Jacob Aagaard
Renier Castellanos



Mastering Chess Exchanges

QUALITY CHESS

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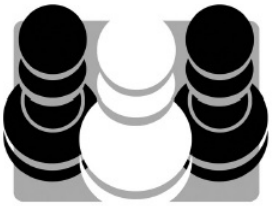
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Mastering Chess Exchanges

By

Jacob Aagaard & ♖enier Castellanos



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Key to symbols used

⩲	White is slightly better
⩱	Black is slightly better
±	White is better
∓	Black is better
+−	White has a decisive advantage
−+	Black has a decisive advantage
=	equality
⩳	with compensation
⇄	with counterplay
↑	with an initiative
∞	unclear
?	a weak move
??	a blunder
!	a good move
!!	an excellent move
!?	a move worth considering
?!	a move of doubtful value
#	mate
†	check

Preface

After finishing the *Grandmaster Preparation* series in 2017, I decided that I would take a few years off from writing books. What had started as a quick idea to monetise exercises I had collected for Boris Gelfand to use as training material in 2009-2013, became a serious series of improvement books with positive mentions and translations into many languages.

It is not a major secret that the idea for the books came from watching a poor cash flow forecast for Quality Chess in 2011 and the knowledge that the publishers do not have to pay the author royalties, when the author is one of the publishers. But when the series was finished, I felt I had inadvertently written something of value.

Especially the last volume, *Thinking Inside the Box*, came out exactly as I wanted it. IM Kostya Kavutskiy of ChessDojo named it his favourite book of the 21st century on a stream and many others had told me they found it helpful, so I am possibly not entirely misguided.

So the decision to let the series exist on its own for a while, not to be in competition with new books from the same author, came naturally.

However, I did not stop working on new material after publishing *Box*, but continued to collect material, give lessons, analyse and annotate games, and think about how chess is best played and best taught. If anything, I got even more obsessive.

Since the *Grandmaster Preparation* series I have been working on various ambitious projects. Some of these have been published recently, and others will come out as I complete them over the next few years. Some of them will be written by me alone and some with co-authors.

A Matter of Endgame Technique was published first and won the ECF Book of the Year 2023. Perhaps in terms of sheer bulk it had more chances to win than the other shortlisted books, as at 896 pages it was really six books in one. It is the start of the *Grandmaster Knowledge* series of books. *Endgame Labyrinths*, co-written with Danish composer Steffen Nielsen (World Champion at the time of publication and awarded GM of chess composition right after), came next, and is the first in the *Grandmaster Training* series. I do not hide the fact that I am a great admirer of Anish Giri, so his description of the book in Twitter-abbreviated style as “absolute gold” was a pleasing reward for the many years we spent on the book. Closely on its heels followed two more *Grandmaster Knowledge* books, *Conceptual Rook Endgames*, a guide to playing practical rook endgames, twinned with Sam Shankland’s *Theoretical Rook Endgames.* All these books have turned out exactly as I wanted them.

This book, *Mastering Exchanges in Chess*, is the first of hopefully many co-written with Renier Castellanos. I got to know Renier when he asked me various questions about *Box* online; I got to meet him first briefly at the Batumi Olympiad and then for real when he attended the Quality Chess Academy in the autumn of 2018. Our discussions about chess continued and when we founded our online training academy, killerchesstraining.com, Renier became our most trusted trainer, always available to substitute if someone became unavailable at the last moment. The weekly Friendly

Homework Club he hosts is appropriately named, although that does not mean that anyone gets all 18 exercises correct...

Our discussions about the thought process in chess have deepened over time and it was natural to take the next step and combine our ideas and material, writing books together that would be better than if we had written them on our own.

I would like to say that the work in this book is strictly 50/50, but I find it impossible to curtail my passion for what I do, always giving 110%, forcing my fiancée to ban me from pouring drinks for people. I found the idea of this book fascinating, have been thinking and dreaming about it for months. Now it is done, I hope you will find what Renier and I have produced to be helpful.

Jacob Aagaard
March 2024

I am available for paid work.
Renier Castellanos March 2024


ESTRELLA DAMM
APEROL

Introduction

Studying the games of strong grandmasters is a sobering experience. One of the fascinating things with chess is that it is possible to understand well, but entirely impossible to play well. Commonly referred to as *simple, yet difficult*. What this means in practice is that it is fully possible to explain why a decision is right or wrong and for most to understand it with confidence. But once we are faced with the task of making the decisions ourselves, this confidence evaporates. Thus, it is important for instructional manuals to balance the need for explaining the common patterns, ideas and thought processes in chess, with the need for practical engagement
(i.e. decision-making).

As trainers we therefore focus a lot of our work with students on solving exercises and discussing their games with them. No matter the level. To amateurs at the early stages of their chess journey, we may spend more time explaining common themes, but to professionals already fighting for the highest titles in the game, we also spend a lot of time explaining these same common themes. It is our belief that anything worth knowing in chess can be explained in simple terms. Or said in a different way: if you cannot explain something in simple terms, you probably do not understand it. It hardly matters which sport we are discussing. Elite level is achieved through flawless application of the basics.

This is an important concept to understand as we take you through this book. We have done our outmost to make the explanations clean and clear. In the process it may appear that seasoned grandmasters do not understand what we are saying. While at times this may be true, we should remember that all considerations during a game will be *on the one hand, while on the other...* We do not profess to know for sure what the players were thinking, but we will take the liberty to imagine it, to ground our narrative in what is most important, the thought process.

With the hundreds of examples in this book, we will definitely be wrong in our speculation of what a player missed or misevaluated or generally imagined would happen a lot of the time. Nonetheless it is sometimes worth speculating what went wrong when a top player makes a mistake. Our experience as grandmasters and of working with students have given us a lot of insights into how chess players think, especially when the outcome is of low quality.

Other works on exchanges

Up to this point there have not been a lot of serious books written on how to decide on what, when and how to exchange material in chess. It would be possible to argue that this is a reason why so many players are poor in this area. But we imagine that it is rather the other way around. Because this is a difficult area to understand, few chess writers have found it compelling to write about it.

Joel Benjamin wrote *Liquidation on the Chess Board* in 2015, a book on the transition into pawn endings. It is unfair to criticise a book for not being about something else, even if the title can feel

deceptive. Benjamin's book is about calculating the resulting pawn endings, rather than evaluating the positional and strategic properties of exchanges. The two books written by GM Rozentalis adopt a similar stance.

While there is nothing wrong with using calculation as a tool to decide on exchanges in principle, it does have potential downsides. Many positions do not possess the forced nature that makes them conducive to calculation. At other times, calculation is simply too time consuming to be practical. While it is natural for players who calculate well to rely on this tool, it is perhaps even more important for them to develop additional skills and expand the scope of their thinking.

In this book we have not entirely avoided variations and calculation. Although we are focusing on positional themes, patterns and considerations, chess is ultimately a concrete game. Moves will have to be played. There are some books that include a lot of variations, sub-variations and further entrenched sub-variations. Often this is the most appropriate way to explain complex material, but at times it is simply easier to press the space bar than to find the core of the position and convey it in simple words to the readers.

What we have tried to do in this book is to provide simplicity and few variations. This is not a sign that these positions are easy, but rather the annotations are designed not to cut to the core of the positions.

This book is fundamentally an exercise book. We have chosen to go for the rarely used multiple-choice option, as it gives us a few advantages over the standard hint-free puzzle format, which felt greatly useful for this topic.

It is this aspect in particular which distinguishes this book from the recent book by Quality Chess, *Understanding Chess Exchanges* (UCE) by Bagheri and Salehzadeh. In some ways UCE can be regarded as a companion guide to this book – we of course would be delighted if you were to buy both books! UCE expands on the examples given in Chapter 2 of this book to illustrate the various principles behind when and when not to exchange, with an emphasis on the games of Magnus Carlsen. To draw out the distinction made in the Preface, UCE is primarily a book about knowledge, whereas this book is primarily about training.

The structure of this book

This book is seeking to be both challenging and inviting at the same time. The structure we have chosen for it reflects this.

The first chapter is meant to impress upon you that we understand perfectly well how difficult it is to make these decisions ourselves. It includes three games from a recent tournament where Jacob made a lot of mistakes concerning exchanges, after obsessing about it for the previous few months.

The second chapter is a thematic walk-through of the reasoning we could have for choosing or avoiding possible exchanges. Such a list will never be fully comprehensive, nor how everyone would want to present it. For example, you will not find a perfect match between the themes referred to in UCE and those in this book. But it is our interpretation of the exercises we have selected for this book, with a bit extra.

Then we have the exercises, divided up into a few obvious sections. The exchanges of queens, rooks, minor pieces, pawns and exchanges in the endgame, followed by lots of solutions.

We have chosen to truncate most of the games, as the instructive moments have passed. It has nothing to do with the topic at hand that White was winning and then another 30 moves followed where his position deteriorated, after which he lost. Or won. We are not telling the story of the games, but mostly focusing on brief moments of special interest within those games.

The reliance on computers

For us it would be unthinkable to write a book in the 21st century without a serious computer check. Stockfish, Leela and other fishy programs have been with us for three decades and have reached an amazing playing strength.

They are valuable for chess improvement, as they can give us instant feedback on our play. Where they can fail is that they are unable to explain anything. So far, any attempts to have automated analysis from ChessBase, Lichess and others are bordering on the ridiculous, if not directly invading that territory.

This can give us a misconception of chess being a game of calculation. One chess author went as far as to say that chess is all tactics, as computers outplay humans with ease and that for this reason, we should all focus exclusively on tactics. Come back when you have managed to match those 2 million moves per second and we will talk about the next stage of your chess development...

With this book, we have gone in a different direction. The advantage of having two authors means that we could look at the positions from both the view of digital certainty and human insecurity. We have been able to ask questions of the positions and variations that computers would not ask, but which matter far more than long variations.

This book is extensively computer checked but is written by humans for human consumption. Just because a computer thinks a move is marginally not best, does not mean that we must pay attention. We have only done so if we found that it improved the narrative. Often it would get in the way of the main point.

In other words, you can trust the accuracy of the exercises. There may be small details where we don’t care what Stockfish says, but nothing wrong should be in this book.
We understand that some of you will see this as a challenge. Please send your improvements to:

info@qualitychess.co.uk

The use of symbols to indicate an advantage

Infrequently throughout the book we have used the classical symbols known as plus over equal and so on as shorthand. Before computers became our masters, they were used by most. The important thing is to not read too much into them. We use them when there is little to say, except to give an evaluation, or when they add a little bit of detail to an otherwise more important explanation.

Chapter 1

Exchanges at a Tournament

by Jacob Aagaard

In the spring of 2022, I played in an open tournament in Torrevieja, a small Spanish town in the Alicante region, with a speciality in providing sun to foreigners. I even came upon a Swedish estate agent! It was excellently organised by my good friend Patricia Claros Aguilar, played in a large sports hall with almost 500 participants. As an ageing grandmaster, I was seeded as no. 15 and looked ahead to the four double rounds (rounds 2-9) with what can best be summarised as outright fear. In advance I made the decision to offer quick draws on the 4th day, with the hope of being able to play decent chess all the way till the end.

It was a tough event. Except for two moves played against someone almost my own age in round 6, all my opponents were half, a third or even a quarter of my age. They collected a total of 91 rating points, of which only one was from me. The most memorable thing about this tournament is that, at the time of writing, I played it last week. I can remember what I was thinking!

The other memorable thing about this event, where I won five games, drew two without playing, drew one after being outplayed, and lost one, was how significant the decisions regarding exchanges were for the outcome of them. And how frequently I got them wrong. As this book includes a lot of positions where grandmasters made really big mistakes, it is only fair that I put my head on the block and show how difficult this topic is to navigate.

The first game was played in round two. My opponent was an aggressive young man from Bulgaria, who is used to disrespecting old, titled players. Or at least so I gathered from the way he aimed to mate me.

Nikola Kanov – Jacob Aagaard

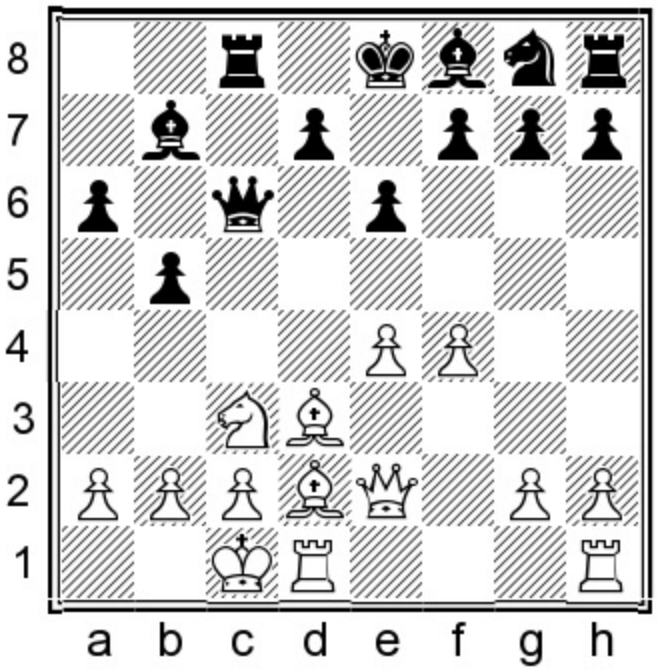
For this game I chose my opening during the game, move by move. I did not know the theory and would not have played like this if I did.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 ♕c7 6.f4 a6 7.♘xc6 ♕xc6 8.♗d3 b5 9.♕e2 ♗b7 10.♗d2 ♖c8

In some lines this is a loss of time. 10...♗c5 immediately makes more sense.

11.0-0-0?

A slip. White needed to play 11.a3!.



11...♗c5?

I missed the chance to win a piece with 11...b4 12.♘d5 ♕a4!, when White has some compensation after 13.c4 exd5 14.exd5† ♔d8 15.♔b1. But Black is still strongly for choice after 15...♘f6 16.g4 ♗c5, when the black pieces are coming into the game.

12.a3 ♘e7 13.♖hf1

The modern plan is apparently to play h4-h5-h6, which exploits the absence of black pieces on the kingside well. But what Kanov played was unpleasant enough.

13...0-0 14.♕h5 f5 15.g4 g6 16.♕h4 d5 17.exf5 exf5 18.♖de1 ♖c7 19.♘e2

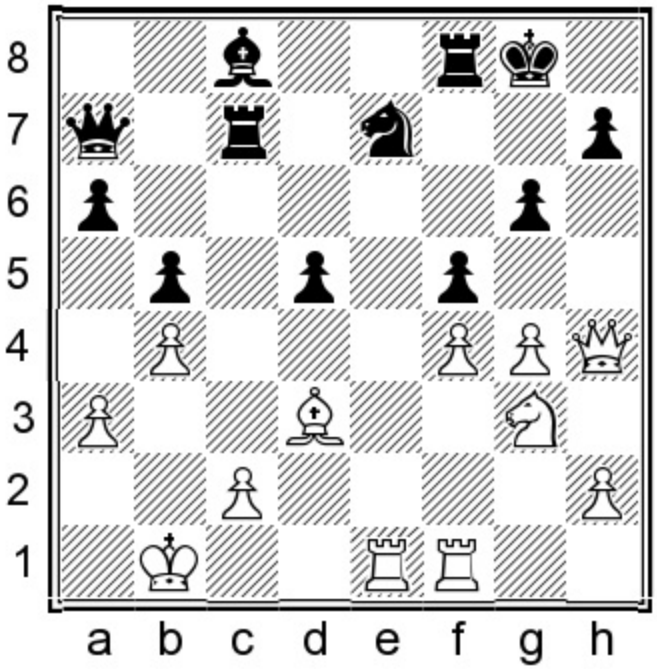
19.♖e5!? is stronger according to the computer. Neither of us considered it and there are still nuances of it I find hard to understand.

19...♕b6?

19...♗c8! to support f5 was my intention. But I decided to play this provocative move, with little upside.

20.♔b1

I was not expecting my opponent to play 20.b4 ♗e3 21.♗xe3 ♕xe3† 22.♔b1 ♗c8 23.♘g3 ♕a7, when I felt White had weakened his king's position and in the long run might not be happy to have done this.



This turns out to be entirely wrong and it is interesting why it is wrong. The dark squares are also weakened around the black king, with the difference that White is able to launch an attack much faster than Black is able to launch the counterattack.

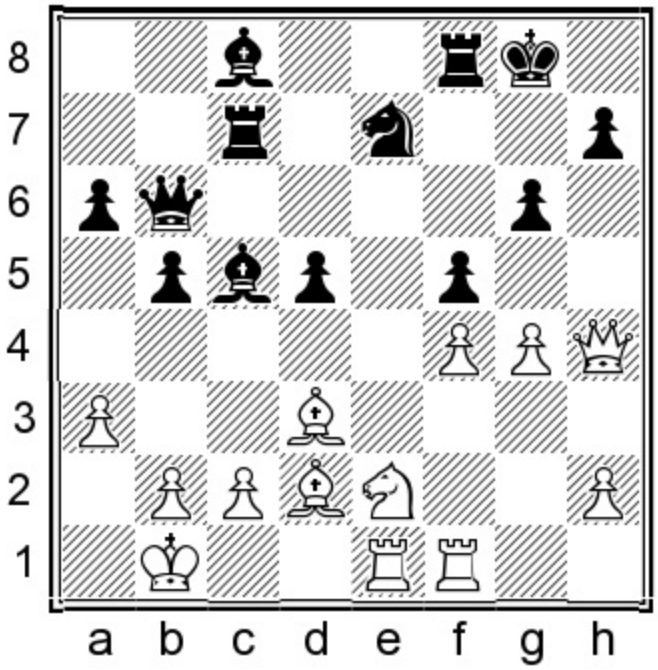
For example, 24.♖e2! is very strong. White brings in more artillery. 24...fxg4 25.♖fe1 ♘f5 26.♘xf5 ♗xf5 27.♖e8! Removing the defender. 27...♖cf7 28.♗xf5 gxf5 29.♕g5† ♔h8 30.♖xf8† ♖xf8 31.♖e7 White wins.

It is important to understand that this is not a variation for calculation and that there are many alternatives for both sides along the way. Rather, I saw the position after move 22/23 opaquely, and came up with a general positional evaluation. The problem with it will be explained after the next diagram. The subsequent moves are an illustration of a possible white advance, as suggested by a computer answering a few questions from the author. This is not how chess is played, but our strategic understanding of chess benefits immensely from combining the abstract, the concrete and the practical.

To discover what the correct decision was, and to understand why it was correct, matters – but to understand how it is achieved is equally important. Throughout this book there will be a lot of exercises that can be solved by deep brute force calculation. But who has the time in a game with 90 minutes plus 30 seconds and no toilet breaks? We need to be able to evaluate the possible

continuations positionally and strategically as well. If nothing else, because it is time efficient.

20...♗c8



21.♘g3

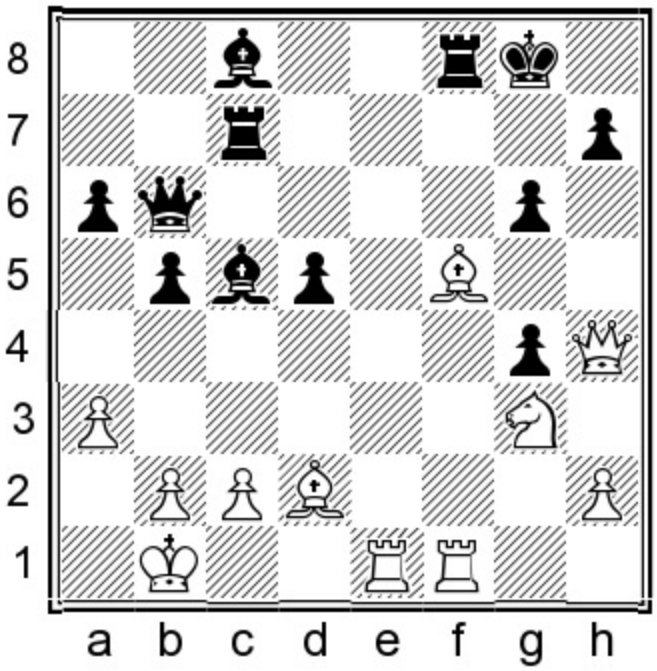
The computer points out that White can exploit the weak dark squares on the queenside with 21.♘c1!!, intending 21...fxg4 22.♘b3 with various threats. I think being able to spot such subtle ideas is the most important skill in top-level chess.

21...fxg4

This is what I intended for a while, with the exchange sacrifice planned.

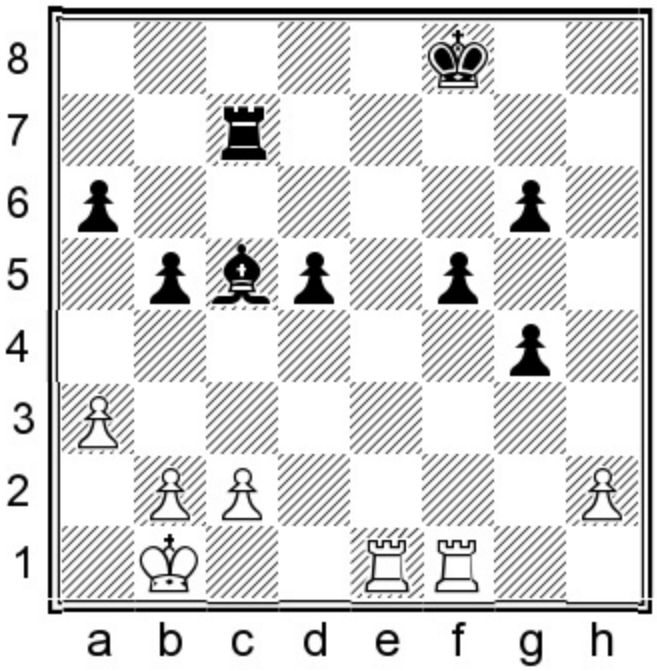
Stockfish indicates a different path. 21...b4! 22.axb4 ♗xb4 23.♗xb4 ♕xb4 24.gxf5 ♖b7! 25.b3 ♘xf5 26.♘xf5 ♗xf5 27.♗xf5 ♖xf5 28.♖e8† ♔g7 and Black is not in danger at all. This line depends on a few only moves.

22.f5 ♘xf5 23.♗xf5



23...gxf5

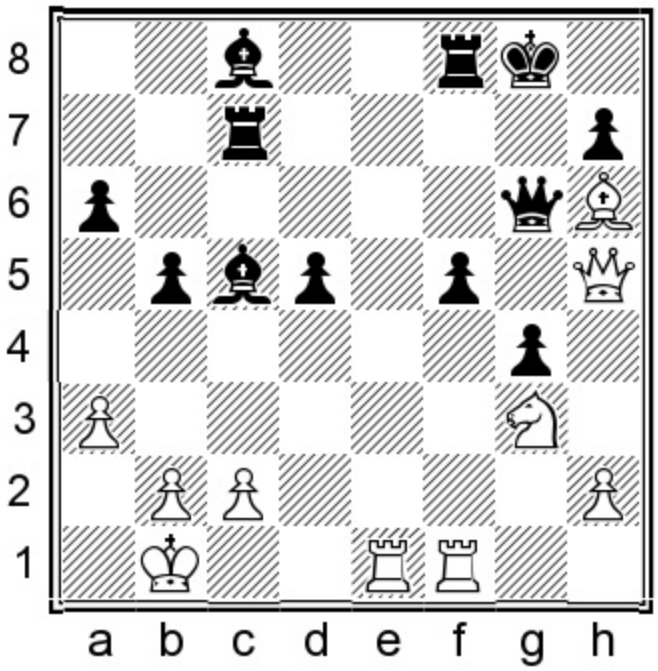
I was not happy to let White keep the knight, but I was worried that after a variation that closely mirrors the game, I would be missing my light-squared bishop: 23...♗xf5 24.♘xf5 gxf5 25.♗h6 ♕f6! 26.♕h5 ♕g6 27.♕xg6† (I understood that 27.♕h4 ♗e7 would be a much-improved version of the game.) 27...hxg6 28.♗xf8 ♔xf8



I could not work out if I should be worried about the d5-pawn. Nor if I should be worried about the invasion with 29.♖e6, when I would be betting quite heavily that my kingside pawns would be not just effective, but overpowering. It turns out that they are. After 29...♔g7 30.♖xa6 ♖f7 Black is just winning.

It should be said that what I played also had some upsides. It gave the potential to play with two bishops against rook and knight, which has the strong supportive argument that it actually happened and was easy to navigate. And that in this variation, 25.h3! is a strong improvement, after which White has good play in an unclear position. If it is better or worse than his chances in the game is hard to evaluate.

24.♗h6 ♕f6! 25.♕h5 ♕g6



26.♗xf8?

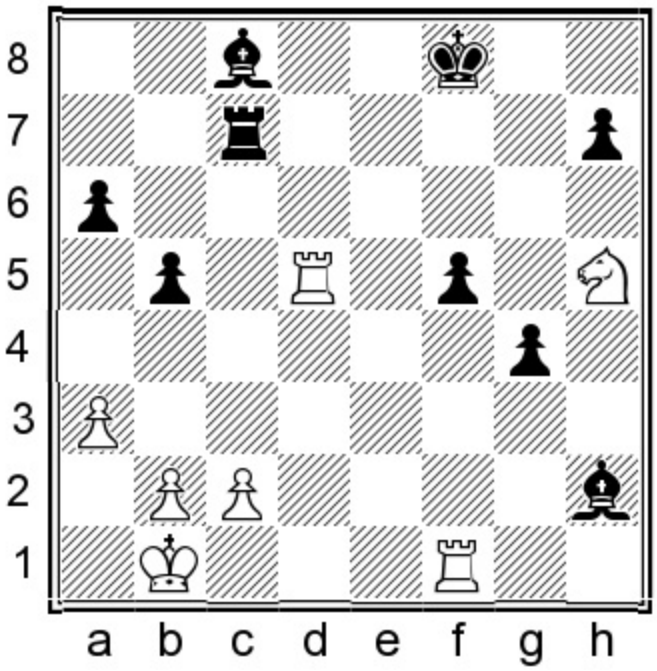
I was pleased when he played this. All my worries went away.

I was convinced that White should play 26.♕h4!, when after the planned 26...♗e7 27.♖xe7 ♖xe7 28.♗xf8 ♔xf8, I was thinking 29.♘h5 would give White compensation, but it appears that 29.h3! is the accurate move, when White is no worse. In practice, this could easily go the wrong way.
The game continuation is not dangerous for Black, and besides a random study-like draw that neither of us were close to seeing, the avalanche of the advancing black pawns was impossible for White to deal with.

26...♔xf8 27.♖e5 ♕xh5 28.♘xh5 ♗d6 29.♖e2?

After this the game is strategically lost, which should have caused White to look deeply for an alternative here. Retreating was not a realistic option.

But neither of us saw that after 29.♖xd5! ♗xh2, White has a funny draw:



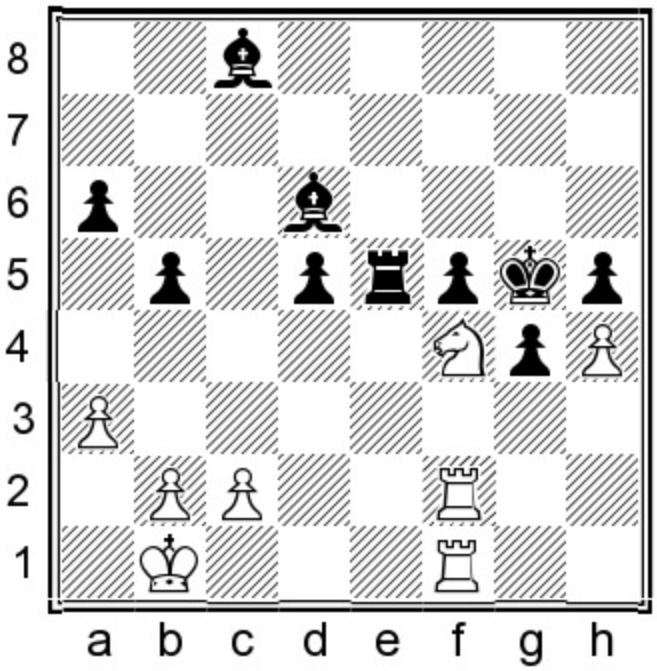
30.♖d2!! ♗e5 31.♖d5! Forcing a draw. The bishop has no other squares than h2. And 31...♖e7? would be a blunder, losing a piece to 32.♖d8† ♖e8 33.♖xe8† ♔xe8 34.♖e1!.

29...♔f7 30.♖d2 ♖e7 31.♘g3 ♖e5 32.♖df2 ♔g6 33.♘e2 h5

Only after having played this did I realise my opponent's idea.

34.♘f4† ♔g5 35.h4†!

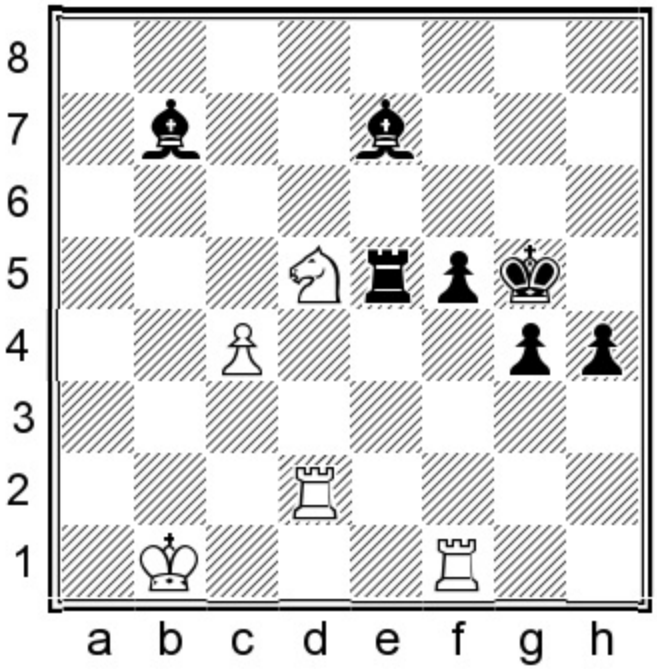
Worth a shot.



35...♔h6!

The h4-pawn becomes a weakness.

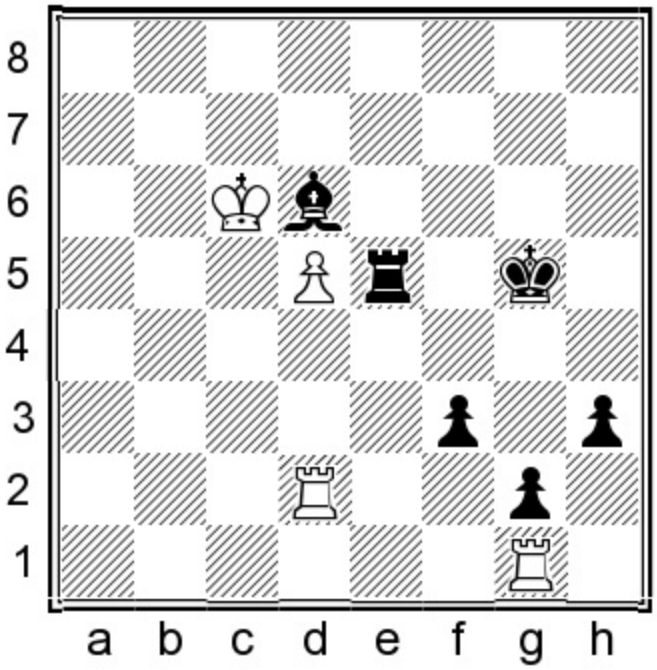
36.♖d2 ♗e7 37.♘xd5 ♗xh4 38.♘f4 ♗e7 39.a4 h4 40.axb5 axb5 41.b3 ♔g5 42.♘d5 ♗b7 43.c4 bxc4 44.bxc4



44...♗xd5!

Anything to reduce the amount of counterplay.

45.cxd5 ♗d6 46.♔c2 h3 47.♔b3 g3 48.♔c4 f4 49.♔b5 g2 50.♖g1 f3 51.♔c6



51...♖f5!

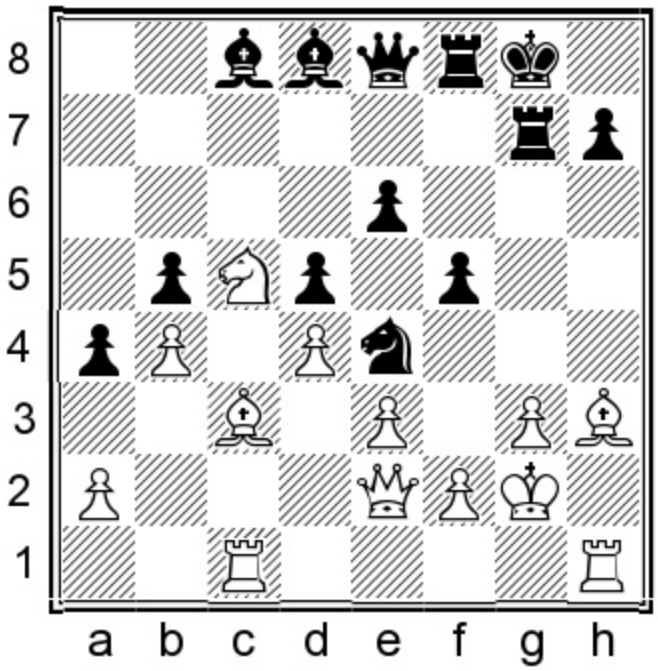
0–1

Not a poor game, with some “Aha!” moments. The most important one for me was clearly the little value winning the exchange had for White, and the difficulty in deciding to recapture with the pawn or the bishop on move 23. Although the computer will tell you that they were objectively of equal value, my feeling is that I chose the wrong recapture, based on the wrong evaluation.

After winning the first four rounds, I found myself playing on board one in the fifth round against one of my favourite players, the highly creative French comet, Jules Moussard. He later won the tournament with 7½/8 plus a half point bye. I wanted a big fight and got it. And no, I was not the player who was able to make a draw against the tournament winner. We join the game when I was already a bit affected by the relentlessness of a 90 plus 30 time-control with no extra time at any point, as well as the stress of double rounds. Yeah, I am warming up for an excuse for making a move I felt might be horrible at the time, but made somewhat on impulse, seeing an idea that really makes no difference.

Jacob Aagaard – Jules Moussard

Torrevieja 2022



30.♘xe4?

The position goes from 0.25 to –0.39 (depth 42) according to my engine, but in practical terms, this was absolutely the losing move. The structural change is horrific for White. The main upside was a release of tension. The main downside is not the f3-square, which I worried about; the real downside turned out to be the difficulties arising later on the c-file.

After the game I said to Jules that I had felt in my gut that I should play 30.♔f1!?, but he convinced me that this was his core trap and after 30...♖xg3? he would have won a pawn. Not true! White plays 31.♗e1! and the bishop on c8 is surprisingly doomed. Thus, he would probably have played 30...h5 31.♘d3 with even chances.

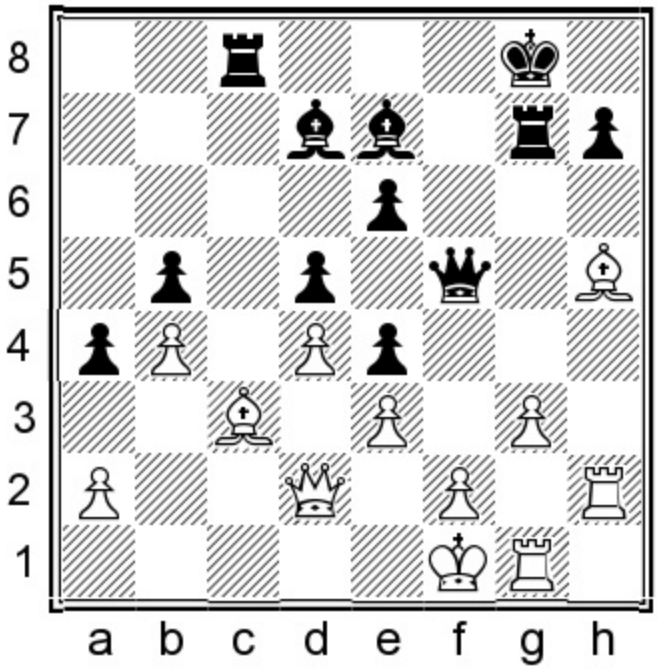
30...fxe4 31.♗g4 ♗d7 32.♖h2 ♕g6 33.♗h5 ♕f5 34.♖g1

34.♗d2 with the idea ♖c7 was also possible. But the rook will not be able to do anything there.

34...♗e7 35.♔f1?

35.a3 with a bad position was necessary.

35...♖c8 36.♕d2



36...a3!

Fixing weaknesses on the queenside, and dooming White to a slow death.

37.♔g2 ♗e8 38.♗e2 ♗d6 39.♖c1 ♖gc7 40.♖hh1 ♕f8 41.♗g4 ♕e7 42.♖c2 ♔g7 43.♖b1 h5 44.♗d1 h4 45.♖b3 ♕g5 46.g4 ♗h5 47.♔h3 ♖f7 48.♕e1 ♖cf8 49.f4 exf3 50.♕xh4 ♗xg4† 51.♕xg4 ♖h8† 52.♕h4 ♖xh4#

0–1

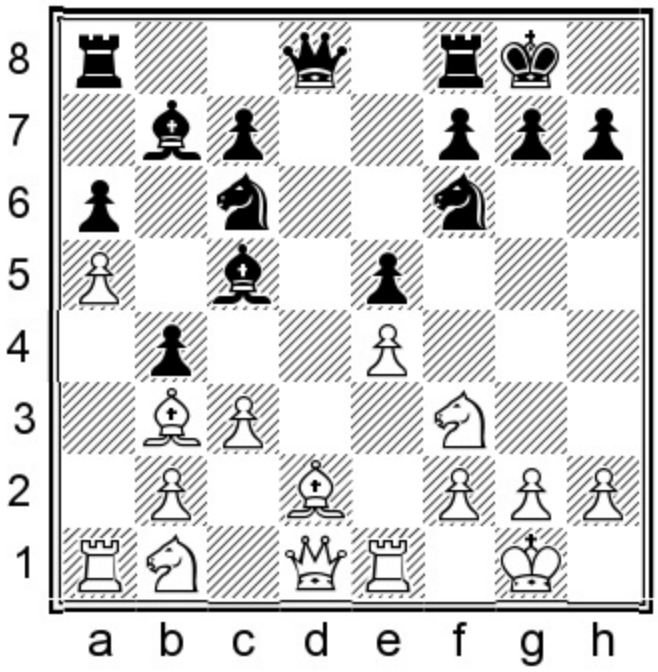
A terrible misjudgement. Way too obvious to make it into this book as an exercise!

In the final round game, my opponent and I both had difficulties evaluating which pieces to exchange and which to keep in the endgame.

Jacob Aagaard – Diego Macias

Torrevieja 2022

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♗b3 0-0 8.d3 d6 9.♗d2 ♗b7 10.a4 b4 11.a5 d5 12.c3 dxe4 13.dxe4 ♗c5



14.♗g5!?

My opponent had recently won the u14 Spanish Championship (and later got 2nd at the European u16 Championship in 2023). I did not know about his accolades, but his age was quite apparent. Having won a lot of endgames in the event, I thought it might be a good practical choice to slow things down a bit.

14...♕xd1 15.♗xd1 bxc3 16.bxc3 h6!

Rightly telling me to get lost. I had thought I was threatening to take on f6 but realised that the f5-square is not weak, and the two bishops would provide Black with an excellent tool.

17.♗c1 ♘e7 18.♗c2 ♘g6

I did not see the great achievement from transferring the knight to g6, which made me a bit optimistic.

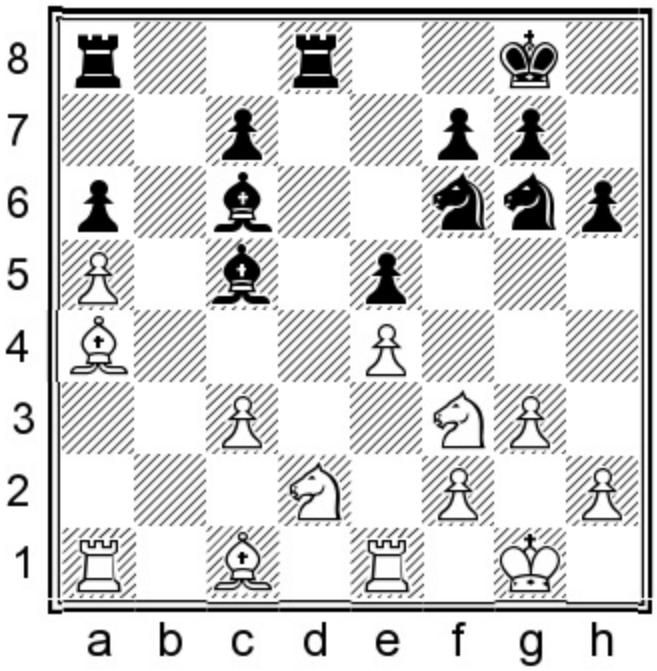
At this point my intention was to exchange the dark-squared bishops, with a hope to place a knight on c5 later. But right now, I felt it was more likely that Black would place a knight there. I wanted the

♘d2-b3 tempo before seeking the exchange of the bishops. Quite honestly, I was way too optimistic about my potential to outplay my opponent, based exclusively on his age.

19.g3 ♖fd8 20.♘bd2 ♗c6 21.♗a4?!

A terrible decision, again promoted by optimism over realism. I was hoping that with the exchange of the bishops, I would be able to transfer my rook to c6 and create pressure on Black's weaknesses. My main concern was if the rook could get trapped there. I was entirely oblivious to the positives the exchange of bishops would do for Black.

Objectively it was time for 21.♘c4 ♘g4 22.♘e3 ♘f6 23.♘c4 with peaceful intentions.



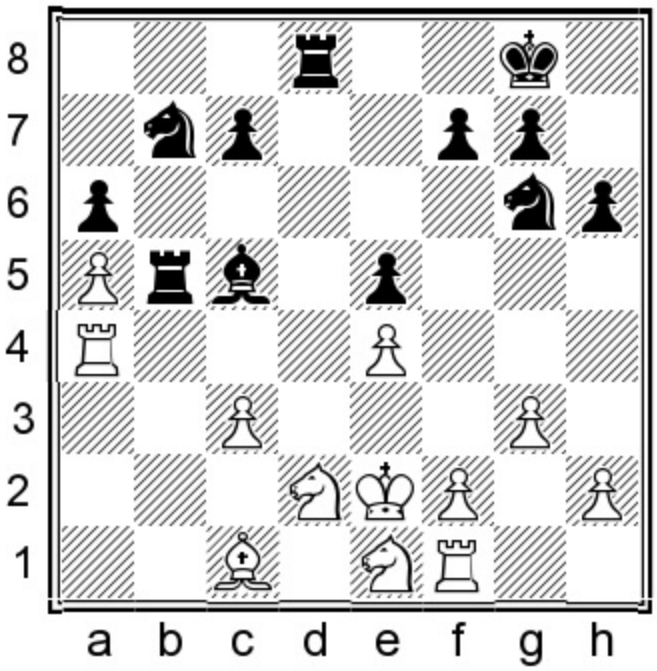
21...♗xa4 22.♖xa4 ♖ab8!

Ouch! With the rook coming to b5, the a5-pawn will be weak, not the a6-pawn. I immediately realised I was no longer playing for an advantage, but for a draw.

23.♔f1 ♘e8 24.♔e2 ♘d6 25.♖f1!?

A weird-looking move, but not a bad one. Space needs to be made for the knight and from here the rook defends f2, as well as supports a later f2-f4 push (I still found it hard to quit the optimism...).

25...♖b5 26.♘e1 ♘b7



27.♘c4

Stockfish gives 27.♘d3 ♗d6 28.♗a3! as fully satisfactory for White. I did consider ideas similar to this at other moments in the game and just did not believe White would have lasting compensation for the pawn deficit. I still feel that in practice, this is something that would be hard to play for White. The computer line is very concrete and goes like this: 28...♖xa5 29.♖xa5 ♘xa5 30.♗xd6 ♖xd6 31.♖a1 ♘b7 32.♘b4 a5 33.♘d5 c6 34.♘b6 ♖d8 35.♘dc4 The play against the black pawns means that one of them will fall and White is by no means worse.

27...♗e7 28.♗e3?!

Hoping to take a knight on c5, but instead this exposes the c-pawn to direct attack.

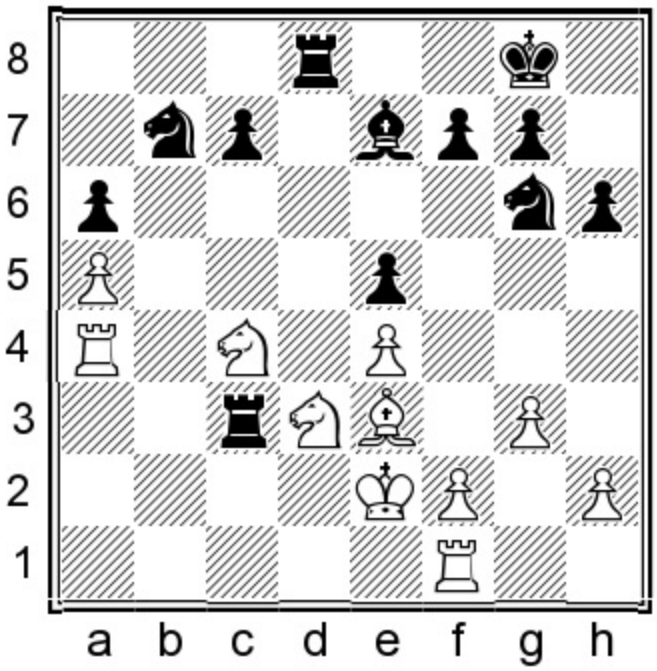
28.f3 was still equal.

28...♖b3!

Exploiting my blunder.

After 29.♗d2 ♘c5 it matters that the e-pawn is hanging.

29.♘d3 ♖xc3

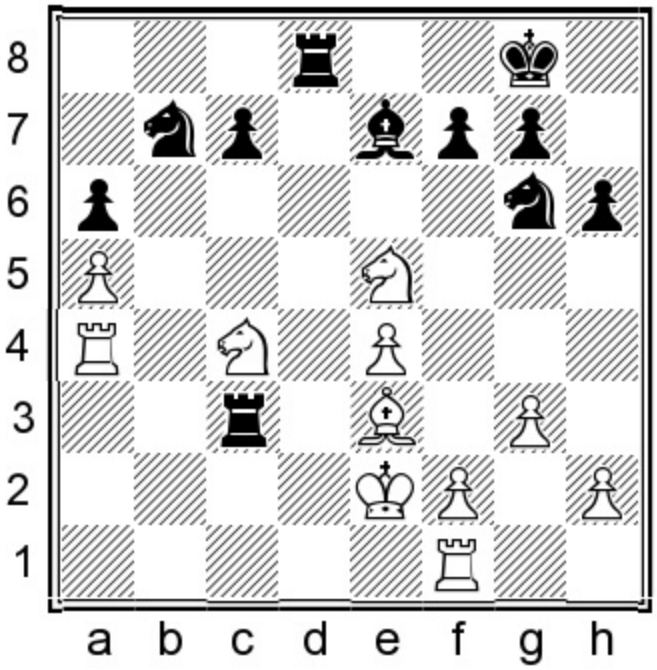


30.♘dxe5?!

The computer comes up with a rather imaginative solution for White.

After 30.♖b1! ♘d6 31.♘xd6 ♗xd6 32.♖c1!, the strongest black piece is eliminated and White can play ♖c4, f2-f4 and all the things I wanted. Yes, a pawn is still missing, but with all other factors on the board being in my favour, a draw is within reach.

Instead, things started to spin out of control.

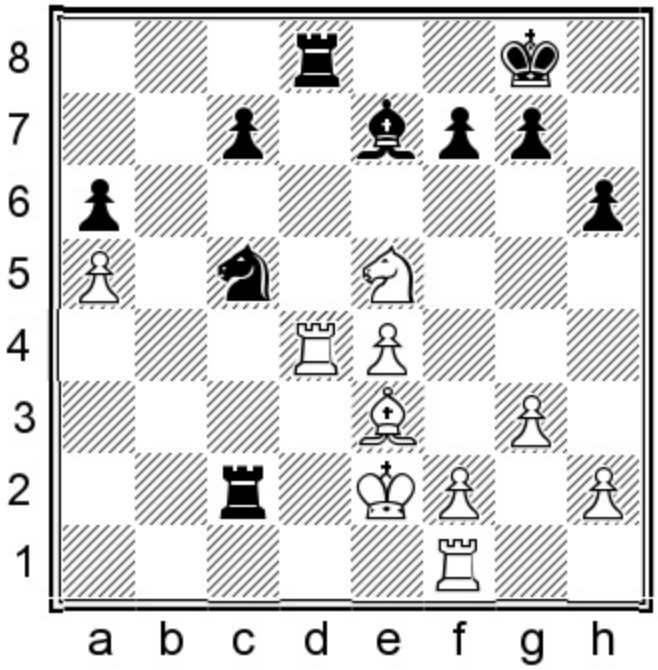


30...♘xe5?!

The natural move, missing out on 30...♘c5! 31.♗xc5 ♗xc5 32.♘xg6 ♖c2† 33.♔f3 fxg6, when

White is left with all the clunky bits and Black's army consists exclusively of cool kids. The game is not entirely lost yet, but it is getting there.

31.♘xe5 ♘c5 32.♖d4 ♖c2†

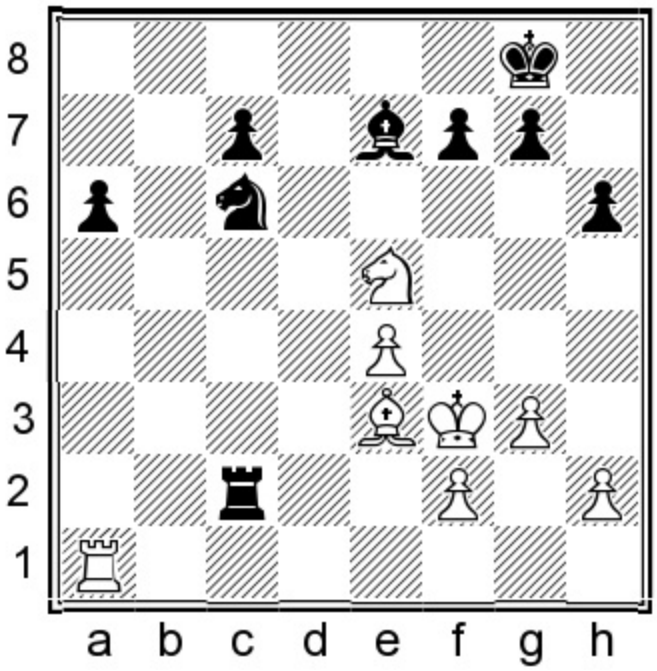


33.♔f3?!

I had planned to play 33.♔d1, but had a look at the position after 33...♖xd4† 34.♗xd4 ♖a2 35.♘c6 ♗f8 and was repulsed. But it is not bad at all. Simplest is 36.♖e1! to bring the rook to life. White is not worse.

33...♖xd4 34.♗xd4 ♘b3 35.♗e3 ♘xa5 36.♖a1 ♘c6

I shall readily admit that I had missed this move earlier when playing 33.♔f3 and had not fully adjusted to having to be a pawn down.



37.♘d3?

Assuming that White is now lost, I made this move without asking myself if the exchange of knights would bring anything else than the clarity I wanted to deprive my opponent of. In short, I was looking for complications and random chances.

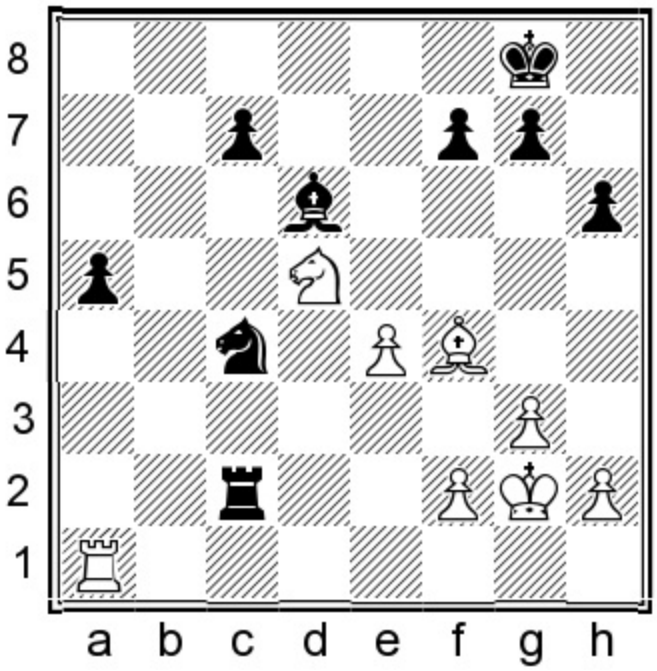
If I had not given up on my position so readily, I would have been able to see that after 37.♘xc6 ♖xc6 38.♖a4!, there is no plan available for Black to improve his position. As White has deprived the black bishop of the b4-square, there is no easy way for Black to make progress. If he gives up the a-pawn for the h2-pawn with some rook lunge, I find it hard to believe Black will be able to create practical chances.

What I would aim to do with Black also does not work. After 38...♔f8 39.♗d4 g6 40.e5 ♔e8 41.♔e4 ♔d7 42.♔d5 White is not worse at all.

37...a5 38.♘f4 ♗d6 39.♘d5 ♘e5† 40.♔g2 ♘c4

40...c6! 41.♘f4 ♗b4 was more precise. Black is in complete control.

41.♗f4



41...c6?

After the game my opponent suggested that perhaps this was his mistake. He is entirely right. The exchanges of minor pieces heavily favour White, who gets close to the rook ending he hopes is his escape route.

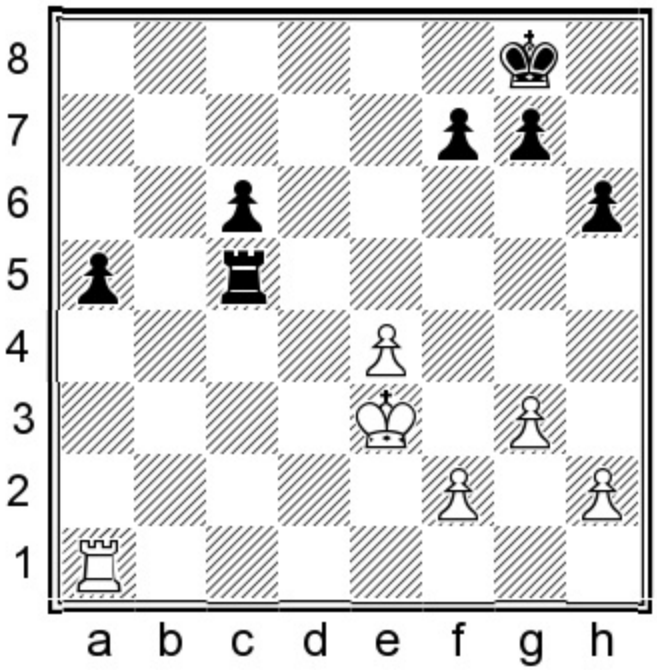
There is also the concrete reason that 41...♗c5! won on the spot.

42.♘e3 ♘xe3† 43.♗xe3 ♗c5

I was so happy seeing this move on the board. Rook endings have a drawish reputation and although I still hated my position, I started to like my chances.

I was more worried about 43...♗c7!?, when my intention was to activate the rook with 44.♖d1! to keep an eye on the a-pawn. I was pessimistic, but at least had a good feeling for how to play my position. I imagined a continuation like 44...a4 45.♖d7 ♗e5 46.♖a7 ♖c4 47.f4 ♗b2 48.e5 a3 49.♔f3 and was worried. Stockfish is close to calling the position equal, but at depth 44 goes for an opaquer –0.16.

44.♔f3 ♗xe3 45.♔xe3 ♖c5



46.♖d1!

Activating the rook is the primary objective in rook endings. Although I suspected that there would still be some difficult win for Black, I was over the moon to have transposed into one of the endings with the highest drawing margins.

46...a4 47.♖d8† ♔h7 48.♖a8 ♖c4

48...♖c3† 49.♔d2 ♖f3 50.♔e2 ♖a3 51.♖c8 and White will be able to harass the black pawns endlessly.

49.h4 f6

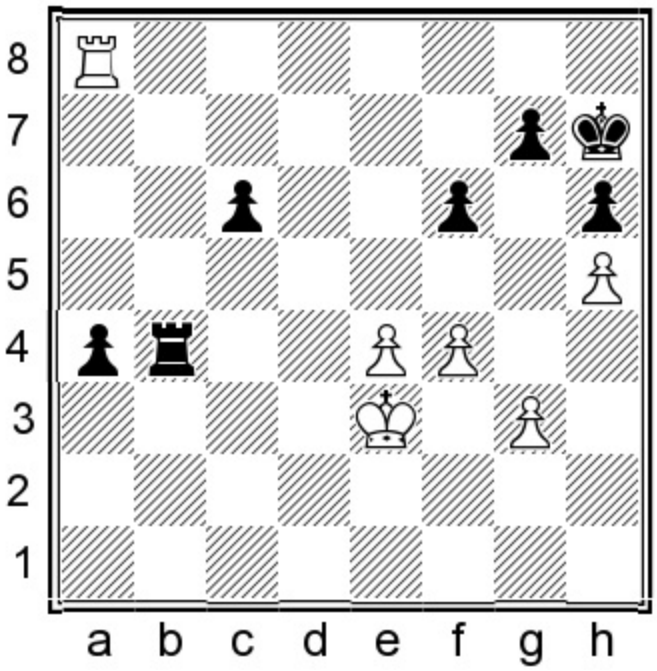
A particularly ugly-looking move, but I have a lot of sympathy with Diego. Not only is it impossible to advance the extra pawn. It is hard to come up with a meaningful move at all.

My intention was to meet 49...♔g6 with 50.♔d3 ♖b4 51.♖a6 or some variation of it. White wins back a pawn and will make the draw effortlessly.

50.h5

I knew for sure that I was making the draw here.

50...♖b4 51.f4



51...g5

I was starting to wonder if I could even win the game until he played this.

After 51...♖b3† 52.♔d4! ♖xg3 53.e5 it is still a comfortable draw for Black, but with little time, maybe more horrible moves were possible?

52.f5 ♔g7 53.g4

This shows the luxury of White's position. Anything works. Black wisely decided to push for an end.

53...c5 54.♔d3 ♖d4† 55.♔e3 ♖b4 56.♔d3 ♔f7 57.♖a5 ♖d4† 58.♔e3 ♖c4 59.♔d3 ♖d4†

½–½

Before the tournament, I had developed a bit of confidence relating to exchanges. Perhaps even enough to feel a bit of arrogance towards the subject, thinking I had it under control. Now I doubt that such a state is within grasp for me. Feeling less confused is my new stated objective. And what we hope to do for you too. And with that we shall start looking at plausible ways to evaluate a possible exchange.

Chapter 2

Reasons to Exchange – Or Not

In this chapter we shall outline the common themes we have discovered while working on the material for this book. They can roughly be divided into five categories:

1. **Piece evaluation**
2. **Structural considerations**
3. **Strategic themes**
4. **Dynamic themes**
5. **Endgame themes**

It is always possible to argue for some themes belonging under a different umbrella, but choices had to be made, and were made this way.

In line with tradition, we shall look at them in order of appearance.

1. Piece evaluation

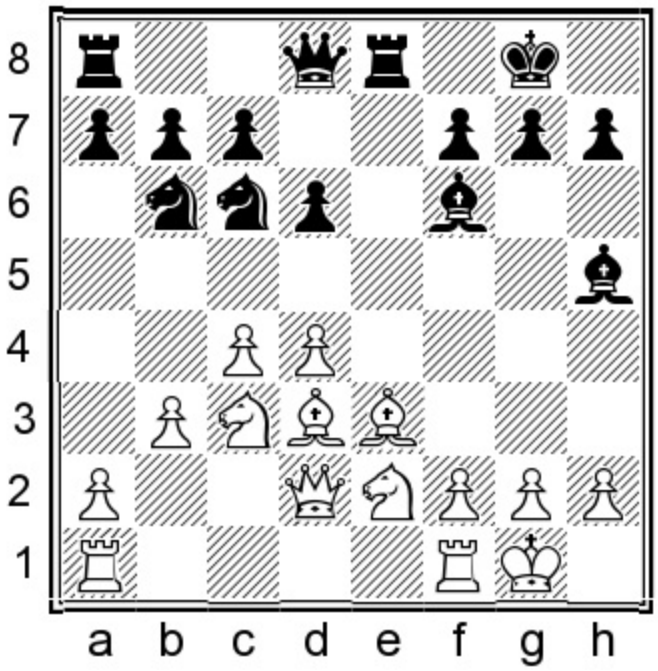
When considering exchanging a piece, there are a lot of questions you could ask yourself. The two most obvious is to compare the pieces.

1.1 Which is the better piece?

Who wants to give up their best piece for the opponent's most ineffective piece? You do, but not without big rewards! In the homework we provide our students with at the Killer Chess Training academy, we frequently give them exercises where all they must do is to exchange to grab the two bishops. The following is a good example.

Nguyen Thanh Thuy Tien – Mykola Bortnyk

Reston 2020



If it was Black to play, the most sensible move would probably be ...♗g6, exchanging White's good bishop for the somewhat wayward light-squared bishop.

White played 13.♖ac1, which is not a bad move at all. Although she later lost the game, she was still better.

But stronger was **13.♘f4! ♗g6 14.♘xg6 hxg6 15.♗e4**, when White would have secured a strategically

winning position. The two bishops give a lasting advantage, assisted by the control of the light squares and the additional space. Even if you cannot see it at this point, the two bishops provide a long-term advantage to be reckoned with, as countless games have shown. It is one of the examples where you can follow the wisdom of others with confidence. It does not apply in all positions and is rarely as overwhelming as here. But unless you can see a reason for the two bishops not being a force to reckon with, they most likely will be.

The first guideline for exchanges is simply, **if the piece you take is better than the piece you part with, you should probably do it.** Things are not often without complications in chess, and navigating competing considerations is what makes chess strategy interesting. But when things are simple, we should not make them more difficult than they are!

The next game has several instances with similar considerations. The first revolving around the notion of good and bad bishops. We all know that a good bishop is one that is not restricted by the pawns of its own army, while the bad bishop is. We have noticed that our students understand these things just fine, but tend to emphasize concrete action (read forcing lines) over plans that improve their hardware. The players would certainly be able to explain the notion of exchanging your bad bishop with ease, and why it is a good thing. But in practice they get caught up with other concerns.

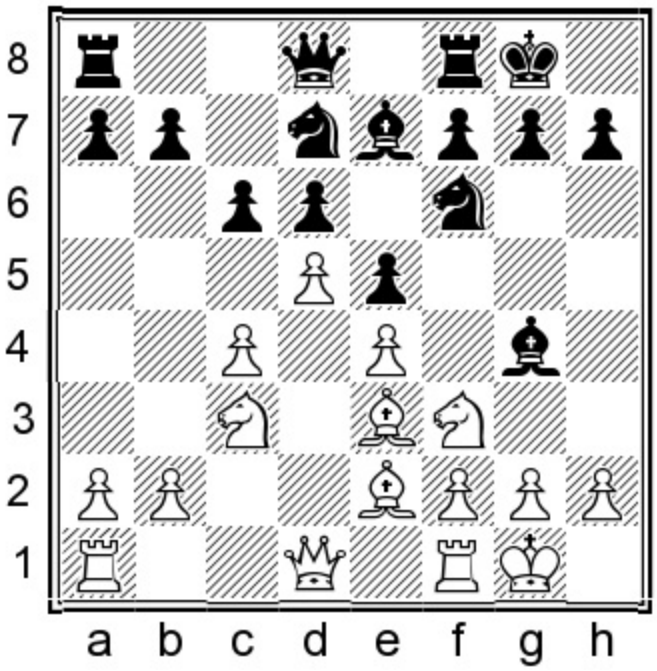
Mike Forster is a member of the Killer Chess Training academy and put this game on our internal forum pages, as we were writing this chapter. It was played in a London League game, with slightly less than the full classical time control. Serendipitously, the critical decisions in the game were predominantly about exchanges.

While you look through the game, see if you can guess Mike's rating.

Michael Forster – Mark Broom

London 2022

1.e4 c6 2.c4 e5 3.♘f3 d6 4.d4 ♗g4 5.♗e2 ♘d7 6.♘c3 ♘gf6 7.0-0 ♗e7 8.♗e3 0-0 9.d5



9...c5?

This provides Black with a cramped position. The opening choice was already rather passive, but after this Black will find his position short of space.

In such positions having lots of minor pieces on the board is not advisable for Black, as Boris Gelfand explained in *Positional Decision Making in Chess*. He also explained that in positions with a space advantage, White's advantage can often increase with the exchange of major pieces, as it makes it possible to invade the black position.

10.♘e1!

The only piece White is eager to exchange is Black's good bishop. In the game Black does manage to get the bad bishop into the game via d8-a5, but it takes time to organise, and it should not have been that great on a5.

10...♗xe2 11.♕xe2 a6 12.a4 ♖b8 13.g3 ♕c8

14.f4!?

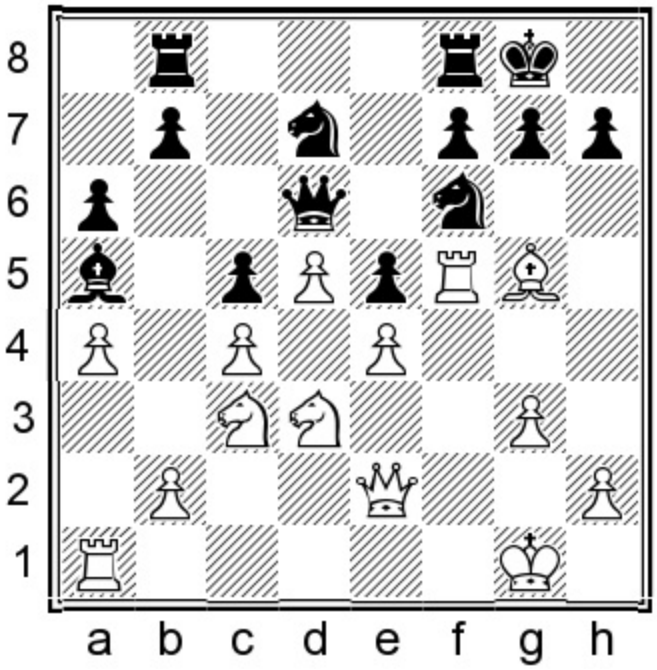
Not the most conventional plan, but White is much better no matter what.

14...♗d8 15.♘d3 ♗a5 16.♗d2 ♕d8 17.fxe5

There are good reasons for this exchange. White can build up on the f-file and will create a passed d5-pawn.

But it should be mentioned that White could also play 17.f5!?, keeping the centre closed to build up a pawn storm on the kingside.

17...dxe5 18.♖f5 ♕e7 19.♗g5 ♕d6

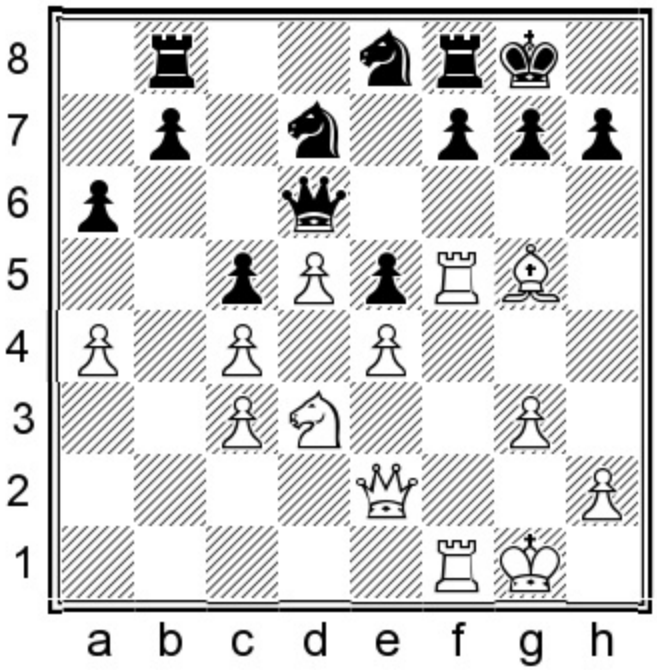


White still has the advantage. It was now time to include the rook from a1 into the game, before making any additional decisions.

20.♗xf6?

A poor decision, dependent on a miscalculation. It should have made White suspicious that the black knights are passive and fighting for the same squares.

20.♖af1 would create serious threats. The only thing to worry about would be 20...♗xc3 21.bxc3 ♘e8, when White either has a knockout blow, or has misplaced all his pieces.

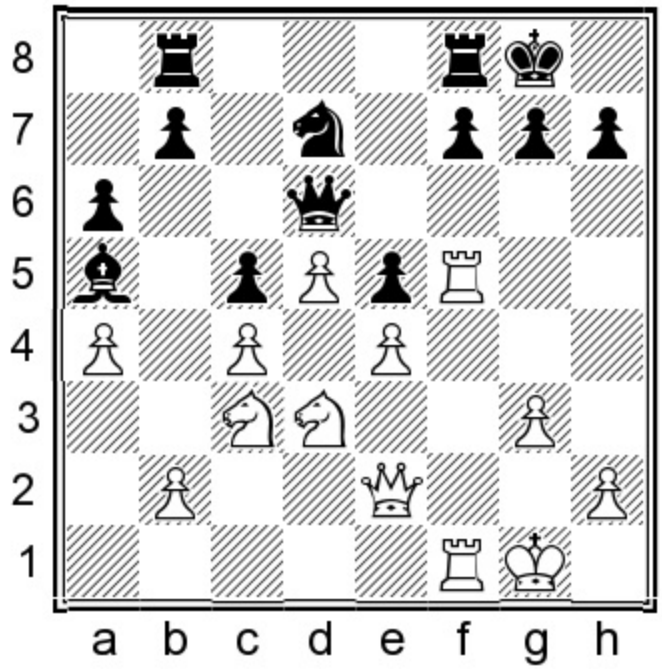


In this case, the knockout blow is there: 22.♘xe5! ♘xe5 23.♗f4 and White wins.

We call 20.♖af1 the **Shankland Rule**, which states that if you have a preferred move, but it faces obstacles, you should look to see if these obstacles have a solution. If they do, we can play the preferred move. If we cannot find one, we should accept the harsh injustice of the universe.

20...♘xf6 21.♖af1 ♘d7?

Black misses the chance to throw in the exchange on c3. Maybe he missed the in-between check on d4, while moving a bit fast? 21...♗xc3! 22.bxc3 ♘d7 would give Black a reasonable position.



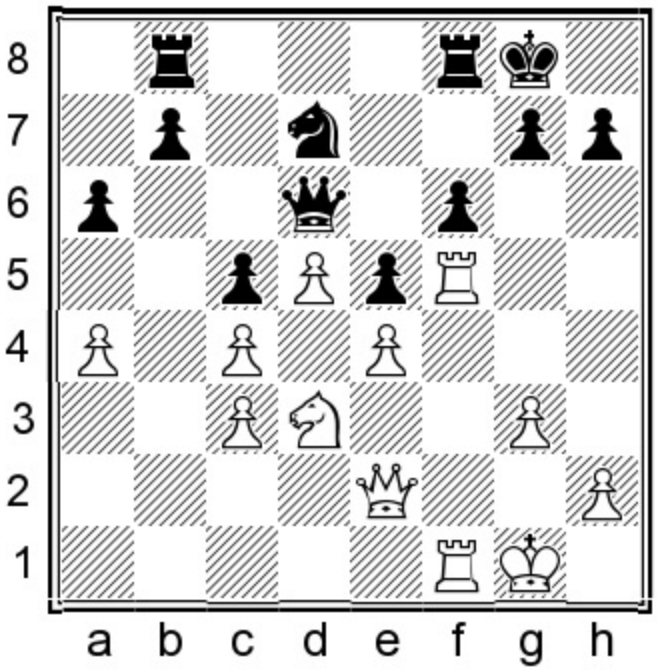
22.♕h5?

White had the chance to escape with the knight, leaving Black's bad bishop stranded on a5. 22.♘d1! Black has little else than 22...b5, when after 23.axb5 axb5 24.♘e3! it is hard for him to create real counterplay. The bishop remains bad, and White has a firm grip on the light squares. The black position should be strategically lost.

22...♗xc3!

Black does not need a second chance to rid himself of the bad bishop.

23.bxc3 f6 24.♕e2



24...b5?!

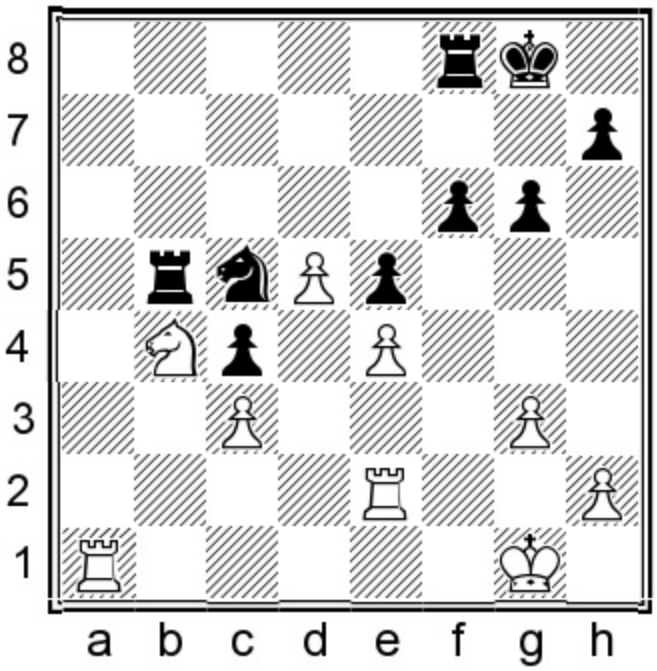
Another poor exchange decision. Black forces the elimination of the weak white pawns on the queenside. It is psychologically difficult not to go for this thematic break when you have placed the rook on b8. Say A, say ...b5.

24...♘b6! would have put some pressure on the white pawns on the queenside, forcing White into a passive position. The key point is that the knight is transferring to d6 via c8, where it will put eternal pressure on the e4- and c4-pawns. It is not a catastrophe for White, but the unpleasantness of the structural problems will linger for a long time.

25.axb5 axb5 26.cxb5 c4 27.♘b4 ♕c5† 28.♕f2 ♖xb5 29.♖a1 g6 30.♖f3 ♕xf2†

Not bad, but 30...♖a5! was a serious alternative. We don't see a compelling reason to exchange queens and bring the f3-rook into the game.

31.♖xf2 ♘c5 32.♖e2



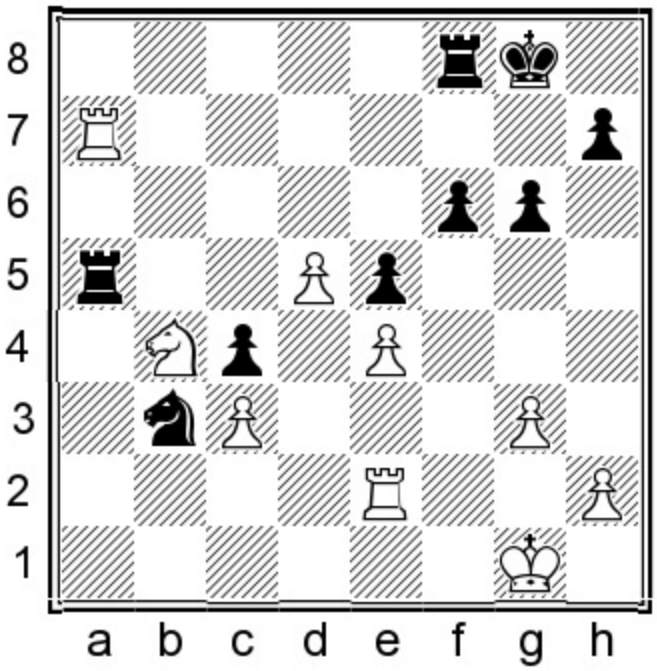
Black does not “have to” do anything here, but to me his position is marginally worse. White has the a-file and the protected passed pawn on d5. This might not seem like a lot at this point, but in practice, it is something. And in the end these factors decide the game.

32...♘b3?!

For the reasons given above, Black could have played 32...♘d3!, when both 33.♘c6 ♖b3 and 33.♘xd3 cxd3 34.♖e3 f5! give active counterplay and a speedy path to the draw.

33.♖a7 ♖a5?

33...♖f7! was necessary to remove the intruder. Exchanging the opponent’s strongest piece for your worst is generally a good idea.



34.♖xa5?

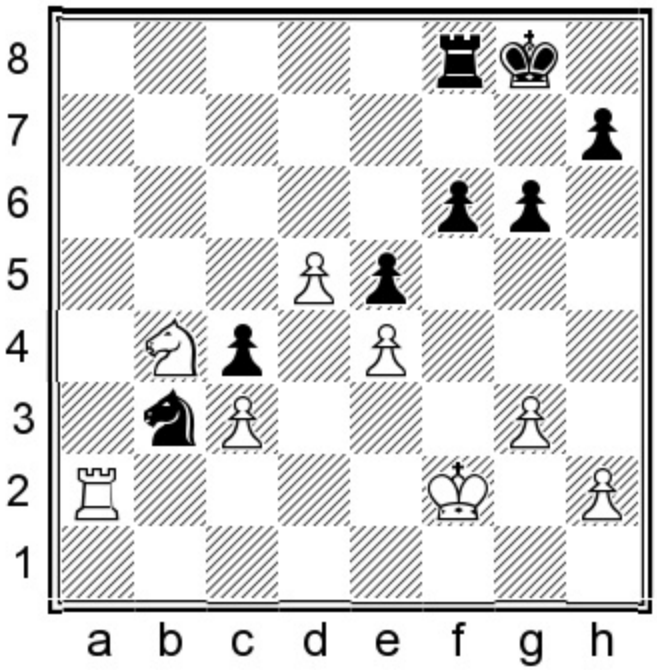
Why would you exchange your rook on the seventh rank Mike? Oh, to activate the rook on e2. But the rook on a5 is stupid and the rook on the seventh rank is great.

After 34.♖c7! Black would have felt the truth of these words. If White was afraid of 34...♖c5, he hid it well during the class. Either way, White has 35.♘c6! with a big advantage. For example: 35...♖f7 36.♖xf7 ♔xf7 37.♖a2 and the second rook takes the glory.

34...♘xa5 35.♖a2 ♘b3

The knight has a stronger path available. After 35...♘b7! 36.♔f2 ♘d6 37.♔e3 ♘b5 Black is no worse.

36.♔f2



36...f5?

A natural-looking break, but there is no counterplay to be had from it.

36...♘c5 was a necessary intermediate move. The key point is that 37.♔e3 f5 38.exf5 gxf5 39.♘c6 would give Black 39...f4† 40.gxf4 ♖xf4!, with counterplay.

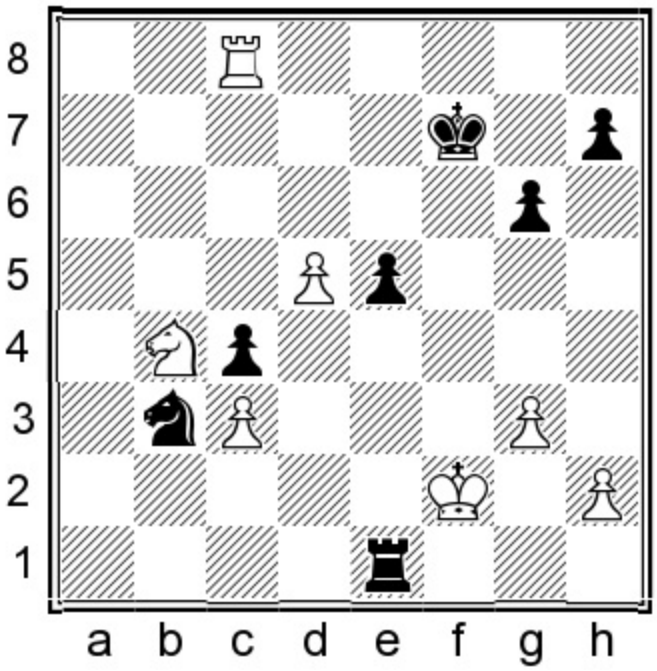
37.exf5 ♖xf5†

Black would be in big trouble after 37...gxf5 38.♘c6 as well. The pawns are lacking the purpose offered in the variation after 36...♘c5.

38.♔e3 ♖f1 39.♖a8†?

The final two mistakes of the game stand out by not being about exchanges. At this point the dominating 39.♖a7! was much stronger.

39...♔f7 40.♖c8 ♖e1† 41.♔f2



41...♖e4?

Trying to hold on to the c-pawn, which is rather insignificant.

41...♖h1 42.♔g2 ♖d1 should have held the game after some discomfort. The key variation to understand is probably 43.♖xc4 ♔e7 44.♖c7† ♔d6 45.♖xh7 ♖c1! 46.♖h6 ♖xc3 47.♖xg6† ♔c5 where Black may still lose, but only if he makes one or two bad mistakes.

42.♖c7† ♔e8 43.d6 ♘a5 44.♖a7

Black resigned.

1–0

Mike is rated just below 2300, while his opponent does not appear to have an active FIDE rating.

1.2 Tension

For most of us there is a tendency to look for forcing continuations in most situations. When there is the possibility of making an exchange, it immediately gets elevated to being a serious option, even if it is clearly stupid. Just because of the forcing nature of taking stuff. Revisit Jacob's horrible 30.♘xe4? against Moussard on page 18, if you are struggling to look for an example.

Tension persists as long as a possible exchange of pieces, or other types of forced lines, remain a possibility, but are not utilised. The simple consideration when considering breaking the tension should be "why?" It rarely makes sense to break the tension without a clear reward, while it mostly does, if the reward is clear and quantifiable.

We all gravitate towards forcing play. It gives an impression of control. We decide, therefore we are in control. And control feels satisfying. Powerful.

But chess does not care how we feel. It is governed by its own strategic principles, entirely detached from the emotional impulses that so influence its creators.

Take 20.♗xf6? in the game above. Mike certainly forced events for a few moves and first drew his opponent forward, then pushed him back. But at a cost. The strong bishop was exchanged for a superfluous piece. By releasing tension, he drew the opponent's pieces into the open. It is rare that our opponents are ungrateful for this.

On paper the two players in the next game are stronger, with Indjic towering above with a 2622 rating. But big numbers don't necessarily make good decisions. And keeping the tension against a strong grandmaster, when you may already feel vulnerable, can be difficult. (This is probably also what a psychotherapist would theorise about Jacob's 30.♘xe4? against Moussard.)

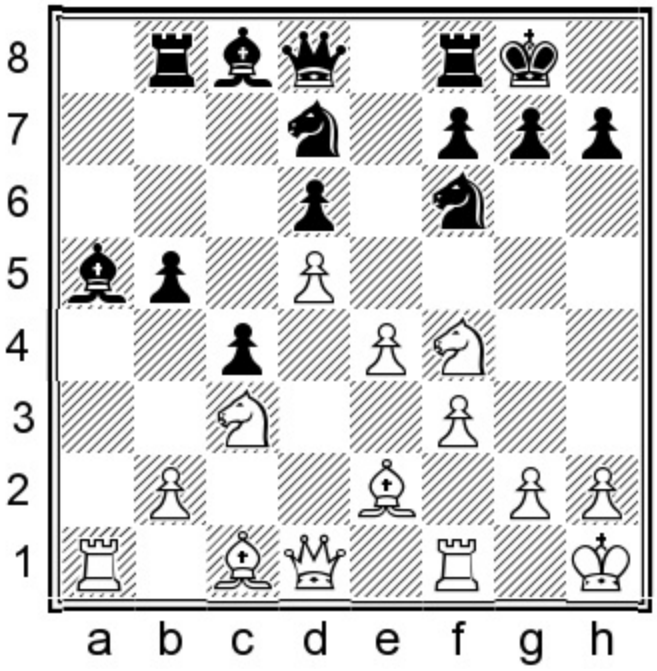
Piotr Sabuk – Aleksandar Indjic

Lisbon 2020

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.f3 c5 5.d5 0-0 6.e4 d6 7.♘ge2 a6 8.♘f4 exd5 9.cxd5 b5 10.a4 ♗a5 11.♗e2 ♘bd7 12.0-0 c4 13.♔h1 ♖b8 14.♗e3?!

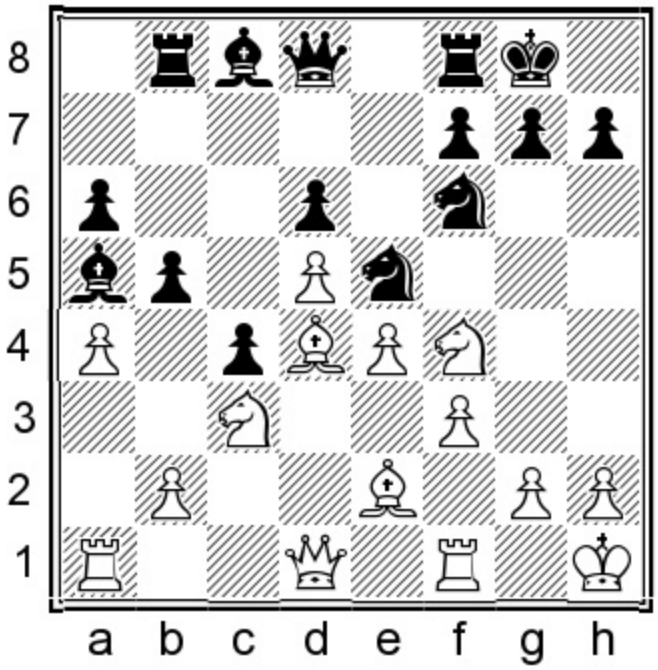
Black has had a successful opening. At this point White had a chance to neutralise some of the pressure on the queenside by a tactical operation to exchange the unfortunately placed knight on f4.

14.axb5 axb5



15.♘e6! fxe6 16.dxe6 White is intending e6-e7, winning the a5-bishop. After 16...♗xc3 17.exd7 ♗b4 18.dxc8=♕ ♕xc8 19.b3 White is by no means worse.

14...♘e5 15.♗d4?!



15...b4?

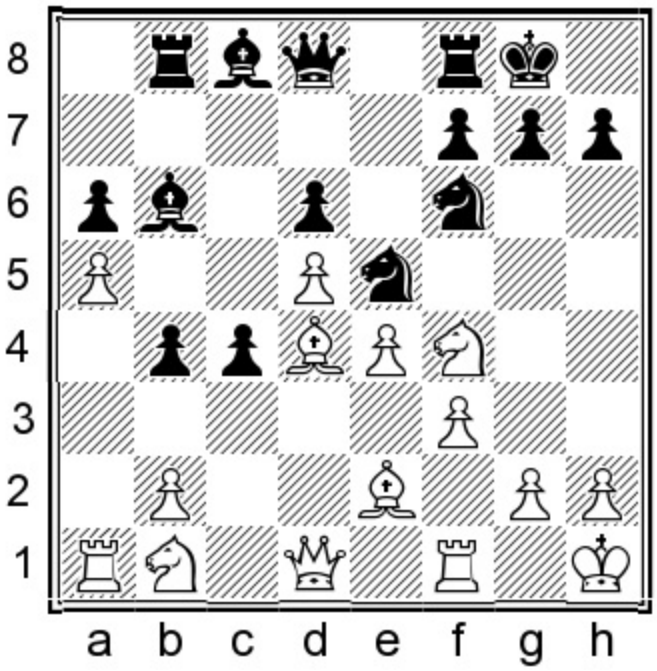
A forgivable mistake by Black, based on a miscalculation.

15...♗b6! with the ideas ...♗xd4 and ...b4 would give Black a tasty position.

16.♘b1 ♗b6

If only Black had time to play ...a5, he would be ready with ...♗a6 and his position would be overwhelming.

17.a5!



17...♗xa5?

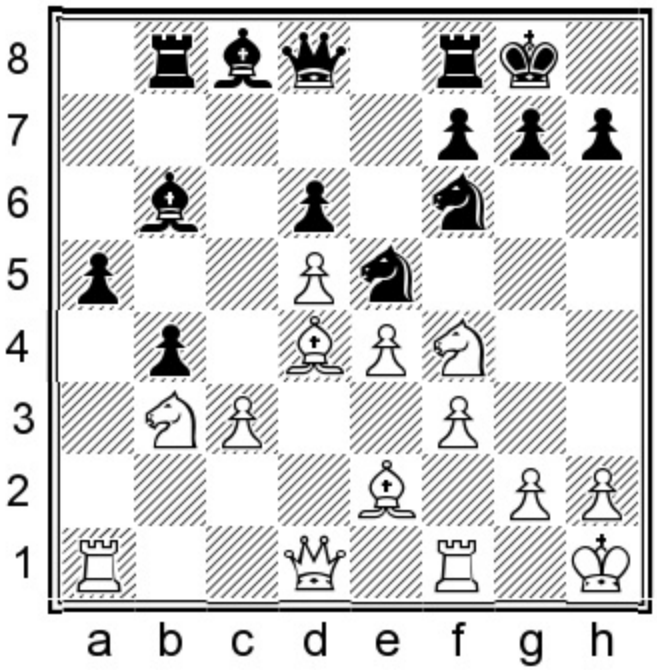
Indjic doubles down and enters the chaos. With an additional 250 rating points and playing in an open, taking a certain amount of risk is a part of the gig. Still, this move is objectively a mistake.

17...♗xd4 18.♕xd4 g5! was stronger. Black plays for counterplay, with the ideal outcome looking something like 19.♘h3 ♗xh3 20.gxh3 ♘h5 21.♘d2 c3 22.bxc3 ♕c8 23.♘c4 ♘g3† with a draw.

18.♘d2 c3

Black is too late with everything. 18...g5? 19.♗xe5 dxe5 20.♘xc4! is just one example.

19.♘b3! ♗b6 20.bxc3 a5



21.c4?

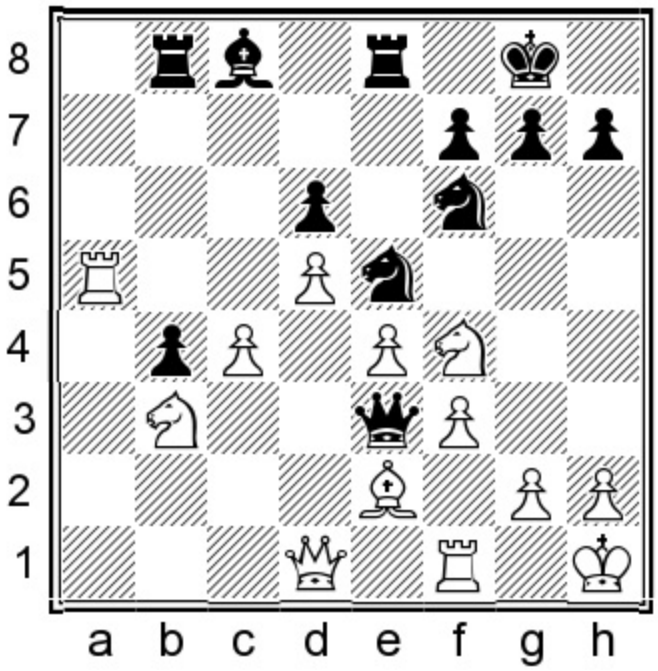
An ambitious move that fails to gain an advantage due to tactics. The move may look positionally dubious, but is based on the twin ideas of c4-c5 and ♗xb6, followed by taking on a5. Effectively it becomes a strategic race to prove the power of the connected passed pawns in the centre, over those on the queenside. Long term your money would be on the queenside pawns, but it is all about which is the blockade that stays up.

21.cxb4! axb4 22.♕d2 would have kept White in control, with a better structure and the b4-pawn as a long-term target.

21...♘fd7?!

After 21...♖a8? 22.c5! the black position would collapse.

But Black could have created counterplay with a timely pawn sacrifice: 21...♖e8!! 22.♗xb6 ♕xb6 23.♖xa5 (23.♘xa5 ♘fd7 and ...♘c5 would give reasonable counterplay) 23...♕e3!

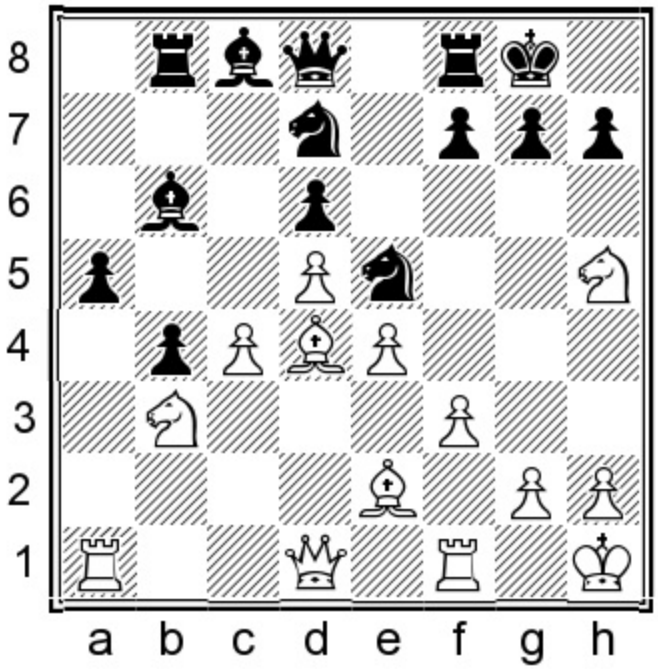


24.g3 g5 25.♘g2 ♕c3 followed by ...♗h3 and/or ...g5-g4!, with counterplay against the stagnant white centre. Somehow Black is not worse.

22.♗xb6??

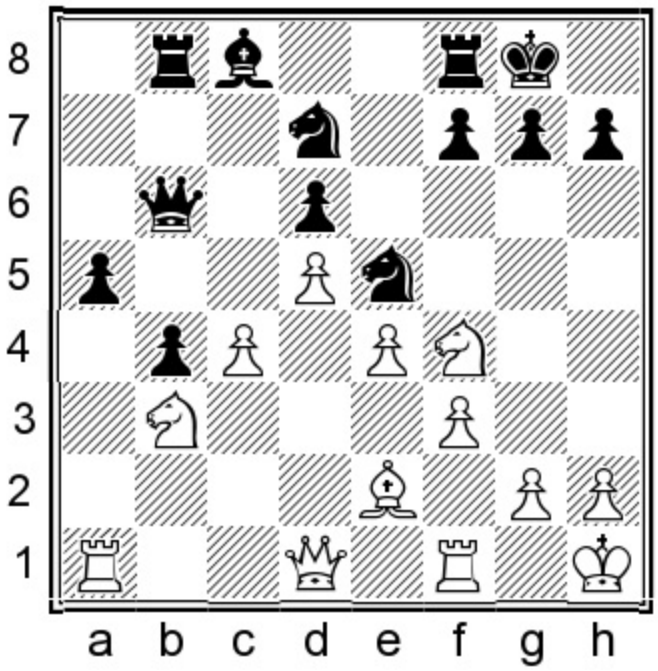
A terrible mistake, releasing the tension and helping the black pieces into the game.

White needed to retain the tension and attack the less obvious black weakness of g7 with 22.♘h5!.



The threat of ♘xg7 is real and if Black exchanges on d4, the a5-pawn is lost. After 22...g6 23.f4! ♗xd4 24.♕xd4 gxh5 25.fxe5 ♘xe5 26.c5 Black is collapsing on the dark squares. White has a serious advantage.

22...♕xb6



23.♕d4?

This was the intention and played within a minute.

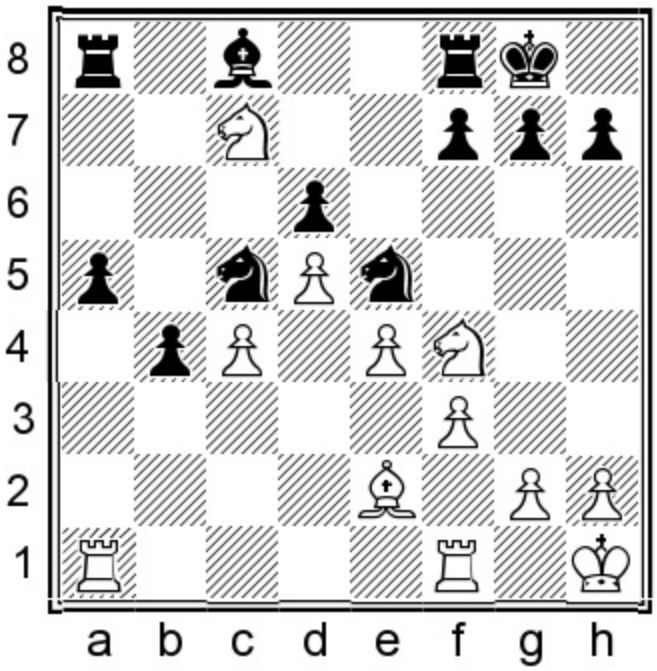
But we can still observe that stronger was 23.♖xa5 ♗a6 24.♖xa6! ♕xa6 25.c5 and 26.c6 with reasonable compensation for the exchange.

23...♕xd4 24.♘xd4 ♖a8 25.♘b5

White has achieved what he hoped for. Which apparently was to force a draw. Black has to give up the exchange to avoid this and is only happy to oblige.

25...♘c5 26.♘c7

26.♘xd6 a4 is picturesque. White has three connected passed pawns, but they are utterly blocked. Meanwhile the two connected black passers are getting ahead in the world.

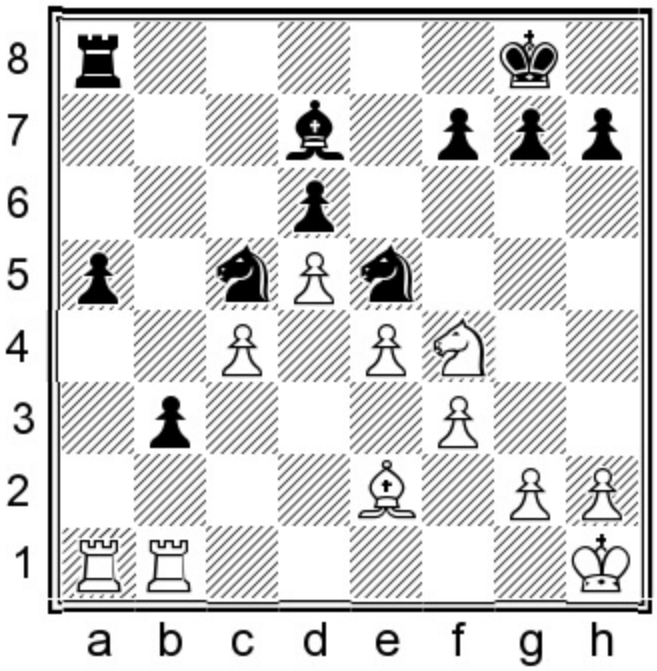


26...♗d7?

This looks logical. Why would anyone want to put the bishop on b7? From d7 the bishop can help to protect the a-pawn and has lots of scope.

But strongest of all would be 26...♖a7 27.♘b5 ♖a6 28.♘c7 a4!, when the bishop finds the best possible square on a6, from where it is attacking the c4-pawn. White might as well resign already.

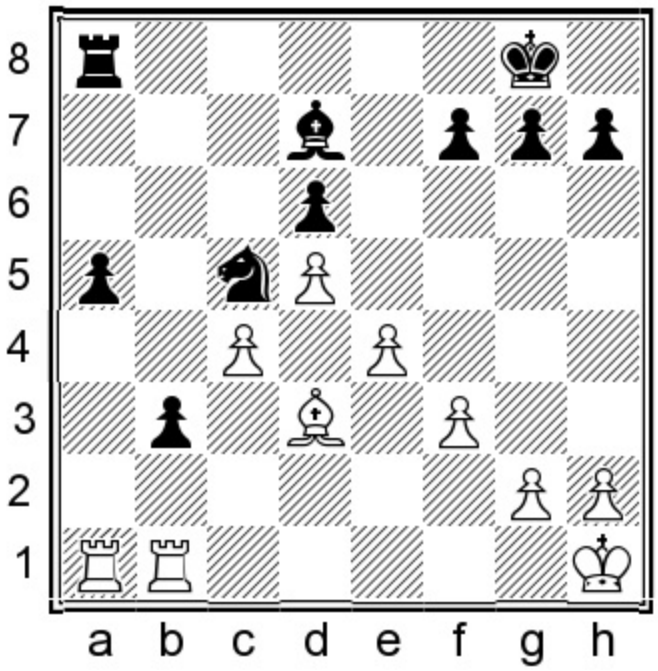
27.♘xa8 ♖xa8 28.♖fb1 b3



29.♘d3?

The reason why the bishop belonged on b7 is that White here had a chance to hold the game with: 29.♗d1! The rook on a8 is undefended and the b3-pawn is thus lost. White will have to return the exchange, but he will be only happy to do so. Black still has a small plus with the passer on the a-file, but the draw is well within reach.

29...♘exd3 30.♗xd3



30...a4!

There is no chance that Black would fall for 30...♘xd3? 31.♖xb3 ♘e5 32.♖xa5!, when he would be the one needing to hold the draw.

After the text move, Black wins easily.

31.♗e2 f5 32.♔g1 ♖e8 33.♔f2 fxe4 34.f4 e3† 35.♔e1 ♗f5 36.♖b2 ♗c2 37.♖xc2 bxc2 38.♖c1 ♖b8 39.♖xc2 ♖b1† 40.♗d1 ♘b3 41.♔e2 ♘d4† 42.♔xe3 ♘xc2† 43.♗xc2 ♖b4 44.♔d4

0–1

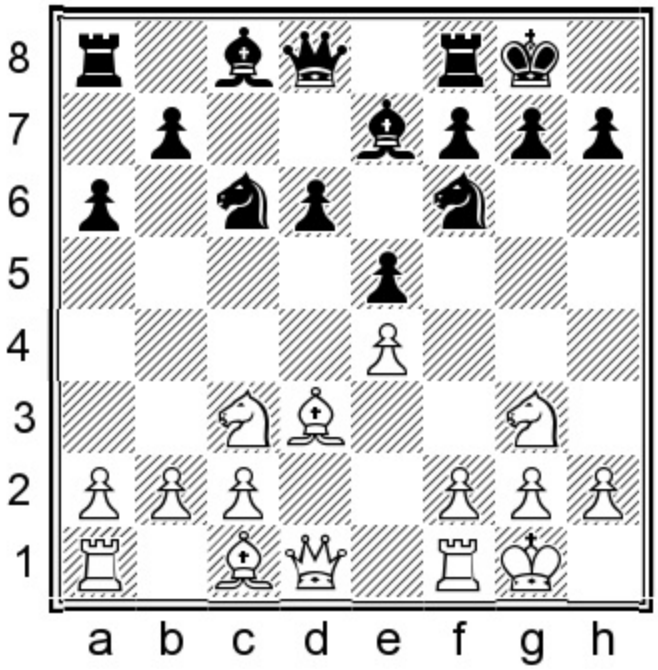
It is not just the forcing nature of captures that attract us, it is also the release of tension. When an exchange, or more, are possible, they provide us with some emotional tension as well. The basic human desire for clarity can take over and we can force the matter simply to rid ourselves of the emotional tension provided by the actual tension on the board.

In the following two games from the 2022 Icelandic Championship, we shall see quite a number of situations relating to exchanges and tension.

Reykjavik 2022

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗d3 e5 7.♘de2 ♗e7 8.0-0 0-0 9.♘g3 ♘c6?!

This inaccuracy is destined to be boldly refuted.



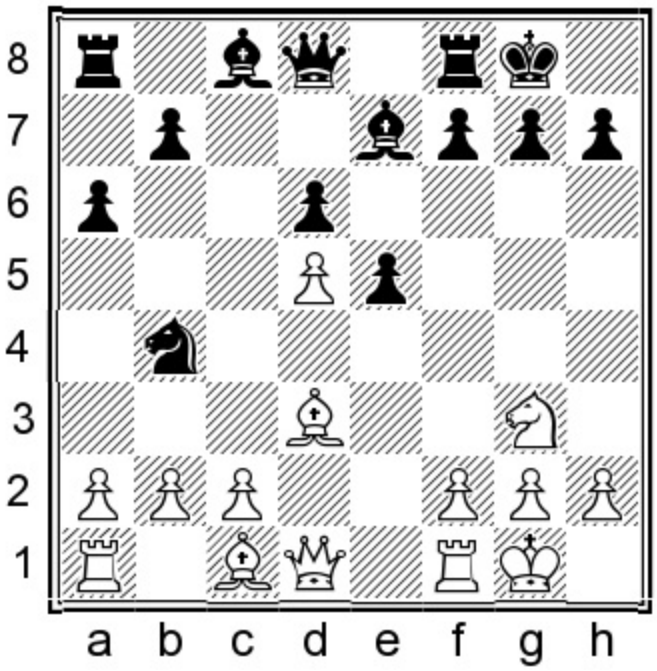
10.♘d5!

Often White's strategy in these structures is to occupy this square with a piece, preferably a knight. Changing the structure of the position creates some discomfort for Black.

We should mention that although the bishop on e7 is "bad", it does provide essential support on the dark squares to all the conflict points in the centre. Allowing it to be exchanged would be a mistake.

10...♘xd5 11.exd5 ♘b4?

11...♘b8 was prudent, although White has a pleasant position after both 12.a4!? and 12.f4 ♘d7 13.c4±.



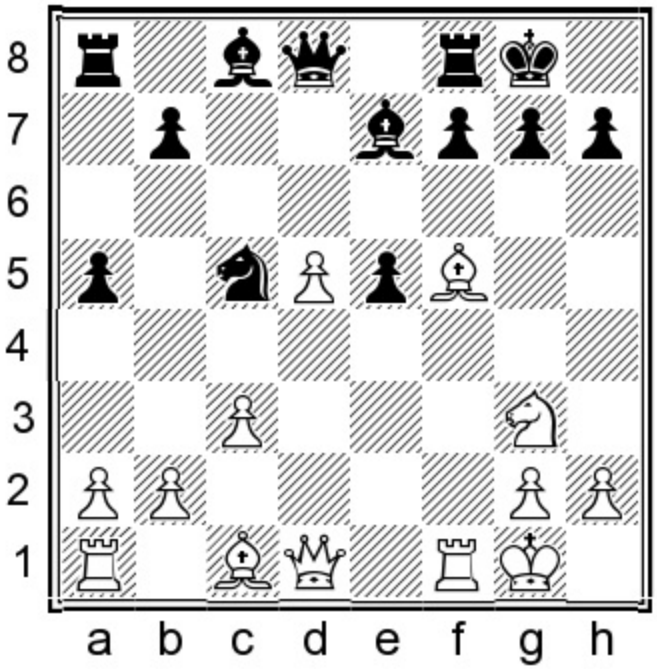
12.♗f5!

White is happy to exchange light-squared bishops, as it will give him control of the f5-square. Meanwhile the knight on b4 is in trouble.

12...a5 13.c3 ♘a6 14.f4!

This push activates both the dark-squared bishop and the rook on f1.

14...♘c5 15.fxe5 dxe5



16.♕g4?!

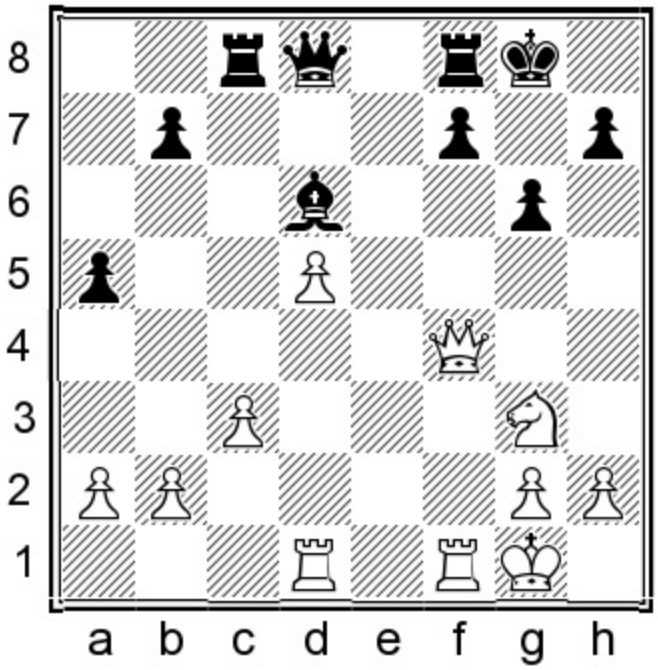
It feels natural to keep the tension, but this was also a good moment to release it.

16.♔h1 looks tempting too. What can Black actually do? Well, he can eliminate the annoying white knight. 16...♗h4!? White is still better after 17.♗c2 ♗xg3 18.hxg3 ♕d6, but the pressure has been relieved a bit.

However, the strong 16.♗xc8! ♖xc8 17.♘f5 ♗f6 18.d6 would give White an overwhelming position. This is a particularly difficult example to explain, as all continuations have something positive to them. But with the knight installed safely on f5 and the blockade of the d6-square firmly broken, this is the best of the bunch. It is worth noticing that ...g7-g6 will almost always fail to ♘h6† and ♘g4, with devastation on the dark squares.

16...♖a6?!

Black had a chance to change events with the cunning 16...♘d3!. The following line is not at all forced, but it shows the potential of Black's position. 17.♗e3 g6 18.♖ad1 ♘f4!, where Black would get compensation for the pawn after 19.♗xc8 ♖xc8 20.♗xf4 exf4 21.♕xf4 ♗d6.

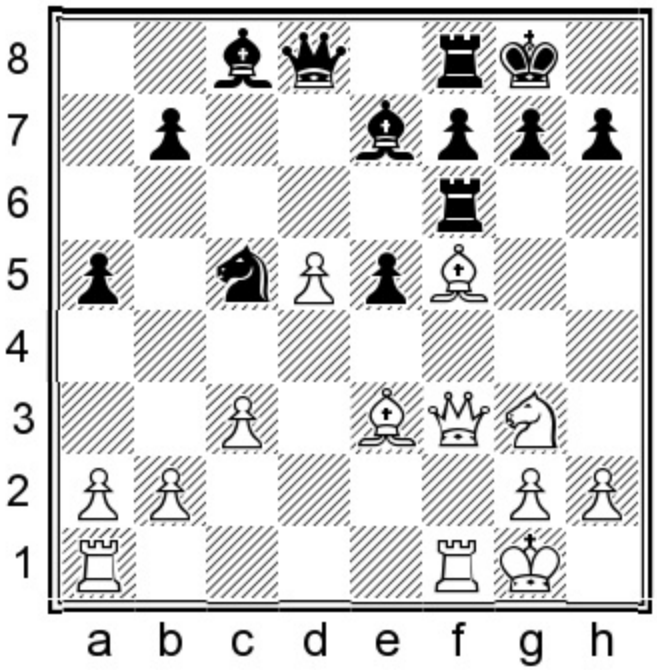


The knight never made it to f5 and the black bishop has become a powerful piece. Black is not worse, despite the pawn deficit.

17.♗e3 ♖g6 18.♕c4?

A simple blunder.

18.♕d1 ♗xf5 19.♘xf5 would give White some advantage.
But strongest is the imaginative: 18.♕f3 ♖f6



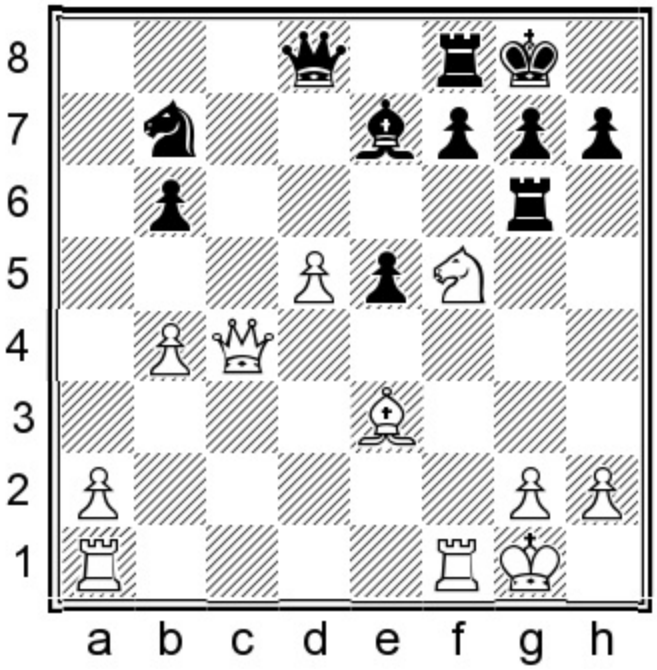
19.d6!! ♕xd6 20.♗g5, where White wins the exchange under pleasant circumstances.

18...♗xf5?

Making the blunder mutual. Besides, why did Black feel the need to release the tension? White is only too happy to put the knight on f5.

18...b5! 19.♕e2 ♕xd5 would give Black a nice position. White will have to win the exchange in some way, but it will not be satisfying now.

19.♘xf5 b6 20.b4 axb4 21.cxb4 ♘b7



22.a4

There are serious arguments for White exchanging the strong knight for the bishop on e7, as this would give White a permanent bishop versus knight advantage to exploit on the queenside. If you analyse deeply enough, you will find that Black's position has enough defensive resources. But during the game, they would have to be discovered.

22...♗g5!

Black eliminates the strong white pieces one by one.

23.♗xg5

23.♗f2!?± was worth considering.

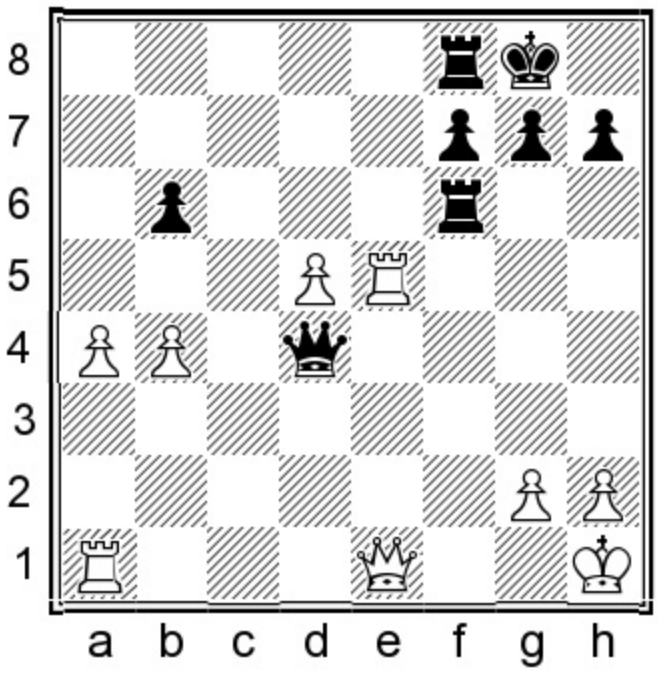
23...♕xg5 24.♕e4 ♘d6!

Removing the strong knight is easily worth a pawn.

25.♘xd6 ♖xd6 26.♖f5 ♕d2 27.♖xe5 ♖f6

27...♖g6! followed by ...f7-f5 would have equalised. White cannot keep all his bits together.

28.♕e1 ♕d4† 29.♔h1



29...♖f4?

A sloppy move. Black is threatening the b-pawn, probably anticipating 30.b5, which would indeed make it harder for White to advance on the queenside.

A few years of marking homework submissions from students has taught us that more often than not,

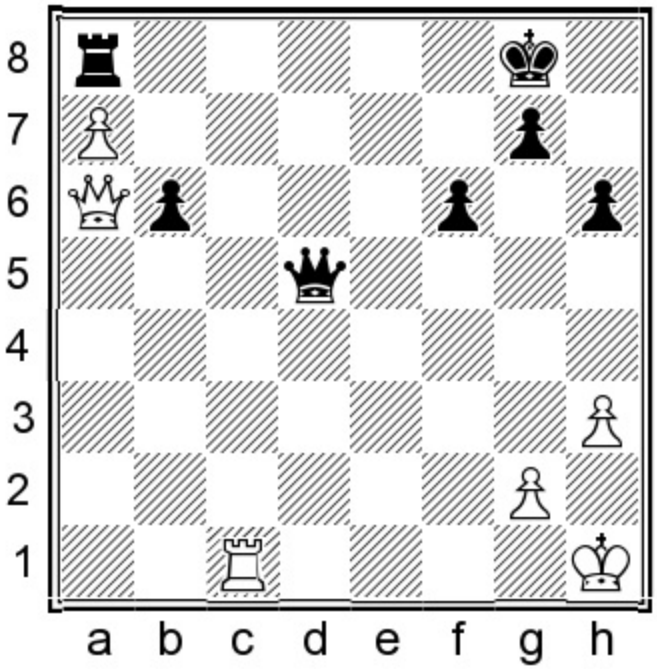
even if a student notices the idea of the opponent (here 30.a5), he will fail to consider it in reply to their own ideas.

29...♖f2! would have given Black counterplay. 30.♖e4 ♕b2 31.♕c1 ♕xc1†! 32.♖xc1 ♖d2 with a likely draw.

30.a5! f6

30...♕xb4 31.a6 would see the a-pawn run ahead and make something of himself.

31.♖e8 ♖f1† 32.♕xf1 ♖xe8 33.a6 ♕xb4 34.a7 ♖a8 35.♕a6 ♕d4 36.h3 h6 37.♖c1 ♕xd5



Tension does not only have to be between the pieces. The tension we feel as players is far more integral to the decisions we make. Imagine that you have played a good positional game. And that you have a winning position against a strong grandmaster. On top of this, you have 14 minutes against his scrappy 1 minute. It is quite possible to get excited by this situation. You see a seemingly winning line and your heart starts racing, you make the winning move, press the clock, and only then slow down to look at the position. It is hard to be sure whether this is a correct narrative of what happened in the 25 seconds Thorfinnsson spent on his next disastrous move. But to the question: "what was he thinking?" it is fair to answer, "he did not."

We do not know of a chess player who has not done the same and we in no way want to point fingers at Thorfinnsson. This was simply the first game one of us looked at, after we had discussed that no illustrative example existed for the theme of tension.

38.♖c8†??

38.♕xb6 was completely winning. White plays 39.♕b8(†), 40.♖c8 and then picks any of the

winning methods he may desire. It could be ♕b8-b1† followed by an exchange of rooks and a return of the queen to b8.

38...♔h7 39.♖xa8

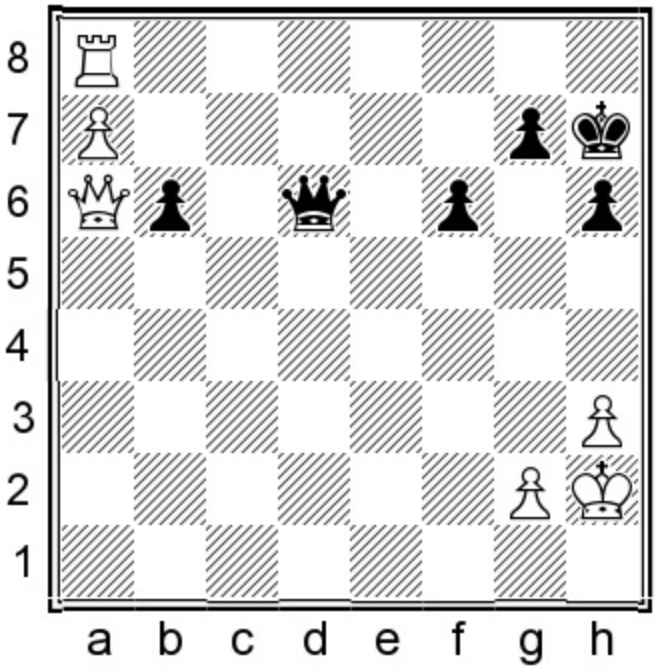
After 39.♖c1 ♕d7 it would be White who would have to make the draw.

39...♕d1†!

Played quickly. Any lifeline is welcome.

Thorfinnsson would have expected 39...♕xa8 40.♕xb6, when Black can only resign.

40.♔h2 ♕d6†



White cannot escape the perpetual. Obviously, Black was not certain of this, but it was clear he had to play for it. And even if there was an elaborate win to be found for White, it would still have to be found.

41.♔g1 ♕d4† 42.♔f1 ♕d1† 43.♔f2 ♕d4† 44.♔f3 ♕d5† 45.♔e3 ♕e5† 46.♔d2 ♕f4† 47.♔c2 ♕f2† 48.♔c3 ♕e1† 49.♔b3 ♕e3† 50.♔c2 ♕f2† 51.♔c3 ♕e1† 52.♔c2

½–½

If you get the impression from the notes to this game or the next that this is simple stuff and Icelandic IMs and GMs don't know how to play chess, we have achieved what we intended. Not because these are easy decisions. On the contrary, because we would have succeeded in making the perplexing understandable.

Nigel Short said that Kasparov told him that dealing with tension had always been a main weakness of his. If it is a problem at top level, it is no surprise that it is so at the level of ordinary grandmasters.

In the following game, some of the exchanges are simple, but others are terribly difficult to evaluate. Then the game descends into tactical madness, where Black receives a lot of chances. Something that can be traced back to the poor decision on move 21.

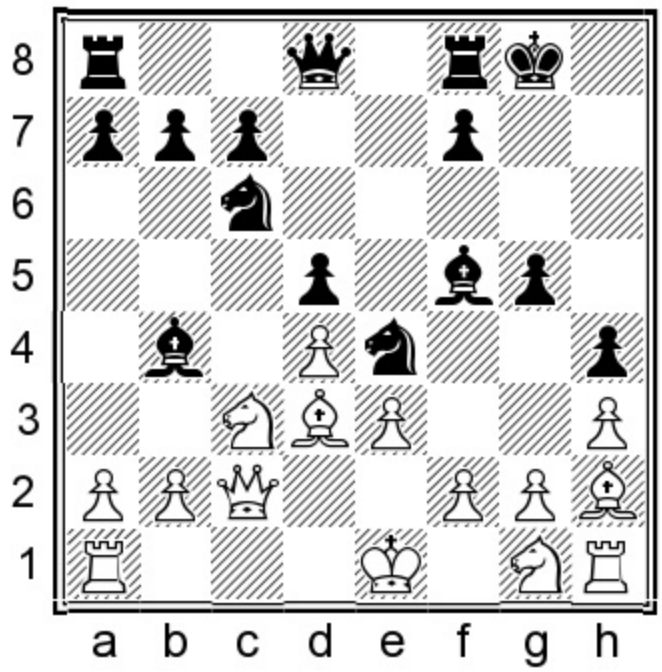
Hedinn Steingrimsson – Hannes Stefansson

Reykjavik 2022

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♕c2 d5 5.cxd5 exd5 6.♗g5 h6 7.♗h4 ♘c6 8.e3 g5 9.♗g3 h5 10.♗b5 h4 11.♗e5 0-0 12.h3 ♘e4!?

Not a bad move objectively, but on balance it would have been more practical to take White's bishop first.

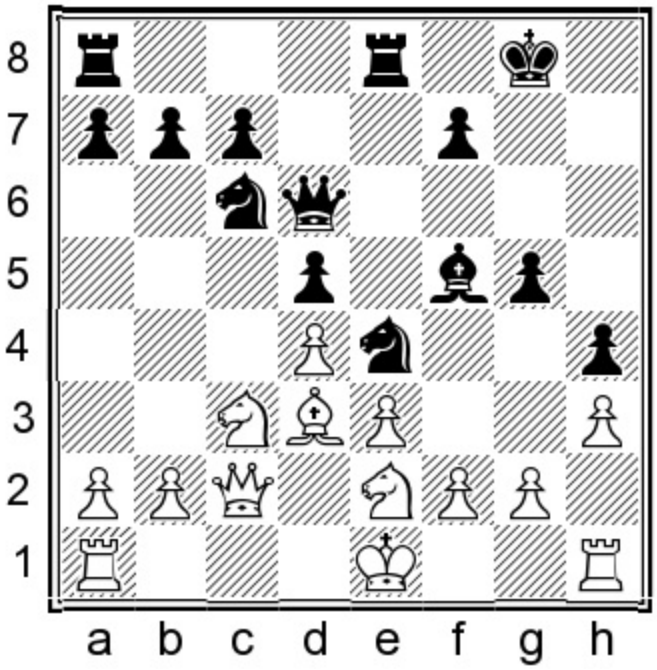
13.♗h2 ♗f5 14.♗d3



14...♖e8?

Black had placed heavy responsibility on himself by not eliminating the dark-squared bishop. At this point he had to find 14...♗a5 15.a3 b5!! to keep the activity alive. The complications arising now are mind-boggling, which is already an achievement for Black. The computer thinks the position is equal; we think it is confusing.

15.♘ge2 ♗d6 16.♗xd6 ♕xd6



17.a3?

White could have gained a significant advantage with 17.♗xe4!, with the key idea 17...dxe4 18.a3 ♖ad8 19.g3!, when there will be a square for the knight on the kingside before too long, open lines for the rooks and a space on the queenside for the white king.

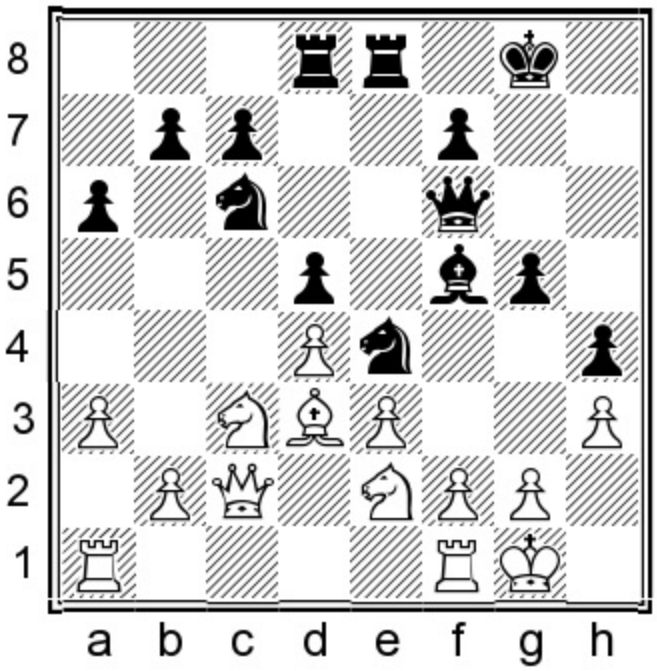
17...♖ad8?

17...♘xc3! was necessary.

18.♘b5?

18.♗xe4! worked again.

18...♕e7 19.0-0 a6 20.♘bc3 ♕f6



21.f3?

White is breaking the tension, at the cost of weakening his pawn structure.

21.♖ac1! would have kept the tension (and threatened ♘xe4 dxe4 ♗xa6!). 21...♖d6 22.b4± would allow White to push on the queenside. It is not easy to see how Black would be able to do anything similar on the kingside.

21...♘xc3 22.bxc3 ♗xd3 23.♕xd3 ♘a5

Black has an easy game after this, but 23...♕e6!∓ was a small improvement. Only on the next move will Black reroute the knight.

24.♖fe1 ♖e6 25.♘c1 c5 26.♖a2 cxd4 27.cxd4 b5 28.♘b3 ♘c4 29.♖ae2 ♖e7 30.♘c5 ♖de8 31.♔h1 ♔g7 32.♕b3

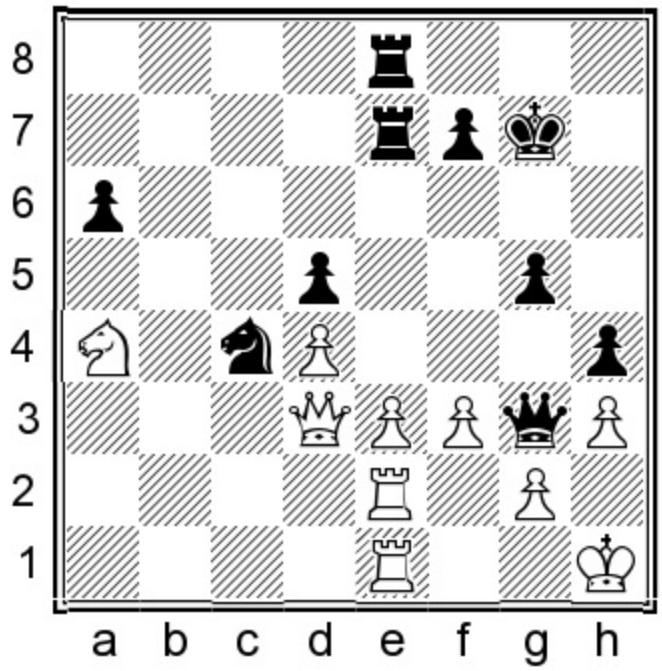
32.e4 with even chances was simpler.

32...♕d6

Black misses a fantastic idea: 32...g4!? 33.hxg4 h3 34.♕d3 a5!? White is under pressure but should be able to keep his position together with accurate moves. But how often do we manage to play accurately?

33.a4 bxa4 34.♘xa4 ♕g3 35.♕d3?

35.♕c3 was better.



Black now has a fantastic tactic at his disposal.

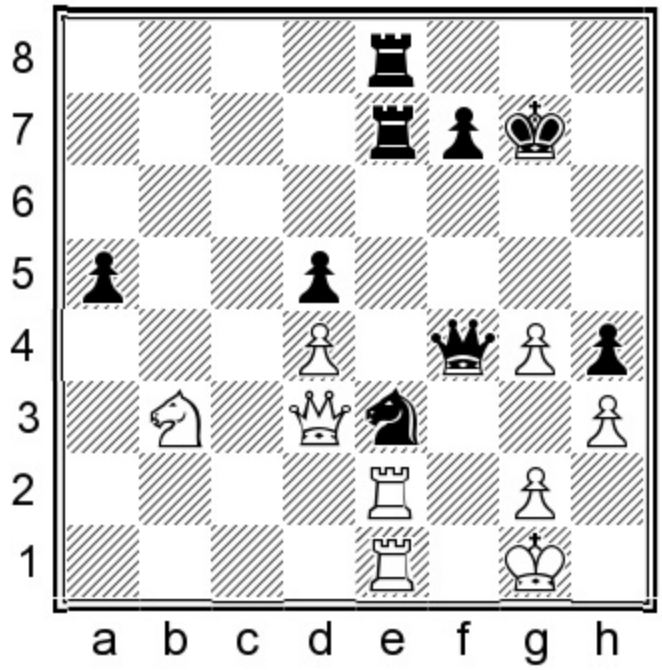
35...g4?

35...♘xe3! 36.♖xe3 g4!! was a fabulous breakthrough. Black wins quickly after 37.hxg4 h3! 38.gxh3 ♖h8, and the mate after 37.♖xe7 ♕xe1† 38.♖xe1 ♖xe1† 39.♔h2 g3# is particularly sweet!

36.fxg4 ♘xe3 37.♔g1 ♕f4 38.♘c5 a5 39.♘b3?

A typical time trouble error. White has been under pressure for a while and stumbles.

39.♖f2 ♕g3 40.♖fe2 with a draw was better.



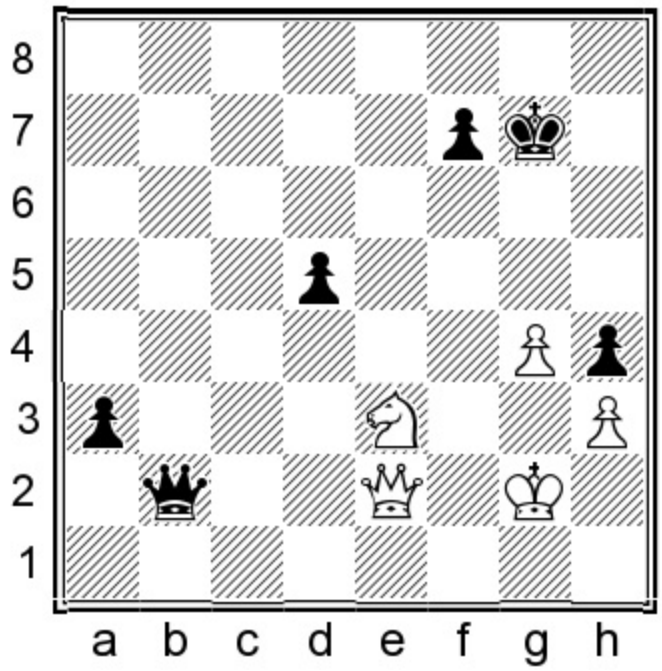
39...a4?

Black had a direct win in the time scramble: 39...♘xg2!, exchange the rooks, and then pick up the b3-knight via a check on g3.

40.♘d2 a3?

Black misses a direct win in 40...♘c2!.

41.♘f1! ♘xg2 42.♔xg2 ♖xe2† 43.♖xe2 ♖xe2† 44.♕xe2 ♕xd4 45.♘e3 ♕b2



46.♘c2?

The knight is only in trouble on c2. It was better to keep the tension by bringing in the king first.

46.♔f3! and White would not lose.

46...a2 47.♔f2 ♕c3 48.♕d1 d4?

48...♕xc2† 49.♕xc2 a1=♕ followed by ...♕e5, consolidating the advantage.

49.♔e2 ♔g8

Black is no longer winning after 49...♕xc2† 50.♕xc2 a1=♕ 51.♔d3, when the king is controlling the d-pawn.

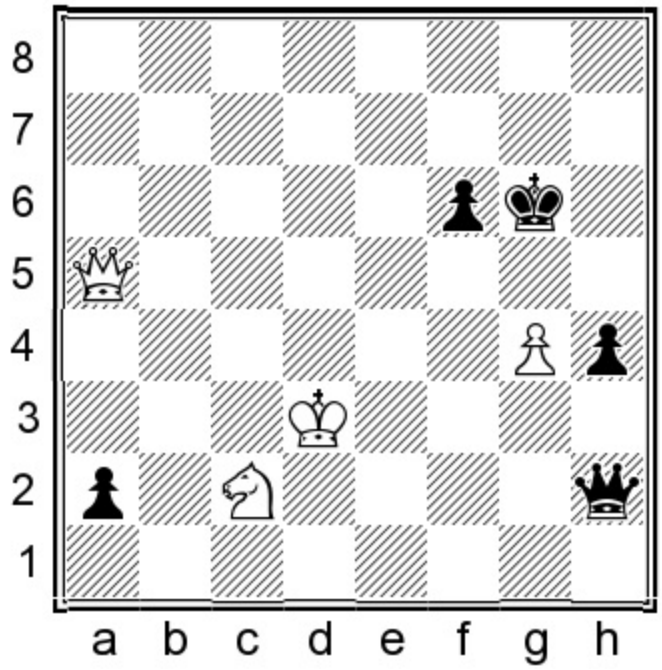
50.♕d3 ♕c5 51.♕e4 ♔g7 52.♔d1 ♕c4 53.♕e5† f6 54.♕e7† ♔g6 55.♕e4† ♔h6 56.♕f5 ♕c6 57.♕f4† ♔g6 58.♕xd4 ♕h1† 59.♔d2 ♕xh3 60.♕e4† ♔h6 61.♕f4† ♔g7 62.♕c7† ♔g6 63.♕a5?

This gives Black a random chance near the end.

63.♕c4 was one of several drawing moves. The possibility of the check on g8 makes it the

simplest.

63...♕h2† 64.♔d3



64...♕d6†?

Black had the chance to win the game with: 64...♕g3†! And after 65.♔d2 ♕d6† 66.♔c1 ♕f4†!, he will either pick up the g-pawn with check, or win instantly after 67.♔b2 ♕e5†.

65.♔c4 is more resilient, but after 65...♕xg4†, Black should win in the long run.

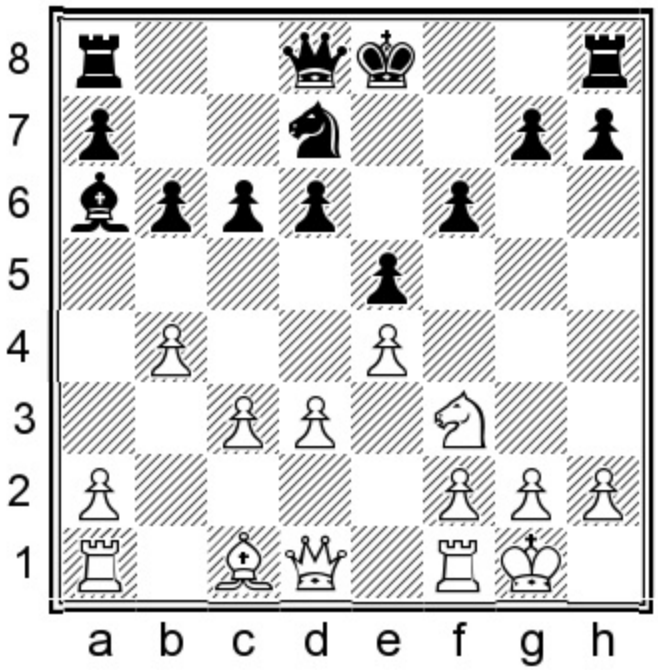
65.♘d4 ♕g3† 66.♔c4

½–½

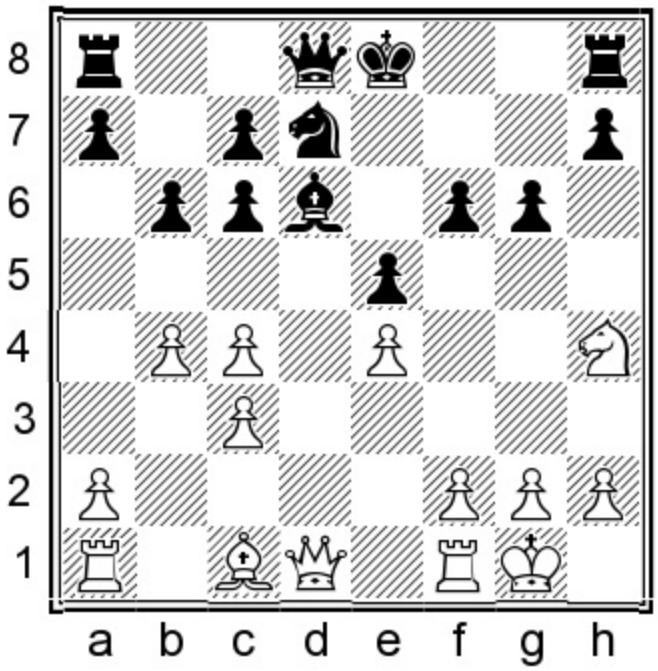
2. Structural Considerations

Having the simple advice out of the way, we can move on to more complex issues, where more than one element is influencing our considerations.

But first, let us take a preview of the exercise section. One of these structures is preferable for Black, the other is preferable for White. Which is which?



A) Should White prefer this structure?



B) Or should he prefer this structure?

Please make your choice before continuing

2.1 Weaknesses

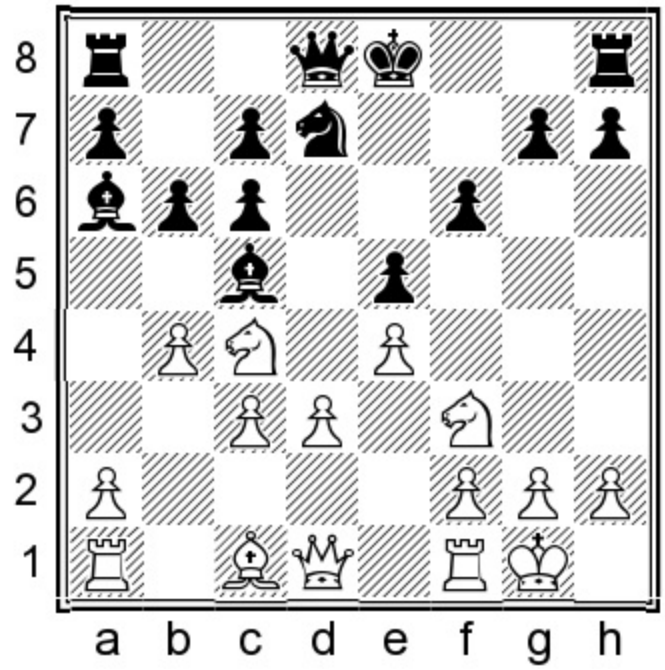
Aram Hakobyan – Mikhail Antipov

St Louis 2022

While the considerations relating to good and bad bishops are useful, chess is often more complex than taking one factor and making it everything. This is why we are not fans of talking about rules in chess, but prefer to look at these observations as common themes, or strategic concepts. They are abstract patterns that work a lot of the time and provide us with short cuts in terms of weighing up different strategic considerations.

In the next example, the good bishop is bad, and the bad bishop is good. It is all about perspective. And in this case, placement.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♗c5 5.♗xc6 dxc6 6.♘bd2 b6 7.♘c4 ♘d7 8.0-0 f6 9.c3 ♗a6 10.b4



The interesting strategic question has arisen. Black has a choice between two possible structures, one arising after ...♗d6 ♘xd6† cxd6 and one arising after ...♗xc4 dxc4 ♗d6. The argument for the first structure is that Black keeps his good bishop and his doubled pawns are straightened out. The argument for the second structure is that White also gets doubled pawns and the bishop on d6 will be able to underpin all the contact points on the dark squares.

Since you have already decided above, we can proceed to the answer.

Structure A is in White's favour. The contact points remain on the dark squares and as White has the only dark-squared bishop, he is well poised to play on these. At the same time, the bishop on a6 is not as effective as it would have been if it was placed on e6. When pawns and bishops work well together, the pawns handle one colour of squares; here the dark squares. And the bishop the other colour. In Structure A, Black's kingside light squares are likely to come under pressure, but the bishop is unable to help. It is often referred to as an absent bishop. At the same time, White can advance the pawns on the queenside to dominate the bishop.

Structure B is in Black's favour. His position is solid and although the bishop is bad, it is useful. All of White's pawn breaks will happen on the dark squares and activate the bishop. This is a solid and fully playable position. If White decides to play unambitiously, Black may find it hard to play for a win. But chess is like this sometimes.

In practice things are always complicated. At the same time, it is important to develop the skill to determine some things for sure.

To us, it is not surprising that the players were unsure about which structure to choose. What is surprising is just how great the difference is between the two.

10...♗d6?

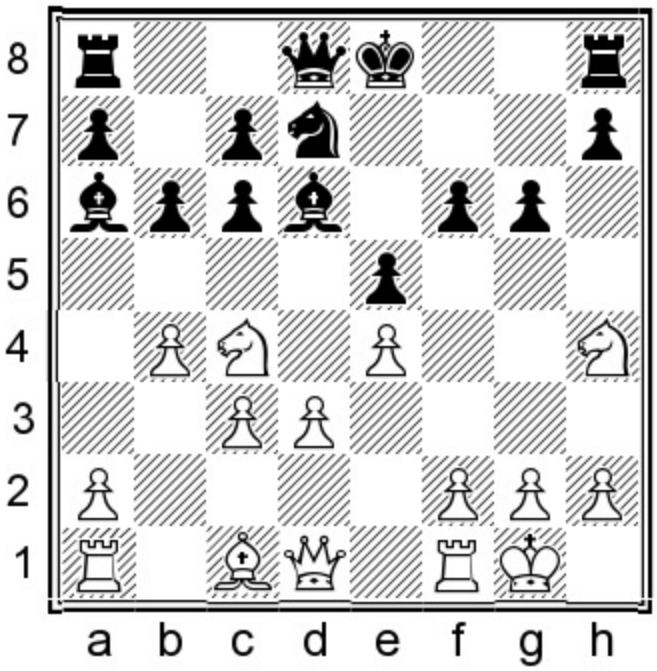
10...♗xc4! is the right choice. It is worth noticing that after 11.bxc5 ♗f7 White's pawn structure is worse and the bishop has successfully regrouped.

11.♘h4?

11.♘xd6†!

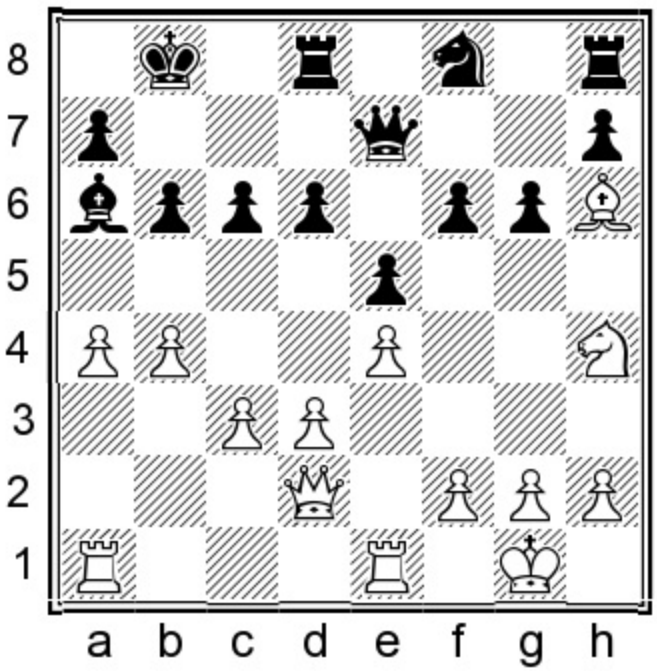
11...g6?

11...♗xc4!



12.♗h6?

Randomly, we have chosen this as the moment to show one way White could exploit his advantage. After 12.♘xd6†! cxd6, White can play in many ways. His advantage is primarily structural. We will show one possible line. 13.♗h6 ♕e7 14.♖e1 0-0-0 15.a4 ♔b8 16.♕d2 ♘f8



17.c4 and White has an overpowering strategic advantage. Next comes the assault on the black king.

12...♕e7

12...♗xc4!

13.g3

13.♕b3 was stronger. If Black would take on c4, he would not damage the white structure.

13...♕e6

13...♗xc4!

14.♕b3

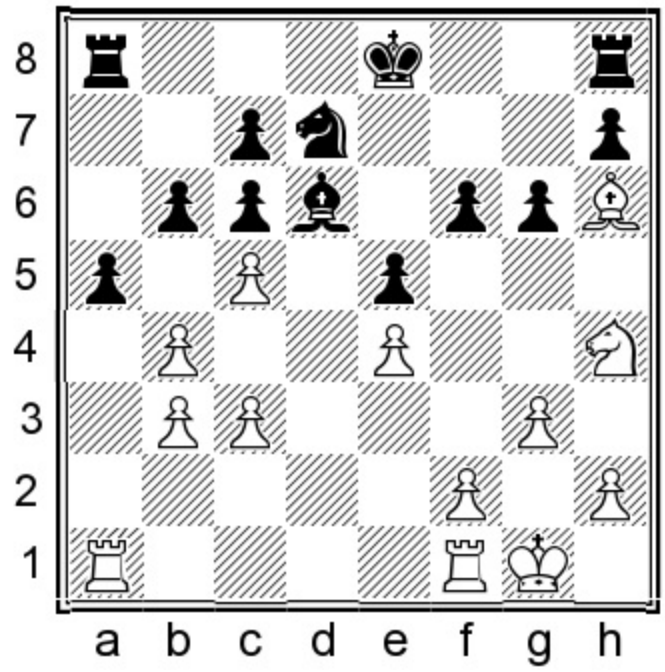
14.♘xd6†!? was still reasonable. But Black would play 14...♕xd6! and his structure would be far more solid than after a pawn recapture.

14...♗xc4! 15.dxc4 a5

This looks a bit automatic.

Human intuition would suggest 15...c5!? as a reasonable alternative, although it may be better to keep flexibility with 15...♔f7! 16.♖ad1 ♖hd8, when the black position is much easier to play.

16.c5! ♕xb3 17.axb3



17...bxc5?

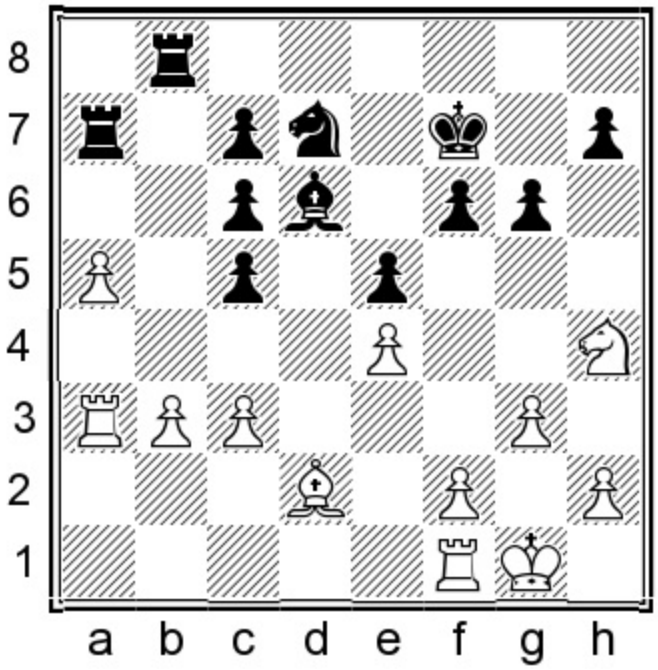
A curious concession, which could be based on a simple oversight.

17...♗e7! is what any grandmaster would want to play. The tactical justification comes after: 18.bxa5?! ♘xc5! 19.axb6 ♔d7! With the white pawns dropping quickly, White will have to play very accurately to keep the balance.

18.bxa5

The structure is certainly pleasant for White now.

18...♔f7 19.♗d2 ♖a7 20.♖a3 ♖b8



21.♘g2

21.c4!± would weaken the d4-square, where the black knight would soon arrive. Still, the arrival of the knight on a strong square would not solve all of Black's problems. The bishop on d6 is horrible and the passed a-pawn is a valuable asset.

21...c4! 22.b4 c5

Black managed to exchange all of the queenside. Hakobyan played on to bare kings, on move 76, but already here the chances of winning the game have shrunk to close to zero.

Sarin Nihal – Parham Maghsoodloo

Belgrade 2022

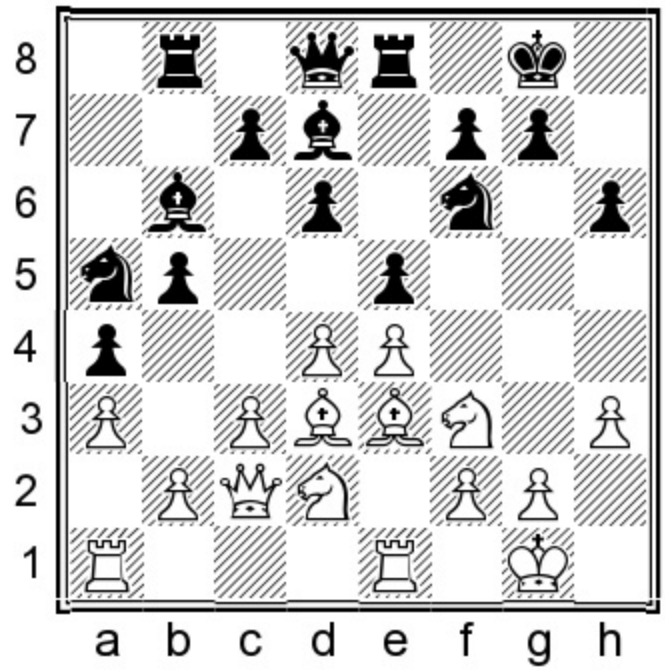
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5

One of the main trends of 21st century chess has been the move away from the Ruy Lopez towards the Italian Game. When Kasparov played against Kramnik for the World Championship in 2000, only two options on move three were analysed: 3.♗b5 and 3.d4. When Carlsen took the number one spot in the world in 2010, he won a good game against Bacrot in the Scotch.

Since then, the Italian has taken over and been almost as dominant as the Ruy Lopez was before. One of the main features of the Italian is that the pawn structure is fluid and there are many chances

for the players to outplay each other. The approach from the Italian has bled into how the Ruy Lopez is played, as in this example.

3...a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 b5 6.♗b3 ♗c5 7.c3 d6 8.d4 ♗b6 9.♗e3 0-0 10.♘bd2 ♖b8 11.h3 h6 12.♖e1 ♖e8 13.a3 ♗d7 14.♗c2 a5 15.♗d3 a4 16.♕c2 ♘a5



White is retaining the tension in the centre, but his next move allows Black to cramp his queenside, bringing him plenty of misery.

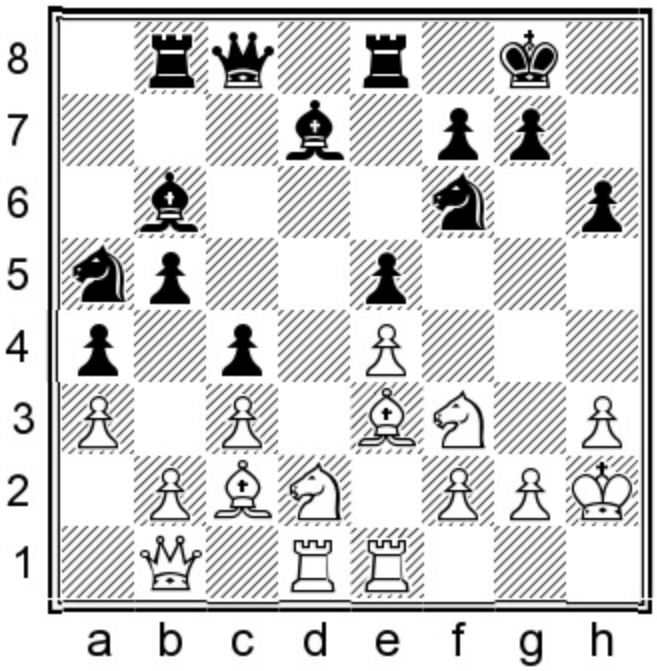
17.♖ad1?

White should have played 17.dxe5! dxe5 18.c4, with even chances.

17...c5! 18.dxe5 dxe5

White can no longer play c3-c4, as Black would have ...b5-b4 with a big advantage. The inferior structure is a reality.

19.♕b1 c4 20.♗c2 ♕c8 21.♔h2



Things have been going well for Black. The white bishop on c2 is poor and the b2-pawn is a long-term target. But Maghsoodloo quickly ruins his advantage.

21...♘h5

21...♗xe3! 22.♖xe3 ♘h5 was stronger. The white rook is not well placed on e3.

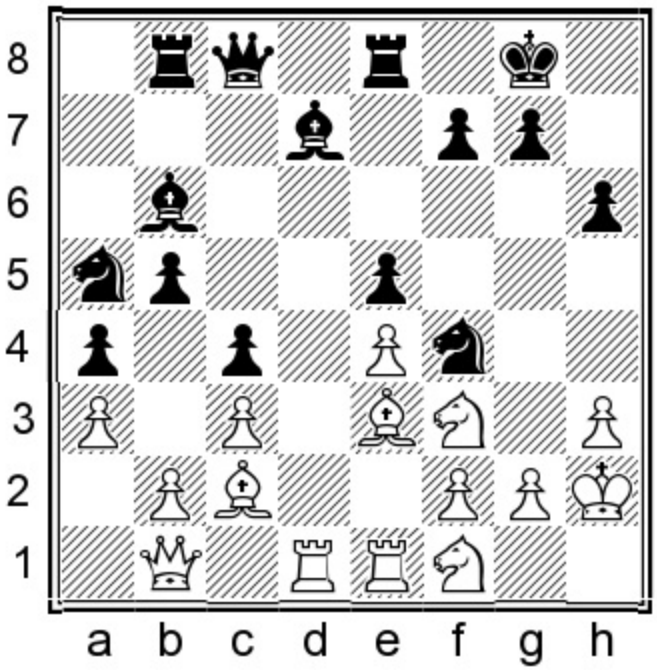
22.♘f1

Preparing to recapture with the knight.

22...♘f4?

When you have a better position, it is common to want to "do something". But it is difficult for Black to get things going in this position, without improving the position of the knight on a5.

Thus, the correct way to continue would have been 22...♘b3!∓, when Black is better, but the game is not over. The problem for White is that the knight on b3 is a horrible intruder, but eliminating it may be worse. The b2-pawn remains a big weakness, and if lost, the b3-pawn would be a strong candidate. At the same time, the d3-square is permanently weakened.



23.♗xf4!?

Nihal could also have played a small combination. 23.♖xd7 ♕xd7 24.♘xe5 ♖xe5 25.♗xf4. White is temporarily a pawn up, but Black has decent compensation on the dark squares. The chances are about even, but perhaps he feared that the practical challenges for White could be more difficult. Or did he think he had a chance to play for an advantage?

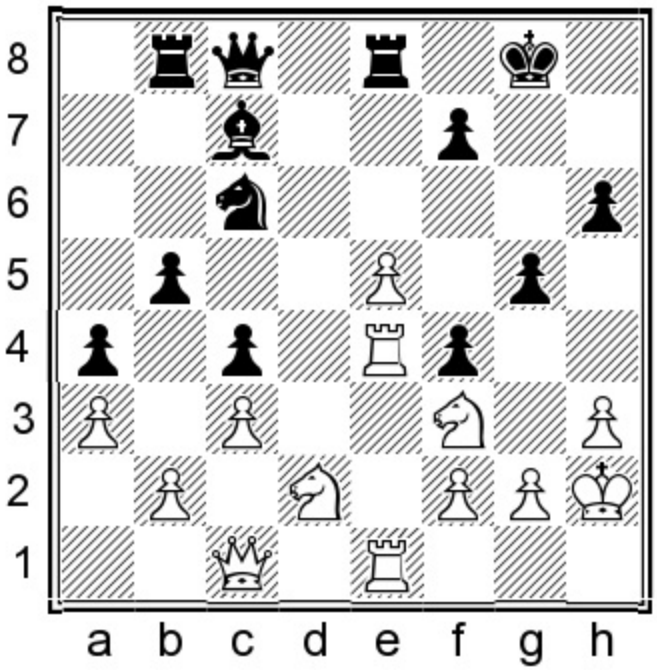
23...exf4 24.♕c1 ♗c7 25.e5 ♗f5 26.♗e4?!

It is a bit misguided to seek to double the rooks along the e-file. Black should be able to defend it without too much trouble.

It made more sense to contest the open file with 26.♖d5, when White is not worse.

26...♗xe4 27.♖xe4 g5∓ 28.♘1d2 ♘c6 29.♖de1

29.♔g1! was more accurate. Black is only a bit better.



29...♖b6?

Misplacing the rook horribly. Maghsoodloo is a seriously optimistic player, which can look a bit ridiculous when things do not work out, but is a great advantage when things do.

White's inaccuracy gave Black the chance to play 29...♕d7! preparing ...♖bd8, when Black would still have a serious advantage due to his better structure. Whatever White does, he will have to worry about the b2-pawn.

30.♕d1 g4 31.hxg4 ♕xg4 32.♕e2 ♘xe5 33.♘xe5 ♕xe2 34.♖4xe2 ♖be6 35.♘df3 f6 36.♘d7 ♖xe2 37.♘xf6† ♔f8 38.♘xe8 ♖xe1 39.♘xc7

White wins a piece, but not the game.

39.♘xe1 would also have led to a draw.

39...♖e2 40.♘xb5 ♖xb2 41.♘fd4 ♖xf2 42.♘d6 ♖b2 43.♘xc4 f3 44.♘xf3 ♖b3 45.♘d4 ♖xc3 46.♘b6 ♔f7 47.♘b5 ♖b3 48.♘d6† ♔e6

½–½

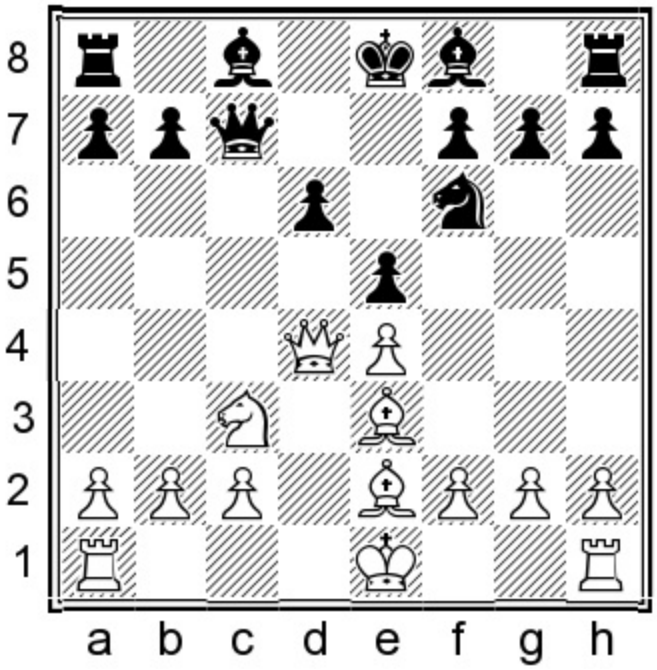
2.2 Colour complex

Exchanges can expose weaknesses, for example by removing defenders. Often when this happens, the defender is controlling one colour only. Because this is what 12 out of the 16 bits we are given at the start do. Rooks and kings have no preference, while the queen does, although she is not limited to that colour except for in extreme examples, where only diagonal moves are legal for her.

The next example is generic, and any grandmaster would play the best move within seconds. But if you have not seen this twist before, it is highly instructive; this includes the Black player, who was very young at the time.

Justin Sarkar – Brian Tay

Internet 2020



The core concept is for White to exchange the pieces in a way that will leave him with the dream formation of a knight on d5 versus a bad bishop on f6. Sometimes when we are trying to exchange pieces towards such a dream scenario, we have to transition across less favourable territory. But in this example every exchange is an improvement of the white position.

10.♕d2?

White still has the advantage after this, but it is a significant mistake none the less.

10...♗e6?!

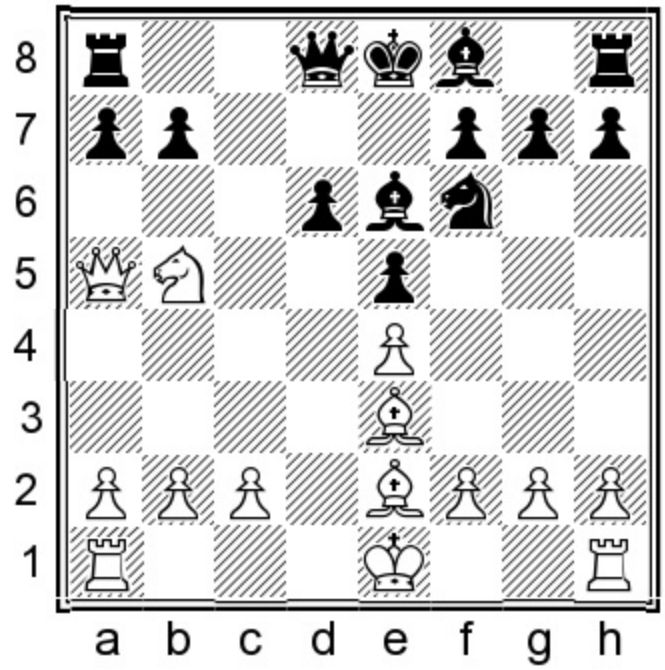
Black would also have been worse after 10...a6, but at least he would live long enough to experience suffering. This may sound uninviting, but the upside is the drawing chances that come with it. And perhaps even the slight chance of a swindle.

11.♘b5! ♕b8?

11...♕d8 was better, but after 12.0-0-0 Black is still in big trouble. For example: 12...♘xe4 13.♕b4 d5 14.♕a4 and Black has to do something he does not want to do.

12.♕a5! b6

White was planning: 12...♕d8



13.♗b6!, winning the exchange.

13.♕c3! ♗e7

13...♔d7 was perhaps the lesser evil. But after 14.0-0-0 it is still pretty evil.

14.♘c7† ♔f8 15.♕c6

White won on move 23.

It is hard to fault White for winning in a rout. But there was a stronger move available.

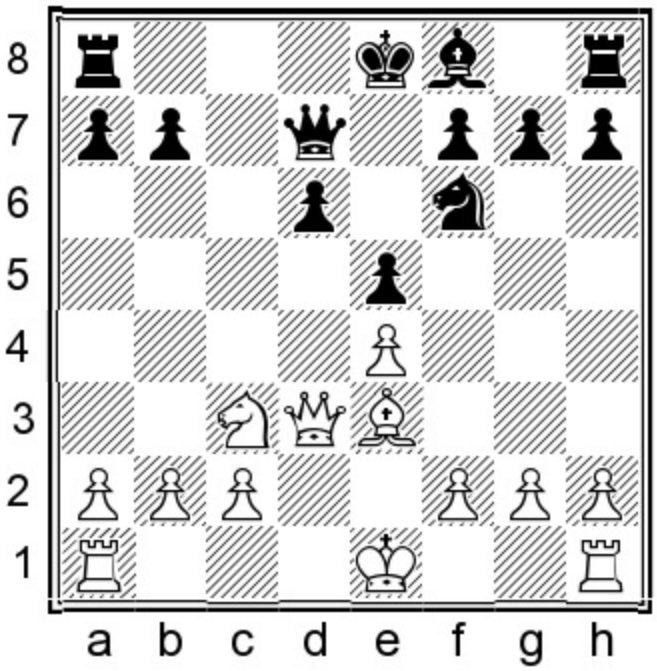
10.♗b5†!

Forcing the exchange of the light-squared bishops.

10...♗d7

Black can avoid the exchange, but it would require him to put the pieces on bad squares. After 10...♘d7 11.♕d2, the knight jump to d5 is imminent, on account of 11...a6? 12.♘d5 ♕d8 13.♗b6!, winning.

11.♗xd7† ♕xd7 12.♕d3

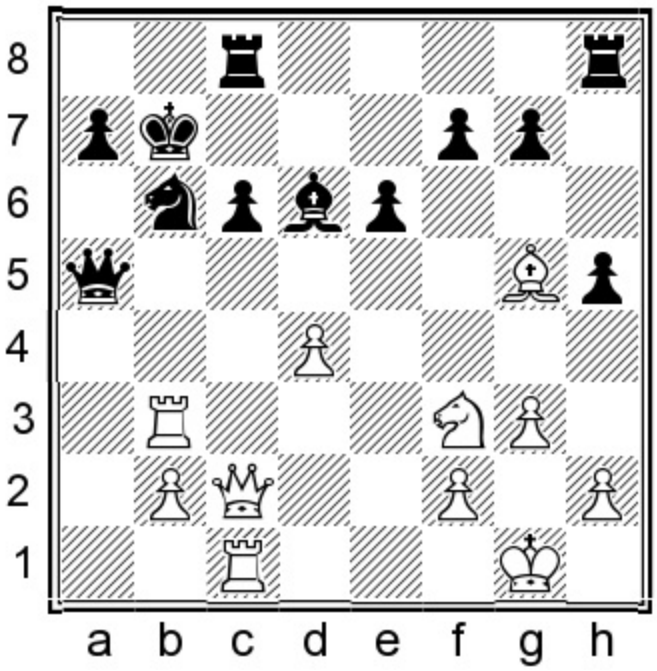


White is strategically winning. The threat is to play ♗g5xf6. There is no decent way to defend against this. For example: 12...♗e7 13.♗g5 ♘g8 14.h4, or 12...h6 13.0-0-0 ♗e7 14.f3, with the idea of g2-g4, h2-h4 and g4-g5. In the long run White will collect loads of positional advantages, with the strong knight on d5 just being another one of those.

The following example is far more advanced, but at its core it is the same. The weaknesses in the black position are the a7-pawn and the c5-square (more than the c6-pawn, which is easy for Black to defend).

Marian Jurcik – Jakub Szotkowski

Czech Republic 2021



25.♘e5!

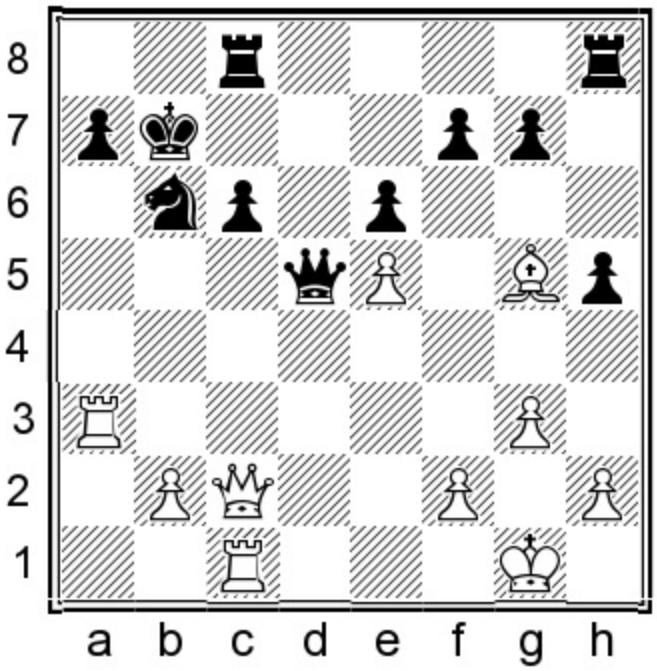
An energetic pawn sacrifice, exchanging the black bishop.

The game quickly went to the dogs for White with 25.♗d2?! ♕f5!? 26.♕c4 ♕d5 and a draw later, on move 47. White should now have played 27.♕d3!± keeping the queens on the board.

25...♗xe5 26.♖a3!

Gaining an important tempo.

26...♕d5 27.dxe5

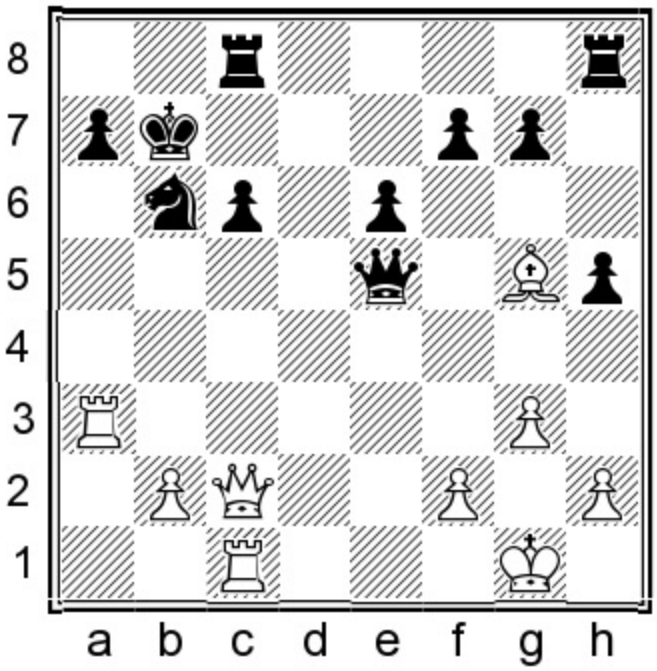


27...♕xe5

Accepting the pawn is the logical test. Black can also try more passive defence, but this will give White the freedom to apply pressure on the dark squares without any material investment.

27...♖c7 28.♗e3 h4 29.♖ca1 ♖a8 30.♗xb6! and the black king is drawn out into the open with catastrophic consequences.

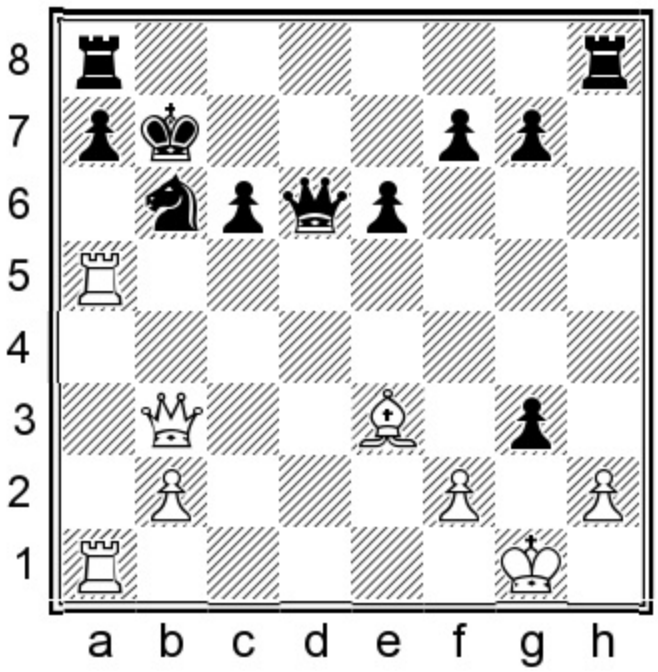
27...♔a8 28.b4! is also bad. White takes control of the dark squares. 28...♖c7 29.♗e3 ♖b8 30.♗c5 White is dominating. If Black seeks counterplay, as with 30...h4, White wins with 31.♖d3! ♕e4 32.♗xb6!.



28.♖ca1

The invasion on the dark squares cannot be stopped.

28...♖a8 29.♖a5 ♕d6 30.♕b3 h4 31.♗e3 hxg3



32.♖xa7†

This is one example of how things can end. Black can struggle a bit, but not avoid doom.

More could be said about weaknesses and exchanges. At times we exchange minor pieces, because the recapture will create a blemish on the opponent's pawn structure, which we hope to exploit later. We will see examples of this in the exercises section of the book.

3. Strategic themes

In this section we shall look at some common strategic themes that can arise when considering an exchange. There are a lot of these themes (strategy itself being a name for a box of various complex approaches). Let's dive straight into the first one.

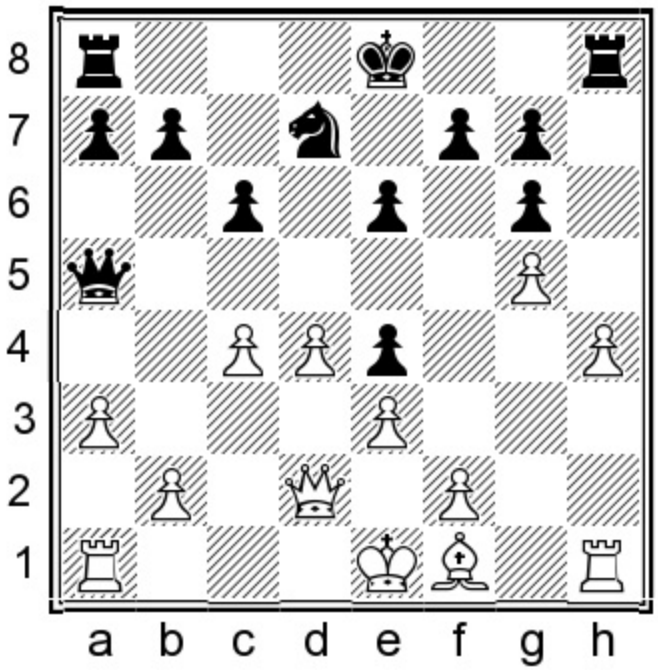
3.1 Space

A common scenario is where one player has managed to occupy more than half of the board. The common guideline is that the person with less space wants to exchange minor pieces, as there can be too little space to manoeuvre them in. We should of course remember that checking if there is enough space for them should be a consideration unique for each position.
When it comes to exchanging the big bits, often the defender will find it less attractive, but we should be careful not to let space considerations be the only factor.

Zdenko Kozul – Lennert Lenaerts

Germany 2022

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♗g4 5.h3 ♗h5 6.♘c3 e6 7.g4 ♗g6 8.♘e5 ♘bd7 9.♘xg6 hxg6 10.g5 ♘e4 11.♘xe4 dxe4 12.h4 ♕a5† 13.♗d2 ♗b4 14.a3 ♗xd2† 15.♕xd2



This is a theoretical position, where quite a number of games have been played. We shall approach it "cold", meaning that we haven't looked at these games and prefer to make up our own opinion, based on analysis and logic, rather than going down a path of information overload. In short,

we don't care much about the importance for this position in some people's repertoires.

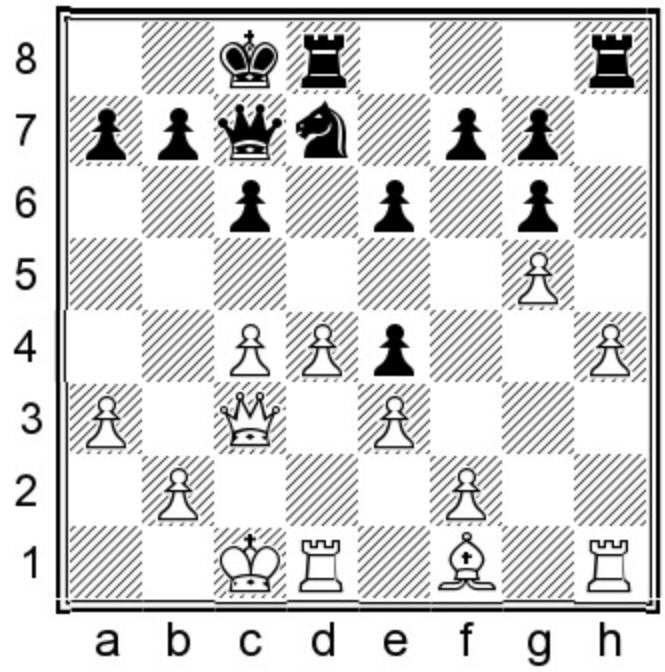
The core question is if Black should exchange queens. Doing so would help the white king advance and leave him with a space advantage. If you have read *Positional Decision Making in Chess* by Boris Gelfand, you will know that in positions where one side has a space advantage, often the exchange of heavy artillery benefits the stronger side, as minor pieces tend to suffer more from a lack of space. But there are not a lot of minor pieces for Black to worry about here, making the choice of whether or not to exchange queens a bit more complicated.

15...♕xd2†!

It would be wrong for Black to keep the queens on the board. White has more space to manoeuvre and the queen will be able to support the advance on either flank, a luxury Black does not have, because of the lack of space.

As we shall see in the game, the position without queens is easier for Black to navigate, as the king does not need protection and can help actively in the fight for squares in the centre.

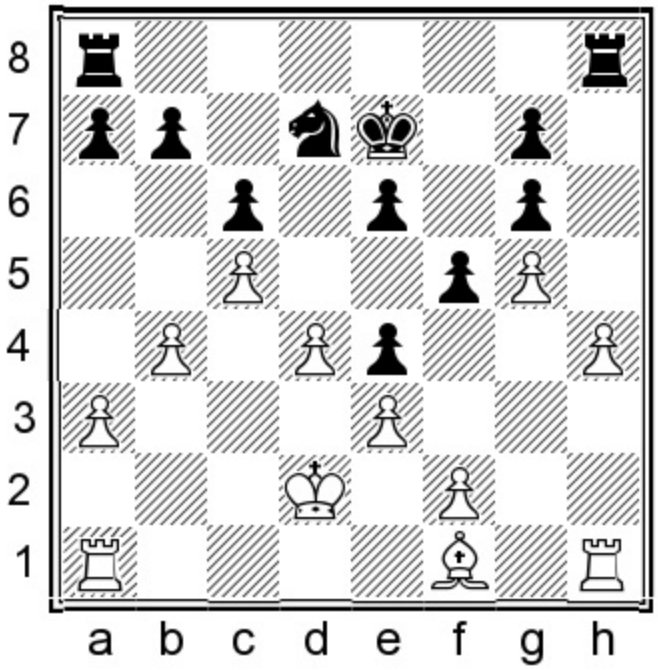
If Black had retreated with the queen, White's best play would look something like this: 15...♕c7? 16.0-0-0 0-0-0 17.♕c3! Fighting for the dark squares. The bishop will take care of the light squares. (White should not go pawn grabbing. After 17.♕c2 f5 18.gxf6?! ♘xf6 19.♗g2 e5! 20.♗xe4 exd4 21.♗xg6 dxe3, a lot of pawns have been exchanged, which alone will ease Black's defensive task. But on top of this, White is sitting with some weaknesses on the dark squares and a bishop that cannot find a good square. Only White is playing for a win, but it is not a serious try.)



White is ready to advance slowly. Black cannot fortify the pawn on e4 on account of 17...f5?! 18.c5! e5 19.d5!, with a big advantage for White. Black has weaknesses all over the place and the knight is just poor. That it will take White time to get to these weaknesses does not matter, as Black is

not able to do anything useful in the meantime.

16.♔xd2 f5 17.c5 ♔e7 18.b4



Should Black:

A) seek a confrontation in the centre, or
B) play to defend his queenside with 18...a6?

18...a6?

The correct answer was A. There are several reasons for this. The first is what we consider to be the main strategic challenge for Black, which is to find a good square for the knight. If we look closely enough, we can see that this square will have to be e6.

Therefore, Black should play 18...e5!, where one important idea is this: 19.♗c4 ♘f8 20.dxe5 ♘d7. Black will win the pawn back quickly, with complete equality.

The second reason 18...a6 is a mistake was not so apparent in the game. But it is not difficult to see. White has a light-squared bishop and it is with great pleasure that White sees another long-term target pop up on the light squares. Once White manages to invade the black position, through the kingside or the centre, the a6-pawn will not only be a target, but also no longer support the ...b7-b6 push (as the pawn would from a7).

19.a4?

White returns the favour. It was better to play 19.♔c3! and keep options open. White's advantage is not too overpowering, but the flexibility and targets still gives him great chances.

19...b6 20.♗e2

It is difficult to evaluate if 20.a5 b5 helps White or not.

20...a5?

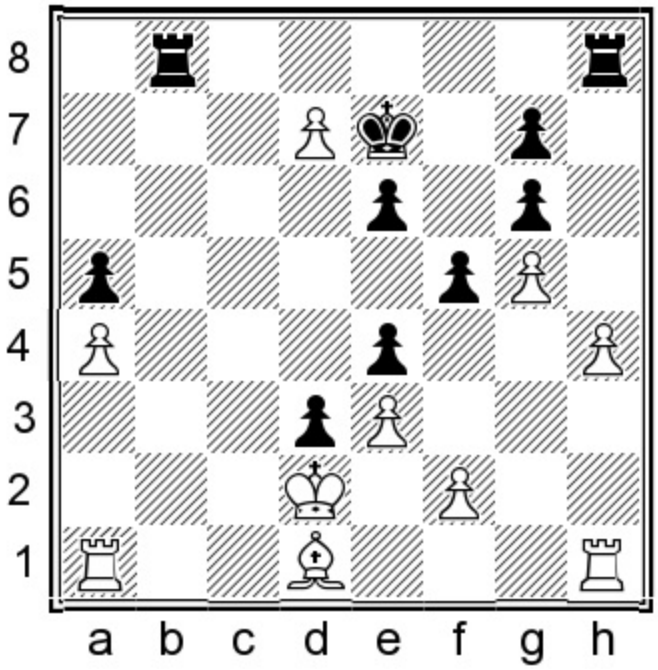
Black decides to sharpen the game. It is based on a misevaluation, but you cannot fault his fighting spirit.

If he had played 20...e5!, his position would still have been perfectly tenable. White probably has a small pull after 21.♖ac1!?, when the game goes on.

21.b5!

White is happy to take on the challenge.

21...bxc5 22.bxc6 cxd4!? 23.cxd7 d3 24.♗d1 ♖ab8



This was Black's intention.

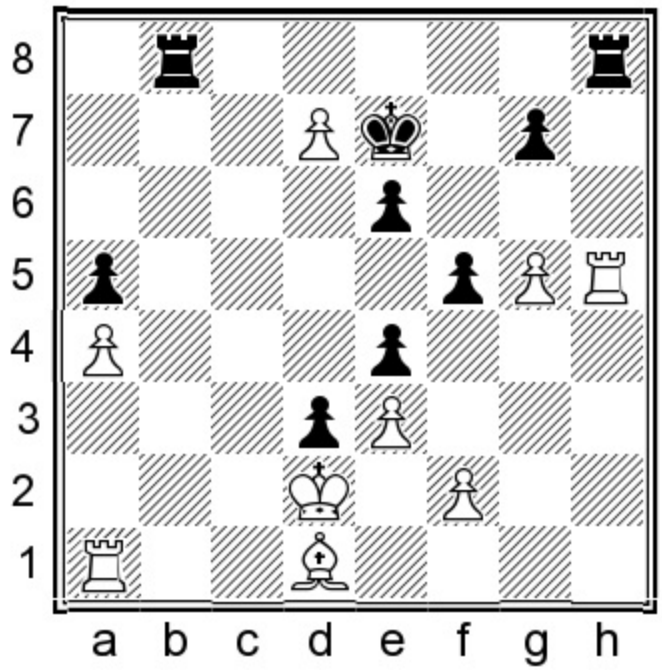
We have reached the crunch point. For the piece, Black has an annoying pawn on d3, which it is difficult for White to get rid of. White cannot make progress without a pawn break, so should it be **A) 25.h5**, or **B) 25.f3?**

25.h5?

This time the answer is B.

White needed to undermine the support for the pawn on d3 to have a hope of activating his bishop later on. A plausible winning continuation could be 25.f3! ♔xd7 26.♖a3!? ♖hd8 27.fxe4 fxe4 28.♖f1 and White is managing to bring out the rooks.

25...gxh5 26.♖xh5

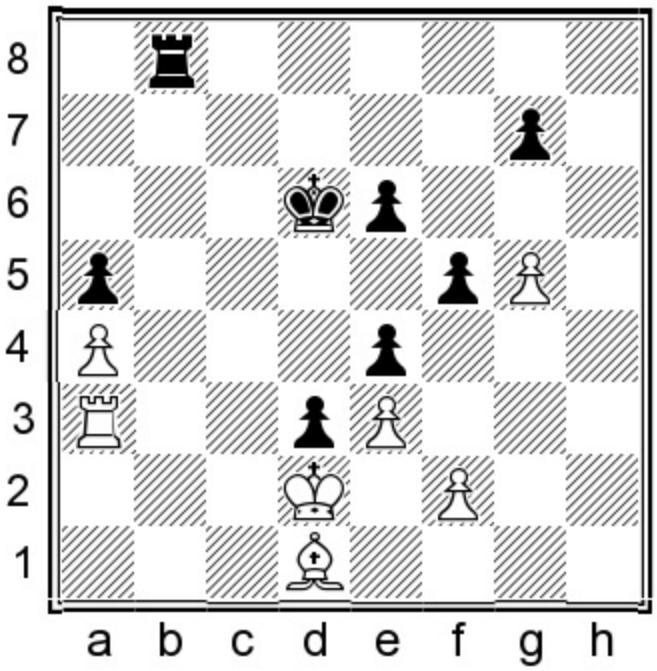


Should Black exchange rooks?

26...♖b2†!?

Yes, he should have. This is a clear, but somewhat surprising example of fighting for an open line you did not know you wanted. It is all about weaknesses. Having said that, the text move does not lose, only it makes Black's defensive task a bit harder.

26...♖xh5 27.♗xh5 ♔xd7 would give Black compensation for the piece. The point is that the h-file is the true source of counterplay after: 28.♗d1 ♔d6 29.♖a3 White will always take over the b-line with this manoeuvre.



29...♖h8! 30.♖b3 ♖h2 There is still a lot of play ahead, but Black is making the draw with active play. The key point is that White's two weaknesses are f2 and g5, and White will not be able to protect f2 with the king from e1, as Black will simply check it away.

27.♔e1!?

An understandable move that gives Black a chance to change direction. White could have put his opponent under a lot of pressure with a hugely tactical continuation:

27.♔c3! ♖xh5

Black has to exchange rooks now anyway.

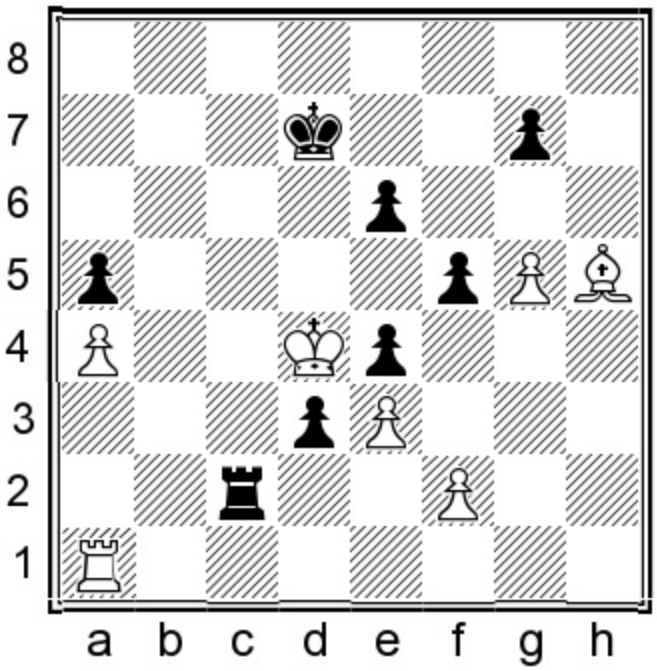
27...♖hb8? 28.♖h7 does not work for Black.

28.♗xh5 ♖c2†!

The rook does not really want to be there, but Black must win time to take the d7-pawn.

28...♖xf2? 29.♗e8 wins for White. It is quite complicated, with one possible line going like this: 29...e5 30.♖h1! Threatening ♖h7 in many lines. 30...f4 31.exf4 exf4 32.♗g6! A key point. White can still win technically with his extra piece if the black pawn centre is eliminated. With the extra threat 33.♗f5, Black can only resign.

29.♔d4 ♔xd7



30.♔e5!?

The most dangerous idea.

30.f4 also looks ominous for Black, but a surprising passive idea leads to a positional draw. 30...♖c6! 31.♗d1 ♖b6!! and now after both 32.♖c1 ♔d6 and 32.♔e5 ♖d6, White is blocked from improving his position. Spectacular stuff.

30...♖c5† 31.♔f4 ♖c2 32.f3

White's greatest desire is to undermine the black centre. Once it is gone, only the extra piece remains.

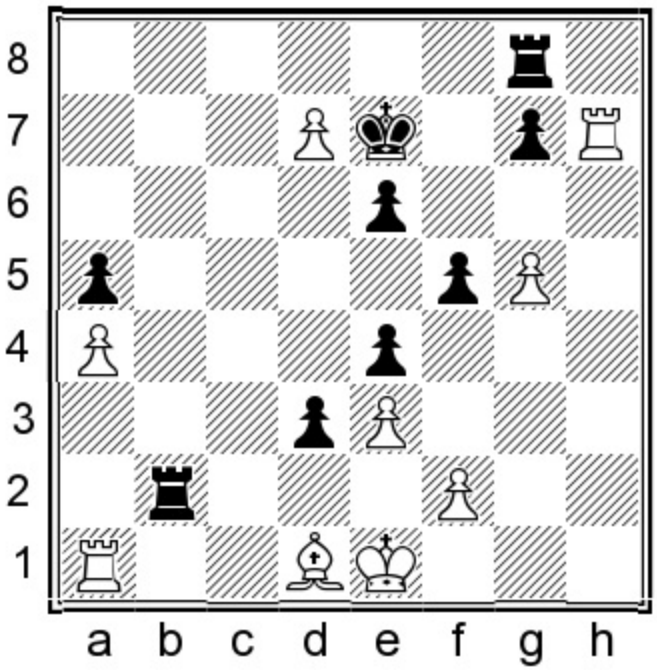
32...♖h2 33.♗g6 d2 34.fxe4 ♖h4† 35.♔f3 ♖xe4 36.♔e2 ♖g4 37.♗h5 ♖xg5 38.♗f3 ♖g3 39.♖d1

Black has fair drawing chances. But it has been a spectacular ride to get here.

27...♖hb8?

Black could return to previous ideas with 27...♖xh5! 28.♗xh5 ♔xd7 29.♗d1 ♖b8! 30.♖a3 ♖h8 31.♖b3 ♔c6 with a defensible position. But reversing ideas is always hard to do in chess.

28.♖h7 ♖g8



It's time for White to begin a mini-plan to remove the irksome rook from the second rank.

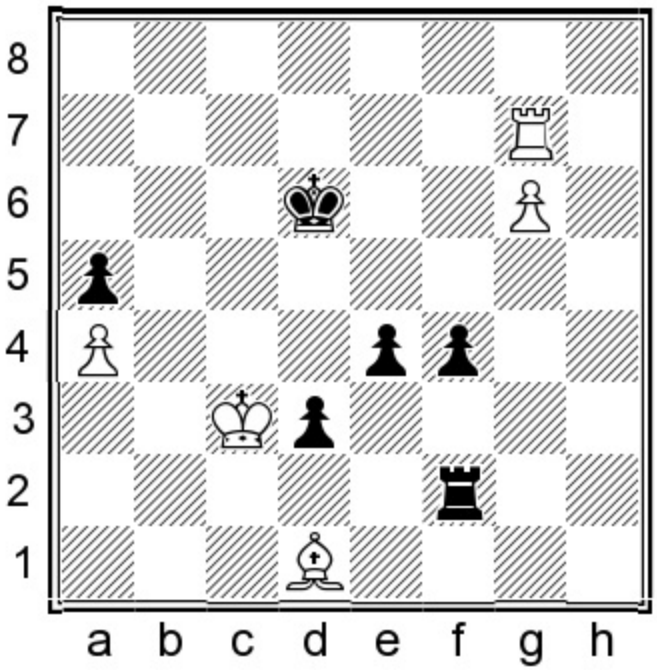
29.♖a3! ♔xd7 30.♖b3! ♖xb3 31.♗xb3 ♔d6 32.♗d1!

The bishop still has a defensive task on d1 to perform. Over the last few moves White has achieved nothing but exchange the rooks. And for this his position has improved immensely.

32...e5 33.♔d2 ♖b8 34.♖xg7 ♖b2† 35.♔c3 ♖xf2 36.g6

36.♖g6† ♔e7 37.♗b3 was simpler.

36...f4 37.exf4 exf4



Black has managed to create counterplay and White will have to play a few accurate moves to maintain a winning position.

38.♖f7?

In what must have been time trouble, Kozul missed the win.

38.♖g8! was the winning move. The key point is that after 38...e3 39.g7 e2 40.♗xe2 dxe2 41.♔d2, the game would end in a draw if the rook was on f7, but here White simply wins.

For this reason, Black will have to go for 38...♔e7 39.g7 ♔f7 40.♖e8 ♔xg7 41.♖xe4, where it is not immediately obvious to the untrained eye that White wins without much effort.

38...e3 39.♔xd3 ♖d2† 40.♔c4 ♖xd1 41.g7 ♖g1 42.♖xf4 ♖xg7 43.♔d3 ♖e7 44.♔e2 ♔c5 45.♖h4 ♖e5 46.♖g4 ♔d5 47.♖h4 ♖e4 48.♖h5† ♖e5

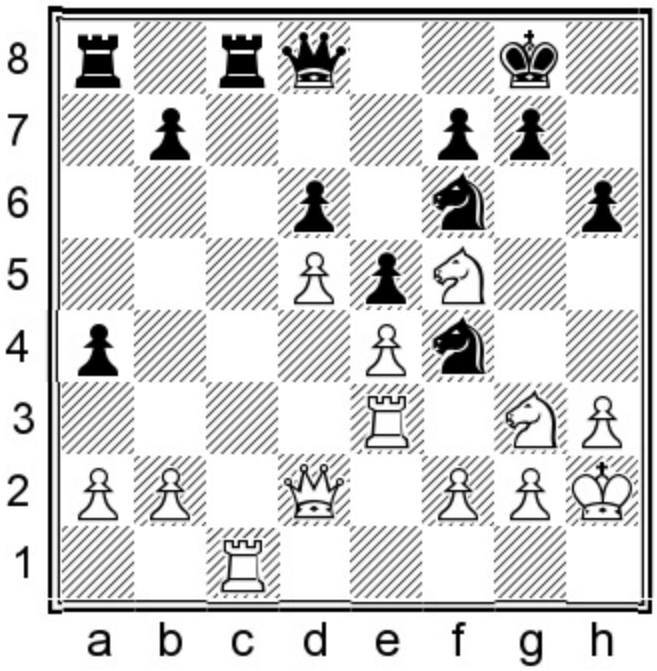
½–½

3.2 Fighting for open lines

One of the core concepts we see when there is a fight for an open file is the exchange of rooks, or the timely exchange of pawns. We shall see a few examples of fighting for open lines in the chapter on pawn exchanges. In this segment, we shall look at an example of exchanging rooks from the 2022 European Individual Championship.

Alexander Areshchenko – Dragos Ceres

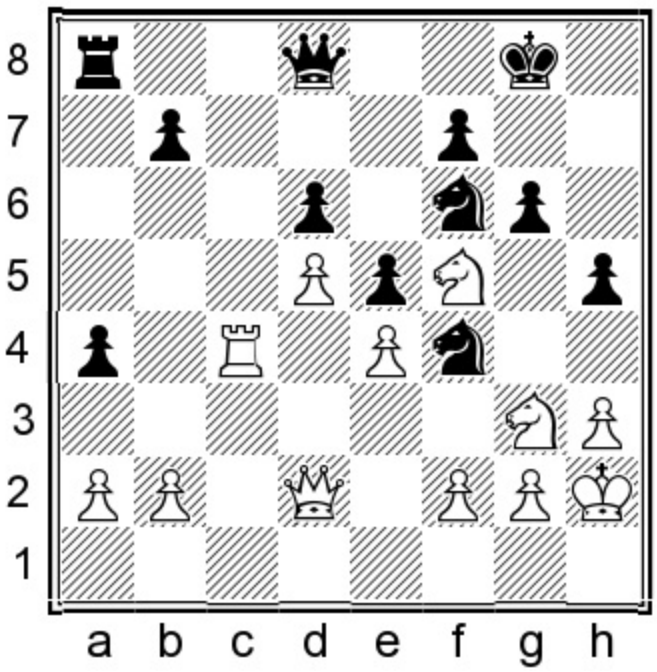
Terme Catez 2022



The fight for open files is an important theme for exchanges. Timing them correctly, so we do not only take over the open files, but also make ample use of them, is not always straightforward.

28...♖xc1?

The correct timing comes after 28...h5!, with the idea of ...g7-g6 and ...h5-h4, when White will find that the rook on e3 is overloaded. It cannot both defend the e4-pawn and fight for the c-line. In practice Areshchenko would have found it difficult to create any type of counterplay. Given some time to think, Stockfish decides to sacrifice a piece, rather than to give up his control of the open file: 29.♖ec3!? ♖xc3 30.♖xc3 g6 31.♖c4!?



Rather than losing the f5-square, White sacrifices a piece. The position is truly complicated, and

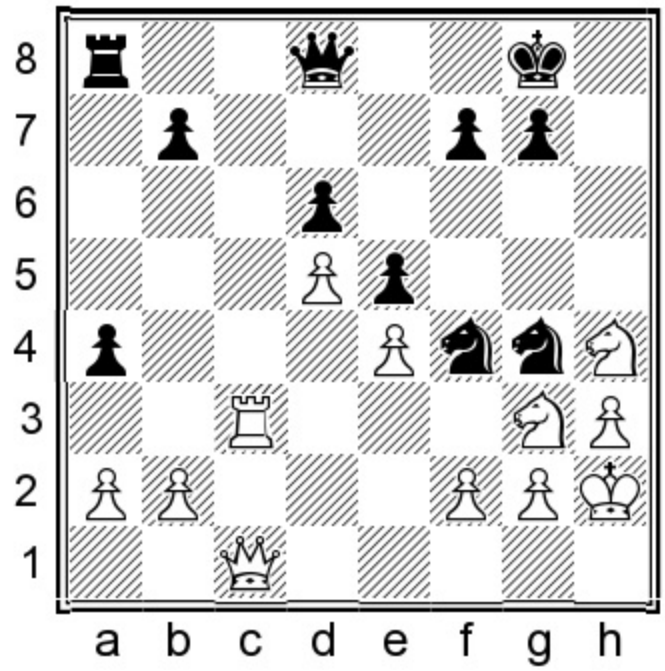
the moves Stockfish suggests are hard to evaluate. Especially as the machine never fixates on a clear evaluation. It is obvious that Black is better, although not overwhelmingly so. But it is not clear if he should take the knight.

A key variation continues: 31...♖b8!? 32.♕e3 ♘e8! with complications in Black's favour.

Entering such a toxic swamp is not always enticing. But if we compare it with the game, it becomes highly desirable.

29.♕xc1 g6

29...h5 is no longer as attractive. The key point comes after 30.♖c3! h4 31.♘xh4 ♘g4†, which looks dangerous for White, as the black queen will be dangerous on g4.

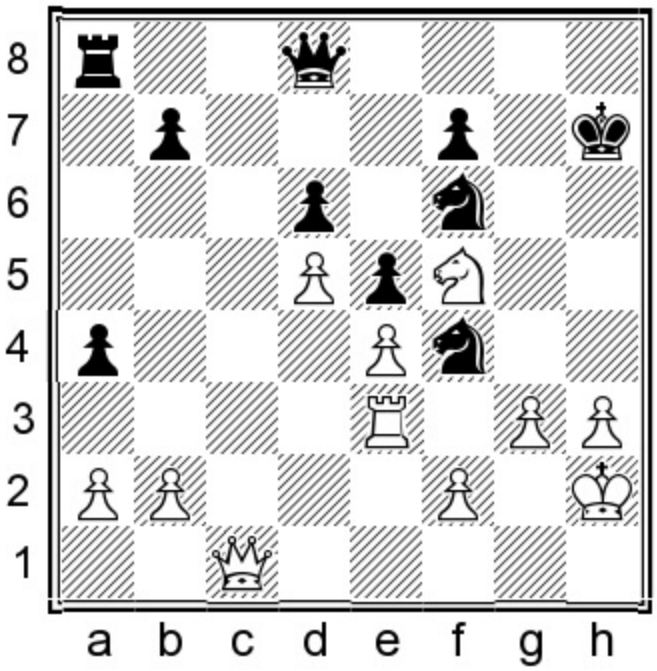


But White has a little twist up his sleeve. 32.♔g1! Rather than taking on g4, White prepares ♖c8†, forcing Black to play: 32...♘xf2 33.♔xf2 ♕xh4, when 34.♕c2 gives White approximate equality.

30.♘xh6† ♔g7 31.♘gf5† gxf5 32.♘xf5† ♔h7

The king was probably safer on f8.

33.g3



33...♖c8?

Black's task has already become insurmountable. To stay in the game, he had to find 33...♘4h5 34.♖c3 ♘g8!! 35.♖c7 ♕f6 with a decent position.

34.♕d2 ♘6xd5

Black faces reality. After 34...♘4h5 35.♖c3!, the threats of ♕h6† and g3-g4, or ♕g5 with similar intentions, are devastating.

35.exd5

With the game entering a technical phase, White is clearly winning. He took all the way to move 93 to do so. But win he did.

1–0

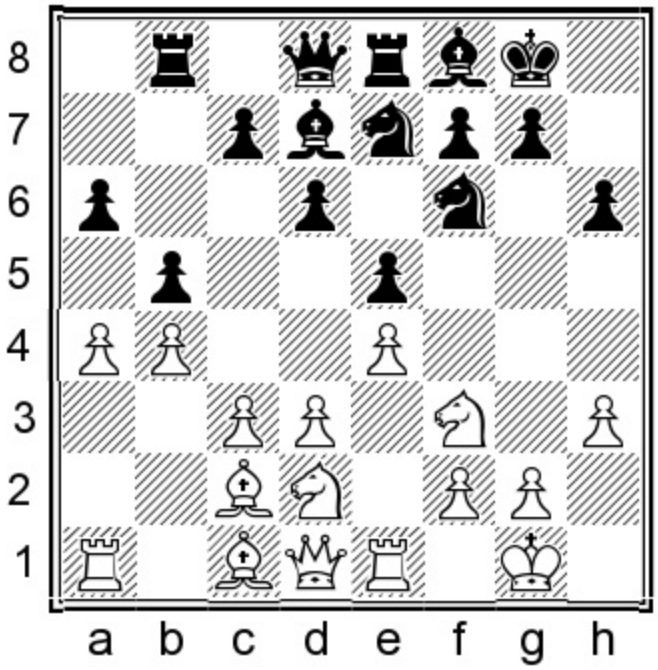
3.3 Breakthrough/Invasion

Often exchanges are used to create access points into the opponent's position. This comes up frequently when we are discussing the removal of defenders, a big topic in this book.

As an example of an invasion (here without a breakthrough) we have chosen a subtle positional win by the then World Champion, played in a rapid game during the pandemic. White won by invading the black position one square at a time, gained through exchanges. This did not have to be lethal, but it created problems for Black that the Chinese ace did not manage to solve. Once White had full control of the vital d6-square, Black's problems overwhelmed him.

Internet (rapid) 2021

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.d3 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.a4 ♗d7 10.♗c2 ♖e8 11.♖e1 h6 12.♘bd2 ♗f8 13.h3 ♖b8 14.b4 ♘e7



15.axb5

It is always difficult to determine when such an exchange should be made. White does occupy the a-line at the moment, but Black can easily contest it.

At this point, it is prophylaxis on account of 15.d4 being met with 15...exd4 16.cxd4 bxa4, which is about as equal as anything else. So Carlsen oddly releases tension, with the intention of keeping tension.

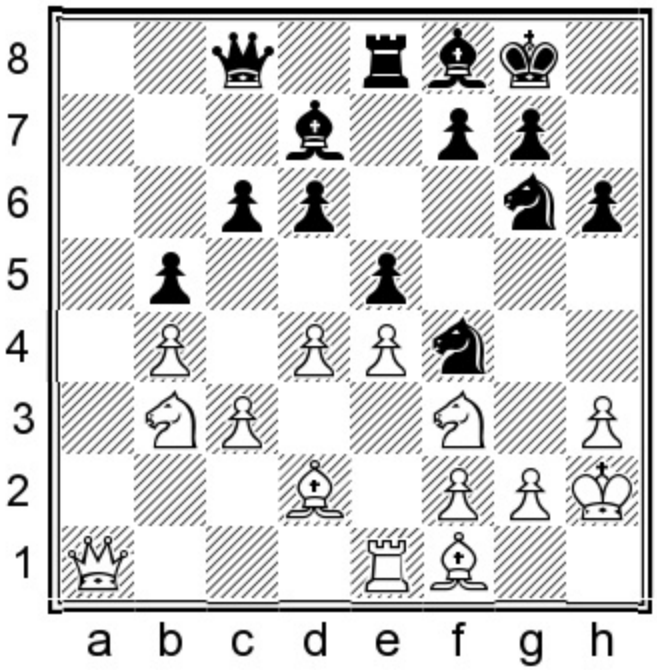
15.♘f1!? would take the game in an entirely different direction.

15...axb5 16.d4 ♘g6 17.♘b3 ♖a8 18.♗d2 ♖xa1 19.♕xa1 ♕c8 20.♔h2 ♘h5

This plan looks faulty. Once the knight arrives on f4, it can do little there and will later be short of squares.

20...d5! would have given Black an easy game.

21.♗d3 ♘hf4 22.♗f1 c6



White uses exchanges to create weak points on the dark squares, which he draws on to create a slow invasion of his opponent's territory.

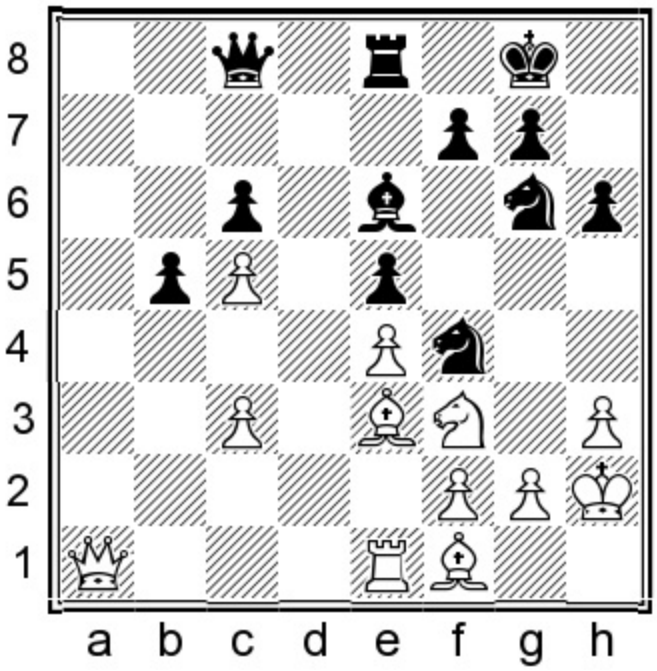
23.dxe5! dxe5 24.♗e3 ♗e6 25.♘c5

Not the only strong move, but an uncomfortable one to face. Black will have to part with the two bishops.

25...♗xc5 26.bxc5!?

An interesting decision. White consolidates control over the d6-square.

26.♗xc5± was more natural. 26...f5!? would potentially be strongest, to play on the side of the board where Black is stronger, but the two bishops should give White a small pull in practice nonetheless.



