

*Renier Castellanos*

*Playing the  
Nimzo-Indian*

*A Dynamic Repertoire*



QUALITY CHESS



# Contents

## Preface

### Part 1 - Less Common 4th Moves

#### Chapter 1 - Miscellaneous

#### Chapter 2 - Leningrad Variation

#### Chapter 3 - The Trendy 4.♔d2

#### Chapter 4 - The Aggressive 4.f3

#### Chapter 5 - Sämisch Variation

### Part II - Kasparov Variation

#### Chapter 6 - 4.♘f3 c5

#### Chapter 7 - 8.cxd5

### Part III - Rubinstein Variation

#### Chapter 8 - 4.e3 0–0 5.♘e2

#### Chapter 9 - 5.♔d3 d5 – 6.♘e2 & 6.cxd5

#### Chapter 10 - The Sharp 6.a3

#### Chapter 11 - 5.♘f3

### Part IV - Classical Variation

#### Chapter 12 - 4.♔c2 d5

#### Chapter 13 - 5.cxd5

## Variation Index

# Preface

The Nimzo-Indian has been one of the most popular defences against 1.d4 in the history of chess. Building on the pioneering work of Aron Nimzowitsch, the Nimzo-Indian was regularly employed by Jose Raul Capablanca, and its legacy carried on, allowing it to be a weapon in the arsenal of every World Champion ever since. Of course, you probably already know that. However, I want to share my personal history and experience with this universal opening. As a young kid I was inclined to play sharp systems, and the Benko Gambit was my weapon of choice against 1.d4, together with all sorts of King's Indian and Benoni-style systems. My results were good against players of my age, but every time I faced an adult I would lose, because such systems were too complex for my chess understanding and gave White too much space and freedom of choice. Tired of getting bad positions out of the opening or having to start the game down a pawn, I went to a more experienced friend of mine asking for advice on how to deal with 1.d4. My friend immediately suggested the Nimzo, with the simple reasoning that after 3...♗b4 Black's game was already easy to play. A bit of an exaggeration, but I liked it! This unbreakable confidence about the Nimzo-Indian Defence motivated me to start learning the variations, and I started playing it shortly afterwards.

Why the Nimzo over other defences?

From my perspective, the Nimzo not only offers a superb weapon against 1.d4, but it is also a fantastic opening to learn if you want to improve your chess understanding in general – mainly due to its versatility. There are many possible pawn structures that can arise in the opening and the middlegame. The IQP (Isolated Queen's Pawn) is a common one, but also the hanging pawns (for both sides), the Carlsbad, the Benoni structure and many more.

Learning how to play these structures will naturally result in an improvement of your chess understanding and quality of play. Another key point for choosing the Nimzo for me was the notion that it takes a lot of bad moves to get a bad position. Unlike with other defences, being out of book should not be a catastrophe – just following the general principles should usually get you to some sort of safety. Obviously, there are exceptions.

However, it must be said that things are rapidly changing. The theory of the Nimzo has evolved greatly. The eruption of engines and the number of games being played around the world have developed the most popular openings to an extent that the amount of theory is increasing at an exponential rate. On the other hand, this doesn't matter too much in practical terms. It is impossible to remember everything – the foundations and understanding are what will remain with us over time.

Let's talk about how this book was created. The project was born inside the Killer Chess Training Academy, which we will henceforth refer to as KCT. If you have not heard of this Chess Academy before, I recommend you do an online search.

As part of our opening courses, I was in charge of teaching the Nimzo to a group of our students. Every week, we'd look at a few lines and discuss them as a group. I presented the material which I had previously researched, and our students not only learned it but also helped greatly in its development with suggestions and improvements.

Is this repertoire a good choice for you?

This book is meant to be useful for players of all levels. Ambitious tournament players can use it as their manual for a complete professional repertoire. Those who want to learn a new opening from scratch and expand their chess understanding can also benefit from going over the lines, as they are always accompanied with

plenty of text explaining the reasoning behind the moves, the key ideas and strategic motifs.

In many cases, the inspiration of my choices was Michael Adams, a player whose games in the Nimzo I have studied carefully. His understanding of the Nimzo fits well with my view of treating it as a lifetime opening. An opening that can be played anytime, without always having to check your notes before the game. An opening where we can always choose the principled approach.

However, not everything is quiet, calm and easy. There are some other razor-sharp lines which were new to me, but I decided to investigate them further for the course and then for this book.

That is the case with 4...d5! against the Classical Variation with 4.♔c2. This is probably the most extensive and critical chapter of the whole book. After 4...d5 5.cxd5 (5.a3 is another important line) 5...exd5 6.♕g5 h6 7.♕h4 I suggest going 7...♖c6!? followed by ...g7-g5 – a modern line that leads to incredibly double-edged positions where both sides need to be accurate. I like this choice because it changes the character of the struggle, in a line which is typically chosen by solid players who want a quiet game where they can out-manoeuvre their opponents. Rather than play the slow game, we instigate a totally different scenario.

Another important line is 4.f3, one of White's most aggressive variations where he tries to crush the Nimzo by grabbing space in the centre. I propose meeting 4.f3 with 4...c5, and after the main move 5.d5 we go for 5...d6 6.e4 b5. We enter a Benoni type of pawn structure with plenty of dynamic factors at play. White has a fair number of continuations, with 7.♘e2 being the critical line. At that point, I present two options, with 8...e5 and 8...g5!?. This is a rare exception in the book when I give two possible choices, mainly because they are both interesting and couldn't be more different in nature. You should use which one suits you better according to your style.

The third important chapter is the one tackling the Rubinstein Variation with 4.e3, one of White's most popular choices.

Theoretically speaking, this chapter is not especially critical. Black can play in many ways in most lines. However, this is where I believe the core of the Nimzo is and where we can learn most about this opening – the typical positions, how the pieces coordinate, and several different pawn structures that every Nimzo-Indian player must know.

Finally, two other important chapters are dedicated to 4.♘f3, the so-called Kasparov variation. My recommended antidote is 4...c5 5.g3 cxd4, followed by castling kingside with the idea of ...d7-d5 next. This line was highly popular some years ago, but it faded away because of the more modern approach with 5...♘e4. However, I always liked the old line with 5...cxd4, and that's what I re-studied and properly structured for this project.

Other chapters are also important, but I consider the four sections mentioned above to hold the essence of what the Nimzo-Indian is all about. Learning the main concepts well should serve as a strong foundation that will allow you to handle any sideline with confidence.

A last recommendation I want to give the reader is not to be discouraged by the amount of theory presented in some of the lines. You do not have to remember everything. Even in the most complicated lines, grasping the main ideas should be enough to give you a playable position in a practical game. The lengthy lines are instructive and may help you to develop a feel for the positions in general, but they are not always there for you to remember them move by move.

Without further ado, I wish the reader an enjoyable read. I sincerely hope this repertoire brings you great success in your upcoming tournaments.

*Renier Castellanos, Bucharest, June 2024*



# Chapter 1

## Miscellaneous

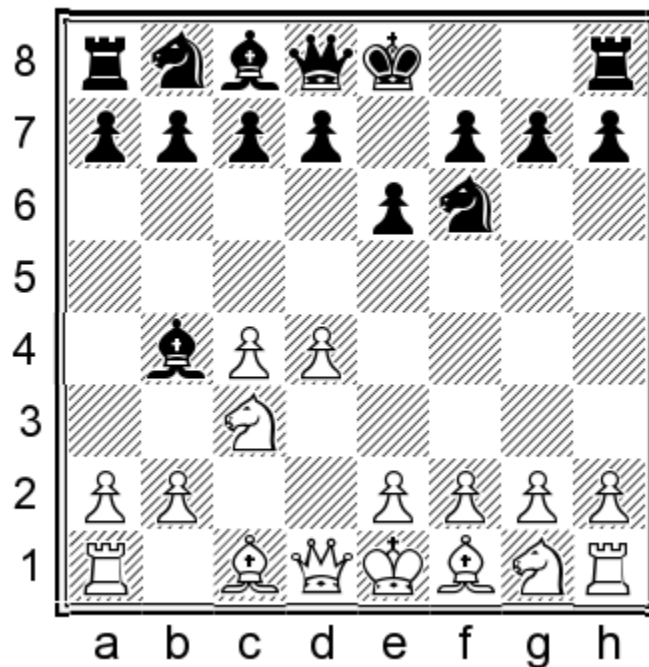
### Variation Index

1.d4 ♞f6 2.c4 e6 3.♞c3 ♞b4

- A) 4.g4
- B) 4.g3
- C) 4.♞f4
- D) 4.♞d3
- E) 4.♞b3

### Introduction

1.d4 ♞f6 2.c4 e6 3.♞c3 ♞b4



So, here we are! The Nimzo-Indian! Black develops the bishop, pins the knight, stops e2-e4, and gets ready to castle. Before diving into the mainlines, there are a few alternatives that, although not necessary to memorize, should be briefly examined.

#### 4.♔b3

The most logical of the bunch of misfits examined in this chapter. One could ponder why this is so much less popular than its cousin, 4.♕c2. Doesn't the queen perform the same task of protecting the c3-knight and also win a tempo on the black bishop? Well, this statement is true, but the queen on b3 has a serious downside: it does not fight for control over the e4-square. In any case, the other moves examined in this chapter are clearly weirder:

4.g4 is, surprisingly, not so bad. This extremely rare gambit tries to baffle us initially, but if we stay calm, stick to the principles, and meet a flank attack with a central counter, I think we shall be fine. In that sense, logical is 4...d5, most likely followed by ...c7-c5 as well. White's plans for chaos are immediately frustrated.

4.♗f4 looks like a normal developing move, but it lacks in actual purpose. The bishop is a bit exposed on f4, and can sometimes look misplaced, depending on the structure. I suggest 4...c5, when I think that White's best choice is 5.e3 but that would lead to a totally harmless IQP (Isolated Queen's Pawn), where the bishop is misplaced on f4.

4.♕d3 is similar to 4.♔b3 and 4.♕c2, but it feels like this is the weirder amongst the three cousins. The queen is obviously exposed on d3, and we shall try to highlight that by once again striking with 4...c5!. After 5.dxc5 ♞a6 the knight will take on c5 with a gain of tempo, highlighting the bad placement of the white queen.

4.g3 is a weird fit for this chapter, as it is a totally normal move. However, after 4...c5! White has nothing better than developing the

knight to f3, which takes us to the mainline of the 4.♘f3 Variation, examined later in the book. Hence in this chapter we only examine alternatives to that normal reaction, mainly 5.dxc5, but that is not at all challenging after 5...♘e4!

### **4...c5!**

Fighting for the initiative immediately by attacking the weakened d4-square.

### **5.dxc5**

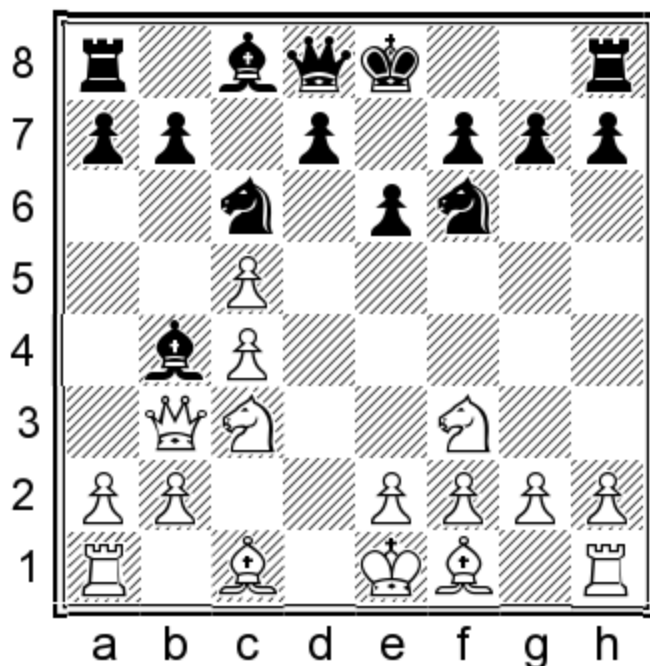
This is the normal reaction, both in this case and in the similar line after 4.♙c2.

### **5...♘c6!**

The first of the two important moves that are about to underline the downside of having the queen on b3. Black is in no rush to recapture the pawn.

### **6.♘f3**

We shall examine alternatives, but this is the more circumspect.



6...Nxe4!

Forcing White to place the bishop on d2 and give up the bishop pair. Black gets a solid position with good long-term prospects.

All the moves mentioned above are quite rare in practice and some of them you may never face. However, this chapter is also an opportunity to get ourselves acquainted with some of the main concepts of this great opening, and improving our understanding is always more valuable than memorizing any forced line.

## Theory Section

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4

We will study: A)4.g4, B)4.g3, C)4.Bf4, D)4.Qd3, and E)4.Qb3.

It is important to mention what happens if White does not believe that the bishop on b4 serves a purpose:

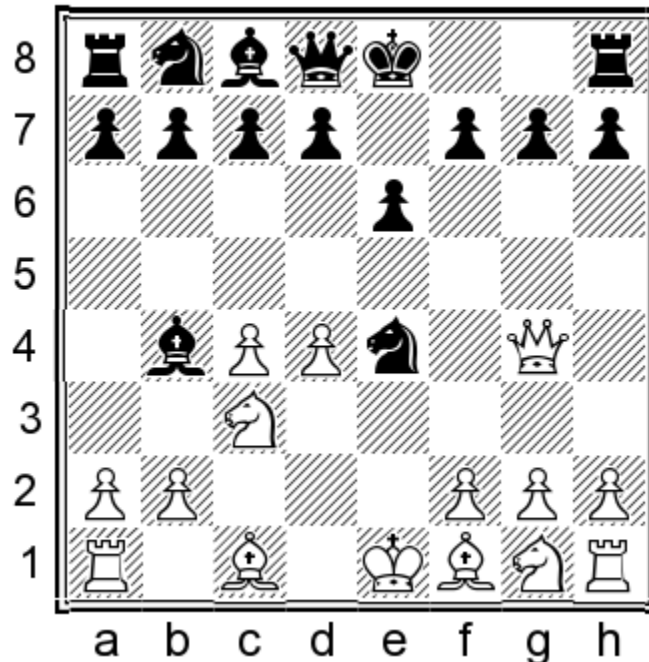
4.e4? Nxe4

Obviously, we have no choice but to take the pawn.

5. ♔g4

The "point".

5. ♔c2 This is the least bad. White will remain down a pawn but could potentially hope for a slight lead in development. Anything works, but it might be instructive to briefly mention the top engine line: 5... ♞xc3 6. bxc3 ♚d6! Black wants to develop the bishop to b7, so this move doesn't interfere with that plan. The h4-d8 diagonal is kept open for the queen, and the bishop is much more active on d6 than e7. Being up a pawn does not mean we should suddenly start playing passively! The next few moves are natural for both sides: 7. ♞f3 b6 8. ♚d3 ♚b7 9. ♔e2 ♞c6 10. 0-0 ♞a5 Castling short would also be possible, but this seems like a more flexible choice, even keeping the option open of ... ♔e7 followed by castling queenside. Black has a large advantage.



5... ♞xc3!

The refutation.

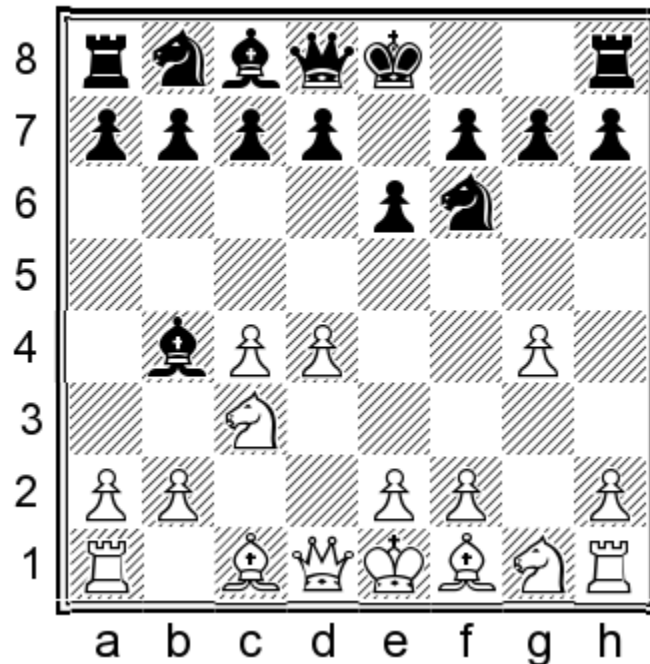
6. a3

6.♔xg7? is probably what White wants to play, but it fails to  
6...♕f6!. Starting with the discovered check also works, but I like  
the style points gained by this move order.

6...♖e7! 7.bxc3 0-0

Black is a pawn up and has zero worries.

**A) 4.g4**



This is a serious joke. No kidding – take it seriously. White is  
looking to wipe us off the board in coffeehouse style. But this is not  
a Sicilian, and White’s attempt to imitate the Keres Attack should  
not really be successful.

**4...d5!?**

A flank attack should usually be dealt with by striking in the centre,  
and this is no exception.

Taking the pawn is fine but messy for no particular reason, while many other moves are also possible, for example striking with 4...c5, or castling immediately.

### 5.a3!

White should force us to take on c3, solidifying the central structure. Otherwise, things might quickly start getting out of hand.

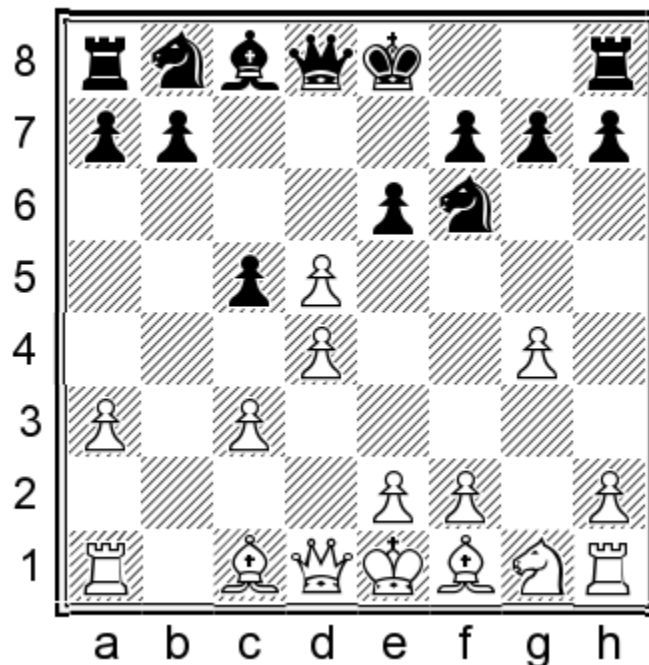
5.g5?! drives our knight to where it wants to go anyway, and after 5...♞e4 Black will follow up with ...c7-c5 and ...♞c6, destroying White's centre.

### 5...♞xc3+ 6.bxc3 c5!

Continuing to apply the same principle, trying to embarrass White's attempt at a flank attack.

### 7.cxd5

White cannot survive the central tension for long.



### 7...exd5

The solid option, although I'm not sure if we need something solid. I believe that 7...0-0! is even stronger and could easily lead to White's demise in a practical game. Not only that, but examples like this help us solidify our faith in the classical principles. Declining the pawn on offer is not so easy, so normal is: 8.dxe6 ♙xe6 9.♙g2 ♘c6 10.g5 ♘d5 The engine claims equality, but with ...♙a5 followed by bringing both rooks to the central files coming in the next few moves, it is easy to see imagine how our opponents could crumble.

### **8.f3!**

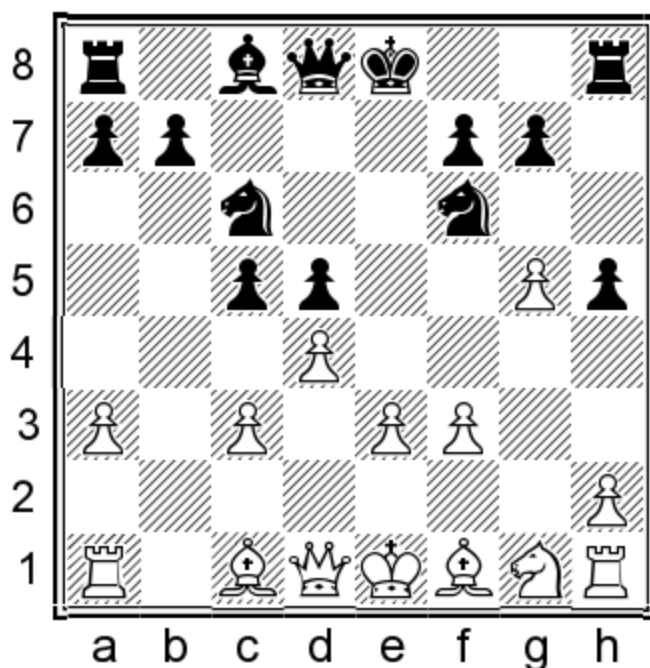
Nothing else makes sense. White tries to turn the game into a 4.a3 or 4.f3 Nimzo, but with the pawn already on g4. As we shall mention in those chapters, as well as in the Rubinstein, this type of position is one Black should generally opt to avoid, since White's potential to slowly build up for e3-e4 is difficult to play against. Moreover, even though it lies outside the scope of this book, in those lines it is not crazy for White to think about pushing the g-pawn.

However, in our present case the g2-g4 thrust was obviously made quite early, and that permits us to think of a different approach than simply castling kingside and waiting for White to build up an attack. This all happened in Bellahcene – Milliet, Paris 2022, and my suggestion would be for Black to play:

**8...♘c6!?N**

Aiming at quick counterplay with ...h7-h5 next. For example:

**9.e3 h5! 10.g5**



**10...♞g8!**

The knight will be relocated to e7 and the c8-bishop will end up on g6. This regrouping allows Black to close the kingside where White was planning to attack. The game could continue:

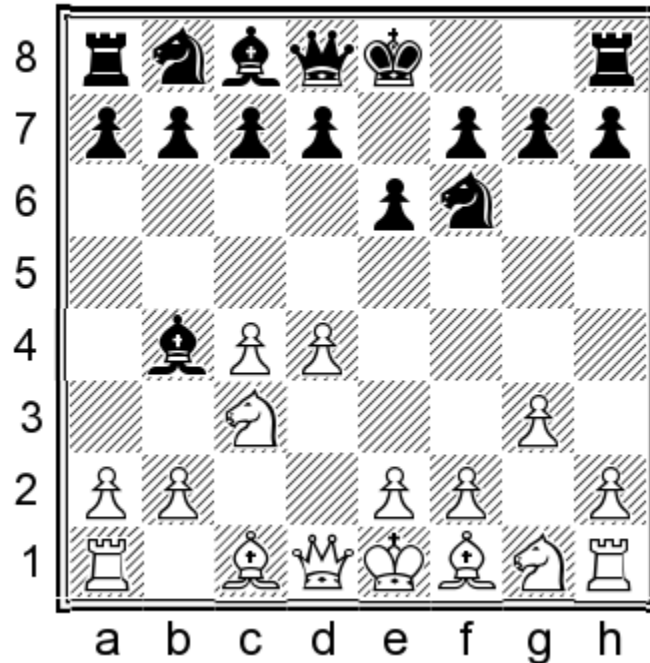
**11.h4 ♞ge7 12.♞e2 ♘f5 13.♔f2 0-0 14.♞f4 ♙g6**

With a complex position where both sides have their chances. The c5-pawn is not in danger, as Black would easily get it back with ...♙a5. White's space might look impressive, but with the black pieces all getting active, the risk of overextension is quite high.

In conclusion, the move 4.g4 is not as bad as one may think at first sight. Taking the pawn leads to a messy position where the better prepared player will have the advantage, and standard play leads to a position that is not terrible for White and both sides have chances. However, Black has many good options, and it is an unlikely line to meet in practice.

As far as our analysis is concerned, I think that Black is without problems in our suggested main line, and the option of 7...0-0! is a serious alternative to put White under pressure if you can remember it over the board.

### B) 4.g3



Unlike most options analysed in this chapter, this move is natural, serious, and quite popular. There are many ways to meet it, but due to our option regarding 4.♘f3, we should try to transpose to the Kasparov variation and save ourselves the trouble of studying anything extra.

### 4...c5!?

At this point, the theoretical consensus is that White should develop the knight to f3, which transposes to our coverage of 4.♘f3 (see Chapters 6 & 7). Hence, there only remains to check any alternatives. However, to put into perspective how obscure all of them are, developing the knight leads to a position with thousands

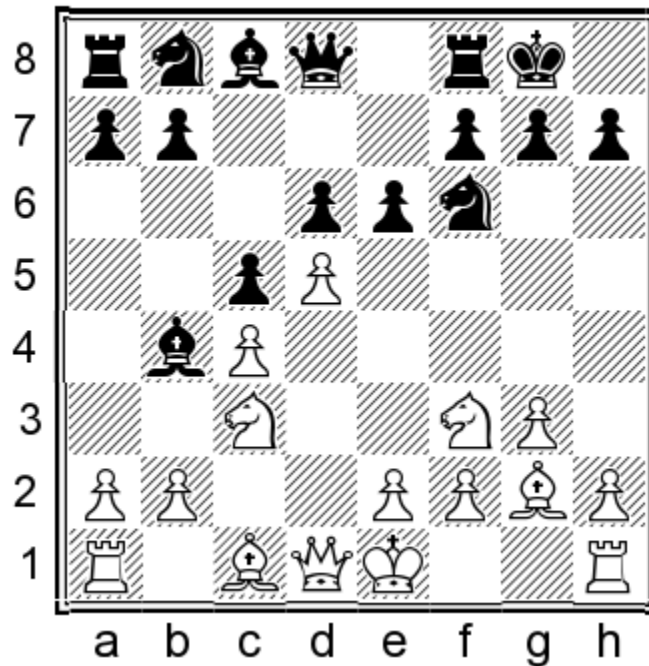
of games, while anything else appears in double digits at most in my database.

### 5.dxc5!?

This is actually decent according to the engine, but if we remember our next two moves we instantly solve all our problems.

5.♔b3?! can be answered with 5...d5! and the white centre is about to collapse.

Even the usually suspicious Modern Benoni is fine for Black when White goes for a kingside fianchetto. Hence, 5.d5?! leading to the Benoni structure but with the bishop already developed on b4 is easy to play with Black in any way you like. If you want to be a perfectionist, the most accurate solution is: 5...0-0 6.♖g2 d6 7.♞f3



7...♖e8! A subtle move. Black waits for White to castle and will only after decide what type of structure go for. For instance: 8.0-0 (Against 8.♙d2 it's interesting to play 8...♙xc3!? 9.♙xc3 exd5 10.cxd5 b5! 11.0-0 ♞e4 and Black has the initiative.) 8...♙xc3 9.bxc3 e5! Black is better due the weakness of the c4-pawn and the

more purposeful placement of the pieces. Next up is ...e5-e4, possibly followed by transferring the b8-knight to e5. 5.a3 is possible, but not advisable. During the last few years, it became quite popular for Black to even answer 4.g3 with the immediate, unprompted capture on c3. So, if White insists... Anyway, after 5...♙xc3+ 6.bxc3 ♚a5! 7.♙d2 d6 with ...e6-e5 and ...♞c6 to follow, Black gets an easy game.

**5...♞e4!**

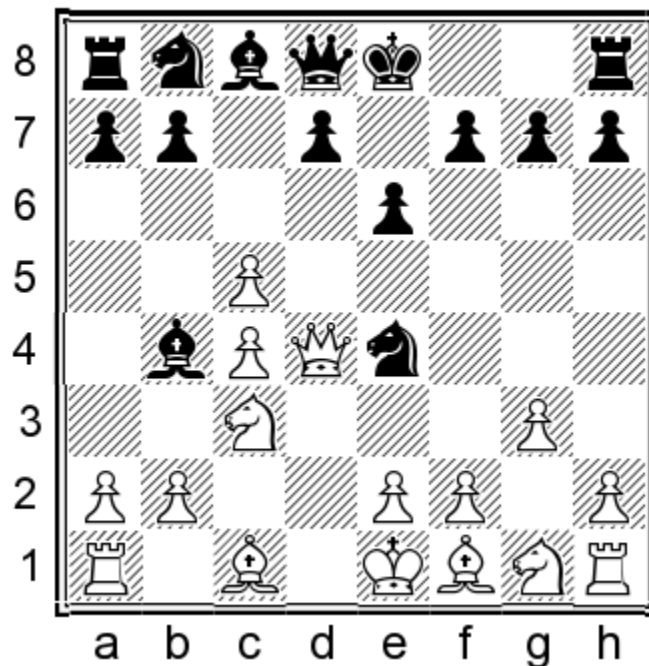
Putting pressure both on the knight on c3 and on the pawn on c5.

**6.♙d4**

This is White's idea.

Alternatively, 6.♙d2 ♙xc3 7.♙xc3 ♞xc3 8.bxc3 ♞a6 is a little better for Black because of the superior structure.

6.♙c2 can be answered with 6...♚a5! and Black is a little better once again.



**6...♚f6!**

This is forced but good.

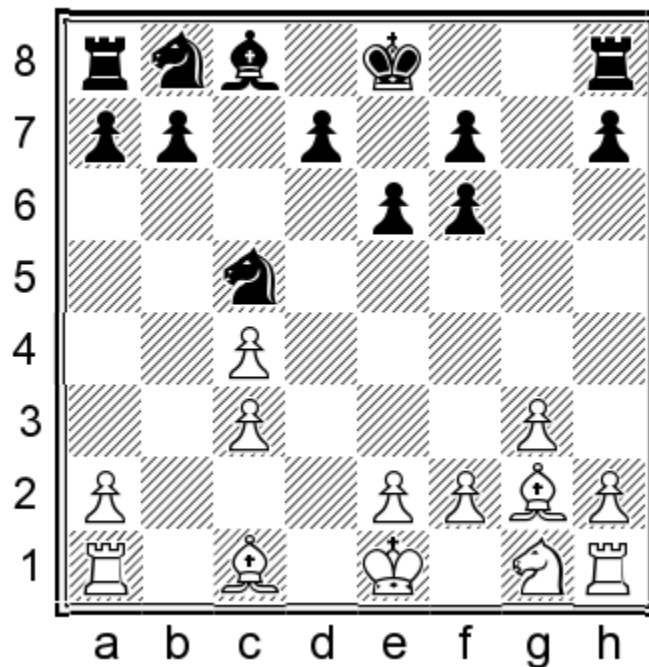
**7. ♔xf6 gxf6 8. ♖g2!**

White is in danger of getting a bad pawn structure and uses tactics to get away with it.

**8... ♗xc3+!?**

The obvious 8... ♘xc3!? is also possible, but after 9. ♖d2 the position remains objectively balanced. At this point, the most solid option would probably be 9... ♘xa2, with equality after 10. ♖xa2 ♗xc5.

**9. bxc3 ♘xc5**



The engine claims this is objectively equal, but Black can easily stabilize while White will need to constantly produce dynamic counterplay to maintain the balance. The one practical example available went down an instructive path:

**10. ♖f4 ♔e7 11. 0-0-0 e5 12. ♖e3 ♘ba6 13. ♘f3 d6 14. ♘e1?**

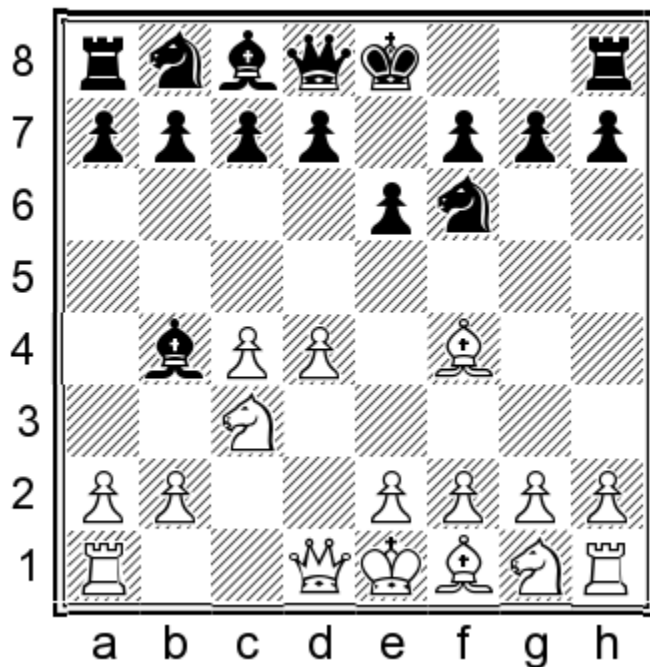
14.♘h4! was best, when the position would remain balanced according to the engine, but still looks easier to play with Black.

14...♙e6 15.♙xc5 ♞xc5 16.♙d5 ♖ac8

Black was winning in Dischinger – Ayas Fernandez, Valencia 1998. The knight goes to a4 and one of the c-pawns drops.

My opinion on 4.g3 is that it's interesting if Black decides to go for Catalan-style positions involving ...d7-d5. However, against 4...c5 White does not have anything better than entering the mainline of the Kasparov (4.♘f3) Variation. 5.dxc5 is decent, but no more, and other moves are even worse.

C) 4.♙f4



This is rare, but it is not stupid by any means. White develops a piece London-style and aims to follow up with ♖c1 and e2-e3. However, as we shall again mention against the more mainstream 4.♙g5, developing the bishop so early weakens the queenside dark squares.

## 4...c5!

The most energetic response, asking an awkward question to the d4-pawn.

## 5.♘f3!?

I would consider this to be the most challenging, trying to actively exploit our momentary weakness on the dark squares.

5.d5? is bad for many reasons, among them 5...♘e4!? increasing the pressure on c3 and hinting at ...♙f6 or ...♙a5. White is forced to play 6.♙d2, allowing us to either take twice on c3 or grab the bishop pair by taking on d2. At this point, choosing an advantage would mostly be a matter of style.

5.e3 is not terrible, but after 5...d5 6.♘f3 cxd4 7.exd4 0-0 Black gets a good version of typical IQP positions, as the white bishop on f4 is purposeless (and even vulnerable in some cases). The fight in these positions is centred around the d5-square, so the bishop should either go to g5, or wait on c1 for some time until the right moment comes. The pawn on c4 and the London System do not mix well in general. A normal continuation would be: 8.♙d3 dxc4 9.♙xc4 b6 10.0-0 ♖b7 Up next is ...♘c6 or ...♘bd7, completing development. The bishop on f4 is staring at empty space.

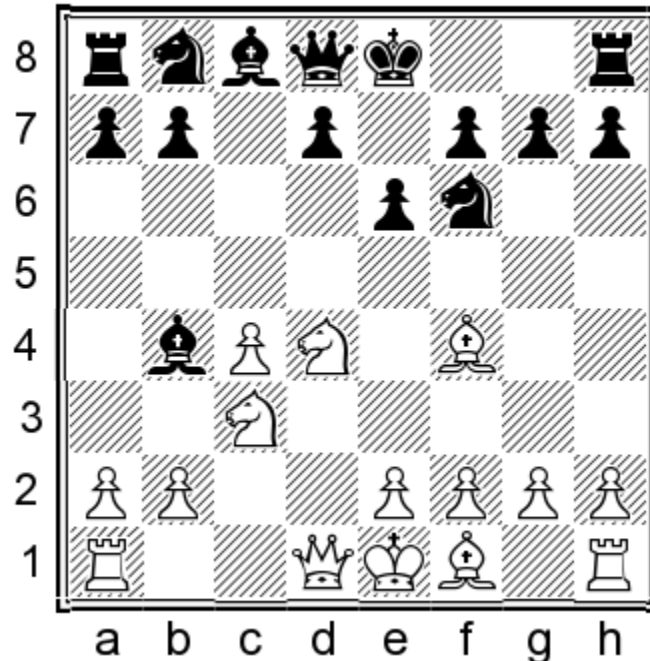
## 5...cxd4!

The concrete route is excellent for Black, but we need to continue accurately.

5...d5!? would also be an option, with typical play in the centre. If White were to play e2-e3 we would transpose to the note above, but I did not want to deal with the captures on d5 and c5.

## 6.♘xd4

The alternative with 6. ♔xd4?! ♞c6 7. ♔d3 d5 is easier to play with Black.



This is the key position after 4. ♕f4.

**6...0-0!**

Only this is correct, followed up by ...d7-d5 next.

For example, 6... ♞c6? 7. ♞db5 0-0 8. ♕d6! leaves us with some unpleasant weaknesses on the dark squares.

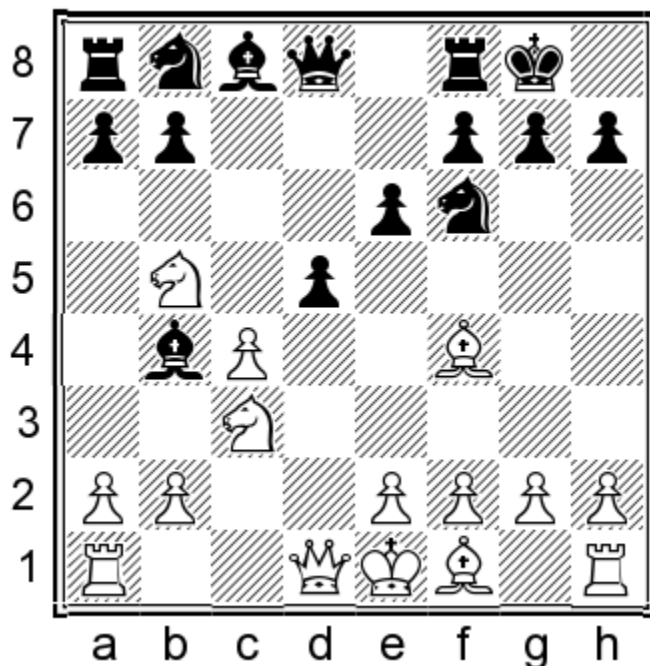
**7. ♞db5**

Everyone plays this, but it is actually a poor move that allows Black to take over the initiative.

7.e3 would be more prudent, but after 7...d5 Black has no problems anyway.

**7...d5!**

And just like that, White's concept turns out to be a complete failure.



### 8.e3

The obvious 8.♘c7? is bad for White in a few different ways, but actually winning for Black is only 8...♘e4!, followed by ...♙f6.

8.♙b3?! is answered with 8...♘c6 threatening ...e6-e5. A practical example saw: 9.0-0-0 ♙e7 10.e3 In Aguila – Szmetan, Argentina 2006, Black could have played 10...a6, with a winning position. The point main point is that 11.♘c7 just gets the knight trapped on c7 after 11...dxc4 12.♙xc4 ♖a7.

8.a3 can be met with a capture on c3, but even more accurate is 8...♙a5!, and after 9.b4?! a6! White will start regretting the overextension on the kingside.

8.cxd5 is the most circumspect, but after the natural 8...♘xd5 9.♙d2 Black can already start playing for an advantage with 9...♘f6!? 10.a3 ♙e7!, leaving White with an awkward assortment of pieces.

## 8...a6!

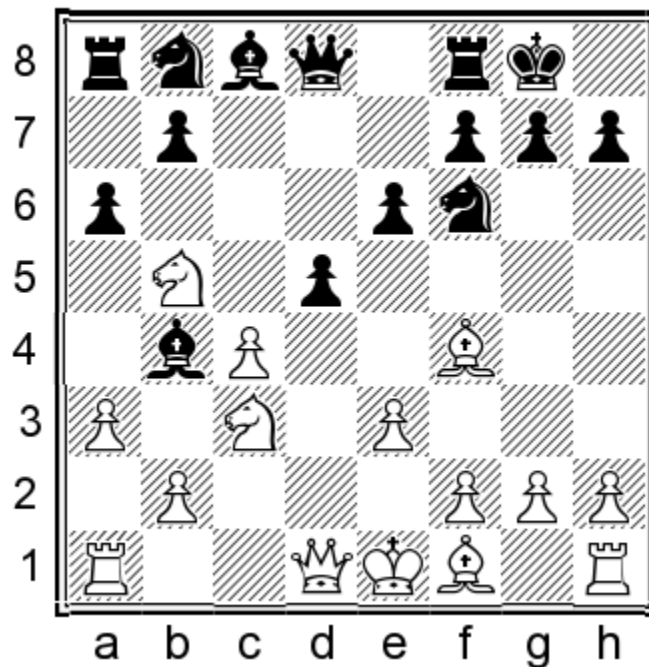
White is in trouble. The b5-knight has already moved three times, and now it has nowhere good to go to.

## 9.a3

The lesser evil.

9.♘c7 ♖a7 is awful for White. The knight is virtually trapped and the tactics with 10.♘7xd5 do not work after 10...exd5 11.♙xb8 because Black has 11...♙g4!, with a winning position.

9.♘d4 was Haag – Wojtkiewicz, Bad Mergentheim 1989, and even though 9...♙a5 was good and gave Black a quick and crushing victory, it would be even more accurate to start with 9...♖e8!, when White is on the verge of collapse. (9...♘bd7, with the same idea, is also quite good.)



## 9...♙a5!

Be careful! 9...♙e7?? loses to: 10.cxd5! exd5 11.♘c7 ♖a7 12.♘7xd5

## 10.♘d6

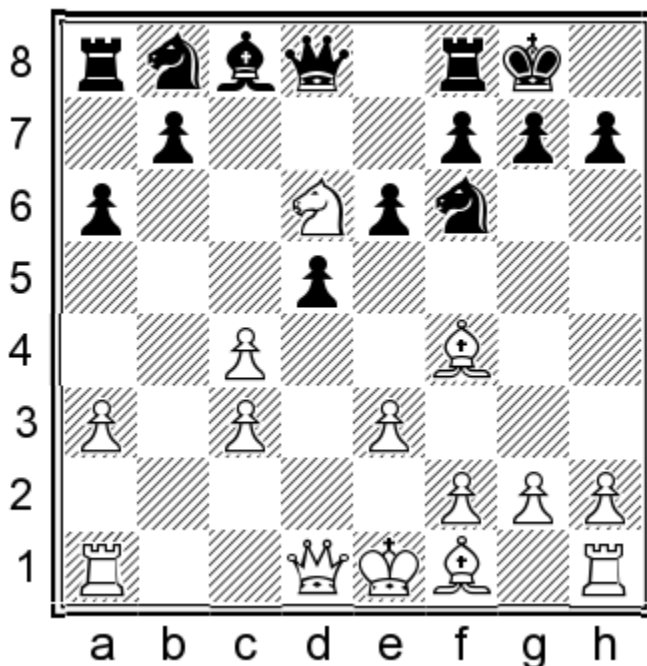
10. ♖d4 should be answered with 10... ♖bd7! followed by ...e6-e5.

**10... ♗xc3+!?**

An interesting inclusion, saddling White with weaknesses on the queenside.

The natural 10... ♖c6!? is also enough for an advantage.

**11.bxc3**



This was Czebe – Berczes, Hungary 2003, and Black should have continued with:

**11... ♖bd7!N**

With the idea of pushing ...e6-e5 next. For example:

**12. ♗e2?!**

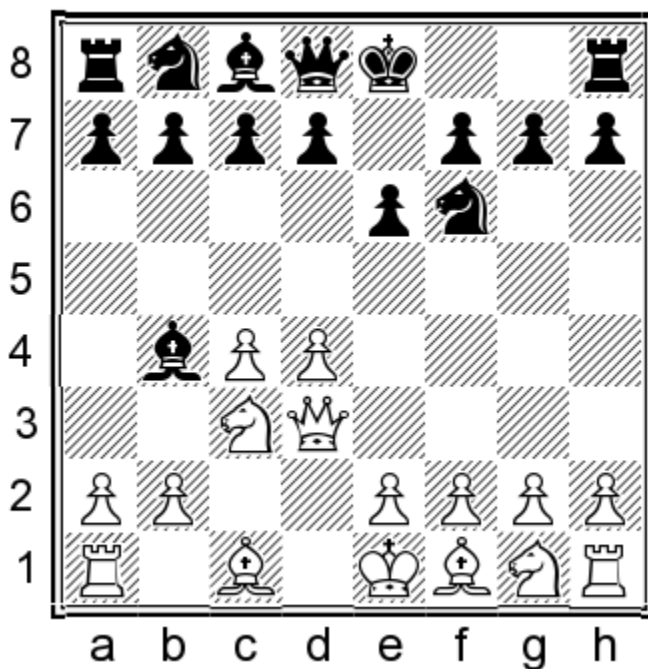
12.cxd5 is also met with 12...e5!

**12...e5 13. ♗g3 ♖c7 14. ♖xc8 ♜axc8**

Black is much better thanks to the better structure and better development. White will lose the c4-pawn without any compensation.

4.♘f4 might be a normal-looking developing move, but it lacks in concrete purpose and gives Black too much freedom of choice. After 4...c5! I think the best for White is to play 5.e3 and enter a toothless version of the IQP. In the case of 5.♘f3, which is the only critical move, Black takes over the initiative with ease, but it is important to remember to start with 6...0-0!, not fearing 7.♘db5 since it can comfortably be answered with 7...d5!, taking advantage of White's slow development.

#### D) 4.♙d3



This is both the rarest and the weirdest among the three squares the queen can choose from where to defend the knight on c3. Granted, it serves that purpose quite well and controls the e4-square, but it is also in the way of the f1-bishop and potentially exposed to attacks.

## 4...c5!

The ambitious choice. Black wants to create quick dynamic counterplay, exposing the weird placement of the queen on d3.

4...d5 is fine, but after 5.a3 our best option is to take on c3, transposing to a line examined on page 353. Since White chose 4.♔d3 and not 4.♔c2, trying for a punishment feels more appropriate.

## 5.a3

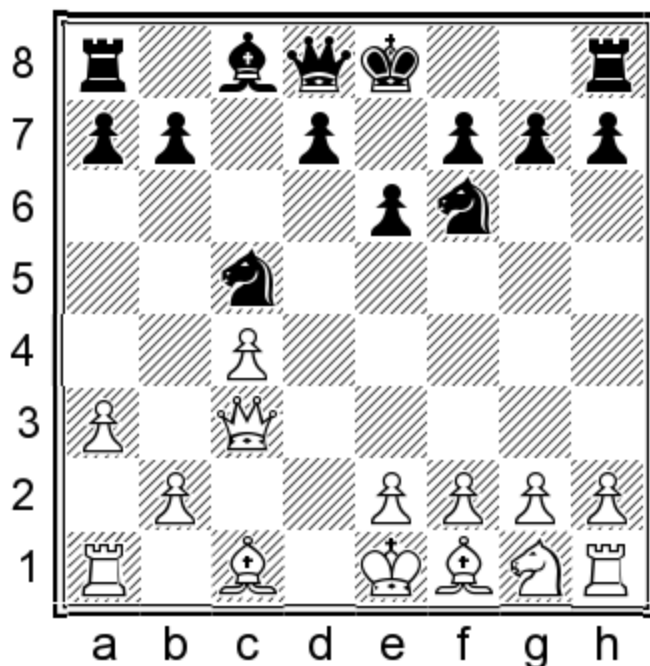
This is critical, but it turns out to be much easier to play with Black.

5.d5?! is suggested by Palliser in a chapter of *Dangerous Weapons: The Nimzo-Indian* devoted to 4.♔d3, but adopting a Benoni structure is hardly a good idea with the queen on this square. It is both a waste of time and could get attacked from a6 with the bishop or with a knight from e5. A fun approach would be 5...b5!N, in the spirit of the Blumenfeld Gambit, but under much better conditions. White will struggle to contain Black's active play. (Palliser only considers 5...0-0, which should also favour Black.)

5.e3 is just weird for White after 5...cxd4 6.exd4 0-0.

5.♘f3 is quite natural, but after 5...0-0!? followed likely by ...d7-d5, we will get typical Nimzo-Indian play but with the queen somewhat awkwardly placed on d3 instead of c2.

5.dxc5 is the standard reaction to 4...c5 with the queen on c2. With the queen on d3 on the other hand, it does not work as well, and this is best underlined by 5...♘a6!, looking to capture the pawn on c5 with tempo. Let's briefly illustrate what a typical continuation would look like: 6.a3 ♘xc5 7.♔c2 ♕xc3+ 8.♔xc3



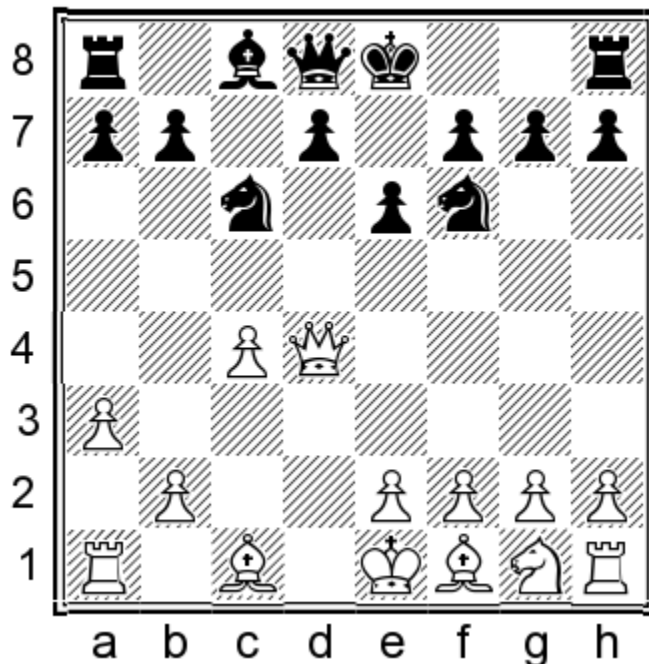
We have arrived at a position usually reached via 4. ♖c2 but, in that case, it is White to play! Unsurprisingly, our extra tempo so early in the game is quite valuable, and it is best put to use by going 8...d6!, controlling some dark squares and intending ...e6-e5 but also ...♗d7 and ...♖c8, building up pressure against the c4-pawn. A normal continuation would be: 9. b4 ♞a4! 10. ♙b3 ♞d7 11. ♞f3 0-0 12. e3 ♖c8 Black has an advantage due to the nagging initiative and will seek to break through on the c-file by playing ...b7-b5 or ...d6-d5 in the near future.

**5...♗xc3+ 6. ♙xc3**

The principled capture, keeping the structure intact and transposing to a position more commonly reached through 4. ♖c2 c5. However, that is not a position White should be aiming for anyway.

6.bxc3 doesn't fit well with the queen on d3. Other approaches are fine, but I like once again playing to embarrass the queen with 6...d5!? creating as much tension as possible.

6...cxd4 7.♔xd4 ♞c6



The white queen has a wide range of options, but none of them seems particularly appetizing.

8.♔d1

This is best – not an encouraging sign.

8.♔d6? walks straight into 8...♞e4! when Black would simply be thankful to have the knight on a more active square.

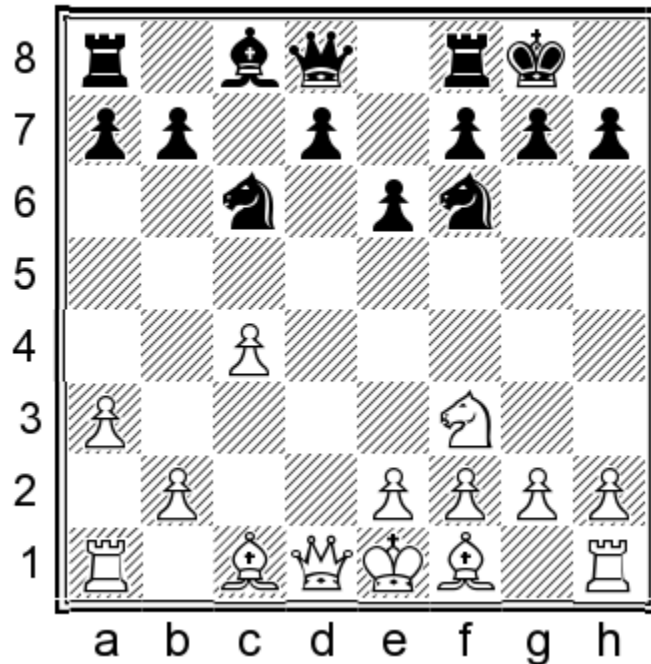
8.♔c3?! should be answered with 8...d5!, when the threat of ...e6-e5 and ...d5-d4 already feels unpleasant for White. After 9.e3 (9.cxd5?! exd5 is even worse) 9...e5! 10.cxd5 ♔xd5!? the lead in development easily outweighs White's two-bishop advantage.

After 8.♔d2 the queen is not only exposed to ...♞f6-e4 but also to ...♞c6-a5-b3. Black could, for example, play 8...d5 9.e3 ♞a5!, with a small advantage already.

White has also tried 8.♔d3 which in favour of consistency we shall also answer with 8...d5!?. However, the placement of the queen on d3 could also invite a dark-squared structure by Black, with ...d7-d6

and ...e6-e5, since that is both harmonious and comes with a threat of ...e5-e4. Anyway, after 9.cxd5 (9.♘f3? e5! is already better for Black) 9...exd5 10.♘f3 Black could also castle, but quite good is 10...♘e4! introducing ideas of ...♙f5, as well as ...♚a5+ and/or ...♛b6. I would find this much easier to play with Black.

**8...0-0 9.♘f3**



**9...d5**

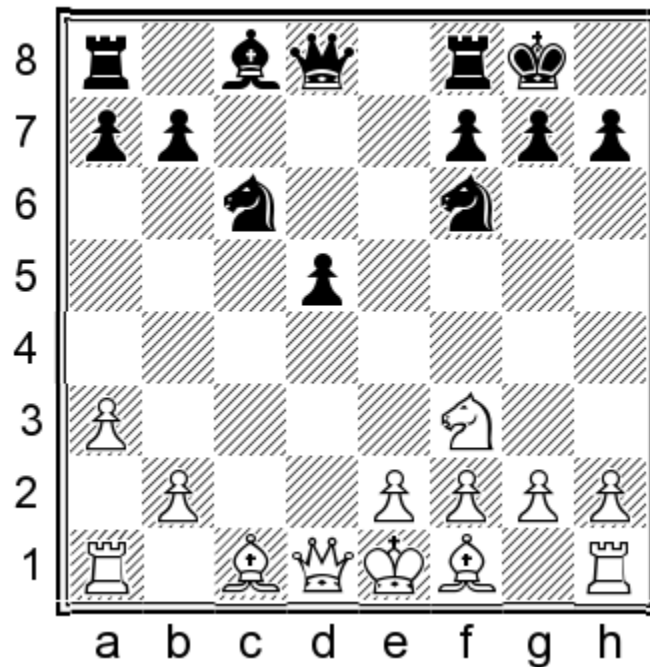
Other moves are possible, but this is both consistent and logical. Since Black is better developed, it makes sense to try to open the position.

**10.cxd5**

10.e3 should be met with 10...e5! with the idea of ...d5-d4. White should probably try to avoid this with 11.cxd5, but after 11...♘xd5 our activity once again easily balances out White's bishops. We already have a threat of ...e5-e4, kicking the knight away from the protection of the h4- and g5-squares one of which would be

promptly occupied by our queen. White should thus go for 12.e4 but that creates an outpost for the c6-knight on d4. White will have a hard time containing the activity of our pieces after 12...♞f6.

### 10...exd5



Sadly for White, the activity of the pieces is usually more important than static factors. White has both the more solid structure and the pair of bishops, but is still three moves away from castling...

### 11.b4

Trying to develop the c1-bishop to the long diagonal, but this delays the development of the kingside for yet another move.

11.g3 was tried in Zwirs – Cyfka, Suwalki 2022, and Black could have gone for something like: 11...d4!? 12.♙g2 ♞e4! 13.0-0 ♜e8, when White will find it hard to develop, while Black has numerous easy improving moves.

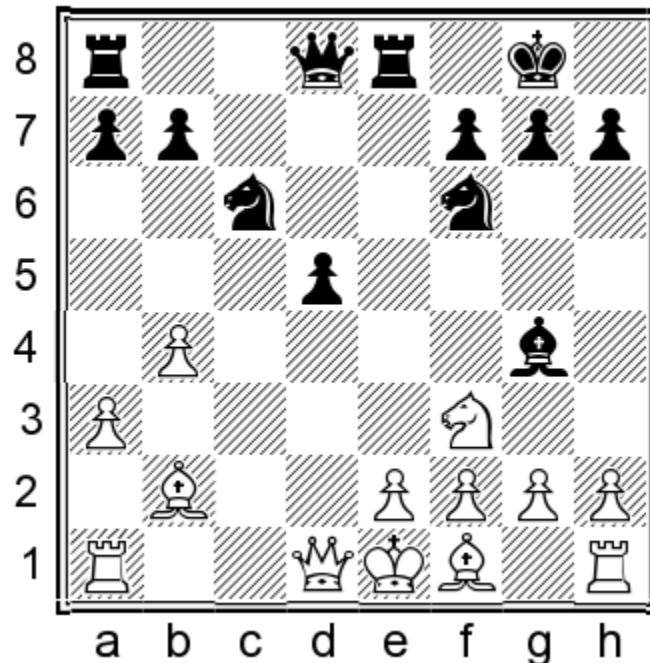
Trying to quickly develop the kingside will leave White in trouble of not being able to develop the queenside: 11.e3 ♞e4 12.♙e2 This

was Golichenko – Laznicka, Pardubice 2009 and the most accurate for Black would have been 12...♖e8 13.0-0 ♘f5! followed by ...♔f6. White has a hard time developing the bishop on c1.

**11...♘g4!**

Developing actively, while hinting at White that the moves e2-e3 and ♘f1-e2 have to be made one at a time, and e2-e3 would run into ...d5-d4. Two practical examples continued down the same path:

**12.♘b2 ♖e8**



**13.e3!N**

This is sad, but there is no other way. Neither of the two strong players that found themselves here with White were able to find this.

In Ilincic – Damljanovic, Nis 1995, White played 13.♘d4? and after 13...♘e5! Black had a winning advantage.

After 13.h3? ♘xf3 14.gxf3 d4 White was both positionally and dynamically busted in Shirazi – Weinstein, Lone Pine 1979.

## 13...d4!

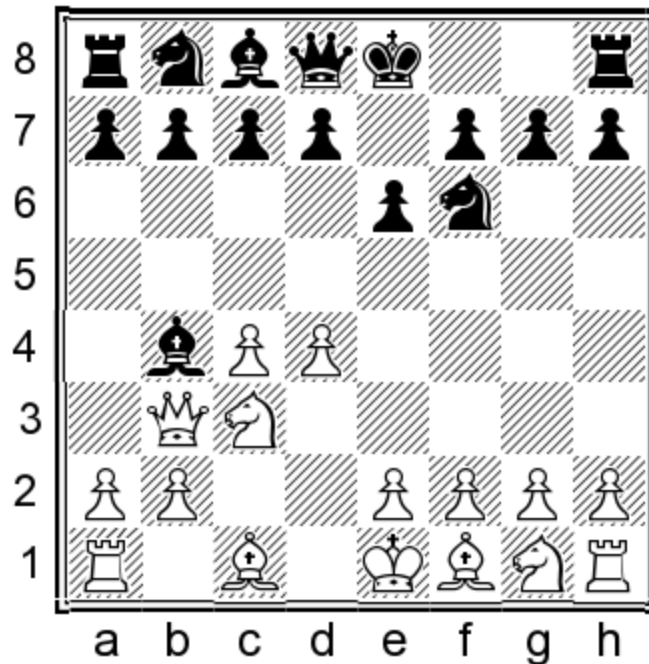
Black shouldn't let White finish development and consolidate, as that would allow the long-term advantages of the pair of bishops and better structure to shine through. The engine finds a way to keep White in the game, but Black's pull is indisputable.

4.♔d3 is rarely seen and, predictably, it fails to give Black the slightest problem. The ambitious recipe is 4...c5, immediately trying to punish the weird placement of the queen and highlight a downside of having the queen on d3 instead of c2, which is that the knight can take on c5 with tempo, and thus 5.dxc5 becomes unappealing.

The only line worth remembering is 5.a3. White might have the two bishops, but after 7...♞c6 the queen is asked to move for a fourth time already in the first eight moves. Consequently, in the IQP positions that follow, Black has a huge and easy-to-handle initiative.

If you want to, you can discard all of this and play 4...d5, allowing White to transpose back to 4.♔c2, which you must study carefully anyway. However, I would personally be reluctant to let my opponent get away with such a provocation.

## E) 4.♔b3



White wants to recapture on c3 with the queen, keeping a healthy pawn structure, and at the same time wins a tempo against our bishop. However, this aggressive move has the drawback that the queen is not particularly well-placed on b3, and Black is not forced to capture on c3. In fact, we can both defend the bishop and attack the white centre with a standard move:

**4...c5!**

Immediately fighting for the initiative.

**5.dxc5**

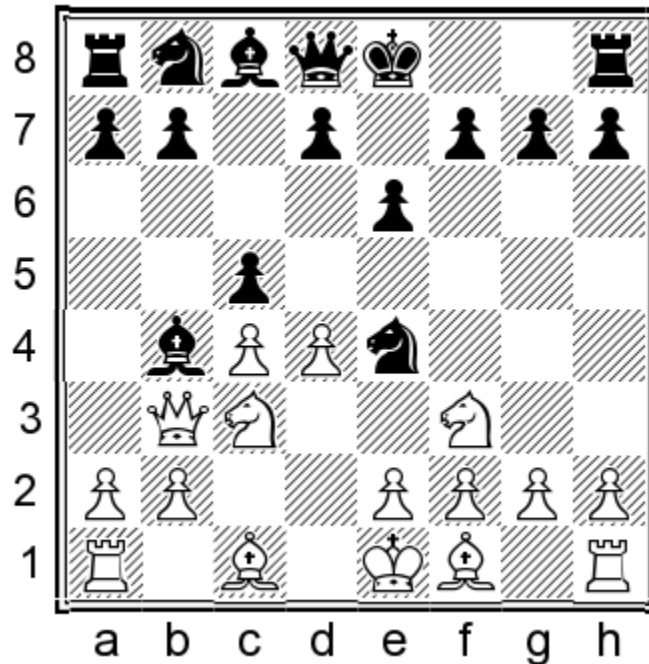
This is both the most logical and the most challenging.

