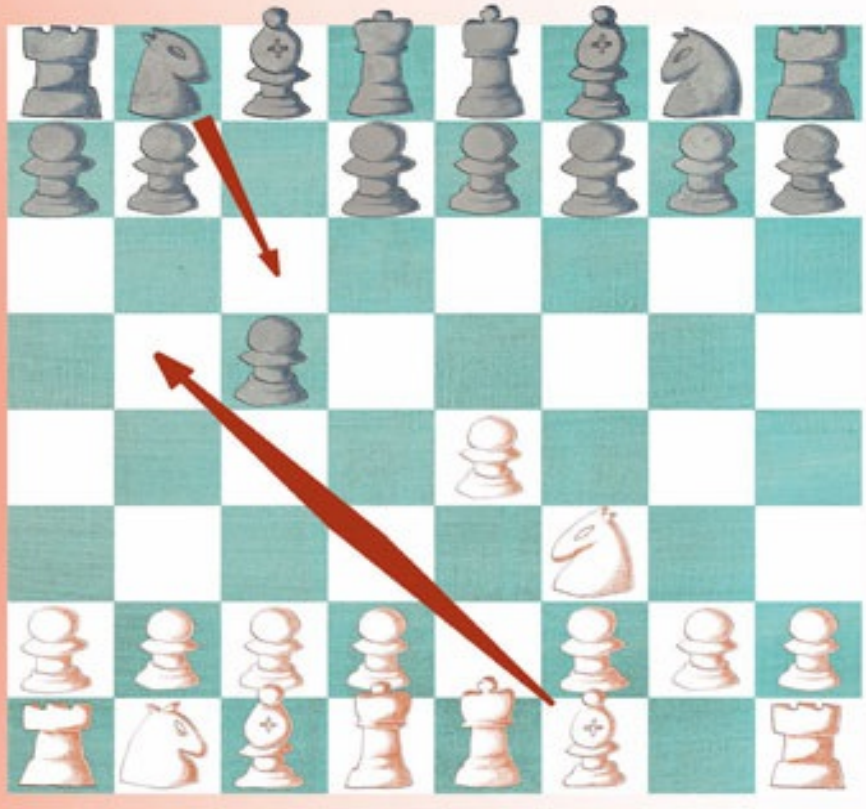
The Modernized Anti-Sicilians





Volume 1
Rossolimo Variation

Ravi Haria

Thinkers Publishing

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The Modernized Anti-Sicilians

Volume 1: The Rossolimo

by

Ravi Haria

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Key to Symbols

! a good move

? a weak move

!! an excellent move

?? a blunder

!? an interesting move

?! a dubious move

□ only move

N novelty

⟳ lead in development

⊙ zugzwang

= equality

∞ unclear position

⩱ with compensation for the sacrificed material

⩲ White stands slightly better

⩱ Black stands slightly better

± White has a serious advantage

∓ Black has a serious advantage

+– White has a decisive advantage

–+ Black has a decisive advantage

→ with an attack

↑ with initiative

⇄ with counterplay

Δ with the idea of

⌓ better is

≤ worse is

+ check

mate

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Preface

In my first volume of the Anti-Sicilians, we will be examining the Rossolimo variation. The Sveshnikov and Classical Sicilians, where Black begins with 2...♘c6, have consistently been a popular way for Black to acquire counter-attacking chances straight from the opening. These openings are the favourites of many top-level Grandmasters; none more so than Magnus Carlsen, who most famously fashioned the Sveshnikov Sicilian against Fabiano Caruana in the 2018 World Championship match.

The Rossolimo variation with 3.♗b5 is the clearest indication that we are attempting to frustrate Black's counterplay. By delaying opening the centre, we can simply wait for Black to show us how he intends to continue before we make any big commitments. Most importantly, we have the positional threat of ♗xc6, which Black has to be wary of if he himself tries to open the centre too quickly. In nearly all variations our principal aim is to achieve rapid development, ensuring optimal conditions for a timely central break. In the main three systems (3...d6, 3...e6 and 3...g6), my multiple suggestions are based on the dual concepts of playing as actively as possible, whilst simultaneously frustrating Black's ideals.

Our repertoire against 3...d6 emphasizes our ability to consistently interfere with Black's co-ordination. We'll immediately break open the centre with 6.c3 and 7.d4, before attempting to create endless practical difficulties in the mainline with an e5-e6 push. It's important to pay attention to the continuous theme of both pawn and exchange sacrifices, where piece quality is often prioritised over piece quantity. As usual, the various lines continuously offer 'safer alternatives' – which are by no means worse, but instead offer the opportunity to take the game in a different direction.

Against 3...e6, I offer two alternatives: either playing critically with 4.0-0 and 5.d4, or frustrating Black's development with 4.0-0 and 5.♖e1. The first option will result in positions similar to Open Sicilians, except that Black has a slightly inferior knight on g6, as opposed to f6. The latter aims for optimal piece placement which will make it difficult for Black to open the centre – whereas we are ideally positioned to break with c2-c3 and d2-d4.

3...g6 is arguably the most critical line against the Rossolimo. As usual, I analysed two distinct options – either capturing on c6 immediately, or playing 4.0-0 and 5.c3 with the aim of occupying the centre. In both lines, we'll often encounter themes revolving around Black's weakened dark-squares, as well as attempts to suppress Black's g7-bishop with a strong e5-pawn. You will quickly realise that a combination of our own dynamic piece play, alongside attempting to create endless practical difficulties for our opponent, are at the heart of every variation we discuss.

I'd like to thank Daniel Vanheirzeele and Romain Edouard for the opportunity to write this series; Daniel Fernandez for finding the time to continuously critique and edit my analysis; and above all my parents, for their endless support throughout my chess journey.

Ravi Haria

London, November 2020

Introduction

The Sicilian Defence has historically been Black's most popular weapon against 1.e4. Its prestige is grounded on a combative nature and fighting approach; Black isn't just playing for equality, but rather seeks to acquire counter-attacking chances straight from the opening. In response, the prevalence of Anti-Sicilians (alternatives to 3.d4) propagated due to their value in reducing the effectiveness of Black's counterplay. In this series, I aim to provide the foundation of a repertoire which seeks to retain the core values of Anti-Sicilians. Namely, I have consistently attempted to create endless practical difficulties for Black, whilst wisely waiting for the right moment to open the position and generate a dangerous initiative.

For too long, Anti-Sicilian rhetoric has centred on the logic of simplicity, geared towards reaching playable positions with easy plans while simultaneously avoiding depths of theory. The danger of this logic is the ease with which we can fall into the trap of inactivity; of mindlessly playing an opening without striving to trouble Black; of solely playing an Anti-Sicilian to avoid theory. In contrast, throughout the volumes I will advocate an active approach – with continuous underlying themes of achieving rapid development, dynamic piece play and dominant central control, with an important focus on denying Black the counterplay that he seeks when choosing the Sicilian Defence.

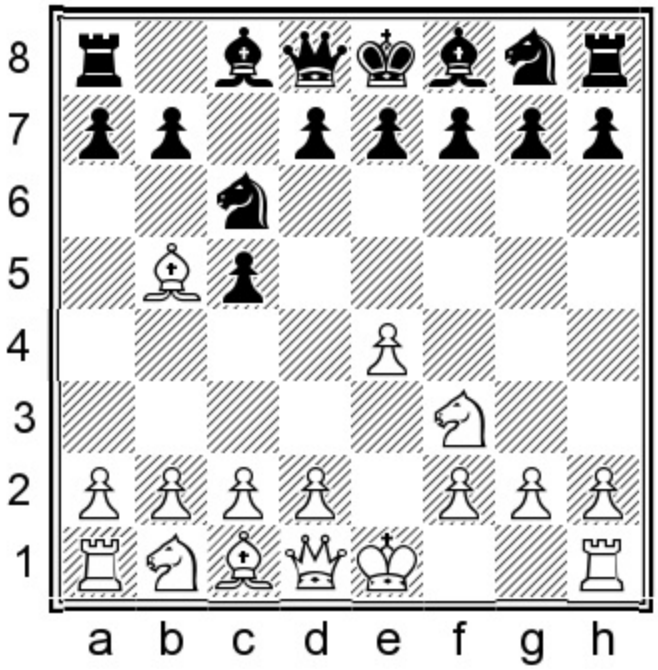
In nearly every system against the various Sicilians, I have provided the reader with multiple options to choose from. Modern-day openings are constantly changing, and the necessity of flexibility in preparation has never been more vital. Having the ability to play different systems against the same opening is also beneficial in increasing our enjoyment of chess. Moreover, each alternative varies in style, enabling us to directly target our opponent's weaknesses – as well as concentrate on our own strengths. Obviously, I can't promise that every line will ensure us an advantage. But by providing a wide variety of different options, we can consistently make life difficult for Black and continue to create new and interesting ideas.

Although every variation has been checked and inspired by a combination of Leela Zero and Stockfish, the emphasis has always been on choosing the most human lines. Readers may notice that the analysis is often extensive – I felt this was often necessary in justifying my suggestions. Nevertheless, the focus in these volumes should be inspiration by the various ideas, rather than memorisation of long lines. In tandem with textual explanations, my fundamental hope is for the reader to absorb the interconnected ideas between each variation. This will be extremely useful in responding to future developments in the Anti-Sicilian.

Part I
Sidelines

Chapter 1
Rare 3rd Moves

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5



Chapter Guide

Chapter 1 – Rare 3rd Moves

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5

a) 3...--

b) 3...♘d4?!

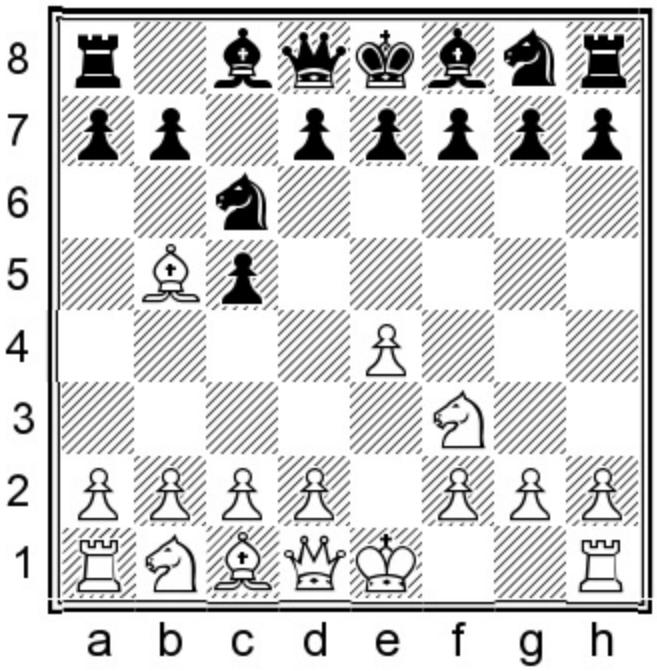
c) 3...e5

d) 3...♕b6?!

e) 3...♕c7

a) 3...--

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5

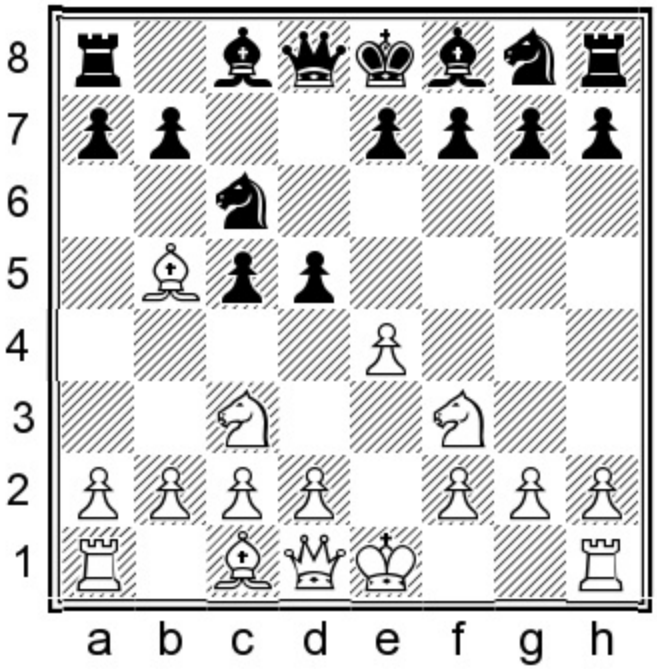


Position after: 3.♗b5

3...b6?!

However Black attempts to avoid the mainline, our plan invariably remains the same: castle, establish a lead in development, and attempt to control the centre.

A) 3...d5?! This doesn't feel right. Generally in Rossolimo positions where we capture on c6 and Black has doubled c-pawns, the move ...d7-d5 is a serious positional mistake – Black is always left with a weak c5-pawn. This position is no exception, and it is quite easily refutable. 4.♘c3!

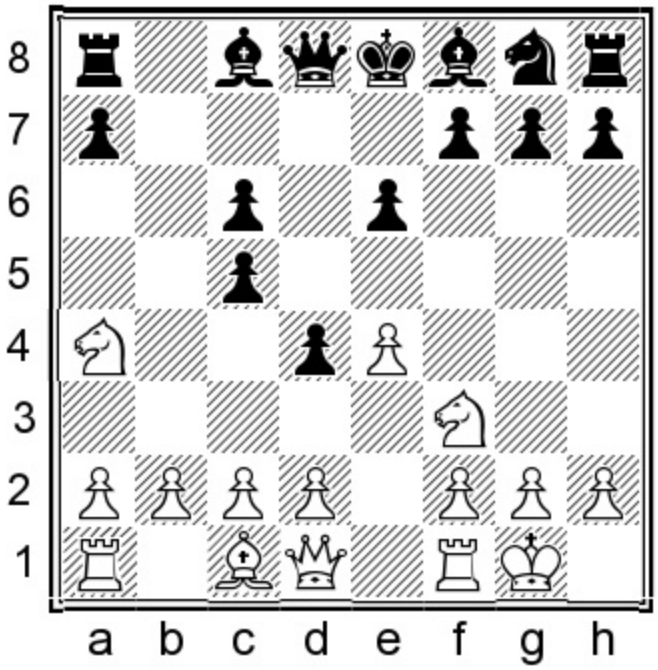


Position after: 4.♘c3!

A1) 4...e6 5.exd5 exd5 6.0-0 ♗e7 7.d4± We'll end up with an extremely favourable version of an IQP position.

A2) 4...dxe4 5.♘xe4 e6 6.♗xc6+ bxc6 7.0-0±

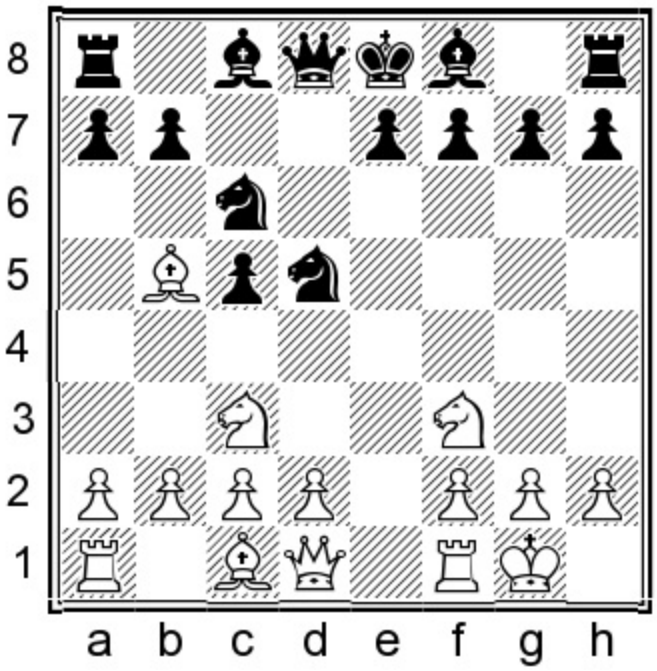
A3) 4...d4 5.♘a4 e6 6.♗xc6+ bxc6 7.0-0



Position after: 7.0-0

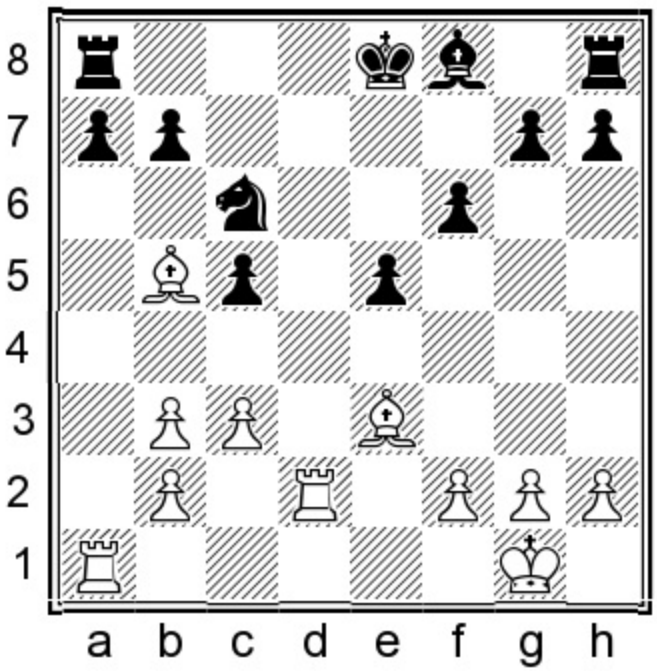
Black is already positionally lost. He'll be tied down to the c5-pawn after we play something like b2-b3 and ♗a3, and the c4-square is another nice outpost for our f3-knight to utilise. This position is basically everything that Black is trying to avoid in the Rossolimo, and underlines why . ..d7-d5 is conventionally a really bad move.

A4) 4...♘f6 5.exd5 ♘xd5 6.0-0



Position after: 6.0-0

6...♘xc3 [6...e6 7.♘xd5 ♕xd5 8.c4 ♕d6 9.b4! cxb4 10.♗b2±] 7.dxc3! Trading queens is perfectly fine as we are simply increasing the scope of our lead in development. Black will struggle to prevent weaknesses being created in his position. 7...♕xd1 8.♖xd1 f6 [8...♗g4 9.♗e3±] 9.♗e3 e5 10.♘d2 ♗f5 11.♘b3 ♗xc2 12.♖d2 ♗xb3 13.axb3

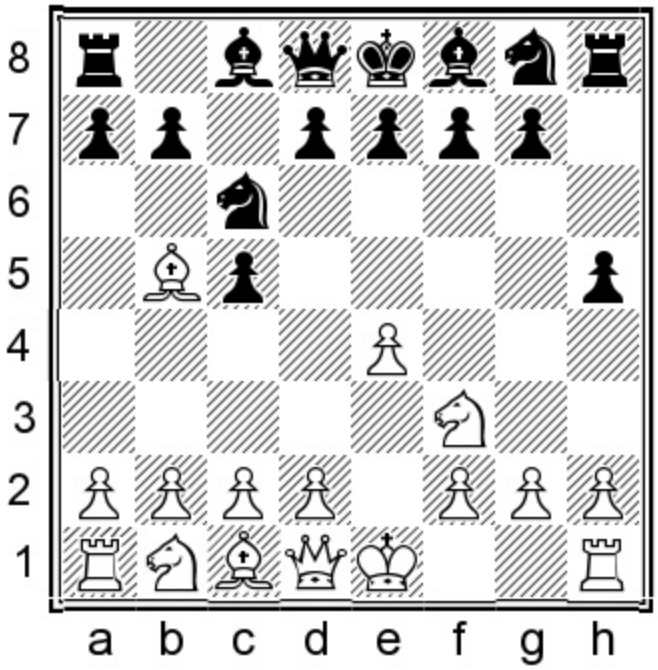


Position after: 13.axb3

The bishop pair more than make up for the sacrificed pawn, and at any moment we can capture on

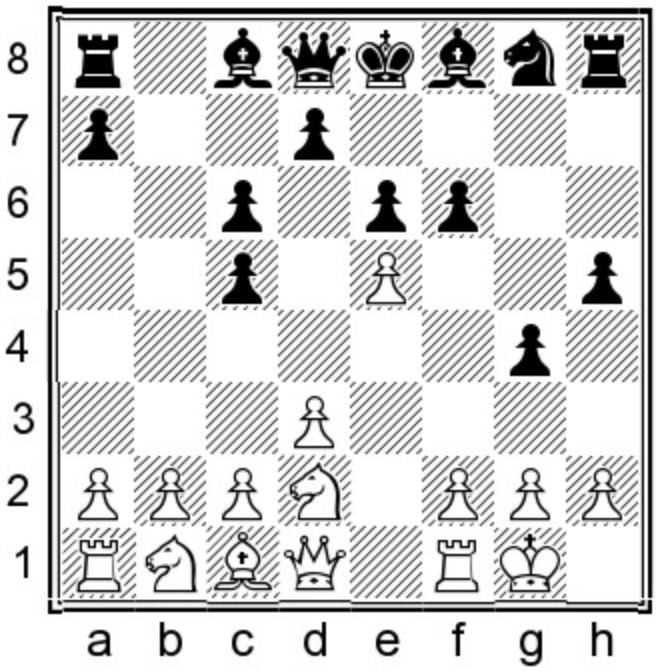
c6 and play ♖a5. 13...♗e7 14.f4±

B) 3...h5?!



Position after: 3...h5?!

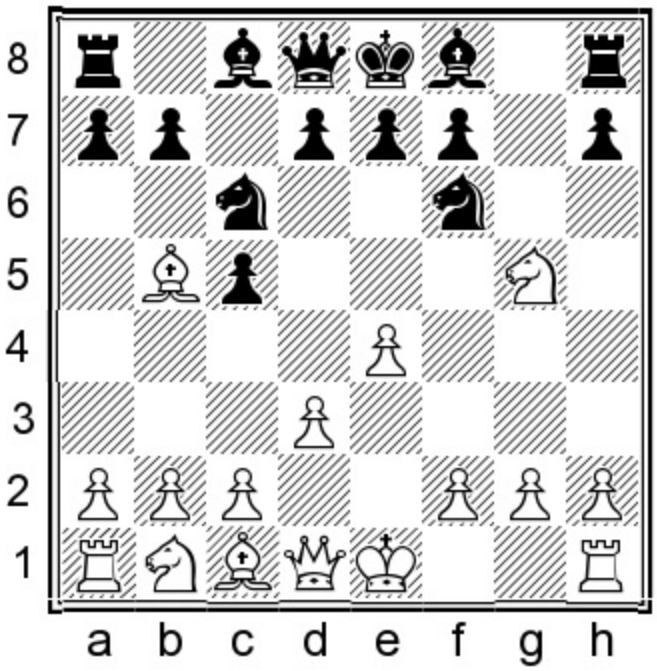
Magnus Carlsen played this move in his rather suspicious match against Ding Liren in the Carlsen Online Invitational, and repeated it in a reversed Rossolimo with the White pieces against Peter Svidler – but I think it's fair to say that we don't need to analyse it too deeply. 4.0-0 [4.h3 was played by Ding but it feels too slow. He still managed to get a great position, which probably illustrates just how bad 3...h5 is. 4...e6 5.c3 ♘f6 6.e5 ♘d5 7.d4!? Ding Liren – Carlsen, M chess24.com INT 2020.] 4...e6 Black should probably try to be consistent with 3...h5 by going for ...g7-g5 as soon as possible, but if we're reasonably accurate then Black will doubtless weaken his own king more than ours. 5.♗xc6 bxc6 6.e5! g5 7.d3 g4 8.♘fd2 f6



Position after: 8...f6

9.f4! ♘h6 10.b3 Black will struggle to cope with his self-inflicted dark-squared weaknesses. 10...♘f5 11.♘e4 ♗g7 12.♗b2!+–

C) 3...g5? An unimpressive pawn sacrifice, which isn't too difficult to refute. 4.♘xg5 ♘f6 [4...♘d4 5.♕h5 ♘h6 6.♘a3+– This is an even better version of 4...♘f6.] 5.d3

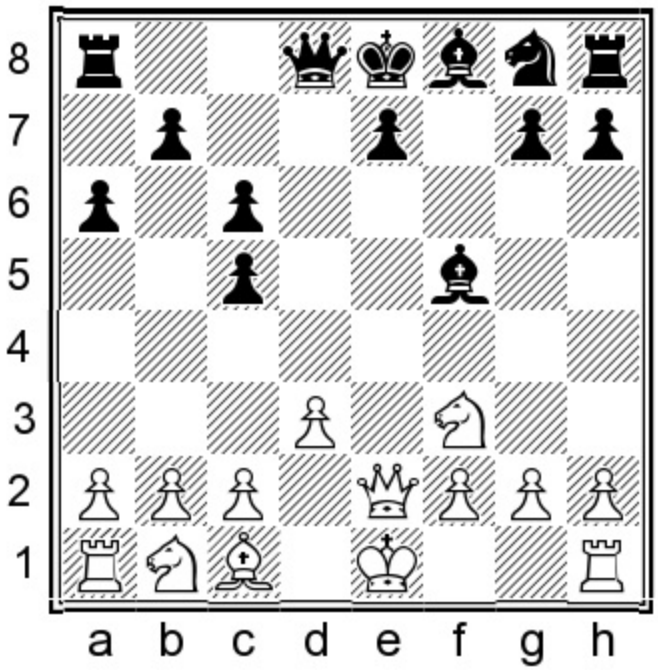


Position after: 5.d3

5...♘d4 [5...♖g8 6.0-0 ♘d4 7.♗a4+–] 6.♗a4!N [Black hopes for 6.♗c4, after which 6...d5 7.exd5

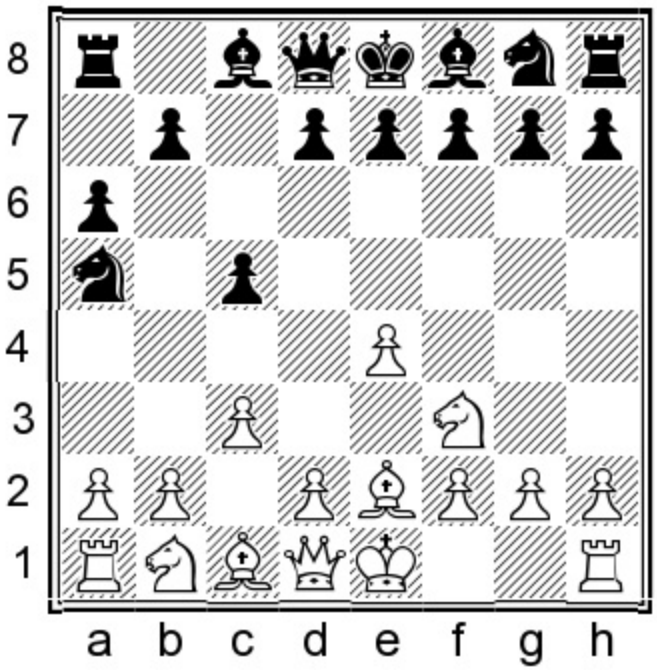
b5∞ is a bit too messy for my liking.] 6...b5 [6...♕a5+ 7.♘c3 b5 8.♗b3 ♘xb3 9.cxb3+–] 7.♗b3 d5 8.e5+–

D) 3...f5? As we'll encounter in future chapters, we ordinarily don't mind sacrificing a pawn in the Rossolimo for positional gains. 3...f5 gives us a pawn, whilst still creating positional weaknesses for us to exploit. 4.exf5 a6 5.♗xc6 dxc6 6.♕e2 ♗xf5 7.d3±



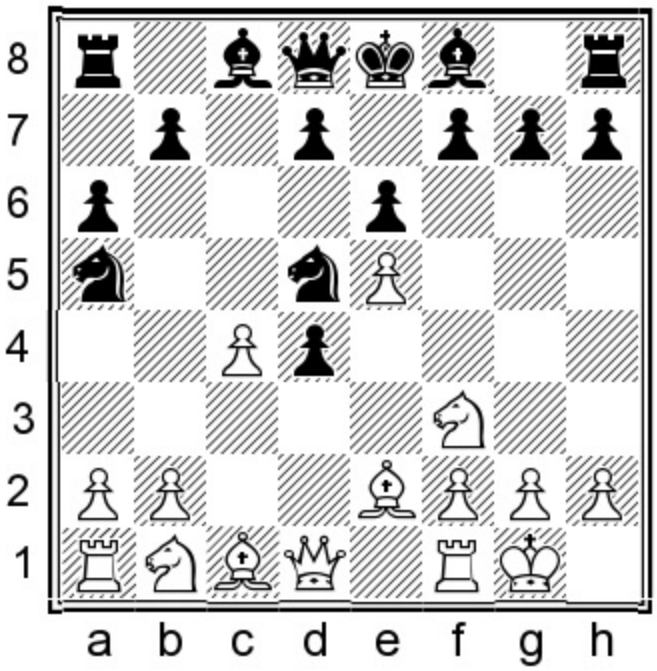
Position after: 7.d3±

E) 3...♘a5 A weirdly understandable way for Black to conserve his pawn structure, but with the obvious downfall of losing time. Yet again, it shouldn't be too hard to prove an advantage by playing normal moves. 4.c3 a6 5.♗e2



Position after: 5.♗e2

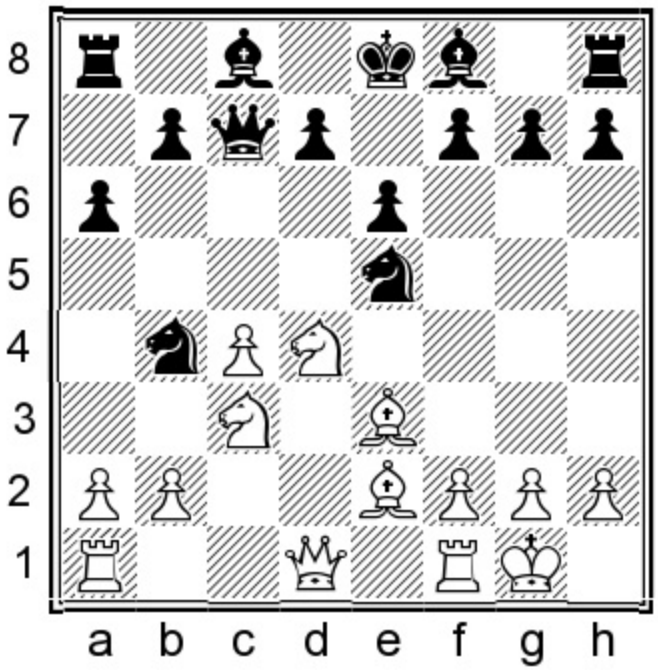
5...♘f6 [5...e6 6.d4 cxd4 7.cxd4 ♘f6 In Tiits – Korze, ICCF email 2009, the simplest continuation was just 8.♗d3 b5 9.0-0 ♗b7 10.♖e1 ♗e7 11.♘bd2±] 6.e5 ♘d5 7.d4 The position resembles an Alapin, except that Black's b8-knight has lost a lot of time going to a5 – eventually it will go back to c6 anyway. 7...cxd4 8.0-0 e6 [8...♘c6 9.cxd4 e6 10.♘c3±] 9.c4!



Position after: 9.c4!

E1) 9...♘b4 Both of Black's knights look completely misplaced here. 10.♘xd4 ♕c7 11.♗e3 ♘ac6

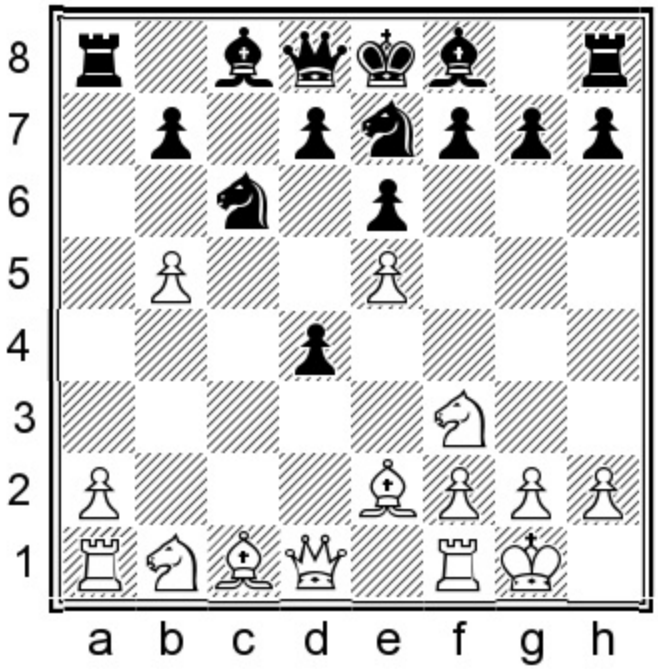
12.♘c3 ♘xe5



Position after: 12...♘xe5

Our development advantage and Black's awkward pieces ensure that we have more than adequate compensation for the pawn. 13.♖c1 ♘g6 14.f4 ♗e7 15.f5→

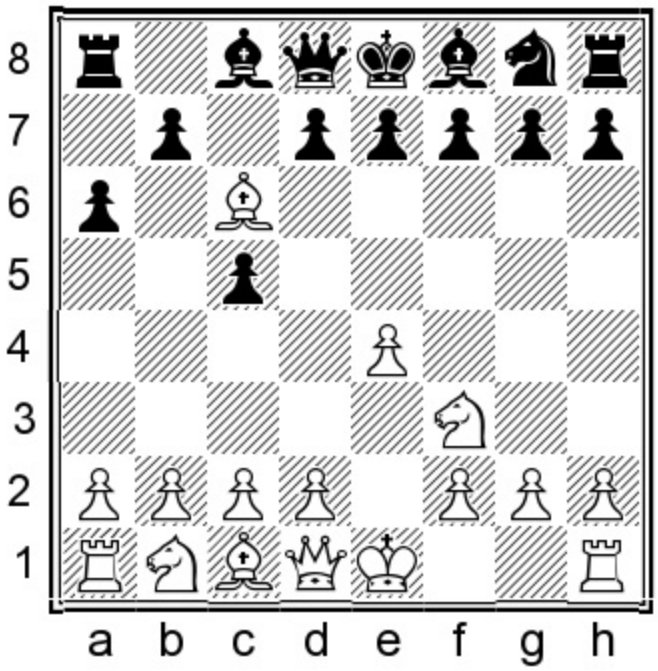
E2) 9...♘e7 10.b4! ♘ac6 11.b5 axb5 12.cxb5



Position after: 12.cxb5

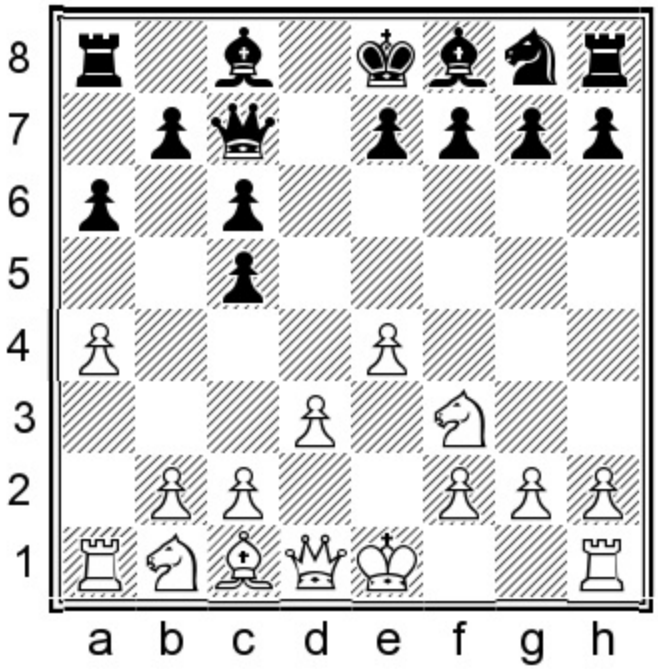
12...♘b4 [12...♘a5 13.♗b2 b6 14.♕xd4±] 13.♘xd4 d6 14.♘f3 ♘g6 15.♗g5 ♕c7 16.♘bd2±

F) 3...a6?! Directly attacking the bishop can often be shrewd in variations further down the line where we haven't chosen to capture on c6. However, here it's too early and most likely we'll find ourselves getting an improved version of the g6 – Rossolimo as Black has wasted a tempo playing ...a7-a6, simultaneously creating a weakness on b6. 4.♗xc6



Position after: 4.♗xc6

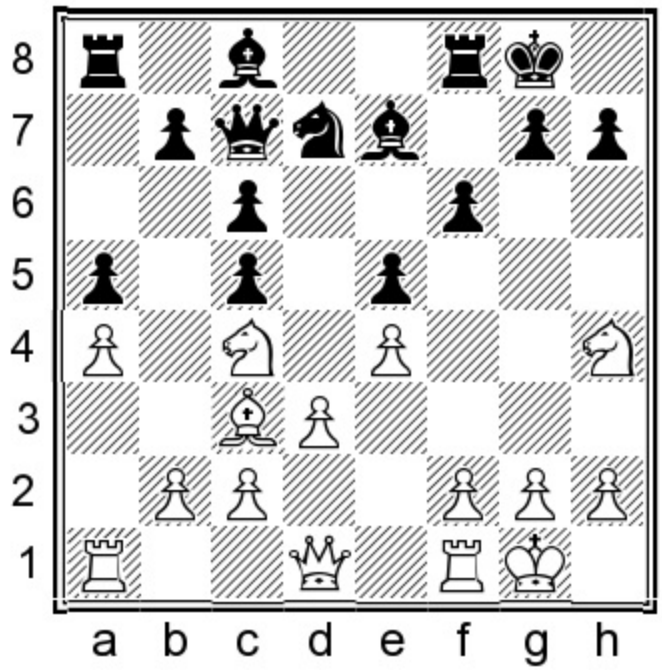
F1) 4...dxc6 There are multiple ways for White to continue. In particular, plans with a4-a5 can be very effective – especially if Black has to waste another tempo playing ...a6-a5. 5.d3 ♕c7 6.a4



Position after: 6.a4

F1.1) 6...e5 7.a5 This is positionally very bad for Black, as the c5-pawn is basically lost. Black's attempt to play actively in Ivanov – Menshchikov, ICCF email 2015 was easily refuted after 7...♘f6 8.♘bd2 ♗e6 9.0-0 c4 10.♘g5! cxd3 11.♘xe6 fxe6 12.cxd3±

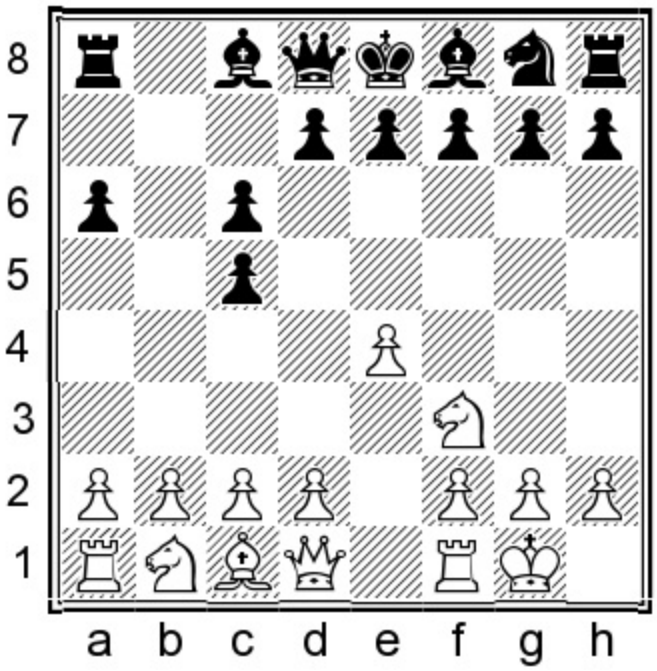
F1.2) 6...a5 7.♘a3 e5 8.♗e3 ♘f6 9.♘c4 ♘d7 10.0-0 ♗e7 11.♗d2 0-0 12.♗c3 f6 13.♘h4→



Position after: 13.♘h4→

We have a massively improved version of the typical structures that we'll encounter in the g6 – Rossolimo.

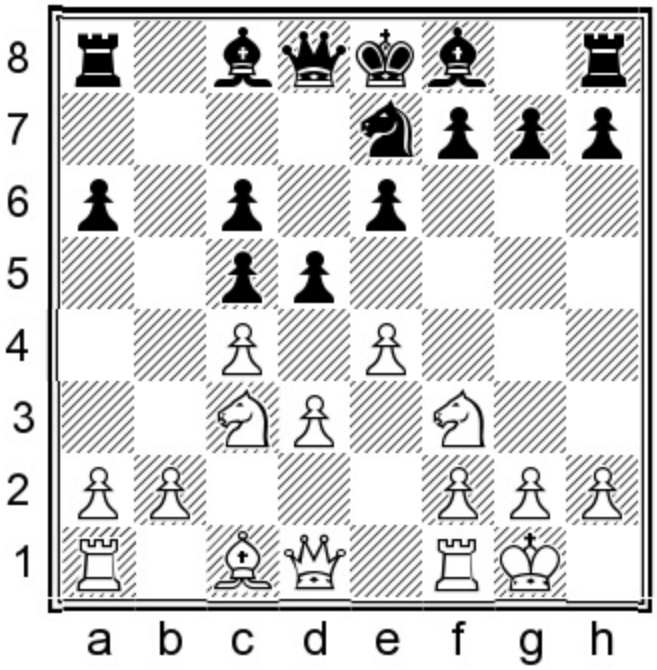
F2) 4...bxc6 5.0-0



Position after: 5.0-0

As we progressively learn about Rossolimo structures, it will become pretty clear why this approach doesn't make sense for Black at this particular time. I will show a couple of variations to clarify that an advantage is easy to achieve.

F2.1) 5...d5?! Hopefully you'll already recognise that such a move is a positional blunder, as the c5-pawn will be extremely weak. 6.d3 e6 [6...f6 7.e5! ♗g4 8.h3 ♗xf3 9.♕xf3 e6 10.♖e1±] 7.c4! ♘e7 8.♘c3

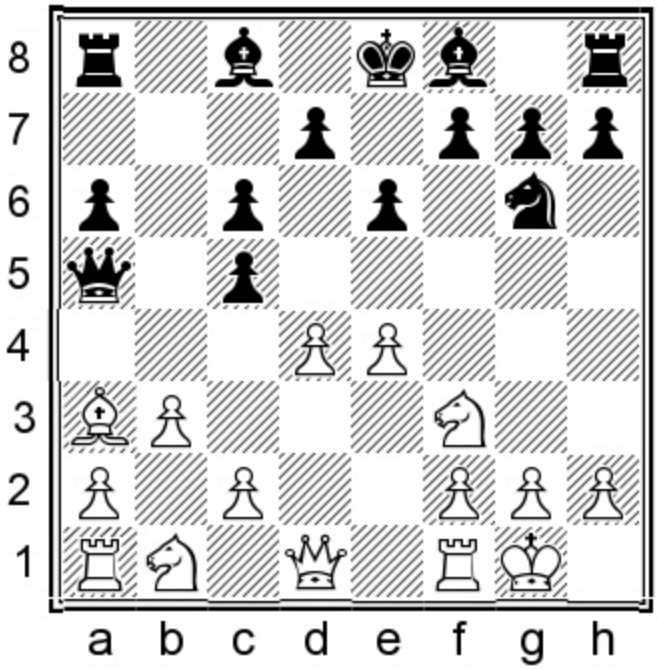


Position after: 8.♘c3

Followed by ♘a4, b2-b3 and ♗a3. It's also a good idea to play e4-e5 before Black can achieve an e5-d4 pawn structure himself. 8...♘g6 9.e5±

F2.2) 5...d6 6.e5!± Further chapters will exemplify why White already has a fantastic position.

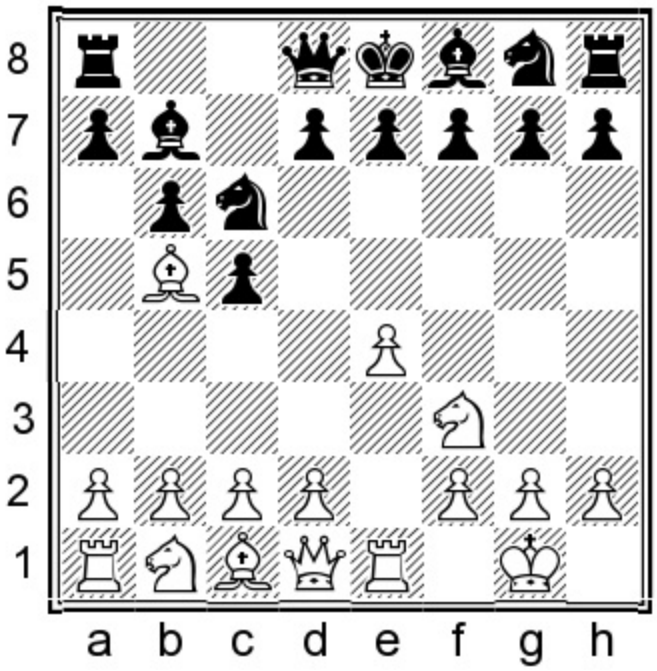
F2.3) 5...e6 Black is a tempo down on the line 3...e6 4.♗xc6, but I'm only suggesting 4.0-0 in this particular line. Therefore it's important to note how to play from this position, although I wouldn't be too concerned considering that Black has wasted time with ...a7-a6. 6.b3! ♘e7 [6...♕c7 7.e5 ♘e7 8.♘a3±; 6...d6 7.e5 ♘e7 8.exd6 ♘f5 9.♗a3 ♗xd6 10.♘c3±] 7.♗a3 ♘g6 8.d4! ♕a5 This critical position was reached in the email game Tiemann – Van Tricht, ICCF 2015.



Position after: 8...♕a5

In the game, White played 9.e5, but the simpler 9.♖e1 poses Black greater difficulties, e.g. 9...♗e7 [9...d5 10.h4! h5 11.c3 ♗e7 12.♕c2 ♗d7 13.♗xc5 ♗xc5 14.dxc5 ♕xc5 15.♘bd2±] 10.e5! Now we play this move with better circumstances – obviously with the intent of exploiting Black's dark-squared weaknesses. 10...0-0 11.♗xc5 ♗xc5 12.dxc5 ♕xc5 13.♘bd2±

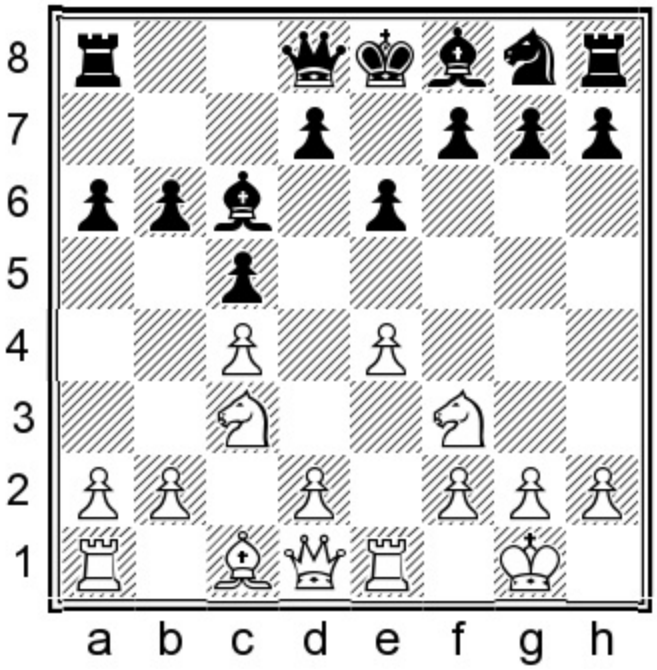
4.0-0 ♗b7 5.♖e1



Position after: 5.♖e1

5...e6

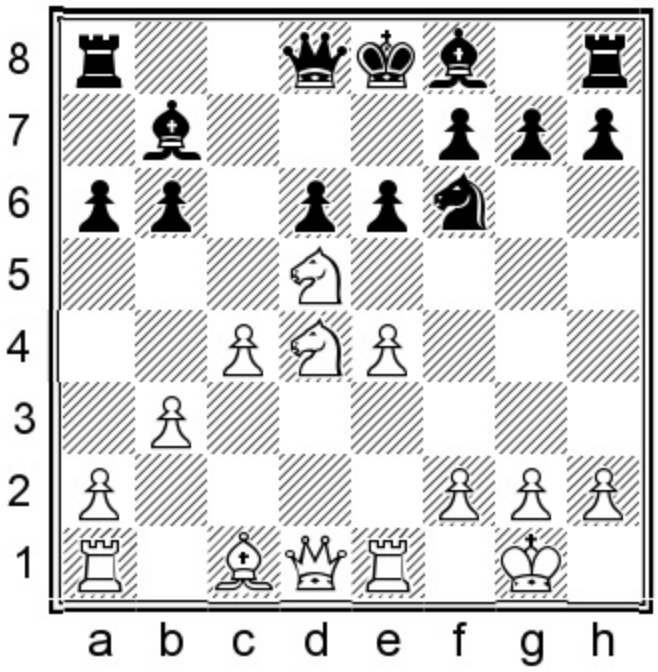
5...a6 6.♗xc6 ♗xc6 7.c4 [7.d4 is also very good but, as we'll encounter in future lines, my preference is to play with a Marcozy structure against Black's light-squared bishop.] 7...e6 8.♘c3



Position after: 8.♘c3

A) 8...♘f6 9.b3 d6 10.d4 cxd4 11.♘xd4 ♗b7 12.♘d5! A standard resource, guaranteeing that Black

can’t even claim a bishop-pair advantage.

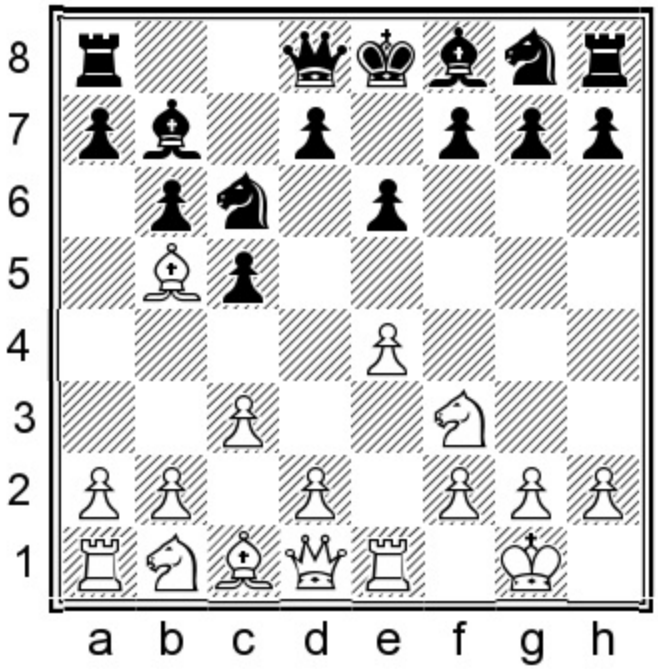


Position after: 12.♘d5!

12...♗e7 13.♘xe7 ♕xe7 14.f3± It is clear that our dark-squared bishop is significantly better than Black’s light-squared bishop.

B) 8...♘e7 9.d4 cxd4 10.♕xd4 ♘g6 11.♘d5!± This time, Black will have to make a concession in order to develop his f8-bishop. In the meantime, we can start to think about fun ideas such as h4-h5.

6.c3

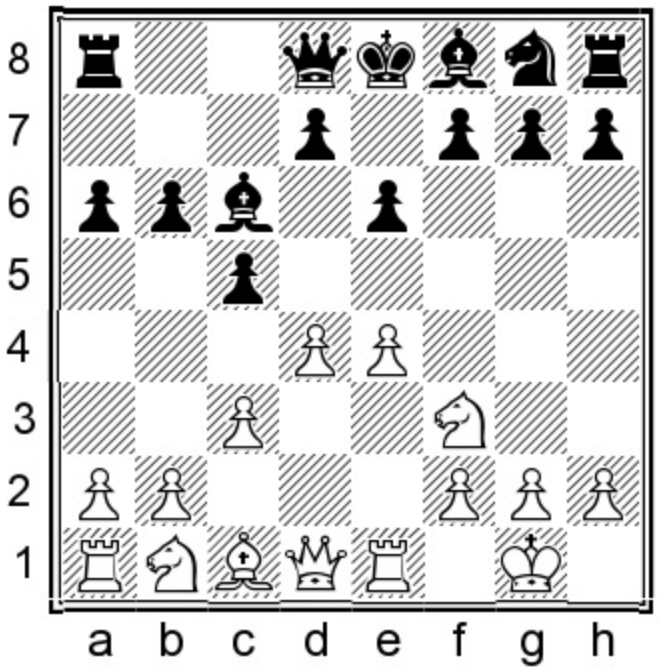


Position after: 6.c3

The resulting positions will tend to resemble a French structure, after a likely ...d7-d5 advance is met with e4-e5. In these scenarios, it appears that Black's bishop on b7 is misplaced – whereas our pieces are positioned perfectly to embark on a kingside attack.

6...♘f6

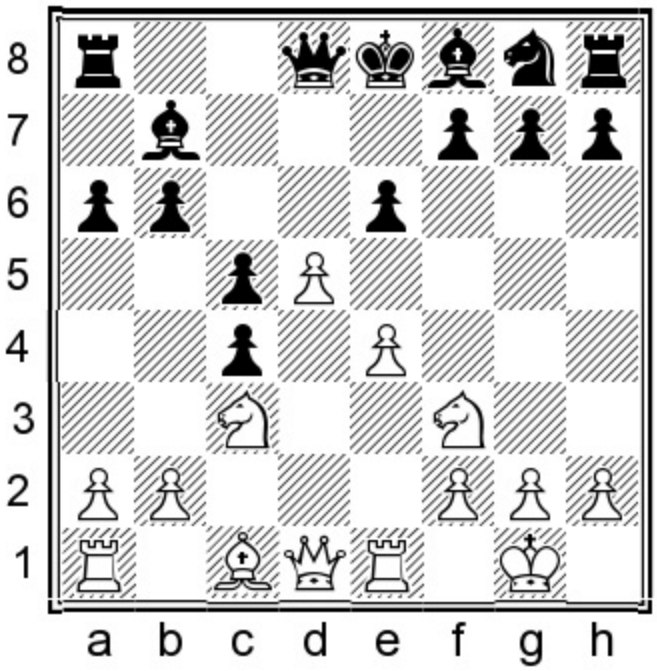
A) 6...a6 7.♗xc6 ♗xc6 8.d4



Position after: 8.d4

A1) 8...d5 This time we don't have the possibility of ♘c3 and ♕a4+, but our c-pawn can help us to open the centre. 9.c4!

A1.1) 9...dxc4 10.d5 ♗b7 11.♘c3

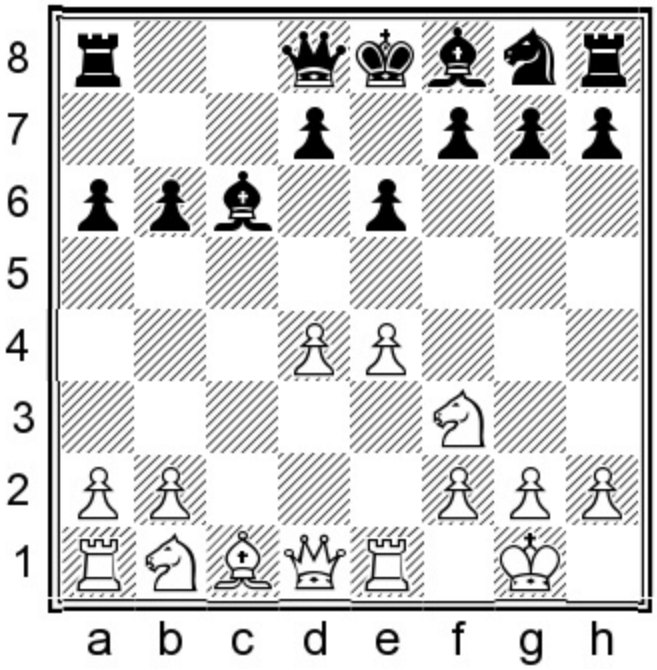


Position after: 11.♘c3

The pawn deficit is insignificant, given Black's predicament. 11...♘f6 [11...b5 12.♗f4 Followed by ♕e2 and ♖ad1.] 12.a4 ♗e7 13.d6! ♗xd6 14.e5 ♗c7 15.exf6 gxf6 16.♕xd8+ ♖xd8 17.♘d2± Black doesn't have enough compensation for the piece.

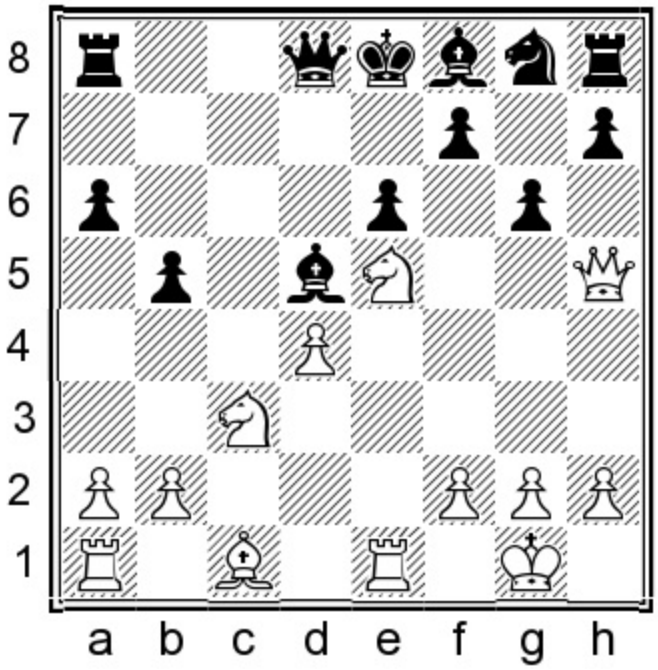
A1.2) 9...dxe4 10.♘e5 ♕d6 [10...♗b7 11.♕a4+±] 11.♘xc6 ♕xc6 12.d5±

A2) 8...cxd4 9.cxd4



Position after: 9.cxd4

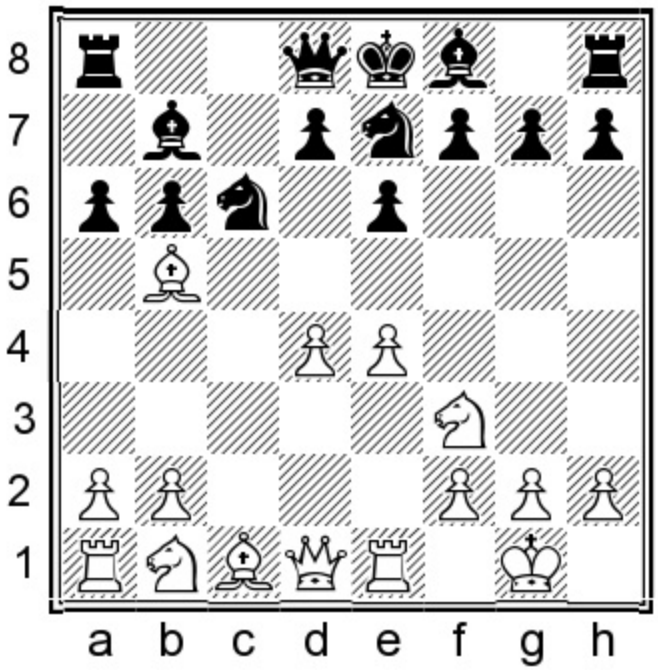
9...d5 The only way to preclude a d4-d5 push, but Black's lack of development will engender his downfall. [9...b5 10.d5 ♗b7 11.d6!± Black wil undoubtedly suffer in passivity for a while.] 10.♘e5! ♗b7 11.♘c3 The threat of ♕a4+ means Black has to continue delay development. 11...b5 12.exd5 ♗xd5 13.♕h5! g6



Position after: 13...g6

14.♘xg6! Perhaps not necessary, but Black can't do anything about the resulting variation. 14...♘f6 15.♕h3 fxg6 16.♘xd5 ♘xd5 17.♕xe6+ ♗e7 18.♖e5 ♘c7 19.♕b3 ♕xd4 20.♖xe7+! ♔xe7 21.♗g5+ ♔f8 22.♗h6+ ♔e7 23.♖e1+ ♔d6 24.♖d1+–

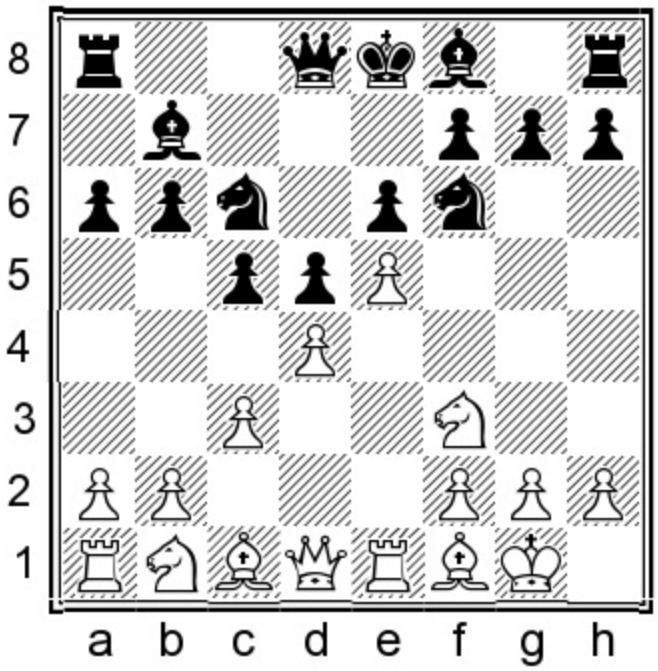
B) 6...♘ge7 7.d4 cxd4 8.cxd4 a6



Position after: 8...a6

In Bohm – Bellon Lopez, Niemeyer 1969, I preferred 9.♗d3 ♘b4 10.♗f1! d5 11.e5± and White quite clearly has a very good version of a French advanced system.

7.d4 a6 8.♗f1 d5 9.e5



Position after: 9.e5

9...♘d7

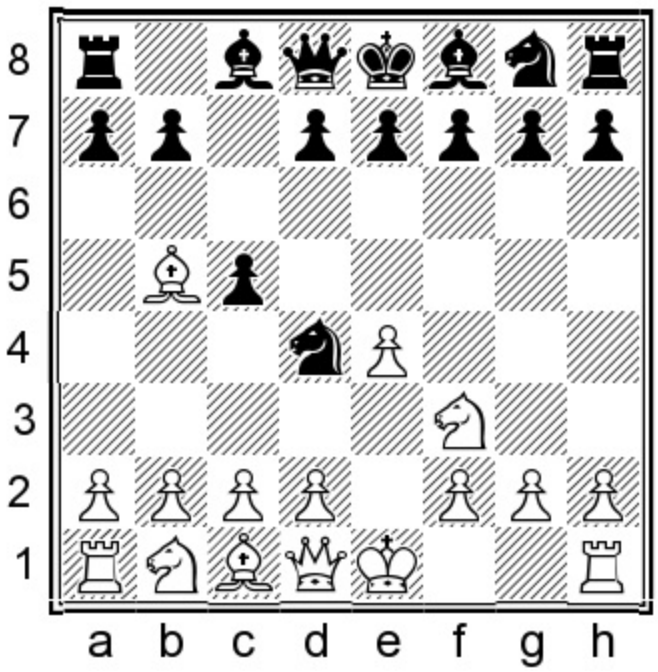
9...♘e4 10.♘bd2 ♗e7 11.♗d3 ♘xd2 12.♗xd2±

10.♗e3±

Followed by ♘bd2 and ♗d3. Our kingside prospects seem more prosperous than anything Black can muster up on the queenside. A timely c3-c4 push is also worth keeping an eye on.

b) 3...♘d4?!

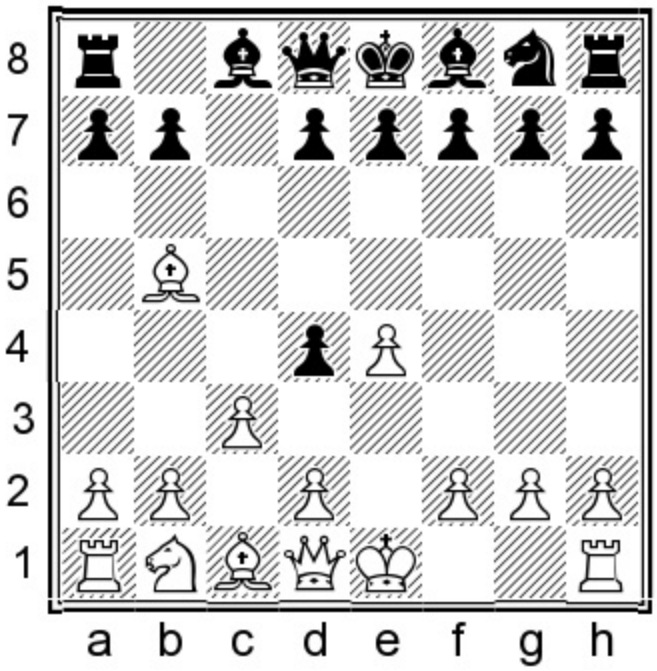
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘d4?!



Position after: 3...♘d4?!

This move makes more sense if our b1-knight is already on c3, but here it's easy enough for White to quickly grab control of the centre.

4.♘xd4 cxd4 5.c3!



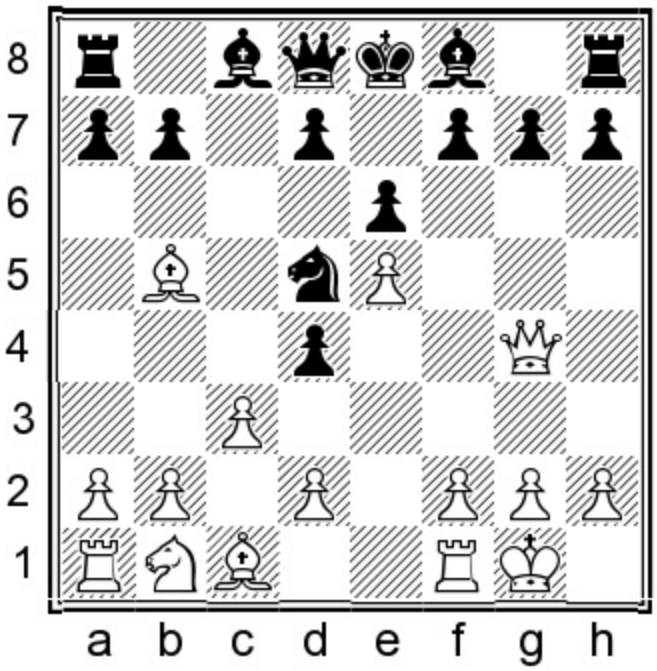
Position after: 5.c3!

It's best to play this move before Black can adequately support the d4-square. Black has several ways to continue, but in each case active play will lead to a compelling advantage.

5...♕b6

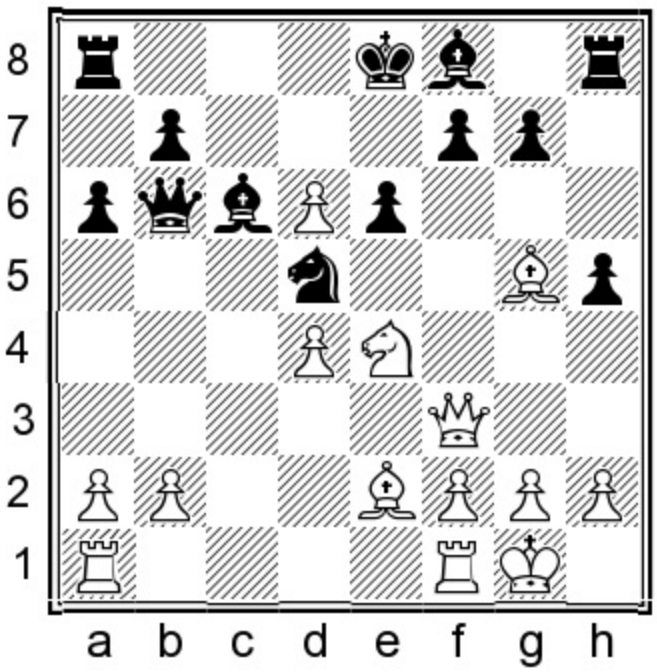
The most common move here, but I feel that ultimately the b6-queen is misplaced and will most likely be hit by a future knight on c4. In the meantime, we can just continue as normal, and the queen isn't exactly the best piece to block our central advances.

A) 5...♘f6 6.e5 ♘d5 [6...♕a5!? was an interesting attempt in Schmidt – Rook, ICCF email 2016. The strongest continuation seems to be 7.♕a4! ♕xa4 8.♗xa4 ♘d5 9.cxd4±] 7.0-0 There's no need to immediately capture on d4, as even if Black plays ...dxc3 this will only aid us in our own development. 7...e6 8.♕g4!



Position after: 8.♕g4!

8...a6 [8...♕b6 9.♗a4 will just transpose to 5...♕b6] 9.♗e2 dxc3 10.♘xc3 d6 11.d4 h5 Black wants to kick the queen from g4 in order to release his f8-bishop, but this consequently reduces the safety of the Black king. [11...g6? Aesthetically this looks really bad for Black, and it can be punished by the simple 12.♘e4+–] 12.♕f3 ♗d7 13.♘e4 ♗c6 14.♗g5 ♕b6 15.exd6

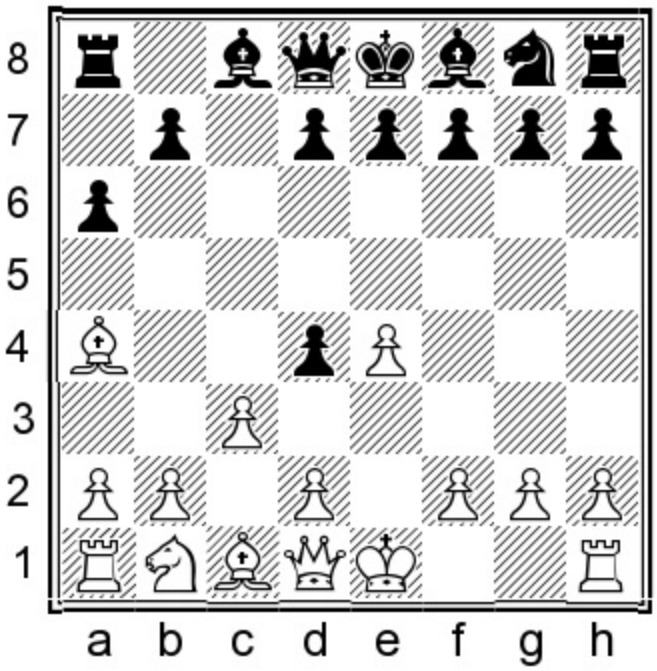


Position after: 15.exd6

15...f6 [15...♕xd4 16.♖ad1 ♕e5 17.d7+! ♗xd7 18.♗c4 ♗c6 19.♖fe1+–] 16.♗d2 ♕xd4 17.♖ad1±

B) 5...dxc3 6.♘xc3 Our development lead and control of the centre already confirms a sizeable advantage, e.g. 6...g6 7.d4 ♗g7 8.0-0 a6 9.♗e2 e6 10.♗f4 d5 11.♗e5!±

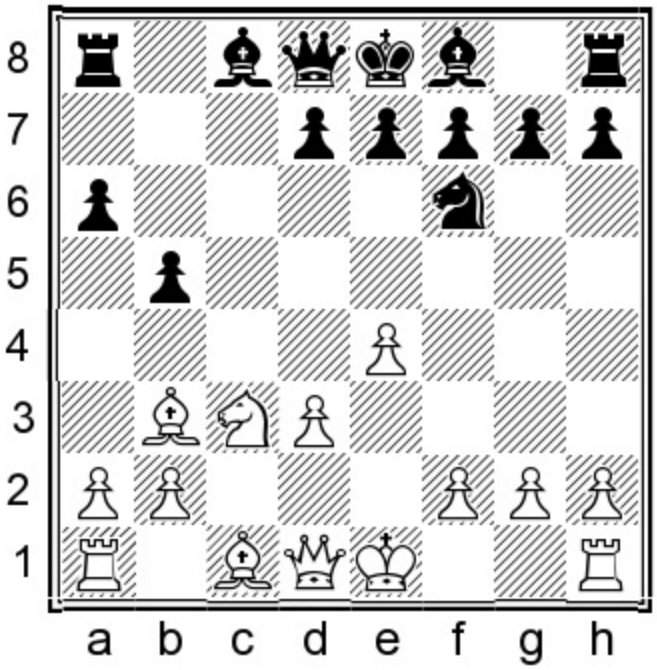
C) 5...a6 6.♗a4



Position after: 6.♗a4

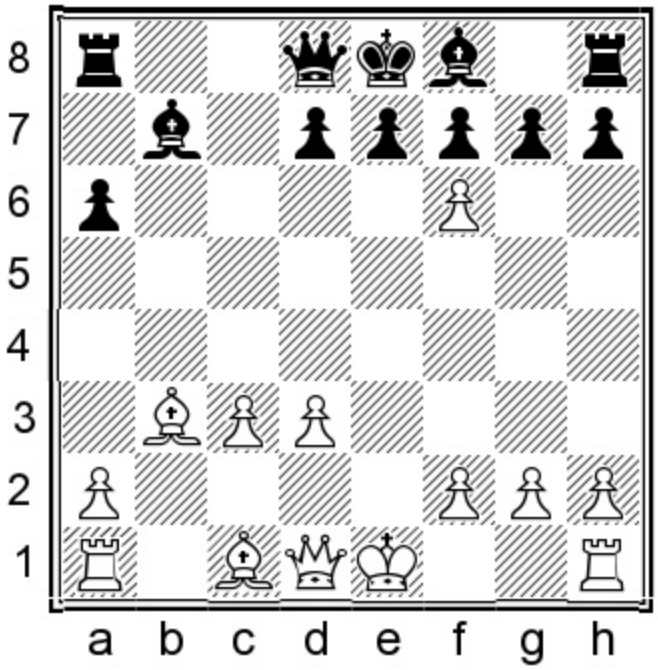
In general I always prefer to retreat to a4 rather than c4, as we're forcing Black to play ...b7-b5 before moving his d-pawn. This will no doubt construct further weaknesses in his position.

C1) 6...♘f6 7.d3 dxc3 8.♘xc3 b5 9.♗b3



Position after: 9.♗b3

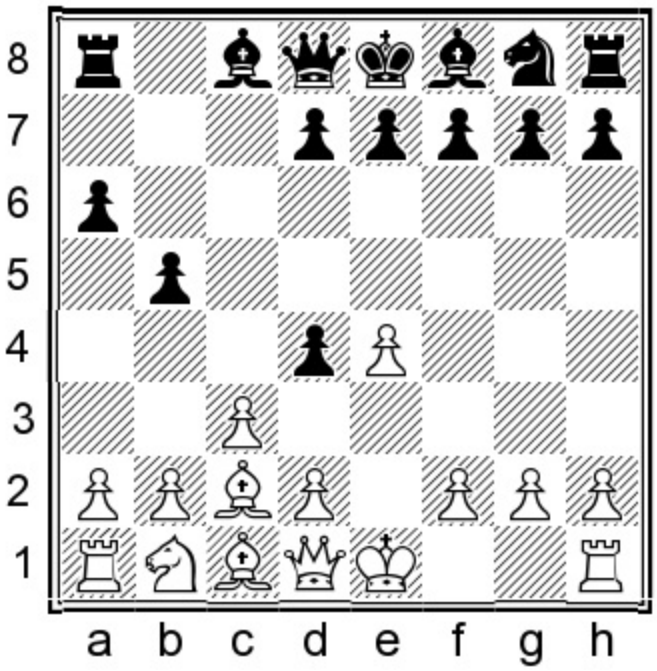
9...♗b7 [9...d6 10.a4! b4 11.♘d5 ♘xd5 12.♗xd5 ♖b8 13.♗g5 ♗b7 14.♗b3± Black has to worry about the threat of ♕f3. In any case, we evidently have a comfortable advantage.] 10.e5! b4 11.exf6! bxc3 12.bxc3



Position after: 12.bxc3

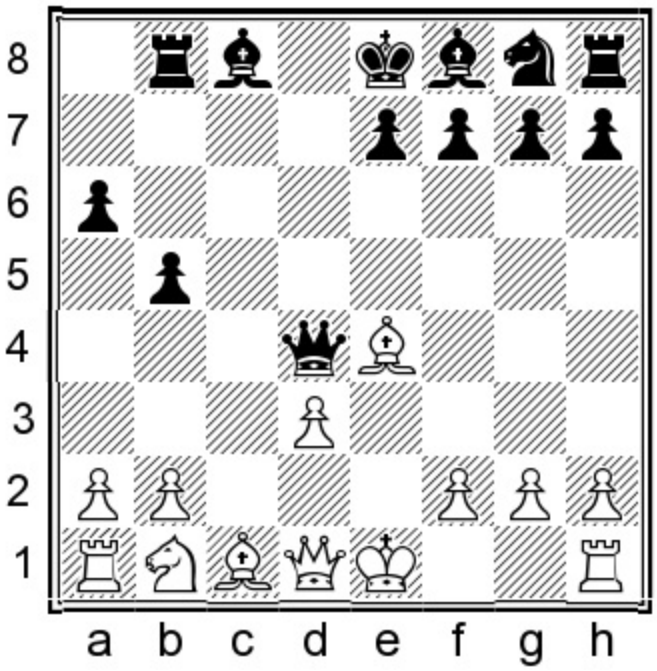
Black faces an uncomfortable choice about how to deal with the f6-pawn considering that ♗xf7 is a potential threat. 12...e6 Perhaps the most pragmatic move, but White will simply emerge a pawn up. [12...gxf6 13.♗xf7+ ♔xf7 14.♕b3+ e6 15.♕xb7±; 12...♕c7 13.0-0 ♕c6 14.♕g4 ♕xf6 Despite managing to maintain his structural integrity, Black's lack of development will now prove costly, for example after 15.♖b1± followed by d2-d4.] 13.fxg7 ♗xg7 14.d4±

C2) 6...b5 7.♗c2!



Position after: 7.♗c2!

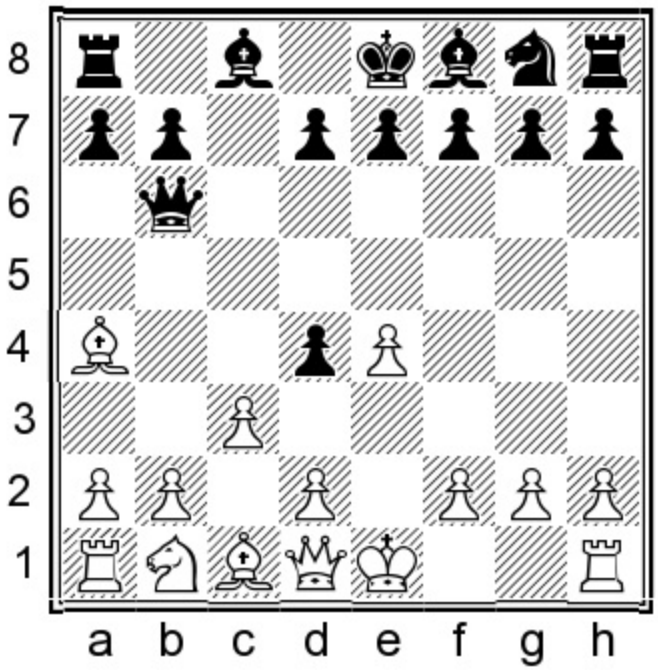
Here we prefer the c2-square for our bishop so that we don't have to waste another move defending the e4-pawn. 7...d5 [7...♕b6 8.0-0 e6 9.cxd4 ♕xd4 The queen isn't a good blockader, and will easily be removed. 10.d3 ♗b7 11.♘c3 ♖c8 12.♗e3 ♕b4 13.♗b3± White had a considerable advantage in Palac – Colpa, Omis 2004.; 7...e5 8.cxd4 exd4 9.♗b3! ♗b7 10.d3 ♗c5 11.0-0 d6 12.♕g4 ♕f6 13.f4±] 8.cxd4 dxe4 9.♗xe4 ♖b8 10.d3 ♕xd4



Position after: 10...♕xd4

In all of the resulting positions, Black will face consistent problems due to the weaknesses incurred by his premature queenside expansion. 11.♗e3! ♕xb2 [11...♕d7 12.♕f3 ♗b7 13.♘c3 ♘f6 14.♗f4 ♘xe4 15.dxe4 ♖c8 16.0-0±] 12.♗c6+ ♗d7 13.♗xd7+ ♔xd7 14.♘d2±

6.♗a4!



Position after: 6.♗a4!

6.♕e2 and 6.♗c4 have been more common, but I really like the text move. The bishop seems very secure on a4 whilst simultaneously inhibiting Black's own ...d7-d6 or ...d7-d5 ideas.

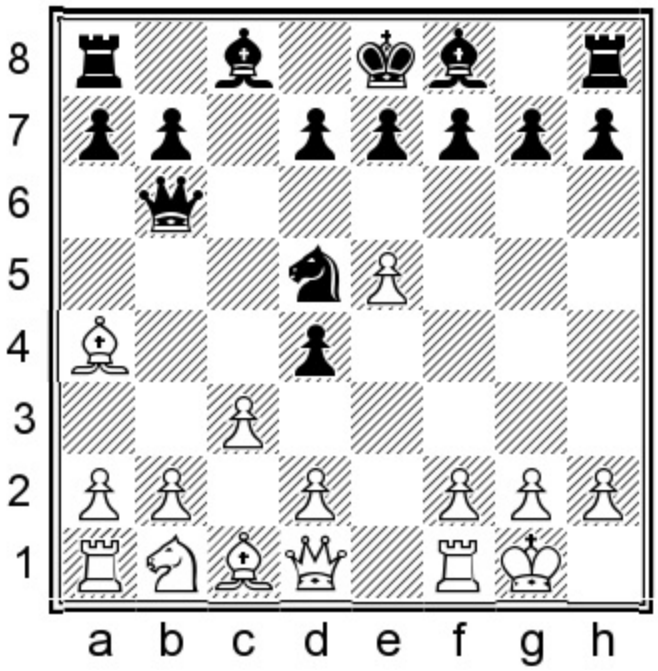
6...♘f6

A) 6...g6 was a creative way to avoid recapturing on d4 with the queen, but after 7.cxd4 ♗g7 8.d5! ♗xb2 9.♗xb2 ♕xb2 10.♘c3± Black's dark squares proved to be too weak in Saric – Humeau, Bastia 2014.

B) 6...♕g6 doesn't seem to place the Black queen in better stead. 7.♕f3 d3? 8.0-0 ♘f6 9.♖e1+– Black's d-pawn was lost in Batricevic – Milovic, Barcelona 2015.

C) 6...e6 7.cxd4 ♕xd4 8.♘c3± Pushing our d-pawn followed by ♗e3 in the next few moves will highlight the main problem with Black's strategy.

7.e5 ♘d5 8.0-0



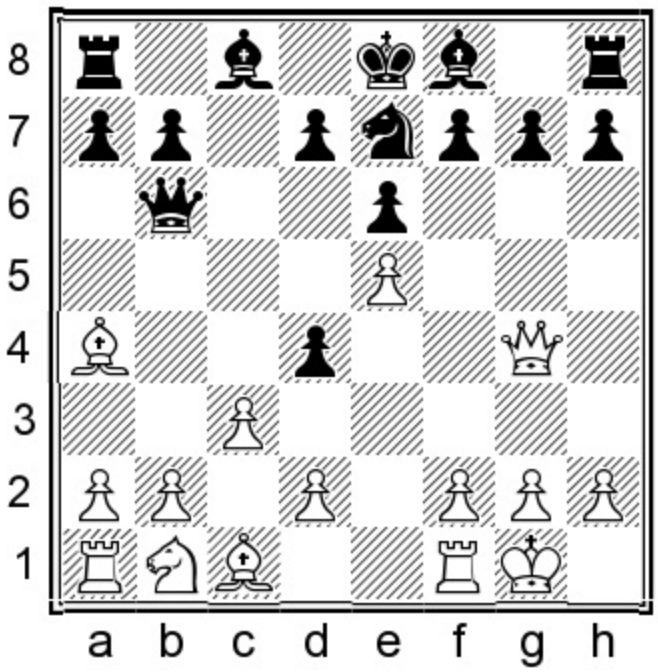
Position after: 8.0-0

The knight on d5 imposes a few minor issues for White in terms of establishing central control. However, Black won't be able to maintain his knight in the centre of the board.

8...e6

8...g6 9.♗b3 ♘c7 10.♖e1 ♗g7 11.cxd4 ♕xd4 12.♘c3 0-0 13.♖e4 ♕b6 14.d4±

9.♕g4! ♘e7

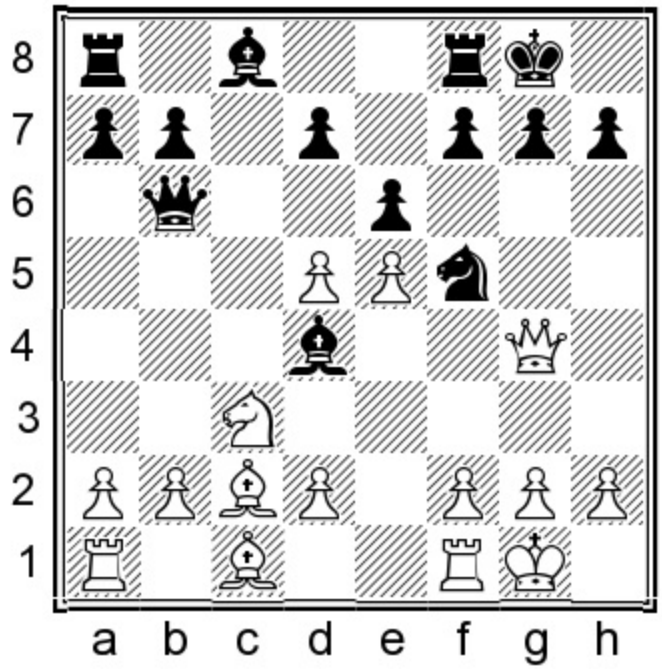


Position after: 9...♘e7

9...dxc3 10.♘xc3±

The knight needs to relocate to either g6 or f5 in order to aid the development of the f8-bishop, and this gives us enough time to capture on d4.

10.cxd4 ♘f5 11.d5! ♗c5 12.♗c2 0-0 13.♘c3 ♗d4



Position after: 13...♗d4

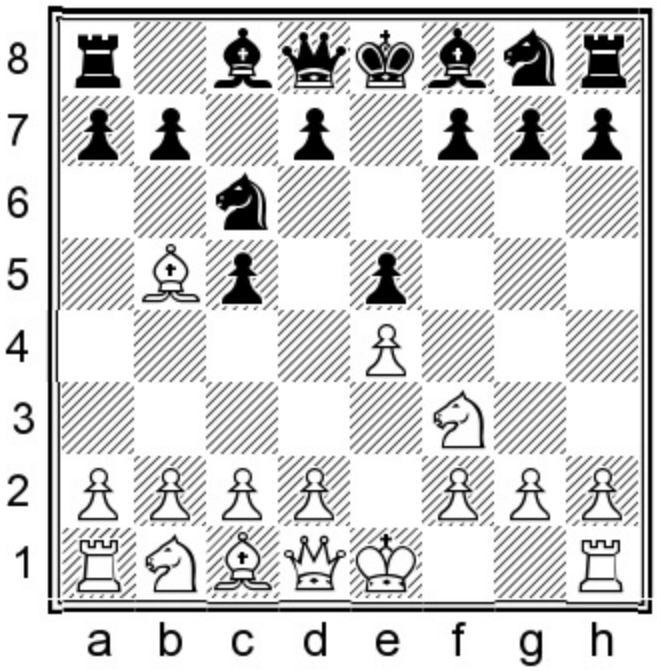
It appears that Black has done enough to win his pawn back, but we can now focus our attention to his badly protected kingside.

14.♘e2! ♗xe5 15.♕e4+–

Followed by g2-g4, and Black will lose a piece.

c) 3...e5

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e5



Position after: 3...e5

A move which is very typical in Rossolimo structures, but it's commonly played to prevent White from enacting his own central plans. In this case, 3...e5 seems too premature, as we can now focus all of our attentions on exploiting the drawbacks of this move.

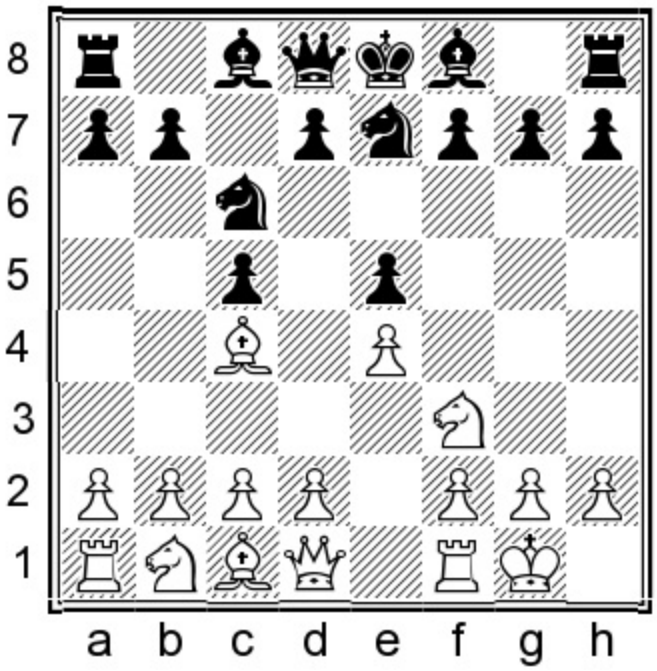
4.0-0

Now Black has to spend one move defending the e5-pawn, which grants us enough time to carry out an effective c3-d4 break.

4...♗d6

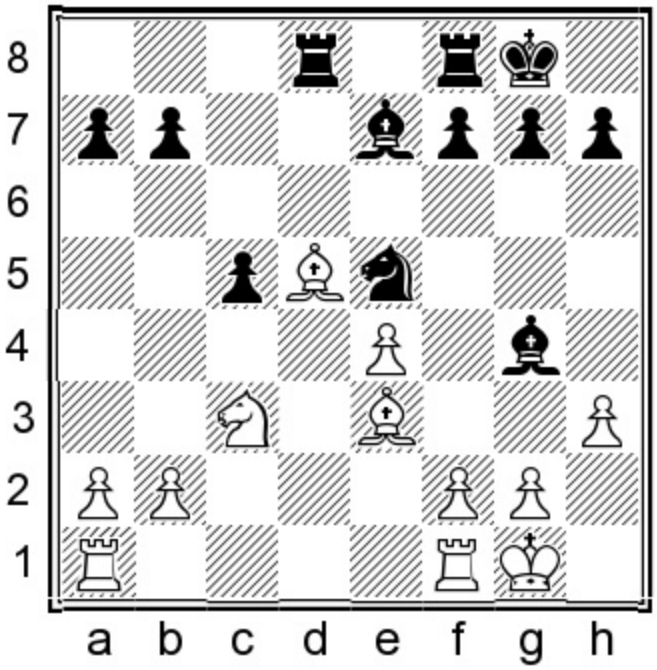
Black aims to play ...♗c7 and ...♘ge7 followed by ...d7-d5, ensuring that the e5-pawn is sufficiently protected. Therefore it makes sense to play c2-c3 and d2-d4 as quickly as possible, before Black can establish any kind of initiative.

A) 4...♘ge7 5.♗c4! We already have a pretty serious threat of ♘g5, so Black must tread carefully. [5.c3 is also very good, but the text move indicates that we can successfully alter our play depending on Black's set-up.]



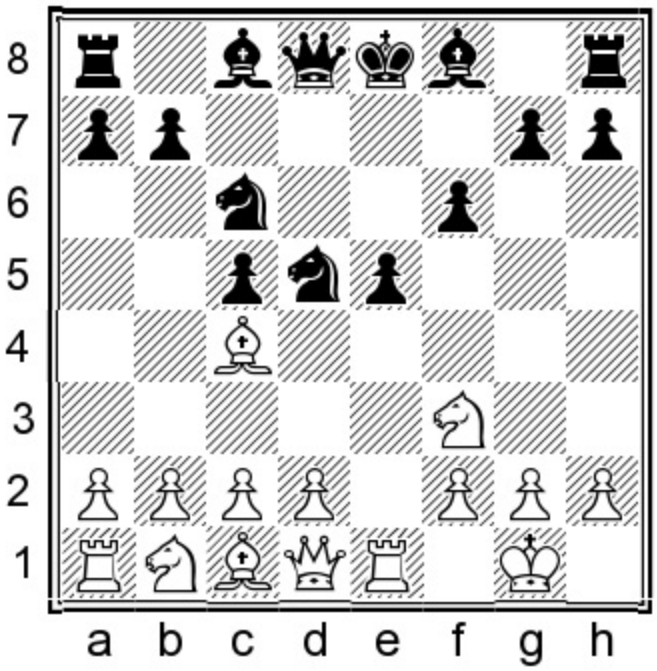
Position after: 5.♗c4!

A1) 5...♘g6 A concession, as Black most likely intended to originally play ...g6 and ...♗g7. 6.c3 ♗e7 7.d4 exd4 8.cxd4 0-0 9.♘c3 d6 10.♗e3 ♗g4 11.dxc5 dxc5 12.h3 ♘ge5 13.♕xd8 ♖axd8 14.♘xe5 ♘xe5 15.♗d5±



Position after: 15.♗d5±

A2) 5...d5 It looks risky to open the centre, and we can certainly prove an advantage here. 6.exd5 ♘xd5 7.♖e1 f6

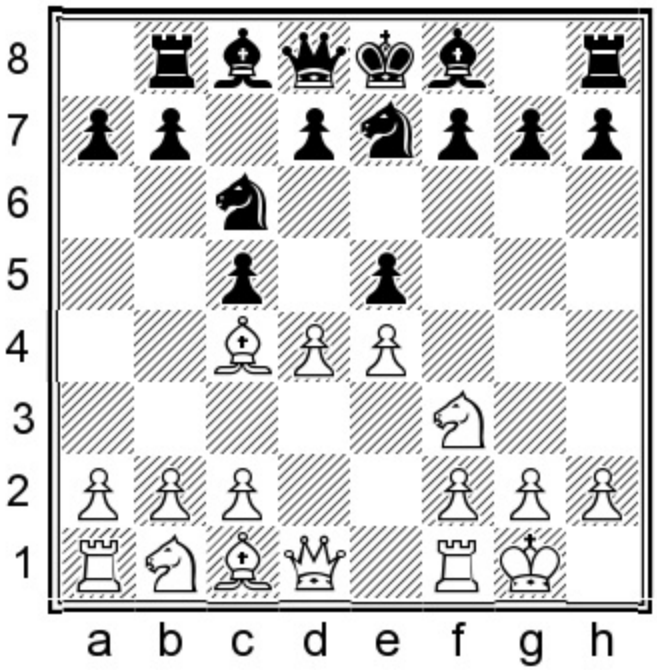


Position after: 7...f6

8.c3! ♘b6 9.♗b5 ♗d6 10.d4 cxd4 11.cxd4 0-0 12.♗xc6 bxc6 13.dxe5 fxe5 14.♗g5 ♕c7 15.♘bd2±

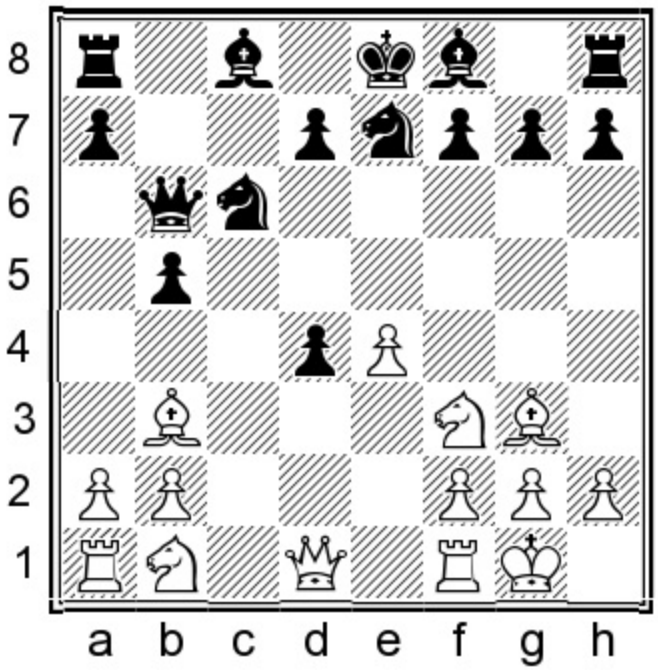
A3) 5...h6 The only way for Black to attempt to continue with his fianchetto plans, but it's too slow. 6.c3 g6 7.d4 cxd4 8.cxd4 exd4 9.♘xd4 ♗g7 10.♘b5 0-0 11.♘d6+–

A4) 5...♖b8?! 6.d4! Black's original idea to play against ♘g5 fails due to tactical reasons. [6.♘g5 d5 7.exd5 b5∞ This justifies Black's 5th move. I would prefer to avoid this variation, even if the complications do favour White according to the engine.]



Position after: 6.d4!

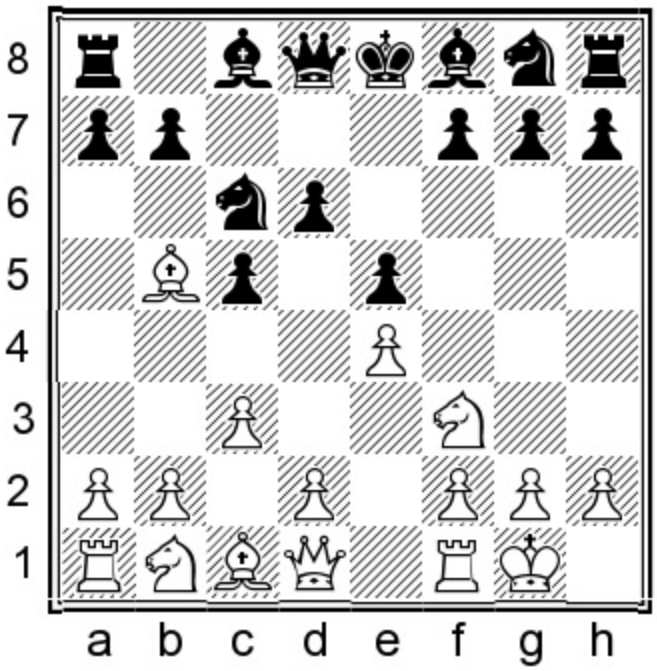
6...cxd4 [6...♘xd4 7.♘xe5 d5 8.exd5 b5 9.♗d3 ♕xd5 10.♗f4+–; 6...exd4 7.♗f4 d6 8.♘g5+–] 7.c3 b5 [7...d5 8.exd5 ♘xd5 9.cxd4± Black will probably have to sacrifice the e5-pawn in order to avoid a quick resignation.] 8.♗b3 ♕b6 [8...dxc3 9.♘g5+–] 9.cxd4 exd4 [9...♘xd4 10.♗xf7+! ♔xf7 11.♘xe5+ ♔f6 12.♗e3 ♔xe5 13.f4+ ♔e6 14.♗xd4 ♕c6 15.f5+ ♔f7 16.f6+–] 10.♗f4 ♖a8 11.♗g3!+–



Position after: 11.♗g3!+–

Black has too many weaknesses to survive. We will either be able to target the f7-pawn with ♘g5, or even advance our h-pawn to prepare for a kingside assault.

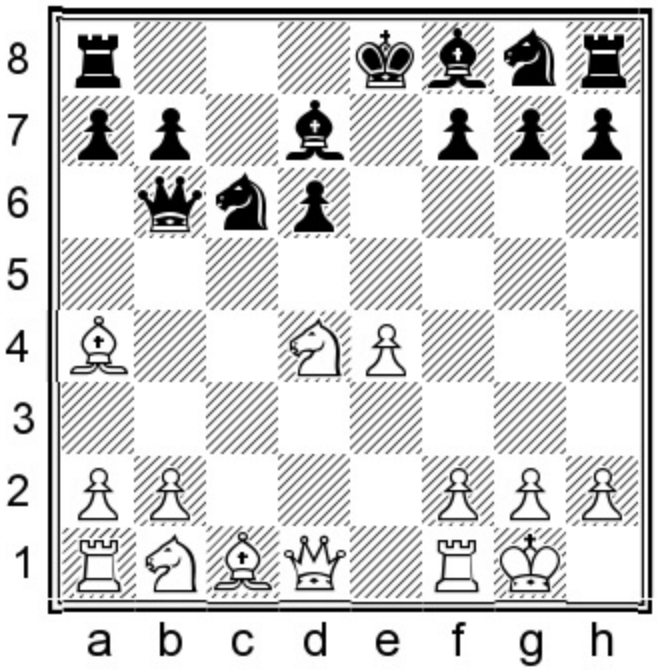
B) 4...d6 is very slow, and our plan is straightforward and constructive. 5.c3



Position after: 5.c3

B1) 5...♘f6 6.d4 will most likely transpose to 5...♗d7 at some point.

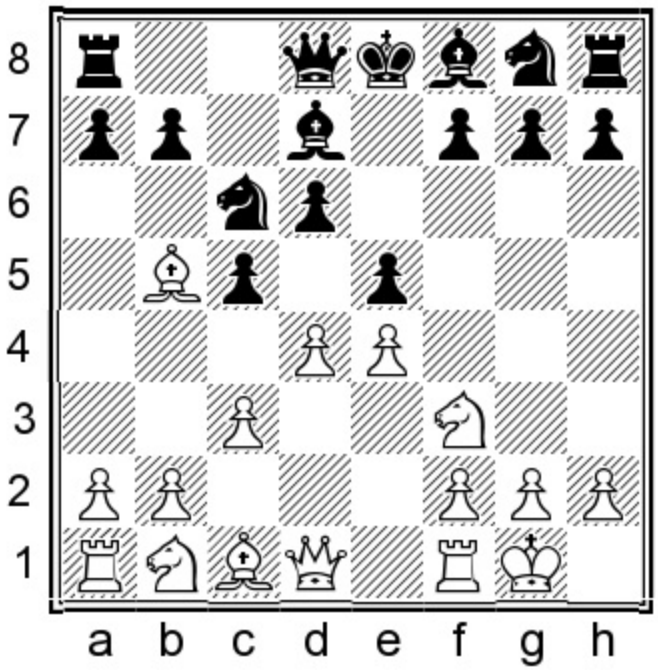
B2) 5...♕b6 The variation indicates that Black isn't actually preventing d2-d4. 6.♗a4 ♗d7 7.d4! cxd4 8.cxd4 exd4 9.♘xd4



Position after: 9.♘xd4

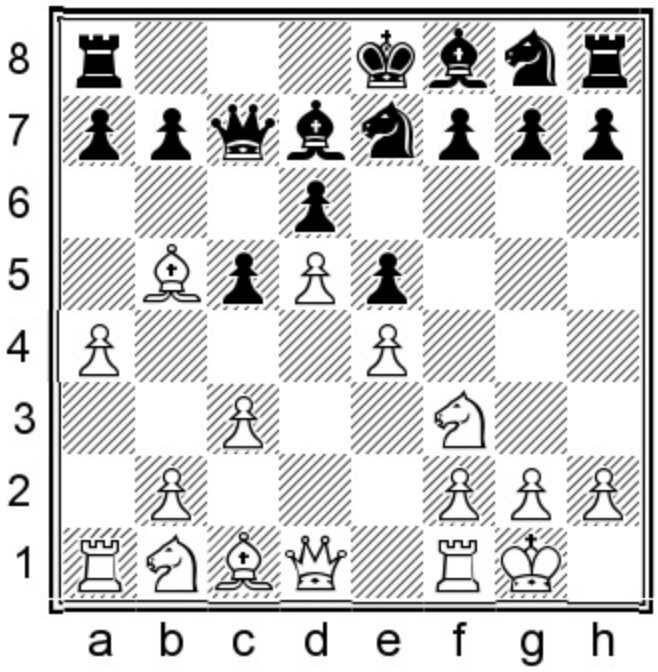
9...♕xd4 [9...♘xd4 10.♗xd7+ ♔xd7 11.♗e3+–] 10.♗xc6 ♕xd1 11.♗xd7+ ♔xd7 12.♖xd1+– Without the light-squared bishops and with a weak d6-pawn, Black faces a hopeless ending.

B3) 5...♗d7 6.d4



Position after: 6.d4

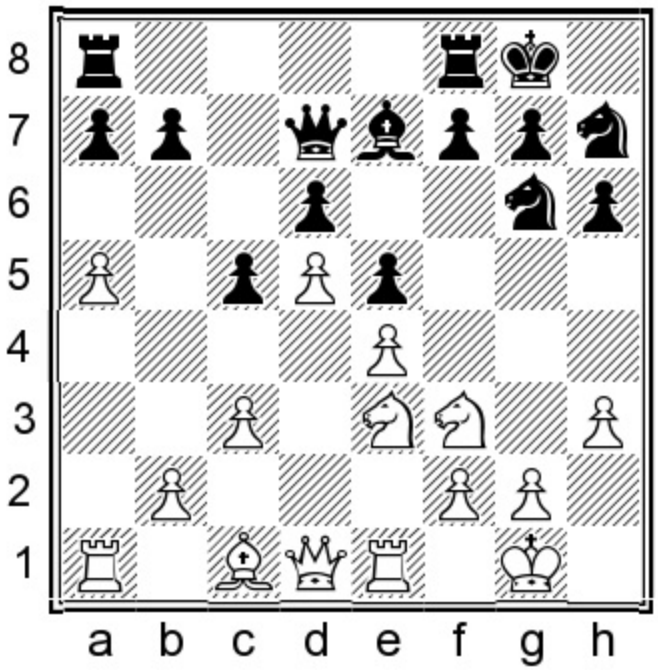
B3.1) 6...♕c7 7.d5 In this case, it makes a lot of sense to expand on the queenside and trade the light-squared bishops. Inevitably, our lead in development and space advantage ensures that we have a nice edge. 7...♘ce7 8.a4



Position after: 8.a4

8...♘f6 [8...a6 9.♗xd7+ ♕xd7 10.♘bd2 ♘f6 11.♘c4 ♘c8 12.♖e1+– Followed by b2-b4, and our

queenside action looks very strong.] 9.♘bd2 ♘g6 10.♖e1 ♗e7 11.♘c4 0-0 12.♗xd7 ♕xd7 13.a5 h6 14.h3 ♘h7 15.♘e3±

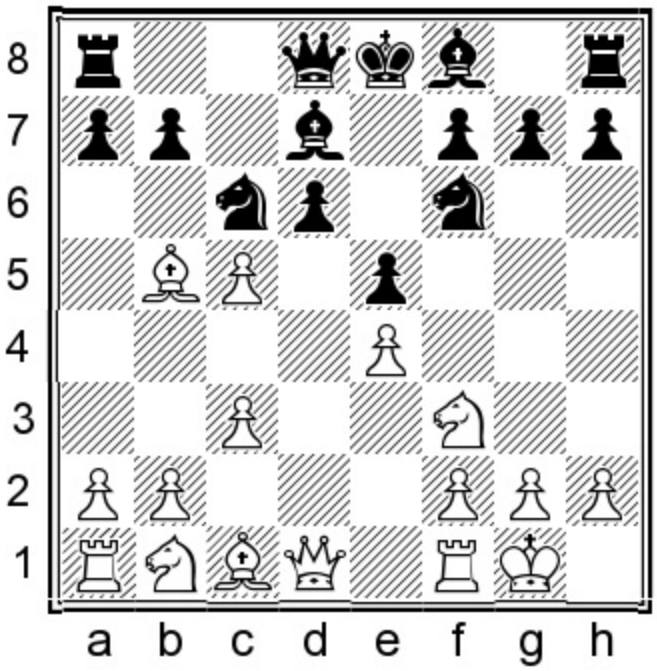


Position after: 15.♘e3±

We don't really need to analyse too many variations here. Our queenside play looks very simple, and the absence of light-squared bishops limits Black's kingside potential.

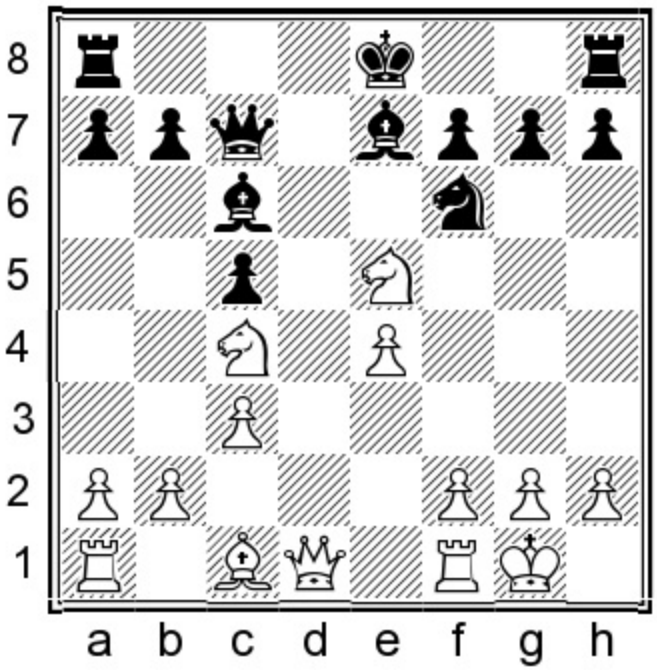
B3.2) 6...cxd4 7.cxd4 exd4 8.♘xd4± Typically this is very comfortable for White.

B3.3) 6...♘f6?! Critical, but in these structures it's often dubious for Black not to capture on d4 at least once. If Black allows us to capture on c5, he will be positionally inferior due to the weak d5-square. Moreover, the e5-pawn now becomes a big weakness. 7.dxc5



Position after: 7.dxc5

7...dxc5 [7...♘xe4 8.cxd6 f6 White has to react quickly to ensure that Black can't consolidate, and crucially we have a clever tactical resource. 9.♗xc6 ♗xc6 10.♘xe5! fxe5 11.♕h5+ ♔d7 12.♕f5+ ♔e8 13.♕e6+ Black is forced to return the piece with dividends.] 8.♘bd2 ♕c7 9.♘c4 ♗e7 10.♗xc6 ♗xc6 11.♘fxe5



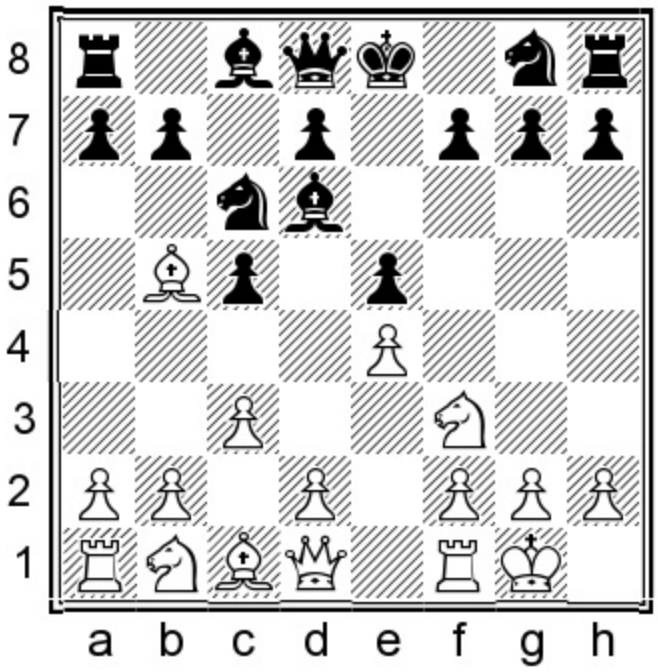
Position after: 11.♘fxe5

Black can't afford to capture on e4 as we have too many tactical motives – but in any other case,

we are just a pawn for the good. 11...♘xe4?! [11...♖d8 12.♕c2! ♗xe4 13.♕a4+ ♗c6 14.♘xc6 bxc6 15.♘a5±; 11...♗xe4 12.♗f4 ♕d8 13.♕a4++–] 12.♘xc6 bxc6 [12...♕xc6 13.♘e5 ♕e6 14.♕a4++–] 13.♖e1 ♘f6 14.♘d6+ ♔f8 15.♘f5+–

C) 4...♕c7 5.♖e1 a6 6.♗f1 ♘f6 7.c3 d6 8.h3 Followed by d2-d4, and White has a pleasant position.

5.c3

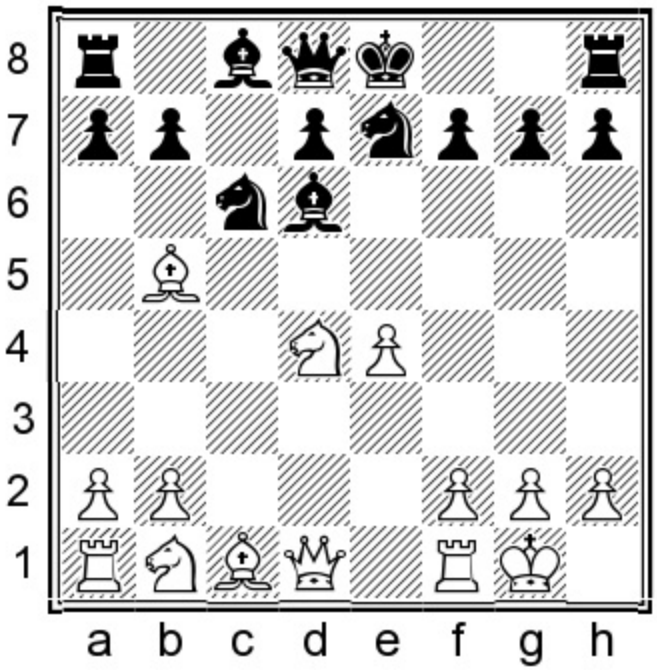


Position after: 5.c3

5...a6

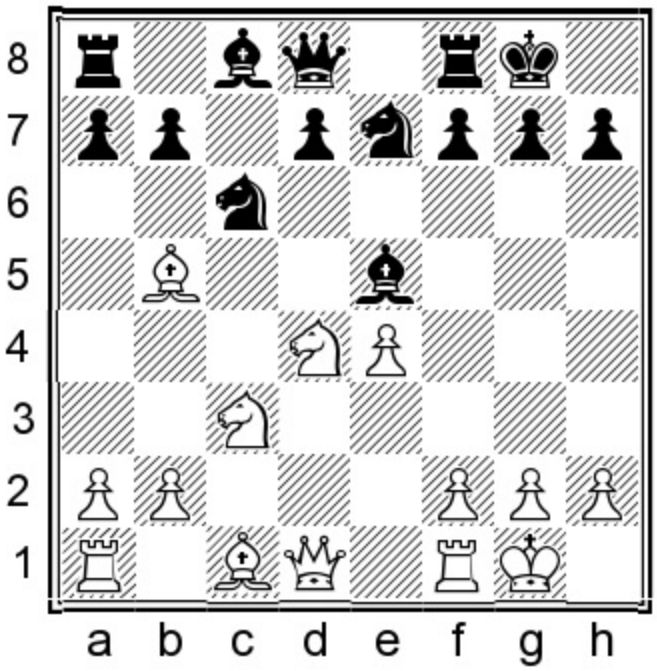
It's clever for Black to ask us what we're doing with our bishop, before moving the knight on g8. It's important not to assume that Black will play ...♘ge7. The variations demonstrate that if we continue in the same vein as 5...♘ge7 and play ♗c4, Black has tricks of his own.

5...♘ge7 6.d4 cxd4 7.cxd4 exd4 8.♘xd4



Position after: 8.♘xd4

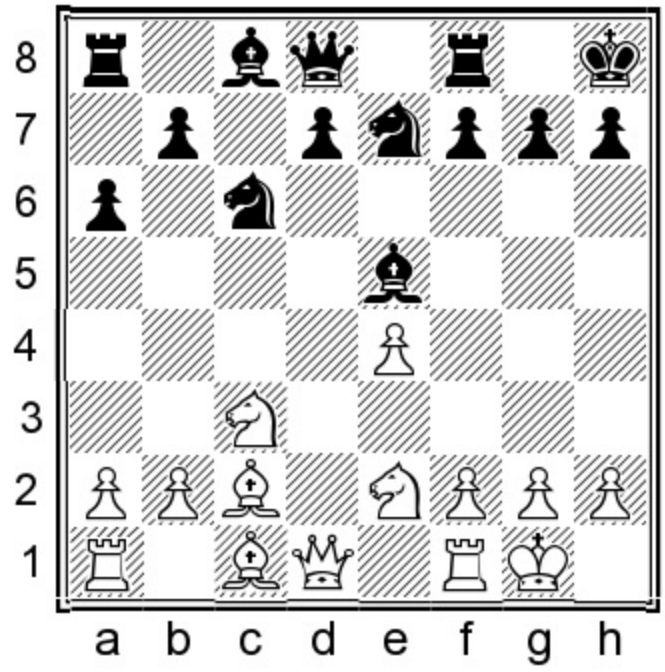
8...0-0 [8...a6 9.♗c4! With Black's knight already committed to e7, our bishop won't face any problems on c4.; 8...♕c7 9.♘f3 a6 10.♗e2 0-0 11.♘c3 ♘e5 12.g3± Kryvoruchko – Bernadskiy, Lutsk 2019.] 9.♘c3 ♗e5 [9...a6 10.♗c4 ♗e5 As the d5-square is sufficiently controlled, we can play 11.♗e3±.]



Position after: 9...♗e5

10.♘de2! We want to maintain control of the d5-square, before completing our development with

♗e3, ♕d2, ♖ad1 and f2-f4. [10.♗e3 d5! Black's idea, which probably just about equalises.] 10...a6 11.♗d3 ♔h8 Black again intends ...d7-d5, and we should repeatedly frustrate this plan. [11...g6 also looks natural, but allows 12.♗g5!±] 12.♗c2!

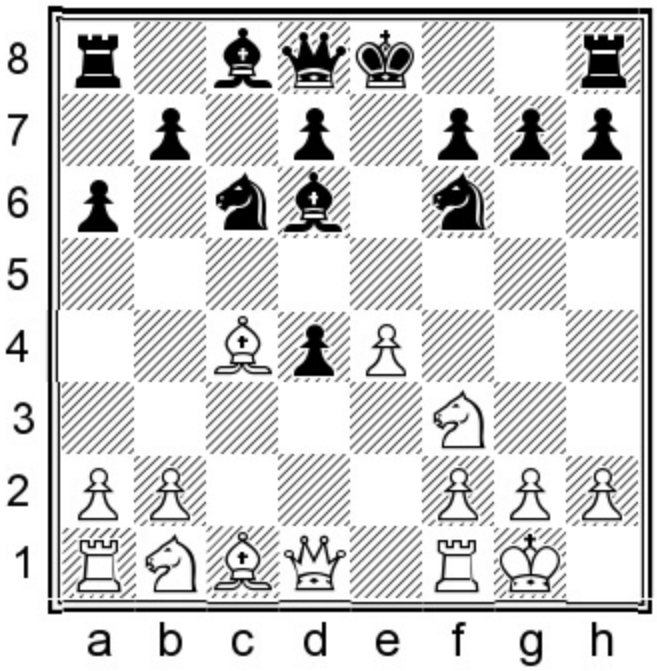


Position after: 12.♗c2!

12...f5 This is the other pawn break that Black can make, but this weakens his kingside and destroys any hopes of trading his weak d-pawn. [12...d6 13.f4 ♗f6 14.♗e3± looks very pleasant.] 13.♗g5 fxe4 14.♗xe4 ♕e8 15.♘g3 d6 16.f4 ♗d4+ 17.♔h1 ♗e6 18.f5 ♗c4 19.♗xc6! ♘xc6 20.♖f4± Followed by ♕h5 and ♖f4, with a strong attack.

6.♗a4!

6.♗c4 ♘f6! 7.d4 cxd4 8.cxd4 exd4!

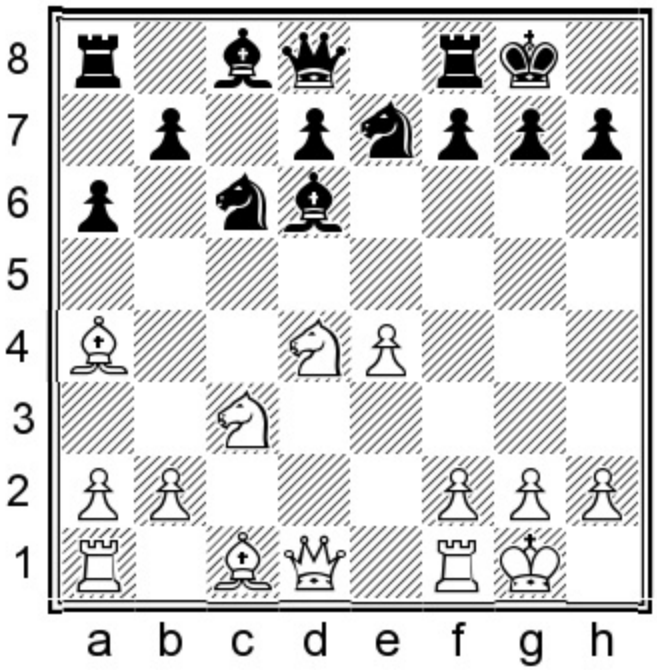


Position after: 8...exd4!

9.♘xd4 [9.e5 ♗xe5 10.♘xe5 ♘xe5 11.♖e1 0-0! 12.♖xe5 ♕c7 13.♕xd4 d5= Black regains his piece with an initiative.] 9...♘xd4 10.♕xd4 ♕c7 11.h3 b5 12.♗b3 ♗b7 Black doesn't face any more problems and suddenly it's White who is fighting for equality.

6...b5

A) 6...♘ge7 7.d4 cxd4 8.cxd4 exd4 9.♘xd4 0-0 10.♘c3



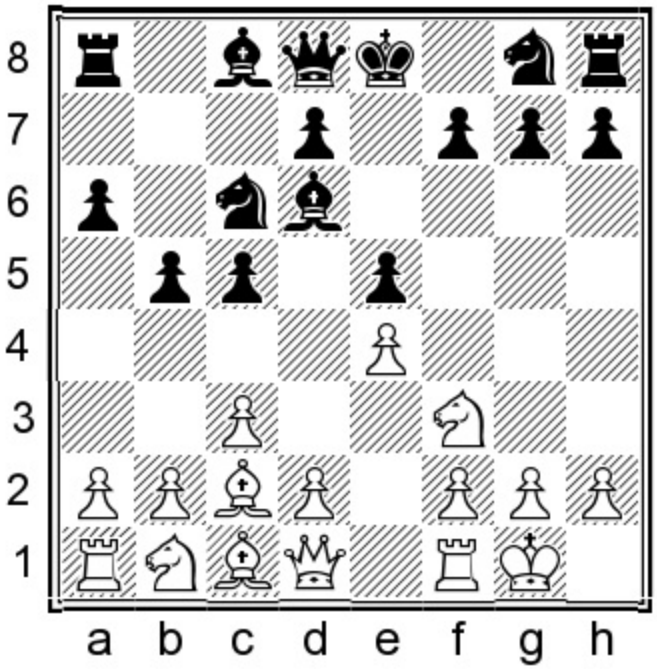
Position after: 10.♘c3

This is similar to the mainline after 5...♘ge7. 10...♗c5 11.♗e3 ♘xd4 12.♗xd4 d6 13.♕d2 ♕b6 14.♖fd1 ♗g4 15.f3 ♗e6 16.♕f2!± White had a pleasant edge in Chakkravarthy – Jobava, Dubai 2016.

B) 6...♘f6?! Black doesn't have the same tricks available to him as in the line after 6.♗c4. Our bishop on a4 is more secure, as well as preventing Black from moving his d-pawn. 7.d4 cxd4 8.cxd4 exd4 9.e5!+–

7.♗c2

Email games have widely favoured 7.♗b3, but it feels more human to put the bishop on a square where it can't be hit by either ...c4 or ...♘a5.



Position after: 7.♗c2

7...♘ge7

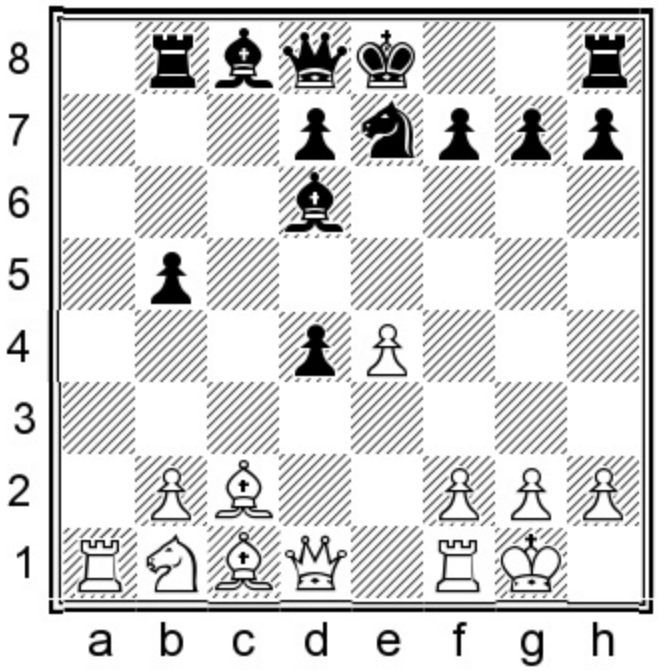
An important moment, which demonstrates how we continuously have to be on edge for potential tricks.

8.a4!?

8.d4?! cxd4 9.cxd4 ♘xd4 10.♘xd4 exd4 11.♕xd4 ♕c7!= An annoying equaliser in Jones – Vidit, China 2019.

8...b4

8...♖b8 9.axb5 axb5 10.d4 cxd4 11.cxd4 ♘xd4 12.♘xd4 exd4

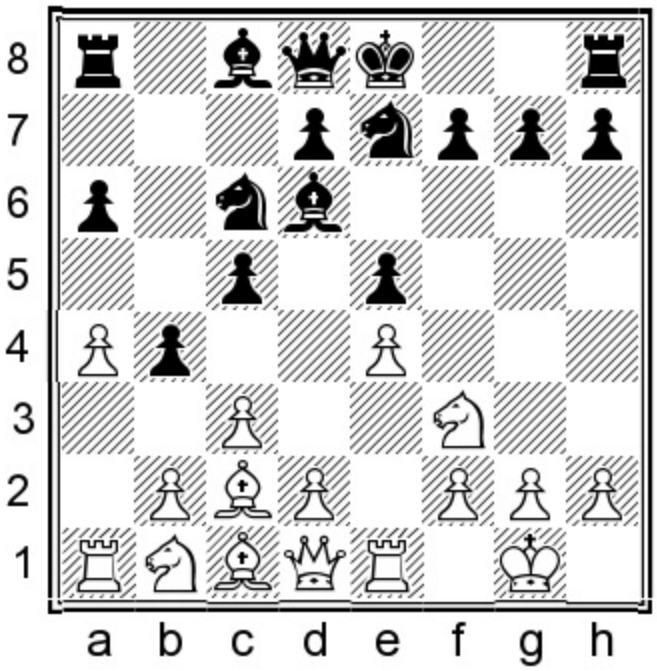


Position after: 12...exd4

In Bologan – Korobov, Poikovsky 2017, White could've captured on d4 immediately. 13.♕xd4 ♕c7 14.h3! 0-0 [14...♕xc2 15.♕xd6 ♘c6 16.♘c3+–] 15.♕d3!± White's better structure invariably offers a long-term edge.

9.♖e1

9.d3 is a less commital way of playing, and White should have no qualms about claiming an advantage here too.



Position after: 9.♖e1

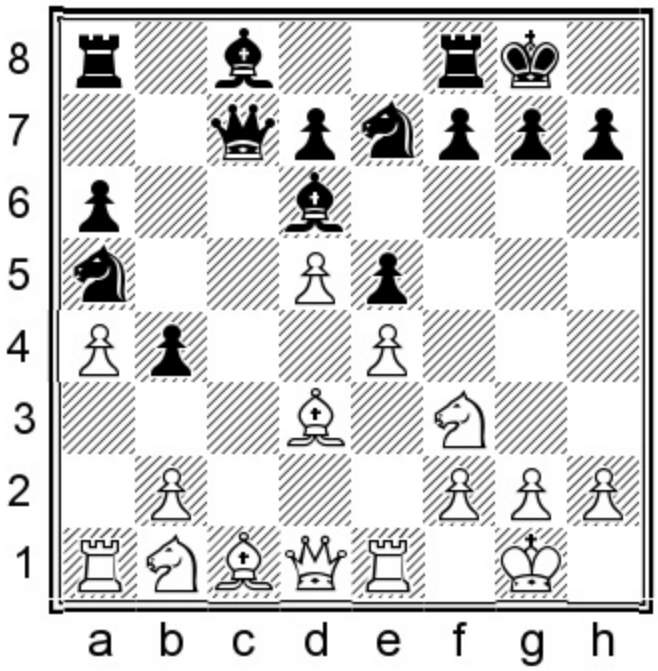
9...0-0

9...♕c7 10.d3± This looks like an improved version of our alternative on move 9, and was seen in Heinemann – Khukhashvili, Antalya 2019.

10.d4 cxd4

10...bxc3 11.dxe5! cxb2 12.♗xb2 ♗c7 13.♘bd2±

11.cxd4 ♕c7 12.d5! ♘a5 13.♗d3±

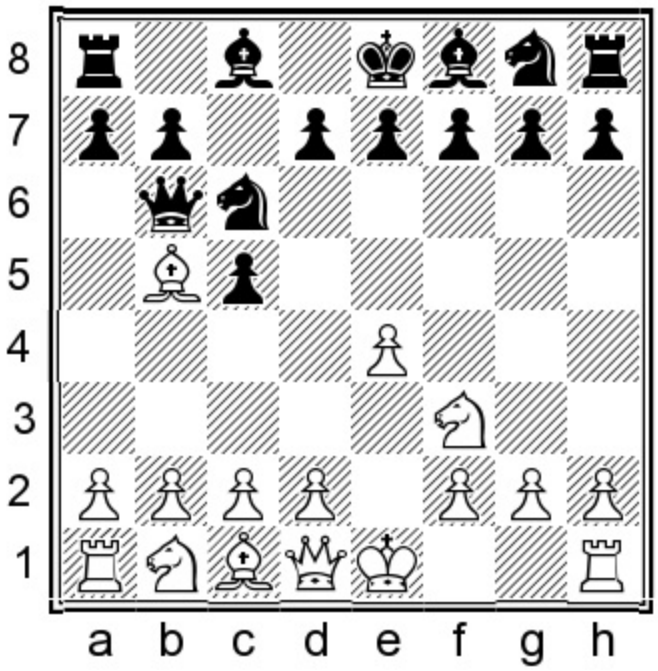


Position after: 13.♗d3±

White's space advantage on the queenside should be enough to claim a safe edge.

d) 3...♕b6?!