26...f6?

Black should have contested the d-file immediately with 26...♖d8!, with the small tactical point that the position after 27.♘xe5 ♘xe5 28.♗xf4 ♘d3 29.♗xd3 ♖xd3 is entirely equal. The extra pawn is not a factor, but the opposite-coloured bishops are. White has no pawn breaks on the queenside, so he cannot make anything out of his extra pawn.

Instead, White would have to fight for the d-file with 27.♖d1!, when he could still claim to be pushing.

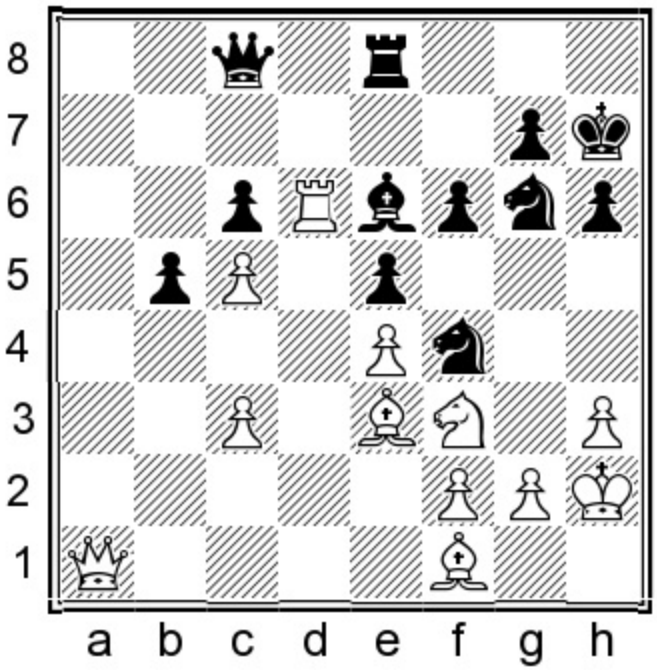
27.♖d1 ♔h7

27...♖d8 28.♖xd8† ♕xd8 would distract the black queen from its influence on the h3-square, making 29.g3 possible. After 29...♘h5, our favourite move is the flexible 30.♗e2, when White has a plethora of options, including ♘d2, the c3-c4 break, and ♕a6, to put pressure on the c6-pawn. It would be a difficult position for Black to keep together in practice.

27...♘h8!± was the best try. Black regroups the knight to a more defensive role on f7 (although later lunges to g5 will always be in the air) and leaves space for the f4-knight to retreat, should it need to.

White has several promising continuations. The most prominent are 28.♕a7 followed by 29.♖a1, to use the a-line to invade the black camp. And the quirky 28.♕c1!? ♘fg6 29.♖d2 with 30.♖b2, 31.♘d2 and c3-c4 to come.

28.♖d6!



We can see how the exchanges on e5 and c5 have led to a white strongpoint deep into enemy territory. Black is in great pain.

28...f5?!

The desperation is understandable, but this does not help.

29.♗xf4! exf4 30.♘d4 ♘e5 31.♕b1!

Black's position disintegrates on the light squares weakened by the advance of the f-pawn.

31...g6 32.♕c1 ♗d7 33.exf5 g5 34.♕c2 ♖g8 35.♕e4 ♕e8 36.♘e6 ♘f7 37.f6† ♔h8 38.♗d3

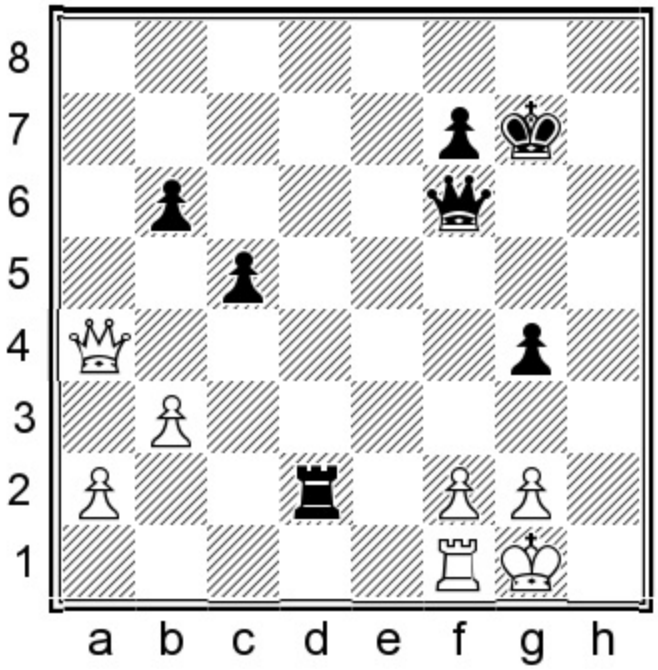
1–0

3.4 Domination

Domination is a version of good pieces versus bad pieces. It happens when our pieces are active and the opponent's are all passive and busy defending. (If it is the other way round, please call the arbiter. Do not put up with unsporting behaviour!) Pure domination would mean that the pieces are entirely deprived of squares, but this rarely happens; so we include under the domination umbrella any situations where the consequences of activating passive pieces are too costly.

In the following example, Black exchanged the only active White piece, the queen, to allow his active rook to bully the white army. But the most important example of domination comes in the annotations.

Internet 2020



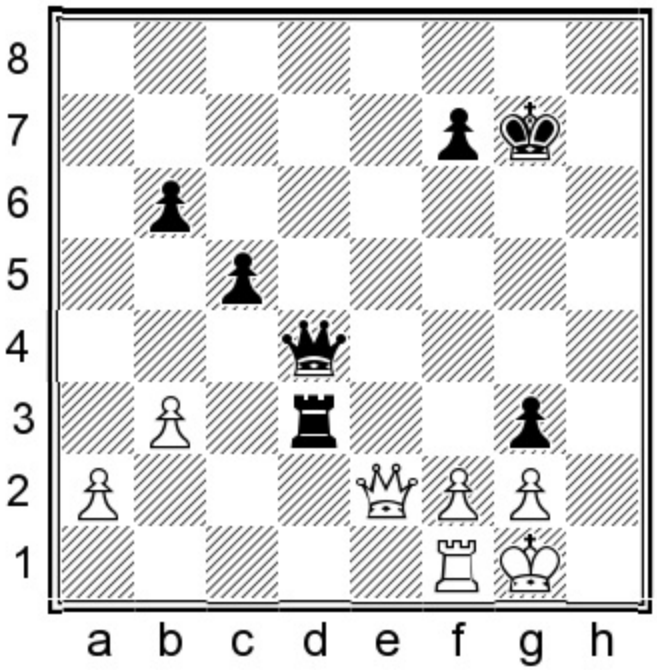
39...♕d4!

A strong move. Black seeks to remove White's best and only active piece.

40.♕xd4†

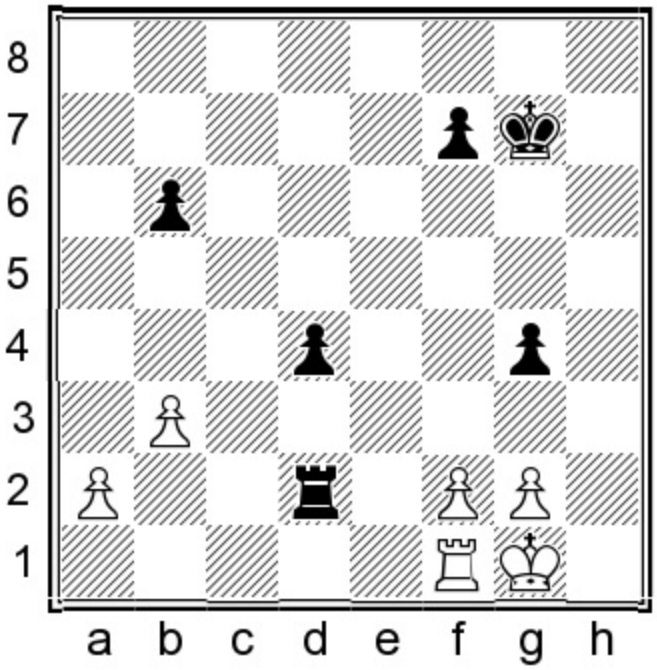
A difficult decision.

It is possible that Black's chances of going wrong would have been greater if White had kept the queens on the board, but the domination would have been brutal: 40.♕a8 g3 41.♕f3 ♖d3! 42.♕e2 (42.♕h5 f6! continues the removal of squares from the white queen)



White is entirely tied down, so Black can improve his position slowly in many directions. The most natural seems to be to create a passed pawn. 42...b5 43.a4 c4 44.bxc4 bxa4! In most cases we should choose the outside passed pawn. This is not the only winning move, but it is good technique. Black wins with all reasonable moves. 45.c5 ♖d2 46.♕f3 gxf2† and Black wins. The rook ending is not a serious option, and after 47.♖xf2 ♕xf2† 48.♕xf2 ♖xf2 49.♔xf2 ♔f6 only the white pawn will be stopped.

40...cxd4



41.a4

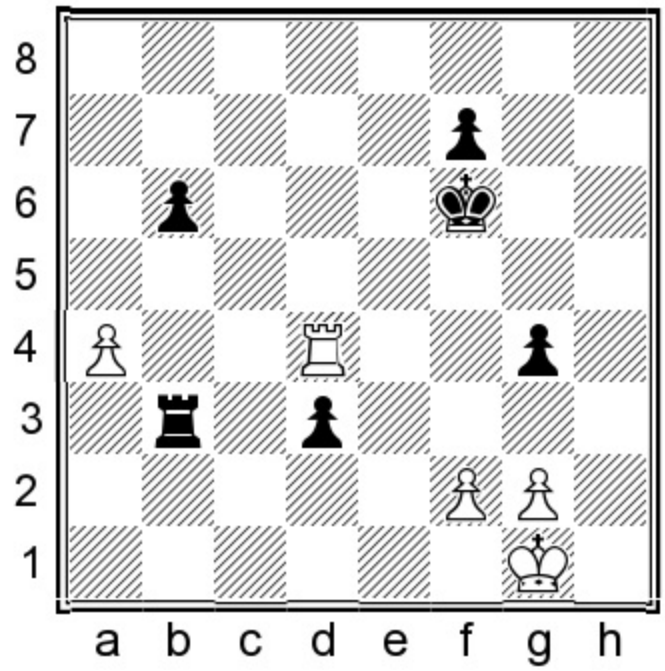
It makes sense to bring out the king. But this is also not enough to save the game. 41.♔h2 ♔f6!

Preparing to defend the prime asset, the d-pawn, with the king. 42.♔g3 ♖xa2 43.♔f4 (43.♔xg4 ♔e5, preparing for ...d4-d3 and ...♔d4, will also win for Black.) 43...♔e6 44.♔e4 ♖d2! Black keeps control and his extra pawn. The next two moves will be ...f7-f5† and ...♖e2.

41...♔f6!

Good technique.

42.♖e1 ♖b2 43.♖e4 d3 44.♖d4 ♖xb3



Black just wins.

45.g3 ♔e5 46.♖d8 ♔e4 47.♔g2 ♖b4 48.♔f1 ♖xa4 49.♖e8† ♔d4 50.♖d8† ♔c3

0–1

3.5 Prophylaxis

Prophylaxis is the art of taking the opponent's intentions into consideration. At times it will include preventing them. At times it will include being prepared for them. And at other times it will mean ignoring them, or even concluding that no serious intentions exist. The ideal is always when we can advance our own evil masterplan in a way that negates the opponent's pitiful aspirations.

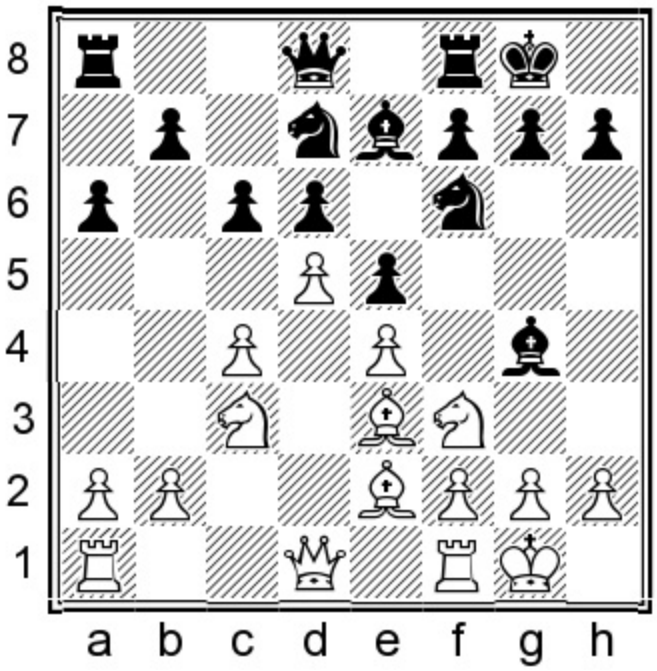
In the following game, there are several moments of prophylactic thinking. Some of them would be considered elementary for grandmaster level, although we often get these types of decisions wrong as well (no one truly excels at the basics; mastering them is a great aspiration). But as the game progresses, it becomes more complicated and the players get lost in the complications. The interesting

thing about this game is the way in which prophylaxis and considerations concerning exchanges are interlinked. This is far less unusual than could be believed.

Cristhian Cruz – Colomban Vitoux

Barcelona 2009

1.c4 c6 2.e4 e5 3.♘f3 d6 4.d4 ♗g4 5.♗e2 ♘d7 6.0-0 ♘gf6 7.♘c3 ♗e7 8.♗e3 0-0 9.d5 a6



10.h3!?

White seeks to grab the two bishops, rather than going for the space advantage as Mike Forster did above (see page 27). As Black has not played ...c5 in this game, it feels appropriate.

10...♗xf3!?

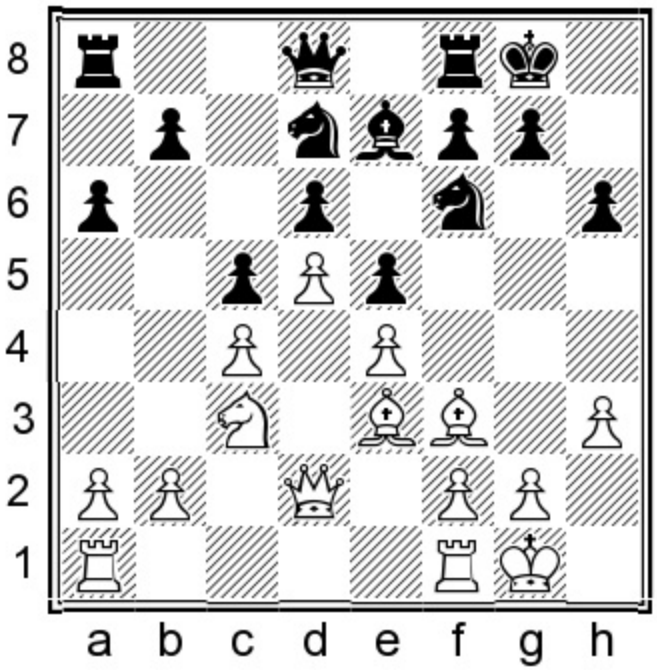
Black could have considered retreating the bishop to keep the tension. White now has a permanent advantage due to his additional space and the two bishops.

11.♗xf3 c5

This makes little sense if you look from the point of view of the exchanged pieces.

12.♕d2 h6?

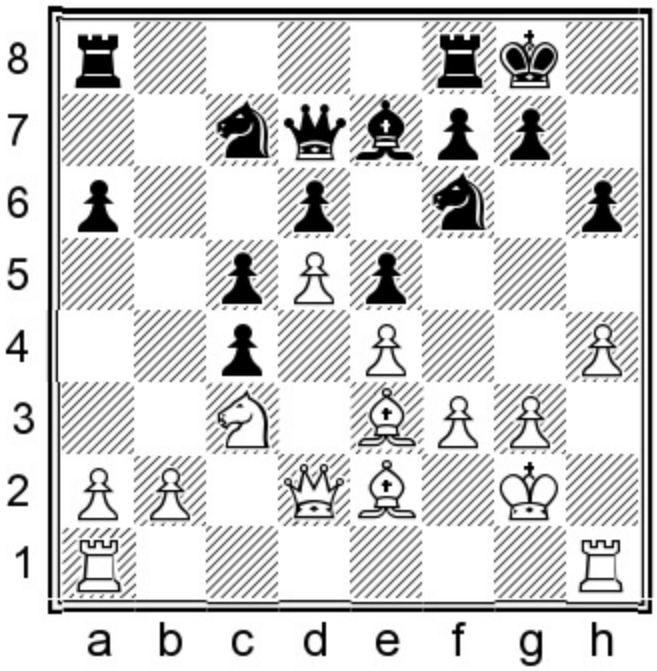
I think it would be wiser for Black to play 12...♘e8 with the idea of ...g7-g6 and ...♘g7, if White choses to prevent the primary idea.



13.g3!

Anticipating the plan of ...♗g5 to exchange the bad bishop.

13...♘e8 14.h4 ♘c7 15.♗e2 ♘f6 16.♔g2 ♕d7 17.f3 b5 18.♖h1 bxc4



19.♗xc4?

A terrible mistake, although it still leaves White better.

19.a4! would have deprived Black of the b5-square. He cannot make meaningful use of the b4-square, so weakening this square (by forever forsaking putting the pawn on a3), is not important.

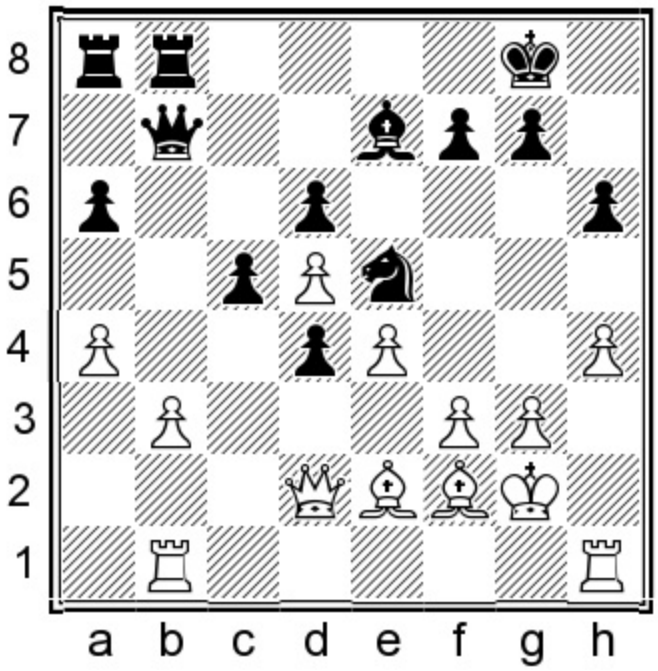
19...♘b5

Black manages to get rid of his knight.

20.♘e2 ♖fb8 21.a4?!

Now this move makes no sense. Black is going to d4 with the knight anyway, but now White has weakened the b4-square for no reason.

21...♘d4 22.♘xd4 exd4 23.♗f2 ♕b7 24.b3 ♘d7 25.♖ab1 ♘e5 26.♗e2

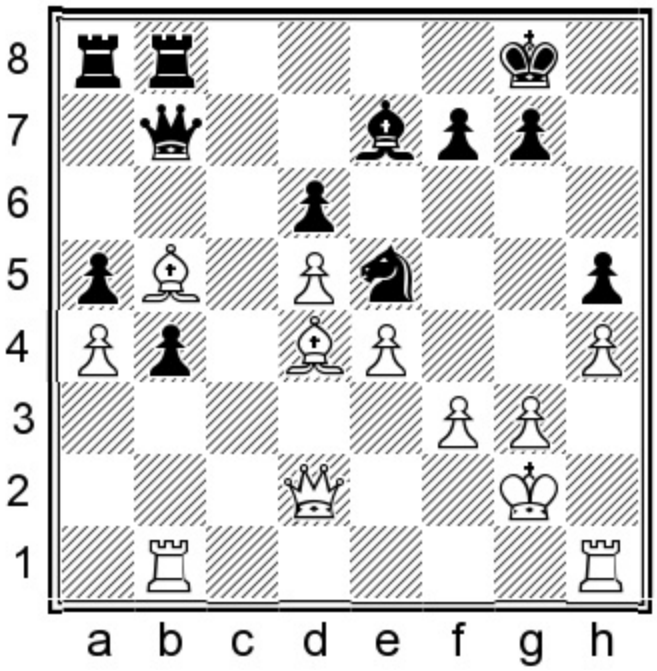


26...♕b4?

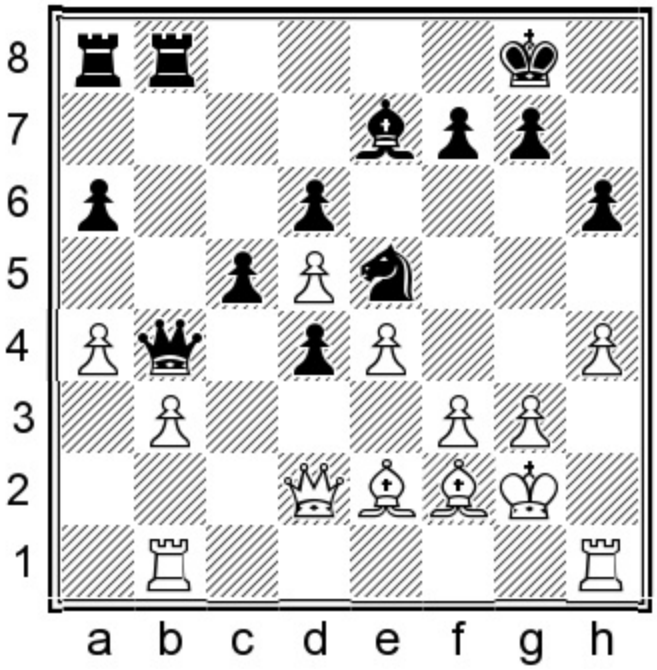
The idea behind this move must be to fight for the b-line, as well as speculating that Black would have better drawing chances in a position without queens. Essentially, Black is afraid of an attack on the kingside. But this is not easy to organise and his fears seems entirely misplaced to us.

Rather, the position is strategically lost after this, as White has the two bishops, some space advantage, and the ability to squeeze Black on the kingside.

Black was presumably afraid of playing 26...h5±, which grabs space and important squares on the kingside, on account of 27.b4! cxb4 28.♗xd4 a5 29.♗b5, which is indeed how White should play. But Black's position is in far less trouble than one would imagine, as he can reorganise his pieces without loss of time with:



29...♗f6! White is better. He should fight for the c-line and see where it takes him. If it is enough to win is hard to say, but our feeling is no. It is important to understand that 30.♗xe5 ♗xe5 31.♗c6 ♕a6 32.♗xa8 ♗c3 would give Black a lot of compensation for the exchange. Without open files it is hard to see how White would be able to cause real concern for Black.



27.♕c2?

If we look at the parameters we have established previously for exchanges, there is little reason for White to reject this exchange. The black queen is a strong piece and the black king is not especially exposed. We assume that Cruz was thinking that his long-term chances on the kingside would benefit from having the queens on the board. This may be true, but before the long term there is the present – when the black queen is able to distract and harass White far more than some long-

term dream of checkmate can compensate for.

The most notable way to see that the exchange of queens was preferable, is that White spends time placing the queen on a not too attractive square, while the black queen remains active.

On top of this, White misses the chance to break the black blockade with: 27.♕xb4! ♖xb4 28.♗e1 ♖b7 29.f4. White will be able to establish the bishop on c4 and put permanent pressure on the a6-pawn. Black will have to have a passive piece defending it always, while the bishop on c4 is ready to fight for the centre and the kingside as well, with a later e4-e5 break. This does not mean that this break will happen, but that Black will have to spend energy defending against it.

After 29...♘d7, 30.h5!? makes sense. White grabs more space on the kingside and prepares both e4-e5 and g4-g5 breaks. Black is not prepared to meet the advance on the kingside and will find it hard to do so, as there is no space for his pieces to set up a strong defensive formation.

White should win the game, but there is still a chance for counterplay in various ways, so the execution of the advantage will have to be marked with accuracy.

27...h5!

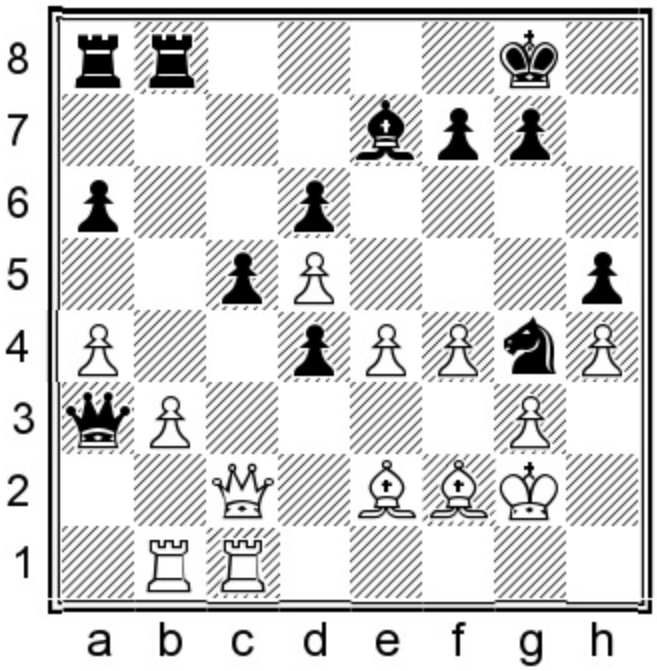
This time Black grabs the space and prepares for the f3-f4 advance.

28.♖hc1 ♕a3?

Black is trying to set up some threats against b3, but they are slow to form and easy to defend against.

28...♗f6! was the right move, defending against the e4-e5 break. Black's position seems entirely defensible.

29.f4 ♘g4



The knight lunge brings up a natural question. Should White exchange on g4? Should he retreat the bishop from f2 to avoid the exchange? Or should he just get on with it?

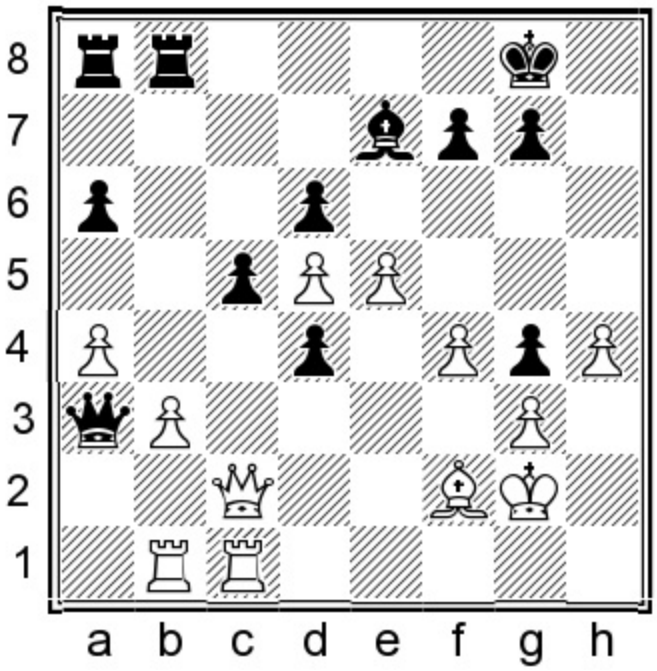
30.♗xg4?

This is a natural emotional reaction. The intruder is summarily executed, to great satisfaction, no matter the cost. But the cost is considerable! The battle for the kingside will be fought on the light squares. It would be a dream come true for White if Black took on f2. Yes, there are situations where White would have to take on g4, but there is no reason to pre-empt this by taking immediately. Move orders matter!

30.e5! was strong. If Black takes on e5, White will take on g4. Meanwhile, White retains the bishop, which would be able to support the d5-pawn, for example.

As said, the dream would be for Black to take on f2. After 30...♘xf2?! 31.♔xf2 g6 32.f5! Black is facing the total collapse of his kingside.

30...hxg4 31.e5



31...♖a7?!

The correct defence was hard to find. Black had to accept that the queen invasion was nonsense and bring the queen back to defend the light squares. None of his remaining pieces are qualified for the job.

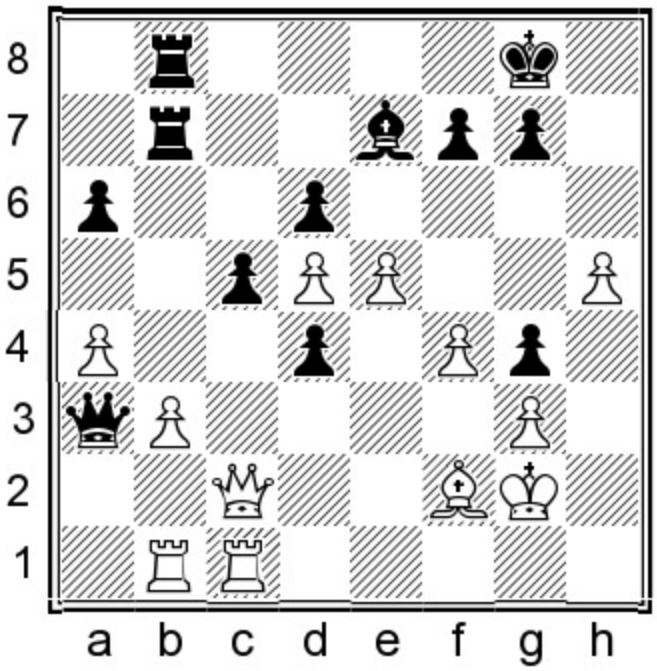
31...♕b4!! was the right move. Surprisingly Black is not worse here according to Stockfish, but there will still be plenty of practical challenges for a human to hold.

Still, the value of this move is shown by analysing 32.h5?, which is devastating in the game, but now would lose on account of 32...dxe5 33.fxe5 ♕b7! 34.♕e4 ♖d8, when Black wins material.

32.h5!

Bringing more wood to the fire. Black could have defended better in what follows, but his position is certainly desperate.

32...♖ab7



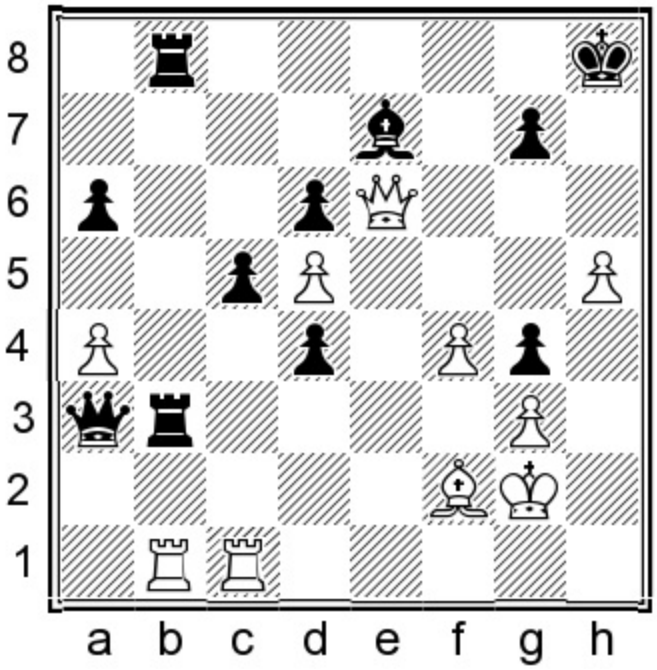
33.e6! fxe6

33...♗f6!? was more resilient, but after 34.♕f5, Black is still facing a relentless onslaught on the light squares, with similar dangers to the game.

34.♕g6 ♖xb3?!

This loses by force, but 34...♗f6 35.dxe6 also looks hopeless. The g4-pawn falls next.

35.♕xe6† ♔h8



36.h6!

A thematic finish.

36...♗f6

36...♖xb1 37.hxg7† ♔xg7 38.♕xe7† would see White give a lot of checks, followed by ♕xb1.

37.hxg7† ♔xg7 38.♕xg4† ♔f8 39.♕e6 ♔g7 40.♕g4† ♔f8 41.♕g6

1–0

4. Dynamic themes

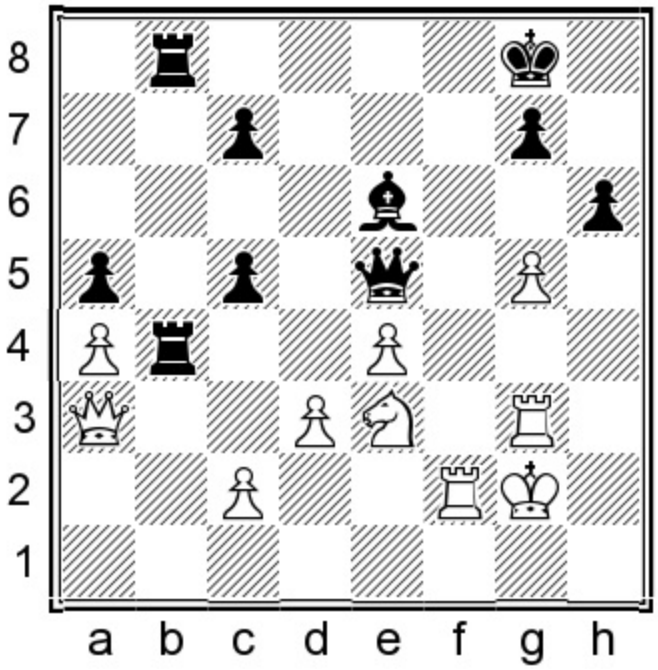
4.1 Tactics

There are many tactical sequences that involve the exchange of pieces. If you look through the games from the most recent round of a current tournament, you are likely to find such an example. While this is not a tactics book, it is also not exclusively a book on positional play. Dynamics and tactics occur in all sorts of positions, whether the dominant features are dynamic, technical, or complex.

We have chosen two examples to illustrate exchanges and tactics. The first is purely dynamic in nature, while the second is predominantly technical. The exchange of rooks, which is one of the core ideas, works because of tactics and would happen by tactics.

Jan-Krzysztof Duda – Alexander Grischuk

Sochi (rapid) 2021



We are entering a play-off game from the 2021 World Cup. Duda famously won the tournament by eliminating Carlsen in the semi-final and defeating Karjakin in the final. But even the way there was full of impressive scalps, including this one.

42...h5?

Grischuk misses a chance for a direct win.

42...♖b1! with the double threat of trapping the queen with ...♖a1 and exchanging the rook on g3 with

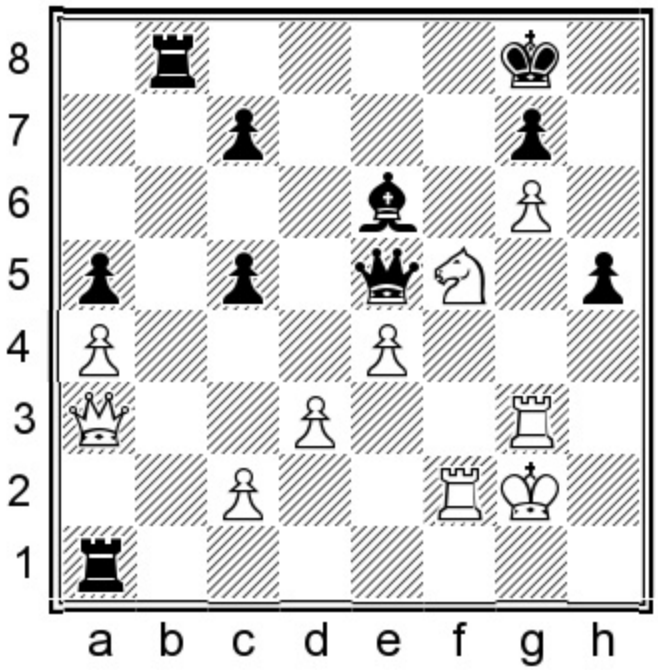
...♖g1†! would have won the game. 43.♖f1 would be one way to try to defend against both, but after 43...♖xf1 44.♘xf1, Black can invade with the rook on both the first and second rank.

43.♘f5 ♖b1 44.♖gf3?

In the chaos of time trouble, Duda misses the only move that would save his position.

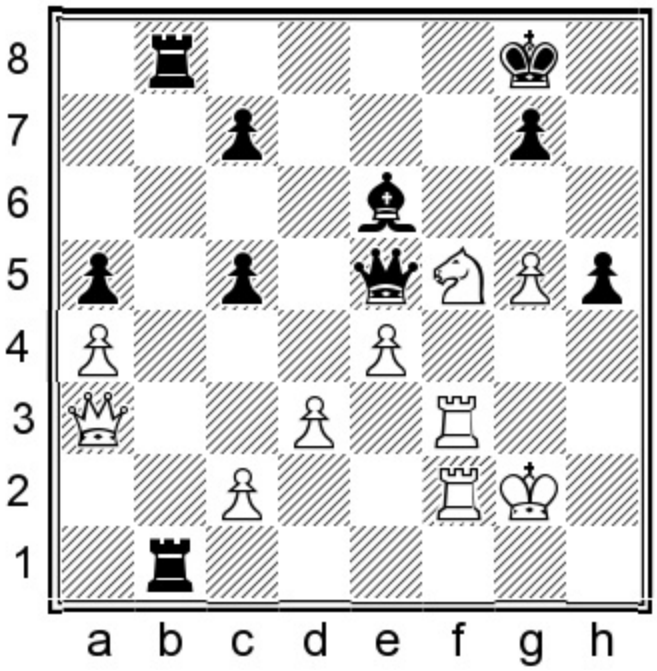
44.g6!! Now 44...♗xf5 45.♖xf5 ♖g1† 46.♔xg1 ♕xg3† 47.♔f1 ♖b1† 48.♔e2 only offers Black perpetual check.

And after 44...♖a1:



45.♕xa1!! ♕xa1 46.♘e7† ♔h8 47.♖gf3 White is a rook down, but the black king is in trouble. Black is even the one who has to be careful. 47...♗g8 48.♖f8 would require Black to play 48...♕d1! to avoid losing.

Also, after 47...♖g8 48.♘xg8 ♗xg8 49.♖f5 ♕d1 50.♖2f3 Black needs to make a draw. For example: 50...♗e6 51.♖f8† ♗g8 52.♖8f5



44...♖a1?

Falling for a trick.

Black was winning after 44...♗f7, 44...g6 and especially 44...h4!, where Black is preparing to take on f5 and go ...♖a1.

45.d4!

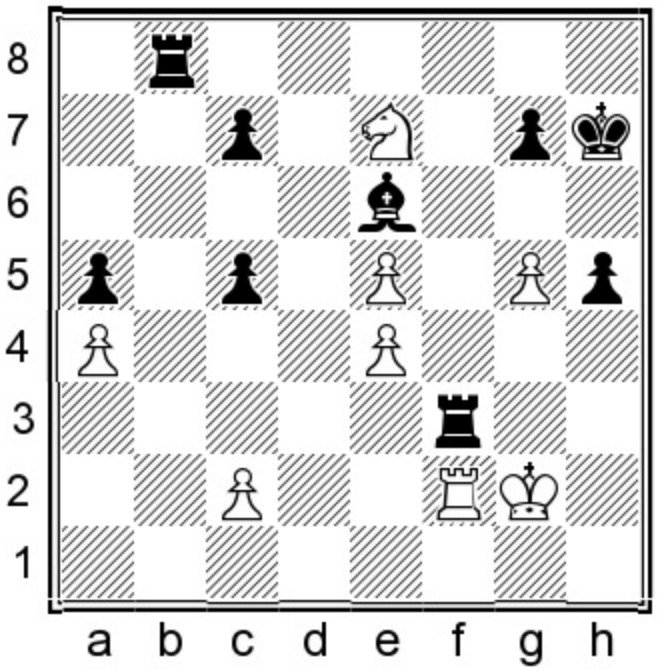
This cheap shot allows White to exchange the queens, which is a great relief.

45...♖xa3 46.♘e7†?!

46.dxe5! was more accurate, with the point that 46...♖xa4 47.g6! ♗xf5 48.exf5 would give White lots of play.

46...♔h7 47.dxe5 ♖xf3?!

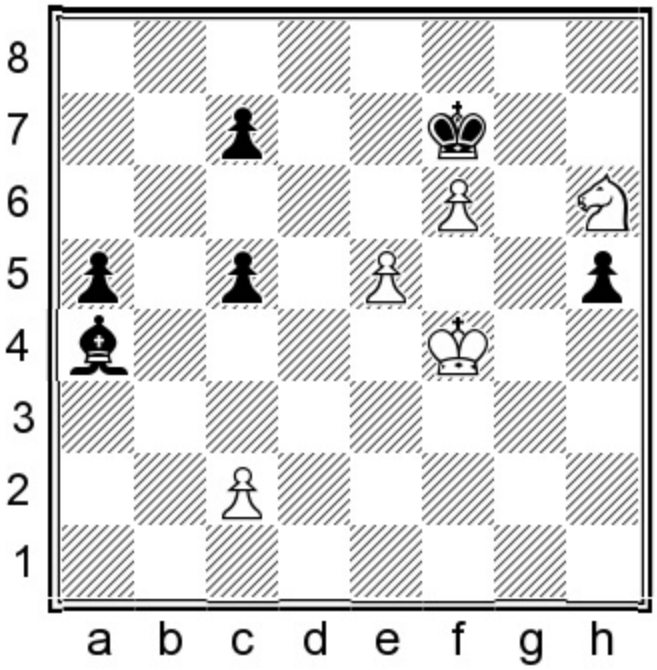
47...♖xa4! would have given Black the better chances in a complex endgame.



48.♖xf3

This position is objectively balanced, but in practice, it turns out that Black is the one who has to be careful.

48...♖b4 49.g6† ♔h6 50.♘f5† ♔xg6 51.♖g3† ♔f7 52.♖xg7† ♔f8 53.♖g6 ♗f7 54.♖f6 ♖b6! 55.♔f3 ♖xf6 56.exf6 ♗e8 57.e5 ♔f7 58.♔f4 ♗xa4 59.♘h6†



59...♔e6?

A natural move, but a grave error.

Black had to play several only moves to make the draw. 59...♔f8! 60.e6 ♗xc2 61.♘f7 ♗b3! 62.♘g5 ♗c2! Preventing ♘h7†. 63.♘f3 ♗b3! Preventing ♘e5-d7†. 64.♔f5 ♗c2† Black holds.

60.f7 ♔e7 61.e6

The pawns will promote.

61...♗e8 62.♘f5† ♔f8 63.fxe8=♕† ♔xe8 64.♔e5

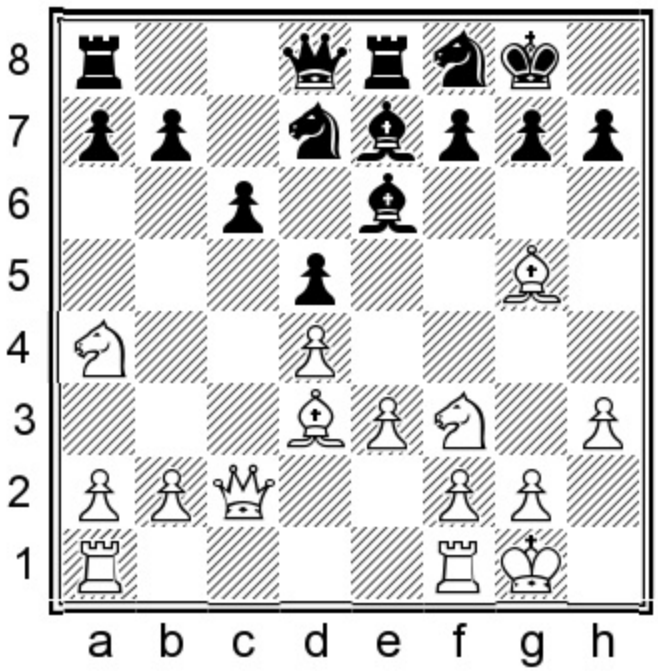
1–0

In the next game, tactics are used to achieve positional goals. At the forefront of all considerations is the possible exchange of bishops.

Kristian Dimitrijeski – Joerg Seils

Germany 2020

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 d5 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗g5 ♗e7 6.e3 c6 7.♗d3 ♘bd7 8.♕c2 0-0 9.♘f3 ♖e8 10.0-0 ♘f8 11.h3! ♗e6 12.♘a4 ♘6d7



In a little corner of a big traditional main line, we find this position. The question is: should White exchange on e7 or not?

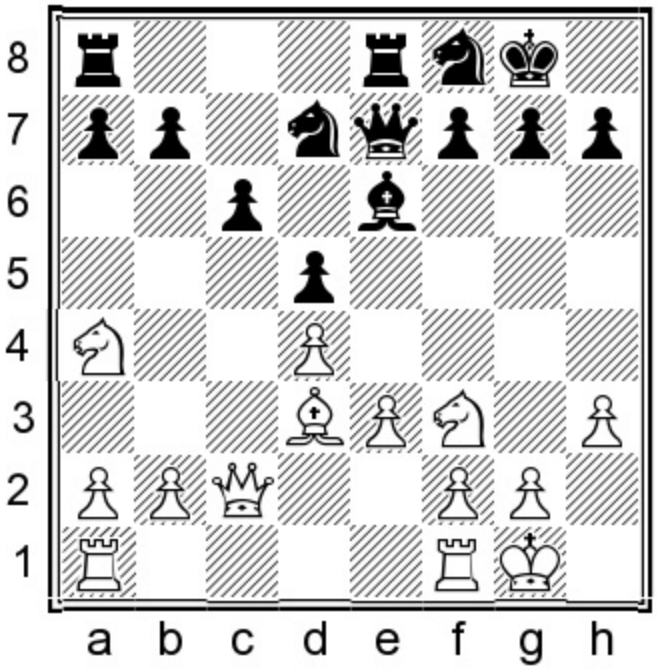
13.♗xe7!

Although the answer is not clear cut, this is what we like. It is all based on simple tactics.

On the one hand, White is exchanging Black's good bishop, but on the other hand, the white bishop is probably the more useful. As is always the case for this type of solid setup, Black has had to make some concessions. In return for the solid structure, he is suffering from a lack of space and is without any natural pawn breaks. Exchanging both bishops is a common strategy for Black in the Carlsbad structure, but this is associated with ...g7-g6 and ...♘e6-g7, which is no longer available when he puts the bishop on e6.

13.♗f4 has been played a few times too, for example in Schenk – Kick, Baden-Baden 2002. The strongest move here could be 13...a5!±, as was indeed Black's improvement in Abdusattorov – Sarana, Belgrade 2022.

13...♕xe7



14.b4!

This is the key point. The little tactic that makes us believe this is the stronger continuation. This may seem simple, but the real challenge occurs on the next move.

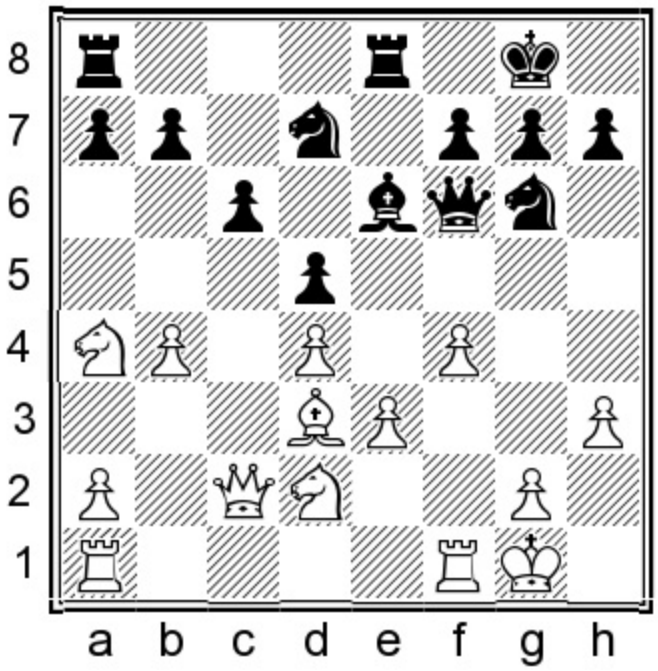
14...♕f6!

Black has little challenge in finding this move, as he lacks alternatives and this is clearly annoying for White.

15.♕e2?!

Dimitrijeski plays the most natural move and gets a good position in return. But as we shall see below, there were other possibilities.

15.♘d2?! ♘g6 also gives Black a lot of counterplay. 11.h3! is an important part of the modern approach to the Carlsbad Variation, which for decades has put the variation under a cloud. But in this position, White can only regret having weakened his kingside. The key line is: 16.f4?



16...♗xh3! and Black has at least won a pawn, but most likely begun a devastating attack after 17.gxh3 ♖xe3, when White's position falls apart.

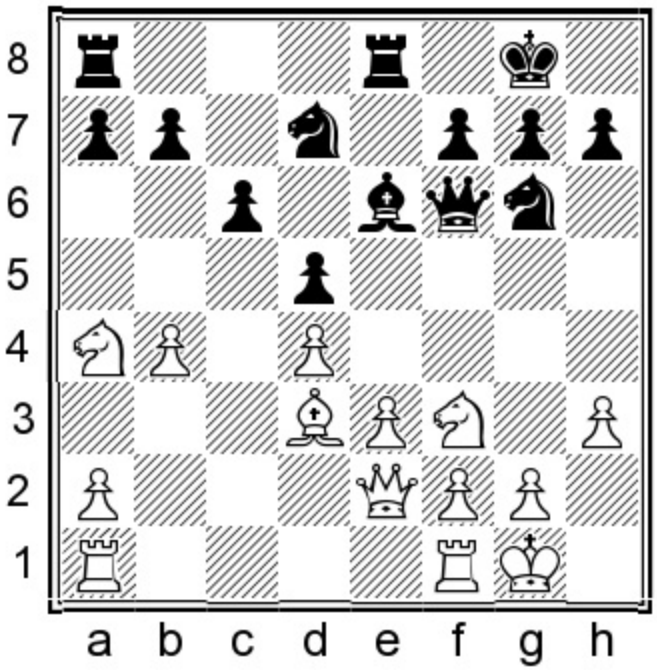
We will return to this moment below.

15...a6?

This move is simply poor. White did in principle have the option of b4-b5, but this is not the main issue Black is facing on the queenside.

And more importantly, there was the chance to create counterplay on the kingside, which is the key idea for Black in the Carlsbad structure.

15...♘g6! was stronger.

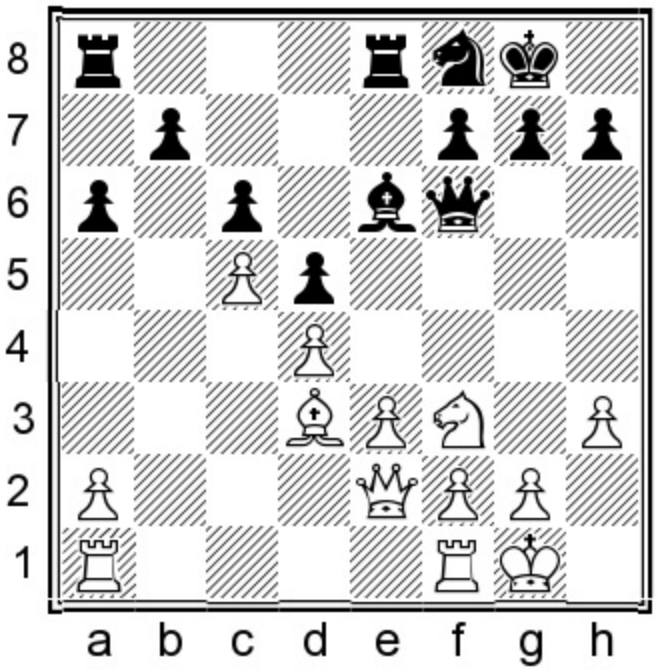


The position is more or less OK for Black.

If White retreats with the knight, 16.♘c3, Black has 16...a5 17.b5 c5 with a playable position. Black's key idea is revealed after 16.♖fe1, when he will play 16...♗xh3!! 17.gxh3 ♘f4 18.exf4 ♖xe2 19.♖xe2 ♕xf4 with lots of play. White would have rook, bishop, and knight for the queen, but with weaknesses all around, he would have no real advantage. In practice, anything could happen.

Something like 16.♗c2 could be tried, but after 16...♘h4, only Black has made progress.

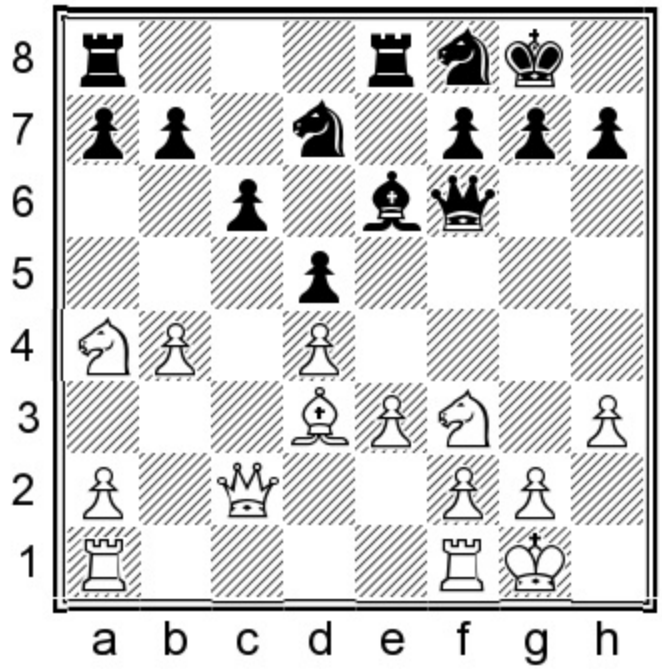
16.♘c5 ♘xc5 17.bxc5



White has a better structure and Black will have to forever suffer in the defence of the b7-pawn. Lots of classical games have been played in similar structures and the experience for Black has been awkward, to say the least.

Black later won the game, but this was not based on the evaluation of this position...

Returning to the position after 14...♕f6!.



At this point White had a very strong and very unnatural move at his disposal.

15.♘h2!

This move is apparently quite normal in this type of position, despite its odd appearance to 1.e4 players. White wants to play a timely f2-f4 and g2-g4, when he can easily swing the queen over to g2 and the knight can later jump to better squares. On top of this, there is a small tactical point to be made.

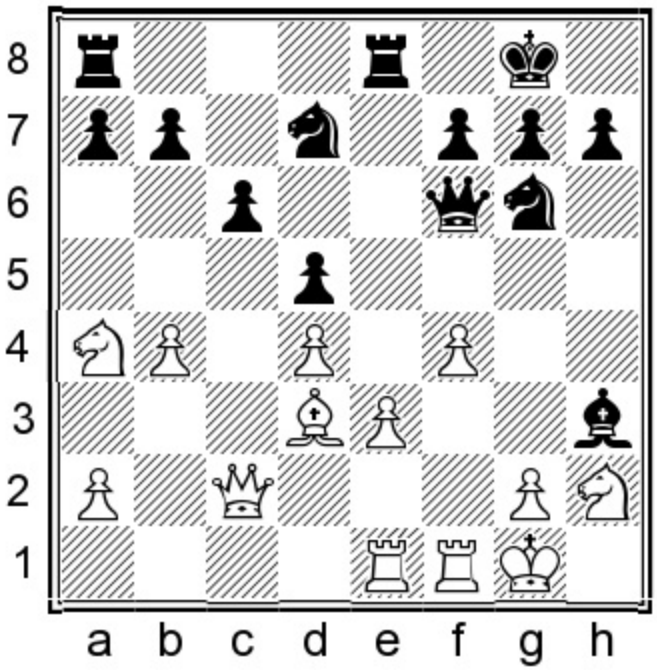
After natural moves like 15...♕e7 (Stockfish) or 15...g6, White will play 16.♘c5 and have achieved something on the queenside, which was the objective behind the exchange of bishops.

The key point comes after:

15...♘g6?

White can play:

16.f4! ♗xh3 17.♖ae1!!



White keeps his structure in the centre intact. We now see the tactical point of putting the knight on h2. The bishop cannot retreat to g4.

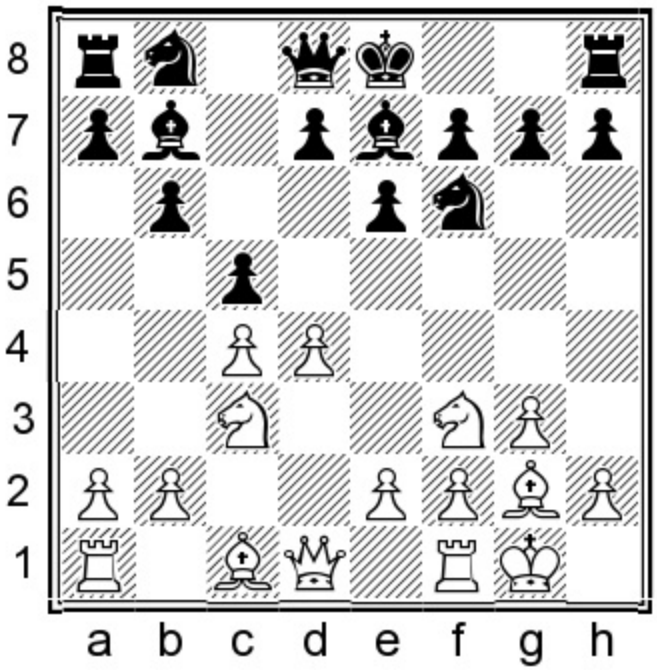
These examples were both somewhat simple. The tactics in the following game are predominantly found after move 41 and are desperately complicated. There are a lot of interesting moments relating to positional play, mainly prophylaxis and organising the pieces, before that.

It was played in the 2022 edition of the Mitropa Cup, a team competition between middle-European countries. The players are FM/IM level.

Marek Mica – Alexander Krastev

Corti 2022

1.♘f3 c5 2.c4 ♘f6 3.g3 b6 4.♗g2 ♗b7 5.♘c3 e6 6.0-0 ♗e7 7.d4



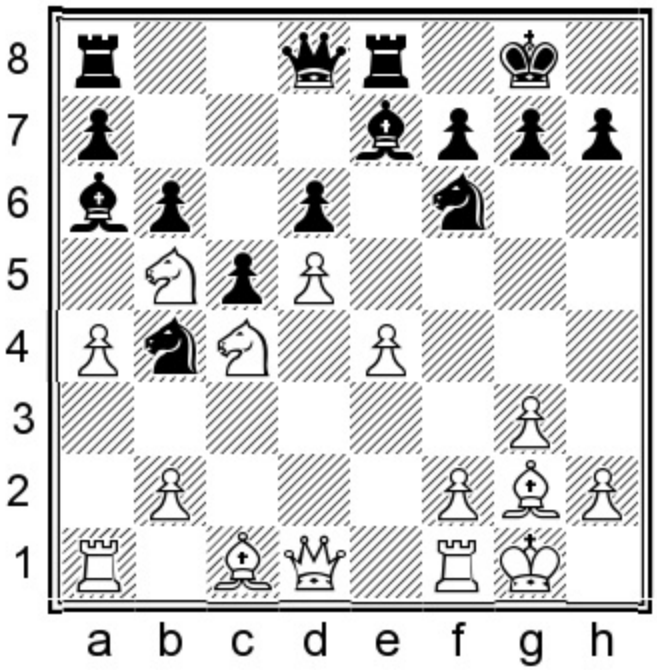
7...0-0?

A peculiar decision. The resulting Benoni structure sees Black having fianchettoed the wrong bishop.

7...cxd4 is standard opening theory – and presumably not to Black's taste.

8.d5!± exd5 9.cxd5 d6 10.a4 ♘a6 11.♘d2 ♘b4 12.♘c4 ♖e8 13.e4 ♗a6 14.b3

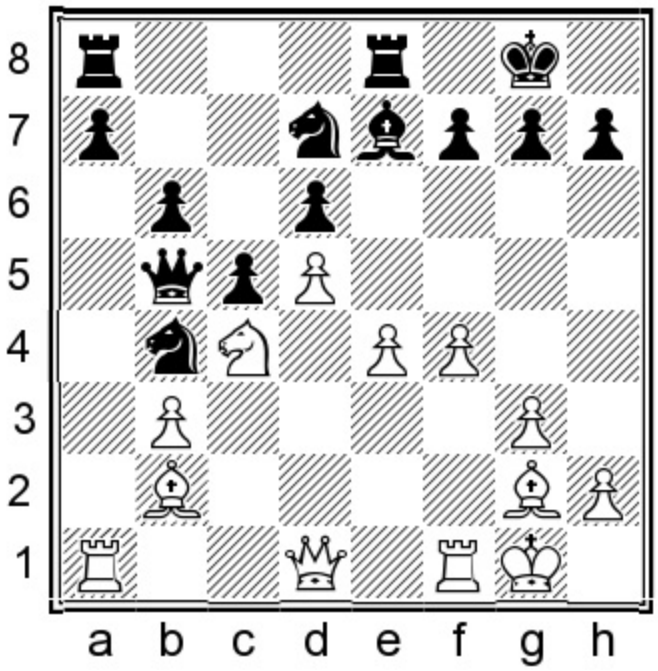
There is nothing wrong with the move played in the game, but since we are exploring exchanges, it is useful to see just how powerful 14.♘b5! was.



The key point is to blunt the black pieces.

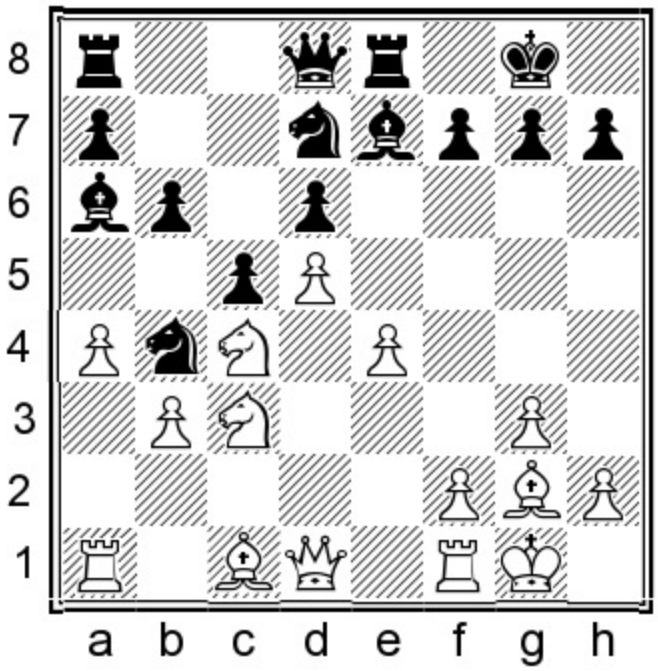
After 14...♕d7 15.♘ba3!, White has rearranged the pieces beautifully and will be ready to focus on an attack in the centre. Black has no path to queenside counterplay, which he usually relies on in the Benoni structure.

The variation we have to check involves the exchange of minor pieces and a pawn sacrifice. 14...♗xb5 15.axb5 ♕d7 16.b3! Bringing the last piece into the game. 16...♕xb5 17.♗b2 ♘d7 18.f4



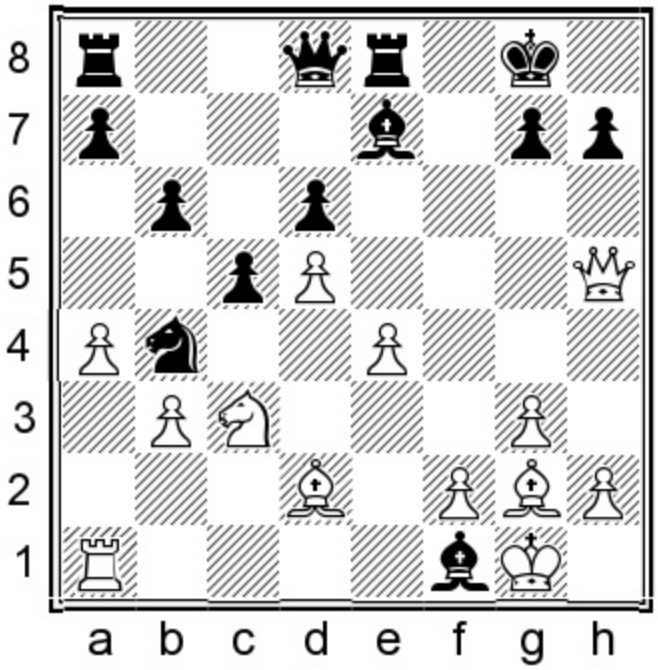
Black has won a pawn and White is completely winning. He will crash through in the centre and on the light squares. Black has no active pieces and no counterplay whatsoever.

14...♘d7



15.♖e1?

15.♗d2!± would make it difficult for Black to get the pieces into the game without taking on c4, which is structurally debatable. Meaning that we do not especially want it, but if it gives dynamic profit (winning tempos), we would. It is possible White was concerned about 15...♘e5, where he would as a minimum have 16.♘b5!? with a nice position. But stronger is 16.♘xe5! ♗xf1 17.♘xf7 ♔xf7 18.♕h5† ♔g8



19.♖xf1 followed by ♗h3 with an invasion on the light squares. Black is up material, but White is strategically winning.

15...♗f6

The tables turn instantly, and not for the last time. Black uses the tempo on the unprotected knight on c3 to activate his bishop.

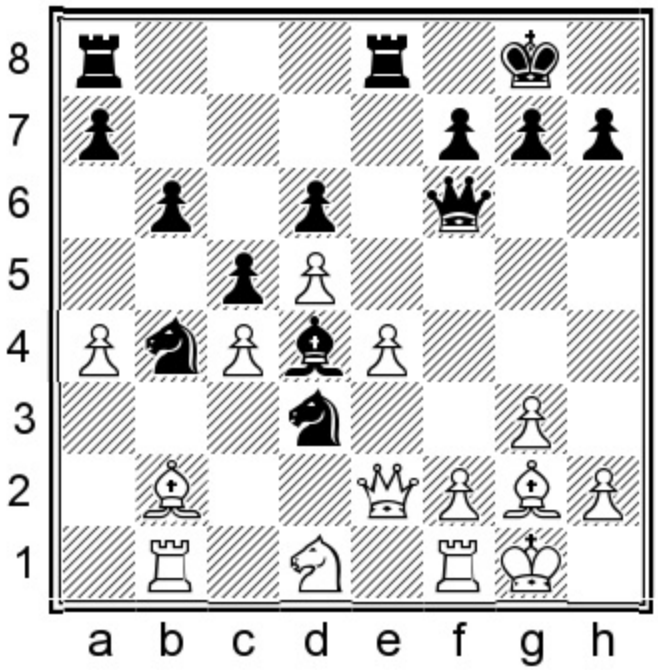
16.♗b2 ♗xc4!

Gaining time to put the bishop on d4 is more important than structural concerns.

17.bxc4 ♗d4 18.♕e2 ♕f6 19.♘d1 ♘e5!

Inviting White to exchange on d4. Black would be happy to get a passed pawn on d4 and soon d3 to support the knights.

20.♖b1 ♘ed3 21.♖f1



Should Black take on b2?

21...a5?

Yes, he should have. With the knight. The knight on d3 lacks stability and most of the conflict squares in the position are on the dark squares; so removing the white bishop would have secured Black a long-term strategic advantage.

22.♗a3!±

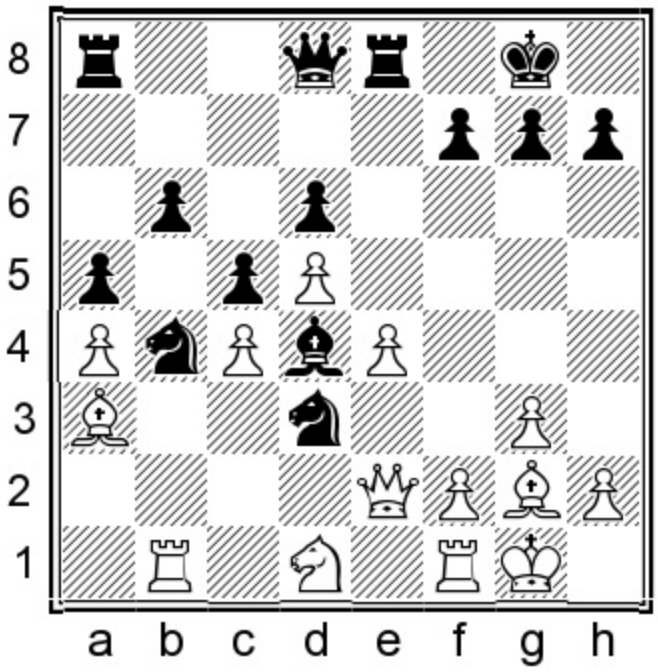
An odd-looking move, until you realise that the intention is not to exchange on b4, but to keep the bishop for later.

22...♕d8?

Presumably played with the intention of winning the a4-pawn. If this was possible, it would have

been a great idea. But since it is not, it is terrible. This is the curse of tactics. They have to work to work.

22...♘e5 23.♖b3 b5!? would have created great complications, which are not unfavourable for Black. He needed to do this, as White now has the chance to kick his pieces backwards.



23.♘b2??

Seeking entirely the wrong exchange.

23.♖b3! would threaten to win a piece, and after 23...♘e5 24.♘c3, the knight would get into the game and the black pieces would be under control. From being in big trouble a few moves ago, White would be on his way to an overwhelming advantage.

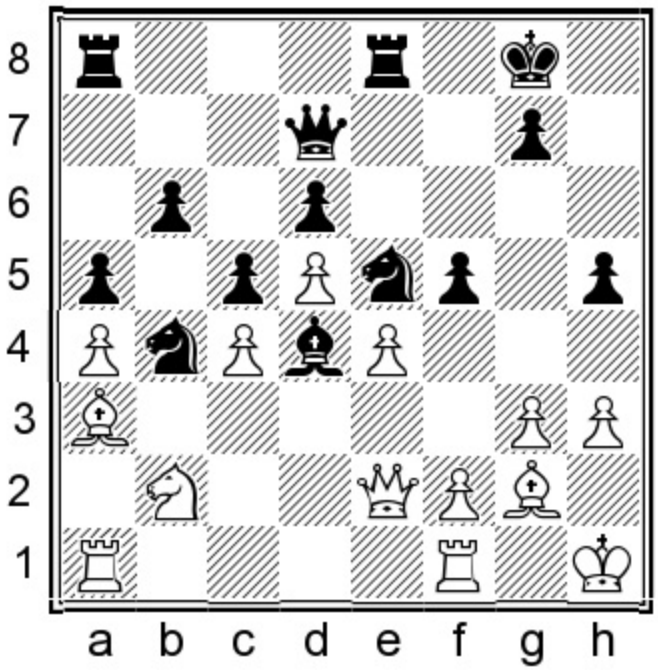
23...♘e5!∓

Once again the tables turn, as they so often do in sharp positions. White should now play 24.♗h3! to limit the damage. Instead, he is quickly forced to weaken his king's position.

24.♔h1? ♕d7! 25.♖a1

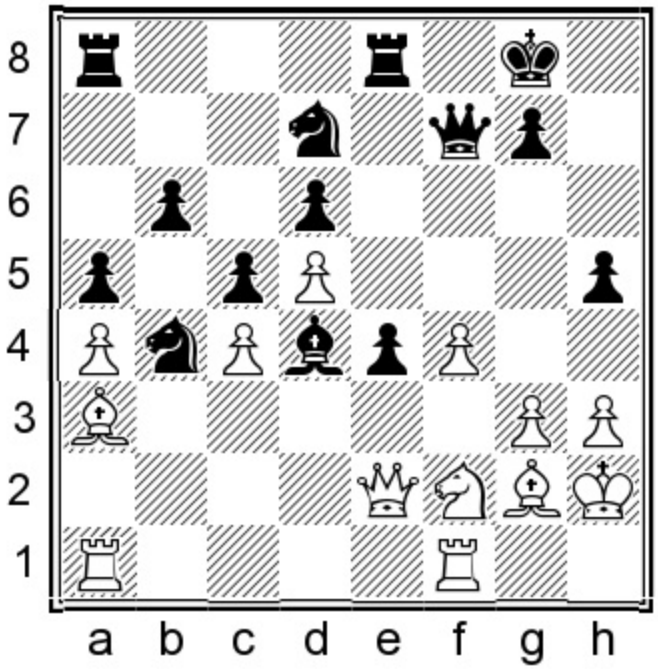
A painful move to play. The rook is forced to enter the pin.

25...h5 26.h3 f5!



Black has managed to put White under immense pressure. White cannot sit and wait, but every active move leads to a further weakening of his position.

27.♔h2 ♕f7 28.f4 ♘d7 29.♘d3 fxe4 30.♘f2



In his desperation, White has decided that the bishop on d4 is worth more than the rook on a1. It is easy to understand this approach of choosing something that may look just slightly complicated. But the bishop on b2 would be working entirely on his own and not provide White with real compensation. The practical thing would have been for Black to take the exchange and activate the last pieces.

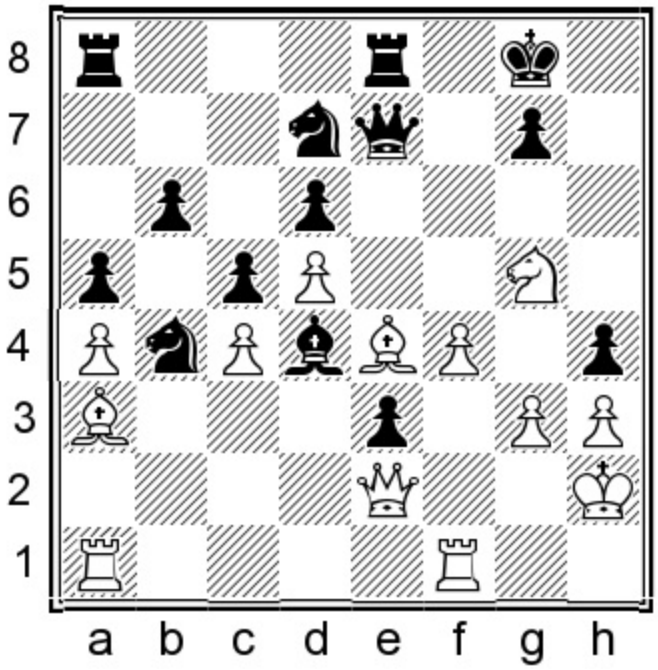
Instead, Black undertakes an odd operation. It is clear that over the next ten moves, in time

pressure, Black entirely loses the plot.

30...e3? 31.♘e4 ♕e7? 32.♘g5 h4? 33.gxh4?

It is easy to understand this decision. White is dreaming of counterplay on the g-file. But the weakening of his king's position is more important, and he should have realised by now that Black is not taking the exchange.

White could have played 33.♗e4!, suddenly creating counterplay. The bishop would be well placed on g6 and after 32...h4?, the g-file would open; and taking on a1 is no longer attractive, as the bishop would not be working alone from b2.



The continuation most in the spirit of this game would be for Black to play 33...♕xe4!?, giving up the queen for White's two strong pieces. The position is entirely bonkers, but certainly not worse for Black.

33...♕f6 34.♖ad1 ♕h6?

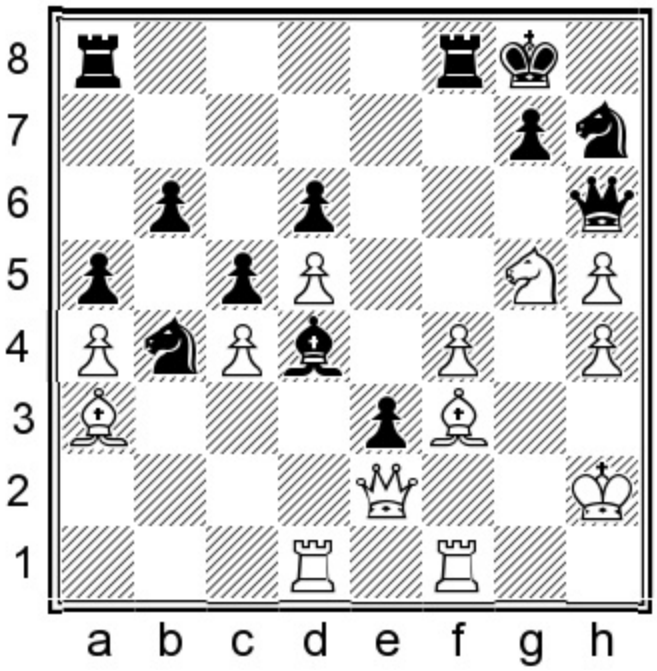
34...♕f5! was Black's last chance to hold on to the advantage.

35.♗f3!

With the idea of ♗g4-e6†.

35...♘f6 36.h5± ♘h7 37.h4 ♖f8?

Time trouble is difficult.



38.♗e4!

Black has been drifting for a while. Rather than cashing in on a1 and activating the rook from a8, he has made simple one-to-two-move plans that White has easily repelled. From dominating on the kingside, he has managed to put his pieces on the least useful squares and given White full invasion rights on the light squares.

38...♘f6 39.♗g6 ♖a7 40.♘e6 ♖e7

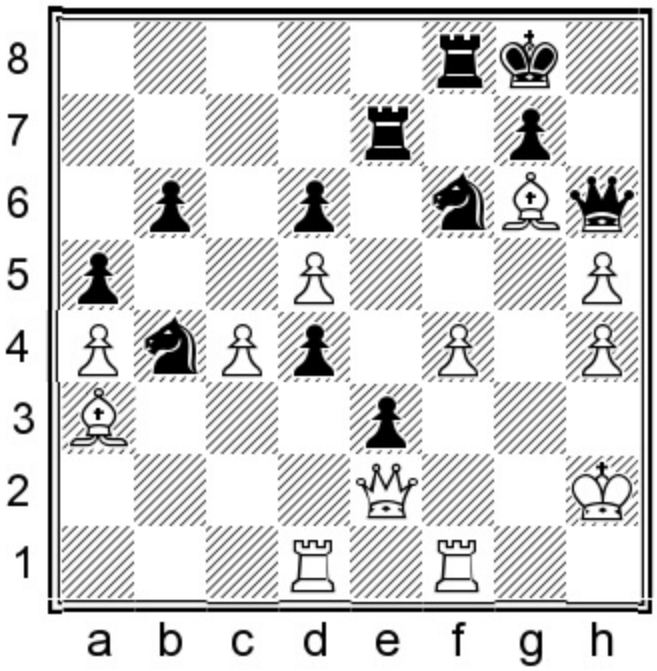
The time control has been reached and Krastev has shown himself in this game to be the weaker blitz player of the two. But neither player was slowing down, presumably pumped with adrenalin, and made the next two moves without much thinking.

41.♘xd4?

The starting gun for the promised tactics.

41.♔h3!, or another slow-paced move improving the position, would have ensured that when the tactics start, they will be entirely in White's favour.

41...cxd4



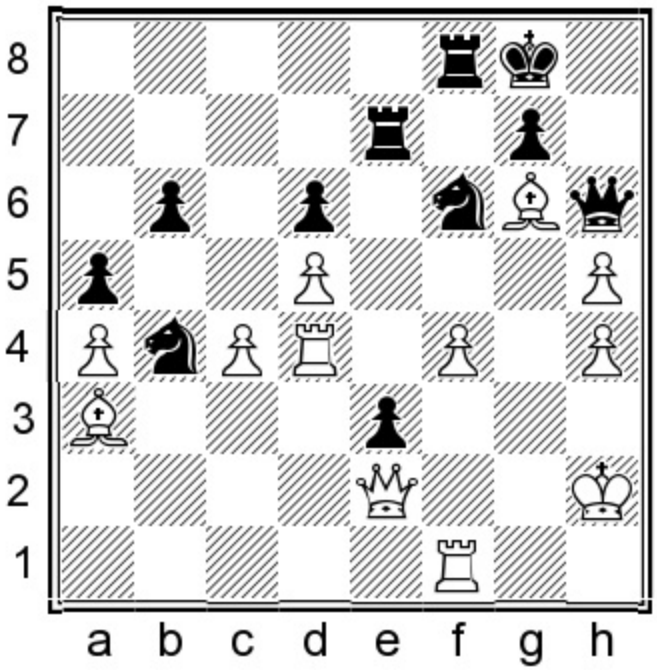
Mark Dvoretsky came up with the governing rule of tactics: “If it works, it works.” There have been countless other attempts to classify tactics and some of them quite successful, mainly relying on patterns and teaching calculation technique or tactical triggers.

If there is one emotional element that is relevant to tactics, it would be the element of surprise. In the following example, the tactical twists and turns are all related to exchanges. Or said in a different way, the choice of exchanges in this game went along fairly standard, unsurprising paths, and were entirely wrong. With one eye on the tactical potentials in the position, both players would have made very different decisions.

42.♖xd4?

Played in 6 seconds...

White would have been better off eliminating the black knight. After 42.♗xb4! axb4 43.♖xd4 ♘d7 the chances are roughly even, although we prefer the look of the black position.

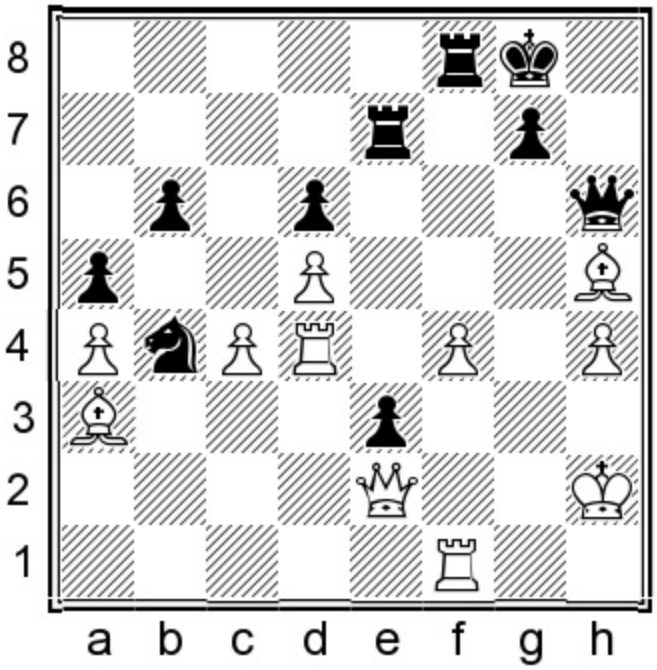


42...♘d7?

But with this move, Black rewarded White for his choice to keep the two bishops, missing a nice shot.

42...♘xh5!! 43.♗xh5

Black wins prosaically after 43.♕xh5 e2! 44.♖e1 ♕xh5 45.♗xh5 ♘c2, as long as he finds the right move order.



43...♘c2!

This is the shot you need to see.

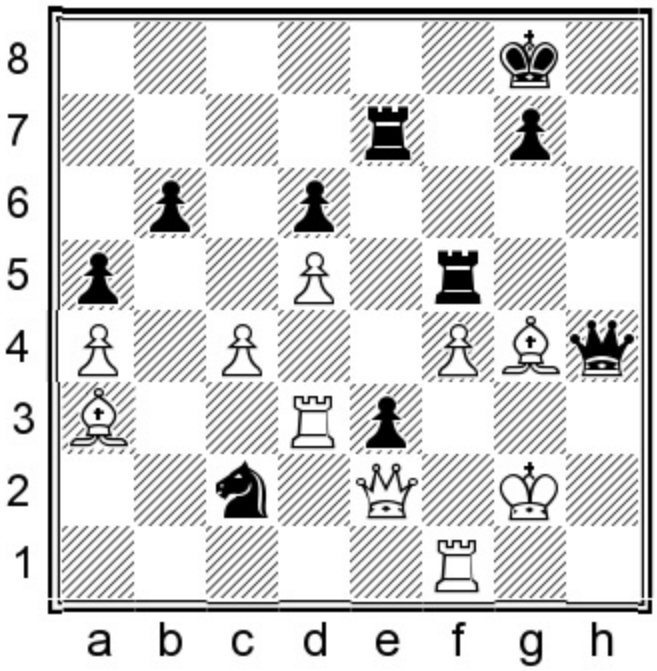
44.♖d3

44.♕xc2 ♕xh5 gives Black a strong attack. It is not easy to calculate, but at the same time not hard to evaluate. Black is threatening ...e3-e2 followed by ...♖e3(†) and ...♕xh4† as a start.

44...♖f5!!

But this is maybe even more surprising. Black does not have time to exchange minor pieces on a3. He needs to keep the threat of winning a piece there alive, as well as ...♘d4 and other knight jumps. The tempo it would take for White to eliminate the knight is far more valuable.

45.♗g4 ♕xh4† 46.♔g2



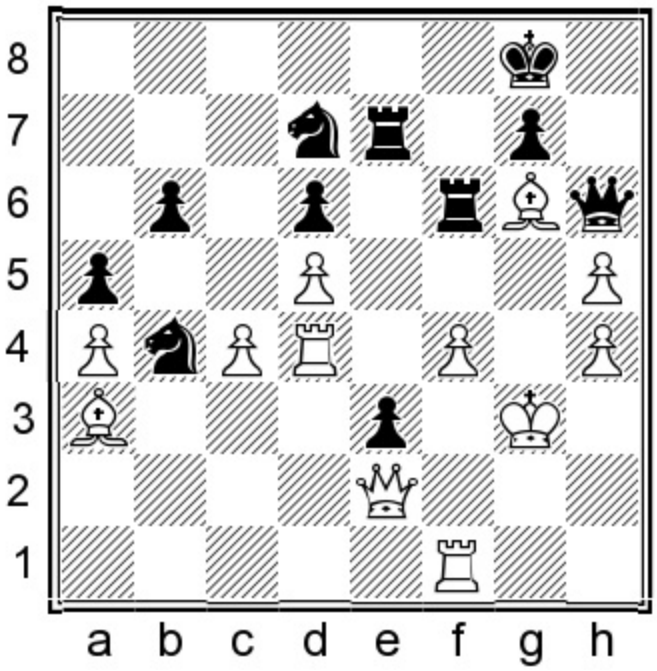
46...♘e1†!!

Spectacular, but 46...♖f6!? is also strong.

47.♖xe1 ♖xf4 48.♗f3 ♕g5† 49.♔f1 ♕g3

Black wins.

43.♔g3 ♖f6



44.♗xb4?

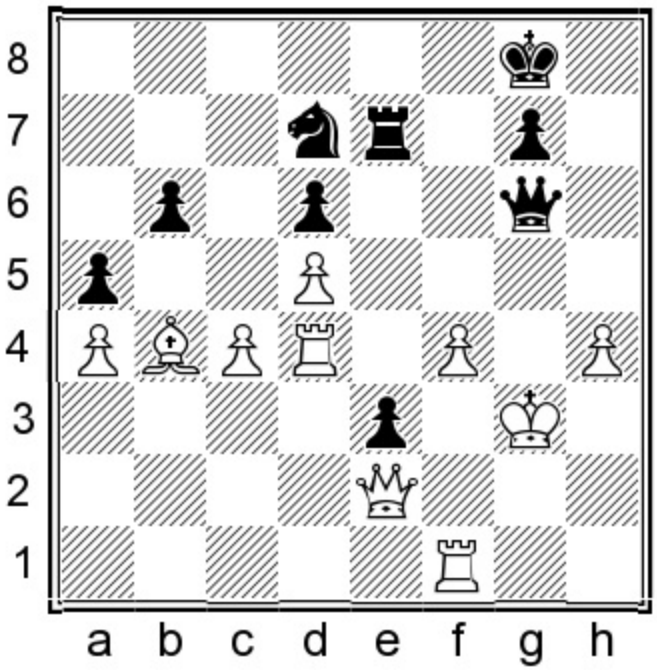
A foolish decision, allowing Black to sacrifice the exchange.

44.♗b1! would have kept the position under control and soon given White a big advantage. The play would be ♗b2, f4-f5 and ♖g4 with a mighty attack. Other ideas such as ♗xe3 and ♖e4 also exist.

44...♖xg6†!?

Black could not resist the chance to get rid of this annoying bishop. Having said that, he would also have been OK after recapturing on b4.

45.hxg6 ♕xg6†

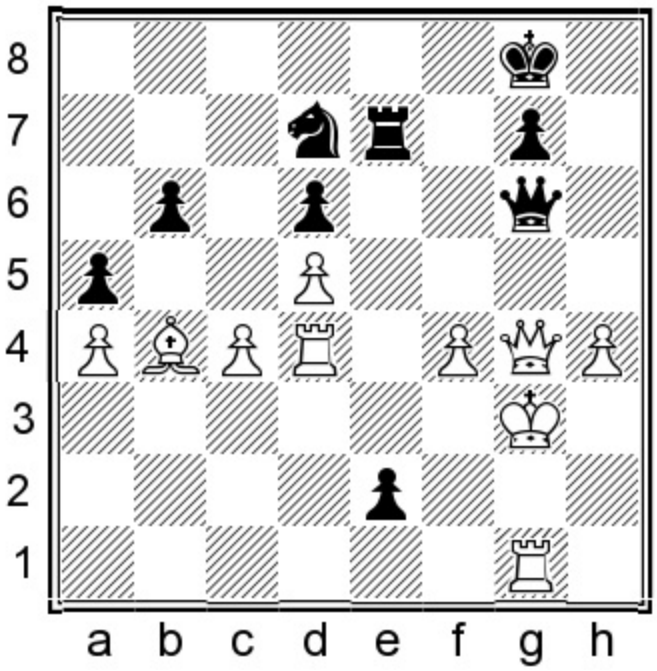


46.♕g4?

This is amusingly the winning move. Amusingly, because at the same time it is a losing move.

Safer was 46.♔h3 axb4 47.♖d3! ♕f5† 48.♔g3 ♕g6† 49.♔h3 where Black has a draw in his pocket, as well as the possibility to try for more. Yet White should be able to keep everything together with good defence.

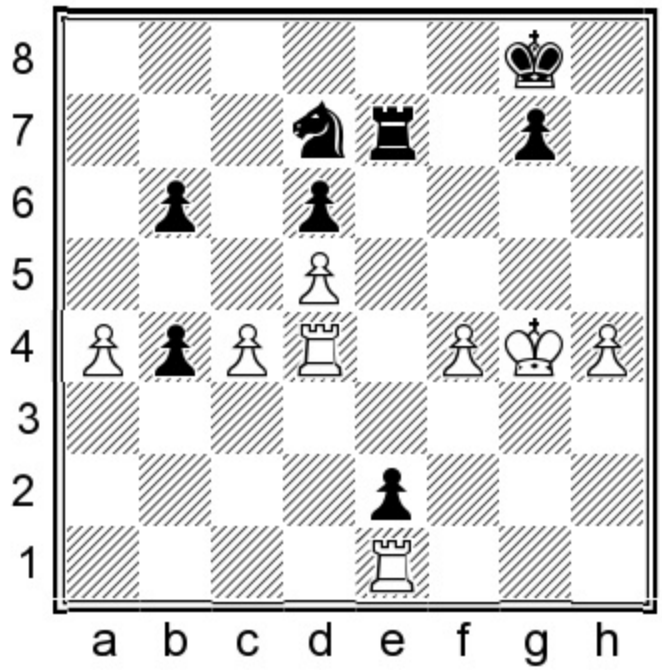
46...e2 47.♖g1



47...♕f6?

The natural move. Despite thinking for 23 minutes, Black was unable to make the exchange of queens work.

47...♕xg4†! 48.♔xg4 axb4 49.♖e1



The starting point for calculation. Black has a lot of options, and it would take time to work out which is the best one. We shall readily admit that we cheated and Stockfish found it for us.

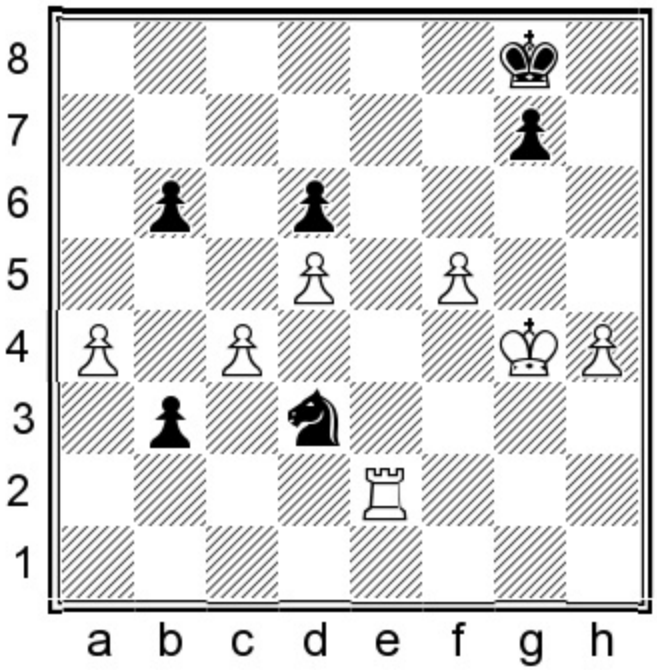
49...♖e3!!

Black is betting on two horses at the same time. He has two passed pawns and the white king is in trouble.

50.♖d2

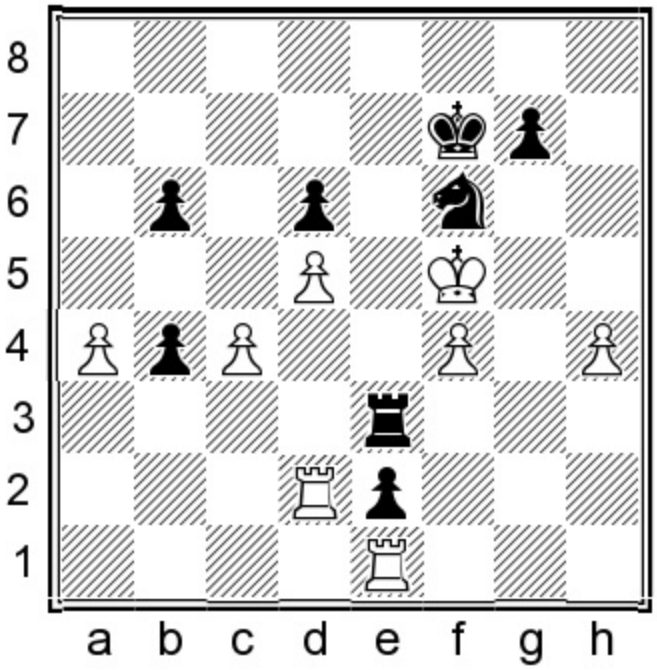
This is the main move to worry about. After other tries, Black would at least have decent compensation. We have no idea if Krastev missed 49...♖e3, or did not believe the position here was viable.

50.f5 would be something to worry about. The white king will not be mated, but it turns out there are other problems. 50...♘e5† 51.♔f4 ♖d3!! A cunning tempo-winner. Black would be happy to take on d4 and give a check on f3. 52.♖e4 ♖f3† 53.♔g5 ♘d3 54.♖1xe2 ♖g3† 55.♖g4 ♖xg4† 56.♔xg4 b3



All of this is forced and, in the end, White can only stop the b-pawn from promoting at the cost of the rook.

50...♘f6† 51.♔f5 ♔f7!

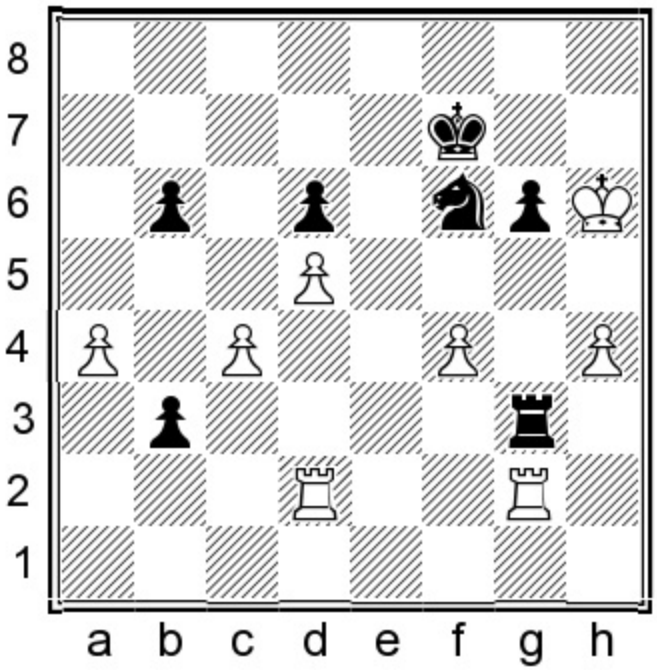


52.♖exe2 g6† 53.♔g5 ♖g3† 54.♔h6

This happens by force. It is curious to wonder why Black would not go for this, as there is at least a draw.

54...b3 55.♖g2

There are other tries here, but they all fail to the same tactical idea.



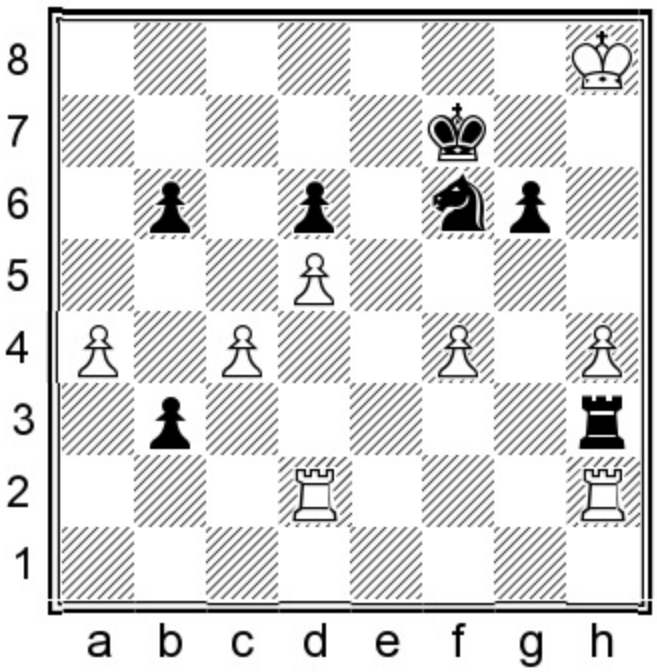
55...♘g8†!

First the king is deprived of the ♔g5 resource. There will be no exiting the kill zone.

56.♔h7 ♖h3 57.♖h2 ♘f6†!

Then the king is pushed all the way into the corner.

58.♔h8



58...♖e3!

Then the rook from h2 is forced away from the h-file.

58...♖c3? 59.h5! would allow White to escape. After either 59...gxh5? 60.♖dg2!, or 59...♘xh5 60.f5!, when the mating net is untangled.

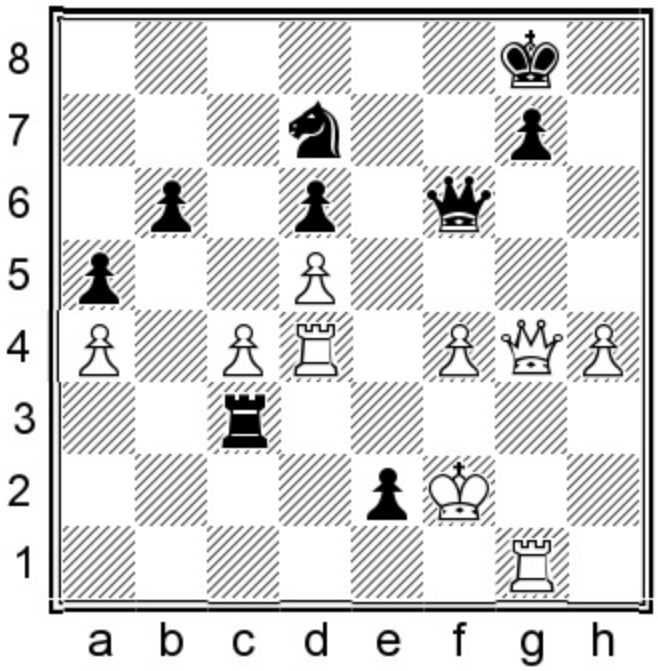
59.♖he2

59.♖de2 b2! would be a cute finish.

59...♖c3

White can resign.

48.♗c3 ♖e3† 49.♔f2 ♖xc3



Perhaps Black believed he would have a lot of active possibilities here. But after White's next move, it was all over.

50.♕e6†!

The game ends thematically, with an exchange of queens and the end of Black's tactical potential.

Black resigned. The endgame after 50...♔f8 51.♕xf6† ♘xf6 52.♔xe2 is hopeless, even if that is not self-evident at first glance.

1–0

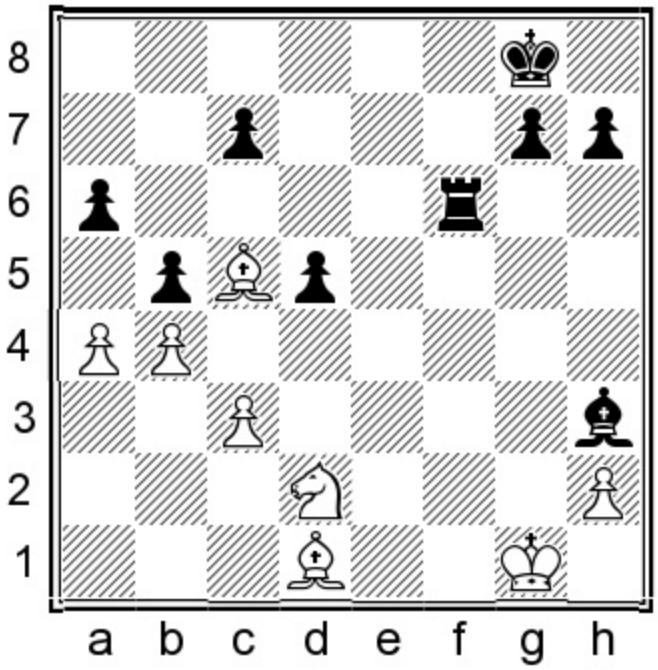
4.2 Gaining time

There are two immediate scenarios regarding gaining time that come to mind. The first is to deprive the opponent of the time needed for defensive measures. We will leave this one to you to think of. You could imagine that the recapture could divert a defender, but don't let us limit your imagination.

The other happens so often we don't even think of it as a choice about exchanges. It happens when the exchange is compulsory due to other pressures. The following example is less clear-cut, but essentially follows the same logic.

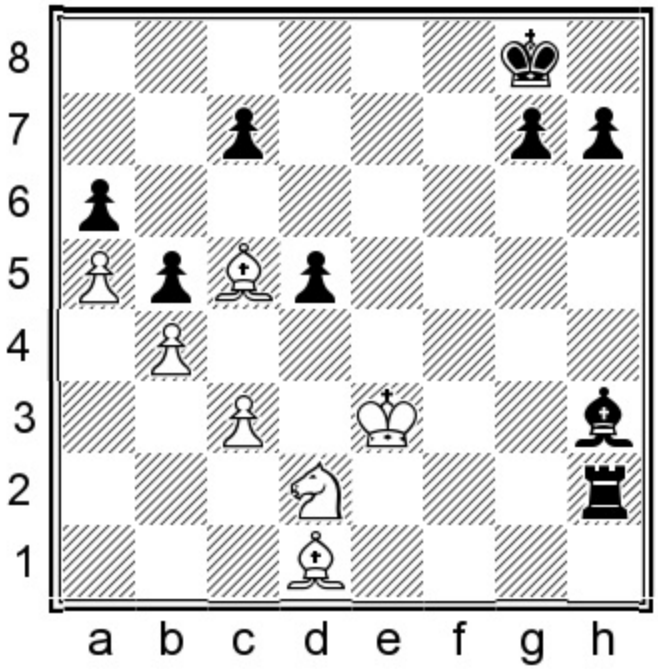
Zdenek Holeksa – Jakub Kusa

Czech Republic 2021



White played:

27.a5? ♖g6† 28.♔f2 ♖g2† 29.♔e3 ♖xh2

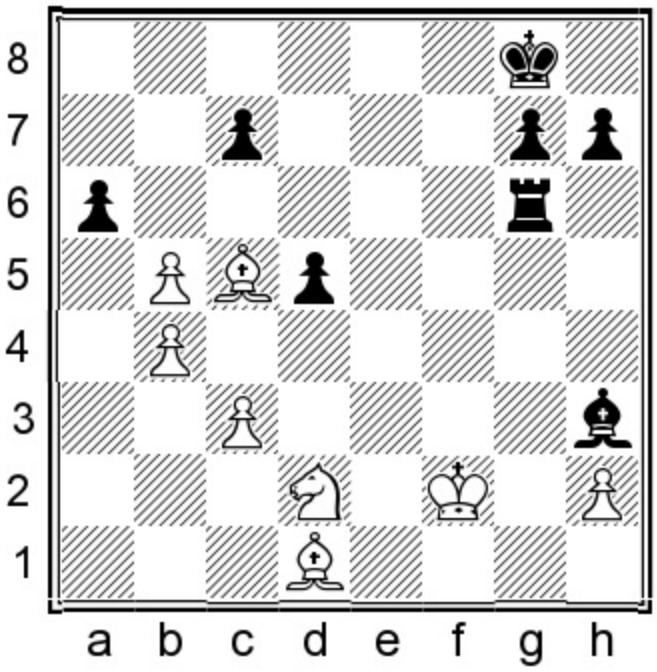


The position has become rather sharp. Black has three extra pawns, but White is active and has the chance to attack the black queenside, which is full of weaknesses. Objectively the position is

equal, but it is harder to justify the pawn deficit than to prove the compensation, which is why Black won on move 60.

The immediate way to head for a draw would have been: 30.♗f3! with the point 30...c6? 31.♗d6! and the black rook is trapped. After 30...♗g2 31.♗g4 ♗h3 32.♗f3 there is a repetition of moves.

Instead of this mess, White could have played the obvious 27.axb5!. This has the downside of exchanging the weak a6-pawn, but 27...♖g6†?! 28.♔f2



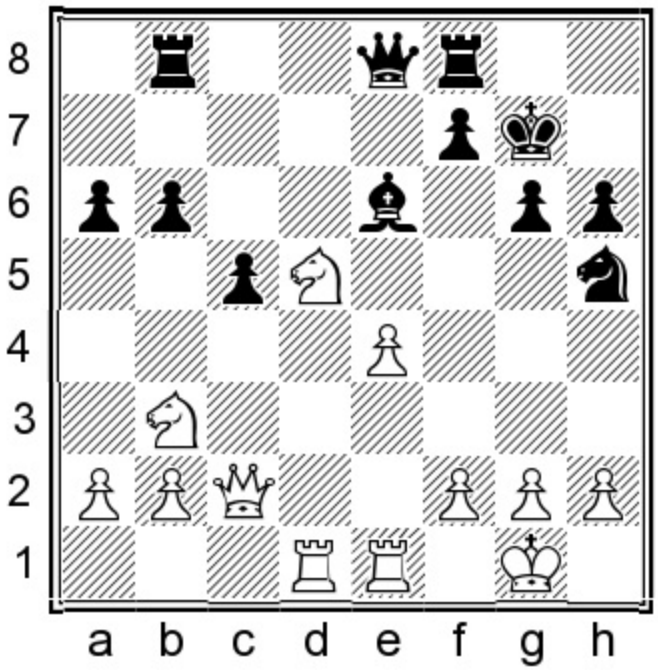
28...♖g2†? 29.♔e3 axb5 does not work. White has 30.♗f3 ♖g5 31.♔f4 h6 32.♘b3 which would see Black defenceless against the combination of ♘d4 and h2-h4, trapping the black rook.

For this reason, Black should play 27...axb5 28.♗f3±, when a long defence awaits.

4.3 King safety

Valentin Dragnev – David Gershkowich

Terme Catez 2022



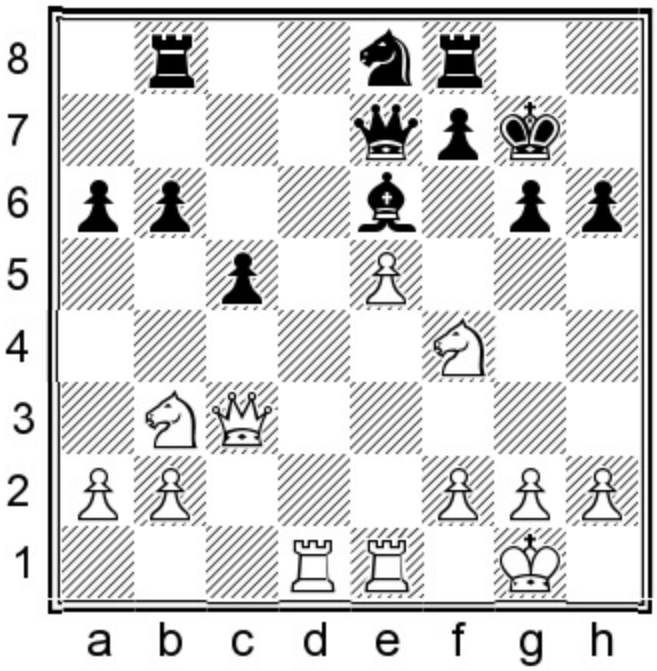
Black tried to keep control of the dark squares with:

24...♕d8?! 25.♕c3†! ♘f6?

Stepping into the pin is fool-hearted. Black believed that he would get the chance to take the d5-knight later, but instead White exploits the unfortunate position of the black pieces to gain tempos to get his pieces closer.

25...♔g8 was necessary, although after 26.♘d2!, White has definitely improved his position. However unpleasant it looks, Black will have to take the bait, as otherwise White would play ♘c4 with lots of pressure. 26...♗xd5 27.exd5 ♕xd5 28.♘e4 ♕xa2 29.g4 f5! Black is relying entirely on this resource. 30.gxf5 gxf5 31.♘g3 ♘g7 32.♖d6 White has a strong attack that is not easily neutralised, but which also does not crash straight through. In practice life is dangerous for Black, but more moves are to be played before a definite outcome will be decided.

26.♘f4 ♕e7 27.e5 ♘e8



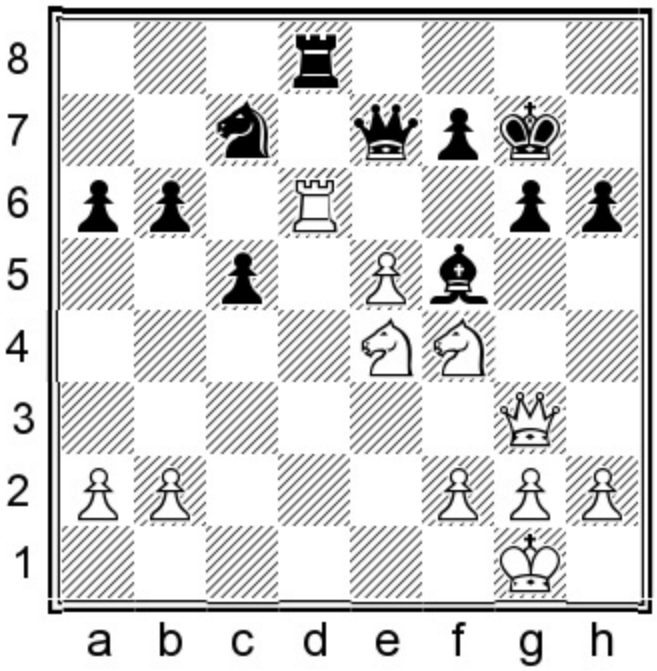
28.♘d2!

The last piece joins the attack. Black's position is beyond hope.

28...♘c7 29.♘e4 ♖bd8 30.♕g3 ♖xd1

30...♔h8 31.h4 would also give White a winning attack.

31.♖xd1 ♖d8 32.♖d6 ♗f5

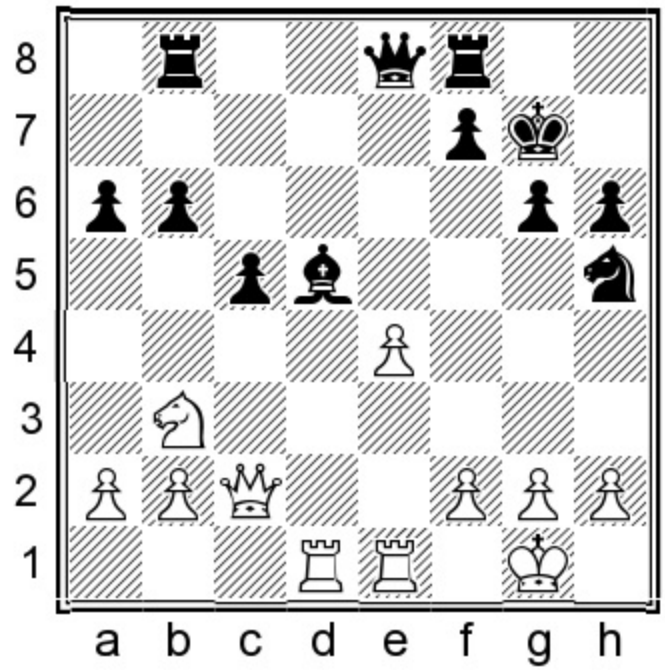


All the pieces are ready. It is time for decisive action.

33.♘h5† ♔f8 34.♕f4! ♖xd6 35.exd6 ♕xe4 36.♕xh6†

1–0

Black could have avoided all these problems if he had eliminated the knight on d5 immediately. 24...♗xd5!



White has two logical continuations, as taking back with the rook is clearly harmless.

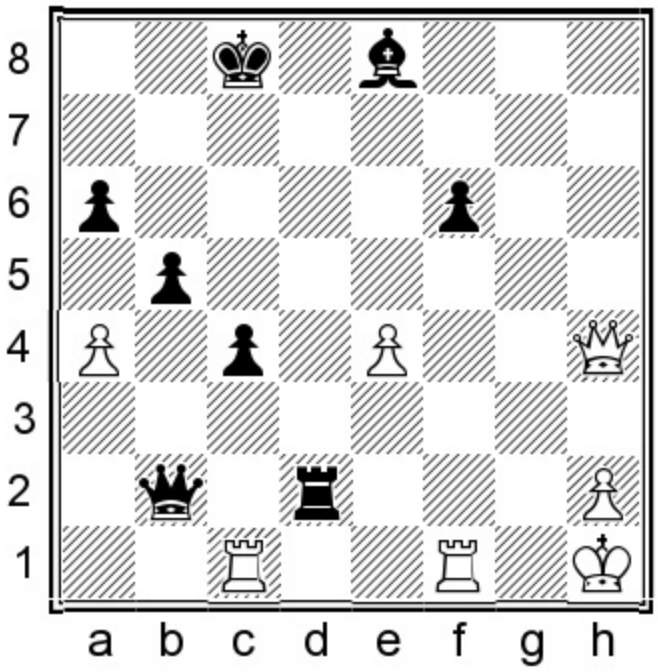
After 25.exd5 Black could either play 25...♕d8 with a solid position, or be more adventurous with 25...♕a4!? with a complicated position with fair chances. It is possible Black overestimated the power of the d-pawn.

More direct is 25.♕c3† ♘f6 26.♖xd5, but after 26...♕e6 Black has fully equalised, preparing to get the king out of the pin or neutralise the pressure on the d-file. Notice that 27.♖ed1? ♔h7 28.♖d6 ♘xe4! would be a disaster for White.

4.4 Removing attackers

The following game was played at the 2021 Rapid World Championship. Objectively the position is equal, with some margin, but White needs to be a little careful, as his king is wide open and Black has managed to set up a strong battery on the second rank. If you were looking at this game with a computer, you would be unlikely to feel the dread that Christiansen might have felt, with the clock running down and no easy way to neutralise the pressure.

Johan-Sebastian Christiansen – Ihor Samunenkov



Chess is a draw from the beginning. Mistakes are needed to upend the balance. When one side has more problems to solve, we say that his opponent has the advantage. With every generation of computer engines, the clarity of the variations they present us with gets stronger. Everything is either mate or 0.00. This position is also 0.00 according to Stockfish, but it needs to a bit of time to make this realisation. And this fact was of no help to White during the game.

What could have helped him, would have been a drive to exchange the attackers.

49.axb5?!

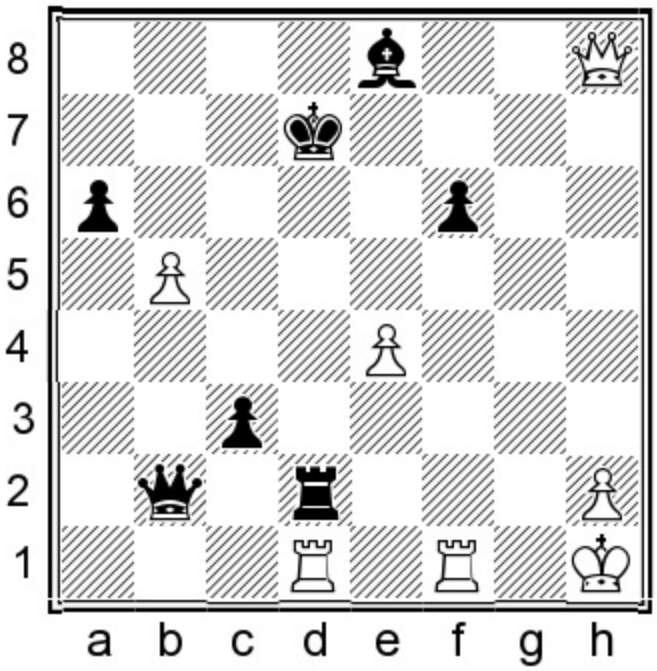
Stronger was:

49.♖cd1!

This is the human solution. White eliminates the intruder.

49...♖xd1

49...c3? 50.♕h8 would be uncomfortable for Black. That the position holds together matters little. In practice it would fall apart. 50...♔d7! 51.axb5!

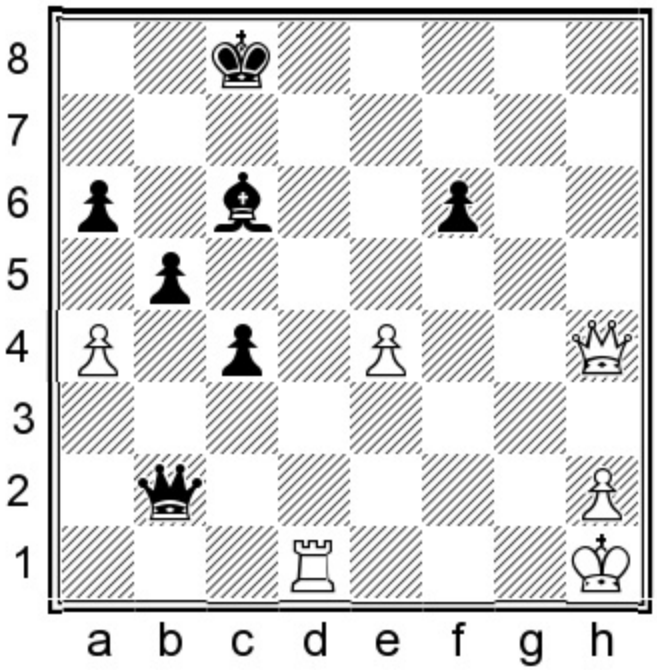


51...♕b4!! Black cannot recapture as the white rook would invade with deadly force through the a-file. 52.♕h7† ♔d8 53.♕f5 ♕d6! 54.♖xd2 cxd2 55.♖d1 ♔e7! Black will hold the endgame after some defensive work.

50.♖xd1

The key point of White's play is that Black would be unable to play:

50...♗c6?



51.♕g4† ♔c7 52.♕g7† ♔b6

Usually, the king is safest right behind the pawns, but in this position, it is not so.

53.a5†!

The key point.

53...♔xa5 54.♕c7†

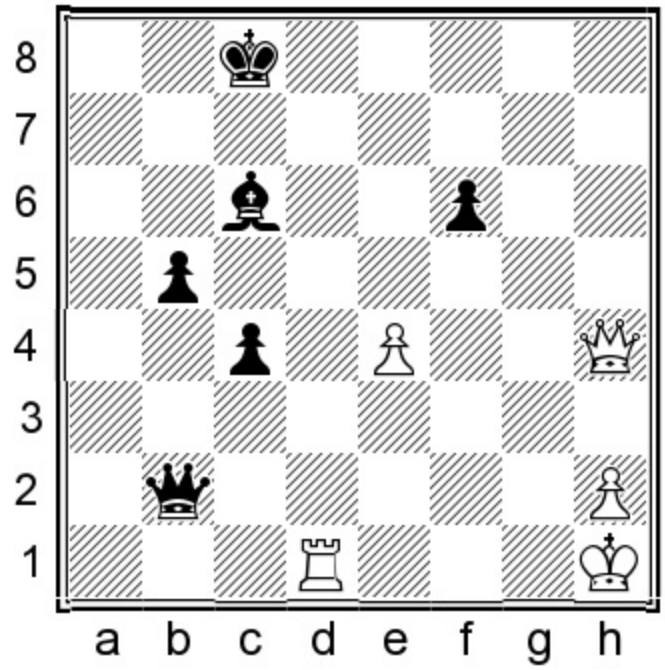
White picks up the bishop and later the full point.

But 50...♕e5 would be a good move. White could then give a lot of checks: 51.♕g4† ♔b7 52.♕g7† ♔b6 53.♕g1† and Black should consider if he wants to go on an adventure, which could as easily go wrong as be rewarded. And yes, every line is 0.00...

49.a5!? ♗c6 50.♖cd1! would also have kept the position balanced but is awfully obscure to the human eye.

49...axb5 50.♖a1

50.♖cd1 ♖xd1 51.♖xd1 ♗c6 looks dangerous and requires White to find a few only moves.



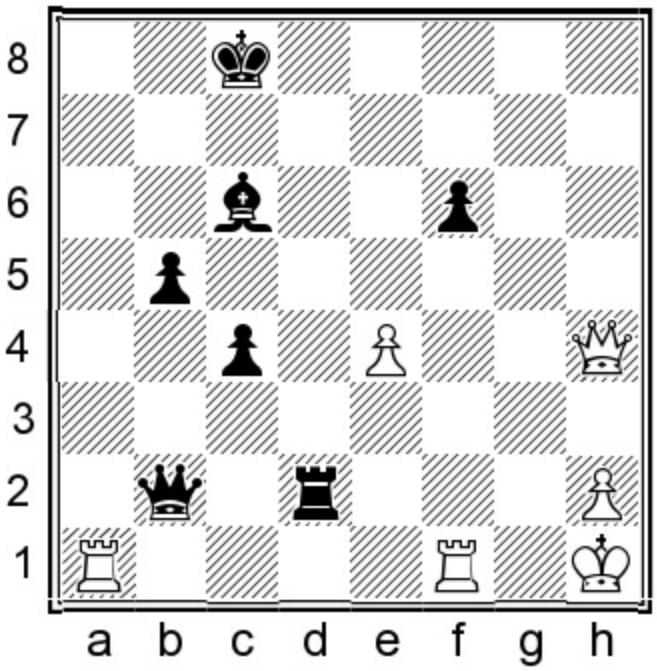
They may look logical enough when shown, but so will a dozen other moves that all lose by force. 52.♔g1! ♔b7 53.♕f4! b4 (53...♕e5? 54.♕xe5 fxe5 55.♔f2! would even win for White. All on one tempo of course.) 54.♕d6! The queen is ready to give a lot of checks. While not quite a perpetual, Black is unable to escape from them with an advantage.

But would you trust this from afar? Or even see it?

50...♗c6

Bringing the last piece into the attack.

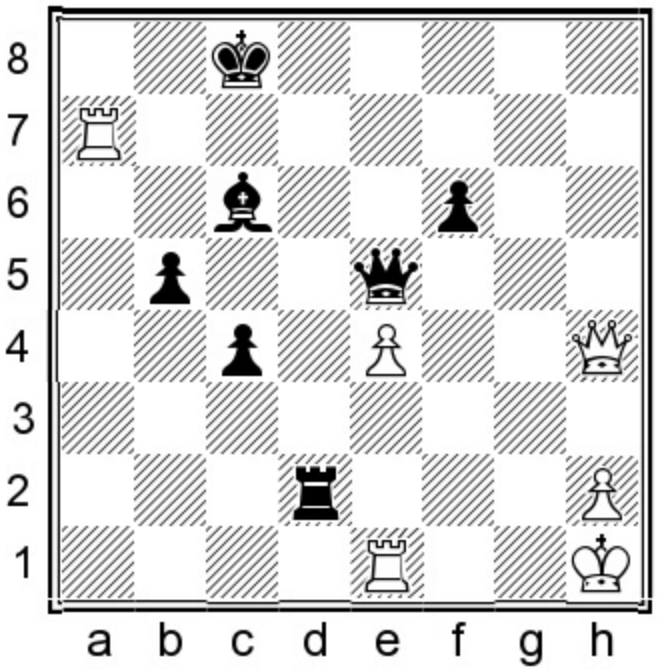
50...♔b7 51.♕h7† ♖d7 52.♕h6 ♕e5 53.♕xf6 ♕xe4† 54.♔g1 also looks scary for White, but the check on a6 will get him out of trouble.



51.♖a7?

White still had a path to the treasured 0.00. After 51.♖a6! ♔b7 52.♖fa1 ♕d4, he would have to find 53.♕h7†! ♗d7 54.♖a7† when Black would have to give up the queen, and the game would most likely be drawn. How easy it would be to play 53.♖a7†? in time trouble, when Black would play 53...♔b6 and the king runs away. For example, 54.♖7a6† ♔c5 55.♕h5† ♔b4 56.♖b1† ♔c3 57.♖a3† ♔c2 and Black wins.

51...♕e5 52.♖e1



52...f5

52...c3! shows the superiority of the black position.

53.♖e7 ♖xh2† 54.♕xh2

54.♔g1!? ♖xh4 55.♖xe5 fxe4 was also winning for Black but would at least have given him a chance to go wrong, this being a rapid game and all.

54...♕xe7 55.♔g1 ♗xe4 56.♕f4 c3 57.♕e3 ♕g7†

White is mated.

0–1

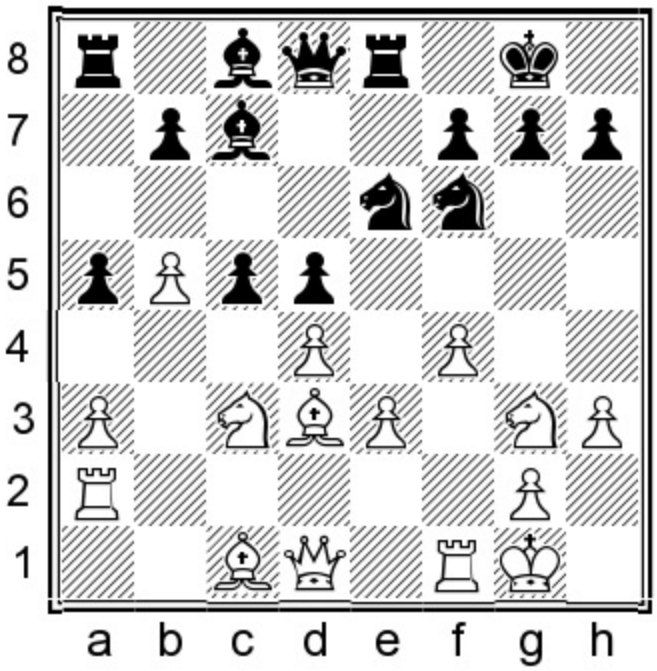
4.5 Removing defenders

The previous section was about defence. This section is about attack. The easiest way for us to show an example about removing defenders, would be to pull out a game from the Sicilian Dragon where White has castled long, played h4-h5 and follows up with ♗e3-h6 to eliminate the g7-bishop.

Instead, we have found three very different examples, which have varying degrees of dynamics linked to them. The first is more about structure than dynamics.

Nico Chasin – Sahil Sinha

Fort Worth 2019



The game went:16.♘ce2? b6 17.♗b2 Black won on move 33, but at this point he did not play the strongest move, 17...c4!, after which the white pieces would be misplaced and Black would have a

preferable structure.

Instead, White could have removed the defender of the d5-pawn with:

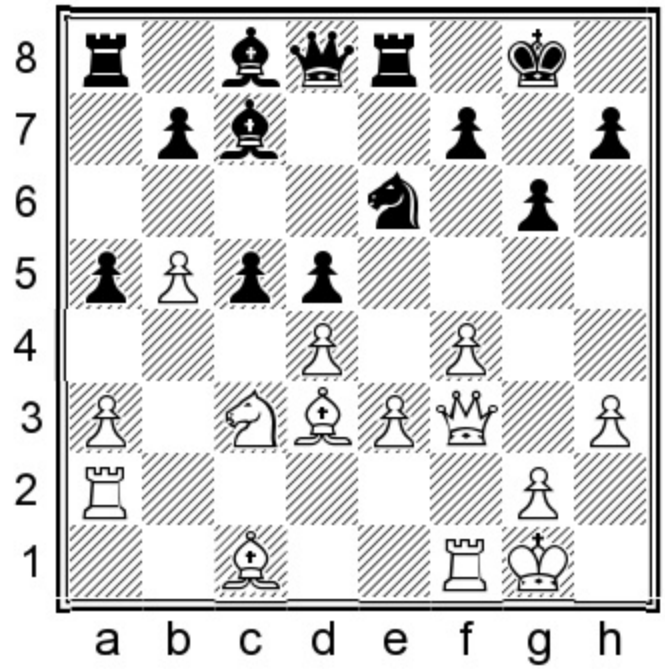
16.♘h5!

The complexity in understanding this is that White does not actually win the pawn, but rather forces Black to make other concessions.

16...♘xh5

16...cxd4 17.♘xf6† ♕xf6 18.♘xd5 ♕d8 19.♗c4 is similar.

17.♕xh5 g6 18.♕f3!!



This is the key point. Taking on d5 with the queen would release the pressure. We want to take with the knight.

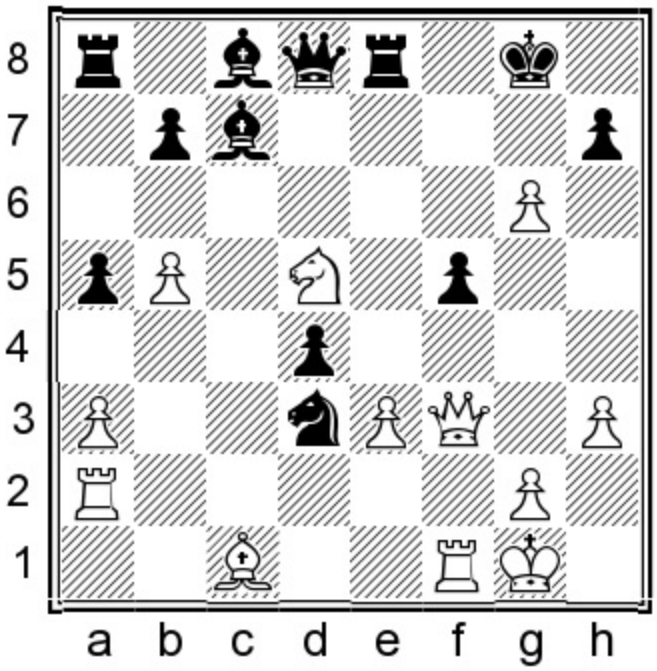
18...cxd4 19.♘xd5

Black has no easy way to proceed. Taking on e3 only brings the bishop into the game and White is about to play ♖c2 followed by ♗b2, when all the horsemen are ready for the apocalypse. Active play also does not work out well for Black:

19...♘c5 20.f5!?

20.♖c2 is also strong, but direct play is more natural.

20...♘xd3 21.fxg6 f5



22.♖c2!

Followed by 23.♕h5 with a terrifying attack.

The next example is hyper-dynamic. Black goes all in for an attack on the king.

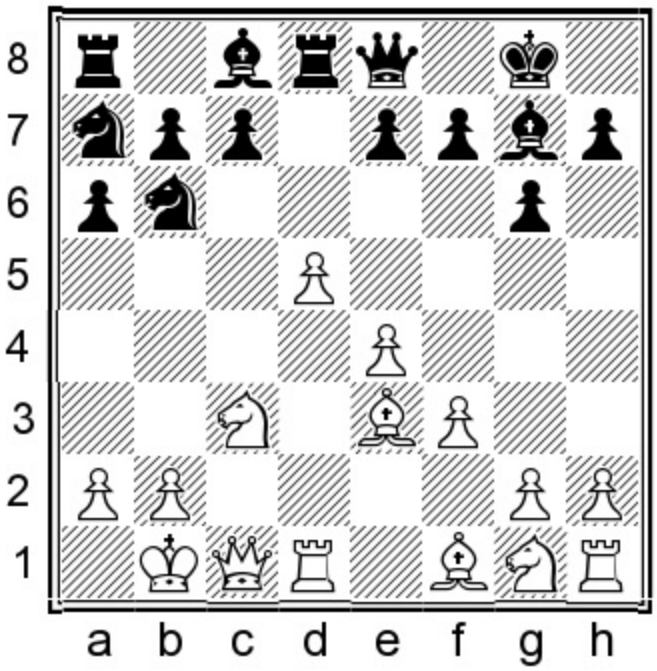
Aaron Jacobson – John Burke

Dulles 2021

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.f3

This is currently a hot take on both the King's Indian and the Grünfeld. The other fashionable line is 3.h4.

3...d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.e4 ♘b6 6.♘c3 ♗g7 7.♗e3 0-0 8.♕d2 ♘c6 9.0-0-0 ♕d6 10.♔b1 ♖d8 11.♘b5 ♕d7 12.d5 a6 13.♘c3 ♕e8 14.♕c1 ♘a7!?



This awkward-looking move has gained traction lately. It is likely it does not quite equalise, but in practice, Black has good play. The idea behind the move is to play ...♘b5 to exchange the important knight on c3. If Black manages to open some files, he will be able to generate an attack.

15.♗f4?

Greed is the main emotion those who will try to cheat you out of your money will use against you. The same goes for those who try to trick you in the opening.

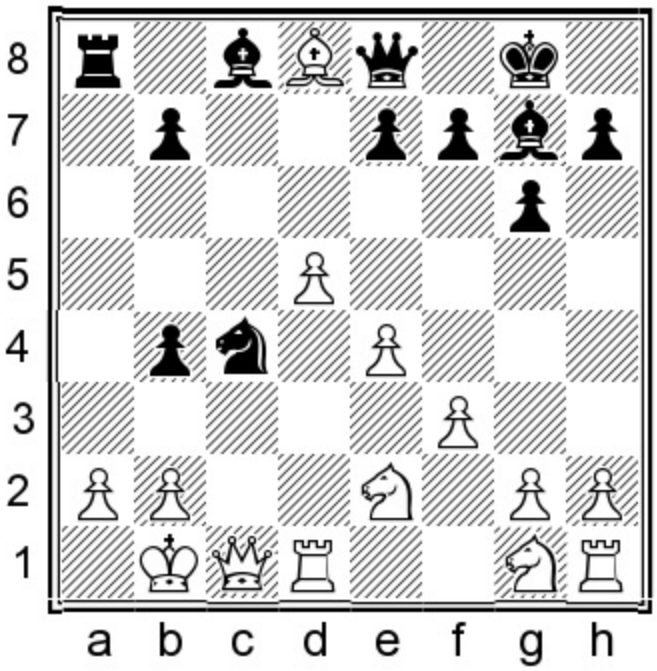
The critical line is 15.h4! ♘b5 16.♘ge2 e6 17.h5, as in Ding Liren – Nepomniachtchi, Internet (rapid) 2020. White appears to be a bit better.

15...♘b5!

15...♗d7?! 16.♗xc7 ♘a4! with compensation was also possible, but this is more attractive.

16.♘xb5?!

The key point of Black's play is shown in the following variation: 16.♗xb5?! axb5 17.♗xc7 ♘c4 18.♗xd8 b4!, which gives Black a completely winning attack. 19.♘ce2



19...♖xa2! 20.♔xa2 ♕a4† 21.♔b1 ♘a3† 22.♔a1 b3 with mate.

For this reason, 16.♘ge2 was necessary. But after 16...c6!∓, the game is played entirely on Black's terms.

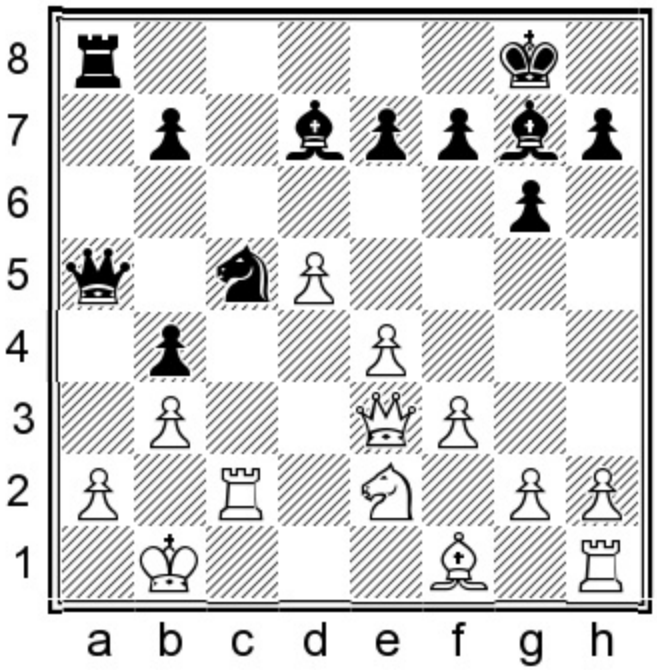
16...axb5 17.♗xc7 ♘a4! 18.♗xd8

18.♖d2 ♗d7! changes little. Black does not want to save the exchange. He is more interested in dominating the dark squares.

18...♕xd8 19.♖d2 ♕a5 20.♖c2 ♗d7 21.♘e2 b4!

Preventing the knight from joining the defence. The white pieces on the kingside are all cut off from the action.

22.b3 ♘c5 23.♕e3



Everything is ready. It is time to strike.

23...♘xb3!

Removing the final cover from the white king.

24.f4

This does not work, but nothing did.

The key point comes after 24.♕xb3 ♗a4 25.♕d3 b3 26.axb3 ♗xb3 with mate.

24...♘a1 25.♖d2 b3 26.♘d4 ♘c2 27.♖xc2 bxa2† 28.♔a1 ♗xd4†

0–1

5. Endgame themes

Endgames are one of the most prominent themes when we think about exchanges. Not the least because endgames will most often come about through exchanges.

Exchanging in the endgame is a major theme that fills 110 pages of Jacob's book *A Matter of Endgame Technique*. This book, *Mastering Chess Exchanges*, is about exchanges in general and not focused specifically on any phase of the game, although the middlegame is overrepresented. But we do have one section focused on endgames, so it makes sense to go over some common themes relating to exchanges in the endgame.

5.1 The dream of a pawn ending

When we talk of exchanges in the endgame, there should always be one eye on potential pawn endings. While we cannot concern ourselves with them in the middlegame, they become increasingly likely as more pieces leave the board. And when we are in the endgame, we already have limited material left to exchange. The relevance is obvious.

Kulkarni Bhakti – A.G. Nimmy

Bhubaneswar 2022

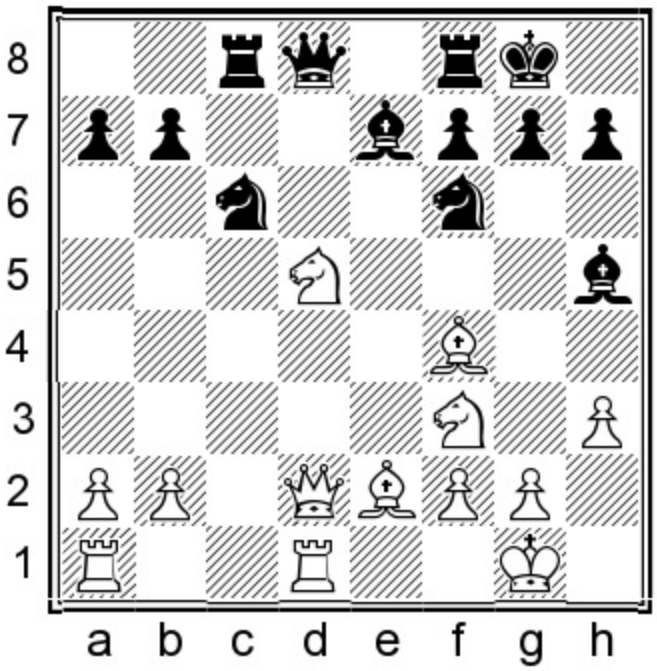
This game is from the Indian Women's Championship, where one of the Indian female stars wins the game by exploiting her opponent's mistakes relating to exchanges.

1.e4 c5 2.c3 d5 3.exd5 ♕xd5 4.d4 ♘f6 5.♘f3 ♗g4 6.♗e2 e6 7.h3 ♗h5 8.0-0 ♘c6 9.♗e3 cxd4 10.cxd4 ♗e7 11.♘c3 ♕d6 12.♕d2 0-0 13.♗f4 ♕d8 14.♖fd1 ♖c8

If you are looking to add this system to your repertoire as Black, you would be happy to know that 14...♘b4! would be the simplest way to equalise.

White's next move is sort of an admission of guilt. White accepts the elimination of the centre, which both gets rid of her potentially weak d-pawn and leads to a freeing of the short-term pressure Black is feeling.

15.d5 exd5 16.♘xd5



16...♘xd5?

A serious positional mistake, even if it should not lead to serious problems. It releases tension by inviting the white pieces up the board and as a result gives her the advantage of the two bishops. This can be neutralised with good defence, but why bring this long-term problem on yourself?

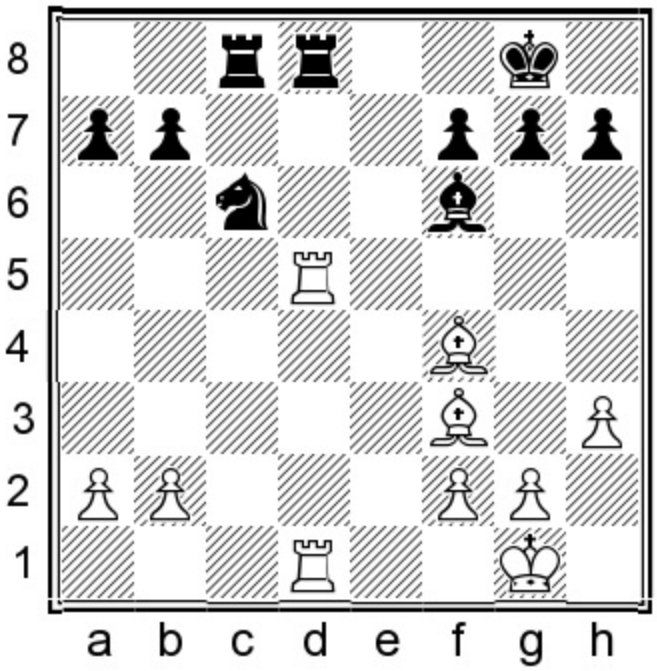
16...♖e8!? would have allowed White to grab the two bishops, but without releasing the tension and instead activating Black's remaining inactive piece. This and 16...♗c5, holding on to the two bishops, were both decent options.

17.♕xd5 ♕xd5 18.♖xd5 ♗xf3

Black has to give up the bishop. 18...♗g6?! 19.♖d7 would be unpleasant.

19.♗xf3 ♗f6 20.♖ad1 ♖fd8

One of White's key points is that 20...♗xb2 is met with 21.♖b5!±.

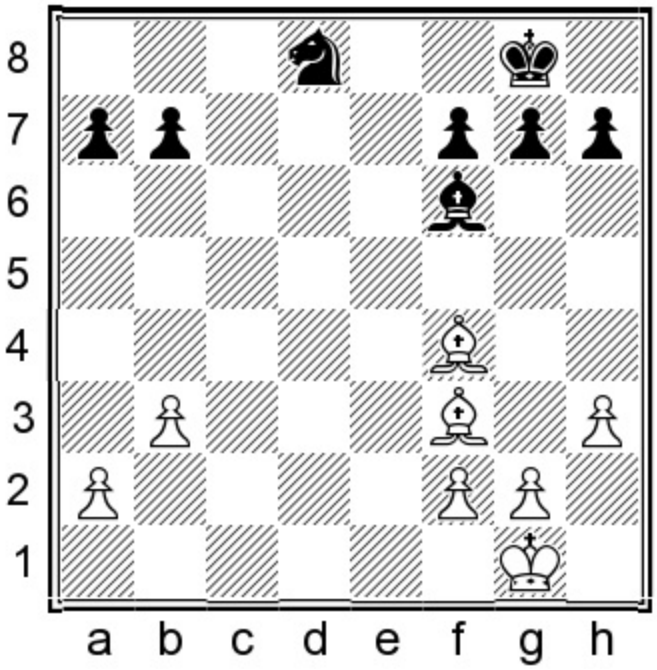


21.♖xd8†

White is better after this, but it feels as if she releases the tension just a fraction early.

Marginally stronger was 21.♗e3!, when Black still cannot take on b2 due to 22.♖b1. Critical becomes 21...b6, which seems necessary. After 22.♖d7 ♘e5, it is finally time to exchange the rooks. 23.♖xd8† ♖xd8 24.♖xd8† ♗xd8 25.♗e4 ♗f6 26.b3 ♔f8 27.f4 ♘d7 28.♔f2± gives White a marginally better version of the endgame. As with the game, it is drawable, but also unpleasant for Black.

21...♖xd8 22.♖xd8† ♘xd8 23.b3



23...♗d4?!

Over the next few moves, both players misunderstand the importance of Black bringing the king into the game.

23...♔f8!± was best.

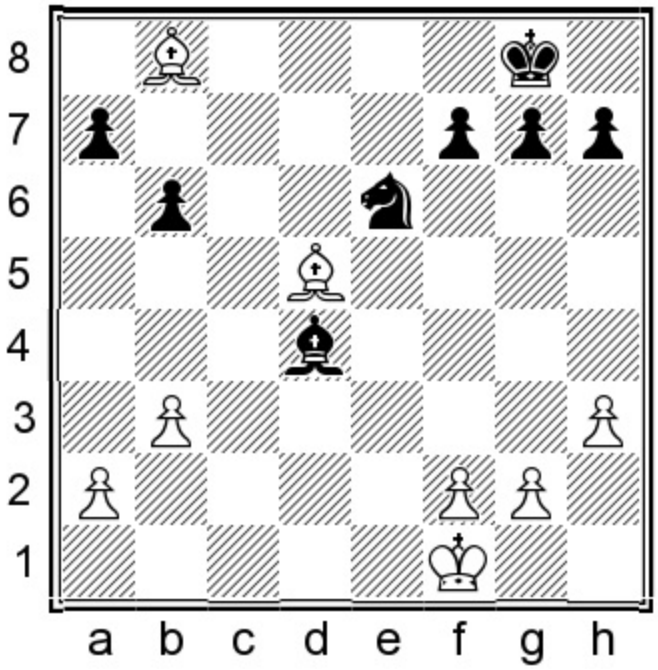
24.♔f1?!

24.♗d6!± would have kept the king shut out.

24...b6?! 25.♗d5?! ♘e6?! 26.♗d6?!

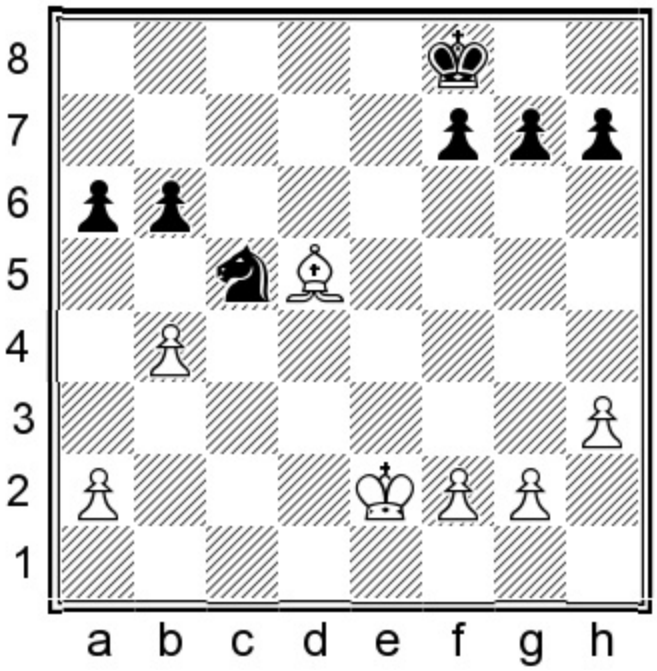
The curious thing is that at the moment when White is pushed to play this, it is no longer the optimal square for the bishop. The margins in this endgame are narrow and for White to win, she has to squeeze every drop out of every opportunity, barring a blunder by the opponent.

26.♗b8! was the strongest move now.

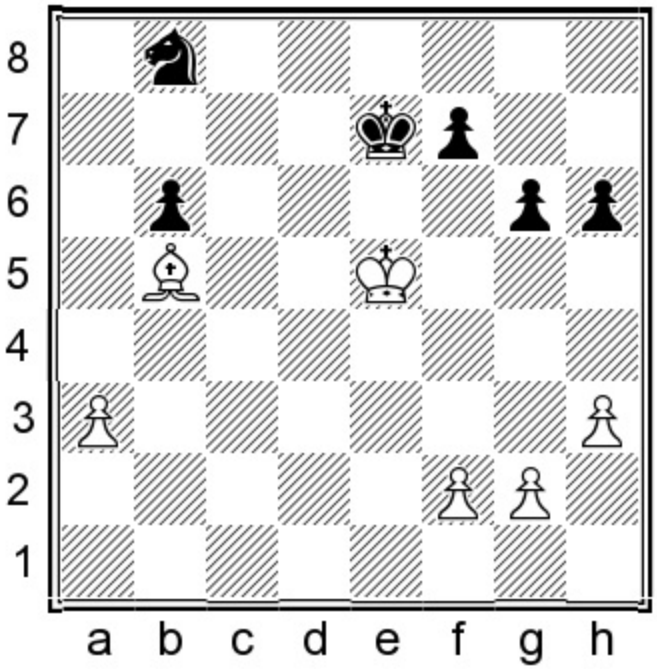


Black cannot play 26...a5?. White can exploit the endgame with accurate play. 27.♗xe6! fxe6 28.♔e2 ♔f7 29.f3 ♔f6 30.♔d3 ♗c5 31.♔e4 g6 32.♗e5† ♔e7 33.♗d4! ♔d6 34.f4, and Black will have to make a painful concession, losing the game.

26...a6 is less bad. After 27.♗d6! the important difference to the game occurs after: 27...♗c5? 28.♗xc5! ♘xc5 29.♔e2 ♔f8 30.b4



We can start to sense the difference. Black would be able to hold this endgame easily if she could put the knight on c7, but there is no route for the knight to get there. Instead, White will slowly break through in the centre. Soon Black will be in zugzwang and forced to create weaknesses. It may be difficult to see here, but White wins without any effort. For example: 30...♘d7 31.♔d3 ♔e7 32.♔d4 ♘b8 33.a3 h6 34.♗c4 g6 35.♔d5 ♔d7 36.b5 axb5 37.♗xb5† ♔e7 38.♔e5



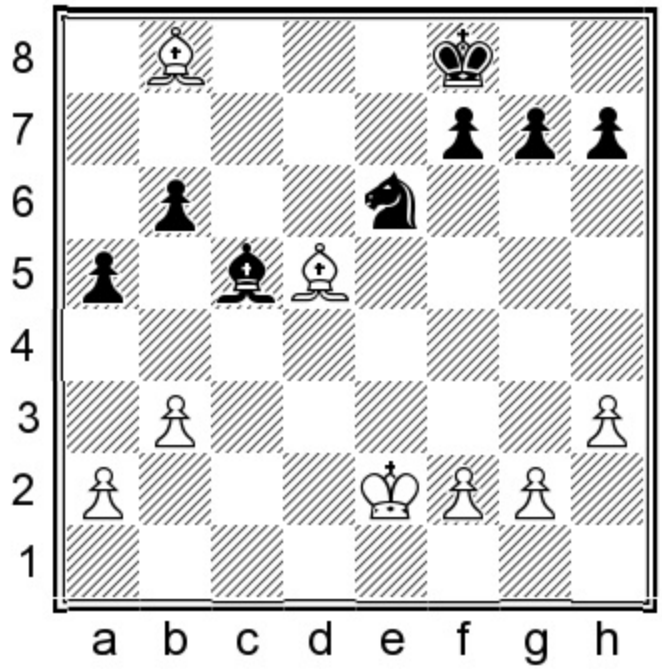
This line was by no means forced. Nor was it forced upon Black. The position was this bad, only now it is visually apparent too.

27...♗c5 is not forced, but if unavailable, Black would face serious practical problems.

26...♗c5!

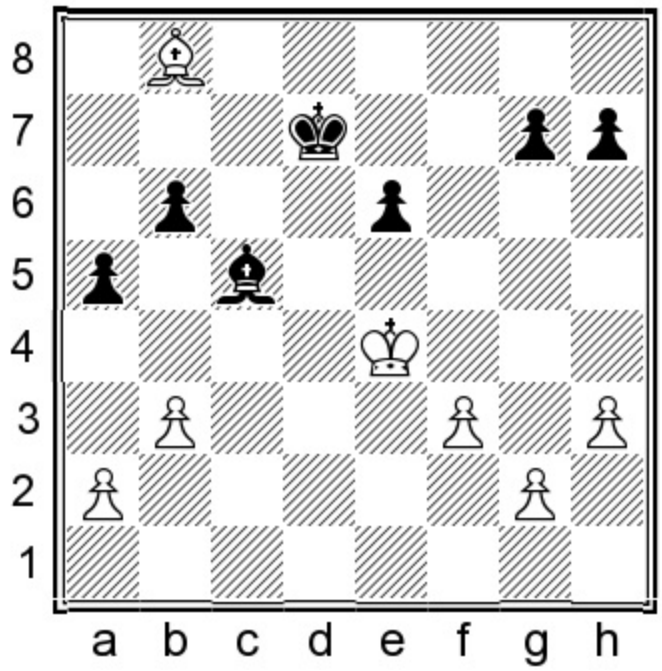
The exchange of bishops would provide Black with an easy draw.

27.♗b8 a5 28.♔e2 ♔f8



Black has organised her pieces well. White needs to make use of the hidden advantage of the two bishops, which is that the player wielding them usually gets to decide when there are exchanges. In this case, White's advantage is disappearing fast, and Bhakti makes the sensible decision to at least get a structural concession out of her opponent.

29.♗xe6! fxe6 30.f3 ♔e7 31.♔d3 ♗d6 32.♗a7! ♗c5 33.♔e4 ♔d7 34.♗b8



The bishop endgame is a draw with a bit of accuracy from Black. But it will include some caution

and discomfort to hold it. Mainly through patience.

We have often experienced that the best way to win a slightly better endgame against a weaker opponent is to do nothing drastic and wait for the tension to eat them out and "try to force a draw", which is rarely going to work from an inferior position. You cannot predict where this attempt to end the discomfort through brute force will come, as it is governed by emotions more than logic.

34...♗d6?

A horrific mistake. The pawn ending is visually dangerous for Black with more pawn islands and a less active king. It is not a surprise that White wins easily.

What can surprise here is that there was no way for White to break through. 34...♔c6 and passive play would have held the draw, as long as Black avoids immediate disasters.

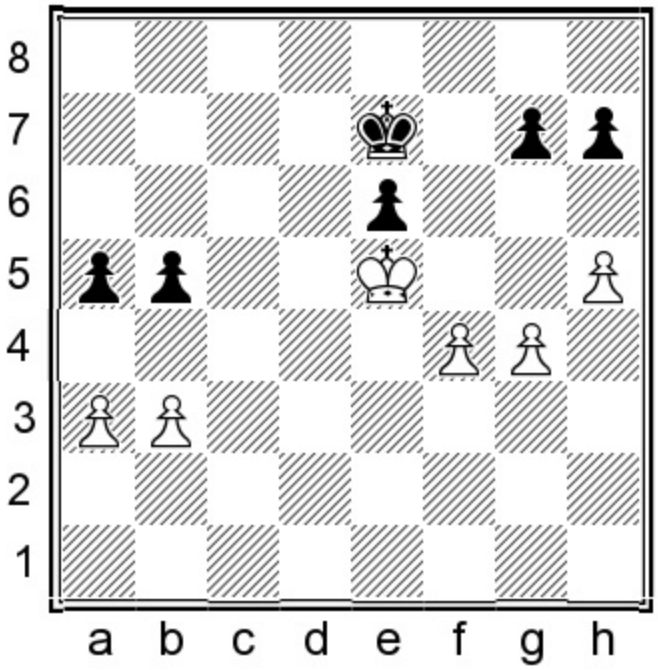
35.♗xd6 ♔xd6 36.f4!

The only winning move, but also the most natural. White takes control of the e5-square.

36...b5

36...♔c5 37.a3 makes no progress either.

37.♔d4 ♔c6 38.a3 ♔d6 39.g4 ♔c6 40.♔e5 ♔d7 41.h4 ♔e7 42.h5



42...g6

42...♔d7 43.h6 gxh6 44.♔f6 ♔d6 45.♔g7 followed by the advance of the f-pawn also wins.

43.hxg6 hxg6 44.g5 a4 45.b4 ♔d7 46.♔f6 ♔d6 47.♔xg6 ♔d5 48.♔f6 ♔c4 49.g6 ♔b3 50.g7 ♔xa3

51.g8=♕

1–0

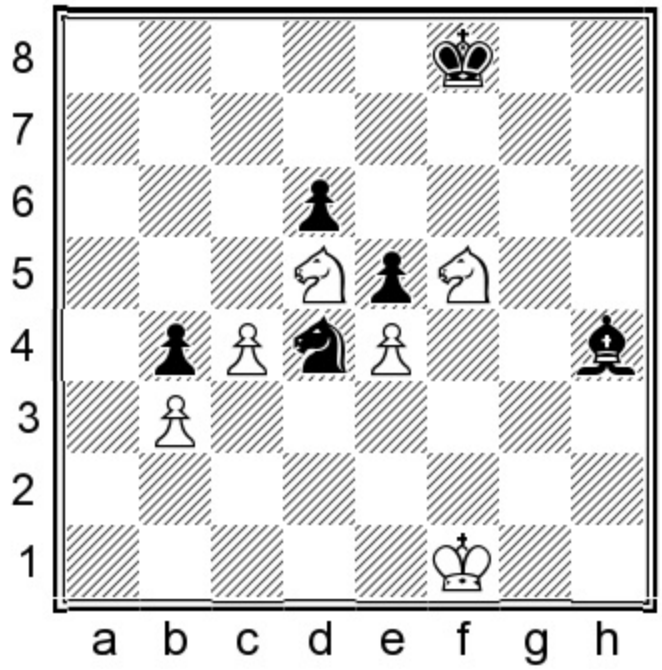
5.2 Escaping with a draw

In *A Matter of Endgame Technique*, Jacob debated the ideas he was taught by Dvoretsky and Yusupov regarding exchanges in the endgame. He found the idea that "the stronger side generally wants to exchange pieces, to get closer to the pawn ending" to be the case so rarely that it was unhelpful in the games he analysed (maybe 50-50, but as long as it is around there, it does not matter if it is 10% one way or the other). However, the idea for the defender of eliminating as many pawns as possible, to get closer to pawnless and frequently drawn endings, often bears fruit. The scenario Dvoretsky always mentioned was there being three men left on the board, one of them being a minor piece.

The example chosen for this book is taken from analysis of the first game won by the American IM Ryo Chen (then pre-teen) against an IM. The variation was supposed to end with "and White wins", but a closer look at the position suggests that it is less clear.

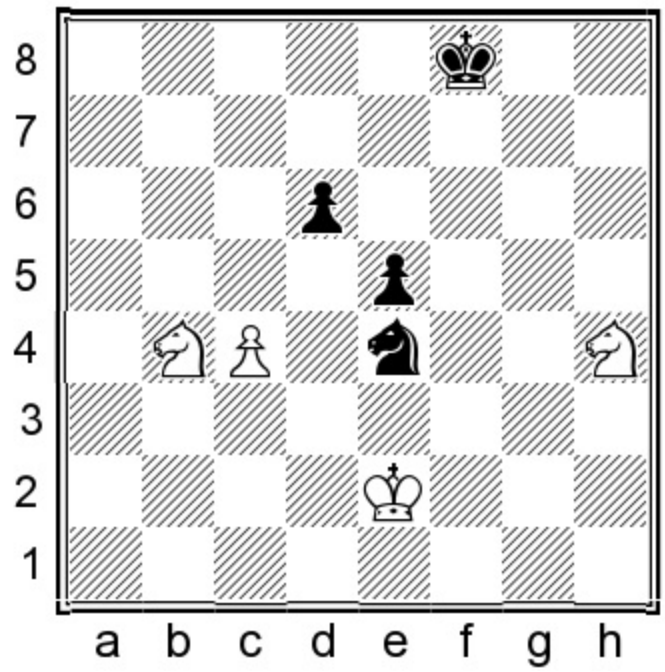
Ryo Chen – Emil Stefanov

United States (var) 2019

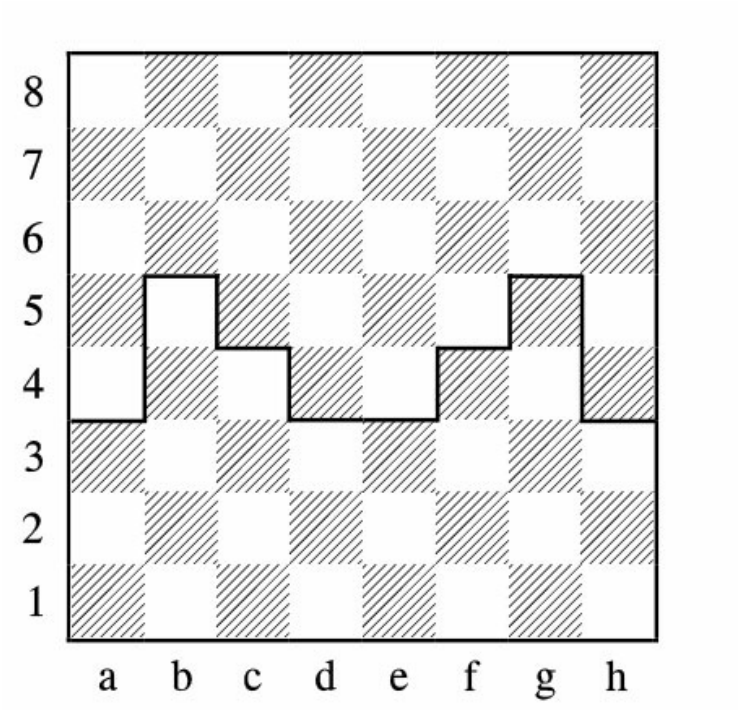


After 34...♘xf5? 35.exf5, Black would indeed be without counterplay and hopelessly lost.

But instead, Black can play: **34...♘xb3! 35.♘xh4 ♘d2† 36.♔e2 ♘xe4**, when the ending after **37.♘xb4±** is far from clear.



There are many scenarios where White could win. If he ends up with two knights against a pawn, for example. The exchange of knights would also lead to a winning endgame. Still, objectively the position is probably a draw. White will find it difficult to eliminate the black knight without allowing a drawn ending. To refresh your memory, the Troitsky line indicates where a black pawn has to have reached for Black to make a draw.



If the black pawn is blocked above this line by a knight, the two knights would be able to deliver checkmate in most situations.

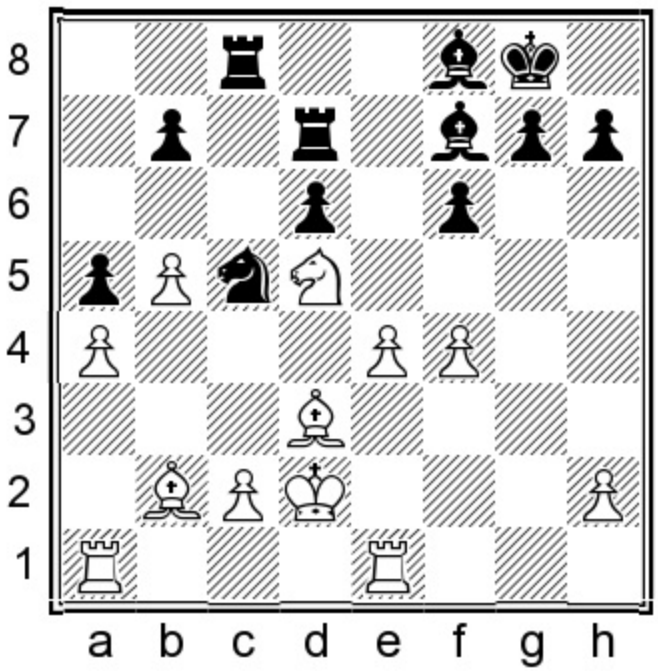
5.3 Exchanging to make a draw

One of the common ways to make a draw in an inferior position in the endgame is to make some concessions, but in the process remove the opponent's ability to win.

In the following example, played in the Bundesliga, Black was actually not in trouble, but still decided to exchange into a safe endgame. What we especially enjoy about it is that the engines overestimate White's position for a while.

Roven Vogel – Robert Kempinski

Germany 2021

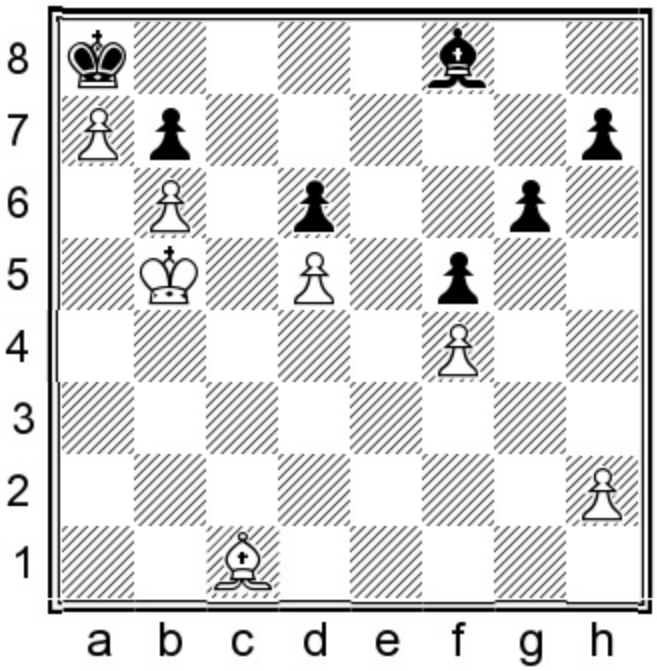


28...♘xd3!?

It should be said that the simplification was not forced. Black could have played 28...♗xd5 29.exd5 g6! with good chances. The tactical point is that 30.♗xf6?! ♖f7 would give Black the better game.

29.♔xd3 ♗xd5 30.exd5 ♖dc7 31.c3

The genius of Kempinski's play is fully on display in the following variation: 31.b6!? ♖xc2 32.♖ac1 ♖xc1 33.♖xc1 ♖xc1 34.♗xc1 f5 35.♔c4 ♔f7 36.♔b5 ♔e8 37.♔xa5 ♔d7 38.♔b5 ♔c8 39.a5 g6 40.a6 ♔b8 41.a7† ♔a8



Black has achieved a perfect fortress. Black will play ...h7-h6 and ...g6-g5 in short succession, and White will not be able to keep his f- and h-pawns. Even if White is able to break through on the kingside thereafter, he cannot eliminate the d6-pawn without the exchange of bishops and a subsequent stalemate. Remember that White also has to protect the b6-pawn.

31...♖c5! 32.c4 ♖xc4 33.♖ac1

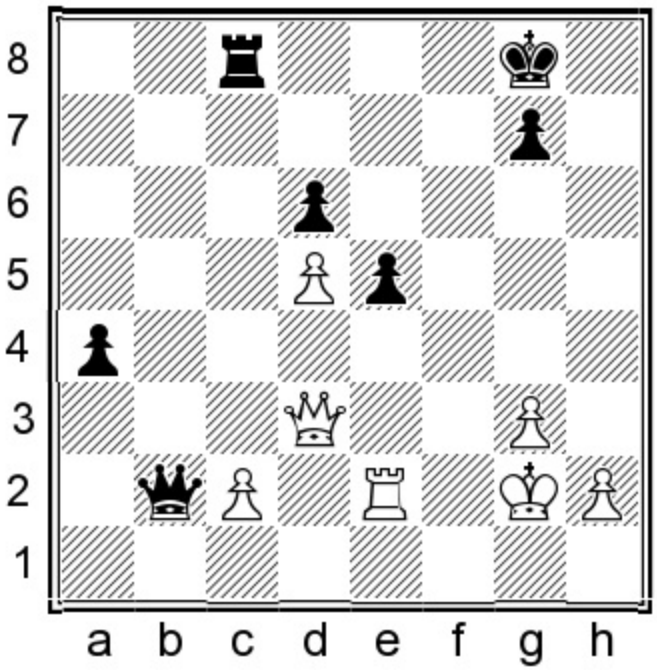
The simplest way here would have been 33...♖xc1 34.♖xc1 ♖c5!, with complete equality. But instead, the game was drawn on move 44.

5.4 Converting an advantage

In the opening and middlegame we win predominantly by delivering checkmate. A dynamic method. In the endgame, we win predominantly by promoting pawns (and then delivering checkmate). A technical method. When speaking of converting an advantage, we almost always refer to exploiting a technical advantage through technical means. More often than not, this means preventing the opponent's possibilities for counterplay. The more static the advantage is, the more this is the case. Imagine a scenario where one side has a strong passed pawn and a better pawn structure but has only one pawn protecting his king. Although the opponent may not be able to deliver checkmate, he retains the idea of perpetually harassing the opponent's king and holding the game in this way. In such a case we would frequently want to exchange queens, which would make this strategy unlikely to succeed.

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave – Anish Giri

Internet (rapid) 2021



In this rapid game, Giri lost all his advantage with 43...♕b7?! and the game was soon drawn. 44.c4∓ ♖a8 45.♕a3 ♕b6 46.♖f2 ♕c7 47.♖c2 ♕b6 48.♖f2 ♕c7 49.♖c2 ♕b6 50.♖f2 ½–½

Instead, he could have made the most out of his passed pawn by removing the queens.

43...♕d4! 44.♕xd4

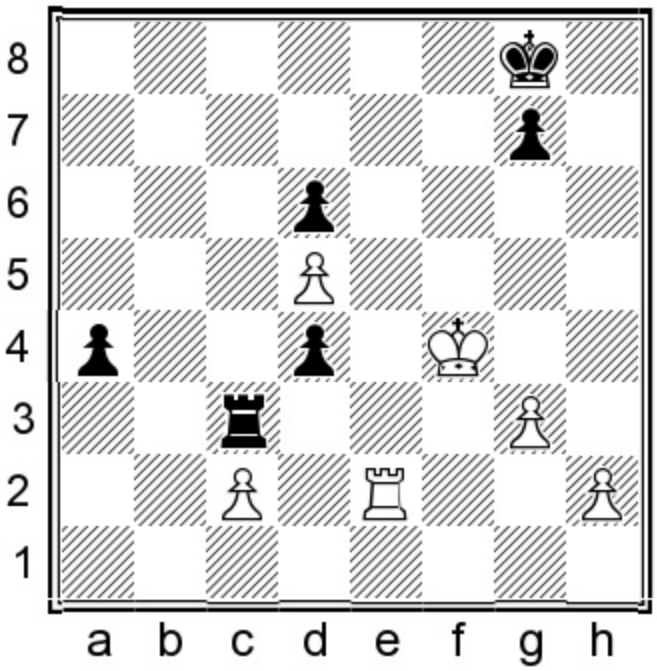
White has nothing better. For example: 44.♕b5 ♖f8 45.♔h3 a3 Black is totally winning.

44...exd4 45.♔f3

White needs to activate the king.

45...♖c3† 46.♔f4

46.♔e4? would lose on the spot to 46...♖e3†.



It is possible Giri saw this and was unsure about the evaluation of the position and believed his chances would be greater with the queens still on the board. But with the white weaknesses and passive rook, this would be a strange expectation.

However, even with powerful engines, it takes a while to work out that Black is indeed winning, and why. To the practical player this is interesting, as it can help us find new ideas we can use in future games, and because it helps strengthen our intuition.

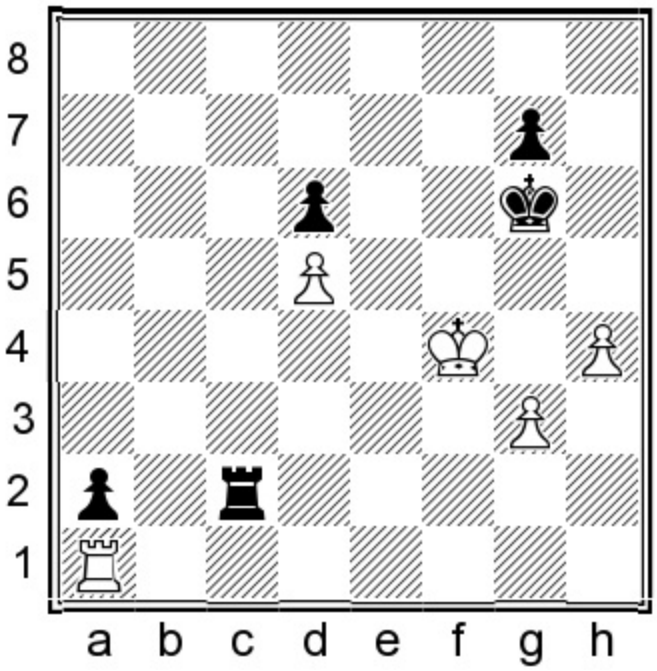
46...♔h7!!

A strange-looking move, which uses a well-known fact about king walks in chess: a straight line is not faster than a crooked one. In this case no straight line exists, but the circular move that fits standard patterns would go through the centre. Only, here it fails to a tactic.

46...♔f7? 47.♖f2! The threat of ♔e4† makes this meaningful. With the king on h7, Black would simply advance the a-pawn and look at his opponent with curiosity. Here the tempo is crucial. 47...♔g6 48.♔e4 a3 49.♔xd4 a2 50.♖f1 ♖xc2 51.h3!∓ There seems to be no forced win for Black, despite the obvious advantage.

47.h4!

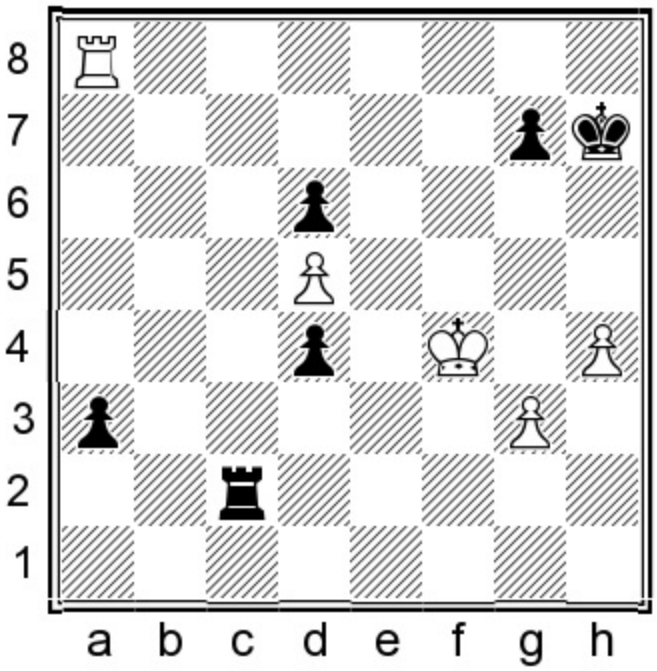
Another tough nut to crack comes after 47.♖d2 a3 48.♖xd4 a2 49.♖d1 ♖xc2 50.♖a1 ♔g6 (50...♖xh2 51.♔f5!!=) 51.h4.



It looks desirable at first sight for Black to rush with ...♖c4 and ...♖a4. But he is in grave danger of it leading to the exchange of the a3-pawn for the g3- and h4-pawns, in a situation where the white rook is active and holds the draw.

White's position is fragile, and Black can force concessions without changing the core of his position greatly. 51...♖h2! 52.g4 ♔f6 White is in in zugzwang. Advancing the pawns will drop them. Otherwise, Black will manoeuvre the rook to the a-file via b2 and a check on the fourth rank. Black's king will invade, and Black will win.

47...a3 48.♖e8 ♖xc2 49.♖a8



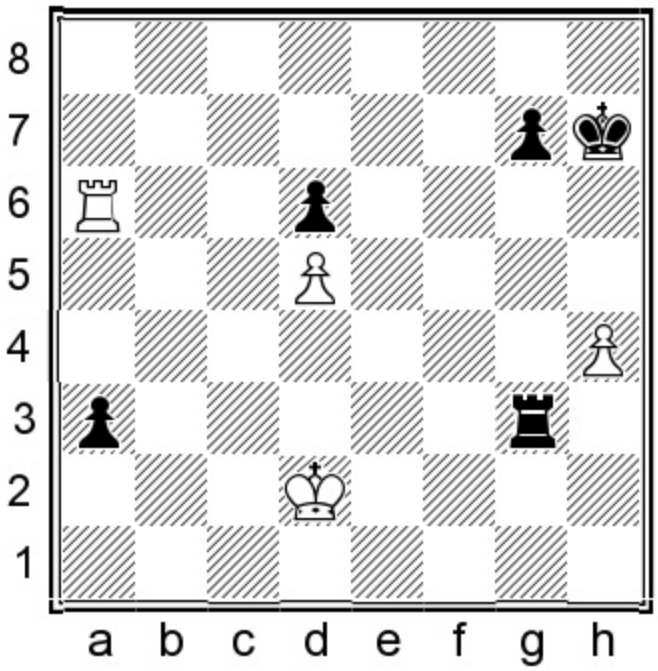
49...♖c3!!

White holds after 49...a2 50.♔e4 ♖d2 51.♖a6!. Black cannot make meaningful progress without activating the king. This cannot happen through the sixth rank, as d6 falls with check. And if the king goes to the eighth rank, White will play ♖a7 and push the kingside pawns, if the black king goes towards the queenside.

50.g4!

The best try.

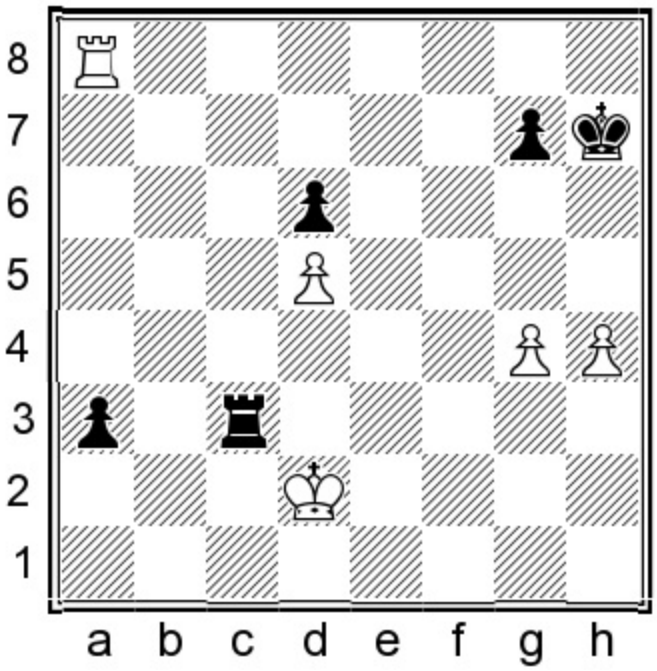
50.♖a6 d3 51.♔e3 d2† 52.♔xd2 ♖xg3 wins for Black.



The key idea is to take on h4. Meanwhile White will get the king to a2 and take the d6-pawn. But Black will put the rook on d3, clearing the path for the g-pawn.

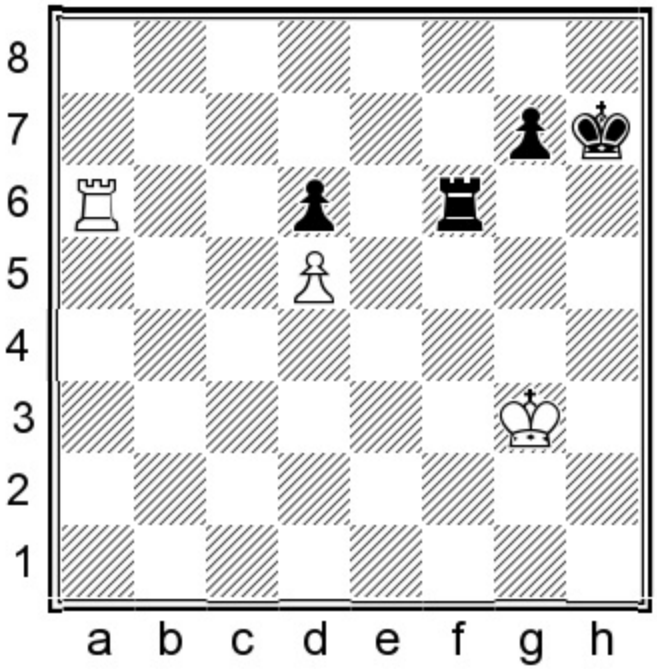
An immediate trick worth remembering is 53.♖xd6 a2 54.♖a6 ♖g1!.

50...d3 51.♔e3 d2† 52.♔xd2



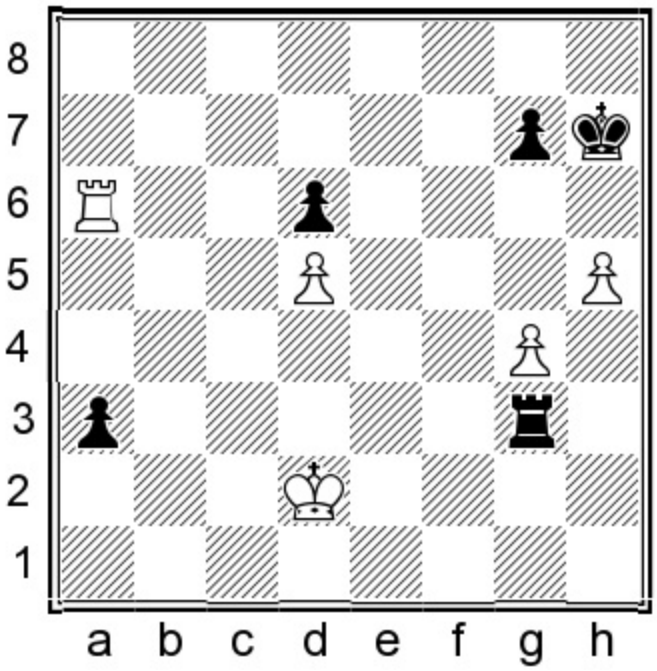
52...♖h3!

White surprisingly holds after 52...♖g3? 53.♔e2!! (53.♔e1!! works in the same way) 53...♖xg4 54.♖xa3 ♖xh4 55.♖a6 ♖h6 56.♔f3 ♖f6† 57.♔g3, kindly supplied by the tablebases.



This is deeply thematic for rook endings, where the king needs to be the passive piece and the rook the active piece, when possible.

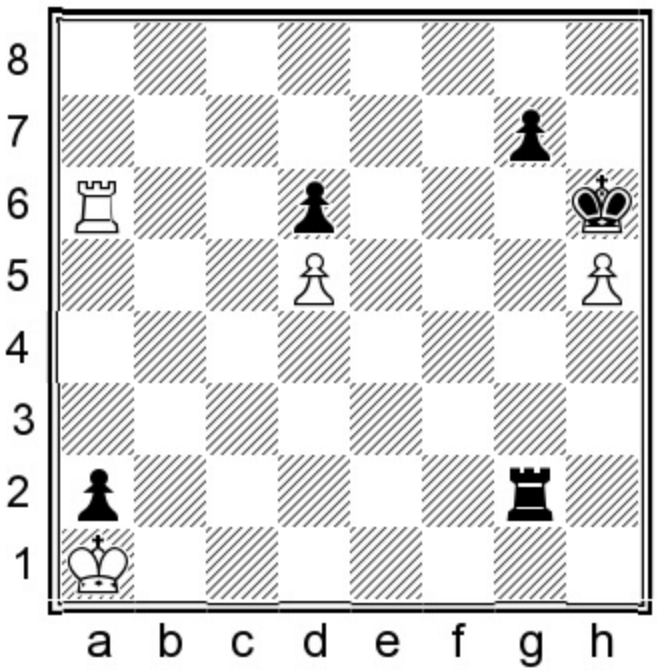
53.h5 ♖g3 54.♖a6!



54...♖xg4

Simple and good.

54...a2? would throw away the win to a stalemate variation: 55.♔c2 ♖xg4 56.♔b2 ♖g2† 57.♔a1 ♔h6



58.♖a8!! ♔xh5 59.♖h8† ♔g6 60.♖h6†! with a perpetual suicide rook.

55.♖xa3 ♖d4†

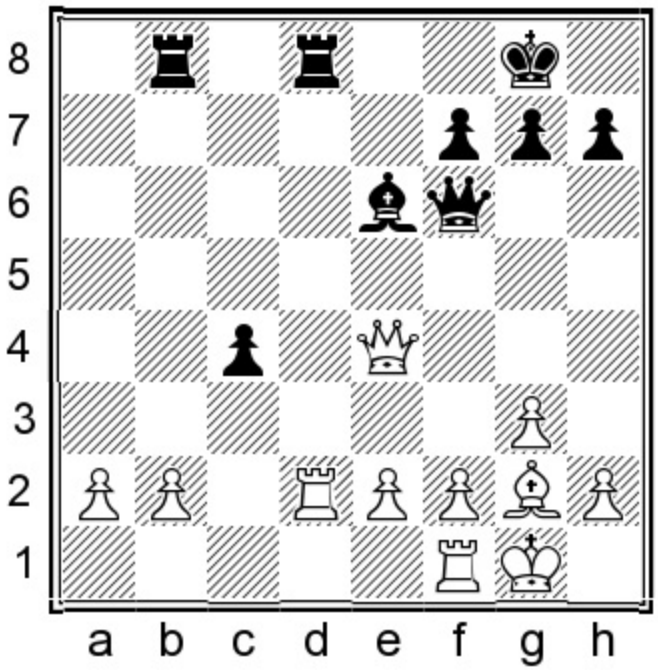
Black wins after some additional moves. Mistakes can still happen, but the magic has disappeared from the position.

5.5 Preventing counterplay

Exchanges of other pieces can help or hinder our desire to prevent counterplay. The following example is a good illustration of this. White is two pawns up, but Black is active. Being one pawn up without counterplay would be great progress.

Serguei Vesselovsky – Lucian Vantuch

Czech Republic 2022



21.♖xd8†!

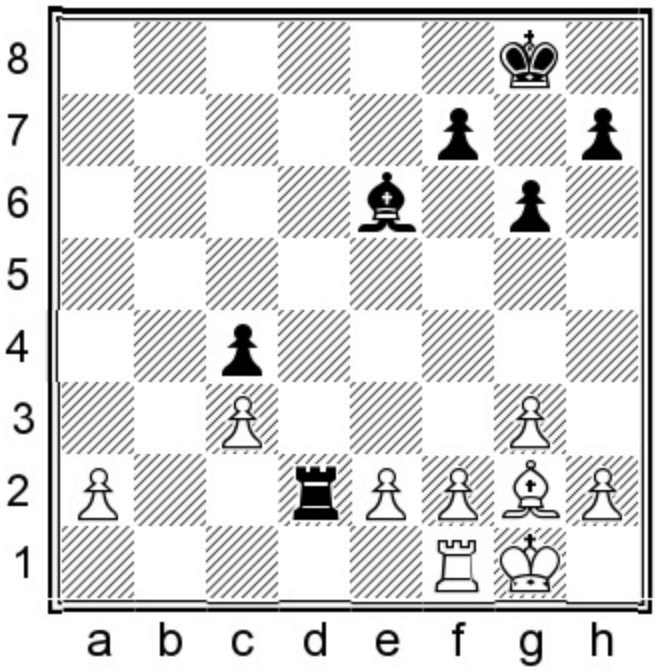
21.♖fd1? would be a serious mistake. After 21...♖xd2 22.♖xd2 c3! 23.bxc3 ♕xc3 24.♖d1 ♗xa2± it is hard to imagine a version of the endgame where White wins. All three single-piece endings should end in a draw with reasonable play.

21...♖xd8 22.♕c2 g6

22...♖b8 23.♖d1! would work in a similar way.

23.h4?

23.♕c3! would have won the game quickly. White is ready to push the queenside pawns, and after 23...♕xc3 24.bxc3 ♖d2



25.♖a1, the a-pawn is the best extra pawn you could ever dream of. 25...♗c8 26.a4 ♖xe2 27.♗f1 ♖c2 28.♗xc4 ♖xc3 29.♗f1 and White wins.

23...♕e5?

23...♖b8! was similar to the game.

24.♖c1?

White misses another chance to play 24.♕c3!. This time it is underpinned by a small tactic: 24...♕xe2?! 25.♗f3! ♕d3 26.♖d1, winning the queen.

24...♖b8 25.b3?!

White had to play 25.♕c3 ♕xe2 26.♖b1 ♕d3 27.♖e1± to retain serious winning chances. But at this point, this was unlikely to happen.

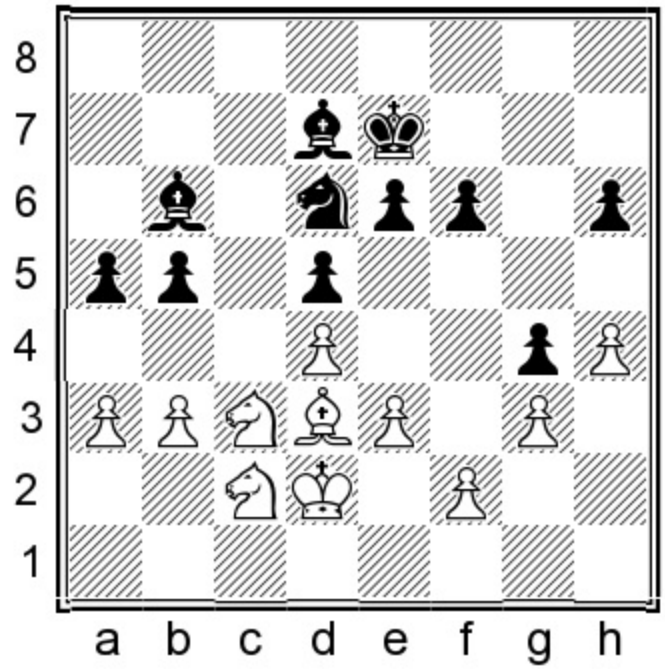
25...cxb3 26.axb3 ♖xb3 27.♗f3±

The game continued all the way until move 83 before a draw was given.

5.6 Removing defenders

In the Breakthrough/Invasion section (3.3 beginning on page 54), we spoke about exchanging pieces as a way to facilitate or assist the invasion of the opponent's position. Nowhere is this more prevalent than in the endgame, where the invasion may happen slowly and often by the king, but can be no less devastating.

Minsk 2017



In this game, White has played solidly and was heading towards a draw against his famous opponent, as long as he did not do anything to weaken his position. So, obviously, this is what he did (otherwise there is no story to tell).

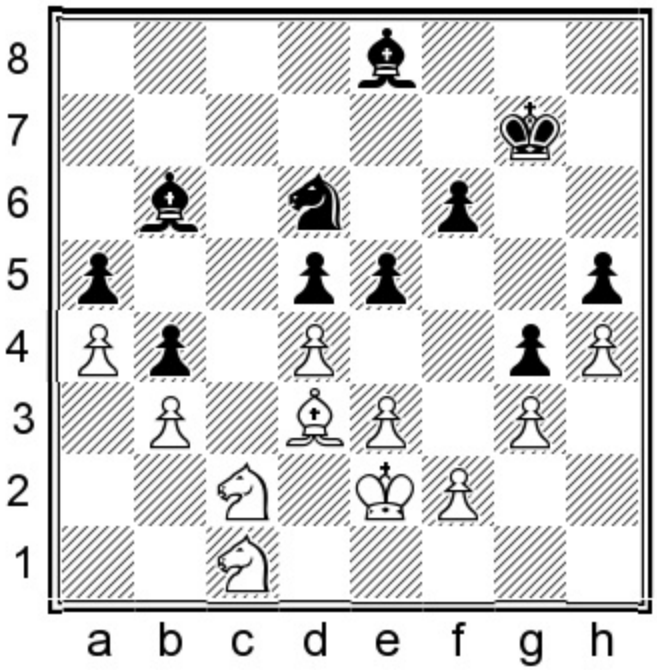
38.a4?

This is a mistake for a few reasons. White loses space and gets the pawns on the queenside fixed as weaknesses.

38...b4∓ 39.♘e2 e5

Black is happy with the changes to the pawn structure, but still fumbles greatly in his attempt to exploit it.

40.♘e1 ♗c8 41.♗b1 ♘f7 42.♗h7 ♘d8 43.♘c2 ♔d6 44.♗d3 ♘c6 45.♗g6 ♗e6 46.♗d3 ♘e7 47.♘e1 ♔c7 48.♘c2 ♘c8 49.♘c1 ♔d6 50.♗a6 ♘e7 51.♗d3 ♗d7 52.♘e2 ♔e6 53.♘c1 ♘f5 54.♘e2 ♘d6 55.♘c1 ♔f7 56.♘e2 ♔g7 57.♘c1 h5 58.♘e2 ♗c6 59.♘c1 ♗e8 60.♔e2



Black may not have played all the best moves to reach this position, but White clearly was playing a waiting game, so there was no need to rush.

We can see that because of the way the pawn structure is constructed, Black will have to invade the position on the light squares with his king. In order to do this, an exchange of light-squared bishops is in order. This was far from obvious to our students, who were too reluctant to give up the bishop pair. But remember, a core advantage of having the two bishops is that in most cases, you get to choose where and when one of them is exchanged.

60...♗g6! 61.♗xg6 ♔xg6 62.♘d3 ♔f5 63.♘c5

Understandable desperation.

63...♗xc5 64.dxc5 ♘e4 65.c6 ♔e6 66.♘e1 ♔d6 67.♘d3 ♔xc6 68.♔d1 ♘c5 69.♘c1 ♔d6 70.♔c2 ♔e6 71.♘d3 ♘xd3 72.♔xd3 f5 73.♔e2 f4

0–1

5.7 Pawn exchanges in the endgame

As described above, the general guideline of pawn exchanges in the endgame is that the defender seeks them, as the chance of pawns queening are reduced with their disappearance. But with anything that is generalised, it is not always the case. An “on the other hand” argument is the theme of “broadening”, where the exchange of pawns create a path for invasion.

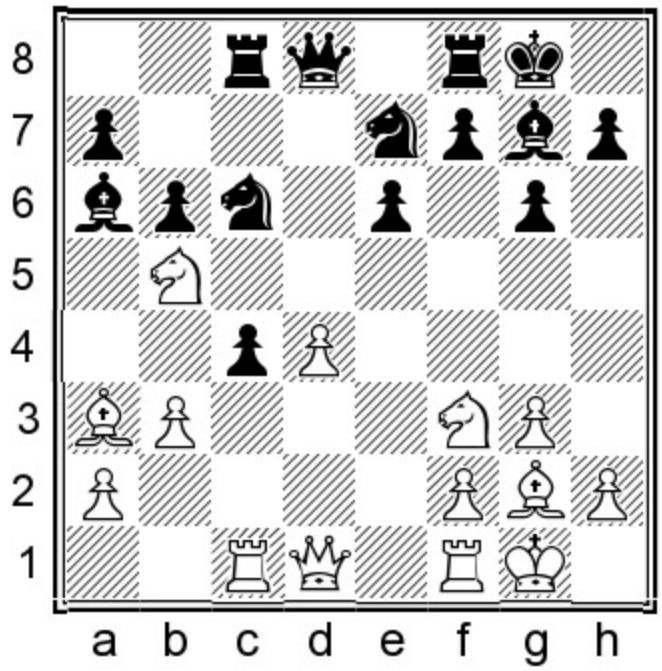
The following game is an advanced example, played between two of the shining lights of the new

generation. There are interesting questions about the exchange of both pieces and pawns, with some decisions being deeply complicated and tactical and some of them less so.

Nodirbek Abdusattorov – Parham Maghsoodloo

Belgrade 2022

1.c4 c5 2.g3 g6 3.♗g2 ♘c6 4.♘c3 ♗g7 5.♘f3 d6 6.0-0 e6 7.e3 ♘ge7 8.d4 0-0 9.♖b1 b6 10.b3 ♗a6 11.♗a3 ♖c8 12.♖c1 d5 13.♘b5 cxd4 14.exd4 dxc4

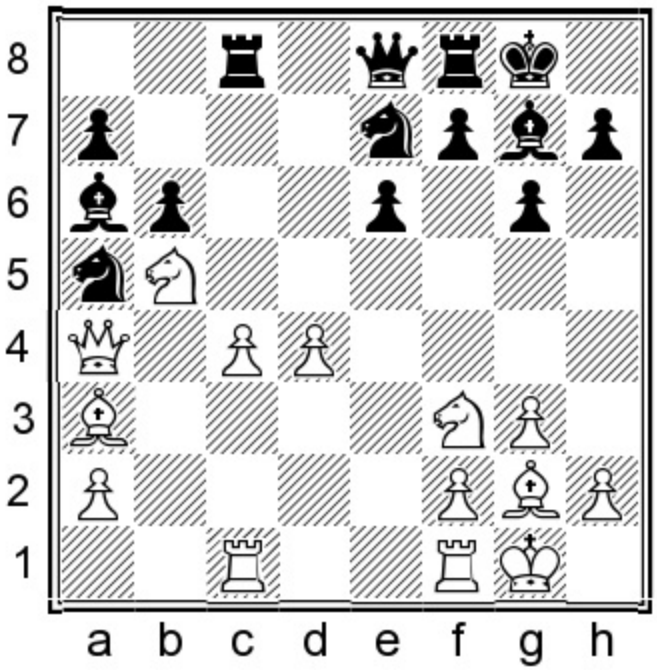


15.bxc4?!

Things are going wrong for White in the opening.

At this point, it was time to pull on the brakes with 15.♘d6 ♖c7 16.bxc4 ♖d7 17.♕a4 ♘a5 18.♘b5, when White keeps the balance.

15...♘a5 16.♕a4 ♕e8!



White is in trouble and already had to look for the exit. Abdusattorov was surely aware of this, but struggled to find it.

17.♘d2?

This allows a combination which is difficult to evaluate, and the players struggled to find the best moves in the complications.

White had a desperate operation, aiming to exchange pawns to limit the chances of them being lost.

17.♗xe7!

A rather strange-looking move, based entirely on tactics.

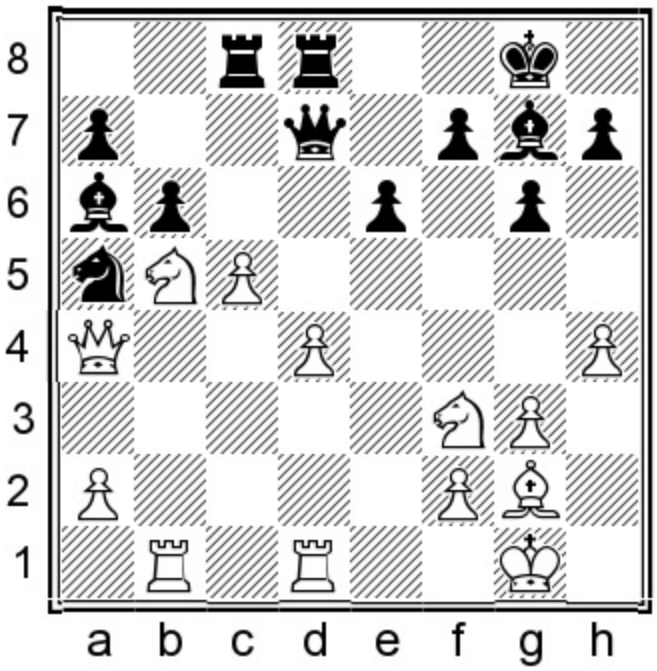
17...♕xe7 18.c5 ♕e8

18...♕d7?! 19.c6! leads to complications Black had better avoid.

19.♖b1 ♕d7

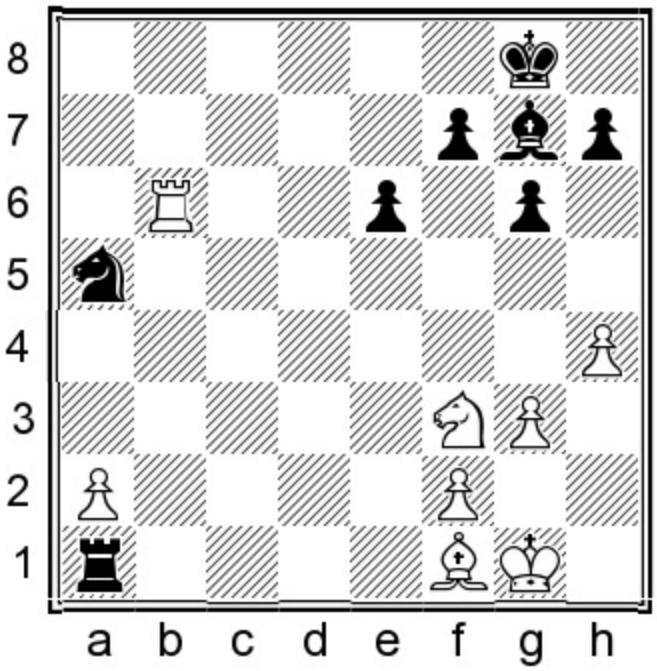
Now this is playable.

20.♖fd1 ♖fd8 21.h4

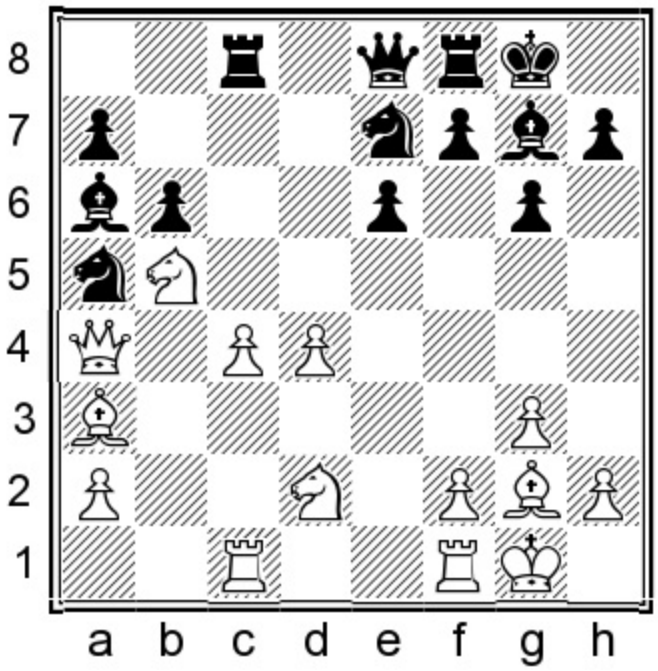


Creating a spot for the king, waiting for Black to do something. The key point is that White is kind of OK after:

21...♗xb5 22.♕xb5 ♕xb5 23.♖xb5 ♖xc5 24.dxc5 ♖xd1† 25.♗f1 ♖a1 26.cxb6 axb6 27.♖xb6∓



The endgame will of course require defending from White, but the combination of the opposite-coloured bishops and absence of pawns on the queenside makes it hard for Black to exploit his extra pawn.



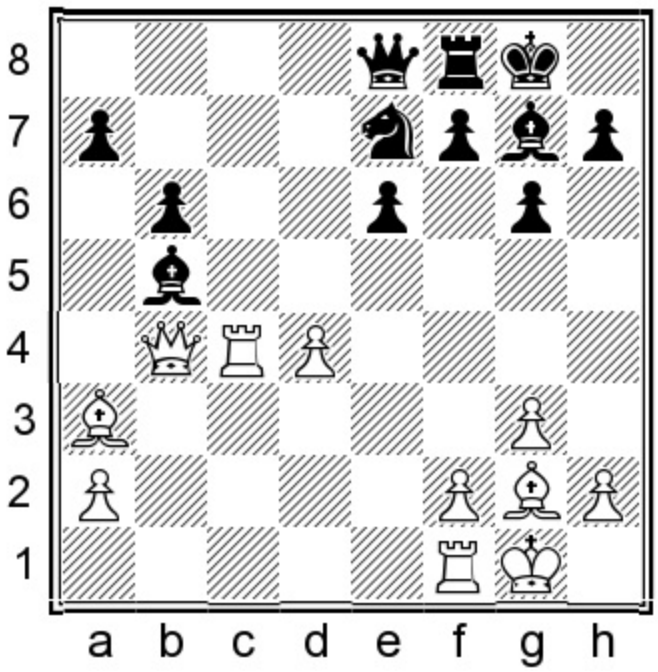
17...♖xc4!

A not-too-difficult tactic that both players were anticipating. The challenges follow.

18.♘xc4 ♗xb5 19.♕b4 ♘xc4!

19...♗xc4?! would be weaker. After 20.♕xe7 ♗xf1 21.♗xf1 ♕xe7 22.♗xe7 ♖e8 23.♗b4 ♗xd4, White needs to think deeply whether he wants to try to make a draw with opposite-coloured bishops or continue with compensation with 24.♖c7∓.

20.♖xc4



20...♗xc4?

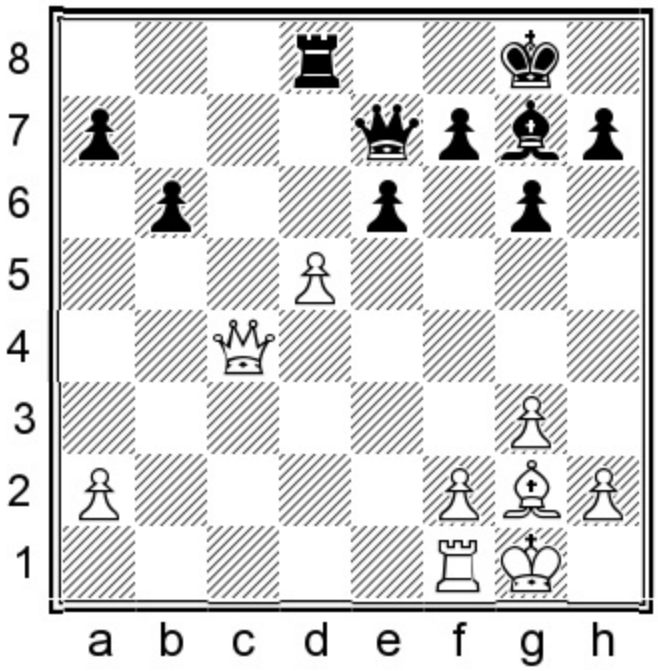
Black was confused about the position after 20...a5! 21.♕b3 ♗xc4 22.♕xc4 b5 23.♕c5. A deeper look shows that Black is better after both 23...♘d5!? 24.♗xd5 exd5 25.♕xd5 b4 and 23...♘f5!. After the latter, White has to play either 24.d5!?, where he will end up a clear pawn down, or 24.♗c6 ♕b8! 25.♕xb5 ♘xd4, where Black with active play has better pieces, as well as an extra pawn. Still, this seems the best White can get.

21.♕xc4 ♕d7

White is a pawn down but has the chance to create counterplay through simple exchanges.

22.♗xe7! ♕xe7 23.d5! ♖d8?

23...e5! was the move – see below.



24.♖c1?

A truly astonishing move. Both players are confused about the value of the exchange of the d- and e-pawns, showing to the rest of us how difficult this is.

There is no downside to taking on e6. Black is left with a weak pawn and three pawn islands. The main weakness is the e-pawn, which is easy to attack for White with his light-squared bishop or would be blocking the black bishop if it advances to e5.

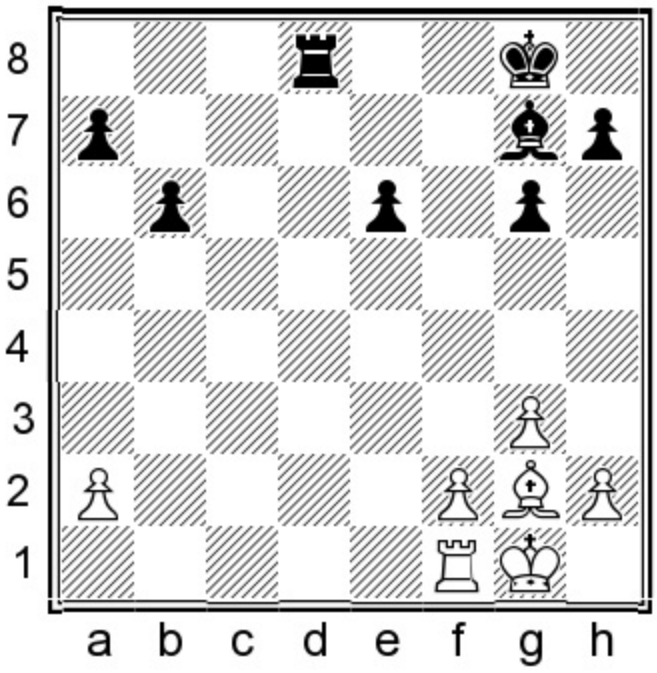
Perhaps the players were wondering if there was a possibility for Black to attack f2 after the opening of the f-line.