5.a3 ♖xc3+ 6.♔xc3 transposes to the position we just examined under 4.♔d3. (6.bxc3? is one of the worst possible versions of this structure I have ever seen, as the queen is terribly out of place on b3. After 6...♞c6 Black is already seriously better.)

5.e3 is easy to play as Black. The queen on b3 does not serve any clear purpose in the ensuing structures. We should go for 5...0-0,

aiming to continue either with ...b7-b6 or with ...d7-d5 against quiet development by White. If 6.a3, then 6...♙xc3+ 7.♚xc3 once again leads to a position where White is underdeveloped. Our best bet is to strike in the centre as hard as we can: 7...cxd4 8.exd4 d5 White needs to be careful not to drift into serious trouble.

5.♘f3 can be met with 5...♞e4!?, exploiting the downside of having the queen on b3 instead of c2, and threatening ...♙a5.



6.♙d2 (In the case of 6.♞d2 ♙xc3 7.bxc3 ♞xd2 8.♙xd2 b6 Black will quickly manoeuvre the knight to a5, putting pressure on the c4-pawn. The burden is on White to prove equality.) 6...♞xd2 7.♞xd2 0-0 Black has the pair of bishops and a solid position, planning to develop the b8-knight on the next move. At this point, White's best option would be to take on c5, leading to similar play as in the mainline below.

**5...♞c6!**

An important nuance. The pawn on c5 isn't going anywhere, so Black develops, protecting the bishop on b4 which, for the moment,

is nicely placed, pinning the knight. Concretely, our idea is to continue with ...♞f6-e4, ruining White's pawn structure.

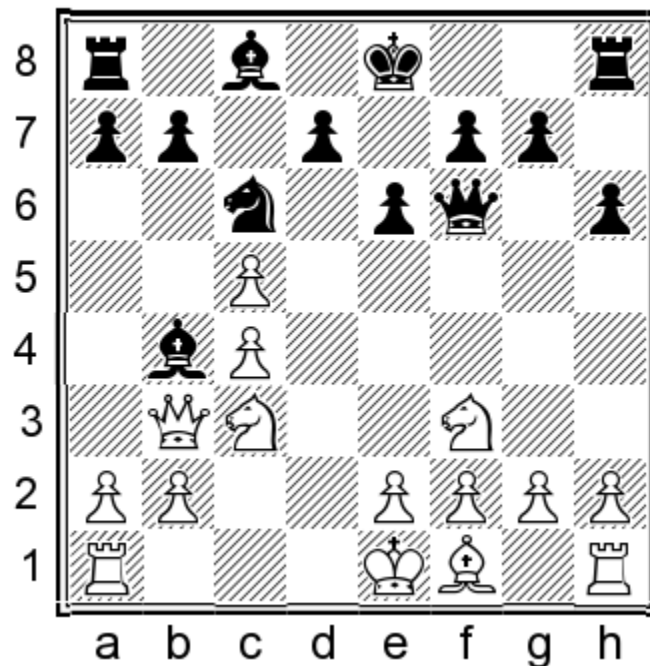
### 6.♞f3

White needs to prioritize development.

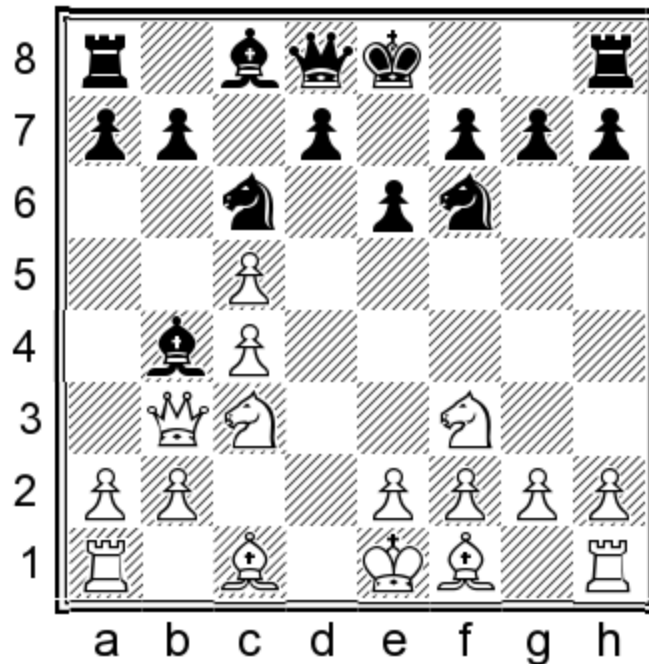
6.♙f4? is met with 6...♞e4 and Black is much better, and the same applies to 6.e3?! ♞e4.

6.♙g5 is not good, as after 6...h6 White needs to play 7.♙xf6. (The alternative 7.♙h4 g5 8.♙g3 ♞e4 is clearly better for Black.)

However, after 7...♙xf6 8.♞f3, if you look up the position in your database, you will find games with strong grandmasters on the white side, including Vladimir Akopian and Vladimir Malaniuk.



The line is quite harmless anyway, but I cannot resist mentioning the engine's suggestion. 8...♖b8!!N The idea is obviously ...b7-b6. (Also tempting is 8...b6!? 9.cxb6 ♙xc3+!. ) 9.♙c2 b6! (9...b5!? should transpose.) 10.cxb6 ♖xb6 11.e3 ♙a5! The threat is ...♖xb2, and I think that's enough fun for today.



6...♞e4!

Exploiting how, in contrast with having the queen on c2, the queen on b3 does not control the e4-square. In terms of remembering anything by heart, this is the move that matters against this line. Black will get the bishop-pair advantage and keep a solid position. White is not worse, but our position is comfortable. The following moves are pretty much forced for both sides:

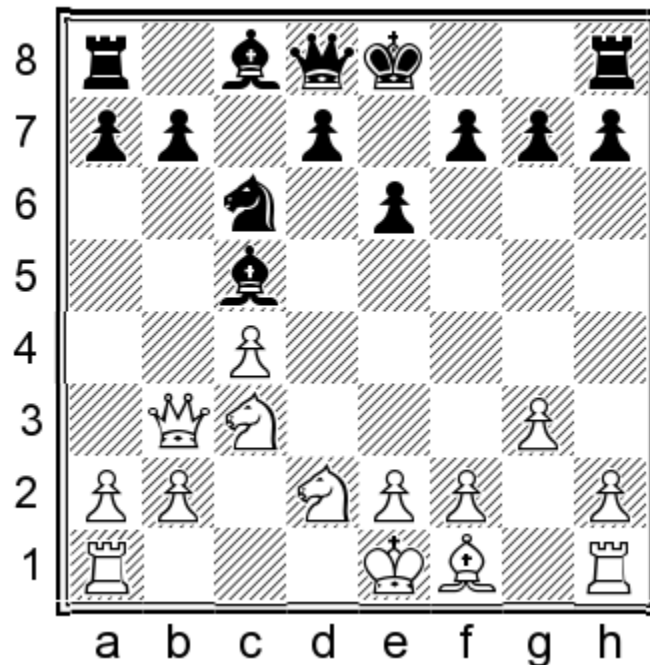
7.♙d2 ♞xd2 8.♞xd2 ♙xc5 9.g3

The modern line.

9.e3 has been played more times overall, but after 9...f5!? Black gains space, hints at a future ...f5-f4 and, most importantly, takes the e4-square away from the white pieces without facing any repercussions. A normal continuation would be: 10.♙e2 0-0 11.0-0 b6 The light-squared bishop belongs on the b7-square, but other moves are also quite possible. 12.♖ad1 ♙b7 Both sides are solid, but

I think it is much easier to come up with constructive, improving moves from the black side.

By the way, playing in Hedgehog style and keeping the pawn on f7 would be a perfectly viable alternative.



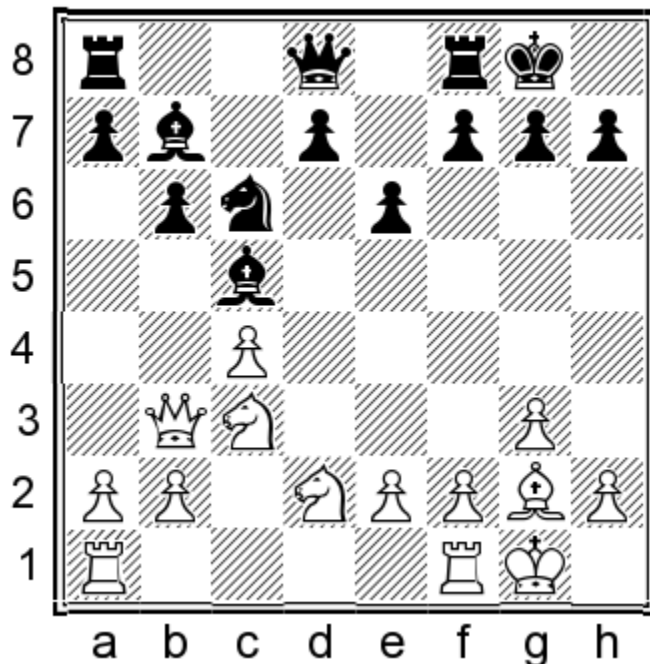
The long diagonal seems like a much better place for the bishop than its standard placement on e2. Not only does the white king feel safer, but the bishop is clearly more useful in this position, staring down its counterpart sitting on b7 at the very least. White wants to quickly castle and bring a rook on d1, dreaming of putting us under annoying pressure down the d-file.

### 9...b6

The most natural.

We could also opt for an endgame with 9...♙b6!? 10.♙xb6 ♘xb6 11.♘g2 ♙e7. This was Aravindh – Shyam, Waskaduwa 2022, where Black had equalized. Up next was ...d7-d6 and ...♘d7, followed by bringing the rooks to the centre with a fine game.

10.♘g2 ♖b7 11.0-0 0-0



The automatic moves are made, the stage is set, and White has to make the first non-obvious decision.

12.♖ac1

The first choice of the engine, and played a few times by Hungarian grandmaster Gergely Aczel, a resident expert in this obscure line. The lines below illuminate the reasons why White should start with this.

12.♖ad1?! looks more natural, but it takes the d1-square away from the queen and after 12...♞d4 Her Majesty is left in an awkward place on the queenside.

12.♞de4 should always be answered with 12...♗e7, preserving the two bishops. After 13.♖ad1 White is not consolidated enough for the pressure down the d-file to be annoying. Black has 13...♞a5! exploiting the bad placement of the white queen, gaining an important tempo and creating counterplay against the c4-pawn.

14. ♔c2 ♕c8! Another nice move with dual purpose. Black increases the pressure on the c-pawn and gets the queen off the d-file in order to play ...d7-d5, while also creating a pin down the c-file. The engine holds this with White, but that would be a terribly unpleasant task for a human in a practical game.

**12...♗e7!**

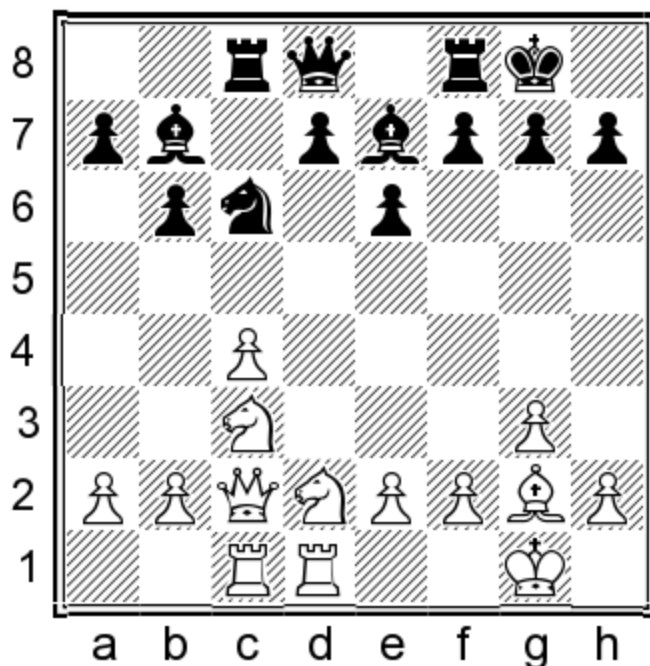
There are many sensible alternatives. For example, 12...f5, 12...h6 and 12...♖c8 are all natural moves that improve Black's position. Being so solid, combined with the pair of bishops, means that we have a lot of options to choose from. However, White is also extremely solid, and our challenge lies in finding an actual constructive plan.

That is why I find the text move preferable to the alternatives – the bishop on c5 looked nice, but its activity was temporary. By retreating to e7, we take the bishop out of harm's way and initiate the plan of transforming our position into a full Hedgehog. Our dream plan is to patiently engineer a break on b5.

**13.♖fd1**

White has also tried 13.♕d1 but that completely relinquishes any pressure felt on b6, suggesting that we can start with 13...a6, already threatening ...b6-b5 since after all the captures a pawn would hang on a2.

**13...♖c8 14.♕c2**



This was all played in Aczel – Gavrilescu, Timisoara 2018. At this point, I would suggest following our main plan:

### 14...a6!N

Again hinting at ...b6-b5, and also controlling the b5-square to make c7 available to our queen. Let's briefly illustrate some of the main ideas in this typical but unexplored position.

### 15.a3

A decent try. White wants to expand on the queenside with b2-b4.

15.b3? leads to immediate disaster after 15...♔a3! when White needs to find the courage to play the extremely sad 16.♕xc6, as moving the rook and allowing ...♞b4 gives Black a decisive advantage.

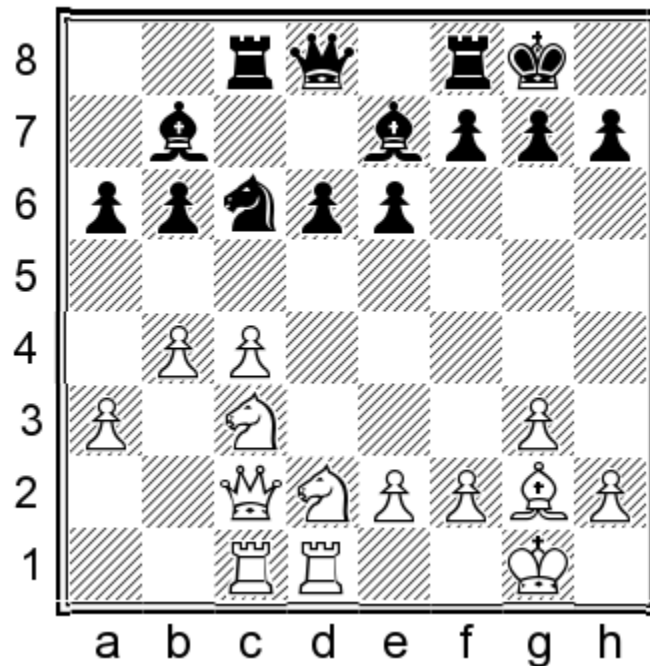
15.♞de4 can be answered with: 15...♞a5! (15...♙c7 is met with 16.♞d5. ) 16.b3 ♖c7! Keeping the tension and allowing the queen to slide into more active positions either on c8 or a8.

### 15...d6

Finally adopting the Hedgehog structure. The next step would be to improve the knight on c6. It would be ideal if we were able to magically transport it to d7.

Black would like to play 15...♖c7 but that allows 16.♞d5! once again.

### 16.b4



### 16...♞d7!

Protecting the b7-bishop to facilitate ...♞c6-e5.

For the final time, do not go 16...♞c7, allowing 17.♞d5.

### 17.♞a4

After 17.♞de4 ♞e5 Black has excellent chances in the complications arising after 18.c5! d5!.

### 17...♞c7

With a complex tense battle ahead. Next up is ...♖fd8, followed by bringing the knight to d7 via e5 or b8. In the long term, White might experience some problems in defending the c-pawn.

4.♔b3 does not look like a great line for White to be honest. Although it is solid, White is not able to generate real problems for Black and there are just too many ways to get an even game. The latter is perhaps the reason it is not so popular in tournament practice.

The important recipe to remember is meeting 5.dxc5 with 5...♞c6! followed by ...♞f6-e4, forcing the bishop to d2 and then grabbing the bishop pair. The resulting positions are not that challenging. With 9.g3 White tries to emulate an English-style setup against the Hedgehog. However, the bishop pair gives Black enough leverage to fight back in equal terms. One idea to watch out for in those positions is the knight jump from c3 to d5, opening the c-file and pinning the knight on c6. If you keep that in mind, then you should be able to navigate the manoeuvring phase quite comfortably on your own.

## Conclusion

The sidelines examined in this chapter did not turn out to be challenging. There are almost no lines that need memorizing, and if we are familiar with the main ideas, then we can work our way to a decent position without too much effort. In some of those lines, we could even at once start thinking about playing for an advantage. Options like 4.g4 or 4.♔d3 only seek to drive the game off the beaten track at an early stage and provoke a scene of chaos, but in my view they just throw away all of White's advantage of having the first move.

Amongst the lines examined in this chapter, 4.♙b3 is by far the most serious option. While White does not fight for an objective advantage, the resulting positions offer plenty of chances for both sides to outplay their opponents.

We should feel well-prepared with the brief solutions presented in this chapter, but even if memory fails us, we should keep in mind the following. The greatest trait of the Nimzo-Indian is that natural moves, following the general principles, should always lead to a good position for Black. In chess, this is a characteristic of a sound opening, and that's what we're dealing with in this book.

# Chapter 2

# Leningrad Variation

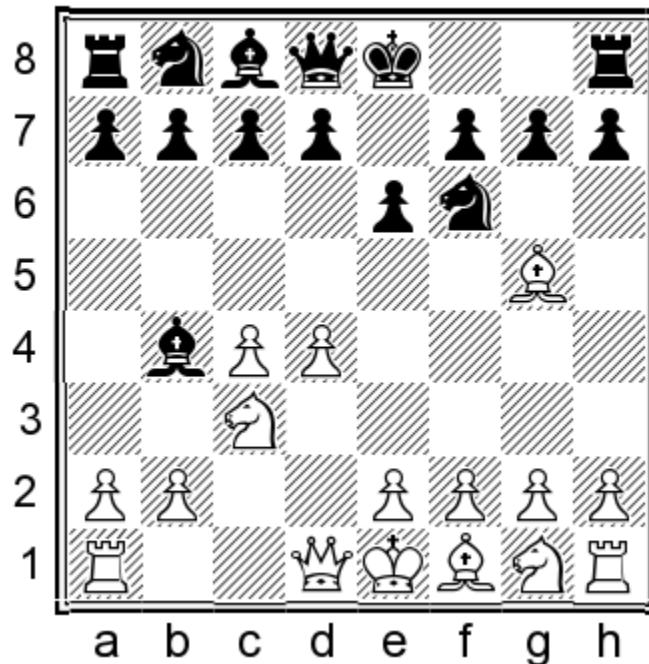
## Variation Index

1.d4 ♞f6 2.c4 e6 3.♞c3 ♞b4 4.♞g5 c5

- A) 5.♞f3
- B) 5.d5 d6 6.e3 exd5 7.cxd5 ♞bd7
- B1) 8.♞b5
- B2) 8.♞d3

## Introduction

1.d4 ♞f6 2.c4 e6 3.♞c3 ♞b4 4.♞g5



The Leningrad Variation is an aggressive line that tries to punish Black for committing the bishop to b4. White would like to prove that the pin on the f6-knight will interfere with our development plans, since breaking it with ...h7-h6 and ...g7-g5 would weaken our kingside.

The dream for White would be to continue with e2-e3, ♖d3 and ♘e2. If that configuration were to be achieved, then already having the bishop on g5 would mean having a superior version of the already dangerous setups usually connected with the a2-a3 and e2-e3 lines. You can now imagine why this variation was a favourite of Boris Spassky, who employed it frequently, winning some fantastic games in the process. In that regard, it might be considered a fun line to play, because it could lead to sharp positions and quick wins against unprepared opponents.

However, things are not so rosy for White as the description above might seem to imply. Unlike moves like 4.e3 where White is strengthening the control over the centre, this long bishop move is a bit provocative and double-edged. The bishop is loose on g5, and Black can already start thinking of ways to harass it. Furthermore, the bishop is already committed to the kingside, meaning that some of the central and queenside dark squares are lacking in protection. That's the two main factors we're going to exploit.

As people started realizing when looking at this line with modern engines, if Black knows what to do, it might even be White that ends up fighting for equality. Sadly for White, the natural development of the bishop turns out to be a tad overambitious. Time to stop yapping – let's get an idea of what our repertoire will look like:

## **4...c5**

A natural break, immediately attacking White's centre and entertaining the idea of ...♖d8-a5 with a somewhat hidden attack on the white bishop.

## **5.d5**

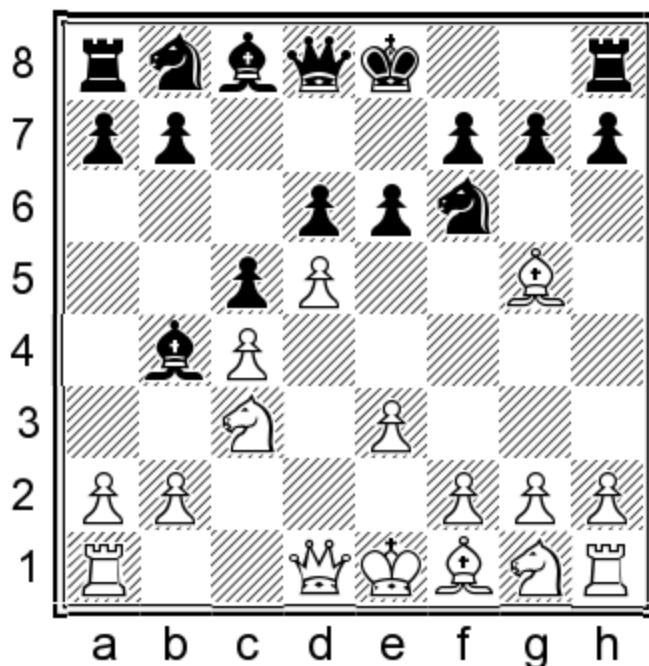
Somewhat sadly for White, this is almost forced, at least in the sense of looking for an advantage. as the alternatives are harmless. White accepts a Benoni-style structure, gaining space but weakening the dark squares even further.

It might be considered telling for this line that the engine slightly prefers 5.♘f3 developing pieces while keeping the tension. However, after 5...h6 White should play 6.♙xf6 which is a good indication that this approach cannot really be challenging.

## **5...d6**

We will need to make this move at some point, so we might as well start with it.

## **6.e3**



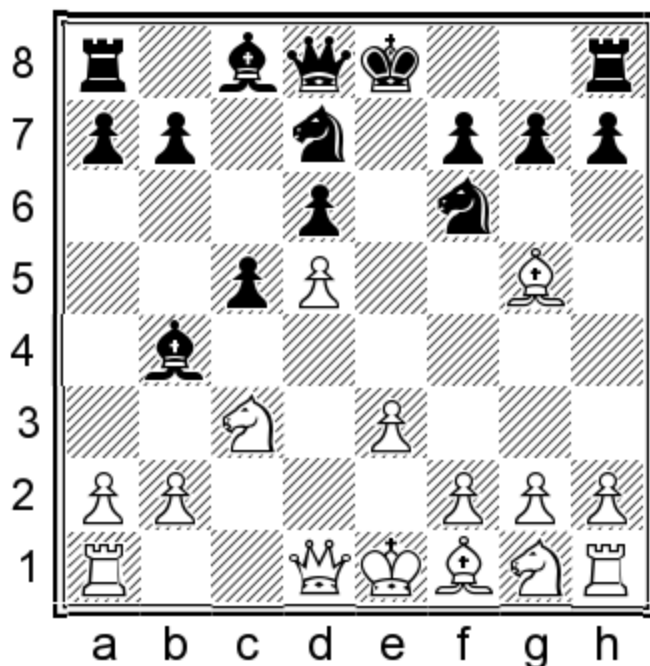
Everyone plays this, and not without reason. As we shall see in the theory section, alternatives are clearly inferior.

### 6...exd5!?

A modern approach, and a move that characterizes our repertoire. By taking on d5 we go for open, dynamic play.

A popular approach for Black has been 6...h6 7.♔h4 ♕xc3+ 8.bxc3 e5!? giving White doubled pawns on the c-file and placing all our pawns on dark squares, playing against the white bishop on h4. As hundreds of games have shown, the resulting positions are rich in strategic nuances, and fine for Black. This is an excellent alternative for anyone that wants something quieter than our proposed approach, but I would advise you to study it carefully. It is not a simple position to handle for either side.

### 7.cxd5 ♞bd7



This can be considered the starting point of our studies. White now has two main paths.

One option is 8.♔b5. This is the second-best move. Since the black knight was about to become annoyingly active on e5, White opts to pre-emptively chop it while it is still on d7. Even though this has been tried by strong players, I think that if White is willing to give us the bishop pair while helping us trade pieces as early as move 8, it is a sign that something has gone wrong.

The main option is 8.♔d3. This is clearly a more natural move. White hopes to finish development and then mobilize the central pawns. Neither line is especially hard to meet, but there are a few nuances that we will need to remember to navigate this variation confidently.

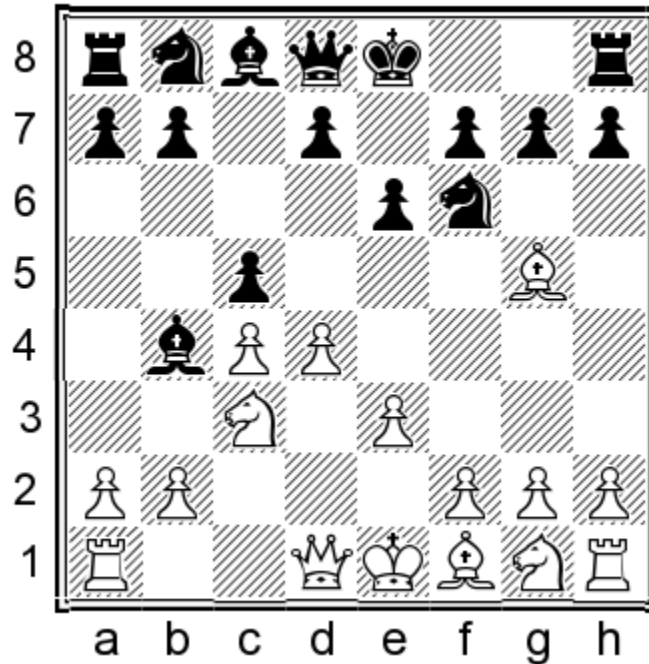
We shall analyse each move separately in the theory section.

## Theory Section

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.♔g5 c5

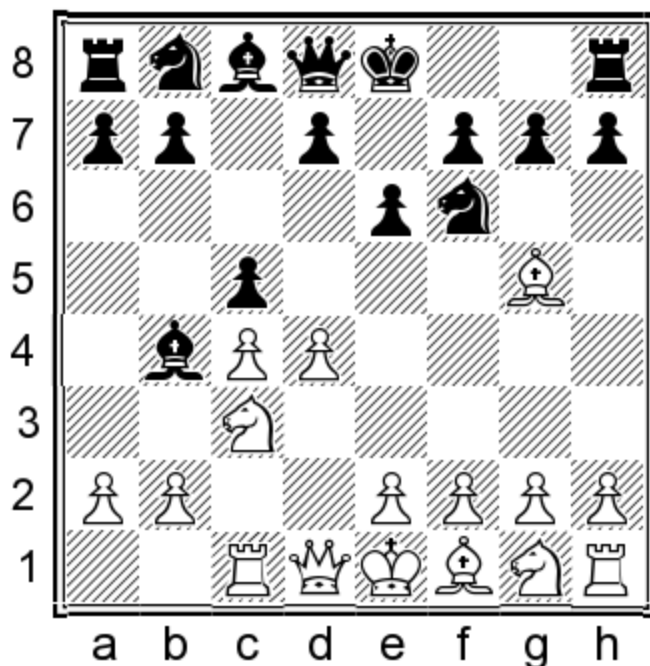
We will study: A)5.♘f3 and B)5.d5 .

The most optimistic option for White would be 5.e3?, trying to keep the d4-pawn in place. It is important to know that this move has a concrete refutation:



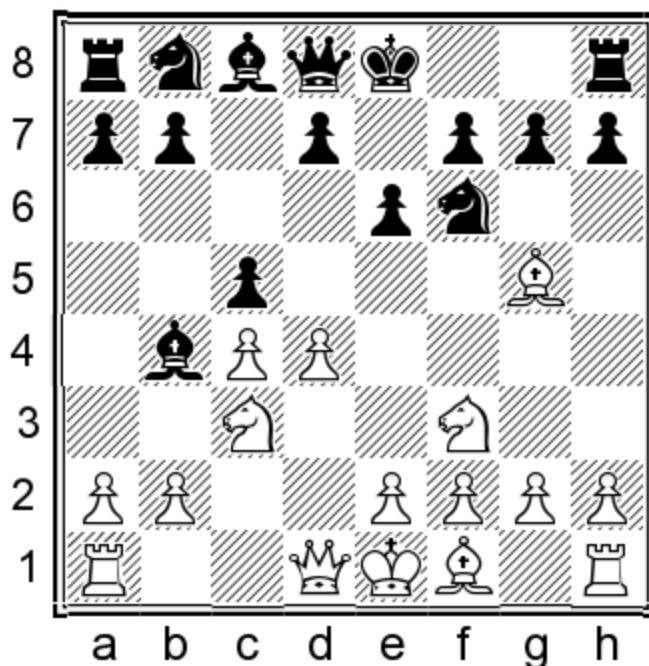
5...♔a5! Threatening ...cxd4, with a horizontal attack on the loose g5-bishop, as well as ...♞e4, with a double attack on the bishop and the knight on c3. That is one of the main tactical reasons why we should start with 4... c5 and not with 4... h6, which, as we shall see numerous times throughout the book, is the usual way of reacting to a bishop appearing on g5. White is pretty much busted already. For example: 6.♙xf6 ♙xc3+ 7.bxc3 (7.♔e2 is also as bad as it looks after 7...♙xb2 8.♙xg7 ♖g8 9.♖b1 ♙xd4! and Black has an overwhelming advantage due to the white king on e2.) 7...♔xc3+ 8.♔e2 gxf6 In addition to the hilarious placement of the white king, Black is up a pawn.

A few strong players have tried 5.♖c1, preventing Black from doubling the pawns on c3.



However, this move has a couple of drawbacks. First, Black can capture on d4, following that up with ...♘b8-c6, getting pieces out with gain of tempo as shown by Roiz in his book, *The Nimzo-Indian Defence*, published by Quality Chess back in 2017. Secondly, Black can simply play 5...h6!?, when White is forced to take on f6 giving Black an easy game. The capture on f6 is forced because after 6.♙h4?! cxd4 7.♚xd4 ♘c6 White does not have the h4-square available for the queen, and after 8.♙xf6 (8.♚d3 ♘e5!? followed by ...♘g6 is also good for Black) 8...♚xf6 9.♚xf6 gxf6 Black has a small but nagging advantage in the endgame.

**A) 5.♘f3**



This could be considered White's attempt at playing it safe, and developing pieces while keeping the tension is quite natural.

**5...h6!**

Asking an awkward question.

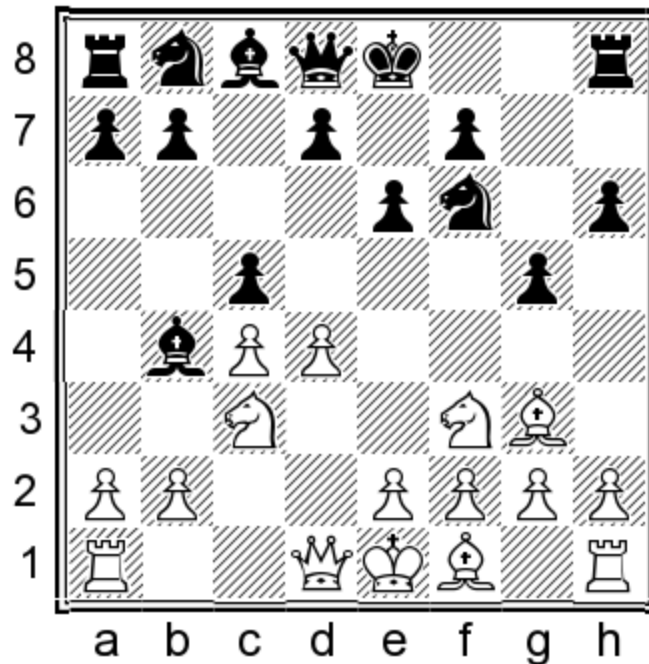
**6.♖xf6**

That this is White's best should already give us an idea that things are going well for us.

6.♗h4?

This is the desirable move, keeping the pin. However, it runs into:

6...g5! 7.♗g3



7...g4!

The only move leading to a large advantage, disrupting the harmony among the white pieces even further.

8.♘e5

Naturally, this was the option chosen by the white players in both games that reached this position.

Against the alternative 8.♘g1 Black has many ways to continue, for example: 8...♘e4 9.♙d3 ♙a5 10.♖c1 ♘xg3 11.hxg3 ♙xa2!? Black is up a pawn with excellent winning chances.

8...♘e4!N

The most accurate.

9.♖c1

9.♙d3 will lead to even more trouble after 9...♘xg3 10.hxg3 d6!

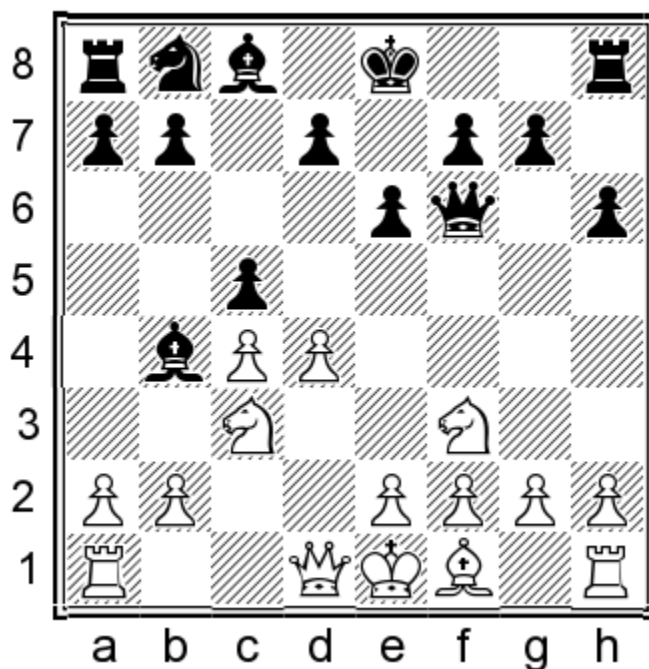
11.♘xg4 e5! and White loses a piece.

9...d6! 10.♘d3 ♙xc3+ 11.bxc3 cxd4!

The tactical point of the whole operation. Black holds a large advantage, as White cannot take back on d4 because of the check on a5.

**6...♔xf6**

Including 6...♘xc3+ is an interesting positional alternative.



**7.♖c1**

The solid approach.

The alternative 7.e3 would allow 7...cxd4 8.exd4 ♔xc3+!?. Black could also delay this move, but it is tempting to ruin White's structure. The game could continue: 9.bxc3 b6 10.♔e2 0-0 This was Ye Rongguang – Nisipeanu, Groningen 1997. For computers this position is close to equality, but for a human this is unpleasant to play with White. There is not much happening in terms of dynamics, while Black has a clear plan of piling up on the weaknesses on the c-file. White is the one that needs to be careful.

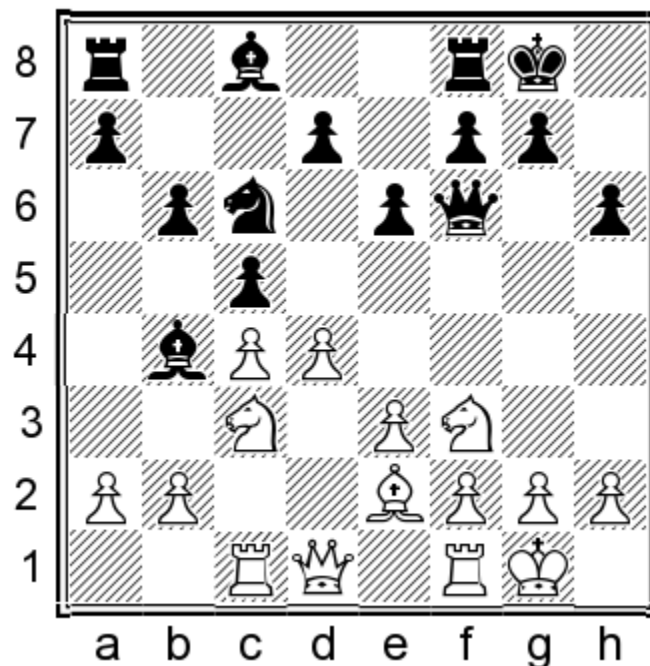
**7...0-0 8.e3 ♘c6!?**

Anything goes at this point. We have several good ways to develop our pieces, but it makes sense to try and be ambitious. This move keeps the tension and tries to avoid further simplification. The game might continue:

**9.♗e2 b6**

Starting with 9...cxd4 is also possible.

**10.0-0**



**10...cxd4!N**

An accurate move.

The immediate 10...♗b7? would be terribly awkward after 11.♘e4, when the bishop on b4 is suddenly out of place.

**11.exd4**

The endgame after 11.♘xd4 ♘xd4 12.♙xd4 ♚xd4 13.exd4 ♗b7 is close to equality, but Black is the one pressing because of the pair of bishops.

**11...♗b7 12.a3**

Anything else is even easier for us.

**12...♗xc3**

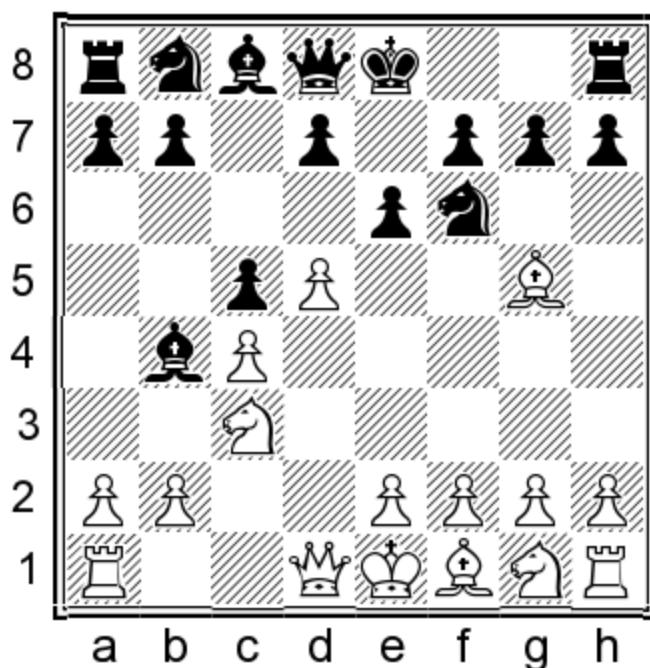
We should oblige, and part with our bishop. There is no comfortable square to retreat to.

**13.♖xc3 ♖ac8**

With an equal position. Black will play ...♖fd8 next and try to play ...d7-d5, always recapturing on d5 with the rook and never with the pawn. Black's position is slightly more flexible, but White is also healthy.

As the above analysis demonstrates, 5.♘f3 is a relatively safe way to play for White, but something we should be happy to see. Let's move on to the more critical lines.

**B) 5.d5**



This is the actual position most players starting with 4.♔g5 would be aiming for. White goes forward, boldly grabbing the extra space. However, in doing so, the white position comes right to the brink of overextension. After our automatic response it is once again White's turn to make a decision:

### 5...d6 6.e3

The main continuation by a large margin. Everything else would pretty much lead to worse versions of the same thing.

6.e4?! does not quite work after 6...♙xc3+! 7.bxc3 h6! when White should give up the bishop on f6 and accept a position with doubled pawns and nothing to show for them. As a general rule, Black is always better in the Nimzo-Indian if the damage on c3 is inflicted and White does not have the bishop pair. Trying to fight by keeping the bishop with something like 8.♙d2 can even be met by a bold capture on e4, but I would prefer 8...0-0!, when White has experienced a positional catastrophe. The desirable 9.♙d3 exd5 10.cxd5 loses to 10...♞xe4!.

6.f3?! might seem logical, trying to increase control over the e4-square but, as we shall see in the 4.f3 chapter, combining a pawn on f3 with the bishop on g5 doesn't work well. In this version, most logical would be to start with 6...h6, asking the bishop an awkward question. (Of course, our usual 6...b5 is also excellent.)

Trying to keep the structure intact with 6.♙c2 does not bear a great difference to the mainline after 6...exd5 7.cxd5 ♞bd7. However, having the queen on c2 seems to be less useful than having a pawn on e3.

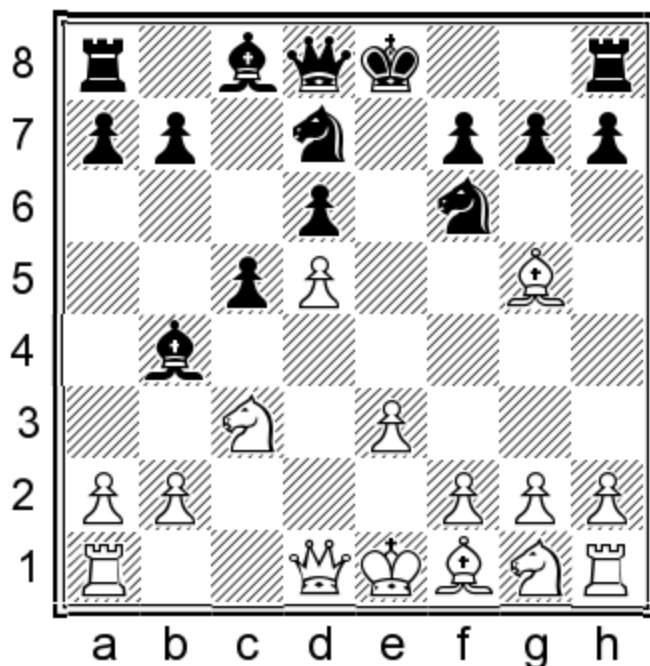
The above reasoning also applies to 6.♖c1.

6.♞f3?! is advocated by Chris Ward in a chapter of *Dangerous Weapons: The Nimzo-Indian*. Although the knight is not without merit on f3, the drawback is that it weakens White's control of the e4-square quite significantly. The most straightforward and instructive continuation is 6...h6!, intending to meet 7.♙h4 with 7...g5 8.♙g3 ♞e4, when White experiences serious trouble on both c3 and g3. Ward's idea was to play dynamically with 9.♞d2 (9.♙d3 f5 also favours Black) 9...♞xc3 10.bxc3 ♙xc3 11.♖c1, but Black has more than one way to keep the advantage: 11...♙g7 (11...♙xd2+ 12.♙xd2 e5 13.h4 ♖g8 14.hxg5 hxg5 also leaves White struggling for compensation.) 12.e3 (Ward offers 12.dxe6 ♙xe6 13.e3, but 13...f5 is great for Black.) 12...0-0 White stands worse, as 13.h4 g4! 14.♙xg4 exd5 15.♙h5 ♖e8 sees us returning the extra pawn to seize the initiative.

### **6...exd5!?**

As explained in the introduction, this is the dynamic option.

### **7.cxd5 ♞bd7**



We will split our attention between: B1) 8.♘b5 and B2) 8.♘d3.

8.♘f3?! can once again be met in various ways, the most accurate being 8...h6! 9.♘h4?! ♔a5! and White is on the verge of collapse. The point of including ...h7-h6 is revealed after 10.♘d2 ♘xc3 11.bxc3 ♔xc3 12.♖c1 ♔b4!, when the bishop hanging on h4 wins Black a crucial tempo or drives the white rook to a ridiculous square on c4.

8.♘h4 is a mysterious move which I don't quite understand. However, both games in my database feature strong grandmasters on the white side (Bareev and Milov), and this usually means that a move should be taken seriously. Anyway, after 8...0-0!? N White has nothing better than developing the bishop to d3, which would allow us to hit the bishop with ...♘e5 and obtain a slightly better version of our mainline. (Even more accurate is 8...♘xc3+! as in Milov – Pelletier, Bern 2014, but I see no reason in trying to remember something so niche. However, one should opt to avoid the premature 8...♘e5?! when after 9.♘b5+ White's plan of delaying the development of the f1-bishop seems to have a point.)

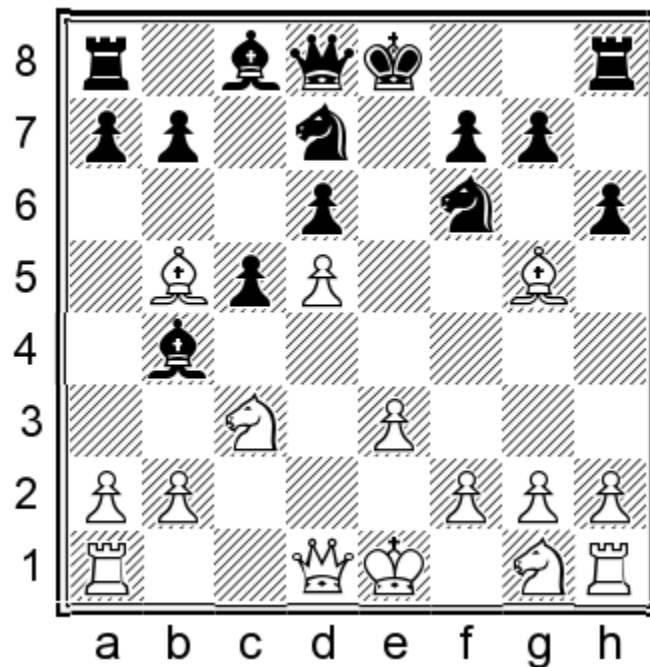
## B1) 8.♘b5

This is significantly less aggressive in comparison to the mainline. White is ready to get rid of the bishop for the knight on d7. It may strike us as slightly weird, but the light-squared bishop has little function in this position. Even in the mainline with 8.♘d3 White allows us to capture on d3 if we want, so it makes some sense just to get rid of the bishop and eliminate a piece that can later become active by jumping to e5.

## 8...h6

Asking the dark-squared bishop the question first.

Starting with 8...a6!? should transpose to the mainline after 9.♘xd7+ ♙xd7 10.♞e2 h6 11.♘h4 ♚e7.



## 9.♘h4

The natural response.

9.♘xf6?! is always a welcome sight. After 9...♙xf6 10.♞e2 a6 11.♘d3 ♞e5 Black has a clear edge.

9.♔f4?! would lead to a better version of the mainline for Black after: 9...a6 10.♕xd7+ ♕xd7 11.♖e2 ♔e7! 12.a3 ♕a5 13.0-0 0-0! Since there was no pin on the f6-knight, there was no need for ...g7-g5.

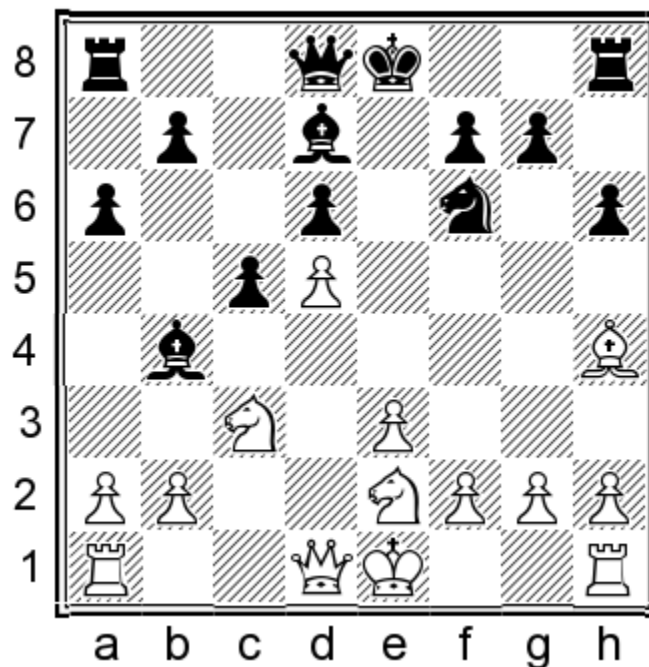
### 9...a6!?

The more fighting approach.

Black has a good alternative in 9...♕xc3+ as played by Kramnik against Korobov in Tromso 2013, but I would prefer playing a livelier game.

With the text move, we allow the game to keep a more complicated character and aim to fight in the style of a turbo-charged Snake Benoni.

10.♕xd7+ ♕xd7 11.♖e2



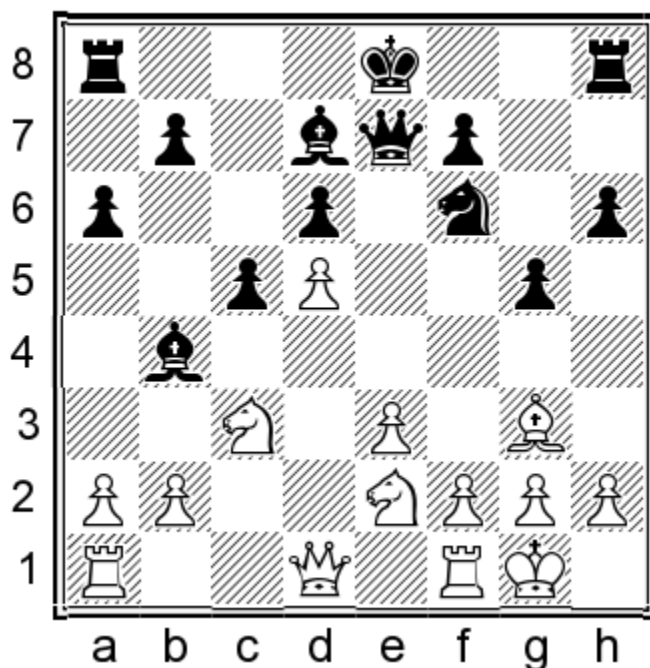
11...♔e7!

Keeping our options open regarding our king. This has been played only twice according to my database and in both games White answered with a natural inaccuracy.

## 12.a3!N

The only way not to drift into serious trouble. After including a2-a3 and ...♗b4-a5, if Black ever castles queenside then White will have b2-b4.

Both games went 12.0-0?!, which gives Black the chance to go for: 12...g5! 13.♗g3



In Pomes Marcet – Cruz Estrada, Llinars del Valles 2023, Black could have gone 13...0-0-0!N. Up next is ...h6-h5, with a huge initiative. Trying to include 14.a3 at this moment fails to 14...♗xc3 15.♘xc3 h5! when White sadly needs to focus on defence.

## 12...♗a5!?

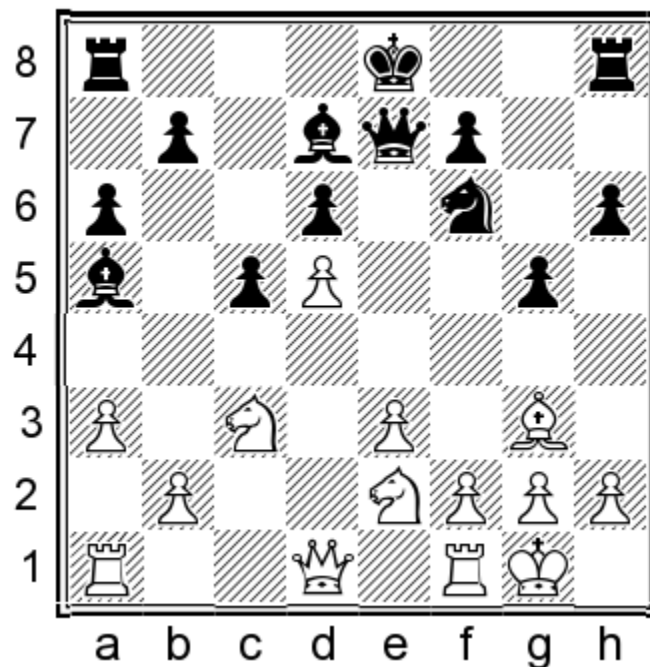
I prefer to keep the bishop because it keeps more chances of a sharp game with mutual chances.

However, the more solid 12...♗xc3+ 13.♘xc3 b5 also leads to a balanced position. Black has very little to worry about and can think of continuing with ...a6-a5 and ...b5-b4.

### 13.0-0 g5!?

Also possible is 13...0-0 with a tense game ahead. Black can either go for ...g7-g5 later or unpin with ...♗a5-d8.

### 14.♗g3



### 14...0-0

With the pawn on a3, castling kingside is the wiser option. The position is double-edged, but Black has easy play on the kingside with ...♘h5 followed by ...f7-f5. For example, the game could continue:

### 15.h3 ♘h5

15...♗f5!? also comes to mind, aiming to put the bishop on g6 and then expand on the queenside.

### **16.e4**

16.♗h2 is met with 16...f5! with a complicated game in which Black has the better chances.

### **16...f5!?**

The consistent approach. Many other moves could be considered, but we shouldn't get carried away overanalysing this.

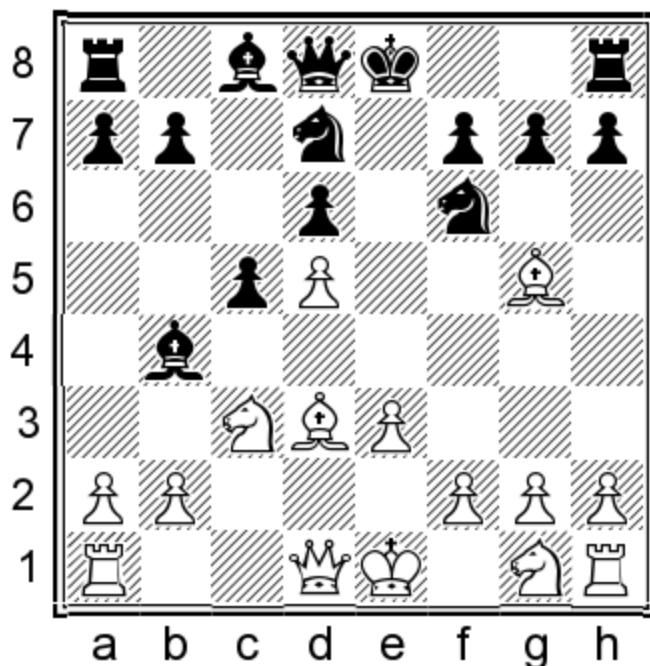
### **17.exf5 ♗xf5 18.♗h2 ♗g6**

Getting out of the way of the f8-rook and protecting the knight. Up next is ...♖ae8. We have an easy game, with White being the one that needs to prove equality.

In conclusion, 8.♗b5 does not really put Black under a serious test. White is hoping for a quiet game in which the dark-squared bishop could put some pressure on the d6-pawn but, as it turns out, this is far from easy to accomplish. Our recommendation aims for Snake Benoni-style counterplay in muddy, double-edged waters. With the sneaky 11...♕e7!? we're setting a cunning trap which White is likely to fall into. Even if your opponent manages to dodge the bullet and finds 12.a3!, the resulting positions seem easier for Black to play.

All in all, despite 8.♗b5 being tried in several high-level games, it turns out to be nothing special.

### **B2) 8.♗d3**



This is both the most popular and the most natural option for White. The bishop does not have any better squares, and White needs to somehow develop the kingside.

**8...♞e5!?**

Surprisingly, this natural move is quite rare. We just continue improving our pieces, trusting our Snake Benoni-style counterplay to give us a good game.

The more concrete 8...♙a5 is played almost exclusively and is also the move chosen by Michael Roiz and analysed deeply in his book. However, the pawn-grabbing operation initiated by this move is not necessary, and it seems to me like it's not very practical.

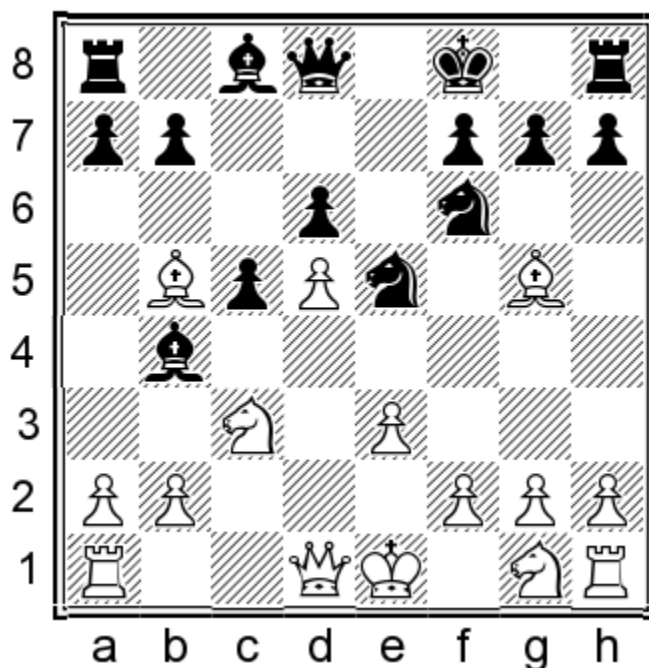
Starting with 8...0-0 could also be considered, but then White gains the extra option of going 9.♞f3!?, which annoyingly prevents our knight from jumping to e5.

**9.♞e2**

This is simultaneously the natural square to develop the knight and the only move ever played.

9.  $\text{Nf3}$  is nicely met with: 9...h6! 10.  $\text{Bh4}$   $\text{Nxf3+}$  11. gxf3 (11.  $\text{Qxf3??}$  loses to 11...g5 12.  $\text{Bg3}$   $\text{Bg4}$ . ) 11...g5 12.  $\text{Bg3}$   $\text{Bh3}$  when Black has the easier game.

9.  $\text{Bb5+!?}$  is a nice idea, as if we block with the bishop White might claim that it's a better version of the 8.  $\text{Bb5}$  lines. However, we can meet White's surprise with a surprise of our own and go: 9...  $\text{Kf8!?$



With ideas of exploiting the weird placement of the white bishops by expanding on either side. A natural continuation could be: 10.  $\text{Ne2}$  h6 11.  $\text{Bh4}$  a6 12.  $\text{Bd3}$  g5 13.  $\text{Bg3}$   $\text{Qe7}$  14. 0-0  $\text{Bd7}$  with ... $\text{Kae8}$  and ... $\text{Kf8-g7}$  to follow, and a vastly complicated but balanced struggle ahead.

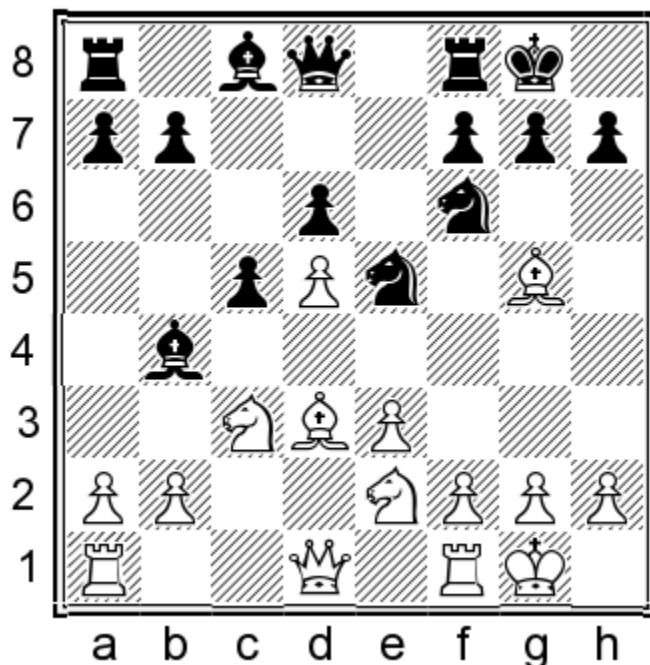
### 9...0-0

Castling immediately removes the option of a check on b5.

## 10.0-0

There is nothing else for White really.

White has also tried 10.♔c2, but 10...h6 11.♔h4 ♞g6 is a better version of the mainline. We weren't going to capture the bishop on d3 anyway so, albeit natural, it is not logical to retreat it.



## 10...h6!

The pin on the f6-knight must at some point be broken.

## 11.♔h4

Breaking the pin with 11.♔f4?! doesn't make much sense. Other moves also work, but I would prefer the simple 11...♞xd3 12.♔xd3 ♞h5, grabbing both of White's bishops. The engine claims the position remains equal, but I think every human would rather be Black.

## 11...♞g6!

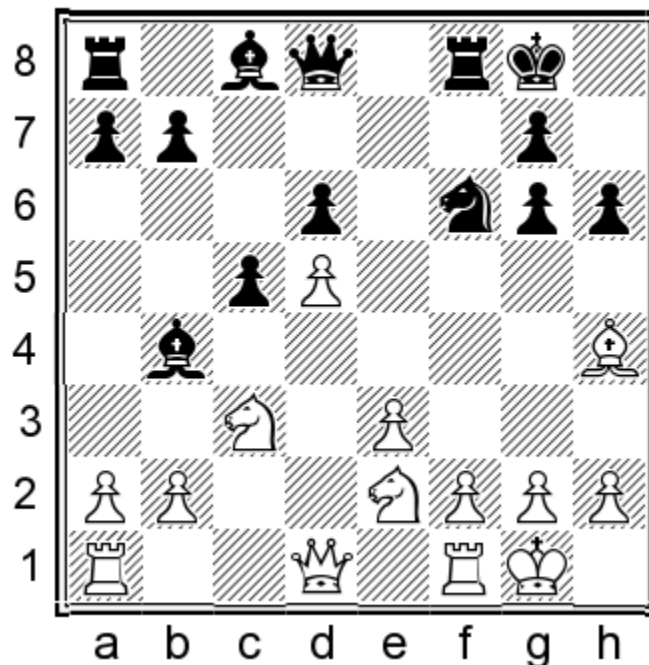
This is the main point of our operation. Black brings the knight over to the kingside to eliminate White's dark-squared bishop.

Just like in the previous segment on 8.♘b5, the character of the game is somewhat sharp; both sides have their trumps. White has a bit of extra space, but we have strong active counterplay in the centre and on the kingside.

