

*Milos Paulovic*

*Playing the  
Sveshnikov*

*An Active Repertoire*



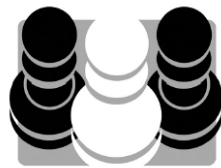
QUALITY CHESS



# Playing the Sveshnikov

By

**Milos Pavlovic**



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## **PLAYING THE SVESHNIKOV**

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# Contents

Key to Symbols Used & Bibliography	5
Preface	6
Introduction	7
<b>9. ♘f6 gxf6 10. ♖d5 f5</b>	
1 Opposite-Bishops Variation	11
2 15. ♖h5 & 15. ♗e1	38
3 11. ♗d3 ♗e6 – Other Lines	78
4 The Popular 11.c3	100
5 11.g3 & Others	126
<b>10... ♗g7</b>	
6 10... ♗g7 Lines with c2-c3	150
7 Main Line with 14.c4	173
<b>9. ♖d5</b>	
8 Positional System – 11.c3	198
9 Positional System – 11.c4	215
10 8. ♖a3 b5	228
<b>Other Lines</b>	
11 The Trendy 7. ♖d5	245
12 Early Sveshnikov Sidelines	277
13 Bonus Chapter – 3. ♖c3 & 3. ♗b5	286
Variation Index	299

# Key to symbols used

±	White is slightly better	∞	unclear
∓	Black is slightly better	?	a weak move
±	White is better	??	a blunder
∓	Black is better	!	a good move
+−	White has a decisive advantage	!!	an excellent move
−+	Black has a decisive advantage	!?	a move worth considering
=	equality	?!	a move of doubtful value
∞	with compensation	□	only move
↔	with counterplay	#	mate
↑	with an initiative	N	New idea/theoretical novelty

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# Preface

The Sveshnikov is the best variation of the Sicilian Defence in my opinion. I have been studying and playing it with both colours since a young age and I became Yugoslav Champion with it, among other successes. Also known as the Lasker-Pelikan Variation in some parts of the world, the Sveshnikov arises after the opening moves **1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 e5**.

Compared with other Sicilian variations such as the Najdorf, Dragon, Taimanov and so on, the Sveshnikov has the key distinguishing feature that Black immediately fights for space in the centre. This avoids the typical Sicilian scenario where White controls additional central space and uses it as the foundation for a kingside attack and central pawn breaks. Another advantage is fast development: our fifth move forces White's knight to move for a second time, and later we can chase it from the b5-square with ...a6 and ...b5.

Obviously every opening system has a drawback of some kind. In the case of the Sveshnikov, the hole on the d5-square forms the basis of White's play in most variations. In my junior years, there were only a few grandmasters who dared to weaken such an important central square at this early stage of the game. Obviously Evgeny Sveshnikov made a great contribution, but grandmasters such as Adorjan, Simic and Vukic also developed it very well. In Yugoslavia, Radoslav Simic was the only grandmaster playing it, and since I played on the same team as him, I was able to follow his example and subsequently develop my own ideas. Later decades saw Kramnik and Leko adopting the Sveshnikov at the highest level, and Gelfand and Carlsen have used it in recent World Championship matches. In return for weakening the d5-square, Black obtains central space and fast development. In the event that White trades the dark-squared bishop for the f6-knight and forces ...gxf6, we will gain the additional option of ...f5, eroding White's centre. We may also benefit from the bishop pair and the open g-file. One more key feature of the Sveshnikov is that Black often obtains attacking chances against the white king, in stark contrast to many other Sicilian variations. In some lines we can even find similarities with the King's Indian Defence.

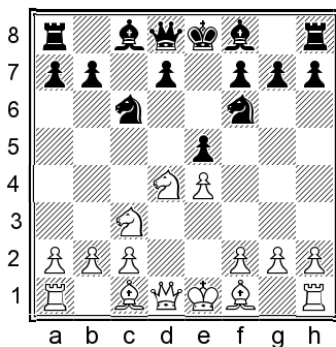
When I first started playing the Sveshnikov it was not so popular, but today it is regarded as a top-tier defence to 1.e4. Invest your time learning it, and it will repay you with healthy opening positions and opportunities for dynamic and exciting middlegame battles.

Milos Pavlovic  
Belgrade, December 2022

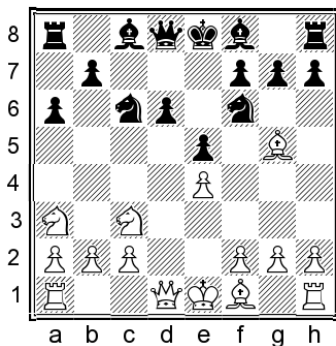
# Introduction

Before we jump in to the first chapter, I will outline the main sections of the book and provide an overview of the proposed repertoire.

The opening moves **1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♞c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♞xd4 ♞f6 5.♞c3 e5** give us the starting position of the Sveshnikov Sicilian.

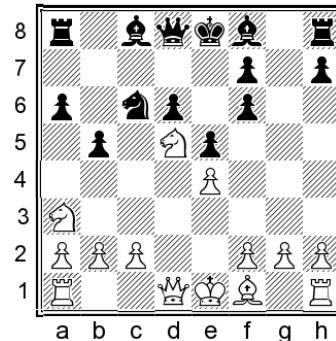


**6.♞db5** is the normal and best move, when **6...d6** is our choice. Then **7.♞g5** is the main line, threatening **♞xf6** and **♞d5**, so we must force the knight back with: **7...a6 8.♞a3**



Black has tried a few different options at this point, but **8...b5** is the characteristic Sveshnikov continuation, restricting the movement of the knight on a3. In some chapters, we will see that the poor placement of this piece can have a detrimental effect on White's position until well into the middlegame, or even the endgame! The position after **8...b5** forms the basis for the great majority of the book. White must now make a fundamental decision.

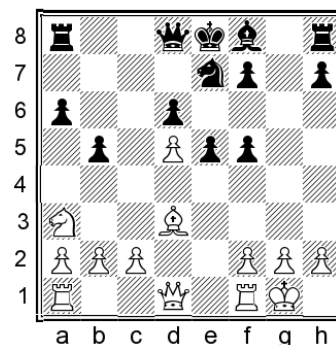
**9.♞xf6 gxf6 10.♞d5** is a natural and principled continuation, reaching the following position.



Our pawn structure is not the prettiest, but the bishop pair and central pawn majority offer tremendous dynamic potential.

**10...f5** is the main continuation and the subject of the first five chapters, which can be considered the cornerstone of our repertoire. From here, the path divides again.

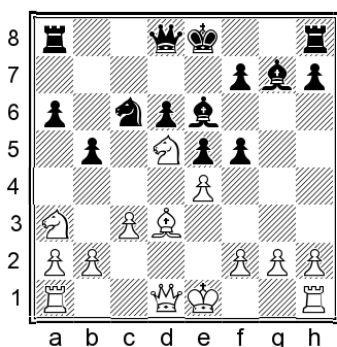
**11.♞d3** is the most obvious continuation, when **11...♞e6** is our choice, counterattacking the knight on d5. **12.0-0** is a natural and flexible choice, and now **12...♞xd5 13.exd5 ♞e7** is my recommendation, reaching what I call the Opposite-Bishops Variation.



In **Chapter 1** we will jump straight in to this critical variation, where each side will attempt to dominate the colour of square controlled by its own bishop. The main continuation is **14.c3 ♞g7**, although I will also provide detailed recommendations against White's alternatives on move 14. In **Chapter 2** we will deal with the trendy and theoretically critical continuations of **15.♞e1**

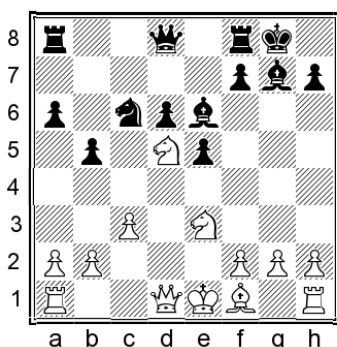
and **15.♖h5**. A key feature of the Opposite-Bishops Variation is that both players can fight for the initiative on both sides of the board, in stark contrast to many other Sicilians where each side is primarily looking to attack on one flank.

**Chapter 3** will deal with White's remaining options in the position after **11.♙d3 ♘e6**. The most important of them is **12.c3 ♗g7**, reaching a position which frequently arises after **11.c3 ♗g7 12.♙d3 ♘e6**.



Now **13.♜xb5! axb5 14.♙xb5** is an important option, trading a piece for three pawns (after a subsequent **e4xf5**). This demands careful attention, but my analysis shows that Black is fine.

**11.c3 ♗g7** is the topic of Chapter 4, when **12.exf5 ♗xf5 13.♜c2 0-0 14.♜ce3 ♘e6** reaches a popular position:

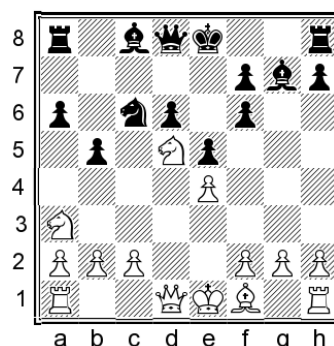


White has rerouted the knight from a3 to e3 but we are ready to counterattack with the f-pawn.

**Chapter 5** concludes the coverage of the 10...f5 variation by considering some rare options such as **11.g3** and piece sacs on b5.

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The next two chapters are something of a bonus section. Although 10...f5 continues to hold up at the highest levels and I have absolute faith in it, **10...♗g7** is a valid alternative.

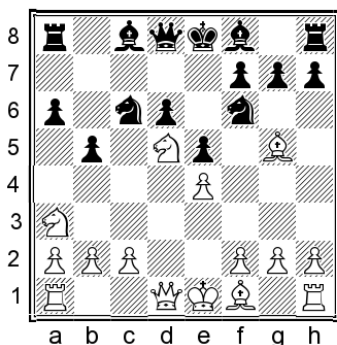


Following the bishop move, sometimes Black can and should transpose to the earlier chapters by playing a quick ...f5, but the text move also has independent value and there are some Sveshnikov specialists who prefer it. The main line continues **11.♙d3 ♜e7 12.♜xe7 ♖xe7 13.0-0 0-0**, and now **14.c3** is a logical continuation covered in **Chapter 6** (along with White's alternatives from move 11 onwards). **14.c4** is the most critical option of all, and **Chapter 7** shows how Black should meet it.

Overall I consider **10...f5** and **10...♗g7** to be equally playable, and personally I find it useful to be able to play both moves. Readers can decide whether to follow this approach or to specialize in the option they prefer – although please keep in mind that there will be times when you need to transpose from one option to another, as will be pointed out in the 10...♗g7 coverage.

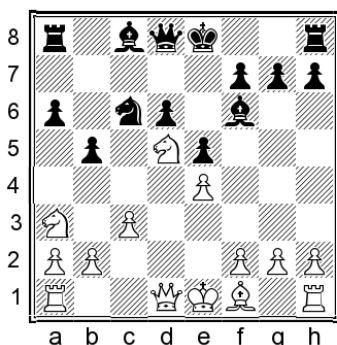
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In the next section of the book, we will return to the position after the opening moves **1.e4 c5 2.♜f3 ♜c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♜xd4 ♜f6 5.♜c3 e5 6.♜db5 d6 7.♗g5 a6 8.♜a3 b5** and consider the second of White's two main options: **9.♜d5**



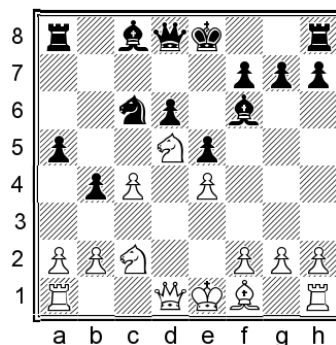
This is informally known as the Positional Variation, and it steers the game in a markedly different direction. Instead of forcing the ...gxf6 structure and allowing dynamic counterplay with ...f6-f5, there are many players who prefer the text move followed by **9...♙e7 10.♙xf6 ♜xf6**, which generally leads to a quieter game, although there are still plenty of sub-variations which can lead to lively, tactical play.

**Chapter 8** will tackle the main line of **11.c3**, preparing to centralize the wayward knight.



Out of the many continuations which have been tested, I decided to recommend **11...♙g5 12.♜c2 ♝b8!**, a modern solution and a favourite choice among Sveshnikov specialists. White's most dangerous idea in these positions is to follow up with a2-a4, so it makes sense to place our rook on the soon-to-be-open b-file.

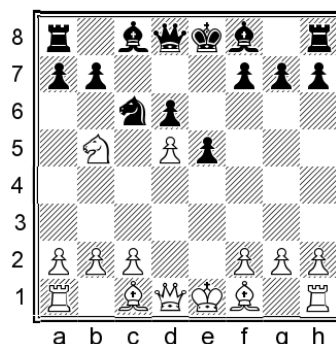
Another option for White is **11.c4**, when **11...b4 12.♜c2 a5** is our choice:



**Chapter 9** will deal with this variation in detail. In most games Black moves the bishop to g5 in the near future, but I rather like the idea of ...g6 and ...♙g7, keeping the bishop safe from h2-h4 attacks and supporting a future ...f5.

**Chapter 10** will then conclude our coverage of **1.e4 c5 2.♜f3 ♜c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♜xd4 ♜f6 5.♜c3 e5 6.♜db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6 8.♜a3 b5 (9.♜d5 ♙e7 10.♙xf6 ♙xf6)** by showing how to deal with any of the unusual options White may try on moves 9, 10 or 11.

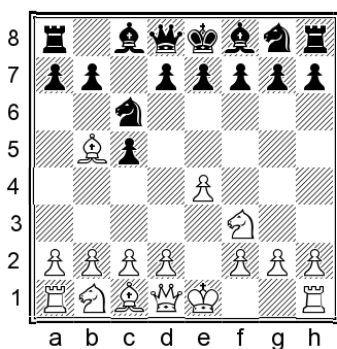
The final section of the book will deal with White's earlier alternatives. After the opening moves **1.e4 c5 2.♜f3 ♜c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♜xd4 ♜f6 5.♜c3 e5 6.♜db5 d6**, White has a serious option in **7.♜d5 ♜xd5 8.exd5**, which became particularly topical after it featured in the 2018 World Championship match.



**8...♜b8** is my preference, after which **9.c4** is historically the main line but **9.a4** is the modern preference, which you definitely need to be ready for. See Chapter 11 for full details.

**Chapter 12** will show how to deal with White's minor options after **1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♝c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 e5**.

Finally, **Chapter 13** should be viewed as bonus material because it doesn't cover the Sveshnikov itself; instead we will be looking at a couple of White's Anti-Sicilian options arising after **1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 ♗c6**. The first of them is **3.♗c3**, when **3...♗f6** is our choice. We will then turn to **3.♗b5**, the Rossolimo Variation:



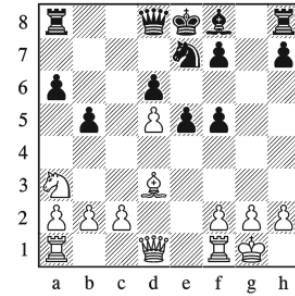
This is widely considered White's most theoretically challenging option in the entire Anti-Sicilian realm. It's a key system which Sveshnikov players need to be ready for, which is why I decided to cover it in this bonus chapter. I offer the slightly unusual **3...♗f6 4.♗c3 ♞c7** as a fighting continuation which leads to interesting play. The chapter is intended to offer a foundation rather than an exhaustive repertoire, and I hope the readers will find it a useful supplement to the main content of the book.

9. ♖xf6 gxf6 10. ♗d5 f5  
1 Opposite-Bishops Variation

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# Chapter 1

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## Opposite-Bishops Variation

### Variation Index

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1. e4 c5 2. ♗f3 ♗c6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♗xd4 ♗f6 5. ♗c3 e5 6. ♗db5 d6 7. ♖g5 a6  
8. ♗a3 b5 9. ♖xf6 gxf6 10. ♗d5 f5 11. ♖d3 ♖e6 12. 0-0 ♖xd5 13. exd5 ♗e7

- A) 14. ♗xb5 ♖g7 15. ♗c3 e4 16. ♖c4 0-0  
A1) 17. ♖d2  
A2) 17. ♖h5
- B) 14. c4 ♖g7  
B1) 15. ♖d2  
B2) 15. ♖b10
- C) 14. ♖e1
- D) 14. c3 ♖g7 15. ♗c2 0-0  
D1) 16. a4  
D2) 16. ♖e1 ♖d7  
D21) 17. a4  
D22) 17. g3

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6 8.♘a3 b5 9.♙xf6 gxf6 10.♘d5 f5

It's worth briefly noting that, unlike some of the upcoming chapters, the content of this one cannot arise via the 10...♙g7 move order.

### 11.♙d3

White activates the bishop and threatens exf5. It would be extremely premature to exchange on e4 or advance with ...f4, so we really only have one decent reply.

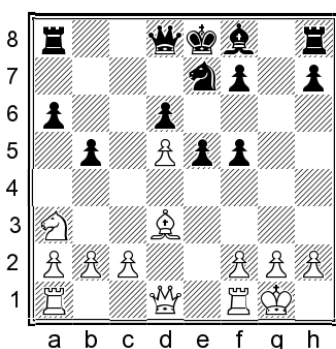
### 11...♙e6 12.0-0

As we saw in the repertoire overview, White has various options on moves 11 and 12, but for now we will focus on the most popular and arguably most critical approach. White develops quickly and castles, keeping us guessing as to whether the c-pawn will advance one or two squares.

### 12...♙xd5

Why am I recommending this exchange? The point is that after the main alternative of 12...♙g7, White can play 13.♙h5 f4 14.c4!, with somewhat better chances.

### 13.exd5 ♘e7



I would characterize this position as strategically sharp, but not yet tactically sharp – although tactics certainly can erupt in certain variations. The opposite-coloured bishops bring an important dimension to the play. If one side can seize the initiative on their ‘own’ colour complex, the opponent will have a hard time defending with the wrong-coloured bishop.

Let's consider the plans for both sides. We would like to advance our respective f-pawns to f4 and f5, gaining space and creating attacking chances. Another important idea is advancing the e-pawn to open the long diagonal for our bishop. If White blocks with c2-c3, then ...b4 can be a useful resource. The open g-file can be useful for attacking purposes, and our knight can often go to g6 followed by any of e5 (after ...e4), f4 or h4 to create threats against White's king.

From White's perspective, there is a question of how and when to bring the offside knight into play. Sometimes White will link this with queenside play with c2-c4 or a2-a4, while in other cases White will attempt to play on the kingside with a well-timed pawn break. We should also keep in mind the possibility of the bishop being rerouted via f1 to h3.

One of the most interesting features of this position is that both sides can fight for the initiative on both flanks. This is a rare characteristic in chess openings – especially within the Sicilian, which is known for middlegame positions with attacks on opposite flanks.

Summing up, we are looking at an extremely rich position in which both sides will attempt to implement their plans using assets on the two flanks. Black's position has stood the test of time, but there are plenty of recent ideas and twists which we should know about.

We will analyse **A)** 14.♘xb5, **B)** 14.c4, **C)** 14.♙e1 and **D)** 14.c3. The last option is by far the main line, and our coverage of it will extend until the end of Chapter 2.

14.♙h5 is sometimes played but it has no independent significance after 14...e4 15.♙e2 ♙g7, when 16.c4 reaches variation B2 below, while 16.c3 transposes to variation A1 of the next chapter on page 44.

### A) 14.♘xb5

This is of course a fundamental idea to consider. White uses a simple tactic and hopes to prove that “a pawn is a pawn.”

### 14...♙g7

We simply ignore the knight and develop. Notice that the last move vacates the f8-square, so the threat of ...axb5 becomes real.

### 15.♘c3

The knight is passively placed here, but the threat of ...e4 meant that there was no choice. The poor placement of the knight is the main drawback of White's 14th move, and Black is generally ensured of a good game.

### 15...e4

We gain time against the bishop while opening the long diagonal.

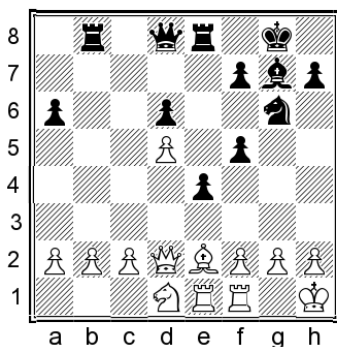
### 16.♙c4

This is the usual continuation, enabling the white queen to find an active spot on the kingside. The drawback is that the bishop may find itself out of play on the queenside.

The alternative is:

### 16.♙e2 ♘g6 17.♚d2

After 17.♞e1 Black castled in Zhao Jun – Wei Yi, China 2015, but a stronger move is: 17...♙e5!N Centralizing and going into action without delay. After 18.♚d2 ♚f6 19.a4 ♞g8 Black is clearly better. 17...0-0 18.♙h1 ♞e8 19.♞ae1 ♞b8 20.♘d1 20.b3 ♚f6 21.♘d1 f4 22.♙xa6 ♚h4 also favours Black.



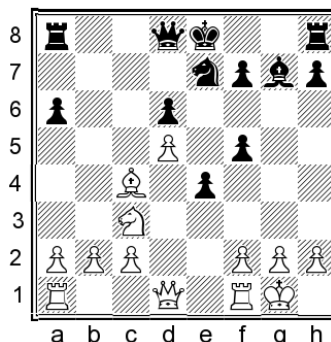
### 20...f4!N

Black should not waste time when such moves can be played.

Having said that, 20...♙xb2 21.♙xa6 ♙g7 22.a4 f4 23.♙b5 ♞e5 gave Black a nice initiative in Voiculescu – Gebur, corr. 2012.

### 21.♙xa6 ♚g5

Black has a powerful attack.



### 16...0-0

Having shifted the king to safety, we will aim to profit from the awkward placement of White's minor pieces. Compared with the note above, the possibility of ♚h5 makes it slightly harder to arrange a direct attack, but a slower kingside build-up is certainly possible. In short, Black has excellent compensation for the pawn.

White has tried **A1)** 17.♚d2 and **A2)** 17.♚h5.

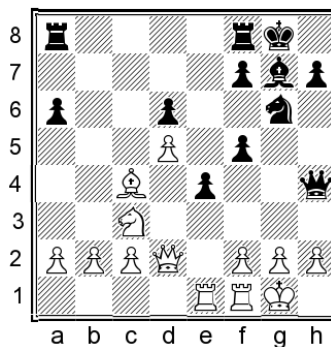
### A1) 17.♚d2 ♘g6

White has tried a few different ways of organizing the pieces, but we can always obtain a strong attack with mostly natural moves.

### 18.♙h1

Some other games have continued with: 18.♞ae1 ♚h4

We insist on kingside play.



### 19.b3

19.g3 ♖h3 20.f4 exf3! 21.♞xf3 ♘e5 exploits the loose bishop on c4. 22.♞xe5 (22.♞f4 runs into 22...♙h6.) 22...dxe5 White has a hard time due to our slight material advantage and powerful bishop. 19.♘d1 f4! is a powerful idea, preventing the knight from going to e3. The tactical justification is revealed after 20.♞xe4 f5 21.g3 (21.♞e1? f3! gives us a decisive attack) 21...♖h3 22.♞xf4 ♙h6 23.♚d3 ♘xf4 24.gxf4 ♖h5, when Black had a significant advantage in Hernandez Molina – Kuiper, corr. 2005.

19...♙h6 20.♚d1 ♘e5

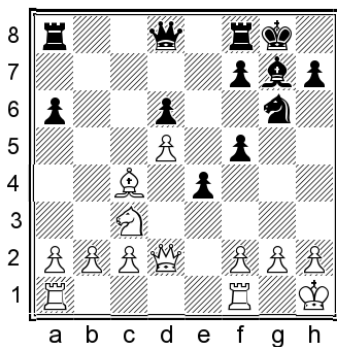
White has tried a couple of moves from here, and in both cases Black proved to have more than adequate play:

21.♘e2

21.♙e2 ♖h8 22.♖h1 ♞ac8! 23.♘a4 ♞g8! 24.g3 ♖h3 25.♞g1 f4 gave White big problems in Jarabinsky – Khan, corr. 2013.

21...♖h8 22.f4 ♘xc4 23.bxc4 ♞ac8 24.g3 ♖f6 25.♘d4 ♞xc4

White needed to defend well to hold this difficult position in Cossmann – Boehm, corr. 2011.



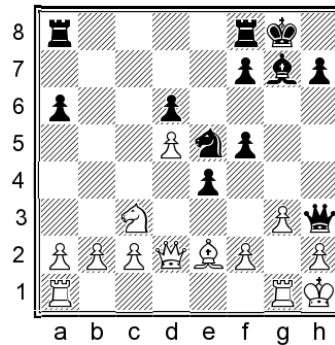
18...♚h4 19.g3 ♖h3

The queen gets closer to the white king.

20.♙e2

20.♞g1 ♘e5 21.♙f1 (21.♙e2 transposes to the main line below) 21...♚xh2† 22.♖xh2 ♘f3† sees us regain the queen with a better endgame.

20...♘e5 21.♞g1



21...♖h8!

We prepare to bring another piece into an attacking position.

22.♘d1 ♞g8

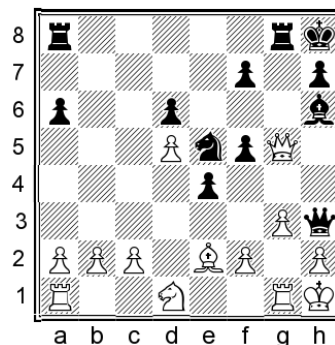
Soon the bishop can go to h6 or f6, and ...f4 will increase the pressure at the right moment.

23.a4!?

White advances a pawn and opens up the possibility of developing the rook along the third rank.

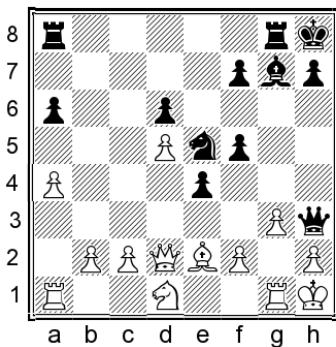
23.♘e3 ♙h6 24.♚d4 ♞g6 25.♘g2 was seen in Ziegler – Klaus, corr. 2018, when 25...♞ag8N 26.♘h4 ♞g6g7 would be my choice. Black has good counterplay and can play ...♙g5 next.

23.♚g5 ♙h6!N (23...♘f3 24.♙xf3 exf3 25.♚f4 led to an eventual draw in Hybl – Esen, corr. 2012, but in practice it would be trickier to prove Black's compensation here.)



24.♚f6† (24.♚h5?! ♚xh5 25.♙xh5 ♞ac8 26.c3 ♞c5 27.♙e2 a5 sees us regain the pawn with the better endgame prospects.) 24...♙g7 The logical outcome would be retreating the queen with a surprising repetition. Instead, 25.♚xd6? runs into 25...f4! 26.♚b4 f5 27.♚e7 ♞ad8 28.c4 f3 29.♙f1

♖h6 when White is in huge trouble on the kingside.



23...♖ac8! 24.c3

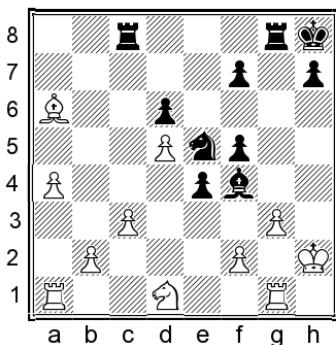
Presumably White didn't like the look of 24.♖a3 ♗h6 25.♖b4, when Black can either play 25...♖xc2 or continue more slowly with 25...♖g6, defending d6 and continuing to build up on the kingside.

24...♗f6

As usual in these lines, Black has serious attacking chances.

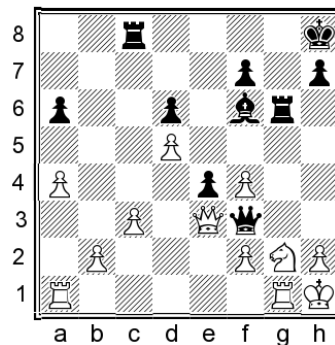
25.♗e3

I also checked: 25.♖f4 ♗g5 26.♗f1 ♖xh2† 27.♗xh2 ♗xf4 28.♗xa6



28...♗f3† 29.♗g2 ♖a8 30.♗b5 ♗xg1 31.♗xg1 h5 32.♗f1 ♗h6 Black has the better endgame.

25...f4! 26.gxf4 ♗f3 27.♗xf3 ♖xf3† 28.♗g2 ♖g6 29.♖e3



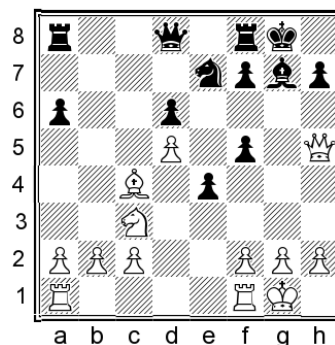
29...♖h5!N

This would be my preference, although 29...♖g4 30.♖af1 ♖cg8 also gave Black enough counterplay in Varlamov – Balabanov, corr. 2014.

30.♗e1 ♖xg1† 31.♗xg1 ♖g8† 32.♗f1 ♖xd5 33.♗g2 ♖f5 34.♖e1 d5

Our activity fully compensates for White's extra pawn.

A2) 17.♖h5



That's one of the points of placing the bishop on c4 instead of e2: the queen has much more space.

17...♖c8

Hitting the bishop while usefully protecting the f5-pawn.

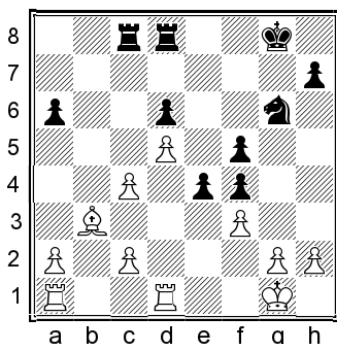
18.♗b3 ♗xc3 19.bxc3 f4

It's obvious that Black is objectively at least equal, despite being a pawn down. White's bishop is out of play and the only way to activate it is via a4. We have a simple plan of pushing the kingside pawns and attacking along the g-file, which is not easy to meet. Let me point out the excellent plan of transferring the rook via a7-g7 after clearing the seventh rank.

## 20. ♖a4

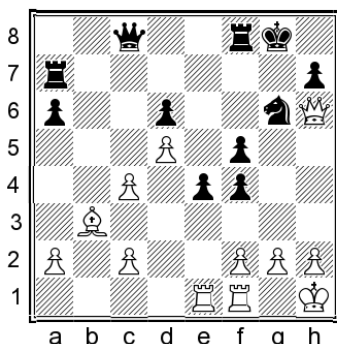
I considered two other tries:

20. ♖g5† ♘g6 21. ♖f6 ♖d8! 22. ♖xd8 ♜fxd8  
23. ♜fd1 f5 24. f3 ♜ac8 25. c4

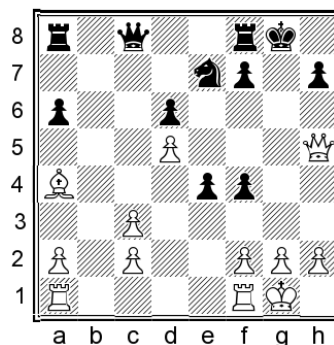


25... ♜e8 26. ♜d4 exf3 27. gxf3 ♜e2 28. ♜ad1 ♔g7  
Due to the strong e5-outpost which can be used by the knight or king, White was under some pressure in the endgame in Broemme – Korze, corr. 2010.

20. ♜ae1 f5 21. c4 ♘g6 22. ♔h1 ♜a7! 23. ♖h6 has been tried in a couple of games, with Black proving to have the upper hand in both of them:



23... a5 (23... ♜g7 24. a3?! This doesn't help, but it's not clear what advice to give to White; somehow there's not much to do except waiting. 24... ♔h8 25. a4 ♖d8 26. ♜g1 ♖f6 Black was clearly better in Schulz – Fritsche, corr. 2010.) 24. a4 ♖c5 25. ♜e2 ♖d4 26. ♜g1 ♜c7 27. ♖g5 ♔h8 28. ♜f1 ♜g7 White was under pressure in Wuerzebesser – Pommrich, corr. 2009.



## 20... ♘g6

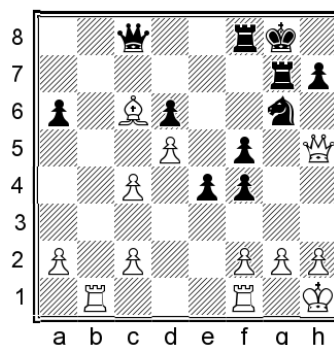
Another logical continuation is: 20... ♖xc3 21. ♜ae1 f5 22. ♖d7 ♔h8 23. ♖e6 ♜a7 24. ♜b1 ♜c7 25. ♔h1 ♖g7 Despite allowing the bishop to reach the e6-square, Black still had some initiative in Pinho – Kondratyev, corr. 2011. Nevertheless, since White's extra pawn is virtually worthless, I would prefer not to allow the bishop to reach such a good outpost.

## 21. ♖c6 ♜a7 22. ♔h1 f5 23. c4 ♜g7

Black has succeeded in transferring one rook to the g-file, and the other may soon follow.

## 24. ♜ab1

I propose a natural improvement:



## 24... ♔h8!N

Tucking the king away is always useful.

24... ♘e5 25. ♖h6 f3 26. gxf3 ♘xf3 was playable in Sueess – Mamutov corr. 2013, in view of 27. ♖xd6 ♘d2 28. ♖f4 ♘xb1 29. ♜xb1 ♖d8 30. d6 ♔h8 31. ♖d5 ♖f6 when the position remains balanced. However, I see no point in rushing things; we have every reason to play more ambitiously.

## 25. ♖h6

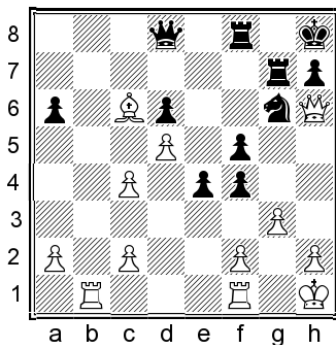
It seems logical to prevent ... ♘e5.

### 25...♙d8!

The queen served its purpose on c8, and now starts eyeing the dark squares.

### 26.g3

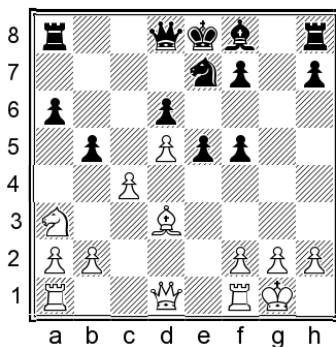
Against other moves Black could consider ...♙h4 leading to a strong attack in the endgame, as well as ...♙a5.



### 26...♙a5! 27.gxf4 ♙d2

The queen prepares to gobble up one or more of the loose queenside pawns. White suffers from a poor pawn structure and inferior minor piece, as well as an exposed king. Black is close to winning.

### B) 14.c4



This was one of the early attempts to create threats as fast as possible before Black can castle. However, we are not without counter-chances.

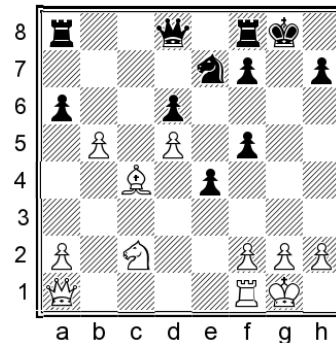
### 14...♙g7

14...e4 15.♙e2 ♙g7 will come to the same thing after White defends b2.

The text move indirectly threatens the b2-pawn, so White usually chooses either **B1)** 15.♙d2 or **B2)** 15.♙b1.

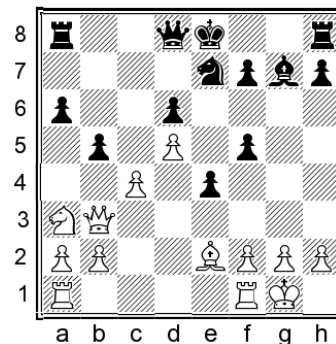
15.♙e2 e4 will soon transpose to one of the other lines.

15.cxb5?! is premature: 15...e4 16.♙c4 ♙xb2 17.♙c2 ♙xa1 18.♙xa1 0-0



19.♙f6? (19.bxa6N is necessary, although 19...♙g6 20.♙d4 ♙g5 still favours us.) 19...axb5 20.♙xb5 ♙xd5 Black was already winning in Sanchez Rivero – Csiba, corr. 2021.

15.♙b3 has been played a bunch of times as well. 15...e4 16.♙e2

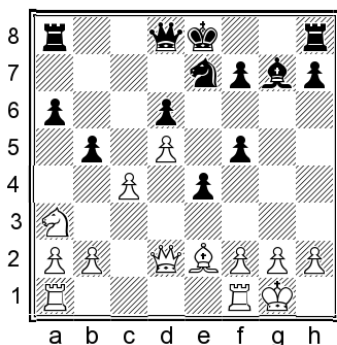


16...b4!N (16...bxc4?! is too cooperative, and 17.♙xc4 gave White a slight plus in Hribar – Hlavac, Pardubice 1996.) 17.♙xb4 See 17.♙xb4 in the notes to variation B1 below.

### B1) 15.♙d2

This has been played about as frequently as 15.♙b1.

### 15...e4 16.♙e2

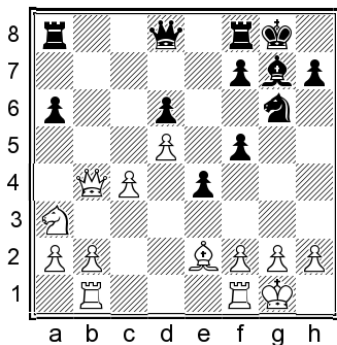


### 16...b4!

16...bxc4 has been played in about as many games, but I would rather not help White's knight to develop.

### 17.♘c2

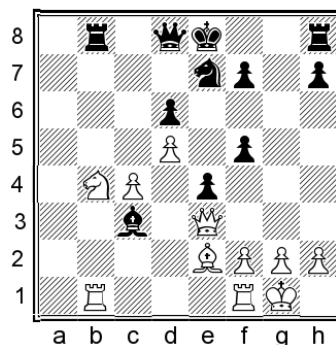
17.♙xb4 0-0 18.♖ab1 ♘g6 gives us promising counterplay:



19.f4! Without this, White would be in grave danger on the kingside. (For instance, 19.♔h1 ♙g5 gives us an easy attack.) 19...exf3 20.♙xf3 ♙g5 We're a pawn down with a damaged structure, but we also have excellent attacking chances on the dark squares.

### 17...♙xb2 18.♖ab1 ♙c3 19.♙h6

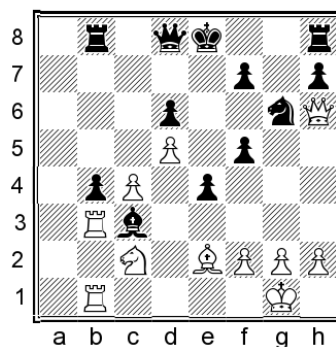
19.♙e3?! is less accurate: 19...a5 20.a3 (20.f3? was played in Lieske – Dorer, corr. 2010, when 20...♘g6!N 21.fxe4 f4 would have given Black a positionally won game.) 20...♖b8 21.axb4 axb4 22.♘xb4



22...♙xb4 A draw was agreed here in Rubinas – Isigkeit, corr. 2011, but in a practical game I would play on with Black. After 23.♖xb4 ♖xb4 24.♙c3 ♘g6 25.♙xb4 0-0 the knight is stronger than the bishop and we have some attacking chances, so White has to be careful to avoid trouble.

### 19...♖b8 20.♖b3 a5 21.a3 ♘g6 22.axb4 axb4 23.♖fb1

The most precise continuation is:



### 23...♙f6N

This virtually forces a draw.

23...♙f6 24.♘xb4 ♘e7 25.♙xf6 ♙xf6 26.♘c6 ♖xb3 27.♖xb3 0-0 was subsequently drawn in Zhekov – Gahler, corr. 2018, but I don't see much potential for Black to play for a win here. Therefore, unless you really have to win at all costs, it makes more sense to secure the draw quickly and cleanly.

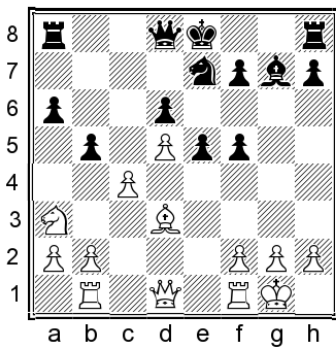
### 24.♖xb4 ♖xb4 25.♖xb4 ♙g5 26.♙g7

White has no real choice, as other queen moves will be powerfully met by ...♘f4.

### 26...♙f6 27.♙h6 ♙g5

The game ends in a repetition.

## B2) 15.♖b1



White removes the rook from the long diagonal and leaves the queen free for other duties.

### 15...e4 16.♙e2 0-0

Rather than take on c4 and help White's knight to develop, we sacrifice a pawn in the spirit of the Benko Gambit – except that here we will be looking to attack on the kingside rather than the queenside.

### 17.cxb5

This has been the usual choice. White has tried a few other ideas but our general plan remains the same:

17.♘c2 f4!N (17...♗b6 18.b3 b4 19.♗d2 a5 20.♗f4 ♖h8 was decent for Black in Laske – Wiesner, Baden 2013, but I prefer the idea of attacking without delay.) 18.cxb5 ♘g6! We have a dangerous attack; for instance, 19.bxa6? f3 20.gxf3 ♙e5 and White has no good defence.

### 17.♗d2 ♘g6

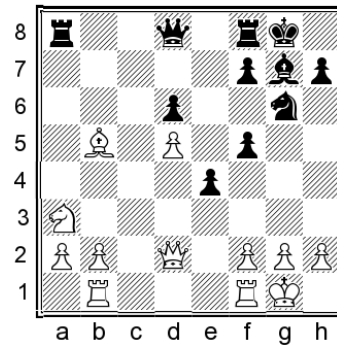
Again following the same plan.

### 18.cxb5

18.f4!? is a sensible continuation, preventing ...f5-f4 by occupying that square with White's own pawn. I suggest meeting it with: 18...b4!N (18...♗b6† 19.♖h1 b4 20.♘c2 a5 led to an eventual success for Black in Glaser – Cijs, corr. 2006, but at this point 21.♘e3!N would have been promising for White.) 19.♘c2 (19.♗xb4 ♖b8 20.♗d2 ♗b6† 21.♖h1 ♙xb2 wins back the pawn, and White is unable to exploit the pinned bishop. After something like 22.♘c2 ♘e7 23.g4 ♗c5 24.gxf5 ♙g7 the position remains dynamically balanced.) 19...a5 20.♘e3 ♗f6 Compared to the

18...♗b6† line noted above, the queen is better placed on the kingside. 21.♖h1 ♖fb8 Black has a harmonious set-up. A possible continuation is: 22.g4!? fxe4 23.♙xe4 ♖h8 With double-edged play.

18...axb5 19.♙xb5



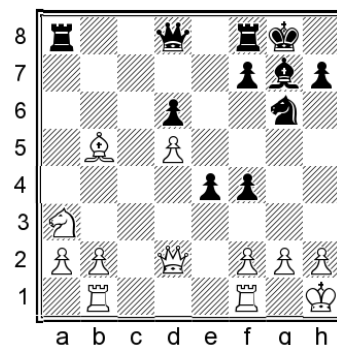
### 19...f4

As below, White is a pawn up but the knight is out of play on a3, and Black's kingside pawns offer considerable attacking potential.

### 20.♖h1

20.♖fe1 f5 21.♙f1 was seen in Sikora Lerch – Klima, Karvina 1994, and now 21...f3!N 22.g3 (22.gxf3? ♘e5! is horrible for White) 22...♗e7 23.♘c4 h5 would have yielded a strong attack.

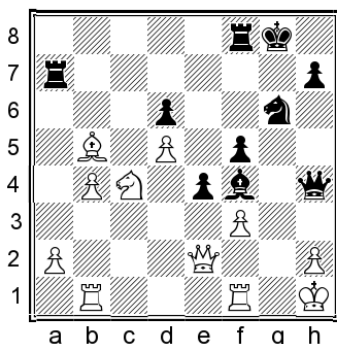
20.♗e2 f5 (20...♗e7!N is well worth considering, and if 21.f3?! e3! 22.♘c2 ♖h8 23.a4 ♖g8 Black stands clearly better.) 21.f3 Here I found a new idea: 21...♘e5!N Sacrificing a second pawn for further compensation, especially considering that White's knight is far away from the action. (21...e3 22.♖fc1 ♘e5 occurred in Rodin – Stalmach, corr. 2004. This looks playable too, but I prefer to avoid blocking the kingside and instead play for increased activity.) 22.fxe4 ♗g5 Play could continue: 23.♖h1 ♘g4 24.♘c2 ♙e5 25.h3 ♘f6 26.exf5 ♘h5 The complications favour Black.



20...♗h4 21.♗e2

Another game continued 21.♖c4 when the strongest reply is: 21...f3!N (The simple 21...♖xa2 22.♗xd6 ♖b8 23.♗f5 ♕f6 24.♗xg7 ♖xg7 was also excellent for Black in Fleischanderl – Mauro, corr. 2010) 22.g3 ♕h5 23.a4 f5 Next the rook will go to f6, with a powerful attack.

21...f3 22.gxf3 ♕e5 23.f4 ♕xf4 24.f3 f5 25.♗c4 ♖a7 26.b4



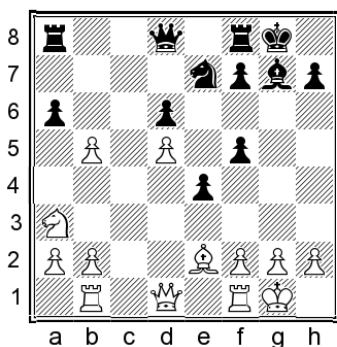
In Saenko – Sukhodolsky, corr. 2010, Black should have continued:

26...♖e7!N 27.fxe4 ♖xe4 28.♕g2 ♖b8

Black has a decisive advantage, due to tactical points such as:

29.♕a6 ♖a8 30.♕b5 ♕xh2! 31.♕xh2 ♕e7

With deadly threats.



17...axb5 18.♕xb5

A possible alternative is:

18.♕b3

White's idea is to take on b5 with the knight.

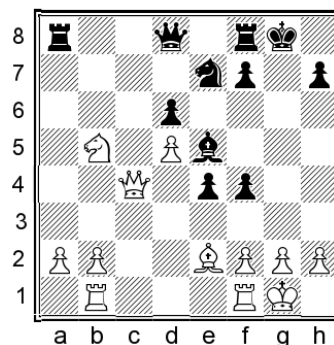
18...f4

Another interesting idea is: 18...♖b8!N 19.♕xb5 (After 19.♗xb5 f4 20.a4 ♖h8 21.f3 e3 22.♕d3 ♖g8 23.♖h1 ♕e5 the rook will go to g5 next, with good attacking chances.) 19...♖a5 20.♕a4 ♕d2! 21.♕c6 ♕h6 The nice manoeuvre has resulted in the queen reaching the kingside, leading to the standard attacking plans that we see in so many of these lines.

19.♗xb5

19.♕xb5 ♖h8 also gives Black a typical initiative.

19...♕e5 20.♕c4



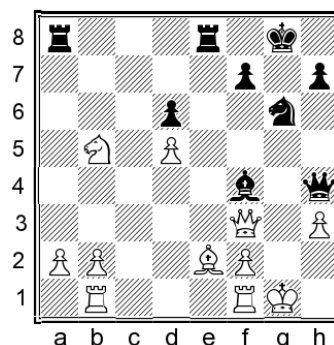
20...f3!N

20...f5 21.♗d4 ♗g6 22.♗e6 ♕h4 23.f3 ♖fc8 24.♕b3 ♖h8 was quite promising for Black in Me – Caire, Montreal 2008, but the text move is even stronger.

21.gxf3 ♗g6

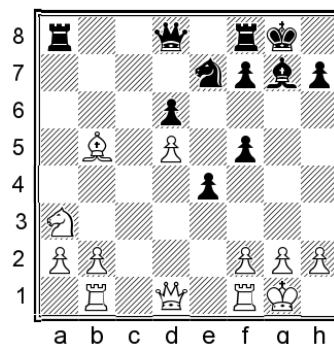
White is already busted. For instance:

22.f4 ♕xf4 23.♕xe4 ♖e8 24.♕f3 ♕h4 25.h3



25...♖xe2! 26.♕xe2 ♕xh3 27.f3 ♗h4

Black wins – a good example of how quickly the game can end if White gets careless.



18...♗g6

We have typical compensation for the sacrificed pawn. White has two passers but, due to misplaced pieces, will have serious problems getting coordinated and formulating a plan.

Meanwhile we are ready to storm the kingside with the usual ...f4-f3, with the queen ready to enter the fray on h4 or g5.

### 19. ♕c6

A logical idea: White hits the rook and clears the path to advance the b-pawn.

19. ♖d2N is never played here, but it immediately transposes to the analysis of 17. ♖d2 in the notes above.

19. ♖e1N is another untested move order which transposes to variation C below – see page 27 for the continuation.

An interesting alternative is:

19. ♖h5

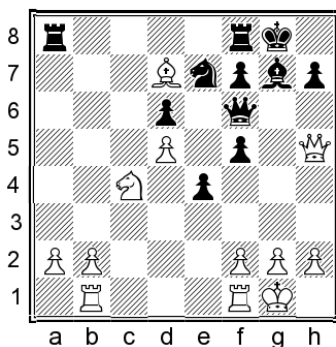
Stopping our queen from occupying its preferred attacking squares.

19... ♖f6 20. ♕d7

20. ♕c6?! ♖f4 drives the queen back, and after 21. ♖d1 ♖a7 Black is for choice.

20... ♖e7 21. ♖c4

A simple improvement is:



21... ♖xa2N

Black was successful with 21... ♖a7?! 22. ♕c6 ♖xa2 in Semenova – Kochetkova, Miass 2007, but 23. b4!N would have mobilized the passer to good effect.

22. b4

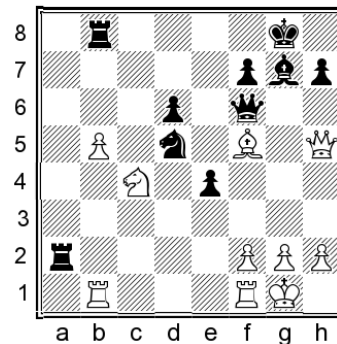
This is still White's best, but the bishop is a bit worse on d7 than c6.

22... ♖b8

22... f4!? is another way of handling the position, when 23. b5 ♖g6 24. ♖xg6 hxg6 25. ♖fd1 ♖c2

26. ♖dc1 ♖xc1† 27. ♖xc1 ♖xd5 28. ♖xd6 results in a balanced endgame.

23. b5 ♖xd5 24. ♕xf5



24... ♖c3!

Losing h7 is no big deal.

25. ♕xh7† ♖f8 26. ♖be1 d5 27. ♖e3 ♖h6 28. ♖f5 ♖f6

Black is fine.

### 19... ♖g5!?

Timing is everything in this type of chess. Black has only offered this exchange sac in one game, but the idea is fully sound.

### 20. ♖h1!N

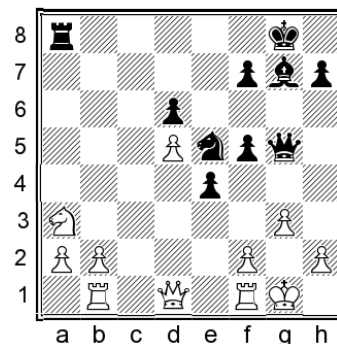
This is perhaps the most accurate choice.

20. ♕xa8N 20... ♖h4 21. g3 ♖f3† 22. ♖g2 ♖xa8 gives us full compensation. For instance, 23. ♖c4 f4 24. ♖xd6 f5!? (24... ♖d2 is also playable) 25. ♖c4 ♖h8 with a sharp, dynamically balanced position.

20. g3

This was seen in Enders – Handke, Germany 2003, when Black should have continued:

20... ♖e5!N 21. ♕xa8 ♖xa8



22. ♖b5

22.♔g2?! offers to transpose to the line above, but 22...f4! is unpleasant.

22.♔h1 ♖f3 23.♖g1!?. A surprising reaction, but White had to do something about the terrible threat of ...♗h5 (or ...♗h6)23...♗xg1 24.♔xg1 f4 25.♗c4 ♗g6 Black's initiative is worth at least a pawn.

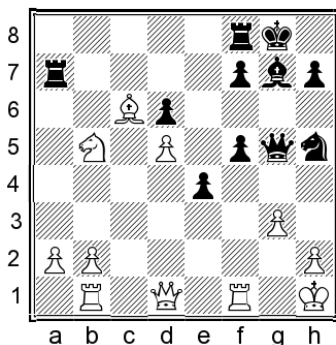
22...♗f3† 23.♔g2 ♗h4† 24.♔h1 ♗f3  
Black has at least a draw.

20...♞a7

20...♗h4 21.♞g1 is White's idea.

21.♗c4

I wondered if White could fight for the initiative by sacrificing a pawn with 21.f4!? ♗xf4 22.g3 ♗h5 23.♗b5, but then discovered a beautiful refutation:



23...♗e5!! 24.♗xa7 ♗xg3† 25.hxg3 ♗xg3! 26.♗e2 ♗h4† 27.♔g1 ♗h8 White is defenceless.

21...♗e5 22.♗b3!?

White can look for safety with 22.♗xe5 ♗xe5 23.f4 (23.a4?! ♗h6 24.g3 f4 gives us a strong attack) 23...exf3 24.♗xf3 ♞xa2, with a likely draw.

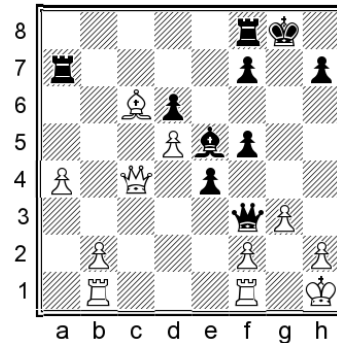
22...♗xc4 23.♗xc4 ♗e5

White keeps an extra pawn, but our kingside counter-chances are guaranteed.

24.a4

24.f4!? gives back the extra pawn in order to obtain some breathing room on the kingside. Still, after 24...♗xf4 25.g3 ♗e5 26.a4 ♗h8 27.b4 ♞g8 28.♗e2 e3 29.♞be1 f4 30.gxf4 ♗xf4 we have enough counterplay.

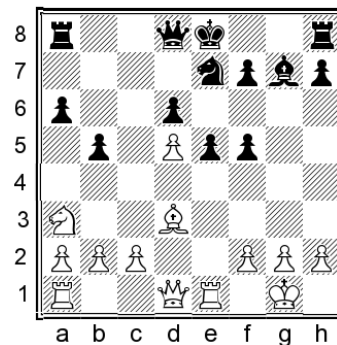
24...♗f4 25.g3 ♗f3†



26.♔g1 f4 27.♞fe1 f5 28.♗e2 ♗b3

Black's initiative is at least as important as White's extra pawn.

C) 14.♞e1 ♗g7



15.♞b1!?

This is the option that gives White's previous move a unique character. White holds back the c-pawn to prepare c2-c4.

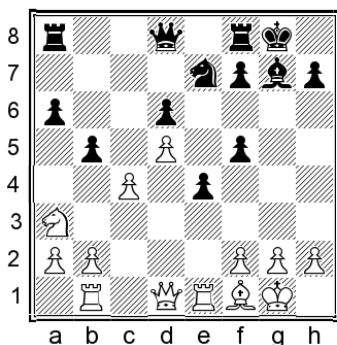
15.c3 transposes to variation B of the next chapter on page 71.

15...0-0 16.c4

White hopes to obtain an improved version of variation B above. Here we see the same kind of fast queenside action, but this time the bishop can safely retreat to f1, where it avoids getting in the way of the other pieces.

16...e4 17.♗f1

From here, the bishop defends the kingside and also takes part in White's queenside play.



17...d6!

Once again we refuse to hand over the c4-square to White's knight, and are instead ready to sacrifice a pawn to fight for the initiative.

### 18.cxb5

Taking the pawn is the most popular choice, but it has a drawback. The whole point of White's move order was to retreat the bishop to f1, which is a better square than e2 – but if the bishop ends up on b5 anyway, why did White even bother with the earlier finesse? Let's check some other continuations:

18.b4 is a logical attempt to push the queenside pawns as fast as possible. 18...d5 19.Wh5 Wf6 20.cxb5 axb5 21.dxb5 Bxa2 22.Be2 (22.d4? Bxf2! is a nice tactical detail.) 22...Bxe2 23.Wxe2 Wg6 24.Wc2 f4 Black had a good position in Kostromin – Kruglyakov, Evpatoria 2006.

18.Be3!?

This makes use of White's earlier regrouping, but the idea proves unconvincing:

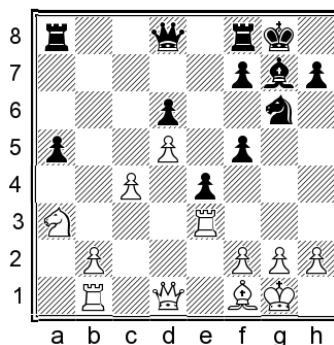
18...b4 19.dxc2 a5 20.a3

White hopes to open the queenside and utilize the rook along the third rank in some way. 20.Wh5 Wf6 21.g3 Bc8 is slightly better for Black.

20...bxa3 21.dxa3N

21.bxa3 Wf6 22.f3 Bfe8 was good for Black in Galkowski – Sakai, corr. 2004, and 22...Bae8!N might be even stronger.

21.Bxa3 Wf6 also looks good, intending ...f4 without allowing d4.



21...d5 22.b5 d4

Perhaps the rook wasn't so well placed on e3 after all...

23.Bh3 Wg5

Black has a clear advantage, 24.dxd6? Wf4 being the simple tactical point.

18.Wd2

This move has been played a few times. I found an interesting new idea:

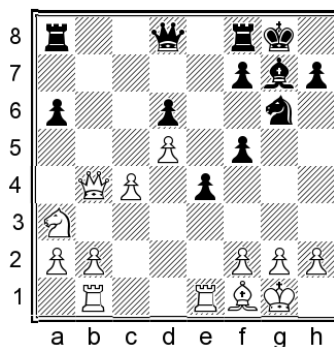
18...b4!N

A surprising motif which is worth noting.

18...ch8 and 18...e5 have both been played, and are also completely acceptable for Black.

19.Wxb4

19.dxc2 a5 is strategically promising for us.



19...Wg5!

The idea is to connect the rooks while taking control of the d2-square.

20.Wxd6

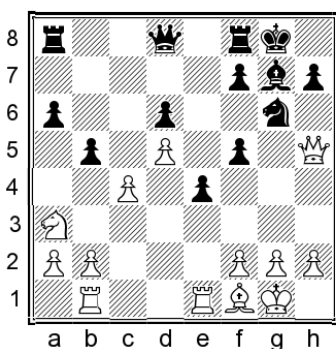
I also considered 20.Be3 d4 21.Bg3 Wf6 22.We1 Bxb2 23.dxc2 Bfb8 24.Bb3 Bxb3 25.axb3 a5, when Black is clearly better.

20...d5 21.Be3 d4 22.Bg3 Bae8! 23.e2 e5 24.Wc5 h5!

White is in trouble.

18.Wh5

White places the queen on an active square, so we'll reply in kind.



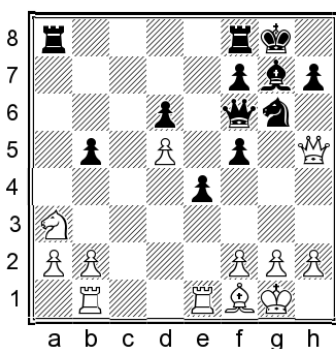
18...♙f6!

Defending f5 in the most active and flexible way. On the next move, there is the possibility of ...♘f4, which would drive the queen all the way back to d1 – but we will not necessarily play that way, because the knight isn't so well placed there. Let's see how we should meet White's possible continuations:

19.cxb5

19.g3 has been played but it doesn't impress me, as we were not necessarily going to play ...♘f4 yet anyway. 19...♘e5 Targeting the newly created weakness on f3. 20.♖h1 In Marjanovic – Vuckovic, Kragujevac 2009, it would have been logical to continue with 20...♙g6!?, and after 21.♙xg6 hxg6 22.cxb5 axb5 23.♙xb5 ♘f3 24.♙ed1 ♙fb8 25.♙e2 ♘d4 26.♙f1 ♙e5 Black has a magnificent version of a Benko Gambit!

19...axb5



From here, White has tried taking the pawn with both pieces.

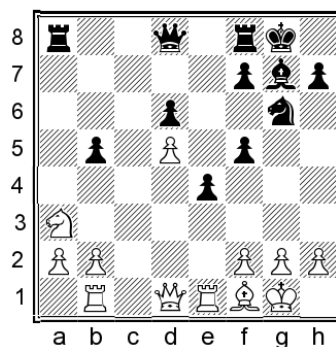
20.♘xb5

20.♙xb5 ♘f4 21.♙d1 ♙g6 22.g3 ♘h3† 23.♙g2 ♘g5 24.♙c4 f4 gave Black a strong attack in Kineva – Kochetkova, St Petersburg 2002.

20...♙xa2

Black had a fine position in Calistri – Aguetaz, Villeurbanne 2004.

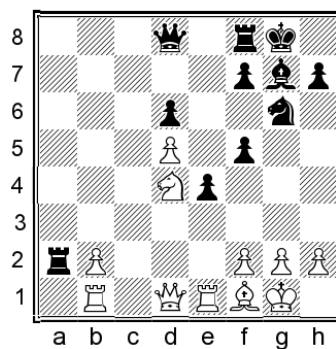
18...axb5



19.♙xb5

This has been the most popular choice, so we'll take it as the main line. However, this move is basically an admission that White's sophisticated scheme with 14.♙e1 has failed. The bishop was momentarily better placed on f1 than e2, but it ended up going to b5 anyway. The upshot is that White is playing a slightly worse version of variation B2 beginning with 14.c4, because there are more purposeful moves available than 19.♙e1 in that line.

White has also taken the pawn the other way: 19.♘xb5 ♙xa2 20.♘d4 White opted to give up the a-pawn in order to improve the offside knight, but a strong reply is:



20...♙g5!N (20...♙f6 was played in Liu – Abasov, Batumi 2006, when 21.♙c4!N would have led to double-edged play.) 21.♖h1 ♙fa8 Black is dominating.

19...♙g5!

Simple and direct.

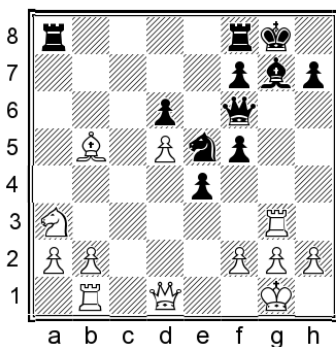
19...♙xb2 20.♘c4 ♕c3!?!N is an interesting novelty which I analysed many years ago. The key line continues 21.♖e3 ♜f6! 22.♘b6 (22.♘xd6?! ♕d4! and 22.a4 ♕d4 turn out well for Black) 22...♕d4! 23.♘d7 ♜g7 24.♘xf8 ♖xf8, when Black has the makings of a strong initiative to compensate for the sacrificed exchange. However, when taking a fresh look at it with modern tools, I found that the dynamic 25.♖eb3! ♖xa2 26.♕c4 ♕xf2† 27.♖h1! causes some problems.

### 20.♖e3

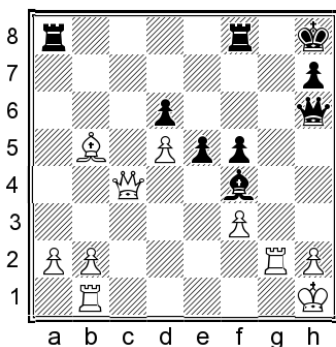
20.♜c1?! ♜xc1 21.♖exc1 ♕xb2 22.♖xb2 ♖xa3 23.♖cc2 ♘e5 gave Black a favourable endgame in Kalashnikov – Oleksienko, Moscow 2007.

### 20...♘e5 21.♖g3 ♜f6

Sveshnikov players should be happy to reach such positions, and you certainly don't need to memorize any more. However, it's worth following a few more moves of a correspondence game to see how the play may develop.



22.f4 exf3 23.gxf3 ♖h8 24.♖h1 ♕h6 25.♖g2 ♕f4 26.♜d4 ♜h6 27.♘c4 f6 28.♘xe5 fxе5 29.♜c4



### 29...♜h5!N

29...♖ac8 30.♜e2 ♖c7 proved perfectly playable in LePage – Hofstetter, corr. 2012, but

the text move is an easier practical choice due to the simple idea of taking on f3. It also forces White to find a subtle move to maintain the balance.

### 30.♜c6!

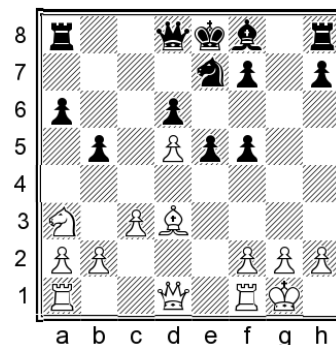
30.♖f1? ♖g8! is unpleasant for White.

30.♜e2 is met by 30...♖xa2 when only Black can be better.

30...♖g8 31.♖bg1 ♜xf3 32.♕e2 ♜h3 33.♖xg8† ♖xg8 34.♖xg8† ♖xg8 35.♜c8† ♖g7 36.♜d7† ♖g8

White escapes with perpetual check.

### D) 14.c3



This is the main line, and a conceptually different approach from the previous options. White fortifies the a1-h8 diagonal, thus limiting the potential of our bishop – although it might still participate in a kingside attack via e5 later in the game. White's last move also prepares to centralize the knight via c2, although in some cases that square will be used by the bishop in response to the ...e4 attack. Also, if and when the knight moves from a3, the trademark a2-a4 attack will be in the air.

### 14...♕g7

Here White must make an important decision. The modern main lines are 15.♜h5 and 15.♖e1, and we will analyse them separately in the next chapter. Before then, we will look at the classical idea of improving the wayward knight.

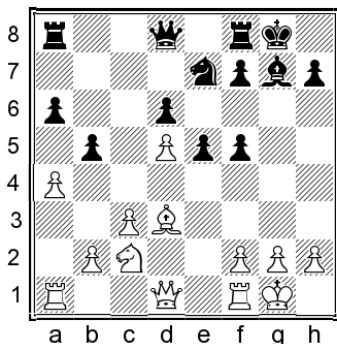
### 15.♘c2

Rerouting the knight is not so fashionable nowadays, but it's still a logical and solid approach which we need to consider.

### 15...0-0

We will analyse D1) 16.a4 and D2) 16.♖e1.

#### D1) 16.a4

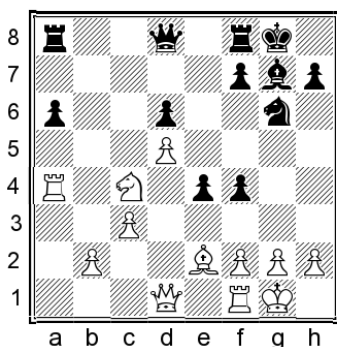


White strikes at the queenside without delay. The drawback of this move order is that we can force the white bishop to move to an inferior square.

### 16...e4 17.♕e2 bxa4 18.♖xa4

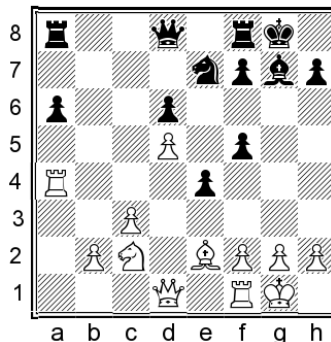
18.♗e3 is a rare alternative, aiming to activate the knight as soon as possible, but it allows us to gain ground on the kingside. 18...f4 19.♗c4 ♗g6 20.♖xa4 This position was reached in Willumsen – Rosenkilde, Copenhagen 2004. Black has many possible ways of building up on the kingside.

My preference is:



20...♔h8!N It's always useful to tuck the king away in the corner and have the option of putting a rook on the g-file at a moment's notice. 21.♔h1 ♕e7 We have a full share of the chances. An illustrative line continues: 22.♗a5?! ♖ae8 23.♗c6 It looks tempting to land the knight on this outpost, but the manoeuvre takes time and the

knight doesn't really achieve anything. 23...♕g5 24.♖g1 ♕f6 25.♖xa6 ♖h6 Our attack is worth much more than the missing pawn.



### 18...♕b6

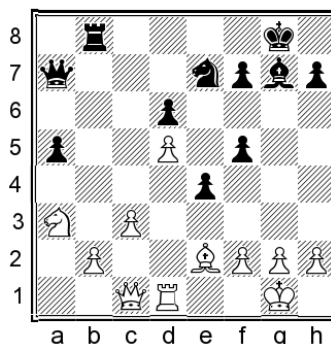
Defending the pawn on a6 while attacking its counterpart on b2. We also have the idea of placing the queen on c5 to attack the d5-pawn.

### 19.♖b4

White has tried a few other ideas:

19.♕a1 ♗xd5 20.♖d1 (20.♖xa6? ♖xa6 21.♕xa6 ♕xb2 was highly unpleasant for White in Didenko – Benza, Dagomys 2004) 20...♗e7 21.♗b4 ♖fd8 Black had no problems in Klovans – Roiz, Biel 2006.

19.♕c1!? is a rare but interesting choice. 19...♖fb8 20.♖b4 ♕a7 21.♖d1 White's idea is to use the rook to protect the pawn on d5 while the queen guards b2. 21...a5 22.♖xb8† ♖xb8 23.♗a3 The knight is coming to the desired c4-square. In Hebels – Chouari, corr. 2006, Black should have continued:

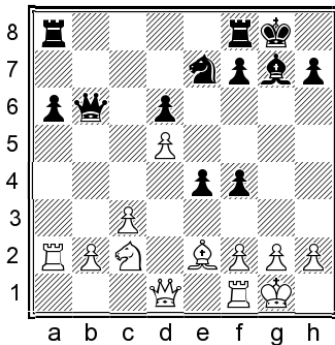


23...♗g6!? 24.♗c4 ♕c7 The position holds chances for both sides. A logical continuation is 25.♕g5! ♕d7! 26.g3 a4 27.♕f1 f4!, when the chances remain balanced.

19.♖a2

This has actually been the most popular choice, but it's nothing to fear.

19...f4



20.♗d2

20.♖e1?! is of little use, and after 20...♔h8! Black has excellent attacking chances.

20...♙e5

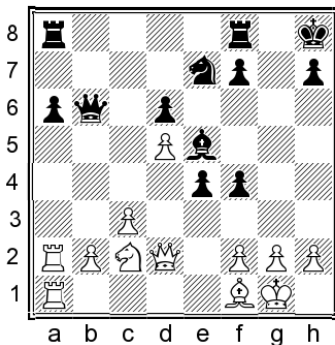
Defending f4 while eyeing the white kingside, as well as clearing the g-file.

21.♖fa1

Another game continued 21.♘a3 ♖c5 22.♘c4 f3 23.gxf3 exf3 24.♙d3 ♗xd5 25.♔h1 ♘g6 26.♖g1 ♗e6 27.♖a4 ♔h8 with mutual chances, Bekemann – Latronico, corr. 2010.

21...♔h8 22.♙f1

22.♙xa6 ♖g8 23.♙f1 ♖xa2 24.♖xa2 ♘f5 gave Black plenty of play for the pawn in Bresadola – Pavlicek, corr. 2012.

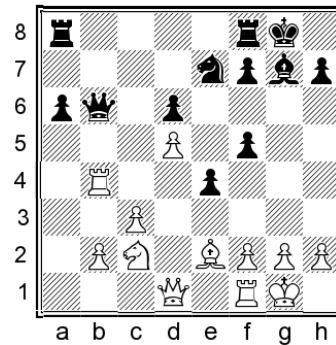


22...f3!N

22...♖fc8 23.♗e1 f5 24.♘a3 ♗b3 25.♘c4 ♖xc4 26.♖a3 ♖xc3 27.bxc3 ♗xd5 28.♖xa6 was slightly better for White in Bondi – Palm, corr. 2012.

23.♗e3 ♗d8! 24.♗xe4 fxe2 25.♔xg2 ♘g6

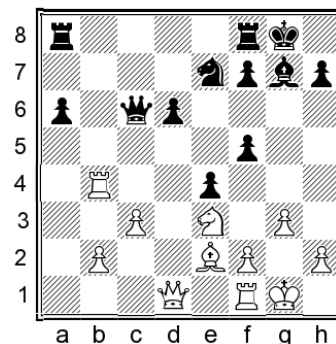
We have typical attacking prospects on the dark squares and along the g-file.



19...♗c5 20.♘e3

White has offered a positional pawn sacrifice in some games:

20.g3!? ♗xd5 21.♘e3 ♗c6



White is well centralized with a healthy pawn structure. This amounts to adequate compensation for the pawn, but nothing more. For instance:

22.♗b3

Another game continued 22.♙c4 a5 23.♖b5 ♙h6 24.♘d5 ♘xd5 25.♗xd5 ♗xd5 26.♖xd5 ♖fc8 27.♙a2 ♖cb8 28.♖b1 ♖a7 29.♖xf5 ♙g7, when the players reached a level endgame and agreed a draw in Carapinha – Pekin, corr. 2017.

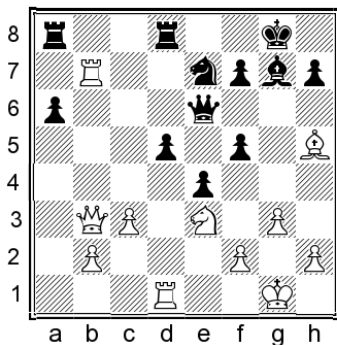
22...d5

22...f4 23.gxf4 d5 is the kind of counter-sacrifice which is always worth considering, but after the further 24.♖b7 ♗d6 25.♗a3 ♗xa3 26.bxa3 White had a small plus in Balshaw – Thierry, corr. 2012.

23.♖b7

23.♖b6 ♗c5 24.♙xa6 f4 25.♘g2 f3 26.♘e3 ♗c7 27.♖d1 ♖fb8! 28.♖b7 ♖xb7 29.♗xb7 ♗xb7 30.♙xb7 ♖b8 31.♙xd5 ♘xd5 32.♖xd5 ♖xb2 resulted in another balanced endgame in Velez – Schuster, corr. 2015.

23...♗e6 24.♖d1 ♖fd8 25.♙h5

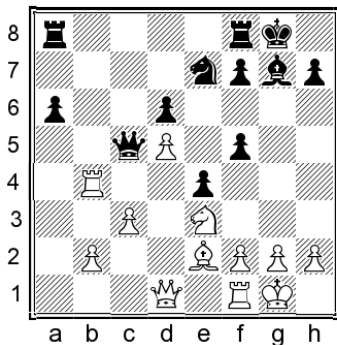


25...♔h8

25...d4!?N is a valid alternative, and after 26.♖xe6 fxe6 27.♗xe7 dxe3 28.fxe3 ♖xd1† 29.♙xd1 ♖b8 30.♗xe6 ♖xb2 31.♗xa6 ♙xc3 an equal endgame is reached.

26.♖b6 ♗e5 27.♙xf7 f4

Black had plenty of counterplay in Mourato – Fedorov, corr. 2015.



**20...♖ab8!**

Challenging the active rook.

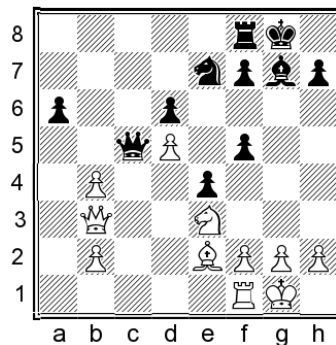
20...♖fb8 is also playable, and there is something to be said for posting both rooks on the queenside. However, White can consider 21.♖c4 ♗b6 22.♙h5!? when the f7-pawn is slightly soft. Black's position is still fine, but it seems easier to avoid this option by keeping f7 securely defended.

**21.♖xb8N**

This is a novelty here, but it will immediately transpose to a game where White exchanged after 20...♖fb8. White has two other ideas:

21.♖c4 ♗b6 22.♖b4 offers to repeat the position, but you also have the option of moving the queen to some other square if you wish to play on.

21.♗b3 ♖xb4 22.cxb4



22...♗d4!?

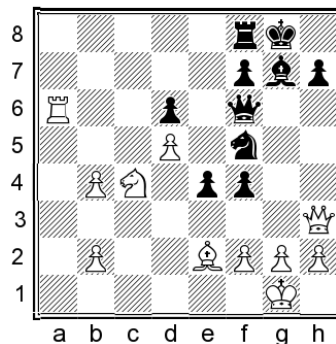
This leads to a complicated position where Black has good prospects for counterplay.

22...♗c8 23.g3 ♘g6 followed by ...f4 was also fine in Sadvakasov – Khalifman, Sochi 2005.

23.♘c4

23.♖d1 ♗xb2 24.♗xb2 ♙xb2 25.♙xa6 ♖a8 26.b5 ♙a3 has led to a couple of draws in correspondence games.

23...♗f6 24.♖a1 f4 25.♖xa6 ♘f5 26.♗h3



26...♘d4!?N

26...f3 proved playable in Lupo – Bresadola, corr. 2012, but we can also maintain the tension for a bit longer.

27.♙f1

27.♗h5 should be met by 27...♗e7, and if 28.♖xd6? ♖a8! White is busted.

27...♗e7 28.♔h1

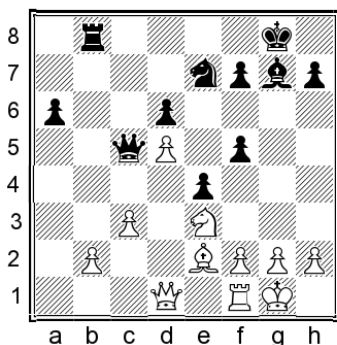
28.♘xd6? e3! is powerful.

28.♖xd6?! ♖a8! is also dangerous for White.

28...f5

The position remains unclear. Notice that 29.♖xd6? is still inadvisable due to 29...♖e8! followed by ...e3.

**21...♖xb8**



### 22. ♖c2 a5

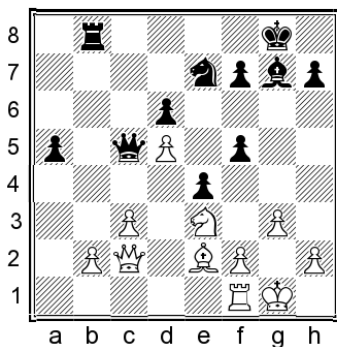
Safeguarding the a-pawn and – if we’re being optimistic – advancing it closer to the promotion square, in case White’s b-pawn should fall at some point.

It’s too early for 22...f4?! in view of 23. ♖xe4! fxe3 24. ♖xe7, and if 24...♞xb2? 25. fxe3 ♖xd5 26. ♖e8† ♙f8 27. ♞f3 Black is busted.

### 23. g3

White wishes to stabilize the kingside and perhaps transfer the bishop to h3.

In the event of 23. ♞a1N 23...f4 24. ♘c4 f3 25. gxf3 exf3 26. ♙d3 ♖xd5 27. ♞xa5 ♖e6 28. ♞g5 ♘g6 Black is doing okay.



### 23...h5!?!N

This could be an interesting way to put White under pressure in a practical game, although objectively the position remains balanced.

After 23...♙f6 a draw was agreed in Faber – Spreemann, email 2013. The position is indeed level, although in a practical game there would still be plenty of play remaining.

I also considered 23...f4!?!N in view of 24. ♖xe4 (24. gxf4?! ♘xd5 25. ♖xe4 ♘xe3 26. fxe3 d5 27. ♖f3 ♞xb2 is good for Black) 24...fxe3 25. ♖xe7 ♞xb2 26. fxe3 ♖xd5, when the inclusion of g2-g3 means that White does not have the winning rook lift shown in the note to move 22 above. However, the game is still likely to end in a draw, in one of several possible ways.

### 24. ♙xh5

Other moves are objectively playable, but I imagine that in a practical game it would be a bit uncomfortable for White to allow the pawn to reach h4.

### 24...f4!

I want to exploit White’s momentary discoordination with the loose bishop on h5, but White can get away with it.

### 25. gxf4 ♘xd5 26. ♘xd5 ♖xd5 27. ♙g4 ♖d3 28. ♖a4!?

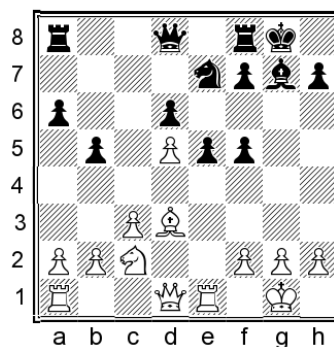
This ‘computer move’ is the safest way to force a draw.

28. ♖xd3 exd3 should be a draw as well, but Black will at least have some practical chances due to the strong a-pawn after White’s b-pawn drops.

### 28...♞xb2 29. ♖xa5 e3 30. ♖d8† ♙h7 31. ♖g5 ♙g8

A draw by some sort of repetition is imminent.

### D2) 16. ♞e1



This can be compared with variation C above, as well as variation B of the next chapter. White is ready to meet ...e4 by neatly slotting the bishop

back to f1 and eventually using it to apply pressure on the kingside after g2-g3. The same position can also be reached via 15.♖e1 0-0 16.♘c2.

### 16...♕d7

Several other moves have been tried, but this one is the most popular and best.

White has tried several different continuations and I will take **D21)** 17.a4 and **D22)** 17.g3 as the main lines. Three other options are worth mentioning:

17.♘b4 f4!? Without the queen on h5, we can push the kingside pawns in this manner. 18.a4 f5 19.axb5 e4 20.♙f1 axb5 21.♖e2 ♘g6 We have transposed to the analysis of 17.♙f1 below.

### 17.♖h5

This offers a pawn sacrifice which we should be happy to accept.

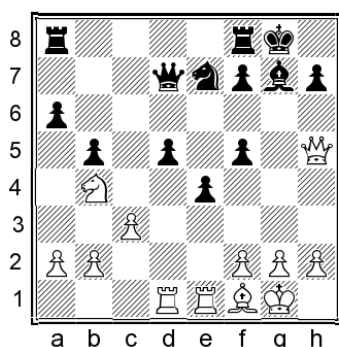
17...e4 18.♙f1 ♘xd5

Like in some similar variations, White has enough compensation for equality but nothing more.

19.♖ad1

19.♖ed1 ♘e7 20.g3 was played in Zarnescu – Zlatariu, corr. 2010. I recommend 20...f4!N 21.gxf4 f5 22.♘h1 ♖f6 when Black is doing fine.

19...♘e7 20.♘b4 d5



21.g4!

White needs to take drastic action to avoid being a pawn down for nothing.

21...♖ad8 22.gxf5 a5 23.♙h3

Here I suggest:

23...♖d6!N

23...♙f6 was also fine in Horwitz – Pommrich, corr. 2011.

24.♘c2 ♖f4

Black has a good position.

17.♙f1

White has continued this way in quite a lot of games. A good reply is:

17...f4!?

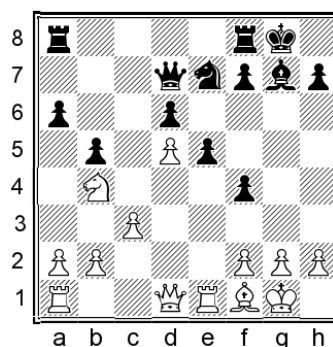
I like this advance in such positions.

17...♖ab8 and 17...a5 are good alternatives. However, I like the idea of playing on the kingside when possible.

18.♘b4

18.g3?! fxg3 19.hxg3 ♖f5 20.♖d3 ♖g5 21.♘e3 f5 22.♙g2 f4 left White weak on the kingside in Priyanka – Stashis, Porto Carras 2018.

18.a4 f5!N (There is also nothing wrong with 18...bxa4 19.♘a3 f5 20.♘c4 ♖d8 21.♖xa4 ♘g6 22.♖a1 as seen in Abrahamyan – Hong, St Louis 2019, at which point 22...e4!N 23.♖xa6 ♖xa6 24.♖xa6 ♙e5 25.f3 ♖g5 would have given Black decent compensation for the pawn.) 19.axb5 axb5 20.♖xa8 ♖xa8 21.♘b4 ♘g6 22.♖e2 e4 23.♖xb5 ♖e7 We have transposed to the analysis below, following on from 18.♘b4.

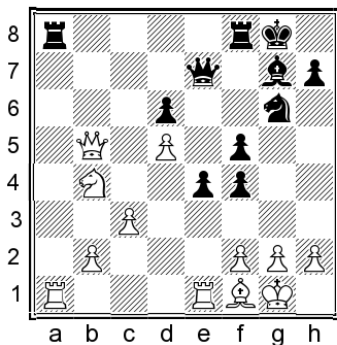


18...f5!N

I like this new but logical idea, advancing our kingside play while preparing to sacrifice a pawn on the queenside.

19.a4 ♘g6 20.axb5 axb5 21.♖e2 e4 22.♖xb5 ♖e7!

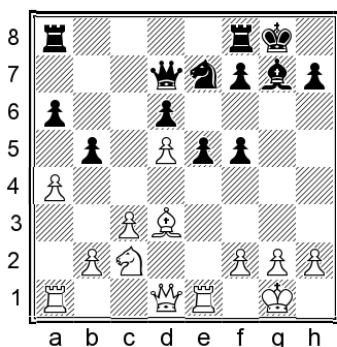
Switching to other side of the board, where the white king feels far from safe. This method is important to keep in mind, as there are many situations where the same kind of plan can be used. 22...♖xa1!? is a possible attempt to save time compared with the line below, although the position should be equal anyway. This way White can take the queen for two rooks, although that should be equal too, so the choice is yours.



23. dxc6 ♖g5 24. ♖xa8 ♖xa8 25. ♗b7 ♖f8 26. ♗d7 f3 27. g3 ♖h8 28. ♗xd6 ♗d2 29. ♖e3 ♗h6 30. ♖e7 ♗xe3 31. ♖xg6† hxg6 32. ♗xf8† ♖h7 33. fxe3 33. ♗f7† leads to an immediate perpetual.  
33... ♗xe3† 34. ♖h1 ♗e1

After accurate play from both sides, we have a draw by repetition.

#### D21) 17.a4



Breaking with the a-pawn is an important option, here and in many other Sveshnikov lines.

#### 17...e4

We should take the opportunity to drive the bishop back.

Otherwise after 17... bxa4 18. ♖b4 it will have the useful additional option of going to c2.

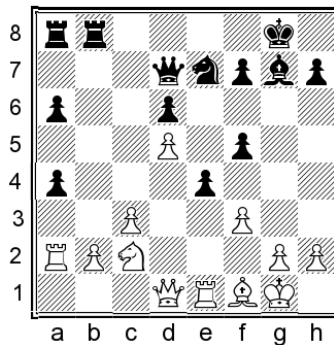
#### 18. ♗f1 bxa4

Thanks to the queen on d7, White is unable to recapture on a4 for the time being, giving us time to seek counterplay along the b-file.

#### 19. ♖e3

It's logical to go to c4 with the knight, but as usual there are other ideas:

19. ♖a2 ♖fb8 20. f3



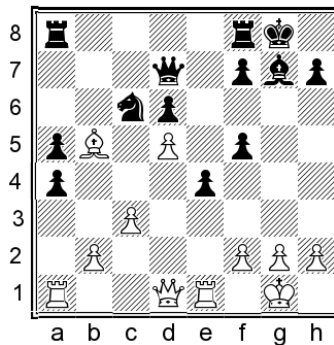
20... ♖b3 21. fxe4 A draw was agreed here in Daanen – Husemann, corr. 2018. A logical continuation would be: 21... ♖ab8 22. ♗c1 (22. ♖d4?! ♖xb2 23. ♗xa4 ♗xa4 24. ♖xa4 fxe4 25. ♖xe4 ♖xd5 favours Black) 22... ♖g6 23. exf5 ♗xf5 24. ♖e3 ♗g5 25. ♖xa4 ♖e5 26. ♖g4 ♗xc1 27. ♖xc1 ♖xb2 Black is fine.

#### 19. ♖b4 a5

A perfectly playable alternative is 19... ♗b7 20. ♗xa4 (or 20. ♖xa4 a5 21. ♖c6 ♖xc6 22. dxc6 ♗xc6 23. ♗c4 ♖ae8!? with active prospects for us) 20... a5 21. ♖c6 ♖xd5 22. ♖ad1 ♖e7 as seen in Magomedov – Sermek, Ljubljana 1992.

20. ♖c6 ♖xc6 21. ♗b5

I suggest a new idea:



21... ♖ab8!N

After 21... ♗b7 22. ♗xc6 ♗xb2 23. ♗xa8 ♖xa8 24. ♗xa4 ♗xc3 25. ♖ac1 ♗e5 Black was doing alright in Dominguez Perez – Felgaer, Cuernavaca 2006, but I see no real reason to give up the exchange.

22. dxc6

22. ♗xc6 can be met by 22... ♗d8 followed by ... ♗e5 and ... ♖h8, with attacking prospects.

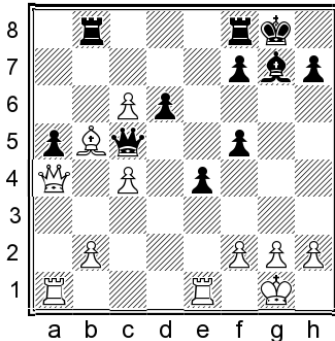
22... ♗a7!

Eyeing the f2-pawn.

23. ♖xa4

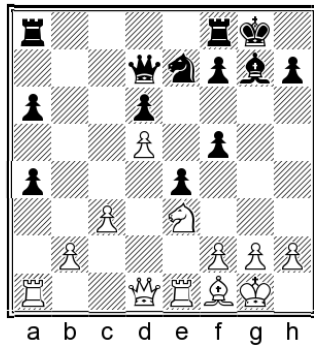
I also considered 23. c4 ♟xb2 24. ♖xa4 ♟c3 25. ♖f1 ♟e5 26. ♖d2 f4! 27. ♖xa5 ♖c5 when Black is fine; the bishop is misplaced on b5.

23... ♖c5 24. c4



24... d5! 25. ♖a3 ♖xa3 26. ♖xa3 dxc4 27. ♟xc4 ♖xb2

We have no problems whatsoever.



19... ♖fb8 20. ♟c4

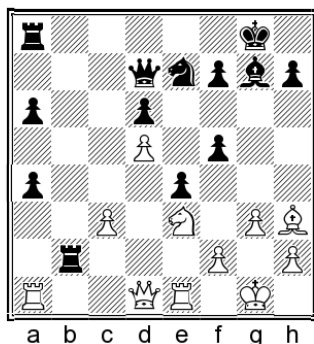
The knight occupies a natural square while defending b2.

20. g3?!

This is a surprising alternative, abandoning the b-pawn in order to switch to kingside pressure. Objectively it's not a good move though.

20... ♖xb2 21. ♟h3

In Lazarne Vajda – Melia, Riga 2017, Black should have grabbed a second pawn with:

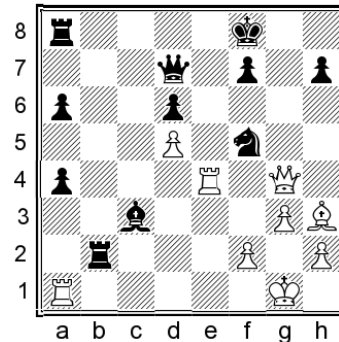


21... ♟xc3! N 22. ♟xf5!?

22. ♖f1 is well met by 22... ♖d2 23. ♖xa4 (23. ♖h5 ♟xa1 leaves White without enough of an attack to make up for the heavy material loss) 23... ♖xa4 24. ♖xa4 f4 25. gxf4 ♖d4, with an extra pawn for Black in the endgame.

22... ♟xf5 23. ♖g4† ♟f8 24. ♖xe4

White's tactical operation can be convincingly met by:



24... ♖xf2!

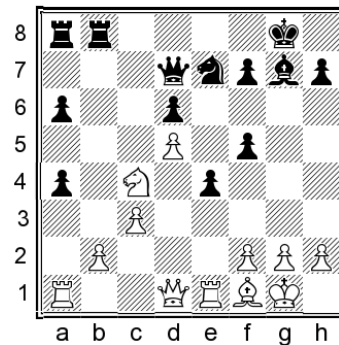
Not the only strong move, but the most forcing and practical choice.

25. ♟xf2 ♖a7† 26. ♟g2

26. ♟e2 ♟xa1 27. ♖xf5 ♖b8 is winning for Black.

26... ♟e3† 27. ♖xe3 ♖xe3 28. ♖xa4 ♖d2† 29. ♟g1 ♖b8

We have good winning chances.

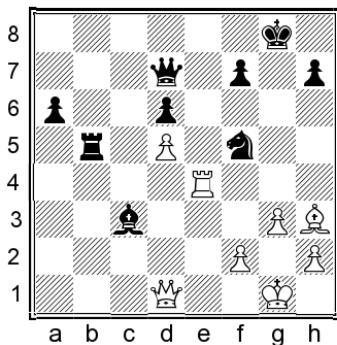


20... ♖b3

Making it harder for White to win back the pawn.

21. f3

I also considered 21. g3 ♖b8 22. ♟h3, leading to a forcing sequence: 22... a3! 23. ♖xa3 ♖xa3 24. ♟xa3 ♖xb2 25. ♟c4 ♖b5 26. ♟e3 ♟xc3 27. ♟xf5! ♟xf5 28. ♖xe4



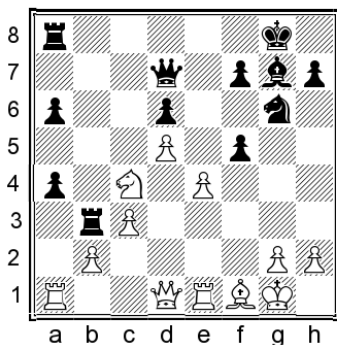
28...Qe3! 29. Qd3 (29. Bxe3 Qxh3 30. Bxc3 Qf5 is fine for us.) 29... Qxh3 30. Be8† Qg7 31. Qxc3† f6 32. Bxe3 Bb1† 33. Be1 Bxe1† 34. Qxe1 Qf5 The queen endgame is an easy draw: White can win the d6-pawn, but it allows an instant perpetual.

The text move has been the usual continuation. I recommend a pawn sacrifice:

### 21...Qg6!

After 21...exf3 22. Qxf3 Black was able to hold in Wynkele – Dorer, corr. 2009, but I would prefer not to give White such easy play.

### 22.fxe4



### 22...f4!?N

I would be tempted to keep the position closed and play for an initiative on the dark squares. This type of sacrifice is thematic for the King's Indian.

22...Qe5 is a good alternative. The position after 23.exf5 Qxc4 24. Qxc4 Bxb2 has been tested in six correspondence games at the time of writing, with Black scoring a win and five draws.

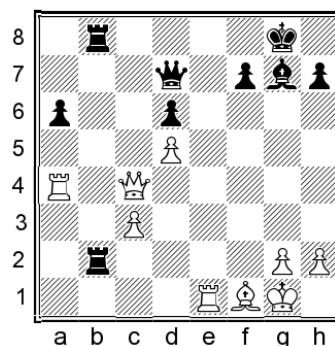
### 23. Qd2

23. Ra2 Qe5 24. Qa5 Bb6 gives Black the better chances.

### 23...Bab8 24.e5!

If White doesn't play this, our next move will be ...Qe5 anyway, intending to trade f4 for b2 and make the a-pawn a passer. The extra e4-pawn does nothing except block White's own pieces, so I think White should take the opportunity to get rid of it; for instance, after 24. Ra2 Qe5 25. Qa5 B3b6 we have the better chances.

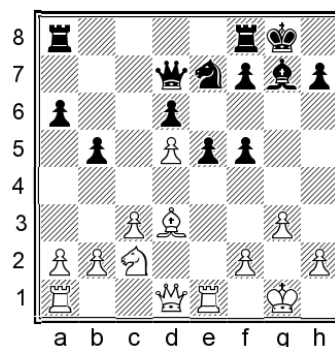
### 24...Qxe5 25. Qxf4 Qxc4 26. Qxc4 Bxb2 27. Bxa4



### 27...Qa7† 28. Qh1 Qf2

Black is not worse at all.

### D22) 17.g3



This has been the most popular choice. White would love to get the bishop to h3.

### 17...f4!

It may have appeared as if White's last move would have discouraged this advance – but on the contrary, we are happy to attack!

### 18. Qb4

White is preparing a2-a4. Two other moves have been tried:

Obviously we should see what happens if White tries to punish our last move:

18.gxf4 f5!

Rather than make the anti-positional recapture on f4, we keep a strong pawn formation and prepare to attack. The knight can go to g6 and later f4 or h4, and the rook can swing via f6 at any moment.

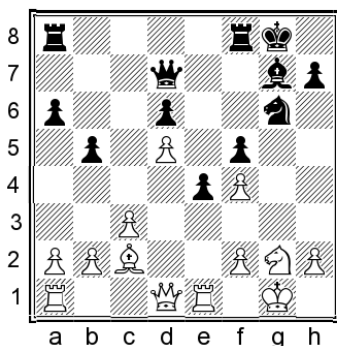
19.♖e3

This seems best. I checked a few other possibilities: 19.a4 bxa4! 20.fxe5 dxe5 21.♗e3 e4 22.♙e2 ♖h8 with better chances for Black.

19.♙f1 ♖h8N 20.♖h1 ♗g6 21.fxe5 dxe5 and we have excellent compensation for the pawn. For instance, 22.♗b4 e4 23.f3 ♖ae8 24.♗xa6 ♗e5! with dangerous attacking chances.

19.fxe5 dxe5 20.a4 e4 21.♙e2 bxa4 22.♗e3 ♗g6 23.♖h1 ♖h8 24.♖xa4 ♗f4 25.d6 ♖ad8 26.♖a5 ♗h3 Black's initiative fully compensated for the pawn in Velilla Velasco – Pirs, corr. 2014.

19...e4 20.♙c2 ♗g6 21.♗g2



21...♙h6!

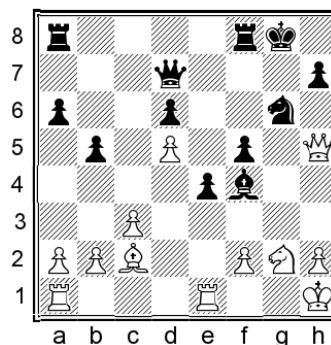
The straightforward attack on f4 works well.

21...♙a7 22.♖e3 b4 23.♖c1 bxc3 24.bxc3 was a touch better for White in Pecis – Pirs, corr. 2015. 22.♙h5

This is the only move played. Black is doing well after the alternatives:

22.f3 ♗xf4 23.♗xf4 ♙xf4 24.♖h1 ♙e5 25.fxe4 f4! Typical strategy in opposite-coloured-bishop positions: White's extra pawn is irrelevant and Black is doing well.

22.♙d2 ♗e5! 23.♙d1 ♖h8 24.♖h1 ♖g8 25.♙e2 ♖xg2! 26.♖xg2 ♙e7 gives us fantastic play. 22...♙xf4 23.♖h1



23...♖h8!?N

A new idea, not that it is especially needed.

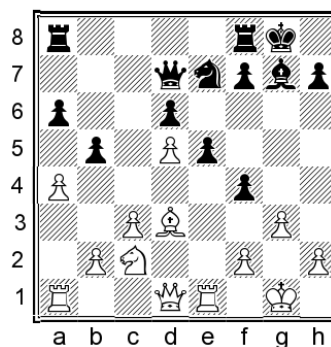
23...♙e5 24.♖g1 ♖h8 has proven a reliable choice in correspondence games.

24.f3 exf3 25.♙xf3 ♙e5

Black is well centralized.

18.a4

This thematic move remains an option, as usual.



18...bxa4

Capturing is normal, but not the only decent option.

18...f5! 19.axb5 axb5 20.♖xa8 ♖xa8 21.♙e2 ♖b8 22.♙h5 ♖f8 23.♗b4 e4 24.♙f1 ♖h8 gave Black a decent position with typical kingside play in Glaser – Bennett, corr. 2015.

19.♗b4

This is the typical reaction. Let's see a few other possible continuations:

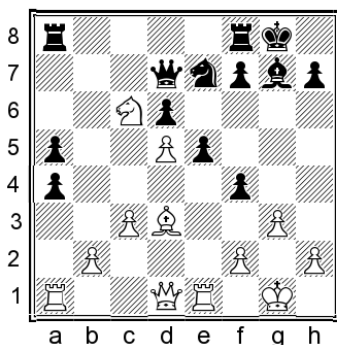
19.gxf4 has been played once, when 19...f5!N transposes to 18.gxf4 f5! 19.a4 bxa4 above.

19.♗a3 f5 20.♗c4 e4 21.♙f1 ♙a7 22.♗xd6 fxg3 23.hxg3 ♖ad8 24.♗c4 ♗xd5 and Black stands better.

19.♙f1 ♖ab8 20.♖a2 a5 21.♖e4 a3 22.♗xa3 f5 23.♙h3 ♖f6 24.♖a4 ♖h6 25.♙g2 fxg3 26.hxg3

f4 gave Black a nice attack in Norchenko – Poetz, corr. 2015.

19...a5 20.♘c6



20...f5!

We have plenty of activity and attacking prospects, for example:

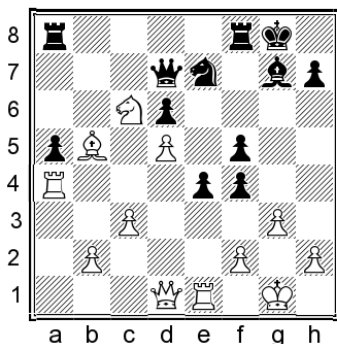
21.♞xa4

21.gxf4 e4 22.♔h1 ♘g6 23.♙c2 ♘xf4 24.♚d2 ♘g6 25.♞g1 ♔h8 with promising play for Black.

21.♙b5 ♘g6 22.♙xa4 e4 23.♚d2 ♚f7 24.♔h1 f3 gave White big problems on the kingside in Ntirilis – Heer, corr. 2014.

21.♙e2 ♔h8 22.gxf4 e4 23.♞xa4 ♘xc6 24.dxc6 ♚xc6 25.♙c4 ♞a7 26.♙d5 ♚b5 27.♞e3 ♚xb2 favoured Black in Miettinen – Pirs, corr. 2015.

21...e4 22.♙b5

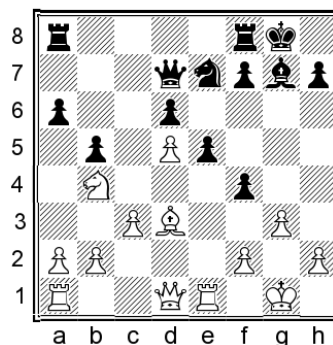


22...♘g6

22...♚b7!?N also comes into consideration, as 23.c4 ♘g6 is better for Black.

23.♚d2 f3 24.h3 ♘e5 25.♚e2 ♚f7

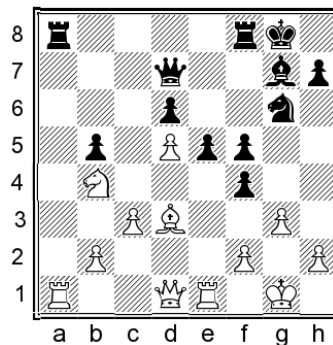
Black was more than okay in Mezera – Hugo, corr. 2014.



18...f5 19.a4 ♘g6

19...e4 20.♙f1 bxa4 21.♚xa4 ♚c7 is a valid alternative. After 22.♚a5 ♚d7 23.♚a4 ♚c7 the players agreed a draw in Laurenc – Pirs corr. 2016; the early repetition doesn't tell us much, but the position looks perfectly okay for Black.

20.axb5 axb5

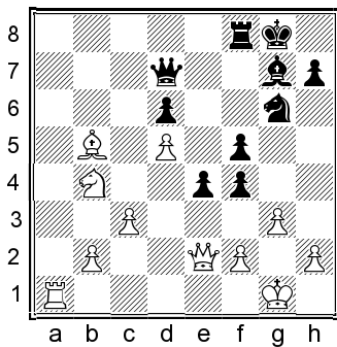


Both sides have their chances. White can attack the b5-pawn, in which case we will cheerfully abandon it in order to focus on a kingside attack, using our massive pawn centre.

21.♞xa8

It makes sense for White to lure our rook away from the kingside.

21.♚e2?! seems less advisable due to 21...♞xa1 22.♞xa1, when controlling the open file is less important than having firepower on the kingside. 22...e4 23.♙xb5



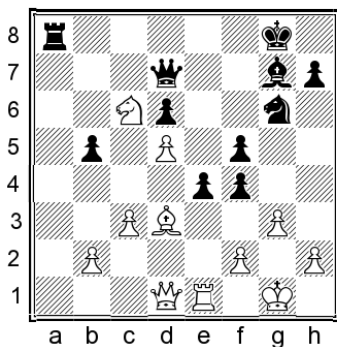
23...♔d8!N The queen prepares to go to g5 at a suitable moment. (23...♖f7 24.♗h5 fxg3 25.hxg3 f4 gave Black a good initiative for the pawn in Nogga – Gleichmann, corr. 2015, but the text move is more accurate.) 24.♗h5 fxg3 25.hxg3 f4 White is in trouble.

**21...♖xa8 22.♗h5**

Having lured the rook away from f8, it seems logical to attack f5.

22.♗e2N hasn't been played but is a logical idea to consider. Without the rook on f8, our attack is slightly slower. Still, after 22...e4 23.♗xb5 ♖f7 we have no reason to be unhappy.

22.♗c6 e4

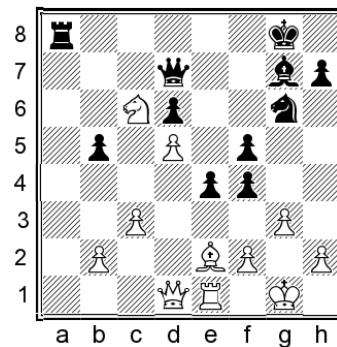


23.♗xb5N Again, this untested move could be a natural choice for a human. (23.♗e2 has been played, and we'll consider it via 22.♗e2 below.) 23...♖b7 24.♖b3 (24.c4 ♗xb2 regains the pawn with a good position.) 24...♗e5 Our initiative is worth at least a pawn.

22.♗e2!? e4 23.♗c6

This funny-looking continuation has been tried in a few correspondence games. Why should White

aim for this position with the bishop on e2 instead of capturing on b5? We'll see in a moment...



23...♗h8 24.♗xb5!?

Typical computer play, apparently losing a tempo due to a tactical nuance.

24.♖d2 ♖f7 25.♗xb5 ♗e5 26.♗e2 f3 27.♗f1 ♗g4 28.h3 ♗h6 29.♖d1 ♗f6 gave Black great value for a pawn in Shields – Heer, corr. 2014.

24...♖b7 25.♗d4

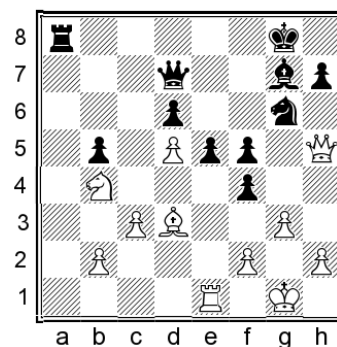
That's the idea! Unlike the 22.♗c6 line above, where the king was on g8, here White can defend the bishop this way because the recapture on d4 will come with check! We're still doing fine though...

25...♗xd4 26.♖xd4† ♗e5 27.♗c6

27.gxf4?? ♖g8† wins.

27...♖g7 28.♗f1 ♖b8 29.gxf4 ♗f3 30.♖xg7† ♗xg7 31.♖a1 ♖xb2

Black retained full compensation for the pawn in Shetko – Gebur, corr. 2014.



**22...e4 23.♗f1**

Aiming for the h3-square. 23.♗e2?! ♗h8 24.♗c6 ♖f7 is clearly better for Black.

**23...♗e5**

Threatening a fork.

**24.♖d1 ♖f7**

We're happy to play an endgame.

**25.** ♖xf7 † ♗xf7 **26.** gxf4

26. ♖xb5 can be met by 26...f3 when our powerful pawn wedge looks more dangerous than White's extra pawn.

**26...** ♗f3 † **27.** ♗h1 ♖h6 **28.** ♖e2

28. ♖xb5?! ♖xf4 29. ♖e2 ♗xh2 would be risky for White.

**28...** ♗h4 **29.** ♖xb5 ♗f6 **30.** ♖b1 ♖xf4

The endgame was perfectly fine for Black in Vlasveld – Pirs, corr. 2014. The h2-pawn is weak, and we still have some attacking potential with the rook coming to the g-file at a suitable moment.

### Conclusion

After the Sveshnikov opening moves of 1.e4 c5 2. ♗f3 ♗c6 3.d4 cxd4 4. ♗xd4 ♗f6 5. ♗c3 e5, we jumped in at the deep end by analysing a critical variation resulting from the further moves 6. ♗db5 d6 7. ♖g5 a6 8. ♗a3 b5 9. ♖xf6 gxf6 10. ♗d5 f5 11. ♖d3 ♖e6 12.0-0 ♖xd5 13.exd5 ♗e7. This is one of the most important and strategically rich battlegrounds in our entire opening system, and studying it can teach us a lot about the Sveshnikov in general.

White can grab a pawn with 14. ♗xb5, but the drawback is seen after 14...♖g7 when the knight is

forced to retreat to the unfortunate c3-square, and the variations show that our initiative is worth at least as much as White's extra pawn.

Next we looked at 14.c4, when we reply 14...♖g7 and once again prepare to sacrifice a pawn on the queenside, trusting in our kingside attacking chances.

Another idea is 14.♖e1, but after 14...♖g7 White should transpose to normal paths with 15.c3, as the overly sophisticated attempt to combine c2-c4 with a bishop on f1 is likely to backfire.

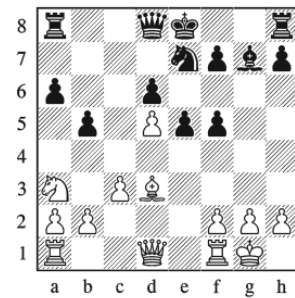
Finally, we moved on to 14.c3, the best and most popular choice. Again we respond with 14...♖g7 when the remainder of the chapter focused on the logical 15. ♗c2, an older continuation which is usually connected with a2-a4 in the near future, although White can also start with some kingside manoeuvres involving ♖e1 and ♖f1. We will castle and then advance with either ...e4 or ...f4, depending on what White does. Both sides have chances and each line has its specific nuances, but we have seen that our counterplay is at least adequate in all variations. From a practical perspective, we should be happy to be the side with the safer king in most cases.

The next chapter will deal with the currently fashionable options of 15. ♖h5 and 15.♖e1.

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# Chapter 2

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## 15.♙h5 & 15.♖e1

### Variation Index

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1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 e5 6.♗db5 d6  
7.♙g5 a6 8.♗a3 b5 9.♙xf6 gxf6 10.♗d5 f5 11.♙d3 ♙e6  
12.0-0 ♙xd5 13.exd5 ♗e7 14.c3 ♙g7

A) 15.♙h5 e4

A1) 16.♙e2 0-0 17.♗c2 ♗e8

A11) 18.f3

A12) 18.g3

A2) 16.♙c2 0-0

A21) 17.♗ad1

A22) 17.♗ae1 ♗c8

A221) 18.f3

A222) 18.♙b1

A223) 18.♙b3

A224) 18.♗h1

B) 15.♗e1 0-0 16.♙h5 e4 17.♙f1

B1) 17...♗e8

B11) 18.♗ad1 ♗c8

B111) 19.♗e3

B112) 19.♗c2

B12) 18.♗c2

B2) 17...♗c8 18.♗ad1 ♗e8 19.♗c2 ♗g6

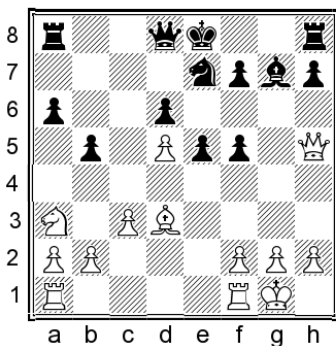
B21) 20.♗d4

B22) 20.♗b4

1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♟c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♟xd4 ♟f6 5.♟c3 e5 6.♟db5 d6 7.♟g5 a6 8.♟a3 b5 9.♟xf6 gxf6 10.♟d5 f5 11.♟d3 ♟e6 12.0-0 ♟xd5 13.exd5 ♟e7 14.c3 ♟g7

We have already dealt with the natural and traditional continuation of 15.♟c2. In this chapter we'll consider the modern options of **A) 15.♞h5** and **B) 15.♞e1**. The latter move also has the idea to put the queen on h5, but the difference is that White prepares to put the bishop on f1.

### A) 15.♞h5



This is an interesting line which has been tested extensively. The ensuing positions are sharp and complicated. White is trying to put pressure on the f5-pawn and the queen is well placed on h5 for various kinds of activity.

### 15...e4

White must make an important choice between **A1) 16.♟e2** and **A2) 16.♟c2**.

### A1) 16.♟e2

This is a positionally motivated idea. White no longer seeks to attack on the kingside but instead opts for more solid play. The knight can reroute via c2 and the f2-f3 break is on the cards, with White counting on the fact that the bishop can be activated via the g4-square.

### 16...0-0 17.♟c2 ♞e8!?

Of the many options available, I decided to recommend this one. One of the main ideas behind it is to activate the rook via e5, gaining time against the white queen. Depending on how White continues, we may capture on d5 next, or play ...f4

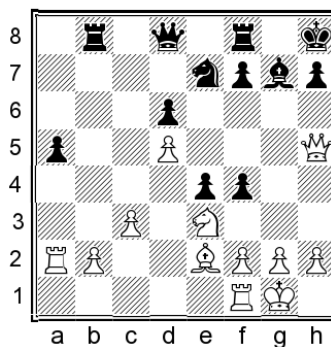
followed by ...♟g6 and ...♞e5, or even ...♟g6 immediately, leaving the f5-pawn en prise.

17...f4 is the most popular continuation, and after 18.♞g5 (or 18.f3 e3) 18...f5 Black should be fine.

It is important to note a most interesting sideline: 17...♟h8!?

This looks fully viable and has scored well so far. A logical continuation is:

18.a4 bxa4 19.♞xa4 ♞b8 20.♞a2 a5 21.♟e3 f4



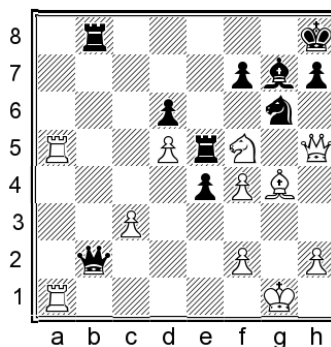
22.♟f5

22.♟c4 is well met by 22...f5, and if 23.♟xa5? f3! 24.gxf3 ♟xd5 25.♟c6 ♞f6 the threat of ...♟f4 is devastating.

22...♞e8

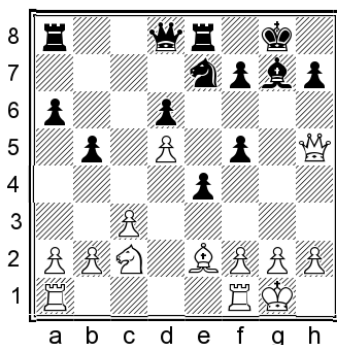
22...♟g6 23.g3 ♞e8 24.♞fa1 ♞f6 25.♞xa5 ♞xb2 also gave Black good play in Markus – Meljnikova, corr. 2016.

23.♟g4 ♟g6 24.g3 ♞e5 25.♞fa1 ♞b6 26.♞xa5 ♞xb2 27.gxf4



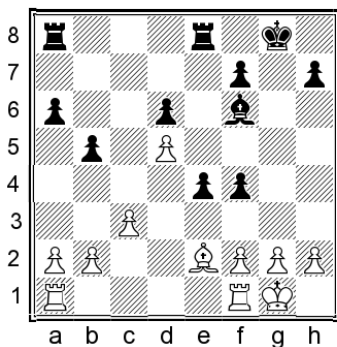
27...♞xd5! 28.♞xd5 ♞xa1† 29.♞d1 ♞b1 30.♟xd6 ♟xf4

Again Black had no problems in Grego – Kural, corr. 2014.



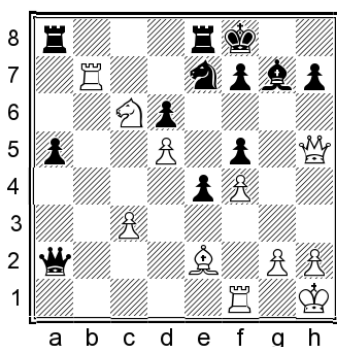
We have reached a significant branching point, where White has tried several continuations. I will take **A11)** 18.f3 and **A12)** 18.g3 as the main lines.

18.♘e3 invites the following sequence: 18...f4 19.♘f5 ♘xf5 20.♙xf5 ♙f6 21.♙xf6 ♙xf6 This type of endgame is fine for us. For instance:



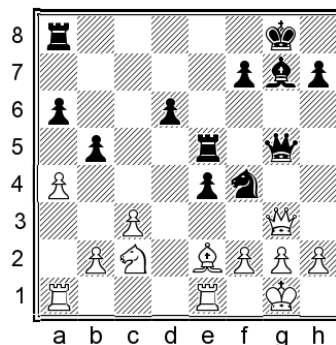
22.a4 (22.♖ac1 ♘g7 23.b3 ♖ac8 24.c4 b4 reached a position where only Black could be better in Paolillo – Ponting, corr. 2008.) 22...♖ab8 23.♖fd1 ♘g7 24.♙f1 ♙e5 25.♖db1 ♖e7 Black was fine and went on to win after carrying out a timely ...b4 break in Hoemske – Leupold, corr. 2007.

18.f4 allows a nice tactical motif: 18...b4! 19.♘xb4 (19.cxb4? ♖c8 is awkward for White.) 19...♙b6† 20.♙h1 a5 21.♘c6 ♙xb2 22.♖ab1 ♙xa2 23.♖b7 ♙f8



24.c4? White should try something else, but Black is doing fine anyway. 24...a4 Black was clearly better in Rensch – Shabalov, Connecticut 2007.

18.a4 ♘xd5 19.♙xf5N (19.g3?! ♖e5! was better for Black in Cetina – Titan, Celje 2007.) 19...♖e5 20.♙h3 ♙g5 21.♖fe1 ♘f4 22.♙g3



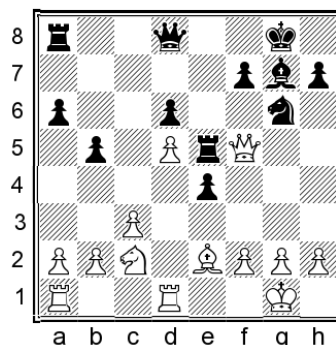
22...♙f6 Threatening ...♖g5. 23.♙f1 b4!? Giving up a pawn in order to deny activity to the enemy rooks. 24.♘xb4 d5 We intend ...♙h8 and ...♖g8, with good attacking prospects.

White has also defended the d5-pawn using either rook. We will check both options, beginning with: 18.♖fd1 ♘g6!

The problem with 18...f4 is that White can go 19.♙g5 and if 19...♘g6 20.♙xd8, the a1-rook will be perfectly placed to support a2-a4 next.

19.♙xf5 ♖e5

It's worth giving up a pawn for the sake of activity and centralized pieces.

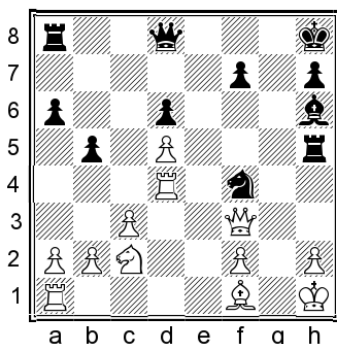


20.♙g4!?

White provokes a pawn advance in order to reduce our attacking options.

20.♙h3 is met by: 20...♘f4 21.♙e3 ♙h6 22.♙f1 ♖h5! Making full use of the h5-square. Now there are multiple threats coming, such as ...♙h4 and ...♘g2. 23.♙h1 (23.♙xe4? ♙h4 threatens

mate as well as a discovered attack on the queen. 23.♖e1? ♜h4 24.h3 ♘h3†! 25.gxh3 ♙h8 gives us a winning attack.) 23...♘g2 24.♗xe4 ♘f4 25.♗f3 White remains a pawn up but we have a powerful attack, with h2 an obvious target. 25...♙h8! White will have to find ‘only moves’ to survive. 26.♞d4!



26...♗h4!?N (26...♞h4 27.♘e3 ♗f6 28.♘g2 occurred in Larsson – Menendez Rodriguez, corr. 2015, when 28...♞h3N would have kept the game unclear.) 27.♗g3 ♗f6 28.♘e3 ♞g8 29.♘g4 ♗g5 30.♘h6 ♗xh6 31.♗xf4 ♗g7 32.♗g3 ♞g5! White will have about enough compensation after giving up the queen. Still, Black is objectively fine and the whole line is dangerous for White.

20...h5

20...f5 is also possible but I prefer to keep the option of switching the rook to g5.

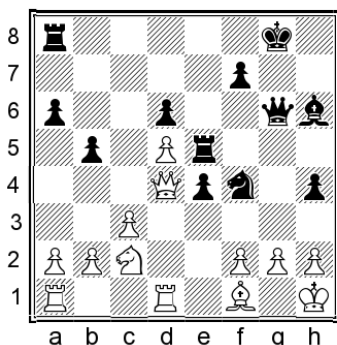
21.♗h3

21.♗g3 ♙h6 22.♙h1 was agreed drawn in one game. It seems an unlikely moment to call off the battle, although 22...♙h8 23.♘d4 ♗f6 24.♘c6 ♞f5 25.♘d4 ♞e5 is a possible repetition.

21...♘f4 22.♗e3 ♙h6 23.♙f1 h4

Compared to the version with the pawn on h7, our attack is slightly slower; on the other hand, we can at least put the ...h5 tempo to use.

24.♙h1 ♗f6 25.♗d4 ♗g6



Once again we have good attacking chances, and White will have to defend accurately.

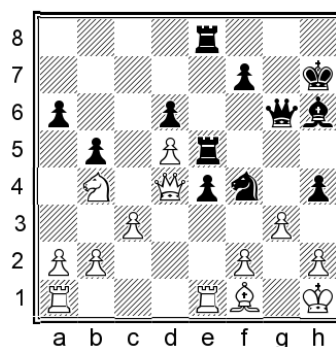
26.♞e1

26.♘e3N appears natural, but 26...♙h7 27.♞d2 ♞g8 28.♞e1 ♞g5 29.g3 ♙g7 30.♗a7 ♙e5 gives us fine attacking chances.

26...♙h7

Another game continued 26...♞ae8 27.♘e3 h3 28.g3 ♘d3 29.♙xd3 exd3 30.♙g1 ♙g7 with good play for Black, Boeken – Betker, corr. 2012.

27.♘b4 ♞ae8 28.g3



28...♞g5 29.♞e3 hxg3 30.fxg3 ♘h5 31.♙h3 f5

White was unable to withstand the attack in Burri – Sciallero, corr. 2015.

18.♞ad1

Against this choice of rook, we should play slightly differently with:

18...f4

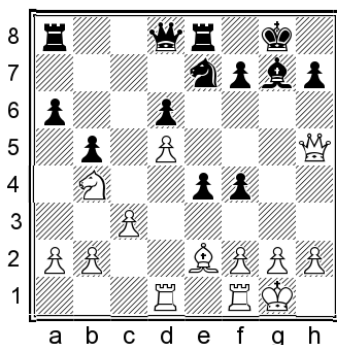
Preparing to deploy the knight on g6 and the rook on e5.

19.♘b4

19.♗g5 (or 19.♗h4) 19...♘g6 20.♗xd8 ♞exd8 is nothing to fear. Unlike the analogous position which we avoided after 18.♞fd1, here White is in no position to trouble us with a2-a4. 21.♘b4 White aims for the c6-outpost. (21.♘d4 allows the typical reaction 21...♙xd4 22.♞xd4 f5, and after the further 23.f3 e3 24.♙d3 ♞f8 25.♞e1 ♙g7 26.♙f1 ♙f6 Black was doing well in Sanakoev – Gusan, corr. 2012.) 21...♘e5 22.♞fe1 ♙h8 23.♘c6 ♞f8 24.♘d4 ♘d7 25.♘f5 ♙e5 26.♙f1 ♘f6 Black had a harmonious set-up and went on to win in Pavlicek – Pirs, corr. 2012.

19.♙g4N is a plausible move which has not yet been tried. A logical continuation is 19...♘g6 20.g3 ♞e5 21.♙f5 ♗f6 22.♘d4 ♞xd5 23.♗g4 ♞e8

24.♖fe1 h5 25.♜xh5 ♜ee5 26.g4 ♜c5 27.♘b3 ♜xf5!  
28.gxf5 ♜xf5 with more than adequate play for Black.



19...♘g6!?N

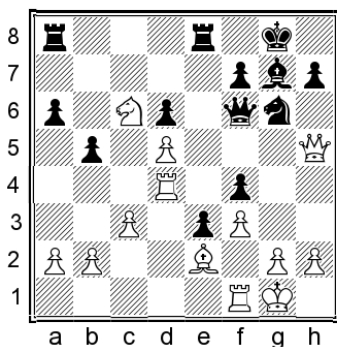
19...♜b6 has proven a reliable choice: 20.♜g4 (20.♜g5 a5 21.♘c6 ♘xc6 22.dxc6 ♜e5 23.♜xf4 ♜xc6 24.♞d4 ♜ae8 25.♜fd1 d5 was equal in Janous – Williams corr. 2013.) 20...a5 21.♘c6 ♘xc6 22.dxc6 ♜xc6 23.♜xf4 ♜ad8 24.♖fe1 d5 A draw was soon agreed in Arias Duval – Domancich, corr. 2012.

20.♘c6 ♜f6

Now ...f3 is a serious threat, so...

21.f3 e3 22.♞d4

White is ready for a2-a4 but it's rather slow. A great way to improve our position is:



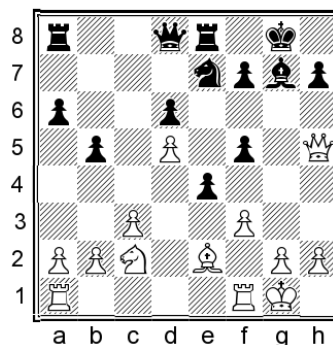
22...h6! 23.a4 ♜g5 24.♜xg5 hxg5

Our pawn structure is fantastic.

25.♜b4 ♞f6 26.axb5 axb5 27.♜xb5 ♜a2

Our active rook and beautiful pawn chain fully compensate for the pawn deficit.