24.dxe6! We now have two different directions.

a) 24...fxe6 25.♖e1 ♖d6 26.♗h3 followed by ♗g4, h2-h4 and ♔g2 should give White an easy draw.

Black is tied down and cannot make meaningful progress.

b) 24...♕xe6!? It is difficult for us to judge which recapture the players were considering. It is even possible they had different expectations. 25.♕xe6 fxe6



26.♖c1! Perhaps the most accurate move. White should play for activity.

It is important to understand that 26...♗d4 27.♗h3 e5 28.♖c8! is an easy draw at this level. While it could be lost in a blitz game, in this game White would not struggle to contain the extra pawn on the queenside.

And after 26...♖d2 27.♗h3 ♗d4 28.♗xe6† ♔f8 29.♖c7 ♖xf2 30.♔h1 White even wins back the pawn.

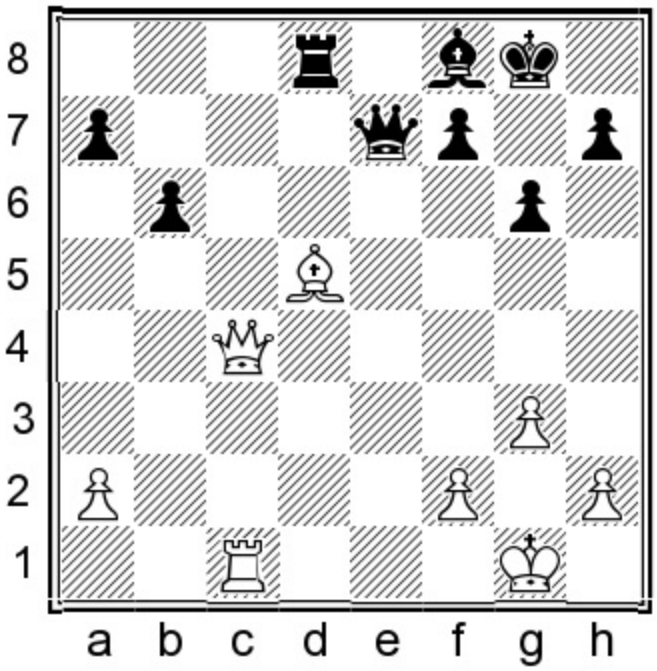
24...exd5?

Black goes for the second of the three options available regarding the pawn exchange. It is certainly not as poor as the previous option (of allowing a weak pawn on e6) but at the same time it is worse than the third alternative (of bypassing the exchange altogether).

24...e5! was the right move. Long term Black wants to put the bishop on d6 and be able to play around the d5-pawn. His two pawn majorities on the flanks will give him a lot of practical chances, even if objectively White is still well within the drawing margin.

One of the important things to understand about these positions is that Black will advance his pawns on the light squares, especially on the kingside. He needs to fight for them, and it can only be done with pawns, due to the material configuration.

25.♗xd5 ♗f8



The following endgame does not have a lot to do with making exchanges; rather it is the result of the decisions made on exchanges. When we saw this position (live), we debated the objective evaluation and came to the agreement that it would surely be a draw with correct play, while we had different opinions on how easy it would be. Jacob felt that the draw should be easy enough with precise play, while Renier was mainly confused.

Let's talk about the main way for White to make a draw. First of all, exchanges of rooks or queens would benefit White, making the defence easier. The exchange of both sets of heavy material would make the draw effortless.

Otherwise, the main strategy would be to not panic. Black has an extra pawn on the queenside, but it should be able to be restrained with reasonable play. On the other hand, White is no weaker on the kingside and could reasonably seek to direct as much of the play to this flank.

The position should be a draw and is quite far from the zone of one mistake at this point (where one small mistake could easily lose the game). Thus, the focus should be on improving the position.

26.♕d4?!

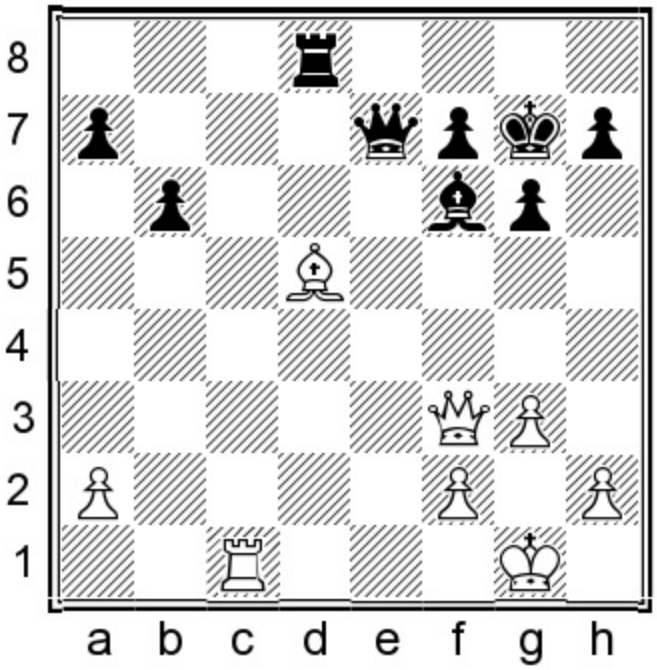
White is not off to a great start, looking for tricks.

26.♔g2! followed by ♖d1, ♕f4 and h2-h4 would organise the white pieces in such a way that would tie Black down to the defence of f7, as well as focus the play on the kingside.

26...♗g7

26...♖d6! would have been a nice way to coordinate the pieces.

27.♕d3 ♗f6 28.♕f3 ♔g7



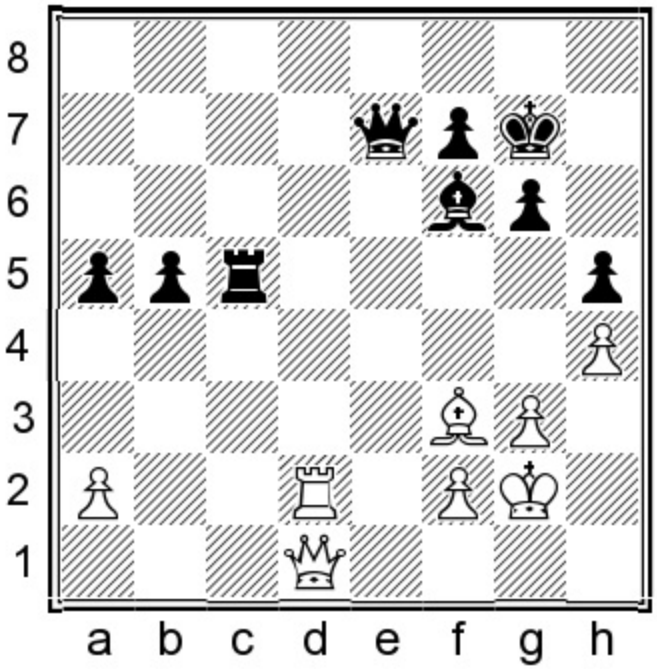
29.♖c6?

You could imagine White proving the viability of his position with:

29.h4 h5 30.♔g2 b5 31.♖d1 ♖c8 32.♖d2

Black is of course better. He has an extra pawn. But it is also not an emergency. The next step would be to create counterplay down the d-file.

32...♖c5 33.♕d1! a5 34.♗f3



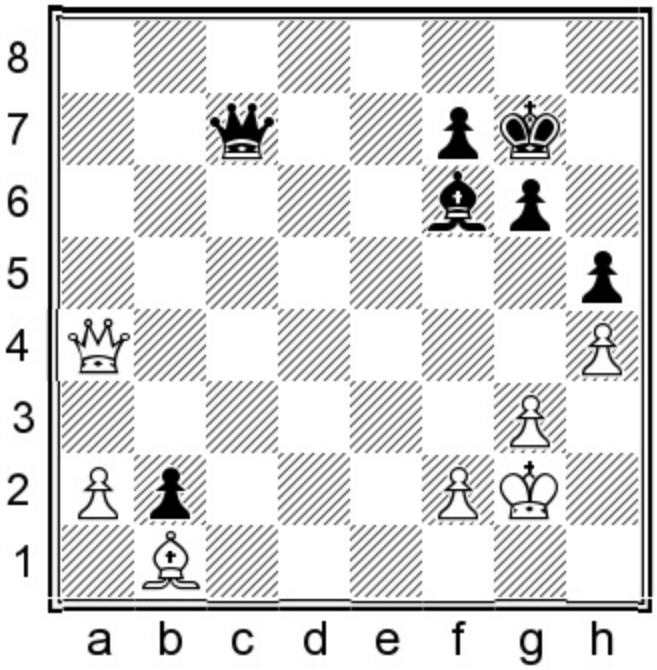
34...a4

The most testing move. White is ready to play 35.♖d5 against almost everything else.

35.♖d7 ♕e6 36.♖d6!

The constant harassment is the point.

36...♕c4 37.♗d5 ♕c3 38.♖d7 ♖c7 39.♗e4 ♕e5 40.♖xc7 ♕xc7 41.♕d3 b4 42.♕b5 b3 43.♕xa4 b2 44.♗b1



White has created a fortress and will hold the game. Black should try, but the draw is near.

29...♗d4?!

Transferring the bishop to c5 is one of the key plans with this move, pushing back the white rook. But from c5 the bishop plays mostly on the kingside and the white rook is not really trapped.

Rather Black should have played 29...b5!∓, when White would not be well placed to harass the advancing black pawns on the queenside.

30.♖c2

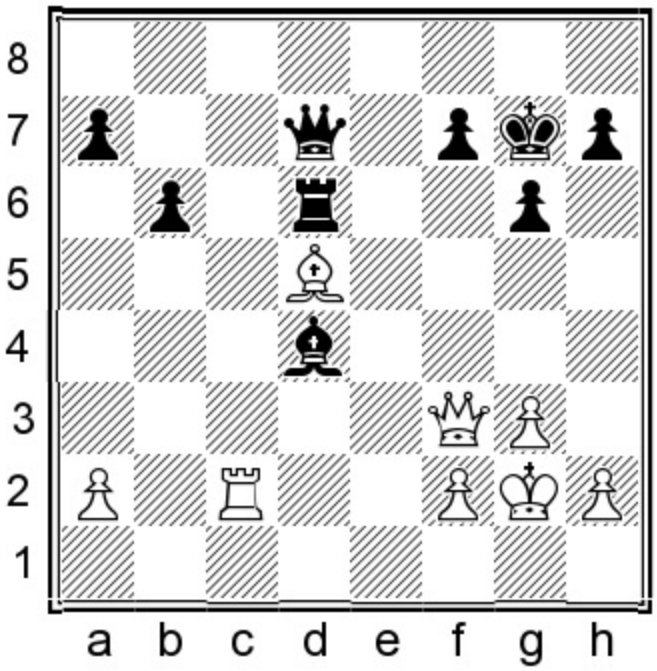
Retreating the rook, afraid it would get cut off from the defence of the second rank.

But White can play actively and will have no problems: 30.♔g2! with the idea 30...♗c5 31.h4! h5 (not forced) 32.♕c3† ♔h7 33.♕f3, and Black has no advantage whatsoever.

30...♖d6!

The rook has more options from here and leaves space for the queen.

31.♔g2 ♕d7



Although Black has made progress, at its core the white position is still fundamentally sound. But it is time to find a good move to prove this.

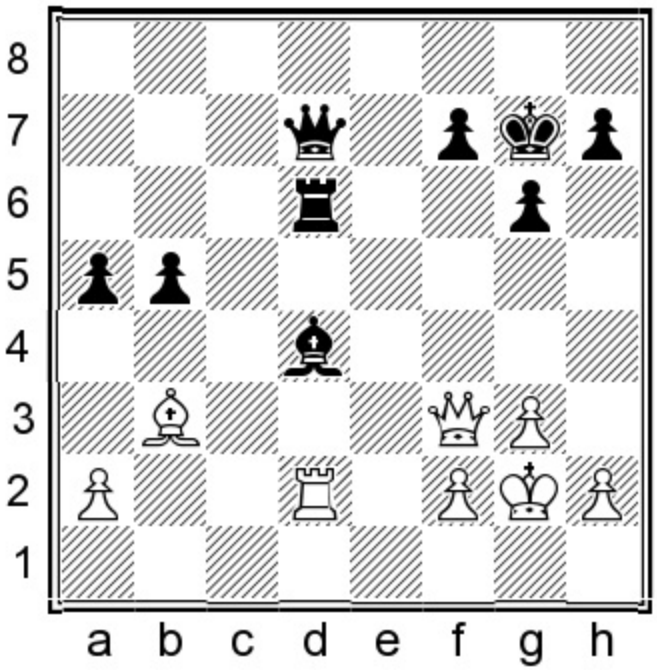
32.♗b3?!

32.♗c6! was strongest. The key idea is to disrupt Black's coordination and place the bishop so it makes the advance on the queenside difficult. It is possible to add variations to this move, but it is not a move that should be found with calculation, but rather on general grounds.

32...b5!∓

Black is able to advance on the queenside where he is stronger. This has happened without him having to suffer any costs.

33.♖d2 a5



The position was already difficult for White and in mutual time shortage, he now seems to play for a trick.

There were a few different ways to hold the position together, although the good old days of forced exchanges into holdable endings are all gone.

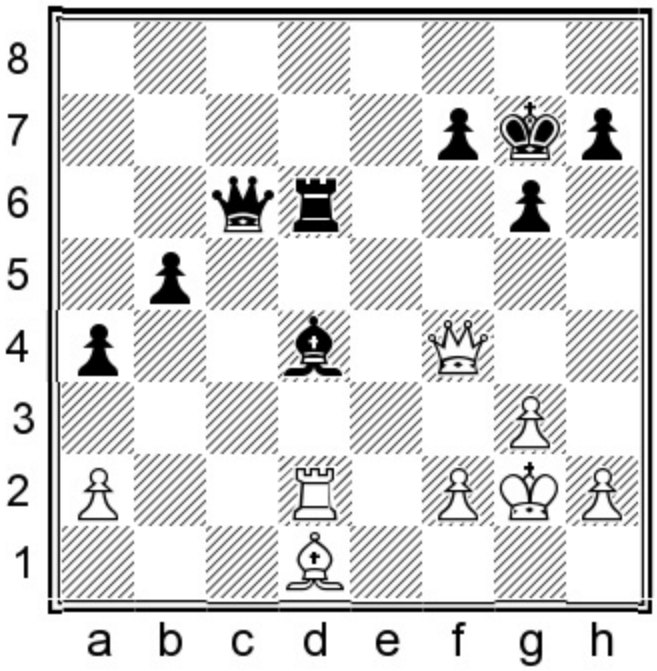
One of these would be the anticipation move 34.♗d1!?∓ with the specific point that 34...a4?! 35.♕a3! would make it difficult for Black to make progress. Black would have to balance advancing on both flanks and White would have plenty of chances to go wrong.

34.♕f4? a4 35.♗d1

The position is most likely already beyond salvaging, but at this moment, the bishop was marginally better placed on c2 according to Stockfish.

However, the key point is that the trick did not work and Black wins instantly after 35.♗xf7 g5!.

35...♕c6†!



It is too late to come up with good advice for White.

36.♗f3

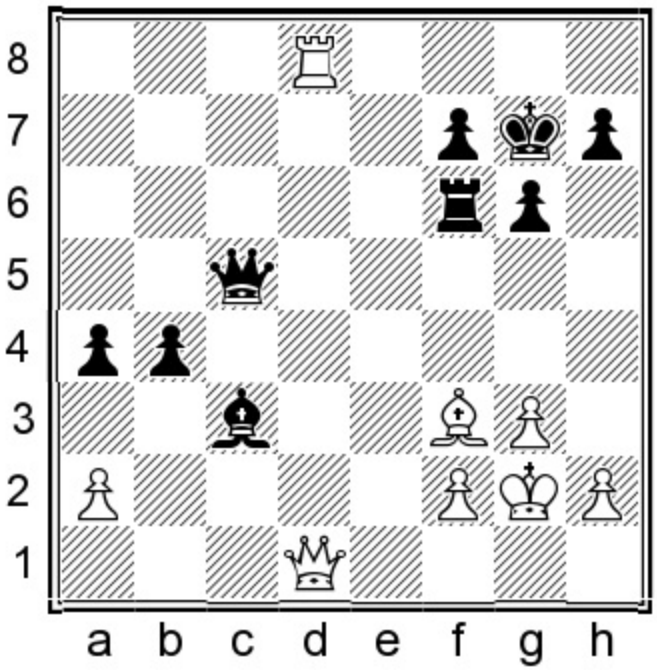
36.♔g1? would lose on the spot to 36...♕c3!.

36.♕f3 may have been the toughest practical test, but Black still wins with accurate play: 36...♕c5 37.♕e4!? ♗xf2 38.♖xd6 ♕xd6 39.♔xf2 ♕xd1 40.♕e5† f6 41.♕xb5 ♕d4† 42.♔g2 ♕e4† 43.♔f2 g5! 44.♕b2 h5 Black will soon create further weaknesses on the white kingside.

36...♕c5

The white position has collapsed. For example, he would lose after 37.♗d1 ♗e5! 38.♕g5 f6.

37.♕e4 b4 38.♕b1 ♖f6 39.♕d1 ♗c3! 40.♖d8



40...b3 41.axb3 a3 42.♖a8 ♖d6! 43.b4 ♗xb4 44.♕a1† ♔h6 45.♗b7 ♕b6 46.♗e4 ♖d2 47.♕e1 ♕d4 48.♖a4 a2 49.♗f3 ♖c2

0–1

5.8 A look at a general endgame

The following game is not between titled players, but it is good at showing some basic considerations.

Pedro Gil Ferreira Silva – Silvia Donate Moreno

Sitges 2020

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.c3 ♘f6 4.h3

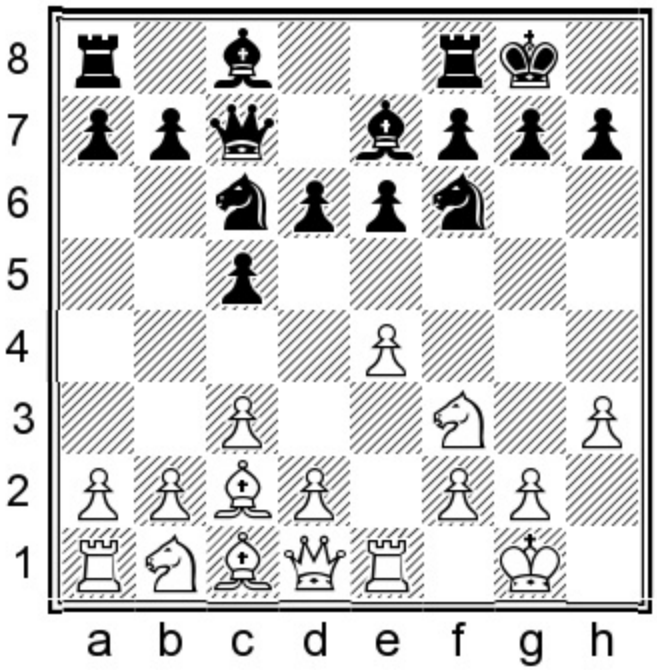
The Kopec Variation, which many have played, but which is not particularly good.

4...♘c6 5.♗d3 e6

Black could play 5...d5 6.e5 ♘d7 with a good game.

6.♗c2 ♗e7 7.0-0 0-0 8.♖e1 ♕c7?

Often in the Sicilian, the queen belongs on this square. But not in this instance.



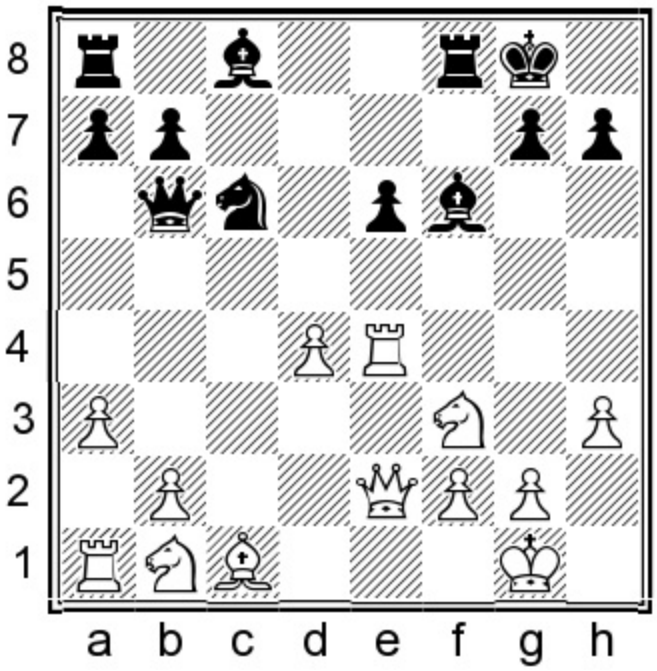
9.d4 cxd4 10.cxd4 ♘b4 11.♗b3± d5 12.e5 ♘e4 13.a3 ♘c6 14.♗c2 f5 15.exf6! ♗xf6 16.♗xe4!?

White decides to go for the extra pawn. He could also play positionally with 16.♗e3.

16...dxe4 17.♖xe4 ♕b6 18.♕e2?

Giving back the pawn with good intentions but missing a detail.

White should have brought out the pieces with 18.♘c3 ♗d7 19.♗e3!±, when White has a full extra pawn, on account of: 19...♕xb2 20.♘a4 ♕b5 21.♘c5 and 22.♖b1.



18...♘xd4?

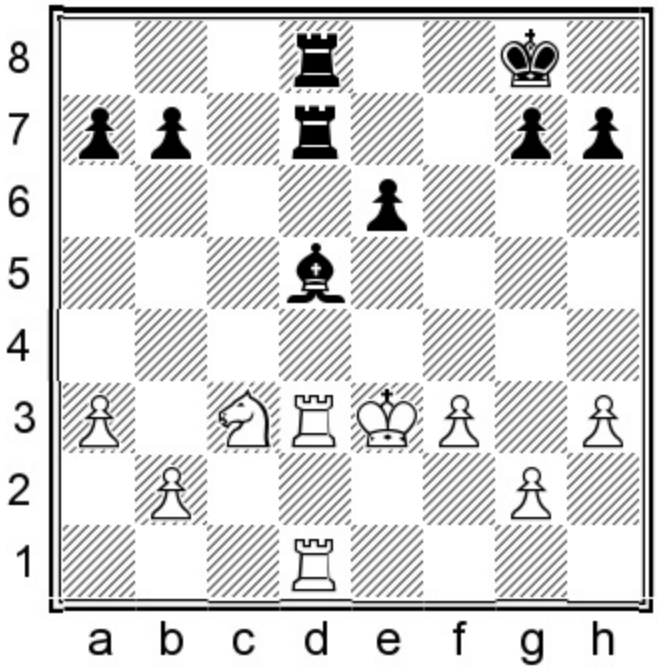
18...♗xd4! was stronger, when Black is fine. The text move enables White to neutralize any

counterplay, while leaving Black with a weak e-pawn and the wrong bishop.

19.♘xd4 ♗xd4 20.♗e3± ♗xe3 21.♖xe3 ♗d7 22.♘c3 ♖f7 23.f3

23.♖d1! was stronger.

23...♗c6 24.♕f2 ♗d5 25.♖d3 ♕xf2† 26.♔xf2 ♖d7 27.♖ad1 ♖ad8 28.♔e3±



The key moment to understand the game. White is better, but Black's position is certainly defensible. He has only one weakness and the bishop is not really weak on d5. If he improved the position of his king, he should hold without too many difficulties.

Instead, he decides to exchange the rooks, making the difference between the bishop and the knight greater.

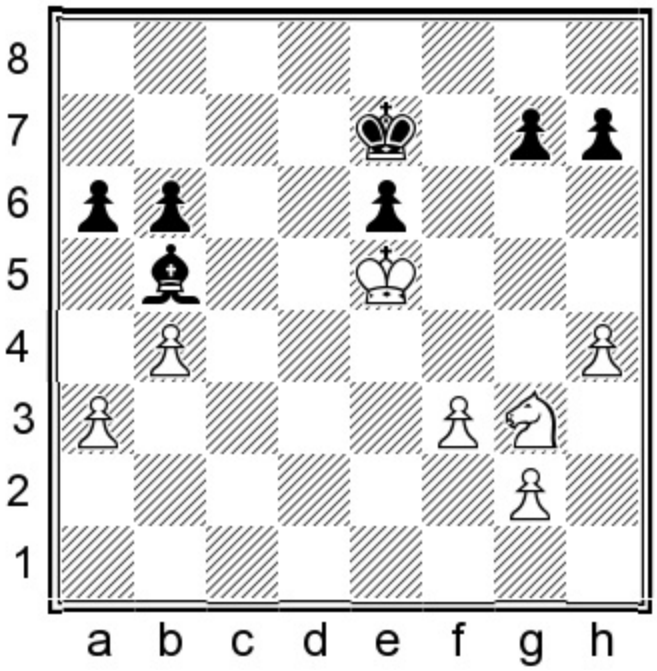
28...♗c6? 29.♖xd7 ♖xd7 30.♖xd7 ♗xd7 31.♔d4 ♔f7 32.♔e5 ♔e7

White is winning but has to find a way to improve his position. Transferring the knight to d6 first would be a good start.

33.b4 a6 34.♘e2?

It is not clear where the knight is going. Get the knight to d6 and Black is toast.

34...♗b5! 35.♘g3 b6 36.h4



36...g6?

A horrible move, weakening the dark squares everywhere. The follow-up makes things even worse.

Both 36...h6 and 36...a5 would be natural moves. Black would still have to defend, but the draw is well within reach.

37.♘e4 h5?

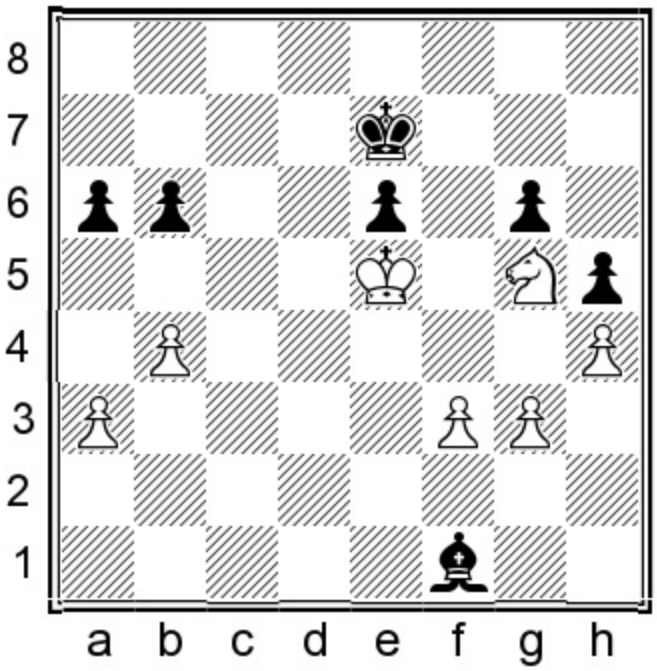
37...♗f1 38.g4 ♗e2 would let Black keep fighting.

38.♘d6 ♗f1 39.g3

39.♘c8†! would create an extra pawn on the queenside. Black is just dead. The g2-pawn is a worthy sacrifice.

39...♔d7 40.♘e4 ♔e7 41.♘g5?

The knight still belonged on d6.



41...♗e2!

White must give up something he is sad to lose; like the ability to play g3-g4 to create a weakness on h5. If White waits, Black will play ...♗d1 and do the same.

42.f4 ♗c4 43.♘f3 a5 44.♔d4 ♗b5 45.bxa5 bxa5 46.♔c5 ♗d3?

Black could have drawn with active play: 46...♗e2 47.♘d4 ♗g4 and however White wins the a-pawn, Black will play ...e6-e5 and start to liquidate the pawns on the kingside, before giving up the bishop for the a-pawn.

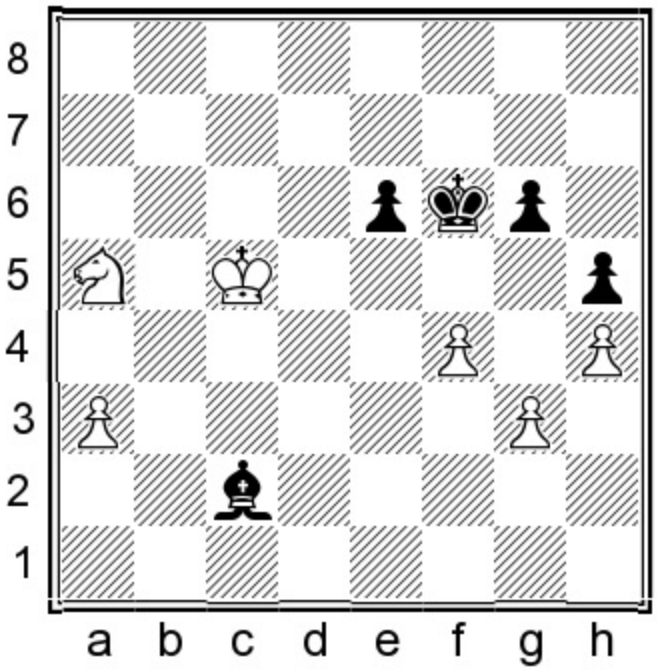
47.♘e5?

47.a4! was winning. White will be able to win the a-pawn, while still putting the knight on e5 with full control.

47...♗c2!

Preparing to defend the a-pawn with the bishop. If the knight comes over to win the pawn, Black will get a free hand on the kingside.

48.♘c6† ♔f6 49.♘xa5



49...e5?

A blunder. The knight will quickly get to e3 with full control.

49...♔f5! 50.♘c4 ♔e4 would have given Black the necessary counterplay to make a draw.

50.♘c4 exf4 51.gxf4 ♔f5

This has to be tried but does not work.

52.♘e3† ♔xf4 53.♘xc2 g5 54.hxg5 h4 55.g6 h3 56.g7 h2 57.g8=♕ h1=♕ 58.♕f7† ♔g5 59.♕d5† 1–0

5.9 Be practical

The following internet rapid game shows the need to discuss practical aspects as well as basic evaluations. The difference after Black gets a big advantage is not between two paths of unequal value, but of unequal obstacles. If you choose the less practical path and still win against the World Champion, there is no real space for criticism. But too often, he will escape, as happened in this game.

Magnus Carlsen – Nodirbek Abdusattorov

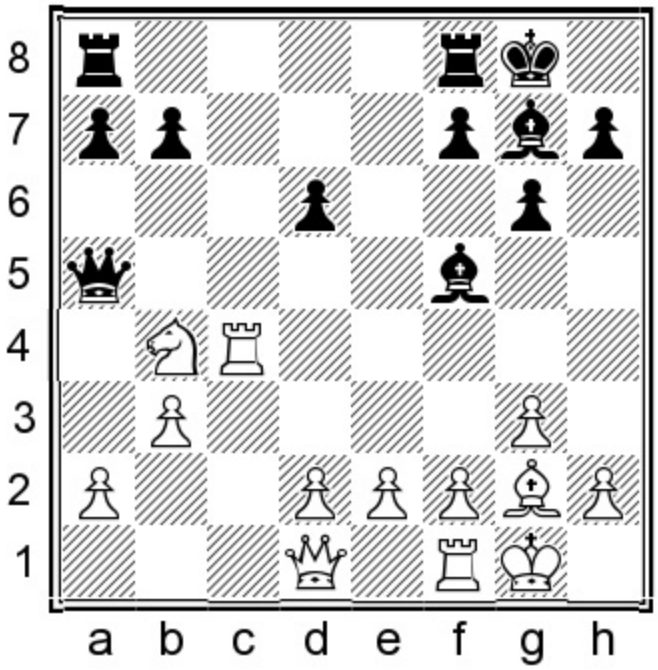
Internet (rapid) 2022

1.g3 ♘f6 2.♗g2 d5 3.♘f3 g6 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c4 dxc4 6.♘a3 c5 7.♘xc4 ♘c6 8.b3 0-0 9.♗a3 ♘e4 10.♖c1 ♘b4 11.♘fe5 ♘d6 12.♘xd6 exd6 13.♗xb4 cxb4 14.♘d3! ♕a5 15.♖c4?

An idea which does not work.

15.♘f4 ♕xa2 16.e3! and 17.d4 would have made life very difficult for Black. The rook will soon land on c7. And after 16...♕a5 17.d4 White is ready for ♘d5 and ♖b1, winning back the b4-pawn.

15...♗f5 16.♘xb4?



It is possible Carlsen simply blundered Black's reply. He is prone to this type of mistake.

16...♗e6!

The rook is out of squares and White goes from better to worse in a heartbeat.

17.♘c2?

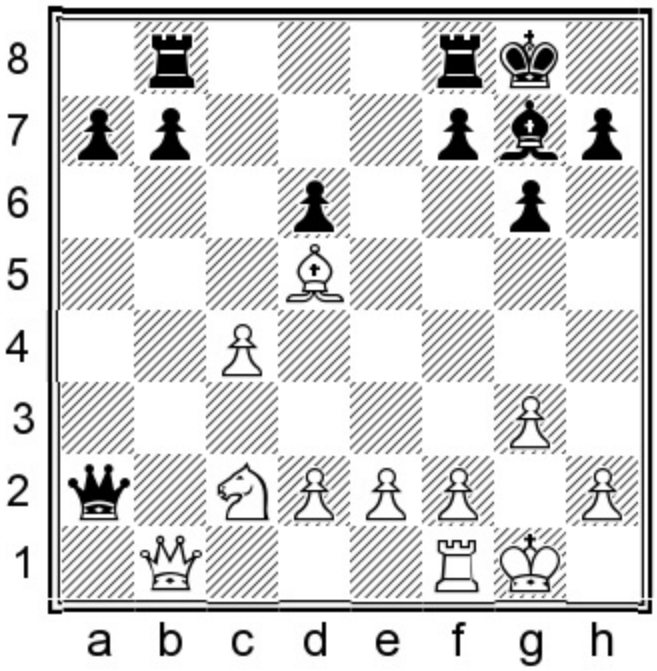
The knight is out of play.

17.♕b1! was strongest. Black could try 17...d5!?∓, playing for activity rather than material advantage.

17...♗xc4 18.bxc4 ♕xa2 19.♗d5

White cannot even take on b7, as the rook would be devastating on the second rank.

19...♖ab8 20.♕b1



The big moment of decision. Whom would the exchange of queens favour? Objectively there is nothing wrong with what Abdusattorov played, but in practice we shall see that it relies on tactical accuracy later, something you cannot be assured of, especially in a rapid game.

The guiding principle for good technical play that Jacob was taught by Dvoretsky and Yusupov is the prevention of counterplay. If you are already winning, make sure that the fight ends, and that time does most of the work for you.

At this point, with this in the back of our mind, exchanging the queens seems more practical.

20...♕a5

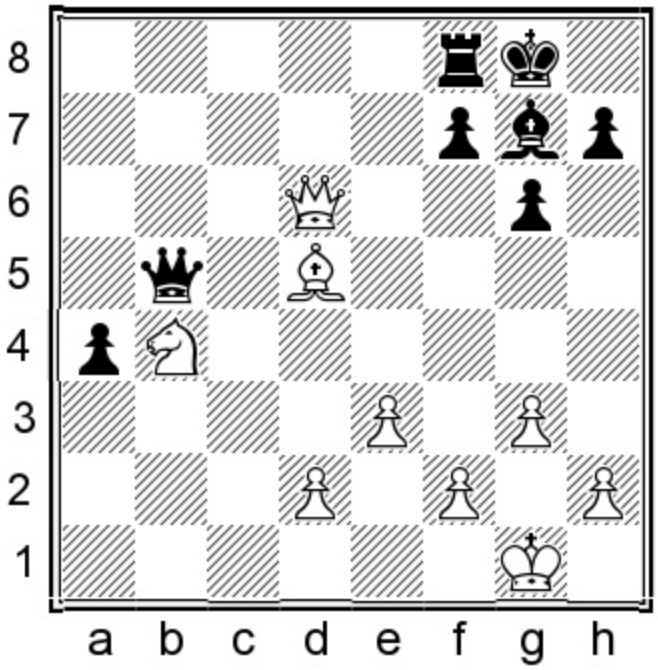
20...♕xb1!? 21.♖xb1 ♖fc8 22.♘a3 a6 followed by ...b5 or ...♖c5-a5, gives a worse score on the Stockfish score board, but just how many points do you need to win by? Of course, had Black played like this and not won, other critics would have pointed to the scoreboard and claimed this was the mistake... But remember that a strategy is not wrong just because the outcome is bad. However, it also does not mean that it is good.

Look at the game and judge for yourself. Would the game be easier to win without queens, because "in the long run..."? Or does keeping the queens on help Black restrict the counterplay on the queenside in the short run, which spills into an easier position to play in the long run?

Sometimes, it is a debate with no correct answers. Which does not mean we should not understand the arguments!

21.♘b4 ♕a4 22.♖c1 ♖fc8 23.e3 a5 24.♘d3 b5 25.cxb5 ♖xc1† 26.♕xc1 ♕xb5 27.♕c7 ♖f8 28.♕xd6

a4 29.♘b4



29...a3

29...♗e5! was strong. But it relies on a single tempo. 30.♕xe5 ♕xb4 31.d4 a3 32.h4 ♕b1† 33.♔g2 a2 34.h5 White to play here would win. But it is not his turn. 34...a1=♕ 35.h6 ♕h1#

30.d4 ♗f6

30...♔h8! made a lot of sense. Get the king out of the firing range. This is a similar mistake to Abdusattorov's loss to Maghsoodloo above; except you cannot call either of the moves a mistake. But again, practicality matters more.

31.♗a2 ♕b8 32.♕c5 ♔g7?

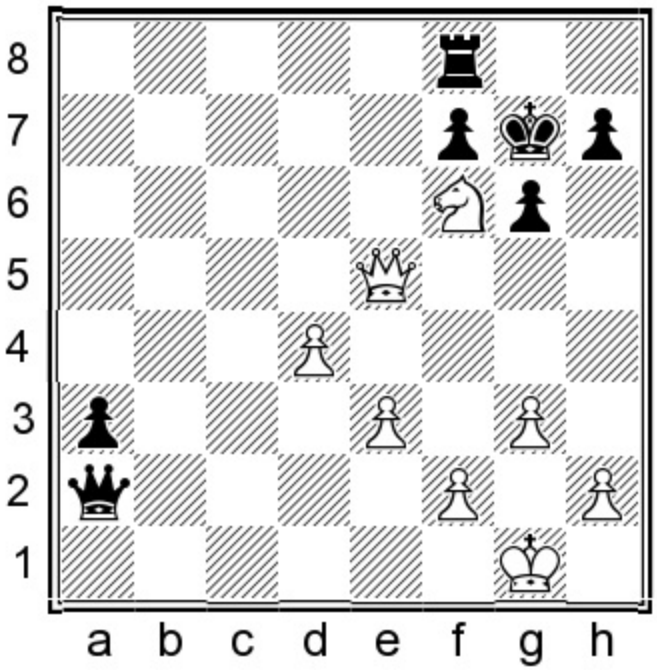
This seemingly natural looking move is a major blunder. White now makes a draw.

Something like 32...♕c8 33.♘c6 ♕b7 would still have won.

33.♘d5

The a-pawn is also hanging.

33...♕b2 34.♘xf6 ♕xa2 35.♕e5!



White has strong counterplay and makes the draw.

35...♕b1† 36.♔g2 ♕b7† 37.d5 ♕b2 38.♘e8† ♔g8 39.♘f6† ♔h8 40.♕e7 ♔g7 41.♘d7 ♖a8 42.♘e5 ♖f8 43.♘d7 ♖c8 44.♘e5 ♖f8 45.♘d7

½–½

Judgement is developed through practice

This brief overview of some of the typical considerations regarding a possible exchange will hopefully be a good starting point for developing a better understanding of exchanges. An underdeveloped part of chess literature, where a systematic overview does not exist. Our grouping of typical decisions should not be considered as scientific, but rather observations from practical examples.

We hope you have enjoyed this rundown, and that it will inspire you to work seriously on the exercises, which will be the main way to improve your skills in this area. Chess is a decision-making game and to get better at it, we need to practice making decisions.

Chapter 3

No Complexity or Tactics

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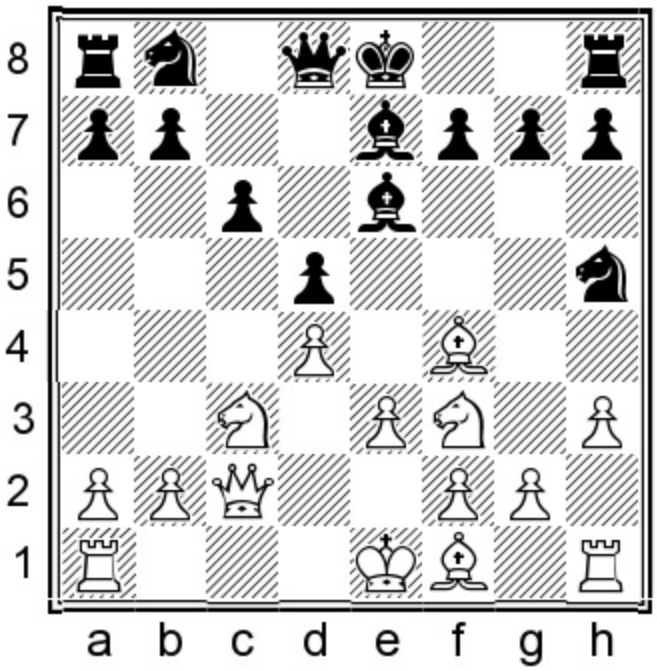
We have arrived at the practical part of the book. In this and the next chapters, you will find a total of 365 exercises.

All the exercises include multiple choice questions. This puts obvious limitations on the exercises we have been able to use. Positions where a particular idea is surprising are automatically excluded. But on the other hand, it expands the options in the other direction, by isolating the choice between 2-3 options, or to a Yes/No option regarding a possible exchange. This means that a few positions have potential additional solutions, which are not an option. Don't be distracted. There is a question; your task is to answer it.

The first chapter of exercises includes positions where we have deemed the complexities and tactics to be mostly insignificant. When you have analysed enough with strong and imaginative players, you know that something concrete will always be hidden under the surface. Yet in these positions, you should try to tune down the part of your brain that insists on thinking in terms of move, move, move, in favour of a logical approach.

1. Fernando Peralta – Leandro Krysa

Barbera del Valles 2020



Should Black play:

A) 11...♘xf4, or
B) 11...g6, with the idea of ...♘g7 and ...♗f5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

In the game Black chose: 11...g6?! 12.♗h6! ♗f6 13.g4 ♗g7 (13...♘g7 14.0-0-0 is unplayable for Black. His pieces are completely dominated.) 14.♗g5 ♘f6 15.0-0-0 This allowed White to get a great version of the typical Carlsbad structure. Black won on move 45, which has nothing to do with the current position.

Instead, Black has the opportunity to trade a knight on the rim, an average piece with no meaningful purpose, for a powerful bishop. As well as gaining the bishop pair, Black also weakens White's pawn structure. Both elements have a significant long-term impact.

Note that there is no time for delay. If Black does not capture the bishop now, White plays ♗h2 and the chance is gone.

11...♘xf4!

11...♗d6? is weaker, as White has: 12.♗e5! (The alternative is not as good, although still nice for White: 12.♗xd6 ♕xd6 13.♗d3±) 12...♘f6 13.♗d3±

12.exf4 ♗d6 13.g3 g6 14.♗d3 ♘d7

Black is not worse. In the long term, the dark-squared bishop is the best minor piece on the board, while the e6-bishop is currently a bit restricted. A key point is that White cannot play:

15.f5?!

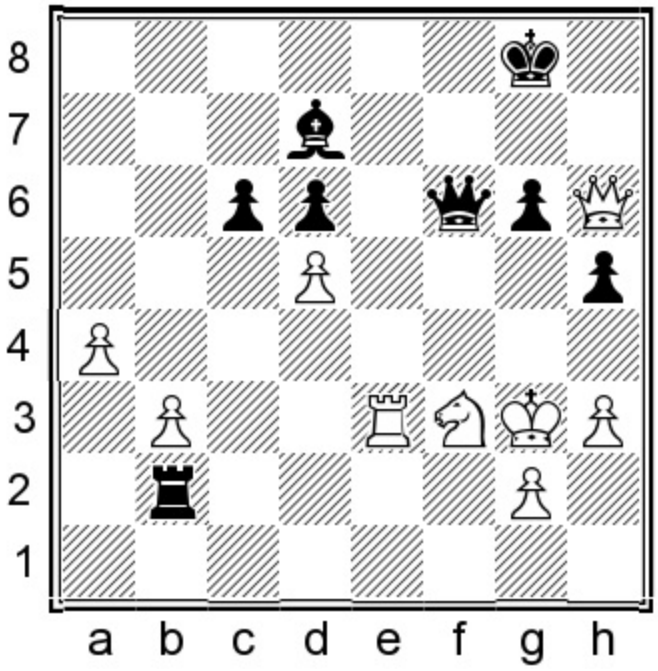
He should play 15.♔f1, with chances for both sides.

15...gxf5 16.♗xf5 ♕f6!

When the tactics don't work out for White.

2. Leon Luke Mendonca – Vasilios Kotronias

Hamburg 2022



Should White:

A) force the exchange of queens with 46.♕g5, or
B) play 46.♔h2?

Show/Hide Solution

(King safety)

White played: 46.♕g5?? This is one of the worst exchanges in the book. With queens on, Black has to deal with his king being wildly exposed, at the same time as White soon having two passed pawns on the queenside. 46...♕xg5† 47.♘xg5 cxd5 48.♘f3 ♔f7 49.h4 ♔f6 50.♖d3 ♗f5 Black is not worse in this endgame. We will visit it again later, as Exercise 89.

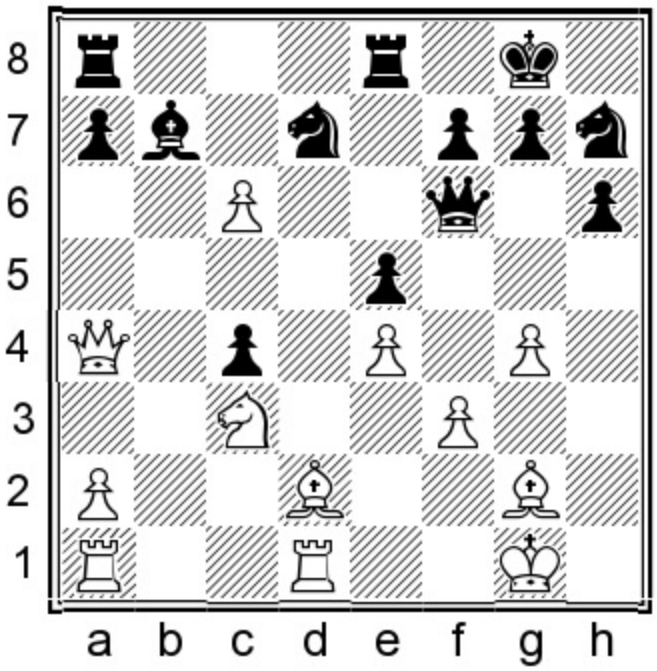
46.♔h2!

This is the correct approach. Black is helpless against the threat of 47.♘h4, attacking the weak

g6-pawn. There were other winning continuations for White, all relying on the weakness of the black king.

3. Lucas van Foreest – Mircea Parligras

France 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange queens with 22...♕xc6, or
B) play 22...♗xc6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

The game went 22...♕xc6 23.♕xc6 ♗xc6 24.♗f1 ♘g5 25.♔f2 and the players agreed a draw after 40 moves.

22...♗xc6!

When your opponent's king is weak, don't exchange queens. This concept should be applied regardless of the material count. This example is clear; Black should keep the queens on and attack the weaknesses around the white king.

23.♕xc4 ♖ac8

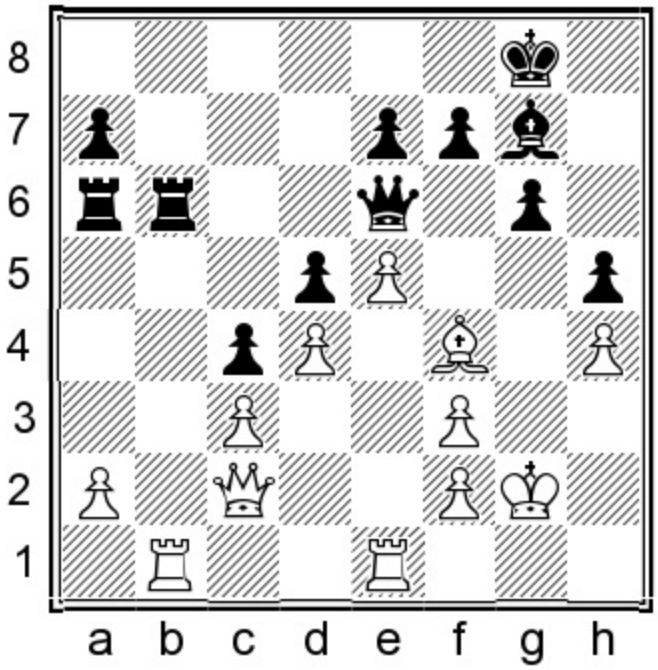
Or: 23...♘g5–+

24.♕e2 ♘df8–+

There is some play left, but White's position is depressing. Once Black plays ...♘e6 and ...♘hg5, it will be impossible for White to survive the pressure.

4. Roy Vagman – Nikita Meshkovs

Brezice 2022



Should Black:

A) offer the exchange of queens with 26...♕f5, or
B) improve the position of his king with 26...♔h7?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing defenders)
26...♔h7? was played in the game, when White should have responded with: 27.♖xb6! Creating a weak pawn on b6 and closing the file. 27...axb6 28.♖b1= Black would not have any chances to penetrate White's position. In the game, White didn't play this and lost in 55 moves.

26...♕f5!

The exchange of queens favours Black, since the white queen is the piece protecting the a2- and c3-weaknesses.

27.♕xf5 gxf5–+

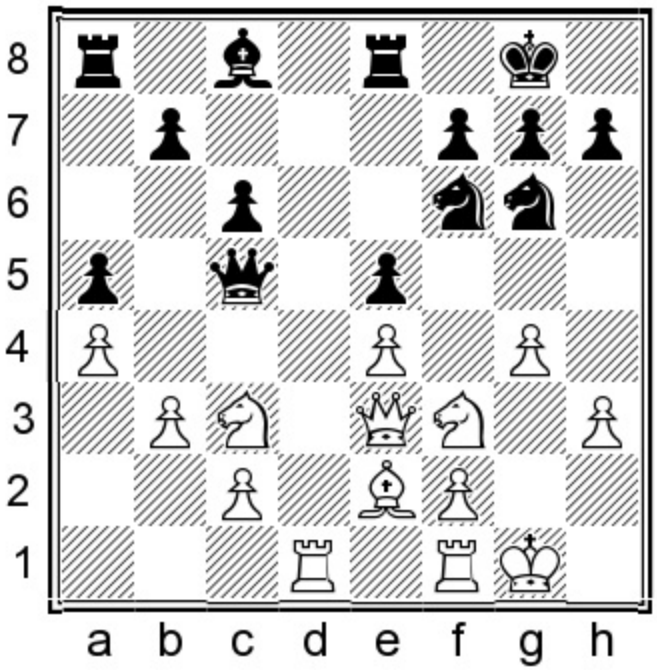
Black will win on the queenside. The game could continue like this:

28.♖xb6 ♖xb6 29.♖e2 e6 30.♗g5 ♗f8 31.♖c2 ♗a3 32.♔f1 ♖b1† 33.♔e2 a5

White will not survive.

5. Pablo Martinez Soriano – Roberto Carlos Gomez Ledo

Alicante 2022



Should Black play:

A) 16...♕e7, or

B) 16...♕xe3?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)

Black made the correct decision with:

16...♕e7!∓

With the white king open and a weak square on f4, it is correct to keep the queens on the board in order to try to exploit these weaknesses.

After 16...♕xe3? 17.fxe3 the doubled pawns in the centre are not weaknesses, as they cannot be exploited. The position is roughly equal.

17.♘e1

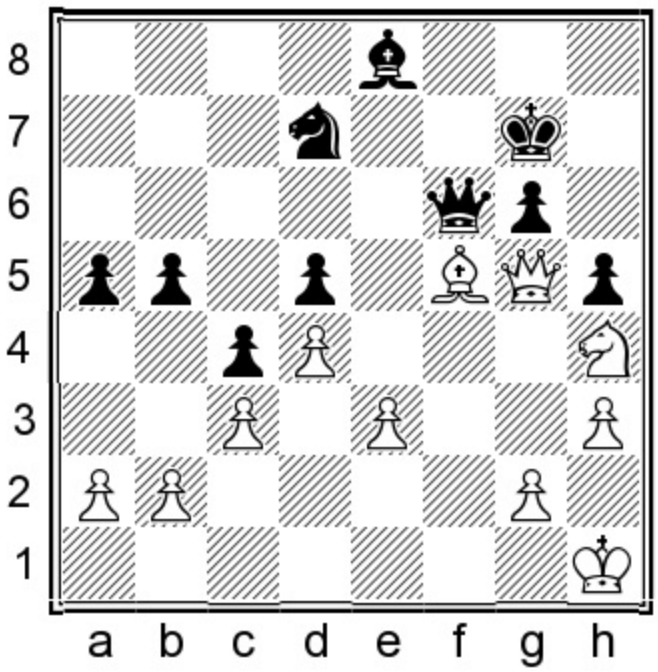
17.g5? did nothing good for the white position. After 17...♘h5 Black was already winning and later won the game.

17...h5 18.f3 ♗e6 19.♘g2 ♘f4!?

Black's position is much better.

6. Shin Jingjang – Joel O. Ebiekuta

Chennai Olympiad 2022



Should White:

A) exchange queens with 38.♕xf6, or
B) retreat with 38.♕g3?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)

White went for a slightly better endgame with: 38.♕xf6†? ♘xf6 39.♗c2 b4± 40.♘f3 bxc3 41.bxc3 Now Black could have kept fighting with an instructive idea. 41...♗d7! (Instead, he played 41...♔f8? and after 42.♘e5 Black is lost. White won ten moves later.) 42.♔g1 ♗f5± By exchanging bishops, Black gets rid of the pressure on g6 and gains access to the e4-square for the knight. The endgame seems defensible for him.

38.♕g3!

Besides the obvious weaknesses of the g6-pawn and the king, Black has tremendous difficulty in defending the dark squares. With this in mind, White should keep the queens on the board and try to increase his advantage.

38...b4

This is just an example of what could happen. Black is unable to change the character of the position. For example:

38...♔h6 39.♗xd7 ♗xd7 40.♘f3+–; Or 38...♘f8, which would be desirable if it works, but after 39.♗c2 ♔h6 40.♘f3 ♘d7 41.e4 White has a winning position.

39.♗xd7!

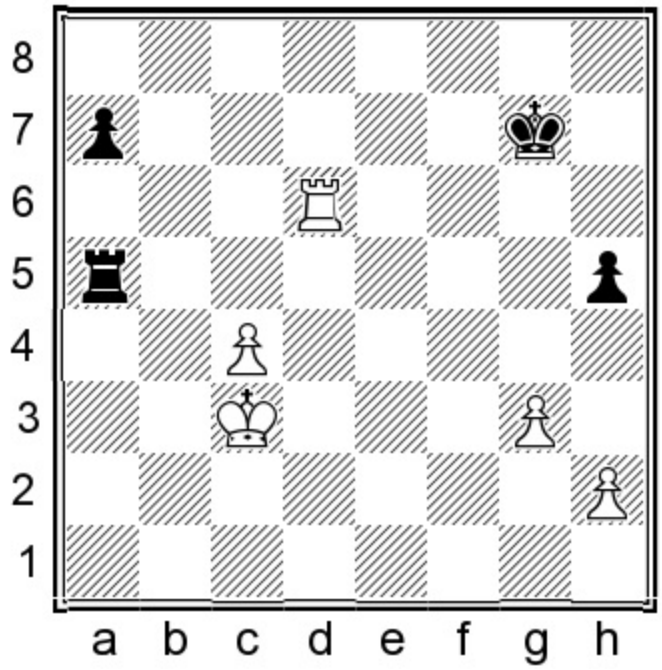
Eliminating Black's only defender of the dark squares, and obtaining the superior minor piece.

39...♗xd7 40.♘f3+–

Nothing can prevent the invasion of the white pieces. Black is lost.

7. William Claridge-Hansen – Nigel Davies

Torquay 2022



Should White:

A) force the exchange of rooks with 36.♖d5, or
B) activate his king?

Show/Hide Solution

(Escaping with a draw)

The game ended in a draw after: 36.♖d5?? ♖xd5 37.cxd5 a5 38.h3 ♔f6 39.g4 hxg4 40.hxg4 ♔e5 41.♔c4 a4 42.g5 a3 43.♔b3 ♔xd5 44.g6 ♔e6 45.g7 ♔f7 46.♔xa3 ♔xg7 ½–½

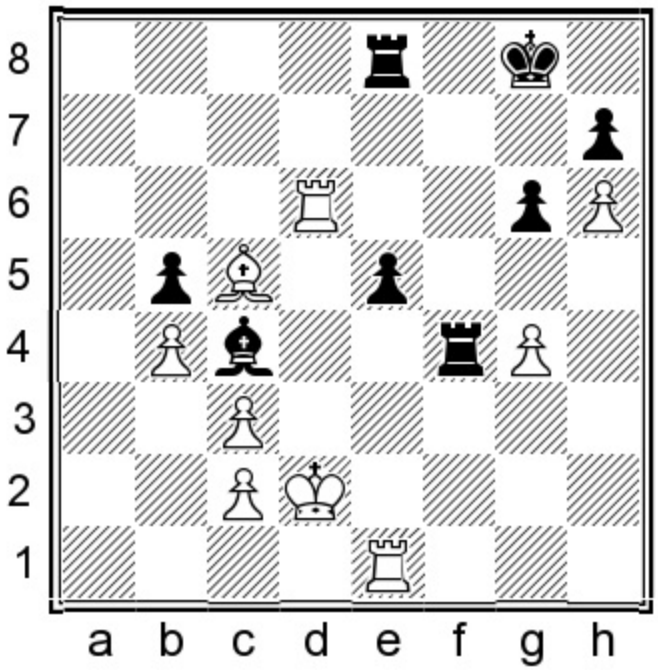
White would have won easily with:

36.♔b4 ♖a2 37.h4+–

Black's king is cut off and he can't prevent the advance of the c-pawn.

8. Rameshbabu Vaishali – Ivan Ivanisevic

Novi Sad 2022



Should White:

A) force the exchange of rooks with the tactic 31.♖xe5, or
B) play to invade on the seventh rank?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

White played: 31.♖xe5? ♖xe5 32.♖d8† ♔f7 33.♖f8† ♔e6 34.♖xf4 This won a pawn but allowed Black to activate his pieces and create counterplay. There followed 34...g5 35.♖f8 ♖e2† 36.♔c1 ♖h2 and the game was drawn nine moves later.

31.g5!

This would have been strong. Simply stepping out of the threat and keeping the black rook boxed in on the back rank. White's idea is to invade with both rooks on the 7th rank.

31.♖a1 would also win. After 31...♖xg4 32.♖a7 ♖h4 33.♗e3 Black won't be able to stop the invasion

through the dark squares.

31...♖f5 32.♖a1 ♖xg5 33.♖a7

Black is lost. For example, after:

33...♖h5 34.♗e3 ♔h8 35.♖dd7 ♗g8

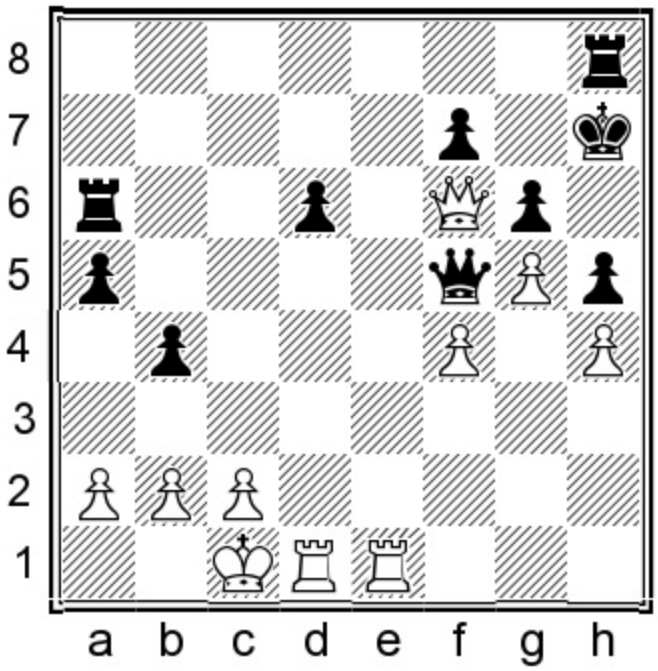
White can now create a passed pawn.

36.c4! bxc4 37.b5

White wins.

9. Leticia Dietrich – Amauri De Carvalho

Floripa 2022



Should White play:

A) 32.♕xf5, or
B) 32.♖xd6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

The game went: 32.♖xd6? ♕xf6? (Black should have preferred 32...♖xd6! 33.♕xd6 ♖c8∓.) 33.♖xf6 ♖xf6 34.gxf6 ♖c8± and was drawn on move 50.

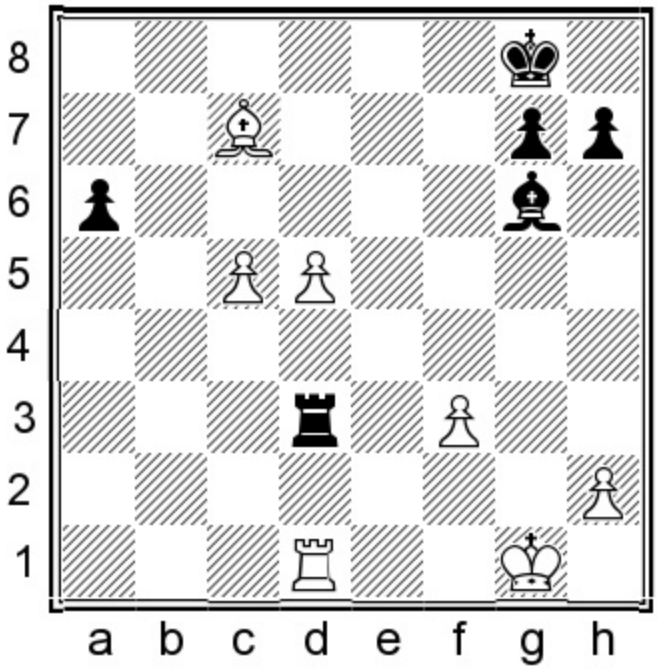
It may not be immediately apparent, but the white king is by far the weaker of the two. Getting rid of the queens would therefore help White's chances. Also, exchanging the queens on f5 exposes all the black pawns on the kingside to attack later in the game. So for this reason, strongest was:

32.♕xf5! gxf5 33.♖e7 ♔g6 34.♖d7

White wins.

10. Jan Smejkal – Vasily Smyslov

Moscow 1981



Should White:

A) exchange rooks on d3, or
B) support his pawn with 38.♖c1?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing defenders)

For some inexplicable reason Smejkal played 38.♖c1?, allowing his opponent to force a quick draw with: 38...♖xd5 39.c6 ♖d2 40.♖a1 (Or 40.♗f4 ♖c2 41.♖xc2 ♗xc2 42.c7 ♗f5=) 40...♖c2 41.♖xa6 ♗e8 42.♖a8 ♔f7 ½–½

38.♖xd3

This was therefore the right move.

38...♗xd3 39.c6!

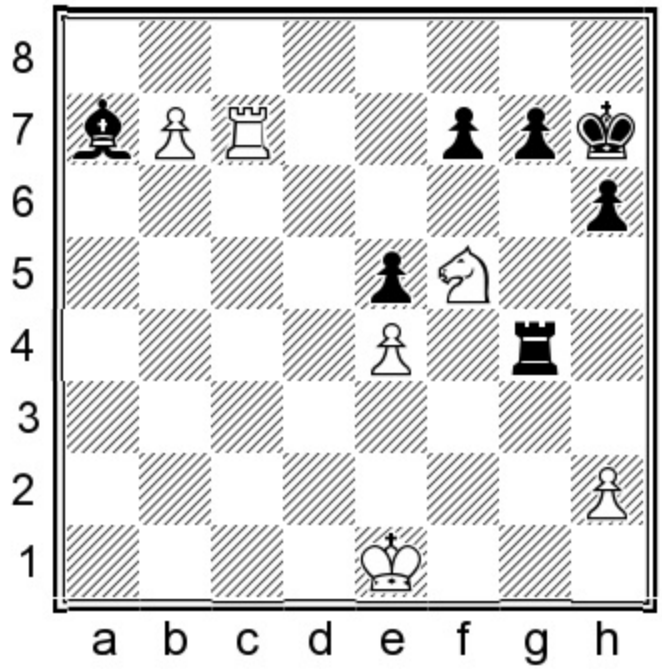
The threat of d5-d6-d7 paralyses Black.

39...♗b5

But now White can play ♔f2-e3-d4-c5 and win easily.

11. Sebastian Bogner – Jonas Lampert

Germany 2022



Should White play:

A) 39.♘g3, or
B) 39.♖xf7?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

White played 39.♖xf7?? allowing Black to get back in the game with: 39...♖xe4† 40.♔d2 ♔g6! Suddenly the black pieces are active, and Black can defend easily by bringing the rook behind the passed pawn. 41.♖f8 ♖b4 42.♘d6 The only move to defend the pawn. 42...♖d4† 43.♔c3 ♖xd6 44.♖a8 ♖b6 45.♖xa7 ♔f5= The rook endgame is equal, and the game was drawn a few moves later.

39.♖c4 is an improvement over the game move: 39...g6 40.♘e3 ♖g1† 41.♘f1+–

But best for White is:

39.♘g3!

Cutting the rook from the action.

39...♔g6

39...♖g6 would help to stop the b-pawn but White can simply pick up another pawn, keeping his advantage. 40.♖xf7+–

40.♖c8

Black is defenceless against ♖a8, winning a piece.

40...h5

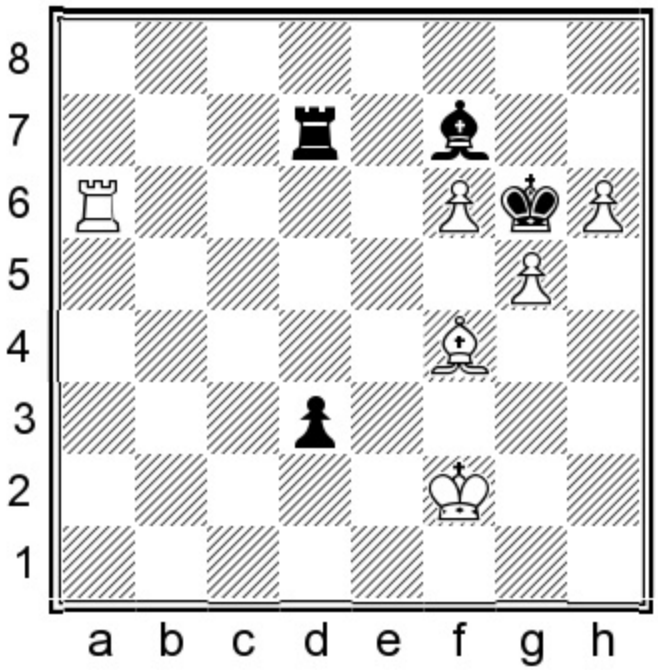
40...♖h4 41.♖a8 ♖xh2 42.♖xa7 ♖b2 43.♘f5

41.♖a8+–

White wins.

12. Nicholas Belous – Derek Jin

Westford 2020



Should White:

A) force the exchange of rooks with 56.♖d6, or
B) block the pawn with 56.♗d2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Converting an advantage)

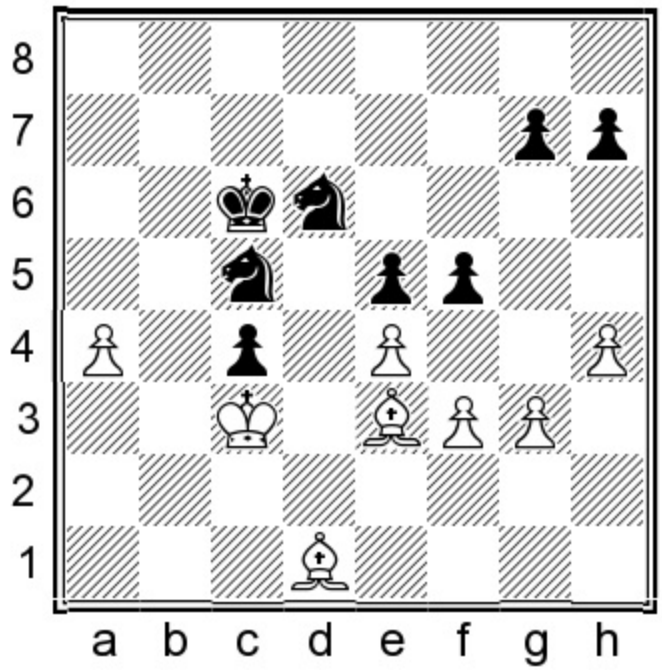
The game ended in a draw after: 56.♖d6?? ♖xd6 57.♗xd6 ♗g8 White pushed for another 11 moves, but there was no way through.

The correct decision was for White to slowly improve his king first, for example to c5, via the 1st rank. Then White should manoeuvre the rook to e7 and create threats to break through on the kingside. To have the time to do all that, he first needed to block Black's passer:

56.♗d2!+–

13. Samir Sahidi – Sebastian Lukas Kostolansky

Slovakia 2022



Should White:

A) exchange with 39.exf5, or
B) keep the tension with 39.♗c2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)

39.exf5!

Simply creating weaknesses in Black's position. It's not an inflexible rule, but generally you should exchange pieces or pawns when there are weaknesses in your opponent's position. There is

even more reason to do so here, as the position is opened for the bishops to have a greater impact.

The game went: 39.♗c2? fxe4 40.♗xc5 ♔xc5 41.♗xe4 h6 Black defends all his weaknesses and White doesn't have a breakthrough. The game was drawn 17 moves later.

39...♘xf5 40.♗f2+–

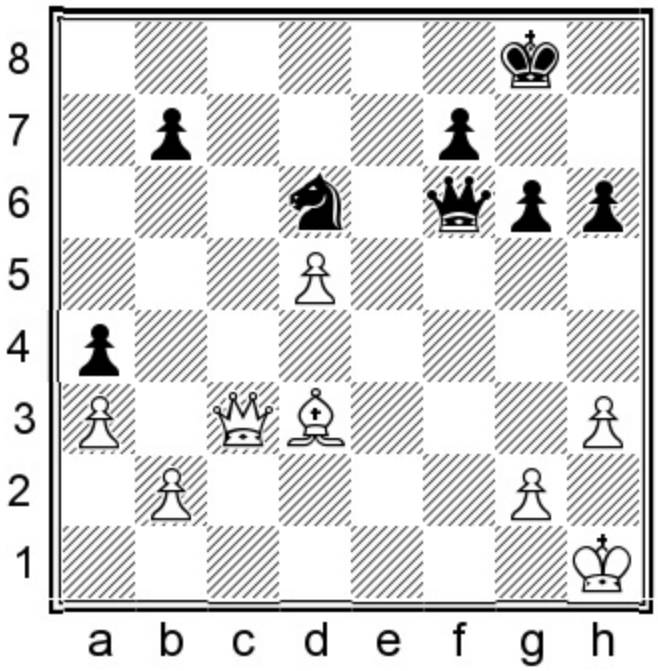
Black has too many weaknesses to defend. The bishops will start attacking the kingside pawns, combined with the advance of the passed a-pawn. A possible follow up could be:

40...♘d6 41.♗c2 h6 42.g4

With the idea of ♗g3. Black is lost.

14. Jose Javier Moreno Alcaraz – Rodrigo Vasquez Schroeder

Alicante 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange queens with 40...♕xc3, or
B) avoid the exchange with 40...♕f4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)

40...♕xc3!

Destroying White's queenside pawn structure, creating weaknesses on c3 and a3.

After 40...♕f4 41.♗c2 the endgame is unclear. White is not worse.

41.bxc3 b5!

Fixing the weaknesses and isolating the d5-pawn. White will soon lose material and the game.

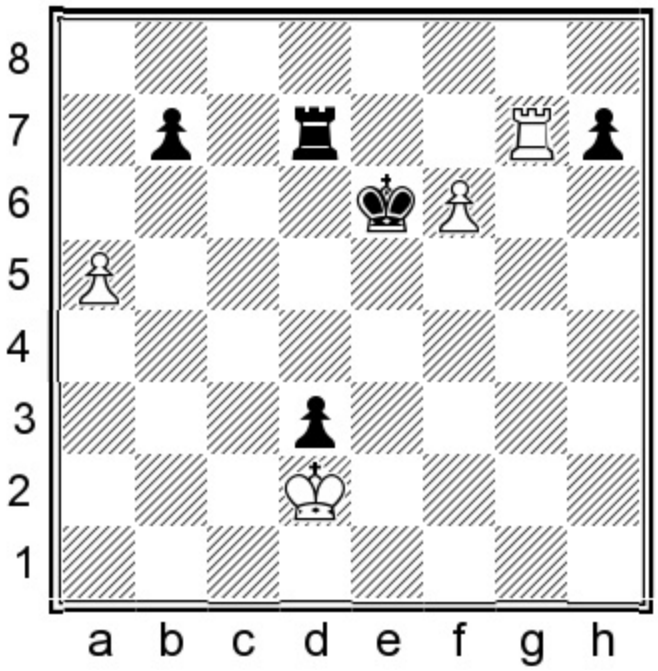
In the game Black played too slowly: 41...♔g7? 42.c4 b6 43.♔g1 ♔f6 44.♔f2 ♔e5 45.♔e3 White is OK and soon Black even lost the game.

42.♔g1 ♔g7 43.♔f2 ♔f6 44.♔e3 ♔e5–+

The pawn goes and Black wins.

15. Evgenios Ioannidis – Dragos Ceres

Chennai Olympiad 2022



Should White:

A) exchange with 41.♖xd7, or
B) keep the rooks on the board?

Show/Hide Solution

(Pawn endings)

Pawn endgames require precise calculation, and any mistake is lethal, which is what happened in the game: 41.♖xd7?? ♔xd7 42.♔xd3 ♔e6 43.♔d4 h5! 0–1 (White was probably only counting on 43...♔xf6 when 44.♔c5 makes a draw.)

41.♖g1

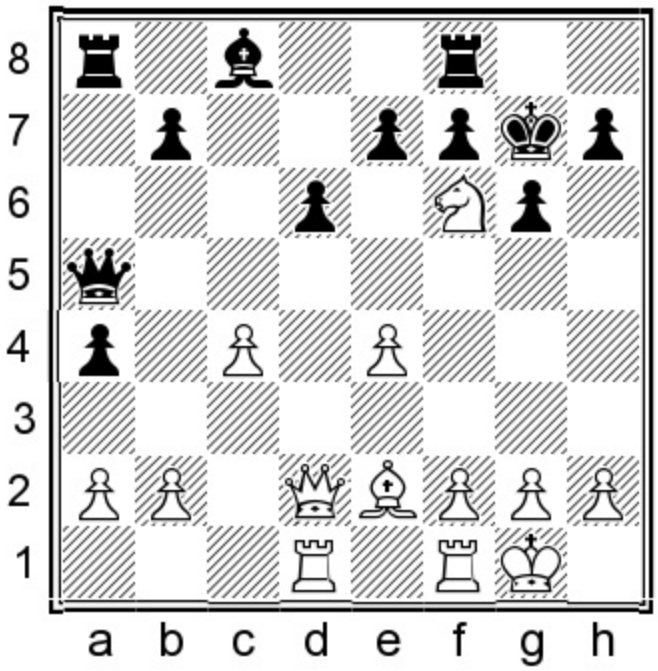
Not exchanging rooks, as rook endgames give far more chances to make a draw. Indeed, here Black does not have any way to make progress.

41...♔xf6 42.♖h1=

With an easily holdable endgame.

16. Volodymyr Vetoshko – Damian Sliwicki

Katowice (blitz) 2021



Should Black:

A) exchange queens with 15...♕xd2, or
B) play 15...♔xf6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Tactics)

Black played 15...♔xf6? and White reacted well with: 16.♕h6! Keeping the queens on the board when the enemy's king is weak. Black is lost and the rest of the game is of little interest: 16...♗e6 (or 16...♖d8 17.f4) 17.♖d3 (17.f4!? is also strong.) 17...♗xc4 18.♖f3† ♔e6 19.♗xc4† White won six moves later.

15...♕xd2!

Black doesn't need to fear the check on h5, doubling the pawns on the h-file. This is only a minor weakness, as it is not easy for White to exploit it.

16.♘h5† gxh5 17.♖xd2 ♗g4!

Provoking f2-f3, making the bishop on e2 worse.

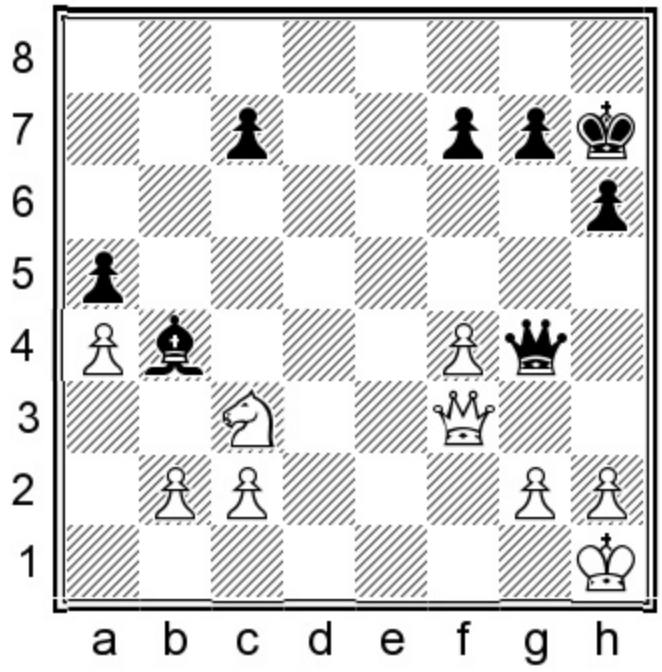
18.f3 ♗e6=

White has no effective way to attack the doubled pawn. For example, Black has enough counterplay after:

19.f4 ♖fc8 20.b3 ♗g4

17. Hans Georg Emunds – Klaus Beckmann

Germany 2018



Should Black:

A) exchange queens, or
B) avoid the exchange?

Show/Hide Solution

(Pawn endings)

Black should make the exchange.

30...♕xf3 31.gxf3 ♗xc3!

31...♗d6 32.f5 would be OK for White.

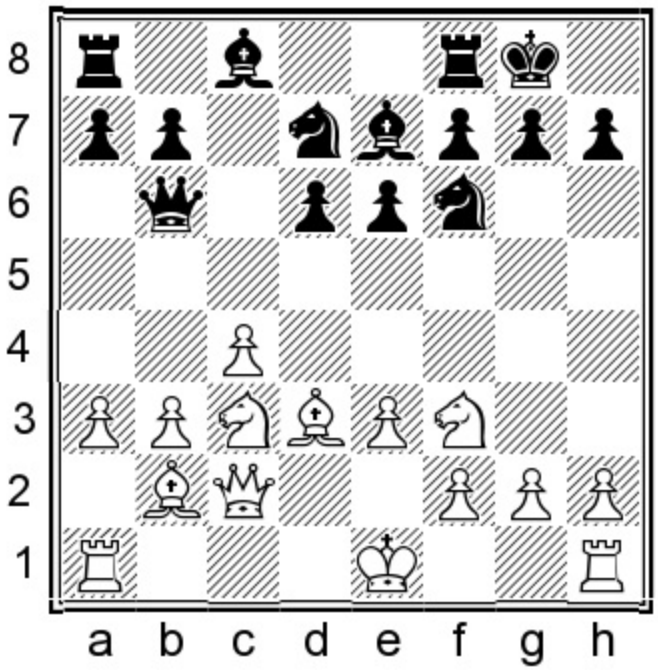
32.bxc3 ♔g6 33.♔g2 ♔f5 34.♔g3 c6

The extra pawn has no value. White resigned.

0–1

18. Suat Atalik – Eduardo Iturrizaga Bonelli

Internet 2018



Should Black:

A) hurry up and play 11...♘c5, with the intention of taking the bishop, or
B) play 11...a6?

Show/Hide Solution

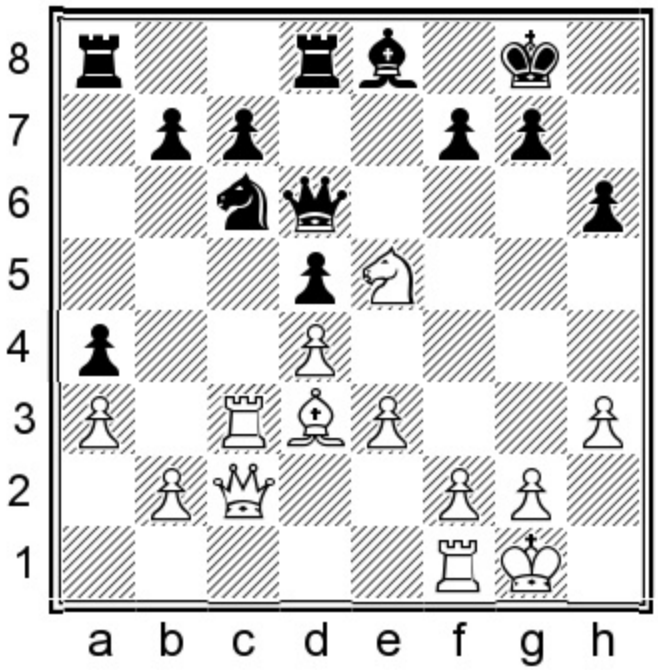
(Exchanging the better piece)

The game went:

11...a6?! 12.b4±

And was drawn by move 53. If Black had taken the bishop, it would be forever missing from the white position and give Black the better side of equality, if not a small edge.

19. Mahammad Muradli – Baskaran Adhiban



Should White:

A) exchange knights with 20.♘xc6, or
B) retreat the knight?

Show/Hide Solution

(Keeping the better pieces)

White played 20.♘xc6?. A practical decision, simply aiming for a safe position where Black lacks the potential to create active play. Objectively it does not lead to an advantage for White. 20...♗xc6 21.♖c5 (21.♖c1 ♗d7 is the same.) 21...♗d7! 22.♖c1 (Of course not: 22.♖xc7 ♗c6∓) 22...c6 23.♕d1 g6 24.♗c2 b6 25.♖c3 b5= Black only has one weakness which is defended comfortably. The position is equal, although Black ended up losing after 61 moves.

20.♘f3!±

The knight on c6 is badly placed. It doesn't have any active function and is not going anywhere. The pawn on c7 is a soft spot that Black wants to solve in the near future by advancing it to c6. Exchanging on c6 not only eliminates Black's worst piece, it also releases the tension and allows Black to solidify his pawn structure.
20.f4 f6 21.♘f3 ♘e7 22.♘h4 is also promising for White.

20...♘e7

This makes the most sense.

20...♘b8?, with the idea of ...c7-c6 and ...♘d7-f6, is too slow. White can seize the initiative with:

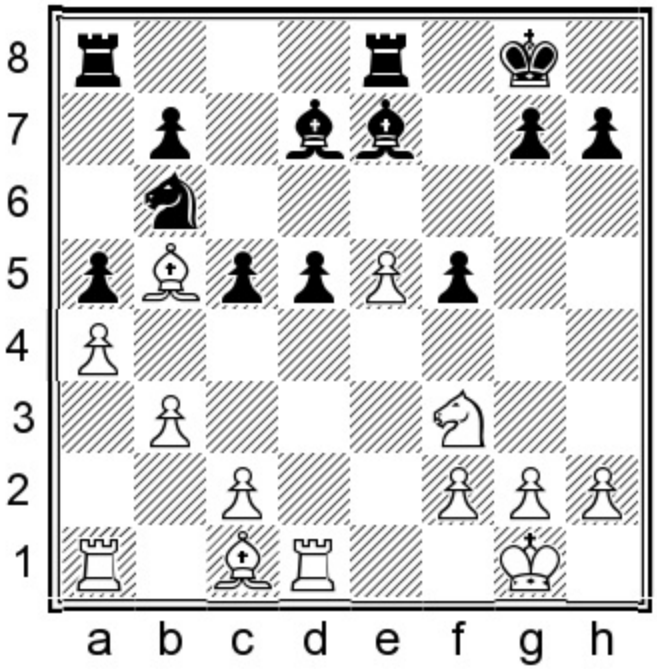
21.♖e1 c6 22.e4 dxe4 23.♗xe4 ♘d7 24.♘h4! White has excellent attacking prospects.

21.♖e1!? c6 22.♕d1

The idea is to create new weaknesses by bringing the bishop to c2 and the queen to d3, eyeing the h7-square. White can also open the position with e3-e4 at a suitable time. White is slightly better, with plenty of fight ahead.

20. Jakob Leon Pajeken – Yevgeniy Roshka

Barcelona 2022



Should Black:

A) capture on b5, or
B) play 17...♗c6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Converting an advantage)

17...♗xb5

A strong exchange which was played in the game. Black facilitates the pawn break with ...a5-a4.

17...♗c6 is weaker because White can retreat the bishop and there won't be any way for Black to break through. The chances are roughly equal.

18.axb5 a4!

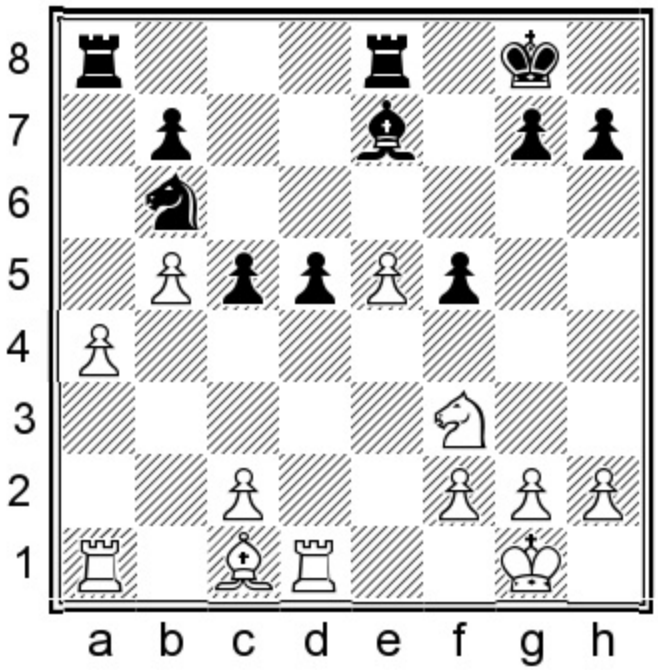
The key idea. Black invades through the a-file or creates a new weakness.

The game continuation was weaker: 18...♖a7?! Black eventually won, but after 19.g3 his advantage is minuscule.

19.bxa4

The only move Black needed to calculate.

If: 19.♗f4 axb3 20.cxb3 ♖xa1 21.♖xa1 ♔f7 Black's idea is to play ...♖a8 next, then block White's e-pawn and eventually capture it. There is some work to do but the endgame should be winning. For example: 22.♖a7 ♖a8 23.♖xa8 ♘xa8 and Black will play ...♘c7-e6 with a winning endgame, thanks to the strong central pawns and White's weak b-pawns.



19...♘xa4! 20.♖xd5?

It is important to have spotted that this fails.

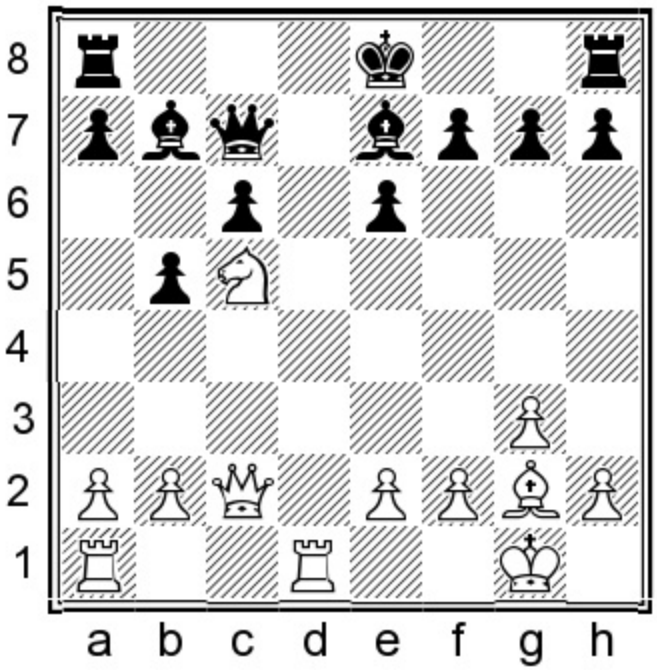
Instead, White has to play something like 20.♗d2, when Black continues 20...♔f7∓ followed by ...♔e6 and ...♘b2-c4, with strong pressure on the e5-pawn.

20...♘c3 21.♖xa8 ♖xa8 22.♖d7 ♖a1

Black wins.

21. Pia Cramling – Ludvig Carlsson

Uppsala 2022



Should Black:

A) play 17...♗xc5, or
B) 17...♗c8?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

The game went 17...♗c8? and Black got crushed with: 18.♘xe6! 1–0 (18.♘a6 is also nice.)

17...♗xc5

The only move. The pressure on c6 is strong, and Black needs to evacuate his king from the centre as soon as possible.

18.♕xc5 ♕b6!

A key move, making sure the queen has to leave the a3-f8 diagonal.

19.♕e5!

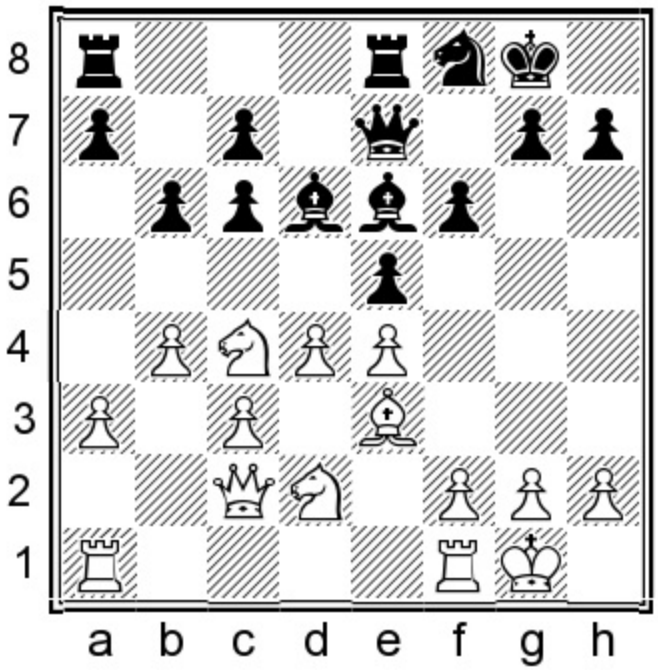
If 19.♕a3 then 19...b4; or 19.♕d6 ♖d8.

19...0-0 20.♖d6

White has compensation for the pawn but no more. The position is equal.

22. Parham Maghsoodloo – Sanan Sjugirov

Belgrade 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange on c4, or
B) allow White to exchange on d6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)

One of the powers of the two bishops is that you can decide when to exchange bishop for knight. In this case, Black chose correctly to give up the light-squared bishop for positional gain.

15...♗xc4! 16.♘xc4 exd4 17.cxd4

17.♗xd4 ♕xe4 is a clear pawn up, with little work left to do.

17...♕xe4 18.♖ac1

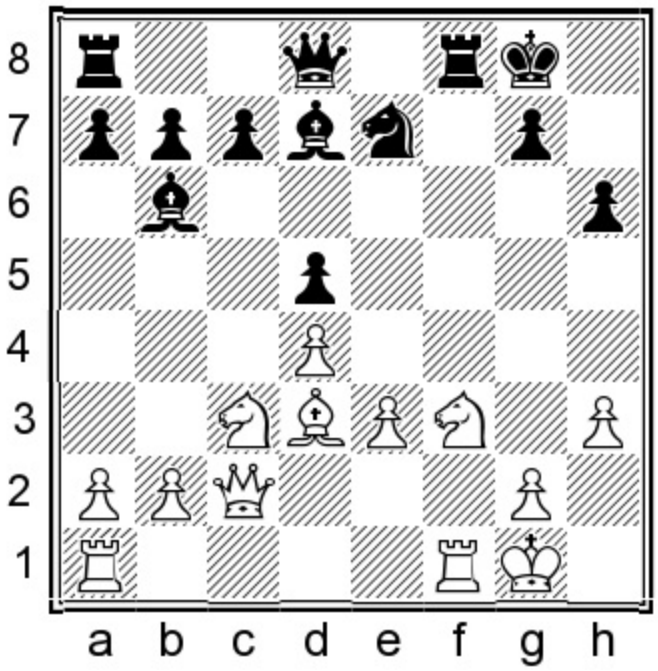
White will win back the pawn, but he will have an isolated d-pawn at the end.

18...♖ad8 19.♘d2 ♕xc2 20.♖xc2 ♘g6 21.♖xc6 ♘e7 22.♖c2 ♘d5∓

Black won on move 39.

23. Cristian Marc Arsenie – Valentyn Prokofiev

Terme Catez 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange bishops with 18...♗f5, or
B) make room for the queen with 18...♗e6?

Show/Hide Solution

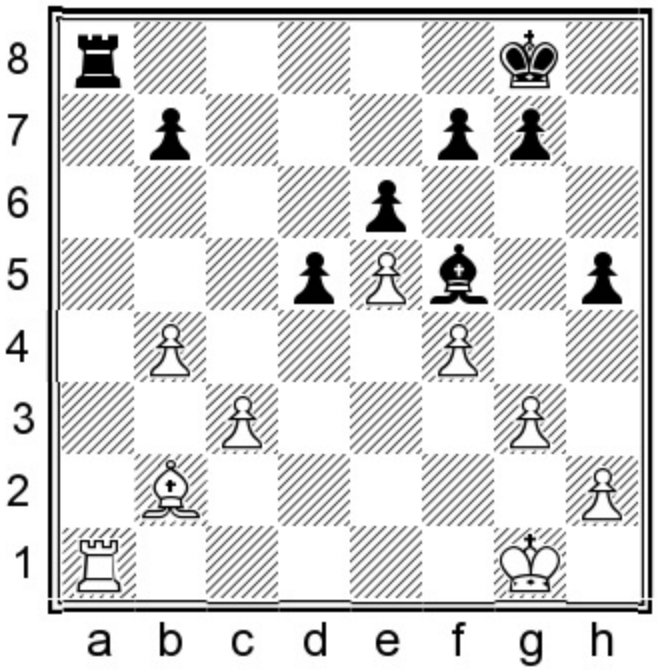
(Colour schemes)
18...♗e6? was played in the game. Now 19.♘e5 was strongest, with a winning attack. The game took many turns before Black won it on move 30.

18...♗f5!=

This is the right choice. Black is fine. The weak light squares on the kingside are defended, and Black can develop his pieces with ...♕d6 and ...♖ae8 without any problems.

24. Marc Carbonell Sancho – Shanti Nur Abidah

Sitges 2021



Should Black:

A) take on a1, or
B) move the rook away?

Show/Hide Solution

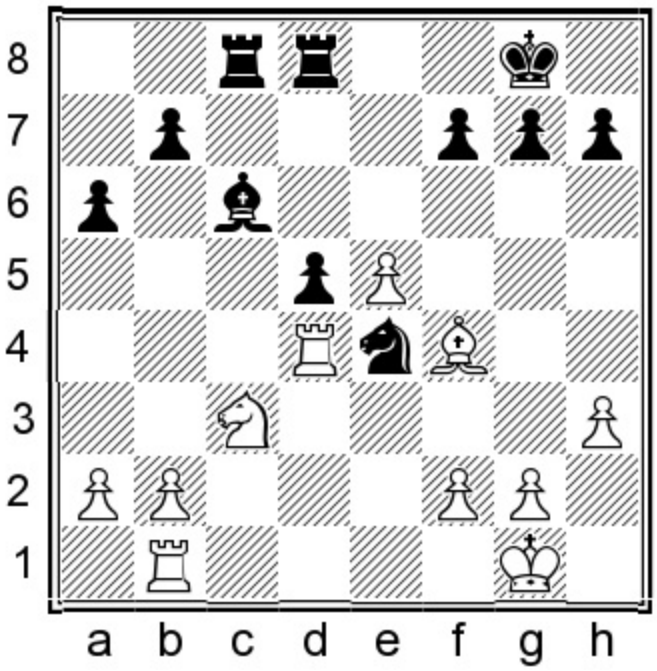
(Keeping the better pieces)
26...♖xa1†? led to an immediate draw. Perhaps the rating difference of 200 points influenced Black's decision. The players made a few more moves before peaceably signing the scoresheet.

26...♖c8!–+

This is the natural move to continue the game. There are some positions where Black will play ...d5-d4, but the main idea is ...♖c4-e4-e2, with an invasion. White cannot improve his position much in the meantime, so Black should not rush and should bring her king out via h7-g6-f5-g4. When it is there, it is time to think of various active options.

25. Nicholas Belous – Derek Jin

Westford 2020



Should Black:

A) take on c3, or
B) retreat the knight?

Show/Hide Solution

(Keeping the better pieces)

The game was equal after: 21...♘xc3? 22.bxc3 b5 The end of the game was the subject of Exercise 12.

21...♘c5!

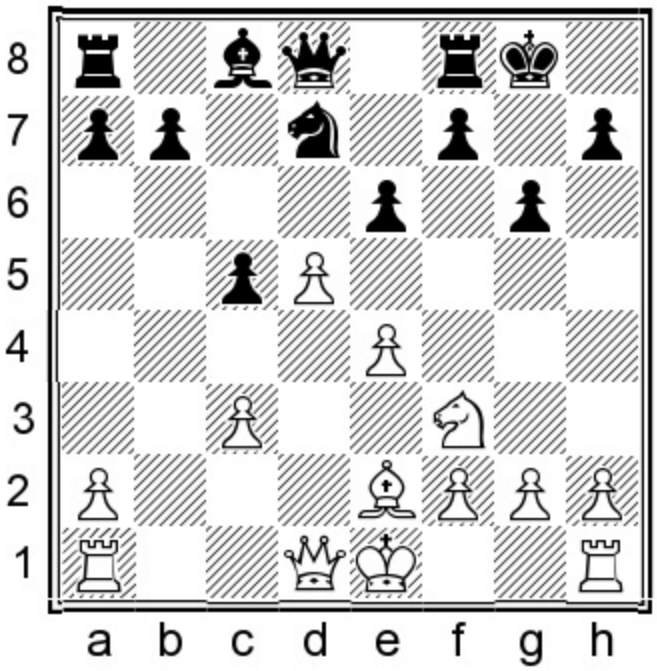
The knight will be strong on e6, while the knight on c3 can be kicked away.

22.♗g3 ♘e6 23.♖d2 d4 24.♘e2 d3

Black has a large advantage.

26. George Anthony Stany – Narayanan Rajeswari Visakh

Internet (blitz) 2020



Should White play:

A) 12. dxe6,
B) 12.c4, or
C) 12.d6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)

The game saw 12.c4? exd5 13.exd5 ♘b6 with equality.

12.dxe6!

The concept here is simple to understand. This exchange creates permanent weaknesses in Black's position, which will be felt throughout the entire game.

12.d6 is tempting and is the only alternative worthy of consideration. However, it seems to give Black enough time to get his pieces out. For example: 12...♕f6 13.♕d2 b6 14.♕e3 ♗b7

12...fxe6

Now White has several attractive options.

13.a4

The strongest move, with the idea of gaining space with a4-a5.

13...♘f6

13...♕e7 is better, but 14.0-0 ♘f6 15.♕d3 e5 16.♕e3 ♗g4 17.♘d2 ♗xe2 18.♕xe2 gives White a

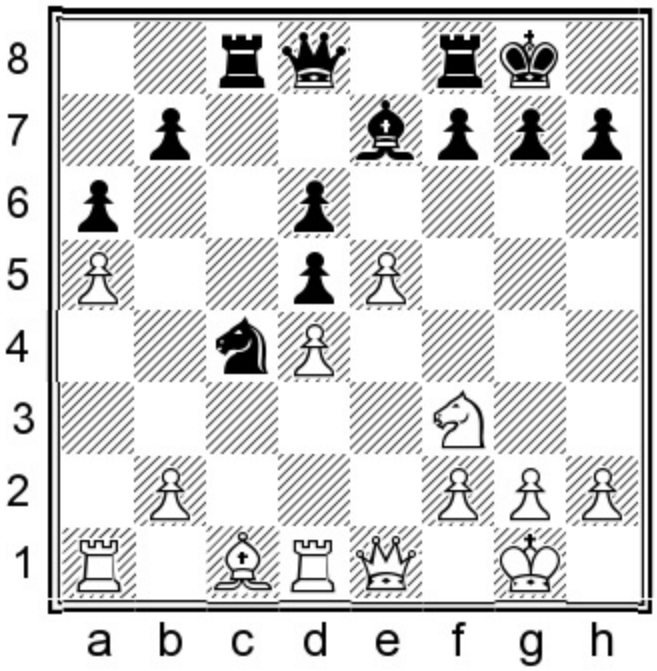
stable positional advantage.

14.♕xd8 ♖xd8 15.♘d2

White intends f2-f3 and ♘c4, with a large positional advantage.

27. Husain Aziz – Felix Blohberger

Warsaw (rapid) 2021



Should Black:

A) remove the weak black pawn with 16...b6, or
B) remove the doubled pawn with 16...dxe5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)

Black has to do something to meet White's threat of 17.b3!.

But after: 16...b6? 17.axb6 ♕xb6 18.e6!± White had a big advantage. The d5-pawn is weak. 18...♗f6 19.♗g5!? The black bishop is poor, but removing it exposes the weak light squares. 19...♖fe8! Forced. 20.♗xf6 ♖xe6 21.♕c3 ♕b7 Although Black won the game on move 52, at this point 22.♗g5 ♘xb2 23.♕d2 ♘xd1 24.♕xd1± would have left him with poorly coordinated rooks and weak pawns, fighting White's two pieces.

16...dxe5!

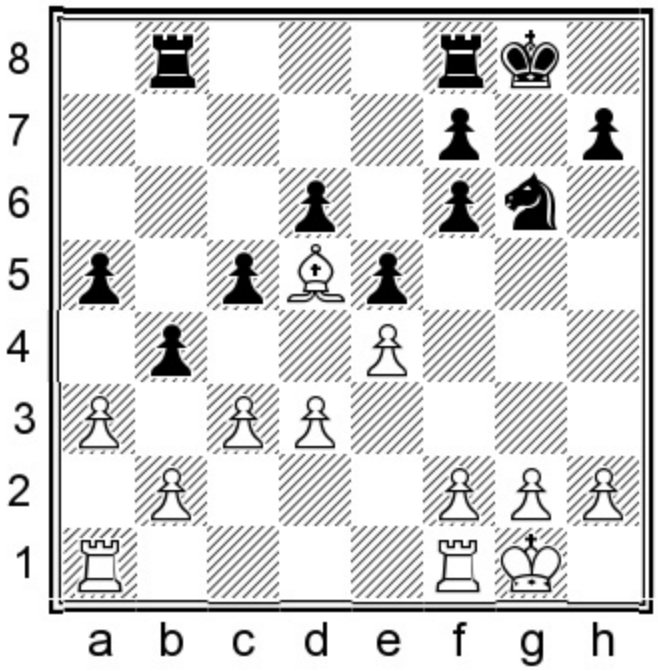
This is strongest, getting rid of the doubled pawn.

17.dxe5 ♖e8

This gives Black complete equality, as do the alternatives 17...♖c5!? or 17...f6!.

28. Aziradji Mohamed Ismael – Md Siraj Munir Ahmad

Chennai Olympiad 2022



Should Black play:

A) 20...♘f4, or
B) 20...bxc3, and then 21...♘f4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Prophylaxis)

Black played 20...♘f4?, missing a great defensive idea: 21.axb4! (Instead White played 21.♖fd1? and was lost after 21...bxc3 22.bxc3 ♘e2†. Black won on move 61.) 21...axb4 22.c4! White sacrifices a pawn, but in return he keeps control of the only open file and has no weaknesses for Black to attack. 22...♘xd3 23.♖fd1 ♘f4 (Or: 23...♘xb2 24.♖d2+–) 24.g3 ♘xd5 25.♖xd5 ♖b6 26.♖a7≅

20...bxa3 does not work after: 21.b3 ♘f4 22.♗c4 ♘e2† 23.♔h1 ♘xc3 24.♖xa3=

20...bxc3!

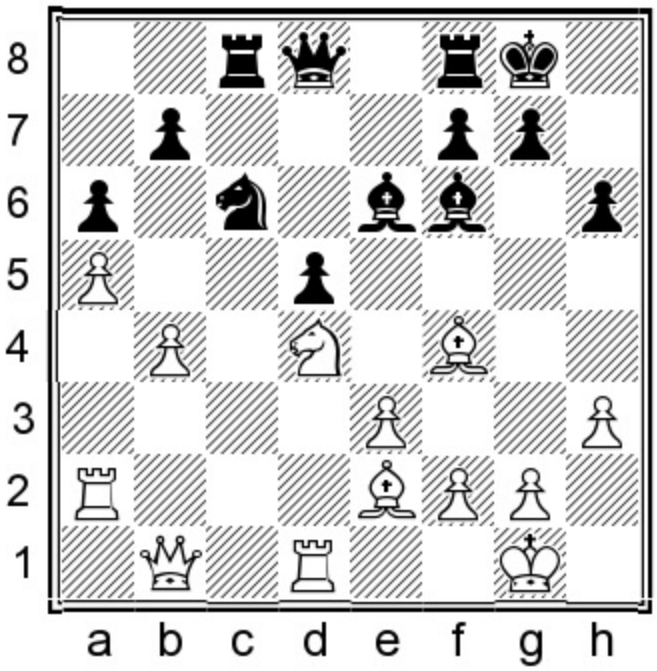
A simple exchange, opening the b-file and creating another weakness on c3.

21.bxc3 ♘f4–+

White cannot avoid losing material.

29. Hovik Hayrapetyan – Bharath Subramaniyam

Yerevan 2021



Should White:

A) exchange minor pieces with 25.♘xc6,
B) exchange them with 25.♘xe6, or
C) push with 25.b5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Colour schemes)

25.♘xc6?! ♖xc6 26.e4 looks dangerous for Black, but he is able to escape. (26.b5?! axb5 27.♕xb5 ♕e7 led to equality in the game, even though White eventually won on move 46.) 26...♖c3 27.exd5 ♗xd5 28.♖ad2 ♕e8!± and Black is over the worst.

25.b5 ♘xd4 26.exd4 axb5 27.♕xb5 ♕e7± offers White some pressure, but Black should be able to neutralise it. A funny line is 28.♗f3?! ♖c4= 29.♗xd5? ♖b4 and Black wins.

25.♘xe6! fxe6 26.b5

White has a massive advantage due to the weakness of the light squares. Black's position disintegrates:

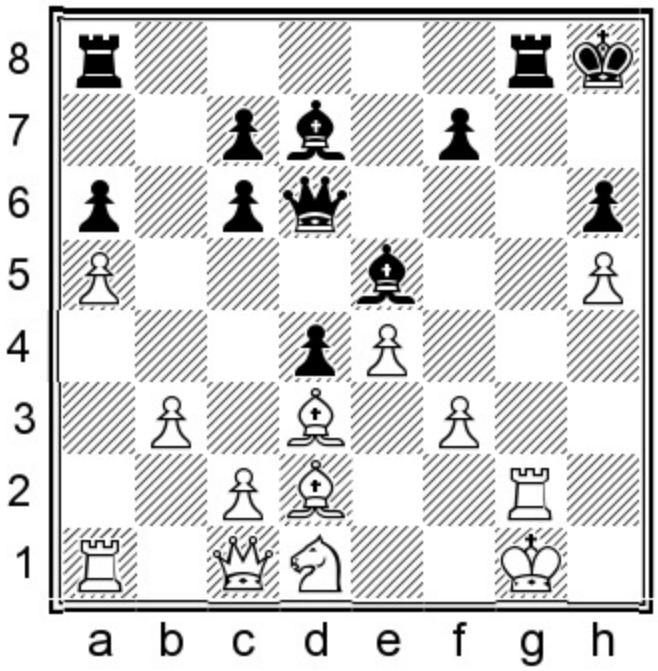
26...♘xa5?!

The pressure is intolerable for Black after 26...axb5 27.♕xb5.

27.♗g4 ♖e8 28.e4+–

30. Nikola Nikolovski – Marc Andria Maurizzi

Chennai Olympiad 2022



Should White:

A) play 27.♗f1, or
B) try to run with 27.♖xg8† and 28.♔f1?

Show/Hide Solution

(King safety)
27.♖xg8†?? was a terrible mistake. The king cannot survive in the open. 27...♖xg8† 28.♔f1 ♕f6! Strong, but not the only winning move. 29.♔e2 ♖g3 30.f4 ♗g4† 31.♔e1 ♕h4 32.♘f2 ♖g2 33.♗e3 dxe3 34.♕xe3 ♗c3† 35.♔f1 ♕h2 0–1

27.♗f1! ♗h3 28.♘f2!∞

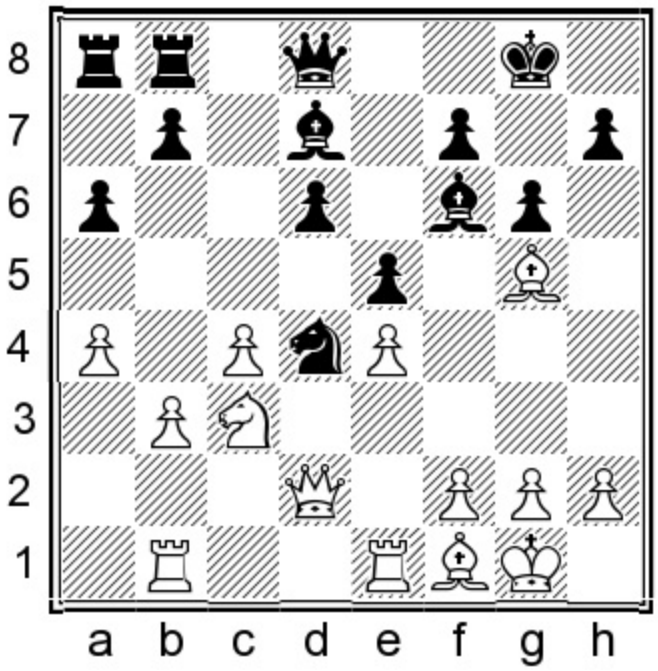
The position is deeply complicated. For example:

28...♗xg2 29.♗xg2 ♗h2† 30.♔f1 ♖xg2 31.♔xg2 ♖g8† 32.♔h1! ♕g3 33.♕f1 ♕xf3† 34.♔xh2 ♕g3† 35.♔h1 ♕f3†

With a perpetual check.

31. Daniel Forcen Esteban – Vojtech Plat

Benasque 2022



Should White:

A) exchange with 22.♗xf6, or
B) play 22.♗e3?

Show/Hide Solution

(Colour schemes)

22.♗xf6!

White exchanges his good bishop for Black's worst piece. However, this exchange is justified by two main ideas. Firstly, he gains the necessary time to seize control over the b6-square, where the knight will inevitably land. Secondly, the dark squares in the black camp are left permanently weak; White will be able to exploit them in the near future.

After 22.♗e3 ♗e6± White is better, but there is still plenty of work to do.

22...♕xf6 23.♘d5 ♕d8 24.a5 ♗c6

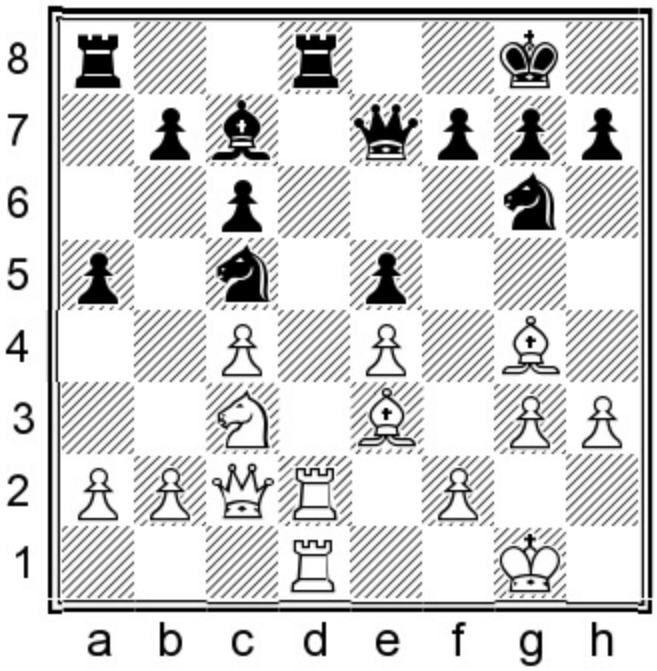
24...b5 was the only try, with the idea of sacrificing the exchange after: 25.axb6 a5 26.♖e3!? ♖xb6 27.♘xb6 ♕xb6 28.b4 But White is still much better.

25.♘b6+–

White has a large plus and won later on.

32. Leon Luke Mendonca – Aurelien Crut

France 2022



Should White:

A) exchange his bishop for the knight with 19.♗xc5, or
B) play 19.h4, gaining space on the kingside?

Show/Hide Solution

(Invasion)

19.h4?± was too slow. Now Black should have played 19...♖xd2!, reducing White's pressure along the d-file. After 20.♖xd2 Black should play 20...♘f8 with the idea of ...♘fe6. Black is only slightly worse.

19.♗xc5!

Not an obvious decision. However, when considering exchanges we must keep in mind the element of invasion. Here White eliminates the knight to invade on the 7th rank, where the rook will severely impact Black's position.

19...♕xc5

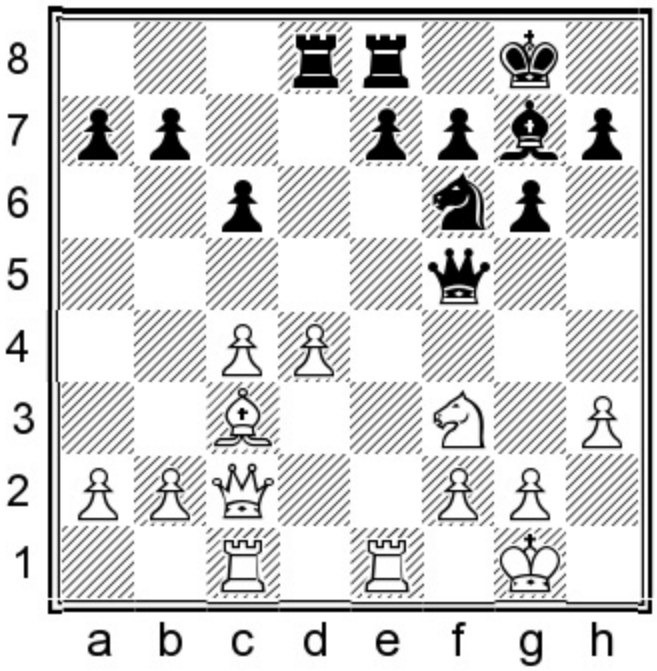
19...♖xd2 20.♖xd2 ♕xc5 21.♖d7 is the same.

20.♖d7 ♖xd7 21.♖xd7

Black can't hold this position.

33. Saskia Pohle –Mieszko Mis

Reinstorf 2022



Should White:

A) play 26.♕xf5, or
B) 26.♕b3?

Show/Hide Solution

(Structure)

White played 26.♕xf5?! which doesn't create any meaningful weaknesses, and gives Black control of the important e4-square. 26...gxf5 27.♖cd1 e6 Black has a fine position. He will play ...♘e4, ...♖d7 and ...♖ed8, with strong pressure against White's centre.

26.♕e2 is better than exchanging queens, but still not great. Black has the inspired manoeuvre 26...♘d7! 27.♖cd1 ♘f8!±, transferring the knight to e6 with counterplay.

26.♕b3!

White attacks a pawn and gains time to improve the pieces. The key point is to avoid the exchange of queens, as this would improve Black's structure.

26.♕a4 achieves the same as the text move.

26...♕c8

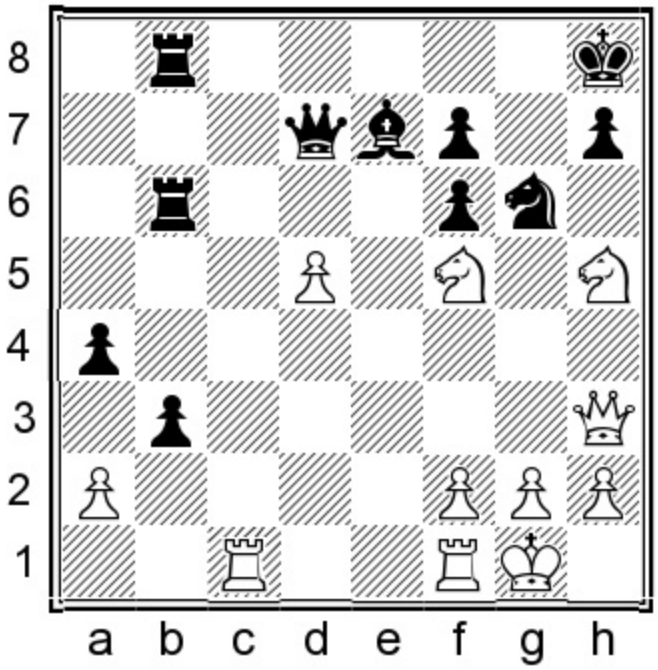
It is important to see that the typical strategic idea 26...b5, fighting for the d5-square, does not work. 27.♖e5! bxc4 28.♕xc4 ♕d7 29.♖c5, and the c6-pawn will fall.

27.a4!?

White's position is the more pleasant to play. White can continue with a4-a5 gaining more space, or ♕a3 with the idea of starting a pawn storm with b2-b4.

34. Nikola Sedlak – Esat Baglan

Belgrade 2021



Should White play:

A) 29.axb3 axb3 30.d6, or
B) 29.d6 right away?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)

In the game White played 29.d6?, when after 29...b2 Black was winning. The important point is that Black has ...a4-a3 down the line. Without this resource, the game is fine for White. For example: 30.♖b1 ♖xd6! 31.♘xd6 ♕xd6 and now 32.♘g3 (or 32.♕g4 a3) 32...a3 was winning for Black, who duly won on move 43.

29.axb3!

This is strongest.

29...axb3?!

Black should play 29...♖xb3 with an unclear game.

30.d6 b2 31.♖b1

Black is in trouble.

31...♖xd6

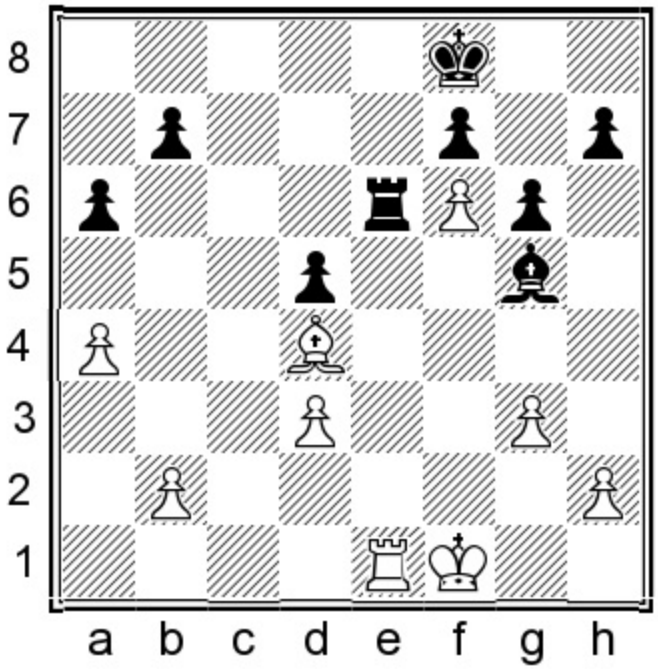
31...♗d8? 32.♕e3! would give White a winning attack on the kingside.

32.♘xd6 ♕xd6 33.♕f3±

Black will struggle in the long run to demonstrate sufficient compensation for the exchange.

35. Colin Pace – Zendan Al-Zendani

Chennai Olympiad 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange rooks with 32...♖xe1, or

B) play 32...♔e8?

Show/Hide Solution

(Converting an advantage)

Black played 32...♔e8? and White returned the favour with 33.h4?, forcing Black to make the best move. (Instead he should have played: 33.♖xe6† fxe6 34.h4! ♗c1 35.♔e2 ♔f7 36.♗e5 There is no way for Black to attack the f6-pawn twice.) 33...♖xe1† 34.♔xe1 ♗h6 35.♔e2 ♔d7 36.♗e3 ♗f8 37.g4 h6?! 38.♔f3?! (38.h5! ♔e6∓) 38...♔e6 39.g5 hxg5 40.hxg5 ♔f5–+ Black won on move 62.

Alternatively, 32...♖c6 33.b4! is less clear than the text move. 33...♗xf6?! doesn't win a pawn because of 34.b5.

32...♖xe1†!

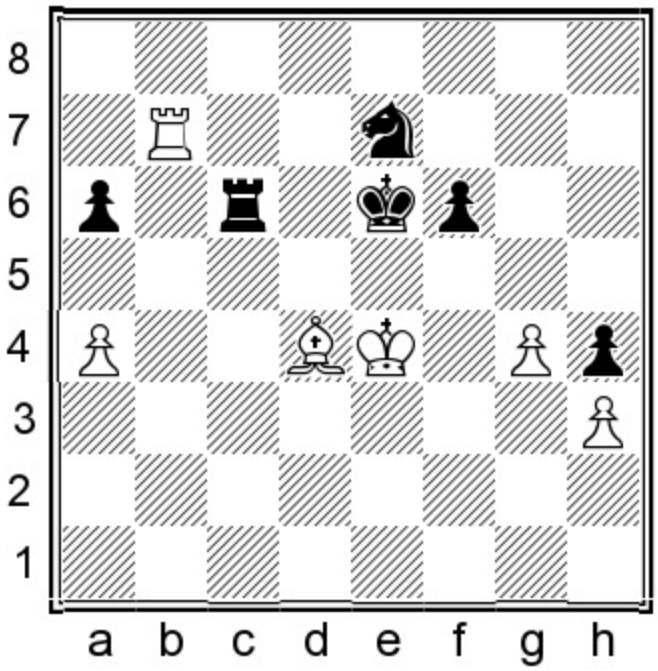
A prophylactic exchange. Black avoids the exchange by White of the rooks on e6. This would force Black to recapture with a pawn on e6, making it impossible to win the weak f6-pawn later.

33.♔xe1 ♔e8–+

Now the king is able to come to e6 and the f6-pawn will be lost. The rest is easy.

36. Yotam Shohat – Luka Budisavljevic

Teplice 2022



Should White:

A) seek to exchange rooks with 59.♖b6, or
B) play 59.a5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

The game went in the wrong direction for White. The position was equal after 59.a5? f5† 60.♔f3 fxg4† 61.hxg4 ♖c4, although the players only finally agreed to a draw on move 145!

59.♖b6!

Going into the bishop against knight endgame is the right thing for White to do. Black has weaknesses on both flanks, and the bishop is by far the strongest piece. Removing the rooks leaves Black without counterplay and unable to stop the invasion of the white king.

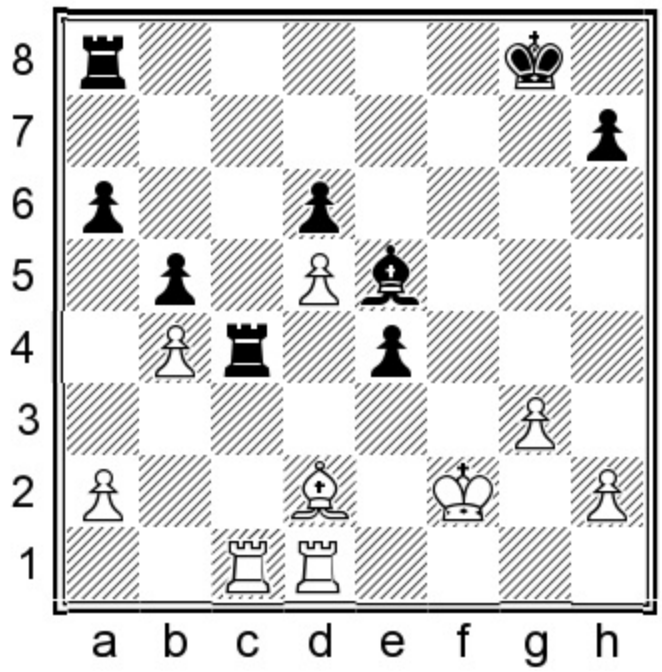
59...♖xb6 60.♗xb6 f5† 61.gxf5† ♘xf5 62.♗f2 ♔f6

Or 62...♘d6† 63.♔d4 ♔d7 64.♔d5 when the king comes in.

63.♔d5+–

37. Alexander Khalifman – Bibisara Assaubayeva

Batumi 2018



Should White:

A) exchange rooks on c4, or
B) improve the position of his other pieces?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)

32.♖xc4!

Exchanging the rooks will create another weakness.

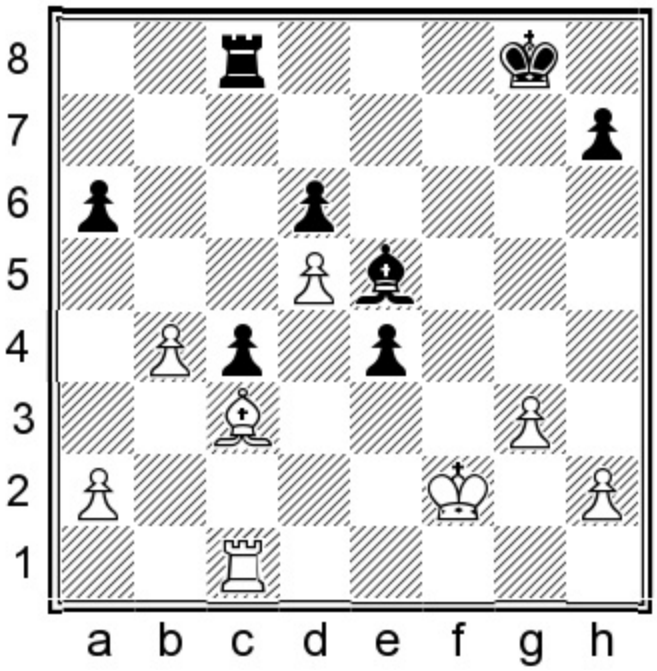
32...bxc4 33.♖c1

33.♗f4? would be wrong, as it loses time. 33...♗xf4 34.gxf4 ♖b8! and Black has counterplay.

33...♖c8 34.♗c3!

Exchanging Black's best piece to take control of the c3-square. Black's pawns are weak, and she has no chance of saving the endgame.

34.♗f4? again fails to 34...♗xf4 35.gxf4 c3!, giving Black the c4-square for the rook.



34...♖f8†

After 34...♗g7 35.♗xg7 ♔xg7 36.♔e3 c3 37.♔xe4 ♖c4† 38.♔e3 ♖xb4 39.♖xc3 White has an extra pawn. Despite the exchange of pawns, Black has no drawing chances.

35.♔e2 ♗xc3 36.♖xc3 ♖f5 37.♖xc4 ♖xd5

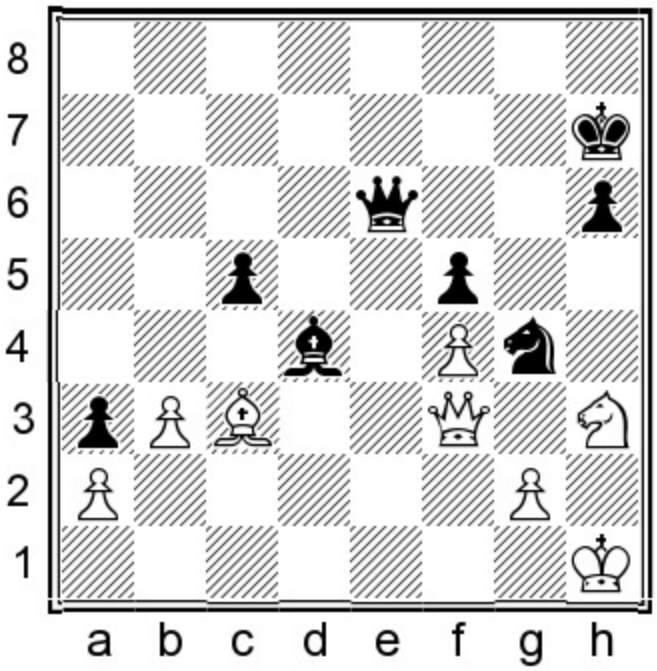
White won the game on move 62. At this point, White should have anticipated ...a6-a5 with the accurate:

38.a4!

But taking the e4-pawn also did the job.

38. Andrey Esipenko – Gata Kamsky

France 2022



Should Black:

A) seek the exchange of queens with 47...♕e4, or
B) improve his position calmly with 47...♔g6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing defenders)

Black played 47...♔g6 which was too slow. It allowed White to regroup with: 48.♘g1!∓ ♘f2† 49.♔h2 ♘g4† 50.♔h1 ♕f6 51.♗e1 c4 52.♘e2= The game was drawn nine moves later.

47...♕e4!

With the deadly threat of ...♕b1†. Black offers the exchange of queens with the idea of creating a passed pawn.

48.♕xe4

The critical line.
After 48.♗xd4 cxd4 49.♕d1 ♕e3–+ White is dominated.

48.♕g3 is possible, but after 48...♔g6! Black improves his position slowly with the idea of playing ...♕c2 or ...♕b1†, without allowing counterplay with ♕e1-e7. White doesn't have any constructive moves. (48...♕b1†? allows White to carry out his idea: 49.♕e1 ♕xa2 50.♕e7†=)

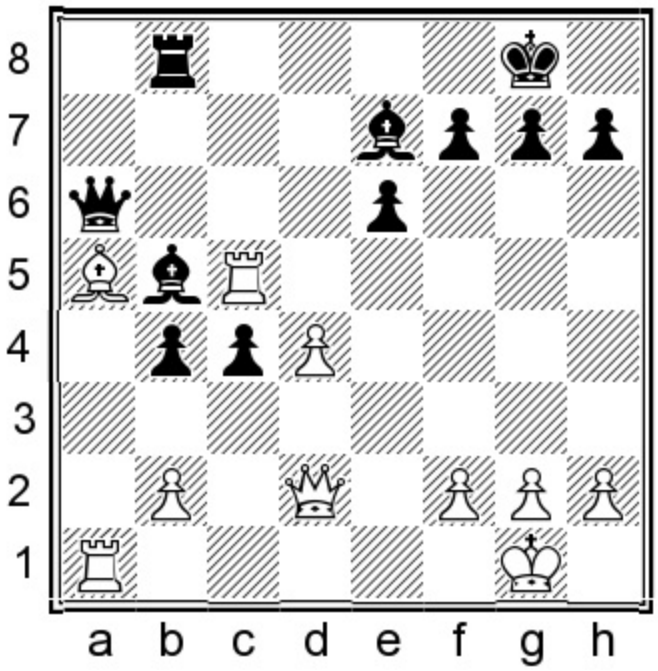
48...fxe4

With a passed pawn and weaknesses to exploit on the queenside, Black has a won ending.

49.♗e1 ♘e3 50.♘g1 ♘c2 51.♗a5 ♗b2 52.g3 ♘d4–+

39. Stavroula Tsolakidou – Alice Lee

St Louis 2022



White has two serious options, which would you choose?

A) return the exchange with 30.♕xb4, or
B) play for an advantage with 30.♖e5 and 31.♖ee1?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

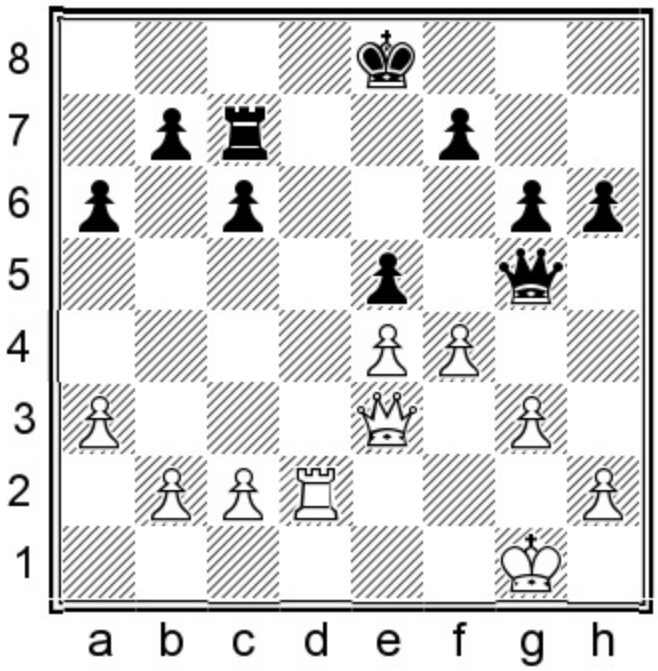
White went in the wrong direction, choosing to remain an exchange up but with horrible pieces. 30.♖e5? ♗c6 31.♖ee1 ♕b7 32.f3 ♗d5 Black is completely winning despite the material deficit. The game was soon over: 33.♕f4 ♖c8 34.♖ec1 ♕c6 35.♕d2 ♕b5 36.♕f4 ♕c6 37.h4 ♗d6 38.♕g5 h6 39.♕d2 ♕b5 40.b3 c3 41.♕f2 ♖a8 42.♕f1 ♖xa5 0–1

30.♕xb4!

This was necessary to give an equal game.

30...♗xc5 31.dxc5=

40. Emanuel Lasker – Mikhail Chigorin



Should Black:

A) seek the exchange of queens with 29...exf4, or
B) move his queen away?

Show/Hide Solution

(Tactics)

The game saw: 29...exf4?? Sorry to trick you, but you always need to pay attention to tactical aspects. Lasker played 30.♕d4 and Chigorin resigned. 1–0 (The automatic recapture 30.♕xf4 was not forced.)

Black should have played:

29...♕f6

29...♕e7 or 29...♕g4 are equally valid alternatives.

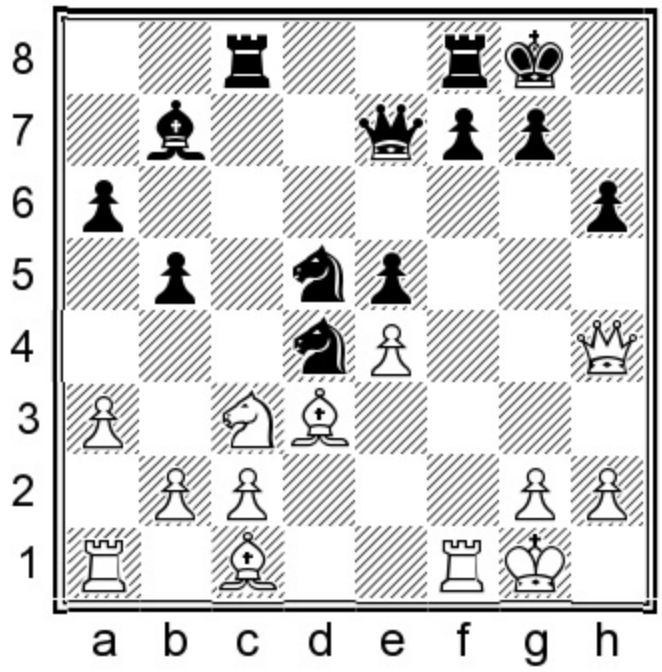
30.♕a7 ♕e6!

Black's problems are not enough to call it a real advantage for White.

Show in Text Mode

41. Jakub Kosakowski – Artyom Timofeev

Warsaw (rapid) 2021



Should White:

A) exchange queens on e7, or
B) play 18.♕g4?

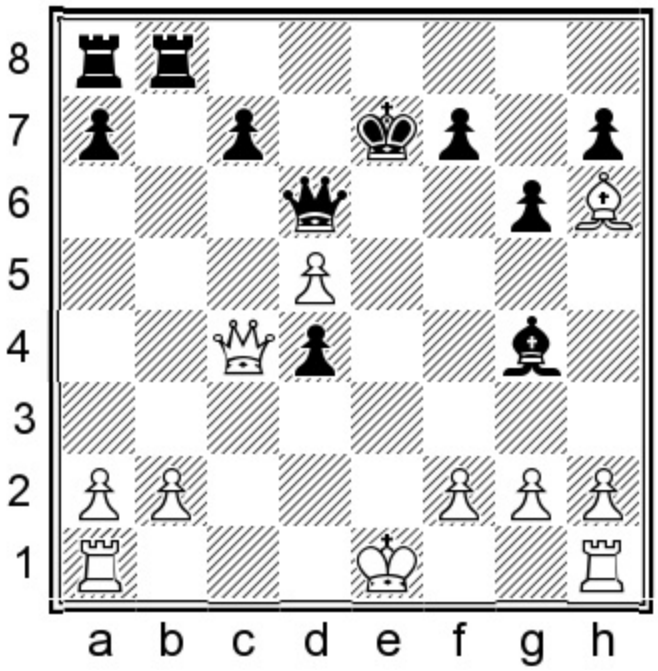
Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses/structure)
18.♕g4? was a serious mistake, which White made a second time after: 18...♘f6? (18...♘xc3!) 19.♕h4 ♘d5 20.♕g4? ♘xc3! This time the grandmaster decided to play on. 21.bxc3 ♕e6 (21...♖xc3!? 22.♗xh6 f6∓ was also good for Black.) 22.♕xe6 ♘xe6∓ Black has a considerable advantage and was pushing for a long time, although White eventually held the draw.

18.♕g3? drops a pawn after 18...♘xc3 19.bxc3 ♖xc3, not least due to: 20.♗xh6 ♘e2†–+

18.♕xe7! 18...♘xe7 19.♗e3=
This is the sensible choice, keeping the position equal.

42. Leandro Krysa – Ivan Cheparinov



Should White:

A) take on d4, or
B) castle?

Show/Hide Solution

(King safety)

In the game White either overestimated his advantage in the endgame, or simply did not believe his attacking potential. 17.♕xd4? was a big mistake. A perfect example of how evaluating exchanges is often a difficult task, even for grandmasters. 17...♕b4† 18.♕xb4† ♖xb4 19.b3 ♖d4 20.♖c1 ♖xd5 21.♖xc7† ♖d7± White has an extra pawn which is not a large advantage here. Nevertheless, he managed to convert it later on, due to mistakes by his opponent.

17.0-0!

Of course! Black has weaknesses on the dark squares plus his king is permanently in the centre. This is the move that White should try to make work.

17...♖b4

Black's best move, but only hoping for White to make a mistake.

17...♖xb2 is met by 18.♕xd4 among many other winning moves.

18.♕c1!

Playing on the dark squares and keeping an eye on the weak spot c7.

18.♕c2 also works.

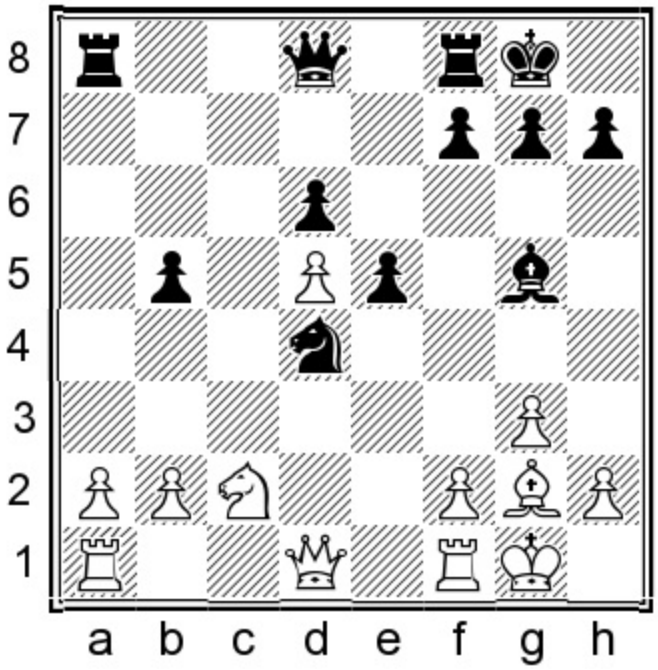
Less precise is: 18.♖fe1†?! This useless check actually improves the position of the black king by forcing it to d7. 18...♔d7 Now Black can capture on d5. 19.♕c1 ♕xd5 20.♗f4 ♖c4 Events have not gone in White's favour.

18...♔d7 19.♗f4 ♕b6 20.♖e1

White's advantage is decisive. White will play ♗xc7 next, or h2-h3 and g2-g4, winning a piece.

43. Julia Antolak – Mariya Muzychuk

Germany 2022



Should Black:

A) take on c2 with 18...♘xc2, or
B) play 18...♕b6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Structure)

In the game Black played 18...♕b6? which is wrong because of: 19.♘xd4 ♕xd4 20.♕xd4 exd4 The dark-squared bishop is blocked by the pawn on d4, and Black cannot hit any targets. The position is dead equal, and the game was drawn in 47 moves.

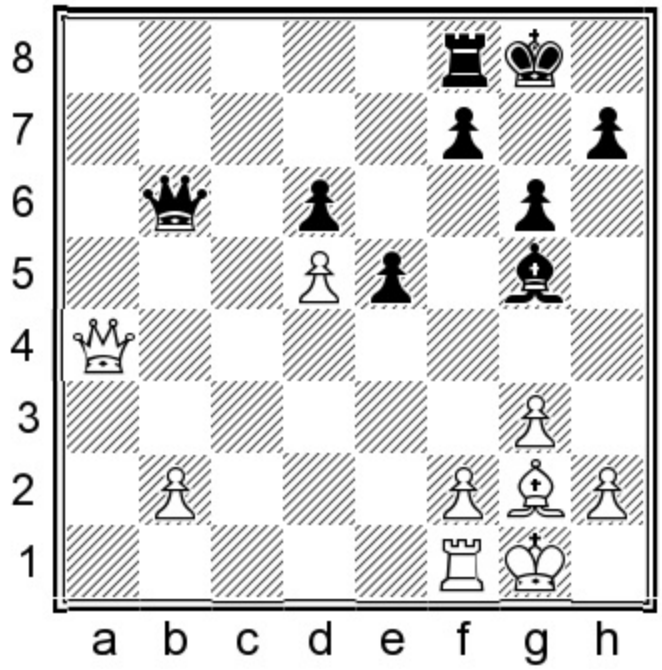
18...♘xc2

This should be an easy move to make. Although there are now opposite-coloured bishops, it is too early to speak of equality. In fact, Black stands better because the dark-squared bishop is stronger than its counterpart on g2. Black can put in motion his majority on the kingside and hit the targets on f2 and b2.

19.♕xc2 g6∓ 20.a4

Or 20.h4 ♗h6 21.a4 bxa4 22.♖xa4 ♖xa4 23.♕xa4 ♗d2 24.b4 ♗c3 with the idea ...♗d4. The b-pawn will always be blocked, and Black keeps some pressure on the dark squares on the kingside.

20...bxa4 21.♖xa4 ♖xa4 22.♕xa4 ♕b6



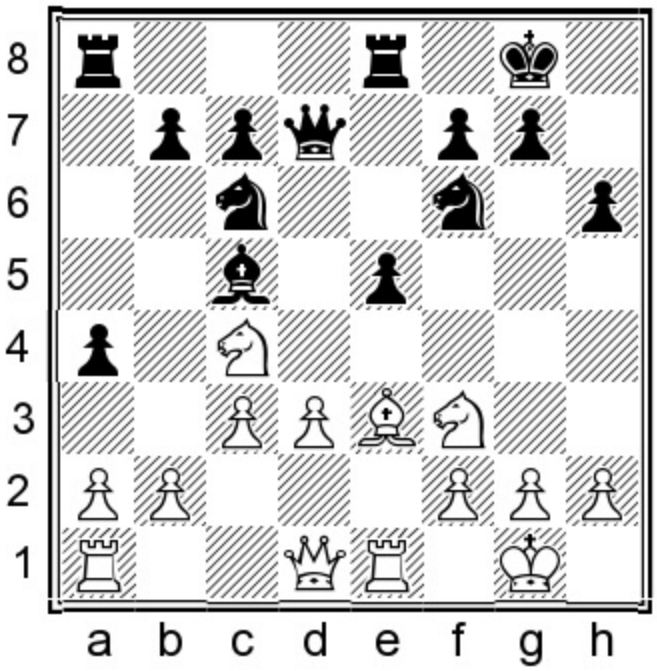
Black plans ...♗d2 and the eventual transfer of the bishop to the a7-g1 diagonal. White's bishop has no influence on the game.

23.b4 ♗d2 24.♖b1 ♖c8 25.♕b3 h5

Black can continue with ...♔g7 and ...h5-h4. The game is far from over, but Black has a promising position with a lot of play.

44. Tomas Sosa – Jaime Santos Latasa

Menorca 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange bishops on e3, or
B) play 16...♗f8?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

The game saw: 16...♗xe3? 17.♖xe3?! (White missed that 17.♘xe3 ♖ed8 18.♘c4 ♕xd3 19.♕xd3 ♖xd3 20.♘fxe5 ♘xe5 21.♖xe5 keeps the balance.) 17...♕d5∓ Black won a long game.

16...♗f8!

The knight on c4 does not have a good square and needs to watch out for ...b7-b5. The bishop on e3 is in the way of the rook that puts pressure on e5. The pawns on d3 and a2 are weak. Naturally, Black should refuse the trade.

17.d4

The alternatives do not present any problems for Black. For example, 17.♗c1 ♕f5 leaves the d3-pawn exposed. Black has a solid advantage.

17...e4

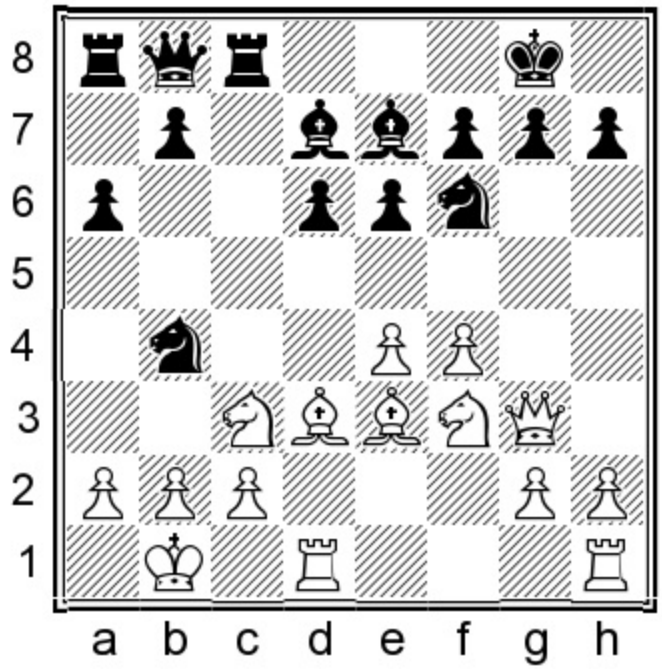
17...exd4 is also strong, but the text is simplest.

18.♘fe5 ♘xe5 19.♘xe5 ♕e6 20.a3 ♘d5

Black has ideas of ...f7-f5 or ...c7-c5 and a large advantage.

45. Josep Manuel Lopez Martinez – Sophie Milliet

Barcelona 2020



Should Black:

A) take on d3, or
B) play 15...b5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

Black went wrong with: 15...b5? 16.e5 ♘e8 (16...♘fd5? 17.♘xd5 ♘xd5 18.♗d4 gave White a winning attack in the game.) 17.♗e4! ♗c6 (Or: 17...d5?! 18.♘g5!±) 18.♗xc6 ♘xc6 White is better after either 19.h4± or 19.f5.

15...♘xd3!

Eliminating the bishop before it becomes dangerous.

16.cxd3

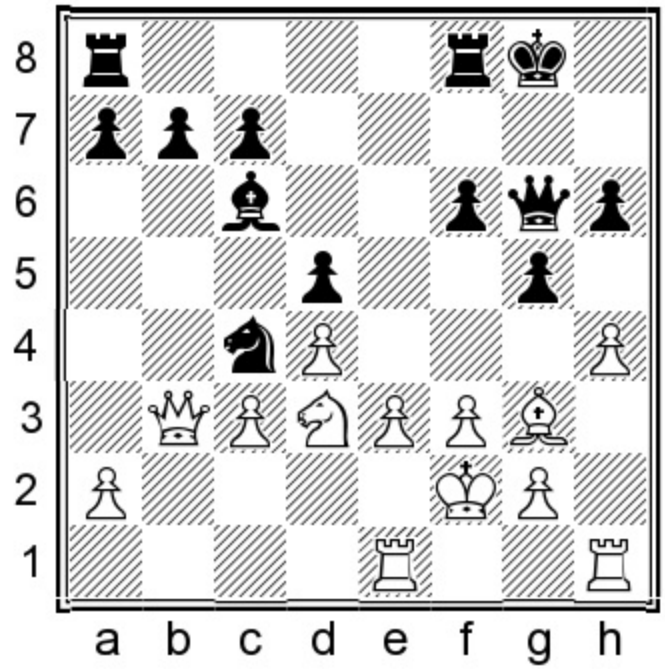
16.♖xd3 is even worse. After 16...♖xc3! 17.bxc3 ♘xe4 18.♕e1 ♗b5 19.♖d4 d5 Black will win any which way.

16...b5

Black will come with a strong attack; the absent defender on the light squares is sorely missed by White.

46. Shant Sargsyan – Alvar Alonso Rosell

Menorca 2022



Should White seek to eliminate:

A) the bishop with 21.♘b4, or
B) the knight with 21.♘b2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)
21.♘b4? was the move played in the game. Black could have answered with 21...a5! forcing the capture on c6. (But 21...f5? was hopeless. After 22.hxg5 hxg5 23.♗xc7 White soon won.) 22.♘xc6 bxc6 The strong knight on c4 guarantees sufficient counterplay. For instance: 23.♗xc7 ♖ae8 (23...♖a7!? is also good.) 24.e4 (Or 24.♗g3 ♕d3⇄) 24...♕f7 25.♗g3 dxe4 26.♖xe4 f5 with even chances.

21.♘b2!

This is the right way to continue. It eliminates Black's best minor piece and results in a middlegame where Black has too many weaknesses on both flanks.

Play may continue:

21...b5 22.♘xc4 bxc4

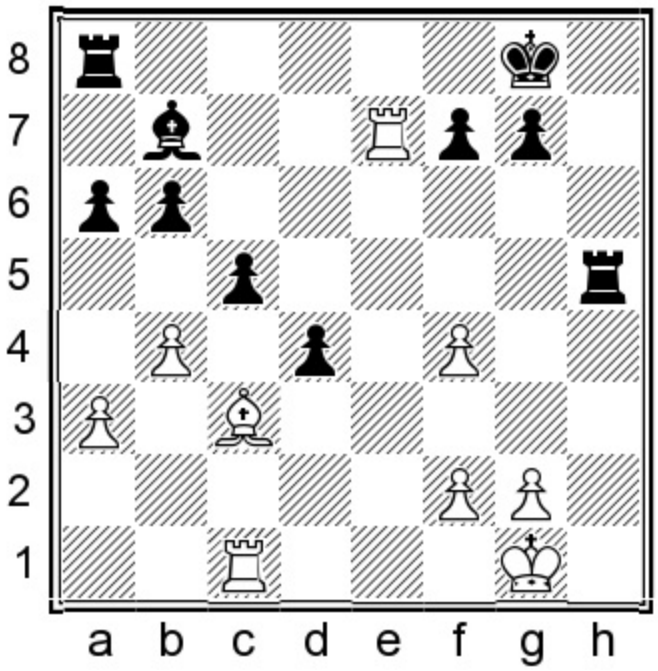
Or 22...dxc4 23.♕b1! and White's central dominance will decide.

23.♕a3 ♖ab8 24.♖e2+–

White is in total control and can freely put pressure on Black's pawns.

47. Ellen Fredericia Nilssen – Viktor Haarmark Nielsen

Svendborg 2022



Should Black play:

A) 29...dxc3,
B) 29...♗d5, or
C) 29...♖b8?

Show/Hide Solution

(Structure)

29...dxc3? was played in the game. Black enters a rook ending where, although he has a material advantage, White has drawing chances, as is the case in many rook endgames. 30.♖xb7 cxb4 31.axb4 ♖c8 32.♖xb6 ♖d5 33.♖xa6 The game is already equal, although White later lost.

29...♖b8? is even weaker. After 30.♗d2 the black pawns cannot easily advance.

29...♗d5

The right way.

30.♗b2

Keeping an eye on the d4-pawn.

30.♗d2 c4 does not change anything.

30...♗e6

30...♖b8 also works, as it defends the c5-pawn indirectly. After 31.bxc5 bxc5, the bishop on b2 is attacked.

31.♖b7

Taking on c5 first doesn't help. 31.bxc5 bxc5 32.♖c7 ♖b8 33.♗a1 ♖d5, and the d4-pawn cannot be stopped.

31...♖d5

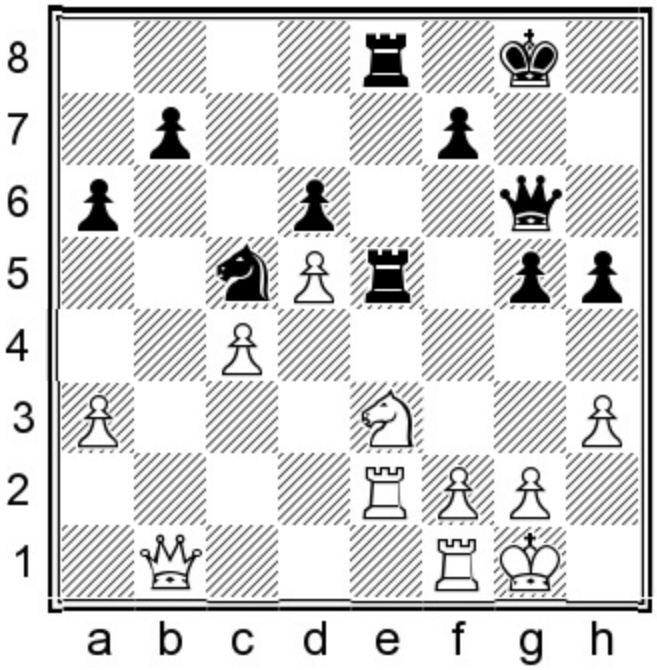
With a winning position. White simply cannot stop the black pawns.

32.♖xb6 c4 33.♖xc4 d3

And so on...

48. Sergey Efimovich – Alexis Cabrera

Alicante 2022



Should Black:

A) play 34...♕xb1, or
B) 34...♖e4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Gaining time/Exchanging the defender)

A lot of the advantage was lost in the game after: 34...♖e4?! 35.♖ee1 ♕f6?! (35...♔f8!?) 36.♕d1! White is OK and later made the draw.

34...♕xb1!

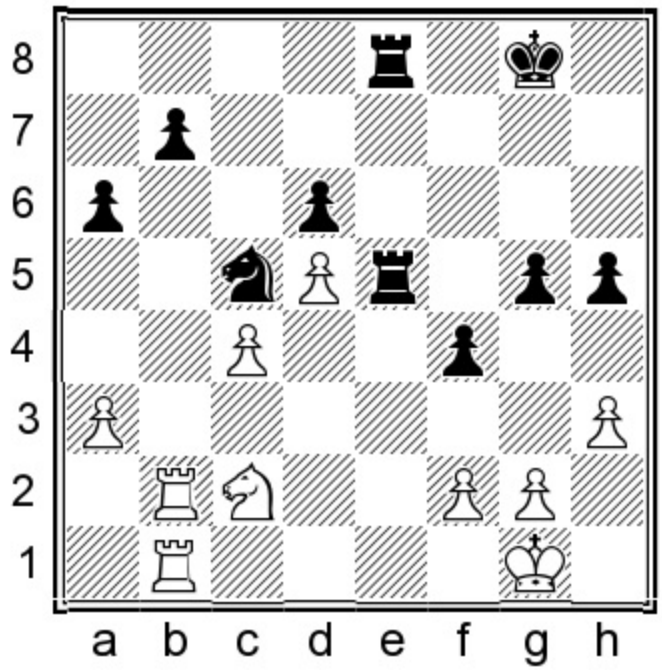
White has a chronic weakness on c4, and is hoping to create some counterplay based on the open position of the black king. This exchange removes the only piece White can use to create threats and defend his weaknesses. It also gains time for Black to destabilize the knight on e3.

35.♖xb1 f5!

The logical follow-up. If Black wants to attack the c4-pawn, he has to remove the e3-knight.

36.♖eb2 f4 37.♘c2

37.♘f1 is met with 37...♖e1 38.♖b6 ♔f7 39.♔h2 ♖xb1 40.♖xb1 ♖e2 when the invasion is lethal.



37...♖e4

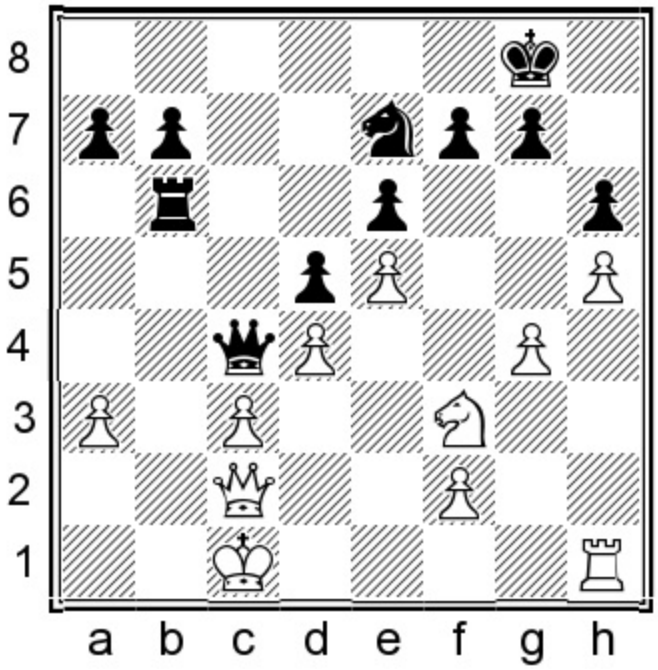
Black has a strong initiative. White is facing a difficult defence. The following variation is just an illustration of the challenges White faces.

38.♖b6 ♖xc4 39.♘e1 ♖ce4 40.♘f3 g4 41.♘g5 ♖e1† 42.♖xe1 ♖xe1† 43.♔h2 ♘d3 44.♖xd6 h4 45.♖g6† ♔f8 46.♘e6† ♔e7 47.♘xf4 ♘xf4 48.♖xg4 ♘xd5

This looks like a technical win for Black.

49. Daniil Dubov – Nils Grandelius

Wijk aan Zee 2022



Should Black play:

A) 36...♕b3 and win the a3-pawn, or
B) continue his attack with 36...♖a6?

Show/Hide Solution

(King safety)

The main factor in this position is the safety of the white king. White has no real attack so there is no need for Black to exchange queens. In the game, Black was tempted by winning material and a risk-free endgame. However, by exchanging queens Black gave White real chances to save the game.

36...♕b3? was played by Grandelius and was a serious mistake. 37.♕xb3 ♖xb3 38.♔c2 ♖xa3 39.♔b2 ♖a4∓ Black is a pawn up, but converting this endgame is far from trivial. He managed to win the game in 82 moves, helped by mistakes from his opponent.

Black should have played:

36...♖a6

There are other winning moves, but this is the most direct. Black threatens to take the a3-pawn.

37.♕b2 ♘c6

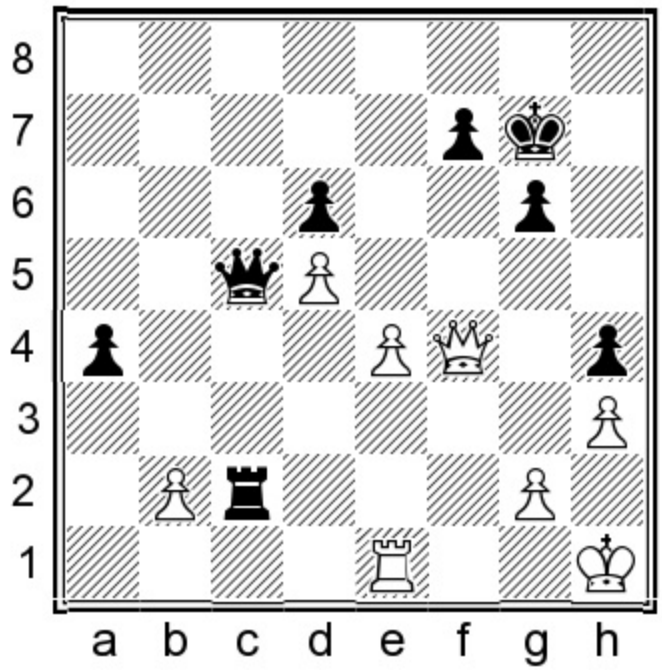
Black will win lots of material by force. For example:

38.g5 ♖b6 39.♕c2 ♕a6! 40.a4 ♘b4

Black wins.

50. Jurica Srbis – Panagiotis Hristodoulou

Novi Sad 2022



Should Black play:

A) 47...♖f2, or
B) offer the exchange of queens with 47...♕f2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Domination)

Black decided to force the draw by going into the rook endgame with: 47...♕f2? 48.♕xf2 ♖xf2 49.♖a1 ♖xb2 50.♖xa4= The game was drawn 19 moves later.

47...♖xb2? is also insufficient to retain Black's advantage: 48.♖f1 ♖b7 49.♕f6† ♔g8 50.♕d8† With perpetual check.

Black is better due to White's weaknesses on e4 and b2. Also, the rook on the 7th rank is extremely unpleasant for White. The idea here is to win the b2-pawn and still keep up the pressure on White's position. This could have been achieved by playing:

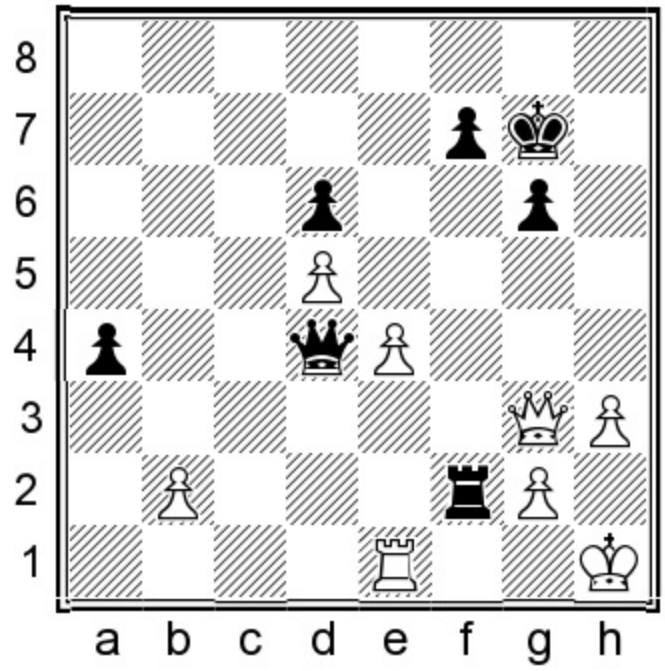
47...♖f2!

It is important to stop White from playing ♖f1 with counterplay along the f-file.

48.♕xh4 ♕d4!

A move of dominance which pins the e4-pawn and takes control of the dark squares. Black threatens to take on b2 and combine pressure along the 7th rank with the advance of his passed pawn.

48...♖xb2? 49.♖f1 again gives White enough counterplay to hold. Now 49...♕d4 is met with 50.♕f4, with a double attack on f7 and d6.



49.♕g3

49.♕e7 ♕d2 50.♖g1 ♕xb2 is hopeless for White.

49...♕xb2 50.e5

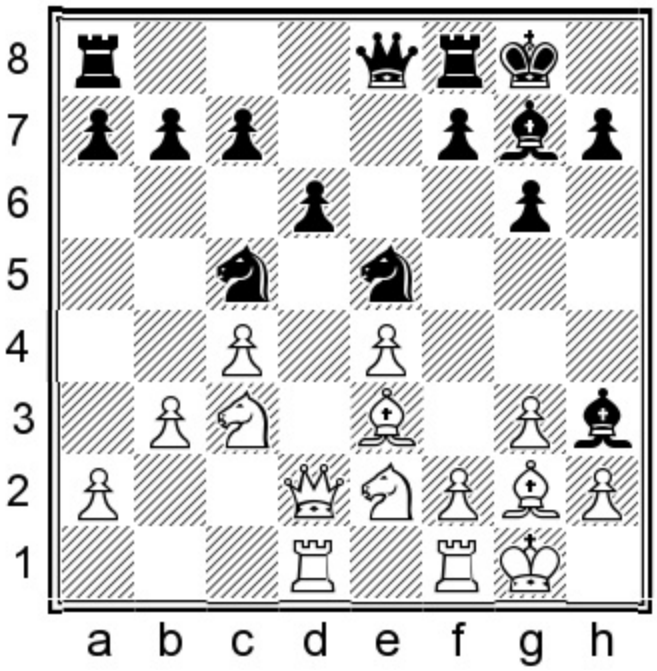
Or: 50.♕xd6 a3–+

50...dxe5 51.d6 f6!

Black defends his e5-pawn and is now ready to play ...♖d2. White's passed pawn is going nowhere. Black is on course to win.

51. Thomas Bartell – Samuel Sevian

Sturbridge 2021



Should White:

A) give up his bishop on c5 in order to give Black a doubled pawn, or
B) play 15.f3?

Show/Hide Solution

(Structure)

White is better no matter what, and had a solid edge after: 15.f3 ♗xg2 16.♔xg2 ♘e6!?± The game ended in a draw on move 39.

But White could have increased his advantage considerably by giving Black the doubled pawn.

15.♗xc5! dxc5 16.♕e3! ♗xg2 17.♔xg2 b6

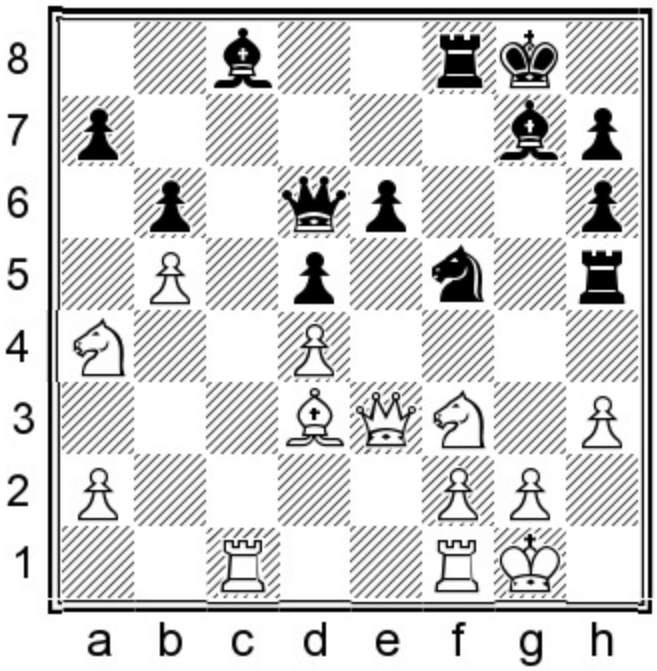
The main reason White is better in this position is the disappearance of the d6-pawn. If Black was able to play ...♘c6, and ...♘d4 or ...♗d4, his position would be playable. But after:

18.f4! ♘c6 19.♘d5 ♖c8 20.e5+–

Black's pieces are dominated, and the game has reached the conversion stage.

52. Jorden van Foreest – Christian Bauer

Chalons-En-Champagne 2021



Should White:

A) take on f5, or
B) retreat his queen?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

For reasons unknown, Van Foreest did not take on f5. Instead he played 25.♕e2? ♗d7 (White is already lost after 25...♘h4) 26.♖fe1?! (26.♘e5∓) 26...♘h4! 27.♘e5 ♖g5 28.g3 ♗xe5 29.dxe5 ♕b4 30.♖c7 ♘f3† 31.♔f1 ♖xe5 32.♖b1 ♖xe2 0–1

25.♗xf5!

Giving up the bishop for the knight makes sense, as it is all about the e5/d4-squares.

25...♖hxf5 26.♖c6 ♕b8

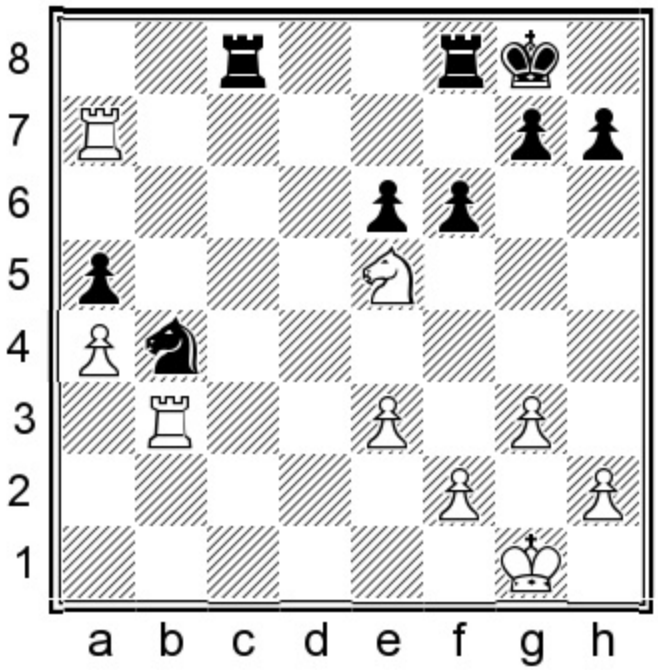
26...♕b4? 27.♖xc8 and wins.

27.♖fc1 ♗d7 28.♖c7

White has a winning advantage. For example:

28...♗xb5 29.♕xe6†

53. Bartlomiej Heberla – Mikhail Kobalia



Should White:

A) exchange the knight on b4 with 29.♘d3, or
B) play 29.♘f3?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)
29.♘f3? ♖a8! allowed Black to solve his problems. In the game the draw was near. 30.♖xa8 ♖xa8 31.♖c3 e5 32.♖c5 ♘d3 33.♖b5 ♖c8 34.♖d5 (Or 34.♖xa5 ♖c1† 35.♔g2 ♖c2 and Black is not worse.) 34...♘c5 35.♘d2 ♘xa4 ½–½

29.♘d3!

Exchanging the knight is correct for two reasons. The knight on b4 is strong and the white knight is not. Although rook endings give a higher drawing percentage than rook and knight endings, it is important to also have the advantage!

29...♘xd3 30.♖xd3 ♖a8 31.♖dd7 ♖xa7 32.♖xa7 ♖b8 33.♖xa5 ♔f7

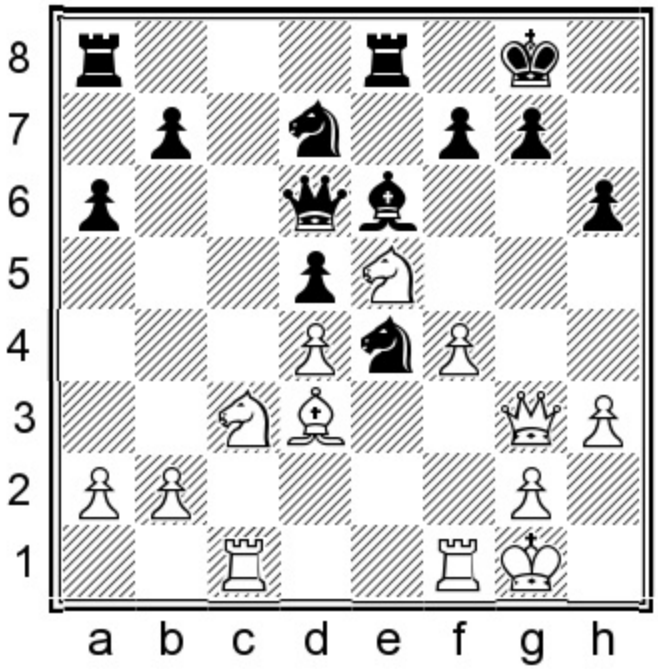
There are many paths that lead to an endgame similar to this.

34.h4±

White has excellent winning chances. Deep analysis may show that Black holds or loses by a tempo. Practice shows that mistakes are likely, and bringing the opponent to the zone of one mistake is an achievement.

54. Liam Vrolijk – Ulviyya Fataliyeva

Sitges 2021



Should White:

A) retreat the queen, or
B) take on e4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Structure)

White decided not to make the exchange. 18.♕e1? ♕b6 (Also 18...♘df6!? looks harmonious.) 19.♕e3 The game was drawn on move 31. 19...♘d6 (or 19...♖ad8) would give complete equality.

18.♘xe4?? is certainly not an option. 18...dxe4 and 19...♕xd4†.

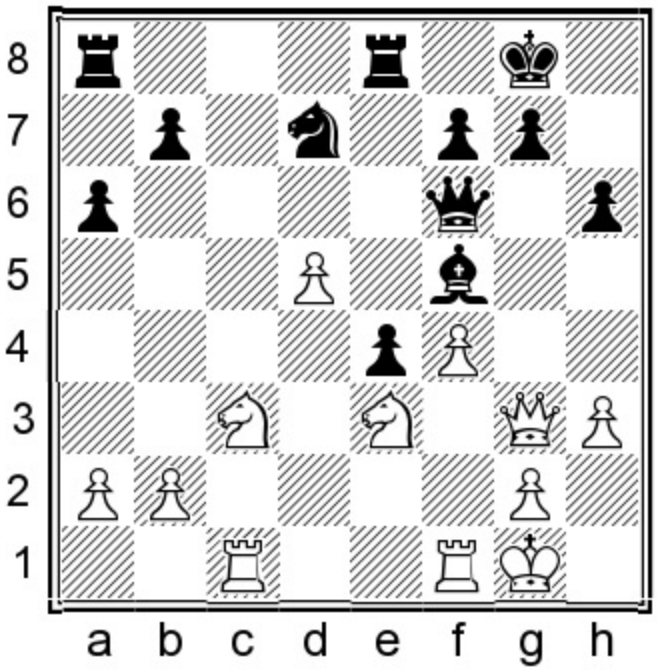
18.♗xe4! dxe4 19.d5

This is strong.

19...♗f5

Black cannot take the d-pawn, as the bishop is lost after 19...♗xd5? 20.♘xd7 ♕xd7 21.♖cd1.

20.♘c4 ♕f6 21.♘e3±



White has fantastic pieces, and the d-pawn is a monster. The only weakness in the white camp is the d3-square, but making use of it is not easy for Black. For example, White wins after:

21...♘c5?! 22.d6! ♗d7 23.♘cd5

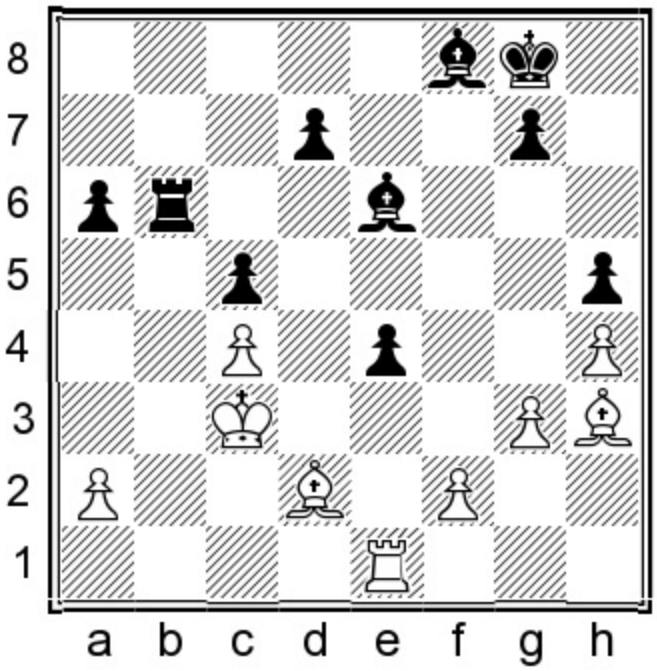
23.f5 is also strong.

23...♕xd6 24.♖xc5 ♕xc5 25.♘f6†

White picks up a piece.

55. Luca Shytaj – Loek van Wely

Germany 2020



Should White:

A) exchange bishops on e6, or
B) play 34.♗g2?

Show/Hide Solution

(King safety)

In the game, White was much worse and went down after: 34.♗g2? White's c4- and a2-pawns are weak, and his king is exposed on c3. 34...♖b4 (34...g6! was even stronger, but the text move is good enough.) 35.♖xe4 g6! 36.♗e3 ♗g7† 37.♔d2 ♖b2† 38.♔c1 ♖xa2 39.♗xc5 a5 40.♗e3 a4 41.c5 ♖a1† 42.♔d2 ♗d5 0–1

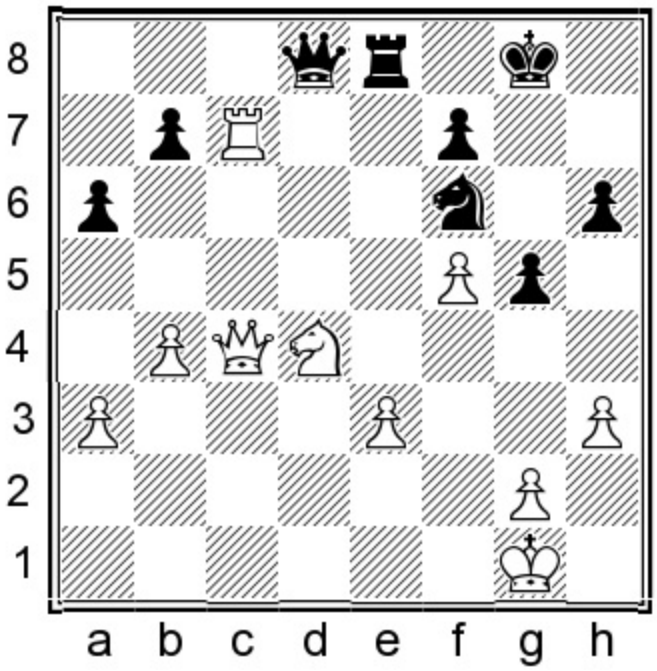
White has reasonable chances to make a draw after:

34.♗xe6†! ♖xe6 35.♗f4∓

But 35.♖b1?! ♖d6!∓ is unpleasant for White.

56. Volker Seifert – Nikola Nestorovic

Gmund am Tegernsee 2021



Should Black play:

A) 35...♕d5, or
B) 35...♘d5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing attackers)

In the game Black played for activity with 35...♘d5? 36.♖xb7 ♖xe3, which fails in only one way. But predictably so. The white pieces are too active and the black position too exposed. 37.♘c6! ♕d6 38.♖b8† ♔h7 39.♕d4! ♕f6 (Or 39...f6 40.♕a7† and White wins.) 40.♕xd5 g4!? 41.hxg4 ♖e1† 42.♔f2 ♖c1 43.♕d8 ♖c2† 44.♔g1 1–0

35...♕d5!

This was essential. After the white queen is removed from the board, the black king's position is no longer exposed. Without White's strongest attacker, the draw is relatively trivial to obtain.

36.♕xd5

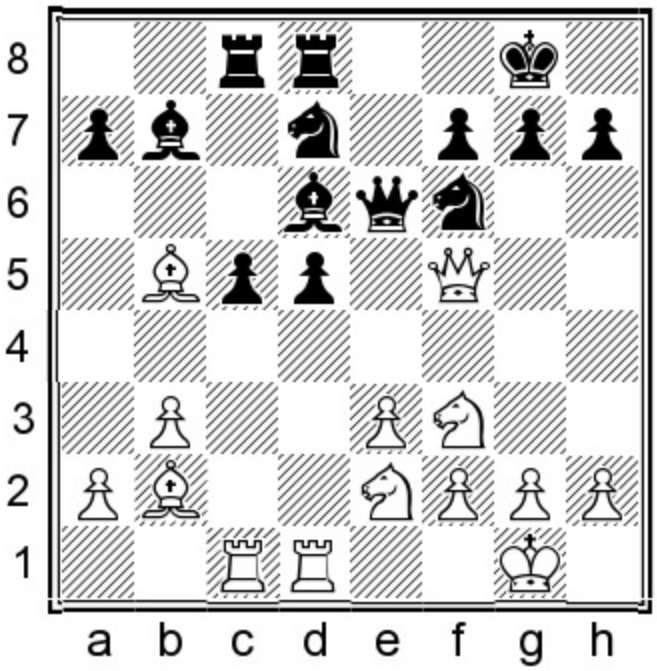
There are other moves, but they all feel like retreats.

36...♘xd5 37.♖xb7 ♖xe3=

Black has good counterplay against a3 and g2, and will make the draw with decent play.

57. Jesper Sondergaard Thybo – Milton Pantzar

Internet 2020



Should White:

A) take on e6, or
B) avoid the exchange with 18.♕g5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Creating weaknesses)

White chose to avoid the exchange of queens. 18.♕g5?! h6 19.♕h4 White later won the game, but at this point 19...d4!? gives Black a good game. (19...♗f8 and 19...♘e4 are also playable.) 20.exd4 c4! 21.♘g3 ♗xf3 22.gxf3 ♗xg3 23.hxg3 cxb3 Black is not worse.

18.♕xe6!

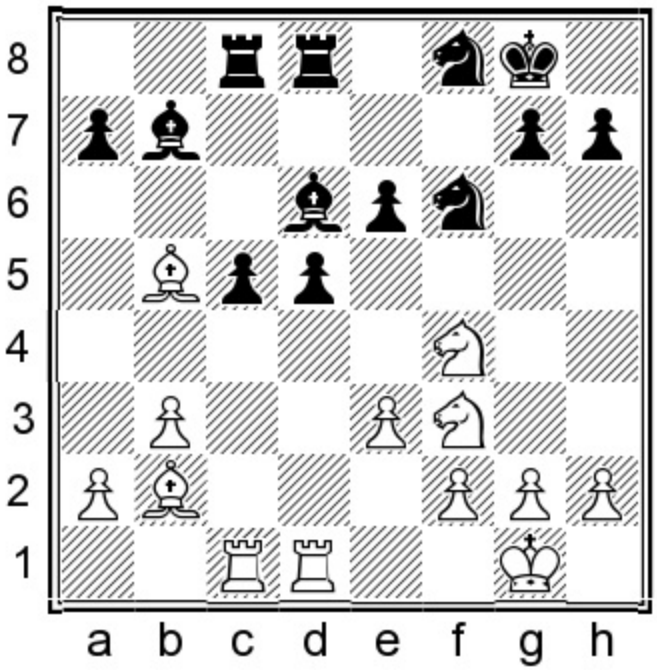
18.♗d3?! leads to a worse version of the main line for White. Black plays 18...g6! and after 19.♕xe6 fxe6, he will be in time to put the king on e7, for example, when all is well. The point is that 20.♘f4? walks into: 20...e5–+

18...fxe6 19.♘f4±

This was stronger. Black has a weak pawn structure and is permanently worse after taking on f4. Play can get direct after:

19...♘f8

White has to be accurate.



20.♘e5!

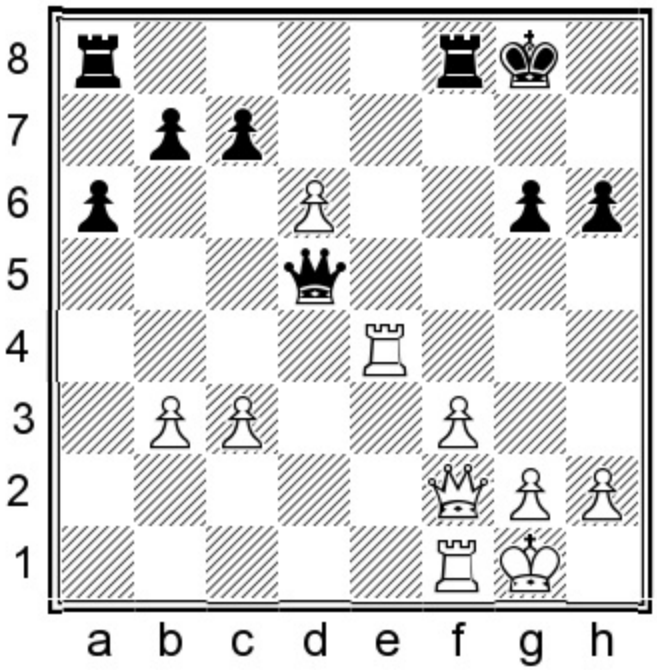
20.♘g5 a6! 21.♗a4 ♗xf4 22.exf4 d4 gives Black active play via the d5-square. 20.♗e5!? is also playable.

20...a6 21.♗e2 ♘6d7 22.♘xd7 ♖xd7 23.h4±

White is in control with no faults in his setup, while Black has a fragile centre and a weak a-pawn to look after.

58. Yoseph Theolifus Taher – Maria Florencia Fernandez

Sitges 2021



Should Black play:

A) 24...♕xd6, or
B) 24...♕xe4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing attackers)

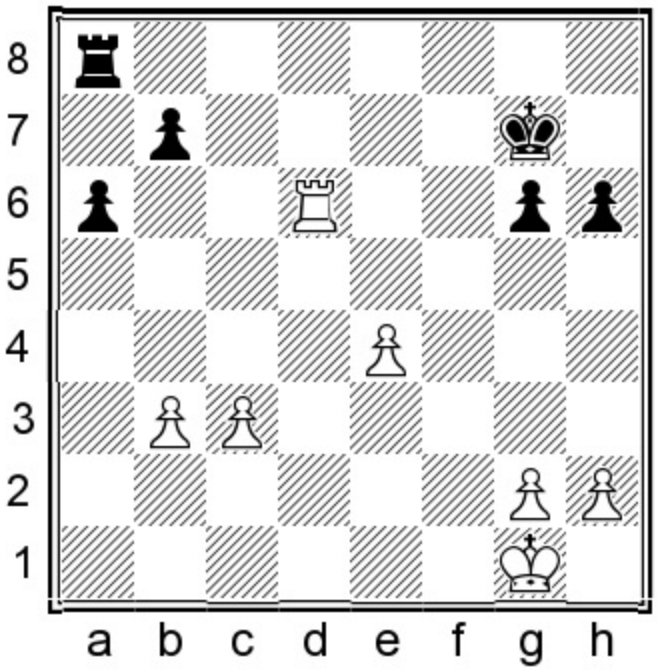
24...♕xd6? was a disaster for Black. Her king is exposed and unsurprisingly, White crashed through: 25.♕e3! Threatening both the h6-pawn and a quick invasion along the e-file. 25...♔g7 (25...♖f5 26.g4 and the h-pawn will go.) 26.♖e6 ♕d5 27.c4 White is taking all the tempos offered. 27...♕f5 28.g4 (28.♖d1! ♖ad8 29.♖e7† ♔g8 30.♖xd8 ♖xd8 31.♖xc7 was cleaner.) 28...♕g5 29.♕d4† ♔g8 (29...♔h7 30.♕d7† ♔h8 31.♖e7 ♕f6 32.♖d1! would also win for White. The last piece joins the attacking force.) 30.h4! ♖ad8 31.♕e4 ♕xh4 Black resigned; apparently it is mate in 9. 1–0

24...cxd6 25.♖fe1+– was also bad for Black.

24...♕xe4!

This was the only sane choice. With such an exposed king, a difficult rook endgame is a dream come true!

25.fxe4 ♖xf2 26.♖xf2 cxd6 27.♖f6 ♔g7 28.♖xd6



28...b5!

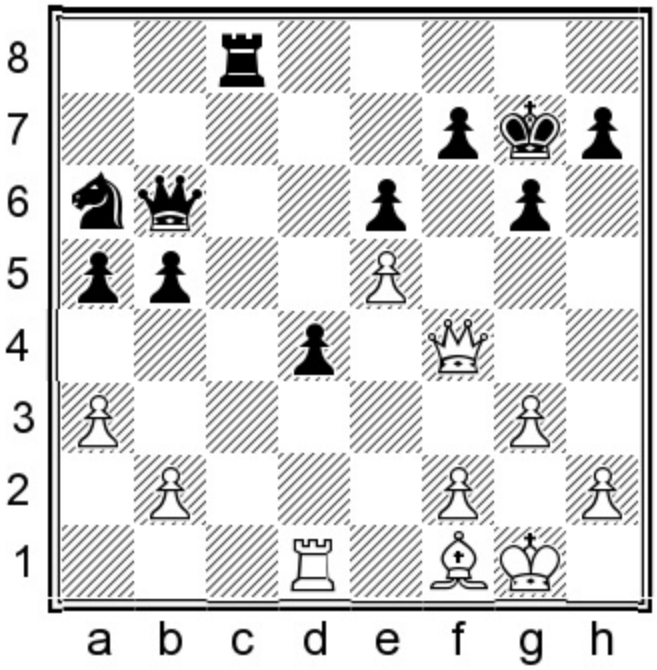
Preventing c3-c4.

29.b4 a5 30.bxa5 ♖xa5±

Despite her pawn deficit, Black should hold without having to find any difficult moves.

59. Boris Gelfand – Dmitry Andreikin

Yasnaya Polyana 2021



Should White:

A) exchange queens with 30.♕xd4, or
B) keep them on by taking with the rook?

Show/Hide Solution

(King safety)

The game move 30.♕xd4? was silly. The weaknesses on the kingside will no longer worry Black. 30...♕xd4 31.♖xd4 ♖c5 32.f4 ♘c7= A draw was agreed on move 40.

30.♖xd4!

This should look like an advantage to you, but to discover that it is entirely winning may shock.

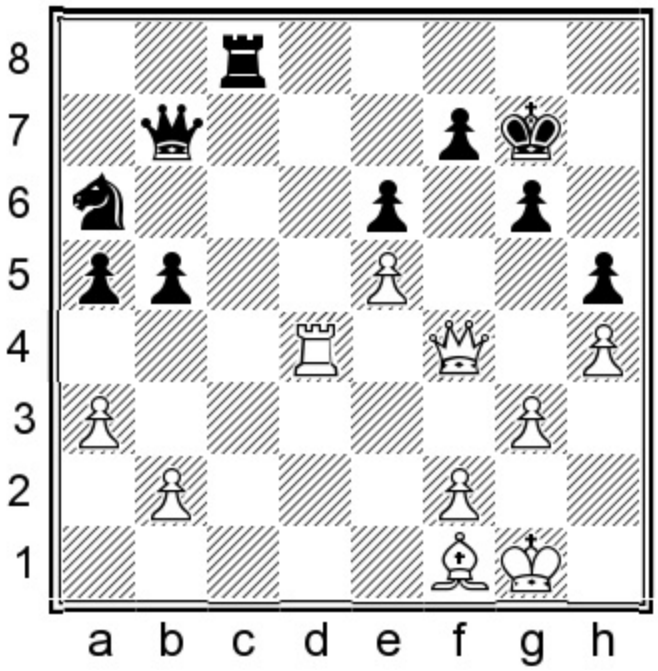
30...♕b7

Or 30...♘c7 31.♖d7 ♖f8 32.♗g2 and Black is paralysed. White is playing ♕f6† and ♕e7 next.

30...♘c5 looks active, but after 31.h4! h5 32.♕f6† ♔g8 33.g4! Black is sent to the hospital on failing life support.

31.h4 h5

This might look solid. But a common theme in chess is that strong control of the centre may facilitate a flank attack.



32.g4!

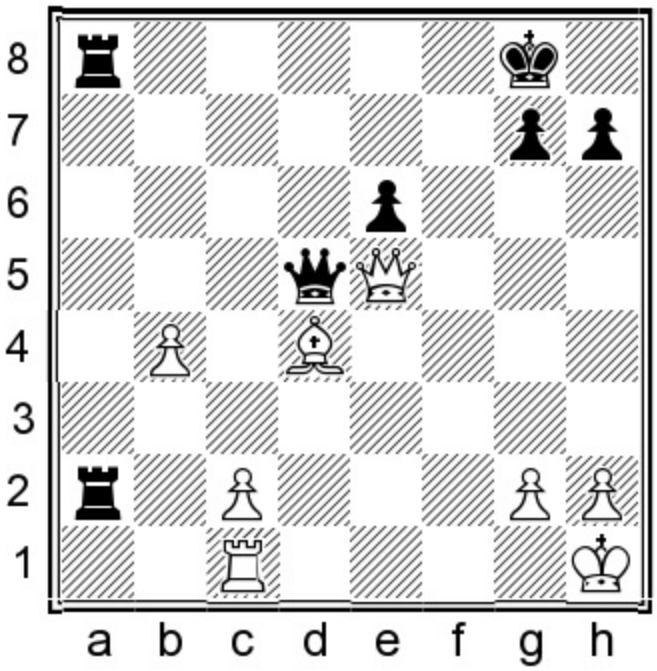
Black can try a lot of things here, but none looks remotely satisfying even at a first glance.

32...hxg4 33.♕f6† ♔g8 34.h5 gxh5 35.♕g5† ♔f8 36.♕xh5

White has a winning attack.

60. Elisabeth Hapala – Aureliana-Eugenia Pancu

Bucharest 2021



Should Black:

A) retreat with 43...♕d7, or

B) exchange the queens with 43...♕xe5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

Black allowed White to keep the strong queen on e5, which was a bad choice:

43...♕d7? 44.h3!?⩲

44.b5! was slightly more accurate.

44...♖d8 45.c3 ♖e8 46.♖e1 ♕b7 47.♕e4?!

47.♖e4!=

47...♕f7

Exchanging queens still gives Black the easier game. White is sufficiently well-placed to hold the draw after: 47...♕xe4! 48.♖xe4 ♔f7∓ But she would need to be careful, as something like 49.♖f4†?! ♔e7 50.♗xg7? ♖g8 51.♗f6† ♔d7–+ would force her to weaken the second rank, after which the white king would be in terrible trouble.

White won on move 62. Here the strongest move would have been:

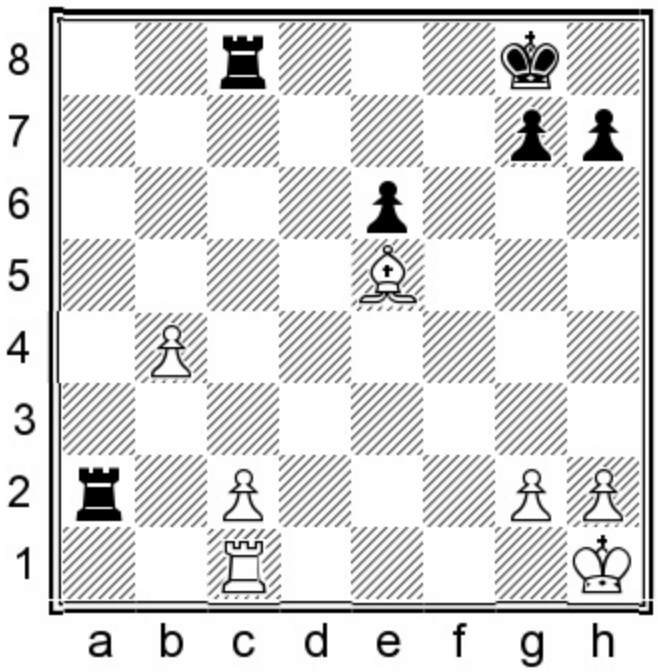
48.b5!±

Black should equalize with accurate play, but already the b-pawn makes White's play easier.

The only one benefitting from the presence of queens is White. The black king is exposed, the white king is not.

43...♕xe5! 44.♗xe5 ♖c8

Black is just winning.



45.c3

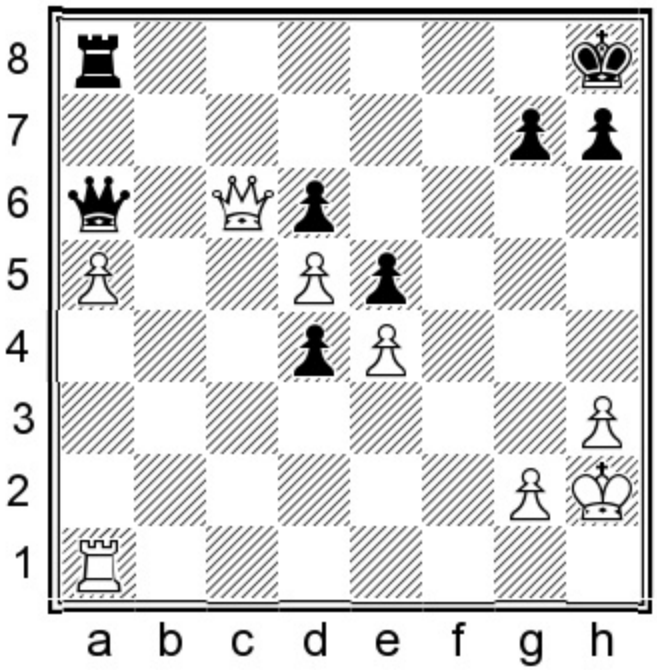
Attempting to give up a pawn and make a run for it with 45.c4!? does not fully work out. After 45...♖a4! (45...♖e2 is also strong) 46.c5 (46.♗d6 ♖xc4!–+) 46...♖xb4 47.h3 ♖b5 White does not have real counterplay. The black king will come over to deal with the pawn and Black will win.

45...♖e2 46.♗d4 e5 47.♗c5 ♔f7

The black king will join the game. The white king cannot. The game is decided.

61. Noe Tutisani – Jan Marn

Terme Catez 2022



Should Black:

A) play 39...h6, or
B) exchange queens.

Show/Hide Solution

(Tactics)
39...♕xc6?, giving White an extra passed pawn, was not a good idea. 40.dxc6 ♔g8 41.a6 ♔f7 42.c7 d3 43.♖b1 d2 44.♖b8! White could delay this, but the key point is to play it. 44...d1=♕ 45.♖xa8 ♕c1 46.c8=♕ ♕f4† 47.♔g1 ♕e3† 48.♔f1 ♕f4† 49.♔e2 ♕xe4† 50.♔d2 ♕d5† 51.♔c1 1–0

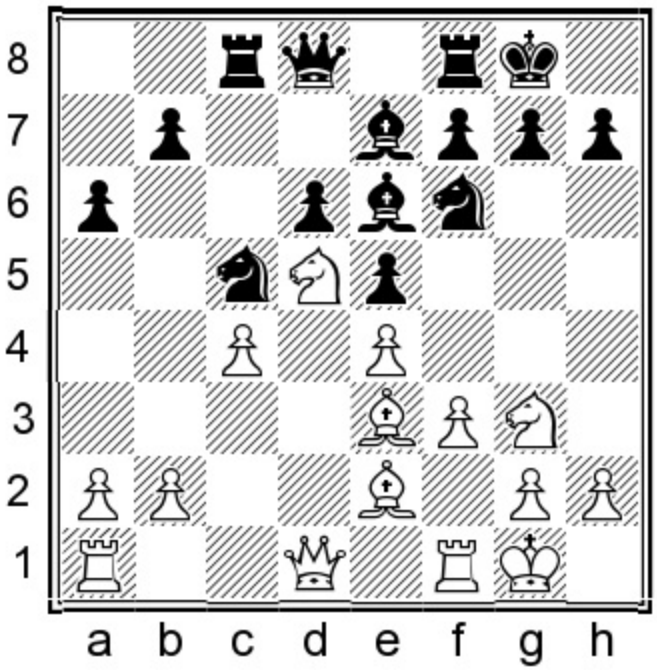
39...h6!
This modest move was best.

After the text move White can exchange queens or make no progress. So let's check the exchange of queens.

40.♕xa6 ♖xa6 41.♔g1 ♔h7 42.♔f2 ♔g6 43.♔e2 ♔g5 44.g3 h5
Black arrives in good time on the kingside. The game will end in a draw, provided neither player does anything stupid.

62. Maksym Dubnevych – Zafrir Patt

Terme Catez 2022



Should Black eliminate the knight on d5 with:

A) 14...♘xd5, or
B) 14...♗xd5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)
14...a5? was played in the game. White should have responded with 15.♘xe7†! ♕xe7 16.b3+–, when his superiority on the dark squares on both sides of the board will be felt deep into the middlegame.

14...♗xd5? 15.cxd5± would give Black long-term problems on the light squares, where all the action is likely to take place.

14...♘xd5!

This was the strongest continuation, with full equality. Black plans to play ...♗g5 (maybe with ...h7-h6 first) and can play equally well on both the queenside and the kingside. The tempo lost from the recapture makes no difference, as the bishop is well placed on d7.

15.cxd5 ♗d7 16.♕d2

16.♖c1 ♗g5!= would exchange White's best piece.

16...h6

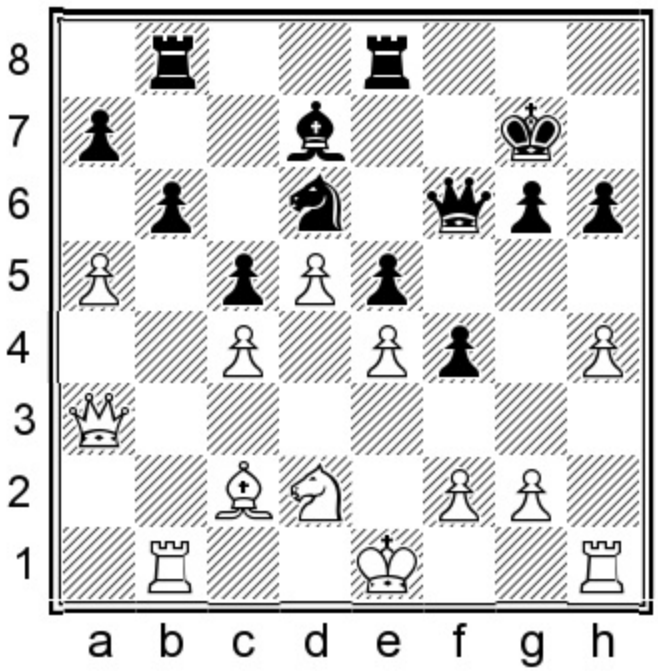
Preparing ...♗g5.

Or: 16...a5!?=

17.b4 ♘a4 18.♖fc1 ♗g5=

63. David Navara – A.R. Saleh Salem

Prague 2022



Should White:

A) exchange bishops with 24.♗a4, or
B) play something else?

Show/Hide Solution

(Invasion)

24.♗a4!

The exchange of bishops gets rid of White's most pointless piece. It also eliminates the defender of the light squares in the black position, which will leave them open for later invasion.

24...b5

It would be damage limitation to play 24...♗xa4 25.♕xa4 ♖e7±, where White is better. This is mostly because of the many weaknesses in the black position (although the h4-pawn makes it difficult for White to find a perfectly safe shelter for the king).

25.cxb5 ♗xb5?!

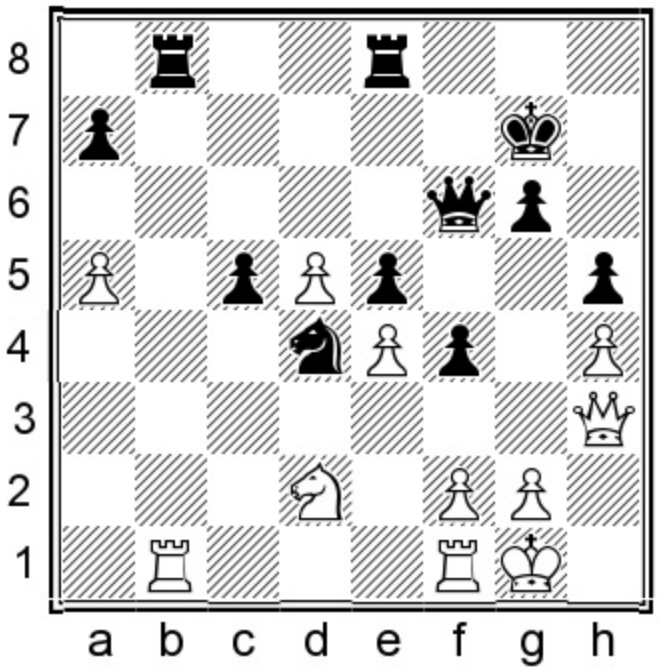
Black is drifting into a bad position, without resisting. The better alternative would have been

25...♘xb5 26.♕d3 ♕a6±, which allows White to castle and is uncomfortable for Black. But in practice it would still require accuracy from White to prove a serious advantage.

26.♗xb5 ♘xb5 27.♕h3!±

The queen is more active on h3 than it may appear, as it assists with a later h4-h5. But more importantly, the queen defends the h-pawn, making it possible for White to castle.

27...♘d4 28.0-0 h5



29.♘f3!

Eliminating the only good black piece without helping Black with his structural issues, as ♘g5 is also a serious concern.

29...♘xf3†?!

This still is a sad moment.

30.gxf3! ♔h6 31.♖fc1 ♖ed8?!

Hoping for counterplay, but it is already too late.

32.♖xb8 ♖xb8 33.♖xc5

The counterplay is an illusion.

33...♖b1† 34.♔g2 ♕a6 35.♔h2 ♕f6

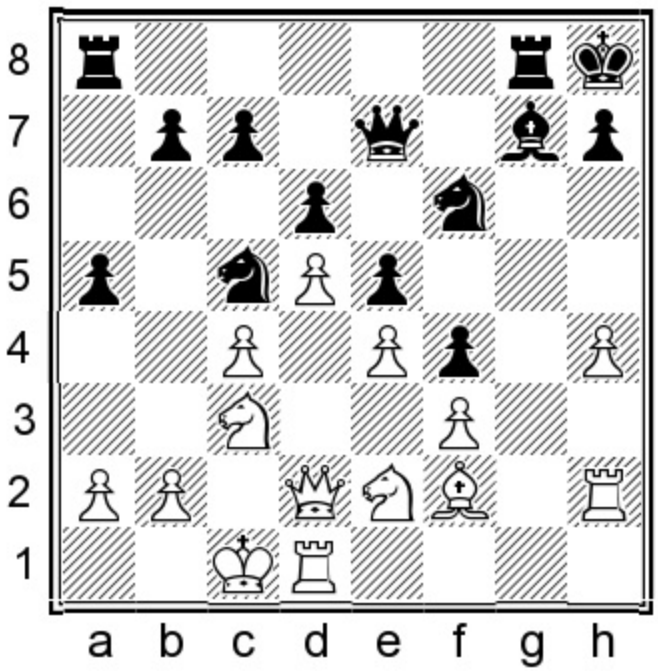
Or 35...♕e2 36.♕g2 and White wins.

36.♖c6 ♕d8 37.♔g2 a6 38.♕f5

1–0

64. Angelika Valkova – Heike Germann

Germany 2022



Is 19.♗xc5:

A) a good move, or
B) not a good move?