**12.♘g3!**

This is the way to play for White.

Some players might be tempted to capture on g6, but that is great news for us: 12.♘xg6?! fxg6

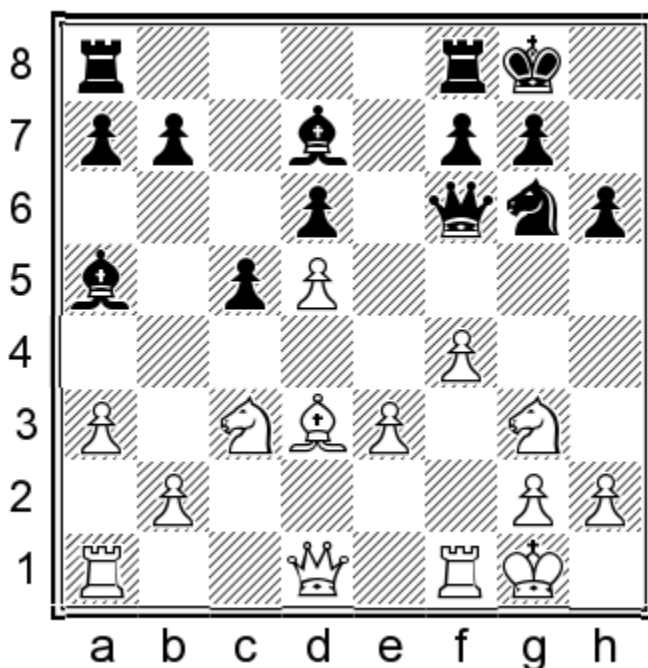


The doubled pawns are not weak, as we can form a healthy pawn chain by going ...g6-g5. That way, we also comfortably break the pin on the f6-knight. Furthermore, our rook on f8 is activated, and against either f2-f3 or h2-h3 we have gained the possibility of ...g6-

g5-g4, opening more lines on the kingside without weakening our king.

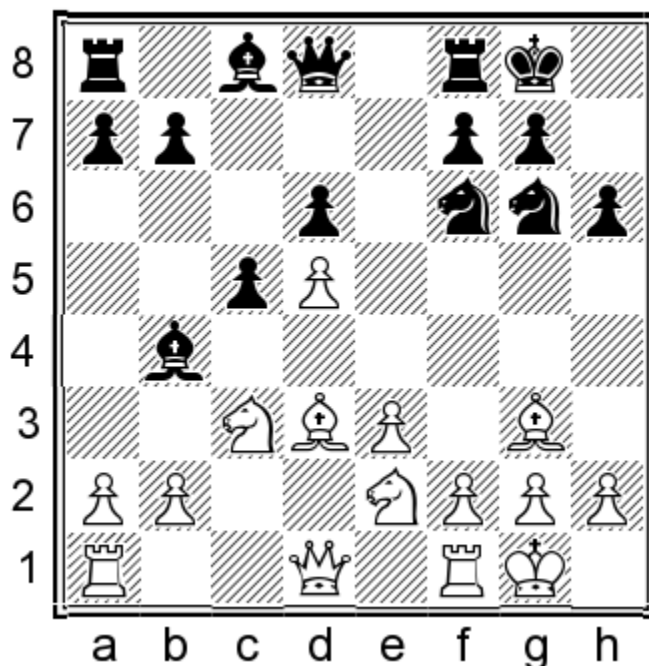
A possible continuation would be: 13.♔d3 (After 13.f3? g5 14.♘f2 g4! Black had a great advantage and went on to win in Dambacher – Wojtaszek, Rhodes 2013.) 13...g5 14.♘g3 ♔e7!? Black is intending to continue with ...♙d7 next and possibly double rooks on the f-file with ...♖f7 and ...♖af8. Once this is achieved, then we can think of expanding on the queenside. Our position is flexible, and we can easily create active play on both wings.

12.♙xf6 is possible but that is generally a decision that Black is happy to see. After 12...♔xf6 13.a3 ♙a5 14.♞g3 in Thorsteins – Orłowski, Lyon 1990, Black should have kept developing pieces with 14...♙d7N and met 15.f4 with:



15...♔e7 16.♔d2 f5! Putting a stop to White's potential kingside play. White might continue to try, but there is no way to advance without e3-e4, and that would open the game even more for our bishop pair.

Our next move is probably ...♖ae8, followed by expanding on the queenside. This is a typical situation for this line, where the engine evaluates the position as equal, but I would personally rather be playing Black.



### 12...♞h5

The most direct. Black wants to take the bishop on g3, and at the same time prepares ...f7-f5, fighting for the centre and preventing White's central advance. Even though this is my main suggestion, I find it a bit weird that it was Black's unanimous decision in all 33 games in my database.

The character of the game is not too concrete, and there are many possible alternatives that could possibly transpose to similar, or even the same positions to the mainline. For instance, I can't see what would be wrong with the natural 12...♖e8!?!N, putting pressure on e3 and making White's plan of going f2-f4 harder to achieve.

### 13.f4!

The critical move. White tries to attack on the kingside with careless abandon.

White has an interesting and natural alternative in:

13. ♔c2

Continuing to develop while staying solid.

13... ♞xg3 14. ♞xg3 ♞e5

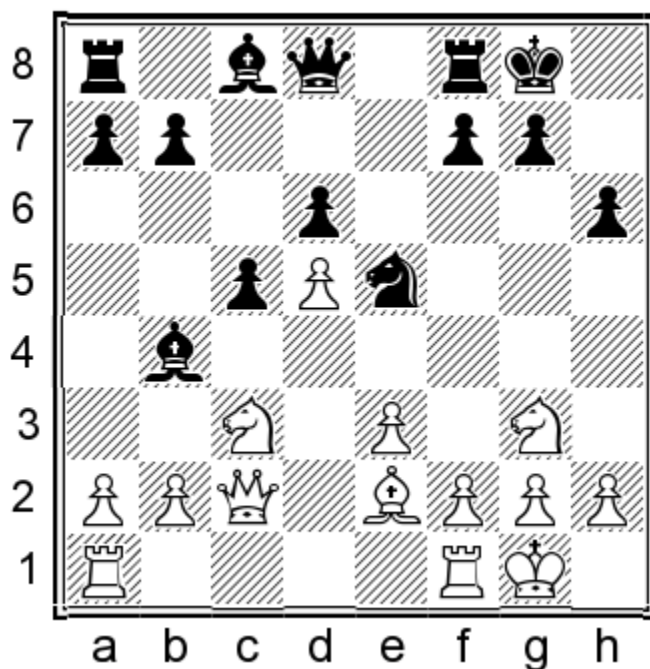
The natural reaction.

14... ♞h4!? is also interesting, as the knight on h4 is quite active.

15. ♙e2

This is the challenging approach.

15. ♙h7+ ♔h8 16. ♙f5 can be met with 16... ♙xf5! 17. ♞xf5 g6! with a nice position for Black.



This was Gonzalez Velez – Ionescu, Manresa 1993. The knight on e5 looks nice, but it is also a potential problem as it will get kicked out and there is nowhere to go except back to d7. White has a space advantage, but we have the two bishops and good chances to create dynamic counterplay. It makes sense to start regrouping without waiting for White to chase us:

15...♞d7!N

The knight will later go to f6, which is a much more stable place.  
An instructive continuation would be:

16.e4 a6

Controlling the b5-square and introducing the option of a later ...b7-b5.

17.f4 ♖e8 18.♔h1 ♞f6 19.♞ae1 b5 20.♙f3 ♖a7!

Black will follow up with ...♞ae7. This is typical Benoni-style play, but in much better conditions for Black than it usually is.

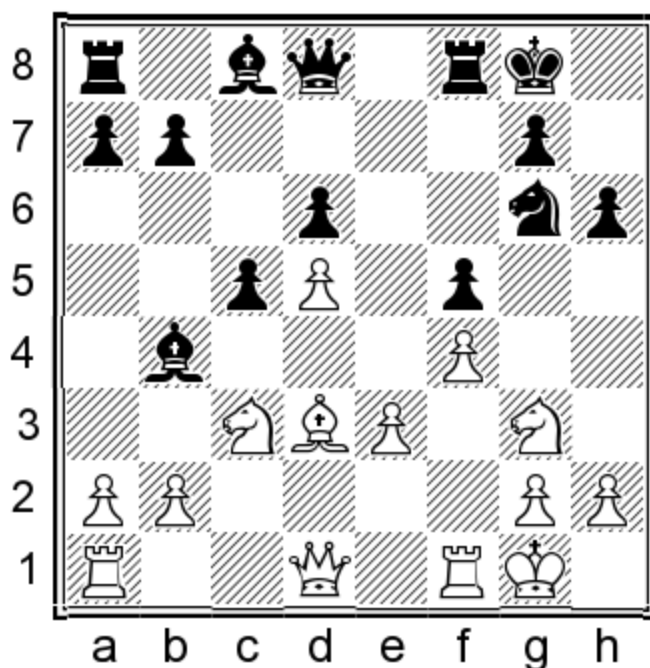
**13...♞xg3!?**

Taking the bishop is natural and part of the plan, removing a potentially strong piece from the enemy camp.

However, with the pawn committed to f4 it would also make sense to play 13...f5 14.♙f2 ♞f6 followed by ...♙d7, with fine position, as played in Moiseenko – Bacrot, San Sebastian 2012.

**14.♞xg3 f5!**

Stopping the white pawn avalanche is the correct idea with or without the capture on g3.



### 15. ♔e2!?N

At my course for KCT I claimed that this move was critical and ensuring an advantage for White, who wants to advance with e3-e4 next and exploit Black's weaknesses on the light squares. However, my opinion has evolved, and I consider the position to be far more complex than I did before, with Black having a fair share of chances. The right setup involves bringing the queen to f6 and the rook from a8 to e8. Then, the concentration of pieces on the kingside ensures counterplay in case White opens the position with e3-e4.

After 15. ♔c2 ♞h4 16. e4 fxe4 17. ♙xe4 ♙d7 18. ♖h1 ♔f6 Black was slightly better in Lodici – Werle, Trieste 2015, and he went on to win. Black's position is both easier to play and has more potential to evolve. The a8-rook coming the e-file and the queenside expansion are the obvious plans for the near future.

Another example went: 15. a3 ♙a5 16. h3 ♙d7 17. ♖h2 This was Babula – Stoczek, Pardubice 2020. Black should have continued

developing pieces to their natural squares with 17...♔f6!N, keeping the h4-square for the knight. Our next move is ...♖ae8, and 18.e4 can be answered with 18...♞h4!

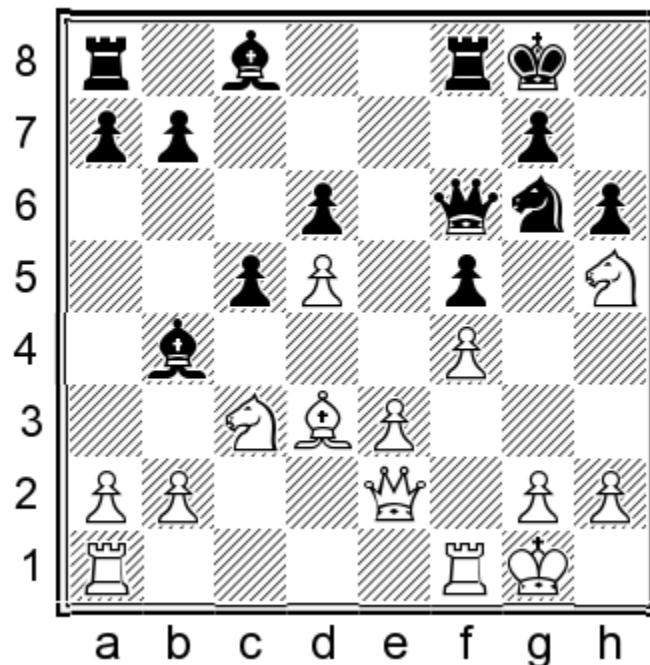
### 15...♔f6!

This is both part of building our ideal setup (queen on f6, bishop on d7, a8-rook to e8, knight to h4), and fights against e3-e4 by using tactical means.

### 16.♞h5

Gaining a tempo and pushing the queen away from the central dark squares, but the knight on h5 does not help the cause of e3-e4.

16.e4 runs into: 16...♔d4+ 17.♔h1 fxe4 18.♔xe4 ♔xe4 19.♞cxe4 ♞xf4 Every step of this line was forced, and it is White that needs to prove equality in the final position.



### 16...♔e7

Putting pressure on the e3-pawn.

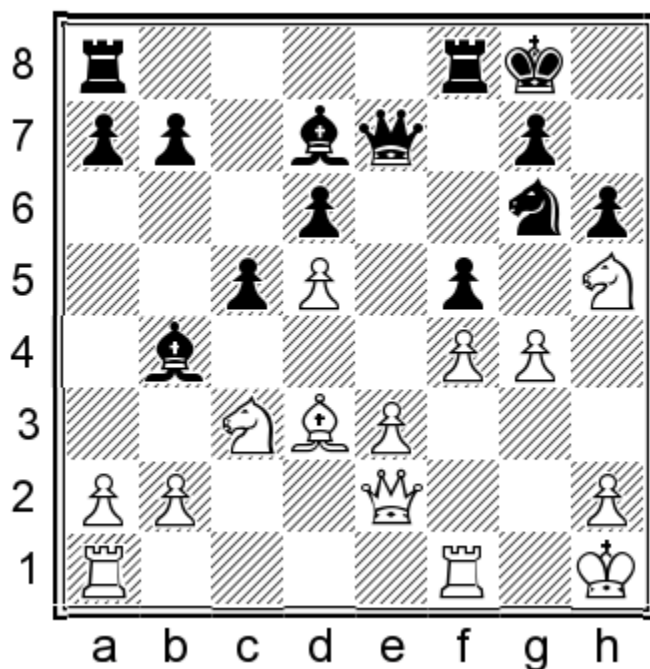
## 17.♔h1

17.e4 has no real threat so it can be met in many ways, the most straightforward being 17...♙xc3! 18.bxc3 fxe4 followed by ...♙f5, with a good position.

## 17...♙d7

We're close to activating our whole army by bringing the a8-rook into play, with an easy game. If White wants anything, quick action is required:

## 18.g4!?



## 18...♖ae8!

As usual, development is the answer to all of our problems. With all our pieces participating, it is unrealistic for White to hope for anything. I would already rather be Black, and this seems like a good moment for us to stop.

In conclusion, our line against 8.♔d3, which is characterized by 8...♞e5!?, leads a different kind of structure than we usually get, offering us more aggressive and dynamic possibilities. In principle, we do not play for equality in this variation. On the contrary, we accept a higher risk, looking for a higher reward. There are a few concepts to keep in mind:

- 1) The idea of placing the knight on e5 is to play ...♞e5-g6 and ...♞f6-h5, gaining the bishop pair. Under no circumstance, should we allow White to push the central pawns while keeping us under a pin.
- 2) We should be ready to meet White's f2-f4 with ...f7-f5, stopping the f4-pawn in its tracks.
- 3) In the main line, after 14...f5!, our ideal setup is achieved by ...♔d8-f6, ...♙c8-d7, ...♖a8-e8, and finally ...♞g6-h4.

I think these three pointers will help you better organize your knowledge of the Snake Benoni... oh wait!

## Conclusion

Despite its tricky appearance, the Leningrad Variation turns out to be quite harmless. I could not resist suggesting a Benoni-type structure, because when White chooses these second-tier systems, it gives us an opportunity to fight for the full point right from the get-go. We rarely get these chances in the mainlines, so I think we should be willing to take some risks when the opportunity presents itself. In this case, quite frankly, the risk isn't even that great.

After 4...c5 the only line that matters is 5.d5. Everything else is either totally harmless or downright bad. After 5.d5 d6 6.e3 exd5 7.cxd5 ♞bd7, the critical line is 8.♔d3, as 8.♔b5 allows us to start playing for an advantage with our tricky little move 11...♔e7!, keeping our options open regarding our king.

Against 8.♔d3 we go 8...♞e5!? aiming for Snake Benoni-style counterplay and accepting a complicated position where Black has excellent chances to emerge victorious. Our main source of counterplay is the vulnerability of both white bishops, and we should take care to at least eliminate the annoying of the two, the one pinning our knight on the h4-d8 diagonal. It would be catastrophic if the white pawns started rolling and we're still under that pin.

I have also included a few different options here and there, and you are obviously free to choose one to deviate from my main suggestion and opt for one of them, depending on your playing style. The hard part about facing offbeat lines like 4.♔g5 is to choose one approach, as we are spoilt for choice. As is often the case, I find it more useful to try to understand the position than to strictly memorize the moves. Without a good understanding to back us up, we could confuse a move order and completely mangle the moves in a practical setting. That is why I wrote all these wordy explanations throughout the chapter. My hope is that next time you face 4.♔g5, you feel comfortable to crack a big smile and immediately start playing for an advantage!

# Chapter 3

## The Trendy 4.♔d2

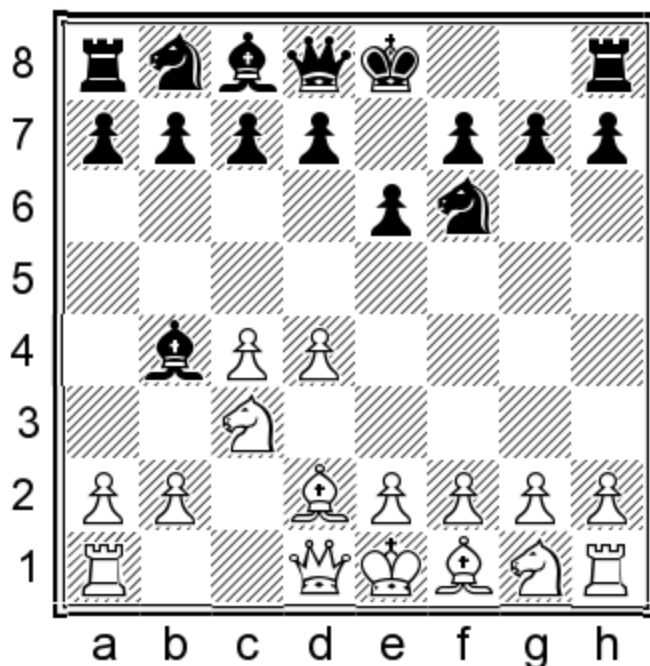
### Variation Index

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♕b4 4.♔b2 0-0 5.e3 d5

- A) 6.a3
- B) 6.♗f3 b6!?! 7.cxd5 exd5
- B1) 8.♕d3
- B2) 8.♖c1 ♕b7
- B21) 9.♗b5!?!
- B22) 9.♕d3

### Introduction

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♕b4 4.♔d2



In this chapter we will dive in detail into a line that has become mainstream in recent years, characterized by the placement of the bishop on d2. This calm and timid developing move used to be considered amateurish and harmless, and a relatively inferior option when compared to placing the queen on c2, which serves the same purpose of preventing the doubling of pawns on the c-file.

In contrast with the 4.♙c2 lines, after ♖c1-d2 and ♗d2xc3, the bishop on c3 is still susceptible to elimination after Black goes ...♞f6-e4. That made the plan of breaking the bishop seem much less inspiring, but modern engines begged to differ, and declared the line interesting and playable. As usual, top players did not need much persuasion to follow suit. In any case, I still believe Black can comfortably equalize and there is nothing to be afraid of.

A common way to transpose to our lines examined below would be via a Rubinstein move order with 4.e3 followed by 5.♗d2. That might even be a more professional way of reaching the same thing,

as White starts with the more universal 4.e3 and waits for Black to commit an extra move before revealing the intention to go for ♖c1-d2. However, for the purposes of our study it is more convenient to start with placing the bishop on d2 and examine all versions of placing the bishop on d2 in one place.

### **4...0-0**

Other moves are also fine, but it is convenient to stay flexible and play the same move that we're going to play against 4.e3. Remember, the lines are likely to transpose to each other.

### **5.e3**

The most logical. The bishop on f1 needs to find a way to get developed and placing it on g2 does not combine well with either the knight on c3 or the bishop on d2.

### **5...d5**

Making our claim in the centre.

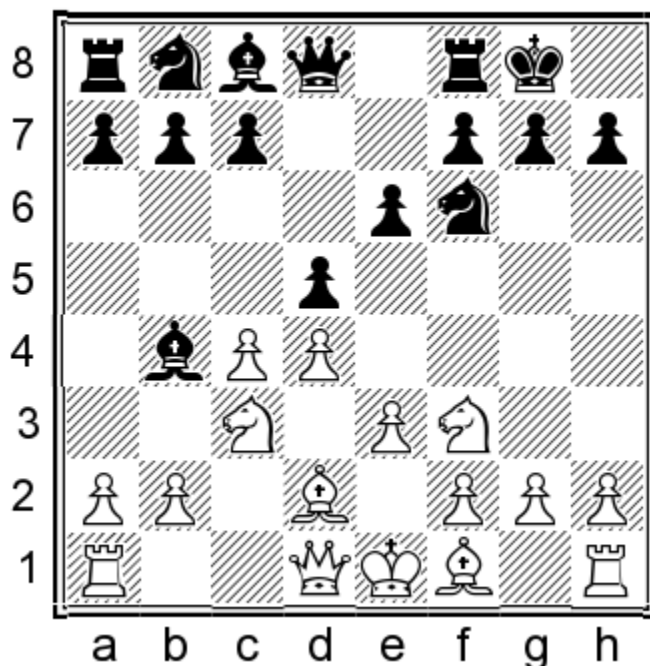
Later in the book, you shall also see coverage of the position resulting after 5...c5 6.♘f3, but that will be through the 4.♘f3 variation on page 163. In our present case, I did not want to go for the immediate break on c5 because of 6.a3!, and after the logical 6...♙xc3 7.♙xc3 ♘e4 8.♘e2 b6! 9.d5! White has some chances to fight for an advantage. That is even more so in practical terms since our position is quite passive. I do not like playing like that, especially when we have the chances to go for a more balanced, fighting and double-edged approach.

### **6.♘f3**

This is the main move, developing naturally.

The main alternative would be 6.a3, which I would like to answer with 6...♙e7! keeping the bishop. This exploits the meek nature of

White's last few moves and plans to exploit Black's slight lead in development by breaking in the centre with an eventual ...c7-c5.



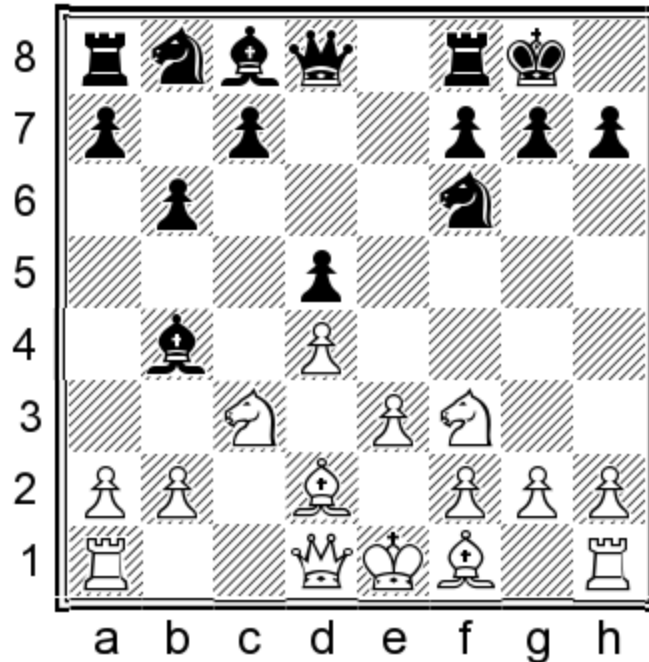
### 6...b6!?

Black continues developing in the most standard fashion, the obvious idea being to bring the bishop out to b7 next.

### 7.cxd5

This is an almost automatic reaction whenever White sees ...b7-b6 with the tension between the c4- and d5-pawns still unresolved. Since the c8-bishop revealed its intention of getting developed to b7, it makes sense to close the long diagonal by once and for all depriving Black of the option of ...d5xc4. Other moves are also possible but nothing special.

### 7...exd5



The scene is set, and we shall study two main roads that White can choose from. Here or on the next move he can play the developing move ♖c1. A flexible move, bringing the rook to the c-file with the idea of putting pressure on Black's queenside. Alternatively, White can make kingside development a priority, and adopt a plan of ♕f1-d3 followed by 0-0 with ♞f3-e5 and f2-f4, also known as the "Pillsbury Setup". On the black side, our general idea should be to create counterplay in the centre with the break ...c7-c5. This will lead to an interesting battle with chances for both sides.

### 8. ♖c1

This leads to less forcing play. 8. ♕d3!? is a more aggressive approach where we could end up in trouble if we go wrong. We will reply with 8... ♕b7 and answer 9.0-0 with the natural but important 9... ♕d6! followed by ...c7-c5 and ... ♞c6 without wasting a single tempo.

### 8... ♕b7

And this is the second divergence point. White has a few different options. The main move is the obvious one:

**9.♔d3**

However, there are alternatives like 9.♘b5 and 9.♘e5 that deserve a close look.

**9...♖e8!**

In this case, the bishop needs to go to f8 instead of d6, as going to d6 would run into ♘c3-b5. Since White lost a tempo with ♖c1 as far as building the Pillsbury setup is concerned, we have the luxury of losing a tempo ourselves and move our rook to e8.

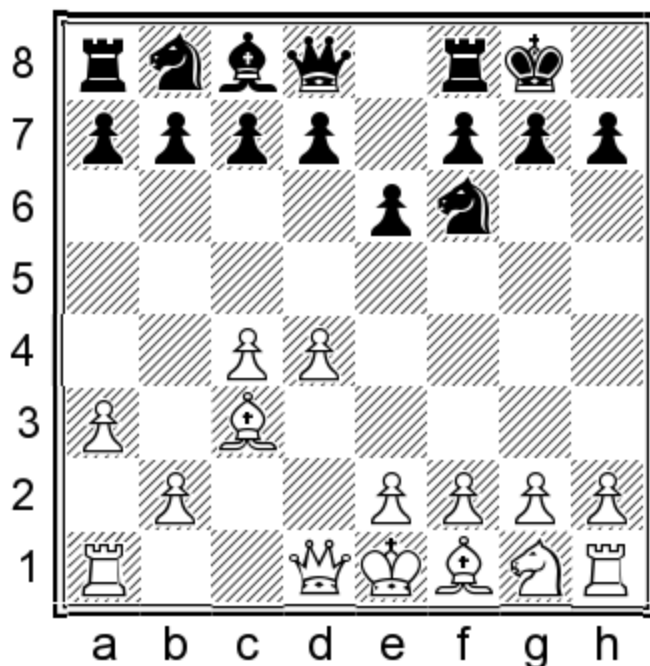
Everything is similar in these lines, and our reactions are also similar. However, as we shall see in the theory section, there are numerous nuances it would be good to be aware of. Let's get to work!

## Theory Section

**1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.♔d2 0-0 5.e3**

As mentioned in the introduction, this is the only line that deserves real study.

If White wants to avoid moving the e-pawn, then the most logical would be 5.a3, but this does not pose Black any serious problems. After 5...♙xc3 6.♔xc3 Black needs to find one accurate move to ensure equality:



6...♞e4! Not allowing White to keep the bishop pair for free. Black can develop next with ...b7-b6 and ...♞b7 or ...d7-d6 and play for ...e6-e5. In any case, the game is balanced and Black's play is easy. A high-level encounter continued: 7.♞c1 Avoiding the doubled pawns. 7...d6 With the idea of ...♞d7 and eventually ...e6-e5. 8.g3 (8.e3 was also possible but equally unchallenging.) 8...♞d7 9.♞g2 ♞df6!? 10.♞d3 ♞xc3 11.♞xc3 ♞e8 Black was ready to play ...e6-e5 on the next move with an equal game in I. Sokolov – Salomon, Stockholm 2018.

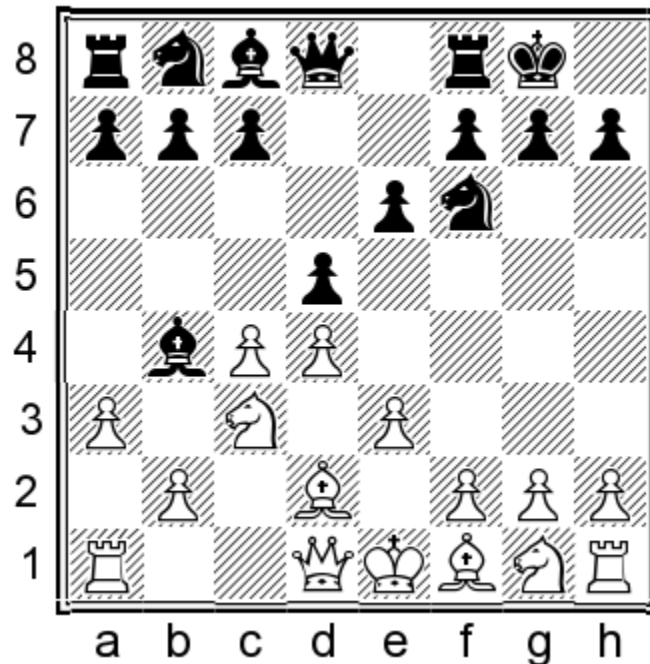
After 5.♞f3 d5 White needs to push the e-pawn and transpose to the mainlines, as we're pretty seriously threatening to grab a pawn on c4. The sometimes-possible Catalan-style gambit with 6.g3 is not good for White after 6...dxc4. The earlier move of the bishop to d2 is a full wasted tempo compared to the theoretical versions of these lines. Not only was a tempo wasted in moving the bishop, but it is also misplaced on d2.

### 5...d5

We will study: **A)6.a3** and **B)6.♞f3**.

Releasing the tension with 6.cxd5 exd5 would lead by transposition to a line studied on page 254 after 7.♔d3 ♖e8 8.♘ge2. Anything else from White would lead to a worse version of the same thing.

### A) 6.a3



This is much rarer compared to the alternative, but it has been tried a few times by top players.

### 6...♔e7!

It is also possible to take on c3. However, since that does not inflict damage to White's pawn structure and Black is already leading in development, there is no need to let the bishop go so easily. Instead, we keep pieces on the board and seek to attack the centre with ...c7-c5.

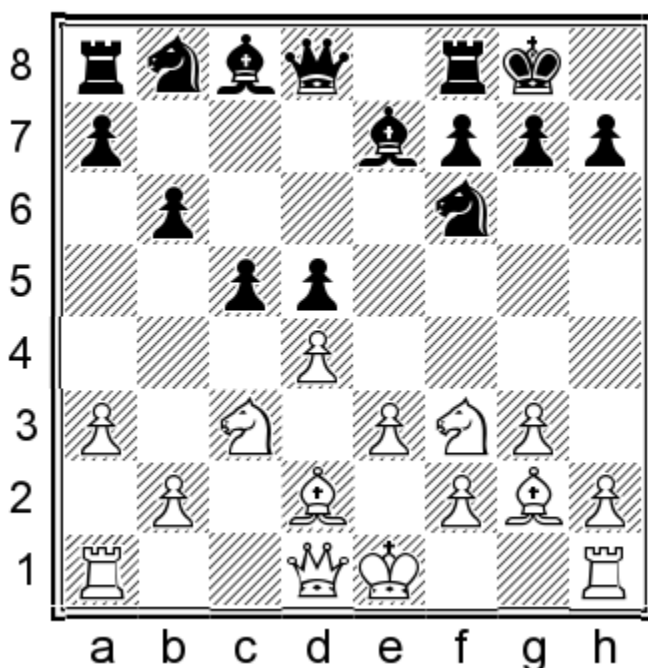
A normal question would be: "Why not 6...♔xc3 7.♔xc3 and then 7...♘e4, taking back the bishop pair?" This is not terrible, but with the pawn already committed to d5, Black will have a bit of a hard time developing the c8 bishop after something like 8.♖c1 ♘xc3



The obvious move. White wants ♖f3-e5 and f2-f4, getting a strong grip in the centre with prospects of a kingside attack. Obviously, Black has to find a way to not let this happen.

9.♖c1 does not make much sense in this case. Black can simply play 9...c5 since the bishop is already on e7.

An interesting alternative is 9.g3!? planning to develop the bishop on g2, which is usually a good place to fight against the hanging pawns. A practical example continued: 9...c5 10.♗g2



10...♘c6! Settling for easy development is the most practical choice. (10...♗a6 also deserves attention, but White will manage to castle kingside after accurate play.) 11.0-0 ♗b7 12.♖e1 ♖e8 13.♖c1 ♗f8  
The position remained balanced in J. van Foreest – T.D.V. Nguyen, Durren 2023.

The idea of the kingside fianchetto seems nice for White because of the pressure against d5. Nevertheless, the bishop on d2 is misplaced, and Black gets an easy game without putting in much effort. A good idea in the final position might be to advance the queenside pawns

with ...c5-c4 followed by ...b6-b5-b4. This would of course take a few preparatory moves, but it is hard for White to come up with a plan.

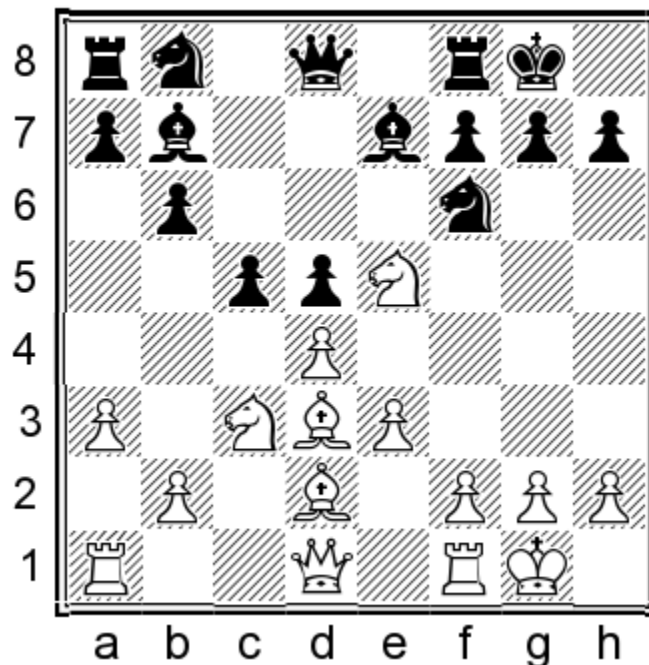
### 9...c5!

It is important to be as fast as possible in challenging the white centre.

### 10.♞e5

The move order does not change anything. White could also start by castling first, leading to the same thing.

### 10...♞b7 11.0-0



### 11...♞c6!

This is much better than developing the knight to d7, as it interferes with White's plan. White wanted to play f2-f4, followed by ♔d2-e1-h4, with an annoying kingside initiative. After the text move that is impossible, as Black is already putting pressure on the d4-pawn, not

allowing White to consolidate the centre. This is already a rare position, possibly because only a few players with Black have bothered preparing this line in detail.

11...♞bd7?! 12.f4! is not terrible, but it is exactly what White wanted.

## 12.♞c1

Putting some pressure along the c-file and trying to undermine Black's central pawns.

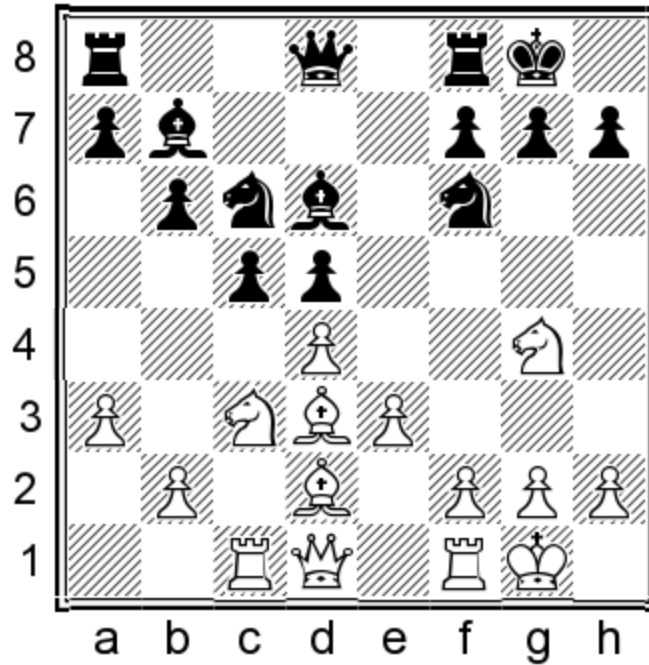
The immediate 12.♞g4 fails to 12...cxd4 simply winning a pawn. 12.♞f3 was tried in Votava – Brkic, Austria 2018, and Black should have played 12...♙d6!N when the knight on e5 cannot be maintained. After 13.♞g4 ♞xg4 14.♞xg4 ♞e7 Black has no problems to speak of.

12.♙e1 is a typical idea, but Black gets an easy game by getting rid of the knight on e5: 12...cxd4 13.♞xc6 (13.exd4? is impossible as after 13...♞xd4! 14.♙xh7+ ♞xh7 15.♞xd4 ♙c5 Black's advantage is already decisive.) 13...♙xc6 14.exd4 ♞e4! Black had comfortably equalized in Ivanchuk – Dzagnidze, Internet (blitz) 2021. It is White that needs to prove equality, as the position is symmetrical, and Black has the more active pieces.

## 12...♙d6! 13.♞g4

This is White's idea.

13.f4 would be bad because after 13...cxd4 14.♞xc6 ♙xc6 15.exd4 ♞c8 the position is slightly in Black's favour. The weakness of the e4-square is permanent.



White is trying to undermine the d5-pawn by exchanging the knight on f6. This would also leave h7 as a potential target. However, the knight on g4 is misplaced and Black has a great response:

**13...♞e8!**

The idea is to kick the knight out with ...f7-f5 next.

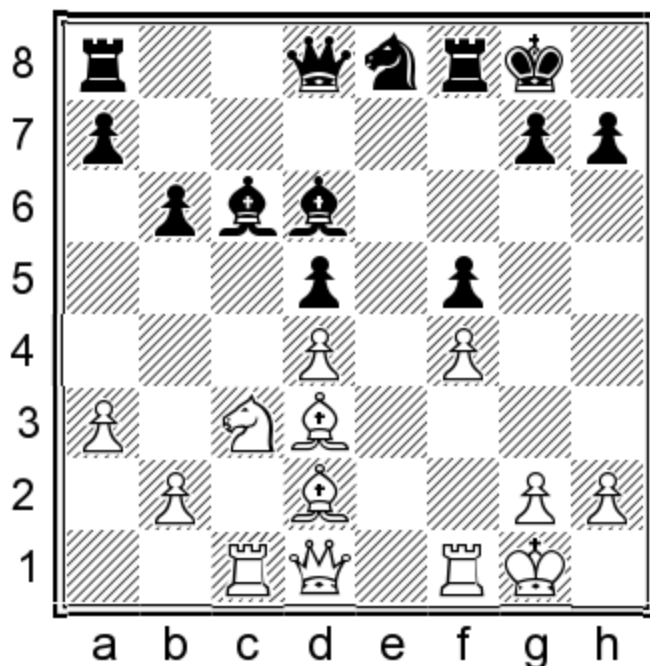
**14.f4**

14.♞xd5? runs into 14...h5!.

**14...f5 15.♞e5**

The alternative 15.♞f2? c4 16.♞b1 ♞e7 is grim for White, whose pieces all appear to be passive.

**15...cxd4 16.♞xc6 ♞xc6 17.exd4**



**17...♔d7!**

The position is balanced with chances for both sides. Black wants to defend f5 and then bring back the knight to the action as quickly as possible. Here are a couple of practical examples:

**18.♔b3**

After 18.♔c2 g6 19.♖fe1 ♞f6 Black was already a bit better in Bluebaum – Amburgy, Internet (blitz) 2024.

**18...♞c7**

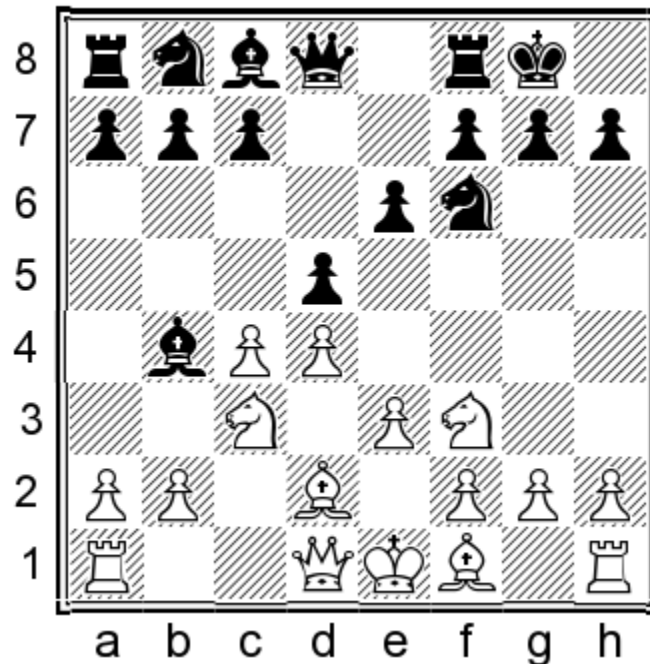
18...♞f6 also makes sense. In the case of 19.♞b5 ♕xb5 20.♕xb5 ♔f7 Black is at least equal with the knight coming to e4 at some point.

**19.♖fe1 ♔h8 20.♔h1 g6**

In Bluebaum – Vidit, Isle of Man 2019, the position remained balanced, and the game was eventually drawn.

The rare 6.a3 is certainly interesting, but Black seems to be doing alright by retreating to e7. Then we follow the standard recipe of ...b7-b6 and ...c7-c5, striking in the centre while preparing to develop the c8-bishop. An important thing to remember is to put your knight on c6 instead of d7, pressuring the d4-pawn and not allowing White to set up the desired construction with f2-f4 and a textbook kingside attack. After 11...♞c6 White's position loses its panache, and any effort to pose us problems looks somewhat artificial.

### B) 6.♞f3



This is both the obvious and the most popular move. White continues developing, waiting for us to show our hand first.

### 6...b6!?

We accept White's challenge and choose to go for something asymmetrical.

6...c5 and 6...♞bd7 7.♞c1 c6 are also good ways to play, but I prefer the most combative approach of accepting the more complicated structure.

### 7.cxd5

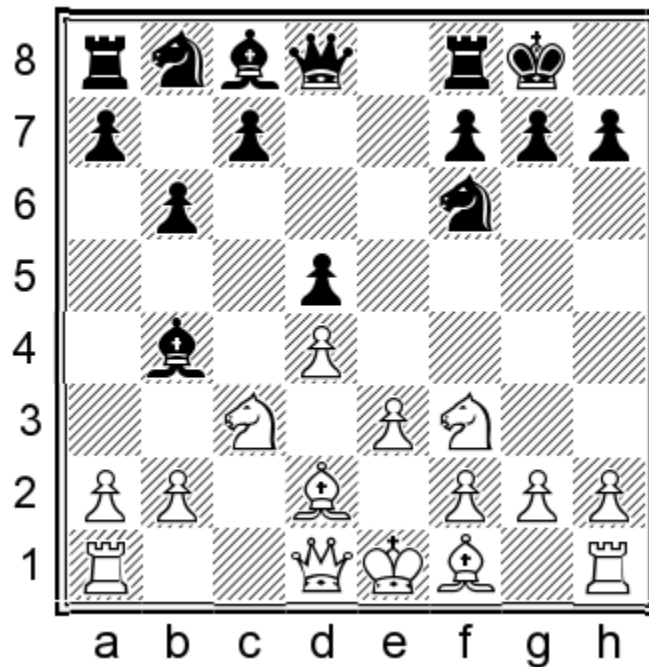
Once again, this is the typical reaction.

Delaying the capture on d5 with 7.♞c1 can easily be met with 7...♙b7, when White seems to have nothing better than taking on d5 yet again. 8.♙e2 is not good because Black is ready to free his bishop with 8...dxc4 9.♙xc4 ♞bd7, with a nice and easy position.

The same applies to 7.♙e2 dxc4!

Finally, 7.♚a4?! is easily met with 7...♙d6, and if 8.♞c1, setting up the positional threat of cxd5 followed by ♞b5, then 8...a6! prevents the threat and asks White what the queen is doing on a4. 9.♞b5?? is met with 9...♙d7 and White can resign.

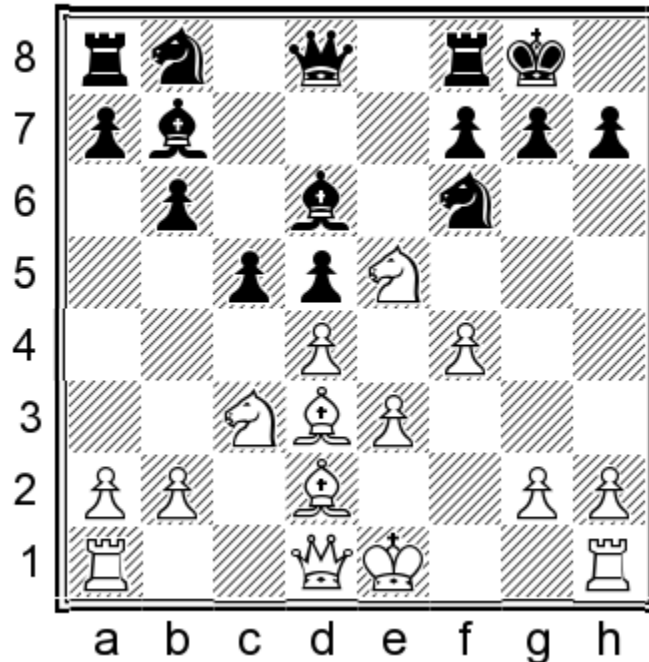
### 7...exd5



This is the main crossroads of the system with ♙d2.

We will now study both B1) 8.♔d3!? and B2) 8.♖c1.

The accelerated 8.♘e5 is met with 8...♙b7 9.♔d3 ♔d6 10.f4, and now it is essential to play: 10...c5! This might appear to be a routine move, but I do want to stress the importance of it. (In the event of something passive like 10...♞bd7 White gets a good game with 11.♚f3! followed by ♚h3.)

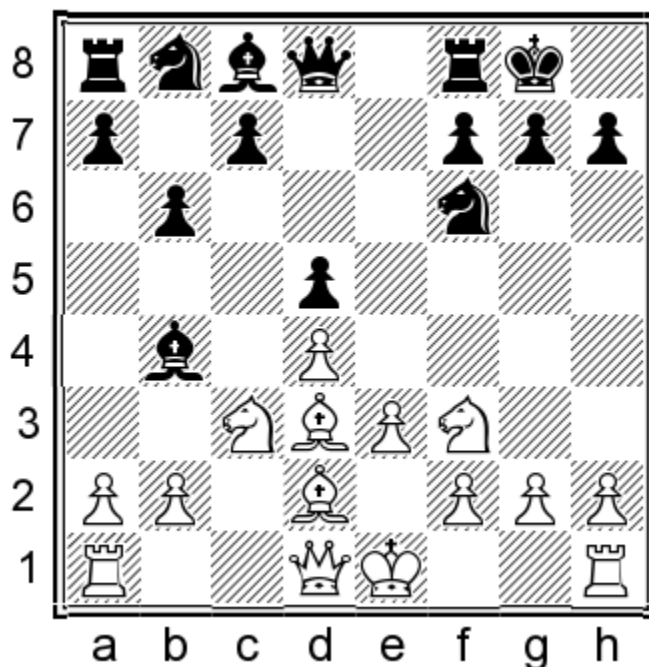


By starting with the break on c5, Black plans to continue with ...♞b8-c6, putting pressure on the d4-pawn. White has nothing better than castling kingside, but that would transpose to our analysis of 8.♔d3.

Nevertheless, it is worth knowing what happens if White insists on 11.♚f3 ♞c6! 12.♚h3. Now White threatens ♞c3xd5, so Black must parry the threat on h7 and the question is with which pawn. Moving the g-pawn would later allow White a break on the kingside with f4-f5, so we should prefer 12...h6!. White is already in serious trouble due to the threat on d4. If 13.♘e2, then we can start punishing

White for creating so many weaknesses in the centre with 13...cxd4 14.exd4 ♖e4!?, when White's position is under serious pressure.

### B1) 8.♗d3



As explained in the introduction, the idea of this move is related to the well-known plan in the d4-structures of going ♘f3-e5 and f2-f4. This plan, largely associated with the early American master H.N. Pillsbury, gives White strong control of the centre as well as attacking prospects on the kingside.

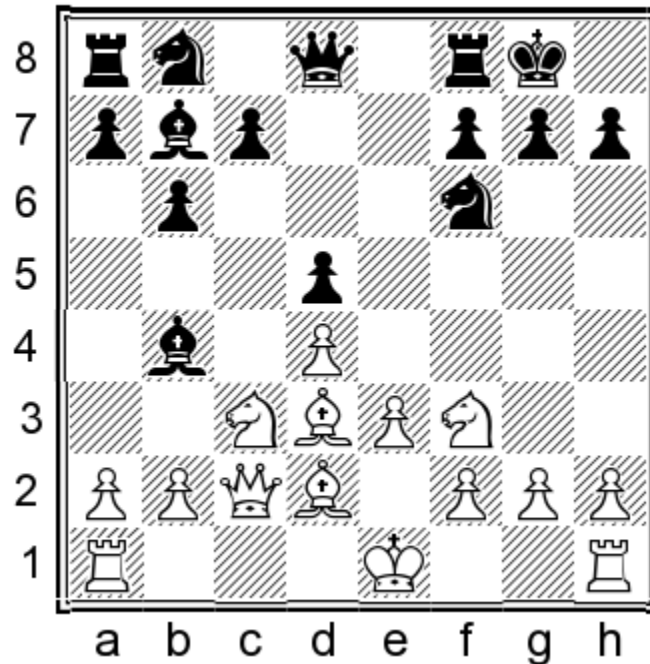
### 8...♗b7 9.0-0

This is played almost automatically, the main alternative being to develop the rook to c1. That however will be covered under the 8.♖c1 move order.

9.♘e5 does not have a soul of its own. After 9...♗d6 White can either transpose to 9.0-0 by castling kingside or go for 10.f4 which transposes to our note regarding 8.♘e5 on the previous page.

However, recently another idea started popping up, where White players started going for:

9. ♖c2!?



This modest developing move targets the black pawns on c7 and h7, while increasing White's control over the e4-square, trying to discourage an eventual ...♘f6-e4. In doing so, White prepares ideas like ♘c3-b5,

♘f3-g5, or even g2-g4.

9...a6!

A nice and practical solution. Black prepares the retreat of the bishop to d6 without having to worry about ♘c3-b5.

Straight into White's hands fall both 9...♗d6 10. ♘b5 and 9...♗e7 10.g4.

An even more malicious trap is that if we were to continue with 9...♖e8, preparing ...♗b4-f8 and ...c7-c5, as we will do in the mainline, then after 10.a3! ♗f8?! White has 11. ♘g5!. Then after 11...g6 12.h4! White had a terrifying initiative on the kingside in Aronian – Esipenko, Berlin 2022. Black's position is objectively

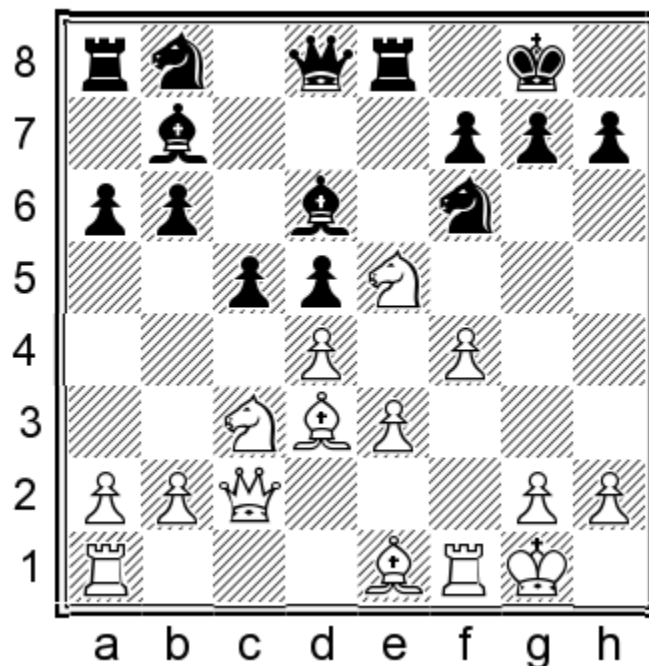
fine but, for a human game, it is not too surprising that he completely collapsed only a few moves later.

10. ♖g5

This is critical.

10.g4 is not as big of a threat when the bishop is still on b4, as Black has good chances to answer g4-g5 by jumping into e4. If needed, the bishop can simply capture the knight on c3. A practical example saw 10... ♔e7! 11. ♘e5 ♘bd7!? (11...c5 might have been even better) 12. ♘xd7 ♔xd7 13.g5?! ♘e4! and Black was clearly better in Shahtahtinsky – Logothesis, Athens 1999.

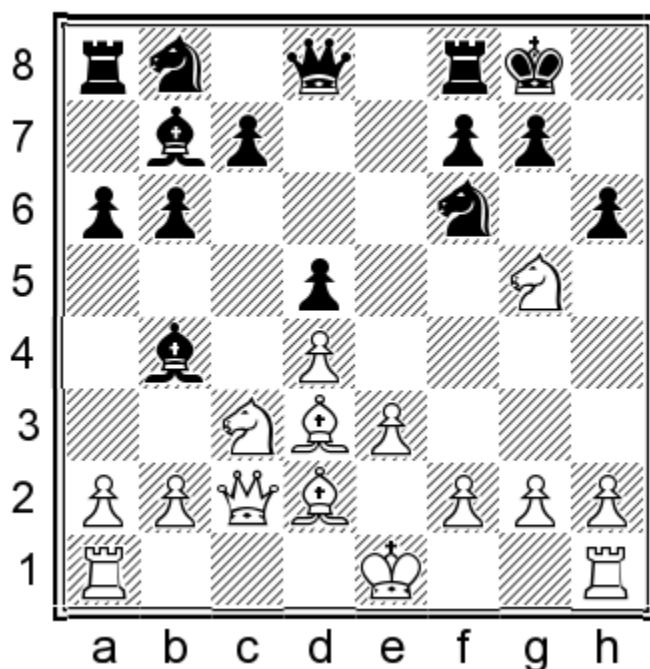
The prudent 10.0-0 does not cause too many problems, but there is one key moment we should note: 10... ♖e8 11. ♘e5 ♔d6 12.f4 c5! 13. ♔e1



This position has been reached four times in my database, with only one of the Black players finding the correct solution. Amusingly, he was the lowest rated of the bunch. 13...cxd4! An important intermediate move. (Starting by 13... ♘c6?! would be a mistake because 14. ♔h4 already threatens both ♔xh7+ and ♘xd5.) 14.exd4

♘c6 Attacking d4 and threatening ...♘b4, so White has no time to bring the bishop to h4. Black had the easier game in Bajec – Subramanian, Nova Gorica 2018.

10...h6



11.♘h7

11.h4 is met with 11...c5! with counterplay. White has no threat.

11...♘xh7 12.♙xh7+ ♔h8

Black's idea is to regroup with ...♙d6 and ...♘b8-d7-f6. A reasonable continuation would be:

13.♙d3 ♘d7 14.0-0 ♙d6 15.♘e2!

Bringing the knight to the f5-square is the idea. Nothing else by White would be challenging.

15...♘f6

15...♙h4!? was a good alternative.

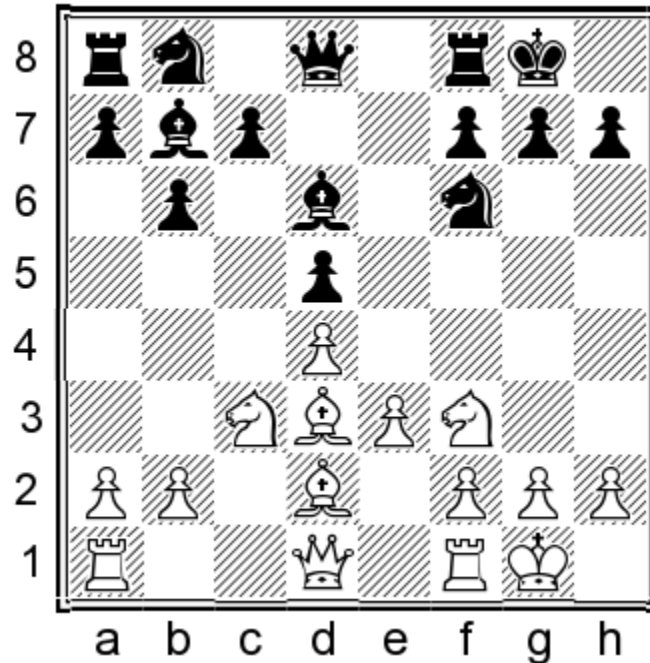
16.♘g3

This was all played in Chiku Ratte – Derraugh, Kingston 2022. At this point, Black's play could be slightly improved:

16...♙e8N

Not fearing the knight about to appear on f5. Black has a good position as all the pieces are active. The f6-knight is ready to jump to e4, and if the white knight appears on f5 then we can just retreat our bishop to f8.

**9...♗d6!?**



This is an important point in the game. Without the rook on c1, the bishop can immediately go to d6 without having to worry about ♘c3-b5. The plan is to continue with a quick ...c7-c5 and ...♞b8-c6 not giving White enough time to stabilize the Pillsbury setup.

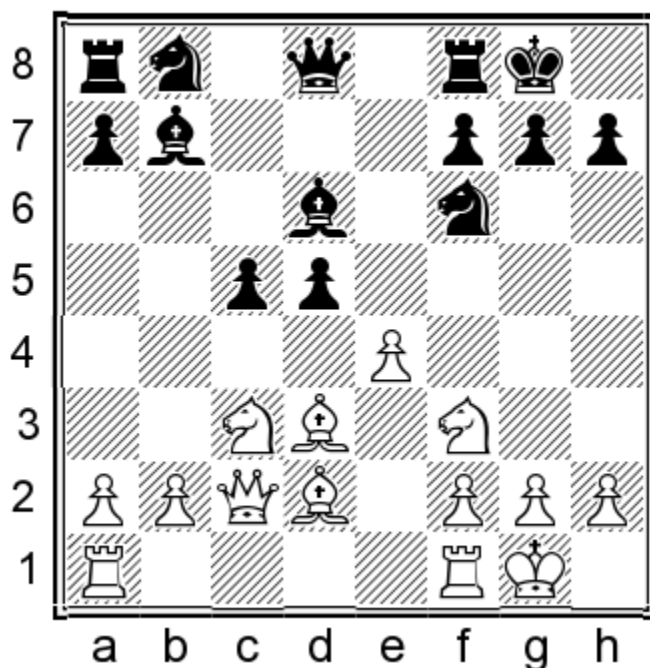
**10.♞e5**

I have chosen this move as the mainline because it looks the most critical and because it is the most consistent. It is not however the most popular, and White has numerous interesting alternatives:

10.♞b5 is a direct attempt to punish our bold retreat, but after 10...♗e7 11.♖c1 c5! 12.♞e5 a6 13.♞c3 it does not look like White

gained anything with the knight excursion. With 13...♞c6 Black puts pressure on the d4-pawn and the e5-knight while also keeping the option of ...c5-c4 and ...b5-b4 with a quick queenside expansion. The position is tense with chances for both sides.

10.♞c2 is a slightly conservative but standard developing move aiming to develop and play against the hanging pawns. However, after 10...c5 11.dxc5 bxc5 White should probably play 12.e4!? trying to liquidate the central structure. (After something quiet like 12.♞e2 Black has an easy game. A practical example went: 12...♞e7 13.♞g3 g6 14.♞fe1 ♞e4 15.♞c3 f5 Black was better in Harikrishna – Studer, Biel 2020 and came extremely close to winning a game that eventually ended in draw.)



Two forced but obvious moves follow: 12...c4! 13.e5 cxd3 14.♞b3 White was counting on this, but there are various moves for Black to get a decent game. I personally prefer 14...♞xe5 15.♞xb7 ♞bd7, when ...♞b8 comes next and Black's pieces are very active.

10.♞b1!?

This is similar to putting the queen on c2, but a bit more purposeful. White has the extra idea of b2-b4 to clamp down on the ...c7-c5



12...c6 13.♘c3 c5

Black wants to play ...♘c6 and ...♙d6.

14.♙b5

Trying to interfere with our development.

14.f4?! ♘c6 gives Black good activity.

14...♙d6!?

Black insists on developing the knight to c6.

14...♙d6 followed by ...♘b8-a6-c7 is also good.

15.♖d1 ♘c6 16.♙xc6 ♙xc6 17.♘xc6 ♚xc6 18.dxc5 bxc5

Black's position was good and easy to play in Xu Xiangyu – Tan Zhongyi, Danzhou 2023. After developing the rooks, she could start looking for a good opportunity to play ...d5-d4.

The most popular option for White has been:

10.♖c1

This is similar to the line where White plays 8.♖c1, but they are not quite the same. In this case the black bishop has already retreated to d6, and White threatens ♘c3-b5.

10...c5

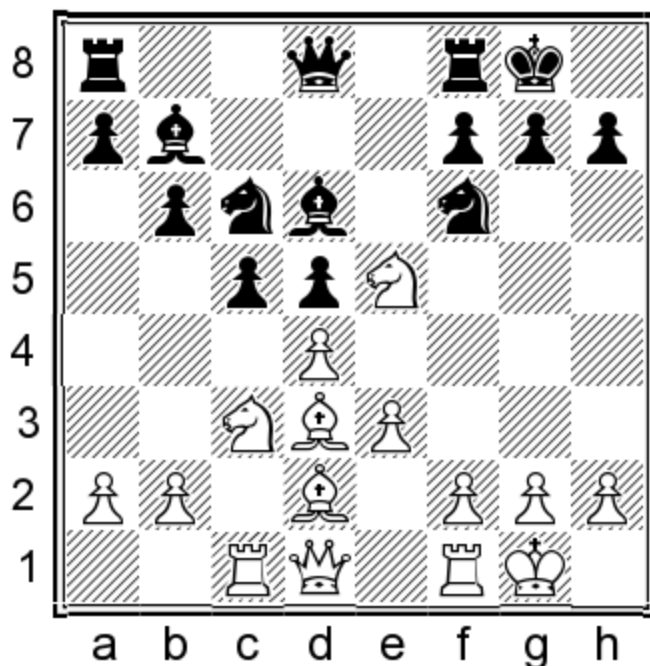
The obvious reaction.