### A11) 18.f3



This is one of the more challenging ideas, seeking immediate play on the kingside. Interestingly, it has only been tested in correspondence play so far.

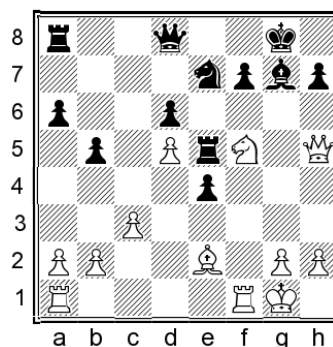
### 18...♘g6 19.fxe4 fxe4

An interesting situation has been reached. We no longer have doubled f-pawns, and the e-pawn is passed. On the other hand, White has opened the f-file and the bishop is no longer bad on e2. The f5-square has the potential to become a strong outpost, but White will not have time to exploit it. We can fight for kingside squares with moves like ...♜e5 and ...♘e7, while also keeping in mind the thematic ...b4 trick to break up White's queenside structure.

### 20.♜f5

Two other moves have been tried:

20.♘e3 ♜e5! (20...♜b6 looks tempting, but 21.♜h3 is slightly better for White.) 21.♘f5 ♘e7



22.♙h1 (22...♞g4N 22...♘d5 leaves White with some compensation for the pawn, but we're not in any real danger.) 22...♜c7 23.♘h6† ♞xh6 24.♜xh6 ♘d5 25.a4 ♜b8 Black was fine in Gazi – Razumikhin, corr. 2011.

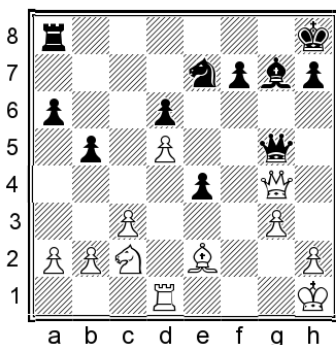
20.♔h1 ♖e5 21.♞f5 ♞xf5 22.♞xf5

This is a logical continuation. The right response is:

22...♞h4! 23.g3 ♘e7! 24.♞d7 ♞g5 25.♞d1 ♔h8

The position remains balanced, for instance:  
26.♞g4

26.♞xd6 ♙e5 27.♞d7 ♘f5 28.♞xf7 ♘xg3†!  
29.hxg3 ♞xg3 30.♞h5 ♞g8 31.♘e3 ♞g5 32.♞e8†  
♞g8 results in a draw.



26...♞g6!?

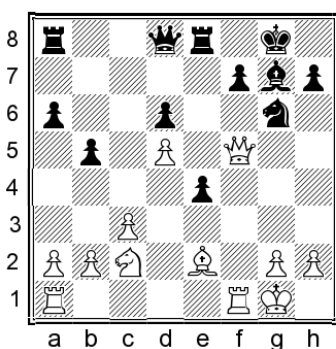
Keeping tension. 26...♞xg4 27.♙xg4 a5  
28.♘e3 b4 29.♞f1 bxc3 30.bxc3 ♞f8 was also fine  
for Black in Herr – Heer, corr. 2014.

27.♞h4

27.♞d7 ♞g5 is a possible repetition.

27...♙f6 28.♞h3 ♙g7 29.♘b4 f5 30.♘c6 ♘g8  
31.♞f1 ♞f8 32.♙d1 ♞f7 33.♙b3 a5!?! 34.♘xa5  
♘h6

Black had fair compensation for the pawn in  
Diaz – Domancich, corr. 2013.



20...♞c7

The spectacular 20...b4!?! has proven a reliable  
choice in correspondence games, but it's not  
required.

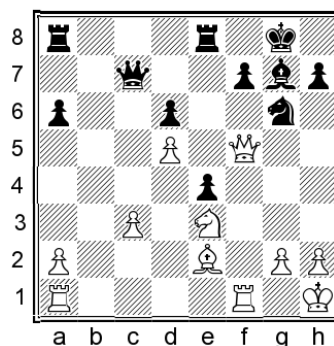
21.♞f2

This was played in the only game to reach this  
position so far. White wants to improve the knight,

but first takes a moment to secure the a7-g1  
diagonal while also vacating the f5-square. I  
considered two other natural ideas.

21.a4N is always a natural move, but after  
21...bxa4 22.♞xa4 ♞b6† 23.♘d4 ♖e7 24.♞b4  
♙xd4† 25.♔h1 ♞a7 26.♞xd4 ♖e5 27.♞f6 ♞e7 we  
are perfectly okay.

21.♘e3N 21...b4 is a typical device to create  
pressure on the queenside. (21...♞c5!?! is possible,  
as the f7-pawn is poisoned. Instead, 22.♞f2  
transposes to the game noted below.) 22.♔h1 bxc3  
23.bxc3



23...♖e5 24.♞h3 ♞f8 25.♞ac1 ♞d8 We aim all our  
firepower towards the kingside. 26.♙xa6 ♞g5  
27.♞ce1 f5 We have full compensation for the  
pawn.

21...♞f8!?!N

I want to play ...f5 to connect the kingside  
pawns.

21...♞c5 22.♘e3 ♞f8 23.♔h1 ♘e7 24.♞g3 f5  
also gave adequate play in Vennemann – Fritsche,  
corr. 2004.

22.♘e3 ♘e7 23.♙g4

White controls f5 but we can strike from  
another angle.

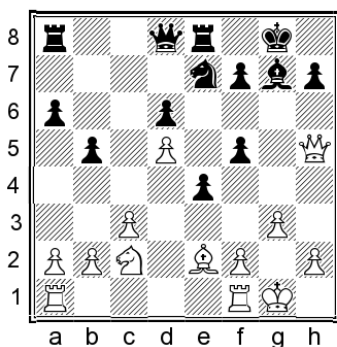
23...b4! 24.♔h1

24.cxb4 ♙d4 is good for us, due to the  
powerful pin and the imminent ...f5 push.

24...bxc3 25.bxc3 ♞xc3

White has some compensation but we are  
certainly not worse.

### A12) 18.g3



This has been tried in several correspondence games, as well as by a few strong GMs in OTB play. Before committing to anything, White makes a useful preparatory move.

### 18...f4!

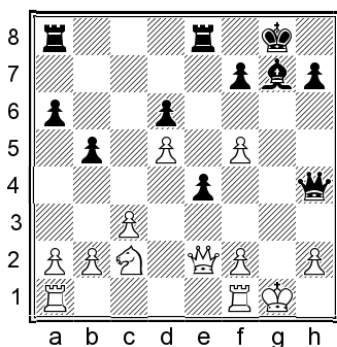
An important idea: we offer a pawn sacrifice to obtain counterplay and interfere with White's plans.

18...♟xd5 19.♞xf5 ♞e5 20.♞h3 may also be playable, but it's not clear if Black's counterplay will fully compensate for the pawn weaknesses.

### 19.♞g4

This is the computer's first choice and a natural human choice as well.

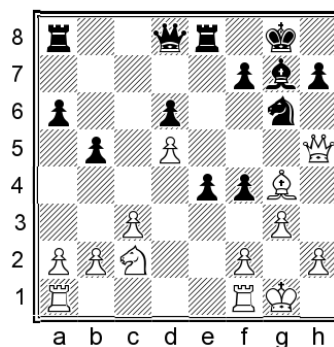
White tried taking the pawn in one high-level game: 19.gxf4 ♟g6 The knight heads straight for f4. 20.f5 (20.♞g4 f5! gives us nice play.) 20...♟f4 21.♞g4 ♟xe2† 22.♞xe2 ♞h4 The queen comes to a strong attacking square and the other pieces will soon follow.



23.♞h1 ♞h8 24.♞g1 ♞e5 25.♞g2 ♞g8 Black's play flows effortlessly. 26.♞ag1 ♞xg2 27.♞xg2 ♞g8

28.♞f1 ♞h5 Black had the more pleasant position in Inarkiev – Gelfand, Nazran 2017.

### 19...♟g6



### 20.♞f5

White activates the bishop in a clever way. However, playing like this requires precision and strong nerves. If White loses control of the f5-outpost at any point, the bishop will have to make a humiliating retreat and our attack will gather momentum.

20.♞ae1 ♞e5 21.♞f5 ♞f6 22.♟d4 transposes to the main line below.

### 20...♞f6

We start putting pressure on the bishop and intend to post the rook on e5 next.

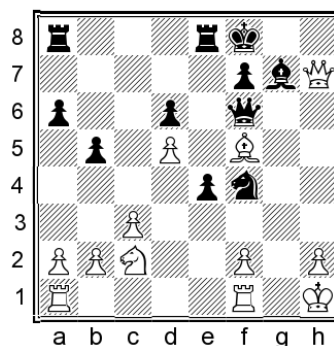
### 21.♟d4

This seems best.

### 21.gxf4?!

This move is objectively playable but practically risky for White.

21...♟xf4 22.♞xh7† ♞f8 23.♞h1



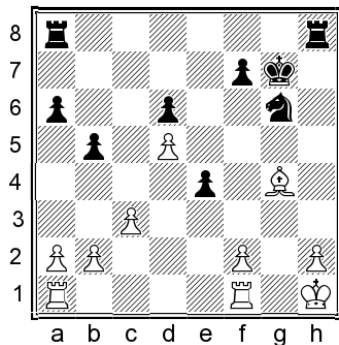
23...♞e7!

White requires some wizardry to both save the queen and avoid being mated.

24. ♔g4!

24. ♕xe4? ♖h8 25. ♗f5 ♗h4 26. h3 ♕e5 gives us a mating attack.

24... ♘g6 25. ♘d4! ♖h8 26. ♗xg7 ♗xg7 27. ♘f5† ♔f8 28. ♘g7 ♔xg7



29. ♖ae1 ♖ae8 30. ♕f5 ♖e5 31. ♕xg6

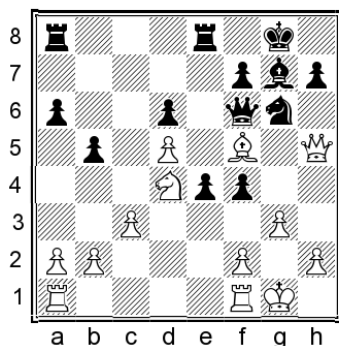
31. ♕xe4? ♖he8 wins material.

31... ♔xg6

White must find another accurate move to avoid being seriously worse:

32. f3!

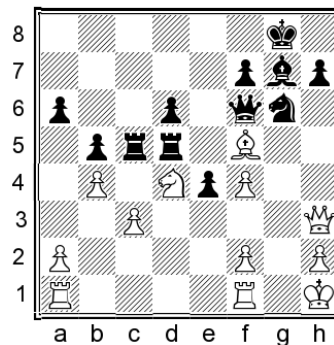
And after all that, White is equal at best.



21... ♖e5 22. ♖ae1

With this, we transpose to some games which arrived here via the sequence noted at move 20 above.

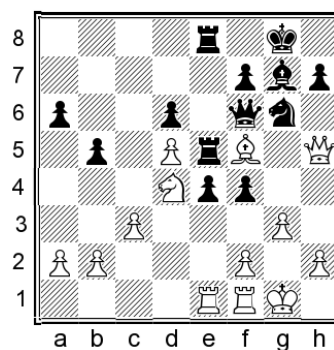
22.gxf4!? could lead to some entertaining tactics: 22... ♖xd5 (22... ♘xf4 23. ♗xh7† ♔f8 is also perfectly playable.) 23. ♔h1 ♖c8 24. ♗h3 ♖cc5 25. b4



25... ♖xc3! 26. ♗xc3 ♖xd4 27. ♗c8† ♕f8 28. ♖ac1 ♗h4 29. ♕xg6 hxg6 30. f5 ♖c4! 31. ♖xc4 ♗h3 Forcing a draw.

22... ♖ae8

Now our pieces are fully centralized.



23.gxf4!?N

This seems a natural move to consider.

23. ♗g4 has been played in all the games that reached this position. A natural continuation is 23... ♔h8N (23... ♕h6 and 23... e3 have been played in the correspondence games, all of which ended in draws.) 24. ♔h1 ♕h6 The position remains complicated and balanced.

23... ♘xf4 24. ♗xh7† ♔f8

As usual, the loss of the h7-pawn is of little consequence, and White's king is at least as vulnerable as ours.

25. ♔h1

25. ♖e3 can also be met by 25... ♖xd5, and White cannot take on e4 because a subsequent ... ♖h5 will trap the queen.

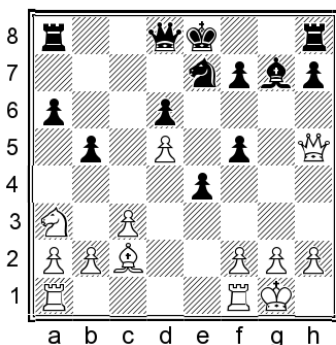
25... ♖xd5 26. ♖g1 ♘d3 27. ♖ef1 ♗h6!

Neutralizing White's play and leading to a level endgame.

28.♙xe4 ♜xh7 29.♙xh7 ♙xd4 30.♞g8† ♕e7  
31.♞xe8† ♕xe8 32.♙e4 ♘xf2† 33.♞xf2 ♙xf2  
34.♙xd5 ♕e7

It's a draw.

A2) 16.♙c2



This has been the most popular choice, and it brings us to the tabiya of a complex variation which has been extensively analysed and tested over a long period. White wants to break up our pawns with f2-f3 or even g2-g4 after suitable preparation. However, in the meantime the d5-pawn is loose and White must watch out for the thematic ...b4 poke.

16...0-0

16...♞c8 is often played, when 17.♞ae1 0-0 converts to variation A22 below. However, there are some scenarios where we might not want to put the queen on c8; see for instance variation A21. We will analyse A21) 17.♞ad1 followed by the more popular A22) 17.♞ae1.

17.f3

This is a natural move to consider, but it's slightly premature.

17...b4!N

An obvious novelty.

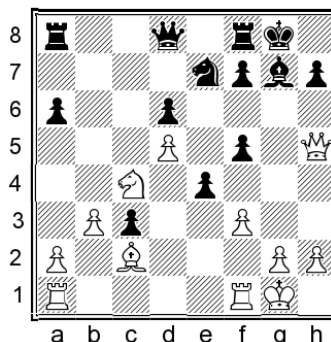
17...♘xd5? 18.fxe4 is obviously no good.

17...♞c8? 18.fxe4 b4 19.exf5! bxa3 20.f6 was clearly better for White in Pontes – D'Israel, Sao Paulo 2009.

18.♘c4

18.cxb4? ♙xb2 19.♞ab1 ♙xa3 20.fxe4 ♞c8! leaves White without enough time to create the necessary attacking chances. 21.exf5 ♞xc2 22.f6 ♕h8 Black is winning.

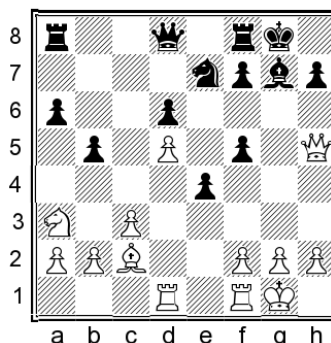
18...bxc3 19.b3



19...♘xd5 20.♞xf5 ♘e7 21.♞xe4 ♘g6

The c-pawn is a valuable long-term asset, so White is the one who will be under pressure to prove equality.

A21) 17.♞ad1



This is a somewhat older approach, but still interesting and important to know.

17...♞c8!

Threatening ...b4, as well as ...♞c5 to put pressure on d5.

18.♙b3

The bishop moves to a more stable square, but is now blocked by its own pawn and no longer points towards h7. White's other options also suffers from certain drawbacks:

18.f3 b4! 19.♘b1 bxc3 20.♘xc3 (20.bxc3 ♞b6† 21.♕h1 ♞b2 22.♙b3 e3 is also pretty depressing for White) 20...♞b6† 21.♞f2 ♞xb2 and Black was winning in Aighasra – Hakki, Bahrain 1990.

18.♞fe1 has been played a few times. A good reply is 18...b4N 19.cxb4 ♘g6! (19...♙xb2?! 20.♞e3! gives White a promising attack) 20.♙b3 ♜f6, reaching a complicated position where we have some initiative.

18.♙b1

This way White keeps the bishop pointing towards h7 but neglects the defence of the d5-pawn, so...

18...♞c5 19.♘c2

19.f3?! ♘xd5 20.fxg4 ♘e3 wins an exchange for not much compensation.

19...♘xd5

We snatch a pawn, while incidentally threatening to trap the white queen with ...♘f4.

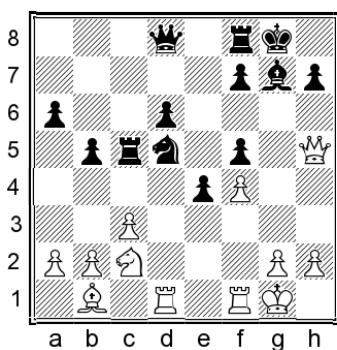
20.f4

20.♞xf5? is a mistake due to 20...♘xc3! 21.♞xc5 ♘e2† 22.♙h1 dxc5 23.♞xd8 ♞xd8, when the extra pawn and mobile queenside majority quickly decided the game in Black's favour in Barczay – Z. Polgar, Hungary 1989.

20.♞h3 ♜g5! 21.♘e3? (21.♞g3 was necessary although 21...♞h6 still leaves White in trouble)

21...♘f4 White was losing the queen and therefore resigned in De Zavalía – Ardití Rocha, corr. 2013.

20.g3!?N is worth considering, although 20...♘f6 21.♞h4 ♘g4 still leaves us with the better chances.



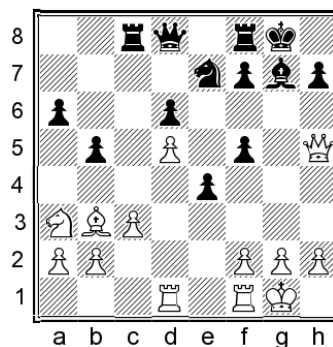
20...b4!

20...♞b6 21.♙h1 b4 22.cxb4 ♞xc2 23.♞xf5 ♘e3 24.♞xe4 d5 was somewhat better for Black in Stets – Collas, Val Thorens 2008, but the text move is even stronger.

21.cxb4 ♞xc2 22.♙xc2 ♘e3 23.♙b3 ♞b6 24.♙h1 ♞xb4 25.♞e2 ♘xf1 26.♞xf1 a5

We have an extra pawn and additional pressure against b2, as well as a protected passer on

e4. If we can mobilize the d-pawn as well, it will be all over.



18...f4!

Immediately exploiting the drawback of White's previous move: the e4-pawn is no longer under attack, so we can take the e3-square from White's knight and aim for a full kingside advance involving both f-pawns.

19.♘c2

Recentralizing the knight is normal, but there are other ideas as well:

19.♞fe1N 19...f5 doesn't really help White, for instance: 20.♘c2 (20.f3 is well met by 20...e3! intending ...♞f6 with excellent attacking chances) 20...a5 21.a3 ♘g6 22.♘d4 ♙xd4! We have already seen some examples of this exchange working well. 23.♞xd4 ♘e5 We have a clear advantage.

19.♞g5 is comfortably met by 19...♘g6 20.♞xd8 ♞fxd8 21.♘c2 a5. Such endgames are usually good for Black and this one was no exception in Privara – Krzyzanowski, corr. 2004.

19...♘g6 20.♘b4

Moving the knight towards the desirable c6-outpost is a typical plan for this type of position.

20.♞f5 ♞e8 21.♞fe1 a5! 22.♘d4?! (22.a3 seems a bit better; this position will be covered below via 20.♞fe1.) 22...♙xd4 23.♞xd4 ♞e5 24.♞h3 f5 25.♙d1 ♞c5 26.a4 ♞g5 27.♙f1 bxa4 28.♞xa4 ♘g7 Black had a large advantage thanks to the powerful centre and the superior minor piece in Heydt – Fritsche, corr. 2006.

20.♞fe1

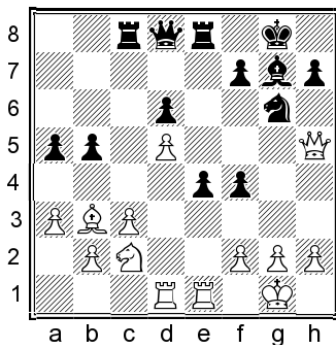
After this move, a small nuance is:

20...a5!N

Threatening to trap the bishop.

There is nothing wrong with 20...♖e8 21.♞h3 (21.♞f5 is covered via 20.♞f5 above) 21...♞c7 22.♜b4 f5 23.♞xf5 ♖f7, when Black had plenty of compensation in Zarnicki – Ricardi, Buenos Aires 1999.

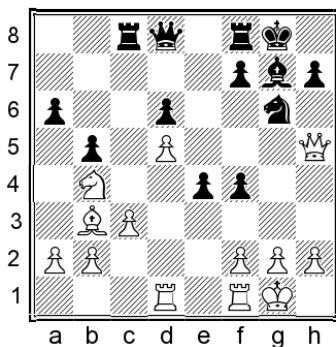
21.a3 ♖e8



Unlike the game continuation above, here White does not even have the option of ♜b4-c6; and if the knight goes to d4, we already know we can happily exchange it. I will mention a brief illustrative line as suggested by the computer:

22.♞f5 ♖e5 23.♞h3 f3 24.g3 f5 25.♜d4 ♞f6 26.♞c2 ♖f8

All of our pieces are on good squares and we have gained a substantial amount of space on the kingside.



20...f3!N

There are other playable moves, but launching an immediate attack is too tempting to resist.

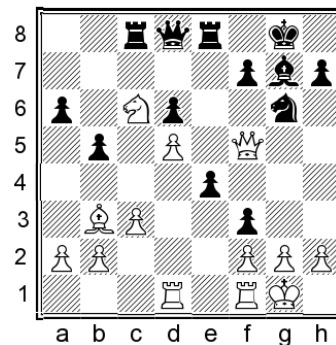
20...♞b6?! has been played but I am not fond of such moves. In this type of position, the queen belongs on the kingside. After 21.♜c6 ♞ce8 22.♞h1 f5 23.♞g5 ♞f6 24.♞h5 a5 25.a3 ♞g7

26.♞c2 White stood slightly better in Smikovski – Balabaev, Internet 2004.

20...f5!N is another good novelty which meets the requirements of the position. Play could continue 21.♜c6 ♞d7 22.f3 e3 23.♖fe1 ♞e5, with somewhat better chances for Black.

21.gxf3

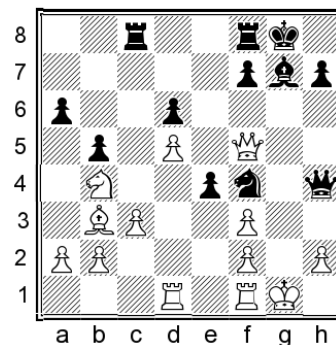
21.♞f5!? is another option, when my line continues: 21...♖e8 22.♜c6



22...♜h4! 23.♞h5 ♞f6 24.g3 ♜g2! A fabulous idea! The knight on g2 controls some important squares and supports a future ...e3 break. Black is surely not worse.

21...♜f4 22.♞f5 ♞h4

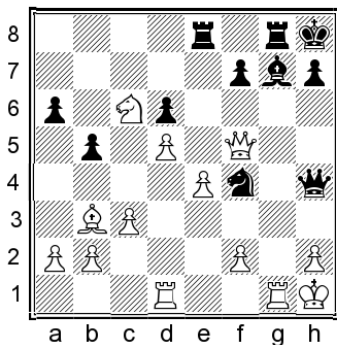
Typical attacking play on the dark squares.



23.fxe4

23.♞g4 ♞h6! threatens to win the queen with ...f5, and if 24.fxe4 ♞h8 we obtain dangerous play on the g-file.

I also considered: 23.♜c6 ♞h8 24.fxe4 ♞g8 25.♞h1 ♞ce8 26.♞g1

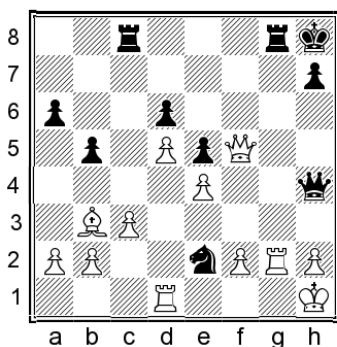


26...d3 27.Bg3 Wxe4† 28.Wxe4 dx2† 29.gh1  
dx4 With a promising endgame for us.

### 23...e5

We clearly have a strong attack for the two-pawn investment. Let's see how the play could develop.

24.gh1 gh8 25.Bg1 de2! 26.Bg2 Bg8 27.d3  
f6 28.de5 fe5

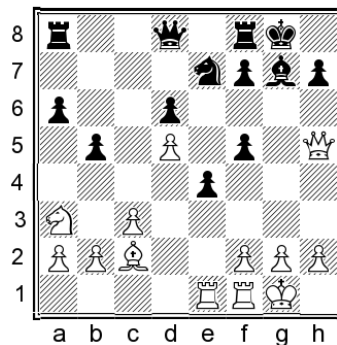


It's all about the mighty knight versus the bad bishop on b3. We are in no real danger, and it's White who must struggle to find only moves to hold the position.

29.Bxg8† Bxg8 30.h3 Wh6 31.Be1 Wg7 32.Wg4  
Wh6

It's a draw.

A22) 17.Bae1



This is the main line by far. White develops the rook on its most active square and hopes to break open the kingside with f2-f3 or perhaps even g2-g4.

### 17...Wc8

This multipurpose move is best. By defending f5, we make ...dx5 a real possibility. Another important purpose is to prepare the ...b4 break, so that if White captures on b4 and we take on b2, White will have real problems. Finally, the queen may land on c5 at some point.

We will consider A221) 18.f3, A222) 18.b1, A223) 18.b3 and A224) 18.gh1 in detail.

A direct attacking idea is:

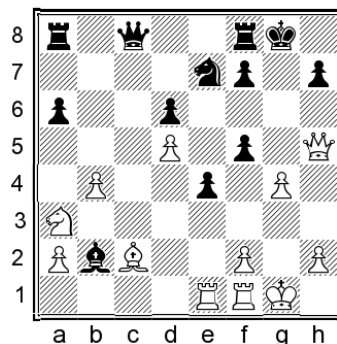
18.g4

This was one of White's early attempts to crash through with blunt force. It is rarely played nowadays, as we have a fairly simple route to equality.

18...b4

As we will see, this is a key source of counterplay when White allows it. Two options are worth considering: a) 19.cxb4 and b) 19.d1.

a) 19.cxb4 dx2



20. ♖g5†

20.gxf5 ♙xa3 21. ♖g5† ♜g6 is the same thing.

20... ♜g6 21.gxf5 ♙xa3

It is becoming clear that attacking at such an early stage doesn't yield anything for White. It's also worth noting that the bishop on a3 is neither vulnerable nor misplaced in the current position.

22. ♙xe4

Also after 22.fxg6 fxg6 23. ♙xe4 ♜f7 Black has nothing to fear, for instance: 24. ♖h1 (24. ♙d3 ♙xb4 25. ♞e6 ♞c3! is fine for us.) 24... ♙xb4 25. ♞e2 ♞d8!?N (25... ♞c3 also proved fine after 26. ♞e3 ♞f6 27. ♖g4 ♙c5 28. ♞f3 ♞e7 29. ♞xf7 ♞xf7 in Mergard – Werner, corr. 2009.) 26. ♖g3 ♖h8 27.f4 ♞f6 Black is not worse at all.

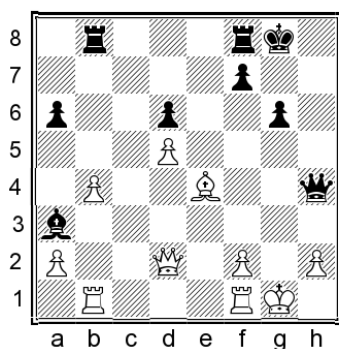
22... ♞d8 23. ♞d2

After 23. ♞xd8 ♞fxd8 24.fxg6 hxg6 25. ♙d3 the players agreed a draw in Lokander – H. Bauer, corr. 2008, but in a practical game Black could play on with 25... ♙xb4 and try to make something of the better pawn structure.

23... ♞b8!?N

23...a5 has been played, with all the games ending in draws.

24.fxg6 hxg6 25. ♞b1 ♞h4

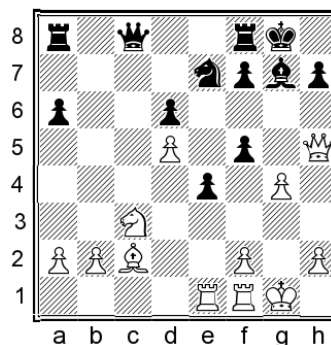


26.f4 ♞fe8 27. ♙g2 a5 28.bxa5 ♙c5† 29. ♖h1 ♞xb1 30. ♞xb1 ♙e3 31. ♞e1 ♞xf4

The position remains dynamically balanced.

White has also tried:

b) 19. ♜b1 bxc3 20. ♜xc3



20... ♞b8!?

Attacking b2 and keeping the game complicated.

20... ♙xc3 21.bxc3 ♞xc3 22.gxf5 ♜xd5 23. ♙xe4 ♜f6 24. ♞h6 ♜xe4 25. ♞xe4 ♞g7† 26. ♞xg7† ♖xg7 was a simple route to a drawn endgame in Wilson – Ponting, corr. 2008.

21.gxf5

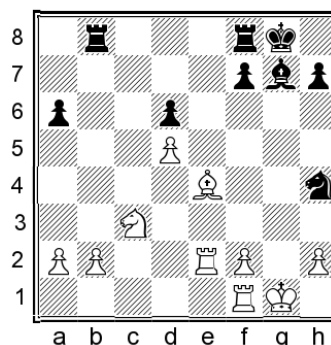
I also checked 21. ♙b3N 21... ♖h8 22.gxf5 ♙xc3 23.bxc3 ♞g8† 24. ♖h1 ♞xc3 25. ♞xe4 ♞g7 26. ♞h3 ♜xf5 27. ♙c2 ♜h6 28. ♞h4 ♞b2 when Black is fine.

21... ♞xf5 22. ♞xf5 ♜xf5 23. ♙xe4 ♜h4

White is temporarily a pawn up, but we have excellent coordination and our counterplay is more than adequate.

24. ♞e2

24. ♜d1 f5 25. ♙g2 ♙xb2 regains the pawn with a good position.



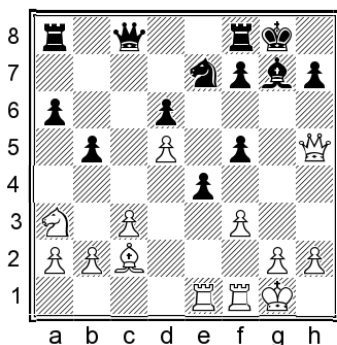
24... ♞fe8N

24... ♞b4 25. ♙d3 a5 26. ♜e4 ♞d4 27. ♞e3 ♞xd5 was equal in Grobler – Leite, corr. 2020.

25. ♞c1 f5 26. ♙d3 ♞xe2 27. ♜xe2 ♞xb2 28. ♙xa6 ♞xa2

Clearly it should be a draw, but White still needs to be a bit careful due to our active pieces.

### A221) 18.f3



This direct attempt must of course be considered. However, it is known to bring nothing for White.

### 18...b4!

As usual, this is a good solution when White allows it.

### 19.cxb4?!

Sacrificing a piece for an attack is the critical way of handling the position. However, it proves to be unsound.

19.fxe4? is no good in view of 19...bxa3 20.exf5 ♖c5† 21.♔h1 ♘d5 22.♚h3 ♜ae8 23.♞d1 ♘f6 and Black was winning in Bromann – Nielsen, Ringsted 1998.

### 19.♘b1

This retreat is playable, though not at all dangerous.

### 19...bxc3

19...♘d5!? has also been tested; for instance, 20.♔h1 ♘f4 21.♚g5 ♘d3 is okay for Black.

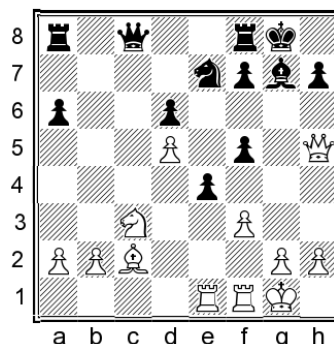
### 20.♘xc3

White has few other choices:

20.fxe4? cxb2 21.exf5 ♘d5 22.♙b3 (22.f6? ♘xf6 23.♞xf6 ♚xc2 wins) 22...♚c5† 23.♔h1 ♜ae8 This was close to winning for Black due to the monstrous b2-pawn in Gomez Anadon – Fluvia Poyatos, Mondariz 2002.

20.bxc3?! This can hardly be a good move. 20...♘d5 Since White neglected to defend the central pawn, we take it and aim to put the knight on f6. 21.fxe4 ♚c5†! 22.♔h1 ♘e3 23.♞xe3 (23.♞f2?! was seen in Mohr – Ankerst, Ljubljana 1997, when 23...♜ae8!N would have been

unpleasant for White.) 23...♚xe3 24.♚xf5 ♚h6 25.♙b3 ♘e5 White had insufficient compensation for the exchange in Joecks – S.B. Hansen, Hamburg 1999.



20...♞b8 21.♙b3 ♘xc3 22.bxc3 ♚xc3 23.fxe4 ♚d4† 24.♔h1 fxe4 25.♚g4† ♔h8

After a relatively forced sequence White can capture on e4 in two possible ways, but we are fine in both cases.

### 26.♞xe4N

26.♚xe4 ♚xe4 27.♞xe4 ♘g6 28.♞a4 ♞b6 29.♞c1 ♘e5 left Black a comfortable endgame thanks to the perfectly placed knight in Vedder – Dek, Netherlands 2016.

### 26...f5 27.♞xd4

27.♚g8†!? is interesting, although 27...♞xg8 28.♞xd4 ♞g4 is still fine for us.

27...fxg4 28.♞e1 h5! 29.♞a4 ♘f5 30.♞xa6 ♞be8 31.♞xe8 ♞xe8 32.♔g1 ♞e2

Our activity yields at least enough compensation for the missing pawn.

### 19...♘xb2 20.fxe4 ♘xa3

We should accept the challenge and capture one piece, while eyeing the bishop on c2 as well. White obviously has an attack, but we can repel it.

### 21.♞e3

White was successful with 21.♞f3? in Oliveira – Ersahin, Internet (blitz) 2020, but 21...♚xc2N 22.♞h3 ♞fd8 23.♚xh7† ♔f8 24.♞xa3 ♚d2 would have been winning for Black.

### 21...♚xc2

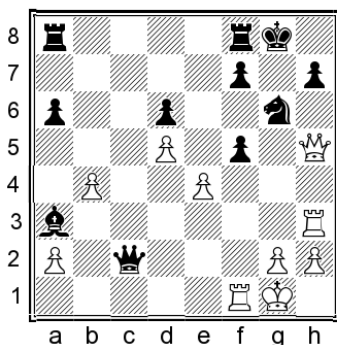
We not only capture another piece, but also remove an enemy attacker while activating our queen.

**22. ♖g3†**

22. ♜h3? ♜fc8 gives White nothing.

**22... ♘g6 23. ♜h3**

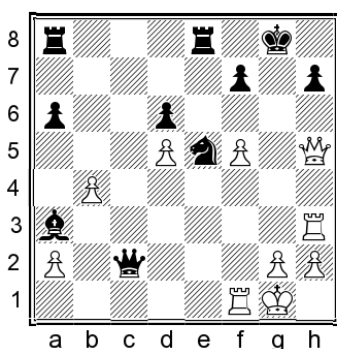
Clearly we need to move the rook from f8, but where should it go? Some strong players have made the wrong choice, so the next move is definitely worth memorizing.



**23... ♜fd8!!**

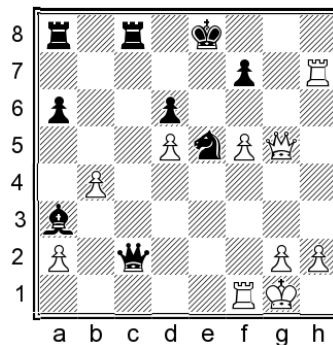
You might think that the purpose of this move is to defend the d6-pawn, but the real point is actually to give the king a suitable escape route. To understand this fully, let's compare the alternatives:

23... ♜fe8? 24. exf5 ♘e5? (24... ♘f4!! should draw with accurate play, but ideally we would like to put the knight on e5. Let's see why it doesn't work here...)



25. ♜g5† ♔f8 26. ♜xh7 The king is unable to run to e8, so Black is dead lost.

23... ♜fc8? 24. exf5 ♘e5? (Once again 24... ♘f4! is necessary, but let's focus on the move we would like to play and the problem with the placement of our rook.) 25. ♜g5† ♔f8 26. ♜xh7 ♔e8

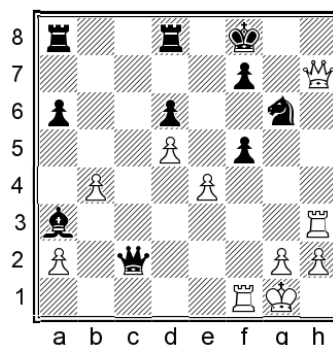


This time the king was able to run to e8, but after 27. ♜g8† ♔d7 28. ♜xf7† it was unable to escape to c8, so Black soon had to resign in L'Ami – Malakhatko, Kavala 2003.

**24. ♜xh7†**

24. exf5 ♘e5! now works perfectly for us: 25. ♜xh7† (25. ♜g5† ♔f8 26. ♜xh7 was winning for White in the lines noted above, but here we can win with 26... ♔e8 when the king can escape any further checks by running to d7 and then c8. It is worth mentioning the possible continuation of 27. ♜e1, when 27... ♔d7! is the only winning move, albeit not an especially difficult one.) 25... ♔f8 26. ♜xa3 ♔e8 The database contains a game, Pontikis – Sallai, corr. 2004, which ends here with a 1–0 result, but with careful play we should be able to prove the superiority of our knight over White's three extra pawns.

**24... ♔f8**



**25. ♜h5**

25. exf5 ♘e5 would transpose to the note above. The text move is a better try, but White's attack is not worth two pieces.

**25... f4!**

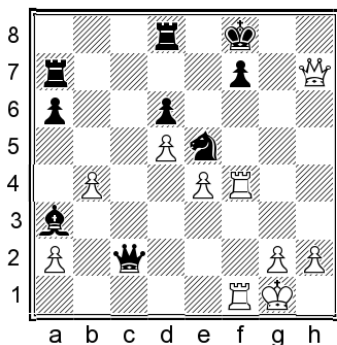
25...♘e5? has been played a few times but is only good enough to draw. The difference is that after 26.♖hx5 White is ready to check on h8 and take on e5, forcing a perpetual.

**26.♖f5 ♘e5 27.♖5xf4**

The placement of the rook on f4 instead of f5 makes all the difference. White still has some pressure along the f-file, but it's not too difficult to defend.

27.♖1xf4 loses to 27...♔c1† 28.♔f2 ♘d3† followed by ...♙xf4†, when we'll have too much material for the queen.

**27...♖a7**



**28.♙h8†**

White's only hope is to pick up the loose bishop on a3.

If 28.♖f5? then 28...♙b2! is the easiest way to shut down White's idea of forcing a draw by taking on e5.

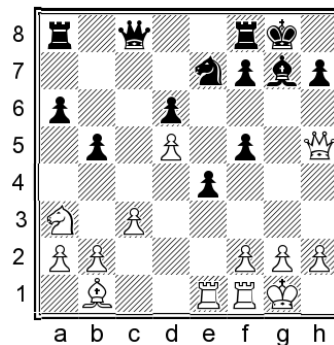
**28...♔e7 29.♙h4† ♔d7!**

29...♔e8 would force White to keep checking, but we can and should play for more than a draw.

**30.♙h3† ♔c7 31.♙xa3 ♔b8**

White has three pawns for the piece, but our king has reached a safe spot and our knight is fantastic. See, for instance, Ramsden – Schuster, corr. 2012, where Black maintained control and soon reached a winning endgame.

**A222) 18.♙b1**



This is a rare and somewhat older continuation, which nonetheless deserves our attention. White takes a maximalist approach, anticipating ...b4 while keeping the bishop pointing towards h7 and preparing to reroute the knight via c2.

**18...♙c5**

Preventing a quick f2-f3 while also attacking the weak pawn on d5.

18...♘xd5? is no good due to 19.♙xe4.

18...b4 19.cxb4 ♙xb2 20.♘c2 ♘xd5 21.♘e3 was a touch better for White in Timoshenko – Yagupov, Moscow 2003.

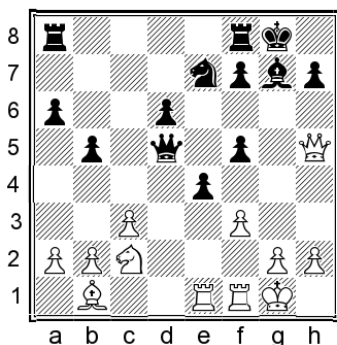
**19.♔h1**

With the obvious intention of f2-f3.

A natural alternative is:

19.♘c2 ♙xd5 20.f3

Another game continued: 20.♘e3 ♙c5 21.♘xf5! A surprising motif! It leads to an endgame where we'll have two minor pieces versus rook and pawn. 21...♘xf5! 22.♙xe4 ♘h6 23.♙xc5 dxc5 This exchange has slightly improved our structure, which is why it was more precise to capture with the knight rather than the queen on move 21. 24.♙xa8 ♙xa8 25.♖d1 This occurred in Sutton – Maurer corr. 2011. Black has a few decent continuations but my suggestion is: 25...b4!N Softening up the queenside and improving the scope of our bishop. 26.♖d6 ♙f8 27.♖d5 bxc3 28.bxc3 ♙b8 Black is fine.



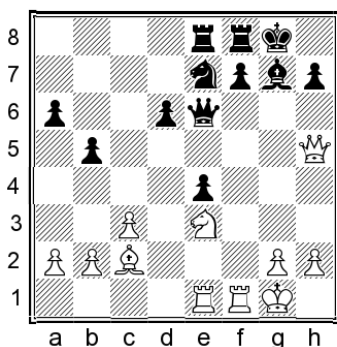
20...Rae8

20...Wc5+!?N is an interesting alternative, with the following clever idea in mind: 21.Qh1 Wc5! 22.fxe4 fxe4 23.Wxe5 dxe5 24.Rxe4 White has regained the pawn but improved our structure in the process. 24...f5 25.Re2 Rad8 26.Qe1 Rd6 27.Qc2 Qh8 28.g3 With a balanced endgame.

21.Qe3

21.fxe4 fxe4 22.Wxd5 Qxd5 leaves White with difficulties regaining the pawn.

21...We6 22.fxe4 fxe4 23.Qc2



23...b4

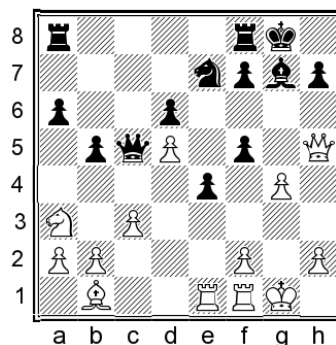
Another tempting continuation is 23...d5!?N 24.Qb3 Rd8 25.Qf5 Qh8 26.Qh1 Rfe8 27.Qg3 Wg6 28.Rxf7 a5 when Black stands better thanks to the strong central pawns.

24.Qf5 d5 25.c4 Qxf5 26.Rxf5 dxc4

Black had the better game in S. Salov – Balabaev, corr. 2003.

An interesting new idea is:

19.g4!?N



This isn't too dangerous, as long as we reply with:

19...Rae8!

19...Qxd5?! 20.Wxf5 is bad; and 19...Wxd5? 20.gxf5 would be even worse.

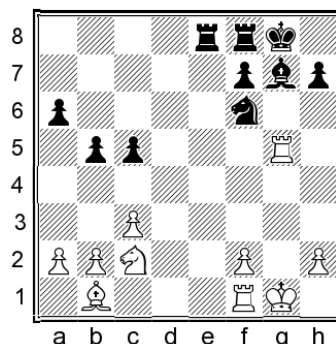
20.Qc2

20.gxf5 Qxd5 enables our knight to get back to the ideal f6-square. Play could continue: 21.Qxe4 Qf6 22.Wf3 b4 23.Qb1 Qh8 24.Qd3 Rxe1 25.Rxe1 d5 26.Qh1 Qh6 27.Rg1 a5 White's extra pawn is irrelevant and we're doing absolutely fine.

20...fxg4

There follows a relatively forcing sequence of captures and exchanges:

21.Rxe4 Qxd5 22.Rxg4 Qf6 23.Wxc5 dxc5 24.Rg5



24...Re2!?

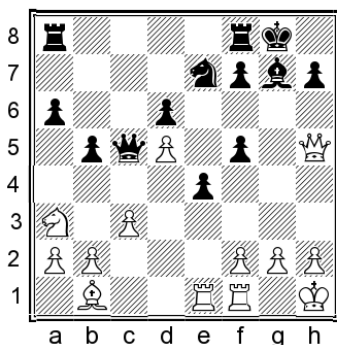
24...Qe4 is a safe alternative which stops White from creating any threats on the g-file.

25.Qe3 Rxb2 26.Qf5 Qe8

White's pieces look menacing but there's no way through on the kingside. Play could continue:

27.Qh1 Qh8 28.Qxg7 Qxg7 29.Rxc5 Ra8

We don't stand worse at all.



19...Qxd5

It's best to take this pawn immediately.

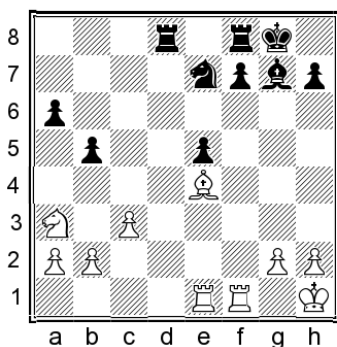
19...Rae8?! 20.f3 Qxd5 21.fxe4 fxe4 22.Qxd5 Qxd5 23.Qxe4 Re5 was seen in Thompson – Shvartsman, Orlando 2011, when 24.Qxd5!N 24...Rxd5 25.Re2 Re5 26.Ref2 Re4 27.Qc2 d5 28.Rd1 Rfe8 29.g3 would have left Black facing a difficult defensive task due to the numerous weak pawns.

20.f3 Qe5!

We saw the same idea in a sub-variation of the 19.Qc2 line in the notes above. White will improve our structure in order to regain the pawn.

21.fxe4 fxe4 22.Qxe5 dxe5 23.Qxe4 Rad8

The arising endgame is equal. Lets have a look:



24.Rd1 f5 25.Qb7 Rxd1 26.Rxd1 Rf6 27.Qc2

27.Rd7 achieves nothing after 27...Qf8 when we're ready to expel the rook with ...Qe8.

White can sharpen the play a little with:

27.c4!?

To which a good reply seems:

27...e4!

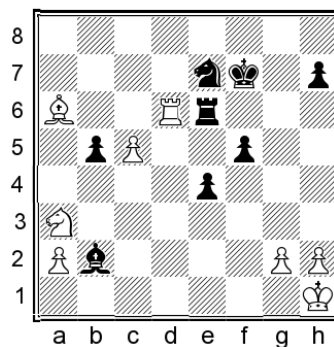
For instance:

28.c5!?N

The most ambitious.

28.cxb5 axb5 29.Qxb5 Bb6 30.Qd5+ Qxd5 31.Rxd5 Rxc6 32.Qc3 Qxc3 33.bxc3 Rxc3 led to an equal rook endgame in Gonschior – Mueller, corr. 2005.

28...Re6 29.Rd6 Qf7 30.Qxa6 Qxb2



31.Qxb5!

White finds a trick, but we have more than one satisfactory reply.

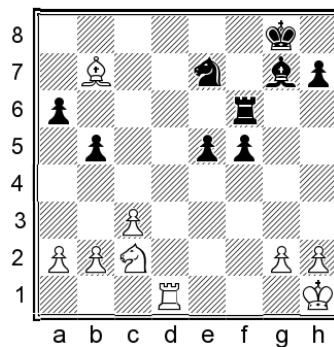
31...Re5!?

Refusing to concede anything.

31...Rxd6 32.cxd6 Qxa3 33.d7! Qc6! 34.Qxc6 Qe7 reaches a pawn-down endgame with opposite-coloured bishops, which is easy enough to hold.

32.Qc4 Rxc5 33.a4 Qf6 34.g3 Qd5

It should be a draw, but both sides still have to make some moves.



27...Qf7 28.Qf3

After 28.g3 e4 29.Qg2 the players agreed a draw in Karabalis – Hoenig, corr. 2002, but under normal circumstances I would definitely play on with 29...Rb6 30.Qd5+ Qxd5 31.Rxd5 Qe6 when we still have some chances, thanks to the strong bishop and active king.

28...e4 29.Qh5+ Qe6

One of the advantages of the e4-f5 pawn duo is the ability of our king to advance under the cover that the pawns provide.

### 30.g4!?

White went for this radical idea in a correspondence game.

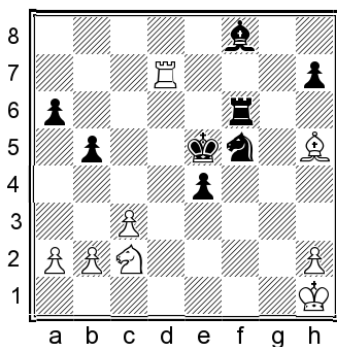
### 30...♗e5!

30...f4!? 31.g5 ♖f8 is 0.00 according to the engine, but in practice anything could happen.

### 31.♞d7 ♕f8 32.gxf5 ♘xf5!?!N

32...♞xf5 33.♙d1 ♘d5 gave White the opportunity to simplify to a pure opposite-coloured-bishops endgame with 34.♞xd5†! ♗xd5 35.♘e3† in Ruefenacht – Krivic corr. 2003, after which Black kept a token advantage but no real winning chances.

The text move would be my suggested winning attempt. For instance:



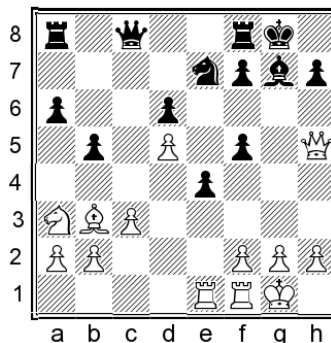
### 33.♞f7

After 33.♞xh7 ♙c5! our initiative and strong passer are worth more than the sacrificed pawn.

### 33...♞xf7 34.♙xf7 ♘d6

It should still be a draw of course, but with knights on the board we can still cause White some problems.

### A223) 18.♙b3



Defending the d5-pawn and preparing the knight shift to c2. The obvious drawback is that the bishop is passively placed and the f2-f3 break loses its power.

### 18...♘g6 19.♘c2

This is almost universally chosen.

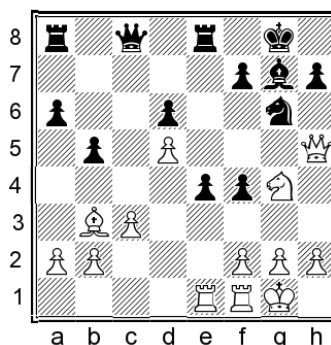
19.♞e3 has been played a few times but after 19...♞e8 it's not clear what White is doing, as ♞h3 can always be met by ...h6.

### 19...♞e8 20.f4

This is the usual continuation: White hopes for a positional bind with the knight coming to e3 next. Alternatives bring nothing:

20.♘d4?! ♙xd4 21.cxd4 f4 22.g3 f3 clearly favoured Black in Sorcnik – Teeriaho, corr. 2008.

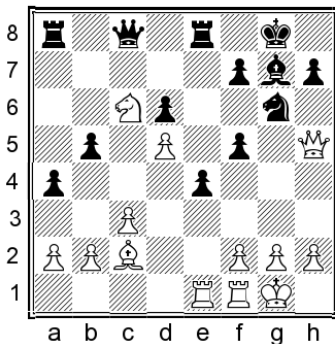
20.♘e3 f4 21.♘g4



21...♞a7!N (Improving on 21...f5 22.♘h6† ♙xh6 23.♞xh6 ♞d8, although this was also pretty good for Black in Cavatorta – Maugg, Lignano Sabbiadoro 2005.) 22.a3 ♞ae7 23.♗h1 ♗h8 We dominate the centre, while White struggles to find a useful move.

20. ♖b4 a5 21. ♖c6 a4 22. ♙c2

This was seen in Luncasu – Manescu, Mamaia 2015. A simple improvement is:



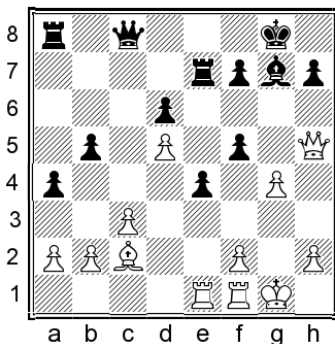
22... ♖e7N 23. ♖xe7† ♞xe7

It is important to realize that our bishop is no worse than its counterpart.

24. g4

24. f3 a3! gives us more than enough counterplay.

24. a3 keeps the queenside secure but enables us to seize the initiative in the centre: 24... ♞e5! 25. ♙b1 ♞c4 26. ♞d1 ♞ae8 27. ♞d4 ♞c5 White must go on the defensive.



24... a3! 25. bxa3

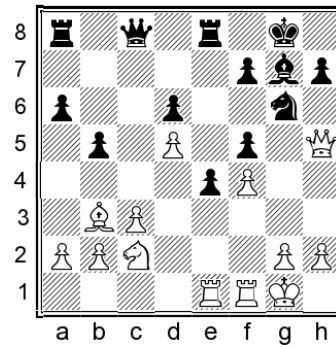
25. gxf5? axb2 26. f6 ♙xf6 27. ♞xe4 ♞xe4 28. ♙xe4 ♖f8 gives White no attack, and the mighty b2-pawn should decide matters.

25... ♞xc3 26. ♙b1 e3 27. fxe3 ♞xe3 28. ♞xe3 ♞xe3† 29. ♖h1 ♞e5!

Centralizing the queen.

30. ♞xf5 ♞xf5 31. ♞xf5 ♞xa3

We have no problems in this endgame.

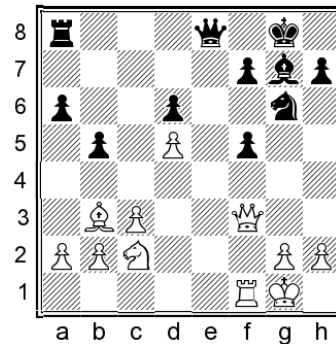


20... exf3 21. ♞xe8†

21. ♞xf3 a5! ♞ gives White nothing better than 22. ♞xe8† ♞xe8, transposing to the main line.

21... ♞xe8 22. ♞xf3

This position has been reached in several games. I found an interesting new idea:



22... a5! ♞N

We threaten to trap the bishop, while also taking away the b4-square from White's knight.

22... f4 has been universally played, and is certainly not a bad choice. After 23. ♞e1 ♞d8 (23... ♞d7 and 23... ♞c8 have also proven to be okay) 24. ♖b4 a5 25. ♖c6 ♞g5 26. a3 ♖e5 27. ♖xe5 ♙xe5 28. ♞f1 ♞h4 29. ♖h1 ♞b8 Black was doing fine in Achilles – Schueppel, corr. 2006.

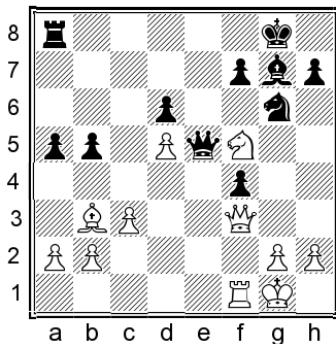
23. ♖e3!

23. ♞e1? ♖e5! wins material, as ...a4 is still threatened.

23. a3 f4 24. ♞e1 ♞d8 gives us an improved version of the note to move 22 above. White cannot activate the knight via b4, and therefore stands worse.

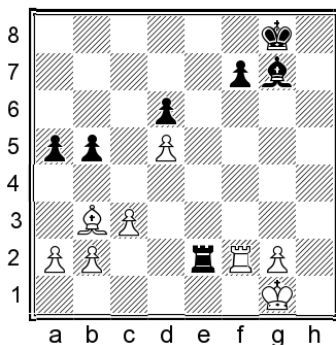
23... f4 24. ♖f5 ♞e5

White's knight has found a good square but we can tolerate it, and our queenside counterplay is strong enough.



**25.♙c2**

Another logical line continues 25.♙g4 ♖e8 26.h4 h5! 27.♙xh5 ♘xh4 28.♙xh4 ♙xf5 29.♙xf4 ♙xf4 30.♙xf4 ♖e2 31.♙f2



We can continue with either 31...♖e1† or 31...♙xf2 32.♙xf2 a4 33.♙c2 a3; in both cases, White's extra pawn is meaningless and the position is an easy draw.

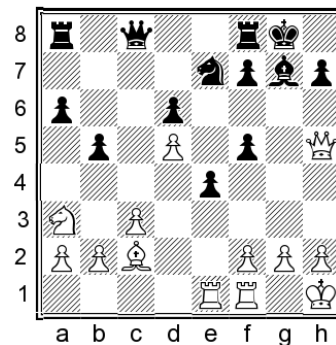
**25...b4 26.♘g7**

26.g3 f3g3 27.h3g3 b3c3 28.b3c3 ♖c8 29.♘d4 ♙h8 30.♙g2 ♙g5 31.♙xg6 ♙xd4 32.cxd4 f3g6 is also equal.

**26...♙xg7 27.♙xg6 hxg6 28.♙xf4 ♙xd5**

The position remains equal.

**A224) 18.♙h1**



This is the main line. White has an obvious idea to prepare f2-f3 without allowing any tricks on the a7-g1 diagonal.

**18...b4!?**

A most interesting idea: we speed up our counterplay before White can even get started on the kingside.

18...♙b8 and 18...♘g6 have been the usual choices.

**19.cxb4**

**19.♘b1?!**

This is as unimpressive as it looks.

**19...bxc3**

First we force White to define the situation on the queenside.

**20.♘xc3**

20.bxc3N 20...♙c5 21.g4 ♙h8! 22.gxf5 ♘xd5 also favours Black.

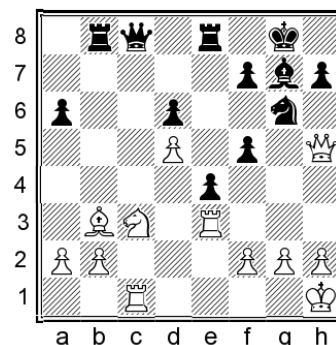
**20...♘g6!?**

We achieve our goals on both sides of the board.

**21.♖e3**

21.g4 f3g4 gives us the upper hand; 21.f3 ♙xc3 22.bxc3 ♙xc3 23.♙b1 ♖ae8 24.fxe4 f4 is also unpleasant for White.

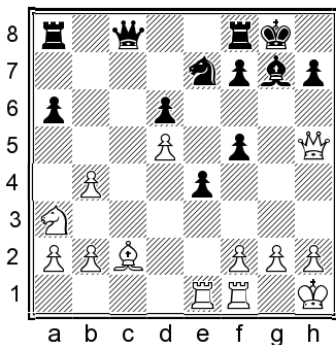
**21...♙b8 22.♙b3 ♖e8 23.♖c1**



**23...f4!N**

23...♖b4 24.g3 ♗d7 25.f3 ♜e7 26.fxe4 fxe4 was somewhat better for Black in Kis Kos – Kroes, corr. 2008, but the text move is even stronger.  
24.♖h3 h6

We have everything that we could wish for in this opening.

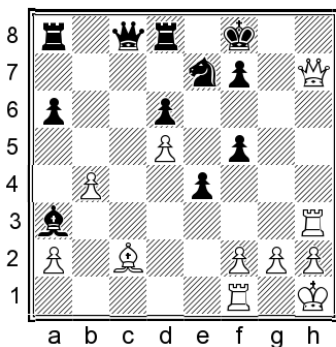


### 19...a5!

This surprising move highlights the deep complexity of the entire system, with both White and Black conducting operations on both sides of the board.

19...♙xb2 is not my recommendation, but I want to show you a couple of lines in order to compare with a possible variation which can arise in our main line below. 20.♞e3. There are now two lines worth mentioning:

20...♙xa3?? leads to disaster after: 21.♞h3 ♞d8 22.♝xh7† ♔f8



23.♝h6†! ♔e8 24.♙a4† Black can resign. This is the line to compare with one of the notes below, where we get an improved version.

20...♙g7 is a decent option though, and 21.♙b3 a5 22.g4 a4 23.♙c4 fxe4 24.♞xe4 ♗g6 25.♞xg4 ♞e8 was fine for Black in Yloenen – Staroske, corr. 2014. The black pieces are well centralized, and White's knight is less than impressive on a3.

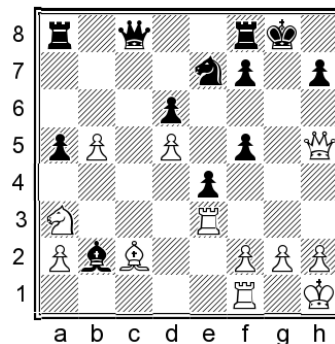
### 20.♙b3

This seems natural, but three other moves are also worth mentioning.

20.b5?!N

This is well met by:

20...♙xb2 21.♞e3



21...♙xa3!

21...♙g7 is perfectly playable, like in the Yloenen – Staroske game noted above, but the text move is better.

22.g4!?

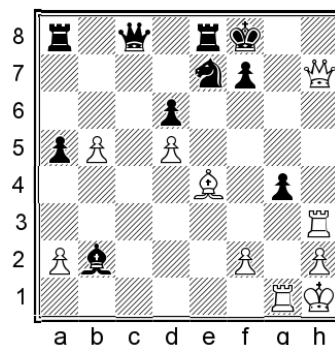
The alternative is: 22.♞h3 ♞d8 23.♙d1 (23.♝xh7† ♔f8 gives White nothing because the bishop won't be able to deliver the key check on a4.) 23...♙b2 24.♝xh7† ♔f8 25.♙h5 ♗g6 26.♙xg6 fxe4 27.♝xg6 ♞a7! We have good chances to convert our material advantage.

22...♙b2!

Care is needed in such a sharp position, but objectively we stand better. For instance:

23.♞g1 fxe4 24.♞h3 ♞e8 25.♝xh7† 25.♙xe4 ♔f8 26.♞f3!? ♗g6 27.♞xg4 ♞xe4! 28.♞xe4 ♙e5 29.♝xh7 ♝c1† 30.♔g2 ♝g5† 31.♔h3 f5 also turns out clearly better for us.

25...♔f8 26.♙xe4



26...♗g8! 27.♙f5 ♝c5 28.♙e6

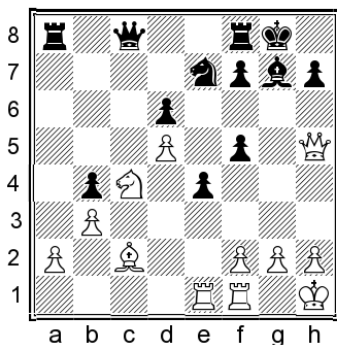
Otherwise ... $\text{d}f6$  comes and White has nothing, as the king can always run away via e7.

28... $\text{R}xe6$  29. $\text{d}xe6$   $\text{W}d5\uparrow$  30. $\text{f}3$   $\text{W}xe6$  31. $\text{R}xg4$   $\text{Q}e7!$

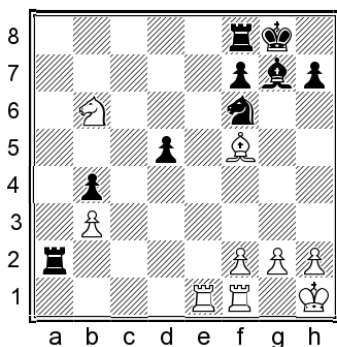
We consolidate and stand clearly better. Summing up, 20. $\text{b}5?!N$  leads to sharp tactics but objectively it would be a mistake for White to go down this path.

20. $\text{Q}b1$   $\text{a}xb4$  21. $\text{Q}c2$   $\text{Q}xd5$  sees us snaffle a pawn while anticipating the arrival of the knight on e3. 22. $\text{Q}e3$   $\text{Q}xe3$  23. $\text{f}xe3$   $\text{W}e6$  24. $\text{R}xf5$   $\text{Q}xb2$  The position was equal in Poell – Ergenekon, corr. 2015.

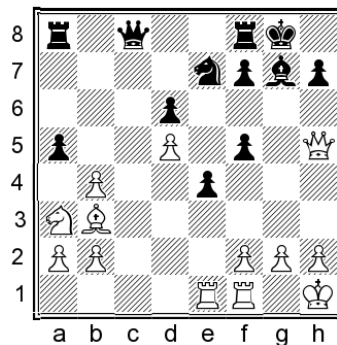
20. $\text{b}3$   $\text{a}xb4$  21. $\text{Q}c4$  is a sensible idea to secure the knight on c4, but we're doing fine after:



21... $\text{Q}xd5$  (21... $\text{R}xa2$  22. $\text{Q}b1$  is unclear; I would prefer to remove the central pawn and invite a short tactical sequence.) 22. $\text{Q}xe4$   $\text{Q}f6$  23. $\text{W}xf5$   $\text{d}5!$  24. $\text{Q}b6$   $\text{W}xf5$  25. $\text{Q}xf5$   $\text{R}xa2$  White has a few options but no advantage, for instance:



26. $\text{R}d1$   $\text{R}d8$  27. $\text{g}4$   $\text{h}6$  28. $\text{h}4$   $\text{R}b8$  (28... $\text{d}4$  is also fine.) 29. $\text{Q}xd5$   $\text{Q}xd5$  30. $\text{R}xd5$   $\text{R}b2$  We'll pick up the b3-pawn and the resulting endgame should be a draw, although the passed b-pawn might offer some practical winning chances if we are being optimistic.



20... $\text{a}4!$  21. $\text{Q}c4$   $\text{Q}xb2$  22. $\text{R}3$

White must proceed energetically due to the hanging minor pieces.

22... $\text{f}4!$

With the bishop on c2 this move would not have been feasible, but here it's the best choice.

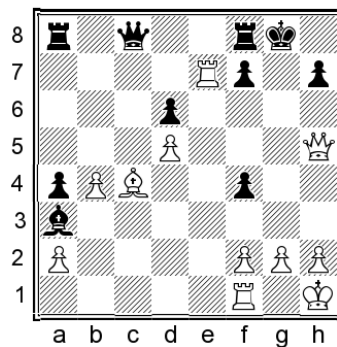
22... $\text{Q}xa3??$  once again loses to 23. $\text{R}h3$   $\text{R}d8$  24. $\text{W}xh7\uparrow$   $\text{Q}f8$  25. $\text{W}h6\uparrow!$ , the key point being that the bishop is poised to deliver a deadly check on b5.

22... $\text{Q}g7?!$  might be playable but 23. $\text{f}3$  gives White easy kingside play, and I see no reason to take such risks.

23. $\text{R}h3?!$

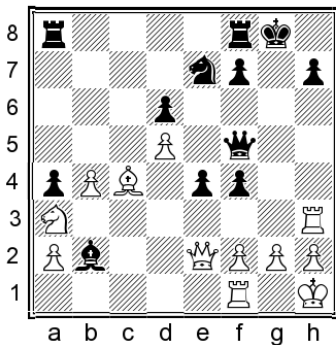
This is the only ambitious attempt, but I think it's riskier for White than for Black.

23. $\text{R}xe4N$  is a safe route to a draw: 23... $\text{Q}xa3$  24. $\text{R}xe7$  (24. $\text{R}xf4?$  leaves White with insufficient compensation after 24... $\text{f}5$  or 24... $\text{Q}g6$ .)



24... $\text{W}xc4$  25. $\text{W}g5\uparrow$   $\text{Q}h8$  26. $\text{W}f6\uparrow$   $\text{Q}g8$  27. $\text{W}g5\uparrow$   $\text{Q}h8$  28. $\text{W}f6\uparrow$   $\text{Q}g8$  29. $\text{W}g5\uparrow$   $\text{Q}h8$  Neither side can avoid the repetition.

23...♖f5 24.♗e2



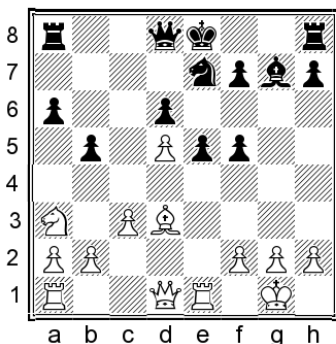
24...♗xa3!?!N

24...♗e5 25.♘b5 ♖fc8 26.♞e1 ♘g6 27.a3 ♗e7 gave Black at least equal chances in Jirku – Binas, corr. 2016, but I like the text move even more.

25.♞xa3 ♖fc8 26.b5 ♘g6

We are doing more than okay, with the stronger minor piece and good attacking chances.

B) 15.♞e1



White creates an escape square on f1 for the bishop. This move order is slightly uncommon, but it immediately transposes to a lot of games which arrived here via 14.♞e1 ♗g7 15.c3. Regardless of which move order White chooses, I consider this, in conjunction with the following deployment of the queen on h5 to be the most critical continuation of all.

15...0-0 16.♗h5

Only now, when the bishop can conveniently retreat to f1, does White deploy the queen aggressively. This can be viewed as a slightly more sophisticated version of 15.♗h5 which we examined previously. The rook is useful on e1, as it keeps our pawn centre immobile and may swing

into action along the third rank in some lines. Unlike variation A above, the c2-square is kept clear for the knight. Later, White may activate the bishop with g2-g3 and ♗h3.

16.♘c2 takes us back to variation D2 of the previous chapter.

16...e4 17.♗f1

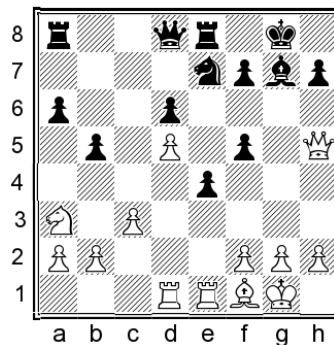
This is a critical variation for the entire 10...f5 system, so it's worth knowing two solutions for Black. We will start with the most popular **B1)** 17...♞e8 before moving on to the interesting alternative **B2)** 17...♗c8!?.

**B1) 17...♞e8**

The main purpose of this move is to make ...♘xd5 a real possibility, as now the reply ♗xf5 can be met by ...♞e5.

White can either maintain the d5-pawn with **B11)** 18.♞ad1 or invite us to capture it with **B12)** 18.♘c2.

**B11) 18.♞ad1**



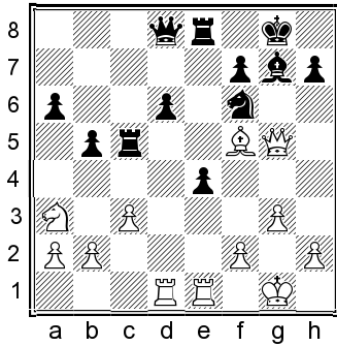
This is the more popular continuation, although I would rate it as slightly less challenging than the other main line. One relevant point is that future a2-a4 ideas are no longer dangerous. Still, White's slow build-up should not be underestimated.

**18...♞c8**

We prepare to deploy the rook on c5.

White usually continues with either **B111)** 19.♖e3 or **B112)** 19.♘c2.

19.g3 ♖c5 20.♗h3 ♘xd5 21.♙xf5 The players agreed a draw here in Hoffmann – A. Smith, Pardubice 2007, but we could easily play on. 21...♘f6 22.♗g5

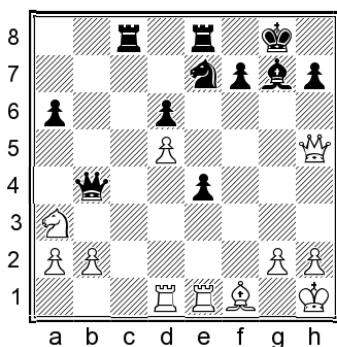


22...♞e5!?! (22...h6 23.♗f4 ♘h5 24.♗g4 ♘f6 leaves White with nothing better than repeating with 25.♗f4, but we can play for more.) 23.g4 h5 24.h3 ♗b6 White has some problems to solve.

19.f3!?

This rare but principled move should lead to balanced play with chances for both sides. We can deal with the central attack while developing our own play by means of:

19...b4! 20.cxb4 ♗b6† 21.♙h1 ♗xb4 22.fxe4 fxe4 We're doing fine in this double-edged position. Let's see a few possible continuations:



23.♗e2

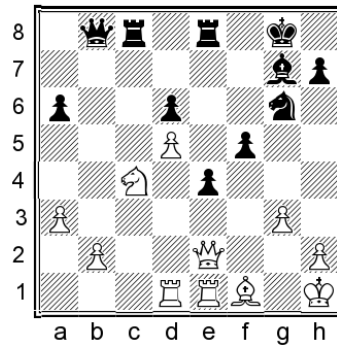
The safest choice. 23.♞e3N appears tempting but 23...♘g6! is quite promising for us. For instance: 24.♞b3 (24.♙xa6 ♗b6! 25.♙xc8 ♗xe3 gives us the better chances.) 24...♗c5 25.♙xa6 ♞b8 26.♙b5 ♞e7 27.♗e2 f5 28.♗c2 ♗xc2 29.♘xc2 ♞c7 30.♘e3 f4 31.♘f5 ♙e5 The rook will invade on c2

next, and we have more than enough play for the pawn.

23...f5 24.♘c4 ♘g6 25.a3

I also considered 25.g3N 25...♞f8! 26.a3 ♗c5 27.b4 ♗c7 28.♞c1 ♗e7 when we transfer our forces to the kingside, with good chances there. 25...♗b8 26.g3

I think the most attractive continuation is:

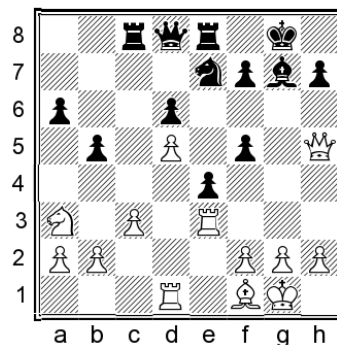


26...♞e7!?!N

26...♞f8 27.♙h3 ♘e7 28.b4 ♞f6 led to complex play in Muzyka – Korosec, corr. 2007. 27.♙h3 ♞f8

The idea is to place both rooks on the kingside, with the option of doubling them at any moment. 28.♗h5 ♞ef7 29.♞f1 ♘e7 30.♘e3 ♗b3 Again we have enough play.

### B111) 19.♞e3



White activates the rook, hoping to cause problems on the kingside.

### 19...♞c5 20.♞h3

An important alternative is:

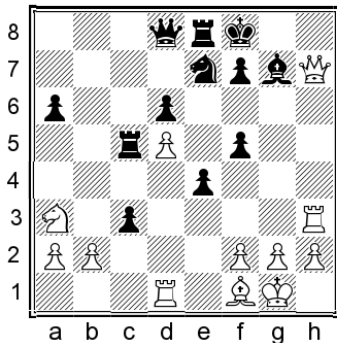
20.c4 bxc4 21.♞h3

21.♙xc4?! ♙xb2N 22.♞h3 ♙g7 23.♗xh7† ♙f8 24.♙xa6 ♘xd5 25.♞g3 ♗f6 26.♘c4 ♞d8 is close to winning for us. 21...c3!

Let's not be afraid of ghosts.

21...h6 is possible, with a transposition to the 21...bxc4 line in the notes to the main line below, but the text move is stronger.

22. ♖xh7† ♔f8

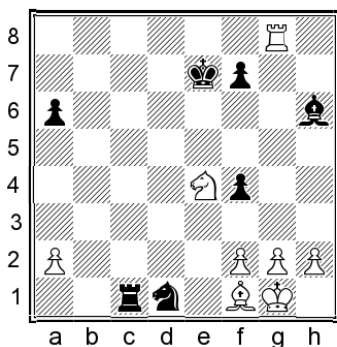


23. bxc3

White has also tried: 23. b4 ♖c7 24. ♖c2 ♘g6 25. ♖h5 ♗f6 26. ♙xa6 ♖a8! 27. b5 ♖c5 (27...♖c4!?N also yields a decisive advantage; this way we prevent a2-a4 and can increase our domination with ...f4 next.) 28. a4 ♔e7 29. ♖xf5 ♗xf5 30. ♗xg7 ♗e5 31. ♗xe5† ♖xe5 White was unable to hold the endgame in Szczepankiewicz – Stephan, corr. 2007. 23...♖g6!?N

It's always tempting to mobilize the knight in this way, although I would characterize it as an interesting new direction rather than an improvement over the existing games.

23...♖xd5 is perfectly fine. The relatively forced line continues: 24. ♖g3 (24. ♗xf5?! is well met by 24...♖e5 followed by ...♖xc3.) 24...♗f6 25. ♖c4 f4 26. ♖g4 ♗h6 27. ♗xh6 ♙xh6 28. ♖xd6 ♖xc3 29. ♖xe8 ♖xd1 30. ♖f6 ♖c1 31. ♖g8† ♔e7 32. ♖xe4



32...♖e3! 33. ♖d2! ♖d1 White was able to hold with accurate defence in Schulz – Doderer, corr. 2016, and several other correspondence games, but

from a practical perspective only Black has any winning chances.

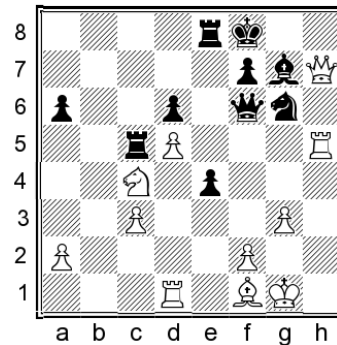
24. ♖h5 ♗f6

We reach a position in which the knight on a3 is still out of play, so White must do something about it. I offer a few sample lines:

25. ♖c4

25. ♖c2 ♗xc3 26. ♖e3 f4 27. ♖f5 ♗f6 28. ♙xa6 ♖a8 works out to our advantage.

25...f4 26. g4 fxg3 27. hxg3



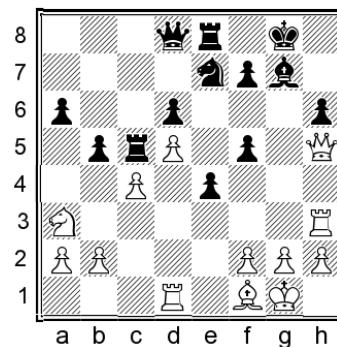
27...♖xc4! 28. ♙xc4 e3 29. ♖f1 ♗xc3 30. ♖f5 ♗xc4 31. ♗xg6 ♗xf1† 32. ♔xf1 e2† 33. ♔g2 ♖e7

White will have to find some accurate moves to avoid losing:

34. ♖xf7† ♖xf7 35. ♗xd6† ♖e7 36. ♗f4† ♔g8 37. d6 e1=♗ 38. dxe7 ♗xe7 39. ♗c4†

With a drawn ending.

20...h6 21.c4



21...♖g6!

We continue in the most active way possible, improving the knight while threatening a fork on f4.

21...bxc4 22. ♖xc4 ♖xd5 23. ♖xd5 ♖xd5 24. ♗xf5 is playable but I prefer the text move.

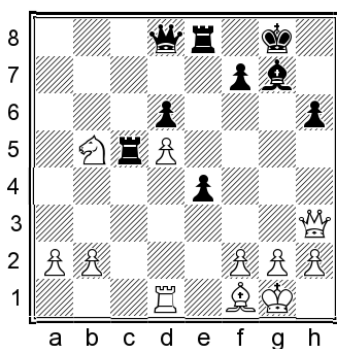
22.cxb5?!

This has been the usual continuation but it seems riskier for White than for Black.

22. ♖xf5 is safer, although 22... ♗xb2 23. cxb5 ♜e5 24. ♖g4 ♗xa3 25. ♝xa3 axb5 26. ♞d4 ♖h7 was pleasant enough for Black in Markus – Pirs, corr. 2014.

22... ♖f4 23. ♖xf5 ♖xh3† 24. ♖xh3 axb5 25. ♖xb5

Here I found a new idea:



25... ♖b6?N

25... ♗xb2 has been played a few times, but it feels like picking off this pawn should not be our top priority.

25... ♝e5 is a good option which has yielded a win and two draws in correspondence games, with no defeats.

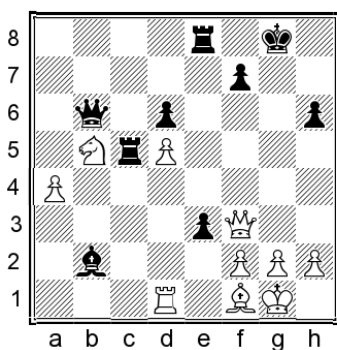
26. a4 e3!

This is the main idea behind our previous move.

27. ♖f3

27. fxe3? ♝xb5! wins on the spot.

27... ♗xb2



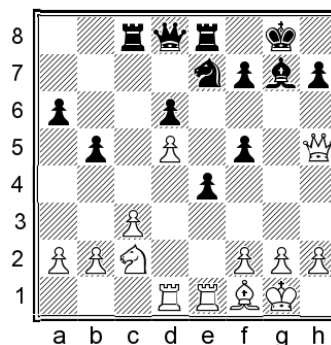
28. ♖h1

28. fxe3 ♝c1 also gives White some problems.

28... exf2 29. ♖xf2 ♗e5

Black stands better.

B112) 19. ♖c2



Improving the knight has been White's most popular continuation.

19... ♝c5

We continue with our plan of attacking d5.

20. ♖e3

This natural move has been by far the most natural choice, but it leads more or less by force to an equal endgame. Let's check some other possibilities:

The overoptimistic 20. f3?! can simply be met by 20... ♖xd5N (20... ♖b6 21. ♖h1 ♖xd5 was also promising for Black in Abreu Delgado – Aguero Jimenez, Havana 2007) 21. fxe4 ♖f6 and Black stands better.

20. ♖d4 ♖c8 21. a4 bxa4 22. c4 was seen in Hoenig – Sakai, corr. 2005, when the thematic 22... ♗xd4!N 23. ♝xd4 ♖g6 would have been quite promising for Black.

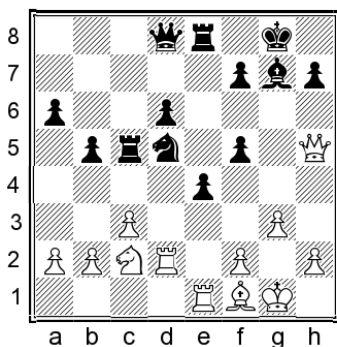
20. g3!

With this rare move, White simply leaves the d5-pawn to its fate.

20... ♖xd5 21. ♝d2

21. ♖xf5 is playable but the tactics turn out fine for us. 21... ♖xc3 22. ♖xc5 ♖xd1 23. ♖a7 ♖xb2 24. ♖xa6 This occurred in Kobryn – Tyutyunnik,

corr. 2014, and here I suggest 24...♙c3!N 25.♙xb5 ♙xe1 26.♙xe8 ♙xf2† 27.♙xf2 ♘d3† 28.♙e2 ♗xe8 29.♗xd6 ♗a8 30.a3 ♗a5 when we are in no danger.



21...♙e5 22.♗d1

That was the idea of White's previous move.

22...♙h6!?

22...f4 23.♘b4 ♗g5 was seen in Nijboer – Reinderman, Hilversum 2009, when White should have tried 24.♘xa6N 24...♙c8 25.♙xe4! ♙xe4 26.♙xd5 with sufficient compensation, although Black is still doing fine.

23.♙d4 ♙g7

I prefer Black's chances. We are still a long way from doing anything with the extra pawn, but it still counts for something.

A final alternative is:

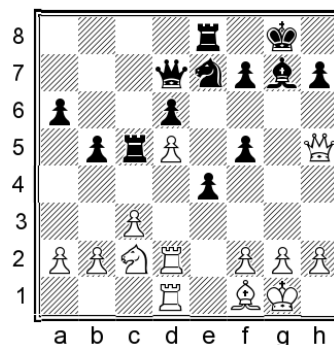
20.♙d2!? ♗d7

Here 20...♘xd5?! is inadvisable in view of: 21.♗xf5 ♙e5 (21...♘xc3? 22.♗xc5 wins material; this is why having the rook on d2 instead of d1 makes a difference!) 22.♗h3 White had the easier game in Rodriguez Guerrero – Gengler, Izmir 2004.

20...♗c8 is a good alternative though, and 21.g3?! (21.♙ed1N is preferable, when 21...f4 22.g3 ♘g6 23.♙h3 ♗d8 transposes to the analysis of 20...♗d7 below) 21...♙xd5 22.♙ed1 ♙xd2 23.♙xd2 ♗c5 24.♘e3 ♗e5 25.a4 f4 26.♗xe5 dxe5 saw White come under some pressure in Milos – Felgaer, Santos 2005.

21.♙ed1

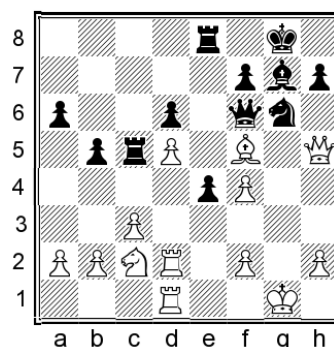
Here I found an improvement on Black's play in Vrana – S. Larsen, corr. 2008:



21...f4!N 22.g3 ♘g6 23.♙h3 ♗d8 24.♙f5

24.♘d4? is met by the thematic 24...♙xd4! 25.♙xd4 ♙e5 26.♗h6 f3 when our knight is stronger than the enemy bishop, and White faces some long-term issues concerning king safety.

24...♗f6 25.gxf4



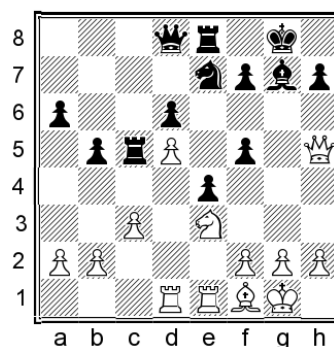
25...♘h4!?

25...♙h6 is a simpler way to maintain a perfectly adequate position.

The text move provokes complications by inviting White to capture on h7. In that case, our king would be in no real danger and we would have chances to exploit the open h-file. A sample continuation is:

26.♘d4 ♙f8 27.♙d7 ♗xf4! 28.♙xe8 ♙xd4 29.cxd4 ♙c7 30.♙f1 ♙xe8 31.♙e2 ♙f8 32.♗xh7 ♙c1

The game should end in perpetual check, in one way or another.

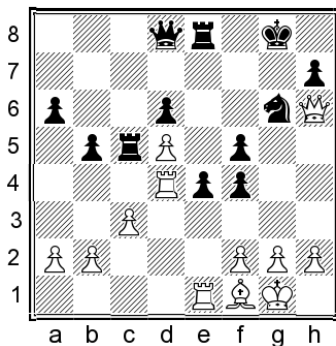


### 20...f4 21.♘f5

White doesn't have much choice.

Retreating with 21.♘c2? makes no sense, and 21...♘g6 22.♖h3 ♖g5! gives us excellent play.

21.♘g4? f5 22.♘h6† ♙xh6 23.♖xh6 ♘g6 gives us the benefit of the superior minor piece combined with a mighty pawn centre. 24.♞d4 This position was reached in Marjanovic – Vuckovic, Subotica 2008. Obviously we have many good moves, but my favourite is:



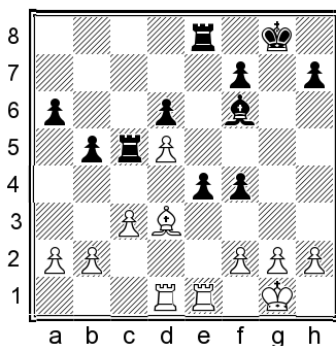
24...♞c7!N I doubt that White can survive.

### 21...♘xf5 22.♖xf5 ♖f6 23.♖xf6 ♙xf6

The simplified position with opposite-coloured bishops should be a draw; but if we had time to consolidate our strong central pawns, we would have chances to press.

### 24.♙d3!

White should definitely take the opportunity to play this move. Our most accurate reply is:



### 24...e3!

After 24...♞xd5 25.f3 a5 26.♞xe4 ♞xe4 27.fxe4 ♞c5 28.a3 ♙e5 29.♙f2 ♙g7 30.♙f3 h6 Black went on to hold without much drama in Reinderman – Krasenkow, Hilversum 2009.

However, White is the only one who can possibly try to win the position while Black has pretty much run out of active ideas, whereas the text move doesn't even offer White a symbolic advantage.

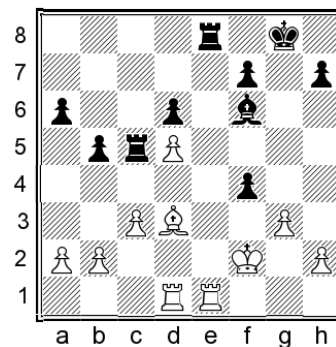
### 25.g3

White has nothing better:

25.fxe3 fxe3 should be a draw, and it is White who should be careful to avoid subsequent problems with our passed pawn.

25.♙f1 a5 (25...♙g7 is also fine) 26.g3 fxg3 27.hxg3 b4 28.cxb4 axb4 29.b3 ♙g7 30.♙c4 ♞a5 31.♞e2 ♞ea8 32.♞xe3 ♞xa2 was absolutely equal in Luers – Husemann, corr. 2016.

### 25...exf2† 26.♙xf2

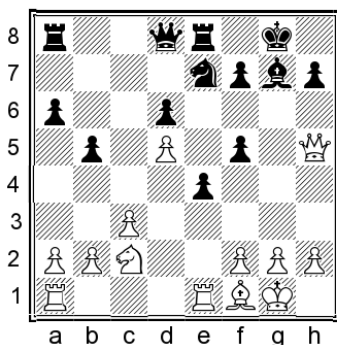


### 26...♞b8!?

This is a possible winning attempt, avoiding unnecessary exchanges and supporting a future queenside advance. (Note that the f4-pawn is untouchable due to the check on h4.)

26...♞xe1 and 26...fxg3† are the simpler options, steering the game towards a draw. All three moves have been tested in correspondence games, with a 100% drawing rate throughout.

### B12) 18.♘c2



This is a critical line. White refuses to spend a tempo defending d5 and instead aims for fast piece play. And with the rook still on a1, let's not forget about the typical a2-a4 plan.

### 18...♞xd5

We should definitely take this pawn, as this was the whole point behind putting the rook on e8. (See the next move.)

### 19.♞xf5 ♞e5

This can be considered the real starting point of the current line. Before we continue, I want to emphasize an important general point: I strongly believe that the black queen belongs on the kingside, which usually means the f6- or g5-squares, even though you can find a lot of games in which the queen went to b6 or some other place on the queenside.

### 20.♞h3

This is generally considered best.

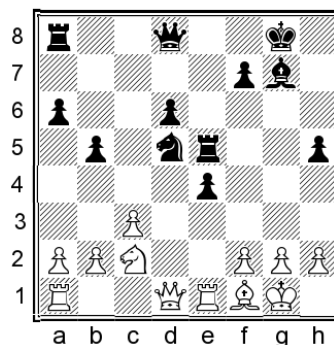
It is also possible to play in a slightly different way:

20.♞g4 h5 21.♞d1

White has tried two other queen retreats:

21.♞g3 ♞f6 22.a4 ♞d8 23.axb5 axb5 24.♞a6 ♔h8 25.♞e3 ♞f4 26.♞d1 ♞h6 and Black's position was by no means worse in Pessoa – Dias, corr. 2015.

21.♞e2 ♞f6!?N A novelty, but a completely thematic move in accordance with my earlier advice about deploying the queen on the kingside. 22.a4 b4!? Giving up a pawn to keep the a-file closed. 23.♞xb4 ♞f4 24.♞c2 a5 25.♞c6 ♞g5 26.g3 d5 27.♞d4 h4 The position remains complicated but I think we have full compensation.



21...♞g5 22.a4 ♞ae8

Both sides are playing logically, although there are always some choices in such a complex position. It's worth adding that Black's last move prepared a possible ...e3 advance.

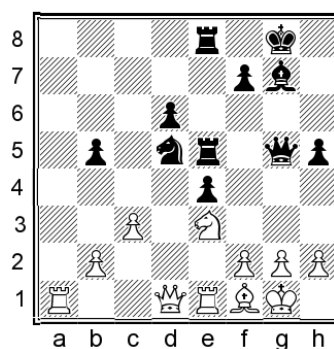
23.axb5

Another game continued 23.♔h1 h4 24.axb5 axb5 25.♞a5 b4 26.cxb4 ♞f5 27.h3 ♞xb2 28.♞c4 ♞f6 29.♞xf5 ♞xf5 30.♞d2 ♞e5, and Black was doing fine in Steiger – Zuev, corr. 2013.

23...axb5 24.♞e3

Blocking a further advance of the e-pawn.

I also considered: 24.♞a6 h4!?N With our pieces so impressively centralized, we can abandon the d6-pawn and play actively. 25.h3 (25.♞xd6 ♞f8 26.♞c6 ♞f4 27.♔h1 ♞d3 28.♞xd3 exd3 29.♞e3 ♞d8 gives us a strong initiative for the pawn.) 25...e3 26.fxe3 ♞xe3 27.♞d2 ♞h6 28.♞xd6 ♞xc2 29.♞xe5 ♞xe5 30.♞xc2 ♞g3. Our kingside threats guarantee a draw at the minimum.



24...♞f4

24...b4 25.♞xd5 ♞xd5 26.♞a4 ♞de5 27.♞xb4 d5 has been played a few times but I'm not entirely convinced by Black's compensation here.

25.♔h1

I also considered 25.g3N 25...♞g6 26.♔h1 ♞d3! 27.♞xd3 exd3 when we're doing fine.

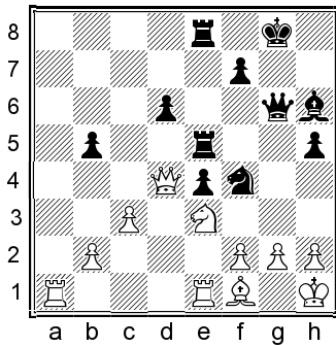
25...♞g6N

25...h4 led to an eventual draw in Sukhodolsky – Oortwijn, corr. 2007, but I'd prefer to improve the queen.

26.♖d2

26.♖a6 ♘d3! is good for us.

26...♙h6 27.♗d4



27...♞8e6!

We have an impressive concentration of pieces in the centre. I will offer a couple of sample continuations:

28.♞ad1

28.g3 ♘d3 29.♙xd3 exd3 30.♞ad1 ♙xe3 31.♞xe3 ♞xe3 32.fxe3 h4! 33.gxh4 ♗f5 is fine for us.

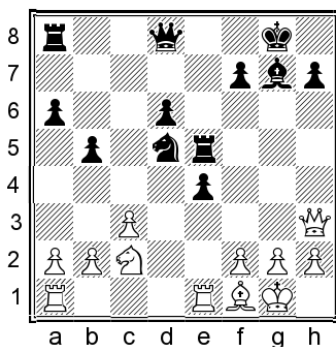
28...h4 29.h3

Or 29.g3 hxg3 30.fxg3 ♘d3 with plenty of counterplay.

29...♞g5 30.♘g4 ♞xg4! 31.hxg4 ♗xg4 32.♞a1 ♙g7 33.♗e3 ♗f5

We have more than enough compensation for the exchange.

After the text move I was able to discover a promising new idea:



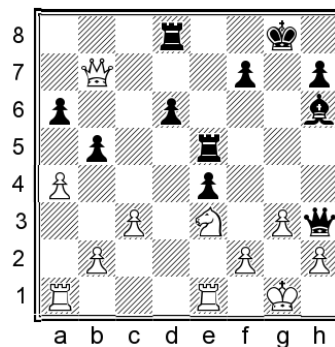
20...♙h8?N

My feeling is that we should keep the enemy queen locked down on h3 until the right moment when we have strengthened our position on the

kingside. Recent examples have favoured White after other continuations:

20...♗b6 21.♞ad1 ♞ae8 22.♞xe4! ♞xe4 23.♞xd5 is a key resource, and one of the reasons why I don't like posting our queen far away from the kingside. After the further 23...♗d8 24.♙d3 ♞h4 25.♗f3 ♞e5 26.♘e3 ♞xd5 27.♗xd5 ♞h6 28.♙f5 White had firm control over the centre and an excellent position overall in Horvath – Sebenik, Villorba 2021.

20...♗f6 is more consistent with my earlier advice about placing our queen on the kingside, but 21.a4! seems quite promising for White. For instance: 21...♘f4 (21...♞d8 22.axb5 ♘f4 23.♗e3 axb5 24.♗b6 ♙h8 25.♘e3 ♞g8 26.g3 ♙f8 27.♞a8 was good for White in Inarkiev – Gelfand, Nazran 2017.) 22.♗d7 ♞d8 23.♗b7 ♗h4 24.g3 ♘h3† 25.♙xh3 ♗xh3 26.♘e3 ♙h6

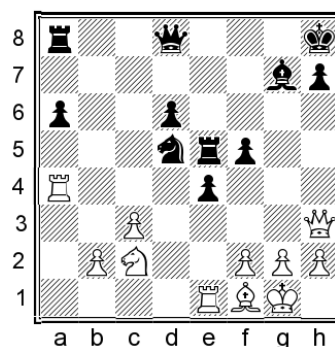


27.♞ad1!N (27.♗xa6 f5 was messy in Sjugirov – Mamedov, Batumi 2018.) 27...♙xe3 28.fxe3 bxa4 29.♗xa6 White maintains some pressure.

21.a4

White hardly has a better idea.

21...bxa4 22.♞xa4 f5



### 23. ♖d4

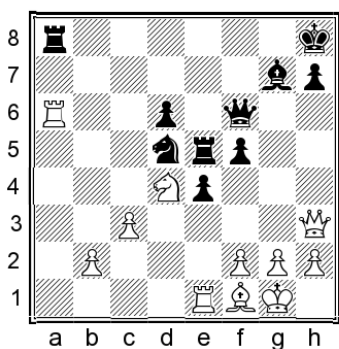
I also checked some other ideas:

23. ♖xa6 ♖xa6 24. ♙xa6 ♚b6 We break the usual rule in order to regain the pawn. 25. ♙c4 ♚xb2 26. ♙xd5 ♚xc2 27. c4 ♚d2 The position is level.

23. ♖eal a5 24. b4 ♖c8 25. ♖xa5 ♜f4 (25... ♖xc3 26. ♖a8 ♖c8 27. ♖xc8 ♚xc8 leaves White with some initiative, so we should invite a repetition.) 26. ♚e3 ♜d5 If White plays for a win with 27. ♚d2 then 27... ♜xc3 gives us a good game, as White can no longer retort with ♖xe5 followed by ♚xf5.

White could also go for a different rook placement: 23. ♖d1 ♚b6 24. ♜b4 (24. b4 ♚c7 25. c4 ♜b6 26. ♖a5 ♜xc4 27. ♖xe5 ♜xe5 28. ♜d4 d5 29. ♜e6 ♚d7 30. ♜xg7 ♜xg7 leaves us with no problems.) 24... ♜f6 25. ♚e3 ♚xe3 26. fxe3 ♙h6 27. ♜c2 ♖b8 We're doing fine here too.

### 23... ♚f6 24. ♖xa6



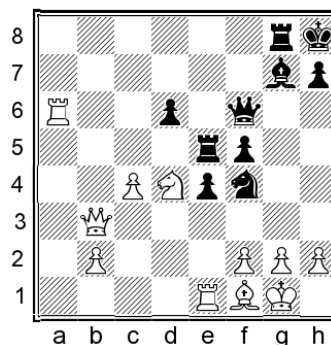
### 24... ♖g8

White has won a pawn but we have a lot of firepower on the kingside.

### 25. g3

The position is extremely complicated and I checked two other possible continuations:

25. c4 ♜f4 26. ♚b3 26. ♚a3 e3! 27. fxe3 ♜h3† 28. ♜h1 (28. gxf3? ♙h6† 29. ♙g2 ♚g7 30. ♖e2 ♙xe3† 31. ♜f1 ♙xd4 wins) 28... ♜f2† with perpetual check.)



26... ♖e7!

Forcing the knight to move away from the centre.

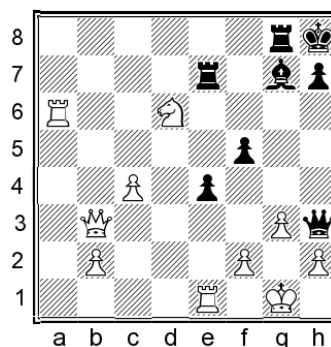
27. ♜b5 ♚h6

Preparing to activate the bishop and rooks simultaneously with ... ♙e5.

28. g3

28. ♖xd6? ♜h3† gives us at least a draw, as taking on h3 will lose the e1-rook to a discovered check.

28... ♜h3† 29. ♙xh3 ♚xh3 30. ♜xd6



30... ♜f4!

Our counterplay is enough to maintain the balance. Notice that the rook on e7 plays a key role in preventing mate on f7. My main line continues:

31. ♖xe4 fxf3 32. hxf3 ♙d4! 33. ♖xe7 ♖xg3† 34. ♚xg3 ♚xg3† 35. ♜h1 ♚h4† 36. ♜g2 ♚xf2† 37. ♜h3 ♚f3† 38. ♜h2

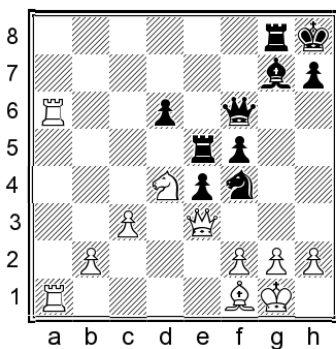
It looks extremely dangerous for White, but we only have a draw.

25. ♖eal

This has the logical idea of preparing ♖a8, exchanging a pair of rooks to ease the defence and perhaps even counterattack along the back rank. However, a good answer is:

25... ♜f4 26. ♚e3

26. ♖g3 ♘h5 might lead to a draw; or if White tries  
27. ♖e3 then 27... ♙h6 gives us plenty of play.



26... ♘g2!

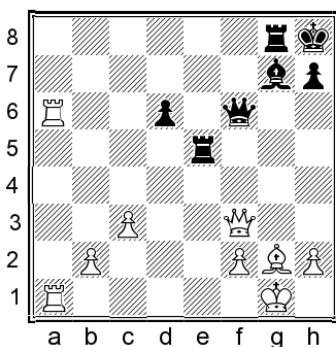
An important tactical motif, sacrificing the knight to open the g-file and gain time to advance our pawns.

27. ♙xg2 f4 28. ♖h3 f3 29. ♘f3

29. ♙xf3 exf3 30. ♖h1 ♖g5 31. ♘xf3 ♖f5 32. ♘d2 ♖f7 33. ♘e4 ♖d5 also gives us full compensation.

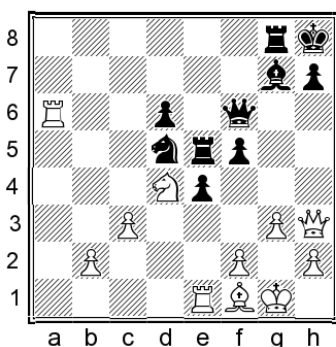
29...exf3 30. ♖xf3

White is two pawns up, but the open f- and g-files provide plenty of counterplay.



30... ♖f5 31. ♖e2 ♙h6 32. ♖a8 ♙f8 33. f4 d5  
34. ♖h1 ♖xf4

Threatening ... ♖f2. White will have to look for a way to exchange further pieces to make a draw.



25...f4 26. ♙c4 ♖g6

Preparing to switch the rook to h5.

27. ♙xd5 ♖xd5 28. ♖e6 fxg3 29. ♖xg6 hxg6

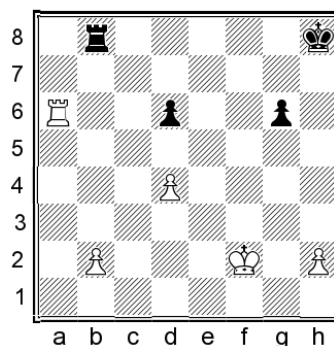
We reach an endgame where White has a token extra pawn, but will not be able to do anything with it.

30. ♖xe4 ♙xd4 31. ♖xd4

31.cxd4 gxh2† 32. ♖xh2 ♖g7 leaves us actively placed, and after something like 33.b4 ♖b8 34. ♖a4 ♖g5 35. ♖h4 ♖gb5 we regain the pawn with a dead drawn endgame.

31... ♖xd4 32.cxd4 gxh2† 33. ♖xf2 ♖b8

Despite being a pawn down, the position should be a fairly easy draw. For instance:



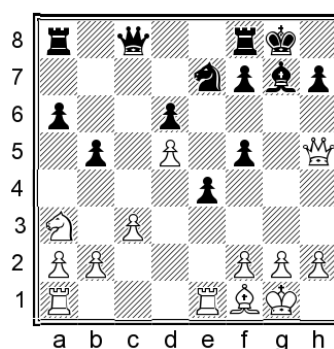
34. ♖a2

34. ♖xd6 ♖xb2† 35. ♖g3 ♖g7 leads to another draw.

34... ♖g7 35. ♖e3 ♖f6 36. ♖e4 ♖e6

White is unable to do anything.

B2) 17... ♖c8



This continuation is less common, but definitely worth considering. By defending the f5-pawn, we threaten ... ♘d5 and also prepare ... ♘g6.

18. ♖ad1

Unlike the previous variation, White really should defend the pawn here.

If 18. ♖c2 ♗xd5 19. ♖ad1 ♕e6 White may claim to have some compensation for the pawn, but it should be enough for equality at most – and even that is not guaranteed.

### 18... ♖e8

We are now ready for the typical plan of ... ♗g6 followed by ... f4. It's best not to move the knight away just yet, as we may yet decide to attack d5 again.

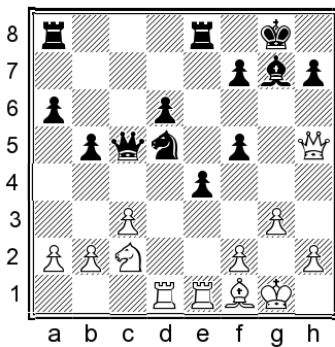
### 19. ♗c2

The alternative is:

19. g3

This is slightly premature, as we can turn our attention to the d5-pawn.

19... ♕c5 20. ♗c2 ♗xd5



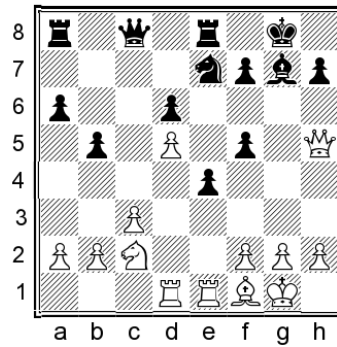
21. ♕xf5

Other choices also don't offer much for White: 21. b4 ♕xc3 22. ♖xd5 ♕xc2 23. ♖e2 ♕b1 24. ♖xf5 ♖a7 25. ♖g5 ♕xb4 and White's compensation was borderline in Nurkic – Vukic, Brcko 2005.

21. ♗d4 ♖e5 22. ♗h3N (22. ♗b3?! ♕b6 23. ♕e2 ♖ae8 favoured Black in Boros – Parligras, Budapest 2004) 22... ♗f6 23. ♕g5 h6 24. ♕d2 ♖d8 leaves White with about enough compensation for the pawn, but nothing more.

21... ♖e5 22. ♕d7 e3 23. ♗xe3 ♗xe3 24. ♖xe3 ♖xe3 25. fxe3 ♕xe3† 26. ♖g2 ♕e4† 27. ♖h3 ♖e5 28. ♗d3 ♕f3

Black was fine in Efimenko – Wang Yue, Dubai 2005.

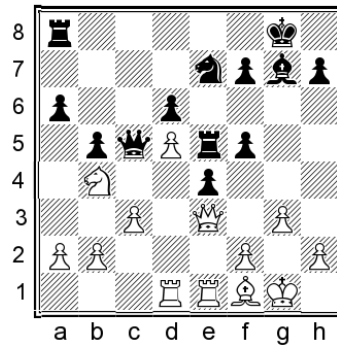


### 19... ♗g6

19... ♕c5?! is pointless here because of 20. ♗e3 or 20. ♗d4!?, both of which favour White.

White's two main options are **B21)** 20. ♗d4 and **B22)** 20. ♗b4.

20. ♕h3 is rare but playable. A good reply is 20... ♖e5, protecting f5 in preparation for activating the queen. For instance: 21. ♗b4 21. g3N 21... ♕d8! 22. ♗d4 ♕g5 significantly improves our position.) 21... ♕c5 22. ♕e3 ♗e7 23. g3

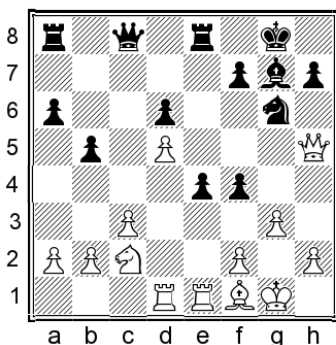


23... ♕xe3 24. fxe3 (24. ♖xe3N can be met by 24... a5, and if 25. f4!? axb4! 26. fxe5 ♖xe5 27. cxb4 ♖xa2 we have nice compensation for the exchange.) 24... a5 25. ♗c6 ♗xc6 26. dxc6 ♖c8 27. ♖xd6 ♖f8 28. ♖d7 ♖xc6 The endgame was equal in Efimenko – Smirnov, Sochi 2005.

The other logical candidate is:

20. g3 f4

Obviously we want to play this to avoid being hit by a nasty ♗h3 pin.



21. ♖h3!?

21.gxf4 ♜xf4 22. ♖g5 ♜g6 23. ♞d4 ♙xd4!  
24. ♖xd4 ♞e5 25. ♖g3 f5 was pleasant for Black in  
Konguvel – Harika, Visakhapatnam 2004.

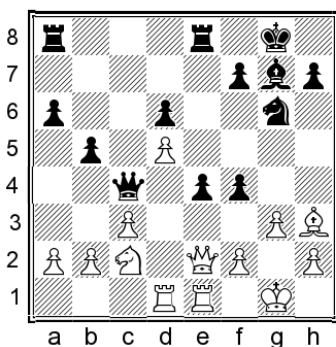
Also after 21. ♞d4 ♙xd4 22. ♖xd4 the position with  
knight versus bishop is decent enough, for instance:  
22...fxg3 (There is also 22...♞e5 23. ♖h6 ♖f5N  
24.gxf4 ♖g4† 25. ♖h1 ♞h5 26. ♙e2 ♖xe2  
27. ♖xg6† hxg6 28. ♖xe2 f5 with an equal  
endgame.) 23.hxg3 ♞e5 24. ♖h6 f5 25.a4!N White  
needs to initiate counterplay to keep the game  
balanced. (25. ♙g2 has been played, but then  
25...♖d7!N 26.c4 ♖g7 gives us some edge in the  
ensuing endgame.)

21... ♖c4

We reach another double-edged position. We  
should be mindful of the fact that the queen has  
gone to the queenside, which I generally prefer to  
avoid, but it works out okay.

22. ♖e2

22.gxf4! ♜xf4 23. ♖g4 ♜g6 gives us a slight  
edge.



22... ♖xe2N

I would instinctively favour this safe  
continuation.

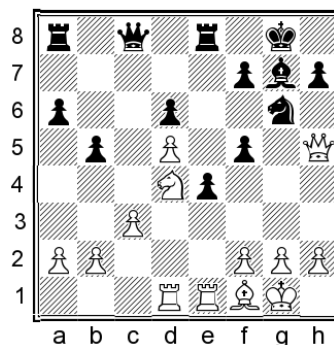
22... ♖xa2! feels a bit greedy but is playable. After  
23. ♞b4 it's necessary to play 23... ♖b3!N when  
White's compensation is in question, although the

position remains complicated. (The last move  
improves on 23... ♖a5?! after which 24. ♙d7 f3  
25. ♖c2 ♞ed8 26. ♙f5 clearly favoured White in  
Yagupov – Yangutov, Voronezh 2018.)

23. ♖xe2 ♞e5

We have a good position, and next we can  
consider ...♞h5 followed by ...f5.

## B21) 20. ♞d4



This has up to now been the most common  
continuation but it's fairly easy to meet.

20... ♙xd4!

By now this should come as no surprise.

21. ♖xd4

21.cxd4! weakens White's structure in order  
to open the c-file. However, after 21...f4 22. ♖c1  
♖d7 23. ♖c6 ♜g7 24.g3 ♖a7 25. ♖d1 ♖e7 26. ♖f5  
e3 Black was doing fine in Mertens – Rattinger,  
corr. 2006.

21... ♞e5! 22. ♖h6

22. ♖d1N 22... ♖d8 23.a4 bxa4 24. ♖xa4 a5 is  
pleasant enough for us.

22.g3 f4N 23. ♖h6 ♖f5 24. ♙h3 ♖h5 25. ♖xh5  
♖xh5 26. ♙f1 ♜e5 27. ♙e2 f3 28. ♙f1 f5 is another  
good example of how to handle the black position.

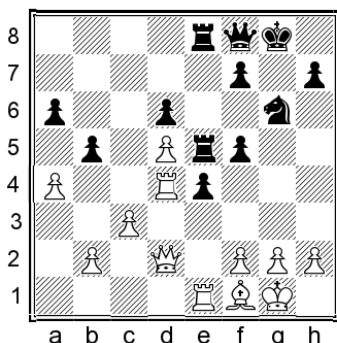
22... ♖f8

We are happy to play an endgame. If White  
refuses the exchange, our queen can be used  
actively on the kingside.

23. ♖xf8†

Let's see what happens if White keeps the queens on the board:

23. ♖d2 ♜ae8 24. a4



24...f4!

We can play aggressively, ignoring the queenside.

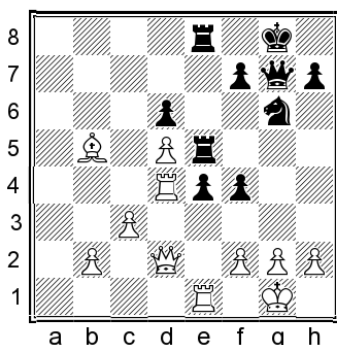
25. axb5 axb5 26. ♙xb5

Also after 26. ♖c2N 26... ♖e7 27. ♙xb5 ♖g5! 28. ♖h1 (28. ♙xe8? ♜h4 29. g3 ♜f3† 30. ♖f1 ♜xh2† 31. ♖g1 ♜f3† 32. ♖f1 ♖h5! is hopeless for White) 28... ♜h4 29. ♖g1 ♖8e7 30. ♖a4 ♜f5 we have a strong attack.

26... ♖g7!?N

An interesting intermediate move.

In the game I also didn't have any problems obtaining counterplay after 26... ♖8e7 27. ♙f1 ♖h6 28. ♖h1 ♜h4, with a strong attack in Vuckovic – Pavlovic, Kopaonik 2005.



27. ♖h1

27. ♙xe8? ♜h4 wins on the spot.

27... ♖h6

Having driven the king to the h-file, our queen follows.

28. ♙f1

28. ♙xe8? loses to 28... ♖h5; or if 28. ♙d7 ♖h8 29. ♖a4 ♖h5 30. ♙h3 e3 31. ♖d1 ♜e5 we have a strong attack.

28... ♜h4!

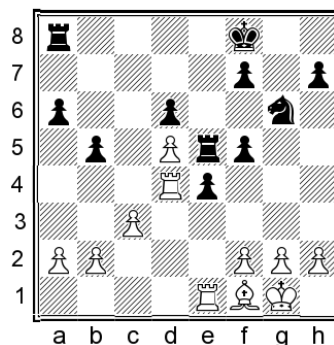
The knight is heading to the ideal f5-square, supporting ...e3 and eyeing a future check on g3.

29. ♖d1 ♖h8

We have a powerful attack.

23... ♖xf8

The endgame is good for us, as the strong knight and pressure against d5 are at least as important as our pawn weaknesses.

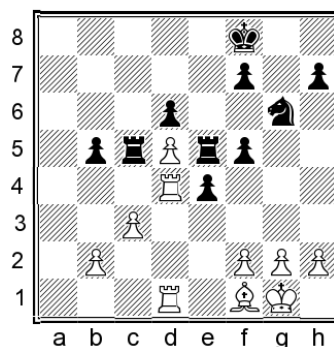


24. ♖ed1

Another game continued 24. g3 ♖c8 25. a3 ♖e7 26. ♖e3 ♜e5 27. ♙e2 ♖c5 28. ♖g2 ♖ec7 with better chances for Black, Balcerak – Gagunashvili, Germany 2004.

24. a4N is a natural move to consider, but 24... bxa4 25. ♖a1 ♖b8 26. ♖d2 f4 27. ♖xa4 f3!? puts White under pressure.

24... ♖c8 25. a4 ♖c5 26. axb5 axb5



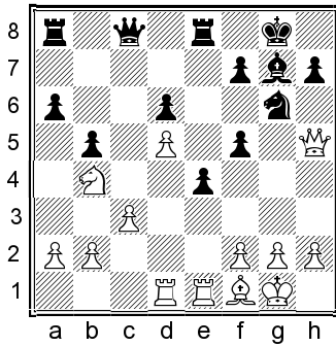
27. c4

27. g3 ♜e7 28. ♖b4 ♜xd5 gave Black a good position in Geenen – Balabaev, corr. 2004.

27... bxc4 28. ♙xc4 ♖e7 29. b4 ♖cc7 30. b5 ♜e5

Black had nothing to worry about in Groszpetar – Vukic, Bizovac 2005.

## B22) 20.♖b4



This is slightly less popular than the previous variation, but I believe it to be White's best.

### 20...♗e5

We centralize the knight and prevent g2-g3 for the time being. White would like to deploy the bishop on h3, but the question is how to go about it. Let us also note that our knight guards the c6-square, but White will often consider ♖c6 anyway, leading to some exchanges.

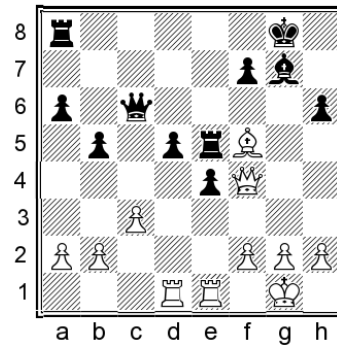
### 21.♖e2!?

White prepares g2-g3 by shifting the rook away from a ...♗f3 attack. Another possible idea is to double the rooks at some point.

The immediate 21.♗c6 is not dangerous in view of 21...♗xc6 22.dxc6 ♖xc6 23.♖xf5 ♖e5 24.♖f4 d5, when Black was doing fine in Kulaots – Van Wely, Liepaya 2004.

21.h3 was played in Bologan – Kramnik, Dortmund 2003. I think the most logical reply is 21...♗h8!?N to prepare ...♖g8. Then 22.♗c6! is a possible attempt to exploit the loose f7-pawn, but after 22...♗xc6 23.dxc6 ♖xc6 24.♖xf5 ♖e5 25.♖xf7 ♖f8 26.♖a7 d5 27.♖e3 ♖ef5 we are doing fine.

21.♗e2 was a playable though slightly odd choice in Gmuer – De Carlos Arregui, corr. 2006. I suggest 21...f4N with the possible continuation: 22.♗c6! ♗xc6 23.♗g4 ♖c7 24.dxc6 ♖xc6 25.♗f5 h6 26.♖g4 ♖e5 27.♖xf4 d5



28.f3 (28.g3 ♖f6 29.♗h3 ♖g6 is fine for us.) 28...♖b6† 29.♗h1 ♖f2 30.♖f1 ♖xb2 31.fxe4 dxe4 32.♗xe4 ♖f8 33.♗d5 ♖xc3 34.♗xf7† ♗h8 The brief tactical sequence results in an equal position.

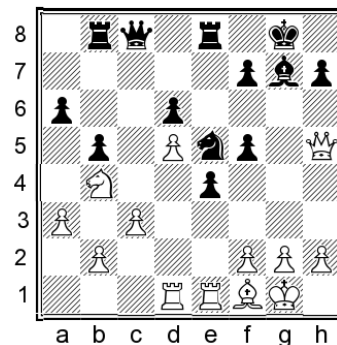
### 21.a3!?

White plays a subtle waiting move, safeguarding against future ...b4 ideas.

### 21...♖b8

Whenever we want to play ...a5, it's useful to put the rook on b8 first.

I also considered 21...♖a7N but found 22.♖e2 ♖ae7 23.g3 slightly annoying. For instance, 23...f4!? 24.♖xe4! ♗f3† 25.♖xf3 ♖xe4 26.♗d3 ♖e1† 27.♗g2 and White has nice compensation for the exchange, although Black should be able to hold.



### 22.a4!?

White loses a tempo in order to draw attention to the a6-pawn, which is no longer defended by the rook.

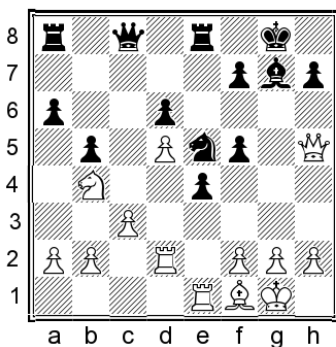
Another sample continuation is 22.♖e2N 22...a5 23.♗c6 ♗xc6 24.dxc6 ♖xc6 25.♖ed2 ♖e6 26.♖d5 b4 27.♖xf5 ♖f6 28.♖xf6 ♗xf6 29.♖g4† ♗g7 30.cxb4 axb4 31.a4 ♖xa4 32.♗c4 ♖e8 33.b3 e3 34.g3 exf2† 35.♗xf2 ♖c6 when the balance is maintained.

22...bxa4 23.♗xa6 ♖d7 24.♖a1 ♗h8 25.♗e2 ♖g8

Black had typical kingside counterplay in Taistra – Savchak, corr. 2004.

21.♖d2

This move is playable, but it gives us a bit more flexibility compared to the main line.



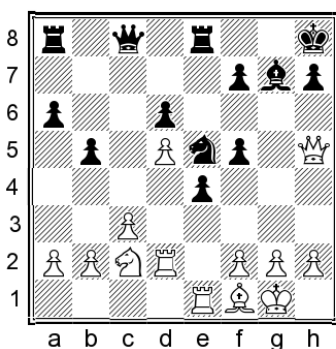
21...♔h8?!

It's tempting to place a rook on g8 in order to create counterplay – especially as White's last move made g2-g3 unlikely.

21...♖a7 is also possible, and 22.♗c2 ♗g6 23.♗d4 ♗xd4 24.♖xd4 ♖e5 25.a4 f4 26.♗d1 ♗f5 27.axb5 axb5 gave Black good prospects in Wernikiewicz – Engelhardt, corr. 2007.

22.♗c2

22.♗c6!? is also playable, and then 22...♗xc6 23.dxc6 ♗xc6 24.♖ed1 (24.♗xf5 ♖e5 looks fine for us) 24...♖ad8 25.♖d5 f4 26.♗g5 ♗d7! is an important defensive idea sending the queen towards the kingside. Following 27.♗xf4 ♗e5 the position remains balanced.



22...♗f6!? 23.♗d4

23.♖e3 ♖g8 24.♖g3 ♖g6 25.♗d4 f4 26.♖xg6 fxc6 27.♗e2 ♗c4 28.♖d1 e3 29.♗e6 ♗e5 is also complicated but equal.

23...♖g8 24.h4?!

Preventing ...♖g5.

24...♖g6 25.♔h1

25.g3?! is one pawn move too many, and 25...f4 26.♖xe4 fxc3 27.f4 g2! 28.♖xg2 ♗g4 gives White some problems.

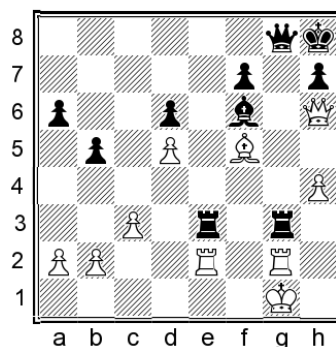
25...♗g8!

Preparing some tactical motifs. The computer's top line continues:

26.♔g1

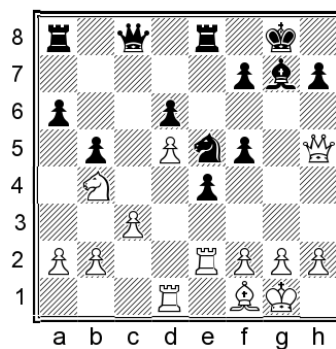
26.♗xf5 ♗f3 and 26.♗xf5 ♗xh4 are fine for us.

26...♗g4 27.♗xf5 ♖e8 28.g3 ♖e5 29.♗h3 e3 30.fxe3 ♗h6 31.♖g2 ♗xf5 32.♗xf5 ♖xg3 33.♖e2 ♖xe3 34.♗h6



34...♖xe2! 35.♗xf6† ♖g7 36.♖g5 ♗f8 37.h5 ♔g8 38.h6 ♖xg5† 39.♗xg5† ♔h8

White has a perpetual but nothing more.



21...♖a7!

21...♔h8?! is not so attractive here because 22.g3! is strong.

21...♖b8 is another idea, but after 22.g3 a5 23.♗c6 ♗xc6 24.dxc6 ♗xc6 25.♖ed2 ♖e6 26.♖d5 f4 27.♗xb5! ♗c7 28.gxf4 ♗e7 29.♔h1 ♔h8 30.a4 it seems to me that Black has not yet equalized.

22.g3

Having safeguarded the rook on the previous turn, White continues with the main plan to place the bishop on h3.

Another natural idea is to reroute the knight by means of:

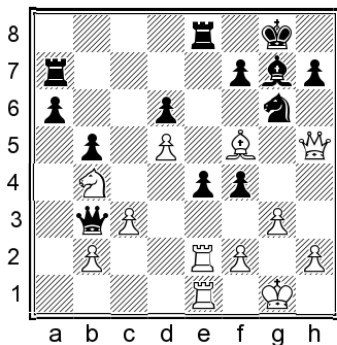
22.♞c2 ♞g6

Preparing to swap off the knight if it goes to d4.

23.g3 f4 24.♙h3 ♖c4 25.♙f5

I also considered 25.♞de1 ♞ae7 26.♙f5 f3 27.♞e3 ♜xa2 28.♞b4 ♜xb2 29.♞c6 ♙xc3 30.♞f1 b4 31.♞e7† ♞xe7 when the position remains messy, but our activity is enough for equality at least.

25...♜xa2 26.♞b4 ♜b3 27.♞de1



27...e3!

The position is extremely sharp, but should be equal.

28.fxe3

28.♞c6 is met by 28...♜xd5! and now:

i) 29.♙xg6 ♜xc6 is equal.

ii) On the other hand, 29.♞xa7?! would leave White worse after 29...♞e5, and if 30.g4? f3! White is suddenly lost. Chess is difficult!