Show/Hide Solution

(Structure)

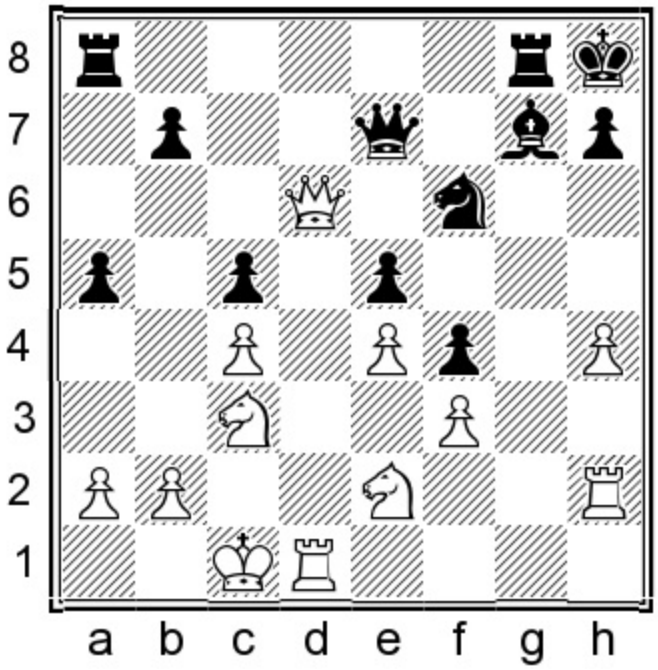
In the game White played 19.♘g1 when Black could have responded with 19...b6. The opportunity for White to make the favourable exchange has gone. (Instead Black played: 19...♗h6 20.♘h3 ♖g6 The position is slightly better for White. There is no clear route to a significant advantage, but White won in 43 moves.) 20.♘h3 ♘h5 With a double-edged position.

19.♗xc5!

The bishop on f2 has no particular function, now or in the future. This exchange destroys Black's pawn structure, and enables the possibility of a central rupture which opens the path for the white pieces.

19...dxc5 20.d6 cxd6 21.♕xd6

As the result of this semi-tactical operation, White has gained control of the d-file and created outposts on b5 and d5 that can be used for her c3-knight. Black has no good answer.



21...♕xd6

Keeping queens on the board with 21...♕f7 is even more dangerous for Black. Now White can also play for an attack against the black king with 22.♖g2 intending ♖dg1.

22.♖xd6 ♖ad8

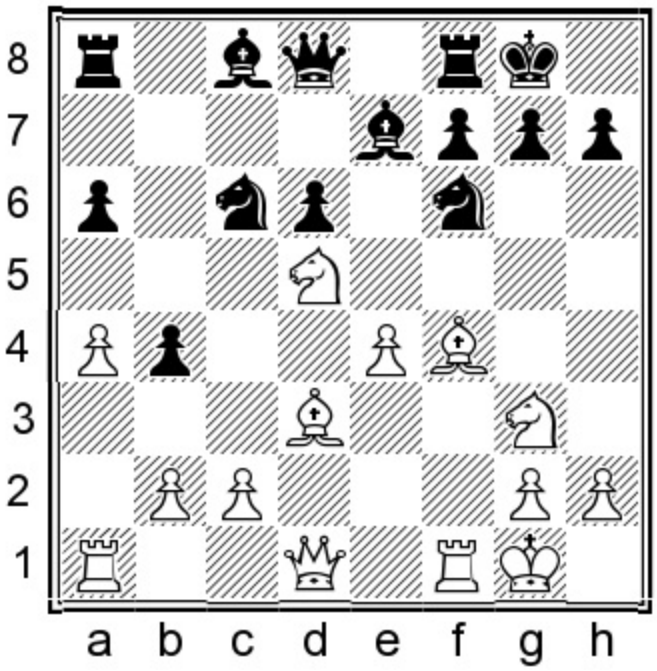
Or 22...♖a6 23.♖xa6 bxa6 24.♘d5 ♘xd5 25.cxd5!. White has a favourable pawn structure and a better minor piece. She will get her king to c4 and the knight to d3, breaking whatever resistance Black may have.

23.♖b6

With an overwhelming positional advantage for White.

65. Jules Moussard – Sergejs Gromovs

Alicante 2022



Should Black:

A) play 13...♘e5, or
B) exchange on d5 first with 13...♘xd5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing attacker)

Black played 13...♘e5? in the game, when after 14.♘xe7† ♕xe7, Black is badly missing the dark squared bishop. 15.♔h1 (15.♕d2!± was slightly more accurate.) 15...♕a7? (15...h6!±) 16.♕d2 The absence of the dark-squared bishop is felt. 16...♕c5?! 17.♗e3 ♕c7 White took on b4 and later won. But a direct path existed after: 18.♖xf6! gxf6 19.♘h5+– with a deadly attack.

13...♘xd5!

An important exchange with a deep strategic idea. Black sacrifices a pawn in exchange for active play on the dark squares.

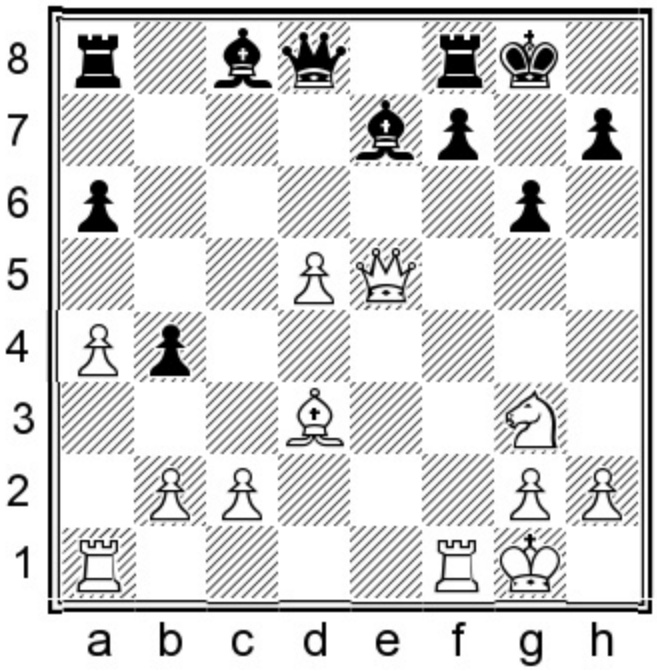
14.exd5 ♘e5 15.♗xe5

Only this is critical. If Black is allowed to play ...g7-g6 and ...♗f6, he will have a good position with a strong knight on e5.

15.a5 ♗g4 16.♕d2 ♘xd3 17.♕xd3 ♗d7 doesn't create any problems for Black.

15...dxe5 16.♕h5 g6 17.♕xe5

This is the position Black should evaluate in advance. Black is a pawn down, but the two bishops, especially the dark-squared bishop, offers good compensation.



17...♕d6!!

The strongest, but Black could also keep the queens on and play dynamically with: 17...♗d6!? 18.♕d4 ♕c7 19.♔h1 ♗e5 Another pawn is sacrificed to activate the rook on a8. 20.♕xb4 ♖b8 21.♕h4 ♕d8!?⩱ An interesting solution. Black will win back one pawn and have enough compensation to make the draw. (21...f5 is also interesting.)

18.♕xd6 ♗xd6⩱

Black's dark-squared bishop is not only controlling the dark squares, but also blockading White's passer. It's not easy for White to find a plan. The game could continue:

19.♖ad1

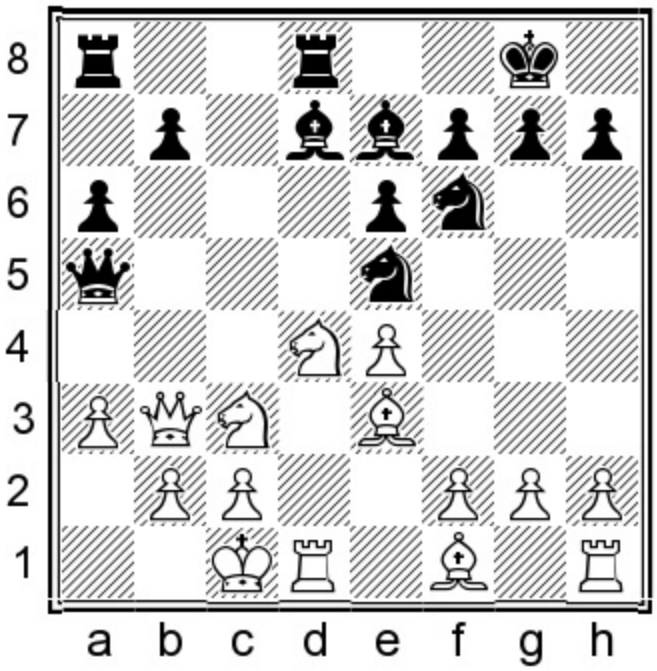
White would like to play 19.♘e4, but after 19...♗e5 20.♖ab1 (Or 20.c3 bxc3 21.bxc3 f5 and Black will regain the pawn.) 20...a5, the rook on b1 is passive and Black will soon challenge the knight with ...♗f5.

19...f5 20.♘e2 ♖e8 21.♘f4 ♔g7 22.b3 ♖e3⩱

Black is not worse. The bishop is fabulous.

66. Erik Obgolts – Ilya Makoveev

Sochi 2021



Should Black play:

A) 17...b5, with the idea of ...b5-b4, or
B) 17...♘fg4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces/colour schemes)

Black has sacrificed a pawn for active play and a misplaced white queen. But the game move was poor: 17...♖ac8? This natural-looking move was played entirely on autopilot. 18.f3 (18.♘f3! would have given White a decent position.) 18...b5!? (18...♗xa3 would only have won the pawn back.) 19.♘a2∓ White is in the game, even if a bit worse. He won on move 38.

17...b5!? is not bad, but still inferior. After 18.f3 b4 19.axb4 ♗xb4∓ Black's position is attractive.

17...♘fg4!

Aiming to take the bishop on e3. This leaves White with a fractured pawn structure and weaknesses on the dark squares without a bishop to defend them.

18.♗d2?

This does not work.

18.♘f5? also fails tactically: 18...♗c5!–+

18...♘xf2 19.♘d5 ♕c5 20.♗b4 ♗g5†!

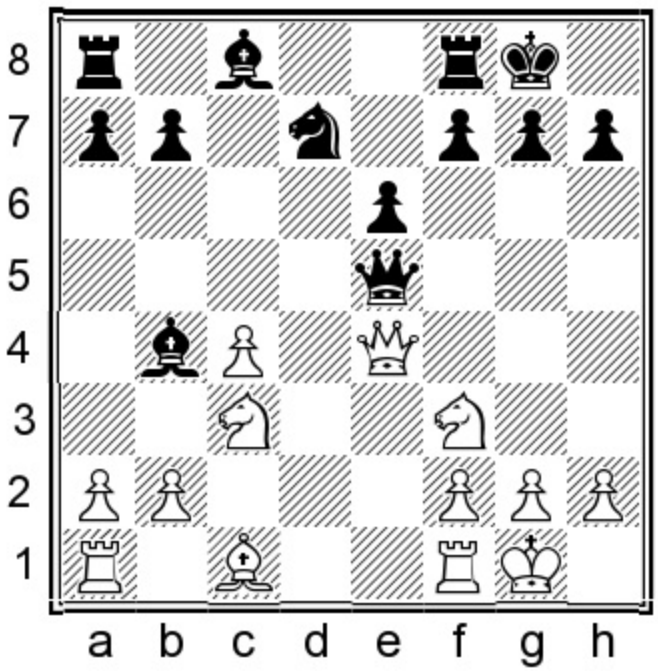
This shows why it is important to move the knight from f6 (where it is not well placed anyway).

21.♔b1 ♕a7!

Black wins.

67. Nguyen Thi Thanh An – Nguyen Thanh Thuy Tien

Vietnam 2020



Should Black:

A) exchange queens, or
B) play 13...♕h5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

13...♕h5? was played. The game was eventful, with both players having their chances. Eventually it was a draw. At this point White could have played 14.♘e2!, when it is immediately obvious that the black queen is uncomfortable and not exchanging was the wrong decision. The chances are roughly even.

13...♕xe4! 14.♘xe4 b6

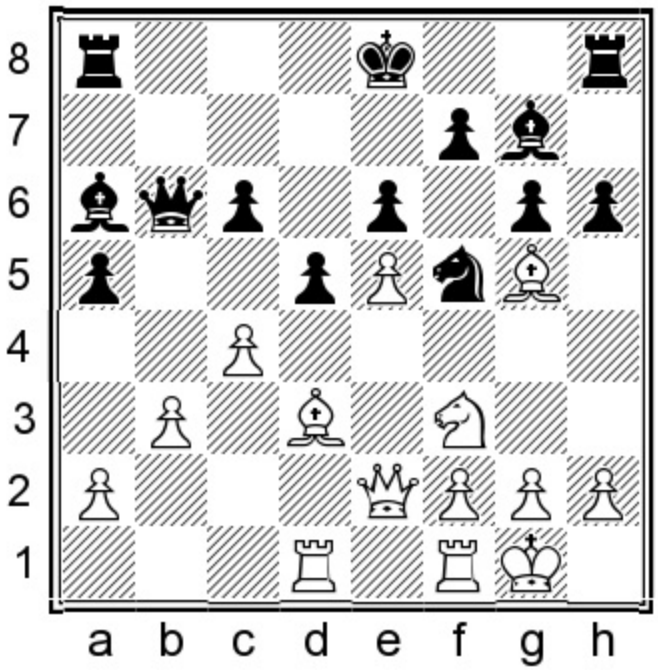
This gives Black a long-term advantage with the two bishops. It is not much, but it is pleasant. White can try a direct attempt to get rid of the bishop:

15.♖d1 ♖d8 16.♘d6 ♘f8 17.♗f4 f6∓

But this gives Black structural advantages in return.

68. Matic Lavrencic – Gasper Kodric

Terme Catez 2022



Should White:

A) retreat the bishop, or
B) play 16.♗f6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Colour schemes)
16.♗c1? 0-0± was the game. White eventually won, as he was the far stronger player. But it was still a bad decision.

16.♗xf5?! hxg5 17.♗c2 also gives White an advantage, but is not nearly as strong as the solution.

16.♗f6!
This would remove Black's key defender. There is simply no reason not to do it.

16...♗xf6
Black can also choose not to take, after which White is happy to have weakened the dark squares.

17.exf6 ♕d8 18.g4!

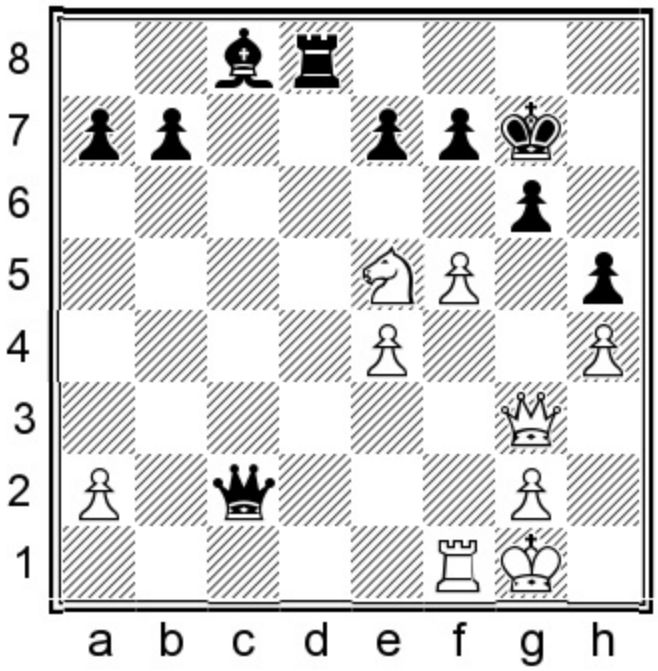
Direct play. This is not necessary, but it works.

18...♘d6 19.cxd5 ♗xd3 20.♖xd3 cxd5 21.♖xd5

White wins.

69. Sebastien Maze – Elliot Papadiamandis

Sitges 2021



Should Black play:

A) 25...♕xe4, or
B) 25...♖d1?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing attackers)

The game was a mess. 25...♕xe4? 26.♘xg6? (26.♘xf7! ♔xf7 27.♕xg6† would lead to perpetual check.) 26...♖d3! 27.♕c7 ♗xf5!? (Black could have won the game with 27...fxg6! 28.f6† ♔f7!, with the idea 29.♕xc8 ♕d4†! and Black is in complete control.) 28.♘f4 ♖d6?! (28...♕d4† 29.♔h2 ♖e3! would have kept full control. 30.♘xh5† ♔h7 is just winning.) 29.♘xh5† ♔h7 (29...♔g6! 30.♘f4† ♔h7–+) 30.♕c3∓ f6 31.♕g3 ♗g6 32.♘f4 ♗f7 Black, still being a pawn up, offered a draw, which White was happy to accept.

25...♖d1!

This was stronger.

26.fxg6

Or: 26.♖xd1 ♕xd1† 27.♔h2 ♕d6–+ Black has everything covered.

26...♖xf1†

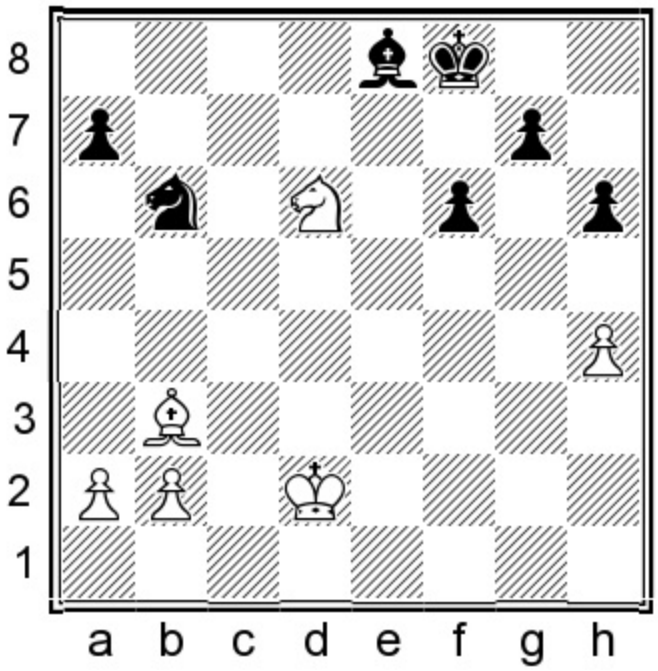
26...♕c5† also wins.

27.♔xf1 ♕b1†+–

Black takes everything.

70. Anton Demchenko – Toivo Keinanen

Warsaw (rapid) 2021



Should White:

A) take the bishop, or

B) play 33.♔e3? White should have played

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

White lost the game on move 65 after: 33.♔e3? ♗d7–+ Black gets two connected passed pawns.

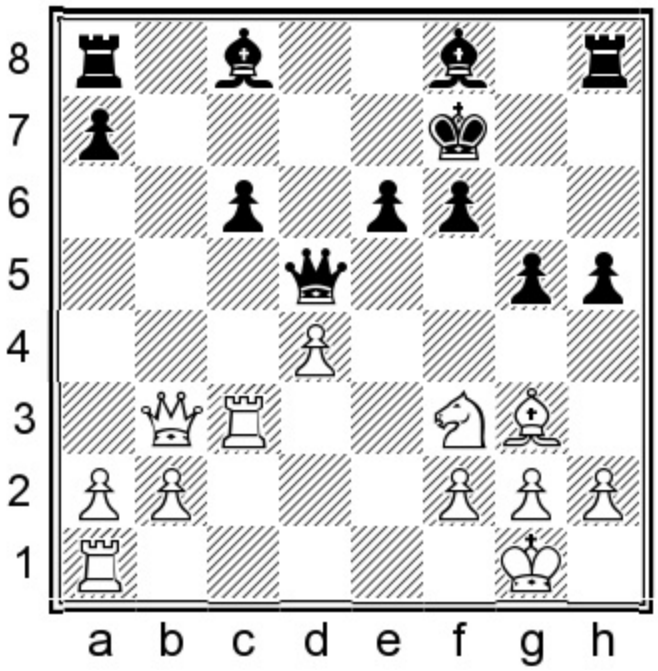
White should have played:

33.♘xe8! ♔xe8 34.h5♒

It is difficult for Black to make anything of his passed pawns quickly; the h5-pawn neutralises two black pawns. And White enjoys the classic advantage of the bishop, with the ability to quickly move from one side of the board to the other. These aspects are enough to give White excellent drawing chances despite the pawn deficit.

71. Antonio Granero Roca – Beloslava Krasteva

Silla 2022



Should White:

A) exchange queens,
B) allow the exchange, or
C) avoid the exchange?

Show/Hide Solution

(King safety)

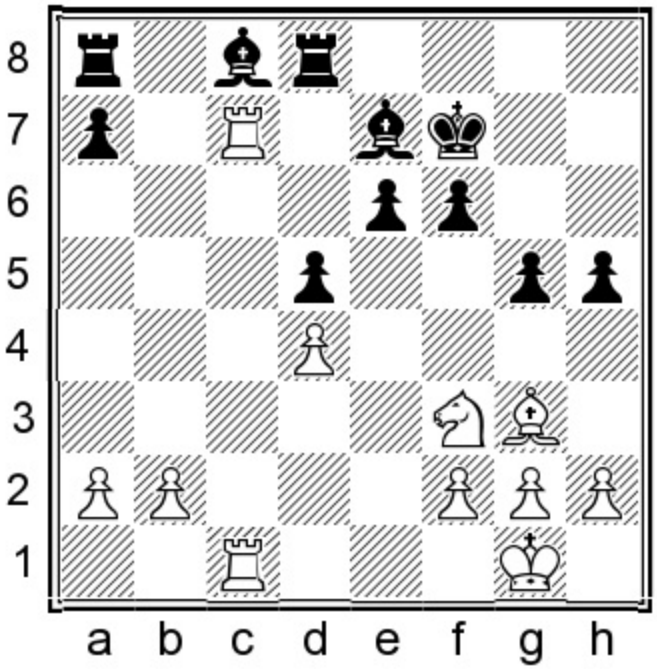
White is facing two threats in this position. The first and most obvious is ...h5-h4 and ...g5-g4, when Black takes over the initiative by harassing White's pieces. Secondly, a deeper idea is the exchange of queens. Without queens Black's position improves, since the shaky position of her king is no longer relevant if White does not have the attacking forces to exploit it. Therefore, keeping the queens is a desired goal for White.

White played 17.h4?, and after 17...g4 18.♘d2 White stood better and later won.

But Black could have played 17...♕xb3!, getting the queens off immediately. After 18.axb3 g4,

Black is fine after 19.♘d2 ♗b4, or 19.♘e1 ♗b7.

17.♕xd5? is also poor. Black's structure has been significantly improved and the upcoming invasion on the 7th rank is meaningless. 17...cxd5 18.♖ac1 ♗e7 19.♖c7 ♖d8



Black will play ...♗d7 and exchange a pair of rooks. The two bishops guarantee her defensive resources: 20.h4!? gxh4 21.♗xh4 ♗d7 22.♖b7 ♖dc8 23.♖xc8 ♗xc8 24.♖c7 ♔e8 Black is fine. She is only momentarily passive.

17.♕c2!

This also puts pressure on the c6-pawn and eyes the weak g6- and h7-squares from afar.

17...h4

The critical try. White now has two paths:

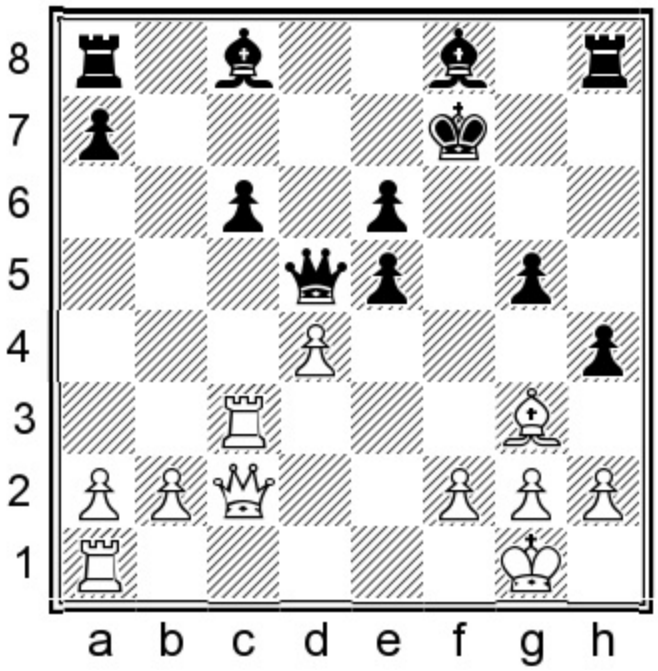
Black can also agree to a passive endgame. 17...♕f5 18.♘e5†! ♔g8 19.♘g6 ♕xc2 20.♖xc2 ♖h7 21.♘xf8 ♔xf8 22.h4 White has lasting pressure on the dark squares. Still, this could be Black's best chance.

18.♘e5†

The most aggressive.

The more circumspect 18.♗e5 is also dangerous for Black. 18...♖h6 (18...fxe5? 19.♘xe5† is suicidal. 19...♔g8 20.♕g6† ♗g7 21.♖f3, with a winning attack.) 19.h3 Black still cannot take the bishop. White continues building up his position. 19...fxe5?! is met with: 20.dxe5! Threatening ♖d1. 20...♗e7 21.♖d1 ♕xa2 22.♘xg5†! ♗xg5 23.♖a3 Winning the queen and soon after the whole kingdom.

18...fxe5



19.♖f3† ♔e7 20.♗xe5 g4!

Black has to seek counterplay.

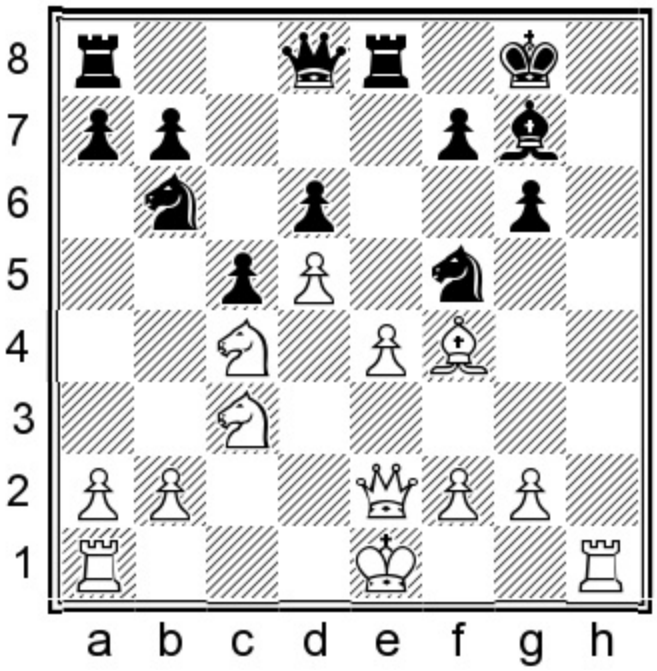
Black cannot defend for long after 20...♖h6 21.♕d2 ♖h5 22.h3.

21.♖c3 h3 22.f3 ♖h5! 23.fxg4 ♖xe5 24.dxe5 ♕d4† 25.♕f2 c5 26.♖ac1±

The game goes on, but with White as the clear favourite.

72. Alexander Donchenko – Vadim Zvjaginsev

Riga 2021



Should White:

A) exchange with 16.♘xb6, or
B) play 16.♘d2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Gaining time)

White was in big trouble in the game after:

16.♘d2? ♘d4!?

Even stronger was 16...♗xc3! 17.bxc3 ♘xd5 18.♕g4 ♘xc3 19.♗g5 ♘xe4! 20.♘xe4 (20.♗xd8 ♘f6† 21.♕e2 ♖axd8–+ also gives Black an ocean of pawns for the exchange.) 20...♖xe4† 21.♕xe4 ♕xg5–+ Black has three pawns for the exchange with an ongoing initiative.

17.♕d3

But now Black went wrong with the horrible:

17...c4??

17...♕f6 would have been very strong. This forces White to obstruct the 3rd rank, eliminating the possibility of any counterplay based on ♕h3. 18.g3 c4 19.♕b1 ♖ac8∓

18.♕h3!±

White has managed to create counterplay. Black should have embraced the complications:

18...♘c2†

In the game, he chose the weaker 18...g5 and later lost.

19.♔d1 ♘xa1 20.♕h7† ♔f8 21.♘f3 ♗f6!

When the position is a big mess.

16.♘xb6!

White needs to gain a move to improve the position of his king. At the same time, he eliminates a piece that could play an active role.

16...axb6

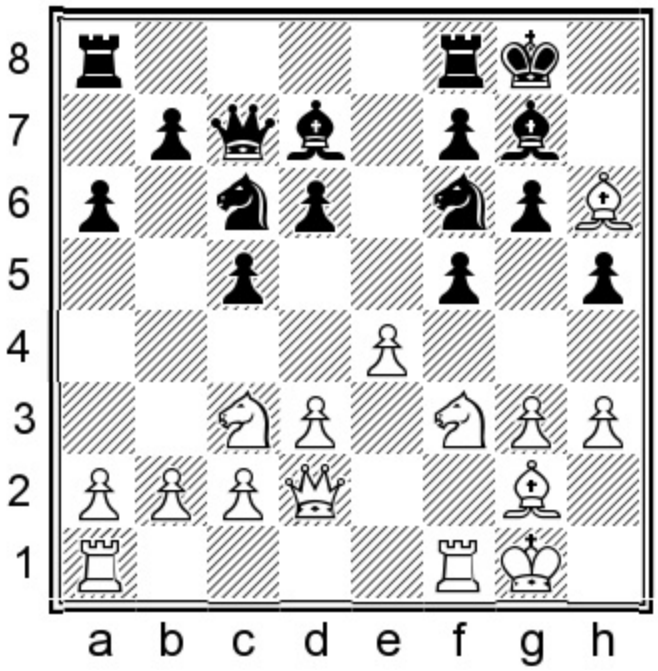
Perhaps White did not like 16...♕xb6. But here he could play 17.♔f1 or the more enterprising 17.0-0-0 ♘d4 18.♕d3. It is Black who now needs to be careful.

17.♔f1=

The position may look promising for Black because of the white king on f1, but appearances can deceive. Black can't exploit the king's position and White can create counterplay along the h-file.

73. David Lariño Nieto – Francisco Restuccia

Argentina 2022



Should White:

A) take on g7, or
B) build up his attack first with 14.♘h4?

Show/Hide Solution

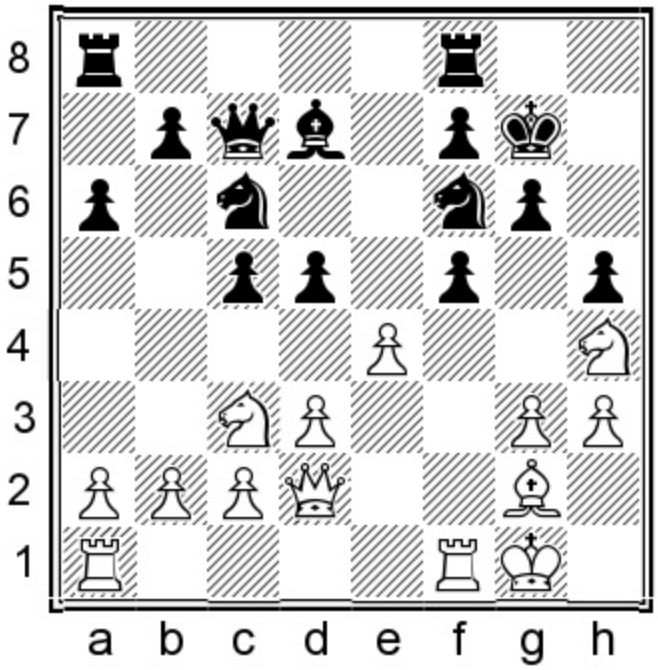
(Tension)

In the game White played:

14.♗xg7

This is mainly wrong because it lacks the flexibility needed to make the attack work. After this

exchange White reduces his chances to one threat only, making Black's defence much easier.
14...♔xg7 15.♘h4 d5!



16.♘xf5†

There is nothing better.

16.♕g5 ♘h7 parries all the threats.

16.♘xd5 can be met with 16...♕xg3 17.♘xf6 ♔xf6, when White has no way to exploit the extravagant position of the black king. 18.♕c3† ♘d4 19.♕xc5? ♘e2† 20.♔h1 ♖ac8 and Black wins.

16...♗xf5 17.♖xf5 d4

Not the only move but good enough.

18.♖xf6 dxc3 19.♕xc3 ♘d4 20.♖f2 ♕xg3

Black has a fine position but lost the game later in 36 moves. (20...f6 was also good.)

14.♘h4!

They say the threat is stronger than the execution and here we have one example of this. White builds up his attack, creating the threat of ♗xg7 followed by ♘xf5†, without committing to any permanent decisions yet.

14...d5

As in the game, this is the only serious try.

After 14...♘e7 15.exf5 White wins due to: 15...♗xf5 16.♘xf5 ♘xf5 17.♖xf5; White is also winning after: 14...fxe4 15.♗xg7 ♔xg7 16.♖xf6

15.♗f4!

This is the difference. Now White can defend g3 while gaining a tempo.

Also interesting is: 15.♘xf5 ♗xf5 16.exf5 ♘e7 17.♖ae1 ♖ae8 18.♘e2 Increasing the pressure slowly.

15...♕b6 16.exf5 ♗xf5 17.♘xf5 gxf5

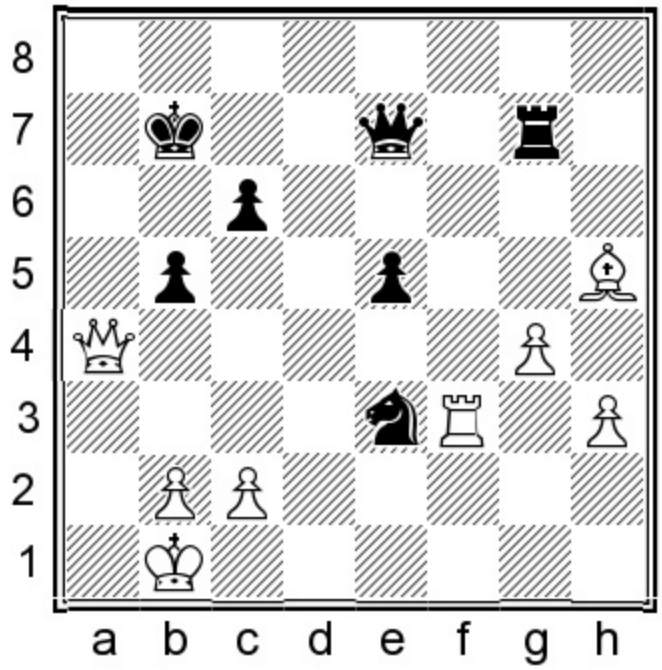
White has managed to destroy Black's kingside and keep his chances for attack intact.

18.♔h1!?±

White has promising ideas at his disposal including ♗g5 and ♘e2-f4.

74. Sarunas Sulskis – Toms Kantans

Tallinn 2018



Should White:

A) play 35.♕a3, forcing the exchange of queens, or
B) centralise his queen with 35.♕e4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing defenders)

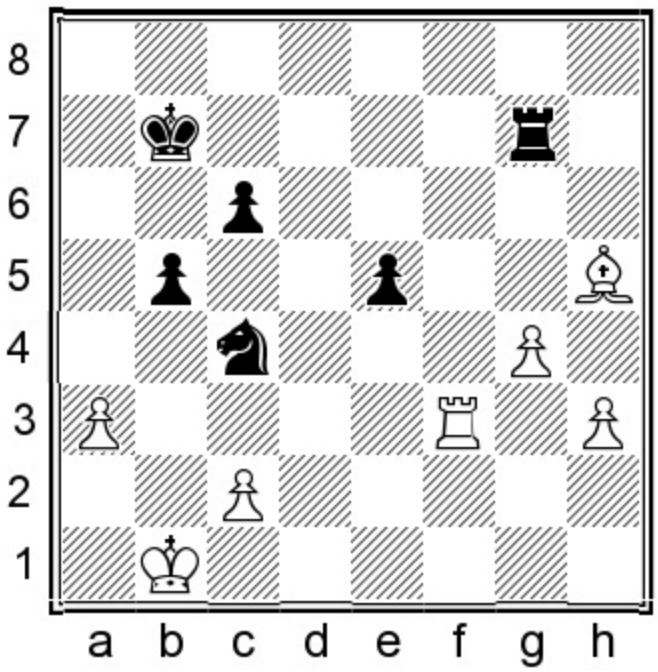
35.♕e4? would be horrible. After 35...♘c4 Black is threatening a check on d2, as well as ...♕b4. And after 36.♕e2 e4, Black is threatening ...♕e5. 37.♖f5 e3 Black has a winning attack on the dark squares. For example: 38.g5 ♕b4 39.b3 ♖d7 40.♖f7 ♖xf7 41.♗xf7 ♘d2† 42.♔b2 ♕d4† 43.c3 ♕e4 44.♕d1 b4! Not the only way, but keeping up the pressure. The key idea is that 45.cxb4 ♕e5† 46.♔c2

e2 leaves White without a perpetual after 47.♕xd2 e1=♕.

35.♕a3!

The exchange of queens removes all counterplay. White's king is safe, and the two distant passed pawns will be free to live up to their full potential.

35...♕xa3 36.bxa3 ♘c4



37.♖f7†!

This clears the passage for the white pawns in an instant.

White is also winning with slow play after 37.♔c1 or similar.

37...♖xf7 38.♗xf7

White is winning. The passed pawns are decisive.

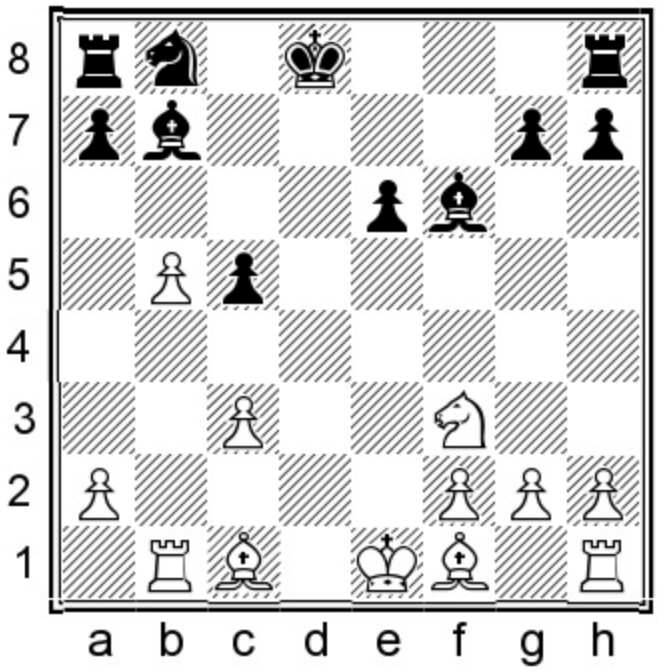
38...♘d2†

38...♘d6 39.♗g6 would see the bishop dominate the knight, giving the pawns free passage.

39.♔c1 ♘f3 40.♗g6 ♔c7 41.♗e4 ♘g5 42.♗g2 ♔d6 43.♔d2 ♘e6 44.h4 c5 45.g5 b4 46.a4 c4 47.a5 ♘c5 48.h5 e4 49.h6

1–0

75. Gabriel Sargissian – Axel Bachmann



Should Black:

A) take on c3 immediately, or
B) play 13...♗xf3 14.gxf3 ♗xc3†?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

Bachmann got into trouble by making a poor exchange. 13...♗xf3? 14.gxf3 ♗xc3† 15.♔e2! White keeps the two bishops and will be able to apply pressure with them. 15...♘d7 16.f4 ♔c7?! (16...♗d4! 17.♗e3 ♖c8± was stronger. The king is less exposed on e7. But Black is still defending.) White eventually won on move 54, but at this point 17.♗e3± would have been simplest. White's initiative is only slightly lessened by the absence of queens.

13...♗xc3†! 14.♗d2

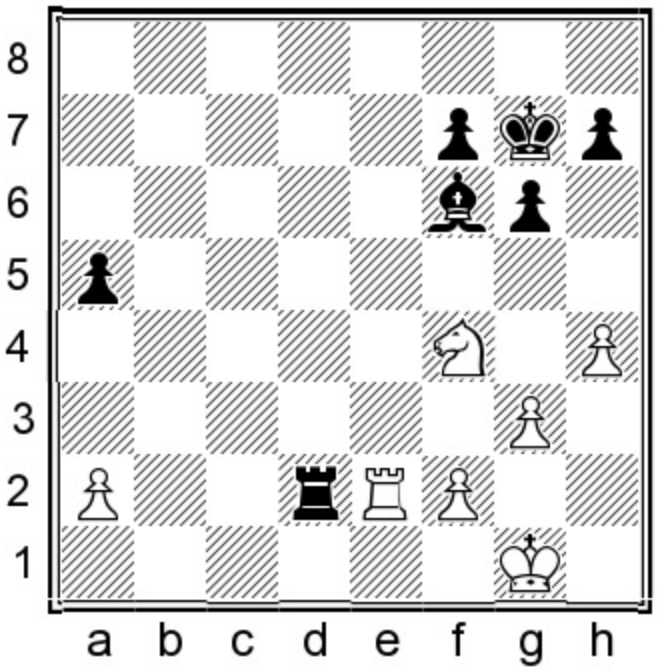
14.♔e2? makes far less sense now compared with the game. There is no easy path for the bishop on f1 to join the game. 14...♘d7∓

14...♗xd2† 15.♘xd2 ♗d5 16.♗c4 ♘d7

Black is not measurably worse.

76. Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa – Wei Yi

Internet (rapid) 2023



Should Black:

A) exchange the rooks with 33...♖xe2, or
B) keep them on with 33...♖d1†?

Show/Hide Solution

(Converting an advantage)

Although Black managed to win the game after 33...♖d1†? 34.♔g2 a4 35.♔f3 a3 36.♔e4 White is well within the margin of holding.

33...♖xe2!

Exchanging the rooks is the correct choice for several reasons. Firstly, the black king will become more active than the white king, which is a tangible advantage. The opposite was true in the game. Secondly, the a2-pawn is easier for White to defend with the rooks on. Thirdly, the possibility of counterplay is higher for White with the rooks on the board. It is possible Black could slowly find a way to win the a2-pawn, but White would be able to win the kingside at the same time and give up the knight for the black a-pawn, leading in the worst case to the drawn, but uncomfortable endgame of rook vs rook and bishop. Without rooks, all these factors turn in Black's favour.

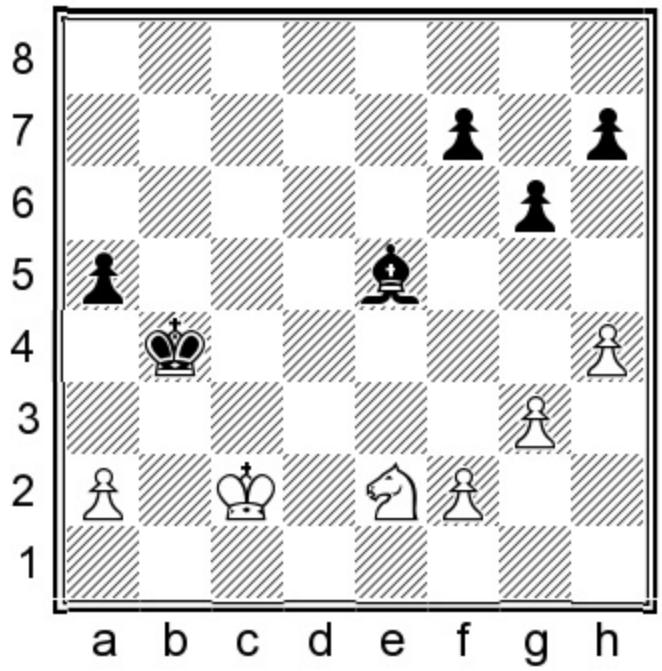
34.♘xe2 ♔f8!

The most effective, but certainly not the only good move.

35.♔f1

35.♔g2 ♔e7 36.♔f3 ♔d6 37.♔e4 ♔c5 38.♘f4 ♔c4 Black will move the bishop and attack the a-pawn at the opportune moment. White cannot hold.

35...♔e7 36.♘f4 ♔d6 37.♔e2 ♔c5 38.♔d3 ♗e5 39.♘e2 ♔b4 40.♔c2



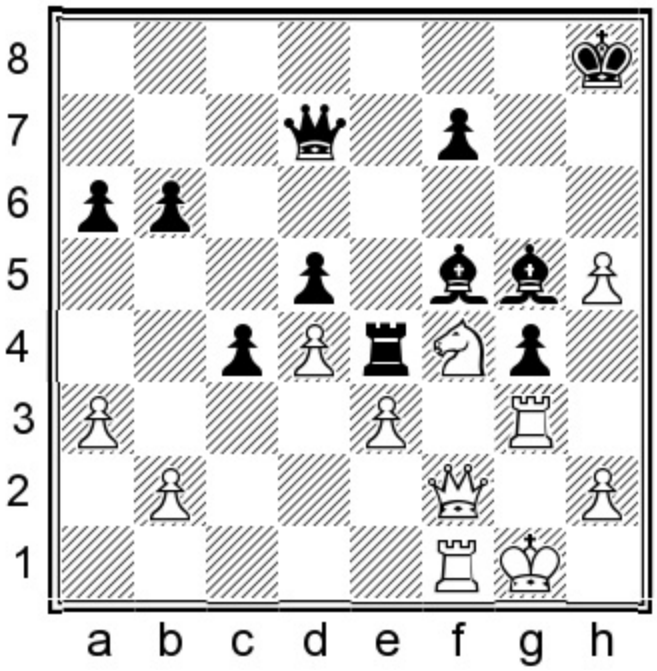
40...h5–+

White is lost due to the common principle of two weaknesses. Black will be able to play ...♗d4 and White will be in zugzwang again and again, desperate to hold Black's king out.

There will be readers that will see this from prior experience, while others won't. Rather than giving long and somewhat arbitrary lines, we suggest that you put the position into Stockfish and try to defend it with White, seeing just how impossible it is.

77. Vladimir Zakhartsov – LMST De Silva

Internet (rapid) 2023



Should Black:

A) exchange minor pieces with 33...♗xf4, or
B) win back the exchange with 33...♗h4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Tactical reasons)

The game ended abruptly. 33...♗h4? 34.♘g2! ♗xg3 35.hxg3 Black resigned. 35...♗e6 36.♕f6† leads to mate.

33...♗xf4

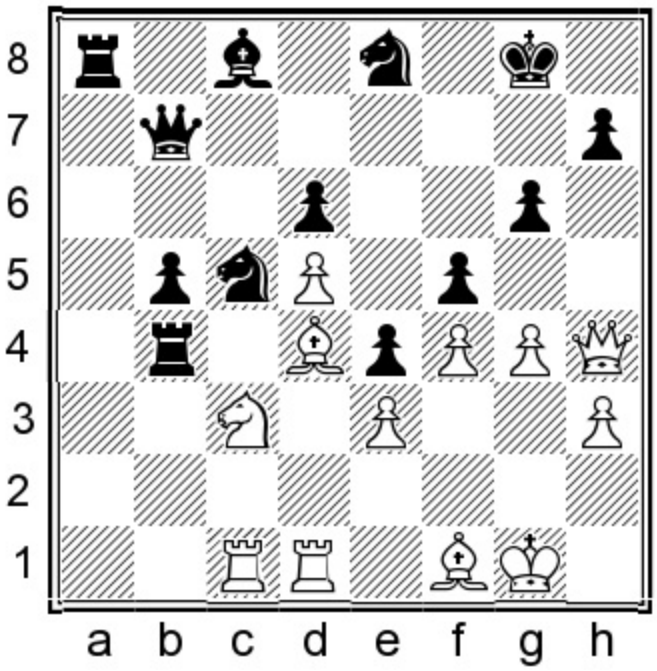
This is the only choice, given the question.

34.exf4 ♕e6∓

Black is an exchange down, but his position is great, nonetheless. The white pieces cannot play at all.

78. Tatiana Dornbusch – Hanna Krisztina Ivan-Gal

Rhodes 2024



Should White defend against the threat of ...♘b3 by:

A) taking the knight on c5 with 36.♗xc5, or
B) trying to keep the bishop with 36.♘e2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

In the game, White tried to keep her impressive bishop with 36.♘e2?, but that allowed Black to survive for the time being, and Black even won on move 58. At this point, best would have been 36...♘d3 37.♖b1 ♕f7∞, when the black position is relatively stabilized.

36.♗xc5!

The bishop was strong on d4, but the c5-knight was strong as well. White eliminates Black's only shred of counterplay and creates a strong passer on the d-file. By allowing the d-pawn to move forward, the white knight and the d1-rook are also allowed to participate in the attack.

36...dxc5 37.d6

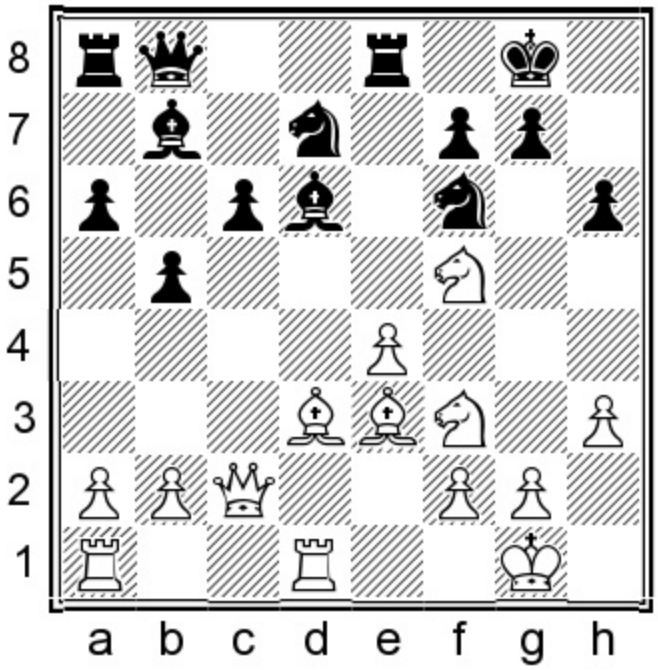
Black has no defence against White's attack after the incoming ♘d5. For example:

37...♕f7

Also hopeless for Black is 37...♗d7 38.♘d5+–.

38.♘d5 ♖b2 39.♘e7† ♔f8 40.♘xc8 ♖xc8 41.d7+–

Chartres 2024



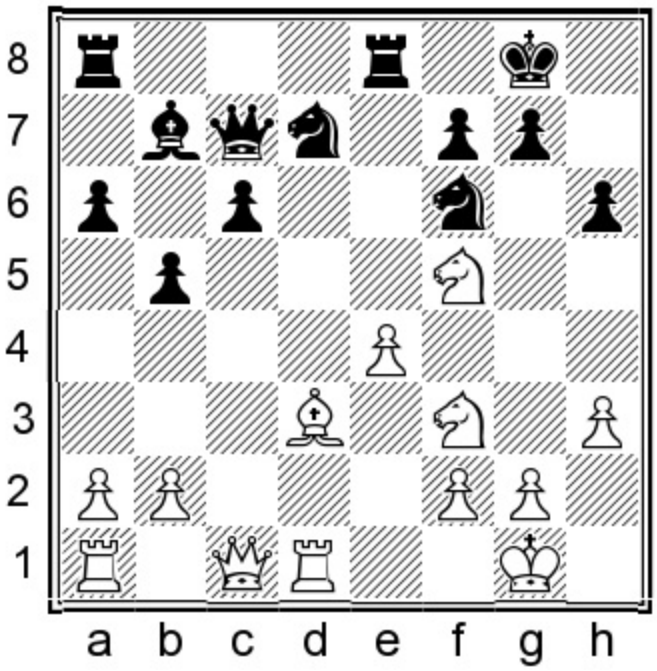
Should Black:

A) try to trade dark-squared bishops with 17...♗f4, or
B) keep the bishop with 17...♗f8?

Show/Hide Solution

(Keeping a defender)

The game saw: 17...♗f4? 18.♗xf4 ♕xf4 Now White could have further highlighted Black's weaknesses on the dark squares with: 19.♕c1! (The game saw 19.♗f1± and was eventually drawn on move 80.) 19...♕c7?! (19...♕xc1 20.♖axc1± is a terrible endgame for Black, who dearly misses the dark-squared bishop. The d6-square is particularly inviting for the white knight on f5.)



Trying to keep the queen to protect d6 and support ...c6-c5 will quickly backfire. 20.♘3h4 ♘e5 21.♘xg7!+– Highlighting another problem related to the bishop's absence.

17...♗f8!

Black's weaknesses are all on dark squares, so keeping the bishop is vital.

With the bishop alive on f8, it's a different story. A plausible continuation is:

18.♕c1 c5 19.♗xh6!?

Quiet play isn't threatening, as Black has a healthy and active position. But this sacrifice is also only adequate for a draw. For example:

19...gxh6 20.♘xh6† ♗xh6 21.♕xh6 ♗xe4 22.♕g5† ♔f8 23.♕h6† ♔g8=

Chapter 4

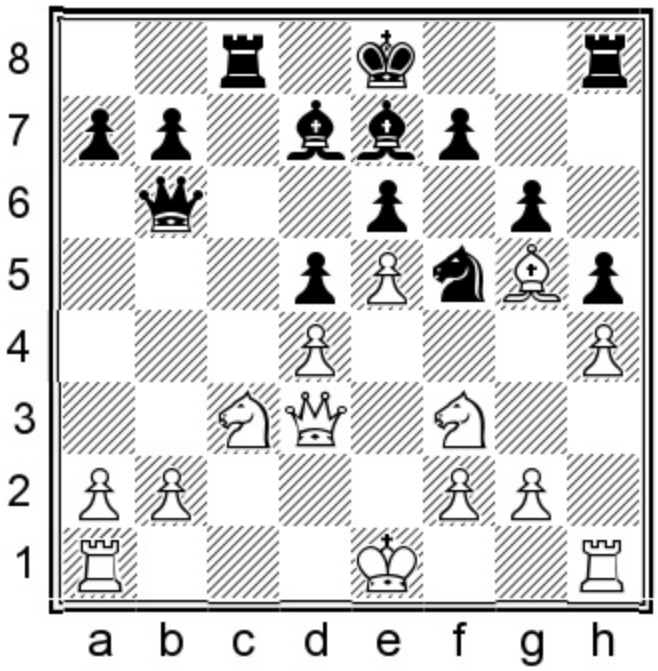
Small Nuances or Tricks

Show in Text Mode

With its 99 exercises, this is the biggest section of the book. While there were close to no tactics involved in the previous exercises, you will now find that there are small nuances and tricks in the solutions that make all the difference. Not in all positions, but in some. So stay alert!

80. Damian Sliwicki – Adrian Budzisz

Katowice (blitz) 2021



Should White:

A) exchange bishops with 16.♗xe7, or

B) defer the exchange?

Show/Hide Solution

(Tactical reasons)

16.♗xe7? was a blunder that should have been punished. 16...♕xb2! would have led to a winning position. (The game went: 16...♔xe7? 17.0-0 ♕xb2 18.♖fc1∞ ♕a3?? 19.♘xd5†! 1–0) 17.♖b1 ♕xc3† 18.♕xc3 ♖xc3 19.♗f6 0-0 20.♔d2 ♖a3–++

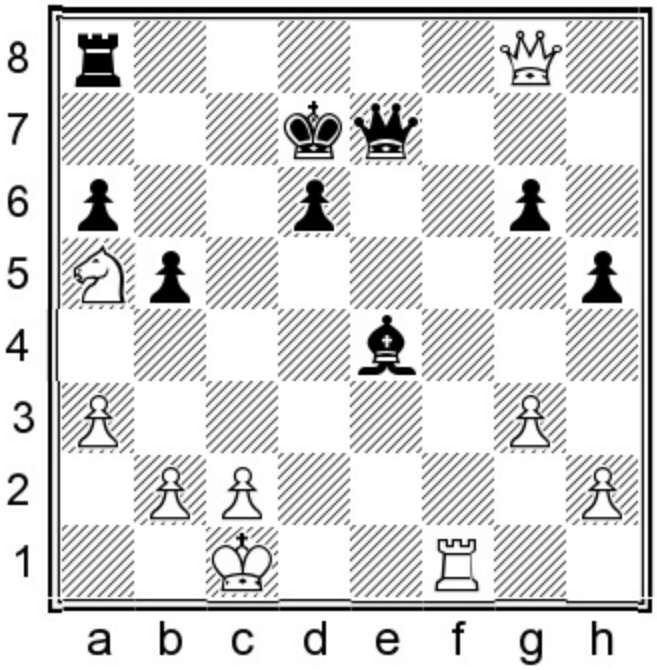
When deciding whether to make an exchange, it is important to check if our opponent is forced to recapture the piece we are taking.

16.♕d2!∓

This is prudent.

81. Max Warmerdam – Oscar Lemmers

Germany 2022



Should White:

A) exchange queens with 29.♕f7, or

B) retreat with 29.♕b3?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

The horribly optimistic 29.♕b3? was played. 29...♗f5?∓ was good enough to give a clear

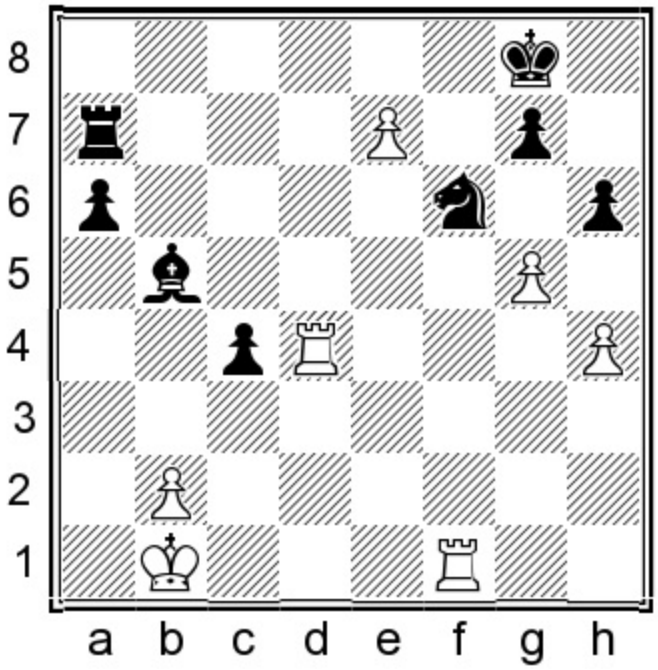
advantage. But stronger was the exchange of rooks with 29...♖f8!?–+, and especially the tactical solution with 29...♗xc2!. But to exchange queens, we do not need to see this trick.

29.♕f7!

This would have kept the balance. Black's bishop is a bit better, but the same can be said of the white structure.

82. Sopiko Khukhashvili – Mobina Alinasab

Ankara (var) 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange on g5 with 38...hxg5, or
B) play 38...♘e8?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

38.g5 hiddden

38...♘e8!=

The exchange of pawns on g5 doesn't make any sense for Black. It doesn't create a weak pawn, on the contrary it opens a file that White can use to attack the king. These types of exchanges are not automatic decisions, and we should always ask ourselves who benefits more from them.

After 38...hxg5?? Black falls into a mating net. 39.hxg5 ♘e8 40.g6! ♖xe7 41.♖h4! ♘f6 42.♖fh1 ♔f8 43.♖h8† ♘g8 44.♖f1†+–

39.gxh6

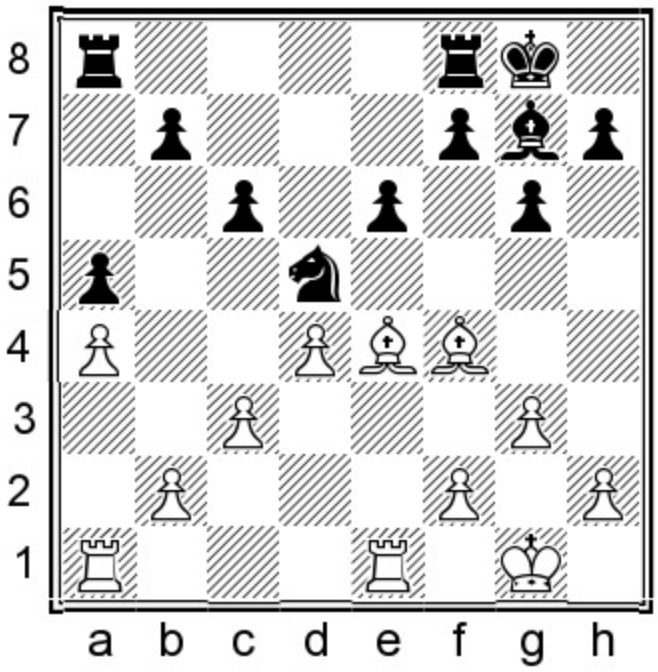
39.g6? fails to: 39...♖xe7–+

39...♖xe7

With an equal game.

83. Dariusz Swiercz – Aleksandr Rakhmanov

Internet (rapid) 2022



Should White:

A) take on d5, or
B) retreat the bishop with 17.♗d2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Creating weaknesses)
17.♗d2? was played and was a missed chance to inflict pain. White won on move 54 anyway, but at this point he barely has an advantage, if one at all.

17.♗xd5! cxd5

Black cannot let the white rook invade on e7.

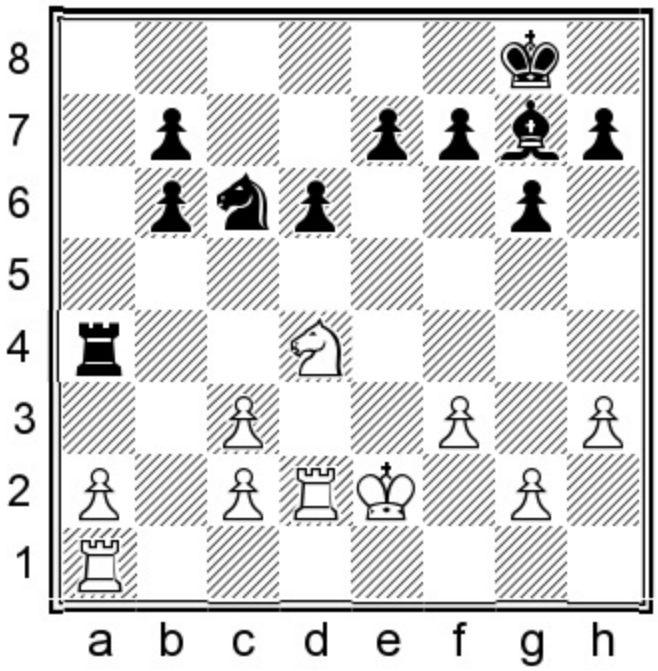
18.♖a3!±

The rook will be placed on b5 soon, creating a lot of discomfort for Black. The white king will

come to d3 and White will then slowly improve his position, giving him great chances in a long endgame.

84. Jesper Sondergaard Thybo – Manish Anto Cristiano

Nova Gorica 2022



Should White:

A) exchange knights with 21.♘xc6, or
B) repeat the position with 21.♘b5 ♘a7 22.♘d4 ♘c6?

Show/Hide Solution

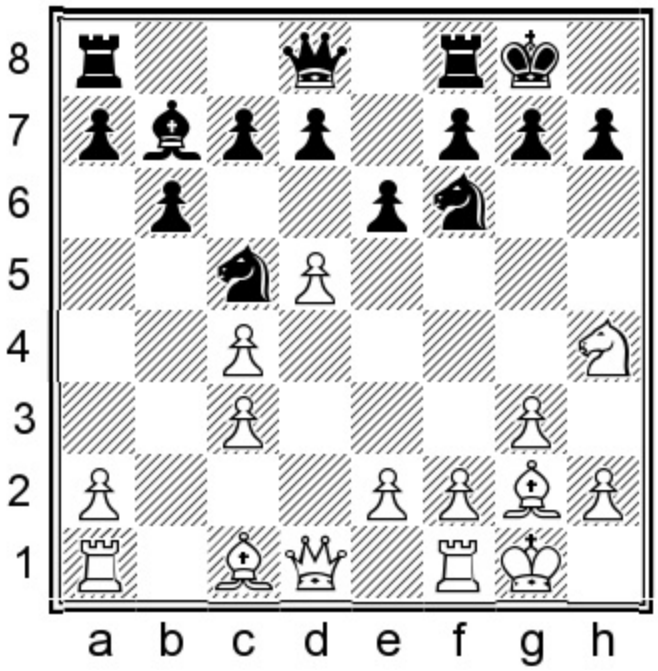
(Dynamics)

Sometimes the will to win takes over rational thinking and we believe that is what happened here when White decided to go for: 21.♘xc6? bxc6 22.♖d3 b5 23.♖e3 e6 24.g3 d5 It's easy to see that White has too many weaknesses and the rooks don't have any chance of being active. The position is dead lost and Black eventually won the game on move 68.

21.♘b5! ♘a7 22.♘d4 ♘c6 23.♘b5=

It is important to keep alive the only piece capable of defending weaknesses. White can never be better, but if he keeps the knight on b5 and plays a2-a3, at least the rooks will be free and it's enough to hold the game.

85. Zala Urh – Hans Moke Niemann



Should White:

A) play to exchange on c5 with 11.♗a3, or
B) centralise her queen with 11.♕d4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

In the game, White was soon in desperate trouble: 11.♕d4? ♖e8 12.e4 d6 13.f4 exd5 14.exd5 and Black won on move 46. Strongest is 14...♕d7–+.

11.♗e3?! is weaker than the solution, as after 11...♕e7, Black keeps his strong structure. Critical is 12.d6! ♕e8! 13.dxc7 ♗xg2 14.♘xg2 ♕e7, when White has to prove she is not worse.

11.♗a3!

This is an important move. White seeks to provide Black with a small blemish in his structure.

11...♖b8!

11...♕e7?! is less effective here, as White can play 12.e4, when after 12...d6 13.♗xc5 bxc5 14.♖b1± the black position is a bit cramped.

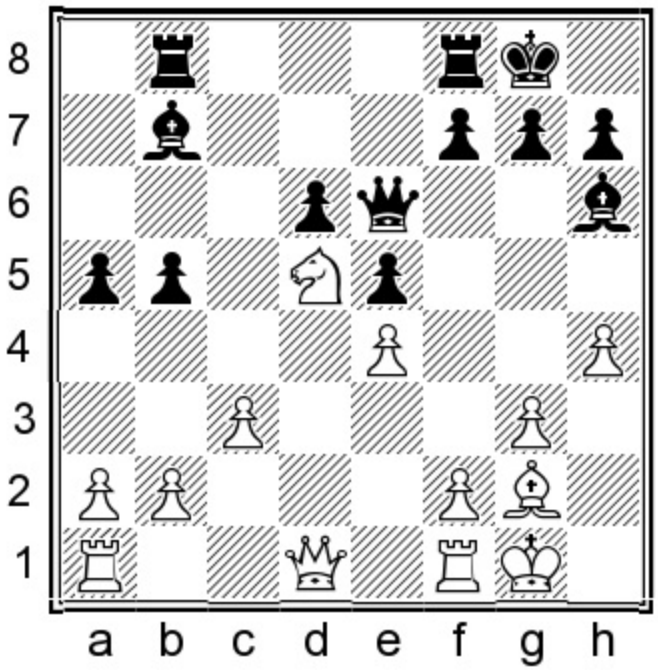
Interesting is 11...d6!? 12.♗xc5 dxc5 13.dxe6 ♗xg2 14.exf7† ♖xf7 15.♘xg2 ♖d7, where Black has compensation for the pawn, but no more.

12.♖b1 ♗a8 13.e4

The position is strategically equal.

86. Josep Maria Ribera Veganzones – Felix Blohberger

Chennai Olympiad 2022



Should White:

A) play on the queenside with 21.a4, or
B) go for a repetition with 21.♘c7 ♕d7 22.♘d5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Structure)

21.a4?!

This ambitious approach was a misunderstanding of who was on the verge of being better:

21...♗xd5! 22.exd5 ♕d7!?

22...♕e8! turns out to be a bit more accurate. You do not need to have seen this to make the right decision, but it is a nice detail. After 23.b4!? axb4 24.cxb4 bxa4 25.♕xa4 the queen is better placed on the e-file, and protected, as Black is better after: 25...♗d2! 26.♖fb1 e4!∓

23.axb5

White would have been close to equality after 23.b4!.

23...♖xb5∓

Black is already a bit better in practice – which simply means that White has problems to solve in order to keep the balance. In the game he did not manage to do so.

24.♕a4 ♕b7 25.♖fb1? ♖xb2 26.♖xb2 ♕xb2 27.♕a3 ♕xa3 28.♖xa3 ♖a8

Black won on move 52.

21.♘c7!

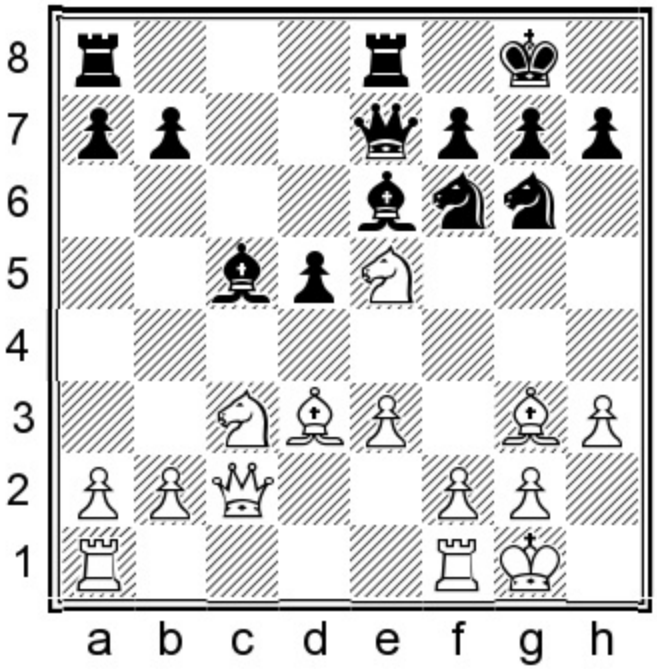
This is the wise choice.

21...♕d7 22.♘d5

Black has no advantage.

87. Marc'Andria Maurizzi – Rinat Jumabayev

Wijk aan Zee 2022



Should White:

A) play 17.♘f3, or
B) give Black a doubled pawn with 17.♘xg6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Structure)

The move played, 17.♘xg6?, loses control of the d4-square, making it easy for Black to get rid of his isolated central pawn. 17...hxg6 18.♘a4 (Otherwise Black will play ...a7-a6, ...♖ad8 and ...d5-d4. For example: 18.♖fd1 a6 19.♗e2 ♖ad8 20.♗f3 d4) 18...♗b4 19.a3 ♖ac8 20.♕d1 ♗d6 The game was soon drawn.

17.♘f3!±

The knight has a good function on f3, controlling the d4-square and preventing Black from

executing the ...d5-d4 break. One possible line is:

17...♖ad8

This looks natural, but Black has nowhere to go. The knight would be better on c6, helping to control the d4-square.

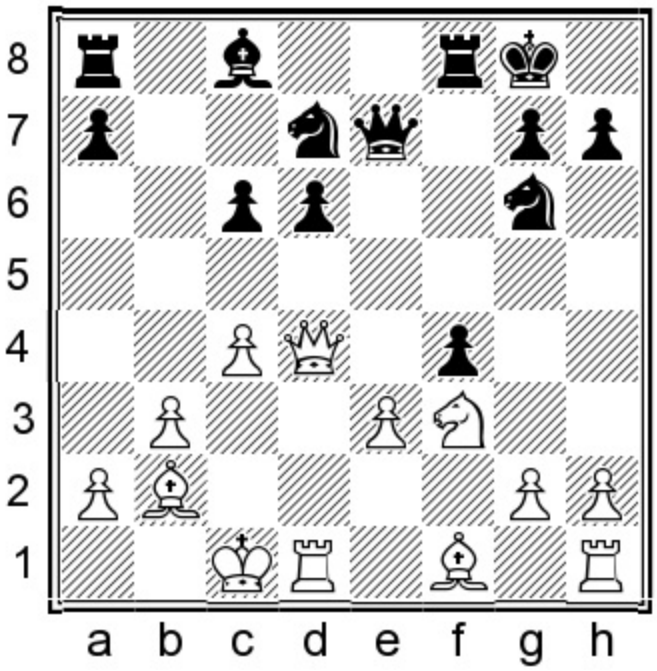
Or: 17...♖ac8 18.♖fd1±

18.♖ac1 a6 19.♖fd1 ♗a7 20.a3±

White has a stable positional advantage, due to his superior pawn structure and better piece coordination.

88. Baadur Jobava – Yannay Ben Ari

Terme Catez 2022



Should Black take on e3:

A) with the queen, or
B) with the pawn?

Show/Hide Solution

(Prophylaxis)

In the game Black was on the snow slope to hell after 16...♕xe3† 17.♕xe3 fxe3 18.♖xd6+– White won on move to 27.

16...fxe3!

This is fine for Black. White will have to spend some time in winning back the pawn.

17.♕xd6?

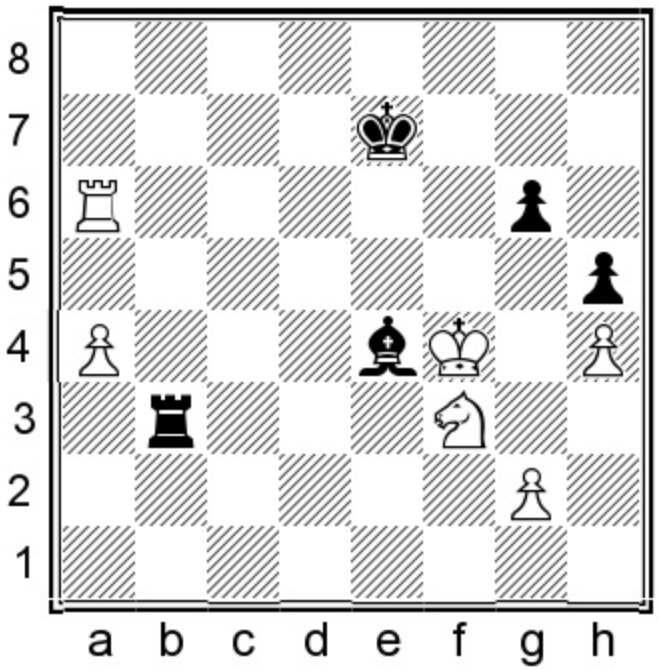
17.♖e1 is a better try. White attacks the pawn with tempo and continues to develop his pieces. 17...♖e8 18.♗d3 ♘f6 19.♘h4! Removing defenders from the black king. 19...c5! (19...♘xh4? 20.♕xh4 is great for White.) 20.♘xg6 hxg6 21.♕f4 ♗f5 22.♗xf5 gxf5 23.♕xf5 e2 The position is balanced.

17...e2∓

The complications are in Black's favour.

89. Leon Luke Mendonca – Vasilios Kotronias

Hamburg 2022



Should Black:

A) eliminate the white knight with 54...♗xf3, or
B) defend the bishop with 54...♖b4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Exchanging to make a draw)

Kotronias played: 54...♗xf3?? This is a difficult exchange to explain, similar to 46.♕g5?? earlier in the game (see Exercise 2). The bishop is stronger than the knight, and the g2-pawn is a target.

Furthermore, the bishop helps by defending on both sides of the board. 55.gxf3 ♔f7 56.♔g5 ♖xf3 57.♖a7† ♔e6 58.♔xg6 ♖g3† 59.♔xh5 Black struggled on to move 85 before throwing in the towel.

54...♖b4!?

Also possible was 54...♗b7. The main thing is to keep the bishop on the board.

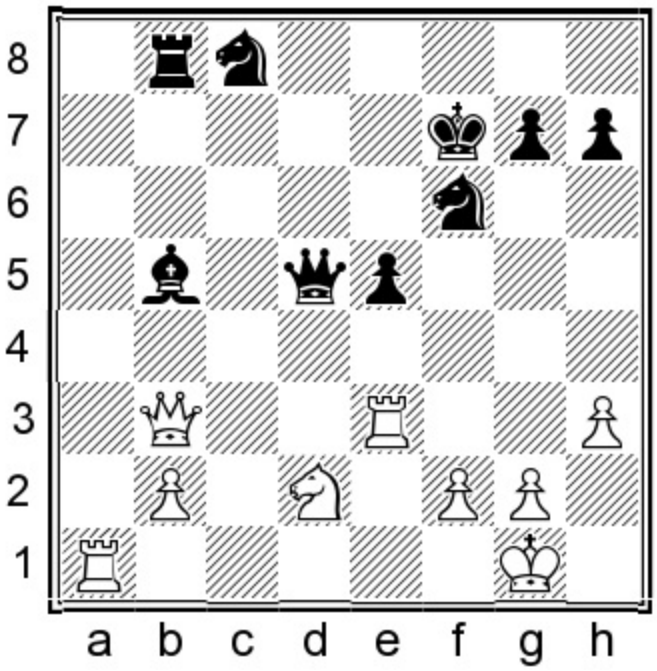
55.♔g3 ♖b2

This is fully sufficient to hold the draw. White can of course try a few things, and should, but by keeping the pressure on, without feeling a great need to "do" anything, Black will make the draw.

It is important to understand that in a position like this, Black may seek to frustrate his opponent, but his obligation is not to "hold", but rather to "not lose", which is a different attitude altogether. If you are trying to hold, often you look for a way to finish the game with a draw, while if you are simply preventing your opponent from making progress, you may make the draw without great problems.

90. Alexander Grischuk – Alireza Firouzja

Terme Catez 2021



Should White:

A) exchange on d5, or
B) play 25.♕c3?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing attackers)

This game was a part of Firouzja's amazing run during the 2021 European Team Championship that saw him propelled to number 2 in the world rankings. In this game he escaped with a scare.

25.♕xd5†? ♘xd5 26.♖xe5± is of course pleasant for White, with two pawns and a rook vs. bishop and knight. Theoretically this should account for a half pawn advantage and give White a chance to apply pressure. This he did all the way to move 86, when the game was drawn.

25.♕c3!

Keeping the queens on the board was much stronger, winning the e-pawn. The white rook soon gets to kick the black queen around, and the black king would be in a danger he did not feel in the endgame. Once again, it is as simple as don't exchange the queens when your opponent's king is exposed.

25...♕c6

25...♘d7 26.♘f3 would soon remove another defender from Black's position.

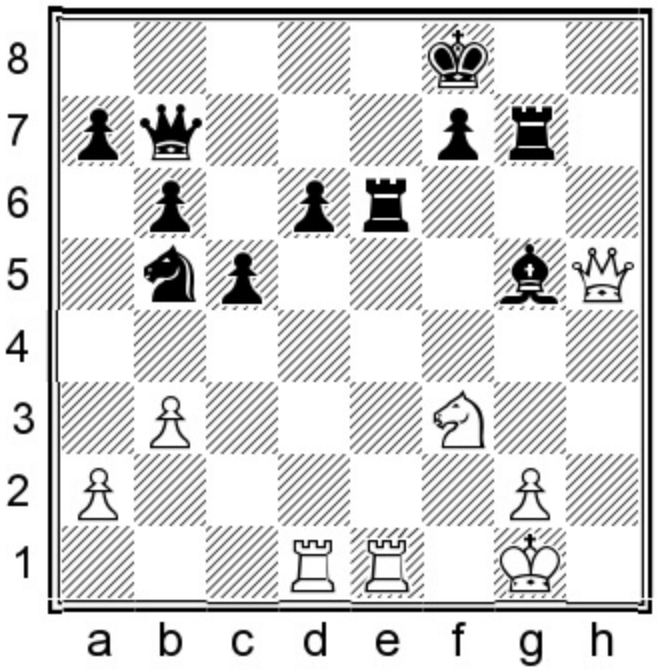
25...♗c6 26.♘f3 ♔g8 27.♖d3 would be a short cut to collapse. White just wins.

26.♕xe5 ♕d6 27.♕c3

White should keep the pressure on without exchanging queens, unless he is able to do so under favourable circumstances.

91. Ward Altarbosh – Rune Djurhuus

Bergen 2021



Should White:

A) exchange rooks on e6, or
B) take on g5 directly?

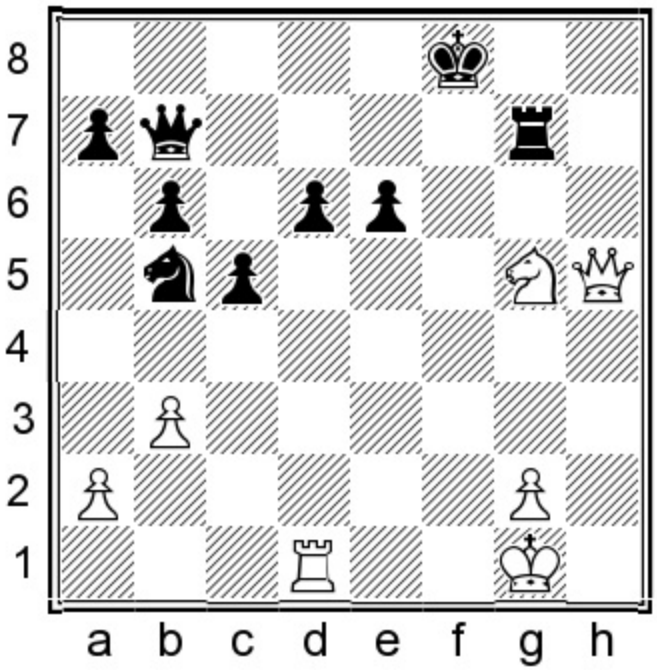
Show/Hide Solution

(King safety)

In the game Black was able to create active play after 35.♘xg5? ♖xg5! 36.♕xg5 ♖g6 37.♕d8† ♔g7 38.♖d2 ♘d4. Black certainly has good counterplay and does not even have a material deficit. All the black pieces play well together. The game was soon drawn: 39.♖e8 ♘f3† 40.♔f2 ♘xd2 41.♖g8† ♔h7 ½–½

35.♖xe6! fxe6 36.♘xg5

With the black kingside opened up and lots of weaknesses, White is able to crash through. The biggest defender has been removed and a weak pawn is in his place. Most importantly, the rook on d1, which previously did not have a way to join the game, now can. The true point of the rook exchange is the time gained, weaknesses created, and space made for the second rook.



36...♖xg5

What else? 36...♕e7 37.♕h8† ♖g8 38.♖f1† and White wins.

37.♖f1†!?

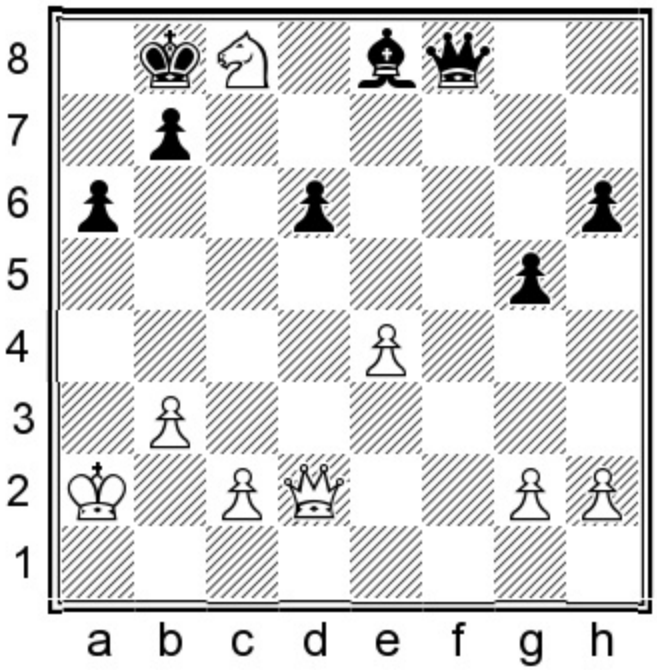
By no means the only win.

37...♖f5 38.♕h8† ♔e7 39.♕g7†

Black can only resign.

92. Anustoop Biswas – Fernando Valenzuela

Sant Marti 2022



Should White capture on d6:

A) with 36.♘xd6, or
B) with 36.♕xd6†, exchanging queens?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

White went wrong with 36.♕xd6†? ♕xd6 37.♘xd6 ♗c6. The endgame is equal, and the game quickly fizzled out into a draw. 38.g4 ♔c7 39.e5 ♔d7 40.♘f5 ♔e6 41.♘xh6 ♔xe5 42.♔a3 ♔f4 43.♔b4 ½–½

36.♘xd6!

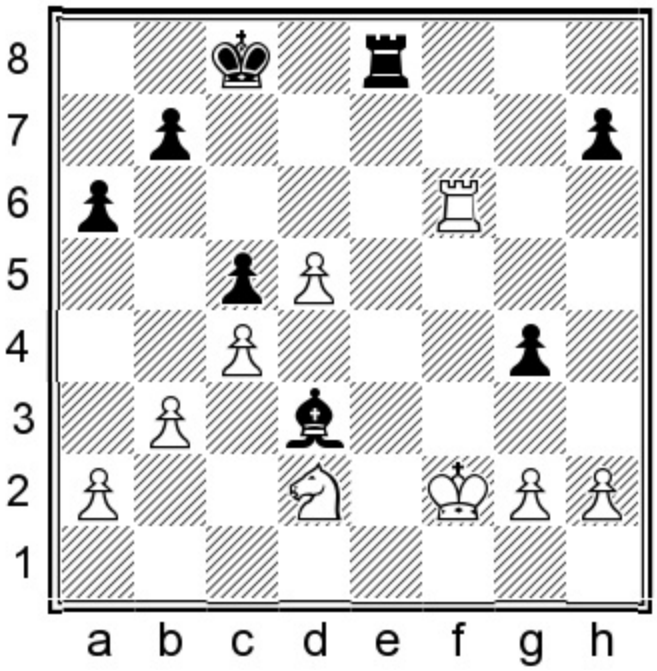
White needs to keep the queens on to maintain the pressure. After the exchange of queens, the bishop is a better minor piece than the knight. Also, the black king can come out to the centre and create counterplay, whereas his counterpart is too far from the action.

36...♗c6 37.♕d4+–

White will play g2-g3, e4-e5 and ♔b2 and slowly convert his advantage, while Black is completely tied up.

93. Seyed Kian Poormosavi – Iniyan P

Dubai 2022



Should White:

A) offer the exchange of rooks with 30.♖e6, or
B) play 30.♔g3?

Show/Hide Solution

(Converting an advantage)

Being a pawn up, White decided to force the exchange of rooks with:

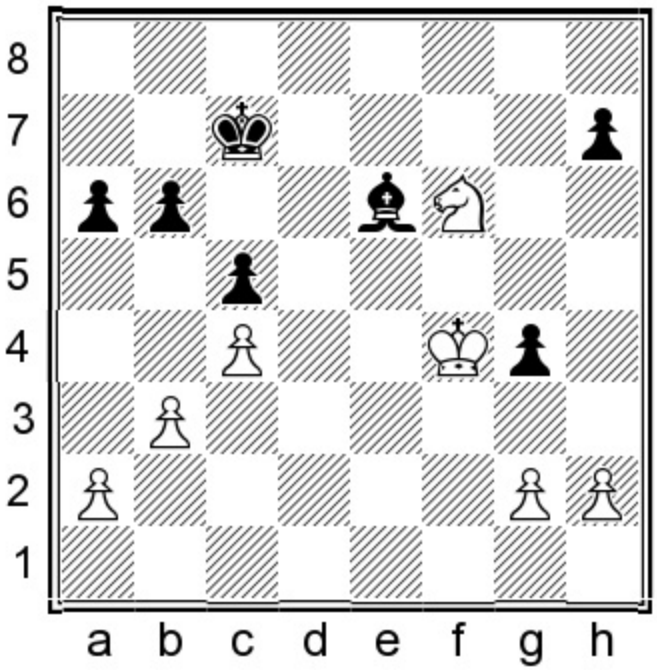
30.♖e6? ♖xe6 31.dxe6

However, with his king out of play, White lacks the necessary forces to gain material and prevent counterplay at the same time.

31...♗f5! 32.♔e3 ♗xe6 33.♘e4

33.♔f4 ♔c7 doesn't change anything.

33...b6 34.♔f4 ♔c7 35.♘f6



35...b5!

This is the problem. When the knight comes to attack the pawns on the kingside, Black creates counterplay on the opposite flank and eliminates all the pawns.

36.♔e5 ♗f7 37.cxb5 axb5 38.♘xh7

Now Black went wrong with:

38...b4?

Instead, he should have continued provoking exchanges with: 38...c4! 39.bxc4 bxc4 40.♔d4 g3 41.hxg3 c3 42.♔xc3 ♗xa2=

39.♘f6! ♔c6

It is now too late for: 39...c4 40.bxc4 ♗xc4 41.♘d5†+–

40.♘xg4 c4 41.♘f2 cxb3 42.axb3 ♗xb3 43.♘d3 ♔b5 44.g4 ♗c2 45.♘xb4 ♔xb4 46.h4 ♔c5 47.h5 ♔c6 48.h6 ♔d7 49.♔f6 ♔d6 50.g5

1–0

30.♔g3!

Without renouncing the idea of playing ♖e6, White should improve his king. This brings it closer to the action and threatens to win the g4-pawn.

30...h5

30...♖e2 31.♖f2! ♖xf2 32.♔xf2 is a much better version of the rook exchange for White, since Black doesn't have any targets to attack.

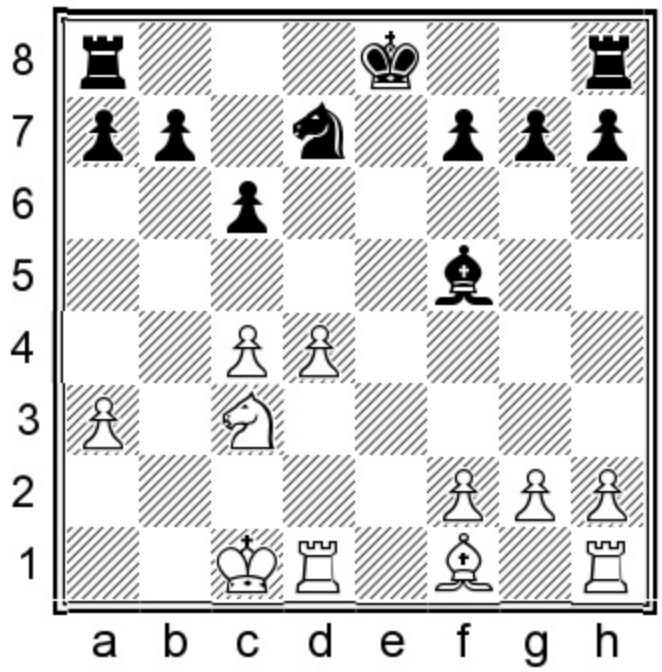
31.♖e6!

Now is the right time to play this, since the white king is already close enough to the black pawns.

31...♖xe6 32.dxe6 ♗f5 33.♔h4 ♗xe6 34.♔xh5+–

94. Manuel Petrosyan – Andrey Tsvetkov

Batumi 2018



Should White:

A) seek the exchange of bishops with 16.♗d3, or
B) play 16.♖e1†?

Show/Hide Solution

(Gaining time)

After 16.♖e1† ♔f8, neither player is able to coordinate their forces well. One idea for Black is to play ...h7-h5 and ...♖h6. This prepares ...♖d6 to put pressure on White's weakness, the d-pawn. 17.♔d2 ♖d8 (Or 17...h5 18.♗d3 ♗xd3 19.♔xd3 h4 20.♖e3 ♖d8 21.♘e4 ♖h5=.) 18.♗d3 ♗xd3 19.♔xd3 ♘c5† 20.♔e3 ♘e6=

After 16.d5?! 0-0-0∓ Black is happy to have the c5-square for the knight.

16.♗d3!

This is the only move to play for an advantage, even if it does not yield much.

16...♗xd3 17.♖he1†

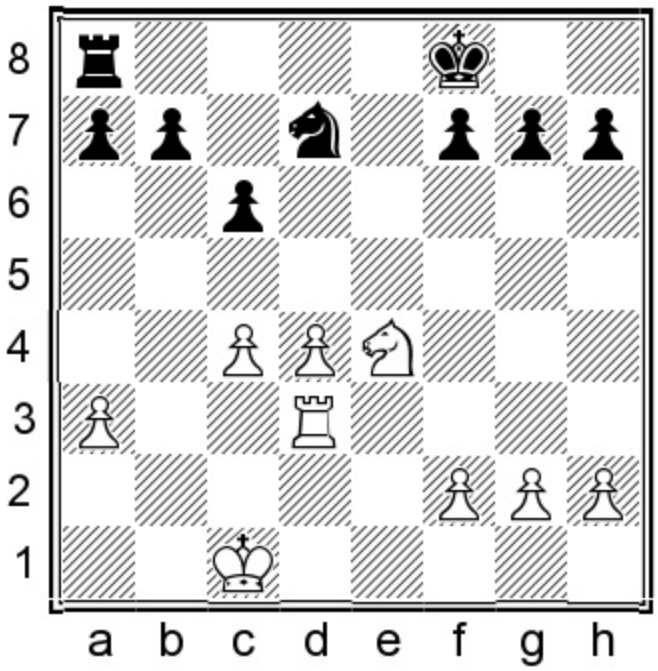
This tempo is the key point to exchanging the bishops.

17...♔d8

17...♔f8 18.♖xd3 h5 was probably better, but White still retains a slight initiative.

18.♖xd3 ♖e8 19.♖xe8† ♔xe8 20.♘e4 ♔f8

White is slightly better with his activity and Black's lack of coordination. Although he won the game on move 70, he could have played more strongly here.



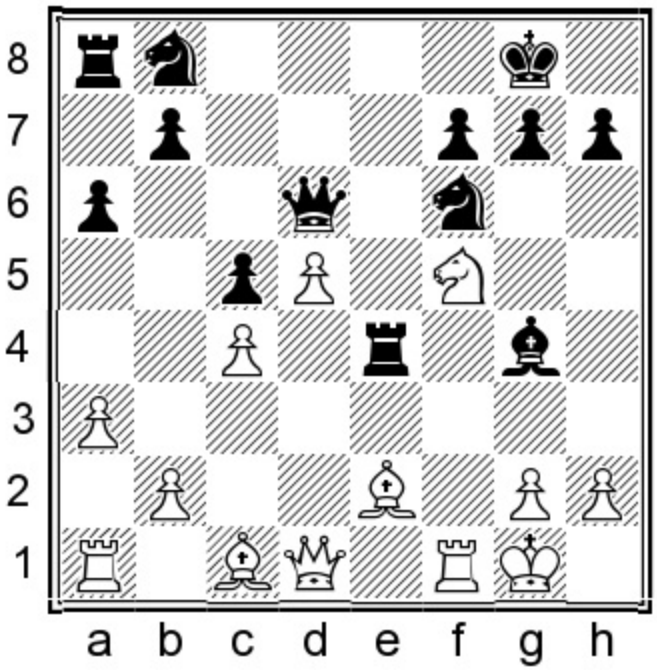
21.♔d2!

The game might have continued:

21...♖e8 22.♘d6 ♖b8 23.♖f3 ♘f6 24.c5±

95. Matthias Bluebaum – Eduardas Rozentalis

Germany 2021



Should Black play:

A) 16...♗xf5, or
B) 16...♕e5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Gaining time)

In the game Black was quickly in trouble after: 16...♕e5? 17.♗xg4 ♖xg4? (17...♘xg4 18.♘g3 ♕d4† 19.♕xd4 ♖xd4 20.b3± was also bad, but not totally over.) 18.♖a2!? (White won the game quickly in 27 moves, but even more powerful would have been 18.♗d2!.) 18...♘bd7 19.b3+–

16...♗xf5!

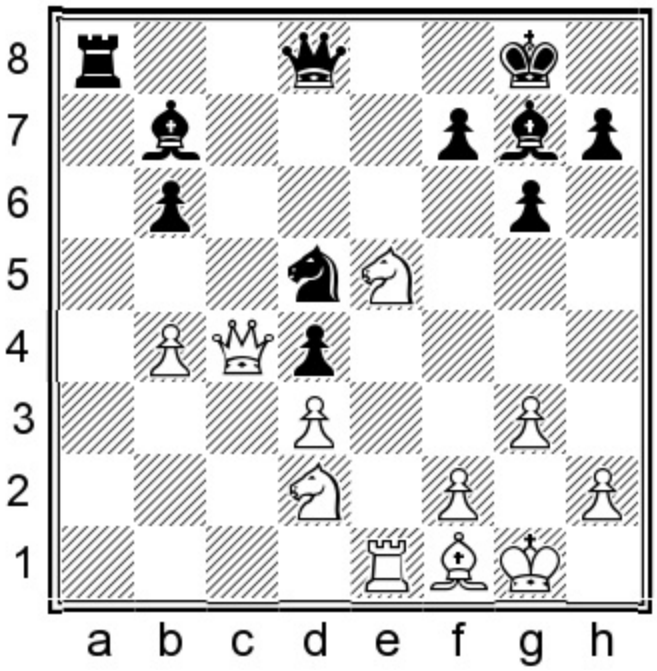
The right decision.

17.♖xf5 ♘bd7∓

Black's pieces are working well together and will create threats quickly enough. Being first out of the gates matters greatly, especially when your opponent has two bishops and a passer.

96. Shiyam Thavandiran – Leonel Figueredo Losada

El Salvador 2022



Should Black:

A) capture with 25...♗xe5, or
B) play 25...♕d6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

The inferior 25...♕d6? was played. After 26.♕xd4 ♕xb4 27.♕xb4 ♘xb4 Black keeps a passed pawn and two bishops, but there is no advantage. White will play 28.♖b1, forcing an equal endgame. The game was later drawn.

25...♗xe5!

By eliminating the only good white piece on the board, Black is able to quickly activate all his pieces and dominate White's position.

26.♖xe5 ♘c3

Surprisingly, White is dead lost. His pieces have no play and Black can create numerous threats. For instance:

27.♖e1

Or 27.♗g2 ♖a1† 28.♘f1 ♗xg2 29.♔xg2 ♕a8† 30.f3 ♖a2† 31.♔h3 h5–+ and the white king is terribly exposed.

27.♘b3 ♕f6! 28.f4 ♖c8 29.♕xd4 ♕c6–+ is also curtains for White.

27...♖c8 28.♕b3 ♕g5 29.♘e4 ♗xe4

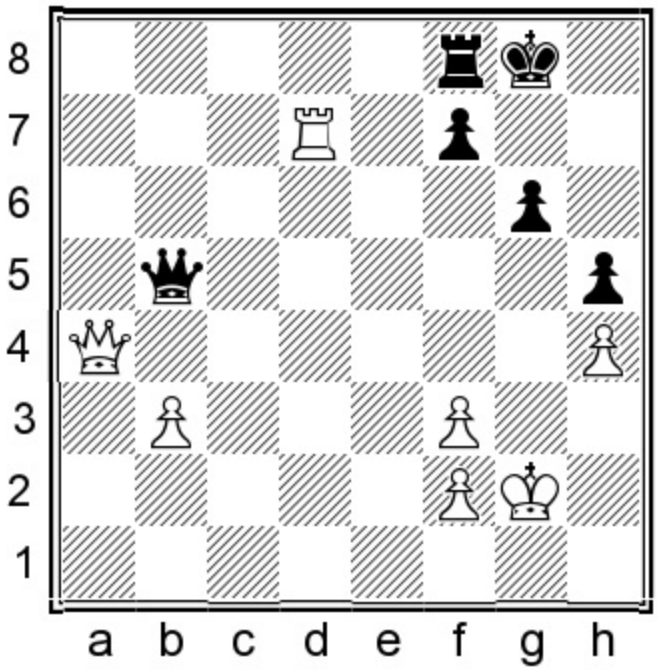
Black does not want to exchange the strong knight on c3.

30.dxe4 ♕d2

Black is winning a pawn and only just getting started.

97. Erez Kupervaser – Ariel Erenberg

Arad 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange queens with 41...♕xa4, or
B) aim for counterplay with 41...♕f5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Escaping with a draw)

Black rejected the exchange of queens: 41...♕f5? 42.♖a7!? (The strongest move was the centralising 42.♕d4, but White was also winning after the text move.) 42...♕d5 43.b4 (In the game, White played 43.♕c4?, which gave Black another chance to exchange queens. He took it, and the game was drawn ten moves later.) 43...♖b8 44.♖e7+– White will win in the long run.

41...♕xa4!

The correct decision. Black would be in trouble in a queen ending, as there is no likelihood of a perpetual. Also, queens are the only pieces that can simultaneously defend a passed pawn and fight

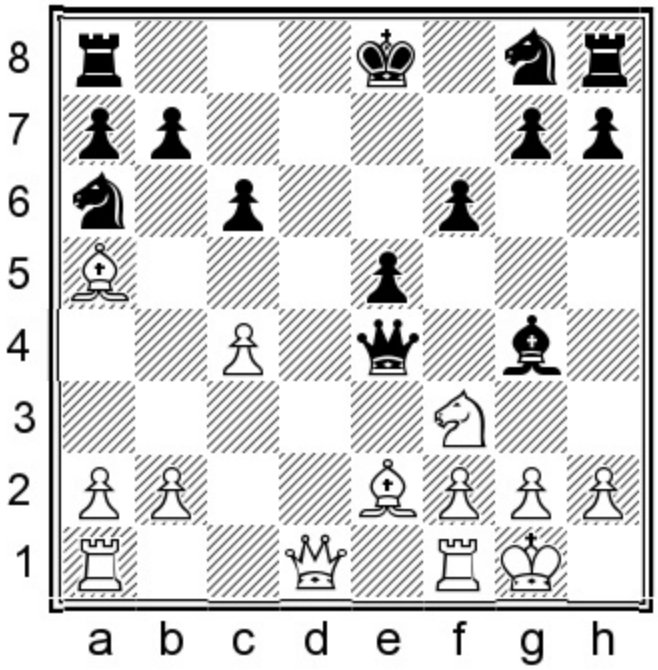
for the square in front of it, without being hopelessly in the way of the pawn (as rooks can be). The rook endgame is the one of the three endgames available to Black that he will be able to hold.

42.bxa4 ♖a8 43.♖d4 ♖a5=

The simplest. Black will play ...g6-g5 at some point, creating a passed h-pawn that will secure the draw.

98. Filip Boe Olsen – Evgeny Sveshnikov

Copenhagen 2020



Should White:

A) win back the pawn with the tactical 12.♘xe5, or
B) play 12.♖e1?

Show/Hide Solution

(King safety)
12.♘xe5? The move played was a big mistake. 12...♕xe2! Black exchanges queens and is safe. (Olsen was probably focusing on 12...♕xe5? 13.♗xg4 ♕xa5 14.♖e1† with a deadly attack. For example, 14...♔f7 15.♕d7† ♔g6 16.♗e6 ♘h6 17.♖e3 and White wins.) 13.♘xg4 ♕xd1 14.♖axd1 ♘e7 15.♖fe1 b6 Black has more or less equalised. White tried a last stab at activity, but only made things worse. 16.♖d6!? ♔f7 17.♗c3 ♖hd8 18.♖de6?! ♖d7 Black is comfortable, was soon better, and won the game on move 56.

12.♖e1!

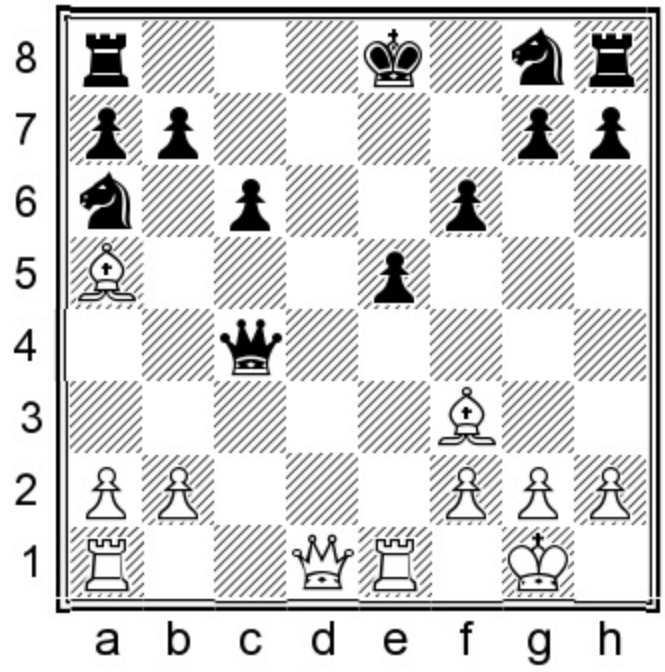
This is the most principled move, exploiting Black's lack of coordination and exposed king in the centre.

12.h3 is another good move among others.

12...♗xf3

Or 12...♕f5 13.♘xe5!? (White could also play 13.♘d4, with f2-f4 coming.) 13...♗xe2 14.♖xe2 fxe5 15.♕d4! ♕d7 16.♖xe5† ♘e7 17.♕xd7† (Keeping things simple. Also winning were 17.♕e4 and 17.♖xe7†!?.) 17...♔xd7 18.♖d1†. In this case the exchange of queens makes sense. White is a pawn up and Black still uncoordinated. The bishop is stronger than the knight and White can still use his initiative to create additional threats.

13.♗xf3 ♕xc4



14.♕d6!

White has a big attack. For example:

14...♘e7

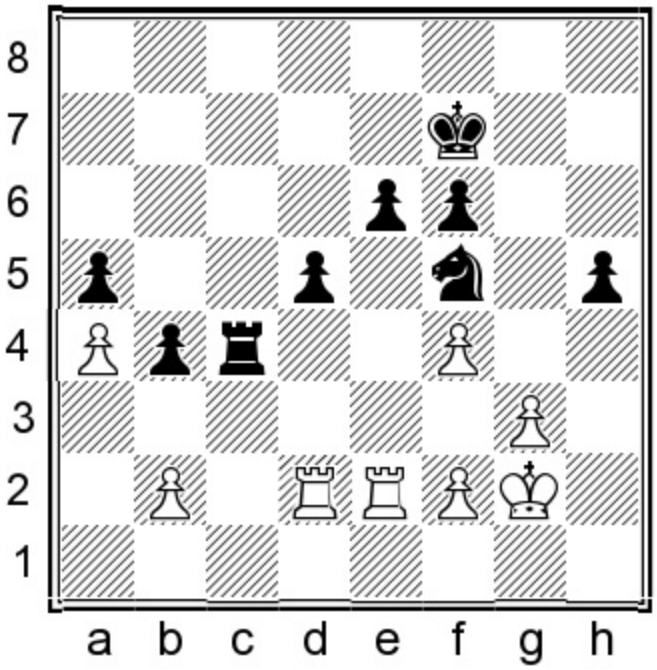
14...♕c5 15.♕e6† ♘e7 16.♖ed1! followed by 17.♖d7 wins quickly for White.

15.♗h5†! ♘g6 16.♖ad1 ♕f7 17.♗c3!

White is ready to crash through on e5.

99. Levon Aronian – Fabiano Caruana

Paris (blitz) 2021



Should White:

A) seek the exchange of rooks with 41.♖c2, or
B) play something else?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

41.♖c2!

It is correct to exchange rooks and it is hard to even come up with another move. The key point is to remove Black's chances of creating counterplay. If nothing happens, White should win.

41...♔e7

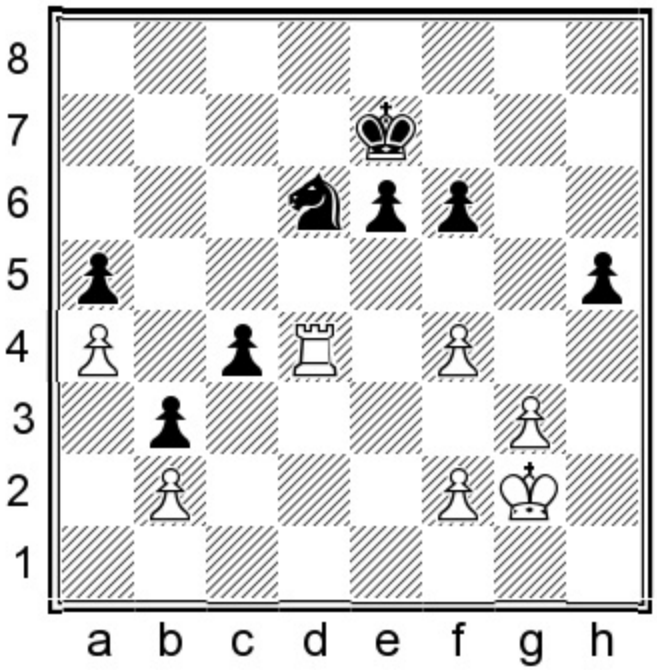
41...b3 42.♖c3! is quite convincing, although White can also take on c4.

42.♖xc4 dxc4 43.♖e4?

But this was a mistake.

After 43.♖c2! ♘d6 44.♖c1! Black has problems on both flanks. White wins, with f2-f3 and ♔f2-e2 coming.

43...♘d6 44.♖d4 b3



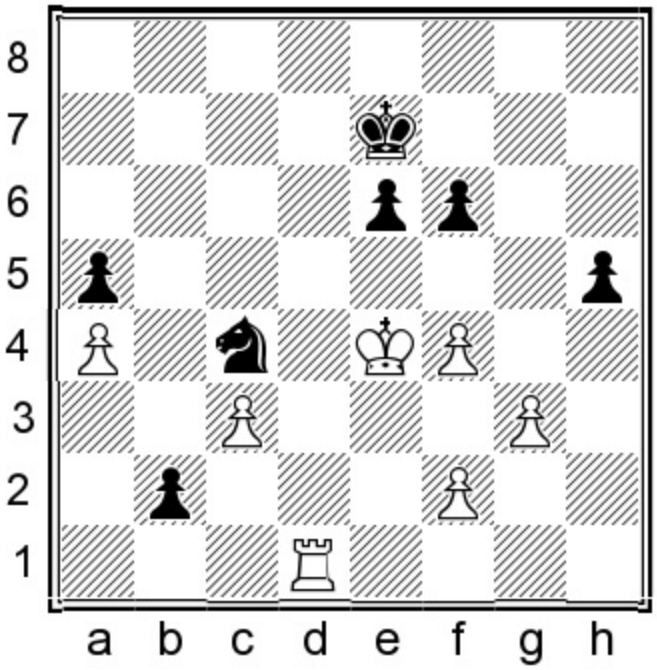
45.♔f3?

Better was something like 45.♔h3!? or 45.♖d1 c3 46.bxc3 b2 47.♖b1 ♘c4 48.♔h3 when White is not worse.

45...c3!

Black should now win. White is only saved by this being a blitz game.

46.bxc3 b2 47.♖d1 ♘c4 48.♔e4



48...♘d2†?

After this mistake the game ended in a funny draw.

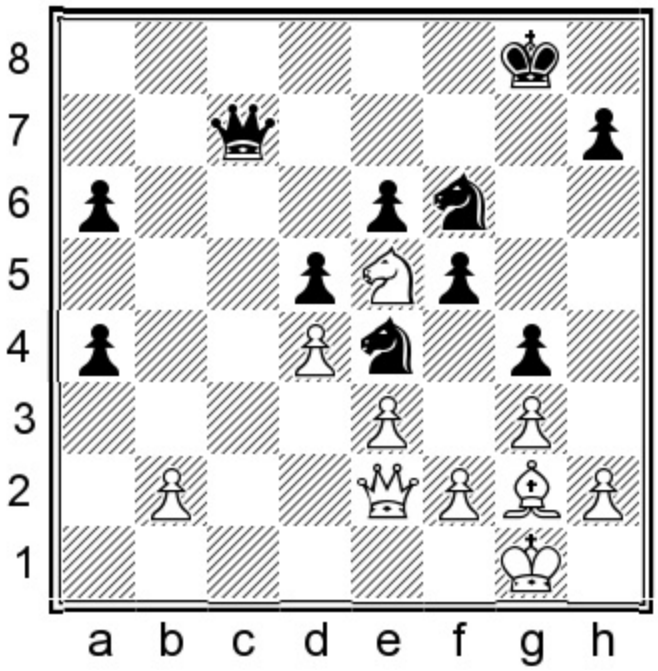
48...♘a3! is stronger. Black is not forced to queen the pawn quickly.

49.♔d3 b1=♕† 50.♖xb1 ♘xb1 51.♔c2 ♘a3† 52.♔b3 ♘b1 53.♔c2 ♘a3† 54.♔b3 ♘b1 55.♔c2 ♘a3†

½–½

100. Evgeny Postny – Luke McShane

Netanya 2019



Should White:

A) take on a6, or
B) exchange on e4 first?

Show/Hide Solution

(Prevention of counterplay)

White won after 32.♕xa6? ♘g5 (But better is 32...♕c1† 33.♗f1, when 33...♘g5!? and 33...♕xb2 34.♕xe6† ♔h8 give Black enough counterplay.) 33.♘c6! and another 55 moves.

White should play:

32.♗xe4! ♘xe4

32...fxe4 33.♕xa6 leaves Black without any ideas.

33.♕xa6

The key point is that White delivers mate after:

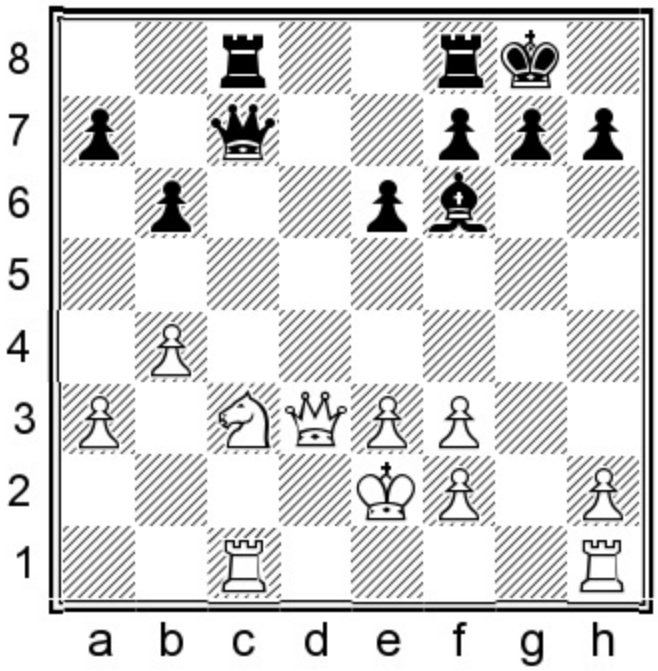
33...♕c1†

White also wins after: 33...♘g5 34.♕xa4 ♘f3† 35.♘xf3 gxf3 36.♕d1+–

34.♔g2 ♕xb2 35.♕xe6†

101. Pia Cramling – Eric Rosen

Gibraltar 2022



Should White:

A) exchange the bishop on f6 with either 19.♘e4 or 19.♘d5, or
B) play 19.♘a2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing attackers)

In the game Cramling played 19.♘a2?, when after 19...♕e5! Black was entirely in control. White lost on move 50. The first few moves in that direction went: 20.a4 ♕b2† 21.♕d2 ♕b3 22.♖xc8 ♖xc8 23.♖c1 ♖xc1 24.♘xc1 ♕xa4 And so on...

19.♘e4!

White should make the exchange.

19...♕xc1

19...♕e5 20.♘xf6† ♕xf6 21.♖xc8 ♖xc8 22.♖d1 would also be fine for White. She should avoid the pawn ending, but would otherwise be fine.

20.♖xc1 ♖xc1 21.♘xf6†

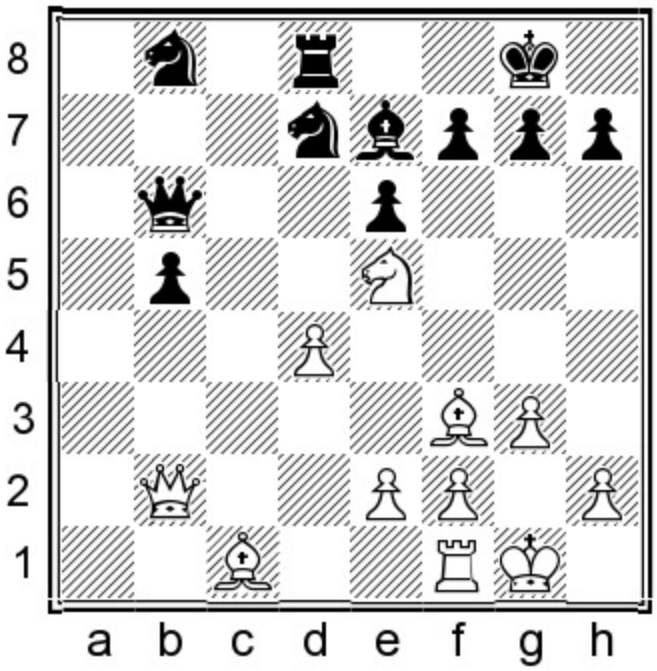
21.f4 would be met by: 21...♗h4∓

21...gxf6 22.♕d4!

An important move. In the long run Black would have a large advantage, so he should not be allowed to coordinate his pieces. White now has sufficient counterplay.

102. Christian Palozza – Daniel Garcia Ramos

Ibiza 2021



Should White:

A) exchange on d7, or
B) retreat with the knight to d3?

Show/Hide Solution

(Tension/Better pieces)

In the game, 18.♘xd7?! exchanged off a passive black knight. 18...♘xd7 19.♗d2 b4 20.♖c1 ♘f6 With roughly equal play, but Black won in 37 moves.

18.♘d3!

White should avoid improving the opponent's pieces. The knight retreat keeps the tension, prepares to put pressure on the b5-pawn and tries to exploit the position of the black queen on b6.

18...♘c6

18...b4 19.♗d2 ♘c6 20.e3 ♕b5 21.♗e2 is not a problem for White.

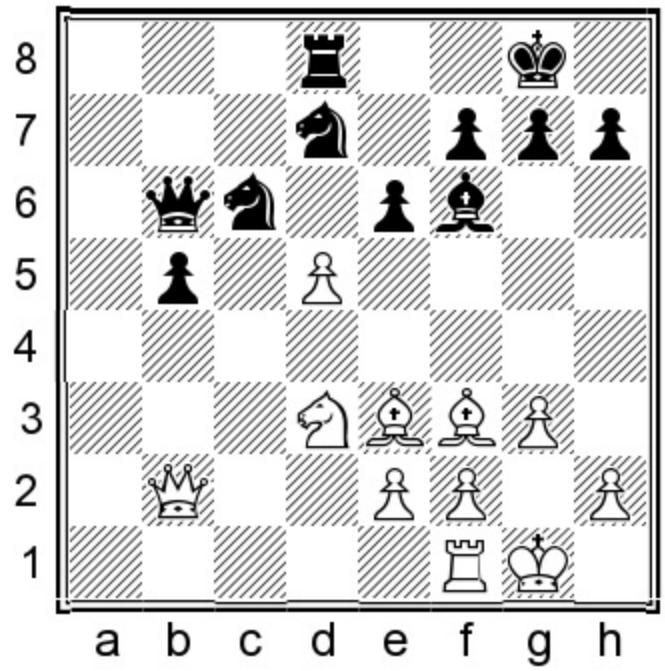
19.♗e3

Strongly threatening d4-d5.

19...♗f6

The only way to counter it.

20.d5



20...♕a6!

But not 20...♗xb2? 21.♗xb6 ♘xb6 22.dxc6 followed by ♖b1 when White will win the b5-pawn.

21.♕b3 ♘ce5 22.dxe6 ♘xf3† 23.exf3 ♕xe6!

Going for a position where Black is down a pawn but with good chances to hold, as White gets doubled pawns.

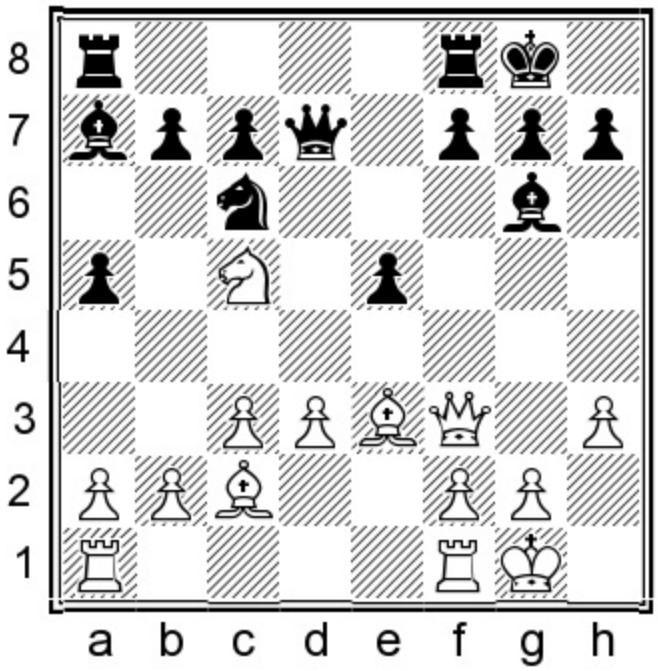
Worse is 23...fxe6 24.♖c1 when White is much better, as he can attack Black's weaknesses on e6 and b5. The knight can also find a strong outpost on e4.

24.♕xb5 ♘e5 25.♘xe5 ♕xe5 26.♕c4±

The position is drawish but White still has a slight pull.

103. Hugo Lopez Silva – Pablo Salinas Herrera

Santiago de Chile 2022



Should Black play:

A) 17...♗xc5,
B) 17...♕e7, with idea of 18.♘xb7 e4, or
C) 17...♕c8, defending b7?

Show/Hide Solution

(Gaining time/Colour schemes)

In the game, Black did not want to give up his bishop and played 17...♕e7 18.♕d5 ♘d8 19.a4 ♖e8 20.♖fe1 ♕d6 with equality. The game was soon drawn.

17...♕c8?! is too passive. After 18.♗a4!±, Black is under pressure.

17...♗xc5!

Giving up the bishop pair is always a difficult decision, but in this case it is justified. Black

eliminates the active knight and gains time to put pressure on the light squares. White's bishops are not dangerous. The strong bishop on g6 is targeting d3, and Black quickly brings in more pieces to attack this point.

18.♗xc5 ♖fd8 19.♖fd1

19.♖ad1 would be a mistake. 19...♕d5! attacks the a2-pawn, forcing the exchange of queens. White's queen is his only active piece, so Black benefits from this exchange. The move also wins a tempo to include the rooks in the game. 20.♕xd5 ♖xd5 21.♗e3 ♖ad8 Black is much better.

19...♕d5 20.♕e3

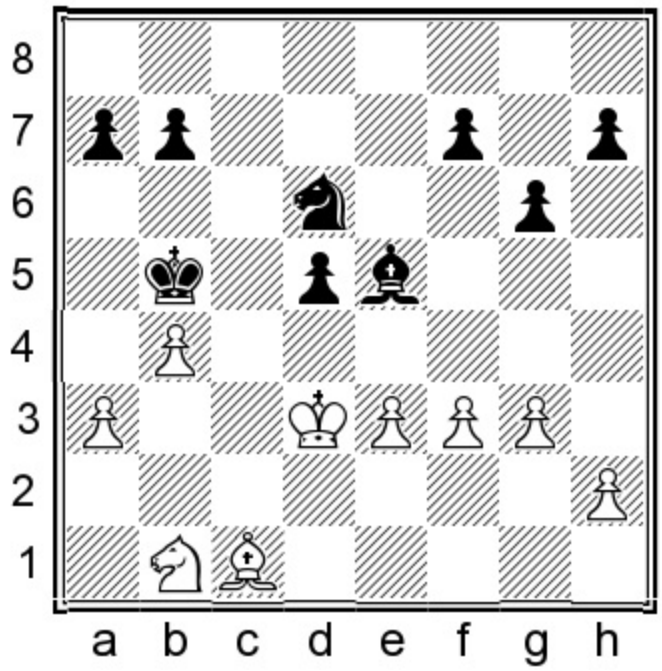
With the a2-pawn defended, White can play this move.

20...a4∓

It is not much, but Black's position is a little more active and can slowly be improved.

104. Arto Ihaksi – Lari Linden

Finland 2019



Should White play:

A) 30.♘c3†, allowing the exchange of bishop for knight, or
B) 30.♗d2, with the intention to seek the exchange of bishops?

Show/Hide Solution

(Invasion)

In the game White quickly regretted his lack of urgency. After 30.♗d2? ♔a4 31.♔c2 he eventually lost on move 48. (White does not have time for 31.♗c3 on account of 31...♘c4.) The simplest way now was 31...♘c4 32.♗c1 f5–+, where White is entirely tied down.

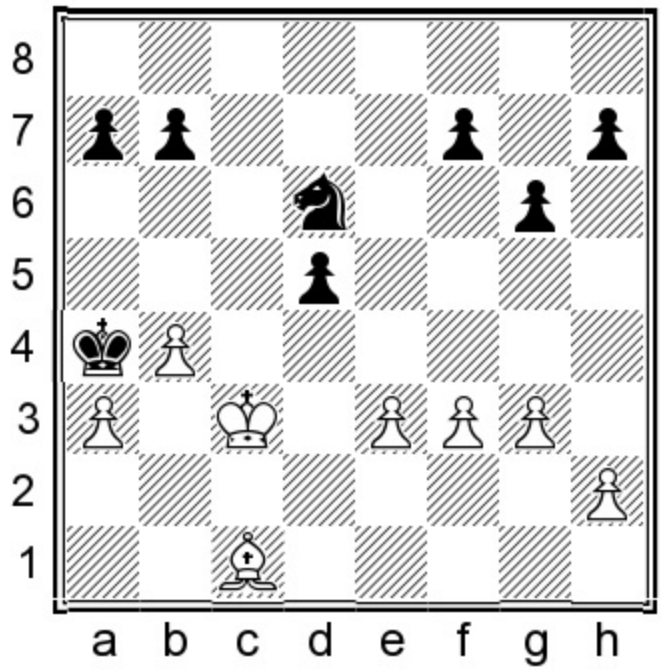
30.e4 dxe4† 31.fxe4 ♔a4 32.♘d2 b5∓ looks unpleasant for White, but Stockfish assures us that 33.♔c2 holds. However, this is not a position anyone would seek out.

30.♘c3†! ♗xc3

30...♔c6 31.♘e2 is not troublesome for White.

31.♔xc3 ♔a4

This is the critical variation.



32.♔d4! ♘b5† 33.♔xd5 ♘xa3 34.♗xa3

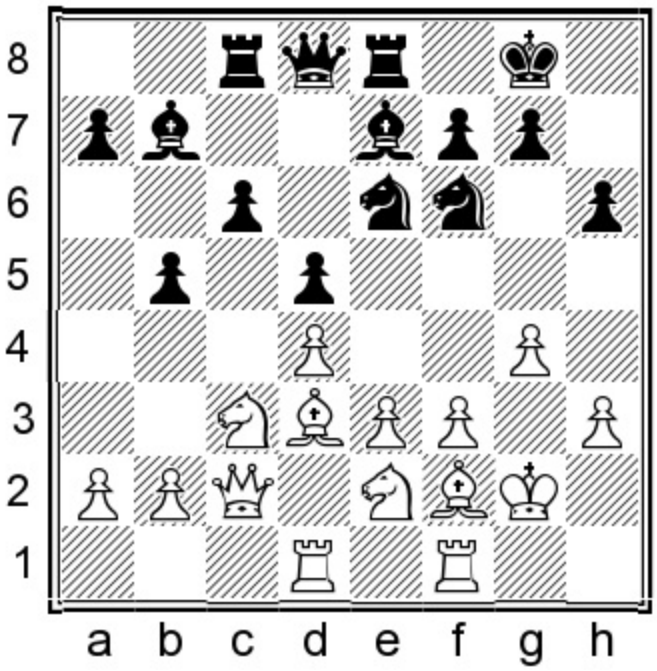
This works. 34.♗d2!? would also hold, which can be played without calculation.

34...♔xa3 35.♔c5 ♔a4 36.b5 b6† 37.♔c4

Black has to be a bit careful and force a draw quickly.

105. Alice Lee – Stavroula Tsolakidou

St Louis 2022



Should White:

A) seek an exchange with 18.♘f4, or
B) play 18.♗g3?

Show/Hide Solution

(Prophylaxis)

18.♘f4!

The exchange is in White's favour.

In the game, Black got great play after: 18.♗g3? b4 19.♘a4 c5! 20.dxc5 ♘xc5 21.♗f5 ♘e6 22.♕d2 White won the game on move 74, but at this point 22...♗d6!∓ would have been strong. The d5-pawn is isolated, but is matched by the equally weak e3-pawn, and the knight on a4 looks silly.

18...♘f8!

Black has a few structures to choose from.

18...b4?! 19.♘xe6 fxe6 20.♘a4± would be bad.

18...♘xf4† 19.exf4 ♗d6 is not as bad, but this structure favours White. The doubled pawns are controlling all the right squares and are not easy to attack. 20.♘e2 b4 21.♖fe1± for example.

19.h4± ♘6d7 20.♕d2!?

Spicing things up.

20...♗xh4

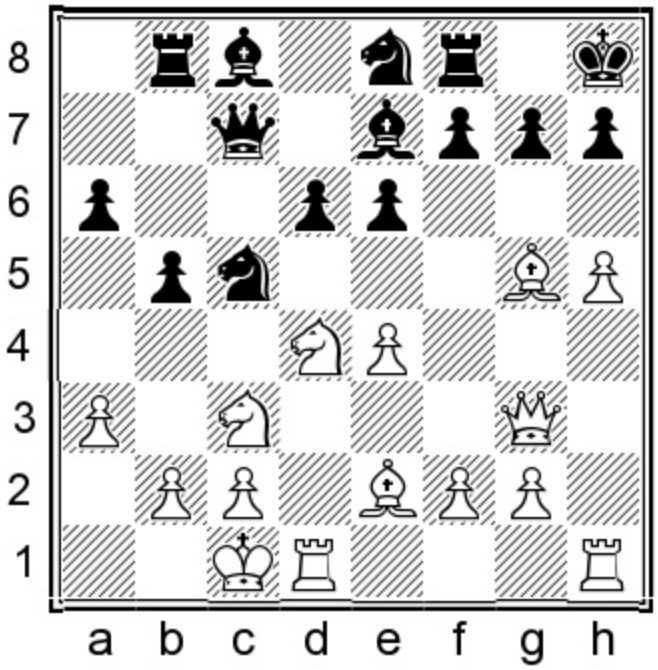
20...b4 21.♘ce2 c5 22.dxc5 ♗xc5 23.♘d4± would give White a stable advantage.

21.♗xh4 ♕xh4 22.♘ce2⩲

White has good attacking chances on the kingside.

106. Jaroslav Bures – Martin Neugebauer

Czech Republic 2021



Should Black:

A) take on g5, or
B) play 16...b4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Prophylaxis)

Black needs to prevent h5-h6, which will create weaknesses around the black king for the rest of the game.

16...♗xg5†!

This exchange favours Black because of what follows.

16...f6 17.♗d2 would give chances to both sides, with a larger responsibility on Black for playing accurately. Long computer analysis will give Black equality, but many accurate moves are needed.

16...b4

This is a critical option, when White needs to be precise in order to keep an advantage.

17.♗xe7 bxc3

This is forced, since after 17...♕xe7 there is a double attack on c6.

18.b4!

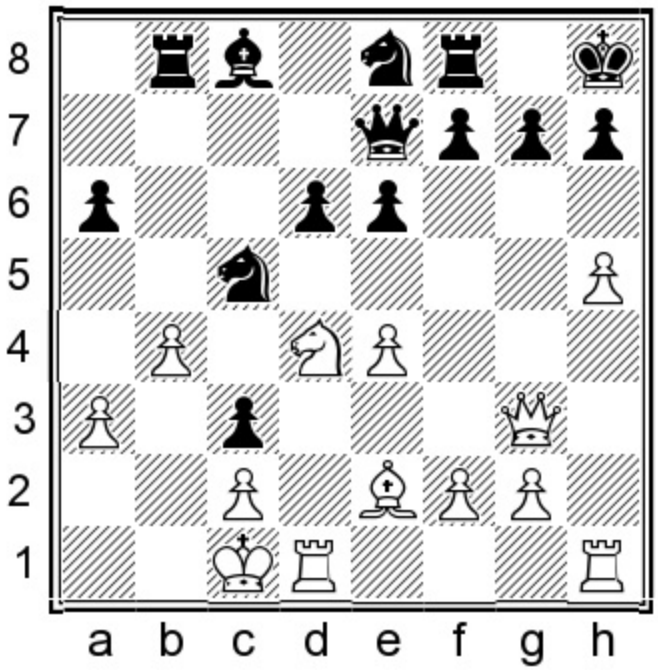
Keeping the b-file blocked.

18.♗xf8 would lose to 18...♘xe4 19.♕e3 cxb2† 20.♔b1 ♘c3†.

18.♕h4 is losing after a long and stunning line: 18...♖xb2 19.♗xf8 ♕a5 20.♗xg7† ♘xg7 21.h6 ♖a2! 22.hxg7† ♔xg7 23.♕xh7† ♔f8 24.♕h8† ♔e7 25.♘c6† ♔d7 26.♖xd6† ♔xd6 27.♖d1† ♔xc6 28.♕xc8† ♔b6 29.♖d6† ♔a7 30.♖d7† ♘xd7 31.♕xd7† ♔b6 32.♕d6† ♔b7 33.♕d7† ♕c7

White's hopes for a perpetual check are over and Black has a decisive advantage.

18...♕xe7



19.h6!

This creates additional weaknesses with tempo. Black is in a tough spot, but the game goes on.

The best defence is:

19...♖g8 20.bxc5 e5 21.cxd6 ♕xd6 22.♘b5 ♕e7 23.♘xc3 ♕xa3† 24.♔d2

The white king is safe on d2, and Black is still under pressure.

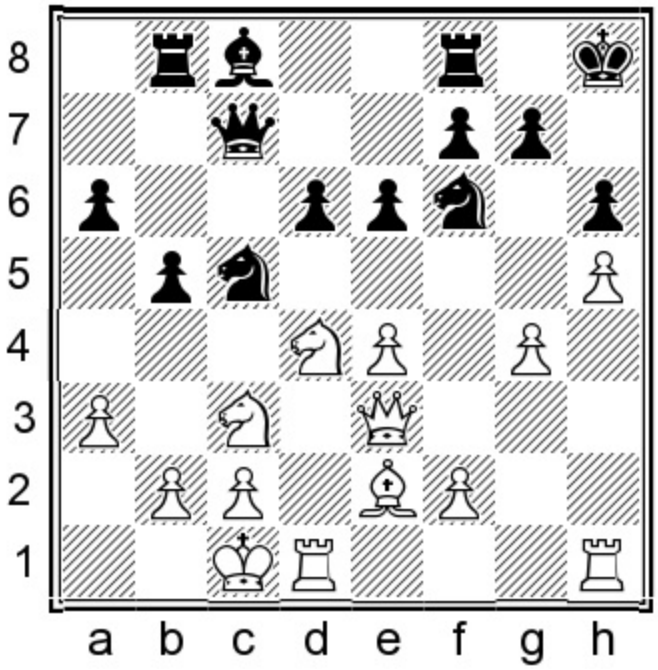
17.♕xg5 h6!

In the game, Black played the odd: 17...b4? 18.axb4 (18.h6! with a transposition was better.) 18...♖xb4 (18...h6 19.♕e3 ♖xb4 20.g4 is already less clear, but still what Black should have chosen.) 19.h6! g6∞ Both players have their chances. Black eventually won on move 58, but not because of this position.

18.♕e3 ♘f6∓

It is difficult for White to create play, so Black comes first on the queenside.

19.g4



19...e5! 20.♘f5 ♗xf5 21.exf5

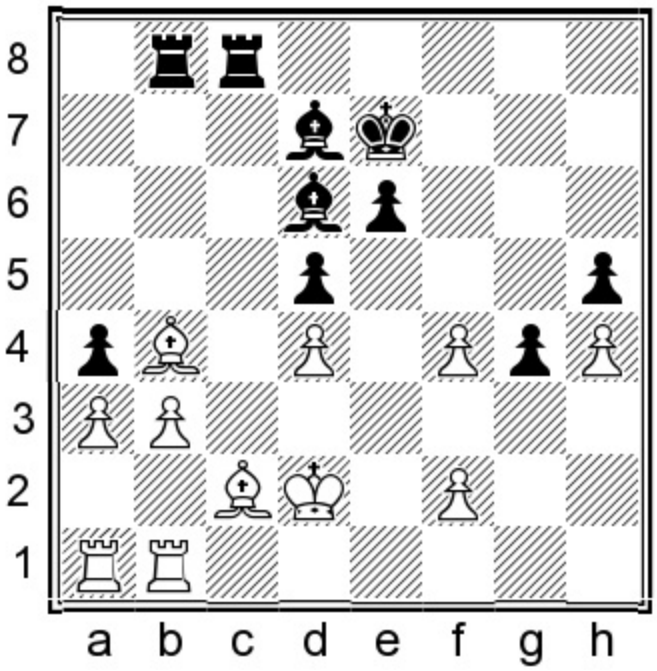
21.gxf5 ♖fc8, with the threat ...♘xe4, is also strong for Black: 22.♘d5 ♘xd5 23.♖xd5 b4! 24.axb4 ♖xb4 and Black crashes through.

21...b4 22.axb4 ♖xb4∓

Black's attack is clearly the more dangerous.

107. Linus Johansson – Dirk Sebastian

Germany 2019



Should Black:

A) take on b4, and if so:
B) with the rook or bishop?

Show/Hide Solution

(Colour schemes)

This was a bit of a trick question.

Black was slightly better after 24...♗xb4†? 25.axb4 ♖xb4 26.bxa4 ♖xd4† 27.♔e3 ♖dc4 28.♗d3 ♖xa4 29.♖xa4 ♗xa4 30.♖b7† ♔d6 White now played 31.♔d4?. (31.♖h7 should hold the game.) After 31...♖f8 32.♖b6† ♗c6 33.♗b5 ♖xf4† 34.♔d3 ♖f3† 35.♔e2 ♖c3 Black won on move 48.

Black was clearly winning after:

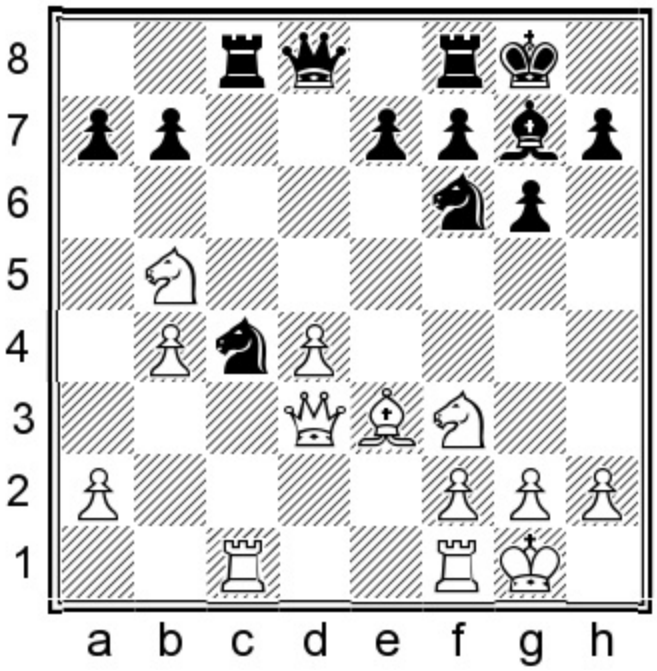
24...♖xb4! 25.axb4 ♗xb4† 26.♔d1 a3

Black is in total control. The rooks are utterly useless. An important point is:

27.♗g6 ♖f8

108. Pavel-Alexandru Nastore – Nicodim-Cosmin Stepanencu

Lasi 2021



Should Black:

A) take on e3, or
B) play something else?

Show/Hide Solution

(Colour schemes/creating weaknesses)
16...♘d6? was played in the game. 17.♖xc8 This feels unnecessary, but it is not really bad. (White could also play 17.♘xd6, 17.♖c5, 17.a3 or anything similar, and be more or less OK.) 17...♘xc8 18.♖c1 ♘d5∓ The game was drawn on move 60.

16...e5 17.♖xc4 leads to equality, as do:
16...♕b6 17.♖xc4 ♕xb5 18.♖fc1 and:
16...♘b6 17.♖c5.

16...♘xe3!

The conflict squares are the dark ones, and White will be left with a weak pawn on either e3 or d4.

17.fxe3

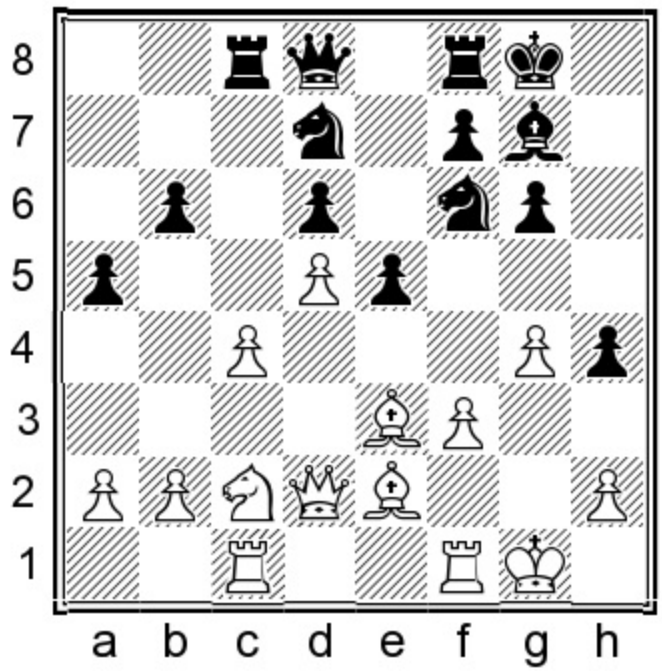
17.♕xe3 ♘d5 and 18...♕d7 would also give Black a winning advantage.

17...♕b6 18.a3 a6 19.♘c3 ♗h6

Black is obviously better. But for the less experienced player, it may be surprising to know that we believe Black is technically winning already.

109. Stepan Zilka – Jan Klimkowski

Warsaw (rapid) 2021



Should Black:

A) take en passant with 18...hxg3 (White has just played g2-g4), or
B) play 18...♘h7?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)

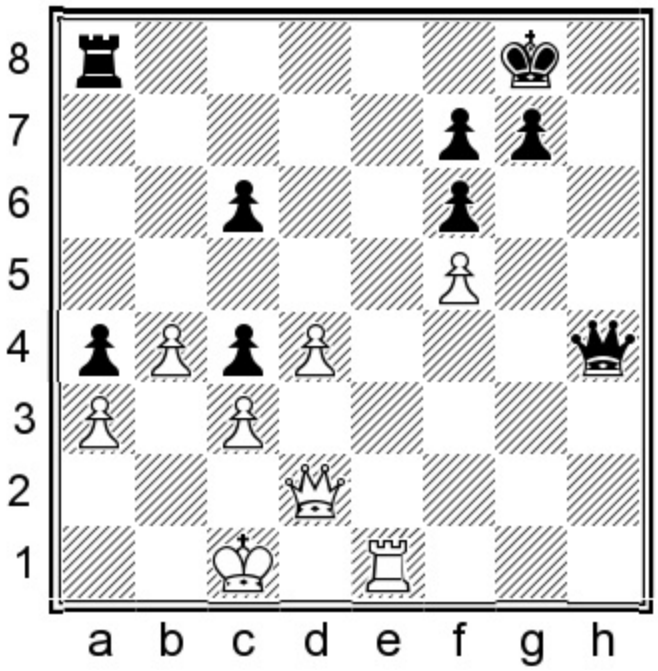
In the game, after 18...♘h7? 19.♔h1!? ♗f6 Black was a bit worse, although he eventually won on move 64. But White could have played more strongly with 19.g5!, when the h4-pawn is cut off from the herd. Something like 19...f5 20.gxf6 ♗xf6 21.♔h1 ♗g5 would be necessary, but after 22.♖g1±, Black is still really struggling.

18...hxg3!

White's king will become exposed and his dark squares loose. The light-squared bishop is also poor.

19.hxg3 ♘h5 20.♔g2 f5∓

110. Cyrielle Monpeurt – Peter Prohaszka



Should Black:

A) seek the exchange of queens with 32...♕g5, or
B) attack the f5-pawn with 32...♕h3?

Show/Hide Solution

(Eliminate counterplay)

The game continued:

32...♕h3? 33.♕c2 ♖d8 34.♔b2 ♖d5?

34...♕f3 or something similar should have been played, with an unusual position.

Here White should have played:

35.♖e8†!

Rather than 35.♕xa4?, after which Black won from this unclear position on move 75.

35...♔h7 36.♖e2!

Serious threats have been created.

36...♕xf5

36...♔g8 37.♕xa4 is technically winning for White, although a lot of counterplay remains.

37.♖h2†

Black should retreat and White again takes the pawn, as after:

37...♔g6 38.♕g2† ♕g5 39.♕f2

White wins in fantastic fashion:

39...♖f5

Or: 39...♕f5 40.♕g1†

40.♕c2 ♕f4 41.b5!! cxb5 42.♖d2

The d-pawn cannot be stopped. White wins.

The best continuation was: 32...♕g5! 33.♕xg5 fxg5 34.♖e5

If White does not seek counterplay, Black will consolidate with ...♔f8 and ...♖e8.

34...♔f8 35.♖c5

The critical test.

35...♖e8!

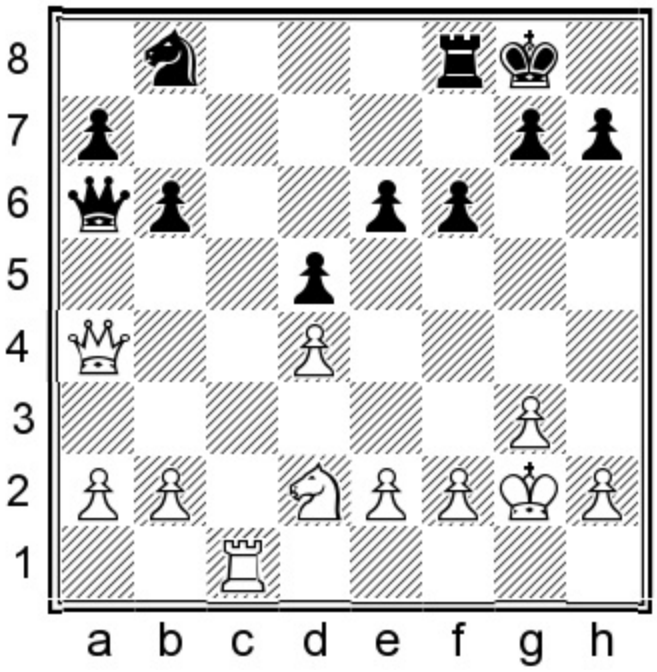
Black is winning, on account of:

36.♖xc6 g4

The pawn will claim the white rook.

111. Lance Henderson de La Fuente – Emilio Cordova

Chennai Olympiad 2022



Should White:

A) exchange queens with 23.♕xa6, or

B) play 23.♕b4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Invasion)

The game soon ended in a draw after: 23.♕xa6? After this exchange it is difficult for White to invade the enemy's ranks23...♘xa6 24.♖c3 (24.♘b1! would have kept a bit of pressure.) 24...♖f7!=

23.♕b4!

Exploiting Black's main problem, the weakness of the 7th rank. Now White threatens ♕e7 or ♖c7, with decisive impact.

23...♕b7

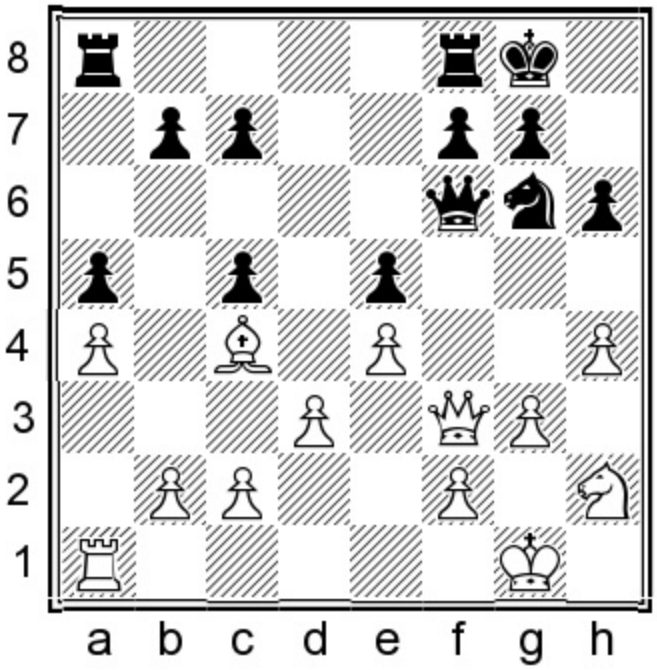
Clearly losing are both 23...♕xa2 24.♕e7+– and 23...♕xe2 24.♕e7+–. Perhaps White considered 23.♕b4 but thought that Black could play 23...♖c8. However, here White again has the powerful 24.♕e7!, attacking e6 and also threatening the winning 25.♖c7.

24.♕d6 ♕d7 25.♕xd7 ♘xd7 26.♖c7+–

White dominates the 7th rank and wins material.

112. Volodar Murzin – Victor Mikhalevski

Warsaw (rapid) 2021



Should White:

A) damage Black's pawn structure by exchanging queens, or
B) avoid the exchange?

Show/Hide Solution

(Counterplay)
20.♕xf6? sought to justify White's exchange sacrifice, but it was a bad decision. After 20...gxf6 21.♘g4 ♔g7 22.♘e3 ♘e7∓, Black was in control and White had no avenues of counterplay. There is a slim chance of building a total blockade, which is what White was hoping for, but in practice this is unrealistic. Black won on move 39.

20.♕h5! ♔h8 21.♔g2 ♕c6 22.♕f5≅

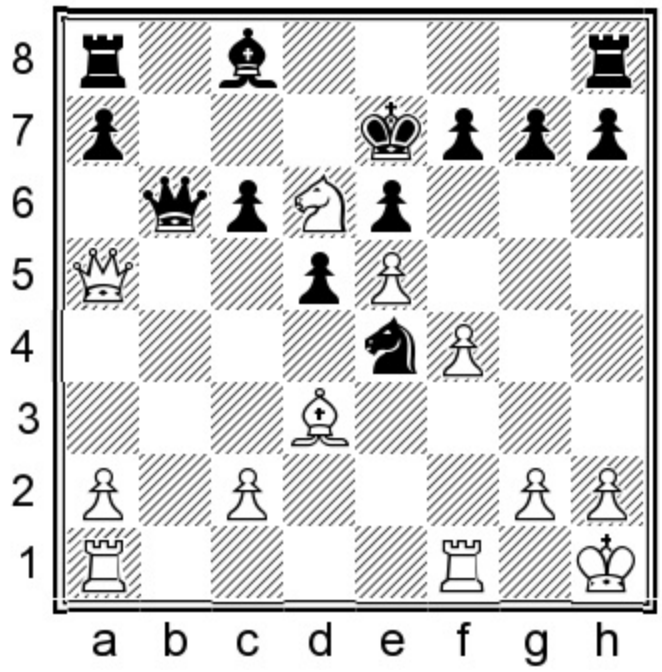
Threatening h4-h5, winning the e5-pawn.

22...♕f6 23.♕h5

This is nearing a draw by repetition. White should take it. He has enough short-term counterplay to make the draw, but hoping for more would be unrealistic.

113. Raul Martinez Fernandez – Enrique Tejedor Fuente

Linares 2021



Should White:

A) exchange queens, or
B) not exchange them?

Show/Hide Solution

(Keeping attackers)

The game saw:

18.♕xb6 axb6∓

White already has a worse structure and a need to prove equality.

19.♗xe4 dxe4 20.♖fb1!

In the game, Black was in control after 20.♘xe4? ♖a4 21.♘d6 ♗a6∓ and won on move 59.

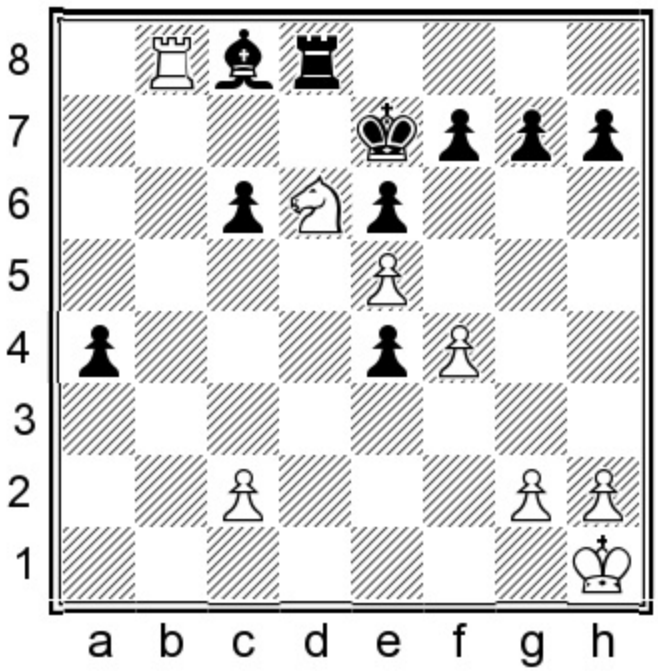
20...b5 21.a4!!

Forcing an opening of the queenside, which allows White to use his slight lead in development to create enough counterplay to make a draw.

21...♖xa4

21...bxa4 22.♖b4= would give White sufficient compensation.

22.♖xa4 bxa4 23.♖b8 ♖d8



24.♘xc8†!

24.♖xc8 also draws, but White will have to play accurately. 24...♖xc8 25.♘xc8† ♔d8 26.♘d6 a3 27.♘b7† ♔c7 28.♘a5! (Black wins after 28.♘c5 ♔b6. The check is needed on c4.) 28...a2 29.♘b3 ♔b6 30.c4! Creating a barrier. The analysis could continue into the pawn ending, where a few traps would remain for White, but we shall stop here.

24...♔f8 25.♔g1

Followed by ♔f2-e3. Black will win back the knight for the a-pawn in the near future, after which White will manage to hold the rook endgame with reasonable defence.

18.♕e1!

Keeping the queens on the board when the king is exposed is logical. Here it also works tactically.

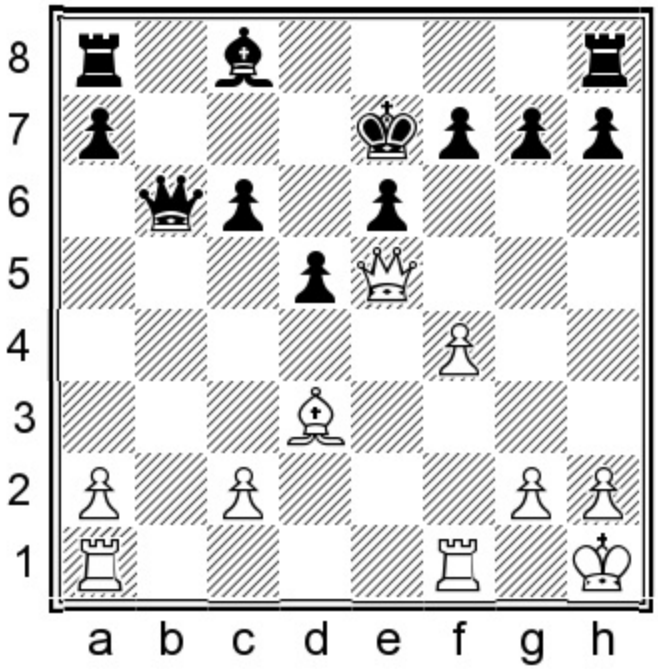
18...♘xd6

It is hard to recommend another move.

19.exd6† ♔xd6

19...♔d7 is possible, but with c2-c4, f4-f5, ♕g3 and other moves coming, White is clearly winning.

20.♕e5† ♔e7



21.f5!?

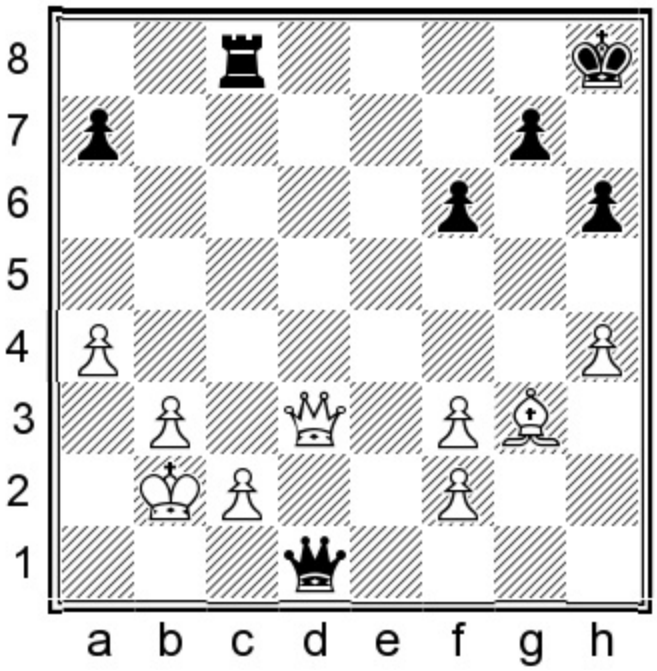
Taking on g7 is of course not wrong either, but this direct assault is very strong.

21...f6 22.♕g3 ♔f7 23.fxe6† ♗xe6 24.♖ab1!

White wins.

114. Sergey Fedorchuk – Jan Smeets

Germany 2021



Should Black:

A) exchange queens, or
B) keep them on with 35...♕e1?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)
35...♕e1? did not work out in the game. Fedorchuk found a radical and direct solution. 36.♗f4!? (Or 36.♕e3 ♕d1 37.c4 with good counterplay.) 36...♕xf2 37.♗e3 ♕xh4 (37...♕xf3 38.♕d7! would also give White enough counterplay.) 38.♗xa7 The white passers are by no means worse than the black ones. White made the draw by move 50.

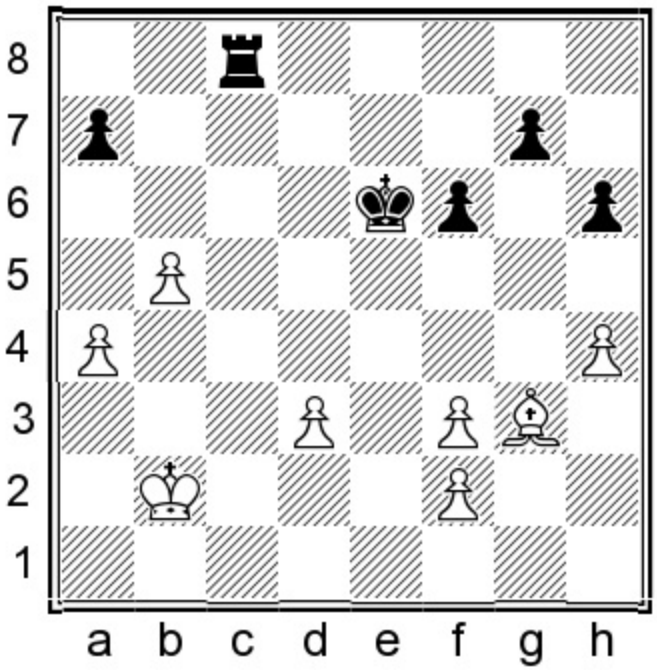
35...♕xd3!

The splitting of the white pawns makes them weaker. But more importantly, without the queens it is possible for Black to bring out the king to help with the defensive duties on the queenside. This frees up the rook to bring home the (vegan) bacon on the kingside.

36.cxd3 ♔g8!

Black still has an advantage with other moves, but after this he just wins.

37.b4 ♔f7 38.b5 ♔e6



39.♔b3

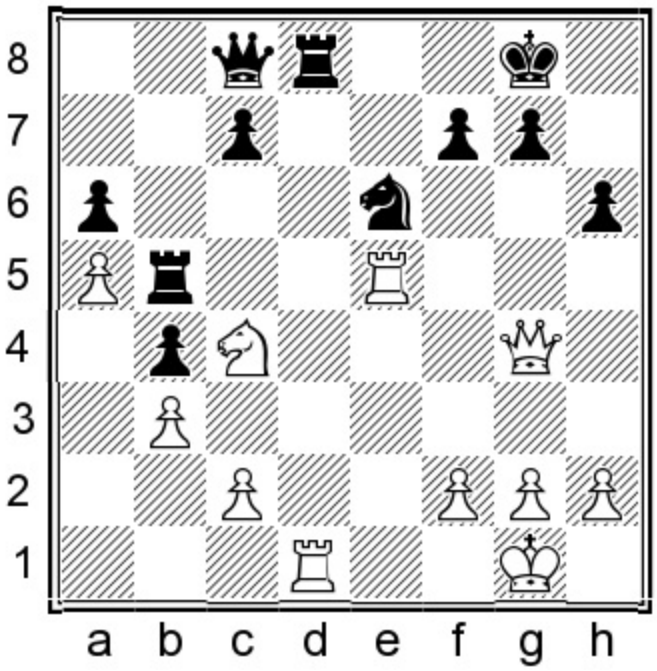
39.h5 also wins for Black after 39...♔d5; but there is a shortcut in 39...a6!. For example: 40.b6 ♖c6 41.a5 ♖c5 and it is time for White to resign.

39...g5 40.♔b4 gxh4 41.♗xh4 h5

The distant passed pawn will win the game after a few additional accurate moves.

115. Viswanathan Anand – Nikola Nestorovic

Germany 2021



Should White:

A) take on b5, or
B) play something else?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)

28.♖xb5!

This exchange creates a passed pawn, but to make the most of it, White has to play energetically.

28...axb5 29.♘e5!

Anand played 29.♘e3?. Black now went for further exchanges and got into trouble. 29...♖xd1†?! (29...c5 would have been stronger, and given Black counterplay via the control of the d4-square.) 30.♕xd1 ♕a6 31.♕a1± The power of the passed pawn is obvious. 31...c5 32.♘f5 ♔h7 33.h4 h5?! 34.♘g3 g6 35.♘e4 ♔g8 36.g3 c4 37.♘f6† ♔f8 38.♘d5 ♔g8 39.♕f6 1–0

29...c5 30.♖xd8† ♕xd8 31.♘c6 ♕d7

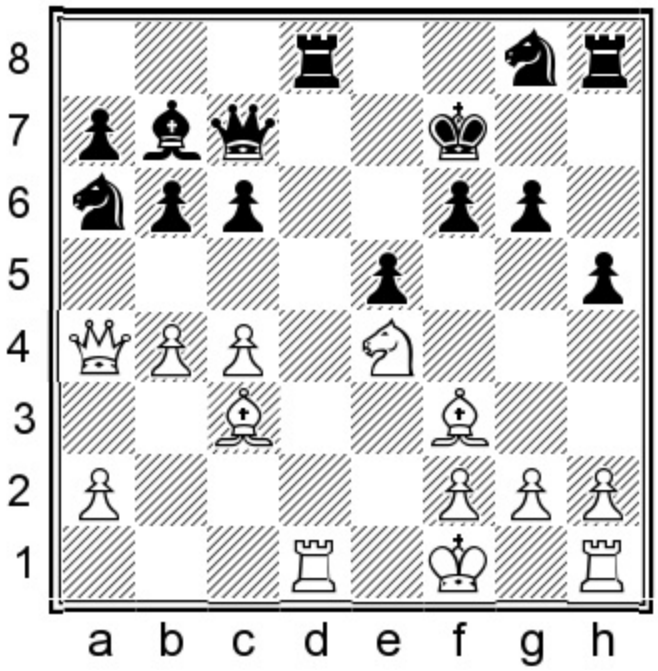
31...♕d6? 32.♕f3± is even better for White. The key reason is that 32...♘g5? fails to: 33.♕d5!+–

32.♕f3±

White is better and will keep on pushing.

116. Dennis Wagner – Ilja Zaragatski

Germany 2019



Should White play:

A) 20.♖xd8, or
B) 20.♔e2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)

20.♖xd8!

It is curious that giving up the d-file is what leads to control of it.

After 20.♔e2? ♘e7 White should be happy to keep equality. Black is a pawn up after all.

20...♕xd8 21.♔e2 ♔g7 22.♖d1 ♕c7 23.♖d6!?

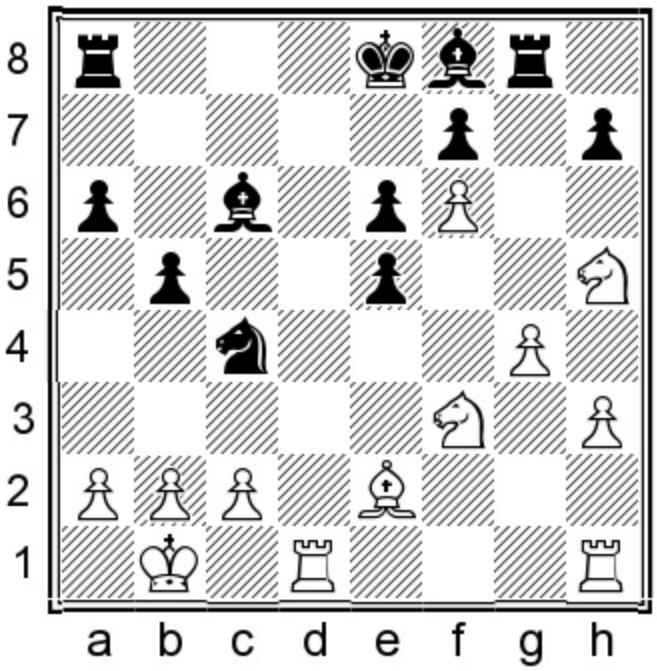
23.c5!+– was even stronger.

23...♘e7?! 24.♖xf6

White won on move 50.

117. Zhansaya Abdumalik – Bobby Cheng

Gibraltar 2022



Should Black play:

A) 24...♖c8, or
B) 24...♖d8?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)
24...♖c8? went nowhere in the game. 25.♖he1 (or 25.a4!?=) 25...♗h6?! (25...♖d8! was still fine.) 26.♗xc4 ♗xf3 27.♗e2! ♗d5? The game ended in a draw on move 53. At this point White could have peeled the skin of the black position with: 28.a4!+–

So, Black should have played 27...♗xe2 28.♖xe2 ♖d8±, when he is just a bit worse.

24...♖d8! 25.a4!?

Looking for counterplay, but there is nothing to do.

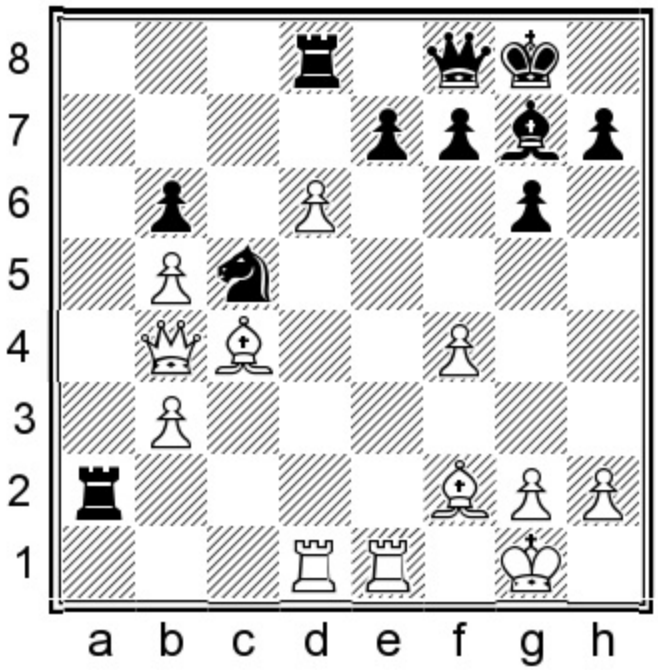
25.♖xd8†? ♔xd8 26.♖d1† would allow the black king to get out of the box. 26...♔c7 27.a4 ♗h6–+ and Black dominates.

25.♔a1 ♘d2! also wins material.

25...♗xf3! 26.♗xf3 ♘d2† 27.♖xd2 ♖xd2 28.♘g3 ♖f2 29.♗c6† ♔d8 30.axb5 axb5 31.♘e4 ♖f4 32.♖e1 b4

Black is winning, although there are many moves left to play.

118. Daniel Fridman – Gabor Papp

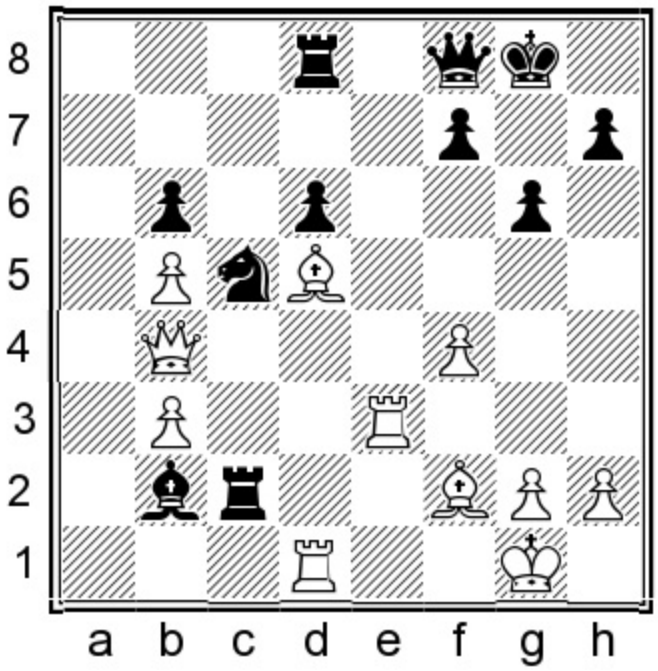


Should Black play:

A) 25...♖xd6, or
B) 25...exd6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces/removing the attacker)
25...exd6? 26.♗d5! left Black paralysed. The rook on d8 is badly placed. 26...♖c2 (26...♖e8 27.♕c4! would soon be followed by b3-b4, with a winning position.) 27.♖e3! ♗b2 (27...♖e8 28.♕e1! ♖xe3 29.♕xe3 gives White a winning position, although a lot of play remains.)



28.♕e1!? (I like 28.f5! more, but the text is also good.) 28...♗f6 29.g4 White initiates a winning attack. 29...h6 30.h4 g5 31.fxg5 hxg5 32.hxg5 ♗xg5 33.♖f3 (33.♖h3!) 33...♖e8 34.♕f1 ♖e7 35.♖h3 ♕c8 36.♗d4 ♕xg4† 37.♔h1 ♗h4 38.♕g1 1–0

25...♖xd6!

There is no reason to have a passive rook on d8. It is not needed to shelter the back rank, as White does not control it. And the text move removes a white rook, which otherwise may have created some counterplay.

26.♖xd6

26.♗d5? would be a disaster now. After 26...e6 27.♗c4 ♖xd1 28.♖xd1 ♖xf2! Black wins a piece. 29.♔xf2 ♘e4† Or the queen.

26...exd6 27.♖e2

It is hard to come up with an active idea for White.

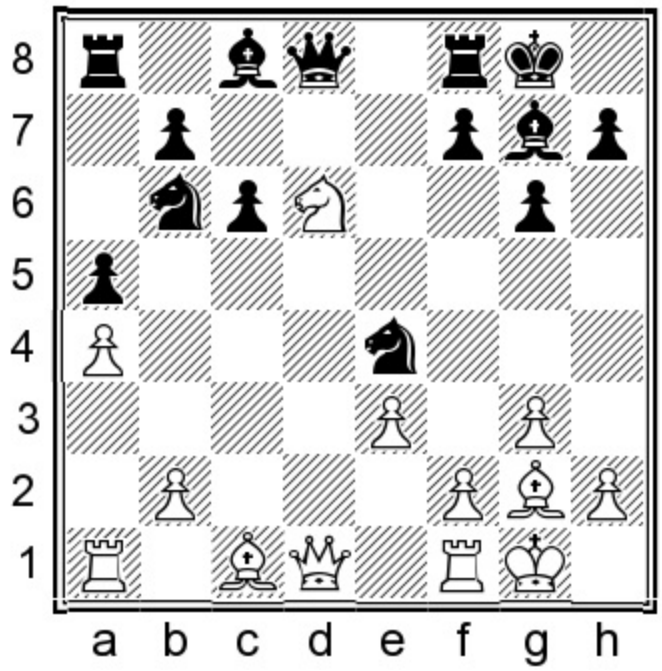
27.♗d5 ♖xf2! is important.

27...♖a1† 28.♖e1 ♖a2

Black is fine.

119. Martynas Buivys – Oleg Romanishin

Formentera 2022



Should White:

A) take on c8, or
B) play 15.♘xe4?

Show/Hide Solution

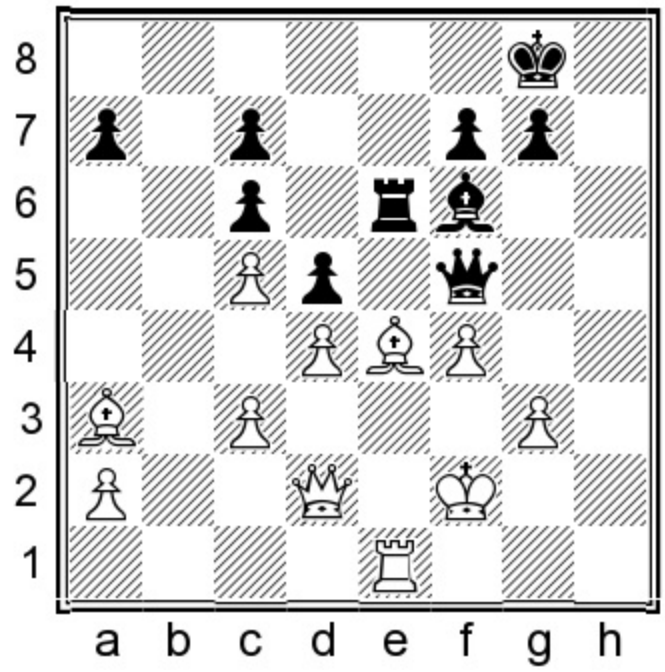
(Better pieces)
15.♘xe4? ♘d5∓ was very bad for White in the game. His knight has no good squares, and the bishop on c8 will eventually become strong. The weakness of both the b2-pawn and the d3-square are also problematic for White.

15.♘xc8!
The modest approach.

15...♕xc8 16.♗xe4=
White is not worse. He will always be able to neutralise the knight, should he wish to do. But this wish is probably not strong, as the bishop will be good at defending the weaknesses on the light squares.

120. Alexander Finkel – Tal Haimovich

Israel 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange rooks with 27...♖xe4, or

B) avoid the exchange with 27...dxe4?

Show/Hide Solution

(King safety)

The game went: 27...♖xe4? 28.♖xe4! (After 28.♖h1? White eventually won on move 73. But his optimism would have been fairly punished had Black played 28...g5!, with a deadly attack.) 28...dxe4 (28...♕xe4 29.♕e2 ♕b1 30.♕e8† ♔h7 31.♕xf7 ♕xa2† 32.♔f3 ♕xa3 33.♕h5†=) 29.♕e2 ♕d5 30.♗c1=

27...dxe4!∓

Because of the exposed white king, it makes most sense to retain as much firepower as possible.

28.♕e3

After 28.♔g2?! Black is able to initiate a winning attack in computer style with: 28...♗h4!!

28...♕d5!

28...♕h3, with the idea ...♗e7 and ...f7-f5, would also give Black a strong position.

29.♖e2

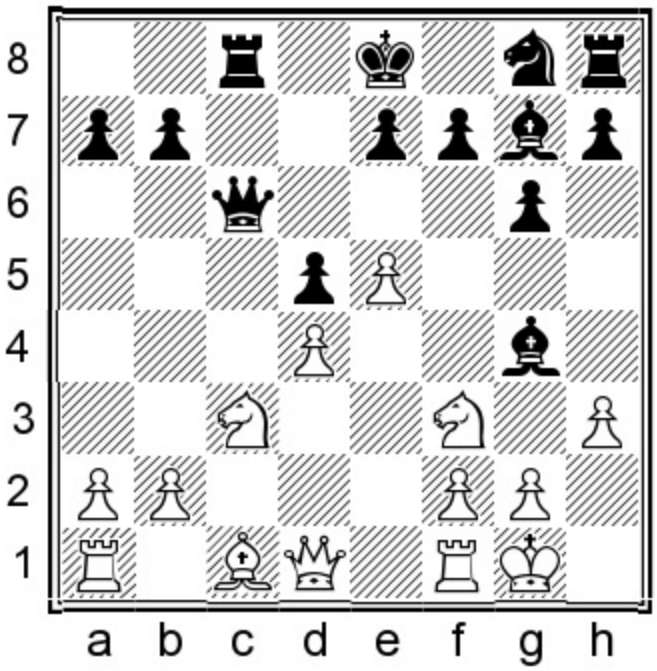
Stockfish somehow prefers 29.♗c1, but after Black steals the pawn, he holds all the cards.

29...♕h5!–+

The white king is permanently unsafe. Black will play ...♗e7, ...f7-f5 and continue to invade with ...♖h6 and ...♕h1, in whatever order.

121. Lan Yao – Frederick Waldhausen Gordon

Edinburgh 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange on f3, or
B) retreat the bishop to f5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)
11...♗f5? was a big mistake. Black is under-developed and will get run over. 12.♗e3 ♗d7 Desperation. (12...e6 13.♖c1 ♘e7 14.g4 would win a piece.) 13.♖c1 b6 14.♕b3 White won. It took surprisingly long, as the position is totally doomed. After 14...e6?! 15.♘b5 Black loses on the spot, so Black instead let the d5-pawn go.

11...♗xf3

This is forced. Black doesn't have time to waste.

11...♗d7 is also poor. 12.a4! a6 13.♗d2 Black will not get his pieces out in time. 13...e6 14.♕b3 ♘e7 15.♖fc1 would force Black to resign.

12.♕xf3 e6±

White is preferable, but not by much.

13.♕d1

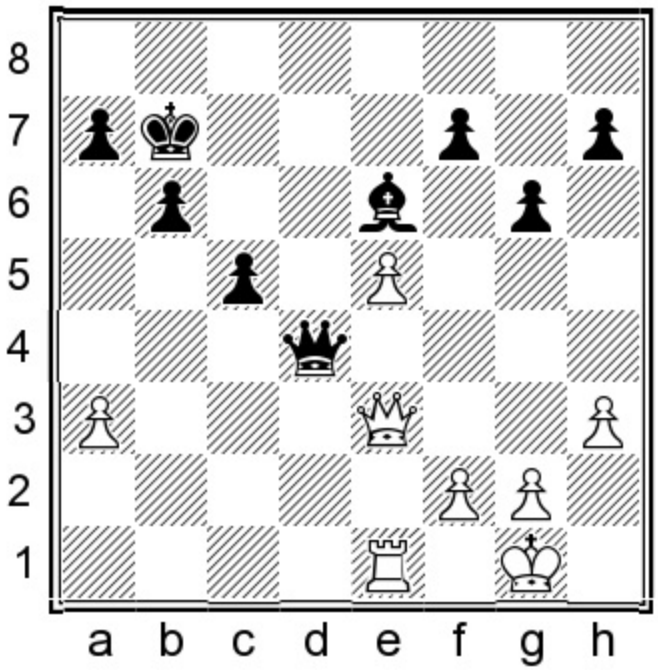
Black is also more or less fine after 13.♗g5 h6 14.♗d2 ♘e7±; or 13.♗d2 ♘e7 14.♗g5 ♕b6!⇄; or 13.a4 a6 14.♗g5±.

13...♘e7 14.♗g5 ♕d7

Black is only slightly worse.

122. Daniel Cawdery – Aram Chekh Adm Khedr

Chennai Olympiad 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange queens, or
B) keep them on with 34...♕d5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Converting an advantage)

The game was a mess. 34...♕d5? 35.♖e2 ♕b3? 36.♕xb3 ♗xb3 37.♖e3?! (37.f4 a5 38.g4 is far more natural. Black should hold with accurate play, but has to be careful.) 37...♗e6 38.g4?! (38.f4! is better.) 38...b5?± The game should still end in a draw, but eventually White won. (38...g5!∓ would have given White some practical problems to secure a draw.)

34...♕xe3!

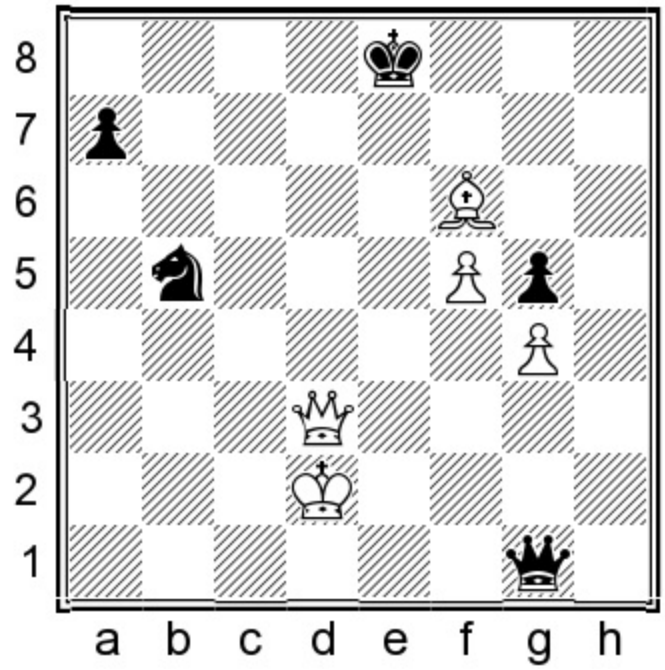
Black has two connected passed pawns, with his king and bishop being well placed to help them. Exchanging the queens will make it easier to advance the pawns. So much so that it is easily winning for Black, unlike the messy endgame which happened in the game.

35.♖xe3 b5–+

White is dead lost.

123. Oscar De La Riva Aguado – Sehyun Kwon

Chennai Olympiad 2022



Should Black:

A) force the exchange of queens with 59...♕f2†, or
B) attack the bishop with 59...♔f7?

Show/Hide Solution

(Escaping with a draw)

After 59...♕f2†? 60.♕e2† ♕xe2† 61.♔xe2 a5 White won a shaky game. Simplest here was: 62.♗xg5 a4 63.♗f6 a3 64.♔e3 a2 65.g5 ♘a3 66.g6 ♘c2† 67.♔e4 a1=♕ 68.♗xa1 ♘xa1 69.♔e5 ♘c2 70.♔f6! ♔f8 (or 70...♘e3 71.g7) 71.g7† ♔g8 72.♔g6 ♘e3 73.f6+–

59...♔f7!

The queens help Black a lot.

60.♗xg5

60.♕d7† ♔xf6 61.♕xb5 ♕xg4 is utterly harmless for Black.

Also, the minor piece endgame after 60.♗b2 ♕g2† 61.♕e2 ♕xe2† 62.♔xe2 a5 is not dangerous for Black. The g5-pawn turns out to matter.

60...♕f2†

60...♕g2† 61.♕e2 ♕d5† also draws.

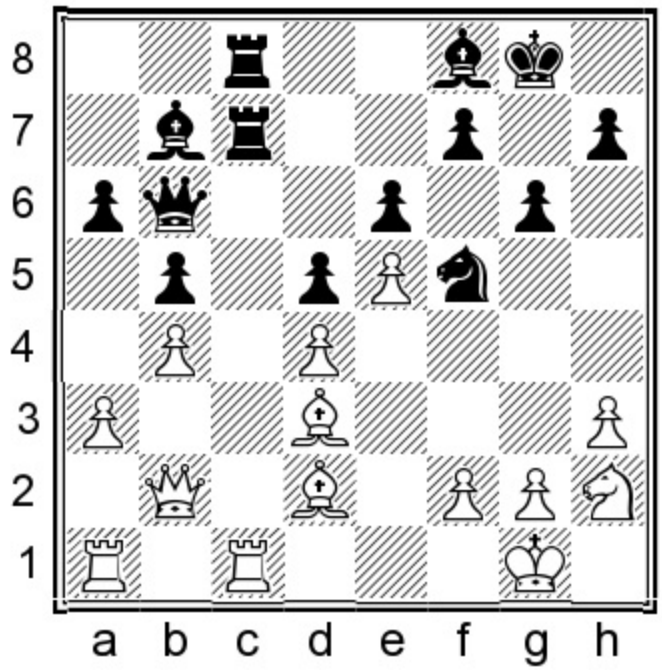
61.♕e2 ♕d4†!=

White can only evade perpetual check by giving up the g4-pawn.

62.♔e1 ♕g1† 63.♕f1 ♕xg4

124. Gabriel Chaves Sanchez – Tinnakrit Arunnuntapanich

Chennai Olympiad 2022 *(Prophylaxis/Colour schemes)*



Should White:

A) play 27.♗xf5, or
B) 27.♖c5?

Show/Hide Solution

27.♘f3?! is not great because it would allow Black to keep the position blocked with 27...♖c4! and it is not easy for White to make progress.

27.♖c5!

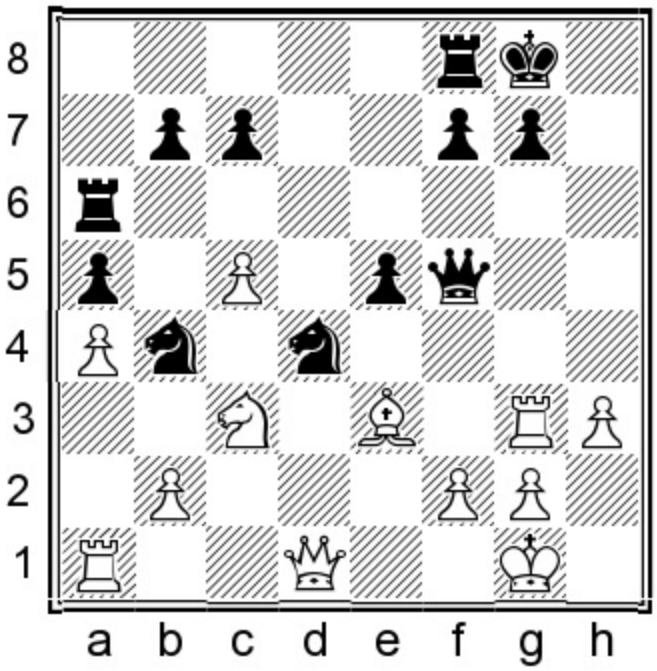
It was wrong to play: 27.♗xf5? Black was totally fine: 27...exf5 28.♘f3 ♖c4= 29.♗e3 ♕c7 30.♘e1 ♗c6 31.♘d3 a5 32.♘c5 Draw agreed. ½–½

27...♗xc5 28.bxc5 ♕c6 29.♘g4+–

Black's rooks are useless. The same can be said of his dark squares.

125. Surya Shekhar Ganguly – Rinat Jumabayev

Wijk aan Zee 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange rooks with 24...♖g6, or
B) develop his last piece with 24...♖d8?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

White was allowed to start an attack in the game: 24...♖d8? 25.♖g5! ♕e6 26.♘b5 ♖c6 27.♘xd4 exd4 28.♗xd4 The position has become sharp and both sides are in need of accuracy. 28...♕h6 White now lost after 29.g4? ♖g6!.

He could have secured equal chances after: 29.♖g4! ♖g6 30.♕f3 (or 30.♖a3!?) 30...♖xg4 31.♕xg4 f5 32.♗xg7! ♕xg7 33.♕xf5∞

24...♖g6!

Removing White's only source of counterplay.

25.♖xg6

There are no other moves.

25...♕xg6–+

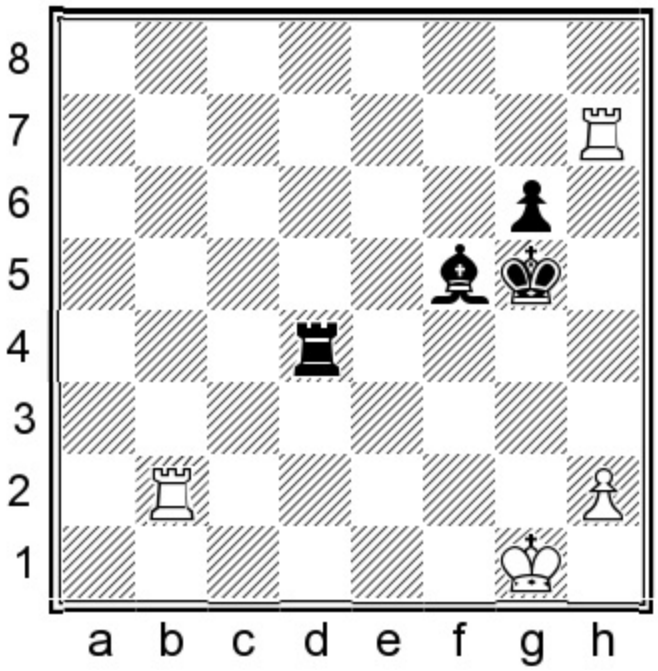
Black has a massive advantage. The white pieces are passive, and an invasion of the knights is looming. For example:

26.♘b5 ♘e6 27.♕e2 ♖d8 28.♖d1 ♖xd1† 29.♕xd1 ♕d3∓

Black has serious winning chances.

126. Magnus Carlsen – Levon Aronian

Warsaw (rapid) 2021



Should Black:

A) provoke the exchange of rooks with 36...♖g4†, or
B) wait and see with 36...♖a4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Escaping with a draw)

Aronian played 36...♖g4†??, after which the endgame is just lost. The exchange of rooks heavily benefits White, as it allows him to make use of his king. 37.♖g2 ♖xg2† 38.♔xg2 ♔f4 39.♖h4† ♔e5 40.♔g3 g5 41.♖h6 ♗e6 42.♖h8 ♔f5 43.♖f8† ♔e5 44.♔f3 ♗f5 45.♔e3 ♗g6 46.♖f3 ♗e4 47.♖g3 ♔f5 48.♔d4 ♔f4 49.♔c5 ♗f3 50.♔d6 g4 51.♔e6 ♔g5 52.♔e5 ♔h4 53.♔f4 ♗e2 54.♔e3 ♗f3 55.♔f2 ♔g5 56.♖g1 ♔h4 57.♖b1 ♗d5 58.♖b8 ♗e6 59.♖h8† ♔g5 60.♔g3 ♔f5 61.♖h5† ♔e4 62.♖g5 ♗d7 63.♖xg4† ♔f5 64.h4 ♔f6 65.♖g5 ♗f5 66.♔f4 ♗c2 67.h5 ♗b1 68.h6 ♗g6 69.♖g3 1–0 White would put the rook

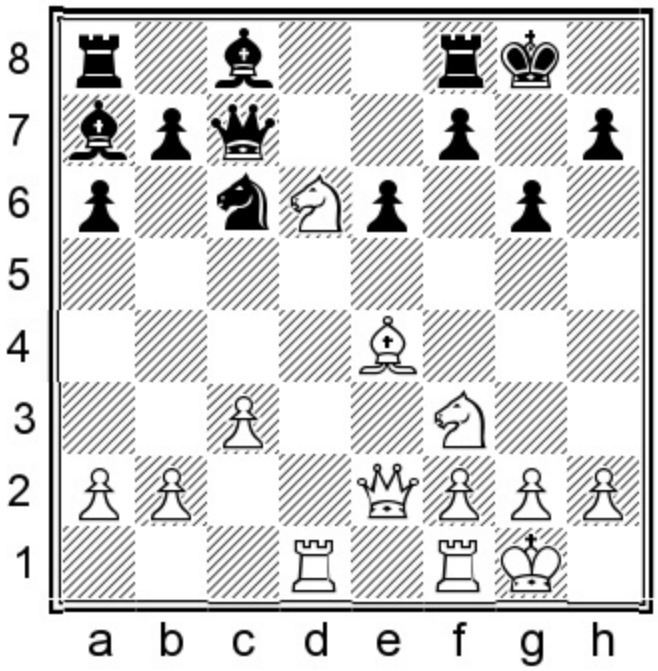
on g7 and manoeuvre the king to f8.

36...♖a4!?=

With the rooks on the board, Black would be able to harass the white king with the rook and create some counterplay.

127. Vojtech Riha – Petr Sprenar

Czech Republic 2021



Should White:

A) take on c6, or
B) improve his pieces with 16.♖d3?

Show/Hide Solution

(Domination)

White is doing well no matter what, for example: 16.♖d3!? ♘d4 17.♘xd4 ♕xd6 18.♘c6 ♕c7 19.♘xa7 ♖xa7 20.♖fd1 b5 21.♕e3 White is close to winning, but still has to wrap it up.

16.♗xc6!

By taking away the only good piece in the black position, all counterplay is removed. Also, the white bishop is not as great on e4 as such a bishop at times can be.

16...bxc6

16...♕xc6 17.♘e5 followed by 18.♘xc8 and 19.♖d7 is crushing.

17.♘e5

17.♖d2! would have been stronger. First bring in the worst-placed piece, then strike. Also strong will be h2-h4-h5-h6 or ♘g5, with various threats.

17.♘xc8? ♖fxc8± leaves White with a better structure and good chances. But the bishop on c8 was awful with no prospects, and the knight on d6 the best piece on the board.

17...♗b8

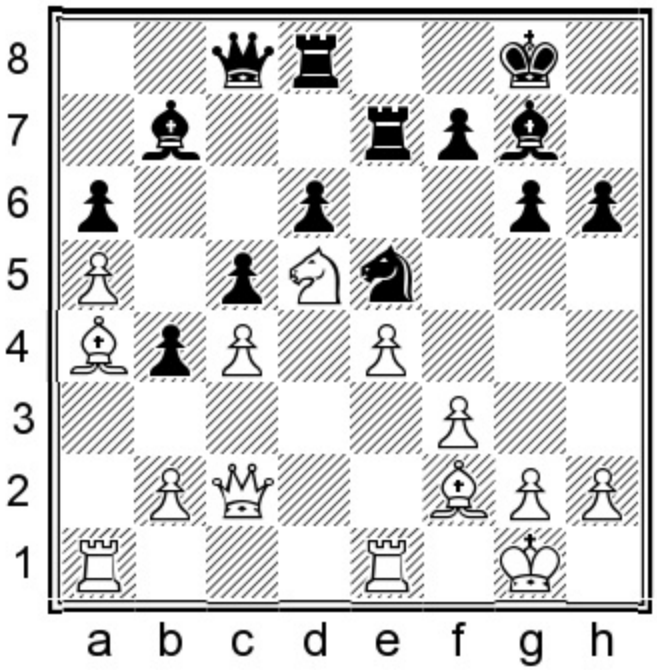
17...f6! 18.♘xc8 ♖axc8 19.♘d7 ♖f7 20.♕xe6 ♔g7 was the only chance for Black to fight.

18.g3 ♗d7 19.♕e4 ♖a7 20.♕h4 c5 21.♘exf7! ♖xf7 22.♘xf7 ♔xf7 23.♕xh7† ♔e8 24.♖fe1 ♕c6 25.♕g8†

1–0

128. Joseph Gallagher – Zhansaya Abdumalik

Gibraltar 2022



Should Black:

A) take on d5, or
B) play 27...♖e6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Colour schemes)

The game ended in an immediate draw after: 27...♖e6?± 28.♘f4 (After 28.♖ad1 ♘c6 29.♗xc6 ♗xc6 30.b3, the control of the d5-square and the weakness of the d6-pawn makes White's life easier.) 28...♖e7 29.♘d5 ♖e6 30.♘f4 ½–½

27...♗xd5!

The knight was strong on d5 and the bishop had no significant potential on b7.

28.exd5

28.cxd5 g5 is an improved version for Black. Besides the strong knight on e5, she now has a pawn majority on the queenside.

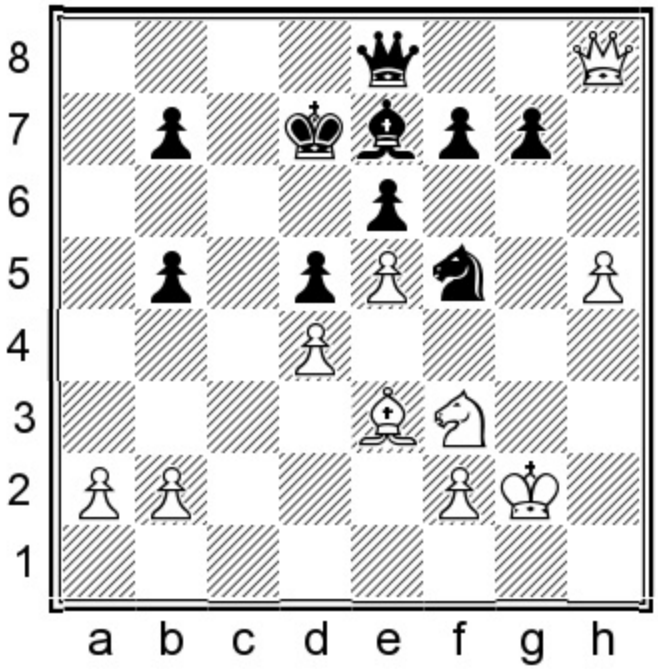
28...g5!∓

Consolidating a minor piece on e5. Neither player has an easy position to play, but the bishop's control of the long diagonal makes Black's life easier. It is important to notice that White will be unsuccessful with brute force:

29.f4 gxf4 30.♗h4 f6 31.♖xe5 ♖xe5 32.♕g6 ♕f5!–+

129. Maxime Vachier-Lagrave – Richard Rapport

Paris (blitz) 2021



Should White:

A) exchange queens, or
B) play 32.♕h7?

Show/Hide Solution

(Remove the attacker)

The game continued:

32.♕h7?

An instructive mistake. The white queen can look active on the surface, but it is actually out of play. Black will be able to activate his queen faster and create threats.

32...♕c8! 33.♗g5

Or: 33.h6 ♕c2 34.♔h3 ♕d1=

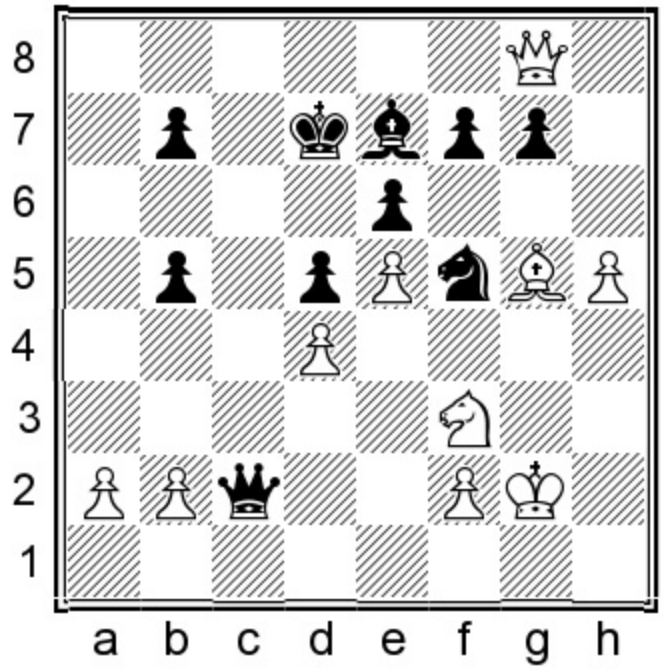
33...♕c2?∓

Too hasty.

33...b4! was stronger. White cannot improve his position, so Black should use the absence of urgency to improve his. Pushing the pawn forward is one way. One day it could be a queen.

34.♕g8?

34.♕h8!! was much stronger. This was a blitz game, so such details are easily lost in the mess.



34...♕e4?

34...f6! would have won the game quickly. White had one try, but it fails to spectacular play: 35.exf6 gxf6 36.h6!? fxg5 37.h7 ♕e4! 38.h8=♕ ♘h4† and White has to return the queen, losing the endgame, or be mated after 39.♔f1 ♕d3†!.

35.♗xe7 ♔xe7 36.♕c8

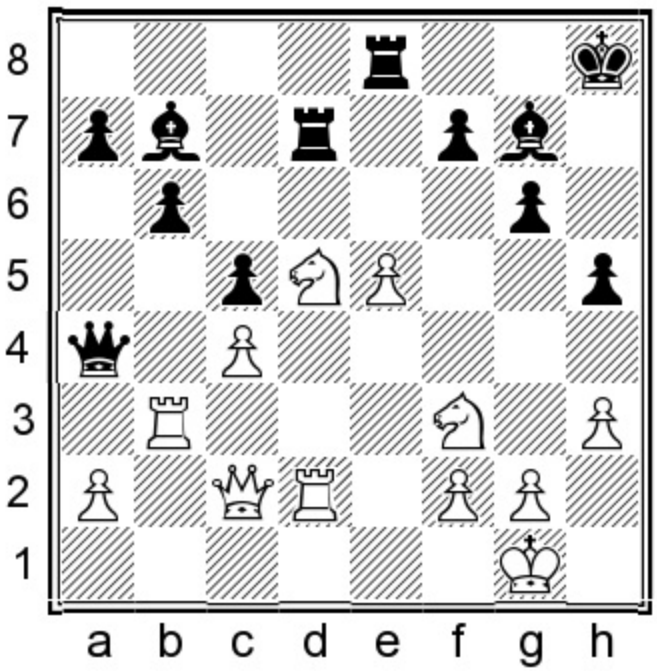
White was back in the game, which ended in a draw on move 59.

32.♕xe8†! ♔xe8

White can play in 10 different ways. All of them leading to equality.

130. Teimour Radjabov – Alireza Firouzja

Paris (rapid) 2021



Should Black:

A) take on d5, or
B) play 30...♗a6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Remove the attacker)

In the game Black blundered with 30...♗a6?, when White won with: 31.♘f6! ♖xd2 32.♕xd2 ♖f8 33.♖d3! ♗xc4 34.♖d8 Black managed to hang on for another 14 moves.

30...♗xe5? is also bad. 31.♘xe5 ♖xe5 32.♕b2 and White wins.

30...♗xd5!

Removing White's only strong piece.

31.cxd5 ♗xe5 32.♘xe5

Or 32.♖e2 ♖xd5 and Black wins.

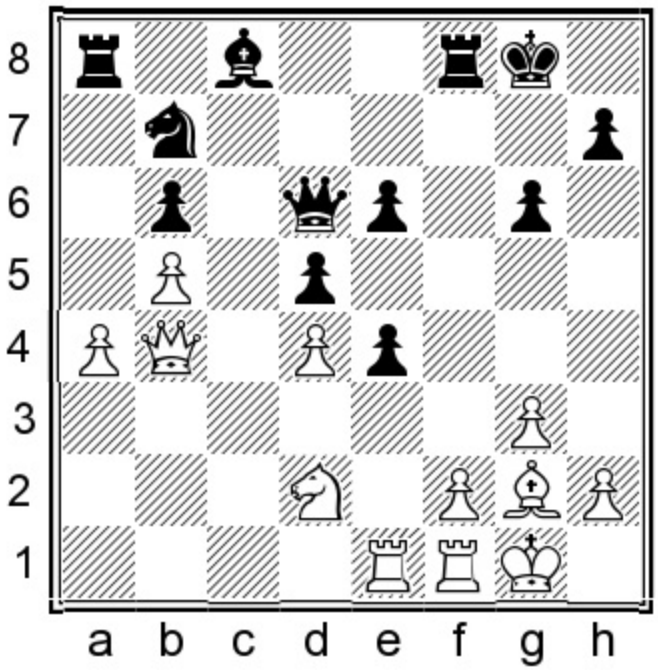
32...♖xe5 33.♕b2 f6 34.♖e3 ♕f4!∓

Black is in control and a pawn up.

Show in Text Mode

131. Alan Pichot – Carlos Pesce

Argentina 2022



Should White:

A) exchange queens on d6, or
B) avoid the exchange?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

21.♕b3!

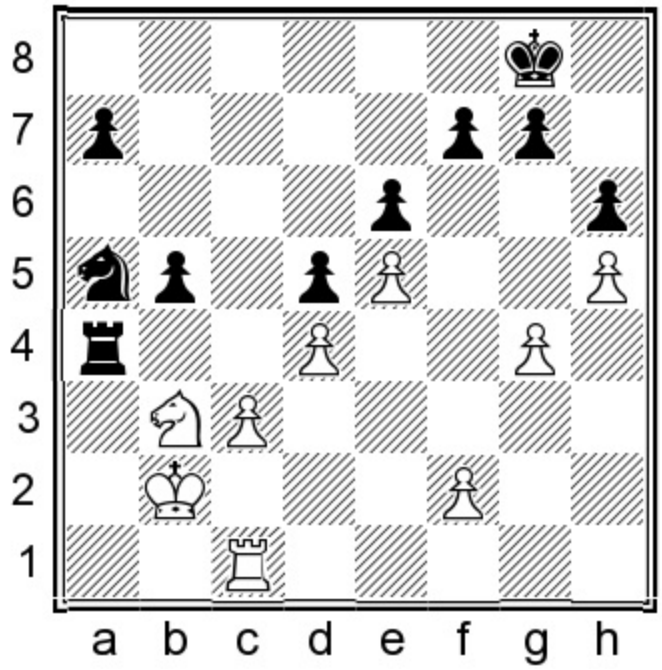
With the black king potentially weak, White correctly decided to keep queens on the board and try to open up the position later in the centre. More obvious reasons to avoid exchanging queens are that the white queen is the sole defender of the a4-pawn, and the capture on d6 would only improve the black pieces.

21.♕xd6? would be a dream for Black. For example: 21...♘xd6 22.♖a1 ♗d7∓ Followed by ...♖fc8 and the centralization of the king to e7. White would need to defend a much-worse endgame, with weaknesses on a4 and d4.

21...♘a5 22.♕e3 ♗d7 23.f3±

White later won.

Wijk aan Zee 2022



Should White:

A) play 43.♘xa5, or
B) 43.♘d2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Escaping with a draw)

When defending an inferior endgame, it is useful to know which scenario offers the most chances of survival. Rook endgames are more drawish than knight endings, meaning that White should exchange the knights.

The game went:

43.♘d2? b4?!

Too rushed! Black had plenty of time to improve the position of his king:
43...♔h7!∓ would have been unpleasant for White. It is hard for him to make a waiting move. Black is threatening ...g7-g5!, improving his position and making it hard for White to make a move again. Thus, White has to seek active play: 44.f4! Black does not have a direct way to apply the pain. The position is probably still within the drawing margin of the engines, but in practice, this is no way to live. (44.♖c2? b4!? 45.c4 dxc4 46.♘xc4 b3! is a funny little reason why White is in a sort of zugzwang. And after 44.♔b1? b4 45.c4 dxc4 46.♘xc4 ♘b3 the d4-pawn falls.)

44.cxb4?

White missed a second chance to save the game with: 44.c4! dxc4 45.♘xc4 ♘xc4† 46.♖xc4 a5 47.♖c8† ♔h7 48.d5! The endgame is about pushing passed pawns, so White needs to create some! 48...exd5 49.♖f8 ♖a3 50.♖xf7 White holds.

44...♖xb4† 45.♔c3 ♘c6

The weakness of the d4-pawn and Black's extra pawn makes for plain sailing.

43.♘xa5!

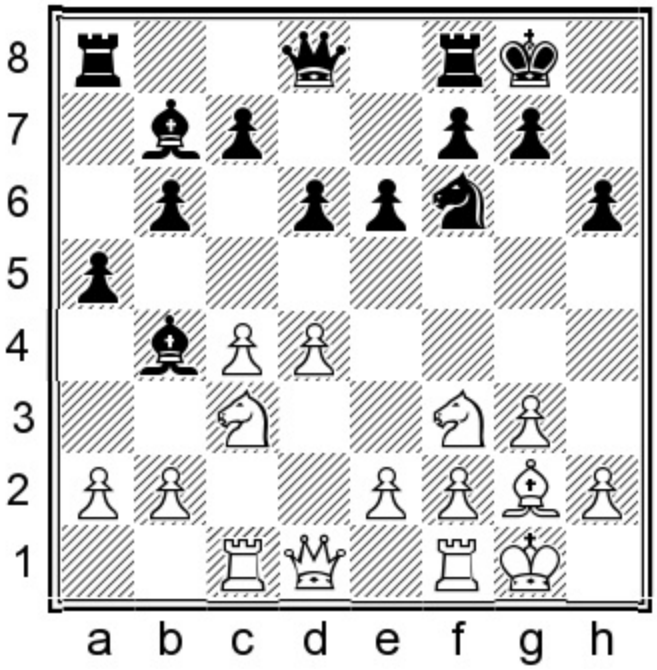
Another reasonable option was: 43.♘c5!? ♖c4 44.♖a1 ♘c6 45.♘a6=

43...♖xa5 44.f4⩲

The rook on a5 is clumsy and the black king far from the battle. White will play f4-f5 with enough counterplay to maintain the balance.

133. Claudio Minzer – Eduardo Iturrizaga Bonelli

Alicante 2022



Should White:

A) play 12.a3 and deny Black the bishop pair, or
B) avoid the exchange of those minor pieces with 12.♘a4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

12.♘a4!

The bishop on b4 is almost trapped, and Black will have to do something awkward to deal with the threat of 13.a3.