11.♘e5

This is both the most popular and the most dangerous.

11.dxc5 is always possible but I don't like it. After 11...bxc5 12.♖e1 ♖e8 Black will continue developing with ...♘bd7, possibly having the easier game.

11...♘c6!



As always, the knight develops actively, putting pressure on the d4-pawn. This could be topical, and we would need to analyse it carefully, but as luck would have it we have analysed it already. We have studied exactly the same position but with the white pawn on a3 instead of a2. The differences are miniscule. In any case, adopting exactly the same approach is fine. For example:

12. ♖g4!

The same move is once again White's only try.

12. f4 cxd4 is good for Black as is 12. ♖xc6 ♙xc6 13. dxc5 bxc5 with a slight advantage once more.

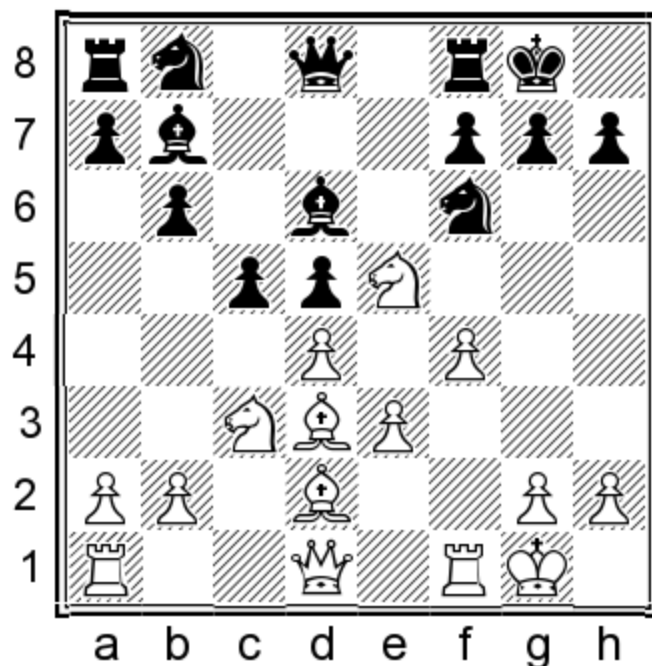
12... ♞e8!

And we also react in the same way, preparing ...f7-f5.

13. f4 f5 14. ♞e5 cxd4 15. ♖xc6 ♙xc6 16. exd4 ♚d7

Preparing to bring the e8-knight into play. For a more detailed analysis check out pages 48 and 49.

**10...c5! 11.f4**



**11...♞c6!**

As always, this is what Black is counting on. The threat of ...cxd4 does not let White develop an attack on the kingside.

**12.♞e2**

Practically forced.

The other move we should check is the optimistic:

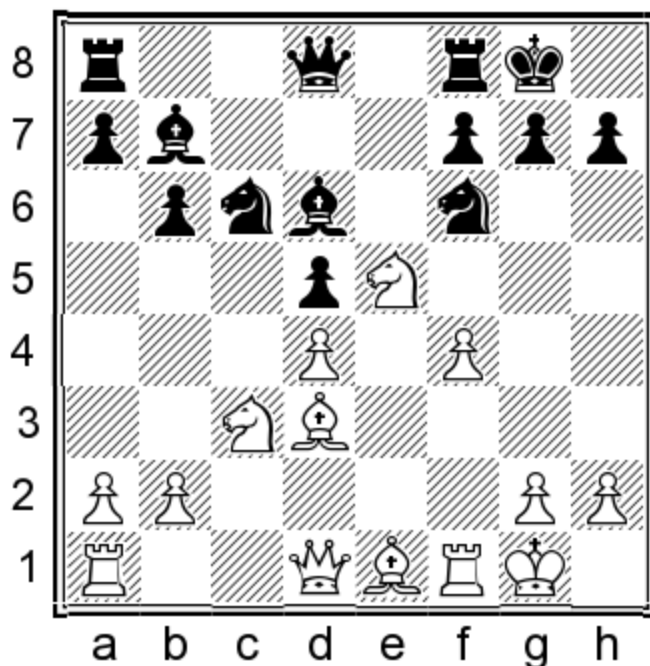
12.♞e1!?

It would be a dream come true for White if this bishop lands on h4, as the pin on the knight would be terribly annoying. Black has one correct reaction, but it is more than adequate:

12...cxd4! 13.exd4

This is a dubious sacrifice.

On the other hand, after the more prudent but sad 13.♞xc6 ♞xc6 14.exd4 Black was slightly better anyway in Bouget – Tregubov, Asnières sur Seine 2023. For example, 14...♞d7! walks away from the h4-d8 diagonal and prepares ...♞fe8 followed by ...♞e4.



13...♞xd4!

Accepting the sacrifice is the only correct way forward.

14.♙h4 ♞c6!N

Challenging the knight on e5. Retreating to e6 is also good and the choice of both Black players faced with this question, but our move is much simpler. The knight cannot be maintained, as Black can increase the pressure with ...♖e8 next. The important line to calculate is:

15.♙xf6 ♚xf6 16.♞d7 ♚h6 17.♞xf8 ♙xf4!

17...♔xf8 is less accurate but also less complicated.

18.h3 ♖xf8 19.♞xd5 ♙d6

With a clear advantage for Black due to the weaknesses around the white king.

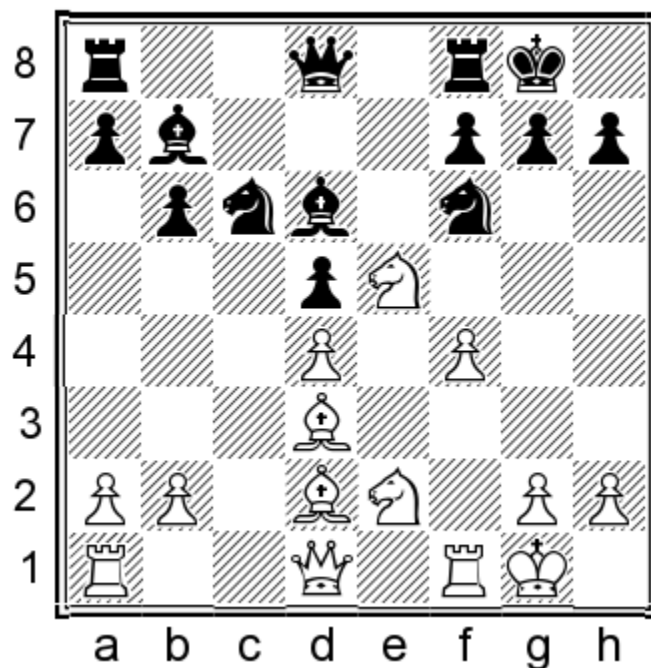
**12...cxd4!**

This tends to be a good inclusion when intending to jump with the knight to e4 in all these ♙d2 lines. However, only one player has ever played this accurate move.

Most players go for the immediate 12...♞e4, but that usually allows 13.♙xe4! dxe4 and then 14.♙c3! with or without the exchange of knights on c6. Now the bishop on c3 is bound to soon be looking at an open long diagonal. This is sometimes, this one included, not at all bad for Black, but by including a capture on d4, it simply becomes impossible.

### 13.exd4N

It might seem tempting for White to go for 13.♞xc6 ♙xc6 14.♞xd4, but after 14...♙d7 the position remains balanced. The weakness of the e4-square and the backward pawn on e3 guarantee Black excellent and easy-to-handle counterplay. The game we're following continued: 15.h3 ♖e8 16.b4 ♚e7 17.♙b3 ♞e4! 18.♙e1 a5! Black had started developing a strong initiative and went on to win in outstanding technical fashion in Shah Dev – Quesada Perez, Marianske Lazne 2020.



13...♞e4!

Keeping the bishops blocked. There remains everything to play for, and Black can continue with ...♞e7 next, looking to kick the white knight out of e5 with ...f7-f6. For instance:

**14.♙c3**

14.♙e3 ♞e7!? is similar.

**14...♞e7! 15.♞g3**

15.♚b3 prevents ...f7-f6, but Black can play 15...g6! with the idea of ...♔g7 and then ...f7-f6.

**15...f6!**

The knight is kicked away from e5, signifying the complete failure of the white strategy.

**16.♞xe4 dxe4 17.♙c4+ ♞d5 18.♚b3 ♙e7!**

Followed by ...♔h8 with the slightly better chances for Black.

Summing up, 8.♙d3 is likely to lead to complex strategic battles that are typical in d4-structures. From a memorization standpoint, the lines are not difficult to remember.

The first important point is to be aware of the tricky 9.♚c2 line, which is seeking to create trouble on the kingside with the move ♞f3-g5. You need to remember to play 9...a6 and avoid falling into White's plans with 9...♖e8?!

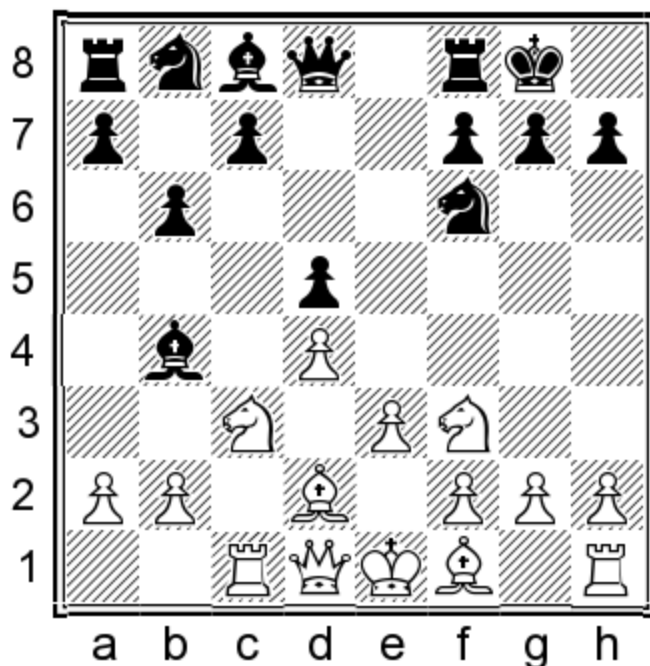
You must also keep in mind that against 8.♙d3, once you have completed your development with the queenside fianchetto, the plan is to go with the bishop to d6 and follow it up with ...c7-c5. We should not waste any time with any other move because Black needs to be on time to play ...c7-c5 followed by ...♞b8-c6 with pressure

against d4 before White can setup the Pillsbury setup with ♖e5 and f2-f4, and then transfer the d2-bishop to h4 via e1.

The rest of the variations are more about standard strategies. The variations shown as notes to White's 10th move are good examples of the possible pawn structures that can arise. One typical scenario is the position where Black gets the central c5- and d5- hanging pawns. In these positions, Black always has good chances for dynamic play, as the white pieces are placed a bit passively for an open, all-out struggle. Whenever White dares to push the f-pawn to f4, by putting immediate pressure on d4 we manage to force either ♖e5xc6 or ♖c3-e2. If White takes on c6, then the f4-pawn seems completely out of place – it only went to f4 to support a knight on e5. If White retreats with the c3-knight to e2, then our typical reaction would be to jump on the newly created weakness on e4, but only after including the accurate capture on d4. In that scenario, our e4-knight might turn out to be stronger than its counterpart on e5, as we can eventually oust the e5-knight with ...f7-f6.

If you manage to grasp these ideas, I think you are more than adequately prepared to play against 8.♔d3. I believe that the above analysis serves as a convincing antidote to White's intentions of building up the Pillsbury setup, and your opponents, previously hopeful of checkmating you on the kingside, might suddenly find it hard to keep the situation under control in the centre and not allow you to seize the initiative. Imagine their disappointment when they realize that there is simply not enough time to achieve their setup.

**B2) 8.♖c1**



This is White's mainline and quite a flexible approach. White does not give up on the main plan of  $\text{♕d3}$ ,  $\text{♞e5}$  and  $\text{f2-f4}$ , but at the same time keeps some other options open.

**8...♕b7**

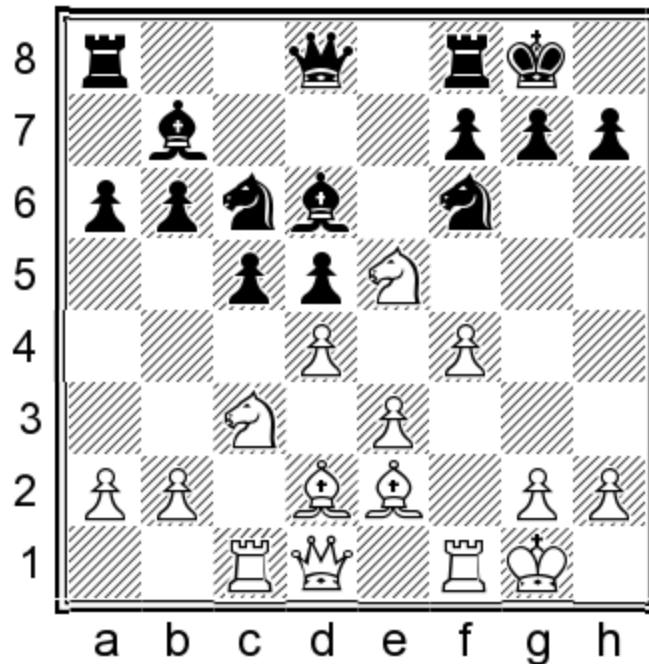
When we have just said A, we need to say B.

We will study in depth: **B21)9.♞b5!?** and **B22)9.♕d3.**

But first let's take a brief look at some alternatives:

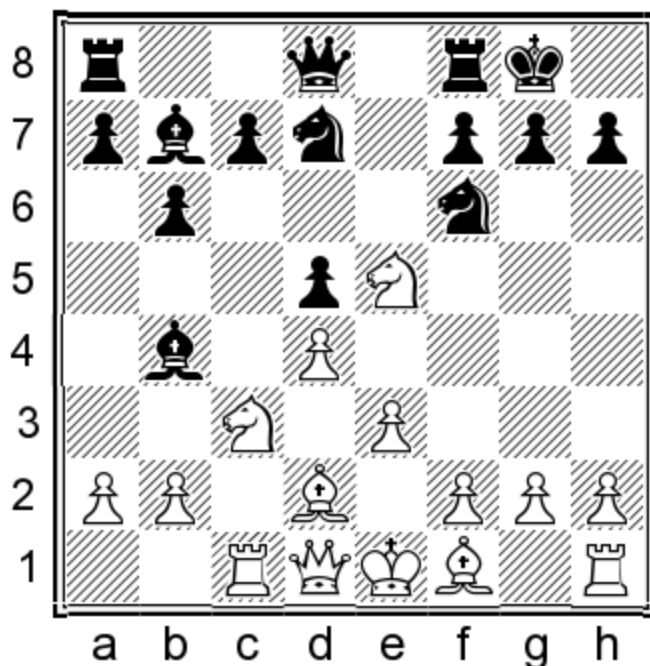
9.♕e2 is too timid and fails to create any trouble for Black.

Nevertheless, White is rock solid and it is still a playable option. I would suggest going for: 9...a6! 10.0-0 ♕d6 11.♞e5 c5! Now White can't really go 12.f4 since after 12...♞c6 the d-pawn is in trouble.



To avoid a worse position White must play 13. ♖g4. (Trying to transport the bishop towards h4 with 13. ♕e1 runs into 13...cxd4 when White needs to take on c6 and accept a worse position, as 14.exd4 is met with 14...♘xd4. ) Anyway, after 13...♘xg4 14. ♕xg4 cxd4 15. ♖xd5 ♕c5! Black has the initiative.

It is possible to start with 9. ♘e5, but I find it less precise. A good option for Black would be to return with the bishop to d6 and try to transpose to the 9. ♕d3 line, but even more comfortable is 9...♘bd7! underlining how premature White's last move is according to the principles of the game.



Both moves White wants to play turn out to be terrible:

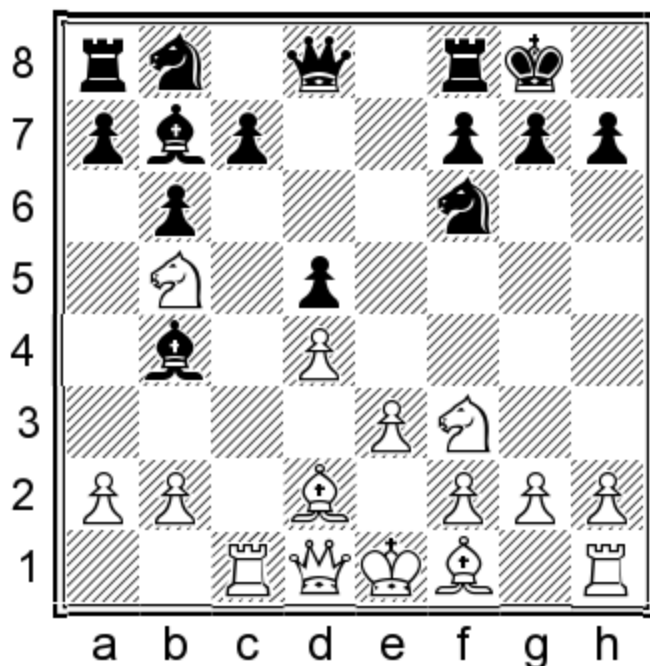
a) 10.♔d3? is bad because of 10...♞xe5 11.dxe5 ♞d7 12.f4 ♞c5 13.♔b1 d4! and the white position collapses after the bishop takes on g2 and the queen comes to h4 with check.

b) 10.f4? runs into the simple: 10...♔xc3 11.♔xc3 ♞e4 Black threatens ...♞h4+ and has a massive knight on e4. The engine suggest that White should continue with 12.♞xd7 ♞xd7 13.♔d3, but after 13...♞fe8 White will have to showcase strong resilience not to drift into a hopeless position during the next few moves.

9.g3 has only been tried once but might see a bit more attention in the near future. White stays solid and tries to fianchetto the light-squared bishop and get ready to pressure our hanging pawns.

Nevertheless, after something normal like 9...♞e8 10.♔g2 ♔f8 11.0-0 I think Black has nothing to fear. We can either immediately strike with ...c7-c5 or continue developing and try to keep the pawn on c7 for the time being. Everything works, because of the misplaced bishop on d2.

**B21) 9.♞b5!?**



This is what an ultra-solid positional player would do, and it has been the choice of players like Artemiev and Wesley So – a good sign for any opening line. White exchanges Black’s good bishop and defender of c7 for the passive one on d2. The hope is for a slow positional game with pressure down the semi-open c-file – it might not come as a surprise that we are not going to allow that.

**9...♗xd2+**

Forced. White can now recapture both ways.

**10.♞xd2**

The most challenging. White wants to finish development as quickly as possible, and then get on with exploiting the structural advantage. From d2, the knight controls the vitally important e4-square.

**10.♔xd2**

This can comfortably be answered with:

**10...c5!**

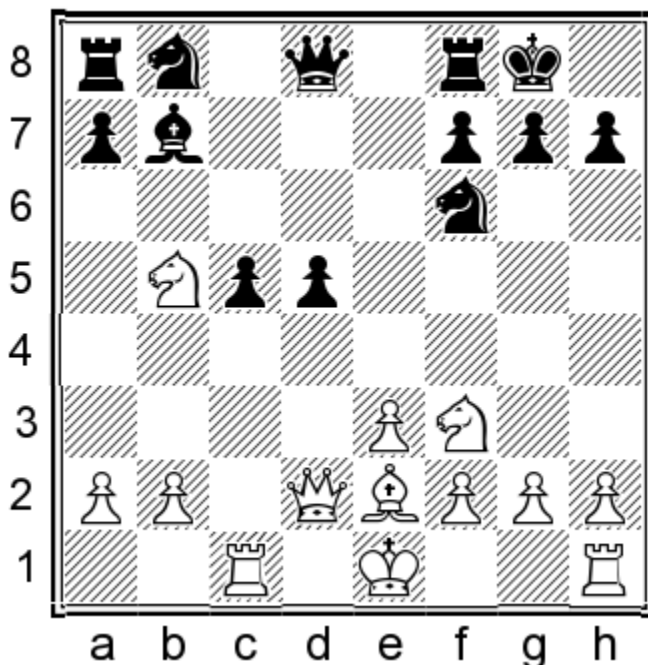
The pawn on c5 is not hanging due to the possible fork on e4.

11.dxc5

This is the logical approach. The exchange of pawns on c5 at least gives Black some potential weaknesses to take care of.

White had previously tried 11.♔e2?!, but that allowed Black to seize the initiative with 11...a6 12.♞c3 c4, intending to go ...b6-b5 next, with a small advantage in Timofeev – Bocharov, Khanty-Mansiysk 2019.

11...bxc5 12.♔e2



And we have the hanging-pawns structure once again. This is an structure that repeats itself in many variations of this repertoire, and it is important to understand its potential. My recommendation is:

12...♞c6!?N

With a simple idea, to play ...♔e7 next and bring the c6-knight to e6 via d8.

However, I want to briefly show a recent game that Black won against a specialist of the white side: 12...a6 13.♞c3 ♔e7 14.0-0 ♖d8 15.♗fd1 ♞bd7 16.b3 ♞f8! The knight will find a superb home on

e6. From there it will defend c5, support the ...d5-d4 advance and stay out of the way of the rook. 17.♖a4 ♘e6 The position is balanced. However, as I mentioned somewhere in this chapter, White needs to be careful and always watch out for the ...d5-d4 advance. In the game, he continued with 18.♙a5? trying to increase the pressure on the c5-pawn and this was met with 18...d4! when Black had a dangerous initiative and White could easily collapse in Sandipan – Liyanage, Abu Dhabi 2023. Black won the game later in 49 moves. The main point is that after 19.exd4 ♘f4 20.♙f1 Black has 20...♘h3+! with a winning attack.

13.0-0 ♙e7 14.♖fd1

As shown in the example above, we shall bring the knight to e6 with:

14...a6 15.♘c3 ♘d8!

Followed by ...♘d8-e6. Black will then bring the f8-rook to d8, with a good position.

Surprisingly, even when White takes back on d2 with the knight to try to stop us from immediately breaking on c5 by preventing the fork on e4, we can still go:

**10...c5!**

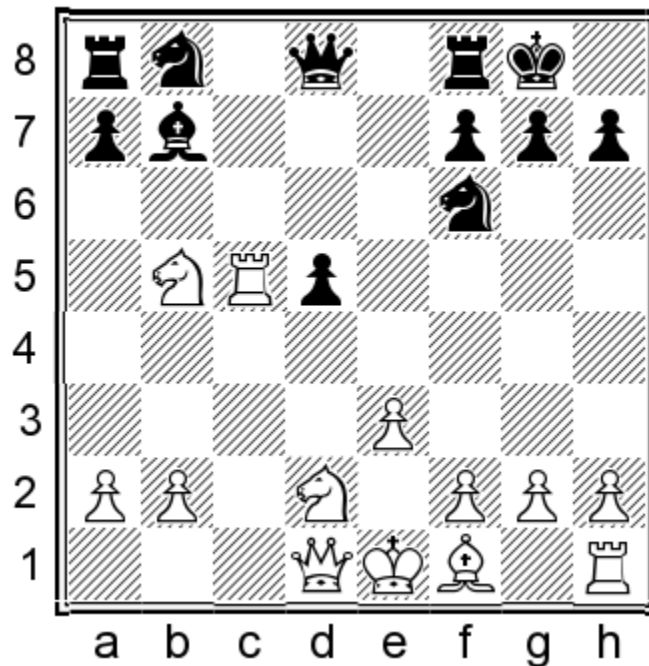
If you want something simpler, then you could try: 10...c6 11.♘c3 c5! However, with the white knight on d2 instead of the queen, the plan with ...c5-c4 is far less tempting, so White can simply keep the tension and the position is slightly trickier than the one we analysed above after 10.♙xd2.

Furthermore, if you want to be cool, then you can dare White to take on c7 with 10...a6!? as in Zysk – Yilmaz, Patra 2018, when White retreated to c3, allowing Black a comfortable ...c7-c5. If instead 11.♘xc7 ♖a7 the knight on c7 is trapped but cannot easily be

captured, leading to extreme concrete complications that should objectively end in equality.

**11.dxc5 bxc5 12.♖xc5**

Only this matters. Against other moves Black plays ...a7-a6 and ...♞bd7 with an excellent position.



**12...♞c6!**

Black plays for compensation based on the fast development of the pieces. Our threat is ...d5-d4, with or without the inclusion of ...♔e7.

**13.♙e2**

This was played in the only game to ever reach this position in my database. During my classes at Killer Chess Training I had only considered two other moves:

13.♙d3?! is met with 13...♔e7! attacking the rook and pinning the e3-pawn to play ...d5-d4, opening up the game. After, for example, 14.♖c1 a6 15.♞a3 d4! Black has a strong initiative.

More solid is: 13.♔a4 The queen gets out and from a4 White keeps more control of the d4-square. 13...♔e7 14.♖b3! Justifying the previous move by preventing ...d5-d4. At this point, it is possible for Black to go for 14...♗fe8!?, gathering energy before the inevitable central explosion. However, more direct is 14...♘e4!? 15.♖c2 d4! with excellent chances in the ensuing complications.

### **13...d4!N**

The correct timing.

The game saw 13...♔e7, but now there is no pin on the e-file and after 14.♖b3! White had an advantage in Bryakin – Bjerre, Vrnjacka Banja 2023.

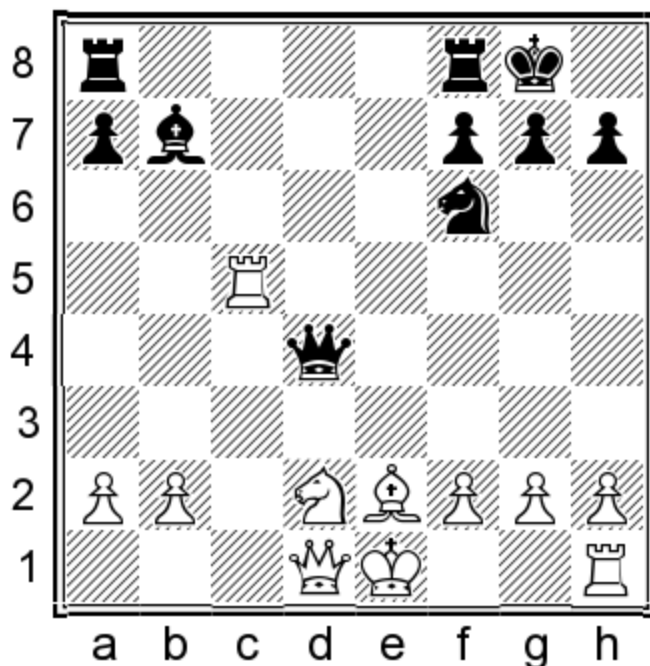
### **14.exd4!**

White needs to be precise.

After 14.♘xd4?! ♘xd4 15.exd4 ♗xg2 the white king is stuck in the centre for the rest of the game, which is more than enough compensation for the material deficit.

### **14...♘xd4 15.♘xd4 ♔xd4**

15...♗xg2!? can also be tried.

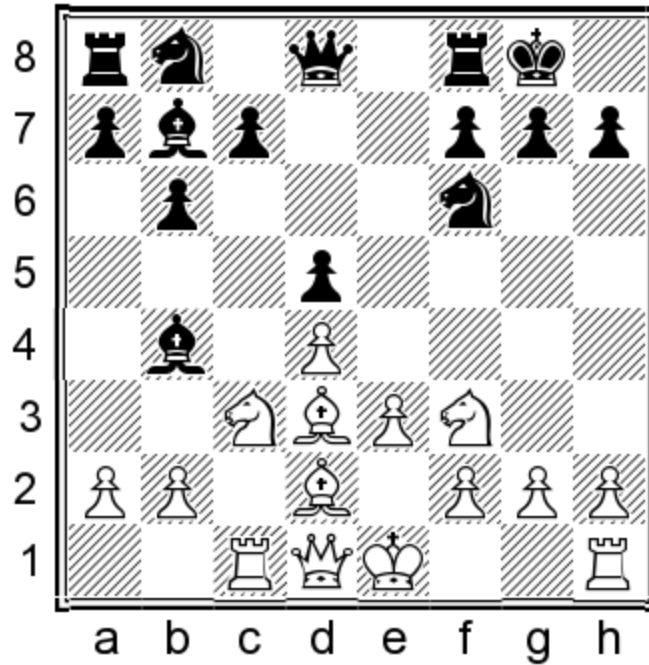


**16. ♖c4! ♔xb2**

The material balance is restored, and Black keeps the more active pieces. White is close to equality, but the game is much easier to play with Black.

All in all, even though we can understand why the 9. ♘b5!/? line can be attractive to some White players, it turns out to be more fun to play from the black side. Since 10. ♔xd2 is easily met with 10...c5, it is only 10. ♘xd2 that is relevant, but even that can be answered with 10...c5!, despite the pawn hanging on c5. White is ethically obliged to take on c5, as that was the whole point of taking on d2 with the knight, but in the resulting position the black initiative seems to be both adequate and easy to handle. I would much rather play such positions with Black.

**B22) 9. ♙d3**



After this natural developing move with the bishop we have finally arrived at the absolute mainline of all these up-and-coming ♗d2 systems. As it turns out, White's plan remains to play on the kingside by achieving the Pillsbury setup. However, the modern twist of including the move of the rook to c1 manages to stop Black from quickly replying with ...♗b4-d6 and ...c7-c5.

**9...♖e8!**

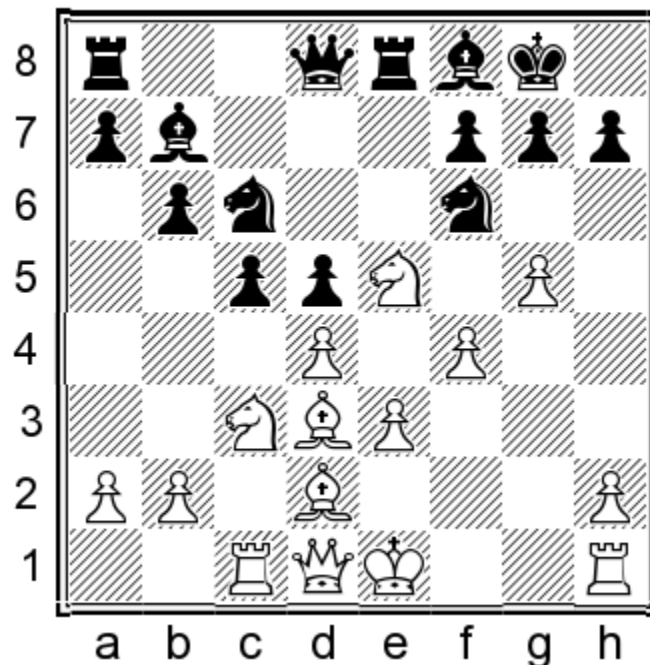
Preparing the retreat to f8 in one go.

Unlike in the variation with 8.♗d3 and 9. 0-0, here Black cannot play 9...♗d6 because 10.♘b5 forces us to part ways with our valuable bishop.

**10.0-0**

The alternative is 10.♘e5 ♗f8 11.f4, accelerating the actions on the kingside. Black should continue with the usual plan of attacking White's centre with 11...c5 followed by ♘b8-c6. At this point,

White should castle and transpose to the mainline, but there is also the surprising alternative 12.g4!? which has been played twice by the all-around ♔d2 expert, Matthias Bluebaum. Black should not panic. A normal reaction is perfectly adequate: 12...♞c6! It is unclear how White can develop an attack. In the case of 13.g5, White has two equally tempting continuations:



13...♞e4! (After 13...cxd4!? 14.exd4 ♞e4! 15.♙e3 ♙b4 I would also find it much easier to be playing Black.) 14.♞xe4 dxe4 15.♙c4 ♞xe5 16.dxe5 ♚d7 Only Black can be better since White's kingside is too open without providing any real chances for an attack.

**10...♙f8 11.♞e5**

This was the point all along.

11.♚c2 is too slow and 11...c5 is immediately equalizing. Black gets typical excellent play in the hanging-pawns structure if White were to take on c5.

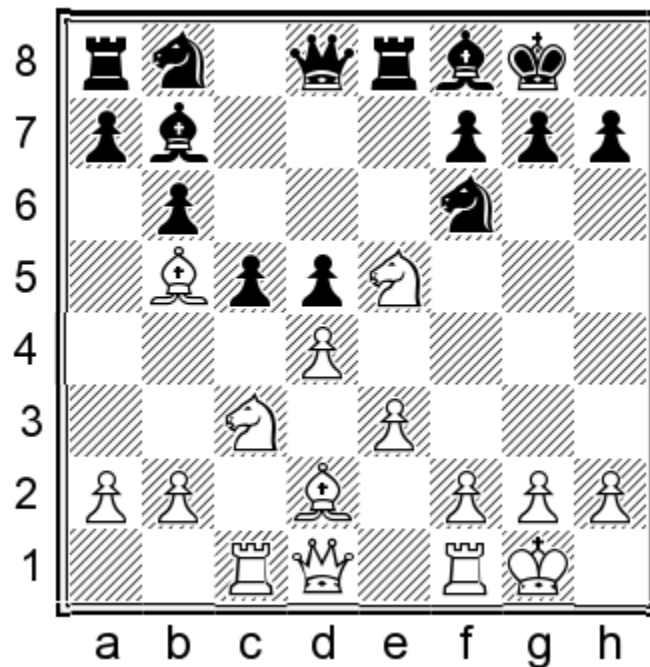
**11...c5!**

As always, preparing ...♞c6.

## 12.f4

This is the consistent approach, but there are two interesting alternatives:

12.♙b5!?



This tries to be annoying and create a certain lack of coordination among the black pieces. The rook on e7 or e6 would be a little awkward, so Black should continue with:

12...♞bd7! 13.f4

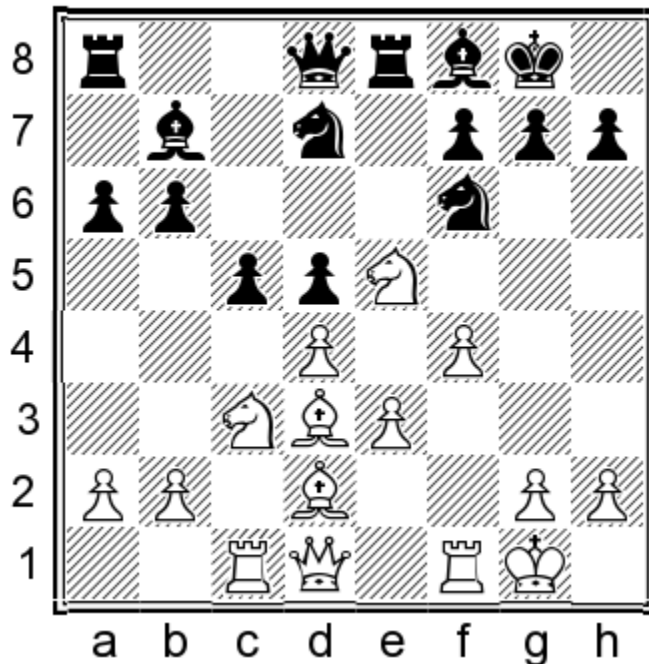
Black was threatening to either break the pin with ...a7-a6 or even sacrifice an exchange by immediately taking on e5. So, stabilizing the e5-knight is necessary.

13.♞xd7 ♞xd7 14.♙a4 is not a problem. Black just goes 14...♞e7 15.♙a6 ♞c8 16.♙xb7 ♞xb7 with a balanced game.

13...a6 14.♙d3

14.♙xd7N has never been played but it has a point that is revealed after 14...♞xd7 15.♞a4!. White is threatening to win a pawn. I like

the straightforward solution: 15...♞xe5 16.fxe5 ♕c6! 17.♞c3 ♔d7!  
 Black is ready to start an offensive on the queenside with ...b6-b5-b4 before White can organize any pressure on the f-file.



14...b5!N

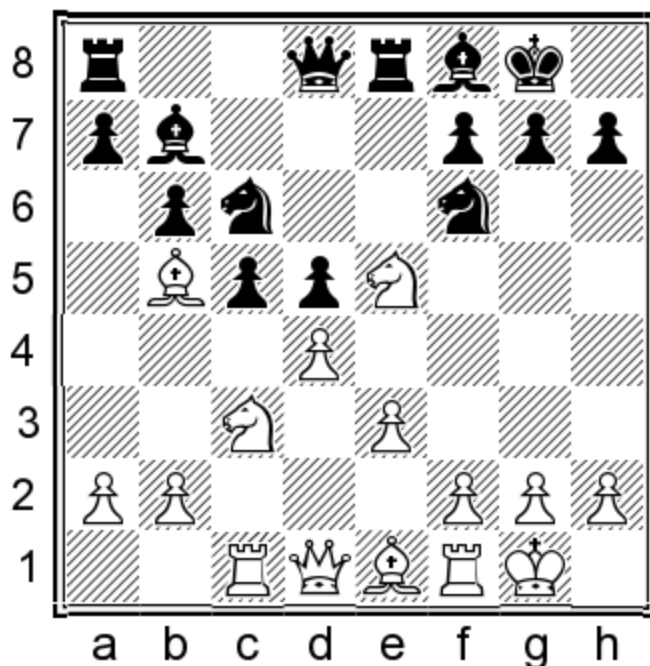
The counterplay on the queenside begins.

14...♞e4?? is a big blunder to know and avoid. White wins with 15.♞xe4 dxe4 16.♞xf7! and the attack is devastating. This actually happened in Valenzuela Gomez – Ashraf, Internet (blitz 2023).

15.♕e1 b4 16.♞a4 c4 17.♕c2 a5 18.♕h4 ♖a6!?

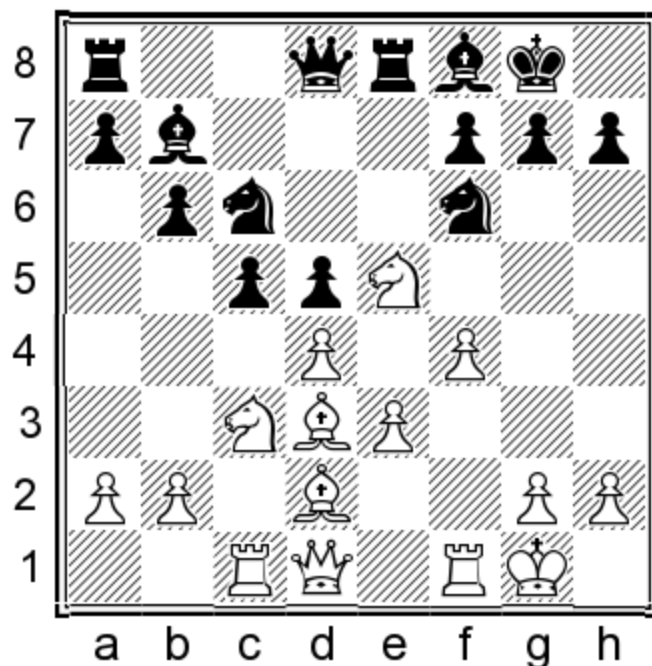
With a complex and sharp position.

12.♕e1 has the idea of transferring the bishop to h4 at some point, maybe even by playing f2-f3 rather than the more weakening f2-f4. Here too Black should continue with 12...♞c6, putting pressure on d4 and interfering with White's plans. 13.♕b5? This move has been played in three games and White won all three. However, the statistics are do not tell the truth in this case. (13.f4 is better, transposing to a position examined below under the 12.f4 move order.)



Black is close to completely winning after: 13...♞xe5! 14.♙xe8 ♚xe8 15.dxe5 ♚xe5 Black's bishop pair, central control and chances for a kingside attack are enough for a winning advantage despite the sacrificed exchange. Our student in KCT Tarun Kanyamarala had this position and came very close to beating his opponent, a strong GM from Croatia. The game went: 16.♞e2 ♙a6! 17.♙c3 d4! 18.♞xd4 cxd4 19.♙xd4 ♚e8!?! (19...♚f5 might have been slightly cleaner.) 20.♞e1 ♞e4 Black was winning but failed to convert and, tragically, even ended up losing in Martinovic – Ta. Kanyamarala, Reykjavik 2021.

**12...♞c6!**



We have reached a familiar scenario. If White would have time to play ♕d2-e1-h4 or ♔d1-f3-h3, Black would be under some pressure. Fortunately, there is no time for either of those plans.

### 13. ♞e2

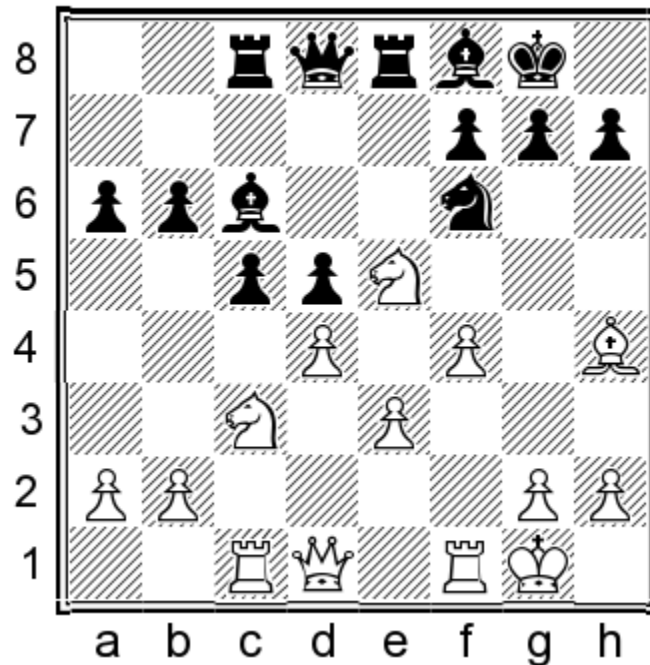
This is the main continuation and also the strongest, fortifying the centre and getting another piece closer the kingside. By protecting the d4-pawn White's idea is to follow up with ♕d2-e1-h4.

Alternatives exist, but nothing else is challenging.

13. ♔a4?! has a nice refutation: 13...cxd4! 14. ♞xc6 (14.exd4 ♞xd4! is even simpler.) 14...♕xc6 15. ♔xc6 ♖c8! Black will regain the piece with a better position due the weakness of the e3-pawn.

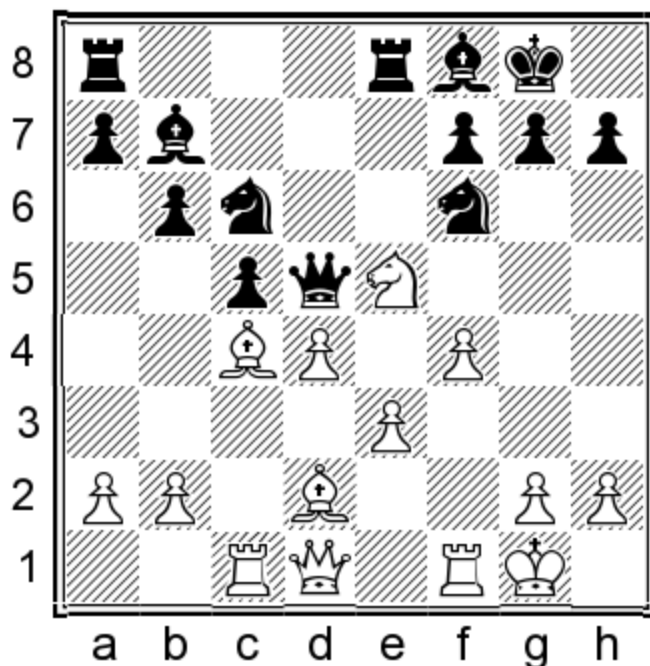
More to the point is 13. ♕b5. This has a dual purpose: not only does White pin the knight on c6 but he also clears the d-file in order play ♕e1, when the d4-pawn is protected by the queen. Black must defend the knight first with 13...♖c8, and after 14. ♕e1 kick the

bishop immediately with 14...a6!, forcing 15.♙xc6. (15.♙e2? is problematic due to 15...cxd4 16.exd4 ♞xd4. ) 15...♙xc6 16.♙h4



White has achieved the goal of activating the dark-squared bishop and putting pressure on the f6-knight. However, this has come at the great cost of parting with the light-squared bishop. After 16...♙b7 Black had the easier game in Bakhrillaev – Koelle, Sant Boi de Llobregat 2023. Up next is probably ...♙d6, breaking the pin.

13.♞xd5!?! is a surprising possibility, but one that White should probably avoid: 13...♙xd5 (Obviously, 13...♞xd5?? loses to 14.♙xh7+. ) 14.♙c4



Black has two good alternatives:

a) 14...♔d8 is a way to accept a forced draw. After 15.♘xf7 ♔c7 White is forced to make a draw by giving the checks. Any attempt at continuing the struggle is bound to backfire.

b) Keeping in mind how conservative White's intentions were, it might be a wise choice to refuse the invitation to shake hands so quickly with the fancy: 14...♔xg2+!? 15.♔xg2 ♘xe5+ 16.♔g1 ♘xc4 17.♖xc4 ♖ad8! Black has tremendous positional compensation for the material deficit, to the point that the position is objectively balanced. I do not think I would ever be able to resist this.

Also possible is:

13.♙e1

This optimistic approach doesn't quite work, but White can still try it.

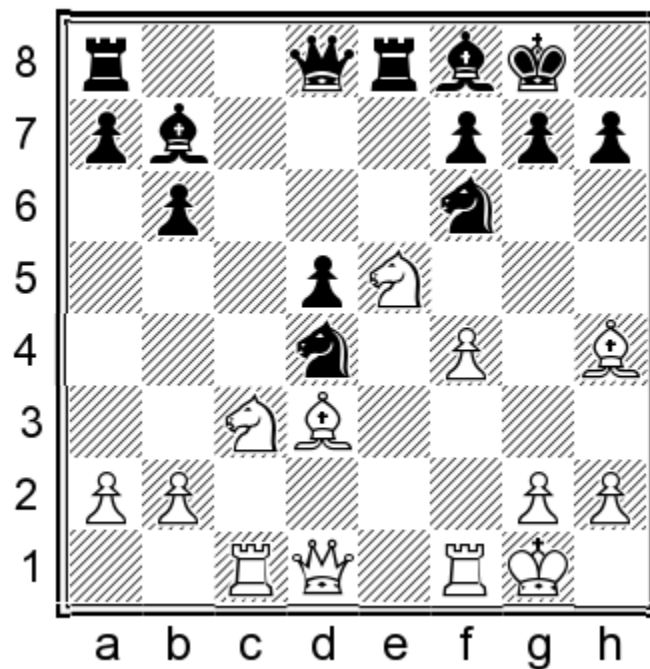
13...cxd4 14.exd4!?

This would be the most annoying to face in practice when unprepared. White blatantly sacrifices the d4-pawn, hoping to find annoying compensation in the form of pinning the f6-knight.

As seen in previous versions, the structure after 14.  $\text{Nxc6}$   $\text{Bxc6}$  15.  $\text{exd4}$  tends to favour Black. For example, a good idea would be 15...  $\text{Ne4!}$ ? immediately underlining the weaknesses inside the white camp.

14.  $\text{Nb5!}$  is White's best bet but after 14...  $\text{Rc8}$  15.  $\text{Nxc6}$   $\text{Bxc6}$  16.  $\text{Bxc6}$   $\text{Bxc6}$  17.  $\text{Nxd4}$   $\text{Bd7}$  Black has no problems, as White can't do much with such a structure on the kingside. The attentive reader will have already noticed the strong similarities to the Quesada Perez game we mentioned on page 55.

14...  $\text{Nxd4}$  15.  $\text{Bh4}$



White has some compensation but no more than that. Black is still slightly better with:

15...  $\text{Ne6!}$

15...  $\text{Nc6!}$ ? is also possible, staying consistent with the option we chose in a similar version of this after 8.  $\text{Bd3}$  on page 55, but after 16.  $\text{Bxf6}$  it is vitally important to include 16...  $\text{Bc5+!}$  before taking back on f6.

16.  $\text{Kh1}$

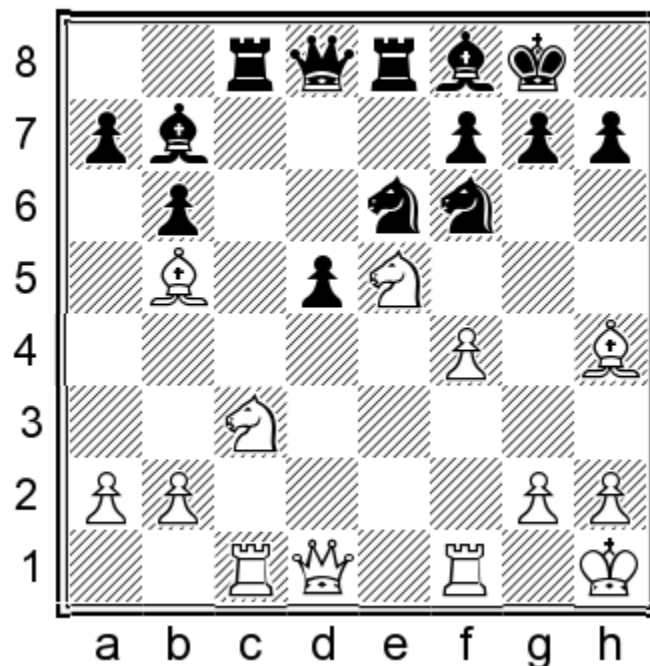
This feels a little generic, but it's not like there is anything better. 16.♘b5? was played in Zhai Mo – Girya, China 2018 and Black missed a chance to gain a decisive advantage with 16...d4! 17.♘xe8 ♔xe8, when it turns out that White is completely lost due to the activity of the black pieces combined with a strong central passed pawn.

16...♖c8!

Since White has no threats, we can continue developing. The pin isn't so devastating as it can always be broken in the future, even with the pessimistic ...♙e7 if all else fails.

17.♘b5

What else?



17...d4!

17...♖e7 is also fine, but I would never choose to play like this if given an alternative.

18.♘xe8 ♔xe8 19.♘xf6 dxc3!

White's position is hanging by a thread. The engine performs a Houdini-like escape, but we're already far from the trodden path, and it feels like a good time to stop.

### 13...♖c8!?

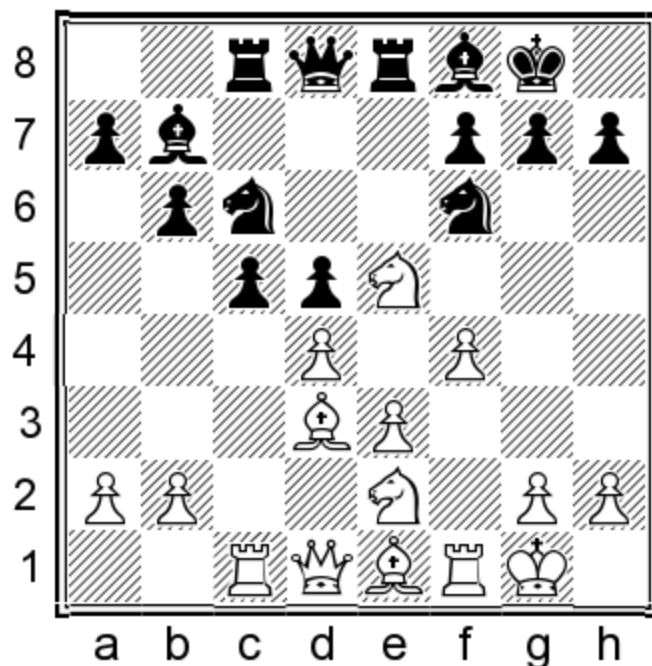
Let's go for a natural, developing course, including the last piece in the battle.

The more committal 13...c4!? is also worth investigating.

In the corresponding line after 8.♕d3, our solution was to take on d4 followed by ...♞f6-e4. One of the benefits of White's move order, and one of the reasons this is the mainline, is that such a course of action is impossible, as 13...cxd4?? simply blunders the knight on c6.

On the other hand, the immediate 13...♞e4!? is possible, but, similarly to the line we gave on page 55, White has the option of going 14.♕xe4 dxe4 15.♕c3!? with an interesting battle ahead. (15.♞xf7 is also possible.)

### 14.♕e1



### 14...♞e4!

It is important to not fall under the pin with ♔h4, but the drawback of this move is that White can force a draw while speculating for more. We will have to defend with accurate moves but, as we shall see, White also runs the risk of losing after a single inaccuracy.

Another benefit of having the rook on c1 is shown after 14...cxd4?! 15.exd4 ♞e4 which would have been perfect, if it weren't for 16.♙b5!, with some annoying pressure on the c6-knight.

The alternative to keep the game less forced is 14...♚d6!?. Then after 15.♙h4, in Gara – Bulmaga, Terme Catez 2021, Black should have played: 15...cxd4!N 16.♙xf6 This is necessary. (16.exd4 ♞e4! is our favourite reaction and seems easier to play with Black.)

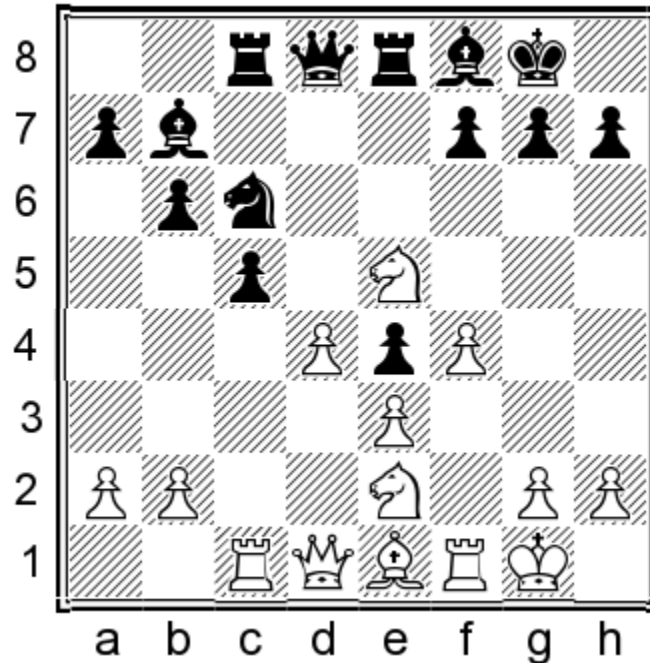
16...♚xf6 17.exd4 ♞b4! 18.♙b1 ♜xc1 19.♚xc1 ♙a6 With a complicated position with chances for both sides.

### 15.♙xe4

Forcing play begins.

15. ♖c3, preparing ♗xe4, can be answered in various ways, including taking on c3. Nevertheless, I'm mostly drawn towards the forcing 15...f6!?N 16. ♗xe4 fxe5 17. ♗f5 exd4 18. ♗xc8 ♗xc8 19. exd4 ♗g4 with tremendous compensation for the exchange.

### 15...dxe4



### 16. ♞xf7!

This is critical and the only move played in my database. If White doesn't play it, then Black is ready to improve the bishop on b7 by going to a6, taking over a nice diagonal.

For example, after 16. ♗c3?! ♗a6! White is the one that needs to start thinking about equalizing.

### 16... ♔xf7

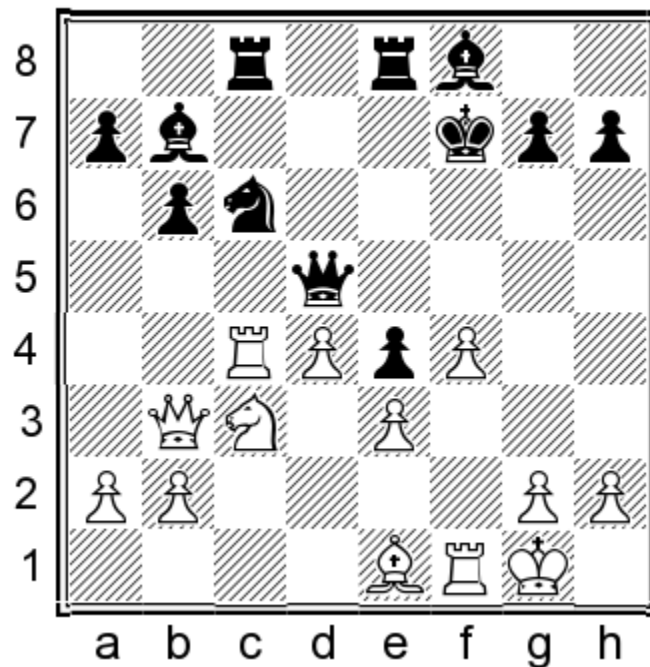
16... ♕d5 could be tried, but it should leave White with a small edge.

### 17. ♕b3+ c4!

The first essential move to remember. It is key to lure the queen to the c-file. The reason will be revealed later, when Black will gain an important tempo.

**18. ♔xc4+**

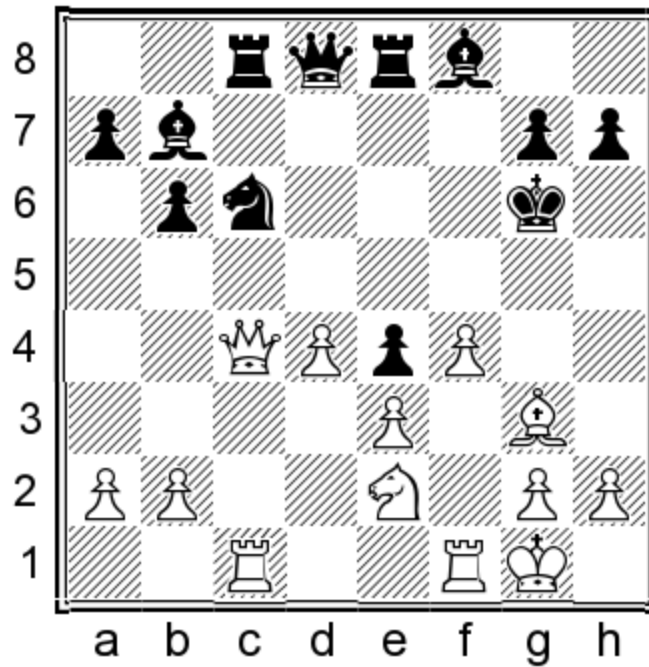
After 18. ♖xc4N ♔d5 19. ♘c3 at first it might look like White has something, but the tactics work in Black's favour:



19... ♘xd4! 20. ♖xd4 (20. ♘xd5?? ♘xb3 is curtains.) 20... ♔xb3  
 21. axb3 At this point there are plenty of ways towards approximate equality, but I prefer: 21... ♖ed8! 22. ♘xe4! ♖xd4 23. ♘g5+ ♔g8  
 24. exd4 ♔d5 Black will pick up a pawn and keep the two bishops as compensation for the minimum material deficit.

**18... ♔g6 19. ♔g3**

19. f5+ ♔h6 20. ♔g3 transposes.



**19...♞e5!!**

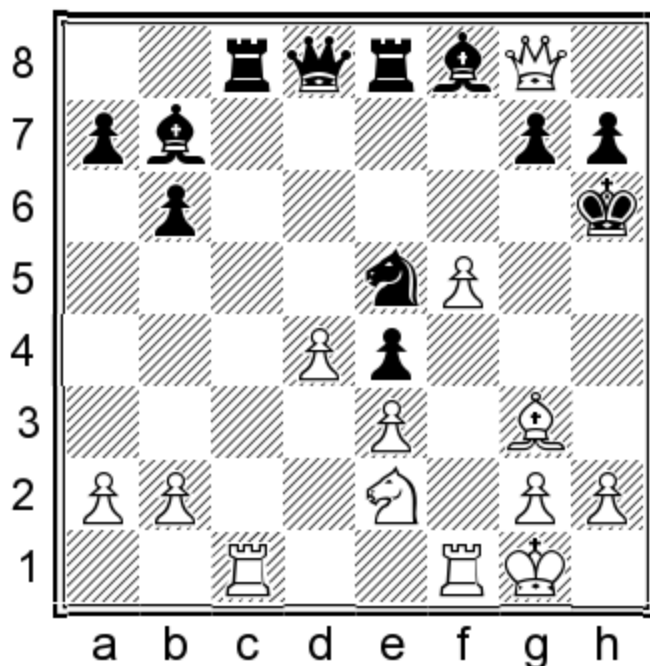
This is why Black had to play 17...c4, dragging the white queen to the c-file. It is also the point where many Black players went wrong.

**20.f5+**

20.♞g8 ♔e7 transposes to the main line after 21.f5+ ♔h6.

**20...♔h6 21.♞g8!**

Creating the threat of ♔f4+.



**21...Ke7!**

Another move it would be good to remember. Anything else loses.  
The forced line continues:

**22.Ke4+**

22.Rxc8 is another move transposing to the mainline after 22...Kxc8  
23.Ke4+ Kg5.

White has also tried 22.Qe6+? Kf6 23.Ke4+ g5 24.fxg6+ Kg7, but  
there is no attack left to speak of and Black won soon afterwards in  
Mladek – Hagner, Mali Losinj 2023.