28...♞xe3 29.♞xe3 fxe3 30.♞e2

30.♞xe3 ♙d4! is a simple but nice detail.

30...a5 31.♞c6 ♞a8 32.♙xg6 hxg6 33.♞e7† ♙f8 34.♜xe3 ♜xb2 35.♞xg6† fxg6 36.♞e6 ♙d4†! 37.cxd4 ♜xd4† 38.♙g2 ♙g7

Again it turns out equal and a draw is likely.

22...♞ae7 23.♙h3 ♖c4!

This resource is the reason why we can allow the bishop to go to h3.

24.♞e3

24.♙f5 ♞f3† 25.♙f1 ♞e5! gives us plenty of counterplay.

24.♙f1 ♞f3 25.♞c6 faces a stunning idea: 25...♞e5! 26.♞xe5 ♞xe5 27.♙f5 ♙f8 Our

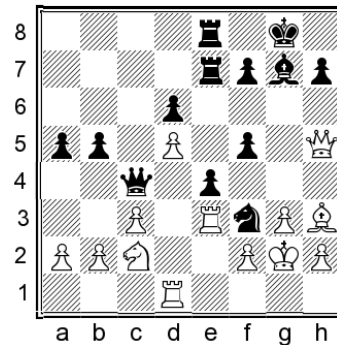
initiative fully compensates for the sacrificed material.

24...a5

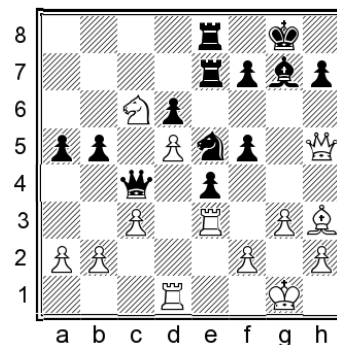
It's hard to suggest another improving move, so we'll drive the knight away.

25.♞c6

After 25.♞c2 ♞f3† 26.♙g2 our most accurate move is:



26...♞a4! Provoking an additional weakening before taking on a2. 27.b3 ♜xa2 28.♞d4 f4 29.gxf4 ♙xd4 30.cxd4 ♙h8 31.♙f5 ♞g8† 32.♙h1 f6 Again we are fine, and White needs to give up the queen in order to force a draw.



25...♞xc6 26.dxc6 ♜xc6 27.♞xf5

27.♙xf5 h6 is fine for us.

27...b4 28.♜xa5 bxc3 29.bxc3 ♞e5 30.♜b4

30.♜a7 ♞e5e7 also leaves us with fully adequate compensation.

30...♙f8

Black had sufficient counterplay for the sacrificed pawn in Tuyl – Cijs, corr. 2015. The plan for the next few moves is ...d5 followed by ...♙c5.

## Conclusion

This chapter completed our coverage of the important variations arising after the opening moves 1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♞c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♞xd4 ♟f6 5.♞c3 e5 6.♞db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6 8.♞a3 b5 9.♙xf6 gxf6 10.♞d5 f5 11.♙d3 ♙e6 12.0-0 ♙xd5 13.exd5 ♞e7 14.c3 ♙g7.

We started by analysing 15.♞h5 e4, when the bishop has a choice of retreat squares. 16.♙e2 0-0 17.♞c2 is the first option, when 17...♞e8!? is our choice. We have nice counterplay in all lines, with 18.g3 f4! being an important part of the repertoire. We then turned our attention to 16.♙c2 0-0, when 17.♞ad1 is possible but 17.♞ae1 ♞c8 is the main continuation. The position is rich in possibilities for both sides, and we have enough resources in all variations.

We then moved on to 15.♞e1 0-0 16.♞h5 e4 17.♙f1. I regard this as White's most challenging way of meeting our system. My aim in this section was to offer robust recommendations which have

proven their worth at the highest levels of correspondence chess, while also offering novelties and slightly unusual continuations when appropriate.

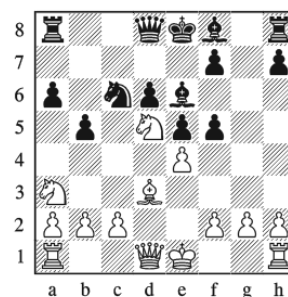
First we looked at 17...♞e8, when 18.♞ad1 ♞c8 is complicated but perfectly fine for us, while 18.♞c2 ♞xd5 19.♞xf5 ♞e5 is more critical. Obviously the variations need to be studied, but I would like to re-emphasize an important point that in my opinion the black queen should generally be deployed on the kingside, rather than on b6 as has occurred in many games.

Finally, I presented 17...♞c8 as a reliable secondary option, when 18.♞ad1 ♞e8 19.♞c2 ♞g6 is normal. Then if White places the knight on d4 we will happily exchange it, when I rate our knight as stronger than the enemy bishop. 20.♞b4 is better, when 20...♞e5 reaches a complicated middlegame where theoretical knowledge, tactical sharpness and positional understanding all come into play, and the analysis shows that our resources are fully adequate here too.

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# Chapter 3

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## 11.♖d3 ♗e6 – Other Lines

### Variation Index

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1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 e5 6.♗db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6  
8.♗a3 b5 9.♙xf6 gxf6 10.♗d5 f5 11.♙d3 ♙e6

A) 12.♙h5

B) 12.c3 ♙g7

B1) 13.♙h5 0-0

B11) 14.0-0

B12) 14.exf5

B2) 13.♗xb5 axb5 14.♙xb5

B21) 14...♙d7 15.exf5 ♗b8!?! 16.a4 0-0

B211) 17.f6

B212) 17.0-0

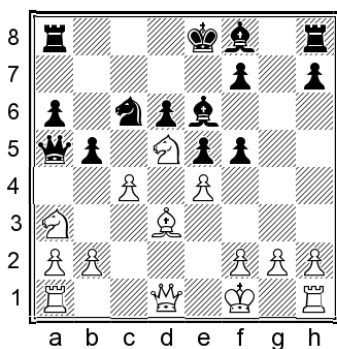
B22) 14...♙c8!?!

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6 8.♘a3 b5 9.♙xf6 gxf6 10.♘d5 f5 11.♙d3 ♙e6

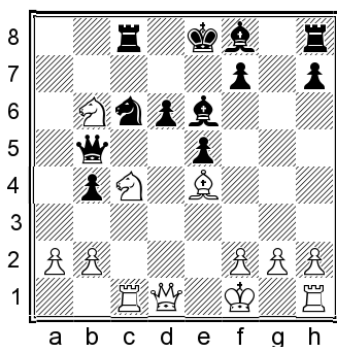
Having examined the consequences of 12.0-0 in the first two chapters, it's time for us to look at White's alternatives.

We will analyse **A) 12.♙h5** and **B) 12.c3**.

12.c4?! has been tried by a few strong players but is premature. 12...♙a5† 13.♙f1 (13.♙d2?! ♙xd2† 14.♙xd2 ♙h6† gives us an easy initiative.)

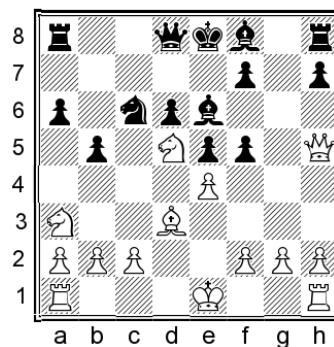


13...fxe4 14.♙xe4 ♖c8 15.cxb5 axb5! (15...♘d4 16.♖c1 ♖xc1 17.♙xc1 axb5 18.♘c7† ♙d7 19.♘e6 fxe6 is slightly better for us, but we can play for more.) 16.♖c1 b4 17.♘c4 ♙b5 18.♘db6 In Binas – Portych, corr. 2016, Black missed the most precise continuation:



18...♖b8!N 19.♘d5 ♙d8! With a decisive advantage.

**A) 12.♙h5**



This old line used to be considered the most challenging continuation; but resources were found for Black, and nowadays it is rarely used by strong players.

**12...♙g8**

This is the main line, which offers various plans for counterplay.

12...♙g7 13.0-0 f4 used to be a popular continuation, but later it became clear that 14.c4! is promising for White.

**13.g3**

White usually blunts the g-file pressure in this way. Alternatives are possible but they are not critical:

Too optimistic is:

13.f4?! ♖xg2

There are other decent options, but it's best to capture the pawn while further activating the rook. 14.0-0-0 ♘d4 15.♘e3

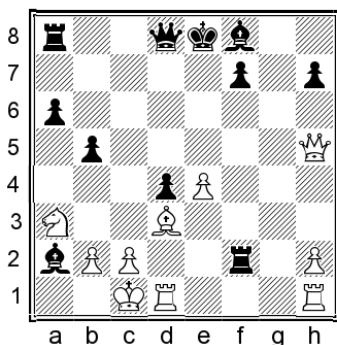
After 15.c3 White went on to escape with a draw in Kindermann – Skrobek, Warsaw 1983, but here 15...♖c8N 16.♙b1 ♙xd5 17.exd5 b4! 18.cxb4 ♙b6 would have given Black a deadly initiative, with ...♖xb2† the primary threat.

15.♙b1N looks to be White's best, although we remain clearly better after 15...♙xd5 16.exd5 ♖g4!, with the dual threats of ...♖h4 and ...♖xf4.

15...♖f2 16.fxe5N

16.exf5? ♙xa2 gave Black an overwhelming advantage in Brodsky – Kramnik, Kherson 1991. The text move is a slight improvement, but White is still in deep trouble after:

16...♙xa2 17.♘xf5 dxe5 18.♘xd4 exd4



19. Bxf1 Bxf1 20. Bxf1 Re6

Our advantage should prove decisive with accurate play.

13.0-0-0?!

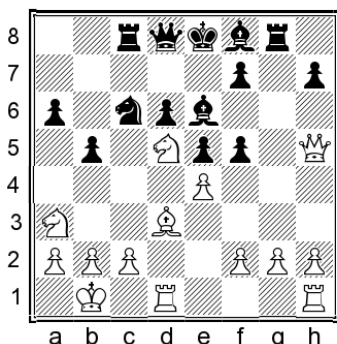
This also asks too much of the white position.

13... Bc8

13... Bxg2 is also good, and if White continues with 14.f4 we transpose to the line above; this is how the Brodsky – Kramnik game proceeded. White has some other options, but none of them look good at all.

14. Bb1

My improvement is:



14... Bb1?N 15.c3 fxe4 16. Bxe4 Bg4!

The key idea, threatening both ... Bb4 and ... Bxe4. White doesn't really have a good response.

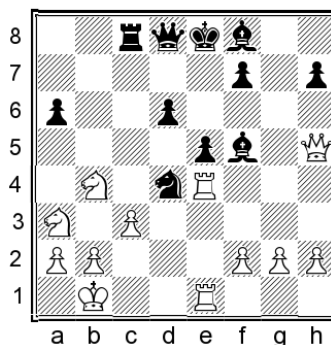
17. Bde1

17.cxd4 Bxe4 18.dxe5 Bxe5 19. Bf3 Bg7 gives us tremendous play.

17... b4! 18. Bxb4

18.cxd4 Bxe4! 19. Bxe4 Bxd5 wins.

18... Bxe4 19. Bxe4 Bf5 20. Bhe1

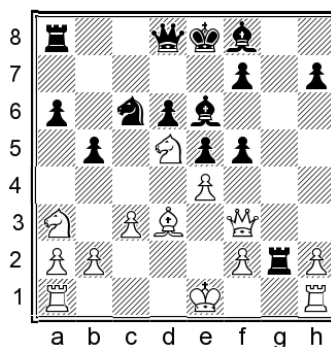


20... d5 21. Bxd5 Bxd5 22. Bxf5 Bxf5 23. Bxe5+ Bxe5 24. Bxe5+ Bxe7

The endgame with a bishop versus three pawns is slightly better for us.

Another way for White to give up the g2-pawn is:

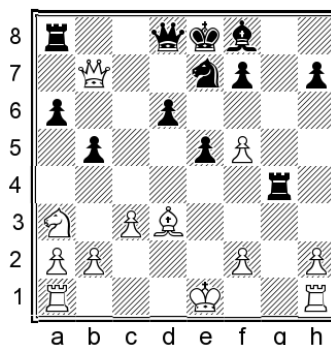
13.c3 Bxg2 14. Bf3



The point is to take on f5 next, but the trade works fine for us.

14... Bg4 15. exf5 Bxd5 16. Bxd5 Bxe7 17. Bb7

17. Bf3?! Bf4 18. Bh5?! Bb6 was excellent for Black in Salas Albahaca – Aquino, Medellin 2007.



17... Bg7?!

Preventing f5-f6 ideas, while developing the bishop and vacating f8 for the king.

17... Bh6?! allows 18.f6 when things get messy' However, 17... Bc8 18. Bxc8+ Bxc8 is a good option, when the arising endgame is at least equal for us.

18.0-0-0!?!N

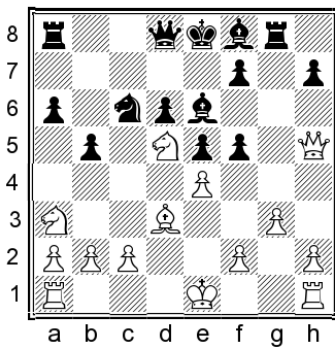
18. ♖c2 ♜c8 19. ♞xc8† ♞xc8 20. ♜b4 a5 21. ♙xb5† ♜f8 22. ♖c2 ♞f4 23. ♞d1 d5 led to a complex endgame with at least equal play for Black in Alagna – Oortwijn, corr. 2003.

18...d5

Also interesting is 18...♜f8!? when my sample line continues 19. ♖c2 ♞b8 20. ♞f3 ♞f4 21. ♞g3 b4! 22. cxb4 ♞b6 23. ♞hg1 ♙f6 with some initiative for Black.

19. f3 ♞h4 20. ♙e4 ♞b8 21. ♞a7 ♙h6† 22. ♜b1 ♞b6 23. ♞xb6 ♞xb6 24. ♙xd5 ♜xf5 25. ♖c2 ♙f4

The arising endgame is fine for us.



### 13...♞g6!?

I found this idea and analysed it in the early eighties, but never had a chance to play it. Having re-analysed it for this book, I still like it.

The more popular 13...♞g5 and 13...♞g4 are also perfectly fine. In general, it is also important to notice that White has a problem with king safety on either side of the board.

### 14.c3

This logical move has been White's usual choice.

14. ♞xh7?? proves disastrous after 14...♞h6 15. ♞g8 ♜d4 16. c3 fxe4 17. ♙xe4 f5 when White can resign.

14.0-0 has never been tried, and indeed after 14...♞h6 15. ♞d1 f4 White may regret committing the king to the kingside. For instance, 16. c3 ♜e7 17. ♖c2 ♜xd5 18. exd5 ♙h3 19. ♞e1 ♞g5 20. a4 ♙e7 21. axb5 ♙g4 with a strong attack.

White has occasionally tried:

14. f4 ♞c8

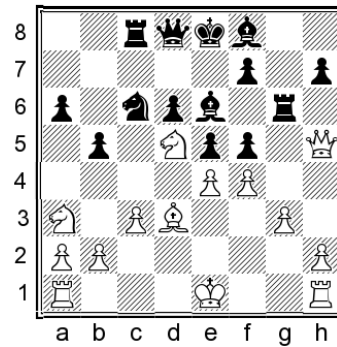
We maintain the central tension and discourage queenside castling.

15. c3N

15.0-0-0? runs into 15...♜d4, and if 16. c3 fxe4 17. ♙xe4 ♞h6! 18. ♞g5 f6 the queen has run out of squares, so White must lose a piece.

15.0-0 ♞h6 16. ♞d1 fxe4 17. ♙xe4 f5 18. ♙xf5? (18. ♙g2N is better, although 18...e4 is still fine for us.) 18...♙xf5 19. fxe5 ♞g5 Black was winning in Van Theemsche – Fontaine, Antwerp 1997.

The text move looks natural but is strongly met by:



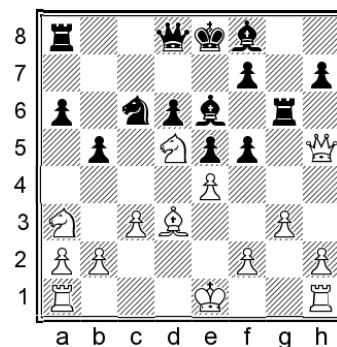
15...b4! 16. ♖c2

16. ♜xb4? ♜xb4 17. cxb4 fxe4 18. ♙xe4 ♙g4 19. ♞xh7 ♞g7 20. ♞h8 ♞b6 is winning.

16. cxb4 fxe4 17. ♙xe4 f5 18. ♙g2 ♜xb4 19. ♜xb4 ♞a5 regains the material with a clear advantage.

16...fxe4 17. ♙xe4 ♞h6 18. ♞e2 f5 19. ♙g2 bxc3 20. bxc3 ♞a5 21. ♜ce3 ♙xd5 22. ♜xd5 e4 23. ♞d1 ♜e7 24. ♜xe7 ♙xe7 25.0-0 ♞xc3

We have an extra pawn and a powerful centre.



### 14...f4!

Gaining space and introducing the possibility of ...♙g4.

### 15. ♞e2

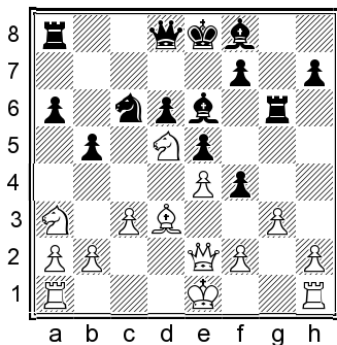
This has almost always been played, although there are choices again:

15.♖c2 gives us the option of forcing a draw with 15...♙g4 (15...♙h6!? is the move if you want to play on, when 16.♗e2 transposes to the main line below.) 16.♗xh7 ♖h6 17.♗g8 ♜g6, with a perpetual attack on the queen.

15.gxf4N allows us to force a draw as above, but there is also a combative option of 15...exf4!? 16.♖xf4 ♖e5 with good compensation.

15.♙e2!N Defending the g4-square and insisting on leaving the queen on h5. 15...♖e7 16.0-0-0 ♖xd5 17.exd5 ♙d7 18.♖c2 ♙h6 19.♖b1 ♗f6 20.♖b4 ♖f8 We have good prospects in this complicated position.

15.♗d1!N can be met by 15...♙h6 16.♖c2 ♖f8, just like the main line below. My illustrative line continues 17.a4 bxa4 18.♖xa4 a5 19.♙c4 ♖g7 20.♗d3 ♖b8 21.b4 axb4 22.cxb4 ♖e7 with a fine position for us.



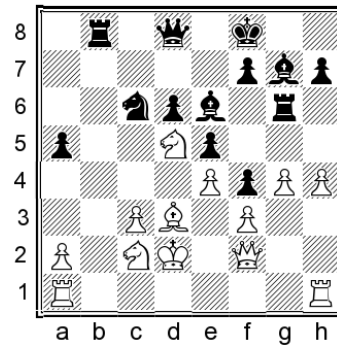
15...♙h6 16.♖c2 ♖f8

The king steps away from checks of any kind. It is still not clear where the white king is going.

17.a4

Striking at the queenside is logical.

Another possible continuation is: 17.f3N 17...♖b8 Anticipating the a2-a4 plan. 18.♗f2 (18.a3 can be met by 18...a5! 19.♙xb5 ♖e7 20.♖xe7 ♗xe7 21.c4 f5 22.b4 fxe4 23.fxe4 ♖g7 with a strong attack.) 18...a5 19.g4 b4 20.h4 bxc3 21.bxc3 ♙g7 22.♖d2

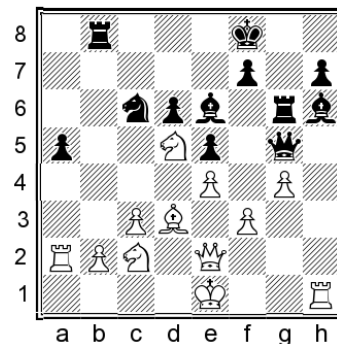


22...♙xd5 23.exd5 e4! 24.♙xe4 ♖e5 We have good compensation.

17...bxa4 18.♖xa4 a5

Both sides have reached their desired positions and I don't see why we should be in any danger. A good example continued:

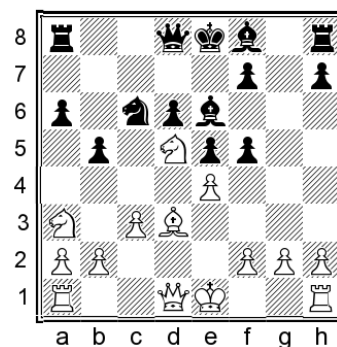
19.f3 ♖b8 20.♖a2 ffg3 21.hxg3 ♗g5 22.g4



22...♖xb2! 23.♖xb2 ♗c1† 24.♗d1 ♖xb2

Black picked up an extra pawn in Hernandez Funes – Munoz Pantoja, Barcelona 2009.

B) 12.c3



Among the options covered in this chapter, this is the clear main line these days.

12...♙g7

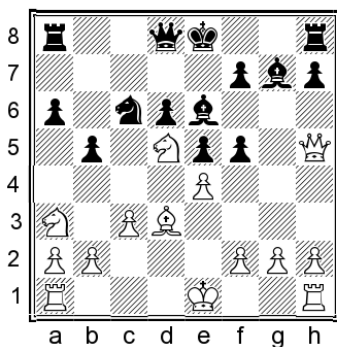
This position can also arise via 11.c3 ♖g7 12.♗d3 ♗e6.

It is worth mentioning in passing that 12...♗xd5 13.exd5 ♖e7 14.♗xb5 ♗g7 15.♗a3 offers Black a degree of compensation, but it's not quite to my taste. It is worth comparing this to variation A of Chapter 1, where the knight grabbed the b5-pawn but then had to retreat to the passive c3-square, whereas here it can go to c4.

White has two main options: **B1)** 13.♗h5 and **B2)** 13.♗xb5.

13.0-0 ♗xd5 14.exd5 ♖e7 takes us back to variation D of Chapter 1.

### B1) 13.♗h5



This is an older line, but it's still important to know how to find counterplay against it.

### 13...0-0

This position used to be topical in the eighties. White has two major options: **B11)** 14.0-0 and **B12)** 14.exf5.

14.♗c2? is inadvisable due to 14...fxe4 15.♗xe4 f5 16.♗f4 exf4 17.♗xc6 ♖c8 18.♗f3 ♗c4 19.0-0-0 This occurred in Bokros – Schlusnik, Budapest 1994, and now Black could have caused serious problems with 19...♖c5!N followed by ...a5 and ...b4.

### B11) 14.0-0 f4

We will go for the typical plan of ...♗h8 followed by attacking along the g-file.

14...fxe4 15.♗xe4 f5 is playable; but unlike in the 14.♗c2? line noted above, White is doing fine after 16.♗f4 exf4 17.♗xc6 because the white king has already found safety on the kingside.

### 15.♖ad1

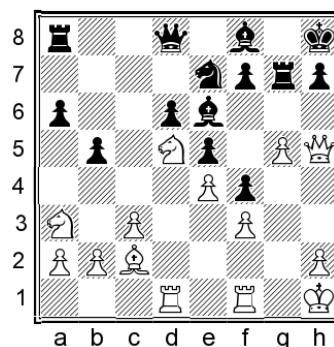
This move indicates that White is no longer aiming for a2-a4, but rather is looking towards the centre and the kingside, with g2-g3 a key idea.

### 15.g4

The idea of this move is to prevent ...f5 entirely. However, it weakens the dark squares and the white king, while also leaving the queen out of play on h5. These factors enable us to obtain counterplay.

15...♗h8! 16.♗h1 ♖g8 17.g5 ♖e7 18.f3 18.c4N 18...bxc4 19.♗xc4 ♗f8 20.♗f6 ♖g7 also favours Black.

18...♗f8 19.♖ad1 ♖g7 20.♗c2



### 20...♖b8!

Preparing to improve the queen before eliminating the d5-knight.

20...♗g8!? 21.♖g1 ♗e7 is a reasonable alternative but the text move is more convincing.

### 21.♖g1 ♗c8

Thanks to our previous move, there is no ♗b6 fork. 22.♖d2

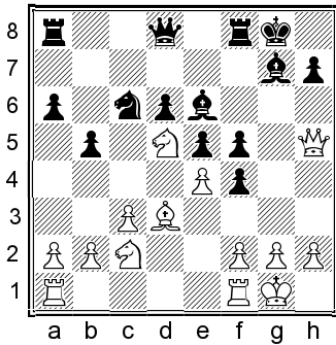
22.♗f6 can simply be met by 22...♗xa2. White can try 23.♖g4, threatening ♖h4 followed by mate on h7, but 23...♗g6 followed by ...♗e6 repels the attack while keeping an extra pawn.

### 22...♗xd5 23.exd5 ♗f5 24.♗xf5 ♗xf5

Black had the advantage in Piccoli – Mende, corr. 2015.

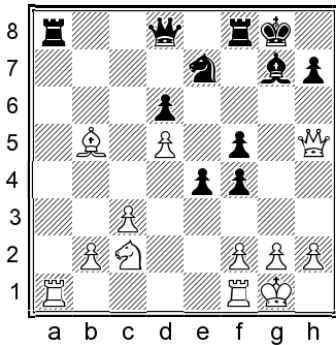
A natural continuation is:

15. ♖c2 f5!



16. ♖cb4

16.a4 is an obvious alternative, when 16... ♙xd5 17.exd5 ♜e7 reaches a position resembling the 12.0-0 ♙xd5 lines from the first two chapters. 18.axb5 (18. ♖fd1?! bxa4 19. ♖xa4 a5 gives us good attacking chances at no material cost.) 18...e4 19. ♙c4 axb5 20. ♙xb5



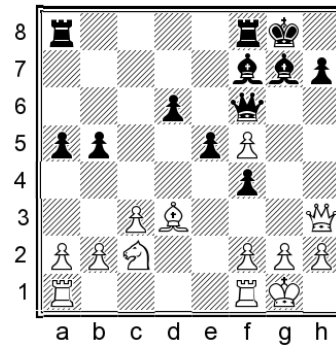
20... ♖xa1!N (20... ♖b8 was played in Lukin – Timoschenko, Moscow 1973, and a couple of other games, but I'd prefer to lure a defensive piece away from White's kingside.) 21. ♖xa1 ♜b6 22. ♜e2 White tries to activate the queen on the queenside. (22.c4 ♜g6 gives us good prospects on the kingside.) 22... ♙e5 23. ♖a6 ♜b7 24. ♜c4 f3 25.g3 f4 26. ♜a4 ♜f5 27. ♖a7 ♜b8 We have strong counterplay.

16... ♖xb4 17. ♖xb4 a5 18.exf5

18. ♖c2 is well met by 18... ♖f6!N 19.exf5 ♖h6 20. ♜f3 ♙f7 21.g4 d5 22. ♙xb5 ♜g5 with excellent chances on the kingside.

18... ♙f7 19. ♜h3 ♜f6 20. ♖c2

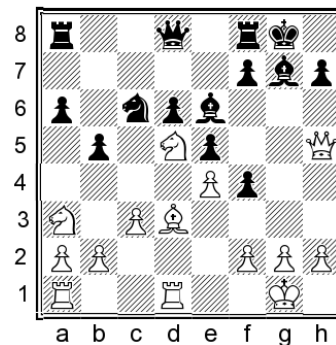
We have been following Anand – McShane, Germany 2003. The best continuation is:



20... ♖b4!N 21. cxb4 d5 22. f3 ♖fe8

Intending ...e4, with powerful counterplay.

15. ♖fd1



Choosing this rook indicates that White still intends a2-a4 at some point, after first supporting the knight on d5.

15... ♖h8

15...f5?! 16. ♙c2! is good for White.

16. ♖c2

16.g3? combines badly with moving the rook away from the kingside. 16...f5!N (16... ♖g8 was decent for Black in P. Smirnov – Grischuk, Sochi 2004, but the text move is stronger.) 17. ♙c2 ♙f7 18. ♜h4 Other queen retreats are met by ...fxg3 followed by ...f4, with excellent attacking chances. 18... ♜xh4 19.gxh4 ♙h5 With an obvious advantage for Black.)

16...f5

We undermine the knight on d5, while preparing a possible ... ♙xd5 followed by ... ♖e7, ... ♖f6 and so on. White has a choice again, but we have good play in all lines.

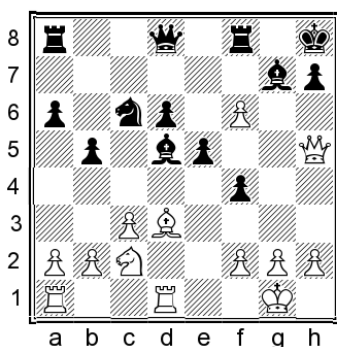
17.exf5

17.a4 ♙f7 is a typical motif, driving the queen to a worse square before exchanging on d5. 18. ♜h3 ♙xd5 19.exd5 ♖e7 20.axb5 e4 21. ♖xa6!? White gives up a piece for some pawns to dampen our

kingside initiative. 21...exd3 22.♖xd3 ♘g6 Black was not worse at all in Dzwikowski – Slawinski, corr. 2016.

17.♘cb4!N is possible, but we can obtain a promising initiative with 17...♗xb4 18.♘xb4 a5 19.exf5 ♙f7 20.♖h3 ♗f6! 21.♘c2 d5 22.♙xb5 ♖ab8 23.a4 ♗g5, with the powerful attacking plan of ...♖b6-h6.

17...♙xd5 18.f6



18...♙h6! 19.♖xh6 ♖a7

White's extra pawn will drop, and our strong centre and open g-file will become the dominant features of the position.

20.f7 ♖xf7

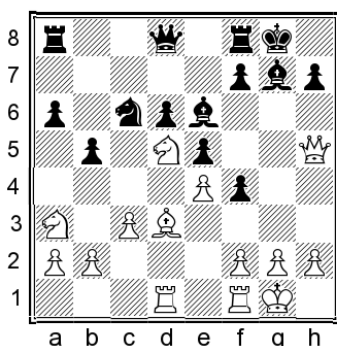
20...♖axf7N 21.♘e1 ♘e7 also gives us clearly better chances.

21.♘e1

21.♙f1 ♖f6 22.♖h5 ♗g8 23.♘e1 ♖g7 was unpleasant for White in Roganovic – Lintchevski, Vojvodina 2005.

21...♖f6 22.♖h5 ♖g7

Black was clearly better in Dimov – Spasov, Albena 2016.



15...♗h8 16.g3

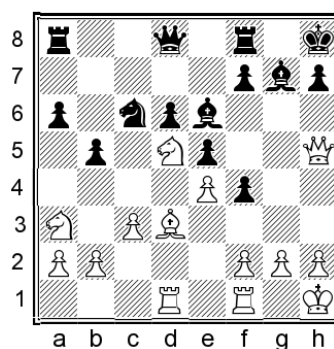
This is the critical continuation, and the most logical sequel to White's previous move. Other options are not dangerous at all:

16.g4? runs into 16...♖g8 17.f3 ♙f8 18.♗h1 ♖g6 19.♖h3 h5!. This shows that the white queen was badly placed for the g2-g4 plan.

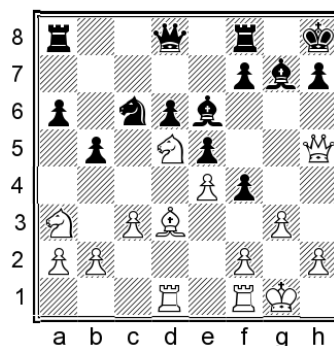
16.♙c2 ♖g8 17.♖d3 ♙f8 18.♗h1 ♖g6 19.h3 ♖a7!? prepares to swing the second rook to the kingside, and 20.♙b3 ♖h6 21.♖e2 ♗g5 was already unpleasant for White in Prudlo – Dubiel, Frankfurt 2009.

16.♘c2 ♖g8 Again we see this standard plan. 17.♘e1 (17.♙e2 ♙f8 18.♘cb4 ♘xb4 19.♘xb4 ♖g6 20.♘d5 ♖h6 21.♖f3 ♗h4 led to typical counterplay in Cijs – Boschma, corr. 1999.) 17...♙f8 18.♖e2 ♖g6 Again Black was slowly but surely building up kingside pressure in Heino – Narhi, corr. 1994.

16.♗h1!? Here I found a logical improvement:



16...♗e7!N (16...h6?! 17.♘c2 favoured White in Sanchez – Da Silva Filho, corr. 2006.) 17.c4 ♖b8 18.cxb5 axb5 19.♘xb5 (19.♘xe7 ♗xe7 20.♘xb5 ♙xa2 retains material equality with good prospects for Black.) 19...♙xd5 20.exd5 f5 21.♙c4 ♖f6 22.♖e2 ♖h6 Our initiative is worth at least as much as White's extra pawn.



16...f5!?

The most active choice, preparing either ...♙xd5 or ...♙f7.

16...♖g8 has been the usual choice, and is certainly playable.

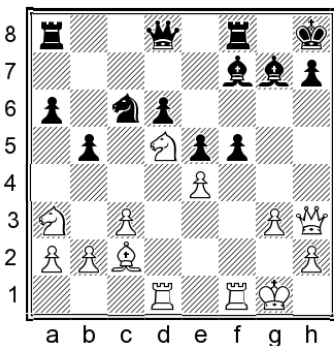
16...♜b8!? is a slower idea, preparing ...♞d7 and planning 17.gxf4 f5 with reasonable compensation. The text move is more forceful though.

**17.♙c2**

17.gxf4 is well met by 17...exf4 (17...♙f7 18.♞h3 ♙xd5 19.exd5 ♘e7 offers compensation but the text move is more convincing) 18.♘xf4 (18.♙h1 ♘e5 is also great for us) 18...♙f7 19.♞h3 ♞g5† 20.♘g2 ♞h5 (or 20...f4) when our initiative is worth significantly more than White's extra pawn.

White's last move prepares to recapture with the rook on d5, but we have another effective idea.

**17...fxg3 18.fxg3 ♙f7 19.♞h3**



**19...f4! 20.gxf4**

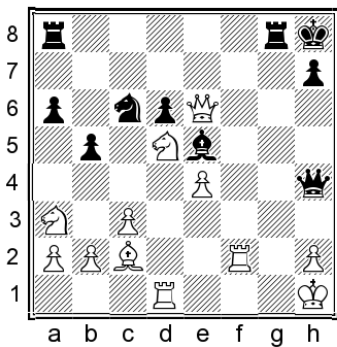
After 20.♙h1 ♞g5 21.gxf4 exf4 the dynamics work well for Black.

**20...exf4 21.♖xf4 ♙e5 22.♖f2 ♖g8†**

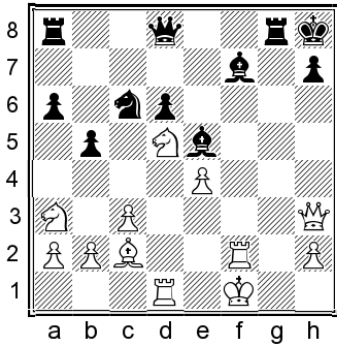
We have sacrificed a pawn in order to generate kingside counterplay, and White needs to be extremely careful.

**23.♙f1**

23.♙h1 is spectacularly refuted by 23...♙e6!! 24.♞xe6 ♞h4 when White has no defence, for instance:



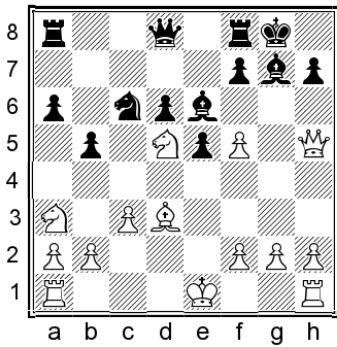
25.♖df1 (25.♖e2 ♖af8 26.♘e3 ♞h5 is crushing.) 25...♖af8! White will have to give up the queen to avoid being mated.



**23...♙e8 24.♘e3 ♙d7 25.♘f5 ♘e7**

Black had at least enough compensation for the pawn in Wilhelmi – Jemec, corr. 2016, thanks to his safer king and powerful dark-squared bishop, as well as the offside knight on a3.

**B12) 14.exf5**



This is another critical line which has been analysed since the seventies. It's not so fashionable these days, but we should still know how to deal with it. The next few moves are forced.

**14...♙xd5 15.f6 e4 16.fxg7 ♖e8 17.♙e2**

Alternatives are inferior, for instance:

17.♙xb5?? ♖e5 is game over.

17.♔c2?! is a worse version of the main line, and 17...♖e5 18.♗h6 b4! gives us an easy initiative.

17.♗xd5?! exd3† 18.♕f1 ♖e5 Our initiative and safer king are far more important than the theoretically weak pawn structure.

### 17...♖e5!

17...♖e5 has been much more common, but after 18.♗h6 the path to equality is less certain.

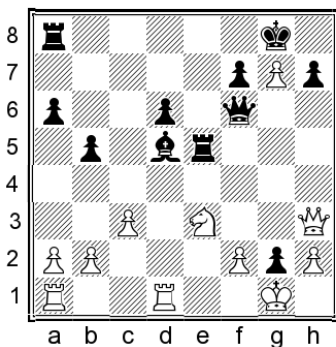
### 18.0-0 ♗f6

The main point of White's strategy is that our dark-squared bishop is gone. On the other hand, we have a lot of active counterplay at an earlier stage than in other lines.

### 19.♗h3!?

White tries to keep our counterplay under control. Let's see some other possibilities:

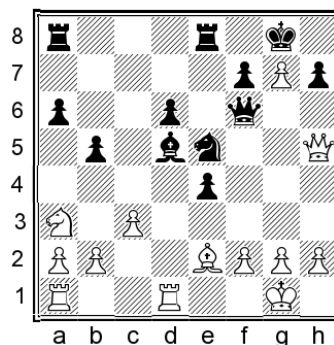
19.♖c2 ♖f3†! 20.♔xf3 ♖e5! shows the kind of resource that can arise from putting the knight on e5 before the rook. Play continues 21.♗h3 exf3 22.♖e3 fxg2 23.♖fd1 and here my improvement is:



23...♔f3!N (23...♔e6 was played in Xiong – Swiercz, Internet [rapid] 2020, and a few other games, but Black's results have not been encouraging.) 24.♖d4 ♖ae8 25.♖h4 Other moves are possible, but in general we always have enough counterplay due to the weakness of White's back rank. 25...h5 26.♗g3 ♖e4 27.♖xe4 ♖xe4 We have no problems.

### 19.♖fd1

This is another logical possibility. I suggest:



### 19...♖d3!?

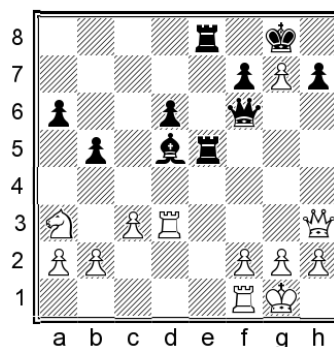
Seeking to activate our pieces at the cost of a pawn.

20.♔xd3 ♖e5 21.♗h3 exd3 22.♖xd3 ♖ae8

Bringing the last piece into play while threatening mate.

23.♖f1

23.♖c2? loses material to 23...♖e2 24.♗g3 ♔e4 25.♖e1 (or 25.♖xd6 ♔xc2) 25...♔xd3 26.♖xd3 ♗g6, when Black's extra exchange was the deciding factor in Volokitin – Oleksienko, Rivne 2016.



### 23...♔e4!

There are other playable moves, but I like the concept of keeping the a3-knight out of play.

24.♖e3!N

This looks like the most natural human choice, so I'll take it as the main line.

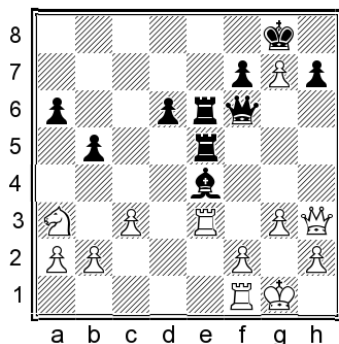
24.♖d4 ♔g6 25.♗g3 ♖8e6 26.h4 ♖e2 left White under some pressure in "Savr53" – "gifted", email 2016.

24...♖8e6 25.g3

White has various options but none can change the overall evaluation: our compensation is undisputed. 25.b4 ♖g5! provokes a weakening, and after 26.g3 ♖d5 27.♖b1 ♖d3 White is under considerable pressure.

25.♖b1 runs into a similar problem: 25...♖g5! 26.g3 (26.♖g3 ♗f4! threatens ...♔f5, and after

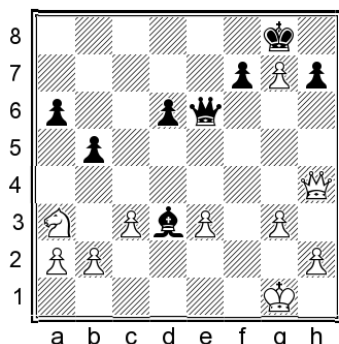
27.♞xg5 ♜xg5 28.♞g3 ♜f5 29.♘d2 ♙xg2 White is busted.) 26...♞g6 27.♞fe1 (27.♘d2 ♞h5 catches the queen.) 27...♙xb1 28.♞xe6 fxe6 29.♞xe6 ♜f7 30.♞xd6 ♞d5! Our extra bishop is clearly stronger than the enemy pawns.



25...♞g6 26.♞h4

26.♞fe1 ♙f5 27.♞h4 ♞xe3 28.♞xe3 ♞xe3 29.fxe3 ♜e6 gives us some advantage in the endgame.

26...♙d3 27.♞fe1 ♞xe3 28.♞xe3 ♞xe3 29.fxe3 ♜e6 White is temporarily two pawns up, but our queen and bishop dominate the board. The knight remains chronically misplaced on a3. Play could continue:

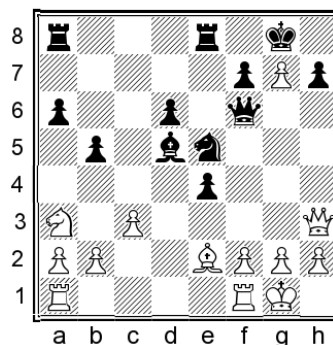


30.♞d4 ♙g6 31.♙f1

31.b3 d5 32.♙f2 ♙e4 is also deeply unpleasant for White.

31...h5 32.b3 ♜f5† 33.♙g2 d5

Our domination of the knight remains clear, and we stand much better.



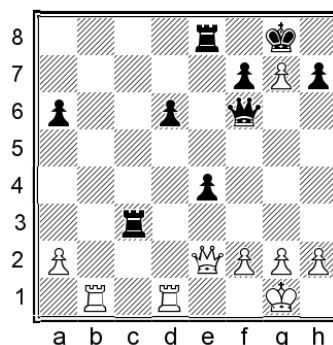
19...♘g6!?

Instead, 19...♞ac8 20.♘c2 ♙c4 is a solid continuation, but I was attracted to the knight manoeuvre which also crops up in some other lines presented in this book.

20.♞e3N

This is the most accurate way for White to reduce our options.

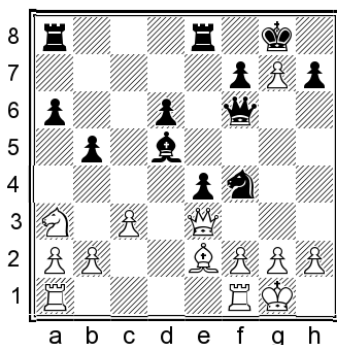
20.♞fd1 allows us an additional tactical possibility: 20...b4!? (20...♘f4N is also fine, when 21.♞e3 transposes to our main line below.) 21.♘c2 (21.cxb4? e3! leaves White in a mess.) 21...♘f4 22.♞e3 bxc3 23.bxc3 ♞ac8 24.♘d4 ♙c4 25.♙xc4 ♞xc4 26.♘e2 ♘xe2† 27.♞xe2 ♞xc3 28.♞ab1



The evaluation is close to equality, but 28...a5!N would have put White under a bit of pressure to prove it. (Instead, 28...e3 29.fxe3 ♞cxe3 30.♞xa6 ♞e2 was just equal in Arjun – Pragganandhaa, Biel 2021.)

20...♘f4

20...♘h4!? 21.♙h1 ♞g6 22.♞g3 e3 23.♞xg6 hxg6 24.f3 ♞ab8 is an alternative leading to equal play.



**21. ♖fd1 ♜e5**

Going for centralization and a possible attack.

**22. ♕f1**

22. ♖d2 ♜ae8 23. ♖ad1 ♜g5 24. g3 ♕xa2 25. ♖xd6 ♜e6 maintains the balance, and the game might well end with perpetual knight checks on h3 and f4.

**22... ♜ae8 23. ♖c2 h5!?**

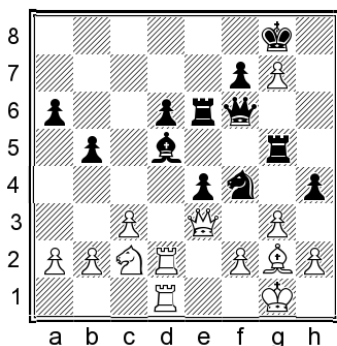
It makes sense to include the h-pawn in our kingside build-up.

**24. ♖d2 h4 25. ♖ad1 ♜g5 26. g3 ♜e6**

Both sides have reached their optimum positions. I decided to extend the analysis a bit further, although the lines are not forcing.

**27. ♕g2**

27. ♖h1 ♖d3 28. ♖d4 ♜e5 29. ♖g1 ♖xg7 and the position remains complicated. 27. b3 ♕b7 28. c4 ♖xg7 29. ♖e1 bxc4 30. bxc4 d5 also keeps things dynamically balanced.



**27... ♖xg2**

27... ♖d3 is also playable, and after 28. ♖b4 ♕c4 29. ♖c6 ♕d5 30. ♖d4 ♜e5 the position is messy.

**28. ♖xg2 ♕b7**

Our strong centralization is enough to compensate for the weakness of the d6-pawn.

**29. ♖d4**

29. ♖g1 is a natural alternative, moving the king away from the dangerous diagonal. Play could continue 29... ♖h6 30. ♖f4 (30. ♖e1? runs into 30... hxc3 followed by ... ♖xg3†.) 30... ♖eg6 31. ♖xd6 hxc3 32. fxc3 ♖xg3† 33. hxc3 ♖xf4 34. ♖xg6 ♖c7 35. ♖g5 ♕c8 when any result is possible.

**29... ♜e5 30. ♖g1**

30. ♖h1 ♕c8!? 31. ♖c6 ♜e6 32. a3 ♖xg7 is also complicated but balanced.

**30... ♖h6! 31. ♖e2 hxc3 32. ♖xg3**

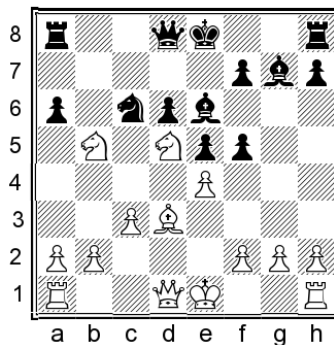
32. fxc3? ♖xg3†! 33. ♖xg3 ♖g5 wins.

32. hxc3?! ♖h7 also puts White in trouble.

**32... d5**

Black is not worse at all.

**B2) 13. ♖xb5**



This interesting continuation is one of White's main tries for an advantage, and is recommended by Negi. I must point out that it's not actually a sacrifice, but rather a trade of a piece for three pawns, with a double-edged game to follow.

**13... axb5**

Some strong players have instead opted for 13... ♕d5 14. exd5 ♖e7, giving up a pawn for some

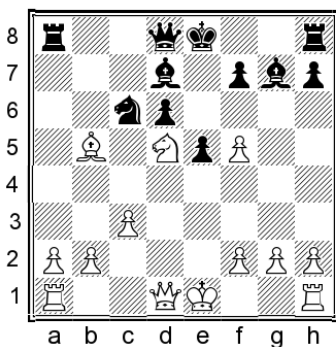
compensation. But settling for an inferior version of variation A of Chapter 1 is not my cup of tea.

#### 14.♖xb5

Why did White develop the bishop to d3, only to recapture on b5 with it a few moves later? The reason becomes clear if we compare the 12.♘xb5? line in the notes at the start of Chapter 4 on page 118, as well as variation C of Chapter 5 on page 166. In both cases, a similar type of sacrifice is strongly met by ...♗b7. In other words, the 'free tempo' of ...♗e6 has deprived us of a useful option, and the bishop will soon have to retreat to d7 anyway.

Since this is quite a critical line, I will present two options: **B21**) 14...♗d7 is the main line, but **B22**) 14...♞c8!? seems equally playable. (In the later case, the bishop will still have to drop back to d7 after ♞a4.)

#### B21) 14...♗d7 15.exf5



White picks up a third pawn for the piece. I analysed this in my 2010 book *The Cutting Edge – The Open Sicilian 1* and it has since received extensive practical testing, as well as being analysed in other books.

#### 15...♘b8?!

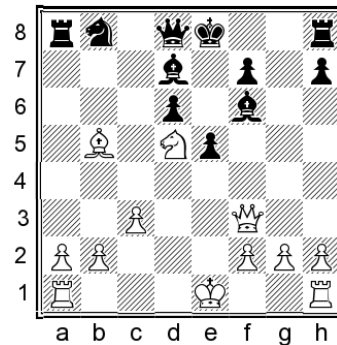
15...0-0 has been the most popular continuation, when 16.0-0 e4 is the main line. (Note that it would be too late for 16...♘b8? in view of 17.f6! ♗xf6 18.♘xf6† ♞xf6 19.♗xd7 ♘xd7 20.♞g4† and White wins.) Kotronias recommends this and I analysed it in my 2010 book, and of course Negi presented some ideas from White's perspective. Black's position is playable, but I find

the knight retreat to be a more convincing route to equality.

#### 16.a4

This is the usual continuation and critical. In the event of an exchange on b5, White will obtain a strong passer which will require our attention. Alternatives are nothing special:

It's too early for 16.f6?! ♗xf6 17.♞f3 due to:



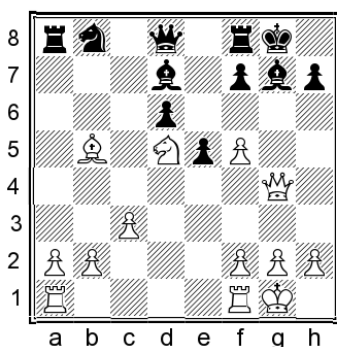
17...♗g7!N (But not 17...♗xb5? 18.♘xf6† ♖e7 19.♞xa8 ♗xf6 as played in Migchels – Kuipers, Arnhem 2007, when 20.0-0!N would have been highly unpleasant for Black.) 18.♗xd7† ♘xd7 19.♘c7† ♞xc7 20.♞xa8† ♖e7 21.♞e4 ♘c5 Materially White is doing quite well, but our lead in development and active pieces give us the upper hand.

Also harmless is:

16.♞g4 0-0 17.0-0

17.♗d3 occurred in Mandon – Bollere, France 2008, when 17...♘a6!N would have given Black the upper hand; the main idea is ...♘c7 to challenge the strong knight on d5, although ...♘c5 might be an idea too.

17.c4!?N is not ridiculous, although 17...♗c8!? 18.0-0 ♖h8 19.a4 ♘d7 looks fine. White's queenside pawns are not going anywhere soon, and in the meantime we have harmonious and easy play.



17...h5?!

We'll take the opportunity to drive the queen away, using the fact that the bishop on b5 is unprotected.

18. ♖f3

18. ♜e2?! ♙xb5 19. ♜xb5 ♜a5 20. ♜d3 ♘d7 21. a4 ♘f6 22. ♘e3 e4 favours Black.

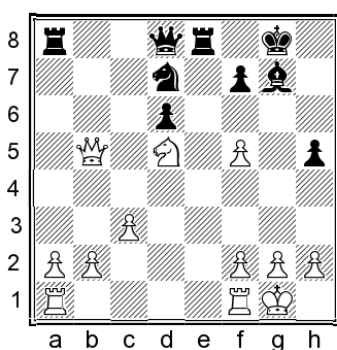
18...e4 19. ♜xe4

19. ♜f4N is harmless at best. 19...♙e5 20. ♜h6 Now we have a choice: 20...♙g7 forces a draw, while 20...♙xf5 is a decent attempt to play for more.

19...♞e8 20. ♜d3

20. ♜c4 leads to the same thing.

20...♙xb5 21. ♜xb5 ♘d7



Despite having four pawns for the piece, White is under pressure due to our activity. In the game we are following, White immediately faltered.

22. ♞fd1? ♞b8

Black won the b2-pawn and eventually the game in Z. Almasi – Ni Hua, Reggio Emilia 2009.

Another sideline worth considering is:

16. ♙d3

This has been tried by some strong GMs but it's not dangerous, provided we avoid doing anything silly such as castling too quickly.

16...♘a6

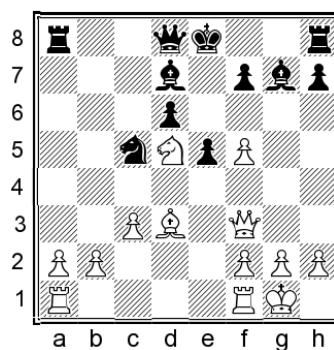
The knight can go to either c5 or c7 next, to challenge White's pieces.

17. ♜f3

17. ♙e4?! was seen in Delorme – Pham, Sautron 2003, when 17...♘c5!N would have been strong: 18. ♙c2 (18.f6 ♙h6 19. ♙c2 ♙e6 is also bad for White) 18...e4 19. b4 (19.f6? ♙xf6 gives White nothing) 19...♘a4 Black stands clearly better.

17.0-0 ♘c7 18. ♙e4 ♘xd5 19. ♜xd5 ♞a6 also gives us an excellent game: 20. ♞fd1 (20.a4?! 0-0 21.a5 ♙c6 22. ♜c4 ♜a8 gave Black a larger advantage in Edouard – Terrieux, Besancon 2006) 20...0-0 21. ♜d3 ♞b6 Black stood better in Lagarde – Valles, Aix-les-Bains 2009.

17...♘c5 18.0-0



18...♘d3!

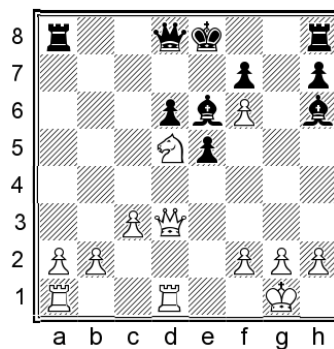
This is a good move, provided we follow it up correctly.

19. f6 ♙h6!

But not 19...♙f8? 20. ♜xd3, when Black was in trouble in Staroske – Vaitonis, corr. 2006.

20. ♜xd3 ♙e6 21. ♞fd1

We have been following Vetter – Esen, corr. 2011. I propose:



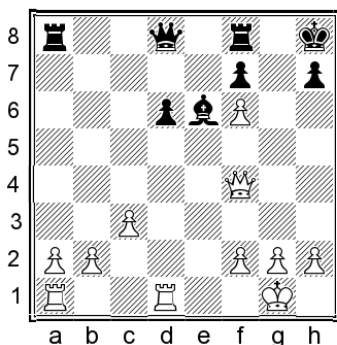
21...0-0!N

Our king is safe enough. A logical continuation is:

22. ♜g3† ♙h8 23. ♜h4 ♙f4 24. ♘xf4

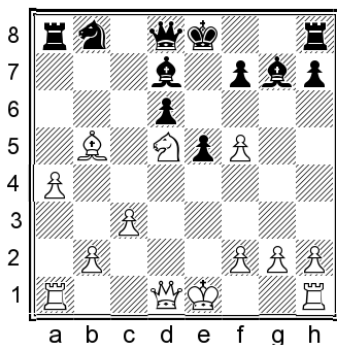
24.g3? ♔xd5 25.♖xd5 ♜g8 leaves us with excellent chances to convert the extra piece.

24...exf4 25.♞xf4



25...♞b6! 26.b4 ♞c6 27.♖d3 ♜g8

Despite having a temporary material advantage of four pawns versus a bishop, White is struggling to equalize.



16...0-0

We will analyse **B211)** 17.f6 followed by **B212)** 17.0-0.

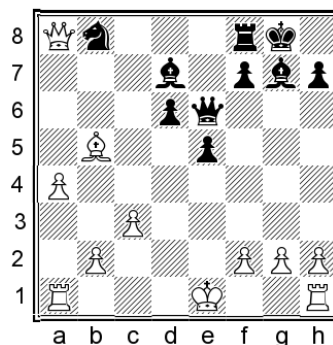
### B211) 17.f6

Obviously we need to check this direct attempt to refute our play. Fortunately, the tactics work out well for us.

17...♔xf6 18.♜xf6†

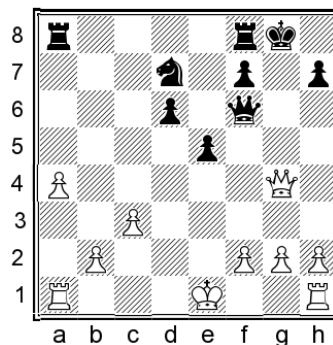
This natural move seems best.

18.♞f3 was seen in Prithu – Markovic, Veliko Gradiste 2017. A simple improvement is: 18...♔g7N 19.♜f6† ♞xf6 20.♞xa8 ♞e6



White has a rook and two pawns versus two pieces, but we have excellent coordination and central control. Play could continue: 21.♞b7 ♔xb5 22.♞xb5 d5 23.0-0 ♜a6 24.♖ad1 ♖d8 25.a5 e4 26.♞fe1 f5 We are not worse at all.

18...♞xf6 19.♔xd7 ♜xd7 20.♞g4†



This fork is the justification for White's 17th move. After picking up the knight White will be two pawns up, but we'll have counterplay against the uncastled king.

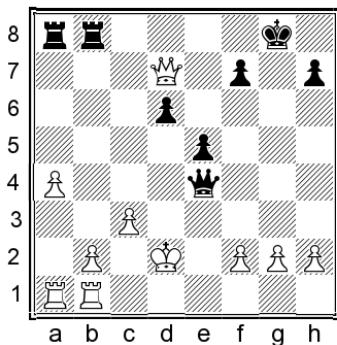
20...♞g6 21.♞xd7 ♞e4†

21...♞xg2? 22.0-0-0 was much better for White in Vallejo Pons – Alsina Leal, Madrid 2016.

22.♔f1

This is the more complicated option.

Going to the queenside should lead to a draw: 22.♔d2 ♖fb8 23.♖hb1 (23.b4 leads to a draw in any number of ways, for instance: 23...♖xb4 [or 23...♖a5 24.b5 ♖xa4 25.♖xa4 ♞xa4 26.♖d1 ♖xb5 27.♞d8† ♔g7 28.♞g5†] 24.cxb4 ♞xb4† With perpetual check.)



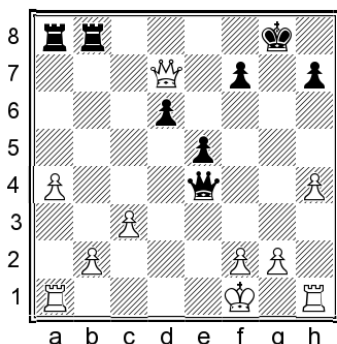
23...Ra5! 24.c4 The only move. 24...Rc5 (There is also 24...Rb3 when White is forced to take a perpetual.) 25.b3 Rxc4 26.bxc4 Qd4† Again it's a draw.

### 22...Rfb8

We are still two pawns down for the moment, but White's inability to connect the rooks is just as important.

### 23.h4

Another possibility is 23.h3N 23...Rxb2 24.Qg4† Qxg4 25.hxg4 Rxa4 26.Rxa4 Rb1† 27.Qe2 Rxb1 28.Ra6 Rc1 with a drawn endgame.



### 23...Rb7!?N

A useful zwischenzug.

23...Rxb2 24.Qg1 Qf4 25.Rf1 Qxa4 26.Qxd6 was also okay for Black in Berbatov – Spasov, Banskó 2010, but the engine points out that the text move is a tad more accurate.

### 24.Qxd6 Rxb2 25.Qg1 Qf4 26.Qc5

26.Rf1 Rxa4 is also completely fine for us.

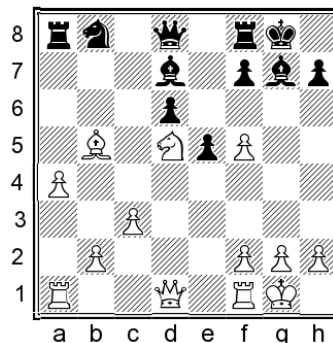
### 26...Rxa4 27.Rf1 Qc4!

Forcing the exchange of queens, due to the nice trap of ...Qxf1!† followed by ...Ra1 mate!

### 28.Qxc4 Rxc4 29.Rc1 h5! 30.Rh3 f6 31.Ra1 Qf7

The endgame is equal. White remains a pawn up but is tied to the defence of c3, with no realistic chances to activate the king or rooks.

### B212) 17.0-0



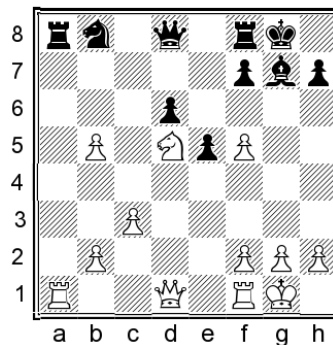
The main line; and Negi's recommendation.

### 17...Qxb5

This is the main idea and the best choice.

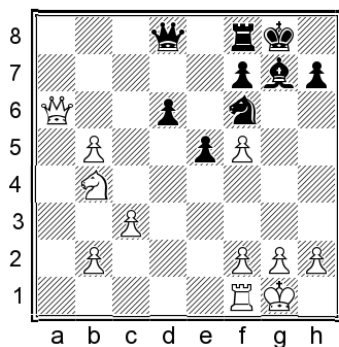
17...Qxf5?! 18.Qf3 Qe6 19.Qf6† Qxf6 20.Qxa8 Qd7 was seen in Azarov – Bobras, Czech Republic 2013, when 21.Qf3!N would have left Black with insufficient compensation, although the position is still practically complicated.

### 18.axb5

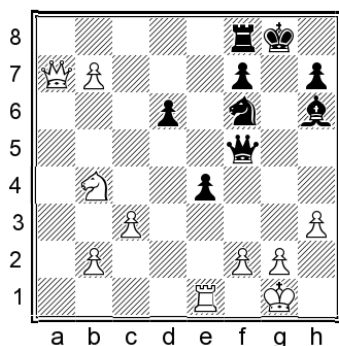


### 18...Rxa1 19.Qxa1 Qd7 20.Qa7

This is the usual move and I think it's best. 20.Qa6!? is also possible. 20...Qf6N seems best, and now 21.Qb4 is mentioned by Negi as a possible idea. Let's see how we obtain counterplay:



21...e4 22.b6 ♖e8 Preparing ...e3. 23.♞e1 (23.b7?! looks risky in view of 23...e3 24.♟c6 ♟d7 25.♞e2 ♞e4 26.♞b5 ♟h8 27.b8=♞ ♟xb8 28.♟xb8 ♞h6, when the initiative swings to our side.) 23...♞d7 24.h3 ♞h6 25.♞a7 ♞xf5 26.b7



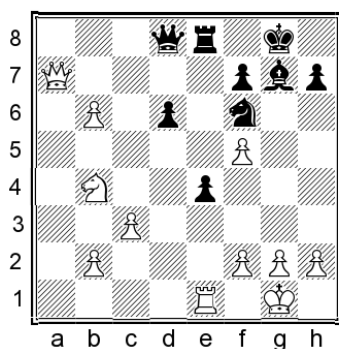
26...e3 27.fxe3 ♟e4 Our kingside initiative is enough for at least a draw.

### 20...e4 21.b6

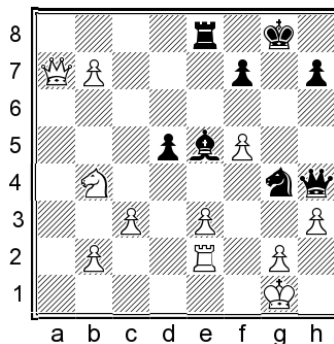
I analysed this move as a novelty in *The Cutting Edge – The Open Sicilian 1*, and concluded that it should lead to an edge for White. Before seeing why my view has changed, let's check some other possibilities:

21.h3 ♞e5 22.♞a1 is covered via 21.♞a1 below.

21.♞e1 ♞e8 22.b6 ♟f6 23.♟b4



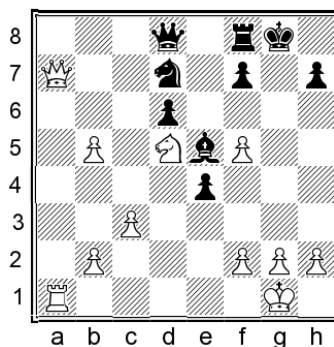
23...♟g4! Highlighting the fact that the rook left the f2-pawn unguarded, and the rook itself may also prove tactically vulnerable. 24.h3 e3! 25.fxe3 ♞h4 26.♞e2 ♞e5! Black is developing attacking chances so White has to be careful as well. 27.b7 (27.hxg4? ♞g3 leaves White defenceless.) 27...d5 (27...♞g3? 28.hxg4 leaves Black without a good follow-up.)



28.hxg4 ♞g3 29.e4! The difference here is that White's queen can assist in the defence. 29...dxe4 30.♟f1 ♞h1† 31.♞g1 ♞h6! 32.♞e3 ♞h1† 33.♞g1 ♞h6 This fantastic line ends in a repetition.

21.♞a1 ♞e5

The bishop tends to be ideally placed on this central square.



22.h3

22.b6 transposes to 22.♞a1 in the notes to the main line below.

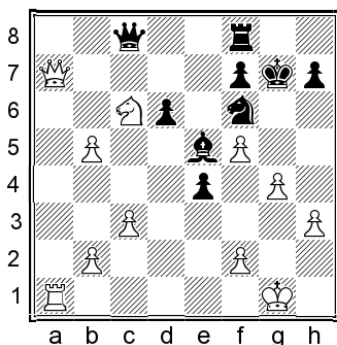
22...♟f6 23.♟e7†

23.♟b4 ♞c8 24.♟c6 ♟g7 transposes.

23...♟g7 24.♟c6 ♞c8 25.g4!N

25.♟xe5 dxe5 26.b6 h6! is a useful move to cover the vital g5-square, and the position remained balanced in Aksenov – Ilyushchenko, corr. 2013.

The text move looks like a logical try, but we are still doing fine after:

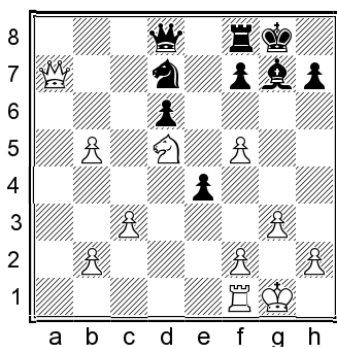


25...♙f4 26.♘d4 ♜e8 27.♘e6† ♞xe6 28.fxe6 ♞xe6  
29.b6 e3 30.b7 exf2† 31.♞xf2 ♙e3 32.b8=♞ ♞e5

The game should end in a draw.

21.g3!?

Negi recommended this move. I suggest meeting it with:



21...♞e8!

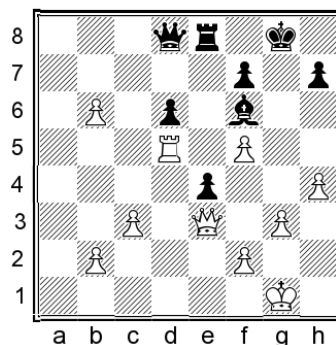
Negi only mentions 21...♙e5 followed by ...♘f6. White's last move was clearly played in anticipation of our bishop landing on e5, so it makes sense to modify our plans.

22.♞d1

22.b6 gives White nothing after: 22...e3 23.fxe3 ♘f6 24.♘f4 ♙h6 25.♞a1 ♙xf4 26.exf4 ♔g7 27.♞c7 Otherwise White will be in danger due to the exposed king. (27.b7? ♞c7 leaves White stuck for ideas.) 27...♞xc7 28.bxc7 ♞c8 29.♞a7 ♘e8 We will pick up the c7-pawn, when the endgame should be a draw, but White is the one who will have to be careful to prove it.

The text move was played in a correspondence game which we will continue to follow.

22...♙e5 23.♞e3 ♘f6 24.b6 ♘xd5 25.♞xd5 ♙f6 26.h4



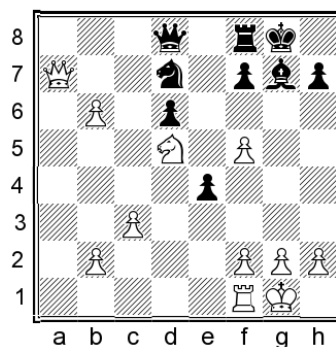
Negi offers this position as a secondary option for White via a different move order, but it turns out to be okay for us.

26...♞d7 27.b3 ♞c6 28.c4 h5! 29.♞b5

29.♞h6 e3! 30.♞xf6 e2 also leads to a draw.

29...♞b8 30.♞h6 d5! 31.♞xd5 ♞xb6 32.♔h2 ♞b8 33.♞xh5 ♞xb3 34.♞g4† ♔h7 35.♞h5†

In view of the impending repetition of moves, the players agreed a draw in Matei – Sospedra Sebastian, corr. 2016. A well-played game!



21...♙e5 22.b7

White can also activate the rook in some way:

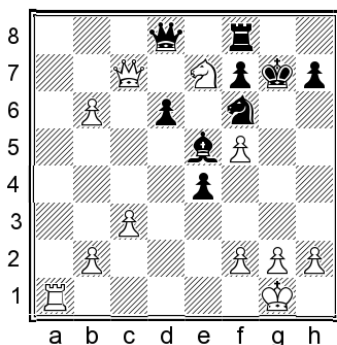
22.♞e1 ♘f6 23.♘e7† ♔g7 24.♞c7? (24.♘c6N is preferable, although 24...♞c8 25.♘e5 dxe5 leaves us with no problems.) 24...♞d7! 25.♞xd7 ♘xd7 26.♘d5 ♘f6 27.♘xf6 ♔xf6 White was unable to hold the endgame in Najer – Tregubov, Dagomys 2009.

22.♞a1 ♘f6 23.♘e7†N

23.♘xf6†?! ♙xf6 24.b7 ♞c7 25.♞a5 ♔g7 26.♞b5 ♞b8 27.g3 d5 saw Black get the upper hand in Barlow – Korze, corr. 2009.

23...♔g7 24.♞c7

In *The Cutting Edge – The Open Sicilian 1* I gave this continuation as leading to some advantage to White. However, Black has a nice resource:

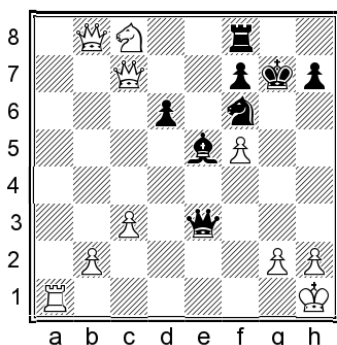


24...e3!

24...♖d7 was the move I considered in 2010.

25.♙xd8

25.fxe3 ♖e8! is fine for us, for instance: 26.b7 ♖b5 27.♜c8 ♖d3 28.b8=♙? (28.♙b6 is necessary ,although the position after 28...♜d7 is dangerous only for White.) 28...♙xe3† 29.♚h1



29...♙h6! 30.h3 ♖f4 31.♚g1 ♖e3† 32.♚h1 ♜e4 Despite White's huge material advantage, our attack is decisive.

25...♙xd8 26.fxe3 ♖b8 27.♙a6 ♖b7 28.♜c6 ♜d5

The game could logically end in a draw after:

29.c4 ♜xb6 30.♜a5 ♖b8 31.♜c6 ♖b7

With a repetition.

22...♚g7

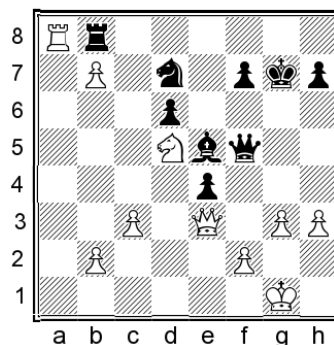
Sensibly taking the king away from potentially annoying checks.

23.♙e3 ♖h4 24.g3 ♖g4 25.♙a1 ♖b8 26.h3!

Without this resource, White would be in trouble.

26...♙xf5 27.♙a8

Had White failed to divert the queen, we would deliver a winning fork on d1.



27...h5!

Note that 27...♙xb7?? would be refuted by either 28.♙g8† or 28.♜e7.

28.h4!N

It appears that neither side can make any real progress. The text move would be my last try if I was on the opposite side of the board.

28.♚g2? would be a mistake due to 28...♙xb7! 29.♙g8† ♚h7 30.♙g5 ♖f3† 31.♙xf3 exf3† 32.♚xf3 ♚h6, when our extra piece should decide matters.

28.b4 ♖f3 29.♙xb8 and a draw was agreed in Corbat – Killer, corr. 2011.

28...♙f3 29.♙g5† ♚h7 30.♙xb8 ♜xb8



31.♜e7

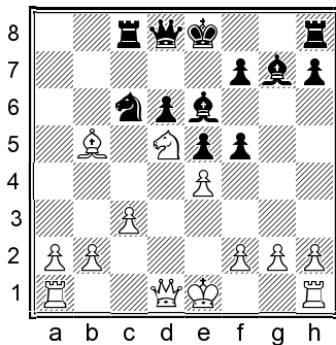
The check on g8 might look worrying, but we control all the important squares.

31...♙d1† 32.♚h2 ♖f3

The game will end in a draw.

However, it should be noted that 32...♙g4? 33.♙xg4 hxg4 34.♚g2 would leave us facing an unpleasant defence in the endgame.

**B22) 14...♖c8!?**



I will not analyse this variation in exhaustive detail because I find the previous main line to be fine for Black. However, I believe the text move to be okay too, so I will provide the essential information to enable you to play it.

**15.♙a4**

White has nothing better.

15.♘b4?! ♙b6?!

15...♙d7 also offers decent chances for an advantage.

16.♙a4

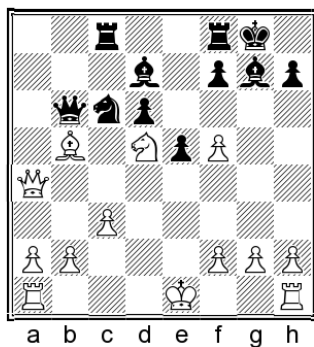
16.♙xc6† ♖xc6 17.exf5 ♙xf5 18.♘xc6 ♙xc6 gives us a clear advantage thanks to the mighty bishops.

16...♙d7 17.exf5

17.♖d1N 17...♙b7 18.♖xd6 ♘xb4 19.♙xd7† ♖e7 20.♙xc8 ♖xc8 21.♖d2 ♙xe4† 22.♖d1 ♘d3 also turns out in our favour.

17...0-0 18.♘d5

In Rieper – Nasoyan, Willingen 2017, Black should have played:



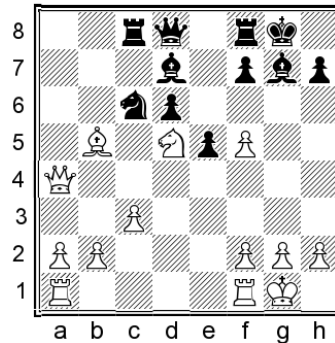
18...♙c5!N 19.♖d1 ♖h8

White has some problems, for instance:

20.f6 ♙h6 21.0-0 ♖a8 22.♙c4 ♙xc4 23.♙xc4 ♖fb8

Our extra piece is worth more than White's three pawns.

15...♙d7 16.exf5 0-0 17.0-0



17...e4!

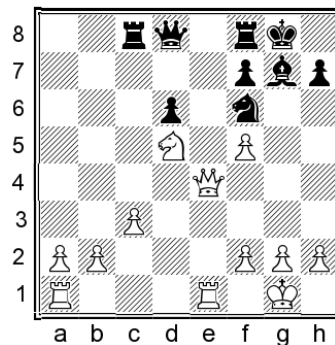
It's important to activate our pieces.

17...♖h8?! 18.♖fd1 ♖g8 19.♙e4 left Black in a bind in Rieper – Nasoyan, Willingen 2017.

18.♙xe4

White can also delay the capture with:

18.♖fe1 ♘e5 19.♙xd7 ♘xd7 20.♙xe4 ♘f6



21.♘xf6†

21.♘e7† ♖h8 22.♙f3 looks tempting but White has been unable to prove anything in correspondence games. After 22...♖c7 23.♘d5 ♘xd5 24.♙xd5 ♖c5 we are at least equal, even though White has four pawns versus a bishop.

21...♙xf6

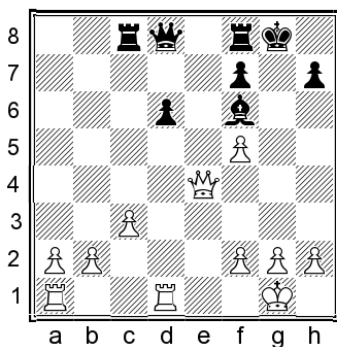
Here too, the material balance of four pawns versus bishop is deceptive. We are doing fine, with ...d5-d4 an important resource to activate our pieces.

22.♖ed1

22.♖ad1 ♖c5 23.♙f4 d5 24.♖e3 ♖h8 25.♖ed3 ♖g8 26.♙f3 d4 27.cxd4 ♖c2 28.d5 ♖xb2 reached an endgame where only Black had winning chances in Aninis – Arnold, corr. 2016.

22.a4 d5 23.♖g4† ♔h8 24.a5 d4 25.cxd4 ♖c2  
 26.♞ed1 ♜d5 27.♞f4 ♞xb2 28.a6 ♞a8 29.g3 ♞a2  
 also left White needing to work to hold the draw  
 in Piccoli – Whitted corr. 2016.

Negi gives this line as a secondary option for White,  
 but doesn't consider our next move:



22...♞e8!?

Activating the rook with tempo is logical.

23.♞f3!N

After 23.♞g4† a draw was agreed in Mendl –  
 Kluegel, corr. 2016. Play could continue 23...♔h8  
 24.a4 ♜b6 25.♞d2 ♖c5 when Black is not worse at  
 all.

23...♞e7!?

Perhaps we'll obtain counterplay via the e2-square.  
 24.a4 d5!? 25.a5 ♞b8 26.b4 d4 27.cxd4 ♞xb4

The position remains balanced and a draw is  
 likely.

18...♞e8 19.♞a4 ♞e5 20.♞ad1 ♞xf5

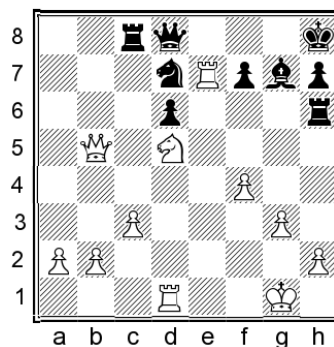
We have regained the pawn which we  
 sacrificed on move 17, and our pieces are much  
 more active compared to the previous structure  
 with our pawn on e5 and the white pawn on f5.  
 Nevertheless, White still has three pawns for a  
 piece, along with a strong knight on d5 and a bit  
 of pressure along the central files. Let's see how we  
 can neutralize it.

21.♞fe1 ♔h8 22.f4 ♞h5!

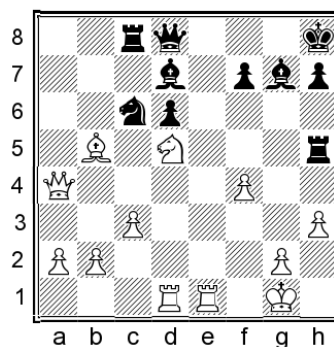
Solving the problem of the weirdly placed  
 rook. We gain a tempo by threatening ...♞h4, and  
 after White makes a suitable defensive move we can  
 reroute the rook via h6-e6.

23.h3

The alternative is: 23.g3 ♞h6 24.♞a6 ♔b8  
 25.♞b7 ♞xb5 26.♞xb5 ♔d7 27.♞e7



27...♔f6! 28.♞de1 ♞h5! A clever way of dealing  
 with White's strong knight. 29.c4 ♞f8 30.♞xf7  
 ♔xd5 31.cxd5 ♞b8 32.♞d7 ♞xb5 33.♞xd8 ♔g7  
 Black had no problems in Anokhin – Rach, corr.  
 2016.

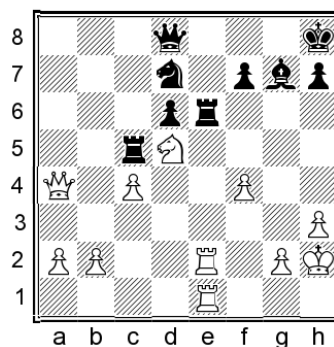


23...♞h6 24.♞e2 ♞e6 25.♞de1 ♔b8 26.♔h2N

26.a3 ♞c5 27.♞xd7 ♔xd7 28.♞b3 ♔f8 is  
 more than okay for Black, who went on to win in  
 Jedinger – Doderer, corr. 2016.

26...♞c5 27.♞xd7 ♔xd7 28.c4

We have been following a logical line given by  
 Negi. My improvement is:



28...♞c8!

Intending ...♔c5.

Negi's illustrative line continues with the immediate 28...♖xe2.

### 29.b4 ♖xe2! 30.♖xe2 ♗f6

30...♖xc4 is playable but I'd prefer to improve our coordination and challenge the strong knight.

### 31.b5 ♗xd5 32.cxd5 ♖b6

A draw seems highly likely. If anything, I would prefer Black's position.

## Conclusion

After the opening moves 1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 e5 6.♗db5 d6 7.♗g5 a6 8.♗a3 b5 9.♗xf6 gxf6 10.♗d5 f5, this chapter has dealt with White's various possibilities after 11.♗d3 ♗e6 – with the exception of 12.0-0 of course, which was covered in the previous chapters.

We started by considering 12.♖h5, when 12...♗g8 13.g3 ♖g6!? is a slightly unusual move which offers nice prospects.

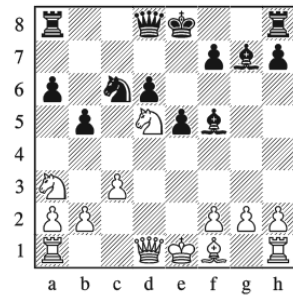
We then moved on to the much more common 12.c3 ♗g7, reaching a position which often arises via 11.c3 ♗g7 12.♗d3 ♗e6. Here too, 13.♖h5 is an important option, but we can happily call White's bluff with 13...0-0. Then 14.0-0 f4 gives us good prospects on the kingside, while the forcing 14.exf5 is also nothing to fear.

13.♗xb5 axb5 14.♗xb5 is the main topic of the chapter. This modern continuation isn't so much a sacrifice as a trade of a piece for three pawns. My main recommendation is 14...♗d7 15.exf5 ♗b8!?, which I believe to be a hundred percent reliable, but I also provided some coverage of 14...♖c8!?, which also seems completely fine.

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# Chapter 4

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## The Popular 11.c3

### Variation Index

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1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 e5 6.♗db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6  
8.♗a3 b5 9.♙xf6 gxf6 10.♗d5 f5 (10...♙g7 11.c3 f5) 11.c3 ♙g7 12.exf5 ♙xf5

A) 13.♙f3?!

B) 13.♗c2 0-0

B1) 14.♙e2

B2) 14.♗ce3 ♙e6

B21) 15.g3

B22) 15.♙d3 f5

B221) 16.♙h5 e4 17.♙c2 ♗e7

B2211) 18.♙b3

B2212) 18.♗f4

B222) 16.0-0 ♗h8!

B2221) 17.a4

B2222) 17.♙h5

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6 8.♘a3 b5 9.♙xf6 gxf6 10.♘d5 f5

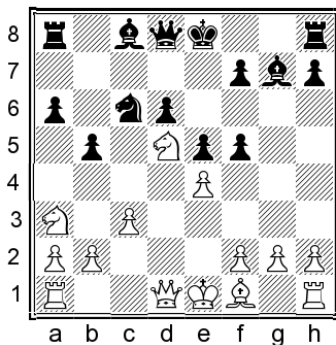
10...♙g7 11.c3 f5 is another possible route to the same position.

### 11.c3

This move in conjunction with 12.exf5 used to be White's main try for an advantage. It's still an important option which we need to know about, but its popularity had waned due to various resources which have been discovered for Black.

### 11...♙g7

It's important to avoid 11...fxe4?! 12.♙xb5!, when 12...axb5 13.♘xb5 gives White a much-improved version of the similar piece sacrifice from Chapter 3. The biggest difference is that ♘dc7† is a huge threat, since ...♙d7 allows the white queen to deliver mate.



### 12.exf5

Other moves exist, but they are easy to deal with:

12.♙d3 is a popular continuation, when 12...♙e6 converts to the previous chapter.

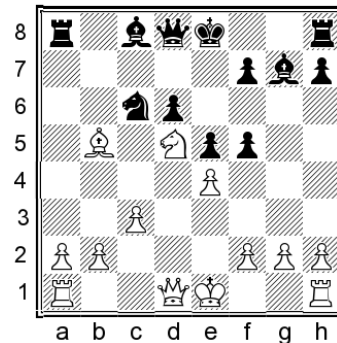
12.♘c2 is sometimes played but after 12...fxe4 13.a4 (or 13.♘ce3 ♙e6) 13...♙b8 White's compensation for the pawn is uncertain, to say the least.

12.g3 fxe4 13.♙g2 0-0 (13...f5!? is a risky independent approach which you could investigate, but it hardly seems worth the trouble for such a rare move order) 14.♙xe4 ♙e6 transposes to variation A1 of Chapter 5.

12.g4!? looks wild but is essentially a positional sacrifice to fight for the light squares. 12...fxg4 13.h3 g3 is a good reply, returning the pawn in order to keep White's bishop out of play. 14.fxg3 This position was reached in Velimirovic – Pavlovic, Budva 2002, and now 14...♘e7N seems the most logical choice, challenging White's strongest piece while its colleagues remain out of play. Black is at least equal.

Interestingly, some strong players have tried an inferior version of the thematic piece sacrifice:

12.♘xb5? axb5 13.♙xb5



13...♙b7!

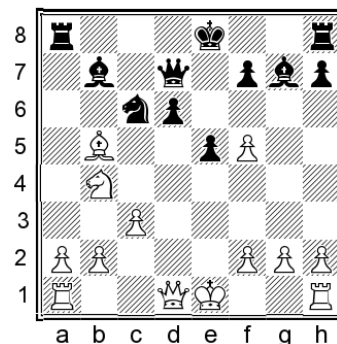
13...♙d7 transposes to the much more topical variation covered in the previous chapter, but the difference is that in that case our bishop never had a chance to go to b7 as it was lured to e6 before White took on b5. As we will see, with the bishop on b7 White's concept is unsound.

14.♘b4

14.exf5 0-0 is virtually hopeless for White, as the extra piece is much more valuable than the three pawns.

14... ♙d7 15. exf5

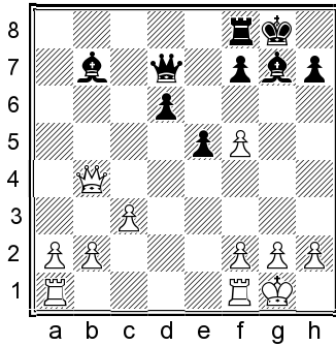
Now in A. Sokolov – Lautier, Val d'Isere 2004, Black missed a powerful idea:



15...♖a5!N 16.♞d5

16.a4 ♖xb5! 17.axb5 ♘xb4 18.cxb4 ♞xf5 also gives us a big advantage.

16...♖xb5! 17.♞xb5 ♘xb4 18.♞xb4 0-0 19.0-0



19...d5!

19...♔h8!? is a decent alternative, when 20.♞ad1 ♞g8 21.♖xd6 ♞c8! 22.g3 ♕f8 favours Black, but the text move is even stronger.

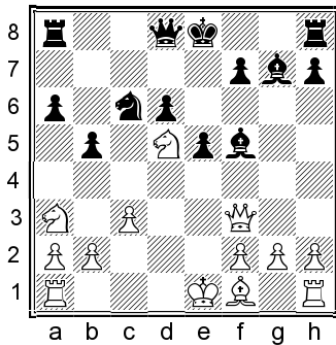
20.♞ad1 d4

We have a near-decisive advantage. Materially White is slightly ahead for now, but our mighty bishops, passed d-pawn and safer king are more important.

12...♕xf5

We will consider A) 13.♞f3?! followed by the more respectable B) 13.♘c2.

A) 13.♞f3?!



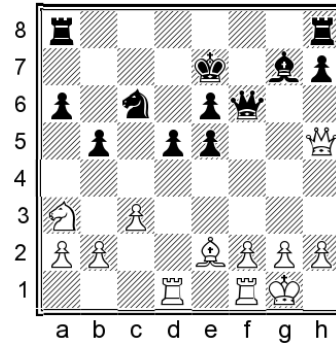
This isn't a great move, but it has been played in hundreds of games so is worth checking.

13...♕e6 14.♕d3

This looks natural but White has scored pitifully with it. Other continuations are also good for us, for instance:

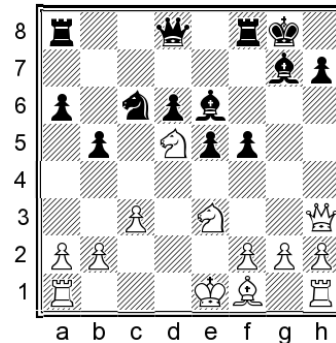
14.♘f6+?! ♕xf6 15.♞xc6+ ♔f8 is clearly better for us. 16.0-0-0?! has been played in some internet games, but 16...d5 17.♘c2 ♔g7 gives us a decisive advantage.

14.♘f4 d5 15.♘xe6 (15.♞g3N 15...♞g8 is also clearly better for us) 15...fxe6 16.♞h5+ ♔d7 17.♞d1 ♞f6 18.♕e2 ♔e7 19.0-0

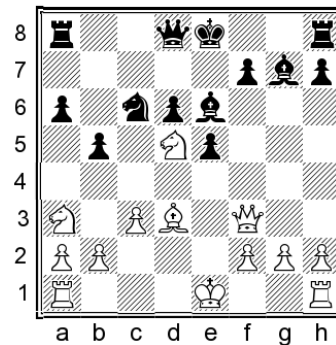


This position was reached in Quixada Neto – Amorim, Brazil 1990. 19...♖ab8!?N would be my choice, and after 20.♘c2 ♞h6 21.♞xh6 ♕xh6 we have a clear advantage.

14.♘c2 0-0 15.♘ce3 f5 16.♞h3



16...♞d7! (16...♘e7!?N is also tempting, as 17.♞d1 ♘xd5 18.♘xd5 ♞c8 19.♕e2 ♞c5 gives us a decisive advantage, but the game continuation is natural and strong) 17.♕e2 ♞ae8 18.♕h5 f4 White was busted in Lengyel – Geisler, Budapest 1994.



### 14...0-0

White's attempts from here are all centred on the f5-square, but they are all doomed to fail. The knight on a3 needs to reach e3 in one tempo instead of two!

### 15.g4

15.♖e3 d5 gives us a huge advantage.

Also after 15.♖f5 ♖g5 16.♗e3 ♗e7 White was unable to maintain the blockade on f5, and therefore had a terrible position in Leygue – Vaissier, France 2003.

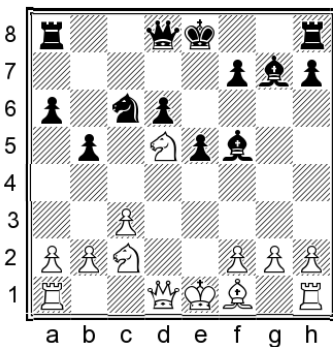
### 15...♗xd5 16.♖xd5 ♗e7 17.♖g2N

17.♖e4 ♗g6 was positionally winning for Black in Fesche – Eros, Bruges 1978.

### 17...b4! 18.cxb4 d5

White's opening has been a disaster.

### B) 13.♗c2



### 13...0-0

The play in this line is pretty logical for both sides; I suppose that's one reason why the variation is popular. White centralizes the offside knight and develops in a natural way, while we prepare our usual kingside and central counterplay with ...f5.

We will analyse **B1)** 14.♗e2 followed by the main line of **B2)** 14.♗ce3.

White has also tried:

### 14.a4

This is playable, although it feels a bit odd to attack on the queenside with the kingside still undeveloped.

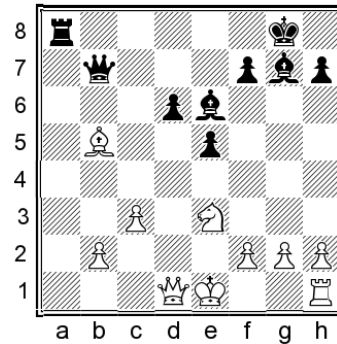
### 14...♗e7 15.♗ce3

15.♗d3 is worth considering, although 15...e4 16.♗e2 bxa4N 17.♖xa4 ♖b8 gives us comfortable play.

### 15...♗e6 16.♗xe7†

16.axb5?! ♗xd5 17.♗xd5 axb5 gives us a better version of the same kind of position.

### 16...♖xe7 17.axb5 axb5 18.♖xa8 ♖xa8 19.♗xb5 ♖b7



### 20.c4?

White should abandon all hope of an opening advantage and retreat the bishop to d3 or e2. In that case we would take on b2 and have no problems at all, but White should be okay too. After the text move, White is in trouble.

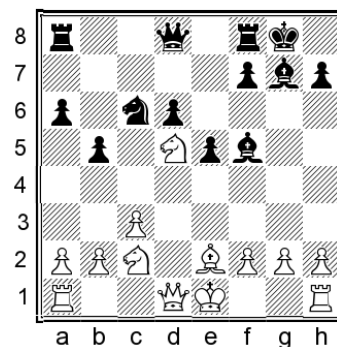
### 20...d5! 21.cxd5

21.0-0 is well met by 21...d4 22.♗c2 e4!N, when our mighty central pawns and bishop pair are much more relevant than the missing pawn.

### 21...♖xb5 22.dxe6 fxe6 23.♖e2 ♖a1† 24.♗d1 ♖b4† 25.♖d2 ♖e4†

Black had a big advantage in Yoo – Tari, Reykjavik 2019.

### B1) 14.♗e2



This solid developing move is not so deeply explored. White simply develops naturally and prepares to castle, avoiding early provocations.

### 14...♙e6

Kotronias recommends 14...♖b8 in anticipation of a2-a4, although the Greek GM then offers a line which forces Black to play accurately to maintain equality. The text move is simple and direct.

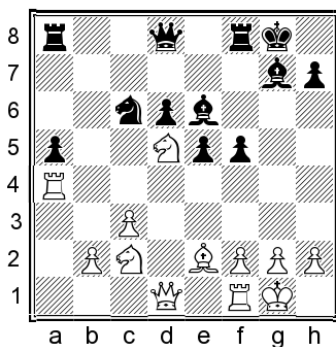
### 15.0-0 f5

We carry out our normal plan.

### 16.a4

16.f4 is rather loosening, and 16...♗e7 17.♗ce3 ♗xd5 18.♗xd5 ♖c8 was good for Black in Akhmadeev – Beshukov, Elista 1994, with ...♖c5 coming next.

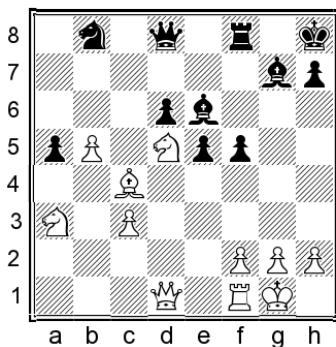
### 16...bxa4 17.♖xa4 a5



### 18.♙c4

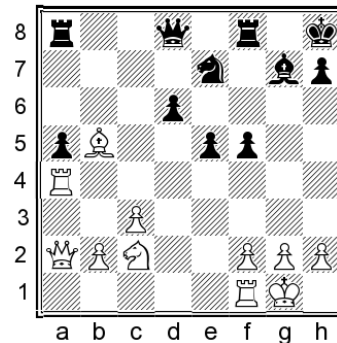
As we will see, this is connected with a tactical idea. Let's see some other possible continuations:

18.b4 has been played a few times, with good results for White. The best reply is 18...♖c8!N (18...♗d4?! is flashy, but 19.♗xd4 exd4 20.♗f4 favoured White in Watson – Preis, Graz 1987) 19.b5 ♗b8 and now a logical continuation could be: 20.♖c4 ♖xc4 21.♙xc4 ♗h8 22.♗a3



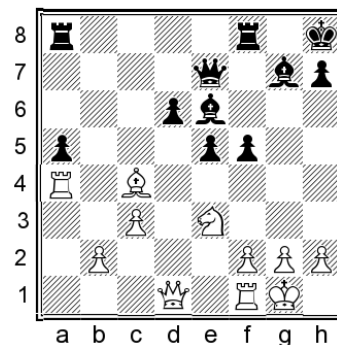
22...f4! 23.♙d2 ♗d7 24.♖d1 ♗c5 25.b6 ♙g5 We have good chances on the kingside.

18.♙d2 is a natural move. A good example continued 18...♗h8 19.♙b5 ♙xd5 20.♙xd5 ♗e7 21.♙a2 and now my improvement is:

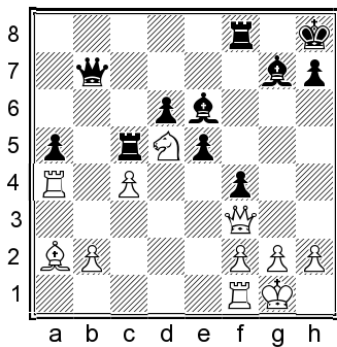


21...e4!N (21...♙b6 22.c4 ♖a7 23.b4 gave White some initiative in Popenkov – Shabaev, corr. 2014.) 22.♖a1 ♗g6 We continue to play in the spirit of the Sveshnikov, looking for kingside activity with the help of the strong pawns. 23.♖xa5 ♖xa5 24.♙xa5 ♙g5 25.♙f1 ♗e5 26.♗d4 ♗g4 Our attack is worth more than White's extra pawn.

18.♙b5 White provokes a retreat of our knight in the hope of exploiting the weak a-pawn, and/or triggering some useful exchanges. 18...♗e7 19.♙c4 ♗h8 20.♗xe7 ♙xe7 21.♗e3



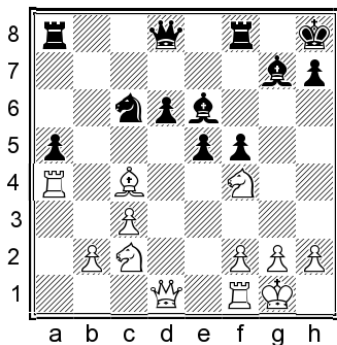
21...f4 22.♗d5 ♙b7 It's a normal type of position, and if White had played b2-b3 within the next few moves it would have remained about equal. Instead, 23.♙f3 ♖ac8 24.♙a2? ♖c5 25.c4 was played in Kovalevskaya – Cmilyte, Sochi 2015, when Black missed a couple of good opportunities:



25...♙xb2N would have yielded some advantage, while the computer likes 25...e4!N 26.♙xe4 ♘f5 27.♙f3 ♙xb2 even more.

### 18...♙h8 19.♘f4

That's the tactical idea behind White's previous move. I suggest meeting it with a subtle new move:



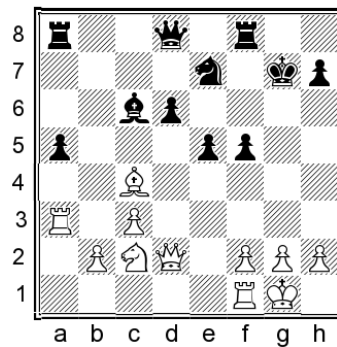
### 19...♘d7!N

White can now choose which of our bishops to swap off for the knight, but we will have good prospects either way.

I am not so happy with the position after 19...♘xc4 20.♙xc4 ♙d7 21.♘d5 ♙ab8 22.b4 axb4 23.♘cxb4 ♘xb4 24.cxb4 ♙e6 25.♙c6 e4 26.g3 ♙b5 27.♘f4 ♙e8 28.♙xd6 ♘e5 29.♙d7 when White had some initiative in Zavrazhnov – Pasmov, corr. 2016, although Black was able to hold.

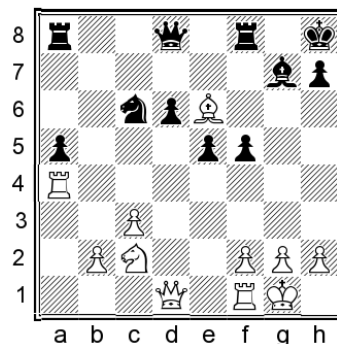
### 20.♘e6

The alternative is: 20.♘h5 ♘e7 21.♙a3 ♘c6 22.♘g7 ♙xg7 23.♙d2



23...f4! 24.♙fa1 ♙c7 I like our chances; the bishop on c6 coordinates nicely with the dark-square pawn chain.

### 20...♘xe6 21.♘xe6



### 21...♘e7 22.♘e3 ♙f6 23.♘d5

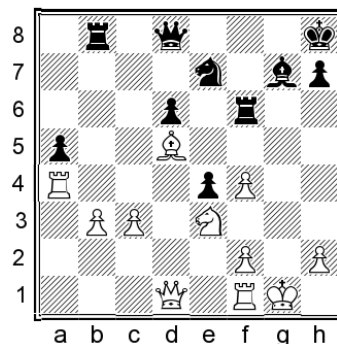
White hopes to profit from the d5-outpost and pressure on the a5-pawn. However, as usual in the Sveshnikov, it's all about dynamics: we have plenty of ideas on the kingside, with our mobile pawn centre and active pieces.

A sample continuation is:

### 23...♙b8 24.b3 e4 25.g3 f4

25...♙c8! also deserves attention.

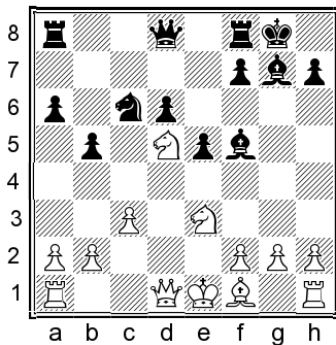
### 26.gxf4



### 26...♘xd5 27.♘xd5 ♙g6† 28.♙h1 ♙h4

The position remains complicated and dynamically balanced.

**B2) 14.♖ce3**



This is the usual approach. White centralizes the knight with tempo, while eyeing the d5- and f5-squares. We will see that White's entire strategy mostly revolves around those two squares, although in some cases the a2-a4 move also comes into play.

**14...♗e6**

Other bishop retreats have also been tried, but this one is normal and best. White's knights are well placed but the manoeuvres have cost time, whereas we are well developed and ready to launch the f-pawn.

We will consider **B21)** 15.g3 followed by the main line of **B22)** 15.♗d3.

**15.♞h5**

This has been played in lots of games but it usually transposes to one of the main lines from later in the chapter.

**15...f5**

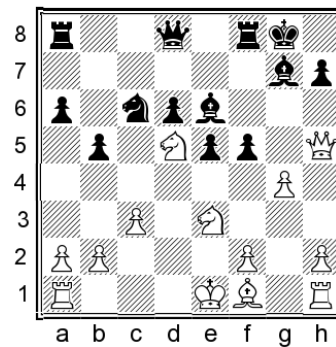
I will mention a few rare, independent ideas.

**16.g4?**

16.♗d3 is the normal move; see variation B221 on page 130.

16.g3 is similar to variation B21 below and could transpose, but it's a bit strange to put the queen on h5 first. 16...♗e7 is a logical reply, and after 17.♗g2 e4 we are at least equal.

The text move runs into a fairly simple refutation:



**16...♗f7 17.♞h3 f4**

And just like that, White is losing a knight.

**18.♗d3 h6 19.g5 fxe3 20.♖f6† ♔h8**

There was no real compensation to be found in Namyslo – Schebler, Dortmund 1992.

**15.a4?!**

This is also seen from time to time. However, it's a bit of an odd choice in conjunction with the early ♖ce3, and we can look to exploit this with:

**15...b4!**

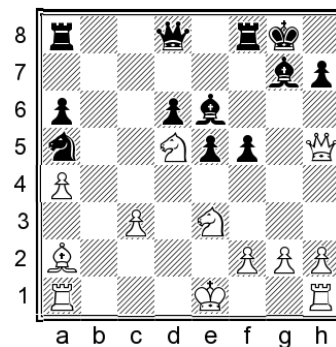
15...♗e7 is a perfectly good option which transposes to the analysis of 14.a4 in the notes above.

**16.♗c4 bxc3 17.bxc3 ♖a5**

17...e4 followed by ...♗e5 is a good alternative recommended by Kotronias.

**18.♗a2 f5 19.♞h5**

My improvement is:



**19...♔h8!N**

19...♞b8 is playable, but 20.0-0 ♔h8 21.♞ab1 ♖b7 22.♞b2 ♖c5 23.♞xb8 ♞xb8 24.♗e7 ♗xa2 was agreed drawn in Ilyes – Sender, corr. 2000, in view of 25.♗g6† with a perpetual.

I also checked 19...f4!?N, when 20.♗b1 ♞f7 21.♗xh7† ♔f8 22.♗f5 reaches a position which is complicated for humans, but the computer shows 0.00 everywhere.

20.0-0 ♕f7 21.♖h3 f4

Compared with the 19...f4 line above, the difference is felt after:

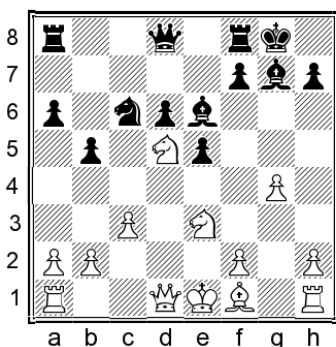
22.♕b1 ♕g8

We conveniently deal with the threat to h7, and we have the better chances.

Finally, an old idea is:

15.g4?!

White forcefully tries to seize control of the light squares, but it takes time and weakens the dark squares, and the kingside in general.



15...b4! 16.♕g2

16.cxb4? ♖b8 17.a3 ♘d4N gives us far too much activity, with ideas such as ...a5 and ...♖h4 putting White under pressure on both flanks.

16...bxc3 17.bxc3 ♖c8

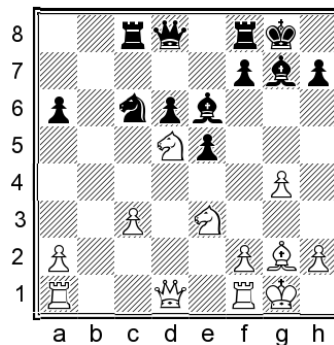
At the moment ...f5 is not possible, so we develop another piece and defend our knight, while also starting to put some pressure on the c3-pawn.

18.0-0

18.♖d3? runs into some nasty tactics: 18...e4! 19.♕xe4 ♘e5 20.♖e2 (20.♖xa6N is a slight improvement although 20...♘g4 21.♘g4 f5! is still excellent for us.) 20...♘g4! 21.♖g1 (After 21.♘g4 ♕xd5 22.♕xd5 ♕xc3† White's position collapses.) 21...♘xe3 22.♖xe3 ♖h8 Black's advantage was already decisive in J. Polgar – Gelfand, Pcs 2003.

18.♕e4 looks logical but 18...♘e7 starts to erode White's central control. 19.♖c1 ♘d5 20.♘d5 ♕h6! 21.♖c2 was seen in Berti Contreras – Echavarría, corr. 2009. Out of several tempting options, I like the flexible 21...♖h8!N with ideas of ...♖h4 and/or ...f5 next. White is clearly under pressure.

18.♘f5!?N is untested but looks fairly sensible. Again we have a bunch of decent options, but 18...♕xd5 19.♕xd5 ♘e7 looks pretty logical, and after 20.♘d6 ♖xc3 21.0-0 ♘d5 22.♖xd5 ♖d7 23.♘f5 ♖xd5 24.♘e7† ♖h8 25.♘d5 ♖a3 the endgame is fine for us.



18...♘e7 19.♖d3

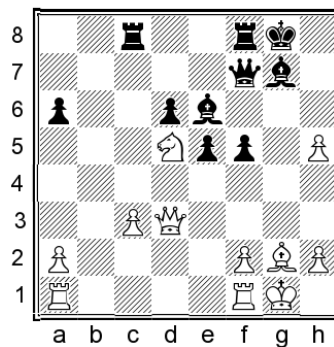
19.c4 has also been played, and after 19...♖h8N 20.♖b1 ♕h6 White's weaknesses on the dark squares are more relevant than ours on the light squares.

19.♘xe7†N 19...♖xe7 20.♖d3 ♖g5 is also good for us.

19...h5!?

This pawn sac is by no means forced, but I think it's entirely justified.

20.gxh5 f5 21.♘xe7† ♖xe7 22.♘d5 ♖f7



23.♘b6?

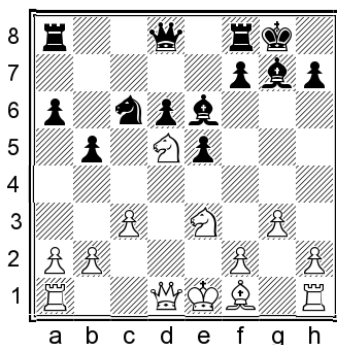
A mistake in a difficult position.

23...e4! 24.♖xd6 ♖fd8 25.♖f4 ♖xc3N

Our advantage is close to decisive.

25...♖c6!? is a bit sophisticated for my taste, but also gave Black a large advantage in Zsiltzova Lisenko – Vega Gutierrez, Khanty-Mansiysk (ol) 2010.

## B21) 15.g3



This is less popular than the main line below, but still a useful line to study, especially for underlining some important concepts. There is an obvious similarity with the 11.g3 set-up of the next chapter, except that here the knight has rushed to e3 more quickly. This isn't necessarily a positive thing for White, as we have ideas of ...f5-f4.

### 15...Bb8!?

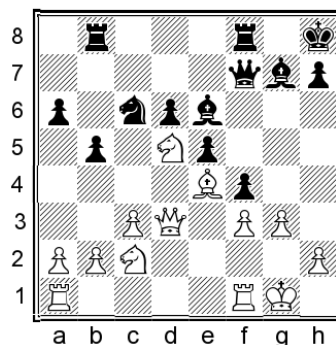
15...f5 is a good alternative but it gives White the additional option of 16.g3!?. This isn't too scary, but it seems simplest just to wait for the bishop to land on g2 before advancing our f-pawn. Having the rook on b8 is always useful, as it gives us possibilities such as ...Wd7 and also makes a2-a4 less attractive.

### 16.g2 f5

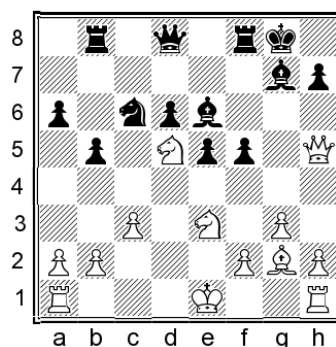
White already has to take into account the possibility of ...f4.

### 17.Wh5

17.0-0 f4! 18.c2 Wd7 is promising for us – and notice how the rook on b8 prevents b6. Let's see a couple of examples: 19.g4 (19.Wh5 f3! 20.gxf3 Bf5 21.Wg4 was seen in Sena – Ippolito, New York 1999, and now 21...Bf4!N 22.Wh5 g7 23.bxf4 gxh5 24.bxh5 Wf5! 25.gxc6 Wxc2 would have given Black some advantage.) 19...Wf7 20.Wd3 Ch8 21.f3 In Masserey – Komarov, Saint Vincent 2002, Black could have seized the initiative with:



21...d4!N 22.cb4 a5 23.cxd4 axb4 24.dxe5 xe5 25.g4 Bbc8 Our initiative and bishop pair are more important than our multitude of pawn islands.



### 17...e4!

There are various playable alternatives, 17...Ch8 being one example, but the text move is active and strong.

### 18.0-0 Ce7 19.bf4 Wd7

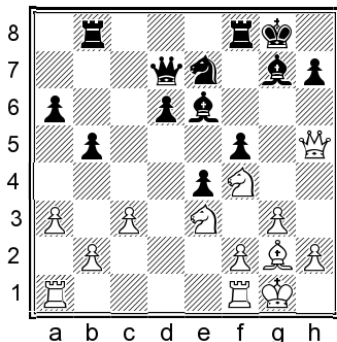
We don't need to get too hung up on preserving the bishop pair. Now we are ready for ...d5, and the bishop can go to e5 at any moment. Let's also not forget about the possibility of queenside play with ...b4.

### 20.a3

20.We2 d5 21.Bad1 ge5 22.bxe6 Wxe6 23.b2 f4 gave Black a nice kingside initiative in Debevec – Thierry, corr. 2009.

Another game ended quickly after 20.bxe6 Wxe6 21.a3, when the players agreed a draw in Bachmann – Hauenstein, corr. 2012. A logical continuation would be 21...d5N 22.Bad1 Ch8 23.Bd2 gh6 with a slight pull for Black; the central pawns are strong, and White's bishop does not have much to do.

Here I found a nice way to improve on a correspondence game:



### 20...d5!N

Again, there's no need to safeguard the bishop pair or chase the white queen at this point.

20...♙f7 21.♖g5 h6 22.♗h4 ♘b3 23.♙h3 ♜f7 24.♖h1 d5 25.♞e2 ♞bf8 led to an eventual success for Black in Moore – Mason, corr. 2013, but the position at this stage seems pretty unclear to me.

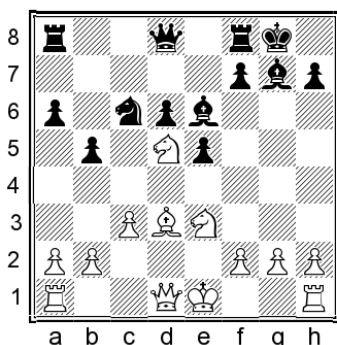
### 21.♞ad1 ♞b6!

We see yet another way in which the rook may prove useful on b8.

### 22.♙h3 ♞d6 23.♖h1 ♖h8

The position remains complicated, but I prefer Black's chances with the strong centre supported by well-placed pieces. Notice that 24.f3? is inadvisable due to 24...♙f7 25.♗h4 ♙f6 26.♗h6 ♞g8, when White will have to lose material to avoid getting the queen trapped.

### B22) 15.♙d3



This is the main line: White develops fast and directs the bishop towards the central light squares and our kingside.

### 15...f5

The two main options are **B221)** 16.♗h5 and **B222)** 16.0-0.

Another idea is:

16.a4 b4 17.0-0

17.cxb4?! ♞d4 gives us a huge initiative.

The most accurate continuation is:

17...♖h8!

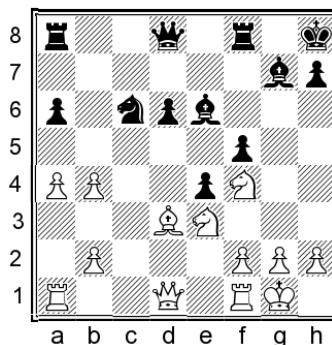
17...bxc3 18.bxc3 ♖h8 is also possible, but after 19.♞b1 White can at least make use of the b-file.

The text move deprives White of any such opportunity.

18.cxb4

This is the only critical attempt to punish us. Without it, White has no open file and no obvious plan.

18...e4 19.♞f4

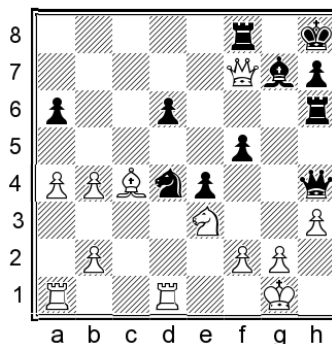


19...♞d4!

Surprisingly, our best approach is to allow the exchange of the bishop.

19...♙g8 gave Black a decent game in Drozniak – Poliakova, Liptovsky Mikulas 2016, but the text move is stronger.

20.♞xe6 ♞xe6 21.♙c4 ♞d4 22.♗h5 ♜f6 23.♞fd1 ♞h6 24.♗f7 ♗h4 25.h3 ♞f8



26.♗xf8+

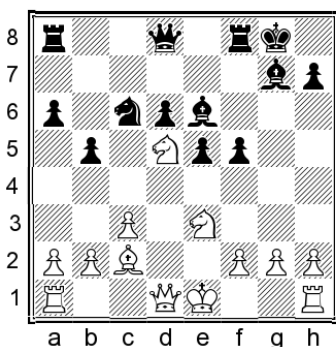
26. ♖d5! ♘f3† 27. ♗f1 ♜h5! 28. ♗b7 f4  
 29. ♘g4 ♘e5 leaves White without a good defence.  
 26... ♙xf8 27. ♜xd4 ♝g6 28. ♙d5 ♝g5

Black went on to convert his advantage in Rozanski – Sherwood, corr. 2019.

A potentially annoying ‘virtual draw offer’ is:

16. ♙c2

White’s idea is to play ♗h5 without allowing ...e4 to come with gain of tempo. It’s not theoretically dangerous, as we have a well-known sequence which virtually forces a draw.



16...f4

This is surely the best move.

If you need to play for a win, then 16... ♙h6!? 17. ♗h5 ♙xe3 18. ♘xe3 ♗e8 is one way to keep the game going. Black stands slightly worse, but the risk isn’t too high and you still have chances to outplay your opponent.

16...e4!? 17. ♘f4 ♙f7 is analysed by Kotronias as a way to avoid the forced draw. Black’s position is playable but there are some risks, and at least one of the ensuing lines ends in perpetual check anyway, so I’m not sure it’s worth the effort of learning the many supporting lines needed to play this way.

Finally, 16... ♜a7 is another way to avoid the forced draw. I don’t really trust it, but if you are willing to take some risks to keep the game complicated, the option is there.

17. ♗h5

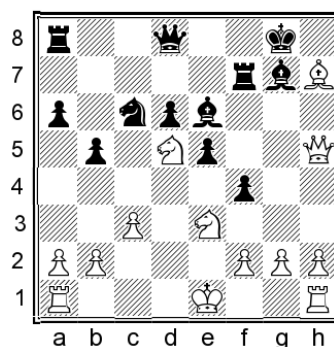
17. ♗d3? is a careless mistake allowing 17... ♗h4 when Black stands better.

17. ♘f1? has been played a few times, but it’s a horribly passive move which we don’t need to waste time analysing.

17... ♜f7 18. ♙xh7†

18. ♙f5? would be a big mistake due to 18... ♜xf5 19. ♘xf5 ♙xd5 20. ♗g4 ♗f8, when our material advantage should decide matters.

18. ♗xh7†?! ♘f8 leaves White without a convincing follow-up, and the knights are still hanging. Play could continue with something like 19. ♗g6 ♗e8 20. 0-0-0 fxe3 21. fxe3 ♜aa7 when the position is still complicated but we have the better chances; we’re ready to offer a queen exchange with ... ♜f2, and we might also open the queenside with ...b4 at any moment.



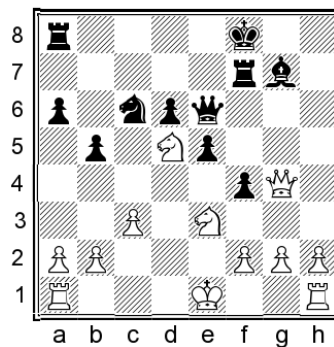
18... ♙f8 19. ♙f5!

White has no other good move.

19... ♗e8

19... ♜xf5? is impossible here in view of 20. ♘xf5 ♙xd5 21. ♜d1 and White wins.

20. ♙xe6 ♗xe6 21. ♗g4



21... ♗h6!

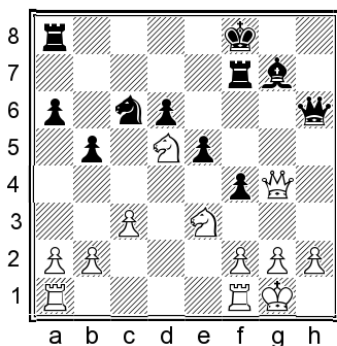
Why do we choose this square for the queen? The point is that if White’s knight retreats to c2, we will play ...e4 with a huge initiative for the sacrificed pawn.

22. 0-0!?

White tries a final trick.

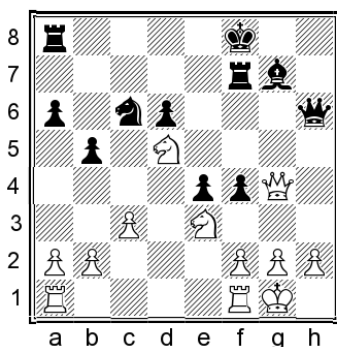
22. ♘f5 ♗e6 23. ♘fe3 is the usual way of repeating the position, which has led to many (prearranged?) draws.

22. ♖b6 is a risky attempt to play on with an extra pawn. 22... ♞d8 23. ♘e5 (23. ♘f5? ♚e6 24. ♘e3 ♜xg4 25. ♘xg4 d5 is clearly worse for White.) 23... e4 Kotronias comments that Black has some initiative for the pawn, but without a clear advantage in sight. However, after 24. h4 ♘e5 25. ♚g5 ♞e8! 26. ♜xh6 ♙xh6 the new Stockfish confirms that Black is clearly better.



22... e4!

22... ♞e3? 23. ♞e3 leaves Black in a hopeless situation.



After the text move we threaten ... ♘e5, so White is more or less forced to take the draw.

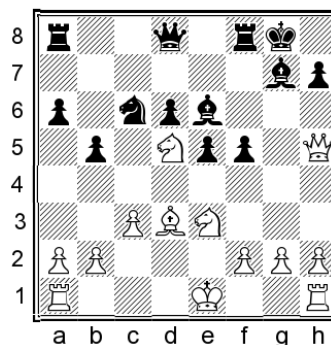
23. ♘f5

23. ♘c2? keeps an extra pawn for now, but hands us a huge initiative. After 23... ♘e5 24. ♚e2 ♜g6 (24... ♞e8!?N is also strong) 25. f3 exf3 26. ♞xf3 ♘xf3† 27. ♚xf3 ♞e8 Black's material advantage was the deciding factor in Saulin – Frolyanov, Tula 2002.

23... ♚e6 24. ♘fe3 ♜h6

The players repeated once more before calling it a day in Radulski – Spasov, Sunny Beach 2009.

### B221) 16. ♜h5



This is the first of White's two critical approaches.

### 16... e4

This is not completely forced, but it's the usual move and best in my view.

### 17. ♙c2 ♘e7

Challenging the strong knight is the most logical idea. White can react in various ways, the main options being **B2211)** 18. ♙b3 and **B2212)** 18. ♘f4.

18. ♘xe7† ♚xe7 seems too cooperative from White's perspective. The aggressive 19. g4! is the only real attempt to challenge us from here, but 19... b4! is a strong and thematic counter-strike. After the further 20. gxf5 ♙f7 21. ♚g4 bxc3 22. bxc3 (22. ♞g1 ♜f6 also favours us) 22... ♙h8 Black stood better in Grigore – Stanculescu, Predeal 2006.

It's also worth mentioning:

18. ♞d1

This has actually been the most popular move of all, but it almost always transposes to a later variation. Here we will briefly look at a few independent possibilities.

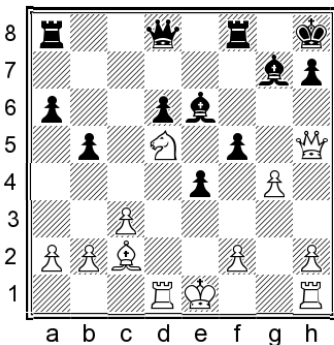
18... ♙h8

18... b4! is a sound alternative which Kotronias recommends. However, rather than learn a whole different set of lines, I find it much simpler to angle for the aforementioned transposition.

19. g4?

19. 0-0 is the overwhelmingly most common continuation, which immediately transposes to variation B222 below.

19. ♖h3 N 19... ♟xd5 20. ♟xd5 is well met by 20... b4! 21. ♟xb4 a5 22. ♟d5 ♟xd5 23. ♞xd5 ♞b6 24. 0-0 ♞xb2 25. ♟d1, and now we have a pleasant choice between 25... ♟e5 with a positional edge, and 25... ♞xa2 26. ♞xf5 ♞xf5 27. ♞xf5 ♞c4 when the strong passer offers us some winning chances. 19... ♟xd5 20. ♟xd5



White was eventually successful in Liccardo – Panken, Long Island 1997, but at this point Black missed an excellent resource:

20... b4! N 21. ♟xb4

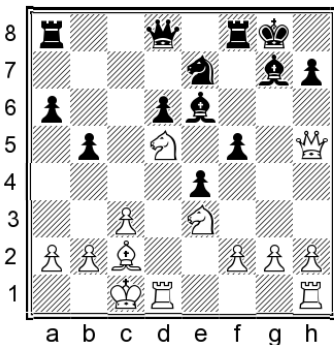
21. cxb4 ♞c8 22. ♟b3 ♟f7 is also great for us.

21... a5 22. ♟d5 ♞b8

White has huge problems.

18. 0-0-0?!

This aggressive try was once played against me by Velimirovic, who was exceptional in his theoretical knowledge at the time. However, I was ready for it:



18... b4!

It's important to create counterplay before f2-f3 comes.

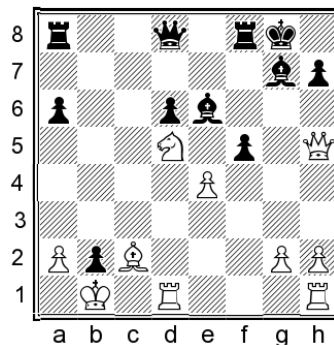
18... ♟xd5 19. ♟xd5 ♞b8 followed by ...b4 is also strong according to the engine, but I like the directness of my chosen move.

19. f3

19. ♟xb4 a5 20. ♟bd5 was seen in Helm – Rudolph, Germany 2003. Black has a few

tempting continuations but I like the flexible 20... ♟h8!? N, and if 21. f3? ♟xd5 22. ♟xd5 ♞b8 our queenside threats are too strong.

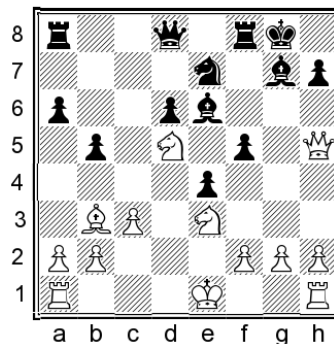
19... ♟xd5 20. ♟xd5 bxc3 21. fxe4 cxb2† 22. ♟b1



22... ♞c8!

The pressure on the c2-bishop was too much to handle in Velimirovic – Pavlovic, Yugoslavia 2003.

### B2211) 18. ♟b3



White maintains the knight on d5 and seeks a bishop exchange.