In the game White played 12.a3?. White failed to realize that the bishop on b4 doesn't have any other purpose than to capture on c3. Forcing the opponent to make a move that he must play anyway makes little sense. Most importantly, a2-a3 weakens the b3-square which could be a serious long-term structural weakness. 12...♗xc3 13.♖xc3 a4∓ Black has a more comfortable position. The weakness on b2 is permanent, and if White ever plays b2-b3 the a3-pawn becomes weak. Black won on move 48.

The engine gives the imaginative:

12...e5!?

12...d5 looks like the more human response. 13.c5 b5 14.♘c3 ♗xc3 15.♖xc3 when White is a little better.

13.dxe5!

Taking the free pawn is simplest.

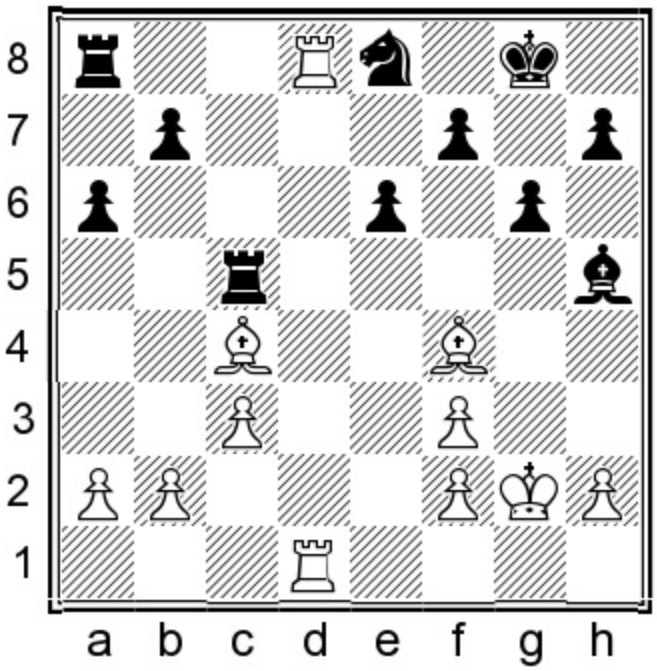
Also possible is 13.a3. The tactical point behind Black's play is that after 13...e4 14.♘h4 ♕d7 15.axb4 (15.f3 e3 16.axb4 axb4∞) 15...axb4 16.b3 g5, Black regains the piece in a deeply complicated position.

13...dxe5 14.♘xe5 ♗xg2 15.♔xg2 ♖e8 16.♘d3±

Black still needs to prove that he has enough compensation for the pawn.

134. Volodymyr Onyschuk – Rauf Mamedov

Riga 2021



Should Black:

A) exchange rooks with 22...♖xd8, or
B) play 22...♖cc8?

Show/Hide Solution

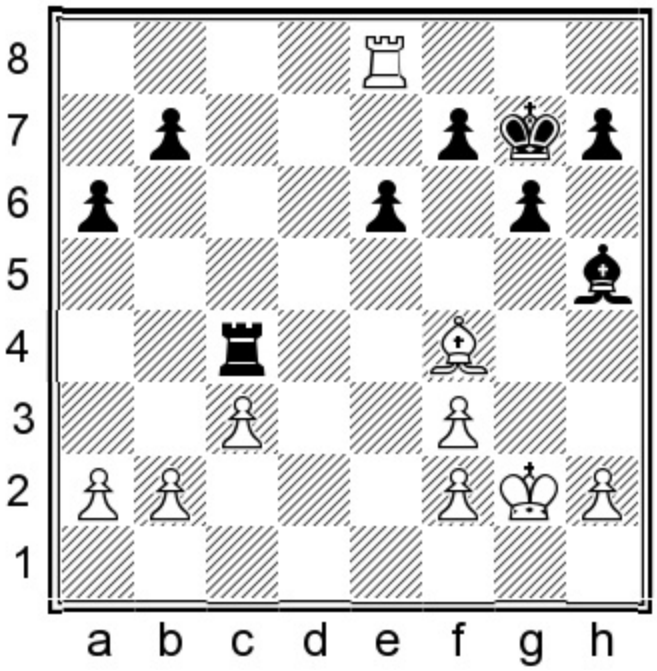
(Better pieces)

Black played 22...♖cc8?, but after 23.♖xc8 ♖xc8 24.♗b3+– the problems in his position could not be solved. His pieces are bad, the invasion on d7 cannot be stopped; the position is simply falling apart. White won in 40 moves.

22...♖xd8!

Exchange your bad pieces is one of the key concepts we hope will stay with you after reading this book. Here is one more example. Black can't do anything about the bishop on h5. But the passive rook on the back rank and the knight on e8 have no use, therefore it is best to get rid of them.

23.♖xd8 ♖xc4 24.♖xe8† ♔g7



The position is about equal. It's true that White's bishop is the slightly more active, but Black doesn't have any meaningful weaknesses.

25.♗e5†

25.♔g3 has the idea of creating some threats against the king on the dark squares. Black can solve this by playing actively with: 25...♔f6 26.h4 ♔f5 27.♖e7 g5 28.♗xg5 b5 The position is equal, as White's extra pawn is irrelevant.

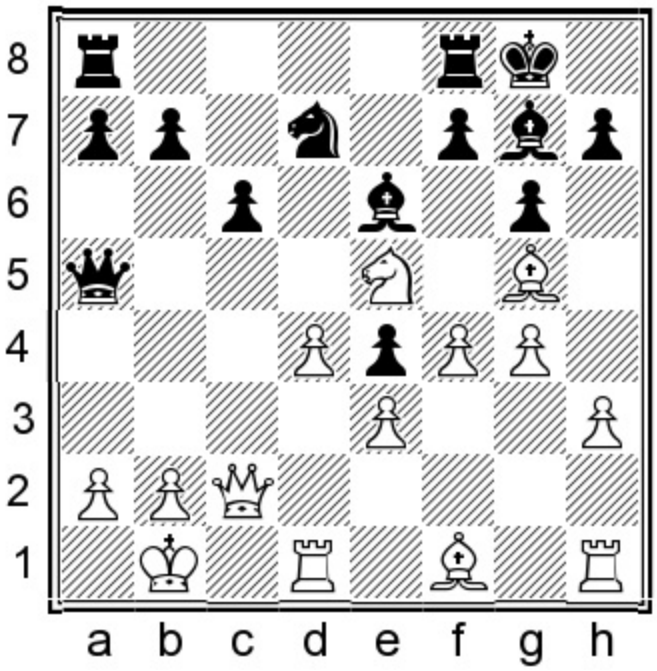
After 25.♗e3 ♔f6, the black king comes out of a potential mating net and is safe.

25...f6 26.♖e7† ♔g8 27.♗xf6 ♖f4 28.♗d4 ♖f7 29.♖e8† ♖f8

With a drawish endgame.

135. Fernando Peralta – Leandro Krysa

Barbera del Valles 2020



Should White defend the a2-pawn with:

A) 20.♗c4, allowing the trade of bishops, or
B) 20.♘c4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing the attacker)

The Argentinian grandmaster opted for:

20.♘c4?!

Which was met with the shocking:

20...♗xc4?

Black could have played 20...♕a6, when there is an X-ray with the bishop on f1 against the queen on a6. But White cannot exploit it, since both the black queen and light-squared bishop are pointing at a2. Play might continue: 21.f5 ♗d5 Black is still a little worse. But ...b7-b5 and ...♖fb8 are coming next, with good chances to complicate the game.

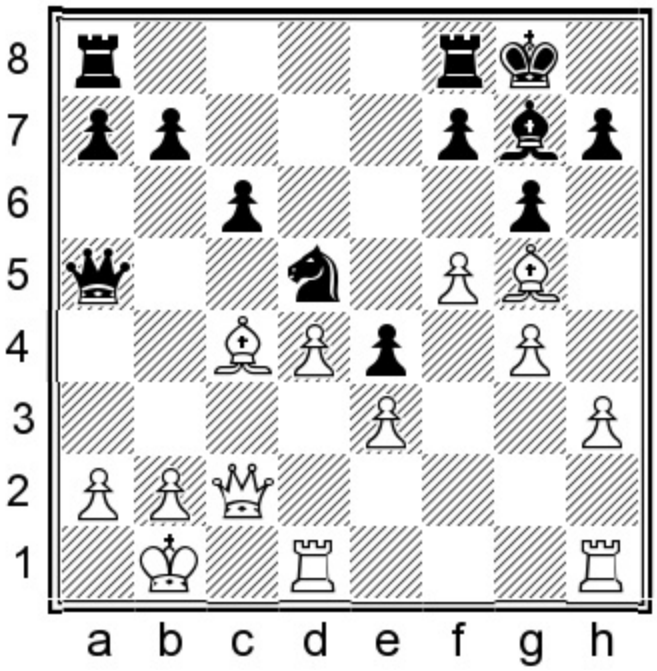
21.♗xc4 ♘b6 22.f5

Although this move gives White an advantage, it allows Black to take on c4, eliminating White's best bishop. White can always play f4-f5 later, when the bishop would have a function attacking the light squares.

After the natural 22.♗b3 ♘d5, White needs to consider the best way to defend the e3-pawn.

23.♖de1 Simple and strong. White will play h3-h4 next, with a large advantage.

22...♘d5



The black king is in great danger, and White is dominating the light squares.

23.♗xd5?±

After something like 23.h4 with a push on the kingside, Black cannot survive. Instead, White gets rid of his best piece.

23...♕xd5 24.♗e7 ♖fe8 25.f6 ♗f8 26.♗xf8 ♔xf8

White still has an advantage but things are harder. Eventually he lost the game in 45 moves.

20.♗c4!

Understanding this move is simple. The f1-bishop doesn't have a function and is in the way of the rooks. Why not exchange it for Black's best piece?

20.a3!? is odd as it weakens the white king, but it also gives a sizeable white advantage.

20...♗xc4

There is no better option.

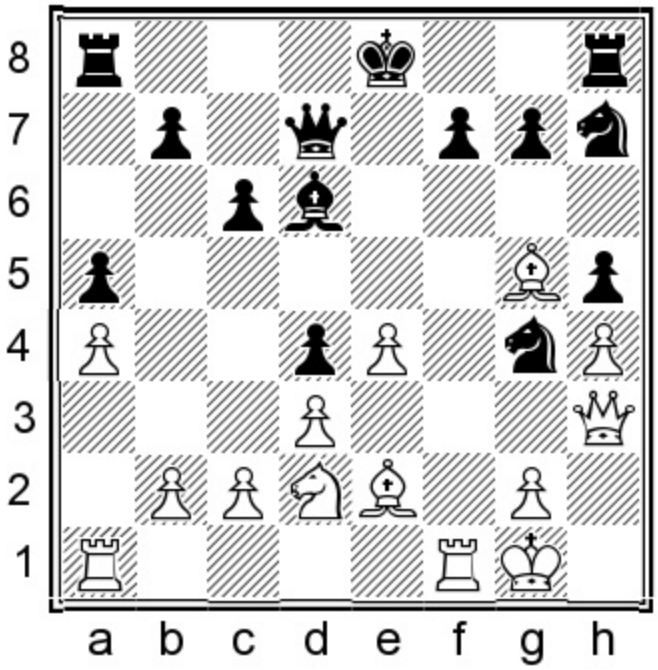
20...♘xe5? 21.dxe5± leaves Black in a desperate situation. He is unable to generate any threats and the e4-pawn is weak.

21.♘xc4 ♕d5 22.♗e7!

Improving the bishop to a better diagonal and securing control over the d6-square. White keeps a solid advantage.

22...♖fe8 23.♗a3±

Terme Catez 2021



Should White play:

A) 19.♗f4, or
B) 19.♘c4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

The game continued: 19.♘c4? ♘xg5 20.hxg5 ♗h2† 21.♔h1 ♗c7 22.♗xg4 ♕xg4 23.♖f3 0-0 Black is better and later won.

19.♗f4!

Black is playing on the dark squares. The d6-bishop along with the g4-knight are his two best pieces. But most importantly, White doesn't want to allow the sad h7-knight to be exchanged for the bishop.

19...♗xf4

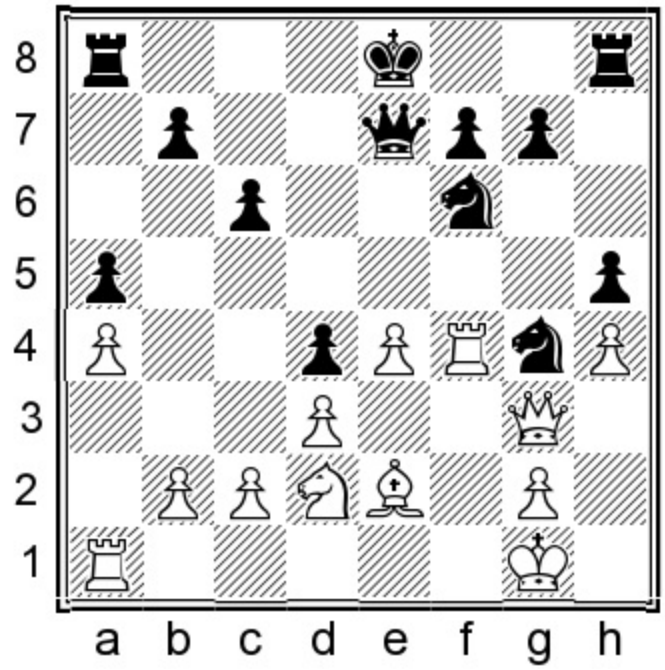
Or: 19...♘hf6 20.♗xd6 ♕xd6 21.♘c4 ♕c7 22.e5 (22.♖ae1 is also a very good option too, but there is no reason not to go for the kill.) 22...♘xe5 23.♕h2 ♘fd7 24.♖f5 f6 25.♗xh5† ♔f8 26.♖e1 ♔g8 27.♗g6+–

20.♖xf4±

All the dark squares are weak. White will play the natural moves ♖af1, ♕g3 and ♘f3. Black is

left in a sad position. For example:

20...♘hf6 21.♕g3 ♕e7



22.♖af1 ♘e3 23.♖1f2 ♔f8 24.♘f1

There are other good moves, but it makes sense to remove Black's only active piece from the board.

24...♘xf1

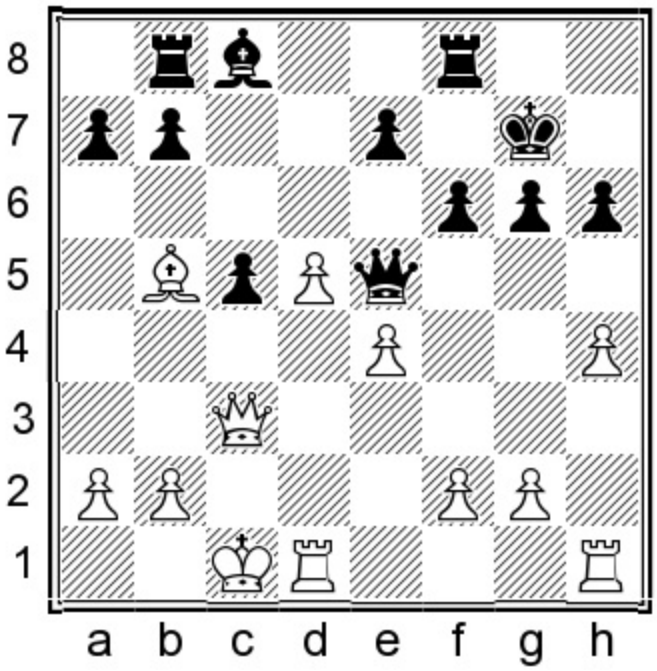
24...♘xc2 is met with 25.♖f5, with e4-e5 coming next.

25.♖xf1

With a winning position.

137. Jaime Valmana Canto – Marc Carbonell Sancho

Alicante 2022



Should White:

A) exchange queens, or
B) play 17.♕e3?

Show/Hide Solution

(King safety)

White chose safety with the less ambitious 17.♕xe5 fxe5 18.f3 a6 19.♗e2. White is still a bit better thanks to a superior pawn structure, but misplayed the position and lost in 47 moves.

17.♕e3!

Keeping the queens on was essential to exploit Black's weaknesses to the fullest. White now threatens f2-f4 and e4-e5, gaining decisive space. Black has no counterplay.

17...f5

This move is critical, but Black has other options:

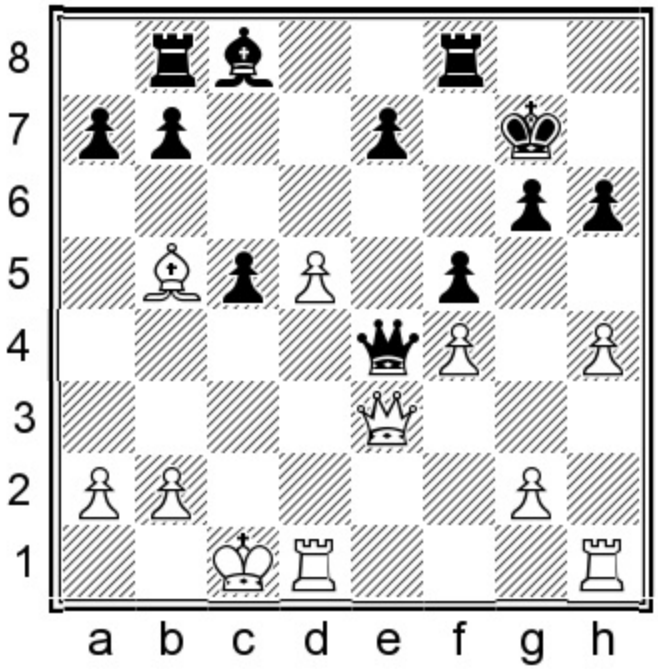
After 17...h5 18.f4 ♕c7 19.♖he1 ♗g4 20.♗e2 ♗xe2 21.♖xe2, White can slowly improve his position a little with ♔b1 etc., before deciding when to strike with e4-e5.

Or 17...♕c7 18.♔b1. There is no need to rush. White secures his king and is ready to start mobilising the kingside pawns. (Also possible is: 18.♗e2 e5 This leaves White with a protected passed pawn on the d-file. 19.g4 followed by g4-g5 with an attack.)

18.f4!

A beautiful idea.

18...♕xe4



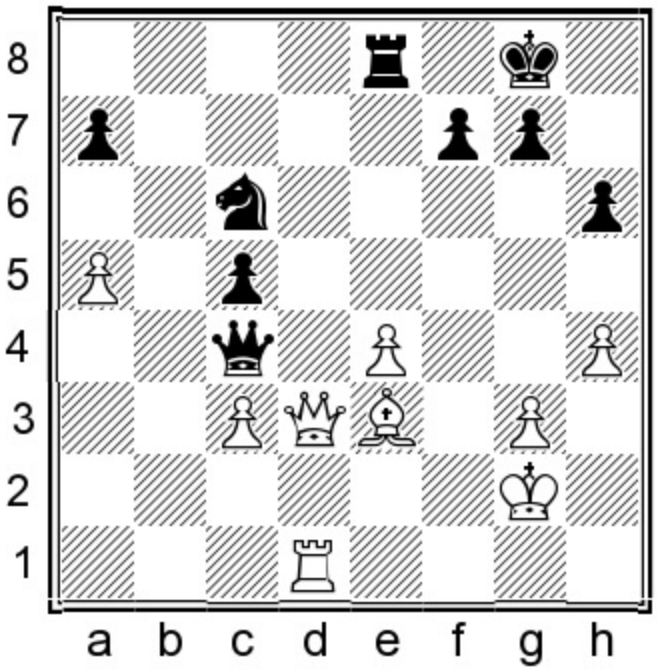
19.♕c3† ♔h7 20.g3

Black is lost against the threat of ♖he1.

20...♕b4 21.♖he1 ♕xc3† 22.bxc3 ♖f7 23.d6 exd6 24.♖xd6

The invasion on the 8th rank will decide the game.

138. Training Position



Should Black:

A) capture on e4, or
B) play 34...♕a4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)

White has weaknesses on a5, c3 and e4, but the greatest weakness is his king. To exploit this, Black should keep the queens on.

34...♖xe4? would be wrong, as it only helps White get rid of his weak e-pawn. 35.♗xc5! For example: 35...♖e2† 36.♔f1 ♕xd3 37.♖xd3 ♖e5 38.♗b4 ♘xa5 39.♗xa5 ♖xa5 40.c4 ♖c5 41.♖d8† ♔h7 42.♖d7 a5 43.♖xf7 ♖xc4 44.♖a7 White will draw without too many problems.

34...♕xe4† 35.♕xe4 ♖xe4 36.♗xc5 is equally harmless.

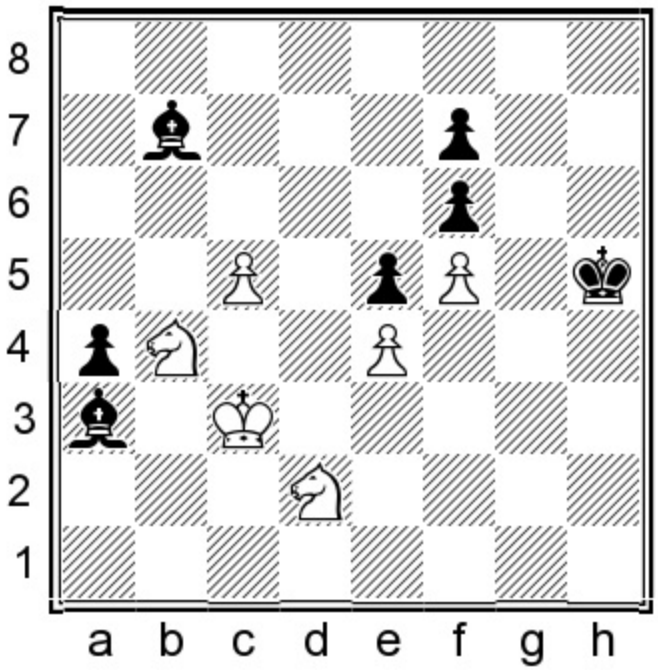
34...♕a4!

Playing on the light squares where White is weak.

35.♗xc5 ♖d8 36.♗d4 ♘xa5

Black now has a passed pawn. White can still defend with best play but this doesn't matter for the purposes of the exercise.

139. Tymon Ochedzan – Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa



Should Black:

A) take on b4, or
B) activate his king?

Show/Hide Solution

(Domination)

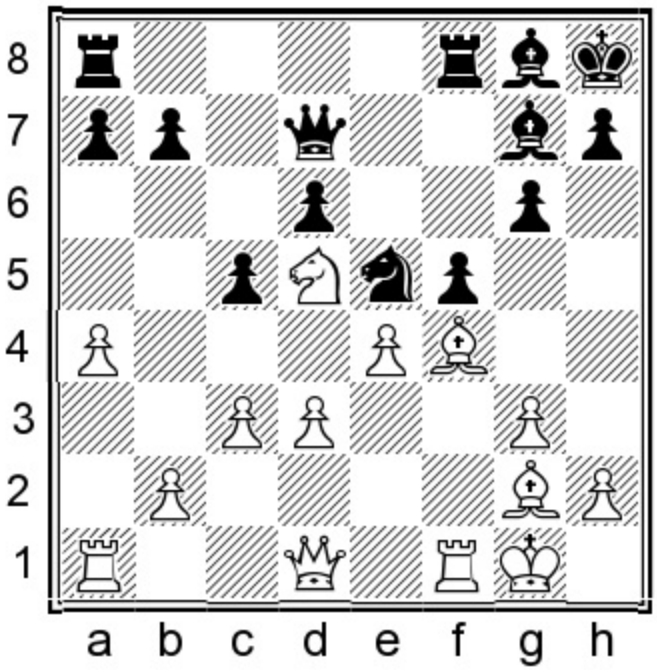
Black played the natural improvement of the king. 53...♔g5? 54.♘d3! The bishop on a3 is dominated and could be lost. (White failed to find the chance he was given and played: 54.♔c4? ♗xb4 55.♔xb4 ♗c6 Black won on move 69.) 54...♗c6 (After 54...♗a6? 55.♘c4 White would even win.) 55.♘c4 ♗xc5 56.♘xc5 ♔f4 White cannot win, but is happy to have escaped.

53...♗xb4†! 54.♔xb4 ♗c6

Black wins easily. White has no counterplay.

140. Milagros Tatiana Brizzi – Fabian Fiorito

Buenos Aires 2022



Should Black play:

A) 17...♗xd5 or,
B) 17...♖ae8?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better Pieces)

17...♗xd5!

Simply eliminating one of White's strong pieces and causing permanent damage to her pawn structure. Black gets a good tandem of minor pieces. If White decides to eliminate the well-placed black knight, she enters an opposite-coloured bishop middlegame with the much poorer bishop.

In the game, Black played the soft 17...♖ae8 when White could have equalized with: 18.exf5! Opening up the bishop on g2. (Instead, she went 18.♕c2 and the game was drawn in 37 moves. 18...♗xd5 was also strong here.) 18...♖xf5 19.♕d2 with the idea of ♖ae1 later. The most important thing is that now the bishop on g2 does not get buried by his own pawn.

18.exd5 a5!

A nice idea. Black fixes the pawn on a4 and prepares the later break ...b7-b5 to create a target on b2.

Black is also better after the normal 18...♖ae8∓.

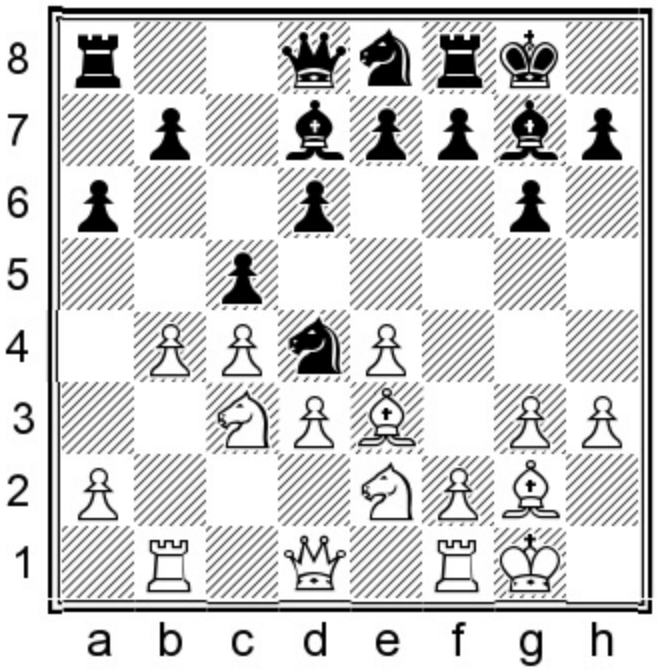
The game could develop like this:

19.d4 cxd4 20.cxd4 ♘f7 21.♕d2 b5

Followed by ...♖fb8, with pressure on the b-file.

141. Maria Jose Campos – Ariel Sorin

Buenos Aires 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange knights on e2 followed by ...b7- b5, or
B) break immediately with 12...b5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Tension)

The Argentinian grandmaster played 12...♘xe2†, essentially giving away his strong knight on d4 and surrendering control of the centre. Although this move is a mistake, it was played with the idea that after 13.♘xe2 cxb4 14.♖xb4 b5 Black would create enough counterplay.

White played the dubious 15.c5? which gave Black the advantage, although the game was later drawn in 40 moves.

Instead, White should have kept tension with: 15.♕d2! ♘c7 (15...a5 16.♖xb5! is a nice idea. 16...♗xb5 17.cxb5+– The passed pawn and central dominance, along with the two bishops, give White a winning position.) 16.♖fb1 White has a comfortable position and can continue pressing on the queenside. 16...a5?! is refuted by 17.♖xb5! ♘xb5 18.cxb5, with a close to winning position.

12...b5! 13.bxc5 dxc5=

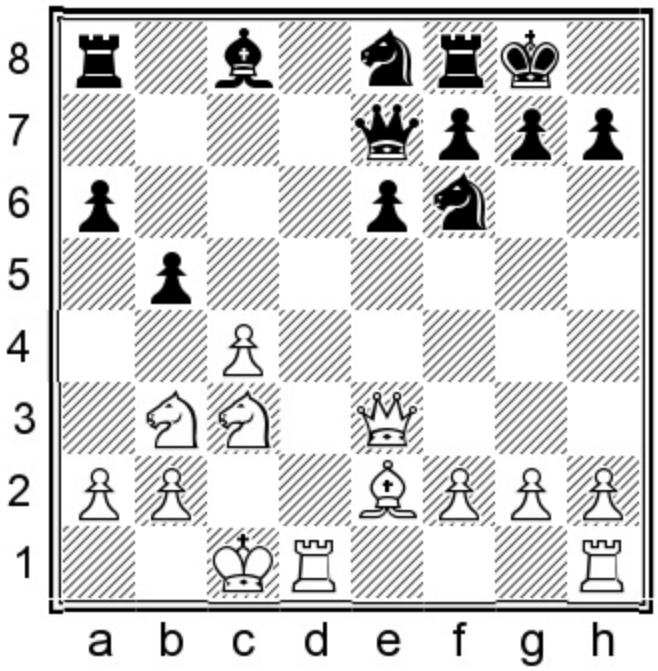
Black is threatening to capture on c4 followed by ...♘d6. If White captures on b5, the rook on a8

is activated with counterplay against a2. The position is dynamically balanced with chances for both sides. A possible follow-up is:

14.f4 bxc4 15.dxc4 ♘xe2† 16.♘xe2 ♘d6 17.♕b3 ♖b8 18.♕xb8 ♕xb8 19.♖xb8 ♖xb8 20.♗xc5 ♖b2
Black has good counterplay.

142. Daniel Alsina Leal – Michael Oratovsky

Barbera del Valles 2020



Should White play:

A) 17.cxb5 to win material,
B) 17.♘a5, or
C) 17.♕c5 to force the exchange of queens?

Show/Hide Solution

(Queens exchanges/Domination)
17.cxb5?! is exactly what we should not do in situations like this. 17...axb5 18.♗xb5 ♗b7 The open lines on the queenside offer Black reasonable compensation.

17.♘a5!? is the second serious move. However, after something like 17...♗d7 18.c5 (18.g4!? b4 19.♘d5 ♘xd5 20.♖xd5 ♖c8± is not clear.) 18...b4 19.c6 ♕d8!, the change in the dynamic is becoming apparent. White may have an advantage, but it is messy. 20.♘b7! ♕c7 21.cxd7 ♘xd7 22.♖xd7 ♕xd7 23.♘c5 ♕c7 24.♘3a4 ♘f6± White is better, but from a practical perspective, to calculate variations like this makes little sense when there is a simpler alternative.

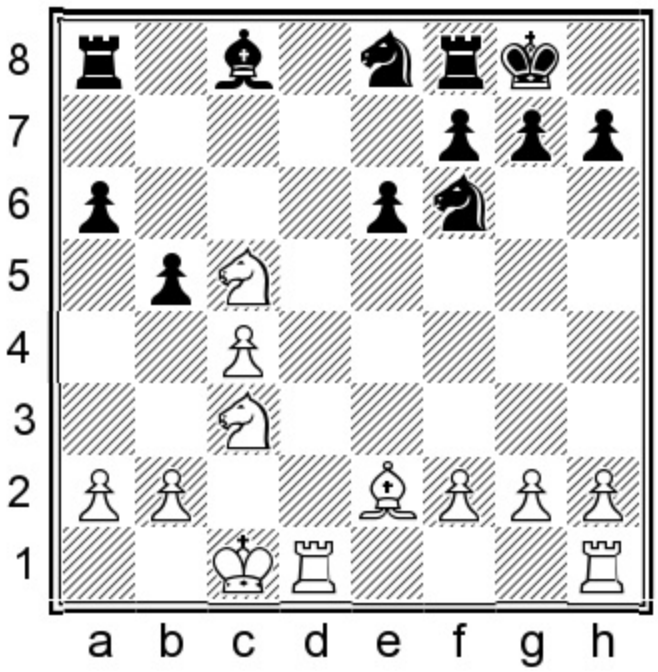
17.♕c5!

White benefits from the exchange of queens and there is more than one reason to understand why. The queen is Black's best piece. She defends the weak d6-square and hopes to become an active piece later. White is not playing for an attack against the king; the battle is on the queenside where his pieces dominate key squares. This domination will increase if the opponent's best pieces are removed.

17...♕xc5

Black could have defended better with 17...♕c7, keeping the tension and accepting the exchange of queens under slightly better terms. But White is still better after 18.♕xc7 ♘xc7 19.♗f3 ♖b8 20.c5, where the white pieces are more active and the passed pawn a significant asset.

18.♘xc5



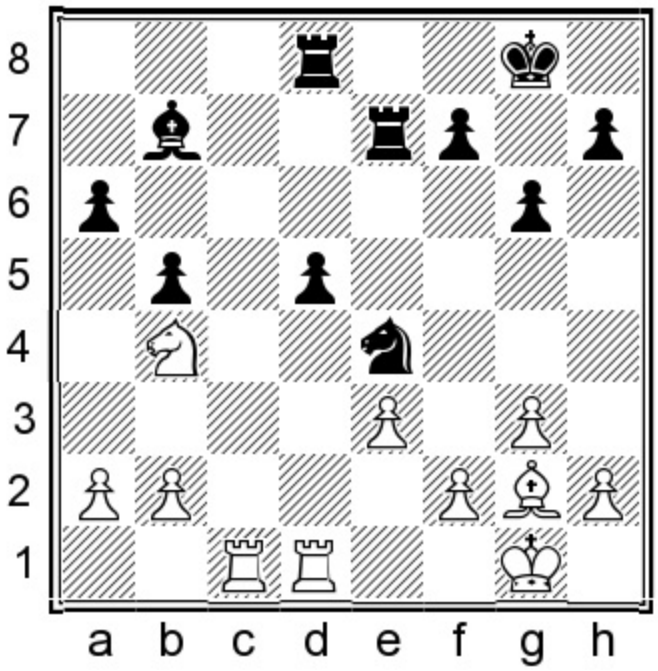
18...bxc4

18...♘c7 is a reasonable move. White's strongest is 19.♖d6!±, making space for the rook on h1 to join the fight, and controlling a lot of squares deep into black territory.

19.♗xc4 ♘c7 20.♖d6 ♘g4 21.♗e2 ♘e5 22.b3 f6 23.♔b2+–

White will continue with ♖hd1 and ♘c3-a4-b6, with an overwhelming advantage. The game was eventually drawn, but that had nothing to do with the current evaluation.

143. Sam Shankland – Domingos Junior



Should White play:

A) 26.♘c6 to force the exchange of minor pieces, or
B) 26.♖d4 to put extra pressure on Black's weakness?

Show/Hide Solution

(Invasion)

26.♘c6!

There is no need to keep manoeuvring around. Black's ''bad bishop'' is the best defender of Black's weaknesses on a6 and d5. After the exchange, Black's position collapses like a house of cards.

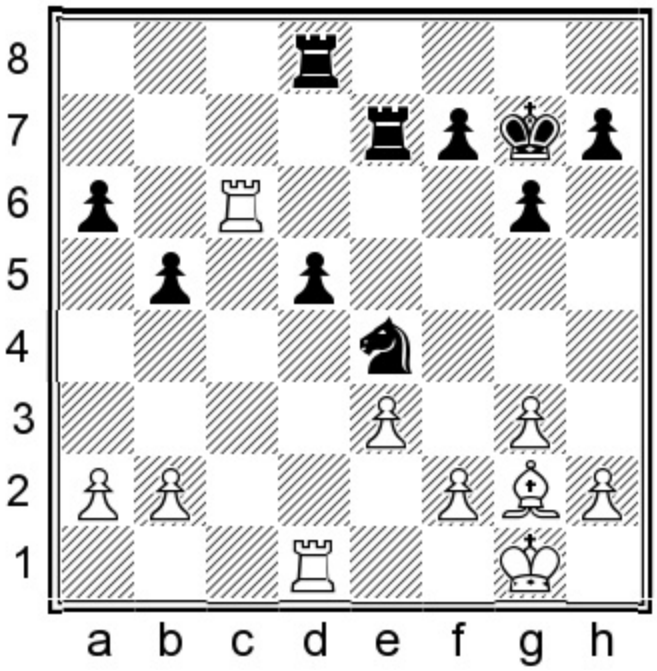
26.♖d4± still kept some pressure on and Sam eventually won after 53 moves. However, Black's position is still tough to crack after something like 26...♔f8 27.♖cd1 ♘f6!. Now it would be totally wrong for White to win the pawn immediately with 28.♘xd5?! ♗xd5 29.♗xd5 ♖xd5 30.♖xd5 ♘xd5 31.♖xd5 ♖c7 when Black has decent chances to survive.

26...♗xc6 27.♖xc6

It is possible that White could have some concerns about allowing counterplay. For example:

27...♔g7

With the idea of taking over the c-file once the rook captures on a6. White wins trivially after the alternatives: 27...♖e6 28.♖xe6 fxe6 29.♗xe4+–; 27...♖d6 28.♖xd6 ♘xd6 29.♖xd5 ♘c4 30.b3+–; 27...a5 28.f3 ♘d6 29.♖xd5+–



28.♗xe4!

Also winning for White is: 28.♖xa6 ♖c8 29.♖b6 ♖c5 White can continue making progress slowly. However, something direct like 30.♗f1? would spoil everything after: 30...♖c2 31.♖xb5 ♘xf2 Black has enough counterplay to keep fighting.

28...♖xe4 29.♖xa6

White is a pawn up and will soon pick up another. The last try could be:

29...♖a4

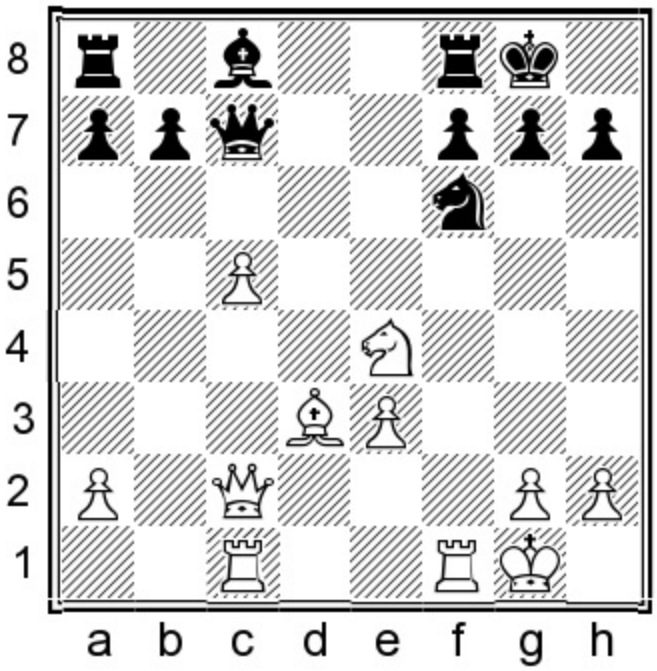
Or: 29...d4 30.♔f1! White is in no rush to take on d4. 30...d3 31.♖a3+–

30.♖xa4 bxa4 31.a3!+–

Not 31.♖d4?? ♖b8 when Black holds.

144. Andrej Dubkov – Dommaraju Gukesh

Menorca 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange knights, or
B) play 17...♘g4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing the attacker)

Black mistakenly played:

17...♘g4?

Which allowed the white pieces to get too close to the black king.

18.♘d6 h6 19.♗c4?

The right idea but wrong move. The correct way to put pressure on Black's weak kingside with all the pieces was to bring in the queen first. There are two ways to do this:

19.♕a4! ♘e5 (19...♘xe3? 20.♕e4 wins a piece) 20.♗b1 ♕e7 21.♕e4 g6 22.♕f4 ♔h7 23.♗e4 is extremely unpleasant for Black.

19.♕c3 ♕e7 (White is also dominating after 19...♘xe3 20.♖f3 ♘d5 21.♕e5.) 20.♗c4 ♗e6 21.♖f4 is also very strong.

19...♘xe3

This is what the knight went to g4 for.

20.♖xf7! ♖xf7 21.♗xf7† ♕xf7 22.♕e4 ♕e6

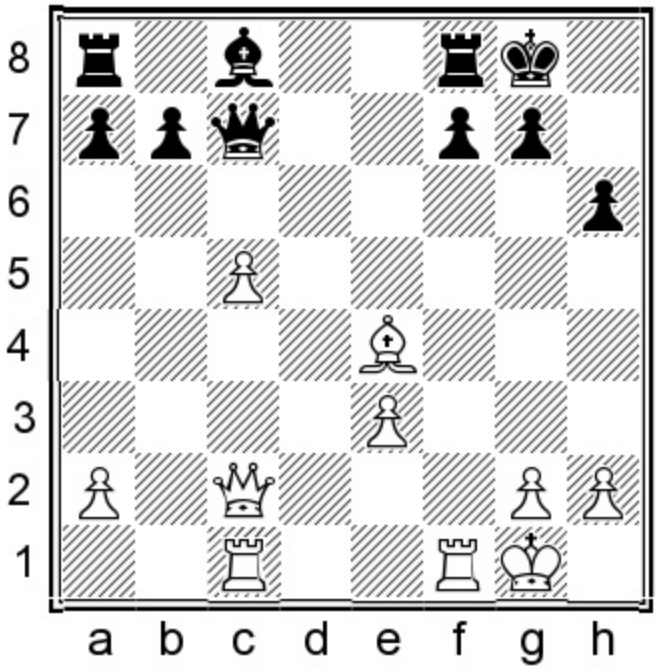
The risk paid off and Gukesh emerged with a winning position.

23.♕xe6† ♗xe6 24.♖e1 ♗xa2 25.♖xe3 ♗d5

Black soon won.

17...♘xe4! 18.♗xe4 h6

This was the correct way to play, although White still keeps some small initiative. 18...g6!? is also possible.



19.♕b3!

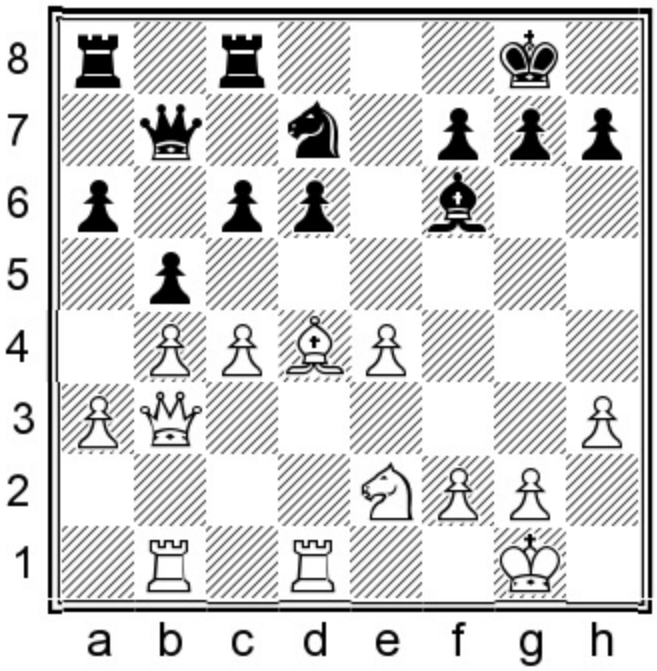
But Black can defend actively, for example:

19...♕e5 20.♗xb7 ♗xb7 21.♕xb7 ♖ac8 22.♕xa7 ♖a8 23.♕d7 ♕xe3† 24.♔h1 ♖xa2 25.c6 ♖d2 26.♕f5 ♕e2 27.♖g1 ♕d3

With a draw on the horizon.

145. Erwin L'Ami – Thai Dai Van Nguyen

Wijk aan Zee 2022



Should White play:

A) 24.♗xf6 and follow up with 25.♘g3, or
B) play 24.♘g3 immediately?

Show/Hide Solution

(Tension)

When deciding on an exchange, it is a useful to see how it affects the opponent's pieces. If we improve those pieces or create extra options for the opponent, we might consider delaying the exchange. The general idea is to improve our position until it is ripe for forcing play.
In the game, White played: 24.♗xf6 ♘xf6 25.♘g3± bxc4 26.♕xc4 d5 27.♕d4 dxe4?! (27...♕a7!± removing the attacker was a good defensive try.) 28.♘f5!± White is much better, although it wasn't enough to win. The game was drawn in 34 moves.

24.♘g3!±

Improving the knight and threatening ♗xf6 followed by ♖xd6.

24...c5

It is hard to find a decent move for Black.

24...bxc4 does not work. 25.♕c3! (25.♕xc4 is also good) 25...d5 26.♘f5 ♕c7 27.♗xf6 ♘xf6 28.exd5 cxd5 29.♖xd5 and White wins a pawn for starters, but is by no means finished collecting.

25.♗xf6 ♘xf6 26.♘f5 ♘e8

Black is forced to go into a passive position. White can continue putting pressure on the

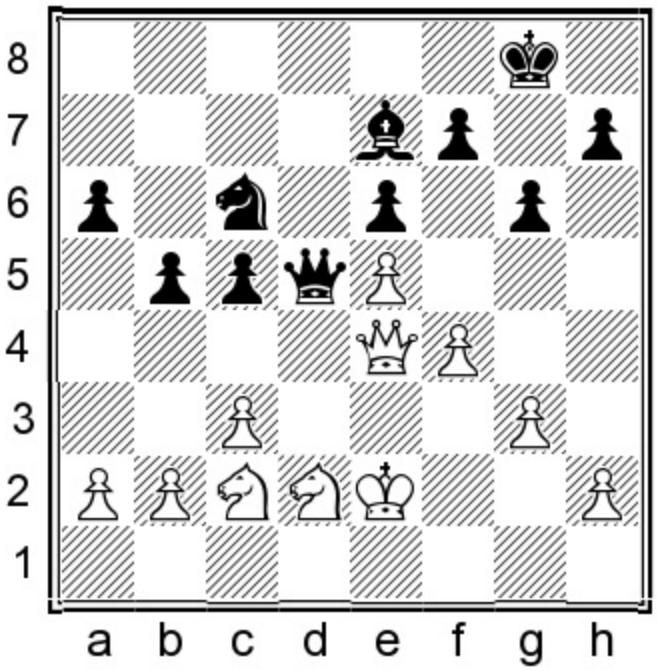
weaknesses with:

27.♕d3±

Looking at both the b5- and d6-pawns.

146. Michael Aigner – Maurizio Prelati

Arco 2021



Should Black:

A) exchange queens with 28...♕xe4,
B) allow the exchange with 28...c4, or
C) retreat with 28...♕d7?

Show/Hide Solution

(Tension)

The game went 28...f6?, which is so bad we don't even want to contemplate it. After 29.exf6 ♗xf6 30.♘e3± White was better. Black chose to exchange queens now. After 30...♕xe4 (Black should have retreated with 30...♕d7) 31.♘xe4 ♗e7 32.b3± White was better although the game was later drawn.

Another poor move is 28...c4?, which would be met with: 29.♕xd5 exd5 30.♘e3 d4 31.♘d5 ♗c5 32.♘c7 ♘b8 33.♘e4±

28...♕xe4†? 29.♘xe4± is also a nightmare. The white king is safe and the knight is fantastic on e4.

28...♕d7!=

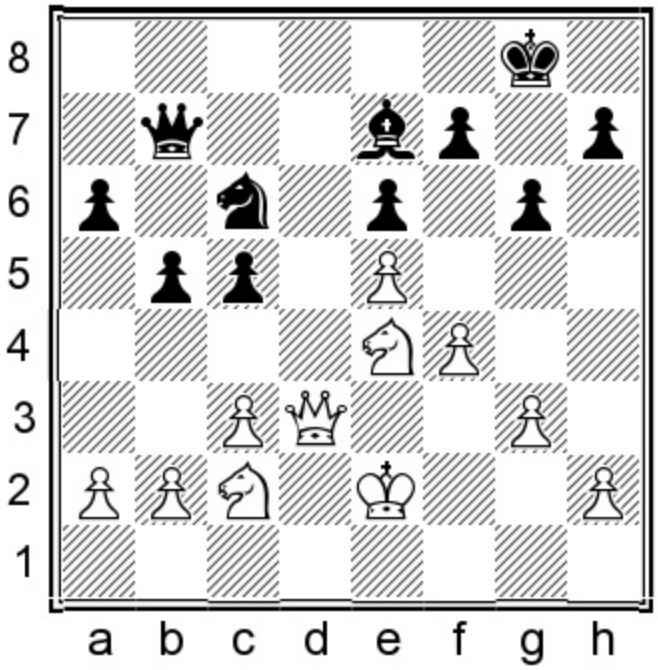
The queen is by far Black's best piece. White cannot use his space advantage or open the position, because this would allow counterplay against his king. In order to keep the balance Black should keep the queens on the board.

29.♕d3 ♕b7

Or 29...♕c7 when Black is fine.

29...♕xd3† 30.♔xd3 is an unpleasant endgame for Black. Although it may hold, this does not make the queen exchange a good decision.

30.♘e4



30...c4 31.♕e3 ♕d7

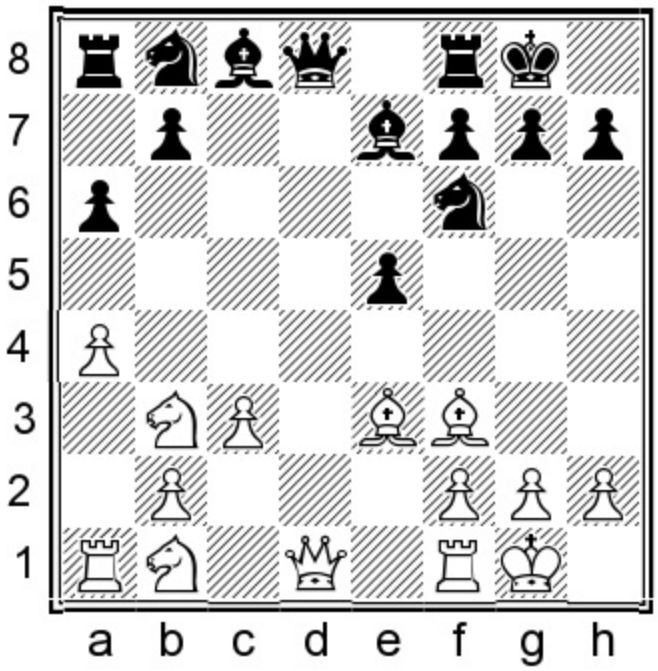
Black is ready to create counterplay. For example:

32.♘f6† ♗xf6 33.exf6 e5 34.fxe5 ♕h3 35.♕e4 ♕xh2† 36.♔d1 ♕xg3 37.♕xc6 ♕d3† 38.♔e1 ♕g3† 39.♔f1 ♕d3†

With perpetual check.

147. Cristian Aguirre Contreras – Benjamin Bahamondes Ortiz

Santiago de Chile 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange queens with 12...♕xd1,
B) allow the exchange with 12...e4, or
C) avoid it with 12...♕c7?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

The game went: 12...e4 13.♗e2 (13.♕xd8! was more accurate. After 13...♖xd8, White can play 14.♗e2 followed by 15.♘1d2, with equality.) 13...♘d5 The position is about equal. White can play in many ways and later won.

12...♕c7!∓

The white queen has no comfortable square, so it makes sense not to let White solve this problem. Meanwhile, Black needs to defend the b6-, b7- and c5-squares, and the queen is well placed on c7 for that.

13.a5

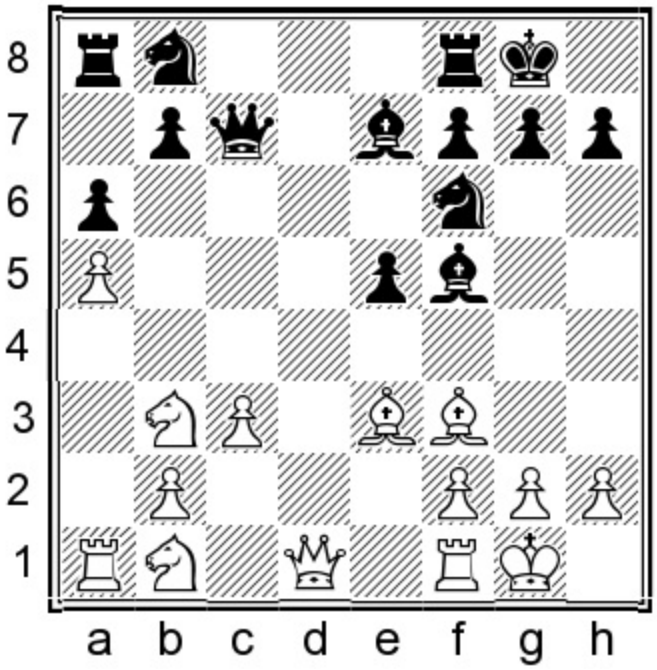
The best move. The alternatives are all poor.

After 13.♘1d2 ♗e6 Black will play ...♘bd7 and ...♖ad8. The white pieces are in each other's way.

If 13.♕c2 Black has 13...♘g4!, winning the pair of bishops.

13.♕e2? loses a piece to 13...e4.

13...♗f5



14.♘1d2

14.♖e1 ♘bd7 15.g4 is one of the engine's top suggestions. A clear sign that things are not going well: 15...♗e6! 16.g5 ♘e8 17.♗d5 ♕d6 White is struggling to keep the balance.

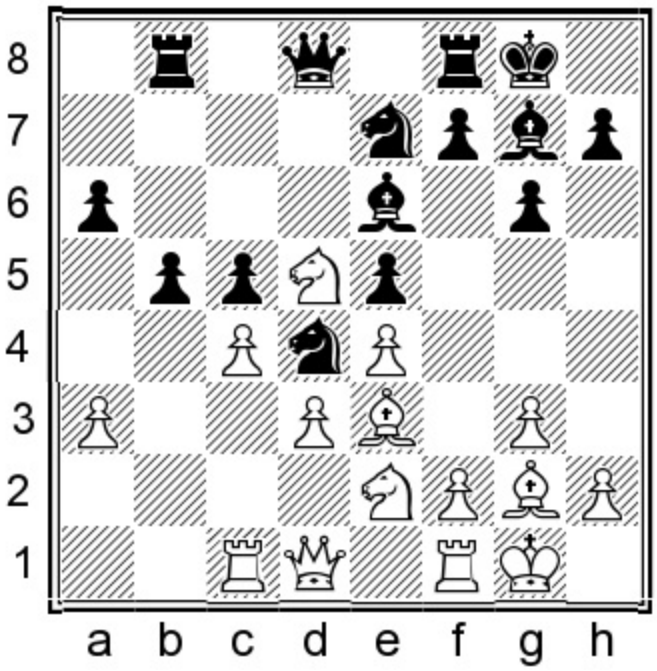
After 14.♗b6 ♕c8∓, ...♘bd7 will come with a gain of tempo.

14...♘bd7 15.♖e1 ♖fe8 16.h3 ♖ad8

With a better position for Black.

148. Jose Felix Calvo Gonzalez – Alexis Cabrera

Alicante 2022



Should White play:

A) 15.♘xd4,
B) 15.♘xe7†, or
C) 15.cxb5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Tension/Transformation of Structure)

It can be difficult to choose the right exchange. Here White can capture in four different ways, yet only one leads to an advantage. How should you choose? The tried and trusted concept of exchanging a bad piece for a good one is often the right path.

White played 15.cxb5?, allowing Black to get a better position after precise exchanges. 15...♘xd5! 16.exd5 ♗xd5 17.♖xc5 ♗xg2 18.♔xg2 ♘e6 19.♖c1 ♕d5† 20.♔g1 axb5 White is left with weak light squares and a passive position. Black later won.

15.♘xe7†? would be a huge mistake. White loses his strongest piece, while improving Black's coordination.

15.♗xd4? is also bad. The knight on e2 would remain lifeless, and White would permanently lose control of the dark squares.

15.♘xd4!

The right capture, getting rid of the passive e2-knight and eliminating the strong knight on d4. It also enables the further weakening of Black's position.

15...cxd4

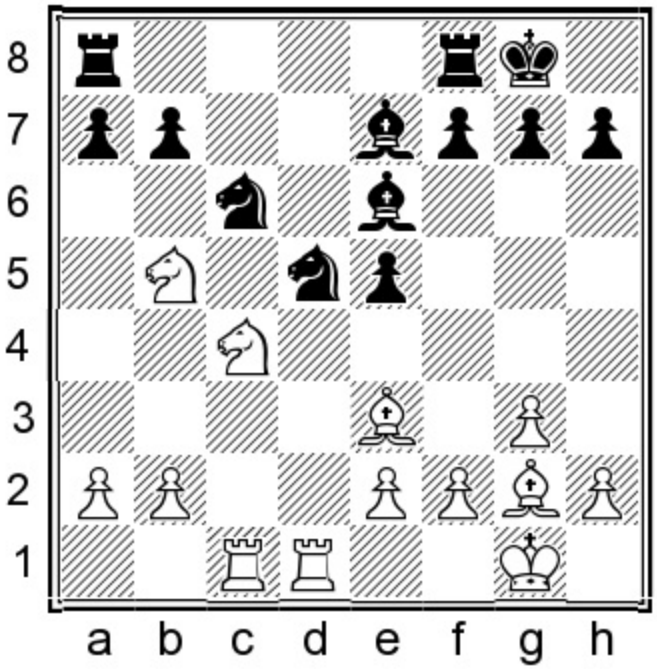
After 15...exd4 16.♗g5 f6 (Even worse is 16...♗xd5? 17.cxd5, which would leave the c5-pawn exposed.) 17.♗f4 ♖c8 18.♖b1 White has strong pressure on the queenside.

16.♗g5 f6 17.♗d2

The structure favours White. The c-pawn is passed, and the bishop is coming to b4. White might also consider taking action on the kingside with f2-f4.

149. Lemnys Arias – David Alejandro Cabezas Solano

El Salvador 2022



Should Black

A) exchange minor pieces with 16...♘xe3, or keep the tension with
B) 16...a6, or
C) 16...♖ad8?

Show/Hide Solution

(Tension)
16...a6? 17.♗xd5 axb5 18.♘b6 would lose.

Black played the tempting:

16...♘xe3?! 17.♘xe3

White had a serious grip over the light squares. His pieces occupy ideal positions, in particular

the bishop on g2 cuts down the long diagonal like a dagger. Black is on the verge of being clearly worse.

17...♗xa2

Black counted on this to solve his problems.

17...♖ad8? 18.♗xc6 bxc6 19.♘xa7 would be game over.

Also 17...♖fd8 18.♗xc6 bxc6 19.♘c7 is dead lost.

17...♖ab8!? is the only alternative. However, after 18.a3! with ideas like b2-b4 or ♘e3-d5, White has a nagging edge.

18.♖d7±

Invading the 7th rank. Black is under pressure, and even though he made a draw later, it is clear he has not solved his problems.

16...♖ad8

Black needs to bring his pieces into the game. With the d6-square under control, he can follow up with ...a7-a6 and ...b7-b5.

17.♗xa7

The critical continuation.

17.♘xa7? fails to 17...♘xe3.

17...♘db4!

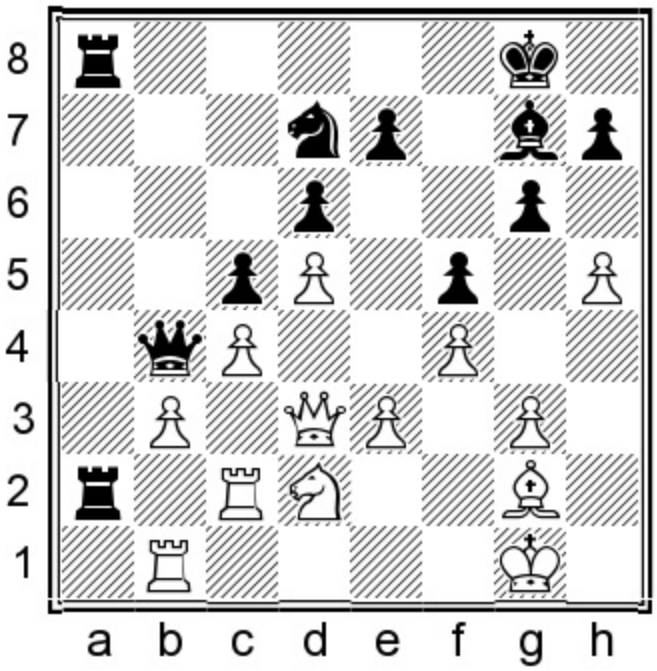
Threatening to win a piece, this equalizes comfortably. The a2-pawn falls.

17...♘f4!? is fancier, but unnecessarily so.

18.♘e3 ♘xa2 19.♖a1 ♘xa7 20.♘xa7 ♗c5 21.♘d5 ♗xa7 22.♖xa2 ♗c5=

150. Rodrigo Vasquez Schroeder – Lukas Breneis

Alicante 2022



Should Black:

A) play 27...♘f6, or
B) exchange rooks with 27...♖xc2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Invasion)
27...♘f6?! allowed White to coordinate his pieces. 28.hxg6 hxg6 29.♗f3 The position is equal, but easier for White. Now Black made an instructive mistake: 29...♖a1? Exchanging White's inferior rook. It is the c2-rook which defends the second rank and the key c3-square, giving White stability. (Black should have played 29...♖xc2 30.♕xc2 ♖a3, with enough pressure to give sufficient compensation for the pawn deficit.) 30.♖xa1 ♖xa1† 31.♔g2 White was better, ready to open the position with e3-e4 and attack Black's weaknesses. After a further 30 moves he won the game.

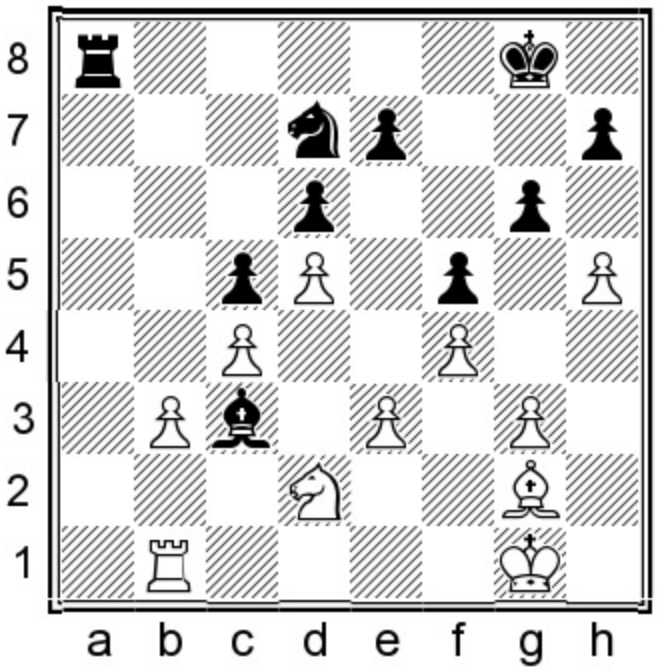
27...♖xc2!

This and the next move eliminate White's best pieces and open his position up to invasion.

28.♕xc2 ♕c3!∓

The key move. White is now forced to exchange queens and adopt a defensive position.

29.♕xc3 ♗xc3



30.♘f1

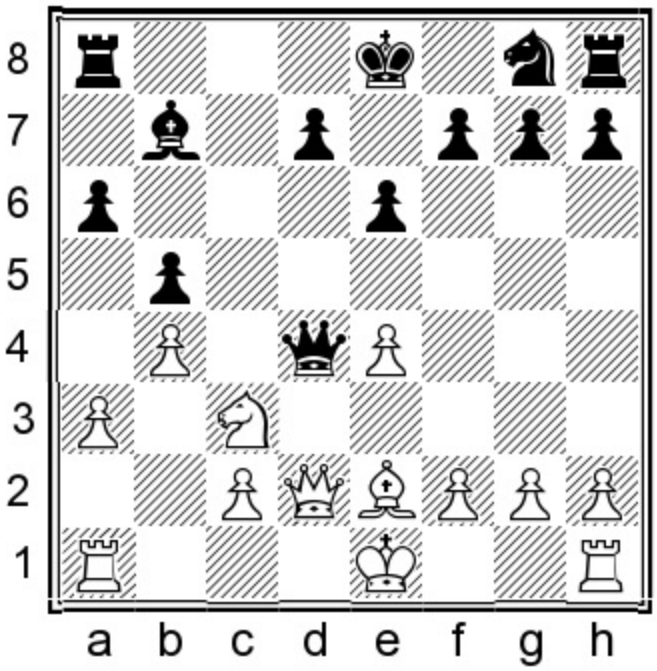
White must accept reality and defend his weaknesses, rather than try to play actively with the knight: 30.♘f3 ♘f6∓

30...♘f6 31.hxg6 hxg6

Black is a little better. It is not enough to win against best play, but his firm control of the a-file and better minor pieces offer practical chances to do so.

151. Ferenc Berkes – Zoltan Medvegy

Budapest 2021



Should Black:

A) play 13...♕e5,
B) support the queen with 13...e5, or
C) exchange queens with 13...♕xd2?

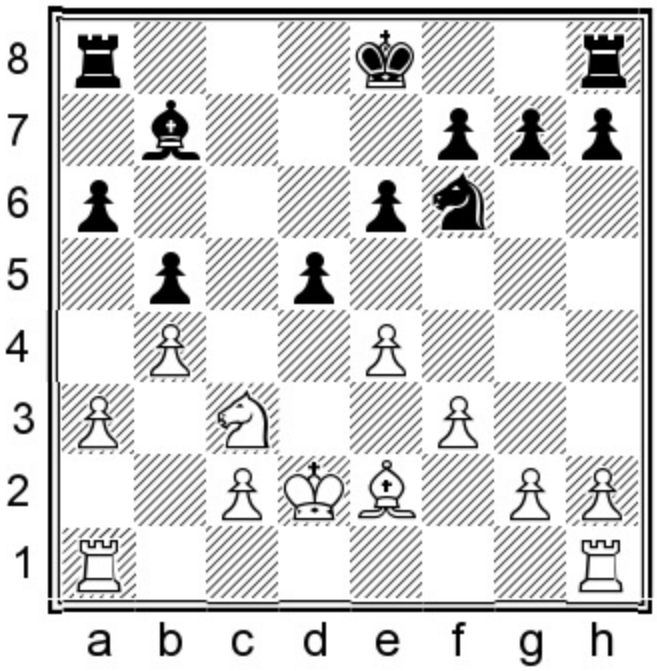
Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)
13...e5? is just wrong. After 14.♕xd4 exd4 15.♘d5 ♗xd5 16.exd5 ♘e7 17.♔d2±, White has the better minor piece and pawn structure.

The game went:
13...♕xd2†?!

This is questionable, as it enters an endgame where White is ready to exploit Black's weaknesses on the queenside with a3-a4.

14.♔xd2 ♘f6 15.f3 d5



Now the right move was:

16.a4!

16.exd5 was weaker and allowed Black to activate his pieces and defend the pawn on b5. 16...0-0-0! 17.a4 ♘xd5 18.♘xd5 ♖xd5† 19.♗d3 ♖hd8 The game was later drawn.

16...dxe4

After 16...d4 17.♘d1 bxa4 18.♘b2, White will regain his pawn with a better structure. Black has a weakness on a6.

17.axb5 0-0-0† 18.♔e3 axb5

18...exf3?! 19.♗xf3+– is even worse for Black.

19.fxe4±

The b5-pawn is permanently weak. White should be able to pick it up eventually.

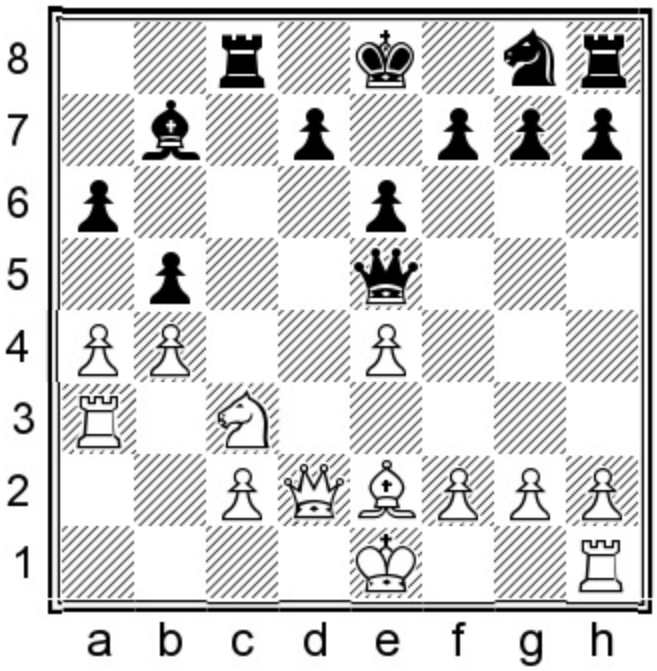
13...♕e5!

With the knight on c3 loose, this is the right square for the queen. Black wants to develop and put pressure on White at the same time.

14.a4

14.f4 ♕c7 15.a4 ♖c8 16.♖a3 bxa4 gives Black enough counterplay.

14...♖c8 15.♖a3



15...♘f6

Responding with active play against the e4-pawn. Black is now ready to castle and strike in the centre with ...d7-d5.

16.f4

16.f3 is met with: 16...0-0 Sacrificing a pawn to get the pieces into the game quickly. 17.axb5 axb5 18.♘xb5 d5 With counterplay.

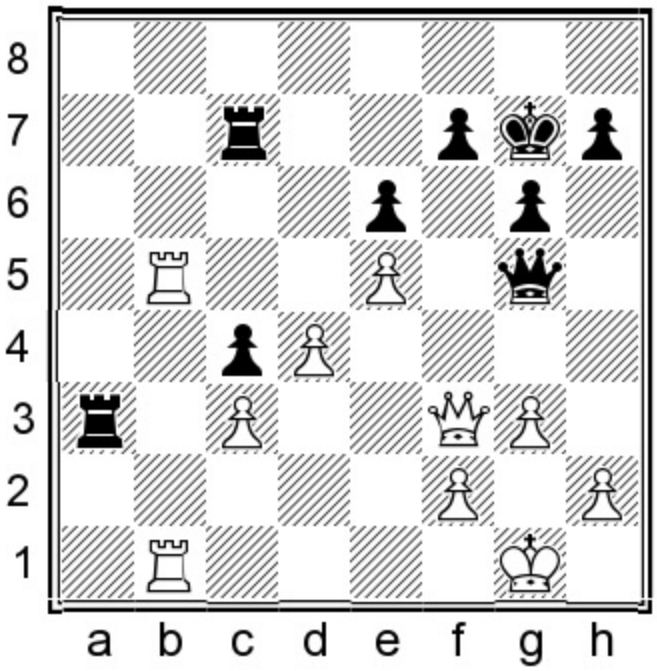
After 16.axb5 ♘xe4 17.♘xe4 ♗xe4 18.♕e3, 18...♕b2! is an important point, unpinning the bishop. 19.0-0 axb5 20.♗xb5 0-0 21.c4 d5 With counterplay.

16...♕b8 17.axb5 ♗xe4

We have entered a sharp middlegame where Black has fine chances.

152. Tom Piceu – Linus Johansson

Mayrhofen 2022



Should White seek the exchange of rooks with:

A) 32.♖b7, or
B) 32.♖c5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing defenders)

32.♖c5!

White either removes the defender of both c4 and f7, or manages to start an attack.

32.♖b7??

This looks logical. But it allows Black to both exchange his own defender, without being under immediate attack, and remove the strong queen from f3.

32...♖xb7 33.♖xb7 ♕f5!

The problem. The rook ending holds.

34.♕xf5

34.♕e3 would be giving in too. Black has several good moves. For example: 34...♕c2 35.♕f4 ♕f5 with a repetition or transposition.

34...gxf5 35.d5!?

Trying to create chances.

35...exd5 36.e6 ♖xc3 37.♔g2

37.e7 ♖c1† 38.♔g2 ♖e1 also holds for Black.

37...♖c1 38.♖xf7† ♔g6 39.♖f8 ♖e1

It is now White who has to be careful. After a handful of accurate moves, the game was drawn.

32...♖xc5

Passive play is also possible, but then White will win the endgame unless he makes serious blunders. Being a pawn down you can rarely defend passively.

33.♖b7!

The tactical point. White is threatening mate in two.

33...♕f5 34.♕xf5 gxf5 35.dxc5

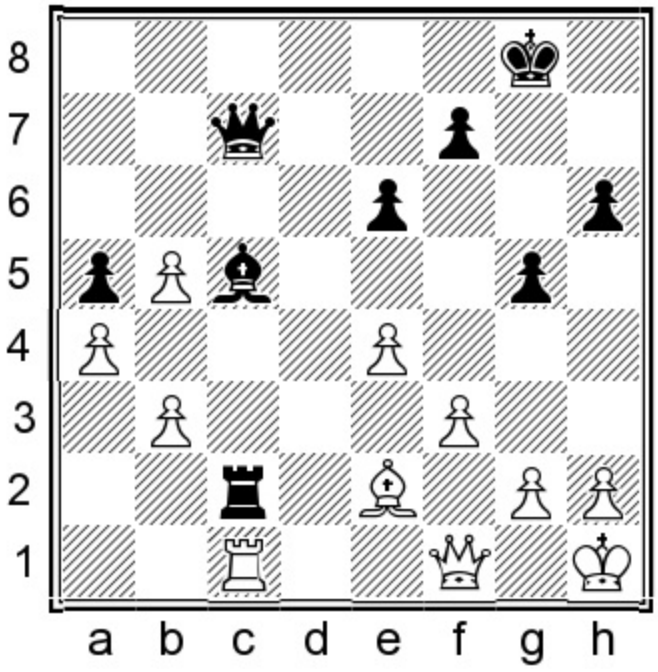
White wins. He either gets a passed pawn on the 7th rank, or wins after:

35...♖xc3 36.c6

White arrives first.

153. Robert Bator – Florian Kaczur

Mayrhofen 2022



Should Black:

A) play 43...♗b6 and allow the exchange of rooks, or
B) play something else?

Show/Hide Solution

(Tactics)

Apologies reader, we put in a trap.

43...♗b6? was played in the game, which was drawn 20 moves later.

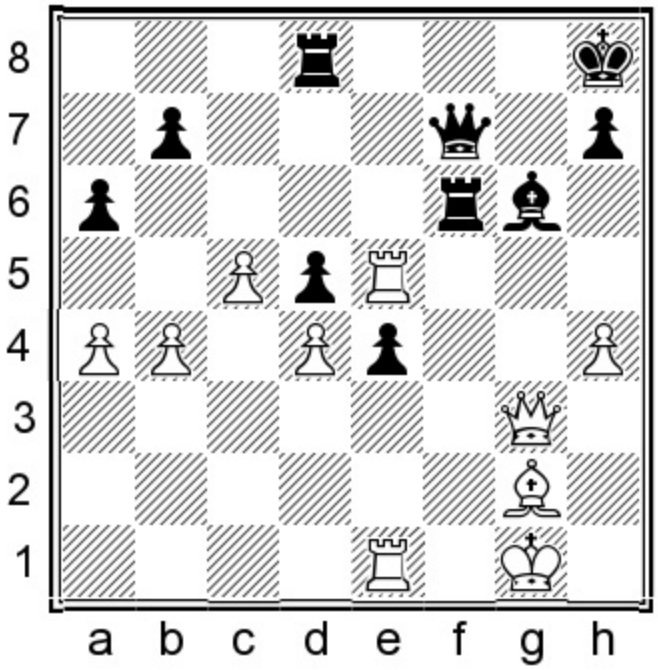
Instead, Black wins in one move with

43...♗g1!

Looking for candidate moves is important...

154. Floryan Eugene – Jean-Luc Chabanon

France 2022



Should White:

A) exchange rooks with 37.♖f1, or
B) advance his queenside pawns with 37.b5?

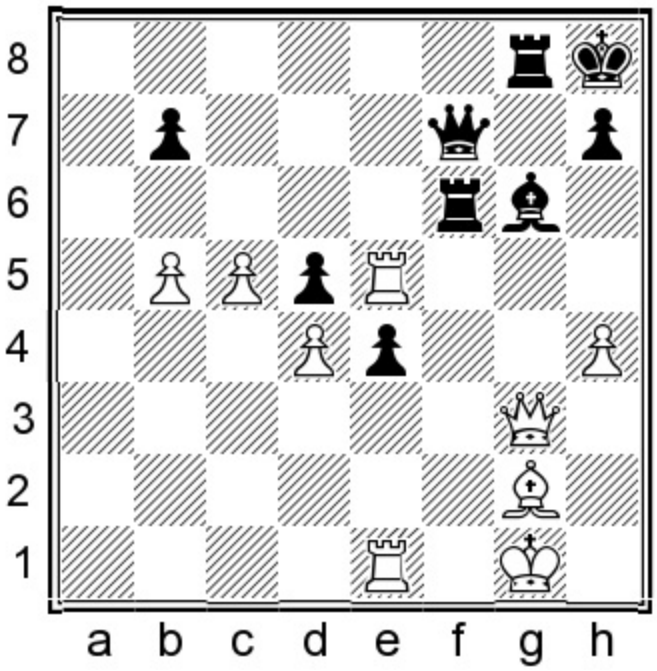
Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

White played:

37.b5? axb5 38.axb5 ♖g8!?

Even stronger was 38...♗f5!!, preventing the rook from coming to g5 in response to ...♖g8. 39.♖f1 ♖g8 40.♕h2 e3! Freeing the e4-square, allowing the bishop to join the attack. 41.♖xe3 ♗e4 42.♖g3 ♖f8! White has managed to defend against the pressure on g2, but now can't stop the invasion through the f-file. His position is hopeless. 43.♖xf6 ♕xf6 44.♕h3 ♕xd4† 45.♔h2 ♗f5–+



39.♖g5 h6 40.♖g4 ♖f8! 41.♕e3 ♔h7 42.♖g3 ♗h5 43.♔h1 ♖f4

Black still achieved a winning position but the game was drawn in 58 moves.

37.♖f1!

There is no rush to advance the pawns on the queenside. First, it's important to prevent Black from organizing an attack against the white king. The rook on e1 doesn't have any particular function and it would be good to trade it for the rook on f6, minimizing Black's attacking potential.

37...♖xf1†

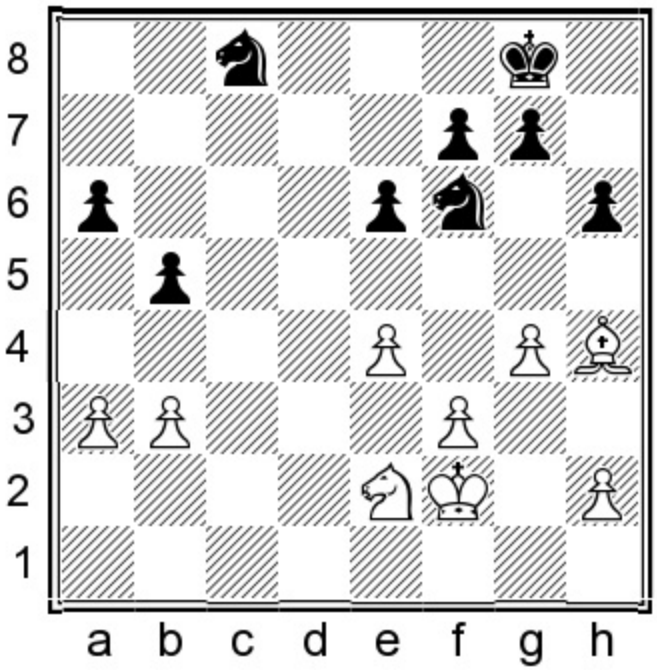
Avoiding the exchange could lead to trouble for Black, for example: 37...♖f8 38.♖xf6 ♕xf6 39.♖xd5+–, or 37...♗f5 38.♖f4 ♖g8 39.♕f2 e3 40.♕f3! where Black is playing with fire and must find a spectacular sequence to stay in the game: 40...♗e4 41.♖xf6 e2! 42.♕xe2 ♕xf6

38.♗xf1 ♖g8 39.♗g2=

White's king is safe, and the position is balanced.

155. Alexey Sarana – Zhandos Agmanov

Novi Sad 2022



Should White:

A) reduce material with 30.♗xf6, or
B) improve his king with 30.♔e3?

Show/Hide Solution

(Eliminating defenders)

30.♗xf6!

The bishop did not have much use anyway. White takes out a defender, and is able to quickly penetrate with his king to attack the black pawns on the queenside.

If instead White plays 30.♔e3 then after 30...♘d7 Black is able to set up a defensive barrier preventing the king getting in. For example, Black is holding after: 31.♔d4 ♘a7 32.♔c3 e5 33.♗f2 ♘c6

30...gxf6 31.♔e3 ♘b6 32.♔d4 ♘d7 33.♔c3 ♔f8

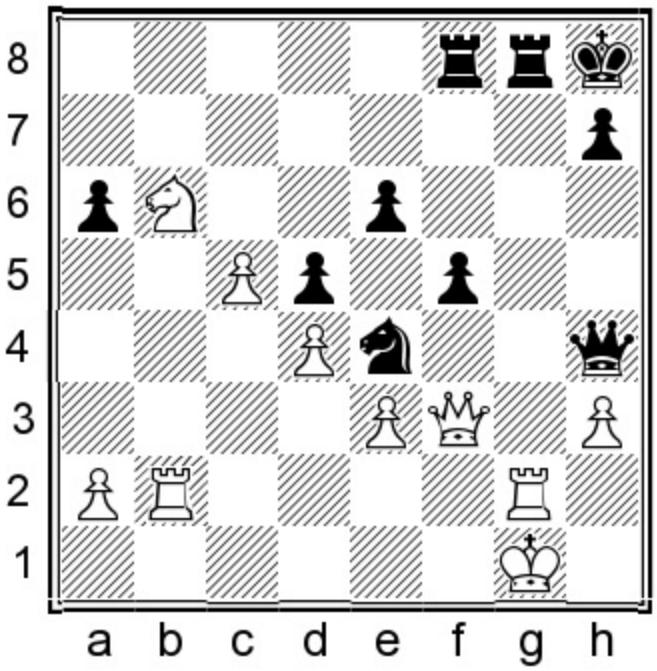
If 33...a5, 34.♘d4+– wins.

34.♔b4 ♔e7 35.♔a5 ♔d6 36.b4

1–0

156. Cemil Can Ali Marandi – Guillermo Vazquez

New York 2022



Should White:

A) seek to exchange queens with 33.♕f4, or
B) play 33.♔h2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

The game went:

33.♔h2

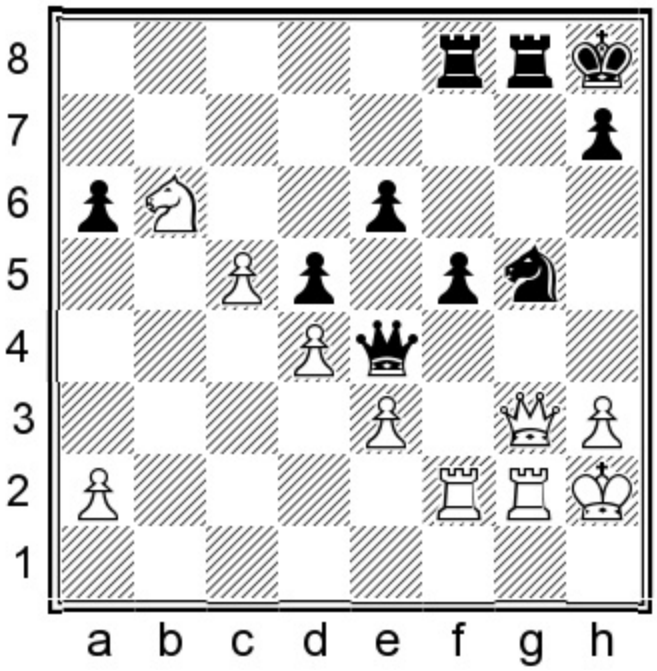
Which allowed Black to stay in the game.

33...♘g5 34.♕g3 ♕e4?

34...♕h5! was better. 35.♖bf2 ♖f7 36.c6 ♖fg7 37.♘d7 ♘e4 38.♕e5 ♘xf2 39.♖xg7 ♕xh3† 40.♔g1 ♖xg7† 41.♔xf2 ♕g2† 42.♔e1 ♕b2 Black has just enough to make a draw by perpetual.

35.♖bf2

Now White is winning again since Black can't create a single threat.



35...f4

The best try, adding a bit of chaos.

35...♘f7? is met by: 36.♕f4!+–

36.exf4 ♘f7 37.♕h4 ♕xd4 38.♘d7 ♖xg2† 39.♖xg2 ♖g8 40.♖xg8†

White again missed a chance to go into a winning endgame, perhaps underestimating the value of the passed c-pawn.

40.♕f6†! ♕xf6 41.♖xg8† ♔xg8 42.♘xf6† ♔g7 43.♘d7 ♘d8 44.♘b8+– The white knight dominates its counterpart and the pawn advances. 44...♔f6 45.c6 ♘f7 46.c7 ♘d6 47.♘d7† ♔e7 48.♘b6

40...♔xg8 41.♕g4†

With both kings open it is difficult for White to escape the checks. The game was agreed drawn here.

½–½.

33.♕f4!

Having already created a strong passed pawn on the queenside, White's prospects in the endgame are excellent. However, White can't convert this advantage as long as Black is creating counterplay against his king. Therefore it makes sense to exchange queens.

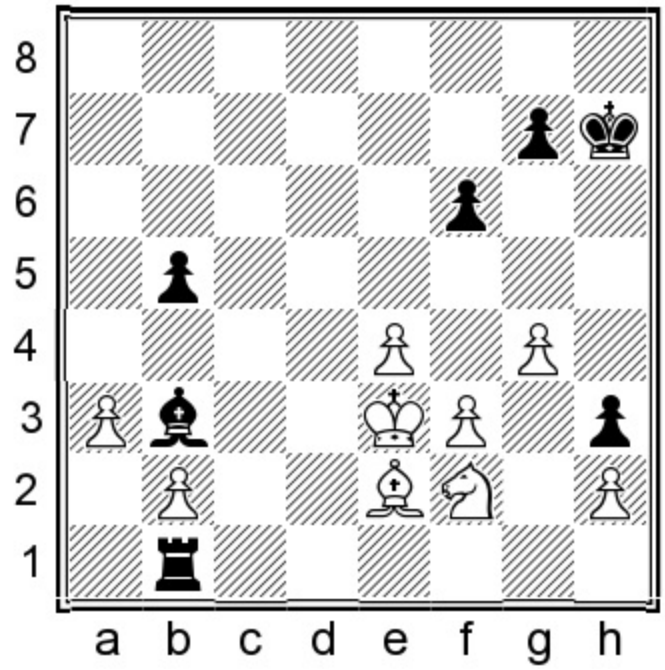
33...♕xf4

33...♕e1† 34.♔h2 is completely winning for White.

34.exf4+–

White has a winning endgame.

Terme Catez 2022



Should Black defend the b5-pawn with:

A) 58...♗c4, or
B) 58...♗a4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Remove defenders)
58...♗a4? was a strange move. The bishop is badly placed on a4, and the bishop on e2 is useful in defending the 2nd rank. The game went: 59.b4 ♖b3† 60.♔d4∓ Stockfish 16 calls this equal, but for humans, it is clear that White is the defending side. 60...♖b2 (60...♖xa3 61.♘xh3 ♖a2 62.♗d3 ♖xh2 63.♘f4 would not give Black any winning chances.) 61.♔e3 ♖b3† 62.♔d4 ½–½

58...♗c4!

Eliminating White's best defender is the way to win this position.

59.♘d1

Passive defence is the most natural, but it does not work.

Black wins after 59.♘xh3 ♗xe2 60.♔xe2 ♖xb2†.

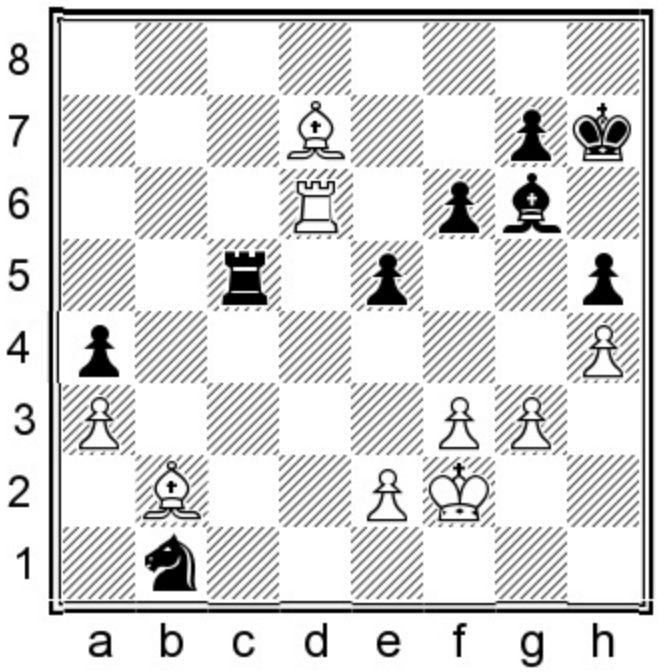
White cannot play actively. 59.♗xc4 bxc4 60.♔d4 ♖xb2 61.♘xh3 g5! The principled move, but not the only one. 62.♔xc4 ♖xh2 63.♘g1 ♖g2 64.♘h3 ♖g3 65.♘f2 ♖xf3 66.♘d3 ♖g3 Black wins.

59...♗xe2 60.♔xe2 ♔g6 61.f4 ♔f7 62.♔d2 ♔e6 63.♔e2 ♔d6–+

The black king invades.

158. Alexandr Predke – Aryan Tari

Riga 2021



Should White:

A) try to exchange rooks with 41.♖c6, or
B) keep the rooks with 41.♖b6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

41.♖b6?

41.♖c6! was correct and it will be seen on move 43.

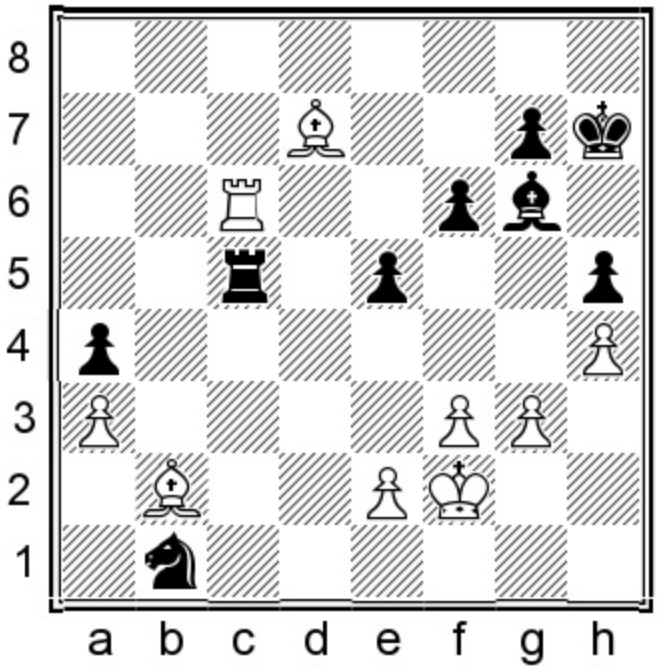
41...♘c3 42.♖d6 ♘b1?

Looking for a draw. Black missed a chance to solve the problem of his position, the awkward position of his knight.

42...♖c7! would have kept Black in the game, since White can't create any further threats.

43.♖c6!

White wants to exchange the strongest of the black pieces. This allows him to bring his king in and exploit the unfortunate position of the black knight.



43...♖b5

This is a sad decision, accepting a passive position. But exchanging rooks wasn't a playable alternative:

43...♖xc6 44.♗xc6 ♗c2 Black manages to defend his weakness, but now the white king comes close, and the knight is trapped. 45.♔e1 ♔g6 46.e4 ♔f7 47.♗b5 ♔e6 48.♔e2 ♔d6 49.♗d3+–

44.♗c1 ♖d5

After 44...♖b7 45.♗c8 ♖b5 46.♗e6 White will win slowly, combining small threats and improvements, while Black can only move his rook on the b-file.

45.♗e6 ♖d1 46.♖c8 ♗e8 47.♗e3 ♗d7

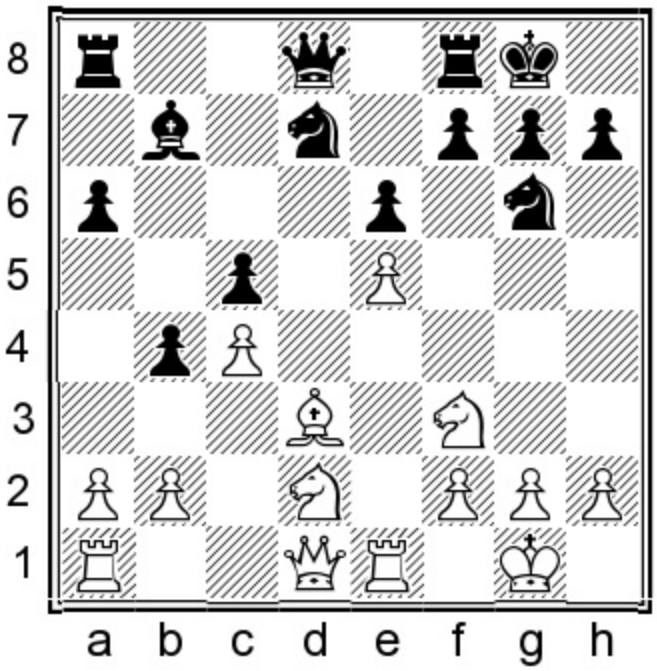
47...♗b5 loses to: 48.♗f5† g6 49.♖c7† ♔g8 50.♗xg6+–

48.♖d8 ♗xe6 49.♖xd1

White won the exchange and the game later in 63 moves.

159. Anapola Borda Rodas – Alan Pichot

Argentina 2022



Should White play:

A) 16.♗xg6, or
B) 16.♕c2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)

White played the placid 16.♕c2 ♕c7 17.♖e3, when after 17...♖fd8 it was not too late to capture on g6 and follow up with h2-h4 with a slight advantage. Instead, White played 18.♖ae1 ♘df8! Black has defended the kingside and is ready to manoeuvre along the d-file or improve the knight from g6 via e7-c6-d4. The position is level. Black won in 37 moves.

16.♗xg6!

A multi-purpose move. It weakens Black's kingside and gets rid of a bishop with little prospects. It also accelerates the white knights being able to control the d6-outpost and the weak g5-square. The knight was a good piece on g6, putting pressure on White's e-pawn, and there was the possibility of it reaching an even better square via e7-f5 or e7-c6. Now Black is passive; his only good minor piece is his bishop, which will also have to be exchanged later to stop the invasion of a knight on d6.

16...hxg6

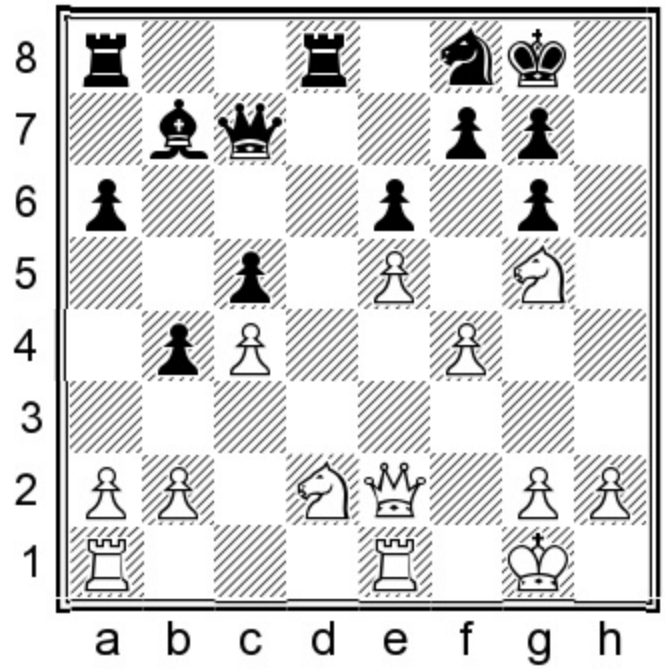
16...fxg6 17.♘e4± followed by ♕d6 is terrible for Black. His position is full of weaknesses.

17.♕e2

White has plenty of time to reroute the knight to d6.

17.♘e4?! ♗xe4 18.♖xe4 ♕e7± would be less troublesome for Black.

17...♕c7 18.♘g5 ♖fd8 19.f4 ♘f8



20.♘de4 ♗xe4

A necessary concession. Black cannot allow the knight to reach d6.

White wins after: 20...♖d4 21.♘d6! ♖xf4 22.♖f1

21.♘xe4

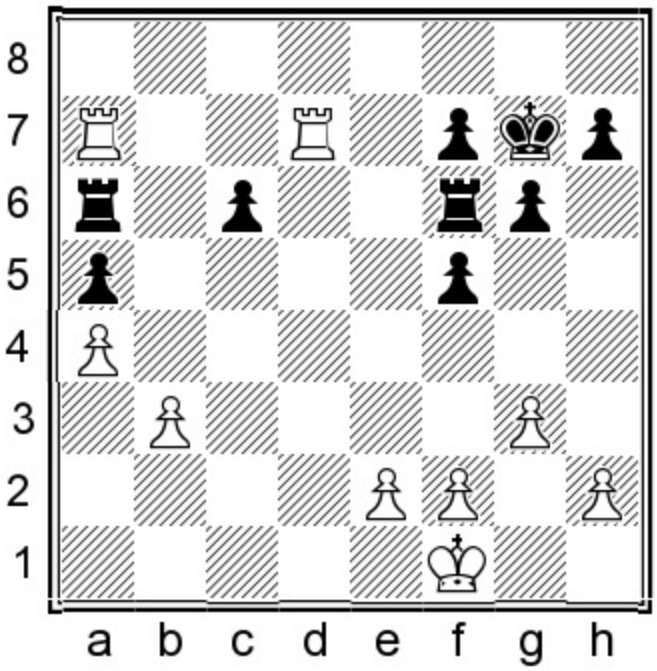
21.♕xe4!? is also strong.

21...♖d4 22.g3 ♖ad8 23.h4±

Black controls the d-file, but cannot use it to do anything. White can manoeuvre cautiously and find the right moment to go for more.

160. Ilia Smirin – Erwin L'Ami

Chennai Olympiad 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange rooks with 28...♖xa7, or
B) play 28...♖b6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Escaping with a draw)

After 28...♖b6? 29.♖d3! c5 30.♖xa5 Black could not improve his rooks. He had to give up another pawn to create some counterplay, which was insufficient to save the game. 30...c4 31.bxc4 ♖b1† 32.♔g2 ♖b2 33.♔f3 ♖c2 34.c5 ♖e6 35.♖e3 ♖c6 36.♖b5 ♖a2 37.a5+– White won 12 moves later.

28...♖xa7!

In rook endgames the activity of the rook plays a key role in determining whether a position can be defended, sometimes regardless of the material count. Here Black needs to hurry up and improve the position of his awful rook on f6.

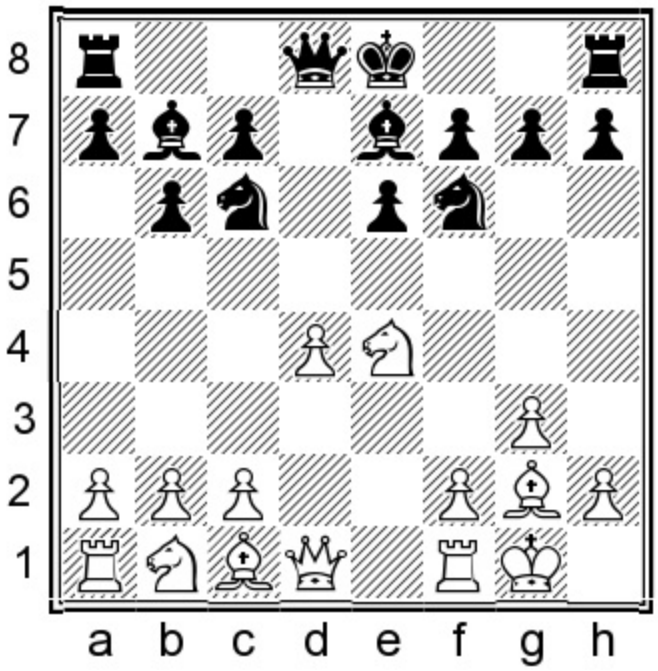
29.♖xa7 ♖d6! 30.♔e1

After 30.♖xa5 ♖d1† 31.♔g2 ♖b1, Black wins the b3-pawn and will hold the endgame with the rook behind the passed pawn. For example: 32.♖a6 ♖xb3 33.♖xc6 ♖a3 34.♖c4 g5

30...♖d4 31.♖xa5 ♖b4 32.♖a6 ♖xb3 33.♖xc6 ♖a3 34.♖a6 g5±

The endgame should be a draw.

161. German Spata – Fernando Peralta



Should Black:

A) exchange knights with 9...♘xe4, or
B) finish his development with 9...0-0?

Show/Hide Solution

(Gaining time)

Black played 9...0-0?! 10.c3 ♘xe4 11.♗xe4 ♘a5, when after 12.♗xb7 ♘xb7 13.♕f3 ♕d5 14.♕xd5 exd5, the position was level, although Black later won.

9...♕d7 10.♘xf6† ♗xf6 11.c3 0-0-0 is also only equal.

9...♘xe4!

It is difficult to seriously consider exchanging the knights at such an early stage. But Black is already facing a critical moment. With all his pieces developed he should seek to exploit this advantage. The exchange on e4 gains time and misplaces the white bishop, leaving the king less protected. White will need time to regroup and protect his king, while Black can act immediately.

10.♗xe4 ♕d7!

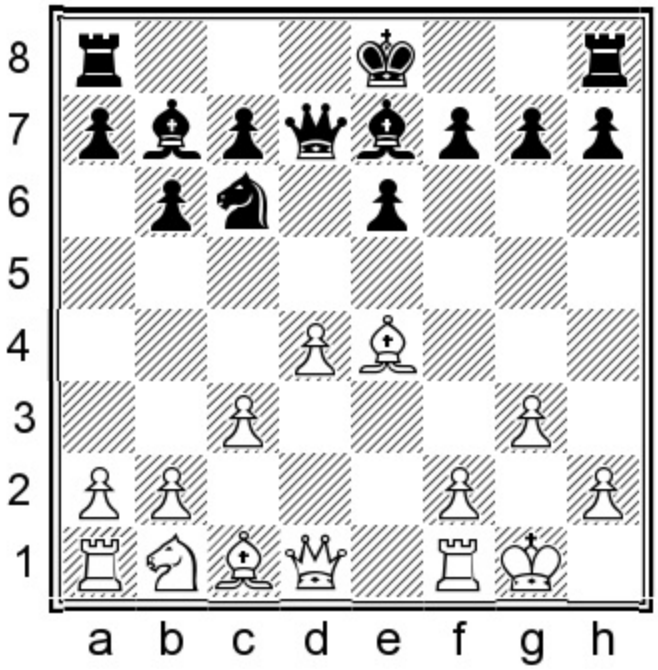
The key idea.

11.c3

The d-pawn will soon need protection.

11.d5? would make things worse. Opening the position while undeveloped is not a good idea. 11...exd5 12.♕xd5 (12.♗xd5 0-0-0–+) 12...♕xd5 13.♗xd5 0-0-0 Black has a winning lead in

development. Next comes ...♘d4.



11...0-0-0 12.♘d2 h5!

Black has a promising attack. If White tries to rearrange his pieces with:

13.♗g2?

There comes:

13...h4 14.♘f3

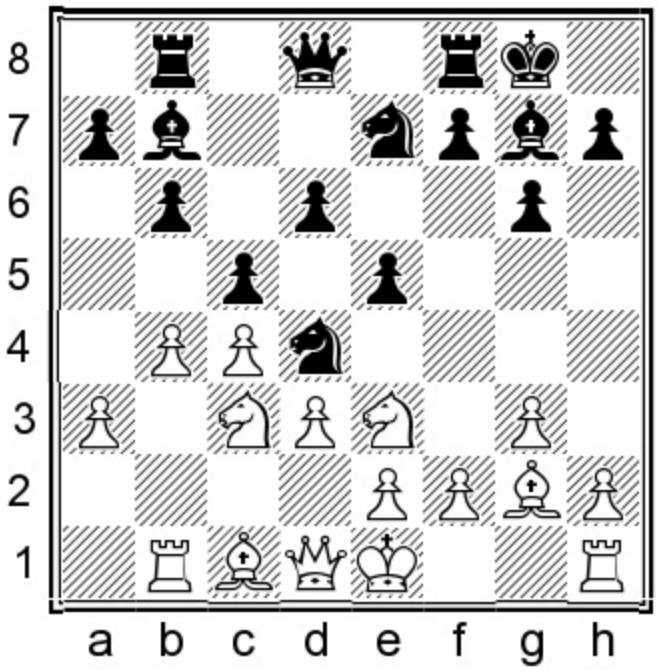
Or 14.♕e2 hxg3 15.hxg3 g5 with a decisive attack.

14...h3!? 15.♗h1 e5

White collapses in the centre.

162. Sam Shankland – Nils Grandelius

Wijk aan Zee 2022



Should White:

A) exchange bishops with 13.♗xb7 followed by ♘ed5, or
B) play 13.♘ed5 immediately?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

The difference between the two continuations is nuanced and the engines will only tell them apart by small decimals. But they are real, and it is important to understand why. Black's light-squared bishop does not have any meaningful function. Its only job is to fight for the d5-square, which Black is largely playing around anyway. But without the g2-bishop, White will be vulnerable on the light squares on the kingside in the long term.

Sam chose: 13.♗xb7 ♖xb7 14.bxc5 dxc5 15.0-0 f5 16.♘ed5 ♘xd5 17.♘xd5∓ The game was drawn in 45 moves. White has managed to establish a strong knight on d5. But Black can coordinate his pieces harmoniously with ...♖bf7 and ...♕d6. This will start an offensive on the kingside, where White is weaker due to the absence of his fianchettoed bishop.

13.♘ed5!

A possible variation could be:

13...♘xd5 14.♘xd5 ♕d7

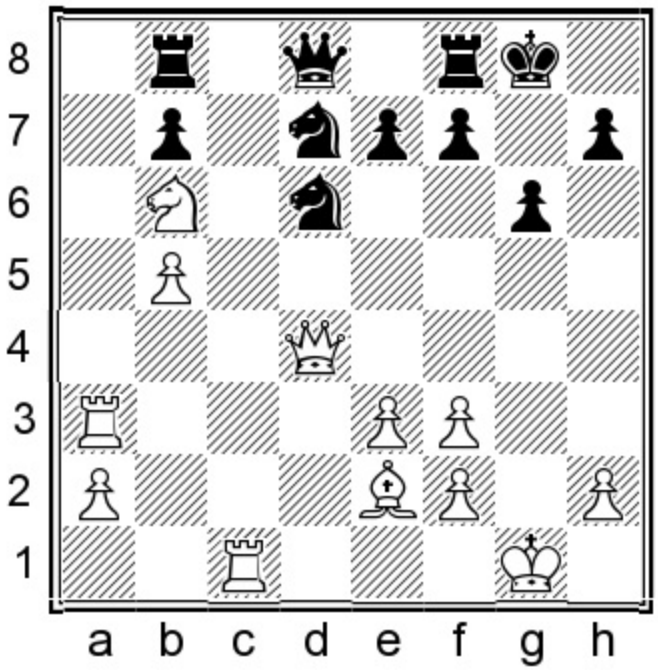
Black cannot easily get rid of the powerful knight on d5. For example: 14...♘c6 15.0-0 ♘e7 16.♕a4! Putting pressure on the light squares and now if 16...♘xd5 17.cxd5! keeps the bishop passive on b7.

15.0-0 f5 16.a4!?

With a promising game for White.

163. Jonas Buhl Bjerre – Toms Kantans

Chennai Olympiad 2022



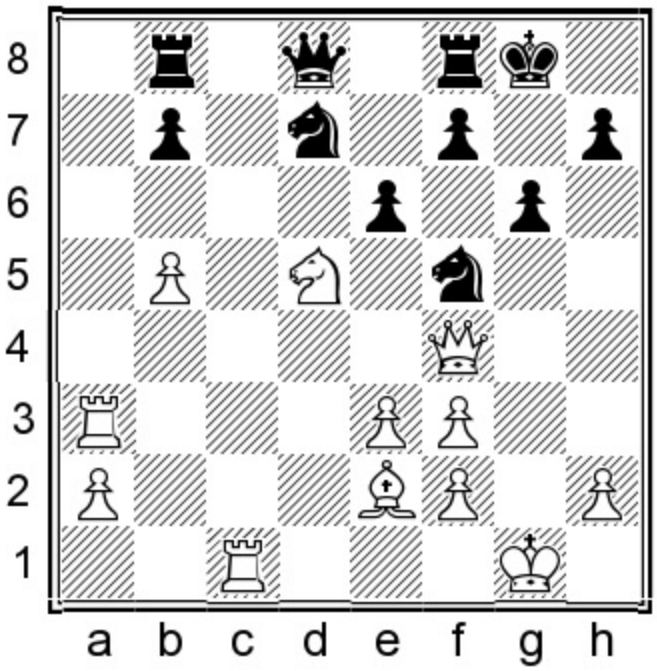
Should White:

A) exchange knights with 23.♘xd7, or
B) play 23. ♘d5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

The game went: 23.♘d5?! ♘f5 (23...e6! 24.♘c3 ♘f5⇄ would remove the queen from her powerful position, while paving the way for ideas like ...♖c8 and ...♕g5† or ...♕e7. The coordination of Black's pieces improves significantly.) 24.♕f4 e6



After 25.♘b4± White had a small advantage, although Black went on to win in 56 moves.

Instead of moving the threatened knight, White had a fantastic but hard-to-find idea: 25.♖d3!! exd5 26.♖xd5 ♘g7 27.♕d4 ♘f5 28.♕g4± White wins the piece back while keeping some advantage, although Black is not without counterplay after 28...♖e8! 29.♖xf5 ♘e5 30.♕g3 ♕d2 31.♖c5 ♕xe2 32.♖fxe5 b6 33.♖xe8† ♖xe8∞.

23.♘xd7

With a minimal material advantage, it's a matter of avoiding counterplay. The white knight has no particular function. Even more importantly, White gains time with the exchange to consolidate his domination of the c-file and put his pawns in motion.

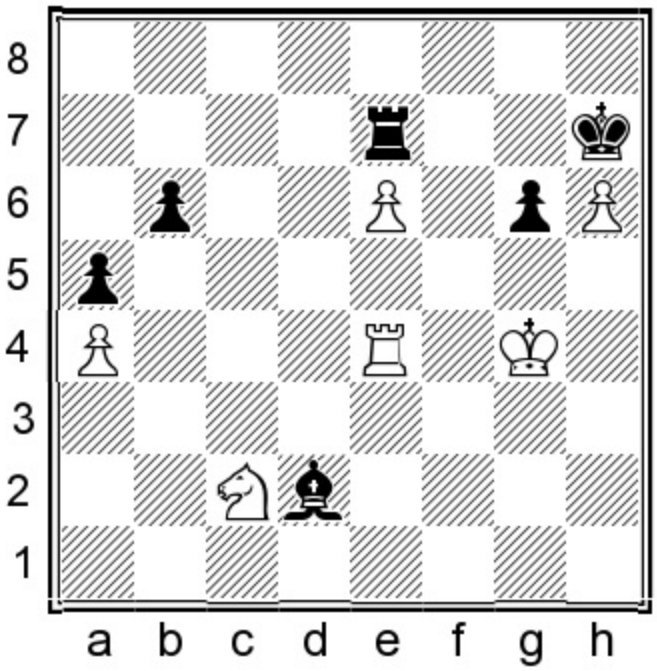
23...♕xd7 24.♖ac3

White is in control. Next he will try to create a passed pawn and penetrate to the 7th rank.

24...♖a8 25.a4+–

164. Alexander Timerkhanov – Mark Gluhovsky

Sochi 2021



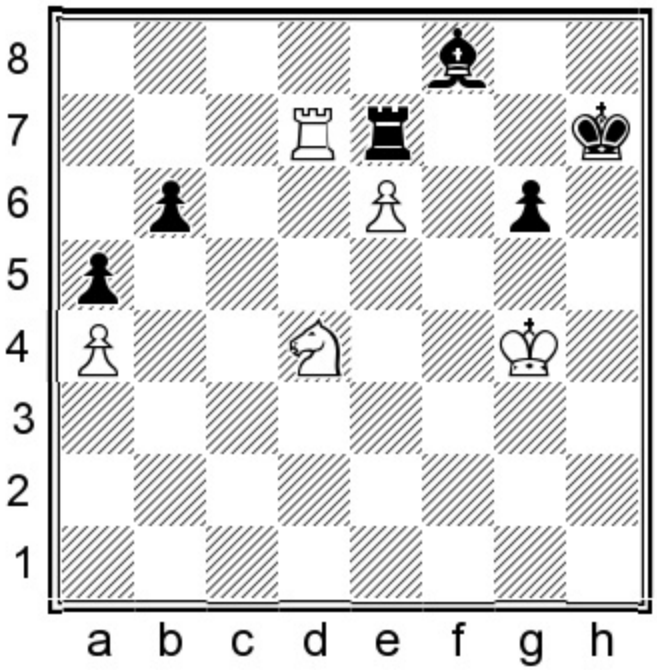
Should White:

A) seek the exchange of rooks with 49.♖d4 and 50.♖d7, or
B) allow the exchange of minor pieces with 49.♘e3?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing defender/Invasion)

49.♖d4? was played in the game, which continued: 49...♗xh6 50.♖d7 ♗f8 51.♘d4 (51.♔f4 ♖xd7 52.exd7 ♗e7 53.♔e5 g5! would also give Black enough counterplay. It is close, but it holds.)



51...♖xd7 (Another way to play was 51...♔g7 52.♘c6 ♔f6, also holding. The idea is 53.♖d8 ♖xe6 54.♖xf8† ♔g7 55.♖c8 ♖e4† and White does not have enough material to create winning chances.)

52.exd7 ♗e7 53.♘c6 ♗f6 54.d8=♕ ♗xd8 55.♘xd8 ♔g7 Black draws by a tempo. 56.♔g5 ♔f8 57.♘c6 ♔f7 58.♘d4 ♔e7 59.♘b5 ♔e6 Draw agreed. ½–½

Incidentally, 49.♘d4 ♔xh6 50.♘c6 ♖e8 is not dangerous for Black. The knight has no function on c6.

The correct strategy is:

49.♘e3!

This enables the white king to invade on the dark squares, either d6 or f6. It also prevents the defensive rerouting of Black's bishop seen in the game.

49...♗xe3

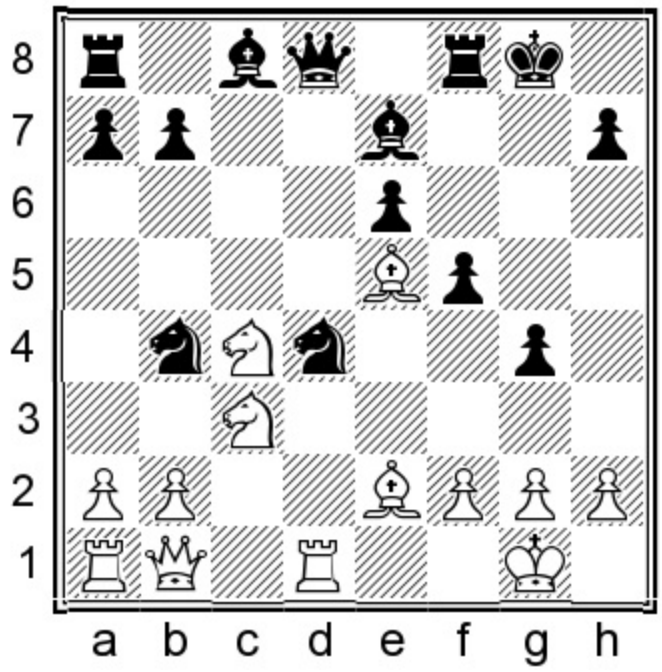
Black has no choice but to take. The knight cannot be allowed to go to d5 and f6.

50.♖xe3 ♔xh6 51.♔f4!

Black will not be able to prevent the white king from making it to d6. After this comes ♖c3-c8 or ♖h3-h8. Black will not be able to hold the blockade of the e-pawn and White wins.

165. Nigel Birtwistle – Katarzyna Toma

Torquay 2022



Should Black:

A) play 19...♘xe2†, or

B) keep the tension with 19...♘bc6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

In the game Black took on e2: 19...♘xe2†? 20.♘xe2 ♘d5 21.♘e3!?± The game was drawn in 58 moves. (Stronger was 21.♘f4! ♗f6 22.♕c1± with a firm grip on the dark squares. It's not easy for Black to complete her development.)

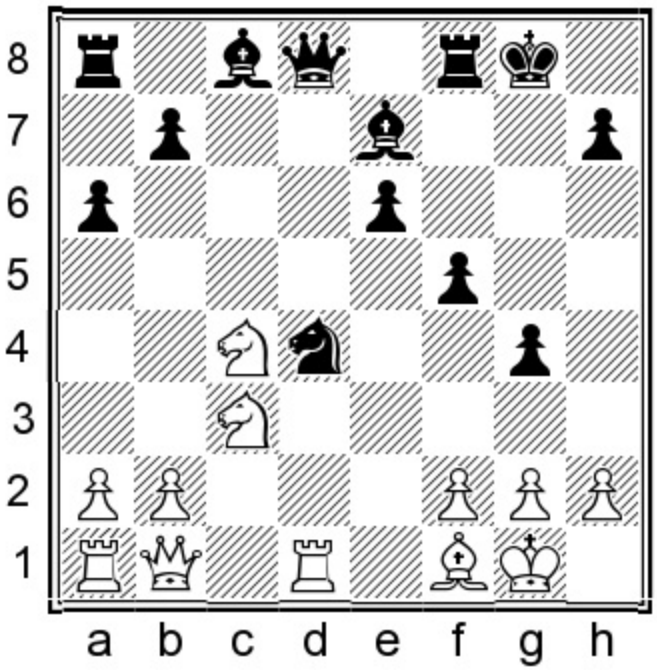
19...♘bc6!

Black should keep her best piece on the board, and that is the knight on d4. However, that isn't the only factor here. Black is a pawn up, but the dark squares around her kingside are weak. It is essential to eliminate the piece that can exploit this weakness, that being the bishop on e5.

20.♗xd4 ♘xd4 21.♗f1

White threatens 22.♘b5 so the simplest answer would be:

21...a6



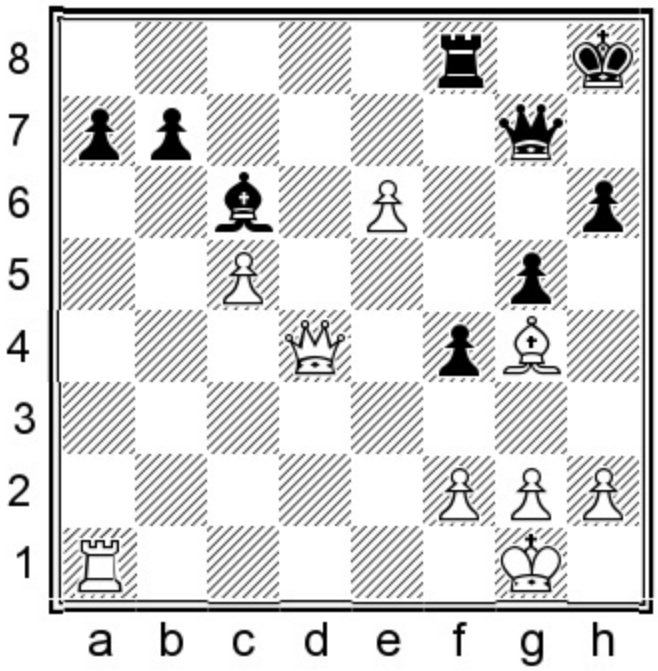
22.♕c1!

But not: 22.♘e2? ♘xe2† 23.♗xe2 ♕c7∓

22...b5 23.♕e3 ♗f6 24.♘e2 ♘xe2† 25.♗xe2 ♕e7 26.♘b6 ♖b8

The position is approximately equal.

166. Josiah Stearman – Joshua Sheng



Should White:

A) exchange queens, or
B) avoid the exchange?

Show/Hide Solution

(King safety)

38.♕d1!

This would have been strong.

Mistaken was: 38.♕xg7†? ♔xg7 39.♖xa7 The extra pawn has no value. For example: 39...♔f6 40.♖a1 ♗d5

38...a6

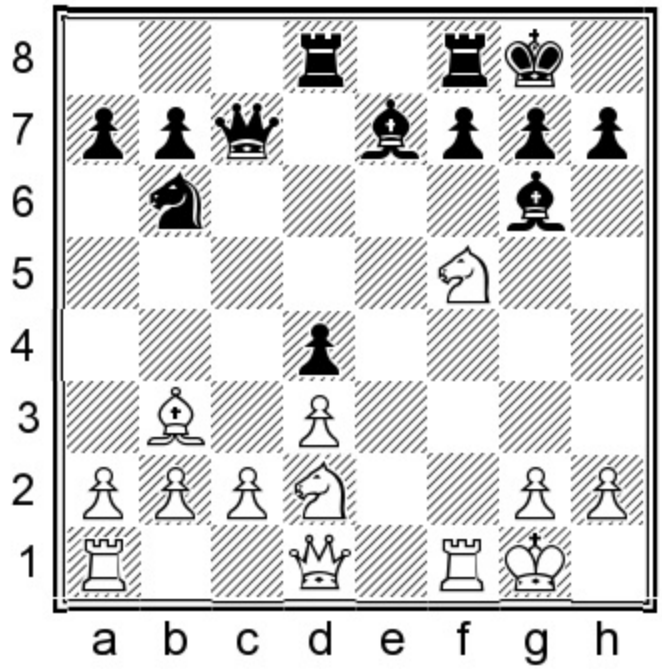
White was threatening to take on a7. White now has a winning advantage.

39.♖a2+–

White is also winning after 39.♕e1 ♕e7 40.♖d1. The key tactical point here is that 40...♕xc5 would lose in many ways. White can do whatever he wants with the extra time. The simplest is probably to remove the defence of the d7-square with 41.♗f3!?, which is entirely based on tactics. 41...♗b5 (Or 41...♗xf3 42.♖d7 ♕f5 43.♕c3† ♖f6 44.gxf3 and White wins. For example, after 44...♕xe6 45.♕c8† ♕g8 46.♖d8.) 42.e7 ♖e8 43.♕e6 ♕xe7 44.♕xh6† ♕h7 This is forced, as otherwise White has a check on d5. 45.♕xg5 and Black will not be able to defend his king for long.

167. Mario Sibilio – Artem Gilevych

Montesilvano 2022



Should White:

A) capture on e7, or
B) play 18.♕f3?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing defenders)

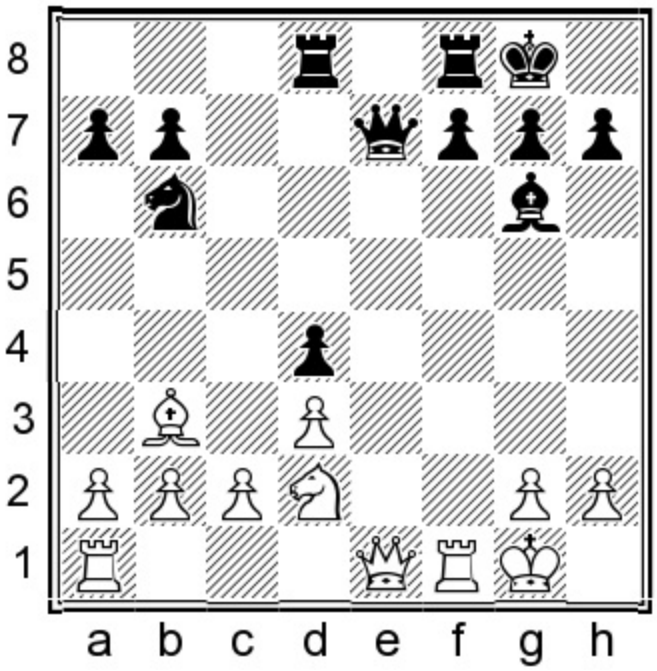
The game continued: 18.♕f3?! ♔h8? (Black should have played 18...♗xf5! 19.♕xf5 g6 20.♕f3 ♔h8 followed by ...f7-f5, where he has no major weaknesses, and it is White who needs to worry about the weak e3-square.) 19.♖ae1?! (Again, 19.♘xe7! ♕xe7 20.♖ae1+– would have given White a large advantage.) 19...♗b4!± Black was only a little worse and later drew.

18.♘xe7†!

After eliminating Black's dark-squared bishop, the weakness of the d4-pawn and the dark squares becomes noticeable. White will use those squares to improve the activity of his pieces. Also, the remaining minor pieces in Black's camp are passive and unable to generate counterplay.

18...♕xe7 19.♕e1!

Other options are good too, but this is strongest. White brings the queen to the kingside with a gain of tempo. Black cannot exchange queens, as the weakness of the d-pawn would make the black position disintegrate.



19...♕d6

19...♕c7 is similar. White can continue with 20.♘f3 followed by ♕h4 or ♕a5, putting pressure everywhere.

19...♕e3† is not an option. After 20.♕xe3 dxe3 21.♘f3 the e3-pawn will soon fall.

20.♕h4

White is better, though there is plenty of play ahead. Black should probably begin by improving the knight with:

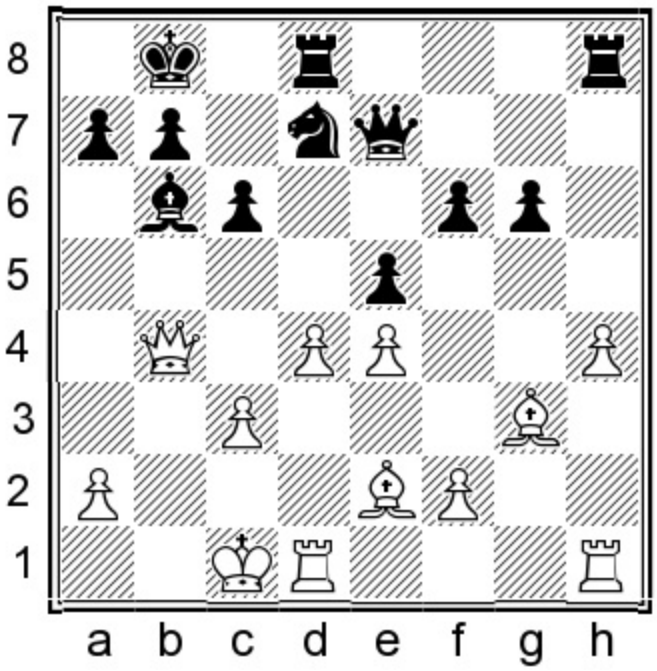
20...♘d7

White has a wide range of good moves to choose from, including the natural:

21.♖ae1±

168. Alvar Alonso Rosell – Mariya Muzychuk

Paterna 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange queens with 22...♕xb4, or
B) avoid the exchange?

Show/Hide Solution

(King safety)
22...♕xb4? entered a slightly worse endgame where only White can play for a win, thanks to the two bishops and perhaps later a passed pawn in the centre. 23.cxb4 ♗c7 24.d5 (24.dxe5! was even stronger. 24...♘xe5 25.♖xd8† ♖xd8 26.♖d1 White has a slightly better endgame due to the bishops.) 24...cxd5 (24...a5! was close to equalising.) 25.♖xd5 White was a little better but could not convert his advantage. The game was drawn in 40 moves.

22...c5!

The most aggressive. With the white king being somewhat weak on c1, Black should try to keep the queens on the board to preserve her attacking chances.

22...♕f7 and 22...♕g7 were also playable.

23.♕a3 ♗c7 24.f3 ♗d6

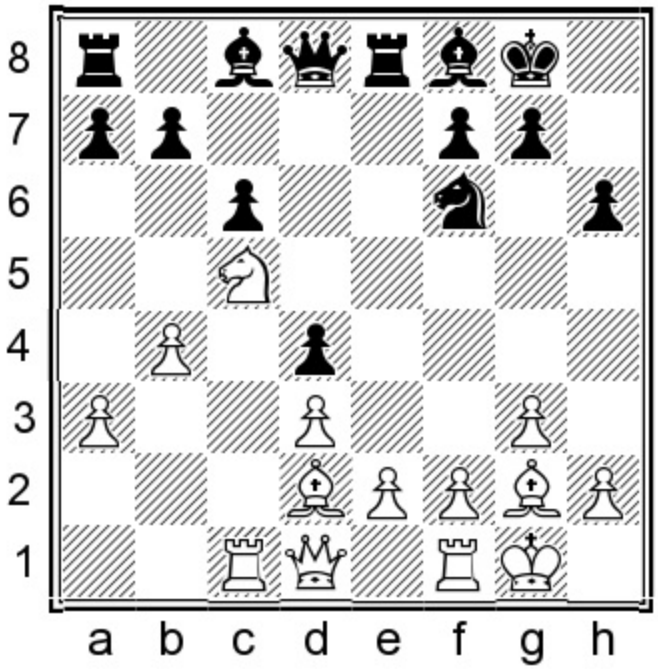
Or: 24...♖c8!?

25.dxe5 ♗xe5∓

White will have to defend well to hold the game, with lots of weaknesses and an exposed king.

169. Nodirbek Abdusattorov – Shakhriyar Mamedyarov

Baku (rapid) 2022



Should Black play:

A) 15...♘d5, or
B) 15...♗xc5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)
15...♘d5? as played by Mamedyarov was the weaker option. After 16.♘b3!± Black has problems with the d4-pawn. Black played the sloppy 16...♕f6?! (16...♘b6 should have been preferred.) and later lost a tense game. White could have immediately exploited it with 17.♖c4!±, when the d4-pawn is in serious trouble.

15...♗xc5!

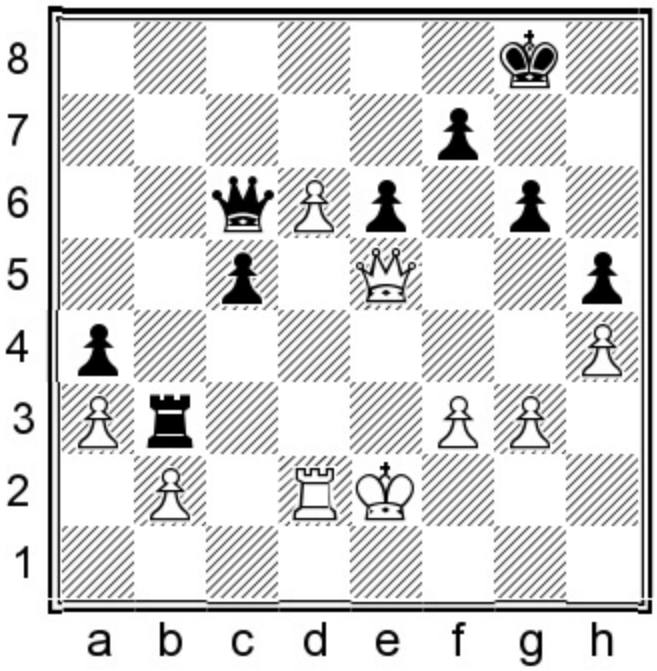
It makes perfect sense to exchange White's strongest piece, as long as it does not give White a long-term advantage with the two bishops.

16.♖xc5 ♗e6

Black's position is already the easier to play. The bishop on g2 is not as strong as it looks.

16...♗g4!? and 16...♕d7 is also good.

170. Boris Grachev – Mikhail Kobalia



Should White:

A) try to exchange queens with 40.♕e4, or
B) keep the queens with 40.♕f6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing attackers)

The game went 40.♕f6? ♕b5† 41.♔f2 ♖d3!= when Black had everything under control. The game was duly drawn on move 65.

40.♕e4!

With the rook behind the passed pawn and the king already centralised, White would win the rook endgame.

40...♕d7

The best defence, but now White begins the domination.

40...♕xe4† is hopeless, as after 41.fxe4 ♖b8 42.♔d3! the king comes in and White wins easily.

On 40...♕b5†!? White wins by creating a second weakness on the kingside. 41.♔d1 ♕f1† (41...♕d7 is the same.) 42.♔c2 ♕b5 43.♔c1 ♕d7 44.g4!

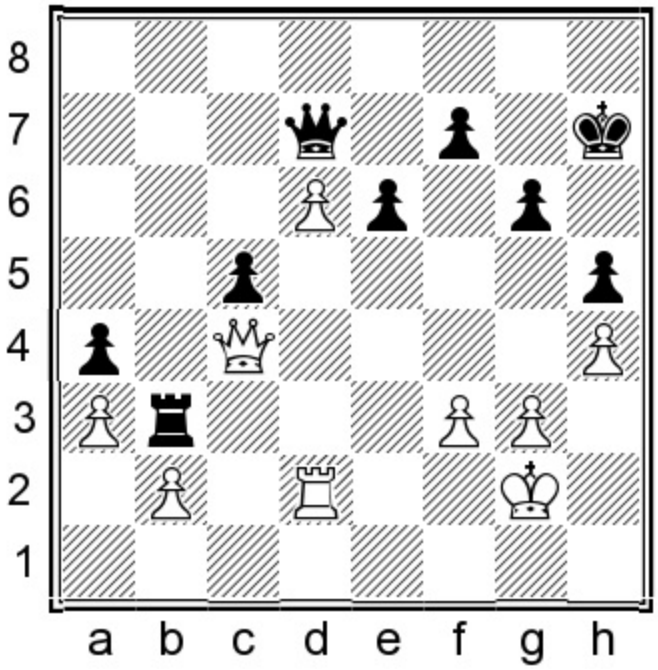
41.♕c4! ♔h7

41...♕c6? 42.♕xb3! axb3 43.d7 is a well-known tactic.

42.♔f2

Be careful in winning positions: 42.♕xc5? ♕b7 And the full point is gone.

42...♔g8 43.♔g2 ♔h7



44.♕xc5

White wins.

44...♕b7

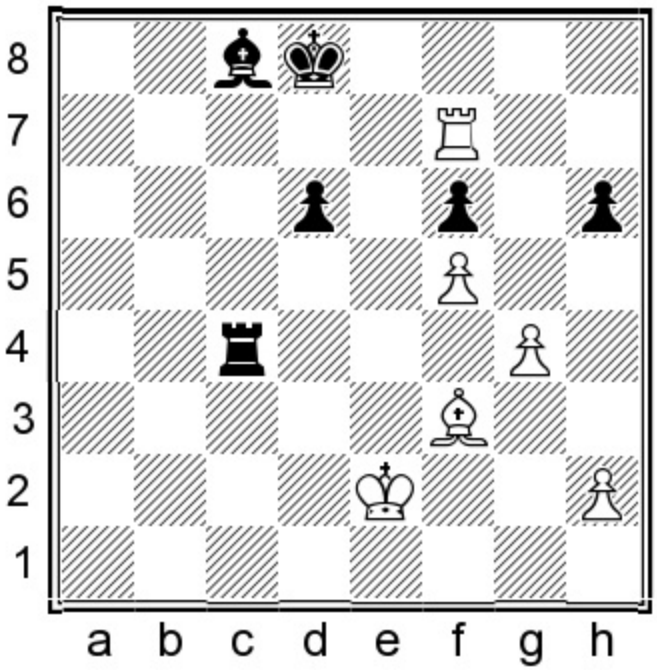
White is able to meet this simply.

45.♕f2 ♕d7 46.♕d4 ♕b7 47.♕f6 ♕d7 48.♕e7 ♖b7 49.♕xd7 ♖xd7 50.♔f2

A very instructive sequence of domination in the endgame.

171. Francisco Vallejo Pons – David Anton Guijarro

Germany 2022



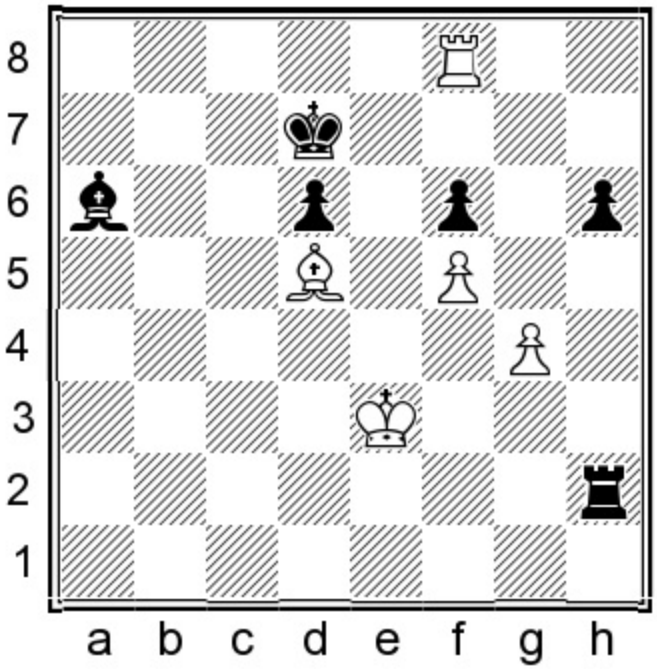
Should Black play:

A) 69...♖c2†, or
B) 69...h5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Escaping with a draw)

Black played: 69...♖c2†? 70.♔e3? (70.♔d3! ♖xh2 71.♖f8† ♔d7 72.♔e3! is the correct way to play. White will pick up the f6-pawn next, keeping pressure on Black's position.) 70...♖xh2? The losing mistake. (It was not too late to play 70...h5 71.gxh5 ♗xf5 72.♖xf6 ♗d7 73.♖xd6 ♔e7 74.♖a6 ♖xh2, with a defensible endgame.) 71.♖f8† ♔d7 72.♗d5 ♗a6



73.♖xf6+– Now Black is dominated and can't prevent White from advancing his passed pawn. 73...♗e2 74.♖g6 ♗d1 75.f6 ♖e2† 76.♔f4 ♖e8 77.♖xh6 ♗c2 78.♖h2 ♗g6 79.♖h6 ♗c2 80.♖h2 ♗g6 81.♖a2 ♖e5 82.♖a7† ♔e8 83.f7† 1–0

69...h5!

A key concept to remember when defending inferior endgames is trying to exchange as many pawns as possible. The fewer pawns on the board, the more chances to make a draw. Here Black is following that strategy, as well as getting rid of one of his weak pawns.

70.gxh5

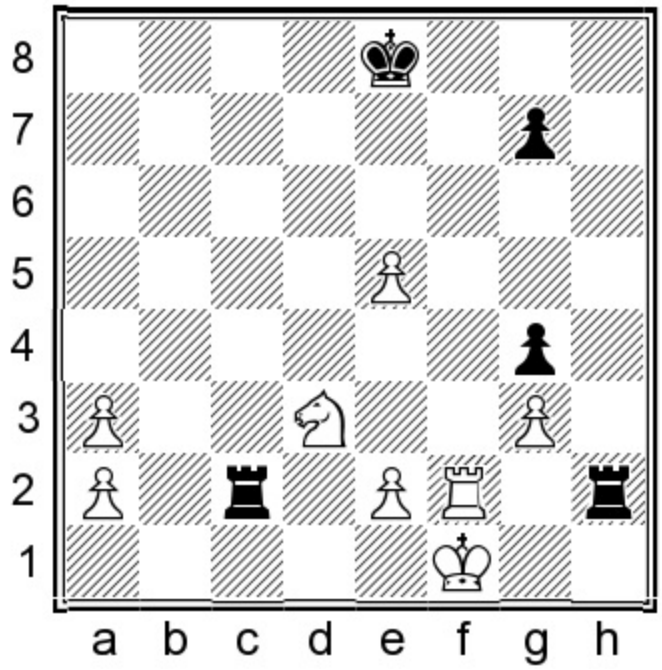
70.h3 does not improve White's chances. 70...hxg4 71.hxg4 ♖c5 Black can already think about sacrificing his bishop for the remaining pawns. For instance: 72.♖xf6 ♔e7 73.♖h6 ♗xf5

70...♗xf5 71.♖xf6 ♗g4!?

Getting a drawn rook endgame.

172. Andre Ventura Sousa – Pedro Filipe Rego

Portugal 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange rooks with 43...♖xf2†, or
B) keep rooks with 43...♖h1†?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

The game went 43...♖xf2†? 44.♔xf2 ♖xa2. Black now has only one active piece, fighting alone against the knight and the king which are now able to play an active role. Black has lost control of the game, and the position is a draw. 45.♔e3! ♔e7 46.♘c5!? (Or 46.♔f4 ♖xe2 47.♔xg4 ♖a2 48.♘f4=.) 46...♖xa3† 47.♔f4 ♖c3 48.♘d3= White eliminates the g4-pawn next and brings the knight to f4. The game was drawn in 53 moves.

43...♖h1†

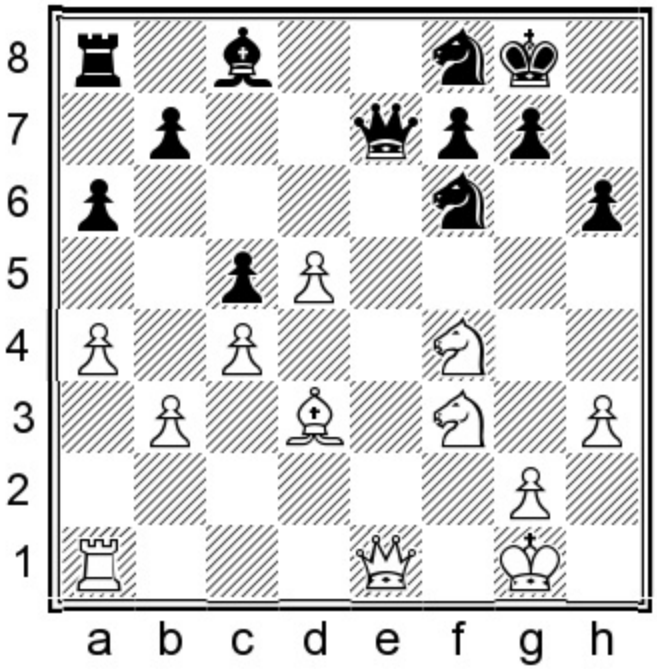
It is important to not exchange your active pieces. Black needs both rooks to attack White's weaknesses.

44.♔g2 ♖a1–+

White's weak pawns will fall one by one. Black is winning.

173. Arjun Erigaisi – Leinier Dominguez Perez

Chennai Olympiad 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange queens, or
B) play 21...♕d6?

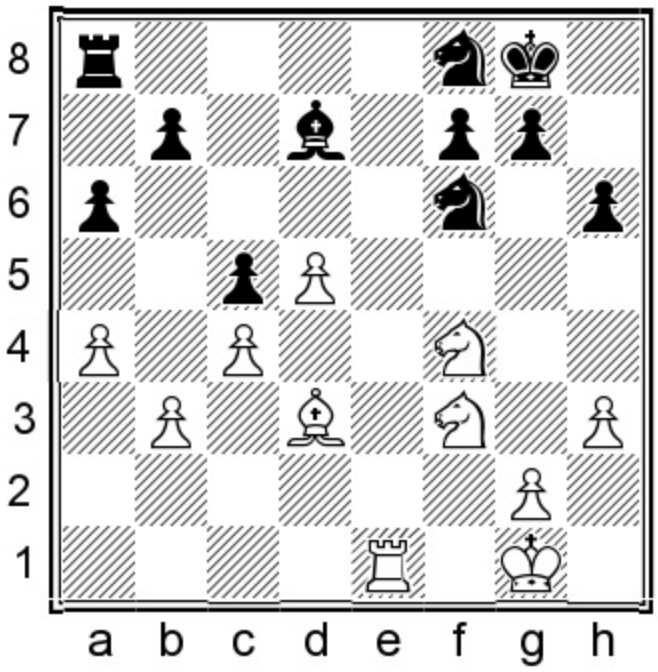
Show/Hide Solution

(Structure)

The game continued:

21...♕xe1†? 22.♖xe1 ♗d7

22...a5 is in principle better, but after 23.♖e7± White has an overwhelming advantage. 23...♗d7 24.♘e5 ♖e8 is what Black would love to play, but both 25.d6! and 25.♖xf7!? ♖xe5 26.♖xf8†! win for White.



23.a5!+–

Fixing weaknesses on the queenside.

23...♖e8 24.♖d1!?±

White won a great game. (Even stronger was: 24.♔f2!, when the spacebar variation looks like this: 24...♖xe1 25.♘xe1 g6 26.♔e3 ♔g7 27.♘e2 ♘8h7 28.♘c3 ♔f8 29.♗e2 ♔e7 30.♘d3 ♔d6 31.b4 cxb4 32.c5†+–)

21...♕d6!

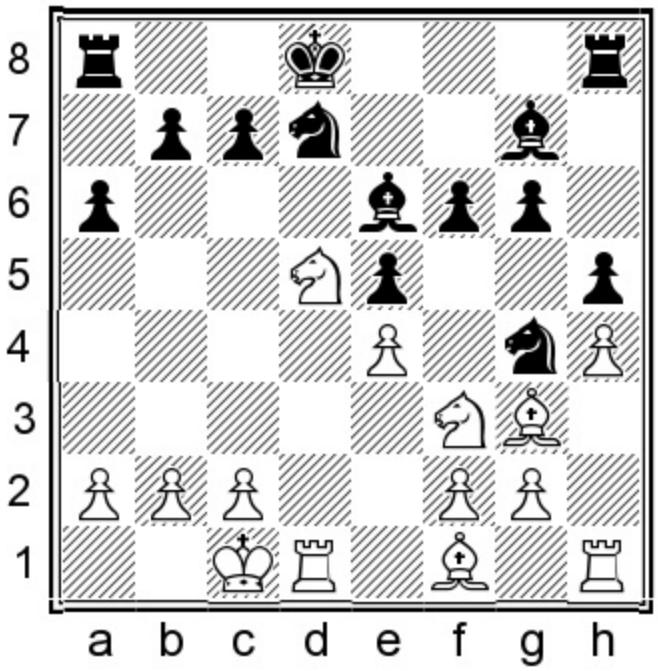
This does not give White time to play a4-a5, as the knight is hanging.

21...♕c7!± is similar to the text move.

22.♕e5 ♕xe5 23.♘xe5 a5±

Black is structurally worse, because of the strong d5-pawn, but it is his only problem, giving him reasonable chances to hold the game.

174. Jakob Leon Pajeken – Karen Movsziszian



Should Black:

A) take on d5, or
B) improve his pieces with 14...♖e8?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

14...♗xd5!

Black eliminates the strong knight on d5, while gaining time to improve his pieces and connect the rooks.

14...♗h6† 15.♔b1 ♗xd5! is similar to the solution and equally strong.

In the game Black played 14...♖e8, when the position was perhaps slightly better for him, but not more. White later won.

15.♖xd5

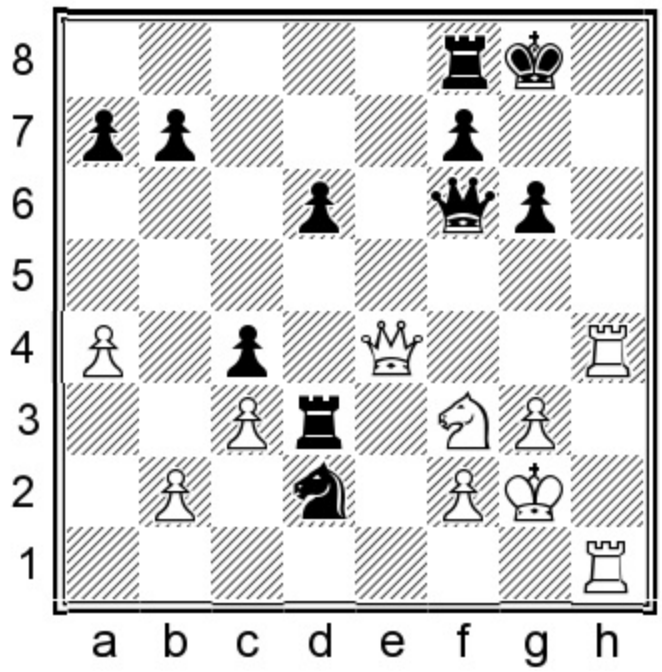
15.exd5 is weaker as it gives Black a strong majority on the kingside. 15...♗h6† 16.♘d2 A sad move, but there was no other choice. (16.♔b1 ♗f4! Black aims to take on g3, ruining White's pawns on the kingside. 17.♗xf4? ♘xf2!–+ is an important tactical point.) 16...f5 17.♗e2 ♘gf6 Black has an overwhelming advantage.

15...♗h6† 16.♔b1 c6 17.♖d1 ♔e7∓

White is under pressure, as his minor pieces are sitting without any play.

175. Richard Rapport – Mustafa Yilmaz

Douglas 2023



Should White:

A) exchange knights on d2 before playing ♖h8†, or
B) play 27.♖h8† right away?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

Rapport played 27.♘xd2? ♖xd2 28.♕e3 ♖d3 29.♖h8† ♕xh8 30.♖xh8† ♔xh8 31.♕xa7 when the position is arguably easier to play for White. He did manage to win the game on move 47, but Black missed several chances to defend better. At this point Stockfish gives a rather fabulous line: 31...♖d1! 32.♕xb7 ♖a1 33.♕b5 ♖a2⇄ And Black is holding. But there were other chances later on in the game too.

27.♖h8†!

"Winning the queen" right away is the correct way to play. The white knight has the potential to attack the black king, while the black knight has no function.

27...♕xh8 28.♖xh8† ♔xh8 29.♕e7!

This move wins an important tempo.

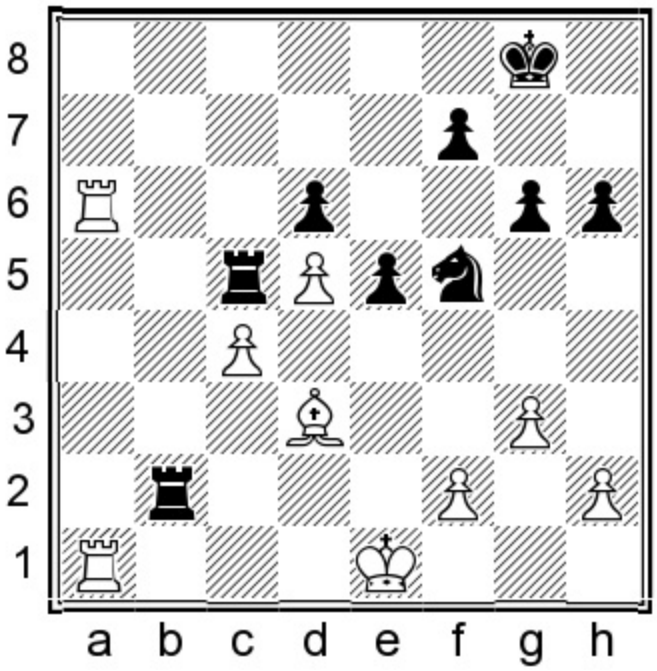
29...♔g8 30.♘g5!

With threats of ♘h7 and ♘e6, depending on how things develop. White can also take the queenside pawns. His position is entirely winning.

The white knight is so superior, that something daft-looking like 30.♘e1!? ♖d5 31.♕xb7 also gives a technically winning position. Even from e1 the knight has potential.

176. Jan Smeets – Aleksandar Kovacevic

Germany 2023



Should White play:

A) 32.♗xf5, or
B) 32.♖c6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Converting an advantage)

Smeets played 32.♖c6?, when after 32...♘d4 the knight was alive and well. The game ended in a draw after 33.♖xc5 dxc5 34.d6 ♖b8 and a handful of additional moves.

32.♗xf5!

Eliminating the better piece should not be too difficult; but you need to see the follow-up also.

32...gxf5 33.♖c6! ♖xc6

There are a number of semi-concrete lines we could cover. They are all based on positional factors, like this one: 33...♖b4 34.♖xc5 dxc5 35.d6! ♔g7 36.♖d1 ♖b8 37.♖d5 and White wins.

34.dxc6 ♖b8

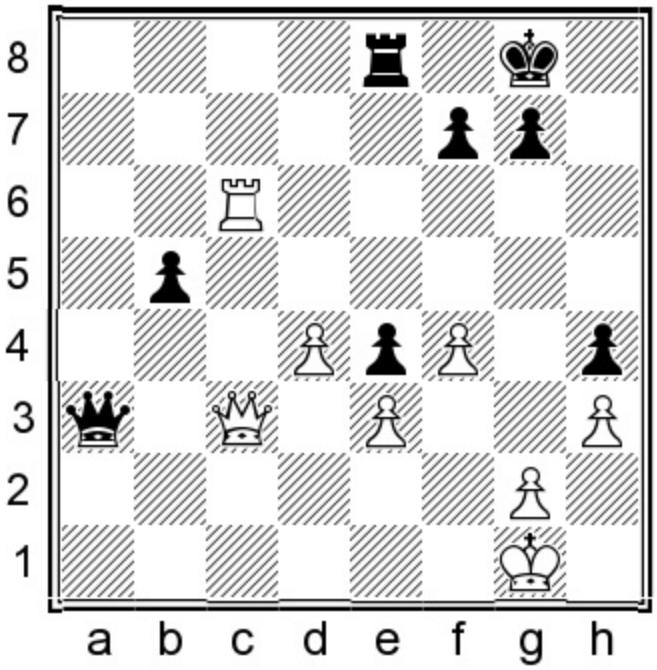
Or 34...♖c2 35.♖a4 and the c6-pawn queens.

35.♖d1! ♖d8 36.c5 d5 37.c7 ♖c8 38.♖xd5

The rook endgame is winning, although requiring a bit more work.

177. Sergei Lobanov – Benjamin Gledura

Internet (rapid) 2023



Should Black:

A) exchange queens with 33...♕xc3, or
B) pass the choice to White with 33...♖a8?

Show/Hide Solution

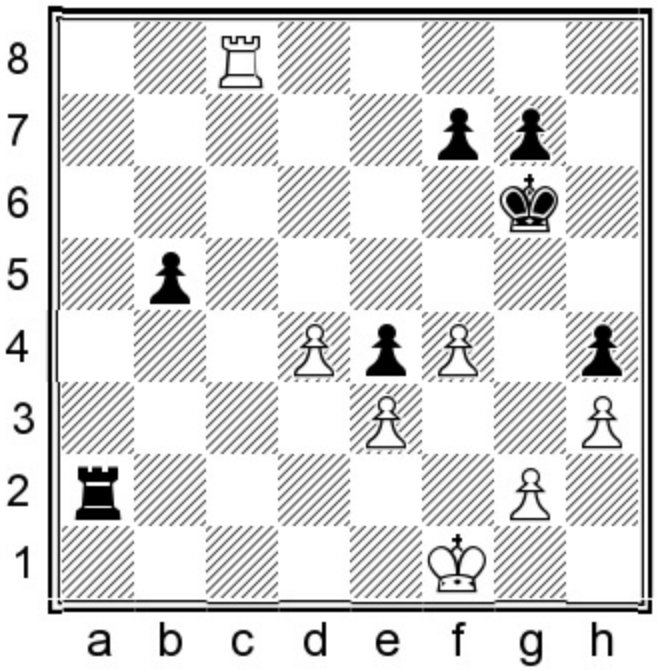
(Converting an advantage)

Black can be forgiven for messing up this online rapid game. Especially since he won it anyway!

33...♖a8? 34.♖c8† ♔h7 35.♕xa3!?

35.d5!= was a simpler way to gain counterplay.

35...♖xa3 36.♔f2 ♖a2† 37.♔f1 ♔g6



38.♖b8

Again equal was: 38.d5 ♔f6 39.♖e8 ♖d2 40.♖e5 b4 41.♔e1 ♖xg2 42.d6 ♖g1† 43.♔e2 b3 44.d7 ♖g2† 45.♔e1 ♖g1†=

38...♖b2 39.♖b7

White can also hold with: 39.d5 ♔f6 40.♖b6† ♔e7 41.♖b7† ♔d6 42.♖xf7 ♔xd5 43.♖xg7 b4 44.♖d7†!∓

39...b4 40.d5 b3 41.d6 ♔f6 42.d7 ♔e7 43.f5! ♔d8 44.♔g1?

White could still have held the game, but it would have been a long path of suffering: 44.♔e1! ♖xg2 45.♖xb3 ♖g3 46.♔e2! ♔xd7 47.♖b7† ♔e8 48.♖b4!∓ and the pawn down endgame is a draw.

44...♖b1† 45.♔h2 b2 46.g3 hxg3† 47.♔g2 f6 48.h4 ♔e7 49.h5 ♔d8 50.♖b4 ♔xd7 51.♖b3 ♔d6 52.♖b7

0–1

33...♕xc3!

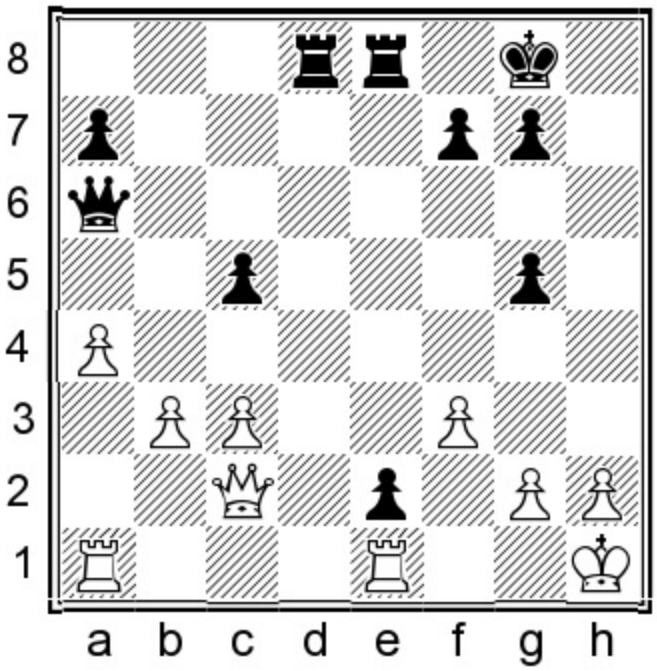
Exchanging queens on his own terms gives Black the advantage. The white rook will have to passively block the b-pawn.

34.♖xc3 b4 35.♖b3 ♖b8 36.♔f2 ♔f8 37.♔e2 ♔e7 38.♔d2 ♔d6 39.♔c2 ♔d5 40.♖b1 ♔c4–+

Black's success is a matter of technique.

178. Arthur Guo – Andrew Hong

St Louis 2024



Should Black:

A) try to penetrate the white position with an exchange of queens with 30...♕d3, or
B) manoeuvre with 30...♕e6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Keeping attackers)

The game continued: 30...♕d3? There are several reasons why exchanging the queens is a bad idea. The white queen is passive, while the black queen is free to roam. White is struggling with space. Exchanging the queens will allow the white king to come out from the corner and approach the e-pawn. Rook endgames have a high drawing margin. And finally, it loses all the advantage. 31.♕xd3 ♖xd3 32.♖ac1!= ♖ed8 (Or 32...♖d2 33.♔g1 and the king can control the e-pawn.) 33.♖xe2 ♖xc3 34.♖ee1 ♖xb3 35.♖xc5 ♖a3 36.♖a5 ♖d4 37.♖xa7 ♖dxa4 38.♖xa4 ♖xa4 39.♔g1 ♖a2 40.♔f1 f6 41.♖e2 ♖a4 42.♖b2 ♔f7 43.♔f2 ♖a3 44.♖e2 ♖a4 45.♖b2 ♖a3 46.♖e2 ♖a4 47.♖b2 ½–½

30...♕e6!

This was the way to win. White is unable to do anything, so Black's most natural way to advance is to do so slowly. This is what good technique is:

1) Remove all counterplay (the e2-pawn does that)
2) Improve your position to the maximum
3) Only strike at the best possible moment

For this reason, best play looks something like this:

31.h3 ♖d5!

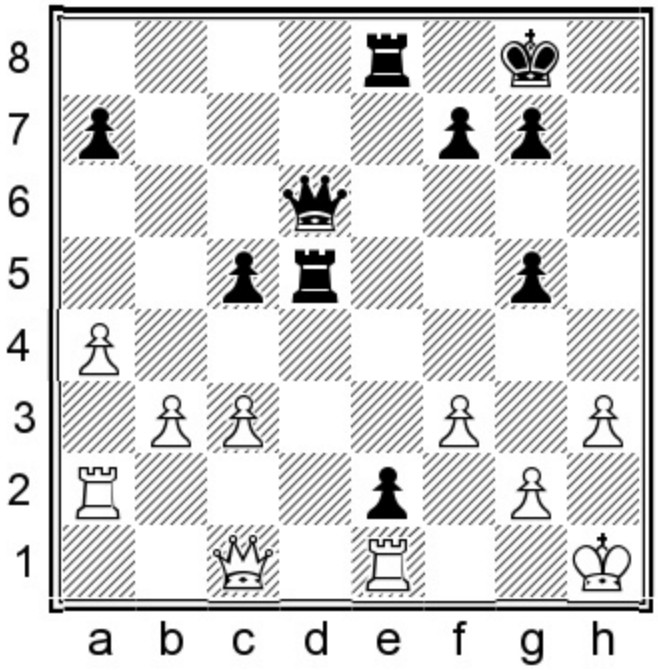
31...g4!? is the computer move. At this point it is not obvious why it is strong, but later we will

understand it.

32.♖a2 ♕d6!

32...♖e5?! also retains a large advantage.

33.♕c1



33...g4!

Not the only way to play, but once you understand this break, it becomes compelling.

34.fxg4

34.hxg4 ♖e6 would threaten ...♖d1, and after 35.♖a1 the attack is unstoppable. 35...c4!? 36.bxc4 ♖h6† 37.♔g1 ♕c5†–+ for example.

34...♖d3! 35.b4 ♖ee3

White is mated.

Chapter 5

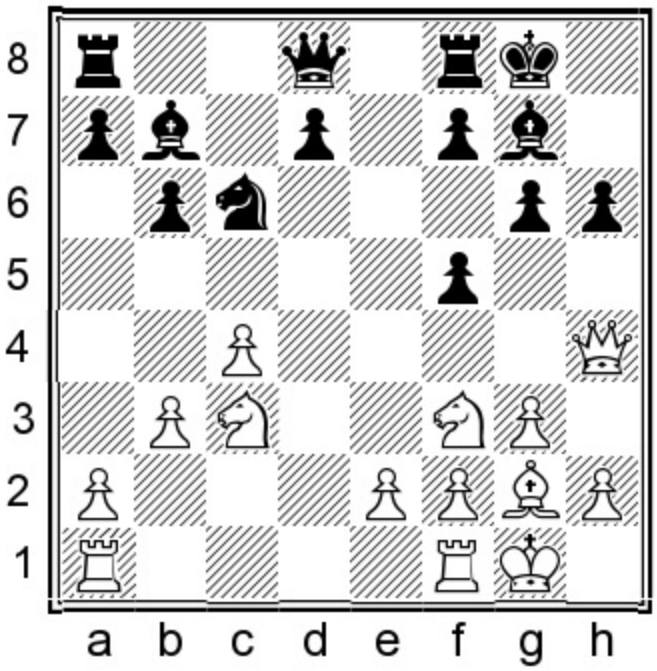
Not Immediately Apparent

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Some of the exercises in this chapter are built on an interconnectivity between tactical and positional nuances. Some are simple enough, some are not. But even the simple questions are difficult to answer. During the early work on this book, we sent the positions and questions to each other. We know the struggle! All we can say is that over the period of working on these positions, as well as others that were discarded from the book, we found an improvement in our ability to make these kinds of decisions. We know you will too.

179. German Spata – Francisco Fiorito

Buenos Aires 2022



Should White:

A) exchange queens on d8, or
B) play 13.♖ac1?

Show/Hide Solution

(Tension)
13.♕xd8 was played in the game, allowing Black to equalise. The exchange on d8 only helps Black in bringing the pieces to the right squares quickly. 13...♖axd8 14.♖ac1 Black should now play 14...♖fe8 15.e3 ♘b4 16.♘d4 ♗xg2 17.♔xg2 and 17...d5 is just one of the moves to equalise, although White won in 40 moves.

13.♖ac1!

White wants to exploit the weaknesses along the d-file.

13...♖e8

This is the most logical move, putting pressure on e2 and preventing ♘d5.
After 13...♕xh4 14.♘xh4 ♗xc3 15.♖xc3 ♘d4 16.♖e1 ♗c6 17.♖d3 the tactics don't work for Black, and White will assert pressure down the d-file.

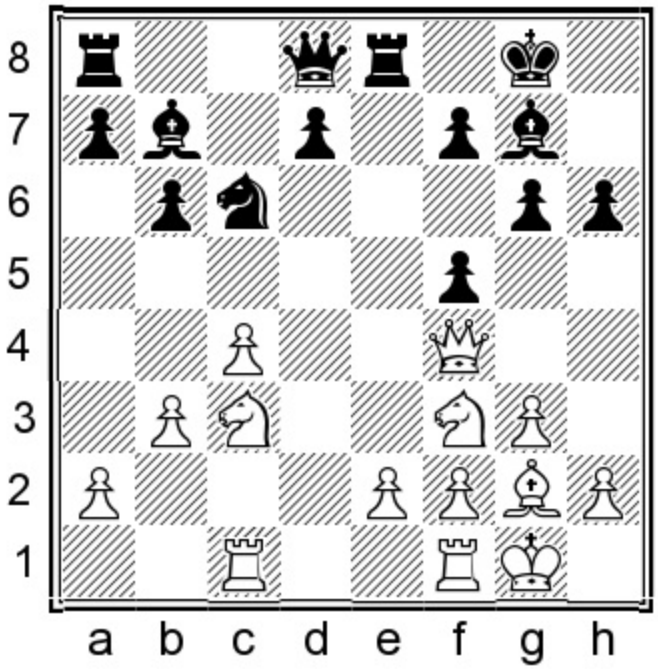
13...g5 is met with 14.♕h5. The queen is powerful on h5. White can continue to put pressure on the d7-pawn. The idea of h2-h4 is also possible, undermining Black's kingside.

One of the important aspects when playing to retain tension is understanding that all options are kept open, and permanent decisions are put on hold for later. White should now refuse the queens exchange with:

14.♕f4!±

The queen occupies a magnificent square, looking at d6 and the pawn on h6, influencing both flanks. White is ready for ♘d5 or ♘b5, with strong pressure on the d-line and the kingside. h2-h4-h5 could be possible in the future. Black is now forced to make a difficult decision.

14.e3 is met by: 14...♘b4!=



14...♗xc3

The best try. If 14...♘e5 15.♘xe5 ♗xe5 16.♕d2 ♗c6 17.e3 Black will suffer a worse position for a long time.

Keeping the tension does not help Black: 14...♕e7 15.♖fd1 ♘d8 16.♕d2 ♘e6 17.♘e1 and ♘d5 comes next.

15.♖xc3 ♖xe2 16.♖d3

White slowly improves his pieces, since Black is not able to defend against all the threats. Black needs to immediately defend against ♘d4.

16...♘b4 17.♖d2!

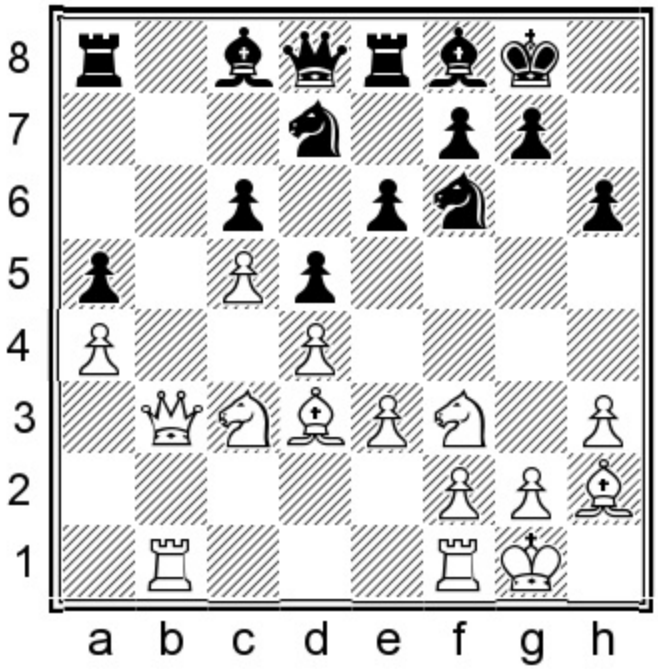
17.♖d6 is also interesting, but exchanging Black's active rook with tempo keeps the initiative.

17...♖xd2 18.♕xd2 ♗xf3 19.♗xf3 ♘c6 20.♖d1 ♕f6 21.♕xh6±

White is better due to his superior pawn structure.

180. Leo Crevatin – Laia Garcia Rodriguez

Sitges 2021



Should Black:

A) play 16...♗xc5 and give up two minor pieces for rook and two pawns, or
B) aim to reroute her bishop with ...g7-g6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

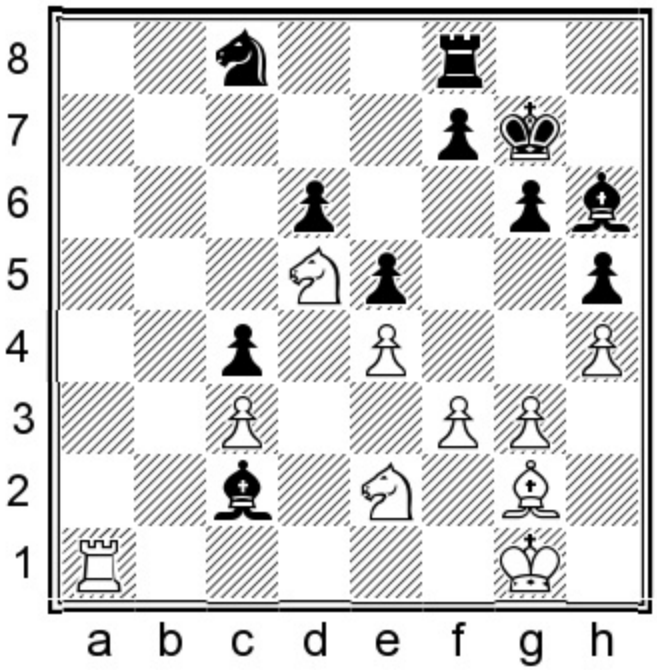
The game was dreadful, as Black tried to solve her problems slowly. 16...g6? 17.♖fe1 Black is cramped and White totally winning. 17...♗g7 18.e4 dxe4 19.♘xe4 ♘xe4 20.♗xe4 ♖a6 21.♗d6 ♘f6 22.♗d3 ♖a8 23.♘e5 White won on move 33.

16...♗xc5! 17.dxc5 ♘xc5 18.♕d1 ♘xd3 19.♕xd3 ♗a6 20.♕c2 ♗xf1 21.♖xf1 ♘d7

The position is rather unclear. Black would have liked to have access to the b-file, but will still be able to make the pieces play. White has well-placed pieces as compensation for Black's minor material advantage.

181. Matous Hlavina – Martin Husek

Pardubice 2021



Should Black:

A) open up the position with 33...f5, or
B) seek to exchange the knights?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

It is not time to attack, when the knight is useless on c8.

33...♘b6!

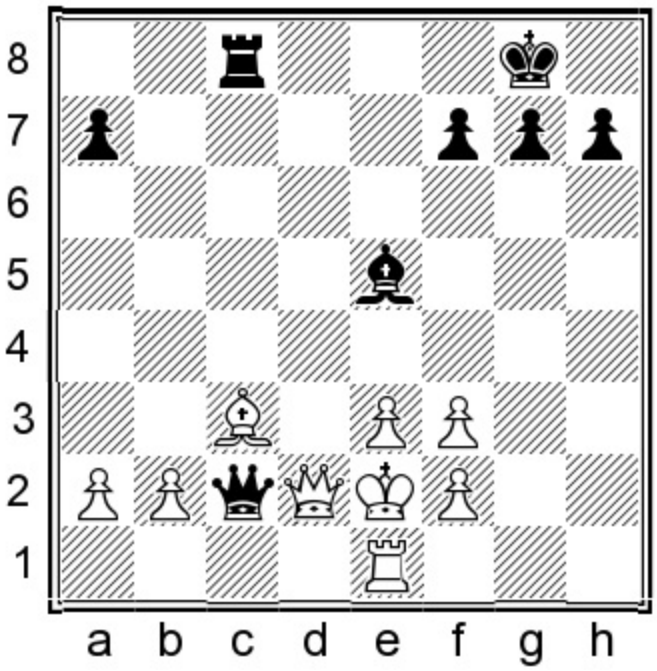
33...f5? Black was winning because of his extra pawn, not because of stereotypical pawn breaks. 34.exf5 ♗xf5 35.♔f2!∓ White should have held this game, alas, he did not. 35...♗e6 36.♘c7 ♗f7 37.♗h3 ♔f6 38.♖a6 ♔e7 39.♖a8 ♘b6 40.♖a7 ♔f6 41.♗d7?? And this is why! (41.g4 was fine.) 41...♘xd7 0–1

34.♘xb6 ♗e3† 35.♔h2 ♗xb6

With superior pieces and an extra pawn, Black will win in the long run.

182. Yerisbel Miranda Llanes – Francisco Moran Velez

Mexico 2022



Should Black:

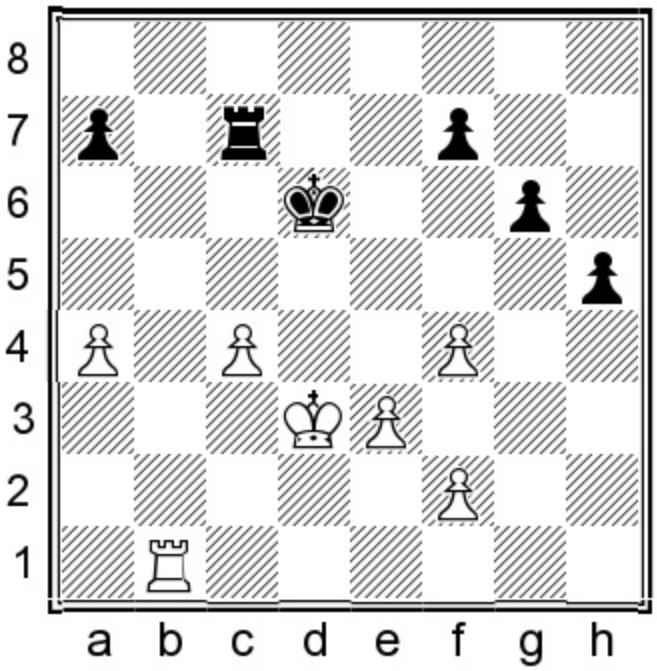
A) exchange queens with 28...♕xd2†, or
B) run away with 28...♕a4?

Show/Hide Solution

(King safety)

Keeping queens on the board is the practical choice. Although the exchange of queens and bishops leads to a rook endgame with drawing chances, White will play for a win without risk. But with the white king slightly exposed and an unhindered sprinter on the h-file, Black can strive for dynamic play with the queens on. In the late-stage middlegame, the pawn advantage is less important and Black will be the one creating threats, while White needs to fight for a draw.

Black played: 28...♕xd2†?! 29.♔xd2 ♗xc3† 30.bxc3 ♔f8± Although the rook endgame should be drawn, it is not automatically so. Black lost only 13 moves later after several mistakes. 31.♖b1 ♖c7?! (31...h5!) 32.♔d3 ♔e7 33.c4 ♔d6 34.a4 h5 35.f4 g6



36.♖g1?! (36.♔c3±) 36...♖c5! 37.e4 (But not: 37.♖g5?? ♖xg5 38.fxg5 h4–+) 37...h4 38.e5† ♔e6 39.♖h1 ♖a5 40.♖xh4 ♖xa4 41.♖h8 ♔f5? (Black could have drawn with: 41...♖a3† 42.♔e4 ♖c3 43.♖c8 a5=) 42.♖f8! ♔xf4 43.e6 1–0

28...♕a4!

A great move. Attacking a2, threatening to take on c3 and indirectly defending the bishop on e5 because of ...♖c2 pinning the queen.

29.♖c1

The most natural move.

29.♗xe5? loses to 29...♖c2.

29...h5∞

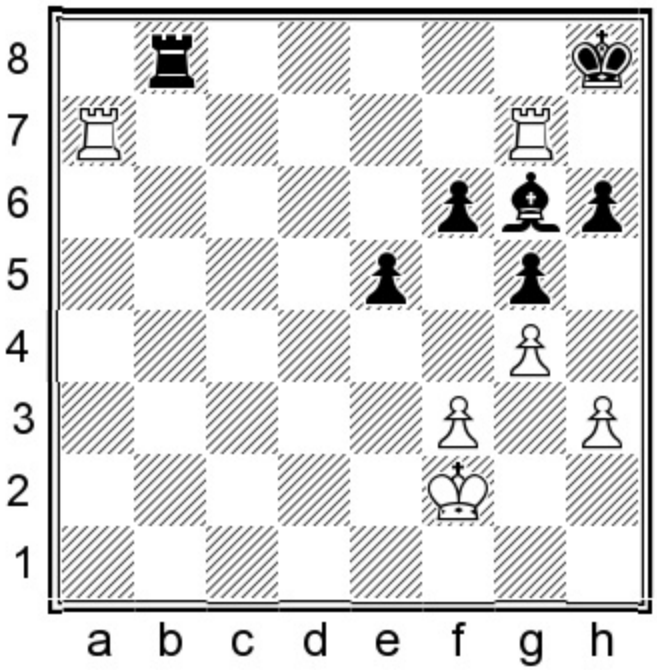
Everything is defended, so Black tries to make the most of his biggest asset. If White now continues:

30.♗xe5 ♖xc1 31.♕xc1 ♕b5† 32.♔e1 ♕xe5

The queen endgame is a draw. The passed pawn is more important than the extra pawn.

183. Ian Nepomniachtchi – Le Quang Liem

Internet (rapid) 2022



Should Black:

A) try to exchange rooks with 48...♖a8, or
B) defend his bishop with 48...♖g8?

Show/Hide Solution

(Escaping into a drawn ending)

In the game, Black played 48...♖g8? 49.♖gc7 ♖d8 and drew on move 79. It took us some time to prove our intuition that this was a horrible and passive decision which should lose. The following plan is what we came up with: 50.♔e2 ♖f8 51.♖e7 ♖d8 52.♔e1 ♖c8 53.♔d1 ♗c2† 54.♔c1 ♗e4† 55.♔b2 ♗g6 56.♔b3 ♗d3 57.♔b4 ♗g6 58.♖ad7 ♖f8 59.♔c5 ♗b1 60.♔d6 ♗g6 61.♖g7 ♗b1 62.♖gf7 White wins.

48...♖a8!

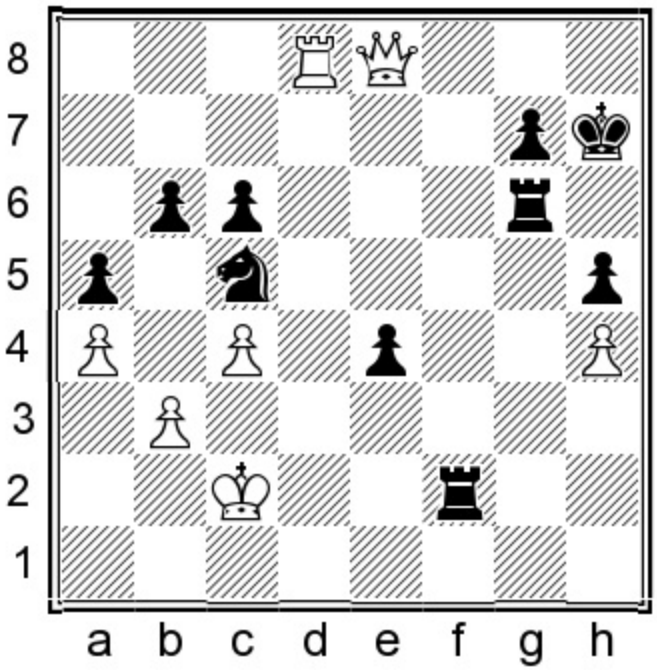
It makes sense to get rid of the strong doubled rooks on the 7th rank.

49.♖h7† ♗xh7 50.♖xa8† ♔g7

This endgame holds, because White will have to watch out for both ...♗d3-f1 and...e5-e4.

184. Ivan Martic – Abhimanyu Puranik

Novi Sad 2022



Should White play:

A) 47.♖d2, or
B) 47.♔c3?

Show/Hide Solution

(King safety)

White lost his way, hoping for mate in one perhaps? 47.♔c3? ♖g3† 48.♔d4 ♖d3† 49.♔e5 ♖xd8 50.♕xd8 e3 The pawn decides. 51.♕e8 e2 52.♔d6 (52.♕xh5† ♔g8 53.♕e8† ♖f8 also wins for Black.) 52...♖f6† 53.♔c7 ♘e6† 0–1

47.♖d2!

This was necessary. The two black rooks are too dangerous otherwise.

47...♖f5

After 47...♖xd2† 48.♔xd2 ♘xb3† 49.♔e3 White is neither better nor worse.

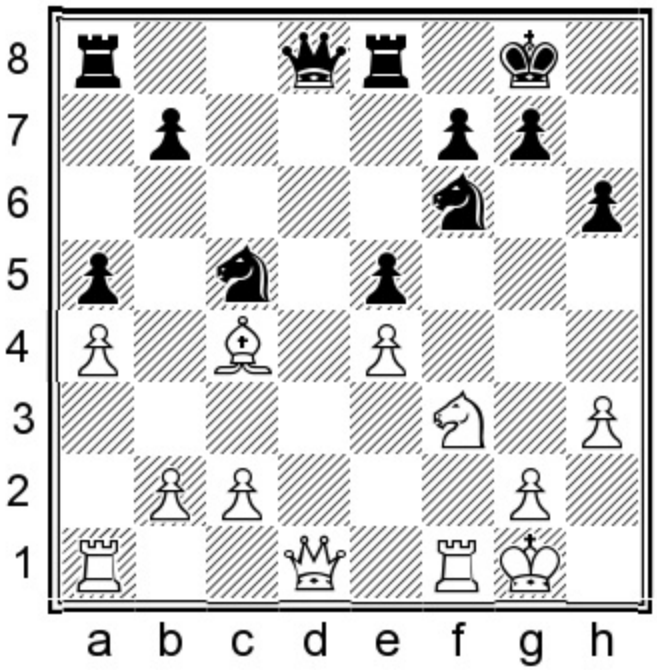
If Black avoids the exchange of rooks, White can repeat the mating threat.

48.♖d8! ♖g2† 49.♖d2

With a repetition of moves.

185. Nikolaos Begnis – Yannick Gozzoli

Germany 2021



Should Black:

A) allow the exchange of queens and grab the e4-pawn, or
B) avoid the exchange with 18...♕b6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Exchanging the attacker)

Black played 18...♘cxe4?, when after 19.♕xd8! (In the game, Black got a second chance and did not miss it. 19.♗b5? ♕b6† 20.♔h2 ♖ad8 21.♕e1 ♖e7 Black is totally winning. Full firepower is still on the board and Black is ready for ...♘d6, or simply just improving his position with ...g7-g6 and ...♔g7.) 19...♖axd8 20.♗b5 White has a lot of counterplay. For example: 20...♖e7 21.♖fe1 ♖d5 22.♖ad1 ♖xd1 23.♖xd1∓ White has good drawing chances.

18...♕b6!

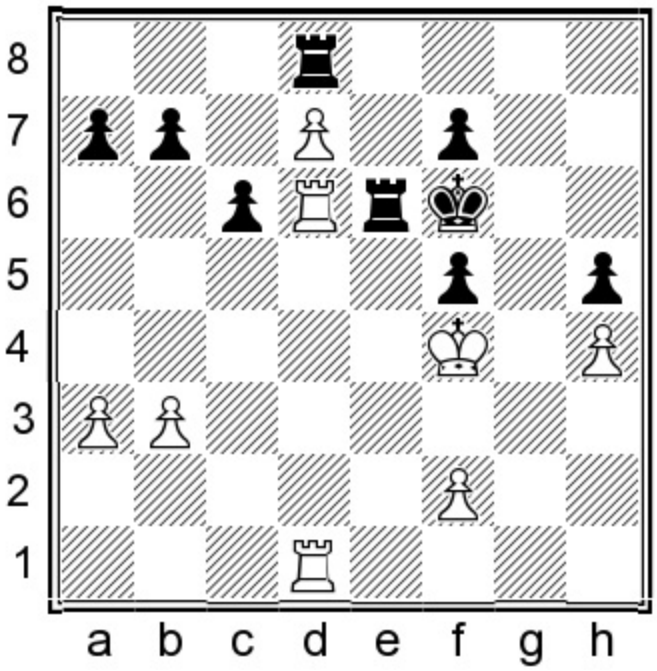
White's king is exposed because of the weak dark squares. The queen is Black's strongest piece, able to create a lot of threats.

19.♔h2 ♘cxe4

Black is totally winning, as in the game.

186. Arnt Esbensen – Ward Altarbosh

Bergen 2021



Should Black:

A) exchange rooks on d6, or
B) start advancing his queenside pawns with 43...a5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing defenders)

After 43...a5 44.♖6d4 White was OK. The game was long and drawn out – and drawn!

43...♖xd6!

The only way to eliminate the d7-pawn is to remove a set of rooks.

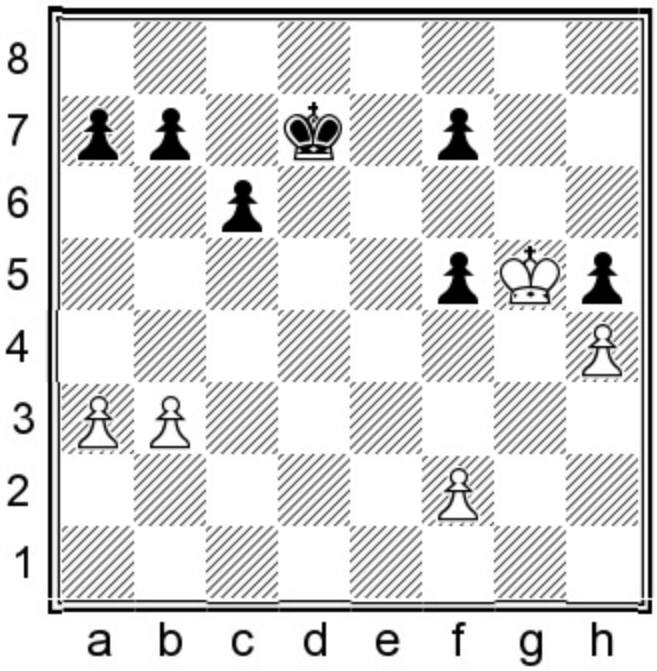
44.♖xd6† ♔e7 45.♖d3

45.♖h6 ♖xd7 wins for Black, after either 46.♖xh5 ♖d3 or 46.♔e3 ♖d1! 47.♖xh5 ♖b1.

45...♖xd7 46.♖xd7†

46.♖e3† ♔f6 is hopeless for White.

46...♔xd7 47.♔g5



47...♔e6!

This looks like the most practical way.

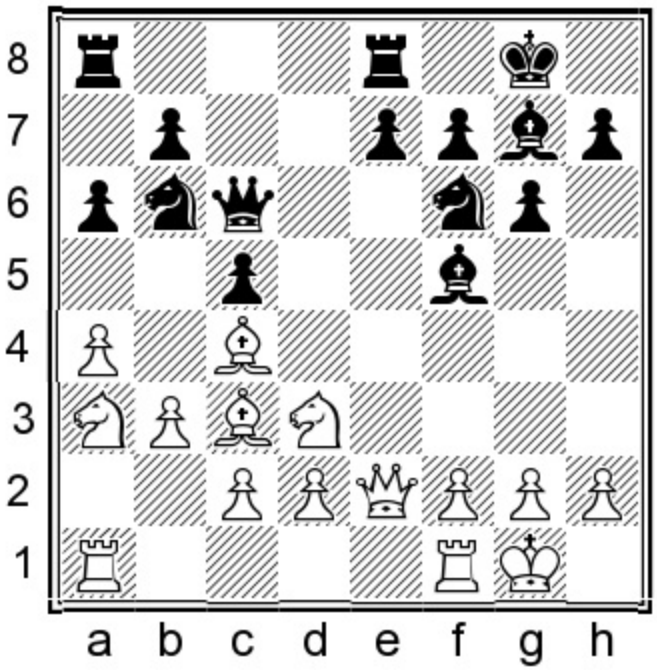
47...c5 48.♔xh5 b5 leads to a queen ending where Black has the f-pawn. This is a technical win, even if it takes a lot of moves.

48.b4 b5 49.♔xh5 c5 50.bxc5 a5 51.♔g5 b4

Black wins.

187. Lumir Mrazek – Vlastimil Babula

Czech Republic 2022



Should Black:

A) play 15...♘xc4, or
B) manoeuvre the knight to the kingside with 15...♘bd5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

Babula played the curious 15...♘bd5? to which White replied 16.♗xd5? and lost by move 28. (White could have played 16.♘e5 ♕c7 17.♖ae1 with only a slightly worse position.) Strongest was now: 16...♘xd5 17.♗xg7 ♗xd3! 18.♕xd3 ♘f4 19.♕f3 ♕xf3 20.gxf3 ♔xg7 With a technically winning position, although a lot of play remains.

15...♘xc4!

The knight is not great on b6 and the bishop is well placed on c4. Exchanging it is thematic.

16.♘xc4

16.bxc4 e5! would also be horrible for White. The key point is that 17.♘xe5 ♕c7 18.f4 ♘e4, followed by either ...♘xc3 or ...f7-f6, would be deadly for White.

16...♖ad8

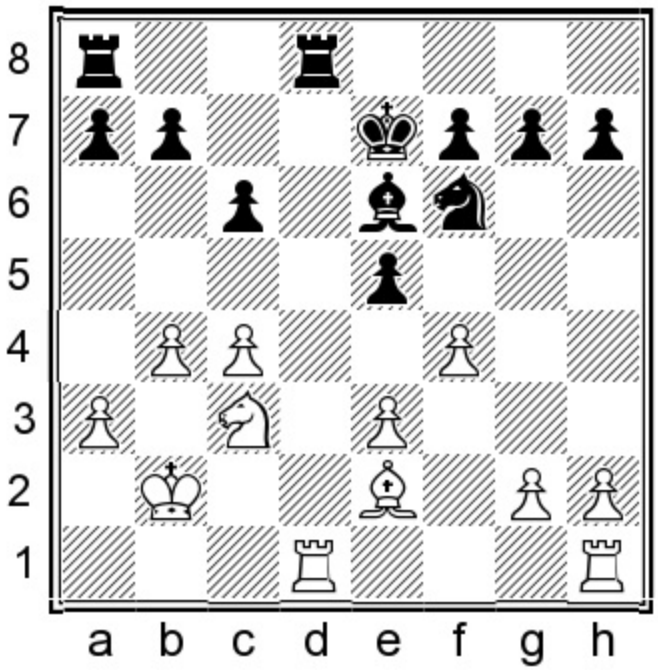
The black position is technically winning. If allowed, he will take on d3, leaving White with permanent structural issues. White loses material if he seeks to prevent this with:

16...♗xd3 would not bring any advantage to Black: 17.♕xd3 ♖ad8 18.♕e2 b5 19.axb5 axb5 20.♘e5

17.♘de5 ♕e4! 18.♕xe4 ♘xe4–+

188. Maciej Klekowski – Kristian Stuvik Holm

Warsaw (rapid) 2021



Should Black:

A) release the pressure by exchanging rooks on the d-file, or
B) play something else?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces/Weaknesses)
17...♖xd1? was the incorrect move played in the game. 18.♖xd1 ♖d8 19.♖xd8 ♔xd8 The endgame is roughly equal. A draw was reached by move 42.

17...♘g4!

Exploiting the weaknesses created with the move f2-f4.

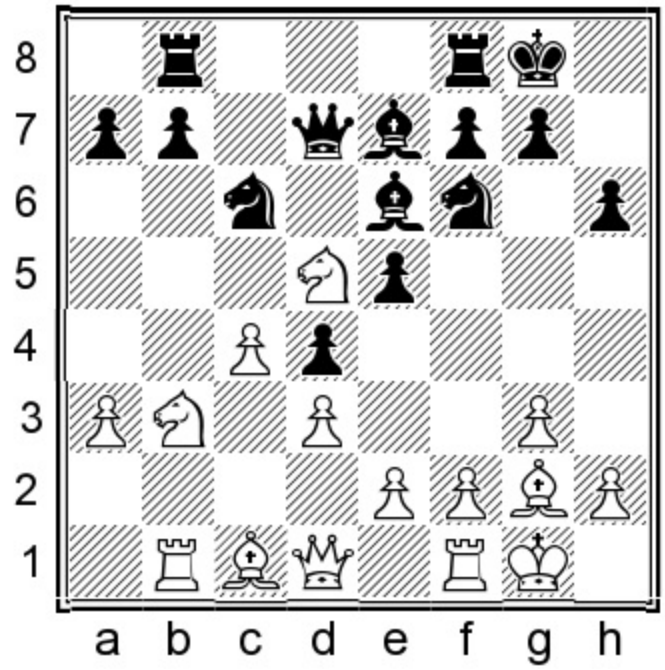
18.♗xg4 ♗xg4 19.♖xd8

19.♖c1 exf4 and ...♖d4, with or without a check on d2 first, is a big headache for White.

19...♖xd8

Black wins. The threats of ...exf4 and ...♖d4, ...♖d2† and ...♗e6 are too much to bear.

Baku 2023



The knight on d5 is undermined. Should White play:

A) 16.♘xf6†, or
B) 16.♘xe7†?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

In the game Indjic left Bacrot with his good bishop, which meant that after 16.♘xe7†? ♕xe7 17.a4 ♖fe8 18.a5 he had no advantage at all. The game was a complicated fight, and he later got chances to win; but lost on move 65. At this point the simplest way for Black would be 18...e4!? 19.dxe4 ♗xc4 20.♘xd4 ♘xe4, with total equality. The two bishops have no significant scope.

16.♘xf6†! ♗xf6

Stockfish hates losing the light-squared bishop so much that it narrowly considers 16...gxf6 the preferable move, even though it gives up the h6-pawn.

17.♘c5 ♕e7 18.♘xe6 ♕xe6

Taking back with the pawn would give Black an even worse pawn structure.

White's advantage is immense. It is not so much the power of the two bishops, as it is way the black pawns and pieces are entirely unable to fight for the light square, cutting the board in two. A possible move now could be:

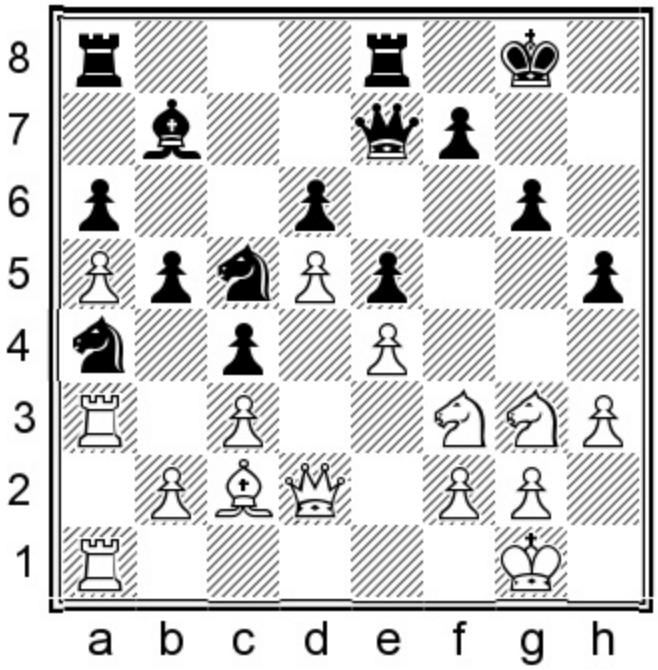
19.♕a4±

With immediate pressure on the queenside.

But many other moves are strong, including 19.f4!? with the idea f4-f5. The pawn reaching f5 would fix the black pawns on dark squares, stabilizing the light-squared dominance.

190. Adam Frank – Jakub Stinka

Czech Republic 2021



Should White:

A) play 26.♗xa4, or
B) defend the b2-pawn with 26.♖1a2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)
26.♖1a2? would be the wrong choice: 26...f5!? 27.exf5 e4 28.♘d4 e3⇄

26.♗xa4!

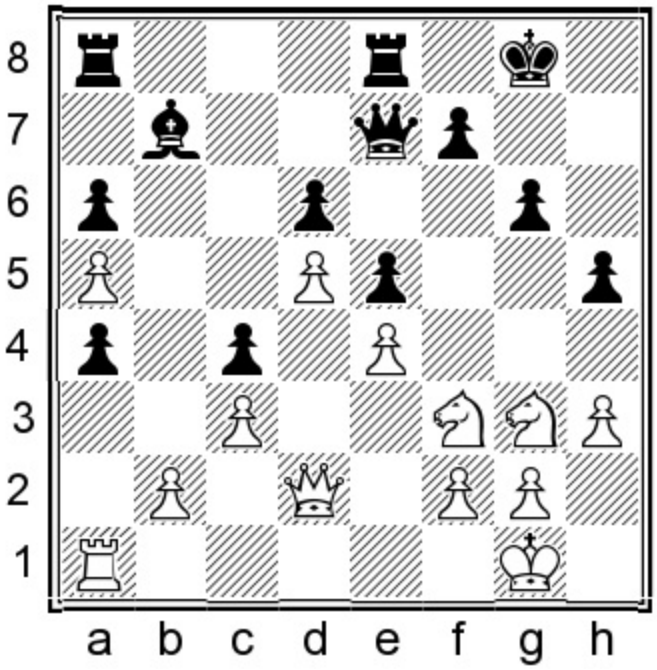
The black knights are dominating and need to be eliminated.

26...♘xa4 27.♖xa4!

This exchange sacrifice is the key move. White gets two pawns for the exchange and eliminates

both of Black's useful pieces. The white knights will be able to regroup slowly, while Black can only watch in horror as the pawn avalanche approaches.

27...bxa4



28.♕h6!

This is a little more accurate than the move played in the game:

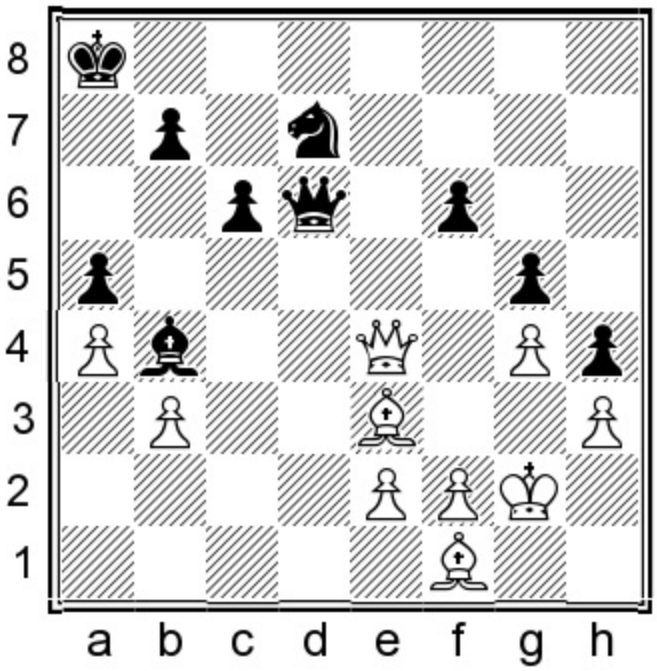
After 28.♖xa4± White won on move 56.

28...♕f8 29.♕g5 ♕e7 30.♕xe7 ♖xe7 31.♘d2

White is completely winning.

191. Suat Atalik – Zaven Andriasian

Internet (rapid) 2018



Should Black seek the exchange of bishops with:

A) 30...♗c5, or
B) 30...♘c5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Tactics)

In the game Black played 30...♘c5? 31.♗xc5 ♗xc5 32.e3 with even chances. Somehow Atalik managed to make a full point out of it and won on move 46.

30...♕d5?! would be a poor exchange. After 31.♕xd5 cxd5 32.f4±, White will hope to make something of the two bishops.

30...♗c3? 31.♕e8† ♘b8 32.♗b6 would leave Black cramped and suffering.

30...♗c5!∓

This is the right move. Black is better if the bishops are exchanged, as White is left with a poor bishop and a weakness on f2. There are no real weaknesses in the black position and the queen and knight work well together. The key point is tactical:

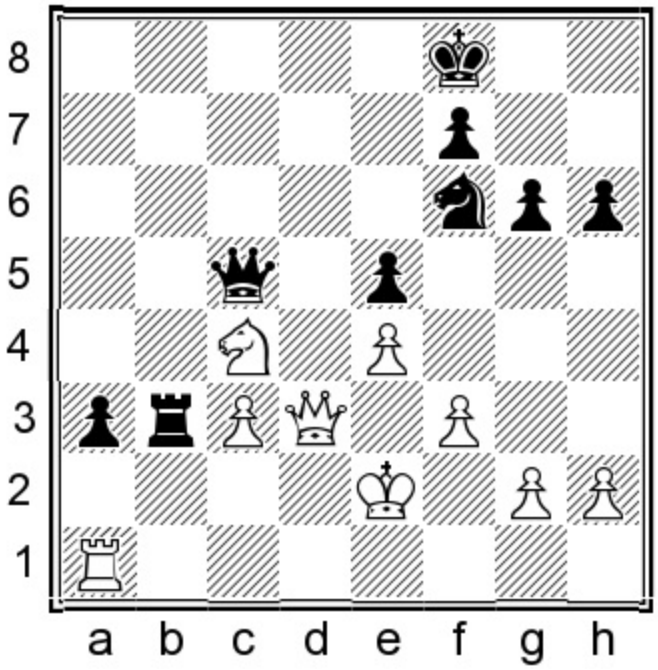
31.♗c1?

Desirable positionally, but not tactically:

31...♗xf2!

Black wins.

Corti 2022



Should White:

A) force the exchange of queens with 32.♕d6†, or
B) play 32.♔d2?

Show/Hide Solution

(King safety)

32.♕d6†!∓

This looks desperate, and it is! The white king is immensely exposed, making this pawn sacrifice the only chance to save the game.

32.♔d2? was played in the game. Moussard was perhaps not as effective as he could have been, but still enough to win the game. The white king is in a permanent headwind now. 32...♔g7 33.♔c2 ♖b7 34.♖xa3 ♕b5 35.♕f1 ♘e8 36.♖a1 ♕b3† 37.♔d3 ♖c7 38.♘d2 ♖xc3† 39.♔e2 ♕b5† 40.♔e1 ♕c5 41.♕f2 White lasted another 12 moves. If Black had played 41...♖e3†! 42.♔f1 ♕b5† 43.♔g1 ♖e2, he would not have done so.

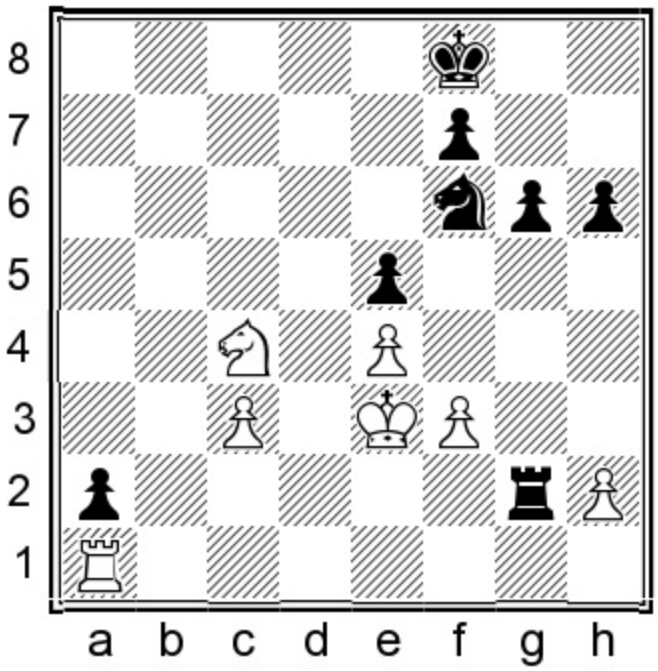
32...♕xd6 33.♘xd6 ♖b2†

The only way to play for an advantage.

34.♔e3 a2

34...♖xg2?! 35.♖xa3 ♖xh2? 36.♖a7± would quickly turn the tables.

35.♘c4 ♖xg2



36.♘xe5! ♖c2 37.♘d3 ♘e8

The most dangerous for White, but the pitfalls are few.

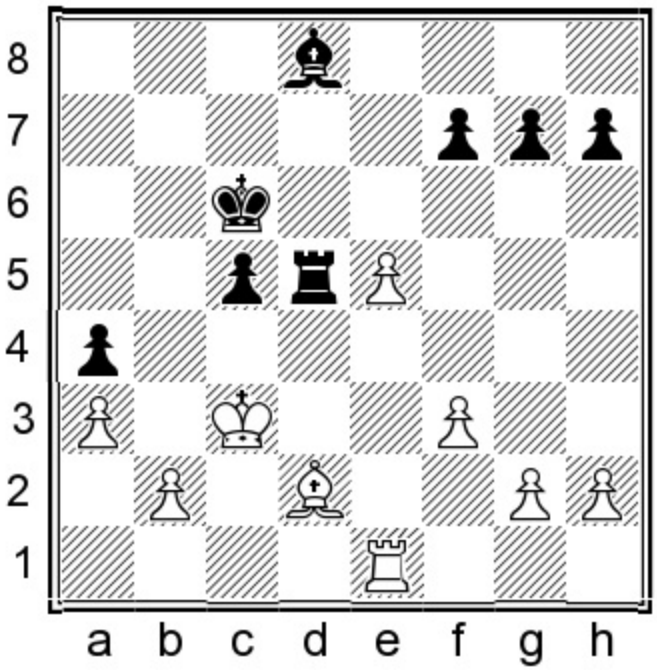
37...♘d7 38.♔d4 and White is OK. ♘b4 and ♖xa2 are coming.

38.♔d4 ♘g7 39.♘b4 ♘e6† 40.♔d3! ♖xh2 41.♖xa2

White is not worse.

193. Jari Reuker – Ilja Zaragatski

Germany 2021



Should White:

A) provoke the exchange of pawns with 40.e6, or
B) seek to activate his bishop with 40.♔c2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Invasion)

The game went 40.♔c2? ♗c7? (Black should have played 40...♖xd2† leading to a drawn pawn ending. The extra pawn is useless with the black king on e4.) 41.♗c3 White was in control and converted the extra pawn by move 60.

Equally poor is 40.♖e2? ♗a5† 41.♔c2 ♗xd2 42.♖xd2 ♖xe5=.

40.e6!!

This tactic is strong and the precursor for an invasion.

40...fxe6

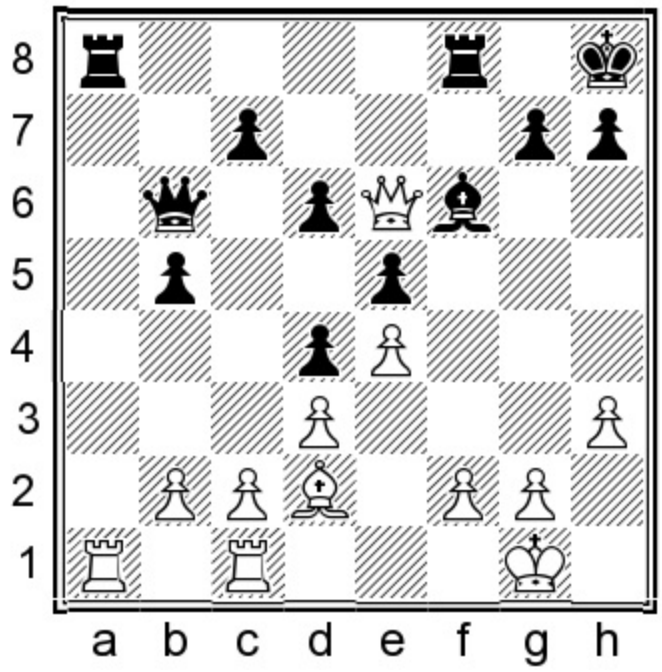
Black has to take, after which his position is open.

40...♗a5†?! fails to 41.b4!! axb3† 42.♔xb3 ♗xd2 43.e7.

41.♖xe6† ♔b5 42.♔c2 ♗f6 43.♗c3 ♗xc3 44.♔xc3

White's extra pawn and better rook gives him a technically winning position.

194. Dariusz Swiercz – Ivan Morovic Fernandez



Should White:

A) play 23.♖xa8, or
B) 23.♕d5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Gaining time)

23.♖xa8!