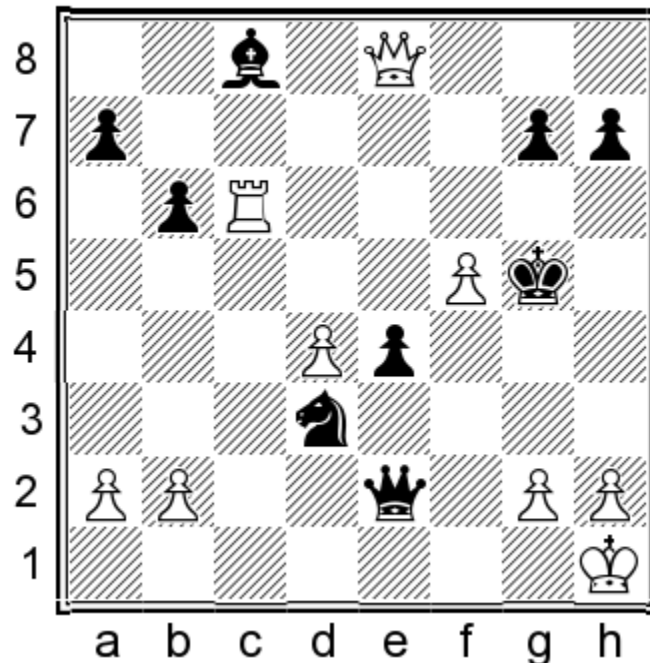
**22...Kg5 23.Rxc8 Kxc8 24.Ke5+ Qxg5 25.Qxe8 Qxe3+ 26.Kh1  
Qxe2 27.Rc1**

Another possible draw is 27.Ra1 Qxb2 28.Rf1 Qe2 29.Ra1 as  
occurred in Samunenkov – Xu Yi, Internet (blitz) 2022, as well as  
two other games.

**27...Nd3 28.Rc6+**

28. ♔xc8??, played in Sarana – Sevian, Internet (blitz) 2022, loses in many ways, the cleanest being 28... ♞e1!

**28... ♔g5**



The position is equal and objectively it should end in a draw, but White still can go wrong.

**29.h3!N**

This is the only move.

29. ♔e7+?? was a move I had analysed for the KCT course and then played by none other than Vincent Keymer. The game continued: 29... ♔f4 30.h3 What else? (Also hopeless is 30. ♔c7+ ♔e3 31. ♔g3+ ♔d2. ) 30... ♔e1+ 31. ♔h2 ♔g3+ 32. ♔h1 (Better is 32. ♔g1, but 32... ♔f2+ 33. ♔h2 ♔xf5 is just a technical win.) 32... ♞f2+ 33. ♔g1 ♞xh3+ 34. ♔h1 ♔e1+ In Keymer – Bjerre, Terme Catez 2021, the German prodigy resigned in view of: 35. ♔h2 ♔g1+ 36. ♔xh3 ♔h1#

**29... ♔f1+ 30. ♔h2 ♔f4+**



The tempting 33.g4+ backfires: 33...♙xg4 34.hxg4+ ♚xg4 35.♚f7+ ♔h4 This is a lost position for White since it is impossible to stop both the infiltration of the black king or the advance of the e-pawn.

**33...♙g6 34.♖f6!**

An only move again, taking control over the f-file. Now Black can force the draw with:

**34...♞f2+**

Or keep the game going with 34...♚g5, when White will need to play another couple of precise moves to maintain the balance.

**35.♔g1 ♞xh3+**

We had this up our sleeve all along.

**36.gxh3 ♚g3+ 37.♔f1 ♚xh3+ 38.♔g1 ♚g3+**

It's perpetual check.

The main line of the whole ♙d2 complex, with 8.♖c1 and 9.♙d3 (or 8.♙d3 and 9.♖c1) looks like a fun line to play as Black – if you know what you're doing. If you don't, then it is quite possible to get wiped off the board and that makes it quite clear why the line has become so fashionable in the last few years.

There are plenty of hidden dynamics that are unleashed if White plays ambitiously with ♞f3-e5 and f2-f4. The line is not difficult to remember. The development is quite natural:

1) We go ...♖f8-e8 and ...♙b4-f8, safeguarding the bishop, followed by ...c7-c5 and developing the knight to c6. This makes it hard for White to continue with the plan of ♙d2-e1-h4, due to our pressure against d4.

2) The manoeuvre of the bishop to h4 can only be accomplished with 13.♙b5, but it costs White the light-squared bishop. Another

try is 13.♙e1, but that drops the d4-pawn which we can grab and then retreat the knight to e6.

3) In the critical mainline, I have also offered a few small alternatives, aimed to avoid the forced play that follows in the mainline. Among those, special mention should be given to the only once played 14...♚d6!?

4) If you are up for the forced lines, then 14...♘e4! is an excellent solution. Despite looking scary at first, the complications that result after 16.♗xf7 turn out to be dangerous for both players. All of our moves are kind of obvious, apart from 17...c4! and 19...♘e5!!, so it would be good to remember those. A last chance to go wrong would be not playing 21...♙e7!, but that is already quite easy to find by using the process of elimination. After that, as you saw, it is mostly White that needs to be careful. In a practical setting, even a player like Vincent Keymer quickly collapsed.

## Conclusion

In recent years, the ♙d2 system, either with 4.♙d2 or with 5. ♙d2 in the Rubinstein, gained a fair reputation for being one of White's main tries against the Nimzo. The simplicity of the setup for White, combined with the chance to create small but tough and varied problems for Black, has made it an irresistible option for players of all strengths.

One of the main challenges in this variation as Black is to be able to differentiate how to play against each white setup. That is why I have divided the material into two main segments. One covers the development where White plays 8.♙d3 and abstains from ♖c1 or delays it for more than a move. In this way, most of the lines that include a rook on c1 could be covered together under the umbrella move order with 8.♖c1.

There is a significant difference between these two segments. Against 8.♖c1 we want to drop the bishop back to f8 so we begin by playing 9...♗e8 first. Against 8.♕d3, we quickly drop the bishop back to d6 since there is no ♘c3-b5. In both cases, we follow up with ...c7-c5 and ...♞b8-c6, putting pressure on the d4-pawn. This type of thinking helps us understand better what we need to do and to memorize the lines that are most important. Having clear-cut ideas is not everything, as chess is also concrete, but I have always found it useful in openings, and especially in the Nimzo-Indian, where my basic principle is that it can be played reasonably well purely by understanding, rather than relying on move-by-move preparation.

A few points about the possible pawn structures that may arise:

Getting hanging pawns is likely. To save the pawn on d4, White might play dxc5 at any stage, and from there play a slow, strategic game. This is not particularly dangerous for Black, and we should apply the general strategy of looking to advance the pawns and create active counterplay.

The second common structure is White with pawns on f4 and d4, often without a knight on e5. This is mostly found in the line starting with 8.♕d3. In this case, Black's position is typically slightly better due to the weakness of the e4-square and White's poor bishop on d2.

Finally, I think it is important to keep in mind that there isn't a situation in these lines where White can get the manoeuvre ♕e1-♕h4 in a comfortable version. The idea of playing ...c7-c5 and ...♞c6 quickly is precisely chosen to combat this plan. With these concepts in mind and the advice found within this chapter, I think the ♕d2 system might become one of the white lines we should be happy to meet. The resulting positions are usually asymmetrical with chances

for both sides, but with us having the initiative, and there is little more we can ask for when playing as Black.

# Chapter 4

## The Aggressive 4.f3

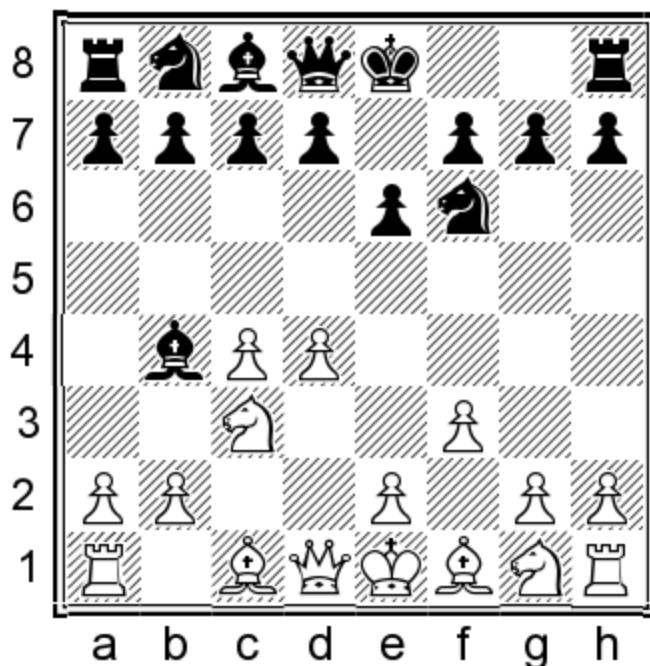
### Variation Index

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.f3 c5

- A) 5.a3
- B) 5.d5 d6 6.e4 b5!
- B1) 7.♙e3?
- B2) 7.♙g5?!
- B3) 7.dxe6 ♙xe6
- B31) 8.cxb5
- B32) 8.♙f4
- B4) 7.cxb5
- B5) 7.♙d3
- B6) 7.♙d2 a6!? 8.a4! ♙a5!?
- B61) 9.dxe6 ♙xe6 10.cxb5
- B7) 7.♗e2 bxc4! 8.♗f4
- B71) 8...e5
- B72) 8...g5!?
- B8) 7.a3 ♙a5
- B81) 8.dxe6
- B82) 8.♙d3

### Introduction

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.f3



This is one of the most aggressive weapons at White's disposal against the Nimzo-Indian. The obvious idea is to take over the centre with e2-e4, gaining a space advantage. Nevertheless, there are also significant drawbacks. Moving the pawn to f3 weakens the dark squares, denies the f3-square to the g1-knight, and "wastes" a tempo that could have been used to develop a piece.

#### 4...c5!

Our choice was easy, as this leads to the most dynamic positions, fitting well with the fighting spirit of our general approach. We strike immediately on the weakened dark squares, asking White to move the d-pawn and surrender even more control over that colour complex.

#### 5.d5

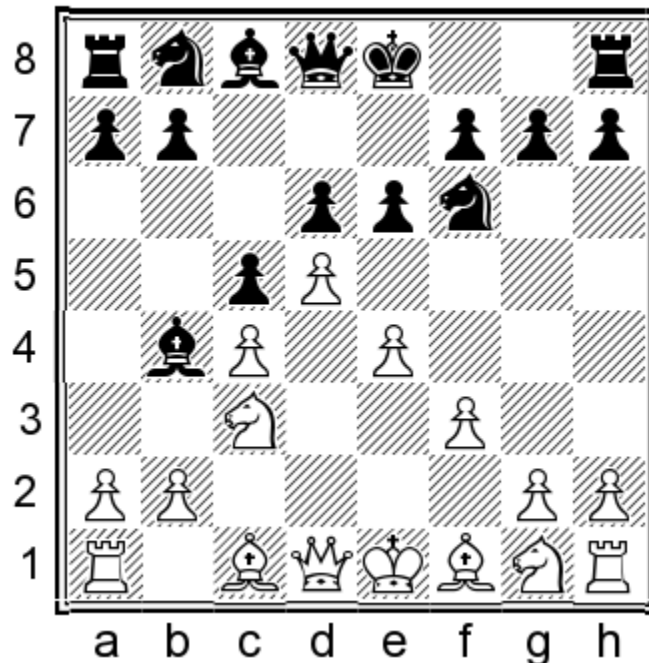
The main move. The alternative is 5.a3, which presents us with a choice. We could either go for 5...♞xc3+, aiming for our coverage

of 4. a3, or we could stay consistent with our play against 5. f3, and play 5...♔a5!?, keeping the play into Benoni-style territory, and most likely transposing to our coverage of 7. a3 after 6.d5 d6 7.e4 b5.

### 5...d6

This is a generally useful move, so we might as well start with it.

### 6.e4



### 6...b5!

I like this approach, being as aggressive as possible. We challenge White's pawn chain in the centre and seek to take over the initiative. White has several ways to continue, which will be examined in detail in due course. Before moving forward, let's take a brief look at some memory pointers that will be useful to better understand and remember the material that is about to follow:

### 7.♞e2

This has been the main move for some years now, and what I think you need to focus on the most.

7.♔d2 is an important alternative, which we suggest to answer with 7...a6, supporting the b5-pawn.

7.♔d3 is a tricky try, but not the most threatening if we remember:

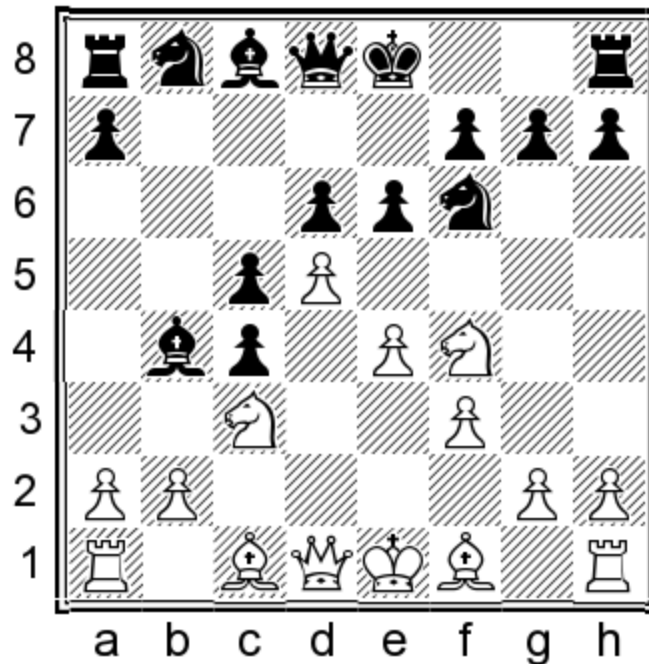
7...0-0 8.♞e2 bxc4 9.♔xc4 exd5! 10.♔xd5 ♞xd5 11.♚xd5 ♔e6!

Taking the rook will get the white queen trapped after ...♚d8-b6 and 12.♚d1 is met with 12...♔c4 with nice active play.

7.dxe6 ♔xe6 8.♔f4 looks natural. However, Black sacrifices the d6-pawn with 8...0-0!. After 9.♔xd6 ♖e8 we get good compensation for the missing pawn. That's not surprising, considering the state of the white kingside.

7.a3 has been tried a few times by India's supergrandmaster Arjun Erigaisi. It is a decent option, but far from being the most problematic for Black. After 7...♔a5 White can once again try employing all the same approaches, but with the inclusion of a2-a3 and ...♔b4-a5. We will explain how this inclusion affects each approach by comparing the resulting positions to what we've studied before, and that's why we will study this after we've gone through everything else.

**7...bxc4 8.♞f4**



This is White's only sensible try. We will present in detail two contrasting approaches:

The solid 8...e5 9.♘e2 ♘bd7! with the intention of defending the c-pawn with ...♘d7-b6.

The dynamic 8...g5!?! 9.♘e2 exd5 10.exd5 ♙e7! with a more double-edged position where Black's aim is to seize the initiative.

I'd like to thank my friend, Grandmaster Jacob Aagaard, for contributing greatly to the analysis you're about to study in this chapter.

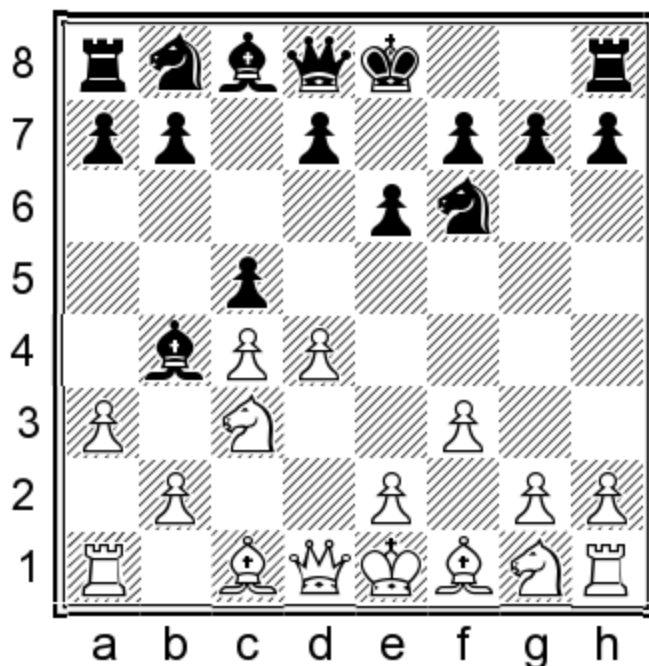
## Theory Section

**1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.f3 c5**

We will study: **A)5.a3** and **B)5.d5**.

5.e3? is terrible for White after 5...cxd4 6.exd4 ♘c6.

**A) 5.a3**



A minor line that gives us a choice.

### 5...♞a5!?

Trying to stay true to the spirit of these Benoni-style lines is an interesting option. We will most likely transpose to a position covered under the 5.d5 move order, but we should have a look at one independent alternative.

Of course, the normal 5...♞xc3+ is not only playable, but after 6.bxc3 it transposes to a position covered in detail in the next chapter dealing with 4.a3.

### 6.dxc5

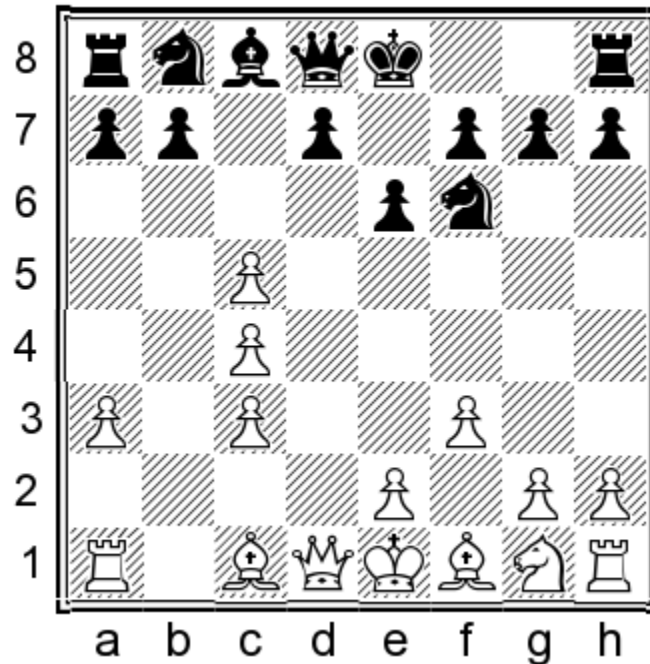
A critical option we're forced to examine if we want to play 5...♞a5. White's idea is not to gain a pawn, but to open the position and try to prove that Black is weak on the dark squares.

The normal 6.d5 transposes to a variation covered under 7.a3 in the mainline after 6...d6 7.e4 b5.

6...♙xc3+

This is the only sensible move as anything else allows b2-b4.

7.bxc3



White has tripled isolated pawns on the queenside and is lagging a bit behind in development. However, the absence of our dark-squared bishop combined with the weakness of the d6-square gives the position an extremely double-edged character.

7...♞a6!

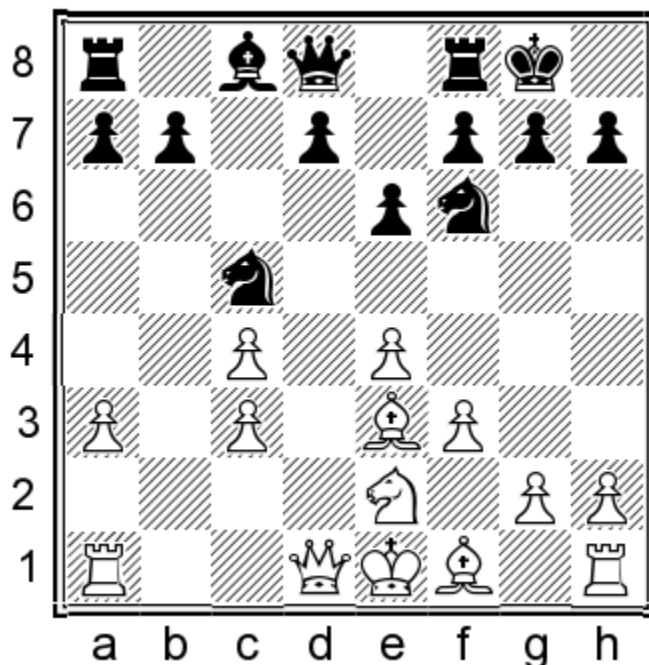
This move has been played only once, but I believe it to be the most accurate.

8.♙d4N

This has to be the most challenging among White's options, since anything else allows us to restore material equality.

The only game to ever feature this position saw 8.e4, when the simple 8...♞xc5!N would have given Black a slight edge. For

example: 9.♖e2 (After 9.e5?! ♞g8 10.♙e3 b6 Black has easy development and the much better structure.) 9...0-0 10.♙e3 (10.♙g5?! allows 10...h6! 11.♙h4 d6! followed by ...e6-e5. By placing all pawns on the dark squares Black consolidates and ensures that the white light-squared bishop will remain a terrible piece for the remainder of the game.)



10...b6! Black has a better pawn structure without facing any real problems in terms of dynamics. More pressure could be added on the c4-pawn later on, or we could once again go for ...d7-d6 and ...e6-e5, favourably fixing the structure. (After 10...d6?! 11.e5! Black is surprisingly still OK, but we will need to go through all sorts of unnecessary drama to prove that.)

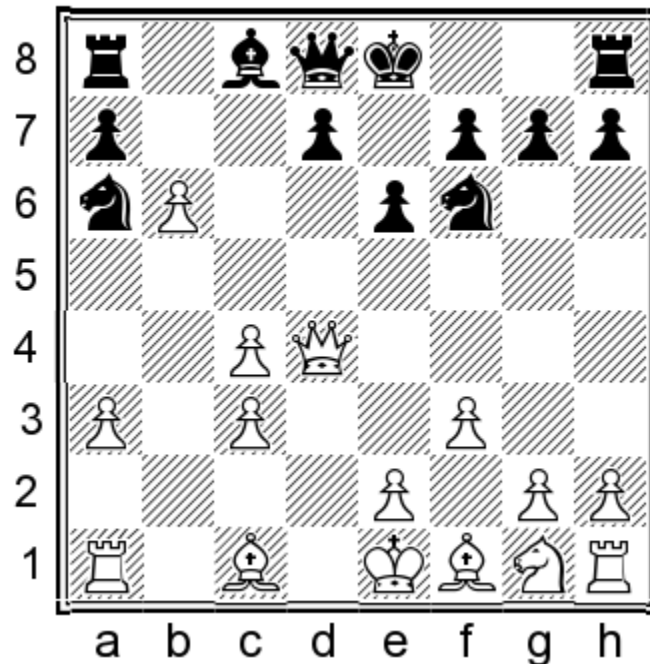
### 8...b6!

Instead of getting too involved with reestablishing material equality, let's just sacrifice the pawn and go for active counterplay.

8...♔a5 is also possible, but 9.♖b1 ♕xc5 10.♗f4 requires us to show precision for a few more moves. 10...♔e7! is the first key move, stopping White from establishing a stronghold on the d6-square.

### 9.cxb6

Nothing else could ever be challenging.



### 9...d6!

This is how important it is to obtain control of the d6-square.

9...axb6 is an interesting alternative.

### 10.bxa7

Let's have this extravagant pawn grab as our mainline.

Against the more prudent 10.e4, we can play: 10...e5 11.♔e3 ♕xb6!? Black is totally fine in the endgame due to the rotten white structure on the queenside. For example: 12.♕xb6 axb6 13.♖b1 ♗e6! 14.♖xb6 ♔e7 We're ready to play either ...♖hc8 or ...♞f6-d7-c5. I would easily prefer to be Black.

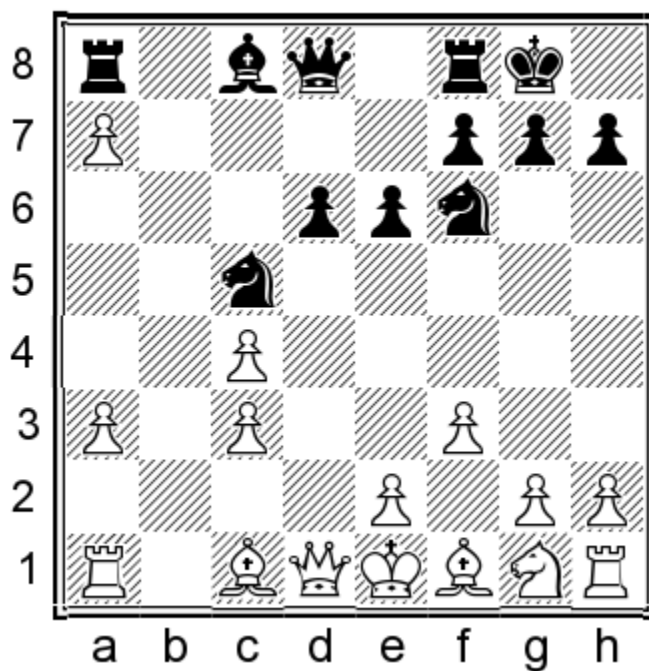
## 10...♞c5

Threatening a fork on b3.

## 11.♔d1

An alternative route could be: 11.♖b1 e5 12.♔d2 0-0 13.e4 ♞h5!  
14.♞e2 g6!? 15.♞g3 ♞f4 With a tense struggle. It's not easy for  
White to finish development, and Black is ready to continue active  
play with ...h7-h5 or even ...f7-f5.

## 11...0-0



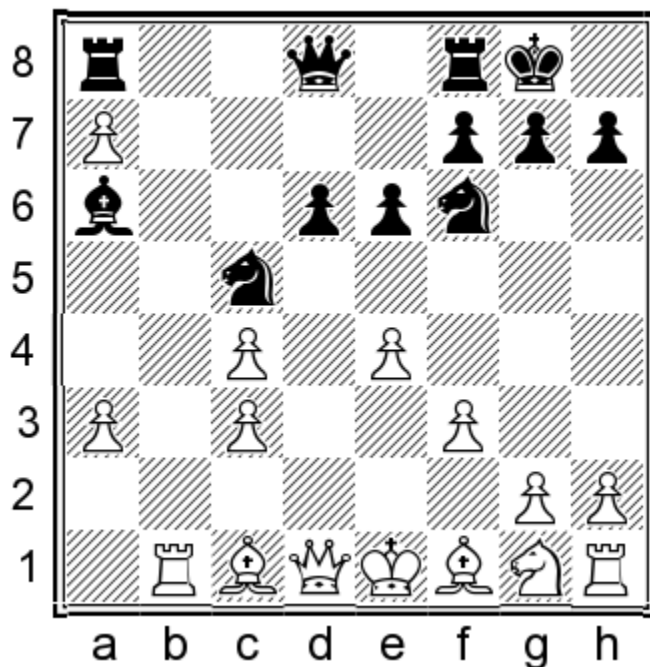
We are three (!) pawns down for the moment, but it doesn't feel like  
it. One of the white pawns is about to fall on a7, one is isolated on  
a3, and two are doubled, isolated, and safely blockaded on the c-file.  
Of course, even more important is our extreme lead in development.  
A possible continuation would be:

## 12.e4 ♞a6

This is interesting but Black could also play less concretely.

12...♖xa7 is also possible. Our position is fine in general, and there is plenty of room for creativity.

### 13.♖b1



### 13...♙a5!

Getting another piece into play. Our ideas include simply taking back the pawn on a7 and taking on c4 followed by ...♙xc3+ and ...♙xc4. We could also go all out for an attack and blow up the centre with ...d6-d5 or get ready to pile up the pressure on White's queenside weaknesses with ...♖f8-c8.

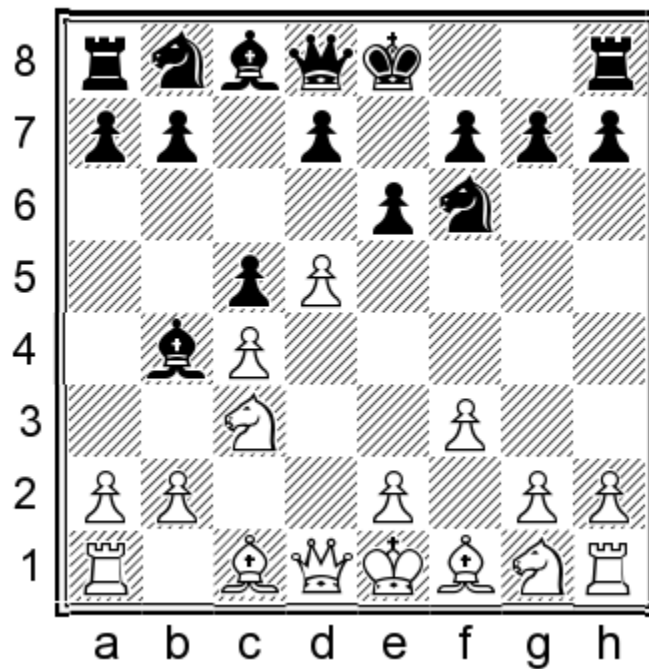
One nice detail is that 14.♙xd6? loses to: 14...♖ad8! (But not 14...♖fd8?? 15.♖b8 and White wins.) 15.♙f4 ♙xc3+ 16.♙d2 ♘d3+ 17.♙xd3 ♙xd3 The white king will perish on the light squares after ...♙xc4 comes in on the next move.

This line could have been omitted from the book, as already back on move 5 we had the alternative of taking on c3 and transposing to a position we anyway ought to cover as White can reach it by playing a2-a3 on move 4. However, some of you might prefer the Benoni-

style structures, so I thought we should at least try and keep the bishop. That is only if it doesn't take up too much precious space in that peculiar hard drive we have inside our heads and call it our memory.

Furthermore, there is a good chance that players going for 5.a3 expect us to take on c3 and get slightly disappointed when we hit them with 5...♔a5!?. Likely, after they get over the shock, they'll go for 6.d5 and transpose to the stuff we will cover in the final segment of this chapter under the move order with 7.a3. If they absolutely don't want to play d4-d5 and reluctantly take on c5 instead, then remembering the bold moves mentioned above up to 8...b6! followed by 9...d6! should give us the more pleasant game anyway. Keeping in mind to meet 8.e4 with 8...♞xc5!N could also prove to be useful.

### B) 5.d5



White grabs space in the centre and restricts Black's development.

## 5...d6

5...b5 6.e4 d6 is a common way to transpose. (People have also tried 6...0-0 quite extensively, but I wanted to avoid dealing with the positions after 7.e5, that's why I recommend we put a pawn on d6 as quickly as possible.)

## 6.e4

Played almost exclusively, and not without good reason.

6.a3? is mistimed, and after 6...♙xc3+! 7.bxc3 0-0 8.e4 ♘h5! White is on the backfoot. Our next move is likely going to be ...f7-f5, pressing on our initiative on the kingside.

6.♙d2?! has been tried a handful of times by strong players, and it allows various excellent options for Black. If you want to keep it simple, then 6...a6!? gets us ready to transpose to our analysis of 7.♙d2, as we can meet 7.e4 with ...b7-b5. (However, we could also try and exploit White's weird move order with: 6...0-0! 7.e4 exd5 8.cxd5 ♘h5! Threatening ...♙h4+ while preparing to strike with ...f7-f5. This is a common plan for Black, and we manage to get it in an improved version due to the wasted tempo of ♙c1-d2.)

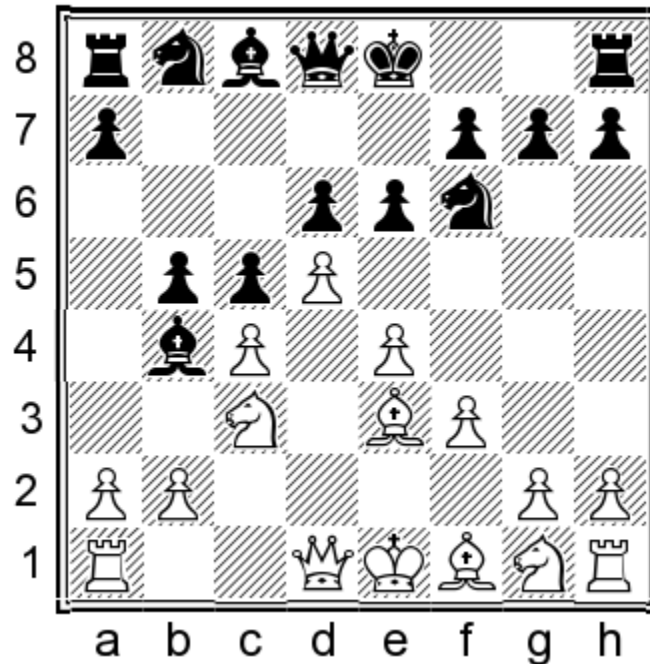
## 6...b5!

Challenging the white centre immediately. We already have the lead in development, so initiating direct contact makes a tonne of sense and narrows down White's options significantly. Delaying development for a single tempo could prove to be a decisive mistake for White.

We will analyse the following alternatives: **B1)7.♙e3?**, **B2)7.♙g5?!**, **B3)7.dxe6**, **B4)7.cxb5**, **B5)7.♙d3**, **B6)7.♙d2**, **B7)7.♘e2** and **B8)7.a3**.

7.♙f4 should be answered with 7...0-0!, when the only sensible reply is 8.dxe6, transposing to our coverage of 7.dxe6.

## B1) 7.♘e3?



The bishop has no purpose on this square. Not only that, but it can also become a future target on the e-file. The only reason white players would play this is because of the similarities this position holds with the Sämisch Variation of the King's Indian. However, apart from the white structure, everything else is different.

### 7...0-0!

Pressing on with our advantage in development. White is almost busted already, the pawns look overextended, and it is hard to complete development without dropping material. Here are a few illustrative lines:

### 8.♘d3

8.♔f2? has been played in three games but cannot be recommended. After 8...bxc4 9.♘xc4 ♘bd7!N Black gets a decisive initiative. Up

next is ...♞d7-e5 and grabbing the pawn on e6 would open the f-file, inviting the f8-rook to join the attack as well.

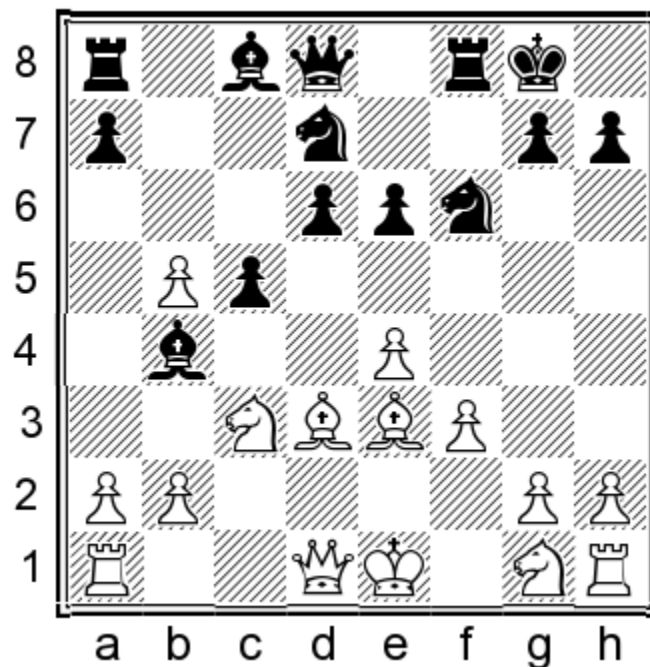
8.♞e2? loses to: 8...bxc4 9.♞f4 exd5! 10.♞fxd5 ♞xd5 11.♚xd5 ♜e6! White is busted.

8.dxe6 is the best move according to the engine, but it makes no sense. If White wanted to capture on e6 it could be done a move ago. What is more, the line continues: 8...♞xe6 9.♞h3 Another weird engine move. Even so, 9...bxc4 10.♞f4 d5 gives us a good advantage.

**8...♞bd7!N**

Developing fast is key. Black threatens ...bxc4 followed by ...♞d7-b6 or ...♞d7-e5, and the white centre will collapse. Hence, forced is:

**9.dxe6 fxe6 10.cxb5**

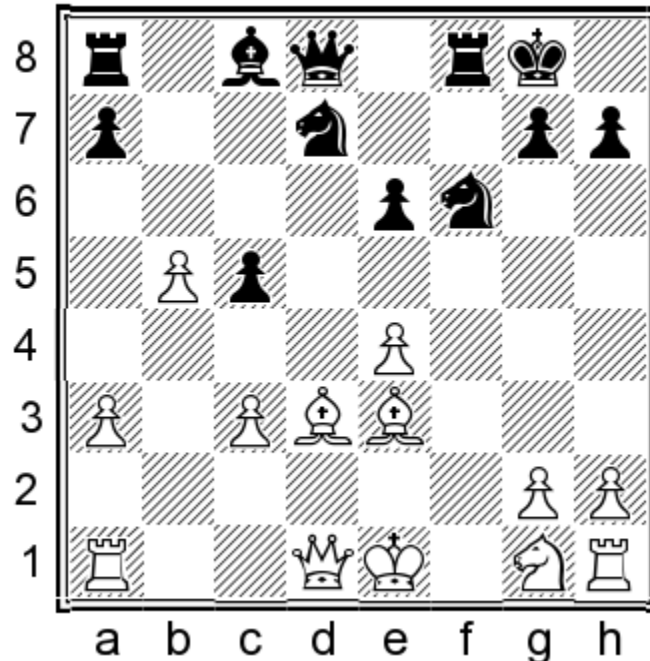


This is not so much about gaining material – White needed to eliminate the possibility of ...bxc4 followed by ...d6-d5.

**10...d5! 11.a3**

This is bad, but there is nothing else that would stop ...d5-d4.

**11...♙xc3+ 12.bxc3 dxe4 13.fxe4**



**13...♞g4!!**

The only completely winning move.

It is not too late to go entirely wrong with 13...♞xe4?, when White is clearly better after the simple 14.♞f3.

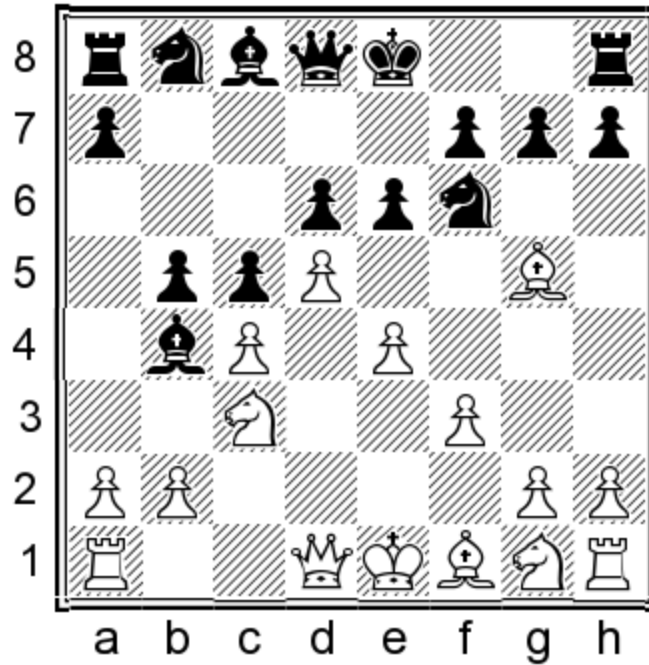
**14.♙d2**

14.♙xg4 ♞e5 was, of course, the point.

**14...♙h4+! 15.g3 ♙f6**

Black wins. Up next is probably ...♞d7-e5, with a devastating initiative.

**B2) 7.♙g5?!**



This is similar to the line we examined previously with 7.♔e3?. The only reason this is not as bad is because the bishop on g5 is less vulnerable than it is on e3.

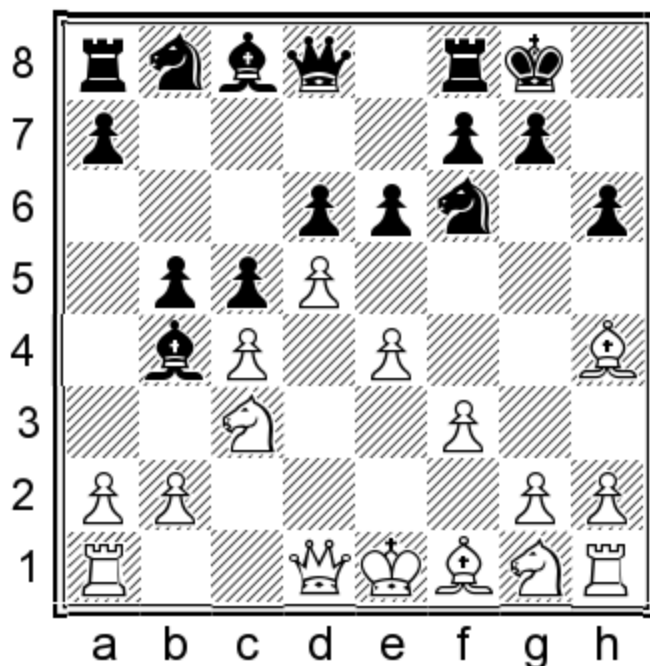
### 7...h6

As always, asking that bishop the question is a good idea.

### 8.♔h4

8.♔d2 would be a better retreat, but that would transpose to the 7.♔d2 line with the useful ...h7-h6 included for free.

### 8...0-0



By far the most popular has been:

### 9.♙d3?

A serious mistake, allowing us to get the dream setup.

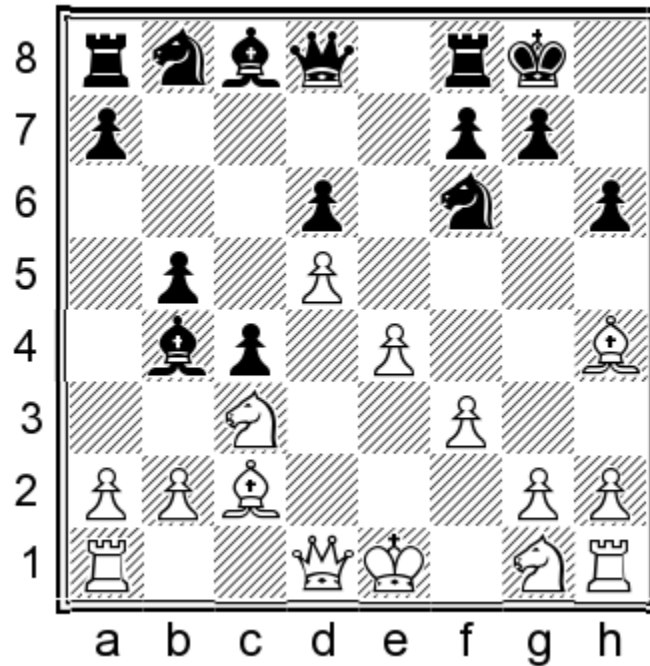
Against 9.a3 both options with the bishop are good, but I prefer the simpler: 9...♗xc3+ 10.bxc3 ♖e8!N It is hard for White to find a good move to continue development. We already have a hidden threat of ...exd5 followed by ...♞xe4!.

Similarly to the lines after 7.♙e3, 9.dxe6 is White's best option, going for damage control. Nevertheless, the early release of the tension is a welcome sight. White made too many concessions to manage building that centre – it is sad to see it disappear so quickly.

### 9...exd5 10.cxd5

10.exd5 is always good for Black. For example: 10...bxc4 11.♙xc4 ♞bd7 12.♞e2 ♞e5 White is in huge trouble. The only move that doesn't lose is a novelty, but even after 13.♙b5N ♙f5 14.0-0 c4 our advantage is obvious.

10...c4! 11.♖c2



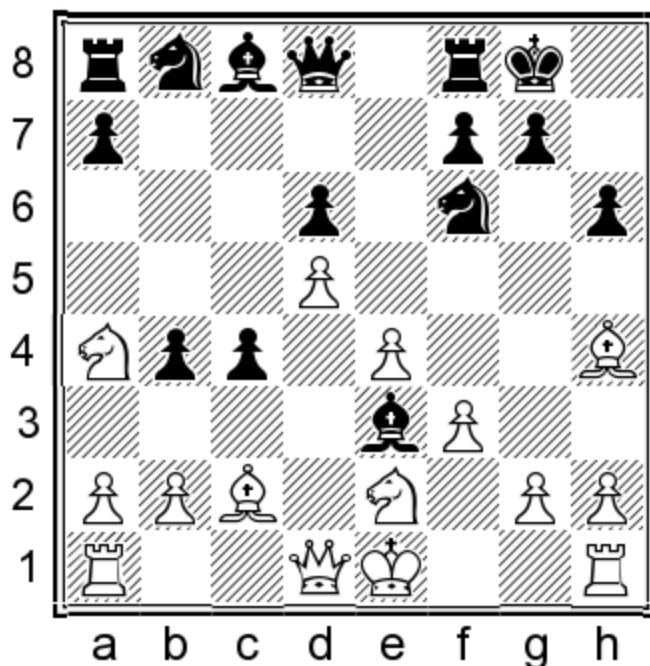
11...♗c5!

The key move, improving the bishop. The white king should already be terrified.

12.♘ge2

12.♘xb5? blunders a piece to 12...♙b6.

12...b4! 13.♘a4 ♗e3



White's army is all over the place, and the king is still stuck on e1.

**14. ♖g3**

After 14. ♕f2 ♖xf2+ 15. ♔xf2 ♘bd7 16. ♖f1 ♘e5 17. ♔g1 ♕d7 Black was already close to objectively winning in Tarun – Krishna Teja, Kankarbagh 2017.

**14...a5!**

Vacating the a7-square, aiming to preserve the bishop on the g1-a7 diagonal.

**15. ♕e2 ♖a7**

In Vogel – Viver Ruiz, email 2019, Black was much better and went on to win. The white king could not find secure shelter on either side of the board.

Summing up, both 7. ♕e3? and 7. ♕g5?! are hasty. The white dark-squared bishop cannot allow itself to be exchanged, as that would leave White with terminal weaknesses on the dark squares. Thus,

developing the bishop so early makes it vulnerable to an attack or a trade.

In meeting 7.♔e3?, our key move is 8...♞bd7!N, which forces White to take on e6 and b5, and after 10... d5! Black pretty much wins by force. The key move is 13...♞g4!.

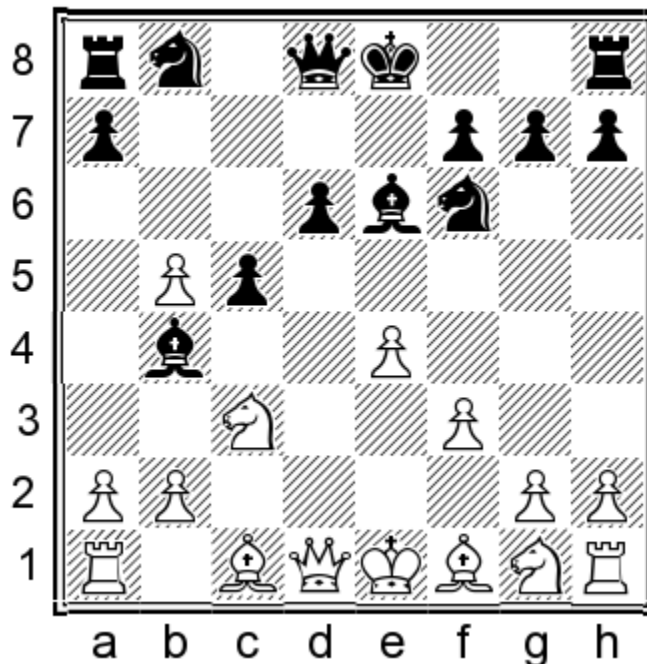
7.♔g5 is slightly better in comparison, but still after 7...h6 and 8...0-0, White struggles to find anything sensible. The fact that most games have seen 9.♔d3?, which allows us to seize a decisive advantage, is quite telling. Enough with the nonsense – time to move on to more serious options.

### B3) 7.dxe6 ♞xe6

Releasing the tension doesn't lead to a bad position by force, but it allows us to get an easy game. As we hinted previously, White's effort to get a big pawn centre came with some concessions (look at that pawn on f3), and the only reason taking on e6 is playable is because we also weakened our position with ...b7-b5.

We will split our attention between: **B31)8.cxb5** and **B32)8.♔f4**.

### B31) 8.cxb5



Accepting the pawn isn't bad per se, but White needs to show some accuracy to maintain the balance. In any case, our moves flow quite naturally.

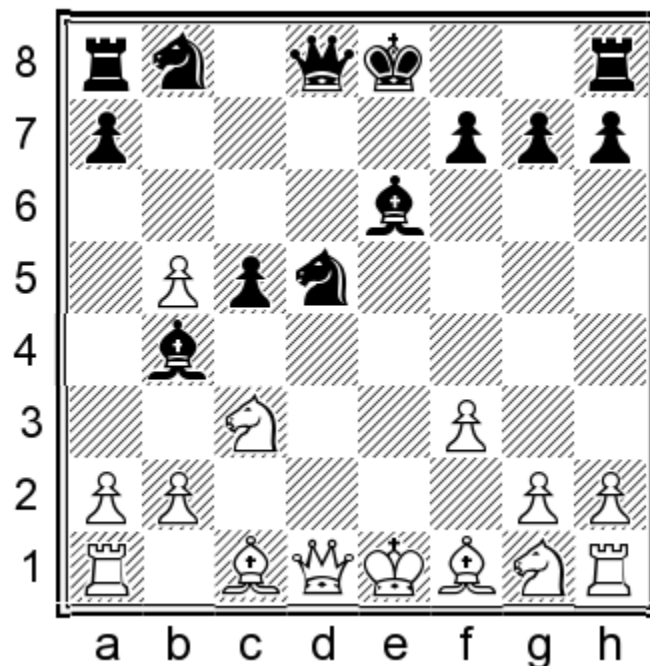
### 8...d5!

If you would like to keep more tension, then 8...a6!?N could be tried as well.

### 9.exd5

9.♔d2 0-0 10.exd5 was played in Sukhanov – Muniz Pardino, email 2019. It hardly ever makes any sense to think in such terms in an engine-assisted game, but in an over-the-board setting, 10...♕f5!N would give us excellent practical chances. White will struggle to complete development, while all our moves come easily and naturally.

### 9...♞xd5



### 10.♔f2!

An accurate move, trying to walk the white king towards safety.

10.♔d2?!

This can be met with:

10...♔xc3!?

10...0-0 is also good, transposing to the email game mentioned above.

11.♔xc3N

The only game to feature this position saw the other capture but I find that to be even riskier: 11.bxc3 0-0 12.♖e2 ♜e8 13.♔f2 ♞d7 14.♞f4 This was Shawket Bin – Murshed, Dhaka 2022, and Black's most accurate option was 14...c4!N Clearing the g1-a7 diagonal for the queen and the c5-square for the d7-knight. White is in dire straits.

11...0-0

Our lead in development easily compensates for the missing pawn. Our next moves will be ...♞b8-d7, followed by ...♜f8-e8, ...♔d8-c7 and ...♞a8-d8. In the meantime, the white king will have a hard time castling.

10.♞e2

Should be met with:

10...♞d7!

It is essential to block the d-file to create the possibility of taking on c3 without allowing a queen trade.

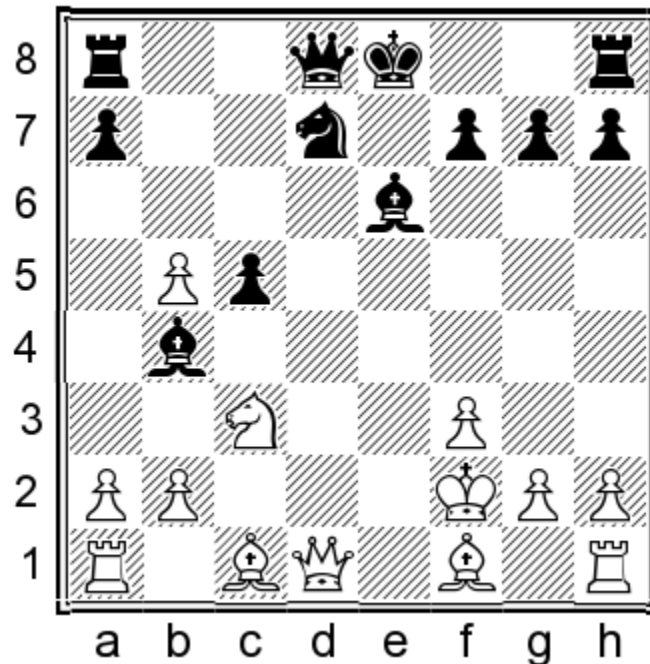
10...0-0? 11.♔f2! is what White was hoping for, as it is hard to develop the b8-knight without taking on c3, but taking on c3 allows the trade of queens.

11.♔f2 ♞xc3

The point.

12.♞xc3

Worse for White is 12.bxc3?! ♖a5 13.♔c2 0-0 14.♗e3 ♜e8. Our main way of building up our attack would be to get the queen to f6, the knight to e5, and the a8-rook to d8. White's development is pitiful.



12...c4!

Clearing the g1-a7 diagonal makes the king on f2 feel some heat.

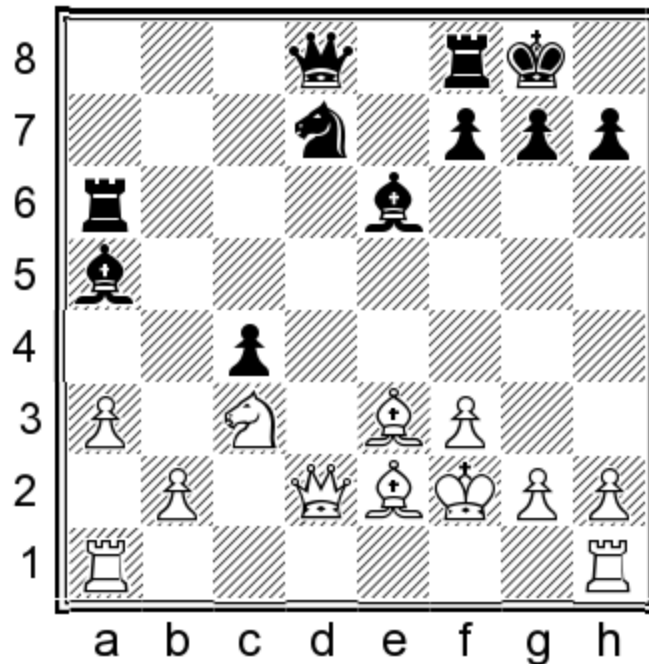
13.♗e3 0-0 14.♗e2 ♖a6!?

Activating the a8-rook. Black has fantastic compensation for the pawn, and White will struggle to stabilize.

Many other moves were good. For example, I would find it natural to consider 14...♜e8!?N, putting some X-ray pressure on the e3-bishop.

The game we're following continued:

15.bxa6 ♜xa6 16.a3 ♗a5 17.♔d2?!



In Wahlund – Sienkiewicz, email 2020, Black played 17...♖c6! and eventually won, but I prefer adding a human touch:

17...♖b6!N

The threat is ...♙b8, piling up the pressure on b2 and h2. We shouldn't be afraid of White grabbing the exchange – our compensation on the dark squares would be truly magnificent.

**10...♞xc3**

The simplest solution.

If you want to play a street fighting type of game, then 10...♙xc3!?N 11.bxc3 ♞d7 is also possible.

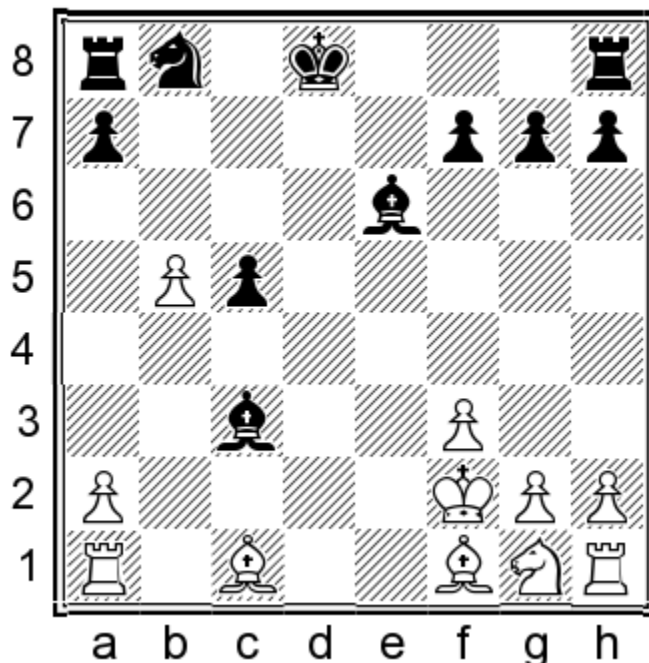
**11.♙xd8+ ♚xd8 12.bxc3**

12.♙g5+ is just flashy, and after 12...♚c7 13.a3 (13.bxc3 transposes to our mainline.) 13...♙a5 14.bxc3 ♙xc3 we transpose back to the mainline but with the pawn on a3 instead of a2. Anyway, this makes

absolutely no difference and Black went on to win in Herzog – Bourgault, email 2020.

The immediate 12.a3?? loses to: 12...♞d1+ 13.♔e2 ♞c4+ 14.♔xd1 ♞xf1

**12...♞xc3**

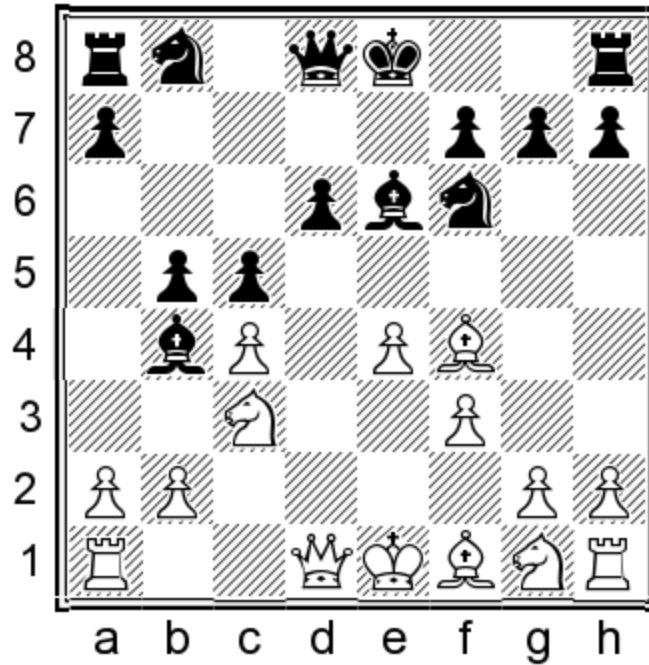


**13.♞g5+ ♔c7 14.♖c1 ♞d4+ 15.♔g3**

We've been following the game Edwards – Simal Moreira, email 2021. We have a draw in hand with ...♞e5+ and ...♞d4+, but the Black player rightly decided to continue for a bit more with ...♔c7-b6. Our pieces are more active, and the c5-pawn can't be considered a weakness since it's impossible to attack. The game later ended in a draw anyway, but it was White who had to search for and give the perpetual.

By the way, 15.♔e1 ♞d7 16.♞e2 ♞e5 was also slightly easier to play with Black in Agaltsov – Semmler, email 2018.

**B32) 8.♞f4**



This has been tried by White a few times, but without any notable success. Yes, the d6-pawn looks terribly weak, but we don't need to defend it:

### 8...0-0!

Quick development is more important than a measly pawn. The king on e1 is our target.

### 9.♗xd6

This is the more ambitious option for White, but it is exactly what we want. The game becomes sharp, and complications tend to favour the side with the lead in development.

Against 9.♘e2 Black has a few decent options, but it's a rare position, so I suggest keeping it simple with 9...♗xc4, when after 10.♙xd6 ♙a5!?! we transpose to a line examined below through the 9.♙xd6 move order.

The main alternative to taking with the bishop is naturally:

9. ♔xd6 ♚a5

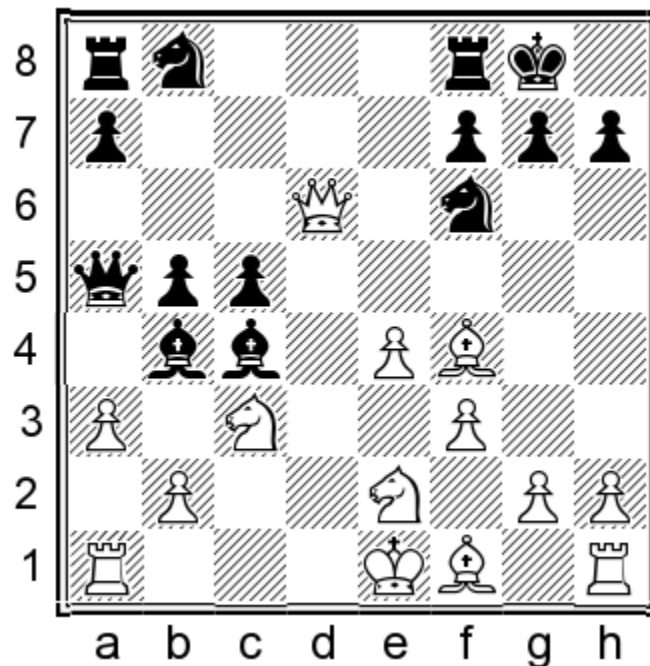
The dynamic option.

If you want a slower but possibly longer game, then you could go for: 9... ♙xc3+!? 10. bxc3 ♚a5 11. ♔f2 bxc4 12. ♘e2 ♞bd7 This was Caron – Simal Moreira, corr. 2021, and both sides had their trumps in the ensuing complicated struggle.

10. ♘e2

Nothing else makes sense.

10... ♙xc4 11. a3!



Any other move by White allows us way too much freedom to develop our initiative.

11... ♖d8!

An accurate, and simple way to play.

More popular in both over-the-board play and correspondence has been 11... ♞a6 but after 12. ♙g5! we need to remember a few unnecessary details in order to force a draw. If possible, we should avoid such situations.

12. ♚c7 ♞a6!?N

12...♞bd7 is also totally fine and led to a draw in Tylecek – Tsekouras, email 2020.