18... ♟g6

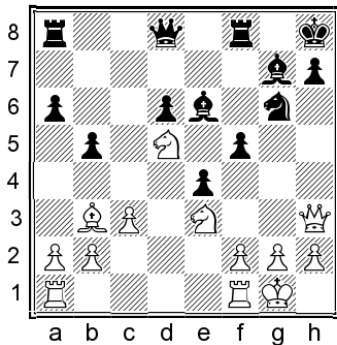
Other moves are possible, but I prefer to avoid excessive exchanges and prevent ♟f4, while also threatening ...f4 ourselves.

19. g3

This is the usual choice, restraining our f-pawn. White has tried several other moves, but the basic rule is that practically anything which allows ...f4 is bad.

19. 0-0? f4 20. ♟c2 ♟h8 is a dream Sveshnikov for us.

19. ♖h3? White temporarily prevents ...f4 by means of a crude pin. The trouble is that once we safeguard the bishop, the alignment of bishop and queen will make the threat of ...f4 even more painful to deal with. 19... ♖h8 20.0-0 This position was reached in Negi – Yu Yangyi, Chalkidiki 2003: a battle in the World Under-10 Championship between two future stars of the game. Black has a choice of good options, but the best and most consistent is:



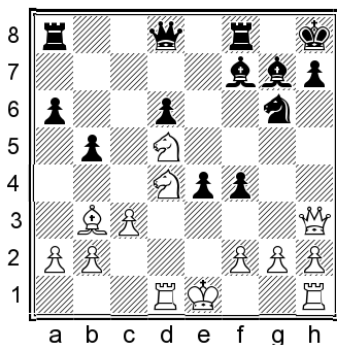
20... ♗d7!N Now ...f4 is a huge threat. White's only sensible option is 21.f4, but then 21...exf3 22. ♖xf3 f4 23. ♗c2 ♗e5 24. ♖e2 ♗g4 25. ♖d2 f3 gives us a serious advantage.

19. ♖d1? f4 20. ♗c2

White hopes to benefit from not having castled, but the e4-f4 pawn duo is extremely strong regardless.

20... ♖h8 21. ♗d4 ♗f7 22. ♖h3

Out of several strong continuations, the most accurate is:



22...a5!N

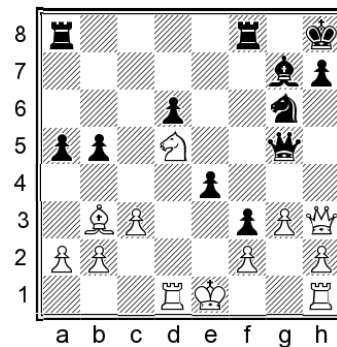
22... ♗xd4 23. ♖xd4 ♗h4 24. ♖f1 ♖g5 placed White under heavy pressure in de Vriendt – Moreira, corr. 2001.

22... ♗h4N is also excellent.

23. ♗e6

23.a3 a4 24. ♗a2 ♖g5 is horrible for White.

23... ♗xe6 24. ♖xe6 ♖g5 25. ♖h3 f3 26.g3

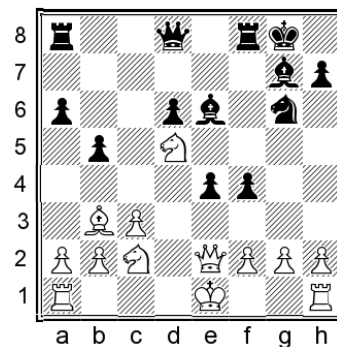


26...a4 27. ♗c2 ♖ae8 28.0-0 ♖e5 29. ♗e3 ♗f4 30. ♖g4 ♖h6

White is getting mauled on the kingside.

19. ♖e2?! f4 20. ♗c2

This has been played a few times. I guess White is hoping to prove that we're overextended in the centre, while also keeping the option of long castling. However, we have a great position after:



20...a5!

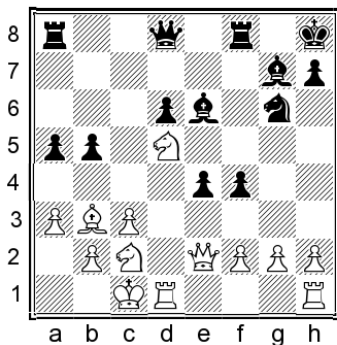
Depriving the knights of the b4-square, while also threatening to trap the bishop.

21.a3

21.a4? bxa4 22. ♖xa4 ♖b8 is simply winning.

21. ♖xb5 proved too dangerous after 21...a4 22. ♗c4 ♗e5 23. ♗d4 ♗f7 24. ♗c6 ♖g5 25. ♗xe5 ♗xe5 26.0-0 ♖h8 27. ♖h1 ♖ab8 28. ♖xa4 ♖xb2 29. ♗b3 ♖h6 and White resigned in Espirito Santo – Jaulneau, corr. 2003.

21... ♖h8 22.0-0-0

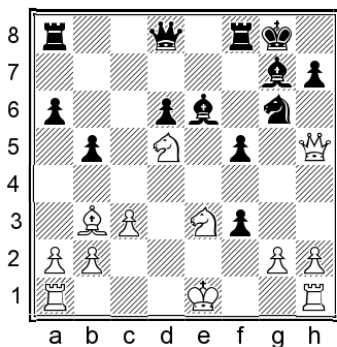


22...b4! 23.axb4 axb4 24.♖cxb4 f3

Black's initiative soon became overwhelming in Kusmierek – Polovnikov, corr. 2009.

Another substandard option is:

19.f4?! exf3



20.0-0!N

Playing in King's Gambit style seems like White's best attempt, although ultimately it doesn't quite work. Alternatives give us an easier advantage, for instance:

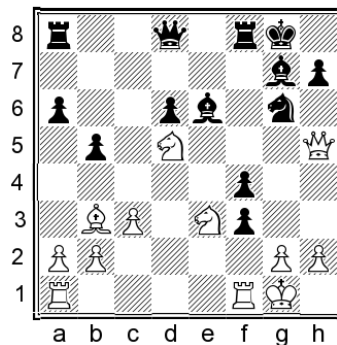
20.♙xf3 f4 21.♘c2 a5 22.a3 ♔h8 gave Black a clear advantage in MacKinnon – Shabalov, Calgary 2007, and 22...♙g5!N might be even stronger.

20.gxf3 f4 21.♘g4 ♖f5! 22.♙xf5 ♙xf5 23.♘e7† ♔f8 24.♘xf5 saw White giving up the queen for a rook and minor piece in a desperate attempt to survive in Bruere – Jamieson, corr. 1985. Black has a few ways to win: Kotronias points out 24...♙xc3†!N 25.bxc3 ♙c8, which is certainly a natural human choice, although the engine likes the disruptive 24...♙e8†!N much more.

Finally, 20.g3N hardly inspires confidence, and after 20...f4 21.gxf4 ♘xf4 22.♘xf4 ♙xb3 23.♙g4 f2† 24.♔xf2 h5 25.♙g3 ♙c4 26.♘xc4 bxc4 27.♔g2 ♖b8 we again stand much better.

20...f4

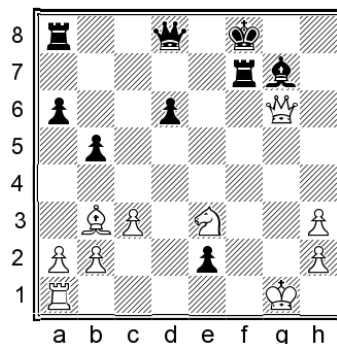
20...fxg2 21.♖xf5 is not so clear.



21.♖xf3!

The sacrificial attack is a nice idea, but we can refute it with careful play.

21...fxe3 22.♖h3 ♖f7! 23.♙xh7† ♔f8 24.♙xg6 ♙xh3 25.gxh3 e2 26.♘e3



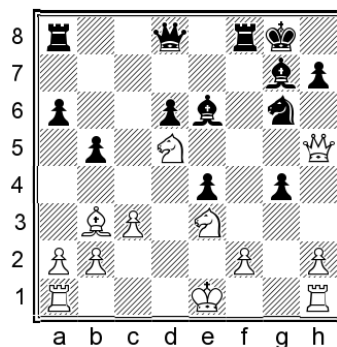
26...d5! 27.♙xd5 ♖aa7

White is in trouble due to our dangerous passer, along with tactical motifs such as ...♙xc3 followed by ...♖g7.

19.g4!?

This aggressive continuation is the most interesting alternative to the main line, although I would be happy to see it as Black.

19...fxg4



20.h3

20.♘xg4?! is the wrong idea, and 20...♔h8! 21.♘ge3 ♘e5 22.♙c2 ♙f7 23.♙h3 ♘f3† 24.♔e2

♙g6 saw Black take over in Wielenga – Hoeksema, Groningen 2005.

20...g3 21.fxg3 ♖h8

The position is rather double-edged but I like Black's chances: we have a great pair of bishops and promising attacking chances against the enemy king.

22.0-0-0

After 22.♙c2? Kotronias offers 22...♙f7 which looks pretty logical, but 22...b4! is a powerful blow which poses White more immediate problems.

22...b4!

Again we can improve on 22...♙f7 as given by Kotronias.

23.♘xb4 ♙xb3 24.axb3 a5

We have a promising initiative, for instance:

25.♘bc2

25.♘bd5N is well met by: 25...♙b8! (25...a4!? 26.bxa4 ♙a5 is also possible, when 27.♖hf1 ♙xa4 28.♖xf8† ♖xf8 should be equal according to my analysis.) 26.♙g4 ♙xb3 27.♙xe4 ♖f2 28.♖d2 ♖xd2 29.♙xd2 ♙xb2† 30.♙c2 Now after 30...♙b7 (or 30...♙b8!?) we have the safer king and the passed a-pawn may prove dangerous.

25...♘e5

In the game we are following, White came under strong pressure:

26.♙b1

26.♖hf1!N looks like the best chance although 26...♙b6 is still pleasant for us, for instance: 27.♖xf8† ♖xf8 28.♙b1 ♙xb3 29.♘d4 ♙b6 30.♙e2 ♘d3 31.♘d5 ♙b7 32.♘f4 ♙xd4 33.cxd4 ♘xf4 34.gxf4 ♙b3!? White may be able to hold, but only Black can be better.

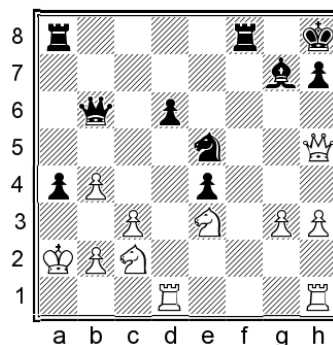
26...♙b6

Our attack flows easily.

27.♙a2

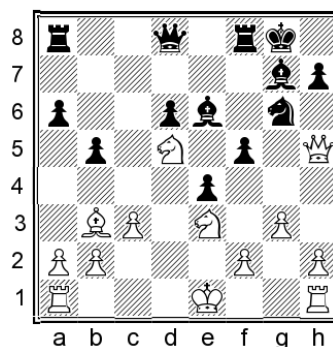
27.♖h2 runs into 27...a4 28.b4 a3 29.♘d5 ♙c6 30.♘xa3 ♖xa3! 31.bxa3 ♘c4!, and our attack should decide matters.

27...a4 28.b4



28...a3! 29.♙e2 axb2† 30.♙xb2 ♖fc8

White was unable to withstand the assault in Rimkus – Cruzado Duenas, corr. 2005.



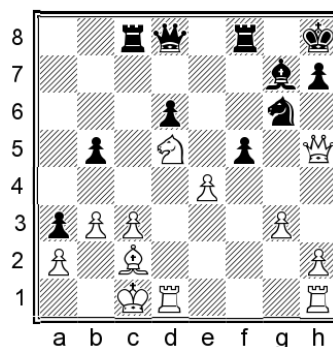
19...♙h8

This is always a useful move in these lines.

20.0-0

This seems most natural, but our kingside play flows easily enough.

20.0-0-0?! has been played but we get an easy attack: 20...a5 21.f3 a4 22.♙c2 a3 23.b3 ♖c8 24.fxe4 ♙xd5 25.♘xd5



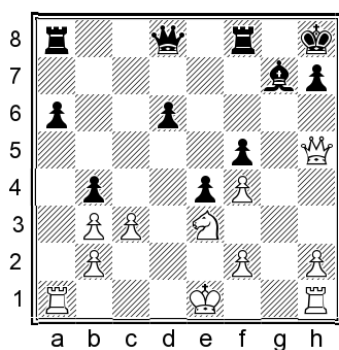
25...♘e7! Removing the key defender of the c3-pawn. 26.♙b1 ♘xd5 27.♖xd5 ♙f6 White was in huge trouble on the long diagonal in Kusmierek – Raijmaekers, corr. 2009.

20.♘f4

This feels like an odd choice, but it may be White's best if followed up correctly. Still, White is fighting for equality rather than an advantage.

20...♖xf4 21.gxf4 ♘xb3 22.axb3 b4

By now, White really needs to hide the king away with:



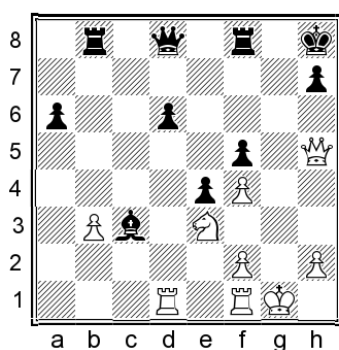
23.0-0!N

23.c4 ♘xb2 24.♞d1 ♘c3† 25.♔f1 a5 26.c5 a4 gave Black a big advantage in Zambrana – Fernandez Cardoso, Santa Clara 2003.

23.♗xf5 bxc3 24.♗xg7 cxb2 25.♞b1 ♞f6! also left White in trouble in Shim Ng Min – Astroukh, corr. 2015.

23...bxc3 24.bxc3 ♘xc3 25.♞ad1 ♞b8

White can maintain equality after:

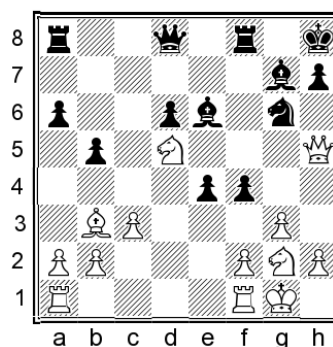


26.♞d5 ♞xb3 27.♞fd1 ♞e8 28.♞xe8 ♞xe8 29.♞xd6 a5

The endgame should be a draw, but we have some chances with the a-pawn.

**20...f4 21.♗g2?**

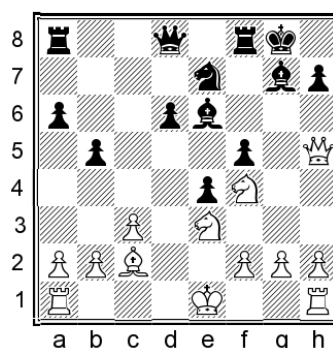
21.♗xf4N is necessary, although 21...♗xf4 22.gxf4 ♘xb3 23.axb3 ♞xf4 24.♗g2 ♞f6 gives us somewhat better chances due to our safer king.



21...♞f5! 22.♞d1 f3 23.♗ge3 ♞h5

White was in grave danger on the kingside in Rimkus – Krzyzanowski, corr. 2011.

**B2212) 18.♗f4**

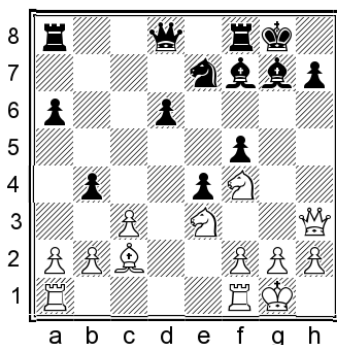


We saw in the previous variation how effective our knight could be on g6, so it's pretty logical for White to drop the knight back to f4 while it has the chance.

**18...♞f7 19.♞b3**

Other moves give us an easy game, for instance:

19.♞h3 b4! (19...♞e5 and 19...♔h8!? are decent options, but the text move is strongest.) 20.0-0 (20.♗xf5? is impossible due to 20...♗xf5 21.♞xf5 ♘c4 22.♞g4 as seen in Pina Vega – Aksiuczyc, Medellin 1996, when 22...♞f6!N 23.g3 ♔h8 would have been horrible for White.) This position was reached in Agnelli – Gagliardi, Crema 2010, and now I suggest:

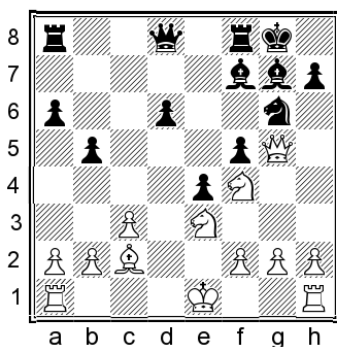


20...♙e5!N Let's improve the bishop and attack the knight on f4. Our next move is likely to be ...♚h8, safeguarding the king and preparing to use the open g-file. We will most likely exchange pawns on c3 in the near future as well, but for now we don't have to rush with it.

Also harmless is:

19.♙g5 ♘g6!

This practically forces a pleasant endgame.



20.♙xd8

20.♙xf5? is again much too optimistic in view of 20...♙c4 21.♘e6 ♙xc3†! 22.♚d1 (22.bxc3 ♙a5 is killing) 22...♞xf5 23.♘xd8 ♞xf2 (the engine likes 23...♙xb2!N even more, but the game continuation is good enough) 24.bxc3 ♞xd8 25.♘xc4 bxc4 26.♙xe4 d5, and the endgame was horrible for White in Dobschat – Vonthron, Eppingen 2004.

20...♞axd8

20...♞fxd8!? is an interesting idea, keeping the other rook available for possible activities on the c-line. However, it doesn't make a big difference, and I would lean towards keeping the rook on f5 just in case an active opportunity arises on the kingside.

21.♘h5

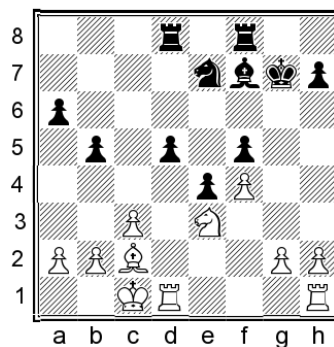
White should eliminate the strong bishop on g7, otherwise we will have an easy advantage.

21...♘e7!

The start of an effective regrouping.

22.♘xg7 ♚xg7 23.f4 d5 24.0-0-0

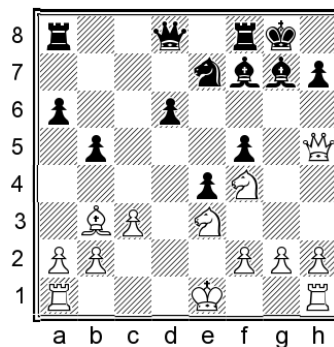
My improvement is:



24...h5!

We don't have to rush anything, and can take our time to squeeze with our extra space and big centre. 24...b4 25.♙b3 bxc3 26.bxc3 ♞c8 27.♚b2 ♞c5 was absolutely fine for Black in Dvoirys – Yagupov, St Petersburg 1998, but the exchange of pawns on the queenside has not achieved a great deal, so I'd prefer to keep that idea in reserve for the time being. 25.♞d2 ♞d7 26.♞hd1 ♞fd8

Our king will go to f6 next, and then we can consider possible pawn advances and other ways of creeping forwards. If White tries 27.♙b3 intending ♘c2-d4, then 27...a5 maintains the pressure.



19...d5!

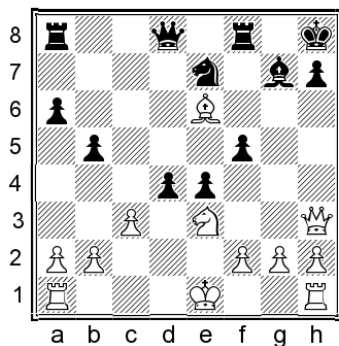
Black has allowed the bishops to be exchanged in some games, but I prefer to avoid simplifications and play with a strong centre, while also gaining a tempo against the white queen. Obviously White will aim to put pressure on the d5-pawn, but we have plenty of resources to deal with it.

20.♙g5

This is the most popular and best continuation. Against anything else, we have excellent chances to obtain the better play, for instance:

Firstly, I briefly checked the untested 20.♖e2N, when 20...d4 21.♙xf7† ♜xf7 22.cxd4 ♚xd4 23.0-0 ♚xb2 24.♚h5 ♚f6 25.♞ad1 ♞af8 is a logical line which leaves White without enough compensation for the missing pawn.

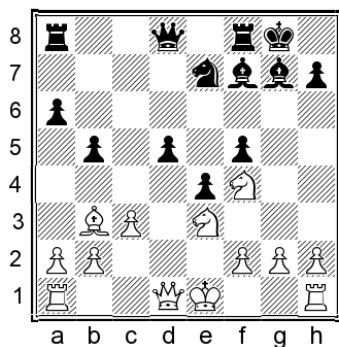
20.♚h3?! d4 21.♘e6?! (21.cxd4N looks like the lesser evil although 21...♙xb3 22.axb3 ♚d6 is more than okay for us.) 21...♙xe6 22.♙xe6† ♖h8



23.♞d1 (23.♘xf5? was played in Bokros – Jelen, Budapest 1999, when Black missed the winning continuation 23...♘g6!N with the deadly threat of ...♘f4.) 23...♚d6 24.♙xf5 ♘xf5 25.♘xf5 ♚f4 26.g4 dxc3 27.bxc3 e3! White was unable to cope with the problems in Aldrete Lobo – Klauner, corr. 2005.

20.♚d1?!

This is another sub-par move, although our strongest reply is far from obvious:



20...♖h8!!N  
20...d4:

21.♙xf7† ♜xf7 22.♘e6 (22.cxd4 ♚a5† is promising for Black) 22...♚b6 23.♘xd4 f4 24.♘ec2 was seen in Herejk – Brom, Czech Republic 2003, when 24...♚g6!N would have given Black a clear advantage. But going back a few moves, 21.cxd4!N would have been unclear.

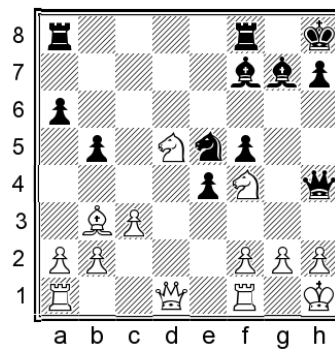
20...♞a7!?N 21.♘exd5 ♘xd5 22.♙xd5 ♞d7 23.♙xf7† ♞fx7 is an interesting continuation offering at least sufficient compensation for the pawn, but the text move is more accurate.

21.♘exd5

White has no other decent move.

21...♘c6! 22.0-0 ♘e5 23.♖h1 ♚h4

We have a dangerous initiative. My analysis continues:



24.f3!

Another only move.

24...exf3 25.gxf3 ♞ad8 26.♚c2

26.♚e1?! ♚h6! gives us a clear advantage, as White's pieces are unstable.

26...♘c4

We have more than enough compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

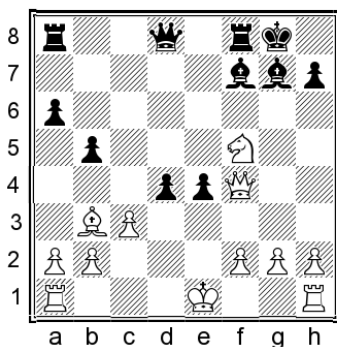
**20...♘g6!**

Forcing a queen exchange. The key point is that we can sacrifice the d5-pawn, as we will get plenty of activity to compensate for it.

20...a5!?N is an interesting alternative which the engine rates as equally good. 21.0-0-0! is the best reply, and after 21...b4 22.♘exd5 ♘xd5 23.♚xd8 ♞fxd8 the position remains balanced after White recaptures on d5 with either the knight or the bishop.

**21.♚xd8**

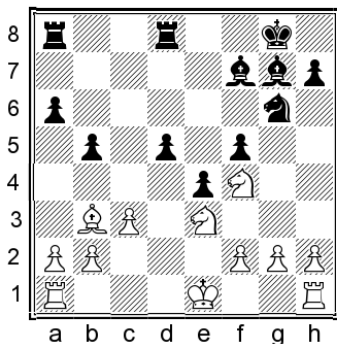
21. ♖xf5? is yet again a terrible idea: 21... ♗xf4  
 22. ♗xf4 d4 23. ♗f5 (23. ♗xf7† ♖xf7 24. ♗f5 ♗d5  
 25. ♗h6† ♗xh6 26. ♗xh6 e3 27. 0-0-0 exf2 is also  
 winning for us.)



23... ♗xb3 24. axb3 ♗f6 25. g4 dxc3 26. bxc3? This  
 loses instantly, but White was busted anyway.  
 26... ♗xc3† 27. ♖e2 ♗d3† 28. ♖e1 ♗c3† It was all  
 over in Kohut – Deeb, corr. 2006.

### 21... ♖fxd8

We have reached another interesting  
 queenless position.



### 22. ♗exd5

Taking the pawn is the only critical try.

22.g3!?N is an unnatural yet playable  
 alternative. Play could continue 22... d4 23. cxd4  
 ♗xb3 24. axb3 ♗xf4 (24... ♗xd4 25. ♗e6! ♗xb2  
 26. ♗xf5 ♗xa1 27. ♗h6† ♖h8 28. ♗f7† is a  
 surprising perpetual) 25. gxf4 ♗xd4 26. ♖g1† ♖h8  
 27. ♗xf5 ♗xb2 28. ♖a2 ♗f6 when the endgame  
 should be a draw, but we have some chances  
 connected with the strong bishop and future  
 passed a-pawn.

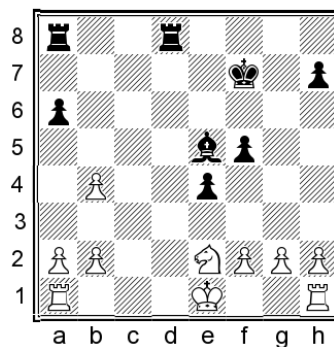
### 22... ♗xf4 23. ♗xf4 ♗e5

Despite the simplifications, our activity  
 provides full compensation for the missing pawn.

### 24.g3

This has been the usual continuation, keeping  
 the knight on a strong square. I checked two other  
 possibilities:

24. ♗xf7† ♖xf7 25. ♗e2 b4 26. cxb4



26... a5!? (26... ♗xb2 is also fine, with a  
 transposition to the 24. ♗e2N line below.) 27. b5  
 a4 28. ♖c1 ♖d5 29. 0-0 ♖xb5 Black regained the  
 pawn with easy equality in Santagata – Schmidt,  
 corr. 2007.

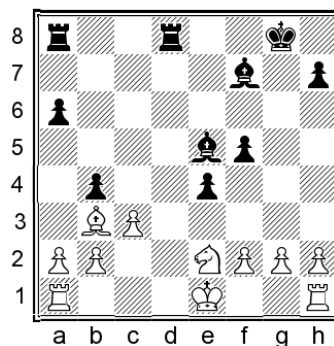
The other natural idea is:

24. ♗e2N

Keeping the light-squared bishops on the board for  
 the moment. White wants to bolster c3 in  
 anticipation of our ...b4 break, but the knight  
 stands passively and we will still get our  
 counterplay.

24... b4

Our typical break works well again. White has a  
 few options but nothing leading to any more than  
 equality.



25. 0-0

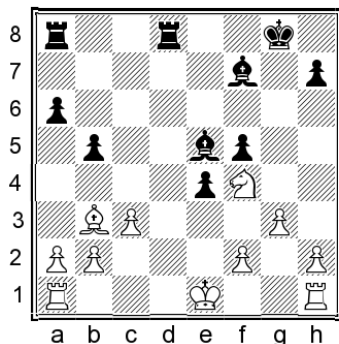
25. cxb4 ♗xb2 (25... a5!? is also fine, like in the  
 Santagata – Schmidt game noted above.) 26. ♗xf7†  
 ♖xf7 27. ♖b1 ♗e5 28. ♗g3 ♖e6 29. ♖e2 ♖ac8

30.♖hc1 ♕f4 White keeps an extra pawn for now, but our activity is worth at least as much.

Removing a pair of rooks doesn't change the assessment: 25.♞d1 bxc3 26.bxc3 ♖ac8 27.♞xd8† ♞xd8 28.f3 exf3 29.gxf3 ♞d3 30.♔f2 ♕xc3, with an equal endgame.

25...♞d2 26.♘g3 ♕xb3 27.axb3 ♕xg3 28.fxg3 ♞c8 29.♞xf5 ♞xb2 30.cxb4 ♞cc2

The endgame is heading for a draw, one way or another.



24...b4!

If you've looked at the above variations, this move will come as no surprise.

25.♕xf7† ♔xf7 26.cxb4 ♕xb2

White failed to cause Black any problems in either of the games that reached this position.

27.♞b1

27.♞d1 ♞xd1† 28.♔xd1 ♞c8 29.♞f1 ♞c1† 30.♔e2 ♞c2† was soon agreed drawn due to the repetition in Martini – Fancsy, Hungary 2008.

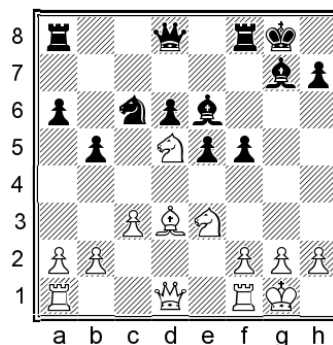
27...♕c3† 28.♔e2 ♞d2† 29.♔e3 ♞ad8

29...♞xa2 30.♞hd1 ♞b8 is also okay, but the text move seems simplest.

30.♖hc1 ♕e5 31.♞c5 ♕xf4† 32.♔xf4 ♞xf2† 33.♔e3 ♞f3† 34.♔e2 ♔e6

Black successfully regained the pawn and had no problems in Skalicky – Sikorsky, corr. 2011.

## B222) 16.0-0



Before doing anything committal, White gets castled. This is rightly considered the main line of this system.

16...♔h8!

This tends to be the best square for the king in these positions. We vacate the g8-square for the rook or bishop, while also avoiding certain tactical tricks. Interestingly, although theory has advanced tremendously since *Experts vs the Sicilian* was published, Aagaard was correct in identifying the king move as the critical future direction of this variation.

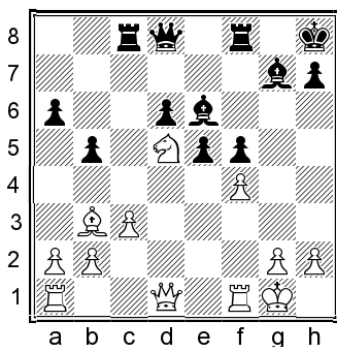
Beware! The natural-looking 16...♘e7? is a famous blunder, but it has been played in hundreds of games on the database, including by Harikrishna back in 2001, as well as by many IMs, FM and other players who should know better. 17.♘xe7† ♞xe7 18.♕xf5! White wins a pawn as well as a huge positional advantage, due to the tactical point of 18...♕xf5 19.♘xf5 ♞xf5 20.♞d5† picking up the rook on a8. So please make a mental note of this trap and avoid becoming the next victim.

16...♞a7 is the old main line but the king move has taken over as the choice of experts nowadays.

We will analyse B2221) 17.a4 followed by the main line of B2222) 17.♞h5.

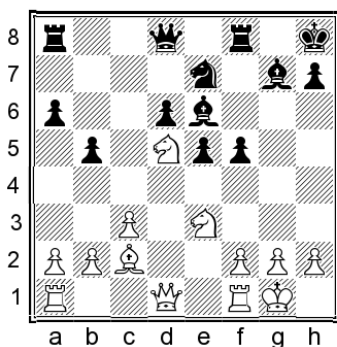
17.f4 is not so common, although the general idea is quite thematic: White tries to exert pressure on f5 in the hope of provoking ...e4, which would leave us with a static structure and White would be able to prepare a g4 break. 17...♘e7 We avoid falling in with White's plan, and play the move we

were intending anyway. 18.♔c2 ♖xd5 19.♗xd5 ♜c8 20.♙b3



20...a5 21.a3 ♜e8! Black had a lot of activity in Ki. Georgiev – Van Wely, Bled (ol) 2002.

The other option worth considering is: 17.♔c2 ♗e7



Challenging White's control of d5 is generally part of our strategy, but – let me remind you – only after avoiding the tactical trap mentioned on the previous move!

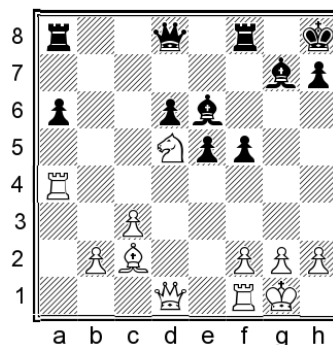
18.a4

18.♗h1 ♗xd5 19.♗xd5 a5 20.a3 ♜c8! gave Black slightly better chances in Jaulin – Bouhallel, Avoine 1999. Soon we will force the knight to retreat from d5 with some combination of ...♜e8-f7 and ...♜c5, or even ...♜c5 followed by ...♜a8.

18.♗xe7 ♜xe7 19.♙b3 f4 20.♗d5 (20.♙xe6?! ♜xe6 21.♗d5 gives us excellent attacking chances after 21...f3 or 21...e4) 20...♜f7 21.f3 a5 22.a3 ♙f6 23.♜d3? was seen in Joshi – D. Singh, Hyderabad 2006, and now 23...♙h4!N followed by ...♜g8 would have led to a decisive attack.

18...♗xd5 19.♗xd5 bxa4 20.♜xa4

Here I would be tempted to try:



20...e4!N

20...a5 is a fully sound alternative which was played in Khachiyani – Sevillano, Burbank 2003, but I like the idea of activating our dark-squared bishop.

21.♙b3

21.♜d2 ♙e5! sees the bishop take up its ideal square, pointing towards the white king.

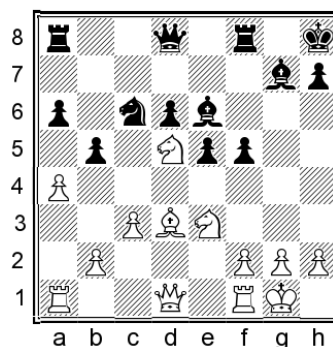
21...♜b8!

It's worth giving up the a-pawn in order to mess up White's coordination.

22.♜xa6 ♙e5 23.g3 ♜g5

Our attack is worth at least a pawn.

### B2221) 17.a4



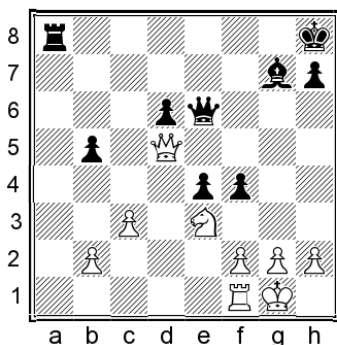
17...♗e7!

We challenge White's strong knight in the usual fashion, even with the b5-pawn under fire.

18.♗xe7 ♜xe7 19.axb5 e4 20.♙c4

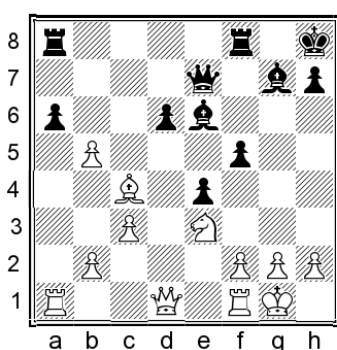
20.♙e2? f4! 21.♗d5 ♜g5 wins material due to the hanging knight and the threat of ...f3.

20.♙c2!N isn't a bad option, although we are still doing fine after: 20...axb5 21.♜xa8 ♜xa8 22.♙b3 f4 23.♙xe6 ♜xe6 24.♜d5



24...♙g8! 25.♚xg8† ♔xg8 26.♘d5 f3 We are certainly not worse in this endgame.

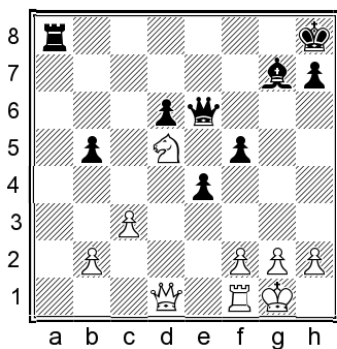
I found a useful improvement:



20...f4!N

This improves over:

20...axb5 21.♞xa8 ♞xa8 22.♙xe6  
 22.♙xb5?! f4 gives Black more than enough play for a pawn.  
 22.♙d5 ♞f8 23.♚b3 ♙d7 was fine for Black in Emelyanov – Jaulneau, corr. 2001.  
 22...♚xe6 23.♘d5  
 23.♚d5!? is interesting, although 23...♚xd5  
 24.♘xd5 ♞a2 25.♞b1 ♔g8 26.♘e7† ♔f7 27.♘xf5  
 ♙e5 gives Black enough activity for the pawn.



In S. Oliveira – Quillien, France 2007, 23...♙e5!N would have been best, although Black is still marginally worse.

21.♙xe6 fxe3!

21...♚xe6 22.♚d5! is a bit awkward.

22.♚d5

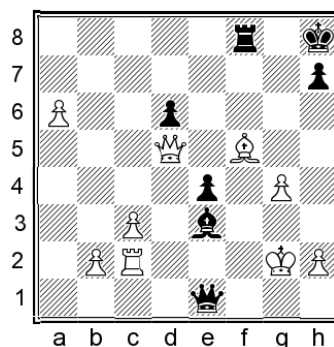
22.♙d5 is harmless: 22...exf2† 23.♞xf2 (23.♔h1? e3 24.♚e2 ♞ae8 25.bxa6 ♚g5 26.♙f3 ♙e5 is hopeless for White) 23...♞xf2 24.♙xa8 ♞xb2 25.♔h1 ♞xb5 26.♞xa6 ♞b8 It should be a draw, although White still needs to take care to keep the passed e-pawn under control.

22...exf2† 23.♞xf2 ♚a7

The position is balanced, as the following lines demonstrate:

24.♞af1

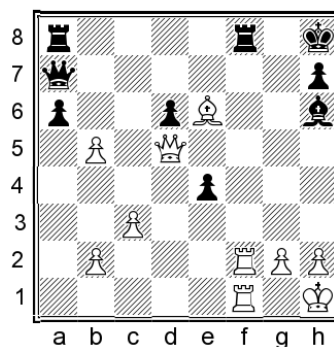
24.♙f5 ♙h6! 25.♞xa6 ♚e3 26.g4 ♚e1†  
 27.♔g2 ♙e3 28.♞c2 ♞xa6 29.bxa6



29...♚g1† 30.♔h3 ♚f1† 31.♞g2 ♚f3† 32.♞g3 ♚f1† 33.♔h4 ♚f2 The game will end in a repetition of moves.

24...♙h6 25.♔h1

25.b6!? ♚xb6 doesn't change much. For instance, 26.♔h1 ♞xf2 27.♚xa8† ♙f8 28.♙c4 ♞xf1† 29.♙xf1 ♚f2 30.♚xa6 ♚xb2 with a drawing endgame.



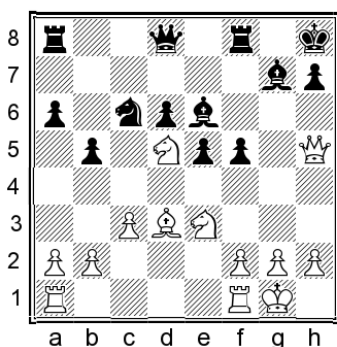
25...♖xf2 26.♗xf2 ♘xf2 27.♚xa8† ♕f8 28.h3 ♚f1†

We must take the draw, as 28...e3? 29.♕c4 is no good.

29.♖h2 ♚f4†

The game ends in perpetual check.

B2222) 17.♚h5



This was Aagaard's recommendation, and it remains the most popular continuation. The pressure on f5 prevents us from playing ...♗e7 immediately, so the logical continuation is:

17...e4 18.♕c2 ♗e7 19.♖ad1

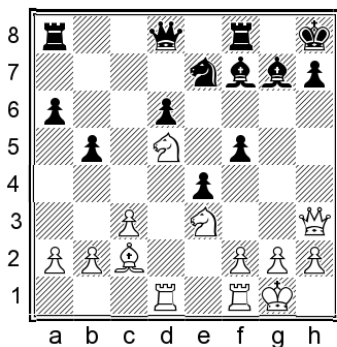
After some normal moves, with both sides developing and fighting for control of d5, it's time for an important subtlety.

19...♕f7!

This refinement has solved all Black's problems in this line.

Aagaard only analysed 19...♖c8 as played in an Anand – Topalov blitz game from 2004.

20.♚h3



20...♗xd5 21.♗xd5 ♚g5

Having driven White's queen back, we can deploy our queen on this ideal square. Next we can increase our activity with ...♕e5, or simply ...♖ae8.

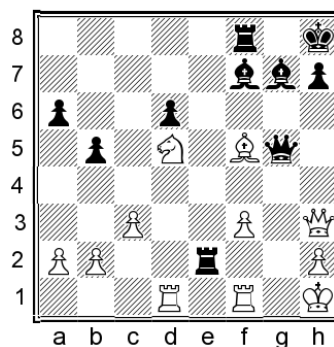
22.♚e3

Several other moves are possible, but there's nothing for us to worry about. For instance:

22.♚g3 ♚h6 23.♚e3 was played in Azarov – Jacobson, St Louis 2018, and now 23...♚xe3!N is a convenient transposition to our main line below.

22.f4?! is a positionally desirable move, but here it suffers from a concrete drawback: 22...exf3 23.♖xf3 ♕xd5 24.♖xd5 ♚c1† 25.♕d1 ♖ae8 26.♖f1 ♚xb2 Black picked up a pawn in Bozzali – Spasov, Anzere 2011.

22.♖h1 ♖ae8 23.f4? (23.♕b3N is better, although 23...♕h5 24.f4 exf3 25.gxf3 ♖e2 26.♖g1 ♚h6 leaves us with a full share of the chances.) 23...exf3 24.gxf3 ♖e2 25.♕xf5 In Olsson – Spasov, Gothenburg 2005, Black missed an excellent opportunity:

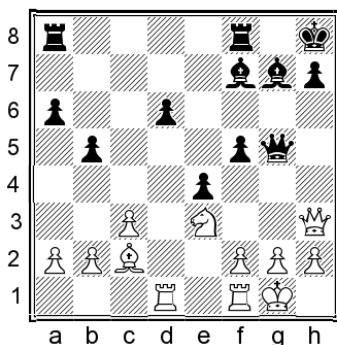


25...♕h5!N 26.♕g4 (26.♕e4 ♚h6! puts White under terrible pressure, the main threat being ...♖xe4.) 26...♕xg4 27.♚xg4 ♚xg4 28.fxg4 ♖xf1† 29.♖xf1 ♖xb2 30.a3 ♕e5 Black has great winning chances in the endgame.

The other important option is:

22.♗e3?

Although it looks tempting to attack two pawns, this is actually an instructive mistake, as we will gain far too much activity in return.



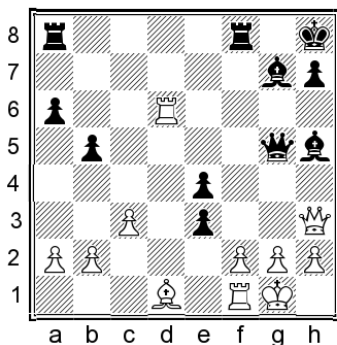
22...♙h5! 23.♞xd6

23.♞de1 b4! is also excellent for us.

23...f4 24.♙d1

24.♞d5 ♙e5 25.♘d1 ♙g4 26.♞xe5 ♞f5! saw Black pick up the queen for questionable compensation in Rimkus – Korabliov, corr. 2011.

24...fxe3



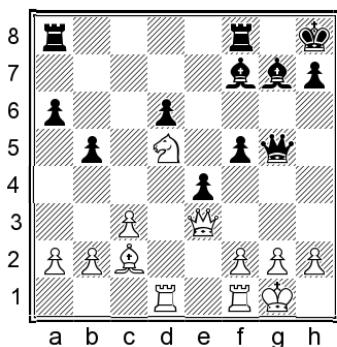
25.♙xh5

25.♞xh5?! exf2†! 26.♙h1 ♞e7 27.♞d5 e3 gives us an even better version of the same kind of position.

25...exf2† 26.♙h1 e3 27.♙e2 ♞ad8 28.♞e6 ♞fe8

The mighty e- and f-pawns are the dominant feature of the position, and White was unable to maintain the blockade in Guedes Jr – Ferreira, corr. 2015.

In Azarov – Spasov, Eforie Nord 2008, Black should have continued with:



22...♞xe3!N 23.fxe3

23.♘xe3 is nothing to fear, as 23...♙xa2 24.b3? ♙xc3 clearly favours us.

23...♙xd5 24.♞xd5 ♙e5

The endgame is fine for us, as shown by the following illustrative lines.

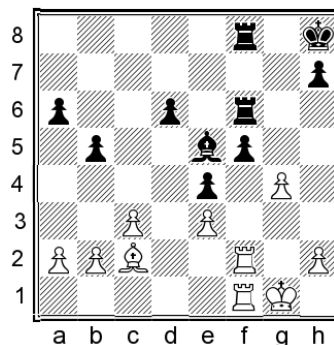
25.♞d2

Targeting f5 seems like White's best attempt to do something.

25.a4 bxa4 (25...♞ab8 is fine too) 26.♙xa4 gives us no problems after 26...♙g7 or 26...♞ab8.

25...♞f6 26.h3

26.♞df2 ♞af8 27.g4 gets nowhere after:



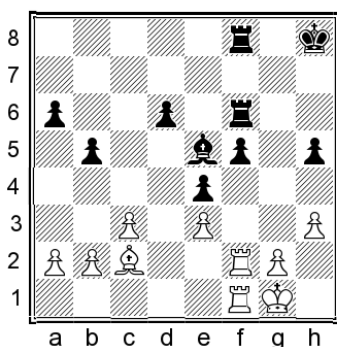
27...fxg4 28.♞xf6 ♙xf6 (28...♞xf6 29.♞xf6 ♙xf6 30.a3 h5 31.♙xe4 ♙g7 is even more drawish.)

29.♞f4 d5 30.♙b3 h5 31.♙xd5 ♙g7 32.♙xe4 ♞e8 We'll regain the pawn while keeping a marginal edge in activity, although it should still be a draw of course.

26...h5

26...♞af8 27.g4 f4!? is a decent alternative which avoids a mass exchange of rooks, thus keeping a bit more play in the position in case you want to push for a win.

27.♞df2 ♞af8



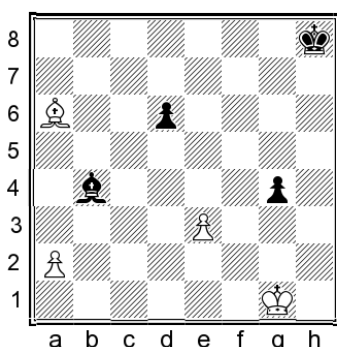
### 28.g4

Otherwise we'll seal up the kingside with ...h4 and continue to strengthen our position.

**28...hxg4 29.hxg4 fxg4 30.♖xf6 ♖xf6 31.♖xf6 ♗xf6 32.♕xe4 b4!?**

32...♔g7 also draws easily.

**33.cxb4 ♗xb2 34.♗d3 ♗a3 35.♗xa6 ♗xb4**



**36.a4 ♕g7 37.♗c8 g3 38.♕g2 ♗e1**

The draw is obvious.

### Conclusion

After the opening moves 1.e4 c5 2.♖f3 ♖c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♖xd4 ♖f6 5.♖c3 e5 6.♖db5 d6 7.♗g5 a6

8.♖a3 b5 9.♗xf6 gxf6 10.♖d5 f5, this chapter has dealt with the important option of 11.c3, when 11...♗g7 is our response. The usual continuation is 12.exf5 ♗xf5 13.♖c2 0-0, reaching a major tabiya which can arise from a few different move orders, so it's important for any Sveshnikov player to be well-versed in both the theory and typical ideas of the ensuing positions.

14.♗e2 is sometimes played, intending to strike at our queenside with an early a2-a4, but the simple plan of ...♗e6 followed by ...f5 offers us plenty of counter-chances.

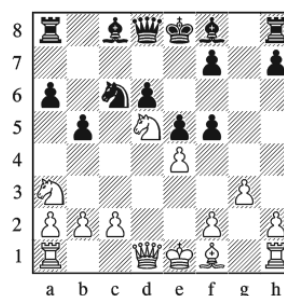
14.♖ce3 is the main line, when 14...♗e6 leads to another branching point. 15.g3 is the first main option, when 15...♖b8!? 16.♗g2 f5 is our choice: we saw that the rook on b8 has plenty of uses, and our typical kingside counterplay is always there.

15.♗d3 is the usual choice, when 15...f5 is our move. It's important to familiarize yourself with the tactics resulting from 16.♗c2, the main line of which ends in a draw. If White wants to play more ambitiously then 16.♗h5 is one option, when 16...e4 17.♗c2 ♖e7 offers us adequate play. 16.0-0 is the big main line, when it's absolutely vital to remember that the otherwise desirable 16...♖e7?? loses the f5-pawn to a simple tactic. That's why 16...♕h8 is a good move, and after the usual continuation of 17.♗h5 e4 18.♗c2 ♖e7 19.♖ad1, the key idea is 19...♗f7!, driving away the white queen so that we can post our queen on g5. Recent practice and analysis shows that we have no problems at all.

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# Chapter 5

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## 11.g3 & Others

### Variation Index

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1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 e5 6.♗db5 d6  
7.♗g5 a6 8.♗a3 b5 9.♗xf6 gxf6 10.♗d5 f5

A) 11.g3 fxe4 12.♗g2 ♗g7 13.♗xe4 ♗e6

A1) 14.c3

A2) 14.♞h5 ♞c8

A21) 15.c3

A22) 15.0-0 ♗e7

A221) 16.♗xe7

A222) 16.♞ad1

B) 11.exf5 (alternatives)

C) 11.♗xb5

D) 11.♗xb5

E) 11.c4?!

F) 11.♞d3

G) 11.♞f3?

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 e5 6.♗db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6 8.♗a3 b5 9.♙xf6 gxf6 10.♗d5 f5

In this chapter we will conclude our 10...f5 coverage by analysing a variety of sidelines:

A) 11.g3, B) 11.exf5, C) 11.♗xb5, D) 11.♙xb5, E) 11.c4?!, F) 11.♚d3 and G) 11.♚f3?.

### A) 11.g3

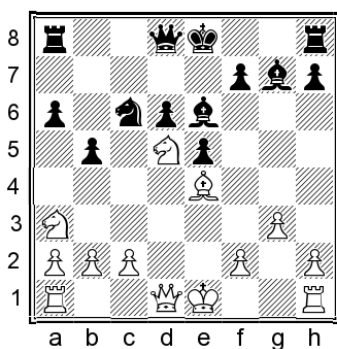
This has never been as popular as the big main lines but it's a respectable move, and we will have to be up to the task to reach a good position. White intends to keep full control over the d5-square, while developing in a way that makes the kingside less vulnerable to attacks along the g-file and ...f4 ideas which we have seen so many times. Another important feature of this line is that Black can't avoid it by choosing the 10...♙g7 move order.

#### 11...fxe4

11...♙g7 is sometimes played but in general I would prefer to take on e4 and force White to spend time recapturing, rather than having to consider the possibility of exf5 on every turn.

#### 12.♙g2 ♙g7 13.♙xe4 ♙e6

This is the real starting point of our analysis of 11.g3.

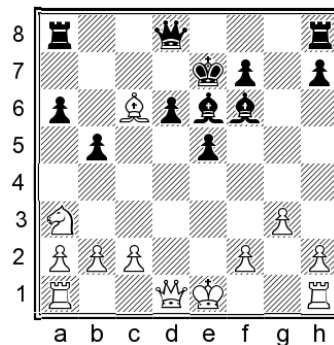


White can play **A1)** 14.c3 to improve the a3-knight, but the more challenging main line is **A2)** 14.♚h5.

14.0-0 0-0 15.c3 transposes to variation A1 below.

An interesting, but not-so-popular alternative is:

14.♗f6† ♙xf6 15.♙xc6† ♗e7



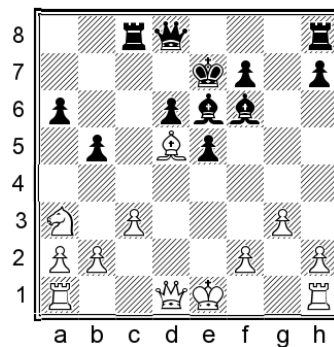
16.c3

16.♙xa8? ♚xa8 17.f3 b4 18.♗b1 e4 gave Black an overwhelming initiative in De Gregorio – Loebler, Caorle 1989.

16...♚c8 17.♙d5!

White is trying to keep control over d5 for as long as possible, while also looking for a convenient moment to deprive us of the bishop pair.

Another example continued: 17.♙g2 d5 (A good alternative is 17...b4!?N 18.cxb4 e4 19.♚d2 d5 20.0-0 ♚b6 21.♗c2 h5 with nice compensation.) 18.♗c2?! (18.0-0N is better, when 18...h5!? 19.♗c2 h4 20.a4 hxg3 21.hxg3 e4 reaches a sharp position where we have enough counterplay.) 18...d4! 19.cxd4 ♚a5† 20.♗f1 exd4 The d-pawn was too powerful in Chiburdanidze – Alexandria, Tbilisi 1977.



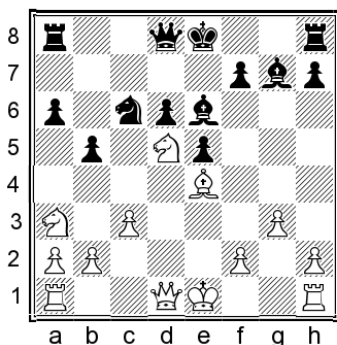
17...b4!?N

17...♚c5 18.♙xe6 fxe6 19.♗c2 ♚a8 20.0-0 ♚d5?! 21.♚e2 gave White some pressure in Z. Almasi – Gledura, Hungary 2019.

18.cxb4 ♚b6 19.0-0 ♚xb4 20.♙xe6 fxe6 21.♗c2 ♚a4 22.b3 ♚c6 23.♗e3 e4 24.♚b1 h5

Another sharp, double-edged battle lies ahead.

### A1) 14.c3



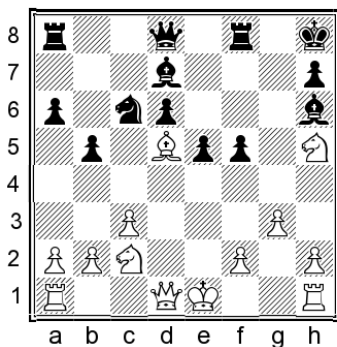
White develops in a normal fashion, preparing  $\text{d}2$  and later  $\text{a}2$ - $\text{a}4$ .

#### 14...0-0 15.0-0

It's worth briefly noting that  $15.\text{g}4?! \text{h}4$  leaves White's position too loose.

$15.\text{d}e3$  is sometimes played, but  $15...\text{d}7$  is a simple and effective answer, preparing  $...d5$  or  $...f5$ . ( $15...\text{d}e7!?$  is a tempting exchange sacrifice as well.)

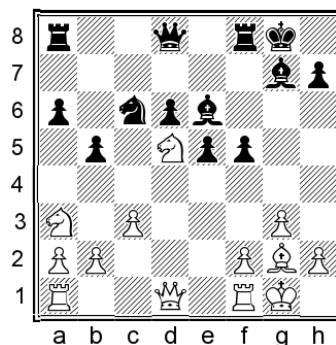
White has also tried:  $15.\text{d}c2 \text{f}5 \text{d}f4!?$  ( $16.\text{g}2 \text{a}5 \text{0-0} \text{b}8$  transposes to our main line below)  $16...\text{d}7 \text{d}d5 \text{h}8 \text{d}h5$  ( $18.\text{d}e6 \text{e}xe6 \text{e}xe6 \text{d}e7$  is pleasant for us, but this was probably White's best bet; it's not clear what the knight is doing on  $\text{h}5$ .)  $18...\text{h}6$



$19.\text{f}4?$  The last move is much too optimistic. In Frindt – Privara, Slovakia 1995, the simple  $19...\text{exf}4\text{N}$  would have decisively opened the e-file leading to White's vulnerable king.

#### 15...f5 16.g2

Black has a few possible plans from here, but I like the following idea of improving our queenside set-up.



#### 16...b8

This move enables our queen to go to  $\text{d}7$  or  $\text{c}8$  without fearing a fork on  $\text{b}6$ . We also anticipate a future  $\text{a}2$ - $\text{a}4$ , having in mind that  $...bxa4$  will uncover an attack on the  $\text{b}2$ -pawn.

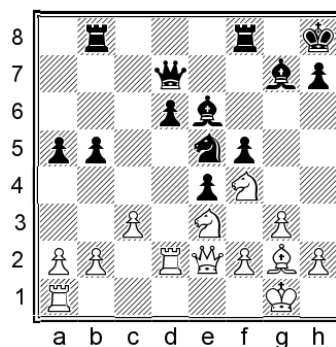
#### 17.d2 a5

It's useful to prevent any  $\text{d}cb4$  ideas. By the way, a similar position has frequently arisen via the move order  $11...\text{g}7 \text{2.}\text{exf}5 \text{e}xf5 \text{3.}\text{g}2 \text{e}e6$ , with Black a tempo down (with the rook still on  $\text{a}8$  instead of  $\text{b}8$ ). Even a tempo down, the position is okay for Black, so the current version can be considered comfortably equal for us.

#### 18.d2

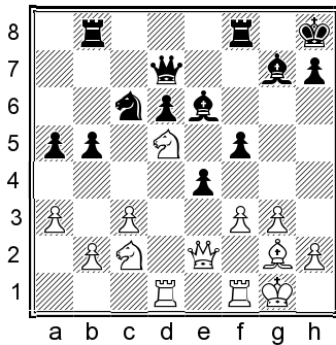
White has tried a few other ideas, but we can generally maintain a nice position with normal moves. Let's see a few examples:

$18.\text{e}2 \text{h}8 \text{19.}\text{f}d1 \text{d}7 \text{20.}\text{d}2$  is a typical plan for White in such positions.  $20...e4 \text{21.}\text{d}ce3$  ( $21.\text{d}ad1$  can be met by  $21...\text{d}e5$  threatening  $...dxc4$ .)  $21...\text{d}e5 \text{22.}\text{d}f4$

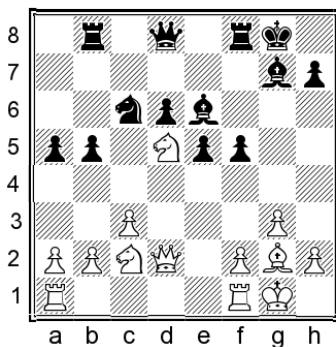


$22...\text{h}6! \text{23.}\text{d}xe6 \text{w}xe6$  Black had a good game in Kantans – Matlakov, Gibraltar 2017.

18.a3 White's idea is to prevent any ...b4 ideas and only later to create some action. 18...♔h8 19.♖e2 (19.♖h5N 19...♘e7 20.♘ce3 e4 21.♖ad1 ♘xd5 22.♘xd5 ♙e5 also gives us at least equal play.) 19...♗d7 (An interesting alternative is to highlight the weakening aspect of the a2-a3 move with 19...a4!? 20.♖ad1 ♘a5, with the knight heading for c4 next.) 20.♖ad1 e4 21.f3



21...♘d4! 22.♘xd4 ♙xd5 23.♖d2 b4 24.axb4 axb4 25.fxex4 bxc3 26.bxc3 fxe4 Black was doing fine in Caruana – Ivanchuk, Reggio Emilia 2011.

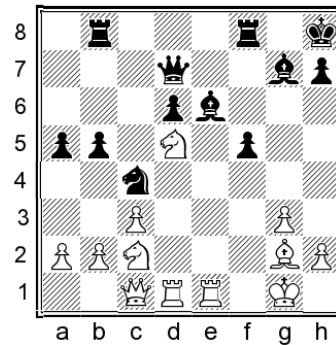


18...♗d7 19.♖ad1 ♔h8

Both sides continue with typical, natural moves.

### 20.♔h1

Another game continued: 20.♖fe1 e4 Also thematic: the knight is heading for e5. 21.f3 The only critical reply. 21...exf3 (We could even sacrifice a pawn with 21...♘e5!?N 22.fxe4 fxe4 23.♖xe4 ♖a7† 24.♖e3 ♖f7 25.♖f1 ♖g8 with good compensation, although it's not needed.) 22.♙xf3 ♘e5 23.♙g2 ♘c4 24.♖c1



24...♙xd5!? 25.♖xd5 b4 Black obtained strong counterplay in Hostinsky – Pravec, corr. 2014.

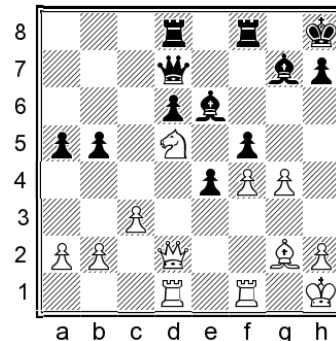
### 20...♖bd8

The rook has done its job. Our queen was able to go to d7; and with White's rook on d1, the a2-a4 break is no longer something we have to worry about.

21.f4 e4 22.♘ce3 ♘e7 23.g4

White also plays logically and thematically, breaking up our pawn structure.

23...♘xd5 24.♘xd5



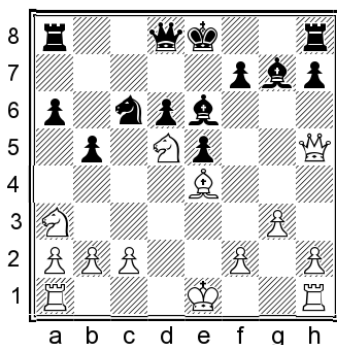
24...♙f7

There are other playable moves, but this one is logical and good.

25.gxf5 ♖xf5 26.♖fe1 ♖de8

Black's chances were not worse in Maksimus – Atomuliyadala, corr. 2016.

A2) 14.♖h5



This is the most popular and challenging choice. White prevents us from castling and frees the d1-square for a rook.

#### 14...Rc8

With castling prevented, we activate our rook and prepare ...Nde7. In some lines, ...Rc5 will be an important resource to fight for d5.

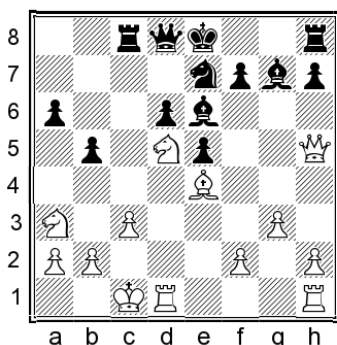
White's two main options are **A21)** 15.c3 and **A22)** 15.0-0.

#### 15.0-0-0!?

It's extremely rare to see White castling long in the Sveshnikov. Still, it's worth seeing how to handle this sharp continuation.

15...Nde7 16.c3N

16.Wg5? Rg8 17.Rhe1 Nxd5 18.Wxd8+ Qxd8 19.Qxd5 Qe7 gave Black a clear advantage due to the better pawn structure and the bad knight on a3 in Slagter – Kuipers, Haarlem 2010.



16...Rc5!

16...Nxd5 17.Qxd5 Qxd5 18.Rxd5 b4 19.Wg4 Qh6+ 20.Qc2 bxa3 21.Rxd6 Rxc3+! 22.bxc3 Wxd6 23.Wc8+ Qe7 24.Wxh8 Wd2+ 25.Qb3 Wb2+ 26.Qa4 Wb5+ 27.Qxa3 Qf8 28.c4 Wb8 29.Qa4 Qe8! 30.Qa5 Wb4+ 31.Qxa6 Wxc4+ 32.Qb7 Wd5+ 33.Qb8 Wxh1 34.Wxe5+ is a crazy line

ending in perpetual check, which I have included for entertainment value. The text move is both simpler and stronger.

17.Nxe7 Wxe7 18.Nc2 d5 19.Qf5 Qxf5 20.Wxf5 We6

We have a typical edge due to our strong centre and better minor piece.

15.Rd1

This has also been played in lots of games, but in most cases it quickly transposes to one of the main lines below.

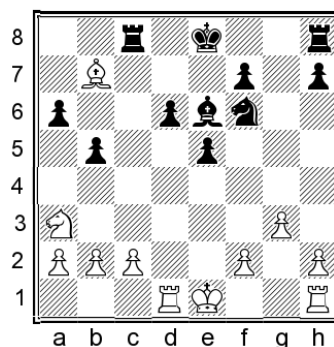
15...Nde7

We follow our normal plan of putting pressure on d5.

16.Nxe7

16.c3 and 16.0-0 transpose to the two main lines A21 and A222, as analysed below.

16.Wg5?! Nxd5 17.Wxg7 Wf6 leads to a favourable endgame for us: 18.Wxf6 Nxf6 19.Qb7

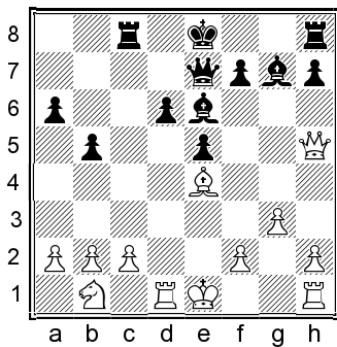


19...Rc7 (19...Rc5 20.Rxd6 Qe7!N 21.Rd2 b4 22.Nb1 Rb8 23.Qg2 a5 also gives us a clear advantage.) 20.Qxa6 b4 21.Nb5 Rxc2 22.0-0 Qe7 White was in trouble in K. Mueller – Joachim, Germany 2004.

16...Wxe7 17.Nb1!?

17.0-0 is normal, transposing to variation A221 below.

The text move prepares to put the knight on c3. This is actually quite a clever idea, but we can exploit White's temporary loss of coordination with:



17...Nc4!N

17...d5!? led to equal play in Hracek – Bobras, Germany 2016, but we can do better.

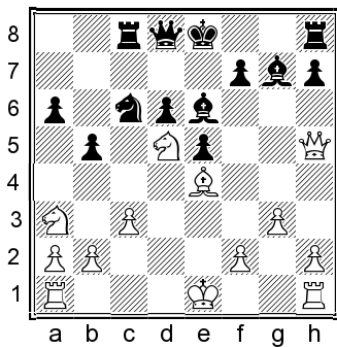
18. Nd2

18. Nd3?? loses material to 18...b4.

18...Bb4 19. b3 d5 20. Qf5 Qxf5 21. Wxf5 We6

White's plan to control d5 has clearly failed, and we have the better chances.

#### A21) 15.c3



White prepares to activate the a3-knight.

15...Ne7

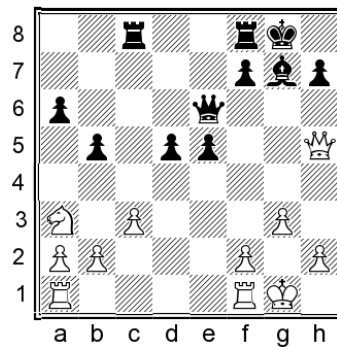
We proceed with our standard reply.

16. Bd1

This is the most logical response.

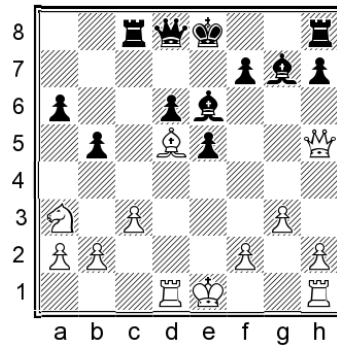
16. Nxe7?! Wxe7 is completely harmless for us.

17. 0-0 d5 18. Qf5 Qxf5 19. Wxf5 We6 20. Wh5 0-0



We have a great game, for instance: 21. Bfe1 (21. We2 f5 22. Nd2 f4 was also unpleasant for White in Rasidovic – Todorovic, Belgrade 1988.) 21...b4 22. cxb4 e4 23. We2 f5 24. Rad1 d4 Black had a big advantage in T. Bauer – Berebora, Szekszard 1993.

16...Nxd5 17. Qxd5



17...0-0

After taking a moment to castle, the fight for the central squares will continue.

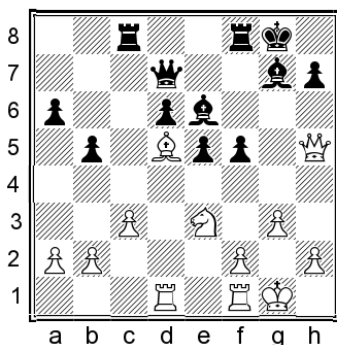
17...Wd7 is also possible, when 18.0-0 transposes to 18.c3 in the notes to variation A222 on page 161. However, when the present move order arises it feels more natural to castle first.

18.0-0

White can also improve the knight first:

18. Nd2 Wd7 19. Ne3 f5 20.0-0

Here I found a new idea:



20...Rf7!?N

Intending to push the f-pawn.

The immediate 20...f4? is bad due to 21.g4! or even 21.g4!?, having the rook on f7 prevents both of those ideas.

20...Kh8 21.Rd2 gxd5 22.Nxd5 Bb8 led to double-edged play in Okara – Zhigalko, Pardubice 2006.

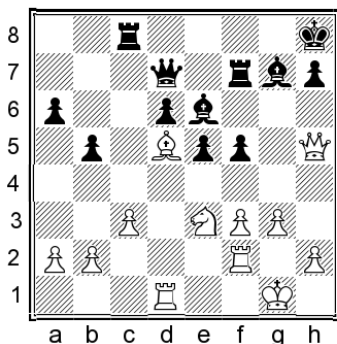
21.f3

21.Rd2 f4! is strong now, and after 22.gxe6 Wxe6 23.Nd5 g6 we have a lot of activity.

21.Ng2 can also be met by 21...f4!? intending 22.gxf4 Bcf8 23.Kh1 Kh8, with good compensation.

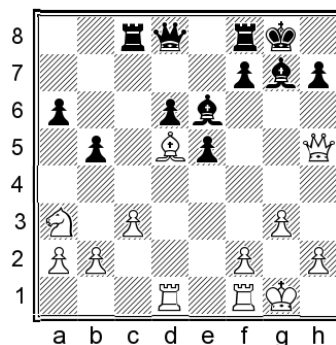
21...Kh8 22.Bf2

22.gxe6 Wxe6 23.Rxd6? Wxd6 24.Wxf7 Wb6 wins material for us.



22...Bcf8 23.Kh1 Bf6 24.gxe6 Wxe6 25.Nd5 Bg6 26.Wh4 f4 27.We7 Wc8

We reach a typical situation where we have plenty of counterplay to offset White's strong knight.



18...Rc5!

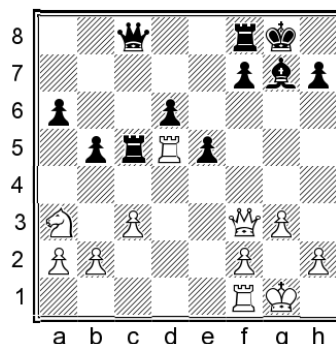
This rook move usually works well in these positions where White tries to maintain the bishop on d5.

19.gxe6

This is the most interesting continuation. I checked a few other possibilities:

19.gb3 has been played a few times, but 19...a5N 20.Nc2 a4 21.gxe6 fxe6 22.Rd2 Wb6 23.We2 Rc7 looks perfectly okay for us.

19.Wf3 Wc8 20.Rd2 gxd5 21.Rxd5



21...We6! 22.Rd2 (22.Bfd1 e4 23.Wh5 e3! is unpleasant for White) 22...g6 23.Re2 f5 24.Nc2 Kh8 25.Bfe1 f4 Black had some initiative in Harvey – Enescu, corr. 2013.

19...fxe6

This change in the pawn structure should generally help us, as the d5- and f5- squares are covered and the f-file is opened, while the doubled pawns are not weak at all. White should look to activate the knight and target our pawn structure in some way.

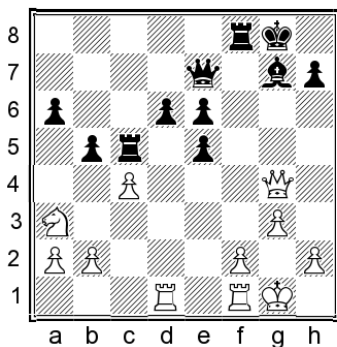
20.Wg4 We7 21.c4!

This is an important positional idea, and the only way to present us with difficult decisions.

Alternatives are harmless. For instance, 21.♘c2 d5 22.♞d2 ♞c4 23.♞d1 ♞g5 24.♘e3 ♞cf4 and White was under pressure in Aleksic – P. Horvath, Porto San Giorgio 2004.

Another game continued 21.♞d3 d5 22.♞f3 ♞xf3 23.♞xf3 a5 and Black was at least equal in Haszon – P. Horvath, Zalakaros 2009.

Let's return to the main line. Suddenly White's knight takes an active role and we must decide what to do. My new idea is:



### 21...d5!N

The game continued 21...h5 22.♞e2 d5 23.cxb5 axb5 24.♘xb5 e4 25.a4 ♞f3 and Black had sufficient compensation in Sacerdotali – Alava Moreno, corr. 2004, but such a position requires extremely accurate handling. I consider the text move a more practical choice.

### 22.b4 ♞c6

We continue to play actively.

22...♞xc4!? 23.♘xc4 bxc4 is an intriguing alternative which the engine evaluates as equal. From a practical perspective, the material imbalance and mutual passed pawns make any result possible.

### 23.cxd5

Accepting the pawn sacrifice must be critical, but it's not the only option. 23.cxb5? ♞c3! exploits the bad knight, and after 24.♘b1 ♞c4 we are in complete control.

23.c5!? is a reasonable move, and after 23...♞e8 24.♘c2 ♞g6 25.♞xg6 hxg6 26.f3 a5 27.a3 ♞a8 the endgame is balanced.

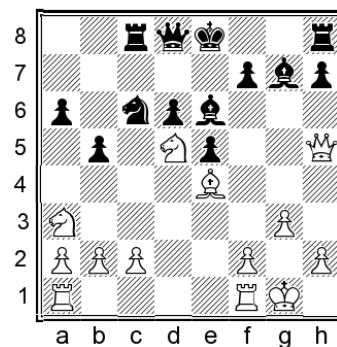
### 23...exd5 24.♞xd5 e4

Activating our bishop. The key to our compensation is the fact that White's knight is out of play.

### 25.♞d7 ♞e5

We maintain full compensation, as the knight is out of play and ...e3 is a useful resource.

## A22) 15.0-0



Castling kingside is a safe positional choice.

### 15...♘e7

As usual, we challenge the knight as quickly as possible.

We reach another important crossroads, where White's main options are **A221)** 16.♘xe7 and **A222)** 16.♞ad1.

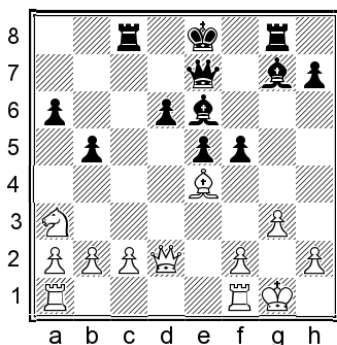
16.♘e3?! b4 17.♘b1 d5 18.♞d1 was seen in Diepeveen – Kuipers, Dieren 2008, when 18...d4N or 18...♞d6N would have favoured Black.

### 16.♞g5?! ♞g8!N

We can aim for more than just the good endgame that can be reached after 16...♘xd5 17.♞xg7 ♞f6 18.♞xf6 ♘xf6, as played in Garre Murcia – Rodriguez Vinuesa, Lorca 2003.

### 17.♞d2 f5 18.♘xe7 ♞xe7

We have excellent chances. My illustrative line continues:

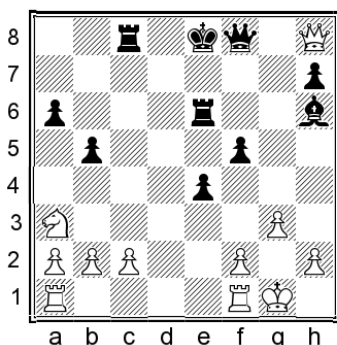


19. ♔d5 ♕h6 20. ♖d3 e4 21. ♗b3 ♔xd5 22. ♗xd5 ♗f7! 23. ♗xd6

23. ♗xf7† ♔xf7 suits us now, because the knight really stands out as being poorly placed on a3.

23... ♖g6 24. ♗e5† ♖e6 25. ♗h8† ♗f8

It may look as if we're in trouble, as we're a pawn down with our king being checked by the white queen. However, our piece activity is the more important factor.



26. ♗xh7

26. ♗xf8† ♔xf8 27. c3 ♔xa3 28. bxa3 ♖xc3 gives us excellent winning chances in the endgame.

26... ♖ec6 27. ♗b7

27. c3? ♖8c7 traps the queen.

27... b4 28. ♔b1 e3 29. ♖d1 ♗c5

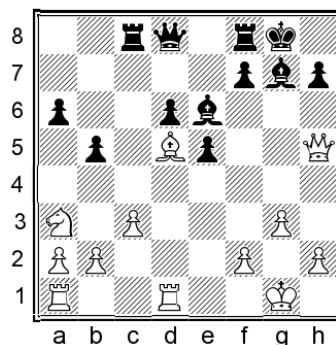
White is in big trouble.

16. ♖fd1

This move is possible, but somehow it feels a bit wrong to neglect the rook on a1, as White is several moves away from arranging a2-a4.

16... ♔xd5 17. ♔xd5 0-0 18. c3

18. ♗e2 ♖c5 19. ♔xe6 fxe6 20. c4 e4! exploits the fact that the rook is still on a1, giving us some initiative. After 21. cxb5 ♖cf5! 22. ♖f1 ♔d4, it's clear that there were drawbacks with the choice of rook on move 16.



18... ♖c5!

Again we rely on this effective way of fighting for control of d5.

19. ♗f3

19. ♔xe6N 19... fxe6 20. ♔c2 d5 21. a4 makes use of the rook on a1, but 21... ♗b6! produces a veiled threat against f2, with a good game for us.

19... ♗d7 20. ♖d2 ♔h6 21. ♖d3 ♔g4 22. ♗f6 ♔g7 23. ♗g5 e4 24. ♖d2 ♔f3

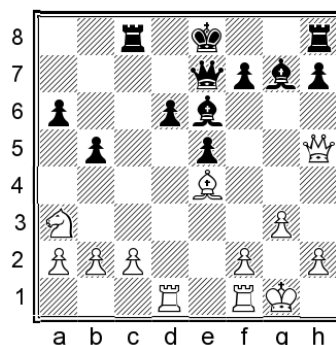
Black had a nice initiative in Zapata – Illescas Cordoba, Linares 1994.

A221) 16. ♔xe7

Releasing the tension doesn't look too threatening, although it does have one benefit: the bishop remains on e4, meaning we still can't castle.

16... ♗xe7 17. ♖ad1

17. c3 d5 18. ♔f5 ♔xf5 19. ♗xf5 ♗e6 gives us easy play.



17... h6!?

Usually this move is not my cup of tea, as it takes away the h6-square from the bishop and sometimes from the rook as well. However, in this particular position it looks satisfactory.

18. c3

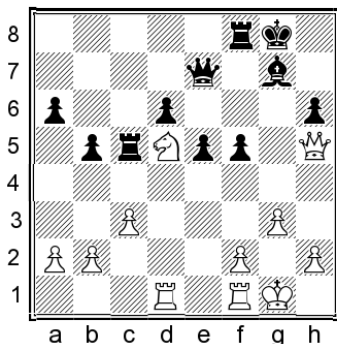
18.♞d2 0-0 19.♞fd1? runs into 19...f5 20.♙d5  
 ♙xd5 21.♞xd5 b4 22.♜b1 ♞xc2, when White is a  
 pawn down for nothing.

18...0-0 19.♜c2 f5 20.♙d5 ♞c5

We fight for the d5-square in the usual way.

21.♜e3 ♙xd5 22.♜xd5

22.♞xd5N 22...f4 23.♞xc5 dxc5 24.♜d5 ♞f7  
 25.♞xf7† ♜xf7 reaches an equal endgame.

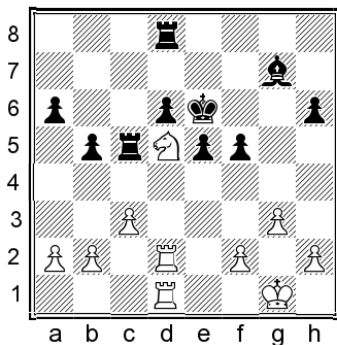


22...♞f7!N

The ensuing endgame is not worse for us at all.

22...♞e6 23.♞f3 f4 24.♞e4 led to unclear play in  
 Motylev – Grachev, Baku 2015.

23.♞xf7† ♜xf7 24.♞d2 ♜e6 25.♞fd1 ♞d8

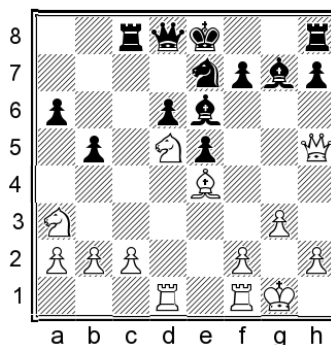


The knight is not really stronger than the  
 bishop, because we are so well centralized.

26.f4 e4 27.h3 h5 28.♜f2 ♙h6

The endgame is equal.

A22) 16.♞ad1



White maintains the tension. We can consider  
 this the main line, especially taking into account  
 that some games have arrived here via 15.♞d1  
 followed by castling.

16...♜xd5 17.♙xd5 ♞d7!?

We get ready to recapture with the queen on  
 e6, while also introducing the possibility of ...♙g4  
 – although please note the possibility of ♞g5,  
 which means we are not yet threatening to win  
 material.

17...0-0

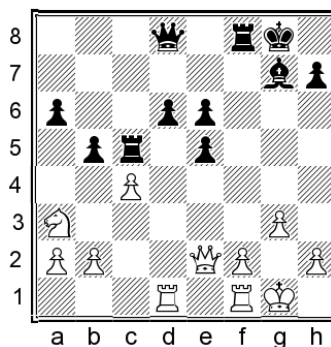
This is playable, although White can try to exploit  
 the fact that c2-c3 has not been played by means  
 of:

18.♞e2!?

18.c3 has been by far the most common choice,  
 with a transposition to variation A21 above.

18...♞c5 19.♙xe6 fxe6 20.c4!

Compared to variation A21, the white queen  
 stands on e2 instead of g4, while ours is on d8  
 instead of e7. This helps White slightly, although  
 it's not the end of the world. The best reply is:



20...d5!N

20...b4 21.♜c2 a5 22.♜e3 gave White a pleasant  
 edge in Suarez Real – Alvarez Solis, Oviedo 2003.  
 21.cxb5

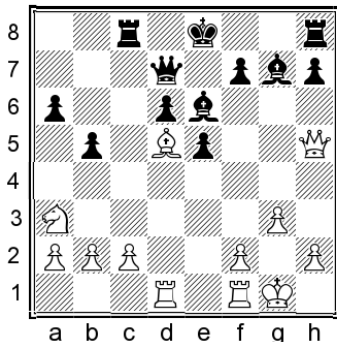
21.b4 ♖xc4 22.♗xc4 bxc4 23.a4 e4 24.♖b1 ♔h8  
25.b5 axb5 26.axb5 ♚b6 gives us enough  
compensation, and the position holds dangers for  
both sides.

21...♚b6 22.♖c1!

22.bxa6 e4 gives us nice play.

22...♖xc1 23.♖xc1

We have enough compensation for the pawn  
deficit, and I will leave it for interested readers to  
explore this more deeply should they wish.

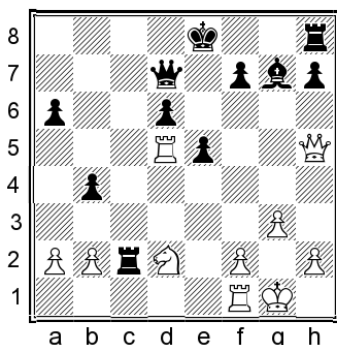


### 18.♗xe6

This is a logical response, but there are some  
other options as well:

18.♚e2 should be met by: 18...♖c5!N (18...0-0!  
was seen in Kiolbasa – Buksa, Katowice 2019,  
when 19.c4!N would have justified White's  
previous move and forced Black to solve some  
problems.) 19.♗xe6 ♚xe6 Now there are no c2-c4  
ideas, and after 20.c3 0-0 21.♗c2 f5 22.♗b4 f4 we  
have good counterplay.

18.♖d2!N is a logical attempt to keep pressure  
along the d-file. The drawback is that 18...b4!  
19.♗b1 ♗xd5 20.♖xd5 ♖xc2 picks up a pawn.  
After 21.♗d2 White has compensation, but we  
will reach a safe position with:



21...0-0 22.♗e4 f5! 23.♖xd6 ♚e7 24.♚d1!  
(24.♗g5 h6 25.♖xh6 ♗xh6 26.♚xh6 ♖f6 27.♚h5  
gives White compensation but no advantage.)  
24...fxe4 This leads to a forced draw. (24...♖c7  
continues the game although White must be a tad  
better.) 25.♖d7 ♚c5 26.♚g4 ♖f7 27.♖d8† ♖f8  
28.♖d7 Neither side can avoid the repetition.

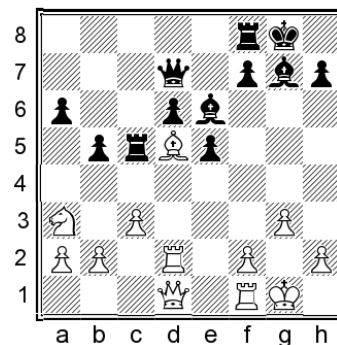
A few games have continued with:

18.c3 0-0

18...♗g4!N is a decent alternative, and after  
19.♚g5 (19.♗xf7†?? ♔e7 will cost White a rook)  
19...0-0 20.♖d2 ♔h8 the position holds chances  
for both sides.

19.♖d2 ♖c5 20.♚d1

Here I found a useful improvement:

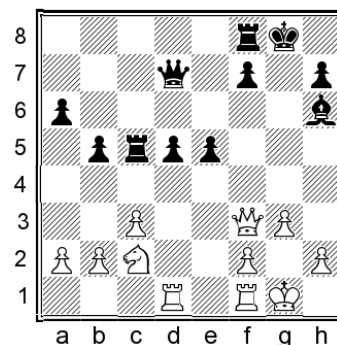


20...♗g4!N

It's important to disturb White's set-up; it reminds  
me a bit of the Zapata – Illescas game in the notes  
on page 158.

20...♖d8 21.♗c2 ♗h6 22.♗e3 ♗xe3 23.♗xe6!  
♚xe6 24.fxe3 left Black in a tough situation with  
weaknesses and no counterplay in Dvoiry –  
Tregubov, Krasnoyarsk 2003.

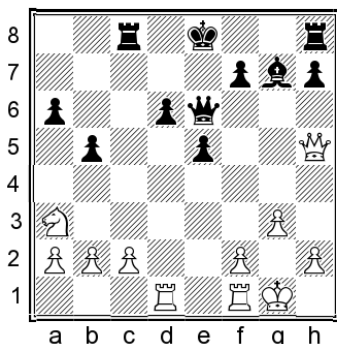
21.♗f3 ♗xf3 22.♚xf3 ♗h6 23.♖dd1 d5 24.♗c2



24...f5! 25.♗b4 e4 26.♚h5 ♗g7 27.♗xa6 ♖c6  
28.♗b4 ♖d6

We have typical compensation for the sacrificed pawn, with ...d4 on the way and perhaps ...f4 coming later.

18...♖xe6



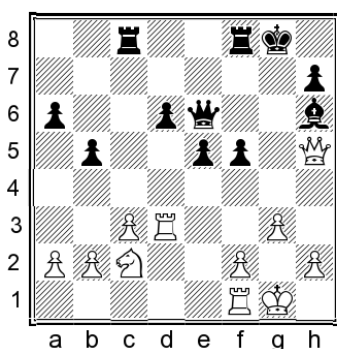
19.c3 0-0 20.♘c2 f5 21.♞d2!N

This move is new in this exact position, but doubling rooks on the d-file is a normal plan for this structure.

21.♞h3 d5 gave Black comfortable equality in Lanka – Vyzmanavin, Sverdlovsk 1987.

21.f4 was seen in Fernandez Romero – Halkias, Linares 2003, when 21...♔h8N looks logical. The position remains equal, but White's king was significantly exposed by the advance of the f-pawn, so we should be happy.

21...♙h6 22.♞d3



22...♔h8!

There's no need to rush!

23.♞fd1 ♞cd8

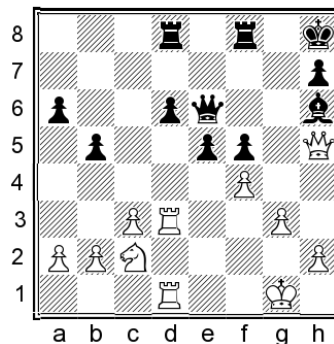
The position is complicated and our counterplay is on the way.

24.f4!?

This is the most ambitious of the possible continuations. I briefly checked a few other lines:

24.♘b4 e4 25.♞d5 e3 gives White plenty to think about on the kingside.

24.♞h3 ♞g6 25.♘b4 e4 26.♞d4 f4 and once again our kingside chances should not be underestimated.



24...♙g7

24...exf4!? 25.♘d4 ♞f6 26.♞e1 fxf3 is wildly complicated, but objectively equal according to the machine.

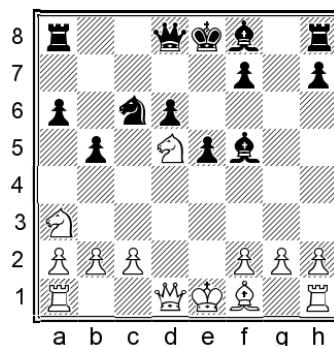
25.♘b4

25.fxe5 ♙xe5 gives us plenty of play, with ...f4 on the way.

25...exf4 26.gxf4 ♞g8

Once again we have a slightly worse pawn structure, but also plenty of counter-chances against White's exposed king.

B) 11.exf5 ♙xf5



This has been played in thousands of games but in the great majority of cases the play transposes to a main line which we examined previously. Here we will consider a few independent possibilities.

## 12. ♖f3?

This is the most popular and complicated of the independent tries, but we should be extremely happy to see it.

12.c3 ♕g7 is the usual continuation, which we analysed in the previous chapter.

## 12. ♕d3!?

If White wishes to avoid the above transposition then this should be preferred, although it's certainly nothing for us to fear.

12... ♕e6 13. ♕e4 ♕g7

Setting a small trap.



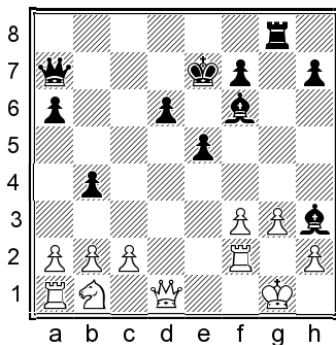
## 14. ♖f6†?

Better is 14. ♖h5 ♖c8 15.c3 ♖e7 16. ♖d1 ♖c5 17. ♖xe7 ♖xe7 18. ♖c2 d5 19. ♕f5 ♕xf5 when a draw was agreed in Sigurjonsson – Bronstein, Hastings 1976. Indeed, after 20. ♖xf5 d4 21.0-0 dxc3 22.bxc3 0-0 the position is balanced.

14... ♕xf6 15. ♕xc6† ♖e7 16. ♕xa8 ♖xa8

We have a huge initiative for the exchange.

17.0-0 b4 18. ♖b1 ♕h3 19.f3 ♖g8 20. ♖f2 ♖a7 21.g3



In Vovk – Oleksienko, Lvov 2006, Black could have won with:

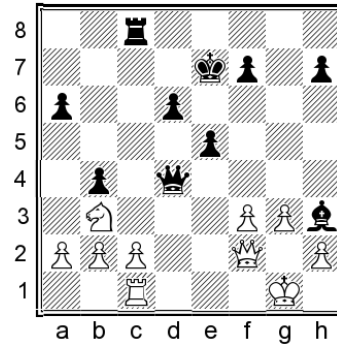
21... ♕g5!N 22. ♖e2 ♕e3

Obviously Black can win back the exchange at a moment's notice, but we can make additional gains along the way.

23. ♖d2 ♖c8 24. ♖c1 ♖d4

White is unable to keep the queenside together. A nice additional detail is:

25. ♖b3 ♕xf2† 26. ♖xf2

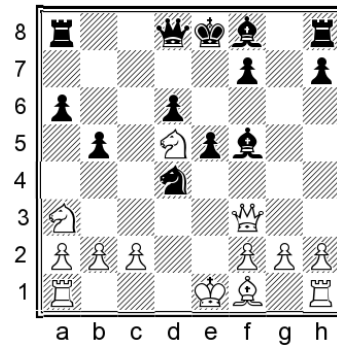


26... ♖xc2! 27. ♖xd4 ♖g2†

With a winning endgame ahead.

## 12... ♖d4!

The exchange sacrifice works perfectly.



## 13. ♖c7†

13. ♖f6†? is worse due to 13... ♖e7 14. ♖d5† ♖e6 15. ♖c7† (or 15. ♖e3 ♖xd5) 15... ♖xc7 16. ♖xa8 b4, when we're simply winning.

## 13... ♖xc7 14. ♖xa8† ♖e7

Our initiative should be enough to win the game, but some precise moves are needed.

## 15.c3

Another game continued 15. ♖xa6? b4 16. ♖b5 ♖xc2† 17. ♖d1 ♖c5 18. ♖c1 ♖d5† 19. ♖d4 (19. ♖e2 ♖d3 is mate) 19... ♖xd4† 20. ♖e2 ♖e4† and White resigned in Kozicz – Steinberg, Polanica Zdroj 1996.

### 15...b4!

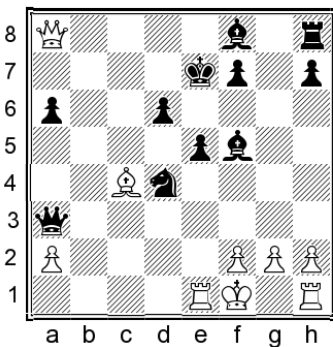
A vital resource, without which we would stand worse.

### 16.cxb4

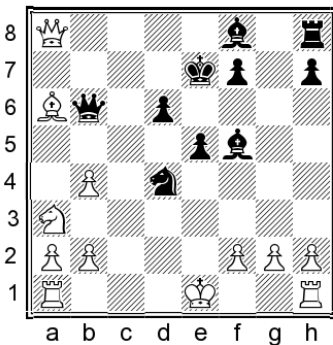
16.cxd4 bxa3 17.♙xa6 axb2 18.0-0 bxa1=♚ 19.♞xa1 ♙g7 left White a piece down for nothing in Schoenbach – M. Mueller, email 2003.

### 16...♞b6 17.♙xa6

17.♙c4 ♞xb4† 18.♔f1 ♞xb2 19.♞e1 ♞xa3 gives White nothing, provided we safeguard our king correctly in the next few moves:

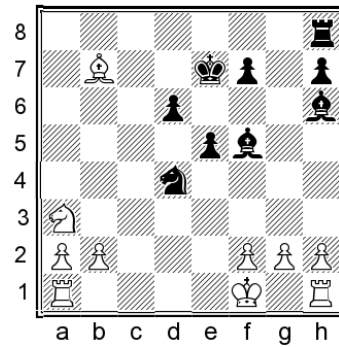


20.♞a7† ♔d8! 21.♞b8† ♙c8 22.♞b6† ♔d7 23.♞a7† ♔c6! 24.♞xf7 ♙e6! 25.♞e8† (25.♙xe6 ♞d3† 26.♔g1 ♘e2† forces mate.) 25...♔c7 26.♙b3 ♙d7 White resigned in Lonewolf – Libuda, corr. 2002.



### 17...♞xb4† 18.♔f1 ♙h6 19.♞b7† ♞xb7 20.♙xb7

White has exchanged queens and is temporarily the exchange and a pawn up, but is nevertheless in deep trouble due to our extremely active pieces and threats against the king.



### 20...♞b8 21.♙a6 ♞xb2 22.♞g1

It's hard to suggest another move for White.

22.h3 d5 doesn't help.

### 22...♙e4 23.g4 ♞b6 24.♙c4 d5

Of course we are well past the point of normal opening preparation, but it's worth seeing some further moves to appreciate the full extent of our initiative and how to exploit it.

### 25.♞e1

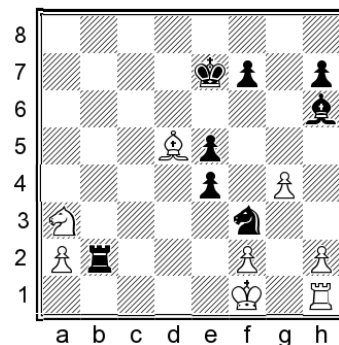
25.♙b3 ♙f4 and 25.♙e2 ♞b2 are both disgusting for White.

White simply gave up the bishop with 25.♞g3 in one game, which speaks for how awful the position is. After 25...dxc4 26.♘xc4 ♞e6 Black was again winning in Hayakawa – Pivinsky, corr. 2005.

### 25...♘f3

With this, we win back the exchange and keep a decisive initiative.

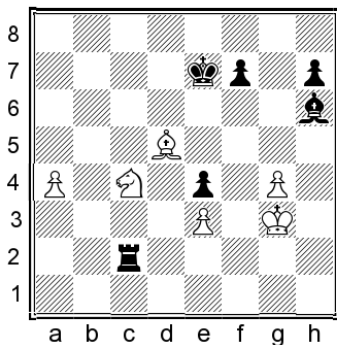
### 26.♞xe4 dxe4 27.♞h1 ♞b2 28.♙d5



### 28...e3!

28...♖d2† 29.♔g2 e3 also proved good enough in Buettner – Fritsche, email 2004, but the text move is even more accurate.

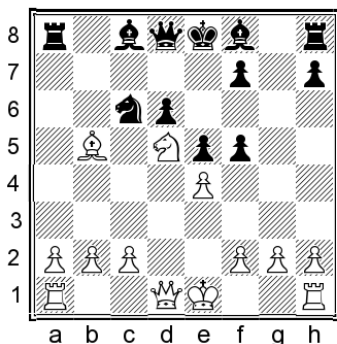
29.fxe3 e4 30.♖c4 ♖b1† 31.♔g2 ♖h4† 32.♔g3 ♖xh1 33.♔xh4 ♖xh2† 34.♔g3 ♖c2 35.a4



35...♔f6 36.a5 ♖c3 37.♔f2 ♔f8 38.♖b6 ♔c5 39.♖d7† ♔g7 40.♖xc5 ♖xc5 41.♔xe4 ♖xa5

White soon had to resign in Krakovsky – Gabris, corr. 2009.

C) 11.♖xb5 axb5 12.♔xb5



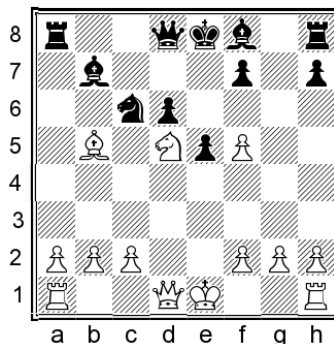
This line became well known after Bronstein played it twice in the late 1970s, although a few other players tried it before him. It subsequently became popular in the eighties. There is an obvious resemblance to the topical 13.♖xb5 variation, as covered in variation B2 of Chapter 3 on page 105, which is a refinement of the present line. You should be happy to meet the present variant, as long as you know the best reply. White will get three pawns and knight on d5 is strong, so it's important to know how to diminish this early initiative. I first analysed this variation in the eighties, by which time my recommended antidote had been discovered. Since then, the whole line has almost entirely disappeared from tournament practice at grandmaster level.

12...♔b7!

The bishop is perfectly placed here, for reasons that will become clear. That's why nowadays White prefers to sacrifice on b5 only after the bishop has committed to e6, as we saw in Chapter 3.

12...♔d7?! has actually been the most popular choice, and there are lots of examples of it from recent years, indicating that many players either forgot or never learned about the best antidote. After 13.exf5 White has good chances. The position is almost the same as in variation B2 of Chapter 3, except that the moves c2-c3 and ...♔g7 have not been played. Transpositions are possible, but White has some additional possibilities such as a2-a4 followed by ♖a3 and lifting the rook to the kingside.

13.exf5



13...♖a5!?

The possibility of sacrificing an exchange for the initiative makes this an attractive practical choice.

13...♖c8 14.c3 ♔g7 is an engine suggestion which is sensible enough, and has scored well for Black in practice.

13...♔h6!?N is another good option, with 14.♖h5 ♖a5! a key point. If I was playing a correspondence game, I might lean towards one of these engine-approved continuations. However, the text move is fully sound and from a practical perspective I like the idea of returning some material in order to fight for the initiative ourselves.

#### 14.a4

Rushing with the pawn is the natural and best choice.

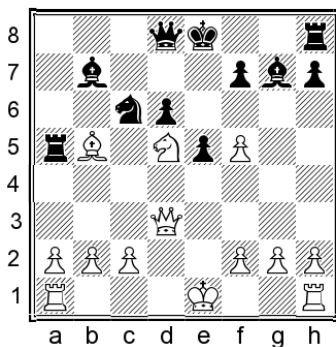
14.♖e2 is never played, as it places the queen on a vulnerable square. 14...♙h6 15.b4 0-0! 16.c3 (16.bxa5? ♘d4 17.♗g4† ♚h8 gives us a crushing attack; 16.♙xc6? ♙xc6 is also horrible for White.) 16...♘a7! (16...♞xb5!? 17.♗xb5 ♖a8 also looks tempting.) 17.bxa5 ♙xd5 The position is messy, but our active minor pieces should prove more effective than White's rook and pawns.

#### 14.♗d3

This is more logical than the line above, but it still doesn't solve White's problems.

14...♙g7

14...♙h6?! 15.b4! is a bit annoying.



#### 15.♗c4

15.b4 ♖a8 gave Black somewhat better chances in Droessler – Norchenko, corr. 2013. We may have lost time with the rook, but b2-b4 has destabilized White's position. Also, compared with the analogous lines from Chapter 3, our bishop has a brighter future on b7 than on d7.

After 15.b4, Black can also try: 15...e4!?!N 16.♗xe4† ♚f8 17.bxa5 ♗xa5† 18.♚d1 ♙xa1 19.♙xc6 ♙xc6 20.♗e7† ♚g8 21.♗g5† ♚f8 is an interesting line which results in a draw, but we can and should play more ambitiously.

15...♚f8!

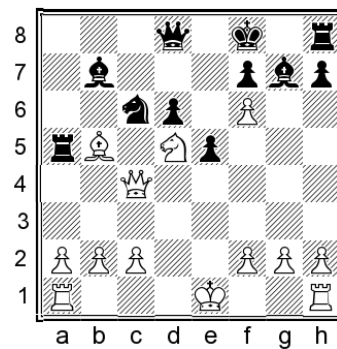
A clever way to defend c6 indirectly.

Black was successful with 15...♞xb5?! 16.♗xb5 ♙a8 in Efimov – Eljanov, Ohrid 2001, but White can claim a slight edge at this stage.

16.f6

The queen sacrifice 16.♙xc6!?!N 16...♞c5 17.♗xc5 dxc5 18.♙xb7 does not quite work, because 18...♗d7! exploits White's poor coordination. After the further 19.♙a8 ♗a4 20.f6 ♙h6 21.♞d1 (21.♙b7 doesn't help in view of 21...♗b5 [21...♗e4† is a powerful alternative] 22.♙c8 ♗c6 when we pick up a piece anyway.) 21...♗xa8 22.0-0 ♞g8, White does not have enough compensation. Nevertheless, in view of the improvement we are about to see, this may be White's best chance to prolong the game.

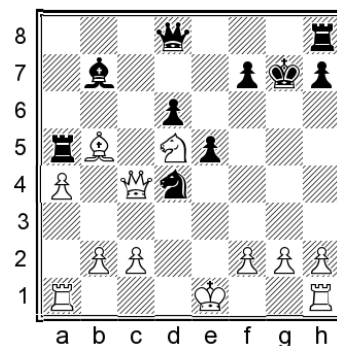
The text move has been played in a couple of correspondence games. Although Black achieved good results, we have a thunderous improvement available.



#### 16...♘d4!!N

The natural 16...♙xf6 was played in both games, and after 17.♘xf6 (17.♙xc6 ♞c5 also favoured Black in Lindam – Mason, corr. 2003) 17...♗xf6 18.♙xc6 ♞c5 Black went on to win in Gonzalez Diaz – Philippe, Paris 2005. The text move is much stronger though.

17.fxg7† ♚xg7 18.a4



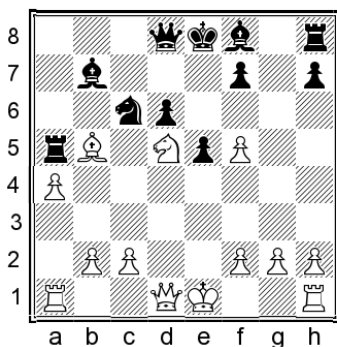
#### 18...♗g5!

Attacking g2 and threatening ...♞c8.

18...♘b5 19.♘e3 ♘d4 is good enough but the text move is more accurate.

19.♘e3 ♞c8 20.♗d3 ♘xb5

We are clearly winning, with an extra piece and a big lead in development.



14...♖xb5! 15.axb5 ♘d4

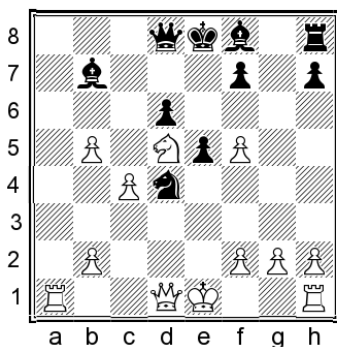
The exchange sacrifice was our key idea, eliminating White's strong bishop while activating our own pieces.

16.c4

This is the only half decent move. Alternatives leave White on the verge of a quick defeat:

16.♘e3? ♕h6! gives White serious problems, for instance: 17.♖a7 (17.0-0? ♖g8 18.f4 ♘xf5! was winning immediately in Heimrath – Goetz, Zirndorf 1985; 17.c3? ♕xe3 18.fxe3 ♗h4† 19.g3 ♗e4 also left White without a good defence in Staszewski – Tomczak, corr. 1997.) 17...♗b6 White's position was horrible in Kobese – Klaver, Cape Town 2007.

16.c3?! ♕xd5 17.cxd4 and now 17...♗g5!N offers us a clear advantage, although the game continuation of 17...♖g8 was also quite problematic for White in Plantet – Dournes, corr. 1994.

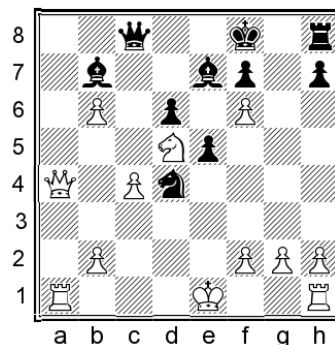


16...♗c8!

Hitting both c4 and f5, as well as threatening ...♕xd5 followed by a fork on c2, all before White can get coordinated.

17.♖a4

White also has problems after: 17.♗a4N 17...♕e7 18.b6† ♖f8 19.f6



19...♕xf6! 20.♘xf6 ♖e7 21.♘d5† ♕xd5 22.cxd5 ♗g4 The attacking combination of queen and knight is extremely dangerous.

17...♗xf5 18.0-0 ♖g8

Our pieces are active and White will have to take care not to be killed on the kingside. For instance, if White's queen takes a wrong step then ...♖xg2† could end things quickly.

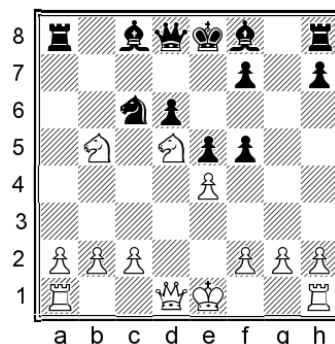
19.f3 ♕h6

Our last piece comes into play, targeting the dark squares which were weakened by White's last move.

20.b6 ♖f8!

Black had the initiative and White was unable to cope with the problems in Droessler – Troia, corr. 2013.

D) 11.♕xb5 axb5 12.♘xb5



This is a famous piece sacrifice which I have played myself. It's pure romanticism in a modern era. Nowadays it's not popular because various resources have been found for Black, but it's still important to know some details.

### 12...♖a5!?

This is far from the most popular continuation, making it all the more effective as a practical weapon. The idea has been known for a long time, at least to me, but it never really caught on, for reasons that remain a mystery to me. The idea is to eliminate one of the enemy knights at a good moment – rather like the previous variation.

### 13.♘bc7†

This is White's usual choice.

Another possible continuation is:

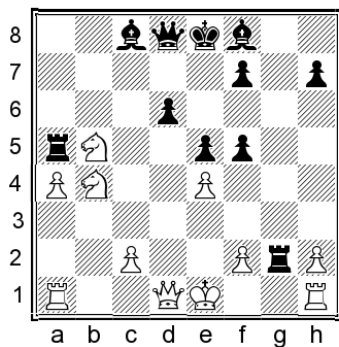
13.a4!? ♖g8!?!N

It's important for us to seek fast counterplay.

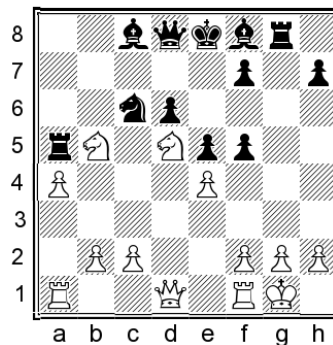
14.0-0

This seems the most natural choice.

A sharp alternative is: 14.b4 ♘xb4! 15.♘xb4 ♖xg2



An important tactical point – now both kings are in danger! 16.♔f1 (16.♗f3 ♖g4 17.♘c6 ♗b6 18.♘a5 ♗xa5† 19.♔f1 ♕d7 gives us a strong initiative for the exchange.) 16...♖g4! (16...♖xf2† 17.♔xf2 ♗h4† leads to an immediate draw.) The text move ♗ continues the fight for a little longer, but the correct outcome is still a draw after 17.♘c6 ♗h4 18.♖a3 ♖f4 19.♖g3 ♖xa4 20.♘xd6† ♕xd6 21.♗xd6 ♕a6† 22.♔g2 ♖xf2† 23.♔xf2 ♗f4† 24.♔g2 ♗xe4† with perpetual check.



14...fxe4 15.b4 ♕g4 16.f3 exf3 17.♖f2

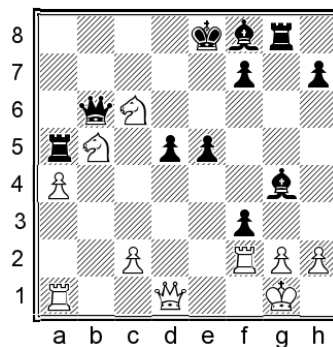
We reach another tactical melee. The best continuation is:

17...♘xb4!

17...♖xb5!? 18.axb5 ♘d4 19.♖a8 ♗xa8 20.♘c7† ♔e7 21.♘xa8 ♘e2† 22.♔f1 (22.♖xe2? fxe2 23.♗e1 ♕h6 wins for Black) 22...♘g3†! It's a fantastic drawing line, but we can play for more.

18.♘xb4 d5 19.♘c6 ♗b6

The position remains wildly complicated, but we are doing more than okay:

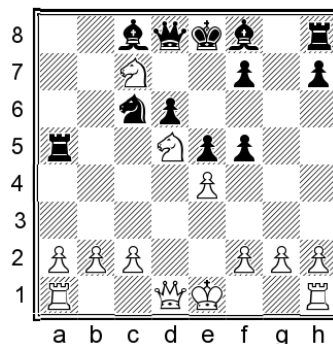


20.♘xa5

20.♘bd4 ♕c5 21.♖b1 ♗c7 22.♖b8† ♗xb8 23.♘xb8 ♕xd4 24.♘c6 ♕xf2† 25.♔xf2 fxe2 26.♗b1 ♕c8 27.♔g1 ♖xa4 sees us emerge with a near-decisive advantage.

20...♕c5 21.♗e1 ♕e6 22.g3 ♕xf2† 23.♗xf2 ♗xa5

We emerge from the complications with somewhat better chances.

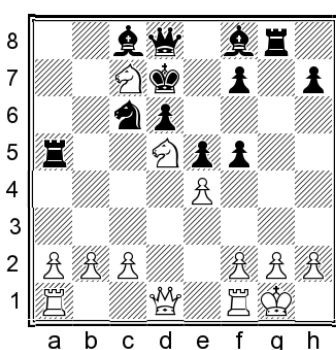


### 13...♔d7 14.♚h5

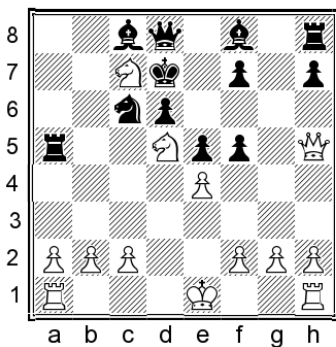
This is the usual continuation. Two other moves have been tried:

14.c4?! occurred in Drozdov – Sinkevich, St Petersburg 2003, where 14...♚g5!N would have stopped the queen from going to h5. After 15.0-0 fxe4 16.♘b5 ♖g8 (16...♔d8 is also good) 17.g3 ♔d8 18.a4 ♖g6 19.b4 ♖a6 our king is safe and we have great attacking chances of our own.

14.0-0 is well met by: 14...♖g8!N (14...♚g5 is a decent option but the text move is even stronger.)



15.♚h5 (15.c3 ♘e7! is also clearly better for us.) 15...♚g5 16.♚xf7† ♔e7 17.g3 ♚g6 Our extra piece will be worth more than the enemy pawns in the ensuing endgame.



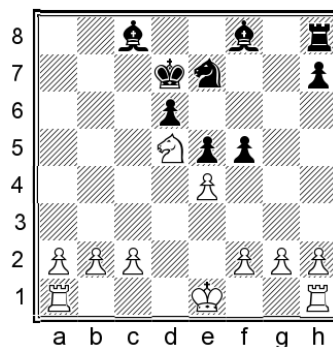
### 14...♖xd5!?

This is an important idea, and indeed the entire point of putting the rook on a5. Eliminating one of the troublesome knights eases our defence and helps our remaining pieces to activate in an easier way.

### 15.♘xd5

15.♚xf7† ♚e7 16.♚xe7† ♘xe7 17.♘xd5 was seen in the game Sanchez Rodriguez – Ginesta

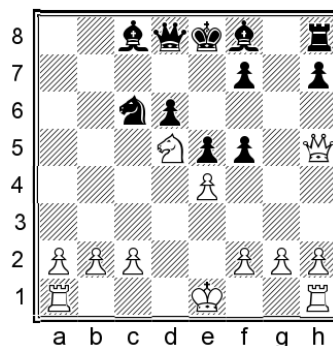
Caballero, Camaguey 2007. I recommend improving Black's play with:



17...♔b7!?N (17...fxe4N 18.♘b6† ♔e6 also leaves us slightly for choice.) 18.♘xe7 ♔xe7 Our bishops have good chances to outwork White's rook and pawns in the ensuing endgame.

### 15...♔e8!

The king steps back to its original position. White has a rook and two pawns versus two minor pieces, but our bishops have fantastic potential. We have given up the right to castle – but with the rook poised to go to g8, would we even choose to castle if we had the option?



### 16.0-0

16.exf5N is an obvious move to consider. The drawback is that 16...♚a5†! forces the knight to retreat from its ideal square, and after 17.♘c3 ♘d4 18.0-0 ♔xf5 we have good attacking chances.

White's king may also run to the opposite flank: 16.0-0-0!?N 16...fxe4 17.♖he1 ♖g8 We'll take all the pawns we can get. 18.♖xe4 ♖xg2 (18...♔e6!? also deserves attention.) 19.♖c4 ♔d7 20.b4! (20.♚xh7 ♖xf2 gives us some advantage.) 20...♔g7 21.b5 ♘e7 22.♚f3 ♘xd5 23.♚xg2 ♘b6 The position is extremely double-edged, but I think our

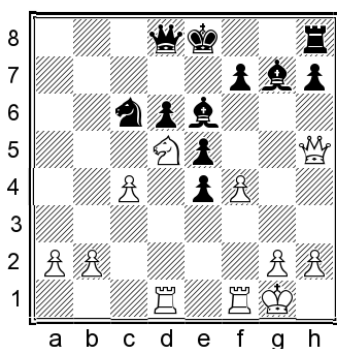
minor pieces are at least as strong as the enemy rooks.

### 16...fxe4

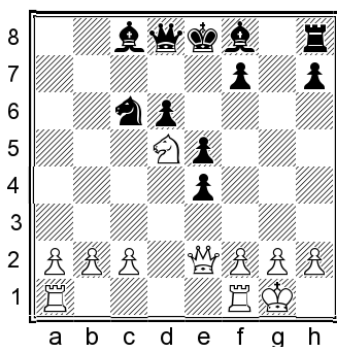
We are not merely capturing a pawn for materialistic reasons, but also to weaken the support of White's strong knight. Controlling the f3-square might also prove useful.

### 17.♖e2

An active alternative is: 17.f4!? ♕e6 18.♞ad1 (18.c4 ♘b4! 19.fxe5 ♘xd5 20.cxd5 ♕xd5 21.♞ad1 ♕e6 turns out in our favour.) 18...♕g7 19.c4



19...♘d4!N (This active choice improves on 19...exf4?! 20.♞xf4 ♕xb2?! 21.♞xe4 ♘d7 22.c5 when Black was in trouble in Lenk – Seifert, Dresden 2007.) 20.fxe5 dxe5 White's initiative has run out of steam.



### 17...♘d4

This looks a reliable choice, but it also offers some scope for us to roll the dice and play for a win.

17...♞g8!? is also worth considering. My illustrative line continues: 18.♖xe4 ♞g6 19.a4 ♘d4 20.a5 f5 21.♖d3 ♕b7 22.c4 ♖g5 23.g3 ♖h5 24.f3 f4 (24...♖h3?! 25.♞f2 is unconvincing.) 25.g4 ♕xd5 26.cxd5 ♖h3 The computer offers several lines with a 0.00 verdict, but the position is still extremely complicated.

### 18.♖c4 ♞g8 19.♘c7† ♘e7 20.♘d5† ♘e6!?

20...♘e8 gives White nothing better than repeating with 21.♘c7†.

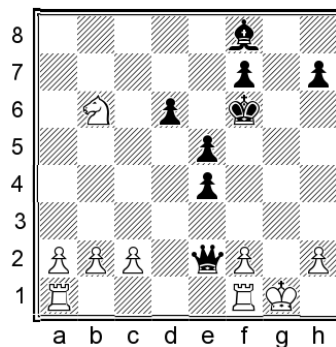
### 21.♘b6†

Here we have an interesting way to avoid a draw:

### 21...♘f6!?

21...d5 22.♘xd5 ♖xd5 23.♖xc8† ♘e7 soon resulted in a perpetual in Galburd – Zaslavsky, Israel 2020.

### 22.♘xc8 ♖d7 23.♘b6 ♞xg2† 24.♘xg2 ♖g4† 25.♘h1 ♖f3† 26.♘g1 ♘e2† 27.♖xe2 ♖xe2

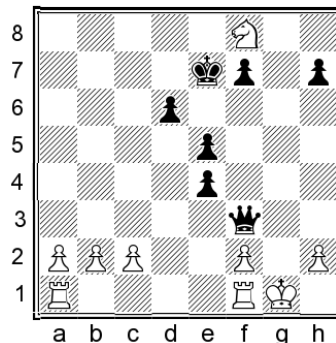


### 28.♘d7†!

It would be dangerous for White to allow our bishop to go to h6 and support the kingside attack.

### 28...♘e7 29.♘xf8 ♖g4† 30.♘h1 ♖f3† 31.♘g1

We still have a draw in the pocket if we want it, but a winning attempt is:



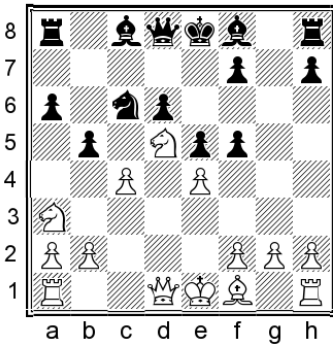
### 31...h5 32.a4! h4!?

32...♖g4† is still an instant draw of course.

33.♠a3 ♖g4† 34.♔h1 h3 35.♞g3 ♜e2 36.♔g1  
 ♕xf8 37.♞xh3 ♜xc2 38.♠a3 ♜xb2 39.♞fa1 ♜b6  
 40.a5 ♜a6

The resulting endgame seems to be balanced, but a lot of play remains.

E) 11.c4?!



This is an older move, and rarely seen nowadays, but it's worth knowing a few details in case someone uses it as a surprise weapon.

11...♜a5†

Other moves are possible, but it's logical to lure the white king into the centre.

12.♜d2 ♜xd2† 13.♔xd2 ♙h6†

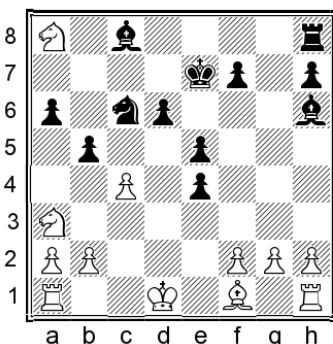
It's always nice to develop with tempo.

14.♔d1 fxe4!

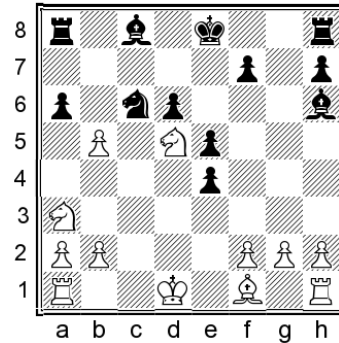
I also analysed 14...0-0 15.exf5 followed by the interesting pawn sacrifice 15...bxc4!?N (15...♙xf5 is a playable alternative which Kotronias recommends) 16.g4 ♙b7, when I found that Black has full compensation. But the text move is objectively best.

15.cxb5

15.♘c7† ♔e7 16.♘xa8 is no better in view of:



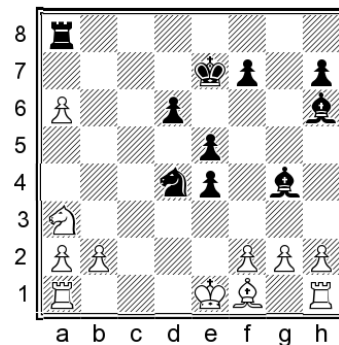
16...♙g4† 17.♙e2 ♙xe2† 18.♔xe2 ♘d4† 19.♔d1  
 ♞xa8 Despite being at a slight material disadvantage, Black had a winning position thanks to the excellent minor pieces along with the overwhelming power of the central pawn mass in Baze – Czuhai, Lansing 1989.



15...♘d4!N

15...axb5?! 16.♙xb5 ♙b7 was enough to give Black a small advantage in Grego – Sospedra Sebastian, corr. 2013, but we can play for more.

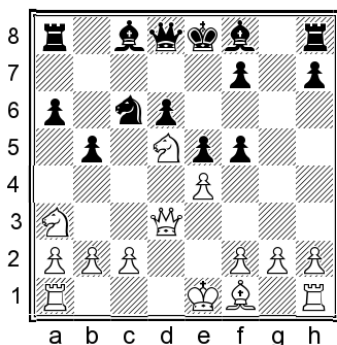
16.♘c7† ♔e7 17.♘xa8 ♙g4† 18.♔e1 ♞xa8  
 19.bxa6



19...d5!

The position looks weird, but objectively we stand clearly better. White's kingside pieces have trouble getting out, and our central pawns are excellent. The engine isn't entirely convinced at first – but let it run for longer, and the extent of White's problems becomes clearer.

F) 11.♜d3



This has been tried by some strong players over the years, but the early queen development isn't fully sound.

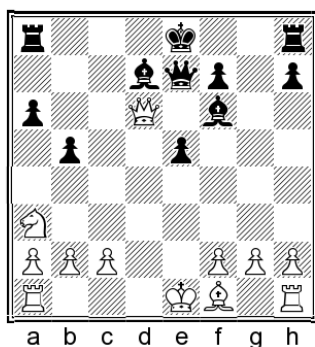
### 11...fxe4 12.♖xe4 ♕g7

We develop in a natural way, and the centralized queen is more a liability than an asset.

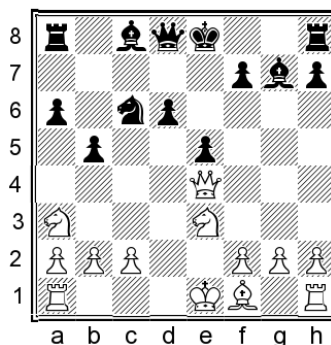
### 13.♗e3

13.g4? is too weakening. 13...♖b8 is a good reply, preparing to exchange White's strong knight, and after something like 14.c3 ♗e7 15.♗xe7 ♖xe7 16.♖c6† ♕d7 17.♖xa6 b4 18.♗c4 d5 White is in trouble.

13.♗f6† has been the most popular choice, when 13...♕xf6 14.♖xc6† ♕d7 15.♖xd6 ♖e7 is known to offer at least enough compensation for the pawn. Kotronias also analyses this, and I don't really have anything to add to what my respected colleague gave. An old but well-played example continued:



16.0-0-0 ♖xd6 17.♖xd6 ♕e7 18.♖d5 f6 19.♖d2 ♕e6 20.♗b1 ♖c8 Black had fine compensation in Muratov – Timoschenko, Beltsy 1977. The bishops are strong and White's knight is badly placed. We can exchange on a3 whenever we want, but we don't have to hurry.



### 13...♕d7!?!N

My idea is to place the rook on c8 and then drop the knight back to e7.

13...d5!? gave Black decent compensation in Kapengut – Kalinitschew, Ordzhonikidze 1978, but there's no need to sacrifice a pawn at this stage.

13...♖b7N 14.0-0-0 ♖d7 is the engine's top choice, which also looks good.

### 14.♖d1!?

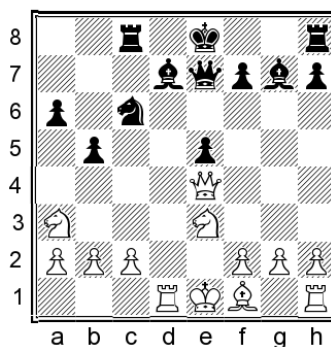
Trying to disrupt our plan.

The slow 14.c3 doesn't cause any problems after 14...♖c8 15.♗ac2 0-0. For instance, 16.g4 ♗e7 17.♖g1 ♕e6 18.♕d3 ♗g6 19.♗b4 ♕h6 with better chances for us.

### 14...♖c8!?

Offering a pawn sac. If White declines it, we'll play ...♕e6 with ideal coordination.