Diverting the rook from f8 is the real point.

After 23.♕d5 ♖ab8±, White cannot use the a-file for much. Black is ready with ...♕b7.

23...♖xa8

The structure is fixed, and White is able to start actions on the kingside.

24.g4!

White is in control. For example:

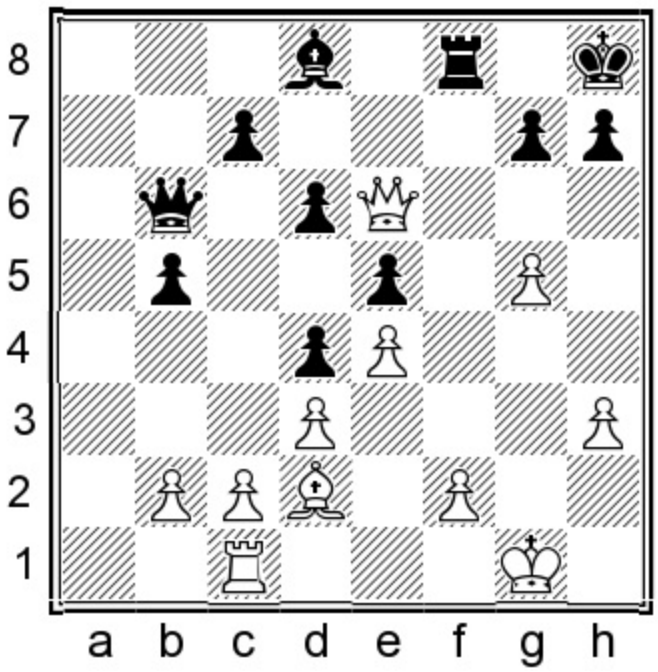
24...♖f8

24...♕c6 with the idea of ...♖e8 is a serious try, but now White can play on the c-file. 25.c3! ♖e8 (or 25...dxc3 26.♖xc3+–) 26.♕f7 White is winning.

24...♗h4 25.g5 ♖f8 26.f3! ♗g3 27.♔g2 ♗f4 28.♗xf4 exf4 29.♕e7 ♔g8 30.h4 also gives White a

winning position. The attack may be slow, but it is still impossible to stop. 30...♕a5 31.♕e6† ♔h8 32.♖f1+–

25.g5 ♗d8



26.♕d7!

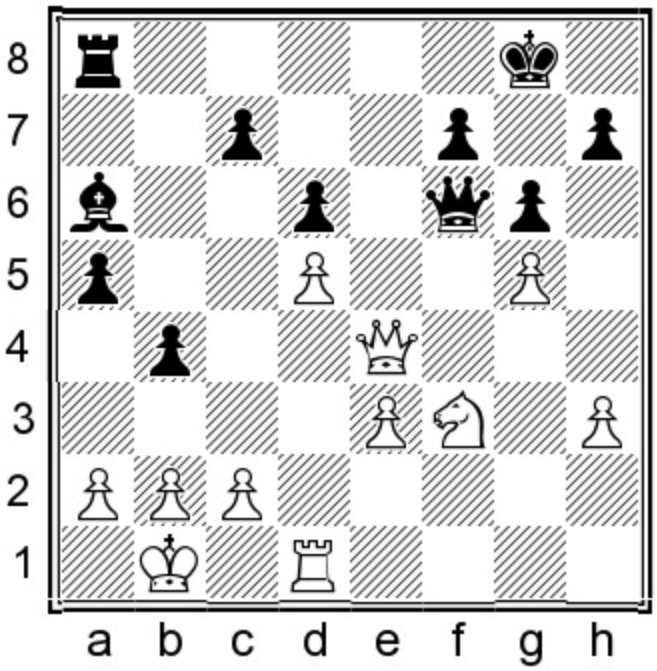
Black's pieces are completely dominated.

26...♕a6 27.♔g2 ♕a2 28.b3 ♕a6 29.h4

With a winning position for White.

195. Martin Neugebauer – Zbigniew Pakleza

Czech Republic 2021



Should Black:

A) seek an exchange of queens with the provocative 24...♕f5, or
B) play 24...♕d8?

Show/Hide Solution

(Fixing weaknesses/better pieces)

In the game Black got into trouble slowly. 24...♕d8 25.♖e1 ♗c8?! And this regrouping did not make things better for him. (Black would have been OK after 25...♗b7 or 25...f5!?.) 26.h4!± ♗h3?! 27.♕d4 ♕d7 28.♘d2 ♗g2 29.e4 ♖e8 30.♕f2 ♗h3 31.♖e3 ♗g4 32.♕f4 ♗h5 Black later won this game, but after 33.b3± he would have been in big trouble.

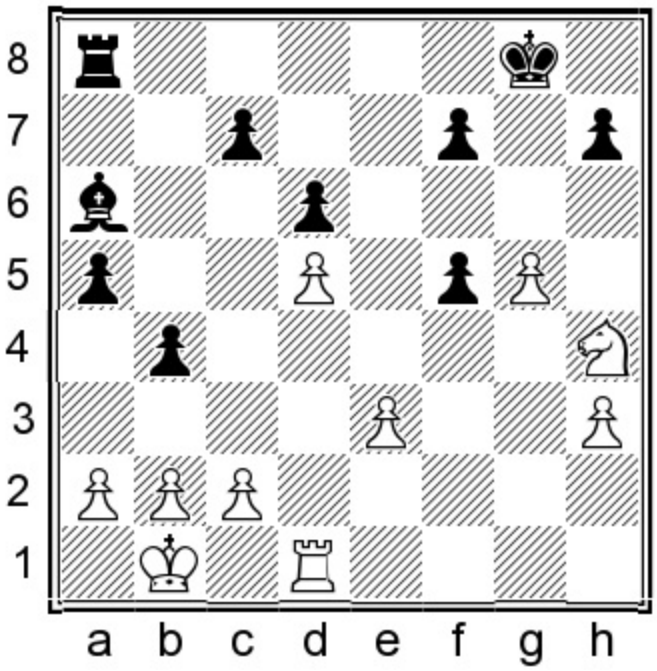
24...♕f5!!

Exchanging queens removes the pressure on the dark squares around the black king exerted by the powerful white queen. It also fixes the e3-pawn as a weakness, and provides a path forward for the black king.

25.♕xf5

25.♕f4? would drop a piece to 25...♗e2.

25...gxf5 26.♘h4



26...♖e8! 27.♘g2

A sad necessity.

27.♘xf5 is even worse. After 27...♖e5! 28.♘h6† ♔f8 Black will regain the pawn and have total control.

27...f4!?

Or 27...f6∓.

28.exf4

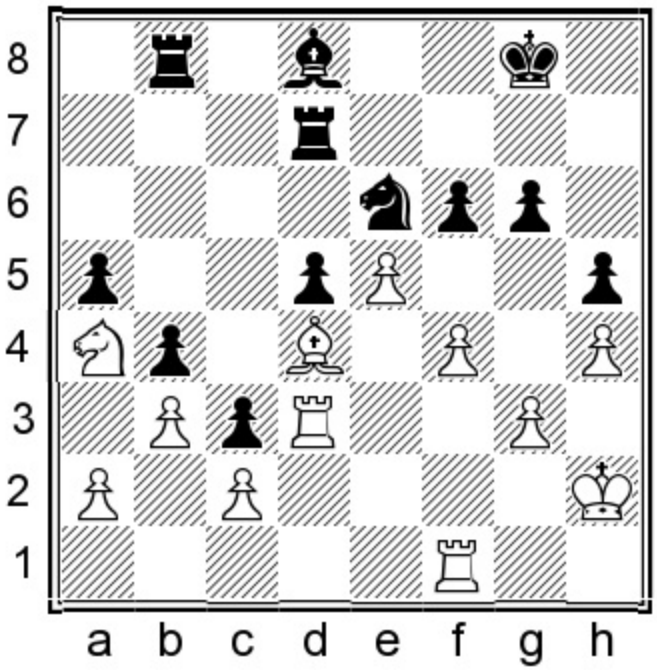
If 28.♘xf4 then 28...♖xe3 and Black should be winning.

28...♗c8 29.h4 ♖e2

Black is in full control and will win the pawn back soon enough and later the game.

196. Felix Meissner – Philip Lindgren

Germany 2019



Should White:

A) play 40.♘c5, or
B) 40.♖e1?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

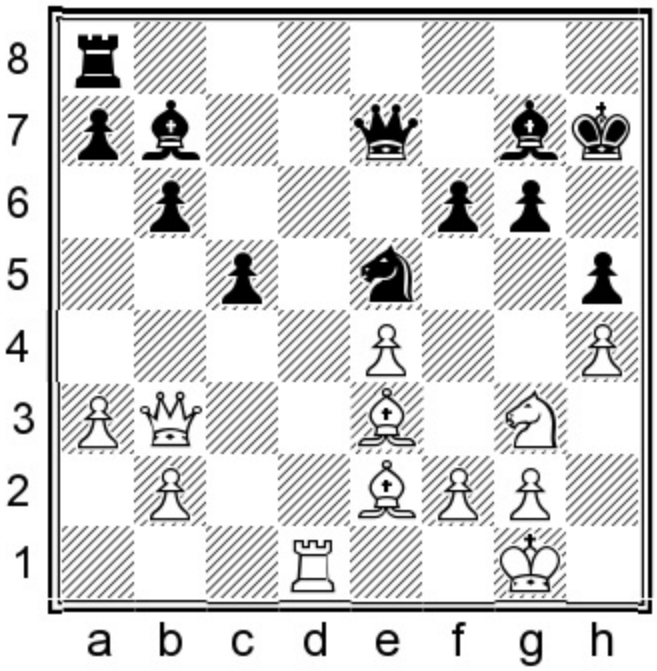
In the game White was in great trouble after 40.♖e1? ♖b5! 41.exf6 ♘xd4 42.♖xd4 ♗xf6∓, when the knight on a4 is poor and White is badly on the defensive. He held the game, but this position is close to lost.

40.♘c5! ♘xc5 41.♗xc5

This would have left White with the better minor piece, and no real problems.

197. Nicholas Pert – Viktor Stoyanov

Torquay 2022



Should Black:

A) fight for the open line with 25...♖d8, or
B) put the rook in the centre with 25...♖e8?

Show/Hide Solution

(Prophylaxis)

The game saw:

25...♖d8?

But this allows White to break Black's piece coordination after the exchange on d8.

26.♖xd8 ♕xd8 27.f4

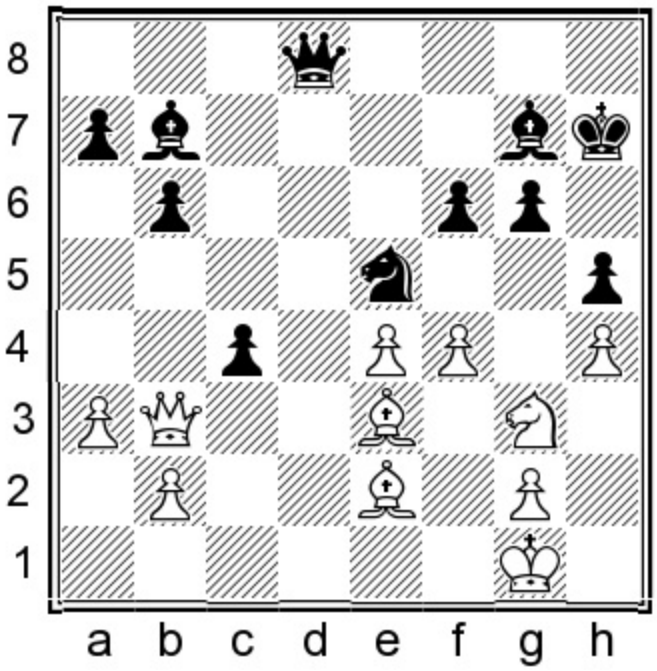
The knight now has no comfortable squares to retreat to, and White has the idea of f4-f5, exploiting the weaknesses of the kingside.

27...c4?!

Seeing the danger, Black tries to mix things up.

27...♘c6? falls right into White's plans after 28.f5±.

27...♘g4 was objectively the best try, going for an unbalanced endgame with decent chances to survive: 28.f5 ♘xe3 29.fxg6† ♔xg6 30.♗xh5† ♔h7 31.♕xe3 ♕d4! 32.♕xd4 cxd4 33.♗e2 ♗h6±



White could have obtained a better position with:

28.♕c2!

(28.♕c3?! ♘g4! 29.♗xg4 f5 30.♕xc4 fxg4 was unclear, although White eventually won in 51 moves.)

28...♘g4 29.♗xg4 hxg4 30.♕xc4±.

25...♖e8=

There are no visible targets on the d-file for either side, so it makes little sense to seek the exchange of rooks. Instead, Black should continue building up his position without renouncing the option of a counterattack.

26.f4

Or 26.♕a4 ♗c6 27.♕c2 ♕e6=.

26...c4!?

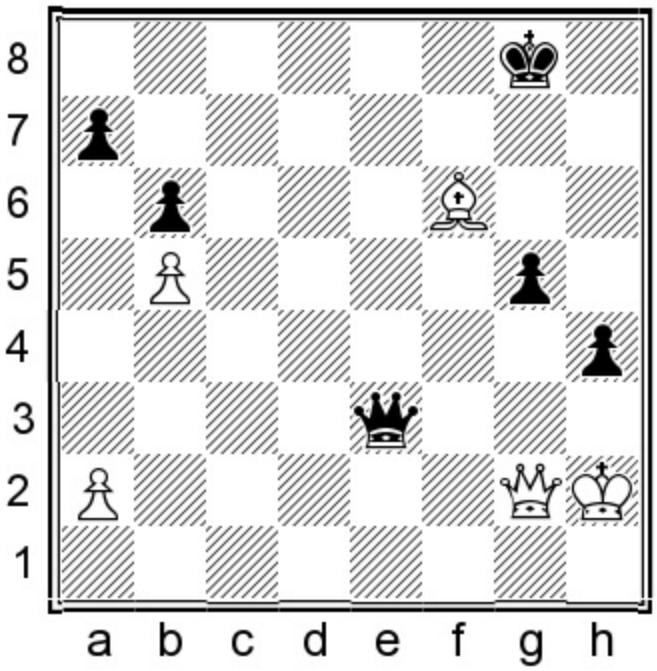
The alternative is 26...♘g4 27.♗xg4 hxg4 when 28.f5?! doesn't work. 28...gxf5 29.♘xf5?? ♕xe4–+

27.♕c3 ♘d3 28.♗xd3 cxd3 29.♕xd3 ♗xe4

With equality.

198. Lucas Guardiola Guillot – Jan Jirousek

Magdeburg 2020



Should White take on g5 with:

A) the bishop, or
B) the queen?

Show/Hide Solution

(Converting an advantage)

The game ended a draw after: 39.♕xg5†? ♕xg5 40.♗xg5 ♔f7! The king's job is to neutralise the white pawns. 41.♗f4 ♔e6 42.a4 (Or 42.♗b8 ♔d5 43.♗xa7 ♔c4 and White will be left with the wrong a-pawn.) 42...♔d5 43.♗b8 ♔c4 44.♗xa7 ♔b4 45.♗xb6 ♔xa4 46.♗f2 ♔xb5 47.♗xh4 ½–½.

39.♗xg5!

The simplest.

39.♕d5†!? ♔f8 40.♗xg5 is also winning. After 40...♕f2† 41.♕g2! Black cannot exchange queens, due to 41...♕xg2† 42.♔xg2 h3† 43.♔xh3 ♔f7 44.♔g4 ♔e6 45.♔f3 ♔d5 46.a4 ♔c4 47.♔e4 ♔b4 48.♔d5 ♔xa4 49.♔c4 when the white bishop will be free to take the black pawns. Black cannot exchange the last pawn, as after 49...♔a5 50.♗d2† ♔a4 51.♗b4! he is trapped in an unpleasant zugzwang, which sadly will not lead to stalemate.

39...♕g3†

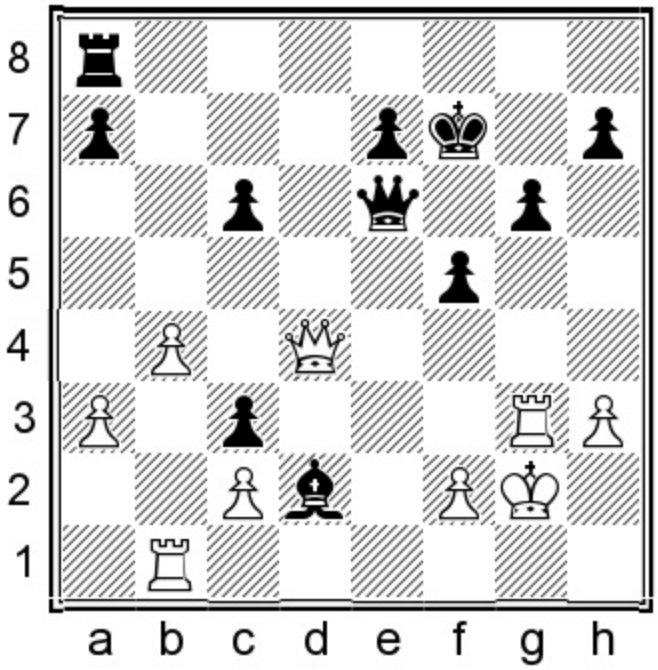
This no longer works.

40.♕xg3 hxg3† 41.♔xg3 ♔f7 42.♔f4 ♔e6 43.♔e4

White wins.

199. Felix Blohberger – Alexander Krastev

Corti 2022



Should Black:

A) play 37...♕d5†, or
B) bring out the rook after 37...a6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

Black wasted his opportunity in the game by playing:

37...a6? 38.♖d3

And White was back in the game. It continued:

38...♖b8 39.♖b3!? ♖b5 40.♕h8! ♕e4† 41.♔g1 ♕e1† 42.♔g2 ♕e4† 43.♔h2?

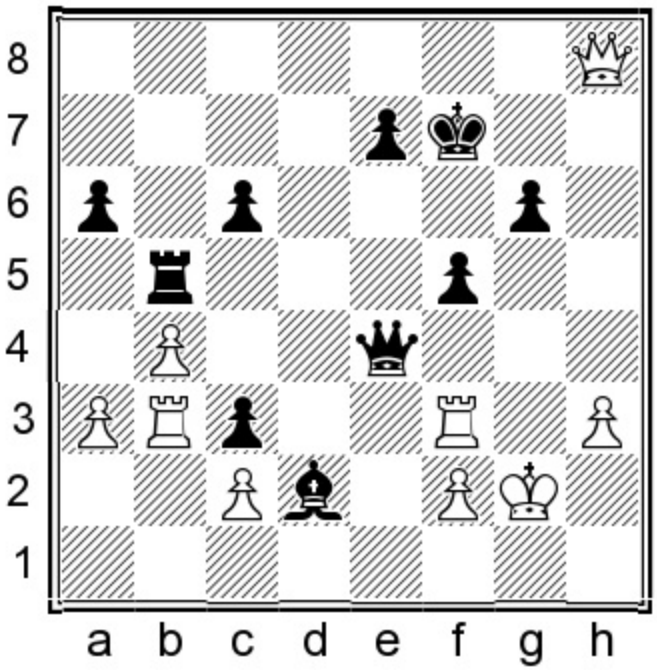
Why would White avoid the draw?

43.♔g1! was sane.

43...♗f4†?

Black missed the chance to play 43...♕h4! 44.♕d4 f4! 45.♖f3 ♕f6!∓, when White has some suffering ahead of him.

44.♔g1 ♕e1† 45.♔g2 ♕e4† 46.♖f3 ♗d2 47.♕xh7† ♔f6 48.♕h8† ♔f7



49.♖bxc3?!

Taking unnecessary risks.

49.♕h7† was a draw once again.

49...♗xc3 50.♕xc3 ♖e5 51.♕b3† ♔g7 52.♕d3 c5

Instead of exchanging queens and making the draw, White now pushed the envelope too far with: 53.♕xa6?

Black could have punished the error with 53...c4!, preventing the queen exchange and creating decisive threats such as ...f5-f4. Instead, Black played 53...cxb4? and a draw was agreed a few moves later.

37...♕d5†!

Exchanging the queens removes all of White's active options and decides the game.

38.♕xd5† cxd5–+

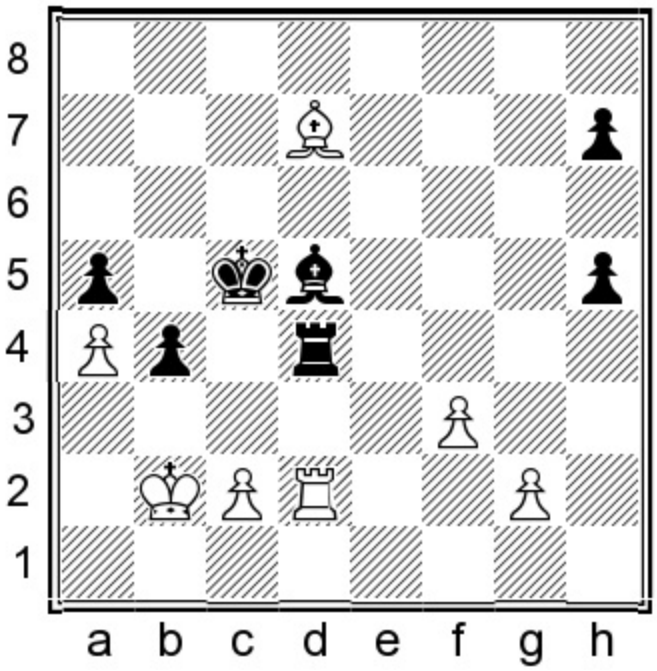
For example:

39.♖d3 ♖d8 40.b5 e5 41.♖b4 d4 42.♔f1 ♔e6 43.♔e2 ♔d5 44.a4 ♔c5

And so on.

200. Manisha Mohanty Kiran – Mukherjee Bristy

Bhubaneswar 2022



Should White:

A) play 37.♔c1, or
B) 37.♖e2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Counterplay)

White played 37.♔c1? which was a horrible move. 37...♖xd2 38.♔xd2 ♔d4 This endgame is hopeless. White cannot avoid running out of moves. 39.♗b5 h6 40.♗d7 h4 White is in zugzwang and cannot allow Black to win the a-pawn. 41.♗e8 h3?? (41...♗e6 is winning for Black: 42.♗c6 h5 43.♗e8 h3 44.gxh3 h4–+) 42.gxh3 ♗xf3 43.h4 ♗e4 44.♗d7 ♔c5= Black won the game, but how is unclear. It is possible that the moves are wrong or that the flag fell.

37.♖e2!

Activating the rook for counterplay was essential and not too bad for White.

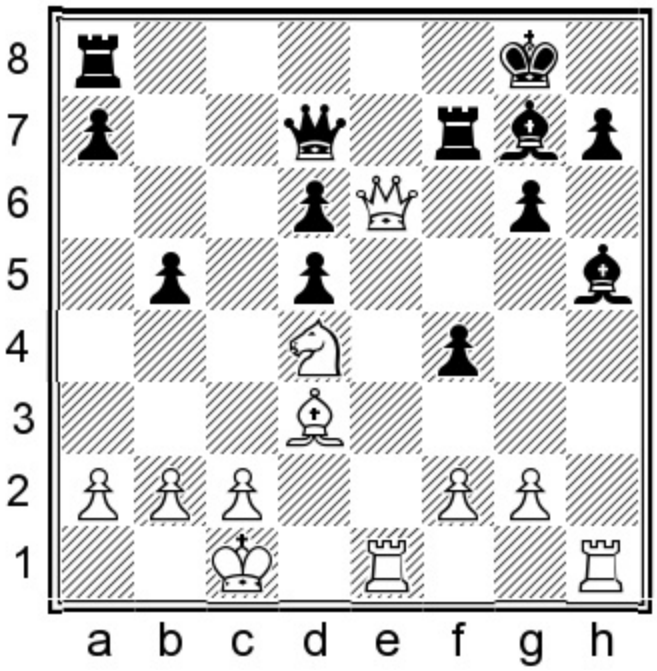
37...♗xf3 38.gxf3 ♖xd7

Winning a pawn in this way may seem tempting, but the rook endgame is not scary for White.

39.♖h2 ♖d5 40.c3=

201. Dusan Dimitrijevic – Ivan Martic

Belgrade 2021



Should Black:

A) exchange queens with 22...♕xe6, or
B) play 22...♗xd4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

The game went 22...♗xd4? 23.♕xd5 ♗xb2† 24.♔xb2∞, and now Black went further astray. 24...♖d8? 25.f3± (25.♖h4! was even stronger) 25...♕b7? 26.♕g5! ♖df8 27.♖xh5 White won the game 20 moves later.

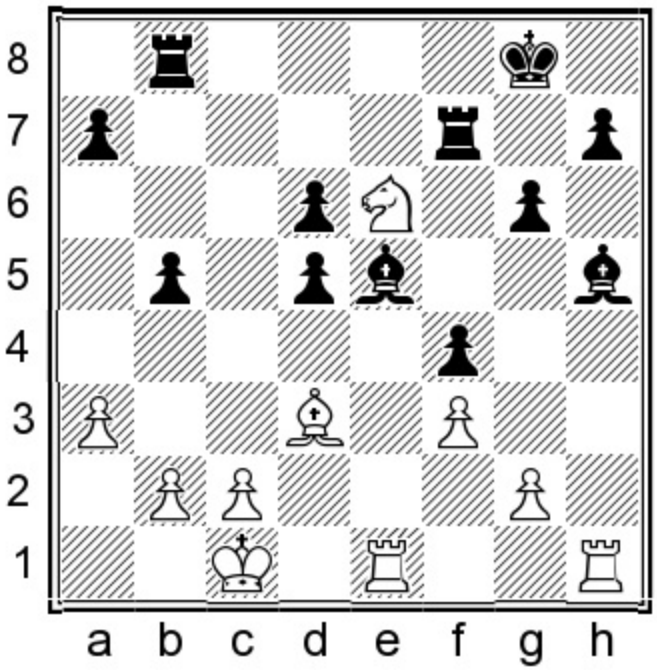
22...♕xe6! 23.♘xe6 ♗e5

Black has a safe position and a material advantage. White has no counterplay. With the two bishops, this decision is a good illustration of getting the queens off with the intention of avoiding complications.

24.♗xb5

White has won a pawn back, but Black is anyway in control.

24.f3!? ♖b8 25.a3 is better.



The general idea is that White wants to play ♔b1 and ♘xf4, followed by g2-g4, to try to escape to an opposite-coloured bishop endgame. But good luck to anyone who finds this idea!

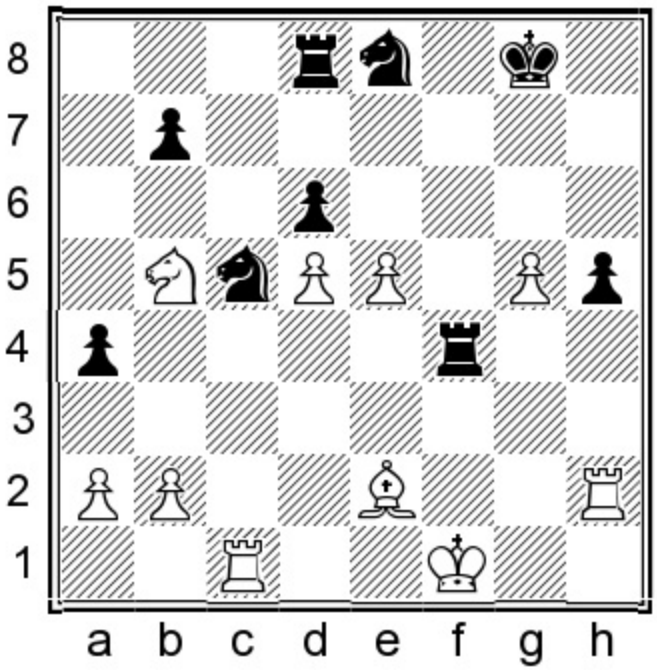
24...♖c8 25.f3 ♖e7 26.♘g5 h6 27.♘h3 g5–+

Matters are only made worse for White by:

28.♘xg5?! ♗g6

202. Yair Parkhov – Nenad Ravic

Novi Sad 2022



Should White:

A) offer the exchange of rooks with 26.♖f2, or
B) play 26.♔g1?

Show/Hide Solution

(Counterplay)
26.♔g1? was a bad mistake. 26...♖f5!± Black gets counterplay against the white pawns and was soon totally fine. 27.exd6 ♖xg5† 28.♖g2 ♖xg2† 29.♔xg2 b6 30.♖h1 ♘xd6 31.♖xh5 ♖e8 32.♗f1 ♘xb5 33.♗xb5 ♖e4= Although Black lost on move 46, due to a blunder on move 40.

26.♖f2!

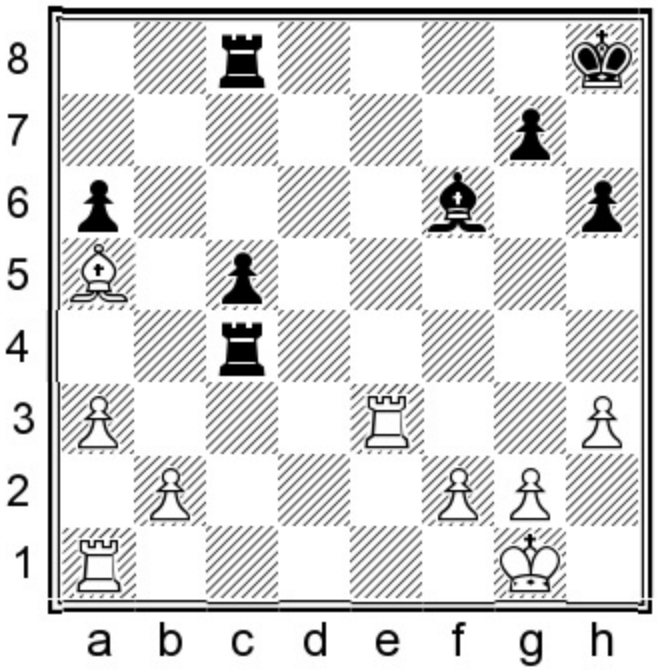
This is simply winning. Black loses a piece if he takes the g5-pawn:

26...♖xf2† 27.♔xf2 ♘e4† 28.♔e3 ♘xg5 29.♖g1+–

1–0

203. Swaminathan Soumya – Agnesa Stepania Ter-Avetisjana

Chennai Olympiad 2022



Should White:

A) play 32.♗c3, or
B) play 32.b3?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

White played: 32.b3? ♖c2 33.♖ae1 The white pawns on the queenside look fragile. Black can create counterplay with the natural 33...♗b2! (In the game Black chose the weaker 33...♗d4? 34.♖3e2± and White won in 77 moves.) 34.a4 c4 35.bxc4 ♖8xc4 36.♖e4 ♗d4= Black will pick up the a4-pawn next, with an equal game.

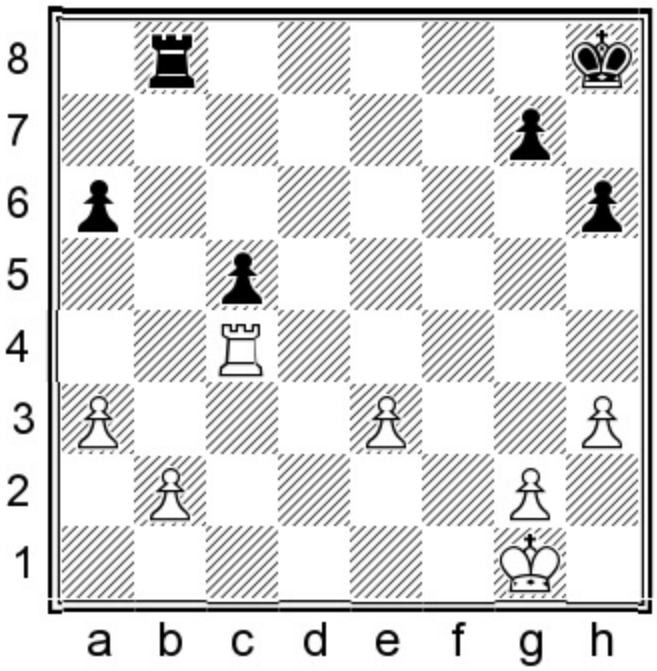
32.♗c3! ♗xc3 33.♖c1!

The point. White also exchanges a pair of rooks while staying active.

Not 33.bxc3? a5±.

33...♖b8

Or: 33...♗d4 34.♖xc4 ♗xe3 35.fxe3 ♖b8



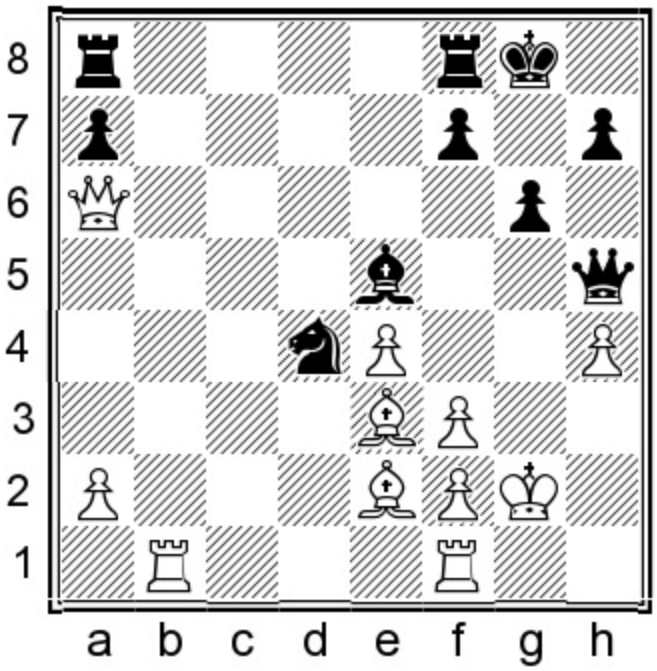
36.♖c2! White will centralize the king before capturing on c5. 36...♔g8 37.♔f2 ♔f7 38.♔f3 ♖b5 (38...♔e7 39.♖xc5 ♖xb2 40.♖c7† ♔f6 41.♖c6† wins easily for White.) 39.a4 ♖b4 40.b3 ♖xb3 41.♖xc5 ♖b6 42.a5 ♖f6† 43.♔e4+–

34.♖exc3 ♖xc3 35.♖xc3 ♖xb2 36.♖xc5 ♖b6 37.h4+–

Without pawns on the queenside the endgame would be a draw, but not here. The black rook is passive, and White will break the defence slowly. First fixing the weaknesses, then centralising the king.

204. Michael Fedorovsky – Alexander Seyb

Germany 2022



Should Black take on h4:

A) immediately, or
B) after taking on e2 first?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing attackers)
20...♕xh4? is the wrong decision. 21.♖h1 ♕e7 (21...♕f6 22.♕xf6 ♗xf6 23.♗c4! would also make it impossible to defend the black position.) 22.♖b7 ♕e6 23.♗c4! ♕xa6 24.♗xa6 ♘e6 25.♖d1 ♖fd8 26.♖xd8† ♖xd8 27.♗c4 White is already winning. For example: 27...a5?! 28.f4! and the game will soon end in his favour.

The game move, 20...♖ae8?, was so bad we did not even make it an option. 21.♖h1! ♗g7 22.♗xd4?? This is impossible to understand. Black's bishop is not strong on g7. Now it becomes a major player, and Black gets drawing chances due to the opposite-coloured bishops. (22.♗d1! looks quirky, but Black has no credible counterplay to compensate for his pawn deficit.) 22...♗xd4± 23.♖b5 ♖e5 The game was drawn on move 31.

20...♘xe2!

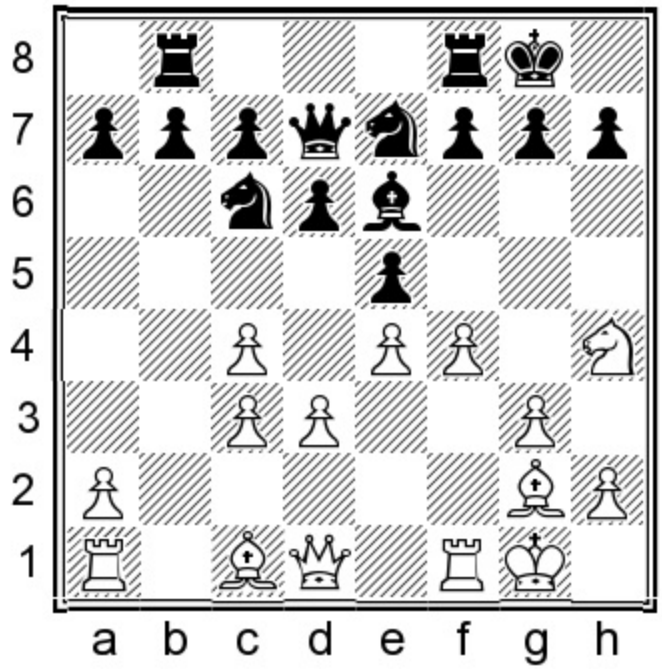
Black should eliminate the bishop before equalising the scorecard. It is not currently active on e2, but soon it could arrive on c4/d5 and shoot at the soft spots in Black's position.

21.♕xe2 ♕xh4 22.♖h1 ♕f6

There is nothing wrong with the black position.

205. Illya Nyzhnyk – Kamil Dragun

St Louis 2022



Should Black play:

A) 11...f5, or
B) 11...exf4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Structure)

11...exf4!

11...f5?! would have been bad. After 12.g4!, White takes over the initiative. If Black takes on g4, pushing the f-pawn gives White a winning attack. And after 12...fxe4 13.f5 ♗f7 14.♗xe4, White has a big advantage. Black can try 14...d5 15.cxd5 ♘xd5, but 16.♕e1 ♘f6 17.♖f2± would keep White in control. Black will not get away with taking on g4, so has to brace himself for resisting a serious onslaught.

12.♗xf4

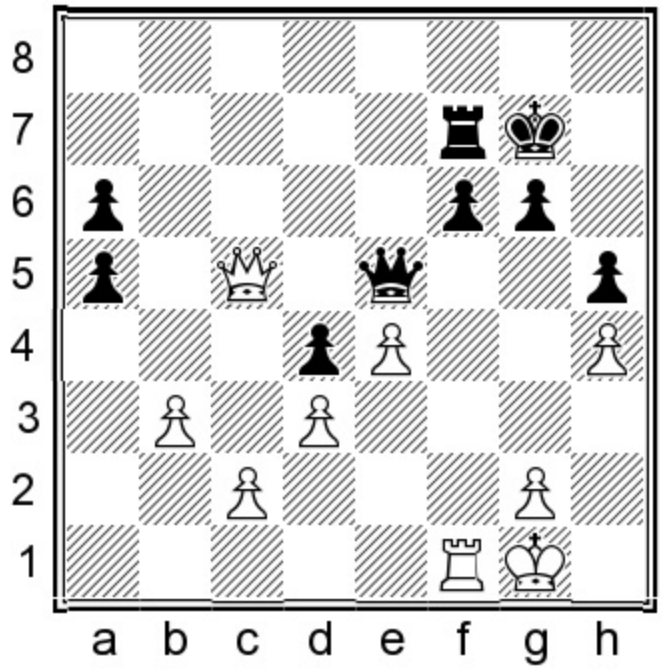
12.gxf4 f5∓ would leave White's pawns loose and without dynamic potential.

12...♘e5!

Black has a slight edge.

The game went 12...♗h3?! 13.♗xh3 ♕xh3 14.c5∞, which led to a white win on move 44.

Novi Sad 2022



Should White:

A) enter a pawn endgame with 38.♕xe5, or
B) play 38.♕b6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Converting an advantage)

White played 38.♕b6? ♖d7 (38...f5! 39.exf5 ♖xf5 leads to an almost immediate draw, since the white king is too exposed and won't be able to hide from checks.) 39.♕xa6 ♖c7 40.♖f2± The game was drawn in 54 moves.

38.♕xe5!

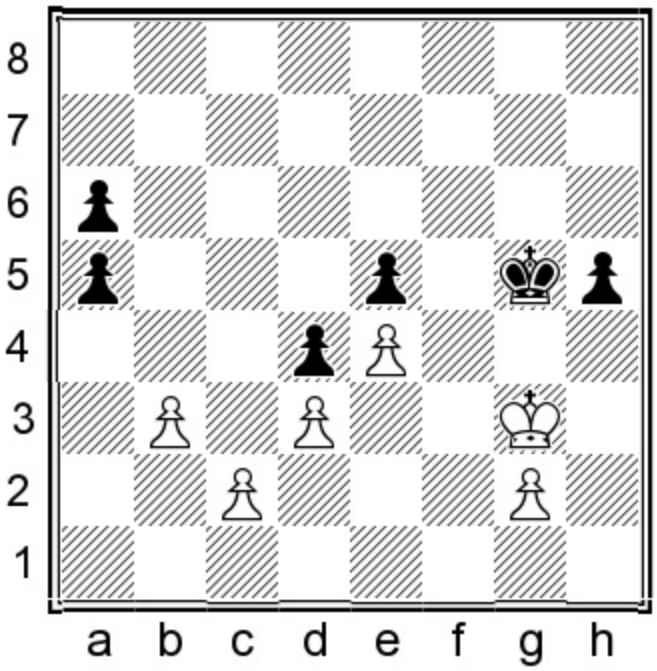
With the better pawn structure, it is worth calculating if the pawn endgame is winning or not. Here White wins because he can create a passed pawn.

38...fxe5 39.♖xf7† ♔xf7 40.♔f2 g5

This is the best defence, although insufficient.

If 40...♔f6 41.♔e2 g5 42.♔d2! White avoids the capture on g5 so the black king can't come in. 42...gxh4 43.c4! dxc3† 44.♔xc3 ♔e6 45.d4 Winning.

41.hxg5 ♔g6 42.♔g3 ♔xg5



43.♔h3! ♔f4

Black can't keep the opposition:

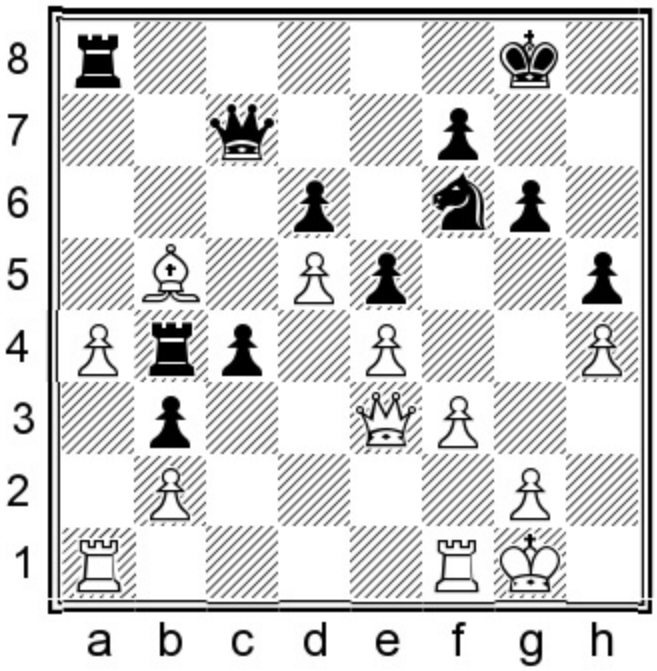
Or: 43...♔g6 44.♔h4 ♔h6 45.g3 ♔g6 46.g4 hxg4 47.♔xg4+–

44.♔h4 ♔e3 45.♔xh5 ♔d2 46.g4 ♔xc2 47.g5 ♔xd3 48.g6 ♔e2 49.g7 d3 50.g8=♕ d2 51.♕g4† ♔e1 52.♕g3† ♔e2 53.♕xe5 d1=♕ 54.♕d5!

White wins.

207. Karen Grigoryan – Miguel Munoz Pantoja

Barbera del Valles 2020



Should Black:

A) play 30...♘d7 to improve the knight, or
B) exchange queens with 30...♕a7?

Show/Hide Solution

(Tactics)

The rook on b4 has an active role. It is behind a potential passed pawn on b3 and also puts pressure on the a4-pawn. However, it is also trapped and the only way to defend it is by playing ...♕c5 or ...♕a5 once it is attacked. So Black had better keep the queens on!

In the game Black tried:

30...♕a7? 31.♕xa7 ♖xa7

But the endgame was dangerous for him. If the white king reaches c3 it is game over. White now should have played:

32.♔f2!

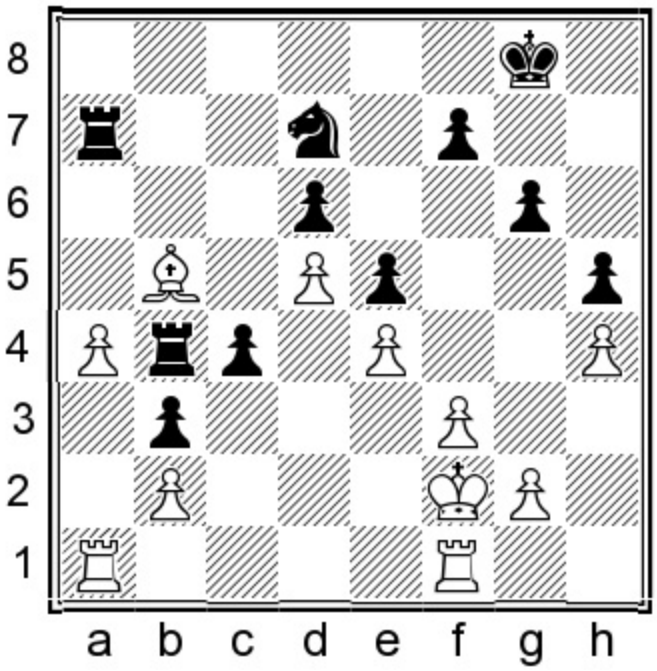
With the idea of ♔e3-d2-c3 to target the c4-pawn.

Instead, the following happened: 32.♖fc1?? c3! 33.♔f2 (33.bxc3 ♖xb5 34.axb5 b2 is the tactical point.) 33...♔g7 34.♖ab1 c2 When Black was winning, although he managed to mess it up later and the game ended in a draw.

32...♘d7

The only move.

32...♖c7 loses to: 33.♔e2 c3 34.bxc3 ♖xc3 35.♖ac1! ♖c5 36.♖xc5 dxc5 37.d6+–



33.♗xd7

White cannot allow the knight to get to c5.

33...♖xd7 34.a5±

We could easily fill a few pages with analysis of this endgame. Instead, we will stop here and conclude that Black is facing an uphill struggle in his fight for a draw.

30...♘d7!

Going to c5 with the knight, attacking the pawn on a4, is a good plan.

31.♕c3

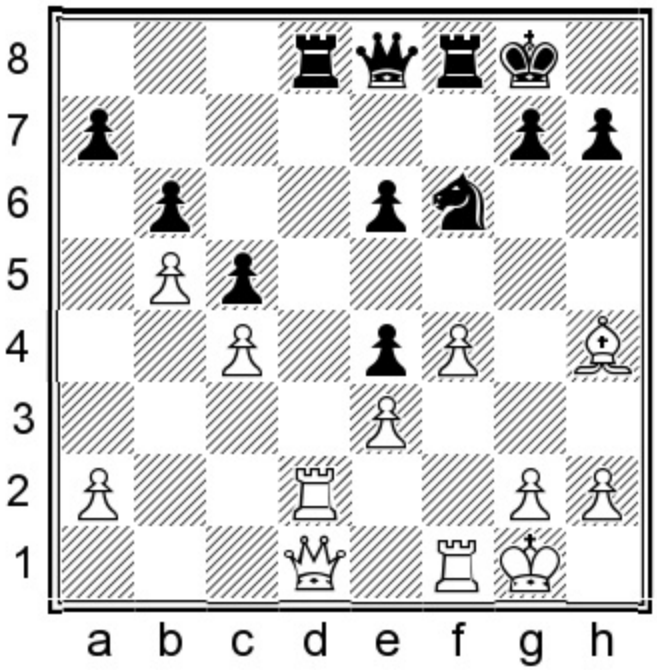
If 31.♔h1 ♘c5 32.♕c3 ♕a5, Black is taking the pawn on a4.

31...♕c5† 32.♔h1 ♘b6=

Black has decent counterplay.

208. Lyudmila Gubernatorova – Kamilla Baiburina

Sochi 2020



Should Black fight for the open file with:

A) 21...♕e7, or
B) 21...♖xd2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)

In the game, after 21...♕e7? 22.♖ff2!, White was in control of the d-line. Play continued 22...e5 23.f5 ♖d3 24.♖xd3 exd3 25.♕xd3 ♖d8 26.♗xf6 gxf6 27.♕e4, and White converted his extra pawn by move 42.

21...♖xd2! 22.♕xd2 ♕d8!

Not 22...♕e7? 23.♖d1, which gives White control of the d-line.

23.♕c1

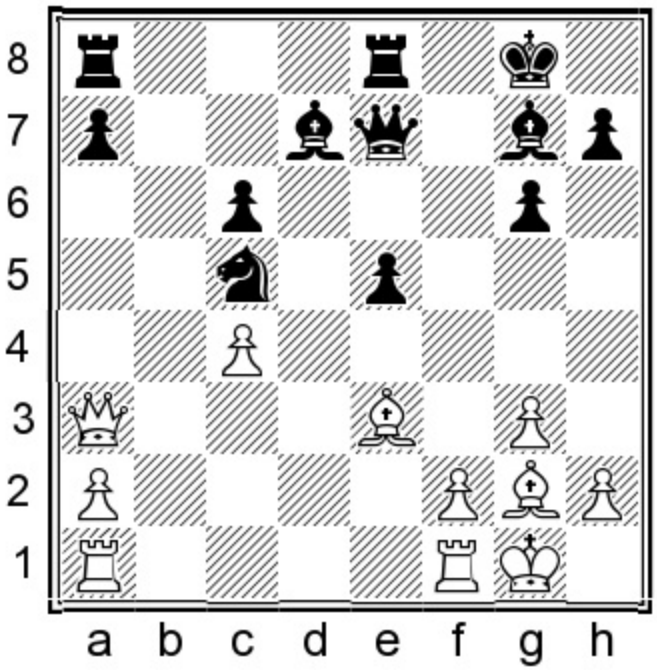
The key point is that after 23.♖d1?! ♕xd2 24.♖xd2, Black has 24...♘g4, when White either has to give up the d-line, after 25.♖e2 ♘h6!, or play 25.♗f2, when Black has 25...a6!!= creating counterplay on the queenside.

23...♖f7 24.h3 h6±

Black is only a little bit worse.

209. Marius Deuer – Oscar De La Riva Aguado

Gmund am Tegernsee 2021



Should White take on c5 with:

A) the bishop, or
B) the queen?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

In the game, after 20.♕xc5? ♕xc5 21.♗xc5 e4, a draw was agreed. Without queens, White cannot find any obvious targets. It is possible he can squeeze a bit with 22.♖ab1!?, but Black would have to play poorly to get into real trouble.

20.♗xc5! ♕f7

Trying to win some time to regroup by attacking the c4-pawn.

20...♕d8 21.♗e4! would keep the e-pawn under control and keep the bishop on g7 bad.

21.♖ab1!

White has the initiative. He needs to use it to make the most out of his position.

21...♕xc4 22.♖fc1 ♕e6 23.♖b7

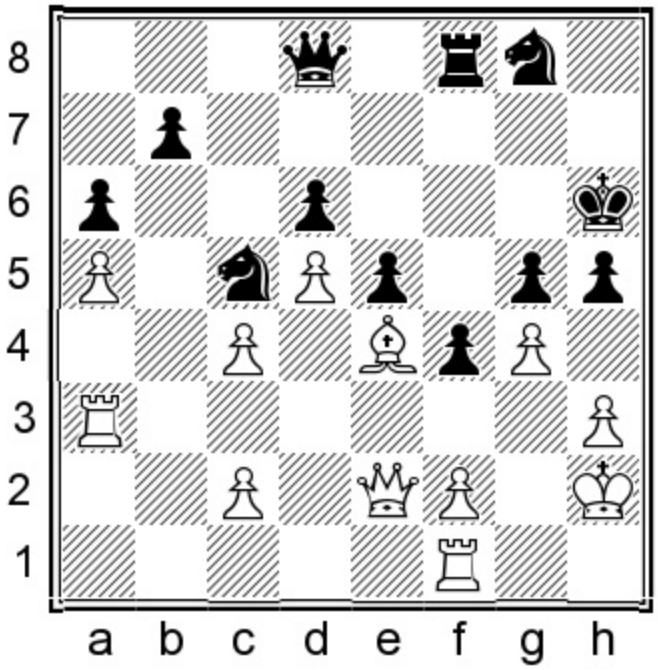
White has a winning attack. For example:

23...♖eb8 24.♖xb8† ♖xb8 25.♕xa7

The combined power of the active white pieces and the distant passed pawn leaves White clearly winning.

210. Jan Vykouk – Artur Jakubiec

Czech Republic 2021



Should Black play:

A) 27...♘xe4, or
B) 27...♘f6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

Black played:

27...♘f6? 28.♗f5 e4

When he has compensation, but nothing more. The position seemed easier to play for Black, as he won the game. But the bishop on f5 is annoying and better than the knight on c5.

29.f3?!

An unnecessary weakening of the position.

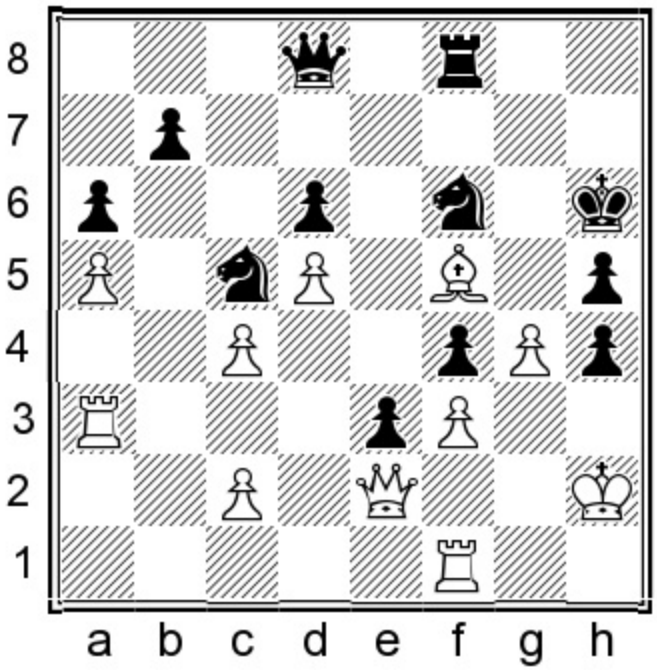
Stockfish 16 gives 29.♖g1! ♕e7 30.♕d1 ♕e5 31.♕a1 as a way for White to keep the balance.

29...e3∓ 30.h4?

Desperate measures from White, giving him a surprising chance.

30...gxh4?

30...hxg4 31.fxg4 ♕e7–+ would leave Black totally in control.



31.♔h1?

White missed the chance for counterplay:

31.♖xe3!! would force Black to play 31...♘xg4† (The key point is that 31...fxe3? loses to 32.♕xe3† ♔g7 33.♕g5† ♔f7 34.♕g6† ♔e7 35.♖e1†.) 32.fxg4 fxe3 with a big mess. For example, 33.♕xe3† ♕g5 34.♕d4 with even chances in a complicated position.

31...hxg4 32.♖xe3 ♘h5!

Black is winning.

33.fxg4 fxe3 34.gxh5 ♕g5 35.♗g6 ♖xf1† 36.♕xf1 ♕e5 37.♕f8† ♔g5 38.♕g8 ♔f4 39.♔g2 e2 40.♕f8† ♔g5 41.♕d8† ♕f6

0–1.

27...♘xe4!

It is important to eliminate White's best piece. The white rooks are not working well in this semi-closed position.

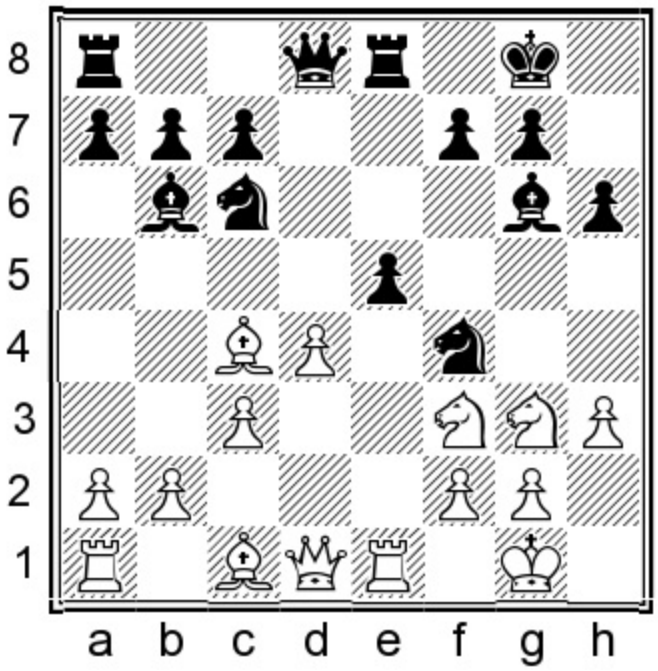
28.♕xe4 ♘f6 29.♕e2

29.♕f5 is not possible due to 29...♘xg4†.

29...hxg4 30.hxg4 e4∓

Black has great prospects. White has an extra exchange, but also weak pawns on g4, c4 and a5, and his king is in danger.

211. Bassem Amin – Alexei Shirov



Should White:

A) exchange with 14.♗xf4, or
B) win a pawn with 14.dxe5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

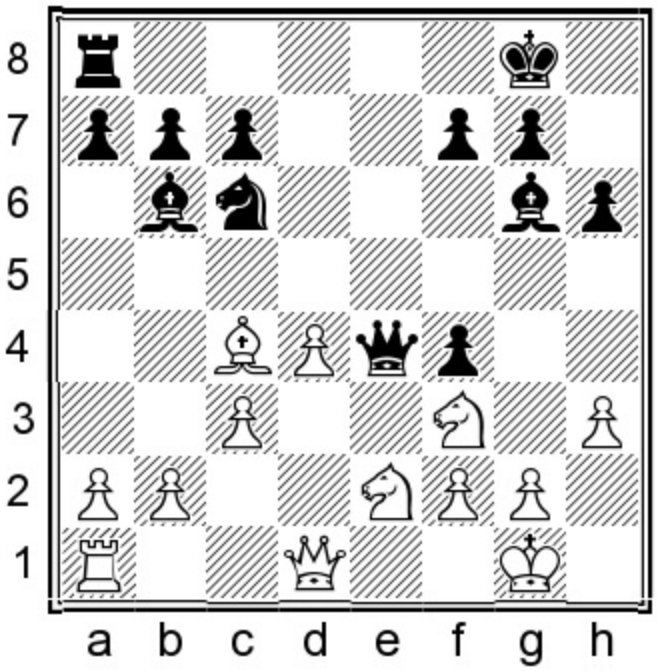
Amin decided to win a pawn with 14.dxe5?, but after 14...♘d3! Black gained the advantage of the bishop pair, guaranteeing full compensation for the pawn. The game finished peacefully in just a few more moves. 15.♗xd3 ♕xd3 16.♕xd3 ♗xd3 17.♘h5 ♖ad8 18.♘f4 ♗c2 19.♗e3 ♘xe5 20.♘xe5 ♖xe5 21.♗xb6 ½–½

14.♗xf4!

Exchanging a strong black piece and creating a long-term weakness on f4. It also amplifies the strength of White's central pawns, making Black's minor pieces on the queenside passive.

14...exf4 15.♖xe8† ♕xe8 16.♘e2 ♕e4

On 16...♘a5, White is happy to exchange the only good piece remaining in Black's camp with: 17.♗d3+–



17.b4!

Prophylaxis against the idea of ...♘a5.

Less precise is 17.♕d2 ♘a5!±, when Black is fine after gaining the bishop pair.

17...a5

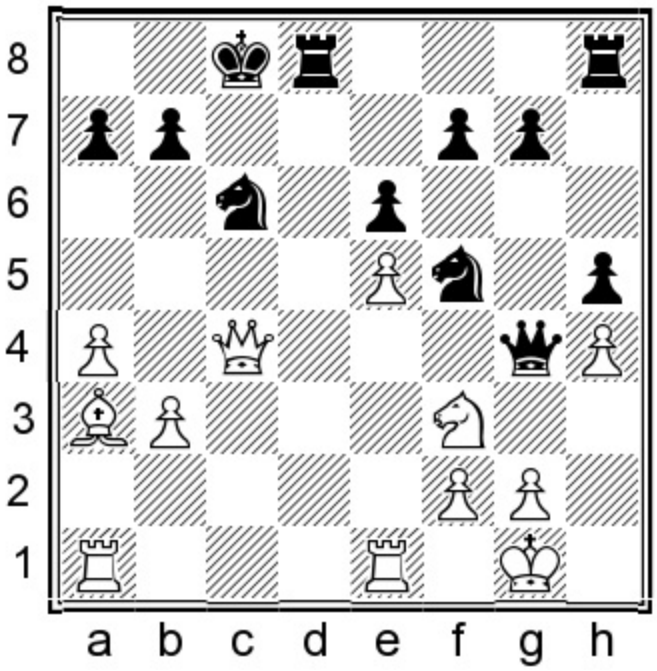
17...♖e8 18.a4 a5 19.b5 ♘e7 20.♕d2 is not an improvement for Black.

18.b5 ♘e7 19.♘e5+–

White has a significant positional advantage. He can continue improving his position, putting pressure on Black's weaknesses on f4 and f7, while Black is unable to create counterplay.

212. Andre Neves Fidalgo – Andre Ventura Sousa

Leiria 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange queens with 20...♕xc4, or
B) offer to exchange knights with 20...♘fd4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)
20...♔b8 21.♖e4 ♕g6 22.♖c1 would be a disaster for Black.

Black played:

20...♘fd4?
Even if White complies with the knight exchange, the outcome is not in Black's favour. For example:
21.♘xd4
21.♘g5! would have been the strongest. 21...♕f5 22.♗d6+– White plays 23.♖ac1 next, with a winning attack.
The game went: 21.♘h2? ♕f5?! 22.♖ac1 White was better but lost in 56 moves.
21...♖xd4 22.♕f1 ♕xh4?! 23.♖ac1
White's attack is very real.

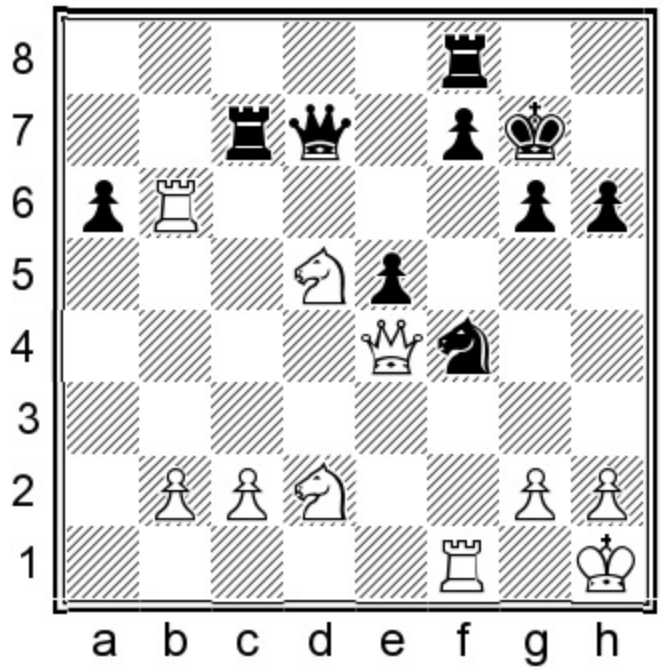
20...♕xc4!
The exchange of queens favours Black. It leaves White with two weak pawns on the queenside and zero attacking prospects. It is as simple as that.

21.bxc4 ♖d7∓

Black plans to continue with ...♖hd8 and slowly improve his position.

213. Leonardo Costa – Michael Braun

Gmund am Tegernsee 2021



Should Black take on d5 with:

A) the knight, or
B) the queen?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

The chances were roughly equal in the game after 33...♕xd5? 34.♖xf4 ♕xd2 35.♕xe5† ♔h7 36.h4. Black lost in time pressure: 36...♖xc2 37.♖xg6 ♕c1†? (The necessary move was 37...♕d1†, taking control of the g4-square. After 38.♔h2 ♔xg6, White would have to find 39.♖f6† ♔h7 40.♖xh6†! to escape with a draw.) 38.♔h2 ♕xb2 39.♖xh6† ♔xh6 40.♖f6† 1–0

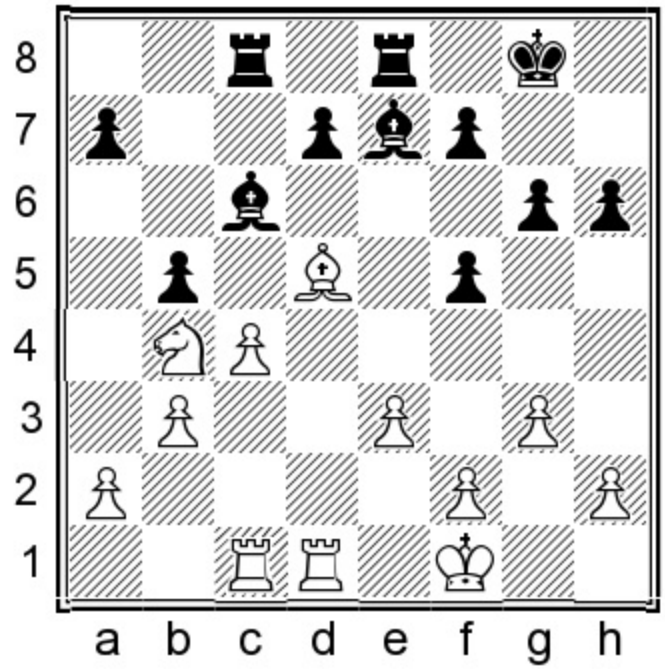
33...♘xd5!

This is strongest. The white queen cannot find a good spot. After:

34.♖xa6 ♖e8∓

White has an exposed kingside, missing the f2-pawn greatly, and his queenside passed pawns are unable to advance. White is under a lot of pressure and will find it difficult to hold the game in practice.

Buenos Aires 2022



Should White take on c6 with:

A) the bishop, or
B) the knight?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

White opted for the opposite-coloured bishop endgame in the game with 23.♘xc6 dxc6 24.♗f3, when after 24...b4! 25.♖d7 ♗c5 Black could play ...♔f8 and ...♖e7, with a fully equal endgame. However, Black later blundered and lost.

23.♗xc6!

Looking for the better knight against bad bishop endgame.

23...dxc6 24.♘a6

The knight enters Black's position, securing the important c7-square which can be used for the invasion of White's rook. Black must now prevent the threat of c4xb5 followed by ♘c7, forking the e8-rook and b5-pawn.

24...♖ed8 25.♔e2

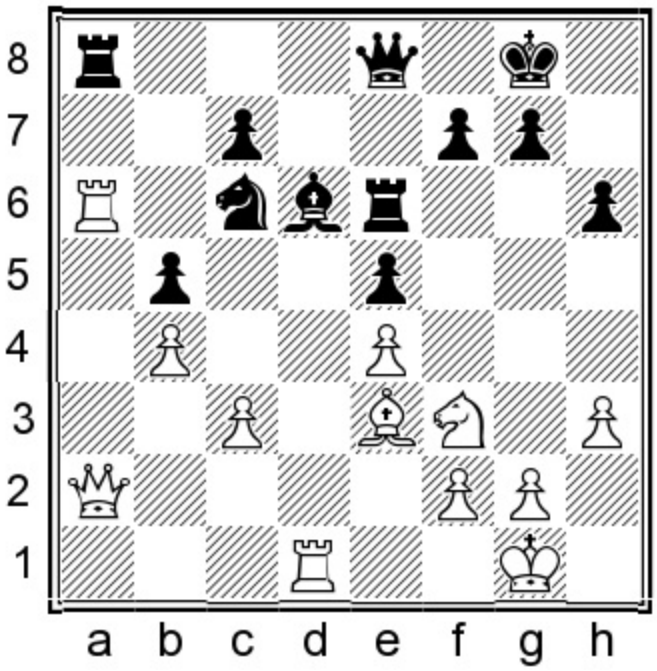
White can win a pawn with 25.♖xd8† ♖xd8 26.cxb5 cxb5 27.♖c7, but after 27...♖d1† 28.♔g2 ♗f6 29.♖xa7 ♖d2 30.♘c7 b4 Black is active and has some compensation.

25...♔f8 26.♖d4±

Slowly improving the pieces and waiting for the right time to break through. White has the better chances.

215. Michael Adams – Rainer Buhmann

Khanty-Mansiysk 2010



Should Black:

A) exchange rooks with 25...♖xa6, or
B) yield the a-file with 25...♖b8?

Show/Hide Solution

(Tactics)
25...♖b8?± left Black condemned to passive defence, from which he did not recover. 26.♕e2 ♘e7 27.♘h4 ♘g6 28.♘f5 ♗f8 29.♖a7 ♘f4 30.♕f1 ♖c6 31.g3 ♘e6 32.♗d2 ♖cb6 33.♕e2 ♖d8 34.♗e3 ♖xd1† 35.♕xd1 ♖c6 36.♕d5! f6 (Or 36...♖xc3 37.♖a8!, winning material.) 37.♕xb5 ♔f7 38.♕d3 g6 39.b5 ♖c5 40.♗xc5 ♗xc5 41.♘d6† 1–0

25...♖xa6! 26.♕xa6

Now Black has the chance to take the initiative with a nice tactic:

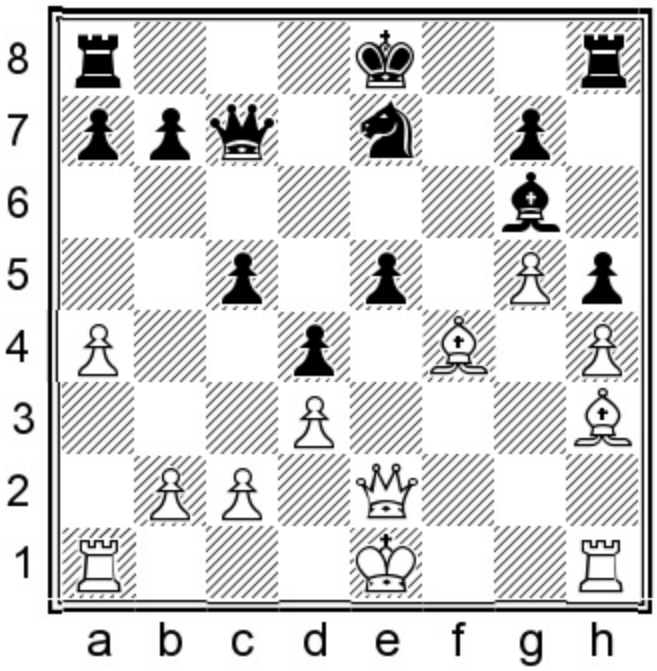
26...♘d4!

Because of the X-ray attack from e6 to a6, White is better off leaving the knight alone and defending a slightly inferior position with:

27.♕a2!∓

216. Anish Giri – Ian Nepomniachtchi

Amsterdam (blitz) 2019



Should White take on e5 with:

A) the queen, or
B) the bishop?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

Giri played 22.♗xe5? ♕a5†. The queens will come off anyway, and the white king is misplaced on d2. 23.♕d2 ♕xd2† 24.♔xd2 0-0 25.♖af1 (Ever so slightly stronger was 25.♖hf1, although Black has excellent drawing chances after 25...♘f5 26.♗xf5 ♖xf5 27.♖xf5 ♗xf5 28.♗d6 ♖c8±.) 25...♘f5 26.♗xf5 ♖xf5 27.♖xf5 ♗xf5 28.♗d6 b6 Black held the draw by move 45.

22.♕xe5!

By elimination, this was the stronger move.

22...♕xe5† 23.♗xe5 0-0 24.♗d6

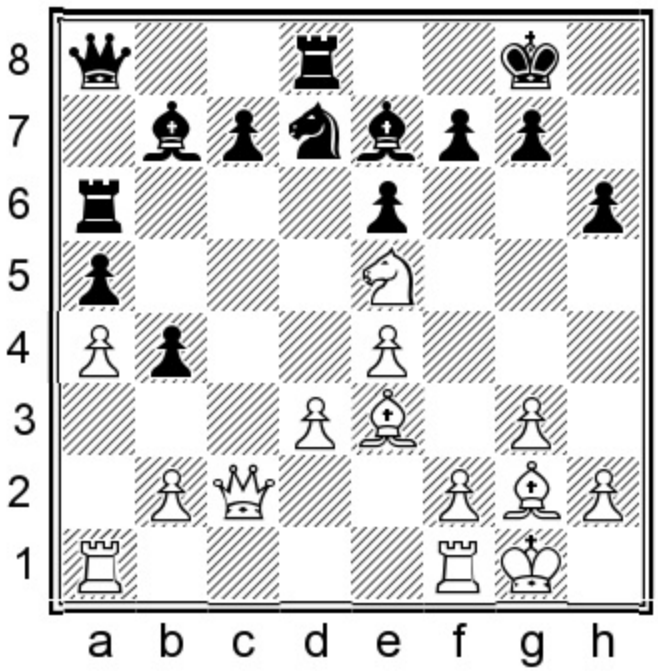
White is winning. For example:

24...b6 25.0-0-0 ♖fe8 26.♗d7 ♖ed8 27.♗e6† ♗f7 28.♗xe7

White has won an exchange.

217. Peng Li Min – Arjun Erigaisi

Portugal 2021



Should White react to the proposed exchange of knights with:

A) 21.♘xd7,
B) 21.f4, or
C) 21.♘c4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

The move played in the game was horrible. After 21.f4? ♘xe5 22.fxe5 ♖d7∓ White's position was full of weaknesses, although he managed to draw by move 56. 23.d4?! For some reason Black failed to find 23...c5!, when the white position falls apart: 24.dxc5 ♖c6 25.♖ac1 ♖dc7 26.♕f2 ♕f8 With a winning position for Black.

21.♘xd7 ♖xd7∓ would be a better version of the game for White. But all the main weaknesses are still in the white position. 22.♖ac1 (22.d4?! ♖c6! 23.♕e2 ♖cd6∓ is bad for White. For example: 24.♕c2 ♗f6! 25.♖ad1 ♗xd4 26.♗xd4 ♖xd4 27.♖xd4 ♖xd4 28.♕xc7 ♖d2 With an enduring advantage for Black.) 22...♗f6 White is a bit worse and will struggle.

21.♘f3 would take the knight to a strange square. After 21...♗f6∓, White is suffering a bit.
21.♕xc7? ♗d6 drops a piece.

21.♘c4!

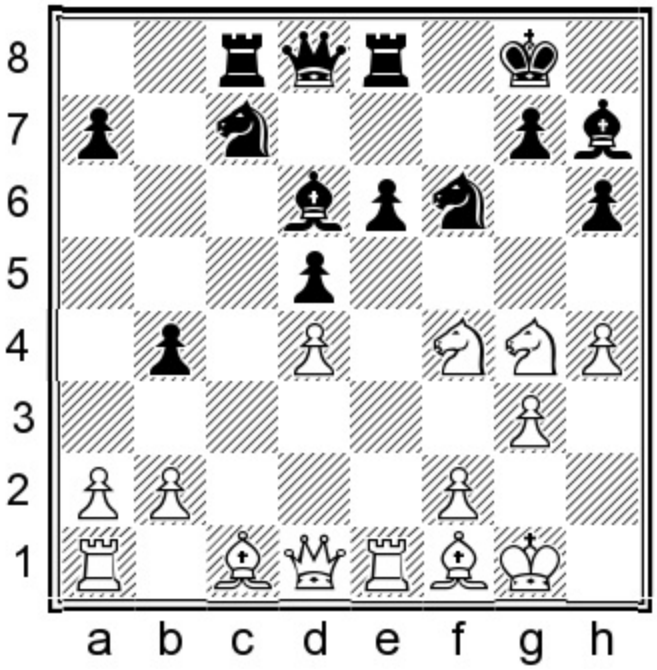
The knight is well placed on c4, aiming at the a5-pawn and blocking the c-file.

21...c5 22.♖ad1

White has the best version of this structure we have seen and is not worse.

218. Christian Palozza – Mattia Pegno

Civitanova 2021



Should Black:

A) exchange on g4, or
B) play 25...♘e4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

In the game Black went 25...♘e4?, when White would have an overwhelming position after 26.♘e5!±. Instead he played: 26.♘h5 ♗g6 27.♘e5 ♗xe5 28.dxe5 and won a long game.

25...♘xg4!

Exchanging a piece which was threatening to become strong in the centre.

26.♕xg4 ♗f5!

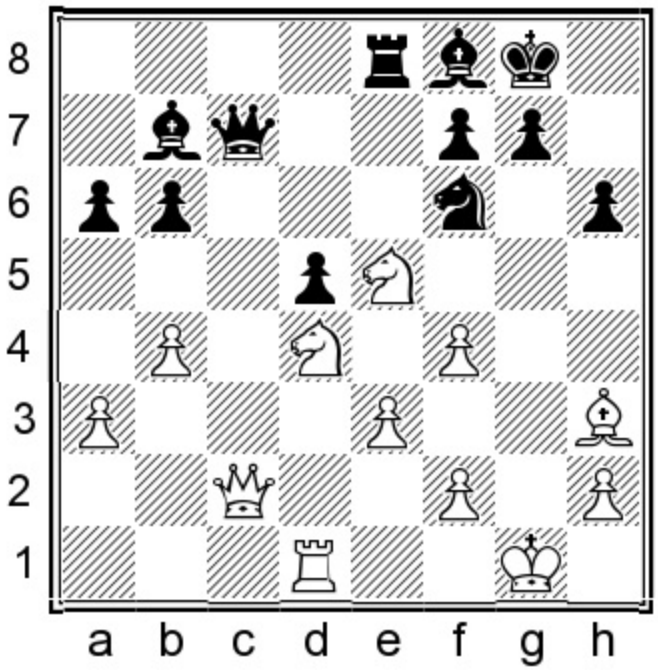
A key follow-up which Black possibly missed. The white queen is sent away from the g4-square where it was very active, particularly after ♘h5.

27.♕d1 ♕f6

Black will play ...e6-e5, or ...a7-a6 followed by ...♘b5, in both cases with roughly equal play.

219. Alberto Hernandez Leon – Daniel Dardha

Alicante 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange queens with 24...♕xc2, or
B) retreat with 24...♕d8?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses/Controlling an open file)
24...♕d8 worked well in the game after 25.♘f5?! (But White should have played: 25.♖c1! ♗d6 26.♘f5 ♗b8 27.♘c6 [27.f3!? is interesting, preparing ♕g2 which attacks the weak g7-square.] 27...♗xc6 28.♕xc6 g6 29.♘d4 Black is under pressure and without counterplay.) 25...a5 26.♕b2 axb4 27.axb4 g6, where Black has counterplay. He later won.

24...♕xc2

It is important for Black to eliminate White's most powerful piece. Black is happy with the endgame, where his two bishops are at their best, and he can try to open the position with a pawn break. Both ...a6-a5 and ...g7-g5 attack White on the dark squares, where he misses the bishop.

25.♘xc2 ♖e7!?

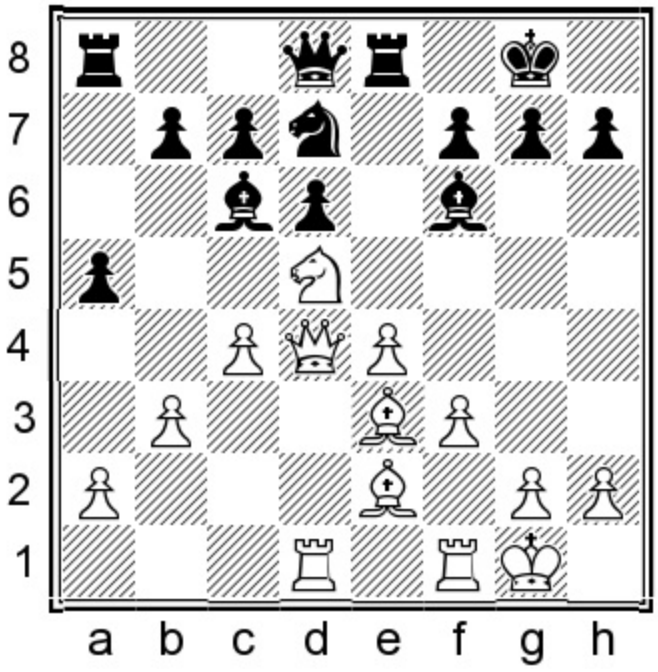
25...a5 and 25...g5 are also playable, but it is safe and natural to contest the c-file.

26.♘d4 ♖c7

Black takes control of the c-file with a good position.

220. Jose Guilherme Santos – Jorge Cori

Teplice 2022



Should White:

A) retreat the queen to d2, or
B) take the bishop pair with 15.♘xf6†?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

White played: 15.♘xf6†?! ♕xf6 16.♕xf6 (16.♕d2!±) 16...♘xf6, after which he had a small advantage due to the two bishops, but suspiciously close to nothing. Black won a not-that-long game after White misplayed the position further.

15.♕d2!

Keeping the tension is to White's advantage. The key element in this position is space. Black is lacking it (and has problems coordinating his pieces), while White has a lot of it (to manoeuvre in).

15...b6

It is hard to suggest moves for Black.

15...♗xd5 16.cxd5± leaves the c7-pawn exposed on the half-open file.

16.♖fe1

16.♕c2 ♘c5 17.♖f2!? is another pleasant way to play, using the space advantage to manoeuvre in.

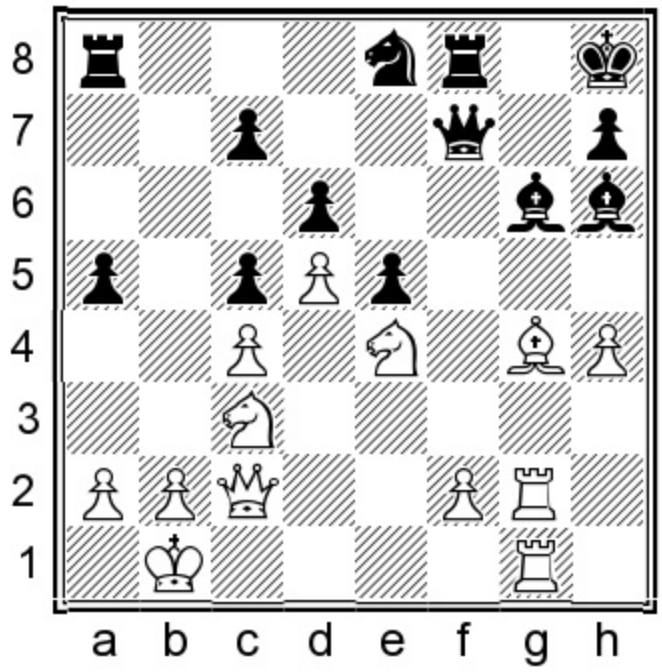
16...♘c5 17.♗f1 ♗b7 18.g3

With the idea of ♗f2, ♗g2 and eventually f3-f4. There are also other tempting ways to play the white position.

Show in Text Mode

221. Luca Silva – Gustavo Velazquez

Buenos Aires 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange knights with 23...♘f6, or
B) play 23...♘g7, with the intention of putting the knight on d4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)
23...♘g7? allowed White to play the prophylactic 24.h5! (White played 24.♕e2?! which allowed 24...♘h5, equalising. However, White still won the game in 34 moves.) 24...♗f5 (24...♘xh5 25.♖h1 would give White a winning attack on the h-file. 25...♗g7 26.♗xh5 ♗xh5 27.♘g5 ♕g6 28.♘ce4 with a winning position.) 25.f3±

23...♘f6!

It is desirable to exchange the poor black knight for the strong knight on e4.

24.h5

The critical try. The reason Black did not play 23...♘f6 was probably 24.♗e6?. But Black can rely on tactics: 24...♘xe4! This is not surprising when there is a black bishop on g6 and White has the queen and king on the h7-b1 diagonal. 25.♖xg6 (25.♗xf7 ♘xc3† wins for Black. 25.♘xe4 is the lesser

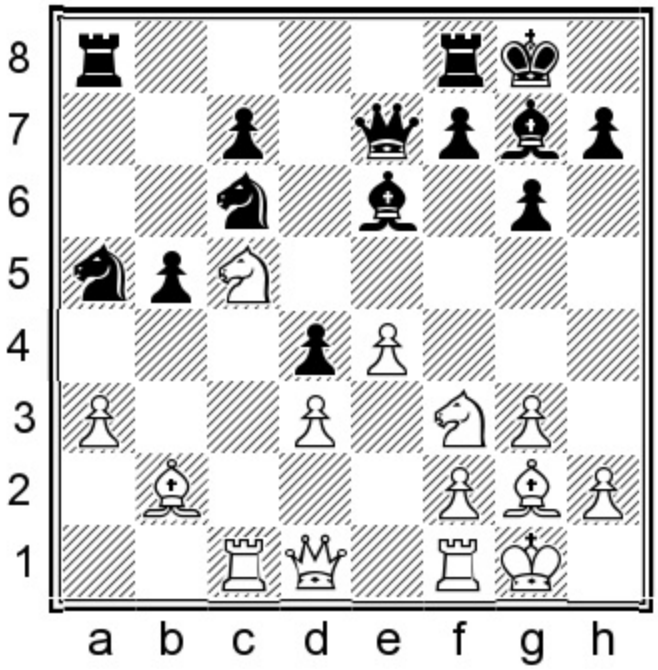
evil. Black can continue with 25...♕f3 26.♖xg6 hxg6 27.♗g4 ♕f4, with the better position.) 25...♘d2†! A beautiful intermediate check. 26.♔a1 (or 26.♕xd2 ♕xg6†) 26...♕xf2! 27.♖6g2 ♕e3, with a winning position.

24...♗xe4 25.♘xe4 ♘xe4 26.♕xe4 ♕f4

Black has equalised.

222. Stephen Brady – Sam Collins

Ireland 2020



Should White:

A) take on e6, or
B) play 17.e5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Colour schemes)

The mistaken sequence in the game was: 17.♘d2? ♖ab8? (Black should have played 17...♗c4! 18.♘db3 ♘e5 when he is not worse. For example, 19.dxc4 bxc4 20.♘xa5 ♕xc5 and Black will win the piece back.) 18.f4 White was better and won on move 62.

17.e5 ♗d5± is not a major problem for Black, although some accuracy from him is needed.

17.♘xe6!

All the critical points are on the light squares. It is therefore correct to eliminate the black light-

squared bishop for a knight that has no other potential.

17...♕xe6

17...fxe6 18.e5 would expose Black's weaknesses on the light squares even further.

18.e5!

There were other strong moves, but this is the principled one, bringing the bishop on g2 to life.

18...♖fd8

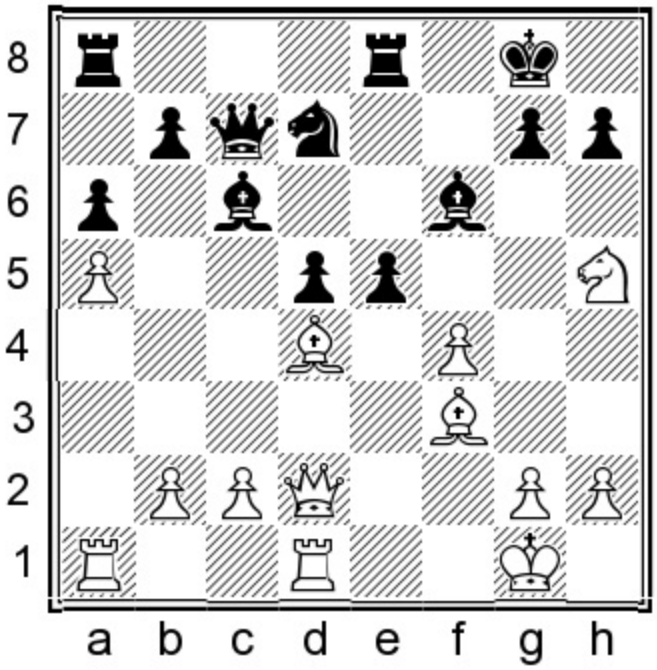
18...♕d7 19.♖e1 followed by 20.♖e4 or 20.e6!?, would put Black under too much pressure.

19.♘g5 ♕xe5 20.♘xf7 ♔xf7 21.♗xc6 ♘xc6 22.♖xc6

White has an overwhelming advantage. Black has many weaknesses and White is about to get a lot of tempo moves.

223. Miklos Nemeth – Michael Massoni

Corti 2022



Should White play:

A) 22.♗xe5, or
B) 22.♘xf6†?

Show/Hide Solution

(King safety)
22.♗xe5? was utterly harmless. After: 22...♗xe5 23.♗xd5† ♔h8 (23...♗xd5! 24.♕xd5† ♔h8 25.fxe5 ♘xe5 was even better. The white queen is uncomfortable on d5.) 24.♗xc6 ♕xc6 25.fxe5 ♘xe5 Black had reasonable compensation for the pawn. He lost on move 69, but not because this position is really dangerous for him.

22.♗f2?! d4± is also acceptable for Black.

22.♘xf6†!

Destroying the structure around the black king. There will be no recovery from this.

22...gxf6 23.♗f2 e4

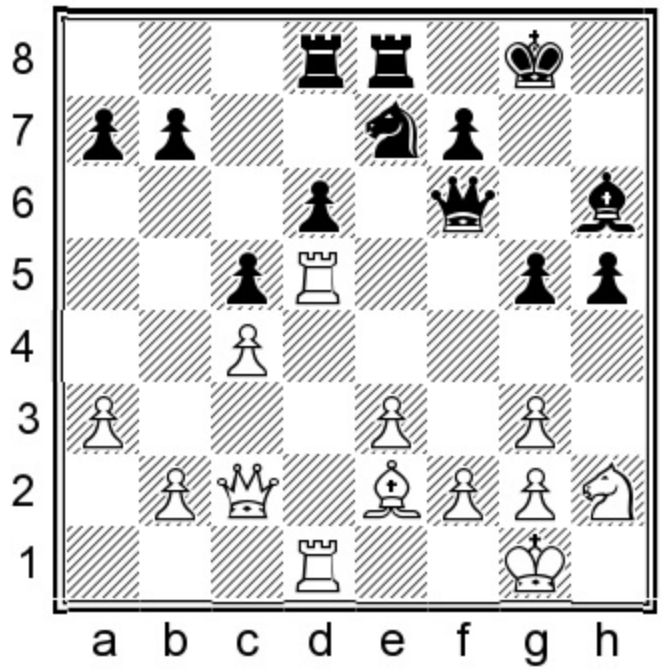
Or 23...d4 24.♗xc6 ♕xc6 25.fxe5 fxe5 26.c3 and White wins a pawn with a winning position.

24.♗g4 ♖e7 25.♖a3

The initial impression is that White's advantage is clear. Actually, Black is completely lost. His king is too weak and White's dark-squared bishop too strong.

224. Alexander Moiseenko – Emil Risteski

Terme Catez 2022



Should White:

A) sacrifice the exchange with 22.♗xh5, or

B) retreat the rook?

Show/Hide Solution

(Colour schemes)

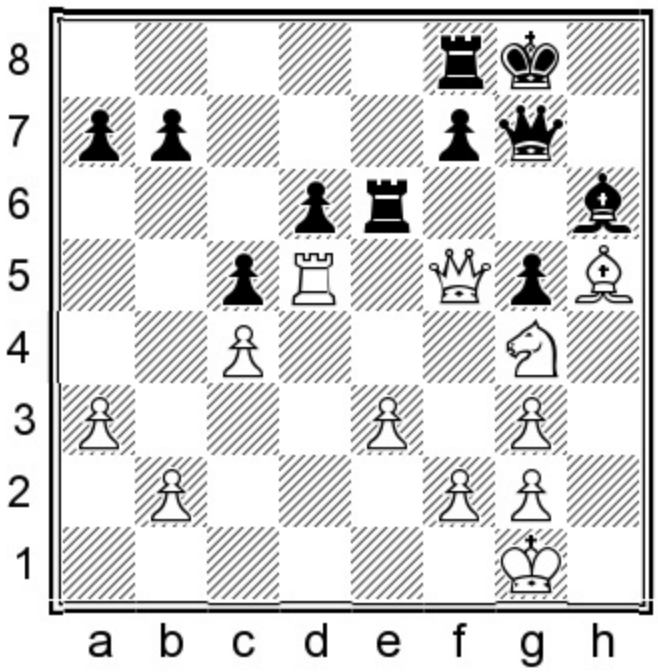
22.♗xh5

This is overwhelmingly strong. The black bishop on h6 is useless, and there is no defence on the light squares after the disappearance of the knight.

22...♘xd5 23.♘g4 ♕g7 24.♖xd5+– ♖e6 25.♕f5!?

25.♖f5! ♖d7 26.♕e2+– was even stronger.

25...♖f8



26.♘xh6†??

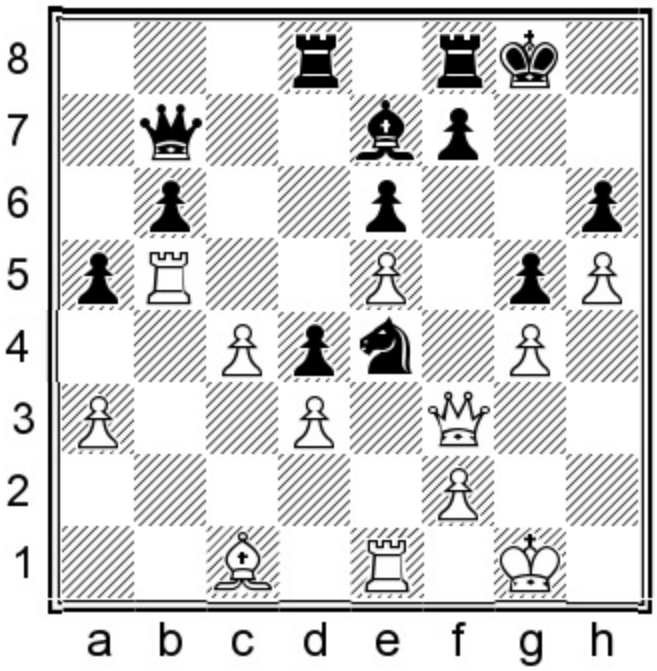
An exchange that cannot easily be explained. Black is tied up and is set free by an exchange of his worst piece for a mere pawn.

26...♕xh6 27.♕xg5† ♕xg5 28.♖xg5† ♔h7=

The game ended in a draw on move 51.

225. Jakob Vang Glud – Antonios Pavlidis

Germany 2021



Should White take on e4:

A) with the queen, or
B) with the rook?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

30.♕xe4!

Without queens, Black is left with pawn weaknesses and no counterplay.

30.♖xe4? would have been bad. After 30...f5! 31.exf6 ♖xf6= Black gets plenty of counterplay down the f-file.

30...♕xe4 31.♖xe4 ♗c5?

Black missed the opportunity to play: 31...a4!!± 32.♖xb6? ♖b8±

32.f4

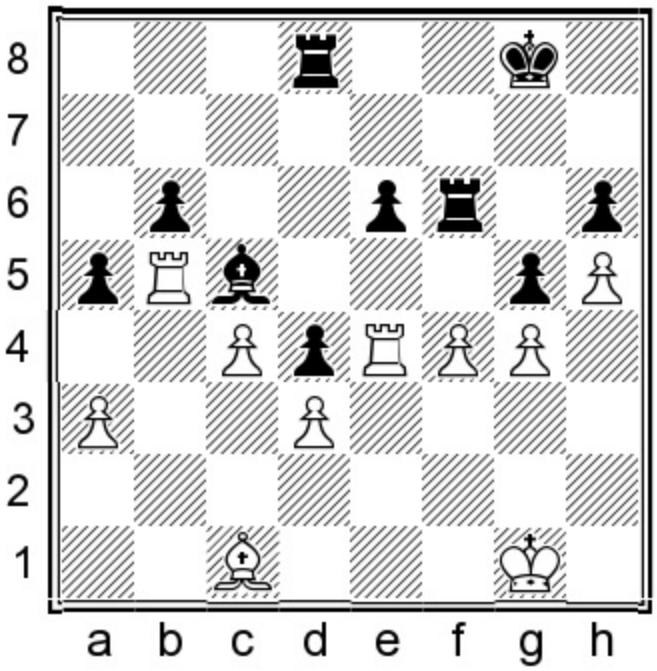
Not ruining anything, but it was better to improve the structure first.

32.a4! was the correct and patient move, not letting the a3-pawn be fixed as a weakness.

32...f5!?

Desperately seeking counterplay. And successfully so!

33.exf6 ♖xf6



34.fxg5??

A blunder, nothing more.

34.a4! would have kept the structure in place and given White a free hand going forward. 34...♖df8 (34...gxf4 35.♔f2 f3 36.♗d2+– is similar.) 35.♔g2 ♖8f7 36.♗d2 ♔f8 37.♖e2! Finally threatening to take on g5. 37...gxf4 38.♔f3 White is dominating and will win back the pawn, leaving Black with nothing but weaknesses. For example, 38...♖c7 (or 38...♖e7 39.♗xa5 e5 40.♗e1, with an easily winning endgame) 39.♖e4.

34...♖f3!

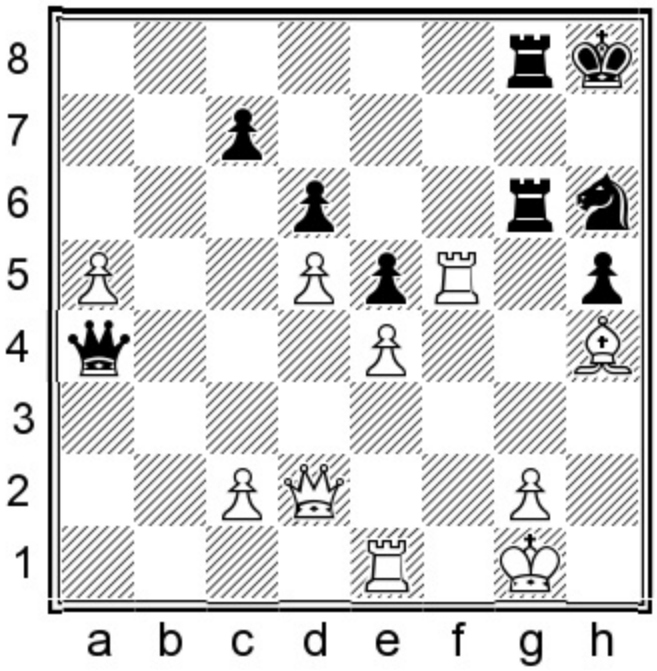
This must have come as a shock.

35.♖xe6 ♖xd3 36.♖g6† ♔f7 37.♗f4 ♖d1† 38.♔g2 d3

Black has more than enough counterplay. The game ended in a draw on move 66.

226. Arkadij Naiditsch – Ashot Parvanyan

Germany 2022



Should White:

A) defend the g2-pawn with 40.♖f2, or
B) play 40.♖xh5?

Show/Hide Solution

(King safety)

After 40.♖f2? ♕d7?! White retained a real advantage, but was unable to win the game. (40...♖a8! with immediate equality was better.)

40.♖xh5!

This adventurous move accepts an uneven material distribution. It is totally winning.

40...♖xg2†

This is the only reason not to take the h-pawn.

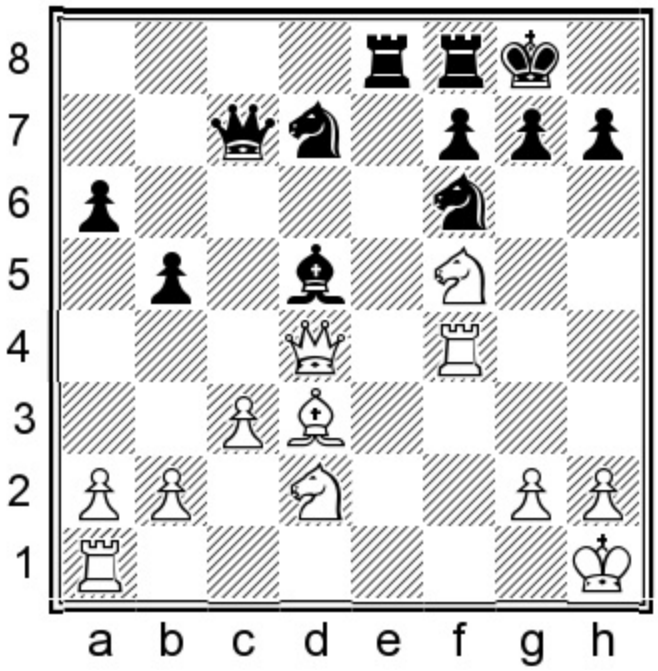
41.♕xg2 ♖xg2† 42.♔xg2 ♔g7

Or 42...♕xc2† 43.♗f2 ♔g7 44.a6 when the a-pawn will reach the 7th rank, winning the battle.

43.♖e3!

A check on g3 is coming, winning the knight.

227. Michel Alejandro Diaz Perez – Lelys Stanley Martinez Duany



Should Black:

A) exchange the queens with 19...♕c5, or
B) play 19...♘e5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Tactics)

The first impression is that White has active pieces, with the centralised queen and the f5-knight pointing to Black's king. But White's king is weak too, with the h2- and g2-pawns targeted from afar. The rook on f4 is loose, defended only by the queen. And the three pieces on the d-file are sitting targets. Tactics alert!

The game went: 19...♕c5? 20.♘b3?! (20.c4 bxc4 21.♘xc4 would have coordinated White's pieces better than in the game, providing a safe route to equality.) 20...♕xd4? (Black had the chance to change his mind with 20...♕c6!, which rarely happens. 21.♗f1 ♖e6∓) 21.♘bxd4 (21.♘fxd4!=) 21...g6 Black is still a little better, but failed to win the game.

19...♘e5!

The strongest move out of several that keeps the rooks on.

A noticeable mistake we found studying exchanges is how often strong players exchange queens once they obtain a better position. They want to reduce counterplay, but end up minimising their attacking potential. This is one example.

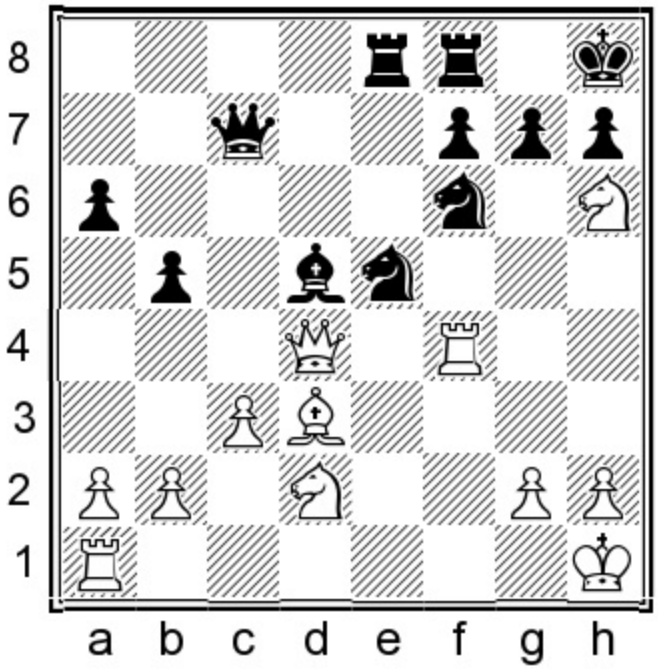
20.♘h6†

Desperation.

20.♗e2 ♘c6 and Black wins material.

20.♗c2 loses to 20...♗xg2† 21.♔xg2 ♖d8 and 22...♘eg4, winning material.

20...♔h8



21.♖xf6 gxf6 22.♕xd5 ♖d8

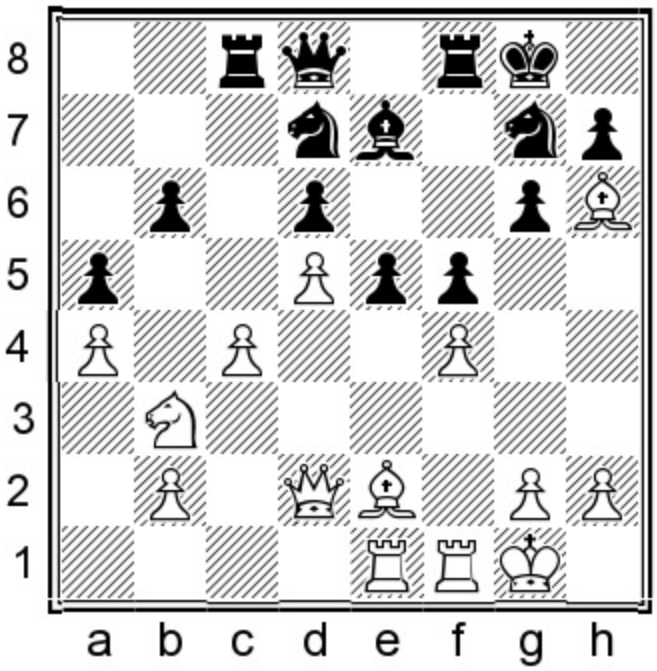
The engine wants the cold 22...♕d8 23.♕xd8 ♖xd8, also winning.

23.♕e4 ♖xd3

Black wins.

228. Dimitrios Mastrovasilis – Jaime Santos Latasa

Gmund am Tegernsee 2021



Should White play:

A) 19.fxe5, or

B) something else?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)

19.fxe5!

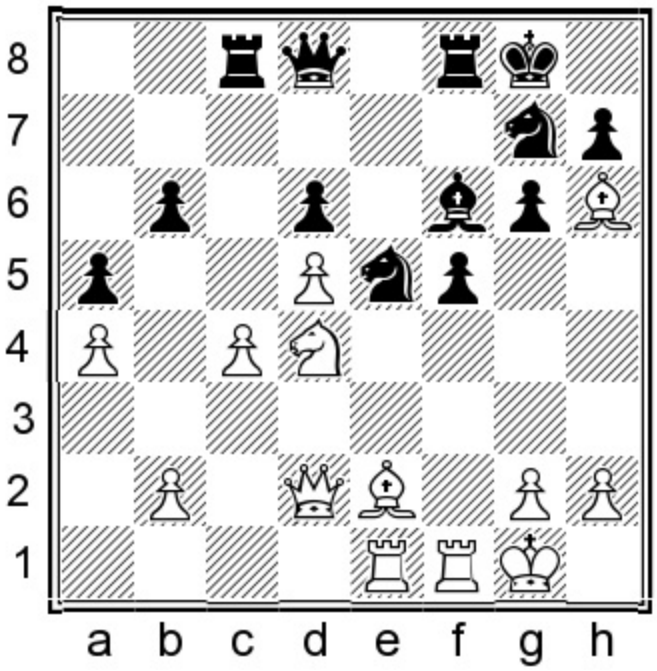
White played this strong move, leaving Black with an unpleasant choice. Black chose the wrong one, but in such situations it is hard to tell them apart.

If Black had time, he would take on f4 and place the knight on c5, successfully defending the e6-square.

19...dxe5?!

This allows White to get a strong passed pawn.

Preferable was 19...♘xe5, but it is easy to see why Black rejected it. With the knight on e5, it is impossible to defend the e6-square. 20.♘d4 ♗f6



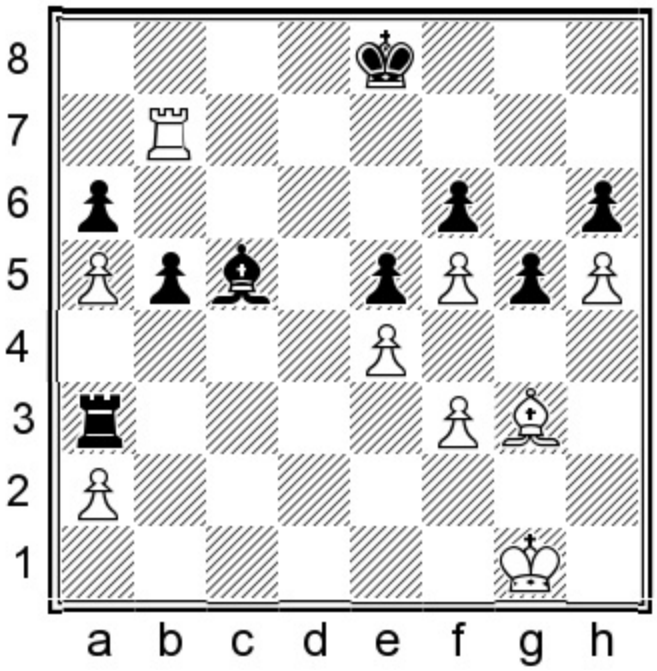
White would have a long-term structural advantage with a restrained move such as 21.b3. (But he needs to avoid falling for temptation with: 21.♗xg7? ♗xg7 22.♘e6 ♕h4! 23.♘xf8 ♖xf8♾, where Black has sufficient counterplay. If he is allowed to take the c4-pawn, his material deficit is limited, while 24.b3 would permanently give up any hope of controlling any dark squares.)

20.d6 ♗f6 21.♖d1

White converted this winning position by move 46. But even stronger would have been 21.c5! ♘xc5 22.♘xc5 ♖xc5 23.♖c1! White wins. The pawn does not matter. The invasion does.

229. Chamil Priyankara – P.R. Hirthickkesh

Chennai 2022



Should White play:

A) 36.♔g2, or
B) 36.♗f2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Escaping into a drawn ending)

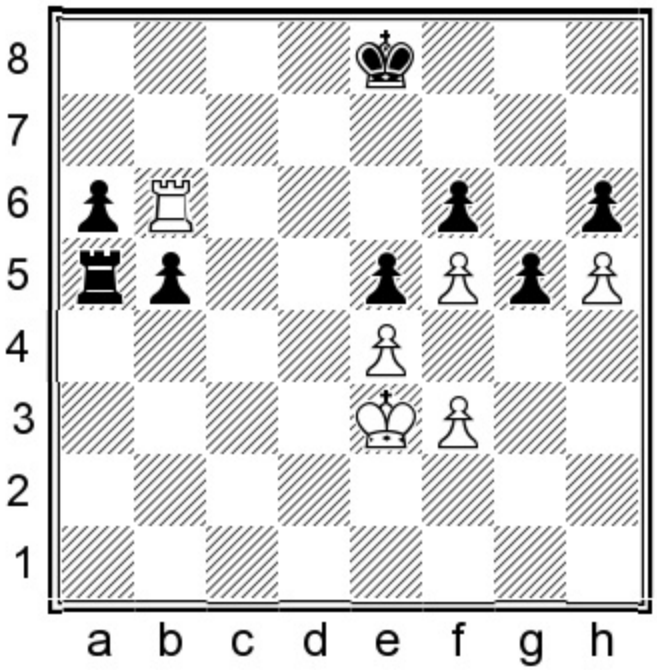
White decided to keep the bishop. 36.♔g2? ♖xa2† 37.♔h3 ♖xa5 38.♗e1 ♖a4 39.♖b8† ♔f7 40.♖b7† ♗e7 41.♗f2 ♖c4 42.♖a7 ♖c6 Black has taken full control. He included the king and won the game easily.

36.♗f2!

The bishop is so horrible that White can exchange it without too much thinking. No better chance can possibly exist.

36...♗xf2† 37.♔xf2 ♖xa2† 38.♔e3 ♖xa5 39.♖b6

White has enough counterplay. He holds by a tempo in a few different ways, although some of the moves in the following line are only moves.



39...♔e7 40.♖b7† ♔d6 41.♖f7 ♔c5 42.♖xf6 b4 43.♖xh6 b3 44.f6

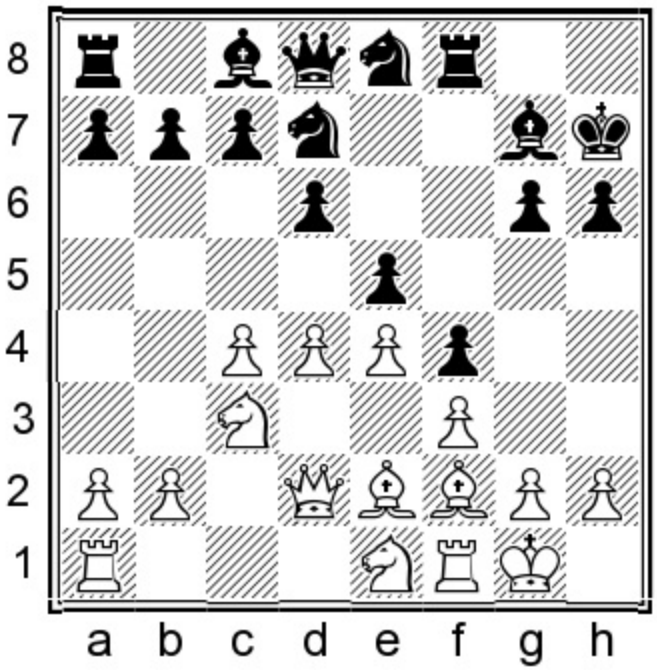
Or: 44.♔d2!?=

44...♖b5 45.f7 ♖b8 46.♖e6! ♖f8 47.♖xe5† ♔b4 48.♖e7 b2 49.♖b7† ♔a3 50.♖a7! b1=♕ 51.♖xa6† ♔b3 52.♖b6† ♔c2 53.♖xb1 ♔xb1 54.f4!? g4 55.f5 ♖xf7 56.♔f4

With a draw to come. But at this point Black should be cautious.

230. Wang Xinyuan – Sergei Blinov

Magdeburg 2015



Should Black:

A) exchange on d4, or
B) develop slowly with 13...♘ef6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Colour schemes)

The game continued: 13...♘ef6? 14.♘c2± White won on move 44. (14.dxe5! was even stronger. After 14...♘xe5 15.♖d1 and 16.c5 White has a pleasant position.)

13...exd4! 14.♗xd4 ♗xd4† 15.♕xd4

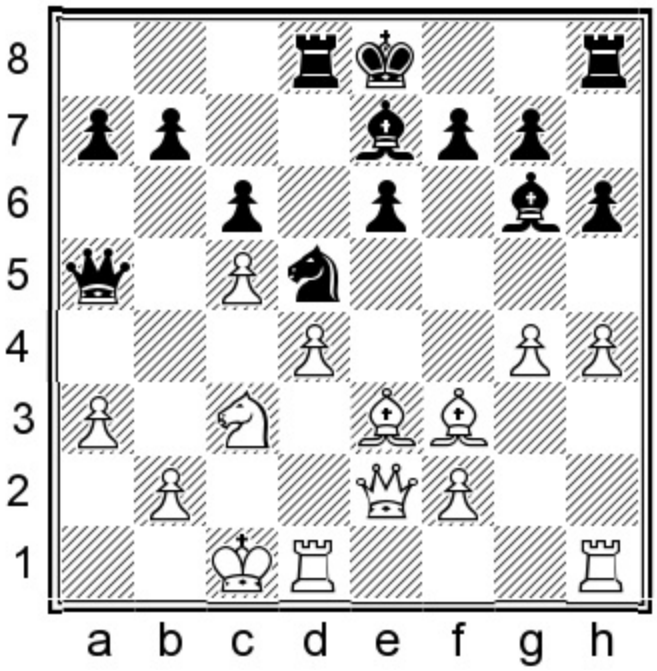
White is left with the worse bishop, which will do nothing to fight for the dark squares.

15...♘g7!∓

Black is planning ...♘e6 and ...♘e5, making the most of the weaknesses.

231. Rafael Rodriguez Lopez – Arian Gonzalez Perez

Barcelona 2022



Should White play:

A) 19.♘xd5, or
B) 19.♗xd5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Gaining time)
19.♘xd5? was played in the game. After 19...cxd5 the bishop on f3 has no function. And it blocks the f-pawn, depriving White of his main pawn break. After 20.g5 h5 Black was already better and later won.

19.♗d2 is also weak. After 19...♘xc3 20.♗xc3 ♕a4∓ Black is in control of the light squares.

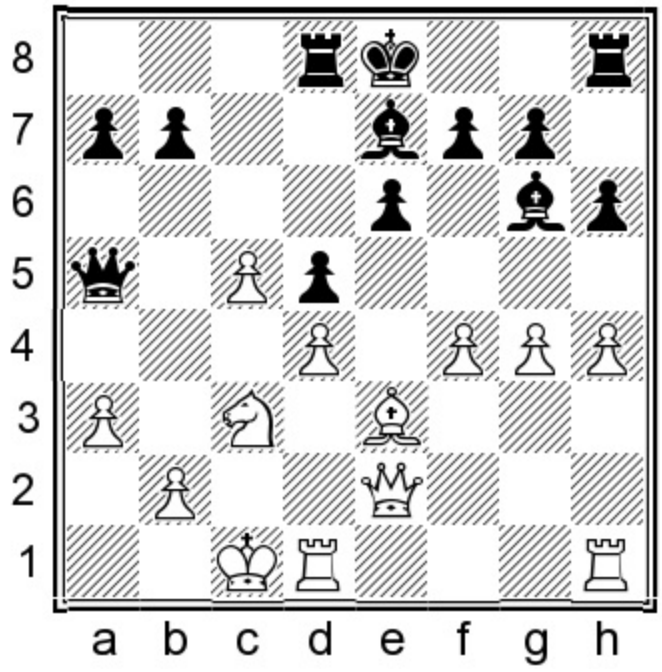
19.♗xd5!
Exchanging the worse minor piece.

19...cxd5
The only serious move.

19...♖xd5 makes sense strategically, but White has a precise move order gaining a large advantage. 20.h5! (Weaker is 20.♘xd5 cxd5 21.h5 ♗e4. White has to play f2-f3 when the rook can no longer use the 3rd rank. And after 22.♖h3 b6 Black gets immediate counterplay.) 20...♗h7 21.♘xd5 cxd5 22.♖h3 0-0 23.♗f4 White will play ♖c3 next, consolidating his material advantage.

19...exd5 opens the e-file. Play could continue 20.h5 ♗h7 21.g5, with a strong white attack.

20.f4!



The point. White will play f4-f5 with an attack against the black king. The game could continue:

20...♕c7

Or 20...♗e4 21.♘xe4 dxe4 22.f5 with an initiative for White.

20...0-0? is met by 21.f5 ♗h7 22.f6 ♗xf6 23.g5, giving White a decisive attack.

21.f5

This direct attack works, but also good are the patient 21.♖df1 or 21.♖hg1.

21...exf5 22.♖df1 fxg4

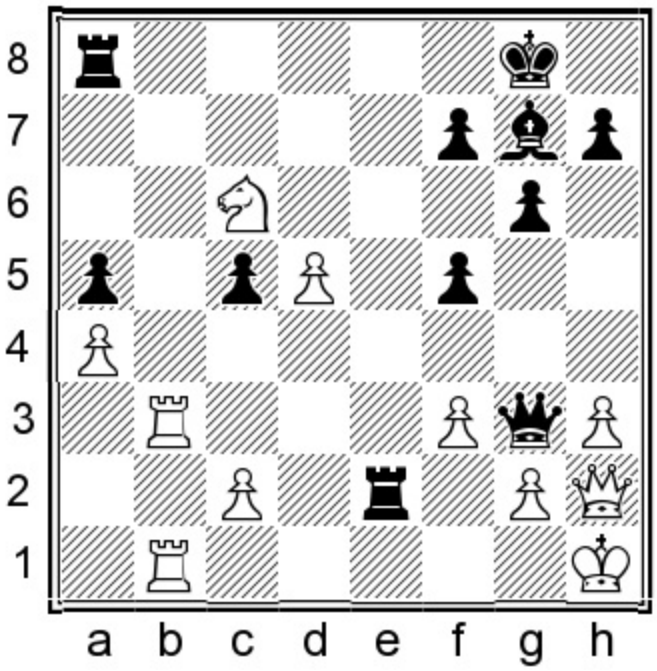
Brute force works against 22...♕d7. After 23.h5 ♗h7 24.g5 0-0 25.gxh6 g5 26.hxg6 fxg6 27.♗f4 White has a strong attack and a wonderful positional advantage.

23.h5 ♗h7 24.♕xg4 ♖g8 25.♕f3

White has a strong initiative.

232. Carissa Yip – Ryo Chen

Irving 2019



Should Black:

A) exchange queens, or
B) not exchange?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay/Colour scheme)

After 33...♕f2? 34.d6⩱ the game was wildly unclear. White won on move 50.

Or 33...♕h4? 34.♖b8† ♖xb8 35.♖xb8† ♗f8 36.♕d6 when Black would have to find 36...♕e1† 37.♔h2 ♖xg2†! to make the draw.

33...♕xh2†

Black has many other options, but none of them prevents White from getting counterplay with the d-pawn.

34.♔xh2 ♗f8!

The key move. Only with the exchange of queens is Black able to control the dark squares. The critical move is now:

35.♖b8?

35.♖3b2! is the best try, although Black is obviously preferable after 35...c4 36.c3 ♗d6† 37.♔g1 ♖e3∓.

35...♖xb8 36.♖xb8 ♔g7 37.♖d8 ♖xc2∓

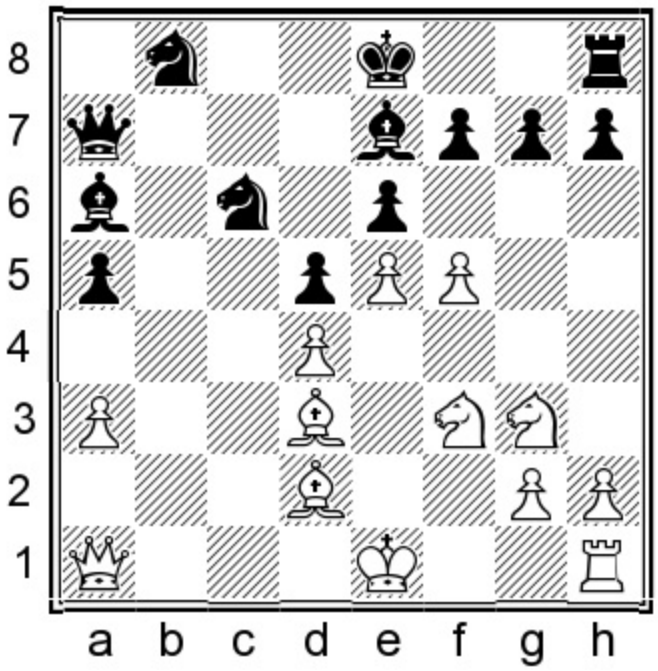
White can offer a last line of resistance with:

38.f4

As after 38.d6?! Black wins with 38...♖d2! 39.d7 ♗d6† 40.♔g1 ♗c7.

233. Ivan Saric – Rinat Jumabayev

Chennai Olympiad 2022



Should White:

A) exchange bishops, or
B) keep the tension with 20.♗c2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Gaining time)

Saric played 20.♗c2?, when after 20...0-0 21.♗e3 ♘d7∓ he had some problems to solve. Eventually the game ended in a draw.

20.♕c3!? is a decent option. After 20...0-0 21.f6!? gxf6 22.♗xh7† ♔xh7 23.♕e3 ♖h8 24.exf6 ♗xf6 25.♕h6† ♔g8 26.♕xf6 ♖h7± the game is messy, with White having the slightly better chances.

20.♗xa6

This is the correct path for White.

20...♕xa6 21.♘h5!

Exploiting the moment to create direct threats.

21...g6 22.♘g7† ♔d7

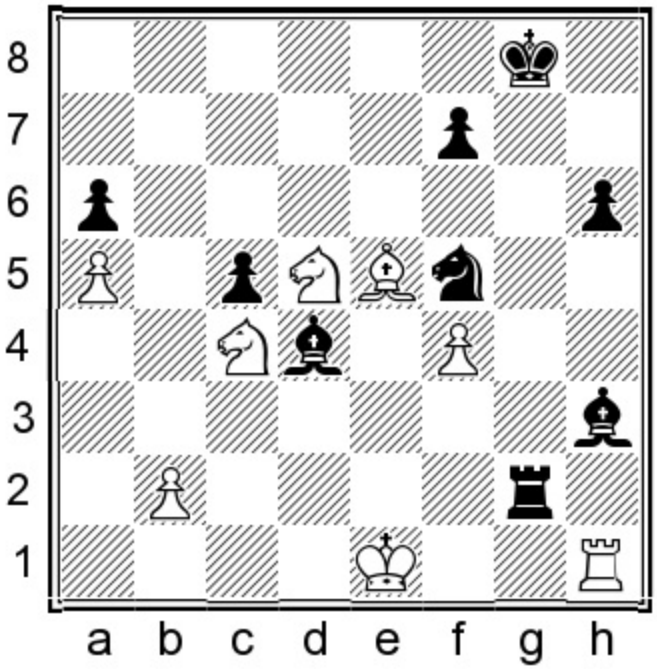
22...♔f8? would be disastrous. The rook is stuck on h8 after 23.♗h6 ♔g8 24.f6+–.

23.f6 ♗d8 24.♔f2 ♗b6 25.♔g3±

White is better in this strategically strange position.

234. Jiri Stocek – Sergei Azarov

Czech Republic 2022



Should Black:

A) play 46...♖g1†, or
B) go for an attack with 46...♗f2†?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

Black played 46...♗f2†?! 47.♔d2 ♗d4†. White had a feeling for which way the game was going, and played 48.♔e1?!, when Black mistakenly checked again on f2, with a draw by three-time repetition. (White was also in trouble after 48.♔d3 ♖g3† 49.♔d2 ♔f8, but it would require a bit more accuracy to win the game.)

46...♖g1†!

The simplest.

47.♖xg1† ♗xg1

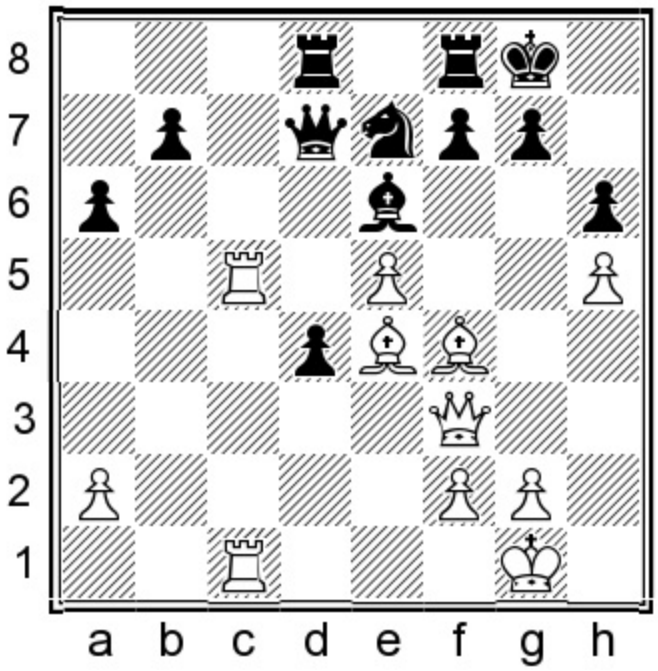
Black is completely winning. The two bishops and the extra pawn are too much for White to handle. A key point is that Black either queens the h-pawn or wins a piece after:

48.♘c7 h5 49.♘xa6 h4

½–½

235. Mobina Alinasab – Arjun Erigaisi

Menorca 2022



Should Black:

A) prevent an invasion with 26...♖c8, or
B) seek the exchange of bishops with 26...♗d5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

26...♖c8 does not bring any advantage for Black: 27.♖xc8 ♖xc8 28.♖xc8† ♕xc8 29.♗xb7 ♕c4 30.♗e4 ♕xa2 31.♗d3 White has enough counterplay to maintain the balance.

White is also fine after 26...♗f5 27.♗xb7 d3 28.♗d2.

26...♗d5!

Removing White's best piece. Black obtains control of the light squares and also a potentially better minor-piece scenario.

27.♖c7

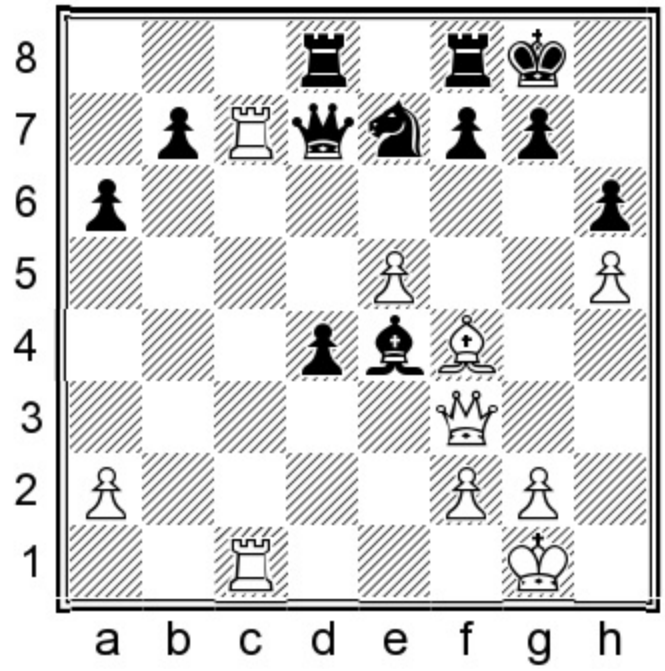
White has to play this.

27.♗xd5 ♘xd5 28.♗d2 ♕e6 is obviously a dream come true for Black.

27...♗xe4

Black goes for the good knight vs. bad bishop scenario. A good practical choice.

After 27...♕e6 28.♖xe7 ♗xe4 29.♖xe6 ♗xf3 30.♖d6 ♗xh5 Black keeps a material advantage, but the opposite-coloured bishop endgame gives White real drawing chances.



28.♖xd7?

White was worse but could have still defended better.

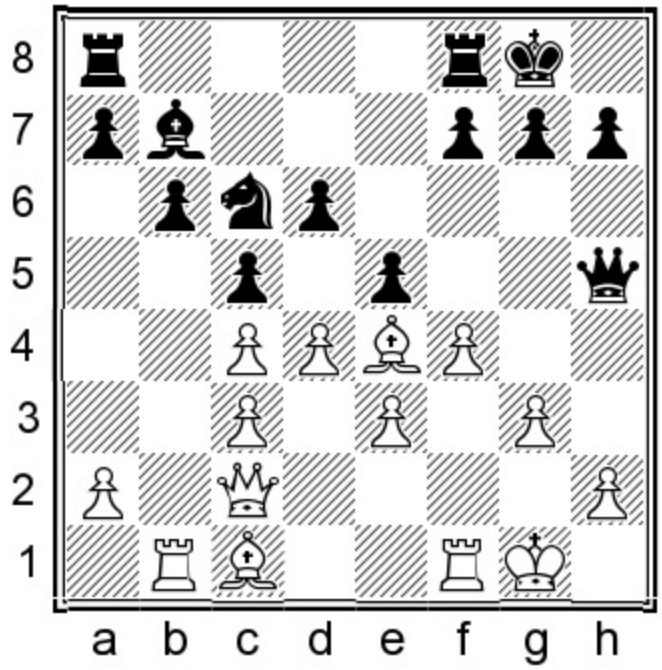
28.♕xe4 had to be tried. 28...♕e6 29.♖xb7 ♘d5 The position is unpleasant for White, due to the passive bishop and the weak a2- and h5-pawns, but he is not lost. 30.♗d2 ♘f6!∓, with the idea of ...♘g4, is an important detail.

28...♗xf3 29.♖xe7 ♗c6

Black won just 7 moves later.

236. Spartak Grigorian – Baskaran Adhiban

Menorca 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange pawns with 15...exd4, or
B) play 15...♘a5?

Show/Hide Solution

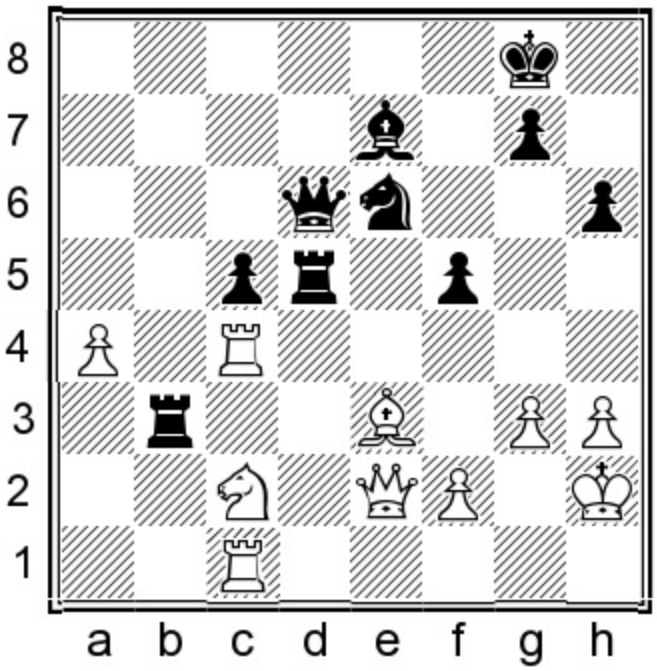
(Better pieces/Prophylaxis)
15...exd4? was imprecise due to: 16.♕g2! (Adhiban's idea was probably 16.exd4? ♖ae8 17.♕g2 ♘a5 18.♗xb7 ♖e2 19.♖f2 ♖e1† 20.♖f1 ♖xf1† 21.♕xf1 ♘xb7, with a winning position. Beastly stuff!) 16...♖ac8 17.cxd4 With a balanced game, that Adhiban managed to win all the same.

15...♘a5! 16.♗d3 e4 17.♗e2 ♕f5

Black is strategically winning. The c4-pawn is terribly weak and White has nothing to compensate for this.

237. Beloslava Krasteva – Felix Antonio Ilinca

Silla 2022



Should Black:

A) improve his position with 42...♗f6, or
B) seek an exchange of bishops with 42...♗g5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Eliminating defenders)

Black played 42...♗f6?∓ in the game, but was unable to break through White's defences. After 43.♘e1 g5?! 44.♗xc5 ♘xc5 45.♖xc5 ♖xc5 46.♖xc5 ♕xc5 47.♕e6† ♔g7 48.♕xb3 ♕xf2† 49.♘g2 the game was level and eventually drawn.

42...f4? is a blunder, due to 43.♖xf4! ♘xf4? 44.♗xf4± and 44...♕d7 45.♕c4, or 44...♕d8 45.♘e3 ♖dd3 46.♘g4! with an attack on the kingside.

42...♗g5!

The e3-bishop glues White's position together. It defends against the ...f5-f4 advance and defends the d2-square.

43.♕f3

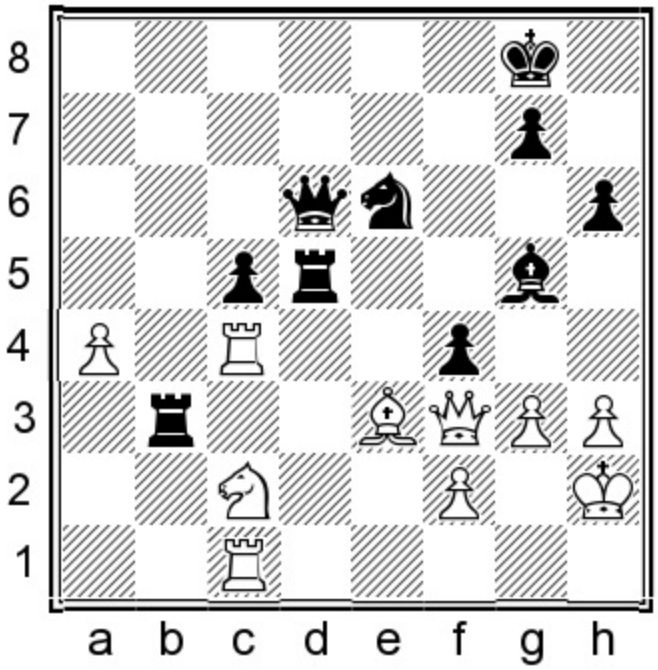
There is little else:

43.h4 f4! 44.hxg5 fxe3 45.♘xe3 ♖d2 with a deadly attack.

Or 43.♗xg5 ♘xg5 44.♖f4 ♖c3–+, when White will suffer great material losses.

43...f4!

All Black's pieces are ready, so he breaks up the kingside.



44.gxf4 ♘xf4 45.♕g3

White also loses after: 45.♗xf4 ♖xf3 46.♗xd6 ♗xc1–+

45...♖f5

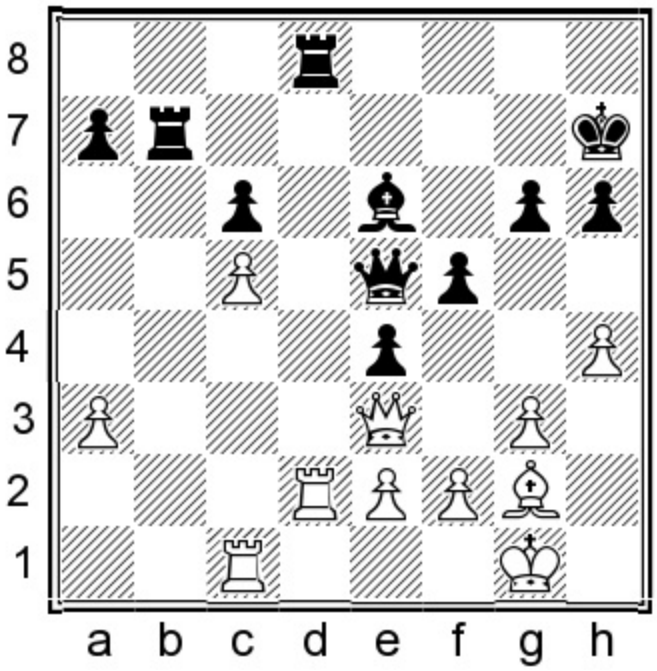
Black is not in a hurry.

46.♖g1 ♕e6

Black wins.

238. Le Valdes – Ivan Morovic Fernandez

El Salvador 2022



Should Black play:

A) 31...♖xd2, or
B) 31...♗d5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Invasion)

After 31...♗d5?! 32.♕d4∓ White exchanges queens and then frees his position with f2-f3, with good drawing chances.

White also has reasonable drawing chances after 31...♖bd7 32.♖xd7† ♖xd7 33.♖b1!.

31...♖xd2!

Eliminating a key defender of White's camp.

32.♕xd2 ♕b2!

The crucial point to the previous move. Black can invade on the 7th rank.

32...♗d5?! was played in the game and it turned out to be an important waste of time. The extra move really matters. 33.e3∓ ♕b2 34.♕xb2 ♖xb2 35.♗f1 White has enough time to play this, going into a rook endgame with even chances. 35...a5 36.♗c4 ♗xc4 37.♖xc4 The position is equal, although Black won on move 66.

33.♕e3

Allowing the black rook in is not an option. White would be left without any play and material

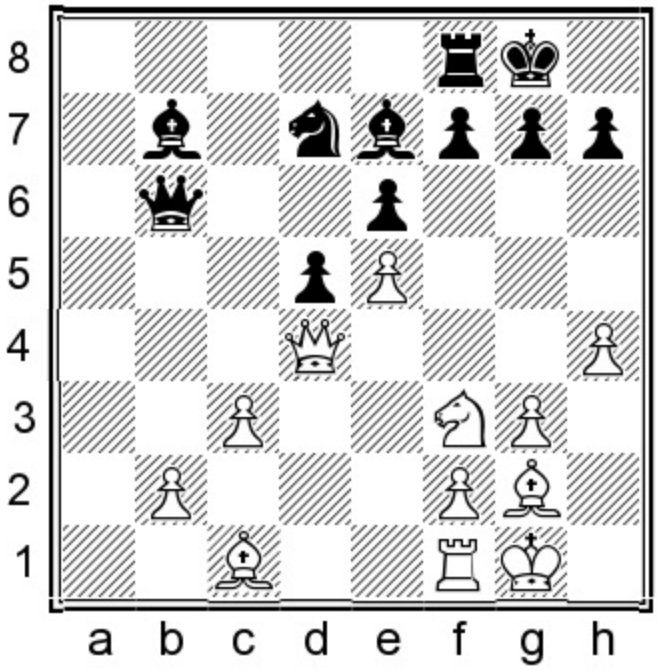
losses would be inevitable. 33.♕xb2 ♖xb2 34.f3 (34.e3 ♖b3–+ is also technically winning.) 34...♗d5 35.♔f2 ♔g7 Black has a winning endgame.

33...♗d5∓

Solidifying the pawn chain and shutting down the remaining open file. White is condemned to a passive position.

239. Kirill Alekseenko – Aryan Chopra

Gibraltar 2020



Should White play:

A) 18.♕xb6, or
B) 18.♕g4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Converting an advantage)

White is a pawn up and would like to consolidate this advantage whilst minimising his opponent's counterplay. Black's main ideas are ...♖a8, activating the rook, and ...♘c5, bringing the knight to e4. It is clear that White needs to gain time to organise a proper defence.

18.♕f4?± was played in the game. Black could have continued with: 18...♗a6! (The game went 18...♘c5? 19.♕g4?! [But stronger was 19.♖d1! ♗a6 20.b4± ♘d3?! 21.♕e3 and White keeps control with a winning advantage.] 19...♖a8 Black is only a little worse and later drew.) 19.♖e1 ♘c5 20.♕e3 ♕c7 when White has problems with the light squares. He must now play 21.♗f1, when after 21...♗xf1

22.♖xf1 ♖a8² Black has counterplay.
There is no obvious way for White to continue after 18.♕g4?! ♖c8±. The extra pawn is not helpful in an attack on the kingside. And no other pieces can easily participate.

18.♕xb6!

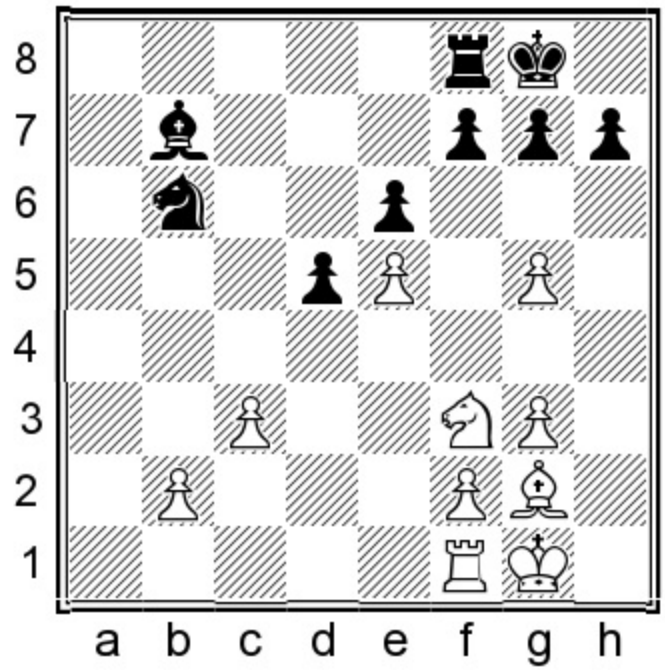
The first step to gain time and deflect the black knight from the route to e4.

18...♘xb6 19.♗g5!

Getting rid of a piece with no special function in exchange for one that could target White's pawns in the future, as well as challenge the knight when it arrives on d4.

19.b3!?± is also strong.

19...♗xg5 20.hxg5!



Squeezing the kingside and keeping the knight on track for d4.

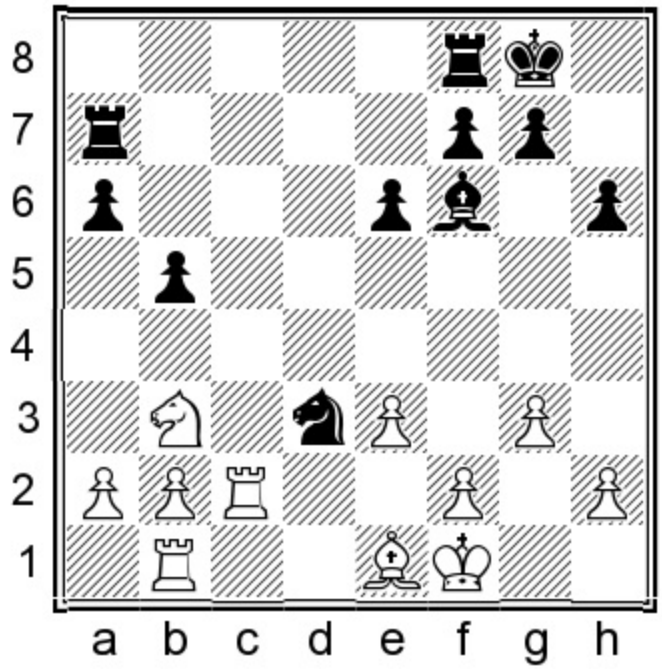
20...♖a8 21.♘d4 ♖a2

21...♘c4 looks tempting, but White can ignore the threat to the b2-pawn and play 22.♖e1. White will play b2-b3 and ♗f1 to solidify his position. It is important to notice that 22...♘xb2 fails to: 23.♖b1 ♖a2 White has a few wins but only needs one: 24.♘e2 and 25.♘c1.

22.b4 ♗a6 23.b5 ♗c8 24.♖c1

White is better. He will improve his position slowly with ♗f1, f2-f4 and ♔f2-e3.

Mexico City 2022



Should Black:

A) capture on e1, or
B) play 27...e5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

Black played 27...e5? in the game, losing control of the light squares and making the bishop on f6 look stupid. After 28.e4 ♗e7 29.♔e2 ♘xe1 30.♖xe1 the endgame could still be defensible. But Black has a worse minor piece and a weakness on a6, enough for White to press for the full point, which he achieved on move 84.

Black would like to bring a rook to the centre, but 27...♖d8 is met with: 28.♗a5! The bishop goes from being passive on e1, to being an annoying needle on a5, controlling the dark squares in Black's camp.

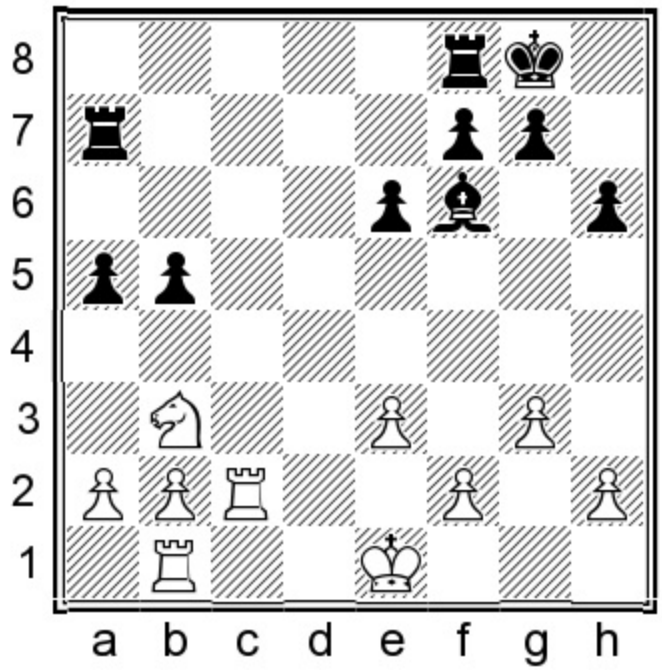
27...♖d7 leaves the a6-pawn undefended, while White can still play 28.♗a5, with nagging pressure.

27...♘xe1!

The knight is pretty on d3, but without a function. It is natural to exchange it for an enemy piece that would become strong if not taken out.

28.♔xe1 a5

Immediately threatening to harass the knight and giving the position a more dynamic character, where the bishop is at least not worse than the knight. Also, it makes it easier for Black to exchange pawns, which would ease the defence.



29.♖c5

The desired c5-outpost for the knight is no longer viable: 29.♘c5 ♖c8 30.♖bc1 ♖ac7 Black is threatening both ...♗e7 and ...♗xb2.

29...a4 30.♘d4 ♖d8 31.♘xb5

Or 31.♘c6 ♖c7 32.♖bc1 ♖d5 33.b4 axb3 34.axb3 ♖xc5 35.♖xc5 ♔f8 with equality.

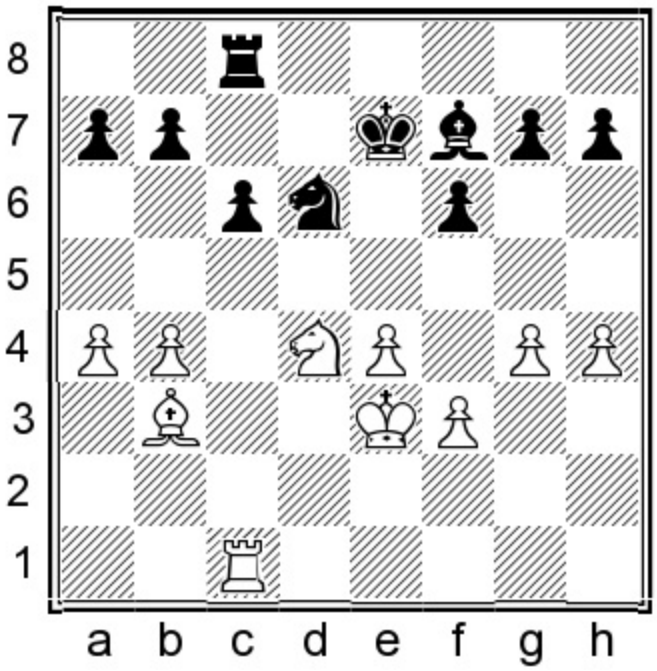
31...♖a5 32.♖bc1 ♗xb2

With equal chances.

Black could also play 32...♗e7 33.♖c7 ♖xb5 34.♖xe7 ♖xb2, with a draw on the horizon.

241. Isaac Garcia Guerrero – Carlos Lopez De Nava Hernandez

Mexico 2022



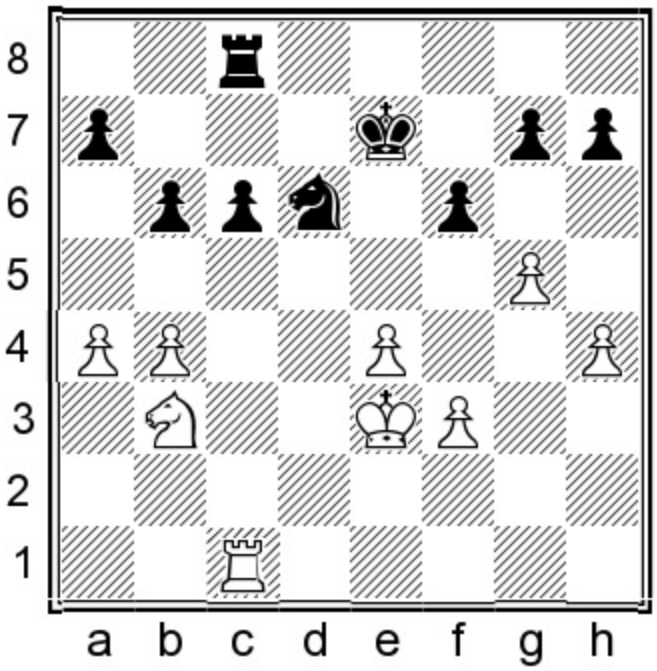
Should White:

A) exchange bishops with 37.♗xf7, or
B) keep the tension with 37.g5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Gaining time)

White played: 37.g5?! ♗xb3 38.♘xb3 Now Black should continue: 38...b6! (The game went 38...♖d8? 39.♘d4 ♖d7 40.f4+–, and White won 11 moves later.)



39.♘d4 There are other tries, perhaps marginally better ones, including f3-f4, ♖c2 or ♔f4. All give White an advantage, but none take the game into the winning zone. 39...c5 40.bxc5 bxc5 41.♘e2

♔e6± White is better, but Black has some counterplay and the result is still very much in doubt. This shows how important it was not to allow Black to capture on b3.

37.♗xf7!

The knight on d4 is ideally placed. White seeks to advance his kingside pawns to create either a passed pawn or targets for later attacks. Allowing Black to take on b3 would slow him down, as the knight would need to return to d4, so this should be prevented.

37...♔xf7

37...♘xf7 38.a5 ♘d6 39.g5 is similar.

38.a5

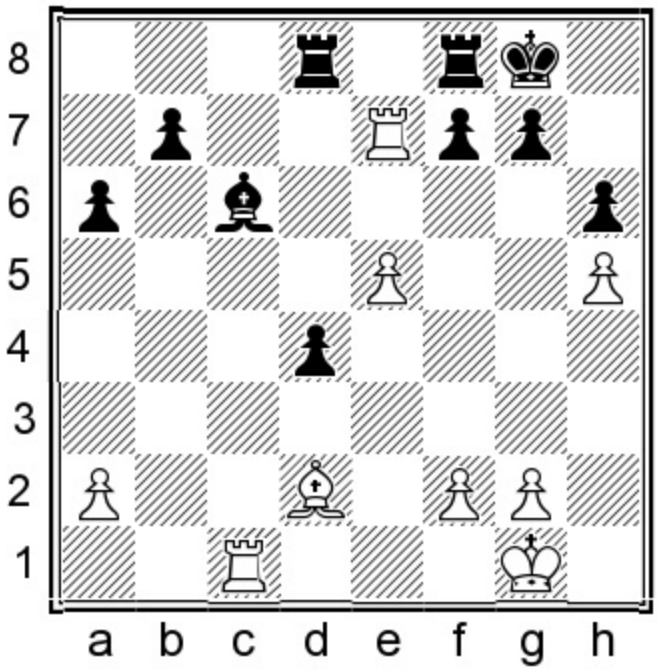
Threatening to soften up the queenside with a5-a6.

38...a6 39.♘b3

With a winning position. White will play ♘c5, tying Black down, and advance on the kingside, creating the necessary second weakness.

242. Mobina Alinasab – Arjun Erigaisi

Menorca 2022



Should Black:

A) play 30...♖d5, or
B) exchange rooks with 30...♖fe8?

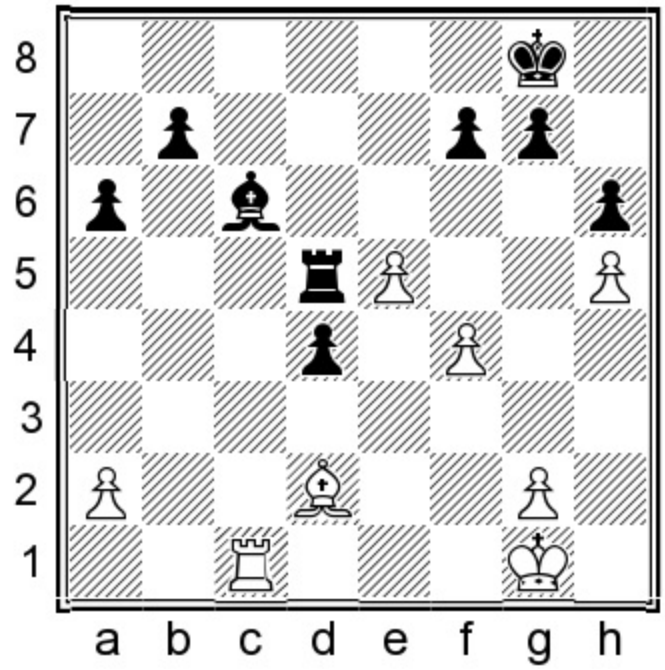
Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

Often in the endgame, where one side has a clear advantage, as Black does here, he tries to reduce material to limit the opponent's counterplay. Especially exchanging major pieces. But it is a better idea to compare the value of the exchanged pieces. Here the rook on e7 is not active and cannot create threats alone. Black can use his rooks by attacking White's weaknesses with one rook and retain the other for different tasks; for example, being behind the passed d4-pawn.

30...♖d5!

In the game Black went: 30...♖fe8 31.♖xe8† ♖xe8 Now 32.♖e1!∓ was a better defence, after which White may hold the endgame with the following idea: (White lost quickly after 32.♖c5? f6! 33.♗f4 d3 34.♔f1 fxe5 35.♗xe5 d2 36.♔e2 ♖d8 0–1) 32...♖c8 33.♖c1 ♖d8 34.f4 ♖d5



35.♖b1 Preventing ...♖b5-♖b2. The black rook cannot penetrate without White activating his rook as well: 35...♖c5 36.♖b4!∓ With counterplay is an example.

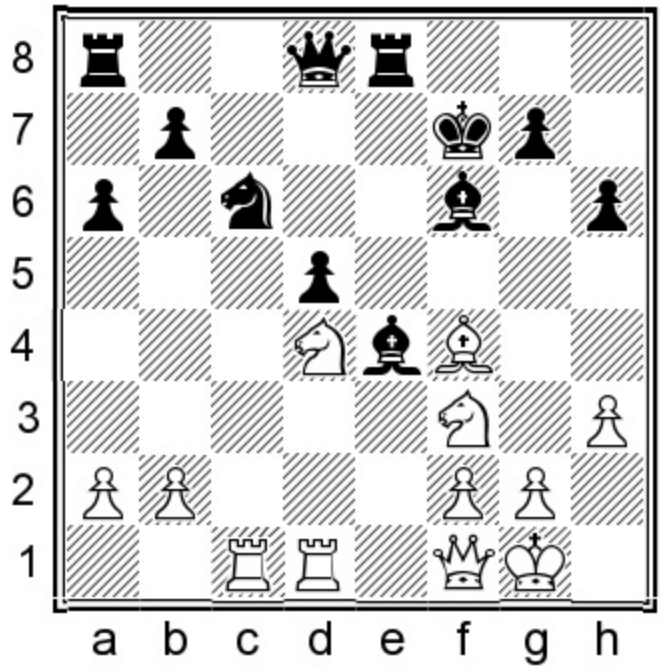
31.♖c4

31.e6 also does not work: 31...♖xh5 Black is winning.

31...♖fd8 32.f4 ♖b5

The invasion on the 7th rank is inevitable. The difference between the d8- and e7-rooks is clear. Why would Black want them off the board?

Internet (rapid) 2021



Should Black play:

A) 21...♘xd4, or
B) 21...♖c8?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses/Tactics)

Black played the natural move: 21...♖c8? This brings a piece into the game and defends the knight. But it lacks energy and allows White to defend with: 22.♗e3 ♕d7 23.♖d2 ♔g8 24.♖cd1 ♔h7 Black was a little better, but lost in 56 moves.

21...♘xd4!

Black exploits the instability of the knight on d4 and the weakness of the b2-pawn, the soft points in White's position.

22.♘xd4

The natural recapture.

White can try to block the path of the queen to b6 by playing 22.♖c7†, but Black has 22...♖e7!. An important move, removing the rook. 23.♖xe7† ♕xe7 24.♘xd4 ♕b4 It does not matter whether the queen hits the knight from b6 or b4! 25.♘b3 exists, but after 25...♗c2 (25...♗xb2?! 26.♕e2 would give White some play.) 26.♗d2 ♕a4 the white queenside starts crumbling.

22...♕b6 23.♗e3

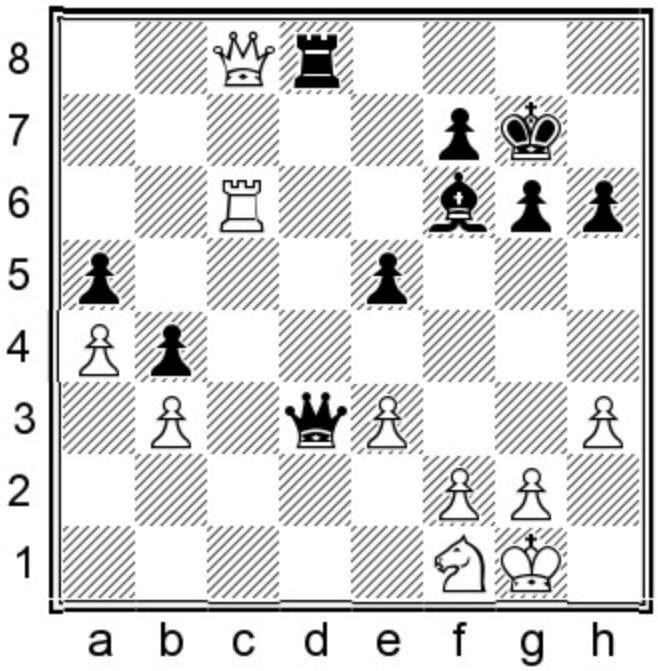
23.♘b3 ♗xb2 24.♖c7† ♔g8 is also technically winning for Black.

23...♕xb2

With a clear advantage.

244. Anton Samojlov – Evgenij Lesovoi

Yaroslavl 2019



Should White:

A) try to exchange queens with 37.♕a6, or
B) keep the pressure with 37.♕c7?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing attackers)

White faces threats to his b3-pawn and knight, and the exchange of queens deals with both of these.

Mistaken was:

37.♕c7? ♕f5?

The game was drawn on move 50 following complications.

Black missed his chance to play 37...♖d5!, defending the a5-pawn. White cannot create any threats quickly. 38.♕b6 ♗h4! Black could also go to d8 immediately, but this is more accurate. 39.g3 ♗d8 Black takes on b3 and will quickly untangle, after which few technical problems in converting his advantage remain.

38.♖d6!

This would have removed the black rook from the board and solved all of White's problems. Other moves also draw, but this is the simplest and one we should hopefully see after working through this book.

37.♕b7 also does not work. After 37...♕xb3, the combination 38.♖xf6 ♔xf6 39.♕b6† fails, as Black has 39...♔e7, winning.

37.♕a6!

Black needs to exchange queens due to the threat to the f6-bishop.

37...♕xa6 38.♖xa6

White is OK. For example:

38...♖d5

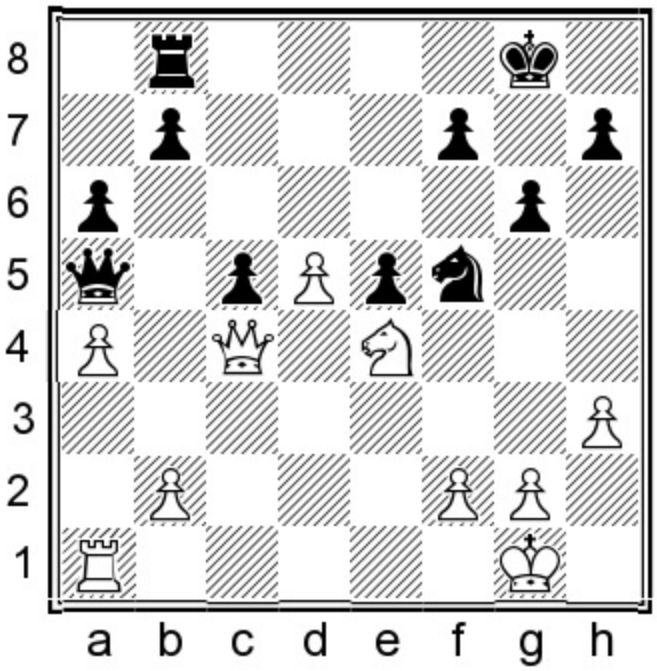
Or 38...♖d3 39.♖xa5 ♖xb3 40.♖b5 when White is not worse.

39.g4

With the idea ♘g3-e4.

245. Bastien Brailly-Vignal – Ezra Kirk

France 2022



Should White:

A) advance his passed d-pawn with 26.d6, or
B) play 26.♕xc5, going into a queenless middlegame?

Show/Hide Solution

(Converting an advantage)

The game was level after 26.♕xc5? ♕xc5 27.♘xc5 ♖d8 28.♘xb7 ♖xd5=, although White lost in 61 moves.

26.d6!

Passed pawns should be pushed! White opens the path for the queen to create threats on f7 and attack the black pawns with ♕d5.

26...♕b4

This may have been the reason why White decided to take on c5. Now it's important to be precise.

After 26...♖d8 27.♕d5+– the e5-pawn falls too.

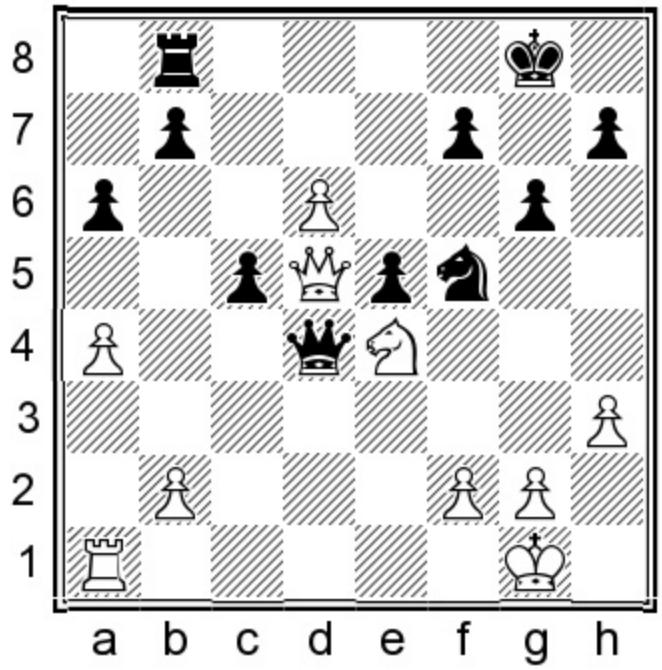
27.♕d5!

Looking to combine the strength of the passed pawn with threats against the king.

Black holds after 27.♕xb4 cxb4 28.♖d1 ♔f8.

27...♕d4

Of course not 27...♕xb2, due to 28.♖d1 followed by d7 and ♘g5.



28.♖d1!

The key move. Queens can be exchanged but only on White's terms. The rook comes to d5 and White picks up the c5-pawn anyway.

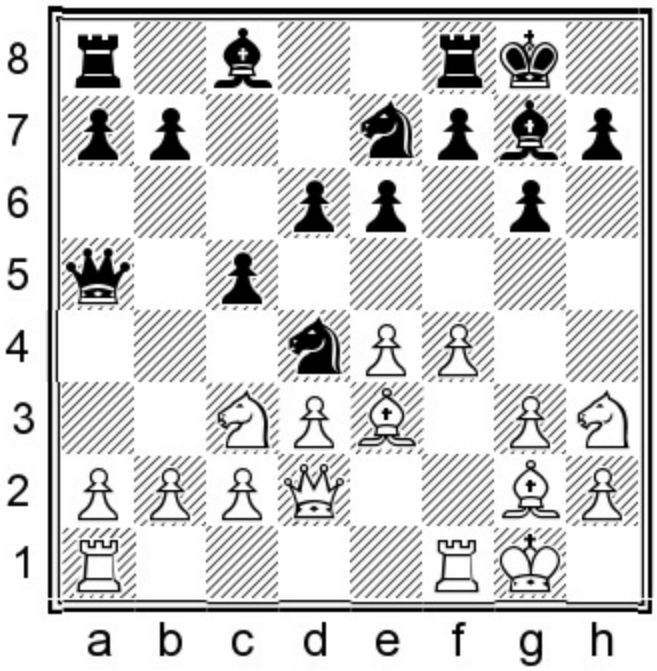
28...♕xd5 29.♖xd5 ♘d4

Or: 29...b6 30.d7 ♖d8 31.a5+–

30.d7+–

246. Luke McShane – Lu Shanglei

Douglas 2019



Should White play:

A) 11.♘d5 to exchange the knight tactically, or
B) something else?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

Luke McShane was the early sensation at the 2019 FIDE Grand Swiss tournament. In this game he got a large advantage by simple means – exchanging the right pieces.

11.♘d5!

The knight on c3 is in the way. Once removed, White can play c2-c3 and f4-f5, expanding in the centre and on the kingside – everything he wants.

11...♘ec6?!

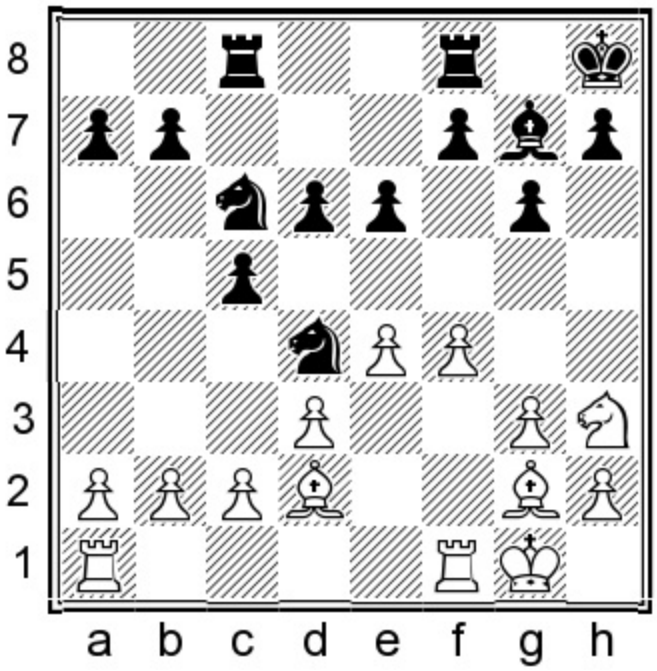
11...♕d8 12.♘xe7† ♕xe7 13.♖ae1 would also be better for White.

12.♘e7†! ♔h8 13.♘xc8 ♕xd2

A sad concession.

13...♖axc8 would be even worse. With the queens still on, 14.c3 ♘b5 15.f5 would likely end as a miniature.

14.♗xd2 ♖axc8



15.c3± ♘b5 16.f5

With two bishops, better-coordinated pieces and some strong threats, White is already close to winning.

16...♔g8 17.f6!

When given the chance, White should brick up the black bishop.

17...♗h8 18.g4 ♘e5 19.g5! ♘xd3

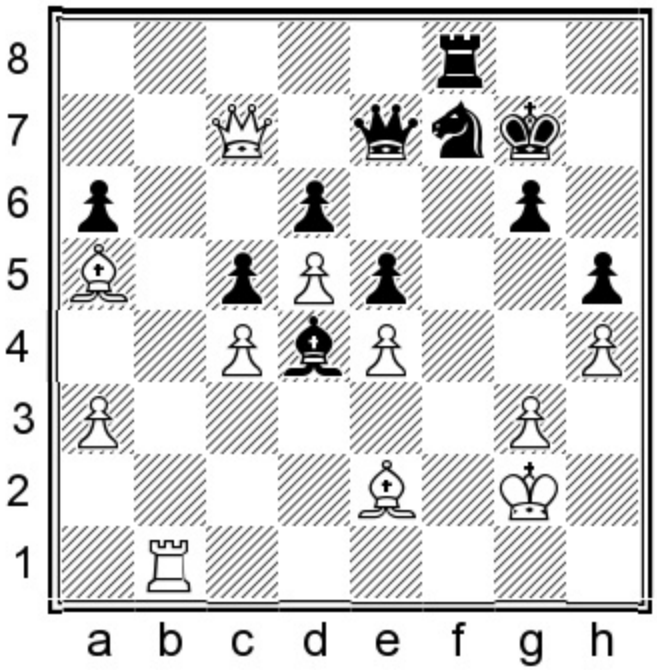
19...h6 20.♘f2 hxg5 21.♗xg5 would also keep the black bishop locked up for the rest of the game.

20.♘f2 ♘xf2 21.♖xf2 ♖fd8 22.♗f4 ♘c7 23.♖d1 e5 24.♗e3 ♘e8 25.♗f1 h6 26.h4 h5 27.♗c4 ♔f8 28.♖fd2 ♖c7 29.♔g2 a6 30.a4 ♖c6 31.a5 ♖b8 32.♔h3 b5 33.axb6 ♖cxb6 34.b4 cxb4 35.♗xb6 ♖xb6 36.cxb4 ♖xb4 37.♗d5 ♗xf6 38.♖f2 ♔e7 39.♖df1

1–0

247. Pranav Anand – Velimir Ivic

Novi Sad 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange queens, or
B) play 42...♕e8?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

Black is under severe pressure, due to multiple weaknesses in his position and the threat of a rook invasion on b7.

Black played the superficial: 42...♕e8? After 43.♗d1! White prevents ...♕a4 while keeping all his threats alive. Black now has to deal with the threat of ♖b7, so he continued: 43...♕d8 44.♕xd8 ♘xd8 45.♗f3 Stopping ...♖f2†. White has a huge positional advantage and soon won the game.

42...♕xc7

The queen is too strong to be allowed to live on c7. Black now gains time to create some threats, forcing White to go on the defensive.

43.♗xc7 ♘h6! 44.♖f1

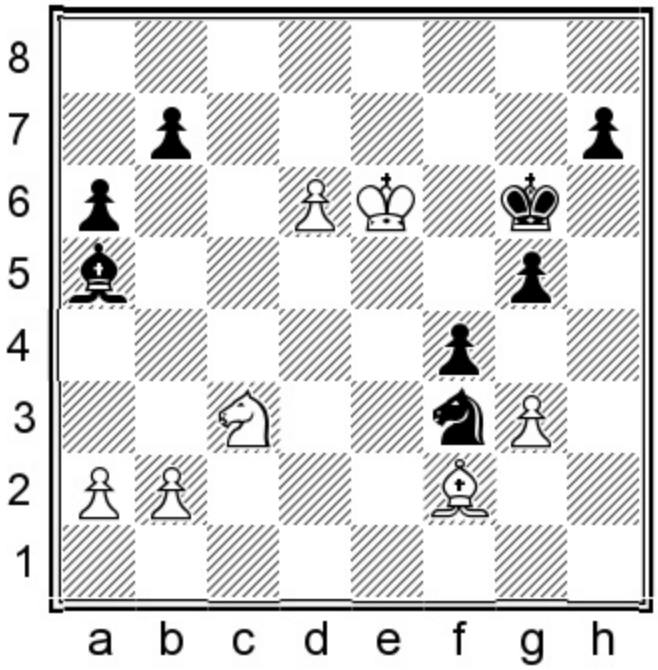
In the event of 44.♗f3, Black can defend with 44...♖f6, planning to go ...♘g4 next. (Black could even go full brute force with 44...♘g4 45.♗xg4 hxg4 46.♖f1 ♖xf1 47.♔xf1 ♔f7 48.♗xd6 ♔e8 49.♗c7 ♔d7, when is not easy for White to make progress.) 45.♖b7 ♖f7=

44...♘f7!

Defending d6 and threatening ...♖c8 next. There is plenty of play left, but Black is holding.

248. Alexandr Doncev – Ivan Yeletsky

Moscow 2022



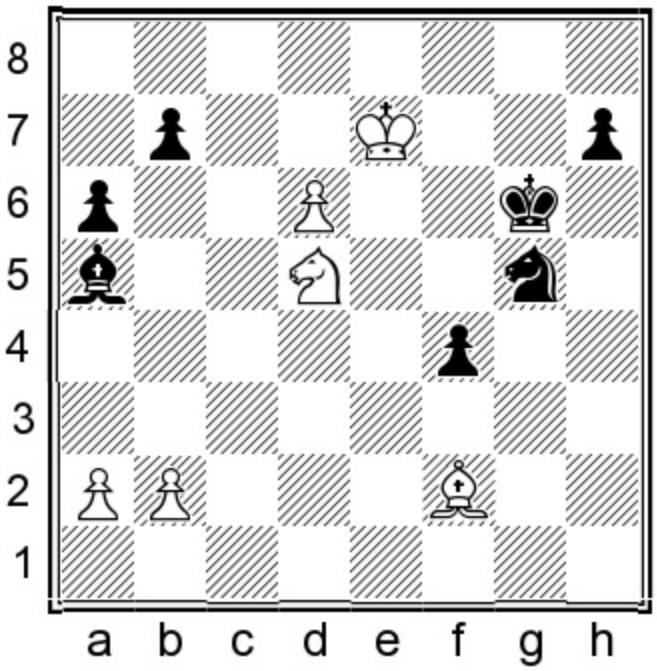
Should White play:

A) 38.♘d5 and allow 38...fxg3, or
B) play 38.gxf4 and then 39.♘d5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Converting an advantage)

White played 38.gxf4? gxf4 39.♘d5 which allowed Black to create counterplay with: 39...♘g5† 40.♔e7



But here Black went wrong, giving up his pawn for no reason with: 40...♘f7? (Instead, Black could have played 40...♗d2!!, defending his pawn which is needed to generate counterplay. 41.d7 ♘f7 42.♗h4 f3= The passed pawn keeps Black in the game, since White can't play: 43.d8=♕ ♘xd8 44.♔xd8 ♗g5†! 45.♗xg5 ♔xg5–+) 41.♘xf4† ♔f5 42.♔xf7 ♔xf4 43.d7 ♔e4 44.b4 ♗c7 45.♗g3 ♗b6 46.a4 ♔d5 47.♔e8 a5 48.♗f2 ♗c7 49.b5 1–0

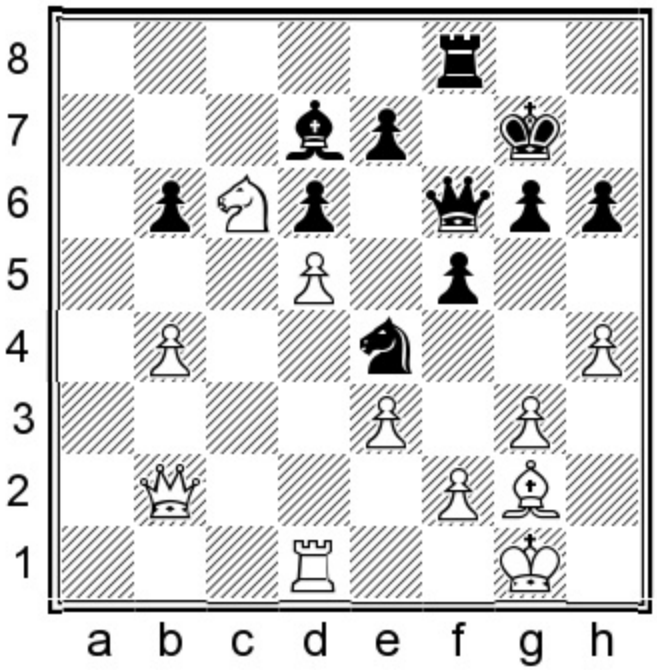
38.♘d5!

As we saw above, taking on f4 only helps Black. A route to stop the d-pawn with the black knight would open up via g5-f7. Such details are easy to miss in the heat of the game, but in general it's important to avoid exchanges that improve the opponent's position and bring no particular benefit to your own.

38...fxg3 39.♗xg3 ♘d4† 40.♔d7! ♘f5 41.♘e7† ♔f6 42.♘xf5 ♔xf5 43.♔c8+–

249. Dennis Wagner – Jan Werle

Germany 2019



Should White:

A) exchange queens on f6, or
B) play 33.♘d4?

Show/Hide Solution

(King safety/Better pieces)

White released the tension with 33.♕xf6†? ♔xf6 34.♖a1. The game ended in a draw after the time control. The most direct way for Black to equalise was 34...b5!, followed by either ...♗xc6 or ...♖c8. In some positions Black will have ...♘c3 as an important resource.

33.♕a3?! ♕c3± is also an improvement of the position for Black.

33.♖d4? allows Black to create counterplay with 33...e5! 34.♖d1 g5 and he is not worse.

33.♘d4! ♖c8 34.♖a1

The black queen has no effect on the game, while the white queen protects many squares on the queenside, and will be able to assist the white rook in its attack on the queenside, especially against the b6-pawn.

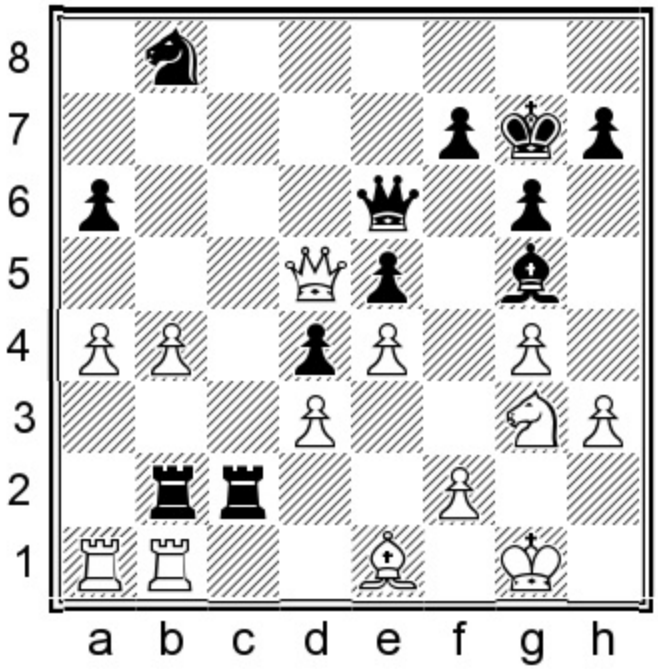
The following moves are plausible.

34...♖c7 35.♖a6 ♖b7 36.♖a8 ♖c7 37.♕a1

White is ready for ♖a7. It is hard to find an idea for Black.

250. Jakub Luberanski – Sebastian Golda

Krakow 2020



Should White:

A) exchange queens, or
B) push his passed pawn with 30.b5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)

White won the game, but only after a bad mistake from his opponent. 30.b5?! ♕f6! Avoiding the exchange of queens, making kingside counterplay possible. 31.♖xb2 ♖xb2 32.♔g2 ♗h4? (Black would have been OK after 32...♗d2 or with an exchange on b5 first.) 33.♖a2+– White was winning and later took the full point.

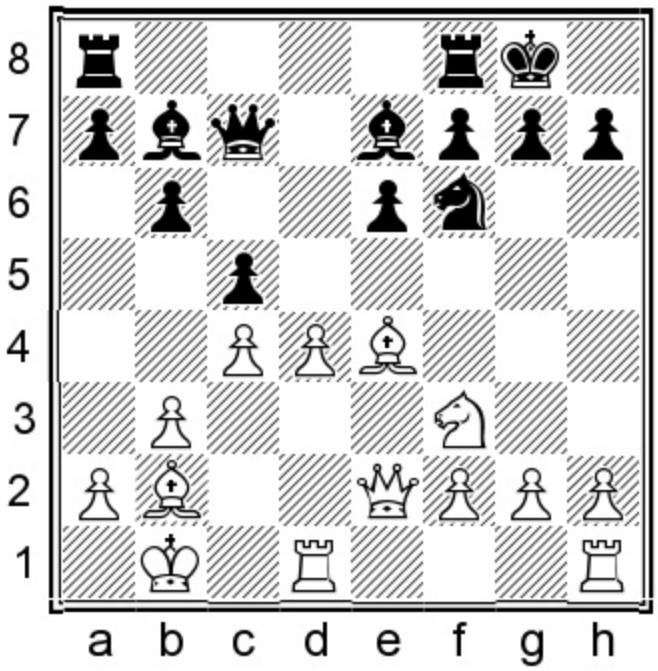
30.♕xe6!

Removing the queens protects the white kingside from counterplay, and damages Black's structure.

30...fxe6 31.♘f1!±

The most accurate. The knight goes to f3, when Black will have to defend for a long time in a difficult position.

251. Vincent Keymer – Abhimanyu Mishra



Should White:
A) take on b7, or
B) return the bishop to c2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Tactics)

Keymer played 15.♗c2±, when after 15...cxd4 16.♘xd4 ♖ad8±, Black was close to OK and won the game by move 55.

15.♗xb7!

The correct exchange.

15...♕xb7 16.d5 exd5 17.♖he1!!

This is the key point. Without this, White does not have an advantage. But now, Black is just lost.

After 17.cxd5? ♘xd5 18.♖xd5 ♕xd5 19.♕xe7 ♖ae8 White would have to fight for equality.

17...♖fe8

After 17...♘e4 18.♖xd5 f5 19.g4+– Black has too many weaknesses.

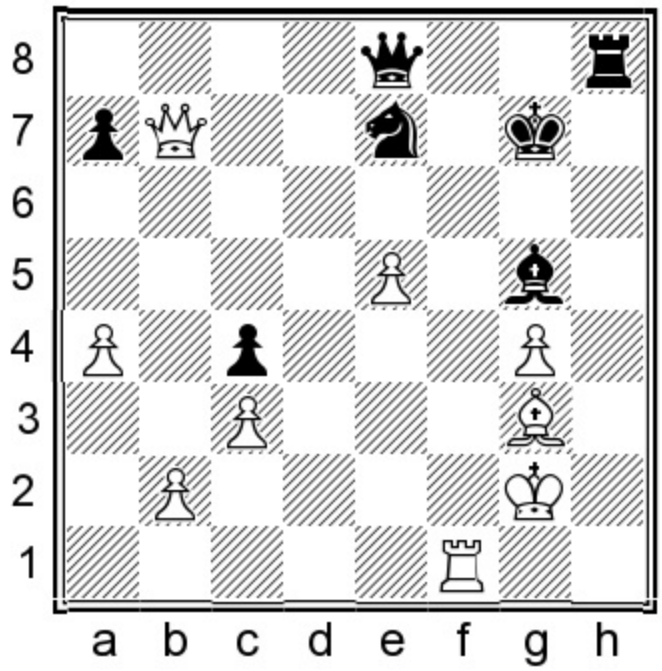
17...♗d8 18.cxd5 leaves White is positionally winning. A key point is 18...♘xd5 19.♕e4, with a deadly pin.

18.♗xf6!

White is totally winning.

252. Daniel Forcen Esteban – Karen Movsziszian

Benasque 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange queens with 35...♕c6†, or
B) play 35...♕g6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

Black should play for an attack against the white king, which is terribly exposed.

Black made a common mistake with 35...♕c6†. Black is a piece for two pawns up, and he sought the exchange of queens, trying to win with a technical grind. However, White has excellent chances of holding in an endgame, since Black has only two pawns left on the board. 36.♕xc6 ♘xc6 37.e6 ♖e8 38.♖e1 ♔f6 39.♖e4 ♖xe6 40.♖xc4 The position is equal, and the game was drawn 7 moves later.

35...♕g6!

The idea is to play ...♕h6, with deadly threats along the h-file.

36.e6

A decent try, but it is not enough:

36...♖d8 37.♗e5†

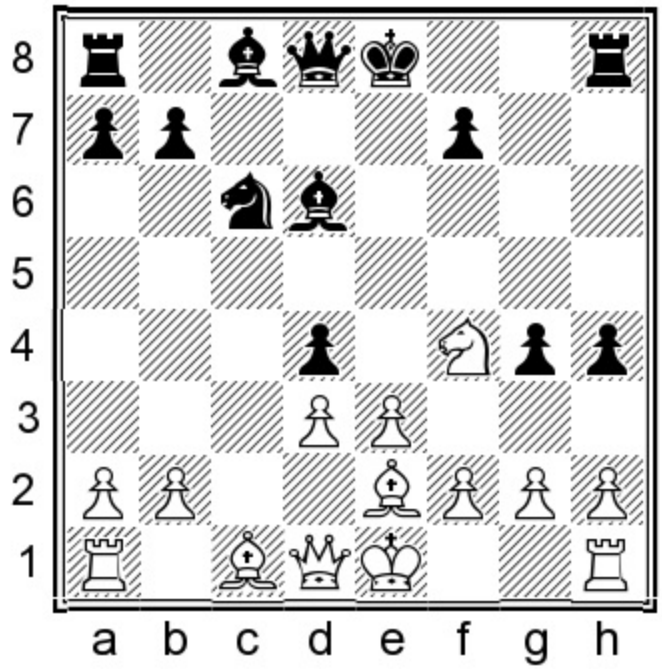
Or: 37.♖f2 ♕xe6–+

37...♔g8 38.♖f7 ♖d2† 39.♖f2 ♖xf2† 40.♔xf2 ♕xe6 41.♗d4 a6

Black has a winning position.

253. Ezra Kirk – Richard Pert

Torquay 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange the bishop with 15...♗xf4, or

B) keep the tension with 15...♕g5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Space)

Black went in the wrong direction in the game:

15...♗xf4? 16.exf4 ♕d5 17.f3±

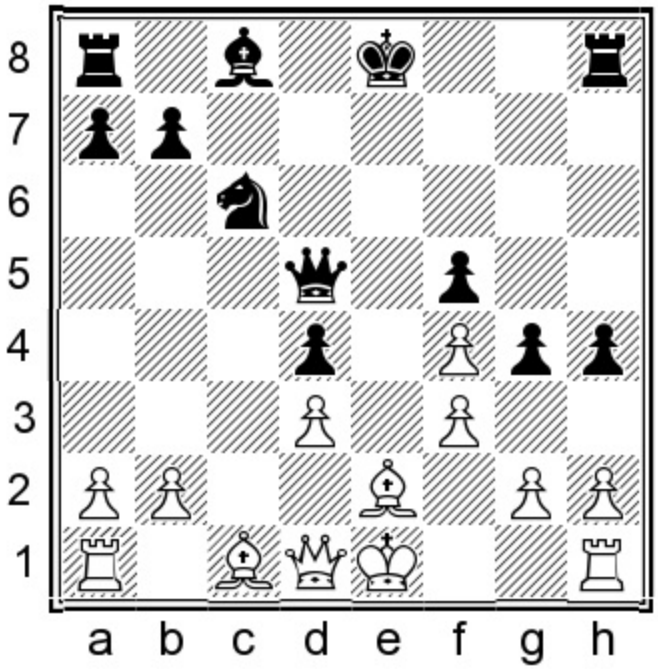
This was probably what Black anticipated, thinking he was creating more weaknesses in White's position. But there is no easy way to exploit the weakness of the e3-square.

17...f5?

A major mishandling of the position. Black gives himself more pawn weaknesses, and blocks the natural route for the knight to the e3-square.

Black should have played: 17...h3 18.g3 0-0 19.0-0 ♘e7 20.♕b3 ♗d7 21.♗d2± Black is worse,

but the game goes on. For example, 21...♖fe8 22.♖ac1?! ♕xb3 23.axb3 ♘d5 24.♔f2 ♘e3 with counterplay.



18.♗d2?!

18.fxg4 fxg4 19.0-0 h3 20.gxh3 gxh3 21.♗f3 would have been decisive.

18...h3

18...♔f7!±

19.g3 ♗e6 20.0-0+–

White won in 42 moves.

15...♕g5!∓ 16.g3

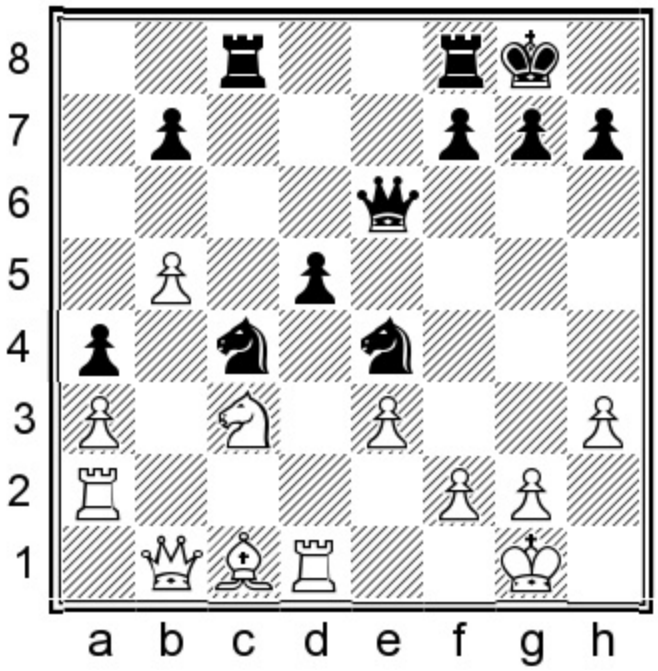
If 16.0-0 then 16...♗d7 with the idea of ...0-0-0 is a possibility.

16...♗d7 17.e4 0-0-0∓

Black has good compensation. The white king is not safe on the kingside, and Black can prepare to open up the h-file after doubling the rooks.

254. Ivan Ivanisevic – David Navara

Belgrade 2022



Should White play:

A) 28.♘xe4, or
B) 28.♘xa4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces/Tactics)
28.♘xa4? was played by Ivanisevic and is wrong for a number of reasons. The simplest being what Navara played. 28...♘b6! (Black also has a strong attack after 28...♘e5!?, as there are no defenders on the kingside. White urgently needs a defence, as a normal developing move like 29.♗d2 would lose quickly: 29...♘f3†! 30.gxf3 ♘g5 31.f4 ♘xh3† 32.♔f1 d4! With a devastating attack.) 29.♘xb6 ♘c3 30.♕b3 ♕xb6 31.♖ad2 ♘xd1 32.♖xd1 ♕c5! 33.♗b2 ♕c2! Black won on move 49.

28.♘e2?! feels pointless. Black's simplest continuation is 28...♕f6 29.f3 ♘c3 30.♘xc3 ♕xc3∓, when all of White's pieces are useless.

28.♘xe4!
This is forced, even though the presence of a pawn on e4 seems scary.

28...dxe4
28...♕xe4 is harmless. 29.♗d2 or 29.♕b4 are fine for White.

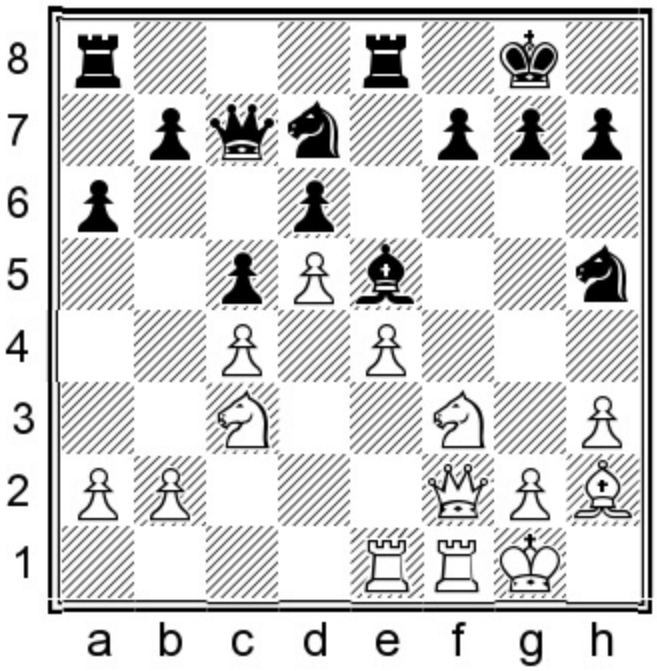
29.♖c2
White is fine.

29...♖fd8 30.♖xd8† ♖xd8 31.♗b2=

Or 31.♕b4, which is also equal.

255. Vlastimil Babula – Daniel Hausrath

Germany 2019



Should White:

A) play 21.♘xe5 followed by ♕h4, or
B) play 21.♕h4 immediately?

Show/Hide Solution

(Colour schemes)

The game continued 21.♕h4? ♗xh2† 22.♔xh2 ♘hf6± and was drawn on move 30.
After 21.♗xe5? ♘xe5, Black has no problems.

21.♘xe5!

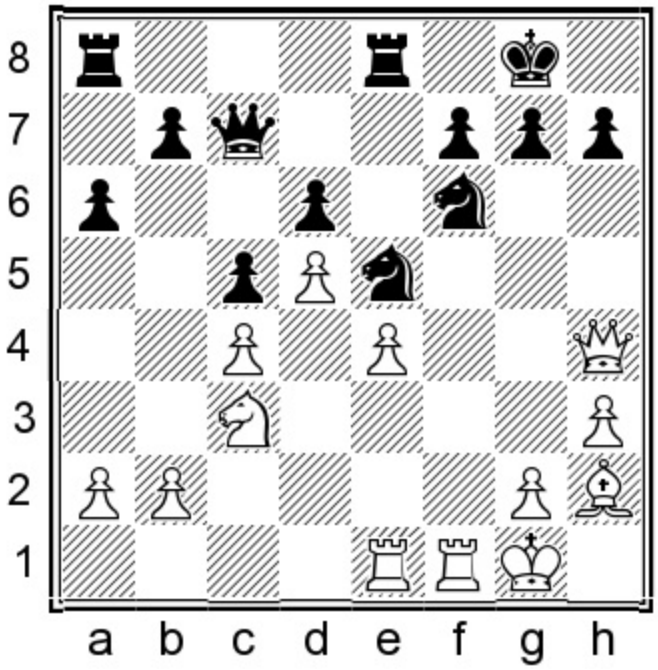
White should make the exchange and create pressure on the dark squares (particularly d6, e5 and f6).

21...♘xe5 22.♕h4!

This move makes things worse for Black, but White also had a clear advantage after less forcing moves.

22...♘f6

22...g6 23.g4 ♘g7 24.♗f4! would see the bishop heading for h6 or f6, creating lots of threats. 24...♘xc4 is of course critical, when White has the chance to bring in his last piece, the knight, with great force: 25.e5! With a winning attack.



23.♖xf6!

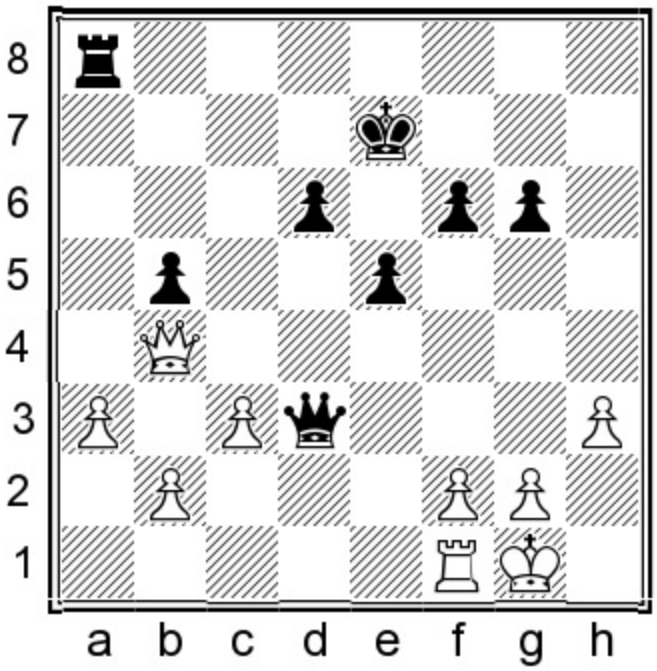
Black cannot be allowed to play ...♘fd7, consolidating all that is good about his position. The exchange is a small price to pay for taking control of the abandoned dark squares on the kingside.

23...gxf6 24.♖f1 ♕e7 25.♖f5!

Preventing the freeing move ...f6-f5 and preparing ♕h6 and ♖h5. White has a strong attack and will win with correct play.

256. Philip Lindgren – Daniel Hausrath

Germany 2021



Should Black play:

A) 32...♕c4 to exchange queens, or
B) 32...♖a4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Escaping with a draw)

Black was lost after 32...♖a4? 33.♕b3 ♖f4 in the game. It ended in an 88-move draw after White exchanged queens on d1; White achieved a good version of the rook ending, with no damage to his pawn structure. But much stronger was 34.♕g8!, staying in the fourth-phase endgame, exploiting the exposed black king. 34...g5 35.♕g7† ♔e6 36.♕f8! The black king is a hunted animal. After 36...d5 37.♕e8† ♔d6 38.b3! White will soon have a passed pawn and make further advances. The endgame is winning, although still complicated.

32...♕c4!!

This would have saved the game. The exposed nature of the black king will not matter. Rather it will be considered active. And the rook ending is holdable, as White has to make structural concessions.

33.♕xc4

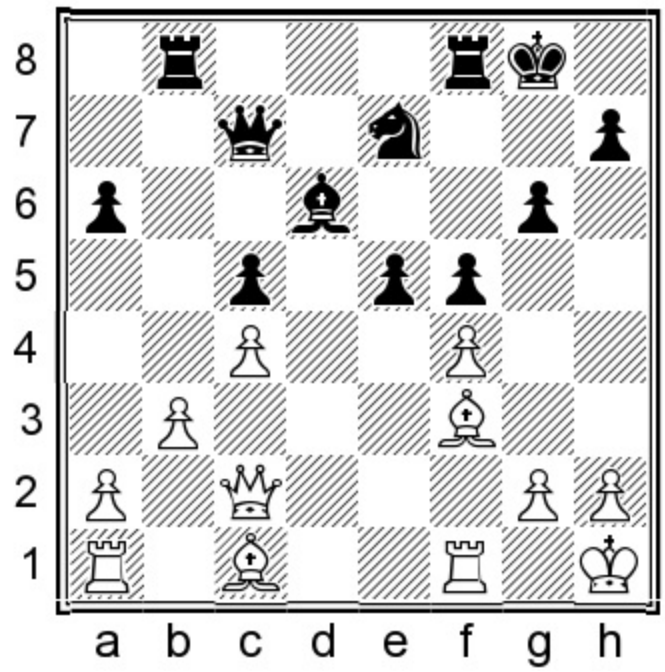
If Black is allowed to take on b4, White is left with a clunky cluster of immobile pawns, with no advantage to speak of.

33...bxc4 34.♖a1 d5

Black will follow up with ...d5-d4 and have excellent compensation.

257. Vishwesh Sai – Das Neelotpal

Madurai 2022



Should White:

A) exchange pawns with 24.fxe5, or
B) play 24.♗b2?

Show/Hide Solution

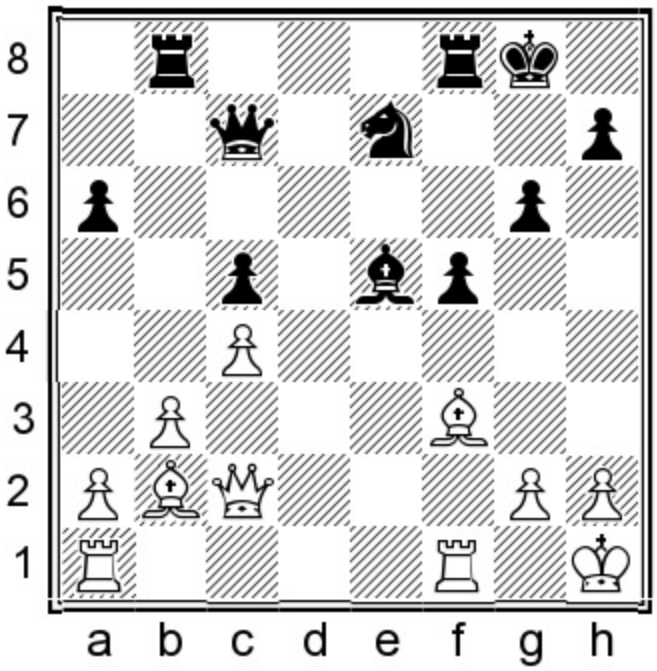
(Tension)

White wants to exploit both Black's dark-square weaknesses and the slightly open position of his king. In order to do so, he should release the tension, opening up the position for his two bishops.

White played 24.♗b2?, which was harmless since Black can now keep the position closed with: 24...e4 25.♕c3 ♔f7 26.♖ad1 ♔e8 The king is perfectly fine in the centre. White does not have a way to open up the game. 27.♗e2 ♗xf4∓

Black is a bit better, but the position remains complicated. Now White went wrong with 28.♕g7? ♖f7 29.♕h8† ♖f8 30.♕xh7 ♗e5–+ With the decisive threat of ...♖h8. White has to give up material. Black is winning, but only managed to draw after 63 moves.

24.fxe5! ♗xe5 25.♗b2!±



The exchange of bishops favours White, since Black will lose the sole defender of the dark squares. White will continue with ♖ae1 and invade through the e-file.

Chapter 6

Complex Exercises

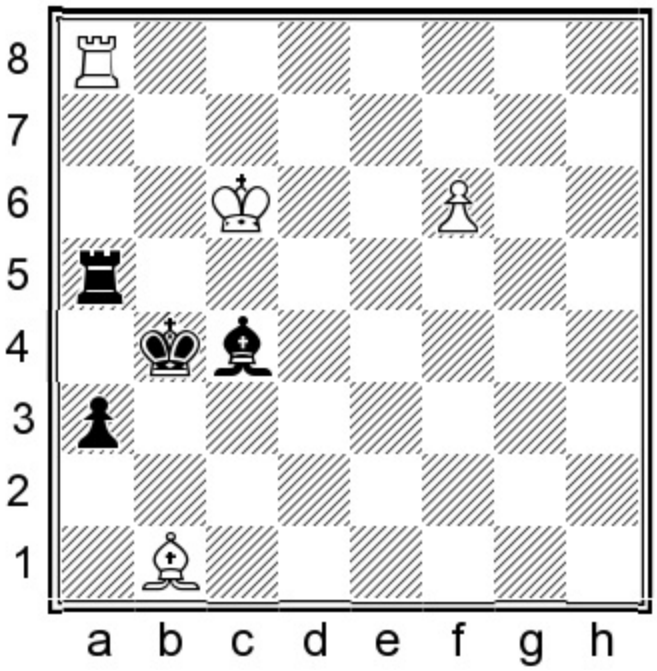
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We are not going to lie. The exercises in this chapter start with a complex endgame and continue over the cliff from there. You will find mistakes committed in games played by the strongest players in the world, as well as in a game played by Renier.

We understand that a lot of these decisions rely on depth and details that will elude many – as it so often eluded ourselves. One of the reasons why we wanted to make this a multiple choice book, is that in our experience, the difficulty for club players is often to know which are the important options. By giving these we have not helped titled players too much, while club players may be helped along towards answering the most important question of the position.

258. Magnus Carlsen – Jorden van Foreest

Oslo (rapid) 2022



Should White:

A) exchange rooks, or
B) not exchange them?

Show/Hide Solution

(Escaping with a draw)

Carlsen played:

64.♖xa5 ♔xa5 65.♔c5

And now Black could have won with:

65...♗g8

White is in zugzwang and must now allow the invasion of the black king through the dark squares.

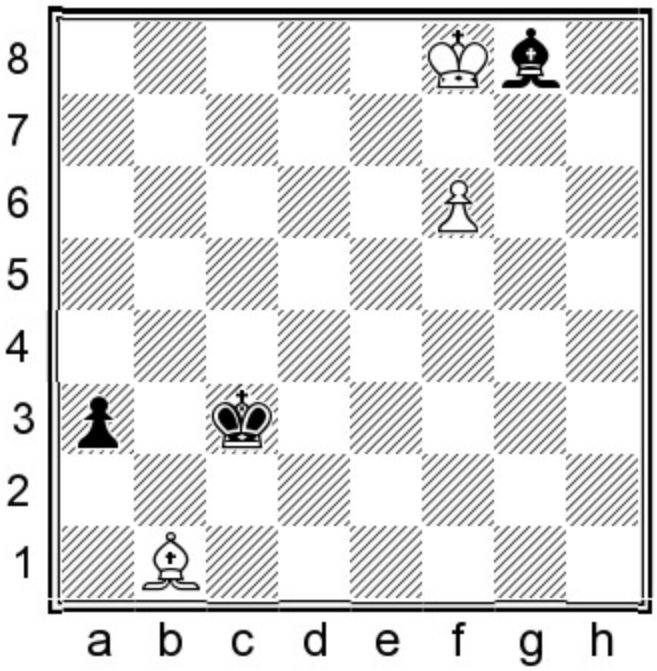
65...a2? 66.♗xa2 is an immediate draw.

66.♔d6 ♔b4 67.♔e7 ♔c3!–+

The last finesse.

Not 67...♔b3?? 68.♗h7 and White escapes. 68...♗c4 69.♗d3 for example.

68.♔f8



68...♗c4!!–+

The only square.

68...♗d5? would fail to: 69.♗h7! a2 70.♗g8 a1=♕ 71.♗xd5 ♕a3† 72.♔g8= Black cannot prevent White from pushing the f-pawn on the next move.

69.♔g7 ♔b2 70.♗h7 a2 71.♗g8 a1=♕ 72.♗xc4 ♔c2

Black will win slowly, as long as White does not get the pawn to f7 – which he is unable to achieve.

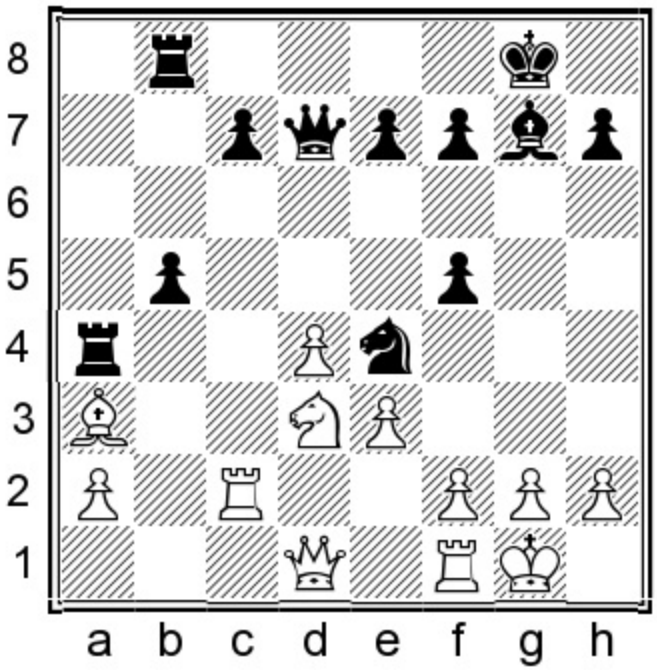
64.♖b8†

Keeping the rook is the only option in this position. Black cannot force the exchange of rooks and White has counterplay with the f-pawn. In the worst-case scenario, White would need to defend a rook and bishop against rook endgame.