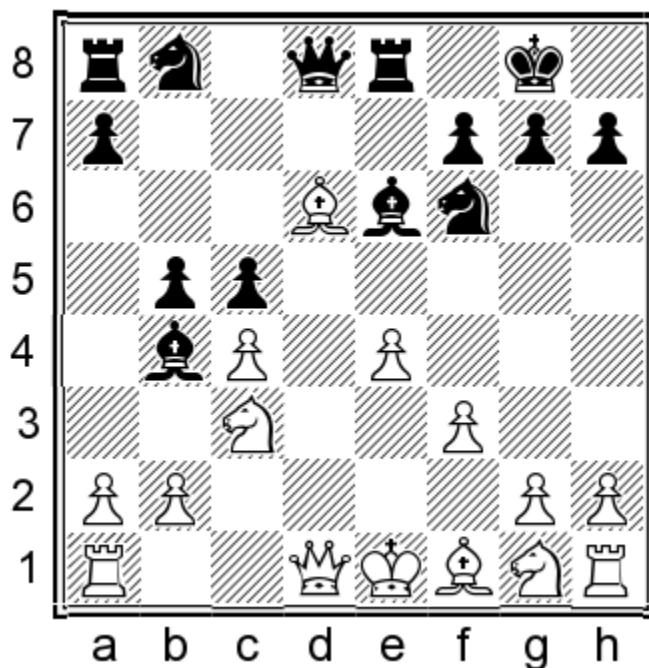
13.♙xa5 ♝xa5

Our activity is a guarantee of safety in the ensuing endgame. Our only problem is the silly knight on f6, but it's a minor detail and we will find the time to improve it. That's the only reason why I opted for suggesting 12...♞a6!? instead of 12...♞bd7 – I wanted to keep the d7-square available to the f6-knight.

**9...♖e8**

We simply get our rook out of harm's way.

Sacrificing the exchange with 9...♞c6!?N is also possible.

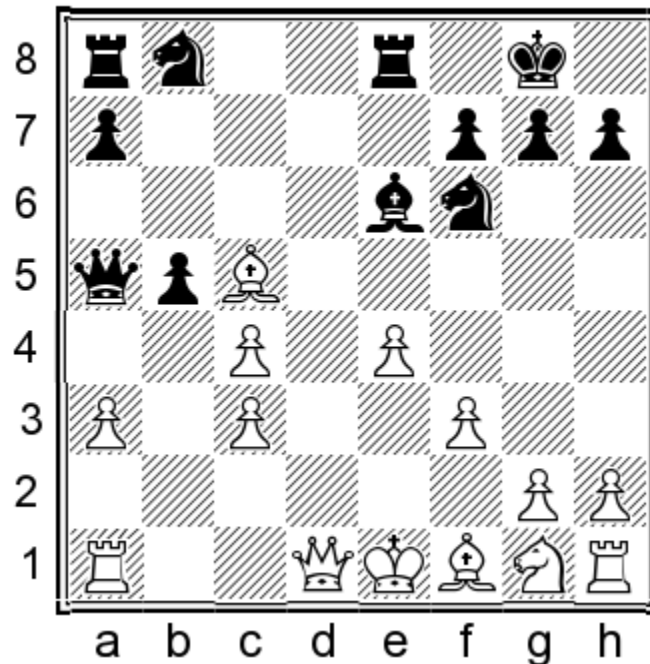


White has tried a few different moves, but nothing is too inspiring with the king on e1.

**10.cxb5**

The most played option.

10.a3?! was played by the 4.f3 specialist Sergey Volkov, but it turned out badly: 10...♗xc3+ 11.bxc3 ♔a5 A multipurpose move, developing the queen, threatening c3, and vacating the d8-square for the rook. 12.♗xc5?!

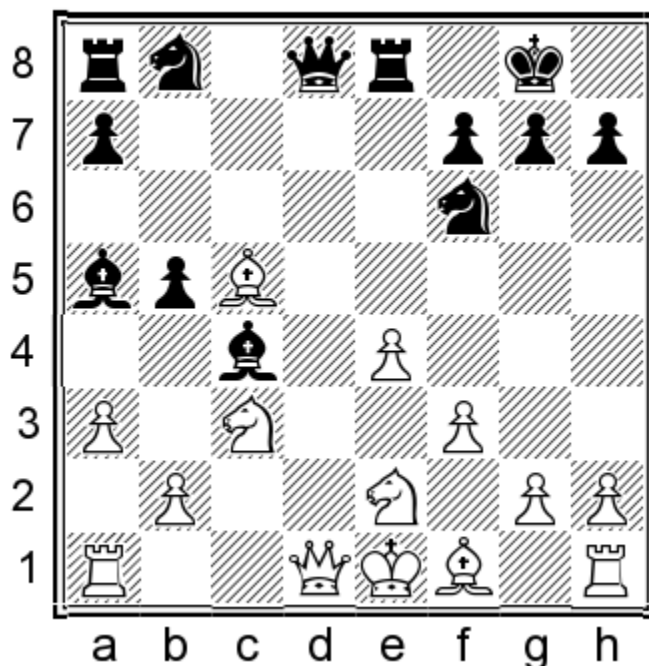


In Volkov – Kotsur, Sochi 2019, Black could have gone for 12...♞c6!, continuing development while taking away the d4-square from the white pieces. Our next move is likely ...bxc4, while the a8-rook is also ready to join the party. White has no way of parrying the oncoming onslaught.

10.♗g3 was tried in Drescher – Salminen, corr. 2019, and I believe our simplest approach would be 10...♙b6N 11.cxb5 a6! with a strong initiative.

10.♗f4N has never been played and looks similar to the line mentioned above. After 10...♙b6 11.cxb5 c4!? we realize it's even a little worse, as the bishop on f4 cannot challenge our play on the g1-a7 diagonal.

10. ♖e2 ♗xc4 11. a3 has also been tried, aiming to grab the pawn on c5: 11... ♗a5 12. ♗xc5

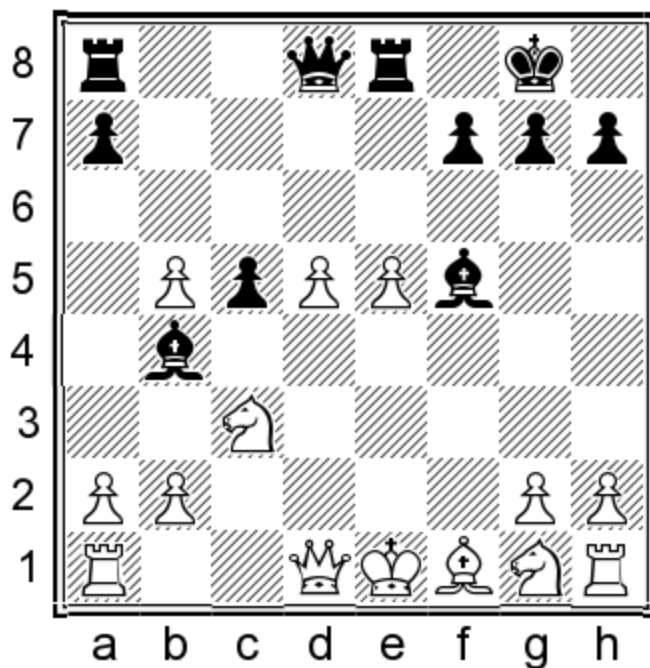


12... ♔c7!N The most accurate. 13. ♔d6? (13. ♗d4?! loses to 13... ♖c6. The best try is 13. b4, but after 13... ♗d8! 14. ♔c1 ♘bd7 White's position remains terrible.) 13... ♔b7 Black is already objectively winning.

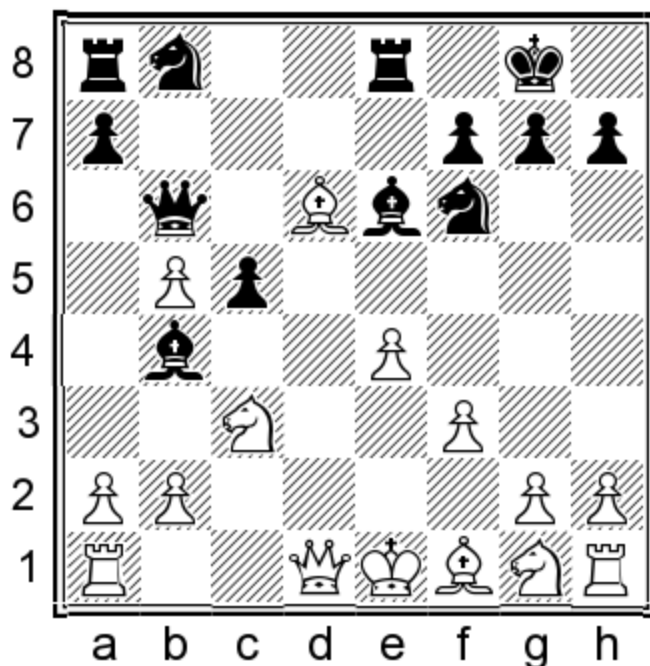
### 10... ♔b6!?N

A less concrete approach to the one mentioned below, but not necessarily a simpler one. The position remains extremely tense.

10... ♘d5!? is a flashy little move that's really hard to resist. White needs to find 11. ♗e5!, as anything else allows us to capture the important dark-squared bishop. Now after 11... ♘d7! White's hand remains forced: 12. exd5 ♗f5 (12... ♗g4!?N is also possible.) 13. f4 ♘xe5 14. fxe5



14...♖xe5+!N That's super dangerous for White, but we're lacking a piece and it felt impractical to continue analysing for a few pages a position with zero practical examples. If, on the other hand, you feel comfortable freestyling this attack, I would encourage you to do so. (14...♔h4+ has been played in both correspondence games that reached this position, aiming to grab the rook on h1 after 15.g3 ♔e4+, but I don't like this materialistic attitude.)



Retreating the bishop to g3 is met with 11...a6, while going to f4 allows 11...c4. Both lines are direct transpositions to what we proposed against 10.♔g3 and 10.♔f4 respectively. However, staying with the bishop on d6 is a bad idea:

**11.♘e2?! ♖d8!**

The pressure down the d-file is extremely irritating. White needs to walk a tightrope in order not to lose in the next few moves.

As we've mentioned already and proved in above analysis, releasing the tension with 7.dxe6 is quite pleasant to face. Our lead in development gives us great counterplay no matter which pawn White tries grabbing.

After 8.cxb5 we get our chance to strike in the centre with 8...d5!, when all our problems are pretty much solved. White should objectively try to avoid too much danger with 9.exd5 ♘xd5 10.♔f2!, inviting us to enter an objectively equal endgame, but one that is still easier to play with Black. If you really don't want the endgame, then you can try the original 10...♔xc3!? novelty,

followed by 11... ♖d7 with long-term compensation against the exposed white king.

In the event of 8. ♕f4, White goes for a seemingly more important pawn on d6 instead of the one on b5. Sure, that makes sense, but this is also a pawn we can give away and 8...0-0! is the way to go. At that point, taking on d6 with the queen is the best option for White, but we still have no problems facing it after 9... ♙a5! 10. ♘e2 ♕xc4. At that point White needs to remember 11.a3!, but we anyway get a good position by winning a tempo with 11... ♖d8! and then developing the b8-knight to either a6 or d7.

Nevertheless, 9. ♕xd6 is more popular than taking with the queen and looks more tempting because of winning a tempo against the rook. After 9... ♖e8 10. ♘e2 I suggest the interesting 10... ♙b6!?N, which puts White's concept under serious pressure. If you want, you can also go for the flashy 10... ♘d5, but then you should be ready to sacrifice a piece in your efforts to attack the white king.

I think by now it's clear why we should be happy to face 7.dxe6 and we can move on to more serious alternatives!

#### **B4) 7.cxb5**

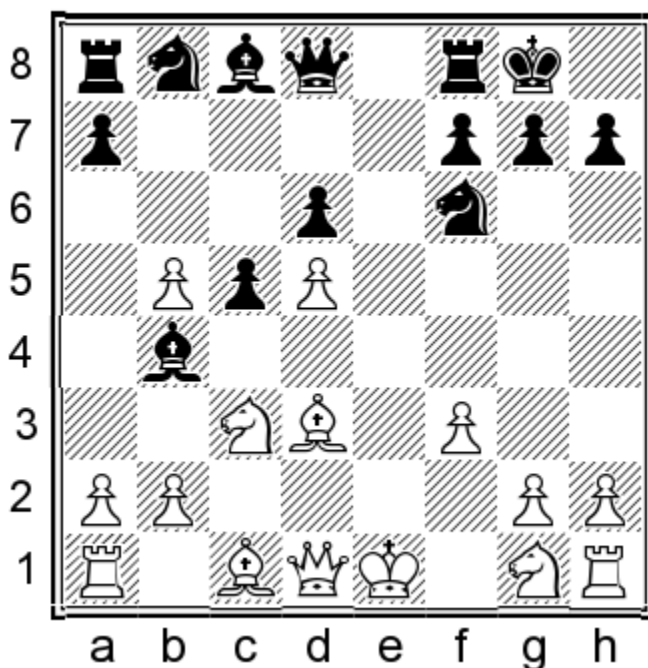


♞e5, followed by a combination of ...0-0 and ...♔b6, Black has a strong initiative.

Hence, the well-prepared Indian prodigy played 9.♞e2+!, but after 9...♔f8 the position remained razor-sharp with chances for both sides in Erigaisi – Bok, Internet (blitz) 2023.

### 9.♞d3

Nothing else makes sense, as White needs to get ready to meet the check on e8 by naturally developing the knight.



### 9...a6!?

This puts the b5-pawn under pressure while also trying to activate all our queenside pieces.

### 10.♞e2

White's best bet is to continue developing.

After 10.bxa6?! ♖bd7! 11.♘e2 c4! 12.♙xc4 ♘e5 13.♙b5 ♚b6  
 White's king is trapped in the centre, and Black is having a ton of fun.

### 10...♚b6!?

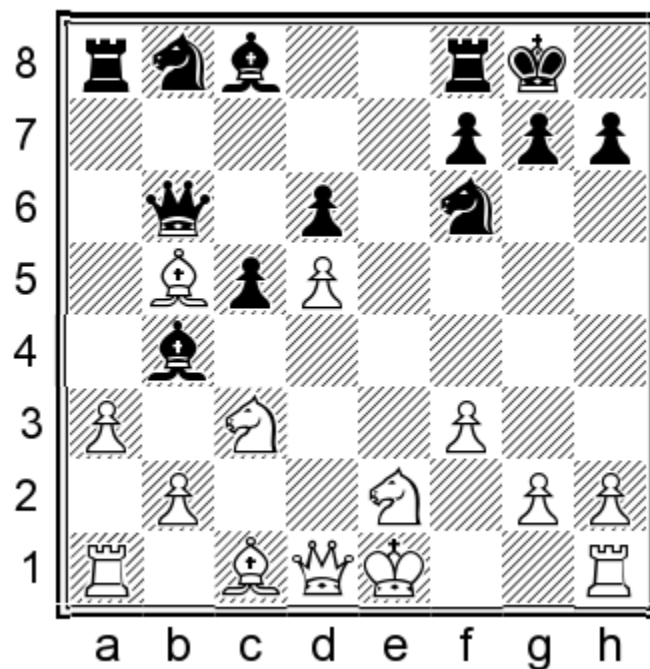
A good move by Grischuk, stopping White from castling, at least for the time being, while also threatening the pawn on b5.

The immediate 10...c4!? also makes sense, followed by ...♚b6 with tremendous compensation for the two sacrificed pawns. That was Richard Rapport's choice in a rapid game against the Indian prodigy.

### 11.a3!

After 11.a4?! c4!? 12.♙xc4 ♘bd7 the game is similar to the note above regarding 10.bxa6?!.

### 11...axb5 12.♙xb5



### 12...c4!N

Again, this second pawn sacrifice is the key to success.

In the game, Grischuk played 12...♙xc3+ 13.♘xc3 ♙a6 and was indeed slightly worse after 14.♙xa6 ♚xa6 15.♚f2 in Erigaisi – Grischuk, Almaty (rapid) 2022.

**13.♙xc4 ♘bd7**

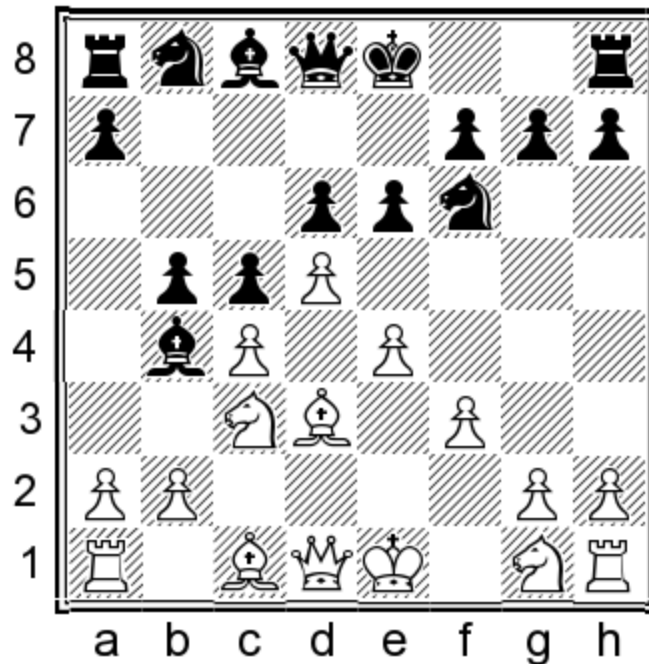
Black has enough compensation. The plan is to continue with ...♙c5 and ...♘e5, with play on the weak dark squares inside the white camp. The engine suggests:

**14.♙d2 ♙c5 15.♚b3! ♚a7 16.♘b5 ♚b6 17.♘bc3**

With a draw by repetition. However, I don't think White enters this variation to make a draw.

Summing up, 7.cxb5 isn't a theoretical problem at all for Black. We get good compensation for our pawn in more than one way, and the ensuing positions offer us plenty of winning chances. The key point to remember would be the pawn sacrifice with ...c5-c4, clearing the g1-a7 diagonal and using it to prevent White from castling.

**B5) 7.♙d3**



This is quite a natural reaction. White, plagued by the constant difficulties with completing development, chooses a blunt approach and stops caring for the possible lost tempo due to the light-squared bishop moving twice. Up next is  $\text{Ng1-e2}$  followed by castling short, and at least that way the kingside will finally be developed. Well, that might be true, but we're also happy to see the bishop losing this tempo. There's a reason  $7.\text{De2}$  is the mainline – in those positions the bishop might be able to take on c4 in one go.

### **7...0-0!**

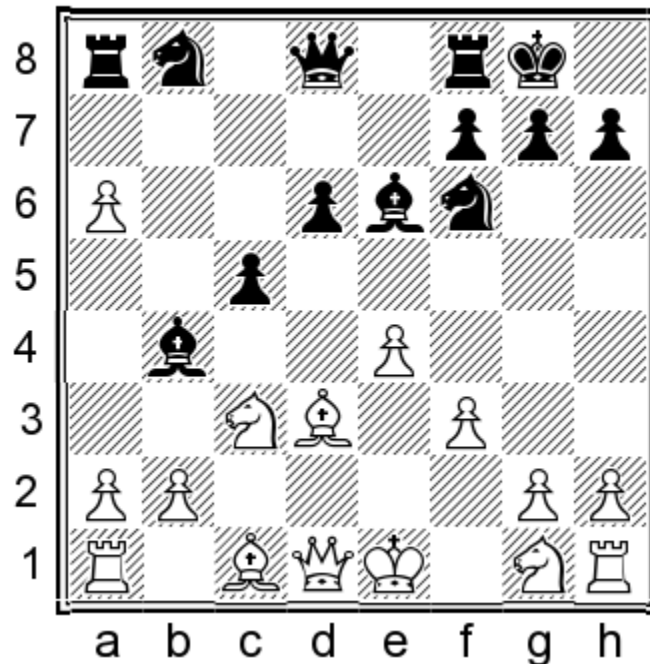
White wasn't threatening anything, so there is no reason for us to release the tension just yet.

### **8. $\text{Ne2}$**

Sticking to the plan of quickly developing the kingside.

$8.\text{cxb5 exd5 9.exd5}$  transposes to a position we studied under  $7.\text{cxb5}$ .

As usual, releasing the tension with 8.dxe6 is not at all scary. After 8...♙xe6 9.cxb5 there are multiple good options, but I quite like going gambit style with 9...a6!?N as this sets up a cute little trap. White cannot accept the pawn: 10.bxa6?

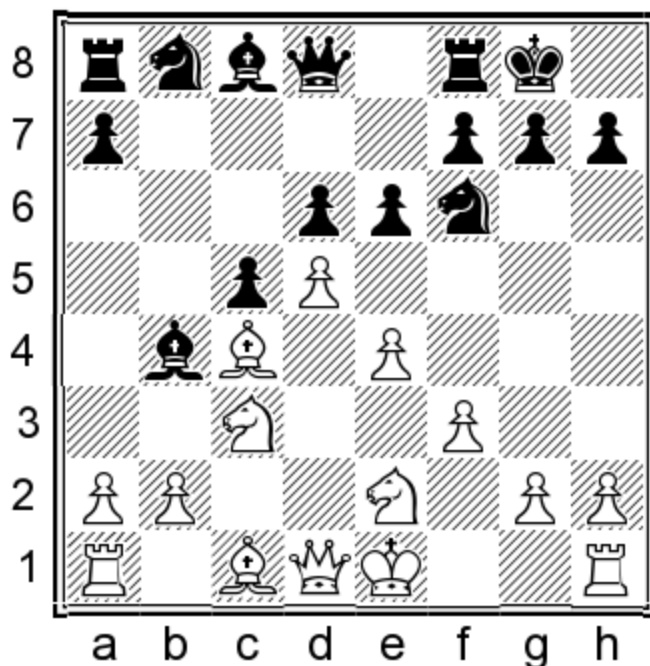


10...c4! 11.♙c2 ♙c5! The white king is trapped in the centre, and the situation looks grim. By sacrificing the a-pawn we managed to vacate the a7-square for the bishop, so that 12.♘a4 is easily met with 12...♙a7.

### 8...bxc4!

White was ready to castle, consolidating to a great extent, so we need to take direct action. We will briefly elaborate on that point in the note to White's 10th move.

### 9.♙xc4



### 9...exd5!

If you like being flashy, then you can achieve exactly the same result by 9...♞xd5! 10.♙xd5 exd5 11.♚xd5, transposing to our mainline. The point is, of course, that 10.exd5 would be met with 10...♛h4+ followed by 11... ♛xc4.

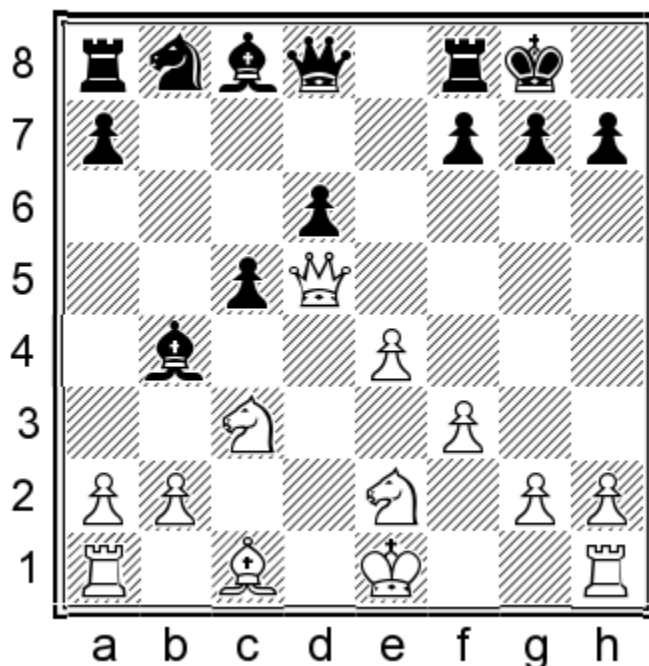
Attention! If we had the same position but with a2-a3 and ...♙b4-a5 included, then we would go for 9...♙a6. However, in the structure reached after 10.♙xa6 ♞xa6 11.0-0 White benefits from keeping the pawn on a2, as the b3-square isn't weak, and the b-file is momentarily blocked. This is certainly playable, and the lazier among us could simply go for this, followed by 11...c4!?, clearing the c5-square for the a6-knight. I believe that White is somewhat more comfortable, but our position is certainly playable.

Nevertheless, I felt compelled to present what I believed to be our best effort and the move that keeps the most winning chances.

### 10.♙xd5

If we hadn't resolved the tension in a timely manner with 8...bxc4! and 9...exd5!, then White could have taken on d5 with the knight, which would have been a positional catastrophe.

10...♞xd5 11.♞xd5



11...♞e6!

The point. Taking the rook on a8 will get the white queen trapped. I once again urge you to be attentive towards a small but important subtlety: with the moves a2-a3 and ...♞b4-a5 included, the rook on a8 would be actually hanging.

12.♞d1

The most prudent.

12.♞d3? was played in Ziegenfuss – Wen Yili, Porto Carras 2018, but the queen's placement is unfortunate, and Black could have gone for: 12...c4! 13.♞d2 ♞b6 with a tremendous initiative.

12. ♖g5 is better than grabbing on a8, but still totally harmless. For example: 12... ♘c6 13. 0-0 (13. ♖xd8 is also nothing to be afraid of. After 13... ♜axd8 14. ♙f4 any random sensible move would be fine, but I would prefer the active 14... ♘d4!? asking White a few questions. The rook has stayed on f8 because our next move is possibly ...f7-f5, opening even more lines for our pieces.) 13...f5! Black had good counterplay and the more pleasant position in Esin – Cvak, corr. 2017.

12. ♖xa8?!

The greedy approach is met with:

12... ♖b6

Trapping the queen. White will get two rooks in return, but the numerous weak squares inside the white camp ensure that we will always have good counterplay.

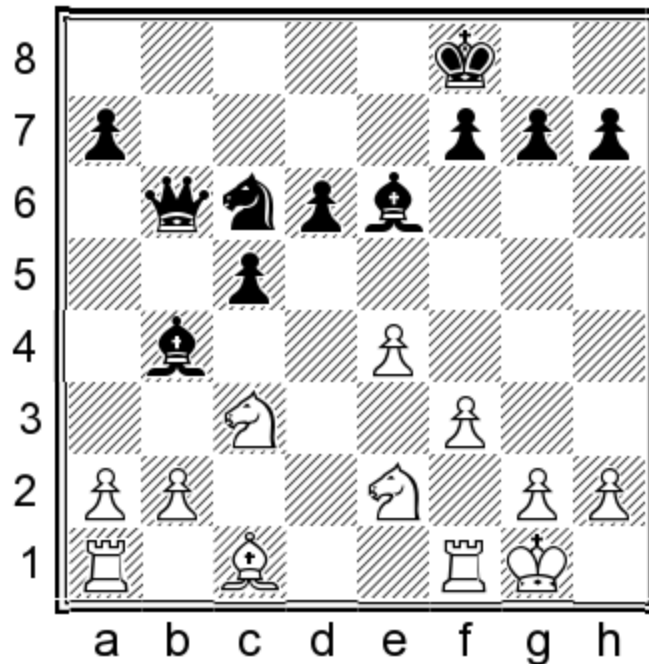
13. 0-0

This is best.

13... ♘c6 14. ♖xf8+

14. ♘d5? loses to: 14... ♙xd5 15. ♖xf8+ ♔xf8 16. exd5 In Happel – Van der Werf, Leiden 2019, Black moved the knight and won easily anyway, but even more precise was 16...c4+ 17. ♔h1 ♘e5 when the knight comes to d3 and the white king is toast.

14... ♔xf8



White has a few options but none of them is particularly challenging.

15. ♖f4

This is the best according to the engine, but the character of the position remains exactly the same.

After 15. ♖d1?! ♞e5 16. ♙e3?! ♜xc3! 17. bxc3 ♚b2 Black was already close to winning in Ning – Sole, Palmerston North 2021.

15. ♙f4?! can be easily met with 15... ♞e5N when Black is already starting to create annoying threats. We could, for example, jump with the knight to d3, take on c3 and invade on b2, improve the light-squared bishop with ...♙e6-c4, and so on.

15. ♙d2 was Hamby – Plant, corr. 2017, when I would once again suggest 15... ♞e5N, with a nagging initiative.

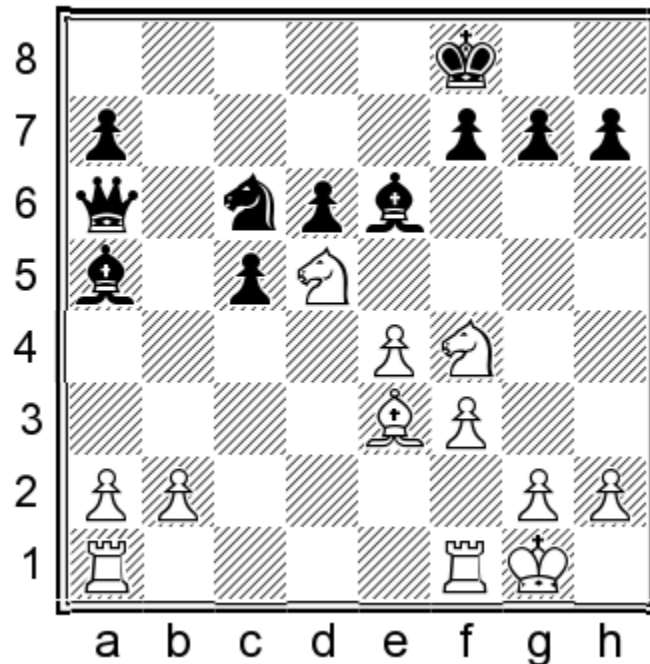
15. ♙e3 ♞e5N is similar to the lines mentioned above.

15... ♚a6!N

I like this move a lot, as it aims to fight against White consolidating, and that's the only thing that really matters in such positions.

However, the usual 15... ♞e5!N is also fine.

The strength of our previous move is aptly illustrated in the line:  
16. ♖cd5?! ♕a5 17. ♗e3



17...g5!

The white construction loses any stability, and we're once again clearly better.

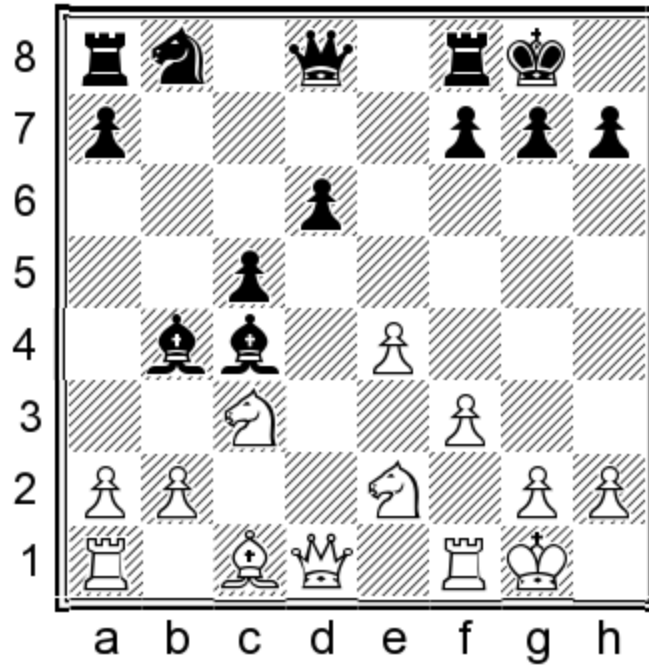
**12...♗c4!**

Activating the bishop.

12...d5 is a good alternative, and Black has scored 4 draws and 2 wins from this position. I'm not suggesting it only because I believe it sells our initiative a tiny bit cheaper than the text move.

**13.0-0**

It would be risky to play anything else – the king has already stayed on e1 for too long.



**13...♙xc3!**

This is the point of our previous move. White cannot take back on c3 with the knight, so we ruin the structure and worsen the prospects of the remaining knight at the same time.

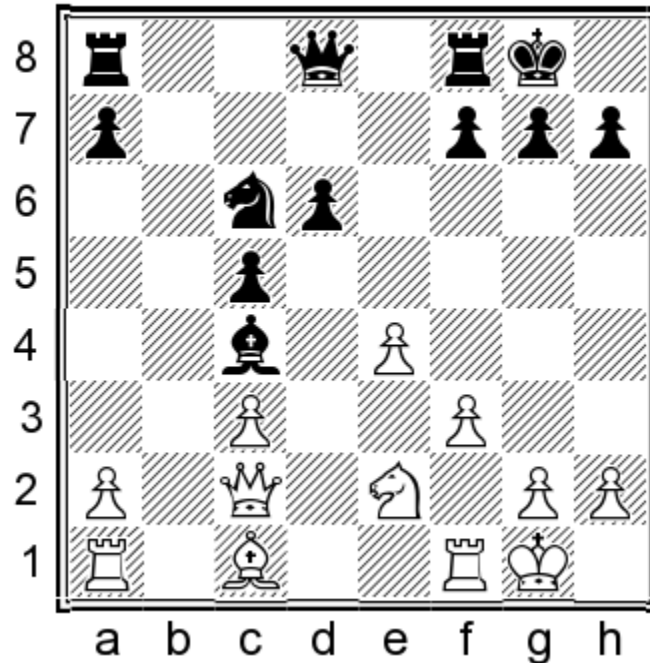
**14.bxc3 ♘c6!**

Keeping our options open regarding both ...d6-d5 and ...f7-f5. The d6-pawn is backward, but it protects the c5-pawn and thus restricts the mobility of the white minor pieces.

**15.♙c2**

Unpinning the knight with 15.♖f2N can be met with: 15...d5!? This is perfectly timed. (15...♞e5!? is also strong when White's only move to keep the balance is the not-so-easy 16.♞g3!, clearing the second rank for the rook on f2. The natural 16.♞f4?, controlling d3 and d5, is a disaster after 16...f5!.) The timing of the ...d6-d5 break was good because 16.exd5 is answered by 16...♞e5! threatening

...♞d3. After 17.♞g3 ♞d3 18.♖d2 ♚xd5 19.♞e4 ♜fd8 we're clearly the ones pressing.



### 15...f5!

A natural pawn sacrifice, granting us a strong initiative. The correspondence game that featured this continued:

**16.exf5 ♜e8 17.♖f2 ♚f6 18.g4 h5!**

Chipping away at the white kingside structure.

### 19.g5

It's hard to find a reasonable alternative.

Developing the bishop with 19.♙f4? allows 19...♞b4, as the a1-rook is hanging with check.

Preparing this with 19.♖b1? is refuted by our main threat of 19...hxg4 20.fxg4 ♚h4, when White can resign.

**19...♚f7**

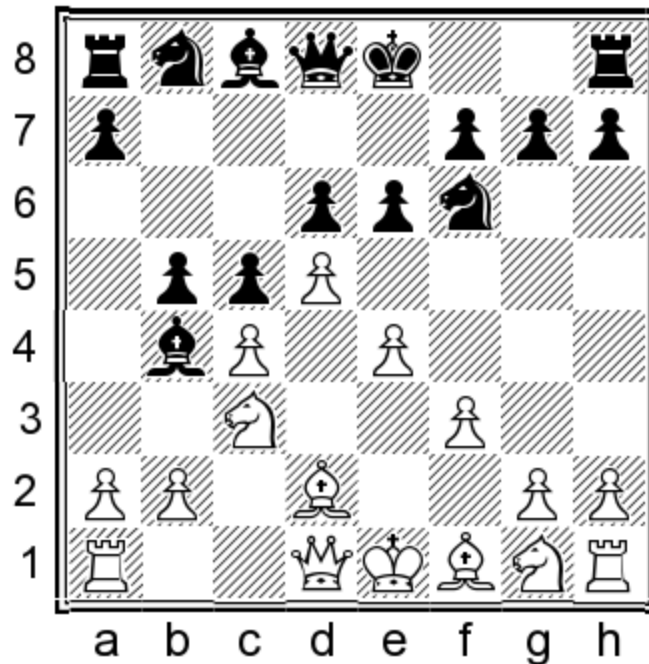
We've been following the game Zordick – Rawlings, corr. 2018. The engine claims that White can hold this, but to me it seems quite clear that White's position is overextended, and Black would be the only one having fun in a practical game.

As we saw, 7.♔d3 is quite easy to play as Black. The important thing to remember is to castle right away, and then trade off the white central pawns with ...bxc4 and ...exd5. It would also help the memorization process of the whole line to keep in mind how after the double capture on d5 White can take back with the queen, trapping the a8-rook. Remembering something characteristic like that might help us distinguish between this line and anything similar, and it would be good practice while memorizing opening lines in general.

The threat to our rook is easily and effectively dealt with by first attacking the queen with 11...♔e6! and then bringing the queen to b6 if White takes on a8, which traps the queen and gets ready to capture it by developing the knight on c6. Therefore, White must retreat the queen to d1, and we can continue creating threats with 12...♔c4! followed by 13...♔xc3, ruining the white structure. In the positions ensuing after we take on c3, the engine claims equality, but I believe White's position is much harder to handle correctly, and Black holds a large practical advantage.

Overall, 7.♔d3 does not impress. If White wants to go for it, then including a2-a3 and ...♔b4-a5 is advisable, and it shall thus be covered as the mainline to 7.a3.

**B6) 7.♔d2**



This is the second most-played move after 7.♘e2, and justifiably so. It holds a significant amount of venom.

### 7...a6!?

We defend against ♘xb5 and keep the tension, passing the ball back to White.

### 8.a4!

This is White's most popular option by a large margin, and it is simultaneously clearly the most challenging. It has gathered some followers and attention over the past few years, and we should treat it with extreme care.

8.a3 ♖a5 will be covered under the 7.a3 move order.

8.♕d3?! is risky, as the bishop on d3 is unprotected. Many moves are good, but I would suggest the most natural 8...♘bd7!, trying to gain a tempo with a quick ...♘d7-e5.

8.♘ge2

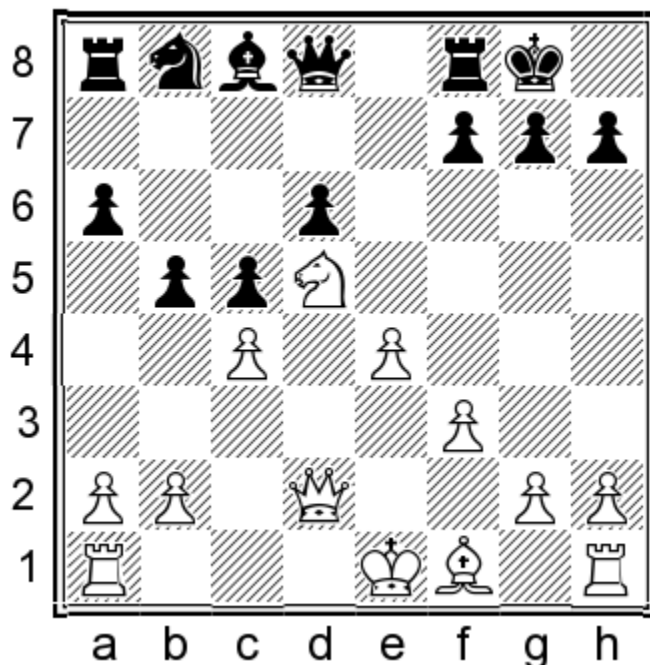
This does not fit well with the bishop already on d2. Normal play would be:

8...0-0! 9.♘f4 exd5 10.♘cxd5

10.cxd5 is a terrible Benoni for White. The bishop on d2 and knight on f4 look out of place, the kingside is yet to be developed, and we have achieved our plan of expanding on the queenside.

10.♘fxd5 ♘xd5 11.cxd5? c4! is a disaster. White is pretty much busted already.

10...♘xd5 11.♘xd5 ♙xd2+ 12.♚xd2



12...♘c6!

Pressing on with our lead in development and directing the knight towards the dream outpost on d4.

13.cxb5

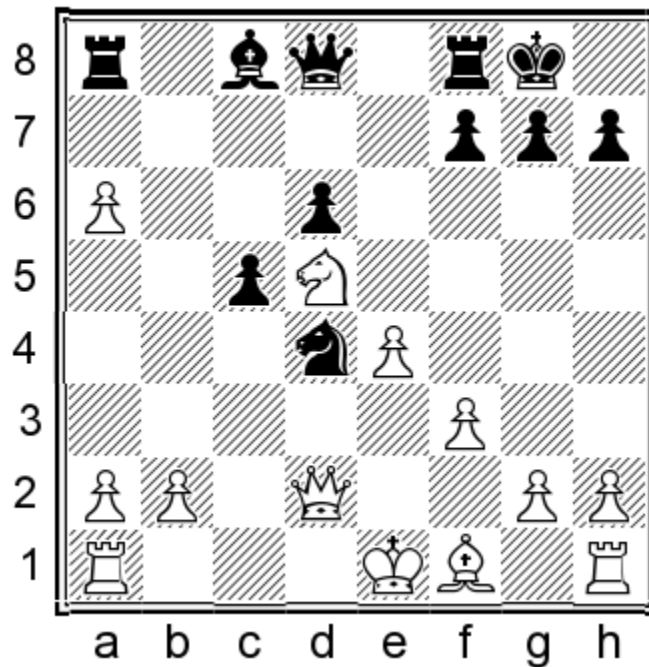
This isn't good, but it's the only thing that could ever be challenging.

13.♙d3 ♙e6 14.0-0?! ♙xd5! would give us a typical situation of a good knight against a "bad" bishop. It was better to move the knight away from d5, but it is obvious we have the easier game anyway.

13...♞d4 14.bxa6

A brave and necessary choice.

After 14.♙d3? axb5 Black was practically already winning in Van der Meijden – Goumas, Heraklion 2016.

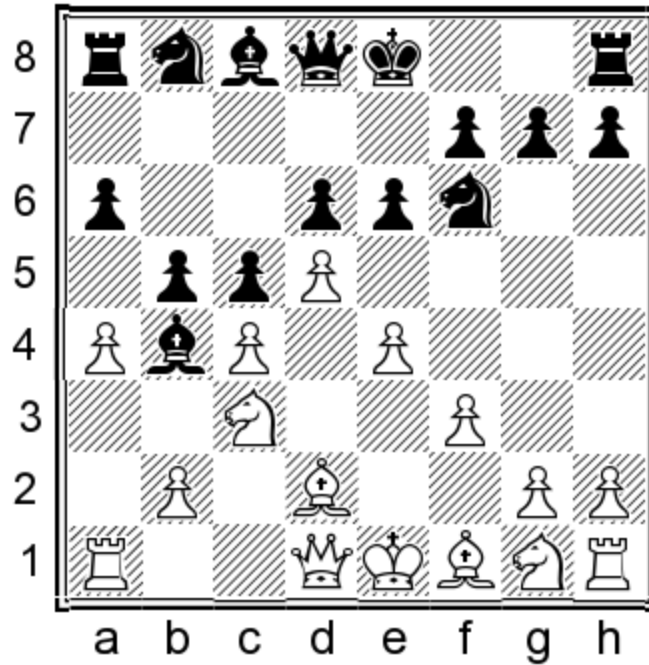


14...♙h4+!

White was on the verge of collapse in Aronian – Grischuk, Internet rapid 2020. The only line that barely holds according to the engine is:

15.g3!! ♞xf3+ 16.♙f2! ♞xd2 17.gxh4

The endgame remains unpleasant anyway.



### 8...♙a5!?

This is our recommendation – a favourite among correspondence players to reach this position, but a rare occurrence in practical play. I like the surprising and chaotic nature of this quirky little move. By breaking the pin on the a-file, we're trying to discourage White from taking on b5. We do not want to push ...b5-b4 or anything, we just want to keep the tension; if we were to move again we would simply castle.

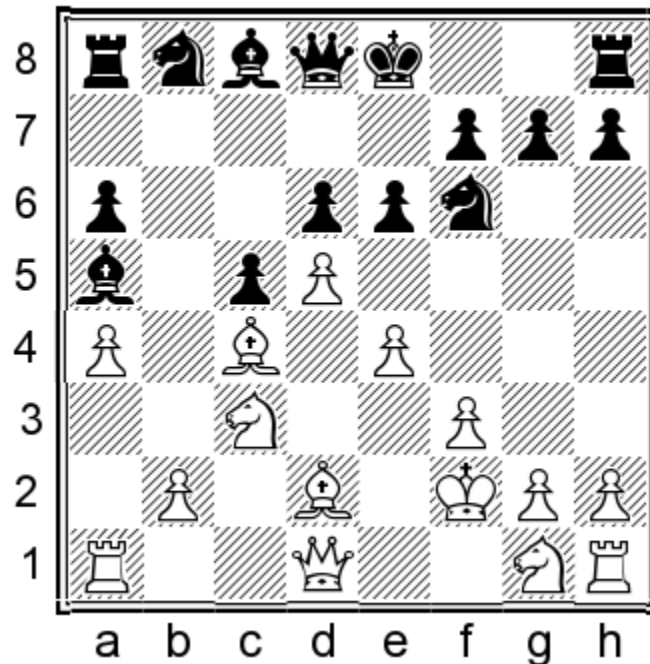
(8...bxc4 9.♙xc4 ♘bd7 has been the most popular, but I didn't find it to be 100% convincing.

On the other hand, 8...exd5 9.cxd5 bxa4 is possible, and you could look into it further for yourself if you are interested in something a bit more solid.)

We will focus our attention on: **B61)9.dxe6**, and **B62)9.axb5**.

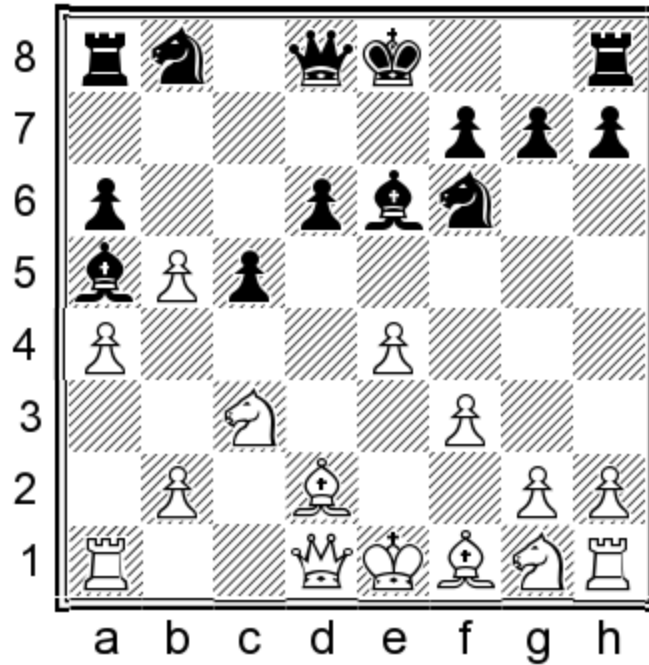
As usual, 9.cxb5?! exd5 10.exd5 0-0 would give us our typical strong dynamic counterplay.

According to my database, two White players opted for evacuating the king with 9.♔f2?!, which may seem weird, but it is a common idea in the 4.f3 Nimzo. However, in this particular position it is not good. 9...bxc4 10.♙xc4



10...♘bd7!N This principled pawn sacrifice is the most precise. (10...0-0 was Black's choice in Lodici – Boruchovsky, Terme Catez 2021, but that allowed White a vitally important tempo in the tough quest of completing development.) 11.dxe6 fxe6 12.♙xc4 ♘e5 13.♙xc8 ♖xc8 Our initiative is terribly strong.

**B61) 9.dxe6 ♙xe6 10.cxb5**



White has snatched a pawn on b5 with no intention of giving it back and is ready to recapture on b5 with the bishop. Nevertheless, as in most cases where the tension is released with dxe6, we have good active counterplay and our own set of trumps.

### 10...0-0!

This is the spirit. Our lead in development fully compensates for the sacrificed pawn.

### 11. ♖ge2

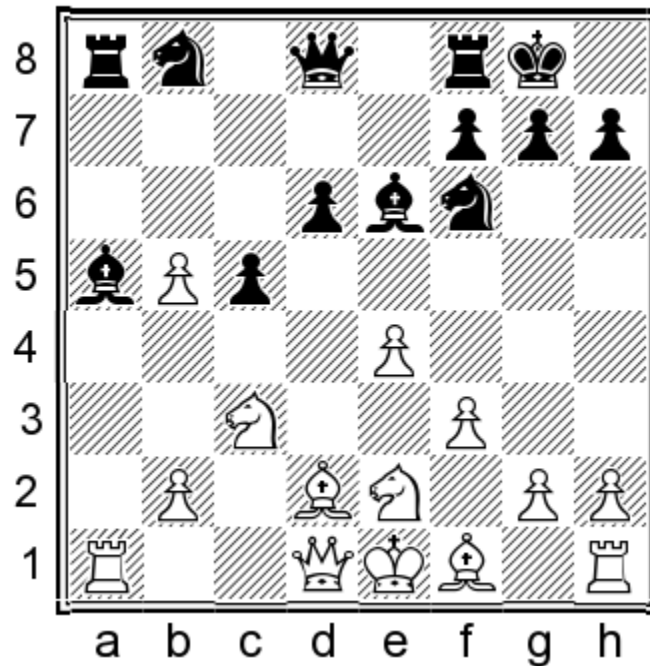
All eight white players to reach this position decided to follow this path.

11. ♖d3N is met with the typical 11... ♖bd7 12. ♖ge2 ♖e5 13. ♖c2 ♖c4, with strong dynamic counterplay.

### 11...axb5 12.axb5

From here on, we're in solely correspondence chess territory.

12. ♖xb5 d5!? gives Black good counterplay. In the game we're following, White immediately made a mistake: 13. exd5? (13. ♖f4! was correct, but our compensation remains more than adequate after 13... ♖c6. ) 13... ♖xd5 14. ♖ec3 ♖b4!? 15. ♕e3?! ♔e7! Black was already winning in Paul – Palac, Germany 2022.



**12... ♖bd7!**

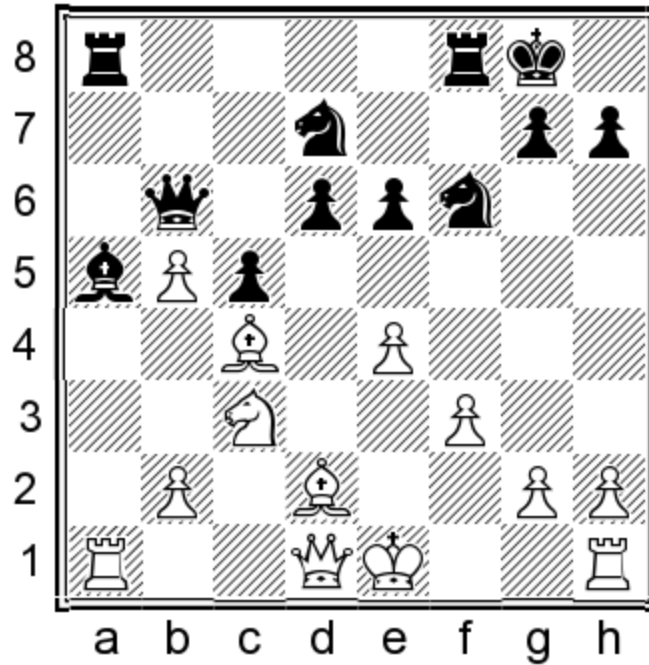
For a practical game, I like keeping the tension. Our plan is ... ♔d8-b6 followed by ... c5-c4, trapping the white king in the centre.

The more concrete 12... d5!? is also possible.

**13. ♖f4 ♔b6 14. ♕e2**

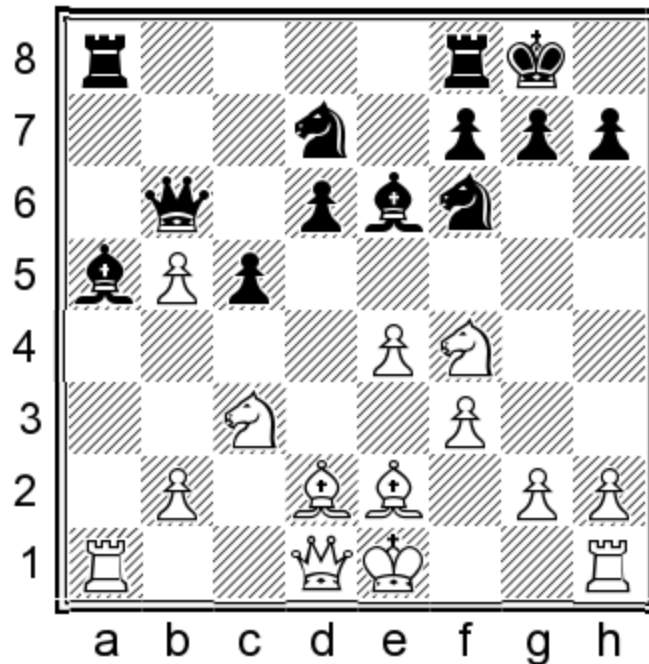
Trying to castle, but it won't be easy.

Tempting looks 14. ♖xe6 fxe6 15. ♕c4, but that is until you realize Black has:



15...d5! 16.exd5 ♖xc3! We will have great attacking chances against the white king. This line is vital to the soundness of our ambitious play with 12...♘bd7!.

Also possible is 14.♘a4, but after 14...♙c7 15.♘xe6 ♕xd2+ 16.♙xd2 fxe6 17.♕e2 c4! we follow up with ...♘d7-c5 and gain excellent positional compensation for the missing pawn.



### 14...c4!

The point of our previous play, keeping the white king in the centre.

### 15.g3

White wants to crawl with the king to safety by ♔e1-f1-g2.

15. ♖xe6? fxe6 16. ♕xc4 runs straight into 16...d5! followed by ...♘f6-g4, with a strong attack against the white king.

15. ♔c1?! can be met with the simple 15...♖fe8, preparing ...d6-d5. White isn't really threatening ♕d2-e3 because of ...♕xc3+ followed by taking on a1, deflecting the queen away from the defence of the bishop.

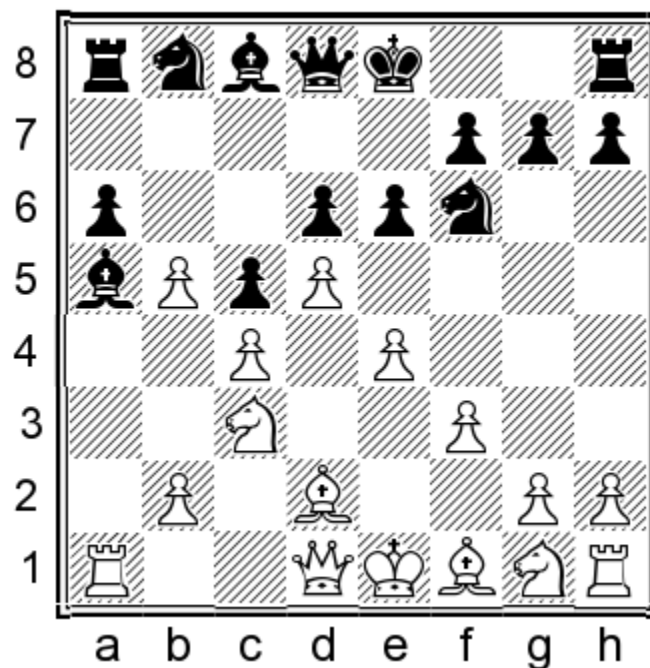
15. ♔f1 was met with the spectacular 15...g5!? in Sitorus – Borstnik, 2020, forcing the e-file open, aiming to attack the white king as violently as possible. (However, also possible was 15...♘c5 16.g3 transposing to our mainline.)

**15...♘c5 16. ♔f1 ♘b3 17. ♖a3 ♘xd2+ 18. ♔xd2 ♕xc3! 19. ♖xc3 ♖a5!**

This was Stanojevic – Broniek, email 2021. Up next is ...♖a5xb5.  
The position remains objectively balanced.

This line with 9.dxe6 is somewhat critical if you're playing chess with the assistance of an engine, and that's why it has been debated in a number of correspondence games. However, the resulting positions are much easier to play from the black side in a practical setting, and the one over-the-board game I have in my database ended in a swift Black victory. Remember, in that game White deviated early on and from the critical 12.axb5 by preferring 12.♞xb5, and was soon in serious trouble.

### B62) 9.axb5



This critical pawn grab is our logical mainline.

### 9...axb5

Allowing this move was the main point behind 8...♙a5!?.

### 10.♞xb5

After 10.cxb5?! exd5 11.exd5 ♔e7+ 12.♔e2 ♘b7 the d5-pawn will fall after ...♞b8-d7-b6.

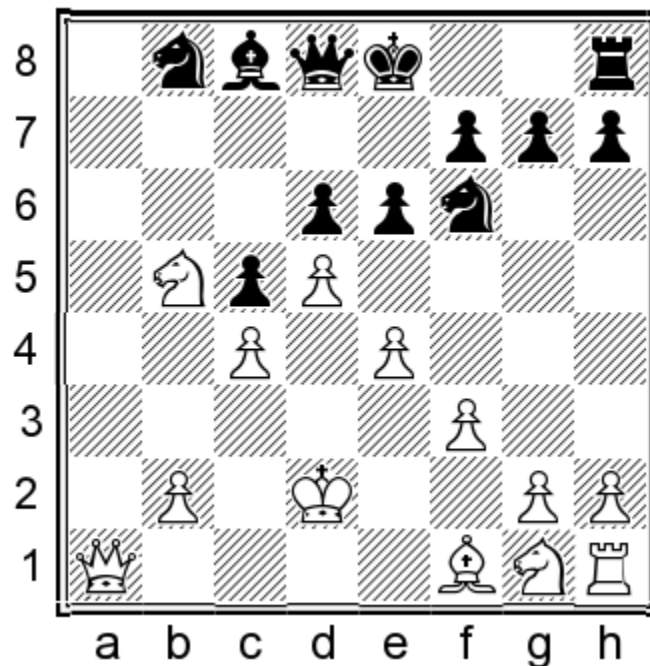
10.dxe6 ♘xe6 11.cxb5 transposes to 9.dxe6.

Against 10.♔f2, the simplest would be 10...bxc4!?N followed by castling and ...♘c8-a6. (In all three games to reach this position Black played 10...b4, which is an excellent move from an objective standpoint but awkward in practical terms due to our a5-bishop suddenly becoming so terrible.)

**10...♘xd2+ 11.♔xd2**

Our main tactical point is revealed – the white king is forced to stay in the centre. The game might continue:



**11...♖xa1 12.♔xa1**



**12...0-0**








I find it funny that this position was reached in an online blitz game: 12...exd5!? 13.cxd5 0-0 14.♘c4 ♞fd7 15.h4? ♞e5 16.b3 In Mueller

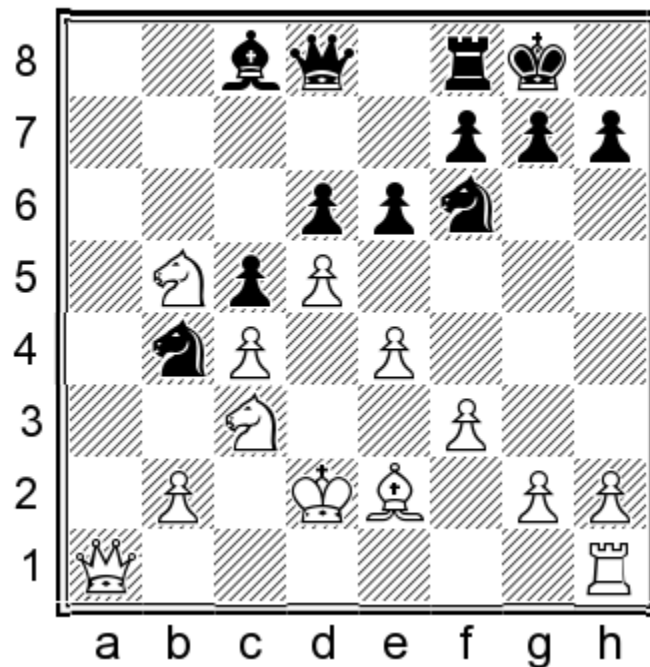
– Schulze, Internet (blitz) 2020, Black should have played 16...f5!N with a great advantage.

13. e2 a6

Getting the knight to b4 is a good idea.

14. ec3 b4 15. e2

Another example saw: 15.g3 d7 16. d1 xb5 17. xb5 e7 18. e2 exd5 19.cxd5 This was Felicio – Pocivavsek, email 2022, when Black uncorked the fancy 19...g5!?, introducing the option of ...g5-g4. The engine continues claiming zeroes, but I would be extremely optimistic if I had this with Black in a practical game. (The more normal 19...a8 was also perfectly fine.)



15...d7

We've followed the game Plas – Stegmann, corr. 2020, up to this point. White is pawn up, but the white king is permanently

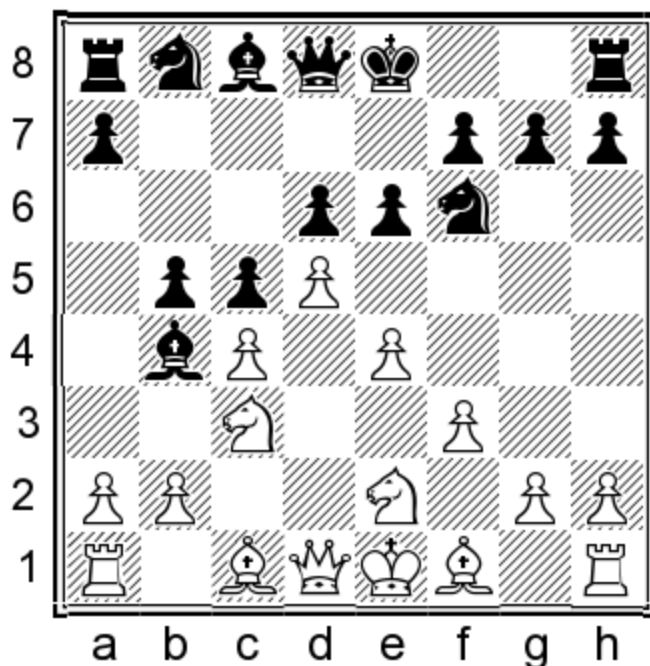
wandering in the centre, and we have good control of the dark squares. I think White has a much harder task ahead than we do.

By the way, 16.♖xd6? is bad due to 16...♙c6! when 17.♖db5? runs into 17...♙xb5 18.♖xb5 exd5 19.exd5 ♖fxd5! and White can resign. Summarizing, 7.♙d2 is a serious option for White, but I believe that the analysis presented in this chapter shows a clear path for Black to deal with this modern approach. Starting with 7...a6, the intention is to continue bringing the pieces out with ...♖bd7 and ...♗e5.