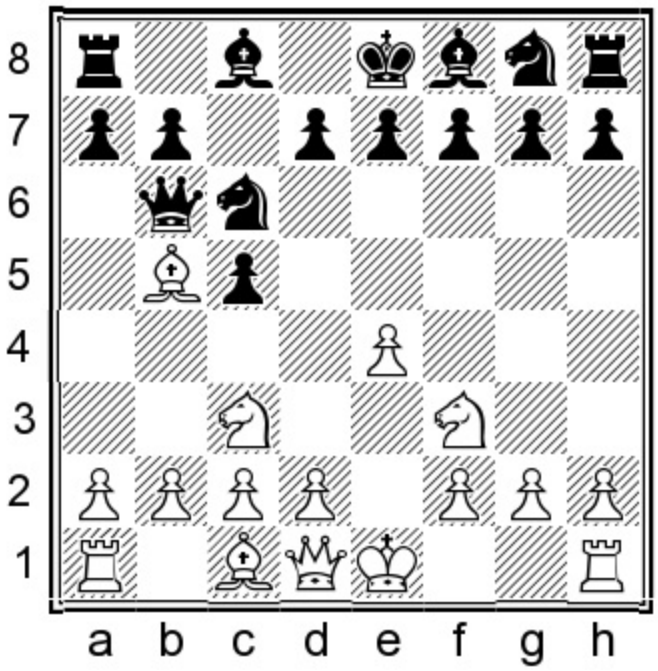
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♕b6?!



Position after: 3...♕b6?!

Black has also attempted to use his queen to protect the c6-knight. However the queen stands badly on b6, and Black will ultimately waste valuable time moving it again. The better queen move 3...♕c7 will be analysed next.

4.♘c3

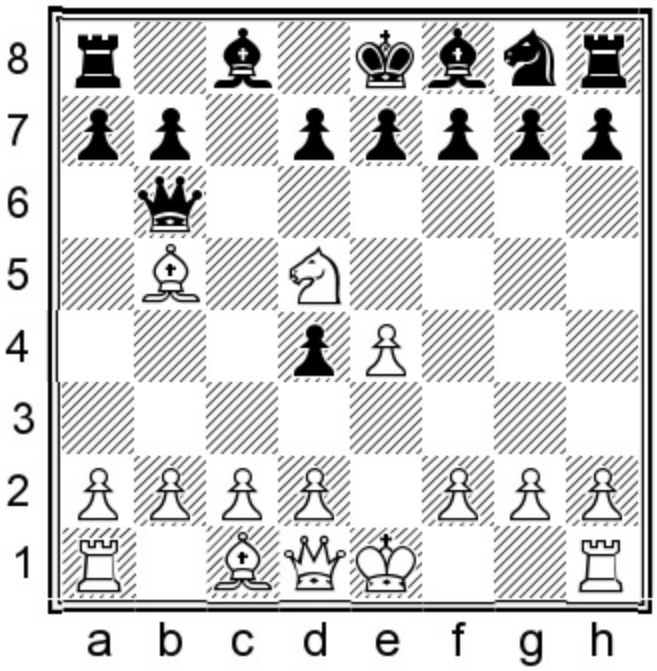


Position after: 4.♘c3

We are already threatening ♘d5, so Black needs to be careful.

4...e6

A) 4...♘d4? is simply very bad due to our tactical resource of ♘d5. 5.♘xd4 cxd4 6.♘d5

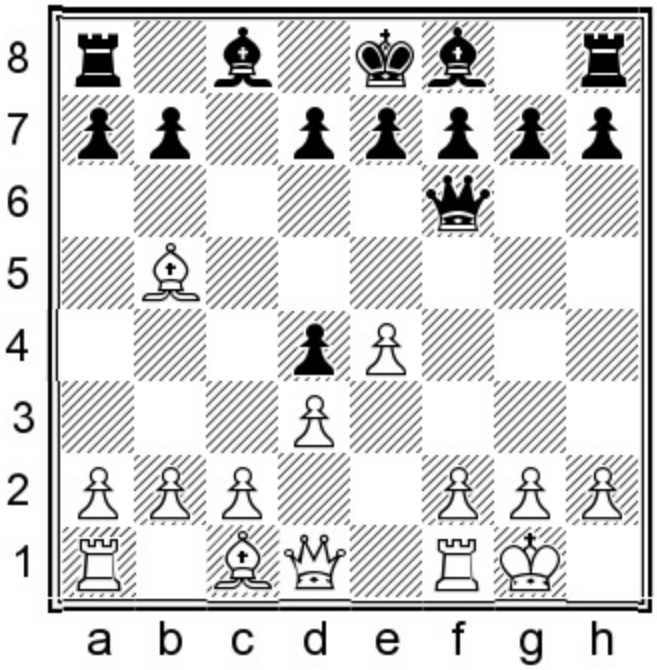


Position after: 6.♘d5

A1) 6...♕d8 7.♕h5! ♘f6 [7...a6 8.♕e5+–] 8.♘xf6+ gxf6 9.c3+–

A2) 6...♕c5 7.c3±

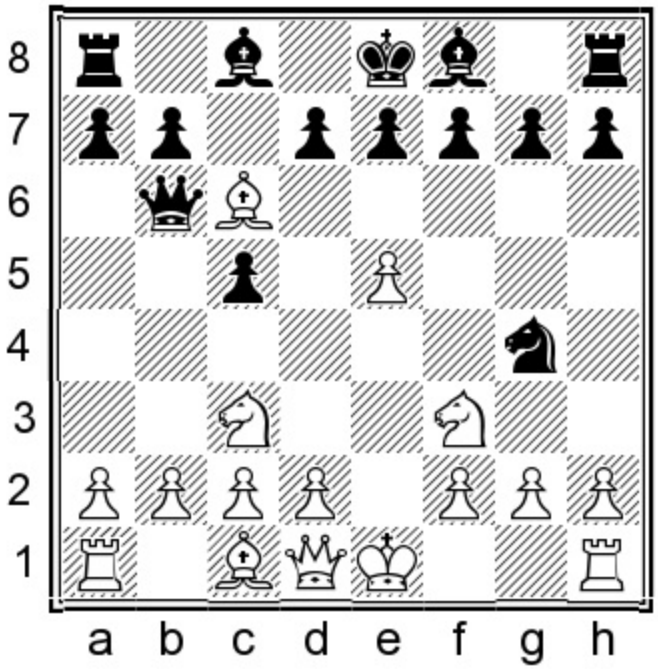
A3) 6...♕d6 7.d3 ♘f6 8.♘xf6+ ♕xf6 9.0-0±



Position after: 9.0-0±

Followed by f2-f4, and White is dominating.

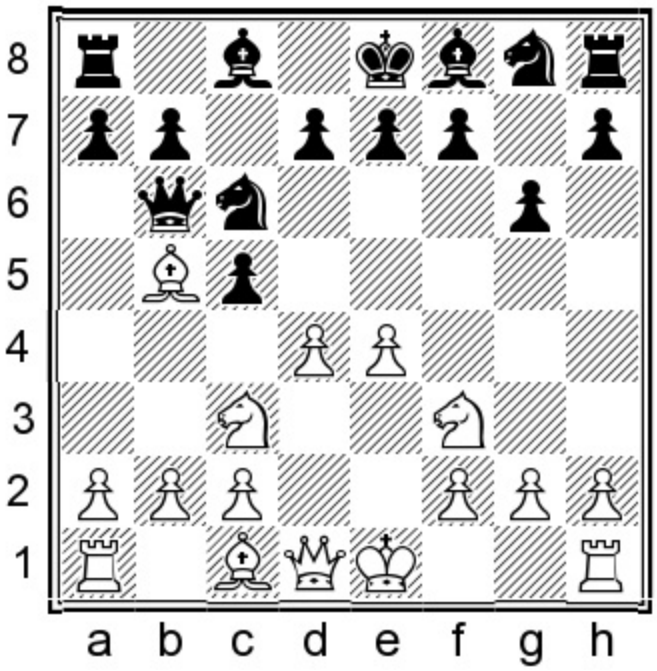
B) 4...♘f6 This is reminiscient of the positions that we'll encounter in the line 3...♘f6, except that Black's queen is horribly misplaced on b6. 5.e5 ♘g4 [5...♘e4 6.♘d5 ♕d8 7.d3 e6 8.♗xc6+– Followed by ♘e3, and positionally we are already completely winning.] 6.♗xc6



Position after: 6.♗xc6

6...bxc6 [6...dxc6 7.0-0 g6 8.♖e1 ♗g7 9.h3 ♘h6 10.♘e4 0-0 11.d3+– This is just a superior version of typical positions that we'll encounter after 3...♘f6.] 7.h3 ♘h6 8.0-0 ♘f5 9.♘a4 ♕a5 10.b3+– Followed by ♗a3, and it's unclear how Black will be able to complete development without conceding some material.

C) 4...g6? 5.d4!



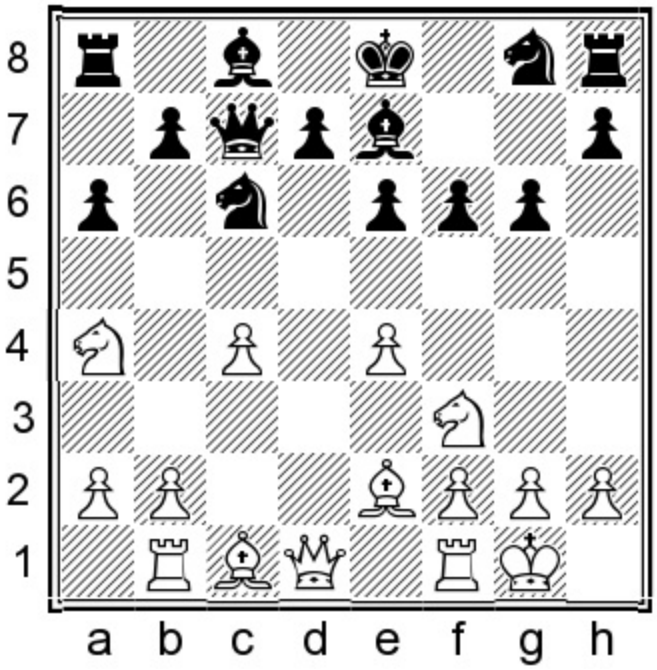
Position after: 5.d4!

The fact that we can always play ♘d5 means that Black doesn't really have any control over the d4-square.

C1) 5...cxd4 6.♘d5 ♕a5+ 7.♗d2 ♕d8 8.♗f4 d6 9.♕xd4+–

C2) 5...♘xd4 6.♘xd4 cxd4 7.♘d5 ♕d8 8.♗f4+–

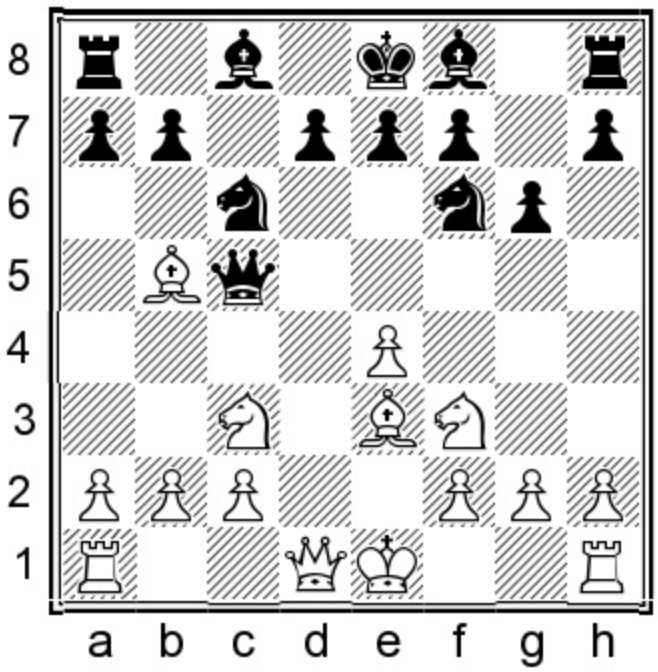
C3) 5...e6 6.dxc5 ♗xc5 7.0-0 Black has too many weaknesses to make any claim that he shouldn't already be lost. 7...f6 8.♗e2 ♕c7 9.♖b1! a6 10.♘a4 ♗e7 11.c4+–



Position after: 11.c4+−

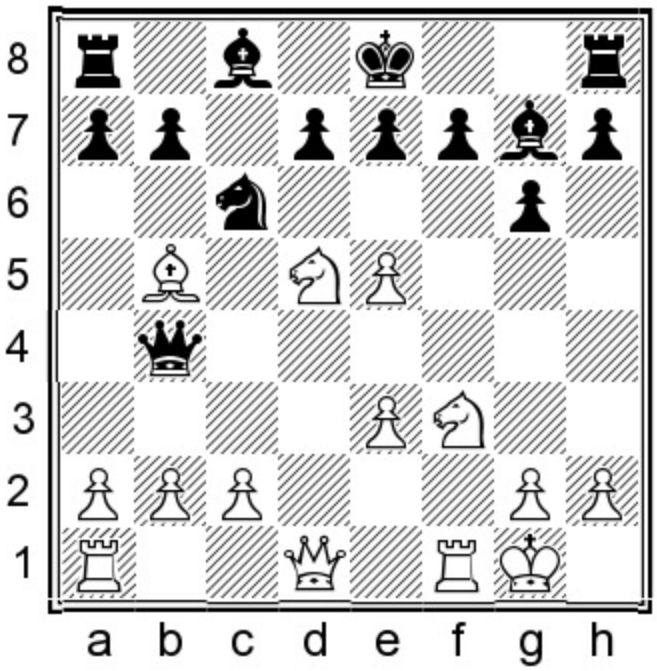
I'm not too sure how the g8-knight is going to get into the game.

C4) 5...♘f6 6.dxc5 ♕xc5 7.♗e3



Position after: 7.♗e3

The following variations aren't really important to remember, but illustrate how quickly Black's position falls apart as a result of his misplaced queen and subsequent lack of development. 7...♕b4 [7...♕h5 8.♘d5! The resulting pawn structure, coupled with White's piece placement, ensures that the position is strategically winning for White. 8...♘xd5 9.exd5 ♘e5 10.♗e2 ♘xf3+ 11.♗xf3 ♕e5 12.0-0 ♗g7 13.c3 0-0 14.♖e1+–] 8.0-0 ♗g7 9.e5 ♘g4 10.♘d5 ♘xe3 11.fxe3!



Position after: 11.fxe3!

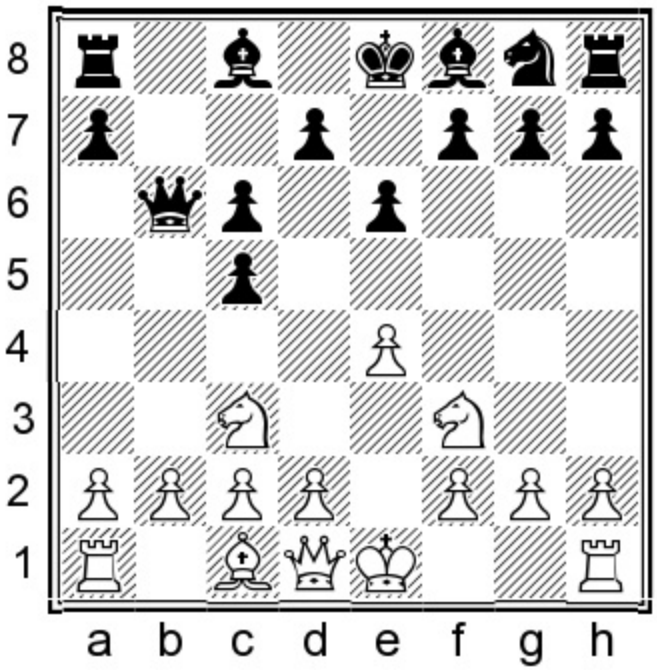
Opening the f-file enables us to get a decisive attack on Black's f7-pawn. 11...♕a5 12.♘g5 ♖f8 13.♘xh7 ♖h8 14.b4! ♘xb4 [14...♕d8 15.♘g5 ♖f8 16.♕g4 ♘xe5 17.♕h3 ♖h8 18.♕g3+–] 15.♕f3 ♘xd5 16.♕xf7+ ♔d8 17.♕xg7 ♖e8 18.♕xg6 ♕xb5 19.♕xe8+ ♔xe8 20.♖f8#

5.♗xc6!

It makes sense to play this before Black can play ...♘ge7 and recapture on c6 with his knight.

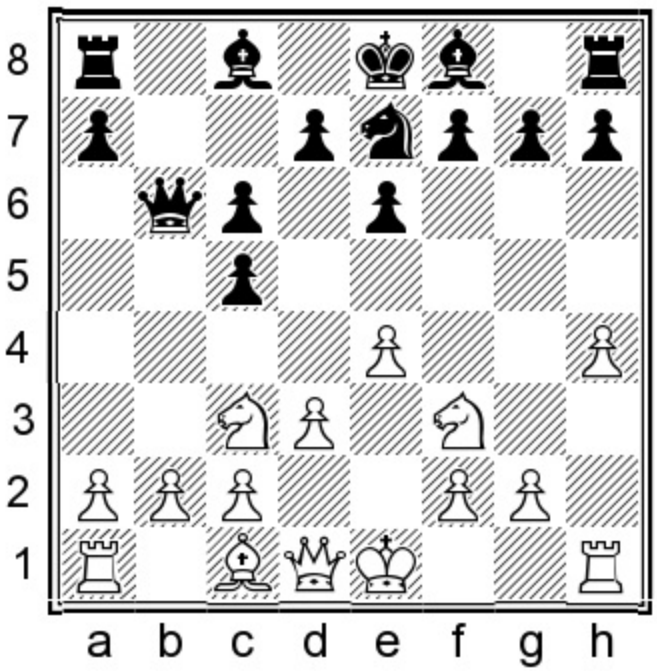
5...♕xc6

5...bxc6



Position after: 5...bxc6

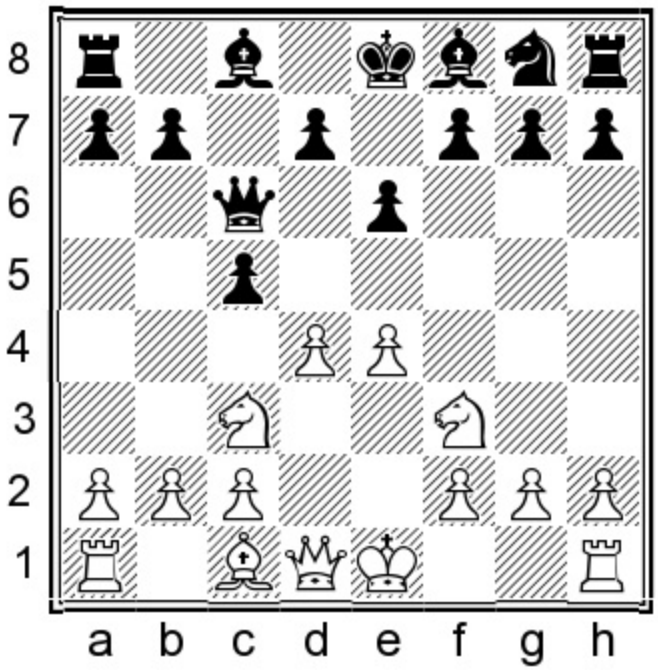
This pawn structure is plausible when we think of lines after 3...e6 where we capture on c6 immediately. However the problem for Black is that his b6-queen is misplaced, and will have to move again. This loss of time definitely ensures us an advantage, as Black basically has an inferior version of the typical lines after 3...e6 4.♗xc6. Although we don't cover these lines in this book, I'll provide some example variations and plans where we can safely say we are doing well. 6.d3 ♘e7 [6...f6 7.♘d2! is clever: after 7...♘e7 8.f4± Black won't be able to protect the c5-pawn with ...d7-d6 without allowing the positionally scarring e4-e5.] 7.h4!?



Position after: 7.h4!?

I think the main difference between the structures in the lines after 3...e6 and 3...♕b6 is that we have time to create a kingside weakness – ensuring that Black has even more problems to deal with. [7.♕e2 is natural and also good – our aim is to simply stop Black from playing ...e6-e5, and we'll attempt to take advantage of the weak doubled c-pawns.] 7...d6 [7...h5 8.e5 The moves h2-h4 and ...h7-h5 definitely benefit us, as we can utilise the g5-square with either one of our knights – or even our c1-bishop at some point.] 8.e5! ♘f5 9.exd6 ♗xd6 10.h5± Again followed by the same ideas of ♘e4, b2-b3 etc. – only this time, Black also has to be wary of kingside pressure too.

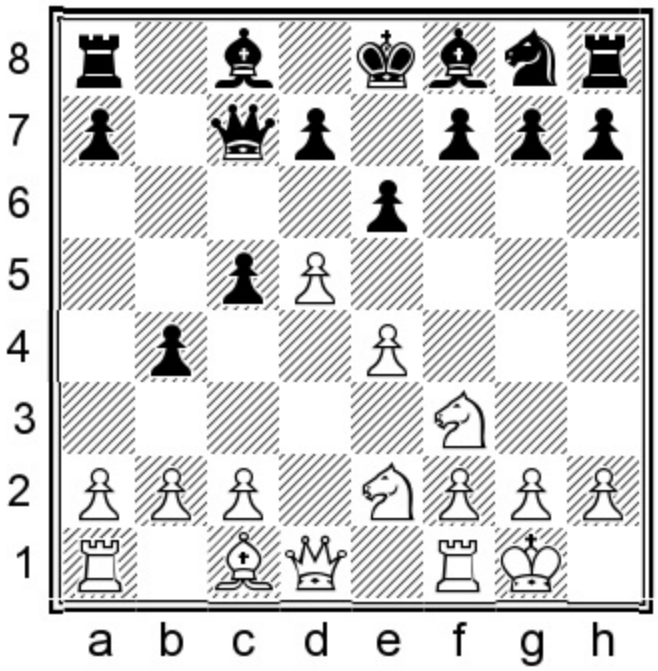
6.d4



Position after: 6.d4

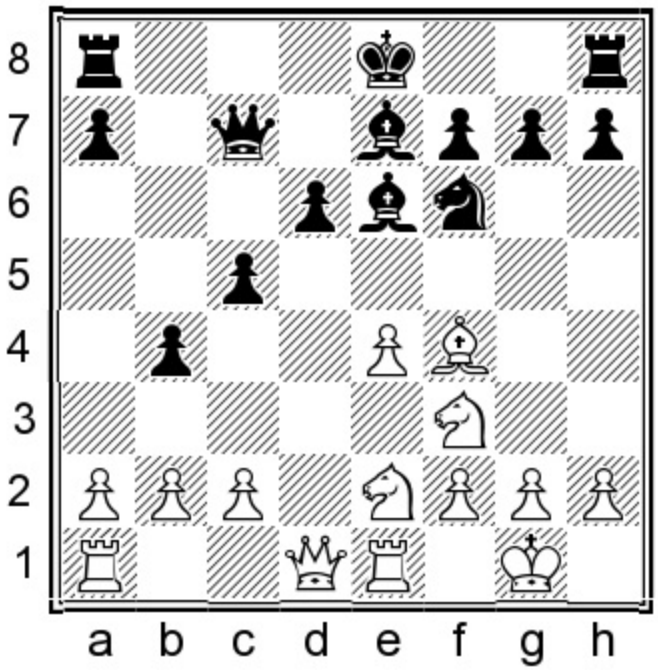
6...cxd4

6...b5!? is probably the type of move someone would make if they have already chosen 3... ♕b6, so we should certainly check it. 7.0-0 b4 [7...♗b7 8.♘e5+– Black can't protect the b5- and d7-pawns simultaneously.] 8.d5! ♕c7 9.♘e2



Position after: 9.♘e2

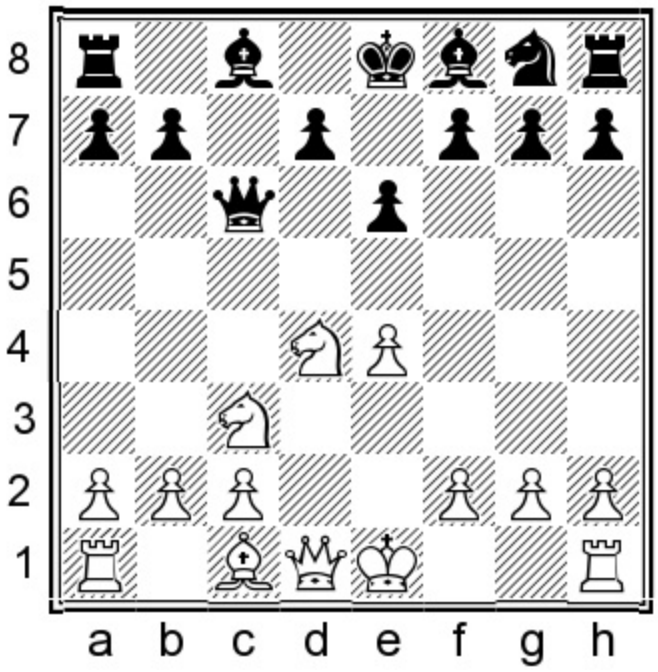
The main issue for Black is that he's just created a weakness on c4 which will be perfect for one of our knights to jump to. Our central pawns also hinder his development. 9...♘f6 [9...♗d6 10.♘g3 ♘f6 11.♖e1 ♘g4 12.♘d2 ♗xg3 13.hxg3 ♘e5 14.f4 ♘g6 With the dark-squared bishop off the board, we can now go for a kingside-oriented approach. 15.♘f3 d6 16.f5→] 10.♗f4 d6 11.dxe6 ♗xe6 12.♖e1 ♗e7



Position after: 12...♗e7

13.e5! dxe5 14.♗xe5 ♕c6 15.♘f4± In addition to his weak queenside pawns, Black will most likely have to capture on e6 with his f-pawn, compounding his problems.

7.♘xd4



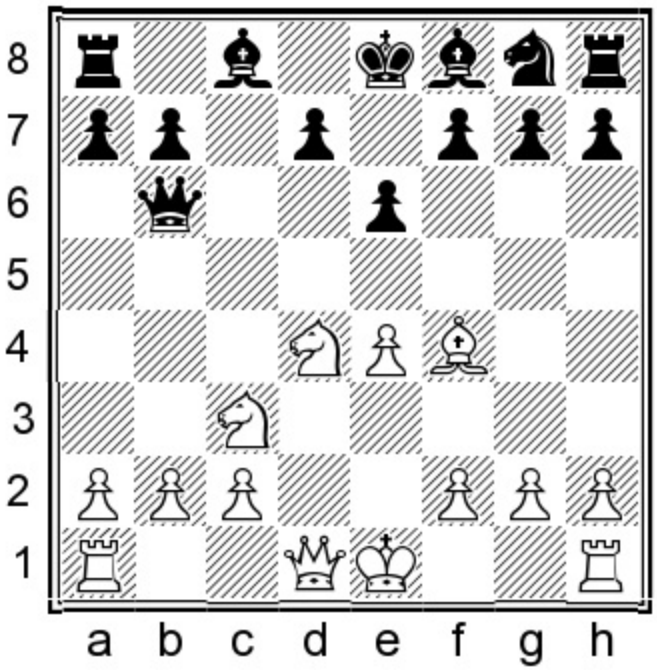
Position after: 7.♘xd4

The position is reminiscient of a Taimanov, except that we've exchanged our light-squared bishop for Black's c6-knight. This benefits us as we are one step closer to castling. More significantly, Black will face serious problems on the dark-squares as his c6-knight is missing and unable to help protect the weaknesses.

7.♕xd4 is also strong, but the text move is more common and feels natural.

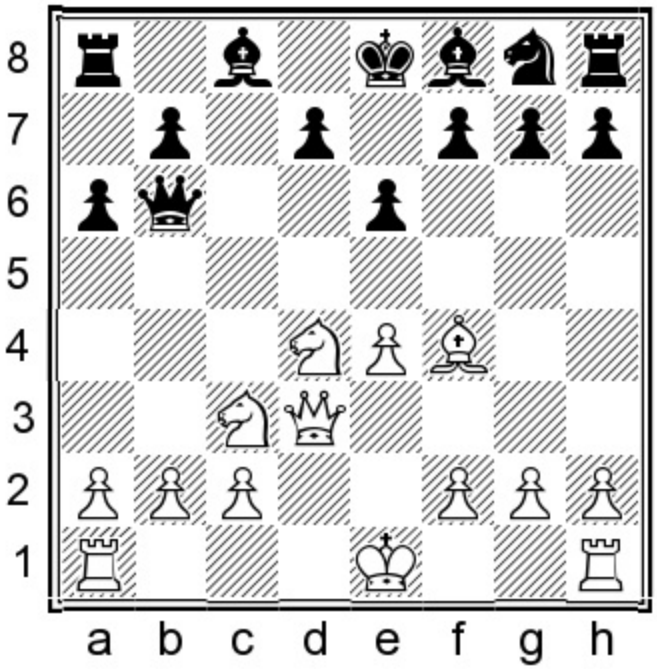
7...♕c7

7...♕b6 8.♗f4!



Position after: 8.♗f4!

This is strongest, immediately threatening ♘db5. 8...a6 [8...♗b4 9.0-0 a6 10.♘f5!+– A useful motive to remember.; 8...♕xb2 9.♘db5 ♗b4 10.0-0 ♗xc3 11.♖b1 ♕xa2 12.♘xc3 ♕c4 13.♘b5+–] 9.♕d3!

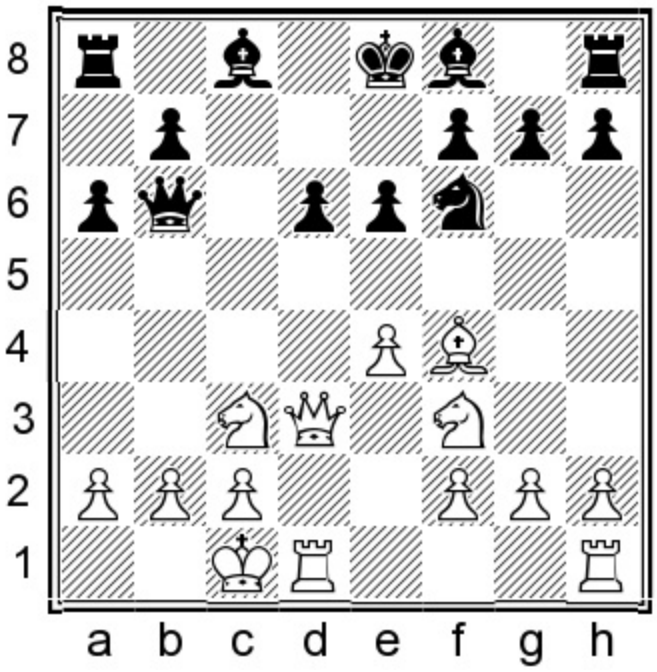


Position after: 9.♕d3!

This time we'll castle queenside, and it is likely that a knight sacrifice in the centre will be decisive.

A) 9...♕xb2 10.♘b3 ♕a3 11.♖d1+–

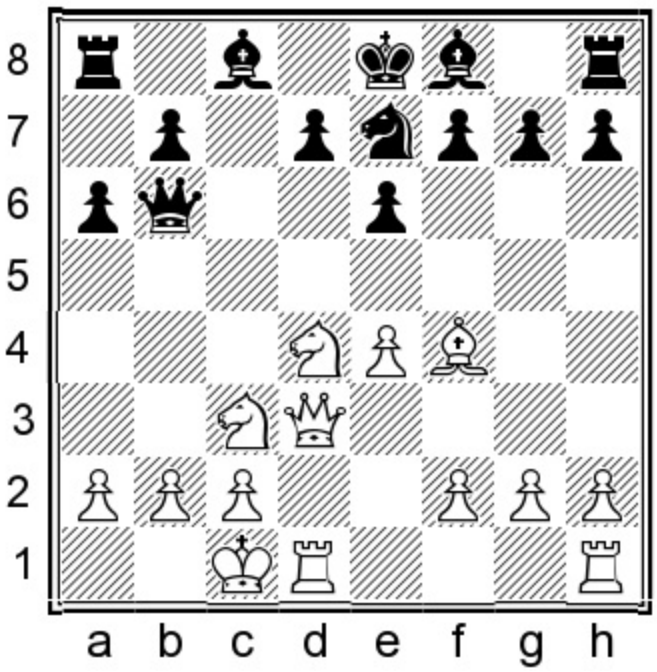
B) 9...d6 10.0-0-0 ♘f6 11.♘f3!



Position after: 11.♘f3!

To avoid losing a pawn, Black is forced to concede the d5-square. 11...e5 12.♗e3 ♕a5 [12...♕c7 13.♗g5+–] 13.♘d2 b5 14.♗g5±

C) 9...♘e7 10.0-0-0

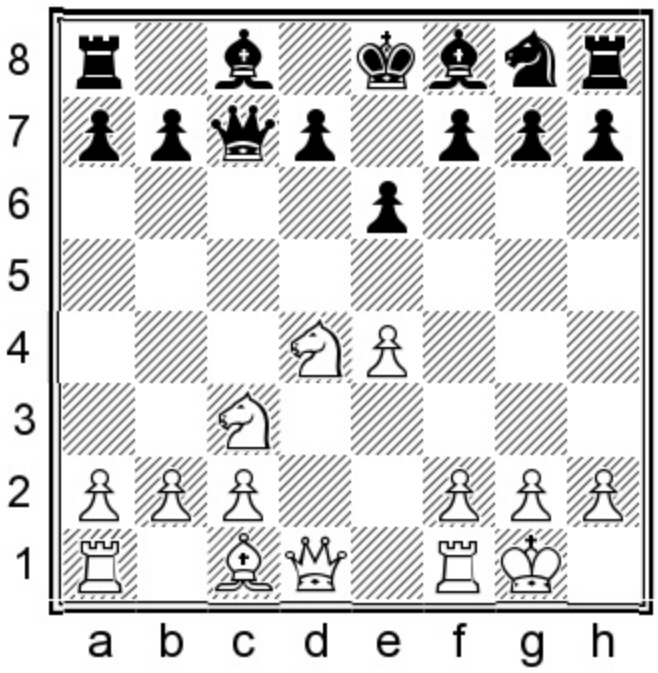


Position after: 10.0-0-0

C1) 10...f6 11.♖he1 ♘g6 12.♗g3 ♘e5 [12...♗e7 13.♘f5!+– is once again problematic for Black.] 13.♕e2 ♗b4 14.♗xe5 ♗xc3 15.bxc3 fxe5 16.♕h5+ g6 17.♕xe5+–

C2) 10...♘g6 11.♗g3 h5 12.♘f5! d5 13.♖he1+– Our piece coordination is impeccable, and it wouldn't be premature for Black to resign.

8.0-0

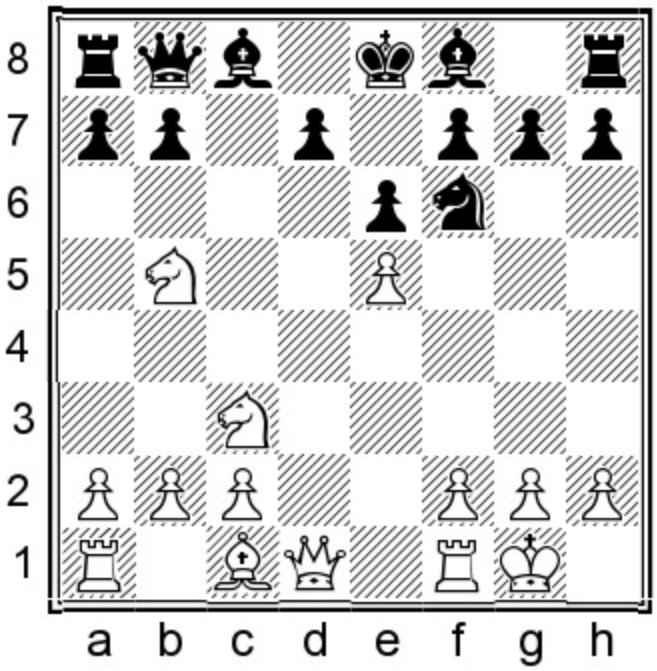


Position after: 8.0-0

It seems that Black's opening strategy is grounded on claiming compensation associated with the bishop pair, but frankly I cannot understand their value compared to the potential of our knights. Black most likely has to waste more time dealing with the threat of ♘db5 and ♗f4.

8...a6

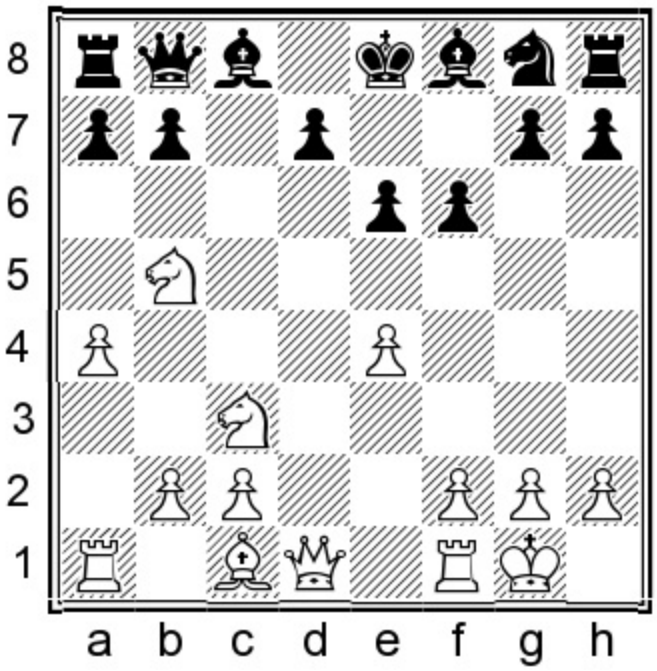
A) 8...♘f6 9.♘db5 ♕b8 10.e5!



Position after: 10.e5!

A typical and clever sacrifice to activate more of our pieces. 10...a6 [10...♕xe5 11.♖e1 ♕b8 12.♕d4+– The threat of ♗f4 is unstoppable.] 11.exf6 axb5 12.♖e1! gxf6 13.♘d5 ♗e7 14.♕f3+–

B) 8...f6 9.♘db5 ♕b8 10.a4!

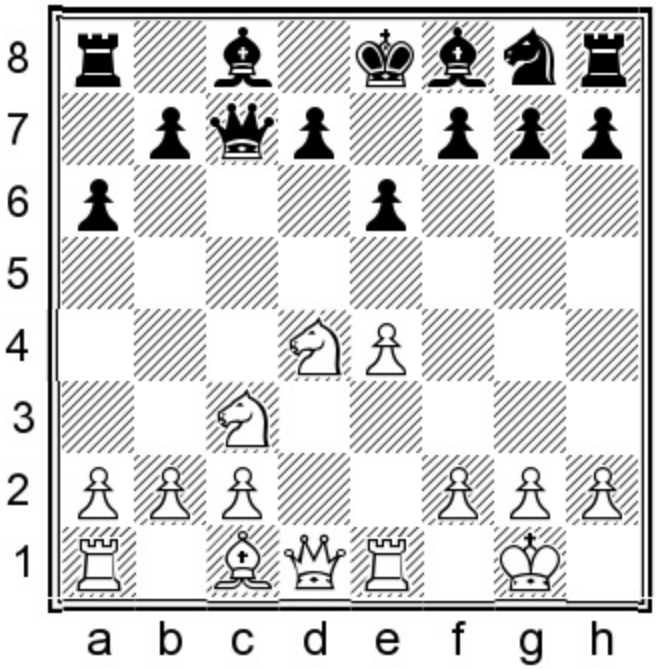


Position after: 10.a4!

Our knight will resourcefully re-route to c4 via a3, and we also have ideas of f2-f4 and ♕h5+. 10...a6 11.♘a3 b6 12.♕h5+ g6 13.♕f3 ♗b7 14.♗f4 ♗d6 15.♗xd6 ♕xd6 16.♖fd1 ♕c5 17.b3 ♔e7

18.♘c4+– Followed by doubling rooks on the d-file, and Black's king will be at our mercy.

9.♖e1



Position after: 9.♖e1

Simple but strong, as now Black always has to be wary of either ♘f5 or ♘d5. Meanwhile it's also a struggle to develop his kingside as ...♘g8-f6 will inevitably be hit by e4-e5.

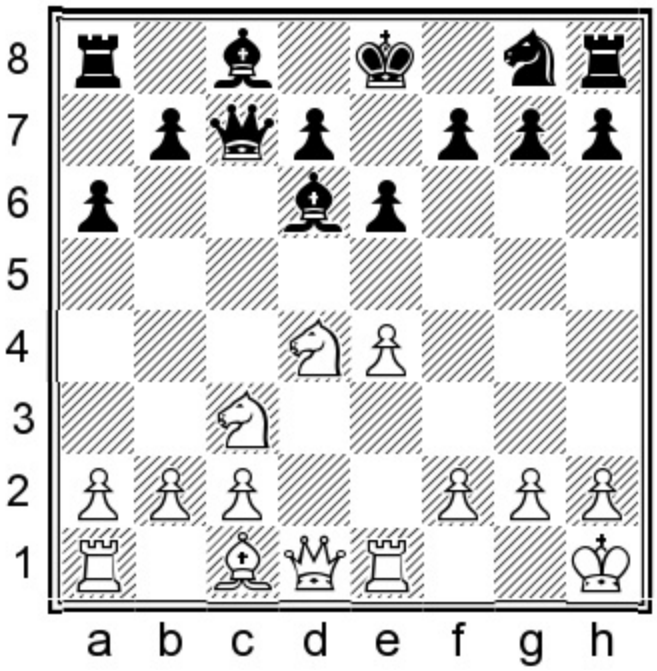
9...d6

A) 9...♘f6 10.e5+–

B) 9...♗c5 10.♘f5! ♔f8 11.♘g3±

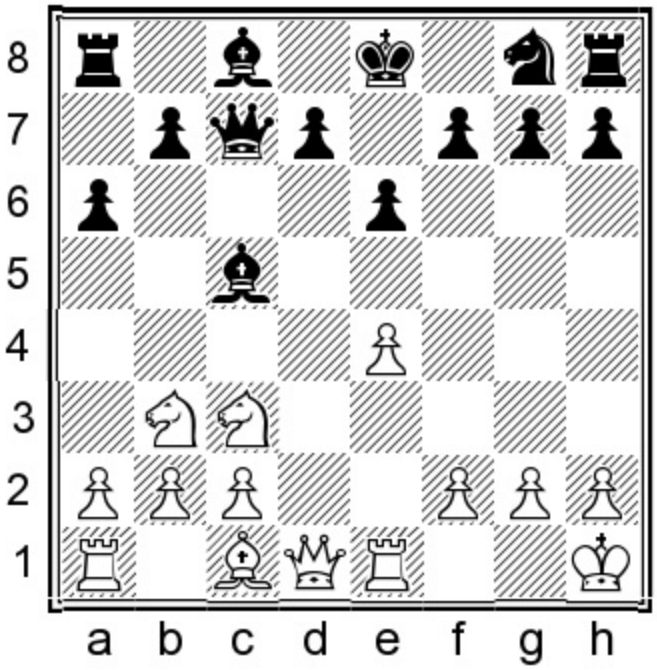
C) 9...♗e7 10.♕f3 d6 11.♗f4! If Black doesn't play ...e7-e5 then we will play e4-e5 ourselves. 11...e5 12.♘d5 ♕d8 13.♗e3 Capturing the piece will only create more trouble for Black. 13...♘f6 [13...exd4 14.♗xd4 ♔f8 15.♕c3+–] 14.♘f5 ♗xf5 15.exf5 ♘xd5 16.♕xd5 ♕c7 17.c4±

D) 9...♗d6 10.♔h1!



Position after: 10.♔h1!

The simplest, and now Black has to move his bishop again as ♘db5 is a big threat. 10...♗c5 [10...♗e7 11.♕g4 ♕e5 12.♘f3 h5 13.♕h3 ♕c7 14.e5! Black faces an unenviable task to defend after we complete development. 14...b5 15.♕g3 g6 16.♗g5±] 11.♘b3!

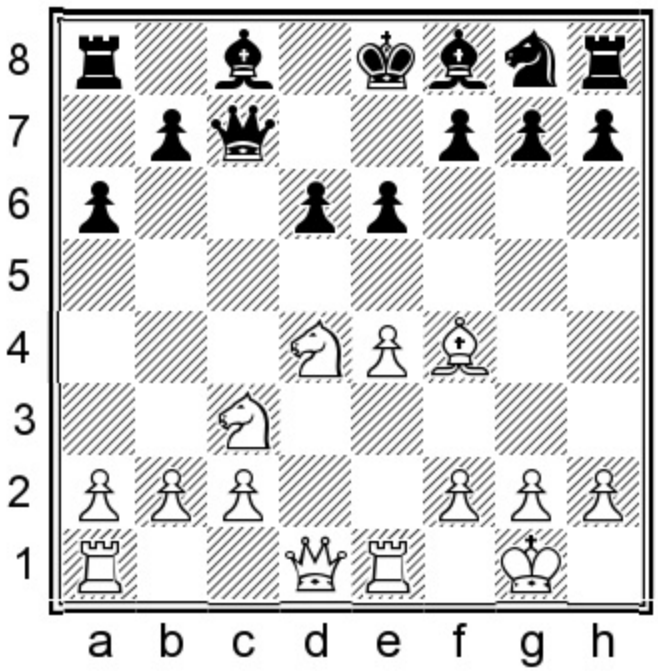


Position after: 11.♘b3!

11...♗e7 [11...♗xf2? does nothing except open the f-file for us to utilise in our attack. 12.♖f1 ♗a7 13.♗f4 ♕d8 14.♕h5 ♘f6 15.♕h4+–] 12.♕g4± Black will have to spend more time defending his

kingside, after which simple chess will best nurture our advantage.

10.♗f4!



Position after: 10.♗f4!

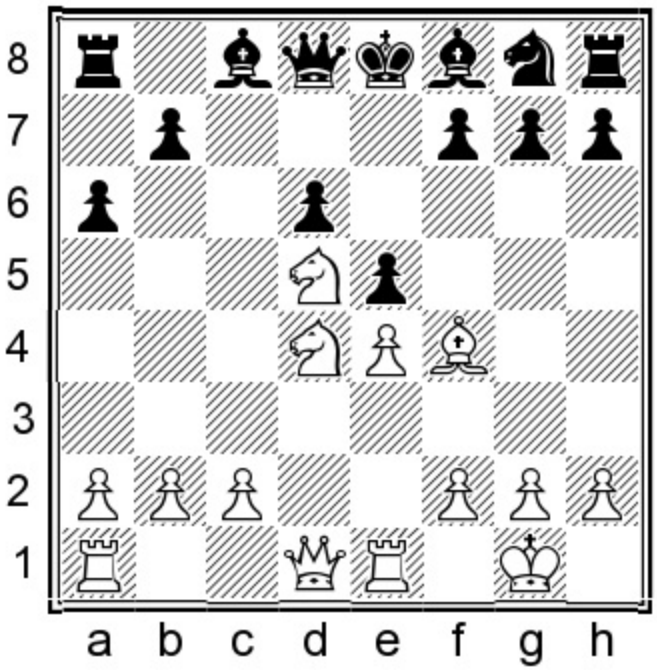
10.♗g5 has been played more often, but the text move is more forcing.

10...e5

A) 10...♗e7 11.e5 d5 12.♕f3± Black has to continuously be aware of ideas such as ♘xd5 or ♘f5.

B) 10...♗d7 has been played in email games. However, White is just winning after 11.♘f5! exf5 12.exf5+ ♔d8 13.♗g5+ f6 14.♘d5 ♕c6 15.♗e3+– White converted easily in Van Tricht – Oezmen, ICCF email 2014.

11.♘d5 ♕d8

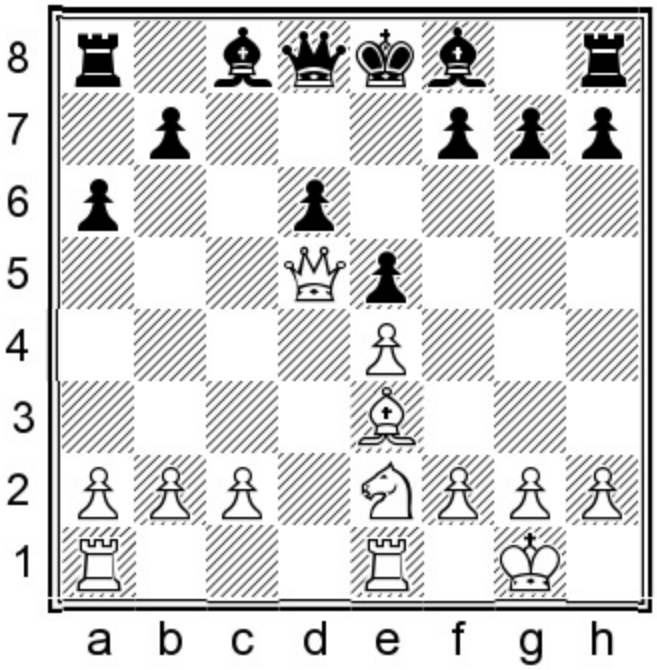


Position after: 11...♕d8

12.♘f5!?N

Trying to exploit Black's lack of development immediately is an interesting option.

12.♗e3 is a perfectly viable (and maybe better!) alternative, and has been played in all the games that have reached this position. 12...♘f6 [12...♘e7? 13.♘c6! bxc6 14.♗b6 cxd5 15.♗xd8 ♔xd8 16.exd5+– Maze – Roy Chowdhury, Montpellier 2007.] 13.♘e2 ♘xd5 14.♕xd5



Position after: 14.♕xd5

We have been following Delchev – Urosevic, Zajecar 2013, where Black played 14...♗e7 and allowed White to set up a Maroczy structure with 15.c4. Perhaps more accurate is 14...♕c7, but even here White should be able to claim a stable edge with some accurate moves. 15.♕d2 ♗e7 16.♘c3 ♗e6 17.♘d5! ♗xd5 18.♕xd5±

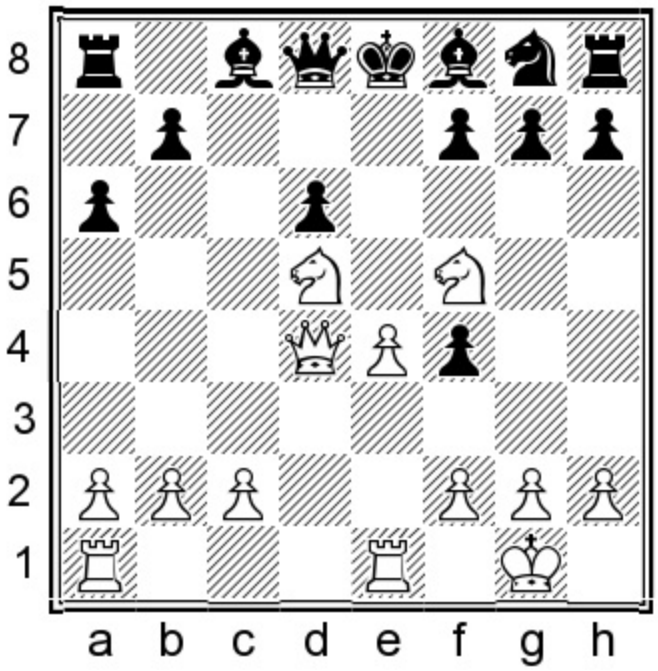
12...exf4

If Black doesn't capture on f4, he'll face major positional problems.

A) 12...♘f6? 13.♗g5+–

B) 12...♗xf5 13.exf5 ♗e7 14.♗e3+–

13.♕d4!



Position after: 13.♕d4!

13...♘e7!

13...♘f6 14.♘b6 ♗e6 15.♘xa8 ♕xa8 16.e5 dxe5 17.♕xe5 ♖g8 18.♖ad1+–

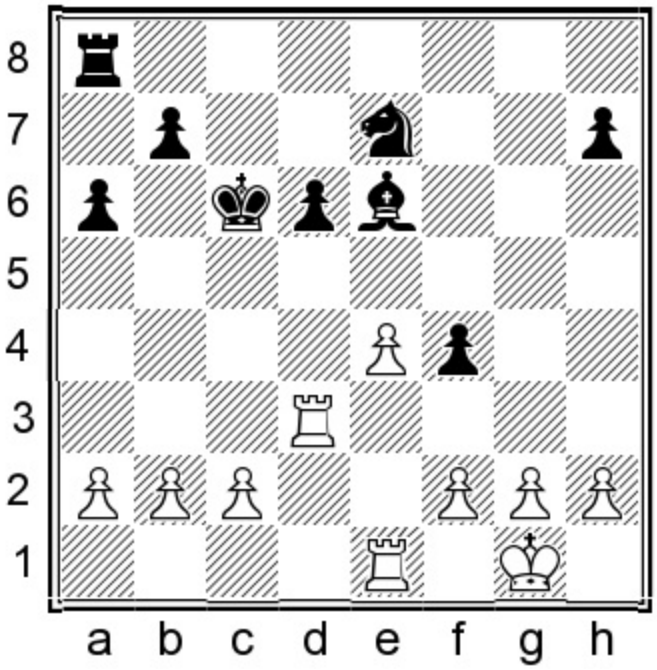
14.♘xg7+!?

The safer option which leads to a two-results endgame.

Stockfish prefers 14.♘f6+ gxf6 15.♘xd6+ ♕xd6 16.♕xd6 ♘g6 17.♕xf6 ♗e6 18.♖ad1 ♗e7 19.♕g7 ♖c8∞ but I'm not totally convinced about the value of the queen against Black's three minor pieces.

14...♗xg7 15.♕xg7 ♔d7 16.♕xf7 ♕f8 17.♕xf8 ♖xf8 18.♘b6+ ♔c6 19.♘xa8 ♗e6 20.♖ad1 ♖xa8

21.♖d3±

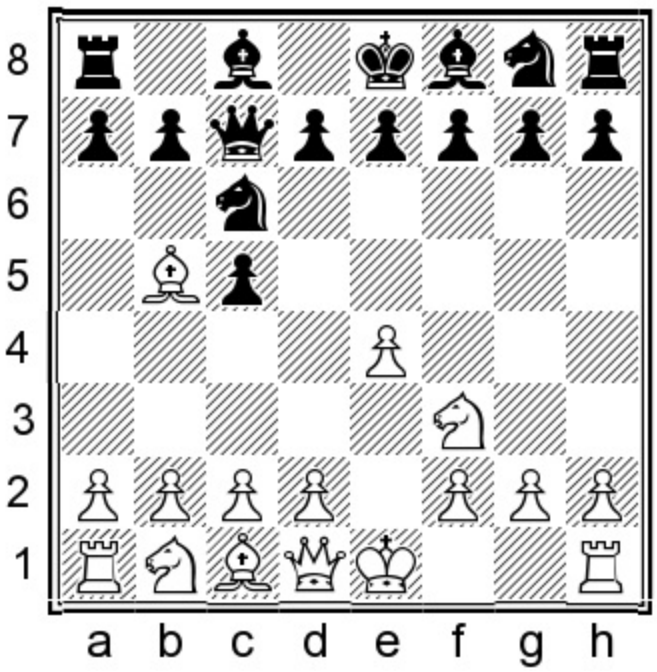


Position after: 21.♖d3±

Black faces a difficult defence. If this endgame doesn't impress you, we have perfectly feasible alternatives on moves 12 and 14.

e) 3...♕c7

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♕c7

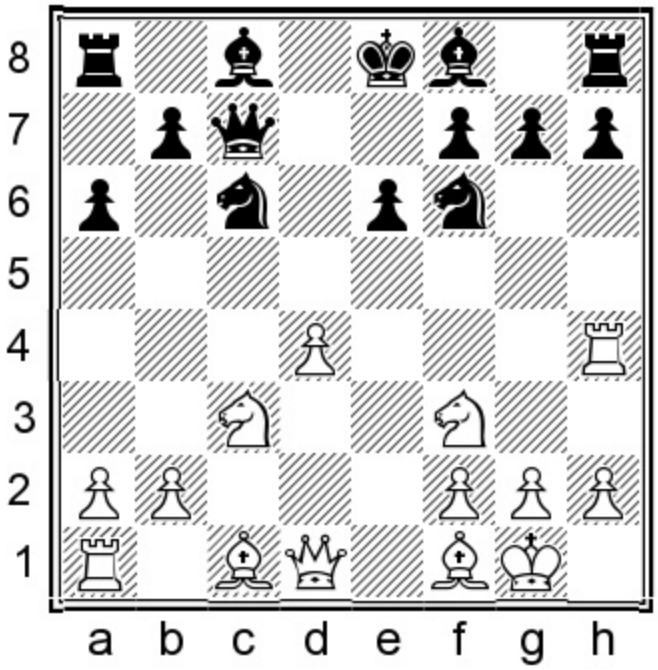


Position after: 3...♕c7

This seems more precise than 3...♕b6, as often the queen ends up on the c7-square regardless. Despite the fact that it's rarely played, accuracy is extremely important – or Black can equalise quite easily.

4.♘c3

4.0-0 has proven to be more popular both in practice and correspondence, but I'll quickly demonstrate the line I wasn't totally convinced with: 4...e6 5.♖e1 ♘ge7 6.c3 a6 7.♗f1 d5 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 dxe4 10.♖xe4 ♘d5 11.♘c3 ♘f6 12.♖h4



Position after: 12.♖h4

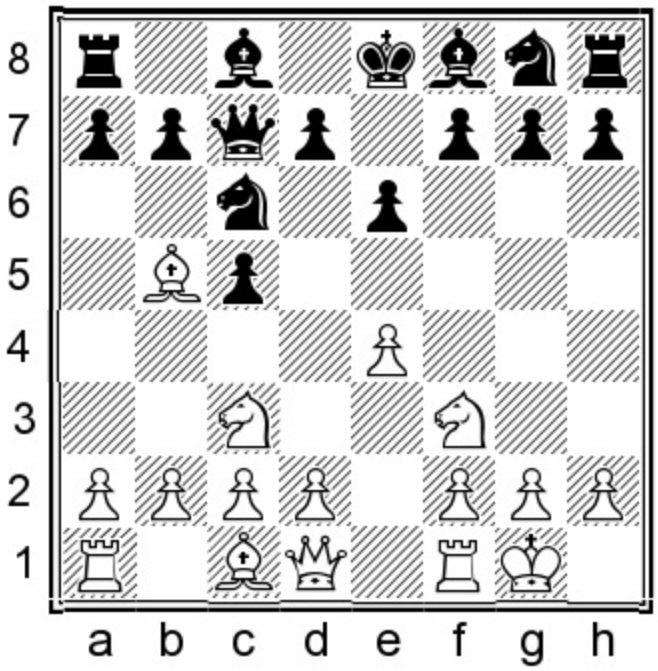
I've spent a while analysing this position, which has been reached in three correspondence games.

My impression is that Black remains very solid, with the potential for things to become very unclear if White overcommits to a kingside attack. However, I'd definitely encourage the reader to undertake their own analysis here – if they so wish!

4...e6

4...♘f6 will transpose to our mainline after 3...♘f6.

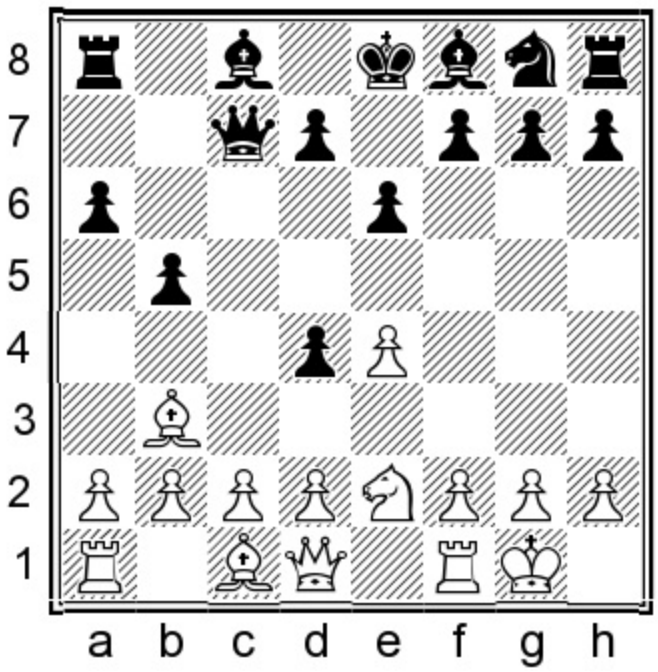
5.0-0



Position after: 5.0-0

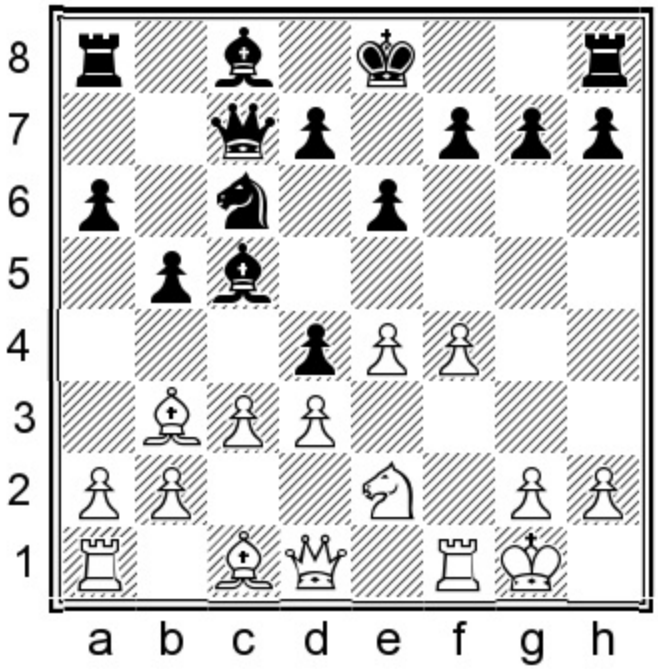
5...♘ge7

5...♘d4 A typical resource which we'll encounter a lot more of in future chapters. It's perfectly playable for Black here, but it also shouldn't be too difficult to prove an edge for White either. 6.♘xd4 cxd4 7.♘e2 a6 8.♗a4 b5 9.♗b3



Position after: 9.♗b3

9...♗c5 [9...♗d6 Our plan remains the same regardless of where Black places his bishop. 10.♔h1 ♕b6 11.d3 ♘e7 12.c3 dxc3 13.♗e3 ♕b8 14.bxc3±] 10.d3 ♘e7 11.c3 ♘c6 [11...dxc3 12.bxc3 ♗b7 13.d4 ♗b6 14.♗f4±] 12.f4!



Position after: 12.f4!

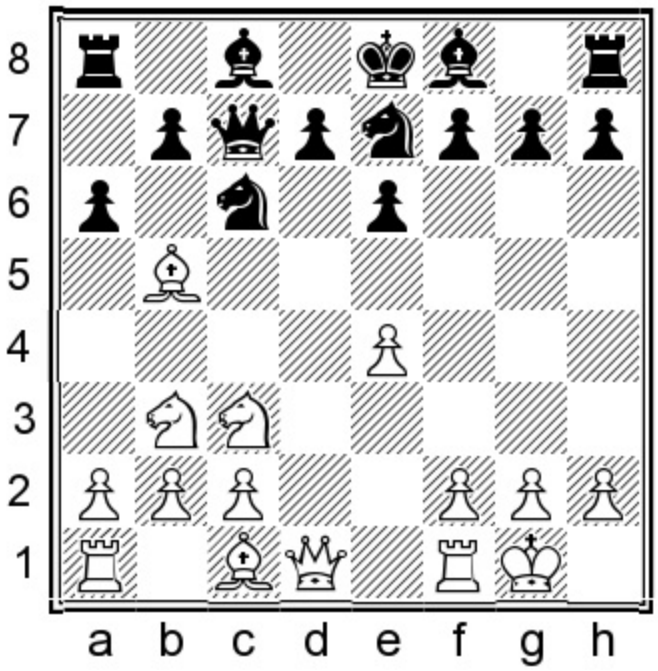
Black has moved his g8-knight to the queenside, meaning that a kingside attack is all the more attractive. 12...dxc3+ [12...♗b7 13.♔h1→] 13.d4 ♗e7 [13...cxb2 14.♗xb2 ♗b6 15.f5→] 14.bxc3 ♘a5 15.♗c2 0-0 16.f5→

6.d4

This is very similar to the lines that we'll encounter after 3...e6. It makes more sense to play d2-d4 rather than ♖e1 here, as our c3-knight stops us from playing c3 and d4.

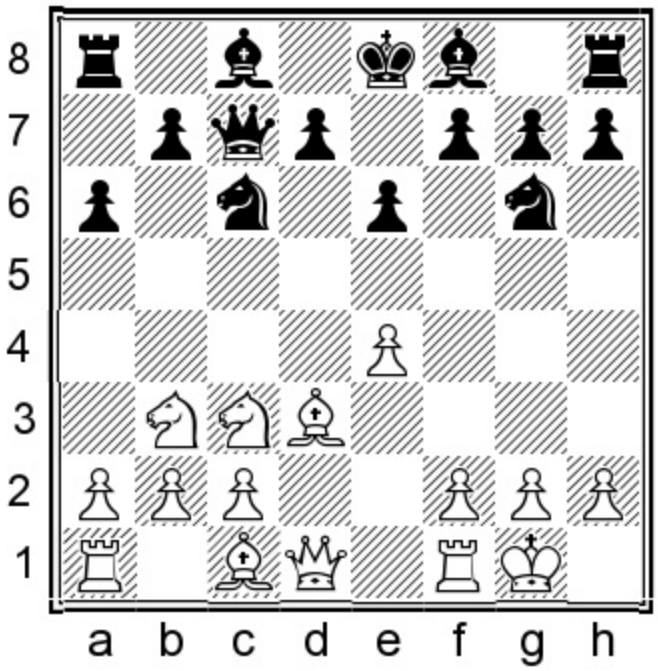
6...cxd4 7.♘xd4 ♘xd4

7...a6 It's important to note that Black isn't even threatening to capture on b5. 8.♘b3 I think it's important to retain our d4-knight; this has the additional benefit of making Black's knights look slightly clumsy.



Position after: 8.♘b3

8...♘g6 [8...♘g8!? Such a move emphasises how the knight belongs on f6 rather than g6! 9.♗d3 ♘f6 10.f4 d6 11.♕f3±; 8...g6 Another logical try, but this time Black invites a new attacking idea. 9.♗e3 ♗g7 10.♗xc6 ♘xc6 11.f4! b6 12.♕d2 0-0 13.f5→] 9.♗d3 The main difference between this position and similar positions after 3...e6 is that Black has played the move ...a7-a6, weakening the b6-square.

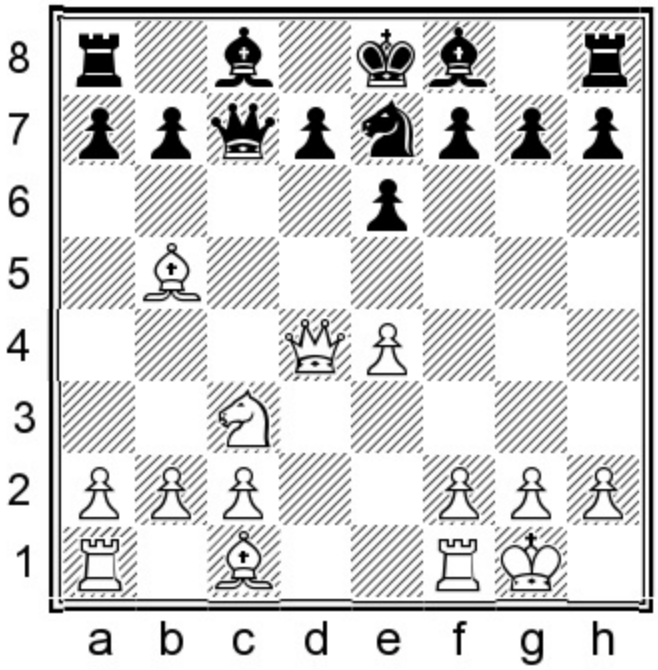


Position after: 9.♗d3

9...♗d6 10.g3 h5 11.f4 h4 12.♗e3 hxg3 13.hxg3± White's position is pretty solid, and it is more likely

that Black's king will end up in trouble after ♔g2, ♕f3 and ♖h1.

8.♕xd4



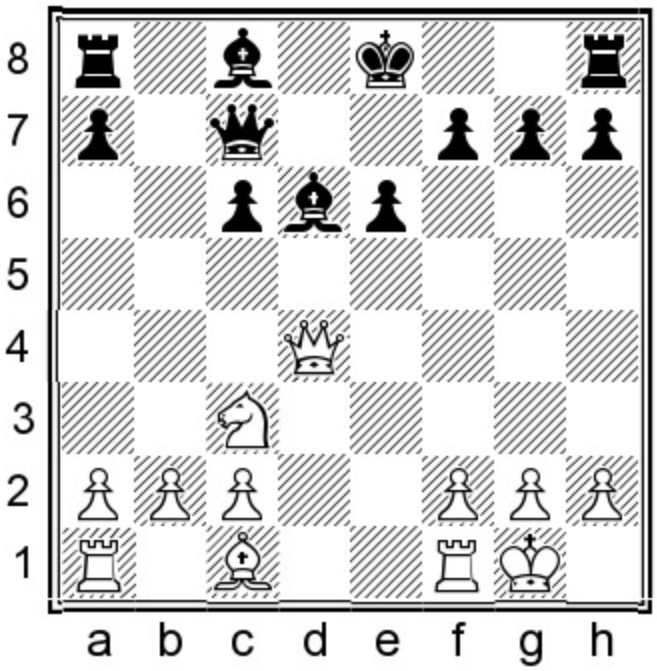
Position after: 8.♕xd4

8...♘c6

8...a6 9.♖d1! The b5-bishop can't be captured, and after 9...♘c6 we simply play 10.♗xc6 bxc6 11.b3± followed by ♘a4 and c2-c4.

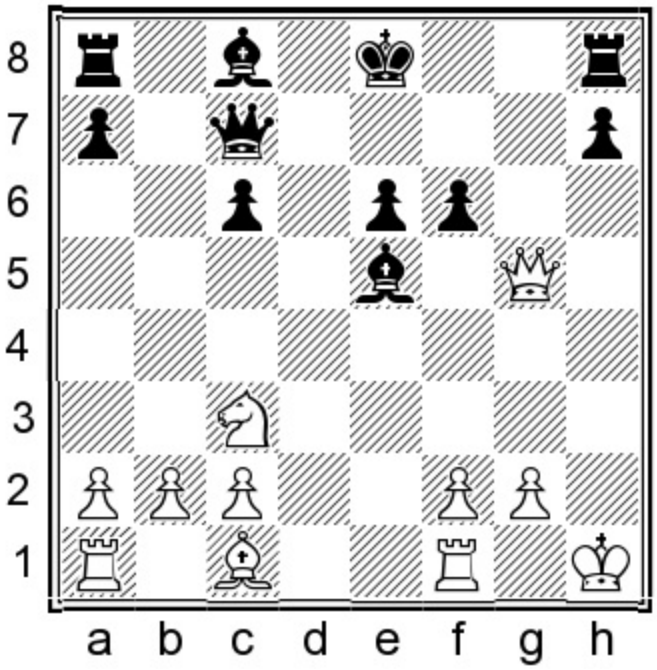
9.♕e3

9.♗xc6 is also possible, but it seems like we're playing into Black's hands a little bit by allowing him to make the position unclear: 9...bxc6 10.e5 d5! 11.exd6 ♗xd6



Position after: 11...♗xd6

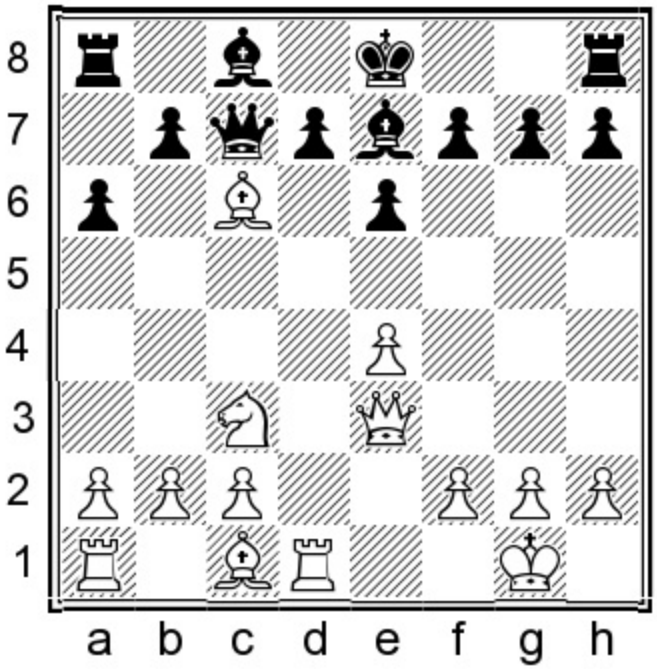
12.♕xg7 [12.♘e4 ♗xh2+ 13.♔h1 f5 14.♕c5 fxe4 15.♕h5+ ♕f7 16.♕xh2 0-0 17.♗e3 This looks nice for White, but I also don't think the position is especially difficult for Black to play, and drawing chances are definitely high.] 12...♗xh2+ 13.♔h1 ♗e5 14.♕g5 f6



Position after: 14...f6

15.♕h5+ [15.♕h4 ♗a6 16.♖d1 ♖g8∞] 15...♕f7 16.♕f3 0-0 17.♗f4 ♗xf4 18.♕xf4 e5 19.♕h4 ♗f5 20.♘e4 ♖ad8 and I don't think Black has too many problems here.

9...♗e7 10.♖d1 a6 11.♗xc6



Position after: 11.♗xc6

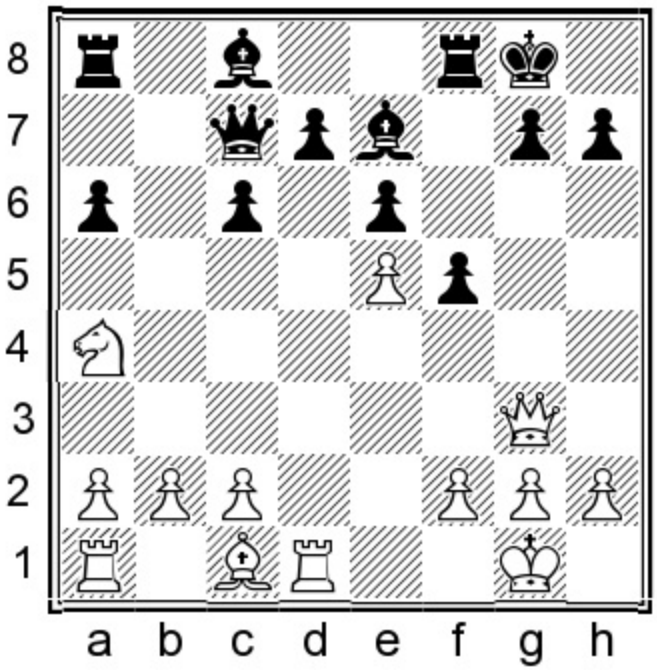
11...bxc6

11...dxc6 12.e5± Followed by ♕g3 and ♘e4, which will be very unpleasant for Black to face.

12.e5 0-0 13.♕g3 f5

Black needs to stop the threat of ♘e4 and ♗h6 somehow.

14.♘a4!



Position after: 14.♘a4!

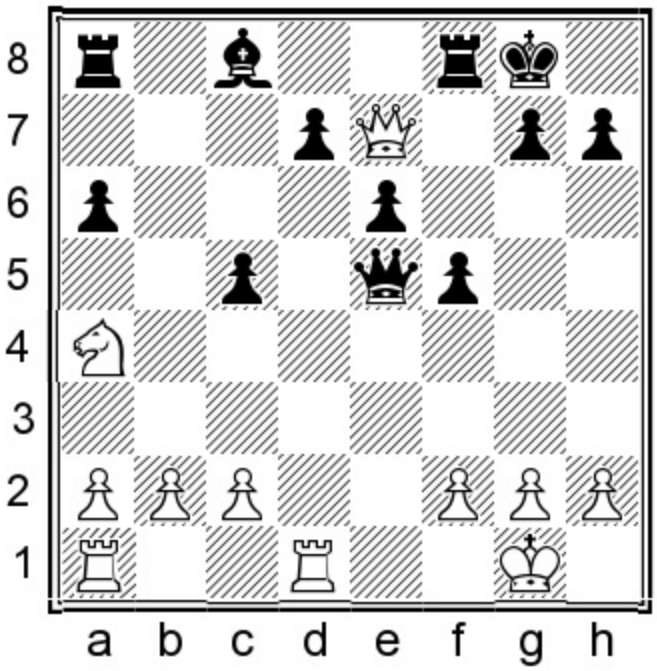
This move has multiple ideas: c4, ♗e3, ♗g5, or even b3 followed by ♘b2-c4 are all on the cards.

14...c5

A) 14...♗b7 15.♗g5!±

B) 14...♖b8 15.b3! ♖f7 16.♘b2±

15.♗g5 ♗xg5 16.♕xg5 ♕xe5 17.♕e7



Position after: 17.♕e7

The c5-pawn is lost, and Black has an inferior position due to his greater pawn weaknesses.

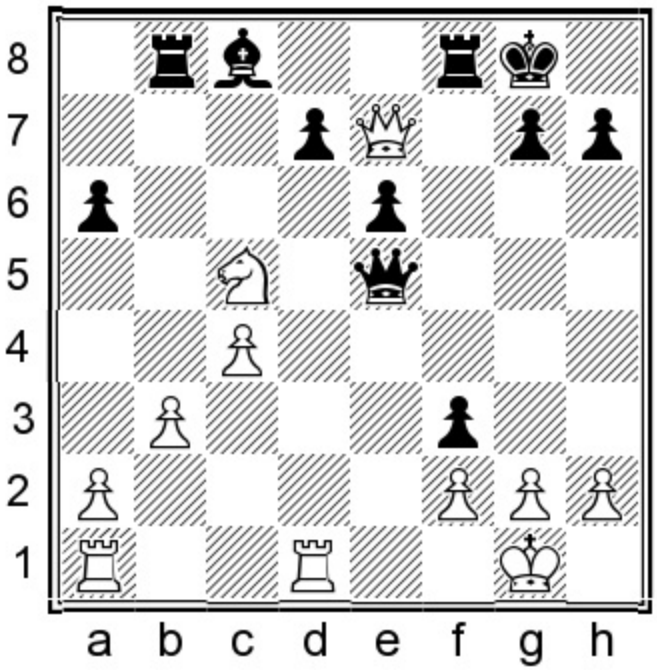
17...♖b8

17...c4 18.♘b6 ♖b8 19.♘xc4 ♕e4 20.b3±

18.c4!

If 18.b3, then Black would've been able to play 18...c4.
Here, Black's best chance is to try and create kingside counterplay.

18...f4 19.b3 f3 20.♘xc5!



Position after: 20.♘xc5!

The resulting Black pawn on g2 will actually help to protect our king. Meanwhile, the main issue for Black is that his b8-rook and c8-bishop are completely out of the game.

20...fxg2 21.♕d6 ♕f6 22.♕d4±

We can continue with ♖d2 and then play the other rook to e1. At some point, we can probably bring a rook to the third rank and either capture on d7, or launch a kingside attack. The position is still rich with ideas and Black's queenside pieces will suffer.

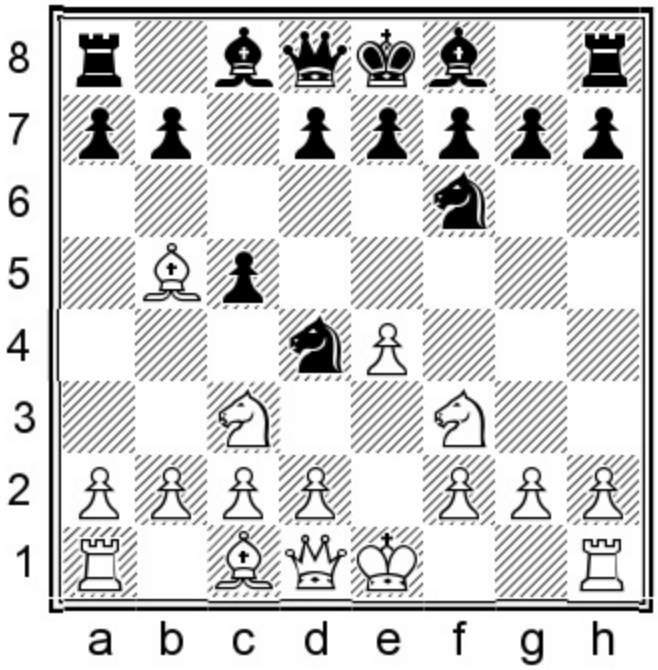
Conclusion to Chapter 1

An analysis of Black's sidelines against the Rossolimo is the perfect way to introduce concepts which will gradually become more and more familiar as we dive into the mainlines. In particular, important underlying themes which we've discovered in Chapter 1 include positional benefits of capturing on c6 and playing e4-e5, as well as noting that any inaccurate play from Black is usually punished by rapidly opening the centre. Although this chapter has focused on Black's sidelines, it's critical to note the significance of accurate play – or else Black will most likely be able to achieve a comfortable game. Subchapter b indicated the necessity of an early c2-c3 push, immediately pressuring Black's d4-pawn. Subchapter c demonstrated the importance of having ideal piece placement to support a c2-c3 and d2-d4 central push. Subchapters d and e introduced the benefits of the Rossolimo, in terms of the fact that we often have the possibility to transition to an Open-Sicilian type position on favourable terms.

Part II
3...♘f6

Chapter 2
4.♘c3 ♘d4

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♘d4



Chapter Guide

Chapter 2 – 4.♘c3 ♘d4

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♘d4 5.e5! ♘xb5 6.♘xb5 ♘d5 7.♘g5!

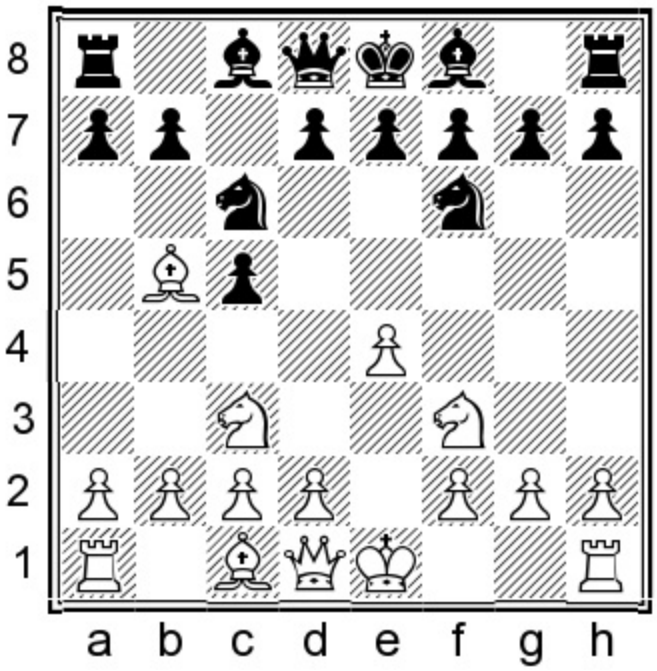
a) 4...-- alternatives

b) 7...--

c) 7...f6

a) 4...-- alternatives

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.♘c3

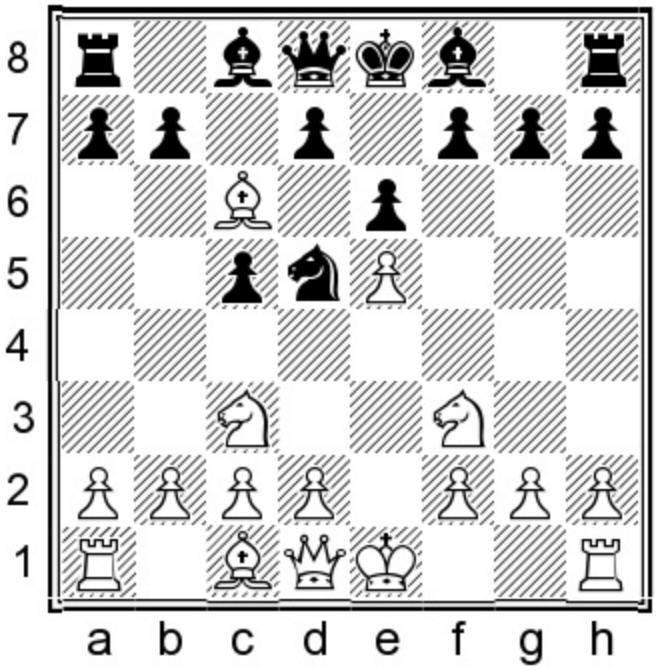


Position after: 4.♘c3

4...e5?

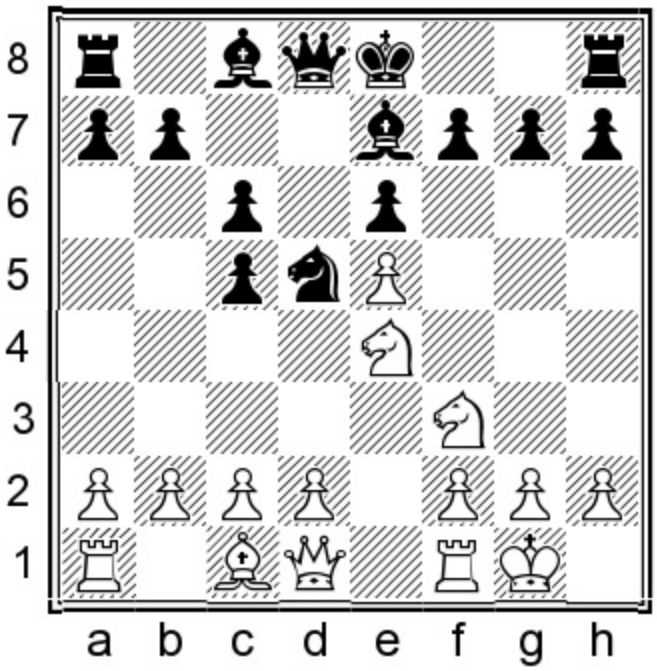
This has been played by both Carlsen and Kramnik, but the most forcing continuation guarantees a large advantage for White.

4...e6?! The combination of ...e6 and ...♘f6 looks dubious, as we immediately have the opportunity to positionally exploit Black's pawn structure with the timely 5.e5! ♘d5 6.♗xc6



Position after: 6.♗xc6

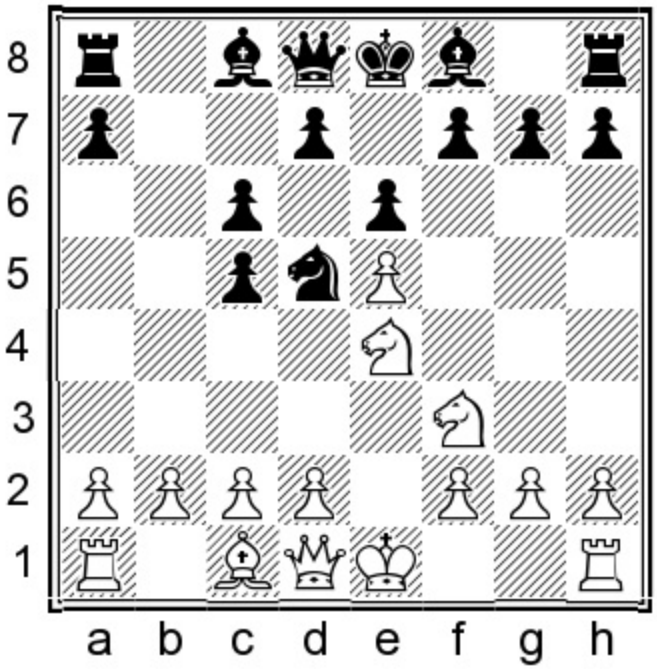
A) 6...dxc6 Capturing this way doesn't make any sense, as now Black can't make a pawn break without creating even more weaknesses. 7.0-0 ♗e7 8.♘e4



Position after: 8.♘e4

If we are allowed to continue developing normally with d2-d3 and c2-c4, then it's quite obvious that we have a significant advantage as Black's bishop on c8 will be lost to the game. Therefore Black is probably forced to try something like 8...c4 but our space advantage means that we are still considerably better after 9.d3! cxd3 10.♕xd3 0-0 11.♖d1±

B) 6...bxc6 7.♘e4

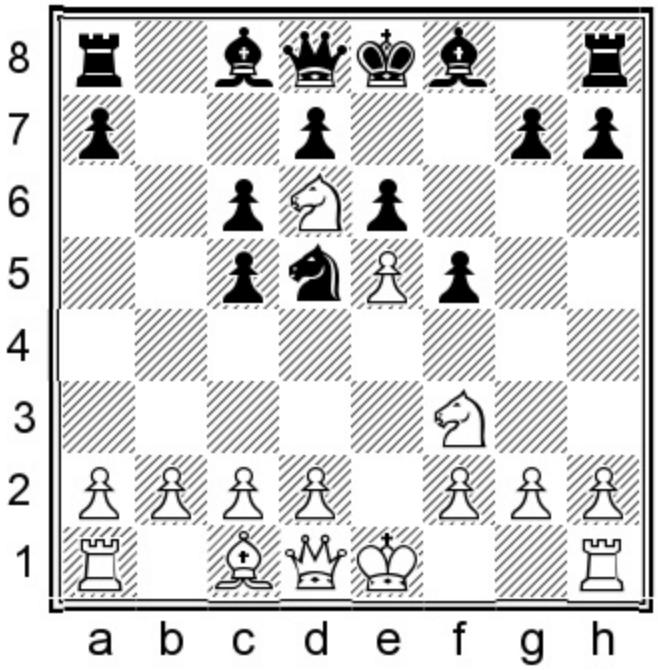


Position after: 7.♘e4

B1) 7...c4 8.b3! cxb3 9.axb3 c5 10.0-0 ♗b7 11.d4 cxd4 12.♕xd4 Black has problems on his dark squares, and is also falling behind in development. The line may continue: 12...♕b6 13.♗d2 a6 14.♘d6+! ♗xd6 15.exd6 ♕xd4 16.♘xd4±

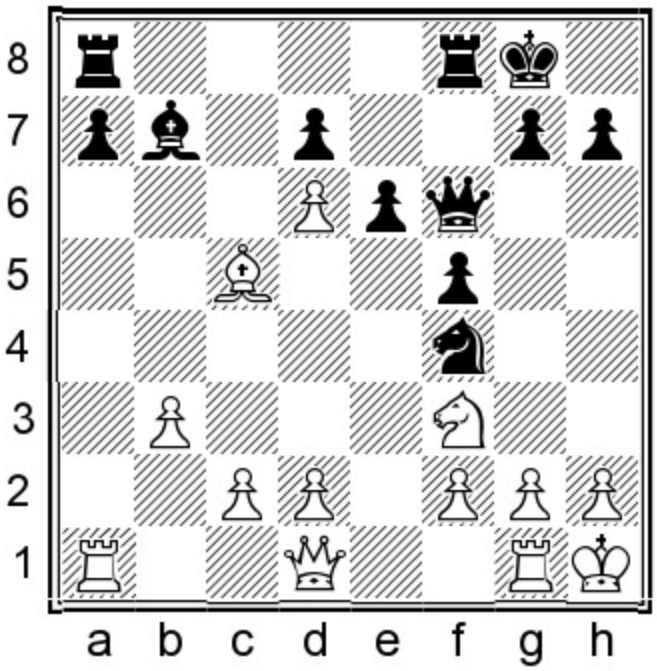
B2) 7...♗a6 8.d3 c4 9.dxc4 ♗xc4 10.b3 ♗a6 11.c4 ♗b4+ 12.♗d2+– It was already game over in Shirov – Sanchez, Andorra 2001.

B3) 7...f5 This appears to be Black's best bet to alleviate his weaknesses, but we have a nice reply. 8.♘d6+!



Position after: 8.♘d6+!

A really important move. It may look like the future d6-pawn will be a bit stranded but, as always, Black will be compounded with problems on the dark squares. And the d6-pawn itself is hard to win, remaining a thorn in Black's position in the meantime. 8...♗xd6 9.exd6 0-0 10.0-0 c4 11.b3 ♕f6 12.♗a3 cxb3 13.axb3 ♘f4 14.♔h1! c5 15.♗xc5 ♗b7 16.♖g1!



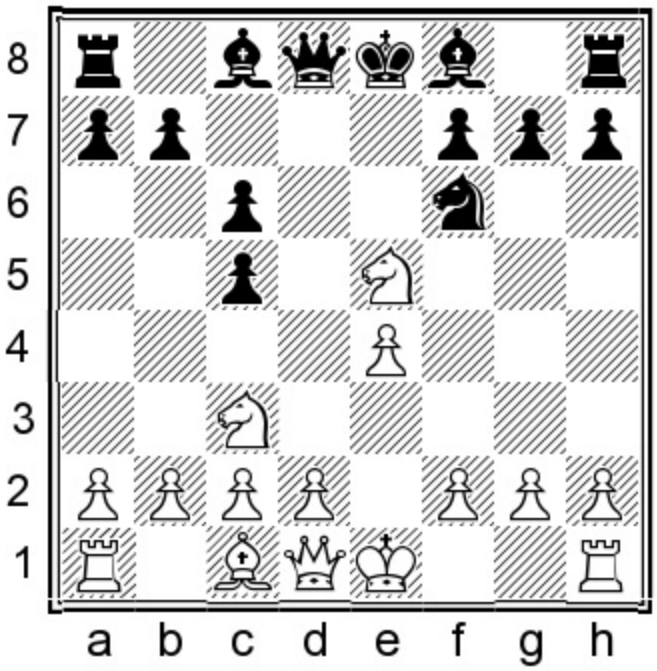
Position after: 16.♖g1!

The variation clearly wasn't forced, but exemplified how Black might try to generate active play. In any case, we have enough pieces to defend our king and emerge a clear pawn up. 16...a5 17.♖a4 e5 18.d4±

5.♗xc6 dxc6

5...bxc6 6.♘xe5 ♕e7 7.♘f3! ♘xe4 8.0-0+–

6.♘xe5



Position after: 6.♘xe5

6...♘xe4

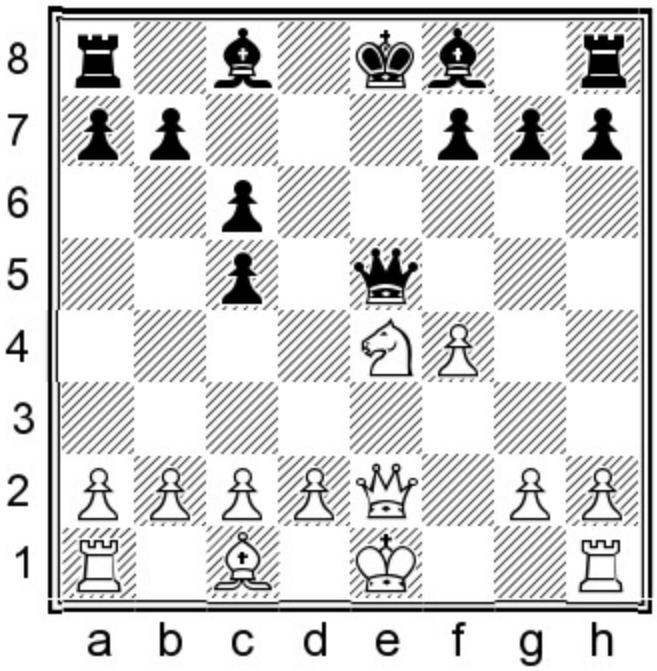
Black's idea to regain the pawn, but it fails for tactical reasons.

6...♕e7 7.f4+–

7.♘xe4 ♕d4

Black wins the pawn back, and apparently has a fine position with the bishop-pair. Crucially however, we are able to take advantage of his misplaced queen.

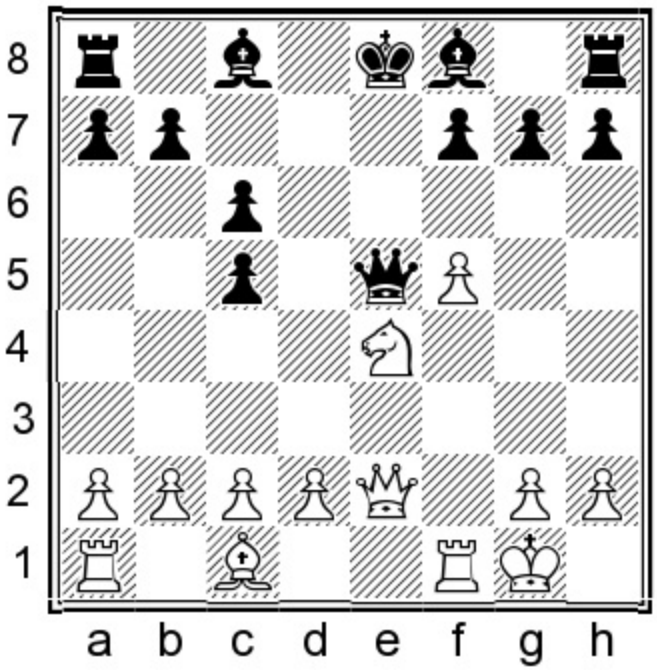
8.♕e2! ♕xe5 9.f4!



Position after: 9.f4!

9...♕xf4

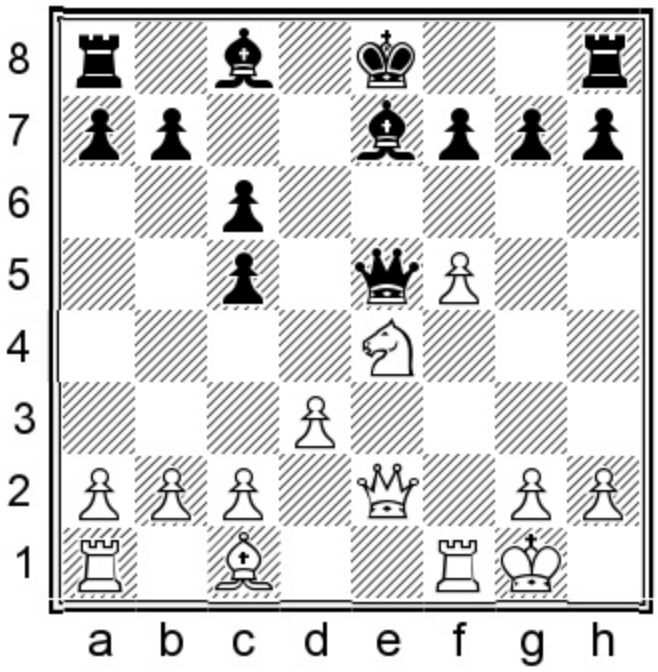
A) 9...♕e6 10.f5 ♕e5 11.0-0



Position after: 11.0-0

A1) 11...♗d7 Attempting to castle queenside doesn't escape our initiative. 12.d4! ♕xd4+ 13.♘f2+ ♗e7 14.♗g5 f6 15.♖ae1 0-0 [15...0-0-0 16.♖d1 ♕b4 17.♕xe7 fxg5 18.♘e4+–] 16.♖d1!+–

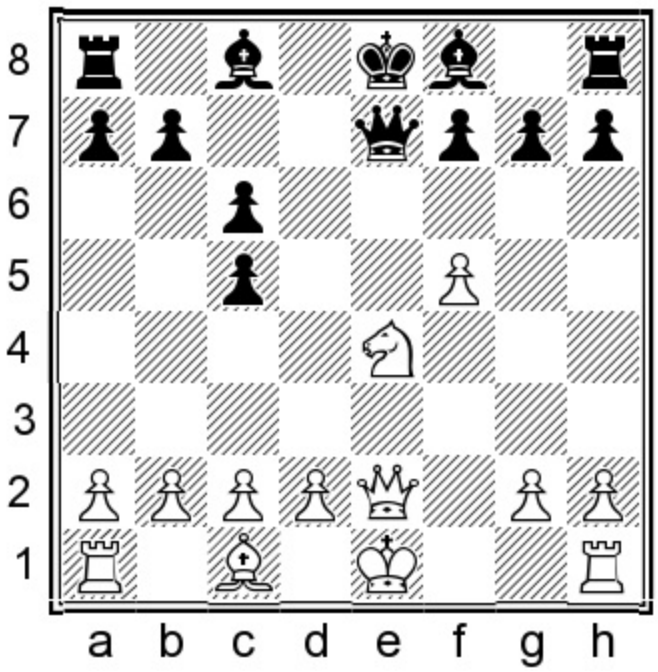
A2) 11...♗e7 12.d3



Position after: 12.d3

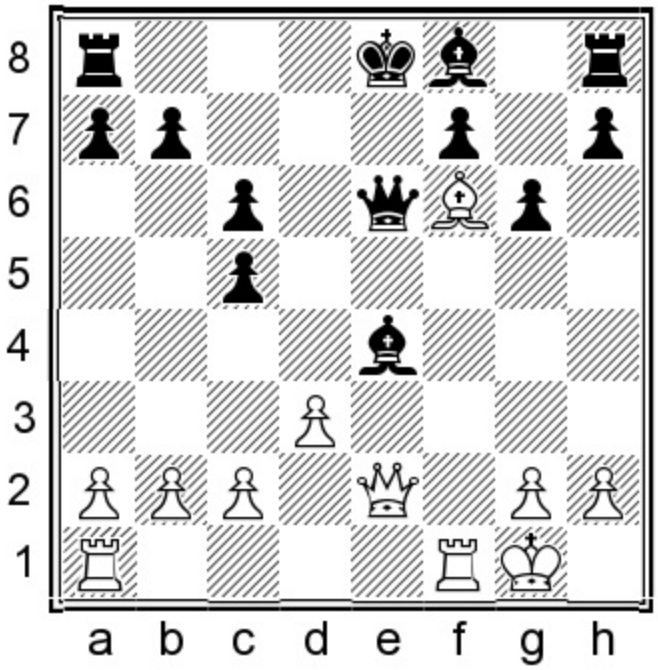
12...0-0 [12...f6 13.♗f4 ♕d4+ 14.♔h1 0-0 15.♖ae1+– White intends ♕g4 and ♖f3. The co-ordination of our pieces in the attack looks to be unstoppable.] 13.f6 ♗xf6 [13...gxf6 14.♗d2! f5 15.♖f3! fxe4 16.♗c3 Black conceded his queen and, shortly after, the game in Schmid – Drazkowski, FICGS email 2010.] 14.♖xf6! gxf6 [14...♗f5 15.g4! ♕d4+ 16.♔f1 ♗xe4 17.♖f4+–] 15.♗d2+– The threat of ♗c3 will be decisive.

B) 9...♕e7 10.f5!



Position after: 10.f5!

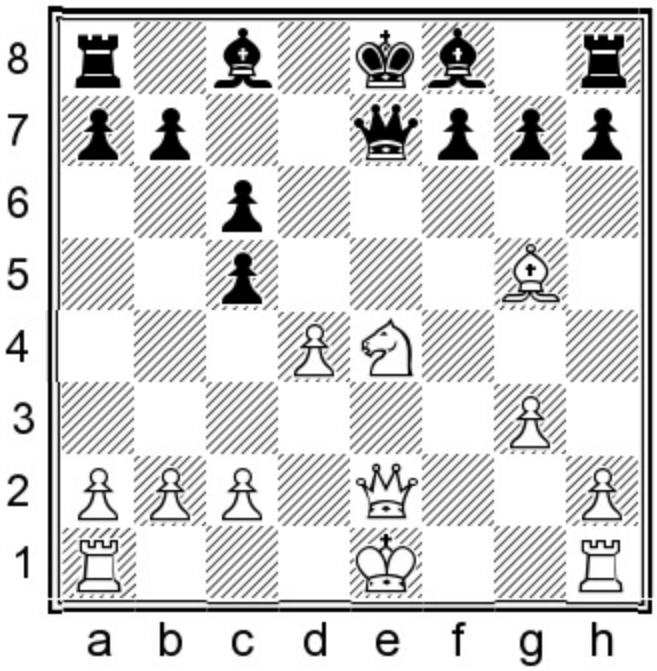
The threat of f5-f6 already looks nasty. 10...g6 [10...♗d7 11.0-0 0-0-0 12.d3 f6 13.♗f4±] 11.d3! ♗xf5 12.♗g5 ♕e6 13.♗f6 ♗xe4 [13...♖g8 14.0-0 ♔d7 15.♖ae1 ♖e8 16.♕f2 ♗d6 17.♗c3 ♗xe4 18.♖xe4 ♕f5 19.♕xf5+ gxf5 20.♖xe8 ♔xe8 21.♖xf5±] 14.0-0!



Position after: 14.0-0!

14...♗f5 [14...♖g8 15.♖ae1!± Followed by ♕d2, and the tactics favour White.; 14...♗g7 15.♗xg7 ♖g8 16.♗h6±] 15.♕xe6+ ♗xe6 16.♗xh8± Black faces an unlikely defensive task.

10.d4 ♕h4+ 11.g3 ♕e7 12.♗g5!

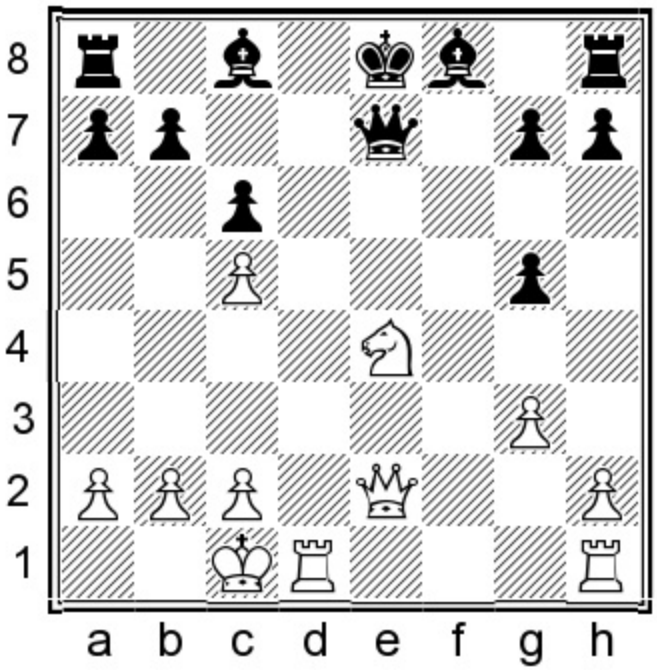


Position after: 12.♗g5!

12...♕e6

The whole variation has been forced so far, but now we need to be especially accurate.

12...f6 13.0-0-0! The point. 13...fxg5 [13...♔f7 14.♖hf1! h5 15.♗xf6 gxf6 16.♖xf6+ ♔g7 17.♖df1+–] 14.dxc5!

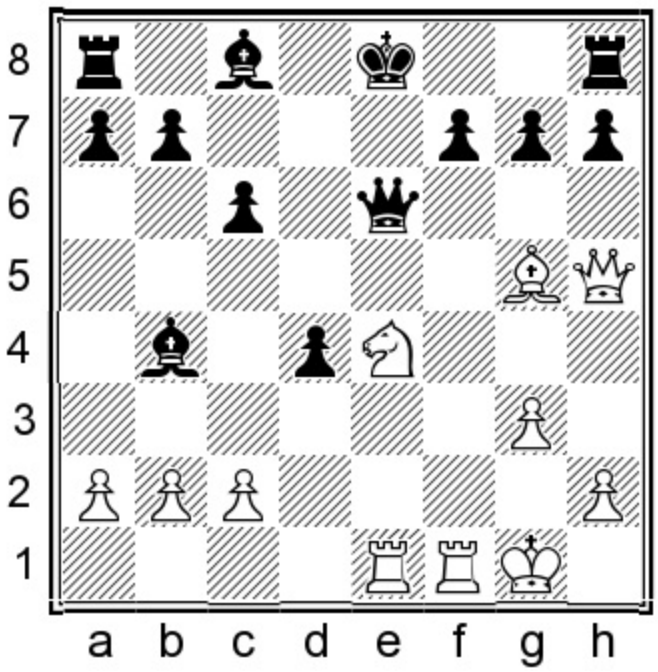


Position after: 14.dxc5!

14...♕e5 [14...♔f7 15.♖hf1+ ♔g8 16.♖d6!+– Zezulkin – Priborsky, Czechia 2007.] 15.♖he1 ♗e6 16.♕f2+– And ♘d6+ on the next move will end the game.

13.0-0 h6

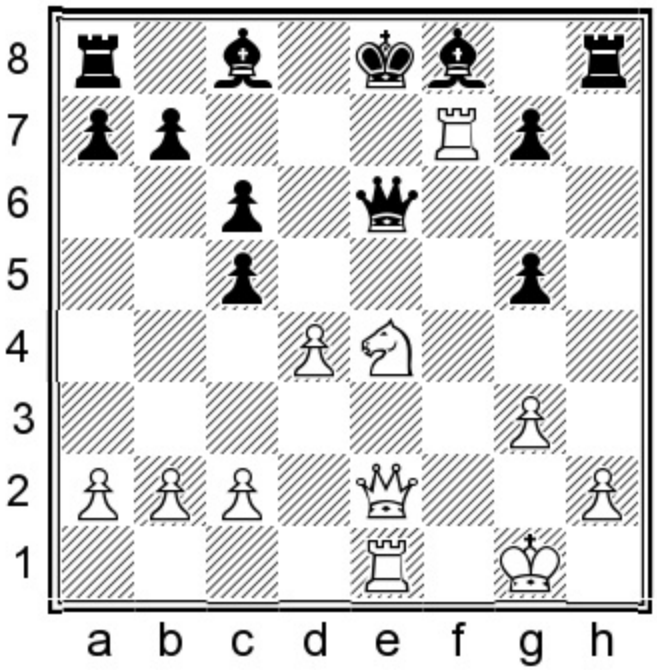
13...cxd4 14.♖ae1 ♗b4 15.♕h5!



Position after: 15.♕h5!

15...♗xe1? [15...♔f8 16.♗d2!+–] 16.♘d6+ ♔d7 17.♖xf7+ ♔xd6 18.♗f4+ ♕e5 19.♕xe5#

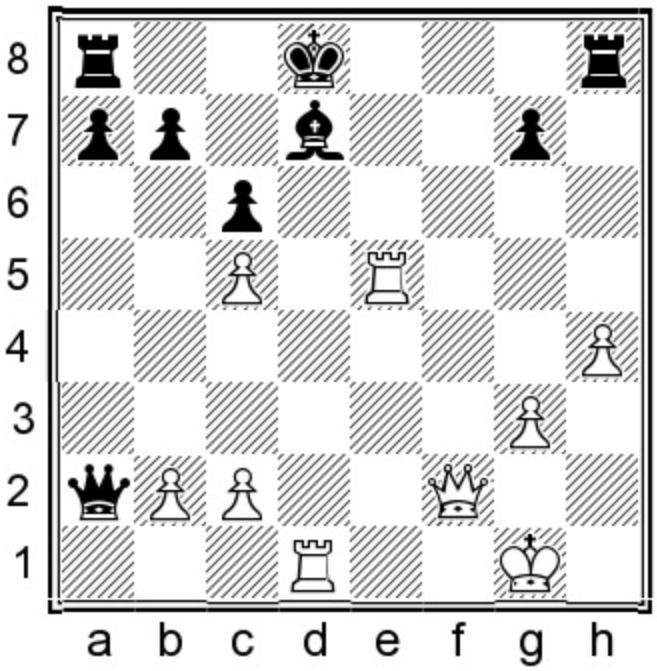
14.♖ae1! hxg5 15.♖xf7!



Position after: 15.♖xf7!

White crashes through in emphatic fashion.

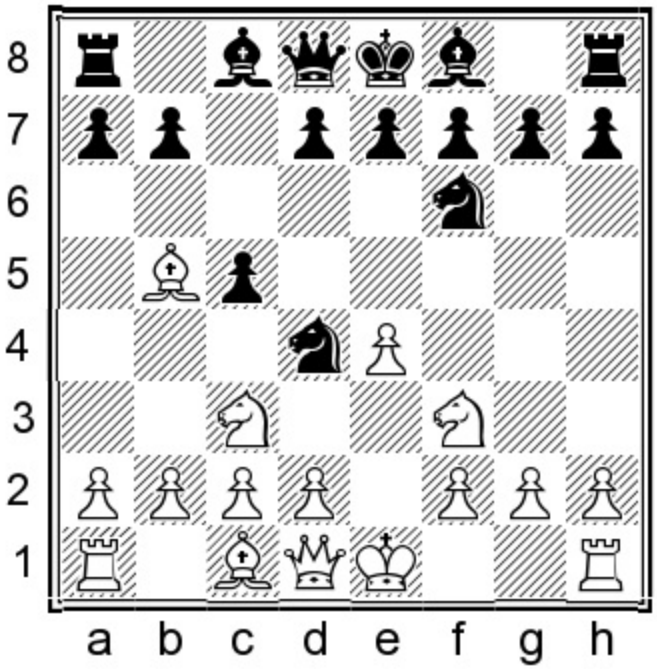
15...♗e7 16.♕f2 ♕g6 17.♘xg5 ♕xg5 18.h4 ♕d5 19.♖fxe7+ ♔d8 20.dxc5 ♗d7 21.♖7e5! ♕xa2 22.♖d1+–



Position after: 22.♖d1+–

b) 7...--

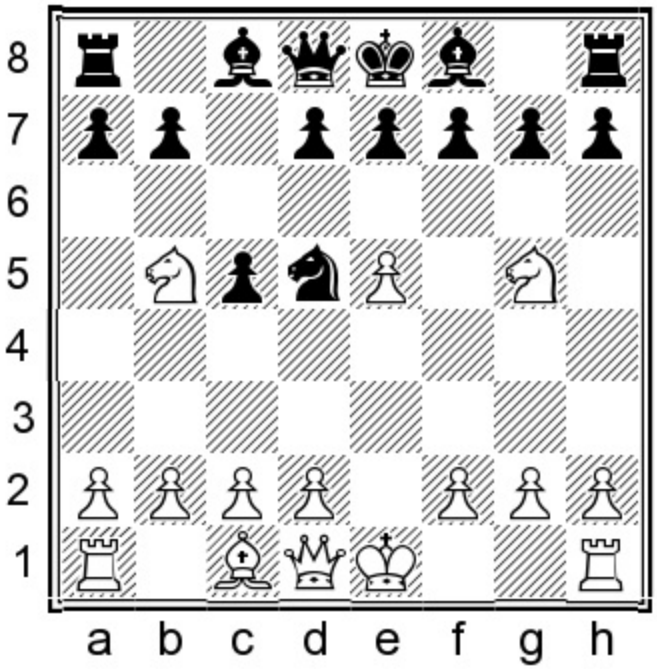
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♘d4



Position after: 4...♘d4

A popular idea which has fallen out of favour in recent times. Today, it is used most commonly in rapid or blitz games as a surprise weapon. If we are accurate, we can create a whole host of problems for Black to deal with.

5.e5! ♘xb5 6.♘xb5 ♘d5 7.♘g5!



Position after: 7.♘g5!

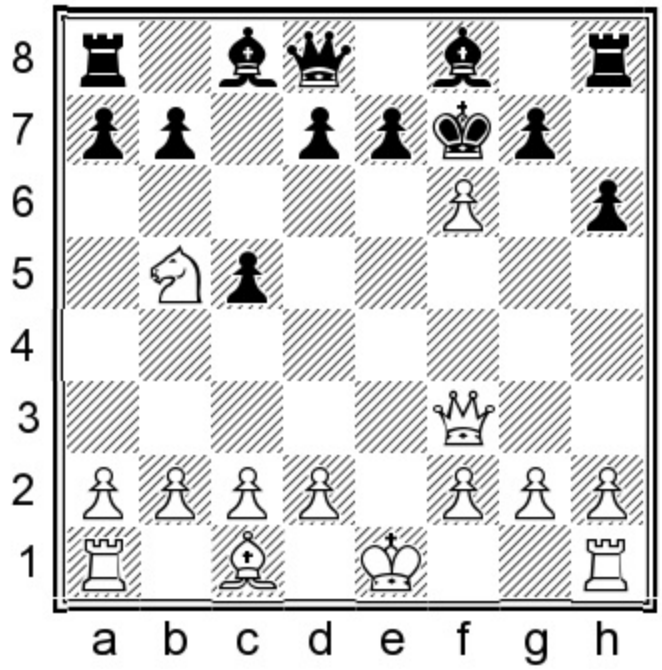
Suddenly the idea of ♘xf7 and ♕f3 seems really difficult to prevent. A lot of moves have been tried here, and it is important to note the various differences between each of Black's attempts.

7...a6

A) 7...f6 is the main move and I consider it in the next subchapter.

B) 7...e6? 8.♘e4+– Black has self-inflicted his own downfall!

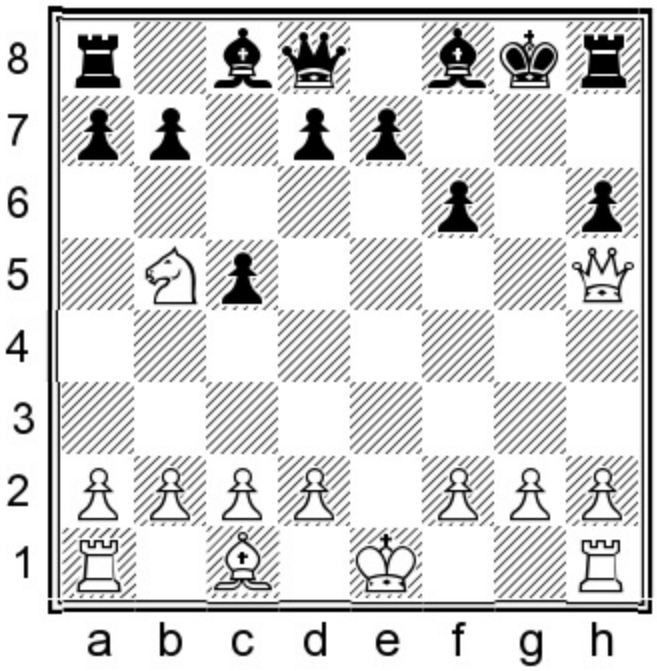
C) 7...h6?! Our response is obvious, but the outcome is not totally straightforward. 8.♘xf7 ♔xf7 9.♕f3+ ♘f6 [9...♔e6?? 10.c4 ♘b4 11.d4! The Black king is getting mated. 11...d5 12.a3 ♘c2+ 13.♔d1+–] 10.exf6



Position after: 10.exf6

C1) 10...exf6 11.♕d5+ ♔g6 12.0-0± This position was reached in Staroske – Tleptsok, ICCF email 2017. Although the game ended in a draw, it was pretty one-sided and currently the king on g6 doesn't fill me with a great deal of confidence for Black.

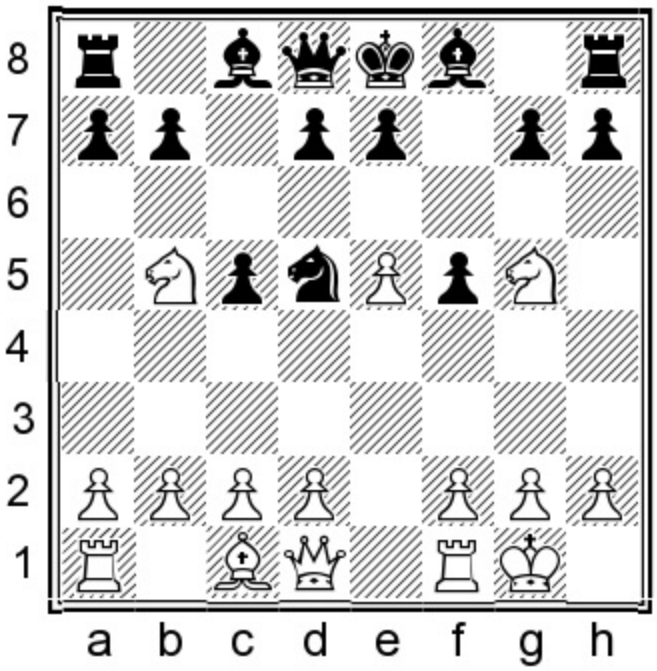
C2) 10...gxf6 11.♕h5+ ♔g8



Position after: 11...♔g8

12.d4! [12.a4!? is also quite a sophisticated idea, e.g. 12...d5 13.♖a3 ♗g7 14.♖g3 ♗e6 15.0-0→] 12...a6 13.♘c3 cxd4 14.♕d5+ e6 15.♕xd4±

D) 7...f5?! 8.0-0

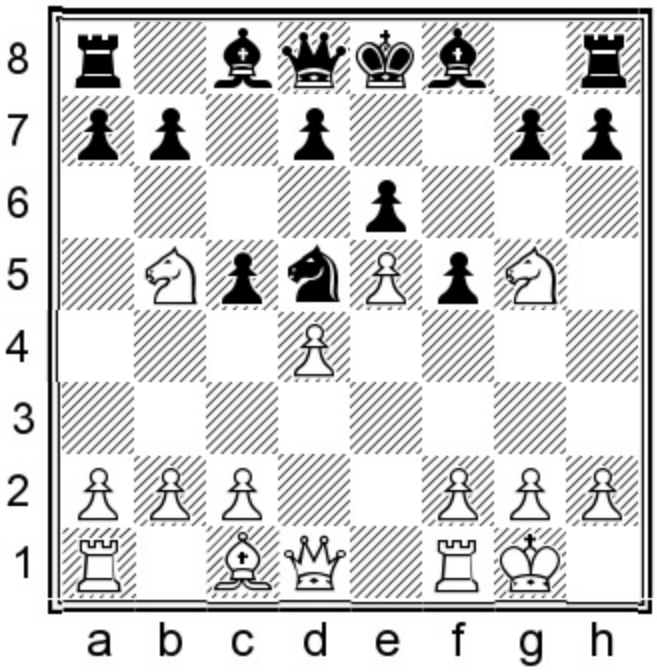


Position after: 8.0-0

I don't see any reason to delay castling, as ...f7-f5 is a rather weakening move. Although I have provided a lot of different and detailed variations in this line, in general it is more important to focus

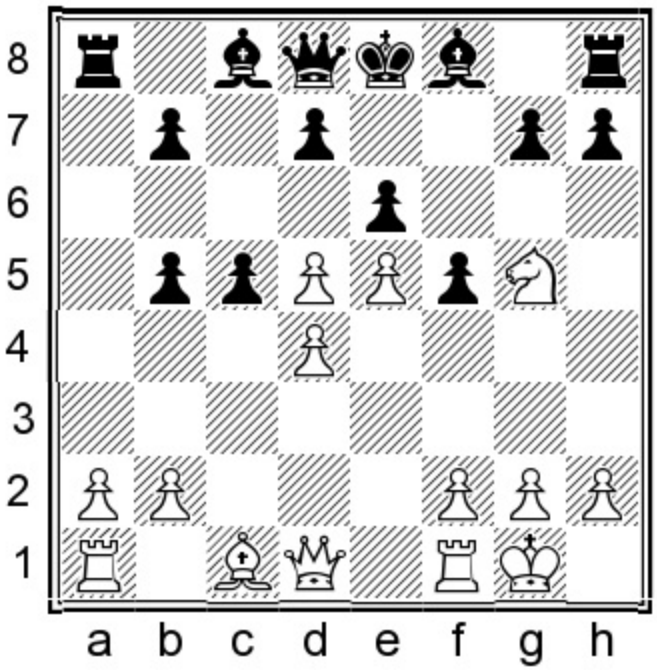
on ideas – specifically the dynamism with which White plays with, and how we use our pieces to play against Black's weaknesses.

D1) 8...e6 Now our g5-knight cannot come to e4 to exploit Black's dark-squared weaknesses, but this isn't a huge issue. 9.d4



Position after: 9.d4

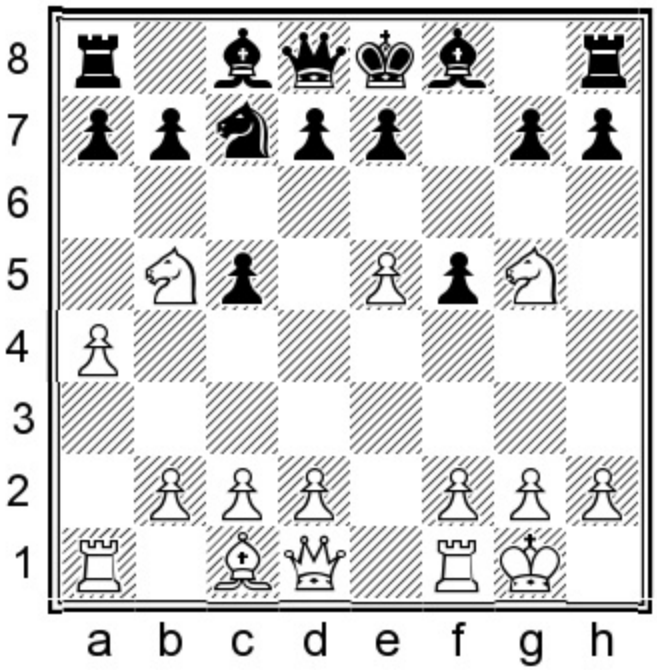
9...a6 [9...c4 Keeping the centre closed doesn't really alleviate any of Black's problems, and it's likely that the c4-pawn will just be a weakness. 10.a4! b6 11.♕h5+ g6 12.♕e2 a6 13.♘d6+ ♗xd6 14.exd6±] 10.c4! A clever intermediate move. 10...axb5 [10...♘b4 11.♘d6+ ♗xd6 12.exd6 Black's dark-squared weaknesses will prove to be his downfall. 12...cxd4 13.♕h5+ g6 14.♕h6 ♕f6 15.♘f3+–] 11.cxd5



Position after: 11.cxd5

11...♖a4 [11...cxd4 12.d6+– is crushing.; 11...♗e7 12.♘f3! exd5 13.dxc5+–] 12.dxc5 ♗xc5 13.dxe6+– Black cannot recapture on e6.

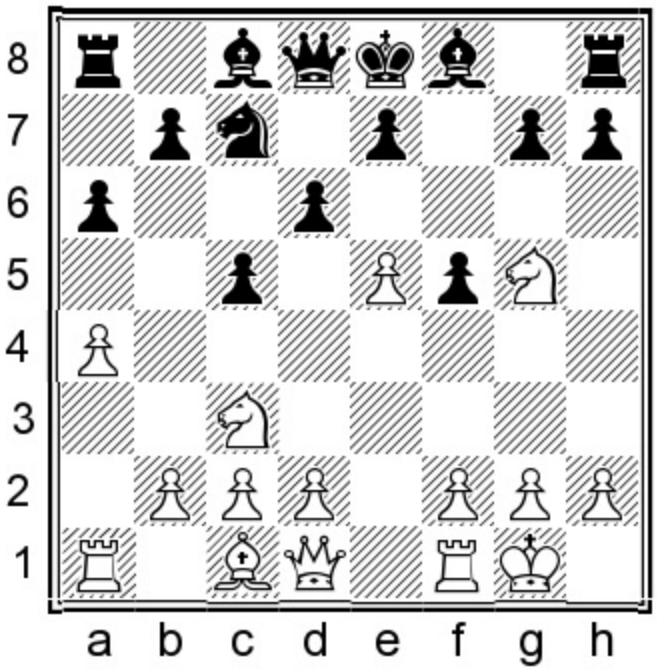
D2) 8...♘c7 9.a4!



Position after: 9.a4!

I really like this move as it incites Black to play ...a7-a6, which in itself is another concession. 9...a6 [9...♘xb5 10.axb5 e6 11.d4!± was very strong in Baltag – Golub, Kishinev 2012.] 10.♘c3

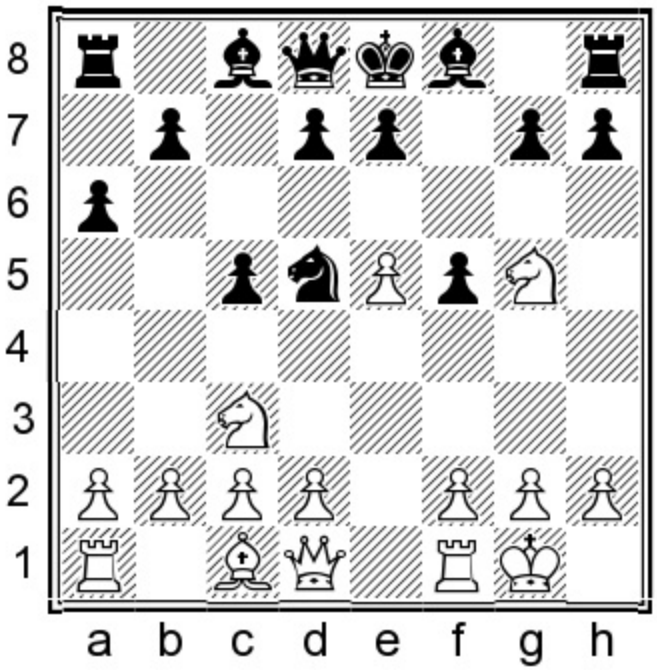
d6 [10...e6 11.d4 cxd4 12.♕xd4 ♗e7 13.♘f3±]



Position after: 10...d6

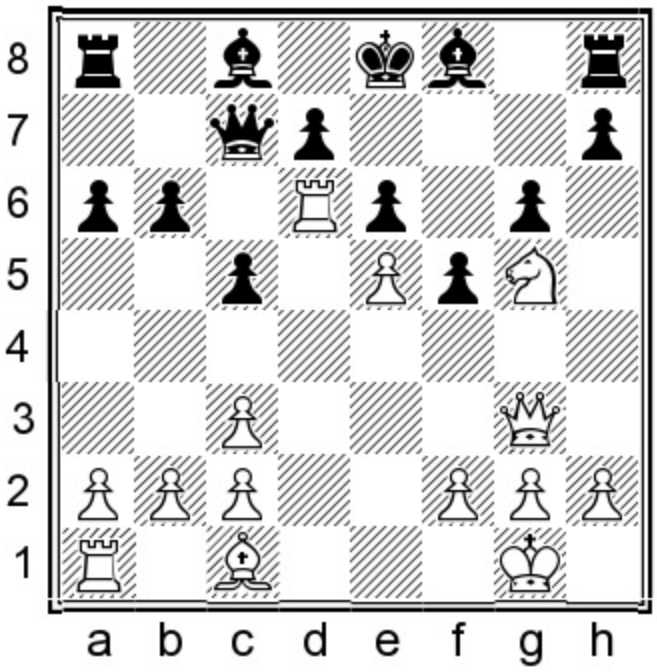
11.♖e1 [11.exd6 ♕xd6 12.♖e1± also looks great for White.] 11...e6 [11...dxe5 12.♕e2 e4 13.d3! exd3 14.♕e5 Black is completely paralysed, for example: 14...h6 15.♘f3 dxc2 16.♗f4 ♘e6 17.♕xf5+–] 12.exd6 ♗xd6 13.♘f3 0-0 14.d4± Even though Black has managed to castle, the drawbacks of his position still persist.