64...♔c3 65.♔d6=

259. Guy Gov – Nimrod Veinberg

Israel 2022



Should White:

A) exchange knights with 20.♘c5, or
B) play 20.♗b4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Prophylaxis)

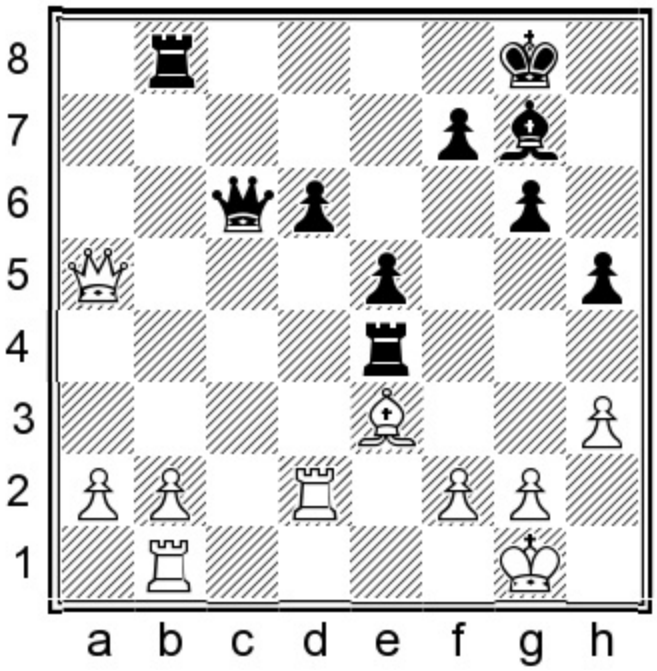
White played 20.♘c5? ♘xc5 21.♗xc5, when after 21...e5! (Black played 21...b4?, and was suffering after 22.♕d2 e6 23.♖b1±. He managed to hold the draw after the time control though.) 22.dxe5 ♕xd1 23.♖xd1 ♗xe5± Black is only marginally worse and should hold with decent play. 24.♖d5 ♖c4!= is a small but important point.

20.♗b4! ♕d8 21.a3+–

White keeps control and has the freedom to slowly build up his position.

260. Uwe Boensch – Arkadij Naiditsch

Germany 2019



Should White:

A) play 25.b4, or
B) exchange the queens with 25.♕d5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Prophylaxis/Better pieces)
25.♕d5? was a big mistake. White did manage to win the game, but the position has gone from completely winning to fully defensible. 25...♕xd5 26.♖xd5 ♗f8 27.♗d2 ♖a4! (An improvement over 27...f5?! 28.b4±, which gave White the win by move 41.) 28.♖a5 ♖xa5 29.♗xa5 ♖a8 30.b4 d5= White is unable to advance his pawns in a meaningful way. Black is fine.

25.b4!

The pawns roll up the board unhindered.

25...♕c3

After 25...♖xe3 26.fxe3 ♗h6 27.♔h1 ♗xe3, it is now time for 28.♕d5, with a winning position.

Play is rather concrete here, which is probably why White played as he did.

26.♖xd6 ♖exb4 27.♖c1 ♕b2 28.♖dc6

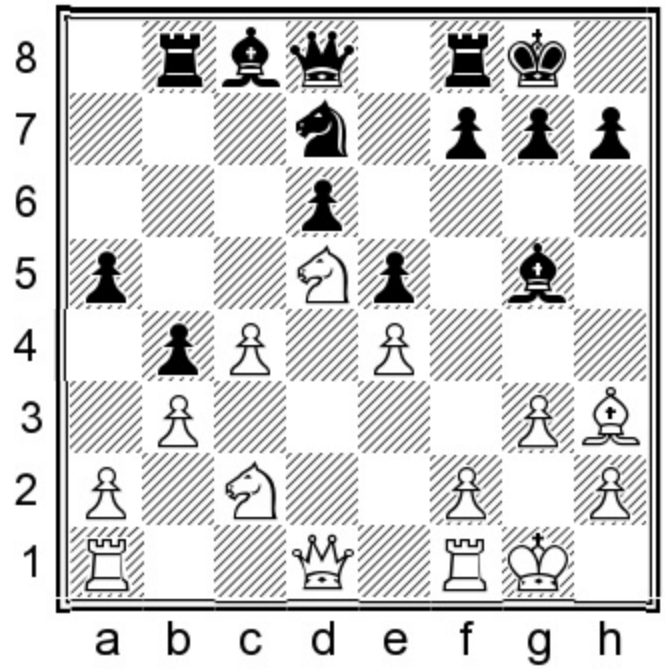
White is winning. He is threatening to trap the black queen by retreating the rook to c2.

28...♖4b7 29.♖c8† ♔h7 30.♕d8

White has a winning attack.

261. Rafael Miranda – Pablo Ricardi

Montevideo 2022



Should White play:

A) 19.♗xd7, or
B) 19.♕e2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

A key element in the Sveshnikov Sicilian structure is the control of d5-square. Black tolerates a white knight on d5 by seeking counterplay elsewhere.

In the game White played: 19.♕e2? The problem with this move is that it allows 19...♘b6!, eliminating White's strong knight on d5. (The game went 19...g6? 20.♖ad1 ♔h8 21.f4 exf4 22.gxf4 ♗h6 23.♘d4 and White won in 42 moves.) 20.♗xc8 ♘xd5! 21.cxd5 ♕xc8 Black controls the c-file, and it is impossible for the knight to go to c4 without being captured on the way.

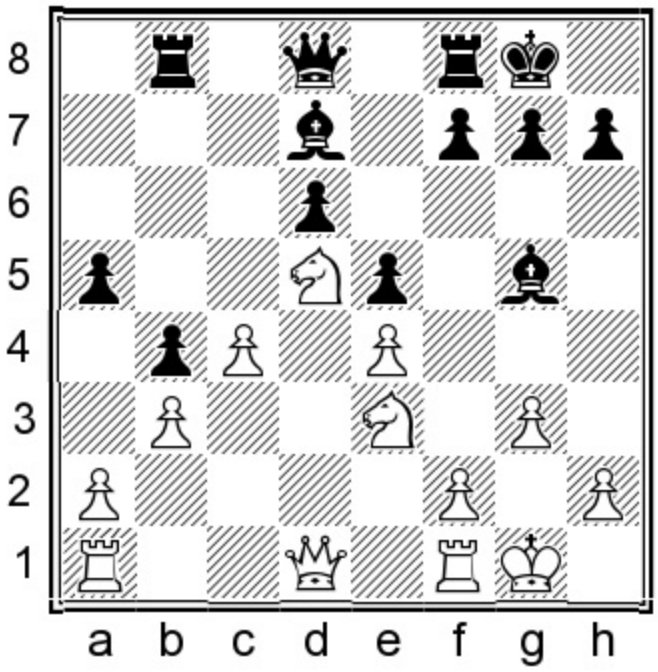
19.♗g2 ♘c5 looks comfortable for Black as well.

19.♗xd7!

The right exchange. It is true that it is a delicate decision, giving up the light-squared bishop for a seemingly harmless knight on d7. However, White secures the d5-outpost (which the black knight was coming to challenge) and gains time to build up pressure against the d6-weakness.

19.a3!? bxa3 20.♘xa3 ♗b7 21.♗xd7! is again the correct exchange and also gives White a big advantage.

19...♗xd7 20.♘ce3±



White plans to continue with ♕e2 and ♖ad1, and slowly improve his position. Black's most natural idea is to seek counterplay with the ...f7-f5 break, but it is not easy to achieve. For instance:

20...g6 21.♕e2 f5?

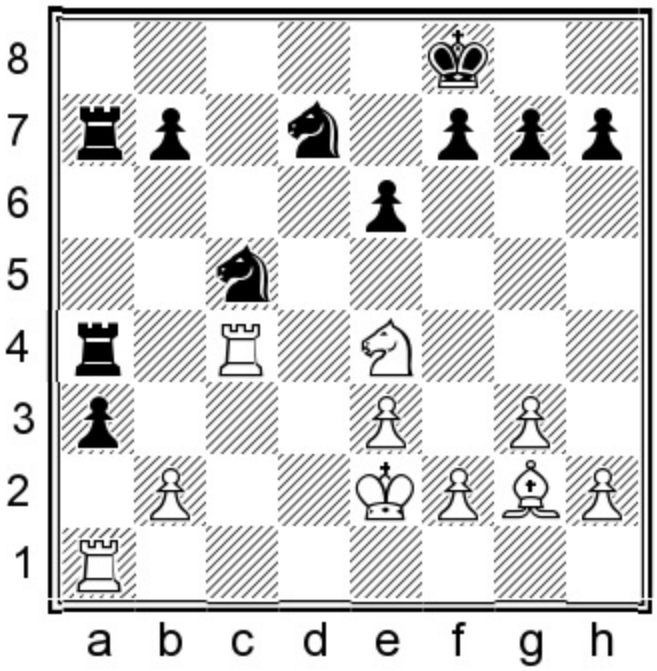
Or 21...♗h6 22.♖fd1 ♔h8 23.♖ac1 ♖c8 24.♖c2±.

22.exf5 gxf5 23.f4 exf4 24.gxf4 ♗h6 25.♖ad1±

Black's position has been further weakened.

262. Ashot Parvanyan – Dmitrij Kollars

Germany 2022



Should White seek:

A) mass exchanges with 21.♖xa4, or
B) material advantage with 21.♖xc5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Escaping with a draw)
21.♖xc5? was a terrible misevaluation. With the pawn on b2, Black will be able to dominate his opponent. 21...♘xc5 22.♘xc5 axb2 23.♖b1 ♖b4 24.♘e4 (It is plausible that White missed that 24.♘d3 would lose to 24...♖a1! 25.♖xb2 ♖xb2† 26.♘xb2 ♖a2!.) 24...♖a1 25.♘d2 b5 26.♗f1 ♖xb1 27.♘xb1 ♖c4 28.♔d2 ♖c1 29.♗d3 g5 Black is clearly winning. 30.h4 gxh4 31.gxh4 b4 32.♔e2 h5 33.♘d2 ♔e7 34.♗b1 ♖h1 35.♗e4 ♖xh4 36.♔d3 b3 37.♗b7 f5 38.♔c3 ♖h2 39.♔xb3 ♖xf2 40.♘b1 0–1

21.♖xa4

It is understandable that White was a bit uncomfortable about this move.

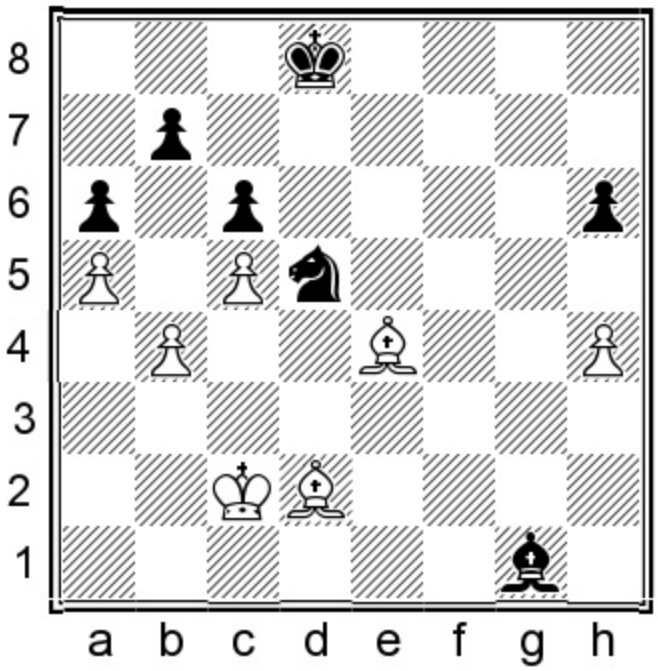
21...♖xa4 22.♘xc5 ♘xc5

22...axb2?? loses to 23.♘xd7†.

23.♖xa3 ♖b4 24.♖a2

The white king will come to help. White can also take on a3 with the pawn on move 23. It is not exciting, but it also does not lose.

263. Anthony Wirig – James Eden



Should Black:

A) try to exchange bishops with 39...♗e3, or
B) play 39...h5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

Black messed things up with: 39...♗e3? 40.♗xe3! ♘xe3† 41.♔d3 With all the black pawns fixed on light squares and a second weakness on h6, White has a winning endgame. 41...♘g4 42.♔d4 ♘f6 43.♔e5 ♔e7 44.♗f3 ♘d7† 45.♔f5 White won in 63 moves.

39...h5!

In order to make a draw Black needs to get rid of the pawns on the kingside. Although this move fixes one more black pawn on a light square, it also fixes the white pawn on h4, where it is an easy target to attack.

40.♗f3 ♗f2 41.♗g5† ♔c7 42.♗xh5

42.♔d2 is also not challenging. 42...♘xb4 43.♗xh5 ♗xc5= is sharp, but Black holds.

42...♘e3†

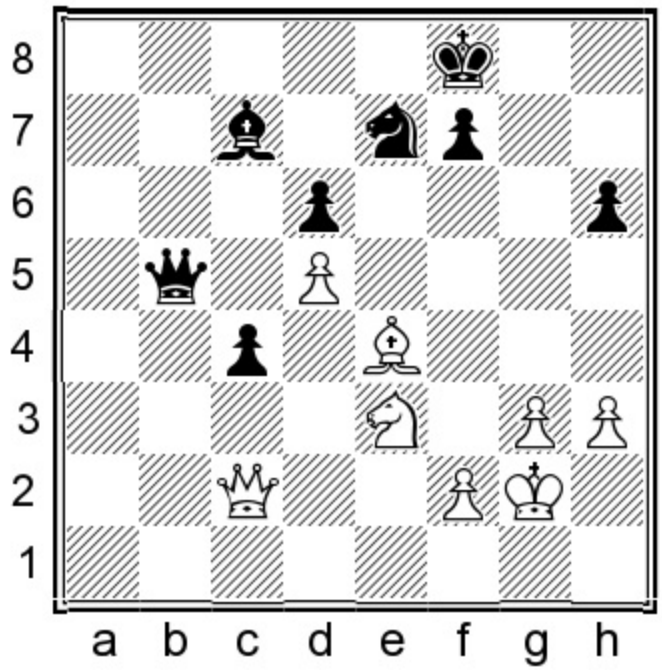
The simplest way is to get rid of the pawn on h4.

However, 42...♘xb4† 43.♔b3 ♘d3⇄ should also be fine.

43.♔d2 ♘g2=

264. Roman Bar – Lev Psakhis

Israel 2020



Should White play:

A) 39.♕xc4, or
B) 39.♕c3?

Show/Hide Solution

(King safety)

39.♕xc4?? ruined everything. 39...♕xc4 40.♘xc4 f5! 41.♗f3 ♔g7 42.♔f1 ♔f6± White is a pawn up, but with opposite-coloured bishops and the limited number of pawns (which will reduce further in creating a passed pawn), he is not able to make real progress. The game ended in a draw on move 66.

39.♘xc4? is also wrong. Black should play 39...♕c5± with the idea ...♕d4 and ...♔g7. White is much better, but Black appears to be safe enough. (39...♘xd5? 40.♕d2! would be a winning double threat.)

39.♕c3!

This was the strongest move.

39...♔g8

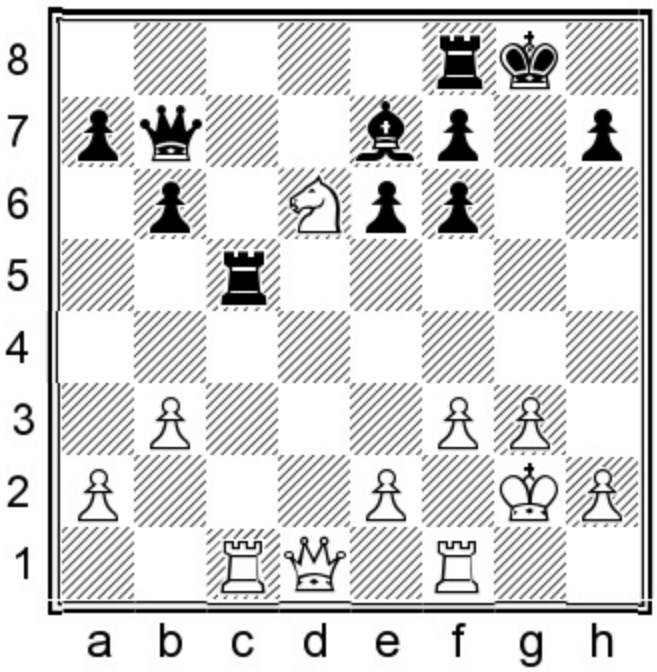
Or 39...♔e8 40.♕h8† ♔d7 41.♕f8+– and Black collapses.

40.♘g4!

With a winning attack for White.

265. Zahar Efimenko – Haik Martirosyan

Warsaw 2021



Should Black:

A) exchange rooks and queens with 19...♖xc1, or
B) force the exchange of rooks with 19...♕c6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

After 19...♕c6? 20.♖xc5 ♕xc5 21.♘e4, the position was relatively balanced, with a draw happening 10 moves later.

19...♖xc1! 20.♘xb7 ♖xd1 21.♖xd1 ♖c8! 22.♖d2

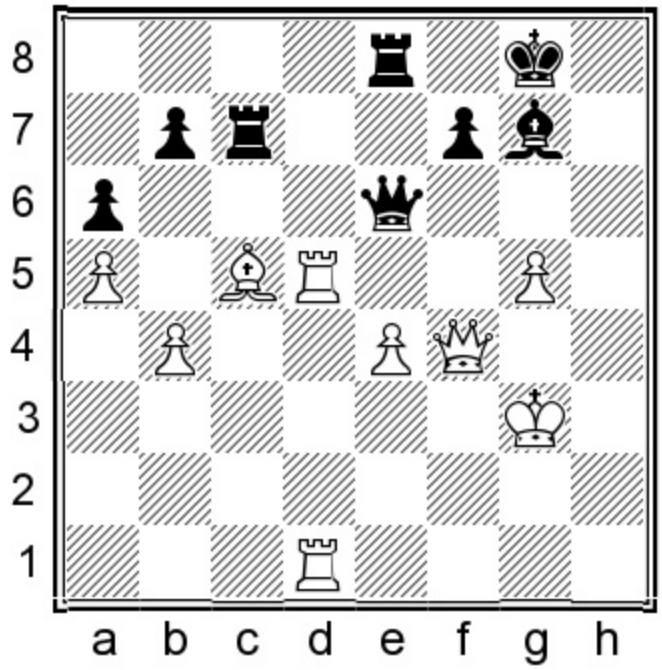
22.♖d7?! ♔f8 gives Black a free tempo.

22...♔f8 23.♘d6 ♗xd6 24.♖xd6 ♖c2

Black will win a pawn and have excellent winning chances, although White may still be minimally within the drawing margin.

266. Vladislav Artemiev – Kirill Shevchenko

Warsaw (rapid) 2021



Should Black:

A) win the exchange with 45...♗e5, or
B) force massive exchanges with 45...♖xc5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

In the game Black decided to flip the coin and win the exchange. After 45...♗e5? 46.♖xe5 ♕xe5 47.♕xe5 ♖xe5 48.♖d8† ♔h7 49.♗d6! White was winning. The rook ending would be hopeless for Black, and after: 49...♖c3† 50.♔f4 ♖b5 (50...♖e6 51.♗e5 leads back to the rook endgame.) 51.♗e5 White threatens ♖h8† and ♖h6#. 51...♖f3† 52.♔xf3 ♖xe5 53.♖d5! ♖e7 54.♖d6 White dominates and won the game 10 moves later.

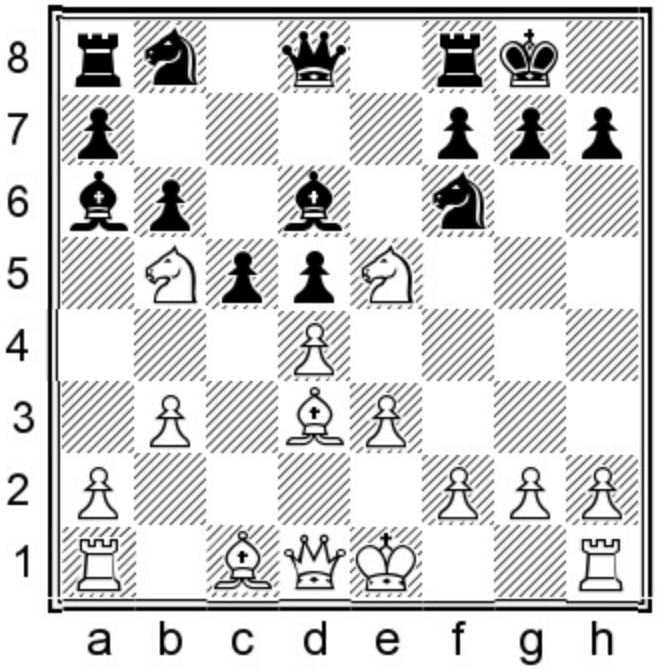
45...♖xc5! 46.♖xc5 ♗e5 47.♖xe5 ♕xe5 48.♕xe5

Also equal is 48.♖d7 ♕c3† 49.♔g4 ♕c4.

48...♖xe5

Black will draw without problems. The extra pawn was valuable not only because it was extra, but also because it made ♖d5! possible. But here the e-pawn is hanging. Black has time for ...♖b5, ...b7-b6 and the exchange of both pawns on the queenside, securing a draw.

267. Georg Meier – Gabor Papp



Should Black:

A) play 11...♖e8 allowing 12.♘xd6, or

B) give up the other bishop with 11...♗xb5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Tactics)

White was fine in the game after 11...♖e8? 12.♘xd6 ♕xd6, and a draw was soon agreed.

11...♗xb5!

Black should play for an advantage.

12.♗xb5 ♕e7

Putting White on the spot immediately.

13.♘f3

The retreat is essentially forced.

13.♗b2?! is even worse. With the king in the centre, White faces tactical problems. 13...cxd4! 14.exd4 ♗xe5! 15.dxe5 ♕b4† 16.♕d2 ♕xb5 17.exf6 ♖e8† 18.♔d1 ♘d7 Black has a winning position due to the exposed white king in the centre.

13.0-0 would give up a pawn and not be practical either.

13...c4!

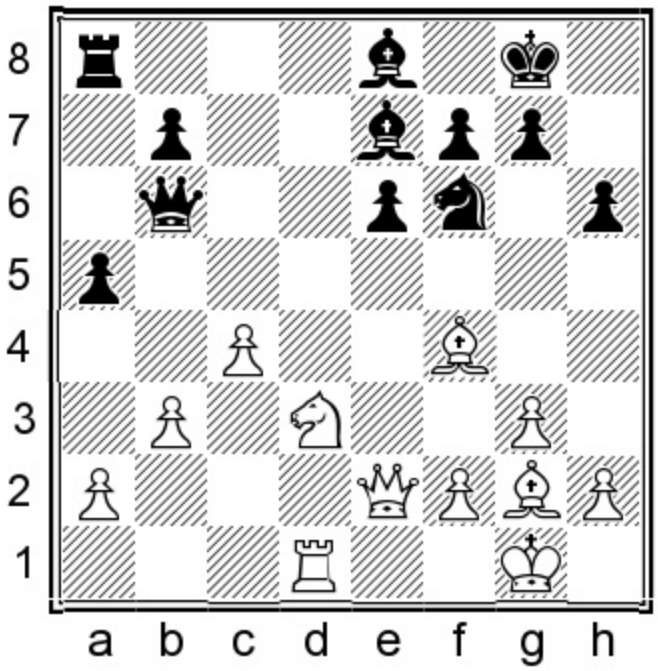
Threatening to trap the bishop. with ...a7-a6.

14.bxc4 a6 15.♗a4 dxc4 16.♗c2 b5 17.0-0 ♘c6∓

Black is more active, and better on both the queenside and the kingside. It is difficult for White to push in the centre without weakening his position.

268. Renier Castellanos – Sergei Efimovich

Valencia 2022



Should White play:

A) 20.♕e3, or
B) 20.♗e3?

Show/Hide Solution

(Converting an advantage)

20.♕e3!!

Renier played the correct move. The queen is the only good piece in the black position, keeping everything together.

20.♗e3? ♕c7 would achieve nothing. White should look to repeat with 21.♗f4, but Black could improve the position a bit with 21...♕c8!±.

20...♕xe3

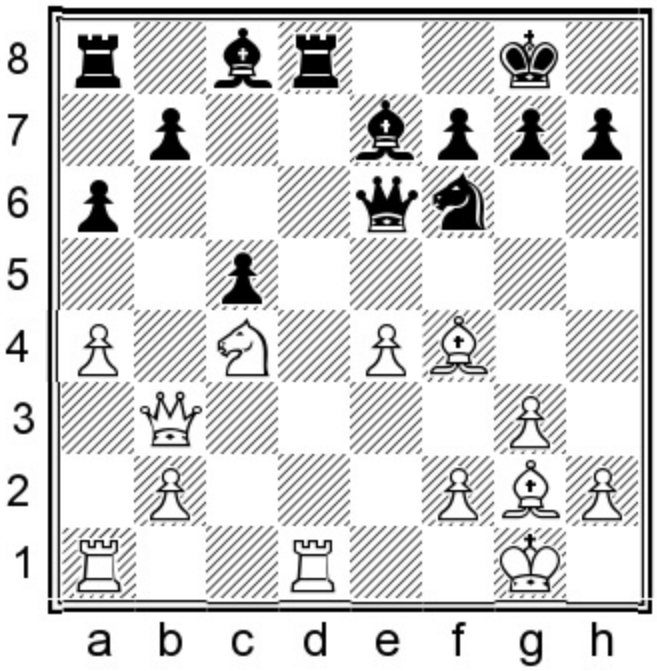
20...♕a6 21.♘c5 would also force massive concessions from Black.

21.♗xe3 ♗c6 22.♗xc6 bxc6 23.♘e5 ♖a6

The game continued as shown in Exercise 278.

269. David Anton Guijarro – Martin Jurcik

Czech Republic 2021



Should Black play:

A) 20...♖xd1†, or
B) 20...♖d4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Escaping with a draw)

The move played by Black, 20...♖d4?, was a disaster: 21.♖xd4 (21.♖ac1 was also strong.) 21...cxd4 22.♖c1! (22.♕d3!? was good enough to win the game by move 44.) White's advantage is overwhelming. For example, 22...♘xe4 23.♕d1! ♗c5?! 24.♘d2! ♘xd2 25.♖xc5 and White wins a piece.

20...♖xd1†! 21.♖xd1 b5!±

This was the only way to keep the game going. White cannot take twice on b5 because of ...♗a6.

22.e5

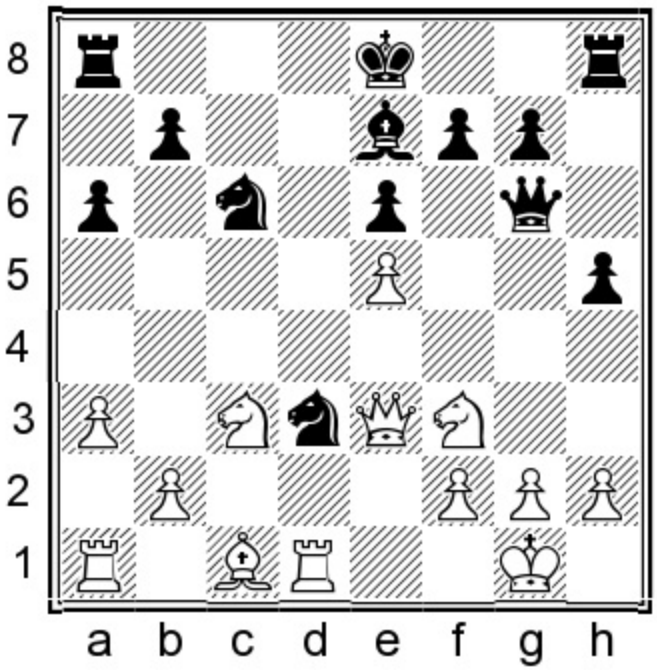
Or 22.♘a5!? ♕xb3 23.♘xb3 ♗g4! 24.♖a1 ♖c8 and Black has solved his problems.

22...bxc4 23.♕c2 ♖a7 24.exf6 ♗xf6 25.♗d5 ♕e8

White's advantage is minimal, if there at all...

270. Bogdan Belyakov – Maksim Samusenko

Sochi 2020



Should Black:

A) take on c1, or
B) defend his knight?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

The game went badly for Black. 20...♘xc1?! 21.♖axc1 0-0 (21...♕h6!?± was better.) 22.♖d7 ♖ab8 The game now continued: 23.♕b6? (White could have thrown in his pieces with 23.♘e4!, threatening to take on c6. White keeps massive pressure after 23...♖fd8 24.♖c7±.) Now Black could have been OK with 23...♗g5 although he drew the game on move 60 anyway.

The alternatives are also poor. After 20...♖d8? 21.♘e4 Black cannot take on e5. White would take on d8 and the black king would be trapped in the centre, giving White a strong attack and the chance to steal the b7-pawn. 21...♘xc1 22.♖xd8† ♘xd8 23.♖xc1 White is winning, as the threat of ♖c7 is immense. For example, 23...♘c6 24.♕b6 ♕xe4 25.♕xb7 0-0 26.♕xc6, when it is a clear extra pawn for White.

And 20...♘c5?! 21.b4 ♘b3 would be like taking on c1 with a tempo less.

20...0-0-0!

White is under a lot of pressure and could easily lose quickly.

21.♕e2!

This is best, as shown by the alternatives:

21.b4? ♕f5! and the e5-pawn is going. A key point is 22.b5 axb5 23.♘xb5 ♗c5! with a winning position for Black.

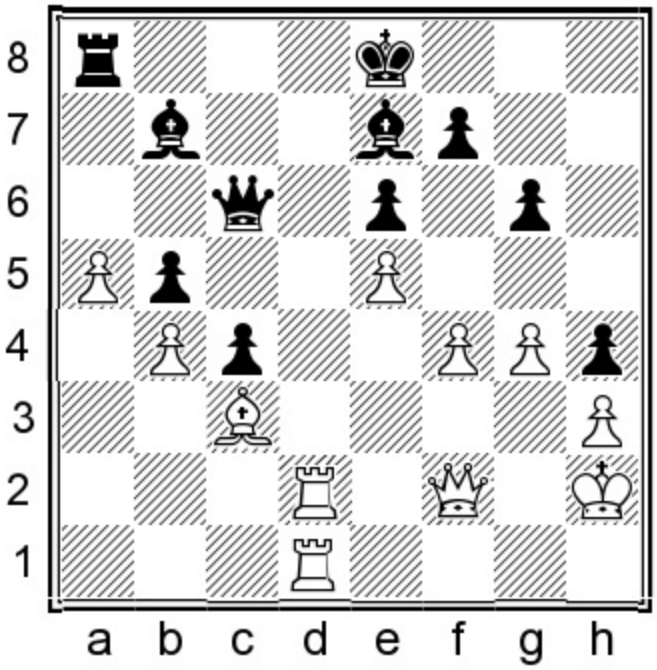
21.♗d2 ♘xb2 is also bad.

21...♕f5 22.♗e3 ♘dxe5 23.♘xe5 ♕xe5∓

Black has an extra pawn, but there is still real counterplay for White.

271. Vugar Asadli – Govhar Beydullayeva

Plovdiv 2021



Should Black:

A) play 43...♖d8, or
B) regroup with 43...♗d8?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing attackers)

43...♖d8!

Removing one of the rooks is necessary for Black – to reduce White's ability both to create threats and to defend the squares around his own king.

Almost everything apart from the solution loses on the spot for Black. For example, 43...♗d8? 44.f5!, with a deadly breakthrough.

44.♖xd8† ♗xd8 45.♖xd8†!?

The only practical way to keep the game going.

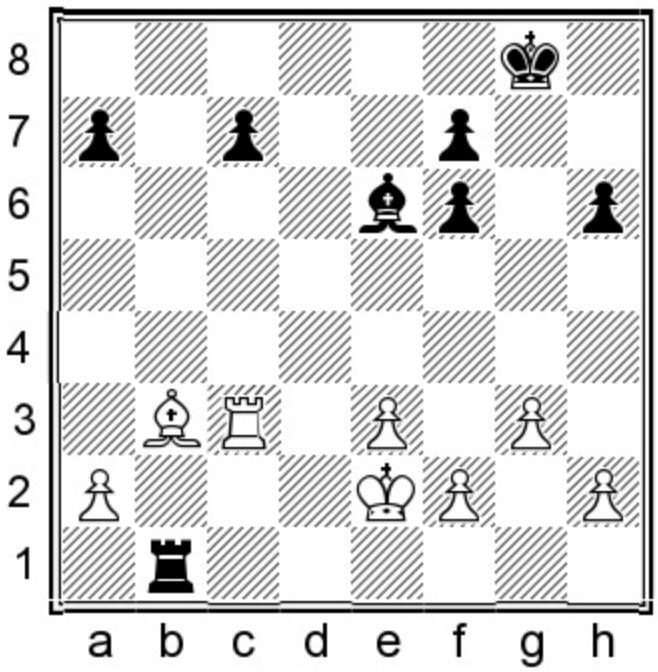
Black would also have reasonable compensation after 45.♕d2 ♗e7=, when it is hard to see how White is going to improve his position.

45...♔xd8 46.♕xh4† ♔e8 47.♕f2 ♕e4≅

Black is fine. Only because of needless mistakes did she lose by move 69.

272. Leandro Perdomo – Darcy Lima

Montevideo 2022



Should White:

A) exchange bishops with 23.♗xe6, or
B) allow Black to do it with 23.♖xc7?

Show/Hide Solution

(Structure)

White went for 23.♖xc7? ♗xb3 24.axb3 ♖xb3 25.♖xa7 ♖b2†, reaching a theoretically drawn endgame where White cannot even pretend to press. The black pawns are ideally placed to exchange any advancing white pawn.

Black also equalises after 23.♔f3 ♗xb3 24.♖xb3 ♖a1 25.♖a3 c5 26.♖xa7 c4 27.♔e4 ♖d1!! 28.♖c7 ♖a1=.

23.♗xe6!

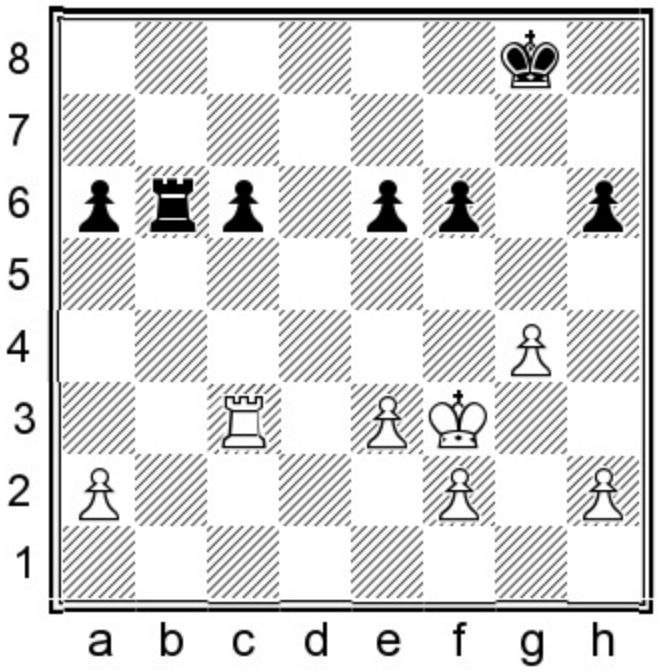
Curiously enough, this capture causes severe damage. It undoubles Black's pawns but also opens the 7th rank. This is the key factor which prevents Black from activating his king, as this would lose material with check.

23...fxe6

White must be precise in order to exploit the weak black pawns. There are two ways:

24.a4!

The other way is 24.♔f3, playing for domination. White will attack Black's weaknesses, forcing the black rook to passively defend on b6 (or b7) where it will be attacked later by a4-a5. This endgame could fill many pages of the book if analysed in detail, but here is a sample line: 24...♖b6 25.♖a3 a6 (25...♖b7 26.♖a5 f5 27.h3 ♔g7 28.g4 fxg4† 29.hxg4 is similar.) 26.♖c3 c6 27.g4



Black is paralysed. 27...♔g7 28.♖c5 ♔g6 29.h4 ♔g7 30.a4 ♔f7 31.♔g3 ♔g7 32.a5 ♖b5 33.♖xc6 ♖xa5 34.♖xe6 White wins.

The direct 24.♖xc7 doesn't work after: 24...♖b2† 25.♔f3 ♖xa2 26.♖e7 e5 Black will hold without too much trouble.

24...♖a1

The passive defence with 24...♖b7 is met with the same idea: 25.a5 ♖b5 26.♖c6! ♖xa5 27.♖xe6 ♔f7 28.♖c6+–

25.♖c6 ♖xa4

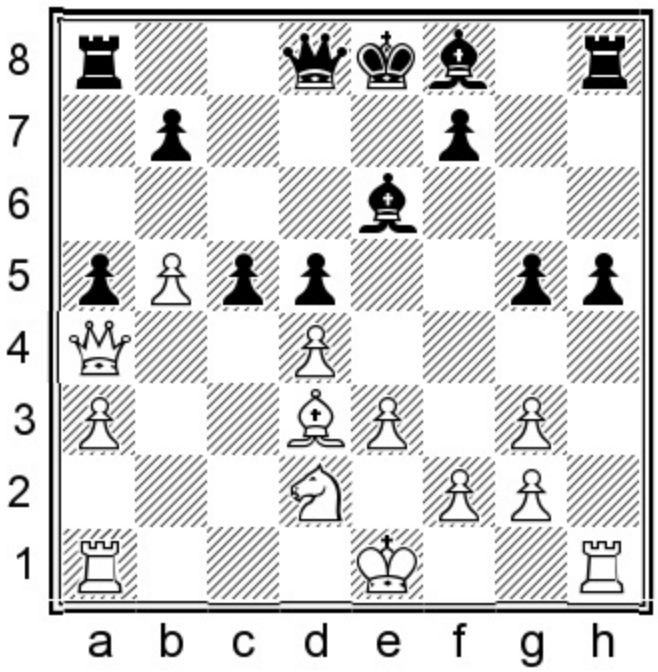
Or 25...♔f7 26.♖xc7†.

26.♖xe6 ♔f7 27.♖c6

White wins another pawn and reaches a winning endgame.

273. Costica-Ciprian Nanu – Mircea-Emilian Parligras

Mamaia 2022



Should White:

A) take on c5 to regroup his knight to d4, or
B) play 19.b6†, seeking to exchange the bishops with 20.♗b5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Remove defenders)

In the game, White played the compliant: 19.dxc5? ♗xc5! 20.♘b3 ♗b6∓ Black followed up with ...♕f6, with control over the dark squares. He won on move 47.

19.b6†!

A defining moment for White. The danger of a strategic battle, where Black has two bishops and mobile pawns on both flanks, requires a drastic transformation.

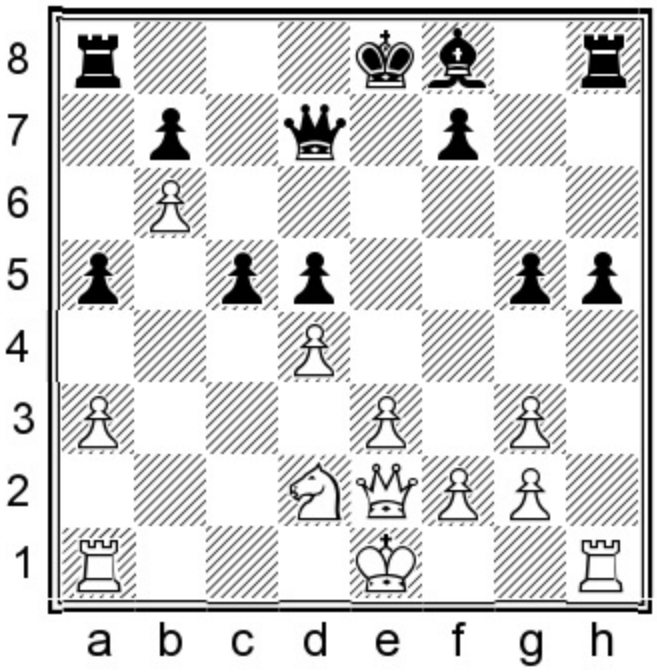
19...♗d7 20.♗b5

This bishop is superfluous, as it had no targets. By removing Black's light-squared bishop, White can hope to exploit the many light squares that will thereby be weakened.

20...♗xb5

20...c4 was also possible. 21.e4!? (or 21.♘f3) 21...c3 22.♘f3 ♗xb5 23.♕xb5† ♕d7 The position has changed, and king safety is now the primary factor. So White is not interested in exchanging queens. 24.♕b3 dxe4 25.♘e5 ♕e6 26.♕xc3 ♗g7 27.0-0 With a balanced position.

21.♕xb5† ♕d7 22.♕e2



The position is unclear. White has managed to get rid of his bad piece. However, Black has an active position and can choose between a few good options. For instance:

22...c4

Although not bad, White has a strong reply.

22...♖c8 makes sense, bringing more pieces into the game. 23.♖xh5 ♖xh5 24.♕xh5 cxd4 25.exd4 ♕f5 26.♘f3 ♗g7 With a double edged position.

22...g4 is also a solid option. 23.0-0 is met by 23...h4 with counterplay.

But 22...cxd4?! would be worse. After 23.0-0 the black king is too weak.

23.e4!

Opening the position and taking the fight to the light squares.

23...0-0-0

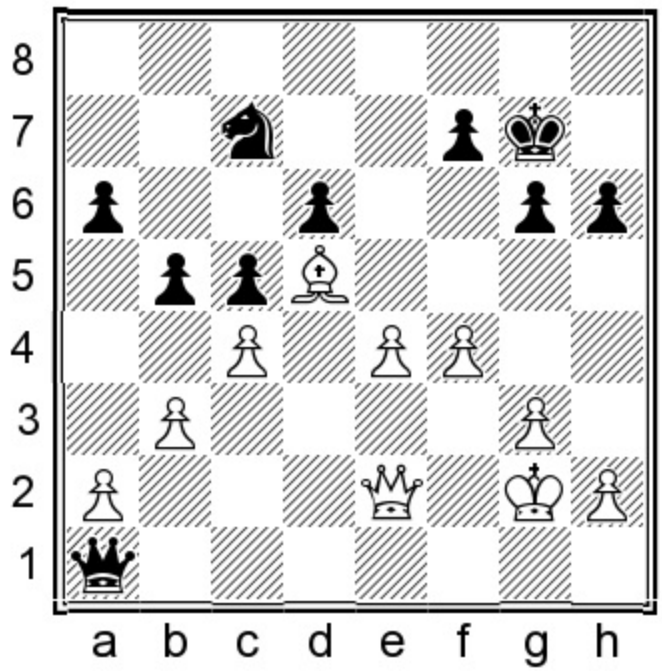
Also not dangerous for Black is: 23...♗g7 24.exd5† ♔f8 25.♘xc4 ♕xd5 26.♘e3 ♕e4 27.♖xh5 With a double-edged position.

24.0-0

With sharp play.

274. Xulio Del Prado Rodriguez – Tomas Sosa

Barcelona 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange minor pieces with 32...♘xd5, or

B) pawns with 32...bxc4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

Black exchanged on c4, removing one of White's weaknesses, and allowing White to escape. 32...bxc4? 33.♗xc4! ♘b5 34.♗xb5 axb5 35.♕xb5 ♕xa2† 36.♔h3 A draw arose in 51 moves.

A suggestion by a student, 32...♕d4, does not lead anywhere: 33.♗b7 bxc4 (After 33...b4 34.♕f2 White is not worse) 34.♕xc4 ♕d2† 35.♔h3 ♕xa2 36.♕c3† White has strong counterplay.

32...♘xd5

This exchange has a deep strategic idea behind it. If White recaptures with the e-pawn he is left with weaknesses on a2 and c4. The white queen is not able to defend both at the same time. If he recaptures with the c-pawn, Black is able to quickly make use of his queenside pawn majority to create a passed pawn.

33.cxd5

The endgame is complicated but, as we shall see, Black is in control.

The same is also true about the alternative structure:

33.exd5 bxc4 34.bxc4 ♕c3

Black is dominating the white queen, while staying close to White's weak c4-pawn.

35.a4

If White waits with advancing the a-pawn with 35.♔f2 then Black plays 35...a5 36.♔g2 a4 37.♔f2 a3 38.♔g2 ♕b2 39.♔f2 h5–+, activating the king next.

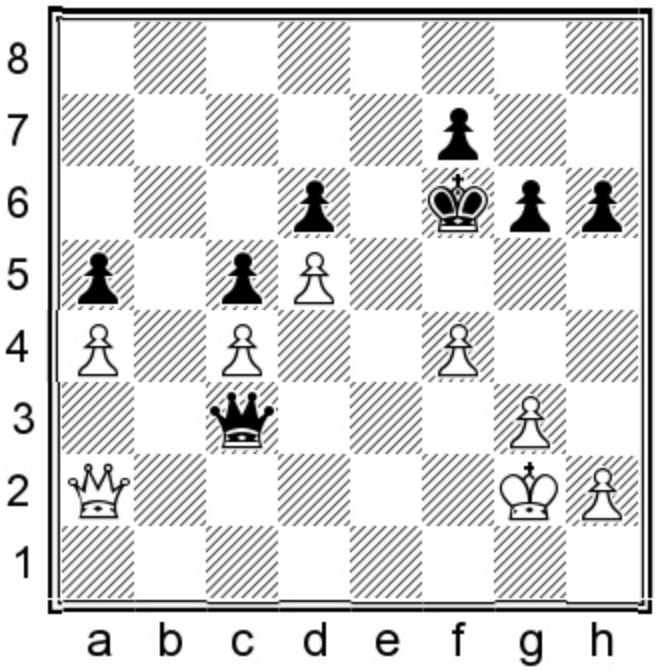
35...a5

Threatening ...♕b3, winning a pawn.

36.♕a2

36.h4 ♕b3 37.h5 is an attempt to create counterplay. But the black king can easily escape the checks. 37...gxh5 38.♕xh5 ♕xc4 39.♕g4† ♔f6 40.♕h4† ♔f5 41.♕h5† ♔e4 42.♕xf7 ♕xd5 Black wins.

36...♔f6



37.g4

New concessions have to be made and White's position becomes weaker. Black can continue applying pressure from afar.

Or 37.♔h3 ♕c1 38.♔g2 ♕d1 when Black dominates and gets ready to play ...♔f5. (The straightforward 38...♔f5 also wins: 39.♕e2 ♕b1–+) 39.♕b2† ♔f5 40.♕a2 ♔e4 Black wins.

37...♕c1 38.♔f3 ♕d1† 39.♔e3 ♔e7

Playing for Zugzwang.

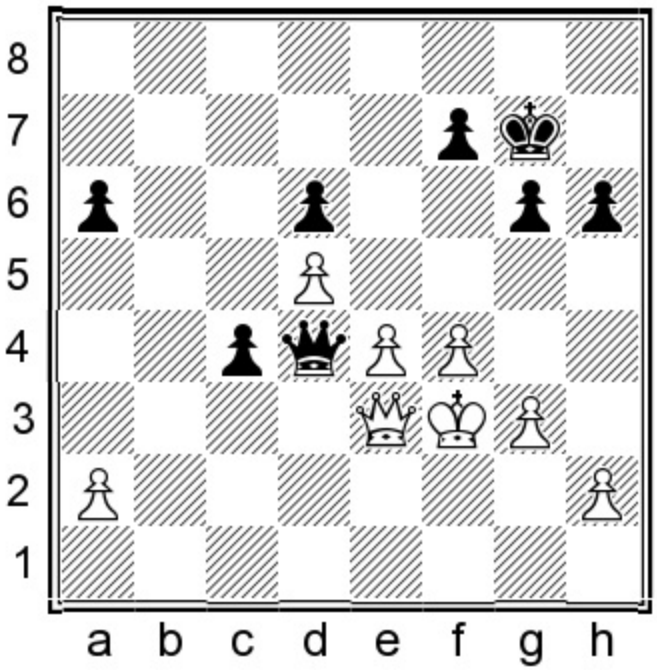
40.♕b2 ♕g1† 41.♔f3 ♕f1† 42.♔g3 ♕d3† 43.♔f2 ♕xc4

The house falls.

33...♕d4!

A fantastic idea, preparing the advance of the passed c-pawn, while at the same time making it difficult for White to break through with e4-e5.

34.♔f3 c4 35.bxc4 bxc4 36.♕e3



36...♕d1†

Black is winning, but there is a lot of play left.

37.♕e2

Other tries:

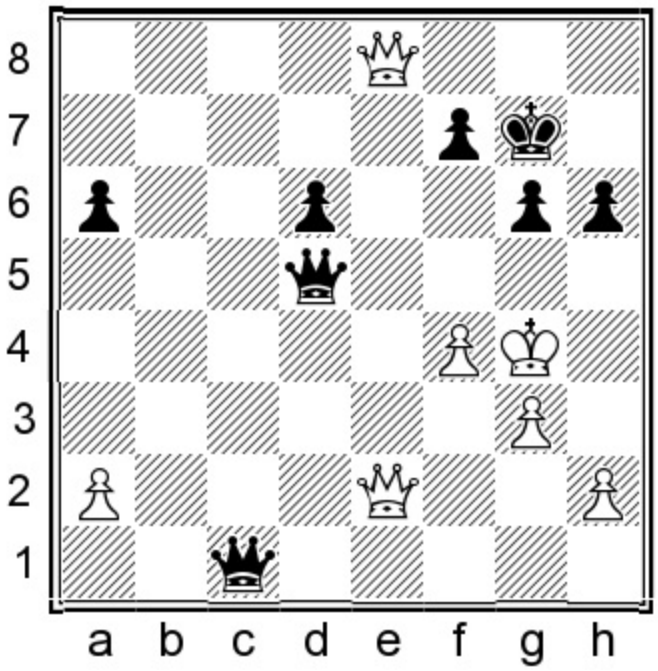
37.♔g2 ♕a1 38.e5 ♕xa2† 39.♔f1 ♕b1† 40.♔g2 ♕b2† 41.♔f1 c3 42.♕d4 dxe5 43.♕xe5† ♔h7 44.d6 ♕b1† 45.♔f2 c2 46.♕d5 ♔g8 47.d7 ♕b6† 48.♔e2 c1=♕ 49.d8=♕† ♕xd8 50.♕xd8† ♔h7 Black will eventually win.

37.♔f2 ♕a1 38.e5 c3 39.exd6 ♕xa2† 40.♔g1 c2 41.♕c3† ♔h7 42.d7 ♕xd5 The simplest. 43.♕xc2 ♕xd7 Again with this endgame, which is technically winning for Black.

37...♕c1

Black guards the path for the c-pawn.

38.e5 c3 39.e6 c2 40.e7 ♕h1† 41.♔g4 c1=♕ 42.e8=♕ ♕xd5



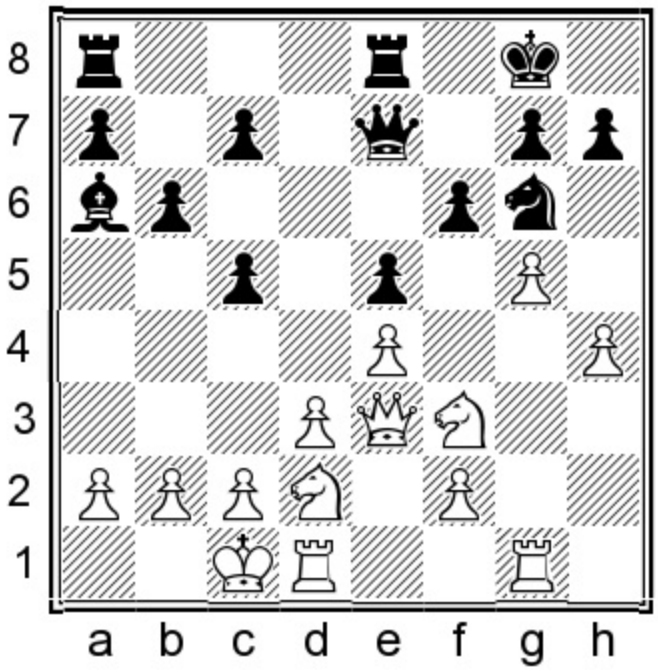
White is lost, as the black queens will soon force a massive simplification or win more material:

43.♔h3 ♕f5† 44.♔g2 ♕cc2 45.♔f2 ♕fc5† 46.♕8e3 ♕xe2† 47.♔xe2 ♕xe3†

Black wins.

275. Radek Sluka – Karolina Pilsova

Czech Republic 2021



Should White play:

A) 17.♖g3, or
B) 17.gxf6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Structure)

Sluka played 17.♖g3?, when after 17...♖ad8? (Black should have gone 17...♘f4! 18.♖dg1 ♔h8 19.gxf6 gxf6±, which looks shaky – but looks aren't everything. White has no clear path to an advantage.) 18.♖dg1 White had a winning attack and won on move 32.

17.gxf6!

Black has to take with the queen, giving White the chance to put pressure on the g7-pawn.

17...♕xf6 18.♖g5!

Preparing to attack the e5-pawn as well as the g7-pawn.

18...♔h8

18...♕f4 19.♖dg1 shows that the exchange of queens will not save Black.

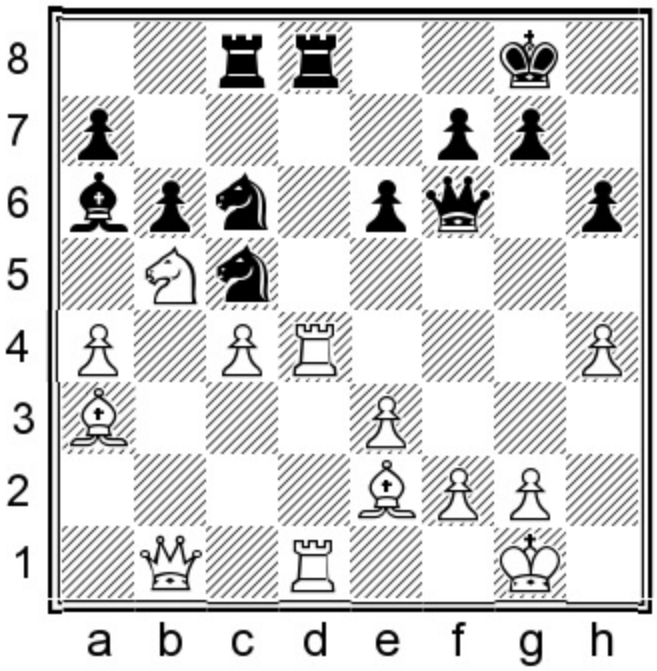
19.♖dg1 ♖e7 20.♖f5

White has a winning attack. Look at how the bishop on a6 is out of play. A nice way to win material now would be:

20...♕d6 21.♘g5 ♖f8 22.♘xh7!

276. Timur Gareyev – Dommaraju Gukesh

Warsaw (rapid) 2021



Which do you prefer:

A) 23.♗xc5, or
B) 23.♖xd8†?

Show/Hide Solution

(Invasion)

In the game, equality was reached after 23.♖xd8†? ♖xd8 24.♖xd8† ♕xd8 25.♗xc5 bxc5 26.♕e4 ♕d7. White won on move 59, but this has nothing to do with the position.

Attacking the queen with 23.♖f4 also doesn't produce any advantage for White after 23...♖xd1†! 24.♕xd1 ♕e7.

23.♗xc5! bxc5 24.♖d7!

The rook could also have stopped on d6. To occupy a file, you do not need to control all 8 squares on it – sometimes 6 or 7 are enough.

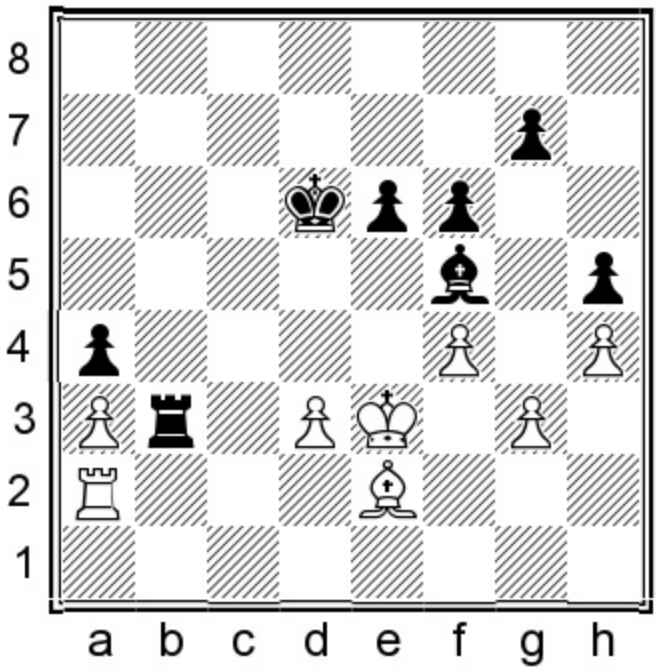
24...♖xd7

24...♕xh4 is not good, but critical. White plays: 25.♕d3! The a7-pawn is falling, and White is pressing strongly on the d-file. The black position is falling apart.

25.♖xd7 ♕xh4 26.g3 ♕f6 27.♕e4±

White has full control of the position. The pawn will soon be won.

277. Ferenc Jr. Gombocz – Pranav Anand



Should White:

A) exchange pawns by taking on h5, or
B) wait with 46.♖a1?

Show/Hide Solution

(Exchanging to make a draw)

White was totally lost in the game after 46.♖a1? g6. Black took home the full point: 47.♖a2 e5 48.fxe5† fxe5 49.♖a1 ♔d5 50.♗f3† e4 51.♗e2 ♔e5 52.♖a2 ♗g4 53.♗f1 exd3 54.♖a1 ♗f5 55.♗g2 d2† 56.♔xd2 ♖b2† 0–1

46.♗xh5!

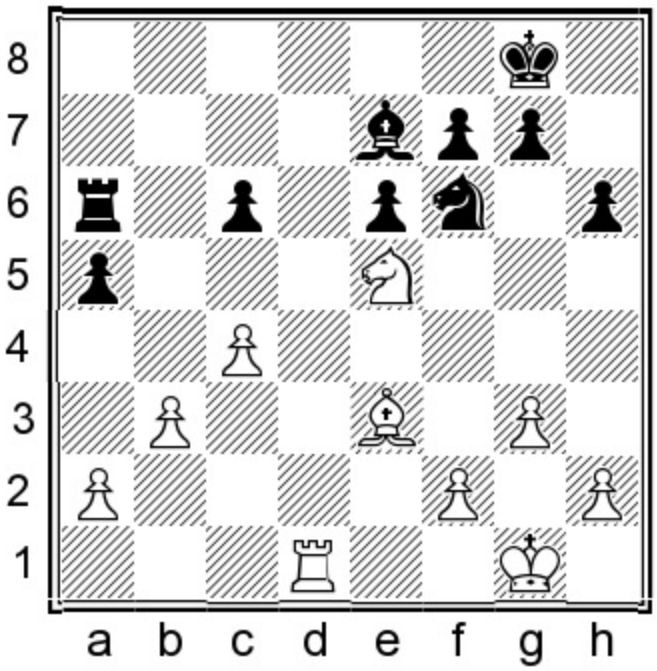
This was essential. The h5-pawn is well-placed, but this is not what makes this the right move. Rather it is getting rid of the weak d3-pawn.

46...♖xd3† 47.♔f2∓

White is worse, but it is a position that can be defended.

278. Renier Castellanos – Sergei Efimovich

Valencia 2022



Should White:

A) prevent counterplay with 24.a4, or
B) look to exchange knights with 24.♘d7?

Show/Hide Solution

(Invasion)

The game saw: 24.a4? ♔f8? (Black had the chance to put a finger in the hole of the dyke. 24...c5! 25.♘d7 ♖c6± keeps everything together.) 25.♔g2? (25.♘d7†! would have won – compare the main line below.) 25...♔e8± Black is solid and held a long game.

24.♘d7!

This forces Black to accept a rook invasion.

24...♘xd7

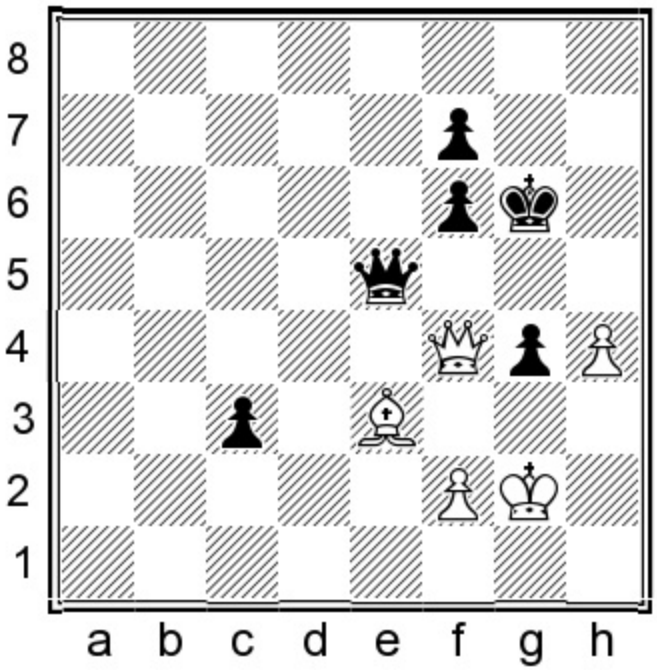
24...♖a8 does not prevent the invasion: 25.♘xf6† ♗xf6 26.♖d6 ♖c8 27.♗b6 ♗c3 28.♖d7 White has a winning endgame, although there is still work to do.

25.♖xd7 ♗b4 26.♖b7!

This precise move keeps Black dominated.

279. Jesus Iruzubieta Villaluenga – Arthur Lucas

Guimaraes 2021



Should Black:

A) exchange queens, or
B) play 59...♕h5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Exchanging to make a draw)

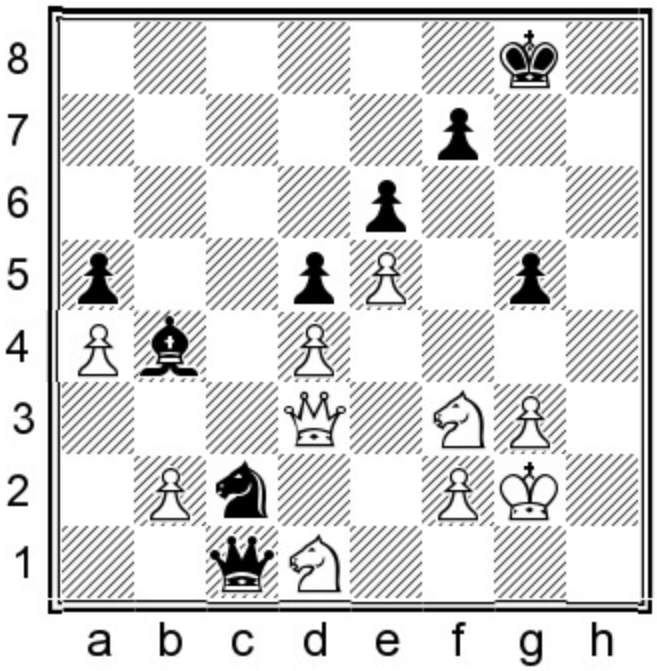
Black played 59...♕h5? 60.♔g3 f5 61.♕d6† ♔h7 and White won on move 79. At this point he could have cut the game short with 62.♗d4! c2 63.♕f6, and White wins.

Black should make the exchange. The white queen and bishop work well together. Without the queens, White is not able to make progress.

59...♕xf4! 60.♗xf4 ♔h5 61.♔g3 f5=

280. Artem Lutsko – Martin Wecker

Terme Catez 2022



Should White:

A) offer the exchange of knights with 41.♘e3, or
B) play something else?

Show/Hide Solution

(Exchanging to make a draw)

In the game, Black had good counterplay after 41.♔h3? ♘e1!? 42.♘xe1 ♗xe1 43.♔g2 ♗d2, making a draw on move 52.

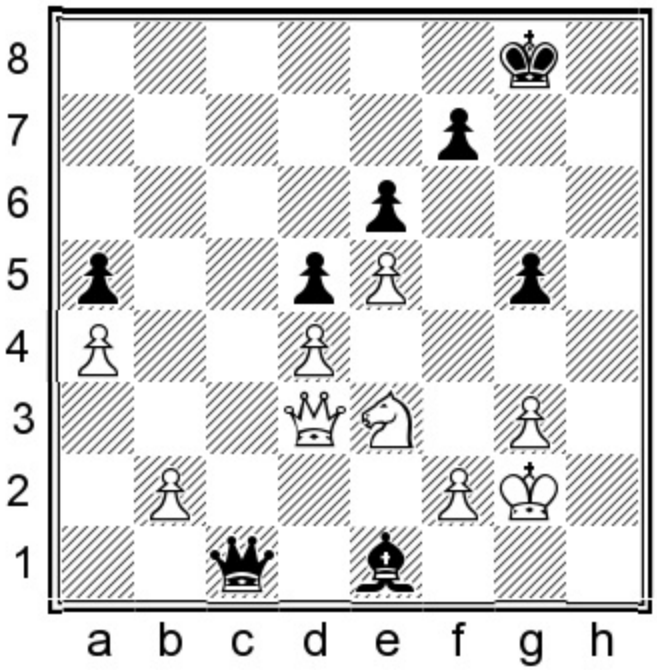
41.♘e3!

Exchanging the knight is the correct plan. The queenless endgame wins, and this way White prevents Black's real plan.

41...♘e1†

White wins easily after: 41...♘xe3† 42.♕xe3 ♕xe3 43.fxe3 ♗e7 44.♔h3 and 45.♔g4 The knight will move freely around the board, until something in the black position breaks.

42.♘xe1 ♗xe1



43.♕c2!

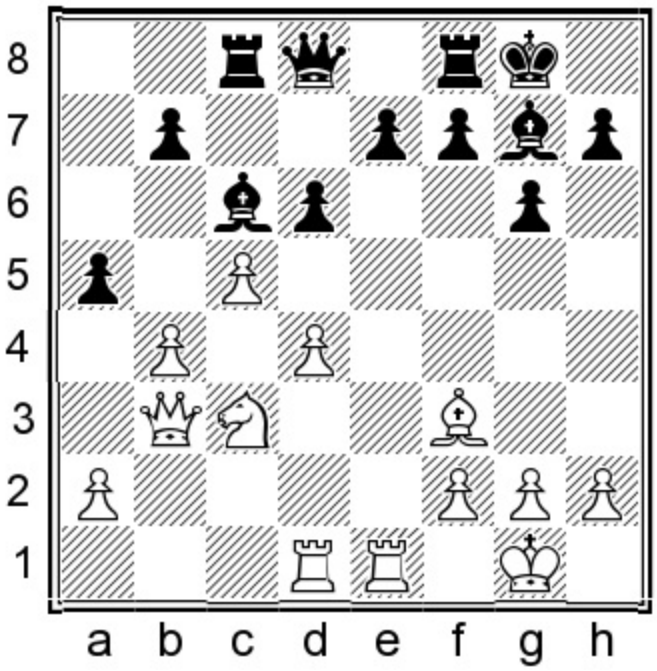
This is the key point. Without queens, Black has no play. The game could finish with this amusing twist:

43...♗d2 44.♕xc1 ♗xc1 45.♘d1 g4 46.b4!

White wins.

281. Gata Kamsky – Patrick Zelbel

Germany 2022



Should White:

A) exchange bishops on c6, or
B) play 18.♗g4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Space)

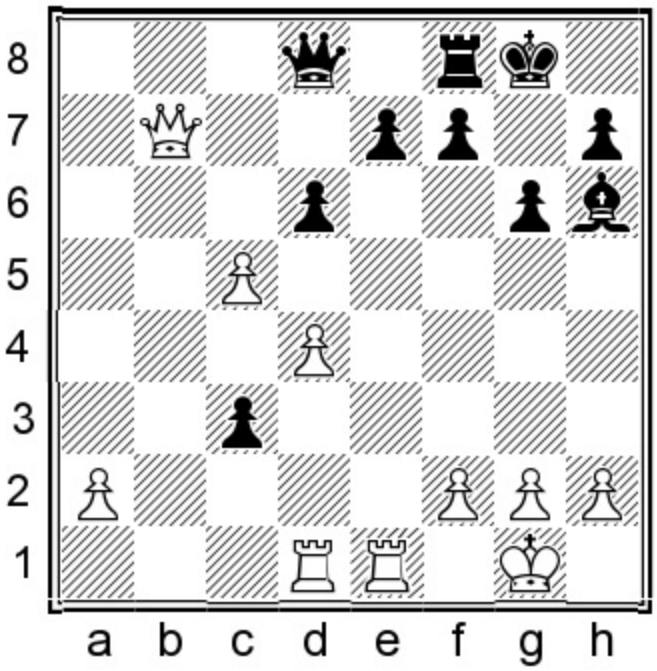
18.♗g4!

This move has two purposes. One is to avoid exchanges in a position with more space. The other is to win a tempo, so Black does not have a chance to play ...a5xb4, destroying White's pawn chain.

White has no advantage after: 18.♗xc6? bxc6! (In the game Black played the strange 18...♖xc6? 19.b5 ♖c8 20.♘d5 e6 21.♘b6 ♖c7 22.♕g3 d5 23.♕c3+– White is in total control and won by move 36.) 19.b5 cxb5 20.♕xb5 For example, 20...dxc5 21.dxc5 ♕c7 with complete equality.

18...e6

Black could try to give up an exchange with 18...axb4!? 19.♗xc8 bxc3, but this does not work: 20.♗xb7 ♗xb7 21.♕xb7 ♗h6!



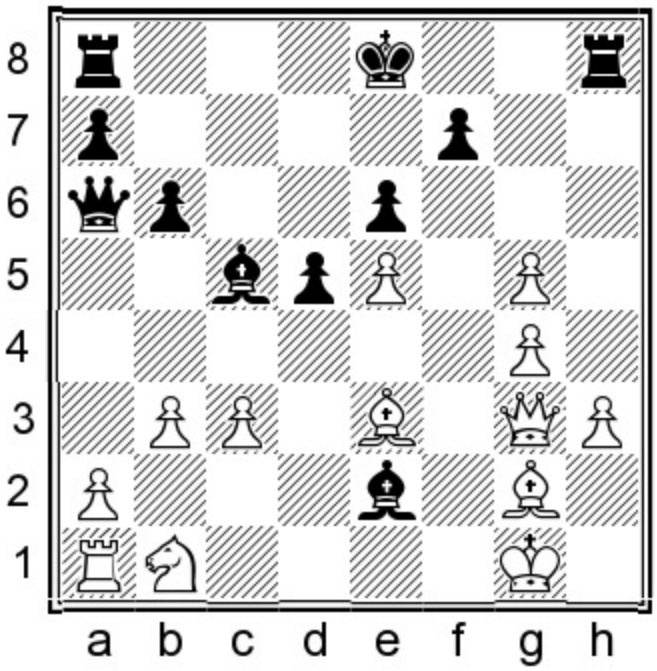
22.c6! But only because of this move. 22...♕a8 23.♕xa8 ♖xa8 24.♖e2 ♗d2 25.♖exd2 cxd2 26.♖xd2 White is winning. If uninterrupted, he will play d4-d5 next, and the coming pawn ending after 26...d5 27.c7 ♖c8 28.♖c2 would be hopeless for Black. He has to take the c7-pawn and then linger on the queenside to deal with the a-pawn. Meanwhile, the white king will invade on the kingside.

19.b5 ♗d7 20.♘a4±

White has an overpowering advantage, similar to the game.

282. Luc Bergez – Elliot Papadiamandis

Sitges 2022



Should White play:

A) 27.♗xc5, or
B) 27.c4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Tactics)

27.♗xc5!

With the black king in the centre, White needs to find a way to open the position up. With this in mind, White played:

27.c4?

But this allows the defence:

27...♕a5!

Now Black can recapture on c5 with the queen, and White can no longer win the piece cleanly. Instead, Black went 27...♖d8? 28.♗xc5 bxc5 29.♕e3 ♗d1 30.♘d2 ♗c2 31.cxd5 exd5 32.♖c1 (Now White could have won by: 32.e6! ♕xe6 33.♕c3+–) 32...♗g6 33.♕xc5+– White still has a winning position but only managed to draw after 66 moves.

28.♗xc5 ♕xc5† 29.♔h2 ♖c8! 30.♘c3 ♗xc4 31.bxc4 ♕xc4 32.♖c1 0-0±

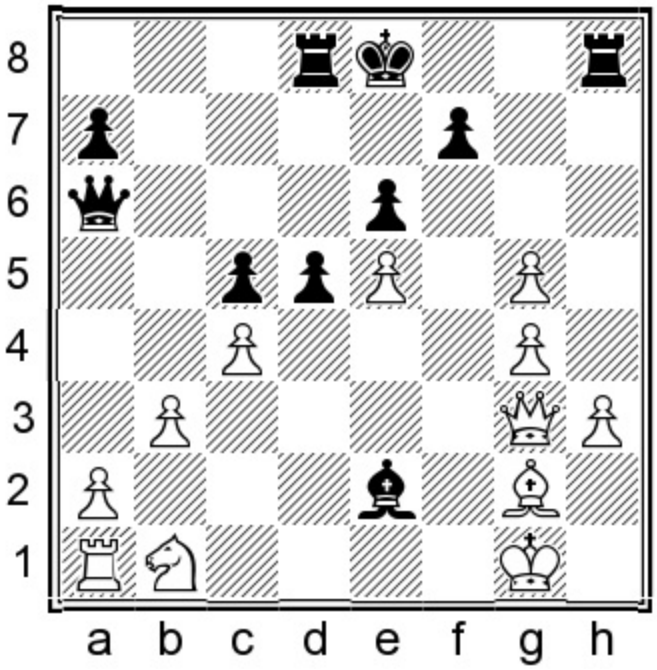
It is difficult for White to untangle his pieces.

27...bxc5 28.c4!

The point. White destroys the enemy centre while at the same time trapping the bishop.

28...♖d8

Or: 28...♗xc4 29.bxc4 ♕xc4 30.♕e3+–



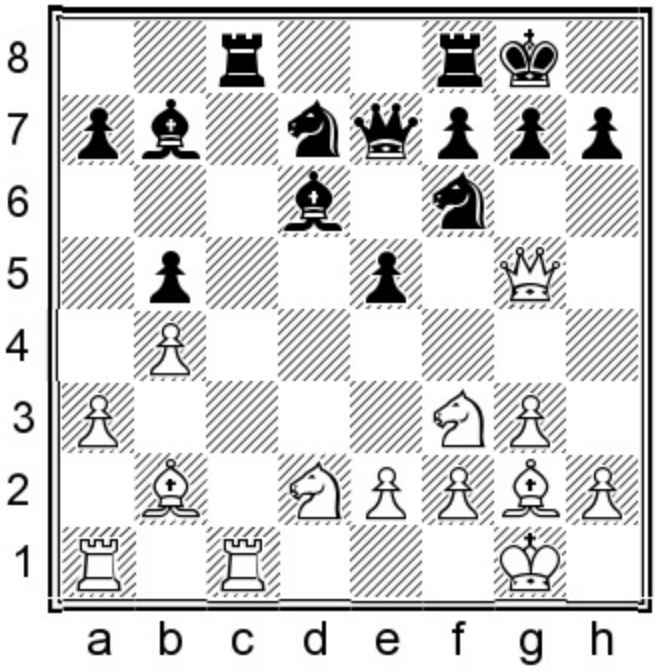
29.♕e3! ♗xc4

White also wins after 29...♗d1 30.♘d2 ♗c2 31.cxd5 exd5 32.e6 ♕xe6 33.♕c3.

30.bxc4 ♕xc4 31.♘d2+–

283. Jesper Sondergaard Thybo – Lars Schandorff

Svendborg 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange both sets of rooks with 17...♖xc1† and 18... ♖c8, or
B) play 17...h6?

Show/Hide Solution

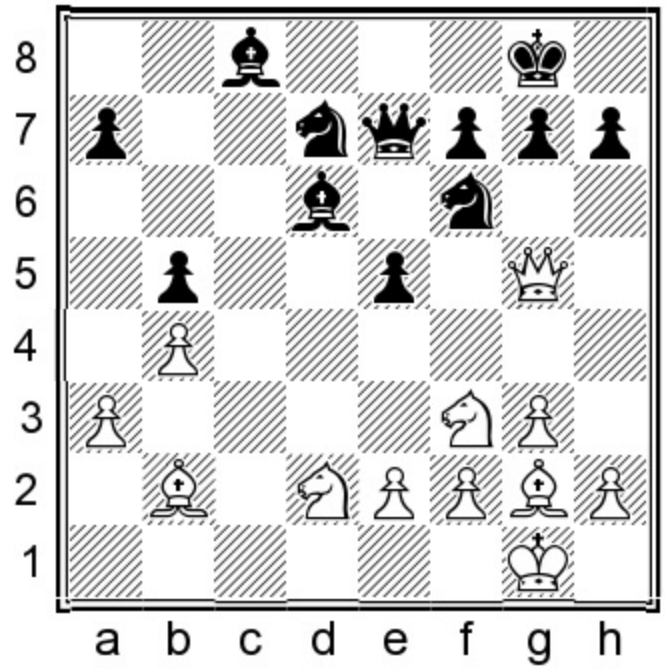
(Tension)

In the game, Black tried solving his problems by forcing simplifications. But the exchange of rooks allows White to invade through the weak queenside squares:

17...♖xc1†? 18.♖xc1 ♖c8 19.♖xc8†!

White continued with 19.♘h4? ♖xc1† 20.♗xc1 ♗xg2 21.♘f5 ♕f8 22.♔xg2 ♗c7 23.♘f3 Black would have been fine with 23...g6!=, freeing the queen from the defence of g7. (Instead Black went 23...♔h8? 24.♗b2± ♘d5? 25.♕c1! ♕b8 26.♕c6 ♘5f6 27.♘g5 ♔g8 28.♘e7† ♔f8 29.♘d5 and White eventually won.)

19...♗xc8



20.♕e3! a6

Or 20...♗b8? 21.♘d4+–.

21.♘e4!

21.♘e1!?²

21...♘xe4 22.♕xe4±

Although the engine doesn't "think'' Black is lost, we find White's position to be much better. All his pieces have an active role. The queen on e4 is dominant and might invade on c6 or a8 at the right time. White can continue with h4-h5 and create further weaknesses. It would be extremely difficult for a human to defend this with Black.

Black should be fine from the starting position, but there are still some small but annoying threats that he needs to pay attention to, particularly ♘h4-f5. Therefore it makes sense to first expel the white queen from her aggressive position.

17...h6! 18.♕e3

Other squares for the queen are less good:

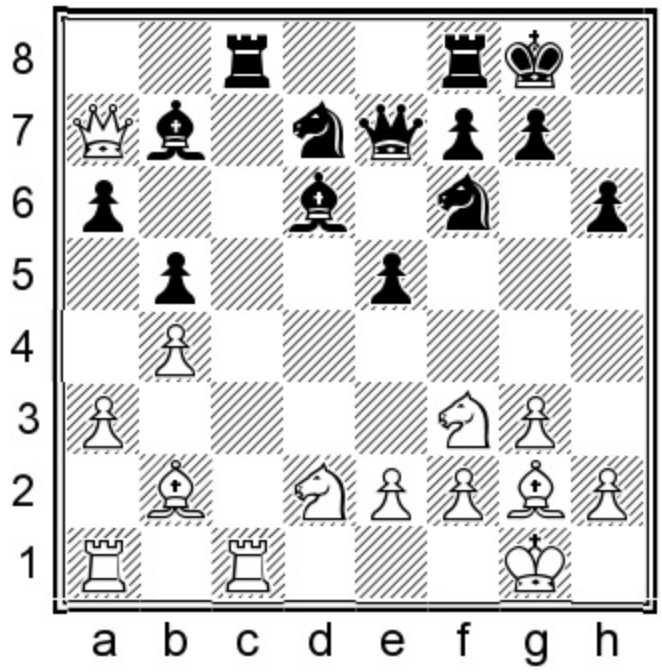
18.♕h4 ♘b6∓ is excellent for Black, putting pressure on White's weak squares.

Or: 18.♕f5 e4 19.♘d4 ♗e5∓ White's coordination is poor and it is not easy to get out of the pin.

18...a6=

The point is that White cannot invade with the queen as it will become trapped:

19.♕a7



19...♘c5!

If nothing else, there's 19...♖b8 when Black is still fine.

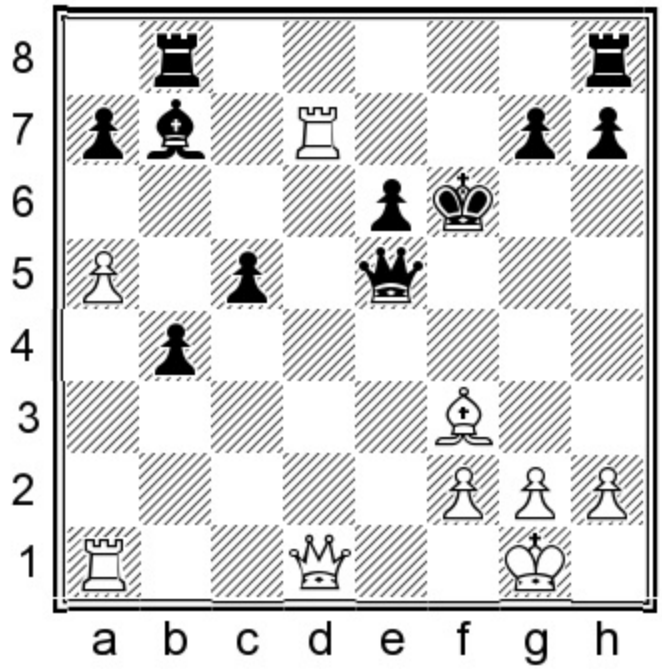
20.bxc5 ♗b8 21.♕b6?!

White does not have enough for the queen after: 21.♕xb8 ♖xb8 22.♗xe5 ♖bc8 23.♗d6 ♕xe2–+

21...♘d5 22.♕a5 ♗c7

The queen goes back in the box.

Wijk aan Zee 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange bishops with 21...♗xf3, or
B) avoid the exchange with 21...♗c8, or
C) 21...♗a6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

Black chose:

21...♗xf3?

This helps the white queen to a great attacking spot with tempo, and it removes a piece that's in the way.

22.♕xf3† ♔g5!

The only move.

White wins after 22...♔g6? 23.♕g4† ♔h6 24.♖f1 followed by 25.f4.

23.h4† ♔h6 24.g4?

Giving Black another chance. There were plenty of alternatives.

24.♖c1 ♖hf8 25.♕d3 ♕f4 26.♕c2÷ would see Black two pawns up, but far from in control.

24...♖hf8

Black brings in another defender after which White is lost. She went down in 42 moves.

21...♗a6!!

Black transfers the bishop to a diagonal which is surprisingly good. The white pieces are in each other's way and the queen cannot join the attack.

21...♗c8? 22.♖xa7 ♕d4 23.♕e1 would lead to a complex middlegame where White's chances are not worse.

22.♗h5!?

After 22.♖xa7? ♖hd8 23.♕b1 ♗d3 it is all over for White.

Or 22.♗g4 ♖hf8!, when it is difficult to find a way for White to play for equality.

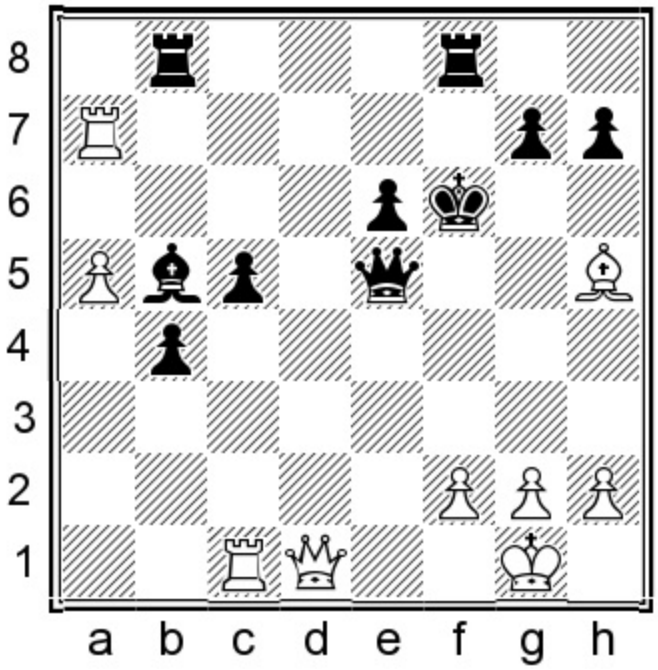
22...♖hf8

Black has a better position, but good moves are needed to claim victory. The following non-forced variation has instructive value.

23.♖c1

23.♕f3† ♔g5 24.h4† ♔h6 shows how useless the bishop is.

23...♗b5 24.♖xa7



24...♗c6!

Regrouping the bishop to the best diagonal, eyeing g2, and vacating the b-file to allow the rook to support the b-pawn.

25.♗f3 ♖fd8

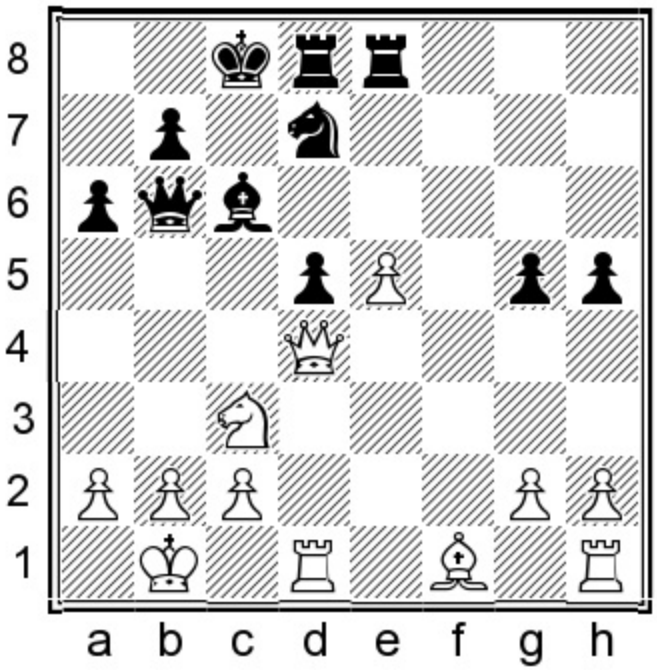
Improving the rook with tempo.

26.♕b3 ♗b5!

A repeat of our exercise question! The reasons for this move are the same as on move 21.

285. V.S. Rathanvel – Dmitrij Kollars

Stockholm 2020



Should Black:

A) exchange queens, or
B) retrieve his pawn with 22...♖xe5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

22...♕xd4!

The only way to play for an advantage.

After 22...♖xe5, White has many ways to get his pieces to harmonise. One of them is 23.♘e2 when the knight is taking control of the vital d4-square.

23.♖xd4

Not the piece White wanted on d4.

23...♘f8!∓

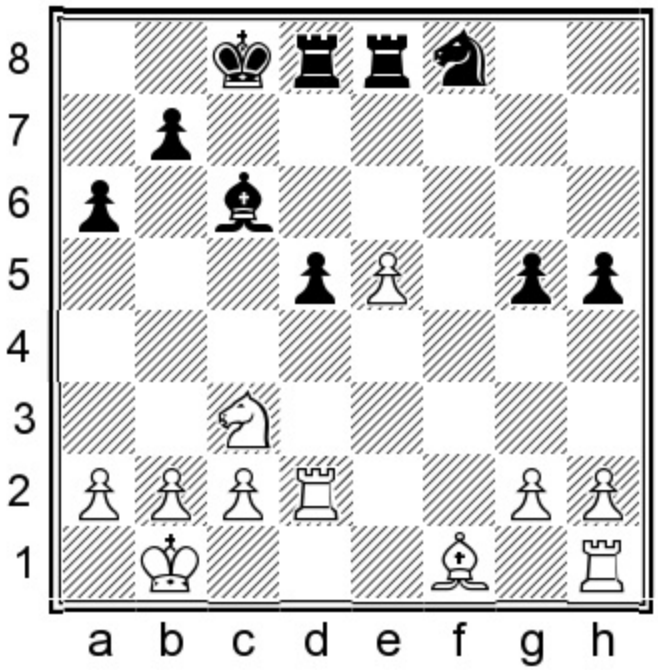
An accurate move from Kollars.

After 23...♘c5, White would get a tempo to create counterplay: 24.b4! ♘e6 25.♖d2 Black will have to spend some moves retrieving the invested pawn.

24.♖d2

It is difficult to find a way for the white pieces to work together. Or even get into the game.

24.b4 now is simply answered with 24...♖xe5∓.



24...♖xe5?!

It is hard to criticise Black for cashing in, as it would require computer-inspired accuracy to exploit this small inaccuracy.

24...d4! 25.♘e2 ♖xe5∓ takes the pawn without allowing White to get his pieces into the game. There are still many moves to play, but for White they are all uphill.

25.♗d3 d4

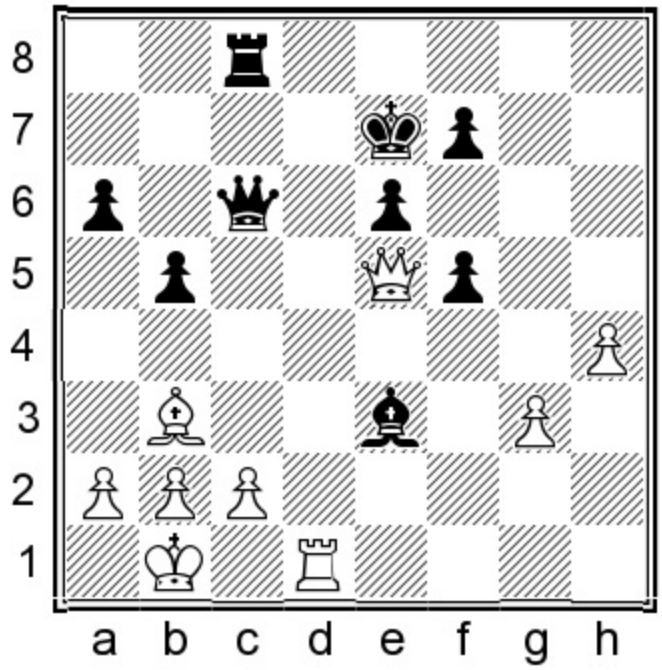
Black won the game on move 55, but at this point White could have solved his problems with the clever operation:

26.♖e2! ♖de8 27.♖he1 ♖xe2 28.♘xe2 ♗xg2 29.♖g1 ♗e4 30.♘g3 ♗xd3 31.cxd3

White has enough counterplay against the black kingside pawns to make the draw.

286. Dieter Morawietz – Namig Guliyev

Gmund am Tegernsee 2021



Should Black play:

A) 28...♖d8, or
B) 28...♕c5?

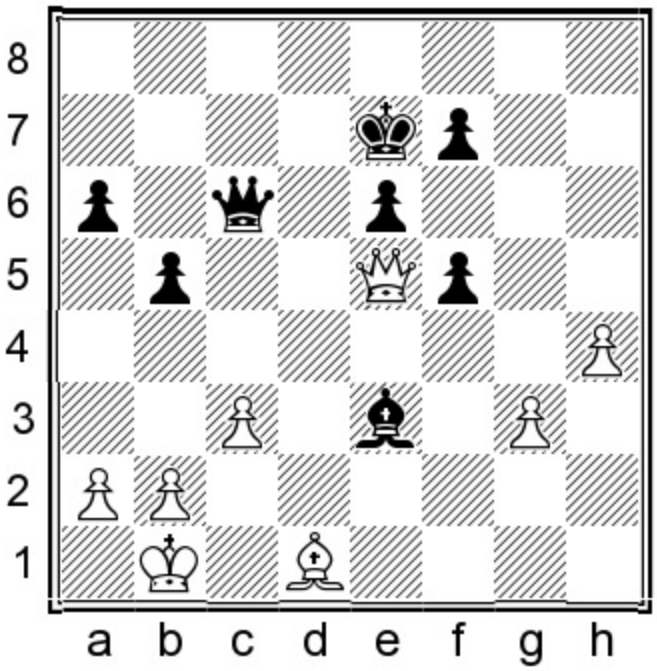
Show/Hide Solution

(Remove defenders)
28...♕c5? 29.♕g7! gave White counterplay in the game. Black is still fine, but not after his next two moves: 29...♕c7?! 30.a3 a5?! 31.♖e1± (31.g4!± was strong. The tactical point is that 31...fxg4?! 32.♖f1 ♗f4 loses to: 33.♕xg4 ♗e5 34.♕g5† ♔f8 35.c3+– Black has no counterplay, and is under serious pressure.) 31...♕b6 32.c3? A serious positional mistake, opening up the queenside for no reason. 32...b4!∓ 33.cxb4 axb4 34.a4 ♕d4 35.♕h7? Exchanging queens and struggling towards a draw was the right choice. 35...♕d2 36.♖d1 ♖c1† 37.♖xc1 ♕xc1† White resigned, as Black will mate him on b2. 1–0

28...♖d8! 29.c3

29.♖xd8? would allow mate in two with 29...♕h1†.

29...♖xd1† 30.♗xd1



30...♕b6!!

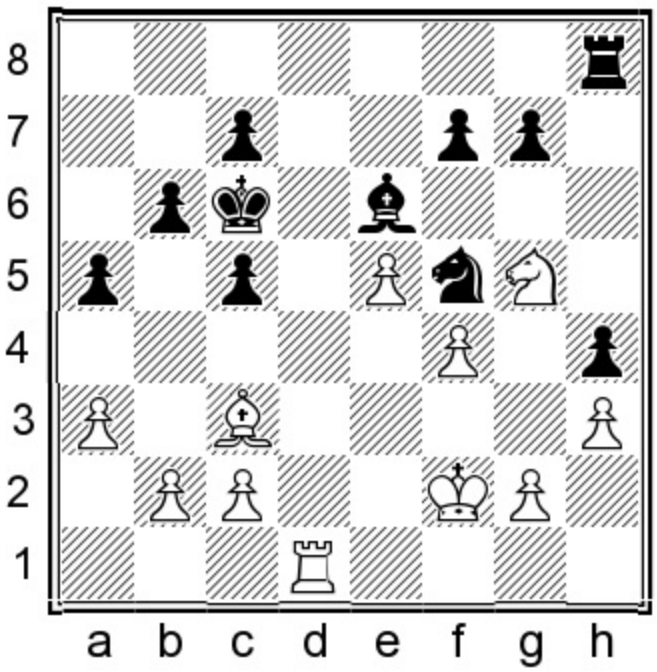
An additional trick. Black is threatening to trap the white queen.

31.♕h8 ♕d6

Black wins the g3-pawn and later the game.

287. Maria Schöne – Axel Smith

Cappelle-la-Grande 2008



Should White:

A) exchange knight for bishop with 27.♘xe6, or
B) play 27.♖d2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

White is playing for a draw and has to do something to defend her weaknesses on the light squares. That something is to eliminate Black's best piece, the bishop.

27.♖d2?

White erred by not making the exchange. We have lightly analysed the rest of the game, as the way in which Black is now able to exploit the light-square weaknesses is instructive.

27...♖a8?!

27...♗d5 retains the bishop (there are other good moves). Black would have to play slowly, and well, to prove a considerable advantage, but there are many ways to do so. One of them is: 28.a4 ♖h6 (28...c4!?∓ is perhaps even stronger) 29.♘f3 ♖e6! (29...♖g6? would fail to the usual trick 30.e6!∞, based on: 30...f6? 31.♖xd5 ♔xd5 32.♘xh4 ♘xh4 33.e7+–) 30.♖d1 ♗e4 31.♖d2 ♖g6 Black is exerting strong pressure. Now 32.e6 works less well: 32...♖xe6 33.♘e5† ♔b7 34.♘xf7 ♖e7 35.♘g5 ♗c6 36.b3 c4! With an advantage to Black.

27...a4! is strong, as with the rook placed stupidly on d2, it would take too long for White to regroup: 28.♘xe6 fxe6 29.♖d1 ♖g8 30.♗e1 g5 31.fxg5 ♖xg5∓

28.♘e4?

28.♘xe6!∓

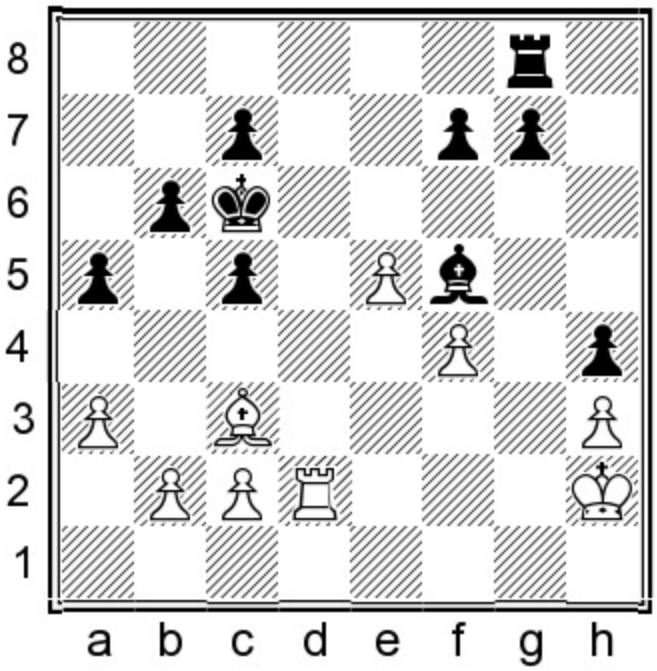
28...♗d5!?

28...b5!

29.g4? ♗xe4 30.gxf5 ♗xf5 31.♔g2 ♖g8!?

Black needed to create more weaknesses with 31...b5!.

32.♔h2

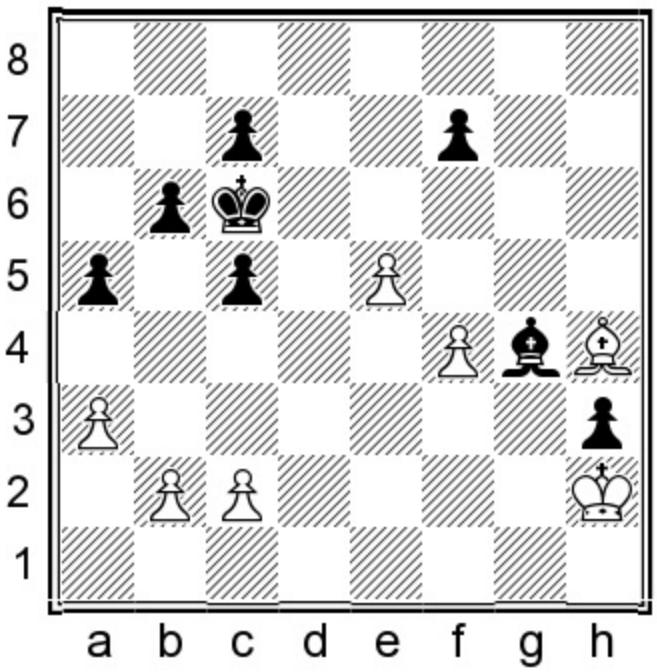


32...g5??

White is not threatening anything, so Black should have improved the position with: 32...♔b5!? 33.♖g2 c4 34.♗e1 ♔a4 when he will break through on the queenside. After 35.♗xh4 Black has 35...c3!, creating a passed pawn.

33.♖g2 g4 34.hxg4 ♖xg4 35.♖xg4 ♗xg4 36.♗e1 h3 37.♗h4

White could have set up a fortress-like position with 37.c4!. The common defensive method in such positions. Black can push, but after 37...♗e6 38.♗g3 ♗xc4 39.f5 ♗d3 40.e6 fxe6 41.fxe6 ♗f5 42.e7 ♗d7 43.e8=♕ ♗xe8 44.♔xh3 b5 45.♔g2 b4 46.♔f2, White will make the draw nonetheless.



37...♗f5?

37...c4! is a simple winning move. As we will see in the game, White cannot prevent Black from

making something out of his extra pawn. ...♔d5-e4 will come.

37...b5!? also wins. The win is a bit narrower, but very attractive. 38.c4!? b4! 39.♗e7 ♗e6 40.♔g3 ♗xc4 41.♔xh3 ♗e6† 42.♔g3 c4! 43.axb4 a4! 44.♔f3 c3 45.bxc3 ♔b5! and the pawn queens.

38.♗d8?

38.c4!=

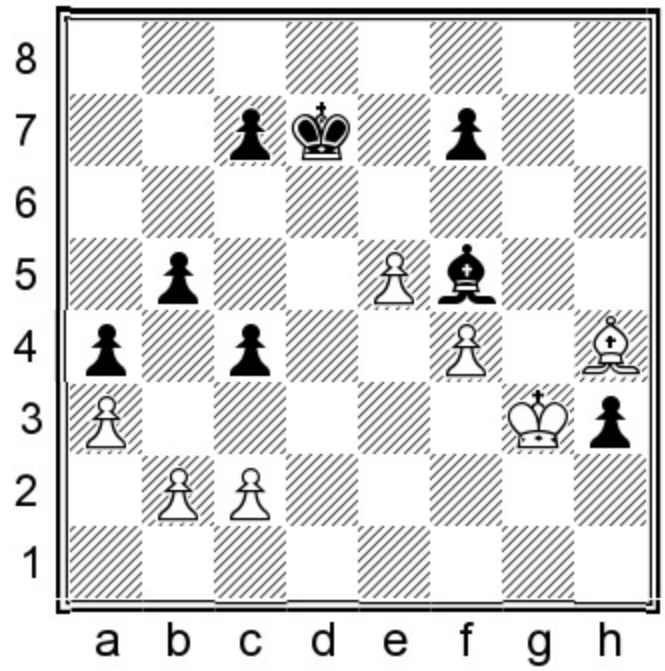
38...a4?

38...c4!–+

39.♔g3?

39.c4!=

39...c4! 40.♔h2 b5 41.♔g3 ♔d7 42.♗h4



42...b4!?

42...♗xc2 43.♔xh3 ♗f5† 44.♔g3 b4 was a more classic breakthrough, but fixing the weakness on b2 also works fine.

43.c3 b3 44.♔f2 h2 45.♔g2 ♔e6 46.♔xh2 ♔d5

0–1

27.♘xe6!

As explained earlier, White needed to exchange Black's strongest piece.

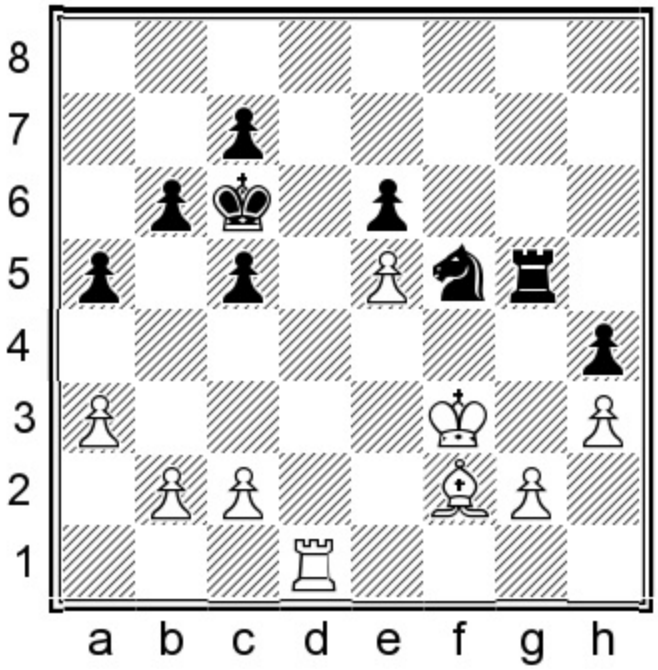
27...fxe6

White has many ways to play for equality. Such as:

28.♗e1 ♖g8

Or 28...a4 29.♔f3=.

29.♔f3 g5 30.fxg5 ♖xg5 31.♗f2



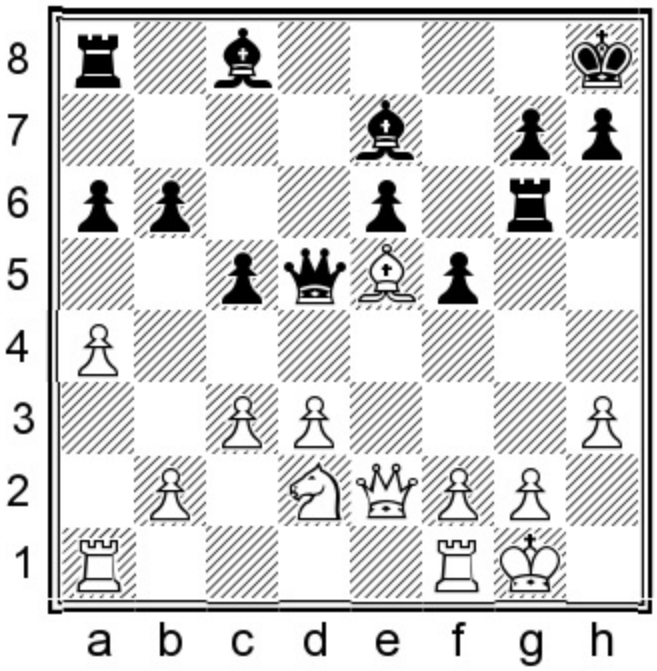
The drawing margin is considerable.

31...♘g3 32.♗xg3 ♖xg3† 33.♔f2 ♖g5 34.♔f3! ♖xe5 35.♖d2 ♖g5 36.g4 hxg3 37.h4 ♖g8 38.♖g2

The great passed pawn on the h-file will give White enough counterplay to make an easy draw.

288. Annmarie Muetsch – Andreas Rupprecht

Germany 2020



Should White:

A) exchange queens with 19.♕f3, or
B) play 19.f3?

Show/Hide Solution

(Colour schemes)

The game was equal after 19.♕f3? ♕xf3 20.♘xf3 ♗b7. White played 21.♔h2 and the players agreed a draw. Black will later play ...♗f6 and ...g7xf6. It is hard for White to untangle herself.

19.f3!

The black queen is more a target than a force on d5, and the white knight is able to go to the attractive c4-square.

19...♗b7

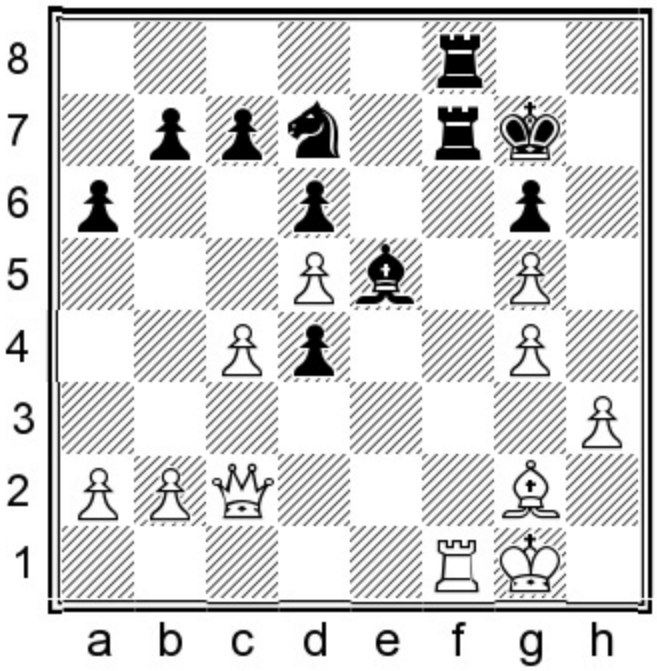
19...b5 20.axb5 axb5 21.c4! also favours White.

20.♘c4 ♕d8 21.♗h2±

White has consolidated, and her knight is not worse than the black bishop. A case where the two bishops are not that attractive.

289. Oscar Idle – Jonathan Blackburn

Internet 2020



Should Black:

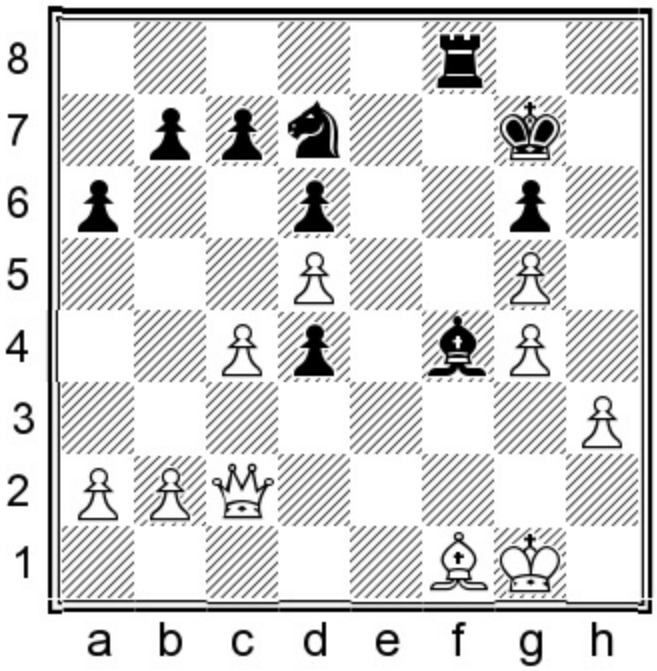
A) take on f1 and then play ...♗f4, or
B) play 24...♗f4 right away?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing attackers)
24...♘c5? 25.♖xf7† ♖xf7 26.b4 d3 27.♕d1 and:
24...d3? 25.♖xf7† ♖xf7 26.♕xd3 ♘c5 27.♕e2 are both nonsensical options. White is winning in the long run.

The game saw:

24...♖xf1†? 25.♗xf1 ♗f4



26.♗g2?

A horrific mistake. White had plenty of good options. For example: 26.♔g2 ♗e3 27.c5! ♘e5 (27...dxc5? 28.♗e2 ♖f2† 29.♔g3 and with the ideas ♕e4 and b2-b4, White is much better. The endgame after 27...♖f2†? 28.♕xf2 ♗xf2 29.cxd6 cxd6 30.♔xf2 is, a bit surprisingly, dead lost for Black.) 28.cxd6 cxd6 29.♕c7† ♔g8 30.♕xd6 ♖f2† 31.♔g3 ♖f3† Black has to take the perpetual check.

26...♗e3† 27.♔h1 ♘e5 28.c5 d3 29.♕b3

Black won on move 51. Here the short-cut starts with 29...d2!? followed by ...♗xg5 and ...♖f4-d4, with total domination.

24...♗f4!

It does not make sense to reduce the amount of black attackers at this stage. Keeping the tension is the same as keeping the advantage.

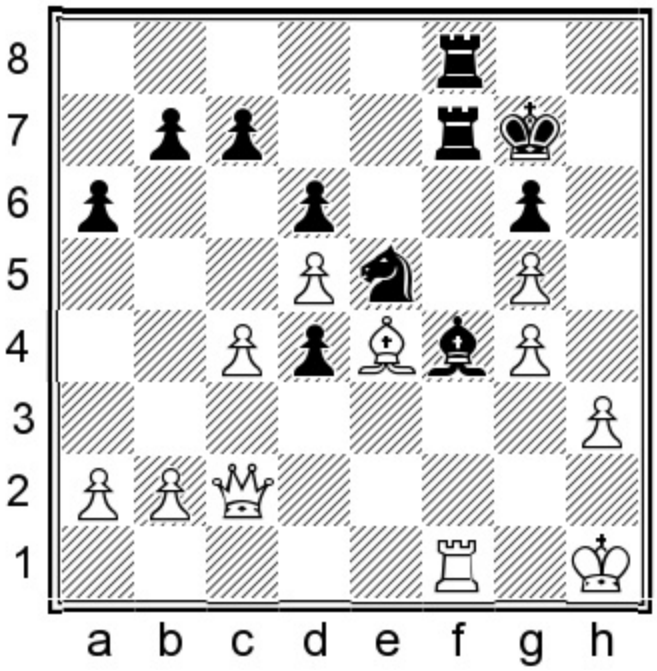
25.♔h1

A possible winning line for Black looks like this: 25.♕d3 ♗e3† 26.♔h1 ♖xf1† 27.♗xf1 ♘e5 28.♕d1 ♖f2 With the winning idea of 29...d3 30.♗xd3 ♘f3.

25...♘e5

25...b6!? is also good.

26.♗e4



26...b6!

Patience is rewarded. The key problem with the alternatives is White's ability to create counterplay on the queenside:

26...♗xg5?! 27.♖xf7† ♖xf7 28.c5!∓ is not so bad for White. Neither is; 26...♗e3?! 27.♖xf7† ♖xf7 28.c5!, when after 28...♖f1† 29.♔g2 d3 30.♕b3! White has saving counterplay against b7.

27.b4 ♗e3 28.♖xf7† ♖xf7 29.c5 ♖f1† 30.♔g2 d3 31.♕b3

This time without threatening ♕xb7.

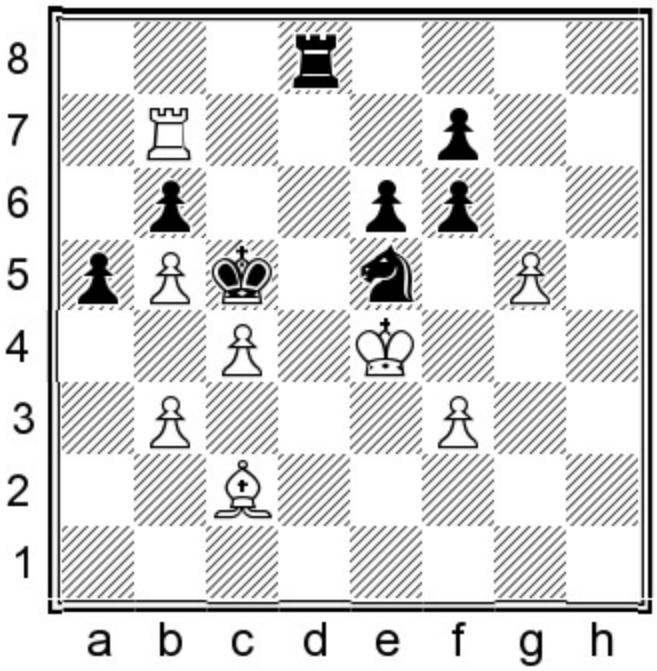
31...♖e1

Black wins. For example:

32.♗xd3 ♖g1† 33.♔h2 ♘f3#

290. Lukasz Licznerski – Franciszek Sernecki

Poland 2022



Should Black play:

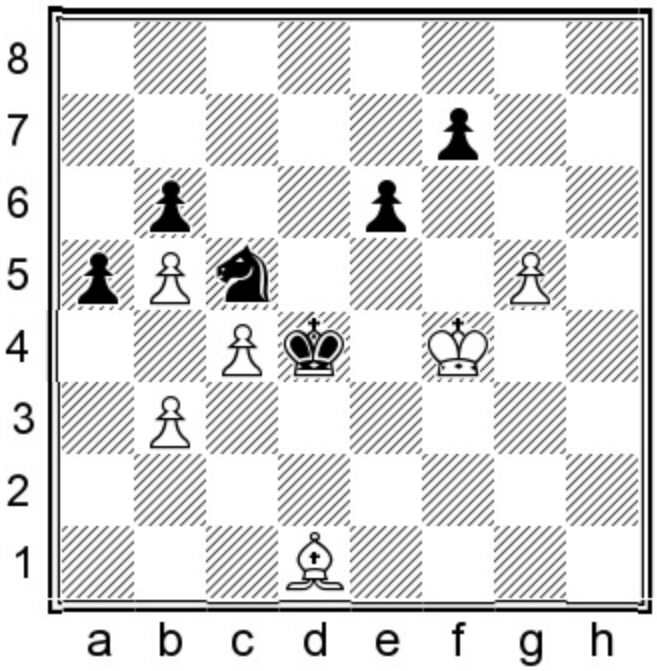
A) 45...♖d7, or
B) play the knight to the same square?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

At first glance, it may seem that the white rook is an active piece preventing Black from making progress. But a deeper look reveals that Black can trap the rook, leaving it as a stranded onlooker while the black king invades the queenside through the dark squares.

The game went 45...♖d7?. White should exchange his useless rook and seek counterplay by attacking the f7-pawn. 46.♖xd7! (Instead, he played 46.♖b8? ♖d2 47.gxf6 ♘d7 48.♖b7 ♔d6 49.♗b1 ♖b2 0–1) 46...♘xd7 47.f4! Fixing the targets on the kingside, White opens the d1-h5 diagonal for the bishop. 47...♔b4 48.♔e3 ♔c3 49.♗d1 fxg5 50.fxg5 ♘c5 51.♔f4 ♔d4



52.♗h5⇄ White will win the f-pawn and the position remains unclear. Nothing is achieved with: 52...♘xb3 53.♗xf7 a4 54.g6 a3 55.g7 a2 56.g8=♕ a1=♕ 57.♕h8† ♔xc4 58.♗xe6† ♔b4 59.♕xa1 ♘xa1 60.♔e5 Draw.

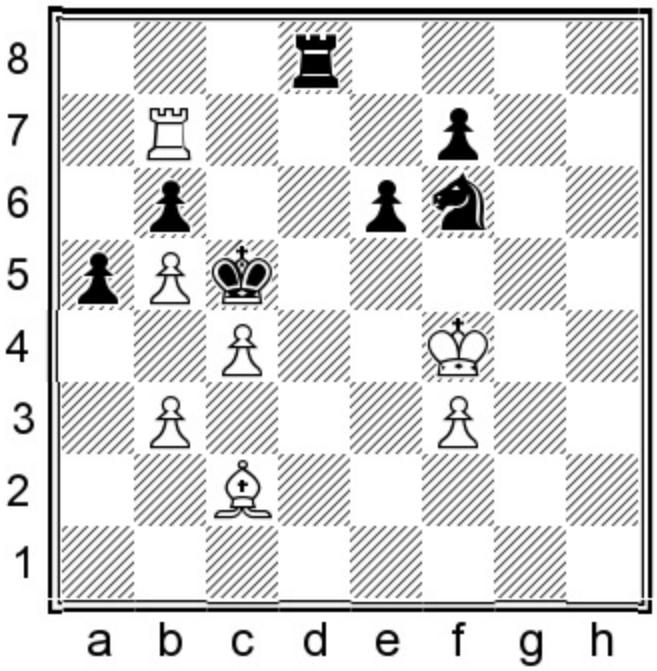
45...♘d7! 46.gxf6

This doesn't work, but nothing does:

46.♖c7† ♔b4 47.gxf6 ♔c3! 48.♗d1 ♔d2–+ The bishop is actually trapped.

After 46.f4 Black has too many ways. One is simply to go 46...♔b4 47.♔e3 ♔c3 48.♗d1 ♘c5, winning a piece.

46...♘xf6† 47.♔f4



47...♘d7

The black king is coming, unhindered by the white rook.

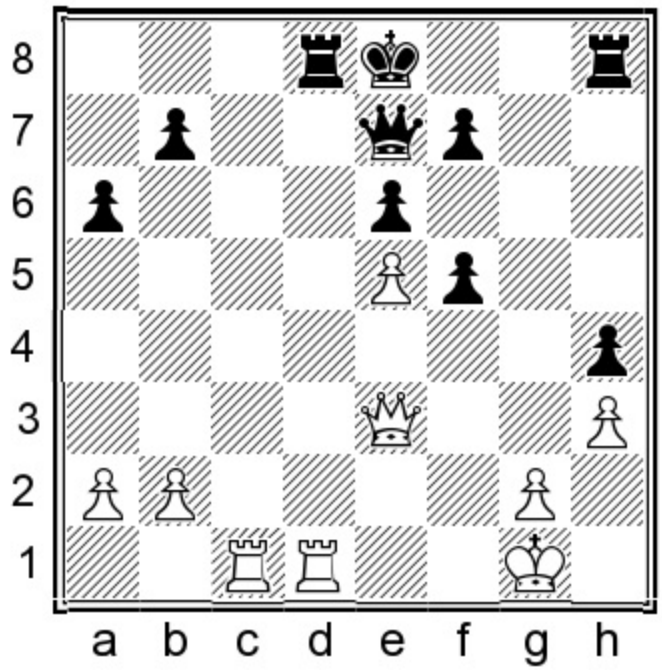
48.♔e3 ♔b4 49.♔e2 ♔c3 50.♗d1 ♘c5 51.♖xb6 ♖d2† 52.♔e1 ♘d3†

Winning.

Show in Text Mode

291. Jens-Uwe Maiwald – Jan Smeets

Germany 2021



Should Black play:

A) 29...♖xd1†, or
B) 29...♖g8?

Show/Hide Solution

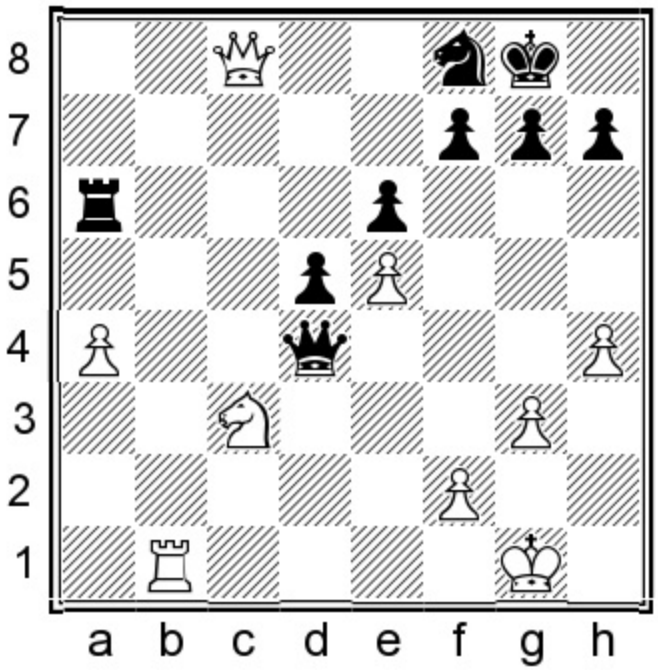
(Remove the attacker)

Smeets played 29...♖g8?, when the strongest continuation was: 30.♖xd8† (30.♕b6? ♖xd1† 31.♖xd1 ♔f8∓ gave Black the advantage and he won by move 40.) 30...♕xd8 31.♕a7 The counterplay is aided by the poor position of the black king and queen. 31...♔f8 32.♕xb7 White is not worse. For example: 32...♕d4† 33.♔h1 ♕xe5 34.♖c8† ♔g7 35.♖xg8† ♔xg8 36.♕xa6 ♕xb2 37.a4 In queen endings, passed pawns are the only thing that matters. Black will need to force a draw sooner or later.

29...♖xd1†! 30.♖xd1 ♔f8∓

The black king is brought to safety. The extra pawn gives him serious long-term winning chances.

292. Andrey Esipenko – Zhou Jianchao



Should Black offer:

A) the exchange of rooks with 48...♖b6, or
B) the exchange of queens with 48...♕c4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Counterplay/Removing defenders)

The game continuation was poor: 48...♕c4? 49.♕xc4 dxc4 50.♖b4 ♖c6 51.♖b8+– Black has a passive position with his rook tied to the pawn on c4, the knight pinned and the latent threat of the passed a-pawn. White won in 84 moves.

48...♖b6!

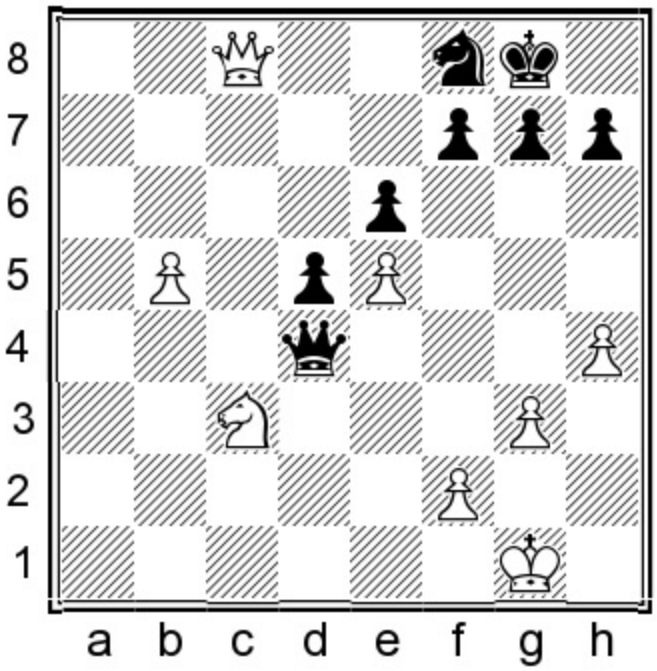
Going into the endgame with queens would have been a solid choice. Black has a passed pawn, and the queen is active enough to create counterplay.

49.♖b5!?

A critical try, trying to create new problems for Black. A passed pawn on the b-file would be easier to promote, since the queen is already controlling the path forward. The threat is ♕c7.

49.♖xb6 does not bring any advantage: 49...♕xb6 50.♘b5 ♕a5! 51.♕c2 (Or 51.♘d6 ♕xa4 52.♕c7 ♕d7∓.) 51...♕e1† 52.♔g2 ♕xe5 53.a5 d4 54.♕c4 ♕e4† 55.♔h2 ♕f5 56.♔g2 ♕e4†=

49...♖xb5 50.axb5



There are two ways to hold this endgame. Creating counterplay by advancing the d-pawn, and attacking the white king in search of a perpetual. We decided to keep both solutions for their instructive value.

50...h5

After 50...♕b4 51.♕c6 d4 52.♘e4 d3 53.b6 d2 54.♘xd2 ♕xd2 55.b7 ♕e1† 56.♔g2 ♕xe5 57.♕c8 ♕e4† Black has a perpetual.

51.♕c7 g5 52.b6

52.hxg5 h4 is similar.

52...gxh4 53.gxh4 ♕g4† 54.♔f1 d4 55.b7

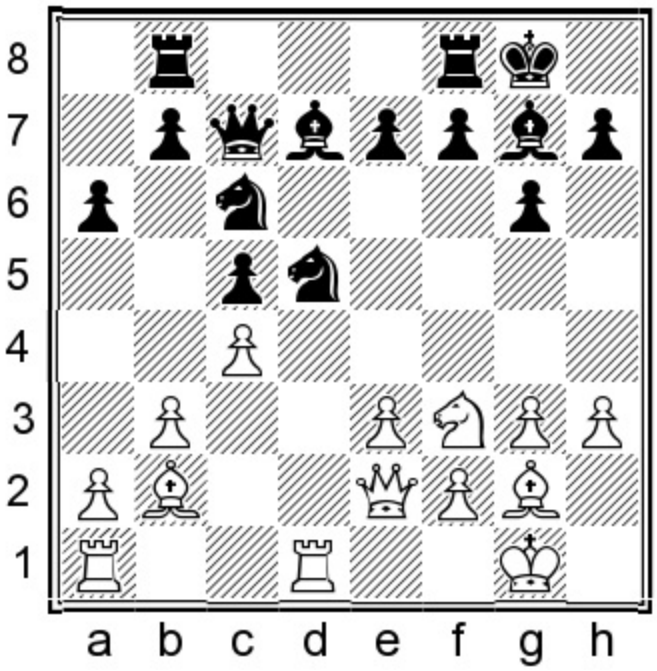
Or 55.♘e2 d3 56.♘c3 d2=.

55...dxc3 56.b8=♕ ♕d1†

Draw.

293. Ian Nepomniachtchi – Peter Svidler

Paris (blitz) 2021



Should White:

A) exchange on g7 before recapturing on d5, or
B) play 16.cxd5 immediately?

Show/Hide Solution

(Space)

In this blitz game Nepomniachtchi played 16.♗xg7?, which worked fine. After 16...♔xg7? (Black's escape pod was 16...♘f4 17.♕b2 ♘xh3† with unclear play. White has been deprived of the structural improvement that comes from cxd5.) 17.cxd5 ♘e5 White won on move 34. Here 18.♕b2 f6 19.♘xe5± is the simplest way forward.

16.cxd5! ♘e5

Strongest is now:

17.♘e1!

17.♘d2?! ♗b5! 18.♘c4 ♗xc4 19.bxc4 b5∓ would give Black all the play he could wish for.

But White also has options like 17.♘xe5!? ♗xe5 18.♖ac1±, with a lot of pressure.

17...f5

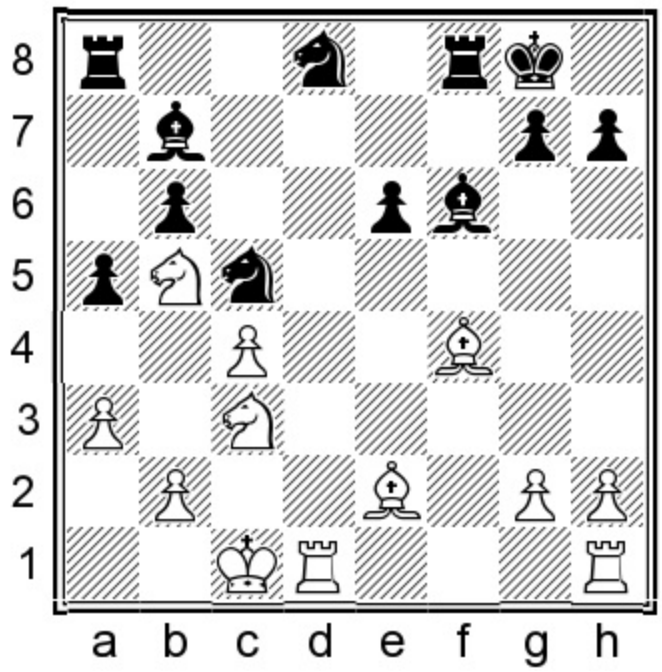
17...♗b5 can now be met with 18.♕c2, when the bishop looks stupid.

18.f4 ♘f7 19.♗xg7 ♔xg7 20.♖ac1

White has an overwhelming advantage.

294. Benjamin Bok – Samuel Sevian

Sochi 2021



Should White:

A) play 18.♗d6 and take on c5, or
B) go for the b6-pawn with 18.♗c7?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

White was distracted by the b-pawn with: 18.♗c7? ♘e4? (Black would have been fine after 18...♗xg2 19.♖hg1 ♗c6 20.♗xb6 ♘db7=.) 19.♗xb6 White is better, although he lost the game by move 60.

Even stronger would have been 19.♖hg1! ♗g5† 20.♔b1 ♗e3 21.♖ge1 and the pawns have not been exchanged, but White is winning. The key idea is that ♗d6 and ♗g4 are both strong. After 21...♘f2 22.♖d7 ♗c6 23.♗f3! the black position falls apart.

White should have aimed for a structural advantage with:

18.♗d6! ♖f7

The human try and the only thing to really worry about in the decision making.

18...♗xg2 may be a better try, making the game more unbalanced. 19.♗xf8 ♔xf8 20.♖hg1 ♗c6 21.♗g4 is a comfortable advantage, but the conversion may be difficult against stubborn defence.

19.♗xc5

The clear intention.

19...bxc5 20.♘d6 ♖e7 21.♘xb7 ♘xb7

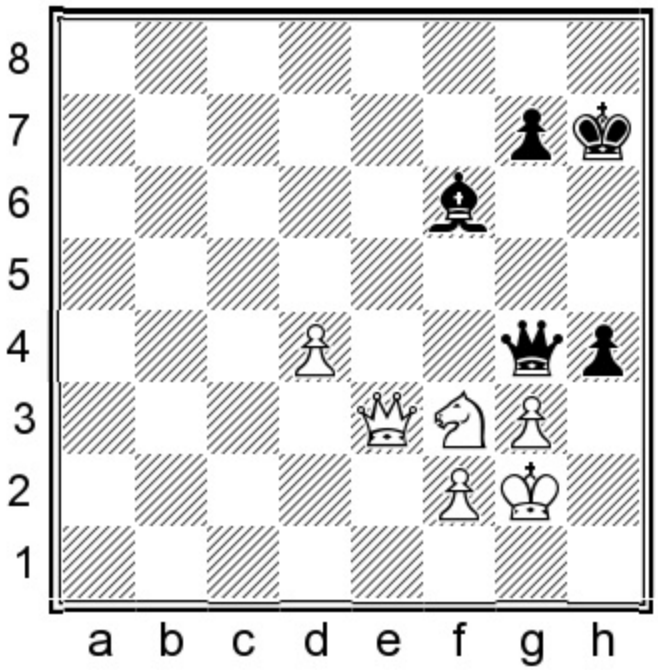
21...♖xb7? 22.♗f3+– is unfortunate.

22.♔c2±

Black will have to fight for a draw, having four pawn islands and laughably uncoordinated pieces.

295. Ivan Saric – Radoslaw Wojtaszek

Germany 2021



Should White:

A) provoke an exchange of knight for bishop with 57.♘e5, or
B) push his passed pawn?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces/Removing defenders)

White played 57.d5? in the game, when after 57...hxg3 58.fxg3 ♕f5 Black held the draw without effort on move 71. Black will play ...♗e7-d6 or perhaps ...♕d5. There is no version of the endgame that gives White winning chances.

57.♕d3† is not enough for a white advantage after 57...g6 58.d5 hxg3 59.fxg3 ♔g7.

57.♘e5! ♕f5

This requires accurate play from White.

White will be able to make the most of the d-pawn after 57...♗xe5 58.♕xe5 h3† (Play is little different with 58...hxg3 59.f3! ♕d7 60.d5.) 59.♔h2 ♕f3 60.♔xh3 ♕xf2 61.d5. There is no perpetual. The d-pawn will take time to promote, but White has nothing but time...

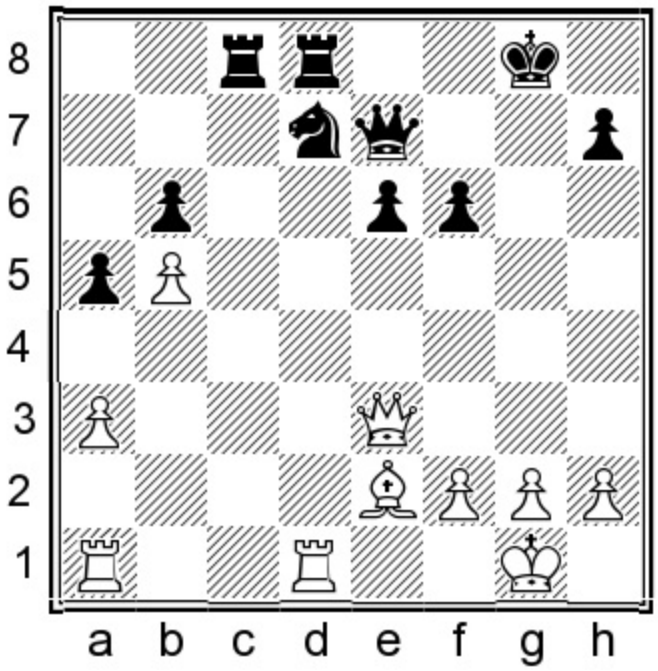
58.g4 ♕e6 59.g5 ♗xe5 60.♕e4†!

White is in control. An important point is:

60...♔g8 61.g6!

296. Andreas Rupprecht – Oliver Kniest

Germany 2021



Should White:

A) play 25.♕g3† and 26.♕d6, or
B) double the rooks on the d-file?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing defenders)

One of the problems it that White is better no matter what. 25.g3 was played in the game, which was eventually drawn. Best is probably 25...♘c5±.

25.♖d4 is also a good move. White is much better. But it cannot compete with the solution.

25.♕g3†!

White should seek to win the d6-square, even at the cost of exchanging queens. The white pieces are not able to create an attack against the black king. But by invading on d6, White makes quick use of the weaknesses on b6 and e6.

25...♔h8

25...♔f8 26.♖d6 was also bad for Black, who cannot get active. For example, 26...♘e5 27.♖xb6 ♖c2 28.♗f1 and White is a pawn up and overwhelmingly better in all other aspects. Black does not have any counterplay on the 2nd rank due to ♖b8†.

26.♕d6!

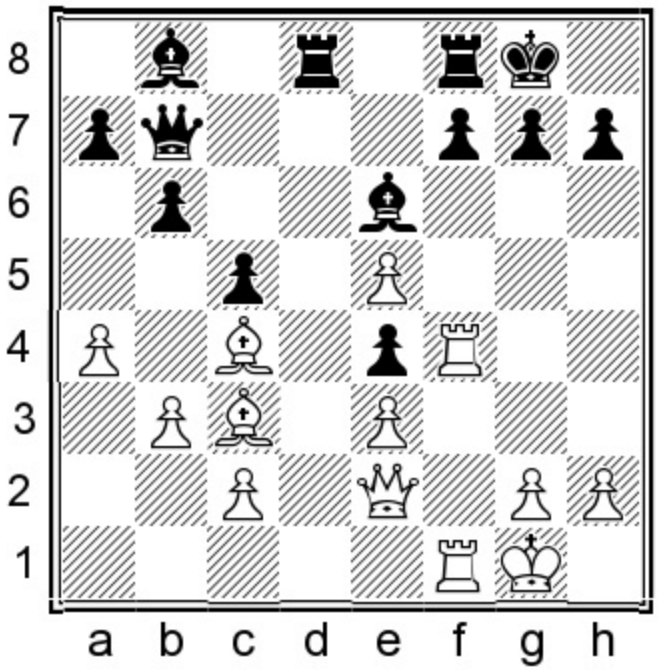
Black gets some counterplay after 26.♖d6 ♖c2.

26...♕xd6 27.♖xd6

Black cannot defend his weaknesses. White wins.

297. Monika Socko – Hanna Marie Klek

Germany 2022



Should Black play:

A) 22...♗xc4, or
B) 22...♖de8?

Show/Hide Solution

(Eliminating attackers)

Black played the mistaken:

22...♖de8?

When White could have won with the following prophylactic idea:

23.♗a6!

23.♗b5!, with the same idea, is also strong.

Instead, she played 23.♕h5? g6 24.♕g5 ♗xc4 25.bxc4 ♕e7 when Black was fine and won on move 58.

23...♕e7 24.♕h5

Black has no defence against ♖h4. For example:

24...♖d8

After 24...h6 25.♖f6! ♔h7 26.♕h4 White wins the e4-pawn and will win the game.

25.♖h4 h6 26.♖f6

White wins.

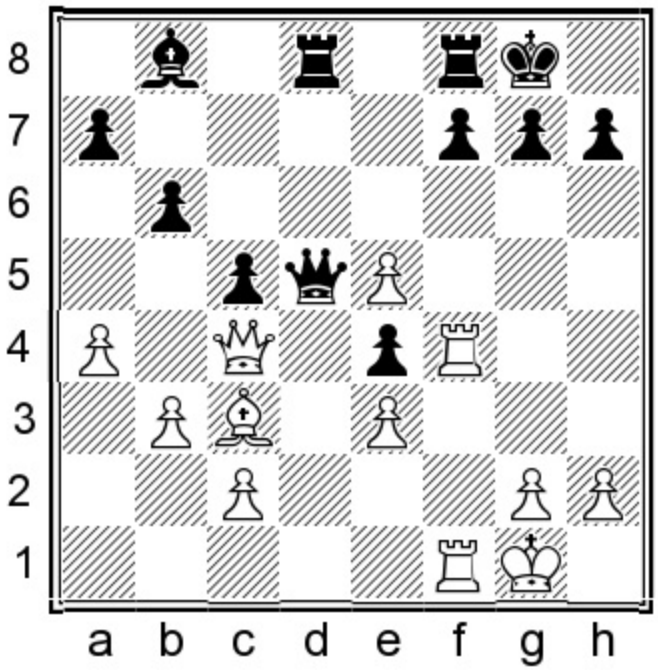
22...♗xc4!

Not only removing an attacking piece from the enemy, but also gaining time to bring the queen closer to the action.

23.♕xc4

23.bxc4 can be met in many ways. The structure is no longer flexible, and White doesn't have any serious targets on the kingside. I like the move 23...♕d7 with the idea of ...♕e6, putting pressure on the c4- and e5-pawns. Black is fine.

23...♕d5!



The loss of a pawn is irrelevant, since White's structure is not great, and she has lost her attacking potential. Black gains the d-file and will put pressure on e5.

24.♕xd5

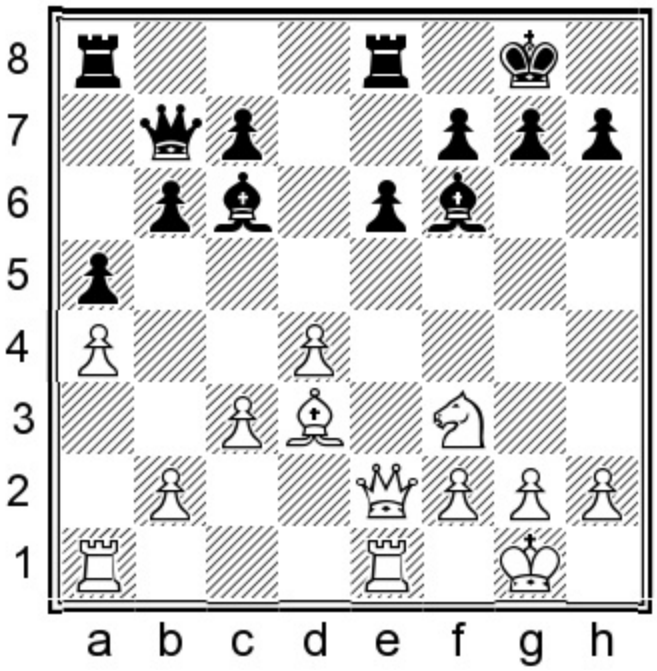
24.♕xe4 ♕xe4 25.♖xe4 ♖fe8 is similar. Black will play ...f7-f6 next.

24...♖xd5 25.♖xe4 ♖e8

Black regains the pawn with full equality.

298. Guenther Beikert – Hans Moehn

Germany 2022



Should White:

A) exchange bishops with 17.♗e4, or
B) avoid it with 17.♘e5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)

White chose 17.♗e4?, when after 17...♗xe4 18.♕xe4 ♕xe4 19.♖xe4 ♖ed8 20.♔f1 ♖d5, there was no advantage, and a draw was agreed.

17.♘e5!! ♗xe5

Black should take. Alternatives are worse: 17...♖ed8? 18.♗xh7† would be a kick in the face.

17...♗xg2 18.♗xh7† ♔f8 19.♕g4 ♗xe5 20.♖xe5 is a worse version of the main line.

18.♕xe5± ♗xg2!?

The only critical move. Without this, White has a stable advantage.

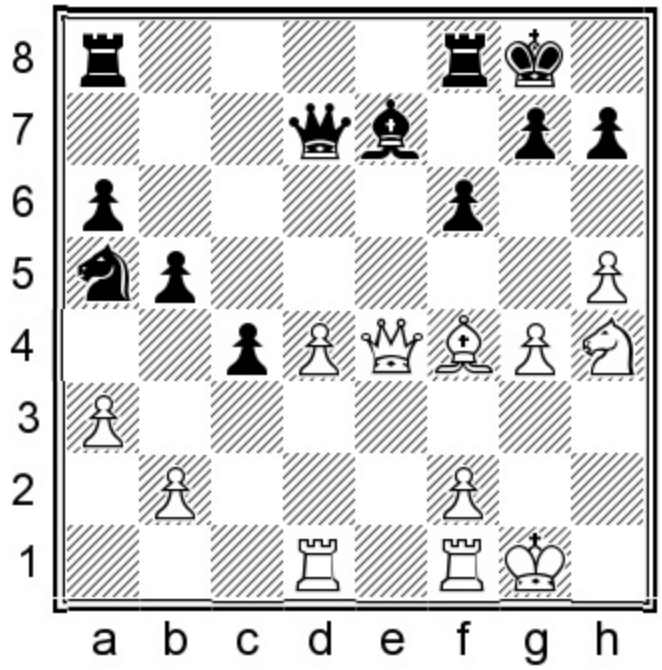
19.♖e3! g6 20.♖g3 ♗c6

20...♗f3 21.♕f4 ♗h5 22.♖e1 is even worse for Black. The bishop on h5 is a target, not a defender.

21.h4 ♖ad8 22.c4 ♗f3 23.♖e1 ♕c6 24.b3

White has a winning attack.

Terme Catez 2021



Should White play:

A) 23.♕f5, or
B) 23.♕f3?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

23.♕f5? showed that Grischuk misunderstood the position. The black queen is a target, not what is holding the black position together. 23...♖fd8!± The strongest now is probably 24.d5, when after 24...♘b7 Black is still on the defensive but close to equality.

Instead, the game continued 24.♖fe1 ♗f8 25.d5 ♕xf5 26.♘xf5 and was drawn on move 37. At this point 26...♘b7! would lead to instant equality.

23.♕f3!

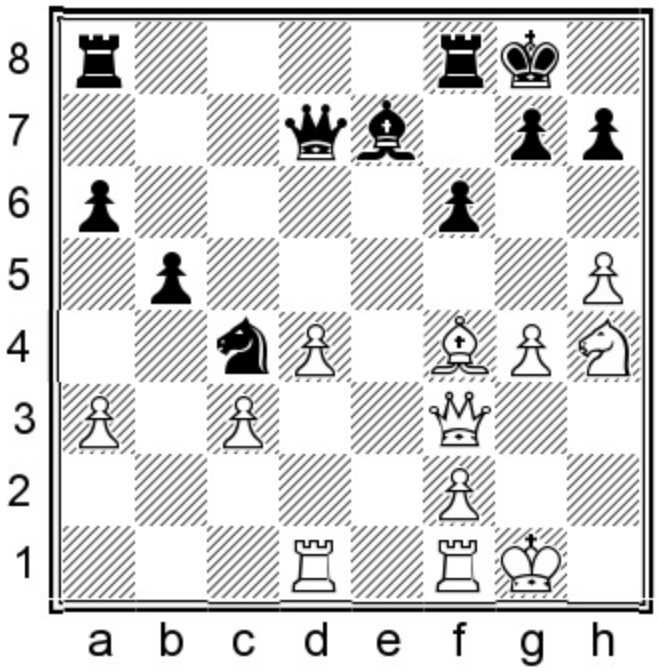
23.♘f5!? ♖ae8 24.♕g2!+– was another strong way for White to continue.

23...c3!?

If 23...♘c6 24.♘f5 ♖ae8 25.♖fe1 g6 26.♘xe7† ♖xe7 27.♖xe7 ♘xe7 28.d5, the pawn continues to d6 with total domination.

Black is also going down hard with 23...♖fd8 24.d5 ♘b7 25.d6! ♗f8 (or 25...♘xd6 26.♘f5 and White wins a piece) 26.♘f5. White is dominating and will win once the last piece joins the party.

24.bxc3 ♘c4



This may be the best try. But White is still winning:

25.a4! bxa4 26.♘f5

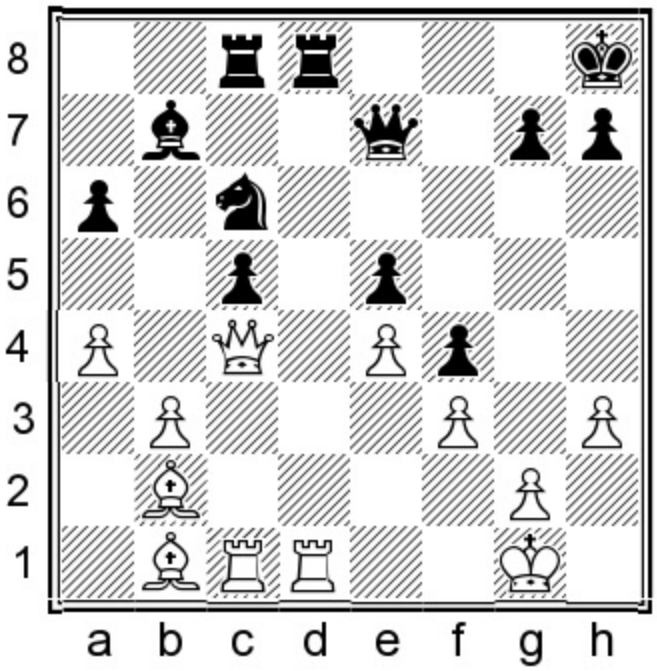
Threatening ♕d5†.

26...♖a7 27.♖fe1 ♗d8 28.♕e2 ♕d5 29.♖b1 a3 30.♖b4+–

White crashes through.

300. Marine Zschischang – Dinara Dordzhieva

Germany 2022



Should White play:

A) 25.♖xd8, or
B) 25.♗a3?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing defenders)

In the game, White went wrong with 25.♗a3? ♘d4!⇄ 26.♗xc5? and here Black failed to spot a simple tactic: 26...♖xc5 (Instead she played 26...♕h4 and after 27.♕d3 there was no compensation for the pawn. 1–0) 27.♕xc5 ♕xc5 28.♖xc5 ♘xf3† 29.gxf3 ♖xd1† 30.♔f2 ♖xb1 Winning the game.

25.♖xd8†!

Correctly removing the defender of the c5-pawn.

25...♖xd8

The critical move.

Or 25...♘xd8 26.♕c3 (26.♗a2 is even stronger, threatening b3-b4!) 26...♘f7 27.♗d3 followed by ♗c4, and Black is in a hopeless situation.

25...♕xd8

This is possible but passive. White has different ways to continue.

26.♕f7

This invasion feels strong and more natural than the complications arising from 26.♕xc5 This needs White to calculate a temporary piece sacrifice: 26...♘d4 27.♕xe5 ♖xc1† 28.♗xc1 ♘e2† 29.♔h2 ♘xc1 30.♕b2 ♕d1 (After 30...♕c7 31.b4 the knight is trapped and White will continue

advancing the b-pawn.) 31.♕a3 ♔g8 32.♕e7 ♗c6 33.♕e6† ♔f8 34.♕xc6 ♘e2 35.♕c5† ♔e8 36.♗c2 Winning.

26...♖c7 27.♕d5

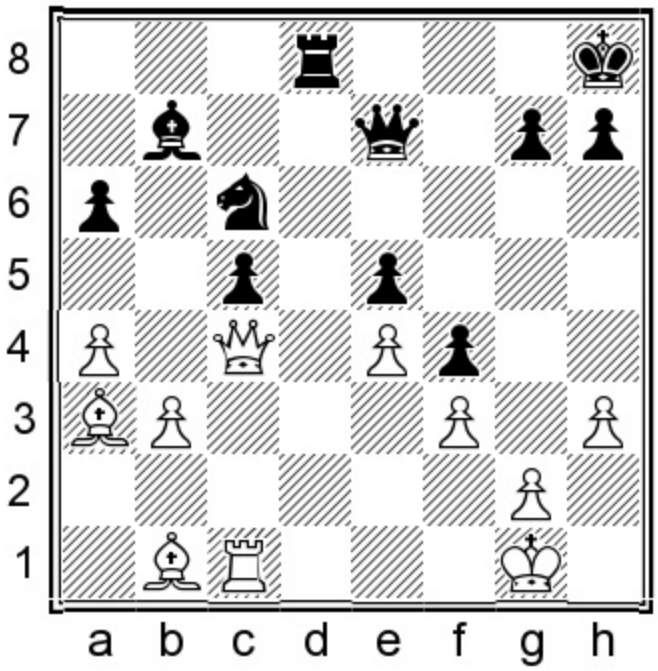
With the idea of taking on c5 next with the rook. If Black exchanges on d5 then the d-pawn decides.

27...♕xd5 28.exd5 ♘d4 29.d6 ♖d7 30.♖xc5

White wins.

26.♗a3

White threatens to win the c5-pawn.



26...♖d2

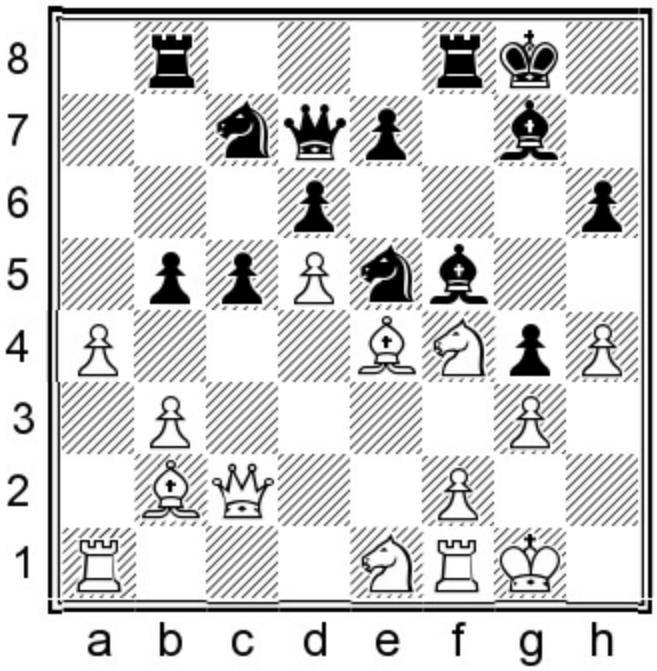
26...♘b4 is refuted by simple means. 27.♕xc5 ♕xc5† 28.♖xc5 ♖d1† 29.♔h2 ♖xb1 30.♗xb4 ♖xb3 31.♗c3 and the black position collapses.

27.♗xc5 ♕g5 28.♗f2

Parrying the threat of mate with a decisive advantage.

301. Tobias Sebastian Moreno Perez – Andrés Rodriguez Vila

Cipolletti 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange bishops with 22...♗xe4, or
B) pawns with 22...bxa4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing defenders)
22...bxa4? 23.♖xa4 did not bring Black any advantage. 23...♕xa4 24.bxa4 ♖xb2 was best met with: 25.♕xb2! ♘f3† 26.♘xf3 ♗xb2 27.♗xf5 ♖xf5 28.♘d2 and White is not worse. The a-pawn gives great compensation. 28...♗e5 is a good illustration: 29.♘g2 ♘xd5 30.♘c4 ♗d4 31.♘ge3! and White will hold the endgame.

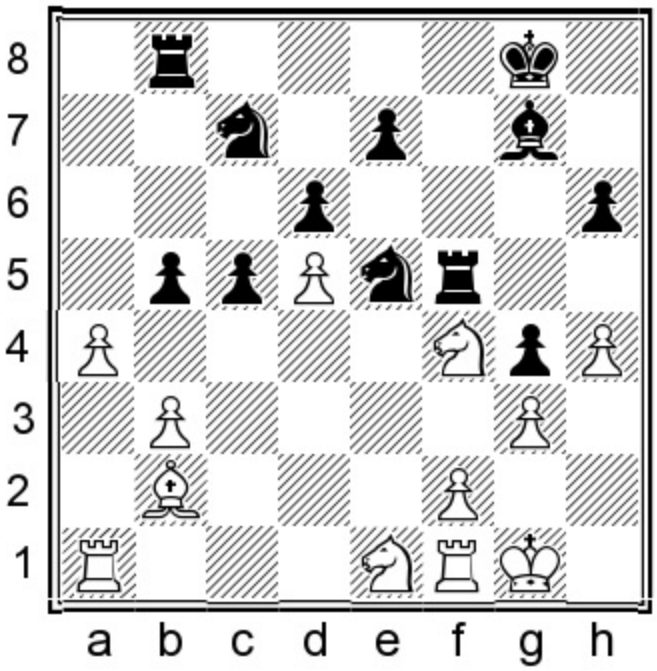
22...♗xe4! 23.♕xe4 ♕f5!

The point. By exchanging queens Black exposes the weakness of White's light squares, including the d5-pawn, which White is unable to protect.

24.♕xf5

24.♕e3 ♘f3† 25.♘xf3 ♗xb2 26.♖a2 gxf3 27.♖xb2 bxa4 is horrific for White.

24...♖xf5



25.axb5

The alternatives are no better:

25.♔g2 bxa4 and the queenside collapses.

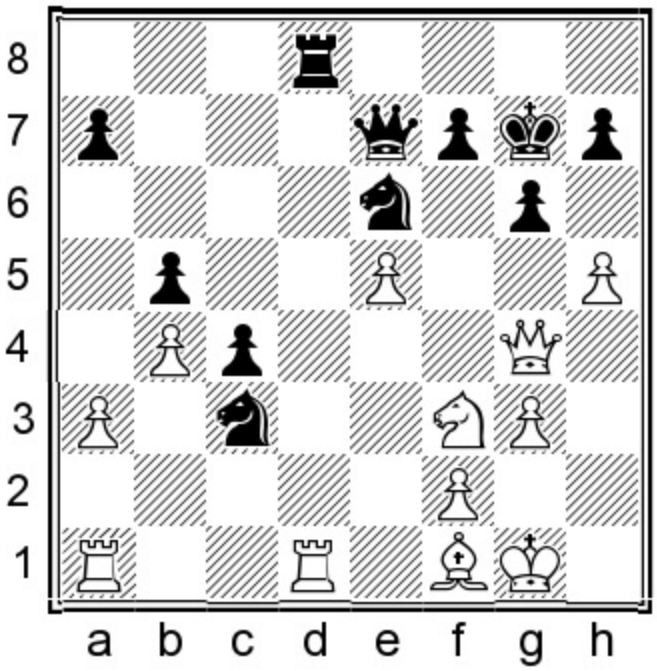
25.♖a2 b4! and the d5-pawn will fall soon.

25...♘f3† 26.♘xf3 ♗xb2 27.♖ab1 ♗f6

Followed by ...♘xd5. Black wins.

302. Daniel Forcen Esteban – Aaron Alonso Garcia

Bernasque 2021



Should Black take on d1:

A) with the rook, or
B) the knight?

Show/Hide Solution

(Prophylaxis/tactics)

The game continued:

31...♖xd1? 32.♖xd1 ♘xd1 33.♘h4!

Strong. But even stronger was 33.♘d4! ♕d7 (or 33...♘xd4 34.♕xd4+–) The extra option awarded to White is a forced win of the knight. 34.♘xe6† fxe6 35.h6†! ♔xh6 36.♕h4† ♔g7 37.♕f6† ♔h6 (37...♔g8 38.♗h3 is instantly over.) 38.♕f8† ♕g7 39.♕d8! and White wins the knight.

33...♕d7

33...♕g5 no longer works. White has 34.♕xd1+–.

34.♘f5† ♔g8 35.♘d6 ♘b2 36.♕f3 gxh5 37.♕xh5+–

White has an overwhelming strategic advantage that should have carried him home. Alas, the game ended in a draw on move 61.

31...♘xd1!=

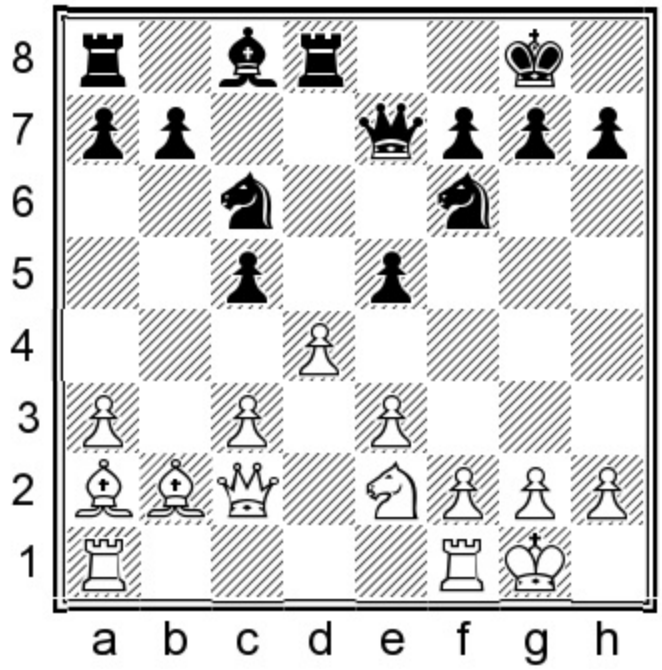
The right move.

32.♘h4? ♕g5!

Black has taken control.

303. Alice Lee – Stavroula Tsolakidou

St Louis 2022



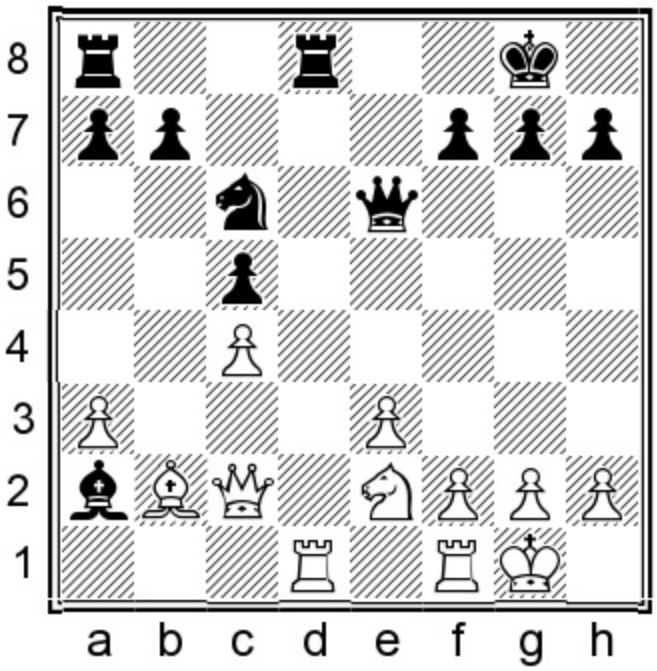
Should White play:

A) 14.dxe5, or
B) 14.♖ad1?

Show/Hide Solution

(Structure)

Alice Lee played the natural looking 14.♖ad1?!, when after 14...♗e6! Black was on the path to full equality. 15.dxe5 ♗xa2? This should have lost in the most horrible way, but this knock-out match was plagued by bad nerves and oversights. (Better was 15...♘g4! 16.c4 ♖xd1! 17.♕xd1 ♖d8 18.♕c2 ♕g5⇄.) 16.exf6 ♕xf6 17.c4 ♕e6?! (17...♕g6 18.e4± had happened before, in De la Villa Garcia – Cubas Pons, Arenal d'en Castell 2011.)



The game was drawn on move 54. Here White could have won with 18.♗a1!, based on 18...♕xc4 19.♕b2 f6 20.♘c1 and the bishop is trapped.

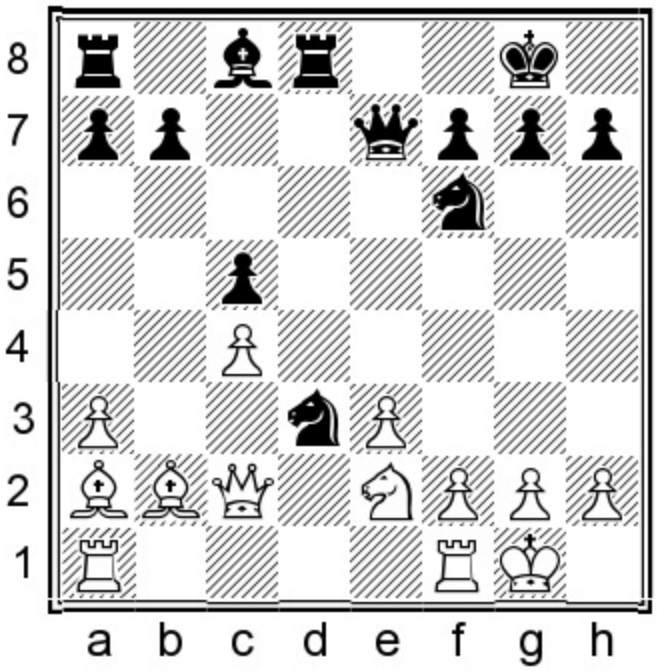
Taking on e5 leads to a good structure for the b2-bishop, White's potentially dominating piece.

14.dxe5! ♘xe5

Eventually the game was drawn in Glanville – MacGregor, email 2015. But White can improve on this.

15.c4! ♘d3

The white pieces are getting close to perfection after 15...b6 16.♖ad1 ♗b7 17.♘g3 ♕e6 18.♕c3±.



16.♗xf6

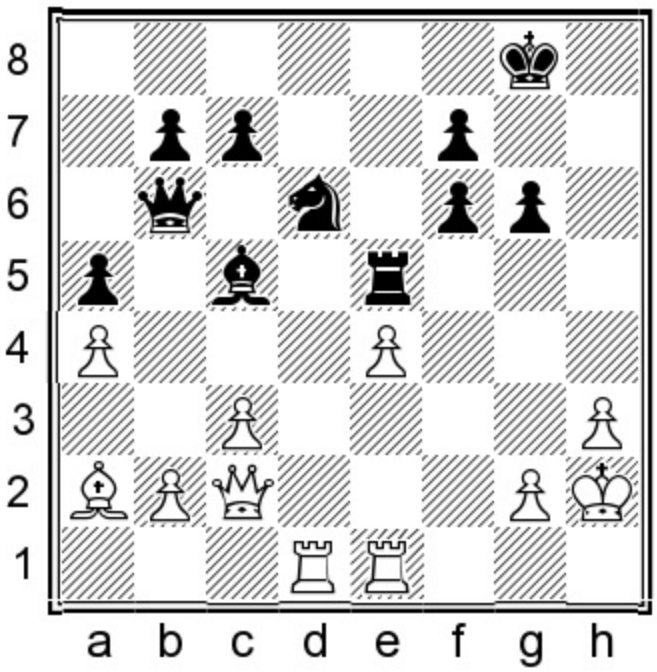
Not desirable, but forced. White wants to take control over the d5-square.

16...♕xf6 17.♘c3 ♗f5 18.e4 ♗g6 19.♖ad1 ♘f4 20.♘d5 ♕h4 21.f3 ♘e6!±

White is better, but the knight on d4 gives Black hope in the middlegame.

304. Ivan Saric – Olexiy Bilych

Terme Catez 2022



Should White play:

A) 28.♖d5, seeking to exchange the rooks, or
B) 28.♕b3 to exchange queens?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)
28.♖d5? was still better for White, but it lost a lot of his advantage. 28...♖xd5 29.♗xd5 c6 30.♗a2 White won on move 38, but if Black had played the only move, he might have held the draw: 30...f5! 31.e5 ♘e4± Black has counterplay on the dark squares.

28.♕b3!

This is much stronger. Exchanging rooks removes some counterplay, but removing the queens removes all counterplay.

28...♕xb3 29.♗xb3 ♘xe4

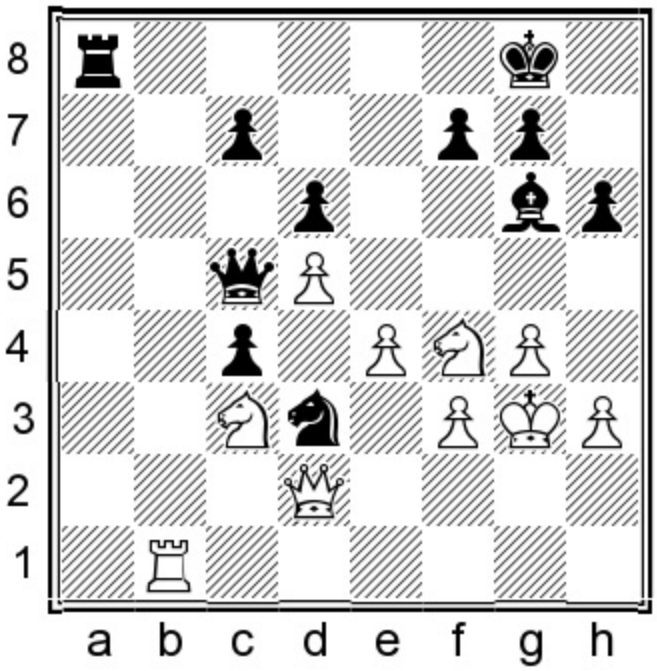
Or: 29...c6 30.g4 ♔f8 31.♔g2 ♔e7 32.♔f3+–

30.g4!

Preventing ...f7-f5 and giving the king the useful g2-square. White is winning.

305. Alexander Grischuk – Fabiano Caruana

Bucharest 2021



Should Black:

A) exchange knights on f4, or
B) play something else?

Show/Hide Solution

(King safety)

After 34...♘e5 35.♕f2∓, the game was drawn on move 66. But simpler was 35.h4!, after which the bishop is awkward.

Black has various ways to sacrifice a pawn, but none really work. After 34...h5 35.♘xd3 cxd3 36.♕xd3 h4† 37.♔g2 ♖a3 38.♖c1 Black certainly has compensation, but there is no obvious way to make progress.

34...♘xf4! 35.♔xf4

35.♕xf4 transposes after 35...♖a3 36.♕d2 ♖b3.

35...♖a3

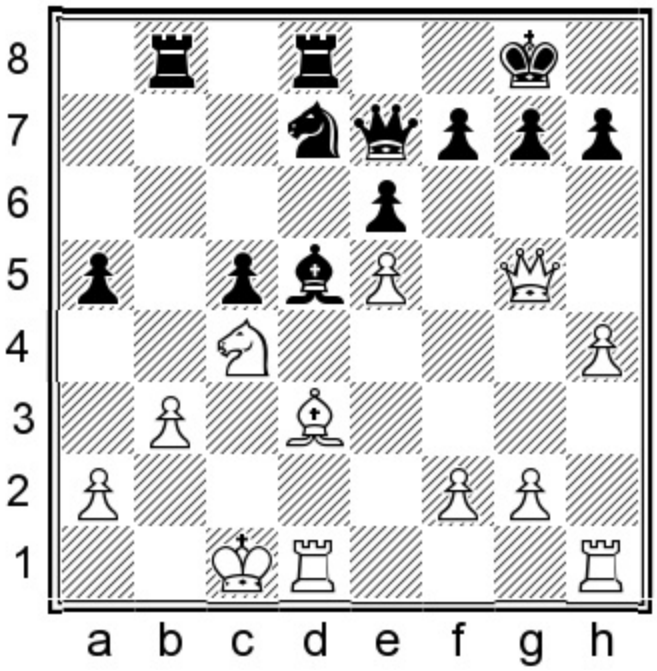
It is important not to give White time to play ♕e3.

36.♔g3 ♖b3

Black has a serious advantage. Soon he will activate the bishop with ...f7-f6 and ...♗e8, while the white king remains exposed.

306. Cristian Sanhueza – Mar Villanueva

Cipolletti 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange queens with 21...♕xg5, or
B) avoid the exchange of queens with 21...f6?

Show/Hide Solution

(King safety)

21...f6!

With White's king stuck in the danger zone, it is essential for Black to keep queens on the board. This move also improves the black knight to f6. The damage to the pawn structure is irrelevant.

21...♕f8!?∓ is also strong, though less so than the text move.

Black chose:

21...♕xg5†

With the idea of winning the e5-pawn.

22.hxg5 ♗xc4!

22...g6 23.♖he1 is OK for White. And 23...♗xg2? 24.♗e4!± gives White a big advantage, despite being a pawn down.

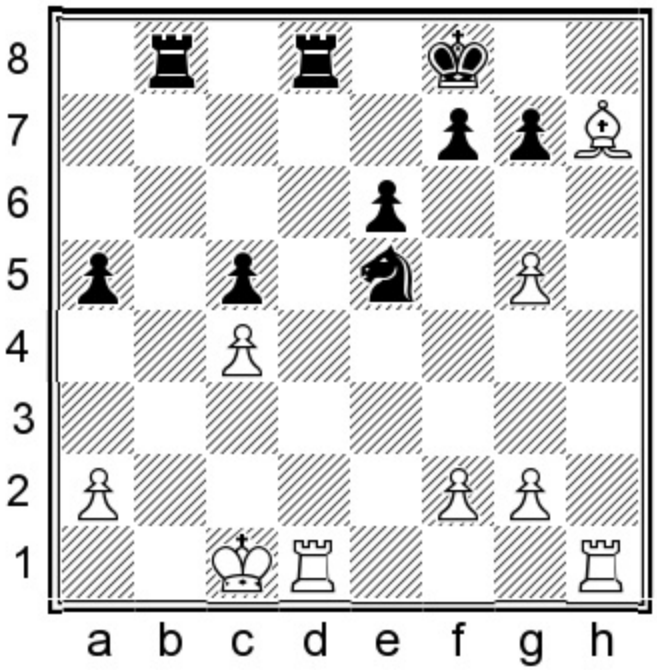
23.bxc4?

This move creates additional weaknesses. A panic reaction in a tough position.

After 23.♗xc4! ♘xe5 24.♖h4∓, it would not be easy for Black to convert his advantage.

24...♖xd1† 25.♔xd1 ♖d8† 26.♔c2 ♖d4 does not work: 27.♖xd4 cxd4 28.♗b5 With counterplay.

23...♘xe5 24.♗xh7† ♔f8



25.♗e4?

25.♗d3! was more stubborn. 25...♔e7 (Or 25...♘xd3† 26.♖xd3 ♖xd3 27.♖h8† ♔e7 28.♖xb8 and White draws.) 26.♗e2∓ White is worse, but there is plenty of fight left.

25...♘xc4

More precise is 25...♖xd1†!, eliminating counterplay first. 26.♖xd1 ♔e7 Black will pick up the pawn on c4 soon with ...♖b4.

26.♖xd8† ♖xd8

Black later won.

22.exf6 ♘xf6 23.h5

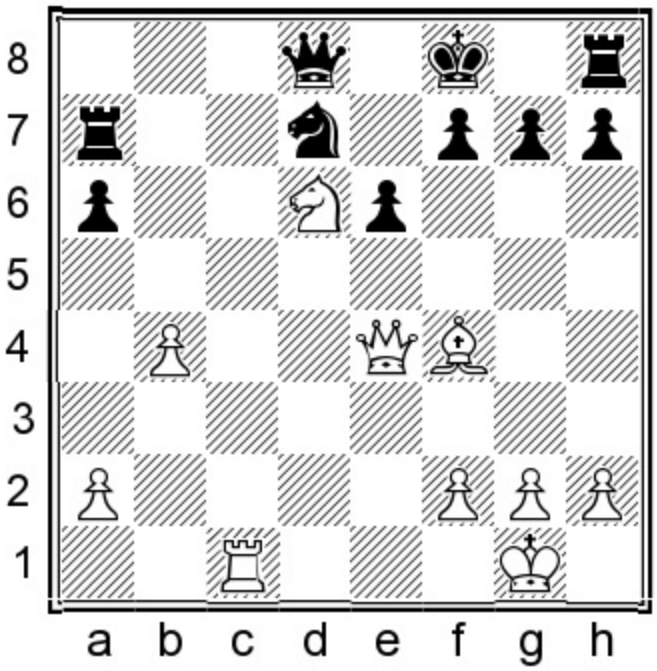
No better is 23.♖h3 a4.

23...h6 24.♕g6 a4

Black's attack is winning.

307. Michael Song – Joshua Sheng

Charlotte 2022



Should Black play:

A) 20...♖c7, or
B) 20...♘b6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing attackers)

In the game, Black was too optimistic:

20...♘b6? 21.♖c6!

A nice move, but not the only chance to dominate.

21...♖d7 22.g3!?

22.h3 was for some reason more accurate. These details are hard to determine during the game, and the players lived happily in ignorance.

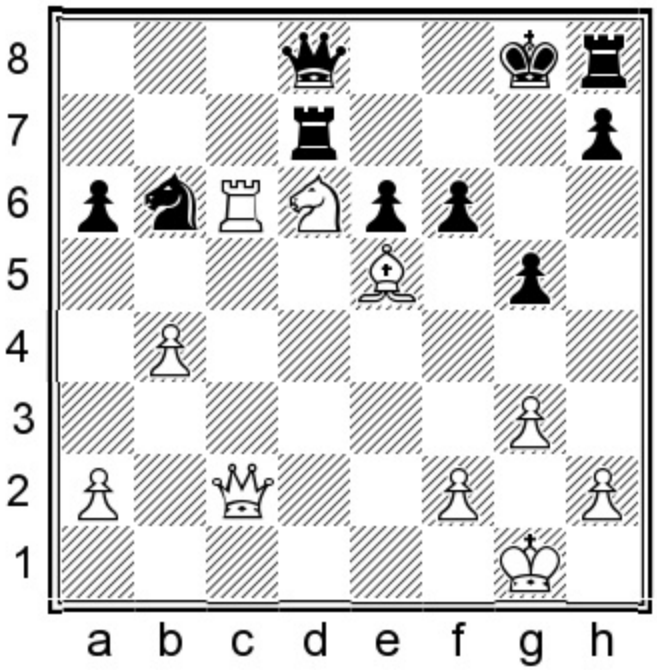
22...♔g8 23.♕c2!?

23.♕e5! was stronger. After 23...♘d5 24.♗g5!, White wins in a plethora of ways. 24...♘f6 25.♘e4! for example.

23...g5!?

The only try.

24.♗e5 f6



25.♕c5! fxe5?

Black missed his chance and went down in flames.

25...h5!? 26.♖xb6 fxe5 would have made things difficult for White, although he would still win with accurate play. The point is that 27.♕xe5? (But who would have found 27.h3!! here?) 27...♖h6!∞ is going the wrong way.

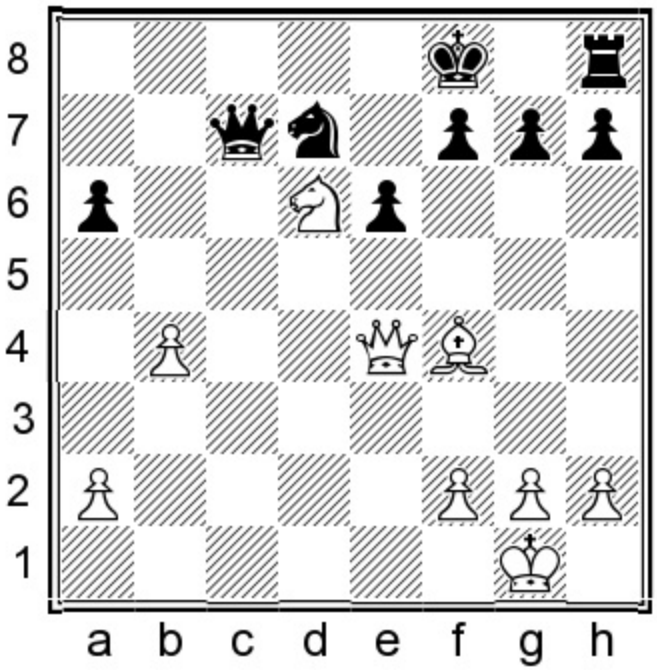
26.♕xe5 h6 27.♕xe6† ♔h7 28.♘e4! ♖g7 29.♘f6† ♔g6 30.♘e8†

1–0

20...♖c7!

This is the only move. White has to exchange the rooks, and will have far less threats once his most vibrant attacker has been removed.

21.♖xc7 ♕xc7



22.h4!?

The strongest. The pawn can be active in some scenarios, and it creates luft.

22.♘xf7? looks tempting and is probably what deterred Joshua during the game, and perhaps you? However, Black has 22...♕c3!, when the threat of mate gives him the all-important tempo to pick up the knight for free.

22...♘b6 23.b5

Freeing the b4-square for a check with the queen.

23...♘d5!

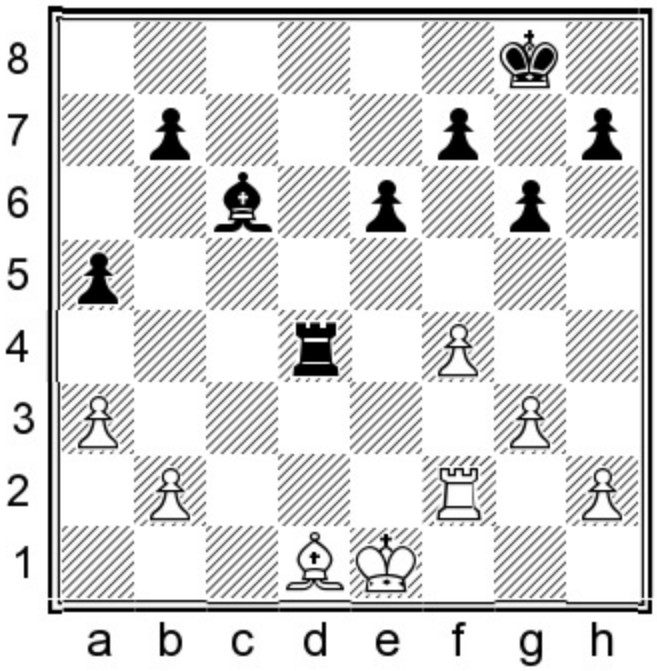
23...axb5? 24.♘f5! would fall for the tactic. The knight is not hanging.

24.bxa6 ♘xf4 25.♕xf4 h6±

Black has to defend, but should be able to.

308. Alejandro Needleman – Cristian Zarate

Buenos Aires 2022



Should White:

A) seek a rook endgame with 34.♗f3, or
B) a bishop ending with 34.♖d2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Exchanging to make a draw)

White was successful in the game with:

34.♗f3? ♗xf3 35.♖xf3

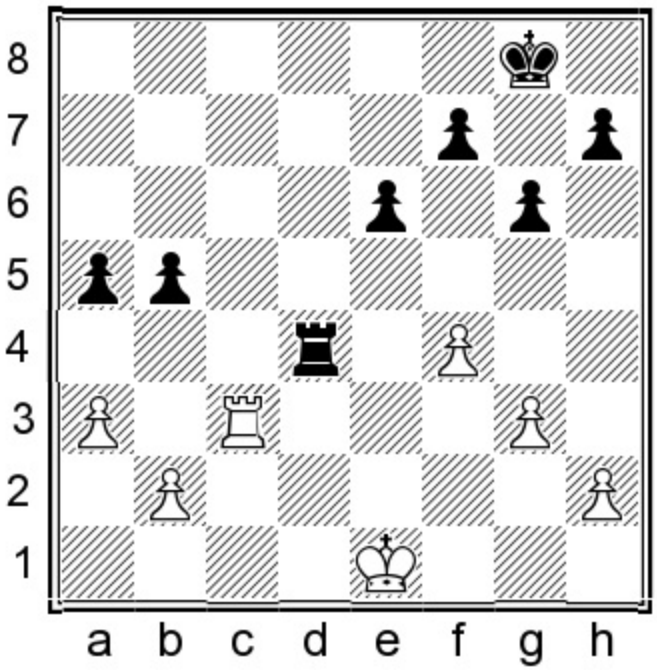
But only because Black rushed.

35...b5?!

Removing the possibility of hitting the b2-pawn from b5.

Black could have won with: 35...♖d5! 36.♖b3 (Black can also show the basic strategy after 36.♖c3 ♖b5 37.b3 ♔g7 38.♔d2 ♔f6 39.♔c2 ♖h5 40.h4 ♔f5, winning.) 36...b5 37.♖c3 h6! 38.h4 ♔g7 39.♔e2 ♔f6 40.g4 h5 Black will break through on the light squares. And if White tries to play actively, he will end up with too many weaknesses. 41.♔f3 hxg4† 42.♔xg4 a4 43.b4 ♖d2 44.♖c5 ♖g2† 45.♔f3 ♖a2 46.♖xb5 ♖xa3† 47.♔g2 ♖b3 and Black will win with an extra pawn.

36.♖c3



36...♖d5?!

36...h6! was still winning.

37.♖c8†?!

37.♔e2∓

37...♔g7 38.♖a8?! a4 39.♖b8 ♔f6 40.♖b7 h6 41.♔e2

A draw was agreed, although after 41...g5, creating new weaknesses, Black has a winning position.

34.♖d2!∓

Usually rook endgames offer better drawing chances than bishop endings, but not always. In the rook ending, Black's dominating rook and White's weaknesses on b2 and h2 make the defence near impossible. But in the bishop ending, the weaknesses are on dark squares and White can utilise his centralised king.

34...♖e4† 35.♖e2 ♖c4 36.♖c2 ♖xc2

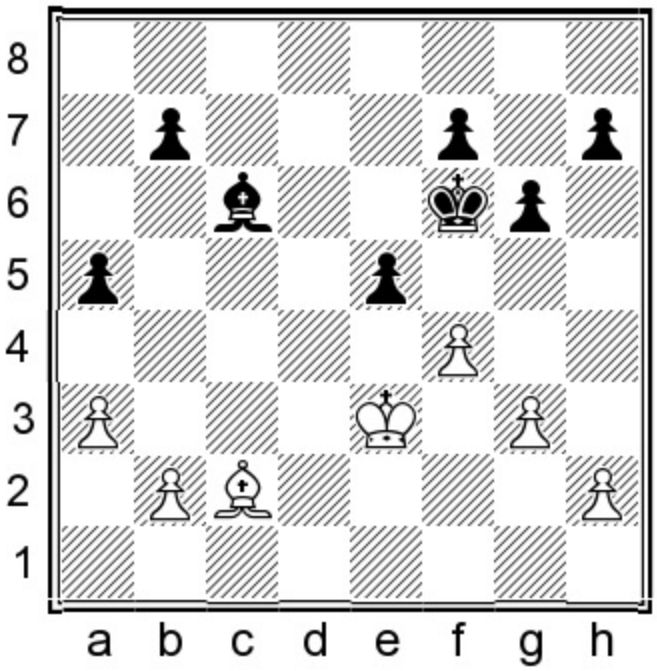
It makes most sense for Black to exchange when White has to recapture with the bishop.

37.♗xc2 ♔g7

While a practical challenge persists, White will hold the draw with accurate play.

38.♔d2 ♔f6 39.♔e3 e5

Another attempt is: 39...h6 40.♔d4 g5 41.b4 axb4 42.axb4 ♔e7 (42...b6 43.h4∓) 43.♔c5! White keeps the blockade.



40.♗b3! ♗e8 41.♔e4 exf4 42.♔xf4 h6

After 42...g5† 43.♔e4 ♗c6† 44.♔d4³ The black king is tied to the defence of the f7-pawn.

43.h4

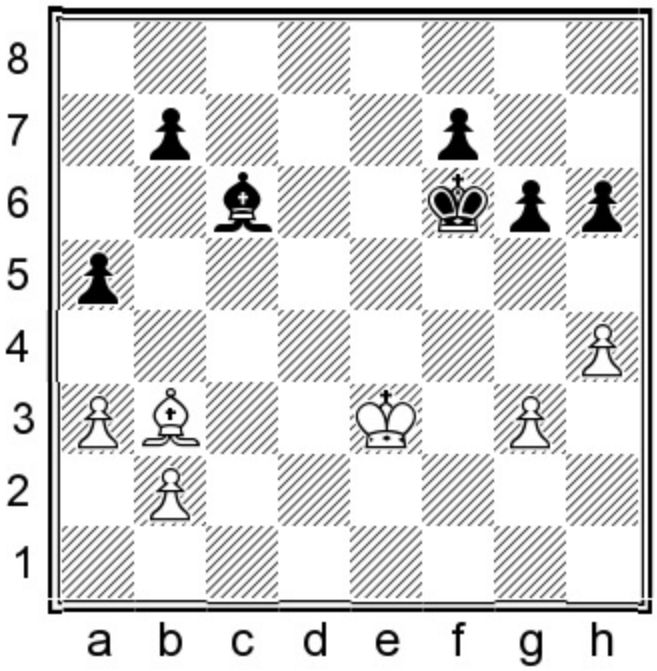
Making sure more pawns are exchanged as Black advances his majority.

43...♗c6

43...♔e7 44.♔e5 f6† 45.♔d4∓ also makes it hard for Black to make progress on the dark squares.

44.♔e3

This is the defensive setup. Black cannot use his king and is thus unable to make progress. White still needs to be cautious though.



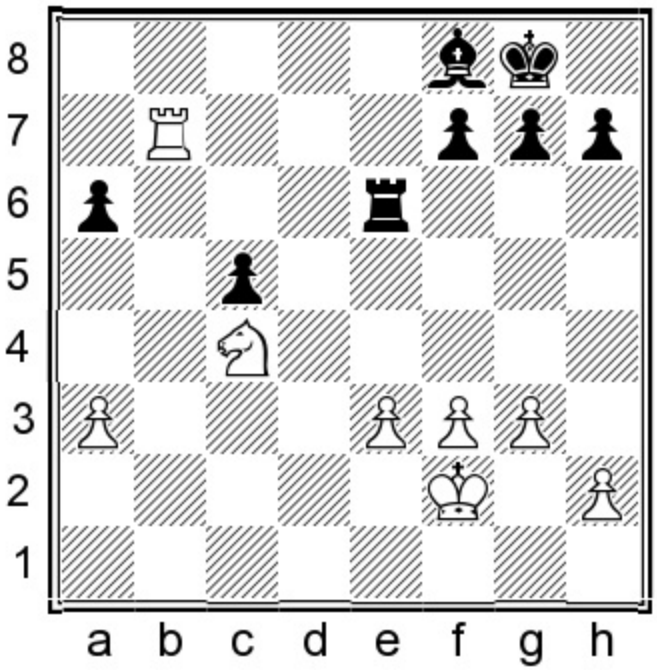
44...♗e8 45.♔f4 b6 46.♔e4 ♗d7 47.♔d4!

Holding the game.

47.♔f4? is one way for White to lose. 47...♗f5! Dominating the king and preparing ...g6-g5, which will gain control of the e5-square. 48.♗a2 g5† 49.hxg5† hxg5† 50.♔e3 ♗e6 51.♗b1 ♔e5 Black will be able to advance the f-pawn and win.

309. Afrim Fejzullahu – Nitzan Steinberg

Mayrhofen 2022



Should White:

A) seek the exchange of rooks with 33.♖b6, or
B) play something else?

Show/Hide Solution

(Prophylaxis)

White should seek to strengthen his position to the maximum before exchanging rooks.

33.f4

All other moves that seek to strengthen the position work too. We decided to go with this one as an illustration. The core idea is to prevent ...g7-g5, which could give Black counterplay against h2 in some situations.

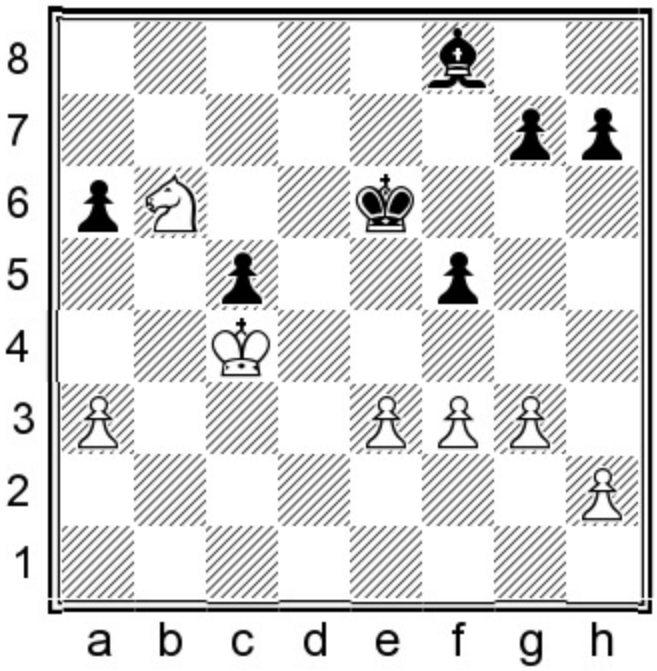
For example, 33.h4 achieves the same job.

White should not exchange rooks. Black is tied down and unable to activate his king. The weaknesses need defending by the black rook, but only because White has an active rook. Finally, the white rook is simply a much stronger piece – rarely a bad way to look at an exchange:

33.♖b6? ♖xb6 34.♘xb6

Black now fought for the light squares and brought out the king at the same time.

34...f5!± 35.♔e2 ♔f7 36.♔d3 ♔e6 37.♔c4



37...♔d6

37...g6!? is also interesting. The point is that 38.♘a4 ♔d6 39.♘xc5 ♔c6 40.♘xa6 ♗xa3 is within the drawing margin if Black plays cautiously.

38.♘a4

Black also holds after: 38.♘d5 g6 39.♘f6 h5=

38...♔c6 39.♘c3

The game ended in a draw on move 80. Here the simplest path to equality for Black was:

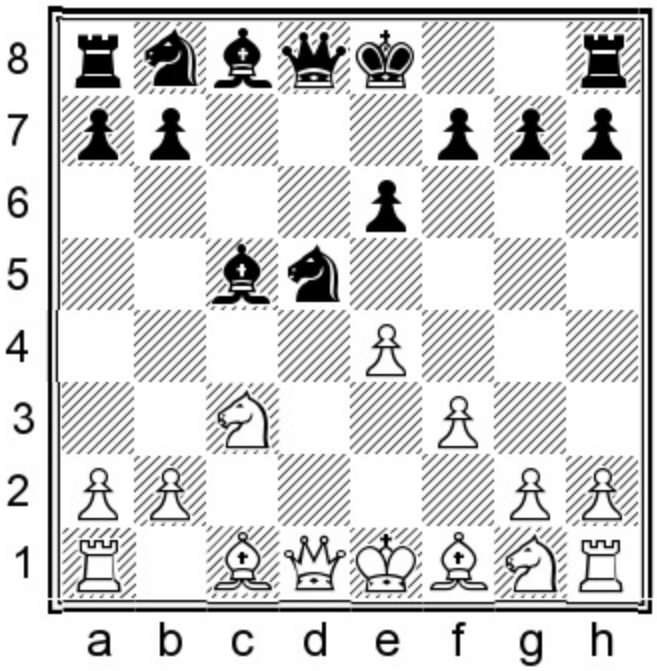
39...g6! 40.♘d5 ♔d6=

33...f5 34.♖b8 g6 35.♔e2 ♔f7 36.a4 ♗e7 37.♔d3 ♗f8 38.♘e5† ♔g7 39.a5

White will continue to improve his position, and at some point play ♖b6, followed by ♔c4 and ♘d3xc5.

310. William Steinitz – Emanuel Lasker

New York, Philadelphia & Montreal (10) 1894



Should Black:

A) invite the exchange queens with 7...♘xc3, or
B) stay in the middlegame with 7...♕h4†?

Show/Hide Solution

(King safety)

The game saw: 7...♘xc3? 8.♕xd8† ♔xd8 9.bxc3 ♘c6∓ Lasker won this endgame, but although he has a pleasant position due to the c3-weakness, his advantage is not overwhelming.

7...♕h4†! 8.g3 ♘xc3

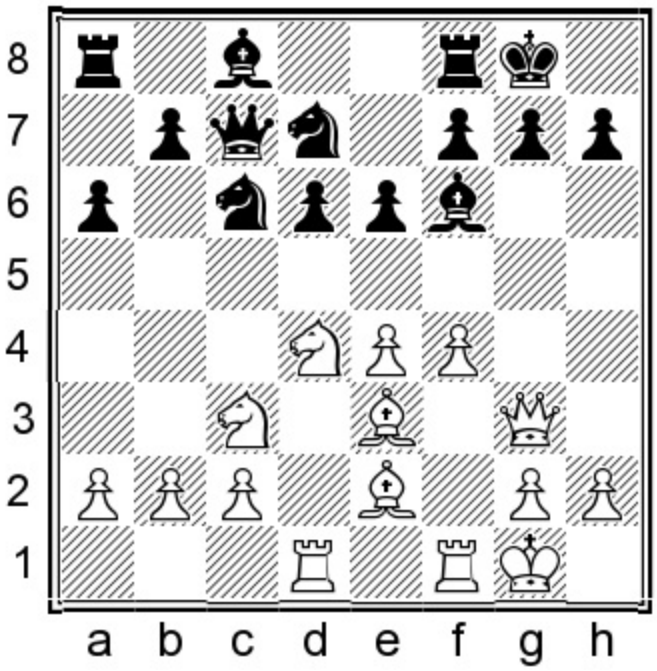
White cannot go for the endgame now.

9.bxc3 ♕f6

White is behind in development, with his king in the middle and his pawns weak. The position is already objectively lost for White.

311. Murali Karthikeyan – Beloslava Krasteva

Sitges 2022



Should White:

A) exchange knights with 13.♘xc6, or
B) improve his position with 13.♔h1?

Show/Hide Solution

(Initiative)

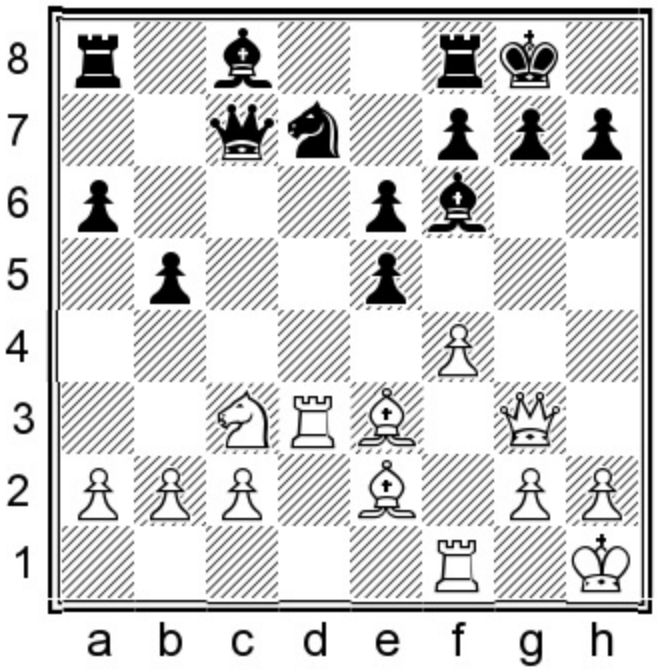
13.♘xc6!

All of White's pieces are in the game, while Black's pieces are standing in each other's way. White can wait, but will not improve his position.

13.♔h1 ♘xd4 14.♗xd4 b5± would give Black a chance to get her pieces into the game.

13...bxc6

After 13...♕xc6, the immediate e4-e5 break is less tempting (although not without potency). Stronger is 14.♖d3! ♕c7 (After 14...b5? White has 15.e5!, winning material.) 15.♔h1 b5 This is too slow, as White is ideally placed for a full-on offensive: 16.e5! dxe5



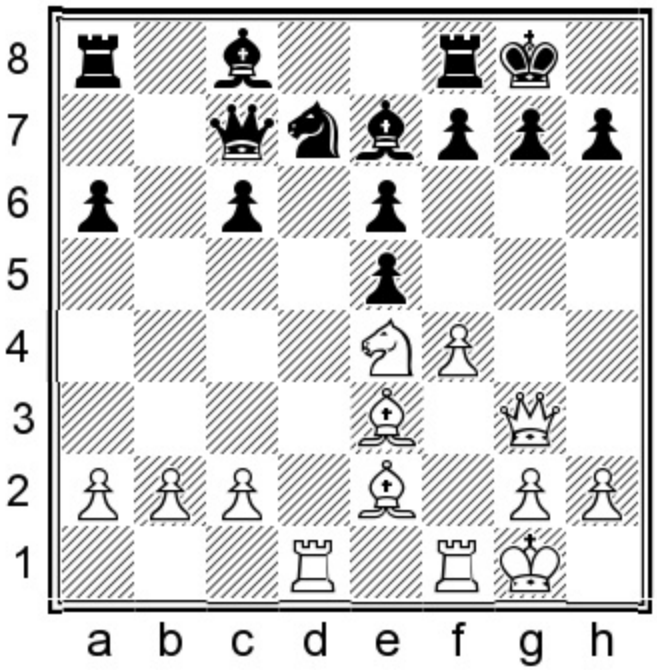
17.♖fd1! With a winning attack. For example, 17...♘c5 18.♗xc5 ♕xc5 19.♘e4 ♕e7 20.fxe5 ♗h4 21.♕g4 ♖a7 22.♖f1! f5 23.exf6 ♗xf6 24.♖df3 ♔h8 25.♗d3 e5 26.♕h4! and only a hopeless endgame is an alternative to being mated for Black.

14.e5!

In attacking technique, this is referred to as "attacking the strongest square". Black controls the e5-square. But soon it will be occupied by a pawn and White can play around it.

14...dxe5 15.♘e4 ♗e7

15...♔h8 is refuted by 16.♖xd7! ♗xd7 17.♘xf6 gxf6 18.♕h4 ♖g8 19.♕xf6† ♖g7 20.fxe5 and the bishops are ready to join in.



16.f5! exf5 17.♖xf5 g6

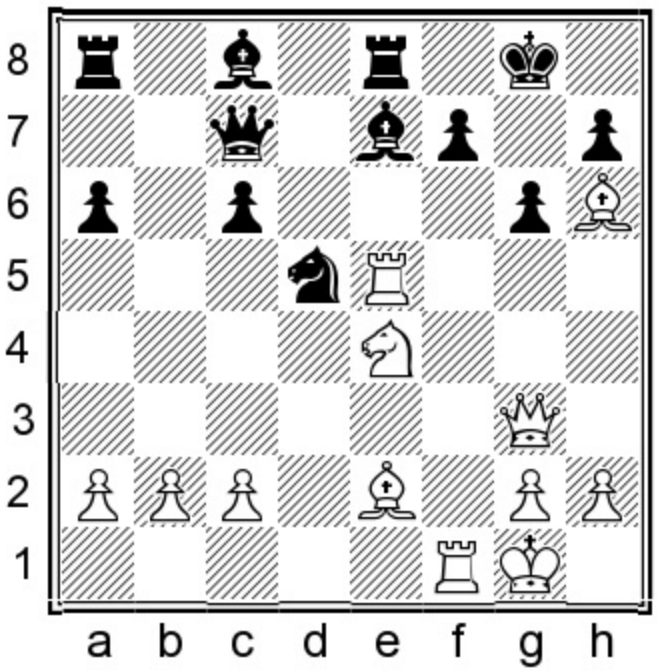
Or 17...♔h8 18.♗d3 with a winning attack.

18.♖df1!?

18.♗h6 with the idea 18...♖e8 19.♖xf7! was also strong.

18...♘b6 19.♖xe5 ♘d5 20.♗h6 ♖e8?!

20...f6 21.♗xf8 fxe5 22.♗h6 was also grim, but not as grim...



21.♔h1!

No discovered checks.

21...♗e6 22.c4 ♘b6 23.♗g4!

The final nail in Black's coffin. The game is over.

23...f5

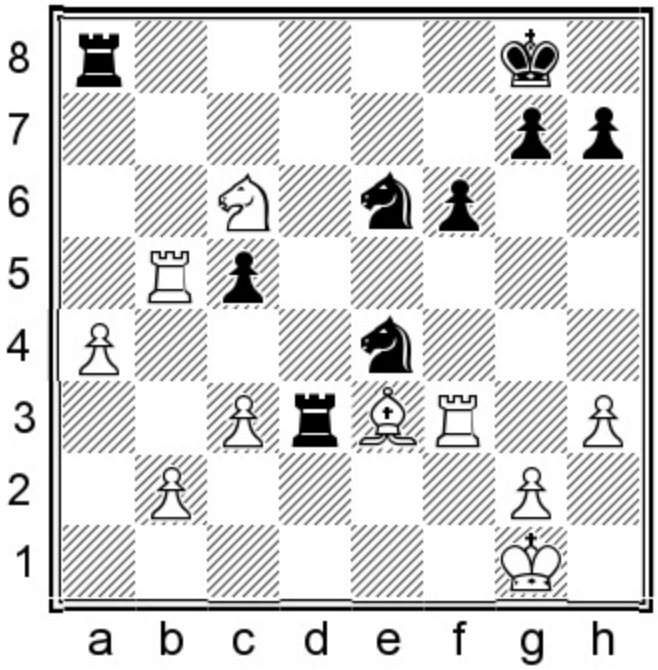
After 23...♗xg4 24.♘f6†! White wins the queen.

24.♗xf5 ♗xf5 25.♘f6† ♔h8 26.♘xe8 ♖xe8 27.♕c3 ♔g8 28.♖ee1

1–0

312. Pablo Salinas Herrera – Timur Gareyev

El Salvador 2022



Should White:

A) push the pawn with 33.a5, or offer a rook exchange with
B) 33.♖a5, or
C) 33.♖b8†?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

White played 33.a5?, but after 33...♘d6! 34.♖b3 ♘c4, Black already had a good game and soon made a draw.

Also wrong is 33.♖b8†?. The drawback is that Black gains time chasing the knight. 33...♖xb8 34.♘xb8 ♖d8 35.♘c6 ♖a8 36.b3 (or 36.a5 ♖a6!) 36...♖a6 37.♘e7† ♔f7 38.♘d5 c4! Black equalises.

33.♖a5!

Exchanging the active rook of the opponent, leaving the passed a-pawn without anyone to stop it.

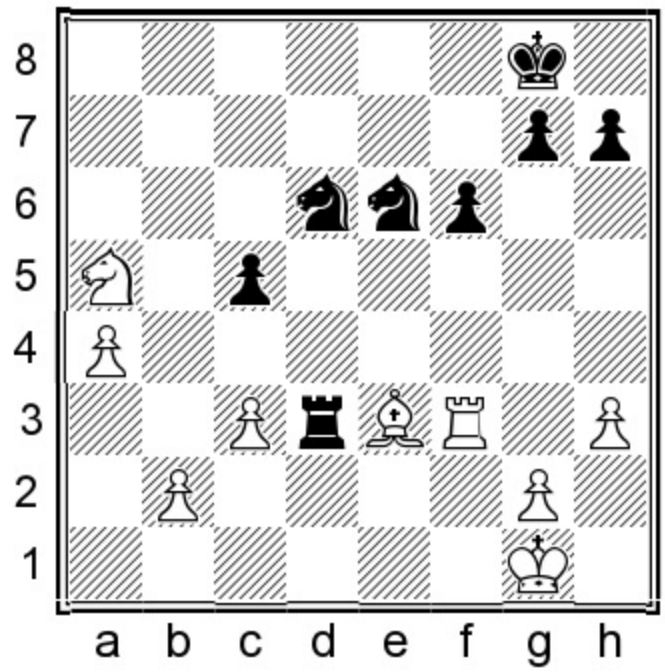
33...♖xa5

Practically forced. Avoiding the exchange would allow White to invade the 7th rank with nearly full domination.

34.♘xa5

White threatens ♘c4 followed by a4-a5, consolidating his position. Black can delay this by playing:

34...♘d6



But White will untangle his pieces in a simple way.

35.♗c1 ♖d1† 36.♖f1 ♖d3 37.♖e1 ♔f7 38.♔f1

The king comes to e2 to make ♗e3 and ♖a1 possible.

38...♖d5 39.♗e3

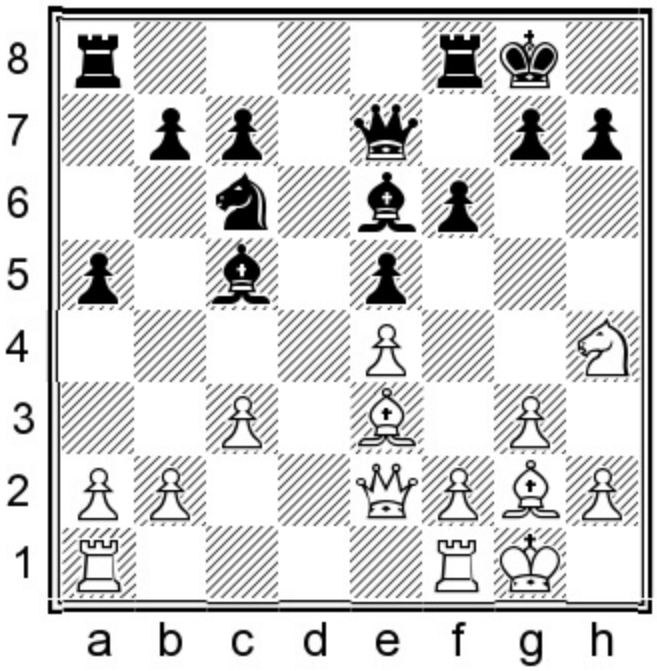
Threatening b2-b4, creating two connected passed pawns.

39...c4 40.♘c6

White will play ♖a1 and win.

313. Emmanuel Jimenez Garcia – Guillermo Vazquez

Mexico 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange bishops with 14...♗xe3, or
B) guard against the knight jump with 14...g6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Gaining time)

The game saw: 14...g6 15.f4 (White could have gained time for defensive ideas with: 15.♗xc5! ♕xc5 16.♖fd1 a4 17.♗f1 with the idea ♘g2-e3. This makes Black's task more difficult, although his position is still pleasant.) 15...♗f7 16.f5 a4 17.fxg6 hxg6 18.♖f2 ♗xe3 19.♕xe3 ♔g7∓ Black had an easier position and later won.