White must therefore act energetically, and that's why 8.a4 is the best move. However, the tricky 8...♙a5!? turns out to be a lot of fun for Black. Our idea is not to close the queenside with ...b5-b4, but to keep the tension instead, hoping to quickly activate our pieces, exploiting the fluidity of the structure. We have many more normal improving moves at our disposal than White, who in fact has no sensible way of keeping the tension and should either take on b5 or e6. In the mainline, White wins a pawn but at the price of getting stuck with the king in the middle of the board. These positions which to the engine are often equal can be especially difficult to deal with in a practical game.

All in all, 7.♙d2 is another line I would personally be happy to face.

**B7) 7.♖e2**



This is White's main system by a good margin. It is also the line recommended by the renowned theoretician Ivan Cheparinov. Since this is one of the positions where Black seems to struggle the most, we will present two distinct approaches: a solid one, and one that calling it razor-sharp would be an understatement.

### 7...bxc4!

The bishop on f1 lost contact with the c4-pawn, so it seems like a reasonable moment to take it.

### 8. Nf4

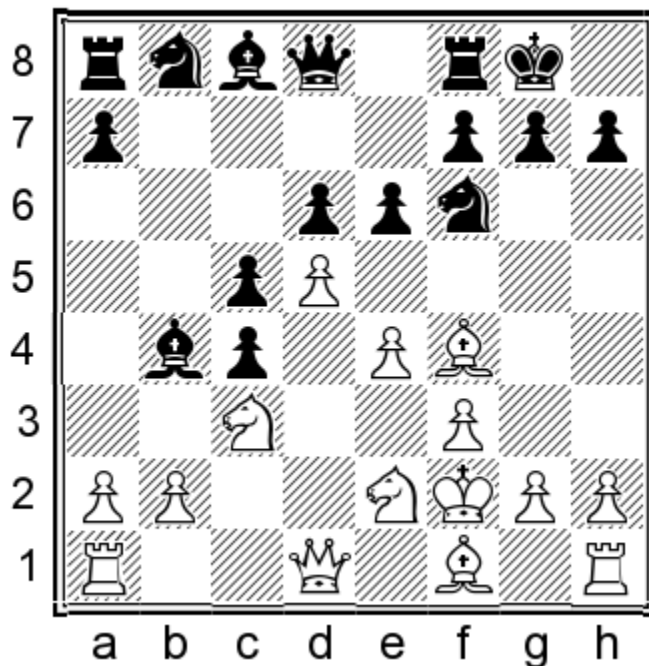
The justification behind sacrificing the pawn on c4.

8.a3 will be examined under the 7.a3 move order. Anything else is silly. For example:

After 8.dxe6? fxe6 Black has a huge advantage. If ...d6-d5 is played it's almost immediately game over.

8. ♖g3? exd5 9. exd5 0-0 looks terrible for White, and it is just as bad as it looks.

The unplayed 8. ♖f2N 0-0 9. ♗f4 is actually quite cunning.

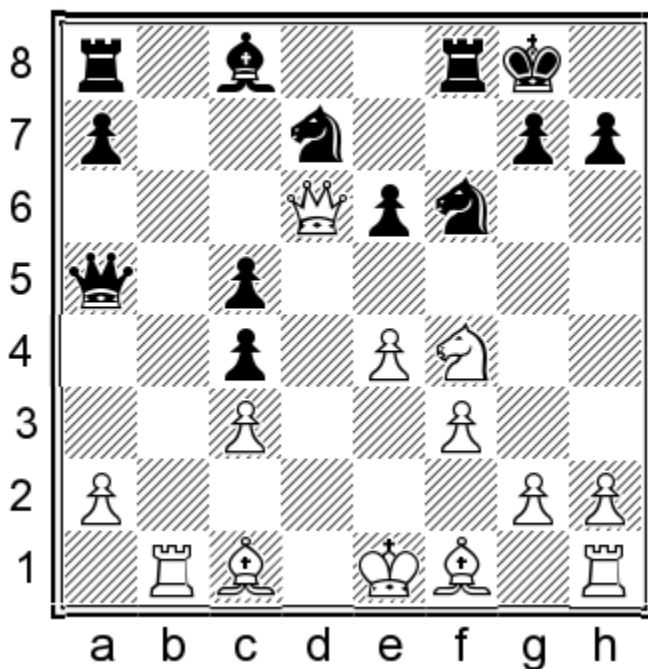


White is threatening d6 and provoking us into either taking on d5, when ♖c3xd5 happens, or push ...e6-e5 when the pressure is removed from the white structure. However, we can go for 9... ♗b7!?, threatening to take on d5, and after 10. dxe6 fxe6 (10...d5!? is also good.) 11. ♖xd6 ♖e8! the queen on d6 is lacking squares, and the white king remains vulnerable. The only move according to my machine is 12. ♗g3, when after 12... ♖c6 we're already threatening to win with ...♖a8-d8, and White needs to walk a tightrope not to collapse immediately.

Appropriate measures are taken with 8. ♖f4 so that White takes back twice with a piece if we take on d5. If we simply allow ♗f1xc4, then White will always get a positional advantage – we need to take concrete action.

We will study **B71)8...e5** and **B72)8...g5!?**.

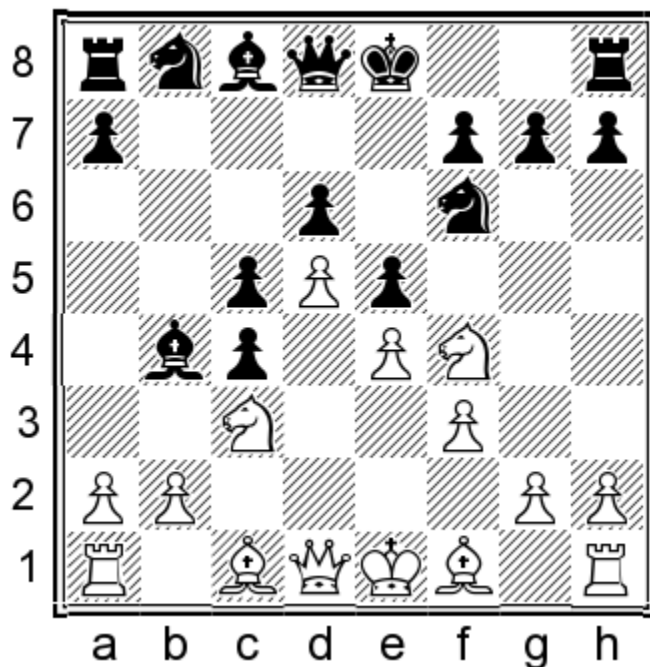
Despite committing to giving two complete solutions already, I cannot resist mentioning that 8...♙xc3+ 9.bxc3 ♚a5! is an interesting sideline, only played in two correspondence games according to my database. It is perfectly sound, and it could be an amazing weapon to have at your arsenal because of its surprise value. The main idea of our last move is to stop ♙f1xc4, which is the crucial move White needs to make in order to consolidate. The main engine line runs: 10.dxe6 fxe6 11.♖b1 0-0 12.♚d2! This is an only move for White. (After 12.♚xd6?? ♜d8 13.♚e5 ♞c6 Black wins.) 12...♞bd7! 13.♚xd6 White can capture on d6 since ...♞f8-d8 does not come with a tempo. (13.♞xe6 leads to a huge mess after 13...♞e8. )



13...♞b6 14.♙e3 ♚xc3+ 15.♚d2 ♚e5!N Cheparinov does not consider this move in his work for Modern Chess titled *Play4.f3 against the Nimzo-Indian Defence*. It does however make great sense to keep the queens on: all endgames are questionable for

Black due to White's great structure and bishop pair, and the white king is still on e1.

### B71) 8...e5



This is the solid and most popular option. We do White the favour of finally removing the pressure from the centre but, on the other hand, the knight is pushed back to e2, and it will be forced to move again, losing even more time.

### 9. ♞e2

There is no other square.

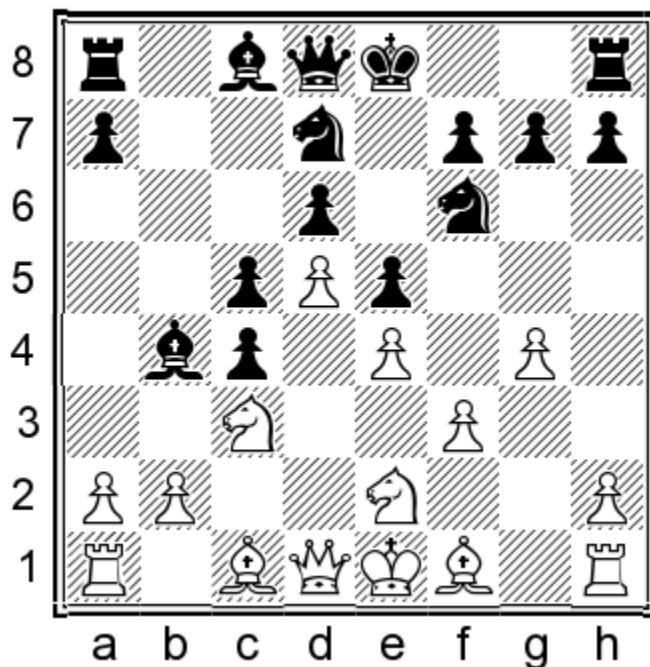
### 9... ♞bd7!

An important move. We're getting ready to defend the pawn on c4 with ... ♞d7-b6. What we truly value is not the pawn itself as extra material but how this pawn is able to restrict the white pieces. That is why we should try to hang on to it for as long as possible.

### 10. ♞g3

This is by far the most common.

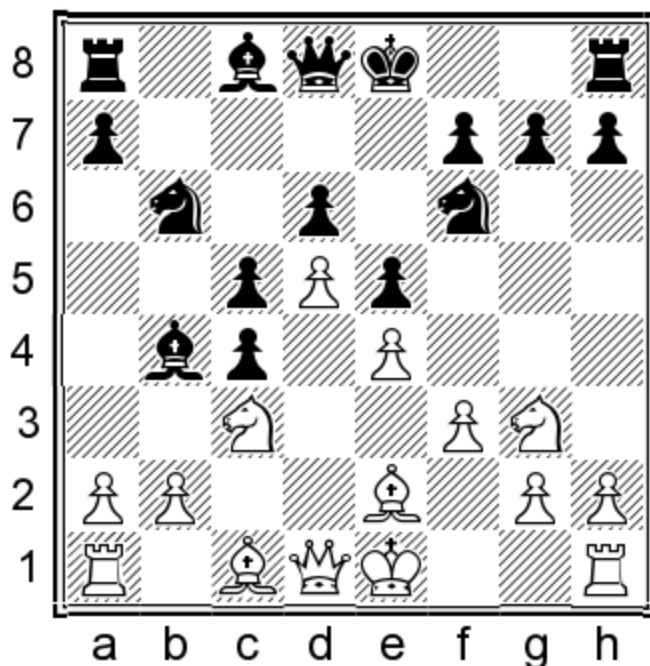
White's maximalist attempt of grabbing some space on the kingside before  $\text{N}e2-g3$  with  $10.g4$  should be met with:



$10...h5!$  Harassing the white structure before White gets to play  $\text{N}e2-g3$ . For example:  $11.g5$  ( $11.\text{N}g3!?$  was played in Vachier-Lagrave – So, Berlin 2022, but it would transpose to the "normal" move order after  $11...\text{N}b6!$   $12.g5 \text{N}h7$ .)  $11...\text{N}h7$   $12.h4 g6!$   $13.\text{N}g3 \text{N}b6$  Black is slightly better. Our next move is most likely going to be  $...f7-f6$ , followed by taking back on f6 with the queen.

**$10...\text{N}b6$   $11.\text{Q}e2$**

Nothing else has ever been played.



White's plan is both clever and quite simple. After we both castle, White will play f3-f4, opening lines for a kingside attack. In such situations, the b4-bishop and the b6-knight could prove to be terribly useless. However...

### 11...♞g8!!

A fantastic move which, when you think about it, makes a lot of sense. The only pawn break Black has is ...f7-f5, and the knight on f6 was getting in the way. It is time to put it on a better square. At the same time, it was White who gave us the right to move back and forth when he made all these moves with the g1-knight. The move was introduced to correspondence chess all the way back in 2017, and it wasn't long until players caught up and it became the mainline of this whole 7.♞e2 complex.

Let's see a typical example of the scenario I described in the note to White's 11th move: 11...0-0?! 12.0-0 ♘xc3 13.bxc3 ♔h8 14.a4 a5 15.f4! exf4 16.♙xf4 ♞g8 17.♞h5 f6 18.♚e1! ♛e7 19.♛g3 ♜d8

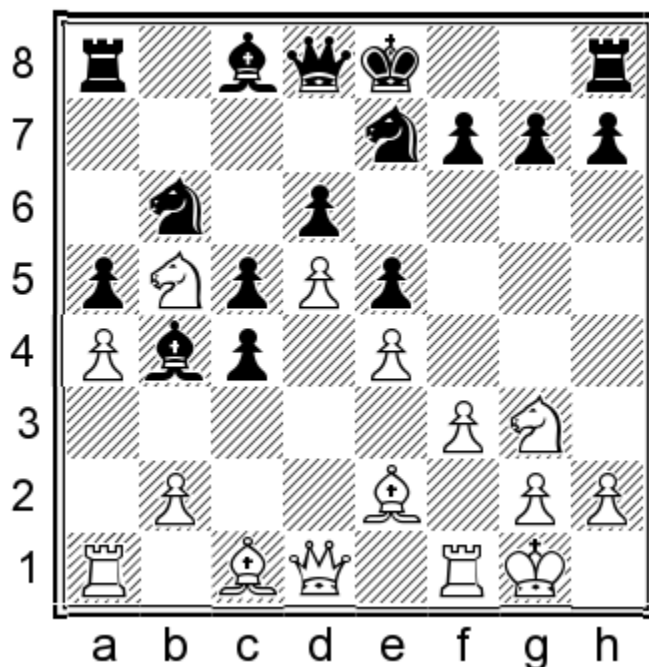
20.♖ab1! Black was on the ropes in Parkhov – Park, Stockholm 2022, and White went on to win quite convincingly.

## 12.0-0

This looks like the most normal.

12.♔c2 ♖e7 13.0-0 transposes back to the mainline.

12.a4 should be met with 12...a5! and after 13.0-0 ♖e7 White can try 14.♘b5!?, preparing f3-f4. (14.♔c2 0-0 leads us once again back to the mainline.)



14...♘g6! Stopping f3-f4 and demonstrating another reason behind our journey with the knight. A correspondence game continued:

15.♔c2 0-0 16.♘f5 ♕xf5 17.exf5 ♖e7 18.f6 ♘exd5 19.fxg7 ♖e8!

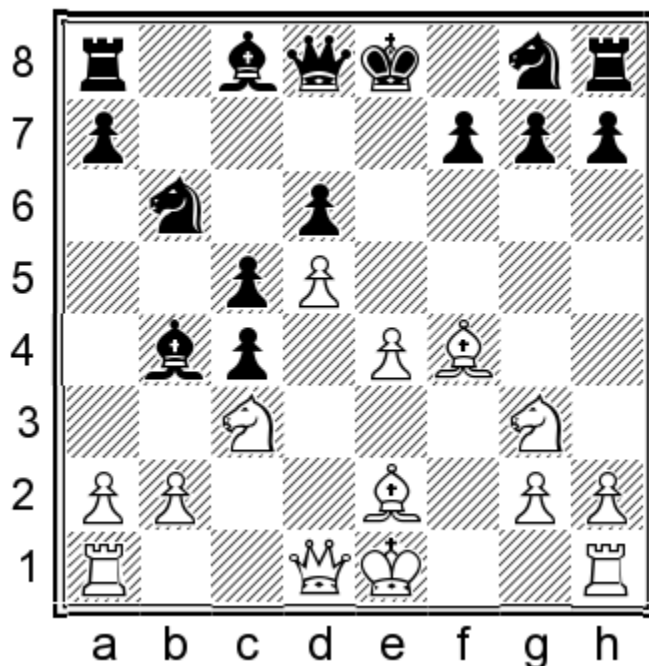
20.♖d1 ♖e6! With the idea of ...♖e6-g6, protecting the kingside. In Jones – Gutierrez Dopino, corr. 2021, White was the one having to prove the compensation.

When a player retreats, a logical reflex is to strike in the centre, so natural is:

12.f4

White is trying to punish us immediately for wasting time with the knight.

12...exf4 13.♔xf4



13...♞e7

Revealing yet another point behind 11...♞g8!!. The knight is on a path towards g6, from where it controls the important e5-square and harasses the f4-bishop.

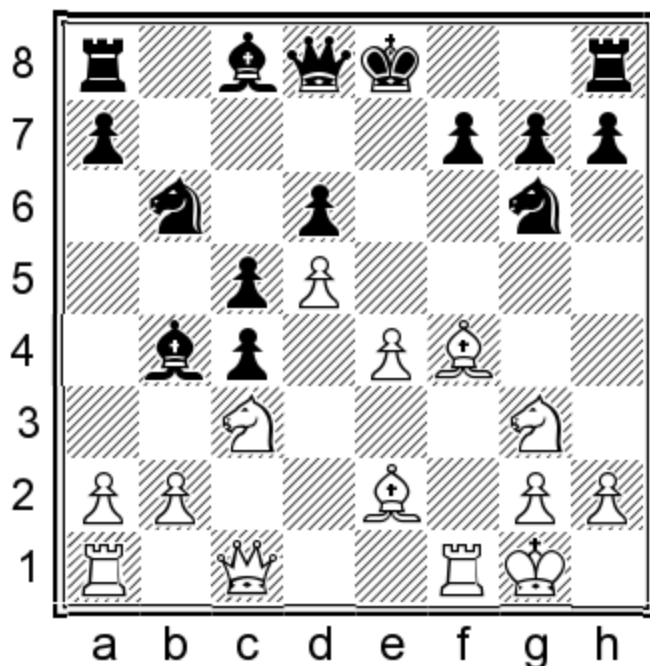
14.0-0

14.♔c1 ♞g6 15.0-0 is another way to the same position.

14...♞g6 15.♔c1!

Creating a cunning little threat.

Sadly for White, keeping the bishop, for example with 15.♔e3 is bad, as after 15...0-0 it is hard to come up with a single threat. Our position is just way too solid, and the knight about to appear on e5 will be a superstar. 16.♔d2 leads us to a position reached in Pantzar – De. Wagner, Internet (blitz) 2021, when Black should have played the new idea 16...♔d7!N, followed by ...♔d8-e7, ...♖a8-e8, and so on. We have a great position.



15...♗xc3!

An important move. White was threatening ♞c3-d1, leaving us with a useless bishop on b4 for the rest of the game.

16.♙xc3 ♞xf4!

This is also essential.

16...0-0?? would allow 17.♞h5 f6 18.♙g3! when we're a tempo short and totally busted.

17.♖xf4 0-0 18.♞h5 ♙g5!?

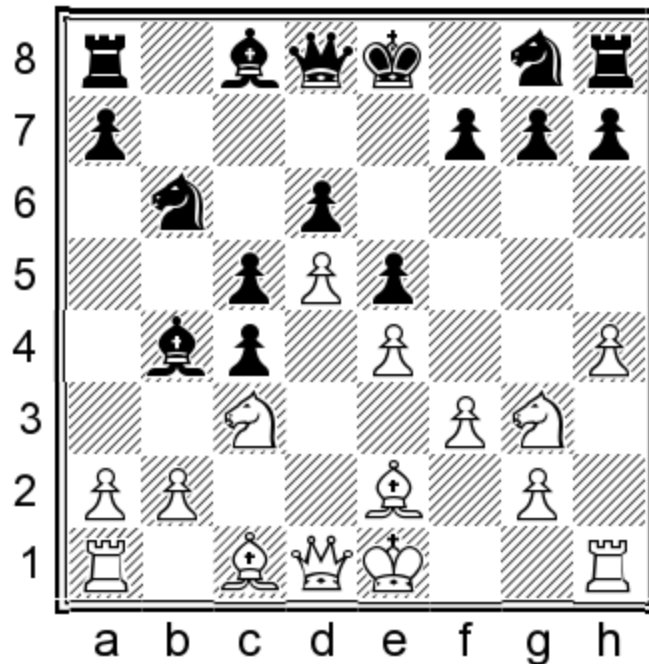
18...f6 is also possible, aiming to keep the queen on e7 instead of going out to g6.

19.h4 ♙g6 20.♖af1 f6

In Ruff – Hagner, Schwaebisch Gmuend 2023, the position remained balanced.

Cheparinov's recommendation is:

12.h4!?



It is not rare to see White trying to gain space on the kingside in these positions. However, this particular option doesn't seem to pose any great problems for Black, and we have a fair amount of interesting choices at our disposal.

12...♞e7

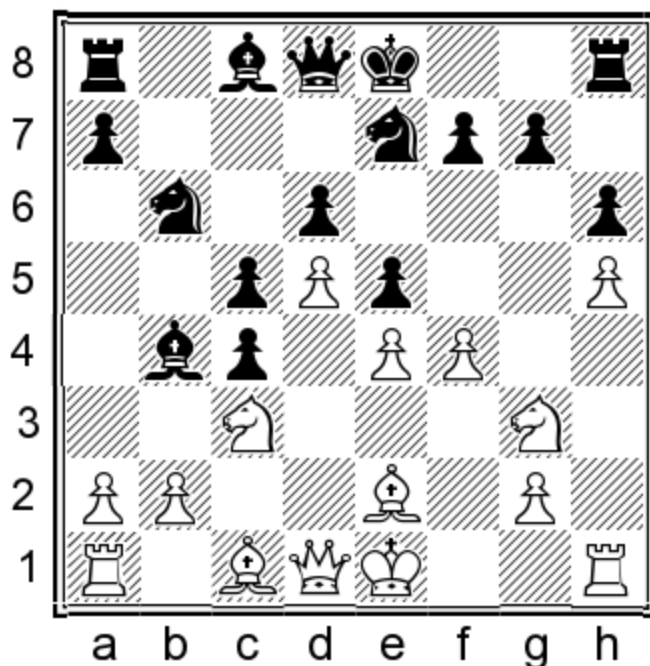
There is absolutely nothing wrong with continuing our plan.

12...f5!? and even 12...h6!? are also good possibilities for Black. I find this second option – passing the move back to the opponent – particularly intriguing. Against 13.h5? we can play a much-improved version of our dynamic try with 13...f5!. (At the same time, against 13.f4 as played in Shlyakhtenko – Kevlishvili, Los Angeles 2023, we have the funny 13...♞f6!, returning to where we came from and exploiting the fact that the g4-square has become a permanent weakness.

13.h5 h6

It is important to stop h5-h6, as that would completely surrender our dark-square control on the kingside.

14.f4



This was White's idea all along: stopping  $\text{N}e7-g6$  and then striking with  $f4$ .

14...f5!

Fighting fire with fire.

15.0-0 0-0 16.fxe5 dxe5 17.d6  $\text{N}c6$

The position is chaotic but balanced. The knight is coming to d4, and that would give Black a certain stability in the centre. White should play:

18.exf5

18. $\text{Q}xc4+??$   $\text{N}xc4$  19. $\text{Q}d5+$  was played in Anuj – Aronyak, New Delhi 2022, and Black's most accurate path to victory was

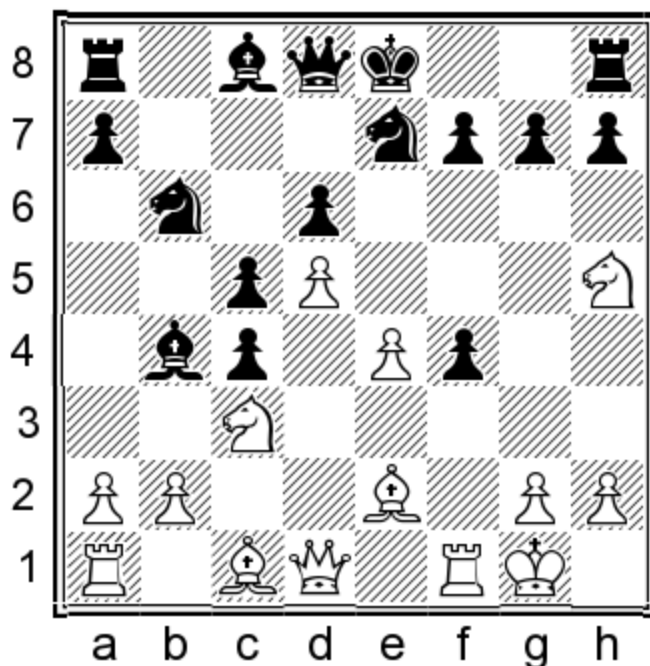
19... $\text{K}h7!$  20. $\text{Q}xc4$  f4, with a winning position.

18... $\text{N}d4$

We will take on d6 next, with a balanced position.

12... $\text{N}e7$  13. $\text{Q}c2$

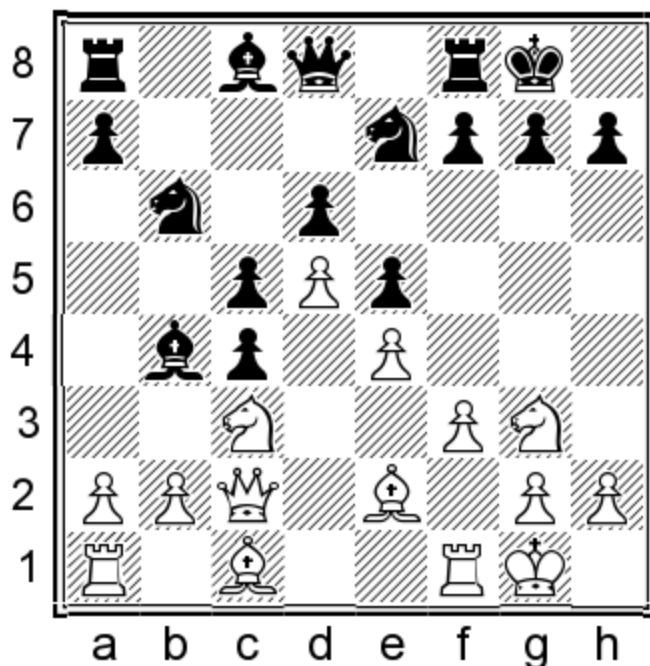
In this move order, 13.f4 exf4 gives White the extra option of 14. $\text{N}h5?!$ . (14. $\text{Q}xf4$  transposes to a position studied under 12.f4.)



Anyway, White is trying too hard to be smart. After 14...0-0 15.♔xf4 ♖g6 16.♔g3 in Suder – F. Svane, Internet (blitz) 2022, Black should have preferred 16...♔e7!N. Our idea is to continue with ...f7-f6, ...♔c8-d7, bring the rook from a8 into the game either on b8 or e8, and wait for the right moment to play ...♖g6-e5. Black is much better.

13.♖e1 looks weird, but White wants to go ♖g3-f1-e3 and win back the c4-pawn. These are way too many moves though: 13...0-0 14.♖f1 f5! Our thematic break. 15.♖e3 In Hua – Wojtaszek, Internet (blitz) 2020, it was best to go for 15...f4!N 16.♖xc4 ♖f6! The white king is in big trouble. Our idea is ...♖h6, ...♔d8-e8-h5 and checkmate.

**13...0-0**



### 14.a4

This was seen in a few games, one of them being Sarakenidis – Jorgensen, corr. 2017 – the first game to ever feature 11...♘g8!!.

14.♘d1 is the typical try of isolating our bishop on b4, but after 14...f5! our activity is way too much. We're threatening ...f5-f4, and after 15.exf5? ♘xf5 16.♘e3 ♘d4 White was already busted in Richter – Kollars, Internet (blitz) 2021.

14.f4?! exf4 15.♙xf4 ♘g6 is excellent for Black and similar to stuff we examined above.

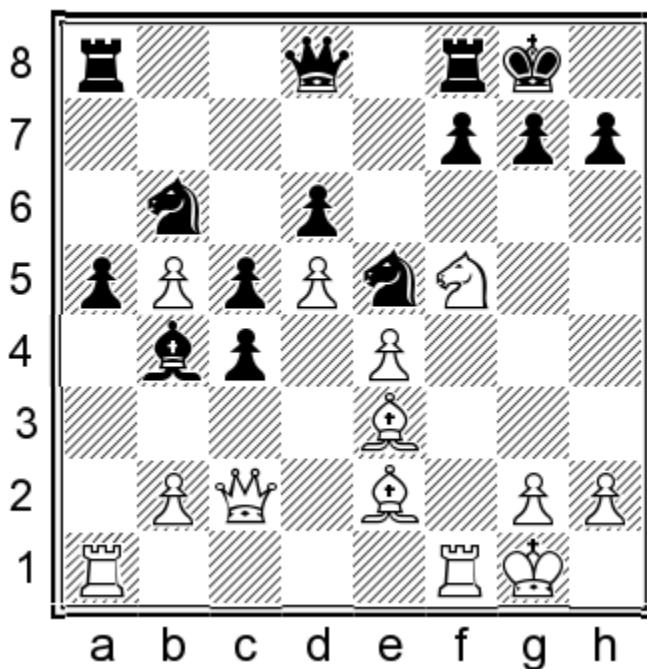
### 14...a5!N

14...♙a5!/? is also possible in this exact position, but I like being consistent, and it failed miserably in some of the aforementioned a2-a4 thrusts.

### 15.♘b5 ♙a6

Black will capture on b5 and play ...♔d7, with a slight advantage. A correspondence game (to which we have transposed) continued with:

**16.f4 ♖xb5 17.axb5 exf4 18.♙xf4 ♞g6 19.♙e3 ♞e5 20.♞f5**



**20...g6! 21.♞h6+ ♔g7 22.♞f2 ♞bd7 23.♞g4 ♞xg4 24.♙xg4 ♞e5**

We've been following Loeffler – Schmitt, email 2021. Black can be more than happy with the outcome of the opening.

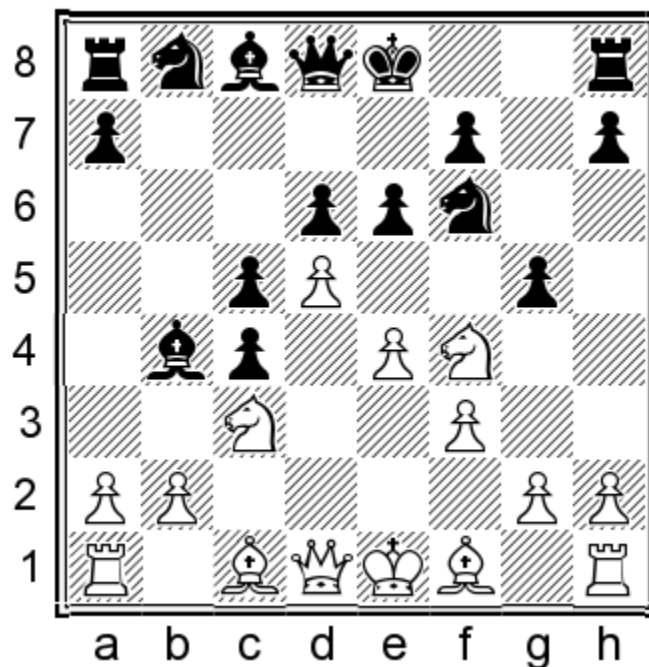
To conclude, 8...e5 gives Black some much-desired stability against this aggressive line. Playing closed positions like this one would not always be advisable, as against mediocre play White could gain an endless amount of space. However, in this case, there are concrete factors at play that make it possible for Black to play like this. It would be good to remember the following:

1) Before castling, we should play 11...♞g8!!, relocating the knight to e7 and getting ready to react with ...exf4 when White opens the position on the kingside with f3-f4.

2) Any attempt at dislodging our b6-knight with a2-a4 should be met with ...a7-a5. In rare cases, it would be fine to go ...♖b4-a5 as well, but it pays to be consistent. The b5-square might be weakened, but keeping the knight on b6 in place is much more important. If White lands a knight on b5, we can always eliminate it with ...♗c8-a6xb5.

I'm actually 100% satisfied with this solution against 7.♘e2, but I thought you should also be aware of the more dynamic alternative that is presented below. After all, 4.f3 should be considered one of the absolute mainlines against the Nimzo-Indian nowadays, so the ability to move around is important.

**B72) 8...g5!?**



This is the latest trend. It was first employed by the Greek IM Stavroula Tsolakidou in a rapid game back in 2018, but it took top players some time to work out the details and start employing it regularly.

The main idea is the same, as with 8...e5. We kick the knight back to where it came from, gaining valuable time. What is profoundly different, is that in this case we do not relinquish the pressure we're exerting against the white centre while opting for a solid structure. In contrast, we accept an obvious weakening of our kingside, in return getting active counterplay in the centre and against the white king.

### **9.♞e2**

This is forced.

9.dxe6? was tried against one of our students from the Killer Chess Training Academy, but this sacrifice is unsound. The game went: 9...gxf4 10.exf7+ ♔xf7 11.♙xf4 d5! 12.e5 ♞h5 13.♙d2 ♚h4+ 14.g3 ♞xg3 15.hxg3 ♚xh1 16.♞xd5 ♙h3 17.e6+ ♙xe6 18.♙xb4 cxb4 19.♚d4 ♚xf3 20.♙e2 ♞c6 White resigned in Kanli – Putnam, Charlotte 2022.

9.♞h3? was tried in Piesik – Klimkowski, Leba 2023, and Black got a good position by playing 9...g4. However, it would be a lot stronger to go for 9...exd5!N when taking back on d5 and allowing us to take on h3 would be a disaster. Sadly for White, 10.♙xg5?! d4 is even worse.

### **9...exd5**

We want to give White a weakness on d5 and open the e-file so that we can harass the white king.

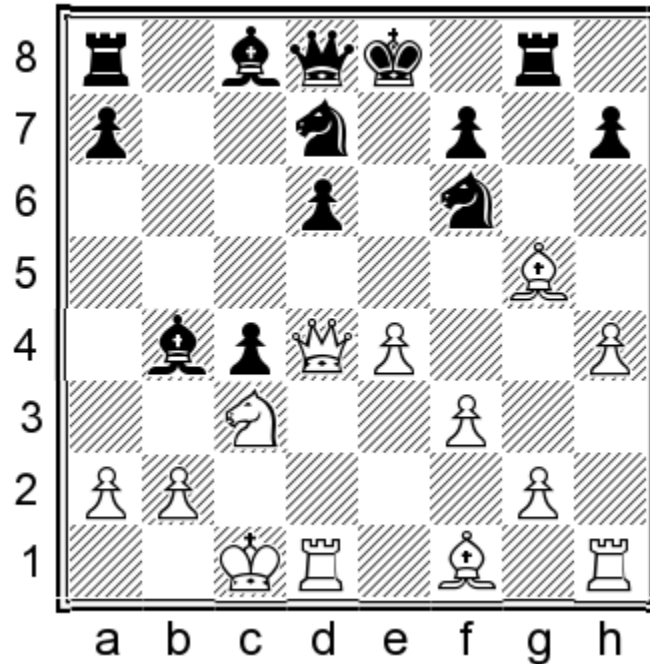
### **10.exd5**

We're threatening ...d5-d4, so White doesn't have much of a choice.

There is only one possible alternative:

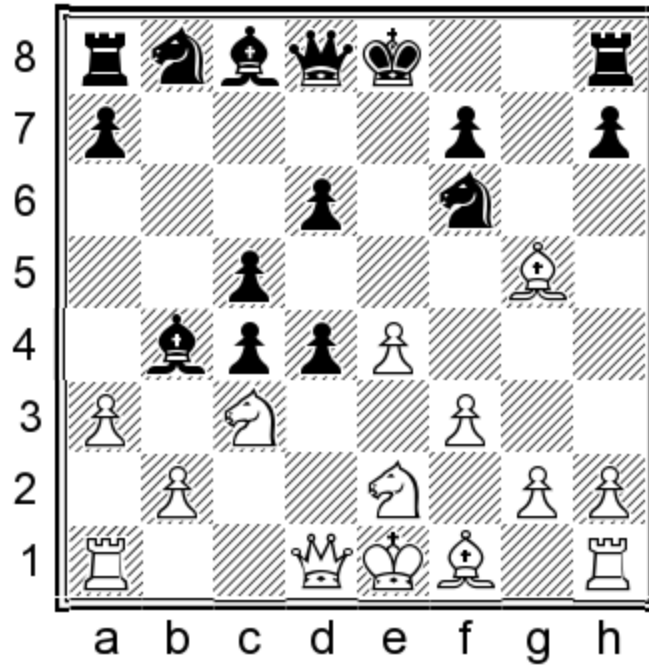
10.♙xg5?! d4 11.a3!

11.  $\text{Nxd4?!}$  N doesn't give White nearly enough counterplay. For example: 11...  $\text{cxd4}$  12.  $\text{Qxd4}$   $\text{Nbd7}$  13.  $\text{O-O-O}$  (13.  $\text{Qxc4}$   $\text{Rg8!}$  is winning for Black as well.) 13...  $\text{Rg8!}$  14.  $\text{h4}$



14...  $\text{Qb6!!}$  The cleanest. White should objectively trade queens, which is obviously a disaster. The point is 15.  $\text{Qxf6}$  runs into 15...  $\text{Qc5!}$  16.  $\text{Qd5}$   $\text{Nxf6}$  17.  $\text{Qxa8}$   $\text{Ke7!}$  and the queen on a8 is trapped.

Back to 11.a3!:



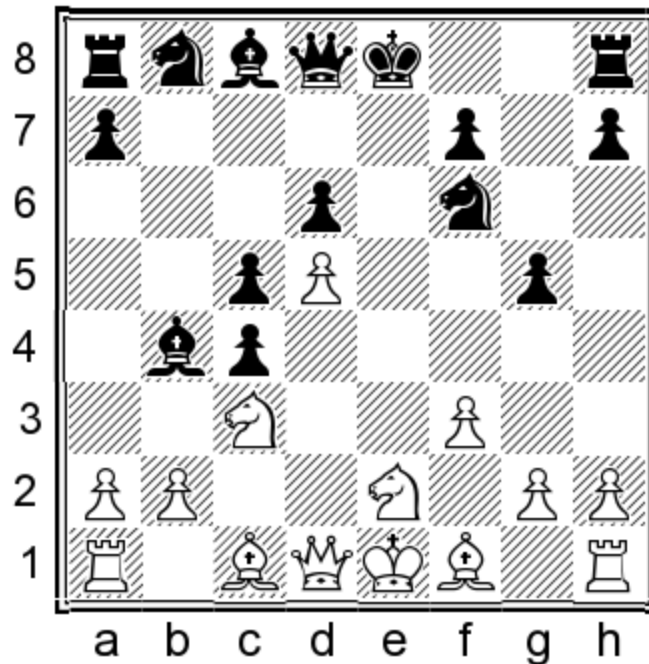
This was tried in Galic – Kuljasevic, Mali Losinj 2021. White’s last move might have been smart, but Black had a way to an advantage nonetheless:

11...♙xc3+!N 12.bxc3 d3 13.♘f4 ♞bd7

White has some pressure against our kingside, but our pawns are extremely strong. It would be tempting to try and take the one on c4, but it meets with a spectacular refutation:

14.♙a4?? ♞xe4!! 15.♙xd8 d2+ 16.♙d1 ♞xc3+

Black wins.



**10...♔e7!**

An important move. There is no time to defend the g5-pawn. We activate our queen and create the threat of taking on c3, ruining the white structure and disrupting the harmony among the white pieces.

10...h6? 11.♘g3 was played in Arabidze – Tsolakidou, St. Petersburg (rapid) 2018, and two more games afterwards.

Unfortunately, this is just bad for Black – there is not enough dynamism to justify the weaknesses. That is a common narrative surrounding such razor-sharp positions: losing one tempo could prove to be fatal.

**11.♙xg5**

This is clearly the most logical. Why not take the free pawn while developing a piece? Nevertheless, White has also tried two other moves:

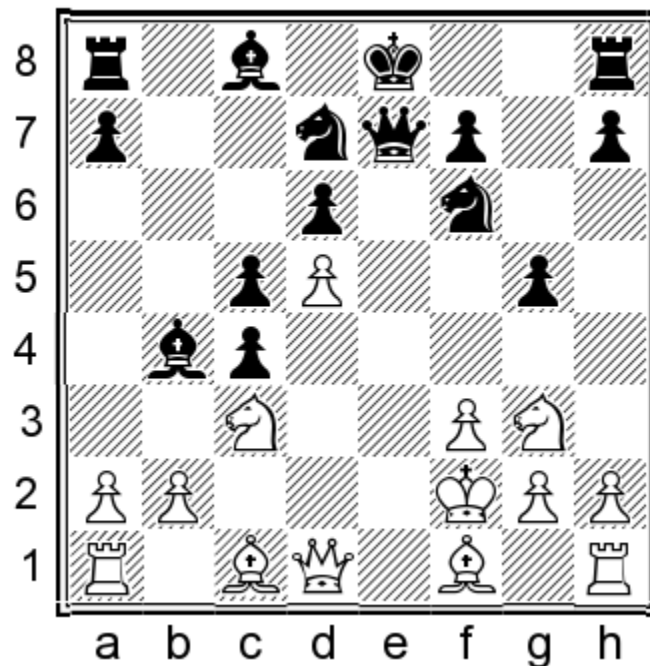
11.♔f2?!

This has been played once by Mamedyarov and then once more by Ivanchuk. Removing the king from the e-file comes with the idea of stopping our planned ...♖b4xc3 since the e2-knight is unpinned and White can simply take back with ♘e2xc3, getting a harmonious setup. At the same time, White is hoping for a quick ♘e2-g3 and ♗f1xc4, managing to develop the always troublesome kingside. Nevertheless, I would be happy to see it as Black. One key point to understand is that White will now have a hard time developing the c1-bishop as taking on g5 would allow ...♘f6-g4+.

11...♘bd7!

We need to use the time we have to protect our valuable pawn on c4.

12.♘g3



This was seen in both Ivanchuk – So, Internet rapid 2022 and Mamedyarov – Ding Liren, Internet blitz 2021.

12...♘e5!N

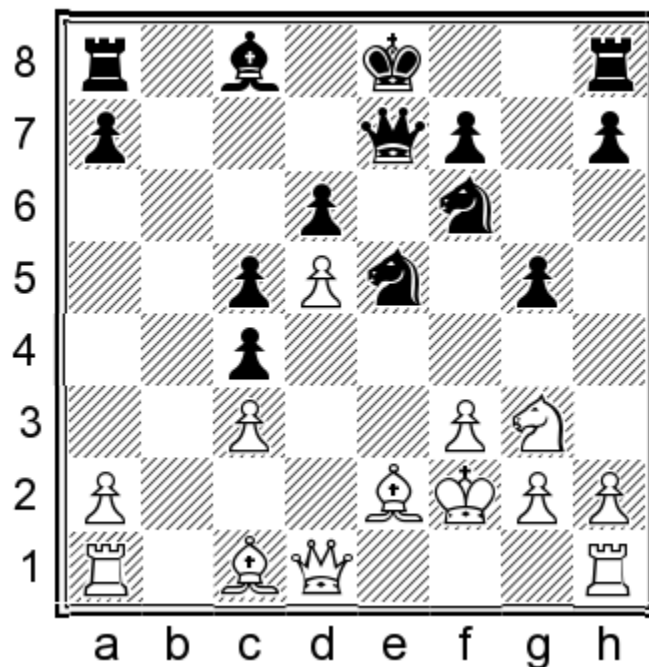
The knight is a beast on this square. The safely "protected" g5-pawn guarantees that White will not be able to oust us with f3-f4 any time soon.

For some reason, both supergrandmasters playing with the black pieces played 12...♞b6?!

13.♙e2

As we said, 13.♙xg5?? loses immediately to 13...♞fg4+.

13...♙xc3 14.bxc3



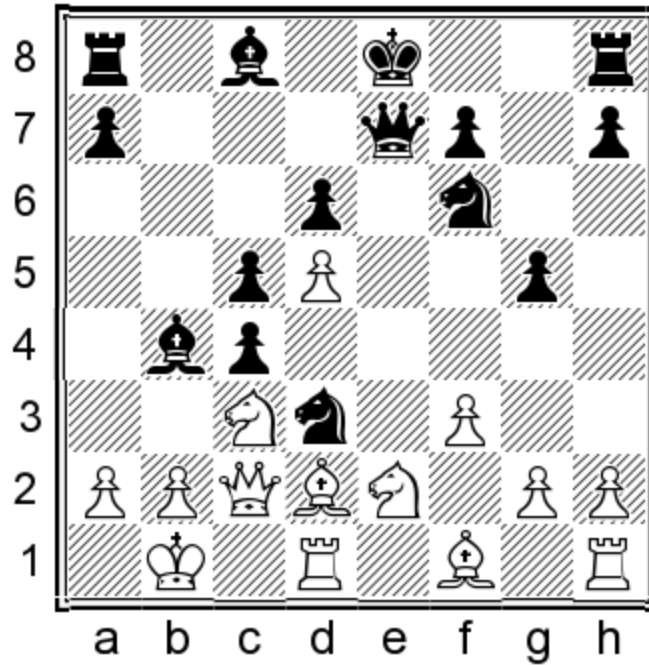
14...h5!

Our initiative is growing. As the saying goes, we have both the pawn and the compensation.

11.♙d2!?

In contrast with the line above, this is a serious alternative. The idea is to play ♙c2 and castle queenside without allowing us to ruin the structure when taking on c3. Of course, this comes at the cost of allowing the g5-pawn to live.

11...♞bd7 12.♙c2 ♞e5 13.0-0-0 ♞d3+ 14.♙b1



14...♗f5!?

A sound but also practically appealing choice. Terrorizing the white king and queen on the b1-h7 diagonal looks so much more tempting than trying to grab material.

Taking the bait with 14...♞f2 is also perfectly fine according to the engine, which boldly suggests 15.♖e1 ♞d3 with a draw by repetition. However, White can break this repetition with a couple of exchange sacrifices that I see no reason to allow. I also see no reason to "beg" for a draw instead of trying to seize the initiative.

15.♗xg5!

The only move that keeps the balance. Anything else is answered with ...♗g6, with at least a slight advantage for Black.

15...♖g8!

15...♗g6?! allows 16.♞e4! with an advantage for White.

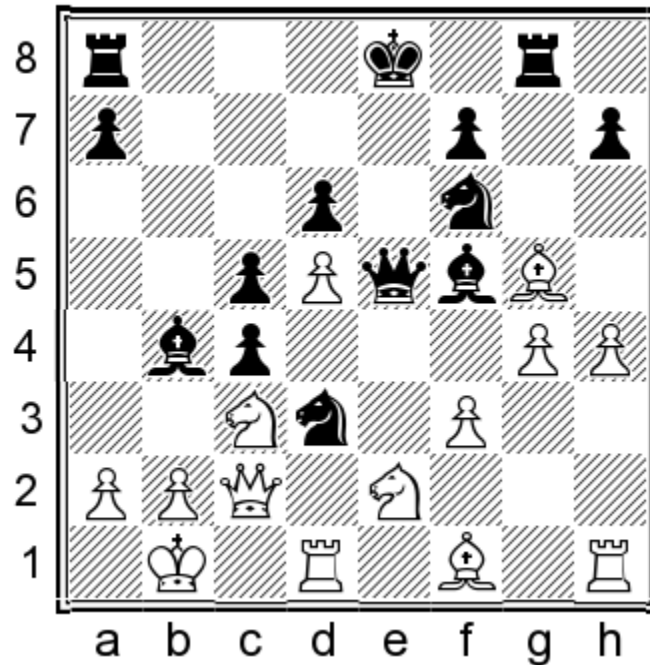
16.h4 ♔e5!?

With one move, Black simultaneously defends the bishop on f5 and walks out of the pin on the h4-d8 diagonal.

16...♔g6!? also works, as the inclusion of the last moves favours Black.

17.g4

The only move yet again.



17...♖xg5!

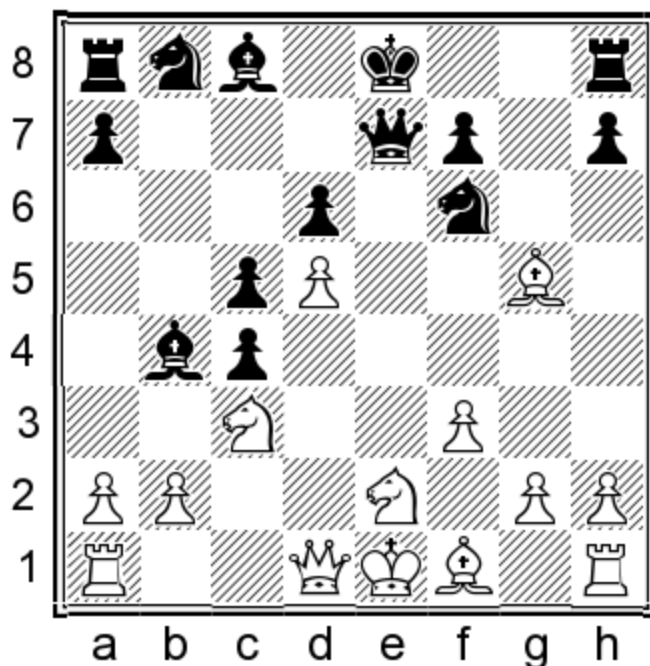
Fighting fire with fire. With one move we manage to both kill White's best piece and create a safe square for our bishop on g6.

18.hxg5 ♔g6 19.♔a1

Forced as ...♞f2 was threatened. So far we have been following the game Puranik – Abdusalimov, Sitges 2023. This is a critical position where Black played 19...♔g5 which led to an exciting battle with chances for both sides. However, it seems that it would have been slightly accurate to continue with:

19...♞f2!N 20.♙a4+ ♞d7 21.f4 ♚e3

There is a lot of craziness up ahead, but I can assure you that Black is objectively fine.

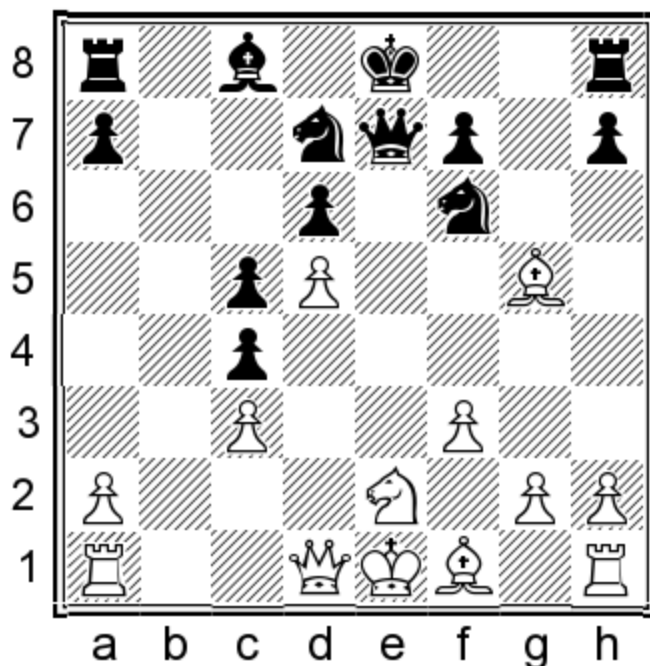


**11...♗xc3+!**

The point behind our previous move. By including this move we make sure that the white structure gets ruined. This also somewhat worsens the future of the knight on e2 and ensures that the white king cannot dare to castle queenside. But wait, if the king cannot go to the queenside, and ♔e1-f2 is unavailable because of ...♞f6-g4+, then what is the white king going to do? Well, stay in the centre, that's what His Majesty has to do – that's pretty much the whole point behind the 8...g5!/? line!

To illustrate the point made above, the immediate 11...♞bd7? fails miserably after 12.♙c2 ♞e5 13.0-0-0! and White is almost winning already. This is a turbo-charged version of the 11.♗d2 line, with the white bishop having the pawn on g5 already instead of sitting passively on d2.

**12.bxc3 ♞bd7**



The knight needs to quickly head towards e5 to threaten the check on d3. Our position is all about dynamic counterplay. Give White one tempo to consolidate and the situation can turn around completely.

### 13. ♔d2!

This is both the most logical and White's only move to keep the balance. The idea is to support the g5-bishop so that the king can finally move to f2 and unpin the e2-knight. As a bonus, the d1-square is vacated, so the king could also go there if needed. Of course, f2 would be preferable, but having alternatives never hurt anyone.

White has also tried protecting the g5-bishop with a pawn instead of the queen: 13.h4? ♞e5 14. ♔f2 h6! 15. ♙xf6 ♚xf6 16. ♞g3 This was Suleymanli – Narayanan, Warsaw (blitz) 2021, and Black could have played 16... ♜b8!N, threatening ... ♜b8-b2+, with a huge initiative.

Another idea would be to give up the bishop before moving the king to f2:

13. ♖xf6?

This surrenders the dark squares too soon. The strong Greek grandmaster Nikolas Theodorou was lucky enough to face this move twice.

13... ♔xf6!

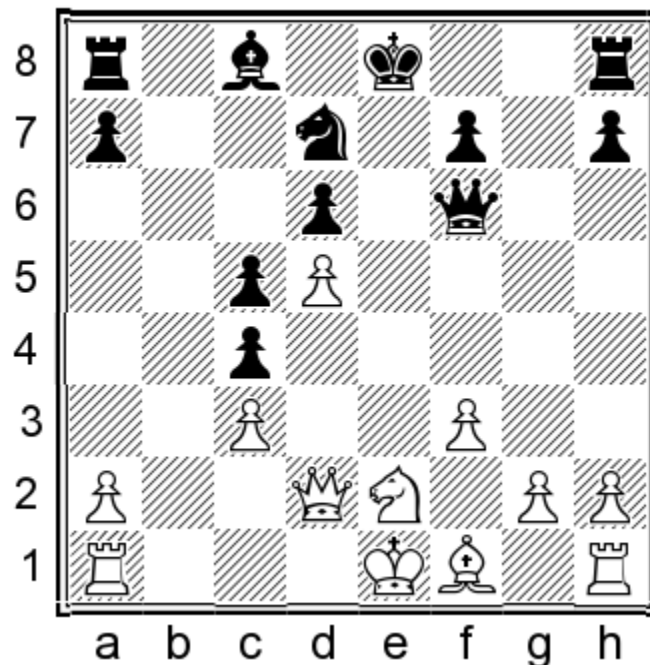
We do not need to keep pinning the e2-knight – ♔e1-f2 is already possible anyway. It is more important to hit the pawn on c3 and keep our knight on the right trajectory. Our plan is still ... ♞d7-e5-d3+.

14. ♔d2

White's best try.

14. ♞g3? ♔xc3+ 15. ♔f2 was played in Sidiropoulos – Theodorou, Kavala 2021, and the cleanest way to victory would have been

15... ♖b8! introducing another piece into the attack, with devastating consequences for the white monarch.



The pawn on c3 is defended, so White's idea becomes to continue with  $\text{N}e2-g3$ , introducing the threat of  $\text{N}g3-e4$ , and getting closer to completing kingside development.

14... $\text{R}g8!!\text{N}$

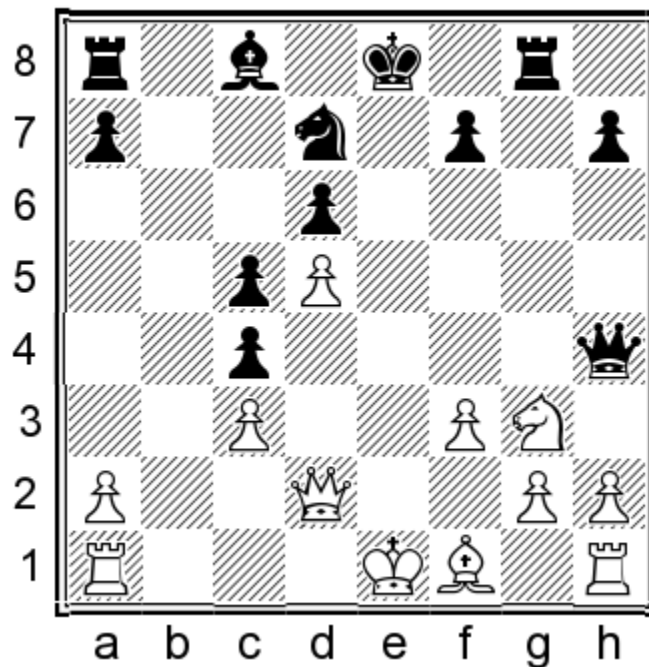
A cunning move, cementing our advantage.

The normal 14... $\text{N}e5$  15. $\text{N}g3$   $\text{R}f5$  16. $\text{Q}f4$   $\text{N}g6$  17. $\text{Q}d2$   $\text{N}e5$  18. $\text{Q}f4$   $\text{N}g6$  19. $\text{Q}xc4$  0-0 was also fine for Black in Sevian – Theodorou, Internet (rapid 2023, but the text move is much stronger).

15. $\text{N}g3$

White's best try is 15. $\text{Q}f4$  but we have many good ways to play, for example 15... $\text{R}g5!?$  16. $\text{Q}xf6$   $\text{N}xf6$  17. $\text{N}f4$   $\text{R}a6$  18. $\text{R}d1$   $\text{R}b8$  and we're obviously the side pressing.

15... $\text{Q}h4!$



The point of our previous move. White needs to do something awkward to protect the g3-knight. In fact, best is:

16.0-0-0!  $\text{R}xg3$  17. $\text{Q}e1+$   $\text{K}f8$  18. $\text{Q}xg3$   $\text{Q}f6$

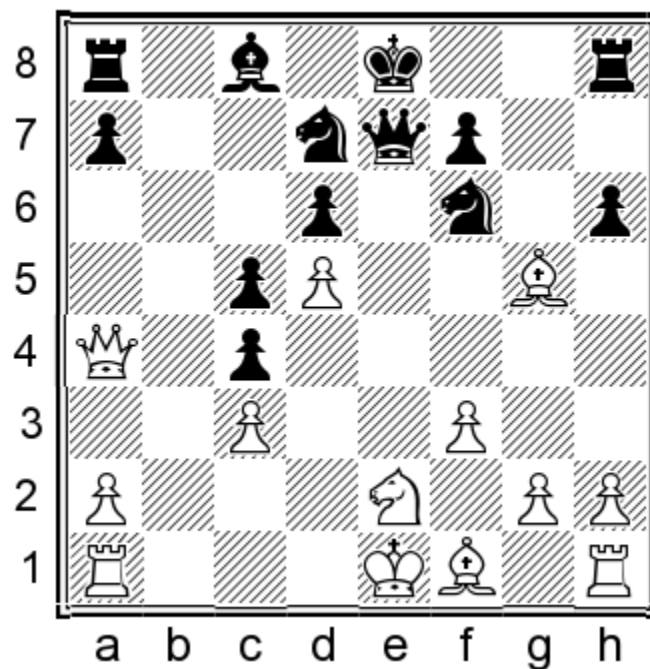
White was smart in forcing us to invest an exchange, but the king on c1 is still in terrible shape. The engine claims White can just about

hold it together with precise play, but I would not like to be sitting on the white side.

13. ♔a4?

This is a move Frederik Svane has faced twice, one time in a classical over-the-board game and one time a few months later in an online blitz game against Daniel Naroditsky. In both of those games he went for the immediate 13... ♖b8, but we can improve on his play with:

13... h6! N



14. ♕d2

14. ♕xf6? ♔xf6 is an even worse line for White than the one mentioned above, which featured the same position with the white queen on d1 and the black pawn on h7 instead of h6. That's because the queen is terribly out of play on a4. White's best option is to go back with 15. ♔c2 and this is a clearly worse square compared to putting the queen on d2. (15. ♔xc4 gives us a strong initiative after 15... ♞e5.

Maybe more surprising is that 14.♔h4? is even worse than taking on f6. The

e3-square is unprotected, and the bishop is weird on h4. After 14...0-0! Black is already objectively winning. For example, 15.♔xc4 ♖e5 16.♔e4 ♜e8! and White can resign.

14...♜b8!

This is just an improved version compared to the immediate 13...♜b8. To illustrate:

15.♔f2 0-0!

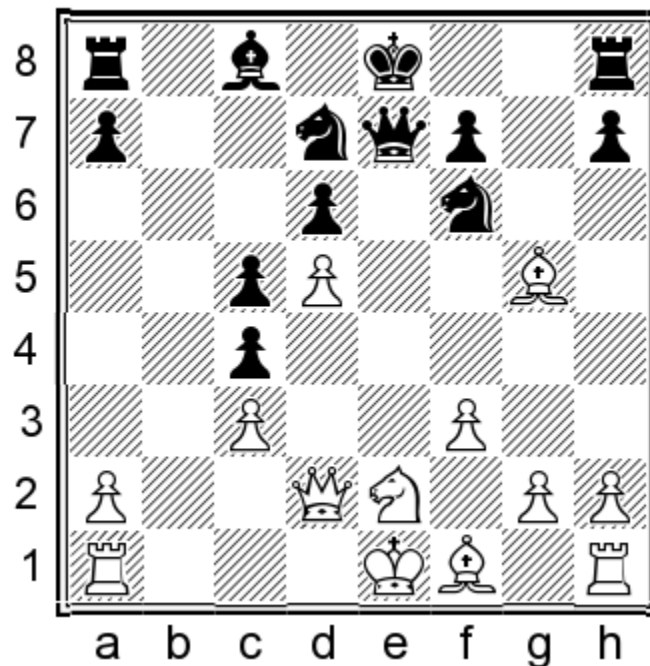
Black has a huge initiative.

16.♔c2

16.♔xh6? loses to 16...♘g4+ 17.fxg4 ♔h4+.