D3) 8...a6 9.♘c3



Position after: 9.♘c3

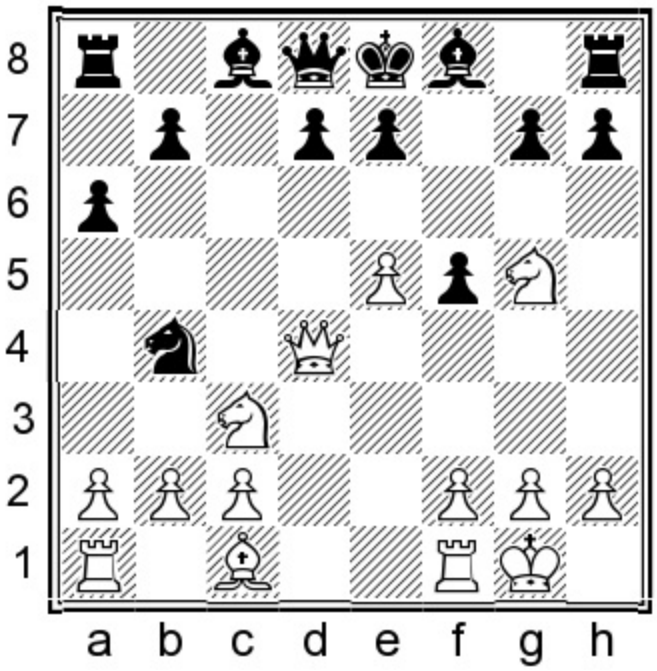
D3.1) 9...♘xc3 10.dxc3 ♕c7 [10...e6 11.♕f3 g6 12.♖d1 ♕c7 13.♕g3 b6 14.♖d6!



Position after: 14.♖d6!

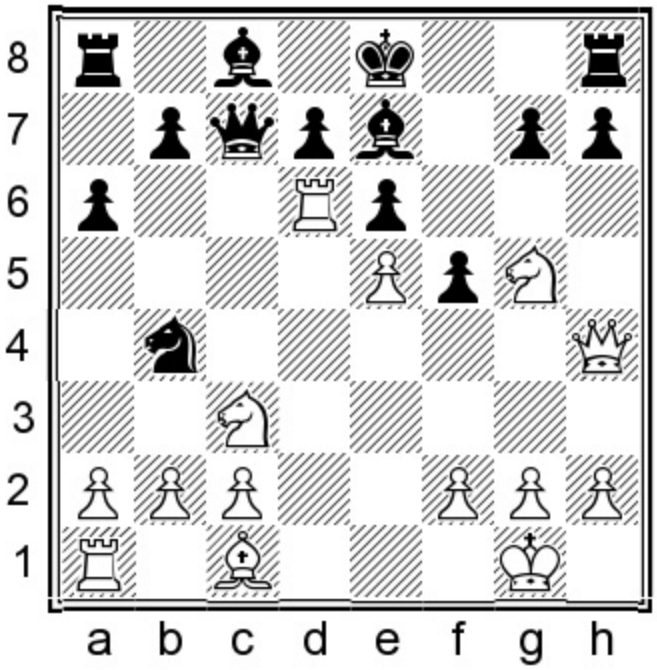
The following variation is an example of how easily Black's position can collapse. 14...♗xd6 15.exd6 ♕c6 16.♘xh7!! ♖xh7 17.♕xg6+ ♖f7 18.♗f4 ♗b7 19.f3 c4 20.♕g8+ ♖f8 21.♕g5 ♖f7 22.♖e1 ♕c5+ 23.♔f1 ♗d5 24.h4+–] 11.e6! A nice, if slightly unnecessary, pawn sacrifice – although it's certainly in the spirit of the Rossolimo. [11.♗f4± is also simple and strong.] 11...dxe6 12.♖e1 ♕d6 13.♕e2 g6 14.♖d1 ♕c6 15.♗f4 ♗g7 16.♖d3 0-0 17.h4→

D3.2) 9...♘b4 10.d4! cxd4 11.♕xd4



Position after: 11.♕xd4

It's obvious that Black can't capture on c2, but what can he do? 11...e6 [11...♘xc2?? 12.♕d3 ♘xa1 13.♕xf5+–; 11...♘c6 12.♕h4 e6 13.♕g3 h6 14.♘h7! ♔f7 15.♘xf8±] 12.♖d1 ♕e7 [12...♗e7 13.♕h4 ♕c7 14.♖d6! As always, this option can be very effective.

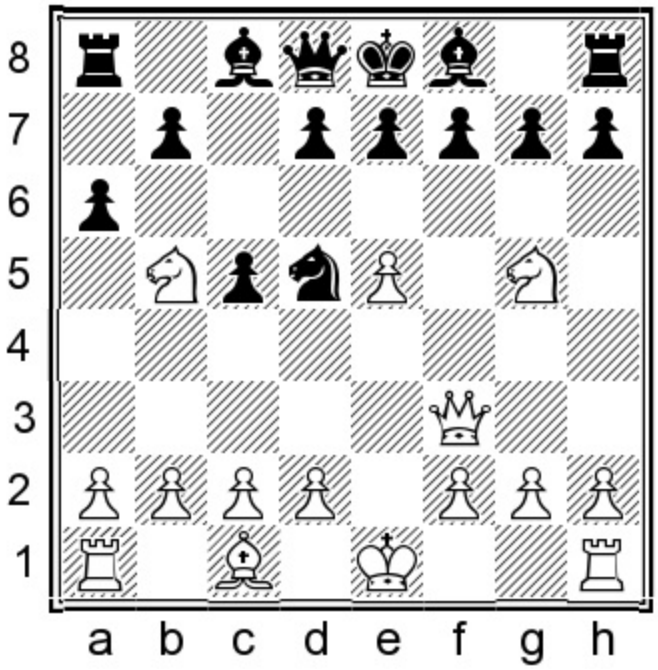


Position after: 14.♖d6!

14...♗xd6 15.exd6 ♕xd6 16.♗f4 ♕d4 17.♘xe6 dxe6 18.♖d1+–] 13.♕h4 ♘xc2 [13...♘c6 14.f4±] 14.♖b1 b5 [14...♘b4 15.g4!+–] 15.♕g3 ♘b4 16.♘xh7!+–

E) 7...♘c7? 8.♕h5 g6 9.♕f3 f6 10.exf6 exf6 11.♘xc7+ ♕xc7 12.♕xf6+–

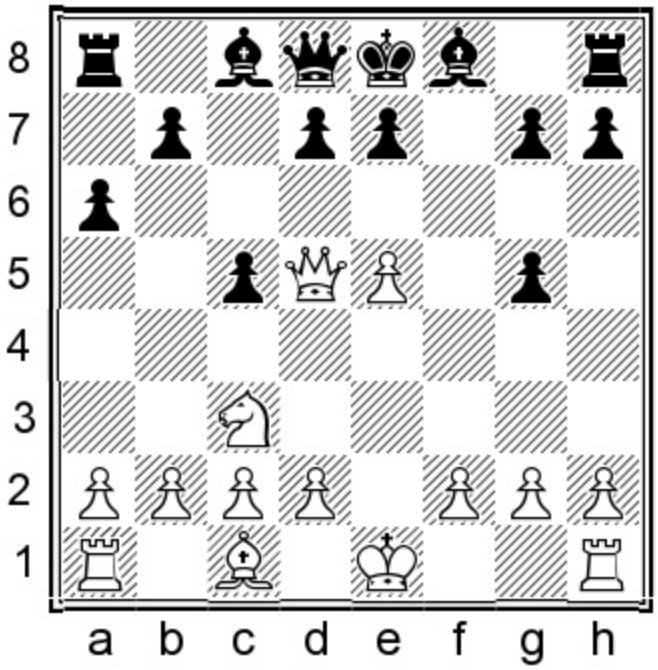
8.♕f3



Position after: 8.♕f3

The difference compared to 7...f6 is that here, Black does not have the option of ...♘c7 (which he does in the main line.)

8...f6 9.♕xd5 fxg5 10.♘c3

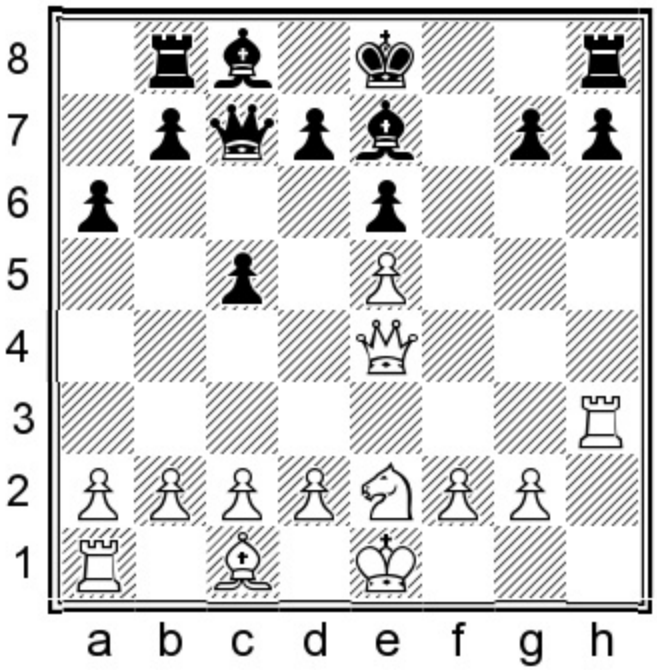


Position after: 10.♘c3

Black has tried two options here, but it's suffice to say that in practical terms his position remains extremely dangerous.

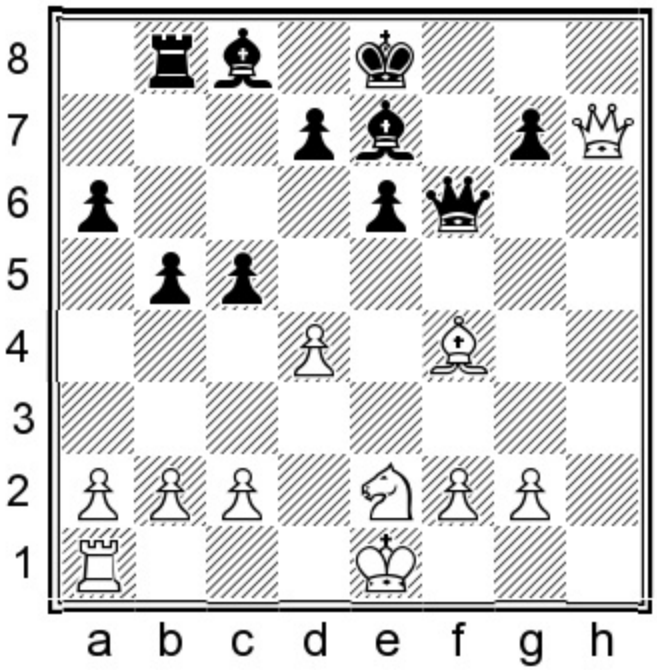
10...e6

10...♕c7 11.h4!N It looks more natural to play 11.e6, but my move simply opens up further lines of attack and poses more questions to Black about his plans for king safety. 11...e6 12.♕e4 gxh4 13.♖xh4 ♗e7 14.♖h3 ♖b8 [14...g6 15.d3 ♖b8 16.♗h6+– The threat of ♗g7 will be crushing.] 15.♘e2!



Position after: 15.♘e2!

A really smart move, subtly threatening ♖xh7 whilst simultaneously redirecting the knight to the kingside. 15...b5 [15...g6 16.♘f4 d5 17.exd6 ♗xd6 18.♘xe6 ♕e7 19.♖e3± Highlighting the benefits of 11.h4!] 16.♖xh7 ♖xh7 17.♕xh7 ♕xe5 18.d4! Our moves are very easy to play whilst Black consistently has to be on alert. 18...♕f6 19.♗f4

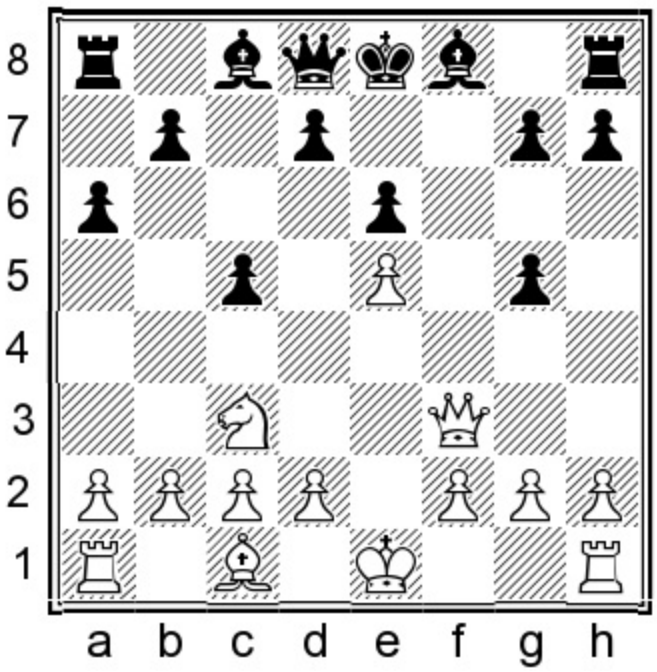


Position after: 19.♗f4

A) 19...♖a8 20.dxc5! ♗b7 [20...♕xb2 21.♕h5+ ♔f8 22.♗e5+–] 21.0-0-0± Black has already moved his a8-rook, corroborating the fact that his king will never be safe.

B) 19...d6 20.dxc5 e5 21.♗e3 dxc5 22.0-0-0±

11.♕f3

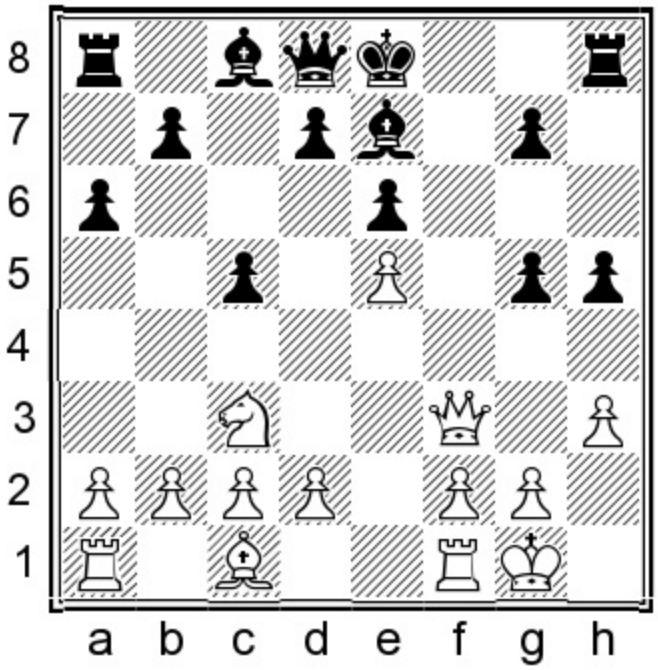


Position after: 11.♕f3

The plethora of moves attempted by Black in this position suggests that nothing is convincing. We will only focus on the two most logical possibilities. On the other hand, White's moves come very naturally.

11...♕c7

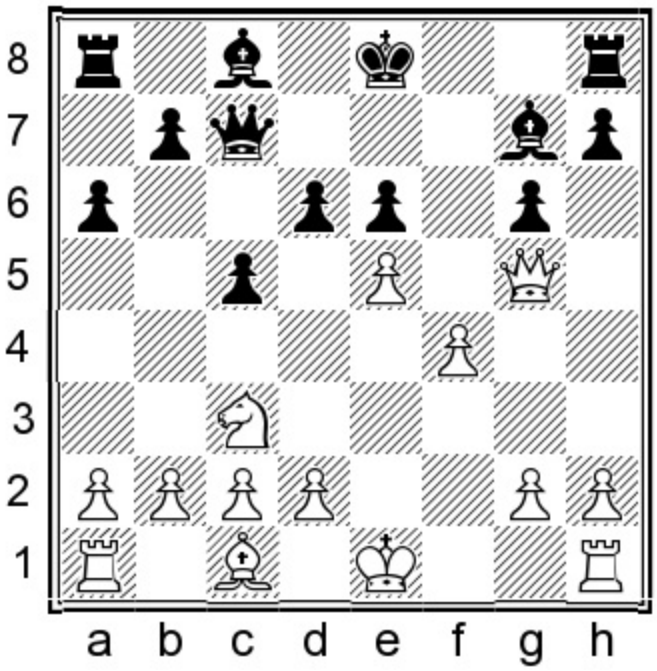
11...♗e7 is an attempt to achieve some kind of artificial development by pushing the kingside pawns. 12.0-0 h5 13.h3!



Position after: 13.h3!

Probably the easiest way to halt Black's approach. 13...d5 14.exd6 ♗xd6 15.♕d3! g4 [15...0-0 16.♘e4 ♗e7 17.♕e2 ♕e8 18.♘g3± Black's attempt at making the game unclear has failed and his pawn structure is reminiscient of scattered rubble.] 16.♕g6+ ♔f8 17.d3! ♕f6 18.♕e4± White can afford to trade queens but we'd rather do it on our own terms, instead of helping to correct Black's pawn structure. In the meantime, a possible ...gxh3 can always be recaptured and it seems to me that Black's king is in greater danger than our own monarch.

12.♕h5+ g6 13.♕xg5 ♗g7 14.f4 d6



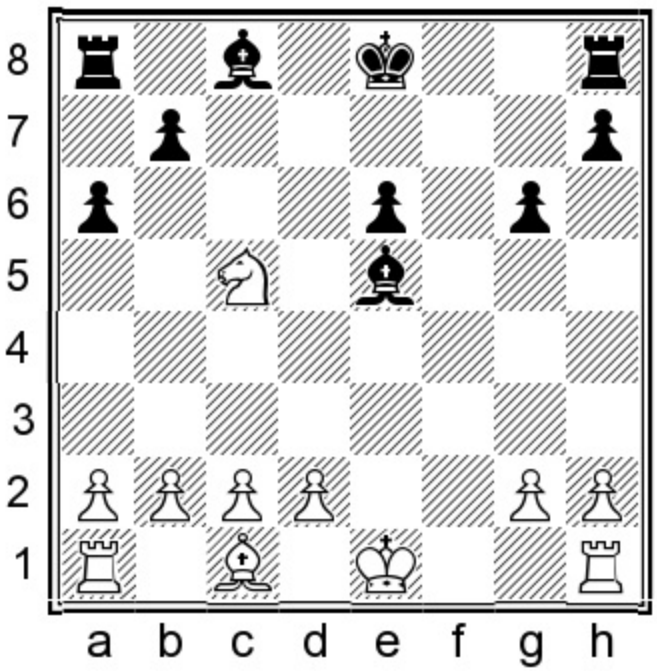
Position after: 14...d6

As Black is beginning to consolidate and activate his pieces, the time is right to liquidate into a comfortable ending a pawn up.

15.♘e4 dxe5 16.fxe5 ♕xe5

16...♗xe5? 17.0-0+–

17.♕xe5 ♗xe5 18.♘xc5±

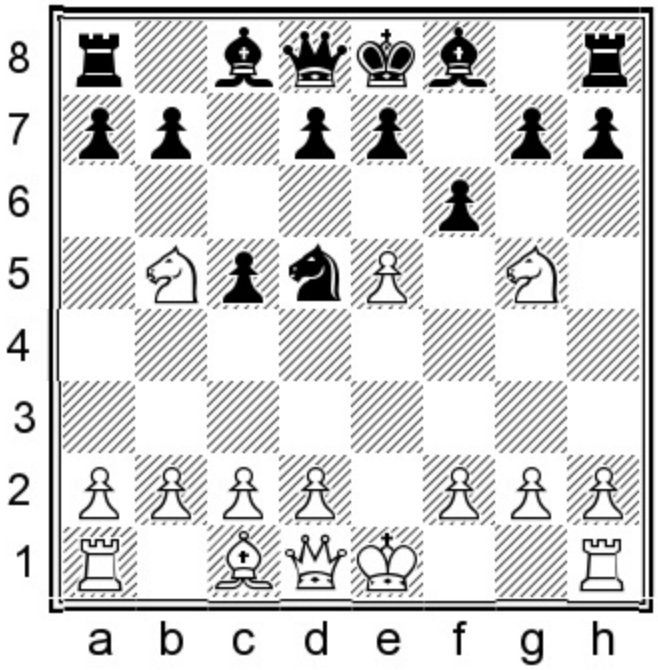


Position after: 18.♘xc5±

c) 7...f6

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♘d4 5.e5! ♘xb5 6.♘xb5 ♘d5 7.♘g5! f6

7...♘c7? 8.♕h5 g6 9.♕f3 f6 10.exf6 exf6 11.♘xc7+ ♕xc7 12.♕xf6+–

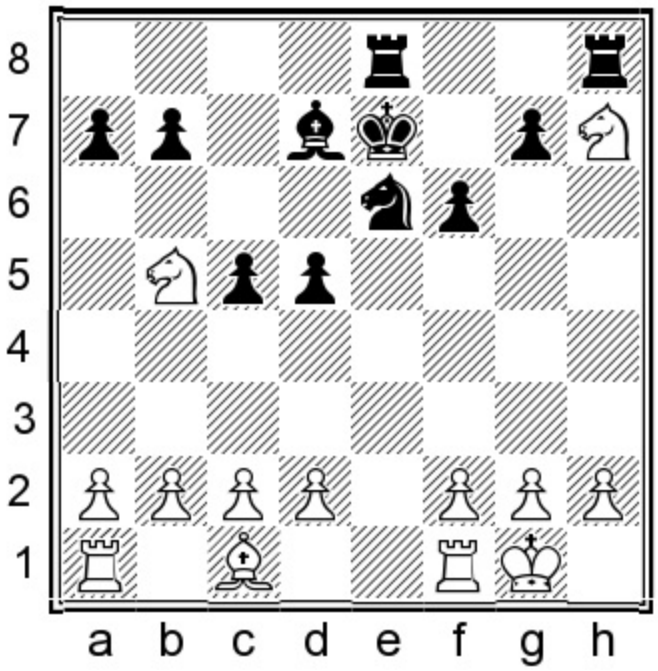


Position after: 7...f6

8.♕h5+!

The 4th most popular move, but in my opinion the strongest. The point of the move is seen in the explanation after 8.♕f3.

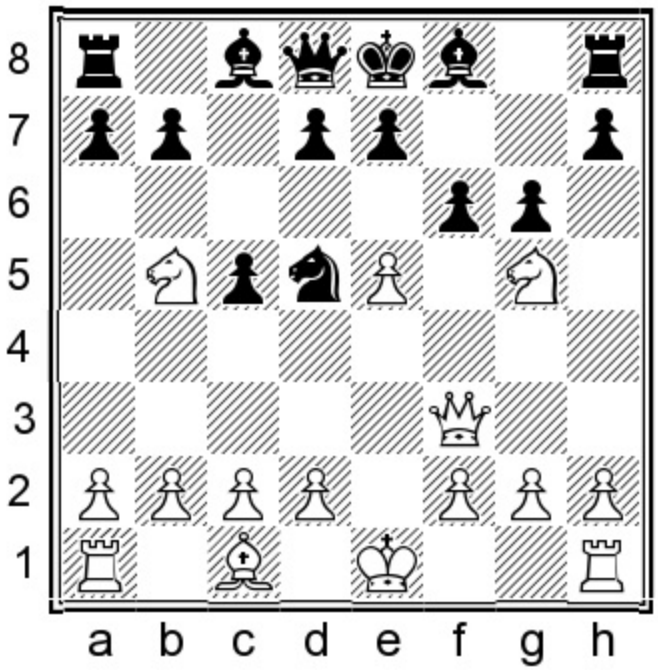
Playing 8.♕f3 immediately allows Black the option of 8...♘c7 9.exf6 exf6 10.♕e4+ ♘e6 11.♘xh7 d5 12.♕g6+ ♔e7 13.0-0 ♗d7 14.♘xf8 ♕b8! 15.♘h7 ♕e8! 16.♕xe8+ ♖axe8∞



Position after: 16...♖axe8∞

The position is a bit murky and it's suffice to say that I'm not convinced about the extent of White's advantage.

8...g6 9.♕f3

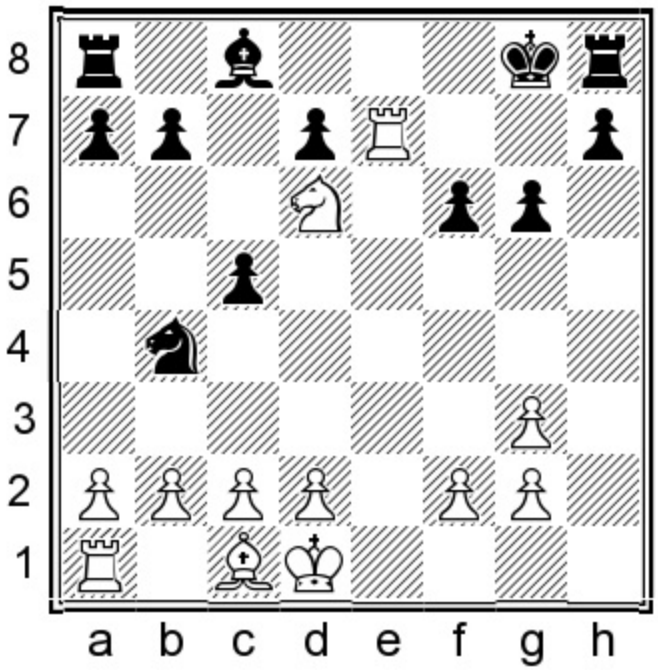


Position after: 9.♕f3

9...fxg5

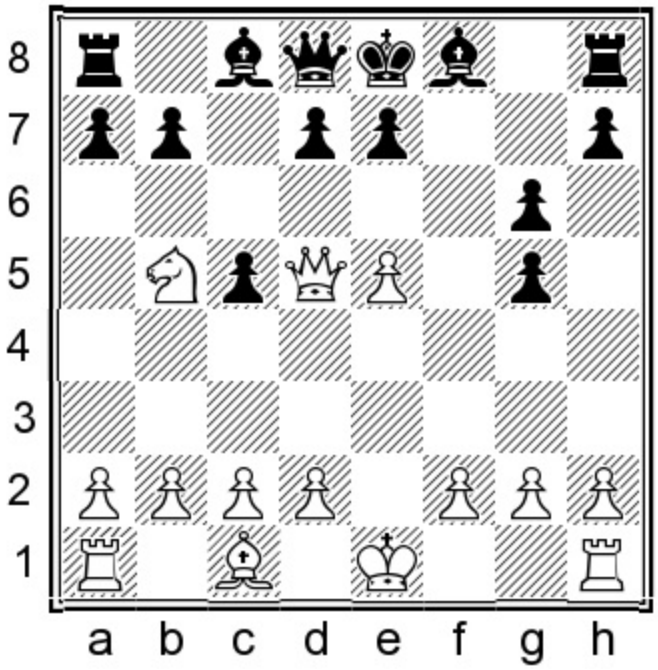
A) The key difference is that if 9...♘c7, we have 10.exf6+–.

B) 9...♘b4 Black can't really afford to waste time moving his knight again. 10.exf6 exf6 11.♘e4 ♔f7 12.♘bd6+ ♗xd6 13.♘xd6+ ♔g7 14.♔d1! ♕e7 15.♕g3 ♕e5 16.♖e1 ♕xg3 17.♖e7+ ♔g8 18.hxg3+–



Position after: 18.hxg3+–

10.♕xd5

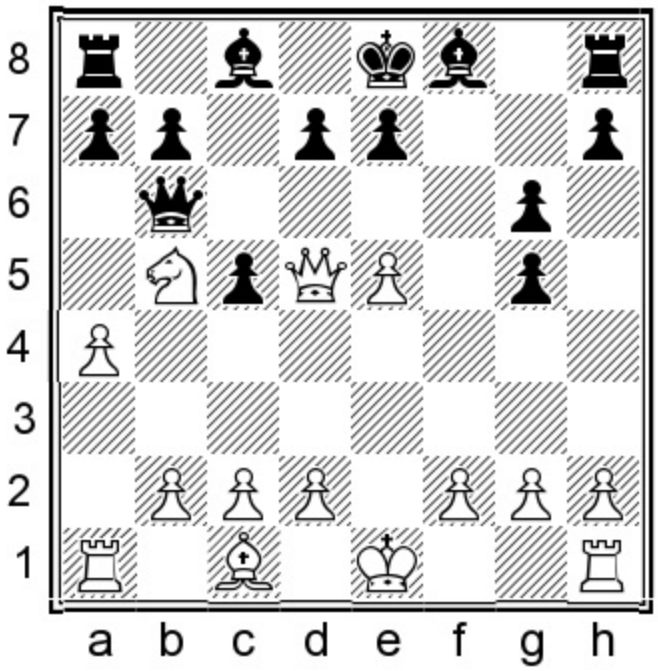


Position after: 10.♕xd5

White has a nice lead in development, and at some point Black will have to play ...e7-e6, weakening his dark squares. A common theme in this line will be the thematic d2-d4 push, possibly sacrificing a pawn to incorporate the c1-bishop in the game. In general, once Black has played ...e7-e6 all opposite-coloured bishop positions will be very good for White.

10...a6

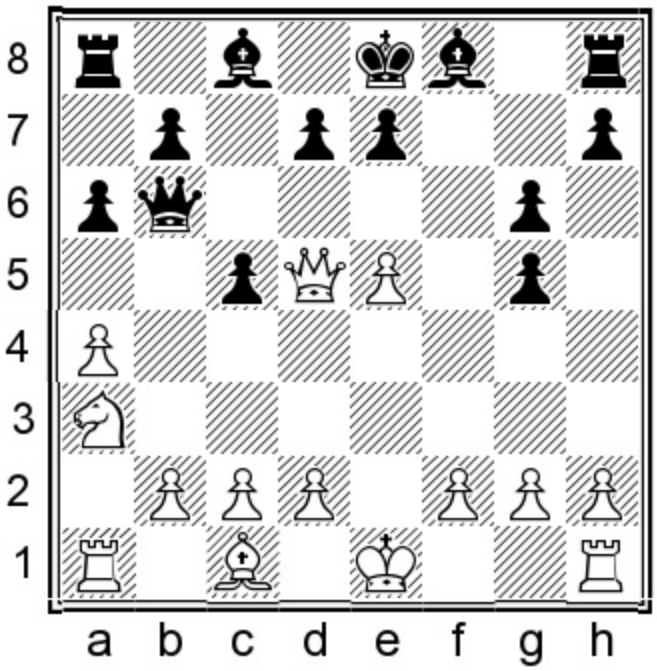
A) 10...♕b6 11.a4! Habitually, it's never a bad idea to provoke ...a7-a6.



Position after: 11.a4!

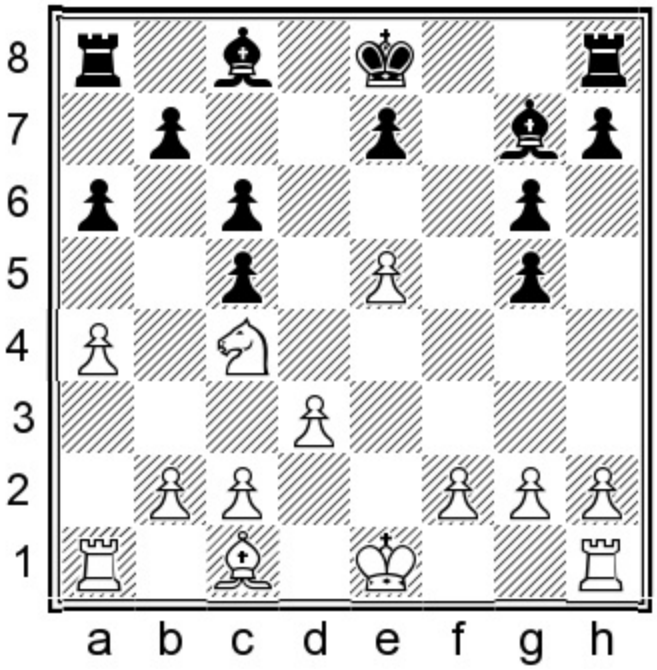
A1) 11...♗g7 It's too risky for Black to leave our knight on b5. 12.d4 cxd4 13.a5! ♕d8 [13...♕c6 14.♕xc6 dxc6 15.♘c7+⩲] 14.♗xg5+– Followed by ♘d6+.

A2) 11...a6 12.♘a3!



Position after: 12.♘a3!

Sadly for Black, we're coming right back at him with ♘a3-c4. 12...♗g7 13.♘c4 ♕c6 14.♕xc6 dxc6 The drawback of ...a7-a6 is evident, and Black will most likely have to exchange his light-squared bishop for our c4-knight if he wants to activate his g7-bishop. In any case, we should always be able to prove an advantage due to Black's scattered pawns. 15.d3

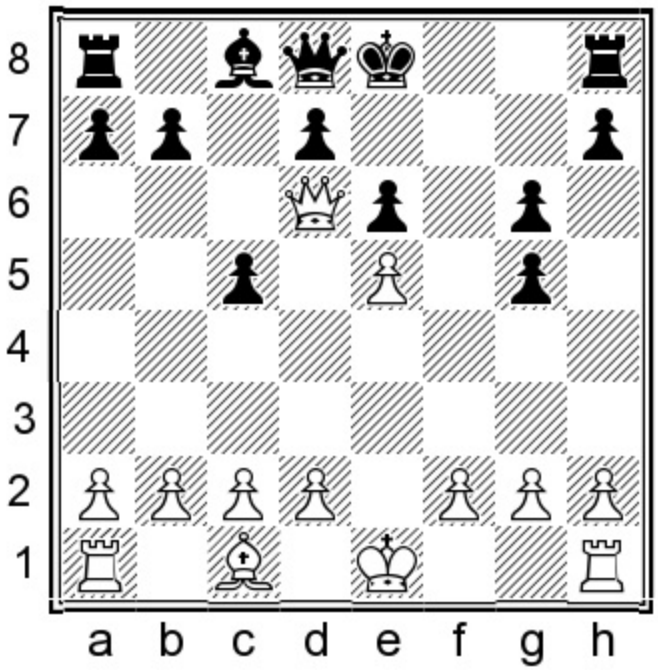


Position after: 15.d3

15...b5 [15...h6 16.♗e3 ♗e6 17.♗xc5 ♗xc4 18.dxc4±] 16.axb5 cxb5 17.♘b6 ♖b8 18.♘xc8 ♖xc8

19.♖xa6 ♗xe5 20.♔e2±

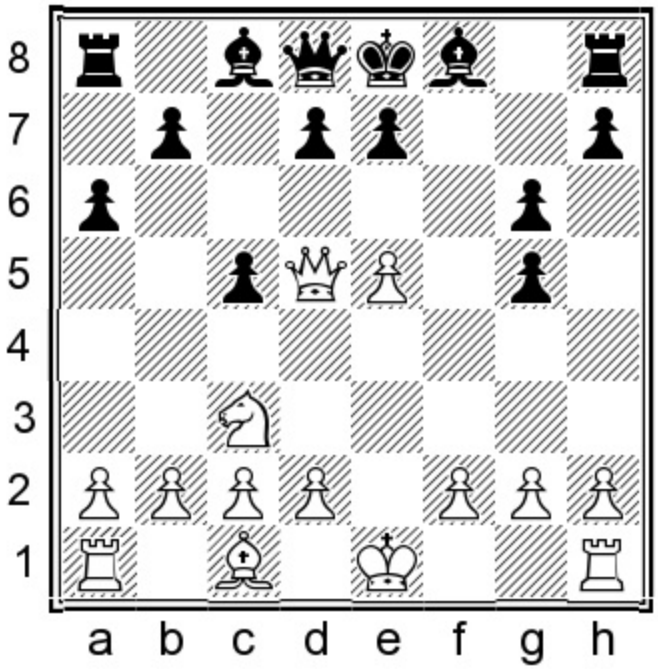
B) 10...e6?! Naturally, Black should kick away our b5-knight before committing to this move. 11.♘d6+ ♗xd6 12.♕xd6



Position after: 12.♕xd6

12...b6 [12...♕b6 13.♕xb6 axb6 14.d4! cxd4 15.♗xg5±; 12...♕e7 13.♕xe7+ ♔xe7 14.d4+– Nouro – Parkkinen, Finland 2005.] 13.d4 cxd4 14.h4! gxh4 15.♗h6 ♖g8 16.f4 ♕e7 17.♕xd4±

11.♘c3



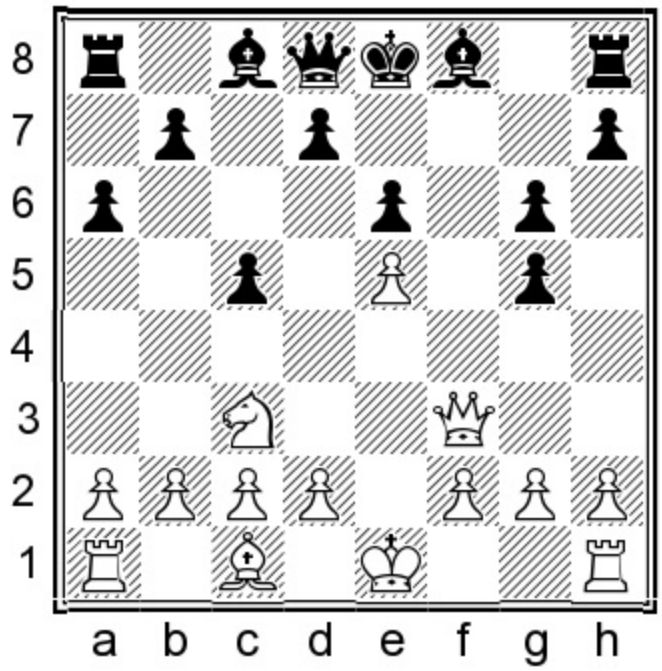
Position after: 11.♘c3

Black's inferior pawn structure limits the compensatory value of his bishop-pair. The variations that follow are quite long, and it's more important to observe thematic ideas rather than memorising endless moves. Essentially, we are trying to exploit Black's weak dark squares or his feeble kingside. More often than not, we don't mind trading queens as Black's weaknesses will persist into the endgame. Although the computer may often only show a limited advantage, our position is always much easier to play – and in every variation, we are pretty much only playing for two results.

11...♕c7

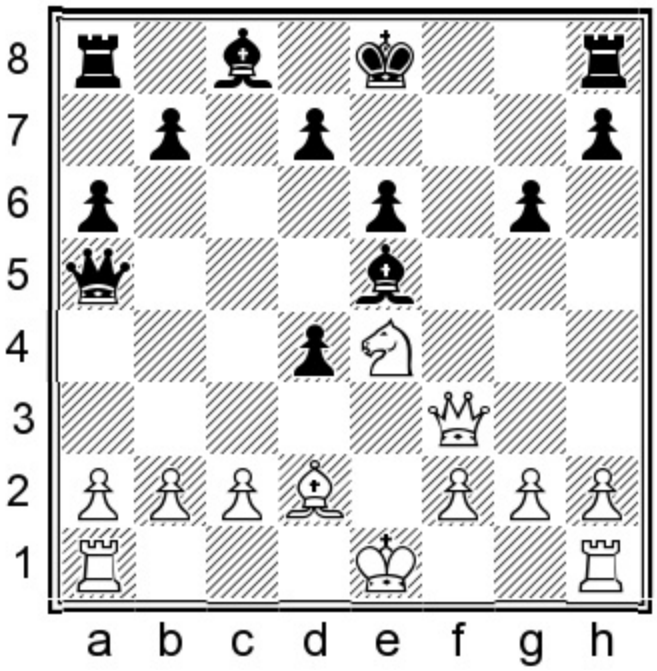
Preventing the desirable ♕f3 and ♘e4 plan, but now the g5-pawn can't be defended.

11...e6 12.♕f3!



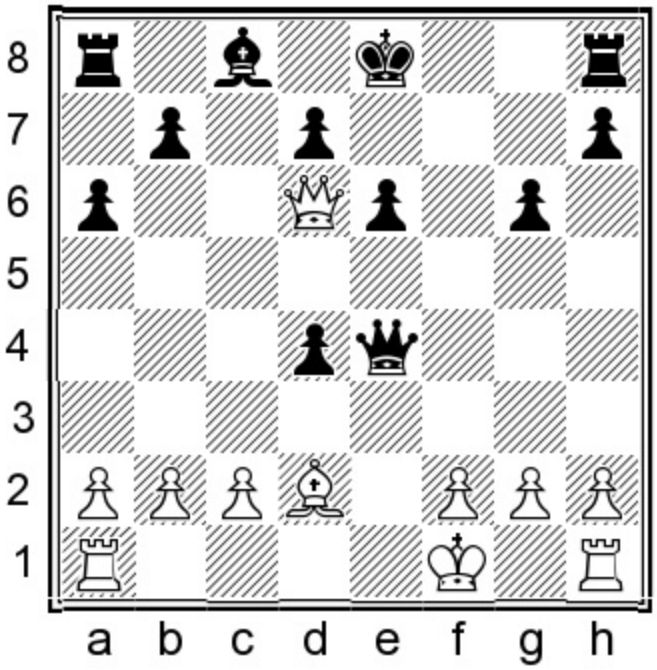
Position after: 12.♕f3!

A young Maxim Matlakov played 12.♕e4, but I prefer to leave the e4-square for our knight if Black affords us the chance. 12...♗g7 [12...♕c7? allows us to play 13.♕f6 ♖g8 14.♕xg5±] 13.♘e4 ♗xe5 14.d4!N This is not only the most pragmatic choice, but also the strongest. 14...cxd4 [14...♗xd4 15.♗xg5 ♕a5+ 16.c3+– A knight check on the following move should prove to be decisive.] 15.♗xg5 ♕a5+ 16.♗d2 Black doesn't have a queen move which can protect against all of our threats.



Position after: 16.♗d2

A) 16...♕d8 17.♕a3! ♕h4 18.♘d6+ ♗xd6 19.♕xd6 ♕e4+ 20.♔f1± I could continue the line even further, but it seems unnecessary considering that it wasn't a particularly forcing variation.



Position after: 20.♔f1±

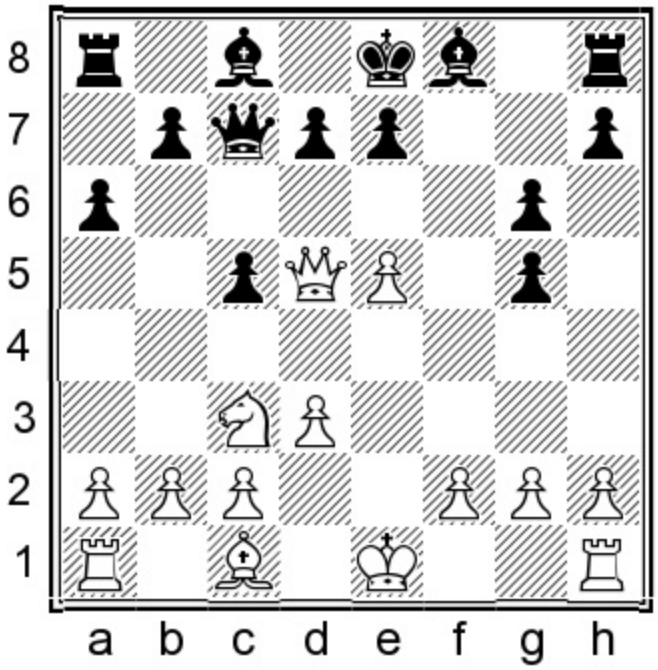
We will bring our a1-rook to e1, obviously, and perhaps play h4-h5 to activate our h1-rook. If Black tries to stop this with ...♕h4, then ♕g3! at some point is also great for us. As I previously mentioned, we are still doing very well even without queens on the board. The position suits

opposite-coloured bishops, but it's vital to try and retain both pairs of rooks if the queens are exchanged.

B) 16...♕d5 17.♗b4±

C) 16...♕b5 17.♘f6+ ♗xf6 [17...♔d8 18.♘g4 d6 19.♕f7 ♗d7 20.a4 ♕d5 21.0-0±] 18.♕xf6 ♖f8 19.♕xd4 e5 20.♕e3 ♕xb2 21.0-0±

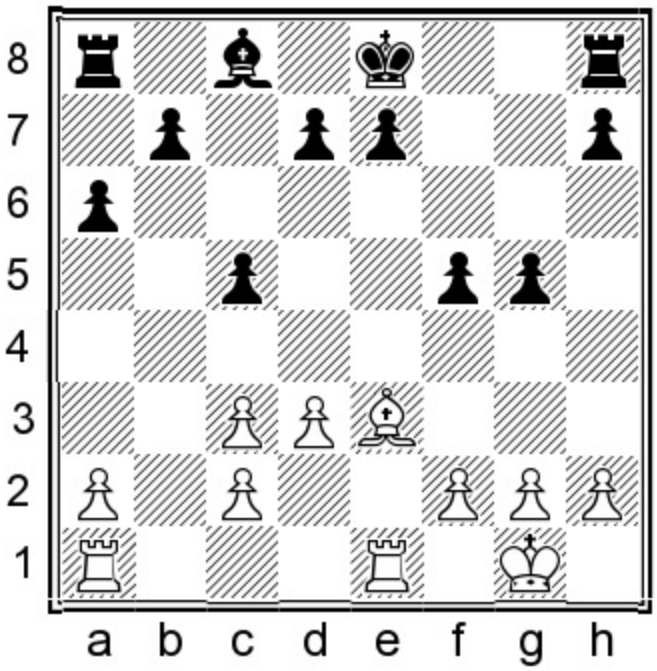
12.d3



Position after: 12.d3

12...e6

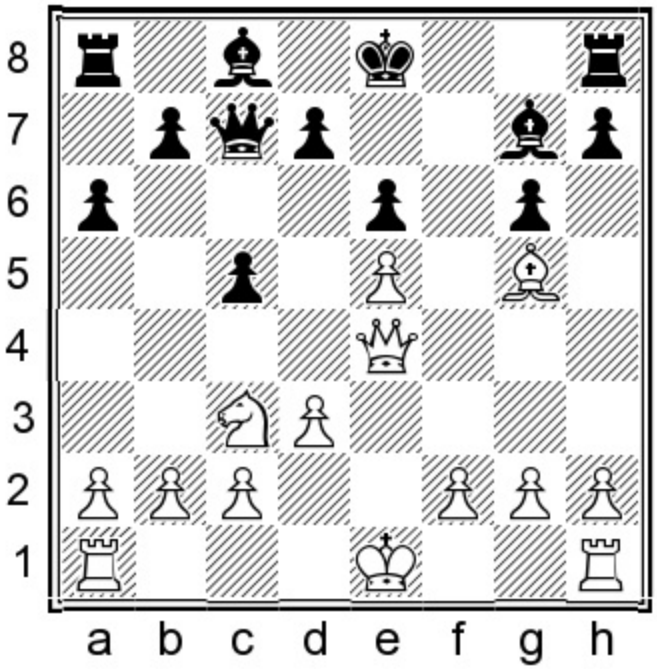
12...♗g7 13.♗e3! ♕xe5 14.0-0! ♕f5! A clever way to trade pieces, but we can still retain an advantage. [14...d6 15.♖ae1±] 15.♖fe1 ♗xc3 16.♕xf5 gxf5 17.bxc3±



Position after: 17.bxc3±

Either the g5- or c5-pawn will fall, and our slightly more active pieces offer us favourable chances in this ending.

13.♕e4 ♗g7 14.♗xg5



Position after: 14.♗xg5

14...♗xe5

14...♕xe5 15.♗f4! ♕xe4+ 16.♘xe4 b6 [16...d5 17.♘xc5 0-0 18.♗d6 ♖f7 19.f4±] 17.♗d6 ♗b7 18.0-0-0 ♖c8 19.h4±

15.f4!?

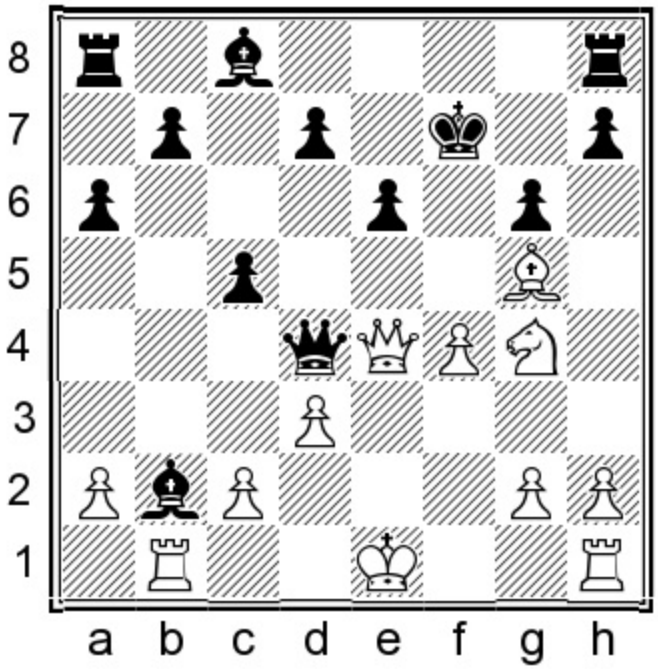
We have a concrete idea in mind.

15.♗h6± is logical and Black still has problems to solve.

15...♗g7 16.♘d5 ♕d6 17.♘f6+ ♔f7 18.♘g4!

Redirecting the knight to the kingside is clever, and the knight sits well on g4.

18...♗xb2 19.♖b1 ♕d4

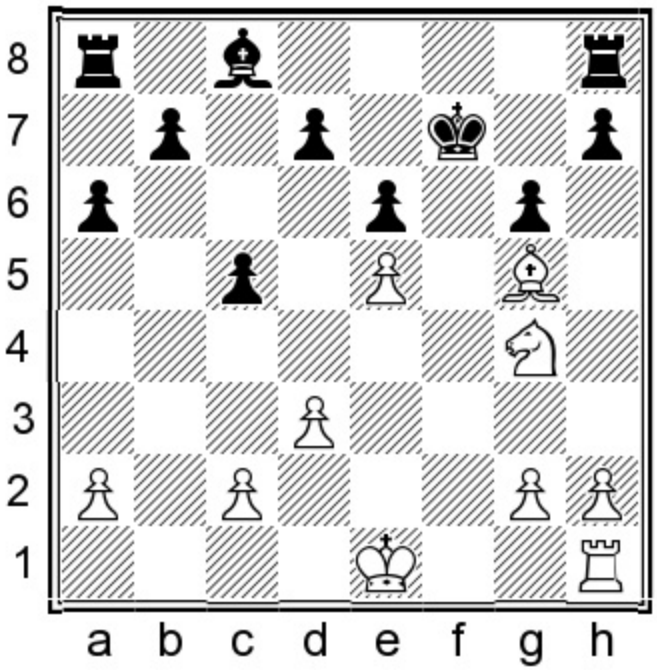


Position after: 19...♕d4

We now have two appealing options.

20.♔e2

20.♖xb2!? ♕xb2 [20...♕c3+ 21.♔e2 ♕xb2 22.♕e5 ♕xe5+ 23.fxe5⩲] 21.♕e5 ♕xe5+ 22.fxe5⩲



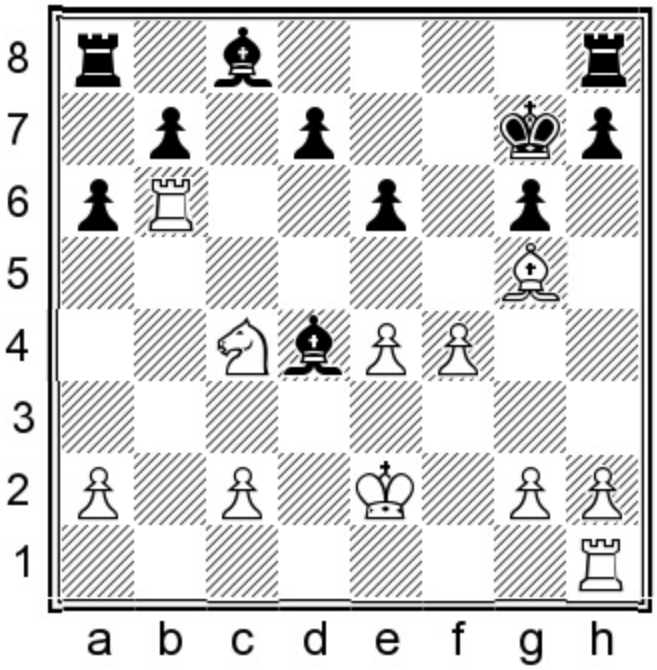
Position after: 22.fxe5⩱

Black's king looks very dodgy, although we still need to prove that we have more than enough compensation for the exchange.

20...♕xe4+ 21.dxe4 ♗d4 22.♘e5+! ♔g7

22...♗xe5 23.fxe5 b5 24.♖hf1+ ♔e8 25.♔d3±

23.♖b6 c4 24.♘xc4!

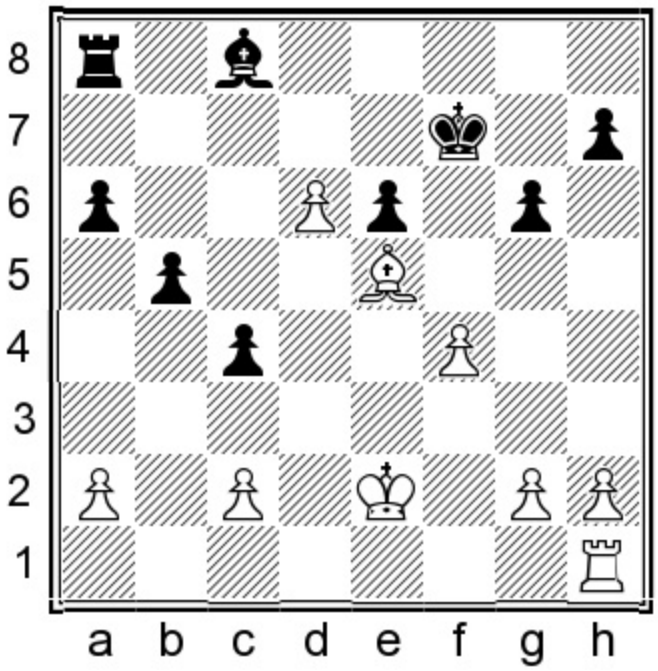


Position after: 24.♘xc4!

24...d5

24...♗xb6 25.♘xb6 ♖a7 26.e5+– is a dream scenario.

25.e5! dxc4 26.♗f6+ ♔f7 27.♖d6 ♗c5 28.♗xh8 ♗xd6 29.exd6 b5 30.♗e5±

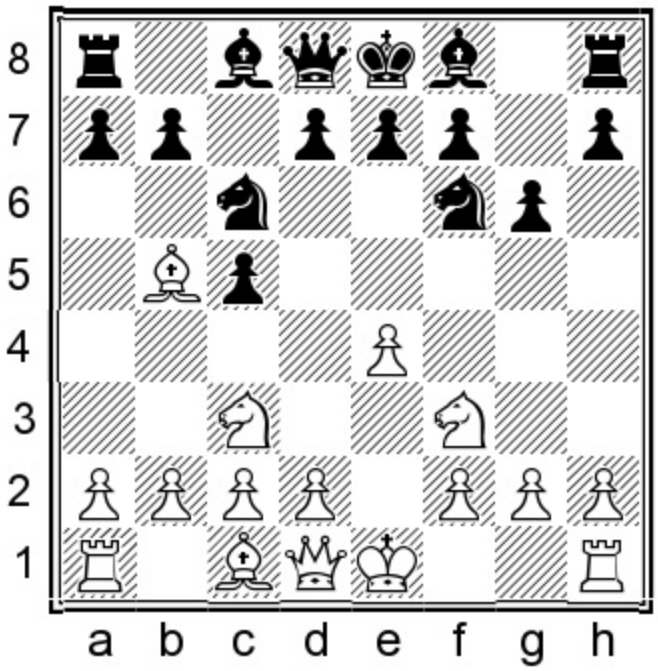


Position after: 30.♗e5±

White can still press for a while by pushing his kingside pawns. In particular, our bishop stands very well on e5, as it will support our kingside pawns whilst also helping to control Black's queenside majority.

Chapter 3
4.♘c3 g6

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.♘c3 g6



Chapter Guide

Chapter 3 – 4.♘c3 g6

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.♘c3 g6 5.h3!?

a) 5...♕c7

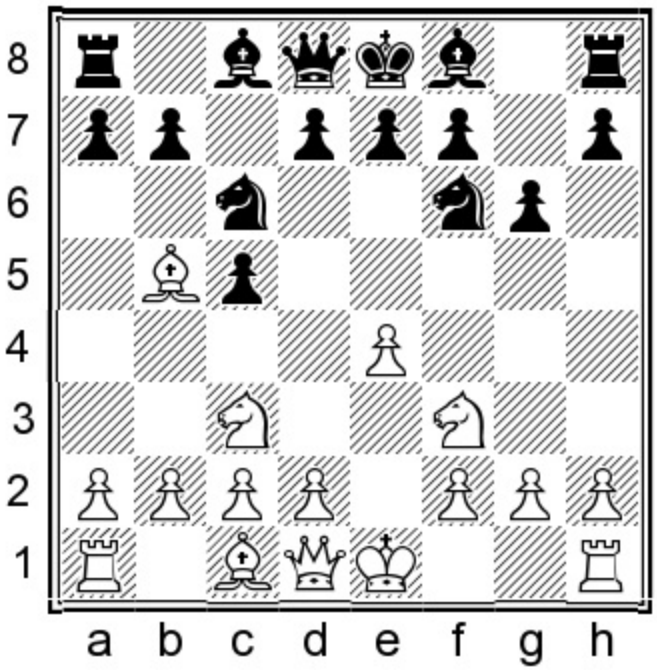
b) 5...♘d4

c) 5...♗g7 6.e5 ♘g8 7.0-0! ♘xe5 8.♘xe5 ♗xe5 9.♖e1 --

d) 5...♗g7 6.e5 ♘g8 7.0-0! ♘xe5 8.♘xe5 ♗xe5 9.♖e1 ♗g7

a) 5...♕c7

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.♘c3 g6



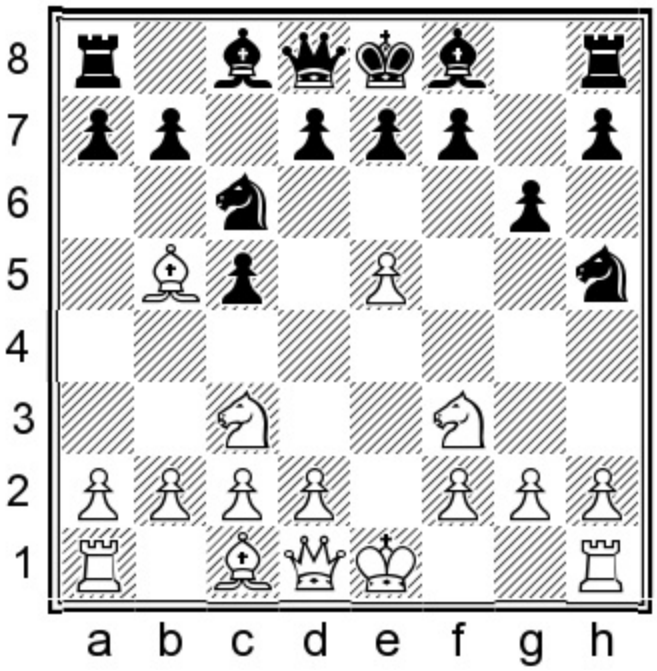
Position after: 4...g6

Black tries to develop the f8-bishop without creating positional weaknesses. However, the knight on f6 now becomes a target for a timely e4-e5 push.

5.h3!?

Only the third most popular move, but in such positions we can often play ‘slowly’. The text move targets Black’s f6-knight, and also deprives Black’s c8-bishop of the g4 square – which is always very useful.

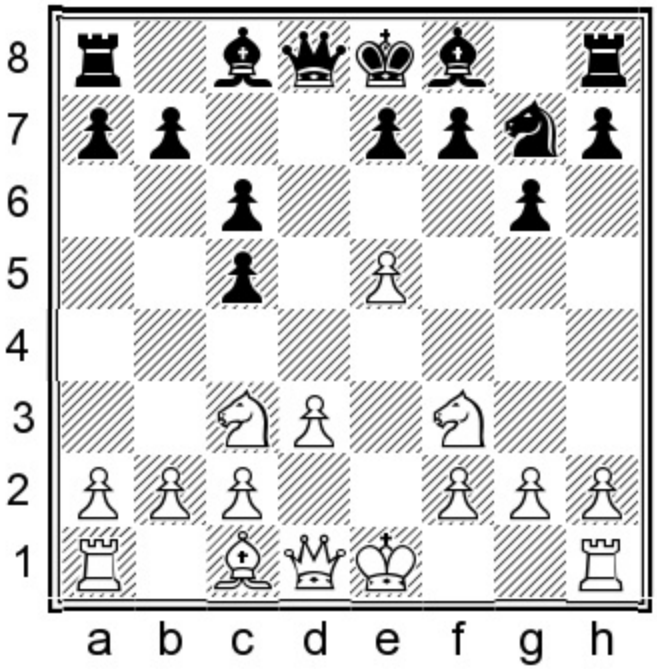
5.e5 is also extremely interesting. In my opinion, Black should play 5...♘h5! to try and complicate matters, denying White an easy game. [5...♘g4 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.0-0 ♗g7 8.♖e1 0-0 9.d3 ♘h6 10.♘e4 b6 11.a4 ♘f5 12.a5 ♗e6 13.c3 ♕d7 14.♗f4 ♖ad8 15.♘eg5± is really comfortable for White.]



Position after: 5...♘h5!

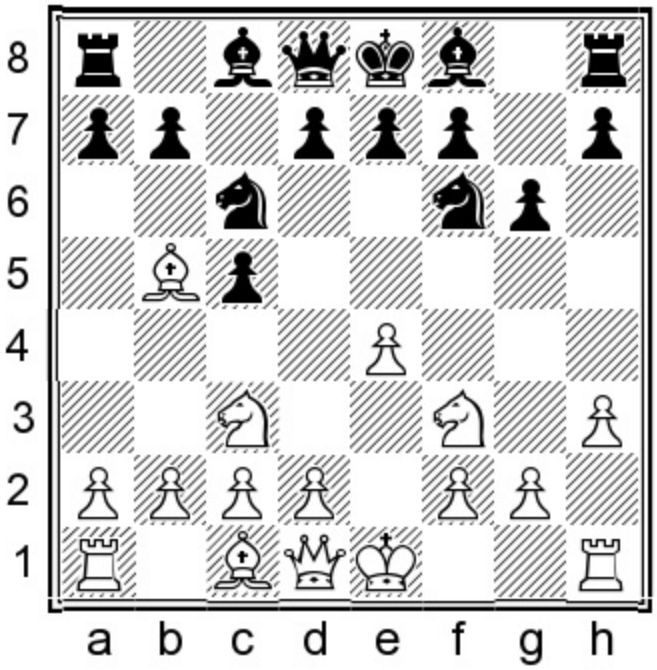
A) 6.0-0 ♗g7 7.♖e1 ♘d4 8.d3 The knight on h5 looks a little lost, and White's play has focused around a future g2-g4, trapping the knight. On the other hand, Black has his own counterplay against the misplaced bishop on b5. The line that follows is quite interesting, and perhaps White does have good chances. However, it is an example of times when things get a little too unclear – which generally we are trying to avoid. 8...0-0 9.g4 d5! 10.h3 a6∞

B) 6.d3!? ♘g7 7.♗xc6 dxc6



Position after: 7...dxc6

8.0-0 [8.♗h6 ♗g4 9.h3 ♗xf3 10.♕xf3 ♘e6 also shouldn't be problematic for Black.] 8...♘e6 9.a4± White is better, but Black definitely has his own ideas of ...♗g7, ...♕c7, and a future ...♖d8 and ...♘d4. The knight on e6 certainly stands better than it did on g4. Black's position seems easy enough to play.



Position after: 5.h3!?

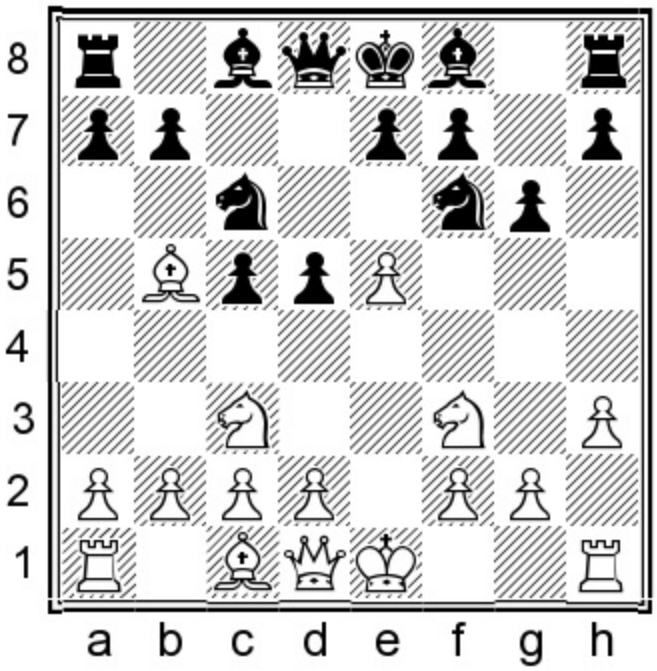
5...♕c7

A logical move, preventing e4-e5. We can continue with normal moves.

A) 5...♗g7 is the main move, which I analyse in the final two subchapters.

B) 5...♘d4 is another logical move, which I analyse in the following subchapter.

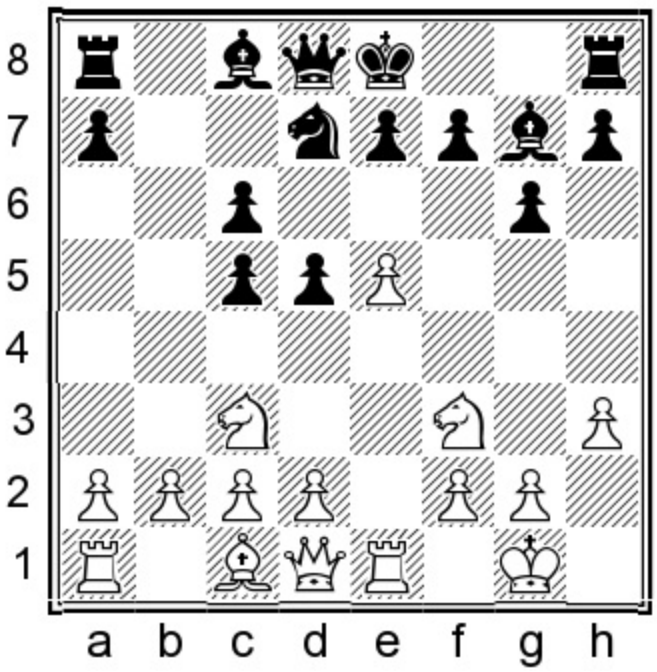
C) 5...d5?! We know that this move is hardly ever good in the Rossolimo when we are able to capture on c6, as Black will suffer long-lasting structural problems. 6.e5



Position after: 6.e5

C1) 6...♘d7 7.0-0

C1.1) 7...♗g7 8.♗xc6 bxc6 9.♖e1

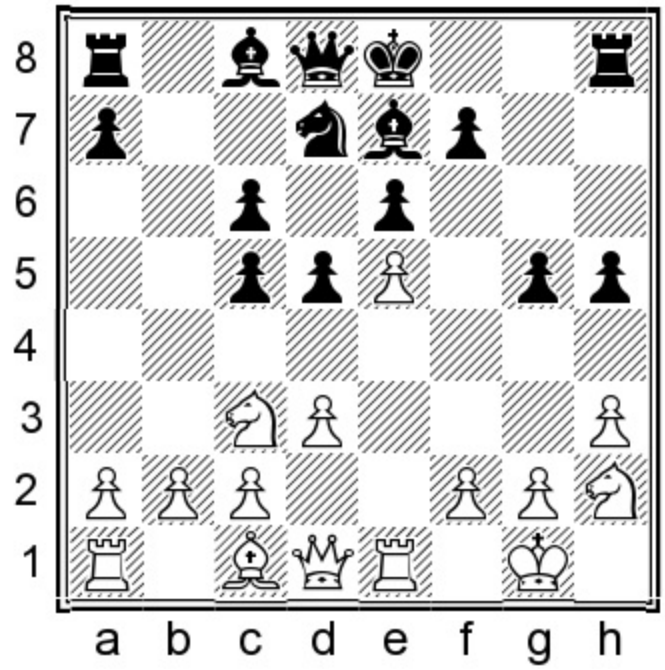


Position after: 9.♖e1

Black has typical Rossolimo problems. His c5-pawn is inevitably weak, and the bishop on g7 suffers due to the e5-pawn. White has two easy plans: advancing on the kingside with h4-h5, as well as simultaneously attacking the c5-pawn with ♘a4 and ♗e3. If Black is forced to play ...d5-

d4, this will only further aggravate his positional weaknesses. 9...0-0 10.d3 ♖b8 11.♘a4 ♗a6 12.b3 c4 13.dxc4 dxc4 14.♗f4+–

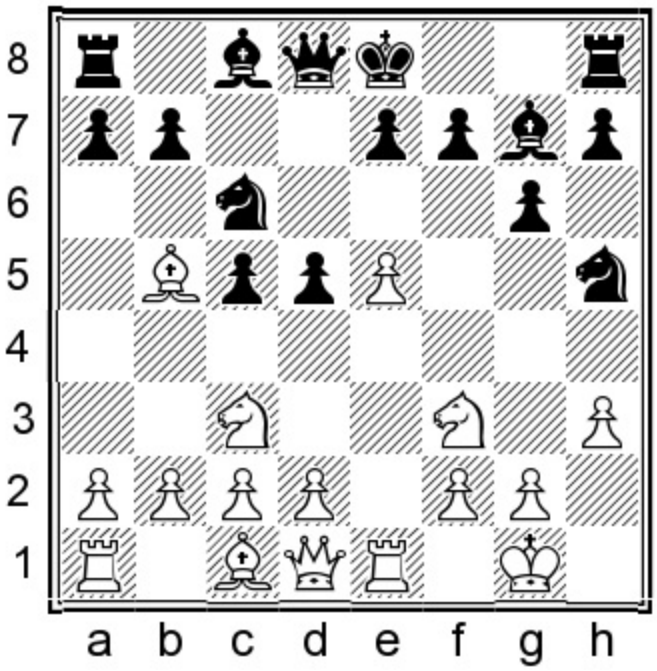
C1.2) 7...e6 8.♗xc6 bxc6 9.d3 ♗e7 As Black has a lot of problems, one idea is to attempt to achieve some kind of kingside attack. However we can respond adequately to this. For example: 10.♖e1 g5 11.♘h2 h5



Position after: 11...h5

12.f4! gxf4 13.♗xf4 ♗b7 14.♘f3± In the end, it appears that Black's king is probably in more danger in the long-term.

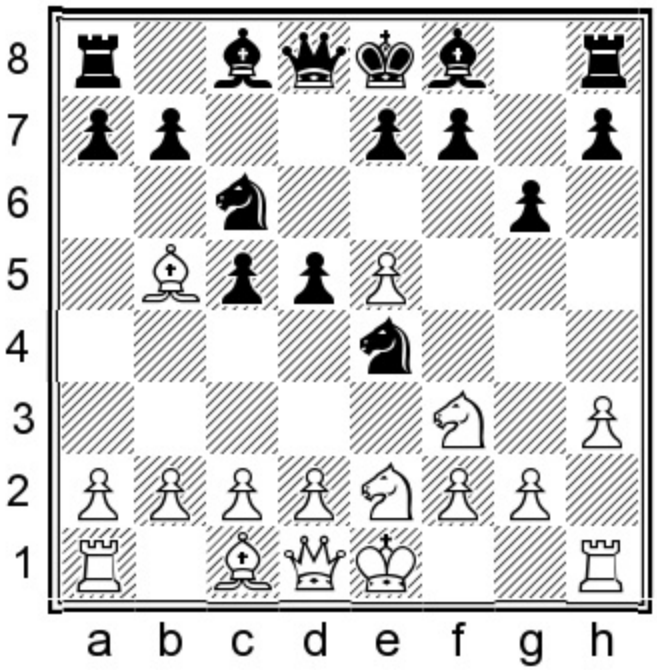
C2) 6...♘h5 This move is often problematic for us, but here the knight is very much misplaced. 7.0-0 ♗g7 8.♖e1



Position after: 8.♖e1

8...d4 [8...0-0 9.♗xc6 bxc6 10.♘a4 c4 11.d4!+– Black will have to waste more time saving his knight.] 9.♗xc6+ bxc6 10.♘a4 ♘f4 11.d3 ♘e6 12.♘g5+–

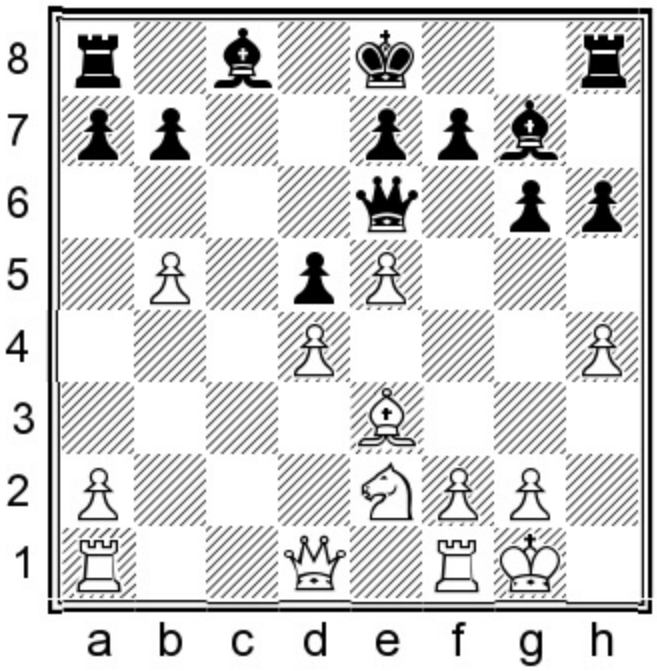
C3) 6...♘e4 7.♘e2!



Position after: 7.♘e2!

Suddenly the e4-knight looks lost, and Black will be forced to make subsequent pawn moves to save his piece. 7...h6 8.h4! c4 9.0-0 ♕b6 10.♗xc6+ ♕xc6 [10...bxc6 11.d3 ♘c5 12.dxc4 dxc4

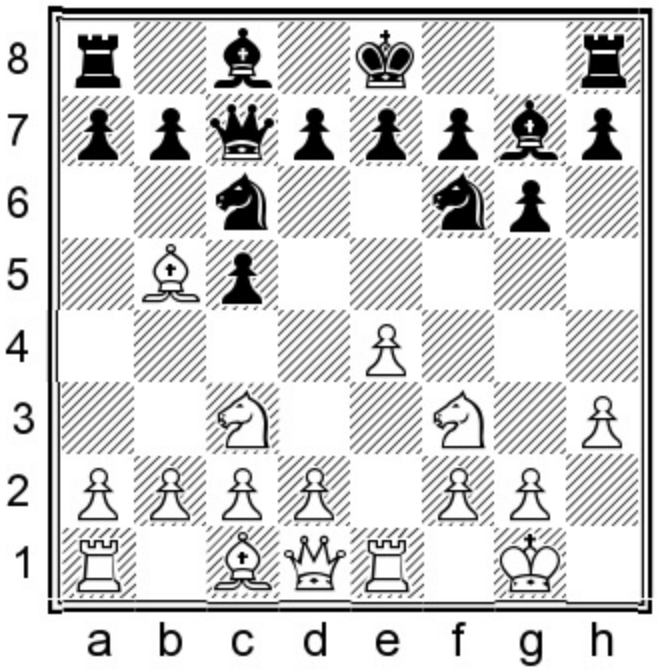
13.♗e3+–] 11.♘fd4 ♕a6 12.d3 cxd3 13.cxd3 ♘c5 14.b4 ♘e6 15.b5 ♕b6 16.♗e3 ♗g7 17.♘xe6 ♕xe6 18.d4±



Position after: 18.d4±

Life is so much easier for White. We can play on both sides of the board, and as always the g7-bishop is hemmed in by the e5-pawn.

6.0-0 ♗g7 7.♖e1



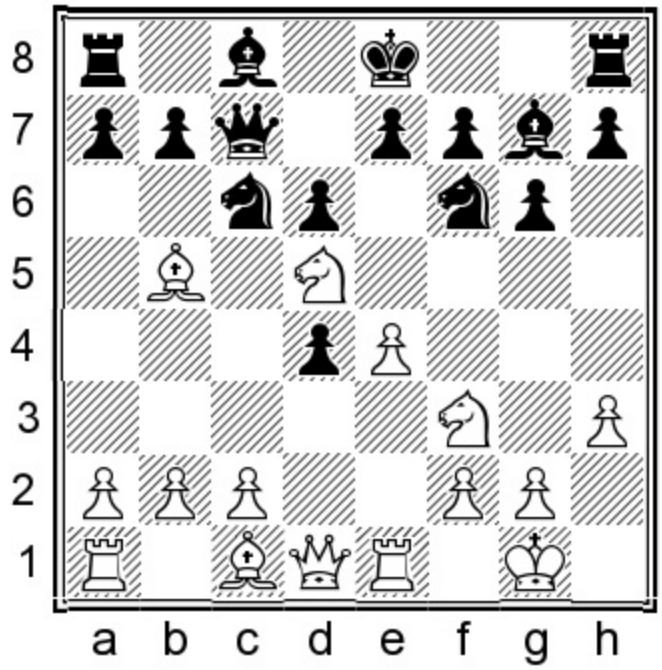
Position after: 7.♖e1

Once again, Black has to deal with the impending e4-e5 push, which comes with even more venom when you realise that it'll be followed with ♘c3-d5.

7...e5

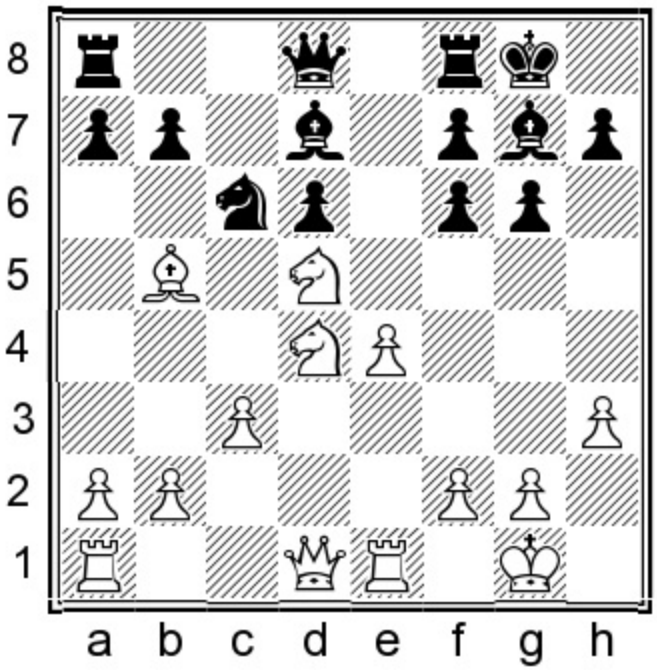
Black's best try, preventing us from achieving any central breaks.

A) 7...d6 8.d4! The perfect time to open the position. [Eltaj Safarli tried 8.e5 but 8.d4 seems more convincing due to our resource on move 9.] 8...cxd4 9.♘d5!



Position after: 9.♘d5!

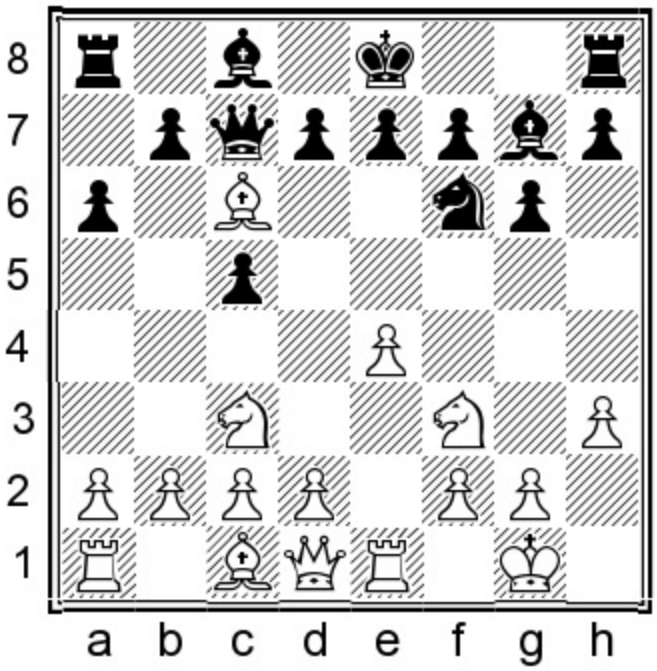
9...♕d8 [9...♘xd5 10.exd5 a6 11.♘xd4! axb5 12.♘xb5+–] 10.♘xd4 ♗d7 11.♗g5 It's impossible for Black to prevent his structure being ruined. 11...0-0 12.♗xf6 exf6 13.c3±



Position after: 13.c3±

Our d5-knight dominates the position, and at the very least we have a long-term structural advantage.

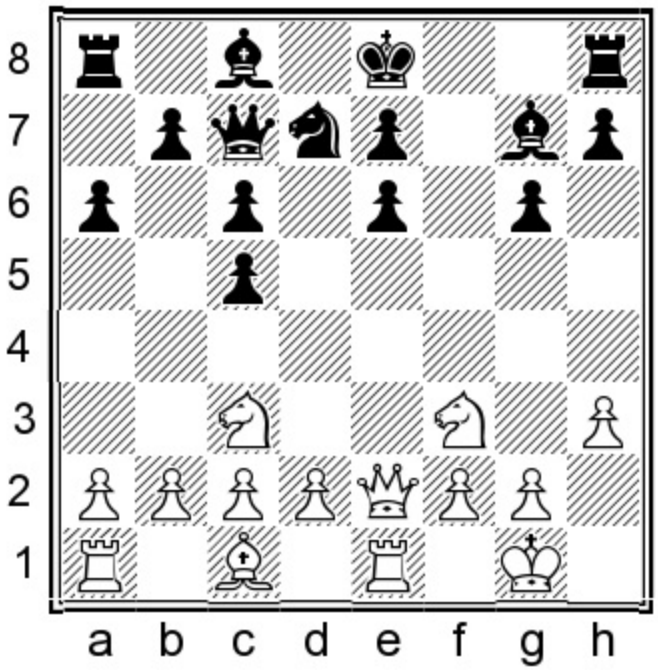
B) 7...a6?! This doesn't do anything to prevent e5, as we'll just play it after capturing on c6. 8.♗xc6



Position after: 8.♗xc6

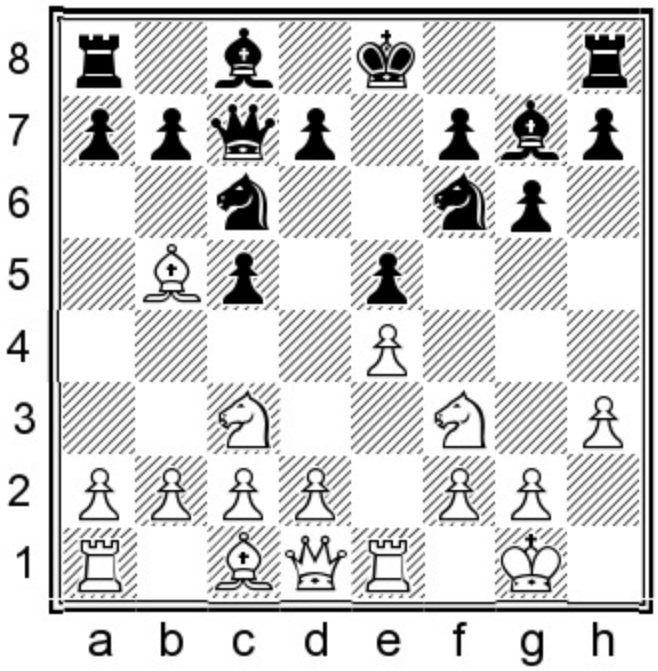
8...dxc6 [8...bxc6 9.e5 ♘d5 10.♘e4 ♕b6 11.c4 ♘c7 12.♘f6+! ♔f8 13.♘e4+–; 8...♕xc6 9.d4! cxd4 10.♘xd4 ♕c4 11.e5 ♘d5 12.♘xd5 ♕xd5 13.♗g5± This is similar to the lines after 5...♘d4 – note

the idea of ♗g5-f6!] 9.e5 ♘d7 [9...♘d5 10.♘e4 ♗xe5 11.♘xe5 ♕xe5 12.♘xc5± The opposite coloured bishops can only favour us.] 10.e6! fxe6 11.♕e2±



Position after: 11.♕e2±

This position looks a bit depressing for Black, and is in truth a dream scenario of what we want to achieve from a Rossolimo.



Position after: 7...e5

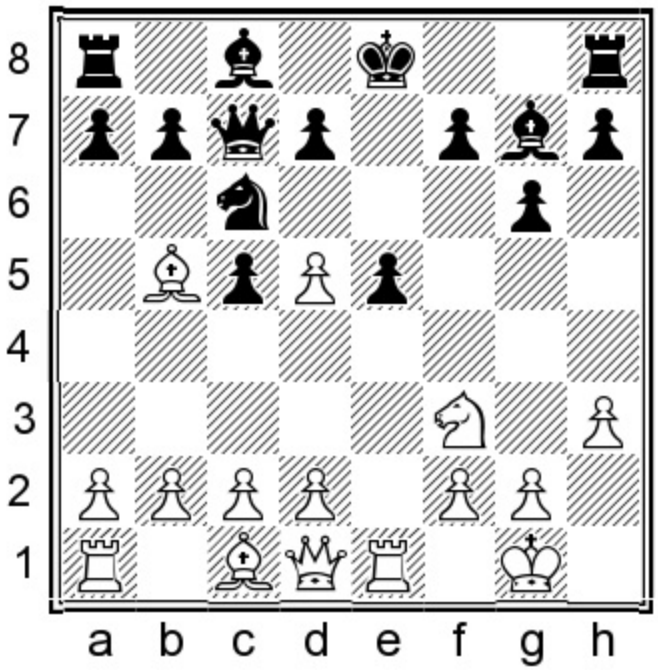
8.♘d5!?

This is a very interesting way to try and immediately exploit Black's previous move.

A) 8.d3 is a simple and sound way of playing the position. 8...d6 9.♗g5 ♗e6 10.♗c4 0-0 11.♗xf6 ♗xf6 12.♘d5 ♕d8 13.c3±

B) 8.a4!?± also doesn't seem like a bad way to start.

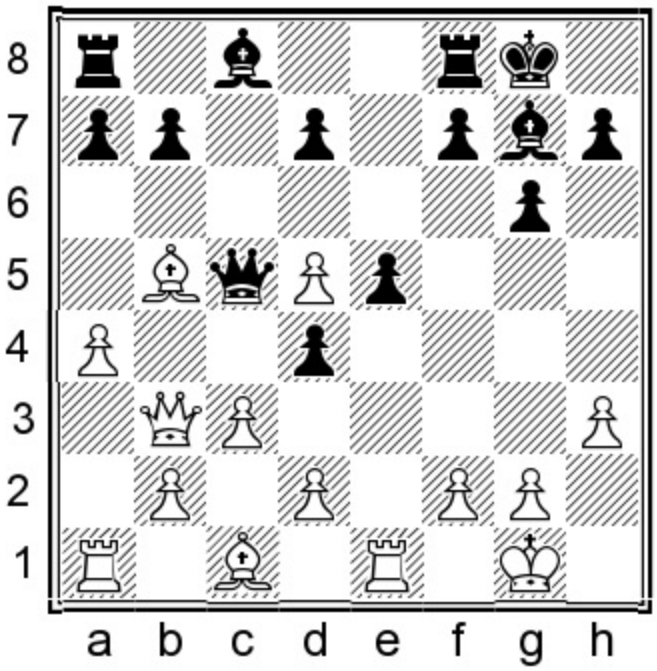
8...♘xd5 9.exd5



Position after: 9.exd5

9...♘e7

9...♘d4 10.♘xd4 cxd4 11.c3 Our short-term plan here is to try and open the c-file for our rooks. In the meantime, it's unclear what Black is doing. 11...♕c5 12.♕b3 0-0 13.a4!



Position after: 13.a4!

Our play here should be queenside-orientated. 13...d6 14.d3 dxc3 [14...f5 15.cxd4 ♕xd4 16.♗g5 a6 17.♗c4 ♗f6 18.♗d2±] 15.bxc3 ♕c7 16.a5 f5 17.d4!± Now that Black has weakened his king, it looks like a great decision to try and open the centre – even if it's at the cost of a pawn. If Black pushes ...e5-e4, we can think about targetting the d6-pawn with ♕b4 and ♗f4.

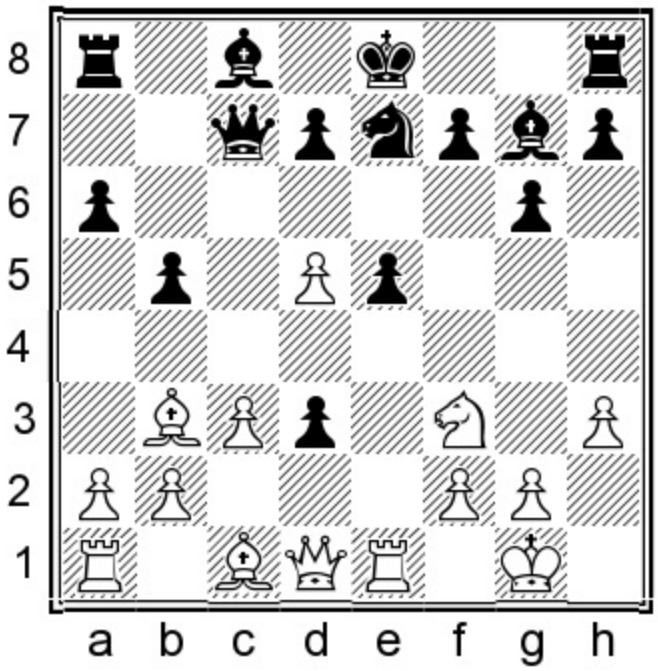
10.d4!

The point – we need to play as actively as possible to maintain our initiative.

10...cxd4 11.c3 a6

11...0-0 12.cxd4± hands White an easy advantage.

12.♗a4 b5 13.♗b3 d3



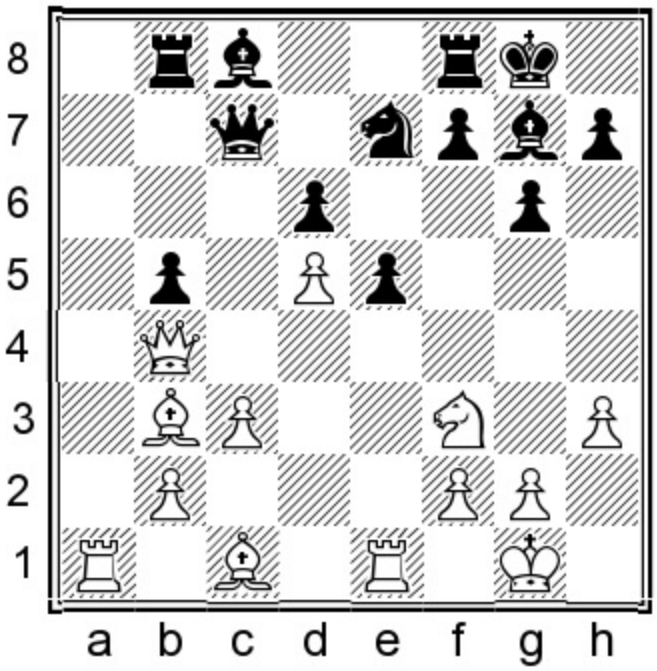
Position after: 13...d3

Black ideally wants to keep the centre closed, and the position undergoes another structural transformation. Our play should now be directed on the queenside.

14.a4! ♖b8 15.axb5 axb5 16.♕xd3 d6 17.♕e4!

The following variation illustrates how we can redirect our pieces to pressuring Black's weak b5-pawn.

17...0-0 18.♕b4



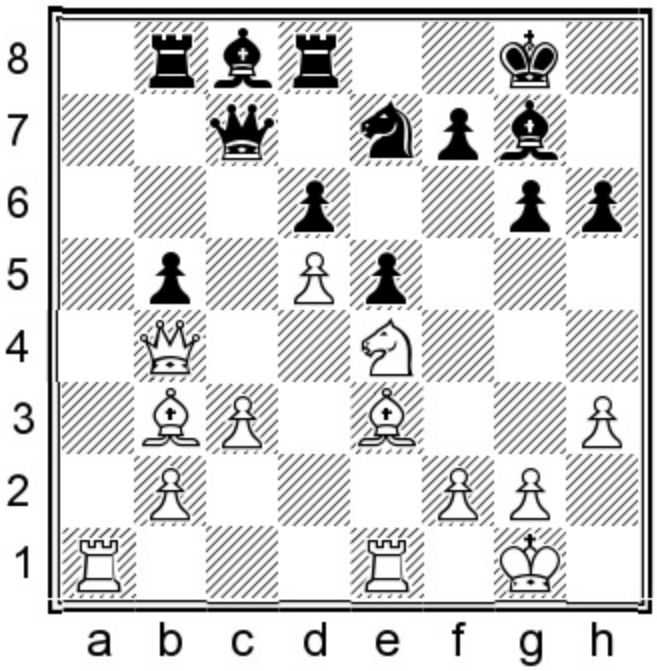
Position after: 18.♕b4

18...♖e8

A) 18...h6 19.♘xe5! is our hidden idea. 19...♗xe5 20.♖xe5 dxe5 21.d6 ♕d7 22.dxe7 ♖e8 23.♕e4 ♕f5 24.♕h4±

B) 18...♖d8 19.♗g5 h6 20.♗xe7 ♕xe7 21.♘d4±

19.♘g5 h6 20.♘e4 ♖d8 21.♗e3±

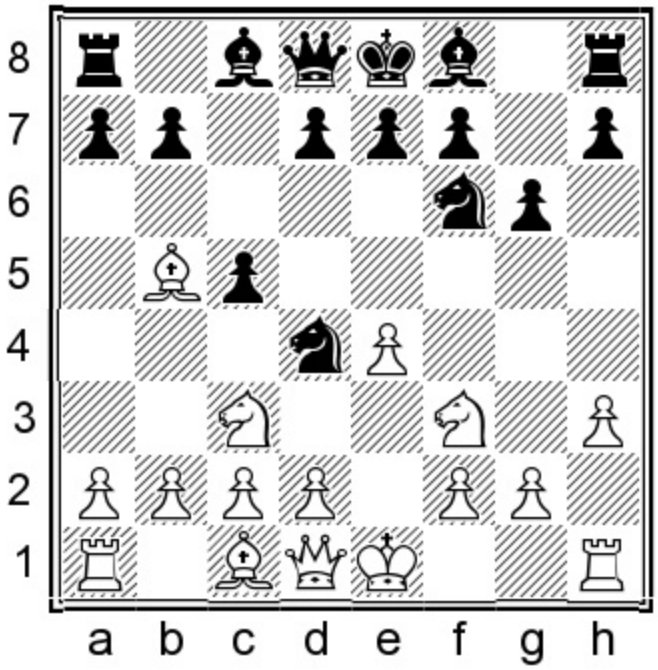


Position after: 21.♗e3±

The prospect of ♖a7 looks difficult for Black to deal with, and he'll probably end up either losing his b-pawn or being forced into an inferior ending.

b) 5...♘d4

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.♘c3 g6 5.h3!? ♘d4

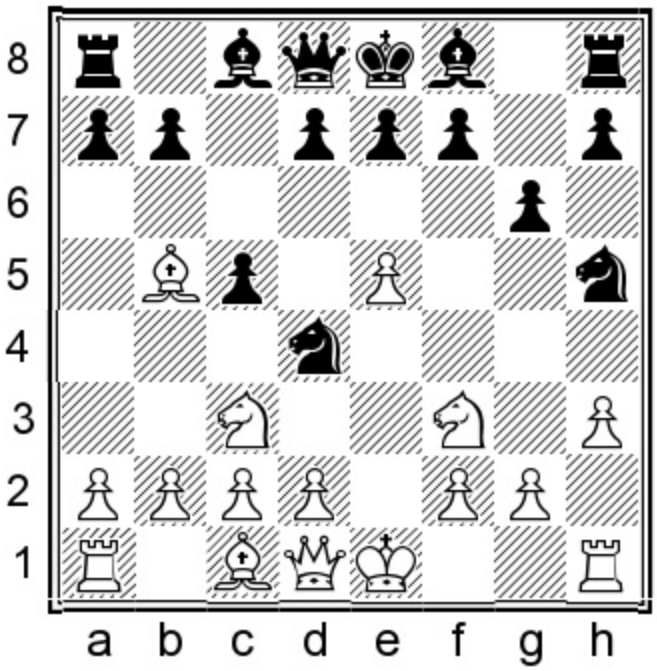


Position after: 5...♘d4

This can perhaps be seen as an improvement on 4...♘f6, as the inclusion of ...g7-g6 and h2-h3 somewhat benefits Black. Nevertheless, White is still able to hold a steady advantage with accurate play.

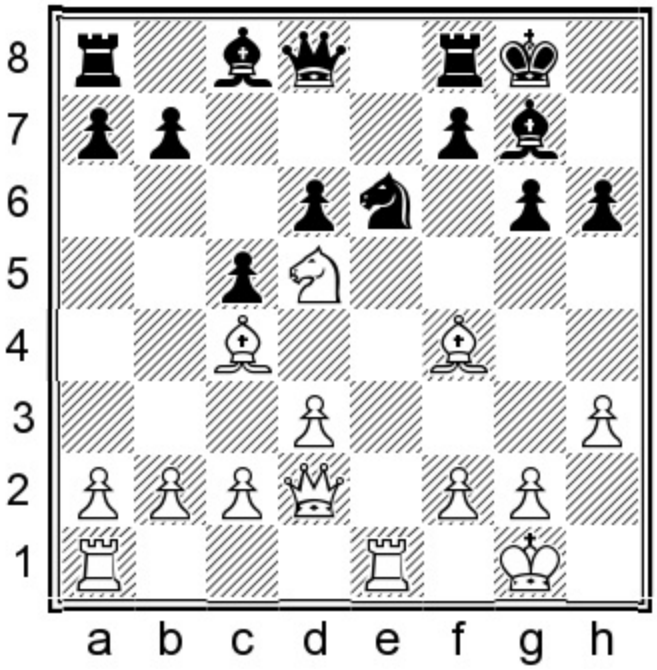
6.e5 ♘xb5

6...♘h5!?



Position after: 6...♘h5!?

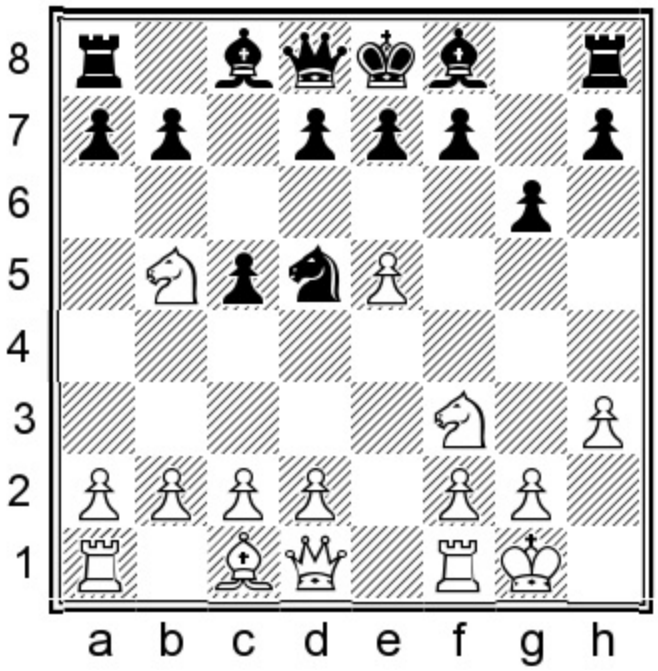
7.d3! Black cannot continue normally with ...♗g7 as his h5-knight will run out of squares. [7.♗c4 has been played by Movsesian and Wang Hao with decent results, but I am concerned about Black's counterplay after 7...d6 8.exd6 ♗g7!∞] 7...♘g7 [7...♘xb5 8.♘xb5 ♘g7 9.♗h6± Mielczarek – Slawinski, ICCF email 2015.] 8.♗c4 ♘ge6 9.0-0 ♗g7 10.♘xd4 ♘xd4 11.♗g5 [11.♗f4 also looks pretty normal, but I don't think it's a bad idea to provoke ...h7-h6.] 11...h6 12.♗f4 0-0 13.♖e1 As we will see in future chapters, the e5-pawn is very good at frustrating Black's g7-bishop. 13...d6 14.exd6 exd6 15.♘d5 ♘e6 16.♕d2!



Position after: 16.♕d2!

16...♘xf4 [16...♗xb2? 17.♗xh6 ♗xa1 18.♖xa1±] 17.♕xf4 ♗e6 18.a4 ♖b8 19.c3± Black's bishop-pair doesn't really impress me, and White can continue to slowly press by doubling his rooks and choosing the right moment to push one of his kingside pawns.

7.♘xb5 ♘d5 8.0-0

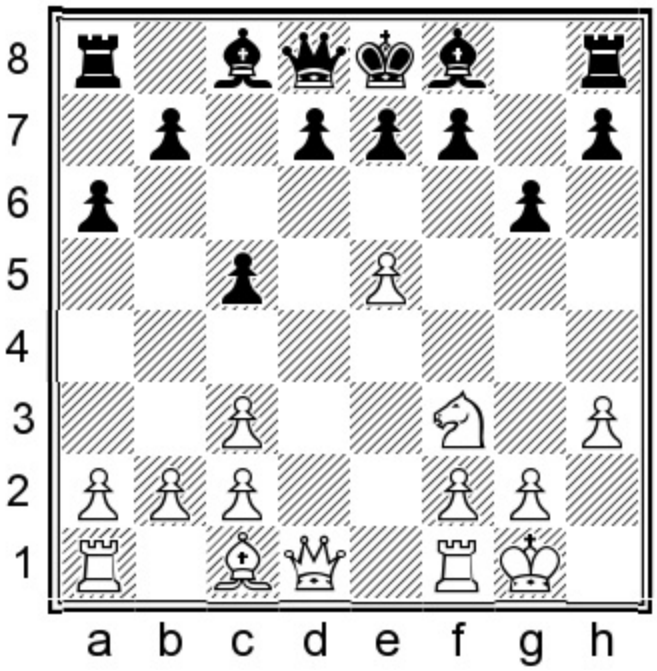


Position after: 8.0-0

Black has attempted three different moves here, but in general, our e5-pawn is pretty good at restricting the activity of his pieces. In each line we'll be able to achieve a comfortable edge with good kingside prospects.

8...♘c7

A) 8...a6 9.♘c3 [9.c4!? was a cool idea in Svidler – Nedev, Neum 2000 – but I don't see any problem with the more natural 9.♘c3.] 9...♘xc3 10.dxc3

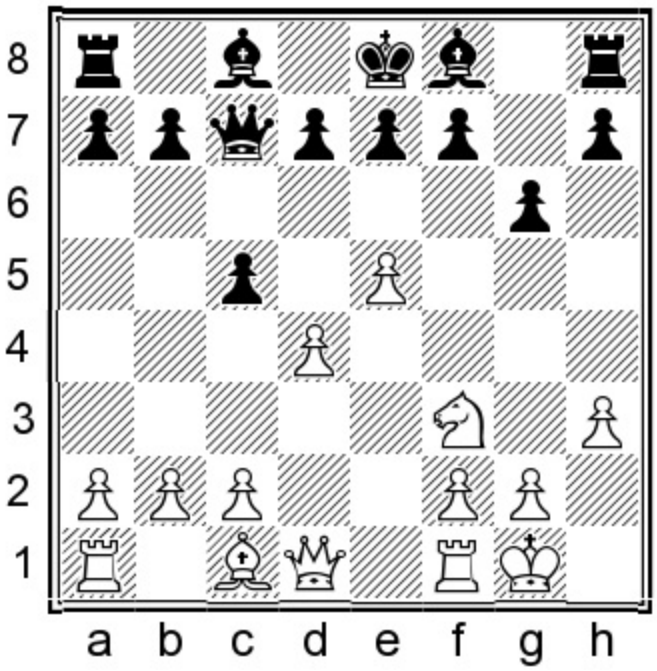


Position after: 10.dxc3

10...♕b6 [10...d5?! 11.♗e3 b6 12.b4!±] 11.a4! ♗g7 12.a5 ♕c6 13.♗f4± We can follow this up with ♕d2, ♖fe1 and most likely h4-h5. Black is cramped and will probably incur positional weaknesses in an attempt to gain some space for his pieces.

B) 8...♗g7 9.d4!± was very strong for White in Lagno – Kosteniuk, Khanty – Mansiysk 2014.

9.♘xc7+ ♕xc7 10.d4!



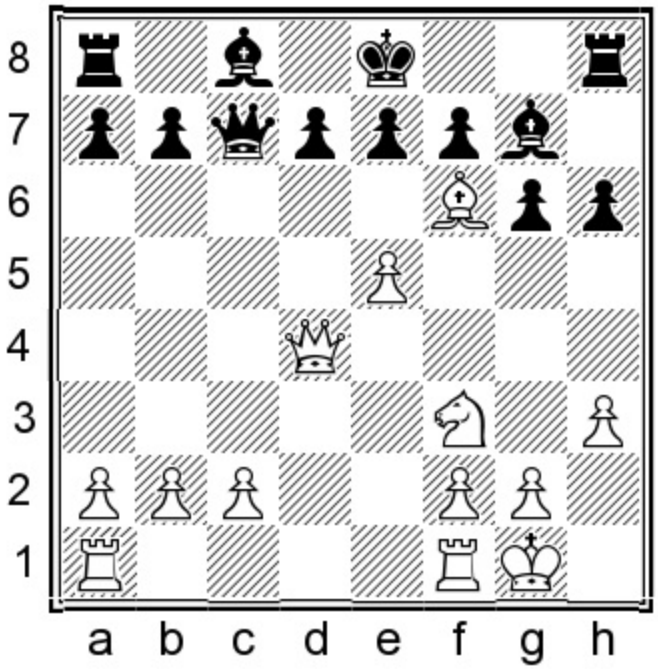
Position after: 10.d4!

10...♗g7

This is yet to be tried but seems most critical.

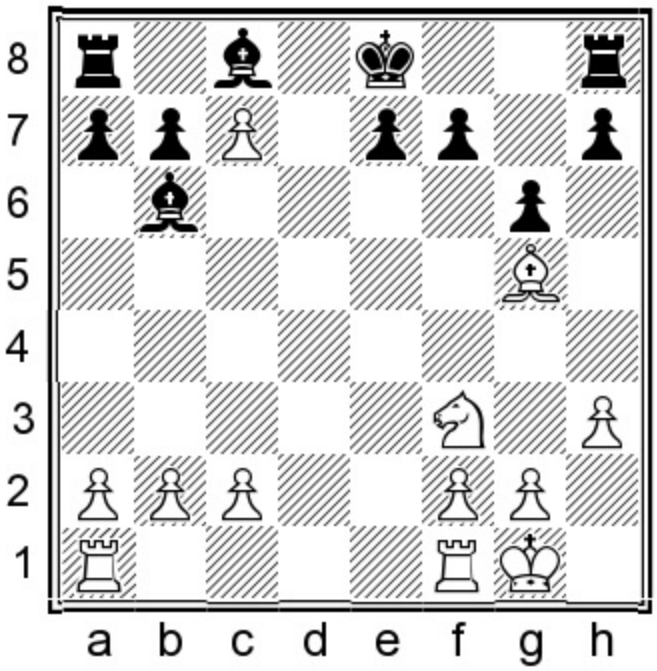
10...cxd4 11.♕xd4

A) 11...♗g7 12.♗g5 d6 [12...h6 13.♗f6!+–



Position after: 13.♗f6!+–

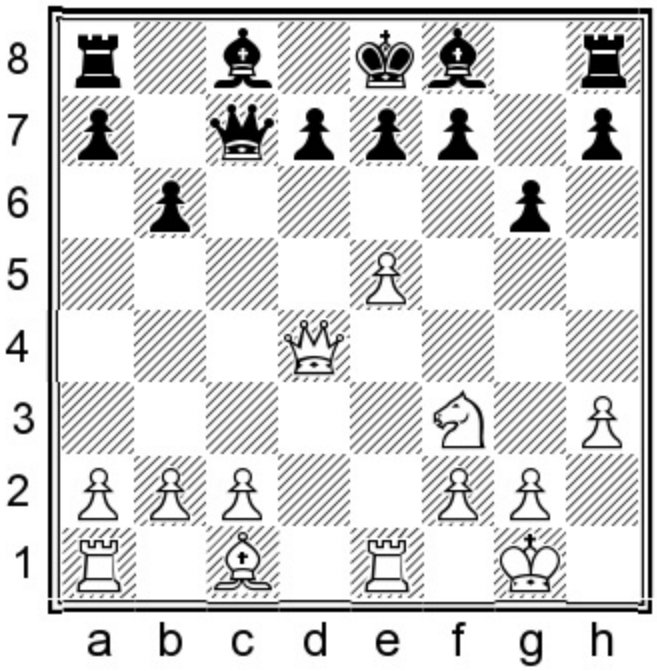
is an important idea to remember, and was decisive in Milliet – Le Diouron, France 2010.] 13.exd6! ♗xd4 14.dxc7 ♗b6



Position after: 14...♗b6

White achieved a much better ending in Lautier – Nataf, Monariz 2000, and should have immediately centralised his rooks with 15.♖ad1 ♗xc7 16.♖fe1 ♗e6 17.♘d4±

B) 11...b6 Black can try and drive our queen away from the d4-square, but this doesn't change our attacking approach. 12.♖e1

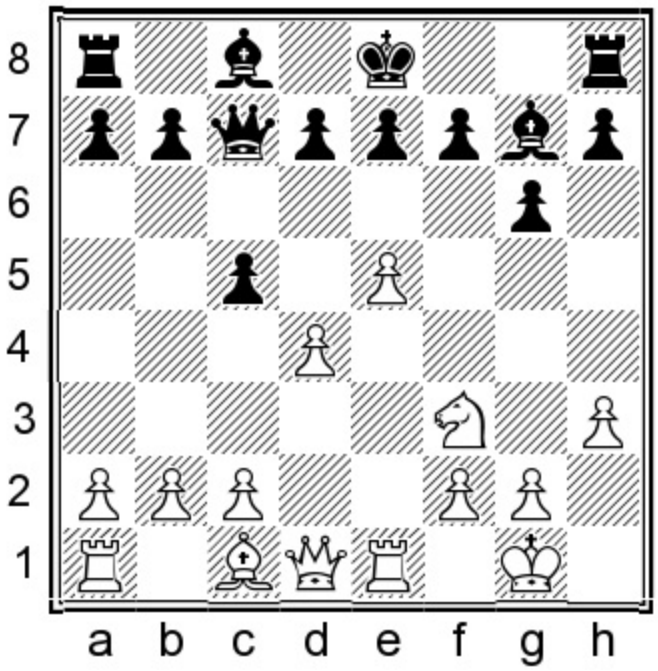


Position after: 12.♖e1

12...♕c5 [12...♗b7? misses our hidden threat with 12.♖e1. 13.e6! f6 14.exd7+ ♕xd7 15.♕xf6+–;

12...♗g7 13.♗g5 ♗b7 14.♗f6! Once again, this motive is decisive. 14...♖g8 15.♗xg7 ♖xg7 16.e6+–] 13.♕h4 h6 14.♗e3 ♕c7 15.♗f4 ♗g7 16.♘d4± This time Black is also struggling to castle, in addition to having to deal with prospects of e5-e6.

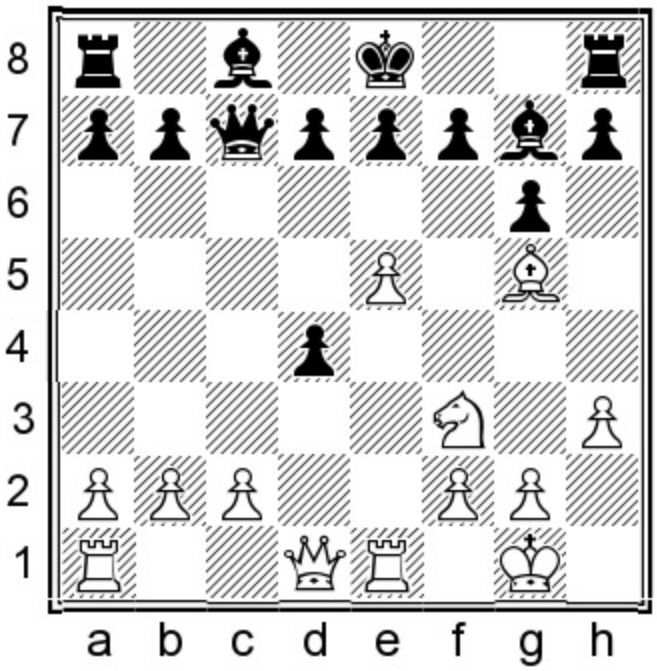
11.♖e1



Position after: 11.♖e1

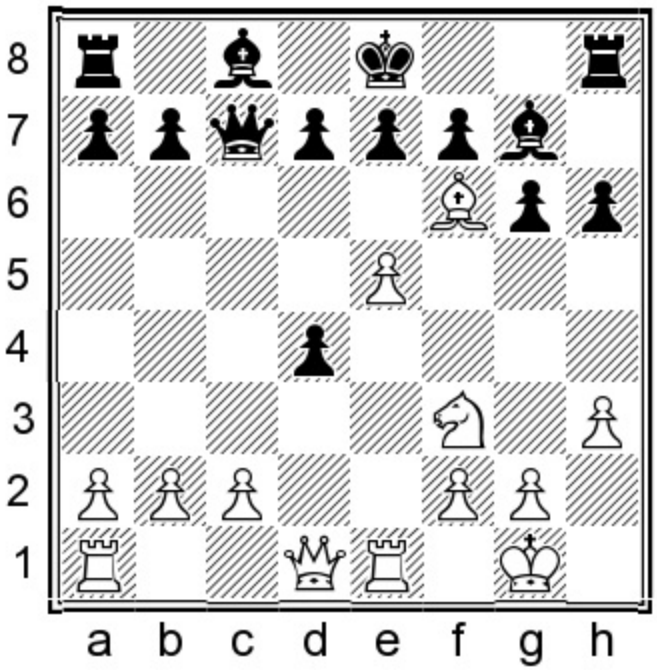
11...0-0

11...cxd4 12.♗g5!



Position after: 12.♗g5!

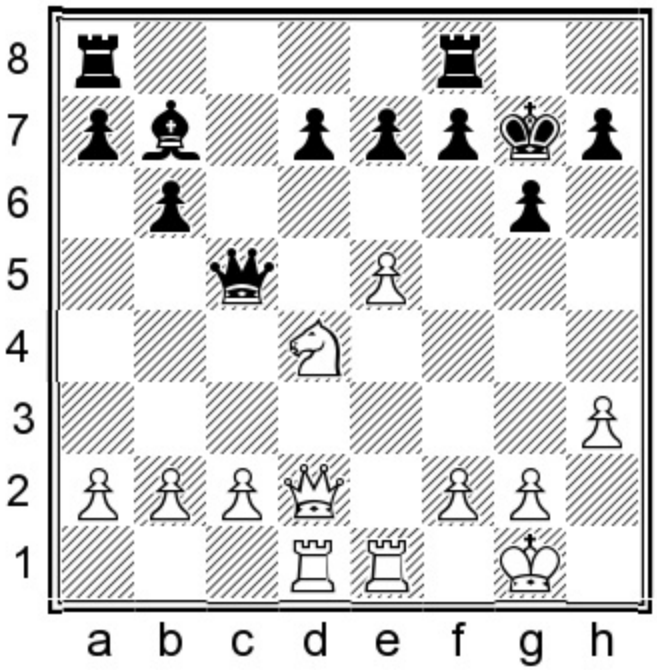
White has an even more improved version of the line after 11...cxd4. The ♗f6 threats are still in the air, and we can choose whether to recapture on d4 with our queen or knight. 12...♕c5 [12...♕b6 13.♘xd4 h6 14.♗f6! ♔f8 15.♗xg7+ ♔xg7 16.♕d3+– Of course, ...d7-d6 is met with e5-e6.; 12...h6 13.♗f6!



Position after: 13.♗f6!

The same idea again! 13...♔f8 14.♗xg7+ ♔xg7 15.♕xd4 ♕b6 16.♕c3+–; 12...b6 13.♗f6! 0-0

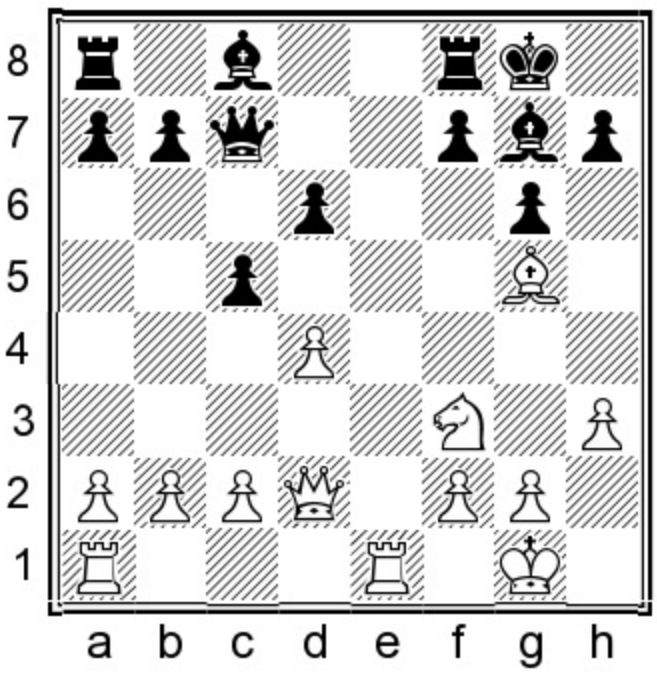
14.♗xe7 ♖e8 15.♗d6 ♕c6 16.♕xd4+–] 13.♕d2 b6 14.♘xd4 ♗b7 15.♗f6! 0-0 16.♗xg7 ♔xg7 17.♖ad1±



Position after: 17.♖ad1±

The main difference between White and Black's positions stems from the activity of our respective rooks. At some point, we can put a rook on the third rank and launch an assault against the Black king.

12.♗g5! d6 13.exd6 exd6 14.♕d2



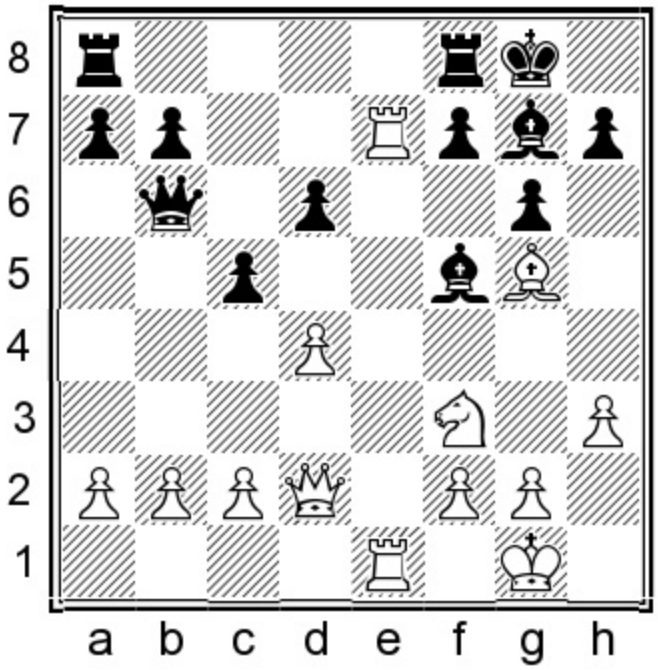
Position after: 14.♕d2

It might appear as though the dust has cleared, but our attacking prospects on the kingside are surprisingly dangerous. For example, check out the following line:

14...♗f5

14...♗e6 15.d5 ♗f5 16.♖e7 ♕b6 17.c3±

15.♖e7 ♕b6 16.♖ae1!

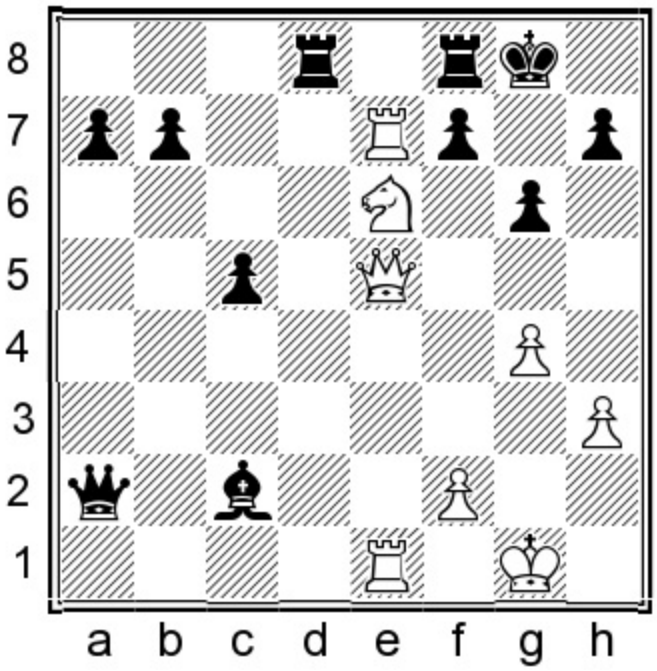


Position after: 16.♖ae1!

A really nice idea. It's important to note how the queenside pawns are pretty irrelevant when all of our pieces are working together against the Black king.

16...♕xb2 17.♗h6 ♕xc2 18.♕f4 ♕xa2 19.♗xg7 ♔xg7 20.dxc5 dxc5 21.g4 ♗c2 22.♕e5+ ♔g8 23.♘g5 ♖ad8 24.♘e6!+–

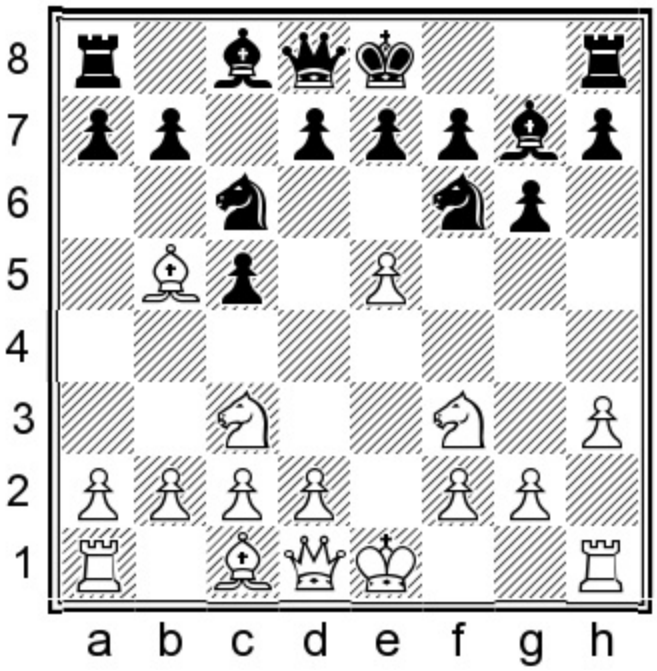
Black loses his queen.



Position after: 24.♘e6!+−

c) 5...♗g7 6.e5 ♘g8 7.0-0! ♘xe5 8.♘xe5 ♗xe5 9.♖e1 --

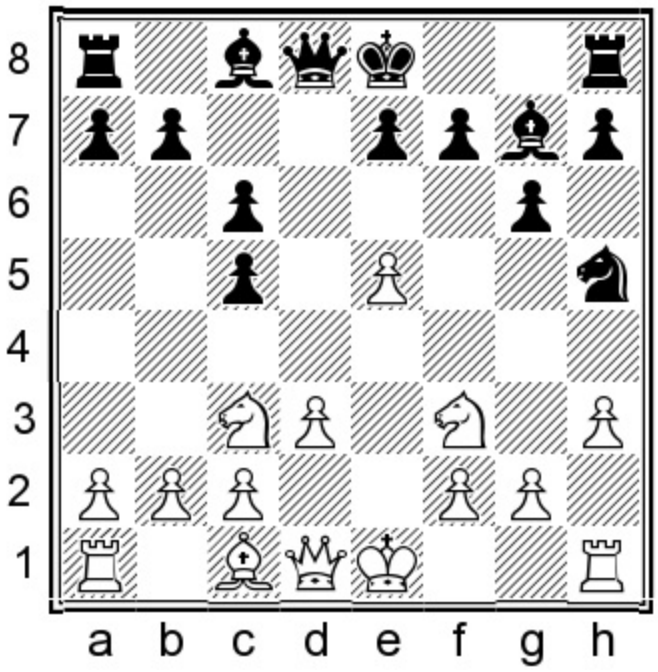
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.♘c3 g6 5.h3!? ♗g7 6.e5



Position after: 6.e5

6...♘g8

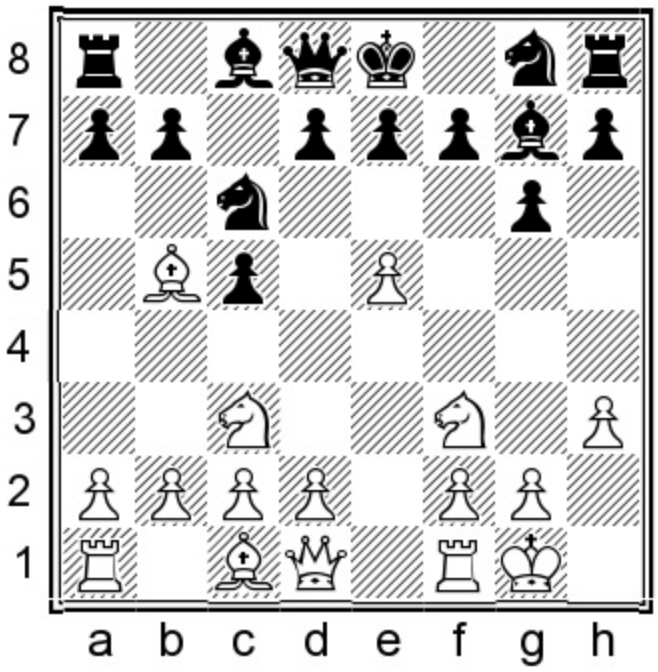
6...♘h5?! 7.♗xc6 dxc6 8.d3



Position after: 8.d3

Once again our pre-emptive h2-h3 push looks very wise in restricting Black's piece mobility. 8...f5 [8...♗f8 is probably better than 8...f5, but it kind of demonstrates that things have gone wrong for Black already. 9.a4! ♘g7 10.a5 ♘e6 11.♗e3 ♗g7 12.♘e4±] 9.exf6 ♘xf6 10.0-0 0-0 11.♖e1±

7.0-0!

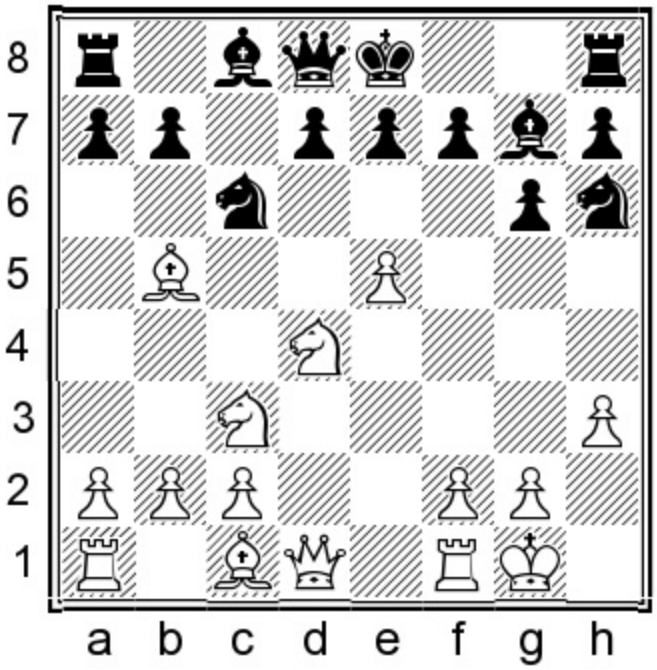


Position after: 7.0-0!

The old mainline was 7.♗xc6, but practice has proven that Black is very solid. Instead, sacrificing the e5-pawn appeals to me most as Black is underdeveloped and we have the potential for a great initiative.

7...♘xe5

A) 7...♘h6 Of course, Black isn't forced to accept our sacrifice. 8.d4! cxd4 9.♘xd4 [9.♘e4!? seems very unclear after 9...♘f5 10.g4 d6!∞ A clever piece sacrifice, after which Black's counterplay seems relatively imposing.]

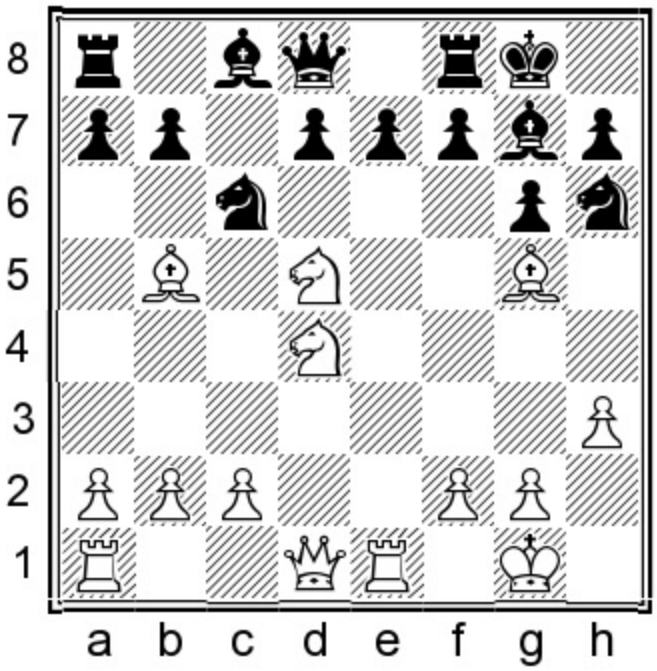


Position after: 9.♘xd4

A1) 9...♘xd4 10.♕xd4 ♘f5 [10...0-0 11.♗d3! Redirecting the bishop as it's obviously no longer useful on b5. 11...d6 12.♕h4 ♘f5 13.♗xf5 ♗xf5 14.♘d5 ♔h8 15.♗g5 f6 16.exf6 exf6 17.♗h6±] 11.♕e4 0-0 12.g4! ♘h6 13.♗f4±

A2) 9...0-0 10.♘f3!± White converted a clearly advantageous position in Ibarra Jerez – Escudero Manzano, Roquetas de Mar 2014.