### 15.♖xd6 ♖e7 16.♖d1



### 16...♗d4! 17.c3 f5 18.♖b7 0-0

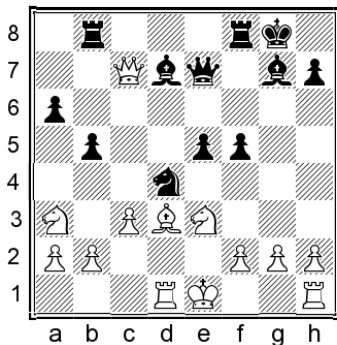
We have a lot of activity for the pawn. A logical continuation is:

### 19. ♖d3 ♜b8

19... ♖e6!? 20. ♗d5 f4 21. ♗xe6† ♕xe6  
22. ♜ec2 ♜xc2† 23. ♜xc2 ♕xa2 is also satisfactory.

### 20. ♗c7

20. ♗a7 ♜a8 also gives us the option of a draw in a similar way.



### 20... ♜bc8

20... ♜fc8 forces the queen to a7, thus keeping a draw in the pocket for us, as 21. ♗a5? e4 followed by ...f4 is horrible for White.

### 21. ♗b7

21. ♗a7? ♗d6! unpins the d7-bishop while leaving White facing the horrible threat of ...♜c7.

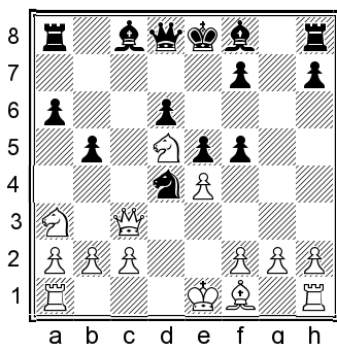
The text move repeats the position from move 19, so we can either force a draw with 21... ♜b8 and so on, or keep the game going with 19... ♗e6!?

### G) 11. ♗f3?

This queen move feels even more artificial than the previous one.

### 11... ♜d4 12. ♗c3

White is playing for tricks but we are ready for them.



### 12... ♜b8!

We actually don't need to prevent the check on c7.

12... ♜a7 13. 0-0 ♕g7! is good enough for a clear advantage, but the text move is even better.

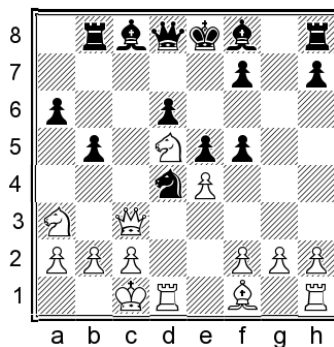
### 13. 0-0-0

13. ♜c7† ♜d7 14. ♜d5 ♕b7 15. ♕d3 (15. ♗h3 ♜e8 is also winning for us) and now in Best – Lawrence, corr. 2011, the simple 15... ♕xd5N 16. exd5 b4 would have been winning.

13. ♕d3 was seen in Bochenek – Peczkowski, Poland 1995, when 13... ♕h6!N would have been horrible for White: 14. ♜c7† (14. 0-0 runs into 14... ♜xe4 when White can't recapture due to the fork on e2) 14... ♜f8 White doesn't have a good move.

13. exf5 ♕b7! 14. ♜c7† ♜d7 15. ♜axb5 axb5 16. ♜xb5 ♜c8 17. ♕c4 d5 is also winning for Black, Van Roon – Dek, Netherlands 2015.

The text move was played in Derlich – Hanewinkel, Dortmund 1987. Black has a few strong ways to continue, but my favourite is to ignore White's 'threat':

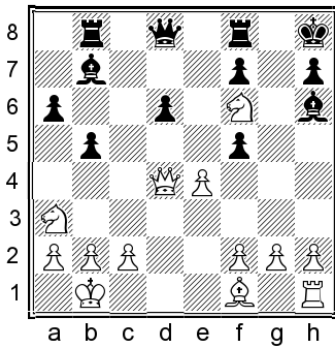


### 13... ♕b7!N 14. ♜xd4 exd4 15. ♗xd4 ♕h6† 16. ♜b1 0-0 17. ♜f6†

17. exf5 gives us a choice of strong continuations, the simplest being 17... ♕g7 18. f6 ♕xd5 19. fxg7 ♜e8 20. ♕d3 ♕xg2 21. ♜g1 d5 with a decisive advantage.

### 17... ♜h8

White is in big trouble as the discovered checks yield nothing. For instance:



**18. ♖h5†**

We were threatening ...♗g7, so White has nothing better than this move.

**18...f6 19.exf5 ♖e8 20.♗d1 ♗e5**

We have a winning advantage.

### Conclusion

In this chapter we considered White's rare options in the tabiya arising after 1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.d4

cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 e5 6.♗db5 d6 7.♗g5 a6 8.♗a3 b5 9.♗xf6 gxf6 10.♗d5 f5.

11.g3 is a respectable sideline, when 11...fxe4 12.♗g2 ♗g7 13.♗xe4 ♗e6 is the normal continuation. Then 14.c3 is a reasonable but not-too-threatening continuation, while 14.♗h5 ♗c8 is a bit more critical, but still fine for us as long as we know what we're doing.

11.exf5 is perfectly playable, but after 11...♗xf5 White would do best to transpose to Chapter 4, since the independent alternatives lead nowhere.

Next we considered the sacrificial continuations 11.♗xb5 and 11.♗xb5, neither of which should threaten us if we are well prepared. In both cases, I like the idea of an early ...♗a5 with a view to seizing the initiative by counter-sacrificing the exchange.

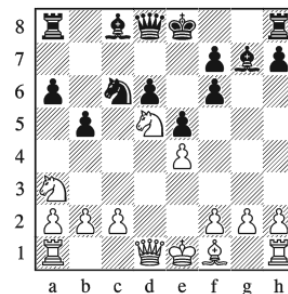
Finally, 11.c4?!, 11.♗d3 and especially 11.♗f3? all fail to impress, although as usual, a certain amount of opening knowledge will help to maximize your chances to punish White's eccentric play.

10...♔g7  
6 10...Bg7 Lines with c2-c3

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# Chapter 6

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## 10...♔g7 Lines with c2-c3

### Variation Index

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1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 e5 6.♗db5 d6 7.♔g5 a6  
8.♗a3 b5 9.♔xf6 gxf6 10.♗d5 ♔g7 11.♔d3 ♗e7 12.♗xe7 ♔xe7

A) 13.c3

B) 13.0-0 0-0

B1) 14.♔f3

B2) 14.c3 f5

B21) 15.exf5 e4 16.♔e1

B22) 15.♗c2 f4!?

B221) 16.♔e2!?

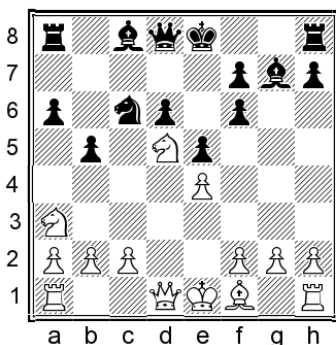
B222) 16.♗b4

B223) 16.a4 bxa4

B2231) 17.♗b4!?

B2232) 17.♔xa4

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6 8.♘a3 b5 9.♙xf6 gxf6 10.♘d5 ♙g7

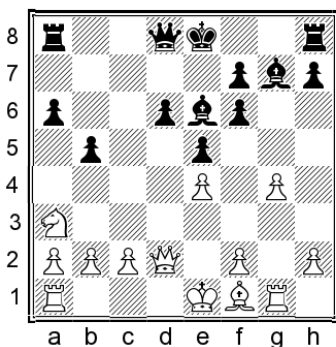


This move is far from new, but it's a nice way to bring fresh ideas into the Sveshnikov – although if you play this way, you still need to be willing to transpose to some of the previous chapters which we analysed via 10...f5. What are some of the reasons for developing the bishop at this stage? The first important point is that we can quickly follow up with ...♘e7 to remove White's strongest piece. In general terms, in postponing ...f5 we hope to play it later with greater effect. Another point is to avoid any ideas involving a sacrifice on b5. Early in 2000 I started working with the prominent young French grandmaster Nataf, and we found a lot of new ideas in the present variation.

### 11. ♙d3

11.c3 should be met by 11...f5, transposing to Chapter 4. (11...♘e7?! is an independent try but White easily obtains a good position with 12.♘c2 or 12.♘xe7 ♜xe7 13.♘c2.)

11.g4? is an overoptimistic attempt to clamp down on the light squares. 11...♘e7 12.♞g1 ♘xd5 13.♜xd5 ♙e6 14.♜d2



This position was reached in Hector – Sylvan, Gilleleje 2020. 14...h5!N followed by ...♙h6 is one strong continuation, and the preparatory 14...♙e7!N is also rated by the engine as highly advantageous for us, with ...h5 the likely follow-up.

11.g3!?

This isn't a bad sideline.

11...f5

11...♘e7 is playable, but after 12.♙g2 ♘xd5 13.♜xd5 ♙e6 14.♜d3 ♜d7 15.0-0 Black still has to do some work to equalize.

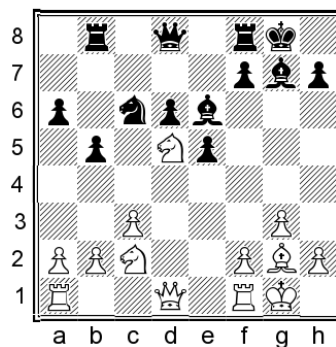
12.exf5

12.♙g2 fxe4 leads back to variation A of Chapter 5 on page 150.

12...♙xf5 13.♙g2 ♙e6 14.c3 0-0 15.♘c2

This is similar to variation B21 of Chapter 4, and would transpose if White were to follow up with a quick ♘ce3. White gains a bit of flexibility by postponing that move, but the position is still fundamentally fine for us.

15...♞b8 16.0-0



16...a5!

With the knight still on c2, it's worth taking a moment to prevent ♘cb4. Compared with the aforementioned line from Chapter 4 we have spent an extra tempo on the queenside, but ...a6-a5 is always a useful move and overall it doesn't harm our chances too much. For example:

17.♘ce3

Having induced ...a5, it seems reasonable for White to try and seize the initiative on the kingside.

17...f5 18.♜h5 ♘e7

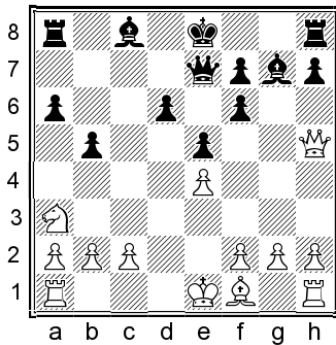
Challenging the strong knight.

19.♞ad1 ♙h8

We have no problems.

Another reasonable sideline is:

11. ♖h5 ♘e7 12. ♘xe7  
 12. ♘e3?! d5 13. ♙d3? was played in Adams – Spasov, Novi Sad (ol) 1990, when 13...b4!N  
 14. ♘b1 f5 would have been disgusting for White.  
 12... ♖xe7

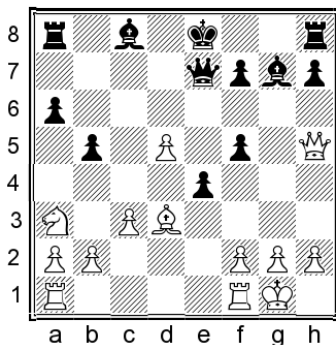


13. c3

This is an important move, not only to improve the knight, but also to protect some vulnerable dark squares. Other moves are worse:

13. c4? d5! is a typical trick, threatening a terrible check on b4.

13. ♙d3?! d5 14. 0-0? (14. c3 is better although 14...f5 still gives us promising play.) 14...f5 15. exd5 e4 16. c3 In Kuklin – Vyzmanavin, Budapest 1989, Black overlooked a lovely idea:

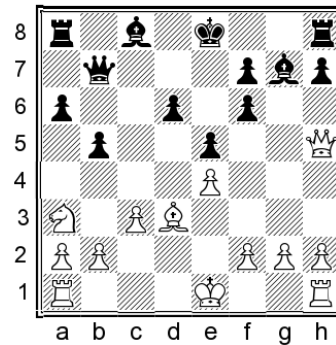


16... ♖b8!!N Intending ... ♖b6-h6 and ... ♖g8, with superb attacking chances.

13... ♖b7

Other moves have been tried, but this seems like the best way of preparing a central pawn break.

14. ♙d3



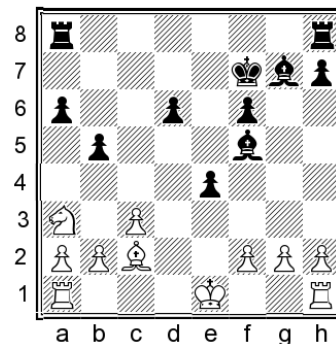
14...f5!N

Black was successful with 14...d5 15. exd5 ♖xd5 16. 0-0-0 ♖e6 in N. Nielsen – Andersen, Silkeborg 2009, but White might be able to claim a small plus at this point.

15. ♖g5

This is White's only challenging idea. A logical line continues:

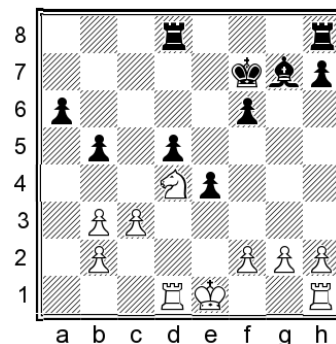
15...f6 16. ♖h5† ♖f7 17. ♖xf7† ♘xf7 18. exf5 e4 19. ♙c2 ♙xf5



20. ♖d1!?

20. 0-0-0 ♖ad8 21. ♙b3† ♙e6 22. ♘c2 f5 is similar, except that in this case we don't have to worry about the knight coming to e3 at all, because ... ♙h6 will be a convenient answer.

20... ♖ad8 21. ♙b3† ♙e6 22. ♘c2 ♙xb3 23. axb3 d5 24. ♘d4



24...b4!

It's important to play this, otherwise b3-b4 will create an unpleasant bind.

25. ♖c6 ♜d6 26. ♖xb4 ♜b8 27. ♖xd5

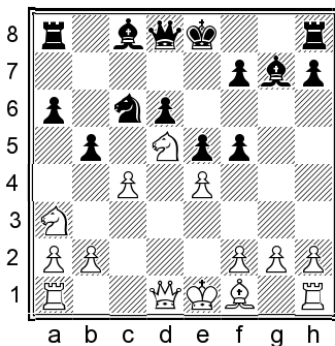
27...0-0 ♜b5 will soon regain the pawn with equal chances.

27...♜xb3 28. ♖e3 ♜xd1† 29. ♖xd1 ♙h6 30. ♖e2 ♙c1

We can take on b2 whenever we want, and a draw is highly likely.

The other significant sideline is:

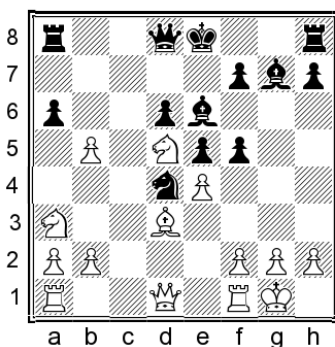
11. c4 f5



12. cxb5

12. ♙d3 gives us a few decent options. My new idea is: 12...♜a5†!N (12...0-0 13.cxb5 axb5 is also perfectly acceptable.) 13. ♜d2 ♜xd2† 14. ♖xd2 fxe4 15. ♙xe4 leaves us with full compensation for the exchange, thanks to the excellent bishops and central pawns.) 15...♜b8 16.cxb5 axb5 17. ♖xb5 0-0 We have nice compensation for the missing pawn, and the position is dynamically balanced.

12...♖d4 13. ♙d3 ♙e6 14.0-0



14...fxe4!N

14...0-0 leads to interesting play but I believe the text move to be more accurate.

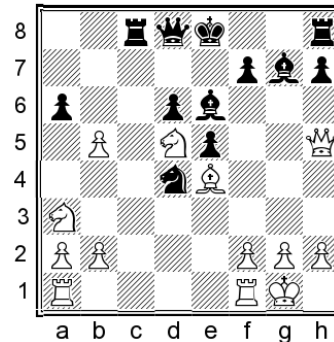
15. ♙xe4 ♜c8

We are one pawn down with another hanging, but our pieces are excellent and ...f5 is a big threat.

16. ♜h5

16.bxa6? f5 17. ♙f3 0-0 18. ♖c3 e4 gives us a tremendous initiative.

16.b6!? is a reasonable move, threatening a check on c7. Best play continues 16...0-0 17.b7 ♜c5! 18. ♜h5! f5 19.b8=♜! ♜xb8 20. ♖e7† ♖h8 21. ♖g6† ♖g8 when White should take the draw, since 22. ♖xf8? ♜xf8 gives us a huge initiative for the sacrificed exchange.



16...axb5 17. ♜ad1 h6!

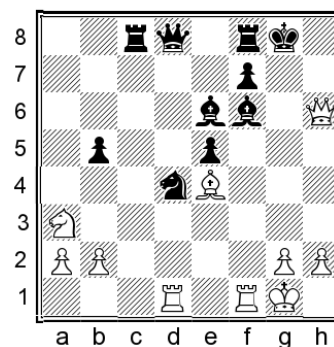
Threatening ...♜g5, as well as preparing to castle. 17...♜c5? 18. ♜xd4! exd4 19.b4 would be deeply unpleasant.

18.f4! 0-0

This should lead to a draw after a mostly forcing sequence.

18...♜c5!? 19. ♜xd4 exd4 20.b4 is a messier continuation which should also be equal, so you may wish to investigate this too.

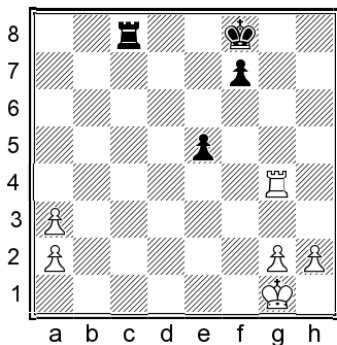
19.fxe5 dxe5 20. ♖f6†! ♙xf6 21. ♜xh6



21...♙f5!

This tactical resource neutralizes White's kingside threats.

22. ♙xf5 ♖xf5 23. ♜xd8 ♖xh6 24. ♜xc8 ♜xc8 25. ♜xf6 ♖g4 26. ♜f5 b4 27. ♜g5† ♖f8 28. ♜xg4 bxa3 29.bxa3



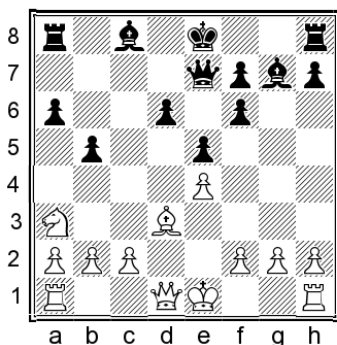
29...Rc1+ 30. Qf2 Rxc2+ 31. Qf3 Qe7

Despite the missing pawn, the rook endgame is an easy draw.

### 11...Nxe7

As mentioned earlier, this is a key idea. After removing the knight from d5, we will have ideas of ...d5 and/or ...f5, creating dynamic chances with our bishop pair.

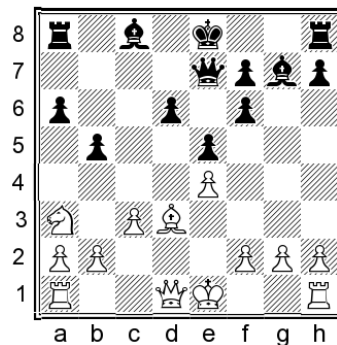
### 12. Nxe7 Rxe7



This is the main tabiya for the 10...Bg7 system – excluding lines such as 11.c3, which practically force us to transpose to the 10...f5 coverage. We will consider **A)** 13.c3 followed by the main line of **B)** 13.0-0.

13.c4 f5 14. Wh5? (14. Wf3? d5! 15.cxd5 fxe4 16. Qxe4 f5 is also excellent for us; 14.0-0 is the normal and best move, transposing to the main line as covered in the next chapter.) 14...d5! 15.cxd5 fxe4 The opening was a complete disaster for the famous grandmaster playing White in Psakhis – Vaisser, Paris 1990.

### A) 13.c3



With this typical move, White prepares to centralize the knight.

### 13...f5

We have a straightforward plan of pushing the central pawns and opening things up for the bishop pair, even if it means temporarily sacrificing a pawn.

13...0-0 followed by ...f5 is likely to transpose.

### 14.exf5

Capturing the pawn is a natural reaction.

14.0-0 0-0 transposes to variation B2 below. (14...f4!? is also possible, when 15. Nc2 0-0 transposes to variation B22 below. However, White can also try to profit from the chosen move order with 15.c4!?, when 15... Wg5 is best. The position is interesting and double-edged, and you may find it interesting to investigate further, but it's easier just to transpose to an existing part of our repertoire and move on.)

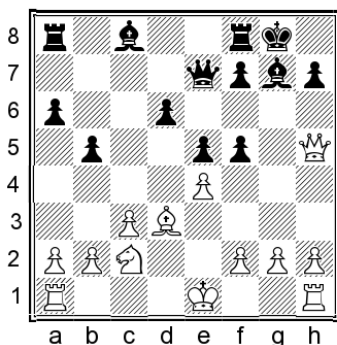
An interesting alternative is:

14. Nc2 0-0 15. Wh5!?

Introducing the option of castling queenside and launching an attack.

15.0-0 transposes to variation B22 below.

15. Ne3 f4 16. Nd5 Wg5 17.g3 Qe6 is fine for us.



15...f4 16.0-0-0!?

White intends to create an attack with g2-g3.

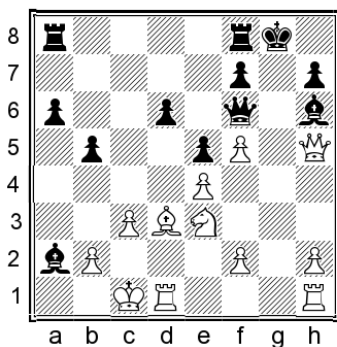
16.0-0-0 transposes to 16.♖h5 in the notes to variation B22 below.

16.g3 also leads to interesting play after 16...f5! 17.0-0-0 ♖b7 18.♗he1 fxg3 19.fxg3 fxe4 20.♙xe4 ♙xe4 21.♗xe4 ♗f2 22.♗e2 ♗af8 23.♗g4 ♗f1 24.♗ed2 ♗xd1† 25.♗xd1 ♔h8, when the position remained balanced in Wallis – O'Connor, corr. 2013.

16...♙e6 17.g3

17.♔b1 ♗d7 is fine for us.

17...♙xa2 18.gxf4 ♗f6! 19.f5 ♙h6† 20.♘e3



20...b4!N

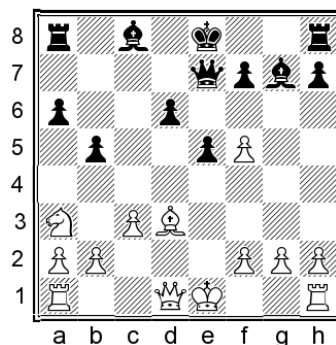
20...♔h8 21.♔c2 ♙xe3 22.fxe3 a5 has proven playable in correspondence games, but the text move is also objectively fine, and to me it feels more natural to open things up on the queenside.

21.♗dg1†

21.♔c2 ♙xe3 22.fxe3 d5 will transpose.

21...♔h8 22.♔c2 ♙xe3 23.fxe3 d5

We have sufficient counterplay and the position remains dynamically balanced.



14...e4 15.♙e2 0-0 16.♘c2 ♙xf5

We have reached a pretty typical scenario for the 10...♙g7 system. White's knight has decent prospects and of course a2-a4 is a key idea to chip away at the queenside. On the other hand, we have the bishop pair and the open g-file, along with a central pawn majority. For the moment the central pawns are immobile, but a later advance of the f-pawn could provide strong attacking chances.

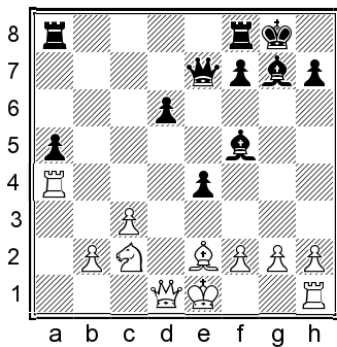
## 17.0-0

Delaying castling doesn't give White anything special, for instance:

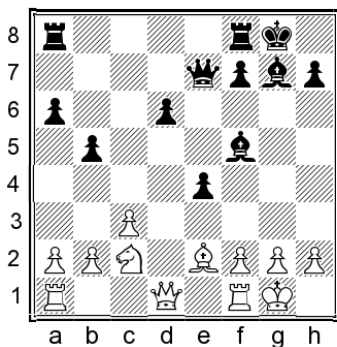
17.♘e3?! ♙e6 only makes the knight a target for our intended pawn advances. 18.0-0 ♗ad8 19.a4? was played in Grabics – Schipkov, Győr 1990, when 19...b4!N 20.♘d5 (20.cxb4 d5 21.♙xa6 f5 is crushing) 20...♗g5 21.♘xb4 ♙h3 22.g3 ♙xf1 23.♗xf1 d5 would have been close to winning for Black.

17.♗d5 isn't such a bad move, although 17...♗e5 18.♗d1 ♙e6 19.♗xd6 ♙xa2 20.♘b4 ♙e6 left Black with no problems in Dvoirys – Yakovich, Moscow 1990.

17.a4 bxa4 18.♗xa4 a5 sees White open the queenside without being fully developed, and we are doing fine. For instance:



19.♖d5 (19.0-0 ♗d7 20.♖a3 ♖h8! 21.♗e3 f5 offers us good prospects for counterplay.) 19...♗e5 We respond the same way as in the 17.♗d5 line noted above. 20.♗xe5 ♗xe5 21.♗e3 ♗d7 22.♖a2 (22.♖xe4 ♖fb8 23.♗d1 ♗f5 gives us at least enough compensation to win back the pawn while keeping an edge in piece activity.) 22...♗e6 23.♗c4 ♖fc8 24.♗xe6 fxe6 25.♖e2 ♖ab8 26.g3 d5 We have a pleasant endgame.  
Returning to the main line, I found an interesting new idea:



### 17...♗d7!N

My idea is to prevent a2-a4 while at the same time liberating the f-pawn, preparing the typical plan of ...♖h8 followed by ...f5.

Alternatives such as 17...♗e5 and 17...♗e6 are also perfectly fine.

### 18.♗e3

Aiming for d5 is natural enough.

I also considered:

18.♗d2 ♖ad8

Now we are ready for ideas of ...f5 and ...♗e5.

19.♗b4

It's logical to send the knight towards d5.

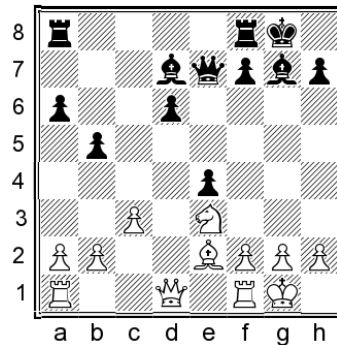
The alternative is: 19.♖ad1 d5!? Showing another point behind our previous move. 20.♗b4 (20.♗xd5 ♗g4 clearly favours us.) 20...d4 21.cxd4 ♗d6 22.♗c2 ♗g6 23.♖h1 ♗c6 With nice compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

19...f5 20.♗d5 ♗e6 21.♖ad1

21.♗f4 ♗h6 22.♖ad1 ♖h8 23.g3 ♗e5 24.♖h1 ♗c6! gives us the easier game.

21...♖h8 22.b3 ♗c6 23.c4 ♗f7 24.g3 ♗e5

We have at least equal chances.



### 18...♖ad8

Again we centralize the rook before taking further action.

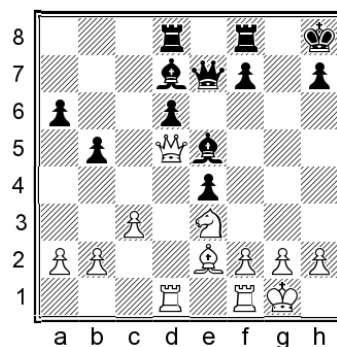
### 19.♗d5

19.♗d5 ♗e6 20.♗d2 f5 transposes to the analysis of 18.♗d2 above.

19.a4 bxa4 20.♗xa6 can be met by 20...♖h8 21.♗d5 ♗g5 (21...♗e6!? is a valid alternative) 22.f4 exf3 23.♗xf3 ♖b8, when our bishop pair and active pieces are at least as important as our split pawn structure.

### 19...♖h8 20.♖ad1 ♗e5!

Placing a bishop on this strong square is almost always beneficial in positions of this type.



### 21.f4

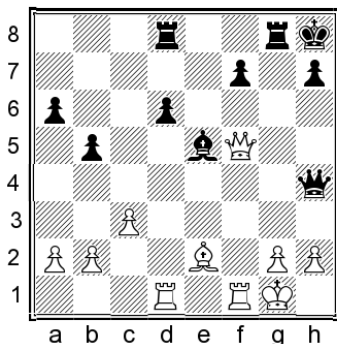
21. ♖d2 f5 22. f4 exf3 23. ♖xf3 ♙e6 24. ♗d5 ♖g7 also gives us good prospects for counterplay.

**21...exf3 22. ♖xf3 ♖g8**

22...f5 23. ♖h5 f4 24. ♗d5 ♖g7 25. ♙f3 a5 also looks completely fine.

**23. ♗f5 ♙xf5 24. ♖xf5 ♖h4**

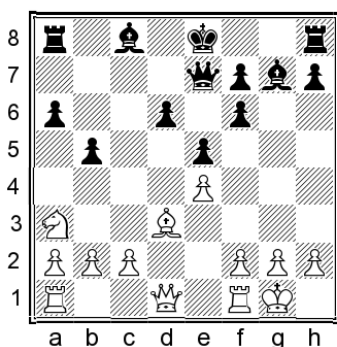
White only has one way to defend the kingside:



**25. ♖h5 ♙xh2† 26. ♗h1 ♖xh5 27. ♙xh5 ♙e5 28. ♖xf7 a5**

With an equal, drawish endgame.

**B) 13.0-0**



This natural move is, unsurprisingly, the main line.

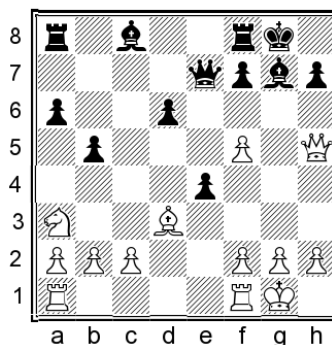
**13...0-0**

13...f5 is sometimes played but we can hardly do better than aim for a transposition by castling within the next move or two, and it feels more natural to get the king safe first.

In this chapter we will concentrate on **B1)** 14. ♖f3 followed by the more popular **B2)** 14.c3.

14.c4 is the big main line which will be covered in the next chapter.

14. ♖h5 is sometimes played but the best White can achieve is to transpose to some other line. 14...f5 (14...d5!? also deserves attention but there's no particular need to get creative.) 15.exf5?! This is the independent try, which fails to impress. (15.c3 is covered via 15. ♖h5 in the notes to variation B2 below. 15.c4 transposes to variation C of the next chapter on page 214.) 15...e4



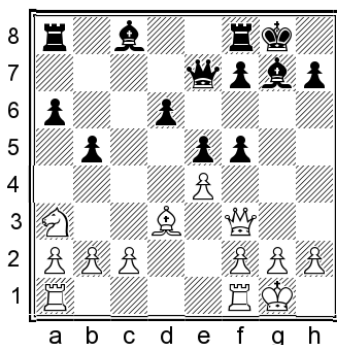
16.f6 (16. ♖ae1?! d5 17.c3 b4 gives us an even better version of the same kind of position.) 16...♙xf6 17. ♖ae1 d5! 18. ♖xd5 ♙b7 19. ♖f5 ♖ae8 20.c3 ♙e5 21. ♙b1 ♗h8 22.g3 ♙b8 Our active pieces and attacking chances are worth more than White's extra pawn.

**B1) 14. ♖f3**

This usually transposes to another variation, but it also has some independent possibilities which we will discuss here.

**14...f5**

14...d5!? is an interesting alternative, when 15.exd5 e4 16.d6! exf3 17.dxe7 ♖e8 18. ♙e4 ♖a7 19. ♙xf3 leads to an endgame where our bishop pair should offer enough compensation to regain the sacrificed pawn sooner or later. But Black doesn't really have any winning chances, so I would prefer to head for a more complicated middlegame instead.



### 15.exf5

15.c4 is the main move, which immediately transposes to variation D of the next chapter on page 219.

### 15...d5!

To justify the sacrifice of one pawn, we need to give up a second!

15...♙b7?! 16.♙e4 is less appealing.

### 16.♙xd5

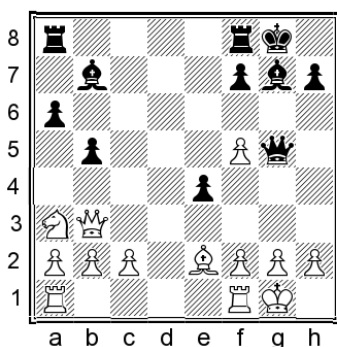
White must accept the offer, otherwise ...e4 will hurt.

### 16...♙b7 17.♙b3 e4 18.♙e2

18.♙ae1?! ♙ae8 19.♙e3 ♙d4 favours Black.

### 18...♙g5

Threatening ...e3 with a huge initiative. Notice that White cannot offer a queen exchange because the b2-pawn needs to be defended.



### 19.♙c4!

Without this, White would be worse. For instance, 19.g3 ♙ad8 20.♙c4 (20.♙ad1?! is strongly met by 20...♙d2!) 20...♙d5 21.♙e3 ♙xf5 22.♙b6 ♙e6 and we have some initiative.

### 19...e3!

Another forced move, without which ♙e3 would stifle our counterplay.

### 20.♙xe3 ♙ae8

We have a potent initiative to compensate for White's three extra pawns. The immediate threat is of course ...♙e3.

### 21.h4!

21.g3? ♙d4 22.h4 ♙h6 is crushing.

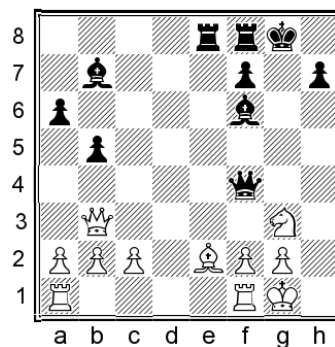
### 21...♙xh4

White has bought a bit of time, but ...♙g5 is still a big threat.

### 22.f6!

22.♙ad1!? is playable, but after 22...♙h8 (but not 22...♙g5?! 23.f4 ♙g3 24.♙f3 when Black's compensation is in question; the rook on d1 prevents the otherwise deadly ...♙d4 from being played) White must play 23.f6! anyway, when either capture leaves us with full compensation but no advantage. (On the other hand, 23.♙d3?! ♙f6! would prevent f5-f6 while preparing ...♙g8 with a dangerous attack.)

### 22...♙xf6 23.♙f5 ♙f4 24.♙g3



### 24...♙h8

Preparing ...♙g8, which would leave White horribly pinned down. A logical continuation would be:

### 25.♙h5 ♙f5 26.♙g3

26.♙xf6? ♙xe2 is winning.

Now we have a choice:

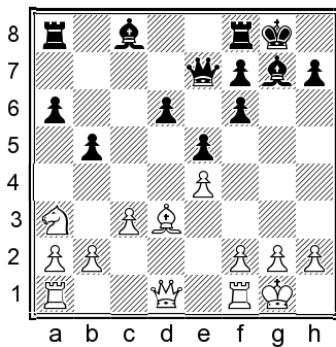
## 26...♔f4

We can take a repetition with this move.

Alternatively, 26...♔c5!? would be a decent way to keep the game going, with fair compensation for the pawn.

### B2) 14.c3

Let me remind you that while 14.c4 is the main line which will be examined later, the text move is an important option which will be our sole focus for the remainder of this chapter. White gets ready to bring the knight into play via c2.



## 14...f5

As usual, this pawn break is a key part of our plans.

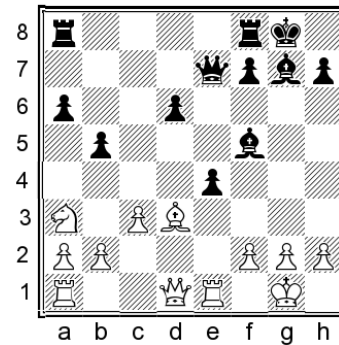
White's main options are **B21)** 15.exf5 and **B22)** ♖c2.

15.♔h5 is playable, but 15...d5 16.exf5 (or 16.exd5 e4 17.♙e2 ♜d8) 16...e4 17.♙e2 ♔f6 18.♞fd1 (18.♞c2 ♔xf5 is good for us) 18...♔xf5 19.♔xf5 ♙xf5 20.♞xd5 ♙e6 21.♞d2 ♞fd8 22.♞ad1 ♞xd2 23.♞xd2 ♙xa2 (or 23...♙h6!?) results in a level endgame.

### B21) 15.exf5 e4 16.♞e1

16.♙e2 ♙xf5 17.♞c2 takes us back to variation A with 13.c3.

## 16...♙xf5



## 17.♞c2

It's important to notice that 17.♙xe4?? ♙xe4 18.f3 can be easily refuted by 18...♔a7†, as seen in Nestande – Mork, Norway 2000.

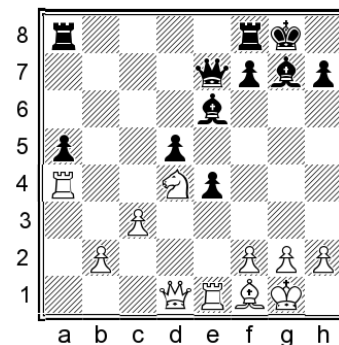
## 17...d5 18.♙f1

18.♞e3? ♙e6 19.♙c2 ♞ad8 gives us easy play. We'll follow up with some combination of ...f5 and ...d5, or possibly ...b4 to make the central pawn chain even more of a threat.

## 18...♙e6

The position is similar to variation A, except for some minor changes in piece placement.

## 19.a4 bxa4 20.♞xa4 a5 21.♞d4

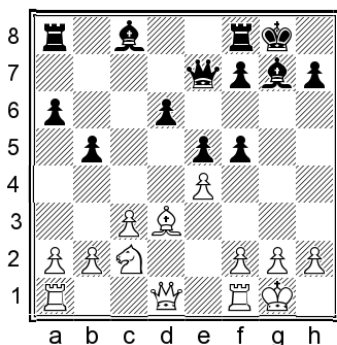


This position has been reached in a few games. We are under no pressure and have several continuations of roughly equal merit. I would be tempted to try:

## 21...♔b7!?!N

Attacking the b2-pawn, while overprotecting d5 and preparing ...♙d7 to chase the rook away. Given the chance, we can follow up with ...f5 later, with active prospects all across the board.

### B22) 15.♞c2



### 15...f4!?

I recommend this space-gaining move, which leads to a structure resembling a King's Indian. Another relevant point is that the knight can no longer utilize the e3-square.

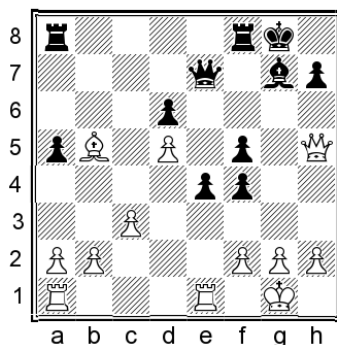
15...♖b8 is an equally popular alternative which leads to a different type of game.

We will consider **B221)** 16.♗e2!?, **B222)** 16.♘b4 and finally the main line of **B223)** 16.a4.

16.c4?! ♗b7 (16...bxc4 17.♙xc4 ♙e6 is also fine) 17.cxb5 axb5 18.f3?! d5 19.exd5 ♖c5† 20.♙h1 ♙xd5 21.b4 ♗c6 22.♗e2 was seen in Hernandez Carmenates – Grimal, Cuba 2000, when 22...♖fc8!N 23.a3 ♙c4 would have given Black a clear advantage.

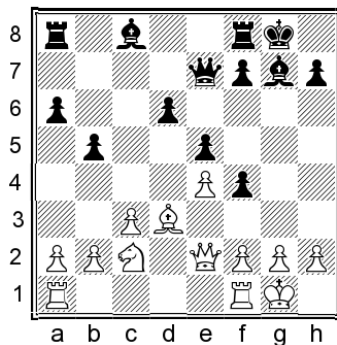
16.f3 ♖b8 17.♗e2 ♗g5 18.♖fd1 ♙f6 19.♘b4 occurred in Voros – Tegzes, Hungary 2011, when the simple 19...♙h8!N followed by ...♖g8 would have offered Black promising attacking chances.

16.♗h5 prevents our queen from coming to g5. After the natural 16...♙e6 17.♘b4 we can obtain an excellent position with: 17...a5 (17...♗d7 18.a4 bxa4 19.♙xa6 ♖fb8!?) is also playable, but the text move is simple and strong.) 18.♘d5 ♙xd5 19.exd5 e4 20.♖fe1 f5 21.♙xb5



21...♖ab8 (21...a4!N is a good alternative) 22.a4 This position was reached in Szlag – Bromberger, Verdun 1995, and now 22...♙e5!N would have reached a position where White's extra pawn is not doing much, while we have an easy plan of attacking along the g-file.

### B221) 16.♗e2!?

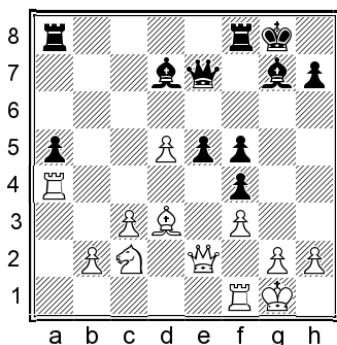


This has not been so popular, but I think it has equal merit to the other main lines which we'll examine shortly. White connects the rooks and intends a2-a4, with big pressure on the queenside.

### 16...♗g5

I will take this natural move as the main line.

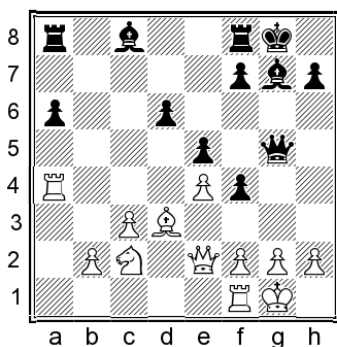
16...f5!N is an interesting alternative, intending 17.a4 d5! with complicated play. Here are a few sample lines: 18.f3 (18.exd5?! e4 19.axb5 f3 20.gxf3 ♗g5† 21.♙h1 exd3 22.♗xd3 f4 turns out in Black's favour) 18...bxa4 19.♖xa4 a5 20.exd5 ♙d7



21.♖a1 (21.♖c4 ♘b5 22.♘a3 ♙xc4 23.♘xc4 ♖h8 leads to unclear play.) 21...♗c5† 22.♖h1 ♖h8 23.♖ad1 ♖ae8 With decent compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

### 17.a4 bxa4 18.♖xa4

The queen helps to put pressure on the a-pawn – although notice that White is not threatening to capture it just yet, because we have a trick with ...f3.



### 18...a5

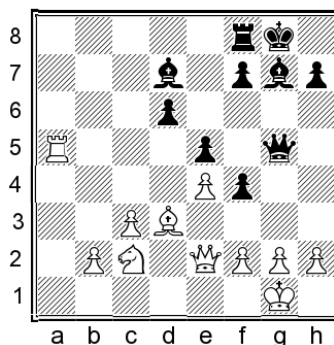
Despite the point mentioned in the last comment, it won't be long before the pawn would be truly in danger on a6, so we may as well move it now and prevent the knight from going to b4. White now has a wide choice.

### 19.♘a3

It's logical to send the knight towards c4. White has several alternatives, most of which are connected with queenside activities:

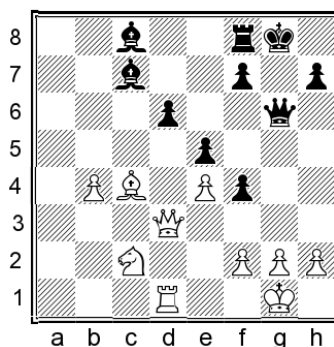
Let's start by noting that 19.♘b4?? loses material to 19...♙d7 or 19...♙h3.

19.♖fa1N is a natural move but 19...♙d7! is a good reply which leads to an unclear game, the tactical point being: 20.♖xa5? ♖xa5 21.♖xa5



21...f3! White is forced to retreat with 22.♗f1, when 22...♙h3! or the simple 22...fxg2 gives us the advantage.

19.♙c4!N is an untested but logical move which the engine proposes. The thematic 19...♙f6 should be our choice, when play may continue: 20.♖fa1 ♙d8 21.♗d3 ♖b8 22.b4 axb4 23.♖xb4 ♖xb4 24.cxb4 ♗g6 25.♖d1 ♙c7 The bishop temporarily settles for a defensive role, but the plan is still to get to b6 when the time is right.



26.♘a3 ♙g4 27.f3 ♙h3 28.♗f1 ♙b6† 29.♖h1 ♙d7 The bishop is strong on b6 and we have a fair share of the chances.

### 19.♘e1

White reroutes the knight with a view to defending the kingside. The best reply is:

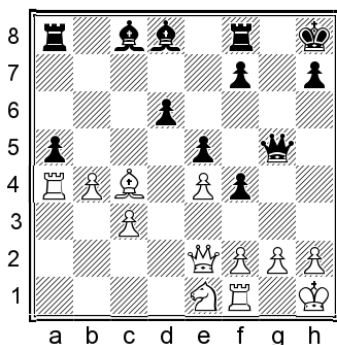
19...♙f6!N

The bishop belongs on b6! We will see the same idea in several of the alternative lines below.

19...♙b7?! generally isn't a good square for the light-squared bishop in these lines, and 20.♘f3 was slightly better for White in Goloshchapov – Jakovenko, Saint Vincent 2005.

20.♙c4 ♙d8 21.b4 ♖h8 22.♖h1

A tense position has been reached. The following continuation is quite instructive:



22...Ra7!

This flexible, multi-purpose move overprotects f7 while also preparing to swing the rook to the kingside at a suitable moment. My illustrative line continues:

23. Qf3 Wg6 24. Rfa1 f5! 25. Qd5 Rg7 26. Rg1 Qd7 27. exf5 Wxf5 28. Ra2 axb4 29. cxb4 Qb6

The position remains objectively balanced, but I like Black's chances with the two bishops and attacking prospects on the kingside.

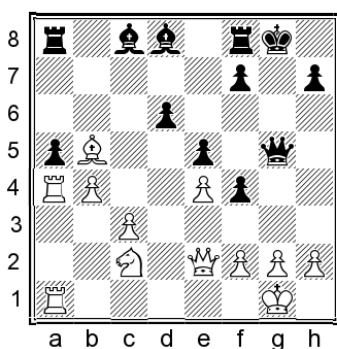
19. Qb5

This was played in Munguntuul – Mihevc Mohr, Bled (ol) 2002. We should respond with a familiar manoeuvre:

19...Qf6!N 20. Rfa1 Qd8

Guarding the a-pawn and preparing to put the bishop on b6 when the time is right. My line continues:

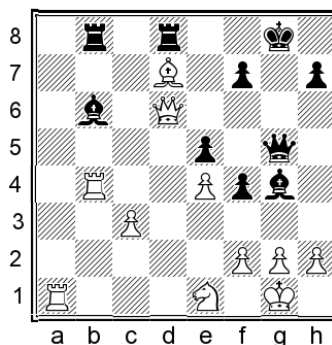
21. b4



21...Rb8!

Now ...f3 is a threat.

22. Qe1 axb4 23. Rxb4 Qg4 24. Wd3 Qb6! 25. Wxd6 Rfd8 26. Qd7

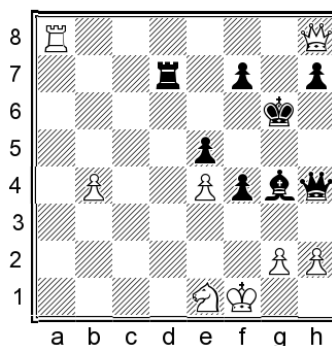


26...Qxf2+! 27. Qxf2 Rxb4 28. cxb4 Rxd7 29. Ra8+ Qg7 30. Wf8+ Qg6 31. Wh8

31. Wg8+ Qh6 is no problem for us.

31...Wh4+ 32. Qf1

Now Black finishes with a nice combination:



32...Wxe1+!

32...f6!? is playable but we don't have real winning chances unless White does something stupid, so we may as well just force the draw.

33. Qxe1 Rd1+ 34. Qf2 Rd2+

The game ends in an unusual perpetual check.

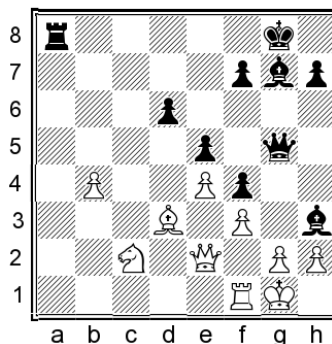
Finally, White can take immediate action on the queenside:

19. b4!? Qh3

It's useful to have this move available to defend the a8-rook with gain of tempo.

20. f3 axb4 21. Rxa8 Rxa8 22. cxb4

I found an interesting new idea:



22...♔e6!N

The thematic 22...♔f6 is also playable, and 23.b5 ♕d8 24.♖b4? ♕b6† 25.♖h1 ♖h8 was quickly winning for Black in Delorme – Gladyszev, Nancy 2007. But White has plenty of other options available on moves 23 and 24.

23.b5 ♖d8

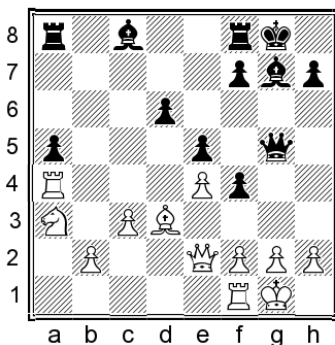
With our rook actively posted on the open file, it becomes quite attractive to transfer the queen to the queenside as well.

24.♖b4 ♕f6

White's b-pawn could become dangerous in some endgames, but we also have our chances with the two bishops and active major pieces. Play could continue:

25.♖h1 ♖b6 26.g3 fxg3 27.hxg3 ♖g7 28.♖d5 ♕xd5 29.exd5 ♖d4

The position remains balanced.



19...♕f6

Again we see this typical manoeuvre.

20.♖c4 ♖h8!

Our previous move was not only intended to improve the bishop; it also helped to clear the g-file. Of course, it's a typical plan which we've seen many times in positions where the pawn has advanced to f4.

21.♖h1

The d-pawn is poisoned: 21.♖xd6? ♕h3 22.f3 ♕e7 23.♖h1 (23.♖c4?? ♕c5† 24.♖h1 ♖g8 is killing.) 23...♕xd6 24.gxh3 ♕c5 Our attacking chances are worth much more than White's extra pawn.

21...♖g8 22.f3 ♕e6!

We continue to offer White a choice of pawns to capture.

23.♖xa5

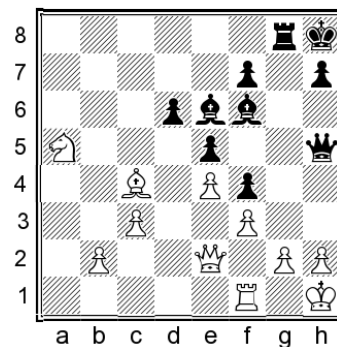
23.♖xd6?? loses to 23...♖ad8, and if the knight moves away then ...♖xd3 comes.

23.♖xa5?? is also disastrous in view of 23...♕d8 24.b4 ♖g6 with a deadly attack.

23...♖xa5 24.♖xa5

The players agreed a draw here in Filipek – Zambor, corr. 2007. Let's continue the line a bit deeper.

24...♖h5 25.♕c4



25...♕c8!

Just like in the Mar del Plata Variation of the King's Indian, it's worth preserving the light-squared bishop in order to be able to sacrifice it later.

26.♖f2

The queen needs to move to a defensive position before ...♕h4-g3 comes.

26...♕h4 27.♕xf7!

White should take the opportunity to bag another pawn, although our initiative remains strong enough.

27...♖h6 28.♖g1 ♖g7 29.♕d5 ♕h3

Forcing White to give up the queen for some pieces.

30.gxh3 ♖xg1† 31.♖xg1 ♕g3! 32.♖g2 ♖h4!

The last difficult move. A possible finish is:

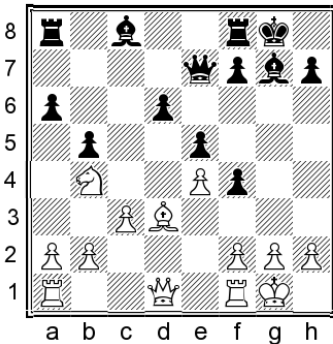
### 33.♖f1

This isn't forced, but if we are allowed to reroute the bishop via f2 then we'll have no problems.

33...♙xh2 34.♖xh2 ♖g3†

The game will end in perpetual check.

### B222) 16.♘b4



This time White opts to activate the knight before breaking with a2-a4. Let me stress that this pawn break must remain an essential part of White's plans; the only question concerns the timing of it.

### 16...♙g5

The queen goes to its preferred attacking square, sidestepping the ♘d5 attack before it happens.

### 17.f3!?

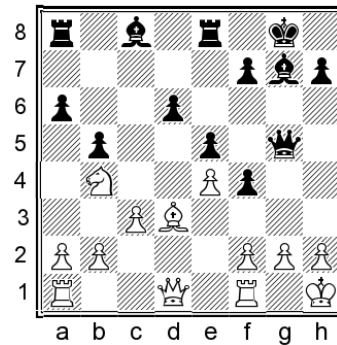
This has been the usual continuation, freeing the f2-square to enable the rook to defend g2.

Another possible way is:

17.♔h1!? ♖e8!?!N

Preparing a quick rook lift via e6. This is an interesting motif because White is unable to prevent it by putting the bishop on c4, unlike in the 16.a4 line which we'll analyse next.

17...♔h8 18.a4! sees White's queenside initiative get underway. Black still has decent resources, but I prefer the recommended novelty. (On the other hand, 18.♖g1 ♙b7 19.g4?! fxg3 20.♖xg3 ♙h4 21.f3 ♙h6 gave Black the upper hand in Makoli – Atakisi, Antalya 2004.)



18.a4

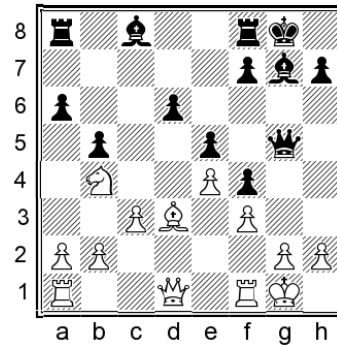
18.♘d5!?! is possible, although 18...♖b8 19.g3 ♖e6 20.gxf4 ♙h4 21.f3 ♖h6 22.♙c2 exf4 23.♙f2 ♔f8 gives us enough counterplay.

18...♖e6 19.g4

19.axb5? ♖h6 yields a decisive attack.

19...♖h6 20.f3 ♖xh2†

Leading to perpetual check.



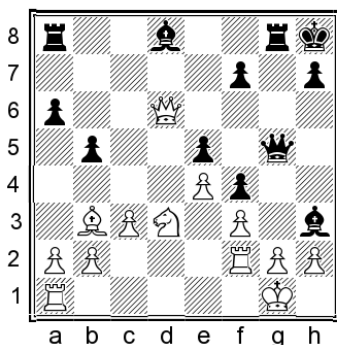
### 17...♙f6

Again we see this typical rerouting of the bishop. Possible plans are deploying it to b6 or via h4-g3 like in the King's Indian. The text move also clears a path along the g-file, as we have already seen.

### 18.♘d5

This seems like the most thematic continuation of White's choice on move 16, activating the knight before breaking on the queenside.

Avoiding a2-a4 in favour of piece manoeuvres is not good enough, for instance: 18.♙c2?! ♔h8 19.♖f2 ♖g8 20.♙b3 ♙d8! 21.♙xd6 (21.♘d5 ♙e6 22.♔h1 ♖g6 is also unpleasant for White.) 21...♙h3 22.♘d3



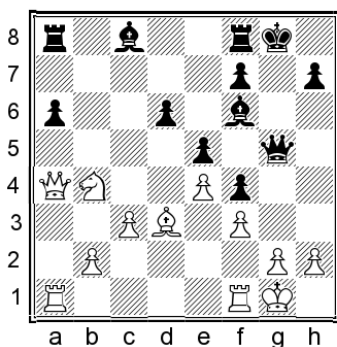
22...d6! 23.c6 e1 d7 24.c2 ad8 25.d5 c5  
26.f1 e6 Black had a winning advantage in  
Antal – Gladyszev, Millfield 2002.

18.a4

This is a reasonable option, when my analysis  
continues:

18...bxa4 19.cxa4!N

19.cxa4 has been played in some games, and  
19...h8 gives us typical counterplay. The text  
move is the engine's preference, so let's see where  
it leads.



19...e6!

Our plan is to attack along the g-file, and the a6-  
pawn is not at all important in this strategy. Let us  
also note that the dark-squared bishop is, as usual,  
looking for an opportunity to go to b6 – or possibly  
h4-g3, as mentioned earlier.

20.f2!?

20.cxa6 h8 21.d5 g8 22.c2 h3 23.f2  
d8 24.b4 e6 25.f1 g6 gives us a strong  
attack.

20...fb8!?

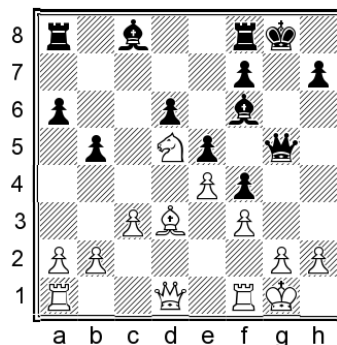
White's last move overprotected g2, so we'll forget  
about the g-file for the moment and instead  
prioritize the bishop manoeuvre to b6.

21.c1 d8 22.c6 b6 23.cxb8 xb8 24.b4  
c8 25.cxa6 e3!?

25...xf2† 26.f2 xc3 is also fine.

26.a3 h4 27.e1 h8

We reach an unusual kind of equality where  
White is tied to the defence of f2 and is unable to  
do anything with the extra pawn, but we also can't  
do much to increase the pressure, so a draw would  
be the correct result.



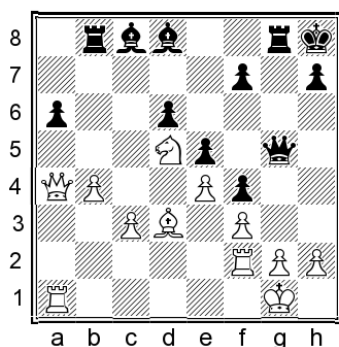
18...d8 19.a4 bxa4

This is the most natural reaction but we also  
have an alternative way:

19...b8!N 20.axb5 axb5 is perfectly playable,  
when my sample line continues: 21.b4 e6 22.a6  
h8 23.h1 g8 24.f2 d5 (24...g6 25.d6  
h6 26.d2 h5 27.g1 g3 28.e2 d5  
29.exd5 b6 30.xb6 xb6 31.d6 hx2†  
32.xh2 e1† 33.g1 h4† is a nice fantasy line  
ending in a draw, but it's far from forced of course;  
besides, we can play for more.) 25.exd5 b6 We  
have the better chances, as White's king is  
somewhat vulnerable.

20.cxa4

20.cxa4 is the alternative, when my  
improvement is: 20...b8!N (20...e6?! 21.c6  
b8 22.b4 c8 23.cxd6 d5 24.exd5 xc3  
25.cxa6 e7 26.ab1 b8 27.f1 slightly  
favoured White in Moskalyov – Ananskikh, corr.  
2013.) 21.b4 h8 22.f2 g8 We are happy to  
abandon the a-pawn in order to build our attack.  
Play could continue:



23.♙xa6 ♜e6 24.♚h1 ♞xd5 25.exd5 ♞b6 26.♞f2 ♞g6 White is in some trouble on the kingside.

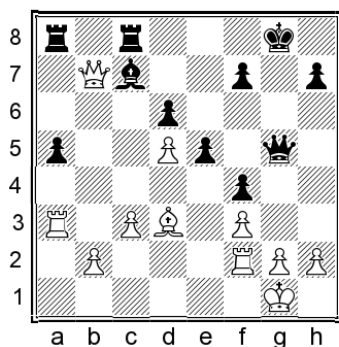
### 20...a5

Notice the multifunctional position of the bishop on d8, which controls the queenside and is poised to play a role in the attack when the opportunity arises.

### 21.b4

White should play with a sense of urgency on the queenside.

Here is a sample line showing slower play: 21.♞f2 ♞d7 22.♞a3 ♞e6 23.♞b3 ♞xd5 24.exd5 ♞c7 25.♞b7 ♞fc8



26.♚h1 ♞ab8 27.♞a6 ♞b6 28.♞c2 ♞c7 We have the better chances due to White's weak king.

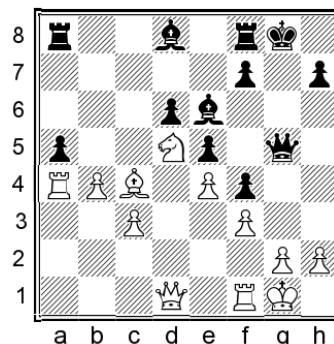
### 21...♞e6

Another example continued 21...♚h8 22.bxa5?! ♞g8 23.♞f2 ♞e6 24.♞a1 ♞h5 25.♞d1 ♞g6 26.♞f1 ♞xa5 27.♞xa5 ♞xa5 and Black was slightly for choice in Sprenger – Kley, Germany 1999, but White's 22nd move was not the best. The position is still interesting but overall I find the text move to be the most logical. We won't hurry to exchange on d5, but it's always useful to

have the option of removing the knight and following up with ...♞b6.

### 22.♞c4

I propose a logical novelty:



### 22...♚h8!N

What could be more natural than preparing to put the rook on the open file?

22...♞c8 23.bxa5 ♞xa5 24.♞xa5 ♞xc4 was equal in Antal – Csirik, Hungary 2006, but personally I would prefer not to simplify in this manner.

### 23.♞f2 ♞g8

It's too early for 23...♞xd5? 24.♞xd5; but after the text move, it's a real threat because ...♞b6 will threaten mate on g2.

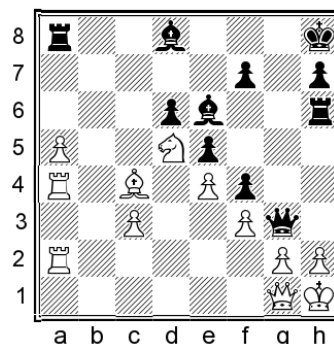
### 24.♚h1 ♞g6

Our rook gets ready to follow the white king to the h-file.

### 25.♞fa2 ♞h6 26.bxa5 ♞g3

Interestingly 26...♞h4 27.♞g1 ♞g3 is also evaluated as 0.00 by the engine, but from a human perspective it makes no sense to lose a tempo.

### 27.♞g1



### 27...♙xd5

This forces a draw. It's not completely forced, but I don't see a good way to play for a win.

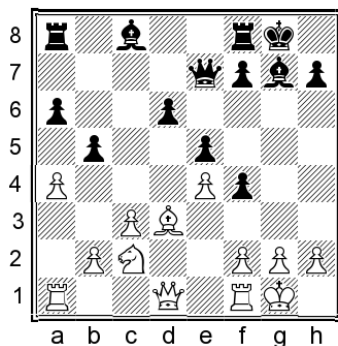
### 28.♙xd5

28.exd5? allows 28...♞xa5!, when the rook is untouchable due to the deadly threat of ...♙b6.

### 28...♞xh2† 29.♞xh2 ♞e1† 30.♞g1 ♞h4†

It's worth remembering this perpetual checking mechanism, as it can occur in other lines with this kingside pawn structure.

### B223) 16.a4



This thematic pawn break is the most critical continuation.

### 16...bxa4

The path divides again: White can activate the knight with B2231) 17.♘b4!? or recapture immediately with B2232) 17.♞xa4.

### B2231) 17.♘b4!?

White takes the ambitious approach of establishing a knight on the d5-square before taking further action on the queenside.

### 17...♞g5!

The knight is no longer able to defend the kingside via e1, so it's logical to launch an attack against g2. The immediate threat is ...♙h3.

### 18.♙h1

This seems most natural, but I checked a few other ideas:

### 18.♞e2 ♙f6!

Starting the process of clearing the g-file, while also preparing the typical rerouting of the bishop.

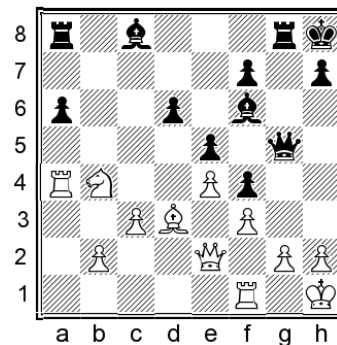
### 19.♞xa4?!

19.♙h1 is better, although 19...a5 20.♘d5 ♙d8 is still promising for us.

### 19...♙h8

Our attack is extremely powerful, for instance:

### 20.♙h1 ♞g8 21.f3



### 21...♙d8!

21...♞g6 allows White to fight a bit harder with 22.♞xa6 ♙xa6 23.♙xa6, although 23...♞ag8 24.♘d5 ♞h6 gives us excellent winning chances.

### 22.♘d5 ♞h6!

White's situation is already becoming desperate.

### 23.♞xa6

23.♞d2 loses to 23...♞h5 followed by ...♞g6.

### 23...♞b8!

Threatening ...♙h4-g3. White's only real try is:

### 24.♞d2 ♙h4 25.g4 ♙xa6 26.♙xa6 ♞g6

We have a slight material advantage and, more importantly, we are poised to play ...h5 when White's kingside will soon collapse.

### 18.♞d2

Against this move, a simple improvement is:

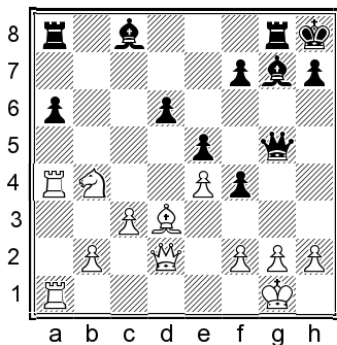
### 18...♙h8!N

18...♙d7 19.♙c2 a5 20.♘d5 was not especially helpful for Black in Guedes Jr – Piccoli, corr. 2011.

Let's focus on the kingside instead!

18...♙f6!?N 19.♞xa4 ♙h8 will soon transpose to the 20...♙f6 line below.

### 19.♞xa4 ♞g8 20.♞fa1



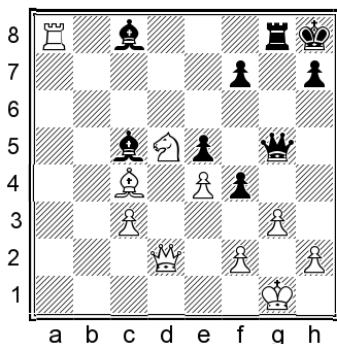
20...d5!!

This move doesn't lead to more than equality against perfect play by White, but it carries tremendous dynamism and shock value. In a practical situation White would need to be extremely careful to avoid losing. The main idea is to activate the bishop via f8-c5.

20...♙f6 is a decent alternative. Here are a few illustrative lines: 21.♙f1 ♙h3 22.f3 (22.g3 ♙xf1 23.♖xf1 ♚h5 24.♚xd6 ♙g7 offers us good attacking chances.) 22...♞g6 23.♞xa6 ♞ag8 24.♔h1 ♚h4 25.♞xd6?! (25.♔d3! is the right way to maintain the balance.) 25...♙e6! (25...♙xg2† 26.♙xg2 ♞h6 27.♙f1 ♞hg6 is an interesting way to force a draw, but Black can do better.) 26.♚e1 ♚h5 27.♚f2 ♙h4 28.♚a7 (28.♚g1? ♚xf3 wins.) 28...♙g3 29.♚g1 ♙xh2! 30.♚xh2 ♚g5 Next comes ...♞h6 to pick up the queen, and White is under some pressure.

21.exd5!

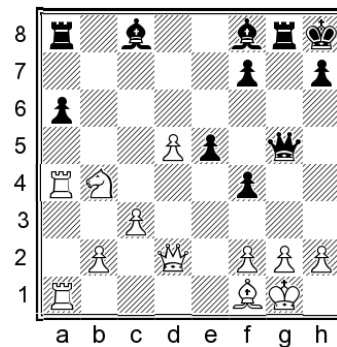
21.♔xd5? looks natural, to centralize the knight, but is actually a losing move. 21...♙f8 22.g3 (22.f3 ♙c5† 23.♔h1 ♚h4 gives us a deadly attack; alternatively, 22.♙f1 ♙c5 threatens ...♙h3, and after 23.♔h1 ♚h4 the f2-pawn must fall, since 24.f3 ♞g6 is immediately killing.) 22...♙c5 23.b4 ♙a7 24.b5 (24.♔f1 ♚h5 gives us a crushing attack.) 24...♙c5 25.♞c4 axb5 26.♞xa8 bxc4 27.♙xc4



27...♚h6! The threat is ...fxg3, and White does not have a good defence.

21...♙f8 22.♙f1

22.g3? ♙c5 is crushing.



22...♙h3 23.g3 ♙xf1 24.♖xf1

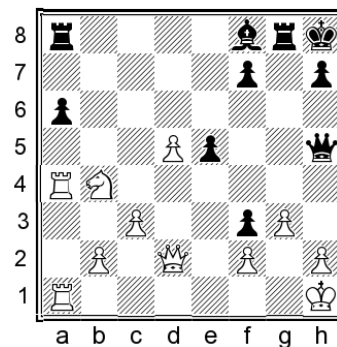
24.♞xf1 ♙d6 gives us more than enough compensation for the missing pawn.

24...♚h5 25.♔g2!

White has no other defence.

25...f3† 26.♔h1

Another forced move, albeit not a difficult one.



26...f5

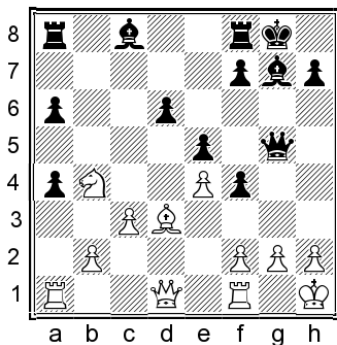
26...♞g6? achieves nothing due to 27.♔c6, when White's rook can swing to h4 in response to ...♞h6. 26...♞g4! is fully playable though.

27.d6!

White has to find this, otherwise ...f4 comes and our attack will be too strong.

27...♞g6 28.♔d5 f4 29.♔xf4 exf4 30.♞xf4 ♙xd6 31.♚d4† ♙e5

The position remains lively but equal.

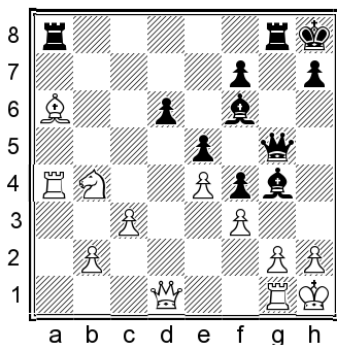


18...♔h8 19.♖xa4 ♜g8

As usual in this line, we utilize the open g-file for attacking purposes.

20.♞g1N

Grabbing the loose pawn is too slow: 20.♙xa6? ♙f6 21.♞g1 ♙g4! 22.f3



22...♙d7!N (22...♙e6 was played in Pokazanjev – Yagupov, Moscow 2006, but it's much more logical to attack the rook.) 23.♘d5!? (23.♖a3 ♞g6 gives us a huge attack.) 23...♞h4! (The immediate 23...♙xa4 24.♞xa4 is advantageous for us but slightly less accurate, as White may look to annoy us with the queen.) 24.♘xf6 (24.♖a3? ♞g6 is hopeless for White.) 24...♙xa4! Having provoked a favourable exchange on f6, it's time to snaffle the material. 25.♞xa4 ♞xf6 Black is winning.

20...♙f6

The bishop takes its usual route.

21.♙c4

21.♙xa6? transposes to the analysis of 20.♙xa6? above.

21...♞g6!

There's no need to defend f7.

22.g3

22.♙xf7? ♙g4! 23.f3 ♞h6 is killing.

22...♞h6

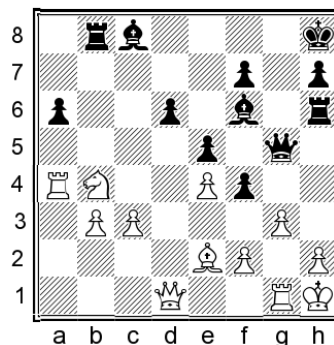
Threatening ...♞xh2† with a forced mate.

23.♙e2

23.♞g2? is a terrible move which can be refuted in multiple ways, the most attractive being 23...f3! 24.♞xf3 ♞c1† 25.♞g1 ♞xh2†! with mate to follow.

23.♙xf7? stops the immediate mating combination because White will be able to block on h5, but 23...♙g4 is an easy refutation, when 24.f3 ♞xh2† 25.♔xh2 ♞h6† 26.♔g2 ♞h3† 27.♔f2 ♞h2† is all over.

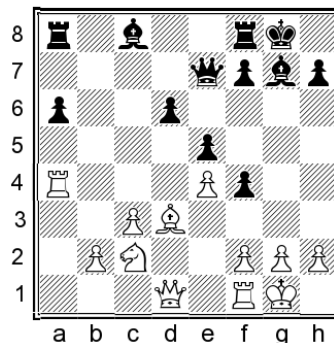
23...♞b8 24.b3



24...♙d8! 25.♘d5 ♙b6 26.♘xb6 ♞xb6

White remains under unpleasant pressure on the kingside.

B2232) 17.♖xa4



This logical move is unsurprisingly the main line. White recaptures the pawn before doing anything else.

17...♞b7!?

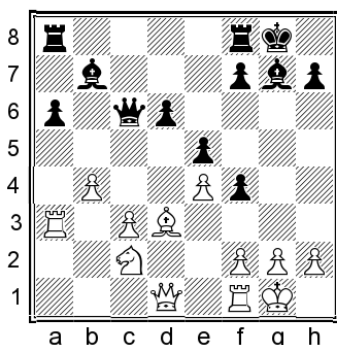
This move has been a rare choice but it actually makes a lot of sense. The queen helps to safeguard the a6-pawn while incidentally attacking b2. Generally our next task will be to develop the light-squared bishop in some way, and later we can look for a suitable opportunity for ...d5 and/or ...f5. This is a modern approach which has proven its worth in correspondence play.

17...♙g5 has been the usual choice. Although the ensuing positions are interesting, White has some additional defensive resources with the knight coming back to e1 in some lines, which is why I prefer a different approach here.

### 18.♘b4

Two other options are worth mentioning:

18.b4N 18...♙c6!? 19.♞a3 ♘b7 is an interesting mode of development, setting up a battery towards g2. Play could continue:



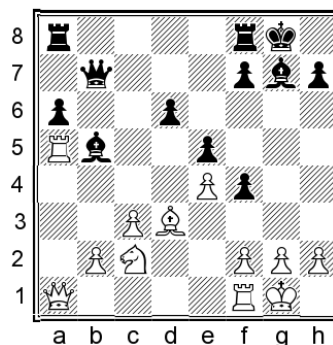
20.c4 (Or 20.♙e2 d5 21.exd5 ♙xd5 22.f3 ♙e6 23.♞fa1 ♞fc8 with a double-edged game.) 20...f5 21.f3 ♙b6† 22.♘h1 fxe4 23.♙xe4 ♙xe4 24.fxe4 Both sides have pawn weaknesses. 24...♞ac8 25.♙d5† ♘h8 26.♞c3 ♞c7 27.♞d1 ♙f2 We have plenty of counterplay and White's king is not entirely safe.

### 18.♙a1

This is a logical move, combining attack and defence.

18...♙d7 19.♞a5 ♙b5

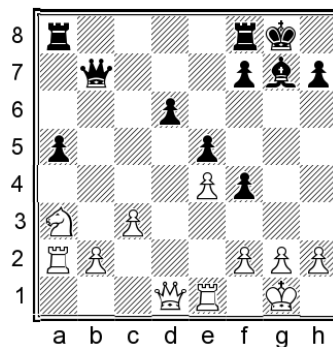
This line shows another nice way to deploy our bishop.



20.♙d1 ♙b6 21.♞a2 a5 22.♙xb5 ♙xb5 23.♘a3 ♙b7 24.♞e1!N

This seems like a logical deviation from the game, and it could lead to some amazing possibilities.

24.♙d3 f5! unleashes the dynamism of our structure, and 25.exf5 d5 26.♞d1 ♞ad8 gave Black plenty of counterplay in Karpanov – Robert, corr. 2014.



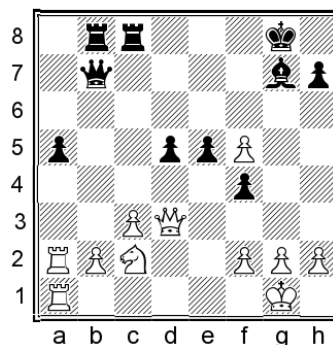
24...♞fc8! 25.♙d3

25.♙xd6?! ♞d8! 26.♙c5 ♙xe4 is a nice tactical point.

25...♞ab8 26.♞e1 f5!

This pawn sac is familiar from the Karpanov – Robert game above, but the follow-up is rather special.

27.exf5 d5 28.♘c2



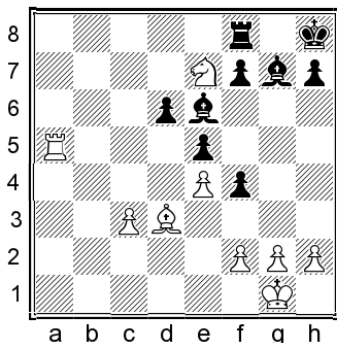
28...d4! 29.cxd4 e4 30.♙d1 e3!

An impressive cascade of pawn sacrifices! 31.fxe3 ♙e4

We are temporarily three pawns down, but we have at least enough activity to compensate for the material deficit.

### 18...a5 19.♖a1

Another idea is to centralize the knight and give up the b-pawn: 19.♘d5 ♜xb2 20.♖a1 ♜xa1 21.♞fxa1 ♙e6 22.♘e7† ♚h8 23.♞xa5 ♞xa5 24.♞xa5



The position has become rather simplified, and after 24...♞b8 25.♘d5 ♙f8 neither side could claim any advantage in Melton – Cinephos, corr. 2004.

The text move is White's main idea, but we have an interesting way of fighting against it.

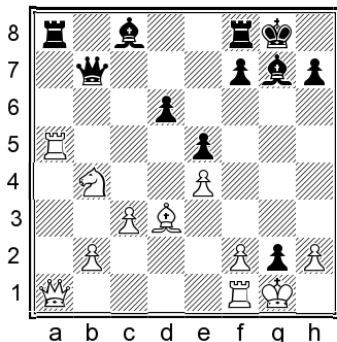
### 19...f3!

Creating a disturbance on the other side of the board!

### 20.♞xa5

20.g3 ♙h3 21.♘d5 ♙xf1 22.♙xf1 ♚h8 leaves White with insufficient compensation for the sacrificed exchange.

### 20...fxg2



### 21.♙xg2

21.♞e1N is a natural alternative; my line continues 21...♞xa5 22.♜xa5 ♙e6 23.♖a6 ♜e7 24.♙c4 ♙h6 25.♙xe6 fxe6 26.♜e2 ♜h4 27.♙xg2 ♙f4 28.h3 ♚h8 when we have enough compensation for the pawn, as White's king is always weak.

### 21...♞xa5

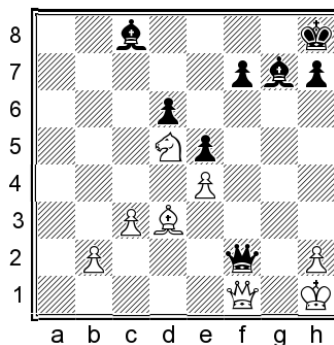
21...♙e6 22.♞xa8 ♞xa8 was okay for Black in Welford – Eacker, corr. 2005, but I would prefer to lure the white queen further away from the defence of the kingside.

### 22.♜xa5 ♚h8 23.♚h1 ♙h6

We continue to develop our kingside play. The immediate threat is ...♞g8 (intending to meet ♞g1 with ...♙g4), while ...♜h4 is another obvious idea.

### 24.♞g1

White can also bring the queen into the defence by means of 24.♜a1N 24...♞g8 25.♜d1. Then 25...♜a7! would be my suggestion, when a logical line is: 26.♘d5 ♞g7 27.♞g1 ♜xf2 28.♞xg7 ♙xg7 29.♜f1



29...♜xf1† (29...♜xb2 30.♜xf7 ♜c1† should also be a draw, one way or another.) 30.♙xf1 ♙b7 We can take on d5 any time we want to, with an obviously drawn endgame.

After the text move I found an interesting new idea:

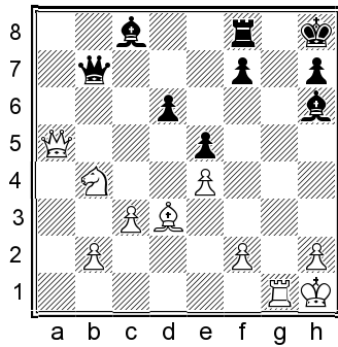
We are doing fine.

## Conclusion

After the opening moves 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 e5 6.♗db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6 8.♗a3 b5 9.♙xf6 gxf6 10.♗d5, having already considered the main line of 10...f5 in the first five chapters, we turned our attention to the alternative option of 10...♙g7. Personally I think it's well worth having this as a second option in your arsenal, although it's important to remember that there are certain possibilities, most notably 11.c3, against which we will need to play 11...f5 and transpose to an earlier chapter.

11.♙d3 is the main move, when 11...♗e7 challenges the strong knight on d5, highlighting the main advantage of putting the bishop on g7 early. After 12.♗xe7 ♙xe7, we considered 13.c3 along with a few other sidelines where White delays castling for a few moves, and saw that there was no particular benefit in doing so.

13.0-0 0-0 is the normal continuation, reaching an important branching point. 14.♙f3 is one option, when 14...f5 15.exf5 d5! offers a nice way of fighting for the initiative. 14.c3 is the main topic of this chapter, when 14...f5 is our choice again. Then if 15.exf5 e4 we quickly regain the pawn with a comfortable game, while on the other hand 15.♗c2 f4!? offers nice attacking chances. 14.c4 is the most popular move of all, and we'll consider it in the next chapter.



### 24...♙e6!?N

To prevent the queen from coming to d5.

24...f5 is also perfectly fine, and after 25.♙d5 ♙xd5 26.exd5 e4 27.♙e2 f4 28.f3 ♙h3 Black had good compensation in Schramm – Petrolo, corr. 2007.

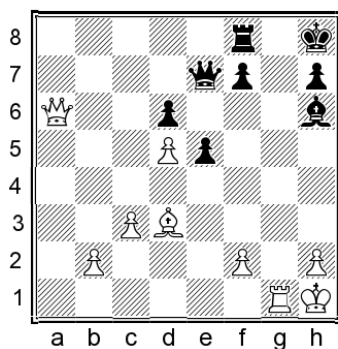
### 25.♙a6 ♙e7

25...♙d7!? 26.♗d5 ♙xd5 27.exd5 ♙f4 also offers good compensation for the pawn.

### 26.♗d5

26.♙c2 is also possible, when 26...♙f4 27.♙e2 ♙h4 28.f3 ♙h6 keeps the game dynamically balanced.

### 26...♙xd5 27.exd5

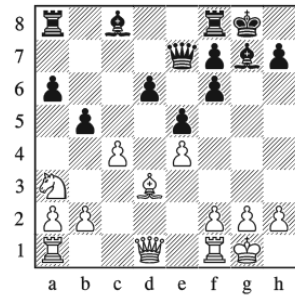


### 27...e4 28.♙c2 ♙f4 29.♙f1 ♙e5

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# Chapter 7

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## Main Line with 14.c4

### Variation Index

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1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6 8.♘a3  
b5 9.♙xf6 gxf6 10.♘d5 ♙g7 11.♙d3 ♘e7 12.♘xe7 ♙xe7 13.0-0 0-0 14.c4 f5

- A) 15.cxb5
- B) 15.♙e2
- C) 15.♙h5
- D) 15.♙f3 d5 16.cxd5 fxe4 17.♙xe4 ♖b8
  - D1) 18.♖ac1!?
  - D2) 18.♖fd1
  - D3) 18.♖ad1 ♖b6! 19.♙d3 ♙d7 20.♙xh7† ♘h8
    - D31) 21.♙e3
    - D32) 21.d6

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6 8.♘a3 b5 9.♙xf6 gxf6 10.♘d5 ♙g7 11.♙d3 ♘e7 12.♘xe7 ♚xe7 13.0-0 0-0 14.c4

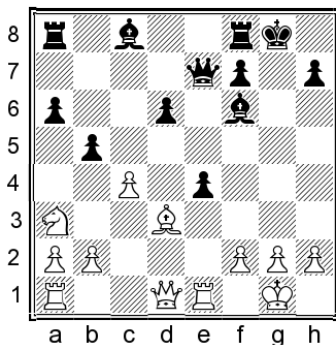
This is the most critical continuation and Negi's recommendation. In order to make the entire idea of 10...♙g7 work, one needs to invest some effort here, as the pressure on Black's structure is considerable.

#### 14...f5

With this standard move, we reach the main tabiya for the chapter. There is much tension with the pawns on b5 and f5 under attack, but that's what we are looking for in order to liberate our bishops and mobilize the central pawns. Many of the lines hinge on one key factor: is the knight on a3 good or bad?

We will analyse four main continuations: **A)** 15.cxb5, **B)** 15.♚e2, **C)** 15.♚h5 and **D)** 15.♚f3.

15.exf5? e4 opens the long diagonal to our advantage: 16.f6 (16.♞e1 ♙xf5 is horrible for White.) 16...♙xf6 17.♞e1



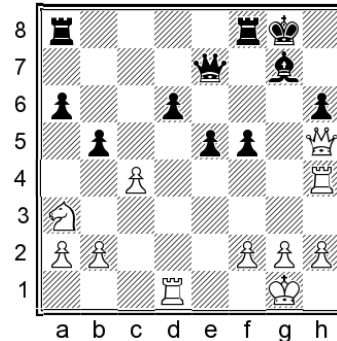
17...d5! Without this key move, White would be doing okay. 18.cxd5 ♙xb2 19.♙xe4 ♚xa3 The pawn on d5 shields the a8-rook from attack, and White's attacking ideas do not work. A high-level example continued 20.♞e3 ♚d6 21.♙xh7† ♘xh7 22.♚c2† ♚g6 23.♚xb2 ♞g8 with a decisive advantage for Black, Van der Wiel – Nunn, Wijk aan Zee 1992.

#### 15.♞e1

This move doesn't harm White's position, but also doesn't threaten us.

15...♙b7 16.exf5

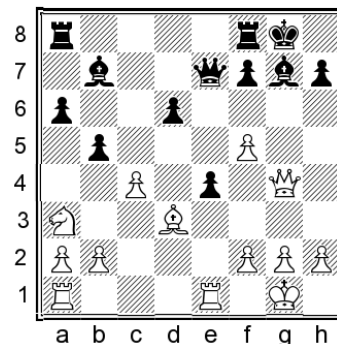
16.♚h5 fxe4 17.♙xe4 ♙xe4 18.♞xe4 f5 19.♞h4 was played in Shirov – Ribera Bazan, Andorra 2001, when Black's most accurate continuation would have been: 19...h6!N 20.♞d1



20...♞ac8! (20...e4 is tempting but 21.♘c2! followed by ♘e3 offers White some counterplay.) The idea is 21.cxb5 (21.g3!? is worth considering although 21...♚e6 still favours us) 21...d5! intending ...d4 and ...e4, when our dominant central pawns are more important than White's extra queenside units.

16...e4 17.♚g4

My improvement is:



17...♘h8!N

Avoiding 17...♞fe8? 18.cxb5 d5 19.bxa6 ♙xa6 20.♙xa6 ♞xa6 21.♘b5 when White was clearly better in Ivanovic – Ivanov, Belgrade 1988.

18.♙xe4 ♞ae8

The rook is still on a1, so ...♙xb2 is a serious threat. 19.♞e2 ♙xe4 20.♞ae1 ♚f6 21.♞xe4 ♞xe4 22.♚xe4?? ♚xb2 threatens mate on the first rank while also hitting the knight on a3.

22...♚xb2 23.♘c2 bxc4

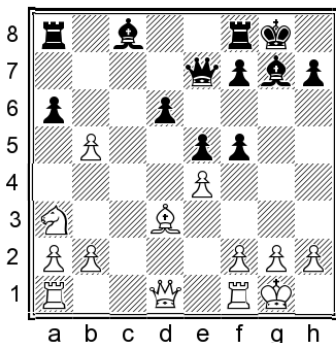
The dust has settled and we have good chances thanks to our strong passed pawn. Play may continue:

24.♘e3

24. ♖xc4 ♕c3 almost wins a piece; White can stay in the game with 25. ♖e3 ♗b1† 26. ♘e1 ♕xe1 27. ♗f1, although 27... ♕xf2† 28. ♖xf2 ♗xa2† leaves us a pawn up with some winning chances. 24...c3 25.a4 ♖b8 26.g3 d5!

White cannot capture on d5 with either piece because of ...c2, so we are doing well.

### A) 15.cxb5



Obviously it is important to know how to deal with the direct approach of capturing this pawn.

### 15...d5!

Again we see this typical motif.

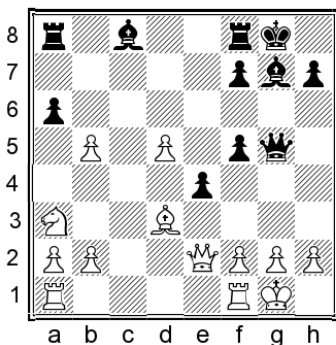
### 16.exd5 e4 17. ♗e2

Pinning the e-pawn while defending b2.

### 17... ♗g5!?

I like this unusual approach.

The usual continuation is 17... ♗b4, targeting the b2-pawn, when 18. ♕c4 ♗xb2 19. ♘c2 axb5 20. ♕xb5 is equal. This is fine of course, but I would rather attack on the kingside.

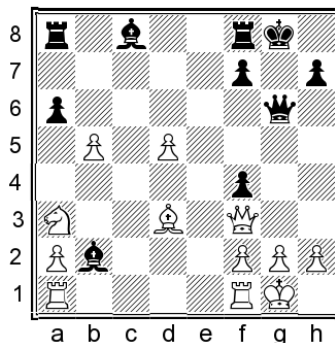


### 18. ♕c4 f4!

Opening a path for the c8-bishop while threatening ...f3.

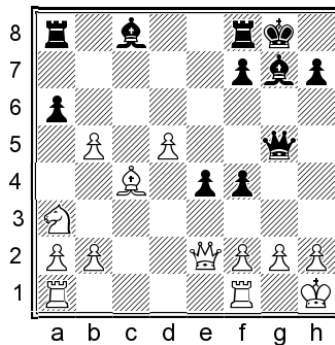
### 19. ♖h1

Obviously we need to see what happens if White captures the central pawn: 19. ♗xe4 ♕xb2 20. ♕d3 ♗g6 21. ♗f3 (21. ♗e2? ♗g7 22. ♘c2 ♕xa1 23. ♖xa1 axb5 leaves White with insufficient compensation for the exchange, especially since 24. ♕xb5? loses outright to 24... ♕f5 25. ♕d3 [otherwise ...f3 will kill] 25... ♖fe8 26. ♗d1 ♕xd3 27. ♗xd3 f3, when White's position is hopeless.)



21... ♕g4 22. ♗xf4 ♗xd3 23. ♗xg4† ♖h8 24. ♘c4 ♕xa1 25. ♖xa1 axb5 26. ♘e3 ♗c3 The engine rates the position as 0.00, but in a practical game White would still need to solve some coordination problems with the loose rook, weak a-pawn and vulnerable first rank.

Here I offer an interesting new idea:



### 19... ♖b8!N

Preparing to lift the rook into the attack via b6.

19... ♗xg2† 20. ♖xg2 f3† 21. ♗xf3 exf3† 22. ♖xf3 ♕xb2 23. ♖g1† ♖h8 24. ♘c2 ♕xa1 25. ♖xa1 led to a balanced endgame in Moreira – Ferreira, Portugal 2003.

### 20. ♗xe4!?

I take this as the main line because it looks most critical, but it turns out well for us.

20.bxa6? ♖b6 followed by ...♞h6 gives us a winning attack.

20.♞ad1! is the best defence, in order to meet ...♖b6 with d5-d6. My analysis continues: 20...axb5 21.♜xb5 ♖b6 22.d6 ♞xb5 23.♙xb5 f3 24.gxf3 exf3 25.♞xf3 ♞xb5 The bishops are strong and we are doing fine.

### 20...♖b6 21.♙e2

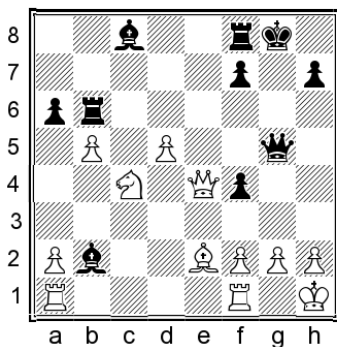
Worse is: 21.♞ae1? ♞h6 22.g3 ♙xb2 23.♜c2 axb5 24.♙d3 ♞h5 25.h4 ♞g4 26.♞xf4 (26.♜g2 is a better try although 26...♙c3 maintains a big advantage) 26...♞xh4† 27.♜g1 ♞xf4 28.gxf4 ♙h3 The exchange-up endgame should be winning.

### 21...♙xb2!

21...♞h6 can be met by 22.♞f3! and White survives.

### 22.♜c4

Our pieces are forked, but it doesn't matter because the attack is so strong.

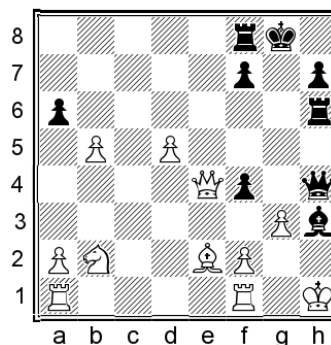


### 22...♖h6! 23.♜xb2

23.♞f3? is no good here because 23...♙xa1 24.♞xa1 axb5 wins.

### 23...♞h4 24.h3 ♙xh3 25.g3!

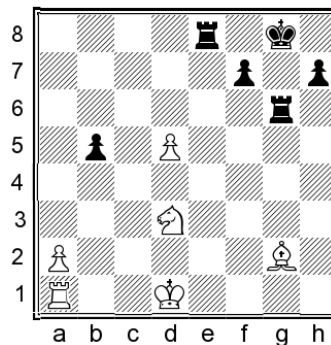
Incredibly, White can avoid getting mated, but we still have excellent chances.



### 25...♞g5 26.♜g1 f3 27.♜d3

Nobody in their right mind would aim for this position with White. But since we've got this far, I will continue the line just to give a definitive verdict.

### 27...gxf2† 28.♜xf2 ♞f6† 29.♜e1 ♙xf1 30.♙xf1 axb5 31.♞g2 ♞e8† 32.♜d1 ♞xg2 33.♙xg2 ♞g6



### 34.♜e1

34.♙f1 ♞e4 puts White under unpleasant pressure.

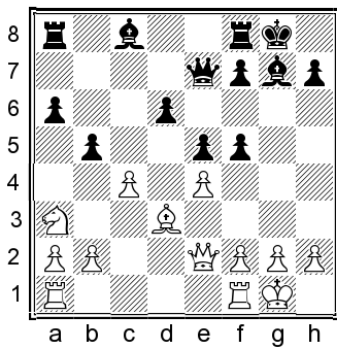
### 34...♞xe1†

34...h5!? also offers winning chances.

### 35.♜xe1 ♞xg2 36.♜f1 ♞d2 37.a4 bxa4 38.♞xa4 ♞xd5

It's a tablebase draw, but Black has practical winning chances with two extra pawns.

### B) 15.♞e2



This isn't the most critical, but it's still a sensible move which has been tried by some strong players.

### 15...d5!?

Again we see this motif, which is something of a trademark of the 10...g7 system.

15...g7 is the main continuation and fully reliable.

### 16.cxd5

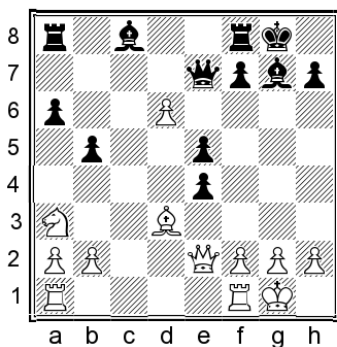
White has no other decent option.

### 16...fxe4 17.gxe4

Recapturing is normal and natural.

White can also try a tactical continuation:

17.d6?!



17...exd3!N

A strong exchange sacrifice.

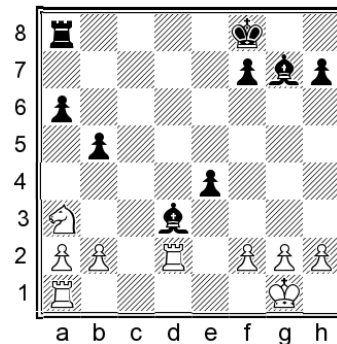
17...h4? 18.gxe4 b8 left Black with insufficient compensation for the pawn in Peng – Cordova, St Louis 2018.

18.dxe7 dxe2 19.exf8=+ xf8 20.f1 f5 21.gxe2 d3

The bishop goes to an excellent square, from where it will limit the movement of the knight on a3.

22.f2 e4

We have two great bishops and fantastic control over the enemy knight.



23.fad1

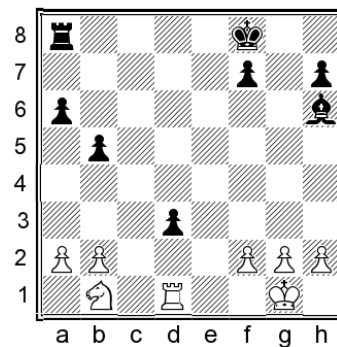
23.f1 is well met by 23...c8! intending ...b4, when White can barely move.

But note that the immediate 23...b4?! allows 24.c2! xb2 25.cxb4 c3 26.dxd3 exd3 27.fed1 xd2 28.fxd2 when White makes an easy draw.

23...h6 24.fxd3 exd3 25.b1!

25.fxd3? loses to 25...c8 26.f1 (26.c3 d8 threatens both mate on d1 and ...b5-b4) 26...b4 27.b1 c2 28.b3 xa2 followed by ...b2, when White is helpless.

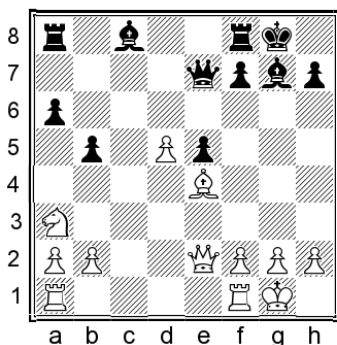
The text move is White's only way to stay in the game, but we can continue the torture with:



25...b4!

Continuing to restrict the knight, with ...c8 coming soon. White still can't take on d3 and will have to suffer for a draw.

After the text move I found a useful novelty:



### 17...♙d6!N

Preventing d5-d6 and preparing ...f5. As we will see later, we would need to play differently if the white queen was on f3, because g2-g4 would be an annoying reply.

17...♞b8 18.♞fd1 ♞b6 19.♞ac1 ♙d7 was played in Uruci – Loiseau, Terme Catez 2022, when 20.♙d3!N would have offered White slightly better chances.

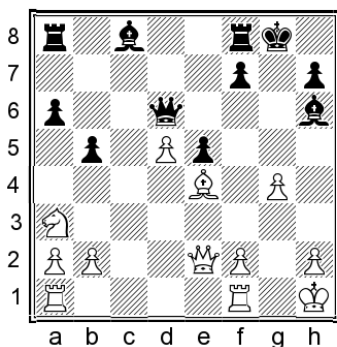
### 18.g4!

Despite the less active position of the queen, White should still play this.

18.♞ac1? f5 19.♞c6 ♙b8 20.♙b1 ♙d7 21.♞cc1 ♙d6 gives us a clear advantage.

18.g3?! prepares a slightly more harmonious retreat square, but 18...f5 19.♙g2 e4 still gives us the better chances. Moreover, natural-looking moves could quickly escalate White's problems. For instance, 20.♞ac1 ♙d7 21.♞fd1? ♞ae8 and the threat of ...f4 is already decisive.

### 18...♙h6 19.♙h1



### 19...f5

This move is an essential part of our plan.

It's possible to start with another move such as 19...♙f4, but after 20.♙c2 we should push the f-pawn pretty soon. Please note that 20...h5? should be avoided due to 21.g5! when Black is in deep trouble.

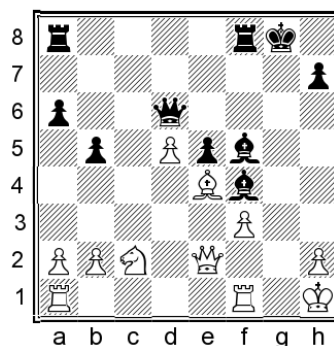
### 20.gxf5

20.♙xf5?! ♙xf5 21.gxf5 ♙xd5† 22.f3 ♞xf5 gives us the better chances.

### 20...♙xf5 21.f3 ♙f4 22.♙c2

22.♞f2? ♙h3! gives us strong pressure.

22.♞g1† ♙h8 23.♙c2 ♙h6 transposes below.



### 22...♙h6!

22...♙h8? allows White to centralize with 23.♙e3, which the text move prevents.

### 23.♞g1†

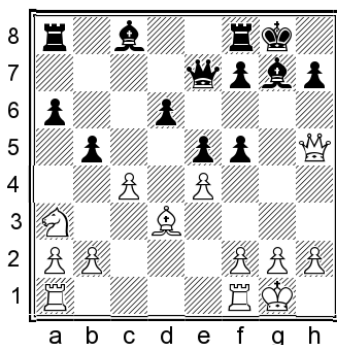
23.♞f2? ♙h3! is strong again.

23.♙xf5 ♞xf5 24.♞f2 ♞g5 25.♞g1 ♞xg1† 26.♙xg1 ♙h8 is another equal continuation.

### 23...♙h8 24.♞ae1 ♙h3

The position remains dynamically balanced, or 0.00 in engine terms. White's extra pawn is secure, but it's hard for White to do anything with it or to force wholesale exchanges. Our next move is likely to be ...♞g8, and we will continue to monitor both flanks.

### C) 15.♙h5



This move has been known for a long time and Negi recommends it. Amazingly, we can respond with a fresh idea which is so new that Negi didn't even consider it.

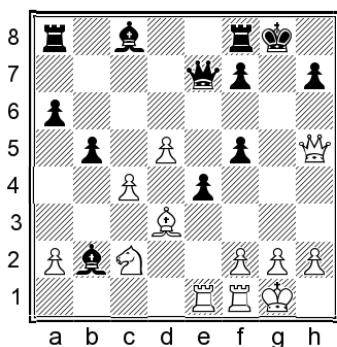
### 15...d5!?

Although the idea is fresh here, the motif is fairly common for these positions. When I saw that Carlsen had played this twice, I knew it warranted a serious look.

15...♖b8 is the most popular continuation, which interested readers can investigate for themselves if they wish.

### 16.cxd5

16.cxd5? is much worse: 16...e4 17.♞ae1 ♙xb2 18.♘c2



18...♙h8! 19.♙e2 ♞g8 20.cxb5 f4 Black was already winning in Lipsits – Popov, corr. 2015.

### 16...♞d8!

This is a key move, running away from the d5-d6 attack and thus preparing counterplay with ...fxe4 followed by ...f5.

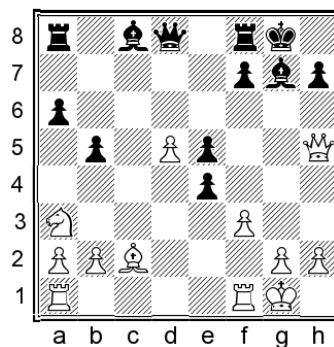
### 17.exf5

This is the usual move, and the only remotely challenging option. Let's take a quick look at some inferior alternatives:

17.g4? fxg4 18.♘c2 is an attempt to play on the kingside light squares, but we can refute it with 18...♖b8! 19.♘e3 ♖b6 followed by swinging to the kingside. For instance, 20.♘f5 ♙xf5 21.exf5 ♞h6 22.♞xg4 ♙h8 23.♙h1 ♞h4 24.♞g3 e4 and our advantage is close to decisive.

17.♞ac1? ignores the positional threat. 17...fxe4 18.♙xe4 f5 19.♙b1N (19.♙c2? was played in Grabowski – Portych, corr. 2013, when 19...e4!N 20.♙b3 ♙h8 21.♞e2 ♞d6 22.♞c6 ♞e5 would have seen Black dominating.) 19...e4 20.♘c2 (20.♞e2 ♞xd5 is hardly an improvement for White.) 20...♙xb2 21.♞cd1 ♞a7! We have clearly better chances, with two strong bishops and attacking chances.

17.♙c2?! fxe4! 18.f3



18...♞b6† (18...f5 19.fxe4 f4 followed by ...♞f6-h6 is possible, but the text move seems strongest.) 19.♙h1 ♞d4! 20.♞ab1 ♙d7 The position is complicated but somewhat favourable for Black.

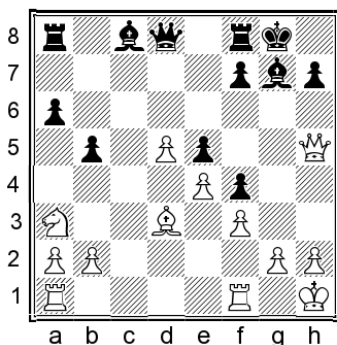
17.f3!?

This is another odd choice, although unlike the above options, this one seems good enough to hold equality for White.

17...f4

The white queen starts to feel uncomfortable, having no safe squares available.

18.♙h1



18...Rb8!

Preparing the thematic rook lift.

19.g4!

Otherwise the white queen would have no escape.

19...Rb6 20.g5 Rg6 21.Rg1 f6

Other moves are playable but this is direct and good.

21...Qb6 and 21...Ch8 can also be considered.

22.gxf6 Rxf6 23.Qxe5

23.Cc2 Qb6 24.Raf1 Ch8 25.Rxg6 Rg6 26.Qh4

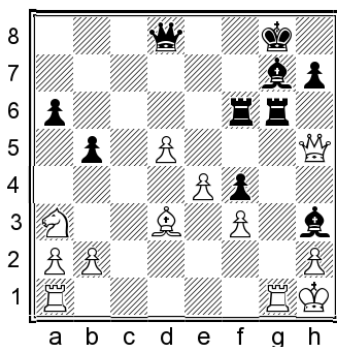
Qf6 27.Qe1 Qe7 28.b4 Qd7 gives us more than enough pressure for the missing pawn.

23...Qh3

With the deadly threat of ...Qg2†.

24.Qh5

The only defence.

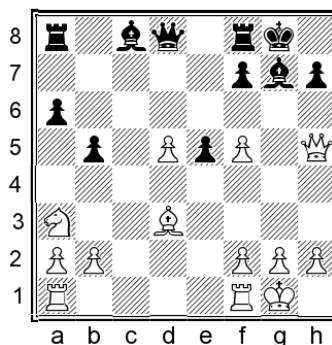


24...Qg2!?

24...Rh6 25.Qg5 Rhg6 26.Qh5 is also a draw.

25.Rxg2 Rxg2 26.Cxg2 Rh6 27.Qf5 Rf6

The line ends in a most unusual repetition.



17...Qxd5

We recapture one pawn and prepare ...e4.

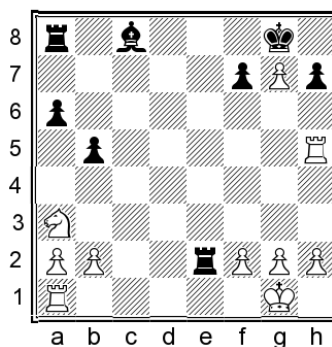
18.Rad1

This is best, and indeed the only really critical try.

18.f6 leads to simplifications which turn out fine

for us: 18...Qxd3 19.fxg7 Re8 20.Rfe1 Qg6

21.Rxe5 Qxh5 22.Rxh5 Re2



23.b3 Qe6 24.Cf1 Rb2 25.Re5 Rc8 26.Re2 Rxe2

27.Cxe2 b4 28.Cc4 Qxc4† 29.bxc4 Rxc4

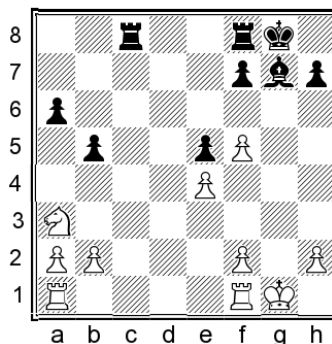
The players reached a level endgame in Papakonstantinou – Halvax, Graz 2020.

18.Qf3 Qxf3 19.gxf3 Qb7 20.Qe4 Qxe4!

It may seem like a concession to straighten out White's

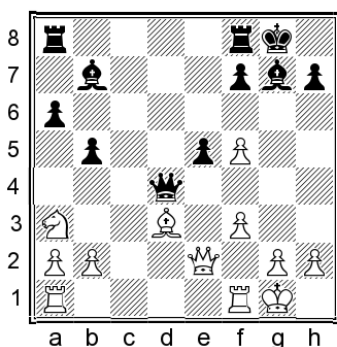
pawns, but it's more important to keep our

initiative going. 21.fxe4 Rac8



22.♘b1!? (22.♞ac1 ♕h6 23.♞c2 ♞fd8 offers us plenty of activity to compensate for the missing pawn.) 22...♞c2 23.♘c3 ♞xb2 24.♘d5 The knight is strong, but it won't hurt us. 24...♖h8 25.a4 ♞e2 26.axb5 axb5 27.♞fe1 ♞xe1† 28.♞xe1 ♞b8 We have no problems in this endgame. The knight is well placed, but our bishop will soon get active and the passed pawn is an important asset.

Another way for White to handle the position is:  
18.♞e2 ♕b7 19.f3 ♞d4†



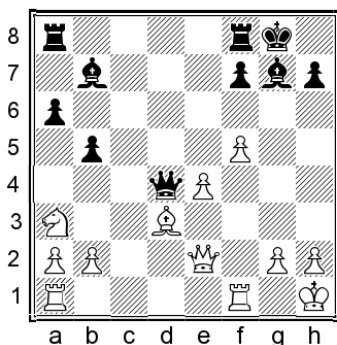
20.♖h1

20.♞f2N is also possible, and has the advantage of defending the b2-pawn, although the drawback is that the rook is pinned. Play could continue: 20...♕h6 (20...♞fd8 21.♕e4 ♕xe4 22.fxe4 ♞ac8 is also possible, with similar ideas of playing against the bad knight on a3.) 21.♖h1 ♞ac8 22.♕e4 ♕xe4 23.fxe4 ♞fd8 24.♞af1 ♞e3 Maintaining full compensation, due to the misplaced knight and our control over the open files.

20...e4!

Opening the long diagonal before White gets time to block it with ♕e4.

21.fxe4



21.♕xe4N may be better, although 21...♕xe4 22.fxe4 ♞xb2 23.♘c2 ♞ac8 24.f6 ♕xf6 25.♞g4†

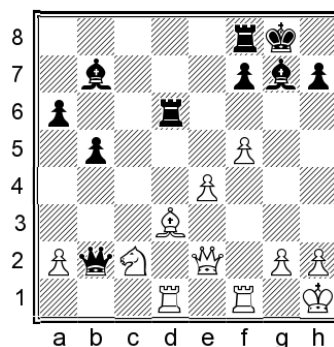
♖h8 26.♘e3 ♞g8 27.♞f3 ♕d4 still gives us comfortable equality.

21...♞ad8!N

21...♞xb2 22.♘c2 was the marginally less accurate continuation of Pobor – Sahin, Podgorica 2021; the difference is that White will be able to do something more useful than putting a rook on the d-file on the next move.

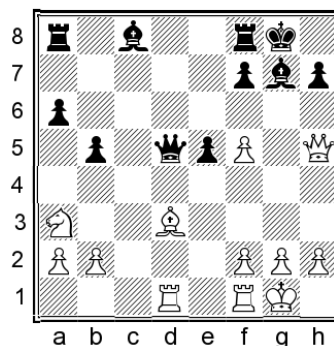
22.♞ad1 ♞xb2 23.♘c2 ♞d6!

We prepare to double rooks on the d-file, while also guarding against f5-f6 ideas. A sample continuation is:



24.♞g4 ♖h8 25.♘e3 ♕e5 26.♞h4 ♞g8

We have strong play on the dark squares.

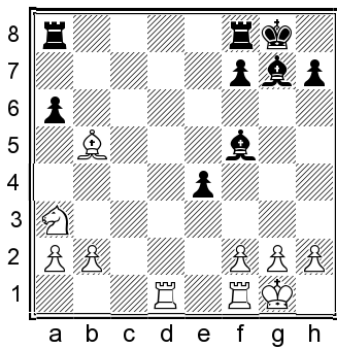


18...e4!

There is no other good move.

19.♕xb5 ♞xf5 20.♞xf5 ♕xf5

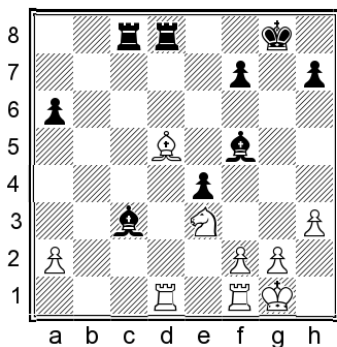
We reach an endgame in which the bishop pair is strong, so White has to do something about it.



### 21.♙d7

It's logical to exchange off one of the bishops.

21.♙c6N 21...♞ac8 22.♙d5 is also playable, but we are fine after: 22...♞fd8 23.h3 ♙xb2 24.♘c4 ♙c3 25.♘e3



25...♙e6! (25...♙g6 26.♙b7 would lead to an unpleasant endgame.) 26.♙xe4 (After 26.♙xe6 fxe6 the doubled pawns are not really weak and we should be fine.) 26...♙d2 27.♙b7 ♞c3 28.♙xa6 ♙xa2 White's extra pawn is unlikely to yield real winning chances, due to our bishop pair and the small number of pawns remaining.

### 21...♙xd7 22.♞xd7 ♙xb2 23.♘c4 ♙g7

It is fair to say that White has a slight initiative, with a rook on the seventh rank and the formerly passive knight now occupying an active post. However, the position is heavily simplified and Carlsen obviously believes in Black's position, having defended it twice without any real problems.

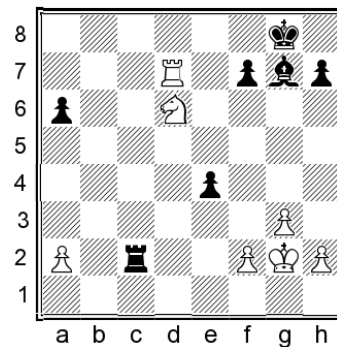
### 24.♞fd1

The other game continued:

24.g3 ♞fd8

24...f5!? should also be good enough to hold, but Carlsen's move is fine.

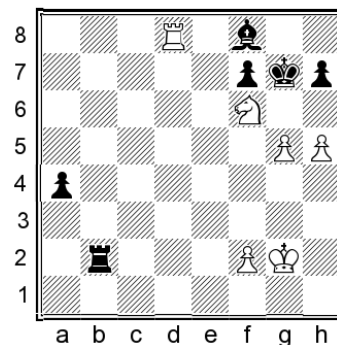
25.♞fd1 ♞xd7 26.♞xd7 ♞c8 27.♘d6 ♞c1† 28.♙g2 ♞c2



### 29.♘xe4

Taking on f7 with either piece would lose to ...e3.

29...♞xa2 30.♞d8† ♙f8 31.♘f6† ♙g7 32.♘h5† ♙g8 33.g4 a5 34.g5 a4 35.h4 ♞b2 36.♘f6† ♙g7 37.h5



### 37...♞b5!

Care is needed! Without this, Black would be losing.

38.f4 h6! 39.♘g4!

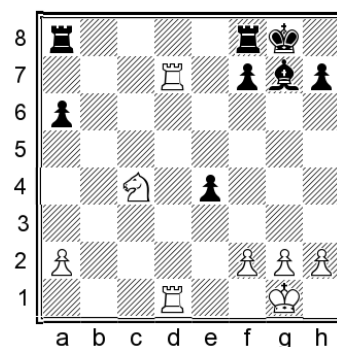
White tries every trick possible, but to no avail.

39...♙a3

39...hxe5? 40.h6† would win.

40.♘h6 ♙e7 41.♞d7 ♙xe5 42.♘xf7 ♞b2† 43.♙f3 ♙xf4 44.♘e5† ♙h6 45.♙xf4 a3 46.♞d5 ♞b4† 47.♙g3 a2 48.♞a5 a1=♞ 49.♞xa1 ♙xh5

A draw was soon agreed in Sarana – Carlsen, Douglas 2019.



24...♖ac8 25.♗e3

25.♗d6 ♖c2 26.♗xe4 ♖xa2 27.g3 a5 leaves us out of danger.

25...♖c5

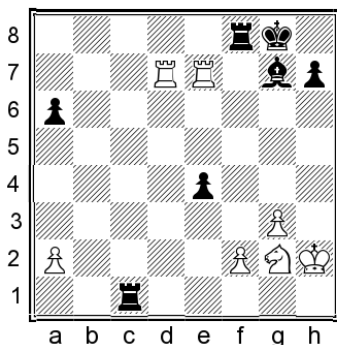
Activating the rook and getting ready to put pressure on the a2-pawn.

26.g4

It is logical to secure the f5-square for the knight. I considered two other options:

26.♖d7d5 ♖xd5 27.♖xd5 ♖b8 28.g4 ♖b2 29.a4 ♖a2 30.♖a5 ♗d4 31.♖xa6 ♗xe3 32.fxe3 ♔g7 and White has no chance of winning.

26.♖e7 f5 27.g3 f4 28.♗g2 fxg3 29.hxg3 ♖c2 30.♖dd7 ♖c1† 31.♔h2



31...♗h6! 32.♖xh7 ♖f6 Despite the extra pawn and menacing rooks, White lacks a good follow-up and the draw is easy enough.

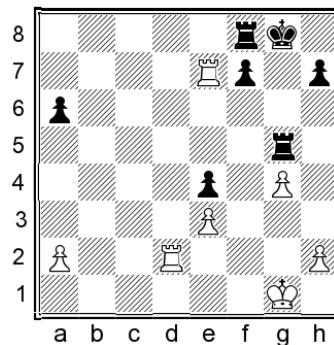
26...♖a5 27.♖1d2

27.♖e7 ♖xa2 28.♖xe4 a5 29.♖d7 a4 30.♖a7 a3 31.♗f5 ♖b8 32.♗xg7 ♔xg7 33.♖f4 ♖a1† 34.♔g2 ♖f8 is another draw.

27...♗h6

I analysed 27...h5!?!N and found that this is also good enough to hold, but Carlsen's move is simpler.

28.♖e7 ♗xe3 29.fxe3 ♖g5



30.♖xe4

30.♖g2 ♖c8 31.♖xe4 ♖c1† 32.♔f2 ♖a5 33.♔g3 ♖a1 34.♖b2 ♖1xa2 35.♖b7 ♖b5 36.♖d7 ♖b1 also leads to a draw.

30...f5 31.♖a4 ♖xg4† 32.♖xg4† fxg4 33.♖d4 h5 34.♖d5

White wins a pawn but will not get any real winning chances.

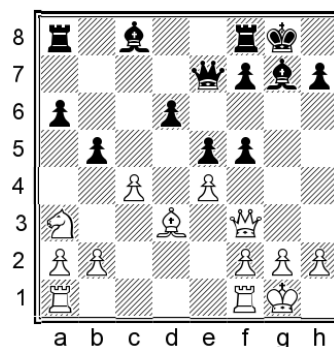
34...♖f3

34...♖b8 35.♖xh5 ♖b1† 36.♔g2 ♖b2† 37.♔g3 ♖xa2 38.♔xg4 a5 is also a draw, but Carlsen's move is again simpler.

35.♖xh5 ♖xe3 36.♖g5† ♔h7 37.♖xg4 ♖a3 38.♖g2 a5

The endgame is an easy draw. When the white king goes towards b2, Black simply places the rook on h3. In Xiong – Carlsen, Internet (rapid) 2020, White kept playing for a while longer but the draw was never in doubt.

D) 15.♗f3



This is the most popular continuation, and perhaps the most critical of all White's options for the assessment of 10...♗g7.

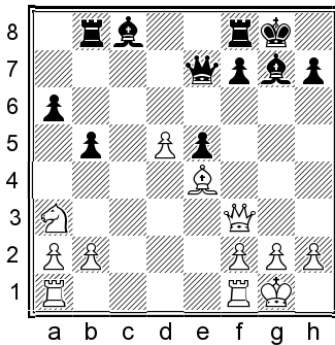
### 15...d5

By now it should come as no surprise that this pawn sacrifice is a serious option.

If you wish to investigate another option then 15...♖b7!? is a decent move. The main line continues 16.exf5 ♜xf3 17.gxf3 e4 18.♙xe4 d5 19.♙xd5, when both 19...♙xf5 and 19...♖b8!? are playable.

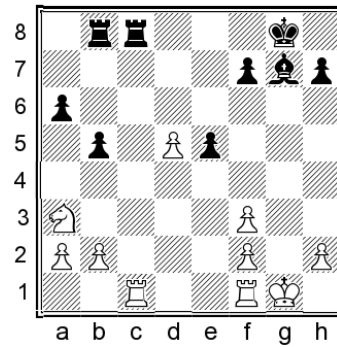
### 16.cxd5 fxe4 17.♙xe4 ♖b8

17...♙d6?! was our choice in the position with the queen on e2 instead of f3, but here 18.g4! would leave Black struggling for compensation. I studied this about twenty years ago with Igor Nataf and we failed to find enough play for Black, so we turned our attention to the rook move and it continues to hold up today. A big part of Black's strategy involves playing against the knight on a3, just like in several of the other lines we have seen.



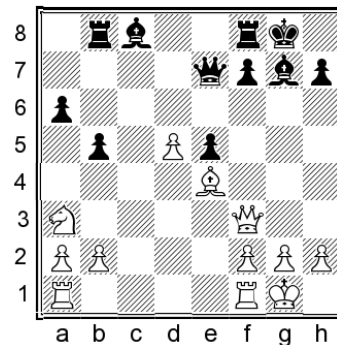
We will analyse three different rook moves. **D1)** 18.♖ac1!? deserves to be considered, but the critical moves are **D2)** 18.♖fd1 and **D3)** 18.♖ad1.

The attempt to block our play with 18.♙f5 is well met by: 18...♙f6 19.♙xc8 ♜xf3 20.gxf3 ♜fxc8 21.♖ac1 This position was reached in Slizhevsky – Yevseev, St Petersburg 2005. Black can play ...e4, either with or without exchanging rooks on c1, but I find the following alternative more appealing:



21...♙h6!?N 22.♖c2 ♔f8 Simply centralizing the king and maintaining the tension, emphasizing the poor position of the white knight. Objectively the position is equal, but White will have to figure out a way to get the knight into the game, and we should always be able to win back the pawn at the absolute minimum.

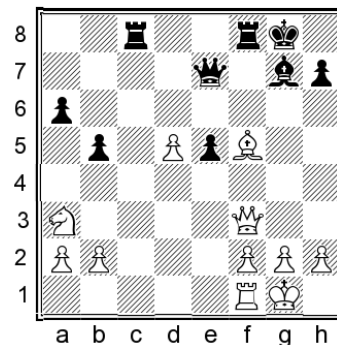
### D1) 18.♖ac1!?



This move prepares an exchange sacrifice on c8. We should accept the challenge with:

### 18...f5! 19.♖xc8 ♖bxc8 20.♙xf5

White has two pawns for the exchange and controls the light squares, but the offside knight is once again a problem.



### 20...♙g5 21.♙e6† ♔h8 22.♙d1

White has nothing better, for instance:

22. ♖e2

The problem with this square is that it allows:

22... ♜c1! 23. g3N

23. ♘c2? ♜xf1† 24. ♖xf1 ♚d2 was winning for Black in Galkin – Shomoev, Internet 2004.

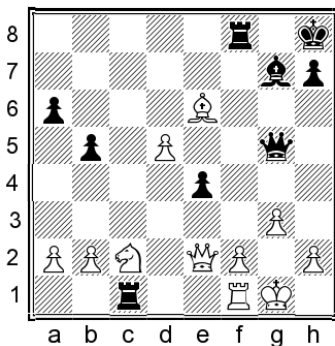
23... e4

The pressure along the f-file and possibility of ...e3 mean that White is the one who has to be more careful.

24. ♘c2

24. ♖xe4? ♚d2 25. ♜xc1 ♚xc1† 26. ♔g2 ♚d2!

27. ♖e3 ♖xb2 is winning for us.



24... ♜xf1† 25. ♔xf1 ♚f6 26. b3

26. ♘e3?! ♖xb2 27. ♙f5? ♖xe2† 28. ♔xe2 a5

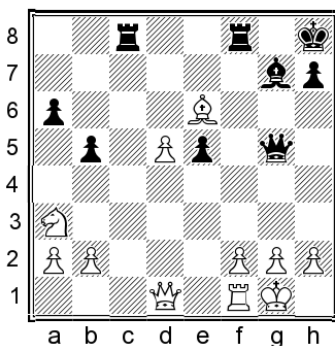
29. ♙xe4 a4 30. d6 b4 gives us a winning endgame.

26... ♖f3

26... ♙h6 is also playable but the text move feels most natural to me.

27. ♖xf3 ♜xf3 28. d6 ♜d3 29. d7 ♙c3!

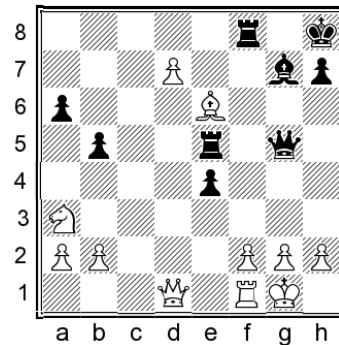
The bishop will drop back to a5 to keep an eye on the d8-square, and it can also go to b6 at some point to assist the rook in attacking f2. White will need to be careful to hold the draw.



22... ♜c5 23. ♘c2

23. ♘b1? e4! was highly unpleasant for White in Ganguly – Venkatesh, Visakhapatnam 2004.