16...♘xd5 17.♘g3 ♔h4 18.♔g1 ♘7f6

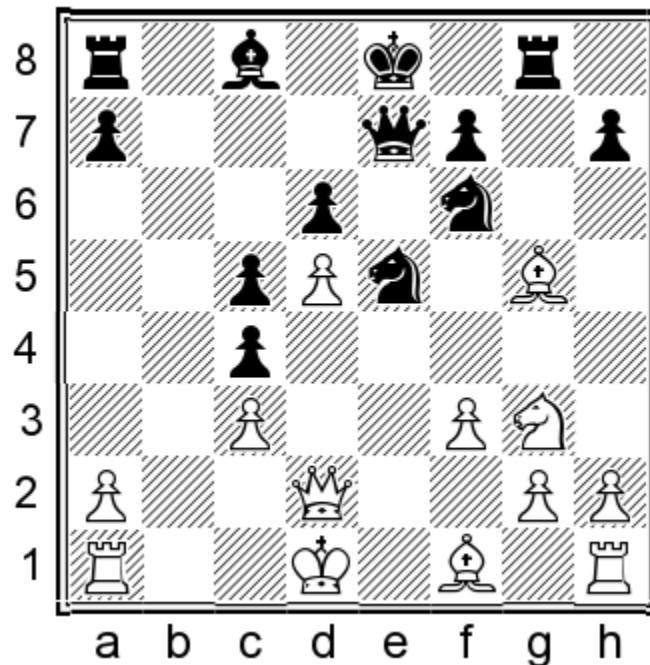
White is struggling to find any useful moves and a way to untangle.



13...♜g8!

We stop ♔e1-f2 by introducing the threat of ...♜g8xg5.

13...♞e5!? is also playable but gives White a bit more freedom. However, in such chaotic positions that could also be interpreted as extra room for errors, and the only game in my database featured: 14.♔d1?! (White can also go for 14.♙xf6 ♚xf6 15.♞g3 transposing to the Sevian – Theodorou game mentioned above, or 14.♔f2 trying to induce 14...♞g8 15.h4 with a transposition to our mainline.)  
 14...♞g8 15.♞g3



In Erigaisi – Sargsyan, Ciutadella de Menorca 2022, Black played 15...♞b8 and got a fine game, but I wouldn't be able to resist: 15...♞xg5!? 16.♚xg5 ♞xd5 With excellent compensation for the exchange.

### 14.h4

14.♔d1 ♞b6 15.♞g3 was Moranda – Baum, Bydgoszcz 2023, when once again I would suggest 15...♞xg5!?, exploiting the weird position of the king on d1.

### 14...♞e5

14...h6 transposes to the mainline after 15.♙xh6 ♘h5 16.♚f2 ♘e5.

### 15.♚f2

Nothing else has ever been played, and that's probably quite normal. If a white player gets all the way to this position there is a good probability of them knowing a thing or two about the position.

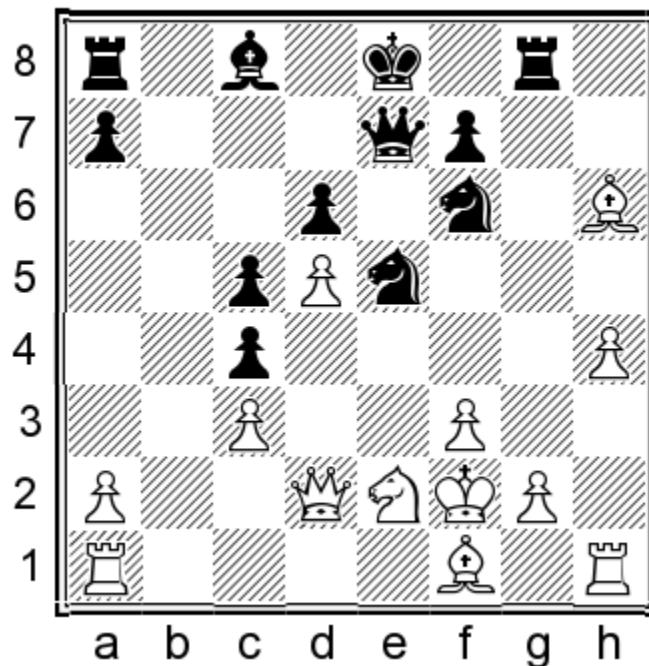
The text move allows a check on d3, but 15.♚d1?N is much worse, as after 15...h6! 16.♙xh6 ♘h5 the white king cannot hide on g1, and one small check could force checkmate.

### 15...h6!

Breaking the pin and clearing the g-file.

15...♘d3+? is mistimed and after 16.♚g1 ♘e5? 17.♘g3 Black was completely lost in Sargsyan – Petrosyan, Jermuk 2022.

### 16.♙xh6



### 16...♘h5!

Stopping ♖e2-g3, bringing the knight closer to the attack, removing the possibility that White could renew the pin with ♗h6-g5, and clearing the h4-d8 diagonal for the queen. This is a lovely multipurpose move.

16...♘d3+ is now also possible, but I much prefer the text move.

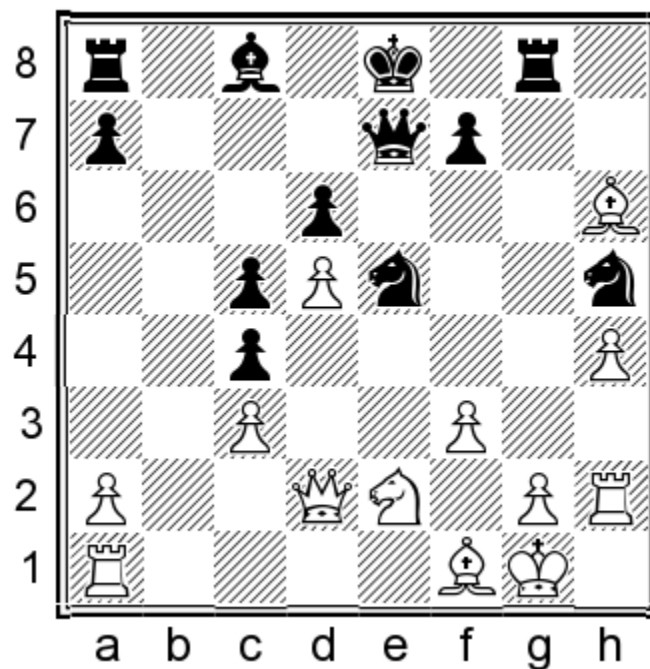
**17.♖h2!**

Moving the rook away from the threat created by a knight landing on g3 so that White can prepare ♖e2-f4.

17.♖f4?? ♘g3 is awkward for White: 18.♗e2 (18.♖h2 loses to 18...♘e4+! 19.fxe4 ♘g4+. ) 18...♖b8! It's not like the h1-rook can move, so what's the rush to take it? Our attack is way too strong. (18...♘xh1+? 19.♖xh1 ♖b8 20.g4 is actually fine for White.)

Now we can force a draw if we want with:

**17...♘d3+ 18.♔g1 ♖e5!**



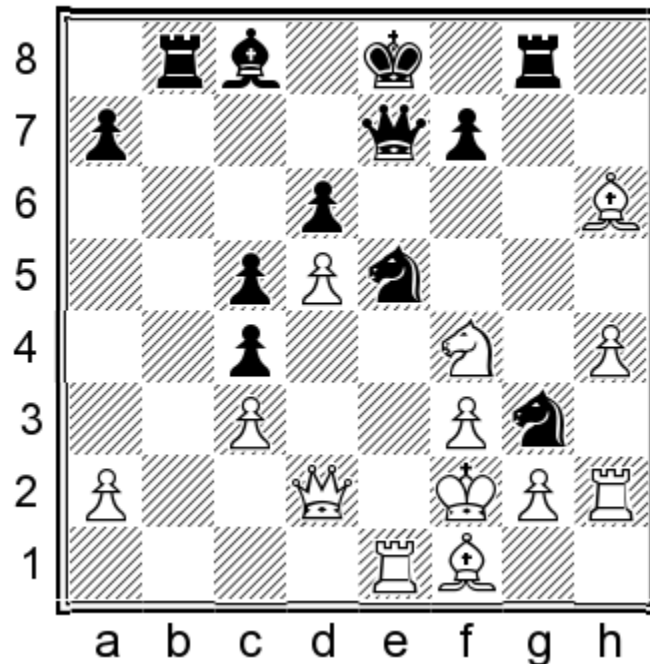
**19.♔f2!**

White should repeat moves, and that's exactly what happened in Xu Xiangyu – Lu Shanglei, Nanjing 2023. The rook is weird on h2, and we have a lasting initiative against any try to keep the game going.

For example, 19.♔h1? ♖b8! is a large advantage for Black.

If we want to keep playing on the other hand, we can. For example:

**19...♖b8!?** **20.♘f4 ♘g3** **21.♖e1**



**21...♔d8!**

Our king is much safer away from the e-file. The position is extremely complicated, and the engine returns its typical favourite 0.00 evaluation. Anything can happen.

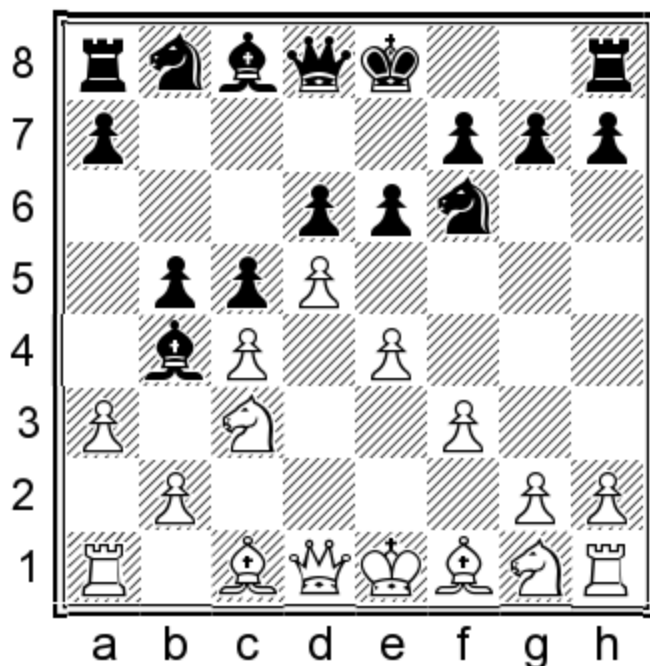
To conclude, the dynamic possibilities associated with 8...g5!? are immense, and it is a serious way to combat the 7.♘e2 mainline. Compared to 8...e5, Black takes larger risks but also puts White under more pressure. In such razor-sharp situations, chances for an error are significantly higher.

The main line with 11.♔xg5 seems to be by far the most important option to memorize. In that case, it is key to remember that we must immediately capture on c3 followed by a quick mobilization of our pieces with ...♞bd7, ...♖g8 and ...♞e5. Later on, the plan might be to forcibly open the g-file with another pawn sacrifice on h6, in order to break the pin and create the option of ...♞f6-h5.

These are largely the main ideas we should remember, but in such sharp lines my best advice would be to go through the material multiple times. This is a necessary step to becoming confident of our knowledge, as the character of the game is so chaotic that we can easily get confused.

Regarding 7.♞e2 as a whole, since we offer two options, I think that choosing one ultimately depends on your style of play or the type of game you want on a particular day. Personally, I like them both and I would make my choice based on the style of my opponent rather than my own. Against more solid players, the option of 8...g5!? must be an absolute nightmare for them, while against more dynamic players, I would play 8...e5 and cool down the game before things become too exciting.

**B8) 7.a3**



This line has been played quite a bit, and the idea is quite simple. White wants to include a2-a3 and ...♗b4-a5, and claim that in some particular place in our analysis presented in this chapter this inclusion could be beneficial for White. This sounds confusing, and it could seem like a daunting task at first to compare everything and make sure that this inclusion does not affect our position – it has been a long chapter after all. However, it is not as complicated as it may seem at first.

There is only one line we've analysed where this inclusion could be detrimental to our approach, and we've already mentioned it. It was the 7.♕d3 line when after 11...♕e6! the white queen could not take the rook on a8 (see page 86). In almost every other case this inclusion is beneficial for us, as the bishop is not blocking our potential pressure down the b-file and the b3-square could potentially become a relevant weakness. For example, the lines involving White releasing the tension with dxe6 are a bit different,

but that is mostly beneficial for our cause. Enough talking, let's dive right in and examine them one by one.

**7...♗a5**

7...♗xc3+ is also possible, but by choosing this our repertoire would become quite confusing since in other instances this capture is suboptimal. Let's not care on which move and which position White played a2-a3, and just retreat to a5 automatically. This approach allows us to easily face every possible transposition (cases where White chooses a different 7th move but plays a2-a3 at some point afterwards).

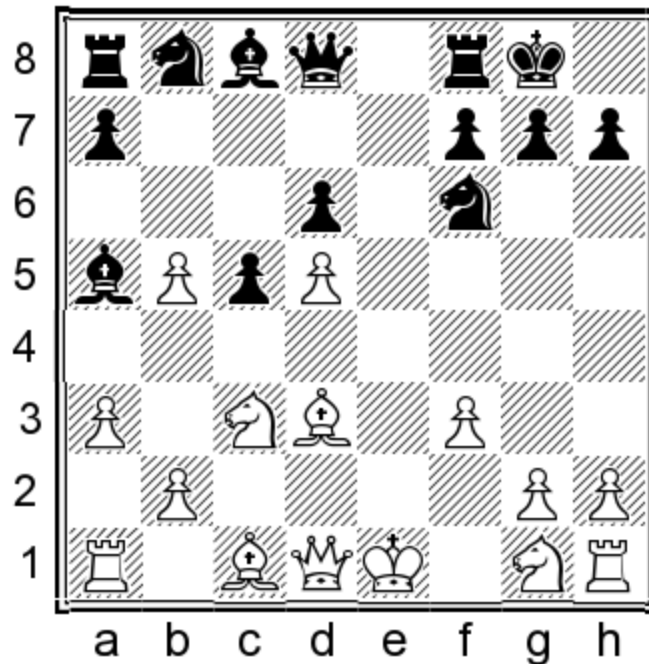
We will examine closely: **B81) 8.dxe6 and B82) 8.♗d3** .

We will not lose any time reanalysing 8.♗e3? and 8.♗g5?, which are as terrible as they were without this inclusion.

In the event of a capture on b5, our play is similar to 7.cxb5. It is not terrible for White, but it gives Black a lasting initiative.

8.cxb5 exd5 9.exd5 0-0 10.♗d3

We reach a position where I would suggest deviating from our method of playing against 7.cxb5:



10...c4!

This is even stronger here compared to the similar position with the pawn on a2 and the bishop on b4. There are other good moves, but I like the concept of opening up the game and quickly bringing our pieces out. The material investment does not matter much, as long as White stays undeveloped.

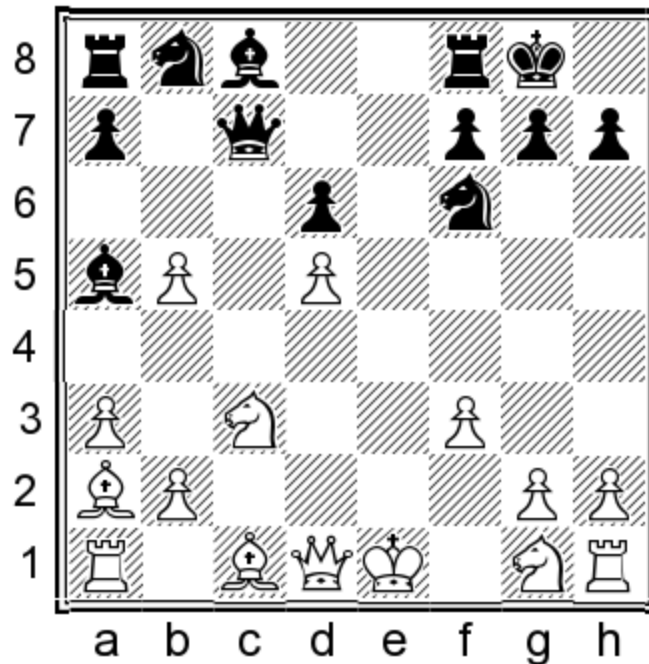
10...a6!? also works, but the inclusion of a2-a3 and ...♗b4-a5 slightly limits our resources.

11.♗xc4 ♕c7!

Without the inclusion, White would have ♕d1-b3 to protect the bishop on c4, while winning a tempo on the bishop hanging on b4.

12.♗a2

In this version 12.♕b3? ♞bd7 is already winning for Black, who's threatening ...♞b6 followed by gaining back the pawn on d5. It is not surprising for one tempo to matter that much in a sharp position.



12...♙d7!

Again, developing and gaining a tempo, this time on the b5-pawn.

13.a4 a6!

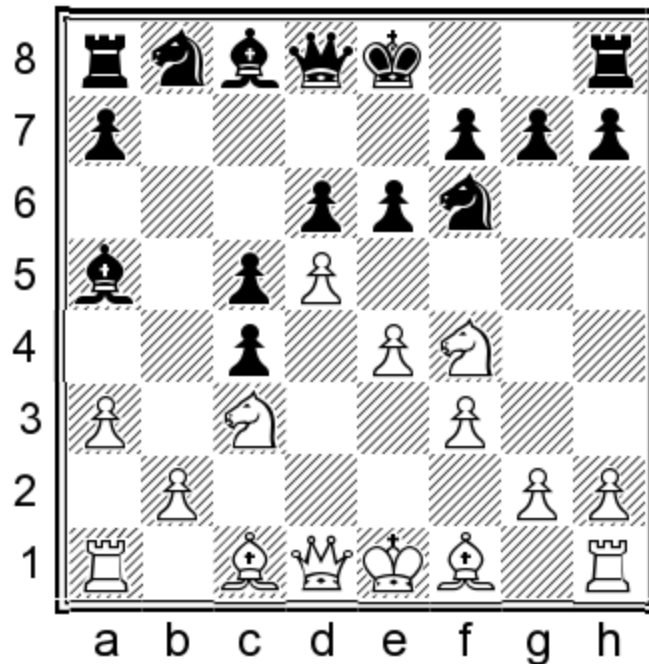
Black has excellent counterplay and the clearly easier game. White should just castle and quickly return both extra pawns in order to maintain the balance.

Moving on to other 8th moves:

8.♘e2?!

This might be White's best effort without the inclusion, but it doesn't fit well with the pawn on a3.

8...bxc4 9.♘f4



9...e5!

This is the structure in which the inclusion could be beneficial for us. In the 8...g5!? line against 7.♘e2 we were later taking on c3, so it doesn't really matter whether the bishop is on a5 or b4.

10.♘e2

This was played in Gareyev – Azarov, Tegernsee 2019, and a few other games. In all cases Black continued with 10...♘bd7, aiming to play the line we studied under the 7.♘e2 move order but with the pawn on a3 and the bishop on a5, and that would also be a fine choice. The b-file is unblocked so ...♖a8-b8 will come in with greater effect, and if you can remember our coverage of that line there were instances of us having to face a2-a4 with either ...a7-a5 or ...♙b4-a5. Well that is no longer the case, as our bishop is already on a5! Despite all that, there is another stronger continuation for Black if you want to mix it up:

10...♘h5!?N

We're not only threatening ...f7-f5, but also anticipating the move ♘e2-g3. The million-dollar question remains though – why didn't

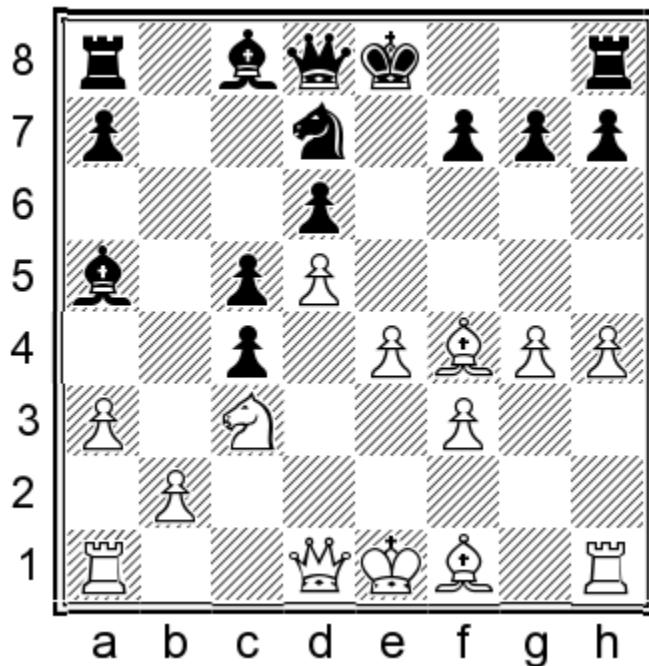
we play this against the 7.♘e2 move order as well? The answer is without the inclusion, it is strong for White to play:

11.h4

Stopping ...♔d8-h4+ and preparing g2-g4.

After something like 11.♘g3? ♕xc3+ 12.bxc3 ♔h4 Black wins.

11...♘d7 12.g4 ♘f4 13.♘xf4 exf4 14.♕xf4



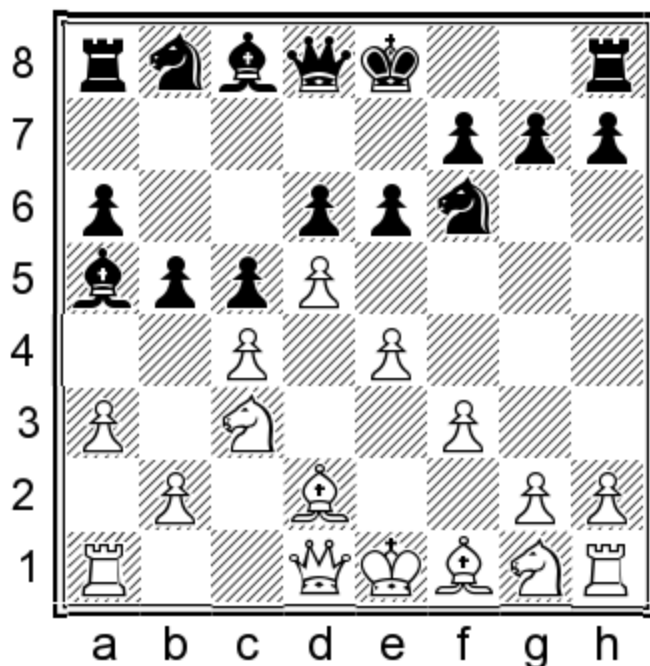
With the bishop on b4 and the pawn on a2, this position would be terrible for Black. However, in this version:

14...♖b8!

The counterplay down the b-file is extremely unpleasant to play against.

We also need to check:

8.♕d2?! a6!



Staying consistent to the approach we took against 7.♔d2. This is not a good version for White. As you can remember, in this position without the inclusion, White was playing 8.a4!, to which we replied with 8...♕a5!?. Well, our bishop is already on a5, so that makes close to zero sense. The only move that comes to mind if White wants to make sense of playing like this would be:

9.b4

However, this is not good.

9.a4 0-0! would be a dream position for Black, entering the razor-sharp complications we studied under 7.♔d2 but with an extra tempo.

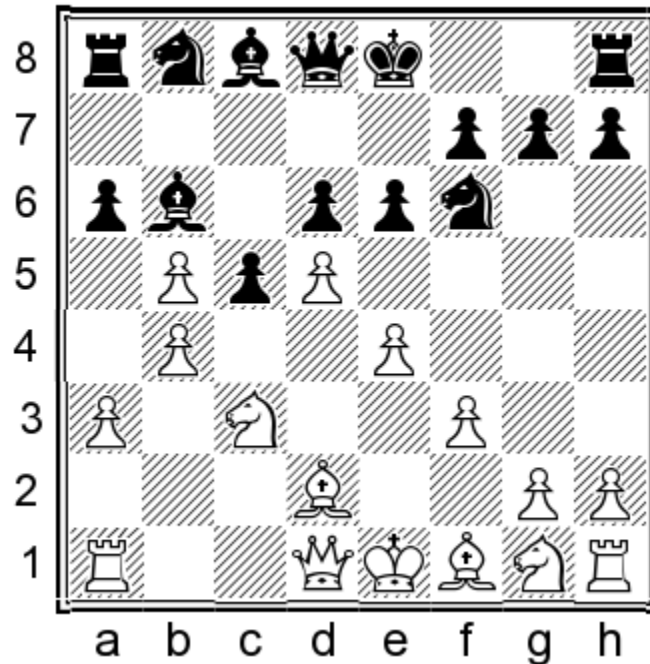
9.♖ge2 is the best move according to the engine, but it doesn't make sense in combination with either ♕c1-d2 or a2-a3. Black can continue naturally with 9...0-0, when 10.♖g3 was played against one of our students in the game Venkatesan – Tr. Kanyamarala, Dublin 2023. The game saw the not-so-optimal 10...♕b7 placing the bishop on a passive square. Instead, Black should have played: 10...exd5!N 11.♖xd5 ♖xd5 12.cxd5 f5!?. With superb play in the centre.

9...♖b6!

Our bishop is great on the g1-a7 diagonal.

10.cxb5

10.♗g5 is White's best move, but after 10...h6 11.♗h4 ♔c7 White's position remains terrible.



10...exd5!

Opening the centre is all that matters. If White were to take back, then castling would already give us a decisive attack. The only way to survive is:

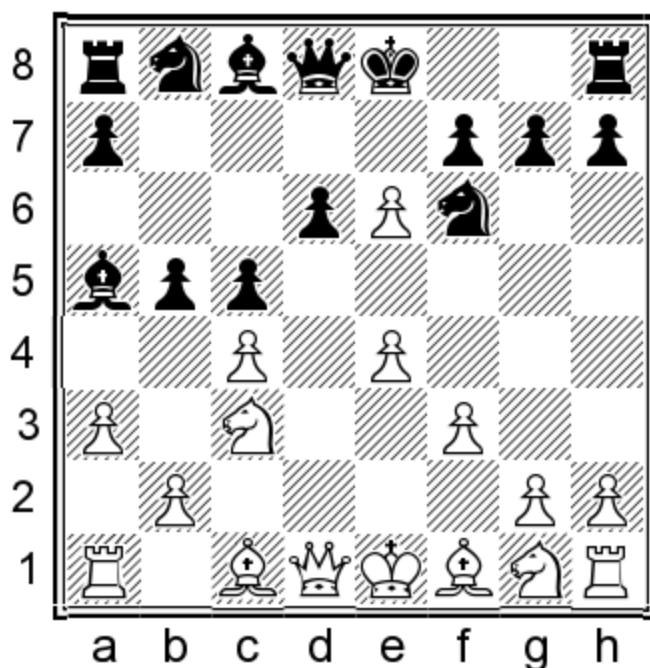
11.♗g5!

Trying to keep some control over the d5-square.

11...dxe4! 12.♞xe4 0-0!

We retain a large advantage as White is way too underdeveloped.

**B81) 8.dxe6**



As we've said time and time again, the capture on e6 isn't scary, and we're happy to see it. However, the lines are not exactly the same compared to when the pawn was on a2 and the bishop on b4, so we need to study it carefully. That's not to say they're better for White. We're the ones mostly getting additional opportunities.

**8...♙xe6 9.♙f4?**

This is what most people play, but it is also a large mistake. No, the position is not the same as the one we have studied before.

White's best option is to go for:

9.cxb5

However, we've studied this position without the inclusion, and this version is just slightly better for us because of the weakness on b3 and the possibility to change diagonal with the bishop by ...♗a5-b6. We could try to go for the most precise line, exploiting the fact that White gave us new options, but that would be a waste of time. Chances are you'll never encounter this, and the reward would be

too small. Let's just see how it stacks up to the lines we studied without the inclusion:

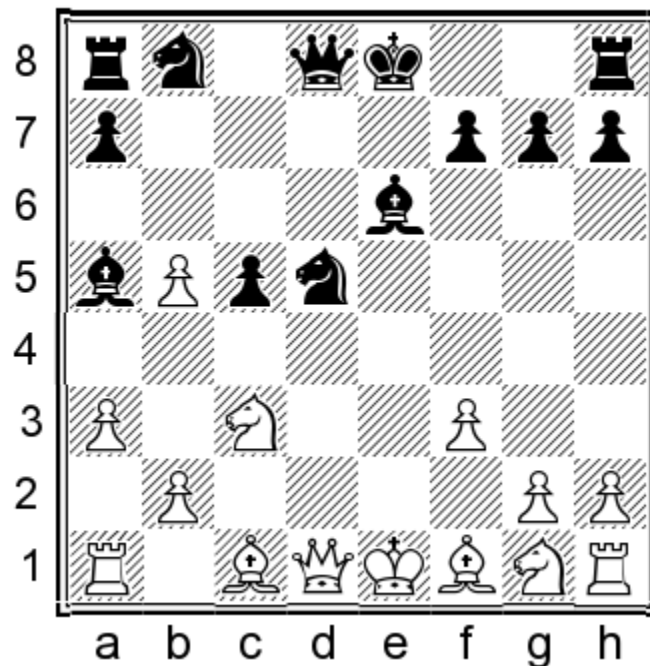
9...d5!

9...a6!? is also interesting exactly like in the position without the inclusion.

10.exd5

10.♔d2 0-0!? 11.exd5 ♕f5! is similar to the lines we showed in the position without the inclusion.

10...♞xd5



11.♔f2?!

This was White's best with the bishop on b4.

11...c4!

We don't need to take on c3. The difference is not immediately obvious, but if you absolutely must know, you can see it in the following line:

12.♞xd5 ♕xd5 13.♕e3?

Amusingly, this would get an exclamation mark with the pawn on a2 and the bishop on b4. In this case, it's a losing mistake.

13...0-0 14.♘e2 ♖e8 15.♘c3 ♜xe3 16.♙xd5 ♚b6 17.♘a4

Without the inclusion, Black would resign.

17...♜e5+! 18.♘xb6 ♝xb6+

With the inclusion, White can resign instead.

### 9...0-0!

Our initial reaction remains the same.

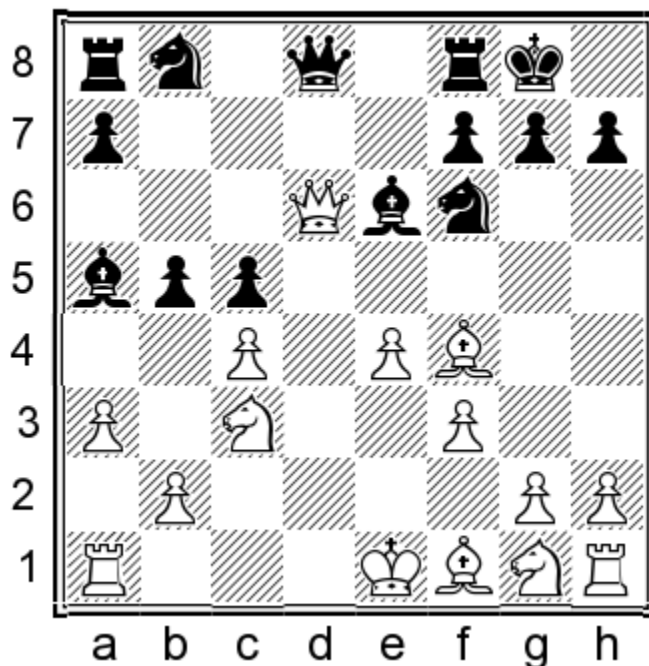
### 10.♝xd6

After 10.cxb5? d5 11.exd5 ♘xd5 12.♝d2 ♘xc3 13.♝xc3 ♚h4+!

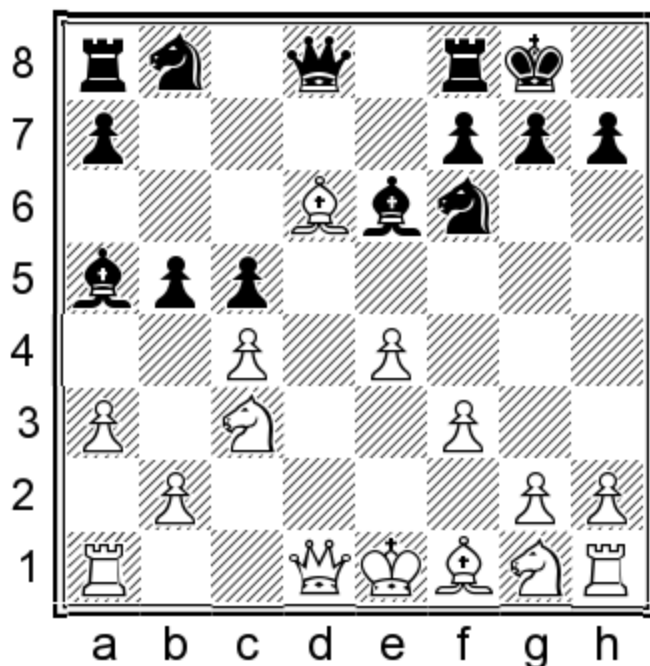
14.g3 ♝xc3+ 15.bxc3 ♚f6 Black had a winning position in Avila

Jimenez – Villar, Barcelona 2019.

10.♙xd6? also loses to:



10...♙c8! 11.cxb5 ♜d8 If the bishop was still on b4, then ...♙d6-c7 would force a queen trade. 12.♙e5 c4 We will follow this up with ...♘b8-d7-c5, and our initiative cannot be repelled.



### 10...♞c6!!

This is the big difference I wanted to show you. We do not need to move our rook. This was in fact also possible without the inclusion, but it gains in strength tremendously when the b3-square is weak, as it could be used by either a knight coming in from d4, or by our light-squared bishop.

What is even more important to note, is that 10...♞c6!! is not only an extra option, but also our only reliable one. With the moves a2-a3 and ...♙b4-a5 included, after the "normal" 10...♞e8? White can play 11.b4!, when 11...♙b6 12.♙xc5 ♙xc5 13.♚xd8 ♜xd8 14.bxc5 bxc4 15.♞ge2 leads by force to a probably holdable but surely unpleasant endgame.

### 11.♞e2

The only move to stay afloat.

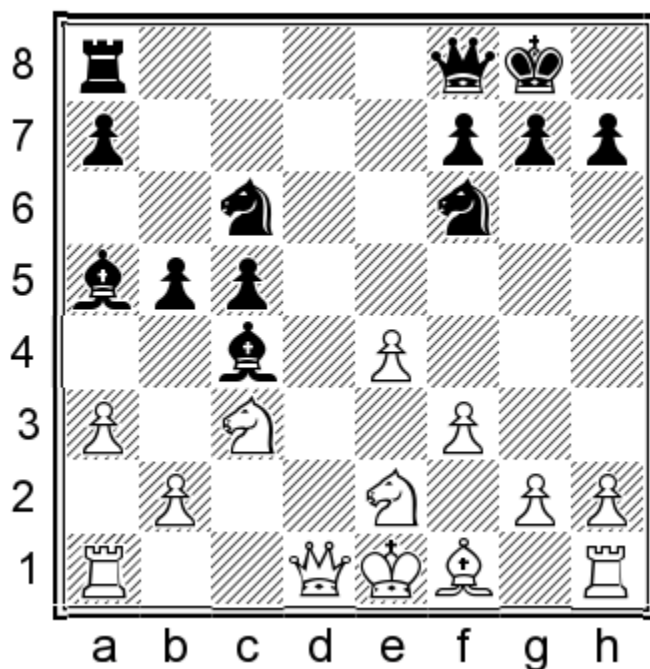
11.♙xf8 ♚xf8 is terrible. For example: 12.♚f2 (12.cxb5 ♞d4 would be playable with a pawn on a2, but now...) 12...♞d8 13.♚c1 ♞d4 I

told you that the b3-square would be relevant! 14. ♔f4 bxc4 15. ♖d1 ♜b8 Our activity is just too much.

11. ♙xc5 is met with 11...bxc4 with similar ideas.

11.cxb5 ♞d4 12. ♙xc5 ♞b3 Once again, it is that cursed b3-square making a difference. Black is completely winning.

**11...♙xc4! 12. ♙xf8 ♚xf8**



In practical terms, Black is almost winning already – a human opponent would probably collapse in the next two or three moves. Even "perfect" defence isn't enough to hold for White, as Black won both correspondence games to reach this position. Let's follow those games for little bit longer, just because the execution was quite instructive.

**13. ♞g3 ♜d8 14. ♚c1 ♙xf1 15. ♚xf1 ♞d4 16. ♚f4 h5!**

Including every possible unit in the attack.

A quiet approach with something like 16...h6 is also fine.

**17. ♞ge2 ♞e6 18. ♚c1 ♜d3 19. ♚c2 c4 20. ♜d1 ♚d6**

In both Auzins – Jankowiak, corr. 2017, and Walther – Burmeister, corr. 2021, Black went on to win quite convincingly.

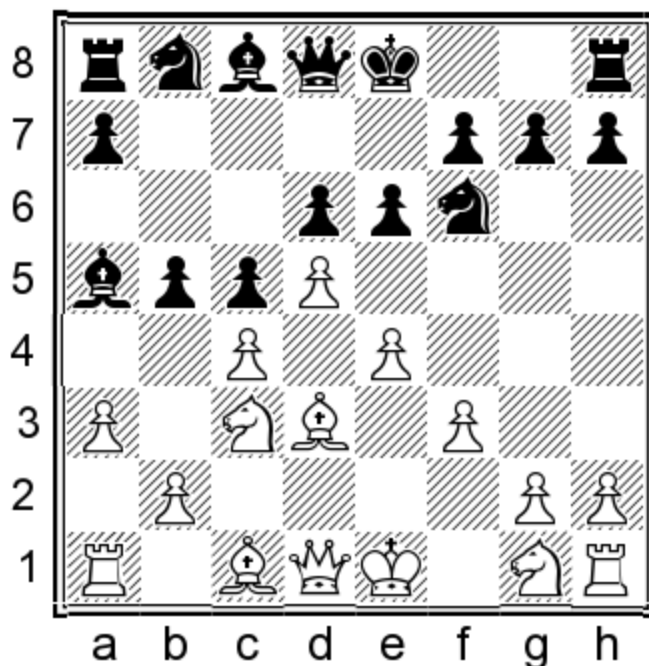
Watching White taking on e6 in such structures always feels like a small victory from the black side, but with the inclusion of 7.a3 ♖a5 it seems like it is a mistake – the type that usually goes unnoticed.

If White continues by taking on b5, we blast the position open with 9...d5, similarly to what we did against the same line but with the bishop on b4 and the pawn on a2. In our analysis, we note one distinct tactical difference that allows us to go for 11...c4! instead of taking on c3, but it is quite a minor detail in an unplayed position.

More important is to remember what happens after 9.♗f4?, which is rightly considered our mainline. That is both because that's the only move played, and because it's important to remember how to react correctly. Instead of blindly following the path examined under the same position but without the inclusion and moving our rook from f8, we have the unexpected 10...♞c6!!, which puts the kibosh on any ambitions from White and completely flips the narrative.

In general I wouldn't think you would be lucky enough to encounter this line in practice, but studying the differences between similar positions with and without the inclusion of a2-a3 and ...♗b4-a5 enhances our understanding of these positions in general.

**B82) 8.♗d3**



This is a serious move, as the inclusion of a2-a3 and ...♔b4-a5 will come in handy for White. Nevertheless, it is quite simple to defuse.

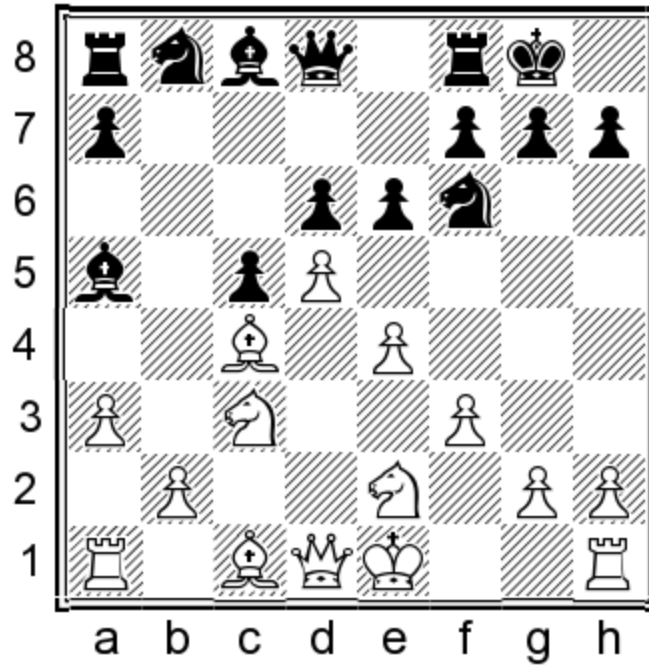
**8...0-0! 9.♘e2 bxc4!**

Our approach for now is exactly the same to the one we took against the immediate 7.♔d3.

9...exd5?! 10.cxd5 a6 11.0-0 ♘bd7 12.♔c2! is a position to avoid. White has a stable centre and will soon start preparing f3-f4 and a kingside attack.

9...♘bd7 was a novelty at the time I was covering this line for KCT, but it is not anymore. It remains, however, an interesting alternative you could explore on your own.

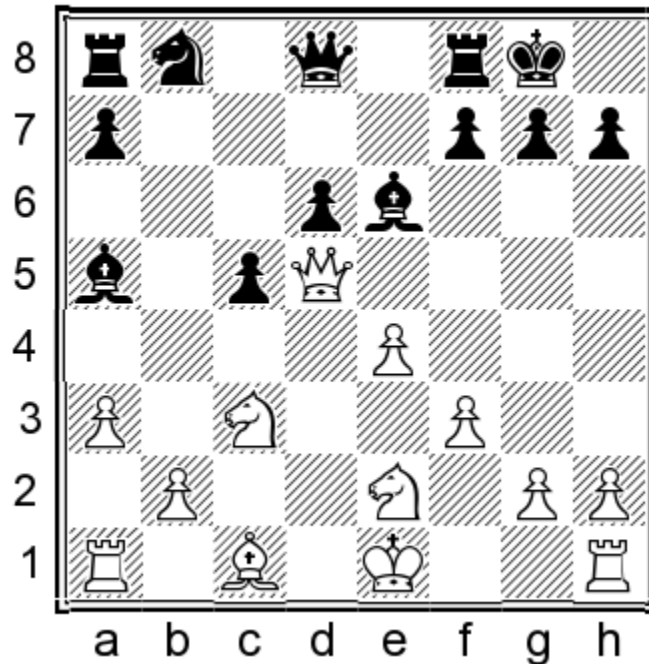
**10.♔xc4**



**10...♙a6!**

This is the moment to deviate.

Instead, 10...exd5 11.♙xd5 ♘xd5 12.♚xd5 remains playable, but not in conjunction with the desired 12...♙e6??.

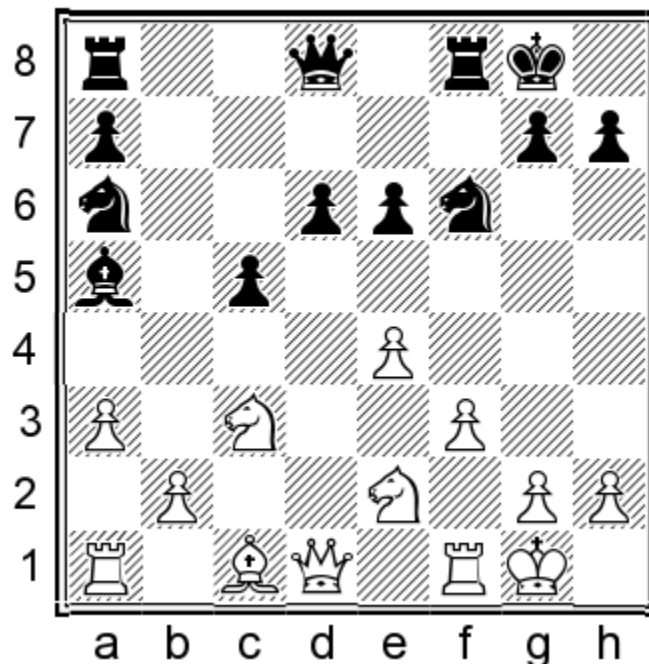


This just loses: 13. ♖xa8! ♙xc3+ (13... ♖b6 is even simpler; White has 14.b4 and the queen will get out by taking on a7 no matter what.) 14. ♘xc3 ♚d7 15. ♘d5! ♜e8 (Obviously, the point was 15... ♘c6 16. ♚xc6. ) 16.0-0 This was all played in Frugah – Busch, Germany 1993, and Black decided to stay away from 16... ♘c6 due to 17. ♘b6! axb6 18. ♚a4, when White wins. If ... ♘c6 isn't available, then that means the queen on a8 can never be trapped.

### 11. ♙xa6 ♘xa6 12.0-0

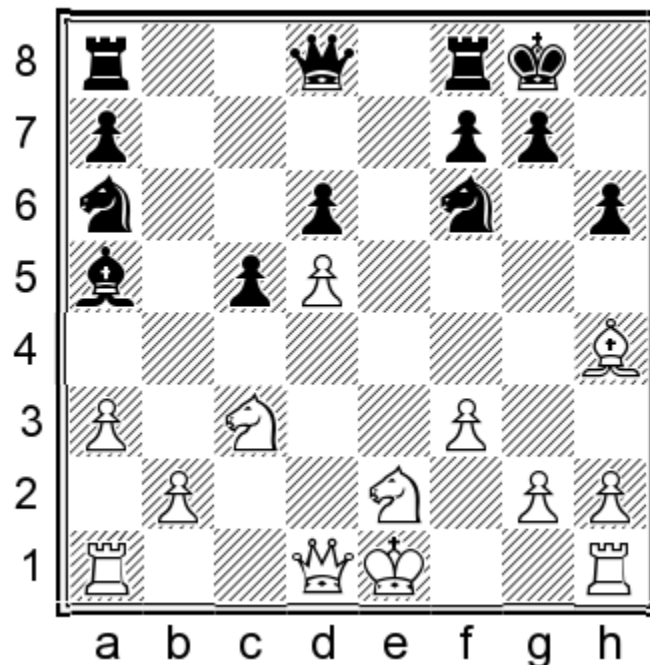
The most natural.

White has also tried 12.dxe6 fxe6 13.0-0 hoping to put some pressure on our structure. However, we have a good way of activating our pieces and using our extra central control:

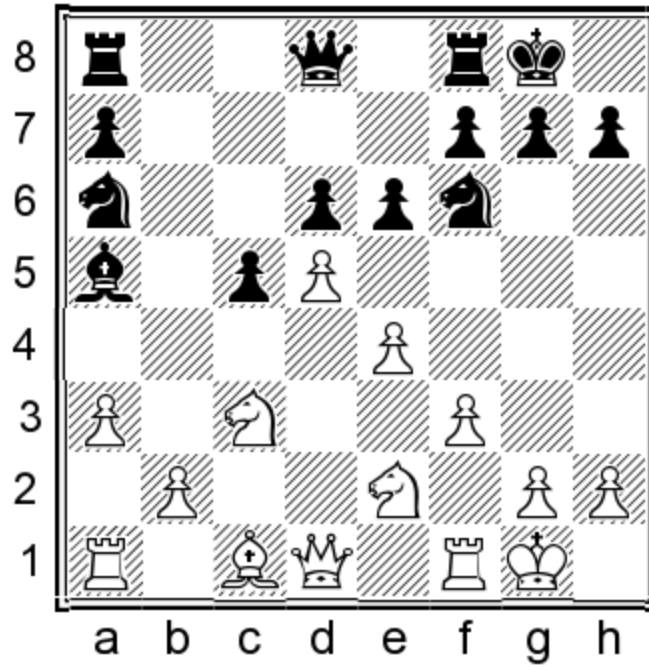


13...c4! Clearing the c5-square and the g1-a7 diagonal. It is already clear that this position is a much better version compared to what it would be with the bishop on b4 and the pawn on a2. In our version, the b3-square is weak, the b-file is already open, and our bishop and

knight aren't both competing for the same square. 14.♔e3 ♖b6  
 15.♔xb6 ♔xb6+ 16.♔d4 ♞c5 Black has comfortably equalized.  
 12.♔g5!?! is an interesting effort, trying to put us into an unpleasant  
 pin. There are many ways to deal with this, including tolerating the  
 pin or eventually moving the queen away and allowing White to  
 double our pawns on the kingside. However, I believe that the  
 simplest way lies in: 12...h6!?!N 13.♔h4 exd5! 14.exd5 (If we hadn't  
 flicked in ...h7-h6, then it would be best for White to just play 14.0-0,  
 unpinning the c3-knight and threatening ♞c3xd5. However, with  
 this inclusion, we can comfortably play 14...d4, aiming to meet  
 15.♞d5 with 15...g5. )



Once again, there are many ways to play this, but I like 14...♔xc3+  
 15.bxc3 ♞b8!?! 16.0-0 ♞bd7 17.c4 ♞e5! and the pin will finally be  
 broken with ...♞e5-g6.



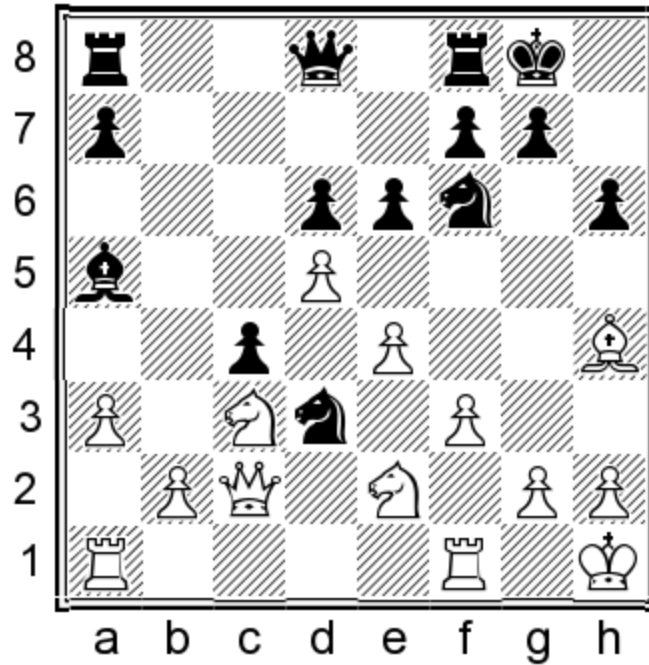
### 12...c4!?

This keeps more life in the position and better highlights why the pawn is better placed on a2.

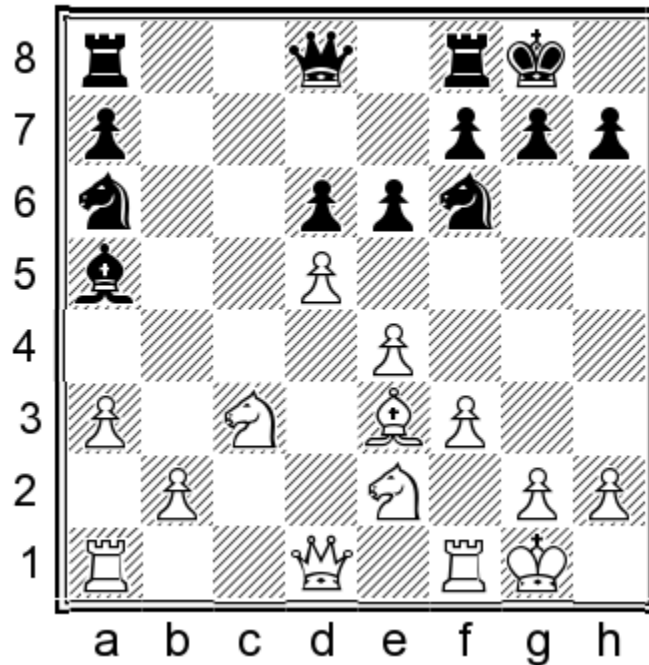
12...exd5 is also possible, aiming to equalize by force after 13.♘xd5 ♘xd5 14.♙xd5 ♘c7 followed by ...d6-d5.

### 13.♙e3

Also possible is 13.♙h1 and one correspondence game continued:  
13...♘c5 14.♙g5 ♘d3 15.♙c2 h6 16.♙h4



In Kamody – Sirk, corr. 2019, Black was fine and could continue in many different ways, the most fighting being 16...g5!?N 17.♙g3 ♘h5, with an extremely active position.



13...♙b6 14.♙xb6 ♔xb6+ 15.♔d4 ♘c5

White has nothing better than taking on e6, and when we take back with the f-pawn we transpose to our note to White's 12th move. Anyway, our position is both active and solid.

The immediate 16.♔h1 can be met with 16...♙a6! when Black starts getting the upper hand.

The most important thing to remember regarding 8.♙d3 is that the inclusion of 7.a3 ♘a5 eliminates the idea of trapping the queen on a8, compared to the 7.♙d3 line. We have to know the difference, because here we deviate and instead of the capture on d5 we play 10...♙a6! exchanging the bishops. This leaves White with a weak square on b3, that we can exploit later on with ...♙b6, ...c5-c4 and ...♞a6-c5. If we just remember this detail, this move order trick with 8.♙d3 – White's best effort in the whole 7.a3 complex – is rendered totally harmless.

## Conclusion

The 4.f3 line against the Nimzo is nowadays regarded as one the most aggressive variations at White's disposal. Our repertoire is meant to be a dynamic way of playing against it, one where Black adopts the Benoni structure and there is tension and active play all over the board.

In many variations, development is a key factor while material plays a secondary role. White tries to keep control of the space advantage, while Black seeks to open up files and diagonals to make way for the pieces. In that sense, I consider some of the lines presented in this chapter to be both fascinating and quite instructive to follow from the standpoint of our general understanding.

From a theoretical perspective, the most important parts of this chapters are the main lines, 7.♙d3, 7.♙d2 and 7.♞e2. The last one is critical from a modern standpoint, and thus we offer a couple of options to choose from with each one leading to a different type of game. One (8...g5!?) is as sharp as it gets, and the other (8...e5 )

leads to a much more strategic battle involving a closed centre. As explained before, you can choose the one you like best either according to your taste or according to any circumstances surrounding one specific game.

One of the things I like best about our repertoire against 4.f3 is that White almost never gets to attack our king. On the contrary, it is Black that usually holds the initiative, and in many cases one single slip from White could prove to be fatal.

# Chapter 5

## Sämisch Variation

### Variation Index

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♕b4 4.a3 ♕xc3† 5.bxc3 c5

- A) 6.e3 ♘c6
- A1) 7.♕d3 0–0 8.♘e2 b6
- A11) 9.♘g3?!
- A12) 9.e4 ♘e8!
- A121) 10.♕e3
- A122) 10.h4!?
- A123) 10.e5
- A124) 10.0-0 ♕a6
- A1241) 11.♘g3
- A1242) 11.f4
- A2) 7.♘e2
- B) 6.f3 ♘c6 7.e4 d6!
- B1) 8.d5
- B2) 8.♘e2
- B3) 8.♕e3

### Introduction

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♕b4 4.a3

Attacking the bishop immediately is quite natural. White gets it over with regarding that dance between the bishop on b4 and the knight

on c3, grabs the bishop pair and receives a nice mass of pawns in the centre to top it all off. On the flipside, the doubled c-pawns could prove to be weak, and by placing our pawns on dark squares we can try to dominate White's "extra" bishop on c1.

The double-edged nature of the ensuing positions has fascinated a number of strong players over the years, with even the likes of Magnus Carlsen dabbling with this line every now and then. With that in mind, it's easy to realize why this is going to be quite the race. The stage is set for White to go for quick dynamic play in the centre and on the kingside, while we'll be trying to consolidate and, if possible, grab the pawn on c4 along the way.

Every opening has some variations where people play mostly following schemes without really studying the details and this is one of them. Black should not be caught unprepared. If that were to be the case, then White's attack is generally easier to execute. Imagine how easy it is to prepare a player from the white side: "You'll play f2-f3, e2-e4, ♖d3, ♗e2, castle, f3-f4-f5 and checkmate."

We have to be slightly more nuanced, but the good news is that if we do know our stuff, our position can turn out to be quite promising.

**4...♗xc3+ 5.bxc3 c5!**

I like this approach. We make our claim in the centre and put some pressure on the pawn on d4, while at the same time blockading the pawn on c4. This could in some cases also be the start of us building a dark-squared structure with ...d7-d6 and ...e6-e5.

**6.f3**

# Variation Index

## Chapter 1 - Miscellaneous

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4

A) 4.g4

B) 4.g3

C) 4.♙f4

D) 4.♚d3

E) 4.♚b3

## Chapter 2 - Leningrad Variation

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.♙g5 c5

A) 5.♘f3

B) 5.d5 d6 6.e3 exd5 7.cxd5 ♘bd7

B1) 8.♙b5

B2) 8.♙d3

## Chapter 3 - The Trendy 4.♙d2

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.♙b2 0-0 5.e3 d5

A) 6.a3

B) 6.♘f3 b6!? 7.cxd5 exd5

B1) 8.♙d3

B2) 8.♖c1 ♙b7

B21) 9.♘b5!?

B22) 9.♙d3

## Chapter 4 - The Aggressive 4.f3

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.f3 c5

A) 5.a3

B) 5.d5 d6 6.e4 b5!

B1) 7.♗e3?

B2) 7.♗g5?!

B3) 7.dxe6 ♗xe6

B31) 8.cxb5

B32) 8.♗f4

B6) 7.♗d2 a6! 8.a4! ♗a5!?

B61) 9.dxe6 ♗xe6 10.cxb5

B7) 7.♘e2 bxc4! 8.♘f4

B71) 8...e5

B72) 8...g5!?

B8) 7.a3 ♗a5

B81) 8.dxe6

B82) 8.♗d3

## Chapter 5 - Sämisch Variation

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.a3 ♗xc3† 5.bxc3 c5

A) 6.e3 ♘c6

A1) 7.♗d3 0–0 8.♘e2 b6

A11) 9.♘g3?!

A12) 9.e4 ♘e8!

A121) 10.♗e3

A122) 10.h4!?

A123) 10.e5

A124) 10.0-0 ♔a6

A1241) 11.♘g3

A1242) 11.f4

A2) 7.♘e2

B) 6.f3 ♘c6 7.e4 d6!

B1) 8.d5

B2) 8.♘e2

B3) 8.♔e3

**Chapter 6 - 4.♘f3 c5**

**1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♔b4 4.♘f3 c5**

A) 5.d5

B) 5.e3 0-0

B1) 6.♔d2

B2) 6.♔d3

C) 5.g3 cxd4 6.♘xd4 0-0 7.♔g2 d5

C1) 8.♘c2!?

C2) 8.0-0 dxc4!

C21) 9.♘db5

C22) 9.♘c2

C23) 9.♔a4

C3) 8.♔b3 ♔xc3+

C31) 9.♔xc3

C32) 9.bxc3

### Chapter 7 - 8.cxd5

**1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.♘f3 c5 5.g3 cxd4 6.♘xd4 0–0  
7.♙g2 d5 8.cxd5 ♘xd5**

A) 9.♙d2 ♙xc3! 10.bxc3 e5!

A1) 11.♘c2

A2) 11.♘b3

A3) 11.♘b5

B) 9.♙b3 ♙a5! 10.♙d2 ♘c6! 11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.0–0 ♙xc3!

B1) 13.♙xc3

B2) 13.bxc3 ♙a6 14.♖fd1 ♙c5! 15.e4 ♙c4! 16.♙a4 ♘b6 17.♙b4  
♙h5!

B21) 18.♖e1

B22) 18.♙f4

B23) 18.♙e3

### Chapter 8 - 4.e3 0–0 5.♘e2

**1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.e3 0–0 5.♘e2 d5**

A) 6.cxd5

B) 6.a3 ♙e7

B1) 7.♘g3

B2) 7.♘f4

B3) 7.cxd5 exd5

B31) 8.♘g3

B32) 8.b4

B33) 8.g3

B34) 8.h3

B35) 8.♘f4

**Chapter 9 - 5.♙d3 d5 – 6.♘e2 & 6.cxd5**

**1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.e3 0–0 5.♙d3 d5**

A) 6.♘e2 dxc4! 7.♙xc4 c5

A1) 8.a3

A2) 8.0-0

B) 6.cxd5 exd5

B1) 7.♘e2 ♖e8!

B11) 8.♙d2

B 12) 8.0-0

B2) 7.a3

**Chapter 10 - The Sharp 6.a3**

**1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.e3 0–0 5.♙d3 d5 6.a3 ♙xc3† 7.bxc3 dxc4 8.♙xc4 c5**

A) 9.♙b2

B) 9.♙d3

C) 9.♘e2 ♔c7

C1) 10.♙a2

C2) 10.♙d3 ♘c6

C21) 11.f4!?

C22) 11.0-0

D) 9.♘f3 ♔c7!

D1) 10.♔d3

D2) 10.♙a2

D3) 10.♙e2

### Chapter 11 - 5.♘f3

**1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.e3 0–0 5.♘f3 d5 6.♘f3 dxc 47.♙xc4 c5**

A) 9.♔e2?!

B) 9.♘e2

C) 9.h3

D) 9.dxc5

E) 9.♙d3

F) 9.a3 ♙a5!?

F1) 10.dxc5

F2) 10.♘a4?!

F3) 10.♘e2

F4) 10.♙a2

F5) 10.♙d3

F6) 10.♔d3 a6!

F61) 11.dxc5

F62) 11.♘e4!?

F63) 11.♖d1

### Chapter 12 - 4.♔c2 d5

**1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.d5**

A) 5.♘f3 dxc4!

A1) 6.♔g5?!

A2) 6.e4

B) 5.e3

C) 5.a3 ♖xc3+ 6.♔xc3 0-0

C1) 7.cxd5

C2) 7.e3

C3) 7.♔g5 h6

C31) 8.♔h4?

C32) 8.♔xf6

C4) 7.♘f3 dxc4! 8.♔xc4 b6!

C41) 9.g3

C42) 9.♔f4

C43) 9.h4!?

C44) 9.♔g5 c5!

C441) 10.e4

C442) 10.dxc5

### Chapter 13 - 5.cxd5

**1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♖b4 4.♔c2 d5 5.cxd5 exd5**

A) 6.♘f3 c5! 7.♔g5 h6

A1) 8.♔xf6

A2) 8.♔h4

B) 6.♔f4

C) 6.♔g5 h6

C1) 7.♔xf6

C2) 7.♔h4 ♘c6!?

C21) 8.♘f3?

C22) 8.e3 8...g5 9.♔g3 h5!

C221) 10.f3

C222) 10.h4

C223) 10.h3

C224) 10.♔d3

C225) 10.♔b5 h4 11.♔e5 0–0!

C2251) 12.♔xf6

C2252) 12.♔xc6 bxc6

C2253) 12.h3