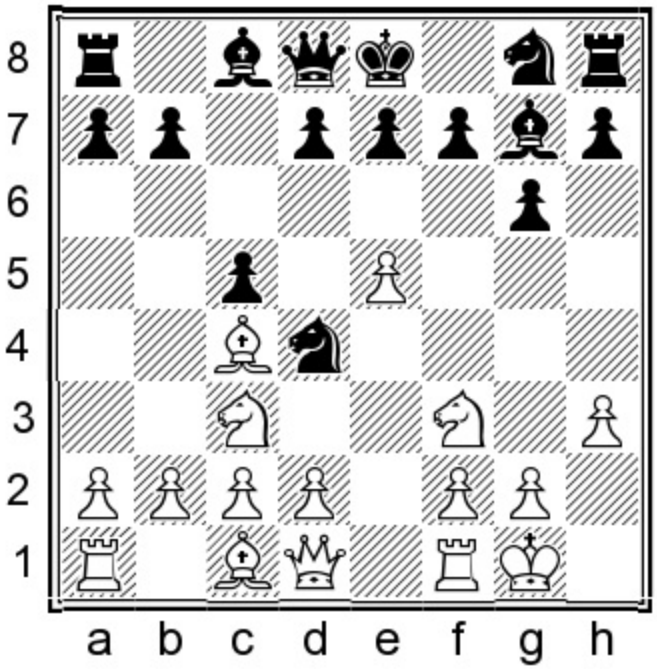
A3) 9...♘xe5 10.♖e1 White's pawn deficit is only temporary, as Black will have to return the material in order to achieve king safety. 10...♘c6 11.♗g5! 0-0 12.♘d5!



Position after: 12.♘d5!

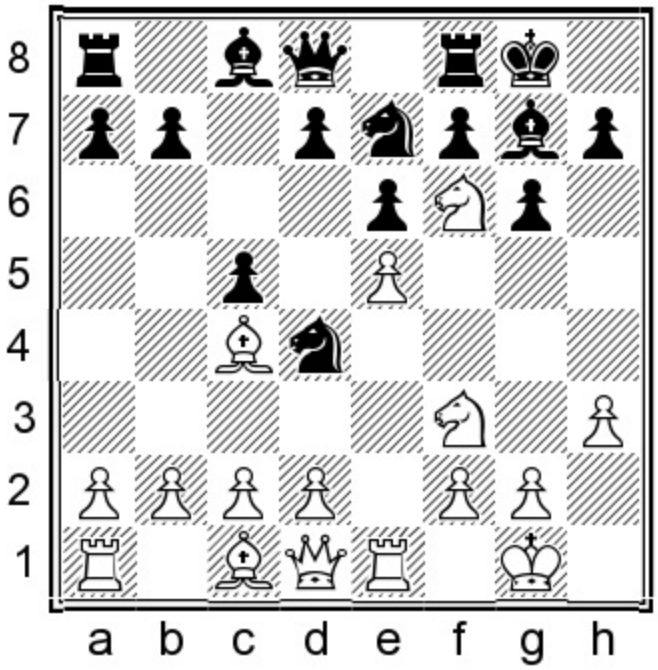
There are a few ways for Black to respond to White's threats, but none of them suffice for equality. 12...♔h8 [12...f6 13.♗xh6 ♗xh6 14.♗xc6 dxc6 15.♘xe7+ ♔h8 16.♘xc8 ♕xc8 17.♕f3±; 12...♗xd4 13.♗xh6 ♗g7 14.♗g5! f6 15.♗xc6 fxg5 16.♘xe7+ ♔h8 17.♗f3±] 13.♗xe7 ♘xe7 14.♖xe7 d6 [14...b6 15.♕d3±] 15.c3± The line illustrates the benefits of 7.0-0 over 7.♗xc6, as by opening the centre we have managed to fully activate our pieces.

B) 7...♘d4!? is another intuitive move. 8.♗c4



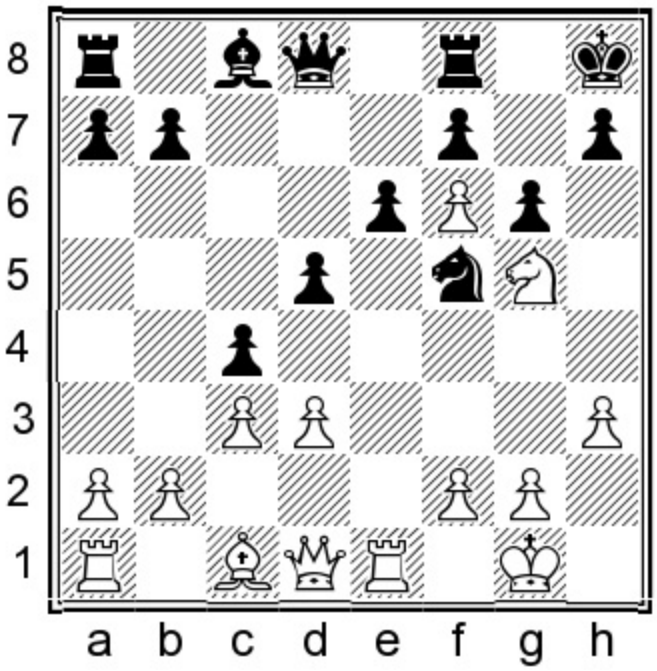
Position after: 8.♗c4

8...e6 [8...d6 9.exd6 ♕xd6 10.♘e4 ♕c6 11.♖e1 ♗e6 12.d3! The resulting pawn structure is favourable for White. 12...♗xc4 13.dxc4 ♖d8 14.c3 ♘e6 15.♕e2±; 8...♘h6 9.♘e4 0-0 10.c3 ♘c6 11.d4±] 9.♖e1 ♘e7 [9...f6 10.b4! The complications favour White due to Black's lack of development. 10...fxe5 11.bxc5 ♘e7 12.♖b1 0-0 13.♘xe5 ♕c7 14.♘d3±] 10.♘e4! 0-0 11.♘f6+!



Position after: 11.♘f6+!

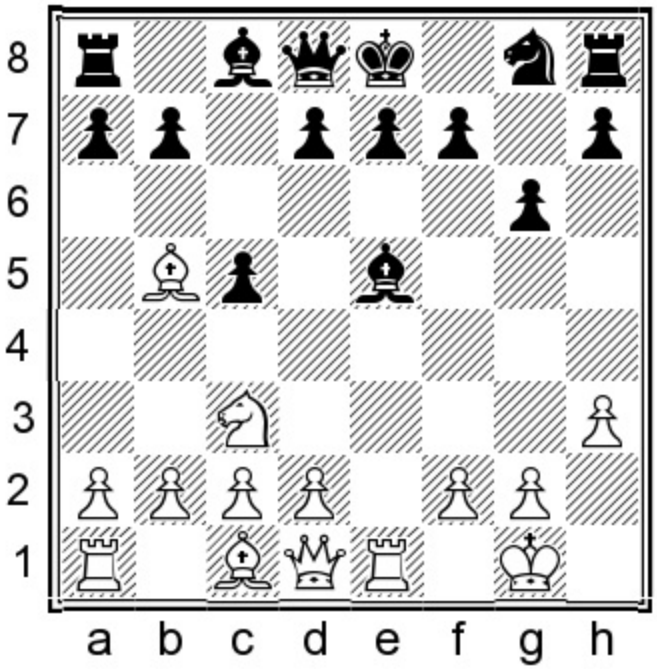
A clever way to practically force Black to give up the bishop pair – and in the resulting positions, Black will have to contend with a few dark-squared weaknesses. 11...♔h8 [11...♗xf6 12.exf6 ♘ef5 13.c3 ♘xf3+ 14.♕xf3±] 12.♘g5 d5 [12...h6 13.♘gh7!±] 13.c3! ♘df5 14.♗d3 c4 15.♗xf5 ♗xf6 16.exf6 ♘xf5 17.d3±



Position after: 17.d3±

Black may be winning the f6-pawn, but the opposite-coloured bishop middlegame is clearly preferable for White.

8.♘xe5 ♗xe5 9.♖e1



Position after: 9.♖e1

It's important to consistently play active moves, to fully utilise our initiative and ensure that Black is

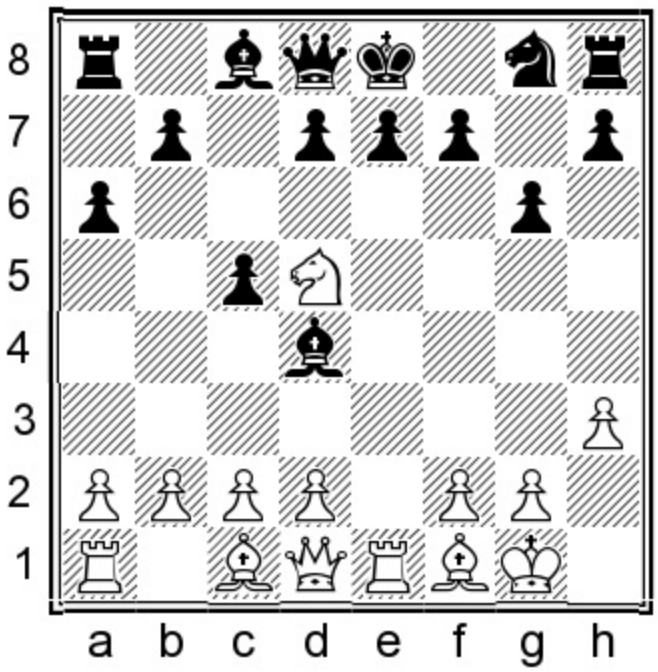
unable to consolidate.

9...f6

This move has predominantly been seen in email games, although it looks like a really odd way to defend the bishop. The following variations illustrate how to open the position for our benefit.

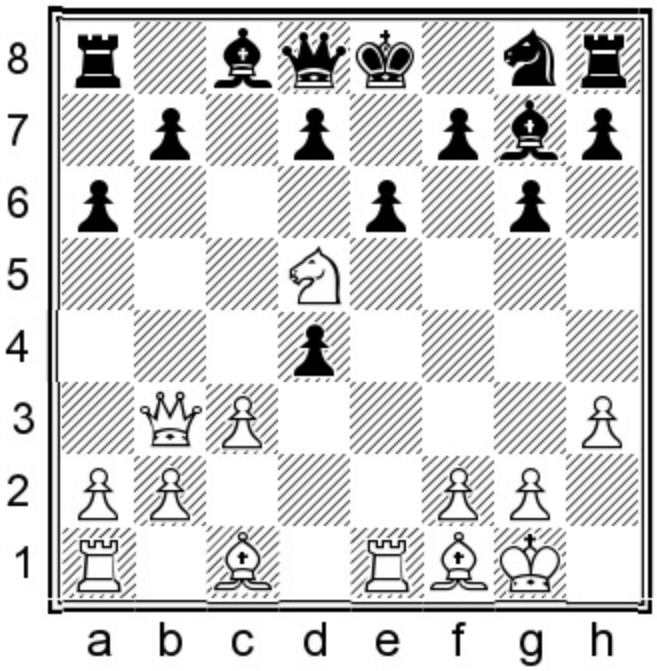
A) 9...♗g7 is examined in the final subchapters.

B) 9...♗d4 Black has yet to have tried this move, for good reason. 10.♘d5! a6 11.♗f1



Position after: 11.♗f1

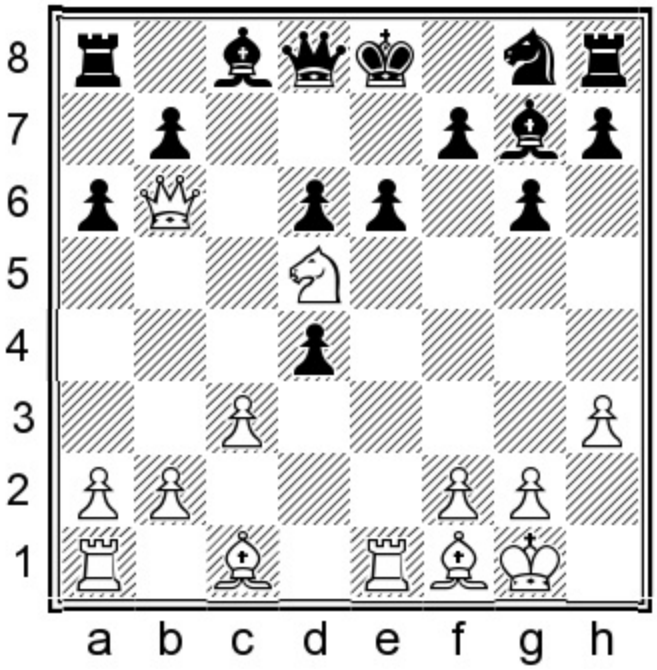
B1) 11...e6 12.c3 ♗g7 13.d4 cxd4 14.♕b3!



Position after: 14.♕b3!

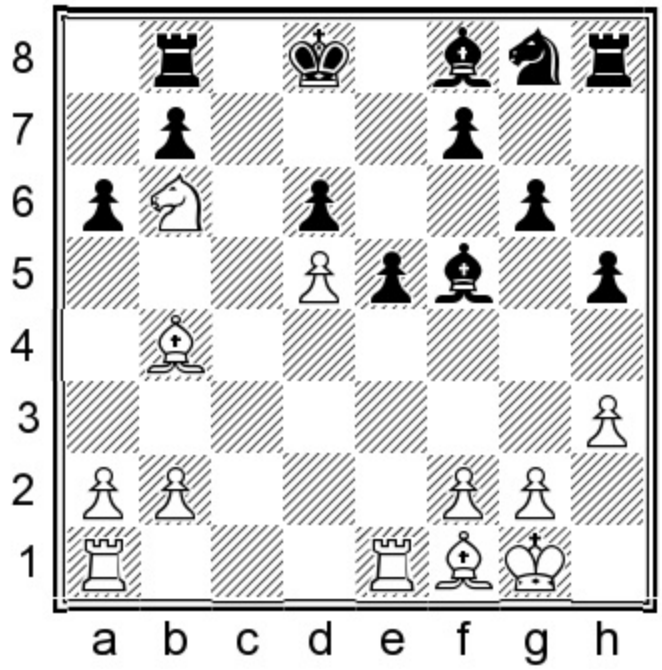
14...b5 [14...d6 15.♕b6! The idea of our 14th move. 15...♕xb6 16.♘xb6 ♖b8 17.♗f4 e5 18.cxd4± The position actually transposes to a variation after 11...d6.] 15.♗f4 d6 16.a4↑ In practical terms, Black's position looks very unappealing.

B2) 11...d6 12.c3 ♗g7 13.♕b3! The b6-square is a bigger weakness than might have first appeared. 13...e6 14.d4 cxd4 15.♕b6!



Position after: 15.♕b6!

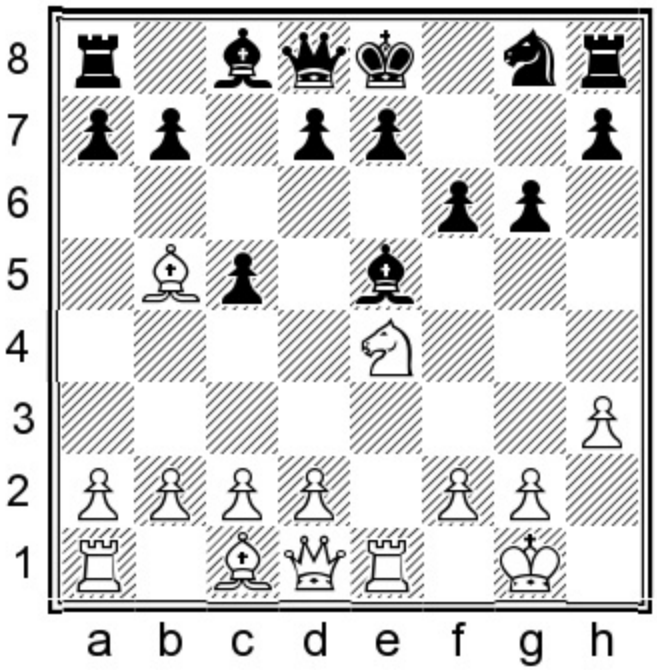
Entering an endgame might seem counter-intuitive, but the trade of queens exacerbates Black's weaknesses. 15...♕xb6 16.♘xb6 ♖b8 17.♗f4 e5 18.cxd4 ♗e6 19.d5! ♗f5 20.♘c4 ♔d7 21.♘b6+! A clever way to ensure that Black can't castle. 21...♔d8 22.♗d2 h5 23.♗b4 ♗f8



Position after: 23...♗f8

24.♖xe5! Like the aforementioned variation this was not forced, as we could also play a normal move like ♖ac1. However, I really like this idea as it demonstrates how minor pieces dominate in this position. 24...♔c7 25.♖xf5 gxf5 26.♗a5↑

10.♘e4!N

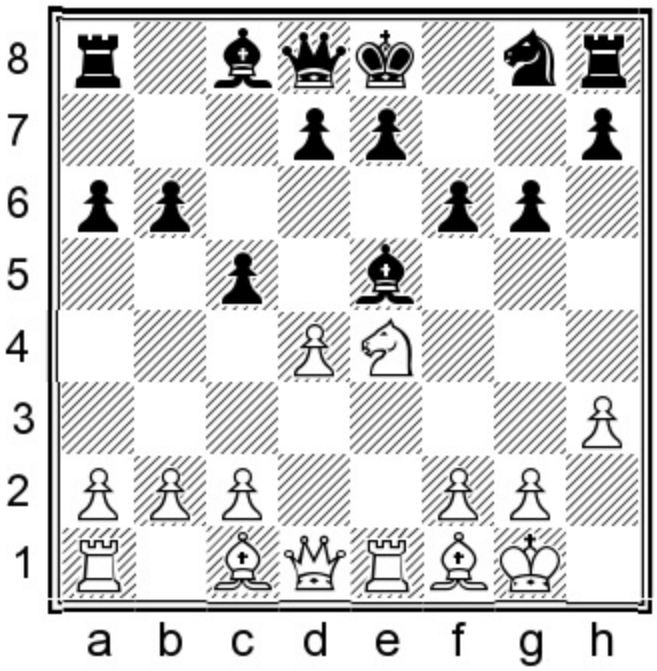


Position after: 10.♘e4!N

10...♕a5!?

This appears to be the biggest test of our sacrifice. If our bishop retreats to f1, Black's queen will support the c5-pawn, enabling him to immediately play ...d5.

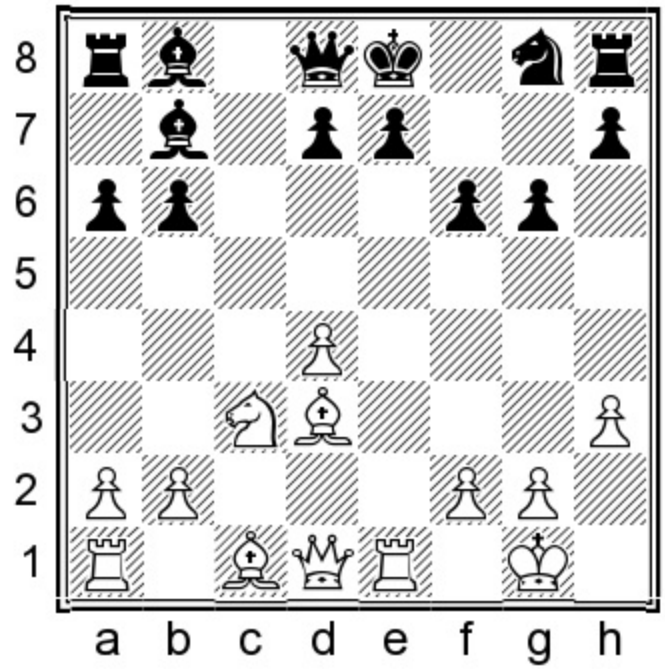
A) 10...a6 11.♗f1 b6 12.d4!



Position after: 12.d4!

12...cxd4 [12...♗xd4 13.♘d6+ ♔f8 14.♕f3 ♖b8 15.♘xc8 ♔g7 16.♗c4! ♖xc8 17.c3+– Black's bishop is lost.] 13.f4 ♗c7 14.♕xd4± The game goes on, but White's activity makes Black's position look increasingly dangerous.

B) 10...b6 11.d4 cxd4 [11...♗xd4 12.c3 ♗e5 13.♕d5 ♖b8 14.♘g5!+– is decisive.] 12.c3! a6 [12...dxc3 13.♕d5 ♖b8 14.♘g5!+–] 13.cxd4 ♗b8 14.♗d3 ♗b7 15.♘c3±



Position after: 15.♘c3±

Black's kingside development looks to be a perennial problem, and in the meantime we can start to probe on the queenside.

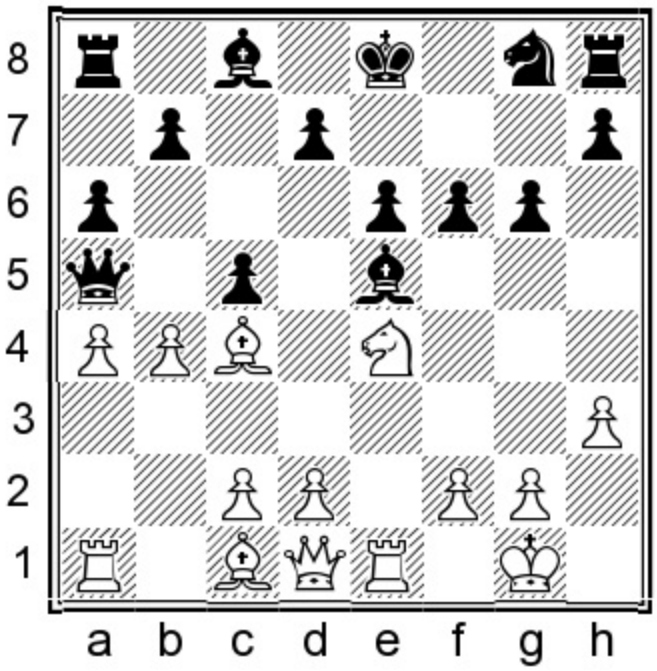
11.a4!

11.♗f1? d5∓

11...a6 12.♗c4 e6

If we allow Black to continue with ...♘ge7 and ...♔f7 he'll be a pawn up for the good, so we need to take rapid action.

13.b4!!



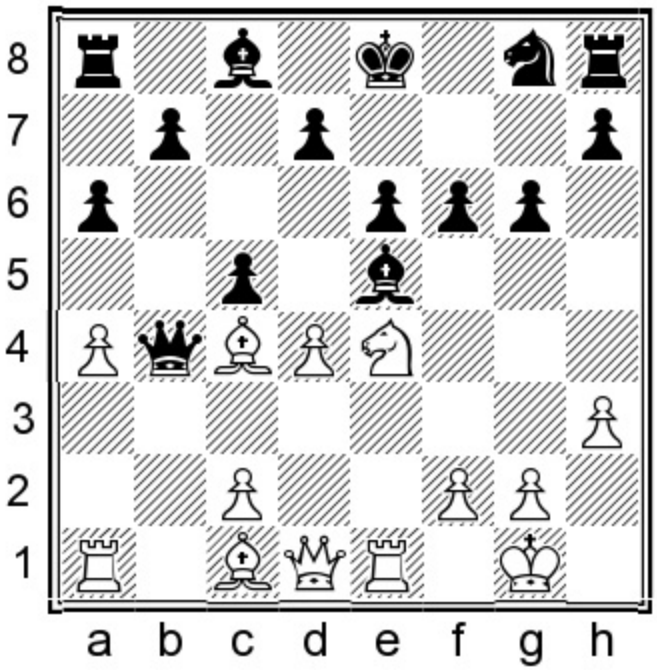
Position after: 13.b4!!

A crazy idea to blow open the position which the computer takes a while to believe. The move underlines the common theme of developing our pieces with tempi, and I will present a few illustrative lines to justify another pawn sacrifice.

13...♕d8

Probably Black's more sensible option, considering that he's still attacking our a1-rook. White has two interesting ways to continue.

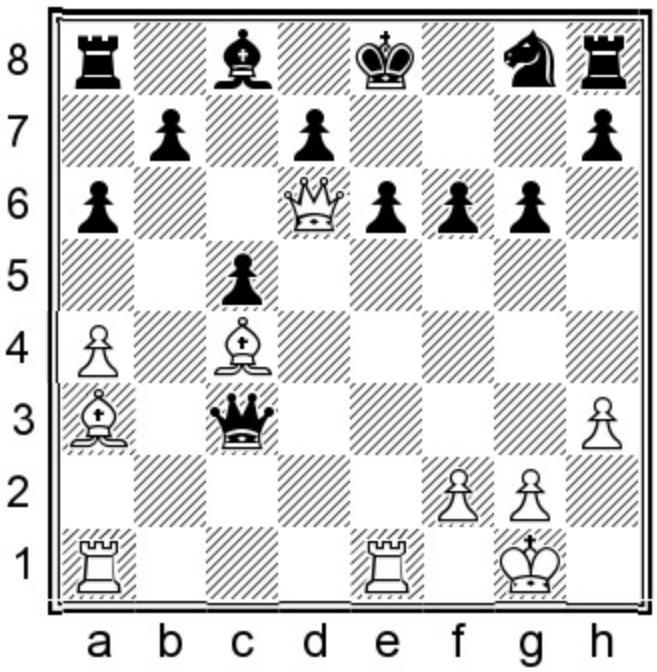
13...♕xb4 14.d4!



Position after: 14.d4!

A) 14...cxd4 15.♗b3± ♗c1-a3 and f2-f4 looks extremely problematic for Black to deal with.

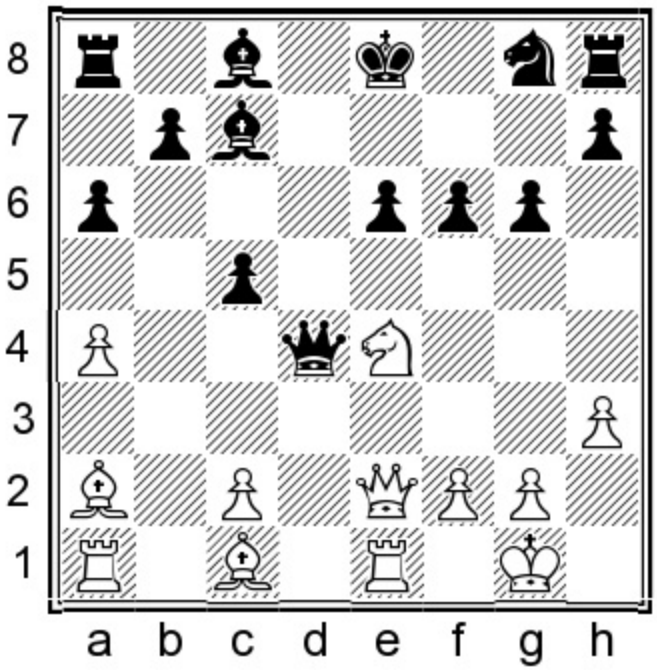
B) 14...♗xd4 15.c3 ♗xc3 16.♗a3 ♕a5 17.♘xc3 ♕xc3 18.♕d6!



Position after: 18.♕d6!

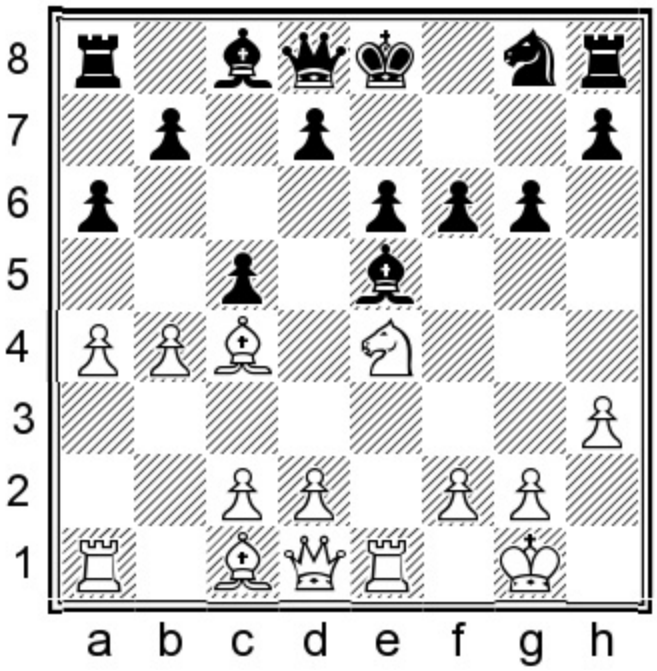
Survival for Black is pretty much impossible without his dark-squared bishop. 18...♘e7 [18...♕xc4 19.♗xc5+–] 19.♗xe6! dxe6 20.♗xc5 0-0 21.♕xe7 ♖f7 22.♕e8+ ♔g7 23.♖ac1 ♕a5 24.♖ed1+–

C) 14...♗c7 15.♕e2! Threatening ♗a3. 15...d5 [15...cxd4 16.♗a3 ♕a5 17.♗c5!± After we capture on d4, it looks increasingly difficult for Black to survive.] 16.♗xd5 ♕xd4 17.♗a2!



Position after: 17.♗a2!

The point of the whole variation! Incredibly, Black's queen will be trapped if he captures our rook. 17...♕e5 [17...♕xa1 18.c3 ♔f7 19.♗a3± The material balance is completely in White's favour when you consider the lack of protection offered to Black's king.] 18.g3 ♕xa1 [18...f5 19.♘g5 ♕xe2 20.♖xe2+– Trading queens clearly doesn't afford any more protection to Black's king.] 19.c3 ♔f7 20.♗a3±



Position after: 13...♕d8

14.d4!?

This was my original idea, continuing in the spirit of the variation.

14.bxc5! The alternative, a computer move. The bishop will be trapped on a1, and as a result it seems highly logical to sacrifice an exchange. 14...♗xa1 15.c3! ♘h6 16.♕f3 0-0 17.♗a3 f5 18.♘d6 ♘f7 19.♘xf7 ♖xf7 20.♖xa1⩲

14...cxd4

14...♗xd4 15.c3 ♗e5 16.bxc5+–

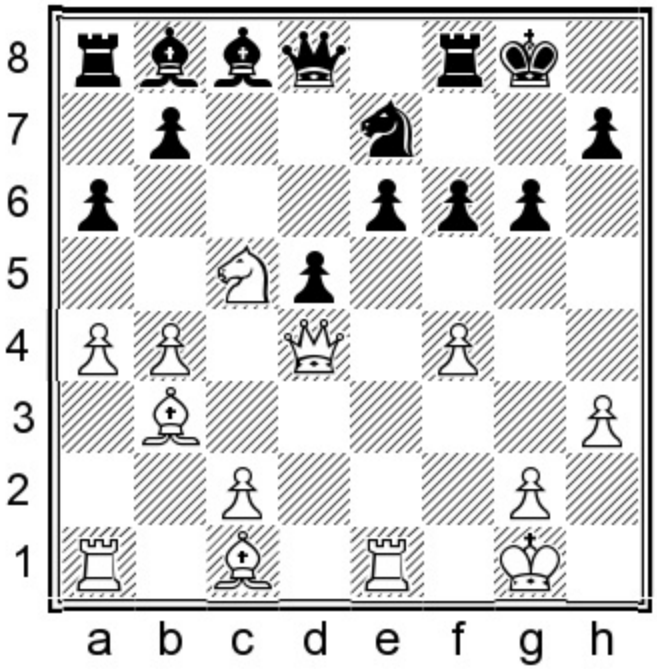
15.♗b3

Surprisingly we can spend a move protecting our minor pieces from the threat of ...d7-d5.

15...d5 16.f4! ♗b8

16...dxe4 17.fxe5 f5 18.♗b2⩲ The bishop-pair will continue to make life difficult for Black.

17.♘c5 ♘e7 18.♕xd4 0-0



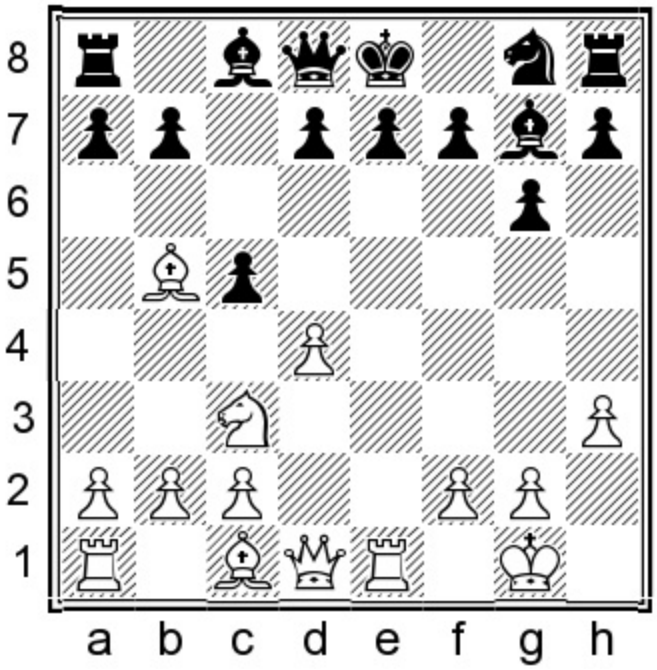
Position after: 18...0-0

Black has managed to castle and emerges a pawn up. Nevertheless, he is extremely passive and we can continue in the same vein in trying to open the position.

19.♕f2 ♕d6 20.a5 ♗a7 21.c4⩲

d) 5...♗g7 6.e5 ♘g8 7.0-0! ♘xe5 8.♘xe5 ♗xe5 9.♖e1 ♗g7

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.♘c3 g6 5.h3!? ♗g7 6.e5 ♘g8 7.0-0! ♘xe5 8.♘xe5 ♗xe5 9.♖e1 ♗g7 10.d4!



Position after: 10.d4!

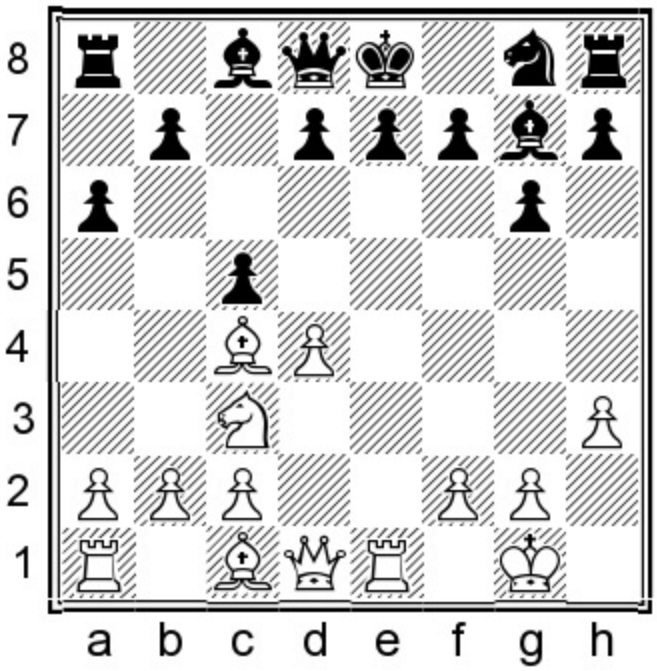
Yet another pawn sacrifice!

10...a6

It is better for Black to drive away our bishop before he thinks about capturing on d4.

After 10...cxd4?! 11.♘d5 ♔f8 [11...a6 12.♗f4+–] 12.♗g5 f6 13.♗h4± White was dominating in Ducarmon – Reinderman, Delft 2016.

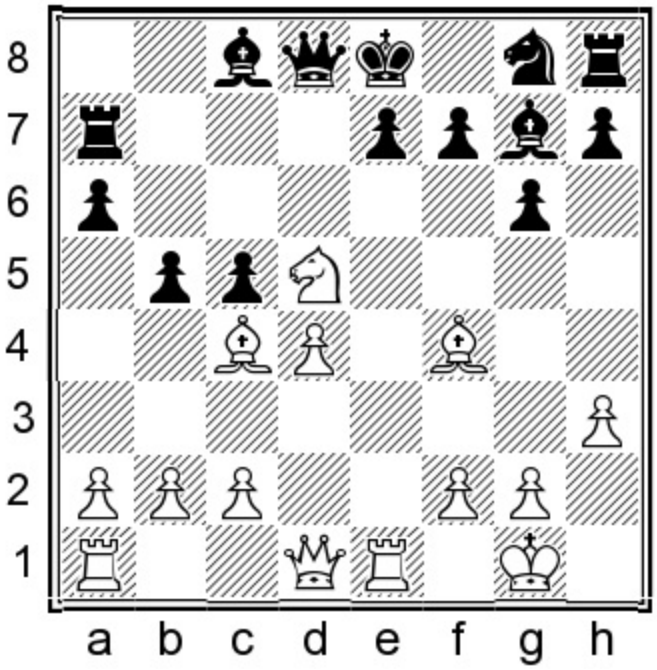
11.♗c4



Position after: 11.♗c4

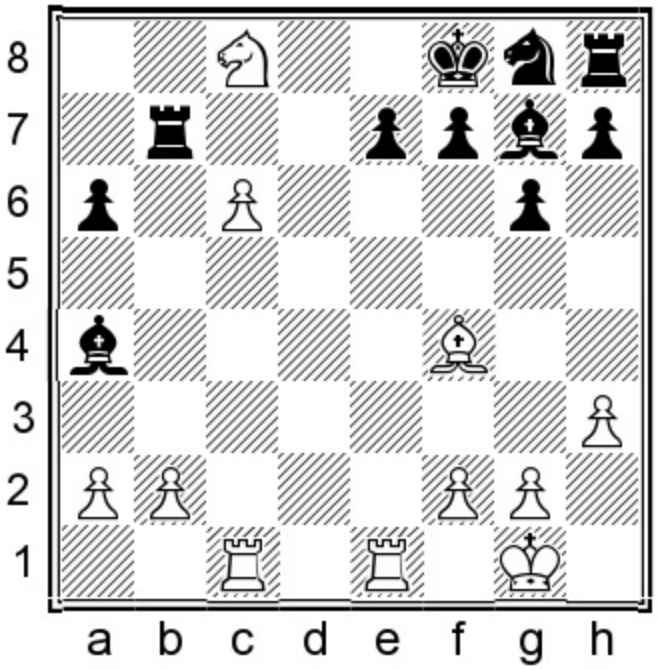
11...♗xd4

A) 11...d5!? It's logical for Black to give back a pawn, but this doesn't quite equalise for him. 12.♘xd5! [12.♗xd5 cxd4 13.♗e3!± was also nice for White in Rombaldoni – Libiszewski, Porto Mannu 2013 – but 12.♘xd5 has a very interesting hidden idea.] 12...b5 13.♗f4 ♖a7



Position after: 13...♖a7

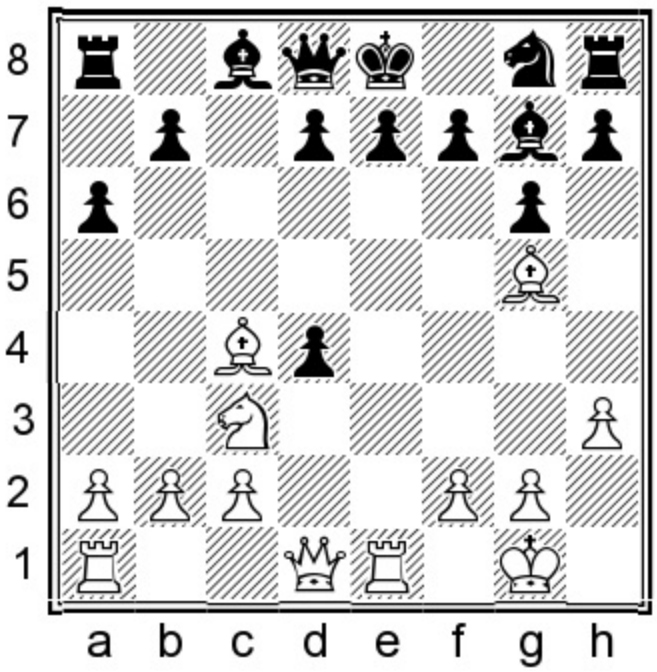
14.dxc5! A really cool move. Our queenside majority will prove too hot to handle for Black. 14...bxc4 15.♘b6! ♕xd1 [15...♗d7 16.♕d6! ♗b5 17.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 18.a4 ♗c6 19.♘xc4± It seems really challenging for Black to cope with our pawns.] 16.♖axd1 ♗f5 17.♘xc4 ♗xc2 18.♖c1 ♗a4 19.♘d6+ ♔f8 20.♘c8 ♖b7 21.c6±



Position after: 21.c6±

Black is forced to return the piece in order to prevent us from promoting, and will face a hopeless ending.

B) 11...cxd4 12.♗g5!



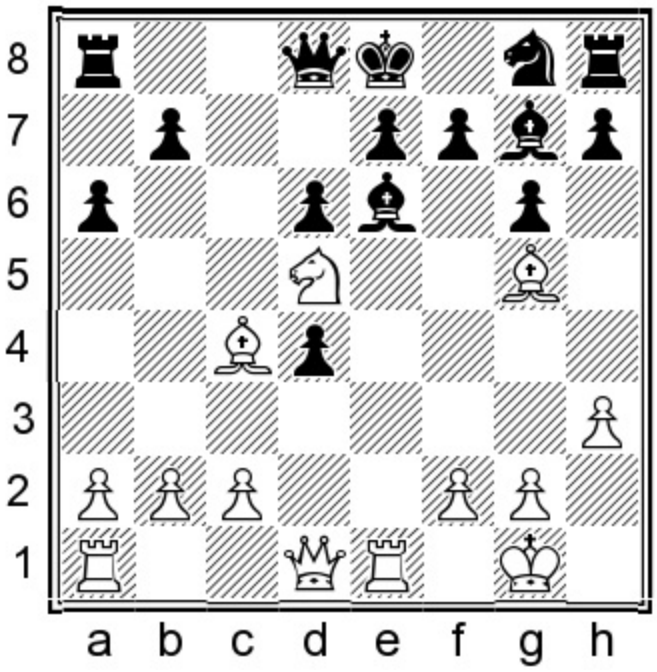
Position after: 12.♗g5!

This is extremely strong, as the variations illustrate.

B1) 12...♘f6 13.♘d5 ♘xd5 14.♗xd5 f6 15.♕xd4 e6 16.♖ad1±

B2) 12...dxc3 13.♕d5+–

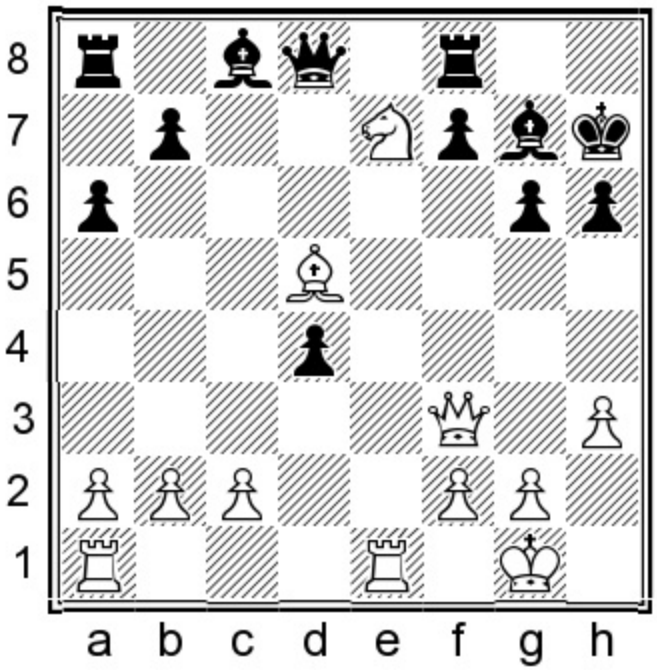
B3) 12...d6 13.♘d5 ♗e6



Position after: 13...♗e6

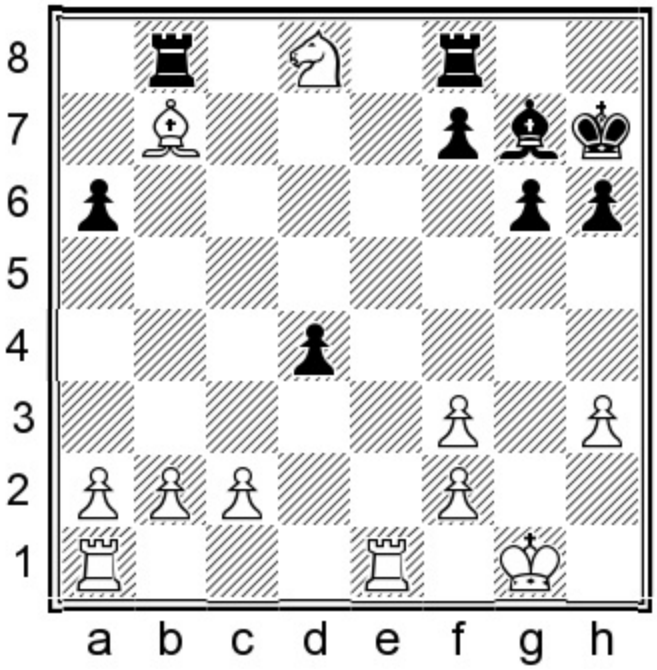
I was concerned about how to continue until I noticed the fairly obvious 14.♖xe6! fxe6 15.♘f4 ♗f6 16.♘xe6 ♕c8 17.♗b3+– If Black captures on g5, we can even throw in a couple of checks before recapturing the piece to ensure that Black can't castle.

B4) 12...h6 13.♗xe7! The point of 12.♗g5. 13...♘xe7 14.♘d5 0-0 15.♘xe7+ ♔h7 16.♕f3 It's mindful to note that Black is still a pawn up, which he can return at his leisure. For this purpose, we still need to be accurate to claim an advantage. 16...d5! [16...a5 17.♖ad1±] 17.♗xd5



Position after: 17.♗xd5

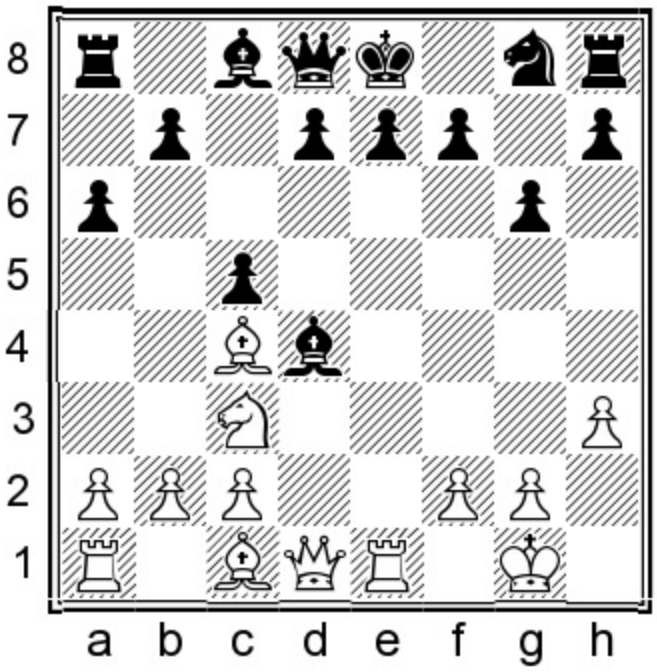
17...♗e6 [17...a5 18.♖ad1 ♖a6 19.♘xc8 ♖f6 20.♕e4 ♕xc8 21.♖xd4±; 17...♗d7 18.♗xb7 ♖b8 19.♘c6 ♗xc6 20.♕xc6 d3 21.cxd3 ♕xd3 22.♖ad1±] 18.♗xb7 ♖b8 19.♘c6 ♗d5 20.♘xd8 ♗xf3 21.gxf3!



Position after: 21.gxf3!

Black obviously retains drawing chances, but the resulting opposite coloured bishop ending is no doubt uncomfortable for him to play. 21...a5 [21...d3 22.cxd3 ♖fxd8 23.♗xa6 ♖xb2 24.♗c4 ♗d4

25.♖f1 ♖xf2 26.♖xf2 ♗xa1±] 22.♗d5 ♖bxd8 23.♗c4±

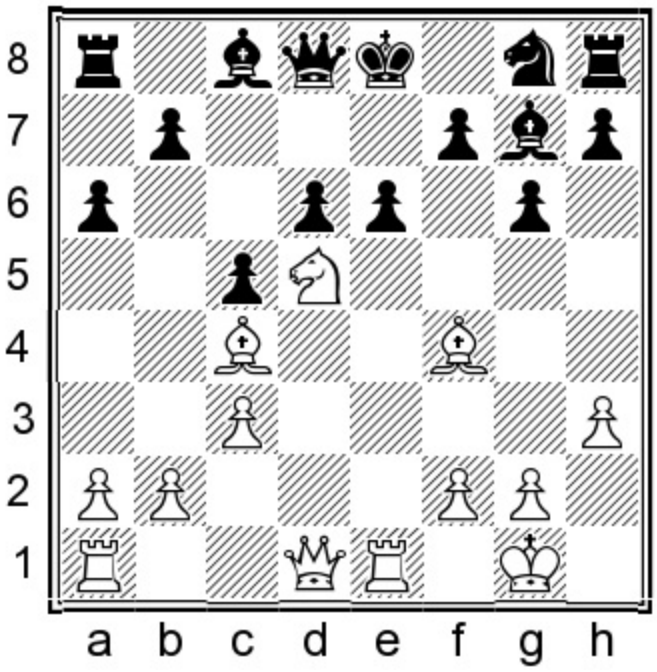


Position after: 11...♗xd4

12.♗f4!

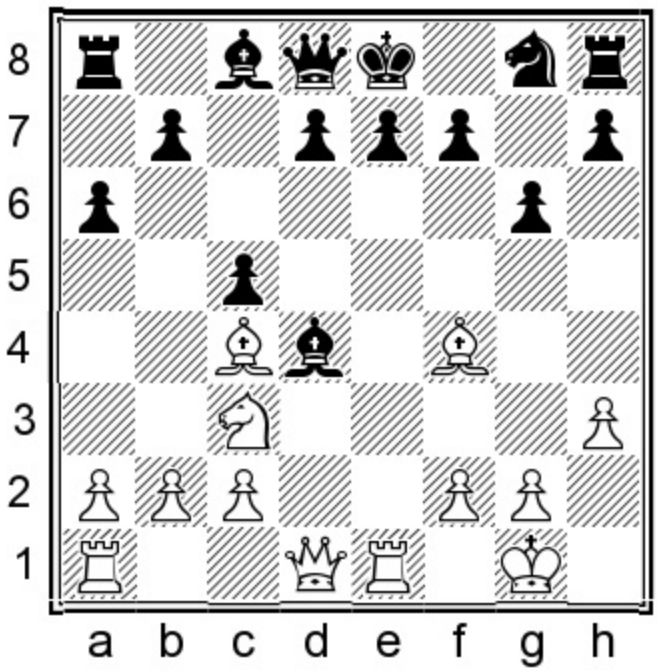
The bishop stands very well on this square, for a variety of reasons which we'll encounter in the following variations.

12.♘d5 Has been played in the majority of games, but 12...e6! is problematic for White, and the following variation shows how Black can develop in an unorthodox way. 13.c3 ♗g7 14.♗f4 d6



Position after: 14...d6

15.♕d2 [15.♗g5 ♕xg5! 16.♘c7+ ♔e7 17.♘xa8 b5∞; 15.♕f3 b5 16.♗d3 In Libiszewski – Vega Gutierrez, Las Palmas 2016, 16...♖a7!∓ would've been the best way to continue developing.] 15...b5 16.♗f1 ♖a7 17.a4 bxa4 18.♖xa4 h5!∞ Followed by ...♗h6, and ultimately the position remains unclear.

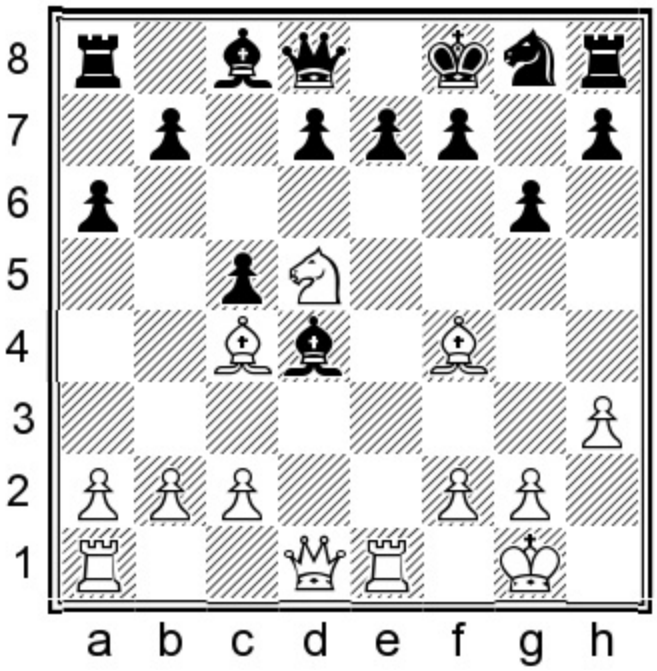


Position after: 12.♗f4!

12...d6

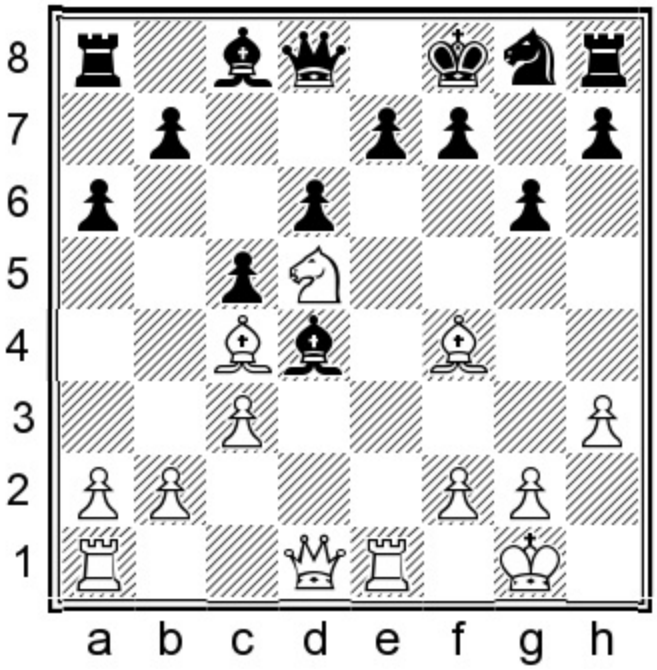
Obviously playing ♘d5 now doesn't really threaten anything, so it makes more sense to bring all our pieces into the attack.

A) 12...♔f8 Black attempts to artifically castle, rather than risking attempting it in one move. However, this will inadvertantly reduce the mobility of the d4-bishop. 13.♘d5!



Position after: 13.♘d5!

After this, Black is pretty much lost in every line. 13...d6 [13...e6 14.♘c7 ♖a7 15.c3 b5 16.cxd4 bxc4 17.dxc5 ♖xc7 18.♕d6++–; 13...b5 14.♗c7 ♕e8 15.c3 ♗g7 16.♗d6+–] 14.c3

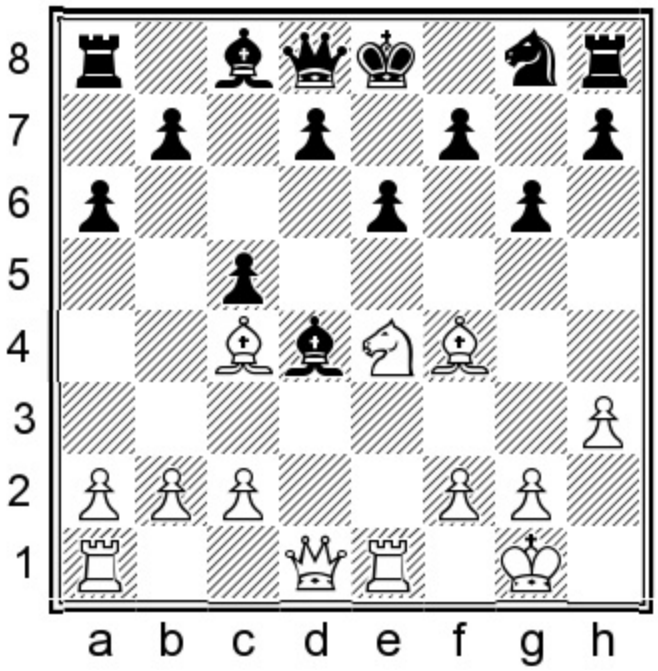


Position after: 14.c3

14...♗e5 [14...♗g7 15.♘xe7! ♘xe7 16.♗xd6 ♗f6 17.♕d5 ♕e8 18.♖xe7! ♗xe7 19.♖e1+–; 14...♗f6 15.♘xf6 ♘xf6 16.♗h6+ ♔g8 17.♕f3±] 15.♖xe5! dxe5 16.♗xe5 f6 17.♗c7 ♕d7 18.♘b6 ♕xc7 19.♘xa8 ♕d6 20.a4!± Black won't be able to cope with the pressure after ♕b3 and ♖ad1.

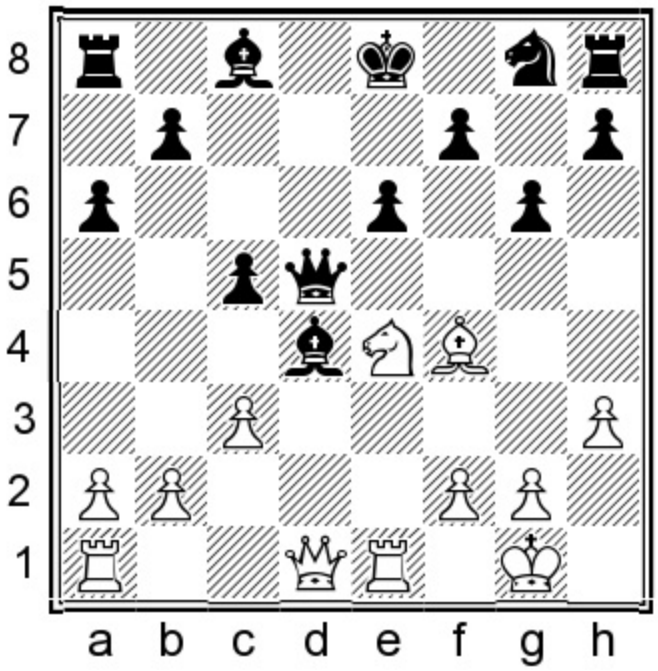
B) 12...♗xc3 Giving the bishop voluntarily seems like a one-way trip to a disaster. 13.bxc3 e6 14.♕f3 ♘e7 15.♗e5 f6 16.♕xf6 ♖f8 17.♕g7±

C) 12...e6? Black's dark-squares are far too weak here. 13.♘e4



Position after: 13.♘e4

13...d5 [13...♘e7 14.♕xd4!+– is important to note.] 14.♗xd5! ♕xd5 [14...exd5 15.♘xc5+] 15.c3 Once Black's d4-bishop is removed, his position will be indefensible.



Position after: 15.c3

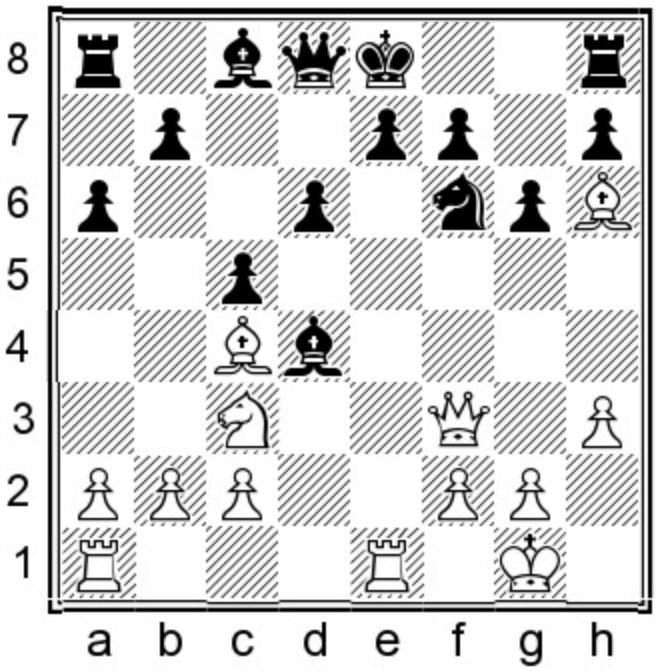
15...♗xf2+ [15...♗g7 of course loses after 16.♕xd5 exd5 17.♘f6+ ♔d8 18.♖e8#] 16.♔xf2 ♕xd1 17.♖axd1 f6 18.♘d6+ ♔e7 19.♘c4 e5 20.♘xe5! fxe5 21.♖xe5+ ♔f7 22.♖d8+–

D) 12...♘f6 13.♗d6!± An additional benefit of our 12th move.

13.♕f3 ♘f6

13...e6 14.♖ad1+–

14.♗h6!



Position after: 14.♗h6!

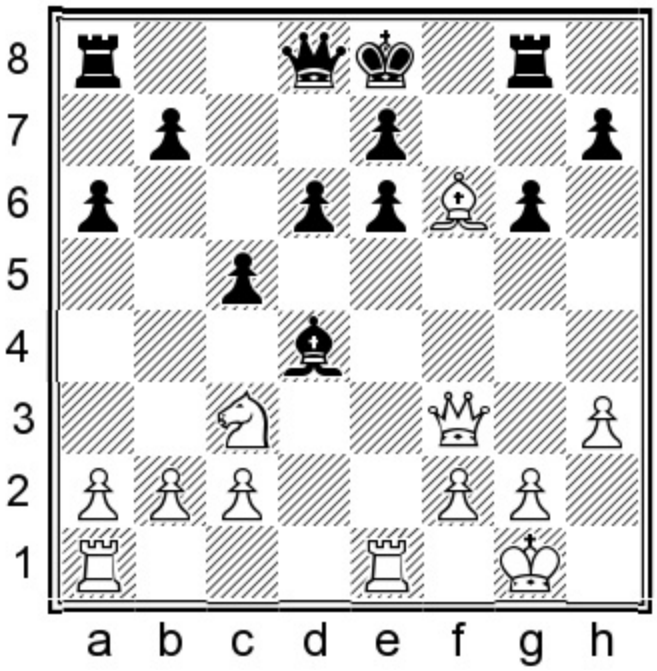
Black's only chance now is to put his king on the queenside, but this is a challenge in itself.

14...♗e6

A good practical decision, but the tactics still favour White.

14...e6 15.♖ad1 ♖g8 16.h4!± Preparing ♗g5, and once again Black is close to losing. [16.♗g5 h6 17.♗xh6? g5!∓]

15.♗xe6 fxe6 16.♗g7 ♖g8 17.♗xf6

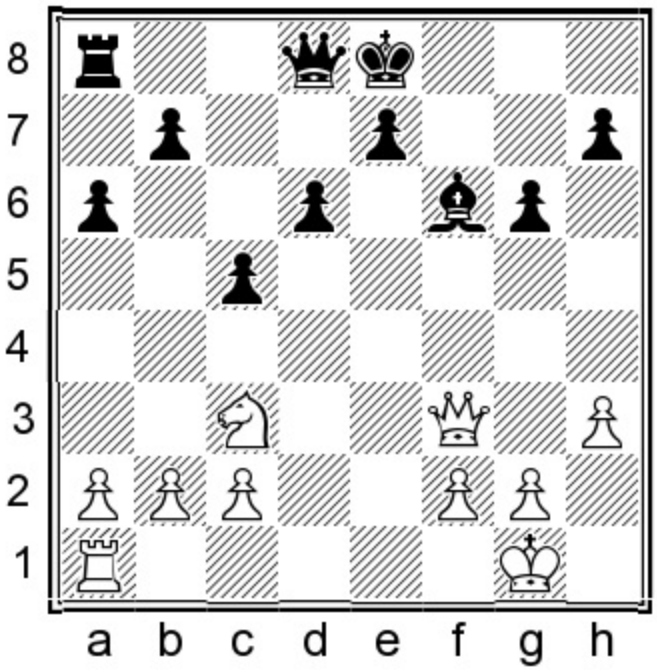


Position after: 17.♗xf6

17...♖f8!

17...♗xf6 invites more pressure after 18.♖xe6 ♖f8 19.♘d5 ♗xb2 20.♕e4 ♖f7 21.♖e1±

18.♖xe6 ♖xf6 19.♖xf6 ♗xf6



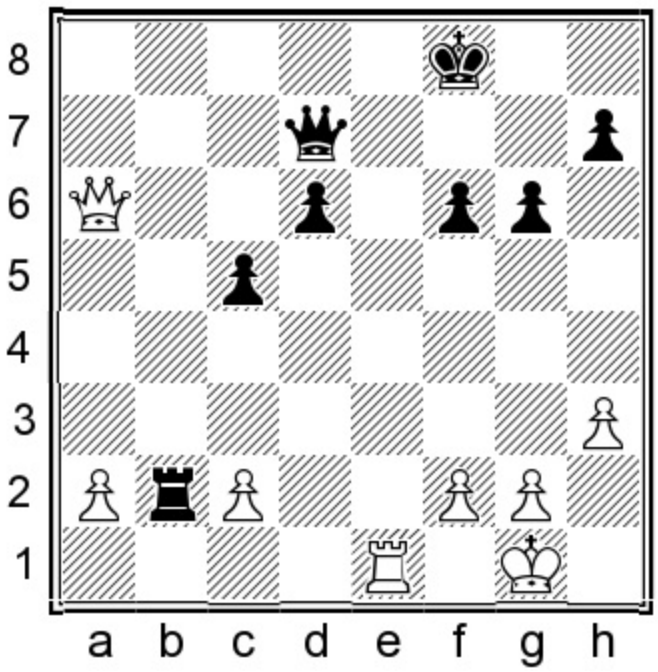
Position after: 19...♗xf6

After a pretty much forced line, White has reached a pleasant ending. Black has a greater amount of weaknesses, and problems with king safety. There are a couple of different ways we can continue.

20.♖e1!?

It's not mandatory to capture the b7-pawn, and we can look to develop threats in the centre.

20.♕xb7 This time, Black will try to hide his king on the kingside, but we'll once again maintain good prospects. 20...♔f8 [20...♖b8 21.♕xa6 ♖xb2 22.♘d5±] 21.♖e1 ♖b8 22.♕xa6 ♖xb2 23.♘e4 ♕d7 [23...♗e5 24.♘g5± Followed by something like ♕c4, or even f2-f4.] 24.♘xf6 exf6



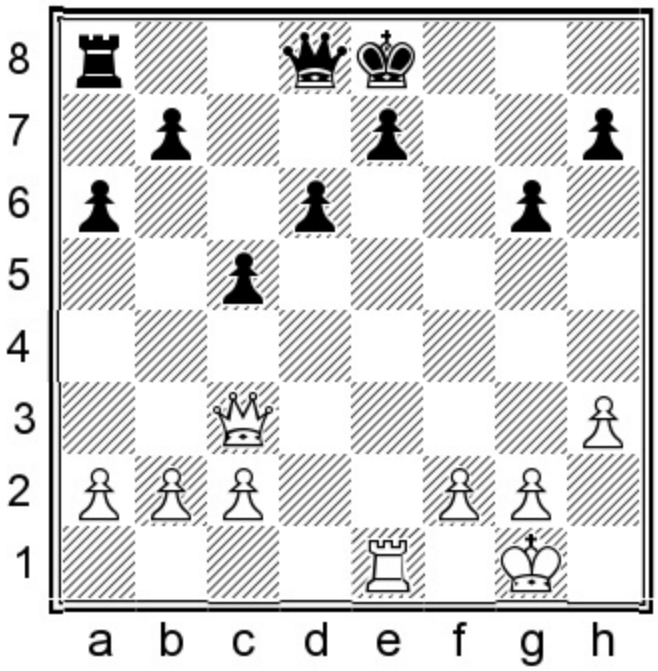
Position after: 24...exf6

The queen and rook ending, as always, is tricky for Black to defend. 25.♕c4 ♖b4 26.♕d5 ♖d4 27.♕f3 ♔g7 28.c3 ♖d2 29.♖a1±

20...♗xc3

20...♗e5 21.♕d5± followed by ♘e4 looks difficult for Black to deal with, as we will also threaten f2-f4 in some positions.

21.♕xc3



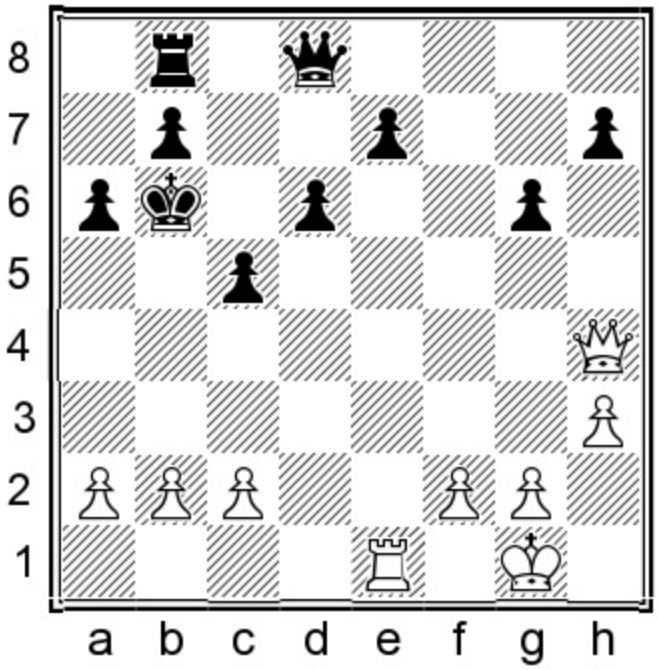
Position after: 21.♕xc3

With both major pieces still on the board, pawns are not as important as king safety.

21...♔d7 22.♕f3 ♖b8 23.♕g4+ ♔c6 24.♕a4+!

This time we will win our pawn back by force, whilst simultaneously maintaining both our queen and rook on the board, and thus pretty decent winning chances.

24...♔b6 25.♕h4±



Position after: 25.♕h4±

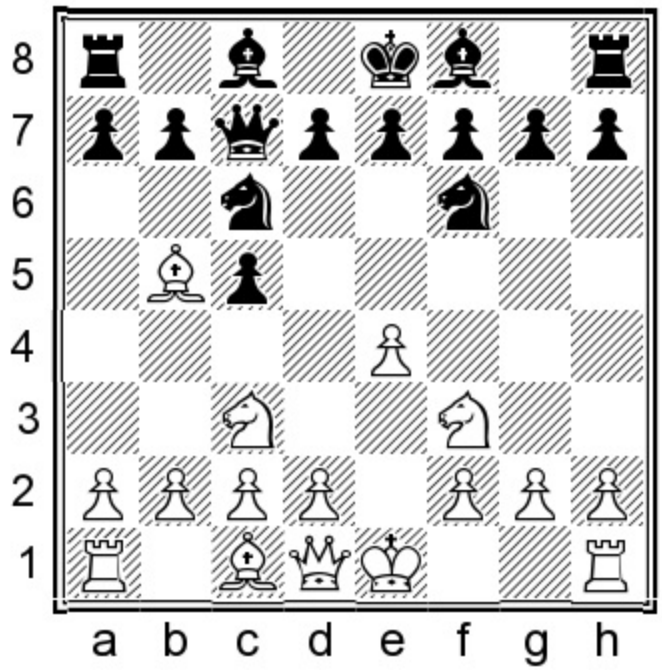
A great game was converted by White in Kaliev – Lukasova, ICCF email 2017.

Conclusion to Chapter 2 & 3

3...♘f6 is a tricky sideline which has been played numerous times to avoid the theoretical battlegrounds of 3...g6, 3...e6 and 3...d6. Despite this, if we do not respond accurately, Black will most likely achieve equality and potential counterplay with ease, so some memory work is advised. The key idea in all variations is to consistently create threats associated with e4-e5, attacking the knight on f6. In doing so, Black will constantly have to react to our possibilities, rather than concentrate on his own counterplay. The most important ideas to remember include 8.♕h5+ (Chapter 2, subchapter c) and the pawn sacrifice in the last two subchapters of Chapter 3, where we allow Black to capture on e5 after 7.0-0. If he accepts, we'll obtain an initiative which will make it hard for Black to keep the position stable. However, we have yet to examine Black's main continuation after 4.♘c3, which is 4...♕c7. For that, see the next chapter.

Chapter 4
4.♘c3 ♕c7

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♕c7



Chapter Guide

Chapter 4 – 4.♘c3 ♕c7

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♕c7 5.d3!?

a) 5...--

b) 5...♘d4

c) 5...d6 6.0-0 e6 7.♗xc6+

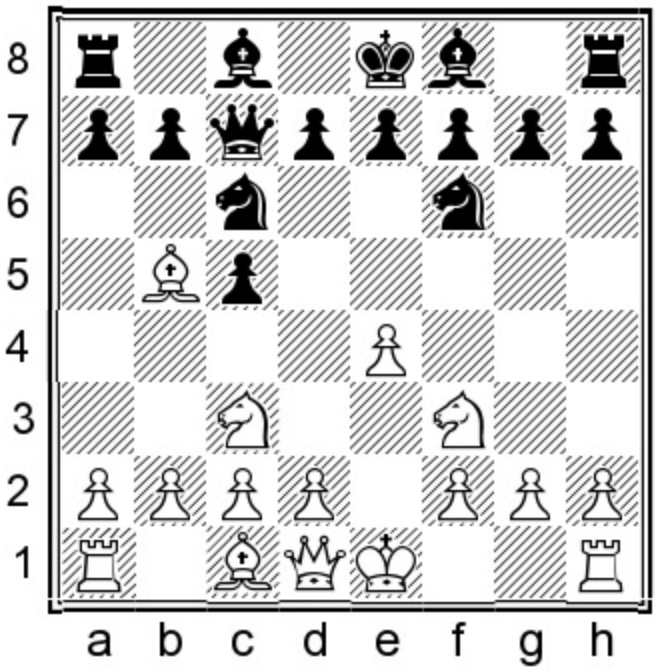
d) 5...d6 6.0-0 e6 7.♗g5!? ♗d7

e) 5...d6 6.0-0 e67.♗g5!? ♘d7!?

f) 5...d6 6.0-0 e6 7.♗g5!? ♗e7

a) 5...--

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♕c7

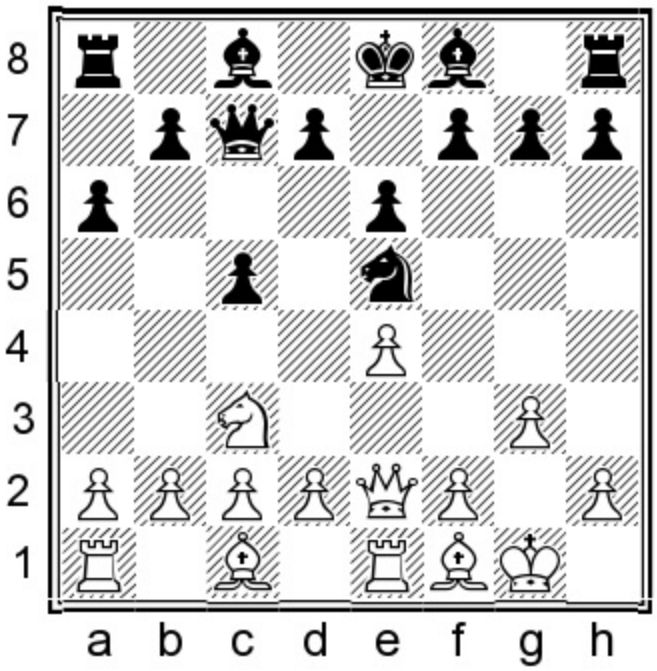


Position after: 4...♕c7

The main move, and most logical, in this position. Black retains control over the e5 square, as well as acquiring the option to possibly recapture on c6 with his queen.

5.d3!?

5.0-0 has been the more popular choice. The reason that I prefer 5.d3 is because White retains more options. For example, the pawn on d3 secures the e4 square – meaning that ♗xc6 followed by e4-e5 and ♘c3-e4 is a continuous idea. Furthermore, as the variations will show, having the ability to play an early ♗f4 or ♗g5 can be really significant. The mainline after 5.0-0 offers Black the ability to simplify things a little too much for my liking: 5...♘d4 6.♖e1 a6 7.♗f1 ♘g4! 8.g3 ♘xf3+ 9.♕xf3 ♘e5 10.♕e2 e6



Position after: 10...e6

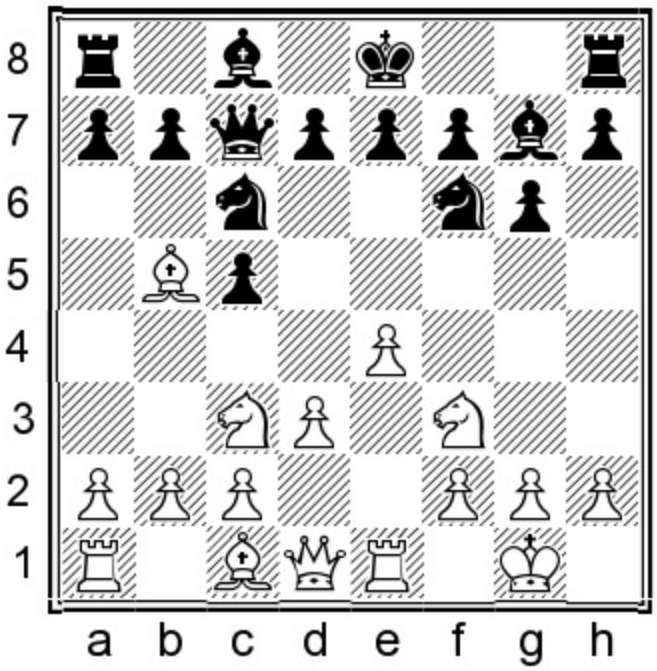
Sergei Zhigalko has played this numerous times with Black, with pretty decent results. In general, it feels like we aren't fully testing Black. In my opinion, 5.d3 offers more interesting ideas and has value in that it hasn't been played as much.

5...e6?!

Typically, we can punish this move with ♗xc6, e4-e5 and ♘e4.

A) 5...d6 is analysed in the remainder of the chapter.

B) 5...g6 This is similar to the line 4...g6 5.h3 ♕c7, except that we've pushed d2-d3 instead of h2-h3. I will quickly outline the various approaches to take against Black's respective options. 6.0-0 ♗g7 7.♖e1

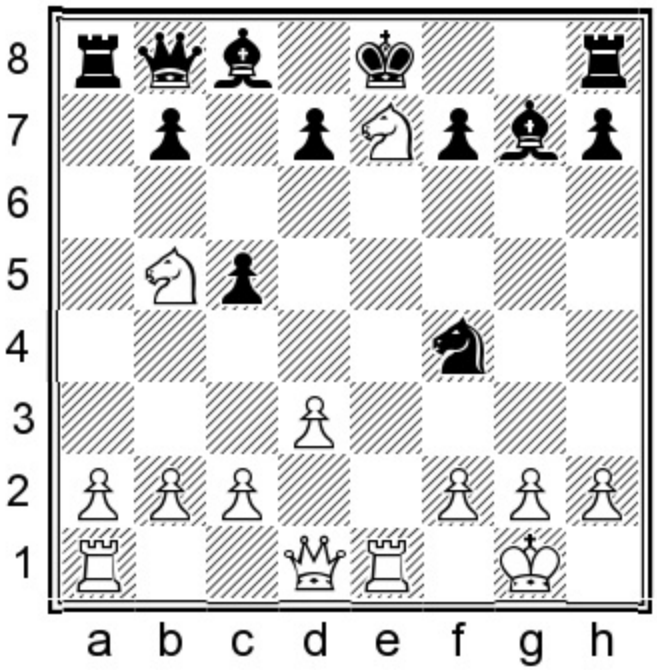


Position after: 7.♖e1

B1) 7...d6 8.e5! dxe5 9.♘xe5 0-0 10.♗xc6 bxc6 11.♕e2±

B2) 7...e5!? 8.♗g5 d6 The position should be analysed further by the reader, as White ran into trouble in Di Berardino – Pichot, Montevideo 2018. A solid improvement seems to be 9.a4 to expand on the queenside. After capturing on f6 at the right moment, White can continue with ♘d5, ♗c4 and c2-c3 followed by b2-b4.

B3) 7...a6 8.e5! An important move. 8...♘xe5 [8...♘g4 9.♗xc6 dxc6 10.♗f4 ♗e6 11.♕d2+– White was already positionally winning in Milliet – Umudova, Dresden 2008.] 9.♘xe5 axb5 10.♘xb5 ♕b8 11.♗f4 ♘h5 12.♘xg6! ♘xf4 13.♘xe7

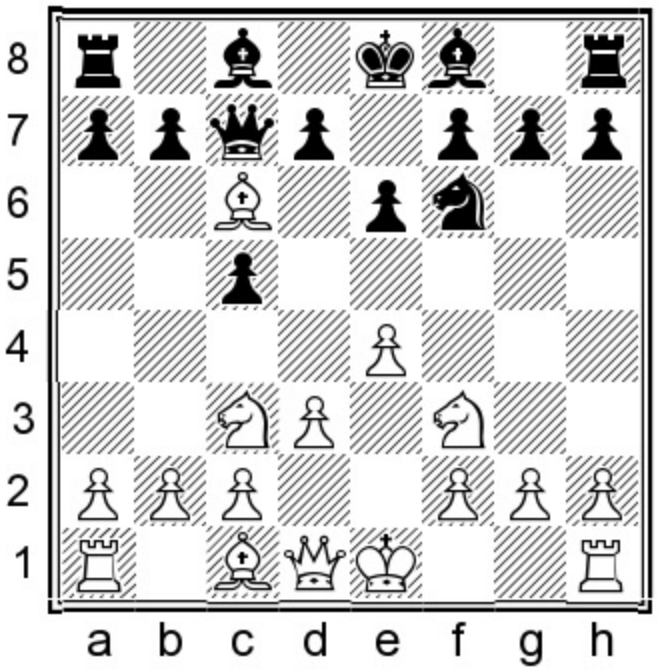


Position after: 13.♘xe7

The piece sacrifice has clearly worked for White, as we're crushing through the centre. 13...♔f8 14.♕f3+–

C) 5...e5 Once again, it feels like White should be able to claim an edge here due to the control of the d5-square, and can start for example with 6.♗g5±.

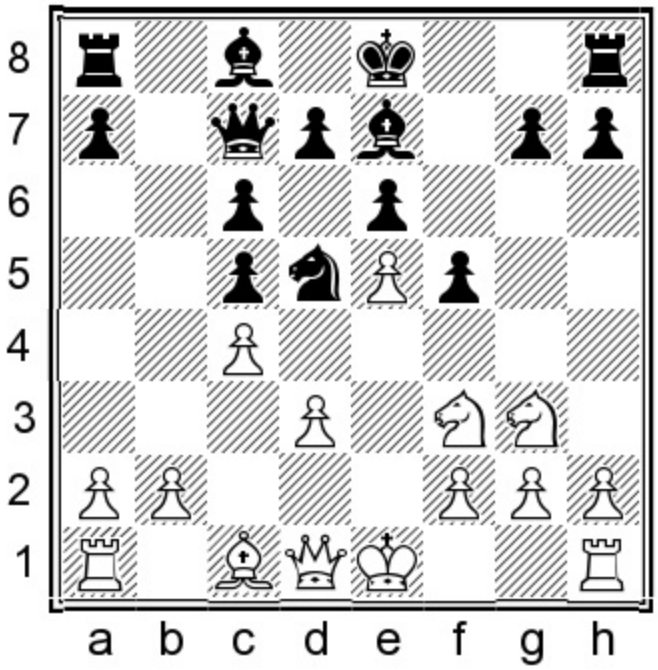
6.♗xc6!



Position after: 6.♗xc6!

6...♕xc6

A) 6...bxc6 7.e5 ♘d5 [7...♘g4?! 8.♗f4 f6 9.♘e4 fxe5 10.♘xe5 ♘xe5 11.♕h5++– The tactics favour White.] 8.♘e4 f5 9.♘g3 ♗e7 10.c4±

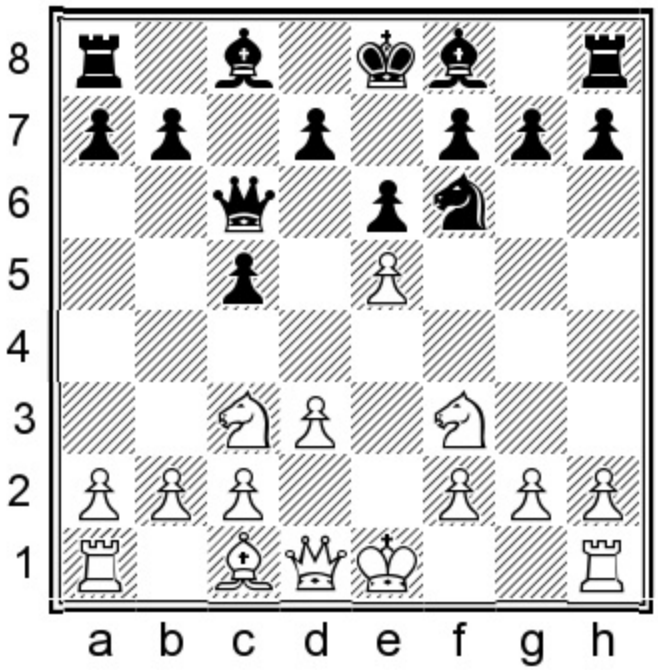


Position after: 10.c4±

The only way Black will ever develop his c8-bishop is by moving the d-pawn, in which case he'll incur positional weaknesses. In the meantime, White can continue to play on both sides of the board, targetting the c5-pawn or even trying to exchange the dark-squared bishops.

B) 6...dxc6? This is, as always, positionally losing for Black. 7.e5 ♘d7 8.♗f4±

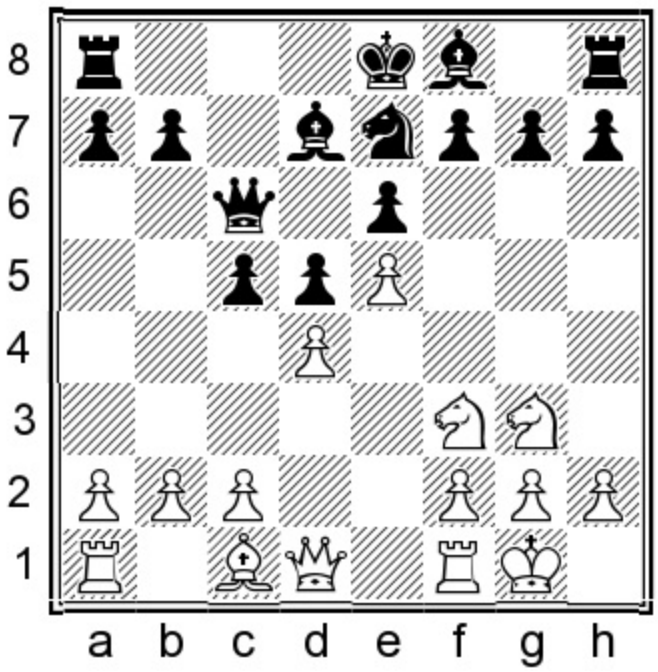
7.e5



Position after: 7.e5

7...♘d5

7...♘g8!? seems like the type of move that I would play. 8.♘e4 d5 9.♘g3! [9.exd6 ♗xd6 doesn't seem to cause Black any difficulties.] 9...♗d7 10.0-0 ♘e7 11.d4!

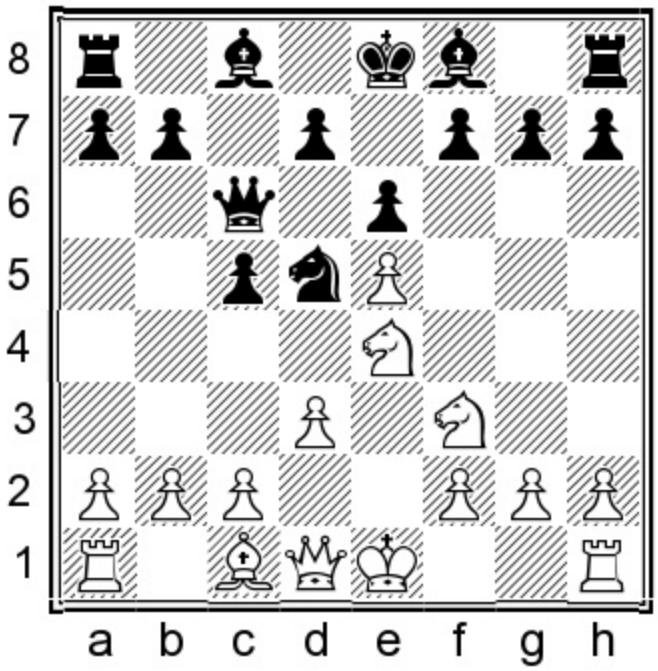


Position after: 11.d4!

This might seem like a perfectly fine French structure for Black, and it's definitely playable.

However, I think White has the better chances. It's important to remember to recapture on d4 with a piece rather than a pawn (or even capturing on c5 ourselves before placing a minor piece on d4). We should also think about playing on both sides of the board. The removal of dark-squared bishops will obviously suit us and, in general, Black probably has to take a lot of caution in a position in which he'd ideally like to activate his pieces as quick as possible. 11...♕c7 12.♖e1 ♘c6 13.dxc5! ♗xc5 14.♘h5± This is one example of how things could go quickly wrong for Black.

8.♘e4



Position after: 8.♘e4

Here White's moves come very naturally, and Black has obvious positional weaknesses.

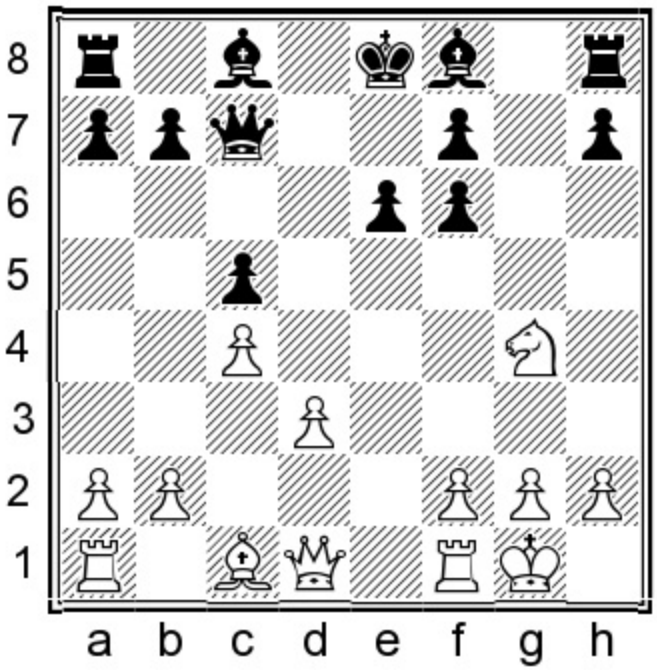
8...d6

A) 8...♗e7 9.c4 ♘c7 [9...♘b6 10.b3± The b6-knight is completely out of play, and an attack on the kingside looks to be very effective.] 10.0-0± Invariably, Black's knight is completely mislocated to deal with an impending kingside attack.

B) 8...b5 Developing the c8-bishop won't really solve Black's kingside problems. 9.0-0 ♗b7 10.♖e1 ♗e7 11.c4 bxc4 12.dxc4 ♘b6 13.♗g5+–

C) 8...f5? 9.exf6 ♘xf6 10.♘e5+–

9.0-0! dxe5 10.c4 ♘f6 11.♘xe5 ♕c7 12.♘xf6+ gxf6 13.♘g4



Position after: 13.♘g4

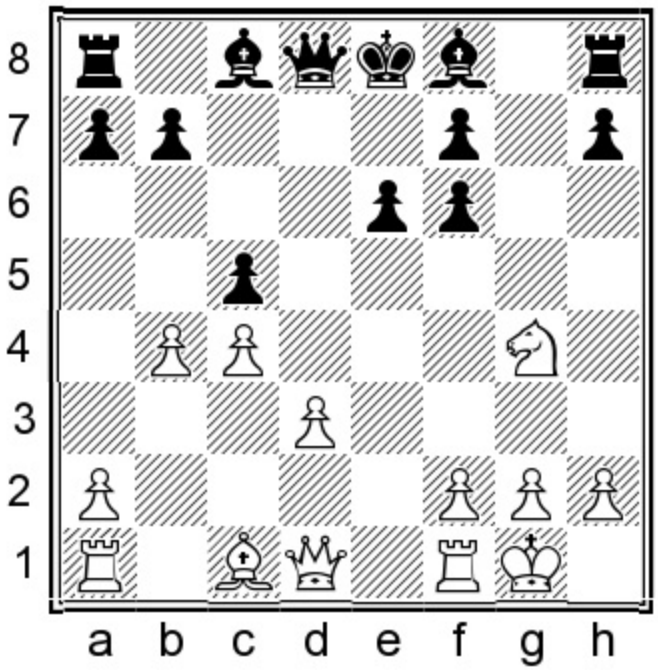
Kingside castling is obviously not a viable option for Black, but he also needs to find a way to protect his weak kingside pawns.

13...♕d8

A) 13...♗g7 14.♗h6! ♗xh6 15.♘xh6±

B) 13...♗e7 14.♕f3 ♕d8 15.♘h6±

14.b4!

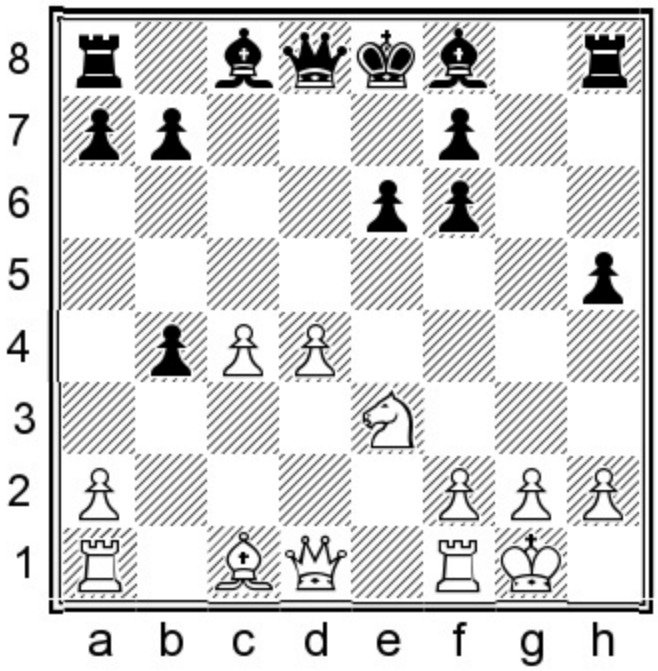


Position after: 14.b4!

14...h5

14...cxb4 15.♗b2 ♗g7 16.a3! bxa3 17.♖xa3± If Black castles kingside, we always have the cool idea of d3-d4 and a rook swing, or even ♕a1.

15.♘e3 cxb4 16.d4±

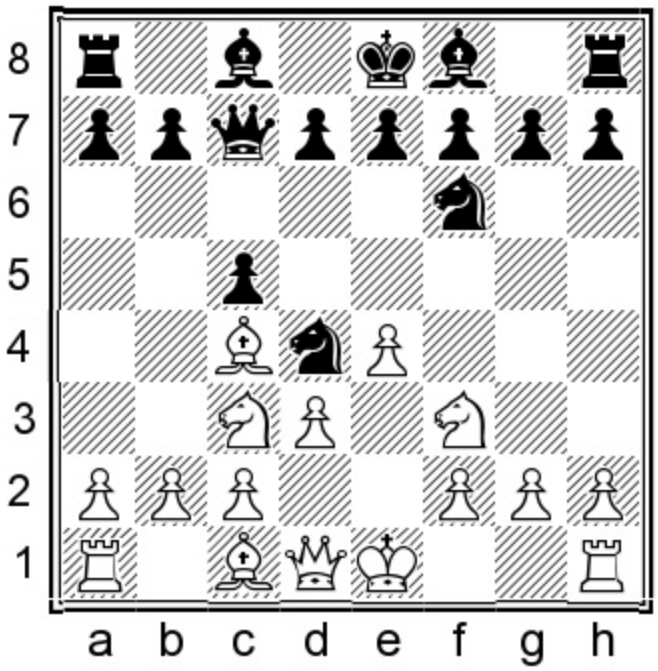


Position after: 16.d4±

Black still has numerous questions to answer, whereas White will look to create further threats across the board.

b) 5...♘d4

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♕c7 5.d3!? ♘d4 6.♗c4!



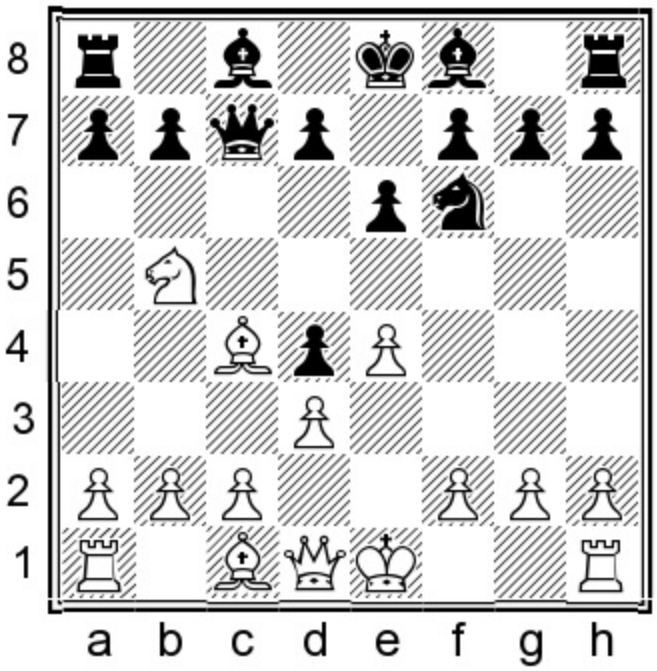
Position after: 6.♗c4!

Note that here our usual reply of e4-e5 isn't as suitable since the pawn drops with check, and placing the bishop on a4 has a defect that will become clear shortly.

6...a6

A better attempt than 6...e6, as Black prevents the annoying ♘b5.

A) 6...e6 7.♘xd4 cxd4 8.♘b5!

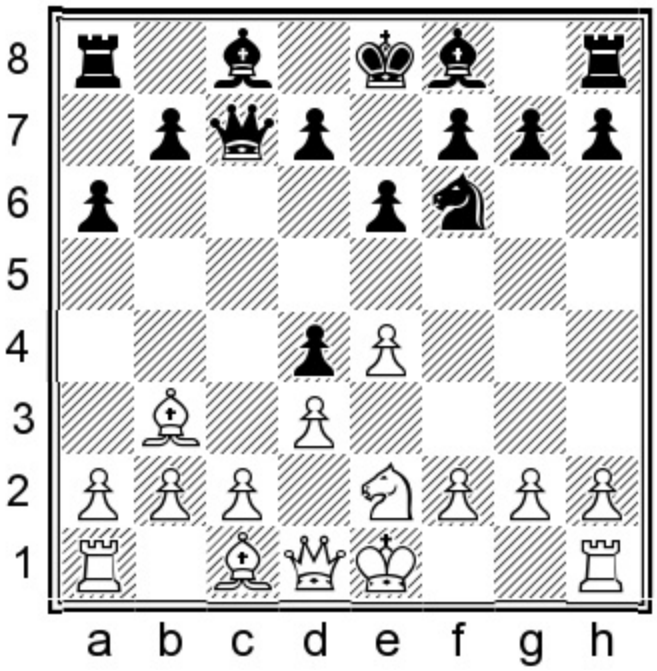


Position after: 8.♘b5!

Note that if we'd retreated the bishop to a4 on move 6 we would not now be able to meet 8...♕a5+ with 9.♗d2. 8...♕c5 [8...♕b6 9.c3 dxc3 10.♘xc3 d6 11.0-0 ♗e7 12.♗e3 ♕a5 13.d4± Voiculescu – Staniszewski, ICCF email 2013.] 9.c3 d5 [9...dxc3 10.♘xc3 ♗e7 11.0-0 0-0 12.♗b3± Followed by d3-d4.] 10.b4! ♕e7 11.♗b3 a6 [11...dxc3 12.e5! is an important point.] 12.♘xd4 dxe4 13.dxe4 ♘xe4 14.0-0 Black's queen hinders his development, and as a result his position is already lost.

B) After 6...d6 7.♘xd4 cxd4 8.♘b5 ♕b6 9.c3± White had an easy game in Kurnosov – Muzychuk, Warsaw 2009.

7.♘xd4 cxd4 8.♘e2 e6 9.♗b3!



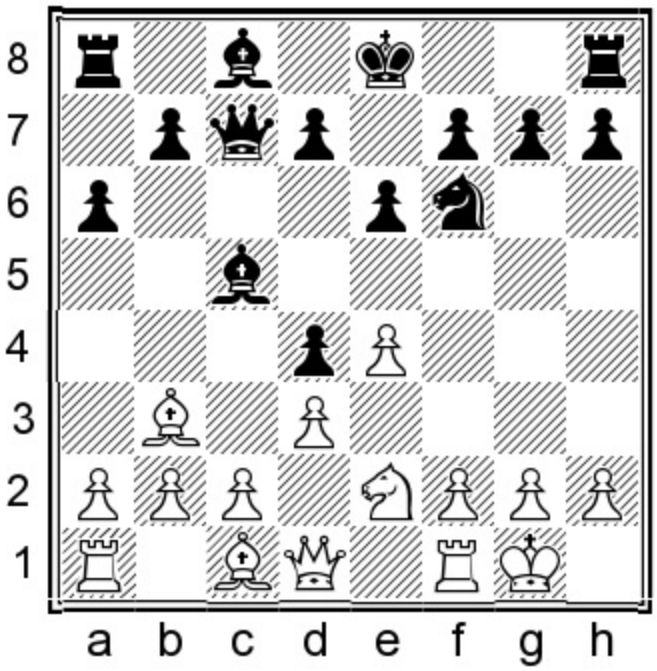
Position after: 9.♗b3!

Avoiding the subtle threat of ... ♘xe4.

9...♗c5

9...♗b4+ I'm not particularly concerned about trading dark-squared bishops. 10.♗d2 ♗xd2+ 11.♕xd2± We can choose whether to play on the kingside, or just open the c-file at our leisure. An exemplary White victory can be seen in the game Voiculescu – Ilyasov, ICCF email 2013.

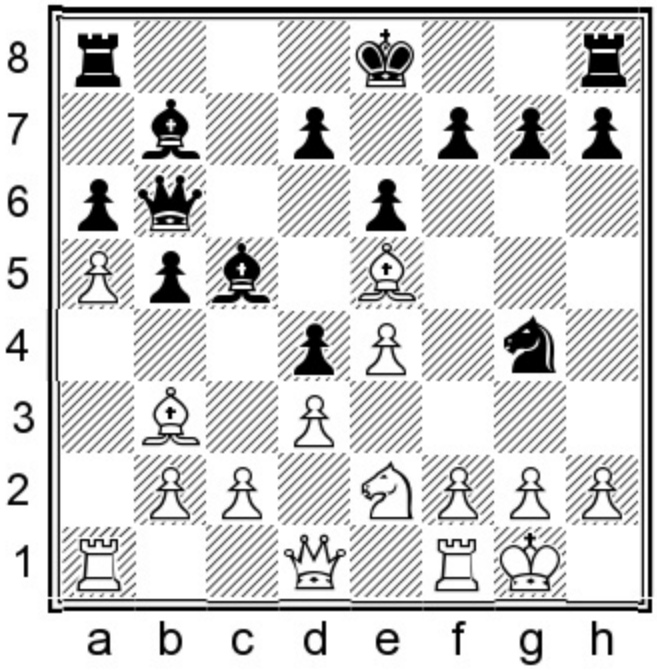
10.0-0



Position after: 10.0-0

10...d5

10...b5 Favoured in all correspondence games, but the resulting positions are still unpleasant for Black to face. 11.♗f4 ♕b6 12.a4 ♗b7 13.♗e5 ♘g4 14.a5!



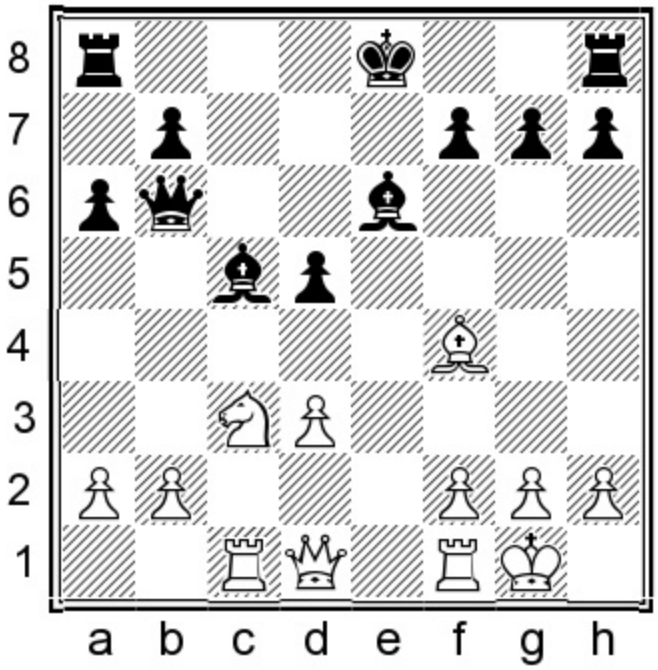
Position after: 14.a5!

A clever intermediate move, before re-focusing our attention towards kingside prospects. 14...♕a7

15.♗f4 0-0 16.♘g3 ♘f6 17.♗g5→

11.♗f4!

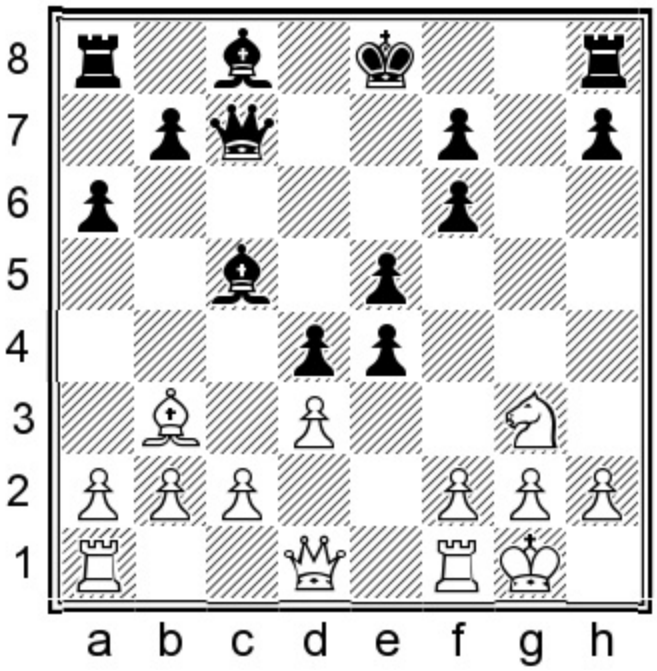
11.exd5 ♘xd5 12.♗xd5 exd5 13.♗f4 ♕b6 14.c3 dxc3 15.♘xc3 ♗e6 16.♖c1±



Position after: 16.♖c1±

This looks pretty unpleasant for Black.

11...e5 12.♗g5 dxe4 13.♗xf6 gxf6 14.♘g3!±



Position after: 14.♘g3!±

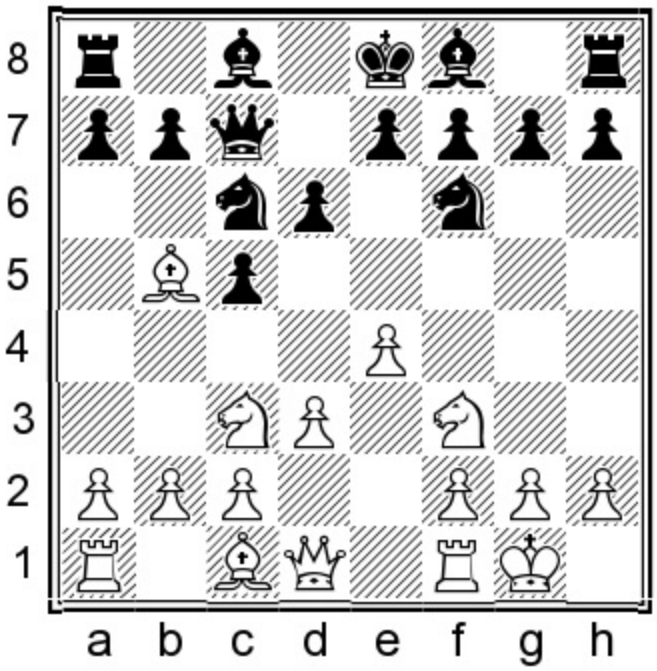
A clever way to increase Black's predicament.

c) 5...d6 6.0-0 e6 7.♗xc6+

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♕c7 5.d3!? d6

This is probably the most sensible move. Black isn't committing to ...e5 himself, whilst simultaneously preventing White from playing e5.

6.0-0

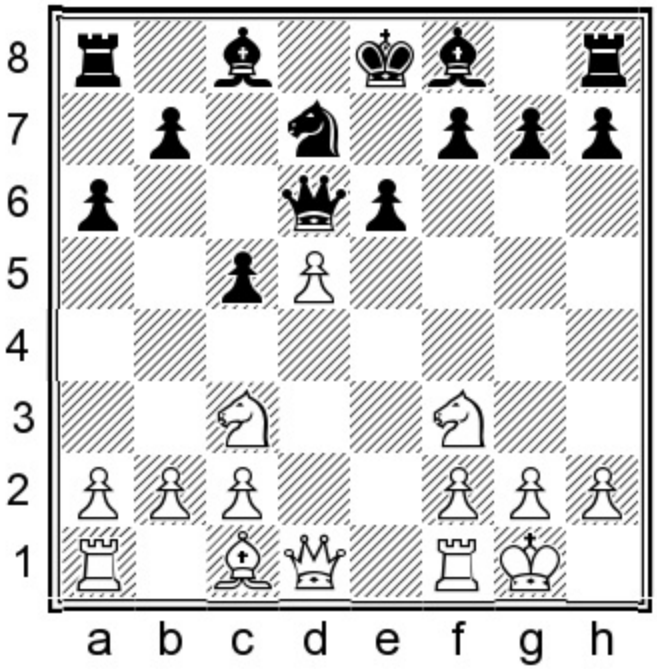


Position after: 6.0-0

6...e6

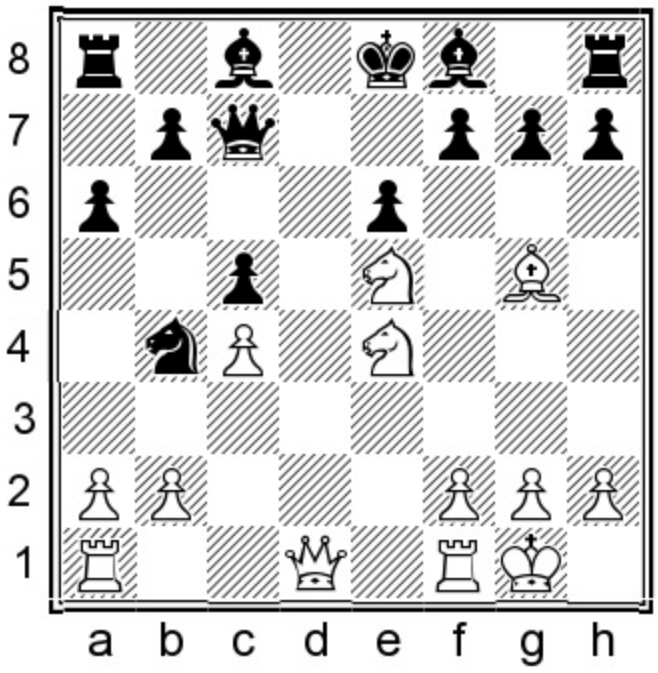
Leading to a critical juncture, at which I intend to present two options (7.♗xc6+ here, and 7.♗g5 in the remaining subchapters.)

A) 6...a6?! This runs into a classic response. 7.♗xc6+ ♕xc6 [7...bxc6 8.e5! dxe5 9.♕e2 ♘d7 10.♖e1 f6 11.b3± Black is too far behind in development, and we can continue with ♘a4, ♗a3 and ♘d2 to attack the weak c5-pawn.] 8.e5 ♘d7 9.exd6 e6 10.d4 ♕xd6 11.d5!



Position after: 11.d5!

We don’t give Black any time to consolidate. 11...♘f6 12.♗g5! ♘xd5 [12...♗e7 13.♗xf6 ♗xf6 14.dxe6 ♕xd1 15.exf7+ ♔xf7 16.♖axd1±] 13.♘e4 ♕c7 14.c4 ♘b4 15.♘e5!

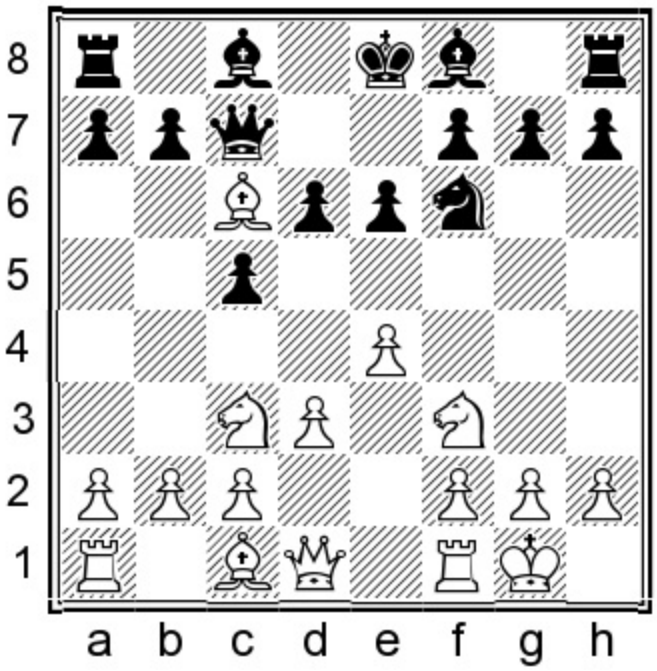


Position after: 15.♘e5!

White has fantastic compensation for the pawn, and the knights will cause all sorts of annoying threats, e.g. 15...b5 16.♗f4 ♗b7 17.♘g5±

B) 6...♗d7 7.♗g5 e6 transposes to 6...e6 7.♗g5 ♗d7 in the next subchapter, but White also has the option of 7.♘d5!? which compensates for the loss of 7.♗xc6 options.

7.♗xc6+

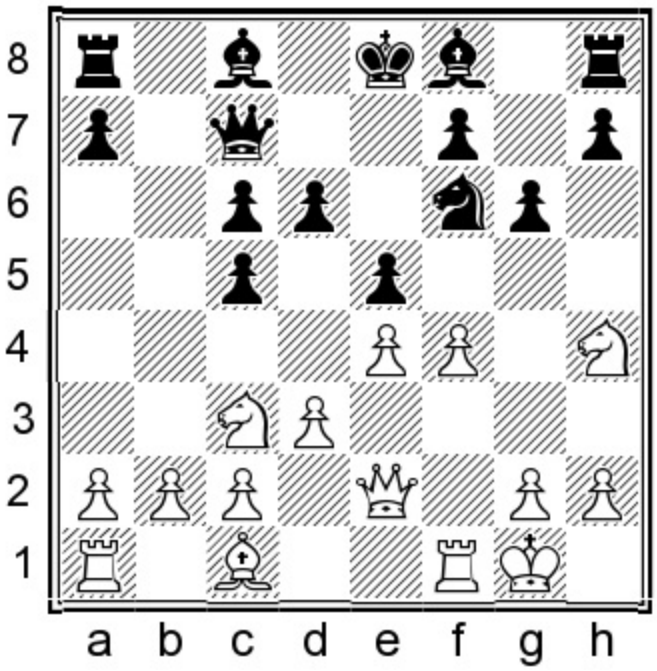


Position after: 7.♗xc6+

7...♕xc6

7...bxc6

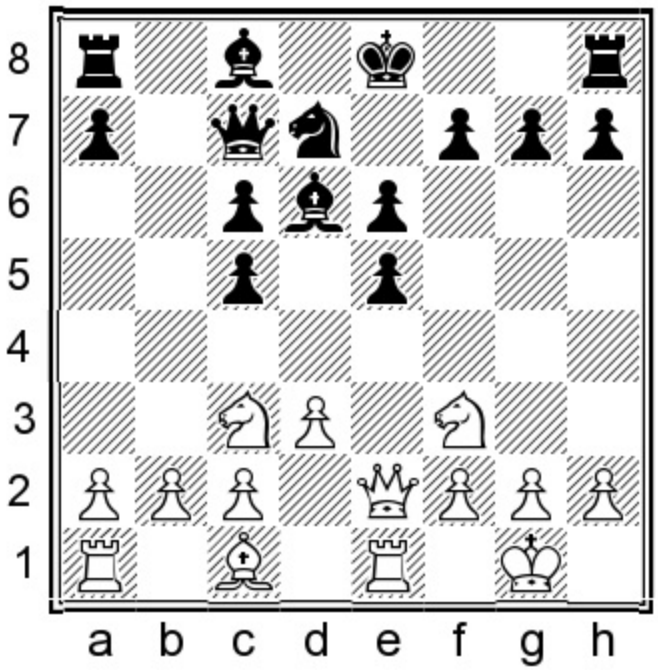
A) 8.♕e2 was the choice of Ernesto Inarkiev, and he achieved a nice advantage after 8...e5 9.♘h4 g6 10.f4±



Position after: 10.f4±

Inarkiev, E – Markos, J Aix les Bains 2011. However Black had the better option of 8...♘d7!, which is the reason why I am keen to play 8.e5 immediately.

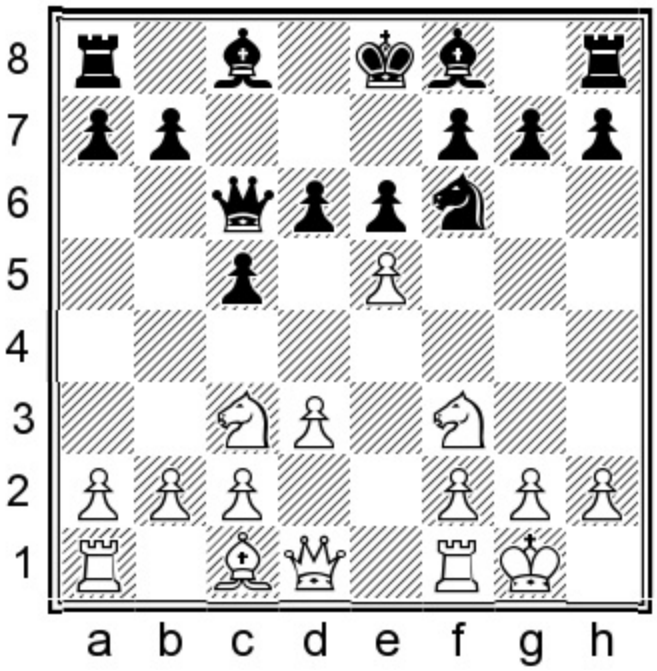
B) 8.e5!? This pawn sacrifice can rarely be bad; we are effectively ruining Black's pawn structure and practically his position will be difficult to play. 8...dxe5 9.♖e1 ♘d7 10.♕e2 ♗d6



Position after: 10...♗d6

Admittedly we're not getting our pawn back anytime soon, but we have more than enough compensation to make up for it. 11.♘g5 h6 12.♘ge4 ♗e7 13.♕g4 ♔f8 14.♕g3⩲

8.e5



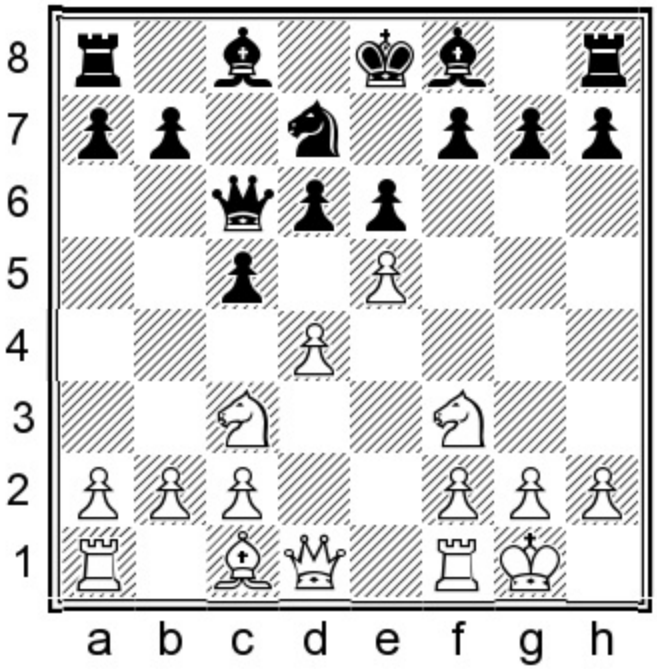
Position after: 8.e5

8...♘d7

A) 8...dxe5 9.♘xe5 ♕b6 10.♕f3± is evidently favourable for White.

B) 8...♘d5?! 9.♘e4 dxe5 10.c4 ♘f6 11.♘xe5 transposes to a line that we saw after 5...e6.

9.d4!



Position after: 9.d4!

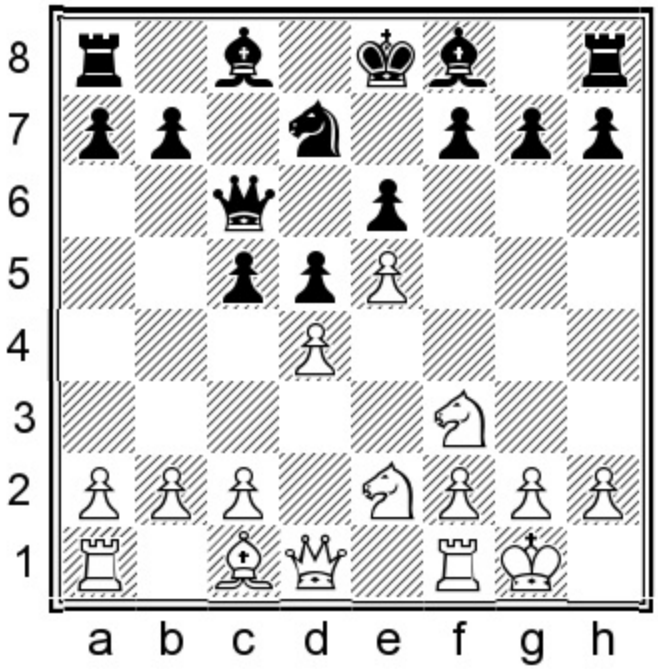
9...d5

We've reached another French structure, which generally is quite hard to judge. I know many people who would be very happy to have the Black pieces, given the unclear nature of the position. Despite that, we can still follow the same principles that I suggested in the French structure that we saw after 5...e6.

9...dxe5 10.♘xe5 ♘xe5 11.dxe5 b5 12.♕g4±

10.♘e2

I prefer to relocate our knight before making any pawn moves. Michael Adams started with 10.a4!?, and played a really instructive game against Sergei Zhigalko. 10...b6 11.♖e1 h6 12.♘e2 a6 13.h4 ♗b7 14.c3 c4? 15.a5!± Adams – Zhigalko, Rijeka 2010.

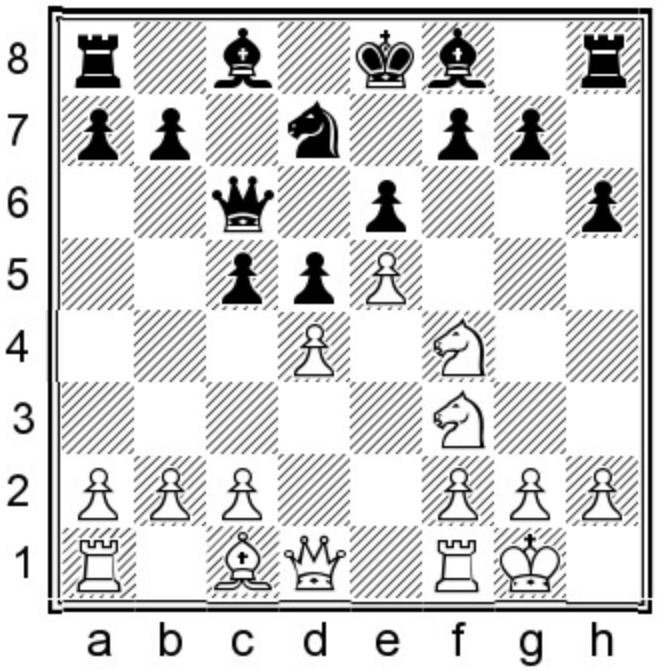


Position after: 10.♘e2

10...b6

A) 10...♗e7 11.♗g5!± Black generally wants to avoid the trade of these bishops.

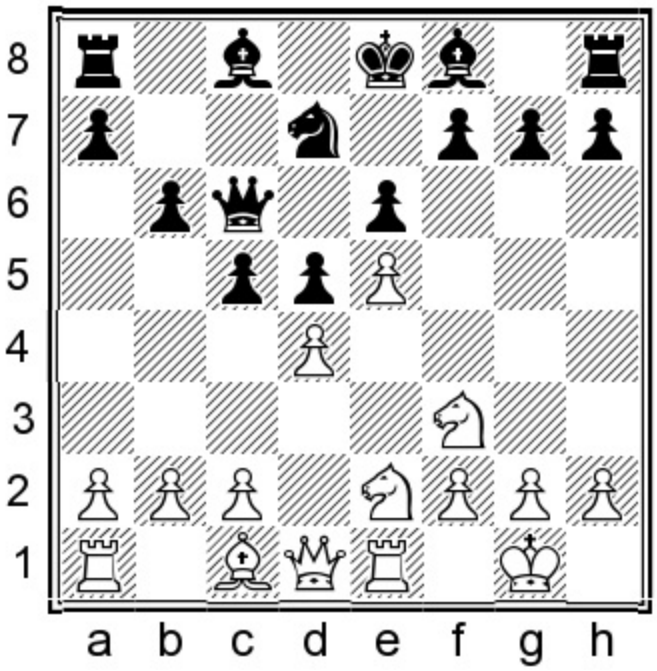
B) 10...h6 11.♘f4!



Position after: 11.♘f4!

The knight sits very well on the h5-square, and Black also needs to be wary of our possibility of c2-c4. 11...♗e7 [11...b6 12.c4!±] 12.♖e1 0-0 13.♘h5±

11.♖e1



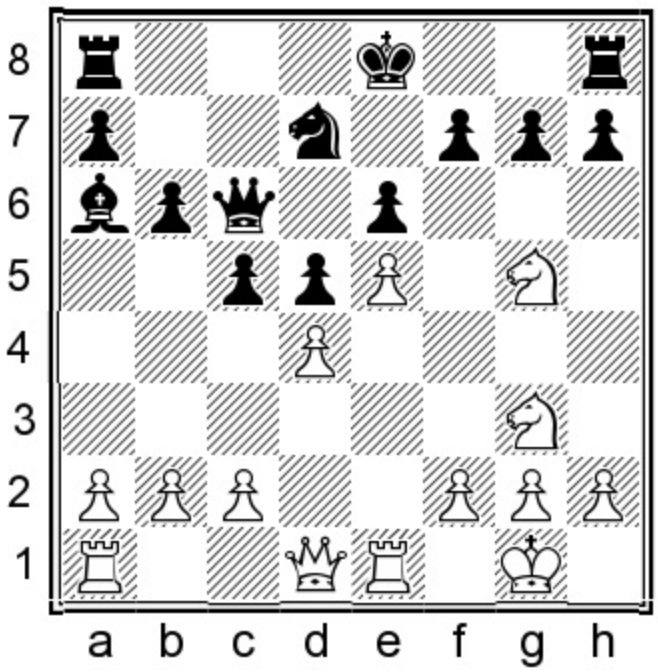
Position after: 11.♖e1

Black faces a tough choice about whether to allow a trade of dark-squared bishops, but he can't waste

too much time as we have an imposing central break on the cards.