Another weak continuation is: 23. d6? e4 24. d7 ♜e5

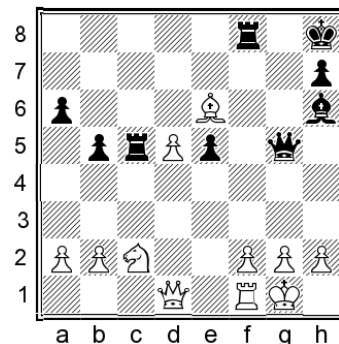


25. ♙h3 (White has to find the difficult 25. h4! ♖xh4 26. ♙h3 in order to survive, although 26... ♖g5 27. ♘c2 ♜d5 28. ♖e2 ♜d3 29. g3 ♜d2 30. ♖xe4 ♖f6 31. ♘e3 ♜xf2 still gives us some winning chances.) 25... ♜d5 26. ♖e1 ♜d2 White's position collapses, as f2 cannot be defended.

23... ♙h6!

Intending ... ♚d2 with a favourable endgame.

23... e4 24. ♘e3 ♙xb2 25. d6 gives White enough counterplay.



24. g4!!

This is the only decent way to prepare for the potential endgame. It would be almost impossible to find such a move over the board.

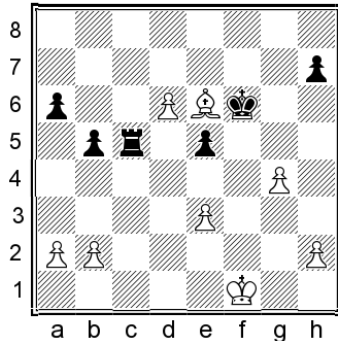
It's important to notice that 24. ♘e3?? loses to 24... ♜xf2! .

24... ♙g7!

Taking into account White's last move, it makes sense to switch plans and play for an attack.

The point of White's last move is revealed after: 24... ♖d2 25. ♖xd2 ♙xd2 26. ♘e3 ♙xe3 27. fxe3

$\text{Rxf1} \dagger$  28.  $\text{Qxf1}$   $\text{Qg7}$  29.  $\text{d6}$   $\text{Qf6}$  In the equivalent position with the pawn on g2, White would be dead lost, as either the d-pawn or the queenside pawns would fall by force. As things stand, White can of course play:

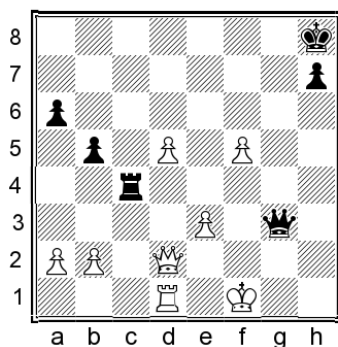


30.  $\text{Qf5}$  The g4-pawn enables the bishop to settle on a perfect square. The endgame should be a draw, but in practice I think Black would have to be more careful.

25.  $\text{Qe3}$   $\text{e4}$  26.  $\text{Wd2}$   $\text{Qe5}$

White is clearly in danger on the kingside, and will have to be careful to survive. Best play continues:

27.  $\text{Rd1}$   $\text{Wh4}$  28.  $\text{Qf1}$   $\text{Rc4}$  29.  $\text{Qf5}$   $\text{Rxf5}!$  30.  $\text{gxf5}$   $\text{Wg4} \dagger$  31.  $\text{Qg3}$   $\text{e3}$  32.  $\text{fxe3}$   $\text{Qxg3}$  33.  $\text{hxg3}$   $\text{Wxg3} \dagger$  34.  $\text{Qf1}$



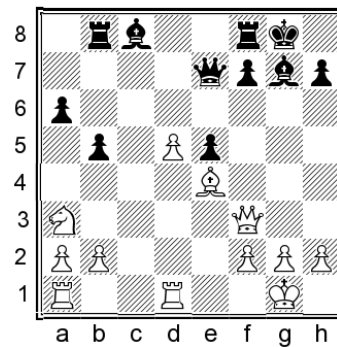
34...  $\text{Wf3} \dagger$

34...  $\text{Rh4}$  isn't a serious winning attempt because 35.  $\text{Wc3} \dagger$   $\text{Qg8}$  36.  $\text{Wc8} \dagger$  gives Black no way to escape the checks.

35.  $\text{Qe1}$   $\text{Wh1} \dagger$

We have an easy perpetual check, but nothing more.

## D2) 18. $\text{Rfd1}$



This is another important idea: White keeps the other rook for active purposes on the c-file.

18...  $\text{Wg5}!?$

For some reason this interesting continuation has hardly ever been played over the board, but it has proven its worth in correspondence games. The idea, of course, is to prepare counterplay with ...f5.

18...  $\text{Wd7}$  19.  $\text{d6}$   $\text{Rb6}$  and 18...  $\text{f5}$  19.  $\text{d6}$   $\text{Wf6}$  are the two most common continuations.

19.  $\text{d6}$

The whole point of White's previous move was to support this advance, so I will take it as our main line.

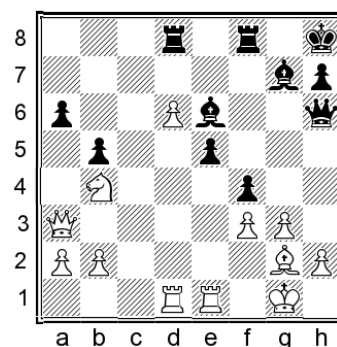
A playable alternative is:

19.  $\text{Wb3}$   $\text{Wf4}$  20.  $\text{Re1}$   $\text{Qd7}$

A thematic kind of situation has been reached. White is a pawn up but ...f5 is unstoppable, so we are guaranteed to obtain counterplay on the kingside. Of course we are also helped by the fact that the knight is out of play on a3.

21.  $\text{Qc2}$

21.  $\text{Rad1}$  N 21...  $\text{f5}$  22.  $\text{g3}$   $\text{Wh6}$  23.  $\text{d6} \dagger$   $\text{Qh8}$  24.  $\text{Qg2}$   $\text{Rbd8}$  also gives us full compensation for the pawn. 21...  $\text{f5}$  22.  $\text{g3}$   $\text{Wh6}$  23.  $\text{Qg2}$   $\text{Qh8}$  24.  $\text{Rad1}$   $\text{f4}$  25.  $\text{d6}$   $\text{Qg4}$  26.  $\text{Qb4}$   $\text{Rbd8}$  27.  $\text{f3}$   $\text{Qe6}$  28.  $\text{Wa3}$

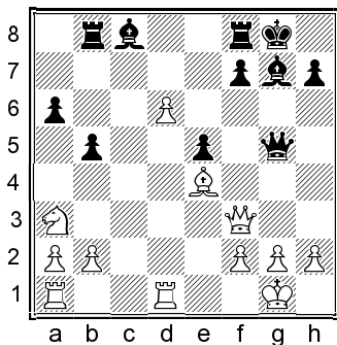


28...e4!

Black obtained strong counterplay in Popenko – Gudkov, corr. 2014. An illustrative line is:

29.♞xe4 ♕f5 30.♘c6 ♕xe4 31.fxe4 f3! 32.♕xf3 b4  
33.♞d3 ♞xd6 34.♞xd6 ♞e3†

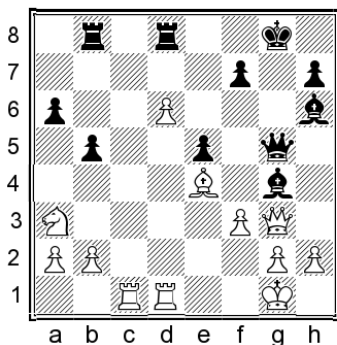
Leading to a draw by perpetual check.



19...♞d8 20.♘c2

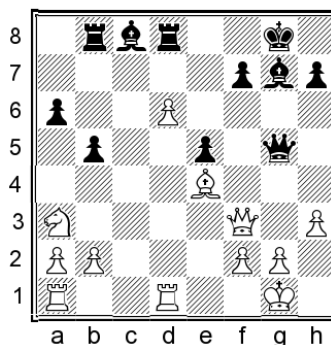
Rerouting the knight is logical, and it's the engine's top choice. Two other moves have been tried in correspondence games:

20.♞ac1 ♕g4 21.♞g3 ♕h6 22.f3 (I also considered 22.♕f3N 22...♕xf3 23.♞xf3 ♞xd6 24.♘c2 ♞bd8 25.♘e3 ♞d4 26.♞e1 e4 27.♞h3 ♕f8 28.♞c6 ♞d3 29.♞xa6 ♕c5 when we have at least enough compensation for the pawn.)



22...♕e6 23.♞c7 ♞xg3 24.hxg3 ♕e3† 25.♖h2 ♕d4  
26.♘c2 ♕xb2 27.♞c6 a5 28.♞b1 ♕d4 29.♘d4  
exd4 30.♞b2 b4 Having reached an equal endgame,  
the players agreed a draw in Khorunzhy – Malin,  
corr. 2016.

20.h3



20...♞f4!?

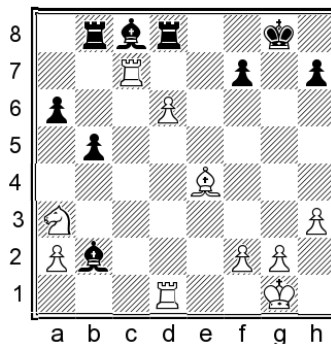
Placing the queen on f4 is an important motif in this variation.

21.♞ac1N

This seems like a natural choice.

21.♞e2 ♖h8 led to another complex, dynamically balanced struggle in LePage – Sudnitsyn, corr. 2014. Here is an illustrative line I analysed:  
22.♘c2 f5 23.♕d5 ♞b6!? 24.d7 ♕xd7 25.♕b3 ♞g5  
26.♞d5 ♕e8 27.♞xd8 ♞xd8 28.♘e3 ♕g6 29.♞c1  
e4 The position remains unclear.

21...♞xf3 22.♕xf3 e4 23.♕xe4 ♕xb2 24.♞c7



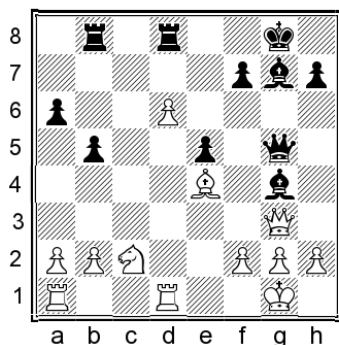
24...♕e5!

Keeping the d-pawn under control.

25.♕d5 ♕d7 26.♕b3 ♞b6 27.♞a7 ♕e6 28.♕xe6  
fxe6 29.d7 ♞c6

Our king will walk to e7 and the endgame is absolutely fine. A key point is that the knight is still sitting on a3, doing absolutely nothing.

20...♕g4 21.♞g3



21...Qxf4

Again we see this key idea, unpinning the bishop while hitting the bishop on e4. If White exchanges queens, the g7-bishop will be happy. If White avoids touching the queen on f4, it may support ...f5 and/or ...e4 ideas in the future.

22.f3

22. Qxf4 exf4 23. Nb4 Qxb2 24. f3 Qd7 25. Bb1 Qa3 was equal in Greig – MacTilstra, corr. 2015.

22...Qe6

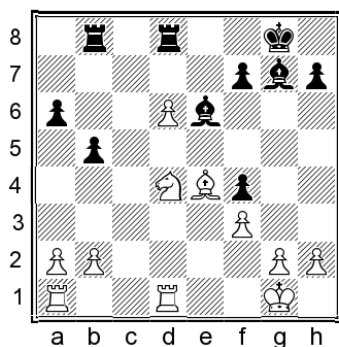
We are ready to pick off the d-pawn with ...Bb6 or (after exchanging on g3) ...Qf8. Another idea is ...f5. We have a lot of activity and White's choices are limited.

23. Qxf4

23. Qf2!? N is another idea, when 23...f5 24. Qc6 Qf8 25. g3 Qh6 26. d7 Qf7 27. Qd5 Bxd7 leads to a balanced position.

23...exf4 24. Nd4

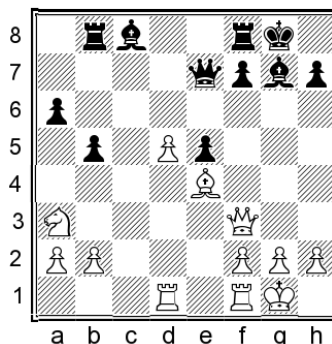
The players agreed a draw here in Volodarsky – Saidashev, corr. 2012. I will continue the line for a few more moves:



24...Bxd6 25. Nxe6 Bxe6 26. Bd2 Qe5 27. Bb1 Qg7 28. b3 h5 29. Bd7 Qf6

The endgame is equal.

D3) 18. Bb1



This is another important option, supporting an advance of the d-pawn while leaving the other rook available for kingside duties.

18...Bb6!

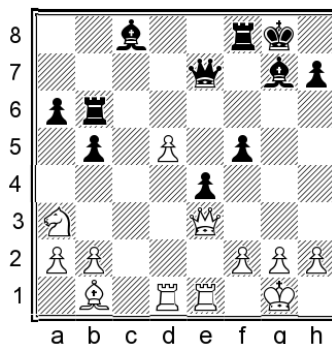
Restraining the d-pawn and preparing to swing the rook to the kingside. The immediate threat is ...f5.

19. Qd3

This is by far the most popular choice, but there are several other options that White could consider:

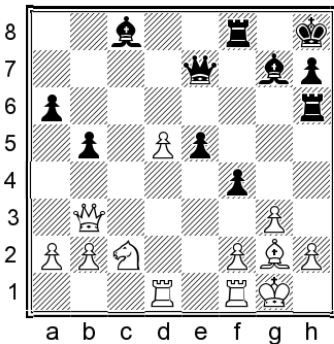
19. d6?! Bxd6 20. Bxd6 Qxd6 21. Bd1 Qe7 22. Nc2 f5 23. Qd5+ Qh8 was more than adequate for Black in Majdan – Vinuthna, Kochin 2004.

19. Qb1?! f5 20. Bfe1?! e4 21. Qe3 was seen in Aguilar – Tristan, Necochea 2007. This is a good example of how a few natural-looking moves from White can result in a really bad position. The best way to capitalize would have been:



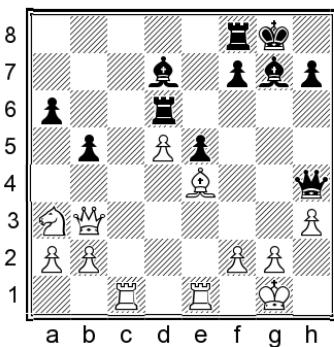
21...♖h6!N 22.♗f4 (22.♘c2 runs into 22...♗h4 23.♗g3 ♗h5 with a deadly attack. 22.d6 avoids being mated, but 22...♗xd6 23.♗xd6 ♗xd6 24.♘c2 ♖h8 leaves White in a miserable position.) 22...♗d6!? There are other good moves, but this version of the queenless position will see us dominate the board. 23.♗xd6 ♗xd6 24.b3 (Or 24.♘c2 ♗xb2 when the d5-pawn remains weak.) 24...♗fd8 Followed by ...♗c3 and ...♗xd5, with a near-decisive advantage.

19.♗e3?! ♖h6 20.g3 f5 21.♗g2 f4 22.♗b3 ♖h8 23.♘c2? was seen in Swathi – Raghavi, Bangalore 2005. White's last move was an error, but our position was already clearly better. At this point the best way to capitalize would have been:



23...♗e8!N The kingside threats will soon decide matters.

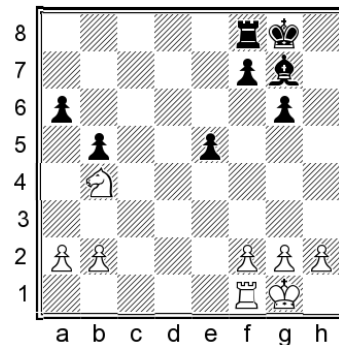
19.♗b3?! was a questionable choice in Swati – Harika, New Delhi 2007. I suggest: 19...♗h4!?N 20.♗fe1 ♖h6 21.h3 (21.♗g3 ♗d8 22.♗c2 f5 23.♘b1 ♖h8 24.♘d2 e4 gives us superb compensation for the pawn. It's not only about our kingside attacking chances: we might also exchange queens on d6 and win back the pawn to reach a highly favourable endgame.) 21...♗d6 22.♗c1 ♗d7



23.♗c6!? White should resort to sacrificing the exchange, otherwise ...f5 will lead to a devastating

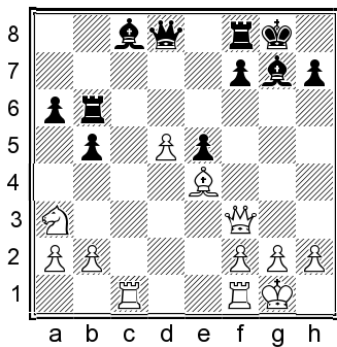
kingside initiative. 23...♗xc6 24.dxc6 ♖h8 White will struggle to prove sufficient compensation, not least because the knight is still misplaced on a3. Play could continue: 25.♗c2 Otherwise ...f5 will lead to the elimination of the c-pawn. 25...♗c8 26.♘b1 f5 27.♗xf5 ♗dxc6 28.♘c3 ♗f8 29.♗e4 ♗c7 We stand clearly better.

19.♗f5 ♗f6 20.d6 White simplifies matters, hoping to obtain a light-square bind with the knight, eventually proving superior to the bishop. 20...♗xd6 21.♗xd6 (21.♘c2N is a logical alternative, when 21...♗xf5 22.♗xf5 ♗e6 23.♗xe6 ♗xe6 24.♗d7 e4 25.b3 f5 26.g3 f4 maintains a balanced game.) 21...♗xd6 22.♘c2 ♗xf5 23.♗xf5 ♗g6 24.♗xg6? Improving our kingside structure is an odd choice. (24.♘e3 ♗xf5 25.♘xf5 ♗d8 would have kept things equal.) 24...hxg6 25.♘b4 In Degraeve – Wagner, France 2007, Black could have pressed with:

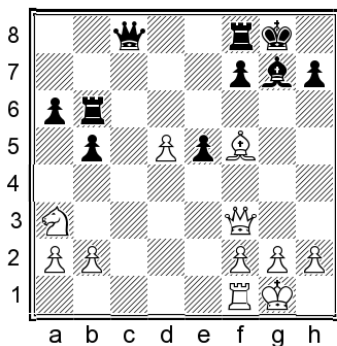


25...♗c8!N 26.♘xa6 ♗c2 27.b4 ♗xa2 28.♘c7 ♗f8 29.♘xb5 ♗xb4 It should be a draw, but Black can press without any risk. The f2-pawn will need to be defended, and Black can gradually advance on the kingside.

19.♗c1!? is a sophisticated idea. White intends a ♗xc8 exchange sacrifice, just like in variation D1, but apparently wastes a tempo! The idea actually isn't so bad though, as our rook on b6 is no longer able to recapture on c8, and we don't want the other rook to be lured away from the kingside. 19...♗d8! After this move White requires an improvement:

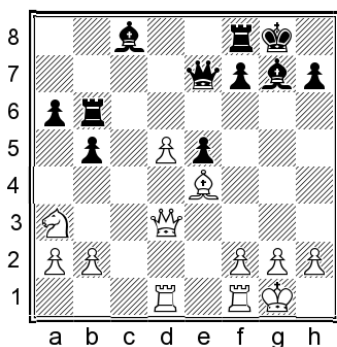


20. Nxc8! White should follow through with the intended sacrifice. (20. Bc6? f5 21. Qc2 Qd7 22. Bxb6 Bxb6 23. Bd1 e4 24. Bf4 Qxb2 saw Black take control of the game in Janusonis – Kukula, corr. 2006.) 20... Qxc8 21. Qf5



21... Bf6! We must act quickly, otherwise Qc2-e3 will cement White's control over the light squares. 22. Qxc8 Bxf3 23. gxf3 Bxc8 24. Bd1 Qf8 With the knight cut off and our king able to approach the centre, we are doing fine.

Returning to the main line, we will proceed to sidestep the d5-d6 attack with:



### 19... Qd7

Offering a second pawn.

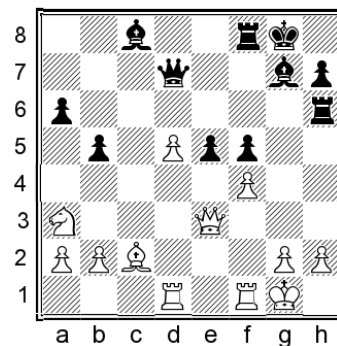
Some readers may also wish to investigate 19... Bh6!?, an interesting alternative which also leads to wild complications and dynamic equality.

### 20. Qxh7†

White has nothing better than accepting the second pawn. 20. d6 Bd8 21. Qxh7† Qh8 transposes to variation D32 below.

20. Qd2?! was played in Strugnell – Yagupov, Pardubice 2016, when 20... f5N 21. Qc2 Bg6 would have offered excellent prospects to Black.

20. Qe3? Bh6 21. Qc2 f5 22. f4 is even worse. In Rodchenkov – Nebolsina, Serpukhov 2004, Black should have played:



22... Qd6! Intending ...exf4 followed by ... Qe5; and if 23. g3? exf4 24. gxf4 Qxb2 our advantage grows even greater.

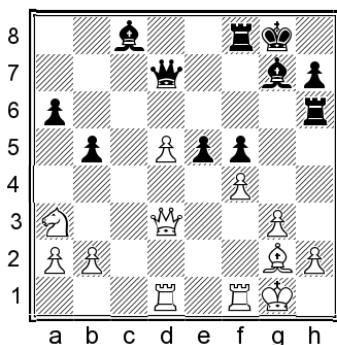
20. g3 f5 21. Qg2

This idea should be familiar by now. It's playable here, but not too challenging.

21... Bh6!?

21... e4 is a good alternative, with dynamic equality. 22. f4

22. Bd2?! e4 23. Qe3 f4! 24. gxf4 Bg6 25. f3 Qh6! 26. fxe4 Qg4 27. Qc5 Qxf4 28. Qxf8† Qxf8 29. Bxf4† Qxf4 30. Bf2 Qf7! 31. Bxf7† Qxf7 32. Qf2 6 is a nice line which results in a favourable endgame for us.



22...♔d6!N

22...exf4 23.gxf4 ♕xb2 was about equal in Leko – Radjabov, Linares 2004; the text move is more ambitious.

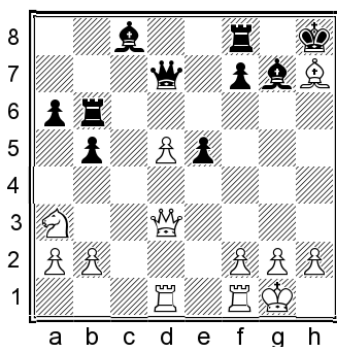
23.♖c2

23.♞d2 ♕d7 24.♗c2 b4! threatens ...♕b5, maintaining our initiative.

23...e4 24.♞b3 ♕d7

White's extra pawn is not doing much. We can easily gain ground on the queenside with moves like ...a5 and ...♞c8, while it's not clear what White should be doing. At the very least, we should be able to regain the pawn and have no problems.

20...♔h8



White has two reasonable moves: **D31)** 21.♞e3 and **D32)** 21.d6.

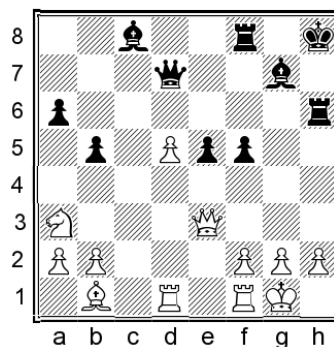
**D31) 21.♞e3**

White gains a tempo against the rook and creates a line of retreat for the bishop.

21...♞h6 22.♕c2

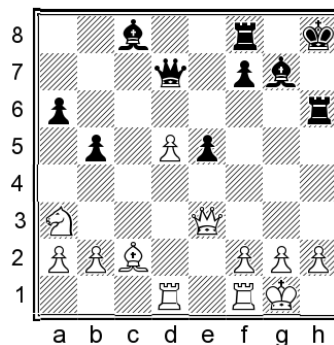
White has also tried the alternative bishop retreat 22.♕b1, when 22...f5!N seems most precise. (22...♞d6 23.♗c2 f5 was played in Slizhevsky – Khairullin, Moscow 2005, and now 24.f4!N

24...exf4 25.♞f3 would have been critical. From a practical perspective the position remains messy and double-edged, but the engine favours White to some extent.)



23.f4 (23.d6 e4 offers us plenty of compensation.)

23...e4 24.♞d2 ♞d6 Next we'll play ...♕d7, with full compensation for the pawns.



22...♞d6!

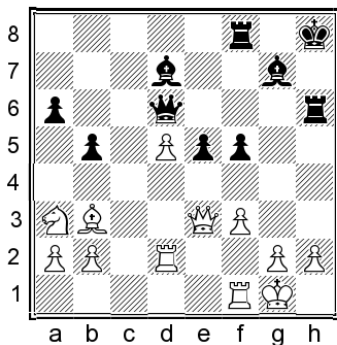
This time we should block the passer before launching the kingside pawns.

22...f5?! is worse due to 23.d6!, when 23...e4 24.f3 favours White. If we compare the situation on the board to the analogous situation with the bishop on b1, here our king is a bit more awkwardly placed, as there are some potential variations where a check on the h-file could drive the king to g8, at which point ♕b3† could be painful.

23.g3

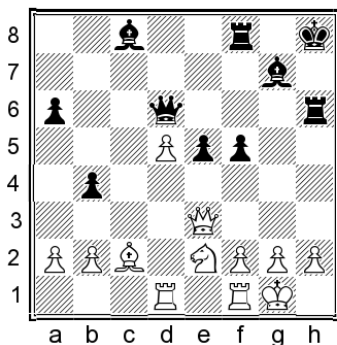
White has tried two other moves:

23.♕b3?! f5 24.f3?! (24.f4 exf4 25.♞xf4 ♕e5 is good for us, but the game continuation is even worse for White.) 24...♕d7 25.♞d2

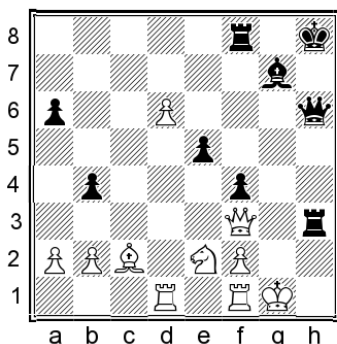


25...f4! 26.♖e4 ♔f6! 27.♞f2 ♔d8 The instructive bishop manoeuvre gave Black a decisive advantage in Shablinsky – Runtig, corr. 2007.

23.♘b1!? f5 24.♘c3  
24.♘d2 e4 25.g3 ♔xb2 gives us nice prospects.  
24...b4 25.♘e2



25...f4! 26.♞f3 ♞h4 27.h3 ♞h6  
Black had good attacking chances in Kauppinen – Dullemond, corr. 2008. I couldn't resist analysing a bit deeper, and found some amazing possibilities. Here is my analysis:  
28.d6 ♔xh3 29.gxh3 ♞xh3  
White has to walk a narrow path to survive:



30.♔g2!! ♞h2†  
30...♞xf3 31.♞h1 ♞h3 32.♞xh3 f3† 33.♔g3  
♞xh3† 34.♔xh3 fxe2 is another pretty line ending in a drawn endgame.  
31.♔g1 ♔f6!

31...♞h3 repeats the position; the text move is more challenging.

32.♔b3 ♞h3 33.♞e4  
33.♔g2? is no good here due to 33...♞xf3 34.♞h1  
♞xf2†! 35.♔xf2 ♔h4† and Black wins.  
33...♞xb3!

Removing the bishop in order to allow the following check.

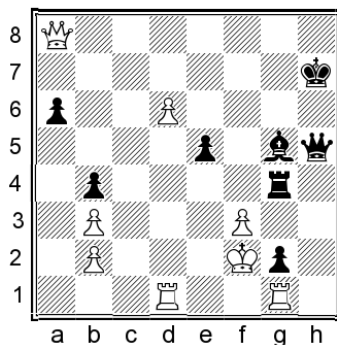
34.axb3 ♞g8† 35.♘g3 fxg3 36.♔g2!

Somehow there is no forced mate, but White still has to walk a tightrope to survive.

36...♞h2† 37.♔f3 g2 38.♞g1 ♞h5† 39.♔e3 ♞g4!  
The only move, without which Black would be losing.

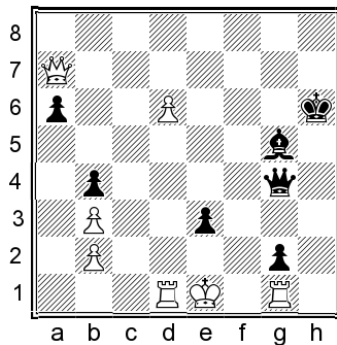
40.♞a8† ♔h7 41.f3! ♔g5† 42.♔f2!

White's last two moves were forced. Now White's king appears to be safe, but there is a wonderful resource.



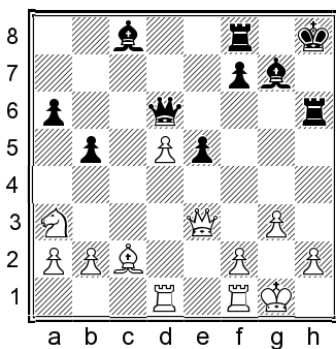
42...e4!! 43.♞a7†!  
Another only move.  
43...♔h6 44.fxg4 ♞h4†! 45.♔e2!  
45.♔xg2? ♞xg4† 46.♔f2 ♞f3† 47.♔e1 e3! is hopeless for White.  
45...♞xg4† 46.♔e1! e3!

The king appears to be caught, but there is a final twist.



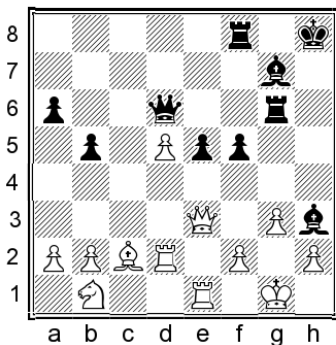
47.♞e7!!

Miraculously, Black has no more than a draw.  
Chess is beautiful!



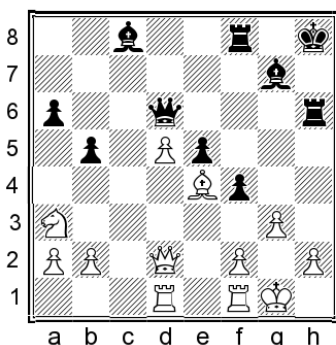
**23...f5**

It's also fine to lead with the bishop: 23...♗h3  
24.♞fe1 f5 25.♞d2 (25.f4? proved disastrous after  
25...exf4 26.♞e7 ♞b6† and White had to resign in  
Smirnov – Radjabov, Tripoli 2004.) 25...♞g6  
26.♘b1



26...e4 27.f4 exf3 28.♞xf3 ♗xb2 Black was doing  
fine in Chiru – Atakisi, corr. 2005.

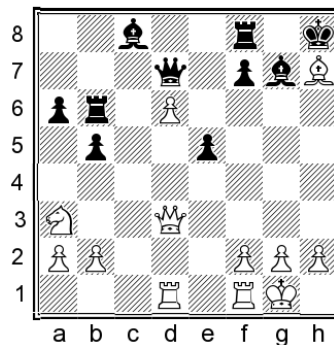
**24.♞d2 f4 25.♗e4**



**25...f3!**

Black had a strong attack and went on to win  
in Trippe – Koetz, corr. 2007.

**D32) 21.d6**



Advancing the pawn and blocking the sixth  
rank is logical and thematic.

**21...♞d8**

Another fascinating position has been reached.  
We are two pawns down, but White's pieces are  
poorly coordinated and our active ...f5 ideas are  
constantly in the air.

**22.♞e4**

White has tried a couple of other queen moves:  
22.♞b1

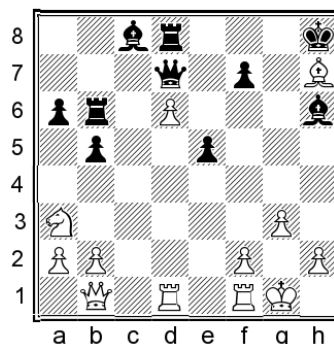
In the event of this move it looks interesting to try:  
22...♗h6!?N

Before taking the d6-pawn, we take control of an  
important diagonal while also clearing space along  
the seventh rank.

22...f5 23.♗g6 ♞e6 24.d7 ♞xg6 25.dxc8=♞ ♞xc8  
led to a balanced struggle in Barua – Hossain,  
Kolkata 2004.

23.g3

23.♞fe1? loses to 23...f5! 24.♗g6 ♞g8 25.♗h5 ♗b7  
26.f3 (or 26.g3 f4) 26...♗f4 with a decisive attack.



**23...f5!**

Maximizing the tension.

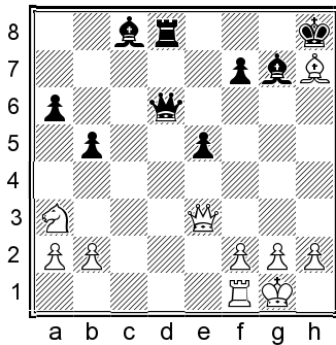
23...♞xd6 24.♞xd6 ♞xd6 25.♗f5 ♗b7 26.♗e4 ♗c8  
is a potential repetition, although either side could  
play on in some way.

24.♔g6 e4 25.♙h5 ♖e6

Soon d6 will fall, leaving us only one pawn down. With two strong bishops and attacking chances, not forgetting the offside knight on a3, we stand at least equal.

Attacking the rook is also possible:

22.♖e3 ♗xd6 23.♗xd6 ♖xd6



White has removed some tension and exchanged one pair of rooks, but we still have plenty of activity for the pawn, with the bishop pair and the ...f5 advance in the air.

24.♙c2

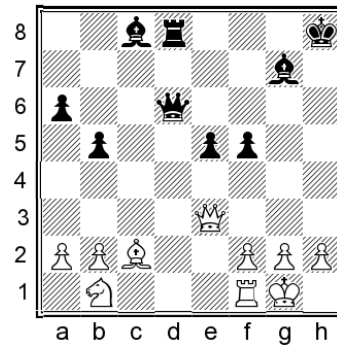
Two other bishop moves are possible:

24.♙e4 f5 25.♖h3† ♖h6 26.♙xf5 ♖xh3 27.♙xh3 ♙xh3 28.gxh3 ♖d2 29.♖c1 ♖xb2 30.♖c2 ♖b4 31.♙g2 ♙f8 gave Black the marginally more comfortable side of an equal endgame in March Morla – Richter, Capdepera 2004.

24.♙b1 f5 25.♘c2 e4 26.b4 was played in Lutz – Radjabov, Plovdiv 2003. Black has several playable moves, but I like the subtle 26...♙g8!N, removing the king from potential checks along the h-file and intending ...♙e6 or ...♖d2 next. Objectively it's equal, but I think Black's side is easier to play. (26...♖d2N is also fine, as our activity and bishop pair would be more relevant than White's extra pawn after a queen exchange. Play could continue 27.♖g3 ♖h6! 28.♖c7 ♖d6 29.♖f7 ♖f6 with a possible repetition.)

24...f5 25.♘b1

This position was reached in Macak – Sebenik Olbia 2008. I recommend:



25...e4!N 26.♘c3 ♖h6!

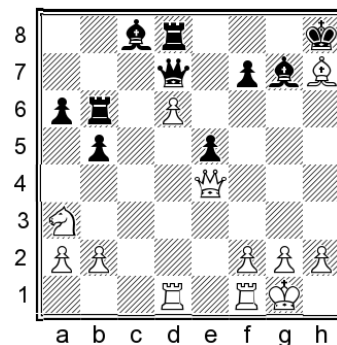
Again the queen exchange suits us. Notice that our king has an open path to e5 in the endgame.

27.♖xh6† ♙xh6 28.♖d1 ♖xd1† 29.♙xd1 ♙g7 30.♘d5 ♙f7 31.g3 ♙c1

31...♙e6 32.♘f4† ♙e5 is also fine.

32.b3 ♙e6 33.♘e3 ♙e5

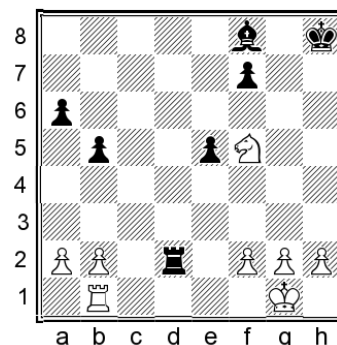
Our activity and bishop pair fully compensate for the pawn deficit.



22...♙h6!?

Just as in the 22.♖b1 line in the notes above, I like the idea of improving this bishop and maintaining the tension.

22...♖xd6 23.♖xd6 ♖xd6 is perfectly playable, albeit less aggressive. A good example continued: 24.♘c2 ♖h6 25.♙f5 ♖f4 26.♘e3 ♙xf5 27.♖xf5 ♖xf5 28.♘xf5 ♖d2 29.♖b1 ♙f8



Again Black's activity compensated for the missing pawn in Rattinger – Blank, corr. 2006.

### 23. Rfe1!?

Interestingly, we saw in the 22. Wb1 note that this move would be a serious mistake in the analogous position there. On the other hand, with the queen on e4, activating the rook is the critical approach, as White is committing to a piece sacrifice.

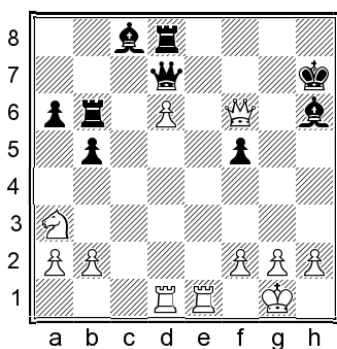
Somehow 23. Wc2!N maintains equality, although it's hard to imagine any human choosing to play this way. Either 23... Rc6 or 23... Rxd6 is fine for us. (23... f5? 24. Qg6 Rg8 25. Wc5! should be avoided though.)

### 23... f5!

Challenge accepted!

23... Wg4 was a safe alternative seen in Solak – Yakovich, Moscow 2005.

### 24. Wxe5† Qxh7 25. Wf6



### 25... Rb7!

An important resource, preventing the check on e7 due to the pin along the d-file.

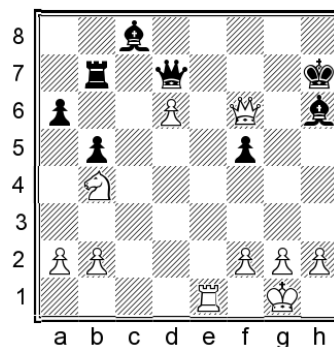
### 26. Qc2 Re8

The last few moves were more or less forced for both sides. We have reached a position where White has three pawns for the piece and our king is somewhat exposed, but the bishop pair still has great potential.

### 27. Qd4

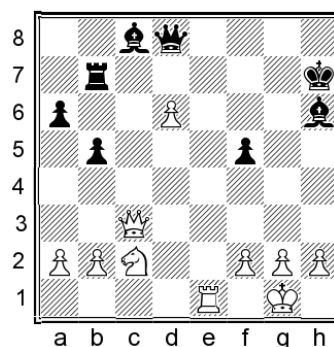
I checked two other continuations:

27. Qb4? Rxe1† 28. Rxe1 would be a strong continuation, if not for the following riposte:

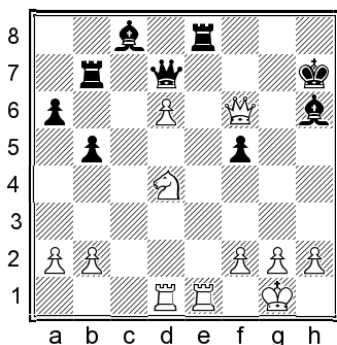


28... Wf7! (28... Wg7?? 29. Wd8 wins for White.) 29. Re7 (Now 29. Wd8 achieves nothing as 29... Qe6 is possible.) 29... Rxe7 30. Wxe7 Wxe7 (30... Qg6! is the computer preference by a small margin, but the human choice is good enough.) 31. dxe7 Qd7 32. Qxa6 Qg5 33. Qc5 Qe8 Black has good winning chances in this endgame.

27. Wc3!N is a computer move which seems to be a slight improvement on the game continuation, although we are still fine in more than one way. 27... Rxe1† (27... Qg7 28. Wh3† Qg8 is a sound alternative, when I don't think White has anything better than angling for a draw with 29. Wb3† Qh7 30. Wh3†.) 28. Rxe1 Wd8



29. Qb4 (29. Qd4 Qg7 30. Wh3† Qg6 31. Wg3† Wg5 is also dynamically equal.) 29... Rf7 30. Rd1 We8 31. Qc6 (31. Qd5 We6 32. Qb6 Qd7 33. Qxd7 Rxd7 gives us some winning chances.) 31... Rg7 32. g3 Qd7 33. Qe5 We6 The computer has it at 0.00. If I had to choose a side then I would take Black, as our king is safe and the d-pawn has been contained, and eventually we can aim to tie White to the defence of f2.



### 27...Re4!N

This isn't the only playable move, but I think it would be the best winning try. We threaten to extinguish White's initiative with ...Qe8 or ...Rg7.

27...f4!N is a playable alternative, when 28.Rxe5 Rxe5 29.Qxe5 Qg4 30.Qe4+ Qg6 31.Qxg6+ Kxg6 32.Bb3! Rd7 33.Bc5 Ra7 results in a balanced endgame.

27...Rg7 28.Qh4+ has been tested in a practical game, when two options are worth mentioning:

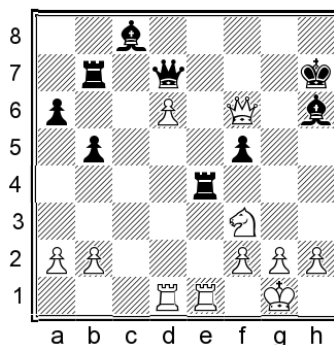
a) 28...Qg8?! led to success for Black in one game but objectively it's not the best way to play. 29.Bf3? Rxe1+ 30.Rxe1?! (30.Bxe1 was better, although 30...Rb6 clearly favours Black) 30...Qxd6 31.Rxe8+ Rf8 was virtually hopeless for White in Kirusha – Khairullin, St Petersburg 2005. However, White has more than one way to improve. 29.Qg3!N is best, when 29...Qh7 30.Bb3 Ra7 31.Bc5 Rxe1+ 32.Rxe1 Qc6 33.b4 gives White excellent compensation and Black will have to defend carefully to hold.

b) 28...Rh6!N 29.Qh5 Re4 30.Bf3 Rxe1+ 31.Bxe1 f4 is a better idea, when the computer calls it equal but I think White's position would be trickier to play.

### 28.Bf3

28.Rxe4? fxe4 leaves White without a good follow-up.

28.g3!? is a computer suggestion but 28...Qe8 29.Bf3 Rg7 sees us consolidating, and it's not clear what White should do next.



### 28...Qe6! 29.Qxe6 Rxe6

We have some winning chances in this endgame.

### Conclusion

This chapter has concluded our coverage of 1.e4 c5 2.Bf3 Bc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Bxd4 Bf6 5.Bc3 e5 6.Bdb5 d6 7.Rg5 a6 8.Ba3 b5 9.Rxf6 gxf6 10.Bd5 Rg7. We analysed the critical variation arising after 11.Rd3 Be7 12.Bxe7 Qxe7 13.0-0 0-0 14.c4, where White strikes at our queenside and tries to tempt us into exchanging on c4, when the a3-knight would leap into action. Instead we should activate our counterplay with 14...f5, when the path divides.

15.cxb5 is an obvious move to consider, when 15...d5! is the thematic reply to mobilize our central pawns. Later I offered a powerful novelty involving a rook lift via b6 to the kingside, which should make life difficult for your opponents.

Next we considered 15.Qe2, when 15...d5!? is an unusual but fully playable sacrifice. The key line continues 16.cxd5 fxe4 17.Rxe4, when 17...Qd6!N is a useful improvement, followed by typical counterplay on the kingside.

15.Qh5 is the next main option, when 15...d5!? is again our choice, intending 16.cxd5 Qd8! 17.exf5 Qxd5. If White plays extremely precisely then we will have to hold a slightly inferior endgame, and Carlsen showed exactly how it should be done. Most of your opponents are unlikely to know the right way to exert pressure. If the endgame isn't to

your liking, you can either stick with 10...f5 or carry out your own investigation into 15...♖b8.

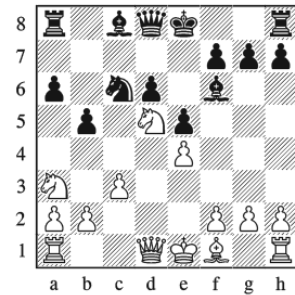
Finally, 15.♗f3 is the most popular continuation which took up most of the chapter. Again 15...d5 is our choice, when 16.cxd5 fxe4 17.♙xe4 ♖b8 is best play. White usually then chooses between one of the three natural rook moves. Each option has its own nuances, so be sure to learn them as best you can, although you can and should also lean on

some general concepts such as mobilizing the queen's rook via b8-b6 and activating the g7-bishop in some suitable way. Sometimes we will look to attack the white king, while in other lines we should simplify to an endgame with compensation for a pawn; this variability illustrates the richness of the Sveshnikov. Please also remember the significance of the offside knight on a3: if you can keep this piece out of play, you will generally be doing well.

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# Chapter 8

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## Positional System with 11.c3

### Variation Index

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1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6  
8.♘a3 b5 9.♘d5 ♙e7 10.♙xf6 ♙xf6 11.c3 ♙g5

A) 12.h4!? ♙h6 13.♘c2 0-0!

A1) 14.a4

A2) 14.g3

A3) 14.g4!?

B) 12.♘c2 ♙b8!

B1) 13.♙e2

B2) 13.a4! bxa4 14.♘cb4 ♘xb4

B21) 15.♘xb4 ♙d7 16.♙xa6 ♙a5! 17.♙xd6 ♙b6 18.♙d3 ♙e6

B211) 19.♙c4

B212) 19.0-0

B22) 15.cxb4 ♙d7! 16.♙xa6 0-0

B221) 17.b3

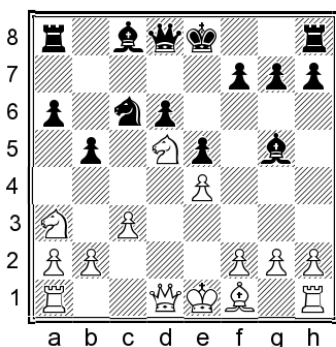
B222) 17.0-0

1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♟c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♞xd4 ♟f6 5.♞c3 e5 6.♞db5 d6 7.♞g5 a6 8.♞a3 b5 9.♞d5 ♞e7 10.♞xf6 ♞xf6 11.c3

This has long been established as a challenging positional system. White prepares to bring the knight to c2 before striking at the queenside with a2-a4.

### 11...♞g5

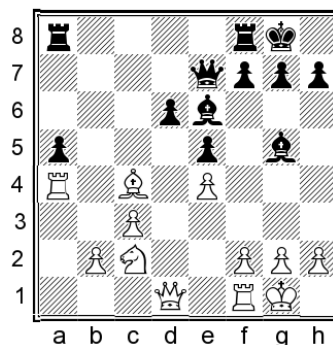
It's always useful to activate this bishop. Black often starts by castling, but I have something else in mind.



We will consider the interesting sideline **A)** 12.h4!? followed by the normal **B)** 12.♞c2.

12.♞e2 isn't the most flexible choice: it would be more accurate to drop the knight back to c2 and follow up with a2-a4, when the bishop would have the option of going to the more active c4-square. After 12...0-0 13.0-0 ♞e7 we're ready to exchange on d5 and meet ♞xd5 with ...♞e6, with a comfortable game.

12.♞d3 is a natural developing move but it does nothing to aid White's control over d5, and after 12...0-0 13.0-0 ♞e7 we are already comfortably equal. Let's see a few more moves: 14.♞xe7† ♞xe7 15.♞c2 ♞e6 16.a4 (16.♞b4? a5 17.♞d5 ♞xd5 18.exd5 b4 gave Black a clear positional advantage in Bakajsa – Holasek, Harrachov 2009.) 16...bxa4 17.♞xa4 a5 18.♞c4 I found a way to improve Black's play from Obolenskikh – Yakovich, Chelyabinsk 2022:



18...♞b7!N 19.♞xe6 fxe6 20.♞e1 (20.♞xd6? ♞b3! wins a piece.) 20...♞xb2 21.♞xd6 ♞b3 22.♞a3 ♞c4 23.♞f3 ♞a6 24.♞d7 ♞f6 We have no problems.

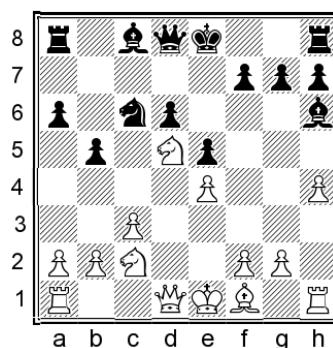
### A) 12.h4!? ♞h6

12...♞xh4?? 13.♞xh4 ♞xh4 14.♞c7† is obviously no good.

### 13.♞c2

13.g4 ♞f4 gives us a slightly easier version of variation A3 below, as White's kingside advances are not so threatening when we haven't castled. 14.♞f3 (14.♞c2 ♞e6 gives us a comfortable game.) 14...♞e6 15.♞xf4 ♞f6 16.♞e2 ♞xf4N Black is fine. (16...exf4?? was the surprising continuation of Pac – Zhigalko, Warsaw [rapid] 2008, when 17.e5N would have been embarrassing.)

In this position it's important that we take into account the inclusion of h2-h4 and ...♞h6 when deciding how to proceed.



### 13...0-0!

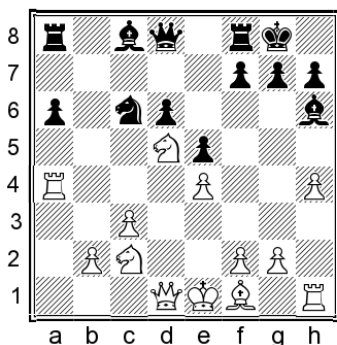
13...♞b8? doesn't work here due to: 14.a4! (14.g4 ♞f4 15.♞f3 0-0 16.♞xf4? exf4 17.♞xf4 b4! favours Black, but the text move is more troublesome.) 14...bxa4 15.♞cb4 ♞d7 (15...♞xb4

16. ♖xb4 ♕d7? is our choice in the analogous position with our bishop on g5 and the pawn on h2, but here the simple 17. ♖xd6 leaves us without a good follow-up, as the bishop is unable to drop back to e7.) 16. ♖xa6 ♖xb2 17. ♖ac7† ♔f8 18. ♕b5! White is clearly better.

The text move produces a major transposition, with many games having arrived here via the 11...0-0 12. ♖c2 ♕g5 13.h4 ♕h6 move order. White may proceed with **A1)** 14.a4, **A2)** 14.g3 or the aggressive **A3)** 14.g4!?

**A1) 14.a4 bxa4 15.♖xa4**

15. ♖ce3 ♕xe3 16. ♖xe3 was seen in Coplin – Martello, corr. 2008, and now 16...♖b8N 17.♖xa4 ♖xb2 18.♕xa6 ♕d7 would have been an easy route to equality. Notice that 19. ♖xd6?? is impossible due to 19...♖b1† 20. ♖d1 ♕g4 and we win material.



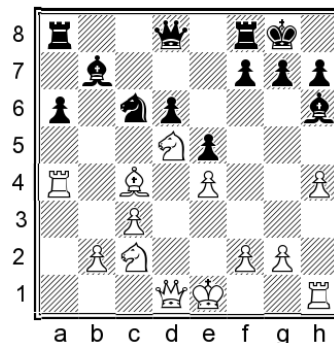
**15...♖b7!?**

15...a5 is far more common; but once h2-h4 and ...♕h6 have been played, the position is slightly different.

**16.♕c4**

I also considered: 16. ♖ce3 ♕xe3 17. ♖xe3 ♖e7 18. ♕d3!?!N (18. ♖d5?! ♕xd5 19.exd5 ♖b6 gave Black the more pleasant game in Alfonso Abrego – Jimenez Almeida, Pamplona 2017) 18...♕c6 19.♖a1 d5 20.0-0 d4 21.cxd4 (21. ♖c4 dxc3 22.bxc3 ♖c7 is equal) 21...exd4 22. ♖c4 ♕b5 We have no problems.

This position has been reached in a bunch of games. I think the strongest continuation is:



**16...♔h8!N**

Preparing ...f5 – perhaps not on the very next move, but it's useful to have the option of playing it at a moment's notice. Play could continue:

**17.♖a3!?**

With ideas of ♕a2 and ♖c4.

17.h5 prepares to castle, but 17...♖b8! 18.0-0 ♖d7 19.b4 f5 gives us a nice initiative.

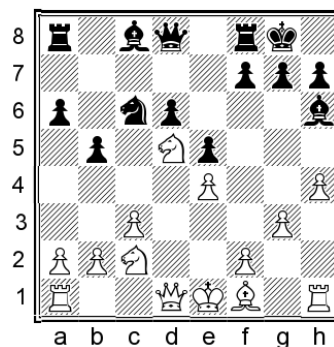
**17...♖e7**

Challenging the d5-knight and opening the path for the b7-bishop, in preparation for ...f5.

**18.♖b4 ♖b8 19.0-0 a5 20.♖b5 f5**

We have good chances on the kingside.

**A2) 14.g3**



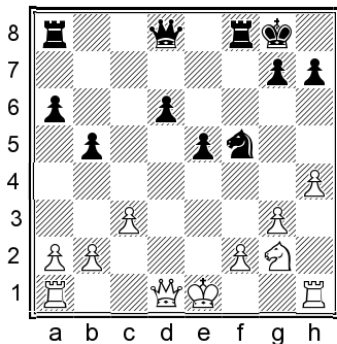
**14...♖e7!**

14...♕e6 is equally popular but I find the knight move to be the most direct and precise way of challenging the knight on d5.

**15.♖xe7†**

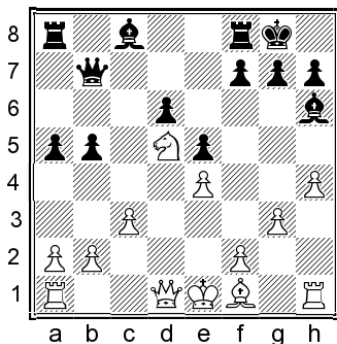
I checked two other natural continuations:

15. ♖cb3 ♙xe3 16. ♗xe3 ♙b7 17. ♙g2 f5 18. exf5  
 ♙xg2 19. ♗xg2 ♗xf5 gives us comfortable play. A  
 high-level example continued:



20. ♖d5†?! (White should settle for 20.0-0 with  
 equality.) 20... ♖h8 21.0-0 ♖b6 Black had the  
 better game in Hjartarson – Anand, Reykjavik  
 2006.

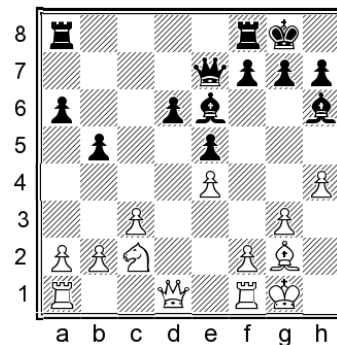
15. ♗cb4 a5! 16. ♗xe7† ♖xe7 17. ♗d5 ♖b7 We  
 intend ... ♙e6 next, and White already has to find a  
 difficult continuation to avoid slipping into a  
 worse position:



18. a4!N (18. ♖b3?! ♖b8 19. ♙d3? was played in  
 Donchenko – Firat, Internet [blitz] 2017, when  
 19... ♖h8!N 20.0-0 f5 would have given Black a  
 decisive initiative.) 18... bxa4 19. ♖xa4 ♖xb2  
 20. ♙c4! ♖h8 21.0-0 White has enough  
 compensation to keep the game unclear, but we  
 certainly have no cause for complaints.

15... ♖xe7 16. ♙g2 ♙e6 17.0-0

White is playing rather unambitiously. We  
 have several decent continuations but the most  
 precise way to fight for the advantage is:



17... ♖d7!!N

17...g6 is the most obvious way to  
 prepare ...f5, but 18. ♗b4 a5 19. ♗d5 ♖b7  
 20. ♗f6†N leads to unclear play.

17... ♖h8 is another idea, but White can obtain  
 counterplay with 18. a4, which the text move  
 prevents.

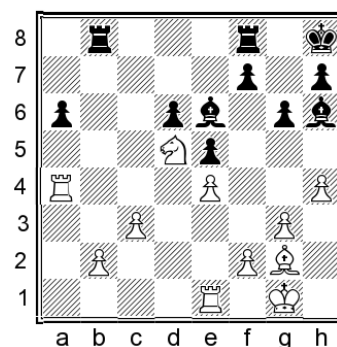
18. ♖e1

18. ♗b4 runs into 18... a5! 19. ♗d5 ♖b7  
 followed by swapping off the knight on either d5  
 or e3, when the change in pawn structure gives us  
 a clear advantage in either case.

18...g6 19. ♗b4 ♖h8

A useful waiting move, anticipating the  
 knight's arrival on d5. I prefer Black's chances, for  
 instance:

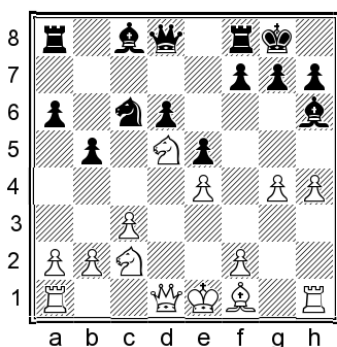
20. ♗d5 ♖ab8 21. a4 bxa4 22. ♖xa4 ♖xa4  
 23. ♖xa4



23... ♙xd5 24. exd5 ♖xb2 25. ♖xa6 ♖d8

White should be able to hold but we have  
 some chances to press.

A3) 14.g4!?



This aggressive continuation is the main line. It's certainly a consistent follow-up to the earlier h2-h4, although there's an obvious risk that White's king could be left without a safe haven.

#### 14...f4

This is the best way to deal with the g4-g5 threat. I would prefer not to touch either the f- or g-pawn.

#### 15. f3 e6

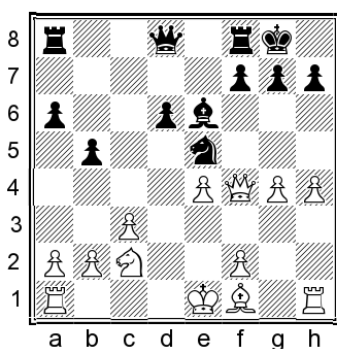
15...e8 has yielded good results for Black but after 16.g5! I rate White's chances as slightly better.

#### 16. dxf4

16.dxc3?! e3 17.dxe3 b4 gives us an excellent game.

16.e3 e5 17.exd5 is well met by 17...b8!, for instance: 18.b4N (18.e3?! e3 19.fxe3 d7 gave Black a clear advantage in Branbey53 – Rashadat1979, Internet [rapid] 2021.) 18...c7 19.f1 d7 20.c6 g6 We have the better chances, with an improved version of a Najdorf-style position.

#### 16...exf4 17. xf4 e5

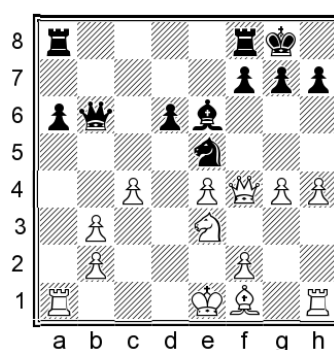


#### 18. g3!?

This seems best. It makes a good deal of sense for White to return the extra pawn in order to improve coordination and obtain some attacking chances along the g-file.

18.f3 defends the g4-pawn but costs time. An attractive reply is 18...c7!? preparing ...d5, with at least enough compensation for the pawn.

18.e3?! has been White's most popular continuation but we should be happy to see it. 18...b4! 19.c4 (19.cxb4 b6 20.a3 d4 also gives us a good initiative.) 19...b3 20.axb3 b6



21.f5? (White should settle for 21.e2 although 21...xb3 still gives us the easier play.) 21...b4† 22.d1 xb3† 23.c1 xc4 24.e4 xc4† 25.d2 ab8 26.ab1 xf5 27.gxf5 White somehow escaped with an eventual draw in Zoch – Pfretzschner, Bad Zwosten 2000, but at this point 27...fc8N would have been killing.

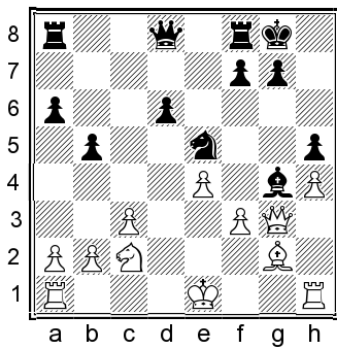
#### 18...xg4 19. g2 h5!?:N

Other moves are playable but I like this new idea, having a spectacular follow-up in mind.

#### 20.f3

This must be the critical continuation.

20.f4 is also possible, when 20...c4 21.b3 b6 22.e3 c7 leads to a complex position where our chances are no worse.



**20...f5!!**

That's the big idea!

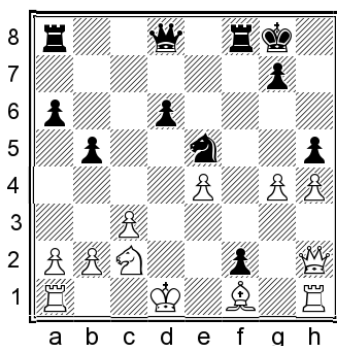
There is no turning back, as 20...♙e6? 21.f4 gives White a near-decisive advantage.

**21.fxg4?**

Taking the material is the key move to consider, but it's a mistake.

21.0-0 should be preferred, when 21...f4 22.♙f2 ♙e6 23.♖b1 ♜f6 leads to unclear play.

**21...f4 22.♙h2 f3 23.♙f1 f2† 24.♖d1**



**24...♙d7!?**

The simple 24...hxg4 also gives us more than enough play for the sacrificed piece.

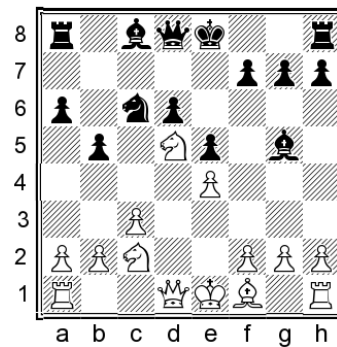
**25.♙e2**

25.gxh5? ♙g4† 26.♖c1 ♙xe4 leaves White without a good defence.

**25...♗xg4 26.♙g3 ♜ae8**

We have a clear advantage, as White's extra piece is outweighed by our attacking chances and dangerous f2-pawn.

**B) 12.♗c2**



Improving the knight is the main line by far. Black has met this set-up in a number of different ways over the decades. One thing has become clear: White cannot hope for an advantage by simply developing, manoeuvring and relying on the d5-outpost to win the game by itself. If White wants to put meaningful pressure on us then pawns breaks are needed: a2-a4 is an essential part of any ambitious plan, and there are also some deep lines where White includes a timely h2-h4 later as well. With this in mind, I have chosen to recommend:

**12...♗b8!**

This doesn't have an official name as far as I'm aware. I shall call it the Correspondence Variation, because it has taken over as the preferred choice of most strong correspondence (as well as OTB) players, and has withstood all of White's attempts at finding an opening advantage. The main point, of course, is to make a2-a4 less appealing.

12...0-0 is historically the most popular move, while 12...♗e7 is another fashionable option.

We will analyse **B1)** 13.♙e2 followed by the more critical **B2)** 13.a4!, after first checking a few minor possibilities:

13.h4?! should be met by: 13...♙xh4! With the rook on b8, we can safely take this pawn because there will be no fork on c7. (13...♙h6? has been played by Radjabov and others, but it transposes to the 13...♗b8? line in the notes to variation A above, which we definitely want to avoid.) 14.g3 (14.a4!? is the engine's preference but after 14...bxa4N White still faces a struggle to justify the pawn sacrifice; we simply have a more comfortable

version of variation B2 below.) 14...♔g5 White has tried a few different continuations but is struggling for compensation in all cases. It's much harder for White to justify sacrificing the h-pawn when we haven't castled.

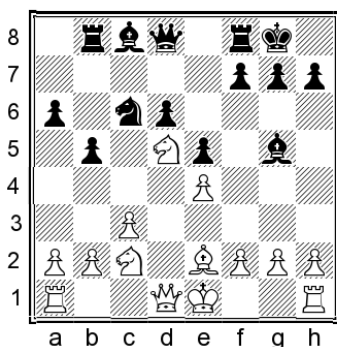
13.♔d3 suffers from the familiar drawback of blocking White's control of d5. 13...0-0 14.0-0 (14.h4?! ♔h6 15.g4 ♔f4 16.♖f3 ♔e6 gives us the better game.) 14...♔e6 15.♗ce3 g6 We have good counter-chances, with ...f5 coming soon.

13.g3 0-0 14.♔g2 a5 15.0-0 ♗e7 16.♗ce3 ♔e6 17.♖d3 ♗xd5 18.♗xd5 (18.exd5? ♔d7 leaves White positionally busted.) This position was reached in Aseev – Huzman, St Petersburg 1999. I suggest: 18...g6!?N 19.♖ad1 ♔h6 We have a solid, flexible position and can look for counterplay with ...f5 when the time is right.

### B1) 13.♔e2

This is the best of White's minor tries, and Shaw's recommendation in *Playing 1.e4 – Sicilian Main Lines*. I don't find it too scary though.

### 13...0-0



This position has been reached in many hundreds of games, but we don't need to spend an excessive amount of time on it. White controls the d5-square but has not carried out a2-a4, and therefore cannot really hope to put us under serious pressure. This is the kind of non-forcing position that Sveshnikov players should learn to handle by playing and gaining understanding, as opposed to trying to memorize variations. For that reason, I will keep the analysis concise, showing the main

plans while pointing out one specific detail which is worth remembering.

### 14.0-0

From time to time White delays castling, but this doesn't bring any special benefits. For instance: 14.♖d3 ♔e6 15.♖d1

Shaw mentions this as an alternative move order for White, but does not consider the following reply.

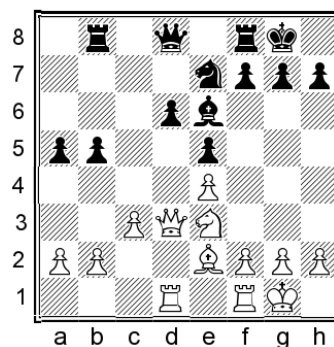
15...a5

A useful move, preventing any ♗cb4 ideas.

16.0-0

16.♗ce3 b4 17.0-0 bxc3 18.bxc3 ♗e7 also led to equal play in Tinture – Morrow, corr. 2016.

16...♗e7 17.♗de3 ♔xe3 18.♗xe3



18...♔xa2

18...♖b6?! has been played a few times but 19.b3!?N offers White a slight pull.

19.♖xd6 ♖xd6 20.♖xd6 a4 21.♖a1

This position was reached in Marcotulli – Kizimenko, email 2003, and now I suggest:

21...♔b3N 22.♔d1 ♔xd1 23.♖xd1 ♗c6 24.♗f1 ♗a5

Maintaining equal chances.

### 14...♗h8!?

This isn't the most common continuation and Shaw doesn't mention it, but I rather like it. It's always useful to tuck the king away before thinking about ...f5.

14...♔e6 is a perfectly good alternative.

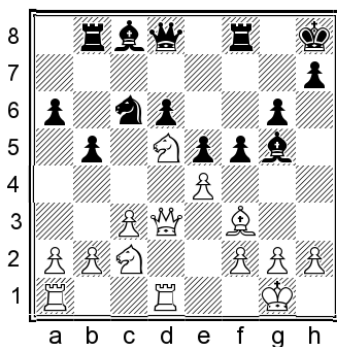
14...g6 is another decent option, when 15.a4 bxa4 16.♗cb4 ♗xb4 17.♗xb4 ♔b7 18.♖xa4 ♖b6 led to

a normal kind of position with balanced chances in Mertins – Lobron, Grosskrotzenburg 1978.

However, it should be noted that the generally desirable 14...a5?! is well met by 15.♘a3! b4 16.♗b5, when Black has some problems to solve.

### 15.♙g4

15.♗d3 is another natural continuation, and after 15...f5 16.♙f3 g6 17.♖fd1 I would like to propose a novelty:



17...♗d7!?N Intending to drop the knight back to d8 before redeploying it on e6 or f7. (17...♙e6 18.♗de3! f4 19.♗xd6 fxe3 20.♗xe6 exf2† 21.♕f1 favours White.) 18.♗de3 Attacking d6 seems best. (18.♗db4 ♗xb4 19.♗xb4 a5 20.♗d5 ♗a7! gives us a nice position.) 18...♙e7! (18...f4 19.♗d5 is playable for us, but from a practical perspective White's position looks easier to handle.) 19.♗b4 ♗d8 The position is unclear and we have decent prospects for counterplay. Our pieces may appear a bit clumsy, but it's only temporary. The knight is on its way to a better square, and the bishop can go to b7.

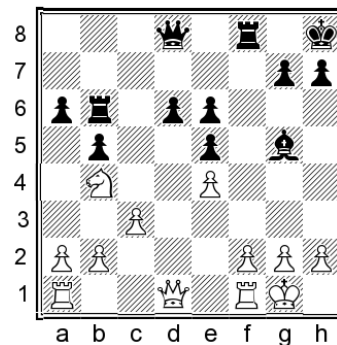
After the text move we must make a crucial decision.

### 15...♙b7!

We are following a Giri – Carlsen game, where the World Champion showed his typical high level of understanding with this move.

15...♙e6? is an instructive error in view of: 16.♙xe6! fxe6 In principle, the exchange on e6 should be positionally desirable for Black, as it opens the f-file and deprives White of the d5-outpost.

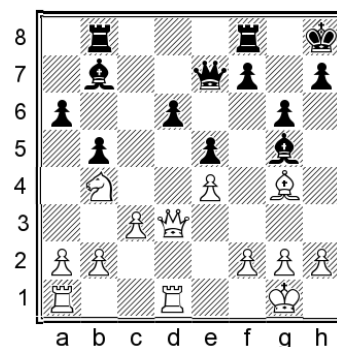
However, in this particular position it doesn't work well, due to some specific details. 17.♗db4 ♗xb4N (17...♖b6 18.♗xc6 ♖xc6 was seen in Tonndorf – J. Sanchez, Milan 2013, when 19.a4!N would have put Black under pressure.) 18.♗xb4 ♖b6



19.♗g4 a5 20.♗d3 Black's position is deceptively unpleasant, with various potential pawn weaknesses and no real counterplay. It's worth memorizing the detail of putting the bishop on b7 instead of e6 in the current variation; and please also keep in mind the importance of building up your general understanding, in order to assess the ...fxe6 structure correctly in other positions.

### 16.♗cb4

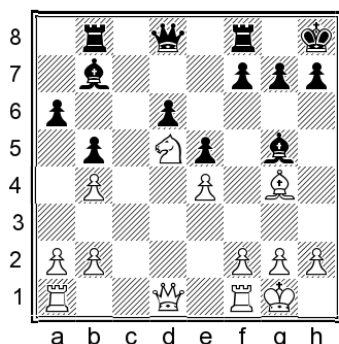
16.♗d3N is an engine suggestion, when my analysis continues: 16...♗e7 17.♗xe7 (17.♗cb4 gives us the option of 17...♗g8!? to leave White with a superfluous knight, and we'll prepare our usual counterplay with ...g6 and eventually ...f5.) 17...♗xe7 18.♗b4 g6 19.♖fd1



19...f5 20.♙f3 (20.exf5 gxf5 21.♙xf5? a5! 22.♗c2 ♗f6 23.g4 ♙f4 gives us far too much play for the pawn.) 20...a5 21.♗d5 ♗f7 We have counterplay and the position remains balanced.

### 16...♗xb4 17.cxb4

17. ♖xb4 gives us a pleasant choice: 17... ♗xe4 sees us pick up a central pawn in return for the one on a6, which can't be bad for us; alternatively, 17...g6 18. ♖d3 is similar to the 16. ♖d3N line above.



**17...g6 18.a4?!**

This ambitious move is more dangerous for White than for Black.

18. ♖d3N is safer, although 18...f5 19. ♗f3 ♖c8 is still fine for us.

**18...bxa4 19. ♖xa4 ♗c6**

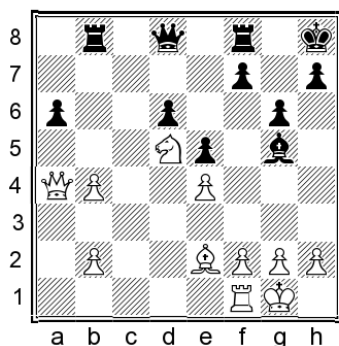
19...f5!?N is also tempting but Carlsen's move is good.

**20. ♗e2**

20. ♖xa6N looks like a slight improvement, although 20... ♗b5 still gives us a more pleasant version of the main line of this chapter – see variation B222 for the comparison.

**20... ♗xa4 21. ♖xa4**

We have been following Giri – Carlsen, Wijk aan Zee 2019. Black could have obtained some winning chances with:



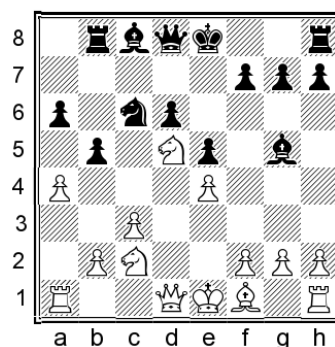
**21...a5!N 22.b5**

22. bxa5 ♖xb2 gives us an active rook and excellent chances to exert pressure on f2.

**22... ♖c8**

The queen is heading for c5, and the bishop will go via d8 to b6. White has some compensation for the exchange, but overall our chances are higher.

**B2) 13.a4!**



Even though our previous move was directed against this pawn break, White usually plays it anyway. Indeed, this is White's only serious attempt to fight for an opening advantage.

**13...bxa4**

Of course we capture and open the b-file.

**14. ♖cb4**

White blocks the b-file and offers an exchange of knights.

14. ♖xa4?! is weak. 14... ♖xb2 15. ♗xa6 The position is still equal according to the engine, but after 15... ♗d7 our position is easier to play, and White's practical results have been horrific.

14. ♖ce3?! is a surprising choice but not a bad move, albeit not too challenging. 14...0-0 (14... ♖xb2!?N 15. ♖xa4 ♗d7 is also fine, since 16. ♖c4? runs into 16... ♖b4!) 15. ♖xa4 ♗xe3 16. ♖xe3 ♖e7 17.0-0-0 ♖c7 Black had no problems in Dominguez Perez – Grischuk, Beijing (blitz) 2014.

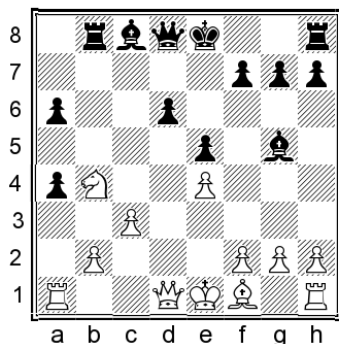
**14... ♖xb4**

This direct approach seems best to me.

14...♔d7 is a fairly popular alternative, but after 15.♖xa4 ♘xb4 (or 15...a5 16.♘xc6 ♙xc6 17.♖a2 and Black still has to work to equalize) 16.♖xb4 White has some edge.

We will analyse both captures: **B21)** 15.♘xb4 has been the more popular choice but **B22)** 15.cxb4 is more critical.

### B21) 15.♘xb4



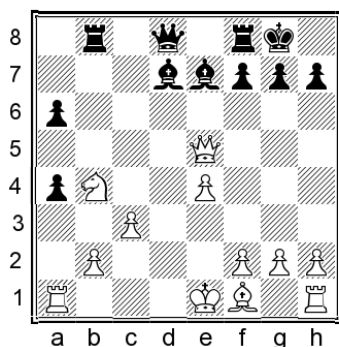
White keeps the pawn structure intact while eyeing the a6-pawn and the c6-square.

### 15...♔d7

We prevent the ♘c6 fork and give White a choice of pawns to take.

### 16.♙xa6

16.♙xd6?! proves an unfortunate choice after 16...♔e7 17.♙xe5 0-0, when our activity is worth much more than a pawn. For instance:



18.♙xa6 (18.♘d5 ♙c5 19.♙d3?! ♖xb2 20.0-0 was seen in Vysotsky – Dubinin, Samara 2017, when 20...a3!N would have been winning for Black.) 18...♙xb4 19.cxb4 ♙b6 White was in big trouble in Virag – Vanczak, Zalakaros 2018.

16.♖xa4? is bad for a few reasons; simplest is 16...a5! 17.♘d3 0-0 when our advantage is already decisive.

### 16...♙a5!

It's important that we don't need to defend d6.

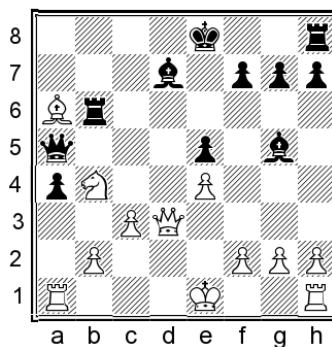
### 17.♙xd6

White should accept the offer, otherwise we'll seize the initiative anyway. For example:

17.♙d3?! ♖xb4 18.cxb4 ♙xb4† 19.♙f1 (19.♙e2? d5! gives us a decisive initiative) 19...0-0 was unpleasant for White in Paresishvili – Tsereteli, Tbilisi 2001.

17.♙d5?! ♙xd5 18.exd5 f5 gives us a pleasant edge at no material cost, thanks to the bishop pair and mobile pawn centre.

### 17...♖b6 18.♙d3



### 18...♔e6

We improve the bishop in preparation for castling.

White has two main tries: **B211)** 19.♙c4 and **B212)** 19.0-0.

### B211) 19.♙c4

This is an important move to check, but we're ready with a sacrifice:

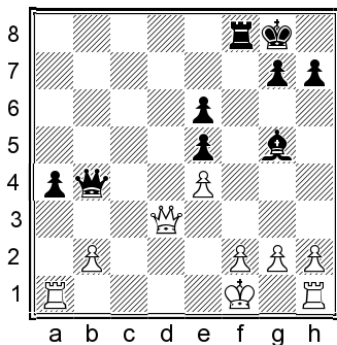
### 19...♖xb4!

White clearly can't take the rook immediately, but we intend to leave it hanging on the next move as well.

20. ♖xe6 fxe6 21. cxb4 ♜xb4† 22. ♕f1

22. ♜c3 ♜xe4† 23. ♕f1 0-0 is hardly an improvement for White.

22...0-0



In return for the exchange, we have a lead in development, a safer king and pressure against the weak b2-pawn. If that pawn falls, then our a-pawn could become a beast.

23. ♜e2

After 23. ♜e1 ♜xb2 24. ♜e2 the players agreed a draw in Stipani – Sanchez Carol, corr. 2021, but in a practical game you could consider playing on and trying to make something of the passed a-pawn.

23...♗e7

Rerouting the bishop to its best diagonal.

23...♗d8 can be played with the same idea, and after 24. f3 ♗b6 25. ♜c1 a3! (25...♗d4 is also fine) 26. bxa3 ♜xa3 27. ♜b1 ♗d4 28. g3 ♜xf3† 29. ♕g2 ♜f2† 30. ♜xf2 ♗xf2 31. ♜b8† ♕f7 32. ♜f1 ♜e3 33. ♜xf2† the players agreed a draw in Usmanoff – Misericordia, corr. 2021.

24. ♜a3

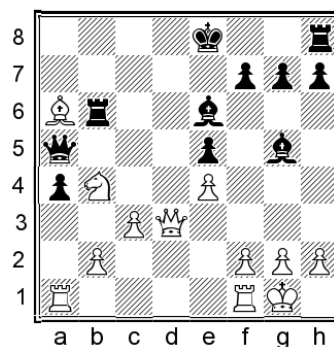
24. ♜d1 ♗c5 25. f3 ♗d4 was pleasant for Black in Keuter – Schuster, email 2015, as was 24. ♜c1 ♗c5 25. f3 ♜d8 26. ♜c2 a3 27. g3 a2 28. ♕g2 ♗d4 29. ♜a1 ♜a8 when another draw was agreed in Reshef – Presnyakov, corr. 2017.

24...♗c5 25. ♜f3 ♗d4

Black was absolutely fine in Duzhakov – Kuzubov, Skopje 2019. With the b2-pawn about

to fall, White will have to look for a perpetual before the a-pawn promotes.

B212) 19.0-0



19...0-0

By castling quickly, White nullified any ...♜xb4 ideas. Nevertheless, our bishop pair and superior coordination provide full compensation for the missing pawn, as the following examples demonstrate.

20. ♗c4

Rerouting the loose bishop seems most logical.

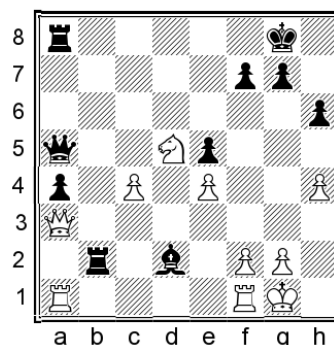
20...♜d8 21. ♗d5 ♗xd5

21...♗e7? 22. ♜d1! ♗xb4 23. ♜xa4 was advantageous for White in Belotti – Komarov, Asti 1994.

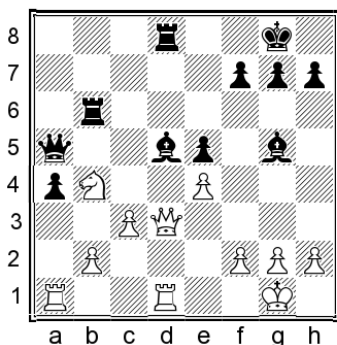
22. ♜fd1

22. exd5 ♗e7 23. ♜c2 ♗xb4 24. ♜xa4 was seen in Koshmak – B. Johnson, corr. 2021, and now 24...♜c5N 25. ♜e4 ♜xd5 seems the simplest route to equality.

We also have no problems after: 22. ♗xd5 ♜xb2 23. c4 ♜a8 24. ♜g3 h6 25. h4 ♗d2 26. ♜a3



26...♖b3 27.♙xb3 axb3 28.♞xa5 ♞xa5 29.♖b1 ♞c5  
 This is another drawing line which has occurred in many correspondence games.



**22...h6**

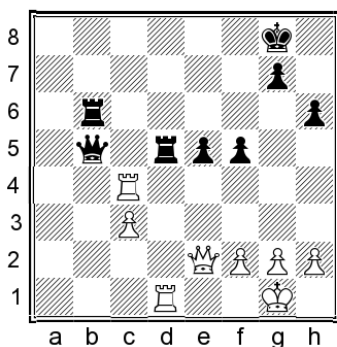
We create an escape square for the king, thus forcing White to recapture on d5.

**23.exd5 ♟e7 24.♙c2**

24.♙e4 ♟xb4 25.cxb4 ♙xb4 26.♙xe5 ♙xb2 27.♙xb2 ♞xb2 28.♞xa4 was agreed drawn in Zhalmakhanov – Ismagambetov, Almaty 2019, with 28...♞xd5 the obvious next move.

**24...♟xb4 25.♞xa4 ♙c5 26.♙e4 ♟xc3 27.♞c4 ♙b5 28.bxc3 f5 29.♙e2 ♞xd5**

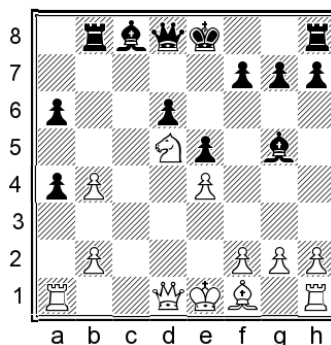
Black is comfortably equal although White should be fine too. In the game we are following, White blundered:



**30.♞e1?? ♞c5!**

Black won. Bharath – Dalaud, Sitges 2021.

**B22) 15.cxb4**



The trendier and more challenging move.

**15...♟d7!**

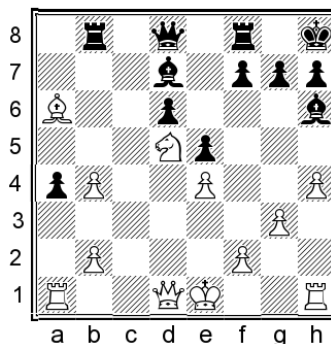
15...0-0 16.♞xa4 a5 is well met by 17.h4! ♟h6 (17...♟e7? 18.bxa5 ♞xb2 19.♙c1 is winning for White) 18.b5 when although Black's practical results have been pretty good, it's not so easy to prove equality.

**16.♟xa6 0-0**

White has nice control over d5, but suffers from a weakened queenside structure. Usually White resorts to a ♞xa4 exchange sacrifice at some point, but we have enough resources to deal with this and any other ideas White may try.

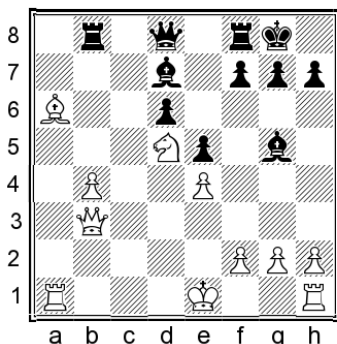
We will analyse two main options: **B221)** 17.b3 and **B222)** 17.0-0.

Also worth considering is: 17.h4 ♟h6! (17...♟e7 was played in Dominguez Perez – Vidit, Internet [blitz] 2021, when 18.h5! would have given White chances for an edge.) 18.g3 White has driven our bishop to the edge of the board, but needs to spend another tempo before castling. 18...♟h8 Preparing counterplay.



19.♖xa4!? ♕xa4 20.♗xa4 f5 Black had good chances on the kingside in “pakarma” – “adil- tkachev”, Internet (blitz) 2021.

**B221) 17.b3 axb3 18.♗xb3**



It’s logical and natural to swap off one of the doubled b-pawns. Given time to regroup, White would have the makings of a decisive positional advantage thanks to the grip on the light squares and passed b-pawn. However, we have enough dynamic resources to stop that from happening.

**18...♕c6 19.♖b1**

19.♕c4 ♗d7 20.0-0 ♕d2! gives us no problems, with ...♕xd5 coming next.

19.b5 ♕a8 20.0-0 ♗d7 is also fine for us. The bishop can go back to d8, and at some point we may consider ...♕xd5 followed by ...♕b6, just like in the main line below. White controls the light squares and has a passed pawn, but the bishop on a6 is paralysed.

**19...♗d7**

19...♖h8? led to an eventual draw in Rajjmaekers – Matozo, corr. 2019, but I find it a bit on the slow side. 20.0-0 is natural, when 20...♕d2 21.b5 ♕xd5 22.♗xd5 ♕c3 looks best. The bishop comes to d4 and Black should be okay, but White still has some chances to press after 23.♕b7 or 23.♖h1!?

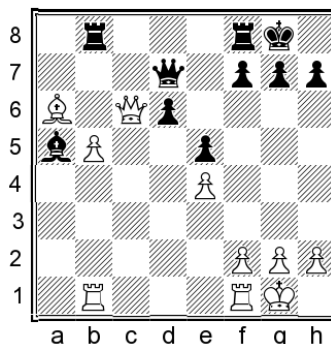
**20.0-0 ♕d2**

Again we see the bishop take this route to attack b4, before White can get fully coordinated.

**21.b5 ♕xd5 22.♗xd5**

White dominates the light squares and keeps the better structure, but a crucial point is that the bishop is stuck on a6.

**22...♕a5 23.♗c6**



**23...♗a7!N**

After 23...♖fd8!? 24.♗xd7 ♖xd7 25.♖fd1 ♖f8 26.♖bc1 ♖c7?! 27.♖c6 Black was able to hold in Karpanov – Khairullin, corr. 2021, but it’s a one-sided position where only White could have winning chances.

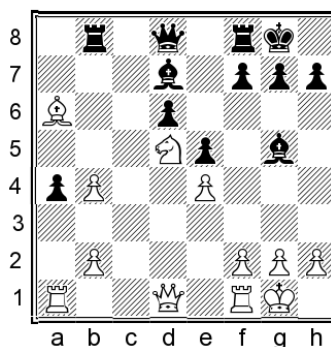
**24.♗xd6 ♕c7 25.♗c6**

25.♗d5 ♖fd8 doesn’t change anything.

**25...♕b6**

We have full compensation. White’s extra pawn is securely blockaded and the bishop is paralysed on a6.

**B222) 17.0-0**



**17...♕c6 18.♖xa4**

This exchange sac is White’s main try for an advantage.

18.b5?! has been played a few times, but after 18...♕xb5 19.♕xb5 ♖xb5 20.♗c2 ♗b8 21.♖fb1 ♖c8 the most White can hope for is equality.

18. ♖c4!? ♔d7!

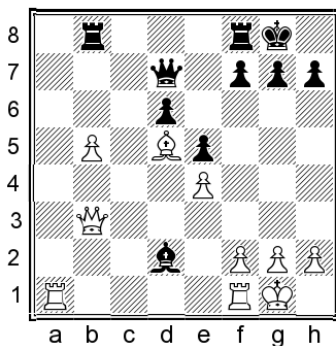
18... ♙d5 19. ♙d5 ♖xb4 20. ♖xa4 ♖xb2 is playable, but after 21. ♖a7 White keeps some nagging pressure for the pawn and it's not easy for us to equalize fully.

19. b3 axb3 20. ♗xb3

20. ♙xb3 ♙d5 21. ♙d5 ♖xb4 gives us an easier version of the 18... ♙d5 line above: White's rook can't go to a7 so we don't have much to worry about.

In Beinenson – Ilyuchyk, Minsk 2018, Black should have continued with:

20... ♙d2! 21. b5 ♙d5 22. ♙d5



22... ♗xb5!

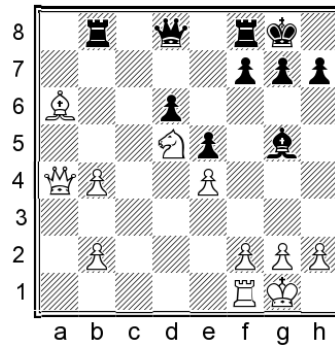
22... ♖xb5 allows 23. ♙xf7+! ♔h8 24. ♗d3 ♖b2 and even though the engine also assesses this as 0.00, I see no reason to give up the f7-pawn if we don't have to.

23. ♗f3 ♔d7

White has fair compensation for the pawn but we are doing fine. Our bishop will soon go via b4 to the ideal c5-square, and it's hard to see a good way for White to activate either rook in a way that could trouble us.

18... ♙xa4 19. ♗xa4

If White had a few spare moves to get fully coordinated, for instance with ♙b5-c6 followed by advancing the b-pawn(s), we would be in serious trouble. Therefore we need to come up with a plan to improve our position. Fortunately we have a couple of decent ideas: we can prepare ...f5 to obtain kingside counterplay, and/or reroute our bishop via d8-b6, where it stands actively and also restrains White's b-pawns.



19... ♔h8

It's best to tuck the king out of harm's way before thinking about ...f5. Khalifman calls this a mistake, but subsequent practice and analysis have confirmed the validity of our position.

20. ♙b5

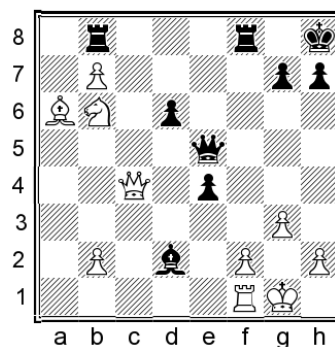
It makes sense to put the bishop on c6 before advancing the b-pawn. White has tried a few other ideas:

20. b5

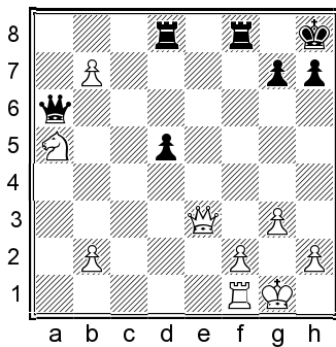
This gives us a choice of decent continuations.

20... ♗d7

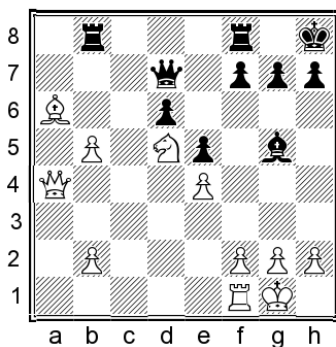
20... f5!? 21. exf5 ♗d7 has also proved a reliable choice in a few games: 22. ♗c4 ♗xf5 23. b6 e4 24. b7 ♗e5 25. g3 (25. ♖b4 ♗xb2 26. ♖c6 ♖xb7 is heading for a draw.) 25... ♙d2 26. ♖b6



26... ♖bd8! (This seems slightly more accurate than 26... d5 27. ♗xd5 ♗xd5 28. ♖xd5 ♖f5 29. ♖e7 ♖f6 30. ♖a1 when Black was able to hold in W. Schneider – Klugel, corr. 2021, but in practice White would still have some winning chances.) 27. ♗e2 ♙a5 28. ♖c4 ♗c5 29. ♗xe4 d5 30. ♗e3! ♗c6! 31. ♖xa5 ♗xa6



32. ♖c5 d4 33. b4 d3 34. ♘c6 ♜xb7 35. ♘xd8 ♞xd8  
 White's extra pawn is not worth much, and he didn't bother playing on any longer in Paesschesoone – Gibson, corr. 2021.



21. ♖c4 ♙d8 22. ♖c6 ♖a7!

Again we shouldn't worry too much about the d6-pawn – activity is more important!

23. ♖xd6 ♞e8 24. ♞c1 ♙b6 25. ♘xb6 ♞xb6  
 26. ♜xe5

26. ♖c5 g6 27. g3 ♔g7 gives us no problems.

26... ♞be6 27. ♖d5 h6

A draw was soon agreed in Echenique Hilario – Siburian, corr. 2020. A sample line could be:

28. ♞e1 ♞e5 29. ♖b7 ♖c5 30. g3 ♖b4

The e-pawn falls, and White will be left with no winning chances.

20. ♖c6

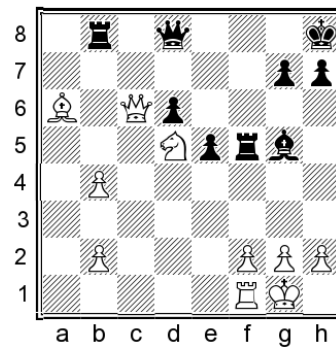
This move makes it harder for us to reroute the bishop, so we'll go to work on the kingside with:

20... f5

Khalifman only mentions 20... ♙d2 but breaking with the f-pawn is clearly more consistent with our previous move.

21. exf5 ♞xf5

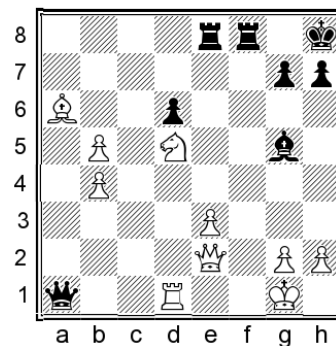
A good example continued:



22. ♖c2 ♞f8 23. b5 ♖a5! 24. b4 ♖a3

Black finds a nice way to activate the queen while stifling White's progress on the queenside.

25. ♞d1 e4 26. ♖e2 e3 27. fx3 ♞be8 28. ♞d3 ♖a1†  
 29. ♞d1



29... ♙xe3†!?

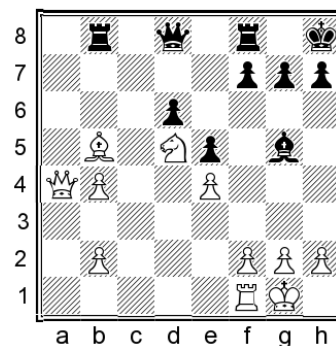
29... ♖a3 would repeat the position.

30. ♘xe3 ♞xe3 31. ♞xa1 ♞xe2

The endgame proved to be a draw anyway after:

32. b6 ♞e4 33. b5 d5 34. b7 g5 35. h3 ♔g7 36. ♞d1  
 d4 37. ♞c1 ♞b8 38. ♞c8 ♞e8 39. b6 ♔f6 40. ♔f2 h6  
 41. ♞c7

The players finally signed a peace treaty in Nekhaev – Perry, email 2015.



20... ♖c8

Again we prepare the thematic transfer of the bishop to b6 via d8.

21. ♙c6 ♙d8 22. b5 ♙b6 23. ♘xb6

White should take the opportunity to exchange, otherwise the bishop will move to c5 or d4 and become a monster.

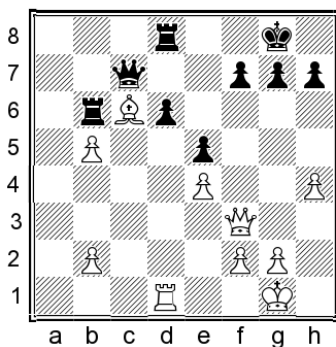
### 23...♖xb6

White has one pawn for the exchange. The bishop is no weaker than either of our rooks, but the b-pawns are doubled and blockaded, and there isn't a whole lot that White can do to make progress. We don't really have any winning chances either, but that's the way it sometimes goes in chess when both sides play accurately until the endgame.

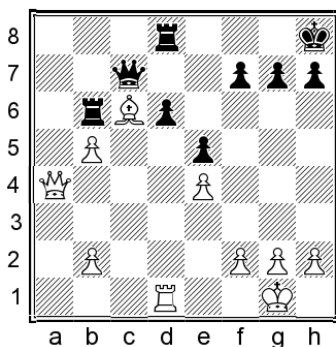
### 24.♖d1 ♗c7 25.♗a3 ♖d8 26.♗a4

After 26.♗c3 g6 27.♖c1 ♖bb8 they soon agreed a draw in Schlosser – Cipressi, corr. 2021.

26.♗f3 ♖g8 27.h4 was played in another game, when Black continued with:



27...♖xc6!? This is by no means forced; it would have been perfectly fine to wait patiently, but it's useful to have the option of simplifying as well. 28.bxc6 ♗xc6 29.h5 h6 Another draw soon ensued in Ghidini – Szymanski, corr. 2021.

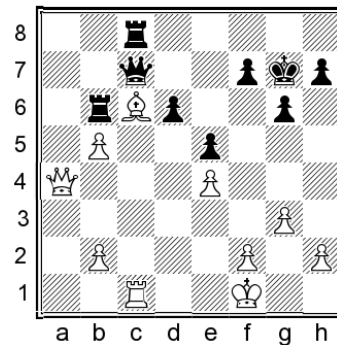


### 26...g6 27.g3

Another example continued 27.♖d3 ♖c8 28.♖c3 ♖f8 29.h3 ♖bb8 30.♗d1 f5 31.exf5 gxf5

32.♗d5 ♗d8 and White got nowhere in Rossbottom – Loriguillo Gonzalez, corr. 2020.

### 27...♖c8 28.♖f1 ♖g7 29.♖c1



### 29...f5

This isn't forced, but it makes sense to do something on the kingside so that White can't just shuffle around forever.

### 30.♖c3 ♖f8 31.exf5 gxf5 32.♗d5 ♗b8 33.♗c6

A draw was agreed in Tateo – Arnold, corr. 2022.

## Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with the important battleground arising after the opening moves 1.e4 c5 2.♖f3 ♖c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♖xd4 ♖f6 5.♖c3 e5 6.♖db5 d6 7.♗g5 a6 8.♖a3 b5 9.♖d5 ♗e7 10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.c3, when White intends to drop the knight back to c2 before deciding how to proceed. 11...♗g5 is our reply, delaying castling for the moment.

In the event of 12.h4!? ♗h6 13.♖c2, it's important that we proceed with 13...0-0! with good counter-chances, rather than 13...♖b8? which leads to an unfavourable version of our main line.

12.♖c2 is the usual continuation, when the modern 12...♖b8! is our choice. Then if 13.h4?! is played, we should simply capture the pawn when White will do well to prove sufficient compensation.

13.♗e2 is a decent continuation, when 13...0-0 14.0-0 ♖h8!? is our choice, preparing a timely ...f5.

Please remember that 15.♔g4 should be met by 15...♙b7! rather than putting the bishop on e6, because the ensuing ...fxc6 structure is surprisingly unpleasant for Black.

13.a4! is the critical continuation, and after 13...bxa4 14.♖cb4 ♖xb4 White faces another choice. 15.♖xb4 has been tested extensively, and after 15...♙d7 16.♙xa6 ♗a5! 17.♗xd6 ♜b6 18.♗d3 ♙e6 there is no doubt that we have fully adequate compensation for the pawn.

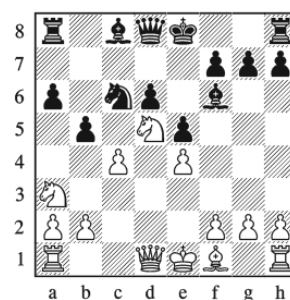
15.cxb4 is the main line, when 15...♙d7! 16.♙xa6 0-0 is our choice. White sometimes follows up with b2-b3 in the next move or two, when we exchange

pawns and attack b4. This forces White to either sacrifice that pawn or make some other compromise such as playing b4-b5 and leaving the bishop shut out of play on a6. White's other approach is to sacrifice an exchange with 17.0-0 ♙c6 18.♞xa4 ♙xa4 19.♗xa4, when 19...♔h8 is our choice to prepare a timely ...f5. In all these lines, one of our main positional objectives should be to reroute our bishop to the a7-g1 diagonal, so keep that in mind. Generally White maintains full compensation but when we analyse the positions and observe White's failure to prove anything in recent correspondence games, it becomes clear that Black is doing fine.

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# Chapter 9

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## Positional System with 11.c4

### Variation Index

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1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 e5 6.♗db5 d6  
7.♙g5 a6 8.♗a3 b5 9.♗d5 ♙e7 10.♙xf6 ♙xf6 11.c4 b4 12.♗c2 a5

- A) 13.♙e2
- B) 13.h4!?
- C) 13.♙f3!?! ♙e7
  - C1) 14.♖d1
  - C2) 14.♙e2
- D) 13.g3 g6!?!
  - D1) 14.♗xf6†!?
  - D2) 14.h4

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6 8.♘a3 b5 9.♘d5 ♙e7 10.♙xf6 ♙xf6 11.c4

This move has been known for a long time, but it never used to be considered all that threatening. However, roughly between the years 2005 and 2010, there was a major resurgence in this line as many of the world's top players used it, and it came to be regarded as a serious weapon.

### 11...b4

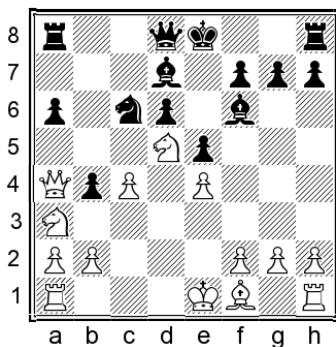
We should definitely close the queenside in order to block White's minor pieces.

### 12.♘c2

12.♙a4?

This tactical attempt backfires.

12...♙d7



13.♘xb4

13.♘c2?? ♘d4 wins immediately.

13.♘b1N might objectively be an improvement, but to play this would be a clear admission that White's previous move was a mistake. Following 13...♘d4 14.♙d1 a5 15.♘d2 ♘e6! we achieve perfect coordination and stand clearly better.

13...♘d4 14.♙d1 ♙b8!

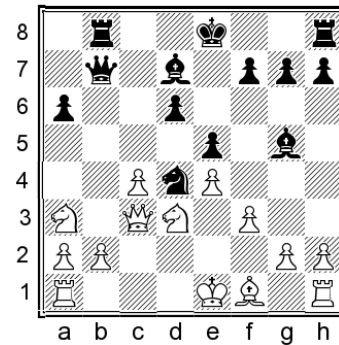
The more popular 14...♙a5 is strong, but the text move is much better.

15.♙d2

15.♘d3 ♙g5 threatens ...f5 with a huge initiative, and 16.♘c2 ♙xb2! was disastrous for White in Hu – Hardicsay, Budapest 1999, the tactical point being that the check on a5 will kill.

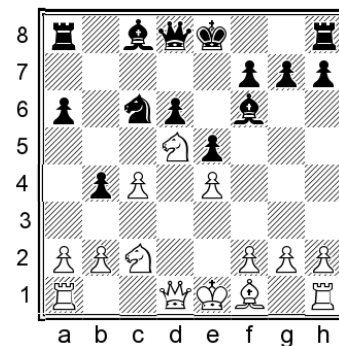
15...♙g5 16.♙c3 ♙b6 17.♘d3 ♙b7! 18.f3

We have been following Varella – Watanabe, Braganca Paulista 1996. Black has more than one winning move but the most accurate is:



18...♙h4+!N

White cannot block the check because f3 would fall, so the king must forgo the right to castle. We will follow up with ...f5, either before or after castling, with an overwhelming position.



Before going any further, let's consider the difference in the queenside pawn structure compared to the 11.c3 positions from the previous chapter. The c4-pawn solidifies White's clamp on the centre; on the other hand, the dark squares are weakened and we can look for opportunities to land our knight on d4 or manoeuvre it to c5. There are various subtleties which will be explained as we go.

### 12...a5

12...0-0!? is possible, since 13.♘cxb4 ♘xb4 14.♘xb4 ♙b6 offers Black adequate counterplay. However, it will be necessary to defend the b4-pawn at some point, so I think we may as well do it immediately.

12...♙b8 has been tried by top players from time to time, and it's worth briefly considering the pros and cons of it. One obvious idea of the rook move is to prepare counterplay with ...b3 if White allows it. Another is that White will not have the option of h2-h4, because we will be able to capture that

pawn without fearing a knight fork on c7. However, there are a couple of more important factors which count against the rook move. Firstly, in the event that White plays b2-b3 at some point, the rook on a8 is well placed to support counterplay with ...a5-a4. Another important point is that we may wish to reroute our knight via b8 towards c5, in which case the rook could get in the way on b8.

Before we go any further, let me draw your attention to one other important theme. In many games, Black proceeds with the typical Sveshnikov plan of ...g5, either before or after castling. Although there is generally nothing wrong with that approach, I was attracted by a less common approach of ...g6 and ...g7, keeping the bishop away from any h2-h4 attacks and supporting a future ...f5 break. The bishop on g7 will also support a ...d4 jump in some lines.

We will analyse four main continuations: **A)** 13.g3, **B)** 13.h4!?, **C)** 13.f3!?, and **D)** 13.g3.

13.g3 is playable, but it obstructs White's play along the d-file and the bishop doesn't have many active prospects on this square. After 13...0-0 14.0-0 g5 we have equal chances, with an easier version of this structure compared to the main lines below.

13.b3

This move often gets played at some point, but it's hard to think of a reason for White to play it so soon.

13...0-0

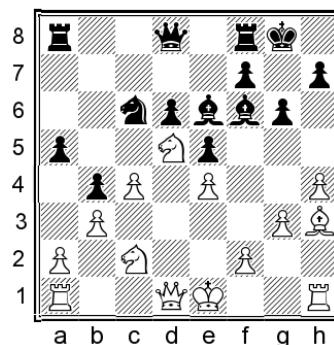
White could try all kinds of moves here, and there are many possible transpositions to other lines where b2-b3 is played later. Here is an illustrative example.

14.g3 g6!?

We may wish to retreat the bishop to g7 in some lines, and of course the ...f5 break may feature in our future plans.

15.h4 g6 16.g3

We have been following Maltsevskaya – Yakimova, Warsaw 2021. This would have been a good moment to play on the queenside with:

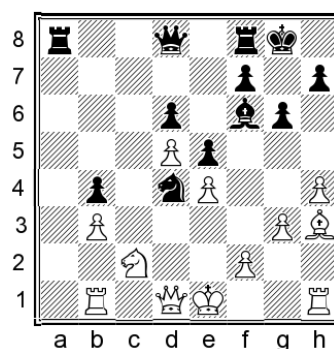


16...a4!N 17.Bb1

17.f1?! g5 18.cxd5 d4 gives Black an obvious edge in development and activity.

17.bxa4 damages White's structure, and 17...xa4 18.f1 g5 19.cxd5 a5 20.e3 a3 21.Bb1 b7 22.xb4 c5 leaves Black with some initiative.

17...axb3 18.axb3 g5 19.cxd5 d4



20.0-0 a2 21.dxd4 exd4 22.Wd3 We7

The position is balanced.

13.Wd3

This is another example of a generally sensible move being played a bit prematurely.

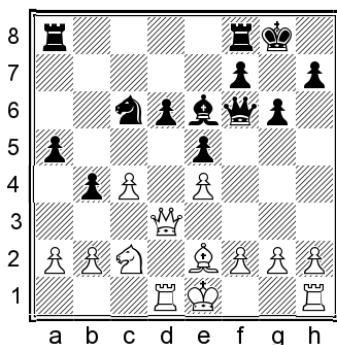
13...0-0 14.g3

Here too, I suggest:

14...g6N

With the same ideas as mentioned above. Play could continue:

15.Bd1 g6 16.f6+ xf6



The position is equal, as taking the loose pawn would be risky for White:

17. ♖xd6?! ♜ac8! 18. ♘e3!

White has to find this difficult move to avoid being worse.

18. ♖d2?! ♜fd8 19. ♖e3 ♜xd1† 20. ♔xd1 a4! gives us too much activity.

18... ♜fd8 19. ♖c5 ♜xd1†

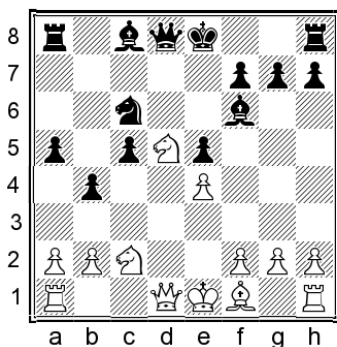
19... ♘d4!? is also playable, since 20. ♖xa5 ♖f4 21. ♔d3 ♜a8 22. ♖xb4 ♜db8 23. ♖d2 ♜xa2 gives us sufficient compensation.

20. ♔xd1 ♖f4 21. 0-0 ♖xe4

We regain the pawn with a healthy position.

Finally, a rare and quirky option is:

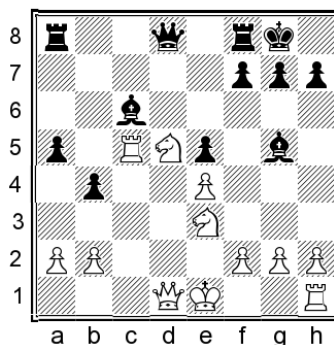
13. c5!? dxc5



This temporary pawn sac brings some surprise value, but with accurate play we can achieve easy equality, with some chances to fight for the initiative.

14. ♔b5 ♔b7 15. ♘ce3 0-0 16. ♔xc6 ♔xc6 17. ♜c1 ♔g5 18. ♜xc5

This position was reached in Vachier-Lagrave – Ni Hua, Turin (ol) 2006. Kotronias points out that the Chinese grandmaster could have fought for the advantage with:



18... ♔xe3!N 19. ♜xc6 ♔d4

Each side has a strong minor piece on an ideal outpost, but White is behind in development and needs to take care to handle the pressure on b2 and f2.

20. ♜c2

20. b3? f5 is horrible for White.

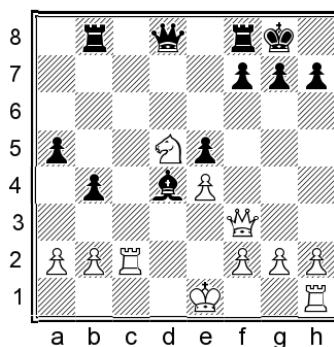
20. ♖c2 f5 gives White a slightly worse version of the main continuation below.

20... ♜b8

20... ♜a7?! is possible but 21. ♖f3! enables White to consolidate with equality.

21. ♖f3

21. 0-0 f5 gives White nothing better than transposing with 22. ♖f3.



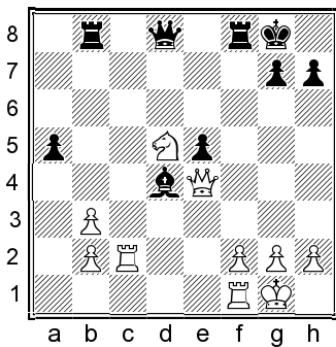
21... f5! 22. 0-0!

22. exf5?? is refuted by 22... b3! (but not 22... e4? 23. ♖b3!) 23. axb3 e4 when White can resign.

22... fxe4 23. ♖xe4 b3!?

23... ♔h8 is also possible but White should be okay.

24. axb3



24...♔h8!

24...♖xb3 allows 25.♖c8!, although 25...♔d6 is still equal.

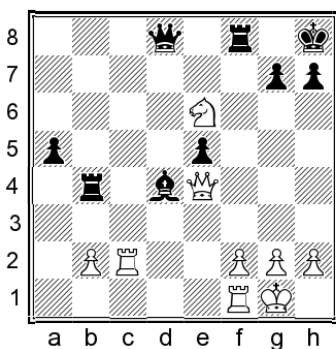
25.b4!

25.♗e3 ♖xb3 26.♗c4 ♖b4 leaves White under some pressure.

25...♖b5!

Kotronias analyses this far and evaluates it as better for Black, but in fact White can escape into a drawn endgame. The key line continues:

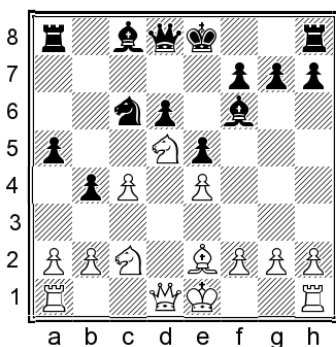
26.♗c7! ♖xb4 27.♗e6



27...♗xf2† 28.♖xf2 ♖xf2 29.♗xf2 ♖f6† 30.♖f3 ♖xe6 31.♖a8† ♖g8 32.♖xa5

Material is level and we have no way of exploiting White's temporarily misplaced king, so the position is a draw.

### A) 13.♗e2



This is a popular method of development. White keeps the d-file open and prepares to post the bishop on g4, hoping for a favourable exchange.

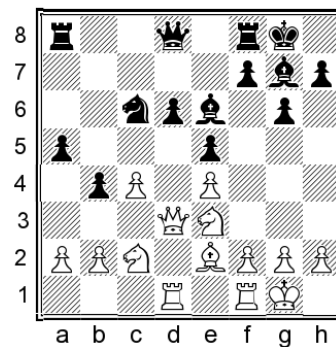
### 13...0-0 14.0-0 g6!?

Once again, I think it makes sense to play this move before committing either bishop.

14...♗g5 is the most popular continuation, which Kotronias recommends.

### 15.♗g4

It's important to realize that crude attempts to gang up on the d6-pawn achieve nothing for White. One such example continued: 15.♖d3 ♗g7 16.♖ad1 ♗e6 17.♗de3



17...h5! Other moves are possible but I like the idea of improving our position on the kingside, while emphasising the futility of White's plan of attacking d6. 18.♔h1?! White should look for a more useful move, although our position is more comfortable in any case. (18.♖xd6? ♗d4 19.♖xd4 exd4 20.♖xd8 ♖fxd8 21.♗d5 d3 22.♗xd3 ♗xb2 is comfortably winning for Black.) 18...♖b6! Black stood clearly better in Mikkelsen – Rosenkilde, Copenhagen 2010. The d-pawn remains untouchable, since 19.♖xd6?? ♖ad8 traps the queen.

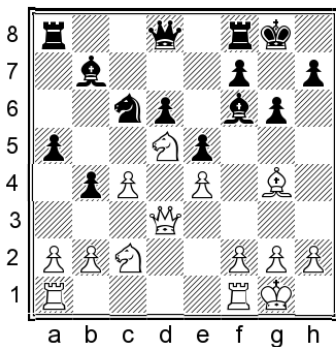
### 15...♗b7!

We should keep this bishop on the board, in order to have the option of ...♗xd5 later.

### 16.♖d3

16.♗d7! is playable, although 16...♗g5 17.♗xc6 ♗xc6 18.♖d3 f5 gives us plenty of counterplay. White has a beautiful outpost on d5,

but only one of the knights can occupy it while the other will struggle to find a useful role.



**16...♙g7**

We safeguard the bishop and open the way for a future ...f5.

**17.a3!?**

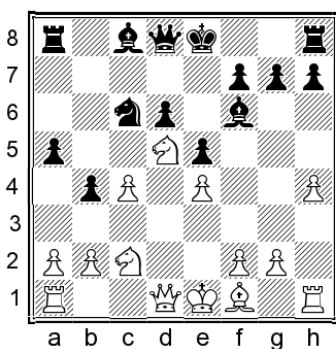
White needs to find an active plan.

17.♖ad1 was played in Antoniewski – Markos, Czech Republic 2008, when 17...♘b8!N would have been both strong and instructive. The knight is heading for a6 followed by c5, and Black stands slightly better.

**17...bxa3 18.♞xa3 ♘d4 19.♘xd4 exd4**

The position was balanced in Parligras – Markos, Germany 2009.

**B) 13.h4!?**



This idea of pre-emptively advancing the h-pawn is familiar from the previous chapter. White stops the bishop from moving to g5, relying on the fact that the pawn is indirectly defended due to the possibility of a fork on c7.

**13...♞b8!**

By shifting the rook away from the potential knight fork, we threaten to take on h4.

**14.g3**

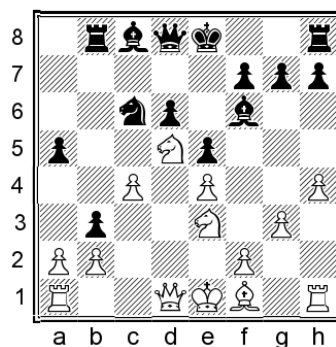
14.b3?! ♙xh4 left White with insufficient compensation in R. Chen – H. Le, Internet (blitz) 2020.

The text move defends the pawn, but now we can utilize the second point behind the rook move.

**14...b3 15.♘ce3**

15.♘a3?! ♘d4 16.♙d3 was seen in Kurayan – Gonella, Vaujany 2012, when 16...♙e6!N 17.axb3 ♘xb3 18.♞a2 ♙xd5 19.cxd5 ♞b4 would have given Black somewhat better chances.

15.axb3N 15...♞xb3 16.♘ce3 s playable, although 16...♘d4! 17.♞a2 0-0 leaves us with no problems.

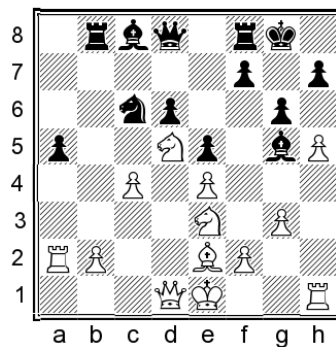


**15...bxa2 16.♞xa2 0-0 17.♙e2 g6!?**

This provokes interesting complications.

17...♘d4 and 17...♙e6 are logical alternatives, both offering equal play.

**18.h5 ♙g5**



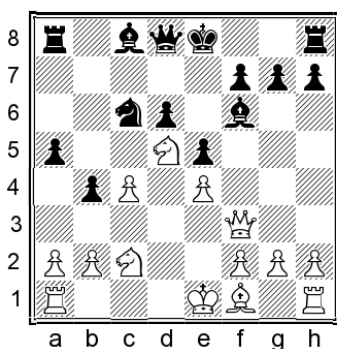
**19.f4!**

White must play boldly, otherwise we will simply stand better.

**19...exf4 20.gxf4 ♖h4† 21.♕f1 ♜e6**

Black was doing fine in Kulakiewicz – Kaczmarek, corr. 2020. If White takes on g6 then the correct response will of course be to recapture with the f-pawn, opening a file for the rook which leads towards the white king.

**C) 13.♞f3!?**



This active choice has been tried by several strong players. Among other features, this move forces us to find an alternative to the ...g6 plan.

**13...♜e7**

13...0-0 followed by ...♜e7 is also fine, as White is not really threatening to take on f6 yet.

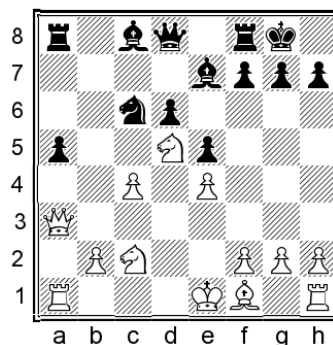
However, 13...♜g5? would be a mistake in view of 14.h4 ♜h6 15.g4 when the bishop starts to wish for a less 'active' diagonal.

We will consider two main options: **C1) 14.♞d1** and **C2) 14.♜e2**.

14.g3 is playable although it looks a bit odd with the queen on f3. 14...0-0 15.♜g2 ♜e6 16.0-0 ♞b8 17.b3 was the continuation of Kisch – Nouveau, corr. 2014, and now 17...♜d8!N 18.h4 ♜b6 would have been a good way of rerouting the bishop to a more active diagonal.

Another fairly popular alternative is:

14.a3 bxa3 15.♞xa3 0-0



16.♜d3

16.♜e2 ♞b8 17.0-0 transposes to the 15.a3 line in the notes to variation C2 below.

16.b4? would be a mistake due to 16...♜b7 17.b5 ♜b4! when the tactics work well for us.

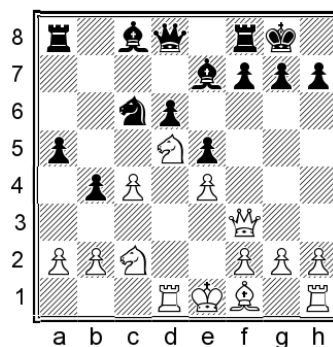
16...♞b8 17.0-0 ♜e6 18.♞fd1 ♜g5 19.♕f1

At this point in Stopa – Kuljasevic, Richardson 2008, Black sought counterplay by launching the f-pawn. Although this seems fully playable, I would prefer to start with:

19...g6!N

Hoping for a better version of the same idea. We might also start by gaining some space with the h-pawn and seeing how White reacts.

**C1) 14.♞d1 0-0**

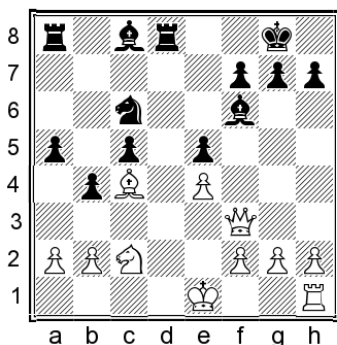


**15.c5**

15.♜e2 transposes to variation C2 below. The text move is a tempting try, but we can happily trade our queen for a bunch of enemy pieces.

**15...dxc5! 16.♜f6† ♜xf6 17.♞xd8 ♞xd8 18.♜c4**

If White was given time to castle and get coordinated, then we would have problems fighting against the light-square blockade. However, the way things stand we can quickly force the exchange of White's active minor pieces.



18...Qd4! 19.Qxd4

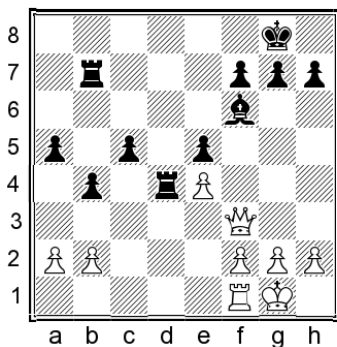
The terrible 19.Qd1? Qb7 20.Qd5 Qxd5 21.exd5 was played in A. Grigoryan – Zhigalko, Martuni 2008, at which point 21...c4!N would have left White with no good way to oppose the queenside pawns.

19...Qxd4

19...cxd4 should be equal, but I would prefer to activate the rook and harass White's bishop.

20.Qd5 Qb8 21.0-0 Qb7 22.Qxb7 Qxb7

Mission accomplished. We have no real weaknesses and the queenside pawns may advance. Stockfish has it at 0.00, but in a practical game White would need to be careful, as evidenced by the examples given below.



23.Qd1

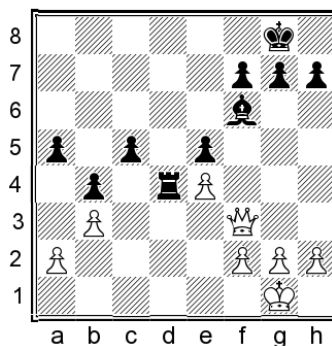
23.Qc1? was played in Nandhidhaa – Savetha, Chennai 2011, and now 23...c4!N would have made it hard for White to stop the queenside pawns in the long run.

23.Qb3!N is playable. We can't take on e4 yet because Qd5 would fork the rooks, so 23...Qb8! is a good reply, threatening ...Qxe4 while usefully guarding the back rank.

23...Qbd7 24.Qxd4 Qxd4 25.b3?

25.g3N is better, but after 25...c4 we are in no danger and it is White who will have to play accurately to secure a draw.

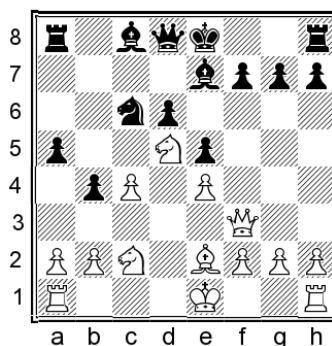
The text move was played in Michelle – Shristi, Chennai 2011, when Black missed an excellent opportunity:



25...a4!N

And since 26.bxa4? loses immediately to 26...c4 when the c-pawn decides, White is under serious pressure on the queenside.

C2) 14.Qe2



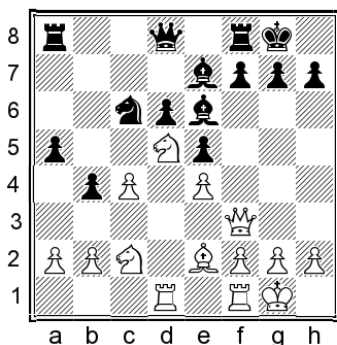
14...0-0 15.Qd1

White could also castle first – it will almost certainly transpose, one way or the other.

15.a3 bxa3 16.Qxa3 shows another possible way of utilizing the queen along the third rank. 16...Qb8 17.0-0 Qe6 18.Qfd1 This occurred in Himanshu – Timoshenko, Mumbai 2009, and now 18...Qg5N would be my choice, with a balanced game.

15...Qe6 16.0-0

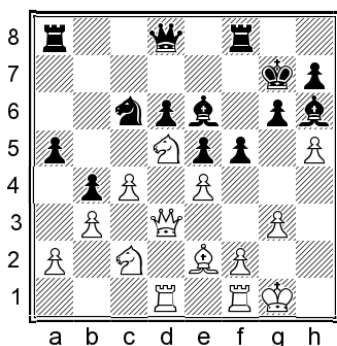
I found an interesting novelty:



16...g6!N

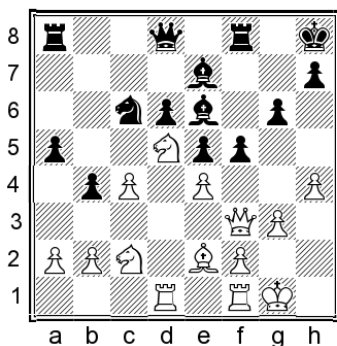
Preparing ...f5.