The immediate 14...a4 would be a big mistake as White invades with: 15.♘f5! forcing 15...♗xf5 16.exf5 ♗xe3 17.♕xe3±, when the g2-bishop is a monster.

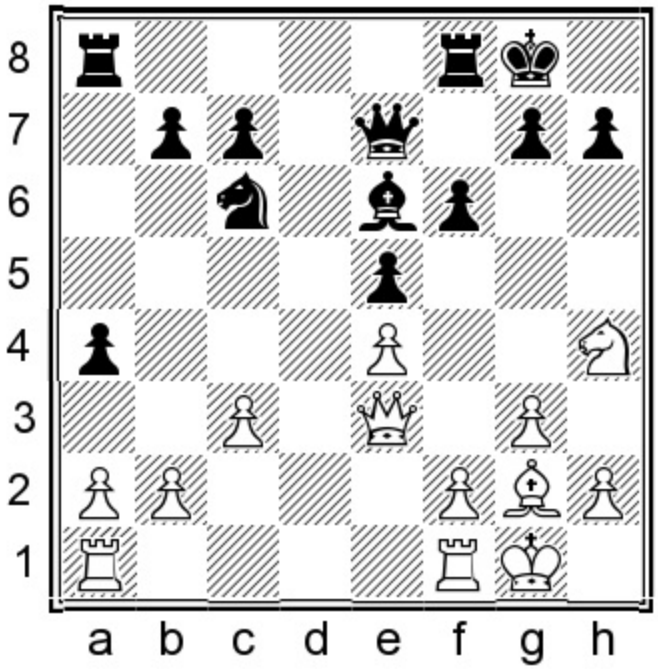
14...♗xe3!

The stronger option. Black should exploit the weaknesses on the queenside light squares quickly, before White gets coordinated.

15.♕xe3 a4!

The idea is ...♕f7 and ...♗xa2.

15...♕f7 16.a4∓ is less painful for White.



16.♖fe1

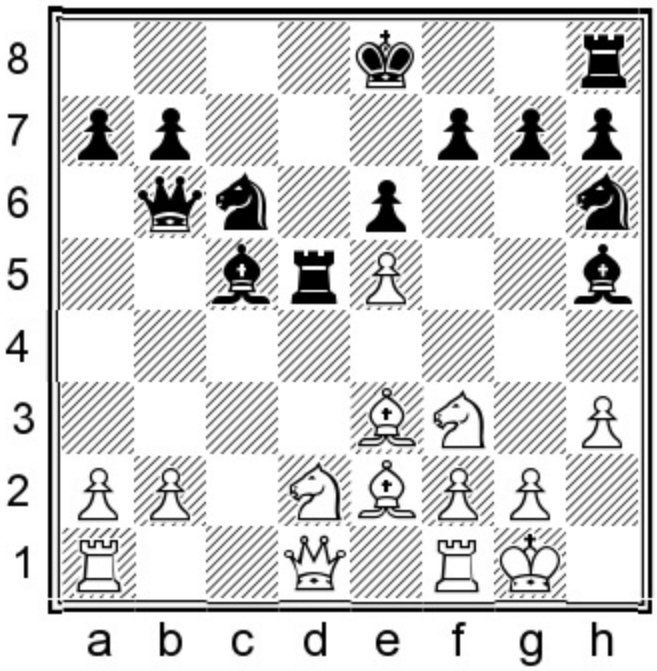
The active 16.♘f5 is met with: 16...♕f7 17.a3 ♘a5∓. Black has gained a strong grip on the light squares on the queenside. The white knight doesn't have as much impact on the position. 18.f4 ♖fe8 19.♕f2 (19.fxe5 ♘c4∓) 19...♗b3 20.fxe5 ♖xe5 With a massive position for Black.

16...♕f7 17.a3 ♘a5

Black's chances are much better, due to his control of the light squares on the queenside.

314. Gilberto Hernandez Amura – Andres Aguilar

Buenos Aires 2022



Should White play:

A) 14.♗xh6, or
B) 14.♗xc5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

The game went 14.♗xh6? gxh6, when Black was fine with two powerful bishops. The doubled h-pawns have no negative impact. Now White made an even worse mistake with: 15.♕e1? He got into trouble after 15...♗b4∓ and later lost.

14.♗xc5!

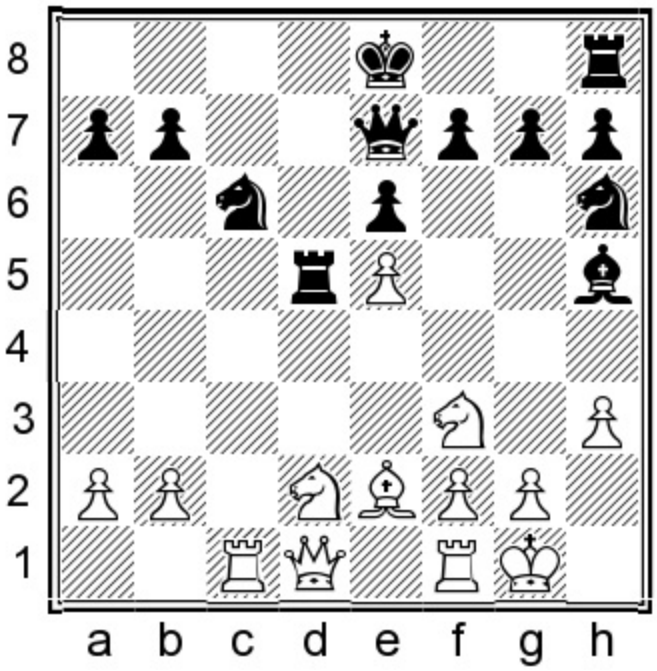
Exchanging the defender of the dark squares, and gaining a tempo to bring more pieces into the game.

14...♕xc5

14...♖xc5 is worse as the knight quickly gets to d6. 15.♘c4 ♕c7 16.g4 ♗g6 17.♘d6† with a winning position for White.

15.♖c1 ♕e7

Or 15...♕b6 16.g4 ♗g6 17.♕b3±.



16.g4

There are other good moves, but this makes sense to quickly free the pieces and make sure the knight on h6 stays there.

16...♗g6 17.♗c4 ♖d8

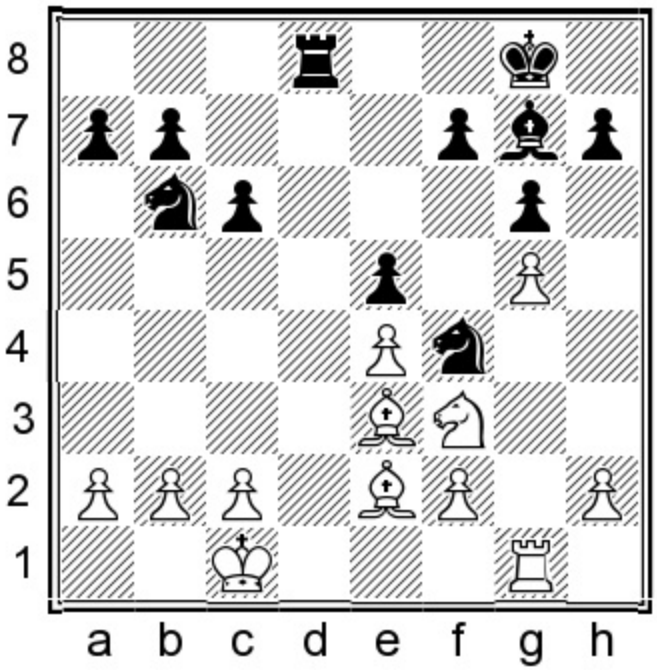
17...♖c5 18.♘b3 would see the rook trapped.

18.♗b5 0-0 19.♗xc6 bxc6 20.♕b3

White has a slightly better position. Black has a good bishop, but the knight has no play, and his pawn structure is worse.

315. Daniel Alsina Leal – Marc Narciso Dublan

Barbera del Valles 2020



Should White play:

A) 17.♗f1, keeping the two bishops, or
B) 17.♗xf4, creating a weak pawn?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

The game continuation was harmless for Black: 17.♗xf4? exf4 18.♖g4 (Even easier for Black is 18.h4 ♖e8!=.) 18...♘d7 19.♖xf4 ♘e5 20.h4 h5⩲ White is a pawn up, but it doesn't matter much. Opposite-coloured bishop endgames have a high drawing tendency, and the white bishop is not great. Also, the pawn on h4 is a permanent target and the rook on f4 is without function. The game was eventually drawn.

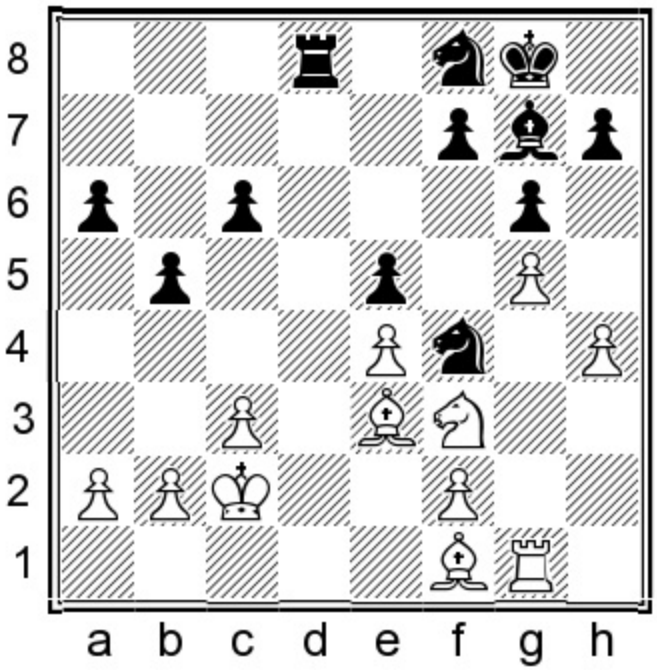
17.♗f1!±

White has the two bishops. The e3-bishop is excellent, putting pressure on the queenside. Also, the e5-pawn obstructs the g7-bishop. Retreating the bishop keeps the white rook out of the game, but that is small price to pay. Eventually, White will be able to untangle or capture on f4 at a more convenient moment. An illustrative continuation is:

17...♘d7 18.c3 a6 19.♔c2 b5 20.h4

It is not easy to see how Black can improve his position. For instance:

20...♘f8



21.♗xf4!

White waited for the knight to go to f8 before taking on f3. Now he is ready to defend the e-pawn and put the bishop on the strong h3-square.

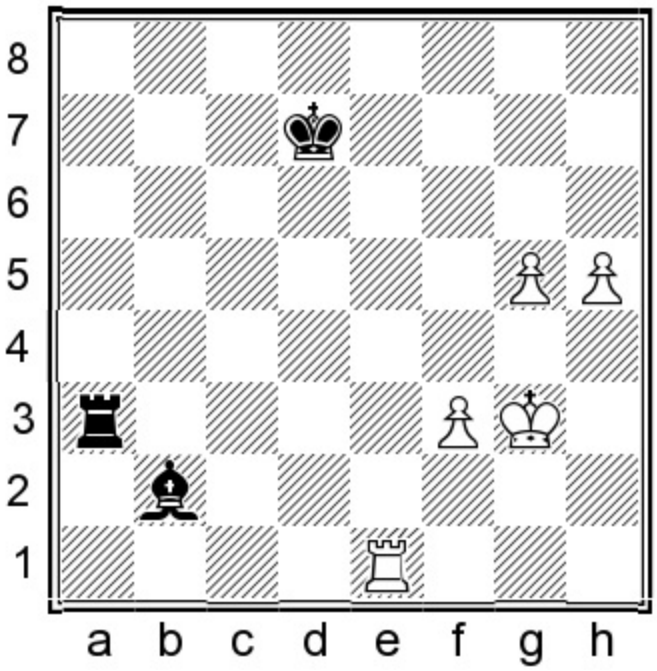
21...exf4 22.♗h3

White has a potential good knight vs bad bishop ending on the horizon.

22...♖e8 23.e5!+–

316. Gabija Simkunaite – Meri Arabidze

Chennai Olympiad 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange rooks with 50...♖a1, or
B) keep the rooks on with 50...♖a8?

Show/Hide Solution

(Escaping with a draw)

Black did not hold the endgame after: 50...♖a8? 51.f4+– ♖e8 52.♖b1! (52.♖xe8 ♔xe8=) 52...♖e2 53.♔f3 ♖h2 54.♔g4 ♔e6 55.♖e1† ♔f7 56.h6 ♗a3 57.♔f5 ♗f8 58.♖e6 ♖h4 59.♖a6 ♔g8 60.♖c6 ♔f7 61.♖c7† ♔g8 62.♖c8 ♔f7 63.g6† ♔g8 64.g7 ♔h7 65.♖xf8 1–0

50...♖a1!

Offering the exchange of the opponent's strongest piece. After the exchange of rooks Black enters a known theoretical endgame, where the bishop and king are able to contain the three pawns.

51.♖e4

The only winning attempt, but now Black can create counterplay by attacking the pawns from behind.

It is only a draw after 51.♖xa1 ♗xa1 52.♔g4 ♔e6 53.h6 ♗c3 54.f4 ♗b2 55.f5† ♔f7 56.g6† ♔g8 57.♔g5 ♗c1†.

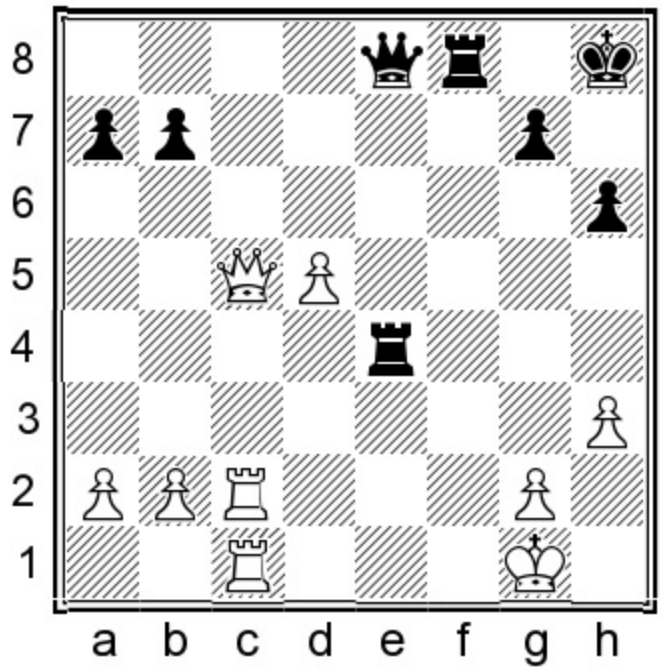
51...♖g1†! 52.♔h4 ♗c1 53.f4 ♔d6 54.h6 ♔d5 55.♖e5† ♔d4=

Black will win a pawn and hold the endgame. For example:

56.♖a5 ♗xf4 57.♔h5 ♔e4 58.h7 ♖h1† 59.♔g6 ♗e5

317. Diego Valerga – Rene Garnier

Buenos Aires 2022



Should White:

A) exchange rooks with 39.♖f1, or
B) play 39.d6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Prophylaxis)

39.d6!

Passed pawns should be pushed and here is not an exception. The immediate threat is d6-d7, but there is also ♖d2, consolidating the material advantage.

White was successful in the game with: 39.♖f1? ♖xf1† 40.♔xf1 But here Black missed 40...♕e5!=.

39...♖e1†

It is possible that in the heat of the game White feared this rook check. But he has a neat reply.

40.♔h2!

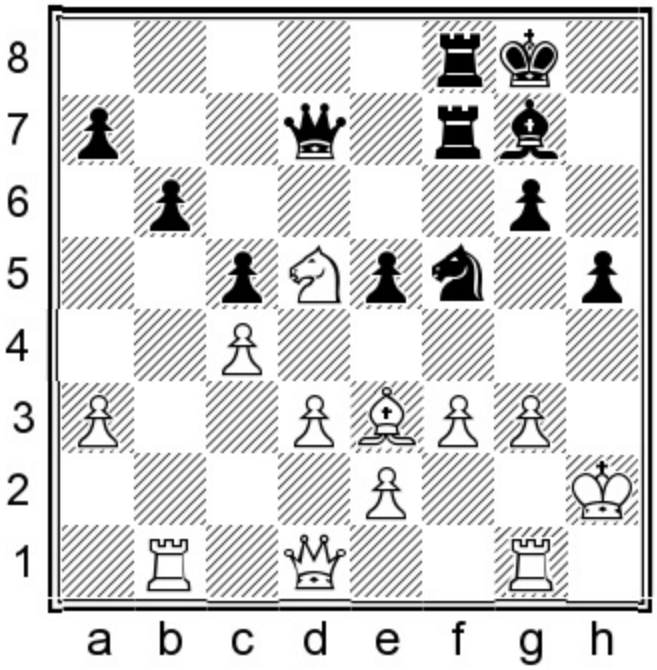
Black wins after 40.♖xe1 ♕xe1† 41.♔h2 ♖f1.

40...♖ff1 41.♕c8!!

Pinning the queen so it can't be used in the attack. White parries the threats and wins the game with his passed d-pawn.

318. Sam Shankland – Nils Grandelius

Wijk aan Zee 2022



Should Black play:

A) 23...♘xe3, or
B) improve his position with 23...♕d6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing the defender)

Grandelius played: 23...♕d6 24.♗g5!± ♘d4 (24...h4 was worth trying. Play might continue: 25.gxh4 e4† 26.f4 ♖e8 with a tense position, although White is better.) 25.♔g2 White has the advantage, although the game was later drawn.

23...♘xe3!

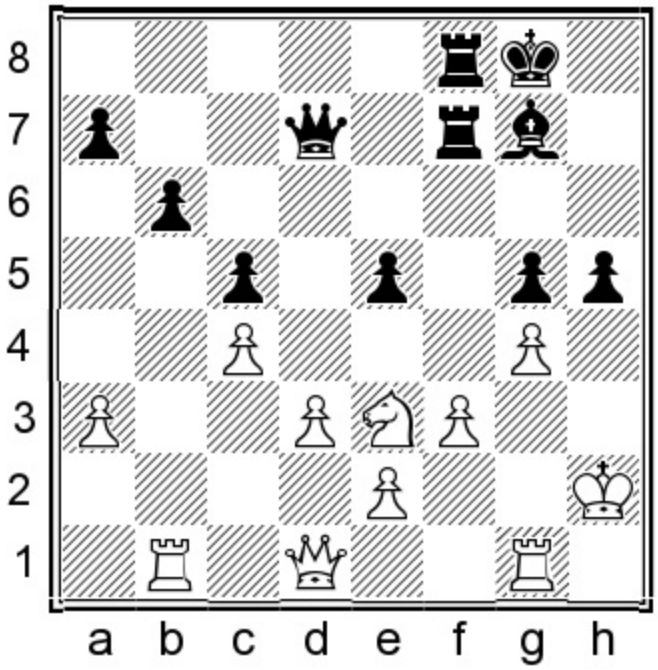
Black voluntarily gives up his best minor piece, with the idea of attacking on the dark squares.

24.♘xe3 g5!∓

The attack needs to start right away. White cannot allow ...g5-g4.

25.g4!

Black's pieces are ready; it is time to exploit the advantage on the dark squares.



25...e4!!

Black activates the bishop.

26.dxe4

Other moves will lead to great structural damage.

26...♗d4 27.♘f5!

The best practical chance. White sacrifices the exchange to get a strong knight on f5.

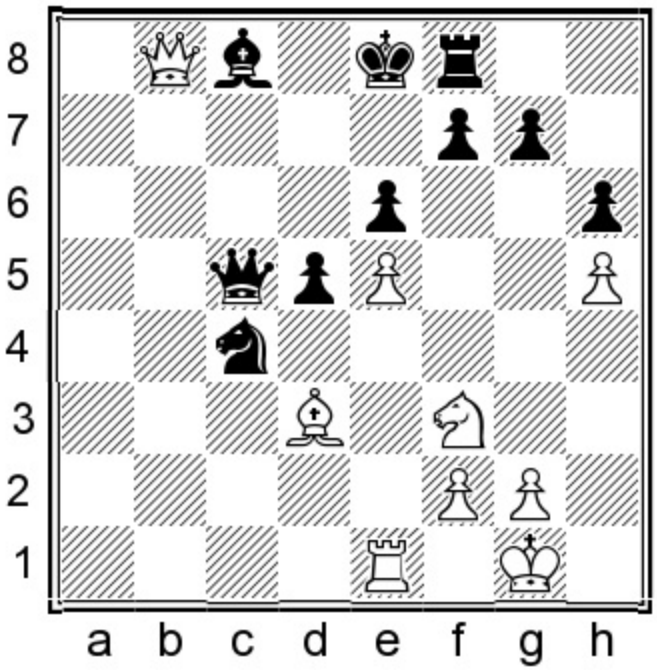
27.♕c1!? ♕d6† 28.♔h1 (28.♔g2 h4 wins for Black.) 28...♖h7 looks scary for White.

27...♗xg1† 28.♕xg1 ♖h7∓

The exchange sacrifice keeps White in the game, but Black can continue to exert great pressure.

319. Bartlomiej Heberla – Karol Kucza

Poland 2022



Should White:

A) exchange with 28.♗xc4, or
B) play 28.♖a1?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing defenders)

28.♗xc4!

With the black king stuck in the centre, White takes a key defender off the board, and tries to use his superior development to deliver the decisive blow.

28.♖a1 would be too soft. After 28...♔e7 29.♖a7†?! ♗d7 Black defends successfully.

28...dxc4

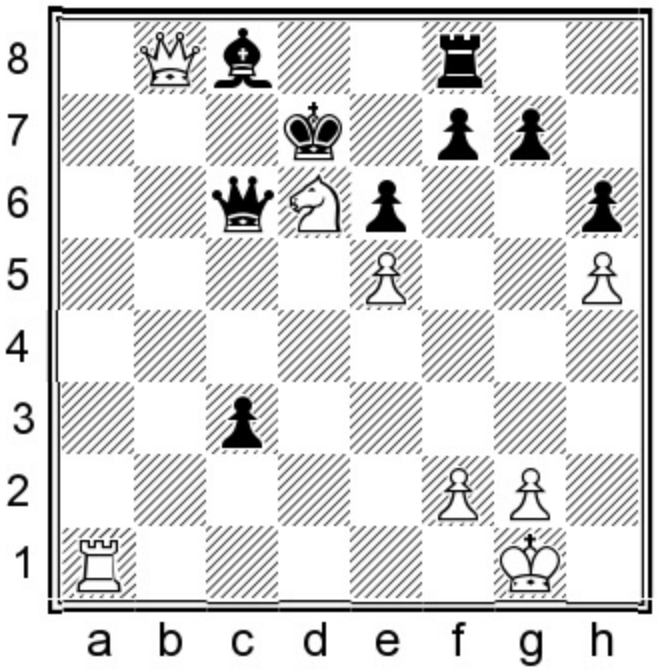
Forced. The e4-square is now left without a guardian, and White can use it as a route to d6 for the knight.

If 28...♕xc4, the easiest is 29.♖a1 threatening an invasion on the 7th rank. Black can't play 29...♔e7 because of: 30.♕d6† ♔e8 31.♖a7 Winning.

29.♘d2! c3 30.♘e4 ♕c6 31.♘d6† ♔d7 32.♖a1?

A careless move, overlooking Black's counterplay.

32.♖c1 wins easily by picking up the c-pawn, then continuing to attack the black king. 32...c2 33.♕b3+–



32...♗b7?

Black returns the favour. It was important to get some counterplay going, containing White's attack.

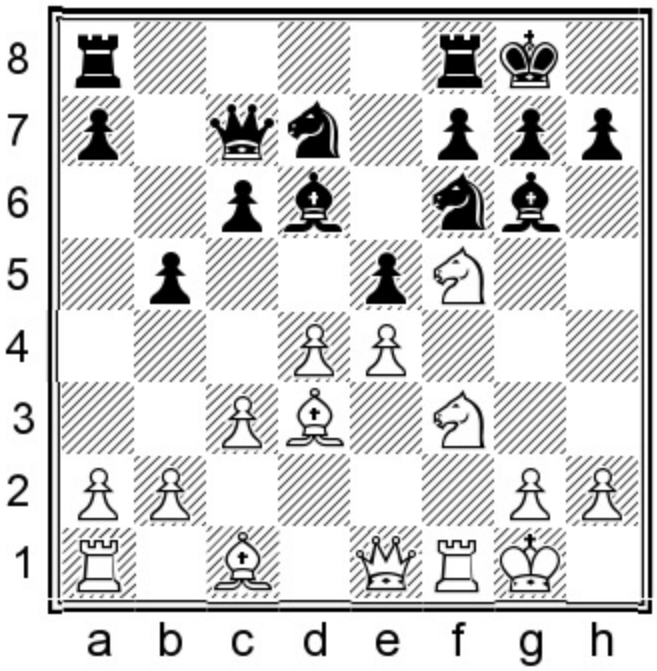
32...c2! ensures the white rook doesn't leave the back rank. 33.♖c1 (On 33.♕a7†, Black has the same idea as in the game but with a full tempo up. 33...♗b7 34.♕xb7† ♕xb7 35.♘xb7 ♖b8 The knight can't make it back in time. 36.♖c1 ♖xb7 37.♖xc2=; 33.♖a7†?? ♔d8 would be unfortunate.) 33...♕d5 With the threat of ...♕d1†. 34.♕a7† ♔d8 35.♕a4 ♕d2! The last touch. White has nothing better than: 36.♕xc2 ♕xc2 37.♖xc2 ♗d7 Black is safe, and the game is equal.

33.♕xb7† ♕xb7 34.♘xb7 ♖b8 35.♘c5† ♔c6 36.♘d3

Black has nothing for the piece and lost in 59 moves.

320. Sankalp Gupta – Shantanu Bhambure

Sitges 2021



Should White play:

A) 14.♘xd6, or
B) first bring out the queen with 14.♕h4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

White played 14.♕h4?, when Black had a chance to eliminate the troublesome knight with the inferior bishop. 14...♗xf5! 15.exf5 ♖fe8∓ 16.♗c2 exd4 17.♘xd4 Black now misplayed the position with: 17...♘c5? (17...a6 gives Black a large advantage; ...♘e5, ...c6-c5 and bringing in the rook, in the most suitable order, are on the agenda.) 18.g4!∞ White managed to create play on the kingside and won the game on move 31.

The natural 14.♘3h4!?± is only marginally worse than the solution (it was not on the ballot though). White gains the two bishops but loses flexibility, as well as his pressure on e5.

14.♘xd6!

Eliminating the bishop helps White to exert pressure on the weak dark squares.

14...♕xd6 15.♗g5!

This is a key move. White needs to be ready for ...♖ae8, with pressure on e4.

15...♖ae8

15...exd4? drops a piece to 16.e5 ♘xe5 17.♕xe5!.

16.♗xf6!

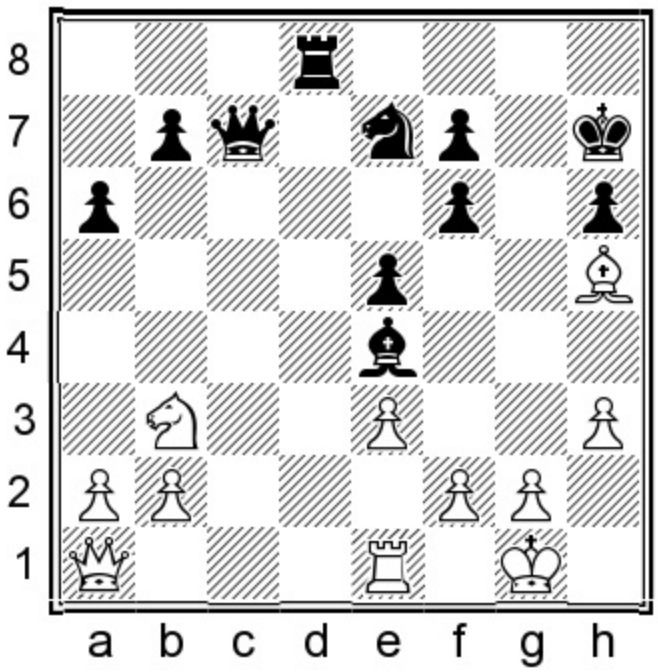
Somewhat surprisingly the f6-square becomes a crisis point. Black is forced to recapture with the pawn to avoid losing material.

16...gxf6 17.♗c2!?±

White has permanent structural advantages, and Black would struggle to hold this in a practical game.

321. Baskaran Adhiban – Dommaraju Gukesh

Internet (rapid) 2023



Should White:

A) exchange queens with 27.♕c1, or
B) grab the c-file with 27.♖c1?

Show/Hide Solution

(King safety)

Adhiban exchanged the queen, and won easily. But only because his opponent blundered. 27.♕c1? ♕xc1 28.♖xc1 ♔g7 29.♖c7 ♔f8 Black has managed to defend all his weaknesses. 30.♘c5 ♗c6 31.♘xb7 (31.a4!?±) 31...♖b8? (Black would have been fine after 31...♖d2.) 32.♘a5 ♗e4 33.f3+– White later won.

27.♗xf7? ♘f5 is really dangerous for White. 28.♗e6! (The white king is in danger after 28.♗h5?! ♖g8 29.♗g4 ♘h4∓. For example, 30.f3? ♕c2–+ and White is mated.) 28...♘h4∓ Stockfish is able to keep

the wolf from the door with accurate defence, but in practical play...

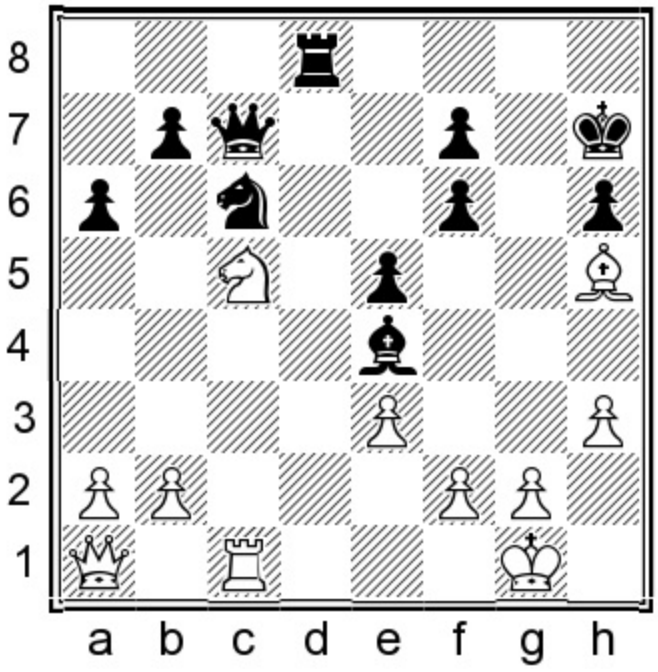
27.♖c1!

The black kingside is fractured, and White needs to push on the weakened light squares to prove a real advantage.

27...♘c6

27...♗c6!? requires concrete calculation: 28.♗xf7 ♘f5 29.♗e6 The bishop can also go to h5. 29...♘h4 30.♖c4! Strongest. 30...♘xg2 31.♕c1! The knight is trapped, but there is still counterplay. 31...♘f4 32.♕c2†! ♔h8 33.exf4 ♕g7† 34.♗g4 h5 35.fxe5! hxg4 36.♖xg4+– White wins.

28.♘c5



28...♗f5

After 28...♗d5?! 29.♕b1† ♔g7 30.♗g4+–, the threat of e3-e4 is hard for Black to meet in a comfortable way. White has great pressure on the light squares.

29.♗f3 ♖d6 30.♖d1!?+–

Simple and deadly, although even better is: 30.a4! ♕b6 (Or: 30...a5 31.♕a3 ♘b4 32.♖c3 ♕b6 33.♘xb7+–) 31.♗e4 ♗g6 32.♗xg6† fxg6 33.♘e4 ♖e6 34.♕a2+–

Chapter 7

Bloody Difficult!

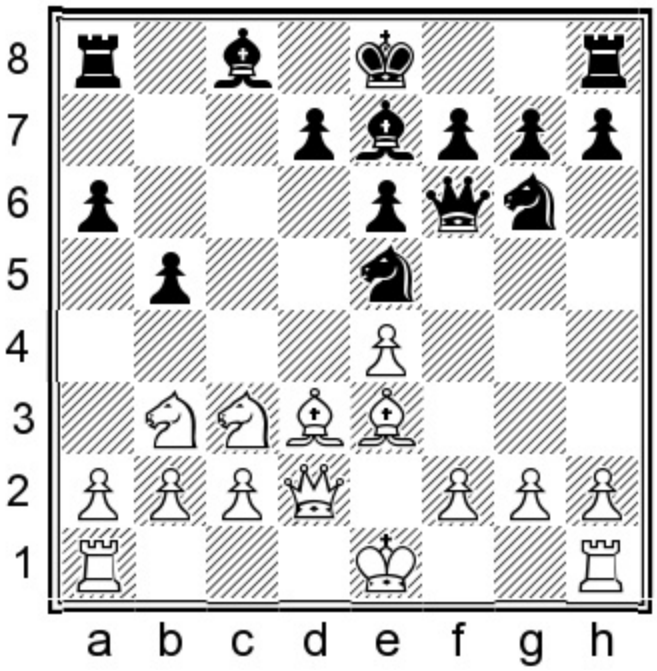
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Despite the chapter title, it is not obvious to us that the exercises in this chapter are significantly more difficult than those in the previous ones. We allocated the exercises using our best judgement, having tested the exercises with a group of close to 10 people, but it's hard for us to anticipate which exercises will be more difficult for you specifically. We are all different.

An important element of decision-making that we have endeavoured to promote within this book is logical thinking. Although there are no "rules" in chess, there are consistent patterns worth understanding and taking into consideration. Each position has its own logic and works in its own way, the only reliable constant is a need for intelligent decision-making. Understanding a lot of positions and a lot of good decisions is an important part of the decision-making process. Making good decisions often comes from a combination of smart thinking and good decision-making skills. With this book, we have tried to train both, related to the limited theme of exchanges. We are certain that working on this book will be useful for you in the long run.

322. Michael Paris – Udo Hoffmann

Germany 2012



Should White play:

A) 12.0-0-0, or
B) 12.♗e2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

The game move 12.0-0-0? is a thematic mistake. Black should take on d3 without hesitation. If White recaptures with the pawn, Black throws the queenside at him. If he takes with the queen, the knight will quickly come to c4. 12...0-0? won the game, but after 13.♗e2!, White would have had a massive advantage.

12.f4? is a simple mistake. After 12...♕h4†∓ there is no pleasant move.

12.♗e2!±

This gives White an overwhelming advantage.

12...♘c4

A key point is that 12...♘h4 is a move White has to be ready for, but here 13.♖g1! is horrible for Black.

12...d5 13.exd5 ♗b7 looks dynamic, but after 14.0-0-0± there is no follow-up. 14...b4 15.♘e4 only helps White. 15...♕h4 16.f4 and so on. Black is roadkill.

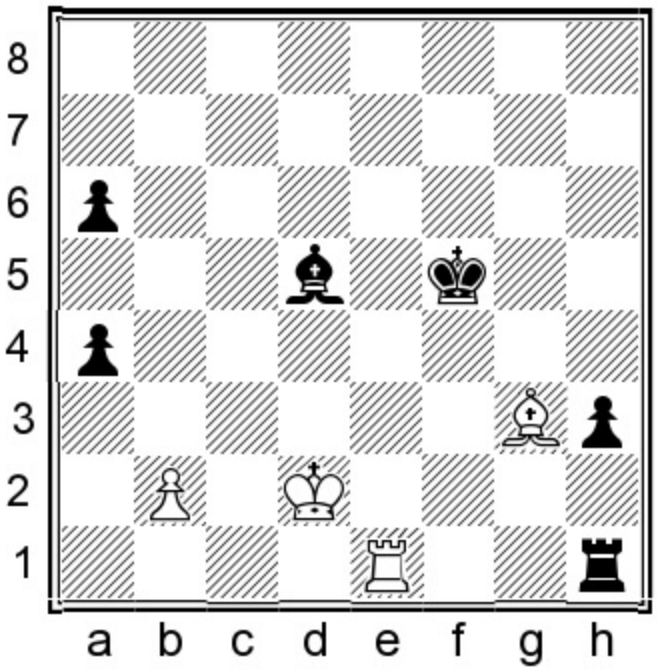
12...♖b8 13.0-0-0 0-0 14.h4 looks grim for Black. As in, the Grim Reaper is searching for him...

13.♗xc4 bxc4 14.♘a5

White wins the c-pawn and takes it from there.

323. Artur Jakubiec – Alexei Fedorov

Czech Republic 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange rooks on e1, or
B) bring the king closer with 49...♔g4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Escaping into a drawn ending)

The exchange on e1 is the right answer, as it drags the white king away from the safety of a1.

Black won after:

49...♔g4? 50.♖xh1?

White draws after a move such as 50.♗b8 ♖xe1 51.♔xe1 ♔f3 52.♔f1 ♔e3 53.♗d6 ♔d3 54.♔g1=.

50...♔xg3! 51.♖c1 h2 52.♔c3 ♗b3!

Preventing the white king from making it into the corner.

52...h1=♕? 53.♖xh1 ♗xh1 54.♔b4 and 55.♔a3 leads to a well-known draw.

52...♔g2 53.♖c2† ♔g3 54.♖c1 does not ruin anything, but is also not progress.

53.♖e1 ♔f2! 54.♔d2

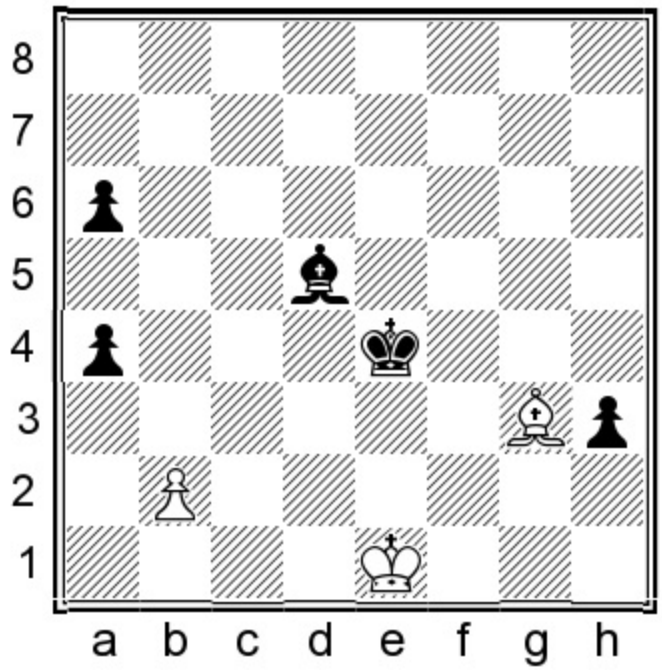
Or 54.♖c1 ♔g2 and Black wins.

54...♗c4 55.♖h1 ♔g2 56.♖xh2† ♔xh2 57.♔c2 ♗a2!

White resigned, 0–1. He will never make it to the corner.

49...♖xe1! 50.♔xe1 ♔e4!

This is the key point. The king is flexible here, aiming at both flanks.



51.♗h2

Also 51.♔f2 ♔d3 would not give White enough time to reroute his bishop to a3. For this reason, White cannot prevent ...♔c2-b3, followed by ...a4-a3, creating a second passed pawn.

Black also wins after 51.♔d2 ♔f3 52.♗e5 ♔g2 53.♔c2 ♗a2.

51...♔d3 52.♔d1 ♔c4 53.♔c1 ♗e4!

Keeping the king out of the corner.

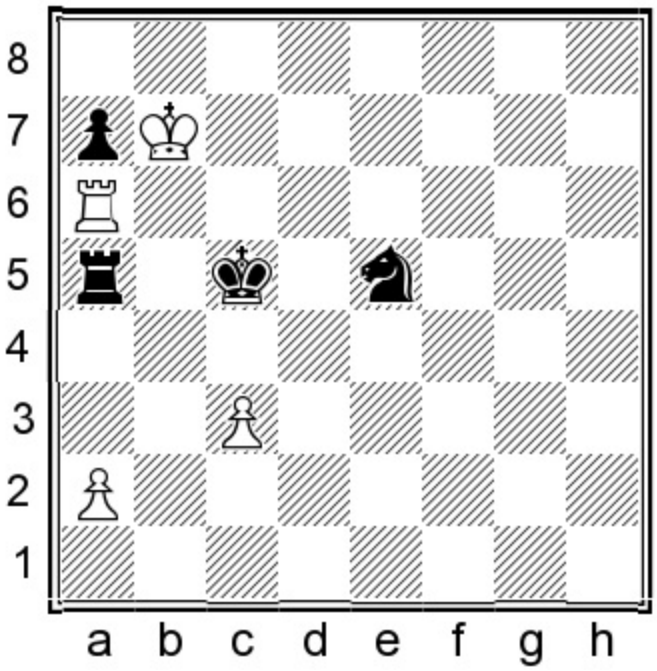
53...♔b3? 54.♔b1 would allow White to draw.

54.♗d6 ♔b3

White is in zugzwang. With Black to play, ...♗f5 would put White in zugzwang again.

324. Dirk Sebastian – David Gavrilescu

Germany 2021



Should Black:

A) exchange the rooks, or
B) play 57...♖b5†?

Show/Hide Solution

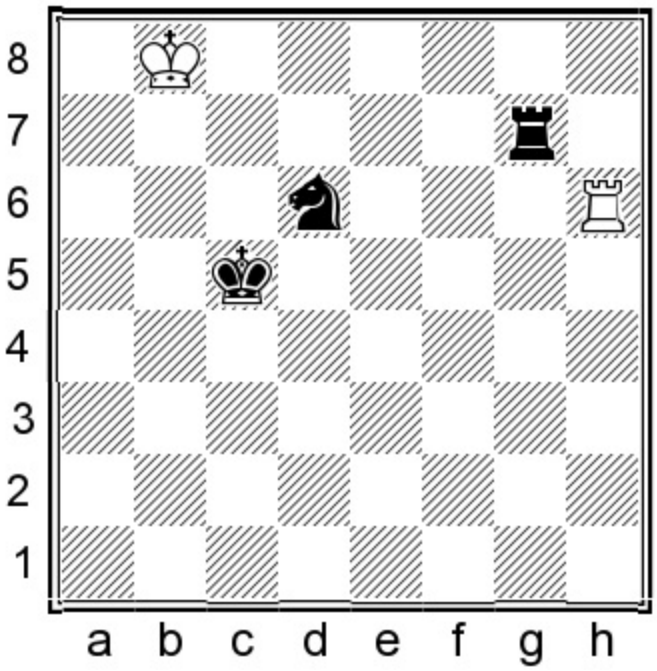
(Converting an advantage)

Black decided to keep the rooks on the board, and was unjustly rewarded for his efforts:

57...♖b5†? 58.♔c7! ♔d5 59.♖xa7 ♖c5† 60.♔b7

This is a theoretical draw, but the white king is in the corner and not out of danger. Most positions with rook and knight vs rook are a draw, but it is possible for the weaker side to lose if his king is trapped in the corner. Usually getting out of the corner square is enough, but occasionally the two adjacent squares can also be dangerous.

60...♘c4 61.♔b8 ♘d6 62.♖h7 ♖b5† 63.♔a7 ♔c6 64.♖h6 ♖a5† 65.♔b8 ♖xa2 66.c4 ♖g2 67.♔a7 ♖g3 68.♔b8 ♖g7 69.c5 ♔xc5



70.♔a8?

70.♖h1! was correct. The rook needs to harass the black king from a distance.

70...♔c6 71.♔b8 ♖d7!

Black has established a mating setup. The rook does not have time to swing around, as ...♘b5† would come in handy down the line.

72.♖h8 ♔b6 73.♖g8 ♖b7†

The winning idea is not obvious: 73...♖f7! 74.♖h8 ♖f6! 75.♖d8 ♖h6 A necessary waiting move. 76.♖f8 ♘b5 77.♔c8 ♖d6! Black will regroup the knight to c6 and win.

74.♔a8 ♖a7† 75.♔b8 ♖d7 76.♖h8?!

76.♔a8! would have forced Black to find the winning method.

76...♘f7 77.♖g8 ♘e5 78.♔c8 ♖e7 79.♖h8 ♘c6 80.♖h7 ♘a7†

0–1

57...♖xa6!

White will not win the a-pawn. There is no obvious main line, but this is certainly important:

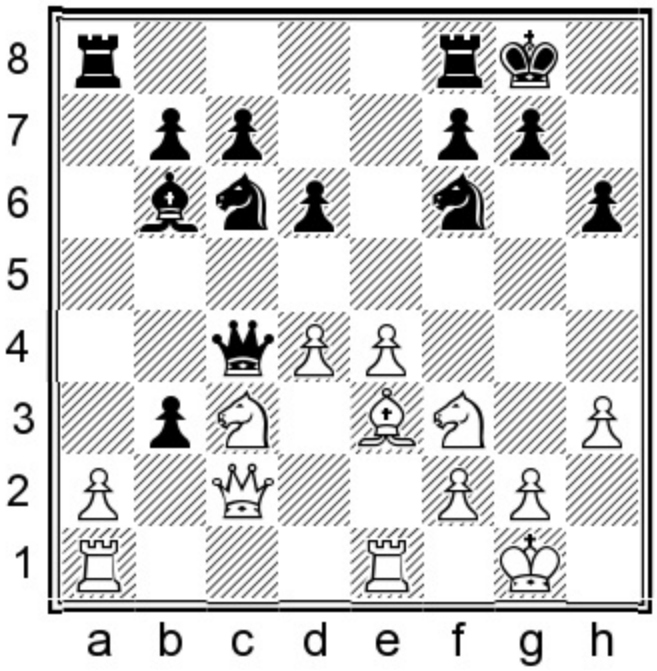
58.♔xa6 ♘c6 59.a4 ♔d5 60.♔b7 ♔d6 61.a5 ♔d5 62.a6 ♔c5 63.c4

63.♔c7 ♘a5 is one variation. Black wins.

63...♔d6 64.♔a8 ♔c7 65.c5 ♘e7 66.♔xa7 ♘c6† 67.♔a8 ♔c8 68.a7 ♘a5 69.c6 ♘c4 70.c7 ♘b6#

325. Zhansaya Abdumalik – Andres Merario Alarcon

Gibraltar 2022



Should White take back on b3 with:

A) the queen, or
B) the pawn?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)

White chose correctly:

21.axb3!

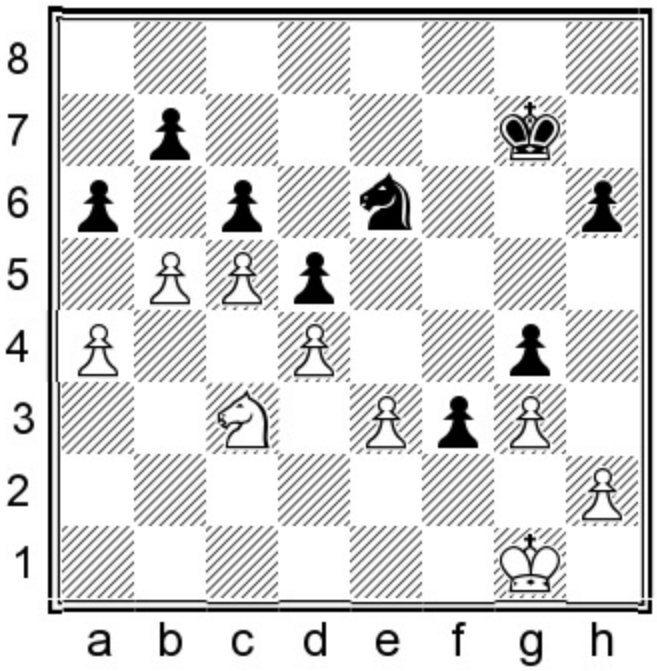
21.♕xb3? would be bad. After 21...♕xb3 22.axb3 ♗a5!, Black is able to weaken White on the light squares and leave her with a bad bishop. 23.♗d2 ♗xc3 24.♗xc3 d5! 25.e5?! (Black is also much better after 25.exd5 ♘xd5.) 25...♘e4 26.♗b2 ♘b4 White has too many weaknesses to deal with.

21...♘b4 22.♕b2 ♕d3 23.♖ac1 ♕a6 24.♖a1=

The players could have agreed a draw here. Instead they played another 11 moves before reaching the same result.

326. Mihnea Costachi – Zahar Efimenko

Warsaw (rapid) 2021



Should Black play:

A) 41...♔f6, or
B) 41...axb5 42.axb5 ♔f6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Prophylaxis)

Including the exchange of pawns was a mistake. 41...axb5? 42.axb5 Now Black played: 42...♔f7 Not ambitious. A draw was agreed a few moves later.

The critical line was: 42...♔f6 The point is 43.bxc6 bxc6 44.♘a2 ♔f5 45.♔f2 ♔e4 46.♘b4 ♘d8 when White holds with 47.♘a6! ♔d3 48.♘b8 and Black cannot make progress.

41...♔f6!

The king can also go to g6. It makes no odds.

42.bxc6

42.b6 ♔f5 43.♘a2 ♔e4 44.♔f2 gives Black many ways to play for a win. The simplest is 44...♘xd4, with a ton of passed pawns.

42...bxc6 43.♘a2 a5!

This is the key difference.

44.♘c1 ♔f5 45.♘b3 ♔e4 46.♔f2

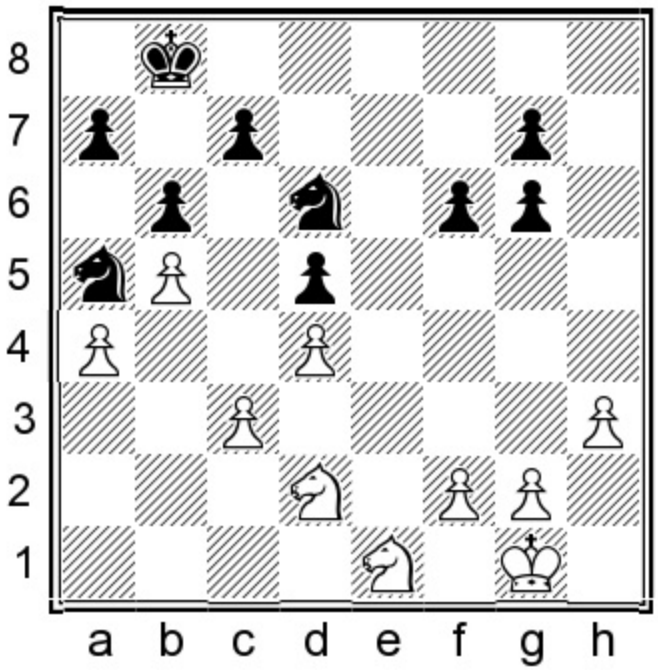
White loses on the spot to 46.♘xa5 ♔xe3 47.♘xc6 ♔e2.

46...♔d3 47.♘xa5 ♘g5

Black wins.

327. Viktor Boev – Arjun Erigaisi

Plovdiv 2021



Should Black:

A) seek the exchange of a pair of knights on c4, or
B) play 24...c6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)

In the game Black's advantage quickly deteriorated. 24...c6? 25.bxc6 b5?! (25...♔c7 26.♘b1 ♘ac4 27.♘d3 a5∓ was stronger, but there is still no direct path forward.) 26.axb5 ♘xb5 27.♘b1∓ White held the draw after a long fight.

24...♘ac4

Exchanging knights leaves the white weaknesses vulnerable.

25.♘xc4

White has to take to avoid ...♘b2xa4.

25...dxc4!

The key point. The weakness on c3 is fixed.

26.f3 a6!

The move order is important. Without this there is nothing.

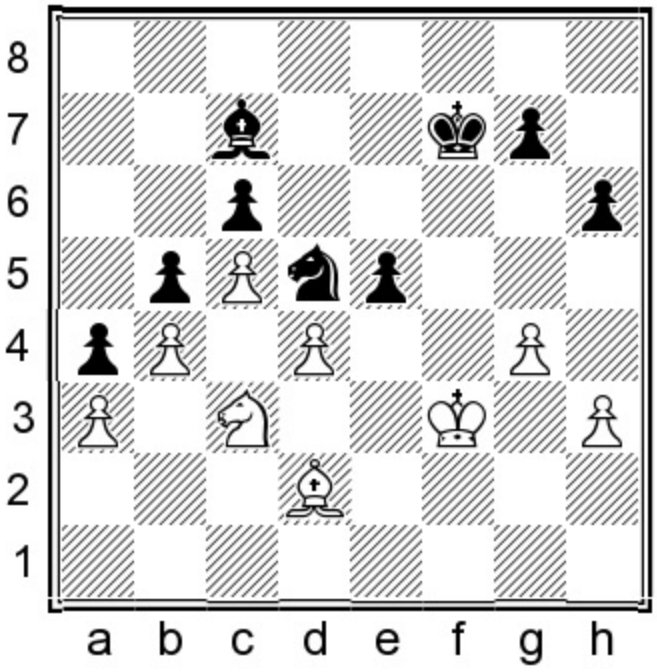
26...♔b7? 27.♘c2 a6 28.♘a3 and White holds the draw.

27.bxa6 ♔a7

The black king will race up the board and decide the game.

328. Jakub Roubalik – Petr Velicka

Czech Republic 2021



Should Black:

A) exchange knights on c3, or
B) play 40...♔e6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

40...♘xc3!

This is right, but it requires accuracy.

40...♔e6? would put the win in doubt. 41.♘e2! ♘f6 42.dxe5 ♗xe5 43.♘f4† and Black will not be

able to break through. For example: 43...♗xf4 44.♔xf4! Retaining ideas of ♔f5-g6. 44...g5† 45.♔e3 ♔d5 46.♔d3 ♘e4 47.♗e1 White has managed to create a blockade.

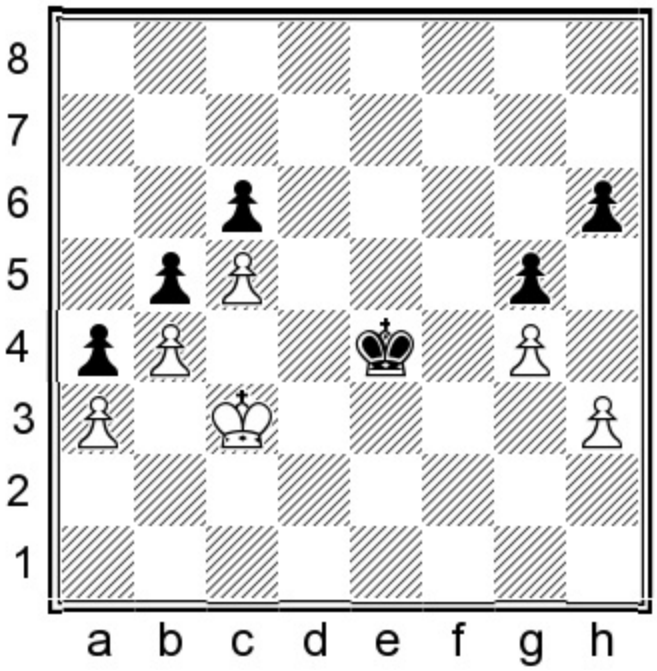
41.♗xc3

Black should now play:

41...exd4!

Black won in the game after 41...♔e6? 42.♔e4? exd4 43.♗xd4 g6, when the weaknesses on two flanks were too much to defend: 44.♗g7 h5 45.♗d4 hxg4 46.hxg4 ♗d8 47.♗e3 (47.♗b2 ♗g5 White is in zugzwang.) 47...♗f6 48.♗c1 ♗e5 Zugzwang. 49.♔e3 ♔d5 50.♔d3 ♗d4 More Zugzwang. 51.♗d2 ♗b2 52.♔c2 ♗xa3 53.♔c3 ♔e4 54.g5 Black wins by a nice triangulation manoeuvre. 54...♔f5 55.♗e3 ♔e5 56.♗d2 ♔e4 0–1

But White could have held by going into the pawn ending. 42.dxe5! ♗xe5 43.♗xe5 ♔xe5 44.♔e3 g5 45.♔d3 ♔d5 (45...♔f4? would even lose. White arrives first after 46.♔d4 ♔g3 47.♔e5 and so on.) 46.♔c3! ♔e4

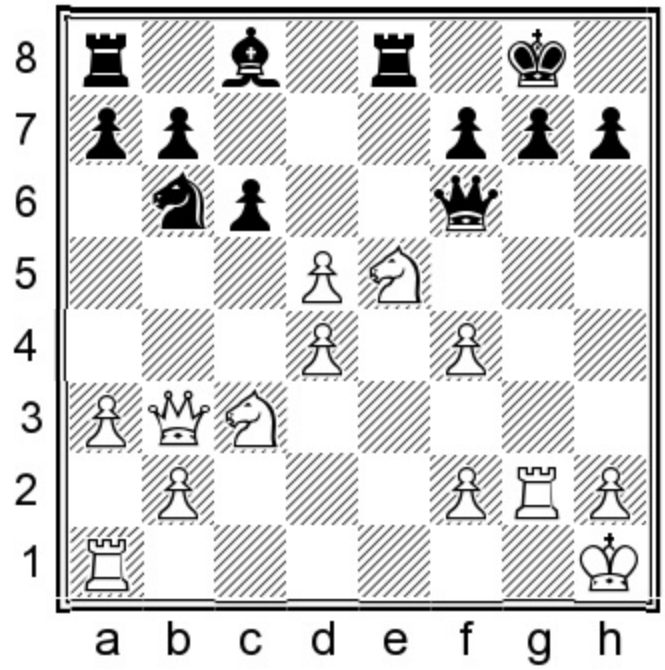


47.♔c2!! Diagonal opposition. 47...♔f3? Trying to win, but taking big risks. 48.♔d3 ♔g3 49.♔e4 ♔xh3 50.♔e5 ♔xg4 51.♔d6 ♔f4 52.♔xc6 g4 53.♔xb5 g3 54.c6 g2 55.c7 g1=♕ 56.c8=♕ Black has to play with great accuracy to prove the draw, starting with: 56...♕e3! 57.♕c7† ♔g4 58.♔xa4 h5 White cannot advance both pawns as quickly as Black can advance one pawn, so we are likely to see an ending which is theoretically drawn but still challenging for Black.

42.♗xd4 g6!

With a path similar to the game.

Warsaw (rapid) 2021



Should Black recapture on d5 with:

A) the knight, or
B) the pawn?

Show/Hide Solution

(Better pieces)

After 19...cxd5? 20.♖ag1 (Even better is 20.♘b5! ♖e7 21.♕g3, with counterplay. It is important that Black does not have a tempo associated with ...♗f5-e4.) 20...g6 Black was a bit better, but White won a long game nonetheless.

19...♘xd5!∓

The knight on b6 does not have great prospects, so getting rid of it is fantastic.

20.♘xd5 cxd5

Black has a better position.

21.♕xd5

Bizarrely, this is probably White's best option.

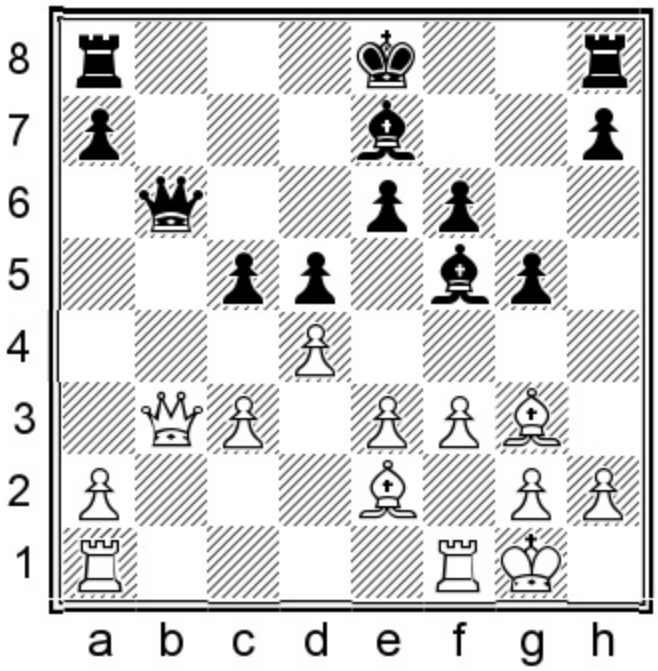
21...♗h3 22.♖g3 ♗e6 23.♕e4 ♖ad8⩱

With a powerful advantage for Black. The computer dislikes White's position, but not as much as

a person would.

330. Laurent Fressinet – David Navara

Germany 2019



Should White:

A) exchange queens, or
B) give a check on a4?

Show/Hide Solution

(King safety)

17.♕a4†!

Fressinet missed the chance to exploit the exposed black king with 17.♕xb6?, when after 17...axb6 18.a4 ♔f7 19.♗b5 ♖a7 Black was fine. The game ended in a draw on move 55.

17...♔f7

If White now played a move like 18.♗a6, he would have some practical chances. But it was a serious mistake to exchange queens, as it is possible to exploit his lead in development to create threats against the exposed black king.

18.e4!!

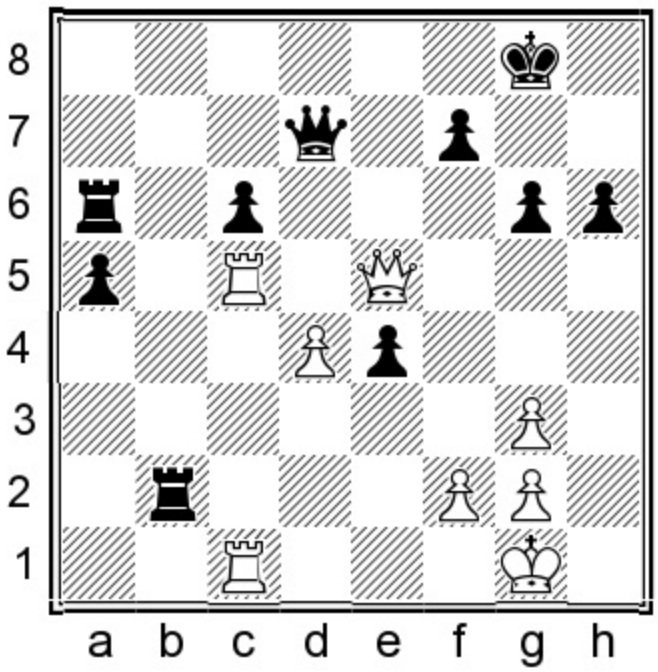
The key move. It does not matter if Black takes the pawn or not. White's next moves will be the same.

18...dxe4 19.♖ab1 ♕d8 20.♖b7

White has an overwhelming attack. Black has many moves, but no solutions.

331. Francesco Sonis – Fabrizio Bellia

Chianciano Terme 2021



Should Black:

A) exchange queens at the cost of a pawn with 38...♕e6, or
B) seek a rook exchange with 38...♖b5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

The right thing was indeed to exchange queens at a high cost.

Bellia chose the wrong option:

38...♖b5? 39.d5?!

In time pressure, White missed the chance to play 39.♖xb5 cxb5 40.♕b8†! ♔g7 41.♕e5† when Black has to play 41...♖f6 to keep the game going. After 42.d5, freeing a square on d4 for the queen, White has reasonable drawing chances.

39...♖xc5?!

39...♖a8!! was possible. White has to play 40.d6 (the trick is 40.dxc6 ♕xc6!), when after 40...♖d8 41.♕xe4 ♖xc5 42.♖xc5 ♕xd6 43.♖xa5∓ White has some drawing chances.

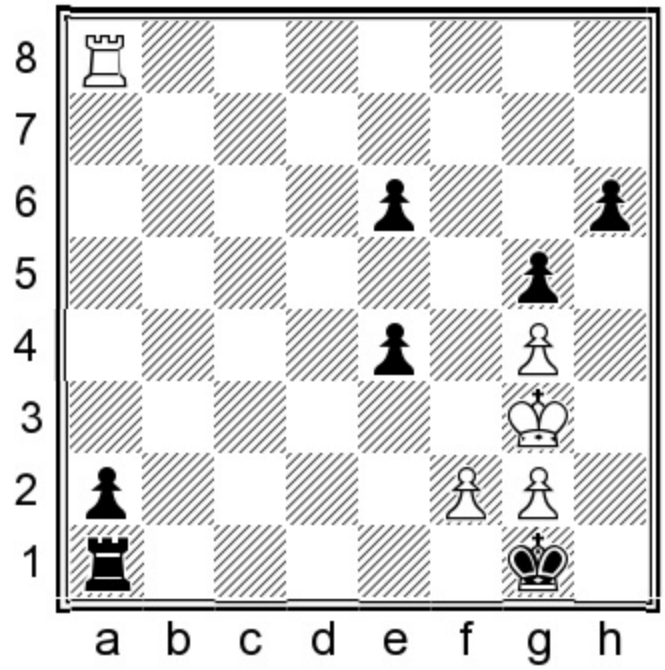
40.♖xc5 cxd5 41.♖xd5 ♕c8 42.♖xa5∓

The game was drawn in 68 moves.

38...♖d2 is a third option, which is good for Black, but not nearly as good as the solution after: 39.♖b1 (Not: 39.♖xa5 ♖xa5 40.♕xa5 ♕xd4–+) 39...♖a8 40.♖xa5 ♖d8 41.♕xe4∓

38...♕e6!! 39.♕xe6 fxe6 40.♖xc6 ♖xc6 41.♖xc6 ♔f7

This is a winning rook ending for Black, which makes it worth giving up the pawn and doubling the pawns to exchange queens. Black can put the rook on a1, the pawn on a2 and he will eventually get the king up to attack d4. With the black king on c4, White cannot check on a4, as ...♔b3 would defend the a2-pawn with the gain of tempo. After this, the king goes to g1, and we arrive at this position:



And this wins for Black tactically.

42.♖a6

Or: 42.♖c7† ♔f6 43.♖c6 ♔e7 44.g4 a4 45.♖a6 ♖a2 46.♔h2 a3 47.♔g3 g5–+

42...♖b1† 43.♔h2 ♖a1 44.♖a8 a4 45.♖a6 a3 46.♖a8 a2 47.♖a6 ♔e7 48.♖a7† ♔d6 49.g4 ♔d5 50.♖a4 g5 51.♔g3 ♔c6 52.♖a8 ♔b5 53.♖a7 ♔c4 54.♔h2 ♔xd4 55.♔g3 ♔d3 56.♔h2 ♔e2 57.♔g3 ♔f1 58.♖a3 ♔g1 59.♖a8

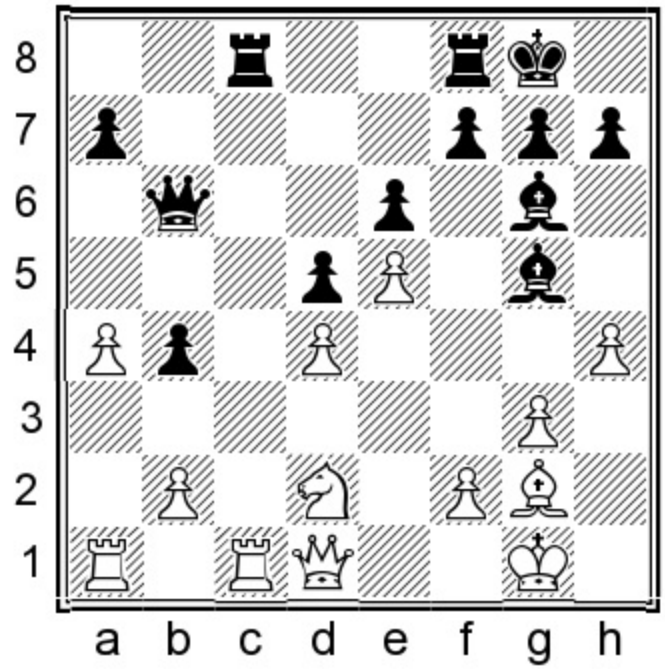
That's our position above.

59...e3! 60.fxe3 ♖e1 61.♖xa2 ♖xe3#

Obviously no one would see this mate in advance, but they could have a good feeling for where the best chances are, as tested by this exercise.

332. Andrei Maksimenko – Wojciech Moranda

Poland 2019



Should Black:

A) accept the provocation and play 21...♗xd2, or
B) play something else?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)

In the game, the strong Polish GM played 21...♗e7?, when after 22.♘b3 he was a bit worse, although he later held the game.

An interesting alternative was 21...♗h5!? 22.♕e1 ♗h6 when White plays 23.♖xc8 ♖xc8 24.♖c1∓, which is not too bad for him.

21...♗xd2!

This is strong.

22.♕xd2 b3!

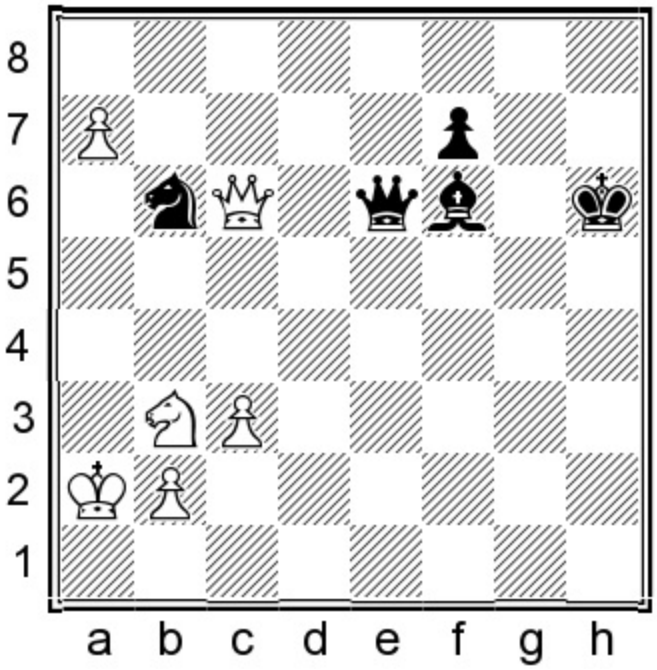
The point. With the big weakness on c2 and the white bishop out of the game on g2, Black will take control. The following spacebar-monkey variation shows how things could go.

23.a5 ♕b7 24.♗f1 ♖c2 25.♖xc2 bxc2 26.b4 ♖c8 27.♗e2 ♕c6∓ 28.♖c1 h5 29.b5 ♕c3 30.♕xc3 ♖xc3 31.♔f1 ♖a3 32.a6 f6 33.exf6 gxf6 34.♔e1 e5 35.♔d2 ♔g7

Black is winning, but more play remains.

333. Peter Svidler – Vasyl Ivanchuk

Internet (rapid) 2020



Should White:

A) exchange queens, or
B) promote the pawn?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

Surprisingly, White had no advantage in the game after: 51.a8=♕? ♘xa8 52.♕xa8 ♗e7 The black f-pawn is by far the best passed pawn on the board. After 53.♕h1† ♔g7 54.♕g2† ♔f8 55.♕a8† ♔g7 56.♕b7, a draw was agreed. ½–½

51.♕xb6? ♕xb6 52.a8=♕ ♕e6 is similar.

51.♕b7? also does not work. 51...♘a8!? is a funny move. After 52.♕xa8 ♕a6† Black has a perpetual.

51.♕xe6!

The best move, which can be found by either the method of elimination, or working out some long forcing lines.

51...fxe6 52.c4 ♔g5

White also wins after 52...♗e7 53.c5 ♘a8 54.♔a3! e5 55.♔b4 e4 56.♔c4 ♔g5 57.♘d4 ♔f4 58.b4 and the pawns are running up that hill...

53.c5 ♘a8 54.♘d2

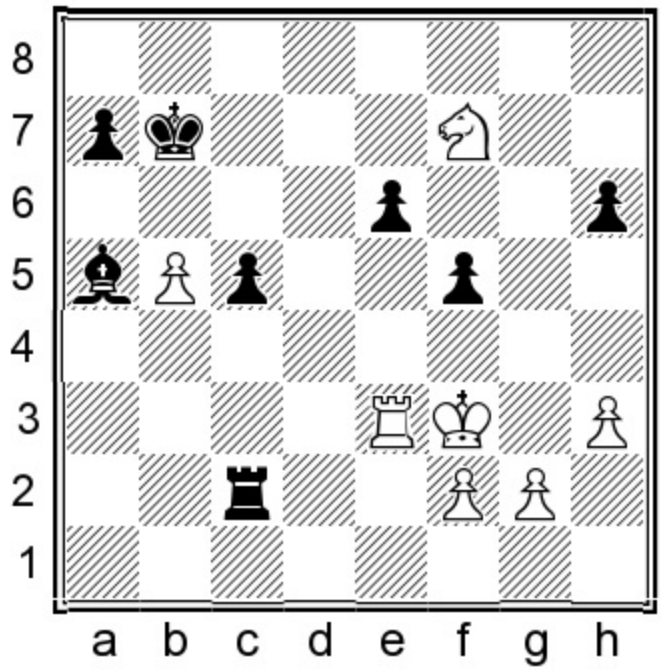
The knight belongs on c4.

54...♔f4 55.♘c4 ♗d8 56.b4 ♔e4 57.b5 ♔d5 58.b6 ♔c6 59.♘a5†

And White wins.

334. Wilson Lorenzana – Shiyam Thavandiran

El Salvador 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange rooks with 28...♖c3, or
B) play 28...♔b6 and capture the pawn on b5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Prevention of counterplay)
28...♔b6? was played in the game. After: 29.♖xe6† ♔xb5 30.♘xh6 (Even stronger was 30.♘d6† ♔b4 31.♘c8 c4 32.♘xa7 ♔b3 33.♘b5 when White has enough counterplay to keep the balance.) 30...♖c3† 31.♔e2 ♖c1 32.♔f3 ♖c3† 33.♔e2 ♖c1 34.♔f3 ♗c3 35.♘xf5 The endgame is defensible, although

Black won on move 46 after White made a major mistake.

28...♖c3!

The knight is generally poor at going after passed pawns, and being this far from the a-pawn makes it worse. It makes sense for Black to trade rooks and go into a better minor-piece endgame with two passed pawns.

29.♘xh6

This does not work, but there are no other reasonable options.

Black is winning after 29.♘d6† ♔b6 30.♖xc3 ♗xc3 31.♘c8† ♔xb5 32.♘xa7† ♔c4. For example, 33.♔e2 ♔b3 34.♘b5 c4 and the pawn will draw blood.

Or 29.♘d8† ♔b6 30.♘xe6 ♔xb5 31.♔e2 ♖xe3† 32.♔xe3 ♔c4!. The king is fighting for the light squares in front of the passed pawn. 33.♘g7 ♔b3 34.♘xf5 ♗b4 Black will advance the a-pawn and win.

29...♔b6

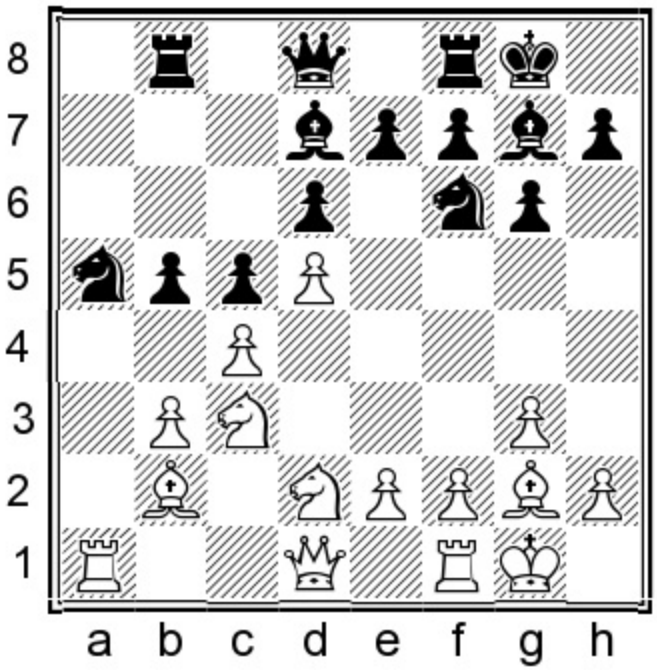
Black is the clear favourite in this race, although the computer confirms that he wins by only a tempo.

30.g4 ♔xb5 31.g5 ♖xe3† 32.fxe3 ♗c3 33.e4 a5 34.exf5 exf5 35.♘xf5 a4 36.g6 a3

The a-pawn will claim the knight.

335. Vincent Tsay – Roberto Martin Del Campo

Charlotte 2019



Should White:

A) exchange pawns with 14.cxb5, or
B) keep things organised with b) 14.♕c2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Domination)
14.♕c2?! bxc4 15.bxc4 ♕b6 would give Black a lot of counterplay. A key point is that 16.♖fb1?! ♘b3! would solve Black's problem with the knight and leave White only with things he will struggle to protect.

14.cxb5!

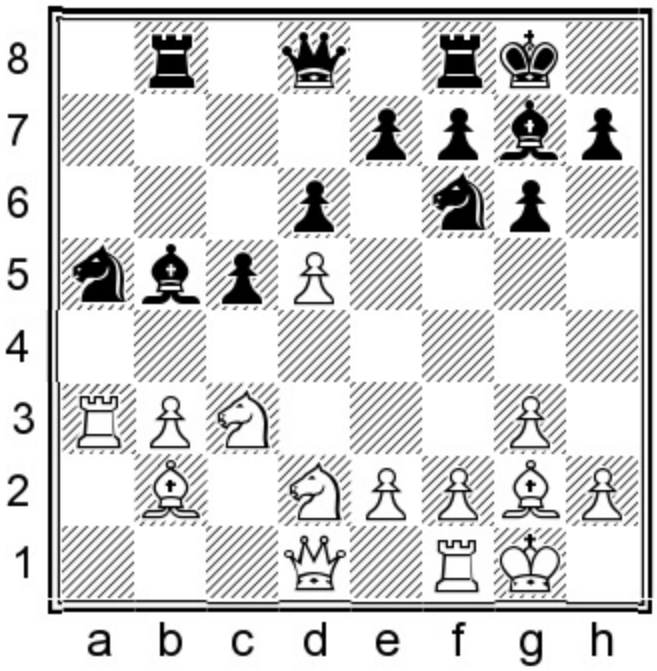
The strategic goal of this position for White is to keep the knight on a5 out of the game. At the moment it has no avenues into the game. White should keep it like that.

14...♗xb5 15.♖a3!

The most flexible move, preparing both ♕c2 and ♕a1, as well as defending the b3-pawn.

15.♕c2!?± is also good.

After 15.♘xb5?! ♖xb5 16.♗c3= Black won on move 46.



15...♕b6

This best illustrates the problems Black can get into:

15...♗d7 is better, but after 16.♕c2 ♗h6 17.♘cb1!± White is able to reorganise the pieces with e2-e4 and ♗b2-c3.

16.♕a1 ♖a8?

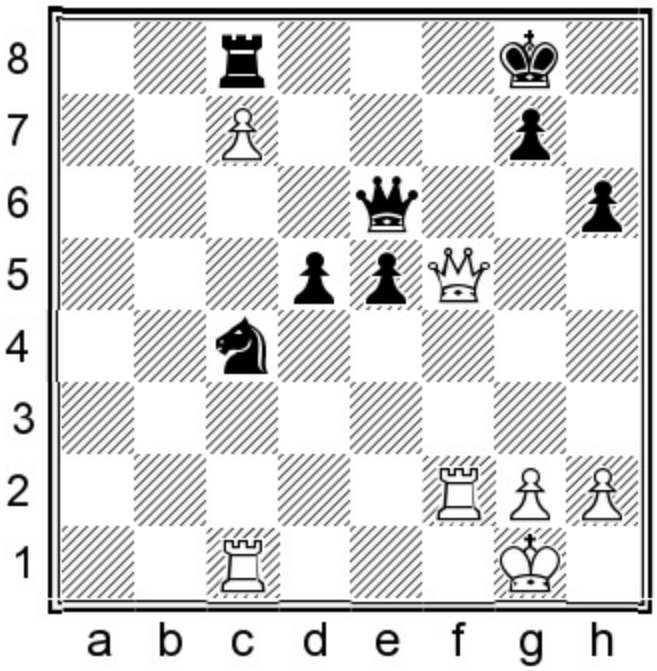
This would be a disaster, stepping into a pin.
16...♘b7 is better, but after 17.♘xb5 ♕xb5 18.♘c4 White is ready for e2-e4-e5, as well as an invasion down the a-file.

17.♘xb5 ♕xb5 18.♗c3! ♘e8 19.♗xg7 ♘xg7 20.♕a2!

White wins a piece.

336. Alexei Shirov – Diego Macias

Linares 2021



Should Black play:

A) 40...♕xf5, or
B) 40...♕e8?

Show/Hide Solution

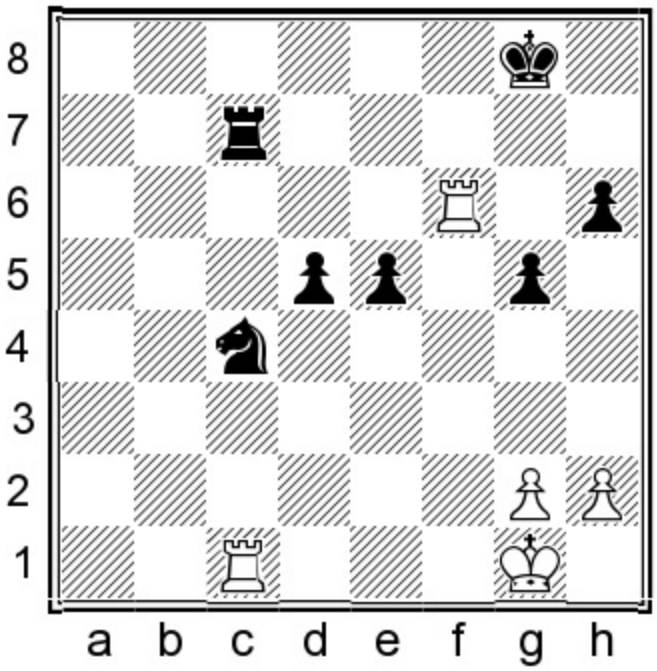
(Escaping into a drawn ending)

In the game Black played 40...♕e8?, when after 41.♖e2! he was lost. He decided to go into a bad ending after 41...♖xc7 42.♖xe5! ♕xe5 43.♕xe5 ♘xe5 44.♖xc7 But the endgame is hopeless for Black and White won without difficulty. 44...♘g4 45.♖a7 ♔h7 46.♖a6 ♘f6 47.♔f2 ♔g6 48.♖a7 ♘h5 49.♔f3 ♔h7 50.♔g4 ♔g6 51.♖a6† ♘f6† 52.♔f4 ♔h5 53.♔f5 ♘g8 54.♖a7 g6† 55.♔e5 ♔g5 56.♖g7 1–0

40...♕xf5! 41.♖xf5 g5!

Even 41...♖xc7 42.♖xe5 ♖d7± is bad but not hopeless for Black. The presence of rooks gives Black some practical chances. The black rook can harass the white king and pawns, and the knight may be able to disturb the coordination of the two rooks.

42.♖f6 ♖xc7



43.♖d6!

It is more important to exchange rooks than to win the least valuable black pawn.

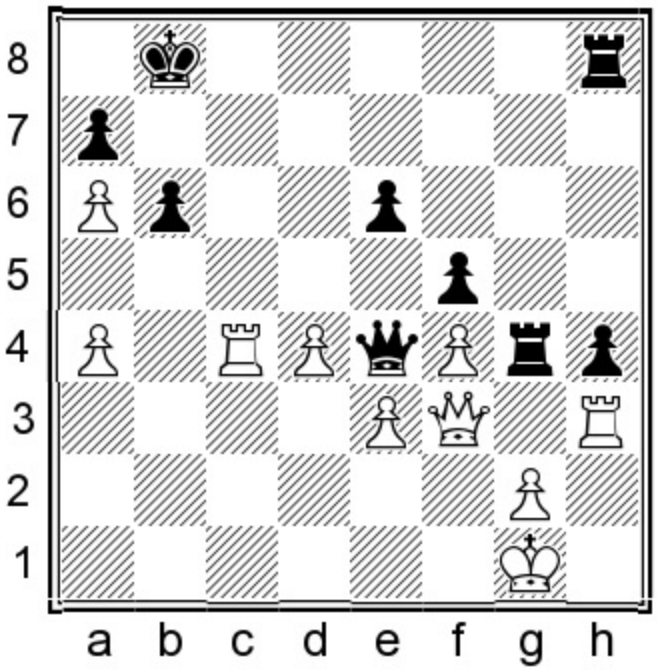
After 43.♖xh6 ♔g7 44.♖e6 e4, the two passed pawns provide Black with enough counterchances to draw with careful play.

43...♘xd6 44.♖xc7 ♘f5 45.♖d7 ♘e3 46.h3 d4±

Black should make the draw, but there will be some discomfort along the way.

337. Arjun Erigaisi – Volodar Murzin

Wijk aan Zee 2022



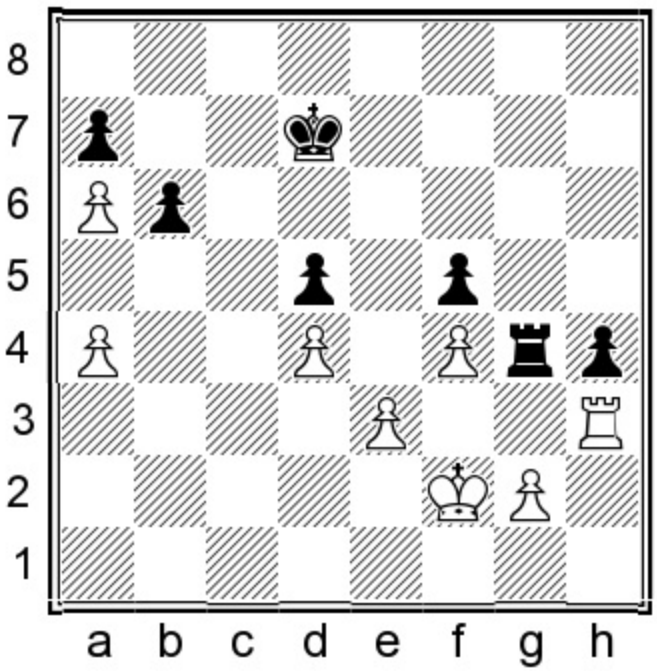
Should Black play:

A) 37...♕xf3,
B) 37...♕d5, or
C) 37...♕b1†?

Show/Hide Solution

(Gaining time)

Black played 37...♕d5? 38.♕xd5 exd5 39.♖c2, when the endgame is winning for White. Black has chronic weaknesses on d5, f5 and h4, and the king is stuck on the queenside. Black can't create any counterplay while White slowly improves his position. 39...♖c8 40.♖xc8† ♔xc8 41.♔f2 ♔d7



Now the easiest path is: 42.g3 (The game went 42.♖h1 ♔d6 43.♖h3 ♔e6 44.♖h1 ♔d6 45.a5 bxa5 46.♖a1 ♖g8 47.♖xa5, and White won on move 71.) 42...hxg3† 43.♖xg3 White wins.

After 37...♕b1†? 38.♔h2 ♖g7 39.♕c6!, the white queen penetrates, and the weak black pawns fall one by one. 39...♖hg8 40.♖c2 ♕f1 41.♖xh4 ♕xa6 42.♖h6+–

37...♕xf3!

The best among all possible choices. Black does not create any further weaknesses in his position and gains time to create counterplay.

38.♖xf3 ♖hg8

38...♖c8!? was a valid alternative.

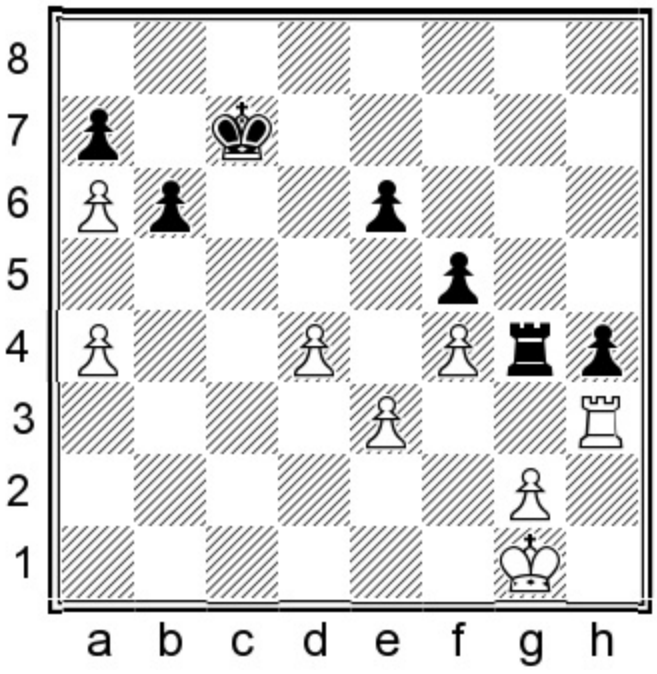
39.♖c2

39.♖f2 allows 39...h3 40.♖cc2 ♖g3 41.♖ce2 ♔c7, when the coming pawn ending is a draw.

39...♖c8

39...♖8g7 40.♖h3 ♖c7 also works.

40.♖xc8† ♔xc8 41.♖h3 ♔c7



Black is holding due to a bizarre mutual zugzwang that no one could predict. Actually, Renier missed it when first analysing this position.

42.♔f2 ♔c6!!

But not 42...♔d6? 43.♖h1!±.

43.♖h1

Or 43.♖h2 b5=.

43...♔d6!

Not 43...b5 44.♖c1† ♔b6 45.♖b1 ♔xa6 46.♖xb5, when White will win with d4-d5 coming.

44.♖c1 ♖g8!

Black is a pawn down, but has enough counterplay for compensation.

45.♔f3 ♖g3† 46.♔f2 ♖g8 47.♖h1 ♖g4 48.a5

This is the most challenging try.

48...♔c6!

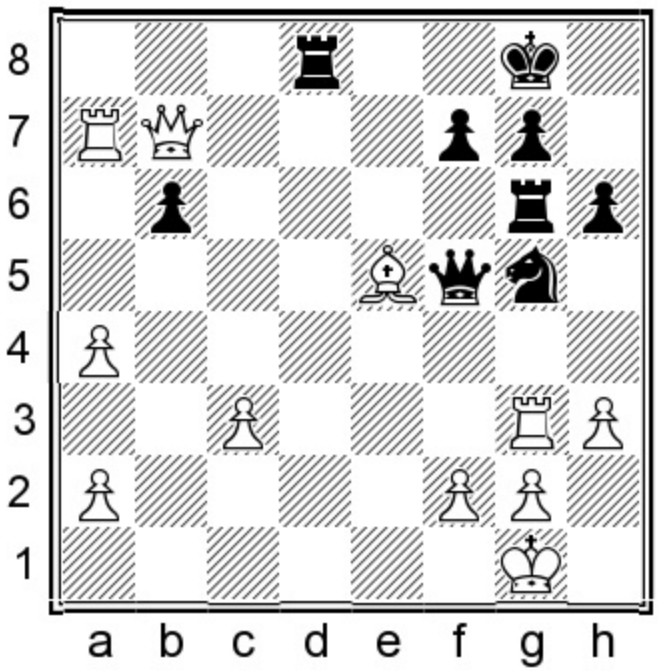
48...bxa5 49.♖a1+– would allow White to activate his rook and attack the black pawn.

49.axb6 ♔xb6

Black holds.

338. Makan Rafiee – Philipp Limbourg

Germany 2021



Should White play:

A) 33.♗d4, or
B) 33.♖a8?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

In the game, White erred by allowing Black to keep more pieces for counterplay:

33.♗d4? ♔h7!

Black missed his chance and after 33...♕f4? 34.♕e7!? ♖f8 35.♕e3+– White was winning. He converted the advantage by move 70.

34.♖a8

34.♕e7 ♖xd4 35.cxd4 ♖e6 36.♕b4 ♖e2 37.♔h2 ♕xf2 38.♕b1† f5 39.h4! ♖e1 40.♕xe1 ♕xe1 41.hxg5 hxg5 42.a5! bxa5 43.♖h3† ♔g6 44.♖a6† White is OK, as after 44...♔f7 45.♖a7† ♔e6 he can take the g7-pawn.

34...♖xd4!

The point! The rook on a8 does not make a difference in the short term.

35.cxd4 ♘e4

35...♖e6!? also works.

36.♖xg6 ♕xf2† 37.♔h2 ♕f4†!

With perpetual check.

33.♖a8!

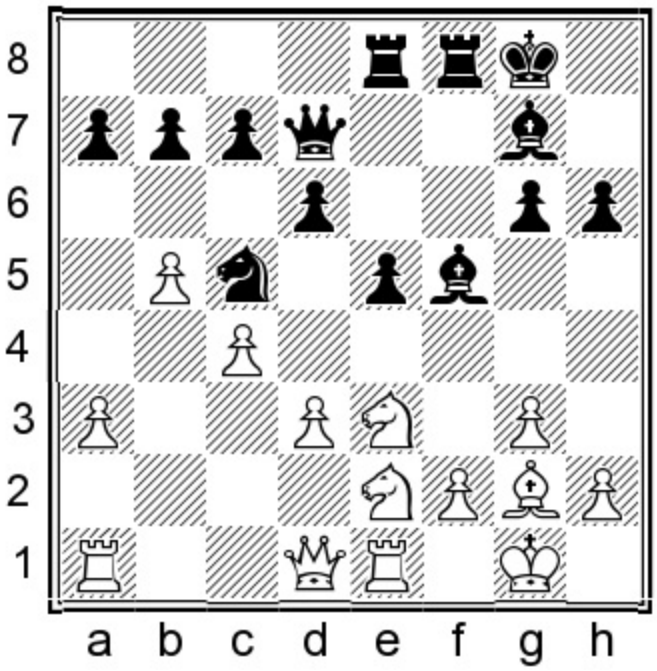
The rook is not doing much on a7. In this way, White manages to remove Black's chances for creating counterplay.

33...♖xa8 34.♕xa8† ♔h7 35.♗d4 ♖e6 36.♕f8 f6 37.♗e3+–

White would be two pawns up with no counterplay for Black.

339. Hovhannes Gabuzyan – Krystian Kuzmicz

Warsaw (rapid) 2021



Should White:

A) take on f5, or
B) play 18.♘c1?

Show/Hide Solution

(Colour scheme)

White made the ugly move 18.♘c1?, and after: 18...♗h3?! (18...e4! 19.d4 [19.♘xf5 is preferable, but White will be passive and an exchange down] 19...♗h3 is also very strong.) 19.♘b3?! (19.♗d5†! ∓) 19...♗xg2 20.♔xg2 The game was eventually drawn on move 47. Had Black played 20...♘e6!∓, he would have been able to initiate a strong attack.

18.♖f1? ♗h3!∓ would leave White with poor pieces and weak squares around his king.

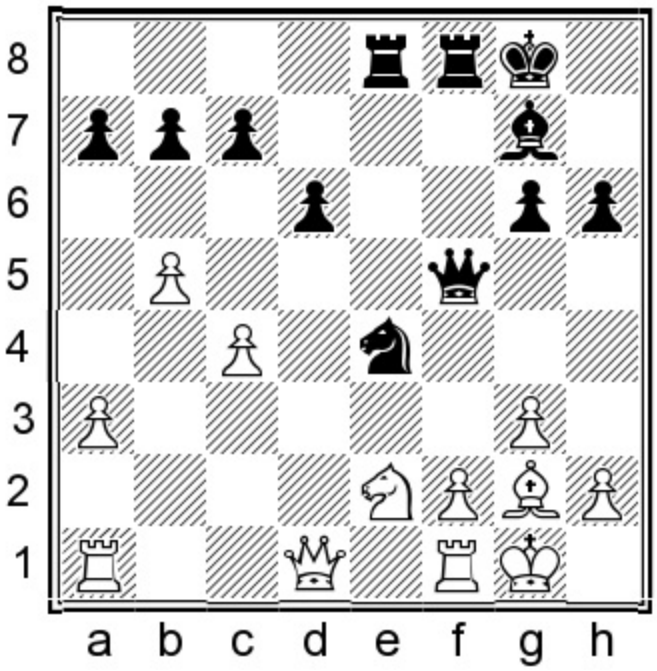
18.♘xf5!

It is essential for White to remove this bishop, before it is exchanged for White's only good piece, his bishop.

18...♕xf5 19.♖f1

White's position is OK. The bishop is strong on g2 and ensures counterplay. If Black takes on d3, White can take the b7-pawn. The critical move is:

19...e4 20.dxe4 ♘xe4



21.♖a2 ♕c5 22.♕d5†

A funny drawing line goes like this: 22.♘f4!? ♘c3 23.♕d3 ♖xf4 24.gxf4 ♘xa2 25.♕xg6 ♖e7 26.♗d5† ♔h8 27.♕f5 White makes a draw. 27...♖e8 28.♕g6 ♖e7! With a repetition. (28...♖f8? would be risky. After 29.♗e4 ♔g8 30.♕h7† ♔f7 31.♗d5† White would win.)

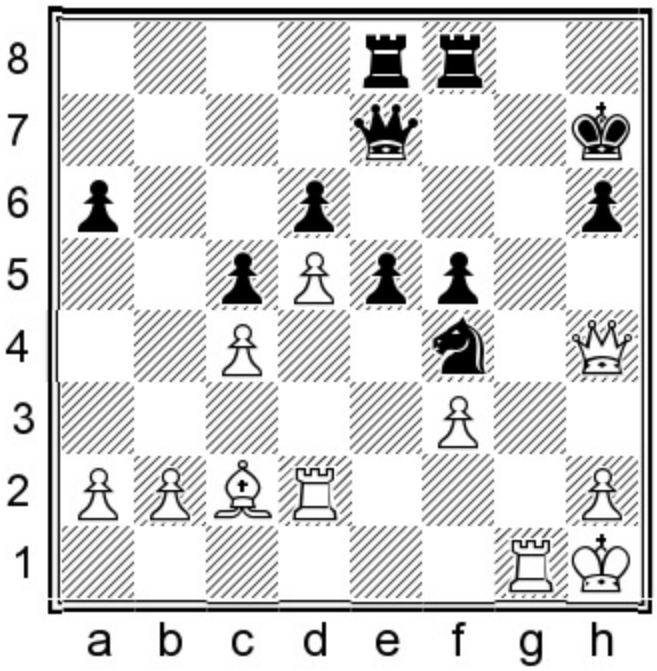
22...♕xd5 23.cxd5

White is not worse. Black could even get into trouble after something like:

23...♘c5 24.♘f4 g5 25.♘e6±

340. Aaron Alonso Garcia – Rodrigo Vasquez Schroeder

Barbera del Valles 2021



Should White:

A) exchange queens with 32.♕xe7†, or
B) avoid the exchange with 32.♕g4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Tactics)

After 32.♕g4? ♔h8 33.♕g3 ♖g8, Black had a winning attack and soon won.

32.♕xe7†!

This exchange may seem surprising, but White has no choice. The white king is in permanent danger, due to the strong and unchallenged knight on f4. A queen retreat allows Black to use his queen to create strong threats. And White must gain time and rely on tactics to create counterplay.

32...♖xe7 33.b4!!

The point. White strikes on the queenside and sacrifices material to create a passed pawn. King safety is no longer relevant and despite the extra material, Black is on the defensive.

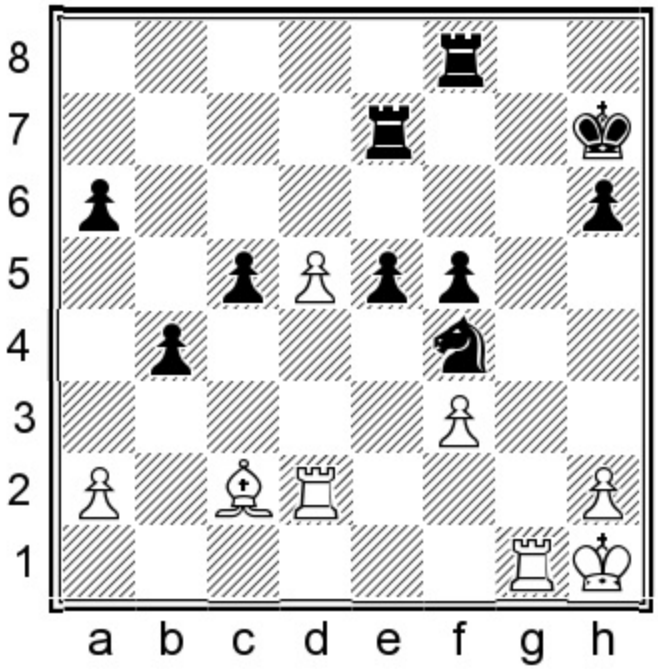
33...cxb4

If Black declines the pawn sacrifice with 33...♖c7, White still generates counterplay with 34.b5!.

34.c5 dxc5

34...♖d7 is met with: 35.♗a4 ♖dd8 36.cxd6 ♖xd6 37.♖c2! Threatening an invasion on the 7th rank. 37...♖f7 (37...♘xd5? 38.♖d2± would place Black in a horrible pin, which will cost a piece.) 38.♖c6! Removing the blockade of the passed pawn. 38...♖xc6 39.dxc6 ♖c7 Black is a pawn up, but

the rook is passive, and the c6-pawn is far advanced. White is not worse.



35.d6

Two pawns down, White still has strong play.

35...♖d7

35...♖ef7 looks a bit strange and allows White to equalise with energetic play. 36.♖e1 (36.h4!? also works.) 36...♘g6 37.♗b3 ♖g7 (or 37...♖d7 38.♗a4⇄.) 38.d7 ♖d8 39.♗e6 White should make the draw.

36.♖e1 ♘g6 37.♗a4

White has managed to change the character of the position and is now creating the threats.

37...♖g7

After 37...♖dd8 38.♖c1 e4 39.♖xc5 White gets a pawn back, maintaining the initiative. The e-pawn would be stranded after 39...e3 40.♖d4 e2 41.♖c1.

38.d7 ♖d8 39.♖c1

White has a lot of counterplay. For example:

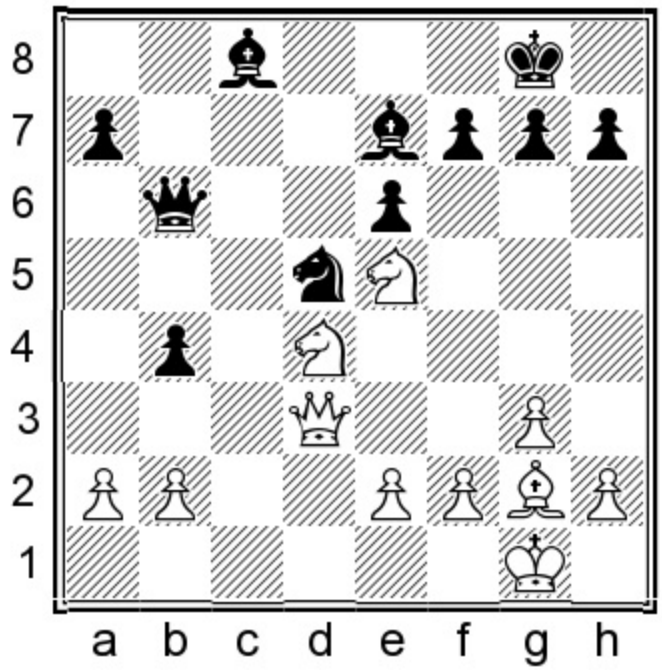
39...♘h4 40.♖d3 ♖g2 41.♖xc5 ♖xa2 42.♗d1

With an extremely unclear position.

Show in Text Mode

341. Bogdan-Daniel Deac – Mustafa Yilmaz

Sharjah 2022



Should White:

A) give up his bishop for the knight with 22.♗xd5, or
B) play 22.♕c2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)

White lost all his advantage with 22.♗xd5? exd5 23.♕f3 ♗e6± 24.♘xe6?!, after which his draw offer was accepted. ½–½

22.♕c2!

Very strong. Black is struggling with a weak f7-pawn and e8-square (which can be used to get to the f7-pawn).

22...♗b7

The best of a bunch of bad options:

22...♕xd4 loses a piece to 23.♕xc8† ♗f8 24.♘d7.

22...♕c7 leads to a lost endgame after 23.♗xd5 ♕xc2 24.♘xc2 exd5 25.♘c6.

22...♕c5 makes it the right time to exchange on d5. 23.♗xd5! exd5 24.♘ec6± forces the exchange of the good bishop after say, 24...♗f8, on account of: 25.♕xc5 ♗xc5 26.♘b3! and White wins a pawn.

22...♘c7 is probably the second best option. 23.♘dc6 ♗f8 24.h4 does not lead to a direct collapse, but objectively the black position should be lost.

23.♕a4! ♘f6 24.♗xb7 ♕xb7

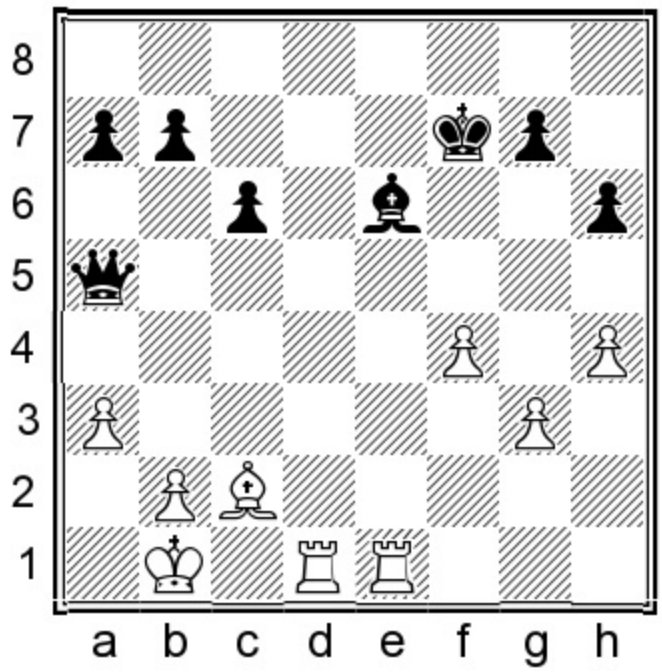
White has serious winning chances.

25.♕b5!?±

Or 25.♘dc6 ♗d6 26.♕a5! ♕b6 27.♕xb6 axb6 28.♔f1±.

342. Le Quang Liem – David Navara

Prague 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange bishops with 32...♗f5, or
B) play 32...♕c5?

Show/Hide Solution

(King safety)

Navara decided against exchanging the bishops with 32...♕c5?, and immediately found his king under attack. The white bishop is good at defending his king, while the control of the h7- and g6-squares is detrimental to Black's king safety. 33.♖e5 ♕f2 (Seeking the attractive exchange of bishops does not work either: 33...♗a2† 34.♔c1! ♗d5 35.h5 and the black king is in a mating net.) 34.♖de1 ♗g4 35.♖1e3 ♕f1† 36.♔a2 ♔f6 37.f5 ♗f3 38.♖e6† ♔f7 39.♖e7† ♔f8 40.♖e8† ♔f7 41.♖3e7† ♔f6 42.♖e1 ♕c4† 43.♗b3 ♕c5 44.♖8e6† ♔xf5 45.♖f1 ♔g4 46.♖g6† ♔h5 47.♖xg7 ♗d5 48.♖f5# 1–0

Therefore, correct was:

32...♗f5!

Now normal play gives Black counterplay and an easy draw:

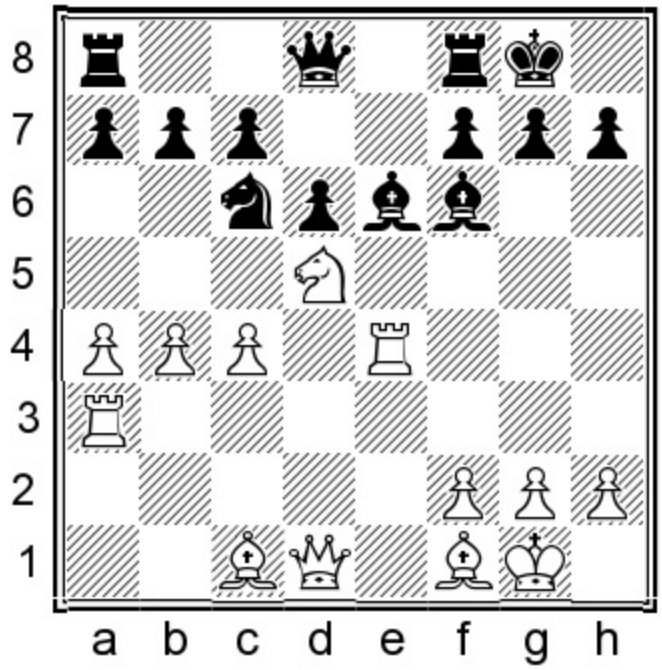
33.♖e5

White should fight for the advantage with 33.g4!. Black could take the gift, which is objectively OK but practically risky. Safer is 33...♗xc2† 34.♔xc2 h5!±, when Black will have some practical problems, but should make the draw with active play. 35.gxh5 ♕f5†! 36.♔b3 b5 With counterplay against the white king.

33...♗xc2† 34.♔xc2 ♕a4† 35.♔c1 ♕b3=

343. Noe Tutisani – Peter Michalik

Terme Catez 2022



Should White:

A) take the bishop with 19.♘xf6†, or
B) bring in the rook with 19.♖g3?

Show/Hide Solution

(Colour schemes)

After 19.♖g3? ♗xd5 20.cxd5 ♘e5 Black was fine and had full control over the dark squares. He later won the game on move 42.

19.b5?! is also weaker. 19...♗xd5! Black eliminates the knight at the first given opportunity, returning the pawn in the process. 20.♕xd5 ♘b4 21.♕xb7 (21.♕h5!? is a bit more ambitious, but also runs some risk.) 21...♕d7 Black is hardly worse.

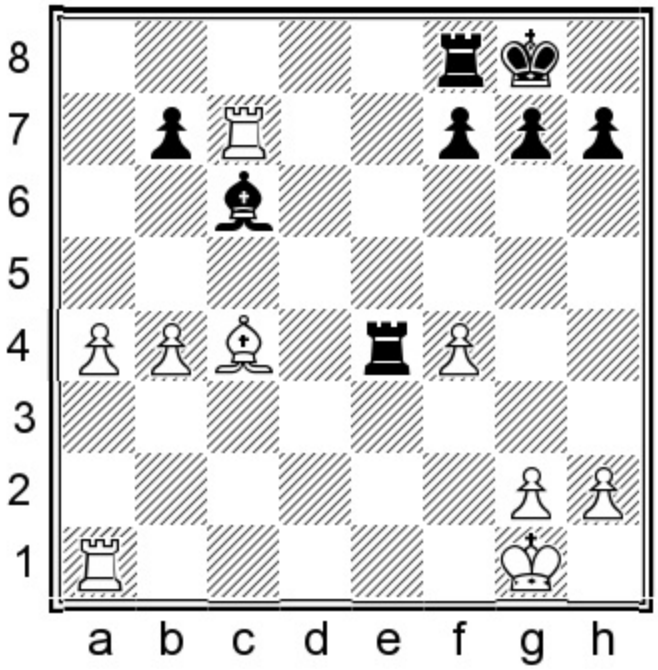
Correct was:

19.♘xf6†! ♕xf6 20.♖g3

White has a winning attack. There are many ideas: ♕d2 and ♗b2; ♖f4; and ♗g5, with ♖h4 and ♗d3 coming.

344. Ilia Smirin – Sebastian Bogner

Chennai Olympiad 2022



Should White play:

A) 29.b5, exchanging the bishops, or
B) 29.♖c1, exchanging pawns?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

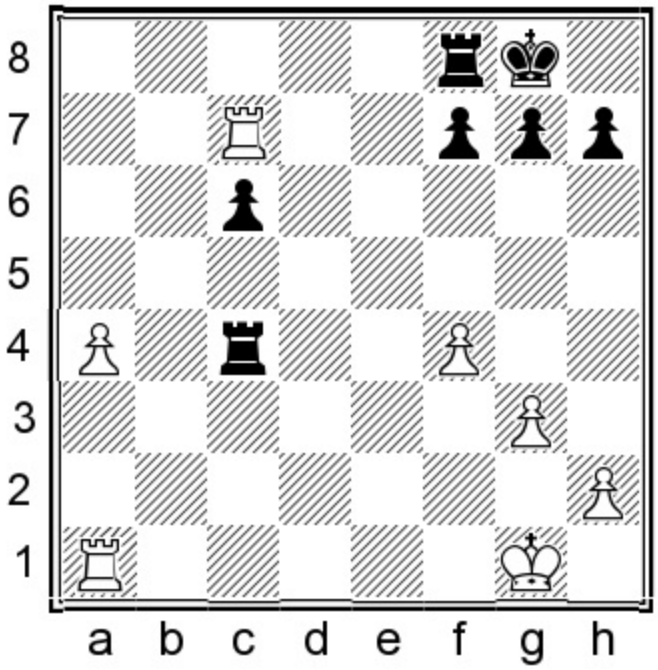
The game continuation looked great for Smirin, but only because Black missed a sensational defence:

29.b5? ♖xc4 30.bxc6 bxc6?

Bogner missed the brilliant defence 30...b6!!, when White does not have a passed a-pawn and needs time to reorganise his pieces. Black will seek to create counterplay against the slightly exposed white king, while the queenside burns. 31.♖b1 h5! 32.♖xb6 ♖e8 The two active rooks secure the draw for Black.

31.g3

31.a5!, not caring about the f4-pawn, would have been simpler. After 31...♖xf4 32.a6 ♖d4 33.a7 ♖dd8 Black is entirely tied down. White can regain the pawn with 34.♖xc6, before bringing in the king. The key point is that the exchange of a pair of rooks would favour White. Black will always have to have one passive rook.



31...♖a8

31...g5!? could have been tried. The idea is 32.fxg5? (But 32.a5! gxf4 33.a6 ♖a8 34.a7 is still winning. The threat is ♖b1, and after 34...♖b4 35.g4! ♔g7 36.♔f2 Black remains tied down.) 32...♖c2! secures the draw through counterplay on the second rank.

32.a5 g6 33.a6 c5 34.a7 ♔g7 35.♖e1 ♖a4 36.♖ee7 ♖f8 37.♖xc5?

Bringing the king in with 37.♔f2! wins.

37...♖d8!

Black has gained counterplay and got a shaky draw on move 52.

29.♖c1!

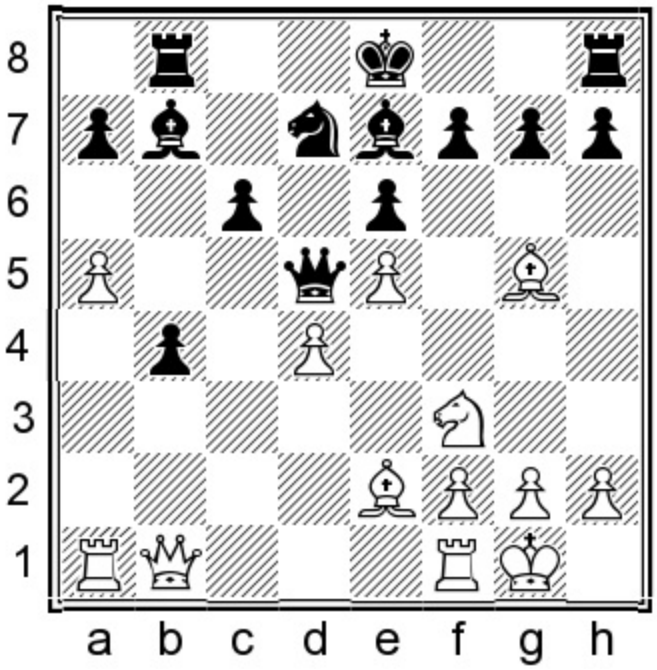
This would have won after:

29...♗xa4 30.♖xb7 ♖xf4 31.b5

White is clearly winning. He will quickly put the pawn on b7; Black will soon have to give up his bishop to avoid it promoting. The b-pawn is better than the a-pawn, and the bishop on c4 makes it easier to attack the second weakness on f7.

345. Polina Shuvalova – Erwin L'Ami

Wijk aan Zee 2022



Should Black play:

A) 15...♗xg5, or
B) 15...c5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

After a bumpy opening, Black has emerged with an extra passed pawn on the queenside. However, there are practical problems to solve. The position is sharp, and the black king in the centre gives White real hopes for counterplay. It is essential to find the right way to challenge White's initiative.

15...c5!

This thematic break was the best choice. Black frees the bishop on b7, defends the pawn on b4, challenges the white centre and, on top of all that, after the recapture on e7, his rooks are connected.

The game continued:

15...♗xg5?!

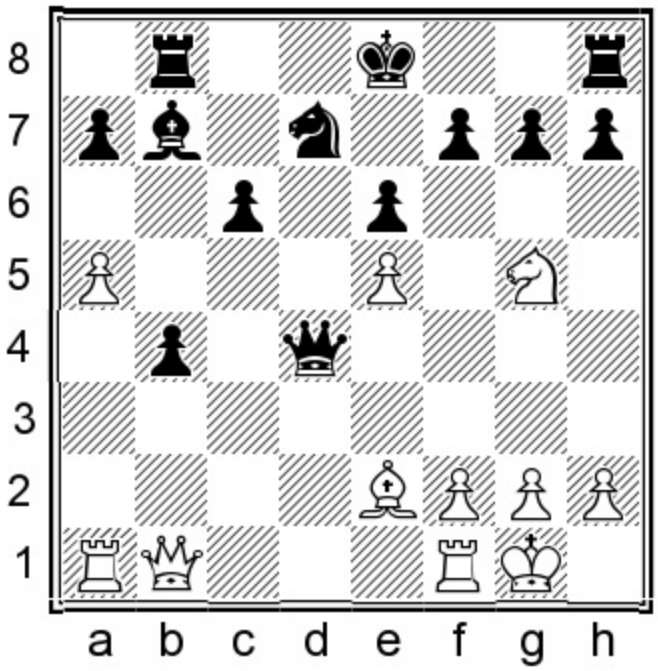
A useful observation gleaned from our work on this book: there is often the need to be careful when exchanging not to bring the opponent's pieces to better squares. In this case, the knight finds a route to d6 via e4.

16.♘xg5 ♕xd4?

The obvious intention.

16...h6?! is also risky: 17.♗f3 ♕xd4 18.♖d1 ♕xe5 19.♘xf7!± with an initiative.

16...c5! was the best choice. 17.♗f3 ♕xd4 18.♖d1 ♕f4 19.♕d3 ♕d4 20.♕b1 ♕f4=



17.♘xf7! ♔xf7?

17...0-0! 18.♘g5 ♖f5 19.♘xe6 ♕xe5 20.♗g4± was deeply unpleasant, but the game was lost...

18.♖d1 ♕xe5 19.♖xd7† ♔f6 20.♕d1

White missed the spectacular 20.♕xb4! ♕xa1† 21.♗d1, with a winning attack.

20...c5! 21.♗f3

We have arrived at Exercise 284.

16.♗xe7 ♔xe7

It is hard to come up with ideas for White.

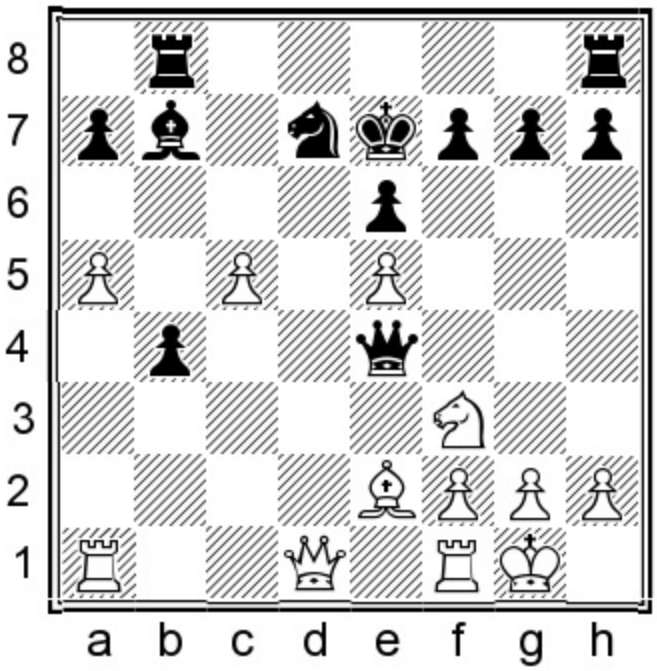
17.dxc5!? ♕e4!

Seeking to make the b4-pawn the only important strategic factor.

18.♕d1

Objectively not best, but it feels critical.

18.♕b2!?∓



18...♖hc8!

Stockfish is fearless.

A more human option would be 18...♗d5 19.c6 ♘xe5 20.c7 ♖bc8 21.♖c1, when Black would now have to find 21...♔d6!∓ to pick up the c-pawn.

19.♕d6† ♔e8 20.♗b5

Otherwise ...♕d5 forces the exchange of queens.

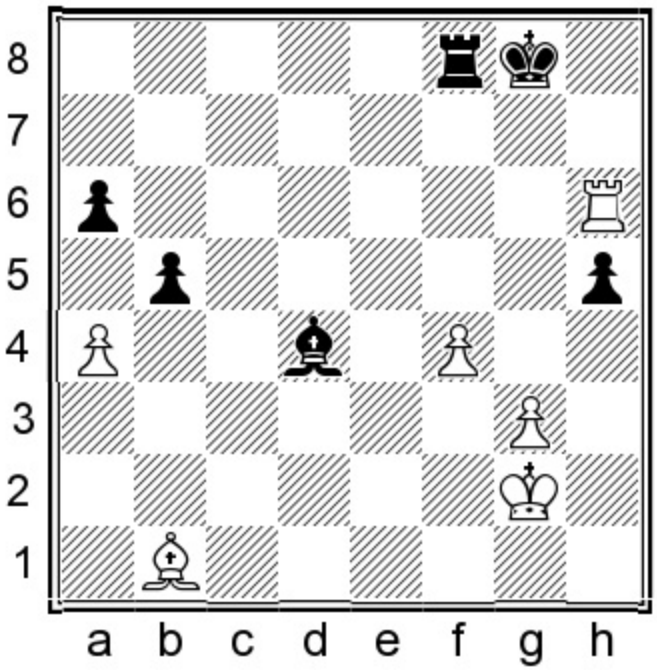
20...♗c6 21.♗a6 ♖d8

To the human eye, the position is a complete mess. But White's pieces are inactive, and he will soon run out of good ideas. For example:

22.♖ad1 ♗a8! 23.♖fe1 ♕c6∓

346. Ding Liren – Nie Xinyang

Fuling 2022



Should White:

A) exchange pawns on b5 with 41.axb5, and then play 42.♖xh5, or
B) play 41.♖xh5, keeping the pawns on the queenside?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

Ding Liren played:

41.axb5?

Missing a strong resource from his opponent.

41...♖b8!! 42.♗d3

Forced.

The point is that now White can't play: 42.♗a2† ♔g7 43.♖xh5 ♖xb5! The only way to avoid the exchange of rooks would be to accept an uncomfortable pin with 44.♗d5. With the pieces lacking freedom of movement, it is impossible for White to make any progress. 44...a5=

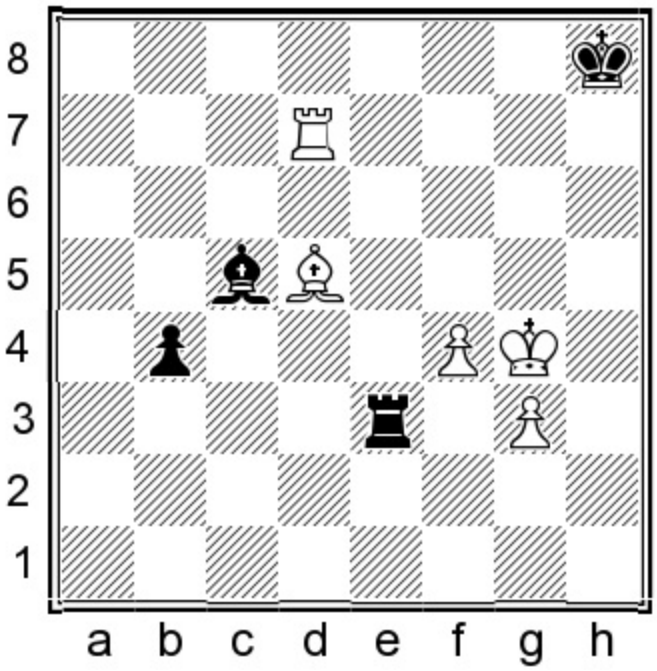
42...axb5 43.♖xh5 b4±

Black has managed to put a pawn on the 5th rank with his rook behind it, and it is not easy for White to block it permanently. The game continued:

44.♗c4† ♔f8 45.♗b3 ♖e8

Black could have used the open file to try to break the blockade with: 45...♖a8 46.♖b5 ♗c3 47.g4 ♖a3 48.♗d5 ♗e1 49.g5 ♖g3† 50.♔f1 ♗d2 The draw is near.

46.♖f5† ♔g7 47.♖f7† ♔h8 48.♖d7 ♖e2† 49.♔f3 ♖e3† 50.♔g4 ♗c5 51.♗d5



Black has got into a delicate situation with his king stuck on h8. There are some mating ideas in the air. Now the precise way to keep the balance is:

51...♖d3!

Pinning the bishop to push the b-pawn.

Instead, Black played 51...b3 52.♖b7 ♖d3 53.♗e6 ♗f2? (The only defence now was 53...♖c3!, maintaining the pressure on g3 and keeping the possibility of ...♗f8†, when the white king comes to h6. Extremely difficult stuff to find in the heat of battle. 54.♔g5 [Or: 54.♗xb3 ♗f2 55.♔g5 ♖xg3† 56.♔h6 ♖h3†=] 54...♖xg3† 55.♔h6 ♗f8†=) 54.♔g5! ♖d6 (54...♖xg3† 55.♔h6+–) 55.♖e7 1–0

52.f5 b3 53.f6 ♗b6!

The only move but sufficient. Black will play ...b3-b2 soon and make the rooks disappear.

The winning continuation was:

41.♖xh5! b4

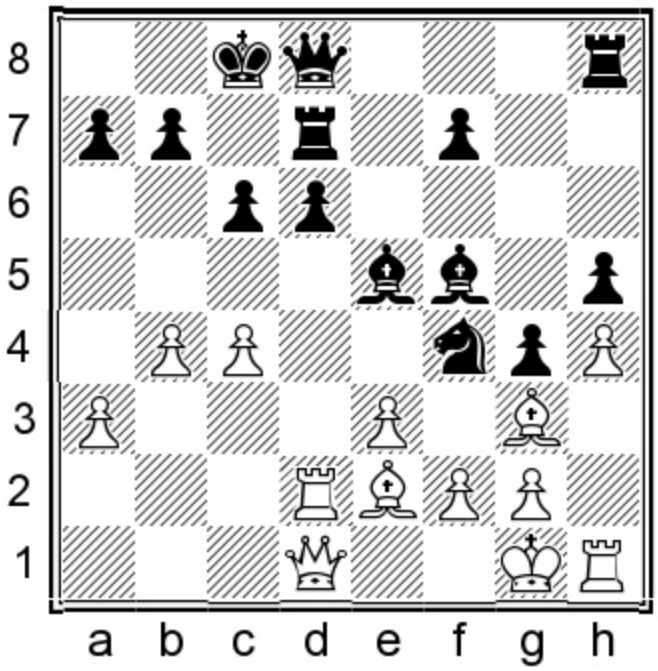
41...♖b8 allows White to fix another weakness with 42.a5 b4 43.♖d5 ♗c3 44.♖d6 b3 45.♖xa6 and White wins.

After 41...bxa4 42.♖a5 ♖b8 43.♗a2† ♔g7 44.♖xa4+– White will take on a6 as well.

42.♗a2† ♔g7 43.♖d5 ♗c3 44.♖d7† ♔g6 45.♔f3 ♖b8 46.♗b3+–

Having put an end to the hopes of the b-pawn, White will win easily on the kingside.

347. Vit Bures – Vojtech Zwardon



Should White:

A) recapture with the pawn, or
B) exchange bishops with 22.♗xf4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Keeping defender/Gaining time)

In the game, White chose to exchange the bishops:

22.♗xf4? ♗xf4 23.exf4

This looks decent from a piece comparison point of view, but is horrendous from a structural point of view. The main issue is that after the exchange the white king cannot go to h2, as the h4-pawn is undefended. This means that White has to play g2-g3, seriously weakening the light squares.

23...♖e8?!

A natural move, but not the most accurate.

Strongest is 23...d5! 24.cxd5 ♗e4!! 25.d6 ♖h6, which is not entirely clear, but White will suffer as Black has a strong initiative.

23...♕f6!? improves the queen and does not allow ♔h2 (as the h5-pawn remains defended).

24.g3

24.♗d3? ♗xd3 25.♖xd3 ♖e4 is an immediate catastrophe.

24.♔h2! was best. Taking on h4 does not work for Black, although he has a pleasant position after: 24...♕f6∓ The h1-rook cannot easily join the game without White making some sort of concession.

24...d5 25.c5 ♗e4 26.f3 gxf3 27.♗xf3 f5 28.♖hh2 ♖g7 29.♖hg2 ♖eg8 30.♔f2 ♕f6 31.♕c1 d4 32.♕c4 ♖d8 33.♖g1 ♗xf3 34.♔xf3 ♖e7 35.♔f2 ♖e4 36.♖e1 ♖xf4† 37.gxf4 ♕xh4† 38.♔f1 ♕h1† 39.♔f2

♕h2† 40.♔f3 ♕xd2 41.♕e6† ♔b8 42.♕e5† ♔a8 43.♕e7 ♖b8 44.♖e5 ♕c3† 45.♔f2 ♕b2† 46.♔g3 ♕xa3† 47.♔h4 ♕f3
0–1

Correct was:

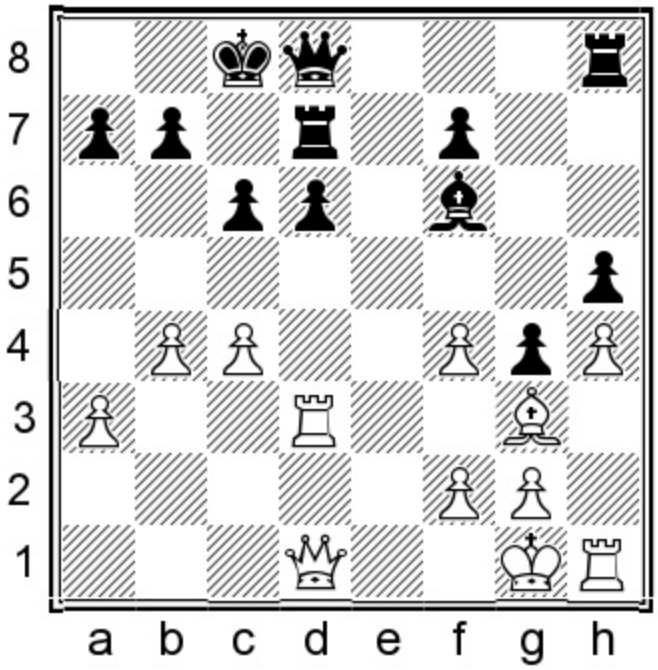
22.exf4! ♗f6

White is better after 22...♗c3 23.♗d3 ♕f6 24.♗xf5 ♕xf5 25.♖d3.

23.♗d3!

23.b5!? is also fine.

23...♗xd3 24.♖xd3



24...d5!

The soundest approach.

Things could quickly go south for Black. Imagine this variation: 24...♖e8 25.b5 ♖e4? 26.bxc6 bxc6 27.♕a4 Black will already find it impossible to defend his bits.

25.cxd5 ♖xd5 26.♖xd5 ♕xd5

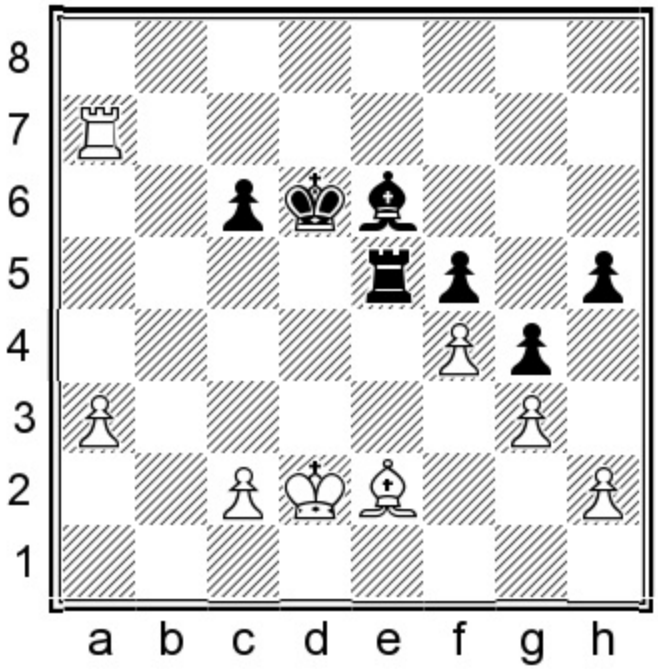
Now all White needs to do in order to be OK is to not exchange queens.

27.♕c2!?

Followed by ♔h2, with full equality.

348. Lukas Cernousek – Bence Korpa

Czech Republic 2021



Should Black:

A) take en passant (White has just played 30.f2-f4), or
B) play 30...♖d5†?

Show/Hide Solution

(Escaping with a draw)

Black played 30...♖d5†?, when after 31.♔e3 ♖c5 32.♗d3 he was a pawn down and unable to defend his weaknesses. White won on move 60.

30...gxf3!

This was necessary. Black needs to use exchanges to reach a drawn endgame.

31.♗xf3 h4!

Seeking to exchange more pawns. White has to take the pawn.

But not 31...♗d5 32.♗xh5 f4 33.♗e2 fxg3 (Or: 33...f3 34.♗d3 f2 35.♖a4+–) 34.hxg3 ♖g5 35.g4 ♗e6 36.♖a4+– when White wins.

32.gxh4 ♗d5!

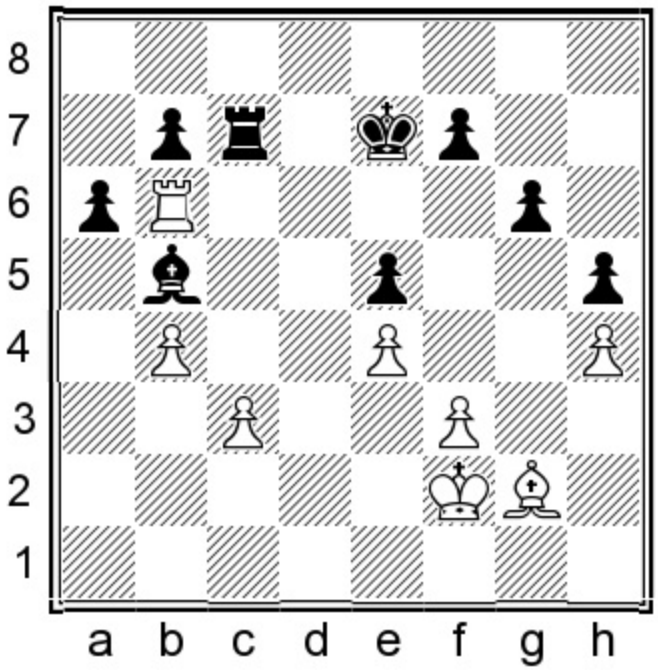
Removing the strong white bishop.

33.♗xd5 ♖xd5† 34.♔e3 ♖c5 35.♔d3 ♖d5†

White has no way to get out of the checks without losing the c-pawn, and with it all chances of winning the game.

349. Aron Pasti – Thomas Bauer

Terme Catez 2022



Should White play:

A) 41.f4, or
B) 41.♗f1?

Show/Hide Solution

(Exchanging to make a draw)

White played 41.f4? in desperation and lost quickly: 41...exf4 42.e5 ♗c6 43.♗xc6 ♖xc6 44.♖xc6 (44.♖xb7† ♔e6 also does not work. Black will soon have 3 or 4 extra pawns on the kingside.) 44...bxc6 45.♔f3 ♔e6 46.♔xf4 ♔d5 47.c4† ♔d4 White resigned.

41.♗f1!

White cannot hold with a bad bishop, when Black has such a powerful one.

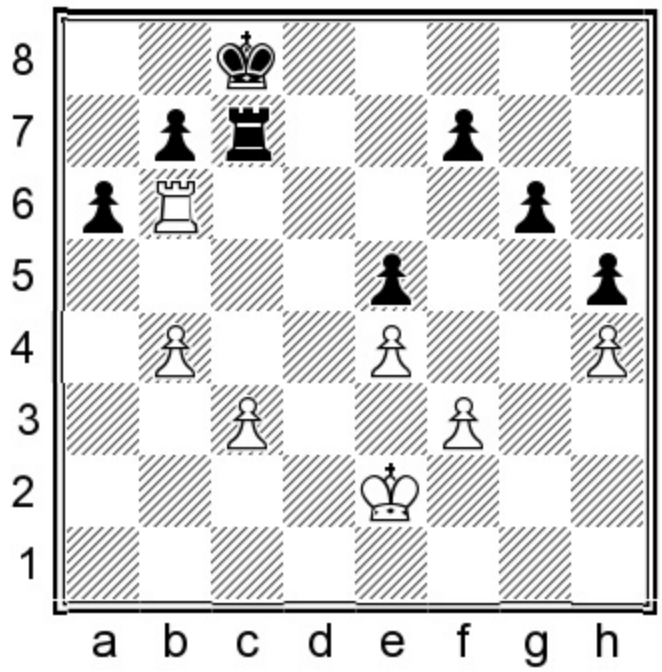
41...♗xf1

41...♗d7!? is perhaps a more practical try. But after 42.c4!∓ followed by c4-c5, White is also within the drawing zone.

42.♔xf1

Black now needs to free up the rook to play for an advantage.

42...♔d7 43.♔e2 ♔c8



But White can switch.

44.♖f6! ♖xc3 45.♖xf7 ♖c4 46.♖e7 ♖xb4 47.♖xe5 ♖b6

47...b5 is met with 48.♖c5†! ♔d7 (or 48...♔b7 49.e5! with counterplay) 49.♖g5! a5 50.♖xg6 a4 51.♖a6 and White holds by a tempo. It is important that Black cannot attack the white rook quickly with the king.

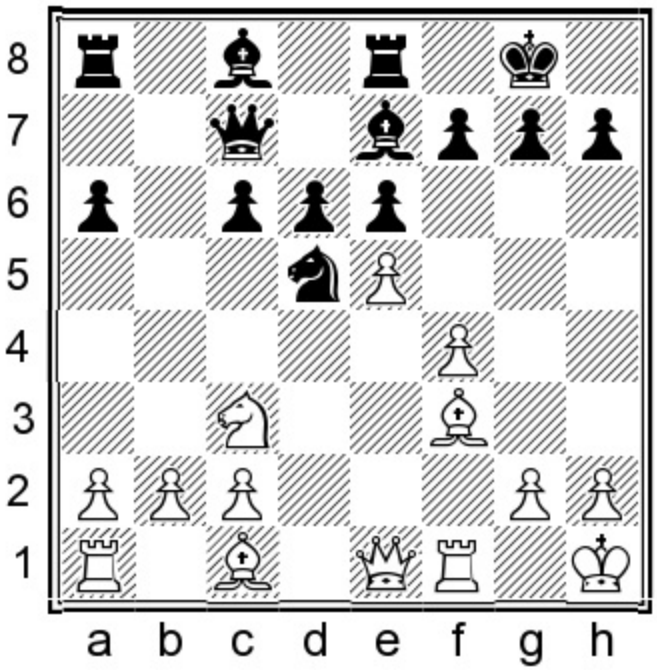
48.♖g5!

White is ready to push e4-e5 or f3-f4-f5, in both cases with counterplay. The black pawns are not that easy to advance. White will hold.

48...♖e6 49.♔d3 b5 50.f4=

350. Elina Otikova – Nicole Manusina

Germany 2022



Should White:

A) seek complications with 14.♘e4, or
B) exchange pawns with 14.exd6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Tension)

The move we would like to play is:

14.♘e4!

This threatens c2-c4 or ♕g3, building up a powerful attack on the kingside.

14.exd6 fails for concrete reasons: 14...♗xd6! (14...♕xd6?! 15.♘e4± is what White was dreaming of – and what she got. She won the game on move 32.) 15.♘xd5 cxd5 16.♗xd5 ♗b7 17.♗xb7 ♕xb7 White is a pawn up, but Black has good compensation; she has the more active pieces, and it is not easy for White to finish her development. 18.b3 e5± for example.

14.♘a4!?± was a decent alternative.

14...dxe5

The only critical move.

For example, 14...a5 15.exd6 ♗xd6 16.♘xd6 ♕xd6 17.c4± is obviously better for White. The two bishops are immensely strong and 17...♘b4 is easily neutralized with 18.♕e2, with the idea of ♖d1.

15.fxe5 ♕xe5

Black has won a pawn, but White can exploit the suspicious position of the black queen on e5.

16.c4

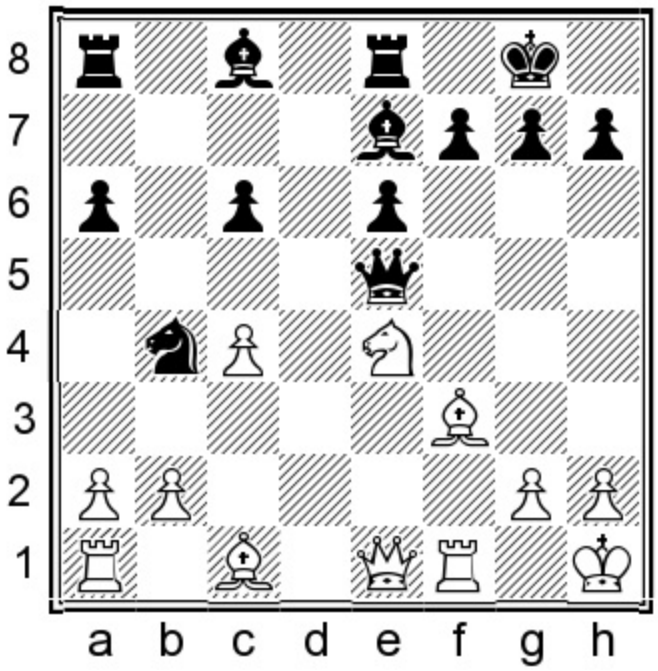
Removing the knight from the centre.

16...♘b4

Alternatively:

16...♗b4 does not improve things for Black. Strongest is: 17.♗d2 (or 17.♕f2!?) 17...♗xd2 18.♕xd2 ♘e7 19.♘d6 ♖d8 20.♖ad1, with complete dominance.

16...♘f6 blunders material to 17.♘xf6† ♗xf6 18.♕xe5 ♗xe5 19.♗xc6.



17.♗f4!!

The point. White gets her pieces out, harassing the queen and generating threats with every move. Black is lost.

17...♕xf4

Nothing else works:

17...♕a5 18.a3+–

17...♕d4 18.♖d1 ♘d3 19.♕g3 Black is in deep trouble. There is no good way to meet ♘d6 or ♗d2-c3. Or 17...♕xb2 18.♖b1 and White has at least ♖xb4, with a winning position.

18.♗h5! ♘d3

18...♕xf1† 19.♕xf1 g6 20.♗f3 is also insufficient.

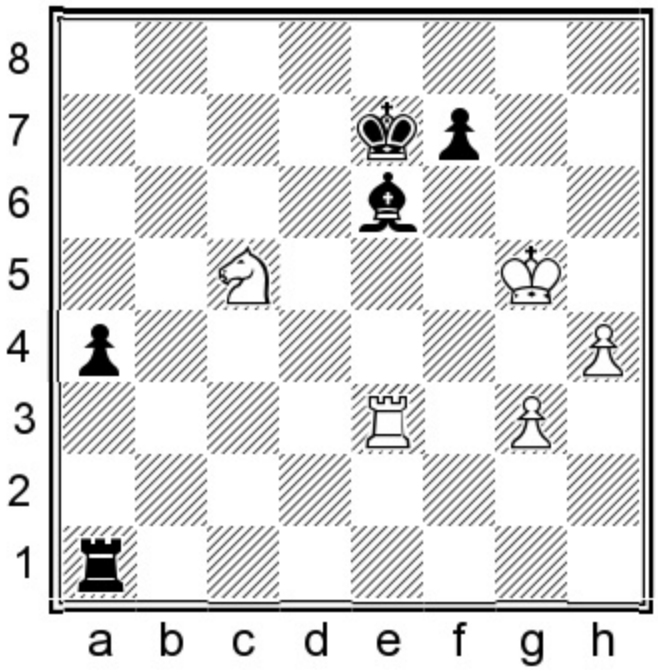
19.♖xf4 ♘xe1 20.♗xf7† ♔f8 21.♖xe1

White wins. For example:

21...♖d8 22.♗xe6† ♔e8 23.♗xc8 ♖axc8 24.c5

351. Paulo Dias – Jose Guilherme Barria Santos

Ovar 2022



Should White:

A) take on e6 with 58.♘xe6, or
B) play 58.h5 first?

Show/Hide Solution

(Converting an advantage)

58.♘xe6!

Of course this exchange is desirable. White creates two connected passed pawns, and it is a matter of technique to win the endgame.

58.h5? would allow: 58...♖d1! 59.♘xe6 ♖d5†! 60.♔h6 ♖d6! 61.♔g7 ♖xe6 62.♖f3 (or 62.♖a3 ♖e4=) 62...♖e5 63.♖xf7† ♔e8 Black has enough counterplay to make a draw.

58.g4? ♖d1 59.♘xe6 ♖d5† works in the same way for Black.

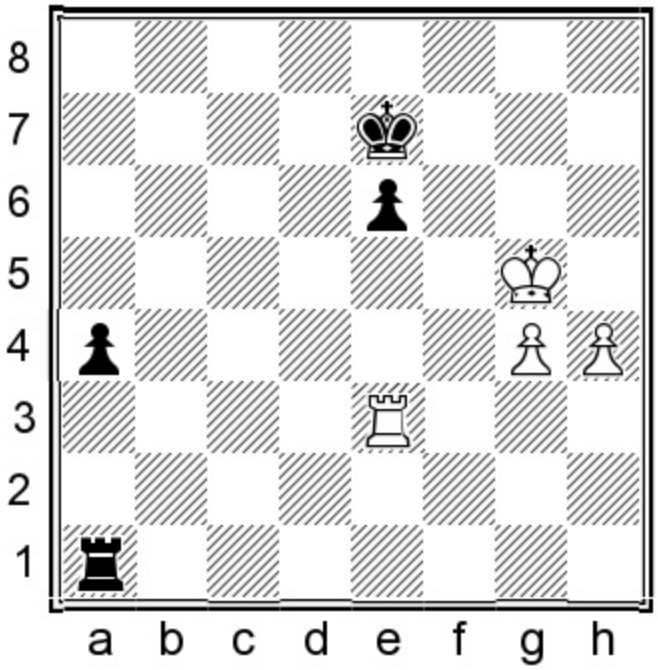
58.♖e4!? would be a simple transposition after 58...a3 59.♘xe6!, and so also be correct.

58...fxe6 59.g4?

Failing to apply the concept of ‘‘do no hurry’’ in a winning position. White should have improved his strongest piece first, placing it behind the enemy’s pawn to prevent counterplay.

59.♖e4! is the simplest move. White can then advance the pawns: 59...♖g1 (59...a3 60.♖a4+– allows the white rook to be perfectly placed.) 60.g4 a3 61.♖a4+–

59.h5! also works after 59...♖c1 (or 59...a3 60.g4+–) 60.h6 ♔f7 61.♖f3†! ♔g8 62.♖f4!! a3 63.♖a4 ♖c3 64.g4 with the idea of ♔g6. 64...e5 65.♖a8† ♔h7 66.♖a7† ♔g8 67.♔f5, and after g4-g5 comes, either ♔g6 or g5-g6, depending on what Black does, winning.



59...a3?

Black misses his chance. The pawn is meaningless by itself, as it’s easy to control. Black needed to bring his rook out, playing for active defence, by means of:

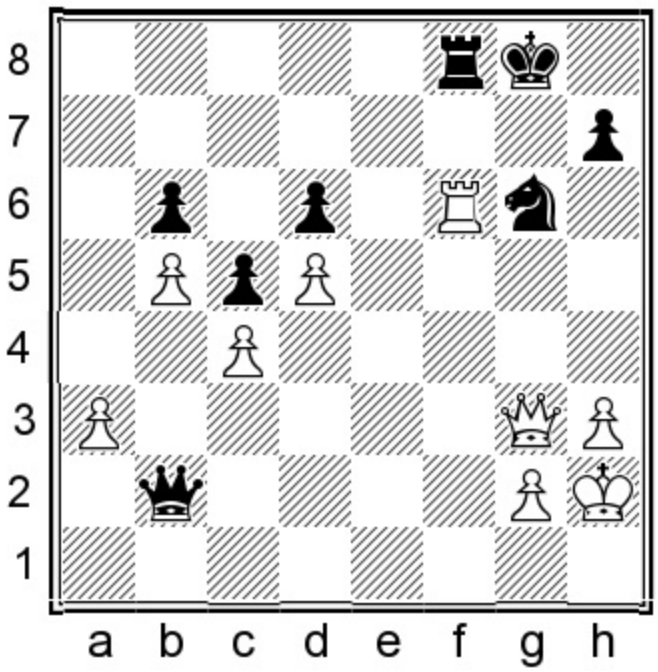
59...♖c1! 60.h5 ♖c8! (The rook could have used the b- or d-file too.) For example: 61.♖a3 ♖g8† 62.♔h4 ♖a8 White is not able to keep the king in front of the pawns, so the black king will occupy that space. 63.g5 ♔f7 64.♖f3† ♔g7 with a drawn position.

60.h5 a2 61.♖a3 e5 62.h6 ♔e6 63.h7 ♖h1 64.♔g6

1–0

352. Alexey Sarana – Aleksandr Rakhmanov

Moscow 2021



Should White:

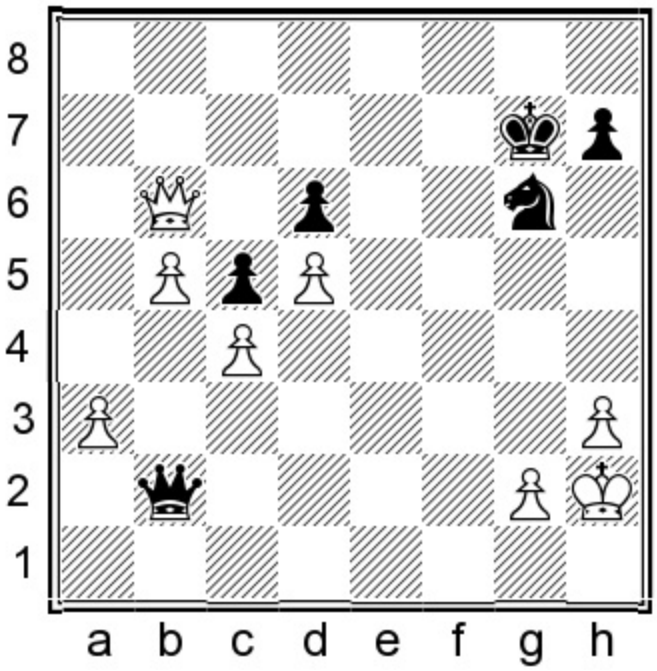
A) exchange rooks on f8, or
B) take the pawn on d6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)

White lost instantly after 54.♖xd6? ♔h8!, when it is impossible for him to defend the g2-pawn. 55.♖xb6 ♘e5 56.♕e3 ♘f3† 57.♔g3 ♕g7† 58.♔f2 ♘h4† 0–1

54.♖xf8†! ♔xf8 55.♕xd6† ♔g7 56.♕xb6

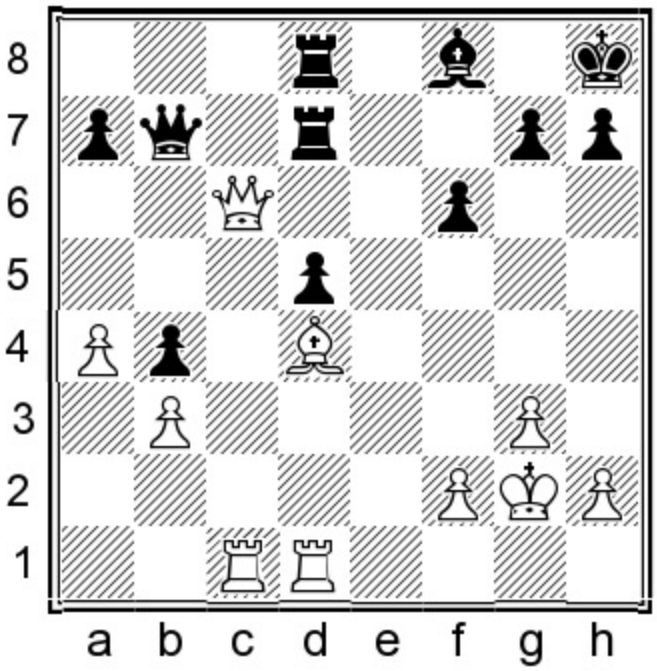


This gives White a decent position. It is advisable for Black to take the draw with:

56...♕e5†! 57.♔h1 ♕e1†

353. Georg Meier – Matias Perez Gormaz

Mexico 2022



Should Black:

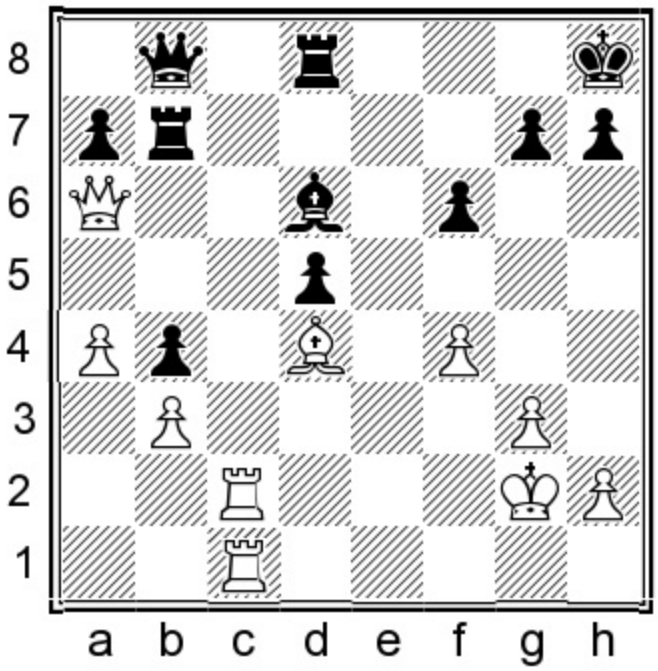
A) allow the queen exchange with 29...♗d6,
B) expedite it with 29...♕xc6, or
C) avoid it with 29...♕b8?

Show/Hide Solution

(Tension)

Black has an extra pawn, yet things are far from simple. White's pieces are active and put Black under pressure, particularly the weak a7-pawn. The white queen is able to apply pressure on a7 from the a6-square, but exchanging queens on c6 would bring the rook in (with the similar idea of ♖a6). In cases like this we should try to keep the tension, improving our pieces or making useful waiting moves.

In the game, Black went in the wrong direction with: 29...♕b8? The black queen has no prospects here. More importantly, the white queen can cause real damage from its outpost. 30.♖c2 ♗d6 31.♖dc1 ♖c7 32.♕a6 ♖b7 33.f4!±



Black is almost fully paralyzed. 33...h6 34.♖c6 ♔g8 35.♕d3 ♔f7 36.♕f5 The queen penetrates on the light squares to e6. White won a few moves later.

Compared with the game, 29...♕xc6?! 30.♖xc6 ♗d6± is a bit better but less precise, as White would have an extra tempo.

Black should have played:

29...♗d6!

On the surface a simple move, but there is a deep idea behind it. The bishop is useful on d6 and allows Black to play either ...♖c7 or ...♖e7, as needed. In some situations, Black can take on c6 and play ...♗e5, going for the endgame with the greatest drawing margin, the rook endgame.

30.♕xb7

White has other tries, but none are scary for Black:

30.♖e1 ♕xc6 31.♖xc6 ♗e5! Returning the pawn is the safest path. 32.♗xe5 fxe5 33.♖xe5 d4 34.♖c2 d3 35.♖d2 h6 Black has the more pleasant side of an equal rook endgame.

30.f4 prevents ...♗e5 but at the cost of opening up the king's position slightly. Black can play: 30...♕b8! 31.♕a6 ♖c7 32.♖c6 ♖xc6 33.♕xc6 ♖c8 34.♕xd5 ♗f8 White has regained the pawn, but with no advantage. The exposed position of the white king will always give Black counterchances.

30...♖xb7 31.♖c6

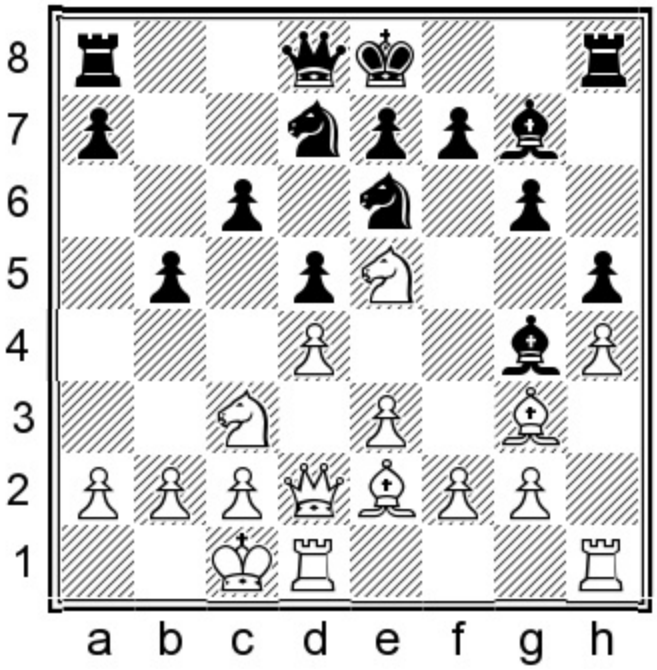
Critical. White brings in the last piece.

31...♔g8!

White has the better side of equality, but it is equality nonetheless.

354. Nicholas Paltrinieri – Hristos Banikas

Montesilvano 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange on e5 with 13...♗xe5, or
B) push on with 13...b4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Preventing counterplay)

The game went 13...b4 with the same idea as the correct solution, but this move order allows White to deviate from the intended course of events:

a) 14.♘a4? fell into Black's hands. 14...♗xe2 15.♕xe2 ♗xe5 16.♗xe5 f6 17.♗h2 (In the game White tried 17.♕a6 fxe5, losing a piece without compensation. Black won in 37 moves.) 17...♕a5 18.b3 ♘b6 This is a typical way of attacking the b3 and ♘a4 setup. Black destroys White's structure. 19.e4 ♘xa4 20.bxa4 ♔f7 21.♖he1 dxe4 22.♕xe4 ♕d5 with a better position for Black. White has no attack and a worse pawn structure.

b) 14.♘xg4! Drastic measures were required to avoid falling into trouble. 14...bxc3 15.♕xc3 hxg4 16.♕xc6 With excellent play for the piece. White will pick up either the d5- or g4-pawn, and has a potential pawn break with h4-h5 if Black decides to castle.

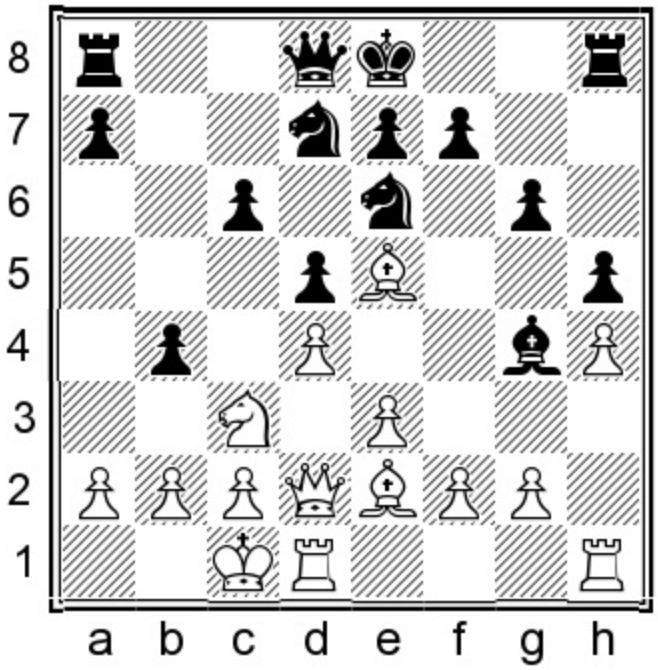
13...♗xe5!

The bishop on g7 does not contribute much to Black's position so it makes sense to start with this exchange, keeping all options open. From a practical point of view this move is problematic for White; he now has several options to calculate and evaluate, meaning the chances for a mistake are high.

14.♗xe5

If White starts with 14.♗xg4, there follows 14...hxg4 15.♗xe5 ♘xe5 16.dxe5 ♕a5 17.♔b1 and now Black can continue with 17...♖h5 with a very active position.

14...b4!



This is the point. Now White does not have the option of 14.♘xg4.

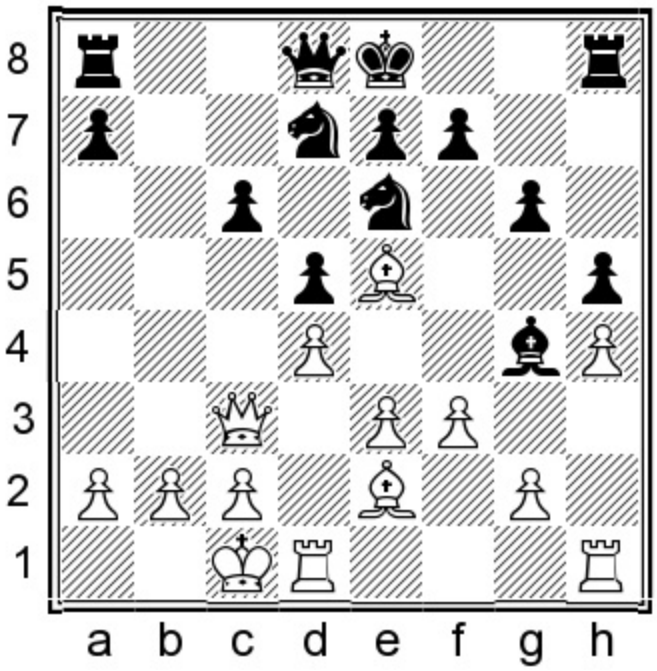
15.f3

This is of course the engine's top suggestion, already an incredibly difficult move to find for a human. The alternatives are worse:

15.♘a4 ♗xe2 16.♕xe2 transposes to the game continuation, as analysed above, where we saw that Black stands clearly better.

15.♗xh8 bxc3 16.♕e1 ♗xe2 17.♕xe2 ♕a5 18.♕d3 ♘b6 19.♕xc3 (Or 19.♗e5 ♘a4 with a winning attack.) 19...♕xc3 20.bxc3 f6 Black will play ...♔d7 next and win the bishop with a better position.

15...bxc3 16.♕xc3



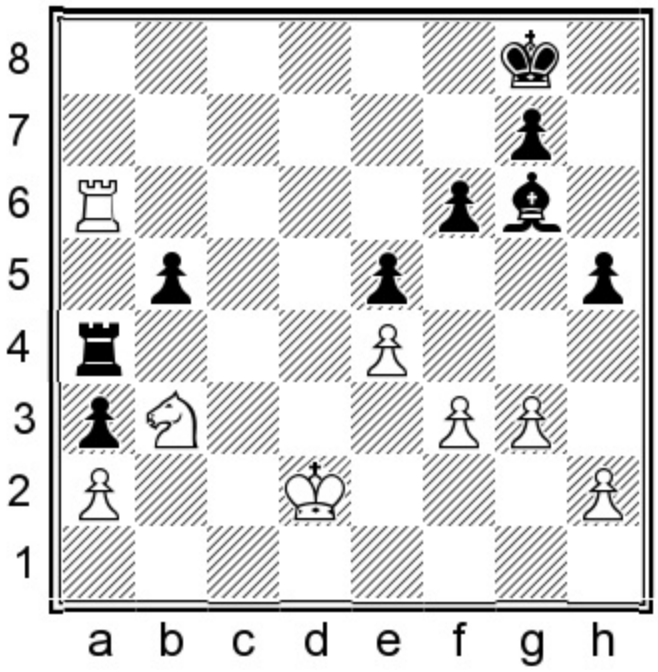
The rook on h8 and the bishop on g4 are still under attack. However, Black still comes out in a better position after a few precise moves.

16...♘xe5 17.dxe5 ♗f5 18.♕xc6† ♔f8 19.e4 ♘f4 20.♗f1 ♖c8 21.♕b7 ♖c7 22.♕b3 ♗e6 23.♕e3 ♕c8 24.♖d2 dxe4 25.♕xf4 ♔g7

White regains his piece but still has plenty of problems to solve. For example, Black is better after:

26.♔b1 ♖d8 27.♖xd8 ♕xd8 28.♗e2 ♕d5 29.b3 ♕c5 30.♖c1 a5

355. Leandro Krysa – Yasser Quesada Perez



Should White:

A) exchange rooks with 30.♖xa4, or
B) go behind the black pawn with 30.♖b6?

Show/Hide Solution

(Escaping with a draw)

When defending an inferior endgame we should look for scenarios with higher drawing chances. White is a pawn down in a rook and knight vs rook and bishop endgame with pawns on both flanks. It would be favourable for White to eliminate the pawns on the queenside to reduce the defence to one side of the board.

White decided to keep the rooks on, but was unable to generate counterplay and lost 17 moves later. 30.♖b6?! ♗e8 31.♖b8 ♔f7 32.♘c5 (Or 32.h4 g5!–+ and White will have more weaknesses on the kingside.) 32...♖d4†! 33.♔e3 ♔e7 34.♖b7† ♔d6 35.♘b3 ♖d1 36.♖xg7 ♖h1 Black picked up the h2-pawn and later the a2-pawn, with a decisive advantage.

30.♖xa4!∓

White eliminates the opponent's most active piece and will use the favourable position of his king and knight to attack the black pawns.

30...bxa4 31.♘c5

31.♘c1? does not work, with the main point being that 31...h4! 32.♔c3 ♗h5!! wins: 33.g4 ♗f7 34.♔b4 ♔h7 The king comes to f4 too fast.

31...♗f7 32.♔c3!

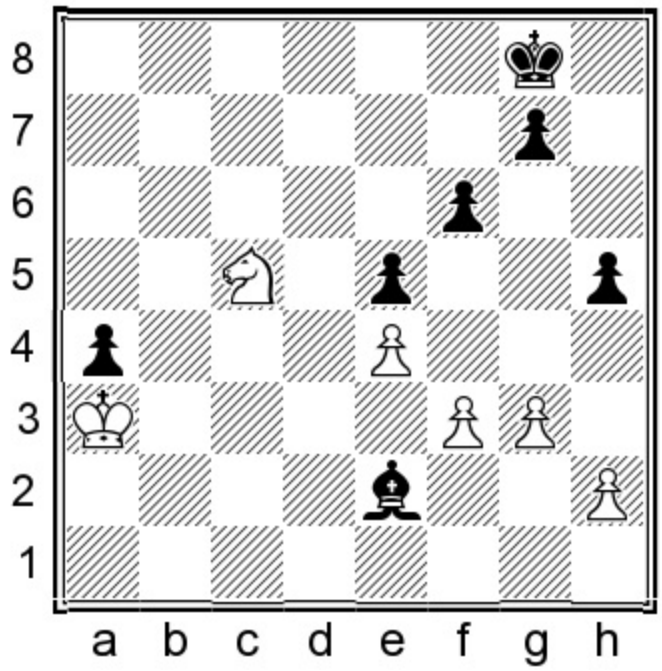
The key move.

32.♘xa4? would lose to 32...♗xa2. The white king will not be able to win the black a-pawn, allowing Black to come with the king to the kingside.

32...♗xa2 33.♔b4 ♗c4

This will win a pawn, but it is not enough.

34.♔xa3 ♗e2



35.♔xa4!

35.f4? would allow Black to play 35...exf4 36.gxf4 ♗d1, with ideas of a later ...g7-g5, creating a second passed pawn.

35...♗xf3 36.♔b3

The king will come to d3, defending the only weakness. Although there is plenty of work remaining, the endgame seems holdable, as Black is unable to create a passed pawn.

36...♔f7 37.♔c3 ♗g2

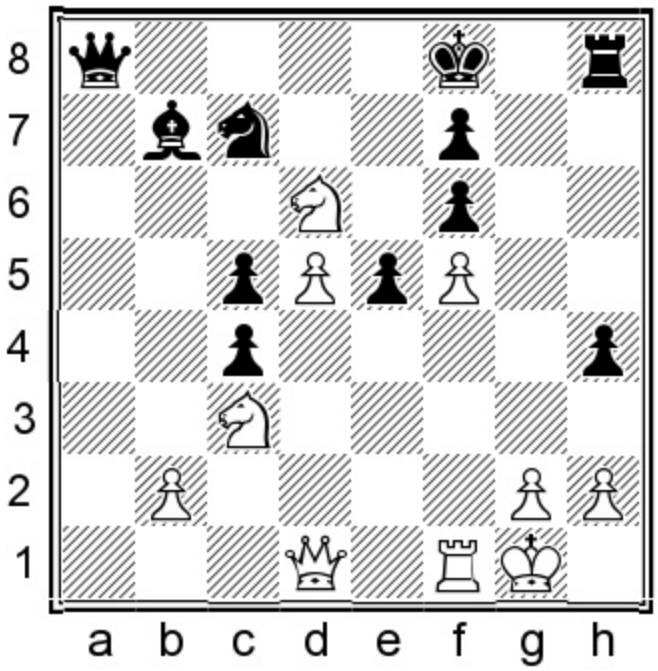
White is also holding after 37...g6 38.♔d3 f5 39.exf5 gxf5 40.♔e3 ♗d5 41.♘d3 ♔e6 42.♘f2, where Black has a passed pawn, but no way to push it forward.

38.♔d3 ♔g6 39.♔e3∓

White should hold, but Black should push.

356. Krikor Mekhitarian – Jorge Ernesto Giron

El Salvador 2022



Should White play:

A) 23.♘de4, or
B) 23.♘xb7?

Show/Hide Solution

(Keeping attackers)

White settled for 23.♘xb7? ♕xb7 24.d6 in the game. But after 24...♘b5, there is simply no advantage. Black eliminates the knight and any time White plays d6-d7, the black king will come to e7. 25.♘xb5 (Black has enough counterplay after 25.♘d5 ♘d4 26.♘xf6 h3.) 25...♕xb5 26.♕d5 ♔g7 27.d7? (27.♕d2!=) 27...♖d8 Black was already winning as White cannot prevent further loss of material.

23.♘de4!

This is the move White would like to play. Putting pressure on the f6-weakness and maintaining enough pieces to attack the black king, whose safety is the dominant factor.

23...♘xd5

This is critical.

After 23...♗xd5 24.♘xf6 ♗xg2, 25.♕d6† is the cleanest way to win. 25...♔g7 26.♕xe5 ♗xf1 27.♘ce4! with a deadly attack. An illustration: 27...♗h3 28.♘h5† ♔h6 29.♕g7† ♔xh5 30.♘f6#

24.♘xd5 ♗xd5 25.♘xf6 ♗xg2 26.♘d7†

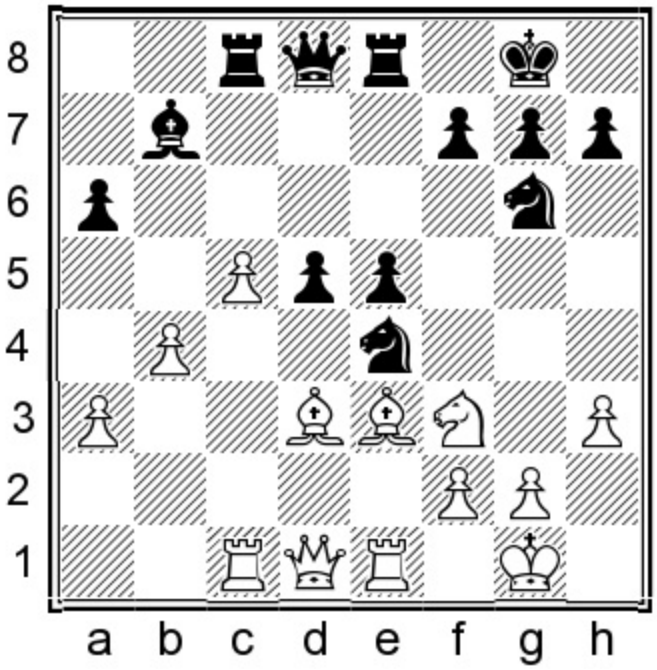
Also, 26.♕d6† works again. 26...♔g7 27.♕xe5 based on 27...♗xf1 28.♘e8† ♔f8 29.♕xh8† ♔e7 30.♕xh4† ♔f8 31.♕h8† ♔e7 32.♕e5† ♔f8 33.♔xf1, winning.

26...♔e7 27.f6† ♔e8 28.♕d6 ♕d8 29.♕xe5† ♔xd7 30.♖d1†

White wins.

357. Fernando Peralta – Sergio Slipak

Buenos Aires 2022



Should White play:

A) 22.♗xe4 and 23.♕xd8, or
B) 22.♗xe4 and 23.♘d2?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)

22.♗xe4

Freeing the c4-square and 'burying' the bishop on b7 behind his own pawn.

An alternative exists but it is less clear. 22.♕e2 f5 23.♗xa6 ♗xa6 24.♕xa6 f4 25.♗d2 ♘xd2 26.♘xd2

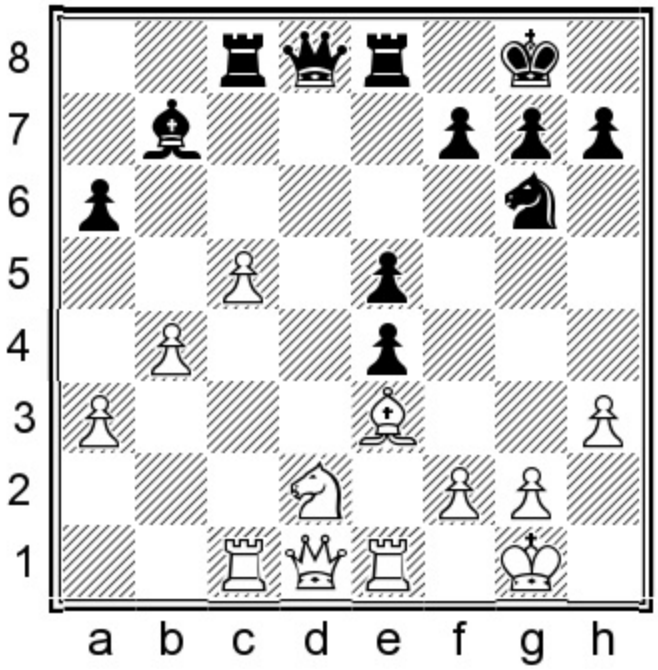
e4 When Black creates some counterplay.

22.♕b3?! does not bring an advantage: 22...d4 23.c6?! (Better is 23.♗d2 ♗d5=.) 23...♗xc6 24.♖xc6 ♖xc6 25.♗xe4 dxe3 26.♗xc6 exf2† 27.♔xf2 ♕b6†∓

22...dxe4 23.♘d2!

This is correct. The white queen will keep control of the light squares and can be used in offensive tasks. The exchange of queens leaves Black with only one job (to block the pawns on the queenside) making the defence easier.

In the game, GM Peralta played 23.♕xd8, which improves the black rook to the open file which can then invade on d3. 23...♖exd8 24.♘d2 Now Black should play 24...♗c6! (The game went 24...f5? 25.♘c4 White was better, but they drew in 34 moves.) 25.♘c4 ♖d3 when it is not easy for White to make progress. For instance: 26.a4 ♖b8 27.♘b6 f5 28.♖b1 f4 29.b5 axb5 30.axb5 ♗xb5 31.♖xb5 fxe3 32.♖xe3 ♖d1† 33.♔h2 ♖d2 With counterplay.



Let's examine some possible continuations after the text move:

23...♗c6

The alternatives are no improvement:

23...♘f4 24.♗xf4 exf4 25.♘c4 and ♘d6 next, dominating the board.

23...f5 just creates additional problems, since now the black king is a target. 24.♘c4 f4 25.♘d6 with ♕b3† next.

23...♕d3 is strongly met by 24.♘c4 followed by ♘d6.

24.♘c4 ♕xd1

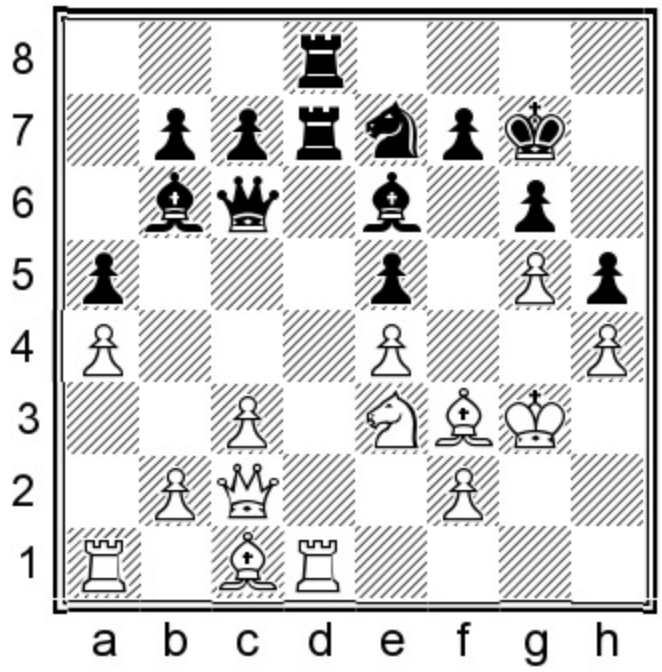
After 24...♖e6 25.♕g4, we see how the white queen can be deployed to put more pressure on Black's position. Now ideas like ♖ed1 and ♘a5 are in the air. Black has no counterplay and is getting crushed on both sides of the board.

25.♖exd1 ♖e6 26.♖d2

White has a strategically winning position. The rook will come to b2 and support the advance of the queenside pawns.

358. Robert Diaz Villagran – David Alejandro Cabezas Solano

El Salvador 2022



Should Black:

A) exchange rooks with 30...♖xd1, or
B) improve the bishop with 30...♗c5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Removing defenders)

Black started manoeuvring with 30...♗c5, when after 31.♖xd7! ♕xd7 32.♗e2 c6 33.f3 (33.b4!∓ would have given counterplay.) 33...♘g8?! Black only had a small advantage, although he won the game later. The knight would have been better on c8, but it is still clear that Black has squandered

most of his advantage.

30...♖xd1!

Black's pieces are all active. White is undeveloped, with the c1-bishop and a1-rook out of play, and the king fairly exposed. Black must act now, or lose his dynamic advantage.

31.♘xd1

31.♗xd1 is strongly met with 31...♗xe3 32.♗xe3 ♗b3! 33.♕xb3 ♕xe4, when the knight's arrival on f5 will be devastating. For example: 34.♔h2 ♘f5 35.♕c2 ♕xh4† 36.♔g2 ♘xe3† 37.fxe3 ♕e1 White cannot prevent ...♖d2.

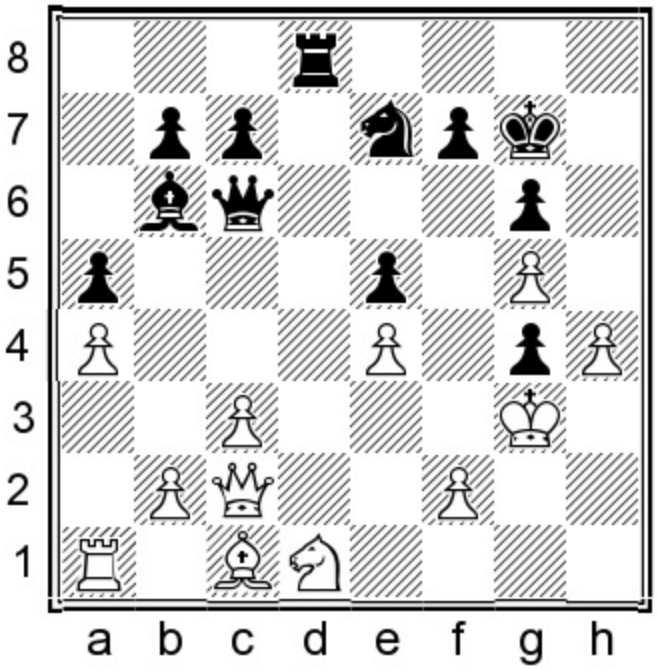
31...♗g4!

Removing the king's only defender. Black is threatening ...♘f5† among other things.

31...♗c4!? is weaker, but still strong. After 32.♘e3 ♗d3 33.♕d1, Black is winning, even if no direct win exists.

32.♗xg4 hxg4

White is hopelessly lost, with an open king and uncoordinated pieces. Black will play ...♘f5† with a strong attack:



33.♘e3

Trying to deal with the knight jump.

33.♔xg4 would be refuted by a computer with 33...♖d4!. (A human would focus on 33...♖xd1!

34.♕xd1 ♕xe4† 35.♔h3 ♗xf2 with a mating attack.)

33...♘f5†! 34.exf5

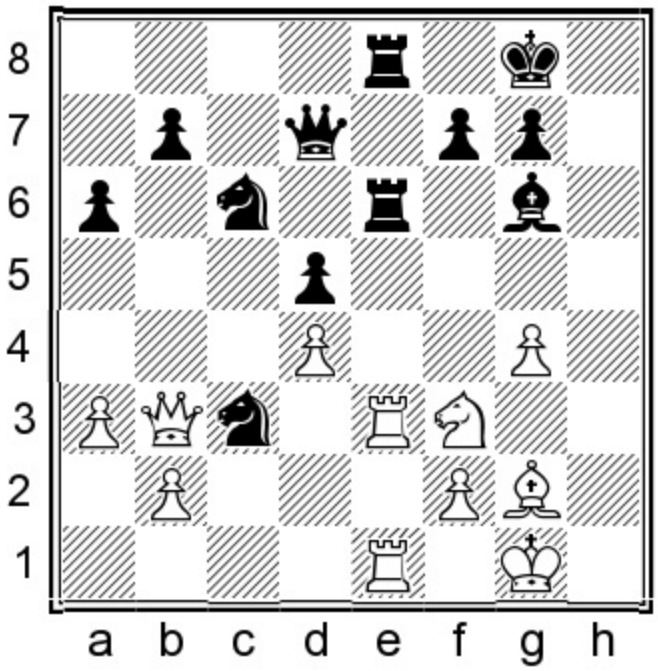
The critical line.

34...♕f3† 35.♔h2 ♖h8 36.f6† ♔g8 37.♔g1 ♗xe3 38.fxe3 ♖xh4 39.♕g2 ♕d1† 40.♔f2 ♖h1

Mate comes soon.

359. Jari Reuker – Dmitrij Kollars

Germany 2020



Should White play:

A) 25.♖xe6, or
B) 25.bxc3?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)

Reuker played 25.bxc3? and was given a second chance: 25...♘a5? (25...♖xe3! would have created weaknesses in the white camp.) 26.♕b4 ♘c6 27.♕b3? (27.♖xe6!=) 27...♖xe3! 28.♖xe3 ♗e4?= The game was drawn on move 48.

But Black would have been winning after 28...♖xe3! 29.fxe3 ♗e4–+, when the structure around the white king is too frail. For example: 30.♘h2 ♗xg2 31.♔xg2 ♘a5 and ...♘c4, with a dominating positional advantage. Black should win this every time.

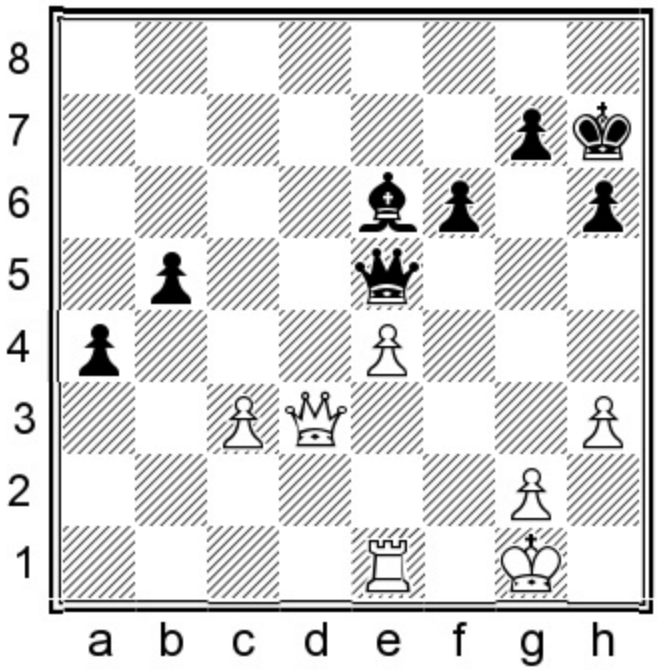
25.♖xe6! ♖xe6 26.♖xe6 ♕xe6 27.bxc3!

White's position magically stays glued together. One reason is:

27...b5 28.♘e5!=

360. Jan-Krzysztof Duda – Magnus Carlsen

Oslo (rapid) 2022



Should White:

A) play 41.♖b1, or
B) aim to exchange queens with 41.♕d4?

Show/Hide Solution

(Exchanging to make a draw)

In the game Duda played 41.♖b1?. After 41...a3 he could not prevent the advance of the queenside pawns and lost quickly. 42.♖a1 b4 43.♔f2 b3 0–1

Or: 41.♖a1 a3–+

41.♕d4!

White should exchange queens. The black queen is strong with multiple functions, putting pressure on the weaknesses on e4 and c3. It can also support the advance of the queenside pawns, and create threats against the white king. White cannot defend everything, so eliminating the attacker is the only path. And after the exchange of queens, the white king can come out to help the rook stop

Black's passed pawns. Even though Black gets connected passed pawns, it is the only try for White.

41...♕xd4†

The alternatives are also not too challenging:

After 41...a3 42.♕xe5 fxe5 43.♖a1 a2 44.♔f2 Black cannot make progress.

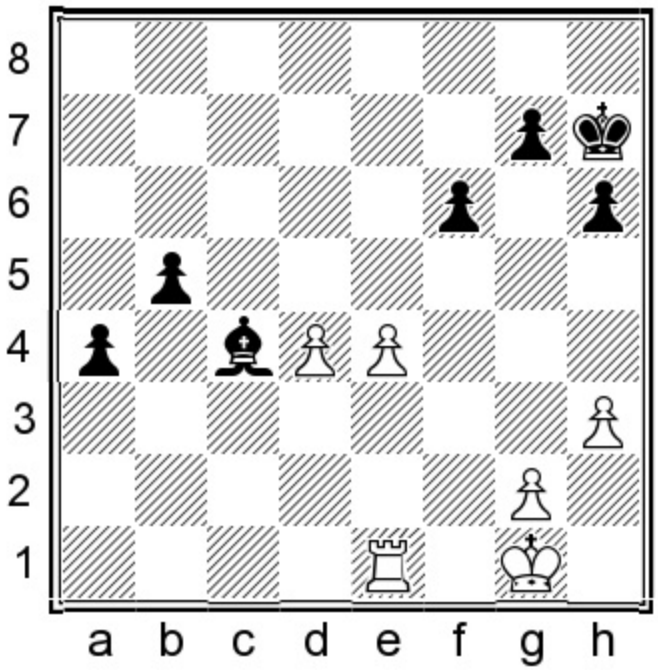
41...♕f4 could be the most testing. The idea is to advance the a-pawn, enslaving the white pieces into stopping it and meanwhile attack White's other weaknesses. So it is important to stop the a-pawn from advancing further. 42.♕c5! Attacking the b5-pawn. If now 42...♗c4 43.♕f5†, the exchange of queens brings White closer to the draw. 43...♕xf5 44.exf5 a3 45.♔f2 White holds.

42.cxd4

Black now has two connected passed pawns on the queenside, but White also has a passed d-pawn that generates sufficient counterplay to hold the balance.

42...♗c4

If 42...b4 43.d5 ♗d7 44.♔f2 b3 45.♔e3, the white king is in time. 45...♔g6 (After 45...a3? 46.♔d2, White stops the pawns and wins.) 46.♔d2 ♔f7 47.♔c3 With a drawn endgame, as neither side can make progress.



White has plenty of paths to a draw. For example:

43.d5 a3 44.d6 ♗e6 45.♔f2 b4 46.♔e3 b3 47.♔d4

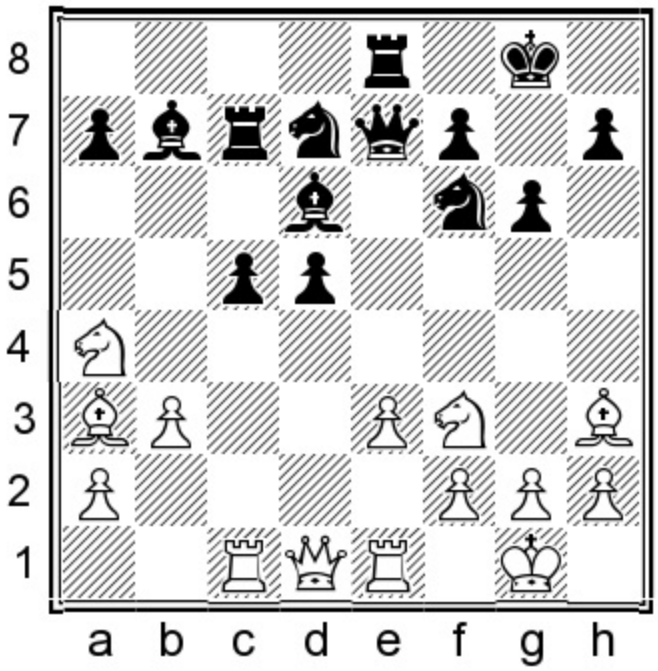
White will play ♔c3 next, with a draw.

47...b2 48.♔c3 ♔g8 49.d7 ♗xd7 50.♔b3 ♗c6 51.♔xa3 ♗xe4 52.♔xb2 ♗xg2 53.h4

This would be a possible way for the game to progress. The draw is within White's reach.

361. Costica-Ciprian Nanu – Robert-Ionut Creanga

Mamaia 2022



Should White play:

A) 17.♗xd7, or
B) 17.♘c3?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses/Eliminating defenders)
17.♘c3?! is the weaker option. 17...a6 18.g3 ♖ec8, and Black has decent chances for counterplay based on ...c5-c4 or ...h7-h5.

17.♗xd7!

This is an standard exchange in these type of positions. White eliminates one defender of the weak c5-pawn.

17...♘xd7 18.♘c3

Attacking the d5-pawn with tempo.

18...♘f6 19.♘b5 ♖cc8 20.♘xd6!

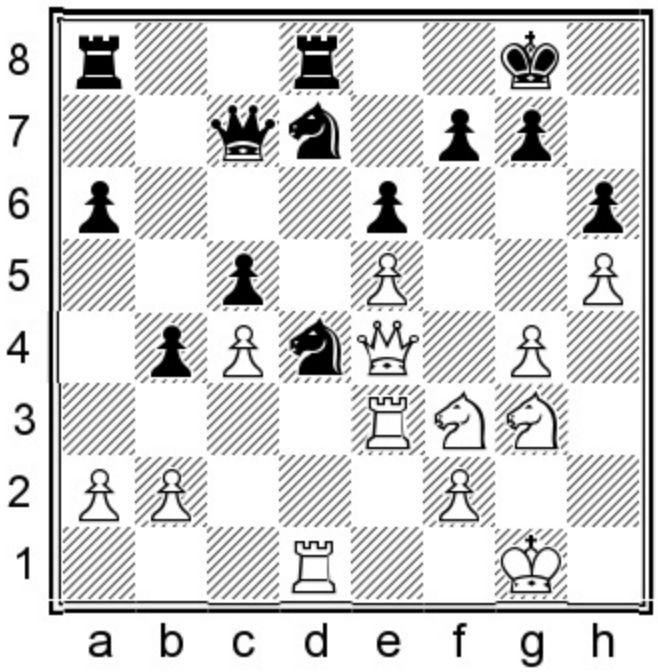
20.♘xa7? was played in the game. 20...♖a8 21.♘b5 ♘e4= The pressure down the a-file gives Black decent compensation for the pawn, though he later lost. The 400-rating difference might have been a factor...

20...♕xd6 21.♖e2 ♘e4 22.♖ec2±

White has strong pressure on the c5-pawn, and the dark squares on the kingside don't look great either.

362. Anapola Borda Rodas – Alan Pichot

Argentina 2022



Should White:

A) exchange on d4, or
B) push with 28.g5?

Show/Hide Solution

(Weaknesses)

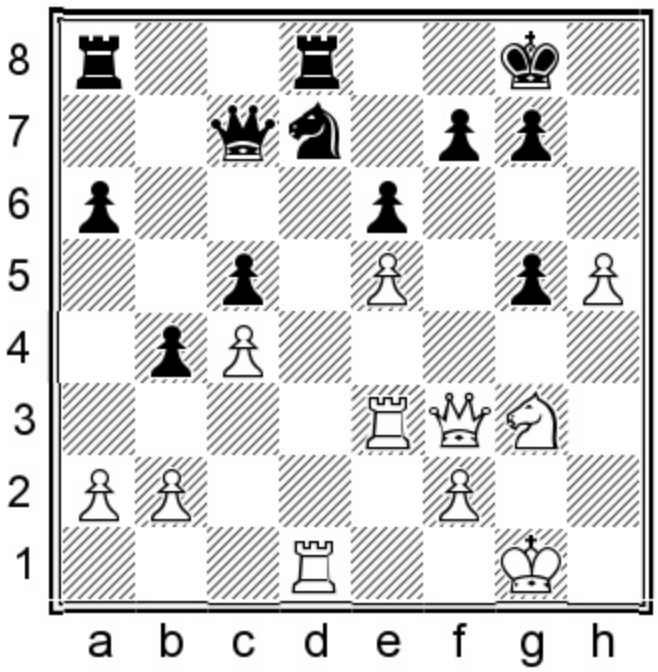
28.g5!

This was the best way to keep Black under pressure and stay in control.

There is objectively nothing wrong with 28.♘xd4, played by White. But Black will have a quiet game with nothing to worry about. White wins a pawn, but only momentarily. Black obtains a great square on c5 for his knight, as well as control over the d-file. 28...cxd4 29.♖xd4 ♘c5 30.♖xd8† ♖xd8 31.♕f3 ♖d2 Black will regain the pawn with an equal position. He won later on.

28...♘xf3† 29.♕xf3 hxg5

After 29...♘xe5 30.♖xd8† ♖xd8 31.♕f4, White wins.



30.♖de1!!

With dangerous attacking chances. White threatens either ♕g4xg5 or h5-h6, with chances for an attack with ♘h5. Black can defend, but it is difficult in practice. A possible variation:

30...♘f8?

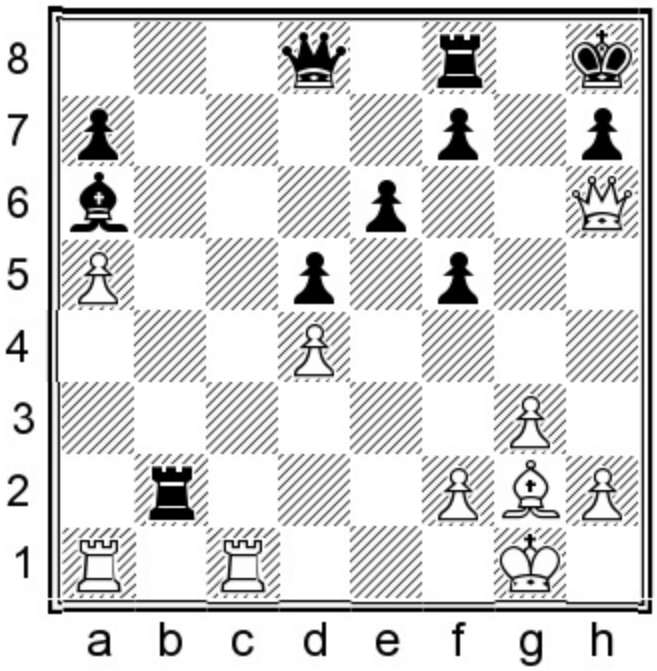
Better play is: 30...♖ac8 31.h6 gxh6 32.♘h5 ♔f8 33.♕h3 ♔e7 34.♘f6 ♕c6 35.♕h5 White has enough compensation, as there are several attacking ideas like ♘d5† or ♘g4. Black needs to keep defending his position carefully. For example: 35...♖h8 36.♘d5† exd5 37.e6 fxe6 38.♕g6 e5 Only move. 39.♖xe5† ♘xe5 40.♖xe5† ♔d8 41.♖e6 ♕d7 42.♕f6† ♔c7 43.♖e7 dxc4 The game should end in perpetual.

31.h6 gxh6 32.♕f6

Black is lost.

363. Daniel Fridman – Mateusz Bartel

Germany 2021



Should White play:

A) 23.♖c7, or
B) 23.♖c6 ♗c4 24.♖c7?

Show/Hide Solution

(Invasion)

White got nowhere in the game after 23.♖c6? ♗c4 24.♖c7 ♔g8!. The a7-pawn is not important. 25.♖xa7 ♕b8! With a strong double threat, forcing White to make a draw. The perpetual followed after a bit of foolishness. Draw on move 31.

23.♖c7!

This was stronger.

23...♖b7

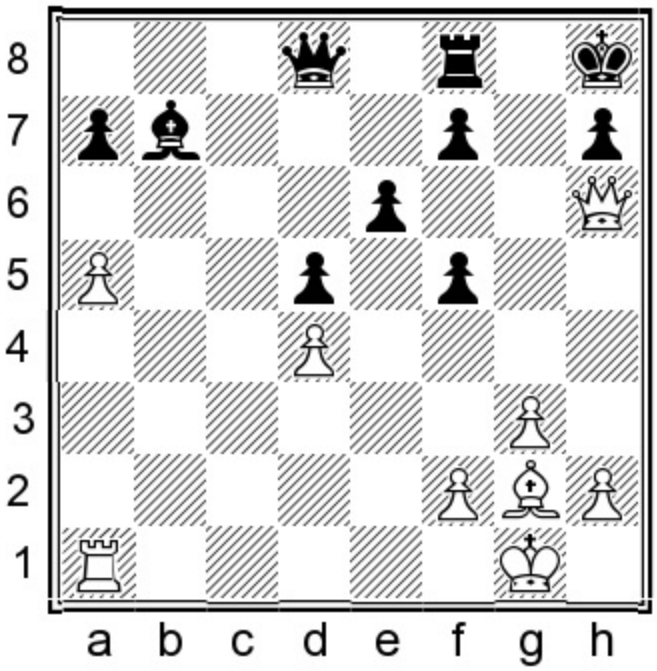
23...♕b8 24.h4! is the key point. The rook on f8 is hanging, giving White an important tempo.

Also, 23...♔g8 24.♖xa7 would win a tempo by attacking the bishop.

24.♖xb7

Or 24.♖ac1±.

24...♗xb7



25.♗f1!

Just like that, the white pieces become strong and the black bishop weak. White is a pawn down, but has a winning position.

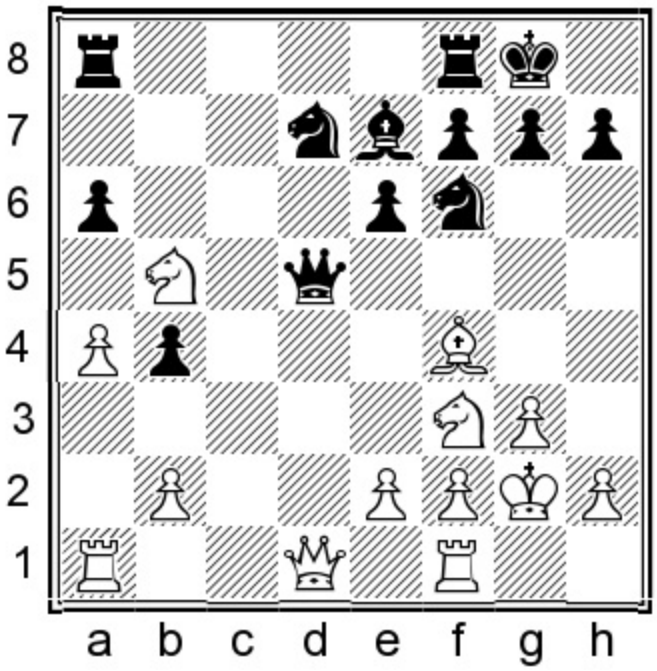
25.a6 was also strong, giving a long-term positional advantage.

25...♔g8 26.♖c1

White will strengthen his position with h2-h4, ♕f4 and h5-h6. Black has a weak king, a square ripe for invasion on c7 and a weak a7-pawn.

364. Patrik Stepan – Josef Pribyl

Czech Republic 2021



Should White:

A) provoke an exchange of bishops with 15.♗d6, or
B) play 15.♘c7?

Show/Hide Solution

(Domination/Tactics)
15.♗d6? was misguided. 15...♗xd6 16.♕xd5 ♘xd5 17.♘xd6 ♘c5 was fully equal, and the game drawn by move 36.

15.♘c7!

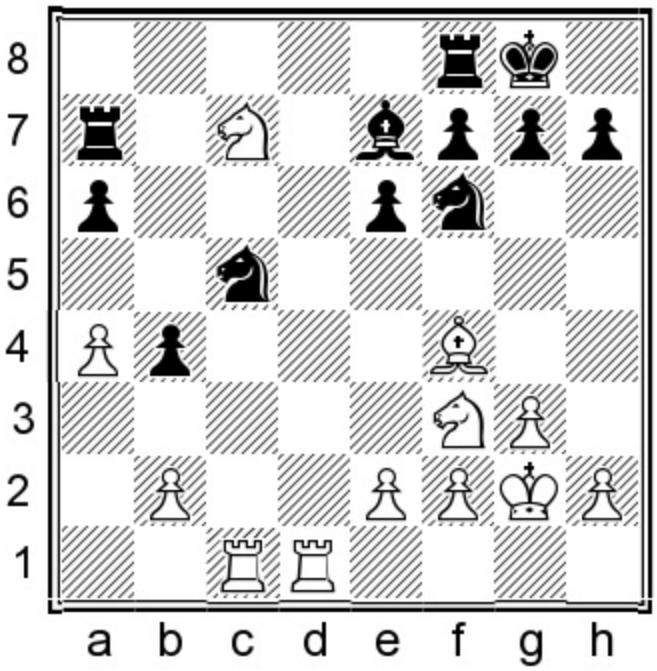
Provoking the exchange of queens is the right path.

15...♕xd1 16.♖fxd1 ♖a7 17.♖ac1

White is dominating. The knight is not in danger of getting trapped. White is already threatening ♗e3, winning a pawn, as well as the devastating ♘d4-c6/b5, killing everyone.

It turns out that the path to victory is narrower than expected at first glance, but still something one could realistically hope to find, one move at a time.

17...♘c5



18.♘d4! ♖c8

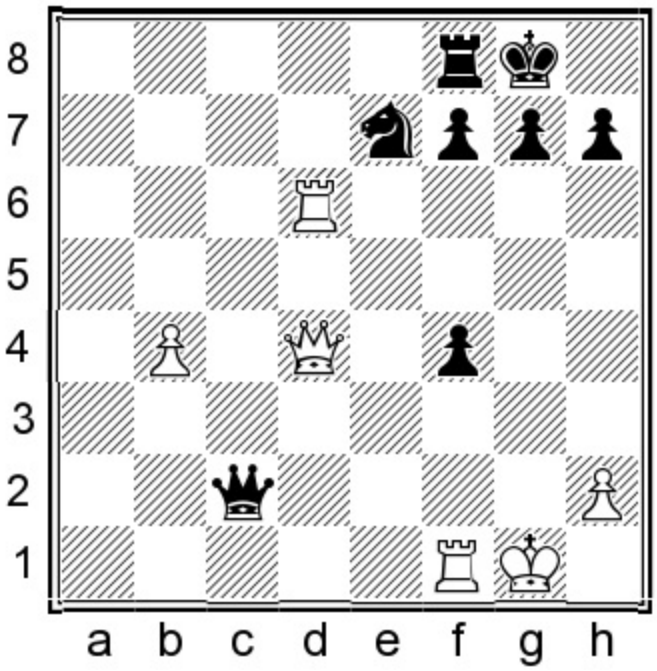
Initiating forced play with ideas most of us would probably miss anyway.

19.♘c6 ♖axc7 20.♗xc7 ♔f8! 21.♘xe7 ♖xc7 22.♘g8!!

The idea that you would have to see all this to choose 15.♘c7! is a misconception of how chess works. White had a nice position with a lot of threats and Black went for complications unlikely to work, that almost worked. We cannot anticipate everything, and White had options for a small plus along the way as well.

365. Velimir Ivic – Parham Maghsoodloo

Belgrade 2022



Should White play:

A) 30.♖d8, or
B) 30.♕xf4?

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(Preventing counterplay)
30.♕xf4? was a serious mistake. After 30...g6± White would win if he could exchange just one set of heavy pieces. But he did not get a second chance. After 31.♕d2 ♕c8 32.♕g5 ♘f5 33.♖d2 h6 the players agreed a draw.

30.♖d8!

This removes a main tool of counterplay.

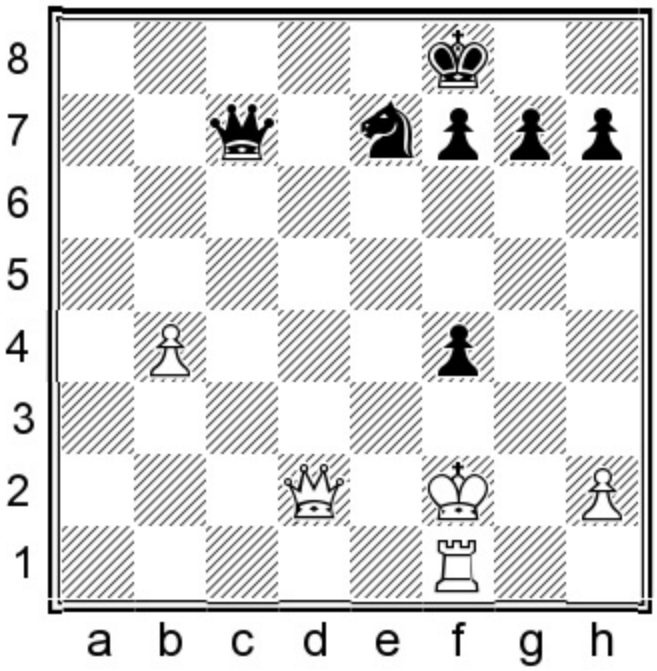
30...♕g6†

White is winning after 30...♘g6 31.♖xf8† ♘xf8 32.♕xf4. It will take time to squeeze the b-pawn forward. But with careful technical effort it will happen.

31.♔f2 ♕c2† 32.♕d2

If 32.♔f3 ♕c6† (32...♕b3† 33.♕d3+–) White needs to retreat with 33.♔f2. (Not 33.♔xf4? ♕c7†.)

32...♕c7 33.♖xf8† ♔xf8



34.♖d1!

This is the key move. Black has good counterplay after 34.♕c1 ♕b6† 35.♕c5 ♕h6! and 34.♖c1 ♕b6† 35.♖c5 g5!.

34...♘c6 35.♔f1!!

The really difficult move.

35.b5? fails to 35...♕b6† 36.♔g2 ♕xb5 37.♕d6† ♘e7 38.♕d8† ♕e8=.

35...♔e7

35...♘e5 loses to: 36.♕d8†+–

By now there are many ways to play. For example:

36.♖c1 ♕b6 37.♖e1† ♔f6 38.♕d6† ♔g5 39.♖e5† f5 40.b5

And White wins a piece.

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