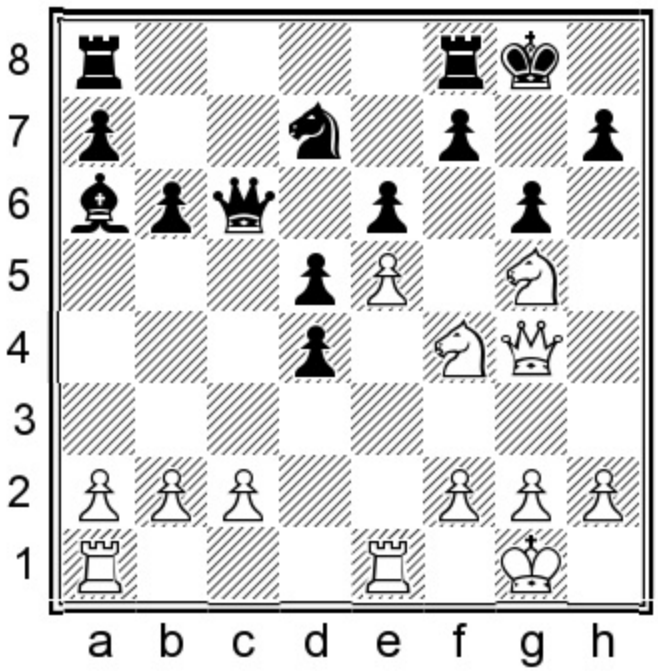
11...h6

A) 11...♗a6 12.♘g3 ♗e7 [12...h6 13.♘h5! g6 14.♘f6+ ♘xf6 15.exf6± Black will be suffering on the dark squares, and a4-a5 is a good follow-up.] 13.♗g5 ♗xg5 14.♘xg5



Position after: 14.♘xg5

A1) 14...cxd4? allows White to build up a dangerous attack. 15.♘h5 0-0 [15...g6 16.♘f6+ ♘xf6 17.exf6±] 16.♕g4 g6 17.♘f4→



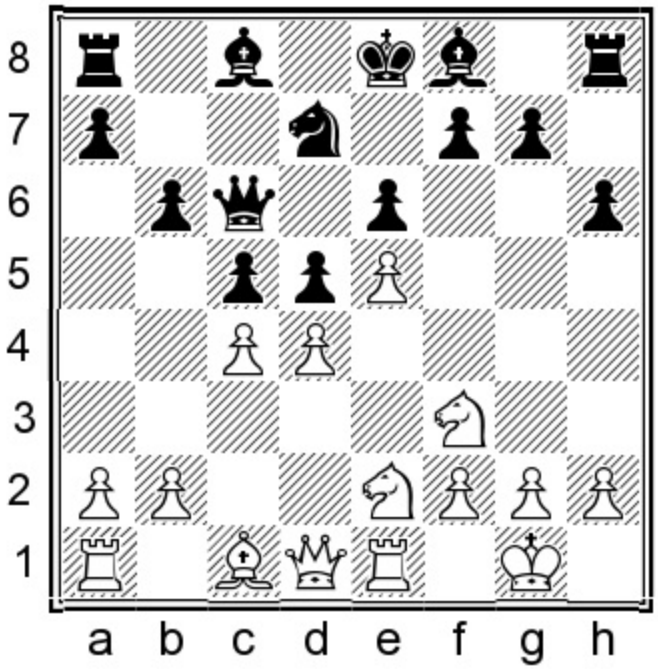
Position after: 17.♘f4→

Knight sacrifices are looming, and we can follow up with h4-h5 or even ♘e2xd4 to retrieve our pawn.

A2) 14...h6 15.♘f3± White has a crystal-clear edge, and plenty of scope to continue to outplay his opponent.

B) 11...♗e7 12.♗g5 ♗xg5 13.♘xg5 h6 14.♘f3±

12.c4!



Position after: 12.c4!

An important idea to remember in these positions. We can take advantage of Black's lack of development by springing a central break.

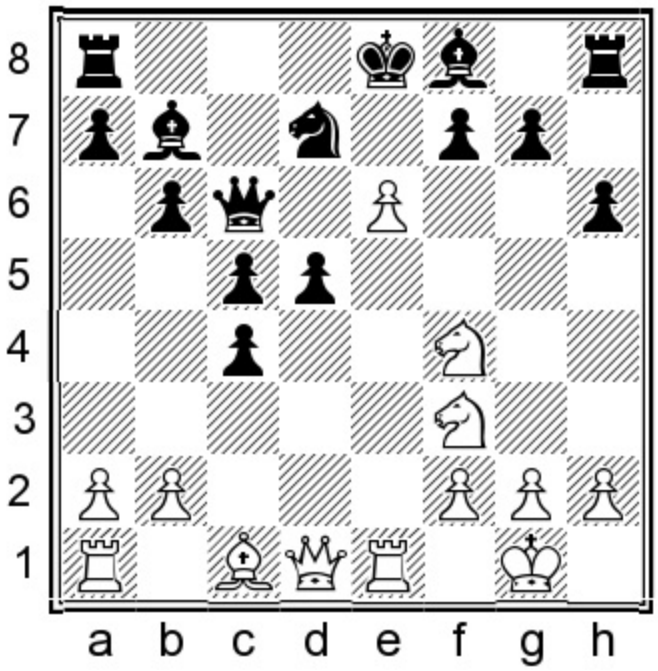
12...dxc4

12...♗e7 13.♘f4 0-0 14.cxd5 exd5 15.b3!± Black's pieces are incredibly uncoordinated to deal with White's activity.

13.♘f4 ♗b7

13...cxd4? 14.♘xd4+– Wherever the queen moves, a follow-up of ♘xe6 and ♕h5 will be decisive.

14.d5 exd5 15.e6



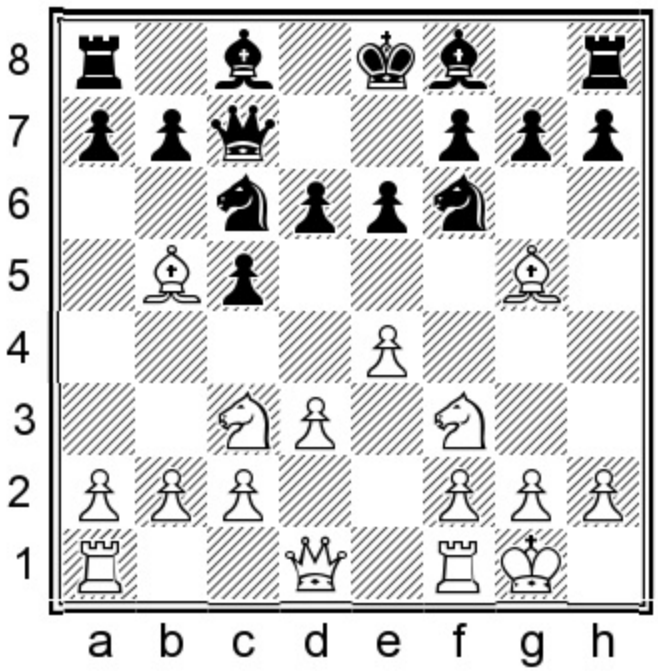
Position after: 15.e6

Black has to sacrifice a piece to escape the attack, but the resulting position is clearly advantageous for us.

15...0-0-0 16.exd7+±

d) 5...d6 6.0-0 e6 7.♗g5!? ♗d7

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♕c7 5.d3!? d6 6.0-0 e6 7.♗g5!?



Position after: 7.♗g5!?

The preference of email games, and also played twice by Yuriy Kryvoruchko. I really like this idea. The basic concept is that, if Black doesn't defend the knight, we will capture on f6 and delve into a Rauzer structure. As we will see, this will be very favourable for White.

If Black does defend the knight with ...♗e7, then a forthcoming e4-e5 push will ensure that Black has to capture on e5, rather than retreating ...♘d7 as he could in the line with 7.♗xc6.

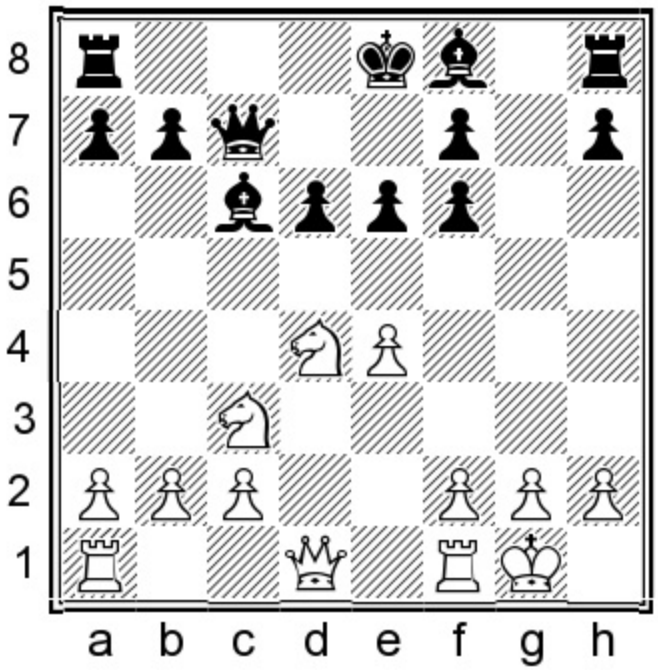
7...♗d7

The other logical moves I will consider are 7...♗e7 and 7...♘d7.

8.♗xc6 ♗xc6 9.♗xf6

9.e5 ♘d7! is Black's idea.

9...gxf6 10.d4 cxd4 11.♘xd4



Position after: 11.♘xd4

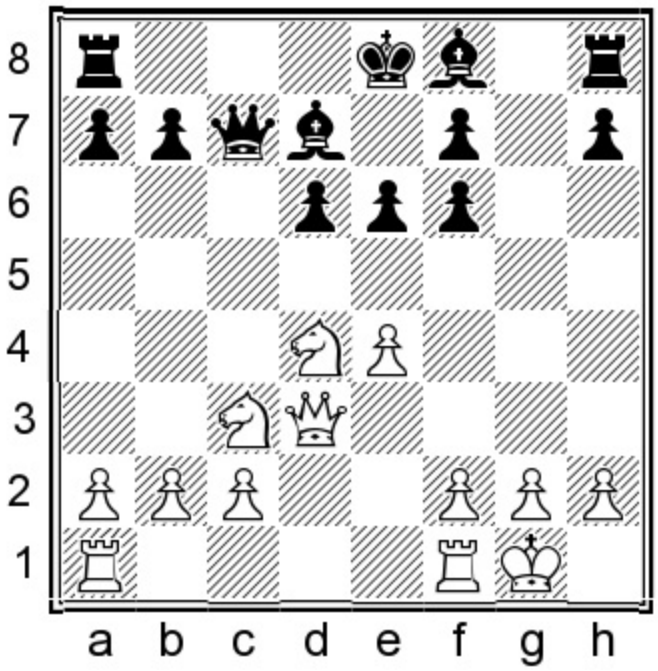
On first glance, one might be quite happy with Black's position. In Rauzer-type positions, Black is happy to have the bishop-pair, and White hasn't begun his usual f4-f5 plan yet. However, there are a couple of crucial differences compared to a typical Rauzer position. Firstly, instead of having just one knight combined with a light-squared bishop, White has two knights. The combination of these two knights against the two bishops makes it really difficult for Black to contest the powerful knight on d4. More importantly, we have castled kingside instead of queenside, after having already captured on f6 and ensuring that Black has doubled f-pawns. This means that when Black does eventually

castle queenside, we will be free to push our pawns on the queenside and launch an attack. Once you start looking deeply at the position, it is actually very unpleasant for Black.

11...h5

This makes sense as Black doesn't really want to allow the possibility of ♕h5.

A) 11...♗d7 12.♕d3 [12.♕h5 ♕c5! Black would ideally like to trade queens.]

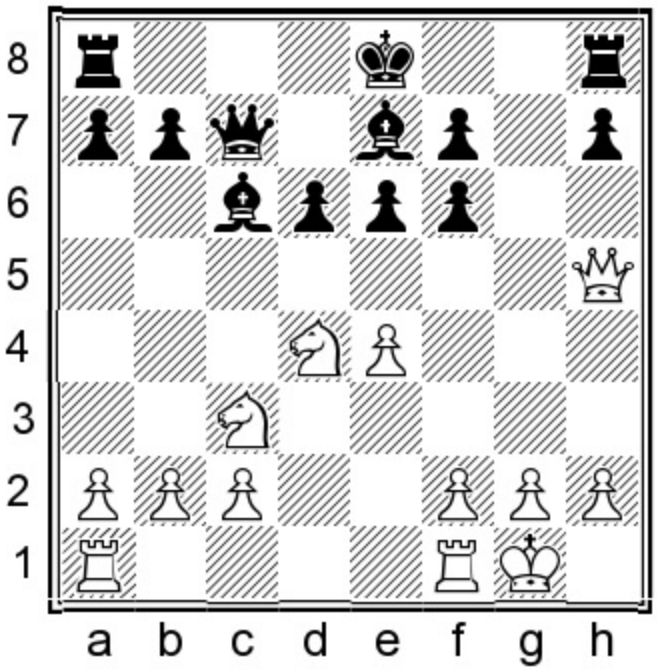


Position after: 12.♕d3

A1) 12...a6 Black may want to prevent ♘b5, but now he has created a target on a6 for White to attack: 13.♖ab1!± and now if Black castles queenside, then the plan is obvious (b4-b5 etc.), while otherwise we will play ♔h1 and f4, and attack the centre.

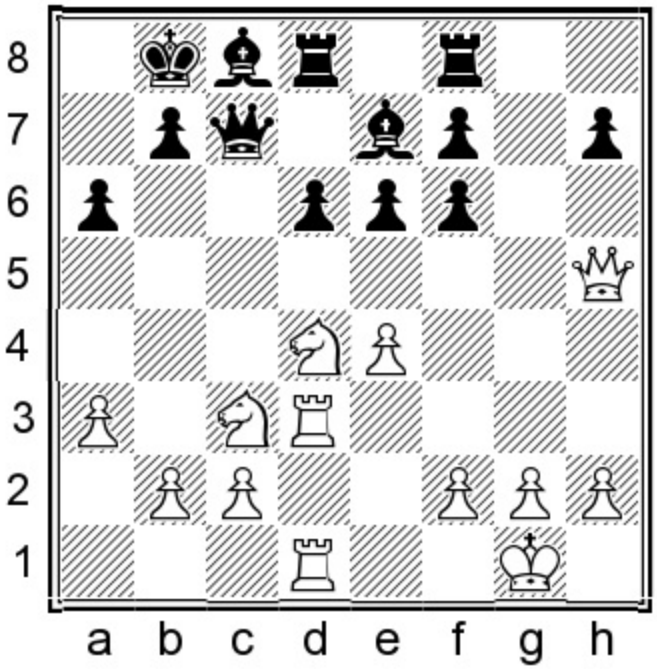
A2) 12...0-0-0 13.♘db5 ♕b6 [13...♕c5 14.b4! ♕b6 15.♖ab1 ♖g8 16.a4→] 14.♖ad1 ♗c6 15.a4± The b2-b4 push is on the cards, and our attack is much quicker.

B) 11...♗e7?! 12.♕h5!



Position after: 12.♕h5!

Black is forced to waste time protecting the f7-pawn before he castles queenside. 12...♗d7 13.♘b3 ♖f8 [13...0-0-0 14.♕xf7±] 14.♖ad1 0-0-0 15.♖d3 ♔b8 16.♖fd1 ♗c8 17.a3 a6 18.♘d4± We can play slowly here.

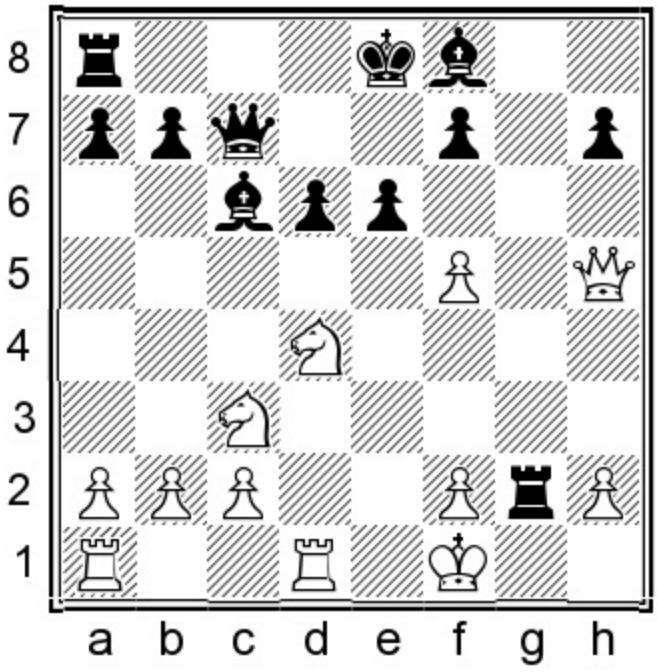


Position after: 18.♘d4±

We always have an eye on whether we can ever capture on h7, and simultaneously we have other plans of ♖g3-g7, or ♔h1 and f4-f5. In general, we have a lot of options, whereas it is really difficult

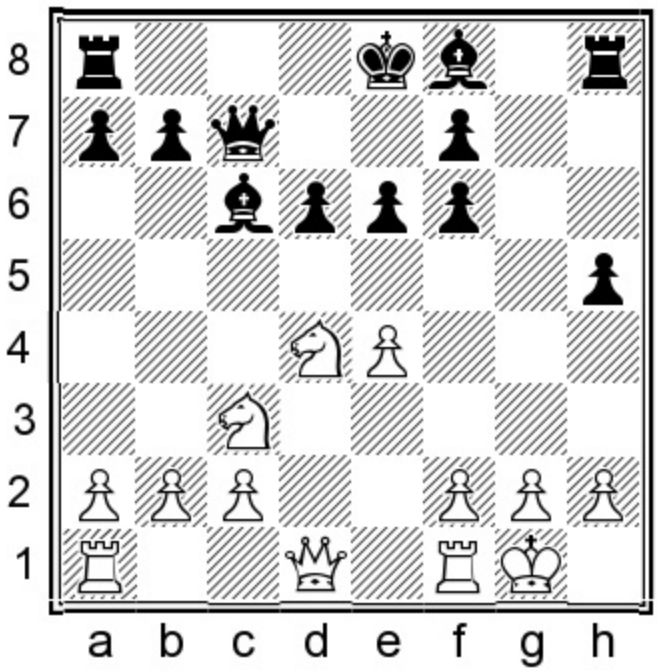
to find any kind of plan for Black that doesn't create weaknesses.

C) 11...♖g8 We should also check what to do if Black delays castling and tries to utilise the open g-file. 12.♕h5! ♖g6 [12...0-0-0 13.♘db5!± Black will lose a pawn.] 13.♖fd1 f5? It appears as though Black is relinquishing himself of his doubled pawns, but we can rise to the challenge. 14.exf5! ♖xg2+ 15.♔f1



Position after: 15.♔f1

Black's attack is far less dangerous than it looks, and he is the one in trouble as we have multiple threats here, e.g. 15...0-0-0 16.♘xc6 ♕xc6 17.♘b5! ♔b8 18.♘d4 ♕d5 19.c4 ♕e4 20.f3+–



Position after: 11...h5

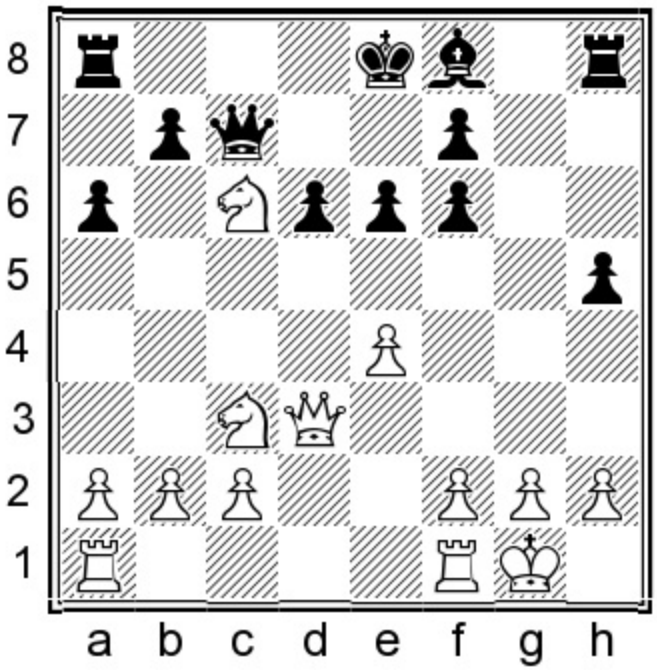
12.♕d3

12.♘xc6 was successfully played in Kryvoruchko – Zhigalko, Wroclaw 2011, but there's no rush to capture the bishop.

12...a6

12...♗d7 Black can't retain his c6-bishop as the d6-pawn is too weak. 13.♘db5 ♕b6 14.♖fd1 0-0-0 15.♘xd6+ ♗xd6 16.♕xd6 ♗c6 17.♕e7 ♕xb2 18.♕xf6±

13.♘xc6



Position after: 13.♘xc6

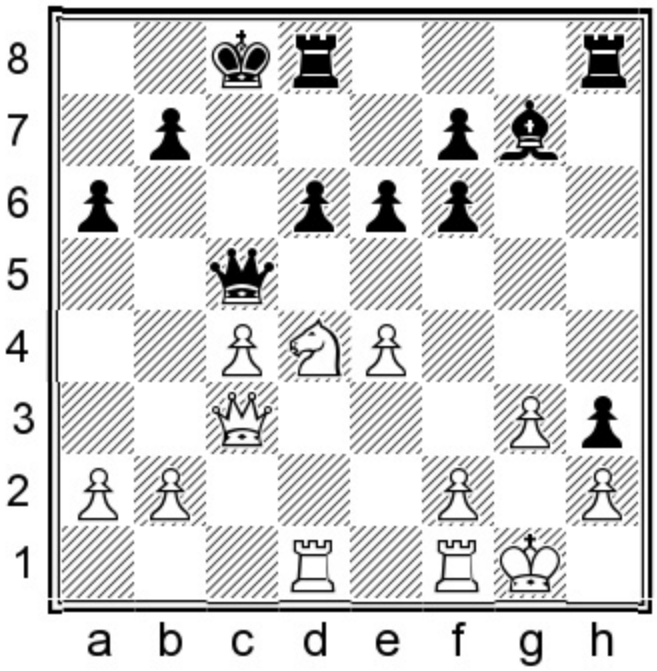
13...♕xc6

13...bxc6 In this case Black signals that he's not castling, meaning that we should attack the centre. It's also important to note how this is an improvement on the Kryvoruchko game, as Black's pawn is on a6 rather than a7. 14.f4 h4 15.f5 h3 16.gxh3±

14.♘e2! h4

14...♖g8 15.♘d4 ♕c5 16.♖ad1 0-0-0 17.♕e2!± Followed by something like ♖d3 and ♖ad1. Placing a rook on the third rank will be effective in both attack and defence.

15.♘d4 ♕c5 16.♖ad1 h3 17.g3 0-0-0 18.c4! ♗g7 19.♕c3!±

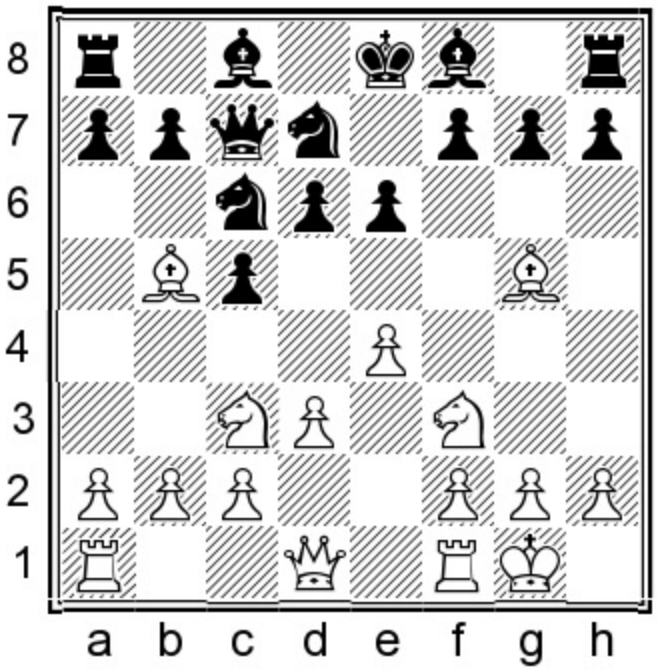


Position after: 19.♕c3!±

Our kingside is very solid, and we can continue making progress on the queenside with b2-b4.

e) 5...d6 6.0-0 e67.♗g5!? ♘d7!?

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♕c7 5.d3!? d6 6.0-0 e6 7.♗g5!? ♘d7!?



Position after: 7...♘d7!?

Black removes the possibility of both capturing on f6 and playing e4-e5, but it seems a bit artificial and hasn't been tried in an over-the-board game yet. We can continue playing normal moves and trying to break in the centre.

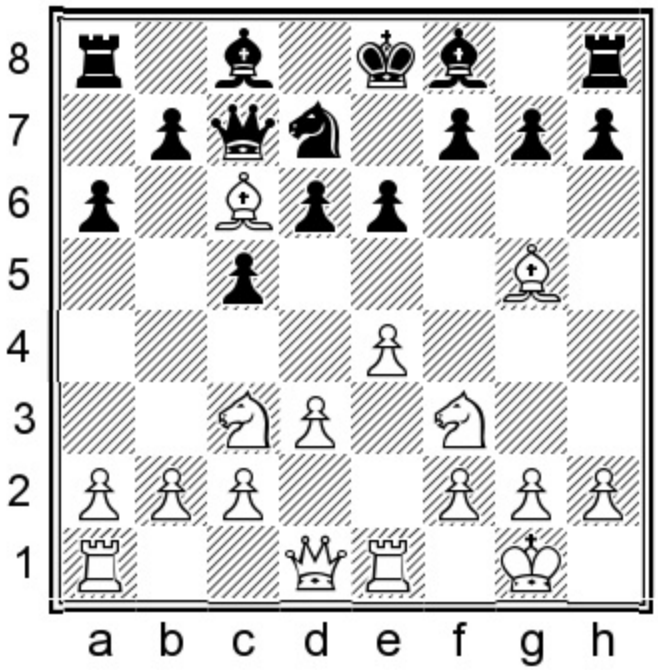
7...♗e7 is considered in the final subchapter.

8.♖e1

Threatening ♗xc6 and e4-e5. It's difficult to see how Black can develop his pieces without making some kind of concession.

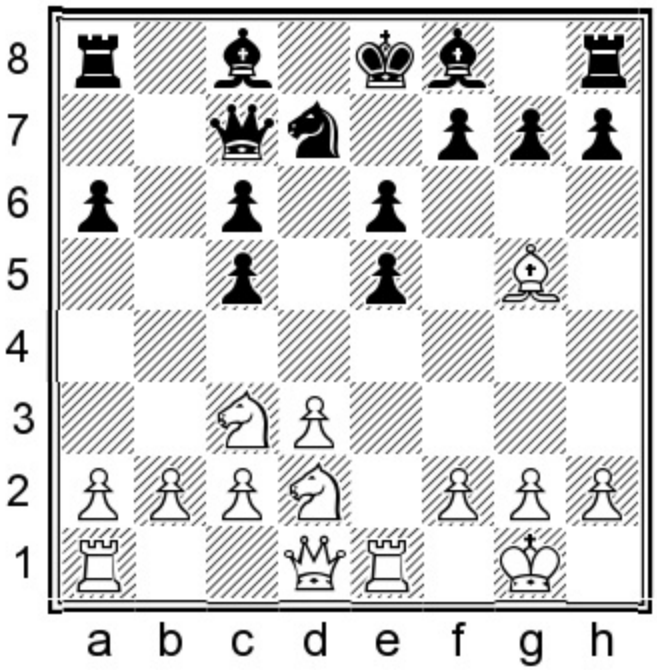
8...h6

8...a6 9.♗xc6



Position after: 9.♗xc6

A) 9...bxc6 10.e5! The position is ripe for this positional pawn sacrifice. 10...dxe5 [10...d5 Black has a typically weak Rossolimo structure; the c5-pawn in particular is extremely vulnerable. 11.♘a4 h6 12.♗e3 ♗e7 13.c4±] 11.♘d2

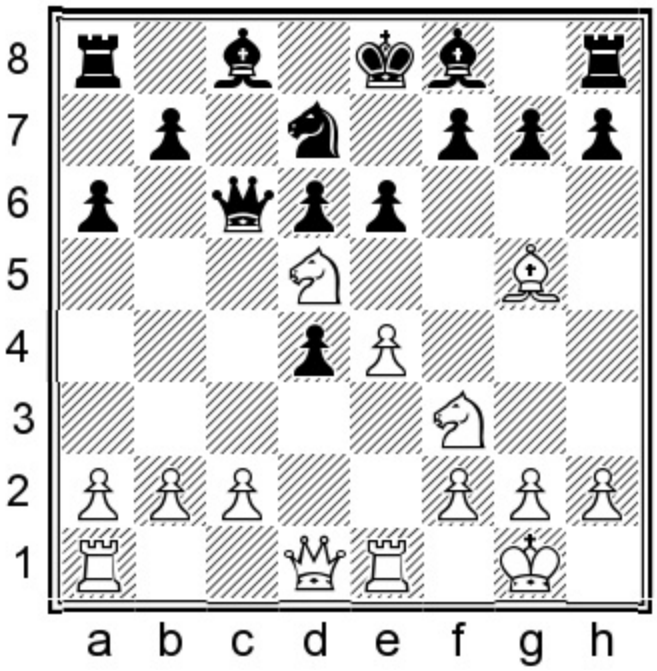


Position after: 11.♘d2

A1) 11...h5!? seems like the most practical way for Black to play, trying to gain some space on the kingside. 12.♕e2 f6 13.♗e3 a5 14.♘a4 Unfortunately for Black his c5-pawn is always a weakness, and we can continue to pressurise it with c2-c4 and ♘e4 or ♘b3.

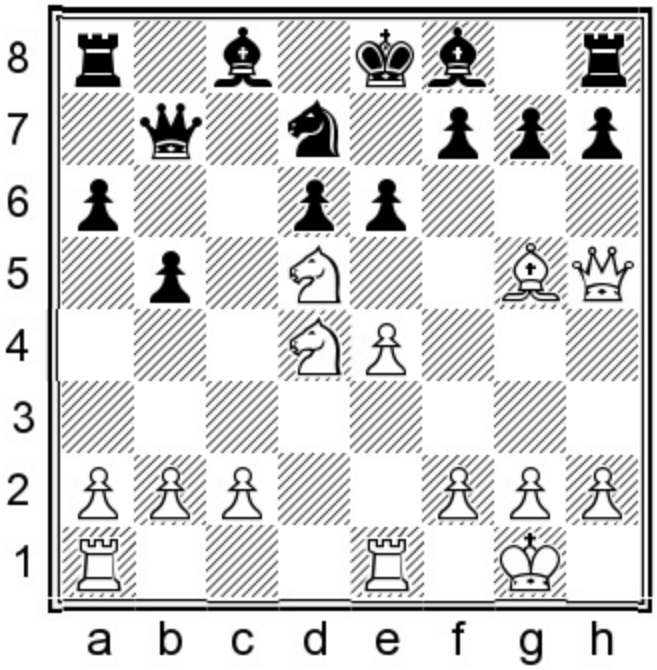
A2) 11...h6 12.♕h5 g6 13.♕h4 ♗g7 14.♗e3 f5 15.♘a4± Black won't be able to maintain his pawn advantage, and will have to accept an inferior position with equal material.

B) 9...♕xc6 10.d4 cxd4 11.♘d5!



Position after: 11.♘d5!

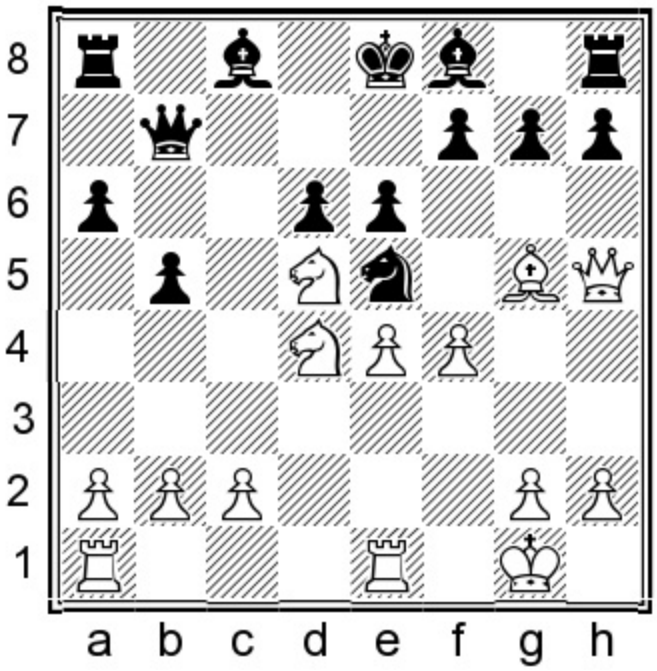
White is already winning. 11...b5 [11...e5 12.c3! d3 13.♘d4! exd4 14.cxd4 We've forced open the c-file, and ♖c1 will be decisive.] 12.♘xd4 ♕b7 13.♕h5



Position after: 13.♕h5

B1) 13...♘b6 14.f4! e5 [14...♘xd5 15.exd5 ♕xd5 16.♖ad1+– The activity of our pieces should be too much for Black to deal with.] 15.♘f3 ♘xd5 16.exd5 g6 17.♕h4+–

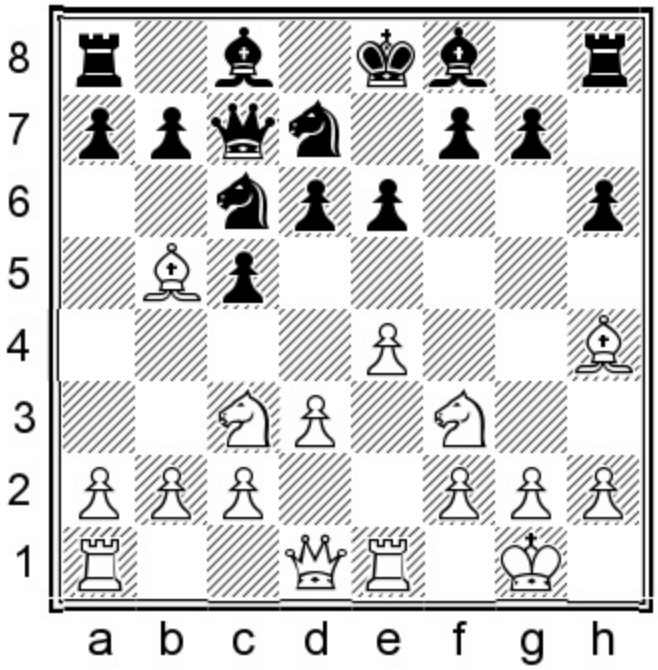
B2) 13...♘e5 14.f4



Position after: 14.f4

14...exd5 [14...h6 15.fxe5 dxe5 16.♘f6+ gxf6 17.♗xf6 ♖g8 18.♘f3+– The position is reminiscient of a ♗g5 Najdorf which has gone horribly wrong for Black.] 15.exd5 ♕xd5 16.♖ad1! ♗b7 17.♖d2 g6 18.♕h4 ♗g7 19.fxe5 0-0 20.♗f6+– Black's pieces are too awkwardly coordinated to avoid losing material.

9.♗h4

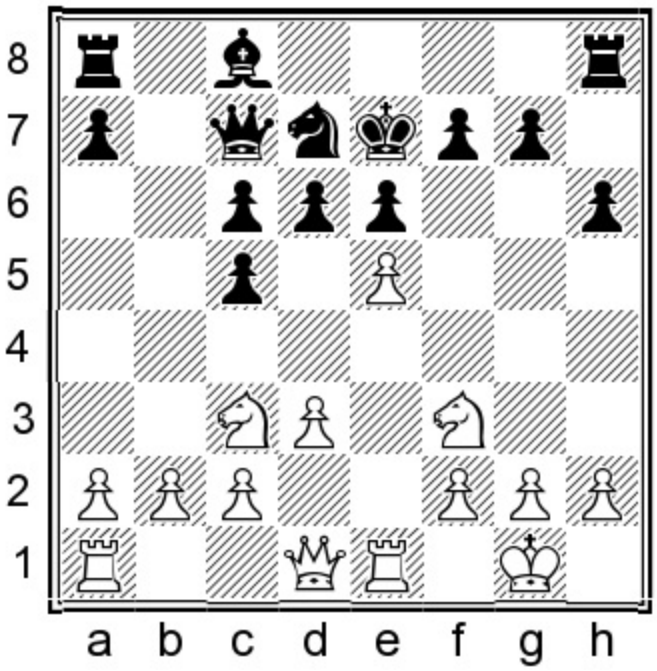


Position after: 9.♗h4

9...g5

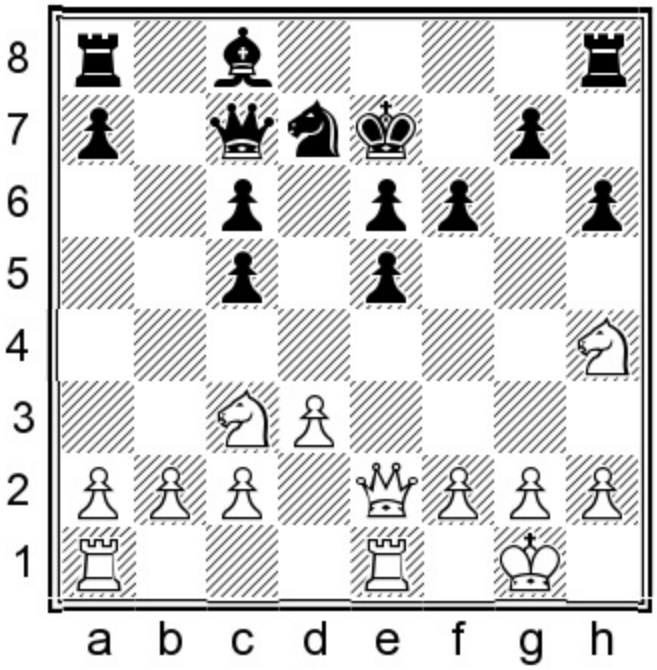
If Black wants to move his f8-bishop, this might be the way to do it.

A) Black is unable to develop with 9...♗e7 as after 10.♗xc6 bxc6 11.♗xe7 ♔xe7 12.e5!



Position after: 12.e5!

We have sacrificed a pawn under even better circumstances than seen previously. 12...dxe5 [12...d5 13.♘a4 ♗a6 14.b3 ♕a5 15.c4±] 13.♕e2 f6 14.♘h4 Black's kingside is now the target, and the following variations illustrate how we can continue.

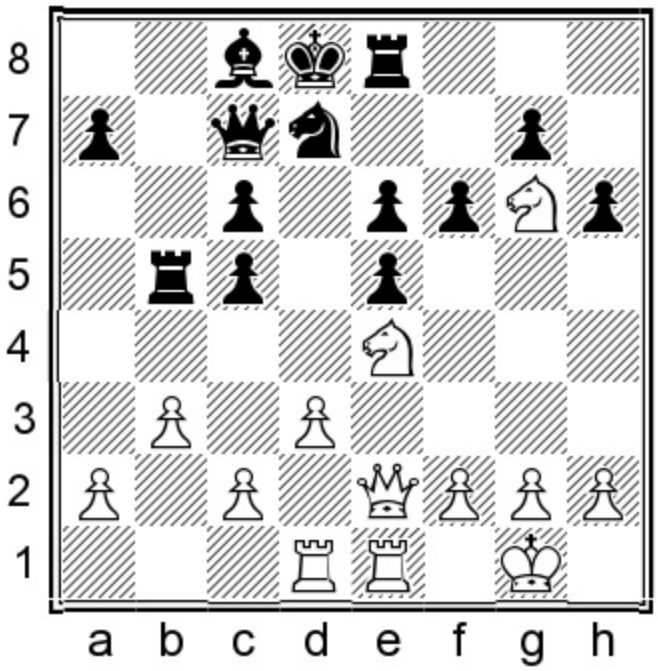


Position after: 14.♘h4

A1) 14...♘f8 15.♘a4 ♕d6 16.♘f3!± Now our knight heads over to e4 or b3, and will undoubtedly win the pawn back on c5.

A2) 14...♖e8 15.♘g6+ ♔d8 [Black's also unable to escape to the kingside with 15...♔f7 16.♕h5 ♔g8 17.♘xe5+–] 16.♘e4 a5 17.♖ad1 ♗a6 18.♕h5± Followed by c2-c3 and d3-d4, which should be very strong.

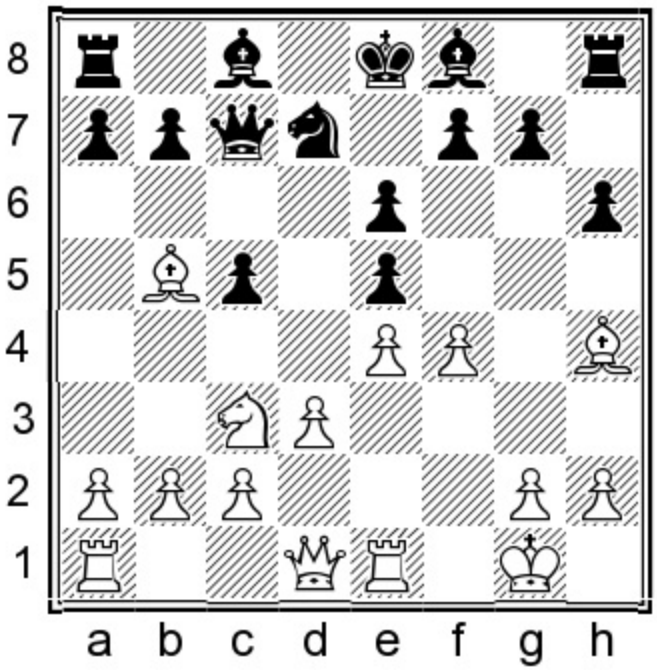
A3) 14...♔d8 15.♘g6 ♖e8 16.♘e4 ♖b8 17.b3 ♖b5 18.♖ad1



Position after: 18.♖ad1

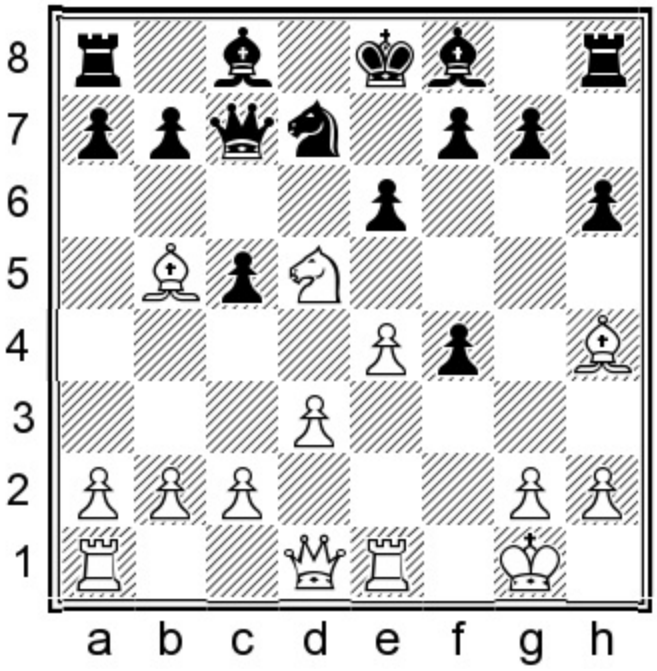
Our g6-knight is a real thorn for Black to deal with, and he's unable to remove it: 18...♘f8? 19.♘xf8 ♖xf8 20.c4 ♖a5 21.♘xc5! ♖xc5 22.b4+–

B) 9...♘ce5!? A direct attempt from Black to prevent us from ever playing e4-e5. As usual, the most active response is the best one. 10.♘xe5 dxe5 11.f4!



Position after: 11.f4!

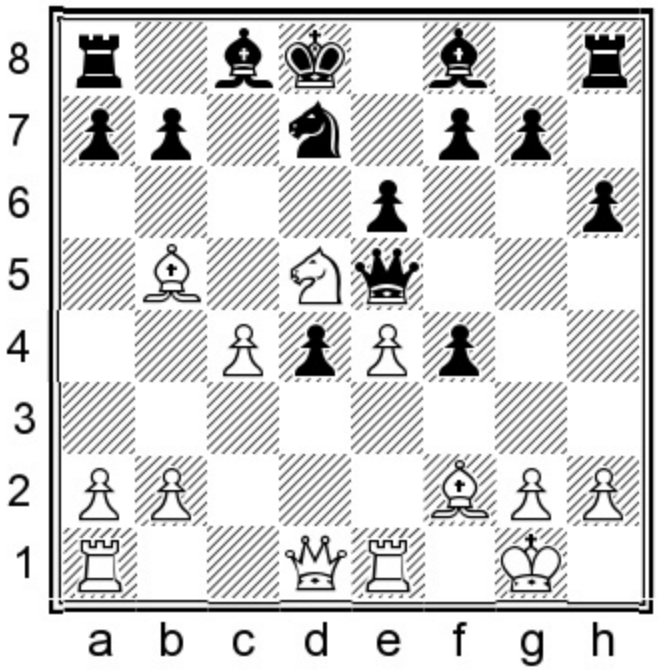
11...exf4 The critical variation, although Black has to navigate through very murky waters. [11...a6 12.♗xd7+ ♗xd7 13.f5→; 11...♗e7 was played in Gburek – Telepnev, email 2016. After 12.♗xe7 ♔xe7 13.f5! White had a lasting initiative and practically speaking, it looks unpleasant for Black to defend.] 12.♘d5!



Position after: 12.♘d5!

B1) 12...♕d6 13.c4! Protecting the knight so that e4-e5 is a legitimate threat. 13...♕e5 The only

way to prevent an e4-e5 push, but a quick central break from White will most likely be decisive. [13...a6 14.e5! ♕b8 15.♗xd7+ ♗xd7 16.♕h5→] 14.♗f2! ♔d8 15.d4 cxd4

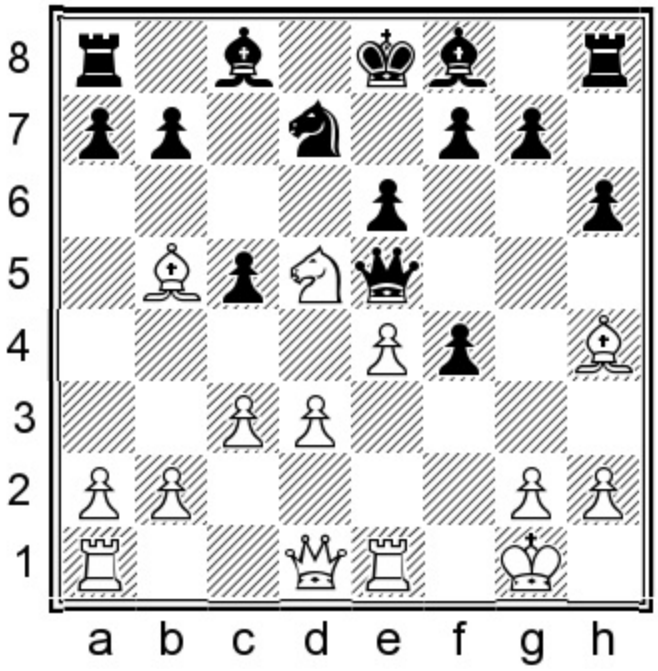


Position after: 15...cxd4

16.b4! exd5 17.exd5 ♕g5 18.c5! ♕xd5 19.♗xd4+–

B2) 12...♕a5? 13.♕d2!+–

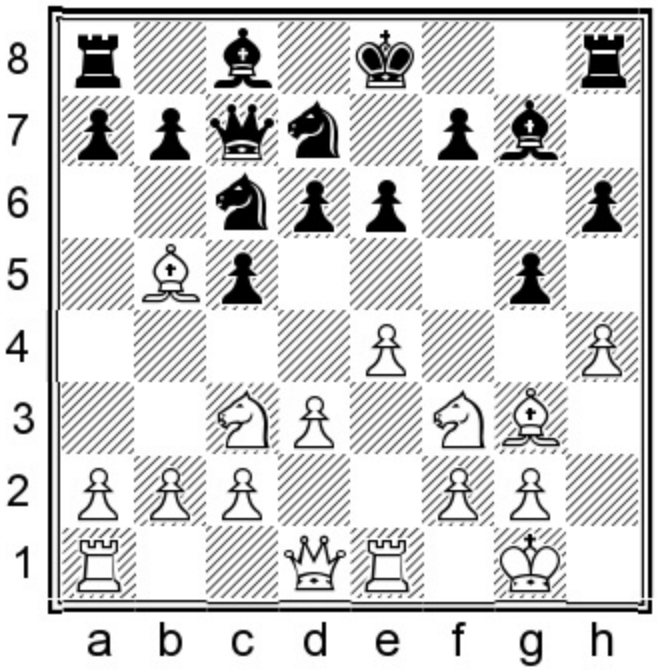
B3) 12...♕e5 13.c3



Position after: 13.c3

As we saw in the line after 12...♕d6, Black will always struggle to deal with White's ability to rapidly open the centre. 13...a6 14.d4 ♕d6 15.♗xd7+ ♗xd7 16.♕h5→

10.♗g3 ♗g7 11.h4!



Position after: 11.h4!

11...♔e7!?

11...gxh4 isn't really in accordance with Black's approach. 12.♘xh4 0-0 13.♗xc6 bxc6 14.♕h5 ♘f6? 15.♕xc5!+–

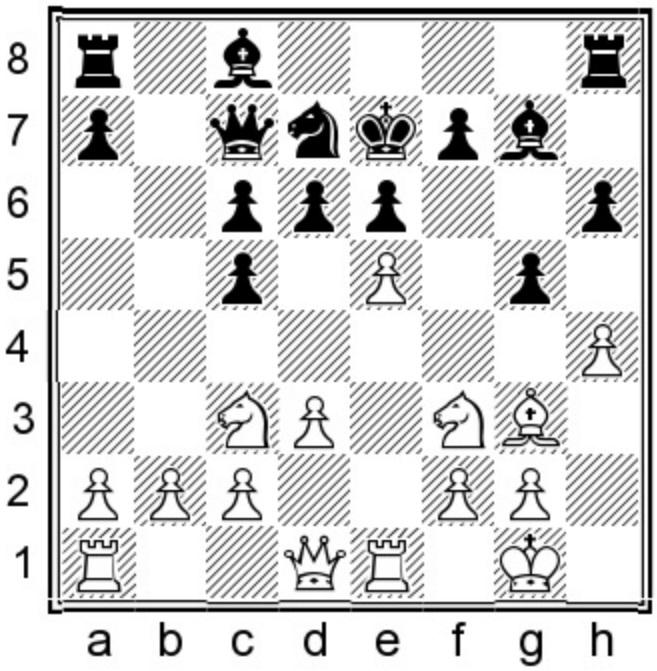
12.♗xc6!

12.hxg5?! hxg5 13.♘xg5 ♘d4∞

12...bxc6

12...♕xc6 Black can't afford to capture with the queen, as he needs to keep the centre as compact as possible to protect his king. 13.d4!→

13.e5!

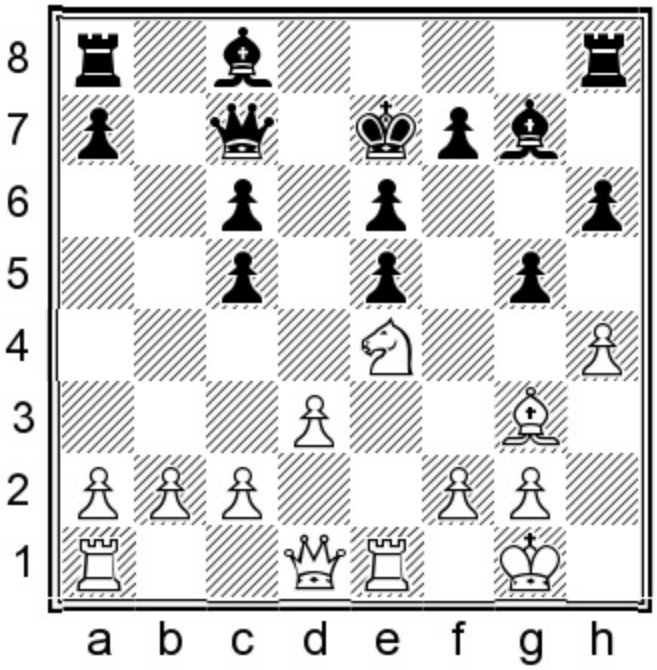


Position after: 13.e5!

Rather than capture on g5, I prefer to sacrifice a pawn myself in keeping with ideas that we've already come across.

13...dxe5

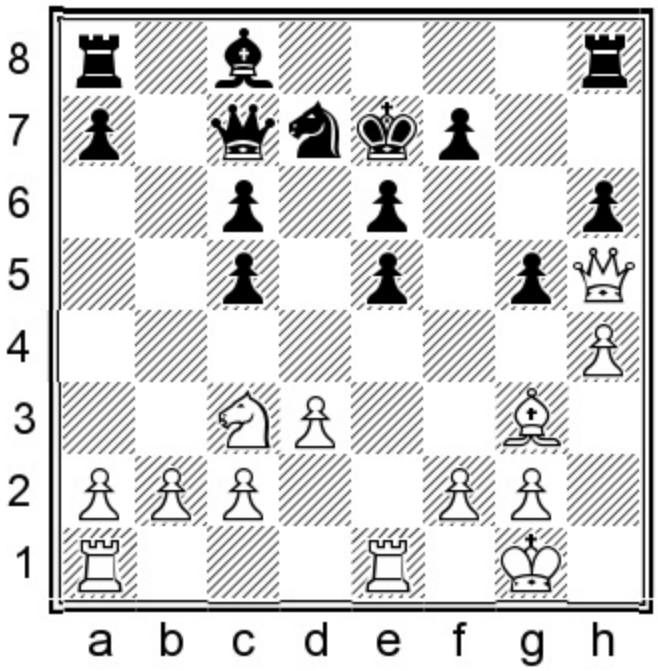
A) 13...♘xe5 14.♘xe5 ♗xe5 [14...dxe5 15.♘e4±



Position after: 15.♘e4±

The c5-pawn will fall, and Black must endure another grim position. It's suffice to say that our e4-e5 pawn sacrifice has worked very well.] 15.♖xe5! Even more precise than capturing with the bishop. 15...dxe5 16.♕h5+–

B) 13...♗xe5 14.♘xe5 dxe5 15.♕h5!

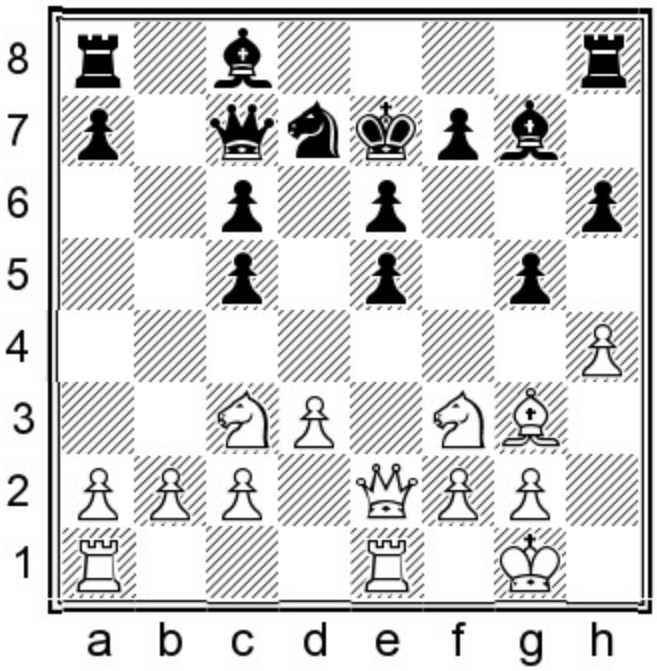


Position after: 15.♕h5!

A clever way to win the e5-pawn. 15...♘f6 16.♕e2 ♘d7 17.♗xe5 ♕xe5 18.♕xe5 ♘xe5 19.♖xe5 ♔d6 20.♖ae1 f6 21.♖5e2±

C) 13...d5 is also hopeless. 14.♕d2 g4 15.♘h2 h5 16.f3+–

14.♕e2



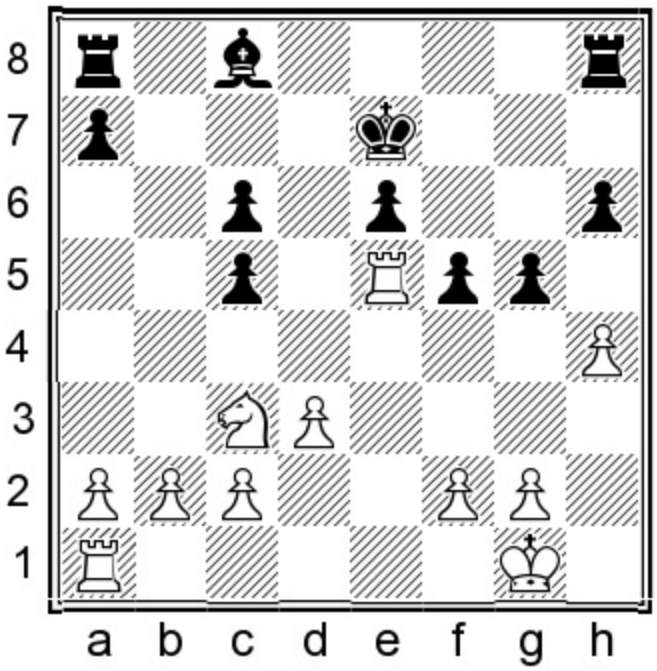
Position after: 14.♕e2

14...f5

14...f6 Attempting to keep the e5-pawn is equally depressing for Black. 15.d4! cxd4 16.♘xd4 ♘b6 17.♖ad1±

15.♘xe5 ♘xe5 16.♗xe5 ♕xe5 17.♕xe5 ♗xe5 18.♖xe5

The doubled c-pawns condemn Black to a long defence.

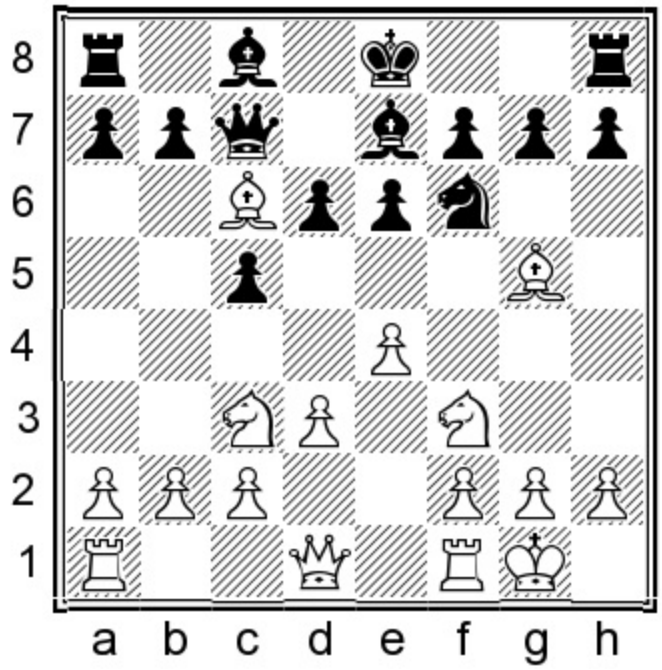


Position after: 18.♖xe5

18...♔d6 19.♖ae1 gxh4 20.♘b1!±

f) 5...d6 6.0-0 e6 7.♗g5!? ♗e7

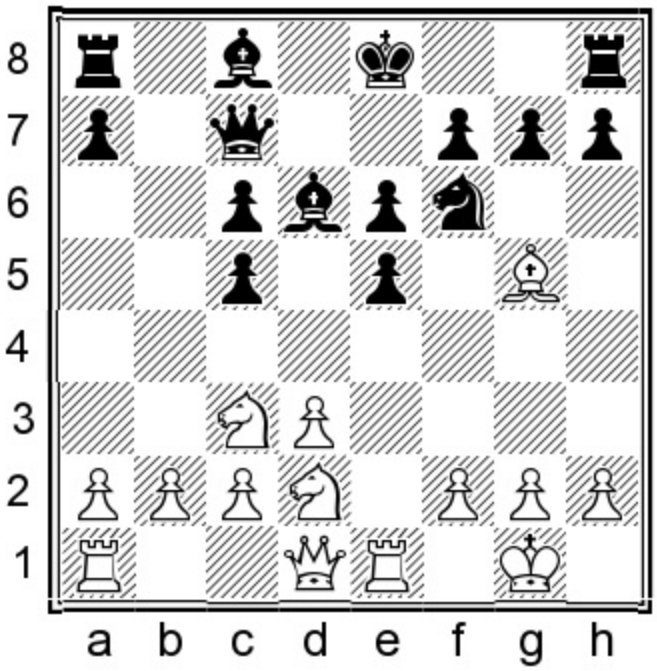
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♕c7 5.d3!? d6 6.0-0 e6 7.♗g5!? ♗e7 8.♗xc6+



Position after: 8.♗xc6+

8...♕xc6

8...bxc6 9.e5! By now I'm sure this wasn't a surprise. 9...dxe5 10.♖e1 ♗d6 [10...♘d7 11.♗xe7 ♔xe7 12.♘d2±] 11.♘d2



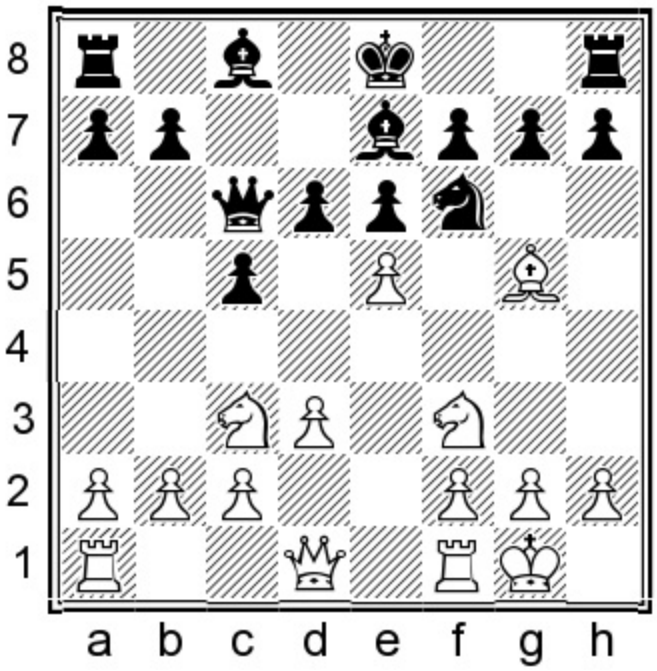
Position after: 11.♘d2

The main problem for Black – in addition to his ruined pawn structure – is that his c8-bishop is basically never going to be active.

A) 11...♗a6 12.♘ce4 ♘xe4 13.♘xe4 0-0 14.b3± [14.♘f6+! is an even stronger possibility.]

B) 11...♘d5 12.♘ce4 It's only a matter of time till we win the c5-pawn. 12...f6 [12...0-0 13.♘xd6 ♕xd6 14.♘e4 ♕c7 15.c4 ♘e7 16.♘xc5±] 13.♘xd6+ ♕xd6 14.♘e4 ♕e7 15.♗d2± Followed by c2-c4 and ♗e3.

9.e5!N

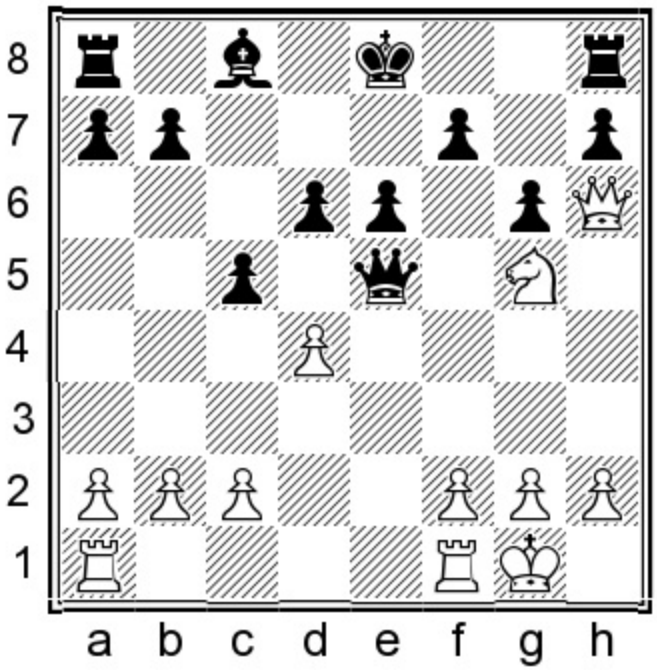


Position after: 9.e5!N

9.♘d2 was played in the Grandmaster game Vallejo Pons – Akopian, Khanty – Mansiysk 2013, but the text move must be critical.

9...dxe5

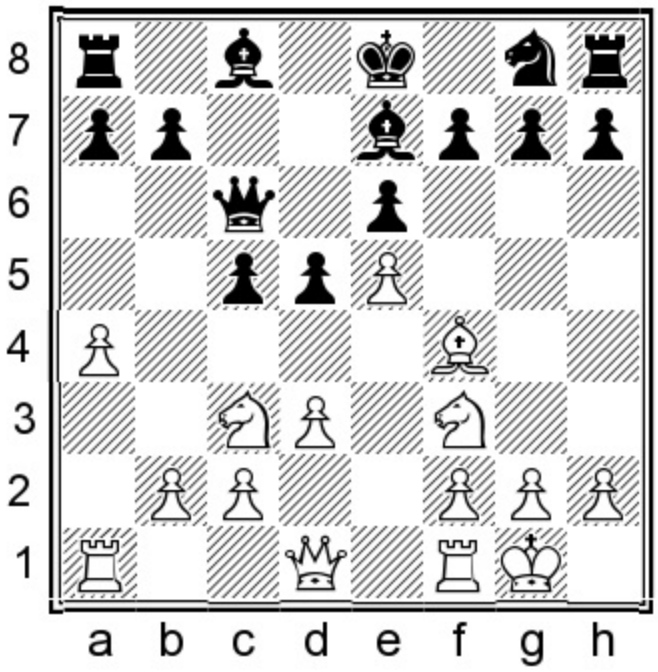
A) 9...♘d5? The exchange of pieces favours White for tactical reasons. 10.♘xd5 ♗xg5 11.♘xg5 ♕xd5 12.♕h5! g6 13.♕h6 ♕xe5 14.d4!



Position after: 14.d4!

The most natural move, opening the central files for our rooks. Black won't be able to maintain control of the g7-square. 14...cxd4 [14...♕xd4 15.♖ad1 ♕xb2 16.♖xd6+–] 15.♖fe1 ♕f6 [15...♕f5 16.♕g7+–] 16.♘e4 ♕e7 [16...♕e5 17.f4+–] 17.♕g7 ♖f8 18.♕xd4+–

B) 9...♘g8 10.♗f4! d5 11.a4!



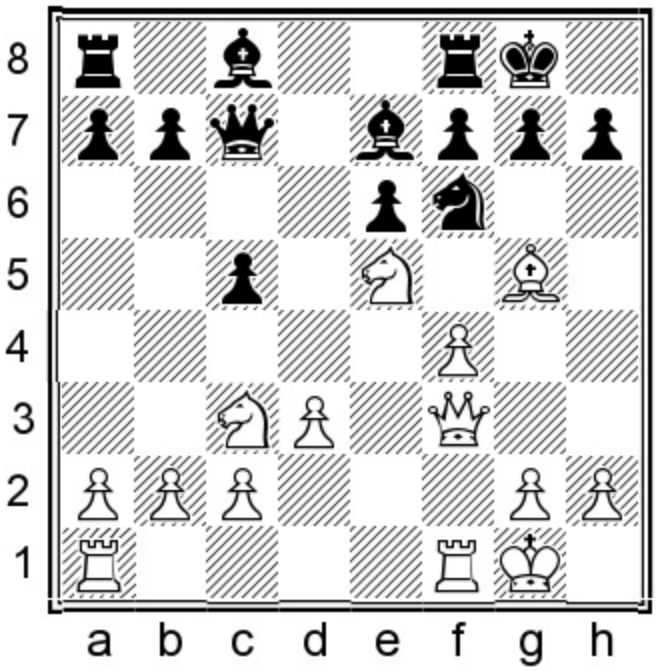
Position after: 11.a4!

Unlike the previous French-type structures that we've seen, our pawn is on d3 rather than d4. Now it is even harder for Black to achieve counterplay on the queenside. His pieces are also more uncoordinated, and so he'll have to waste time developing his g8-knight. 11...a6 12.♘e2± Followed by ♘g3, h2-h4 etc.

10.♘xe5 ♕c7 11.f4!

The plan for White is very easy, and the variations that follow are instructive about how to launch a kingside attack. I haven't made my analysis too extensive as this position has yet to be tested over-the-board, but at the very least it seems pretty unpleasant for Black to deal with.

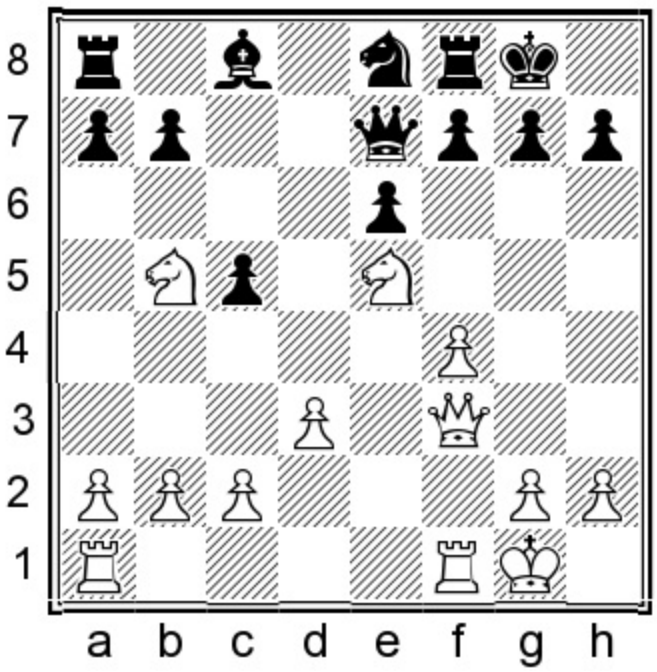
11...0-0 12.♕f3



Position after: 12.♕f3

12...♗d7

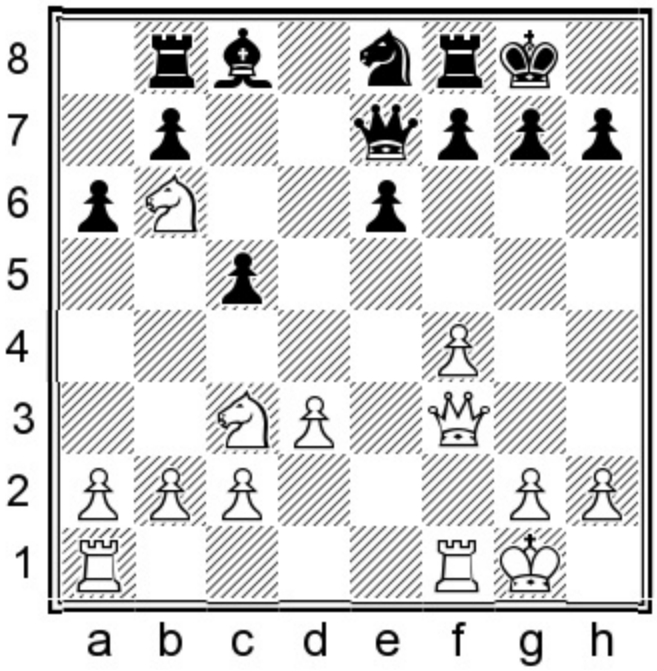
12...♘e8 It might be a wise idea for Black to trade dark-squared bishops, but he'll be left with inferior minor pieces. 13.♘b5! ♕d8 14.♗xe7 ♕xe7



Position after: 14...♕xe7

The correspondence game Churkin – Belov, ICCF email 2013 continued 15.a4, but I prefer 15.♘c4!

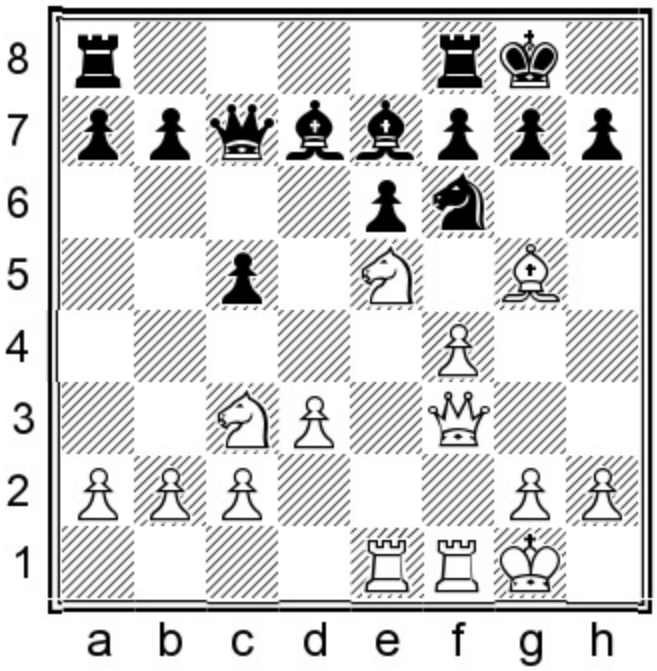
a6 This creates another weakness for Black to deal with, but it's hard to see what else to do. [15...♘c7 16.a4!±] 16.♘c3 ♖b8 17.♘b6!



Position after: 17.♘b6!

17...♘f6 [17...♕c7 18.♘ca4± White's play seems unassuming, but funnily enough Black can't defend the c5-pawn after ♕e3 on the next move.] 18.a4 ♘d7 19.f5!↑ White retains a lasting initiative.

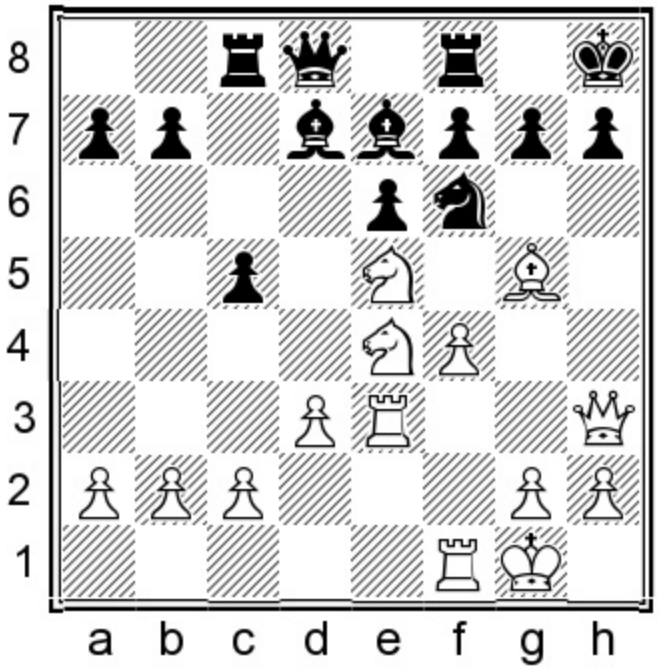
13.♖ae1



Position after: 13.♖ae1

13...h6

13...♖ac8 14.♕h3! The queen clears a path for the rooks to join the attack. 14...♕d8 [14...h6? 15.♗xh6! Followed by a rook lift, and the game will be over.; 14...b5 An attempt to find counterplay is also too slow. 15.♖e3 c4 16.♖g3 ♗c6 17.♕h4 ♔h8 18.♖h3+–] 15.♖e3 ♔h8 16.♘e4!



Position after: 16.♘e4!

It's very useful to remove another kingside defender. 16...♘xe4 17.♖xe4 ♗c6 18.♖e3→ The attack continues.

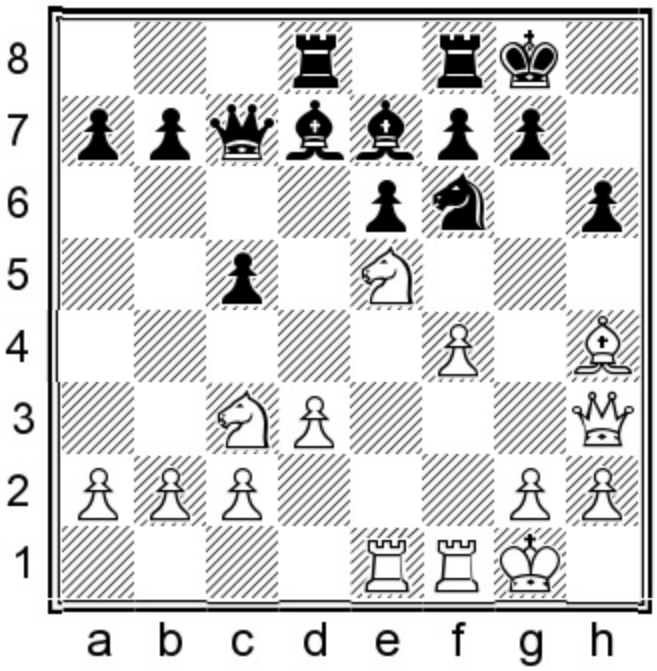
14.♗h4

14.♗xh6? doesn't work in this position. 14...gxh6 15.♕h3 ♔h7–+

14...♖ad8

14...♖ac8 15.♕h3→ with similar ideas to the main line.

15.♕h3

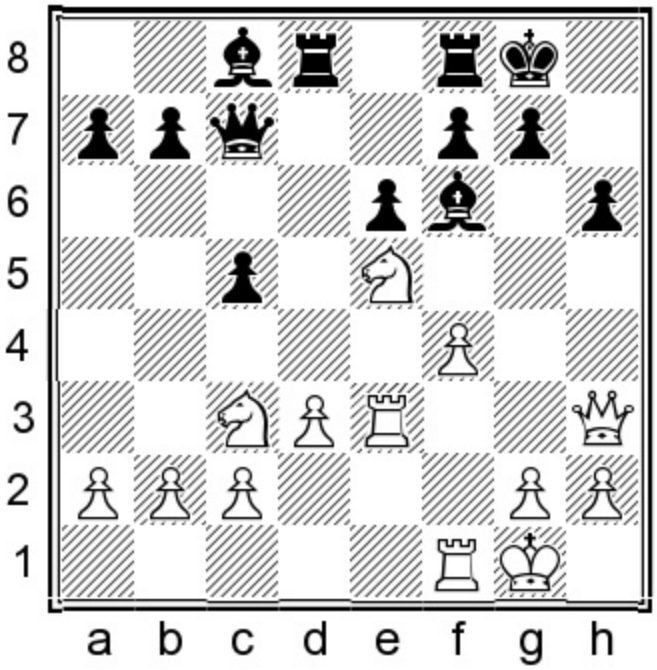


Position after: 15.♕h3

Black needs to move his d7-bishop to try and achieve some counterplay on the d-file, but it all seems too slow.

15...♗c6

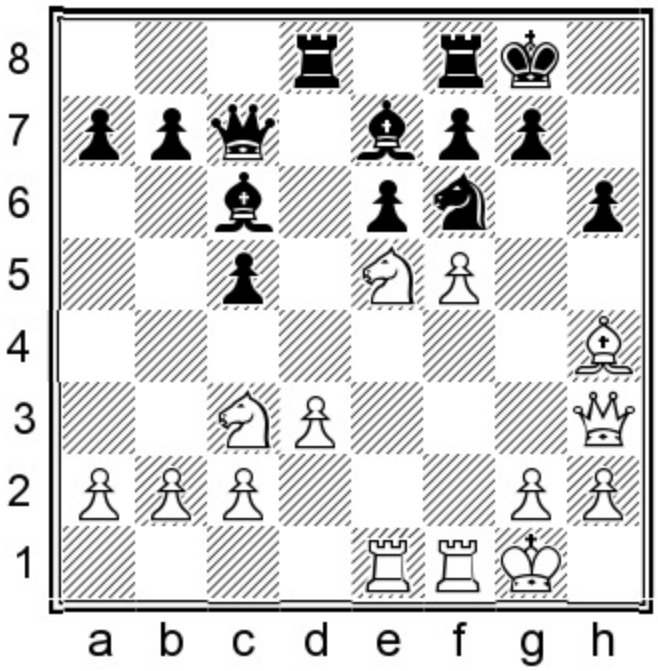
15...♗c8 16.♗xf6! Simplifying the position so that g4-g5 will be most effective. 16...♗xf6 17.♖e3



Position after: 17.♖e3

17...♔h8 [17...c4 18.♘e4! is an important point. 18...♗xe5 19.fxe5 cxd3 20.cxd3 ♔h8 21.♖g3!→ 21...♕xe5 falls to the fantastic 22.♖f6!] 18.g4! c4 19.g5 ♗xe5 20.fxe5 cxd3 21.cxd3+– The position obviously wasn't winning after 11.f4 but, in truth, White's attack is extremely hard to contain.

16.f5!



Position after: 16.f5!

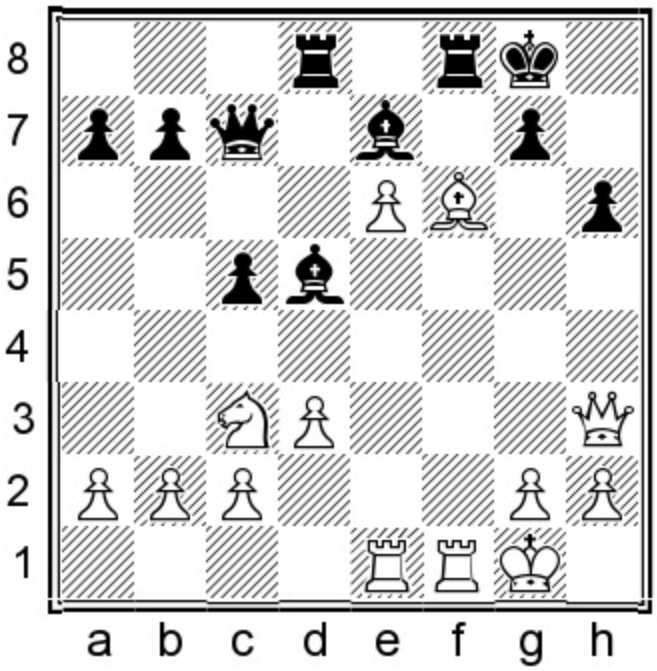
16...♗d5

16...exf5 17.♘xc6 bxc6 18.♖xf5+– An exchange sacrifice on f6 looks hard to stop.

17.♘xf7!

The culmination of all our pieces working together in attack.

17...♖xf7 18.fxe6 ♖ff8 19.♗xf6



Position after: 19.♗xf6

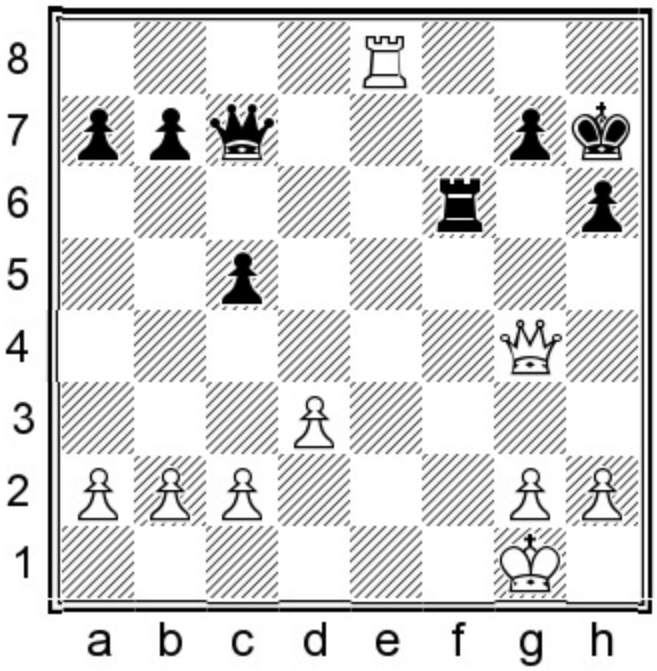
19...♗xf6

19...♖xf6 20.♖xf6 ♗xf6 21.♘xd5 ♖xd5 22.e7 ♗xe7 23.♕e6++–

20.♘xd5 ♖xd5 21.♖xf6 ♖xf6

21...gxf6 22.e7 ♖e8 23.♕e6++–

22.e7 ♖d8 23.e8=♕+ ♖xe8 24.♖xe8+ ♔h7 25.♕g4+–



Position after: 25.♕g4+−

White emerges a pawn up and Black's king is still in danger.

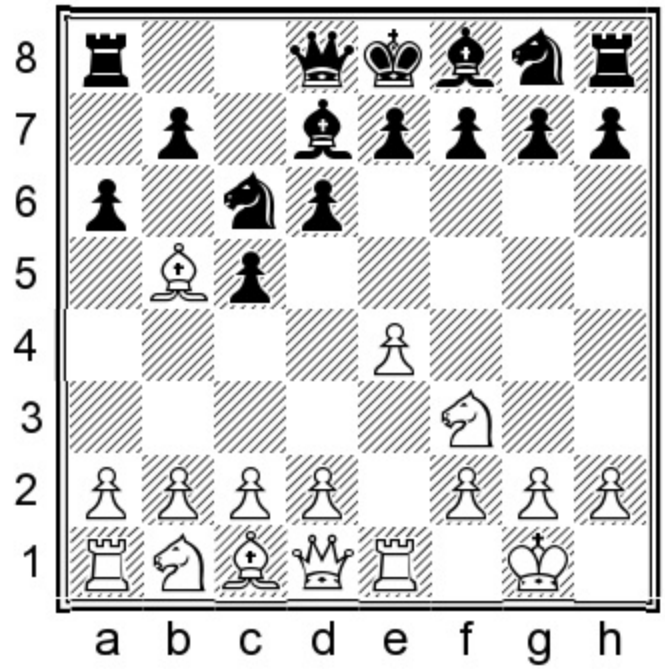
Conclusion to Chapter 4

Our threats in the centre have mounted, by move 5, to the point where Black's best option by far seems to be playing first 5...d6 and then 6...e6. Then, we have a choice between the thematic Rossolimo capture on c6, and the Rauzer-esque 7.♗g5, whereafter Black is forced to make an uncomfortable choice. As discussed in subchapter d, allowing the capture on f6 seems a poor option, but also after 7...♗e7 or 7...♘d7 we'll be able to embark on a dangerous kingside offensive.

Part III
3...d6

Chapter 5
4.0-0 ♗d7 5.♖e1 a6

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 d6 4.0-0 ♗d7 5.♖e1 a6



Chapter Guide

Chapter 5 – 4.0-0 ♗d7 5.♖e1 a6

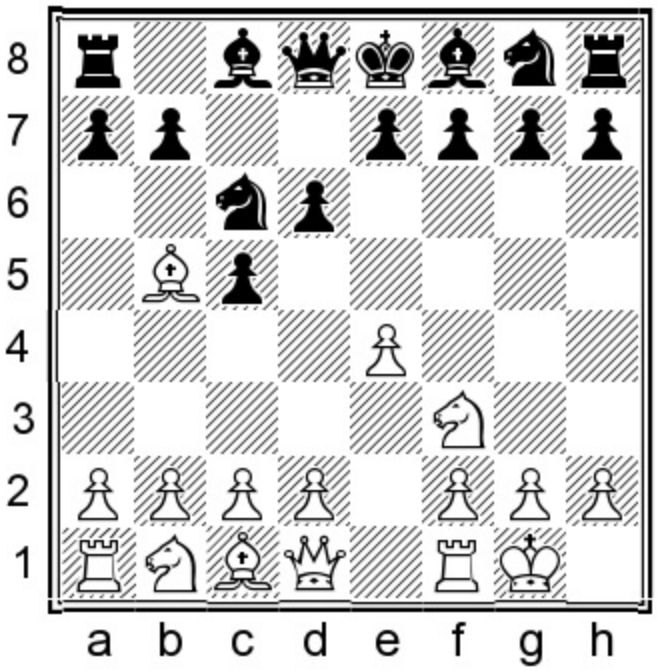
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 d6 4.0-0 ♗d7 5.♖e1 a6 6.♗xc6 ♗xc6 7.d4 cxd4 8.♘xd4

a) 8...--

b) 8...♖c8

a) 8...--

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 d6 4.0-0

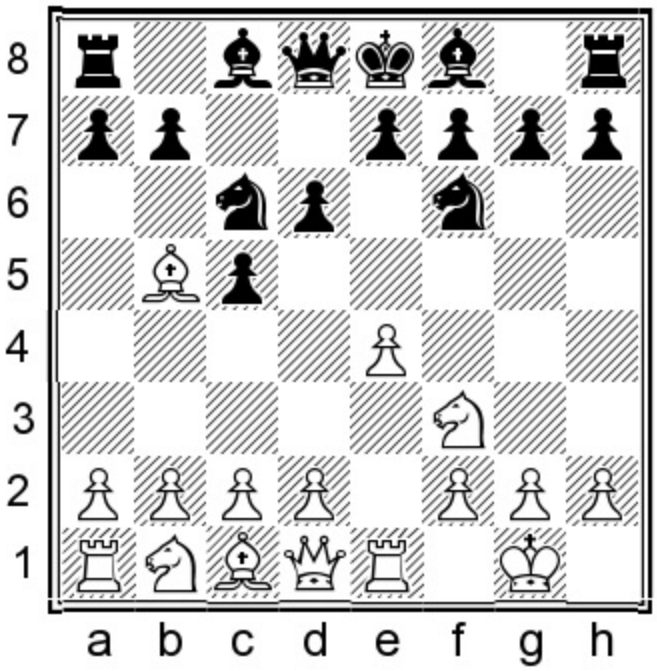


Position after: 4.0-0

4...♗d7

There's no logical alternative.

A) 4...♘f6 5.♖e1

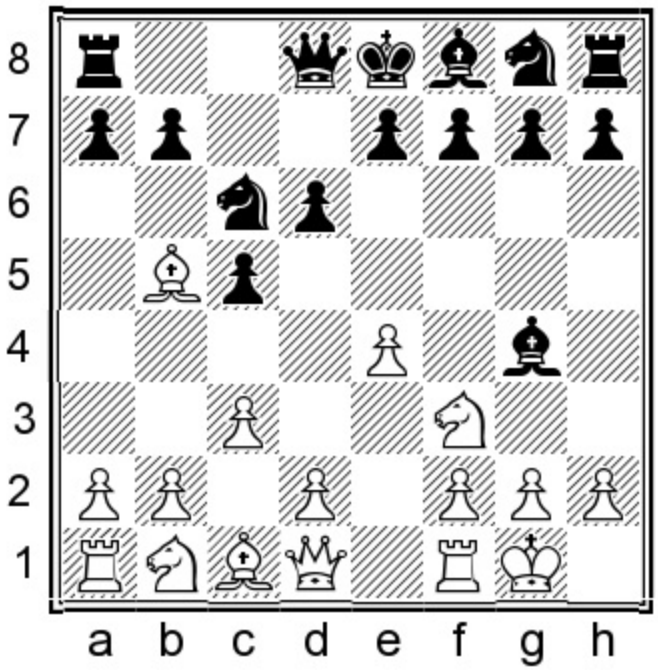


Position after: 5.♖e1

5...e5 [5...a6 6.♗xc6+ bxc6 7.e5 This is already a disaster for Black. 7...dxe5 8.♘xe5+–; 5...♗d7

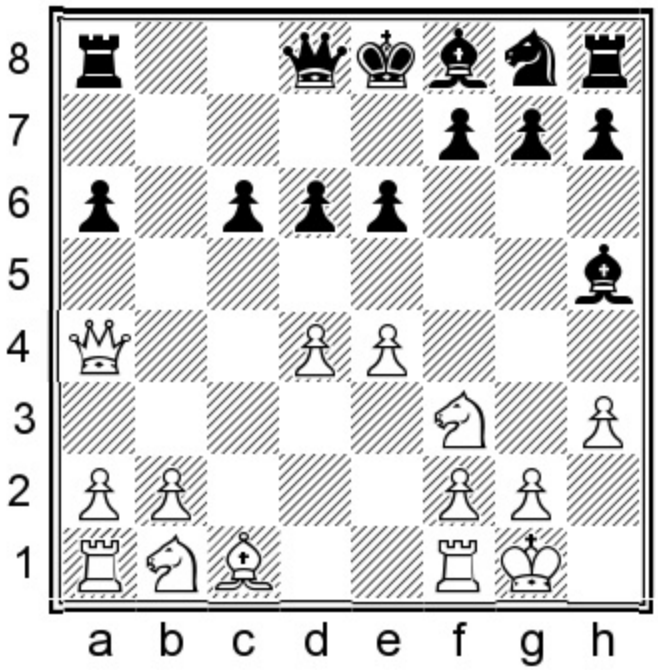
transposes to the mainline.] 6.c3 ♗e7 7.d4 cxd4 8.cxd4 exd4 9.♘xd4 ♗d7 10.♘c3±

B) 4...♗g4 An early ...♗g4 is rarely good without first kicking away our corresponding light-squared bishop from b5. 5.c3



Position after: 5.c3

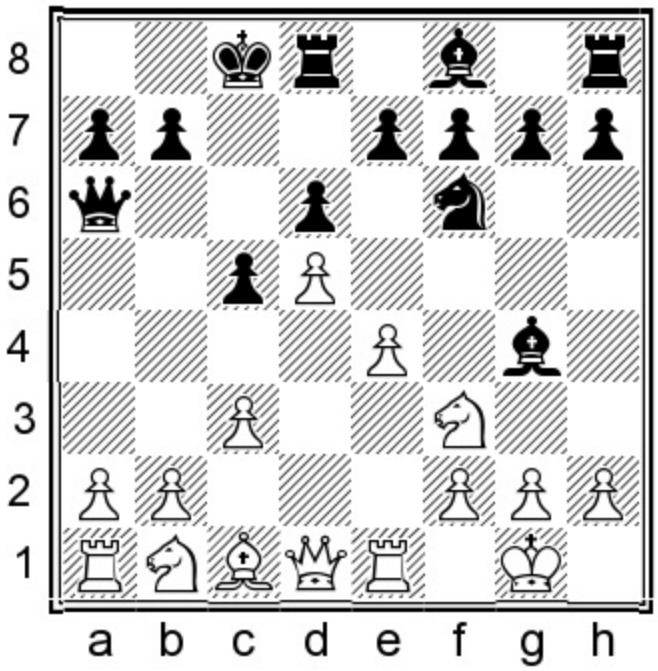
B1) 5...a6 6.♗xc6+ bxc6 7.h3 ♗h5 [7...♗xf3 8.♕xf3 e5 9.♖e1 ♘f6 10.d4! cxd4 11.cxd4 exd4 12.♗f4 ♗e7 13.e5 dxe5 14.♕xc6+ ♘d7 15.♗xe5 ♖c8 16.♕a4 0-0 17.♗xd4±] 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 e6 [9...♘f6 10.♗f4!,10...♘xe4 fails due to 11.♕c2. 10...e6 11.♘bd2±] 10.♕a4



Position after: 10.♕a4

10...♖c8 [10...♕d7 11.♘fd2 d5 12.♘c3± Black still has to solve the issue of kingside development, and his queenside contains a few positional weaknesses. The bishop on h5 is also a bystander.] 11.♘fd2 ♘f6 12.♘c3 d5 13.exd5 ♘xd5 14.♘xd5 ♕xd5 15.♕xa6±

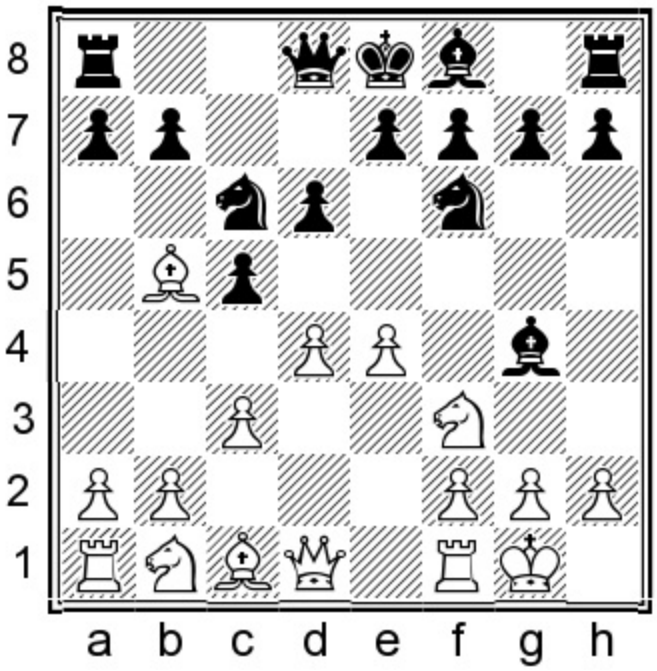
B2) 5...♕b6 6.♗a4 ♘f6 7.d4 0-0-0 8.♗xc6 ♕xc6 9.d5 ♕a6 10.♖e1±



Position after: 10.♖e1±

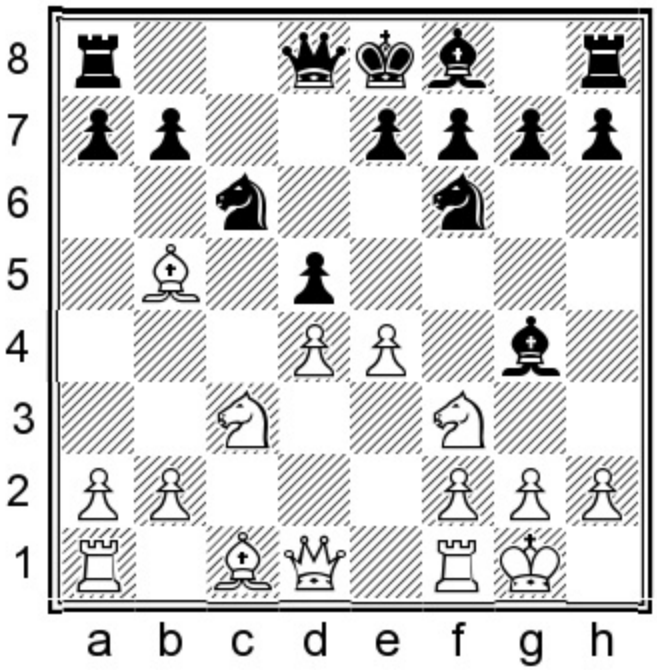
Although Black won the game, it's fair to say that White was doing very well in Ulybin – Tiviakov, Oakham 1992. For example, a2-a4, ♘a3 and b2-b4 already looks extremely dangerous for the Black king.

B3) 5...♘f6 6.d4!



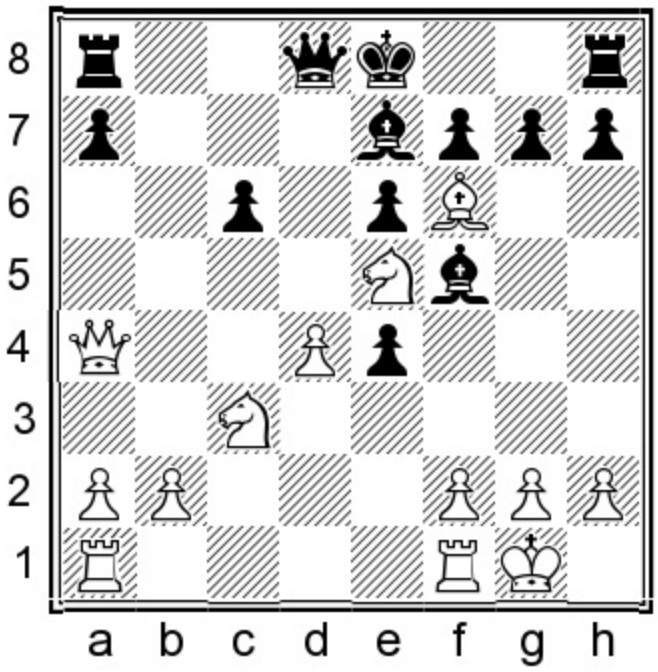
Position after: 6.d4!

This demonstrates why Black needed to remove our bishop from b5 as a pre-requisite to his own development. Now White's advantage can't be contested. 6...cxd4 [6...e6 7.d5 a6 8.♗e2 ♗xf3 9.♗xf3 exd5 10.exd5 ♘e5 11.♗e2 ♗e7 12.c4 0-0 13.♘c3 ♘g6 14.f4±] 7.cxd4 d5 The critical line must be an attempt to contest the centre, but it's not difficult to refute Black's opening play. [7...e6 8.d5 a6 9.♗a4 b5 10.dxc6 bxa4 11.♕xa4 ♗xf3 12.gxf3 ♗e7 13.♗d2±; 7...a6 8.♗xc6+ bxc6 9.h3 ♗h5 10.♗f4 e6 11.♘bd2±] 8.♘c3!



Position after: 8.♘c3!

B3.1) 8...e6 9.♗g5 ♗e7 10.♗xc6+ bxc6 11.♕a4 dxe4 12.♘e5 ♗f5 13.♗xf6

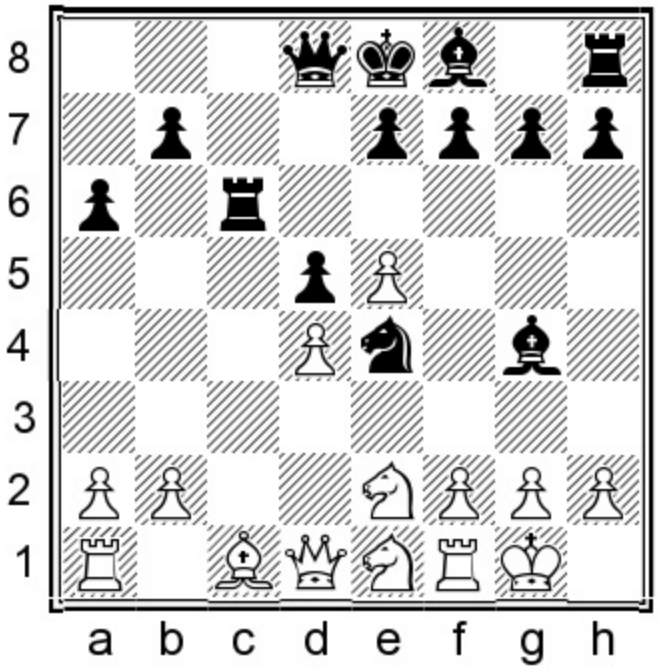


Position after: 13.♗xf6

13...gxf6 [13...♗xf6 14.♕xc6+ ♔f8 15.♘xe4±] 14.♘xc6 ♕d7 15.♖ac1±

B3.2) 8...dxe4 9.d5 ♘xd5 [9...♕c8 10.♕a4 ♘xd5 11.♘xd5 exf3 12.♗f4+–] 10.♕xd5 exf3 11.♗xc6+ bxc6 12.♕xc6+ ♗d7 13.♕xf3+–

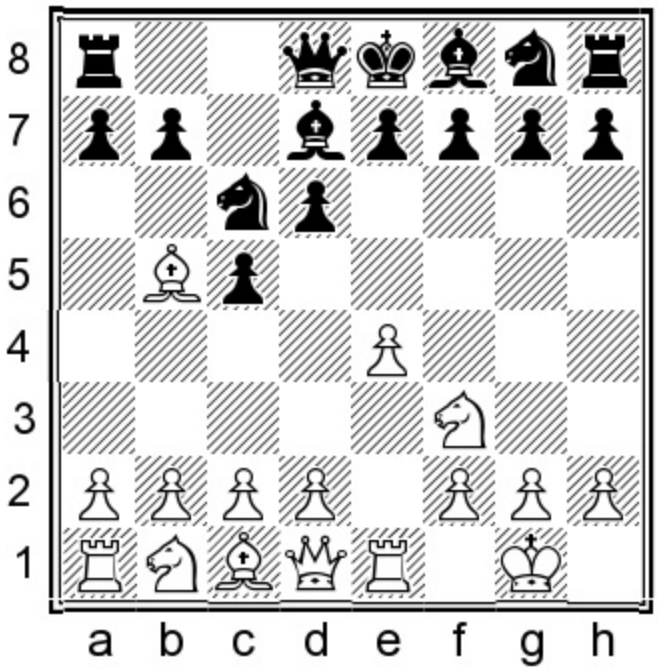
B3.3) 8...♖c8 9.e5 ♘e4 10.♘e2! a6 11.♗xc6+ ♖xc6 12.♘e1



Position after: 12.♘e1

The knight on e4 is trapped, and Black must waste even more time enabling its escape. 12...♗xe2 13.♕xe2 h6 14.♗e3 e6 15.f3 ♘g5 16.♘d3± Whilst the Black knight continues to search for a path back into the game, we can divert our attention to the queenside.

5.♖e1



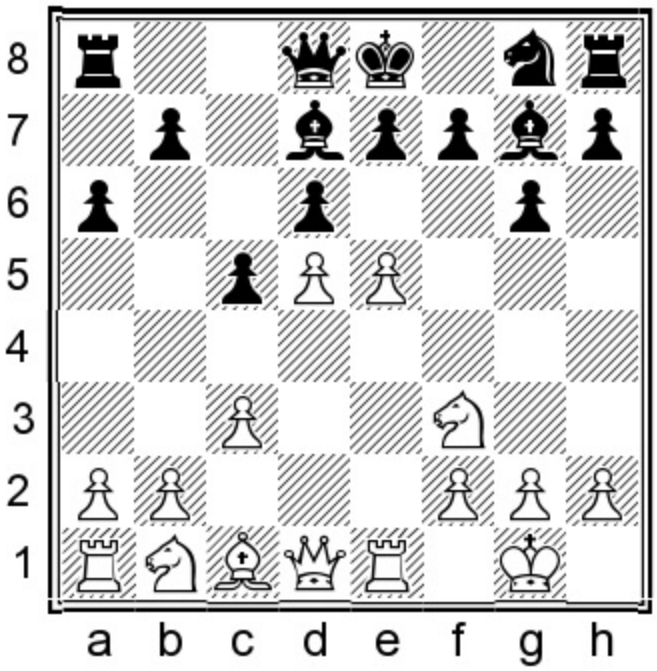
Position after: 5.♖e1

5...a6

To be honest, I never considered this a serious line for Black. I always believed that 6.♗xc6 and 7.d4 led to a very easy edge. Having analysed it deeply, it's evident that White has to be very accurate to prove any advantage at all.

A) 5...♘f6 is the mainline, and we'll cover that in the following chapters.

B) 5...g6?! is very uncritical and hands White central control on a plate. 6.c3 ♗g7 7.d4 a6 8.♗xc6!? [8.♗a4±] 8...♗xc6 9.d5 ♗d7 10.e5!



Position after: 10.e5!

10...dxe5 [10...♗g4 11.♕a4+ ♕d7 12.♕xd7+ ♔xd7 13.♘g5 ♘h6 14.h3 ♗f5 15.g4 ♗xb1 16.e6+ fxe6 17.dxe6+ ♔c7 18.♖xb1+–] 11.♘xe5 ♘f6 12.c4 0-0 13.♘c3±

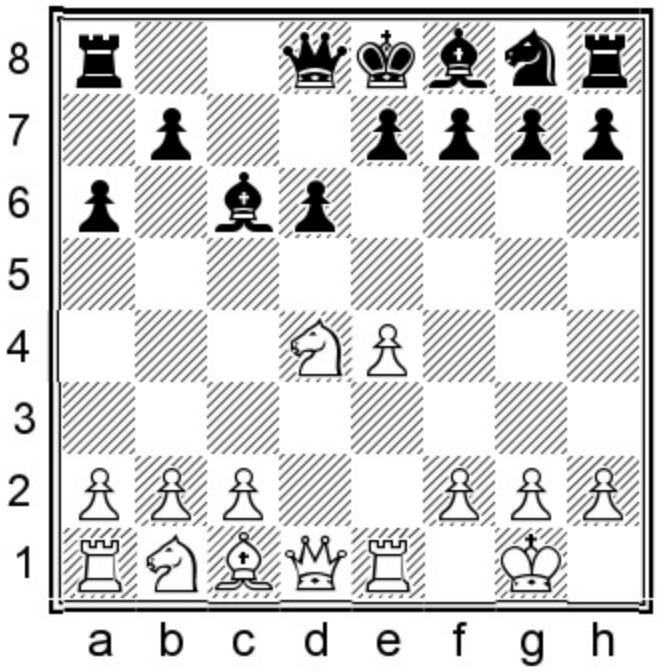
6.♗xc6

6.♗f1 ♗g4 will transpose to the chapters on 6.c3.

6...♗xc6 7.d4

As our e4-pawn is defended, we can rapidly open the centre and attempt to capitalise on Black's lack of kingside development.

7...cxd4 8.♘xd4



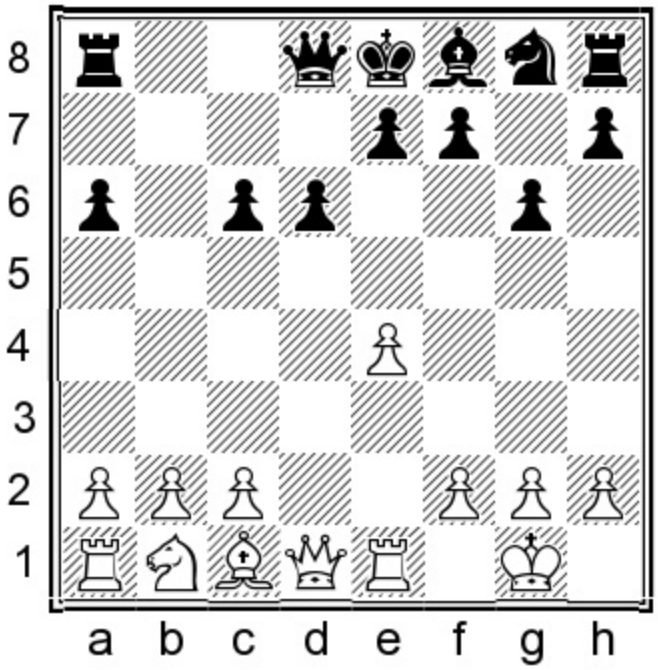
Position after: 8.♘xd4

If Black doesn't defend the bishop on c6, we'll capture it and set-up our pieces with ♕f3 and ♘d2-c4. In the ensuing variations, Black's central pawns will ultimately be very weak.

If Black does defend his bishop, the best choice is to enact a Maroczy structure – and the c6-bishop will likely find itself dominated by our central pawns.

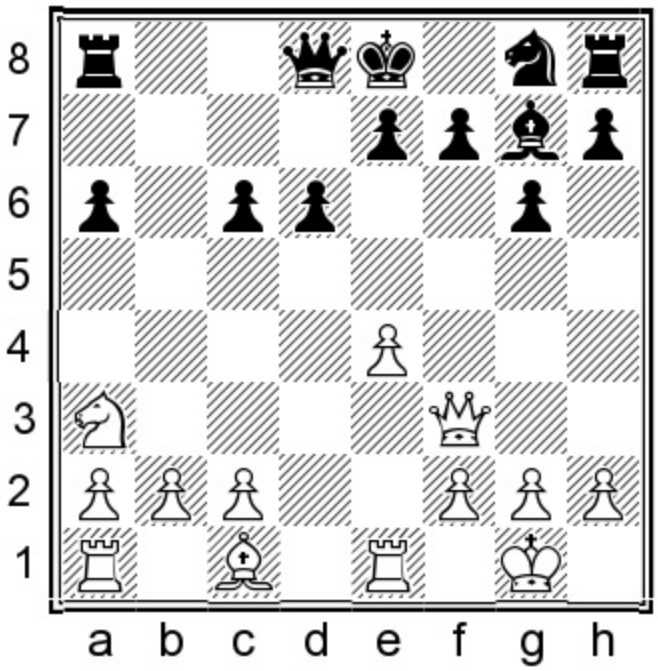
8...♗d7

A) 8...g6?! 9.♘xc6 bxc6



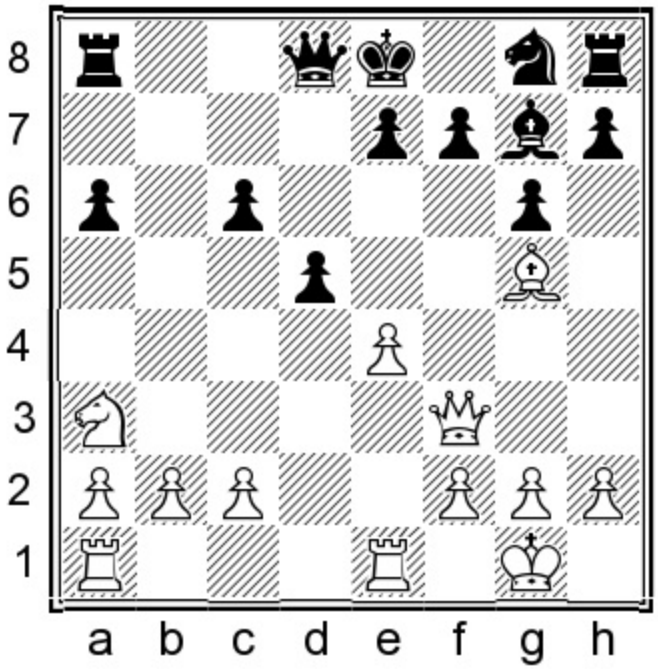
Position after: 9...bxc6

10.♕f3 [10.♕d4 has been the most popular choice, but I don't see any problem with our typical ♕f3 and ♘d2-c4 plan.] 10...♗g7 [10...♕b6 11.♘d2 ♗g7 12.c3 ♘f6 13.e5! dxe5 14.♘c4±] 11.♘a3



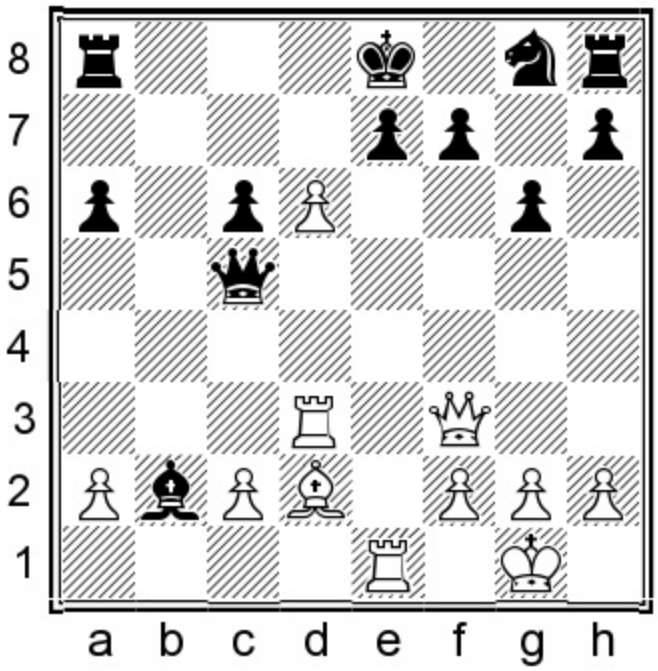
Position after: 11.♘a3

11...d5 [11...♕d7 12.♘c4 ♖b8 13.e5 d5 14.♗f4! Either side pushing their pawn to e6 will prove favourable for White. 14...♖b5; 11...♘f6 12.e5 dxe5 13.♕xc6+ ♘d7 14.♗e3±] 12.♗g5! Delaying the development of the g8-knight.



Position after: 12.♗g5!

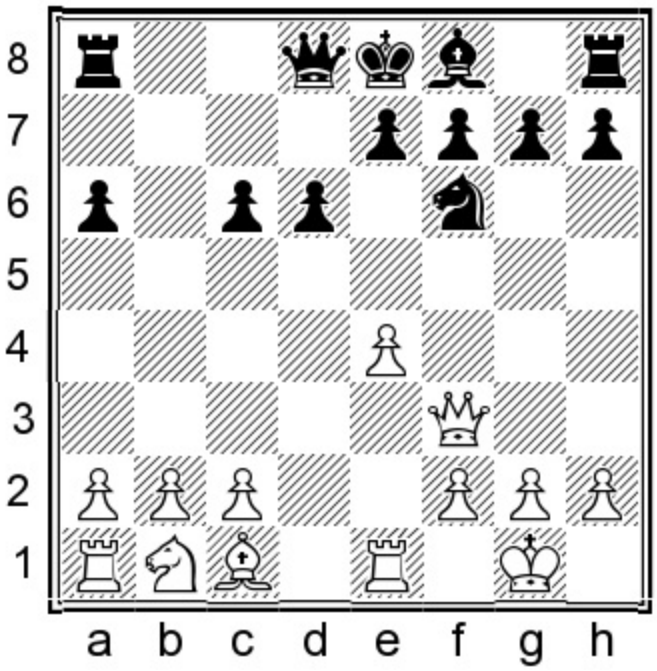
12...♗xb2?! Even if Black wins a piece, this whole concept looks suicidal. [12...h6 13.♗h4 g5 14.♗g3 ♘f6 Black has had to weaken his kingside in order to develop his knight. At some point we can begin thinking about h2-h4 ideas. 15.♖ad1 0-0 16.exd5 cxd5 17.c4 e6 18.♘c2±] 13.♖ad1 ♕a5 14.exd5 ♕xa3 [14...♗xa3 15.d6+–] 15.♖d3 ♕a5 [15...♕c5 16.d6 ♔f8 17.♗e3 ♕xc2 18.♖d2 ♕c3 19.♖b1+– Followed by ♗h6+.] 16.♗d2 ♕c5 17.d6



Position after: 17.d6

17...♔f8 [17...♖d8 18.♕f4 e5 19.♗b4 ♔f8 20.♗xc5 exf4 21.d7+ ♔g7 22.♖e8 ♘h6 23.♖xh8+–] 18.♗e3 ♕xc2 19.♖d2 ♕c3 20.♖b1+–

B) 8...♘f6?! 9.♘xc6 bxc6 10.♕f3 Here, e4-e5 is already a big threat. Black has a few different ways to defend against it, but none of them are convincing.

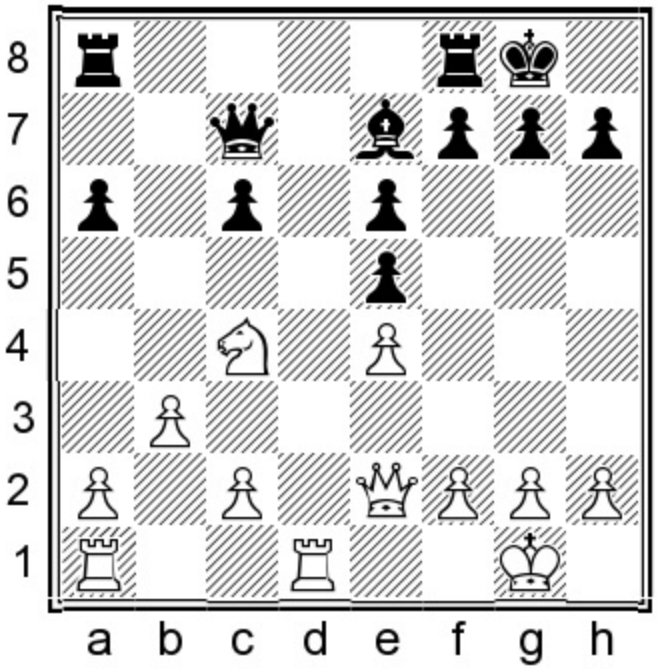


Position after: 10.♕f3

B1) 10...e6 11.e5 dxe5 12.♕xc6+ ♘d7 13.♖d1 ♕c8 14.♕a4±

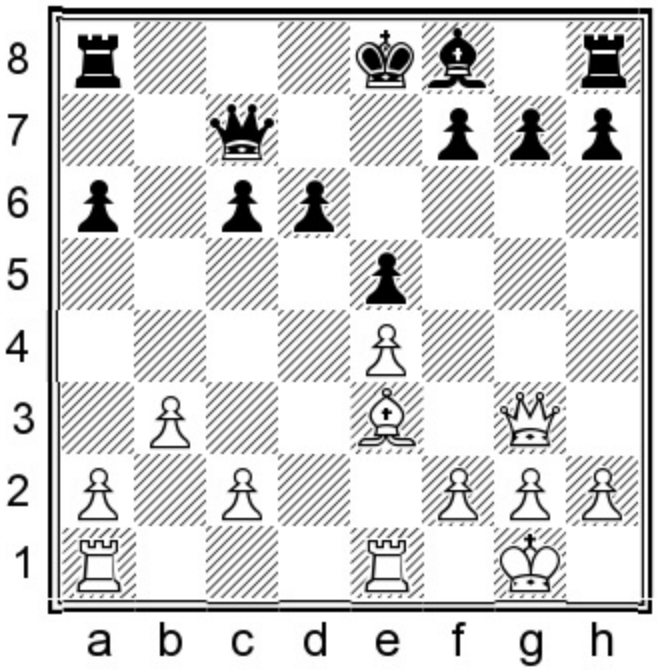
B2) 10...e5 11.♘d2 ♗e7 12.♘c4 0-0 13.♗g5 ♕c7 14.♖ad1± White converted without any issues in Zhigalko – Teterev, Minsk 2011.

B3) 10...♘d7 11.b3! ♘e5 12.♕e2 e6 [12...g6 would've been met with 13.f4, demonstrating the point behind 11.b3.] 13.♗b2 ♗e7 14.♗xe5 dxe5 15.♘d2 0-0 16.♘c4 ♕c7 17.♖ed1±



Position after: 17.♖ed1±

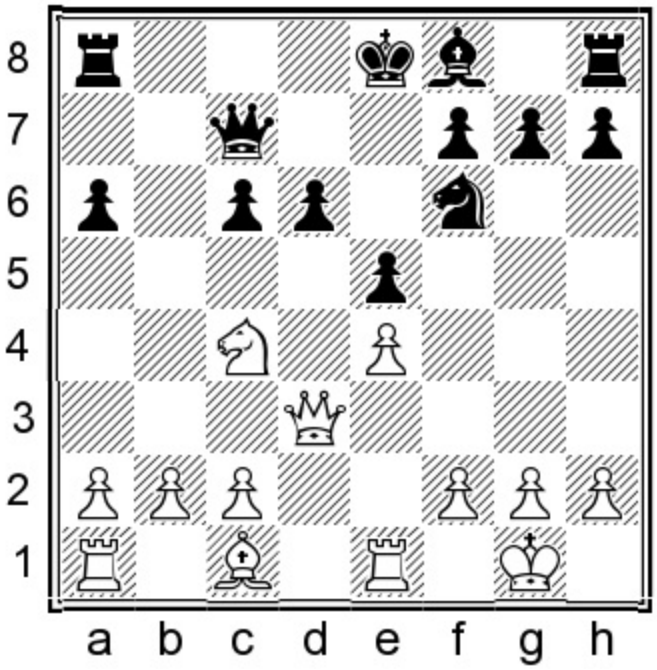
B4) 10...♕c7 11.♘d2 ♘d7 [11...g6 12.♘c4 ♗g7 13.e5+–] 12.♘c4 e6 13.♗f4 ♘b6 14.♘xb6 ♕xb6 15.b3 e5 16.♗e3 ♕c7 17.♕g3±



Position after: 17.♕g3±

After Black plays a likely ...g6, we can combine doubling rooks on the d-file with an h4-h5 push.

C) 8...e5? doesn't make any sense, since after 9.♘xc6 bxc6 10.♘d2 ♘f6 11.♘c4 ♕c7 12.♕d3

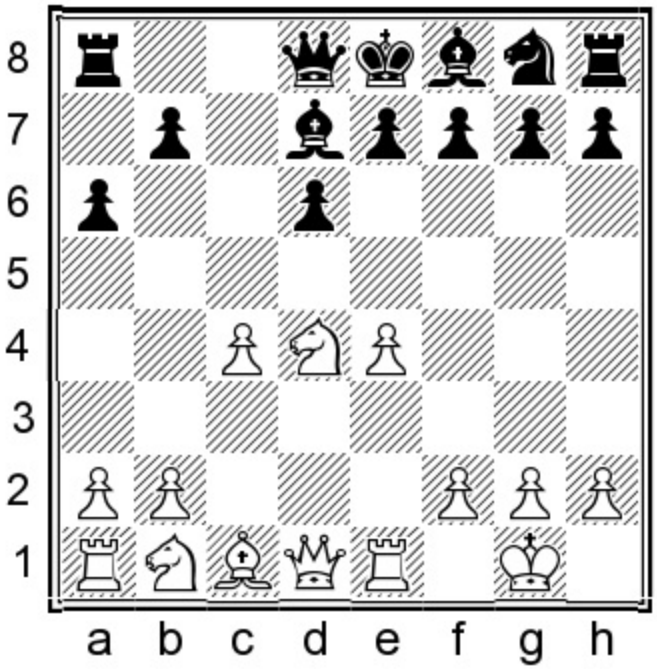


Position after: 12.♕d3

12...♘d7 [12...♗e7 13.♗g5 ♖d8 14.♘e3+–] 13.♗e3+– Black's d-pawn is pretty much lost.

D) 8...♖c8 is considered in the next subchapter.

9.c4



Position after: 9.c4

As we already discussed, when Black defends or removes his bishop from c6 we should revert back to a Maroczy structure.

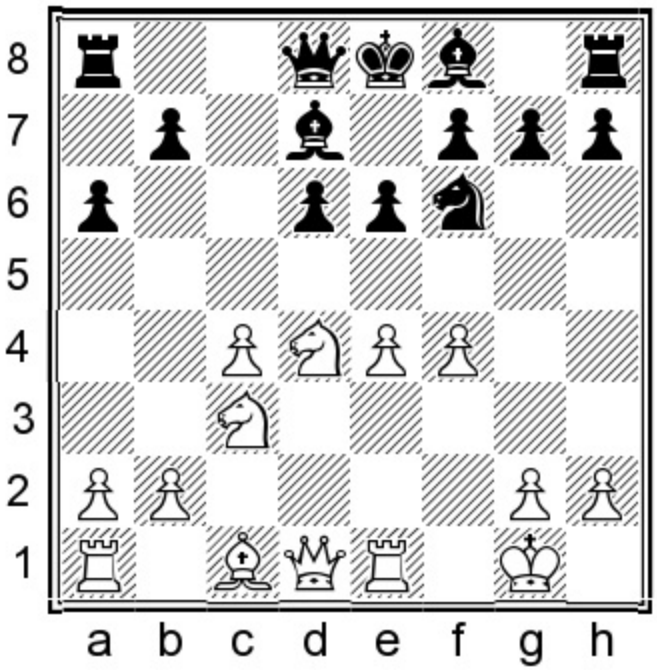
9...♘f6

9...♖c8 transposes to 8...♖c8.

10.♘c3 e6

10...g6 11.♗f4! Once again, e4-e5 is a big positional threat. 11...♗g7 [11...e5 12.♗g5± followed by ♘c2 with an incredible grip on the d5-square.] 12.e5 dxe5 13.♗xe5 0-0 14.♕e2±

11.f4!



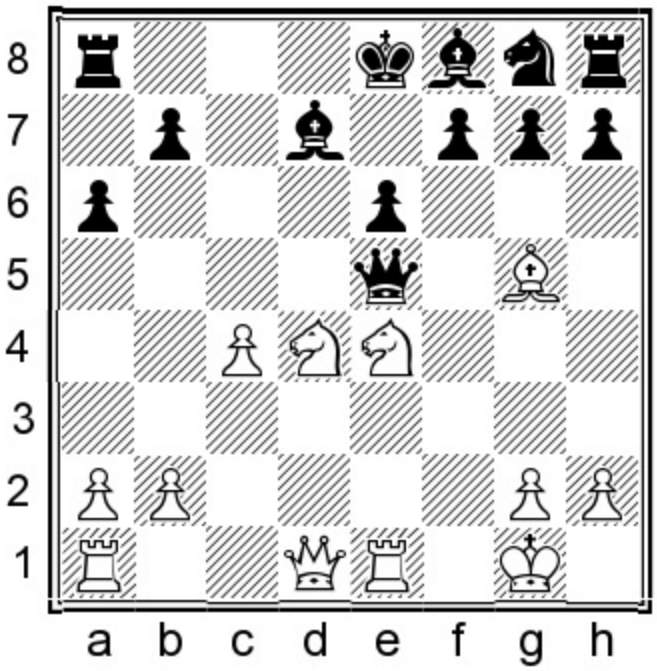
Position after: 11.f4!

Black can't stop us from playing e4-e5, and his knight doesn't have any good squares to go to.

11...♕c7 12.e5 dxe5 13.fxe5 ♘g8 14.♘e4! ♕xe5

Despite winning a pawn, Black's queen will find herself the centre of a lot of unwanted attention.