A high-level example continued: 16...g5 17.g3 g5h8 18.b3 g6 19.h4 g5h6 20.h5 g5g7 21.Wd3 f5



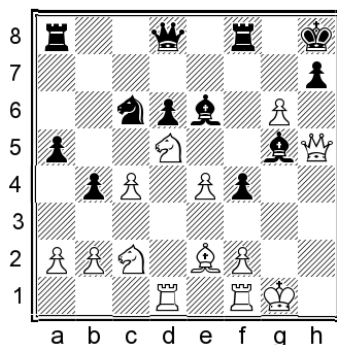
22.c5! dxc5 23.Wb5 d4 24.dxd4 cxd4 25.d6 b6 Bb8 26.Wxe5+ Wf6 27.Wxf6+ gxf6 28.d5+ g5d5 29.exd5 Black was worse, and needed to defend well to hold in Dominguez Perez – Swiercz, St Louis 2021. Black's play can be improved along the way, but the text move provides an easier path to dynamic equality.

17.g3 g5h8 18.h4 f5



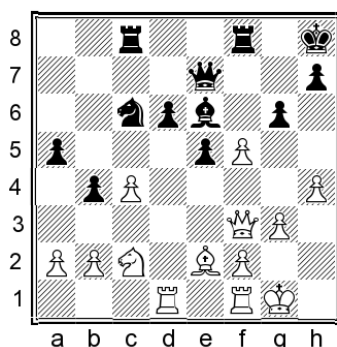
19.dxe7

19.h5? is powerfully met by: 19...f4! 20.gxf4 g5 21.hxg6 exf4 22.Wh5



22...Ba7! The only move, but good enough. We have a tremendous initiative for the sacrificed pawn.

19...Wxe7 20.exf5 Bxc8



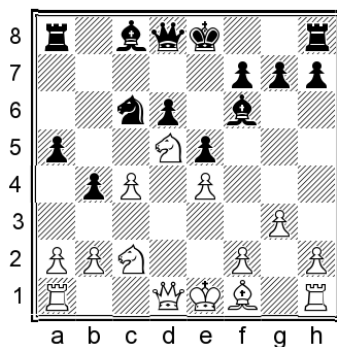
21.fxe6!?

21.We3 gxf5 gives us at least equal play.

21...Bxf3 22.gxf3 Wxe6 23.gxc6 Bxc6 24.dxe3

White has enough compensation for the queen to maintain the balance, but we have no cause for complaints.

D) 13.g3



This has been the most popular continuation. White may or may not follow up with h2-h4. The other purpose of the move is of course to develop the bishop, either on g2 or, in the event that h2-h4 is played, perhaps to h3.

### 13...g6!?

Again I like this move, intending to drop the bishop back to g7. One of the features of White's g2-g3 move is that it becomes less attractive for us to put the bishop on g5, as it will be hit by h2-h4. However, another feature of g2-g3 is that it loosens White's kingside to some degree, so an eventual ...f5 might come with added bite.

13...0-0 has been the normal choice.

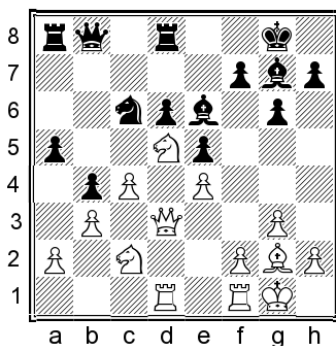
13...h5!?

 has been employed by some strong players and deserves consideration as well. White usually responds with 14.h4, when 14...g6 converts to variation D2 below. However, the untested 14.♖d3!N looks more critical, and if 14...h4 15.0-0-0 hxg3 16.fxg3 White's lead in development might be worth something. 14...h4 was not forced though, so you may wish to investigate this yourself as an alternative way of reaching variation D2.

We will analyse two main continuations: **D1)** 14.♘xf6!?

 and **D2)** 14.h4.

Let's see what happens if White opts for a normal plan of development: 14.♙g2 ♙g7 15.0-0 0-0 16.b3 (16.♖d3 ♙e6 17.♞ad1 ♖b8 leaves White with nothing better than transposing with b2-b3 in the near future; 16.♖d2 ♙e6 doesn't really change the situation.) 16...♙e6 17.♖d3 ♖b8 18.♞ad1 ♞d8



We have no problems at all. 19.f4!?

 was the ambitious continuation of Agmanov – Goganov, Chelyabinsk (blitz) 2022, and a few other games. The best reply is 19...exf4N 20.gxf4 a4! when we have at least enough counterplay.

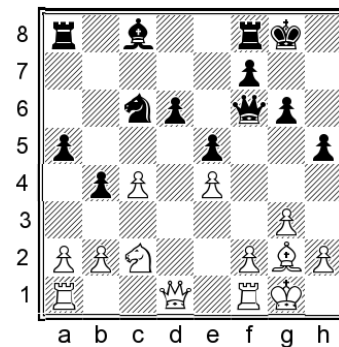
### D1) 14.♘xf6!?

Normally it would be crazy to exchange the powerful knight for our bad bishop. However, taking into account the factors outlined above, it makes a lot more sense here. In the resulting position, White can look to exert pressure on the d-pawn as well as preparing kingside operations with f2-f4.

### 14...♖xf6 15.♙g2 0-0 16.0-0 h5!?

16...♙b7 17.♖d2 ♘b8 is a sensible regrouping but Black is slightly lacking in coordination. After the further 18.♞fd1 ♞a6 19.♖e3 ♘d7 20.a3 ♞b6 21.axb4 axb4 Black eventually prevailed in Harikrishna – Carlsen, Internet (rapid) 2020, but at this point 22.♘e1!N would have favoured White.

16...a4!?

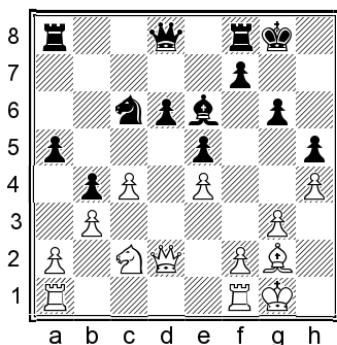
 17.♖d2 ♙e6 is dynamically equal but the text move is easier to understand.


### 17.♘e3!?

This has been White's choice in correspondence games.

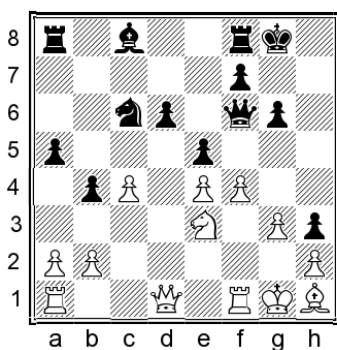
17.h4N can be met by: 17...♙e6 (17...a4!?

 is also possible, just like in the previous note.) 18.b3 (18.♖xd6?! ♞ac8 19.♘e3 ♞fd8 20.♘d5 ♖xf2! 21.♙xf2 ♞xd6 gives us the better chances in the endgame.) 18...♖d8!? 19.♖d2



19...a4! Our counterplay is good enough to maintain the balance. The simple tactical point of the last move is seen after 20.♖xb4?? ♕a5 21.a3 axb3, when Black is winning.

17...h4 18.f4 h3 19.♗h1



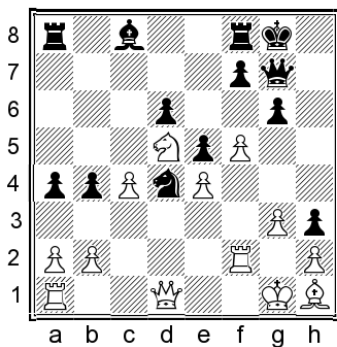
19...♗d4!

19...exf4 20.gxf4 ♖xb2 21.e5 ♖a6 22.exd6 was extremely complicated but objectively slightly better for White in Biedermann – Yasakov, corr. 2014.

20.♖f2 a4

20...♖b8 21.f5 ♖g5 22.♗c2 ♗xc2 23.♖xc2 ♖b6 was also equal in Maia – Schoch, corr. 2020.

21.♗d5 ♖g7 22.f5



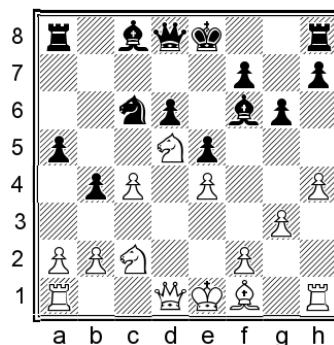
22...♗e6!?

A small finesse, exploiting the fact that the bishop is tactically defended, as the reader can verify.

23.♗e3 ♗d7

In Cretu – Akram, corr. 2020, the position remained complicated and dynamically balanced.

D2) 14.h4



14...h5

This isn't forced, but it seems simplest to stop the pawn from advancing any further. By the way, some games have arrived here via the alternative move order 13...h5!? 14.h4 g6.

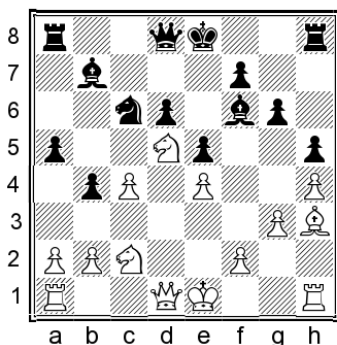
14...0-0 is the alternative, when 15.♖f3! ♗g7 16.h5 is critical. I analysed this in detail and found that it eventually turns out equal, but the text move is simpler and easier to play.

15.♗h3

15.♗g2 is possible, just like the 14.♗g2 line in the notes above on page 268. After 15...♗g7 16.b3 ♗e6 17.0-0 0-0 18.♖d2 we can play 18...♖b8 with equality, as in the aforementioned line, while 18...♗h7!? is a fine alternative, utilizing the fact that the h-pawns have moved.

15...♗b7!

15...♗g7? has been played a few times but White is clearly better after the light-squared bishops disappear.



### 16...Qd3!

16.0-0 Qg7 17.Qd3! transposes.

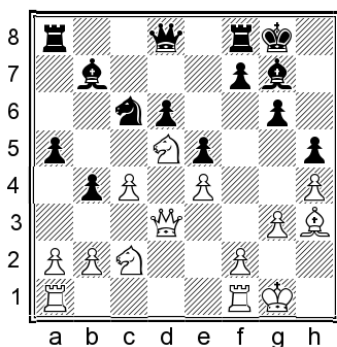
16.Qd2 Qg7 17.0-0 gives us the additional option of 17...Qb8!?N heading for c5, with a good position. (17...0-0 is also fine of course.)

### 16...Qg7 17.0-0

17.Rd1 0-0 18.0-0 transposes to 18.Rad1 below.

### 17...0-0

17...Qb8?! is inadvisable here because 18.a3! is annoying. If the queen was on d2 instead of d3, we would be able to respond with ...b3, with some advantage.



### 18.a3!?

In the event of 18.Rad1 I like the thematic idea of 18...Qb8! 19.Qe3 (19.c5? Qa6 wins the exchange) 19...Qa6 20.a3 Qxd5 21.Rxd5 Qc7 with good play on the dark squares.

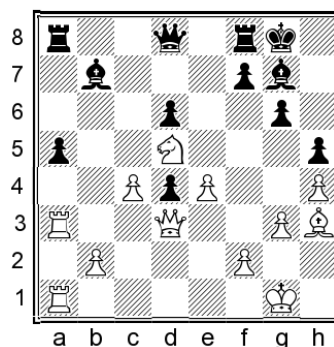
On the other hand, after 18.Rfd1 we should prefer 18...Qd4 with equal play, rather than 18...Qb8? when 19.c5! is annoying.

### 18...bxa3

18...Qd4!? 19.Qxd4 exd4 20.axb4 axb4 also turns out okay after 21.Qxb4 Qb6 22.Qd2 Qxe4 23.Qg2 Qxg2 24.Qxg2 Qc5 25.b3 Rab8 26.Ra4 Rfe8 when the position remains balanced. The text move is simpler though.

### 19.Rxa3 Qd4 20.Qxd4 exd4 21.Rfa1

All this was played in Asis Gargatagli – Garriga Cazorla, Barcelona 2021. My choice would be:



### 21...Re8N

Other moves are also fine, but this seems like the most natural way to maintain an equal position. Next the bishop can go to c6, and of course we always have the option of exchanging on d5 if we feel like it.

## Conclusion

After the opening moves 1.e4 c5 2.Qf3 Qc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Qxd4 Qf6 5.Qc3 e5 6.Qdb5 d6 7.Qg5 a6 8.Qa3 b5 9.Qd5 Qe7 10.Qxf6 Qxf6, after dealing with the most popular 11.c3 in the previous chapter, here we have discussed the important alternative 11.c4 b4 12.Qc2, which sees White set up a firm light-square clamp. 12...a5 is our choice, and from here White has tried all kinds of moves. We dealt with various minor options in the notes, before moving on to four main branches of theory.

13.Qe2 is a sensible move, when 13...0-0 14.0-0 g6!? is our choice. We saw that direct attempts to win the d6-pawn achieve nothing, while after 15.Qg4 we simply avoid the bishop exchange with 15...Qb7!, with a fine position.

Next we considered 13.h4!?, a move which prevents ...♙g5 (not that we were intending it anyway) and also discourages our ...g6 idea. Instead, 13...♖b8! is a good answer, and after White safeguards the h-pawn we will obtain good counterplay with ...b3.

13.♗f3!? is an interesting move which sets up a few possible ideas. I suggest 13...♙e7, and if White opens things up with 14.♖d1 followed by c4-c5, we can happily capture and trade our queen for an equivalent sum of enemy pieces. 14.♙e2 is a bit

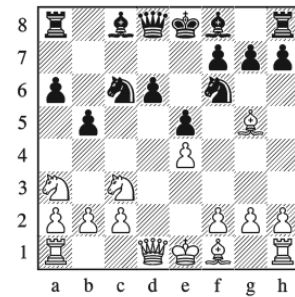
more challenging, but after 14...0-0 followed by ...♙e6 we have a fully playable position.

13.g3 is the final option that we looked at, when 13...g6!? is my suggestion. Then 14.♗xf6+! ♗xf6 15.♙g2 0-0 16.0-0 is quite logical, but 16...h5!? has proven fully adequate in correspondence games. 14.h4 is the other main try, when 14...h5 15.♙h3 ♙b7! once again avoids the exchange of light-squared bishops. We will follow up with ...♙g7 and ...0-0, after which a timely ...♗d4 tends to work well.

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# Chapter 10

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## Positional Sidelines

### Variation Index

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1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6  
 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6 8.♘a3 b5

- A) 9.♘d5 ♙e7  
 A1) 10.♙xf6  
 A2) 10.♘xe7 ♘xe7!  
 A21) 11.♙f3  
 A22) 11.♙d3  
 A23) 11.♙xf6 gxf6  
     A231) 12.♙d2  
     A232) 12.♙f3  
     A233) 12.c4  
 B) 9.♘ab1!?

1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♟c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♟xd4 ♟f6 5.♟c3 e5 6.♟db5 d6 7.♟g5 a6 8.♟a3 b5

In this chapter we will consider some sidelines occurring after the usual A) 9.♟d5, followed by the quirky B) 9.♟ab1!?

### A) 9.♟d5 ♟e7

We will consider a few extremely minor sidelines after the normal A1) 10.♟xf6, before analysing the more significant sideline of A2) 10.♟xe7.

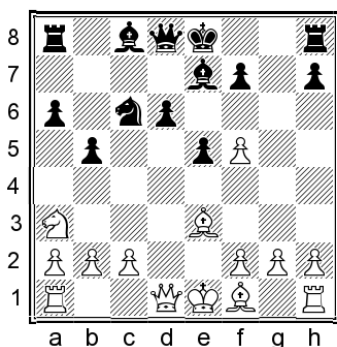
A much worse option is:

10.♟xf6†? gxf6!

Forcing White to waste time with the bishop, after which our central pawns will roll.

11.♟e3 f5 12.exf5

If 12.♟d3 then 12...f4N (12...d5! 13.exd5 ♟xd5 also gave Black a decisive advantage in Jelic – Parezanin, Vrnjacka Banja 1996) 13.♟d2 ♟g8 gives us an overwhelming initiative.



12...d5!

The f5-pawn will not run away.

13.♟h5N

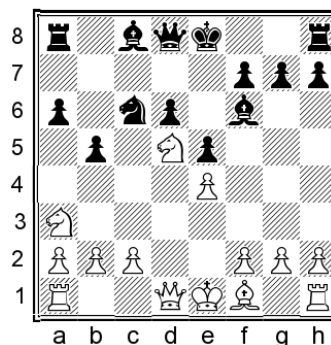
13.♟b1 ♟xf5 14.♟e2 ♟g8 was horrible for White in Ratcu – Hashizume, Caioba 1993.

13.c3 was played in B. Stefanovic – Chelushkina, Belgrade 2021, when 13...d4!N 14.cxd4 exd4 15.♟d2 ♟d5! would have given Black a massive advantage.

13...d4 14.♟d2 e4 15.♟e2 ♟d6

Our advantage in activity is far more relevant than White's extra pawn.

### A1) 10.♟xf6 ♟xf6



Obviously 11.c3 is the most popular and challenging move in this position, with 11.c4 a legitimate contender as well. Having addressed those continuations in the previous two chapters, here we will turn our attention to some minor tries.

### 11.♟e2

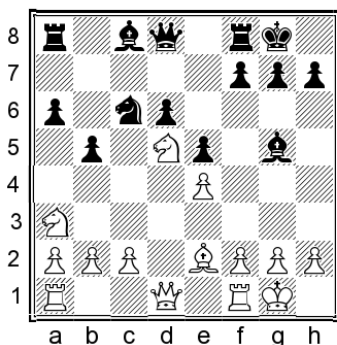
11.♟b1 will be covered in variation B at the end of the chapter, via the 9.♟ab1!?

11.♟xf6†?! is an extremely odd choice, after which White will have to play well to avoid being worse. 11...♟xf6 12.c3 ♟g6! 13.♟c2!N (13.♟d3 0-0 14.♟c2 ♟b7 favoured Black in Hladik – Galvan, Gibraltar 2020.) 13...♟xe4† 14.♟e3 0-0 15.♟d3 ♟h4 16.g3 ♟f6 17.♟e4 ♟b7 18.0-0 ♟ab8 White has just enough compensation, but we are absolutely fine.

11.g3 is not stupid, but White would do best to follow it up with c2-c3 in the near future, when we'll have an easier version of Chapter 8. Instead after 11...0-0 12.♟g2 ♟g5 13.0-0 ♟e6 14.♟d3 ♟e7 Black already had the easier game in Grabics – Sargac, Rijeka 2005.

11.♟d3 is another sensible but non-threatening move. Following 11...♟g5 12.0-0 0-0 13.c3 ♟e7 Black had equalized effortlessly in Gepstein – Shabtai, Netanya 1993.

### 11...0-0 12.0-0 ♟g5



### 13.c4!?

13.c3 is similar to variation B1 of Chapter 8, except that White's knight is still stuck on a3 for now, and 13...♞e7 gives us an easy game.

13.♙g4?! is logical in the sense that it gives White's move order some independent significance, but it's not a good move. 13...♙b7! Naturally we avoid the bishop exchange, while putting latent pressure on the e4-pawn. 14.c3 ♞e7 15.♞d7† ♚xe7 Black already stood better in S. Mendoza – Heredia Serrano, Tarija 2011. The e4-pawn is attacked, the knight is offside and the ...d5 break will be hard to stop.

### 13...b4 14.♞c2 a5

The position is similar to variation A of Chapter 9. Here we have committed the bishop to g5 instead of the plan of ...g6 and ...♙g7 which I recommended there, but the position is still completely fine. For example:

### 15.♚d3 ♙e6 16.♞ad1 ♚b8!?

Just one of several decent options.

### 17.g3 ♙d8N

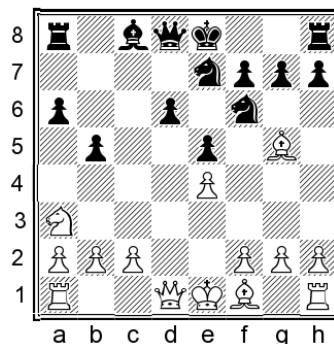
The bishop can go to b6 next, with nice prospects for us.

### A2) 10.♞xe7

This is an older line which is no longer popular, but it's still important to understand how to conduct the ensuing positions.

### 10...♞xe7!

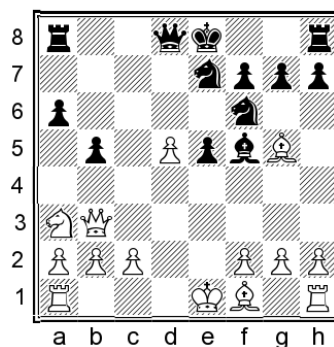
10...♚xe7 is playable but the text move is my preference. One advantage is that the f6-knight is not pinned, so the threat of ...♞xe4 is real. We need not fear the exchange on f6, and the knight on e7 helps to support the ...d5 break.



White has three main options: **A21)** 11.♚f3, **A22)** 11.♙d3 and **A23)** 11.♙xf6. Each path has its own specific details, but a general rule of thumb is that we will be looking for the ...d5 break as soon as possible.

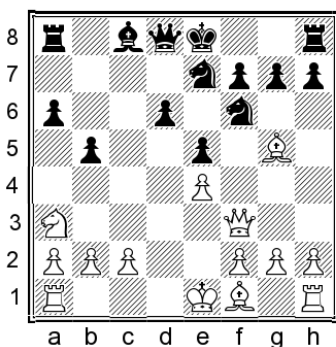
11.f3 can be met by 11...d5 (11...♙e6 12.c4 0-0 is a perfectly playable alternative) 12.exd5 ♞fxd5 13.c4 bxc4 14.♙xc4 f6 15.♙d2 ♙e6 and Black's central control was at least as relevant as White's bishop pair in Tatar Kis – D. Berczes, Hungary 2005.

11.♚d3 also gives us easy play after: 11...d5 12.exd5 (12.♙xf6 gxf6 transposes to 12.♚d3 d5 in the notes to variation A23 below.) 12...♙f5 13.♚b3



13...♞fxd5! (13...♚xd5 14.♚xd5 ♞exd5 was equal in Anand – Leko, Linares 2005.) 14.♞d1 f6 Black had slightly the more comfortable game in Hamer – Avrum, email 2001. (14...h6!?N is another tempting idea, since 15.♙xe7?! ♚a5† turns out well for Black.)

### A21) 11. ♖f3



White hopes that the attack on f6 will prove disruptive, but it's nothing to fear.

### 11... ♗g4

11... ♘d7 is a perfectly playable alternative but the text move is a more active choice.

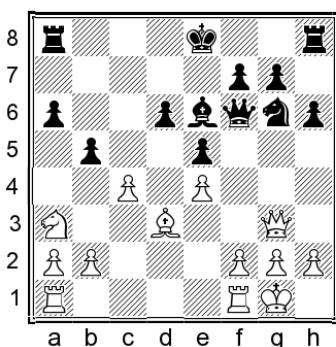
### 12. ♖g3

12. ♖d3 d5 13. exd5 ♗f5 transposes to the Anand – Leko game in the notes above.

### 12... ♗e6 13. ♗d3

13. ♗xf6?! gxf6 14. ♖g7? ♘g6 is useless for White.

### 13... ♘g6 14. 0-0 h6 15. ♗xf6 ♖xf6 16. c4



### 16... ♘f4!

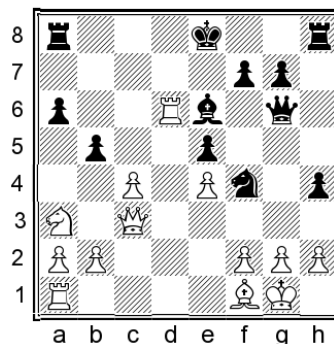
16...b4 has been played but the text move is much more dynamic. Our kingside threats are more dangerous than they may first appear.

### 17. ♖fd1

17. cxb5?! is strongly met by 17...h5!, and after 18. ♖e3? ♖g5 19. g3 h4 the attack was already decisive in Miranovic – Zacic, Yugoslavia 1994.

### 17...h5 18. ♗f1 h4 19. ♖e3?

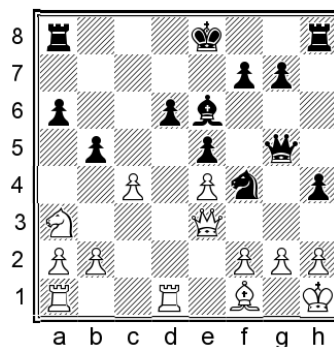
19. ♖c3!N is the only way for White to stay in the game, although we are still doing well after: 19... ♖g6! 20. ♖xd6 (20. ♘h1? loses to 20...b4! 21. ♖xb4 h3 with a mating attack.)



20...b4! 21. ♖xb4 Now we have a pleasant choice. 21... ♘g2 is the ambitious option, when White can avoid being mated but we still have slightly better chances in the complicated position (around -0.2 in engine terms). Alternatively, we have an easy draw with 21... ♘h3† 22. ♘h1 ♘xf2† 23. ♘g1 ♘h3† if we want it.

### 19... ♖g5 20. ♘h1

In Gross – Wendt, Hamburg 1999, Black overlooked a winning continuation:



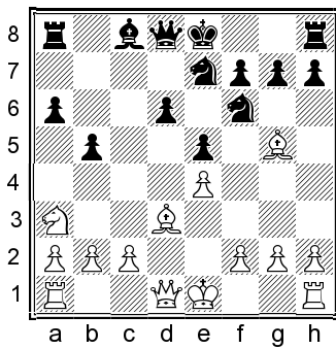
### 20...b4!N 21. ♘c2 ♗xc4

A simple tactic, utilizing the kingside pressure for material gain.

### 22. ♖f3 ♗xf1 23. ♖xf1 a5

We have a clear extra pawn.

### A22) 11. ♗d3



White defends e4 while developing another piece before deciding whether or not to take on f6.

### 11...d5! 12.exd5

The alternative is:

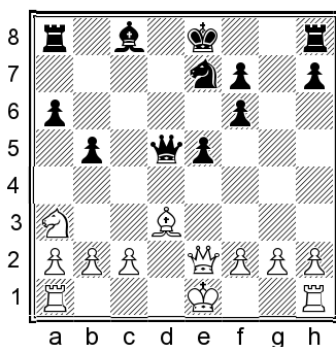
12.♙xf6 gxf6 13.exd5

13.♚e2 is no better. 13...f5 14.0-0-0 (14.f3? ♚a5† 15.c3 b4 is even more unpleasant for White.) In Rosso – Adla, Buenos Aires 1992, Black's most precise continuation would have been: 14...b4!N 15.♘b1 fxe4 16.♙xe4 ♚d6! 17.♚e3 ♙e6 Intending ...♚c7, with a clear advantage due to Black's central domination and White's uncoordinated pieces.

13...♚xd5 14.♚e2

14.f3?! ♚c5 15.♚d2 ♙e6 gives us an obvious edge in activity.

A useful improvement is:



14...♙b8!N

Threatening to take on g2, while rendering the ♙e4 move pointless.

14...♙b7 15.f3 was perfectly playable for Black in Jumabayev – Kosintseva, Samara 2002, but White is fine too. The text move poses more problems.

15.0-0-0!?

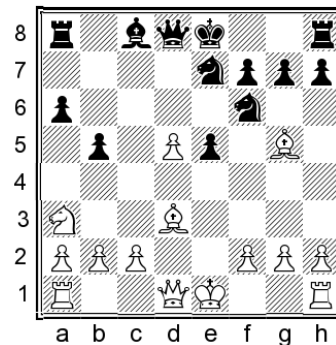
15.♙e4? ♚c5 doesn't help White at all; the bishop can be hit by ...f5 at any moment, and we can easily strengthen our pieces with ...♙e6, ...♘g6 and so on.

15.f3 ♘g6 is also excellent for us.

According to Stockfish, the text move is White's best, but it comes with an obvious defect.

15...♚xa2

The position remains complicated, but we have bagged a pawn and got closer to the white king. Black stands at least slightly better.



### 12...♚xd5

We recapture in the most active way possible, attacking g2.

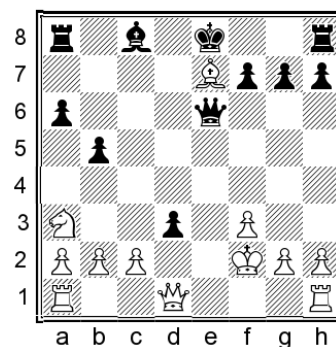
### 13.♚d2

13.0-0? ♙b7 14.f3 ♚d4† sees us pick up the b2-pawn for no compensation.

13.f3

This move invites a forcing sequence:

13...e4! 14.♙xf6 exd3 15.♙xe7 ♚e6† 16.♙f2



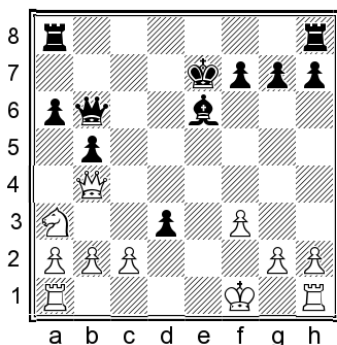
16...♚b6†! 17.♙f1

17.♙g3 was played in Perez Rodriguez – Garcia Garcia, Santa Clara 2022, when 17...♚c7†!N 18.♙f2 ♚a7† 19.♙g3 ♚xe7 would have left Black with a strong initiative, thanks to White's exposed king and the offside knight.

17...♙xe7 18.♚e1†

18.♚xd3?! ♙e6 19.♙e1 ♙hd8 20.♚e3 ♚c7 gives Black the upper hand.

18...♙e6 19.♚b4†



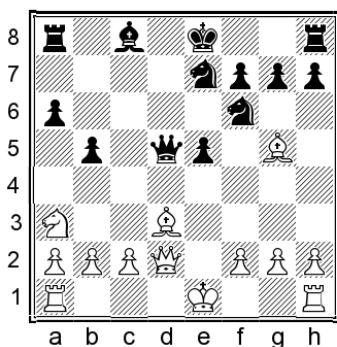
In Yemelin – Bochkarev, St Petersburg 1998, Black allowed a queen exchange. A stronger approach is:

19...♔e8!N

19...♔d7!N 20.♖d1 ♖ad8 is also tempting.

20.cxd3 ♖d8

Our king will easily find safety after ...f6 and ...♔f7, and it's far from obvious how White will get coordinated.



13...♗e4!

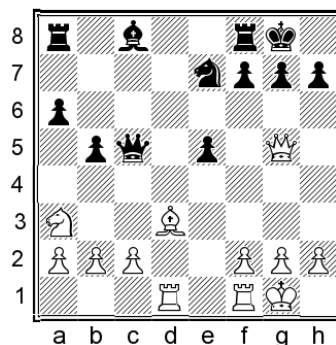
Taking on g2 would squander the initiative. The text move is much better.

14.♙e3 ♗xg5 15.♙xg5 ♖c5!

An excellent multipurpose move, guarding the knight in preparation for castling, while threatening ...♙b4† and more generally moving the queen to a safer square.

16.0-0-0

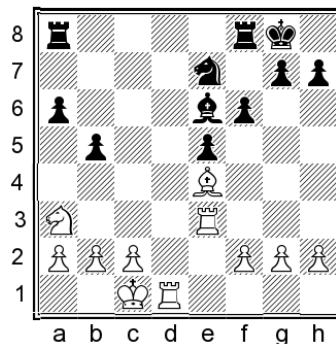
16.0-0-0 gives us easy play, for instance: 17.♖ad1 (17.c4!?N may be a slight improvement, although after 17...h6 18.♙d2 ♗f5 I would still take Black.)



This position was reached in Misailovic – Nataf, Budva 2004, and now 17...f6!N 18.♙d2 ♗e6 would have given Black a small but obvious advantage.

16...0-0 17.♖he1 f6 18.♙e3 ♖xe3† 19.♖xe3 ♗e6 20.♗e4

In Morozevich – Radjabov, Heraklio 2007, Black moved the rook to d8 when the position was equal. More ambitious is:



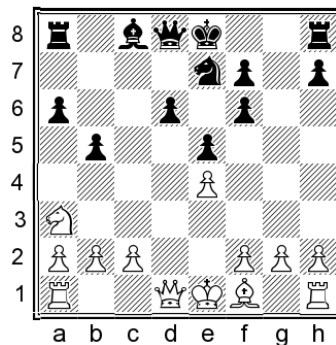
20...♖a7!N 21.♖d6 ♔f7

We are ready to advance with ...f5, and White will need to take care to avoid being worse.

A23) 11.♗xf6

This is the most common continuation.

11...gxf6

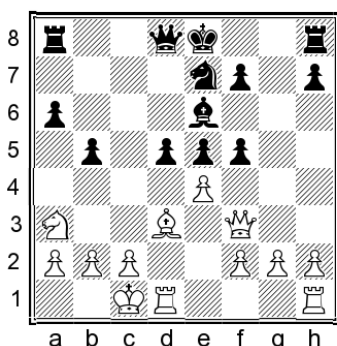


Before we go any further, it is worth mentioning that a similar position can arise after 10.♙xf6 ♘xf6 11.c3 ♖e7 (instead of 11...♙g5, as recommended in Chapter 4) 12.♖xf6† gxf6. This is a fairly respectable sideline and I was tempted to recommend it, until I became aware of a narrow path leading to White's advantage. Here we have a clearly improved version of that variation, as White is missing the c2-c3 move.

White has three main options: **A231)** 12.♙d2, **A232)** 12.♙f3 and **A233)** 12.c4. Here are a few minor tries:

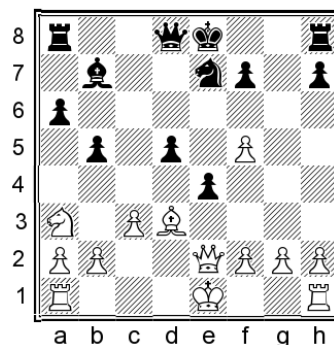
12.♙d3 doesn't present much of a challenge, and we have more than one good reply. 12...d5 is simplest, with a transposition to 12.♙xf6 gxf6 in the notes to variation A22 above. (12...♙g8!? also looks perfectly good.)

12.♙d3 d5 13.0-0-0 ♙e6 14.♙f3 f5 15.♙d3? (15.exd5 was the lesser evil, although 15...♖xd5 followed by...e4 slightly favours Black.)



This position was reached in Meinecke – Huhn, Ditzingen 2009, and now 15...fxe4N 16.♙xe4 ♙c7 17.♙f6 0-0-0! would have given Black a decisive advantage.

Finally, 12.c3 is of course a useful move, but now White is playing the aforementioned theoretical variation a full tempo down. We have several decent continuations, the simplest being: 12...♙b7 13.♙d3 d5 14.♙e2 f5 15.exf5 (15.f3 dxe4 16.fxe4 fxe4 17.♙xe4 ♙xe4 18.♙xe4 ♙d5 19.♙xd5 ♖xd5 was also at least equal for Black in Flis – Krasenkova, Koszalin 1997.) 15...e4

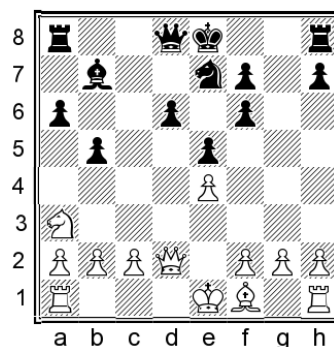


16.♙c2N (16.f6?! was played in Klusowski – Jegorovas, Suwalki 2000, when 16...♖f5!N followed by ...♙xf6 would have given Black an improved version of the 16.♙c2N line below.) 16...♖xf5 17.♙g4 ♙f6 18.♙f4 h5! 19.0-0-0 ♙g8 We have a strong centre and stand slightly better.

### A231) 12.♙d2

White prepares long castling.

### 12...♙b7



### 13.0-0-0

Other moves are no better:

13.c4?! ♙xe4 14.cxb5

This weak continuation sees White giving up a valuable central pawn in return for a flank one.

14...a5!

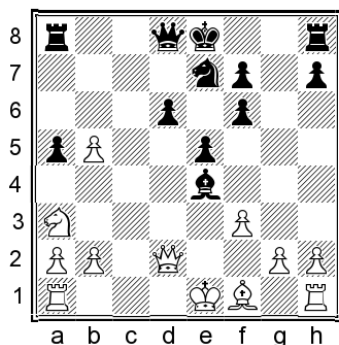
14...0-0 15.bxa6 d5 is promising but the text move is stronger.

15.f3

15.♙d1? looks useful but is mostly a waste of time.

15...d5 16.f3 In Pohle – Punt, Goch 2009, 16...♙g6!N would have maximized Black's advantage.

15.h4!?N is the engine's suggestion but after 15...d5 Black is still better.



In Niedbala – Bulau, Mamaia 2017, the most accurate retreat would have been:

15...♙g6!N 16.h4 h5 17.♙d3 ♗xd3 18.♚xd3 ♖c8

Black is clearly better.

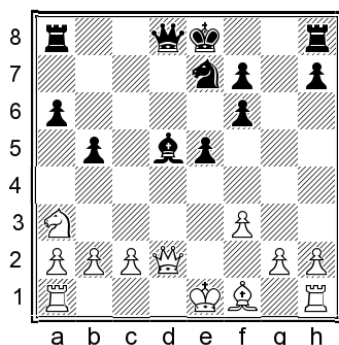
13.f3

This move is playable, but such a slow continuation can hardly threaten us.

13...d5

13...f5 is also decent, but let's stick with the normal plan.

14.exd5 ♗xd5

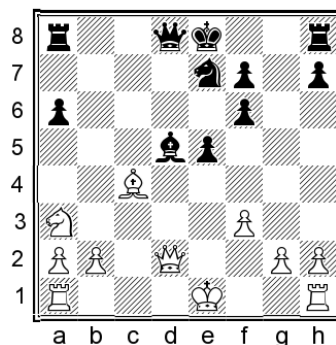


15.c4

15.0-0-0 ♚b6 16.♙b1 0-0-0 17.♚e1 was played in Gauche – Andrade, Montevideo 2018, when 17...♙e6!N would have seen Black take over the d-file, with big problems for White.

15...bxc4 16.♙xc4

This position was reached in Konios – Erkan, Tallinn 1997, and here I would prefer:



16...0-0N

Keeping the tension a moment longer.

17.♖d1

17.0-0 ♚b6†!? 18.♚f2 ♚b4 gives us nice activity.

17...♙xc4 18.♚xd8

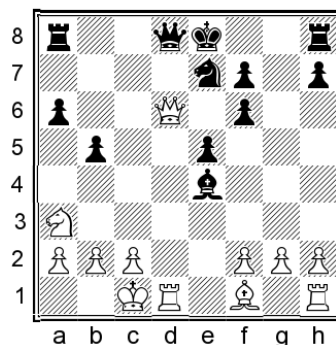
In the event of 18.♗xc4 ♚c7 19.b3 ♖fd8 White will have to be slightly careful.

18...♖fxd8 19.♗xc4 ♗c6

The knight will go to d4 later, and the endgame is equal.

19...♗d5!?! is also perfectly playable.

13...♙xe4 14.♚xd6



14...♚xd6

I found an interesting new idea, which also deserves consideration:

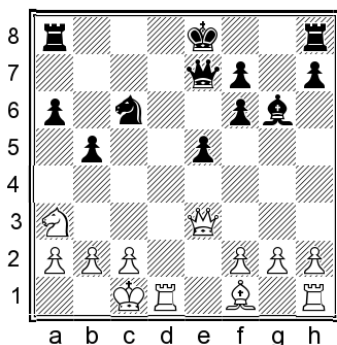
14...♗c6!?!N 15.♚c5!

This is White's only way to maintain the balance.

15.f3?! ♚xd6 16.♖xd6 transposes to 16.f3?! in the notes to the main line below.

Also after 15.♚xd8†?! ♖xd8 16.♖xd8† ♗xd8 we have the better chances.

15...♚e7 16.♚e3 ♙g6



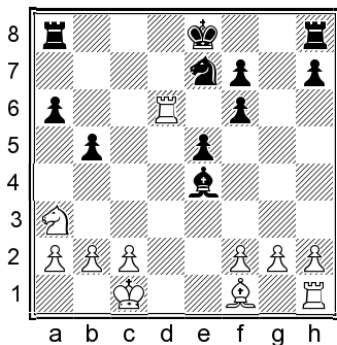
17.h4!

Instead after something like 17.♔d3?! ♖c8 18.♕b1 ♜e6! we stand clearly better.

17...h5 18.♔d3 f5

The position is complicated and dynamically equal.

15.♖xd6



15...♗c6!

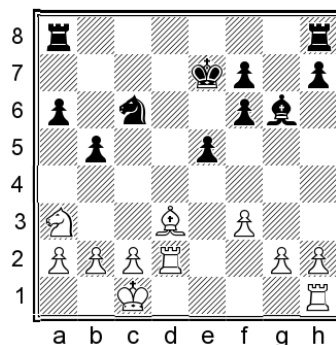
A promising pawn sacrifice.

16.♖xf6

White should accept the offer, otherwise we will get a strong initiative anyway.

16.c3?! ♕e7 17.♖d2 was played in Sondermann – Ankerst, Cologne 1995, when 17...♖hd8N would have given Black an easy initiative.

Another example continued: 16.f3?! ♕e7 17.♖d2 ♔g6 18.♔d3?! (18.c3 ♖hc8 gives us good attacking chances, despite the exchange of queens; nevertheless, White should have tried this.) In Roos – Birnboim, Buenos Aires 1978, Black could have obtained a clear advantage with the following instructive continuation:



18...♖ad8!N We want to provoke an exchange on g6, so it's worth keeping the other rook on the h-file. 19.♖hd1 ♗b4! 20.♔xg6 ♖xd2 21.♖xd2 hxg6 22.c3 ♗c6 White must move either the g- or the h-pawn, when the kingside pawns will be vulnerable in the long term. We can probe with the knight and gradually advance our own pawns, and White faces a difficult defence.

16...♕e7 17.♖h6 ♖ac8

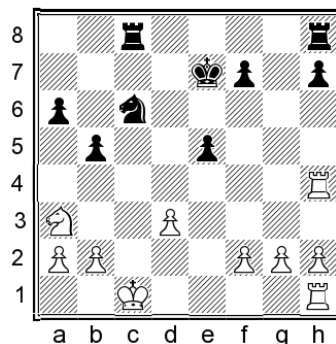
We have a useful lead in development and White's rook is weirdly placed on h6 – albeit not in danger of being trapped at this stage.

18.♖h4

18.c3 ♗b4 19.♕d2 was played in Farkas – Pal, Hungary 2011, and now 19...♖hd8†N 20.♕e3 ♔g6! 21.cxb4 ♖d1 looks like a nice idea. Next comes ...♖cc1 followed by regaining the sacrificed piece, and White's knight will be completely blocked out of play.

18...♔g6 19.♔d3 ♔xd3 20.cxd3

This position was reached in A. Hunt – Maze, Cannes 2006. Black's most accurate continuation is:



20...♖hg8!N 21.g3 ♖gd8

It was worth provoking the pawn move in order to weaken the f3-square.

## 22.♔d2!

Despite the looming possibility of a check on f3, this is White's best chance to maintain the balance.

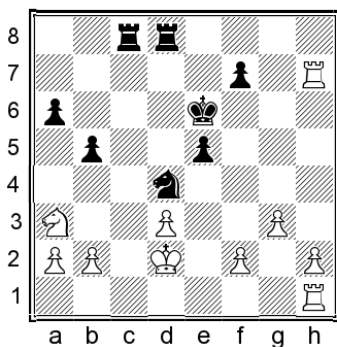
Either 22.♔b1 ♖xd3 or 22.♞d1 ♘b4† 23.♔b1 ♘xd3 would reach a situation with equal material where we maintain an edge in activity.

## 22...♘d4 23.♞h5 ♔e6!

23...♔f6! 24.♞h6† ♔g7 25.♞xa6 e4 is rated as equal by the engine, but I don't see any real benefit in forcing the play like this.

## 24.♞xh7?!

White should play something else, but in any case our activity is worth at least as much as White's extra pawn. Let me show you what happens if White gets too greedy.



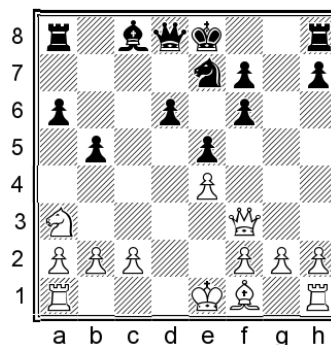
## 24...e4!

Threatening ...♘f5 or ...♘f3†, among other ideas. The tactical point is:

## 25.dxe4? b4!

With decisive threats.

## A232) 12.♞f3



## 12...f5

Usually we prefer ...d5 in these lines, but here the threat to the f6-pawn necessitates a different approach.

## 13.exf5

13.0-0-0?! is too optimistic. 13...fxe4 14.♞xe4 (14.♞f6 ♘g6 15.♞xd6 ♞xd6 16.♞xd6 ♔e7 17.♞d2?! ♔e6 18.g3 was played in Gyuricsek – Zdrzil, Liptovsky Mikulas 2019, when 18...f5!N followed by ...h5 would have given Black an overwhelming positional advantage.) 14...♔f5 15.♞e3 ♞c8 Black had the more pleasant game in Szulc – Krol, Borowice 2012.

## 13...♔xf5 14.♔d3 ♔e6!

It's best to keep the bishops on the board. This is partly to help cover our own light squares, and also because White's bishop will be a target for our future pawn advances.

## 15.0-0

The position after 15.c3 has arisen in many games – except that usually it's White to move here! After 15...0-0 we threaten ...f5 and White must fight for equality.

## 15...0-0

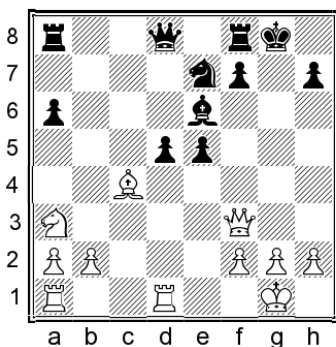
15...d5 is a good alternative but it feels natural to castle before deciding which pawn to advance.

## 16.c4 bxc4!

16...f5! leads to interesting play but the text move is more straightforward.

## 17.♘xc4

17. ♖xc4?! d5 18. ♖fd1 was played in Gallagher – Lawton, Nottingham 1987. My improvement is:

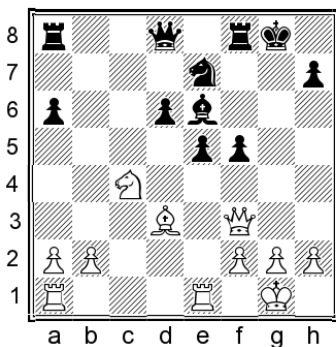


18... ♗b8!N Unpinning while eyeing the b2-pawn. 19. ♕f1 (19. ♕b3 a5 and 19. ♗f6 ♖g6 are unpleasant for White too.) 19... ♖g6 Black is clearly on top.

### 17...f5 18. ♖fe1

Another game continued 18. ♖fd1 e4 19. ♗e3 d5 and Black was dominating in Lochte – Doeres, Bad Neustadt 1992.

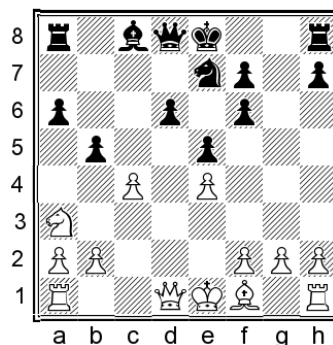
The text move was played in Behr – Darnstaedt, Germany 1991. In that encounter, Black placed the king in the corner, which was rather slow. Instead, we have a much better way of avoiding any checks along the g-file:



### 18...♖g6!N

Activating the knight and generally improving our coordination. White has big problems. The threat is ...e4; and even though White can avoid losing material in the short term, the subsequent advance of the d-pawn (possibly with ...♖c8 being thrown in somewhere as well) will create an extremely powerful pawn roller in the centre.

### A233) 12.c4



As noted earlier, moving the pawn to c3 would result in a theoretical position where White has lost a whole tempo. Therefore it's natural to put the pawn on c4 instead.

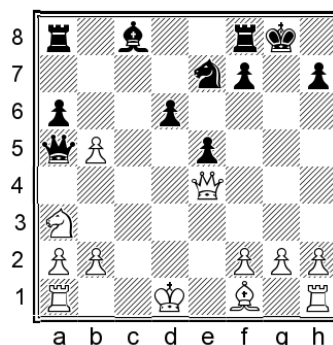
### 12...f5

Not the only move, but it's completely thematic and fully reliable.

### 13.exf5

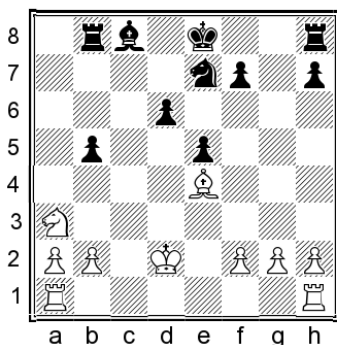
There are other options, but in all of them Black has more than adequate chances.

13.cxb5? fxe4 14. ♗a4 0-0 15. ♗xe4 ♗a5† 16. ♖d1 was seen in Hoffman – Jakovenko, Internet (blitz) 2004, when simplest and best would have been:



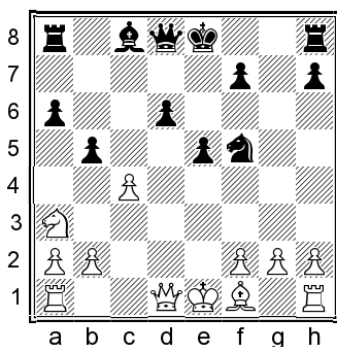
16...axb5!N Black is winning. For instance, 17. ♕xb5 ♕f5 followed by ...♖fb8 is crushing.

13. ♕d3 ♗a5† 14. ♗d2 ♗xd2† 15. ♖xd2 certainly isn't dangerous; the only question is whether we stand better or merely comfortably equal. 15...fxe4 16. ♕xe4 ♖b8 17.cxb5 axb5 Here White needs an improvement:



18. Rg8!N (18.b4? is much too optimistic. 18...f5 19. Qd3 Qd7 20. Nc2 was clearly better for Black in Nikitenko – Zhigalko, Minsk 2015; the strongest continuation would have been 20...Nd5!N followed by ...Qe7, when Black is strategically winning, as the central majority cannot be stopped in the long run.) 18...Rg8 19.g3 b4 20. Nc2 Qe6 Black is more comfortable, as the central pawns have the potential to become extremely powerful later.

### 13...Nxf5



### 14.cxb5

Another possibility is:

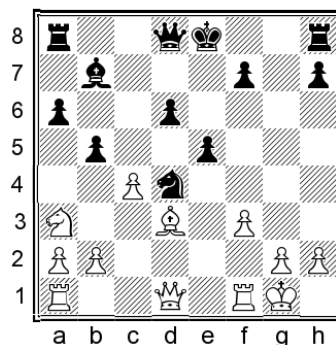
14. Qd3 Nd4 15. 0-0

15.cxb5? Qb7 16. Wg4 was played in Bitalzadeh – Van der Wiel, Hoogeveen 2006, when 16...Qf8! 17. Wh3 h5 would have been extremely strong.

15. Qe4N also isn't dangerous. 15...Wa5† 16. Wd2 Wxd2† 17. Qxd2 Bb8 is like the Nikitenko – Zhigalko game in the note above, except that here our knight is on d4 instead of e7, which should be beneficial to us.

15...Qb7 16.f3

Now an important improvement is:



16...Rg8!N

It's best to keep the queen flexible for the time being.

16...Wg5?! was an inaccurate choice in Alekseev – Zhigalko, Baku 2013, because 17. Rf2!N 17...Rg8 18. Qe4 would have left Black with no attack and many weaknesses.

17. Rf2 Wb6!?

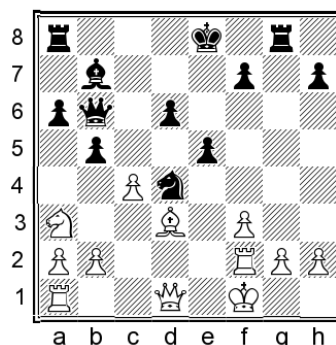
I like the idea of eyeing White's rook and king, while incidentally defending the b5-pawn.

17...Wh4 is also playable. A sample line is 18.cxb5 Rxc2†! 19. Qxc2 Qe7! when the sharp tactics should lead to a draw.

18. Qf1

It's natural to remove the king from the dangerous diagonal.

18. Qe4 is another idea, when 18...Qxe4 19.fxe4 Rg7 is dynamically balanced.



18...Qe6!

Sacrificing a pawn in order to reroute the knight to a dangerous attacking square.

19.cxb5 axb5 20. Nxb5 Nf4 21.a4 Qf8!

We have at least enough compensation for the pawn. Ideas include ...d5, ...Rg5-h5 or even ...Qc8, threatening ...Rxc2.

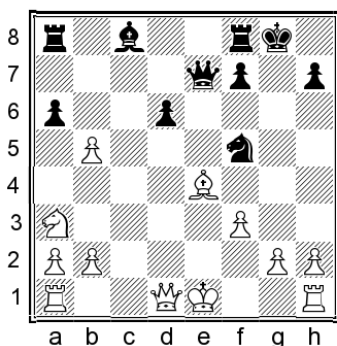
### 14...0-0 15.bxa6

Taking another pawn has been the usual choice, although it's clear that we have a lot of activity for it.

Another game continued:

15.♔d3 e4 16.♔xc4 ♖e7 17.f3?

White had to find 17.♕d5!N when the critical line continues 17...♞e8! 18.f3 ♔e6 19.♕d2 d5 20.♔xf5 ♔xf5† 21.♖f1, reaching a position where White has two extra pawns but poor coordination and an unsafe king. 21...♗f6 would be my choice, with ideas of doubling rooks on the e-file. (21...♔g6!? is also dynamically equal according to the engine, but it's a less human way to play.)



17...d5!

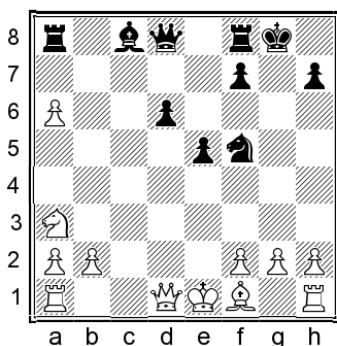
17...♗h4† 18.♖e2 ♞e8 should also be good enough, but the text move is even more precise.

18.♕xd5 ♞d8 19.♕xd8† ♕xd8 20.♔xa8 ♗e7†

The queen is stronger than the two rooks here, as White's king is exposed and the rooks are unable to get into the game.

21.♔e4 ♗b4† 22.♖e2 ♗xb2† 23.♗c2 ♗d4† 24.♖d2 ♗xb5

Black's initiative should have been enough to decide the game in Volkmann – Nedev, Fuegen 2006.



15...♔xa6 16.♔xa6

16.♔c4 ♔xc4 17.♗xc4 d5 also gave Black more than enough compensation for the pawn in Bagonyai – Korpics, Hungary 2006.

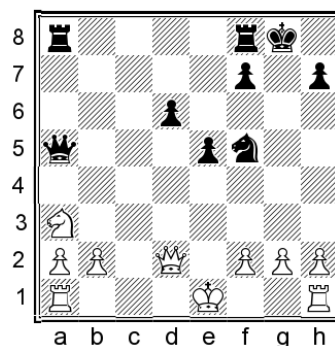
16...♗a5† 17.♕d2 ♗xa6

The database contains a bunch of games which soon resulted in quick draws by repetition in some way. However, I found that Black can actually play for a win.

18.h4

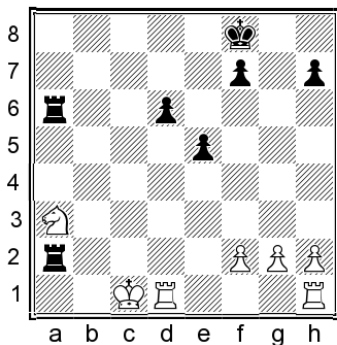
White has a limited choice of playable moves.

18.♕e2 ♗a5† 19.♕d2 can be met by:



19...♞fc8!N A possible winning try. (19...♗a6 20.♕e2 ♗a5† 21.♕d2 led to a quick draw in Socko – Malakhatko, Lublin 2009.) 20.♕xa5 ♞xa5 Despite the queen exchange, we have at least enough compensation thanks to our more active pieces and mobile central pawns.

18.0-0-0!N is risky but not ridiculous. My line continues: 18...♞fb8 19.♕g5† ♖f8! (19...♖h8 20.♕xf5 ♞xb2 21.♕d3! ♞xa2 should lead to another draw in one way or another. The text move is stronger, and it's also simply a more natural choice to give the king more shelter from checks.) 20.♕xf5 ♞xb2 21.♕d3! The only move. 21...♞xa2 22.♕xa6 ♞xa6 For the time being we only have one pawn for the piece, but look at those rooks!

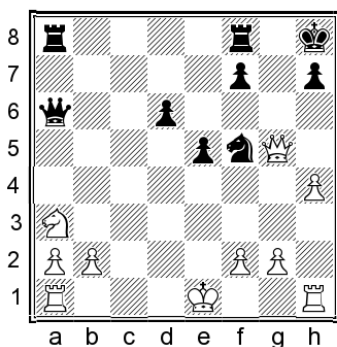


23. dxc4 Rxf2 Banking a pawn while threatening mate. 24. Qb1 Rxc2 25. Rxd6 Rxd6 26. dxd6 Qe7 The endgame should be a draw, but White still needs to be a bit careful. We have a lot of activity and the connected passers are well supported by the king.

18... Qh8 19. Rg5

19. Rh3? Rg8! would give Black great play.

After the text move we can take a draw if we wish, but once again there is a winning try:



19... Qg7! N

19... Qd4 20. Rf6† was immediately agreed drawn in Socko – Radjabov, Izmir 2004.

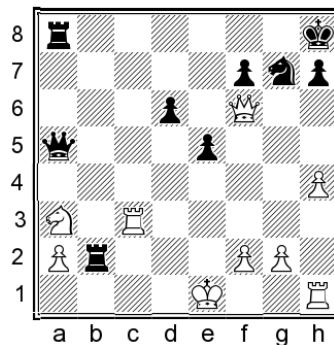
20. Rf6

20. Rh3 f6 tidies up our kingside before resuming the initiative.

20... Rfb8! 21. Rc1!

The only move.

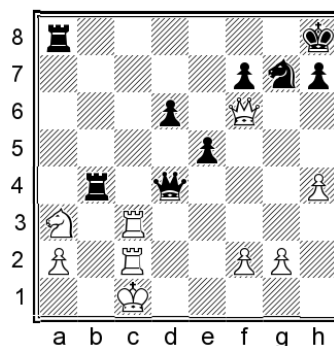
21... Ra5† 22. Rc3 Rxb2



23. Rh3!

White is barely surviving.

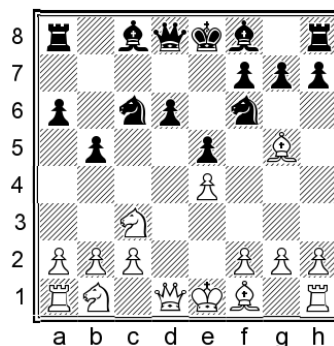
23... Qd5 24. Rc2! Qe4† 25. Re3 Qb4† 26. Qd1 Qd4† 27. Qc1 Rb4 28. Rec3



28... Qg8!

White remains under pressure. It is worth pointing out that 29. Rc8† Qe8 30. Rxa8? is impossible due to 30... Qa1† 31. Qd2 Rd4† 32. Qe3 Qe1† 33. Qf3 Rd3† 34. Qg4 Qe4† 35. Qh5 Qxa8 36. Rg5† Qh8, when Black is winning.

B) 9. Qab1!?



This move looks unimpressive but it actually isn't so bad. White's idea is to strike with a2-a4 in the near future, followed by activating the knight.

9... Qe7 10. Qxf6

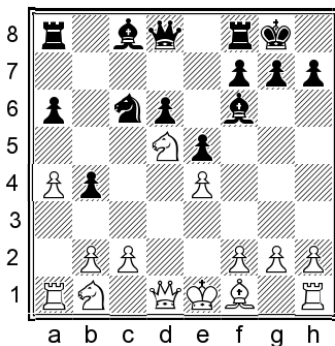
This is practically forced, as ...b4 was threatened.

### 10...♙xf6 11.♘d5

According to the database, this isn't the most common choice via the current move order. However, if we factor in the 9.♘d5 ♗e7 10.♙xf6 ♙xf6 11.♘ab1 transposition, as noted on page 274, we can consider this the main continuation.

The alternative is:

11.a4 b4 12.♘d5 0-0



### 13.♙c4

The alternative is: 13.♘d2 ♗e6 14.♙c4 (14.♘c4?! a5 favours Black; it would be too risky to grab the d6-pawn, and we intend ...♙g5 with a more comfortable version of a normal Sveshnikov position.) 14...a5!?N 15.0-0 ♗g5 With a balanced game.

13...a5!? 14.0-0

This position was reached in Jurcik – Najgebauer, Slovakia 2015. My choice would be:

14...♙g5!?N

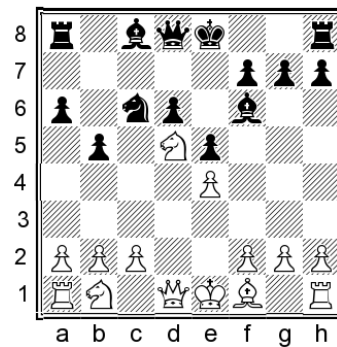
This isn't forced, but it's always useful to activate the bishop. Moreover, although ♘xf6† certainly wasn't a threat at this stage, it's handy not to have to think about that possibility on every move.

15.c3!?

15.♘d2 ♗e6 transposes to the final position of the 13.♘d2 line noted above.

15...♗e6

The position remains balanced.



### 11...♙b8!?

We can utilize the same idea as in Chapter 8, anticipating White's pawn break.

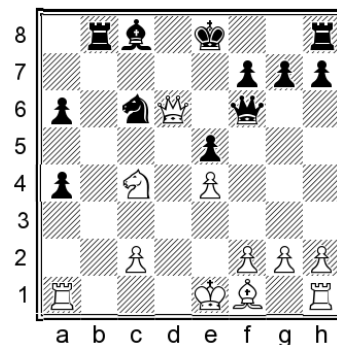
### 12.a4

Here too, White's most challenging approach is to play it anyway.

12.♘d2 ♗g5 gives us no problems at all, with ...♘e7 coming either on the next move or after castling.

### 12...bxa4 13.♙xa4

13.♘d2 was played in Novy – Parizek, Hrdonov 2013, when 13...♙xb2 would have offered Black effortless equality at the very least. Play continues 14.♘c4 ♙b8 15.♘xf6† ♙xf6 16.♙xd6

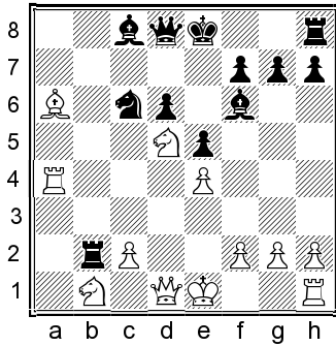


16...♙xd6 (16...♗d7!? 17.♙c7 ♙c8 18.♘d6† ♗e7 19.♘xc8† ♙xc8 20.♙b6 ♘d4 21.♙xf6† ♗xf6 22.♗d3 ♘xc2† 23.♗xc2 ♙xc2 24.0-0 should also result in a draw.) 17.♘d6† ♗e7 18.♘xc8† ♙hxc8 19.♗xa6 ♙c7 20.0-0 ♘b4 21.♙xa4 ♘xc2 I would take Black if given the choice, due to the active rooks and the availability of the strong d4-outpost for the knight, but it should be a draw of course.

### 13...♙xb2 14.♗xa6

14. ♖c1?! ♜b8 15. ♙xa6 was played in Podgurkii – Manescu, Techirghiol 2003, when 15... ♙g5N 16. ♖d1 ♙g4! 17. f3 ♙e6 would have given Black the more pleasant game.

After the text move we will initiate a lively tactical sequence, starting with:



14... ♙g4!

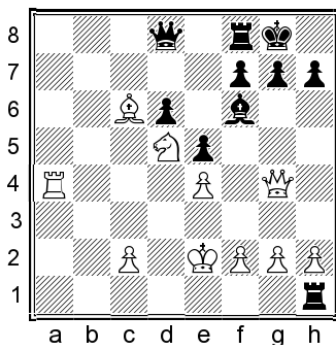
Making full use of the rook on b2.

15. ♖c1!?

The alternative is:

15. ♖xg4!?N 15... ♜xb1† 16. ♙e2 ♜xh1 17. ♙b5 0-0 18. ♙xc6

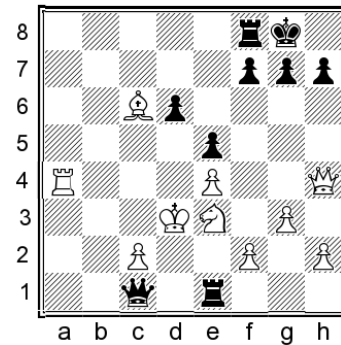
White has sacrificed the exchange in order to obtain some positional domination, and ♜a8 is a huge threat. However, we can conveniently counter with:



18... ♙h4! 19. g3 ♖g5 20. ♖xh4 ♖c1

Now we are material down, but with immediate mating threats. White only has one way to survive. 21. ♗e3! ♜e1† 22. ♙d3!

22. ♙f3? ♜xe3† 23. fxe3 ♖d1† 24. ♙f2 ♖xc2† enables us to pick up the bishop next, with an easy win.



22... ♜xe3†

The same sacrifice, but here it's only enough for a draw.

23. fxe3 ♖d1† 24. ♙c3 ♜c8!?

24... ♖e1† is also fine immediately.

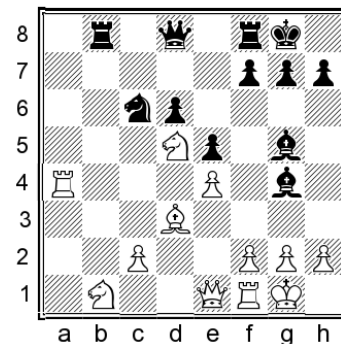
25. ♜c4 ♖e1† 26. ♙d3

White has no choice, as moving to the b-file would allow a deadly rook check.

26... ♖d1†

With perpetual check.

15... ♜b8 16. 0-0 0-0 17. ♙d3 ♙g5 18. ♖e1



18... ♙f4!?N

18... ♙e7 was equal in Degerhammar – Necula, corr. 2002. The text move is an interesting attempt to complicate matters.

19. ♗bc3

19. g3?! is a natural reaction but it weakens White's kingside, and 19... ♙h6 leaves Black slightly for choice.

19... ♖g5

The position remains balanced. In practical terms though, it could be slightly unpleasant for White to face such a build-up of pieces on the kingside, with ... ♗d4 on the agenda as well.

## Conclusion

This chapter has covered some minor options at White's disposal after the opening moves 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 e5 6.♗db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6 8.♗a3 b5. Starting after 9.♗d5 ♙e7, we looked at a few possibilities after 10.♙xf6 ♙xf6 where White refrains from moving the c-pawn, but these are unsurprisingly harmless. How can White hope to profit from leaving the knight offside on a3?

10.♗xe7 is a somewhat more serious proposition, when 10...♗xe7! is our choice. The usual

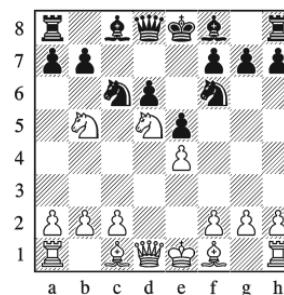
continuation is 11.♙xf6 gxf6, when the position resembles a more popular theoretical line except that here White's pawn is on c2 instead of c3, and we will generally get a fine position by following up with ...d5 and/or ...f5 in the near future.

Finally we saw that 9.♗ab1!? is a better move than it may appear. The position after 9...♙e7 10.♙xf6 ♙xf6 does not hold too many dangers for us, but we should still proceed accurately and look for the appropriate tactical opportunities to make the most of our position.

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# Chapter 11

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## The Trendy 7.♘d5

### Variation Index

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1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6  
5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♘d5 ♘xd5 8.exd5 ♘b8

A) 9.♙f3!?

B) 9.c4 a6

B1) 10.♙a4!?

B2) 10.♘c3 ♙e7

B21) 11.♙d3

B22) 11.♙e2 0-0 12.0-0 f5

B221) 13.f3

B222) 13.f4

C) 9.a4 ♙e7

C1) 10.♙d2

C2) 10.♙e2 0-0 11.0-0 ♘d7

C21) 12.b4!?

C22) 12.a5

C23) 12.♚h1

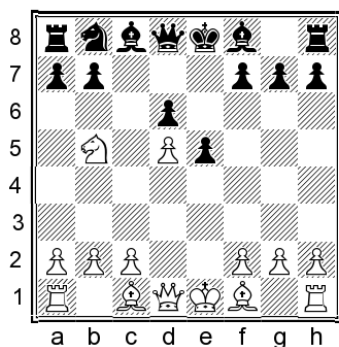
C24) 12.♙d2

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♘d5

This is a well-known system which I have played myself with White. One of the advantages of it is that White dictates the direction of the game and gets to play a thematic pawn structure with well-defined middlegame plans. In recent years, this variation has undergone a resurgence, for a few reasons. With the main lines of the Sveshnikov being so deeply analysed with computers, there are those who like the idea of playing a strategic middlegame guided by plans rather than memorizing forced lines. Paradoxically, there are certain sub-variations of this system in which computers have unearthed new ways of challenging Black's position, so this variation has also attracted some of those players who enjoy learning and playing concrete computer lines. In short, White's system offers something for everyone, and we need to be ready for all types of scenario.

7...♘xd5 8.exd5 ♘b8

8...♘e7 is a valid alternative. Each knight retreat has its pros and cons, but I have always preferred the text move. This way our bishop is free to develop to e7, and the knight can later develop harmoniously to d7.



We have an asymmetrical pawn structure, as is typical for many Sicilian variations. White will attack on the queenside and Black on the kingside. Many of the ensuing middlegames share some common motifs with the King's Indian, although of course there are some differences as well.

We will analyse three main branches: **A)** 9.♙f3!?, **B)** 9.c4 and **C)** 9.a4.

**A) 9.♙f3!?**

Due to some new tactical ideas, this rather obscure line has recently re-emerged.

**9...a6!?**

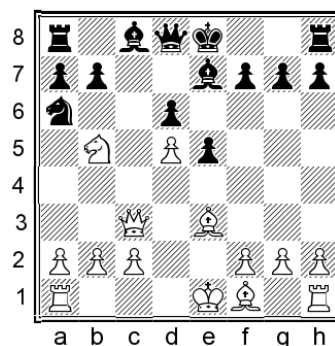
Not the only playable continuation, but it's both fully sound and the most entertaining.

It's also worth mentioning:

9...♙e7

As we'll see, this requires Black to sacrifice a pawn for active play.

10.♙c3 ♘a6 11.♙e3

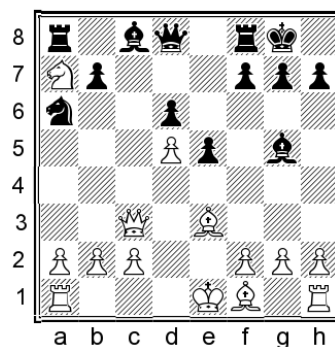


11...0-0

11...b6?? is impossible because 12.♙c6† ♙d7 13.♙b7 wins on the spot.

12.♘xa7 ♙g5

White has a few possibilities, but we have full compensation in all cases.



13.♙xa6

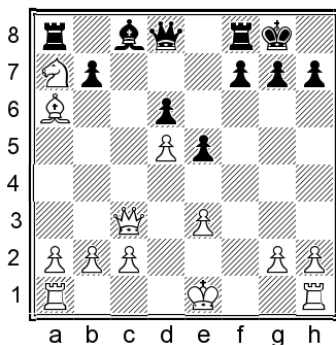
The alternative is: 13.♘b5 ♙xe3 14.♙xe3 f5 15.♙e2 (I also checked 15.♙a3N 15...♙f6 16.0-0 f4 17.♙d2 ♙f5 18.♘c3 ♙f8 when we have plenty of compensation.) 15...♘c5 (15...f4 16.♙d2 ♘c5 is also possible, and if 17.0-0?! ♙f6 our attack is extremely dangerous.) 16.0-0 f4 17.♙c1 ♙f6 18.f3 ♙d7 19.c4 ♙g6 20.b4 ♙g5 Black's attack was

worth more than a pawn in Hansen – Thierry, corr. 2009.

13...♙xe3 14.fxe3!?

We have no problems after: 14.♙xe3 ♖a5† 15.c3 (15.♙d2 ♗xa6 16.♘xc8 ♜fxc8 17.b3 has been played a few times but 17...b5! 18.0-0 ♗a5 easily gave Black enough compensation in D. Jansen – Bonnmann, Germany 2015.) 15...♗xa6 16.♘xc8 ♜fxc8 17.a3 ♗b5 18.♙e2 (18.♙d2 ♜a4 19.f3 ♜c5 20.♞d1 ♗b3 21.0-0 ♜aa5 wins back the pawn with a pleasant game.) 18...♙xd5 19.0-0 ♜c5 20.♞ad1 ♗e6 21.♞d3 d5 22.♞fd1 ♞d8 23.♞e3 The position is equal and the players agreed a draw in Hansen – Cuccumini, corr. 2015.

Let's return to 14.fxe3!?, which forces us to be accurate.

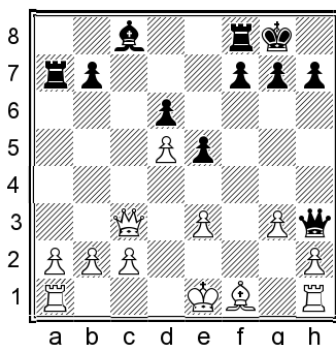


14...♞xa7!

14...♗h4†? proves to be inadequate after 15.g3 ♗e4 16.0-0 ♙h3 17.♞f2 ♞xa7 18.♙f1 ♙xf1 19.♞axf1 ♗xd5 as seen in Ribshstein – Kaganskiy, Israel 2007, when 20.♞xf7!N would have given White good winning chances.

15.♙e2 ♗h4† 16.g3 ♗h3 17.♙f1!N

17.♙f3 was seen in Harshavardhan – Zhigalko, Internet (blitz) 2021, when 17...♙g4N 18.♙xg4 ♗xg4 would have been the most accurate way to maintain full compensation.



17...♗g4 18.♙g2 ♙f5

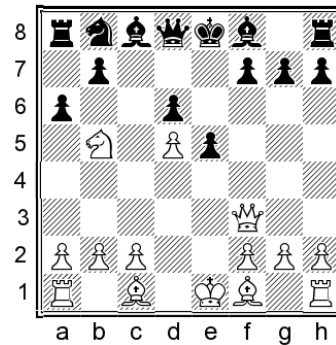
Threatening ...♞c8, so White still doesn't have time to castle.

19.♙d2 ♞c8 20.c3 ♗c4!

Continuing to prevent castling, while targeting d5. 21.a3 ♜a5 22.♞d1 ♞b5

We maintain full compensation.

Let's return to my main recommendation of 9...a6, which may require us to sacrifice an exchange.



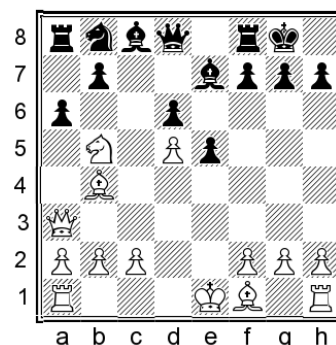
10.♙a3

This was the point behind putting the queen on f3.

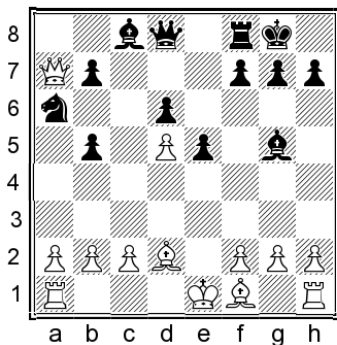
10...♙e7 11.♙g5!?

This is one of the ideas which led to renewed interest in this line. The bishop is immune and White hopes to provoke ...f6.

11.♙d2 is the older move, which gives us an easier game: 11...0-0 12.♙b4 This gives us the option of sacrificing the exchange, and I would be happy to take up the challenge!

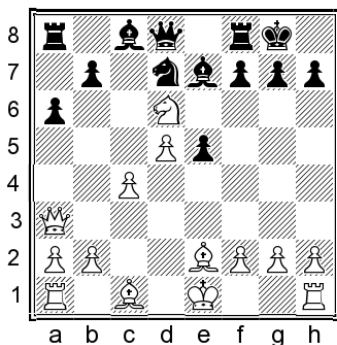


12...axb5! 13.♗xa8 ♘a6 14.♙d2 ♙g5 (14...♗c7 is similar to the 12.♙d2 line below and may transpose after a future ...f5, but it's logical to exploit the fact that our pawn is still on f7.) 15.♗a7 (15.♙xg5 ♗xg5 16.♗a7 ♘b4 17.♘d1 ♙g4† 18.f3 ♙f5 gave Black a crushing initiative in Lagerman – Alvarado Sepulveda, Santo Domingo 2005.)

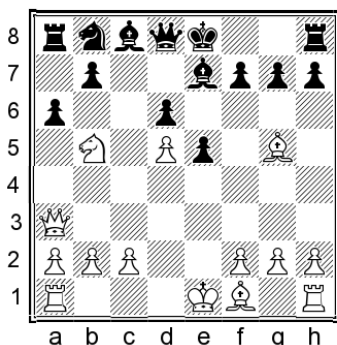


15...♙xd2† 16.♚xd2 This occurred in Vuelban – Figus, Rocca Priora 2012, and now 16...♙f5N would have maintained excellent compensation for the sacrificed material.

11.c4 0-0 12.♙e2 ♘d7 13.♙xd6 has also been tried. My improvement is:



13...b5!N (13...♙f6 14.c5 ♘xd5 15.0-0 favoured White in Donatti – Korniyukov, Internet [blitz] 2021.) 14.0-0 ♖b8 Threatening ...b4. 15.c5 ♙xc5 16.♙xc8 ♗xc8 17.♞d1 ♙d6 We have an active position and a firm blockade of the passed d-pawn.



### 11...f6

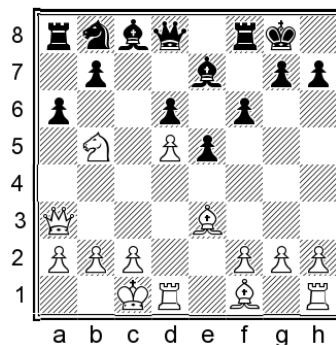
11...♙g5? is no good due to 12.♙xd6† ♗f8 13.♙xc8† ♗g8 14.♙d6, when we can't pin the knight with 14...♙e7? because 15.♙xb7 wins for White.

11...♙f5!? is fully playable though.

### 12.♙d2

An important alternative is:

12.♙e3 0-0 13.0-0



This is a fairly new battleground, although in today's chess it is not always easy to say what's new. 13...♙d7!?

White may soon be ready to launch the g- and h-pawns, so we should develop counterplay.

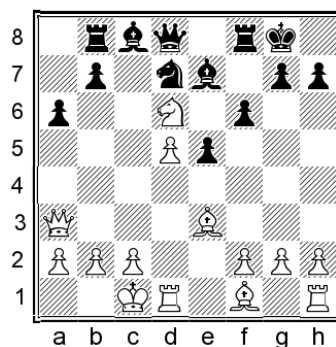
14.♙xd6!N

This looks like a critical move to consider. Alternatives are also possible:

14.♗b1 b6 15.f4 ♙c5 16.♙c3 ♖b8!? led to double-edged play in Bulgarini Torres – Vertiz Gutierrez, corr. 2016, while 16...♙d7N also looks perfectly reasonable.

14.f4N 14...♖b8 15.♙a7!? exf4 16.♙xf4 ♙c5 17.♙xc8 ♗xc8 18.♗b1 f5 gives us promising counterplay, with ...♙f6 coming next.

14...♖b8



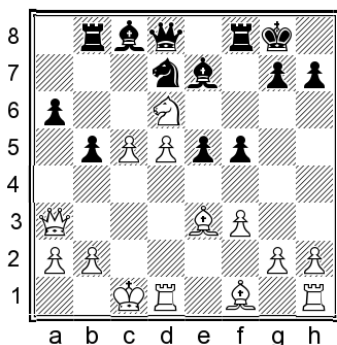
15.c4!?

I was experimenting here to see if White can grab the pawn and get away unpunished.

15.♙a7 gives us a choice: 15...♖a8 forces the bishop back and leads to a repetition, but we can also play for more with 15...f5!? 16.♙xb8 ♙xb8 17.♙xb7 ♙xb7 18.d6 ♙g5† 19.♗b1 ♗h8 20.h4

♙f6 21.♖h3 ♘c6 22.♖b3 ♚d7 when the position is a complete mess.

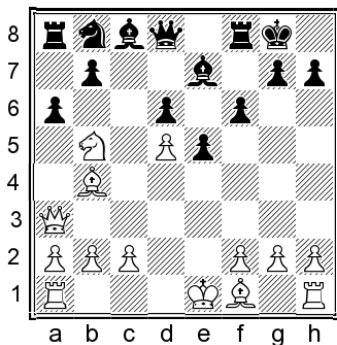
15...f5 16.f3 b5 17.c5



17...b4 18.♚a4 ♜xc5 19.♙xc5 ♙xd6 20.♙xd6 ♚xd6 21.♙c4 ♙d7

We're doing fine.

12...0-0 13.♙b4



13...axb5!

13...♙d7!? is an interesting way to defend d6 by tactical means, but the exchange sacrifice is direct and effective.

14.♚xa8 ♜a6 15.♙d2

Compared with the note on 11.♙d2 above, the f6-pawn prevents an immediate ...♙g5, but we have other good options.

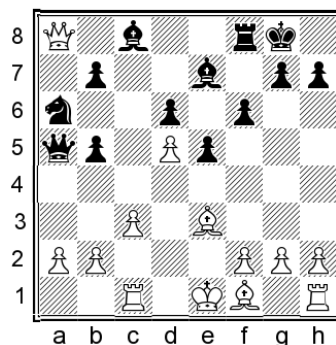
15...♚c7!

15...♚b6 has been more popular but 16.♙e3 ♚a5† 17.c3 isn't so easy.

16.c3

16.♙d3 defends c2 but allows 16...♙h3 followed by picking up g2 and d5, when we're surely at least equal.

16.♖c1 ♚b6 17.♙e3 ♚a5† 18.c3 (18.♙d2N invites a repetition although we could also play on with 18...♚xa2!?)

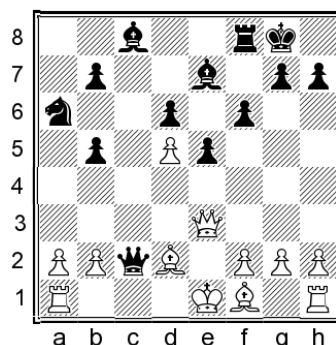


18...f5! We have a promising initiative, and after 19.♚a7 f4 20.♚b6 ♚xa2 Black was already winning in Nestorovic – Ugrcic, Belgrade 2008.

16.♚a7!?

This move sees White bring the queen back into play at the cost of the c2-pawn.

16...♚xc2 17.♚e3



17...♚g6!N

17...♚xb2?! 18.♙c3 ♚a3 19.♙xb5 gave White a slight edge in Packroff – Pommrich, Germany 2007.

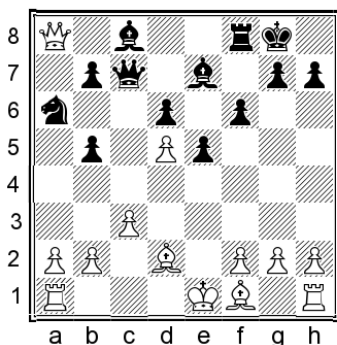
17...f5N is a decent alternative though. For instance, 18.b4 f4 19.♚d3 ♚b2 20.♖c1 ♜xb4 21.♚xb5 ♜c2† 22.♜d1 ♚xb5 23.♙xb5 ♜d4 and the position remains dynamically balanced.

18.h4 f5 19.h5 ♚e8

Despite rerouting our queen to a less active position, we still have excellent prospects. For instance:

20.b4 f4 21.♚b6 ♙d7 22.♚xb7 e4 23.♚xa6 ♙f6 24.♖c1 e3

With a powerful attack.

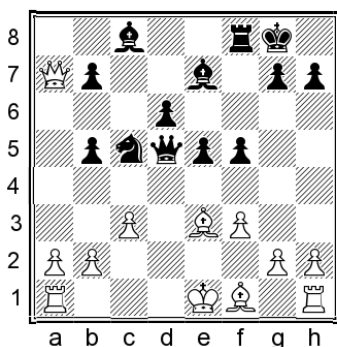


### 16...♙c5!N

16...f5 17.♙a7 was somewhat better for White in Markovic – Panic, Vrnjacka Banja 2008, although 17...♘c5N 18.♙xb5 f4 would still offer practical compensation with a tough battle ahead. Still, we will focus on the objectively best continuation.

### 17.♙e3 ♜xd5 18.♙a7 f5 19.f3 ♘c5!?

We have strong pressure for the sacrificed material. Here are a few further sample continuations:



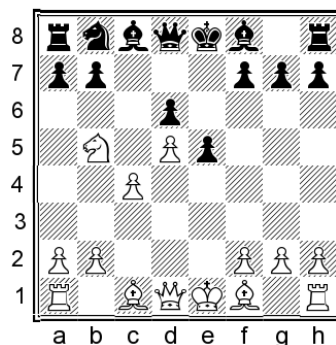
### 20.♙xb5

20.♞d1 ♜c6 21.♙a5 ♙d7 22.c4 f4 23.cxb5 ♜c8 24.♙c4† ♘h8 25.♙f2 ♘e4 26.♙b4 ♘xf2 27.♘xf2 ♜d8 gives us an ongoing initiative in return for the exchange.

### 20...♙h4† 21.♘f1 f4 22.♙xc5 dxc5 23.♙a4 ♜d2 24.♙c4† ♘h8 25.♙e2 ♞d8

Our compensation carries through to the endgame.

### B) 9.c4



This has been known for many decades as typical play. White launches the queenside majority while forming a connection to the d5-pawn. Another point is that whenever ...a6 is played, the knight will conveniently slot in behind the c-pawn. Still, progressing further on the queenside will be far from easy. Moreover, we will not just be sitting and waiting, but instead gaining space in the centre with ...f5 and subsequently looking for attacking opportunities.

### 9...a6

In my young days I learned that it was “correct” to chase the knight away immediately; or if varying the move order, at least to start with 9...♘d7.

Therefore I was surprised to see Giri choose 9...♙e7 against MVL in the 2021 Candidates tournament, as the obvious 10.c5 will force Black to give up the bishop pair. I looked at things a bit more closely and found that Black’s position is actually perfectly playable here as well, after either the usual 10...0-0 or Giri’s 10...♘a6!?. If White refrains from 10.c5 then the play will almost certainly transpose to one of the branches of variation B2 below. Personally I still prefer to hit the knight immediately, but in case you don’t like the complications of variation B1 or don’t have time to learn them before an important game, you may wish to consider 9...♙e7.

After my recommended move White sometimes tries **B1)** 10.♙a4!?, but the usual continuation is **B2)** 10.♘c3.

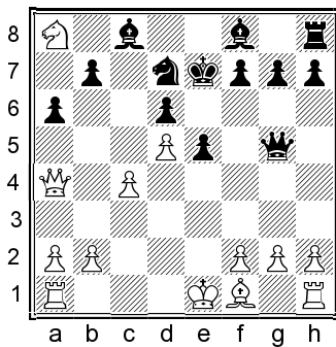
### B1) 10.♙a4!?

White seeks to initiate an early tactical confrontation with this move, but the complications should not worry us.

### 10...♘d7 11.c5

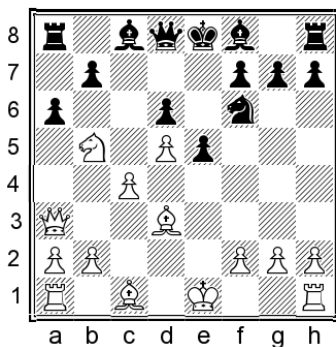
This is the main idea. I checked some other options as well:

11.♙g5 ♖xg5! (11...f6 is playable, but the exchange sac looks good to me.) 12.♘c7† ♔e7 13.♘xa8



This occurred in Wei Yi – P. Papp, Internet (blitz) 2017, and now 13...g6!N would have been most logical. After something like 14.♖a3 ♙h6 15.♞d1 e4 16.h4 ♗f6 17.♙e2 e3! 18.fxe3 ♗e5 we have at least sufficient compensation.

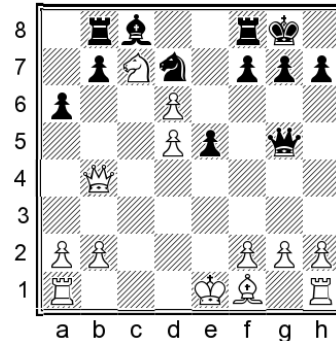
11.♖a3 ♘f6!? 12.♙d3?! (12.c5? dxc5 13.d6 c4! is no good for White. 12.♘c3N is best, and then 12...♙e7 13.♙e2 0-0 14.0-0 ♙f5 15.♙e3 ♘d7 16.f3 b6 leads to a positional battle where the queen on a3 is misplaced.)



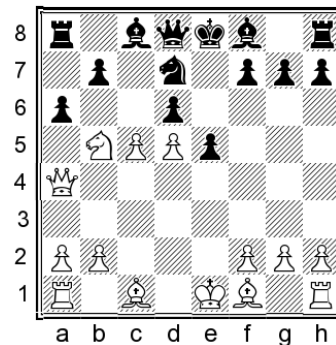
The text move was seen in Jurcsin – Justus, Tatranske Zruby 2006, and now 12...♙h3!N would have been awkward for White.

11.♙e3 ♙e7 12.c5!? We should always be mindful of this motif. 12...0-0 13.cxd6 (13.♘xd6? ♘xc5

14.♙xc5 ♙xd6 gives us a nice lead in development.) 13...♙g5 14.♙xg5 ♗xg5 15.♘c7 ♞b8 16.♗b4 This occurred in Mousa – Lotfy, Assiut 2008, and here Black could have obtained somewhat better chances with:



16...♗g6!N Intending ...b6 or ...b5, with threats against the d6-pawn. White is underdeveloped and the knight is stuck on c7.



### 11...dxc5!

11...♞b8 is playable, but once again the idea of sacrificing the exchange for the initiative is too tempting.

### 12.d6 axb5 13.♗xa8 ♙xd6 14.♙xb5

An important alternative is:

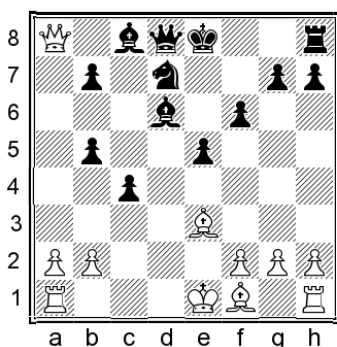
14.♙g5!N

This hasn't been played but is an obvious idea to consider, once you notice the possibility.

14...f6

There is no other decent option.

15.♙e3 c4



The drawback of White's bishop shuffle is that we had time to safeguard the b5-pawn. Still, we need to be careful because we are still a few moves away from achieving decent coordination.

16.0-0-0! ♗e7!

Again the only decent move.

17.♠xd6!

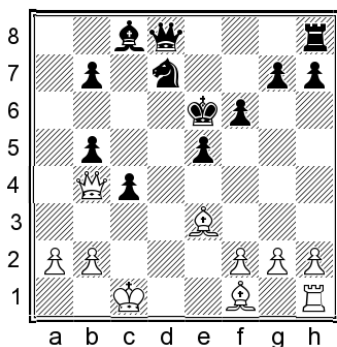
Without this, we would consolidate with ...♖c7 and have no problems.

17...♗xd6 18.♖a3† ♗e6

We can get away with this because White's kingside pieces are undeveloped. Let's not forget that we are now two pawns up, so White needs to do something quickly.

19.♖b4

Attacking b5 is best.



19...e4!

Activating the knight just in time.

20.♖xb5 ♗e5 21.♗xc4† ♗xc4 22.♖xc4† ♖d5

The whole line was virtually forced. We have reached a position with equal material and opposite-coloured bishops, and it's hard to see how either side can hope for real winning chances.

#### 14...0-0

We have a pawn for the exchange, plus a lead in development. Later the ...e4 advance can lead to attacking chances on the kingside.

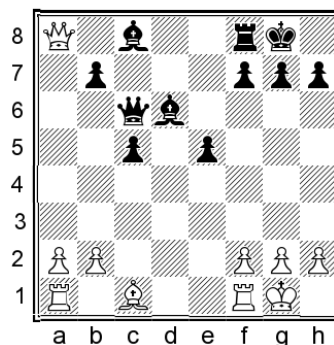
#### 15. ♖a4

There are some other important moves to consider:

15.0-0 e4 16.♖a4 ♗f6 transposes to the main line below.

White has also tried:

15.♗xd7 ♖xd7 16.0-0 ♖c6

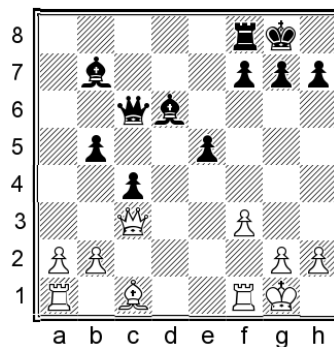


17.♖a7

Also after 17.♖a3N 17...b5 18.♞d1 ♗b7 19.♖f3 e4 20.♖h3 f5 21.♗e3 ♞f6 22.♗g5 ♞f7 23.♗e3 h6 we have excellent compensation and it's not easy to establish play for White.

17...b5 18.♖a3 ♗b7 19.f3 c4 20.♖c3

Here I would take the opportunity to open the long diagonal with:



20...e4!N

20...♗c5† 21.♗e3 ♗d6 22.♞ac1 e4 23.f4 still offered reasonable compensation in Golovchanov – Matsenko, Voronezh 2000, but the b7-bishop definitely approves of my new idea.

21.♗e3

21.f4? e3 22.♖c2 ♞e8 23.♖e2 b4 is crushing.

21...exf3 22.♞xf3 ♖c7 23.♞h3 ♞e8 24.♗f2 ♗e5

25.♖c2 ♗e4 26.♖e2 ♖c6

We have more than enough compensation.

15.♔e3

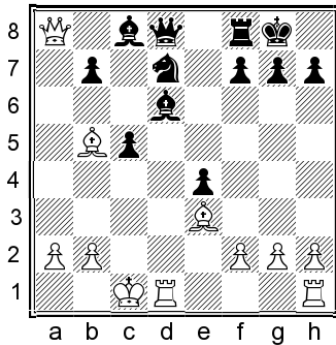
White prepares to castle on the queenside. The best reply is:

15...e4!

15...♖e7 16.0-0-0 e4 17.♗a4 ♘b6 18.♗c2 ♙g4 19.♞d2 left Black with insufficient compensation in Belluire – Molet, Belfort 2010.

16.0-0-0

Also possible is: 16.♗a4 ♘e5 17.0-0-0 ♙e6!N (17...♙f5 also offered decent compensation in Korinek – Ederer, corr. 2015.) 18.♚b1 ♗e7 We reach a complex position with chances for both sides. For instance: 19.♞d2 (19.♗xe4 ♞a8 20.a3 g6 21.g4 ♞a5 gives us good attacking chances.) 19...♞c8 20.♞hd1 ♘d3 21.♙c4 ♗f6 22.f3 b5 23.♙xb5 c4 24.fxg4 h6 We maintain sufficient compensation.



16...♘e5!N

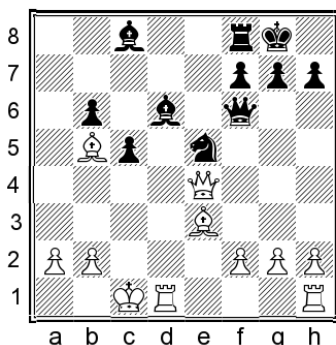
16...♗f6? was played in Tronenkovs – Nathan, Internet (blitz) 2021, when 17.♗a5!N would have left Black without a good move.

17.♗a7!?: b6 18.♗a4

18.♚b1 ♘d3 19.f3 ♗f6 gives us a useful initiative.

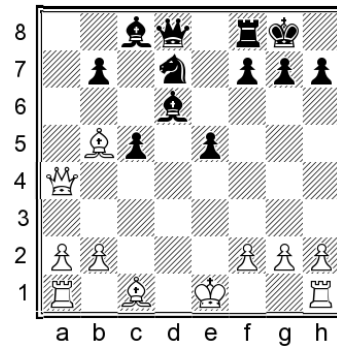
18...♗f6 19.♗xe4

Despite the loss of the e-pawn, we still have nice compensation, for instance:



19...♙b8 20.♞d2 ♙f5 21.♗d5 ♙e6 22.♗b7 ♙xa2

We are back to having a pawn for the exchange, and we have much the safer king.



15...e4 16.0-0 ♘f6

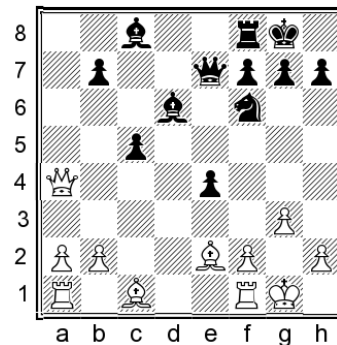
It's obvious that we have enough compensation, with a pawn for the exchange plus some attacking chances.

17.♞d1

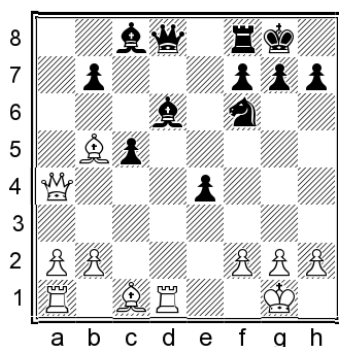
I checked a few other options:

17.♙g5? runs into the simple 17...♙xh2† 18.♚xh2 ♘g4†, and after 19.♚g1 ♗xg5 20.♗xe4 ♗h6 White is in trouble.

17.♙e2 ♗e7 18.g3 (18.♙d2?! ♙xh2†! 19.♚xh2 ♗d6† picks up a pawn while weakening White's kingside. 18.♙e3 ♘g4 19.♙xg4 ♙xg4 20.♞fe1 ♗e6 leaves us with strong compensation.)



18...♘g4 19.♞e1 ♘xh2! Another useful tactical motif to keep in mind 20.♙d1 (20.♚xh2? ♗h4† and the attack crashes through.) 20...♙f5 We have decent play, although it's important not to overestimate our chances in such positions; despite the loss of the h2-pawn, there is no immediate win on the kingside and a complicated battle lies ahead.



17...Qe7 18...Be2

It's logical to bring the bishop back to assist with the defence of the kingside.

18.h3 Qe5 19.g3 Be7 20.Qf4 Wh5 gives us a promising initiative.

18...h6!?N

I recommend this useful waiting move, preventing Qg5.

After 18...Qf5 19.Qe3 Qe5 20.g3 Nd5 21.Qb3 Qxe3 22.fxe3 Qe7 23.Bac1 Black was struggling to prove compensation in Sidenko – Wieland, corr. 2007.

19.g3

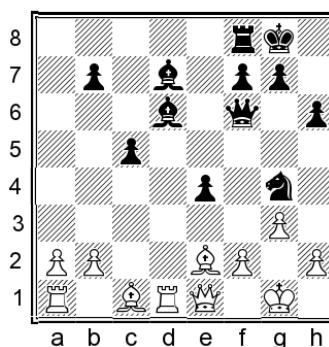
White can also develop the bishop at once:

19.Qe3 Ng4 20.Qxg4 (20.g3 Qxe3 21.fxe3 g6 gives us an improved version of the correspondence game above, with decent compensation.) 20...Qxg4 21.Bd5 b6 22.Qc6 Qc7 23.a4 Bc8 24.Qb5 Qe6 25.Bdd1 Wh4 26.g3 Wh5 White is permanently weak on the light squares.

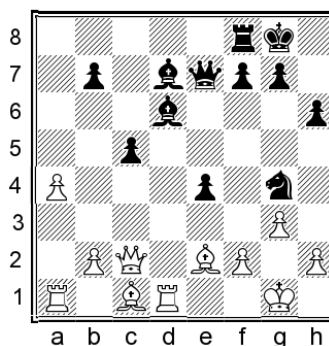
19...Qd7 20.Qc2 Ng4 21.a4

White is looking to activate the rook along the third rank, as well as having a5-a6 ideas.

Another interesting possibility is: 21.Qd2 Qf6 22.Qe1



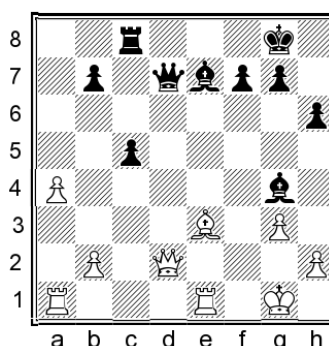
22...c4!? (22...Qe5 is also sensible.) 23.Qf4 Qc5 24.Qf1!? A typical computer move. 24...Qe6 (24...Qxf2? 25.Bxd7 leaves us without a good discovered check.) 25.Qxg4 Qxg4 26.Bd2 Qe6 We have strong counterplay.



21...e3!

We are well past the limits of any normal opening preparation, but I extended the analysis because I find it fascinating how Black's active pieces can always generate counterplay.

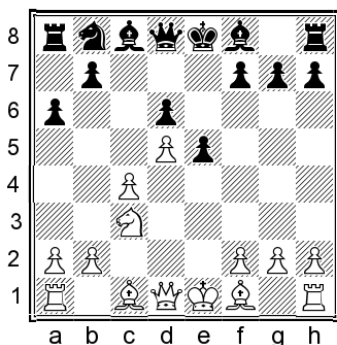
22.Qxg4 exf2† 23.Qxf2 Qxg4 24.Be1 Qd7 25.Qf4 Qe7 26.Qe3 Bc8 27.Qd2



27...Qc6! 28.Qxh6 Qf6 29.Qf4 c4

Despite having picked up a pawn, White has serious problems generating anything more than just surviving moves.

B2) 10.Qd3



This is the old main line and there have been no particularly special theoretical developments in recent years. In general we have nothing to worry about, and we will use our kingside pawn majority to launch an attack.

### 10...♙e7

We will analyse **B21)** 11.♘d3 followed by the more common **B22)** 11.♙e2.

#### **B21) 11.♘d3**

The general nature of the position is the same regardless of where the bishop goes, although of course there are some differences in the details. We will start by analysing the more active square, where the bishop can sometimes play a useful role, but may also be exposed to attack in some lines.

### 11...0-0 12.0-0 f5

It's important to note that the bishop is slightly unstable on d3. For instance, our knight may come to e5 or c5 with gain of tempo at some moment.

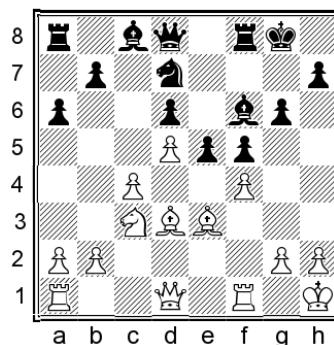
### 13.f3

This has been the usual choice.

A popular alternative is:

13.f4 ♘d7 14.♙h1 g6 15.♙e3 ♙f6

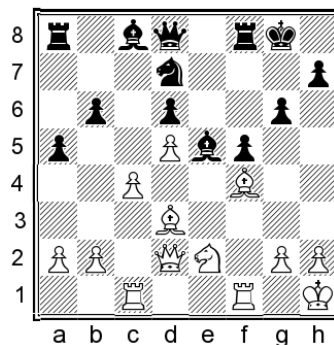
White has two logical ways to approach this position:



### 16.♙c1

Another good example continued 16.♙d2 exf4 17.♙xf4 ♘e5 18.♙e2 ♙d7 19.♙ac1 ♙c8 20.♘d1 b5 21.cxb5 ♙xc1 22.♙xc1 ♙xb5 23.♙xb5 axb5 24.♙d2 ♙a8 25.b3 ♙c8 and Black was in control in Trapl – Mokry, Prague 1978.

16...exf4 17.♙xf4 ♙e5 18.♙d2 b6 19.♘e2 a5



Black builds a wall on the dark squares before taking action in the centre.

20.♙b1 ♙xf4 21.♘xf4 ♘e5 22.♙d4 ♙b8 23.♙c3 ♙f6 24.b3 ♙d7

Black once again had the upper hand in Vidic – Miljkovic, Palic 2014. In both of the above examples, it was noticeable how strong the knight became on e5.

### 13...♘d7

A reasonable alternative is:

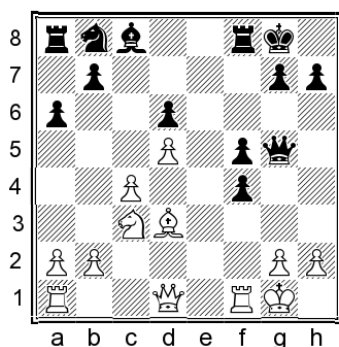
13...♙g5

This could easily transpose to lines given below, but there's also an independent twist:

14.♙xg5 ♙xg5 15.f4!?

After 15.♙h1 ♘d7 16.b4 we can choose between 16...a5 and 16...e4!?, both of which transpose to lines considered below under 13...♘d7.

15...exf4



16. ♖e2

White hopes that the lead in development will prove more important than our extra pawn.

16... ♖h8

It's useful to be able to put the knight on d7 without allowing the queen to land on e6 with check.

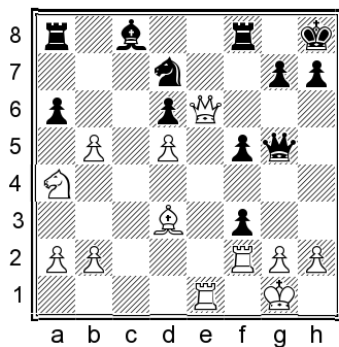
17. ♖ae1 b6 18. ♗a4

18. ♗c2 was seen in Sanchez Rodenas – Fajs, corr. 2010, when 18... ♖a7!N would have activated the rook in a nice way. After something like 19. ♗a4 ♖c7 20. ♗e8! ♖h4 we have a full share of the chances.

18... ♗d7 19. ♖e6 b5! 20. cxb5 f3! 21. ♖f2

21. ♖xf3?? ♗e5 wins.

Here I found a way to improve Black's play from Warzecha – Pirs, email 2011:



21... axb5!N 22. ♗xb5 ♗f6 23. ♖e7 ♗a6 24. ♗c6

24. ♗xa6? is impossible due to 24... ♖ae8.

24... h5!

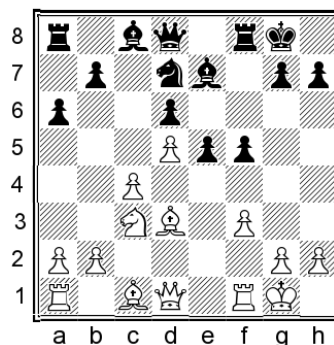
The position remains wildly unclear, but with good counterplay for us. For instance:

25. ♗xa8 ♖xa8 26. ♖xd6 ♗e4 27. ♖b6 ♗e2 28. ♗c3 ♖d2 29. ♖b1 ♖d3 30. ♖a1 ♖a6!

Bringing the final piece into the attack.

31. ♖b8† ♖h7

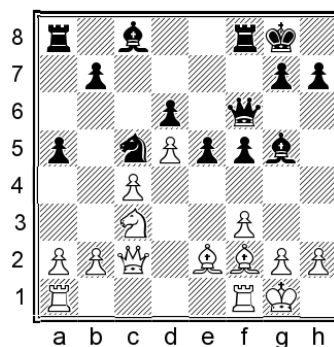
The computer calls it 0.00. From a human perspective, I would prefer our safer king over White's slight material advantage.



14. ♗h1

This is always a useful move.

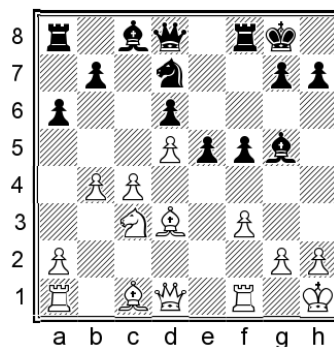
White can also avoid the bishop exchange with 14. ♗e3 ♗g5 15. ♗f2, although our bishop is not bad at all. A game of mine continued: 15... ♖f6 16. ♖c2 ♗c5 17. ♗e2 a5



18. ♗a4 ♗xa4 19. ♖xa4 e4 20. ♖a3 ♗f4 Both sides have played logically and the position was dynamically balanced in Smeets – Pavlovic, Wijk aan Zee 2004.

14... ♗g5 15. b4

Now we have at least two good continuations which are equally viable but differ in sharpness.



15... a5

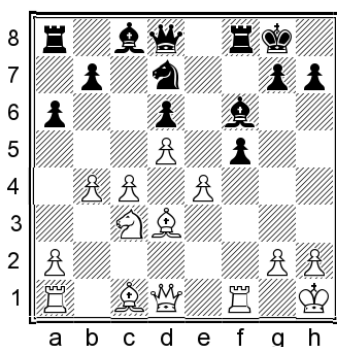
This is the more solid continuation.

The ultra-dynamic alternative is:

15...e4!? 16.fxe4

White can also insert 16.♙xg5 ♖xg5 and now after 17.fxe4 ♘e5 18.♙e2 (18.exf5? ♖e3 wins material for us) 18...f4 19.c5 ♖f6 20.♗d2 ♙g4 a draw was agreed in Guaimare – Arnold, corr. 2020, in a position where Black has plenty of compensation for the pawn.

16...♙f6



17.♙d2N

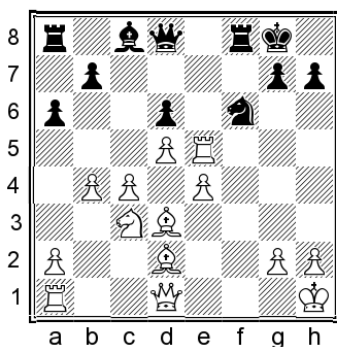
This looks like a logical human choice.

17.♖c2 fxe4 18.♙e2 (18.♙xe4?? ♙xc3 exploits White's weak first rank) 18...a5 19.b5 ♙e5 20.♖xf8† ♘xf8 21.♙e3 ♙f5 22.♖f1 ♗h4 23.♙g1 ♙g6 was fine for Black in Ottesen – Nenneman, corr. 2020.

17...♙e5!

This leads to some amazing tactical resources. The critical line continues:

18.♖xf5 ♘f6 19.♖xe5



19...♘g4!! 20.♙g5 ♖b6 21.♗d2

21.c5? ♖xb4 leads to material gains for us.

21...♘f2†

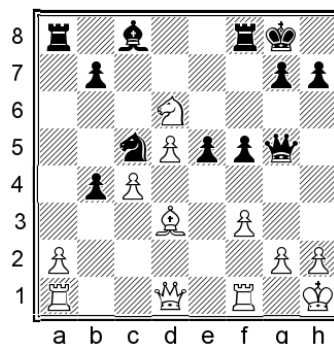
21...♗d4!? keeps the game going for one more move, but after 22.♖e7 we must take a draw anyway.

22.♙g1 ♘h3†

Neither side can avoid the perpetual check.

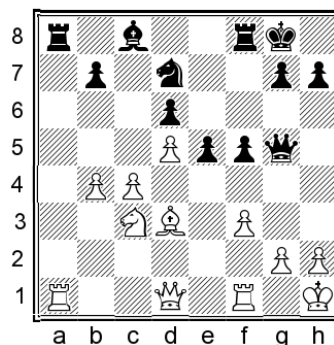
### 16.a3

Another good example continued: 16.♙xg5 ♖xg5 17.♘b5 axb4 18.♘xd6 ♘c5



19.♘xc8 ♖xc8 20.♙c2 g6 Black had nice control on the dark squares in Ottesen – Rawlings, corr. 2019.

16...axb4 17.♙xg5 ♖xg5 18.axb4



18...♖xa1 19.♖xa1 ♖e3!?

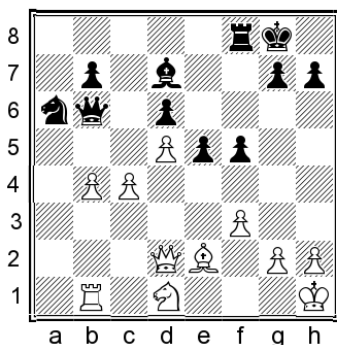
We should try to profit from the unstable position of the bishop.

20.♙e2 ♘b8!

We target the b4-pawn with this interesting manoeuvre.

21.♖c1

White soon fell into difficulties after: 21.♖b2 ♘a6 22.♖b1 ♙d7 23.♘d1 ♖b6 24.♗d2

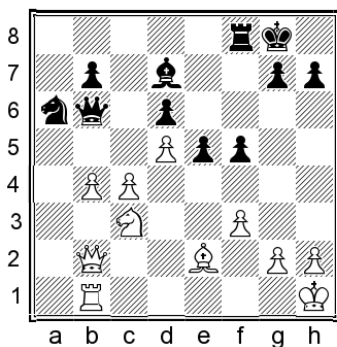


24...♖d4! 25.♗xd4 exd4 26.♔g1 ♜b8! 27.♘f2 b5  
White was unable to hold the endgame in  
Koronowski – Vegjeleki, corr. 2011.

### 21...♗b6 22.♗b2

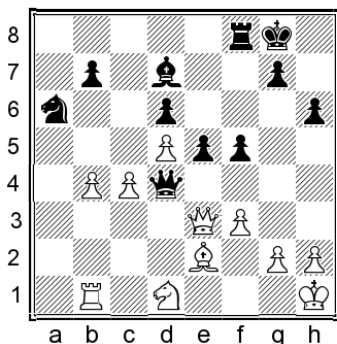
Another example continued 22.♗a3 ♘a6  
23.♞b1 ♗e3 24.c5 dxc5 25.♙xa6 cxb4 26.♗xb4  
bxa6 27.♗c4, when White had some  
compensation for the pawn but no advantage in  
Hansen – Pommrich, corr. 2016. 27...♗d4N looks  
natural and good.

### 22...♘a6 23.♞b1 ♙d7



### 24.♗c1

24.g3 ♞e8 25.♔g2 ♗d4 26.♗b3 e4 27.f4 ♞a8  
gave Black nice play in Hansen – Cvak, corr. 2015.  
24...♗d4 25.♘d1 h6 26.♗e3



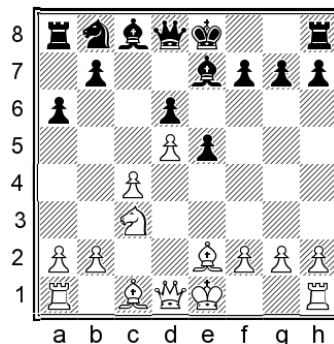
### 26...♞b8!

Threatening ...b5, when White's queenside  
pawns will be weak.

### 27.b5 ♘c5 28.♗xd4 exd4 29.♔g1 ♞a8

White was under unpleasant pressure in Yao  
Lan – Ushenina, China 2016.

### B22) 11.♙e2



This is the most popular continuation. White  
develops solidly and avoids making the bishop a  
target for ...f5/...e4 and/or ...♘c5 or ...♘e5.

### 11...0-0 12.0-0 f5

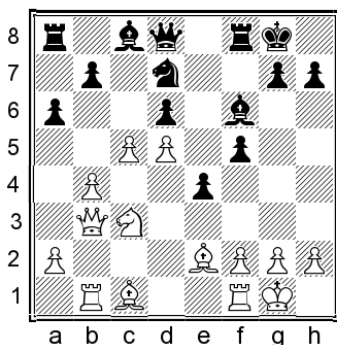
We follow our usual plan.  
We will analyse B221) 13.f3 and B222) 13.f4 in  
some detail.

13.♔h1 ♘d7 will almost certainly convert to one  
of the main lines after White's f-pawn advances  
either one or two squares.

Let's see what happens if White ignores the  
kingside:

13.♞b1 ♘d7 14.b4 e4 15.c5 ♙f6  
15...♘e5 has been played but I prefer the text move.  
16.♗b3

16.♘a4N 16...b5! 17.cxb6 ♘xb6 is fine for us.  
Another interesting possibility is: 16.♗d2N  
16...♔h8 17.♙b2 dxc5 18.d6 c4!! 19.♘d5  
(19.♙xc4? b5 gives us a clear advantage.) 19...b5  
20.♘c7 ♙b7 We'll have full compensation for the  
exchange, no matter which rook White decides to  
take.



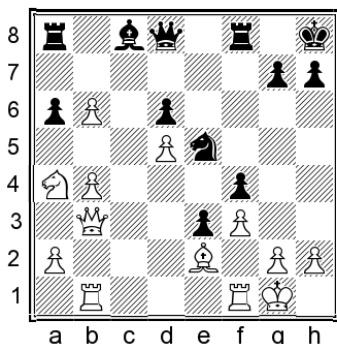
16...♔h8!N

16...dxc5 17.d6† ♔h8 also led to double-edged play in Moen – Johannessen, Oslo 2009, but somehow I prefer the text move.

17.♘a4 b5 18.cxb6 ♕e5!

Centralizing the bishop is important; Kotronias doesn't mention this idea in his book.

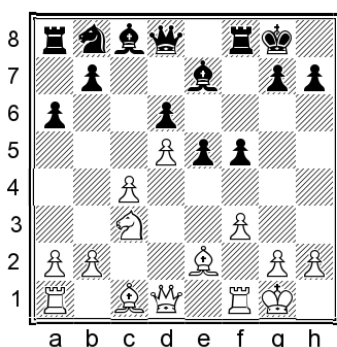
19.♖b2 f4 20.f3 e3 21.♕xe5 ♘xe5



22.♞bc1 ♗g5 23.♔h1 ♞f6

With a dangerous attack.

### B221) 13.f3



This is less popular than the other main line below, but still a well-known way of attempting to deal with our kingside advance.

13...♘d7 14.♕e3

This usually implies that White intends to preserve the dark-squared bishop from being

exchanged. Let's see what happens if White allows the bishop trade:

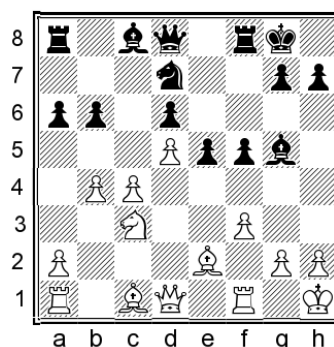
14.a3 ♕g5 15.b4 b6 16.♔h1 transposes to the 14.♔h1 line below.

14.♔h1

White intends to keep things solid on the kingside, and also prepares b2-b4 by removing the king from potential checks from the queen on b6.

14...♕g5 15.b4 b6

Both sides will attempt to play on the side of their respective pawn majorities. No immediate breakthroughs are possible, so a tense manoeuvring battle lies ahead.

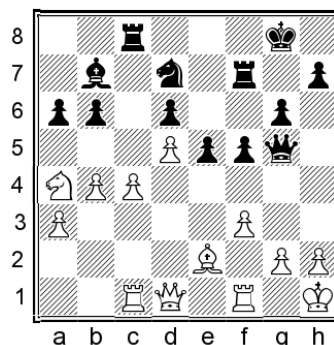


16.a3 ♕b7

The bishop may look passive here but it has some purpose. It makes room for the rook to go to c8, while the pressure on the d5-pawn will make it harder for White to carry out c4-c5. Occasionally, we may even be able to play a timely ...b5. Another possible plan to keep in mind is ...a5 followed by ...♕a6, to attack the c4-pawn and provoke a concession.

17.♕d3

Another good example continued: 17.♞b1 ♞c8 18.♕d2 ♗f6 19.♘a4 ♞f7 20.♞c1 g6 21.♕xg5 ♗xg5

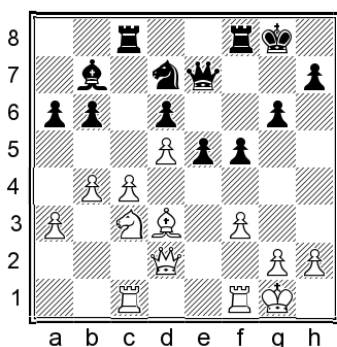


22.c5!? bxc5 23.bxc5 ♖xc5 24.♗xc5 ♜xc5 25.♞xc5 dxc5 26.d6 ♜d7 27.♞b3† ♔g7 28.♞e6 ♙c6 29.♞xe5† ♞f6 The position remained balanced and a draw was soon agreed in Sigurosson – Da-Riva Alonso, corr. 2016.

17...♞c8 18.♙d2

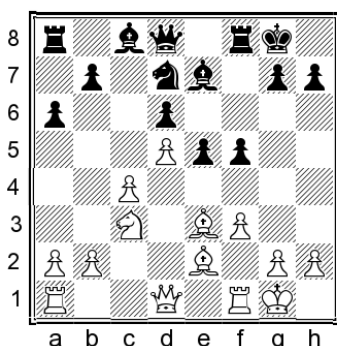
After 18.♗a4 g6 19.♞e2 ♙xc1 20.♞axc1 a5 21.♞e3 ♔g7 22.♞b1 ♙a6 23.♞fc1 ♞f7 24.♞d2 ♞f8 25.♞e3 the position remained level and the players agreed a draw in Rinat – Kevin, corr. 2014.

18...♞f6 19.♞c1 ♙xd2 20.♞xd2 ♞e7 21.♔g1 g6



22.♞fd1 ♞c7 23.♞c2 ♞fc8 24.g3 e4 25.fxe4 ♗e5

Black had enough activity in Barbalic – Dulany, corr. 2016.



14...♙g5

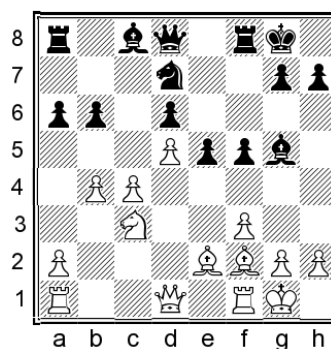
Again we make this typical move, either exchanging our bishop or activating it with gain of tempo.

15.♙f2

White keeps the bishop in order to support the future c4-c5 break, and the queenside attack in general.

Allowing the exchange with 15.♞d2?! gave Black easy play after 15...♙xe3† 16.♞xe3 a5! 17.f4 ♞e8 18.♙d3 ♗c5 19.♙c2 ♙d7 in Kasimdzhinov – Carlsen, Moscow 2007.

15...b6 16.b4



16...♙f4!?

This is not just a rare move in this specific position – it's an unusual type of manoeuvre in general. I want to put the queen on g5 next.

17.♗a4

This was played in the only practical example I found, and it's a normal idea to support c4-c5.

17.♔h1N 17...♞g5 reaches a double-edged position which can be compared with the lines below.

The other plausible continuation is:

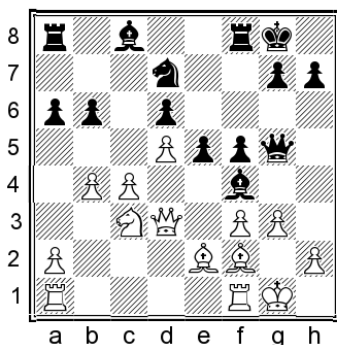
17.g3N 17...♞g5

This supports a bishop trade via e3, and we may also consider lifting the rook into the attack via f6 at some point. It may look as if our bishop is in danger of being trapped, but concretely everything works out fine.

18.♞d3

Preventing the bishop trade.

18.♔h1 proves harmless after 18...♙e3 19.♙xe3 ♞xe3 20.♞c1 ♞xc1 21.♞fxc1, and now 21...♔f7 22.♔g2 g5!? 23.♞ab1 h5 sees us gain an impressive amount of space, while White has nothing special on the queenside.



18...a5!

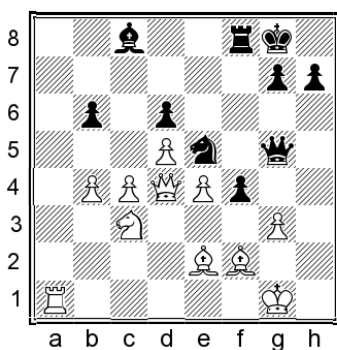
18...♖f6? is no good because of 19.♔h1.

19.♔h1

19.a3 takes us to another fascinating line: 19...axb4

20.axb4 e4! 21.fxe4 ♖xa1 22.♖xa1 ♜e5 23.♙d4

♙xg3! 24.hxg3 f4

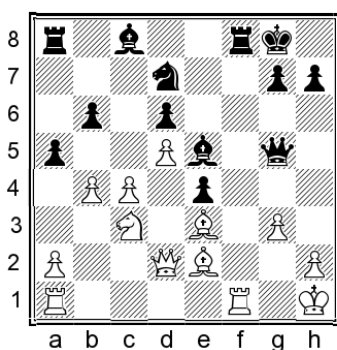


Our attack is extremely threatening, but 25.♙d2! ♙g4 26.♜b5! ♙xe2 27.♙xe2 fxe3 28.♙e3 ♙h4 29.♜d4! ♙xe4 30.♖f1! enables White to maintain the balance.

19...e4! 20.fxe4

20.gxf4 is safer, when 20...exd3 21.fxe4 dxe2 22.♜xe2 axb4 reaches a double-edged position without queens.

20...♙e5 21.♙e3 fxe4 22.♙d2



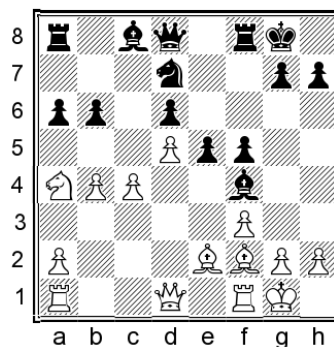
22...♙g6! 23.♖xf8† ♜xf8 24.bxa5 ♖xa5

The position is unclear. It's worth mentioning that it would be risky for White to grab the b-pawn:

25.♙xb6 ♖a3 26.♖c1 ♙g4!

We have a strong initiative.

Returning to the main line, my natural improvement is:



17...♙g5!N

The typical move, with the same two ideas: exchanging bishops via e3, and lifting the rook via f6.

17...♖b8 gave Black a playable position in Rombaldoni – Birnboim, Jerusalem 2015, but I find the recommended move more purposeful.