15.♗g5



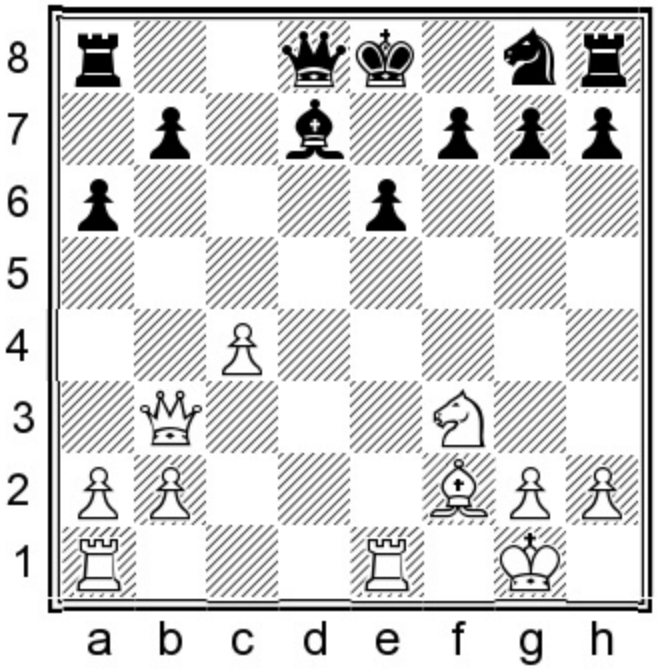
Position after: 15.♗g5

15...♗c5

A) 15...h6 16.♗h4 ♗c5 17.♗f2 ♗e7 18.♗g3 ♕a5 19.a3 ♘f6 20.♘d6+ ♔f8 21.b4±

B) 15...♕c7 16.c5!+–

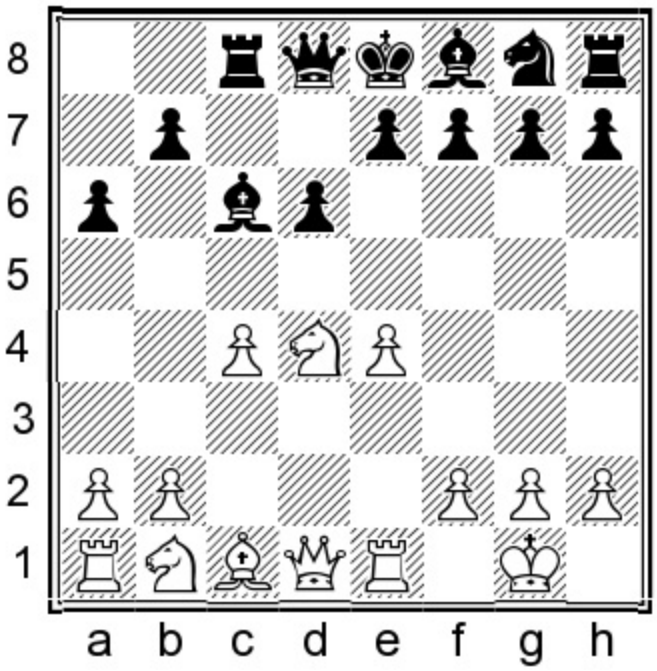
16.♘xc5 ♕xc5 17.♗e3 ♕e5 18.♗f2 ♕g5 19.♘f3 ♕d8 20.♕b3+–



Position after: 20.♕b3+–

b) 8...♖c8

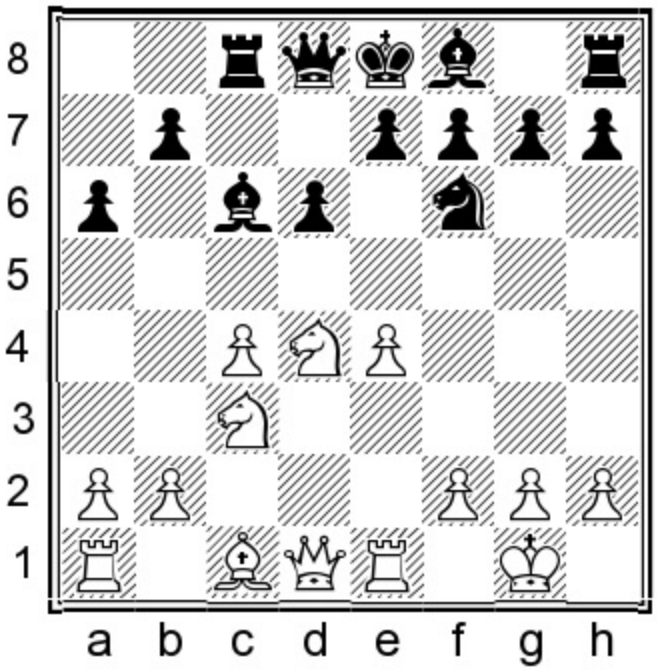
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 d6 4.0-0 ♗d7 5.♖e1 a6 6.♗xc6 ♗xc6 7.d4 cxd4 8.♘xd4 ♖c8 9.c4



Position after: 9.c4

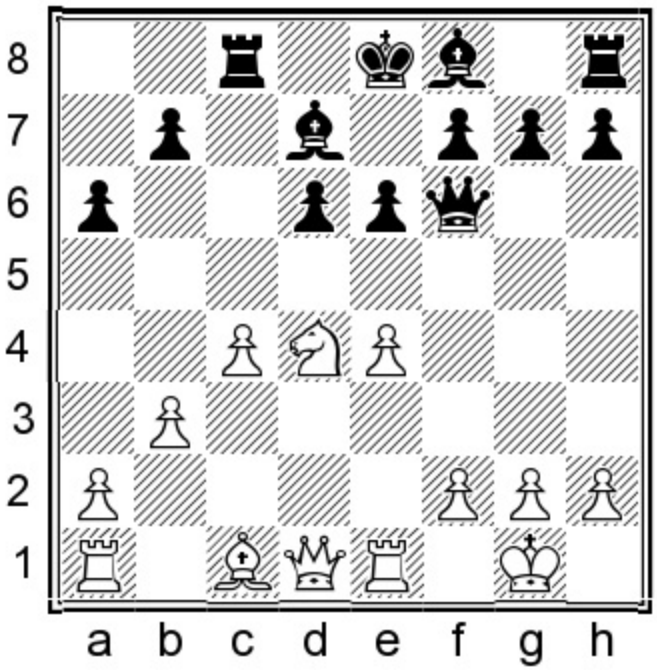
9...♗d7

9...♘f6 10.♘c3



Position after: 10.♘c3

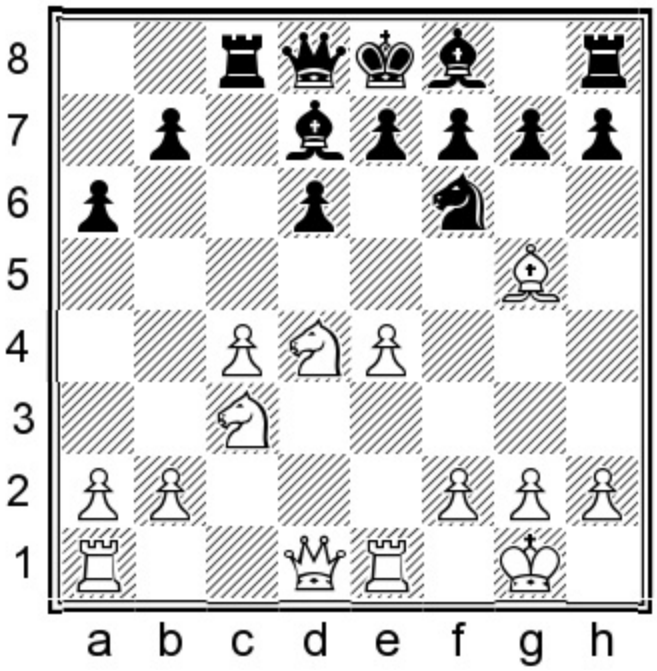
A) 10...e6 11.♘d5!? A sophisticated move to continuously frustrate Black's kingside development. Another option is ♗f4 to simply target the d6-pawn. 11...♗d7 12.♘xf6+ ♕xf6 13.b3



Position after: 13.b3

In all of the following variations, Black faces continual problems associated with his d6-pawn. 13...♗e7 [13...♕d8 14.♕d3 ♗e7 15.a4 0-0 16.♗a3±] 14.♗b2 ♕g6 [14...0-0 15.♘c6 e5 16.♘xe7+ ♕xe7 17.♗a3±] 15.♗a3! ♖d8 [15...0-0 16.e5±] 16.♕f3 ♕f6 17.♕xf6 ♗xf6 18.♖ad1 ♗e7 19.f3±

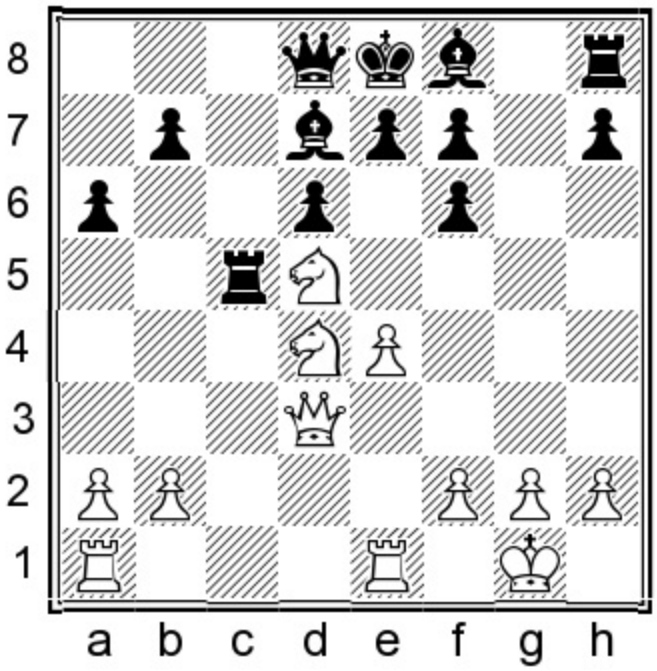
B) 10...♗d7 11.♗g5!



Position after: 11.♗g5!

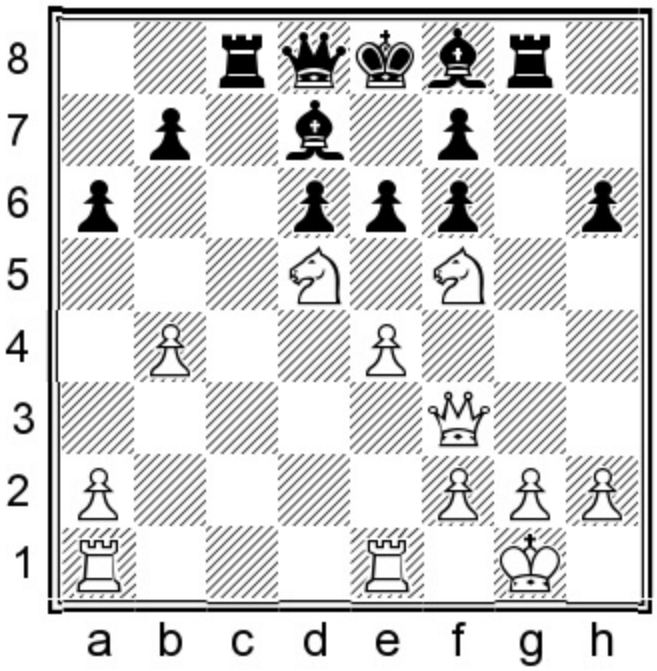
For the sacrificed pawn, we'll be able to cripple Black's structure and imprison his king in the

centre. 11...♖xc4 [11...e6 12.♘f5! h6 13.♗xf6 ♕xf6 14.♘xd6+ ♗xd6 15.♕xd6±] 12.♕d3 ♖c5 13.♗xf6 gxf6 14.♘d5



Position after: 14.♘d5

14...a5 [14...♖g8 15.b4 ♖c8 16.♘f5 e6 17.♕h3 h6 18.♕f3+–

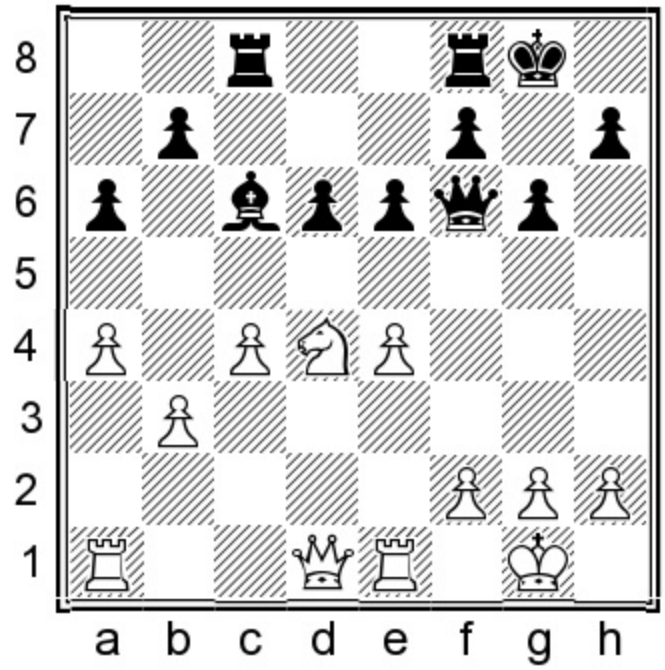


Position after: 18.♕f3+–

An absolutely fantastic position – Black's pieces are completely paralysed.; 14...e6 15.♘f5! A useful idea to remember.] 15.♖ac1 e6 16.♖xc5 dxc5 17.♘b5 ♗c6 18.♘xf6+ ♔e7 19.♘d5+ ♔e8

20.♕g3 ♗xb5 21.♘c7+ ♔e7 22.♘xb5+–

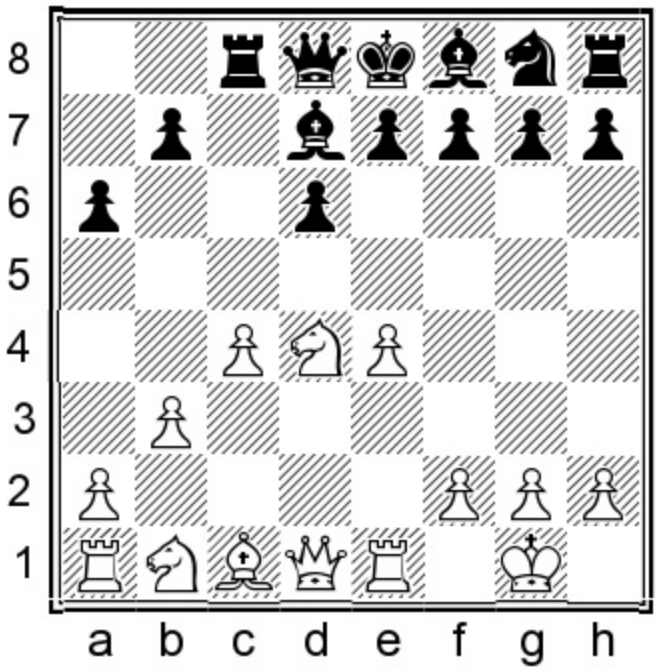
C) 10...g6 11.b3 ♗g7 12.♘d5! With the typical aim of exchanging off all the minor pieces, apart from our knight vs Black's light-squared bishop. 12...0-0 13.♗g5 e6 [13...b5 14.♗xf6 ♗xf6 15.♘xf6+ exf6 16.cxb5 axb5 17.♖c1±; 13...♖e8 14.♖c1 ♗xd5 15.exd5 h6 16.♗e3±] 14.♘xf6+ ♗xf6 15.♗xf6 ♕xf6 16.a4!



Position after: 16.a4!

We've reached the ideal minor piece scenario which I keep going on about. Black's light-squared bishop really suffers against our Maroczy structure, and Black also has other dark-squared weaknesses which he'll find difficult to defend. He may try 16...e5, but in this case the change in structure benefits us, and we can exchange off to a major-piece middlegame. 17.♘xc6 bxc6 18.♖a2! ± Followed by ♖d2, ♖e3 and ♖ed3. White will continue to press for a long time.

10.b3

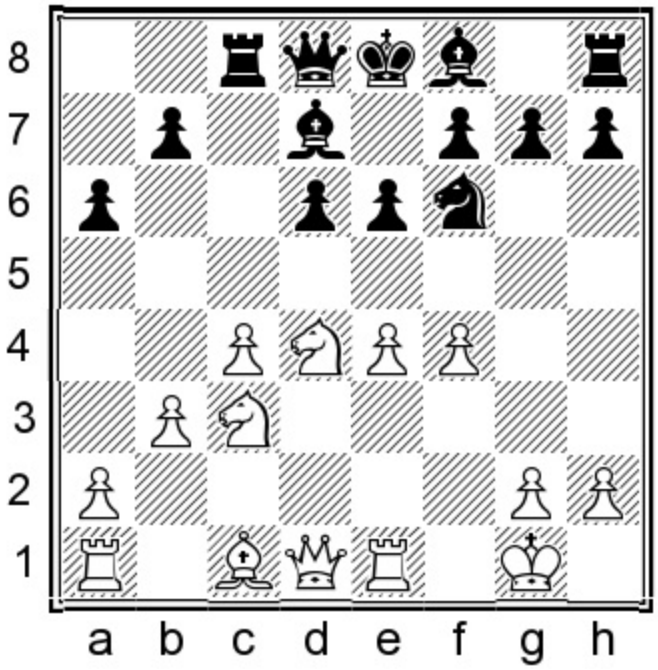


Position after: 10.b3

10...g6

Therefore, Black's best option is to wait for us to play ♗b2 before developing with ...♘f6.

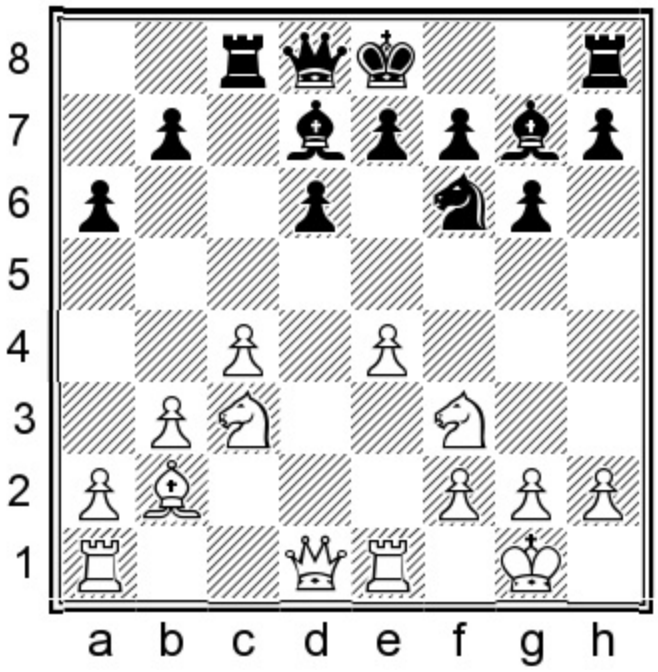
10...♘f6?! It will soon become apparent why this is already a mistake. 11.♘c3 e6 [11...g6 12.e5! dxe5 13.♖xe5± Black is under considerable pressure, and the problem with 13...♗g7 is that 14.♗a3 pretty much wins on the spot.] 12.f4!



Position after: 12.f4!

12...♕b6 [12...♗e7 13.e5 ♘g8 14.♕g4+–] 13.♔h1± It's really difficult for Black to finish his kingside development due to the continuous threat of e4-e5.

11.♗b2 ♘f6 12.♘c3 ♗g7 13.♘f3!



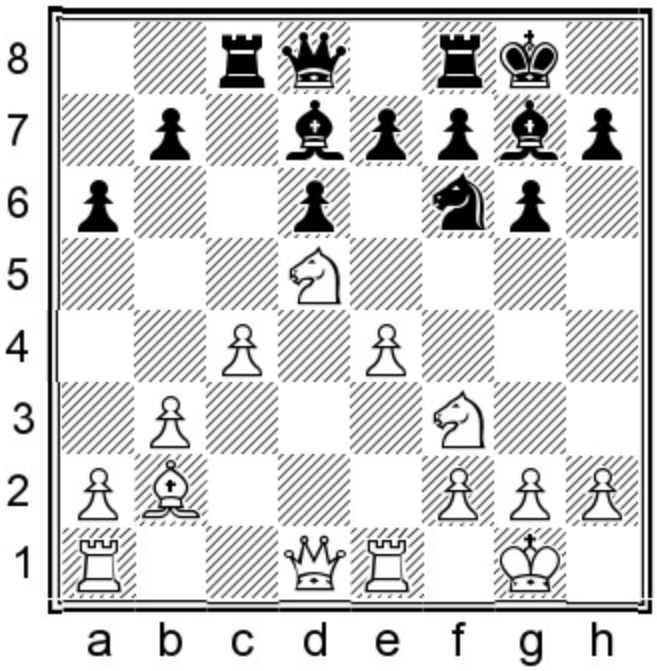
Position after: 13.♘f3!

A thematic idea, attempting to trade minor pieces with ♘d5. Ideally, we want to achieve a position where we have one knight vs Black's light-squared bishop. In this scenario, we can exploit Black's dark-squared weaknesses, and Black's bishop on d7 will be feeling a bit useless against our Maroczy pawns.

13...0-0

13...♗g4 14.♘d5 e6 15.♘e3 0-0 16.h3 ♗xf3 17.♕xf3± Even though Black has managed to exchange his light-squared bishop, he's now created another weakness on d6.

14.♘d5



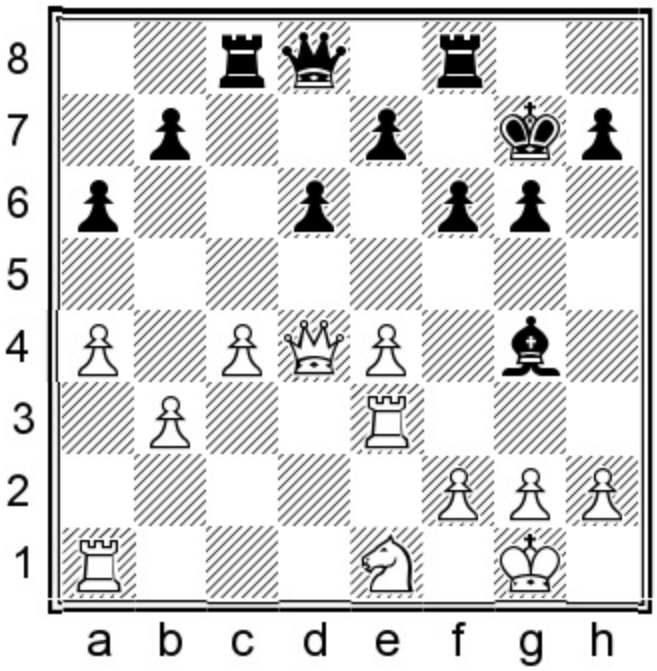
Position after: 14.♘d5

14...♘xd5

14...♗c6 Black will have to double his own pawns if he wants to retain his dark-squared bishop, and this won't ease his problems. 15.♘xf6+ exf6 16.♘d4 b5 17.cxb5 axb5 18.♖c1 ♗d7 19.♖xc8 ♕xc8 20.♘c2!± The knight will be redirected to d5.

15.♗xg7 ♔xg7

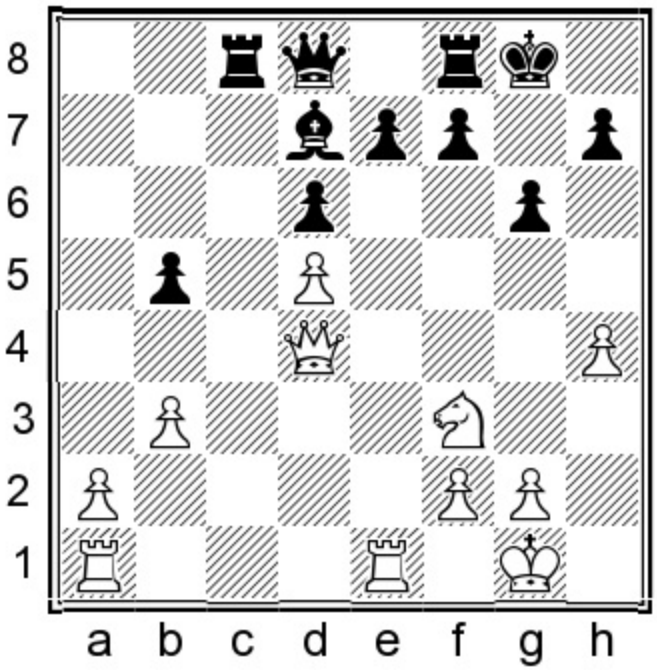
Black can also keep the e-file closed with 15...♘e3!? 16.♖xe3 ♔xg7 17.a4 ♗g4 [17...b5 18.cxb5 axb5 19.a5±] 18.♕d4+ f6 19.♘e1±



Position after: 19.♘e1±

Black is still solid, but White has the clearly superior minor piece. We can try to maneouvre our knight to e3, and at some point probe on the kingside with h4-h5.

16.exd5 b5 17.♕d4+ ♔g8 18.cxb5 axb5 19.h4±

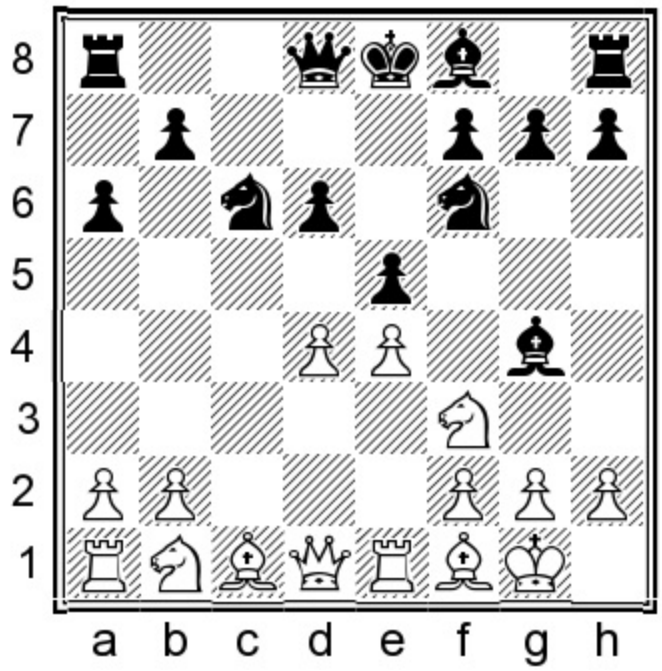


Position after: 19.h4±

Our a-pawn can be used as a diversion whilst we attack on the kingside.

Chapter 6
4.0-0 ♗d7 5.♖e1 ♘f6 with 9...e5

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 d6 4.0-0 ♗d7 5.♖e1 ♘f6 6.c3 a6 7.♗f1 ♗g4 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 e5



Chapter Guide

Chapter 6 – 4.0-0 ♗d7 5.♖e1 ♘f6 with 9...e5

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 d6 4.0-0 ♗d7 5.♖e1 ♘f6 6.c3 a6 7.♗f1 ♗g4 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4

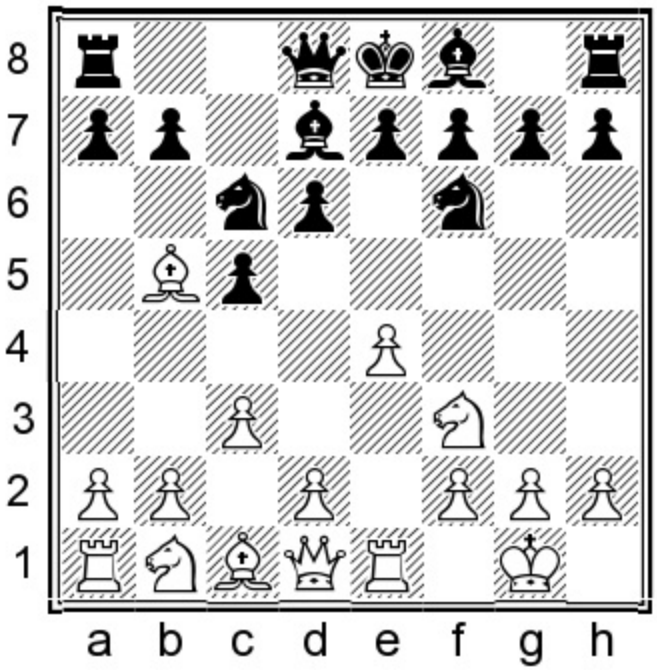
a) 9...--

b) 9...e5 10.♗e3

c) 9...e5 10.d5

a) 9...--

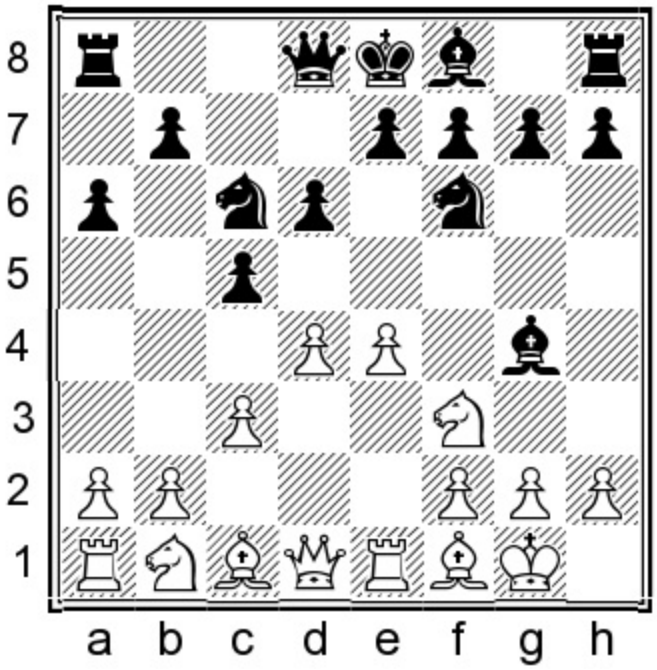
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 d6 4.0-0 ♗d7 5.♖e1 ♘f6 6.c3



Position after: 6.c3

White intends to play d4, and so Black almost always tries to thwart that intention by playing the following sequence.

6...a6 7.♗f1 ♗g4 8.d4

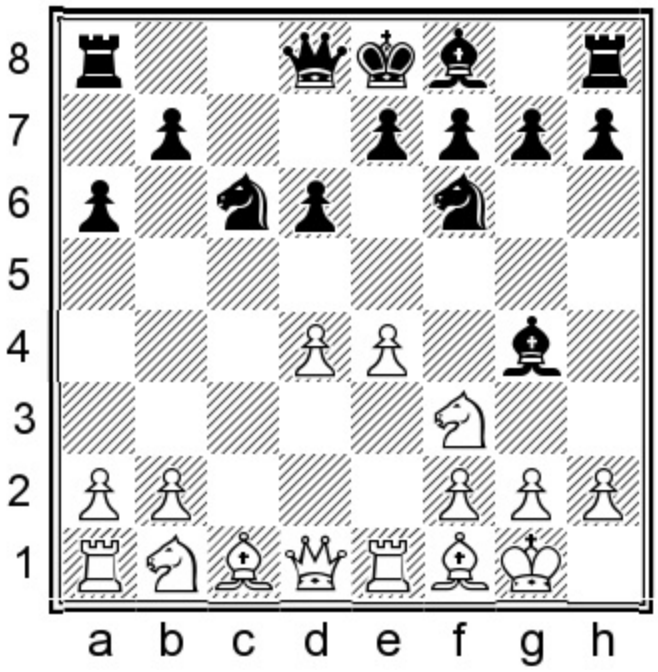


Position after: 8.d4

Anyway! Here, 8.h3 is the most common move, and a fine alternative. However, I want to keep with

my theme of trying to play the most forcing lines – and there are many more fascinating ideas after 8.d4.

8...cxd4 9.cxd4

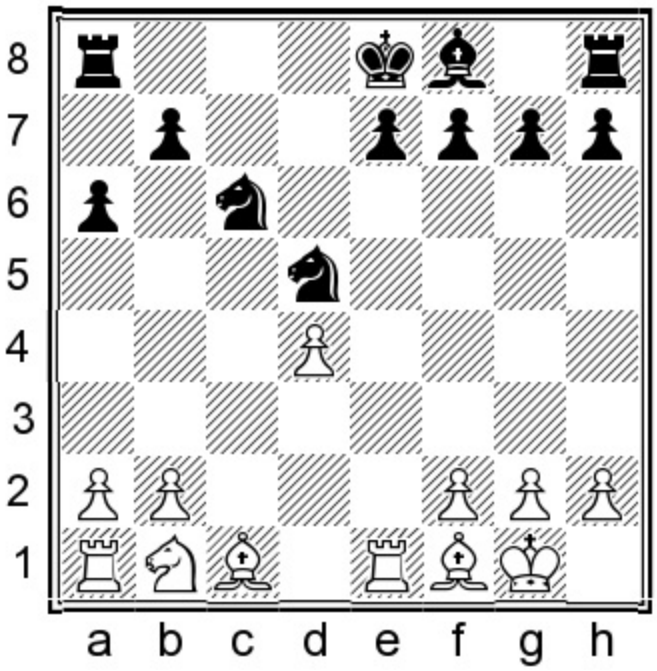


Position after: 9.cxd4

9...♗xf3!?

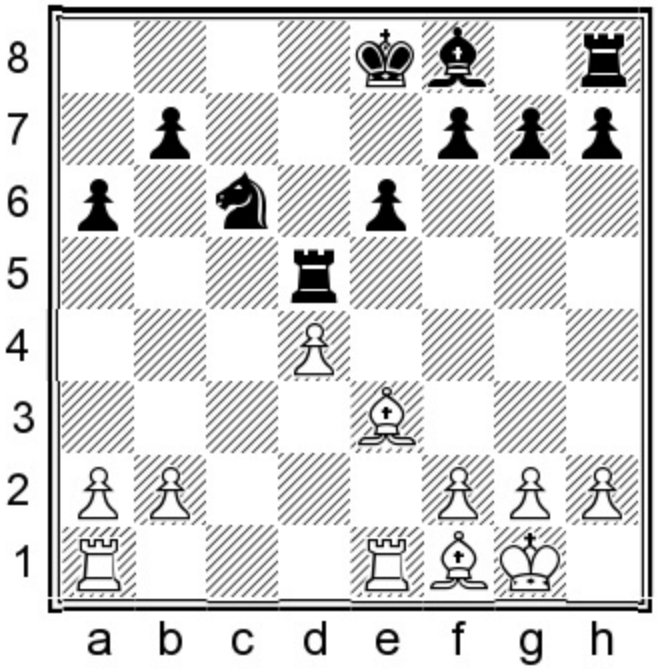
This is quite an interesting idea if Black wants to put his knight on h5 after playing ...d6-d5, as it may be best placed on h5 to meet e5-e6 ideas.

A) 9...d5 Here White can either play safely, or try to complicate the game and disrupt Black's development. 10.exd5 This is a distinct possibility if you want to cut down the number of chapters you read. However, I don't think Black has too many problems as long as he plays accurately, so my main recommendation in the next chapter is 10.e5. 10...♗xf3! 11.♕xf3 ♕xd5 12.♕xd5 ♘xd5



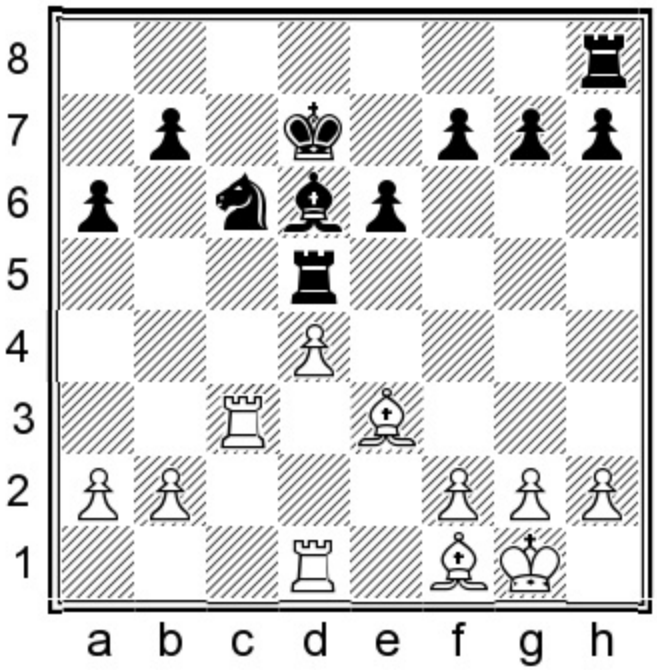
Position after: 12...♘xd5

The bishop-pair gives us an advantage, the extent of which I'm not really sure about. 13.♘c3 ♖d8 14.♘xd5 ♖xd5 As long as Black quickly gets his c6-knight to the d5-square, he will remain very solid. 15.♗e3 e6



Position after: 15...e6

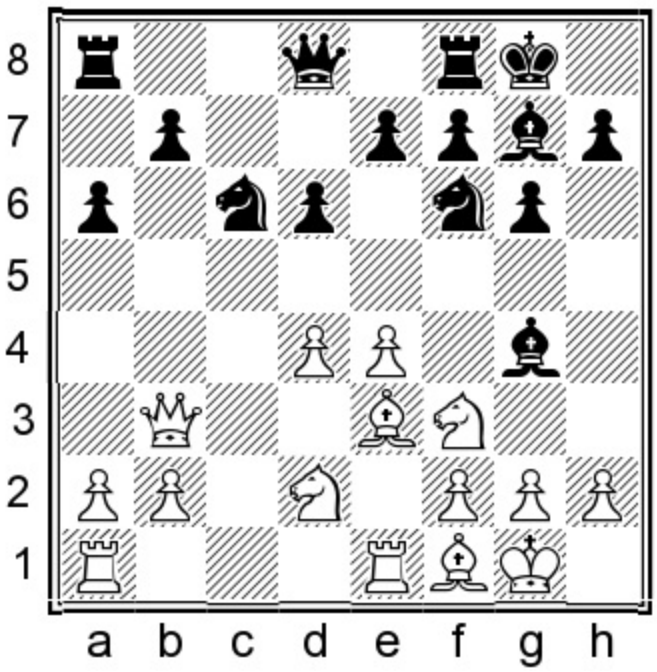
16.♖ec1! [16.♖ac1 ♗b4 17.♖ed1 ♘e7! 18.g3 ♖d7 19.a3 ♗d6 20.♗g2 ♘d5 A draw was agreed in Speisser – Lukas, ICCF email 2018.] 16...♔d7 17.♖c3 ♗d6 18.♖d1



Position after: 18.♖d1

The good news is that Black is a little discoordinated, and we certainly aren't in danger of being worse. With simple moves we can press for a while, although odds of a draw remain high. I think the text move is a much better option to play for a win. As we'll see in the ensuing variations, there are many fascinating ideas which we can add to our arsenal.

B) 9...g6 is too slow and exemplifies why we're able to get a comfortable advantage if Black doesn't play anything critical. 10.♗e3 ♗g7 11.♘bd2 0-0 12.♕b3!

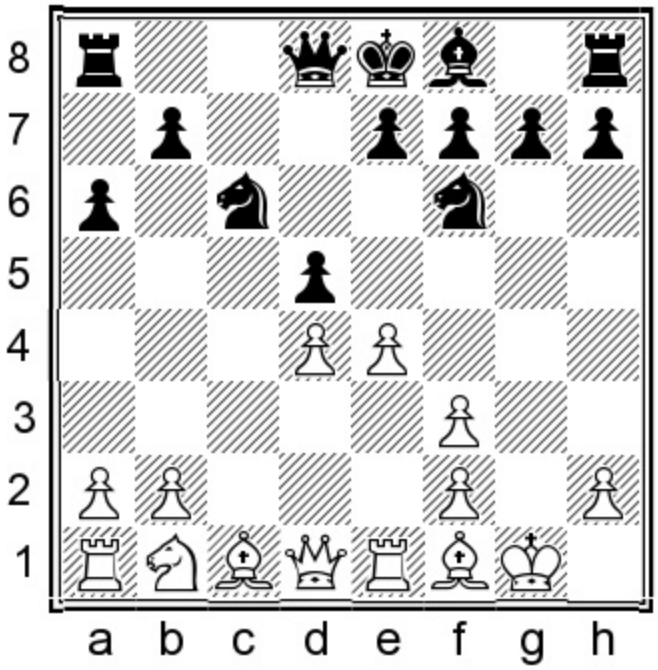


Position after: 12.♕b3!

Now we can recapture on f3 with our d2-knight without conceding the e4-pawn. 12...♗xf3 Immediately capturing on f3 is possible, but we still retain a large advantage courtesy of our bishop pair. [12...b5 13.h3 ♗xf3 14.♘xf3±; 12...♘a5 13.♕d3±] 13.♘xf3 ♘xe4 14.♕xb7 ♕c8 15.♕b3±

C) 9...e5 is the topic of subchapters b and c.

10.gxf3 d5

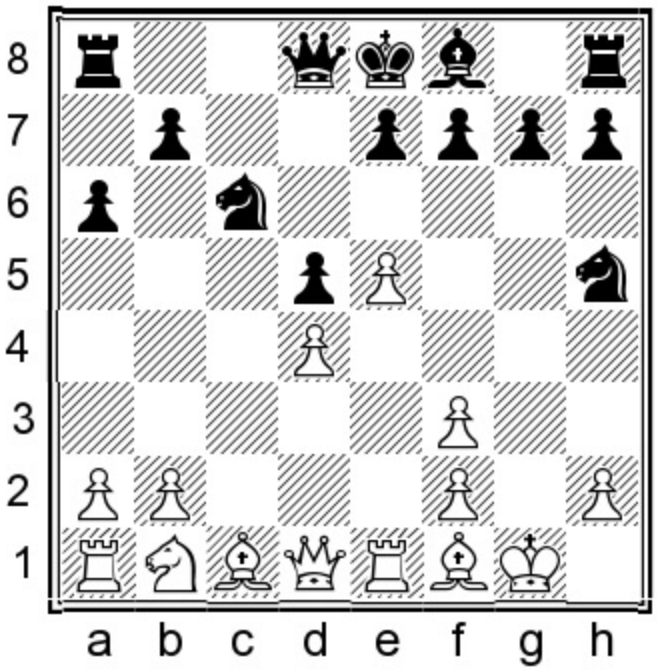


Position after: 10...d5

11.♘c3!

I prefer this move as it poses greater practical problems for Black.

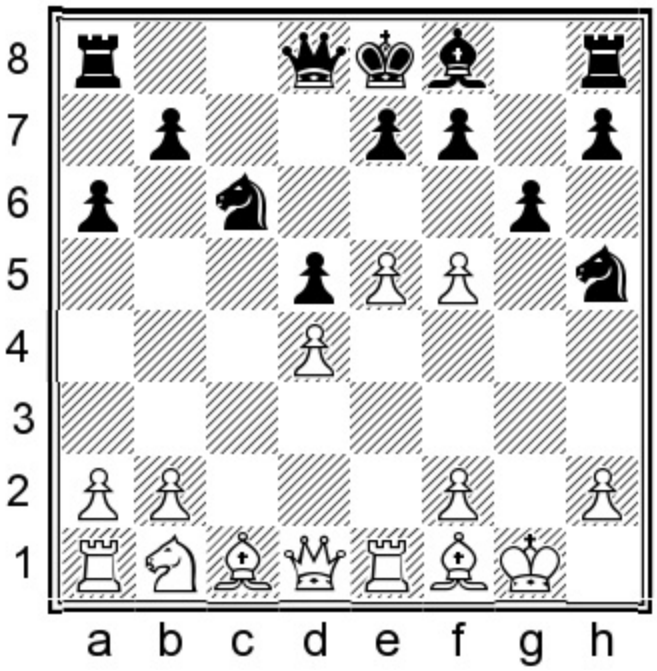
11.e5 is the natural move to play here, but the line seems quite forcing and I'm a bit worried about simplifying the position too quickly. 11...♘h5



Position after: 11...♘h5

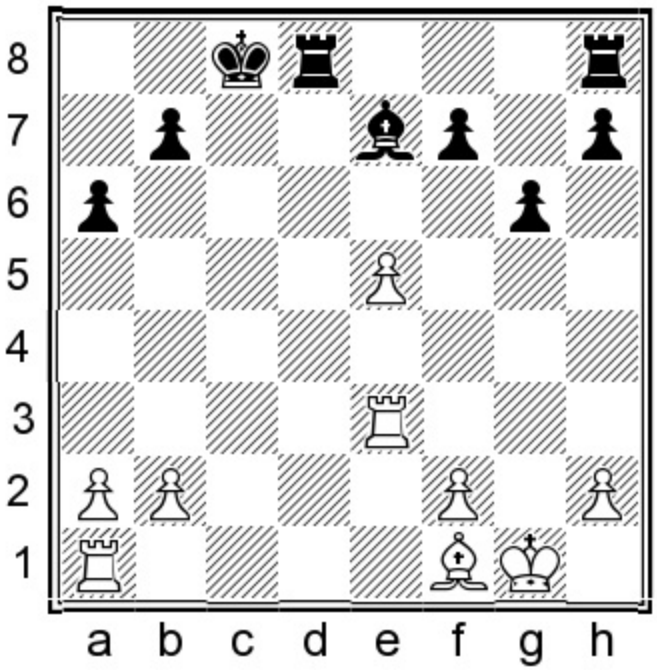
A) 12.e6 g6! is the point. 13.♘c3 ♘g7! [13...f5?! 14.♕b3→ led to a quick win for White in Svidler – Albornoz Cabrera, Khanty – Mansiysk 2019.] 14.♗h3 ♕d6 15.exf7+ ♔xf7∞

B) 12.f4 g6 13.f5



Position after: 13.f5

13...♘g7 [13...♕b6 14.♗e3 ♘g7 15.f6 ♘f5 16.♘c3±] 14.f6 ♘f5 15.♘c3 ♘cxd4 16.♗e3 ♘c6 17.♕xd5 ♘xe3 18.♖xe3 ♕xd5 19.♘xd5 0-0-0 20.♘xe7+ ♘xe7 21.fxe7 ♗xe7



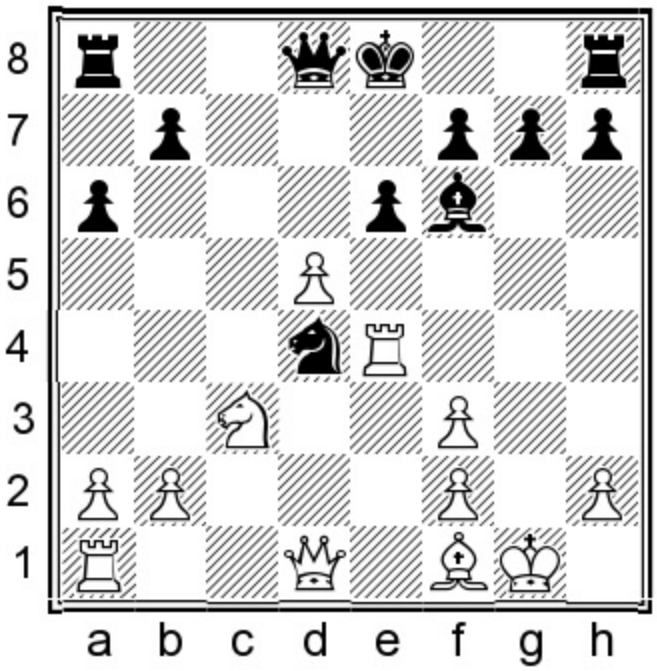
Position after: 21...♗xe7

After this forcing line, it's clear that White is the only one playing for anything – we can win a pawn by force, as the following line illustrates. Whether this is enough to win the game is another matter. 22.♖b3 ♖d4 23.♖c1+ ♔b8 24.♗xa6 ♖b4 25.♖xb4 ♗xb4 26.♖c4 ♗a5 27.♗b5±

11...e6

11...dxe4? 12.d5 ♘e5 13.♘xe4 ♘xe4 14.♖xe4+–

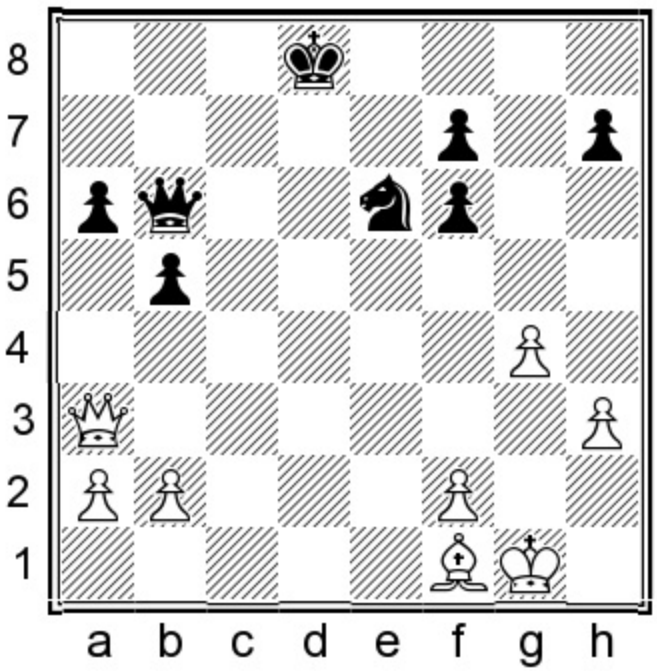
12.♗g5 ♗e7 13.♗xf6 ♗xf6 14.exd5 ♘xd4 15.♖e4!



Position after: 15.♖e4!

15...♘f5

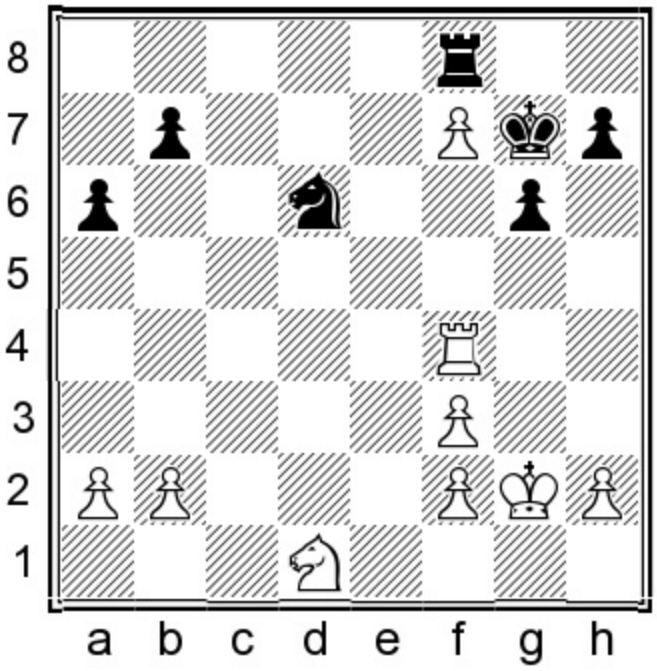
15...♕b6 16.dxe6 ♘xe6 17.♘d5 ♕d8 18.♕a4+ b5 19.♘xf6+ gxf6 20.♕a3 ♖g8+ 21.♖g4 ♖xg4+ 22.fxg4 ♕b6 23.♖d1 ♖d8 24.♖xd8+ ♔xd8 25.h3±



Position after: 25.h3±

Black's inferior pawn structure and our superior minor piece means he faces a long defensive task.

16.dxe6 0-0 17.exf7+ ♔h8 18.♕xd8 ♖axd8 19.♖d1 ♖xd1 20.♘xd1 g6 21.♗c4! ♘d6 22.♖e6 ♘xc4 23.♖xf6 ♔g7 24.♖f4 ♘d6 25.♔g2±

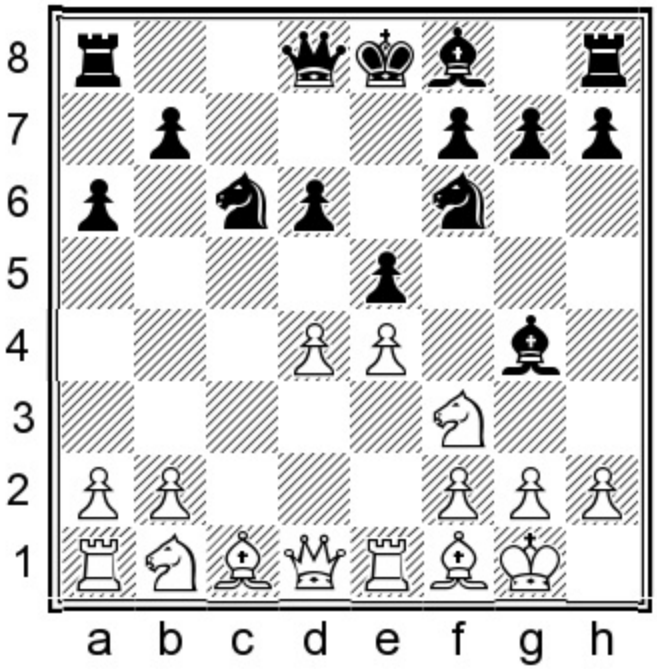


Position after: 25.♔g2±

White also has very good chances in this ending.

b) 9...e5 10.♗e3

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 d6 4.0-0 ♗d7 5.♖e1 ♘f6 6.c3 a6 7.♗f1 ♗g4 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 e5



Position after: 9...e5

10.♗e3

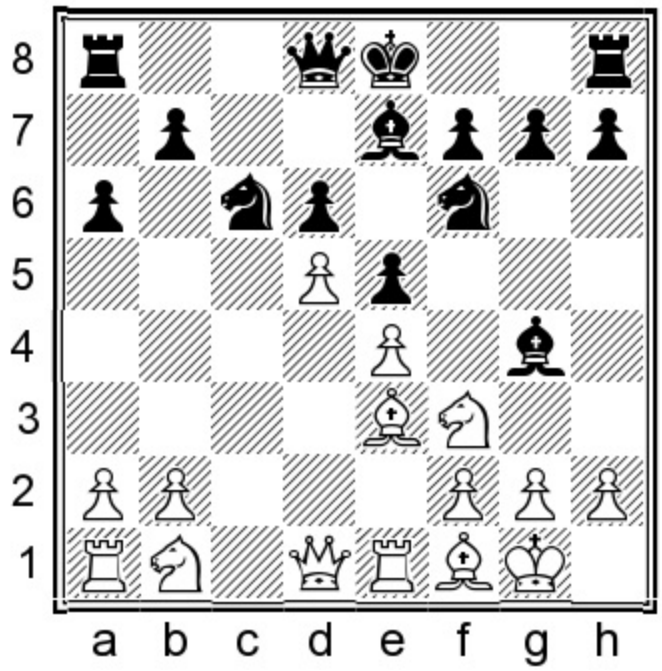
White has the luxury of being able to choose from two different strategies. The text move is the simplest way to play, claiming a comfortable advantage due to Black's weak d6-pawn. Meanwhile, 10.d5 will be examined in the next and final subchapter.

10...exd4

Black is basically forced to capture on d4, as d4-d5 is a big threat.

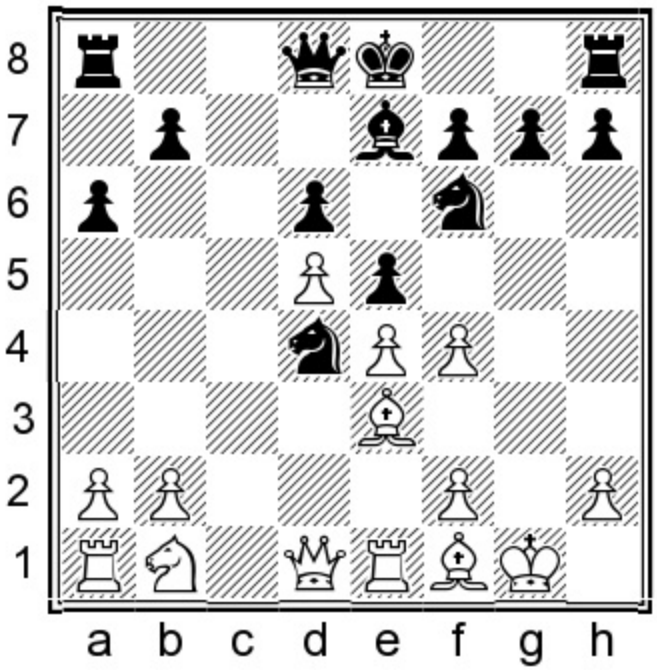
A) 10...♗xf3 11.gxf3 exd4 will transpose to 10...exd4.

B) 10...♗e7?! 11.d5



Position after: 11.d5

11...♗xf3 [11...♘d4 12.♗xd4 Our ability to capture the d4-knight with our bishop means that Black will forever have a weak d4-pawn, which we'll most likely win at some point. 12...exd4 13.♘bd2 ♘d7 14.h3 ♗h5 15.♕b3 ♘c5 16.♕b4 d3 17.♕a3±] 12.gxf3 ♘d4 13.f4!

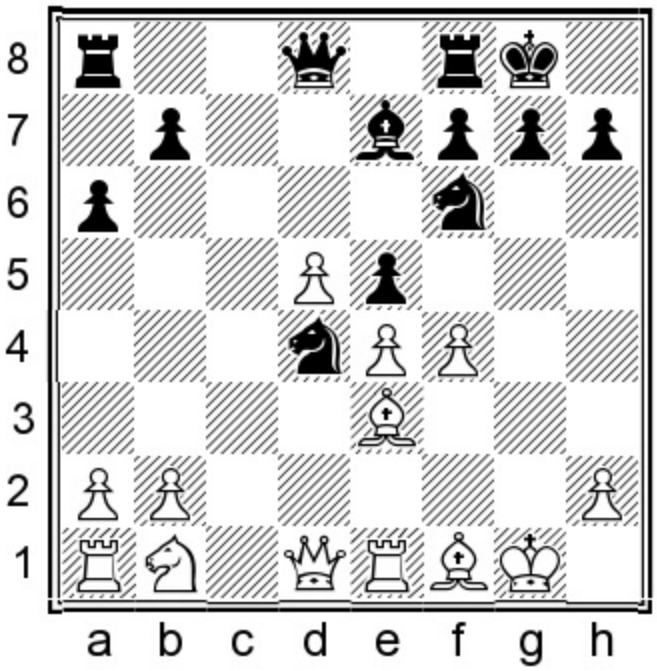


Position after: 13.f4!

Black's knight on d4 is too unstable, and he'll probably end up losing a pawn for very limited compensation.

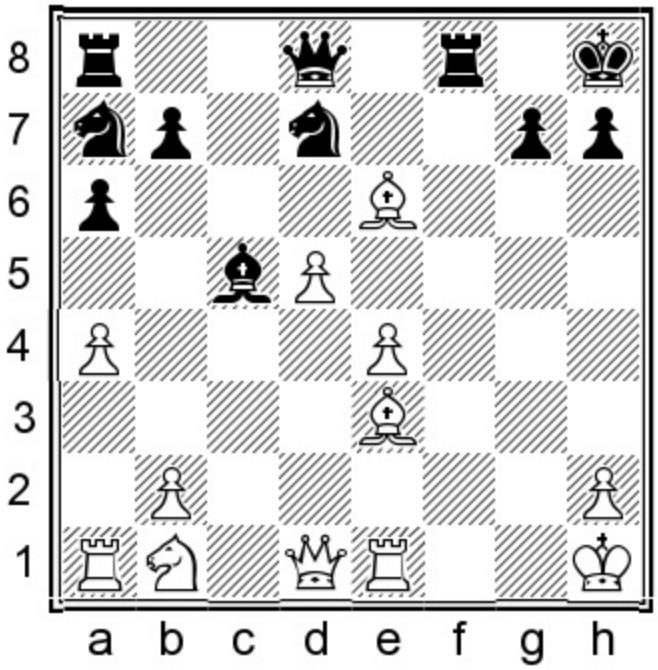
B1) 13...♘d7 14.♘d2 0-0 15.♗h3 ♖c8 [15...♗f6 16.fxe5 dxe5 17.♖c1+– Our bishops dominate, and limited analysis of this position will demonstrate that White has a winning advantage.] 16.♗xd4 exd4 17.♘f3 Most likely followed by ♕xd4, as ...♗f6 can always be met with e4-e5.

B2) 13...0-0 14.fxe5 dxe5 15.f4!



Position after: 15.f4!

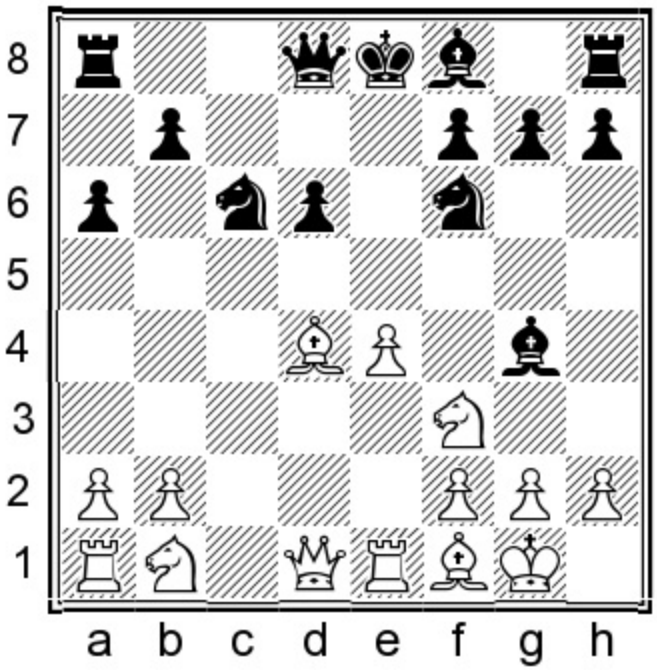
15...♘b5 [15...♕c7 16.fxe5 ♘c2 17.d6 ♘xe3 18.♕d3!+– Black is losing a piece.] 16.fxe5 ♘d7 [16...♘xe4 17.♘d2 ♘xd2 18.♕xd2+– The central pawns will be too strong for Black to deal with.] 17.a4 ♘a7 18.e6 fxe6 19.♗h3! ♔h8 20.♗xe6 ♗c5 21.♔h1+–



Position after: 21.♔h1+–

C) 10...d5?! This move looks completely wrong, and is naturally refuted quite easily. 11.exd5 ♘xd5 12.♗d2! ♗e7 [12...♘xd4 13.♕a4++–] 13.dxe5±

11.♗xd4



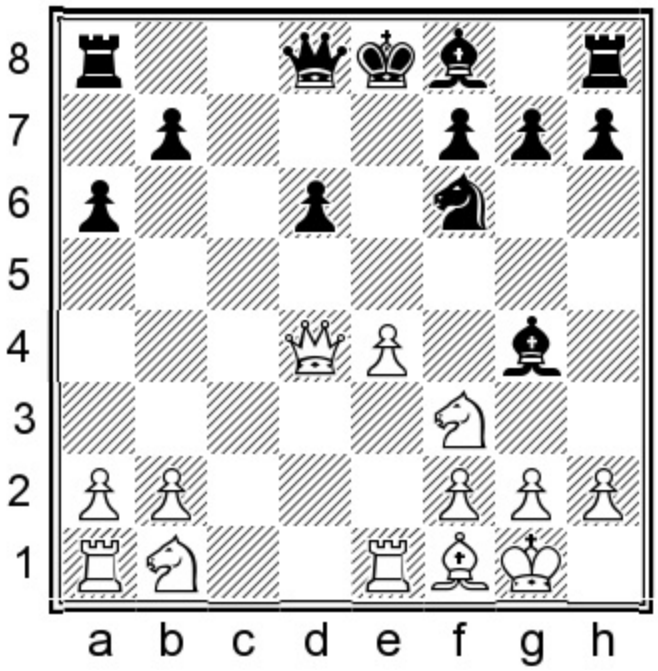
Position after: 11.♗xd4

11...♘xd4

Black will have to capture on d4 at some point, as his compensation for his inferior d6-pawn will probably derive from claiming control of the dark-squares.

11...♗e7 12.♘c3 0-0?! 13.♗e3!± Black has lost his chance to capture on d4, and is now comfortably worse.

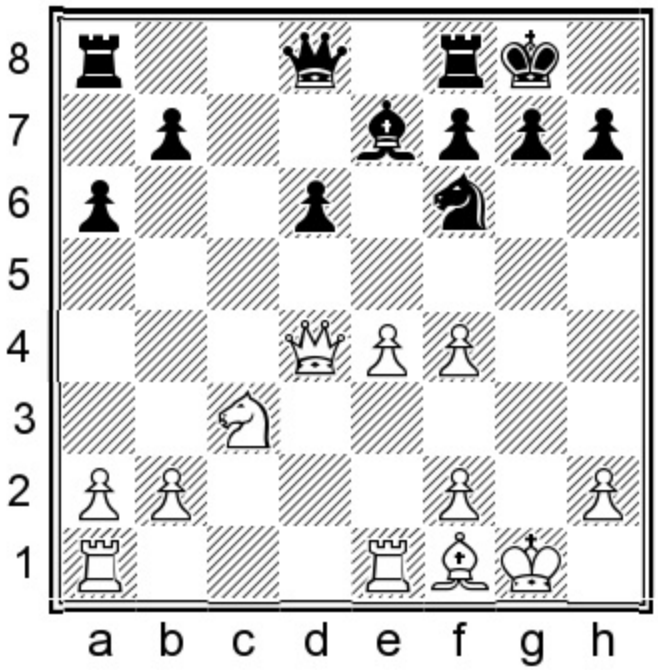
12.♕xd4



Position after: 12.♕xd4

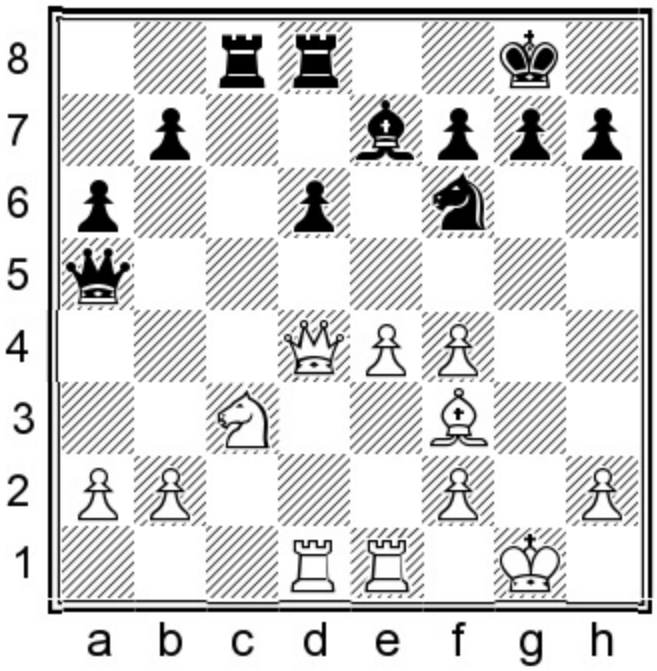
12...♗e7

12...♗xf3 It makes sense that Black would want to ruin our pawn structure, but we are in time to quickly advance with f3-f4 and e4-e5 before he can exploit our weaknesses. 13.gxf3 ♗e7 14.♘c3 0-0 15.f4! Necessary before Black plays something like ...♘h5 and ...♗f6.



Position after: 15.f4!

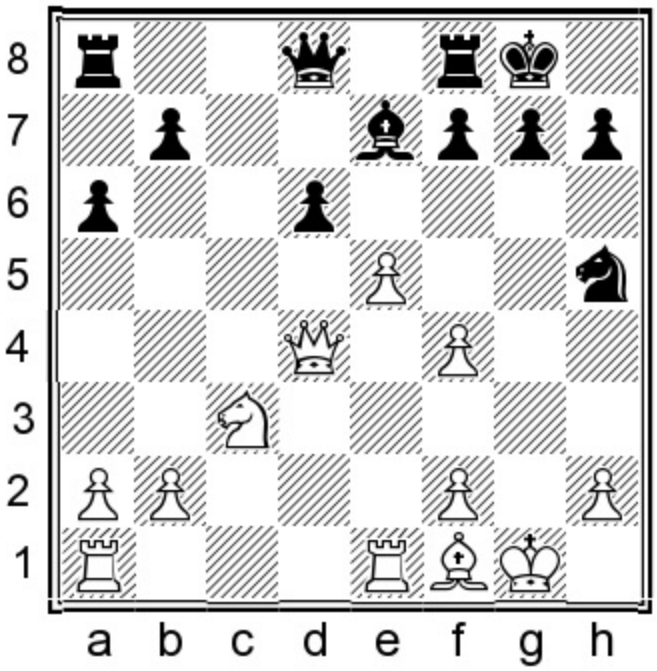
A) The lesser evil is probably 15...♕a5 16.♗g2 ♖fd8 17.♖ad1 ♖ac8 18.♗f3± after which White can slowly improve with moves like ♔g2 and ♖e2.



Position after: 18.♗f3±

We'll also consider doubling on the d- or e-file with our rooks, and it's important to keep an eye out for the possibility to advance e4-e5.

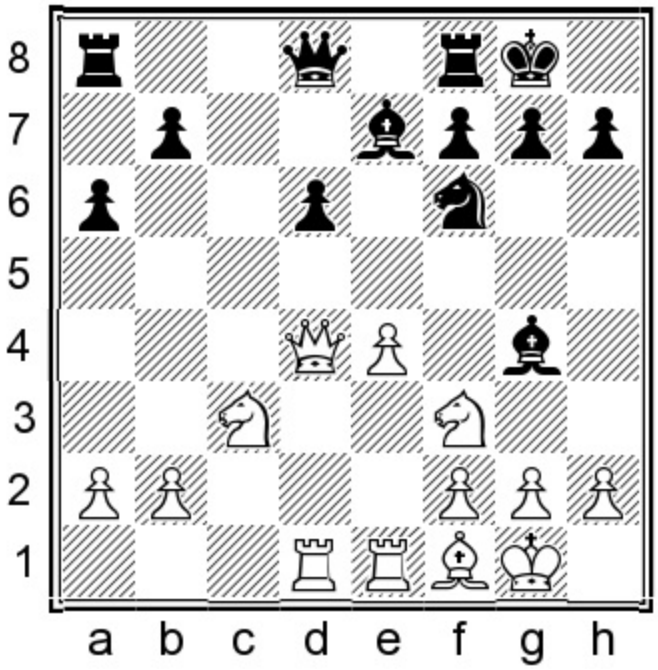
B) 15...♘h5?! 16.e5!



Position after: 16.e5!

16...♕c8 Black can't exploit White's slightly weakened king, as our pieces are too active. [16...dxe5 17.♕xe5+– The point of our strategy, as Black can't defend both of his minor pieces.; 16...g6 17.♖ad1 ♕d7 18.♗e2 ♘g7 19.exd6+–] 17.♗e2 ♕h3 18.♘d5 ♖ae8 19.♕d1! g6 20.♗xh5 gxh5 21.exd6 ♗d8 22.♖e7!+–

13.♘c3 0-0 14.♖ad1



Position after: 14.♖ad1

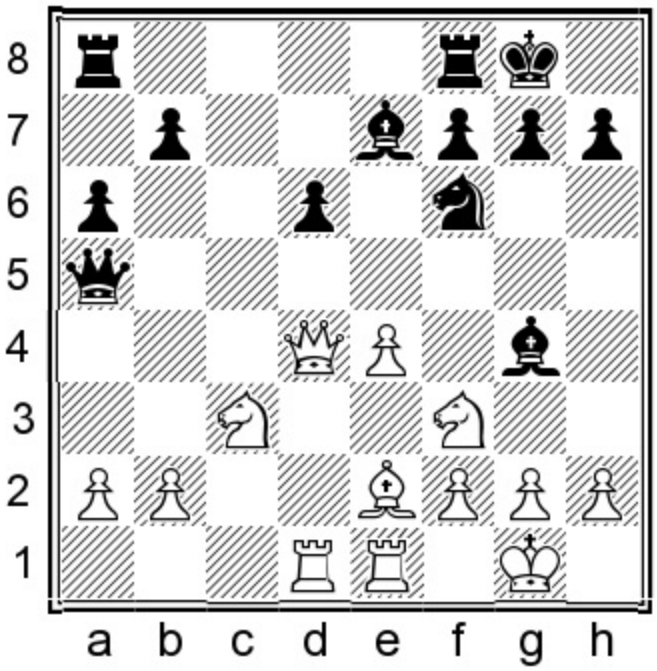
It's time to consider what happens if Black doesn't trade on f3.

14...♕c7

A) 14...♗xf3 15.gxf3 ♘h5? This fails due to 16.e5!+–

B) 14...♘d7 should always be met with 15.♘d5! ♘e5 16.♗e2±

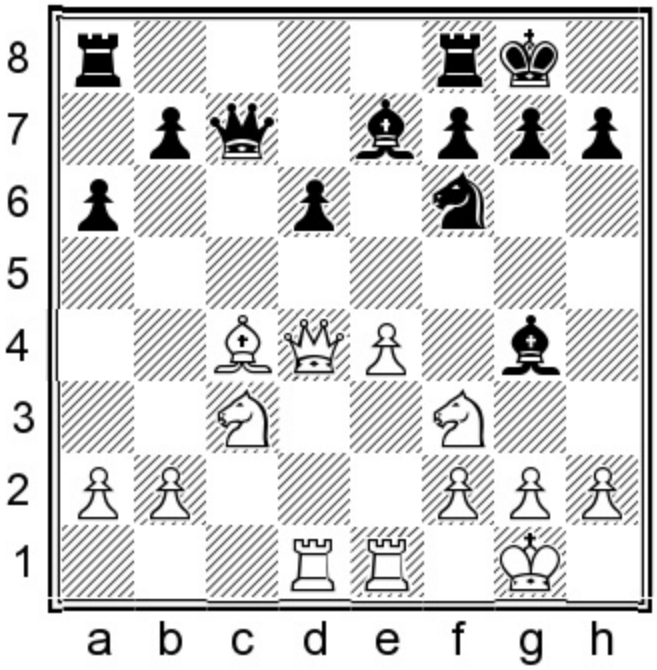
C) 14...♕a5!? Quite a sophisticated idea to prevent us from implementing our bishop on c4. 15.♗e2!



Position after: 15.♗e2!

Because of the threat of ...♗xf3 and ...♕g5+, it's necessary to defend the f3-knight with our bishop. Simultaneously, we also have the idea of ♘f3-d2, followed by ♘b3 or ♘c4, attacking the a5-queen. 15...♗e6 16.♕d2!± Followed by ♘d4, and the position is once again quite comfortable for White.

15.♗c4



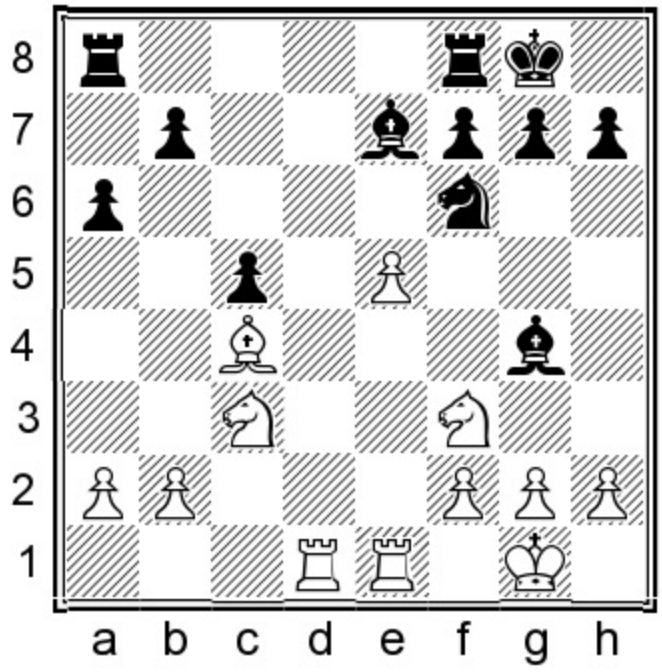
Position after: 15.♗c4

Obviously this is the best square for the bishop, controlling the d5-square as well as putting pressure on the f7-pawn.

The variations from here onwards aren't particularly important – just use them to understand our plans and ideas. Certainly, it's enough to know that we have a pleasant position with a small edge.

15...♖ac8

A) 15...♕c5 Trading queens doesn't really make life easier for Black. 16.♕xc5! dxc5 17.e5

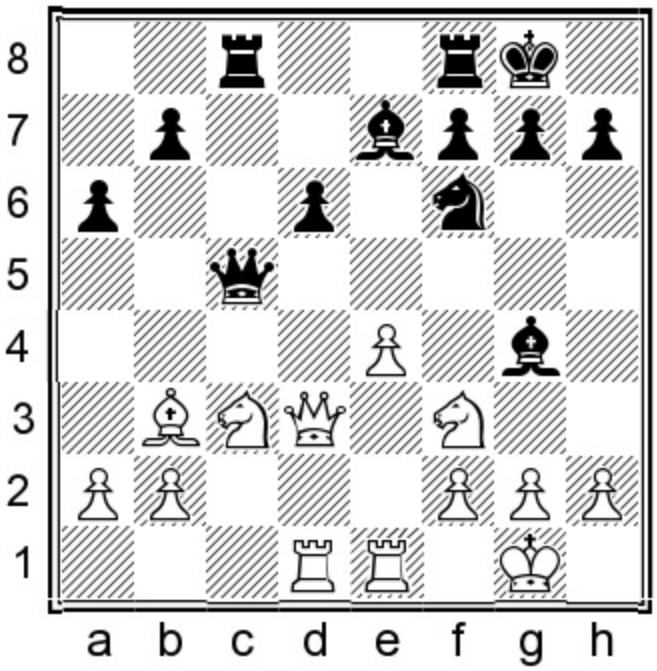


Position after: 17.e5

17...♘h5 [17...♘e8 18.e6! fxe6 19.♗xe6+ ♗xe6 20.♖xe6 ♗f6 21.♘a4±] 18.♘d5 ♗d8 19.♖e4 ♗f5 20.♖e3±

B) 15...b5 16.♗b3 ♗xf3 17.gxf3 ♕a7 18.♕d3±

16.♗b3 ♕c5 17.♕d3!



Position after: 17.♕d3!

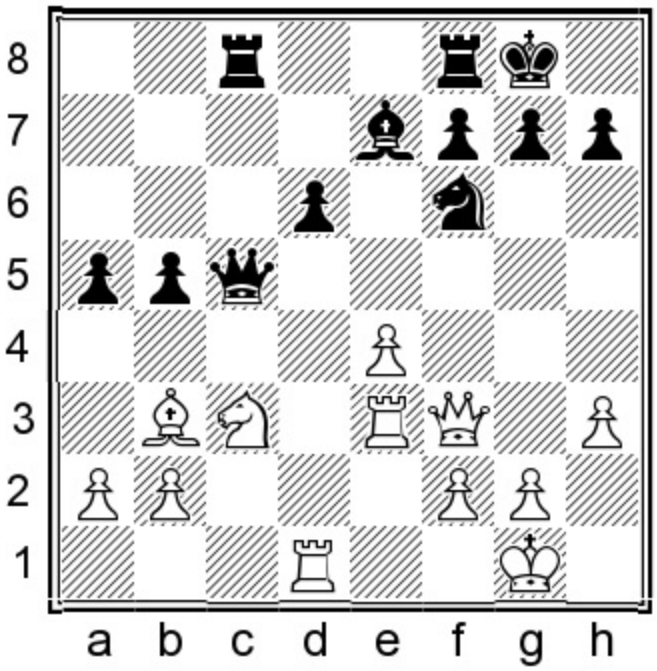
This time we don't capture on c5, as Black can recapture with his rook.

17...b5

Black should probably try and expand on the queenside to achieve some counterplay, or else his position will become extremely passive.

17...♖fe8 18.h3 ♗e6 19.♗xe6 fxe6 20.e5! dxe5 21.♖xe5 ♕b6 22.♕b1±

18.h3 ♗xf3 19.♕xf3 a5 20.♖e3±

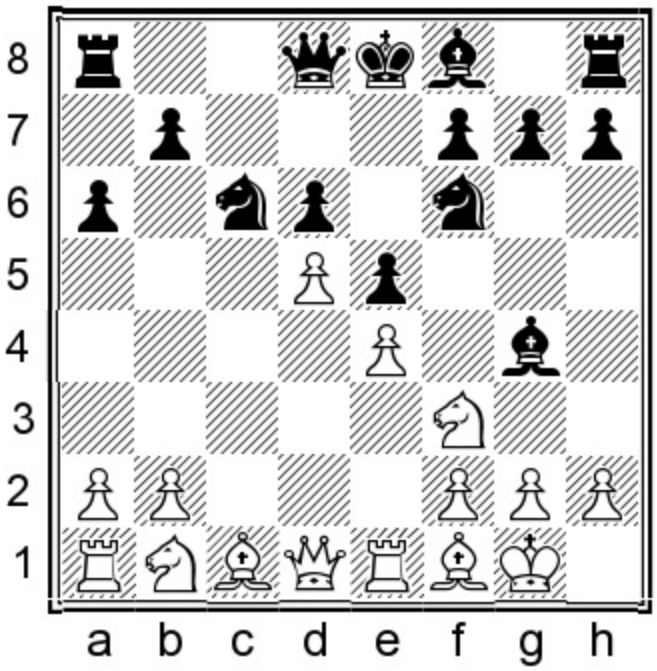


Position after: 20.♖e3±

Despite Black's queenside expansion, we're very comfortable and still only playing for two results.

c) 9...e5 10.d5

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 d6 4.0-0 ♗d7 5.♖e1 ♘f6 6.c3 a6 7.♗f1 ♗g4 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 e5 10.d5

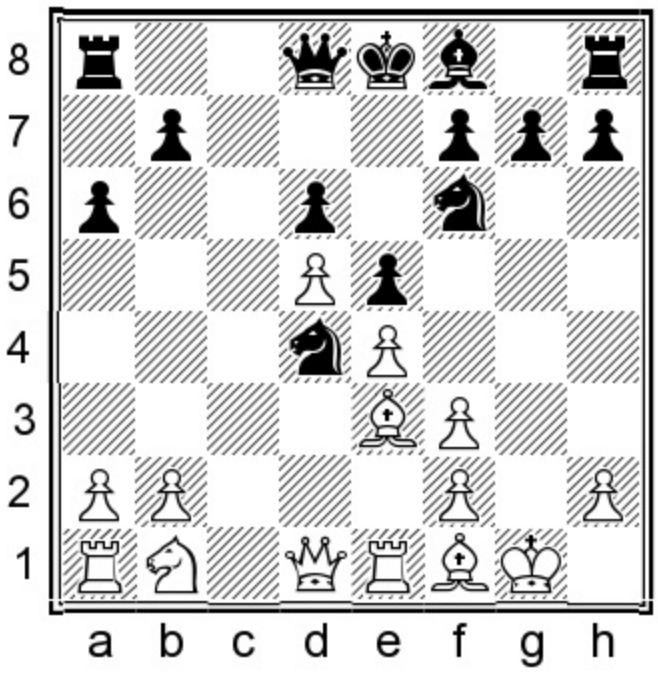


Position after: 10.d5

This is the alternative to the immediate 10.♗e3, covered in the previous subchapter. Black can double White's f-pawns without ceding the bishop-pair.

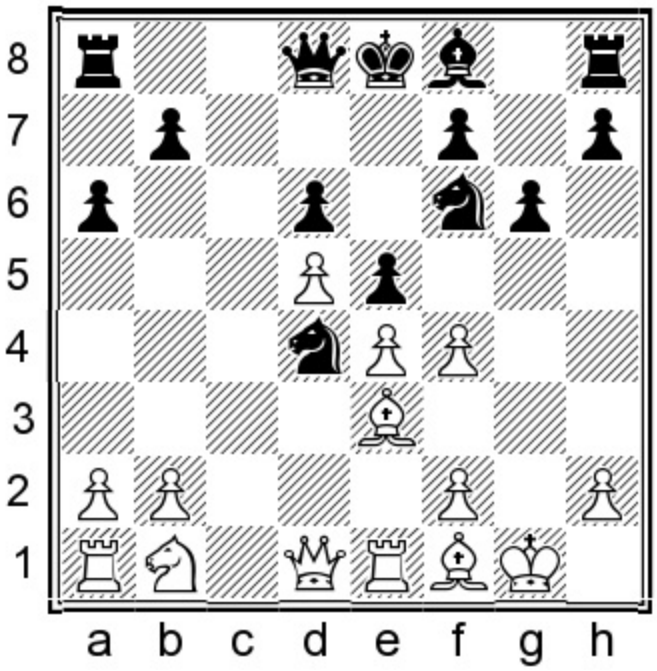
10...♘d4 11.♗e3 ♘xf3+

11...♗xf3 Black will likely lose a pawn after this move. He'll also have to contend with our additional option of f3-f4, undermining Black's centre. 12.gxf3



Position after: 12.gxf3

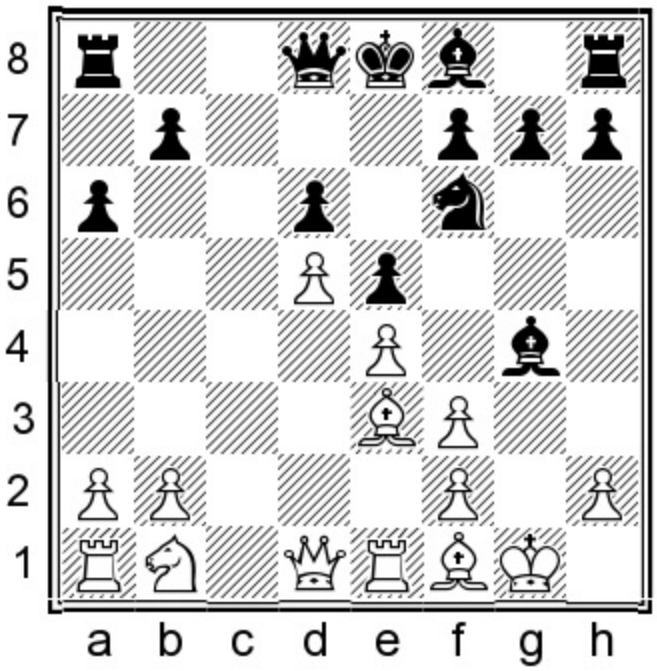
12...g6 [12...♗e7 transposes to a line covered after 10.♗e3.; 12...♘d7 13.♗h3 g6 14.♗xd7+! ♕xd7 15.♗xd4 exd4 16.♕xd4 f6 17.♘c3±] 13.f4!



Position after: 13.f4!

Black won't be able to muster up any counterplay on the dark-squares, as his centre will be too weak. 13...♘h5 14.fxe5 dxe5 15.♗xd4 exd4 16.♕xd4 ♕g5+ 17.♔h1 ♗g7 18.e5 0-0 19.♘d2 ♖fe8 20.♘f3 ♕f5 21.♕e4±

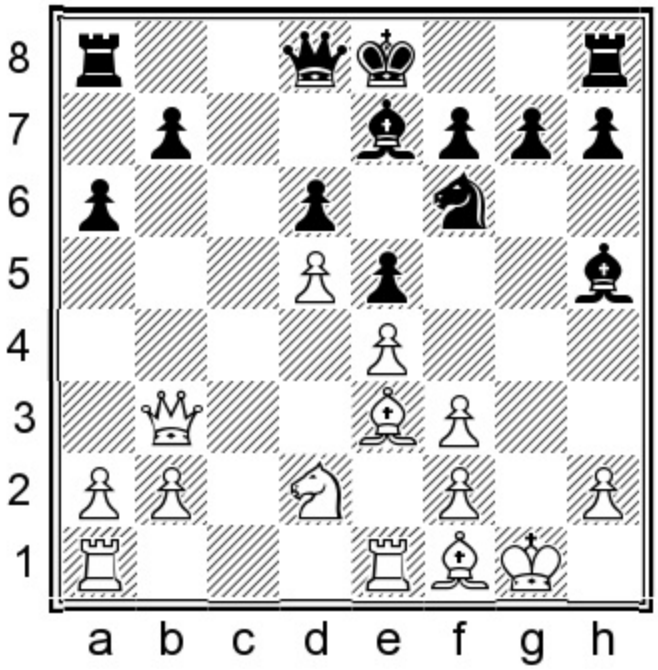
12.gxf3



Position after: 12.gxf3

12...♗d7

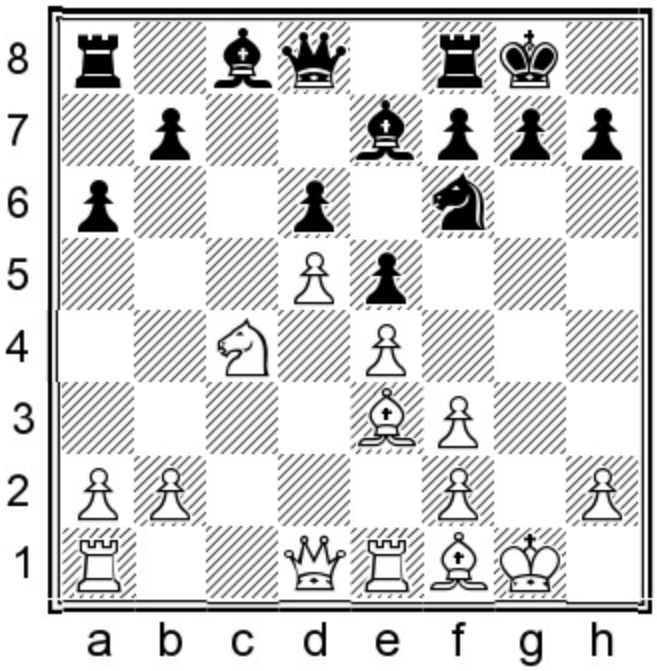
A) 12...♗h5 doesn't make too much sense, as Black is gifting us the h3-c8 diagonal for our light-squared bishop. More significantly, after we play ♘d2 we can move our queen away from the f3-pawn and Black's h5-bishop will be ostracised. 13.♘d2 ♗e7 14.♕b3±



Position after: 14.♕b3±

We can continue with something like ♖ac1, ♗g2, a2-a4 and ♘c4. Black's position already looks pretty hopeless.

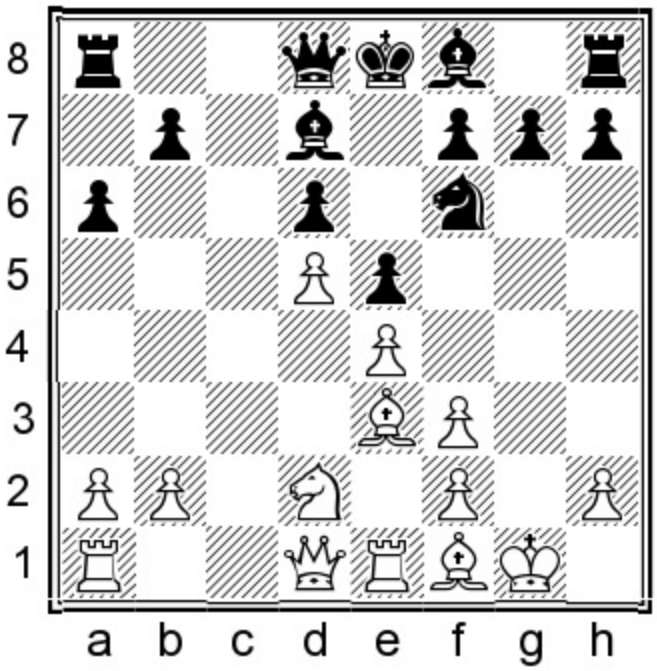
B) 12...♗c8 seems a bit too artificial, and we can just continue with normal moves. 13.♘d2 ♗e7 14.♘c4 0-0



Position after: 14...0-0

15.♘b6 ♖b8 16.♖c1 ♘d7 17.♘xc8 ♖xc8 18.♖xc8 ♕xc8 19.♗h3± Followed by putting one or both of our major pieces on the c-file.

13.♘d2



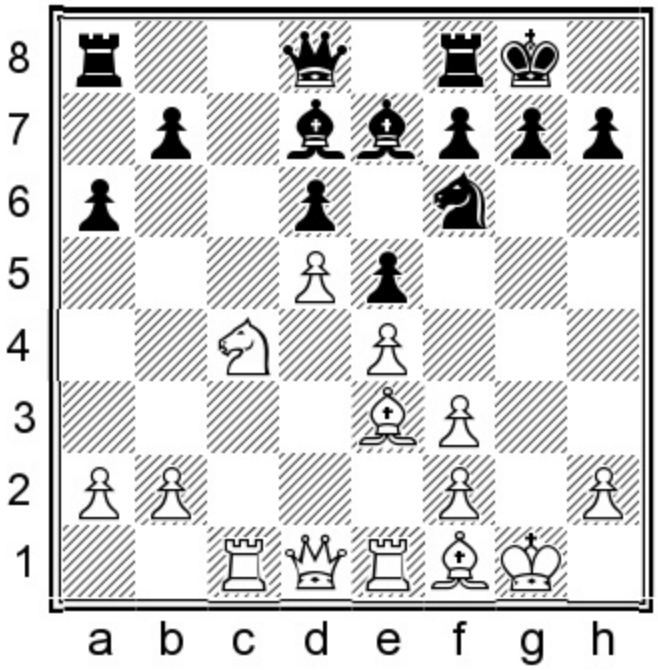
Position after: 13.♘d2

We shouldn't be fazed by the prospect of Black playing 13...b5. However, the prophylactic 13.a4 has

been played more often in practical games, and was the recommendation of Arturs Neiksans in his database on Anti-Sicilians for Modern Chess.

13...b5

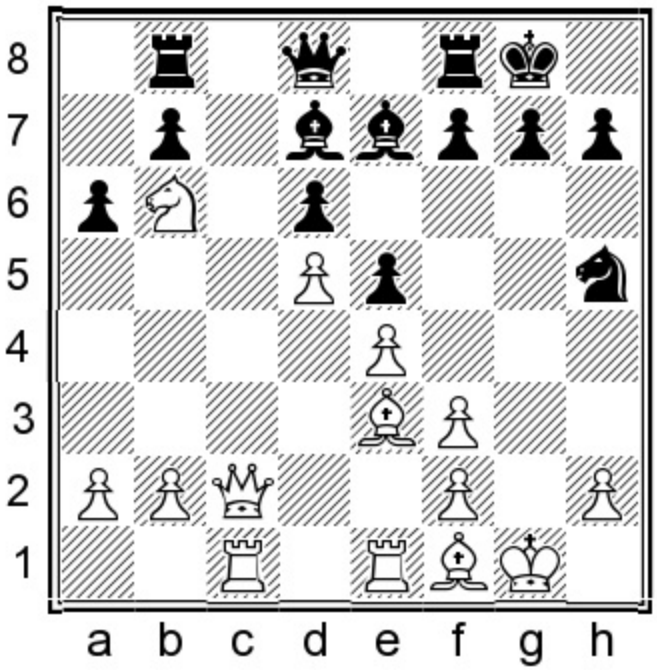
13...♗e7 Of course, we should definitely have a pleasant edge if Black doesn't prevent ♘c4. 14.♘c4 0-0 15.♖c1



Position after: 15.♖c1

A) 15...♖c8 16.♕b3 b5 17.♘b6 ♖b8 18.♘xd7 ♘xd7 19.♖c6±

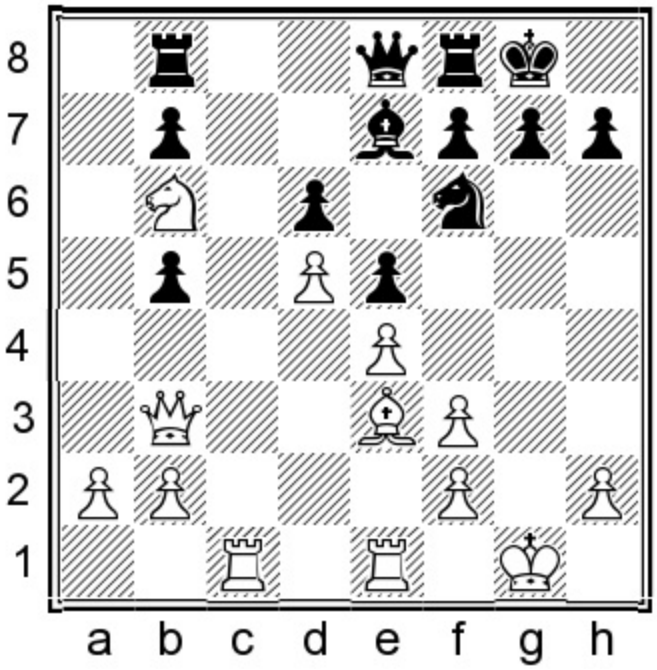
B) 15...♘h5 It makes sense for Black to play on the kingside here, but we are simply quicker on the queenside and can create enough threats to prevent Black from achieving any significant counterplay. 16.♘b6 ♖b8 17.♕c2



Position after: 17.♕c2

17...♗g5 [17...f5 18.♕c7±] 18.♕c7 ♗xe3 19.fxe3 ♕g5+ 20.♔h1 ♗b5 21.♗xb5 axb5 22.♘c8!+– Black can't make any more progress on the kingside, and Black's queenside and central pawns appear to be lost.

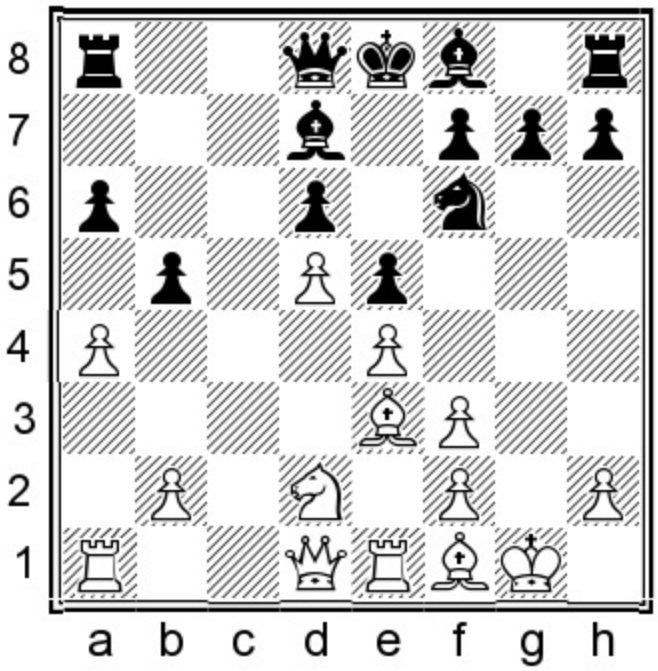
C) 15...♗b5 Black wants to trade the light-squared bishops off before enacting on an ...f7-f5 plan, so we have to play quickly. 16.♘b6 ♖b8 17.♗xb5 axb5 18.♕b3 ♕e8



Position after: 18...♕e8

19.a4! [19.♖c2 ♘h5 20.♖ec1 ♗d8 21.♘c8 f5∞ looks a little unnecessarily complicated.] 19...bxa4 20.♕xa4 ♕xa4 21.♘xa4 We've reached a really pleasant ending. We have plans of both playing on the queenside, as well as a possible f3-f4 push at some point.

14.a4!

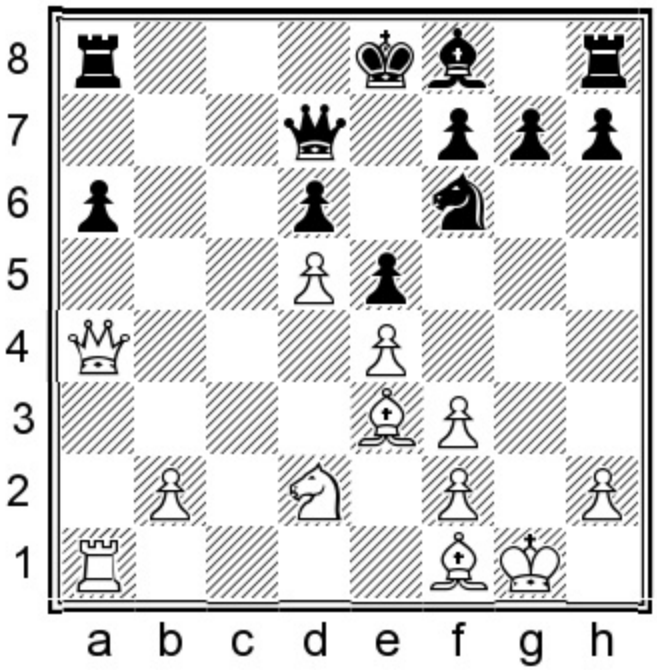


Position after: 14.a4!

The point – Black can't capture the exchange, as without the light-squared bishop his position will fall apart.

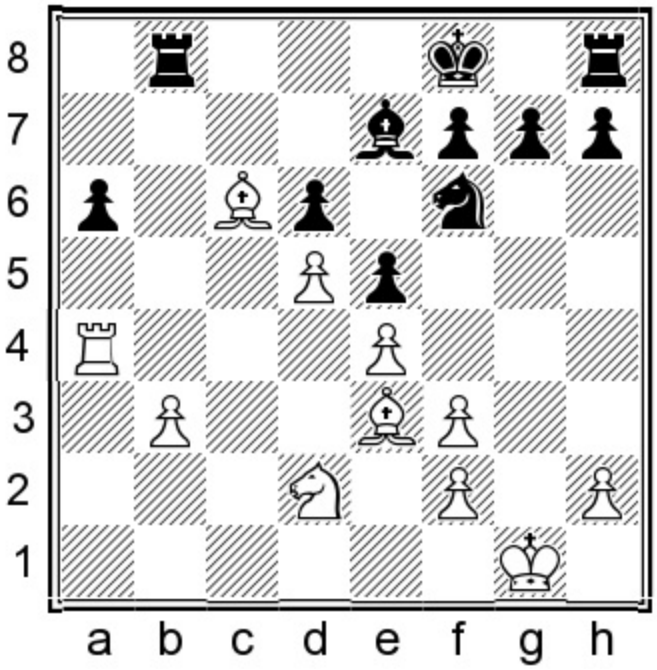
14...♗e7

14...bxa4? 15.♖xa4 ♗xa4 16.♕xa4+ ♕d7 17.♖a1!



Position after: 17.♖a1!

The plan is simple and strong – capture the a6-pawn and push our b-pawn down the board. In practical terms, it seems almost impossible for Black to defend. 17...♕xa4 18.♖xa4 ♗e7 19.♗b5+! ♔f8 20.♗c6 ♖b8 21.b3+–

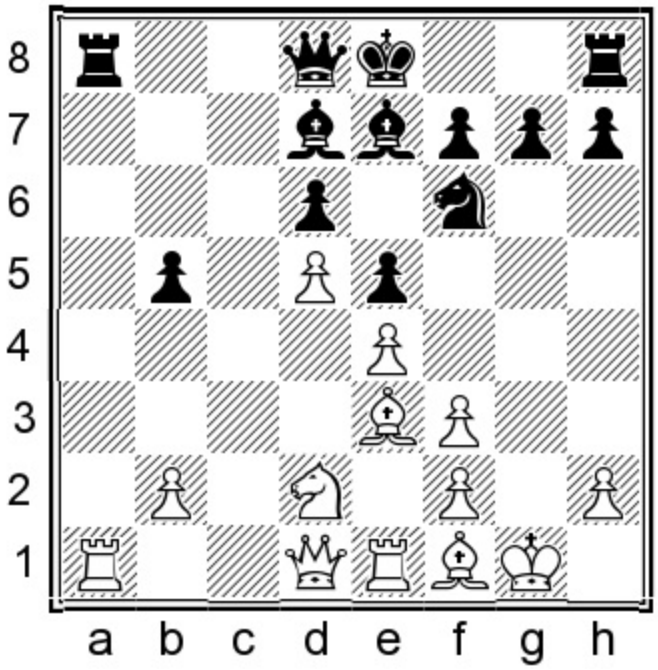


Position after: 21.b3+–

15.axb5

The easiest plan here is to just aim for a better ending, where Black will constantly be under pressure.

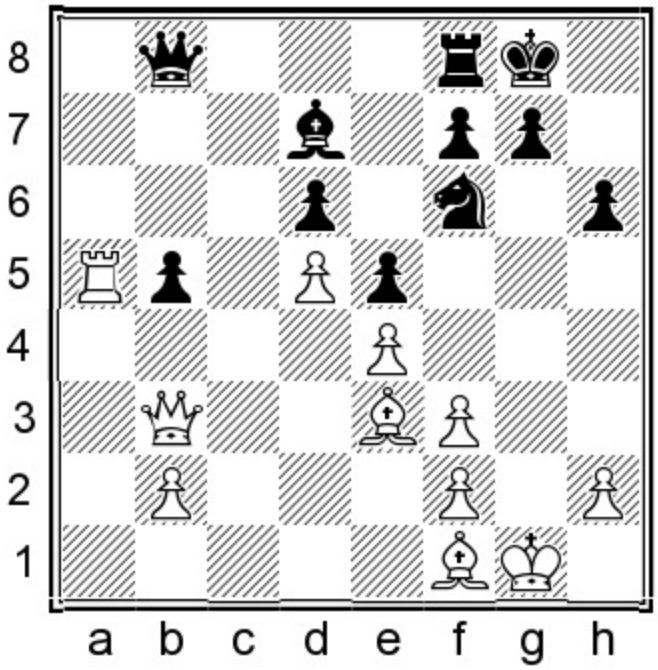
15...axb5



Position after: 15...axb5

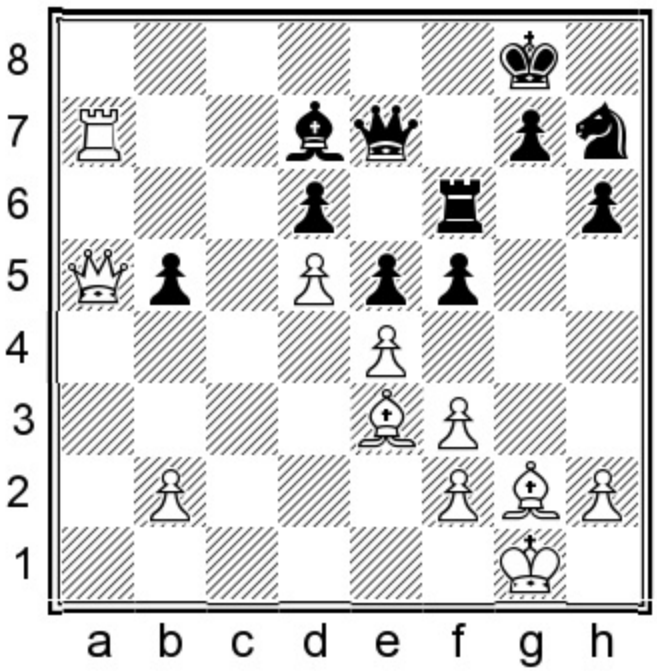
16.♖xa8!?

16.♕b3 has overwhelmingly been favoured in correspondence games. The mainline continues 16...0-0 17.♖ec1 h6 18.♖xa8 ♕xa8 19.♖c7 ♗d8 20.♖a7 ♕b8 21.♘c4! ♗c7 22.♘a5 ♗xa5 23.♖xa5



Position after: 23.♖xa5

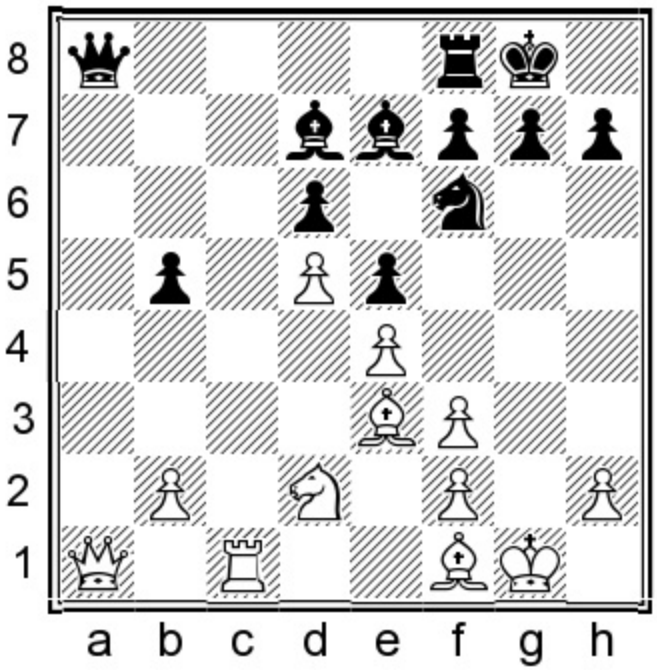
White has won the bishop pair, and it appears that Black will have to also concede the b5-pawn. However, the four correspondence games which reached this position all ended in draws – and the following line will illustrate that Black can gain interesting counterplay. 23...♘h7! 24.♖a7 [24.♗xb5?! f5!⇄] 24...♕d8 25.♗g2 f5! 26.♕b4 ♖f6 27.♕a5 ♕e7



Position after: 27...♕e7

We've been following the game Roques – Hanio, ICCF email 2017. After playing very accurately to reach this position, Black held the draw pretty easily. In practical terms, I believe 16.♖xa8 is the wisest choice and, as my analysis will illustrate, Black's defensive task is pretty miserable.

16...♕xa8 17.♕a1!N 17...0-0 18.♖c1



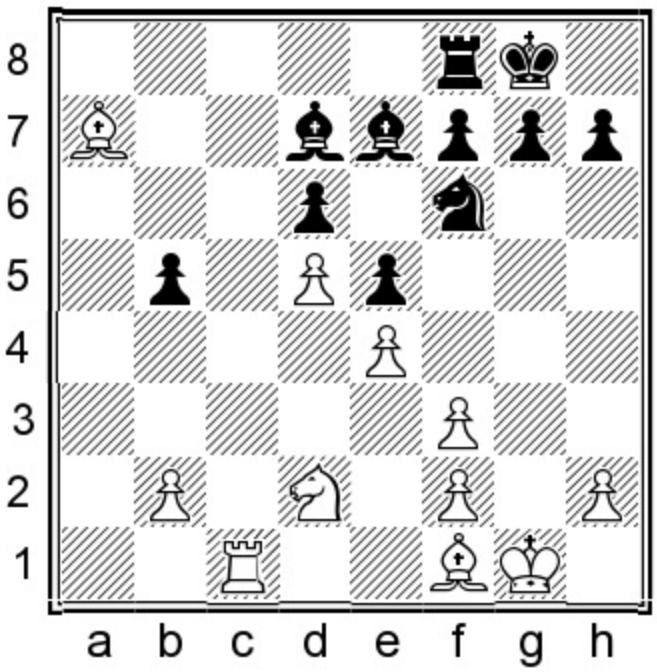
Position after: 18.♖c1

18...♕b7

A) 18...♕xa1 19.♖xa1 ♖b8 20.♖a7 ♗d8 21.b4±

B) 18...♕b8 19.♕a7 ♖c8 20.b4!±

19.♕a7 ♕xa7 20.♗xa7



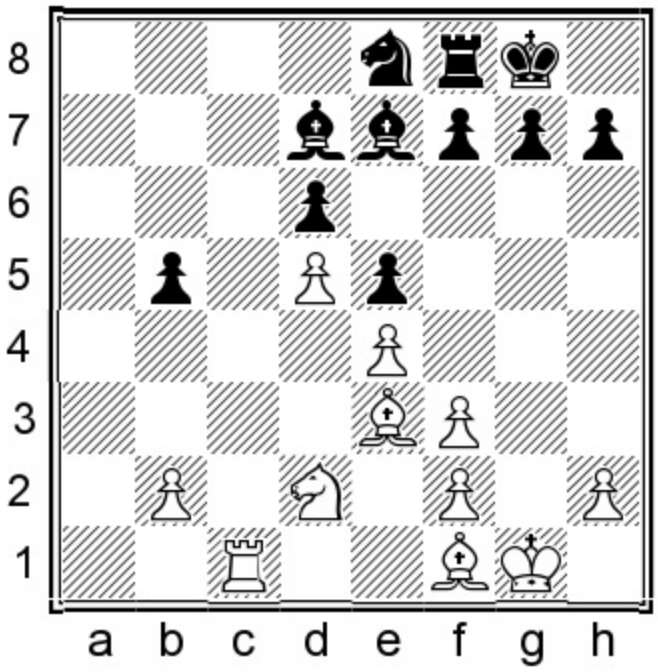
Position after: 20.♗xa7

The problem for Black is that his b5-pawn is a major weakness, and he can't prevent our rook from entering the 7th-rank.

20...♖a8

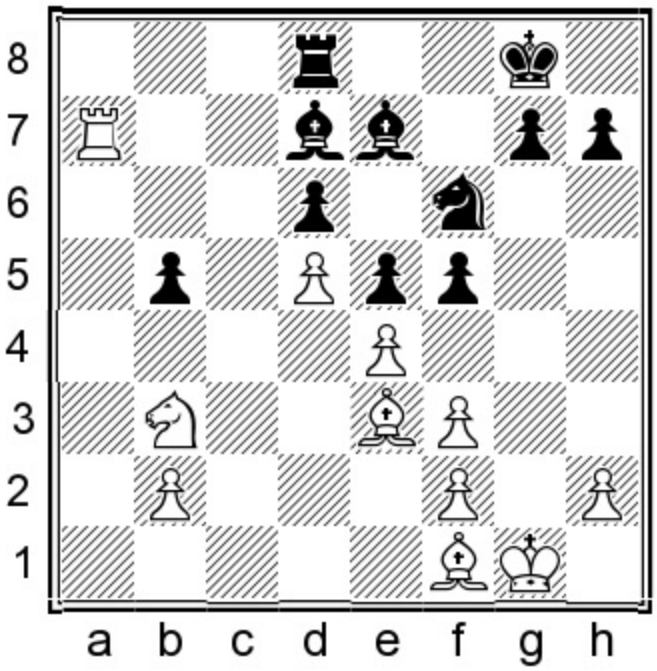
A) 20...♖c8 obviously fails due to 21.♖xc8+ ♗xc8 22.♗xb5+–

B) 20...♘e8 21.♗e3!



Position after: 21.♗e3!

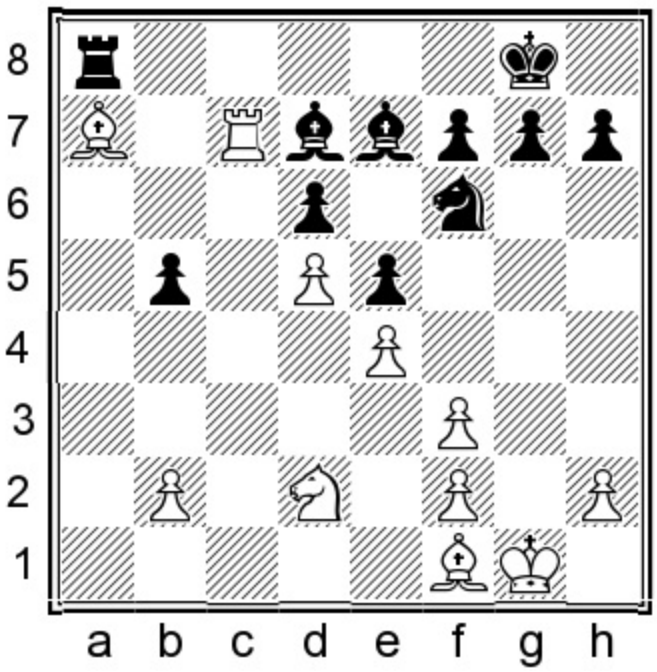
Now we'll switch our rook to the a-file, whilst also keeping f3-f4 ideas in mind. 21...f5 22.♖a1 ♘f6 23.♖a7 ♖d8 24.♘b3!



Position after: 24.♘b3!

Another big issue for Black is the weak c6-square, which is perfect for our knight to jump to. 24...♔f8 [24...fxe4 25.fxe4 ♘xe4? 26.♗b6+–] 25.♘a5 ♖c8 26.♗d3 ♗d8 27.♖a6 ♗xa5 [27...♔e7 28.♘c6++–] 28.♖xa5±

21.♖c7



Position after: 21.♖c7

In practical terms it seems really difficult for Black to find defensive resources. Although it might be possible to defend with perfect play, it certainly won't be an enjoyable task.

21...♔f8

21...♗d8 22.♖b7 ♗c8 23.♖b8+–

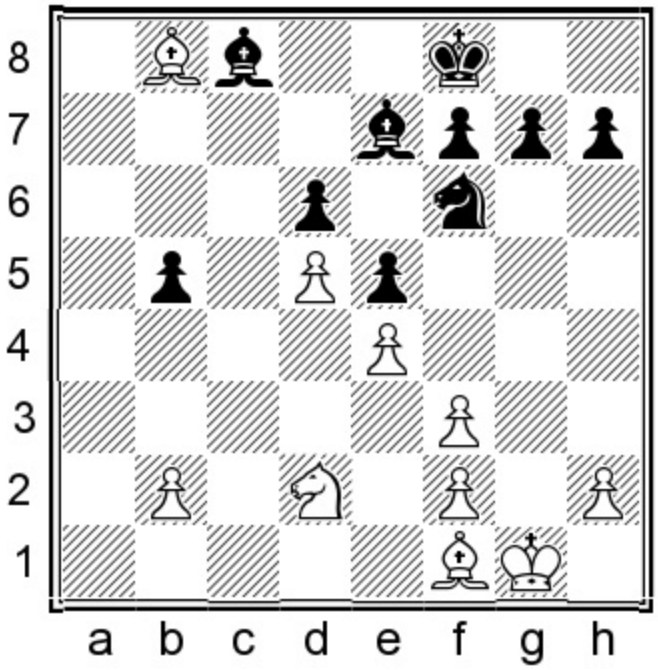
22.♖b7

If Black doesn't do anything, we can simply play ♗e3 followed by ♗xb5.

22...♗c8 23.♖b8!

23.♖xb5 ♖xa7 24.♖b8 ♖c7 25.♗a6 ♗d8 26.♖xc8 ♖xc8 27.♗xc8 ♗a5 28.♘c4 ♗b4 The opposite coloured bishops suggest that Black has very decent drawing chances.

23...♖xb8 24.♗xb8

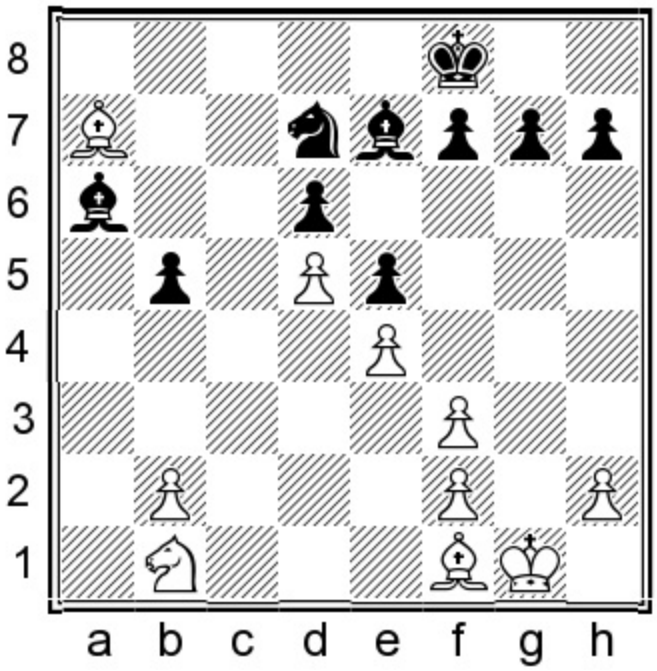


Position after: 24.♗xb8

24...♗a6

It makes more sense for Black to leave the d7-square for his knight: 24...♗d7 25.♘b1! ♘e8 [25...b4 26.♗c7 h5 27.♗a5 b3 28.♘d2 ♗a4 29.♗c4±] 26.♘c3 b4 27.♘a2 b3 28.♘c1 ♗a4 29.♗c4±.

25.♘b1! ♘d7 26.♗a7



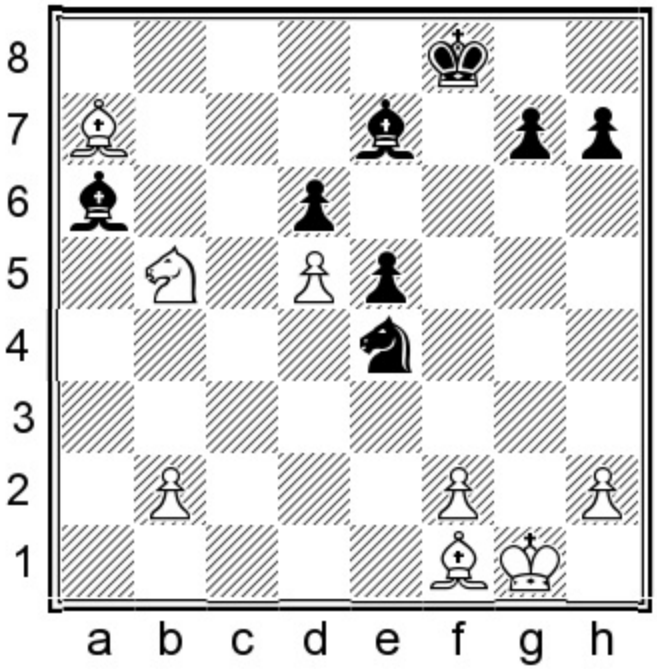
Position after: 26.♗a7

26...f5

Black needs to find counterplay somehow.

26...♗g5 27.♘a3 ♗c1 28.♘xb5 ♗xb5 29.♗xb5 ♘f6 30.b3±

27.♘a3 ♘f6 28.♘xb5 fxe4 29.fxe4 ♘xe4



Position after: 29...♘xe4

30.♘xd6! ♗xf1

30...♗xd6 31.♗xa6±

31.♘xe4 ♗d3 32.f3±

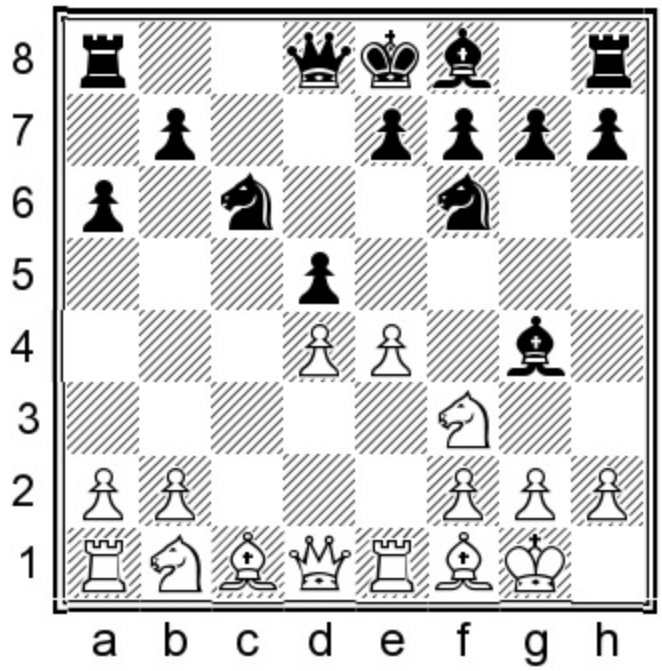
Black's long defensive struggle continues.

Conclusion to Chapter 5 & 6

6.c3 and 8.d4 is the most forcing way for White to play against the main line of the 3...d6 system. To fight for the centre, Black now needs to take a second tempo out with his light-squared bishop to put it on g4. Whilst Black is doing that, we are claiming that we can make use of the time gained to generate a dangerous initiative. I have provided a couple of different lines for White to choose from after the important 9...e5 option. Neither of these alternatives will be easy for Black to face, and a similar choice will be presented after 9...d5 10.e5 in the next chapter.

Chapter 7
4.0-0 ♗d7 5.♖e1 ♘f6 with 9...d5

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 d6 4.0-0 ♗d7 5.♖e1 ♘f6 6.c3 a6 7.♗f1 ♗g4 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 d5



Chapter Guide

Chapter 7 – 4.0-0 ♗d7 5.♖e1 ♘f6 with 9...d5

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 d6 4.0-0 ♗d7 5.♖e1 ♘f6 6.c3 a6 7.♗f1 ♗g4 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 d5 10.e5

a) 10...♘e4

b) 10...♘d7 11.e6! ♗xe6

c) 10...♘d7 11.e6! fxe6

d) 10...♘g8 11.e6!?

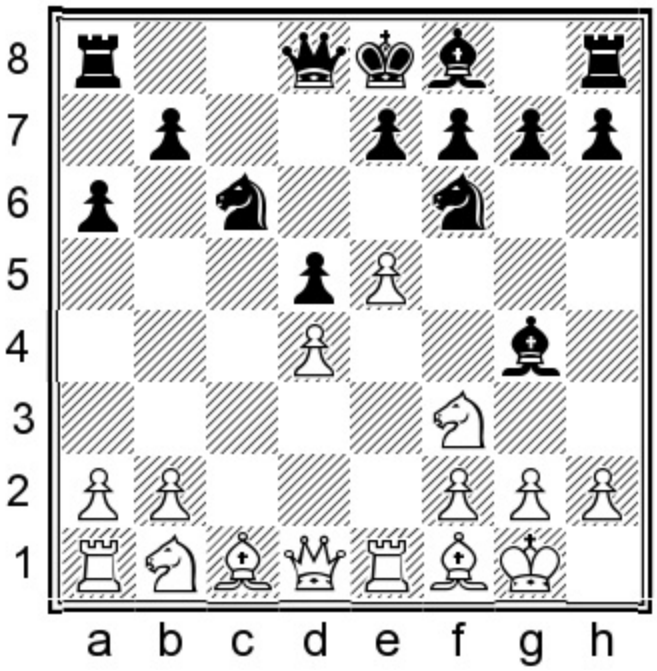
e) 10...♘g8 11.♖e3!?N

a) 10...♘e4

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 d6 4.0-0 ♗d7 5.♖e1 ♘f6 6.c3 a6 7.♗f1 ♗g4 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 d5

Let's now elaborate a bit on a better way for White to react than the 10.exd5 mentioned in the last chapter.

10.e5



Position after: 10.e5

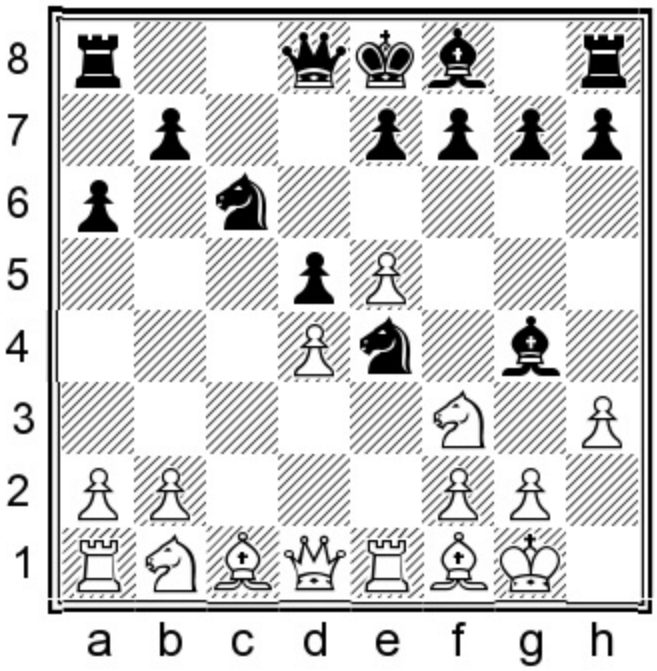
Black already faces a dilemma about where to put his f6-knight. The position resembles a French structure, except that Black has seemingly released his 'bad bishop' as it now stands relatively well on g4. However, there are hidden dangers to the assumption that this is a 'good French' for Black. As Black hasn't played ...e7-e6 yet, we always have the option to play e5-e6 first – possibly even sacrificing an exchange to disrupt Black's development. Moreover, the fact that Black's light-squared bishop is already on g4 means that his queenside pawns may lack protection. Finally, Black will only be able to claim that he has a good version of a French if he successfully completes his kingside development. As this will undoubtedly take a few moves to complete, we have various different ideas which may hopefully hand us a strong initiative and make Black's life incredibly difficult.

10...♘e4

A) 10...♘d7 is examined in subchapters b and c.

B) 10...♘g8 is the main line, and will be examined in subchapters d and e.

11.h3

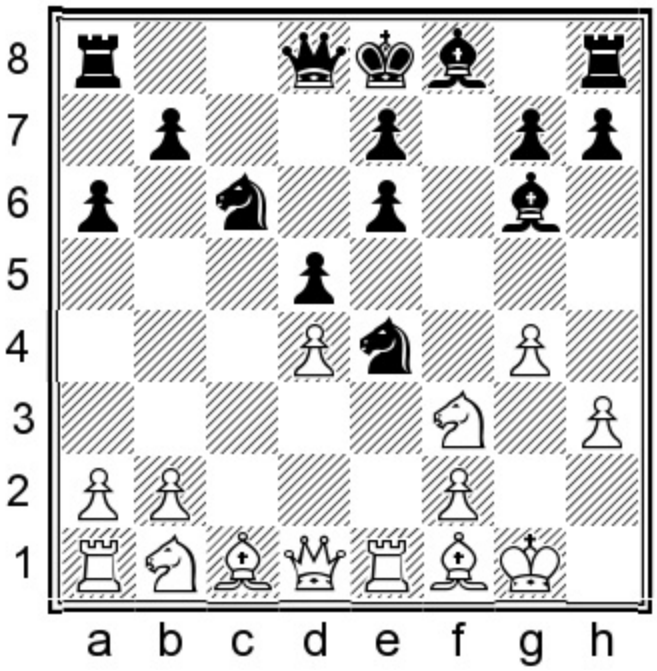


Position after: 11.h3

11...♗f5

Black can also try to prevent our e5-e6 idea, but we can now target the bishop.

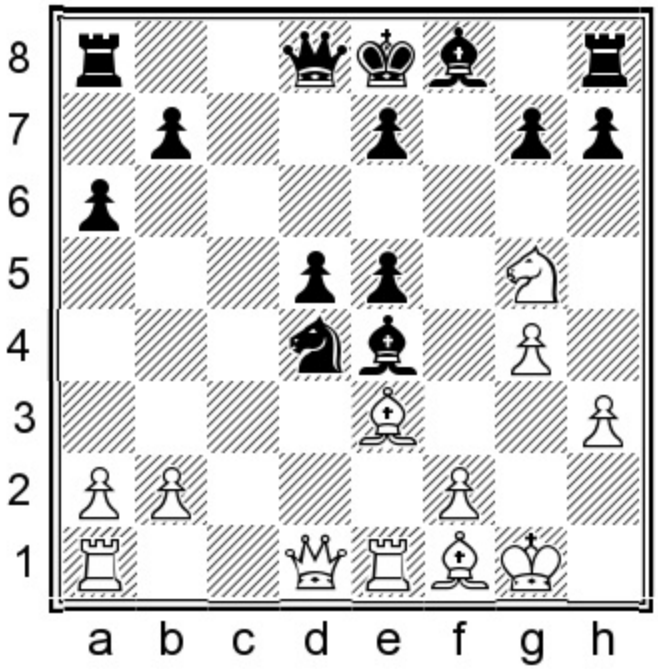
11...♗h5 12.g4 ♗g6 13.e6! fxe6



Position after: 13...fxe6

The problem with Black's knight on e4 is that it's too easy to undermine with moves like ♘c3, ♘h4

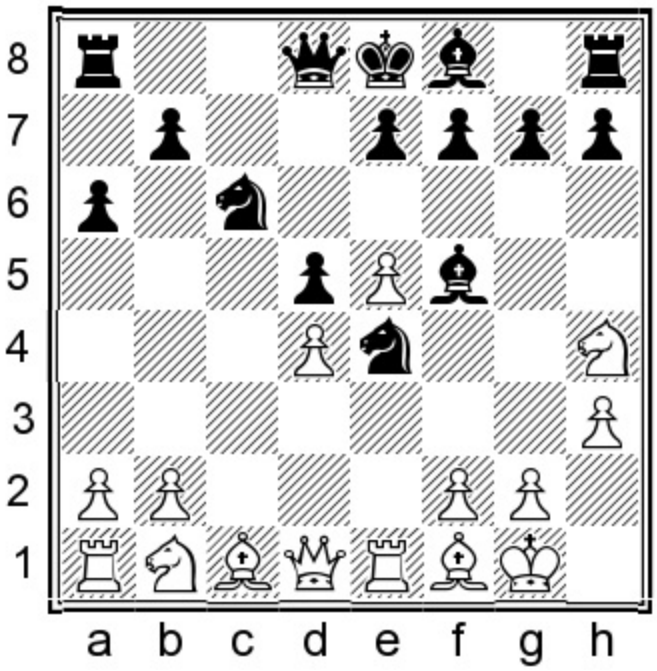
and ♗g2. Therefore, it really doesn't provide adequate protection for the Black king. 14.♘c3 e5 [14...h5 15.♘h4 ♗f7 16.g5±] 15.♘xe4 ♗xe4 [15...dxe4 16.♘xe5 ♘xe5 17.dxe5±] 16.♘g5! ♘xd4 17.♗e3!



Position after: 17.♗e3!

There's no rush to capture on e4, and it makes more sense to wait for Black to further weaken his position. 17...e6 [17...♘c2 is suicidal. 18.♘xe4 ♘xe1 19.♘c5 d4 20.♕a4+ b5 21.♗xb5+ axb5 22.♕xb5+ ♔f7 23.♕c4+ ♔e8 24.♖xe1 dxe3 25.fxe3+–] 18.♘xe4 dxe4 19.♗xd4 exd4 [19...♕xd4 20.♕b3 ♕d7 21.♗c4+–] 20.♖xe4 Despite the presence of opposite-coloured bishops, the position is hopeless for Black. 20...♗e7 21.♕a4+ ♕d7 22.♕xd7+ ♔xd7 23.♖xd4+ ♔e8 24.♗c4±

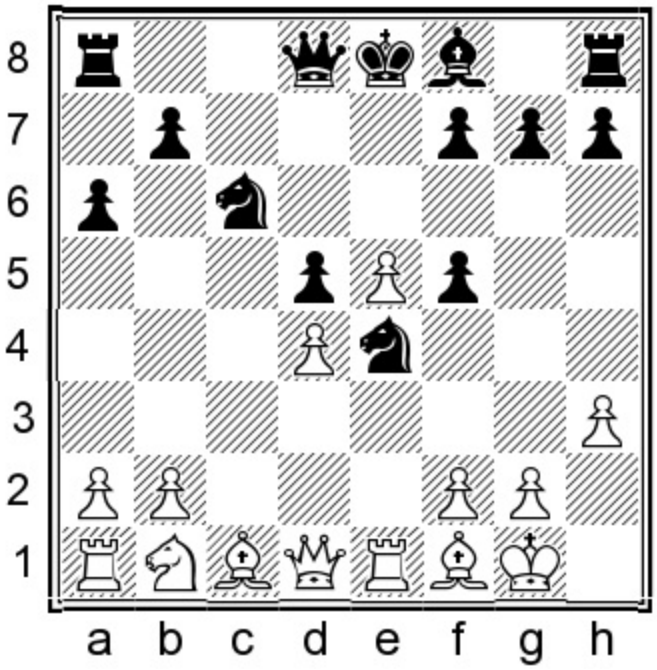
12.♘h4!



Position after: 12.♘h4!

12...♗d7

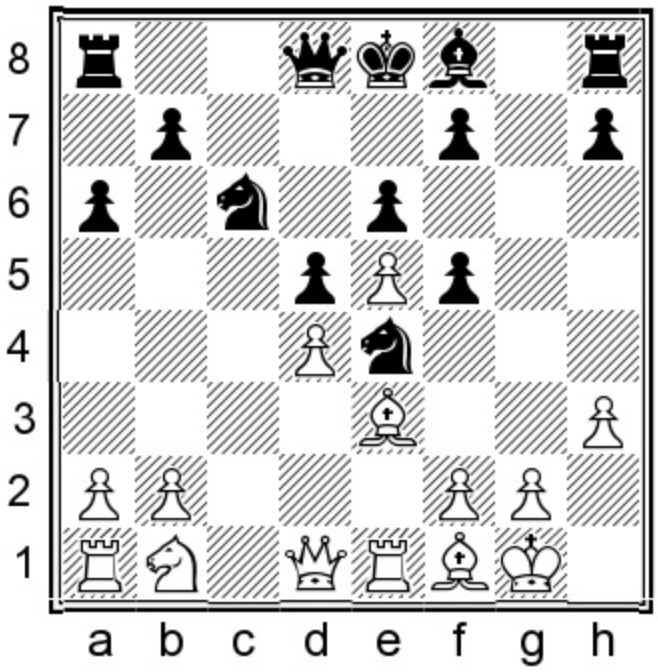
A) 12...e6 13.♘xf5 exf5



Position after: 13...exf5

The structure very much favours White, as Black's d5-pawn in particular will prove to be extremely vulnerable without a light-squared bishop to protect it. 14.♘c3 ♗b4 15.♕b3 0-0 16.♗e3±

B) 12...g6 13.♗e3 e6 [13...♗g7 14.♘xf5 gxf5 15.♘c3 0-0 16.♕b3±] 14.♘xf5 gxf5

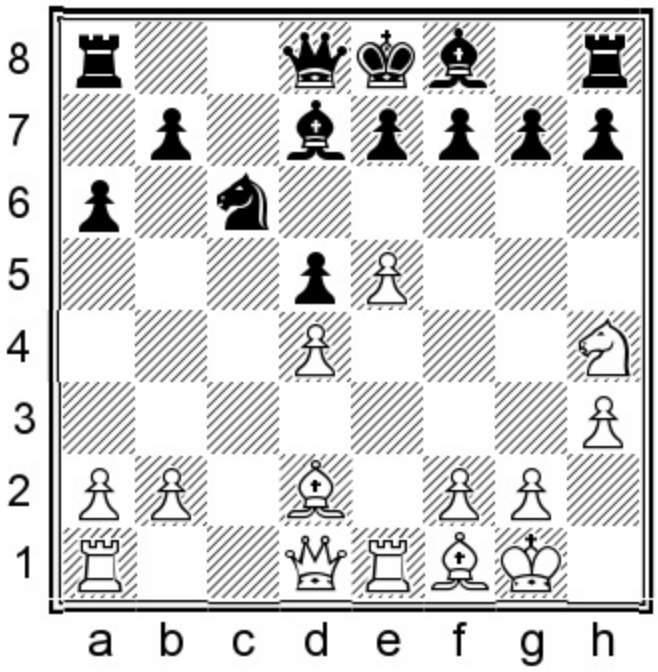


Position after: 14...gxf5

15.♕h5 ♗g7 16.♘c3±

C) 12...♗e6 13.♘c3 ♘xc3 14.bxc3 g6 15.f4±

13.♘d2! ♘xd2 14.♗xd2



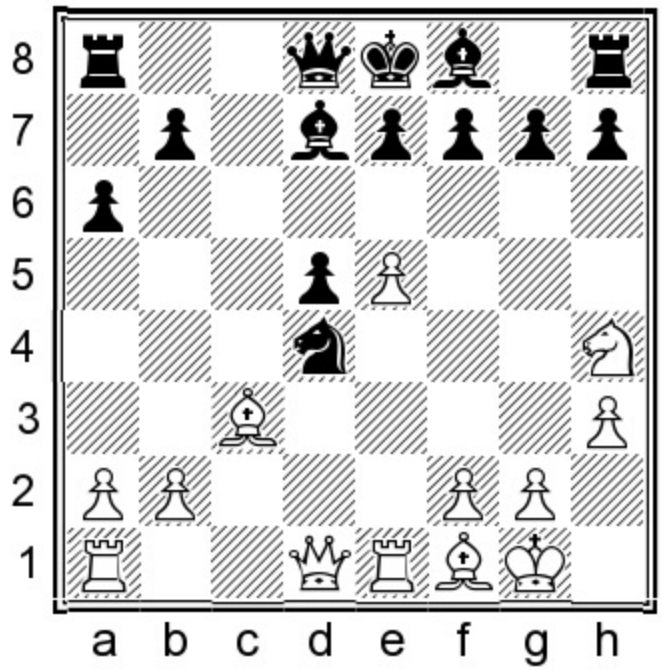
Position after: 14.♗xd2

14...♘xd4

This allows White too much activity, but there is nothing better.

14...e6 Black's light-squared bishop is confined to d7, and we can embark on a kingside offensive. 15.♕g4! h5 16.♕g3 ♘xd4 17.♖ed1 White has a strong initiative, and if Black retreats with 17...♘c6? we have the typical winning idea of 18.♘g6!+–

15.♗c3



Position after: 15.♗c3

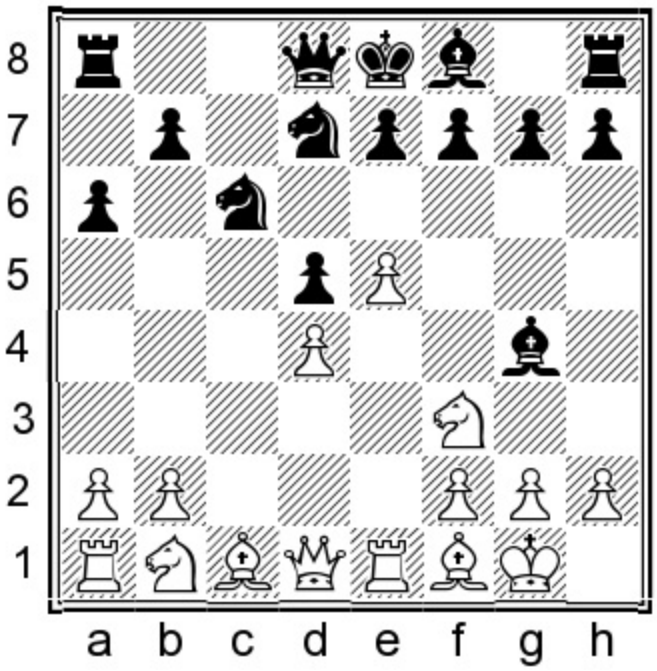
15...♘c6

15...♘b5 16.e6! ♗xe6 17.♗xb5+ axb5 18.♖xe6 fxe6 19.♕h5+ g6 [19...♔d7 20.♘f3+–] 20.♘xg6 hxg6 21.♕xg6+ ♔d7 22.♗xh8+–

16.♕xd5 e6 17.♕e4±

b) 10...♘d7 11.e6! ♗xe6

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 d6 4.0-0 ♗d7 5.♖e1 ♘f6 6.c3 a6 7.♗f1 ♗g4 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 d5 10.e5 ♘d7



Position after: 10...♘d7

Kotronias's recommendation, but he surprisingly neglects to analyse my next move, to which I now devote two subchapters.

11.e6!

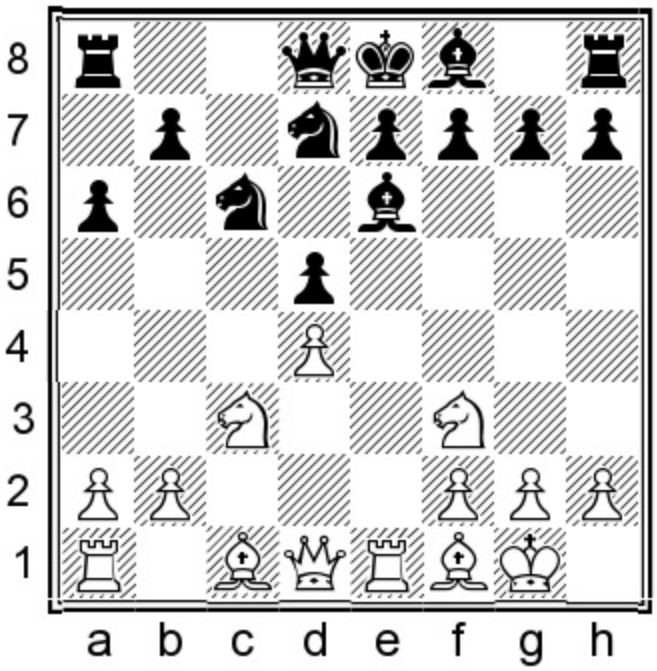
A very thematic idea, sacrificing a pawn to stall Black's development.

11...♗xe6

Black avoids damaging his pawn structure, but still faces very similar problems regarding development. The problem for Black is that we always have ideas such as ♘g5 combined with ♖xe6. The d5-pawn remains a weakness, and we also have the ability to play on the queenside.

11...fxe6 is considered in the next subchapter.

12.♘c3



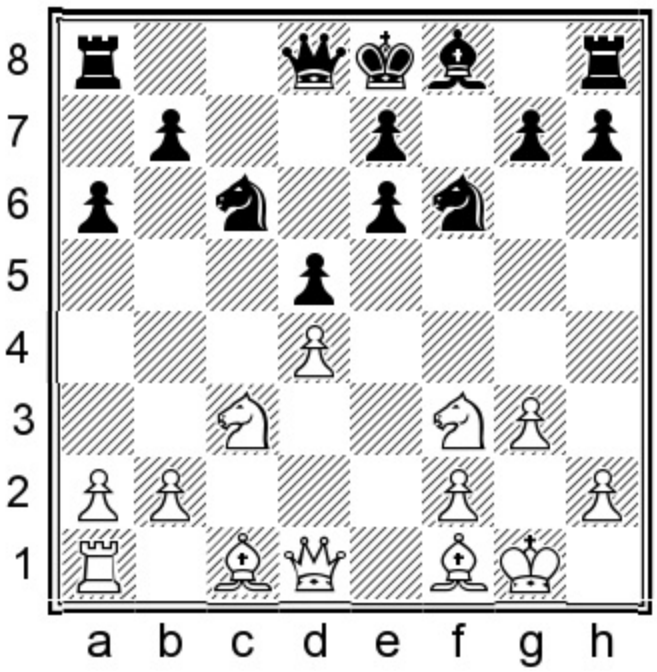
Position after: 12.♘c3

Immediately preventing Black from returning his bishop to g4.

12...♕b6

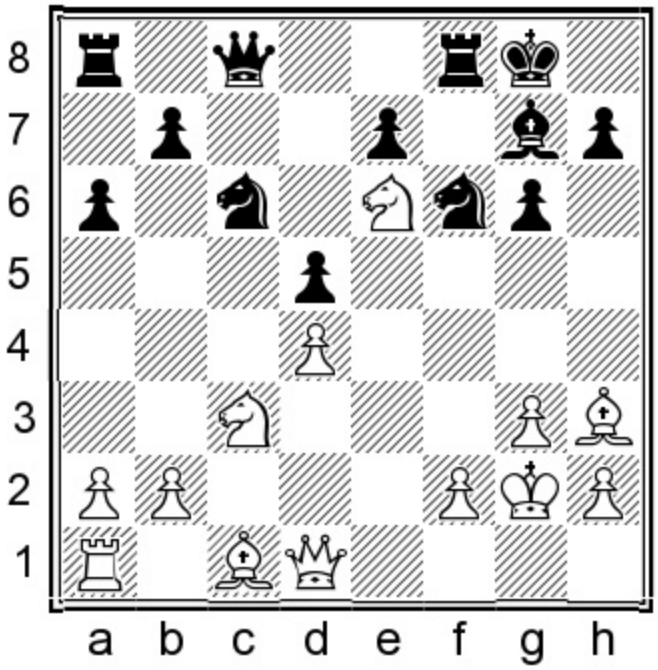
It's logical for Black to play against the threat of ♘g5 – in this case, he'll be able to respond with ...♘xd4.

A) 12...♘f6? 13.♖xe6! fxe6 14.g3



Position after: 14.g3

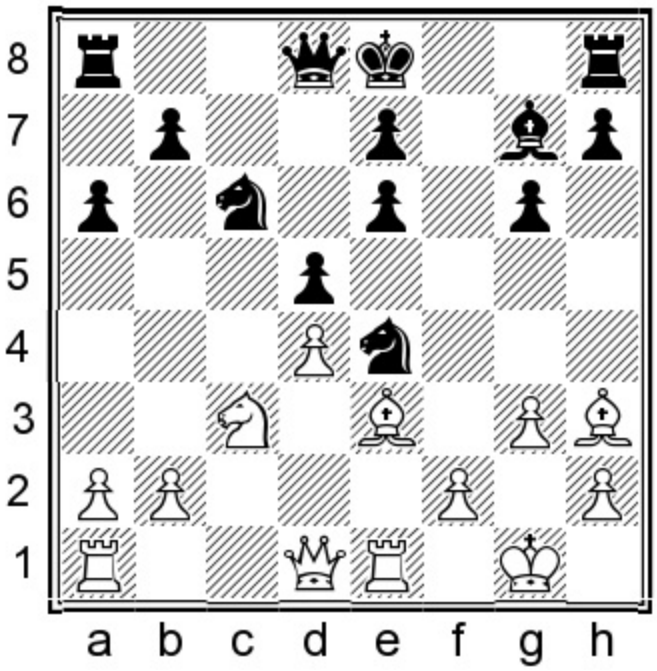
I can't see a way for Black to defend his e6-pawn, and his position will soon collapse. 14...g6 15.♗h3 ♗g7 [15...♘e4 16.♗f4 Followed by ♗xe6, and the bishop-pair dominates the board.] 16.♘g5 0-0 17.♘xe6 ♕c8 18.♔g2+–



Position after: 18.♔g2+–

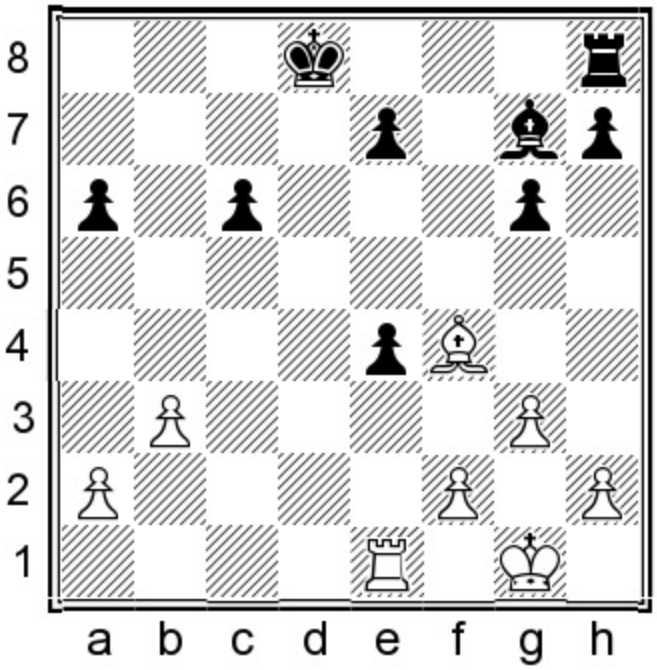
It's not at all necessary to capture the exchange in the forseeable future. For example, we can start by maneouvring our c3-knight to f4 – followed by ♕b3 and ♖ae1.

B) 12...g6 13.♘g5 ♘f6 14.♘xe6 fxe6 15.g3 Black will face similar problems on the light-squares. 15...♗g7 16.♗h3 ♘e4 17.♗e3



Position after: 17.♗e3

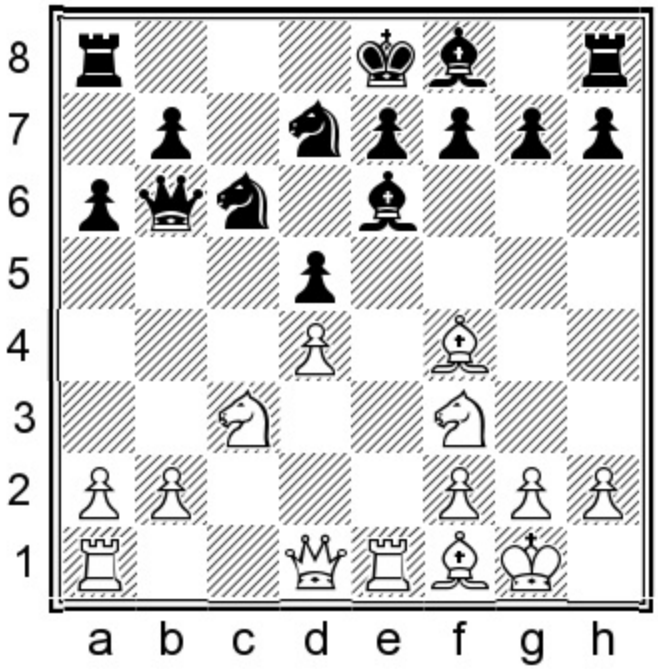
17...♘xc3 [17...♕d6 18.♗f4 ♕d7 19.♘xe4 dxe4 20.♗xe6! ♕xe6 21.d5 ♕d7 22.dxc6 ♕xc6 23.♖c1 ♖d8 24.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 25.♖xc6 bxc6 26.b3



Position after: 26.b3

White converted a technically winning ending in Calio – Henri, ICCF email 2015.] 18.bxc3 ♕d7 19.♗f4 ♘d8 20.♗g4± If Black castles kingside, we'll continue to apply pressure with h4-h5.

13.♗f4

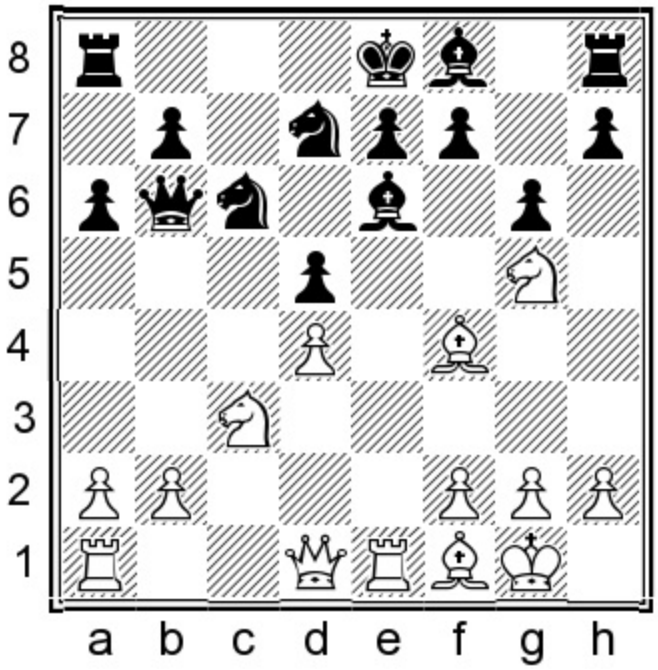


Position after: 13.♗f4

13...g6

13...h6 14.♖xe6! fxe6 15.♘a4 ♕a7 16.♕d3 Castling queenside will only increase our ability to attack Black's king. 16...♔f7 17.♖e1 g5 18.♗xg5 ♗g7 19.♗e3+–

14.♘g5!

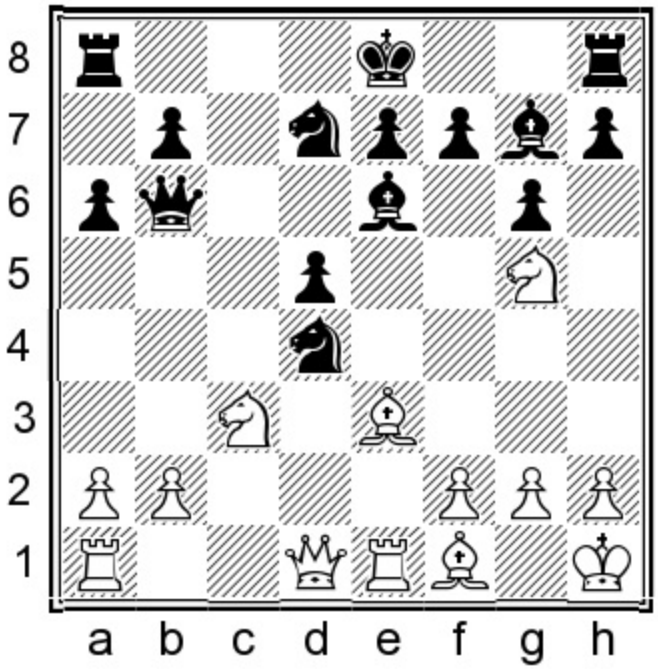


Position after: 14.♘g5!

We don’t need to worry about the d4-pawn any longer. Our pieces are all developed, and the rook on a1 can take advantage of the d-file opening up.

14...♕xd4

14...♘xd4 15.♗e3 ♗g7 16.♔h1!



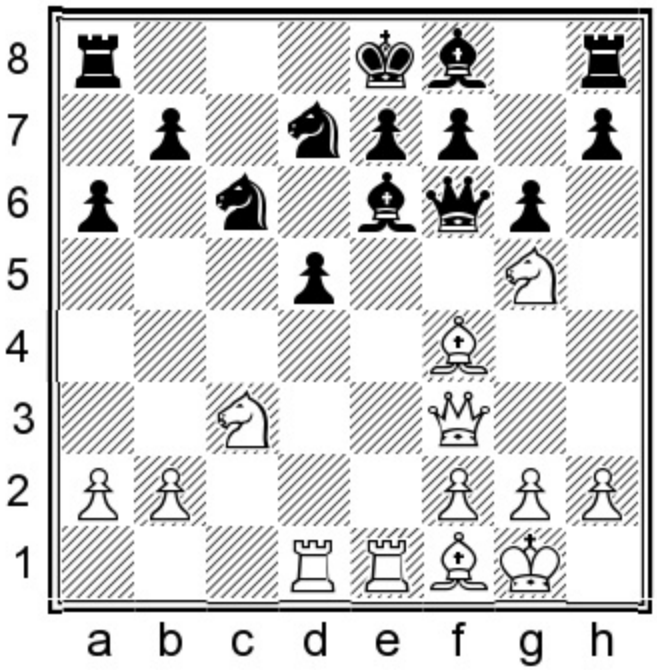
Position after: 16.♔h1!

Black can’t retain the piece due to the threat of ♘f3 or ♘e2.

15.♕f3 ♕f6

15...♗g7 16.♖xe6+–

16.♖ad1



Position after: 16.♖ad1

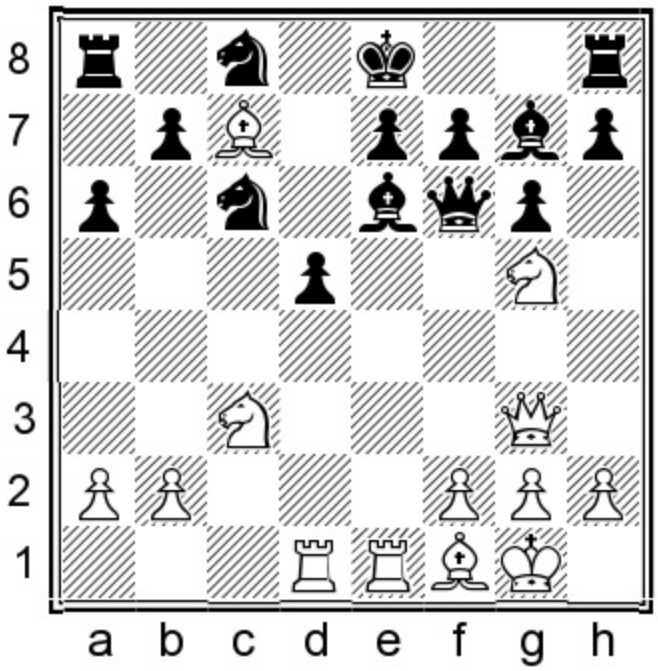
Black's defence is a seemingly impossible task here.

16...h6

A) 16...♗g7 17.♘xd5 ♗xd5 18.♖xd5+–

B) 16...♘de5 17.♕g3+–

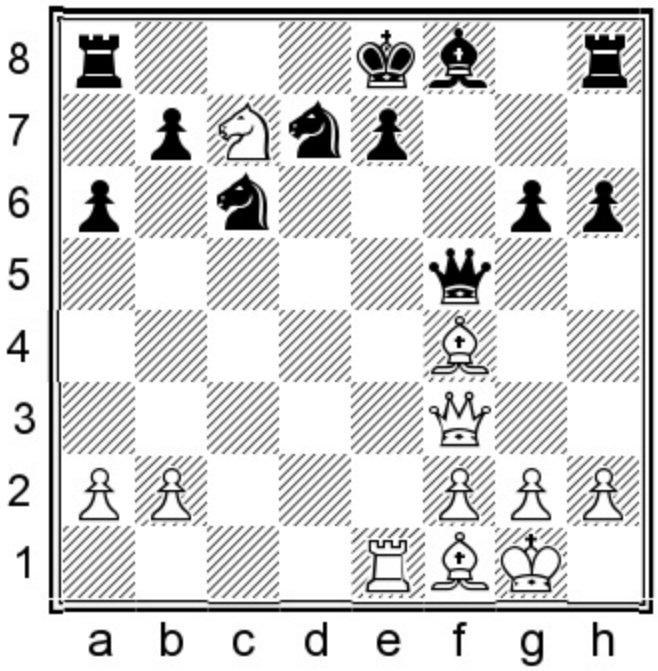
C) 16...♘b6 Black defends the d5-pawn, but we should continue playing logical attacking moves. 17.♕g3 ♗g7 18.♗c7 ♘c8



Position after: 18...♘c8

19.♖d3! h6 20.♘xe6 fxe6 21.♖de3 ♕g5 22.♖xe6 ♕xg3 23.♗xg3± Black faces a depressing ending which is most probably technically lost.

17.♘xe6 fxe6 18.♖xd5! exd5 19.♘xd5 ♕f5 20.♘c7+



Position after: 20.♘c7+

20...♔d8

20...♔f7 21.♕b3+ e6 22.♗d3 ♘c5 23.♗xf5 ♘xb3 24.♗xe6+ ♔g7 25.♗xb3 ♖c8 26.♘e6+ ♔h7 27.♖d1+– Our knight on e6 hinders Black's rooks from contributing to the game.

21.♘e6+!

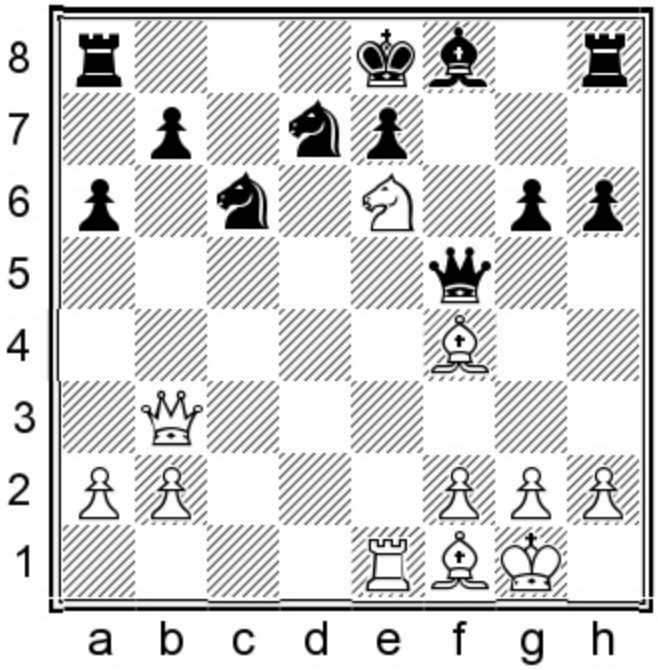
It makes more sense to keep attacking with our knight.

21.♘xa8 e5!∞

21...♔e8

21...♔c8 22.g4 ♕f6 23.♕d5+–

22.♕b3

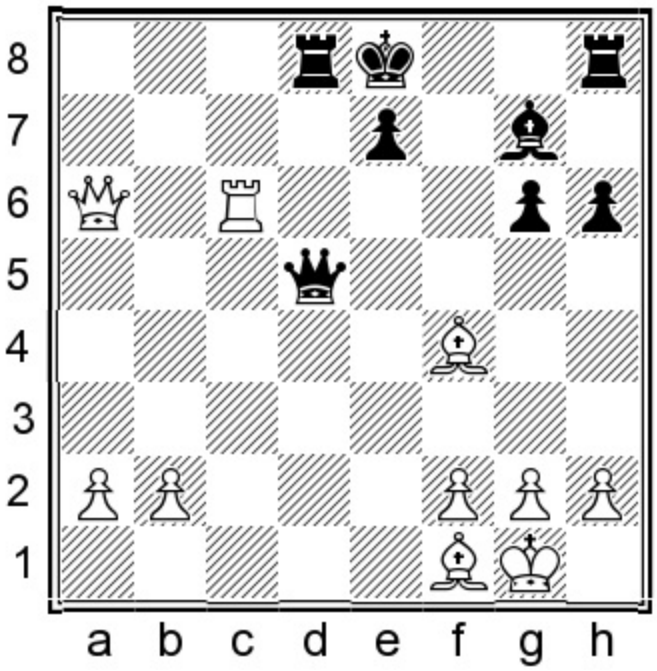


Position after: 22.♕b3

22...♘c5

22...♘d4 23.♘xd4 ♕xf4 24.♘e6 ♕d6 25.♖c1+–

23.♘xc5 ♕xc5 24.♕xb7 ♖d8 25.♖c1 ♕d5 26.♖xc6 ♗g7 27.♕xa6±



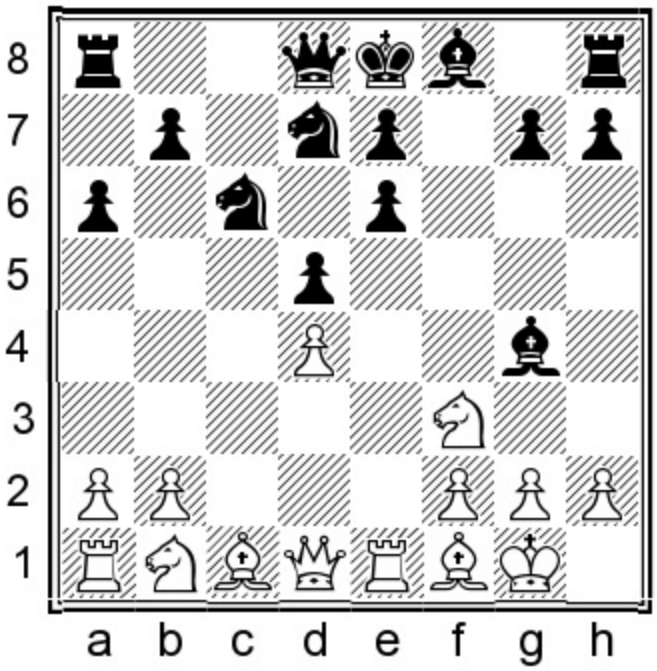
Position after: 27.♕xa6±

Our knight checks have ensured that Black can't castle, and his kingside pawns look like they'll be dropping off.

c) 10...♘d7 11.e6! fxe6

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 d6 4.0-0 ♗d7 5.♖e1 ♘f6 6.c3 a6 7.♗f1 ♗g4 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 d5 10.e5 ♘d7 11.e6! fxe6

11...♗xe6 was analysed in the previous subchapter.

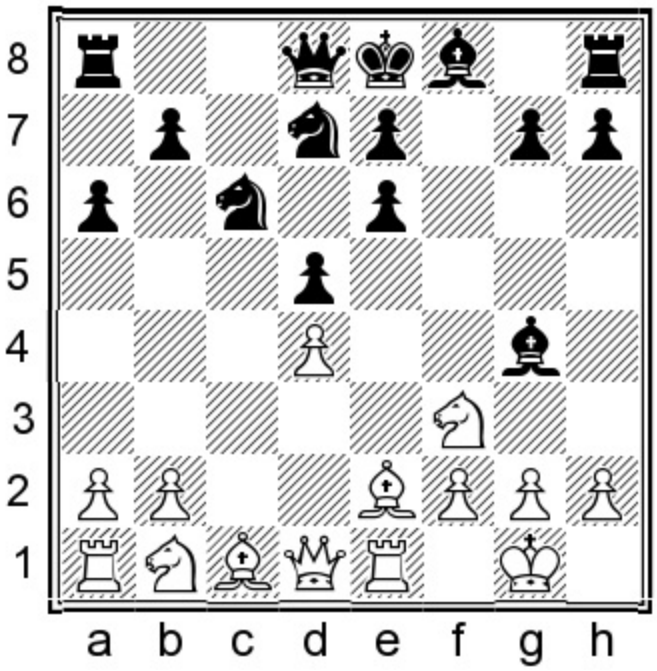


Position after: 11...fxe6

12.♘c3

A move unique to correspondence games. I prefer this compared to Wang Hao's move, as Black doesn't really have the option of ...e6-e5 here.

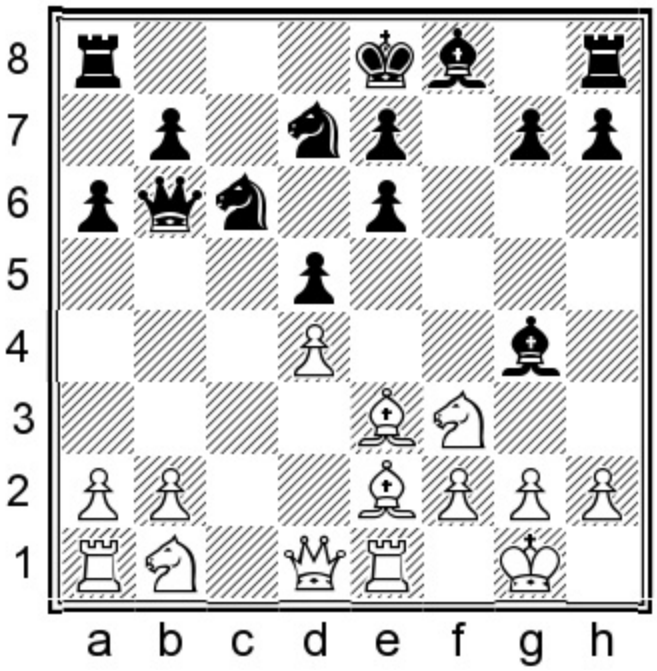
12.♗e2!? was played by Wang Hao.



Position after: 12.♗e2!?

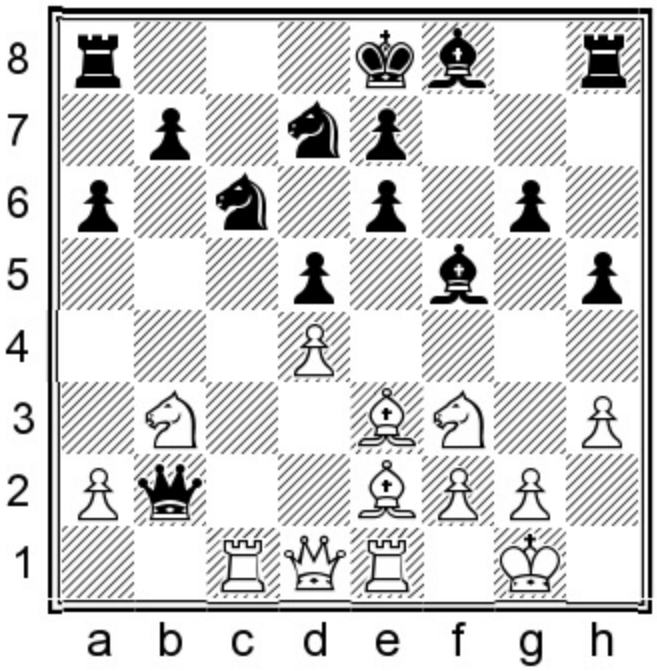
White obviously wants to recapture on f3 with the bishop, and ♘g5 is an immediate threat.

A) 12...♕b6 Now in Wang Hao – Battulga, China 2016, White played ♘bd2. I suggest the following line instead: 13.♗e3!



Position after: 13.♗e3!

A1) 13...♕xb2 I can't really imagine a human playing this move, and after a while the engine stops believing it too. 14.♘bd2 ♗f5 15.♖c1 g6 16.h3 h5 17.♘b3±

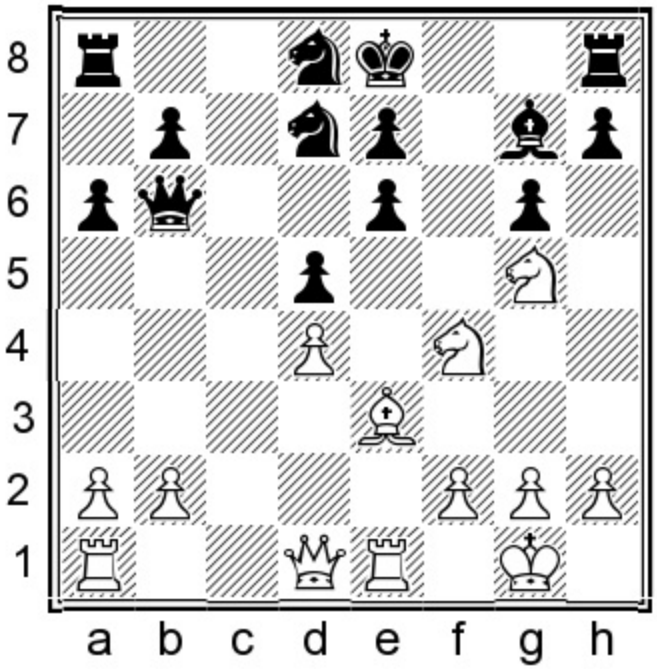


Position after: 17.♘b3±

We can just increase the pressure with ♗d3 and ♘g5, and the fact that Black has had to make moves like ...h7-h5 can't be good news for him.

A2) 13...♗xf3 14.♗xf3 g6 15.♘c3 ♗g7 16.♗g4 ♘d8 17.♖c1±

A3) 13...g6 14.♘c3 ♗g7 15.♘g5 ♗xe2 16.♘xe2N [16.♕xe2 was played in Poetz, F – Rawlings, A ICCF email 2016.] 16...♘d8 17.♘f4±

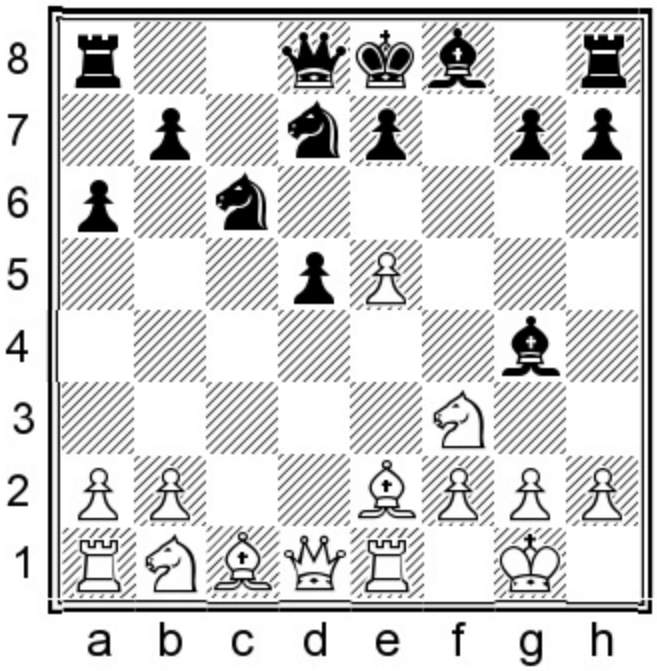


Position after: 17.♘f4±

Black is under a lot of pressure and we can continue with ♖c1 and h4-h5, further undermining his structure.

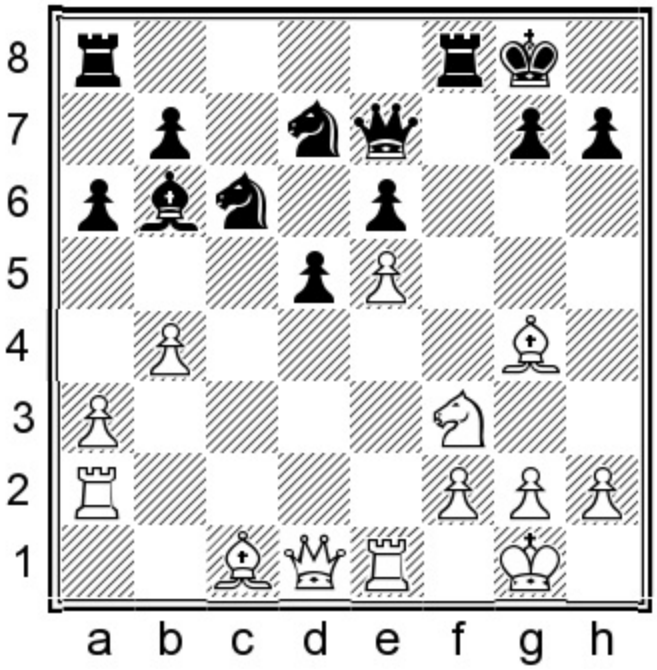
B) 12...g6 13.♘g5!+–

C) 12...e5!? Returning the pawn is probably the best practical try. 13.dxe5



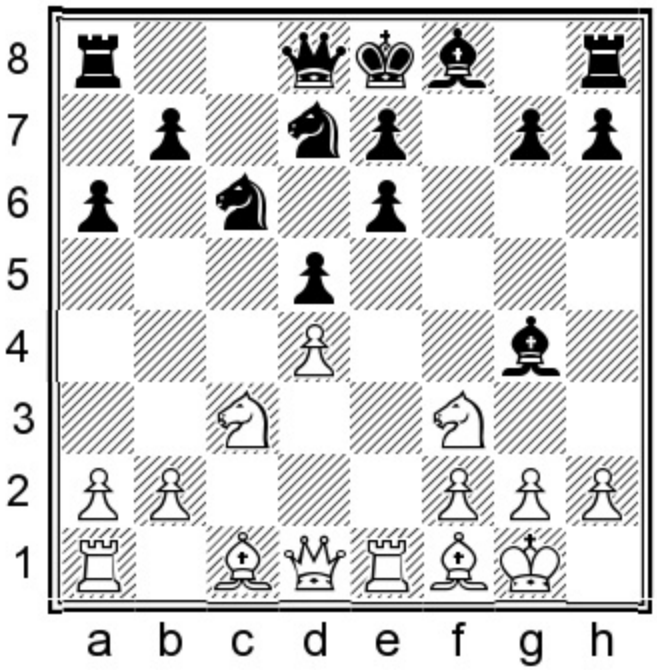
Position after: 13.dxe5

13...♗xf3 [13...e6 14.♘g5 ♗xe2 15.♕xe2 ♘c5 16.♕h5+ g6 17.♕h3 ♕d7 18.♘c3↑] 14.♗xf3 e6 15.♗g4 ♗b4 [15...♕e7 16.f4 ♕f7 17.♘d2!± ♕xf4? 18.♘e4 ♕xe5 19.♘d6+] 16.♘d2 ♕e7 17.a3 ♗c5 18.b4 ♗b6 19.♘f3 0-0 20.♖a2±



Position after: 20.♖a2±

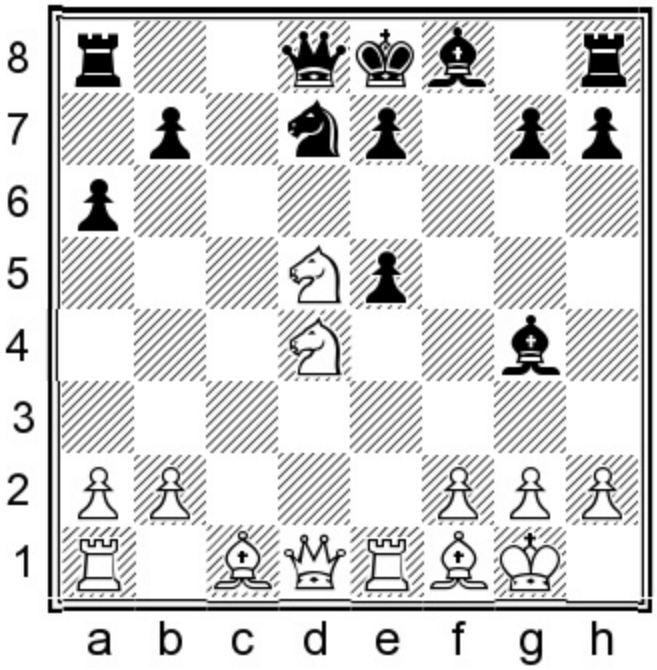
The game remains complex, but White has the better chances with his bishop-pair.



Position after: 12.♘c3

12...g6

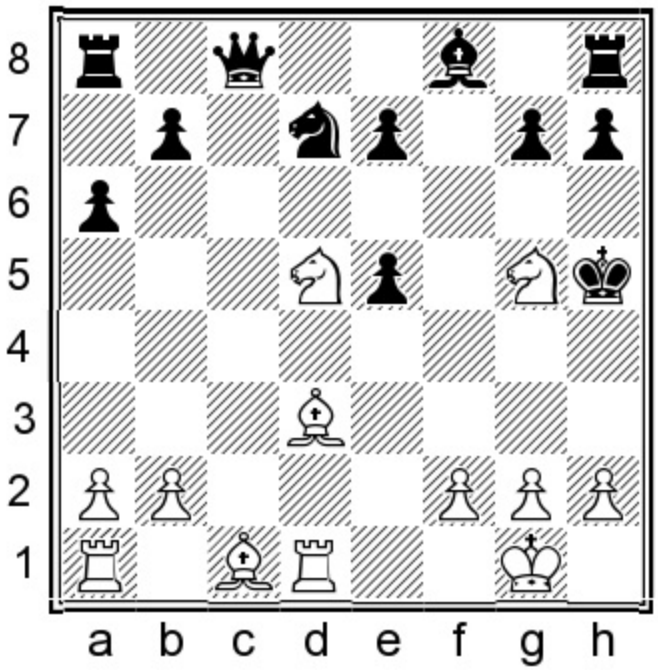
A) 12...e5?! 13.♘xd5 ♘xd4 [13...♕a5 14.♗c4 ♗xf3 15.gxf3 e6 16.♗d2! ♕d8 17.♘f4!+– White had an overwhelming initiative in Pospisil – Rodriguez, ICCF email 2017.] 14.♘xd4!



Position after: 14.♘xd4!

Our minor pieces will be too strong for Black's king to survive. 14...♗xd1 15.♘e6 ♕c8 16.♘dc7+

♔f7 17.♘g5+! ♔f6 [17...♔g6 18.♗d3+ e4 19.♗xe4+ ♔h5 20.♘xa8+–] 18.♘d5+ ♔g6 19.♗d3+ ♔h5 20.♖xd1+–

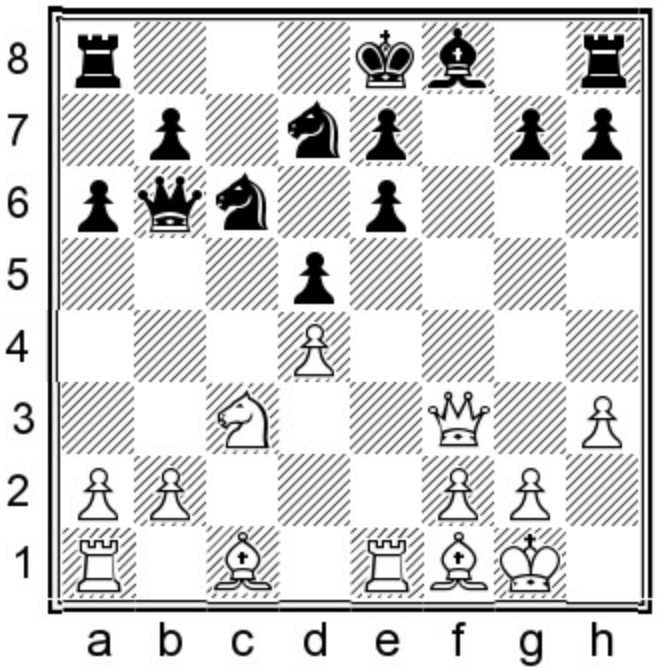


Position after: 20.♖xd1+–

Resignation will be forced after the forthcoming h2-h3 and g2-g4.

B) 12...♗xf3 Freely conceding the bishop-pair seems dubious. 13.♕xf3 g6 [13...♘xd4 14.♕d1 e5 15.♗e3+–] 14.♗g5 ♗g7 15.♖ad1 ♘f8 [15...♘xd4 16.♕e3+–] 16.♗e3 We can continue pressing on both sides of the board, and Black's position is very unpleasant.

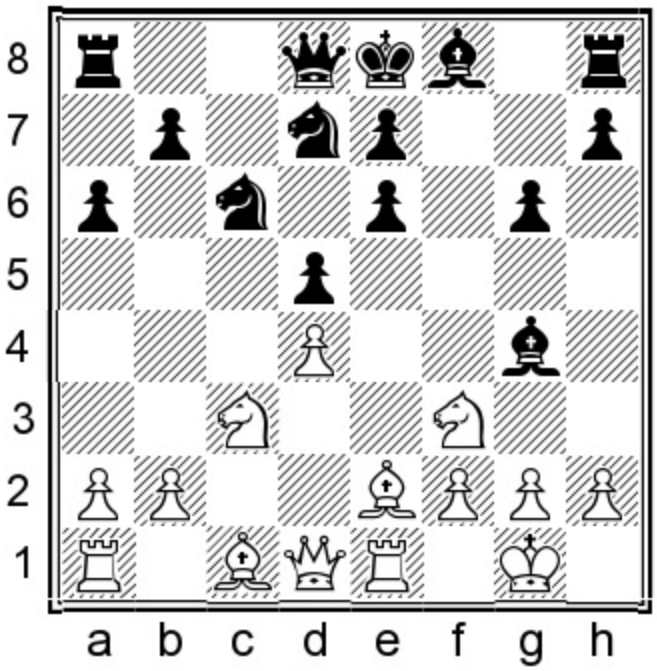
C) 12...♕b6 13.h3!N Similarly to 12...♗xf3, we really don't care if Black captures our d4-pawn. [13.♗e3 was played in Poetz – Rawlings, email 2016, but 13.h3 is more direct.] 13...♗xf3 14.♕xf3



Position after: 14.♕xf3

14...g6 This is more sensible, but once again Black faces an unpleasant defensive task. [14...♘xd4 15.♕d3 e5 16.♗e3 e6 17.♘xd5!±] 15.♕g4 ♘d8 16.♗g5 ♕d6 17.g3 ♗g7 18.♖ad1 0-0 19.h4→

13.♗e2



Position after: 13.♗e2

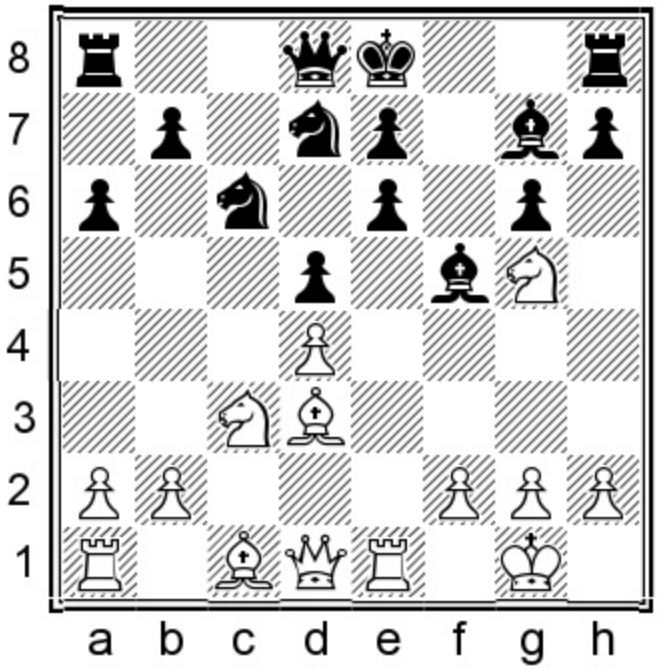
Now that we have stopped Black's ...e6-e5 resource we can embark on our previous idea of either

playing ♘f3-g5, or forcing the trade of Black's light-squared bishop for our knight.

13.h3? isn't effective here as Black is in time to defend his d4-knight with his f8-bishop: 13...♗xf3 14.♕xf3 ♘xd4 15.♕g4 ♗g7∓

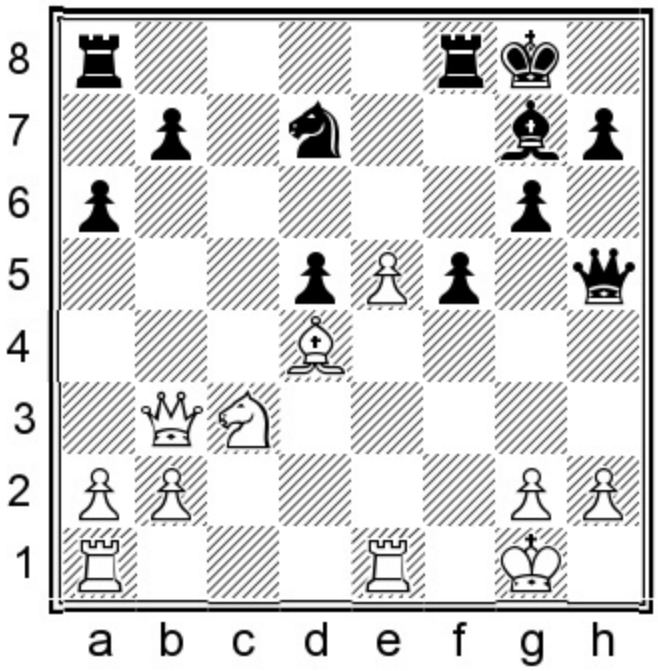
13...♗xf3

13...♗g7 Black can't really allow ♘g5, or his position will fall apart quite quickly. 14.♘g5 ♗f5 [14...♗xe2 15.♘xe2 ♘f8 16.♘f4 ♘xd4 17.♗e3 ♘f5 18.♘gxe6 ♘xe6 19.♘xe6 ♕d7 20.♗g5 ♗xb2 21.g4 h6 22.♖b1 ♗c3 23.♗f4 ♗xe1 24.gxf5+–] 15.♗d3!



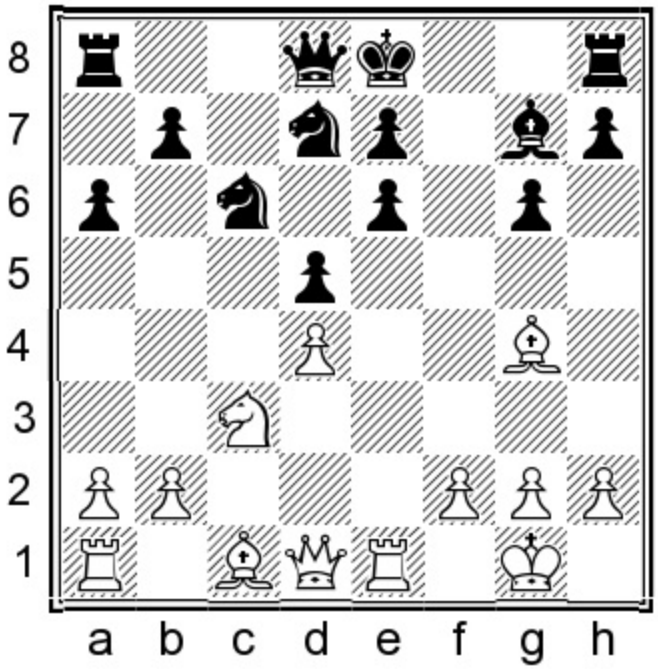
Position after: 15.♗d3!

After this move, Black's light-squared pawns will likely fall. 15...♘xd4?! [15...0-0 16.♗xf5 ♖xf5 17.♘xe6 ♕b8 18.♗g5±] 16.♗xf5 exf5 17.♗e3 e5 18.♗xd4 ♕xg5 19.f4! ♕h5 20.♕b3 0-0 21.fxe5+–



Position after: 21.fxe5+−

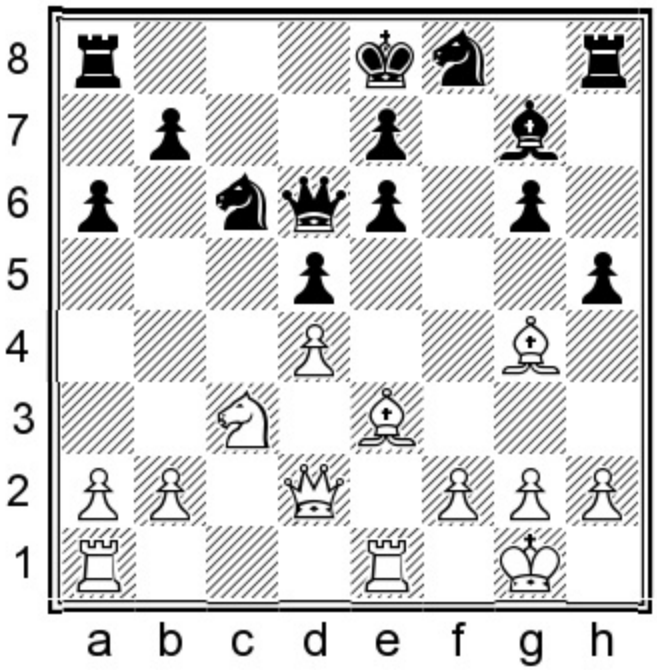
14.♗xf3 ♗g7 15.♗g4



Position after: 15.♗g4

15...♗xd4

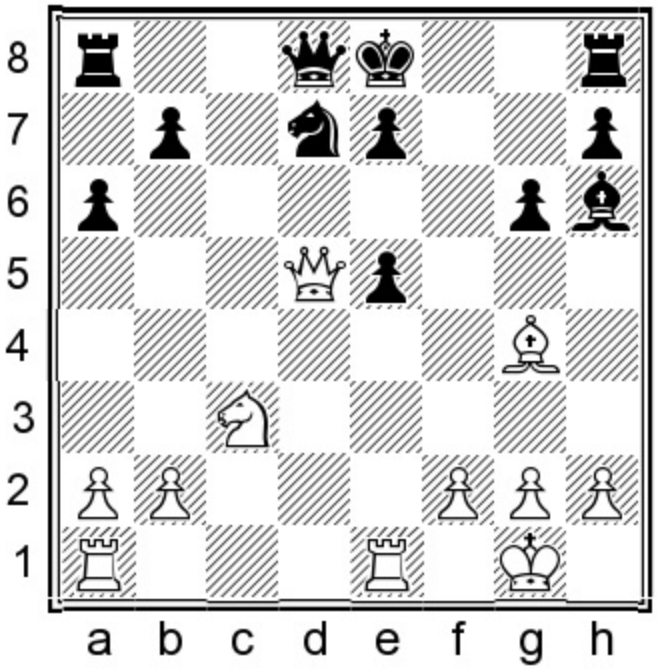
A) 15...♘f8 Even if Black manages to avoid ♗xe6, he'll still be under constant pressure and will face problems regarding king safety. 16.♗e3 ♕d6 17.♕d2 h5!?



Position after: 17...h5!?

It makes sense that Black should play in an unorthodox fashion, but even still it's relatively easy for us to maintain a large advantage. 18.♗d1! Taking advantage of Black's last move by targetting the g6-pawn. 18...♘d7 19.♗c2 0-0 20.♖ad1!± [20.♗xg6? e5 21.dxe5 ♘dxe5–+]

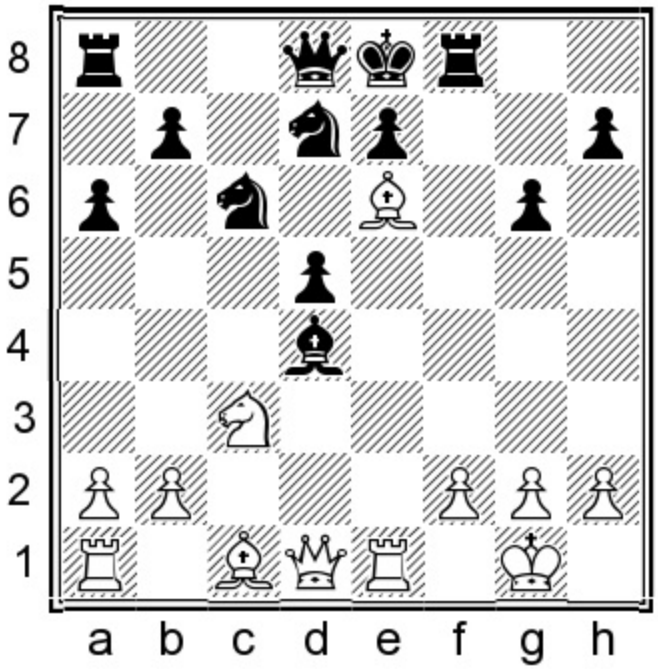
B) The problem with 15...♘xd4? is that we have 16.♗h6! ♗xh6 [16...♗f6 17.♗xe6 ♘xe6 18.♖xe6 ♘c5 19.♖e1 d4 20.♕f3! ♔f7 21.♘d5 e6 22.♘xf6 ♕xf6 23.♕g3+–] 17.♕xd4 e5 18.♕xd5



Position after: 18.♕xd5

Black's light-squares will be the source of his downfall. 18...♘f6 19.♕xe5 0-0 20.♗f3+–

16.♗xe6 ♖f8

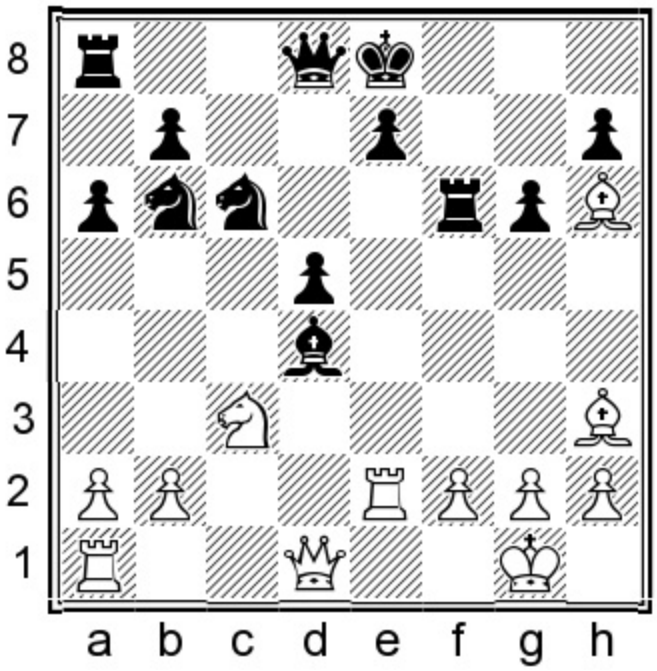


Position after: 16...♖f8

17.♖e2

My first idea was to play 17.♗e3, but I think retaining the bishop pair is more conducive to increasing the pressure and utilising our compensation.

17...♘b6 18.♗h6 ♖f6 19.♗h3

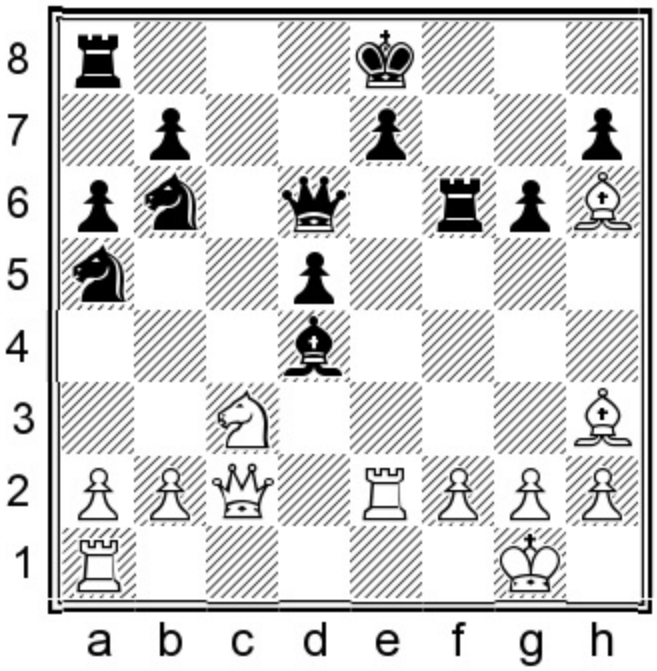


Position after: 19.♗h3

We have great compensation for the pawn. Black has problems both on the light-squares and also regarding where his king is going to be safe.

19...♔f7

19...♕d6 was tried in Pospisil – Rawlings, ICCF email 2017. 20.♕b3 ♘a5 [After 20...♖f7 21.♖d1⩱ White's initiative remains strong, and Black continues to struggle in a practical sense.] 21.♕c2



Position after: 21.♕c2

21...e5 [After the game's 21...♘c6 I believe 22.♔h1! followed by f4 was also the right plan.] 22.♔h1! ♔f7 23.f4↑

20.♗g5

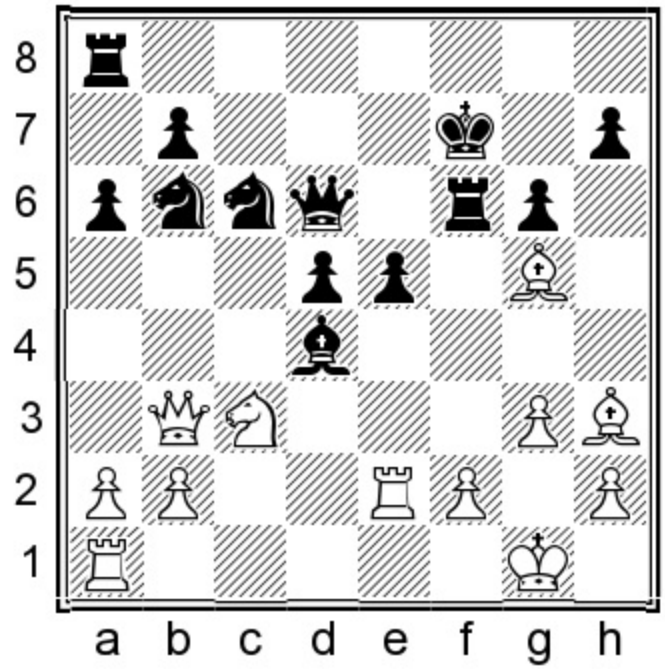
Black has to sacrifice an exchange now.

20...e5

20...♖d6 21.♖xe7+! ♘xe7 22.♕xd4+–

21.g3 ♕d6 22.♕b3!

The rook isn't going anywhere, and we can continue to develop before capturing on f6.

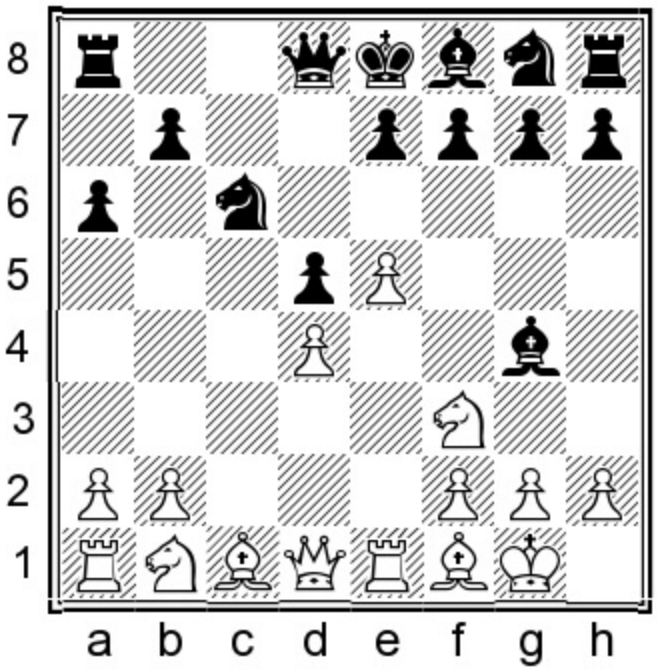


Position after: 22.♕b3!

22...♘a5 23.♕c2 ♔g7 24.♗xf6+ ♕xf6 25.♘d1±

d) 10...♘g8 11.e6!?

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 d6 4.0-0 ♗d7 5.♖e1 ♘f6 6.c3 a6 7.♗f1 ♗g4 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 d5 10.e5 ♘g8



Position after: 10...♘g8

Black's idea with this retreat is to meet e5-e6 with defensive ideas of ...g7-g6, ...♘h6 and ...♘f5, or even ...♗h6.

11.e6!?

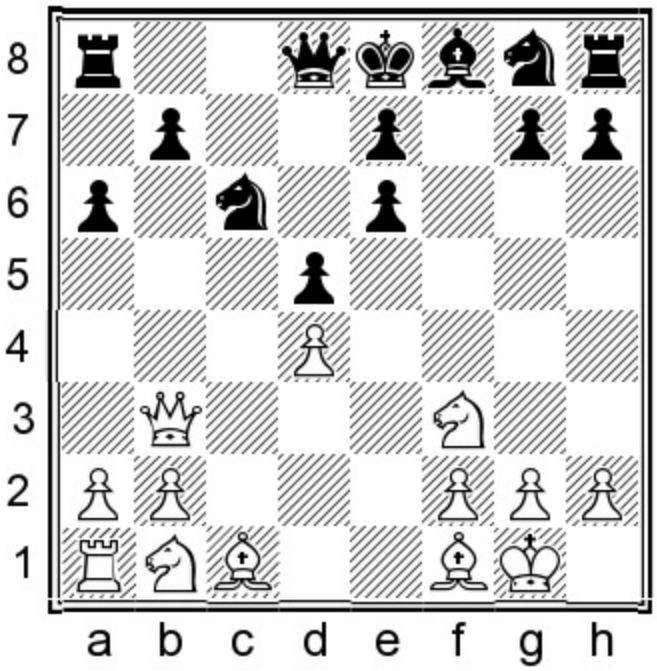
It's still plausible to go for this sacrifice, although we do have other options worth considering.

11.♖e3!?N is considered in subchapter e.

11...♗xe6

11...fxe6? This looks like a bad version of the corresponding line after 10...♘d7. 12.♗e2! ♗xf3 13.♗xf3 ♘f6 14.♗g5±

12.♖xe6 fxe6 13.♕b3

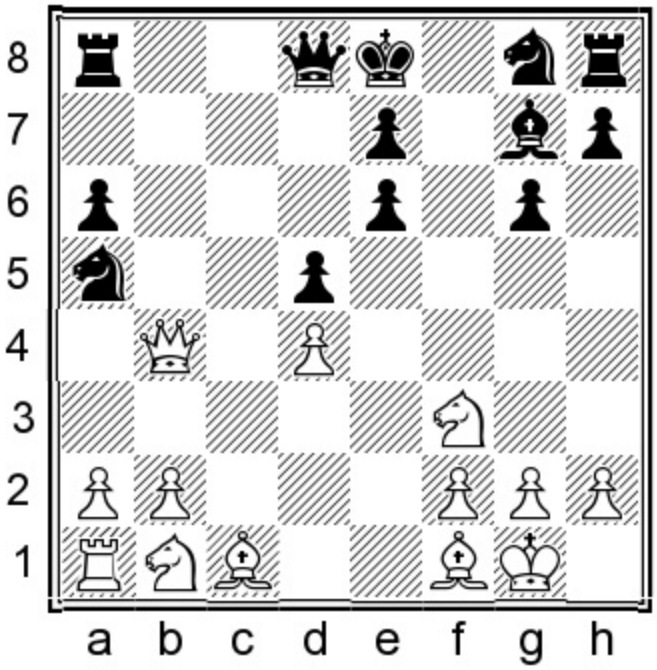


Position after: 13.♕b3

For his exchange, Black has a few different problems. He must find a way to complete his kingside development, whilst simultaneously dealing with his queenside weaknesses.

13...♘a5

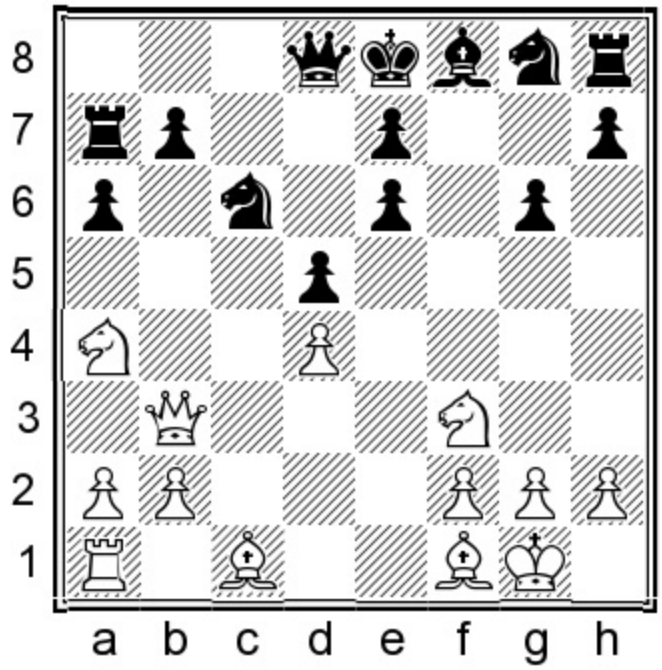
A) 13...g6? 14.♕xb7 ♘a5 15.♕b4 ♗g7



Position after: 15...♗g7

In Wang Hao – Markos, Beijing 2008, the most effective continuation was 16.♕a4+! ♔f8 17.♘c3+–

B) 13...♖a7! seems like the best defence. 14.♘c3 g6 15.♘a4!

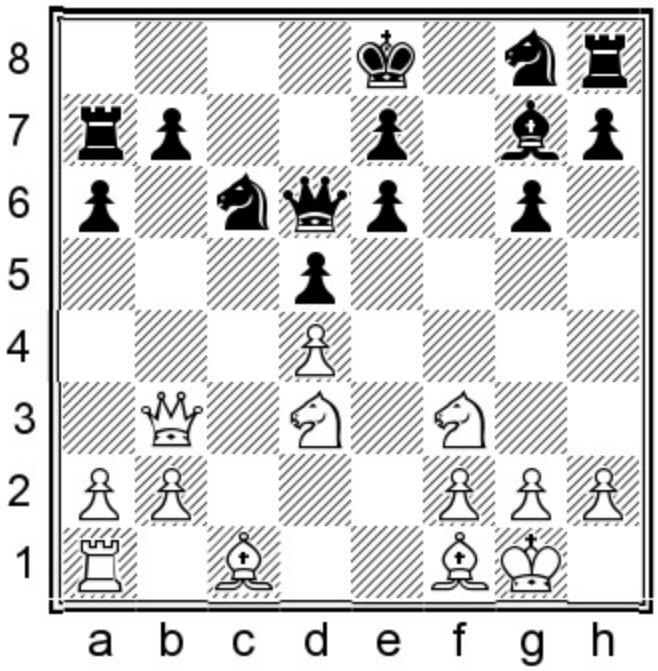


Position after: 15.♘a4!

B1) 15...♕d6 16.♘c5 ♗h6 Black can reach exactly the same position as after 15...♗g7, except our knight is on c5 instead of d3. I don't think this changes anything about the position though. [16...♗g7 17.♘d3 transposes to 15...♗g7.] 17.g3 ♘d8 18.♕a4+ ♕c6 19.♕d1 ♕d6 20.♘g5⩱ With the idea of playing ♗f4, followed with ♖c1.

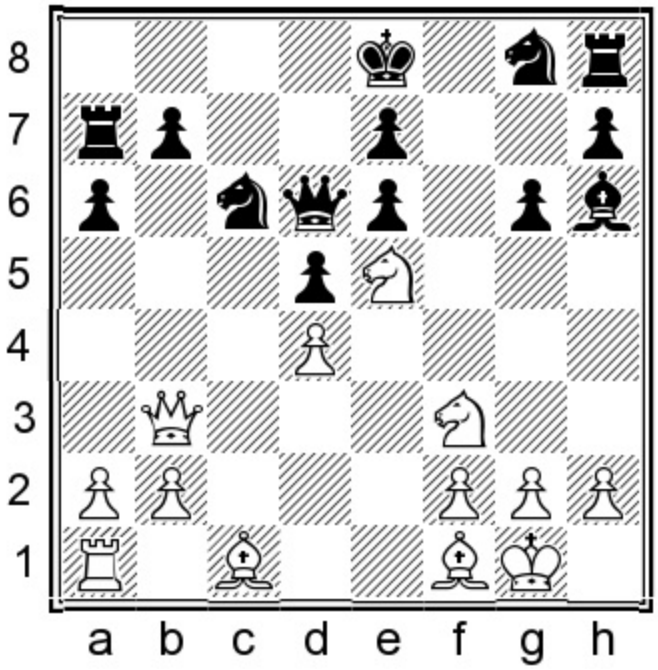
B2) 15...♘f6 was played in a couple of correspondence games, but after 16.♘c5 ♕d6 17.g3!± Black will struggle to deal with the forthcoming ♗f4 and ♗h3.

B3) 15...♗g7 16.♘c5 ♕d6 17.♘d3



Position after: 17.♘d3

17...♗h6! Black has to stop our threat of ♗f4. [17...♗xd4? 18.♗f4! e5 19.♘dxe5 ♗xe5 20.♘xe5 ♘xe5 21.♕g3+–; 17...♘xd4 18.♘xd4 ♗xd4 19.♕a4++–] 18.♘de5 The engine's assessment of this position hovers around 0.00, although it feels like Black is walking on a tightrope.



Position after: 18.♘de5

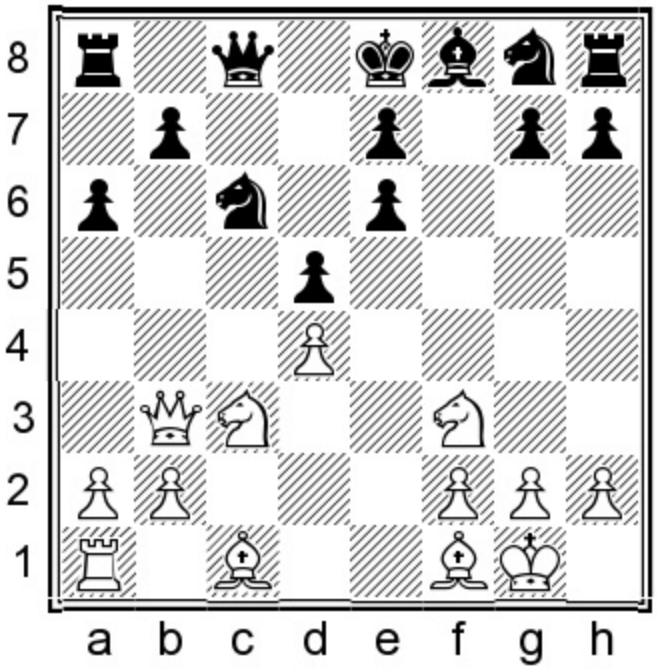
B3.1) 18...♔f8 19.h4! ♗xc1 20.♖xc1 ♔g7 [20...♘h6 21.♘g5⩲] 21.♘g5⩲ Natural moves such as ♖e1 will keep up the pressure. We also don't mind if Black captures on d4, as this opens up the

a1-h8 diagonal which will further weaken the black king.

B3.2) 18...♘d8 19.h4 b5 20.♗g5!±

B3.3) 18...♕c7 19.♗e3 ♗xe3 [19...♖a8 20.♖c1 ♗xe3 21.♕xe3 ♘f6 22.♕h6 transposes to 19...♗xe3.] 20.♕xe3 ♘f6 21.♖c1 ♖a8 22.♕h6 ♖g8 23.g4!→ It's evident that our exchange sacrifice has been very successful.

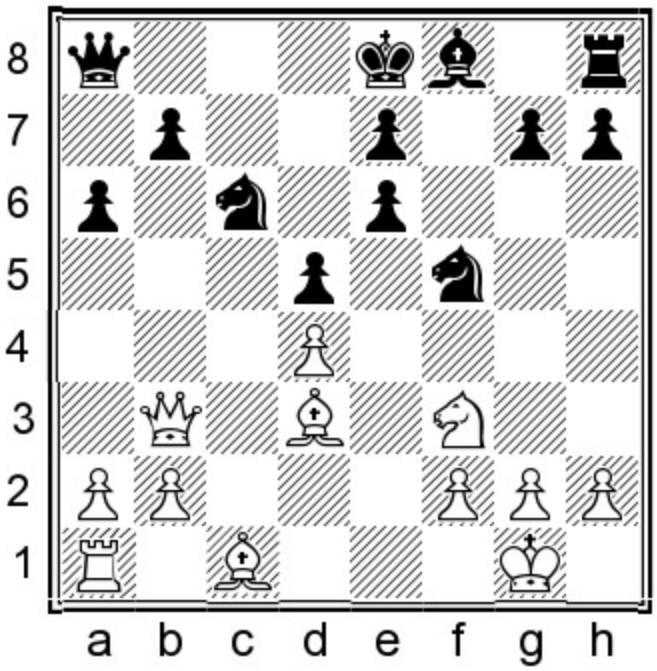
C) 13...♕c8!? This is basically Black's way of giving back the exchange, as he can't prevent ♘c3-a4-b6. 14.♘c3



Position after: 14.♘c3

C1) 14...♘f6 15.♘a4 g6 [15...♘d7 Black will be far too passive after this. 16.♗f4 g6 17.♖c1 ♗g7 18.♘g5↑] 16.♘b6 ♕d8 17.♘xa8 ♕xa8 18.g3±

C2) 14...♘h6 It's difficult to see what the best way of developing is for Black, but ...♘h6-f5 has some sense. 15.♘a4 ♘f5 16.♘b6 ♕d8 17.♘xa8 ♕xa8 18.♗d3!

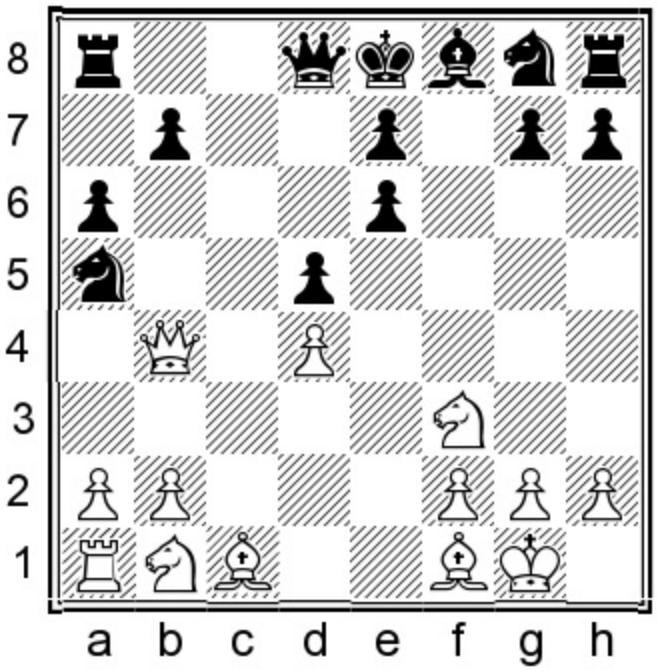


Position after: 18.♗d3!

18...g6 [18...♘fxd4 19.♘xd4 ♘xd4 20.♕c3 ♘c6 21.b4±] 19.♗xf5 gxf5 20.♗f4 ♗g7 21.♕e3 ♕c8 22.♖d1± White remains on top.

14.♕b4!N

14.♕e3 was played by Wang Hao, but it seems misplaced here as Black can play ...g7-g6 and ...♗h6. I'd also prefer to capture the e6-pawn with our knight or bishop, rather than our queen.



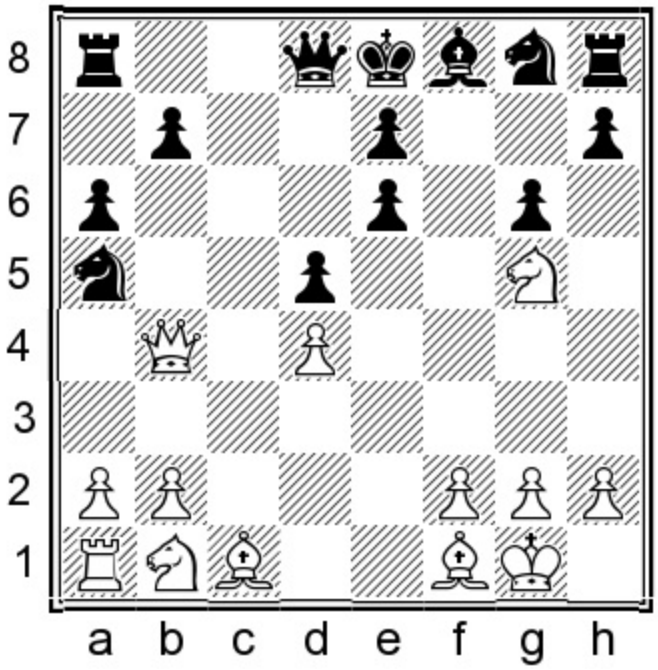
Position after: 14.♕b4!N

14...g6

A) 14...♕c7 15.♕e1! The queen stands really nicely here, and isn't vulnerable to a ...♗h6 move anymore. 15...g6 16.♘c3 ♕d6 17.♘g5 ♘c6 18.g3 ♗h6 19.♗f4 ♕d7 20.♗h3 ♗xg5 21.♗xe6 ♕d8 22.♗xg5⩲

B) After 14...♘f6 we can just continue with normal moves. 15.♘c3 ♖c8 16.♗f4 g6 17.♖e1 ♗g7 18.♘g5 ♘c6 19.♕xb7 ♘xd4 20.♕xa6⩲

15.♘g5!



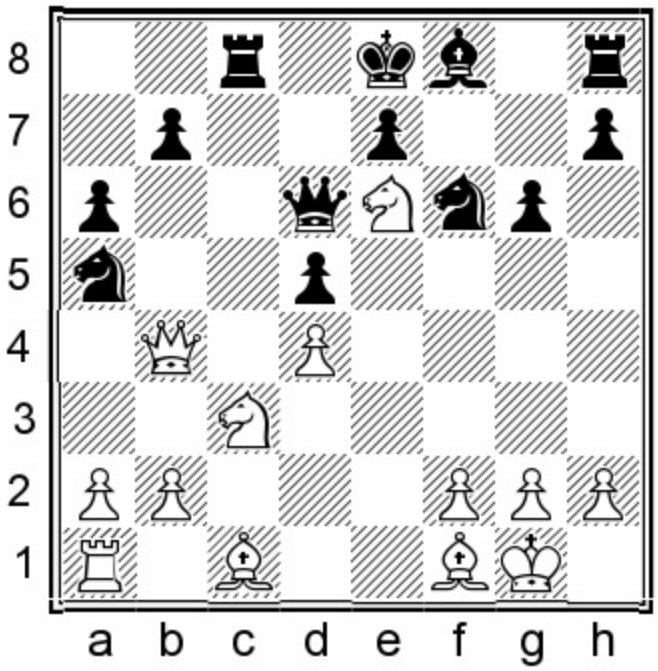
Position after: 15.♘g5!

It's always difficult for Black to defend the e6-pawn, and here he'll need to attack our bishop on c1 to gain a valuable tempo.

15...♕c8

A) 15...♖c8 16.♘c3

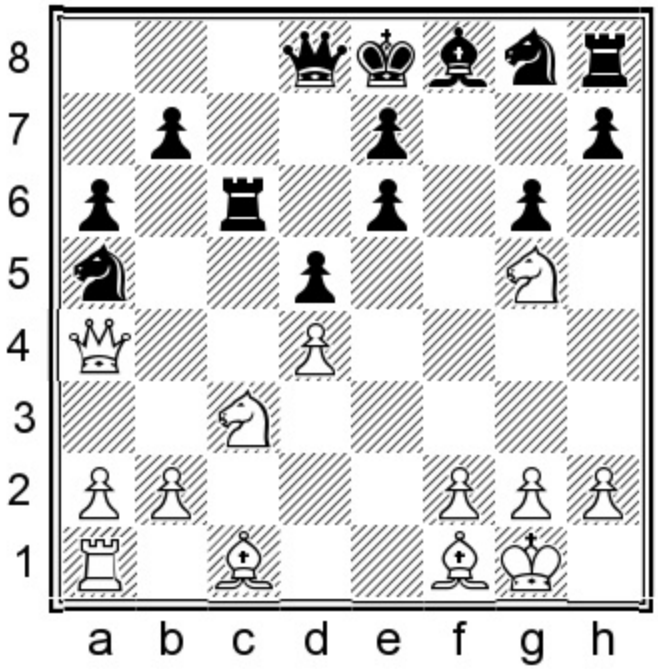
A1) 16...♘f6 17.♘xe6 ♕d6



Position after: 17...♕d6

18.♕xd6!? [18.♘c5 This is also a completely viable option if we don't want to exchange queens. 18...♕c7 19.♗g5⩱] 18...exd6 19.g3 ♔f7 20.♘g5+ ♔g7 21.♗h3 ♖e8 22.♗e3 h6 23.♘e6+ ♔h7 24.♘c7 ♖d8 25.♘7xd5 ♘xd5 26.♘xd5 ♗g7 27.♖c1⩲ White's minor pieces dominate in this queenless middlegame.

A2) 16...♖c6 17.♕a4!



Position after: 17.♕a4!

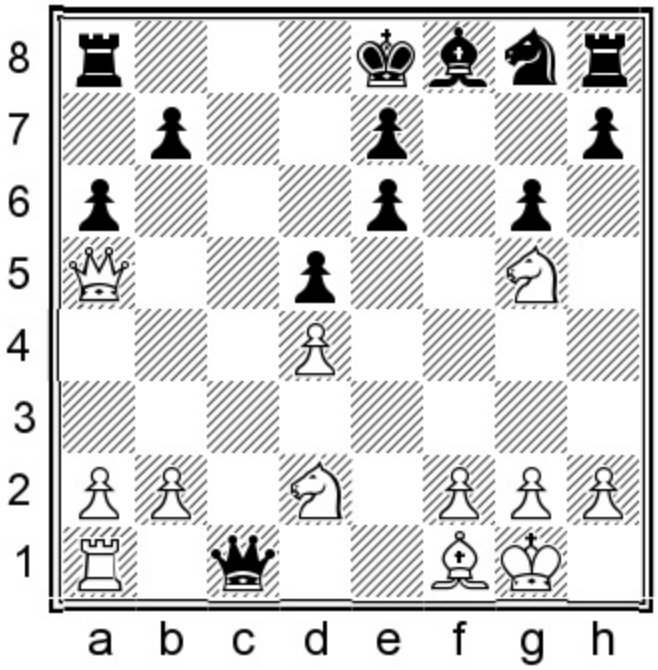
It’s impossible for Black to prevent ♘xe6. 17...♘c4 18.♗xc4 dxc4 19.♘xe6 ♕d7 20.d5 ♖xe6 21.dxe6 ♕xa4 22.♘xa4±

B) 15...♕c7 This might be the best option for Black, but it’s very likely that his queen will be vulnerable on c7 to a future ♗f4. 16.♘c3 ♘c6 17.♕b3 ♘f6 18.g3⩱ Black’s queen will have to retreat to c8 in the near future.

16.♕xa5!

An incredible idea which exemplifies the benefit of piece quality over quantity.

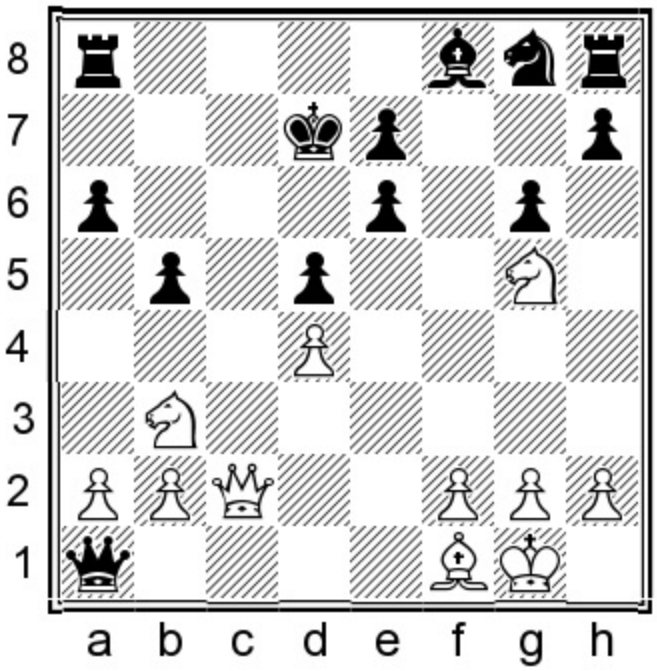
16...♕xc1 17.♘d2!



Position after: 17.♘d2!

17...♕c6

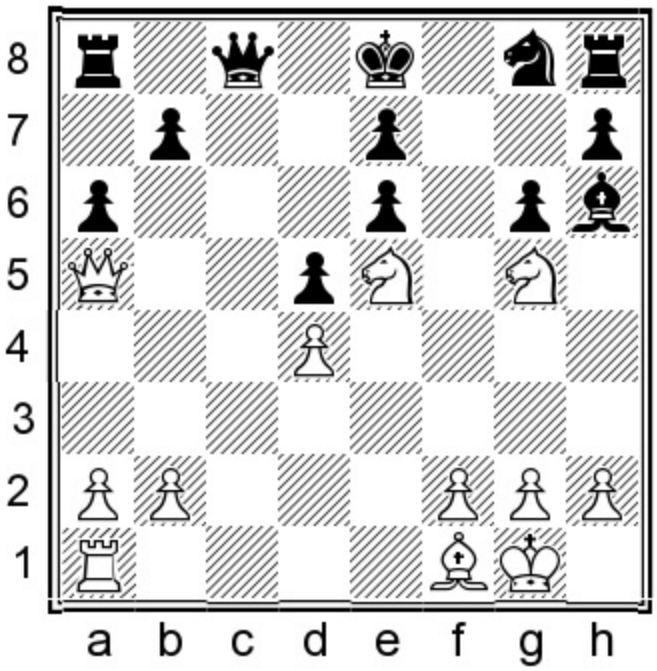
17...♕xa1 18.♕a4+ b5 19.♕c2! Our g5-knight is so powerful and Black will have to sacrifice his queen to avoid mate. 19...♔d7 [19...♖d8 20.♘b3 ♕xa2 21.♕c6+ ♖d7 22.♘c5] 20.♘b3



Position after: 20.♘b3

20...♗h6 [20...♕xa2 21.♘c5+ ♔c6 22.♘cxe6++–] 21.♘xa1 ♗xg5 22.♘b3 ♖c8 23.♘c5+ ♔e8 24.♕b3+– Black's central pawns will collapse, and so too will his position.

18.♘df3 ♗h6 19.♘e5 ♕c8



Position after: 19...♕c8

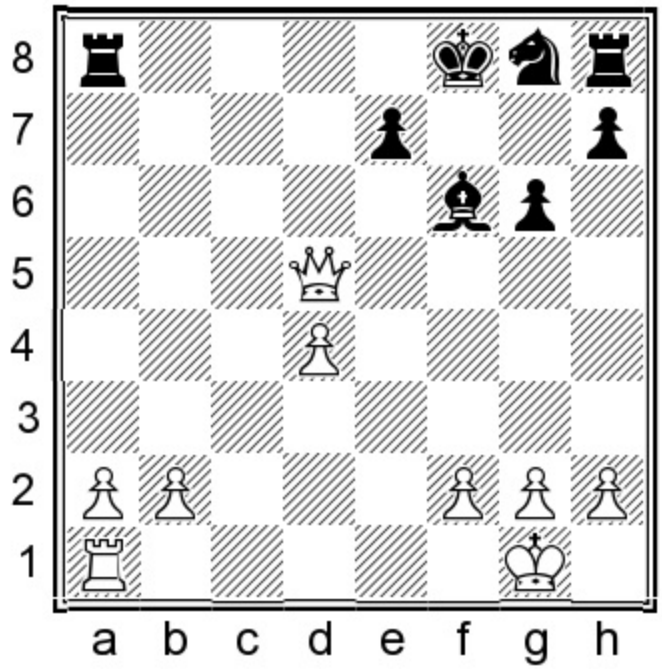
20.♕a4+! b5 21.♗xb5+ axb5 22.♕xb5+ ♔f8 23.♘d7+

Black has to lose his queen, and the resulting material imbalance favours White. In particular, our queenside pawns look very strong.

23...♕xd7

23...♔g7 24.♘xe6+ ♔f7 25.♕xd5+–

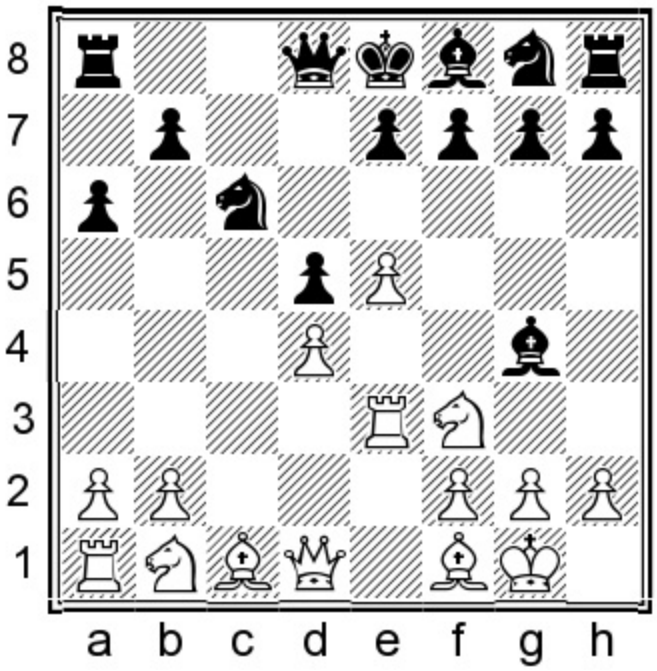
24.♕xd7 ♗xg5 25.♕xe6 ♗f6 26.♕xd5±



Position after: 26.♕xd5±

e) 10...♘g8 11.♖e3!?N

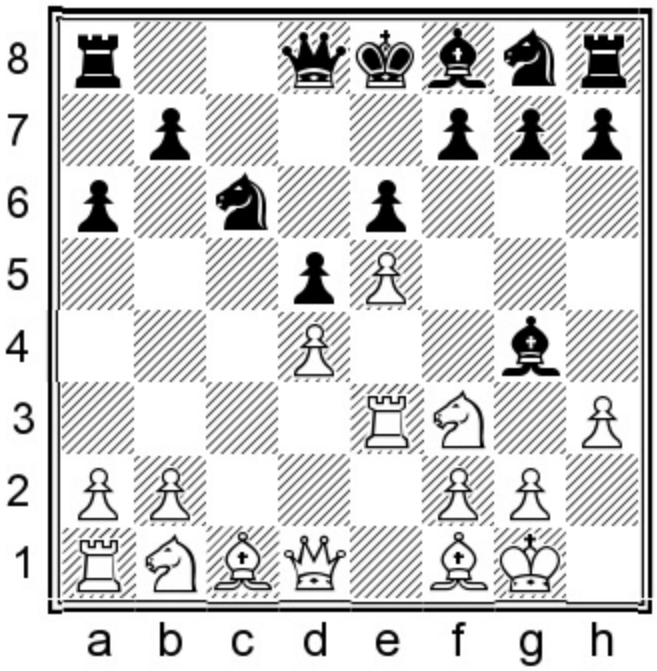
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 d6 4.0-0 ♗d7 5.♖e1 ♘f6 6.c3 a6 7.♗f1 ♗g4 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 d5 10.e5 ♘g8 11.♖e3!?N



Position after: 11.♖e3!?N

A sophisticated alternative where we aren't committed to sacrificing an exchange. Rather, we unconventionally probe at Black's queenside pawns whilst adding another protector to the knight on f3.

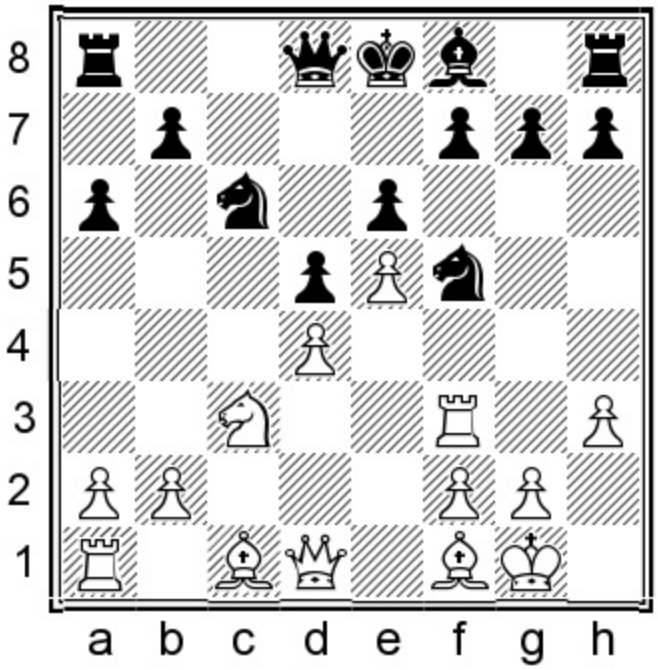
11...e6 12.h3



Position after: 12.h3

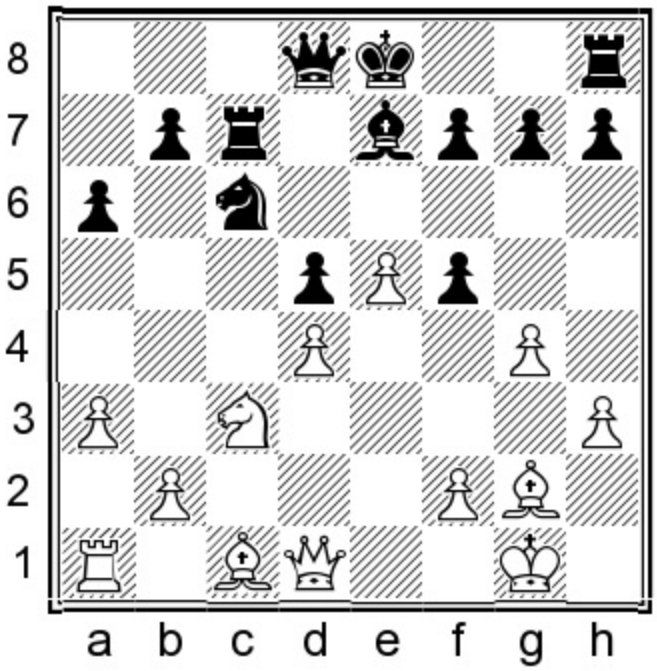
12...♗h5

12...♗xf3 Black can also try to play more positionally, but we have a cool idea to disrupt his plans. 13.♖xf3 ♘ge7 14.♘c3 ♘f5



Position after: 14...♘f5

15.♖xf5! This time we do sacrifice an exchange, as Black's pawns will be virtually indefensible. 15...exf5 16.a3! We want to prevent ...♗b4 in order to maintain our powerful c3-knight. 16...♗e7 17.g3 ♖c8 18.♗g2 ♖c7 [18...0-0 It feels like our central pawns will be too strong if Black doesn't try to resist us capturing on d5. 19.♘xd5 ♕d7 20.♗e3 ♗d8 21.♕d3 ♖e8 22.♗f4 b5 23.♖e1±] 19.g4! [19.♘xd5? ♖d7∞]

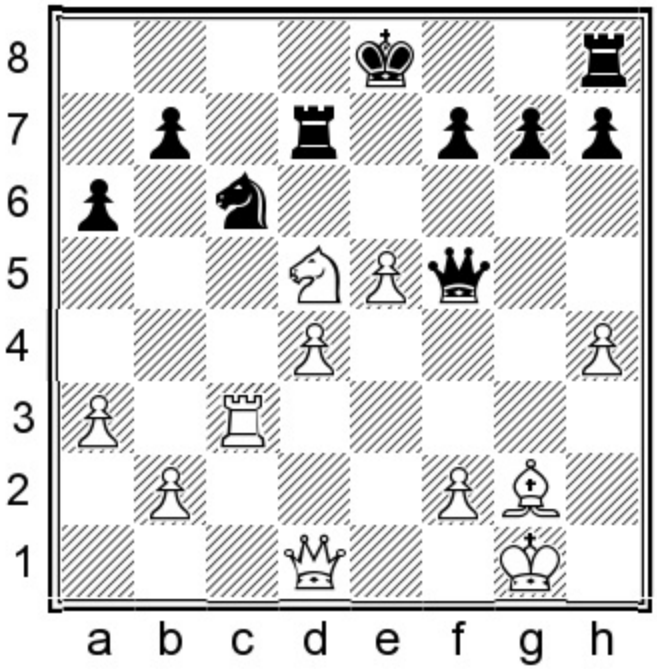


Position after: 19.g4!

A) 19...f4 20.♗xf4 ♖d7 21.♕d3 ♗g5 22.♗h2± Black is tied down to the defence of the d5-pawn, and we can soon begin to push our kingside majority.

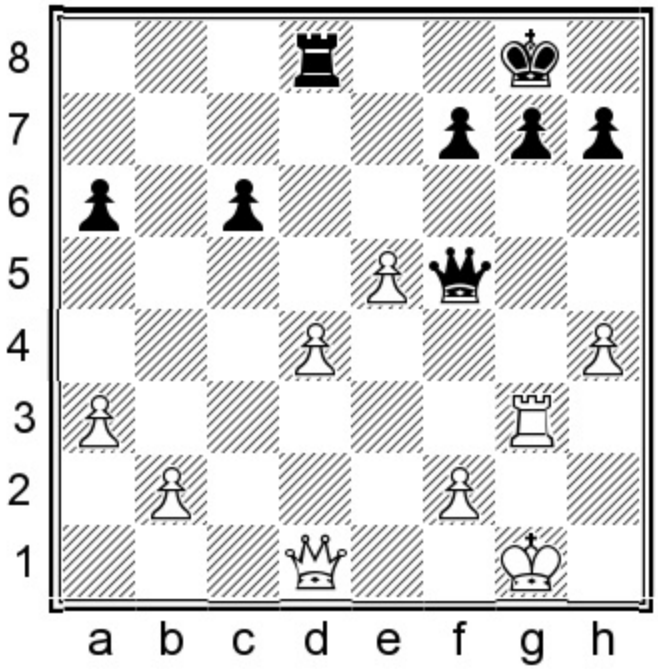
B) 19...fxg4 20.♕xg4 Our queen has come into the game with a tempo, and our attack should be very strong. 20...g6 21.♗xd5 ♖d7 22.♗xf7+ ♔xf7 23.e6+ ♔e8 24.exd7+ ♕xd7 25.♗e3±

C) 19...♗g5 20.gxf5 ♗xc1 21.♖xc1 ♕g5 22.♘xd5 ♖d7 23.h4 ♕xf5 24.♖c3!



Position after: 24.♖c3!

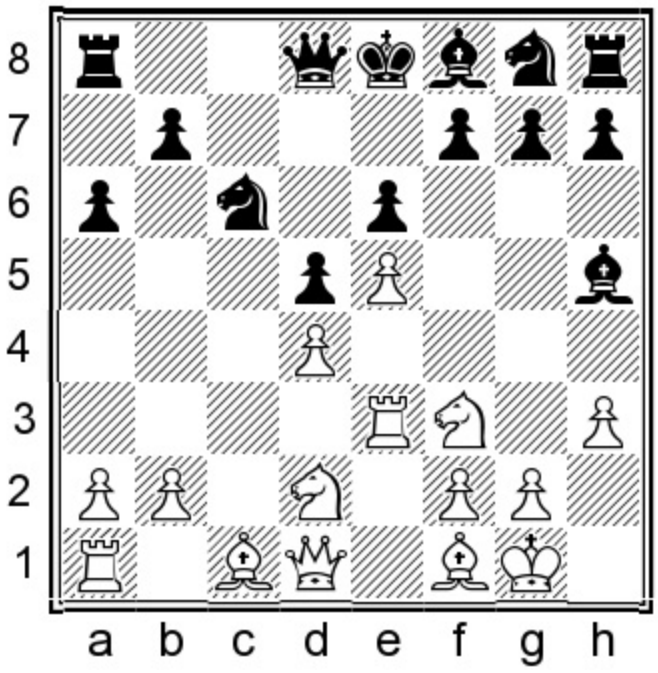
The second time we're using our rook on the third rank to good effect. 24...0-0 25.♖g3 ♖xd5 26.♗xd5 ♖d8 27.♗xc6 bxc6 I'm not sure if this position is technically winning, but Black has to play very accurately to hold the draw.



Position after: 27...bxc6

The variation could continue: 28.♕d3 ♕f4 29.♕xa6 ♕c1+ 30.♔g2 ♕xb2 31.♕xc6 ♕xd4 32.e6 fxe6 33.♕xe6+ ♔h8 34.♖g4±

13.♘bd2!



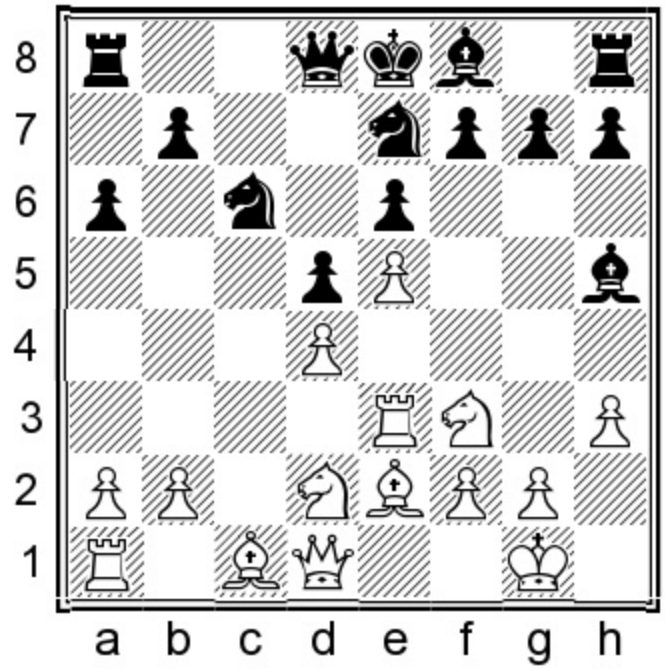
Position after: 13.♘bd2!

We're not sure yet if our rook belongs on b3 or c3, and I like our knight on d2 as it simultaneously protects the f3-knight as well as offering the possibility of ♘b3-c5. Meanwhile, it seems very risky for Black to capture the d4-pawn as he's basically trading off one of his only developed pieces.

13...♘xd4

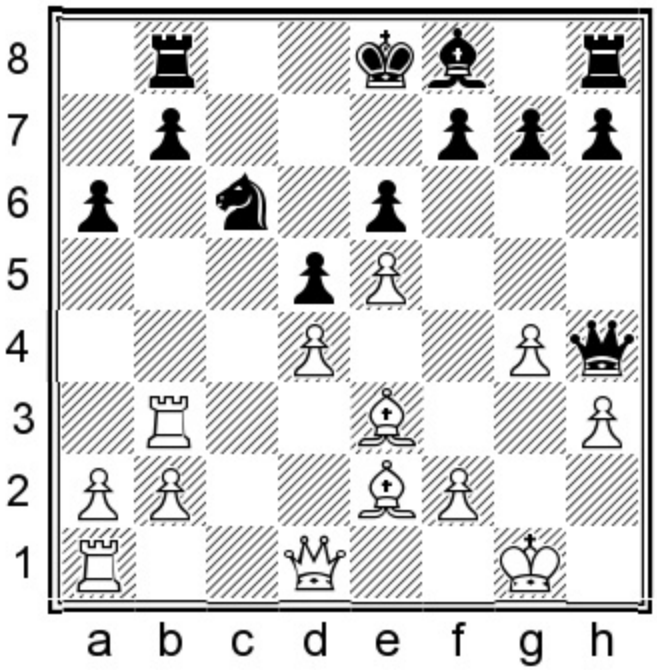
The critical test of our strategy.

13...♘ge7 14.♗e2



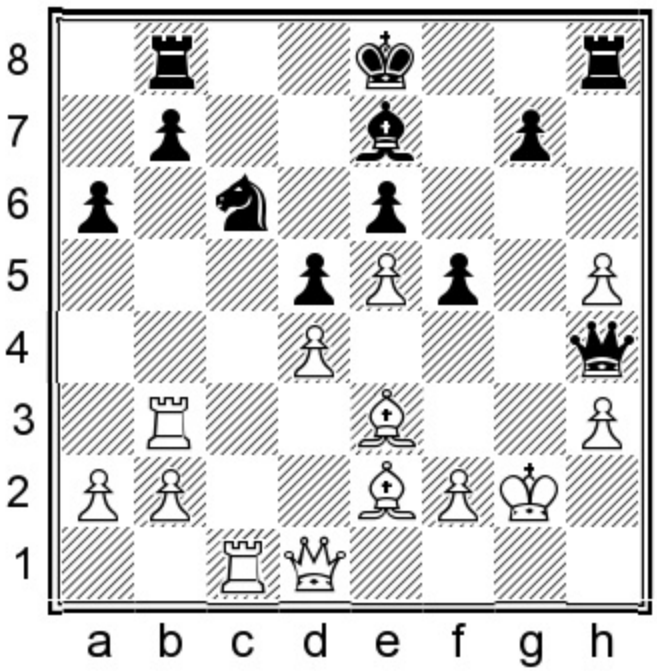
Position after: 14.♗e2

We need to protect the d4-pawn before playing ♖b3. 14...♘f5 [14...♗g6 15.♖c3! In this case, it's logical to slowly develop a queenside initiative. 15...♘f5 16.a3 ♗e7 17.♘b3 0-0 18.♗f4± Our rook on c3 is perfectly placed to facilitate a queenside press.] 15.♖b3 ♗xf3 16.♘xf3 ♖b8 17.g4! ♘h4 18.♘xh4 ♕xh4 19.♗e3!



Position after: 19.♗e3!

White's rook on b3 is a fantastic piece, basically doing two jobs at once. Our kingside isn't really weak, although it's worth examining what happens if Black tries to make inroads against our king. 19...♗e7 [19...♕xh3 20.♗g5+–] 20.♔g2 h5 [20...0-0 21.f4± White is in full control here.] 21.gxh5 f5 22.♖c1!

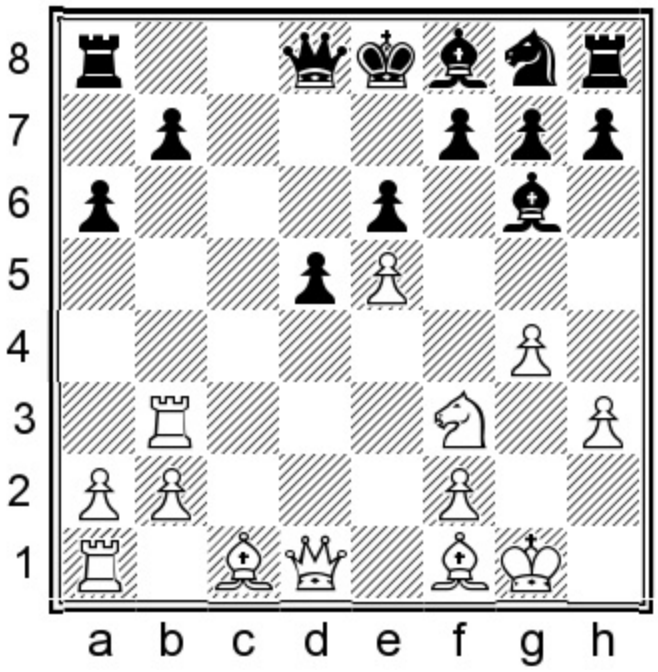


Position after: 22.♖c1!

22...f4 [22...♔f7 23.f4! Black won't be able to avoid the queen trade after we play ♕e1 next move.]

23.♗xf4 ♕xf4 24.♖xc6 0-0 25.♖c7 ♕xf2+ 26.♔h1± Although White's king may not look safe, it's pretty well protected and we also have our own attacking ideas against Black's king.

14.g4 ♘xf3+ 15.♘xf3 ♗g6 16.♖b3

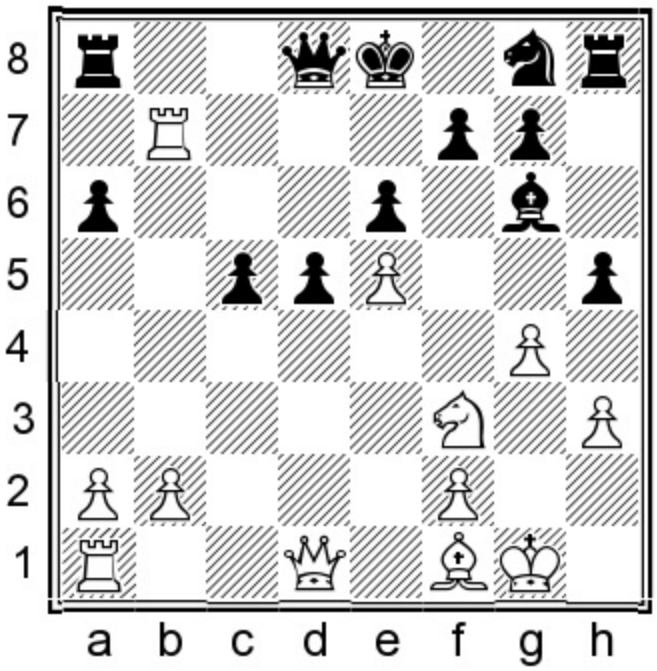


Position after: 16.♖b3

This somewhat reminds me of French advanced lines where White sacrifices his d4-pawn to attain quick development. In those lines, Black's bishop is usually confined within the pawn structure on c8. I can't help but think that it's better placed on c8 than g6, as right now Black's light-squared bishop seems completely out of the game.

16...♕c7

A) 16...b6 17.♗e3 ♗c5 18.♗xc5 bxc5 19.♖b7! h5 Black should create counterplay on the kingside, but it can only generate limited activity.

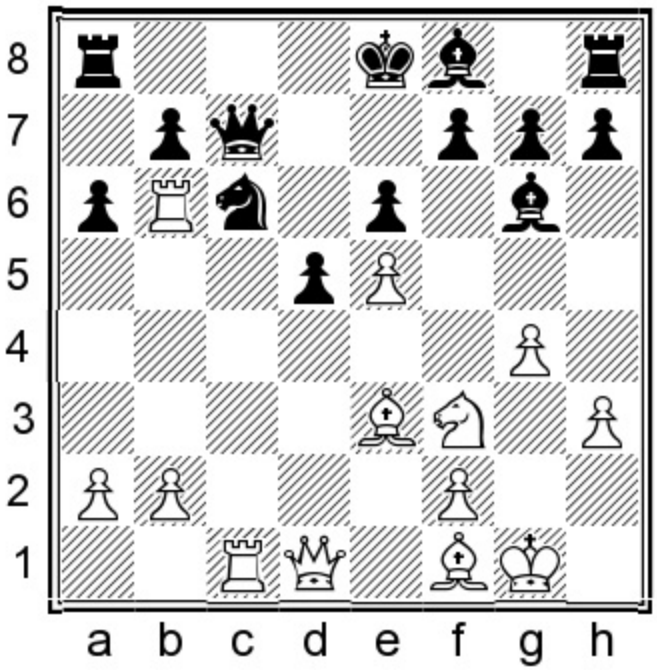


Position after: 19...h5

20.♖c1 hxg4 21.hxg4 ♕c8 22.♕b3 ♘h6 23.♕b6 0-0 24.♖xc5 ♕e8 25.g5 ♘f5 26.b3± Even if Black manages to trade a couple of major pieces, the resulting minor piece endings still seem very much favourable for White.

B) 16...♕d7 17.♗e3 ♘e7 18.♘d4 h5 19.♖c1+– if 19...♘c6, we can capture the knight and Black's a6-pawn will be hanging.

17.♗e3 ♘e7 18.♖c1 ♘c6 19.♖b6!

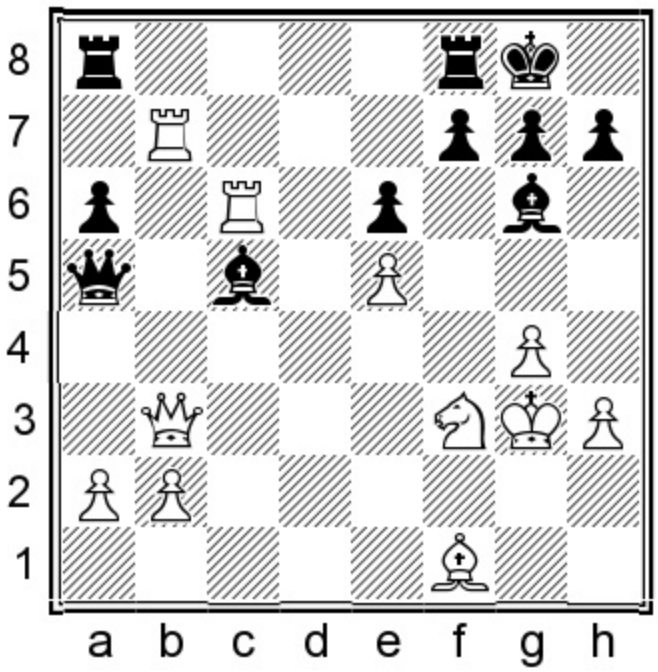


Position after: 19.♖b6!

It seems very difficult for Black to deal with our queenside pressure.

19...♕d7

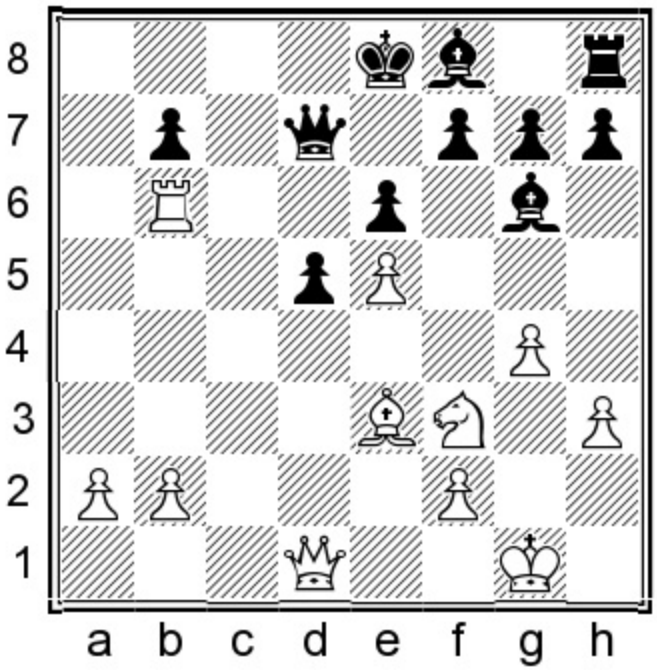
19...d4 20.♕b3! The start of a forcing line which works in White's favour. 20...dxe3 21.♖xb7 exf2+ 22.♔xf2 ♕a5 23.♖xc6 ♗c5+ 24.♔g3 0-0



Position after: 24...0-0

Our rooks are incredibly strong in suffocating Black's activity, and his pieces will find themselves very uncoordinated. 25.♕c4 ♗e3 26.♖b3 ♗d2 27.♗e2±

20.♗xa6! ♖xa6 21.♖cxc6 ♖xb6 22.♖xb6



Position after: 22.♖xb6

Black must give up his d-pawn to avoid giving us queenside passed pawns, but he'll face a grim defence in the resulting ending.

22...d4 23.♕xd4 ♕xd4 24.♘xd4 ♗e4 25.♘b3±

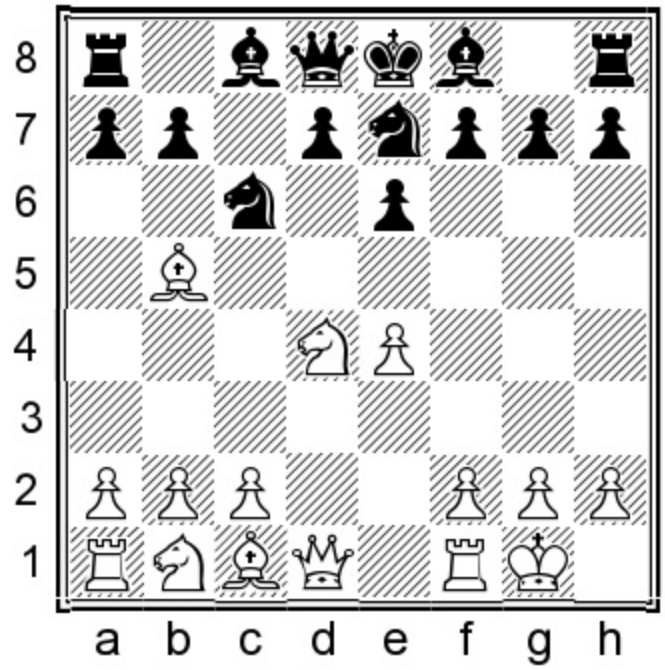
<u>Conclusion to Chapter 7</u>

After we've reacted to Black's 9...d5 with the combative 10.e5, it often happens that this pawn pushes onwards to e6 to interfere with Black's co-ordination. I believe the pawn sacrifices after either 10...♘d7 or 10...♘g8 have the potential to lead to extremely complex and fascinating positions, where I have succeeded in finding new and interesting ideas. In particular, the theme of an exchange sacrifice on e6, so as to later be able to embed a knight or bishop on that same square with tempo, is a very threatening one. To provide some variety, in the final subchapter I have also provided an alternative against Black's most principled knight retreat.

Part IV
3...e6

Chapter 8
4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4 cxd4 6.♘xd4 --

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4 cxd4 6.♘xd4



Chapter Guide

Chapter 8 – 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4 cxd4 6.♘xd4 --

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4!? cxd4 6.♘xd4

a) 6...a6

b) 6...♘xd4 with 9...--

c) 6...♘xd4 with 9...b5

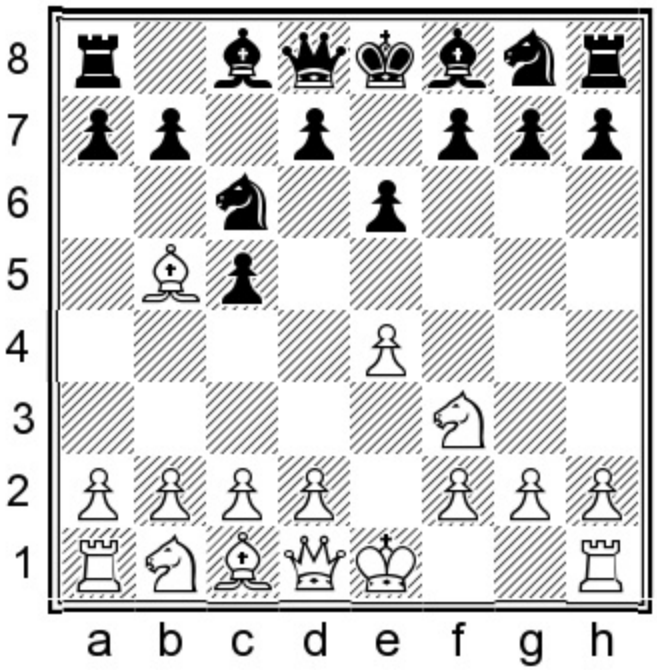
d) 6...♕c7 & 6...♘g6 7.♗e3 ♕c7

e) 6...♘g6 7.♗e3 ♗e7 8.♗e2! 0-0 9.c4 --

f) 6...♘g6 7.♗e3 ♗e7 8.♗e2! 0-0 9.c4 b6

a) 6...a6

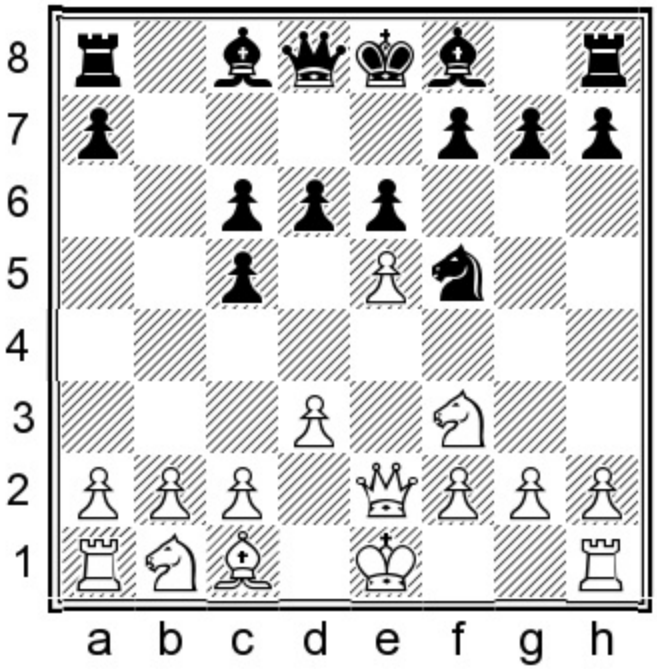
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6



Position after: 3...e6

4.0-0

4.♗xc6 was favoured by Viswanathan Anand in his World Championship match against Boris Gelfand. However, I wasn't convinced by the following line: 4...bxc6 5.d3 ♘e7 6.♕e2 d6 7.e5 ♘f5∞



Position after: 7...♘f5∞

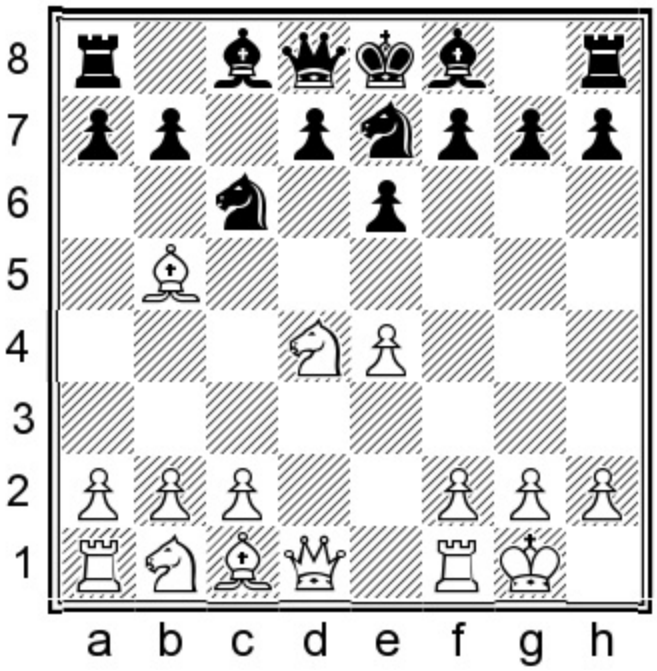
Black's positionally weak doubled c-pawns are outweighed by his increased piece activity. The main

point is that it's difficult for White to deal with a ...♘d4 jump.