18.c5

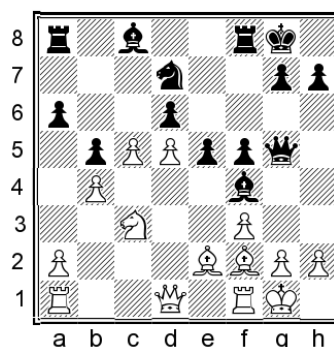
It seems logical to press ahead on the queenside.

18.♜xb6? ♜xb6 19.♙xb6 ♙h4 leaves White facing a decisive attack.

18.♔h1?! ♙h6 19.g3 ♙e3 gives us slightly better chances.

18.g3 may be White's best, although 18...♙e3 19.♙d3 ♙xf2† 20.♖xf2 a5 is still quite pleasant for us.

18...b5! 19.♜c3



**19...♖f6!**

White has made good progress on the queenside, but our attack is dangerous. Let's see a few more moves.

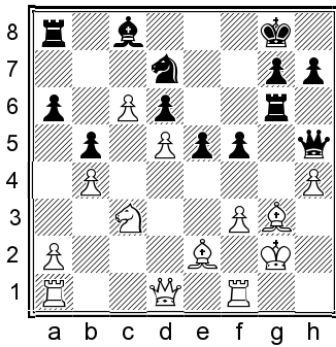
**20.c6?**

White must insert 20.h4 to have a chance of surviving, but after 20...♗h6 White's weakened kingside is the most important factor in the evaluation.

**20...♖h6! 21.g3 ♗h5 22.h4 ♖g6**

The attack is crushing. For instance:

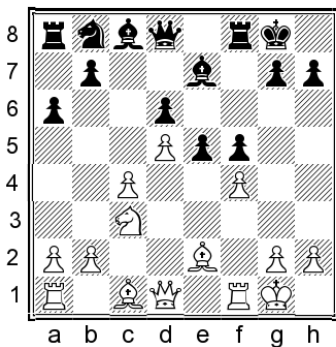
**23.♔g2 ♕xg3 24.♕xg3**



**24...♝f6!**

White has no defence. This highly instructive line shows how quickly the game may take a sharp turn.

**B222) 13.f4**



This is the most popular continuation and arguably the most critical line of the 9.c4 set-up. We saw something similar in the notes to variation B21, where White's bishop was on d3 instead of e2. Here too, we will use the e5-square to create counterplay, although this time White's bishop is out of attacking range of the knight. Meanwhile,

White hopes for active play on the queenside and perhaps in the centre.

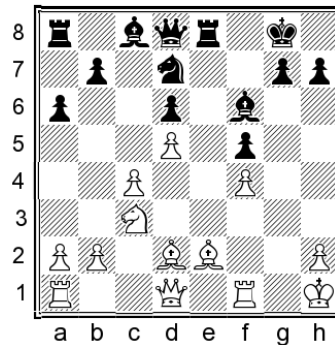
**13...♞d7 14.♔h1 ♕f6**

In virtually all the lines that follow, the e5- and f4-pawns will be exchanged, and one of our minor pieces will occupy the e5-outpost. My usual preference is to place the bishop on e5 and send the knight on a different route.

**15.♗c2**

In most lines we can get a good position by relying on the same type of plan. Let's see some examples:

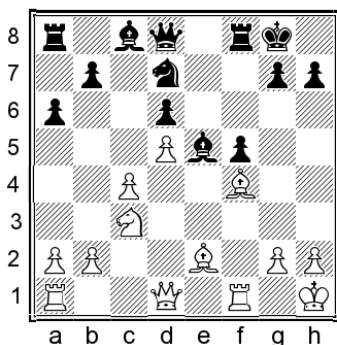
15.g3?! reminds me of a famous Tshchovskiy – Tal game. Recapturing with the pawn on f4 keeps our pieces away from e5, but significantly weakens White's kingside. 15...♖e8 16.♕d2 (16.♗c2 exf4 17.♕xf4N 17...♞e5 is also excellent for us.) 16...exf4 17.gxf4



In Smeets – Ikonnikov, Amsterdam 2001, Black could have obtained a clear advantage with 17...♞c5!N, when White suffers from weak squares and general disharmony.

15.fxe5?! ♕xe5 16.♕f4 reaches the same position as the next line below, except that here it's Black to move. After 16...b6 17.♗d2 ♕xf4 18.♗xf4 ♞e5 Black had a pleasant game in Figueiras – Ribeiro, corr. 2003.

**15.♕e3 exf4 16.♕xf4 ♕e5**



Again I suggest placing the bishop on the central outpost. White has a few options but the general character of the play remains the same.

17. ♖xe5

17. ♕d2 transposes to the main line below.

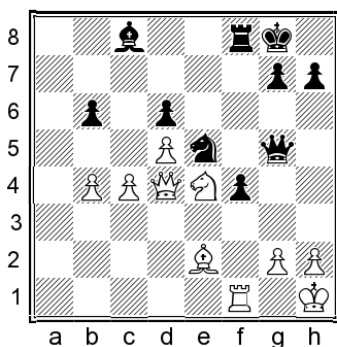
17... ♗xe5 18. ♕d4

Centralizing is logical.

18... b6 19. b4 a5 20. a3 axb4 21. axb4 ♖xa1 22. ♖xa1 f4

We will see the same strategy in the main line below.

23. ♖f1 ♕g5 24. ♗e4



24... ♕h6!N

24... ♕g6 was seen in Tugaj – Pavlov, Rodatycki 2006; although that move is playable too, the text move has an advantage which will soon become clear.

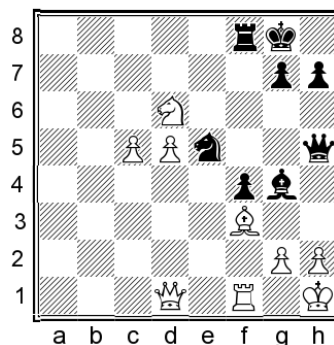
25. c5 bxc5 26. bxc5 ♖g4

In the above game White traded bishops in the equivalent position, but here the mate threat on h2 would make a big difference, so White has to do something different.

27. ♕d1 ♕g6! 28. ♗xd6 ♕h5

The agile queen continues to annoy White.

29. ♖f3

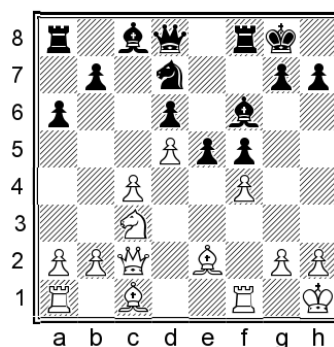


29... ♖b8!

Threatening to take on f3 and bring the rook to b2.

30. ♕e2 ♗xf3 31. gxf3 ♕xd5

We are comfortably equal.

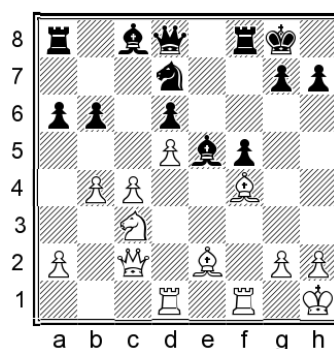


15... exf4 16. ♖xf4 ♖e5

Again I'm happy to stick with our usual plan, although 16... ♗e5!? is a playable alternative which leads to an even more complicated game.

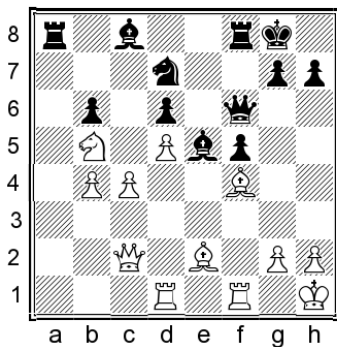
17. ♕d2

17. ♖ad1 doesn't change much. 17... b6 18. b4 This position has been reached in a few games. My new idea is:

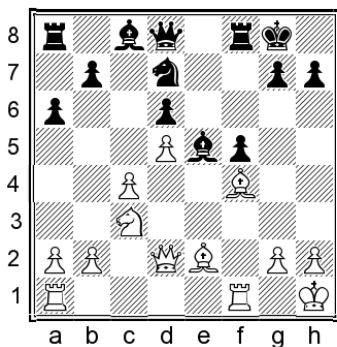


18... a5!N (18... ♖xf4 19. ♖xf4 g6 20. ♗a4 ♖b7 is also quite playable and the position was still about equal in Apicella – Grollemund, France 2001.) 19. a3 axb4 20. axb4 ♕f6 21. ♗b5 (21. ♖xe5 ♗xe5 22. c5 bxc5 23. bxc5 f4! is an instructive point: we can allow White a beautiful passed pawn with

24.c6, as after 24...♖g4 25.♙xg4 ♘xg4 26.♞d2 f3  
 White may not even make it to the endgame...)



21...♙xf4 22.♞xf4 ♘e5 We have a nice position.  
 My illustrative line continues: 23.c5 bxc5 24.bxc5  
 dxc5 25.♞xc5 ♞a2 26.♘d4 h6 Again we have at  
 least equal chances.



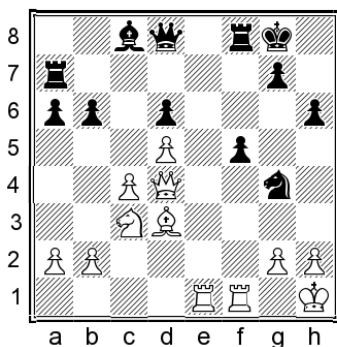
### 17...b6

Again we tighten up our control of the dark squares. Now White has various ideas, most of them connected with playing on the queenside.

### 18.b4

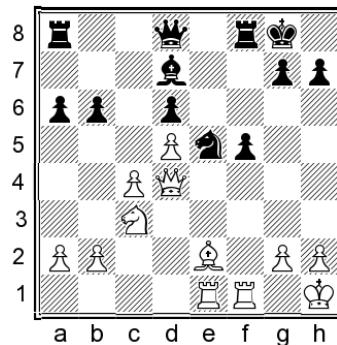
This logical move is White's main approach. Let's check some other ideas:

18.♙g5N 18...♘f6 19.♞ae1 doesn't achieve much.  
 For instance: 19...h6 20.♙f4 ♙xf4 21.♞xf4 ♞a7  
 22.♙d3 ♘g4 23.♞d4



23...♞e7! 24.♞xe7 ♞xe7 25.♞xb6 f4 Our attacking chances are worth at least a pawn.

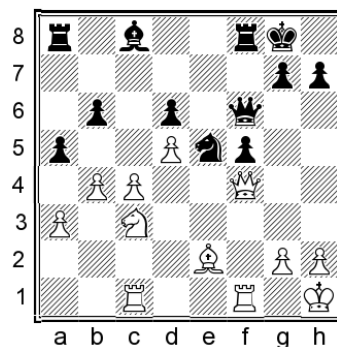
18.♞ae1!? looks natural but is actually not such a great idea, as White's forces have no particular strength in the centre. 18...♙xf4 19.♞xf4 ♘e5 20.♞d4 ♙d7



It's hard to suggest a good plan for White, and 21.♙d1 ♞c8 22.b3 ♞c7 23.♞e3 b5 saw Black take control of the game in Caposciutti – Starostits, Budapest 1997.

### 18.♞ac1

This is a logical approach; White wants to play b2-b4 without allowing an exchange of rooks on a1. 18...♙xf4 19.♞xf4 ♘e5 20.b4 a5 21.a3 ♞f6

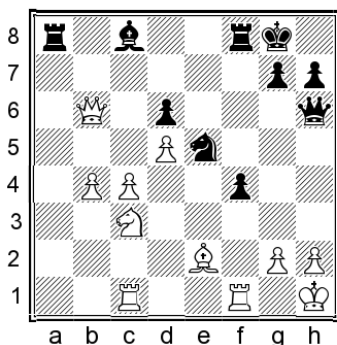


We'll see something similar in the main line below. The lack of a rook exchange on a1 changes some details of course, but the general evaluation is still fine for us.

### 22.♞e3!N

This seems a natural idea to consider, hitting b6. 22.♘b5 axb4 23.axb4 ♞a2 24.♘c3 ♞b2 saw Black make active use of the rook in Sciallero – Sacripanti, corr. 2009.

22...axb4 23.axb4 f4!? 24.♞xb6 ♞h6



We have good attacking chances for the sacrificed pawn. An important factor is that the rook on c1 might hang after ...f3 in some lines. My analysis continues:

25. ♖g1 ♕g4 26. c5

26. ♕xg4 ♜xg4 27. c5 ♞ab8 also gives us plenty of counterplay.

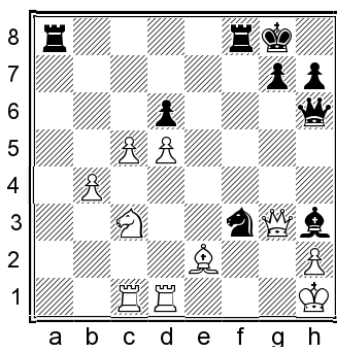
26...f3! 27. gxf3 ♕h3 28. ♞fd1 ♜xf3!

28...♞f5 29. ♞a1! ♞xa1 30. ♞xa1 ♞g5 31. ♞a8† ♜f7 32. ♞a7† forces a draw.

After the text move White is under a strong attack, for instance:

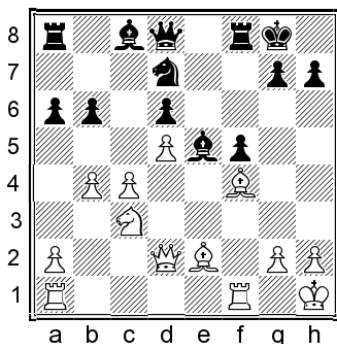
29. ♖g3

29. ♕xf3 ♞xf3 30. cxd6 ♞af8 31. ♜e4 ♞h4 32. ♜g5 ♕g4 leaves White without a good defence.



29...♜xh2!! 30. ♖xh2 ♞f4

With decisive threats.



18...a5!N

This is important to remember: it's not about one move, but the concept of exchanging rooks on a1.

18...♕b7?! fails to equalize after 19. ♞a1 (19. ♕xe5!N 19...♜xe5 20. ♞d4 looks like an even more direct route to an edge) 19...♞c8 20. ♜a4 ♜h8 21. ♕xe5 ♜xe5 22. ♞d4 as seen in Ayza Ballester – Oussama, Catalonia 1996.

19. a3 axb4 20. axb4 ♞xa1 21. ♞xa1 ♞f6!

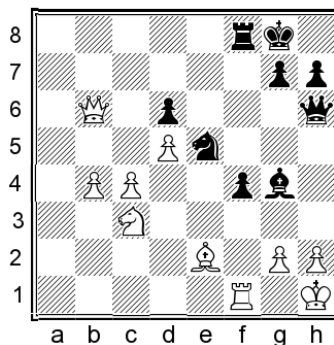
The exchange on a1 benefits us in a couple of ways: White's rook is undefended, and the absence of a white rook on the kingside makes our attacking ideas with ...f4 more venomous.

22. ♕xe5 ♜xe5 23. ♞d4 f4

23...♕d7!? is a good alternative, when 24. ♞xb6? is not possible due to 24...♜xc4 or 24...♜g4.

24. ♞f1 ♞h6 25. ♞xb6 ♕g4!

25...f3 26. ♕xf3 ♜xf3 27. ♞xf3 ♞xf3 28. gxf3 ♞c1† 29. ♜g2 ♞d2† leads to perpetual check, but we can play for more.



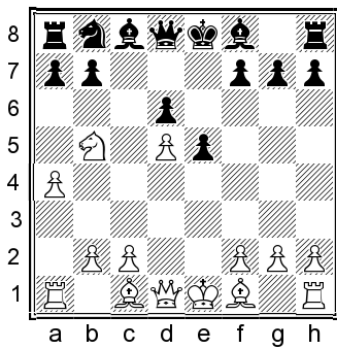
26. ♖g1!

Without this, White would be clearly worse.

26...♞h5

Our initiative fully compensates for the sacrificed pawn, and in a practical game I would prefer Black's chances due to our safer king.

C) 9.a4



This move has been known for a long time, but it became particularly trendy after Caruana used it against Carlsen in Games 8 and 10 of their 2018 World Championship match. White intends to advance the pawn further, and to meet ...a6 with ♖a3-c4, giving this variation quite a distinct character compared with 9.c4 – although the overall plans remain similar, with White generally playing on the queenside and Black on the kingside.

### 9...♙e7

9...a6?! is premature in view of 10.♘a3 ♙e7 11.♗c4 when the b6-square becomes an inviting target for White.

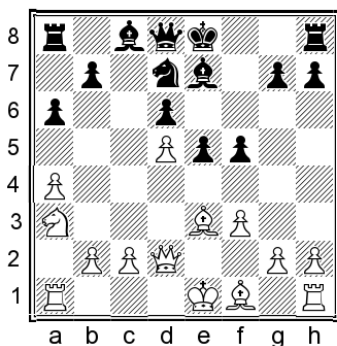
We will consider the delayed-castling approach with **C1)** 10.♙d2, followed by the more popular **C2)** 10.♙e2, preparing to tuck the king away.

Another way to delay castling is:

10.♙e3 ♗d7 11.♚d2

Now the threat to take on a7 is real, because we won't have the ...♚a5† trick available.

11...a6 12.♗a3 f5 13.f3



13...♙h4†!

Provoking a brief tactical sequence.

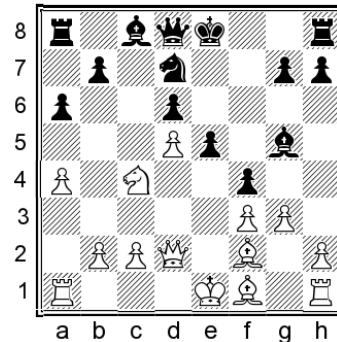
14.g3 f4 15.♙f2 ♙g5 16.♗c4

16.♚b4 was played in Dueckstein – Klundt, Dresden 2008, when 16...0-0N would have been

best, and if 17.♚xd6? ♗h8 Black's initiative is too strong.

Interestingly, the same player played the much worse 16.g4?? the following year, and 16...e4 17.fxe4 ♗e5 18.0-0-0 ♙xg4 was horrendous for White in Dueckstein – Siegmund, Velden 2009.

The text move was played in Borisek – Parligras, Nova Gorica 2004. Once again Black should prioritize swift development with:



16...0-0N 17.h4

17.♗xd6?! is risky after 17...fxg3 18.♙e3 ♙xe3 19.♚xe3 g2! 20.♙xg2, and now either 20...♚h4† or 20...♗b6 give us more than enough activity for the sacrificed pawn.

17...fxg3 18.hxg5 gxf2† 19.♚xf2!

19.♗xf2? ♗c5 gives us a huge initiative.

19...♚xg5 20.♗xd6 ♗f6

We are doing fine, and White will need to be slightly careful due to the uncastled king.

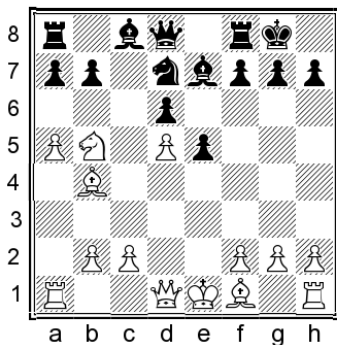
### C1) 10.♙d2 0-0 11.a5

White makes some gains on the queenside before completing kingside development.

11.♙e2 followed by castling will convert to variation C23 below.

### 11...♗d7 12.♙b4

White tries to disrupt our normal plan of ...f5.



### 12...e4!

12...♘f6 has been played a few times but blocking the f-pawn clearly compromises our prospects for active counterplay.

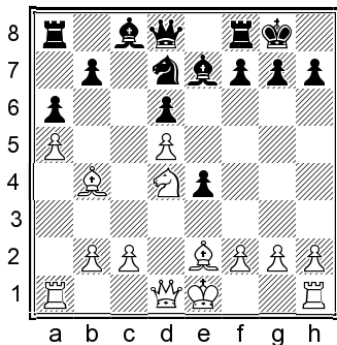
I also rejected 12...a6 13.♘a3 f5 14.♘c4 ♘f6 because 15.♙e2!N clearly favours White. (The last move improves on 15.♘b6 ♖b8 16.♗a3? f4 when Black had excellent play in Nepomniachtchi – Nakamura, Internet [blitz] 2020.)

### 13.♙xd6

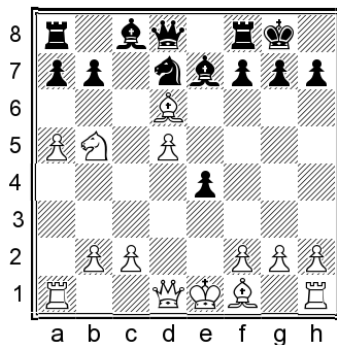
Taking the pawn must be critical.

13.♘xd6?? ♘e5 wins material.

I also considered: 13.♙e2 a6 14.♘d4



14...♙f6! (14...♘c5?! 15.♙d2! sees White regroup effectively.) 15.0-0 (15.♙xd6 ♖e8 gives us at least enough activity for the sacrificed pawn.) 15...♘c5 With our bishop already on f6, White does not have the option of regrouping with ♙d2, and we are doing fine.



### 13...♙xd6

Having already castled, we will exchange off White's active pieces to leave only the undeveloped ones on the board.

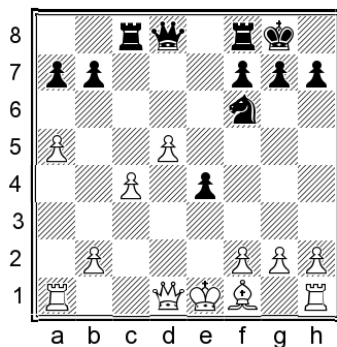
### 14.♘xd6 ♘f6 15.♘xc8

15.♘c4? ♘xd5 followed by ...♙e6 gives us an easy initiative at no material cost.

15.♘b5?! isn't much better; we can of course take on d5 with a comfortable game, but 15...e3! puts White under more pressure.

### 15...♗xc8 16.c4

We have made great gains in development, having provoked White to exchange the knight for our undeveloped bishop on c8, activating our rook in the process. Nevertheless, White remains a pawn up and is only two moves away from castling, so we need to make something happen quickly.



### 16...b5!!

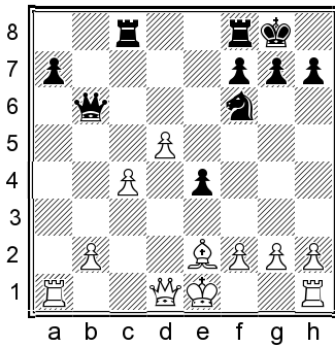
That's the way to do it! We strike at the centre and force White to make a difficult decision.

### 17.♖d4!

This seems most logical.

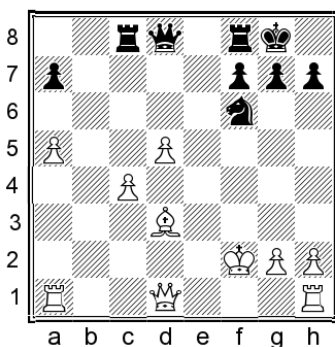
17.cxb5 e3! 18.fxe3 ♕e7 would be dangerous for White.

17.axb6 ♖xb6 also forces White to walk a fine line. Best play continues 18.♗e2! when we should respond energetically with:

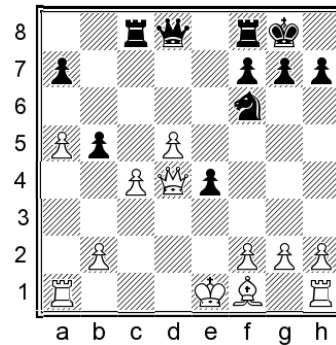


18...e3! (but not 18...♖xb2? 19.0-0 when White's king is safe and the connected passers are strong, while our a-pawn is vulnerable.) 19.f3 White has no other decent move. 19...♖b4† 20.♔f1 ♖xb2 White should aim for a perpetual attack on the queen with 21.♖b1, when we can decide whether to take the draw or play on in a double-edged position. (Instead 21.♖xa7?? ♖xc4 would be disastrous for White.)

17.b3 is the other plausible move, when we can cause problems with: 17...e3! 18.♗d3 (18.fxe3?! ♖e8 19.♗e2 ♖e7! is unpleasant for White.) 18...bxc4 19.bxc4 exf2† 20.♔xf2



20...h5! 21.h3 ♖e4† 22.♗xe4 ♖h4† 23.♔g1 ♖xe4 We have the better chances; at the very least, we should be able to restore the material balance while keeping the edge in activity and king safety.



17...♗d6!

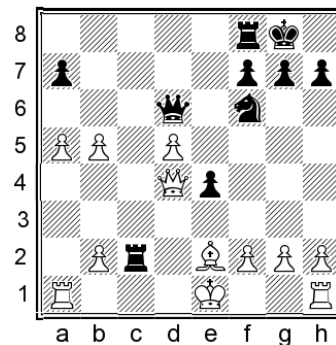
Another strong move, activating the queen while maintaining the tension on the queenside.

18.cxb5

18.♗e2 bxc4 is good for us, with ...♖b4† an annoying prospect for White.

18...♖c2! 19.♗e2

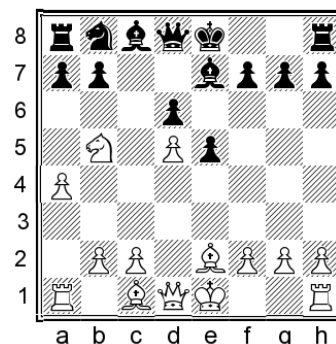
19.g3 gives us a few decent options, the most active being 19...e3!? 20.fxe3 ♖e8 21.♗d3 ♖c5 22.♗e2 ♖e4, when our activity fully compensates for the missing pawns.



19...♖xd5 20.♖xd5 ♖xd5

Again we have full compensation, and in a practical game I think the position would be trickier for White to play.

C2) 10.♗e2



White prepares to castle before deciding how to proceed on the queenside.

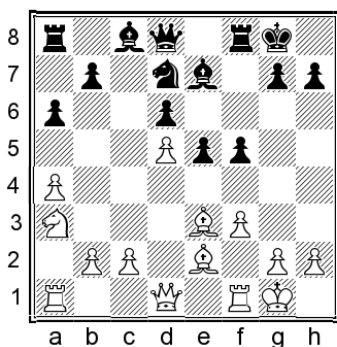
**10...0-0 11.0-0 ♖d7**

11...f5 can also be played, but I think it's more flexible to develop the knight first.

We will analyse four moves in detail: **C21) 12.b4!?**, **C22) 12.a5**, **C23) 12.♔h1** and **C24) 12.♙d2**.

An older line worth mentioning is:

12.♙e3 a6 13.♘a3 f5 14.f3  
14.f4 exf4 15.♙xf4 ♘c5 16.♘c4 a5 reaches a position from variation C23 below, except that here White's king is still on g1 instead of h1, so clearly we should be happy.



14...f4!

Unlike the 9.c4 lines, here White's knight is a long way from the e4-square, so advancing this pawn is not such a big positional concession.

15.♙f2 ♖f6

15...♙h4!N is also viable, but we don't really need to search for alternatives.

16.♘c4 ♖h6

Our attack practically plays itself, whereas White will have to make difficult defensive decisions. In the game we are following, White was unable to cope with the pressure.

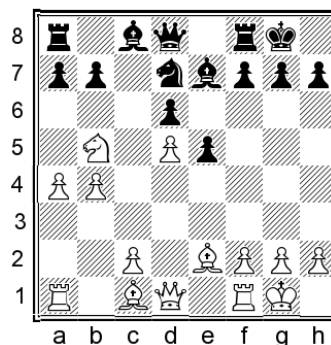
17.♙d3 ♙h4 18.♙f5 ♙xf2† 19.♖xf2 ♘c5 20.♙xc8 ♖xc8

Despite the exchanges, White's position is tough to defend.

21.♘d2 ♖h4 22.h3 ♖g6 23.♔f1 ♖g3

White soon went down in A.S. Abdullah – Ramnath, Bhubaneswar 2011.

**C21) 12.b4!?**



This was played by Caruana in the latter of the aforementioned games but it didn't really catch on. It's an interesting move though, and it took some effort to find the right way to answer it.

**12...a6 13.♘a3 b6!**

This rare move seems to be best.

Carlsen's choice was:

13...a5

It makes sense to break up White's queenside structure, and most games have continued this way. However, I was unable to make it work after:

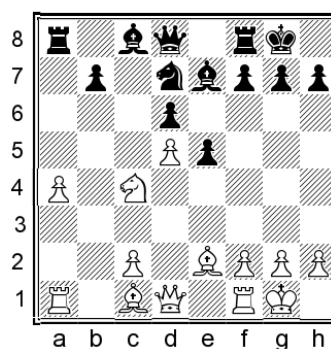
14.bxa5!

14.c3 f5 15.♘c4 b6 16.f4 ♖c7 leads to interesting play but is fine for us.

14...♖xa5

14...♖xa5 15.♘c4 ♖c7 16.a5 doesn't help, as our queen needs to reach the kingside to be effective.

15.♘c4 ♖a8



16.♙e3!

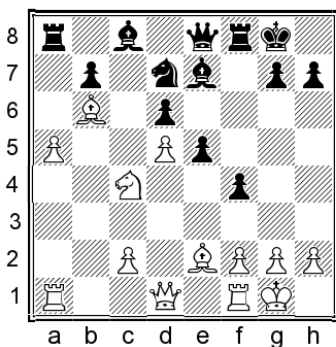
16.a5?! was played in Mosadeghpour – Daghti, Internet (rapid) 2021, when 16...b5!N 17.♘a3 b4 18.♘c4 ♙a6 19.♘e3 ♙xe2 20.♖xe2 ♙g5 would have been fine for Black.

16...f5

16...b6?! 17.♖b1 ♖xa4 18.♗xb6 is structurally helpful for us, but tactically it simply doesn't work because White gets too active.

17.a5 f4 18.♙b6 ♔e8

The last few moves flowed naturally on both sides, but here White's best move is rather subtle.



19.♗e1!N

19.♖a3 ♔g6 20.♙c7 e4 gave Black decent counterplay in Caruana – Carlsen, London (10) 2018.

The text move is mainly intended as prophylaxis against ...♔g6, as White is now ready to counter with ♙d3.

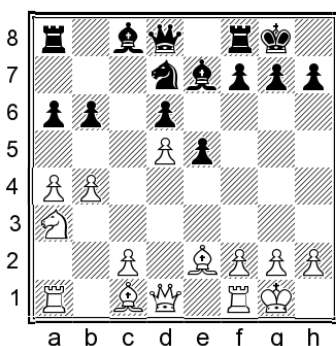
19...♖f6

19...♔g6 20.♙d3 ♔h6 might be the best practical try, but 21.f3! keeps the kingside under control and I don't believe in Black's position.

The text move is suggested by Shankland in his ChessBase annotations, but White can counter it with:

20.♗d2! ♙d8 21.♗e4 ♖h6 22.♙f3

The attack is going nowhere, and Black is positionally busted.



14.♗c4 a5

This way we break up White's queenside structure without giving away an outpost on b6. It may look risky to leave ourselves with a weak pawn on a5, but it's not a big problem.

15.bxa5

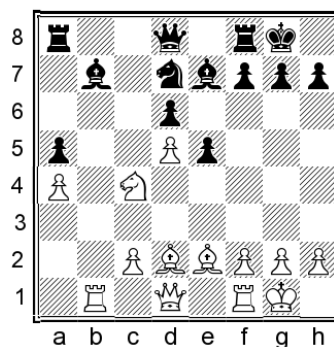
15.c3?! ♙a6 is good for Black.

15.b5!?N is an interesting computer suggestion, but fixing the queenside like this carries obvious strategic risks. Best play continues 15...f5 16.f4 ♔c7 with a dynamically balanced game; perhaps this will be tested in future.

15...bxa5 16.♙d2 ♙b7 17.♖b1

17.♔e1!?N is playable but 17...♙xd5 18.♙xa5 ♔c8 19.♗e3 ♙c6 leaves us with little to fear.

We have been following Mosadeghpour – Darini, Teheran 2019, where Black committed a big error with 17...♔c8?. A much better move is:



17...♙a6!N 18.♔e1

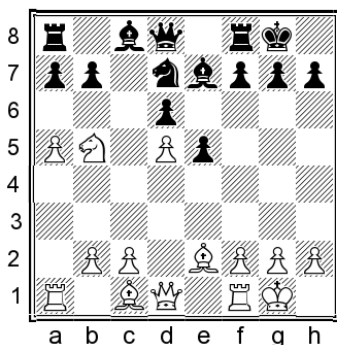
18.♗xa5? ♙xe2 19.♔xe2 ♖xa5 wins material.

18.♗xa5? also proves a poor choice after 18...♔c8 19.♗b6 ♗xb6 20.♙xb6 ♙xe2 21.♔xe2 ♖xa4, when our pawn structure is better and White will suffer in the endgame ahead.

18...♙xc4 19.♙xc4 ♙g5

We have good counterplay thanks to our dark-square control and potential attacking chances.

C22) 12.a5



This has scored well for White so far, mainly thanks to the efforts of Jobava, but it doesn't offer much.

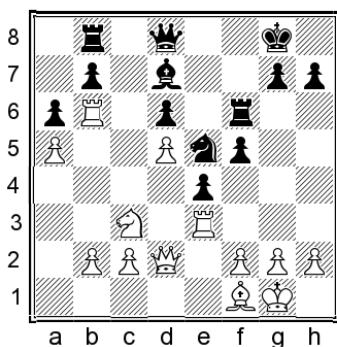
### 12...a6 13.♘c3

White has to retreat this way to keep the a5-pawn defended.

### 13...f5 14.♞a3 e4!?

We are actually rather spoiled for choice, with two tempting alternatives:

14...♙g5 15.♙d2 (15.♙xg5N 15...♞xg5 16.♞c1 can be met by: 16...♞d8 17.♞d2 e4! Enabling the knight to occupy its ideal square. 18.♞e1 ♘e5 19.♙f1 ♙d7 20.♞b3 ♞b8 21.♞b6 ♙e8 Black is fine.) 15...e4 16.♞e1 ♘e5 17.♙f1 ♙d7 18.♞b3 ♙xd2 19.♞xd2 ♞b8 20.♞b6 ♞f6 21.♞e3

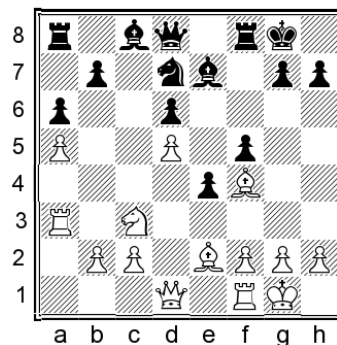


In Jobava – Sjugirov, Internet (blitz) 2020, Black tragically blundered and lost, but at this point 21...♞h6!N would have yielded a decisive attack.

14...f4! is another thematic idea, squeezing the c1-bishop and gaining space on the kingside. 15.♙d2 ♞f6 16.♘a4 ♞b8 17.♞e1 ♞h6 18.h3 ♘f6 19.♘b6 ♙f5 Black had good attacking chances in Jobava – Grischuk, Internet (blitz) 2021.

### 15.♙f4

Here I found a nice way to improve Black's play:



### 15...♞b8!N

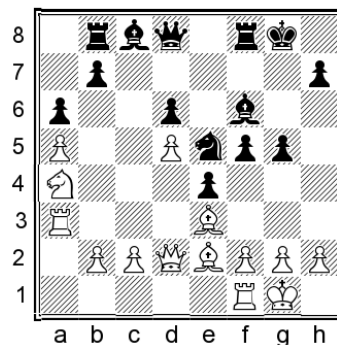
15...♘e5?! 16.♘a4! was slightly better for White in Jobava – Salgado Lopez, Tbilisi 2017, the point being that 16...♞xa5? runs into 17.♙xe5 dxe5 18.d6 when Black loses material.

### 16.♞d2

Now 16.♘a4? ♞xa5 is a safe pawn-grab.

### 16...g5 17.♙e3 ♙f6 18.♘a4 ♘e5

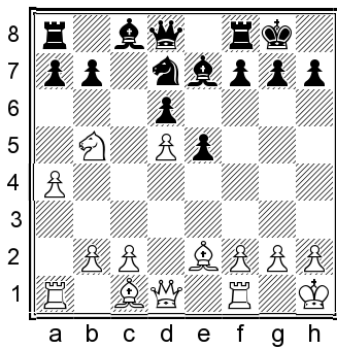
We have a clearly improved version of the game noted above. Play could continue:



### 19.♙a7 ♞a8 20.♙d4 f4

White has made some progress on the queenside, but our kingside pawns are becoming rather menacing.

### C23) 12.♙h1



This move is seen from time to time, but is generally not considered too threatening. We now face an interesting decision regarding whether to chase away the knight immediately, or wait a little longer.

### 12...f5!

I think this is the more accurate sequence, as it slightly reduces White's options.

Let's compare the alternative to see how the choice of move order makes a difference:

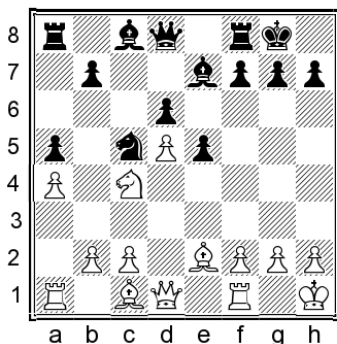
12...a6

Interestingly, Carlsen has chosen this move in two games.

13.♘a3 ♘c5

13...a5 is slightly premature due to 14.f4 f5 15.♘b5! (rather than 15.♘c4 b6 16.♖a3 exf4 17.♙xf4 ♘c5 18.♞e3 g5 19.♞xe7 gxf4 20.♞e6 ♘xe6 21.dxe6 ♙xe6 22.♞xf4 ♙xc4 23.♙xc4 ♖h8, when Black was clearly better and went on to win in Navara – Carlsen, Shamkir 2019) 15...♙h8 16.♙e3 exf4 17.♙xf4 ♘c5 as played in Petrova – Istona, Czech Republic 2019, when 18.♙f3N would have favoured White.

14.♘c4 a5



15.♙e3!?

This is the extra option which becomes available to White after the 12...a6 move order. I don't think it yields any real advantage, but it's still a respectable continuation which we may as well avoid.

15.f4 exf4 16.♙xf4 f5 was played in the Vachier-Lagrave – Carlsen game referred to in our main line below; we will pick up the analysis there, via my preferred move order.

15...b6 16.c3

I will include a few more moves of a correspondence game.

16...♙a6

It is also possible to place a bishop on the other diagonal: 16...♙d7!?N 17.f4 exf4 18.♙xf4 f5 and now both 19.♞c2 ♞c7 20.♞fe1 ♞ae8 and 19.♘xd6 ♙xa4 20.♞xa4 ♙xd6 21.♞d4 a4 lead to double-edged play.

17.f3!

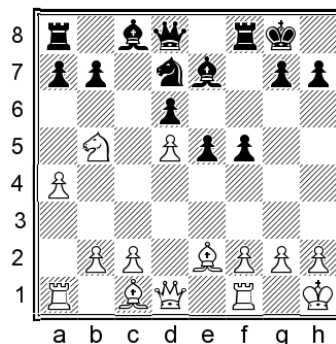
Securing a retreat square for the bishop.

17.b4 ♘d7 18.b5 ♙b7 19.f4 is also possible, although 19...♞c8 offers Black enough counterplay.

17...♞c8 18.♙g1 ♞e8 19.♞e1 ♙h4 20.g3 ♙e7 21.♘a3 ♙xe2 22.♞xe2 ♙f8 23.♙xc5 bxc5 24.♘c4 ♞b8

White has a strong knight but the mobile kingside majority gives Black enough counter-chances. The game Dunlop – Modestino, corr. 2020, resulted in a draw twenty moves later.

Summing up, Black is not doing badly at all here, especially since 16...♙d7!?N appears to be fully playable as well. However, it just seems a lot simpler to head for the position from the MVL – Carlsen game without giving White the chance to steer the game in a wholly different direction.



13.f4

White doesn't really have another useful move – especially after having spent a tempo moving the king into the corner in preparation for this.

### 13...a6

Now we chase the knight away.

### 14. ♖a3 exf4 15. ♗xf4 ♘c5

This is the simplest continuation, angling for a transposition to the MVL – Carlsen game referred to above.

It's worth mentioning a possible alternative:

### 15... ♘e5!?

Centralizing the knight is also in the spirit of these positions.

### 16. ♗xe5!?!N

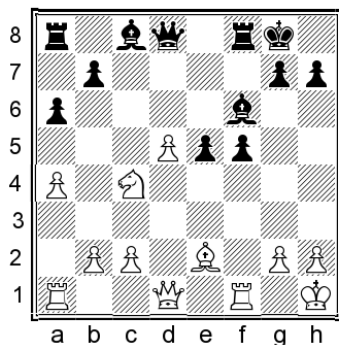
Exchanging is the critical test.

16. ♖d2 ♗d7 17. ♖b4 ♖b8 18. c4 a5 19. ♖b3 ♘g6 20. ♗e3 b6 21. ♘b5 ♗xb5 22. axb5 ♗g5 saw Black take over in Nakamura – Gelfand, London 2012.

16. ♖c4 ♘xc4 17. ♗xc4 ♗f6 18. c3 g5 19. ♗e3 f4 20. ♗d4 ♗f5 also offers Black plenty of counterplay

16...dxe5 17. ♖c4 ♗f6

17...♗d6 is also possible, when 18.a5 looks best.

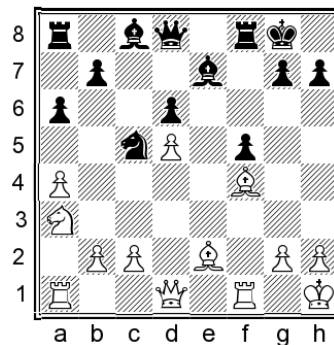


18.a5 ♖b8 19. ♖d2

19.d6 ♗e6 20. ♘b6 g6 21. ♗c4 ♗xc4 22. ♘xc4 ♖d7 23. ♖d5† ♖f7 24. ♖ad1 ♖bd8 looks okay for Black. Also possible is 19. ♘b6!? ♗e7, when the engine finds nothing better than repeating with 20. ♖c4 ♗f6.

19...e4 20. ♖ad1 ♗d7 21. b4 ♗g5 22. ♖e1 ♖c8

Such positions are double-edged, and require the utmost care from both sides. You can certainly consider playing this way, but let's now return to my main recommendation, which is reliable and relatively easy to play.



### 16. ♖c4 a5

Naturally we prevent White from clamping down with a4-a5. With this move, we transpose to the aforementioned elite-level game, which we'll continue to follow.

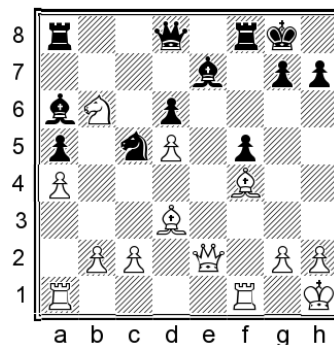
### 17. ♗d3 b6 18. ♖e2 ♗a6

Carlsen prepares to eliminate the strong enemy knight.

### 19. ♘xb6!?

White goes for a forcing option, but it results in equality.

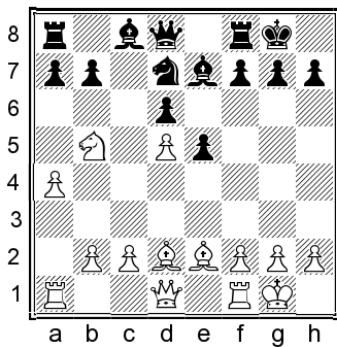
19. ♖ae1N is a sensible alternative, although 19...♗h4 20.g3 ♗xc4 21. ♗xc4 ♗g5 leaves us with no problems, and White will have to take care to avoid suffering from a bad bishop.



19...♘xd3 20.cxd3 ♖xb6 21. ♖xe7 ♗xd3 22. ♖e6† ♖h8 23. ♖xd6 ♖xd6 24. ♗xd6 ♗xf1 25. ♗xf8 ♗c4 26. ♗e7 ♗xd5

The mostly forced sequence resulted in a drawing endgame in Vachier-Lagrave – Carlsen, Stavanger 2019.

### C24) 12. ♗d2



This move only first appeared about five years ago, and it has since taken over as the most popular continuation, no doubt boosted by the attention it received after Caruana played it against Carlsen in their 2018 match. White wants to advance the a-pawn as soon as possible, even at the cost of placing the bishop on a more passive square than usual.

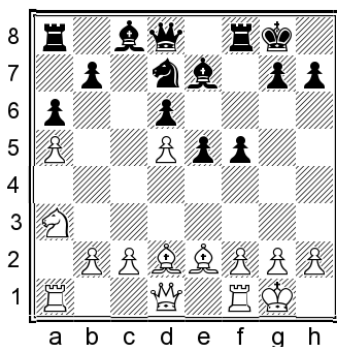
### 12...f5

12...a6 13.♖a3 a5 has been played at a high level but, just like in the note to Black's 12th move in the previous variation, I would prefer not to give away the b5-outpost so soon.

12...♘f6!? is a rare idea, intending to put pressure on the d5-pawn, and also to utilize the e4-square in some lines. 13.♙e3 a6 14.♘a3 ♖b8 This has been played by Gelfand but, although the positions are interesting, I don't entirely trust Black's scheme. Besides, advancing the f-pawn is more consistent with the way we handled most of the other lines in this chapter, making it a more cohesive repertoire choice.

### 13.a5 a6 14.♘a3

An important crossroads has been reached. How should we proceed on the kingside?



### 14...e4

This was Carlsen's choice, vacating the e5-square and opening a path for the bishop which will soon land on f6.

14...♘f6 15.♙b4 f4 16.♘c4 e4 looks like a logical continuation, but 17.♘b6 ♖b8 18.♙d4!N 18...f3 19.gxf3 exf3 20.♙xf3 ♘d7! 21.♙e4! turns out in White's favour.

However, the following rare alternative is well worth considering:

14...f4!? 15.♘c4

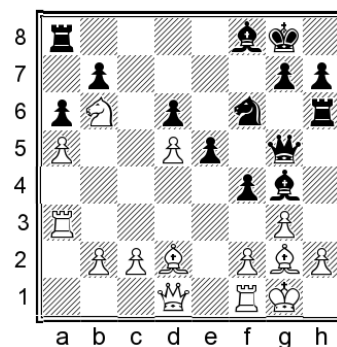
In Korobov – Rios, Sitges 2021, the best way to follow up Black's previous move would have been: 15...♙f6!N

This attacking scheme is crude, but not at all easy for White to deal with. I think it deserves further analysis and practical tests. Here are a few illustrative lines, using Stockfish's top choices for White.

16.♙a3 ♖h6 17.g3

Obviously other moves are possible, but our general plan remains the same. When looking through this line, I noticed something in common with King's Indian Mar del Plata lines: the engine initially rates the position clearly in White's favour but, as you make more moves and it analyses more deeply, the strength of the attack becomes clearer.

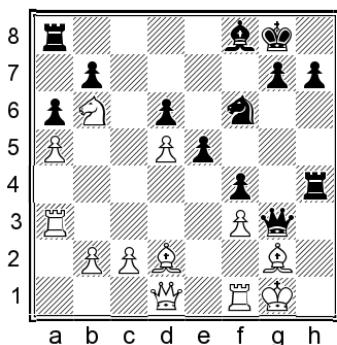
17...♙f8 18.♙f3 ♙g5 19.♙g2 ♘f6 20.♘b6 ♙g4



21.h4?!

21.f3 is more natural, when 21...♙h3 22.♙xh3 ♖xh3 23.♘xa8 ♖xh2 24.♙xh2 ♙xg3† results in a draw. The text move avoids the perpetual but I consider it riskier for White than for Black.

21...♙g6 22.f3 ♙h3! 23.♙xh3 ♙xg3† 24.♙g2 ♖xh4



25. ♖xa8

25. ♖f2?! creates an escape square for the king, but 25... ♖e8 26. ♙e1 ♜h2† 27. ♗f1 ♝h5! leaves White facing the extremely dangerous plan of ... ♖g5 followed by marching the h-pawn to h3.

25... ♜h2† 26. ♗f2 ♜g3† 27. ♗e2!?

27. ♗g1 ♜h2† is a draw.

27... ♜xg2† 28. ♖f2 ♜g6

We have full compensation for the rook. The machine sees it as 0.00 in various ways, but in practice anything could happen.

15. ♖c4 ♗e5 16. ♖b6

After 16. ♖xe5 dx5 the doubled pawns are not weak, and we will have good chances on the kingside.

16... ♝b8 17. f4

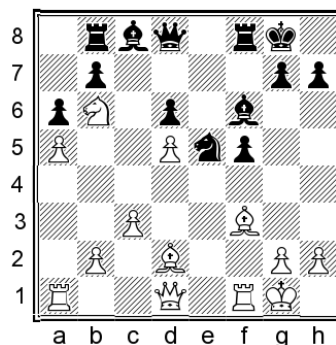
Nobody plays 17. f3N, but we don't really have anything better than transposing with 17... exf3 anyway.

17... exf3 18. ♙xf3 ♙f6

18... g5? asks too much of the black position, and 19. c4 f4 20. ♙c3 was objectively close to winning for White in Caruana – Carlsen, London (8) 2018. The text move was unveiled as an improvement by Caruana himself when he took the opposite side of the position the following year.

19. c3

Here we should take the opportunity to improve on the play of the former world title challenger.



19... ♖d7!N

The point of this move is not only to challenge the knight on b6, but also to place our bishop on e5.

19... g5 was played in Svidler – Caruana, Karlsruhe 2019, when 20. g3!N would have been good for White. Notice that White can consider taking on c8 and attacking the f5-pawn, which can no longer be defended by its neighbour.

20. ♙e3

Now 20. ♖xc8?! ♝xc8 suits us perfectly, as our pieces are superbly placed and the f-pawn is not weak at all, unlike the analogous situation with ... g5 and g2-g3 included.

20... ♙e5 21. ♜d2

21. ♖c4! is an interesting alternative. It's important that we can respond with 21... ♙xh2† 22. ♗xh2 ♜h4† 23. ♗g1 ♜xc4 winning a pawn. True, White has pretty good compensation, but I don't think we should be worried.

21... f4

We could also consider 21... ♖xb6 22. ♙xb6 ♜h4 (or 22... ♜f6 immediately) 23. g3 ♜f6 with a typical kind of position, but it feels more natural to push the f-pawn and gain some additional space.

22. ♙f2 ♖xb6 23. ♙xb6 ♜f6

We have reached a complex middlegame position with mutual chances. In the long run White will look to advance the queenside pawns to b4 and c5, but it will require some preparation. In the meantime, our bishop can come to f5 and we can consider a kingside assault with ... g5-g4 at any moment.

## Conclusion

After the opening moves 1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♞c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♞xd4 ♞f6 5.♞c3 e5 6.♞db5 d6, the former sideline 7.♞d5 has undergone such a resurgence in recent years that some might even call it the main line nowadays. After the forced 7...♞xd5 8.exd5 I recommend 8...♞b8, reaching an important tabiya.

We started by considering 9.♞f3!?, a modern idea based on swinging the queen to a3 in order to create tactical opportunities. I recommend 9...a6 (while covering 9...♞e7 as a playable sideline) 10.♞a3 ♞e7 when we are doing fine, although we need to be ready to sacrifice the exchange with a timely ...axb5! in order to make the most of our chances.

Next we looked at 9.c4 a6, when the path divides again. 10.♞a4!? ♞d7 11.c5 is an interesting tactical continuation, when 11...dxc5!? 12.d6 axb5 13.♞xa8 ♞xd6 sees us sacrifice an exchange,

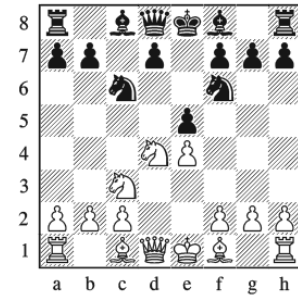
fighting fire with fire. Ultimately it turns out equal, if both sides are suitably well prepared and tactically alert. We then turned to the old main line of 10.♞c3 ♞e7, when White has some choices but in all cases we will obtain good counterplay by advancing with ...f5.

Nowadays 9.a4 has taken over as White's main weapon, thanks in no small part to the exposure it gained during the 2018 World Championship match, when Caruana used it twice against Carlsen. After 9...♞e7 it's important to consider the plan of delaying castling with 10.♞d2 0-0 11.a5, when 11...♞d7 12.♞b4 e4! is an important continuation to obtain counterplay. We then looked at the usual continuation of 10.♞e2 0-0 11.0-0 ♞d7, when White has tried several moves. The general rule is that we should look for counterplay with ...f5 as soon as possible, but there are various details and nuances that are unique to each variation. From a theoretical perspective I think we are in good shape everywhere; and from a practical point of view, it's always nice to be the side attacking rather than defending on the kingside.

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# Chapter 12

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## Early Sveshnikov Sidelines

### Variation Index

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1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♘f6 5.♗c3 e5

- A) 6.♗db5 d6
  - A1) 7.♗a3
  - A2) 7.♕e3
  - A3) 7.a4
- B) 6.♗f5
- C) 6.♗de2!?
- D) 6.♗b3?!

1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♟c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♟xd4 ♟f6 5.♟c3 e5

We will start this short chapter by considering some minor options on move 7 after the usual **A)** 6.♟db5, before turning our attention to the sidelines **B)** 6.♟f5, **C)** 6.♟de2! and **D)** 6.♟b3!.

### A) 6.♟db5 d6

Having analysed the main options of 7.♟g5 and 7.♟d5 in previous chapters, here we will cover three sidelines: **A1)** 7.♟a3, **A2)** 7.♟e3 and **A3)** 7.a4.

#### A1) 7.♟a3

White prepares to recentralize the knight before we can restrict it with ...b5. The obvious downside is that White is losing time.

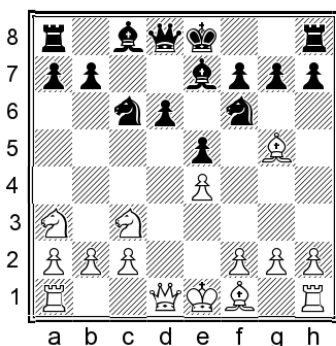
7...♟e7

Continuing with logical development.

8.♟g5

White wants to employ a similar strategy as in the main lines, but with the a3-knight playing a more active role.

8.♟c4 gives us a choice between simple development with 8...0-0 9.♟e3 ♟e6 and forcing the play with 8...♟xe4!? 9.♟xe4 d5, both of which are completely fine.



8...♟xe4!?

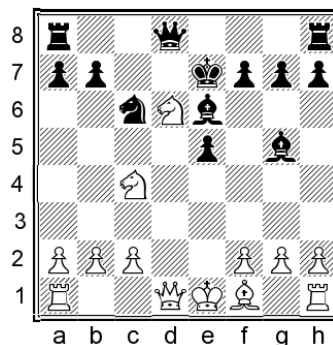
8...0-0 is fine of course, but the tactical solution works well.

9.♟xe4

9.♟xe7?! ♟xc3 10.♟xd8 ♟xd1 11.♟xd1 ♟xd8 12.♟xd6† ♟e7 gives us a slight pull in the endgame.

9...♟xg5 10.♟xd6† ♟e7 11.♟ac4 ♟e6

This mostly forced sequence has been played on a few occasions.

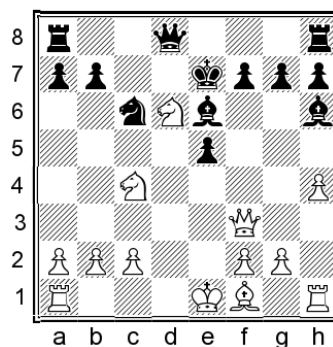


12.♟d3

White has some other options:

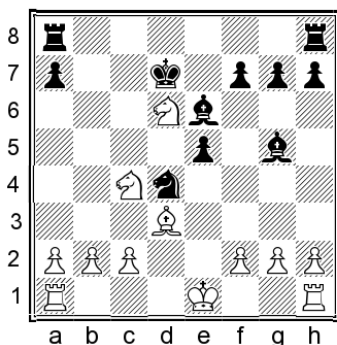
12.c3N 12...♟c7 13.♟h5 f6 14.♟e4 ♟d8! 15.♟cd6 ♟f7 16.♟xf7 ♟xf7 17.♟f3 ♟h6 with no problems for Black.

12.h4N 12...♟h6 13.♟f3



13...♟d2†! It's useful to keep this tactical resource in mind. 14.♟xd2 ♟xd6 15.0-0 ♟c5 Again, this looks fine for us.

12.♟f3 ♟d4 (12...♟d2†!N deserves attention, just like in the line above.) 13.♟xb7† ♟d7 14.♟xd7† ♟xd7 15.♟d3



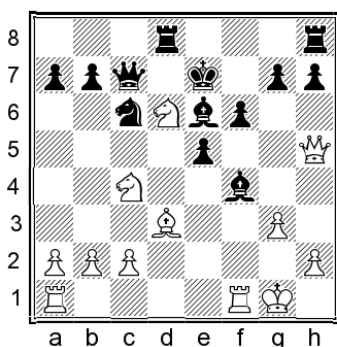
15...♙e7 16.c3 ♗xd6 17.♘xd6 ♔xd6 18.cxd4 exd4 The endgame is equal and the players soon agreed a draw in Mastrovasilis – Nedev, Heraklion 2007.

**12...♙c7 13.♙h5?!**

We are following a game in which White overestimated his attacking chances and soon fell into trouble.

**13...f6 14.0-0 ♖ad8 15.f4 ♗xf4 16.g3**

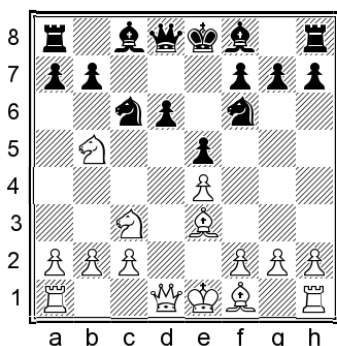
In Tomczak – Shirov, Trzcianka 2016, Black should have continued:



**16...♖xd6!N 17.gxf4 ♖d4**

Black is already close to winning.

**A2) 7...♙e3**

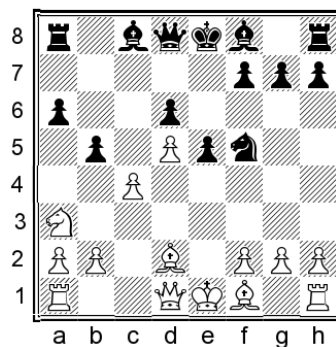


This old idea is employed from time to time, mainly as a surprise weapon.

**7...a6 8.♘a3 b5**

Other moves are possible but I'd like to prevent ♘c4 while forcing White's next move.

**9.♘d5 ♘xd5 10.exd5 ♘e7 11.c4 ♘f5 12.♙d2**



**12...e4!?**

This ambitious move is in the spirit of our system. Let's see a couple of examples:

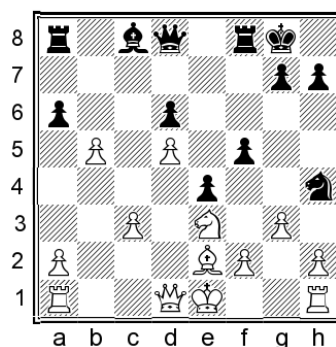
**13.♘c2**

13.♙e2 ♙e7 14.0-0 0-0 15.cxb5 ♙f6 16.♙c3 ♙xc3 17.bxc3 ♘h4 18.♙d2 f5 gave Black at least enough play for the pawn in Tesik – Ivanisevic, Hungary 2012.

**13...♙e7**

Like in many other lines, we don't care too much about the loss of a pawn on the queenside – development and the initiative are more important.

**14.cxb5 0-0 15.♙e2 ♙f6 16.♙c3 ♙xc3† 17.bxc3 ♘h4 18.♘e3 f5 19.g3**



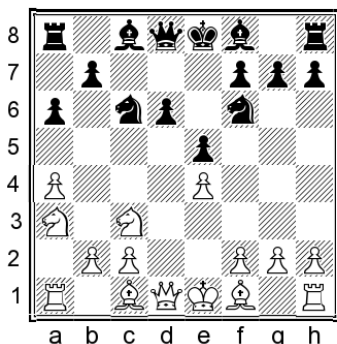
**19...f4! 20.gxf4 ♙f6**

Black was already close to winning in Brenjo – Perunovic, Valjevo 2012.

**A3) 7.a4**

White wants to establish a queenside bind with the a4-pawn in front of the knight on a3, but it costs time and allows us to organize counterplay.

7...a6 8.♘a3

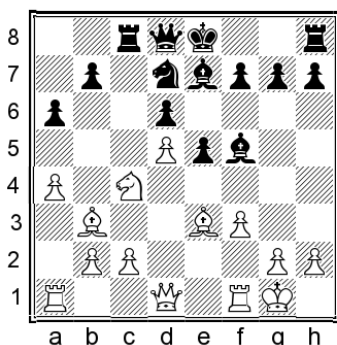


8...♙g4!?

Other moves are possible but I find this the simplest.

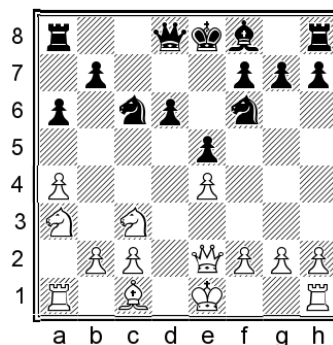
9.♙e2

9.f3 has been more popular, but after 9...♙e6, the inclusion of f2-f3 loosens White's dark squares, improving our prospects for counterplay. A good example continued: 10.♙c4 ♜c8 11.0-0 ♘b4 12.♘d5 ♘bxd5 13.exd5 ♙d7 14.♙b3 ♙e7 15.♙e3 ♙f5 16.♘c4 ♘d7



17.f4 exf4 18.♙xf4 0-0 19.♙h1 ♘f6 20.♘e3 ♙g6 Black had an active game in Escalante Ramirez – Sjugirov, Internet (rapid) 2020, with good prospects on the kingside. The b3-bishop is not active at all. White's main plan in this structure is to advance the queenside majority, as we saw in Chapter 11, but here that is not possible.

9...♙xe2 10.♞xe2



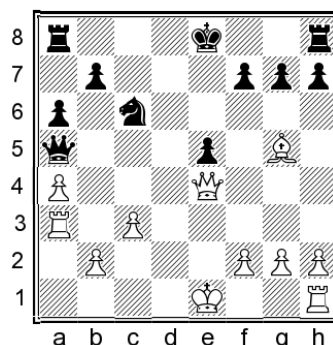
10...d5

This break is the justification for the early bishop exchange.

11.♙g5 dxe4 12.♘xe4 ♞a5† 13.c3 ♘xe4 14.♞xe4 ♙xa3!

14...♞c7 15.♘c4 ♙e7 16.♙xe7 ♞xe7 led to a quick draw in Tomczak – Harikrishna, Katowice 2019, but White has chances for a slight edge due to the passive knight on c6.

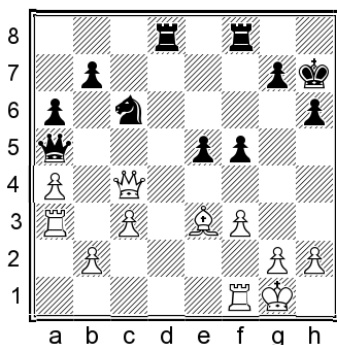
15.♞xa3



15...h6N

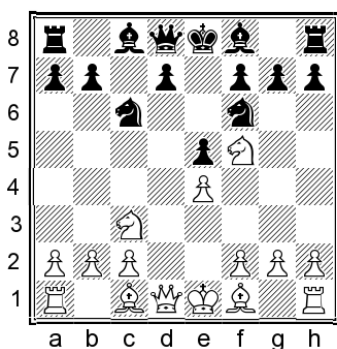
15...0-0 16.0-0 f6 was fine for Black in H. Petrosyan – Rodriguez Manzaneda, Prague 2012, but I'd prefer to nudge the bishop with the other pawn and maintain the option of ...f7-f5. For instance:

16.♙e3 0-0 17.0-0 f5 18.♞c4† ♙h7 19.f3 ♞ad8



The position is still equal but I like Black's activity.

### B) 6...d5



This is occasionally tried by strong players. It has some surprise value, but objectively we should have no problems.

### 6...d5

Of course.

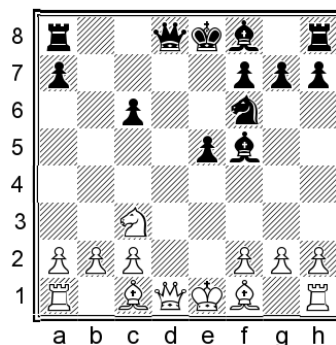
### 7...exd5

Best by far.

7.g5!? d4 8.gxf6 gxf6 9.b1 gxf5 10.exf5 b4† 11.d2 ♖d5 favoured Black in Kjartansson – Stefansson. Reykjavik 2020.

### 7...gxf5 8.dxc6 bxc6

We can also simplify with 8...♞xd1† 9.dxd1 bxc6, and after 10.dxe3 g6 11.g4 d5 12.b3 g5 13.0-0 0-0-0 14.f6 the endgame was not at all bad for Black in Krysa – Adhiban, Internet (blitz) 2020.

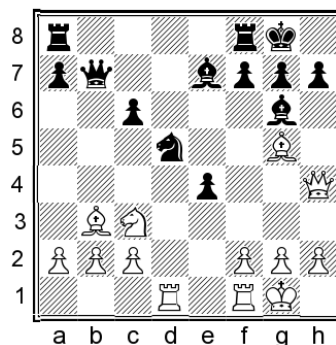


### 9...f3 ♞d7

White has some options here, but the general evaluation is that our active pieces offer plenty of compensation for the slight compromising of our queenside structure.

### 10.g5

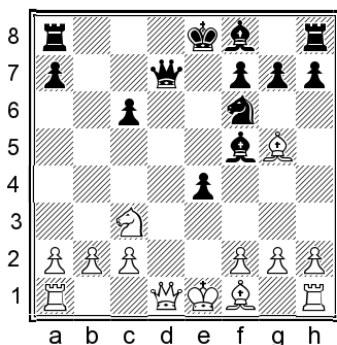
Another example continued 10.g4 e4 11.g3 g6 12.0-0 g6 13.h4 0-0 14.f4 g7 15.ad1 ♞b7 16.b3 d5 17.g5 and here I suggest:



17...dxc3N (17...g5 is also playable, and 18.g5 dxc3 19.bxc3 ♞b5 20.gxb5 cxb5 21.f5 was about equal in Bacrot – Melkumyan, Zagreb 2019.) 18.g7 f8 19.bxc3 g7 20.f4 h6 21.g3 h7 Black is absolutely fine.

### 10...e4 11.gd1

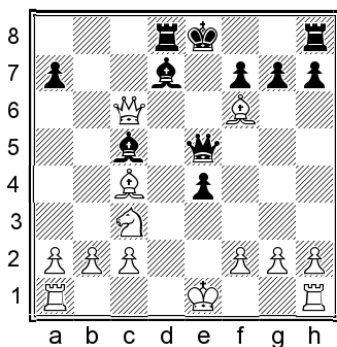
11.g2 g7 is good for us, since 12.g6?! g6 13.dxe4 0-0 14.dxf6† gxf6 is too risky for White.



11...Qe6 12...Wd4!

White has to find this subtle queen manoeuvre to avoid being worse. Still, Black kept a good position in the high-level blitz game we are following.

12...Rd8 13...Wa4 Qc5 14...Qc4 We5 15...Wxc6+ Qd7 16...Qxf6



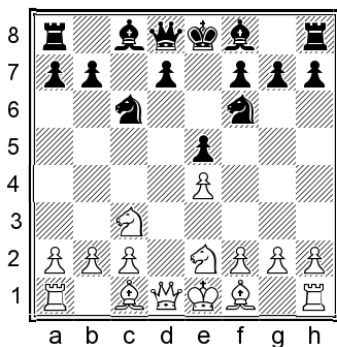
16...Qxf2+! 17...Qf1

17...Qxf2?? loses the queen after 17...Wf4+.

17...gxf6 18...Wxe4 Qd4

Despite suffering an eventual defeat, Black had a good position at this stage in Vachier-Lagrave – Carlsen, Internet (blitz) 2020.

C) 6...Qde2!?



This looks timid but it's not ridiculous. The knight may go to g3 and perhaps f5 or h5 later.

This move was analysed from White's perspective by Richard Palliser in a chapter of *Dangerous Weapons: The Sicilian*.

6...Qc5 7...Qg3

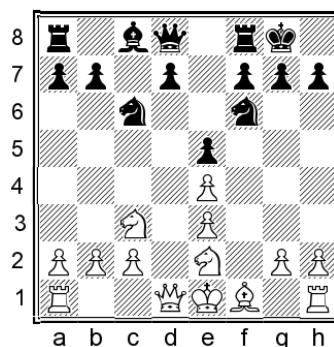
White has also tried:

7...Qe3!? Qxe3 8.fxe3

With the idea of speeding up queenside castling. The drawback of White's plan is obvious: the pawns on e3 and e4 may come under attack. The knight on e2 may also have trouble finding a good square.

8...0-0

Another relevant game continued 8...d6 9...Wd2 Qe6 10...Rd1 0-0 11...Qg3 g6 12...Qe2 Qg4 13...Qd5 Wh4 and Black was doing fine in Hase – Pelikan, Santa Fe 1973. I mention this old game because Jorge Pelikan did a lot to popularize the entire system, long before most other strong players started using it.



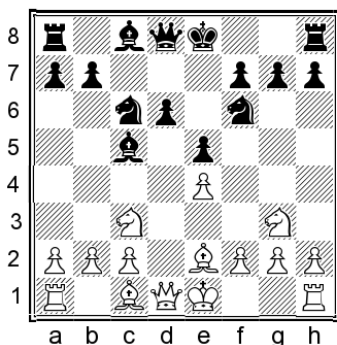
9...Qg3 d6 10...Wd2 Wb6 11.0-0-0 Qe6

We enjoy easy development along with good chances to put pressure on the e3- and e4-pawns. 12...Qd5 Qxd5 13.exd5 Qb4 14...Qc4 Rfc8

Black was much better in Rodriguez Vila – Spasov, Tunja 1989.

7...d6 8...Qe2

White seems to be playing a somewhat artificial type of chess, but we still have to decide what do to. I found a brand new idea which is not mentioned by Palliser.



### 8...♙d4!?:N

Sometimes when the opponent plays antipositionally, the best approach is to copy the same strategy!

8...♙b4 has been played, but 9.0-0 0-0 10.♖d3 h6 11.♞d1 is slightly annoying. With the bishop on d4 instead of b4, we avoid any such pressure along the d-file.

### 8...a6

This is a playable alternative, which can also arise after the text move in the event that we wish to decline a repetition (see the notes below).

### 9.0-0 h6

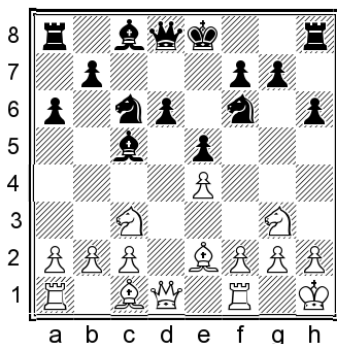
It's worth investing a tempo to avoid 9...0-0 10.♙g5.

### 10.♞h1

10.♞d5 ♞xd5 11.exd5 ♞e7 is equal.

10.♞h5 ♞hx5 11.♙xh5 0-0 12.♞d5 was seen in Rodriguez Vila – Van Wely, Minneapolis 2005, when 12...♞e7N would have been at least equal for Black.

This position was reached in Pinter – Skreno, Slovakia 2001, and a few other games. I think Black should continue with:



10...0-0N 11.f4 exf4 12.♙xf4 ♞e8

Reaching a typical pawn structure for the Najdorf or Scheveningen systems, with some differences in piece placement, notably the bishop on c5 and knight on g3. Chances are balanced and a rich middlegame lies ahead.

### 9.♞b5

This seems the most challenging reply.

The main point of our previous move is to meet 9.0-0 0-0 10.♙g5? with 10...♙xc3 11.bxc3 h6 12.♙xf6 ♖xf6, when White has no compensation for the shattered queenside structure.

9.♖d3 is sensible though, and after 9...h6 10.0-0 0-0 11.♙e3 ♙xc3 12.♖xc3 d5 the position is level.

### 9...♙c5

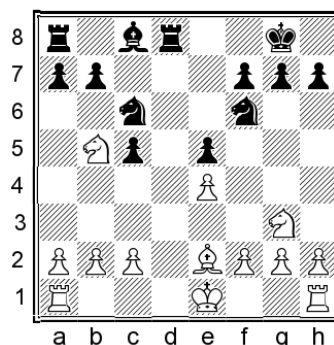
It's fine to take a step back; having the knight on b5 does not improve White's prospects.

### 10.♙e3!?

In the event of 10.♞c3 you can either repeat the position or continue the fight with 10...a6, following the 8...a6 line in the notes above.

10.0-0 0-0 11.c4! is another natural try, when 11...a6 12.♞c3 ♞d4 is fine for us.

### 10...0-0 11.♙xc5 dxc5 12.♖xd8 ♞xd8



### 13.♞c7!?

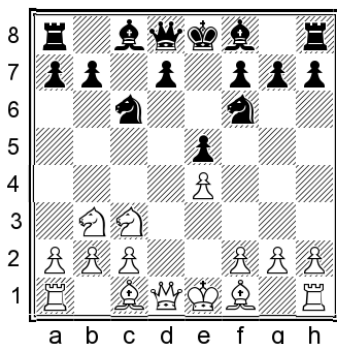
13.c3 ♞b8 14.♞a3 a6 is at least equal for us.

Also after 13.♞d1 ♙e6 14.♞c7 ♞xd1† 15.♙xd1 ♞d8 16.♞xe6 fxe6 we are doing fine; the doubled pawns are not weak at all.

13...♟b8 14.♞d1 ♘d4!? 15.c3 ♘e6 16.♞xd8†  
♘xd8

Followed by ...♘e6 with equal chances.

D) 6.♘b3?!



After this passive retreat, White is already the one who has to work to equalize.

6...♞b4

We have fast development and easy pressure on the e4-pawn without making any concessions to achieve it.

7.♞c4!?

White tries to play actively.

7.♞d2 can be met by: 7...♞xc3 (7...0-0 allows 8.♘d5 although 8...♞xd2† 9.♘xd2 d6 is still comfortable for us.) 8.♞xc3 0-0 (8...♘e4 9.♞g4 is okay for White.) 9.♞d3 d5 10.exd5 ♘xd5 Our active development is more important than White's bishop pair.

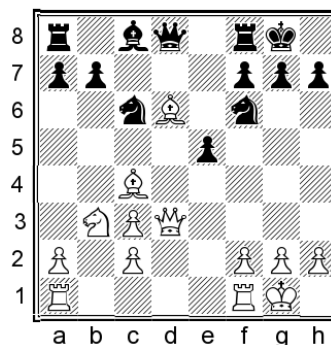
7...0-0 8.0-0 ♞xc3 9.bxc3 ♘xe4

Simple and good.

10.♞a3 d6

There is no point in getting too greedy with 10...♘xc3?!, when 11.♞d3 d5 12.♞xf8 leaves Black with questionable compensation for the exchange.

11.♞d3 ♘f6 12.♞xd6



12...♞f5!

This simple tactical device solves our development problems, while White's structural issues remain.

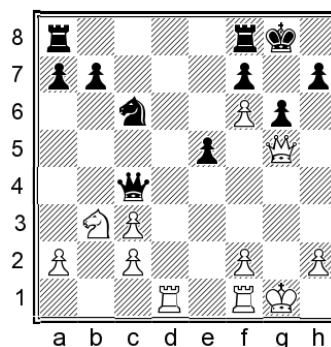
13.♞xf5 ♞xd6 14.♞ad1 ♞a3!?

14...♞c7 was also good for Black in Leve – Svicevic, Internet (blitz) 2020.

15.g4!?

If White plays slowly then we will automatically stand better, so let's briefly check this aggressive attempt.

15...♞a4 16.g5 ♞xc4 17.gxf6 g6 18.♞g5

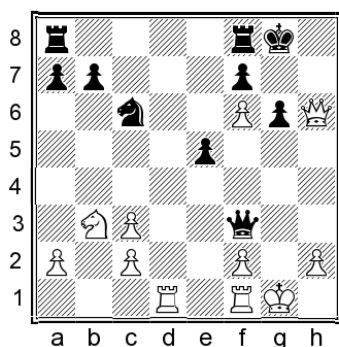


18...h6!

Forcing a favourable simplification.

19.♞xh6 ♞g4† 20.♞h1 ♞f3† 21.♞g1 ♞g4†  
22.♞h1 ♞f3† 23.♞g1

Obviously we have a draw in the pocket, but we have every reason to play for more.



### 23...♞xf6!

White had no real compensation for the shattered pawn structure in Rodchenkov – Paravyan, Internet (blitz) 2021.

### Conclusion

This chapter concludes our coverage of the Sveshnikov Sicilian which arises after 1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♟c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♟xd4 ♟f6 5.♟c3 e5.

We started by checking some sidelines after 6.♟db5 d6, beginning with 7.♟a3, when 7...♞e7 8.♞g5 ♟xe4! is a tactical solution that works well. 7.♞e3 is playable, but it soon leads to a version of the ♟d5/exd5 structure from the previous chapters

in which we have excellent counterplay. Then we turned to 7.a4 a6 8.♟a3, when White establishes a queenside clamp, but 8...♞g4! 9.♞e2 ♞xe2 10.♞xe2 d5 exploits the slowness of White's scheme and gives us a comfortable game.

6.♟f5 is theoretically harmless but at the same time not a bad move. Play continues with the logical sequence of 6...d5 7.exd5 ♞xf5 8.dxc6 bxc6, when our fast development and activity is at least as important as White's superior pawn structure. It is worth noting the tactical continuation of the MVL – Carlsen game we followed, as it would not be easy to find those moves over the board.

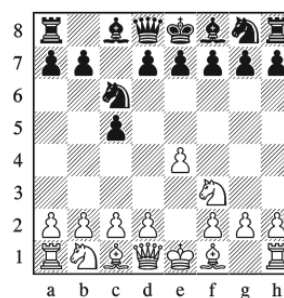
6.♟de2! is a rare continuation which is better than it looks. After the natural continuation of 6...♞c5 7.♟g3 d6 8.♞e2 I proposed the new idea of 8...♞d4!N, which is theoretically equal and gives White something different to think about.

Finally, 6.♟b3! is a weak move. After 6...♞b4 White can play for tricks, but with correct play we are already fighting for the advantage.

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# Chapter 13

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## Bonus Chapter – 3.♘c3 & 3.♝b5

### Variation Index

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1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6

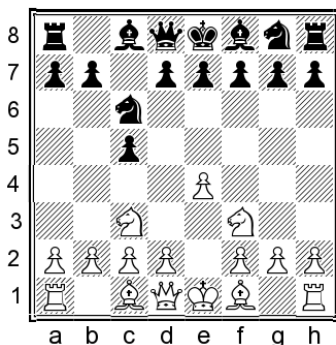
- A) 3.♘c3
- B) 3.♝b5 ♗f6
  - B1) 4.e5
  - B2) 4.♝xc6
  - B3) 4.♘c3 ♖c7 5.0-0 ♗d4 6.♞e1
    - B31) 6...a6
    - B32) 6...e5!?

### 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6

As explained earlier, I consider the subject of Anti-Sicilians to be a huge topic in itself, and recommend the 504-page work of Kotronias for detailed coverage of the myriad options White may try instead of 2.♘f3 and 3.d4. In this bonus chapter, I will offer a brief outline of a repertoire against **A) 3.♘c3** and **B) 3.♙b5**.

I chose to focus on these moves because I consider them the most troublesome options for Sveshnikov players. Let me stress again that this chapter should be considered as bonus material, where I will sketch out some ideas which you can use as a starting point to develop your own repertoire against these two options.

#### A) 3.♘c3



The tricky feature of this line is that White maintains the option of d2-d4.

### 3...♗f6

Some Sveshnikov players prefer to block the centre with 3...e5, but I'm not a big fan of this central structure.

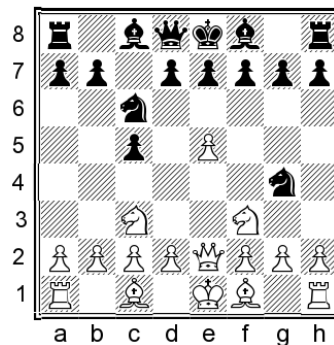
### 4.e5!?

This is the main option which gives White's move order independent significance.

4.d4 cxd4 5.♗xd4 e5 gives us our Sveshnikov.

4.♙b5 is White's other objectively best move, transposing to the Rossolimo as discussed below.

### 4...♗g4 5.♙e2



### 5...d6

Simple and safe.

5...♙c7?! is best avoided, since 6.♗b5 ♙b8 7.d4! cxd4 8.♙f4 gives White too much activity.

5...f6!? 6.exf6 ♗xf6 is the maximalist try, which you may wish to investigate. The position is complicated but Black can fight for the advantage.

### 6.exd6 e6!

This is much more harmonious than taking on d6 with the queen.

### 7.♙c4!?

In the event of 7.♗b5 ♙xd6 8.♗xd6† ♙xd6, our central control and easy development matter more than White's bishop pair. For instance: 9.g3 e5 (9...♙d5!? is the engine suggestion, threatening ...♗d4.) 10.h3 ♗f6 11.♙g2 0-0 12.d3 In Pribyl – Karner, Tallinn 1985, Black could have continued 12...♙e8N 13.0-0 b6 14.♙e1 ♙b7 with the more harmonious position.

7.♗e4 ♙xd6 8.♙c4 ♗f6 9.d3 was played in Stambulian – Goloshchapov, St Petersburg 2000, when 9...e5!N would have been excellent for Black.

### 7...e5 8.h3

8.♙xc5? ♙xd6 gives us way too much activity for a mere pawn.

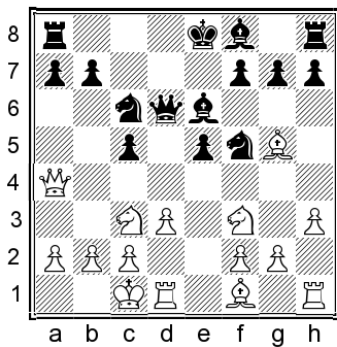
### 8...♗h6 9.d3

9.♙xc5?! is poor again, and 9...♙xd6 10.♙c4 0-0 was clearly better for Black in Reefat – E. Tate, Los Angeles 2000.

The text move was played in a notable game from 2006, in which a future world-class GM fell into severe trouble with the white pieces.

9...♘f5 10.♙g5?! ♚xd6 11.0-0-0? ♜e6 12.♚a4

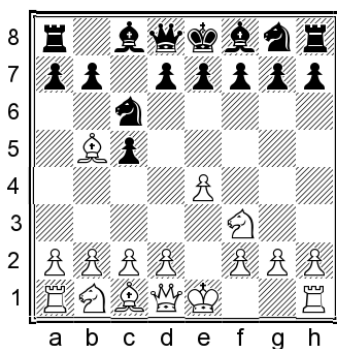
In Vachier-Lagrave – Spasov, Turin (ol) 2006, Black already had a choice of winning continuations. Strongest would have been:



12...♘fd4!N

Dominating the centre and leaving White's queen stuck in the firing line of our upcoming queenside pawn advances. The evaluation from Stockfish already exceeds  $-3$ .

B) 3.♙b5



The Rossolimo is a popular choice at all levels, and one of the few Anti-Sicilians that can routinely be seen at the absolute pinnacle of chess, including World Championship matches. White develops quickly and introduces the possibility of ♙xc6, compromising Black's pawn structure, rather like a Nimzo-Indian but with reversed colours and some extra space for White.

3...♘f6

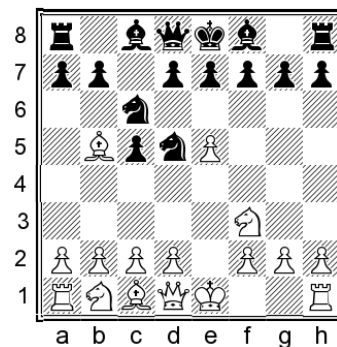
This is the move I would like to present for your consideration. It's well known, but not the most popular or currently fashionable choice. Like

Alekhine's Defence, the knight hits the e4-pawn and tempts it to advance. One practical advantage of having this move in your repertoire is that it enables you to meet 3.♘c3 with 3...♘f6, as shown above. Players who favour a different response to the Rossolimo will need to find something else against 3.♘c3 as well.

3...g6 is the most popular reply, while 3...e6 and 3...d6 are also serious options.

We will look at a few possibilities after B1) 4.e5 and B2) 4.♙xc6, followed by the main line of B3) 4.♘c3.

B1) 4.e5 ♘d5



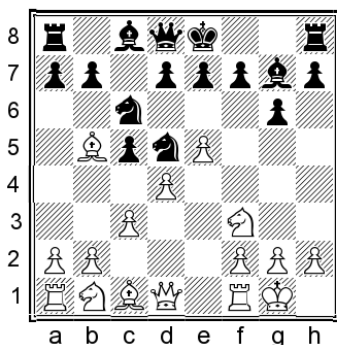
This Alekhine-style continuation leads to interesting play. Quite often we will have the option of ...g6, transposing to a position more commonly reached via the 3...g6 move order. Instead, I have looked for ways to maintain the independent character of our 3...♘f6 move order. In particular, we should be on the lookout for opportunities to advance the g-pawn two squares!

5.0-0

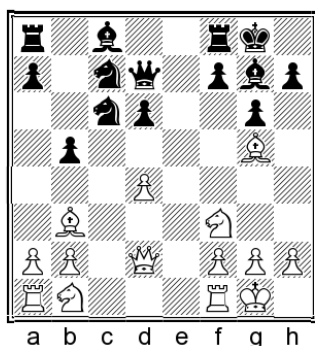
White has three other main tries:

5.♙xc6 dxc6 6.h3 h6!? (6...g6 has been almost universally played) 7.0-0 occurred in Novosel – Kolednjak, Krapina 2018, and now 7...g5!?N looks attractive.

5.c3 g6 On this occasion, transposing to a non-threatening 3...g6 line is easiest. 6.0-0 ♙g7 7.d4



7...♖c7! 8.♗a4 (8.♗xc6 dxc6 9.dxc5 ♔xd1 10.♞xd1 ♗g4 gives us at least enough for the pawn.) 8...cxd4 9.cxd4 0-0 10.♗f4 b5 11.♗b3 d6 12.exd6 exd6 13.♗g5 ♔d7 14.♔d2 In Smirin – Vakhidov, Moscow 2017, Black should have continued with:



14...♗e6!N 15.♗e3 ♗e7 With an excellent position.

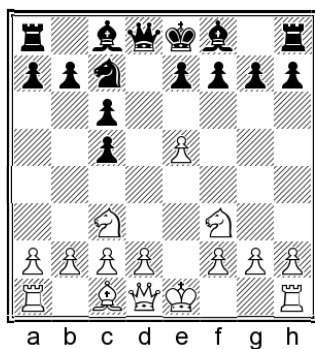
5.♗c3

This forces us to decide what to do with the knight.

5...♗c7

5...♗xc3!? also isn't stupid: after 6.dxc3 we get a version of the 2...♗f6 Sicilian where the bishop would not normally go to b5.

6.♗xc6 dxc6



Now the knight will have the useful e6-square available, but first we want to develop the bishop to f5. I also want to exploit our move order by

advancing the g-pawn two squares when the time is right.

7.h3

7.0-0 h6 is likely to transpose.

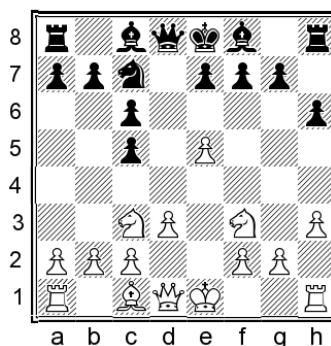
7.d3 h6 8.♗e3 b6 9.♔e2 was played in Advait – Filip, Alba Iulia 2019, and now 9...g5!N would have offered Black nice prospects.

7...h6!?

Again we see this modern approach, safeguarding the future of the bishop on f5, as well as preparing ...g5.

8.d3

8.♗e4 b6 9.0-0 g5! has led to trouble for White in a few games.



8...♗f5

8...g5!? is worth considering, but in this particular instance I prefer to delay it a little. If White castles early, it's a different story.

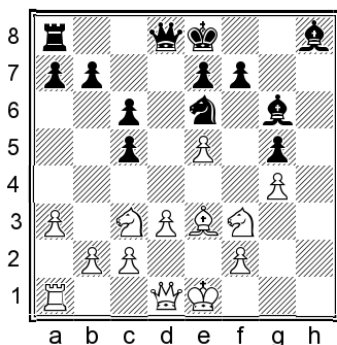
9.♗e3 ♗e6

It's convenient to defend c5 with the knight, rather than spend a tempo on ...b6.

10.a3 g5 11.g4!?

11.b4N is a natural alternative, when 11...c4!? 12.dxc4 (12.d4 ♗c7 gives us decent play on the light squares) 12...♔xd1† 13.♗xd1 ♗g7 offers fair compensation for the pawn.

11...♗g6 12.h4 ♗g7 13.hxg5 hxg5 14.♞xh8† ♗xh8 In the game we are following, White made a slight inaccuracy.



15. ♖xg5?! ♗xg5 16. ♕xg5

In Grib – Zhigalko, Minsk 2017, Black could have obtained a slight edge with:

16... ♕xe5 17. ♖e2 f6

The bishops are strong, and we might take on c3 to damage White's pawns if a suitable moment arises.

### 5... ♗c7

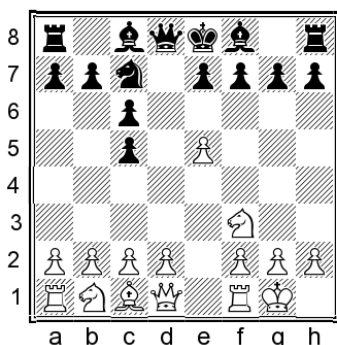
5...g6 is a popular alternative, but once again I prefer to maintain some flexibility with this pawn.

### 6. ♕xc6

6. ♕e2 d6 7. exd6 ♖xd6 gives us an easy game.

### 6... dxc6

We reach a typical structure, with similarities to the lines in the notes above. Many moves and transpositions are possible, so I have limited the coverage to some well-chosen examples showing how our plans can be implemented.



### 7.h3

7.d3 gives a choice: 7... ♕g4 is fine if we just want to develop, while 7...h6!? is the combative option to prepare ...g5.

7. ♖e1 h6 8.d3 was played in Priasmoro – Zhigalko, Internet (blitz) 2021, when 8...g5!N would have been good.

### 7...h6

7... ♖g8!? is another way of preparing ...g5 which deserves attention.

### 8. ♗c3 g5!

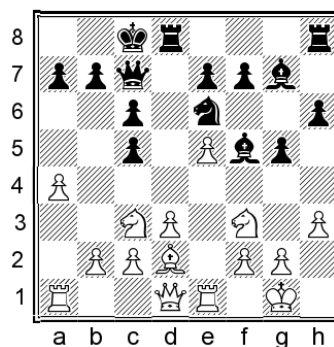
8... ♕f5 has also been played, but I think it's more accurate to maintain the possibility of ...g4 followed by ... ♕xg4 without losing a tempo with the bishop.

### 9. ♗h2

It's natural to sidestep away from the ...g4 advance, but White loses some coordination with this move. We are following a GM game in which White soon fell into trouble.

9... ♕g7 10. ♖e1 ♕f5 11.d3 ♗e6 12. ♕d2 ♖c7 13. ♗f3 0-0-0 14.a4

In Chandler – Cherniaev, Birmingham 2006, Black missed a nice way to capitalize on his active pieces:



14...c4!N 15.dxc4 h5!

White is under pressure on multiple fronts, and there is no adequate defence. For instance:

### 16. ♖c1

16. ♗e4 g4 17. ♗fg5 ♗xg5 18. ♗xg5 ♕h6 attacks the knight, while ...gxh3 is also a threat. If 19.h4 then 19...f6 is all over.

16...g4 17. ♗h4 ♕h7

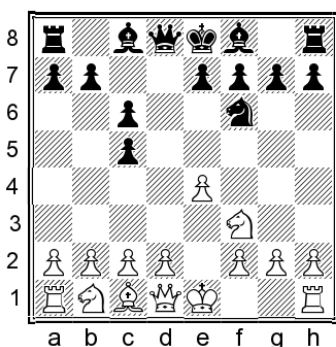
White's position is falling apart.

## B2) 4.♙xc6

This is an important option, especially since many Rossolimo players also like to play it against Black's other main options on move 3.

### 4...dxc6

It's important to understand the implications of the resulting pawn structure. The doubled pawns aren't weak per se, but they do make it harder for us to challenge White's centre and open things up for the bishop pair.



### 5.d3

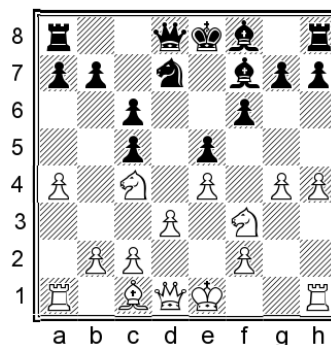
5.e5 ♖d5 leads back to 5.♙xc6 dxc6 in the notes to the previous variation.

### 5...♙g4

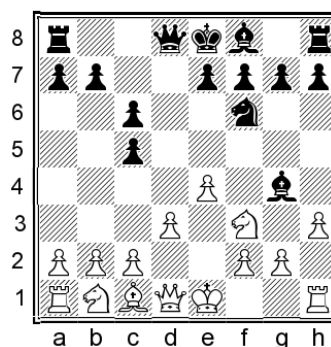
There are other ideas but it's useful to get the bishop out. Next the knight can drop back to d7, preparing ...e5.

### 6.h3

White quite often prefers 6.♘bd2; however, since we were not 'threatening' to exchange on f3 anyway, there is no need for White to commit the knight so soon. 6...♘d7 7.h3 ♙h5 White has various options and move orders, but the general plans and ideas remain similar for both sides. A good example continued: 8.♘c4 f6! (8...b5? has been played but the surprising 9.g4!N 9...♙g6 10.♘ce5 gives White a clear advantage.) 9.a4 e5 10.g4 ♙f7 11.h4



This position was reached in Murzin – Zvjaginsev, Sochi 2022. I suggest 11...h5!N 12.g5 ♙e7 intending the thematic ...♘f8-e6 regrouping, with a balanced game.



### 6...♙h5

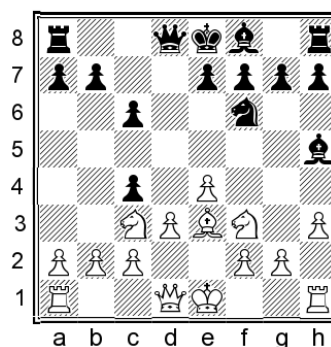
As mentioned earlier, it's better not to take on f3 for now.

### 7.♘c3

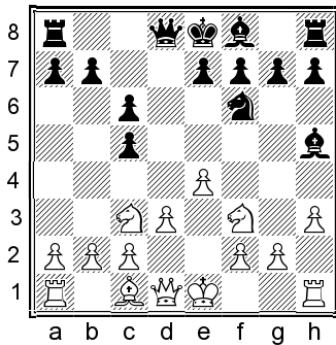
7.e5 ♘d5 8.e6?! f5! is messy but good for Black.

7.0-0 ♘d7 8.♙e3 e5 9.♘bd2 ♙e7 10.♞e1 ♜c7 11.c3 0-0 12.♞e2 ♞fe8 13.♘f1 ♘f8 14.♘g3 ♙g6 15.♘f5 ♘e6 saw Black carry out the typical regrouping with a good position in Zhao – Kuzubov, Internet (blitz) 2020.

7.♙e3 should be met by: 7...c4 8.♘c3



8...e6! (8...cxd3 9.cxd3 e6 is less accurate because White's queen is free to jump, to b3 for instance.)  
 9.g4 ♖g6 10.♗e5 cxd3 11.cxd3 This occurred in Kryvoruchko – Macieja, Katowice 2010, and now 11...♗d6!N would have been at least equal for Black.



7...♗d7

As usual, we prepare ...e5 followed by an eventual transfer of the knight to e6.

8.g4! ♖g6 9.♗f4

Controlling the e5-square is the only critical idea.

9...e6

9...f6?! 10.e5 is bad for Black.

10.♗e2 b5!

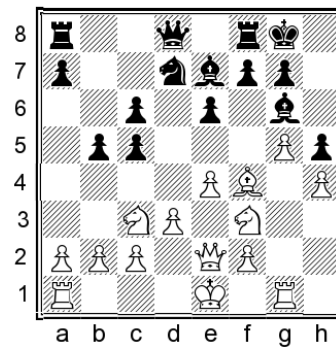
Reminding White that the king will not be guaranteed safety on the queenside.

11.h4

11.♗g3 ♗e7 12.0-0 was played in Zeberski – Grela, Poland 2017, and now 12...0-0!N 13.e5 ♗b6 would have been best, with a highly complex position.

11...h5 12.g5 ♗e7 13.♗g1 0-0

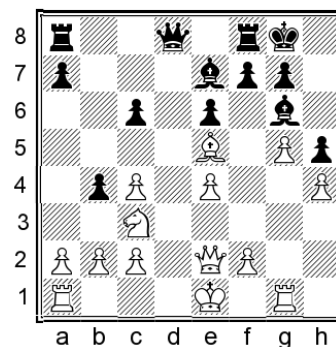
The position is strategically complex, to put it mildly. In the game we are following, White went astray.



14.♗e5?! ♗xe5 15.♗xe5 c4!

Opening things up to good effect.

16.dxc4 b4



17.♗a4??

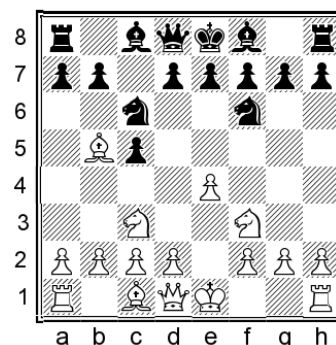
17.♗d1?! f6! gives Black a strong initiative.

17.♗b1N was best, although it would be unpleasant to make such a move. Play continues 17...f6! 18.gxf6 ♗xf6 19.♗xf6 ♗xf6 20.♗d2 ♗h7 21.0-0-0 ♗xf2 22.♗xf2 ♗xf2 when only Black can be better.

17...♗a5!

Black was winning a piece in Delorme – Dardha, France (blitz) 2020.

B3) 4.♗c3



This natural move is the main line. It can also arise via 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♙b5, as we have already seen, as well as after the Anti-Sicilian line 2.♘c3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 ♘f6!? 4.♘c3.

#### 4...♙c7

This move will be our focus. The main point of moving the queen so early is to control the e5-square. This system is well known and there are lots of games with it, but there is nothing like as much theory here compared to 3...g6 for instance.

4...♘d4 is the move we would like to play, but 5.e5 ♘xb5 6.♘xb5 ♘d5 7.0-0 (or 7.♘g5!?) leaves Black uncomfortably behind in development. With the queen on c7, we will have the option of ...♘d4 without allowing the f6-knight to be kicked around.

4...g6 is another possibility, but once again I prefer not to transpose to 3...g6 territory.

#### 5.0-0

This is the main move by far.

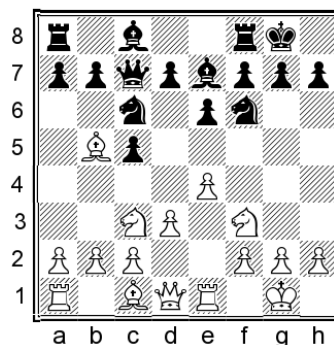
An interesting alternative is: 5.♙xc6!? dxc6! The safest recapture, leading to similar positions to those discussed earlier in the chapter. (5...♙xc6 6.♙e2 followed by d2-d4 could be tricky, due to White's lead in development.) 6.h3 is the most common continuation, although I don't think it's strictly necessary to stop ...♙g4 at this point. 6...e5 7.0-0? (7.d3 is better, when 7...♙e7 leads to a normal game where we should keep in mind the idea of launching the g-pawn in the event that White castles prematurely.) The text move has been played a few times but 7...g5!N could make White regret the previous decision.

It's also worth considering:

5.d3!?

This sideline is more interesting than it looks.

5...e6 6.0-0 ♙e7 7.♙e1 0-0

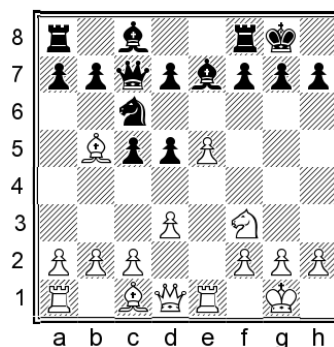


8.e5

8.♙g5 has been played a few times. The most accurate reply is: 8...h6!N (8...d6 9.♙xc6!N 9...♙xc6 10.e5 gives White some initiative.) 9.♙h4 d6 10.♙xc6 ♙xc6 11.e5 ♘d5! 12.♘xd5 ♙xh4 13.♘xh4 ♙xd5 With the knight misplaced on h4, we have nothing to worry about.

8...♘d5 9.♘xd5 exd5

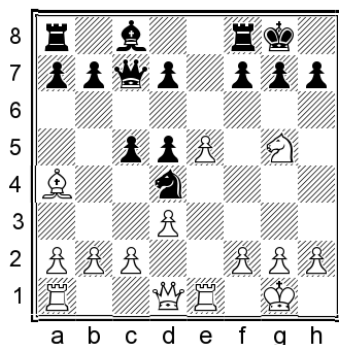
Our pawn structure has been mildly compromised but we are ready to free ourselves with ...d6, so the onus is on White to make something happen.



10.♙g5

Another example continued 10.d4 cxd4 and here White blundered with: 11.♘xd4?? (11.♙f4N is better, when 11...d6 12.h3 dxe5 13.♘xe5 ♙d6 14.♙xc6 bxc6 15.♙xd4 ♙a6 16.♘d3 ♙xd3 17.♙xd6 ♙xd6 18.cxd3 a5 results in equality.) 11...♘xd4 12.♙xd4 ♙a5! 13.♙h6!? White miraculously went on to save half a point in Milliet – M. Muzychuk, Istanbul (ol) 2012, but here 13...♙xb5N 14.♙g4 g6 would have been comfortably winning for Black.

10...♙xg5 11.♘xg5 ♘d4 12.♙a4



12...♞e6!N

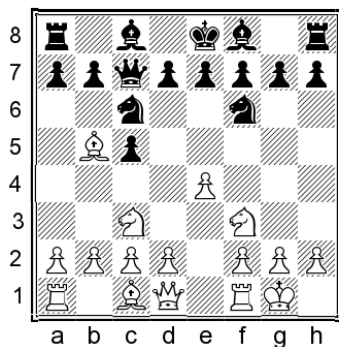
12...b5 13.c3 ♞e6 14.♞xe6 fxe6 15.♙b3 ♚b6 16.d4 gave White a risk-free edge in Vuckovic – Halkias, Vrnjacka Banja 2010.

13.♞f3

13.♞xe6 dxe6 is fine for us.

13...d6

I see no reason why Black should be worse.



5...♞d4

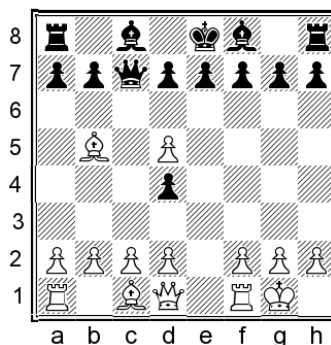
That's why we placed the queen on c7: to put the knight here without allowing e4-e5 in response. We are a bit behind in development but it's not so easy for White to open the position in an effective way.

6.♞e1

We will focus our brief coverage on this move, which is the main line and the usual recommendation for White. There are two serious alternatives though:

6.♞xd4!? cxd4 7.♞d5 ♞xd5 8.exd5

White hopes to utilize the open e-file.



8...♚c5! 9.c4

9.♙a4? and 9.♚e2? are both met by 9...♚xd5, when White has little to no compensation for the missing pawn.

9...a6

9...dxc3? 10.♚b3 gives White a big lead in development.

10.b4!

10.♙a4 b5 11.cxb5 ♚xd5 is promising for Black.

10...♚xb4 11.♙a4 b5 12.cxb5 axb5 13.♙b3 g6

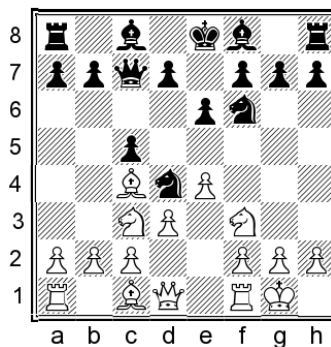
Black has a decent position.

The other main option is:

6.♙c4 e6 7.d3

7.♞e1?! is slightly inaccurate in view of 7...♞g4!

8.g3 ♞xf3† 9.♚xf3 ♞e5 10.♚e2 ♙e7 when the position remains complicated but Black has the better chances, as the light-squared bishop has fantastic potential.



7...a6

This position is sometimes reached via the move order 2.♞c3 ♞c6 3.♙b5 ♞d4 4.♙c4 e6 5.♞f3 ♞f6 6.0-0 a6 7.d3 ♚c7!?. GM Matthieu Cornette offered excellent analysis of it in *Experts on the Anti-Sicilian*.

8.♞xd4 cxd4 9.♞e2 ♞xe4!

Showing another purpose of the queen on c7.

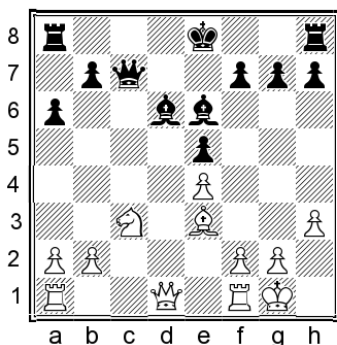
10.♙xc6!

This is the most challenging continuation. Alternatives do exist though, and I suggest checking them for yourself if you decide to play this way.

10...dxe6 11.dxe4 ♗d6!

Some players have opted for 11...e5 immediately, but it's useful to develop the bishop with tempo first.

12.h3 e5 13.c3 dxc3 14.♖xc3 ♗e6 15.♗e3



15...♗d8!

15...0-0 16.♗d5 ♖d8 17.♗b3 might be holdable for Black, but White has an easy initiative with little to no risk.

15...♗c8!N 16.♗d5 ♖b8 is another idea but 17.♗a4†! ♗d7 18.♗a5 gives White an annoying clamp.

16.♗d5

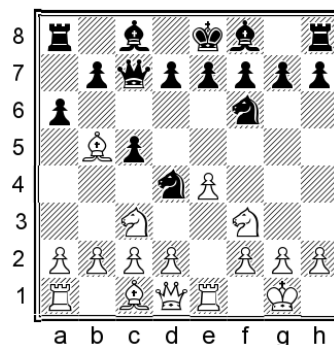
16.♗c1 ♗a5 gives us no problems.

16...♗c4!N

I agree with Cornette, who gives this as Black's best. The analysis runs much deeper and I recommend checking some lines for yourself with an engine to verify that White's ideas with ♗g5 followed by sacrificing on f6 turn out fine for Black.

The text move is White's most popular and challenging option, threatening e4-e5. I will provide some ideas showing how to handle the black position after both **B31)** 6...a6 and **B32)** 6...e5!?

### B31) 6...a6

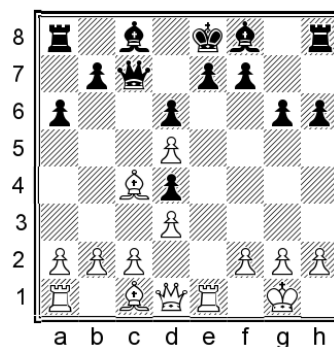


### 7.♗f1

This is the main line, which Jones recommends in his *1.e4 Coffeehouse Repertoire*. There are two serious alternatives:

7.e5!? ♗xb5 8.exf6 ♗xc3 9.fxg7 ♗xg7 10.dxc3 d6 reaches a double-edged position where White is better developed, but we have a strong centre and the bishop pair, and we still have the option of castling on either side.

7.♗c4 d6 8.♗d5 ♗xd5 9.exd5 g6 10.♗xd4 cxd4 11.d3 h6! reaches something similar to the main line below, but with White's light-squared bishop on a different square:



Our last move prevents White's other bishop from going to the optimal g5-square. We are behind in development but we have a straightforward plan of ...♗g7-f6 followed by walking the king to g7. A complex game lies ahead, and it seems to me that Black's position holds up okay.

### 7...d6

Here too, we should prevent e4-e5.

7...♗g4?! has been more popular but there is more than one drawback to it, as the reader can verify.

### 8. ♖d5

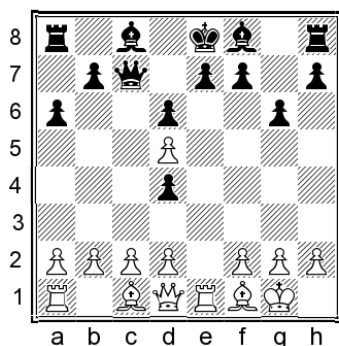
8. ♖xd4 cxd4 9. ♖d5 ♖xd5 10. exd5 g6 transposes to the main line below.

### 8... ♖xd5 9. exd5 g6 10. ♖xd4

10. c3 ♖xf3† 11. ♖xf3 ♗g7 and 10. ♖g5!? h6 11. c3 hxg5 12. cxd4 ♗g7 both deserve attention, but neither option offers White any advantage according to my analysis.

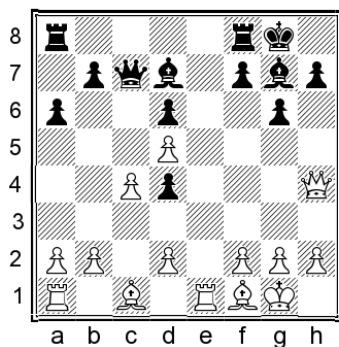
### 10... cxd4

Again we reach an interesting structure with 'double doubled' pawns on the d-file.



### 11. c4 ♗g7 12. d3

White is unable to profit from the open e-file at this stage: 12. ♖e2 0-0! 13. ♖xe7? ♗d7 14. ♖h4



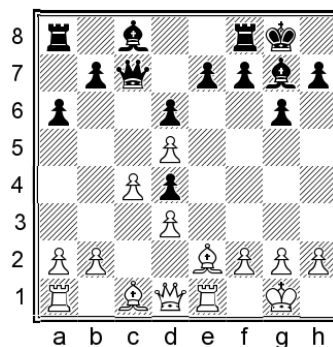
14...d3! 15. ♗xd3 ♖ae8 16. ♖f1 f5! We have a huge initiative for the sacrificed material.

### 12... 0-0 13. ♗e2!? N

13. ♗g5 e6 14. dxe6 fxe6 is okay for us.

The text move is a clever novelty which Jones recommends. The point is that sooner or later Black will want to play ...e5 anyway, so White manoeuvres the bishop to a better location in

anticipation of this. Should your opponent get this far, my suggestion would be:



### 13... e5!?

13...b5 14. b3 bxc4 15. bxc4 e5 16. dxe6 ♗xe6 17. ♗f3 ♖ab8 18. h3 is the illustrative line offered by Jones, when White stands better. It seems to me that opening the b-file does nothing to help Black, so I suggest leaving the b-pawn at home for now.

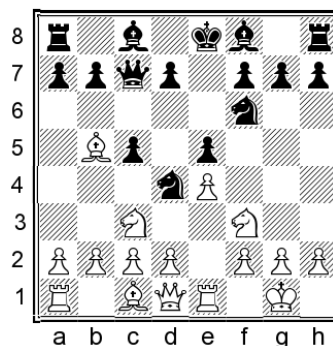
### 14. dxe6 fxe6

Our pawn structure isn't the prettiest, but it will take a lot of time and skill for White to make anything of this. In the meantime we have an easy plan of development. Play could continue:

### 15. ♗f3 ♗d7 16. ♗d2 ♖f7 17. ♗e4 ♖af8

The engine gives White a plus, but Black's position is certainly playable in practice. After suitable preparation we can consider ...♗c6 followed by ...bxc6, showing another potential advantage of leaving the pawn on b7.

### B32) 6...e5!?



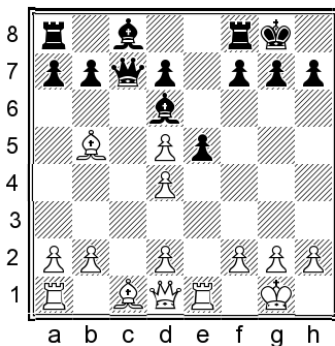
This move has the practical advantage of reducing White's options and generally leading to calmer play, making it relatively safe and easy to learn. The drawback is that we are committing to a static pawn structure with a weak d5-square.

However, unlike the 3.♘c3 e5 line, here White has committed the bishop to b5 and rook to e1, which makes our life a bit easier.

### 7.d3

Jones recommends this, so I will take it as our main line.

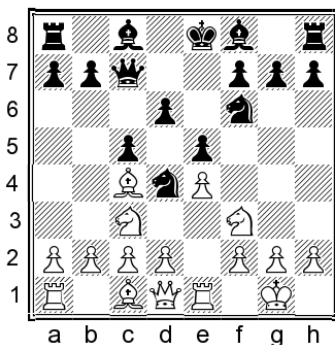
7.♘xd4!? cxd4 8.♘d5 ♖xd5 9.exd5 ♙d6 10.c3 0-0 11.cxd4 was the more dynamic continuation of Petr – Ikonnikov, Germany 2017. The most accurate continuation is:



11...a6!N 12.♙d3 e4! 13.♙xe4 f5 14.♙f3 ♙xh2† 15.♙f1 ♙d6 With an unclear game.

White can also preserve the light-squared bishop with:

7.♙c4 d6



8.d3!?

8.h3 is the most common continuation, leading to more or less the same type of game, but with White spending this additional tempo on the kingside. As we will see below, there's actually no need to touch the h-pawn yet.

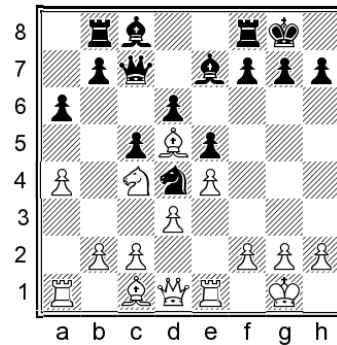
8.♘g5! occurred in Kogan – J. Sanchez, Bergamo 2008, when best play would be 8...h6!N 9.♘b5! (9.♘xf7? ♖h7 leaves the knight trapped) 9...♘xb5

10.♙xb5† ♙d7 11.♙xd7† ♖xd7 12.♘f3 ♙e7 with a level game.

8...♙e7

8...♙g4?! isn't a threat because of 9.♘b5, when Black must settle for 9...♘xb5 10.♙xb5† ♙d7 with an obvious edge for White.

9.♘d2 ♖b8 10.a4 a6 11.♘d5 ♘xd5 12.♙xd5 0-0 13.♘c4

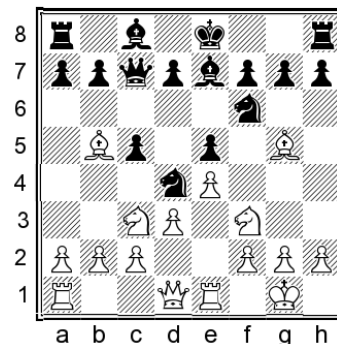


We have been following Fedorchuk – J. Sanchez, Elancourt 2004. I think Black should play:

13...b5N 14.axb5 axb5 15.♘e3 ♙g5

White's advantage is minor, if it exists at all.

7...♙e7 8.♙g5



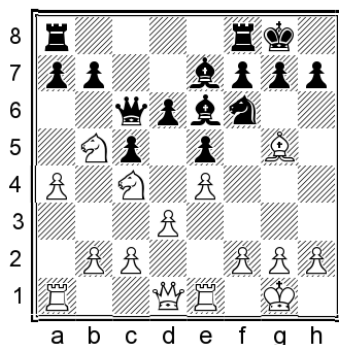
8...♘xb5!

Jones offers an example continuing with 8...0-0, when White obtains an easy edge with 9.♙xf6 followed by ♘d5. Let's instead remove the bishop and reduce White's control over the light squares.

9.♘xb5 ♖c6 10.a4

10.c4 d6 11.h3 h6 12.♙e3 0-0 gave Black no particular problems in T. Horvath – Gauglitz, Hungary 1989.

10...d6 11.♘d2 0-0 12.♘c4 ♙e6



White eventually prevailed in Hracek – McShane, Lippstadt 2000, but at this stage I see no real problems for Black. White may try to use the outpost on d5, but only one of the knights can occupy it at a time. If we avoid excessive exchanges and keep our two bishops on the board, we will have good chances on the kingside in the long run.

### Conclusion

Anti-Sicilians are too big a topic to cover in their entirety in a book like this, so in this chapter I have offered the foundation of a repertoire against two of White’s potentially annoying options after 1.e4 c5 2.f3 d6.

We started with 3.f3, when 3...f6 is my recommendation. Then 4.e5 g4 5.f2 is a

possible attempt to disrupt our development, but 5...d6 6.exd6 e6! is a convenient antidote.

3.f5 is the Rossolimo, which many would consider the best of all White’s Anti-Sicilian tries. 3...f6 is my recommendation for players looking for a playable and slightly offbeat way of meeting it. We saw some examples of typical plans after both 4.e5 d5 and 4.fxc6 dxc6. Remember the possibility of ...g5, which offers us excellent play in many variations.

4.f3 is the main line, when 4...c7 is our choice. Then 5.0-0 d4 6.f1 is critical, and I have offered two playable ideas against it. 6...a6 is the most complex and combative move, and you should check some additional lines for yourself in order to play it with confidence. I also offered 6...e5!? as a solid alternative, which is relatively safe and easy to handle.

Summing up, if you like the idea of meeting 3.f5 with 3...f6 as I do, then this chapter should serve as a useful foundation for your further study on this topic.

# Variation Index

## Chapter 1

1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♟xd4 ♟f6 5.♟c3 e5 6.♟db5 d6 7.♟g5 a6 8.♟a3 b5 9.♟xf6 gxf6 10.♟d5 f5 11.♟d3 ♟e6 12.0-0 ♟xd5 13.exd5 ♟e7

- A) 14.♟xb5 ♟g7 15.♟c3 e4 16.♟c4 0-0 13  
A1) 17.♟d2 14  
A2) 17.♟h5 16  
B) 14.c4 ♟g7 18  
B1) 15.♟d2 19  
B2) 15.♟b1 20  
C) 14.♟e1 24  
D) 14.c3 ♟g7 15.♟c2 0-0 28  
D1) 16.a4 29  
D2) 16.♟e1 ♟d7 33  
D21) 17.a4 35  
D22) 17.g3 38

## Chapter 2

1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♟xd4 ♟f6 5.♟c3 e5 6.♟db5 d6 7.♟g5 a6 8.♟a3 b5 9.♟xf6 gxf6 10.♟d5 f5 11.♟d3 ♟e6 12.0-0 ♟xd5 13.exd5 ♟e7 14.c3 ♟g7

- A) 15.♟h5 e4 44  
A1) 16.♟e2 0-0 17.♟c2 ♟e8 44  
A11) 18.f3 48  
A12) 18.g3 50  
A2) 16.♟c2 0-0 52  
A21) 17.♟ad1 53  
A22) 17.♟ae1 ♟c8 56  
A221) 18.f3 58  
A222) 18.♟b1 61  
A223) 18.♟b3 65  
A224) 18.♟h1 67  
B) 15.♟e1 0-0 16.♟h5 e4 17.♟f1 71  
B1) 17...♟e8 71  
B11) 18.♟ad1 ♟c8 71

- B111) 19.♟e3 73  
B112) 19.♟c2 75  
B12) 18.♟c2 78  
B2) 17...♟c8 18.♟ad1 ♟e8 19.♟c2 ♟g6 82  
B21) 20.♟d4 84  
B22) 20.♟b4 86

## Chapter 3

1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♟xd4 ♟f6 5.♟c3 e5 6.♟db5 d6 7.♟g5 a6 8.♟a3 b5 9.♟xf6 gxf6 10.♟d5 f5 11.♟d3 ♟e6

- A) 12.♟h5 92  
B) 12.c3 ♟g7 96  
B1) 13.♟h5 0-0 97  
B11) 14.0-0 97  
B12) 14.exf5 101  
B2) 13.♟xb5 axb5 14.♟xb5 105  
B21) 14...♟d7 15.exf5 ♟b8!? 16.a4 0-0 105  
B211) 17.f6 108  
B212) 17.0-0 109  
B22) 14...♟c8!? 113

## Chapter 4

1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♟xd4 ♟f6 5.♟c3 e5 6.♟db5 d6 7.♟g5 a6 8.♟a3 b5 9.♟xf6 gxf6 10.♟d5 f5 (10...♟g7 11.c3 f5) 11.c3 ♟g7 12.exf5 ♟xf5

- A) 13.♟f3?! 119  
B) 13.♟c2 0-0 120  
B1) 14.♟e2 121  
B2) 14.♟ce3 ♟e6 124  
B21) 15.g3 126  
B22) 15.♟d3 f5 128  
B221) 16.♟h5 e4 17.♟c2 ♟e7 130  
B2211) 18.♟b3 132  
B2212) 18.♟f4 136  
B222) 16.0-0 ♟h8! 141

B2221) 17.a4 142  
B2222) 17.♖h5 144

## Chapter 5

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3  
e5 6.♗db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6 8.♗a3 b5 9.♙xf6 gxf6  
10.♗d5 f5

- A) 11.g3 fxe4 12.♙g2 ♙g7 13.♙xe4 ♙e6 150  
A1) 14.c3 151  
A2) 14.♖h5 ♞c8 153  
A21) 15.c3 155  
A22) 15.0-0 ♗e7 157  
A221) 16.♗xe7 159  
A222) 16.♞ad1 160  
B) 11.exf5 (alternatives) 163  
C) 11.♗xb5 166  
D) 11.♙xb5 169  
E) 11.c4?! 173  
F) 11.♖d3 174  
G) 11.♖f3? 176

## Chapter 6

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3  
e5 6.♗db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6 8.♗a3 b5 9.♙xf6 gxf6  
10.♗d5 ♙g7 11.♙d3 ♗e7 12.♗xe7 ♖xe7

- A) 13.c3 184  
B) 13.0-0 0-0 187  
B1) 14.♖f3 188  
B2) 14.c3 f5 189  
B21) 15.exf5 e4 16.♞e1 189  
B22) 15.♗c2 f4!? 190  
B221) 16.♖e2!? 191  
B222) 16.♗b4 195  
B223) 16.a4 bxa4 199  
B2231) 17.♗b4!? 199  
B2232) 17.♞xa4 202

## Chapter 7

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3  
e5 6.♗db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6 8.♗a3 b5 9.♙xf6 gxf6  
10.♗d5 ♙g7 11.♙d3 ♗e7 12.♗xe7 ♖xe7 13.0-0  
0-0 14.c4 f5

- A) 15.cxb5 209  
B) 15.♖e2 211  
C) 15.♖h5 214  
D) 15.♖f3 d5 16.cxd5 fxe4 17.♙xe4 ♞b8 219  
D1) 18.♞ac1!? 220  
D2) 18.♞fd1 223  
D3) 18.♞ad1 ♞b6! 19.♖d3 ♖d7 20.♙xh7† ♗h8  
225  
D31) 21.♖e3 229  
D32) 21.d6 231

## Chapter 8

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3  
e5 6.♗db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6 8.♗a3 b5 9.♗d5 ♙e7  
10.♙xf6 ♙xf6 11.c3 ♙g5

- A) 12.h4!? ♙h6 13.♗c2 0-0! 238  
A1) 14.a4 239  
A2) 14.g3 240  
A3) 14.g4!? 241  
B) 12.♗c2 ♞b8! 243  
B1) 13.♙e2 244  
B2) 13.a4! bxa4 14.♗cb4 ♗xb4 247  
B21) 15.♗xb4 ♙d7 16.♙xa6 ♖a5! 17.♖xd6 ♞b6  
18.♖d3 ♙e6 248  
B211) 19.♙c4 249  
B212) 19.0-0 249  
B22) 15.cxb4 ♙d7! 16.♙xa6 0-0 250  
B221) 17.b3 251  
B222) 17.0-0 252

## Chapter 9

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3  
e5 6.♗db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6 8.♗a3 b5 9.♗d5 ♙e7  
10.♙xf6 ♙xf6 11.c4 b4 12.♗c2 a5

- A) 13.♙e2 261  
B) 13.h4!? 263  
C) 13.♖f3!? ♙e7 264  
C1) 14.♞d1 264  
C2) 14.♙e2 266  
D) 13.g3 g6!? 267  
D1) 14.♗xf6†!? 268

D2) 14.h4 269

## Chapter 10

1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♟c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♟xd4 ♟f6 5.♟c3 e5 6.♟db5 d6 7.♟g5 a6 8.♟a3 b5

A) 9.♟d5 ♟e7 274

A1) 10.♟xf6 274

A2) 10.♟xe7 ♟xe7! 275

A21) 11.♟f3 276

A22) 11.♟d3 277

A23) 11.♟xf6 gxf6 279

A231) 12.♟d2 280

A232) 12.♟f3 284

A233) 12.c4 285

B) 9.♟ab1!? 289

## Chapter 11

1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♟c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♟xd4 ♟f6 5.♟c3 e5 6.♟db5 d6 7.♟d5 ♟xd5 8.exd5 ♟b8

A) 9.♟f3!? 294

B) 9.c4 a6 299

B1) 10.♟a4!? 300

B2) 10.♟c3 ♟e7 305

B21) 11.♟d3 305

B22) 11.♟e2 0-0 12.0-0 f5 309

B221) 13.f3 310

B222) 13.f4 313

C) 9.a4 ♟e7 318

C1) 10.♟d2 319

C2) 10.♟e2 0-0 11.0-0 ♟d7 321

C21) 12.b4!? 322

C22) 12.a5 324

C23) 12.♟h1 325

C24) 12.♟d2 328

## Chapter 12

1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♟c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♟xd4 ♟f6 5.♟c3 e5

A) 6.♟db5 d6 332

A1) 7.♟a3 332

A2) 7.♟e3 333

A3) 7.a4 334

B) 6.♟f5 335

C) 6.♟de2!? 337

D) 6.♟b3?! 339

## Chapter 13

A) 3.♟c3 342

B) 3.♟b5 ♟f6 343

B1) 4.e5 344

B2) 4.♟xc6 346

B3) 4.♟c3 ♟c7 5.0-0 ♟d4 6.♟e1 349

B31) 6...a6 352

B32) 6...e5!? 353

# Playing the Sveshnikov

Milos Pavlovic

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