4...♘ge7 5.d4!?

5.♖e1 is the other option in this repertoire and is covered in Chapter 12, 13 and 14.

5...cxd4 6.♘xd4



Position after: 6.♘xd4

6...a6

Inviting White to straighten out Black's knight tangle. Of course, this is not our intention. If Black wants to develop the c6-knight proactively he can choose ...♘xd4 (subchapters b and c) or ...♘g6 (subchapters d – f.)

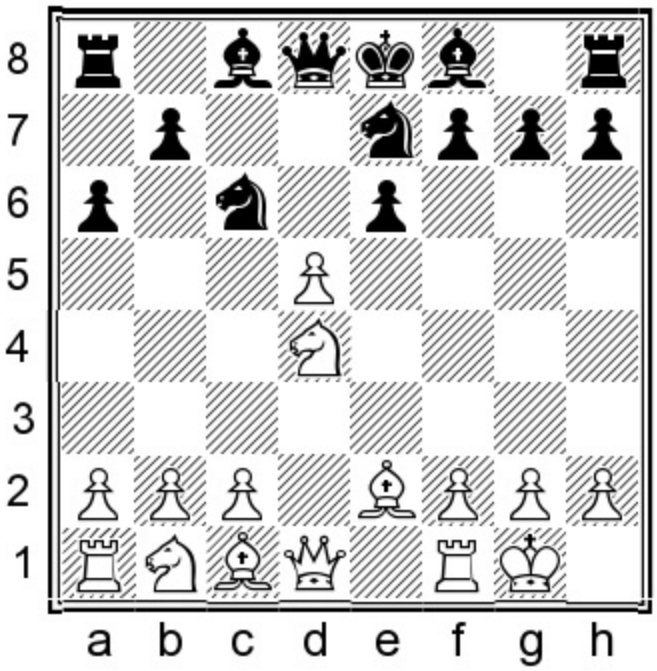
6...♕b6 is the main move, considered in the next three chapters.

7.♗e2 d5

I'm not concerned by this immediate pawn break. We are ahead in development, and therefore opening the position should suit our more actively placed pieces.

7...♘xd4 8.♕xd4 transposes to subchapters b and c.

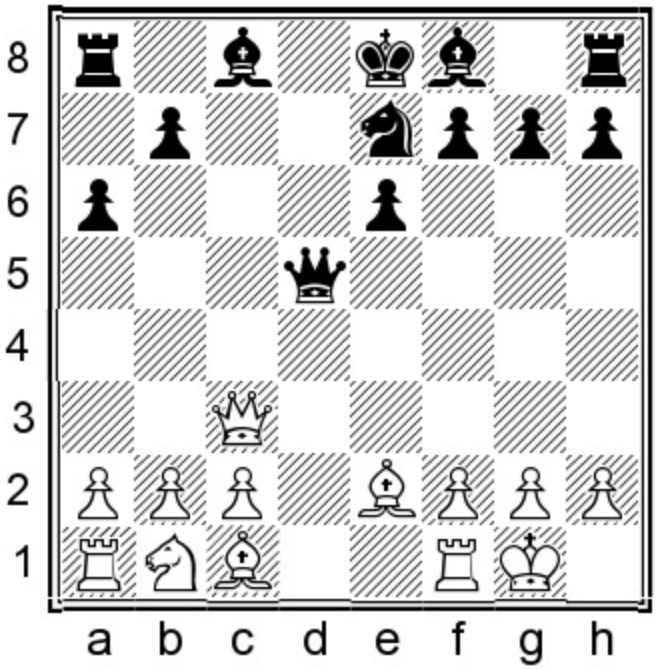
8.exd5



Position after: 8.exd5

8...♕xd5

8...♘xd4 9.♕xd4 ♕xd5 10.♕c3! Black's queen will be hit on the next move, and our own queen stands well, confounding Black's dark-squared bishop.

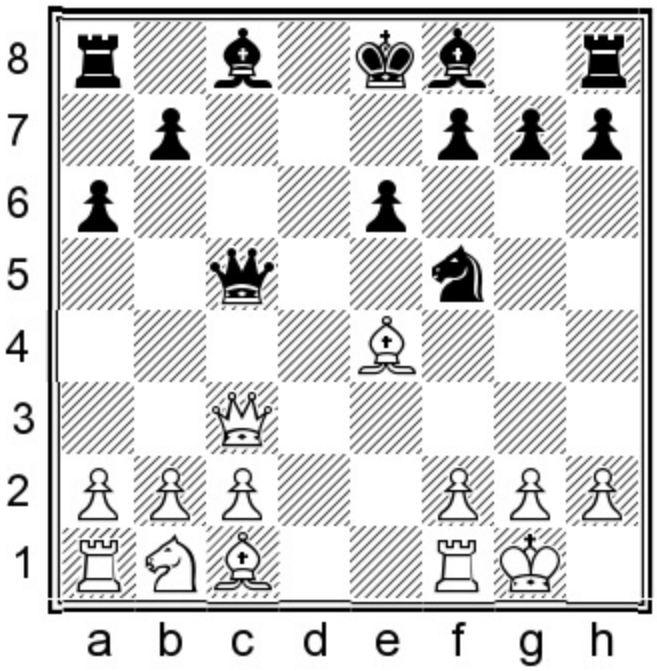


Position after: 10.♕c3!

A) 10...♕c6 Black can force the exchange of queens, but they'll be on much better terms for us than

if we'd have exchanged immediately on move 10. 11.♗f3 ♕xc3 12.♘xc3 ♘g6 13.g3 ♖b8 14.♗e3 ♗d7 15.♖ad1± The ending is evidently advantageous for White.

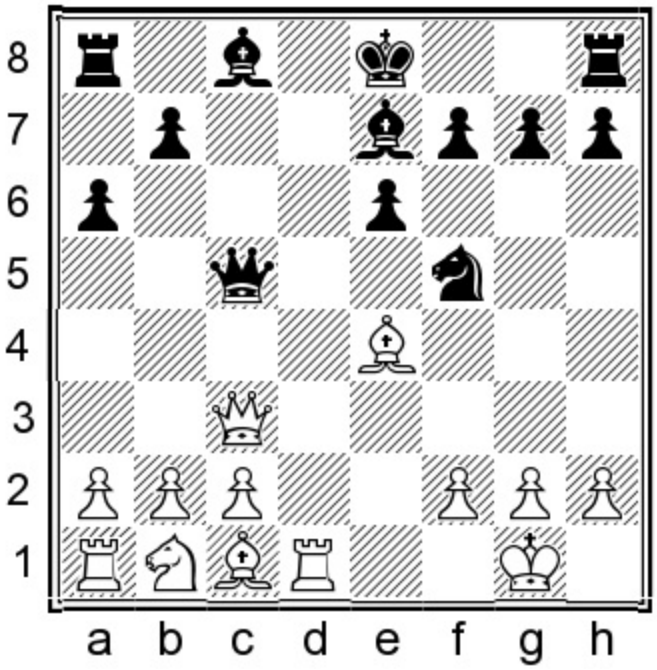
B) 10...♘f5 11.♗f3 ♕c5 12.♗e4! A weird-looking move, the point of which is seen after 12...e5.



Position after: 12.♗e4!

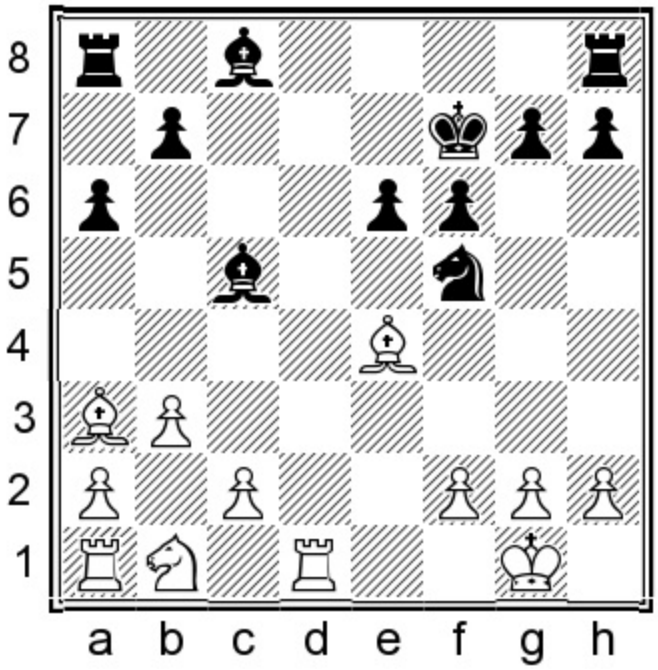
B1) 12...e5 13.♕d3! Black's pieces will end up being very uncoordinated. 13...♘d6 [13...g6 14.♖d1 ♗e7 15.♘c3±] 14.♗d5 ♗e7 15.♕b3 0-0 16.♗e3 ♕b5 17.♘c3±

B2) 12...♗e7 13.♖d1



Position after: 13.♖d1

13...f6 With the queens coming off, Black should put his king on f7, but he still can't hold the balance. [13...0-0 14.♕xc5 ♗xc5 15.a4! ♘d6 16.♗f3 ♘f5 17.c3±] 14.b3! ♔f7 15.♕xc5 ♗xc5 16.♗a3

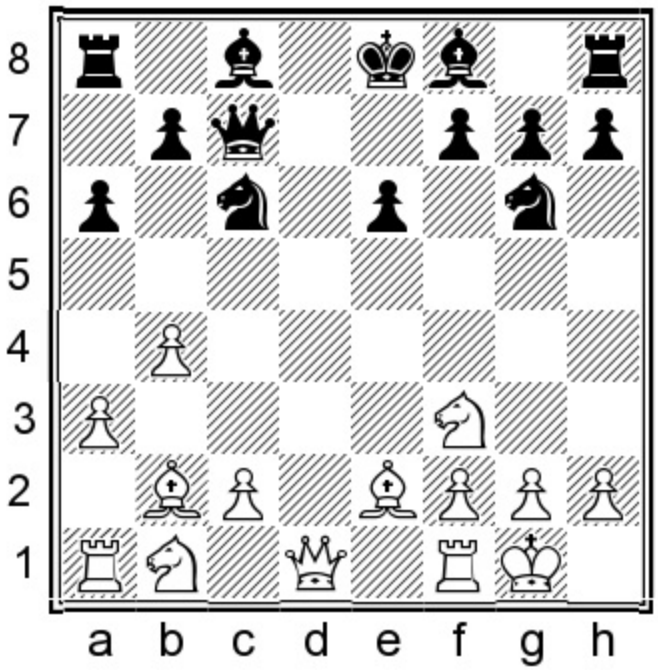


Position after: 16.♗a3

It's a good idea to trade these bishops, as Black will face more problems on the dark-squares as well as the struggle of protecting his queenside. 16...♗e7 17.♗xe7 ♘xe7 18.♘c3 ♖b8 19.♘a4 e5 20.♘c5 f5 21.♗d5+ ♘xd5 22.♖xd5± Black obviously still has drawing chances, but the play is completely one-sided.

9.♗e3

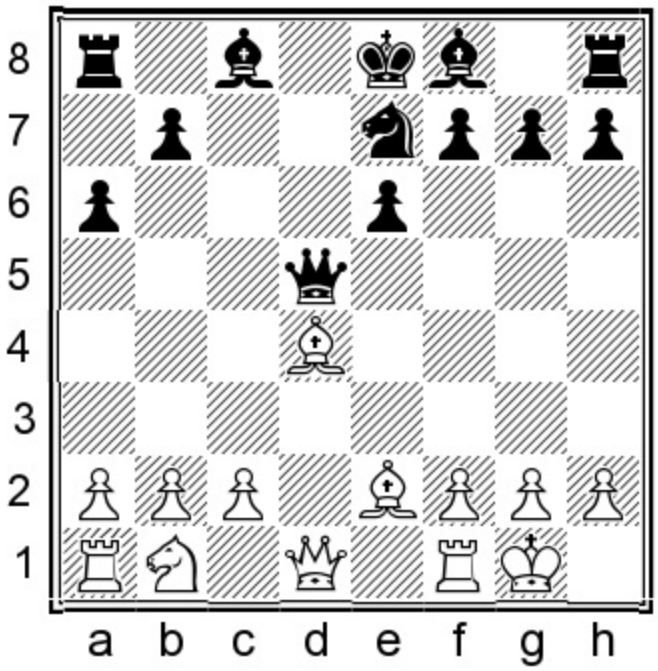
I also considered 9.♘f3, when after 9...♕a5 10.a3 ♕c7 11.b4 ♘g6 12.♗b2



Position after: 12.♗b2

it appears a struggle to develop the f8-bishop. However, Black has good chances after 12...♗e7! 13.♗xg7 ♖g8 14.♗h6 b6∞

9...♘xd4 10.♗xd4



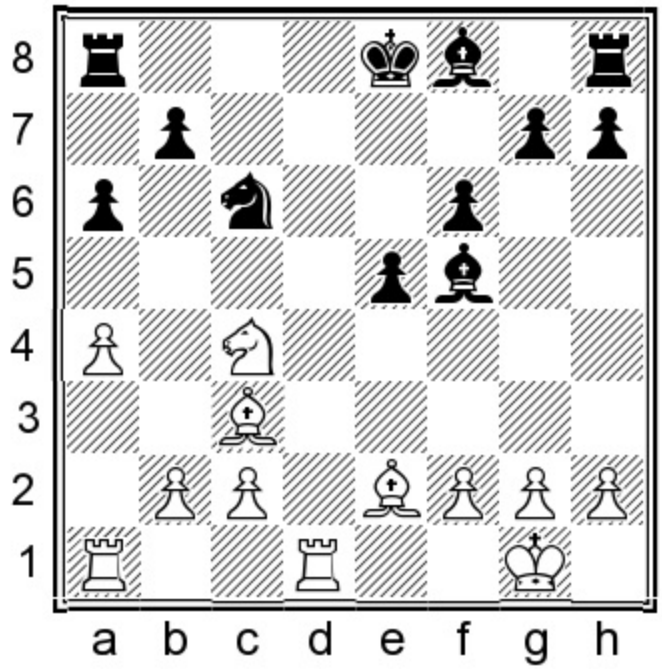
Position after: 10.♗xd4

Black has a few options of how to play, but none of them are good enough to equalise.

10...♘c6

A) 10...e5 11.♗b6 ♗e6 12.c4 ♕c6 13.♕b3 ♖c8 14.♘d2± We've established a bind on the queenside, and ♗f3 already looks like it'll be problematic for Black.

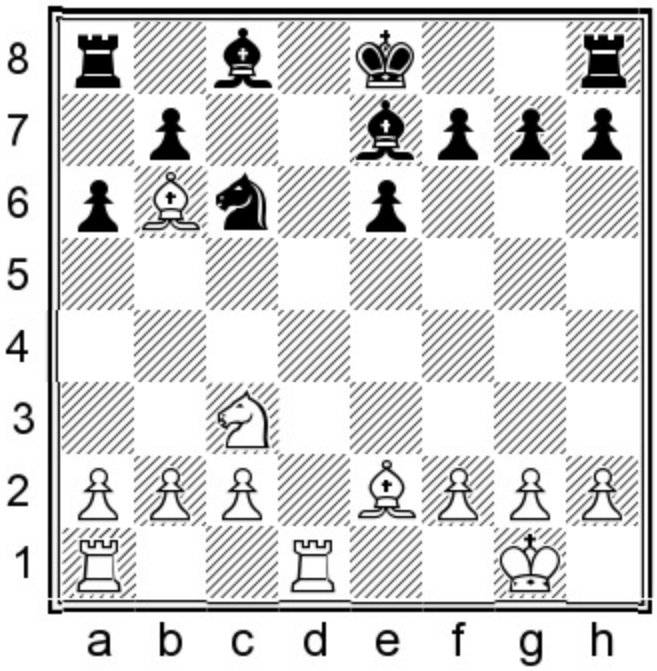
B) 10...♕d6 Black wants to protect the b6-square before playing ...e6-e5. White has a couple of options, both centred on following up with ♗f3 and ♘a5. 11.a4!? [11.c4 e5 12.♗c3 ♕xd1 13.♖xd1 ♘c6 14.♘d2 ♗f5 15.♘b3±] 11...e5 12.♗c3 ♕xd1 13.♖xd1 ♘c6 14.♘a3 f6 15.♘c4 ♗f5



Position after: 15...♗f5

16.♗f3! ♗xc2 17.♖d2 ♗f5 18.♘a5⩱ It looks like we'll be winning at least one of the queenside pawns back, and our a-pawn is a big long-term problem for Black.

11.♗b6 ♗e7 12.♘c3 ♕xd1 13.♖fxd1

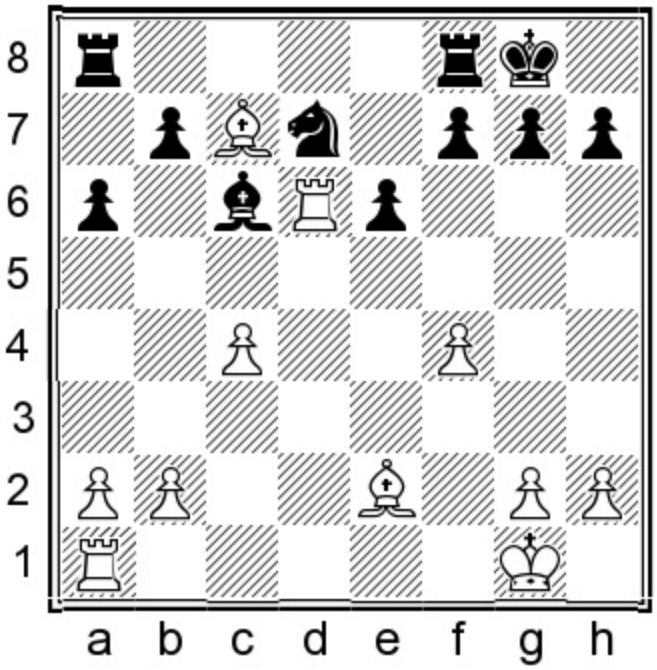


Position after: 13.♖fxd1

13...♗d7

Black tried to gain space on the kingside with 13...f5 in Muzychuk – Javakhishvili, Doha 2016 – but it's never going to make up for the queenside bind, and White could've continued with 14.♗c4 ♔f7 15.a3±, followed by continued queenside expansion. Black's position is once again very depressing.

14.♘e4 ♘e5 15.f4 ♗c6 16.♘d6+ ♗xd6 17.♖xd6 ♘d7 18.♗c7 0-0 19.c4±

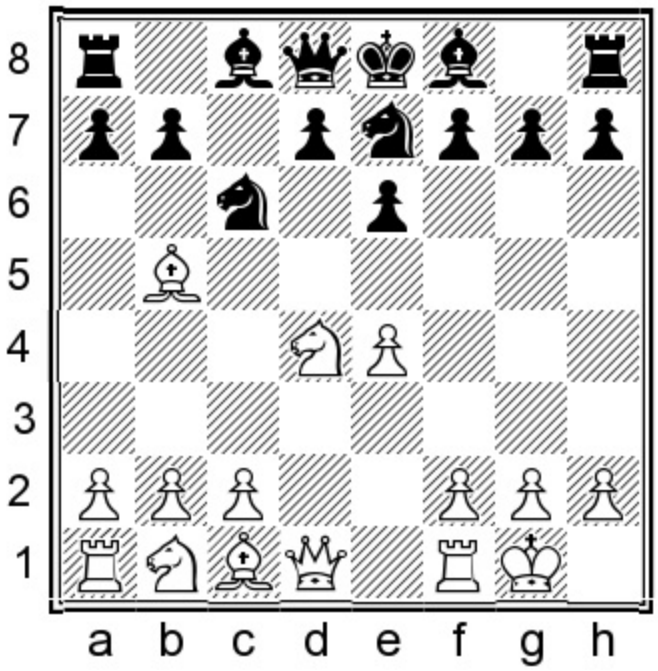


Position after: 19.c4±

The bishop-pair offers very good winning chances.

b) 6...♘xd4 with 9...--

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4!? cxd4 6.♘xd4

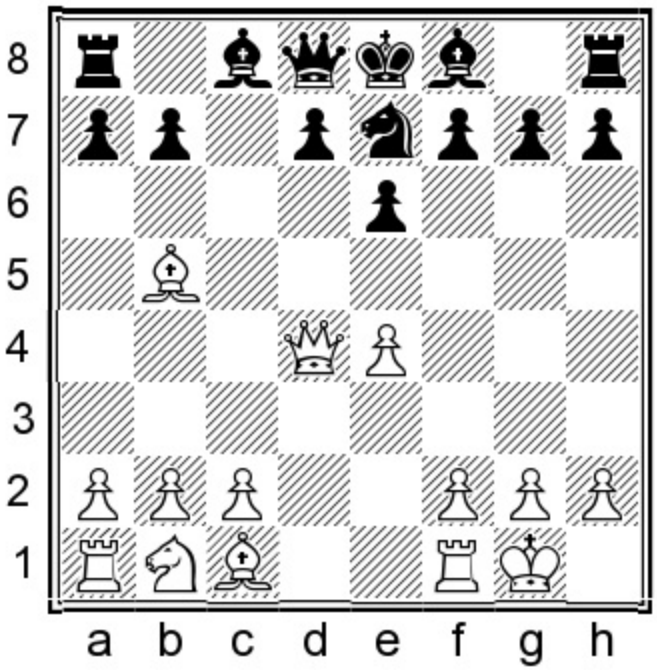


Position after: 6.♘xd4

6...♘xd4

A natural follow-up to 4...♘ge7, replacing the c6-knight with the one on e7. However, Black will face problems developing his f8-bishop.

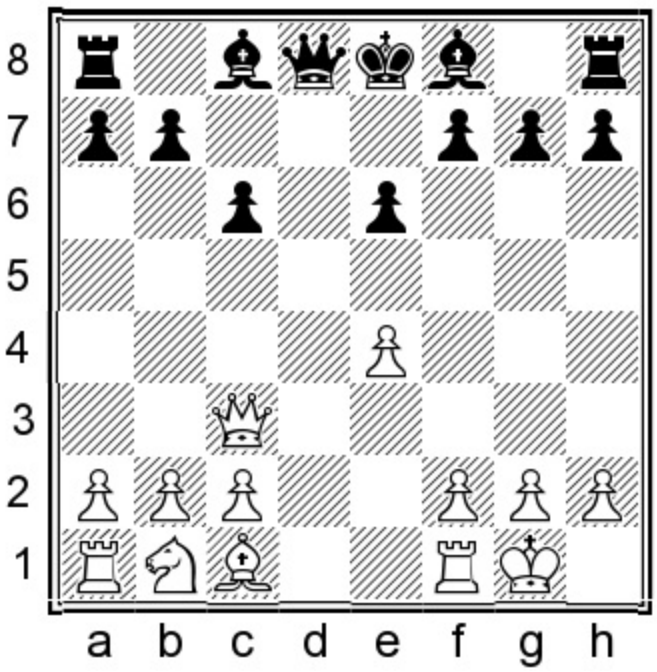
7.♕xd4



Position after: 7.♕xd4

7...a6

7...♘c6 8.♗xc6 [8.♕c3 is perfectly good too, and will probably transpose to 7...a6.] 8...dxc6 [8...bxc6 9.c4± White is better structurally, and Black still has a big problem regarding king safety.] 9.♕c3!

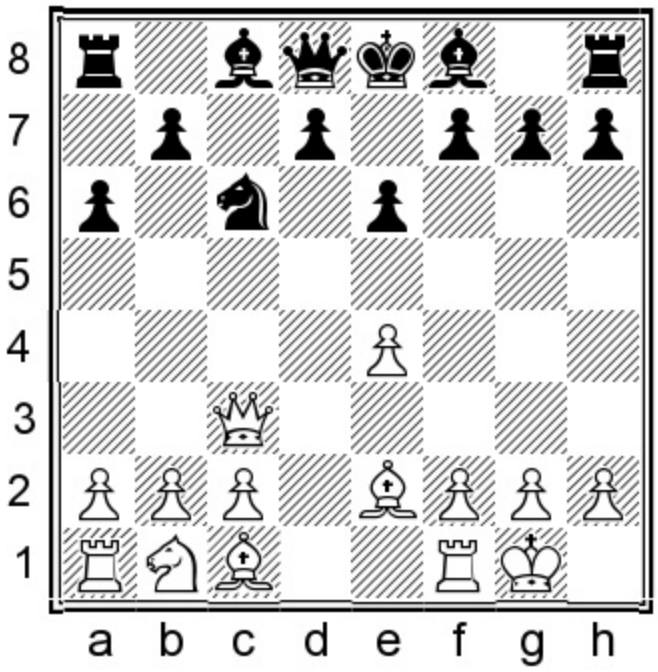


Position after: 9.♕c3!

If Black was able to play ...♗d6 and ...e5 he'd be absolutely fine, but we'll never allow him this

luxury. 9...♕f6 10.e5 ♕h4 11.♖d1 ♗e7 12.♗e3 0-0 13.♘d2± The c8-bishop suffers, and Black is in danger of being cramped.

8.♗e2 ♘c6 9.♕c3!



Position after: 9.♕c3!

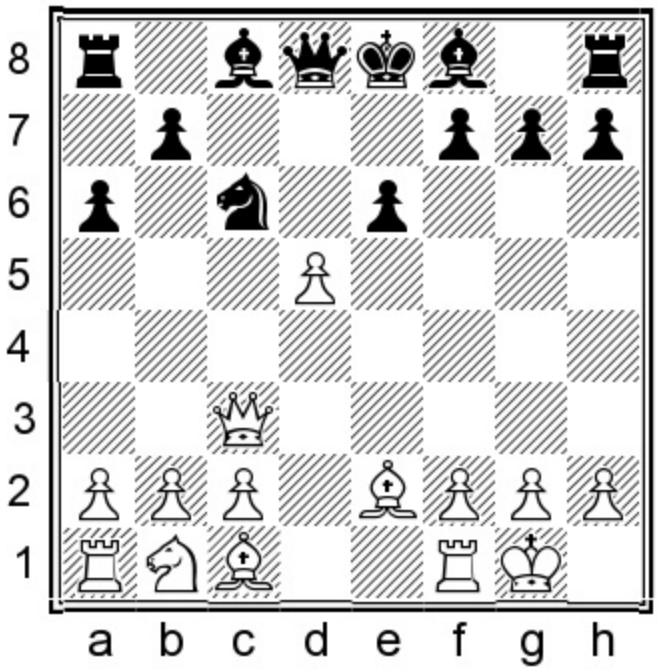
This position has occurred in several Grandmaster games, but Black's lack of development suggests that he could already be significantly worse.

9...♕c7

Striving to control the g3 square before embarking on the ...b5-b4 plan, but a trade of queens doesn't worry us. We are more worried about the ...♗d6 skewer motifs, which motivates the following prophylactic move.

A) 9...f6 An attempt to develop unorthodoxically won't ease Black's problems. 10.♕g3! ♔f7 11.♘c3 ♗c5 12.♖d1± ♗f4 followed by doubling rooks on the d-file will continue to hinder Black's development.

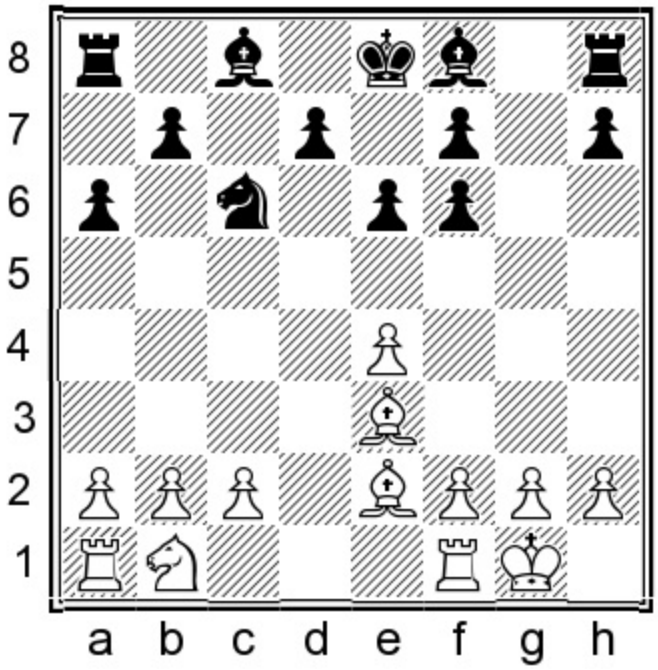
B) 9...d5 10.exd5



Position after: 10.exd5

10...exd5 [10...♕xd5 This position could've emerged from the line after 6...a6 and 7...d5, and is very pleasant for White. 11.♖d1 ♕c5 12.♗e3 ♕xc3 13.♘xc3±] 11.♖d1 ♗e6 12.♗f4 ♖c8 13.♘d2± Creating an IQP hasn't solved any of Black's problems.

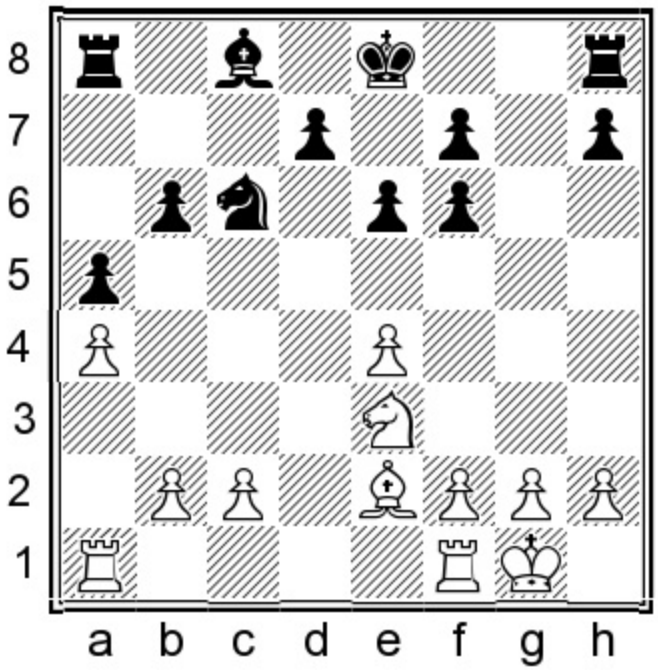
C) 9...♕f6 Another attempt to exchange queens but, as I mentioned before, all endings are also very good for White. 10.♕xf6 gxf6 11.♗e3



Position after: 11.♗e3

If Black does nothing, we will put our knight on c4 and double on the d-file.

C1) 11...b6!? was an interesting attempt in a recent game between two American chess legends, Joel Benjamin and Larry Christiansen, but Benjamin could've improved with 12.♘d2 ♗c5 13.♘c4! ♗xe3 14.♘xe3 a5 15.a4

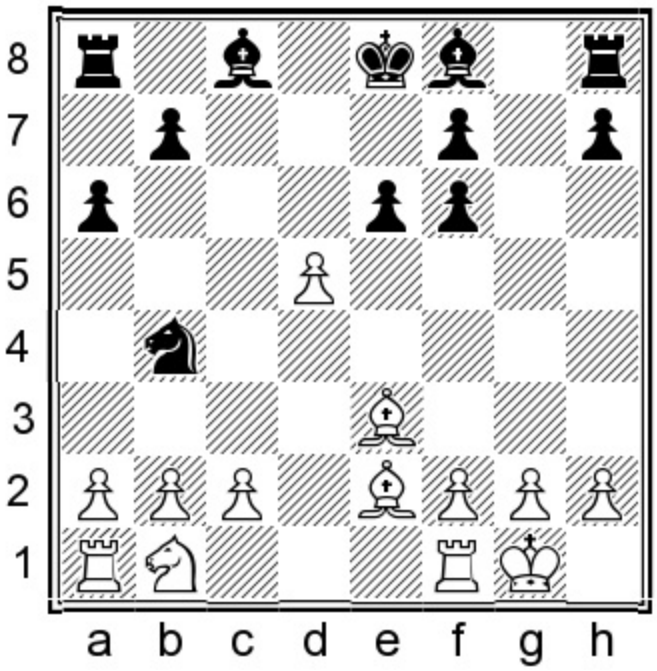


Position after: 15.a4

The b6-pawn is a weakness, and White has plenty of other targets such as the d7- and h7-pawns. 15...♔e7 16.♖ad1 ♗a6 17.♗b5±

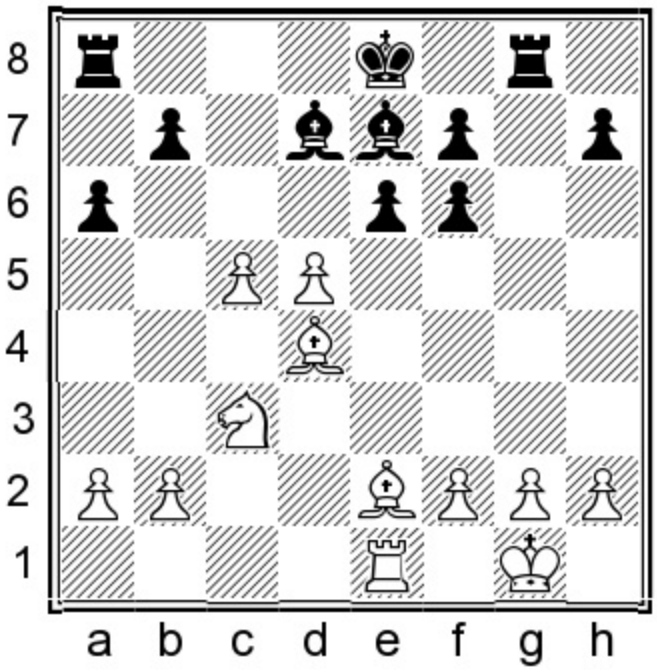
C2) 11...b5 12.♘d2 ♗b7 13.a4± White was already positionally winning in Popov – Lalic, Mali Losinj 2019.

C3) 11...d5 12.exd5 ♘b4 [12...exd5 13.c3±]



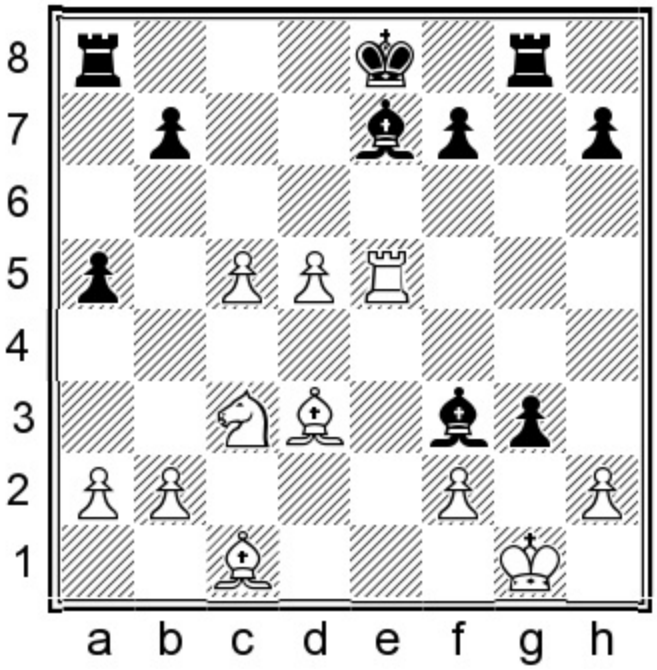
Position after: 12...♘b4

13.c4!? For some reason I think this is even more convincing than 13.♘c3, as I would prefer to keep my bishop-pair! [13.♘c3 Completely understandable if you don't feel the need to sacrifice the exchange! This is also pretty nice for White. 13...♘xc2 14.♖ad1 ♘xe3 15.fxe3± Yu – Yap, China 2013.] 13...♘c2 14.♘c3 ♘xa1 15.♖xa1 ♗d7 16.♗d4 ♗e7 [16...e5 17.♗b6± Followed by c4-c5; Black is once again in a bind.] 17.c5! ♖g8 18.♖e1!



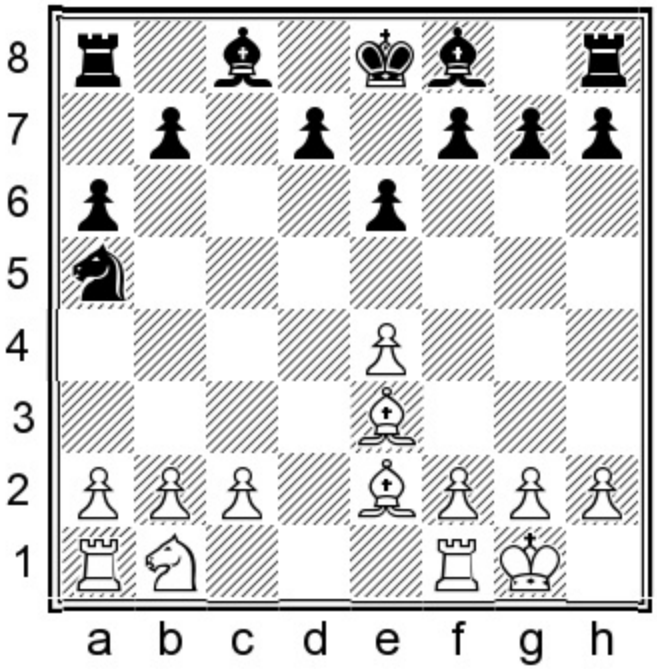
Position after: 18.♖e1!

It’s difficult to see what to do with Black. At some point he’ll end up playing ...e6-e5, but this will only reinforce the power of our central pawns. 18...a5 19.♗f3 e5 20.♗e3 ♗g4 21.♗e4 f5 22.♗d3 f4 23.♗c1 ♗f3 24.g3 fxg3 25.♖xe5!± There’s no danger on the kingside, and White is close to winning.



Position after: 25.♖xe5!±

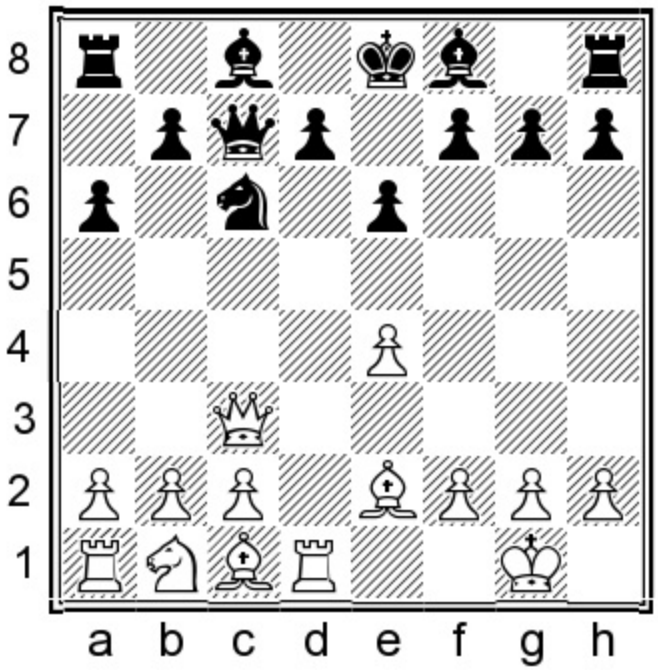
D) 9...♕a5 The final attempt to exchange queens, but once again White can establish a bind and begin to take control on the dark-squares. 10.♕xa5 ♘xa5 11.♗e3



Position after: 11.♗e3

11...b5 [11...♗e7 12.a4 0-0 13.♘d2± Followed by c2-c3 and b2-b4.] 12.a4 b4 13.♗b6 ♘c6 14.♘d2 ♗b7 15.♘c4± White was clearly better in Ryska – Rogovsky, email 2013.

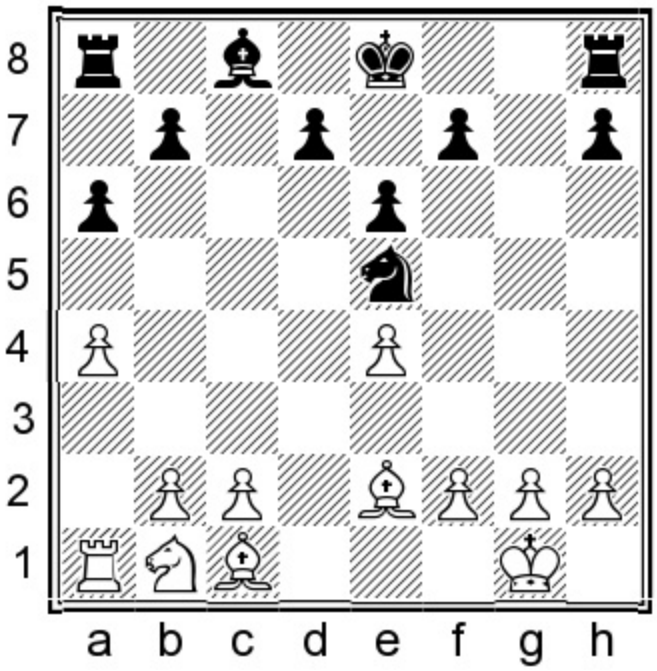
10.♖d1!



Position after: 10.♖d1!

10...b5

Black can still play 10...♗d6, but we have two decent possibilities. 11.♖xd6!? [11.♕xg7 seems to also yield an advantage for White. 11...♗xh2+ 12.♔f1 ♗e5 13.♕h6 ♘d4 14.♘c3!±] 11...♕xd6 12.♕xg7 ♕e5 13.♕xe5 ♘xe5 14.a4∓

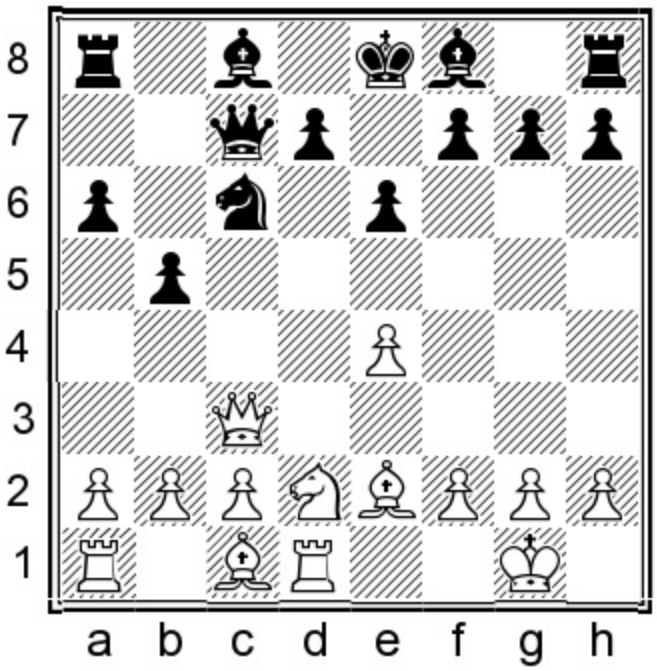


Position after: 14.a4♾

This is a really interesting exchange sacrifice, where White has plenty of scope for outplaying his opponent with the bishop-pair and dark-square control. The longer Stockfish analyses this position, the more it likes it for White.

11.♘d2

11.h3!? can also be considered as further prophylaxis against ...♗d6.



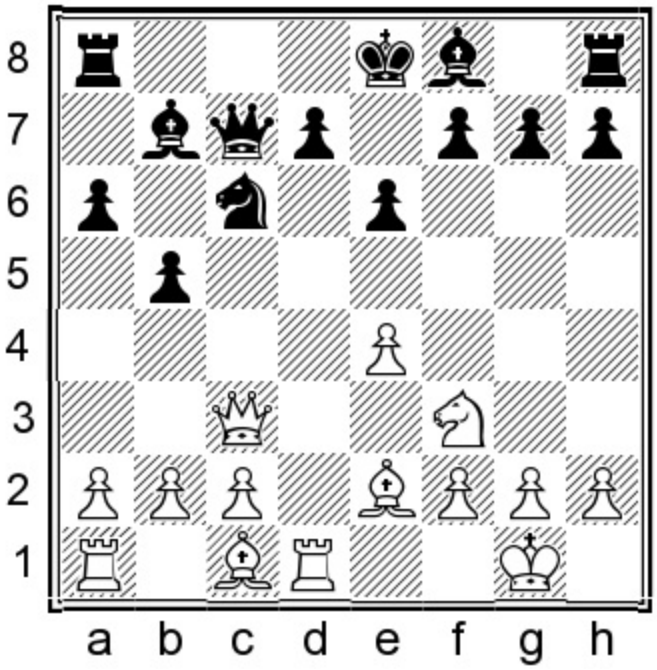
Position after: 11.♘d2

11...♗b7

A) 11...b4 12.♕e3 ♗d6 13.♘c4!± A capture on h2 will have severe repercussions.

B) 11...♗d6 12.♕xg7 ♗xh2+ 13.♔h1 ♗e5 14.♕g5±

12.♘f3



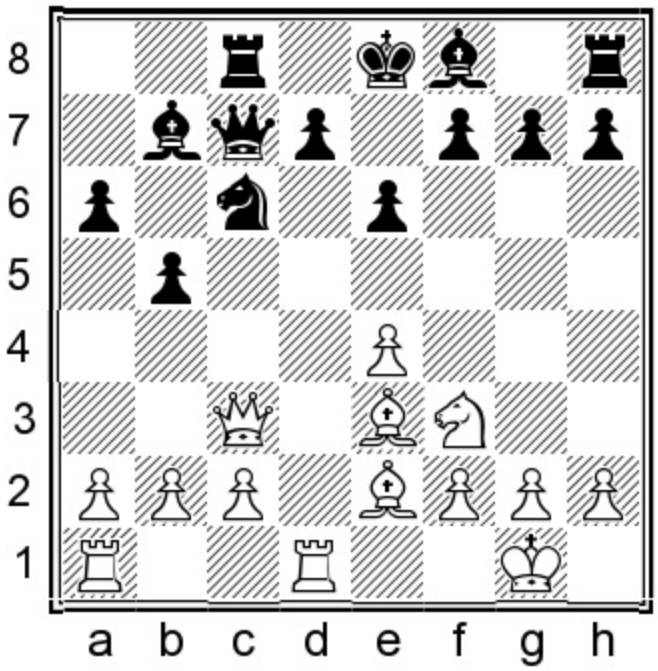
Position after: 12.♘f3

12...♖c8

This is the computer's top suggestion – a less controversial way to try and remove the c3-queen. However, accurate play will guide White to an advantage once again.

12...b4 This attempt to remove the queen from c3 will invariably engender weaknesses, even if the White knight isn't on d2 anymore. 13.♕d3 ♖d8 [13...♗e7 14.♗f4!± is the threat.] 14.♗g5 ♗e7 15.♗xe7 ♘xe7 16.♕d4 0-0 17.♕xb4± Black has limited compensation for the pawn.

13.♗e3

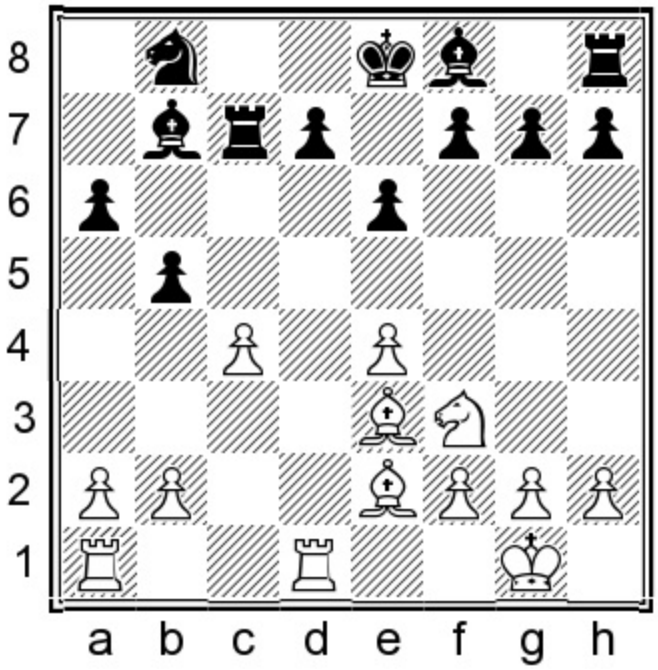


Position after: 13.♗e3

13...♘b8

13...♘b4?! 14.♕xc7 ♖xc7 15.c3! ♘c2 16.♗f4 d6 17.♖ac1 ♗xe4 18.♘g5 ♗g6 19.♗d3+– The Black knight is lost.

14.♕xc7 ♖xc7 15.c4!



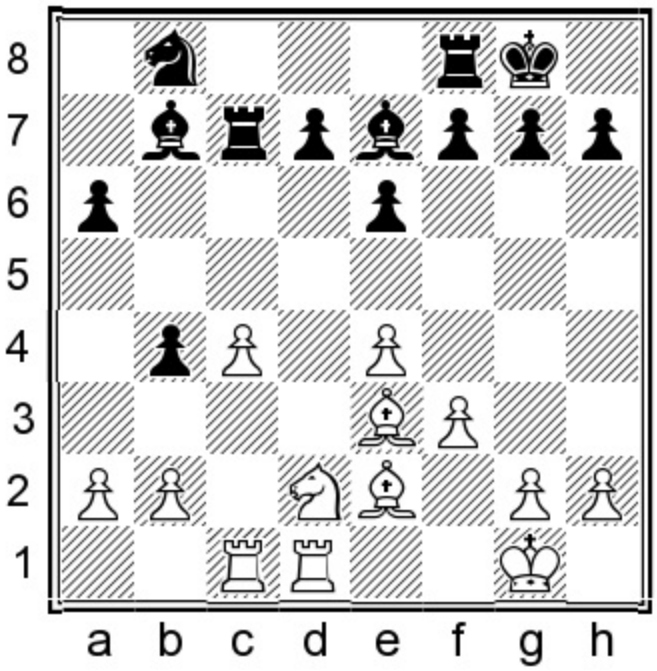
Position after: 15.c4!

A really important move, enabling White to regroup his pieces without wasting time.

15...bxc4

A) 15...♗xe4 16.cxb5 axb5 17.♗xb5 ♖b7 18.a4+– The queenside passers are much stronger than Black's central pawns.

B) 15...b4 16.♘d2 ♗e7 17.♖ac1 0-0 18.f3±



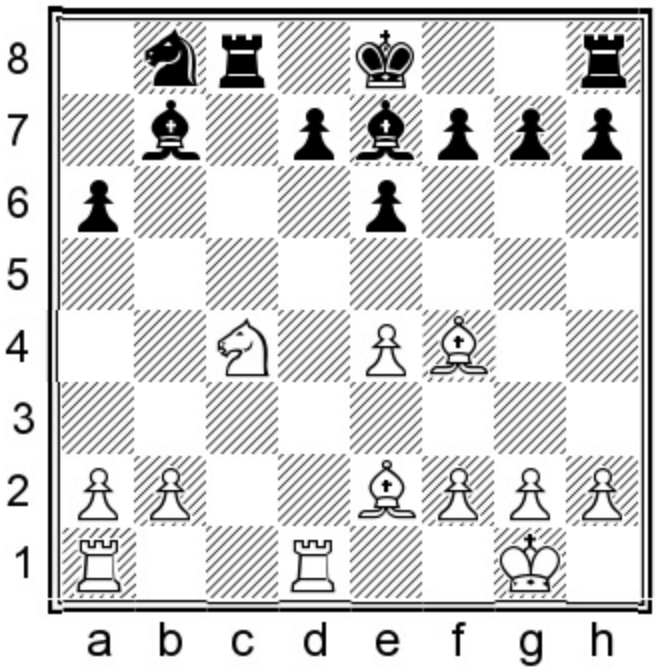
Position after: 18.f3±

The Maroczy structure gives White a lot of control, and we can start thinking about knight jumps to exploit Black's queenside weaknesses.

16.♘d2 ♗e7

16...c3 gives White a winning initiative after 17.bxc3 ♖xc3 18.♖ab1+–

17.♗f4 ♖c8 18.♘xc4



Position after: 18.♘xc4

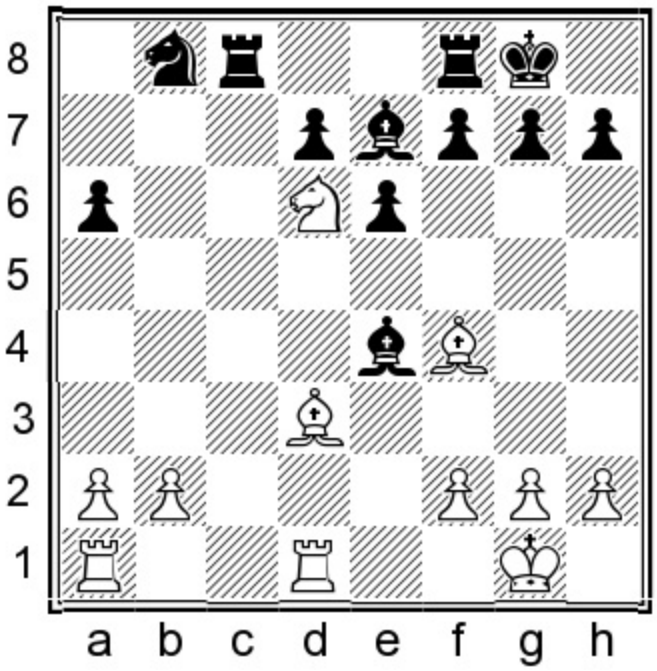
18...0-0

18...♗xe4 19.♘d6+ ♗xd6 20.♗xd6± The bishop-pair combined with the prospect of a queenside passed pawn gives White a technically winning position.

19.♗d3

Either ♘d6 or ♗d6 will be very effective for White, for example after

19...♗xe4 20.♘d6!±

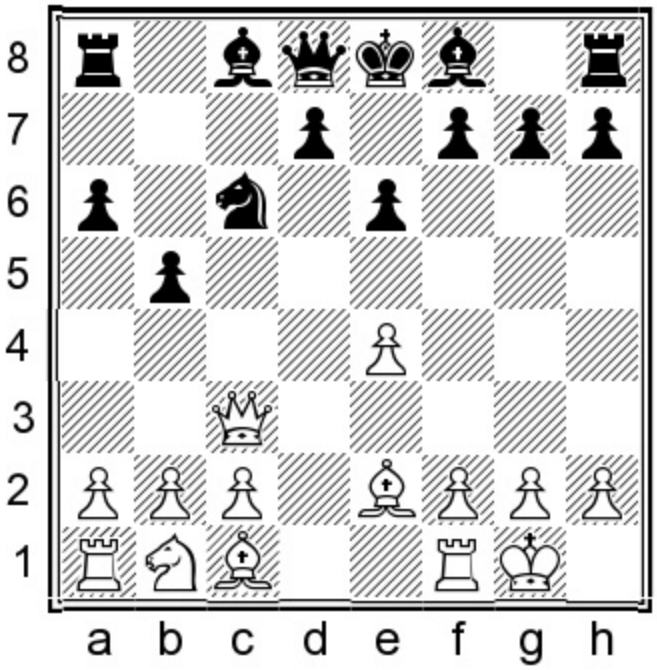


Position after: 20.♘d6!±

Black will lose an exchange and most likely the game.

c) 6...♘xd4 with 9...b5

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4!? cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♘xd4 7.♕xd4 a6 8.♗e2 ♘c6 9.♕c3! b5

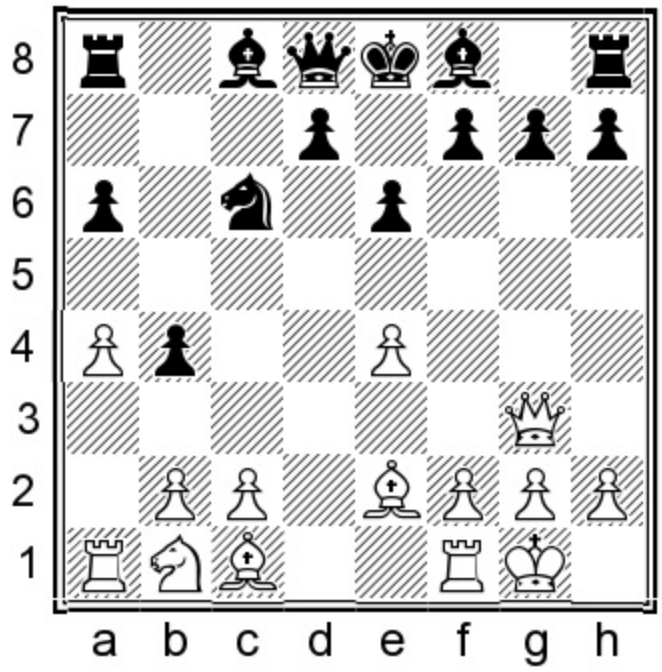


Position after: 9...b5

10.a4!

10.♖d1 has been successfully played in email games, but the text move is the most popular in practical games and is my predilection.

10...b4 11.♕g3

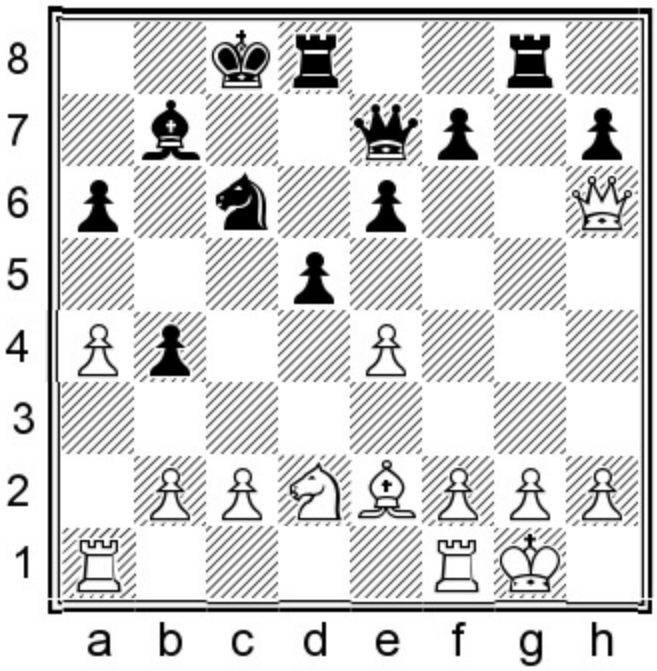


Position after: 11.♕g3

11...h5!?

Playing dynamically in this position is probably Black's best bet. The text move aims to disrupt our kingside, before perhaps continuing the assault with ...♗b7 and ...♗d6.

A) 11...♗b7 12.♗g5! ♗e7 Black doesn't get any compensation for the pawn here, as his king will be even weaker than ours. [12...f6 13.♗e3 ♖c8 14.♘d2± I don't see how Black should complete his kingside development, and in the meantime we can continue with natural moves such as ♘c4, ♖ad1 and even f2-f4.] 13.♗xe7 ♕xe7 14.♕xg7 0-0-0 15.♘d2 ♖hg8 16.♕h6 d5



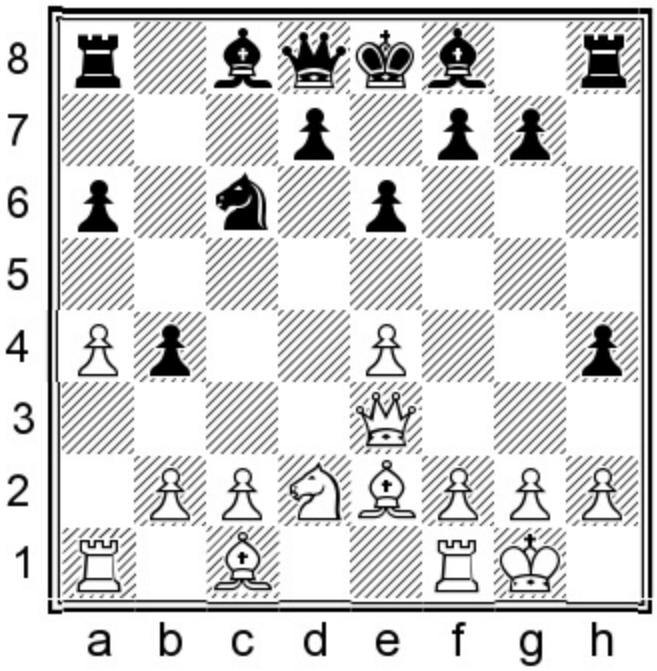
Position after: 16...d5

In Areshchenko – Krasenkow, Baku 2014, White should've brought his queen back to the action with 17.♕e3! dxe4 18.♖ad1 ♘d4 19.♘xe4±

B) 11...♕f6 12.♘d2 ♗c5 13.♘c4 0-0 14.e5 ♕g6 15.♕h3!± White converted his advantage to victory in Safarli – Tersinsev, Batumi 2018.

12.h4!

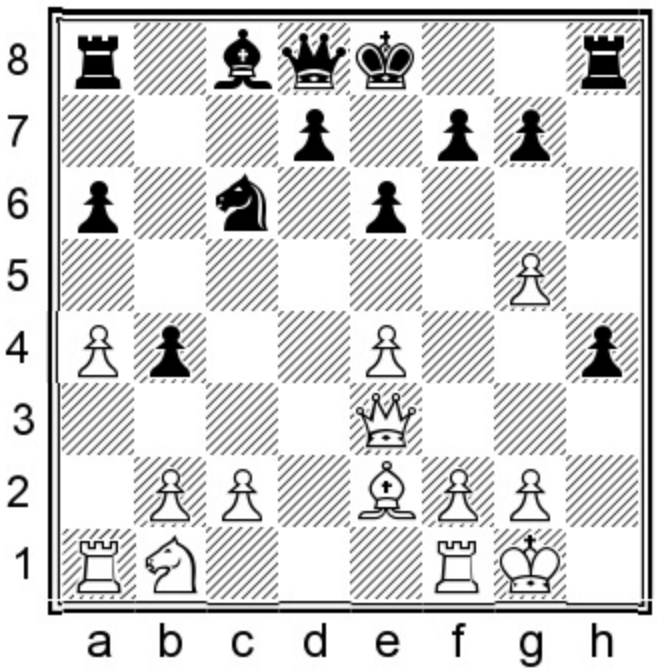
12.♘d2 was played in a recent high level Grandmaster game. 12...h4 13.♕e3 Here Black should have continued in the same spirit.



Position after: 13.♕e3

13...h3 [Instead Black played 13...♘e5?! in Amin – Zeng, Changsha 2019, and here 14.b3!± followed by ♗b2 or f2-f4 would have been effective in kicking the knight away.] 14.g3 ♕c7 15.b3 ♕a7! 16.♘c4 ♗c5∞

12...♗e7 13.♗g5 ♗xg5 14.hxg5 h4 15.♕e3

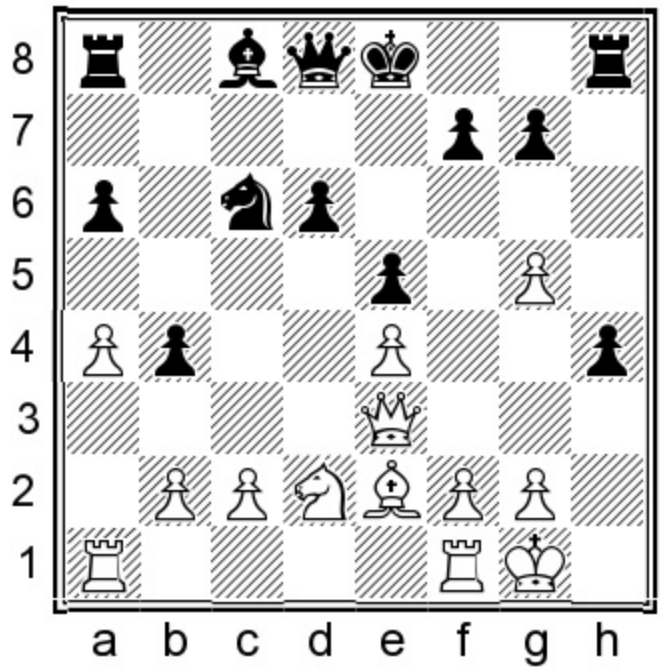


Position after: 15.♕e3

We reach a compelling position which has only been reached once in practice, where a 2600 beat a lower rated GM. White has the obvious plan of bringing his knight to c4, followed by trying to take advantage of Black's weak dark squares. We can also double our rooks on the d-file to attack Black's king, as castling kingside or queenside doesn't look to be in Black's plans at this moment. For example, if Black tries to castle kingside, our g-pawn has the potential to disrupt Black's kingside pawn structure. Furthermore, Black's h-pawn will also be weak. Therefore, Black will probably prioritise controlling the dark-squares with moves such as ... ♕c7, ...d7-d6 and ...e6-e5. The following variations will indicate how we need to open up the position to maximise our initiative.

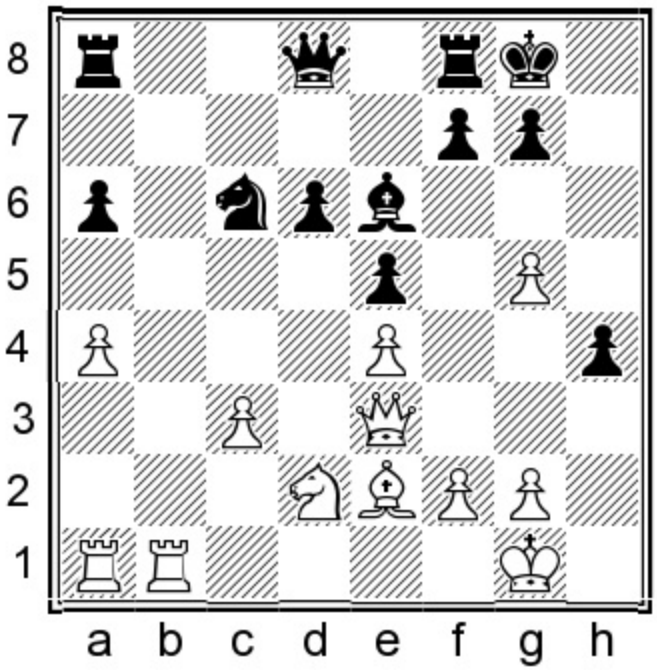
15...h3

A) 15...d6 16.♘d2 e5



Position after: 16...e5

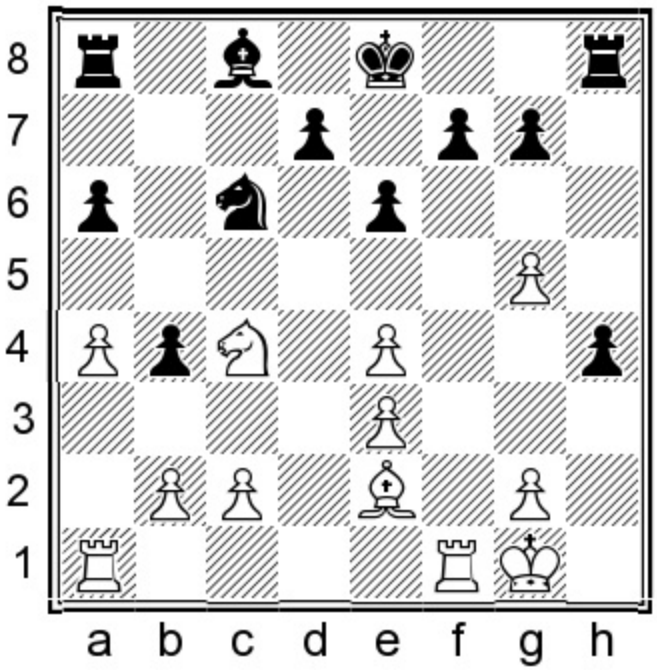
Black has achieved some control of the dark-squares, but it seems to me that whilst he's removed weak dark-squares, he's inadvertantly created pawns which will be difficult to defend. 17.c3! bxc3 18.bxc3 ♗e6 19.♖fb1! [19.♘c4 was played in Gagare – Grigoryan, Seville 2020. Although White kept his advantage, he failed to find a decent plan and ended up getting outplayed.] 19...0-0±



Position after: 19...0-0±

Here we can play on both sides of the board, combining ideas of a4-a5, ♖b6 and ♖ab1 with g5-g6, ♘f3 and ♘g5. White is clearly better.

B) 15...♕c7 16.♘d2 ♕a7 17.♘c4 ♕xe3 18.fxe3!



Position after: 18.fxe3!

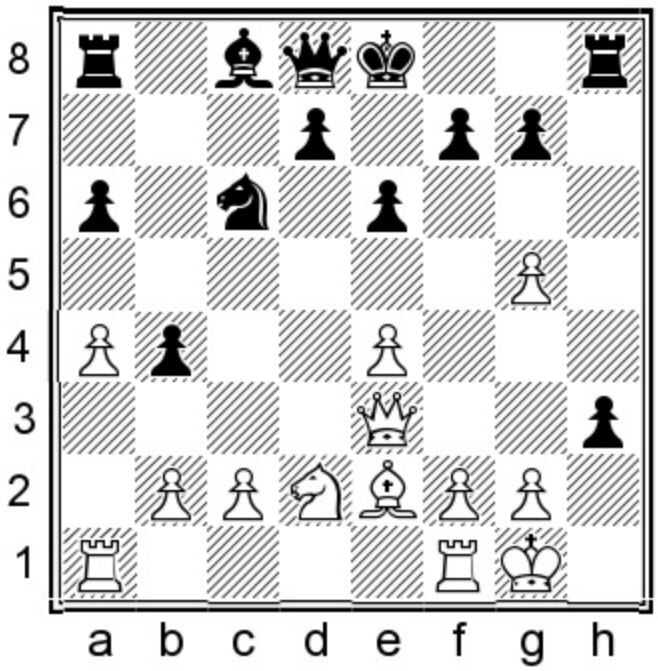
A very thematic decision to double our own pawns, procuring more control over the dark squares and opening up the f-file. This also increases our attacking avenues, and we'll see other examples of

this idea in the next few chapters. 18...♔e7 19.♖f4 a5 20.♖af1 ♖f8 21.♗h5 f6 22.e5! f5 23.♗f3±

16.♘d2!

A very nice move, completely ignoring Black's kingside play.

16.gxh3? e5! Followed by ... d7-d6, and it appears that the tables have turned. 17.f4 ♘d4! The point. We can begin to understand why 16.♘d2 is more precise. 18.♗d3 ♘e6∓

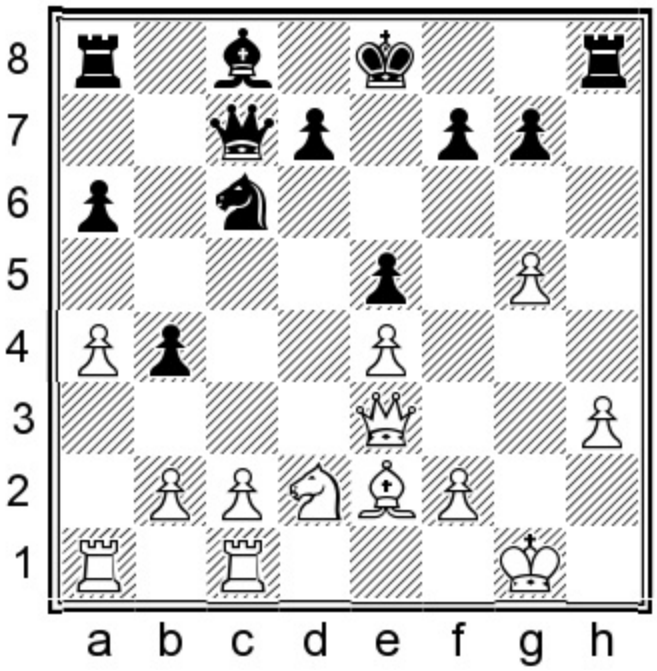


Position after: 16.♘d2!

16...♗b7

A) 16...hxg2 17.♔xg2 ♘e5 18.♖h1 Suddenly Black very much regrets opening the h-file. 18...♖f8 19.f4 ♘g6 20.♖ad1±

B) 16...♕c7 17.gxh3! This time we can capture on h3, as the variation will show. 17...e5 [17...♗b7 18.♖ac1 ♘e7 19.c3±] 18.♖fc1!

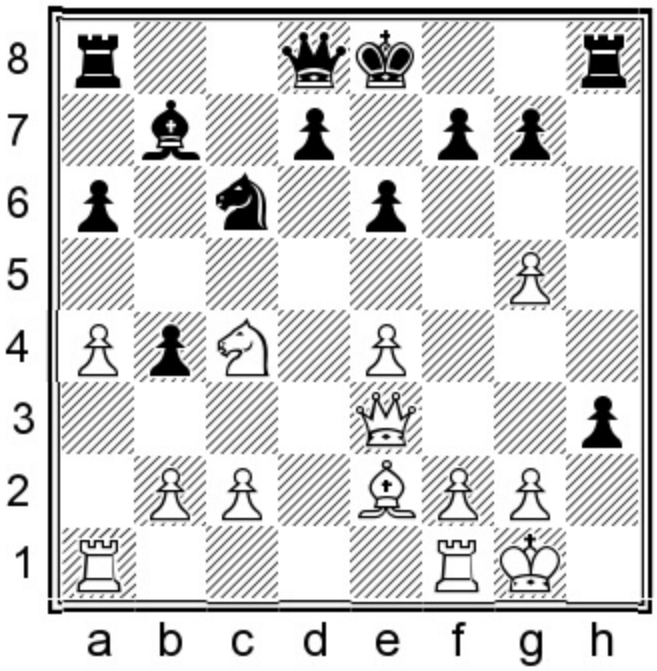


Position after: 18.♖fc1!

As Black's queen is on c7, the ...♘d4-e6 plan is no longer concerning. 18...d6 [18...♘d4 19.♗f1 d6 20.c3±] 19.♗f1 ♘e7 20.c3± White's counterplay is quicker, and Black's centre will most likely collapse.

C) 16...d5 17.exd5 ♘e7 18.dxe6 ♗xe6 19.g3± This is also fundamentally unconvincing for Black.

17.♘c4

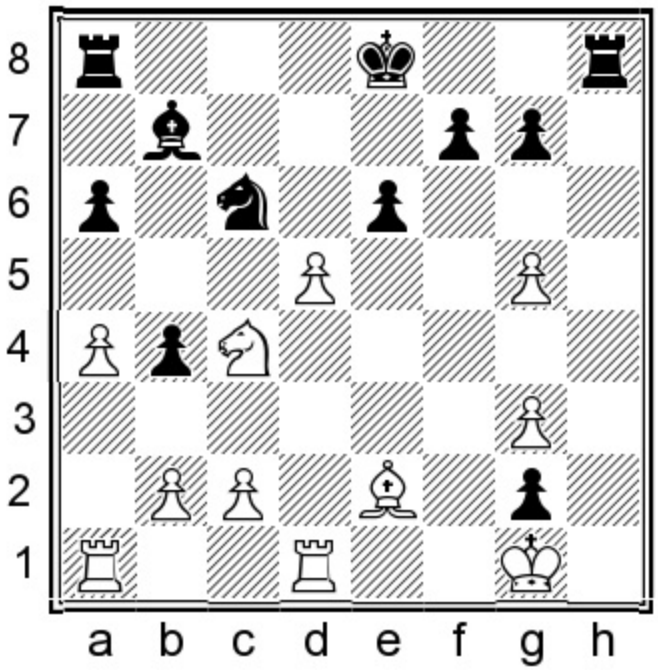


Position after: 17.♘c4

17...♕c7

17...d5 18.♖fd1 ♕c7 19.exd5 hxg2 20.♕g3± transposes to 17...♕c7.

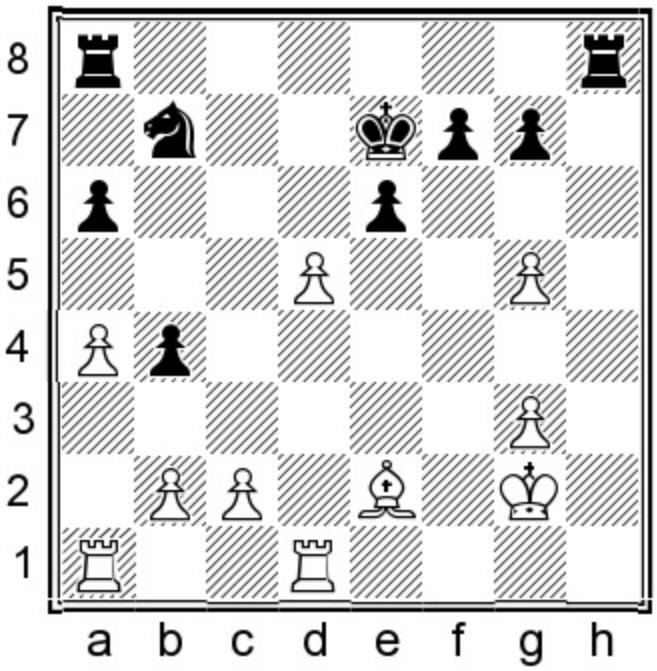
18.♖fd1 d5 19.exd5 hxg2 20.♕g3 ♕xg3 21.fxg3



Position after: 21.fxg3

Black has managed to exchange queens but, as always, the ending will be very bad for him.

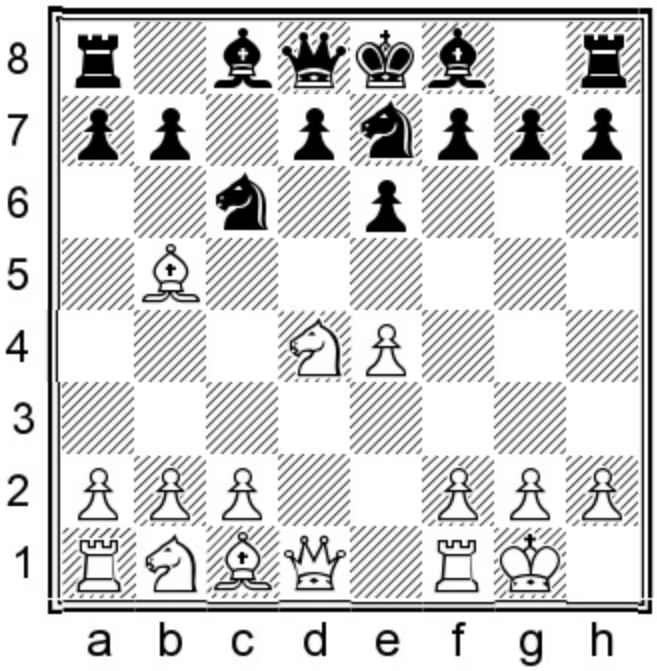
21...♘d8 22.♘d6+ ♔e7 23.♘xb7 ♘xb7 24.♔xg2±



Position after: 24.♔xg2±

d) 6...♕c7 & 6...♘g6 7.♗e3 ♕c7

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4!? cxd4 6.♘xd4

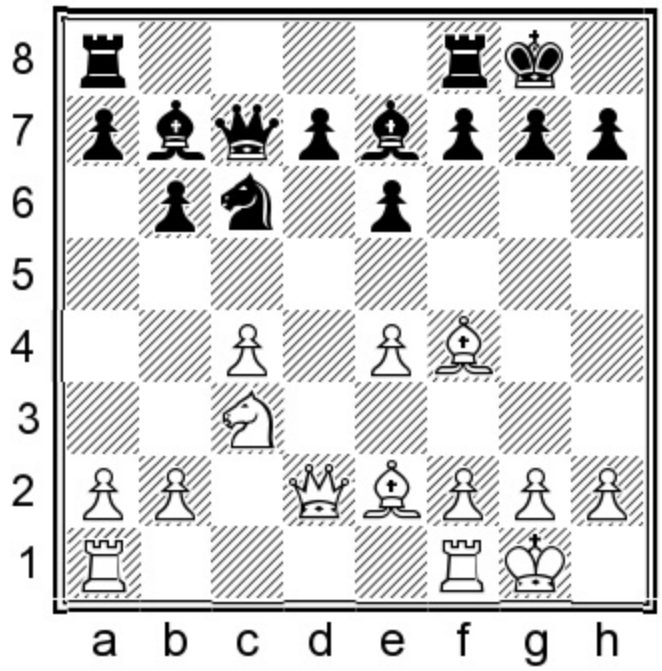


Position after: 6.♘xd4

6...♘g6

Instead of capturing on d4, Black aims to rapidly complete his kingside development. The downside to this is that his knight ends up slightly misplaced on g6. In turn, the best approach for White is to utilise his space advantage by deploying a Maroczy structure.

6...♕c7 is a move order alternative which can transpose into a lot of positions that we'll encounter after 6...♘g6. 7.♗e3 ♘xd4 [For example 7...♘g6 8.♗e2! will transpose to 7...♗e7 or 7...♕c7.] 8.♕xd4 ♘c6 Black can try to justify that his knight stands better on c6 than g6, but this could even benefit White in some lines. 9.♕d2 ♗e7 10.♗e2! 0-0 11.c4 b6 12.♘c3 ♗b7 13.♗f4! We wouldn't have had this option after 6...♘g6.



Position after: 13.♗f4!

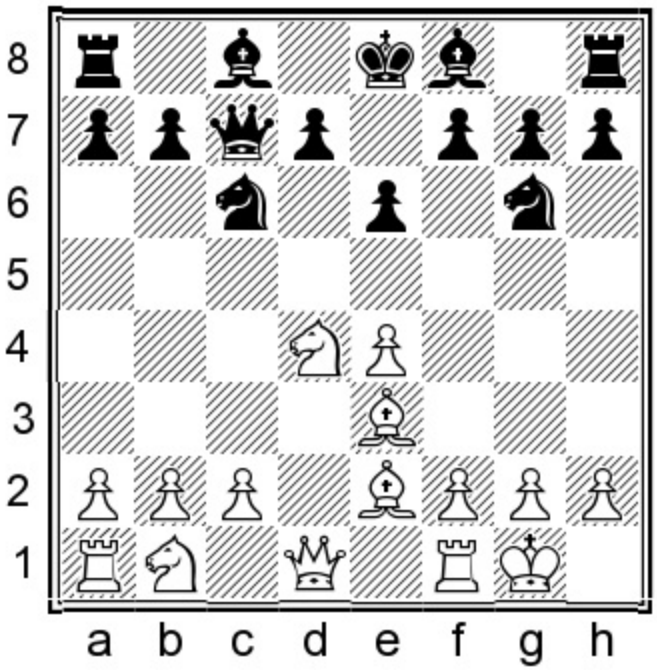
13...d6 14.♘b5 ♕d7 15.♖ad1 ♖fd8 16.♕c1± Black will have to play ...e6-e5 soon if he doesn't want to concede a pawn, but this is a big positional concession.

7.♗e3 ♕c7

Black can also delay the development of his f8-bishop to include the possibility of a future ...♗d6.

7...♗e7 is examined in subchapters e and f.

8.♗e2!



Position after: 8.♗e2!

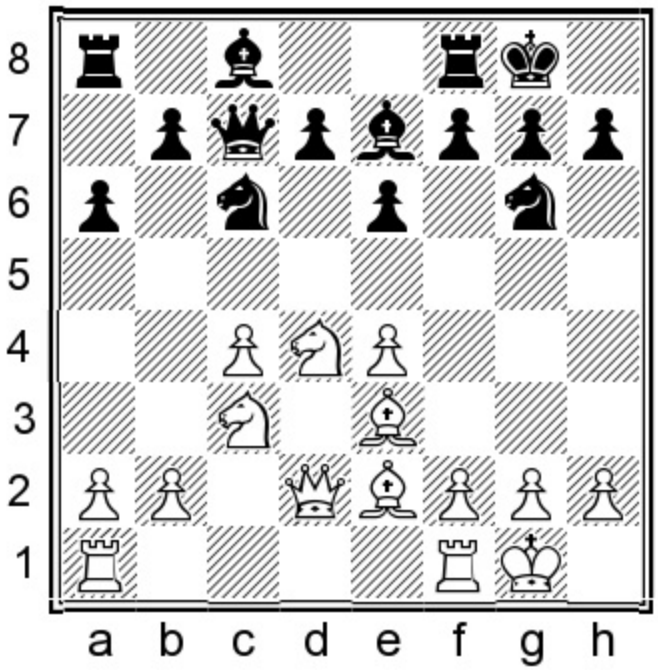
The point of this move is that we want our bishop back on e2 before we play c2-c4. Often in Maroczy positions the e2-bishop is misinterpreted as being a 'bad bishop'; in actuality, it is very useful in defending our e4- and c4-pawns, in addition to long-term prospects of attacking the Black king.

8...♘xd4

A) 8...♗e7 9.c4 will transpose to 7...♗e7.

B) 8...♗d6?? 9.♘b5! ♗xh2+ 10.♔h1 ♕e5 11.g3+– The bishop is trapped.

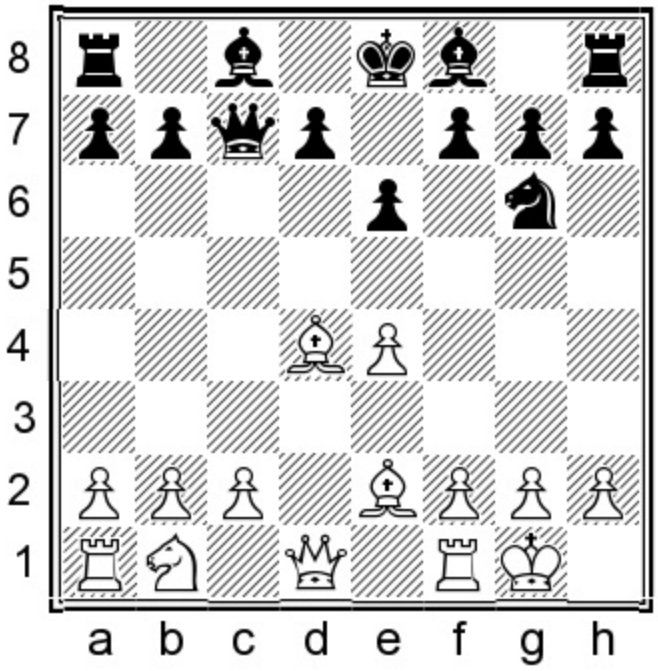
C) 8...a6 was played in a couple of the chess.com speed championship games between Hikaru Nakamura and Vladimir Dobrov, but after 9.c4 ♗e7 [9...♗d6 might justify 8...a6, but White is still much better with the simple 10.g3±] 10.♕d2 0-0 11.♘c3



Position after: 11.♘c3

we've just arrived at another typical Maroczy position, which we'll examine in a bit more depth in the line after 7...♗e7.

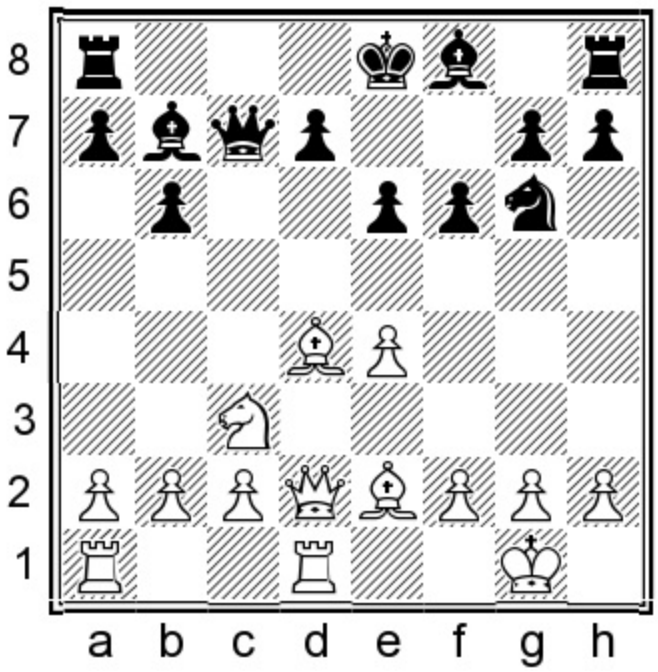
9.♗xd4



Position after: 9.♗xd4

9...♗d6!?

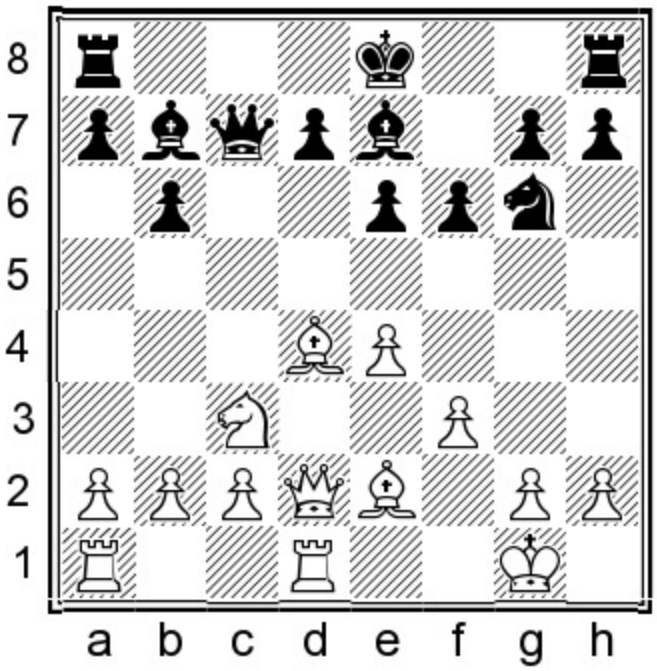
9...b6 Playing a weird set-up with ...b7-b6, ...♗b7, ...f7-f6 and ...♗d6 seems to fit the spirit of Black's play, although it's not too difficult to refute it. 10.♘c3!? Just to clarify, we don't have to deploy a Maroczy structure against everything! 10...♗b7 11.♕d2 f6 [11...♗d6 12.g3± Black can't prevent both ♘b5 and ♗xg7.] 12.♖fd1



Position after: 12.♖fd1

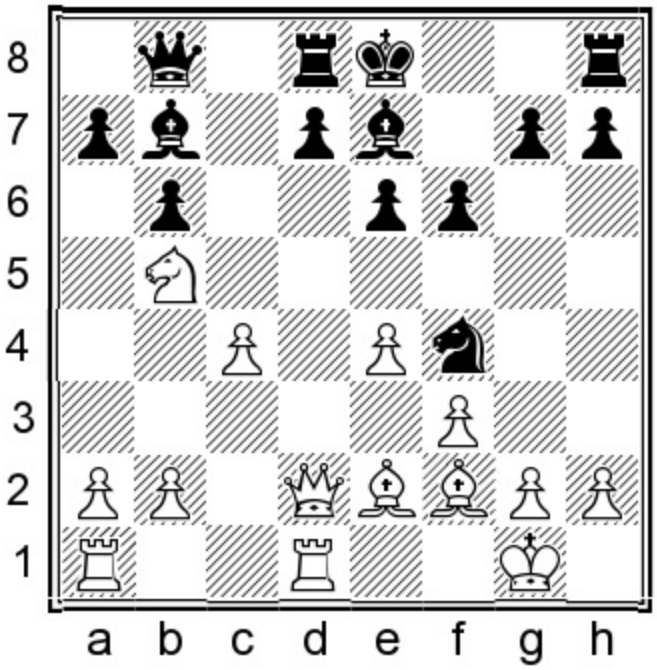
A) 12...♗d6 13.h3 0-0 [13...a6? 14.♗xb6+–] 14.♘b5 ♕b8 15.♘xd6 ♕xd6 16.♗e3! ♕xd2 17.♖xd2 ♗xe4 18.♖xd7± The bishop-pair grants us excellent chances.

B) 12...♗e7 In this case, it seems like a good time to revert back to our original plan of playing c2-c4. 13.f3



Position after: 13.f3

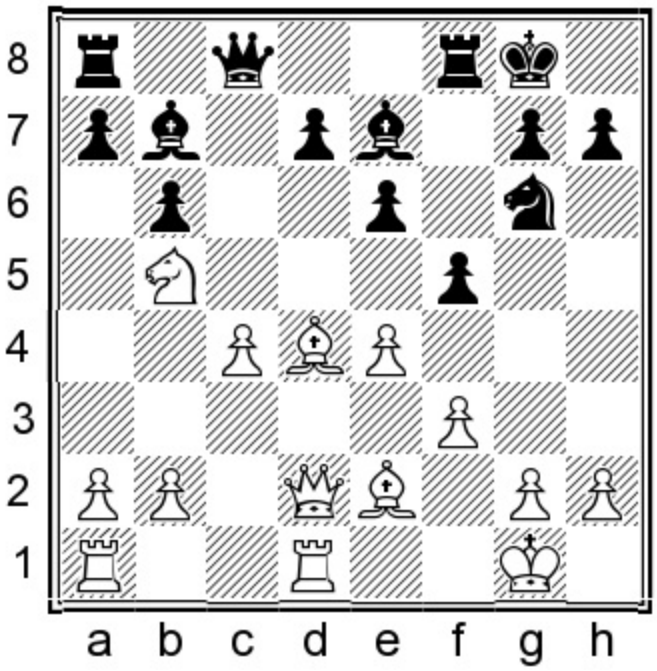
B1) 13...♖d8 14.♘b5 ♕b8 15.♗f2! A clever way to try and exploit Black's queen. 15...♘f4 [15...d5 16.♗g3 e5 17.♕c3 0-0 18.exd5 ♗xd5 19.♖xd5+– Followed by ♕b3 and ♘c3.] 16.c4



Position after: 16.c4

16...♘xe2+ [16...0-0 17.♗f1 d5 18.cxd5 exd5 19.exd5 ♗xd5 20.♕c2↑ White still has a strong initiative and Black has a few holes in his position to deal with, such as the c6- and e6-squares.] 17.♕xe2 a6 18.♗g3 e5 19.♘c3± The bishop will return to f2 and White is dominating.

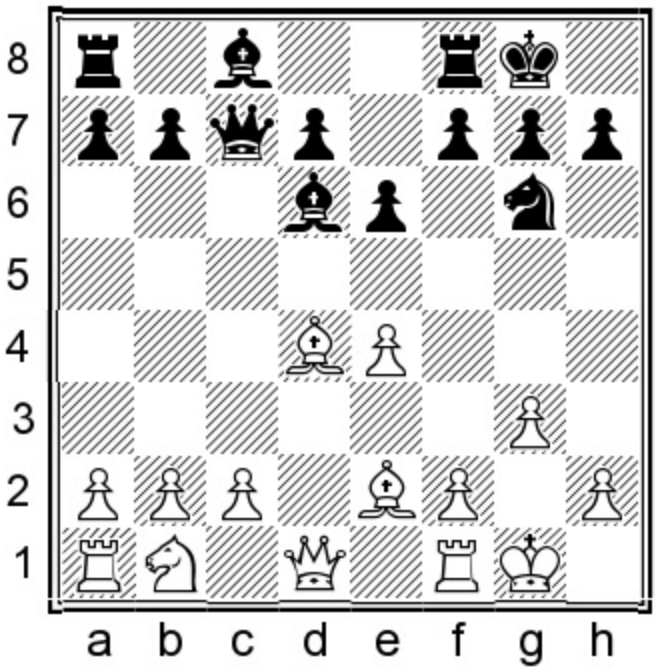
B2) 13...0-0 14.♘b5 ♕c8 15.c4 f5 Black needs to try and achieve some activity, but we have a good response. [15...a6 16.♘c3±]



Position after: 15...f5

16.e5! We can continue playing on the queenside, perhaps with a timely ♘d6 to try and create dark-squared weaknesses. Black's g6-knight is clearly ostracized. 16...♕d8 17.f4! a6 18.♘d6 ♗xd6 19.exd6±

10.g3 0-0



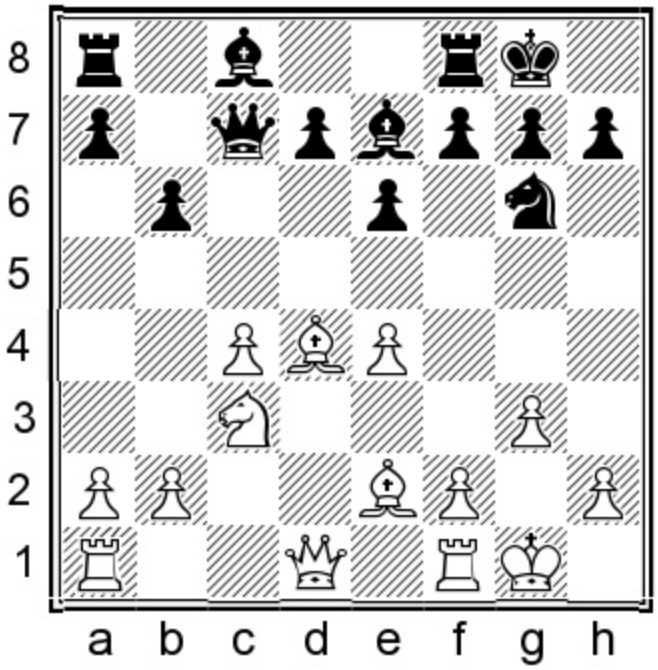
Position after: 10...0-0

We are currently following a game between Hou Yifan and Vassily Ivanchuk, and here we are two interesting options.

11.♕d2!?

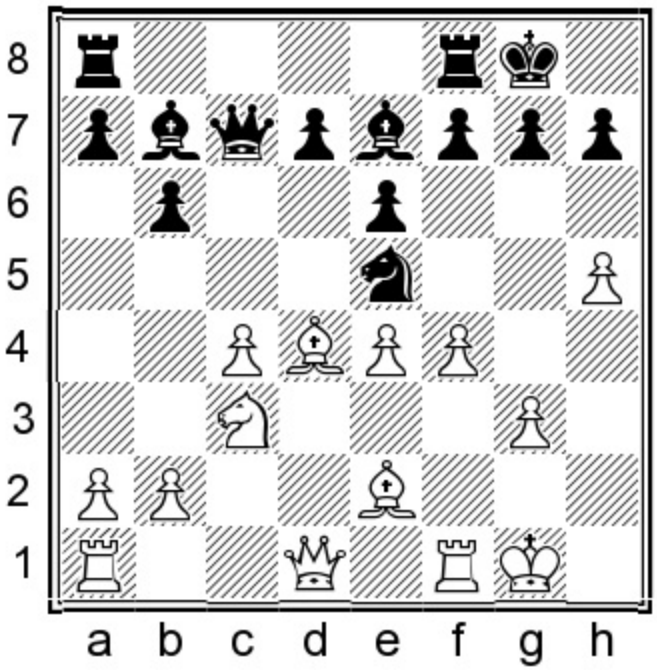
I like this cute idea of exchanging queens, because it underlines how White possesses an advantage irrespective of whether the queens are on the board or not.

11.c4 was played in the game, and follows our aforementioned plan. 11...b6 12.♘c3 ♗e7



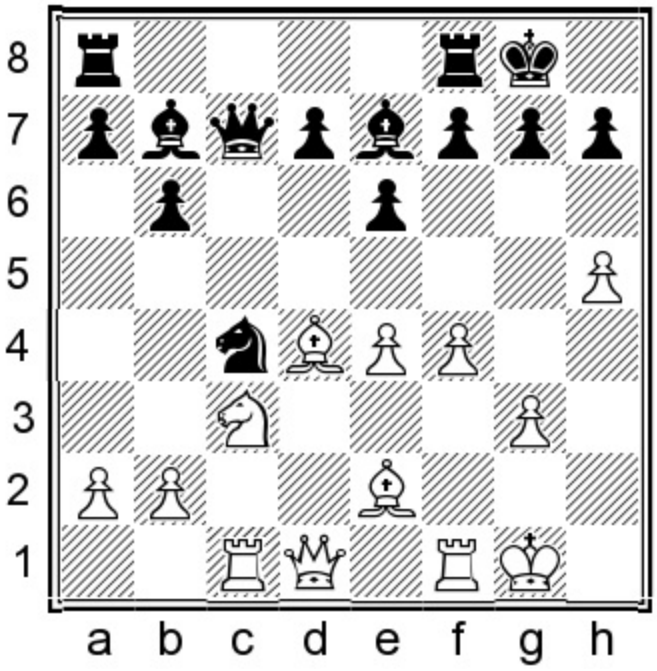
Position after: 12...♗e7

13.h4! A very thematic way to play against the g6-knight. [Instead after 13.♖c1 ♗b7 14.♗f3 ♕xc4 15.♘d5? the game reached a premature conclusion. 15...♕xa2 16.♖a1 ♕c4 17.♖c1 ♕a2 18.♖a1 ½-½ Hou – Ivanchuk, Danzhou 2016.] 13...♗b7 14.h5 ♘e5 15.f4!



Position after: 15.f4!

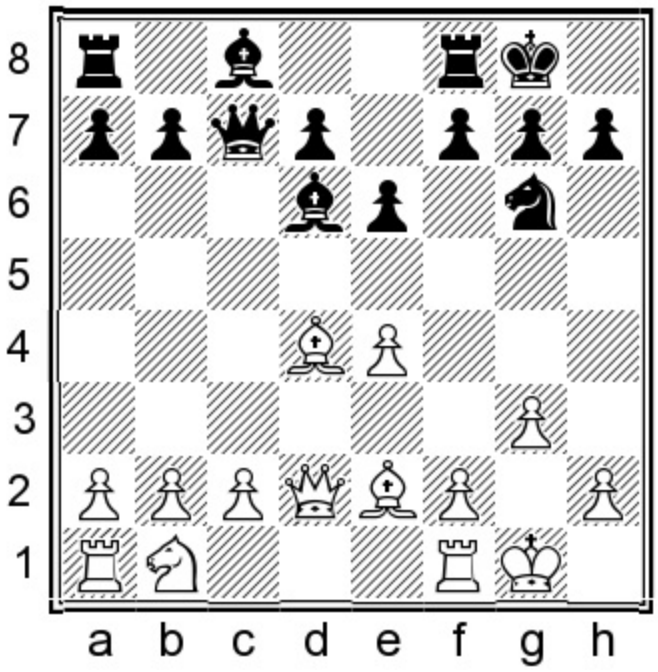
Black wastes time with his knight whilst we make inroads on the kingside. 15...♘xc4 Capturing the pawn looks very dangerous. [15...♘c6 16.♘b5 ♕b8 17.♗f2± Black is forced to weaken his queenside pawns if he wants to remove our knight from b5. In the meantime, we can continue our kingside attack with e4-e5, ♗d3 and ♕g4.] 16.♖c1



Position after: 16.♖c1

16...♘a5 [16...d5 17.b3 ♘d6 18.h6→] 17.h6→ At the very least, a future ♘d5 and ♘xe7 will give

White the better minor pieces and increase our attacking prospects.



Position after: 11.♕d2!?

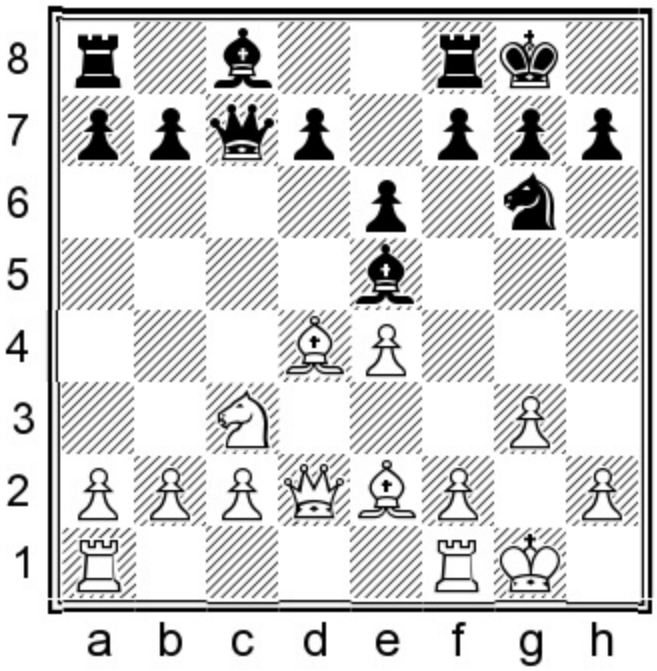
11...b6

A) 11...b5!?

A1) 12.♗xb5 f5! Suddenly Black has a dangerous initiative. 13.♘c3 [13.exf5 ♘h4!∓] 13...f4∞

A2) 12.♖d1! ♗e7 13.♗xb5 f5 14.exf5± Black doesn't have the option of ...♘h4 anymore. Meanwhile, White can choose when to play ♕c3 to exchange queens and emerge a pawn up.

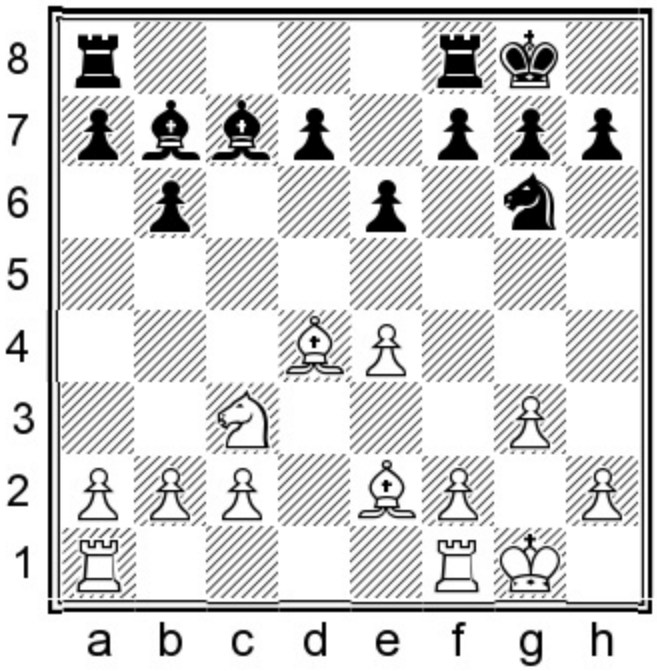
B) 11...♗e5 Attempting to prevent the queen trade is essentially a waste of time for Black. We can revert back to developing normally, given that our queen wanted to be on d2 anyway. 12.♘c3!



Position after: 12.♘c3!

12...b6 [12...a6 13.♖ad1 b5 14.♗xe5 ♕xe5 15.f4 ♕c5+ 16.♕d4± Whether or not Black exchanges queens, we can continue with something like h4-h5, or even a2-a4.] 13.♘b5 ♕c6 14.♗xe5 ♘xe5 15.f4 ♘c4 [15...♕c5+ 16.♕d4±] 16.♗xc4 ♕xc4 17.♘d6 ♕c5+ 18.♖f2± Our knight dominates the c8-bishop, and we can begin to launch a kingside attack at the right moment. Perhaps a good build-up is ♖e1-e3.

12.♕c3! ♗b7 13.♕xc7 ♗xc7 14.♘c3



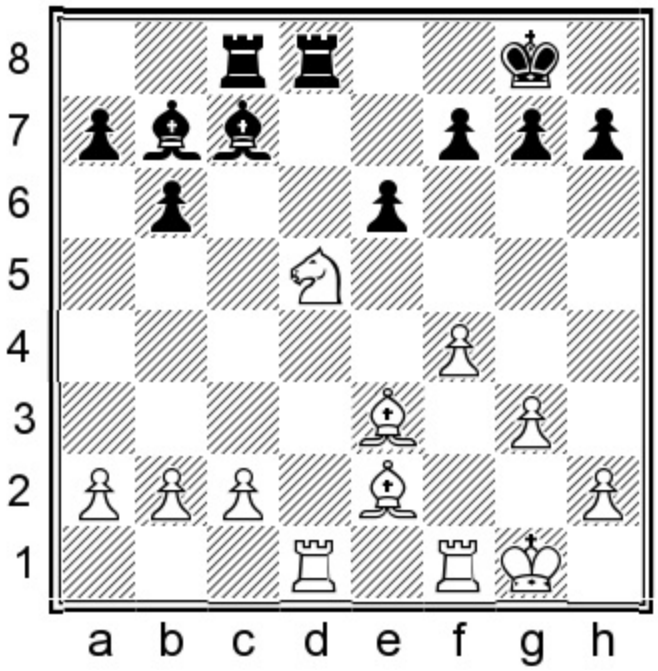
Position after: 14.♘c3

It's interesting to try and understand why White is better in this ending. Black's extra central pawn would make you inclined to believe that he has equally good chances. However, with so many pieces on the board, White's kingside pawns are seemingly effective in limiting the Black minor pieces. In particular, the g6-knight looks very stranded. Whereas Black doesn't have an obvious plan, White has several avenues to consider. For example, there is the obvious plan of f2-f4 and ♗f3, consolidating the kingside. Our rooks will line up against the d7-pawn, and we can possibly advance a4-a5 to create another queenside weakness. The position doesn't require any hasty action, and we can slowly build-up our pieces. The variations that follow will also give an indication of what may happen if Black tries to force matters.

14...♖ac8

A) 14...♗d6 15.♖fd1 ♗b4 16.e5±

B) 14...♘e7 Playing for ...d7-d5 is the most sensible idea, but it doesn't equalise. 15.♖ad1 ♖ac8 16.♗e3 ♖fd8 17.f4 d5 18.exd5 ♘xd5 19.♘xd5



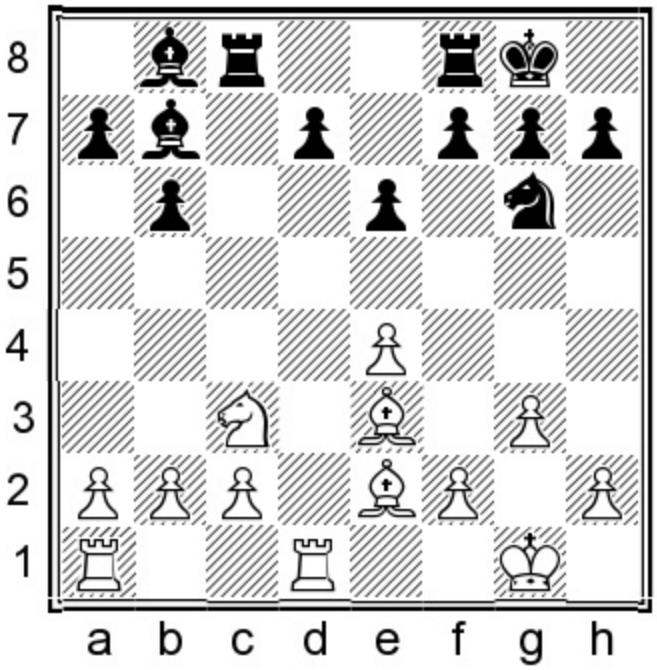
Position after: 19.♘xd5

19...♗xd5 [19...♖xd5 20.♖xd5 ♗xd5 21.♖d1± Followed by c2-c4 and the creation of a passed pawn on the queenside.] 20.c4 ♗c6 21.♔f2± White has the better chances as his queenside play will be more effective than Black's kingside majority.

15.♖fd1 ♗b8

15...f5 16.exf5 ♖xf5 17.♘b5! ♗b8 18.c4±

16.♗e3



Position after: 16.♗e3

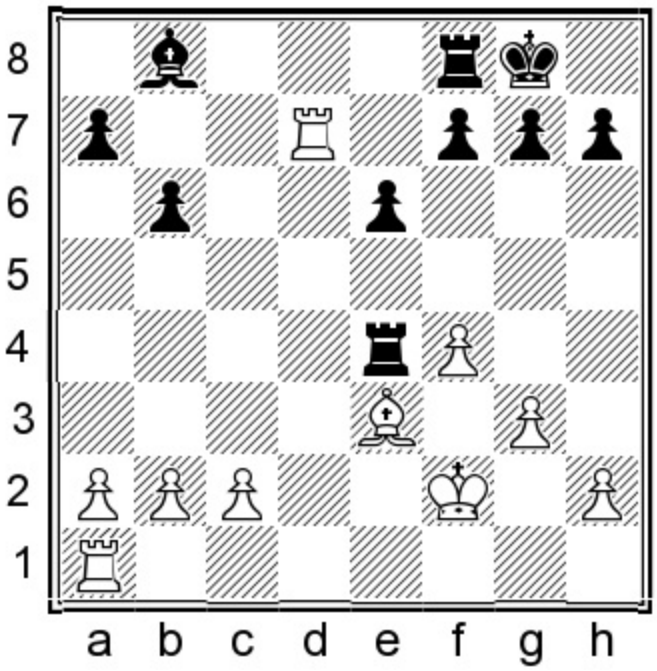
16...♘e5

16...♖fd8 17.f4 ♘e7 18.♖d2 d6 19.♖ad1 ♔f8 20.♔f2± and White continues, for example, with h4-h5 trying to create a weakness on the kingside.

17.f4

17.a4± is also logical.

17...♘c4 18.♗xc4 ♖xc4 19.♖xd7 ♗xe4 20.♘xe4 ♖xe4 21.♔f2±

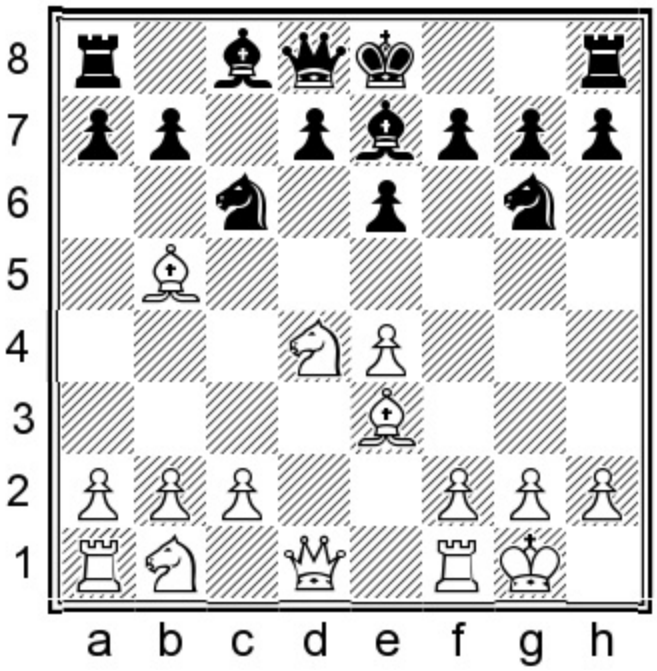


Position after: 21.♔f2±

The recurring theme is that White has more active pieces and greater potential on the queenside.

e) 6...♘g6 7.♗e3 ♗e7 8.♗e2! 0-0 9.c4 --

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4!? cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♘g6 7.♗e3 ♗e7



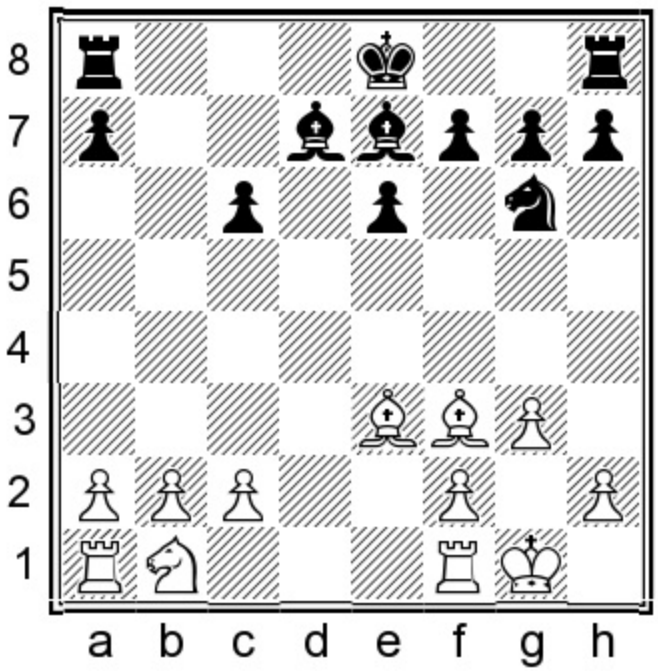
Position after: 7...♗e7

8.♗e2!

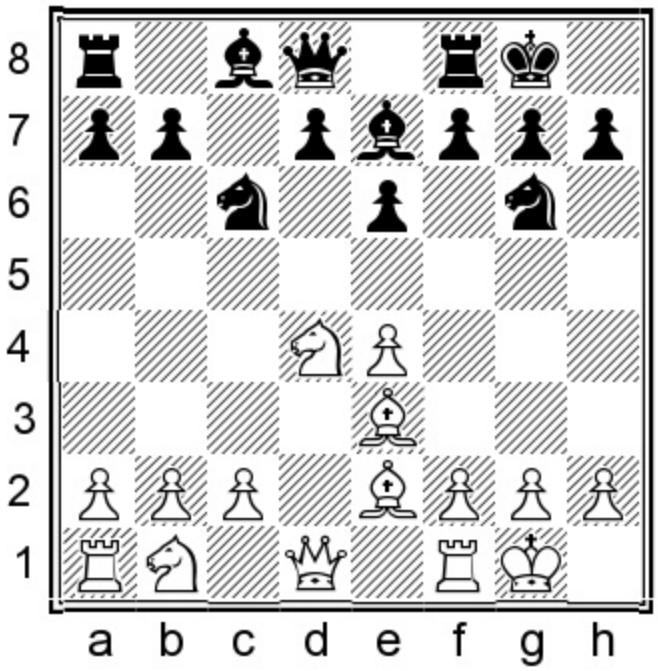
After the immediate 8.c4 the bishop on b5 looks misplaced.

8...0-0

8...d5 The early central break doesn't deny White a comfortable position. 9.exd5 ♕xd5 [9...exd5 10.♘d2±] 10.♗f3 ♕d7 11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.♕xd7+ ♗xd7 13.g3±



Position after: 13.g3±



Position after: 8...0-0

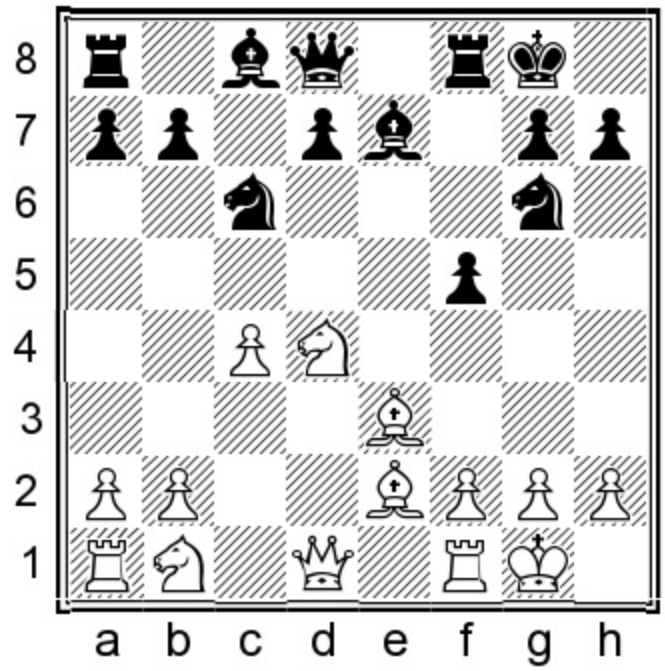
9.c4

This position is really simple for White to play. Black's pieces in general seem quite misplaced to deal with a Maroczy structure. If Black doesn't capture on d4, we have the option to retreat our knight to b3 – retaining as many pieces as possible. Thereafter we will naturally develop with ♕d2 and ♖ad1, before proceeding with f4-f5 or even g3-h4, trying to hit the misplaced g6-knight. It's important to also realise that our pieces aren't ideally placed for an all-out kingside assault; for that, perhaps bishops on b2 and d3 would be a necessary pre-requisite. Therefore we don't want to attack like crazy, but just try and slowly improve our position whilst creating weaknesses in Black's camp. These weaknesses could end up being self-inflicted; Black obviously needs to do something, and a central push like ...f7-f5 or ...d7-d5 seems necessary at some point. If Black does decide to capture on d4, then our plan is still very similar, although we have additional options such as a3-b4, or ♘b5-d4. We may also prefer to play more solidly with f2-f3 rather than f2-f4, although this will of course vary on the exact position.

In general, Black remains extremely solid especially when he does capture on d4, and the positions are probably objectively equal. Nevertheless, we still have different ideas to try and make Black's life difficult.

9...♘xd4

A) 9...f5 This break is premature, and White will obtain an initiative after 10.exf5 exf5

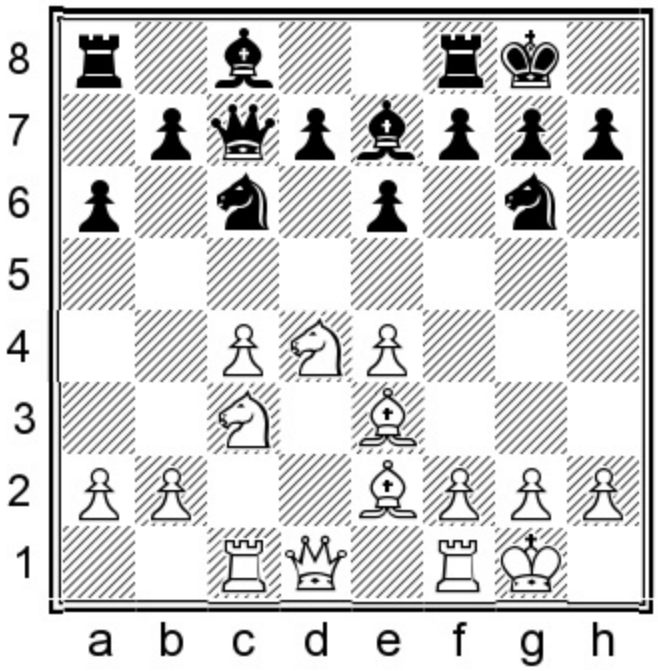


Position after: 10...exf5

11.♘f3! f4 12.♗d4 d5 13.cxd5 ♕xd5 14.♘c3 ♕f7 15.♕a4± Followed by centralising the rooks.

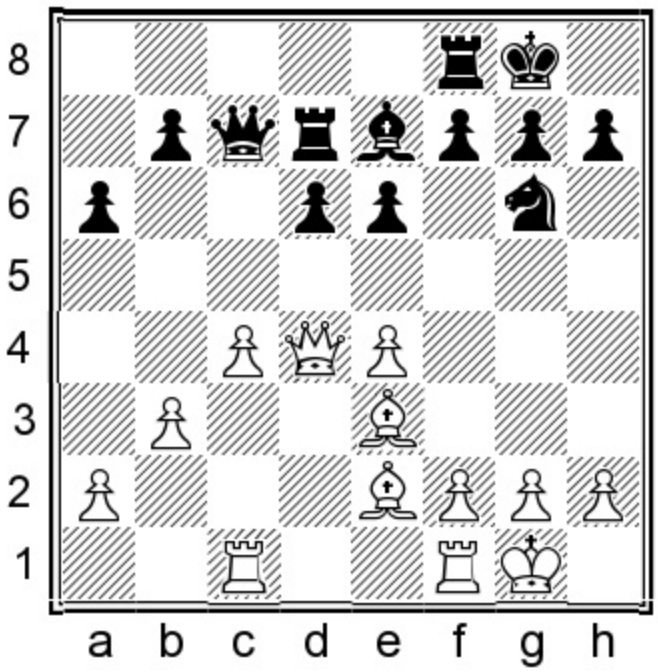
B) 9...d5 has never been played, because White can easily attain a comfortable position against an IQP. 10.exd5 exd5 11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.cxd5 cxd5 13.♘c3 ♗e6 14.♘b5±

C) 9...♕c7 10.♘c3 a6 11.♖c1



Position after: 11.♖c1

This kind of thing can also arise from ...♕c7 on move 6 or 7, and in fact we've transposed exactly into the Nakamura – Dobrov game mentioned in the previous subchapter. 11...♘xd4 [11...b6 12.♘d5! is a useful idea to remember. 12...exd5 13.cxd5 ♗d6 14.dxc6 ♗xh2+ 15.♔h1 ♗f4 16.♗xf4 ♘xf4 17.♗f3±] 12.♕xd4 d6 13.♘a4 ♗d7 14.♘b6 ♖ad8 15.♘xd7 ♖xd7 16.b3±

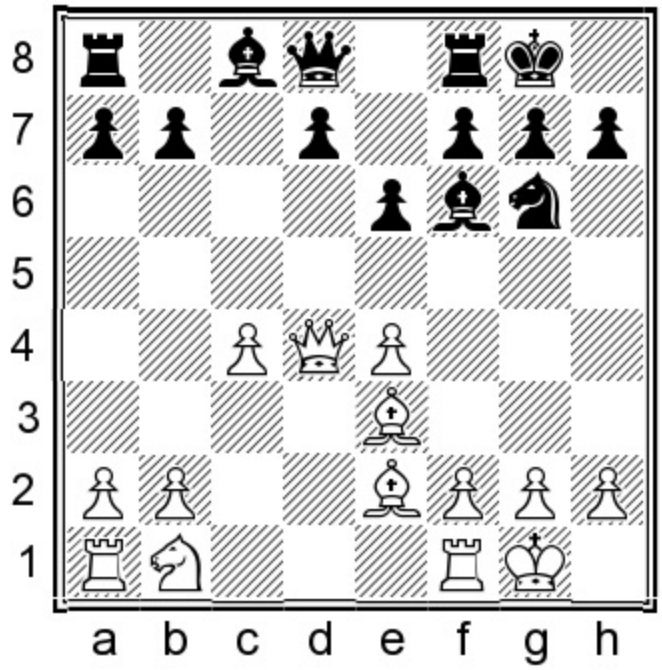


Position after: 16.b3±

White converted his advantage in Nakamura – Dobrov, 2019.

D) I will consider the implementation of 9...b6, both here and after a preliminary capture on d4, in the following subchapter.

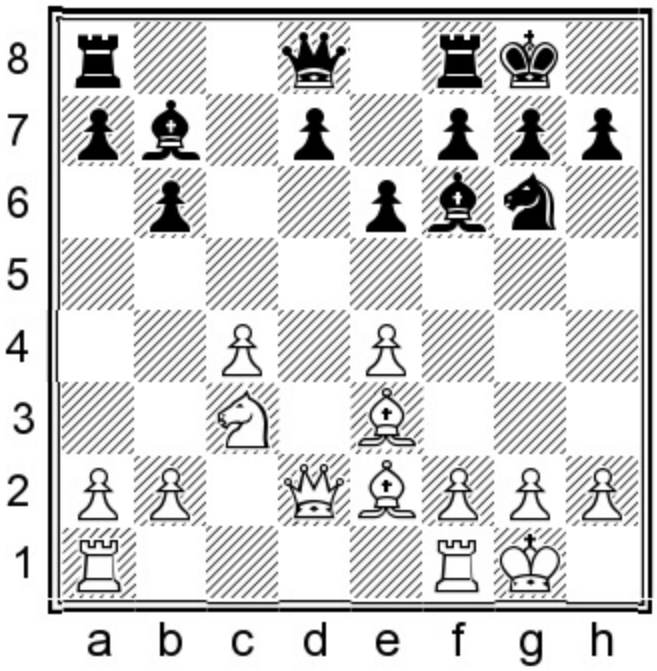
10.♕xd4 ♗f6



Position after: 10...♗f6

Black aims to quickly put pressure on the e4-pawn. In this way, he gains time to bring his queen to e7, which doesn't occur in the next subchapter.

11.♕d2 b6 12.♘c3 ♗b7

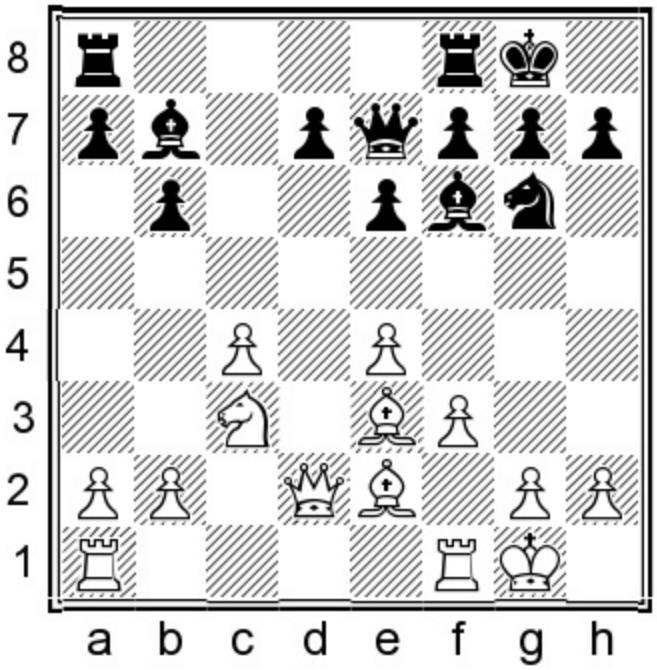


Position after: 12...♗b7

13.f3

Caruana suggested 13.♗d3 as an improvement to 13.f3, but I don't want to allow Black to exchange his knight for our bishop just yet. 13...♘e5 14.♖ac1 ♖c8 15.b3 ♘xd3 16.♕xd3 ♗e5! 17.f4 ♗xc3 18.♖xc3 d5=

13...♕e7

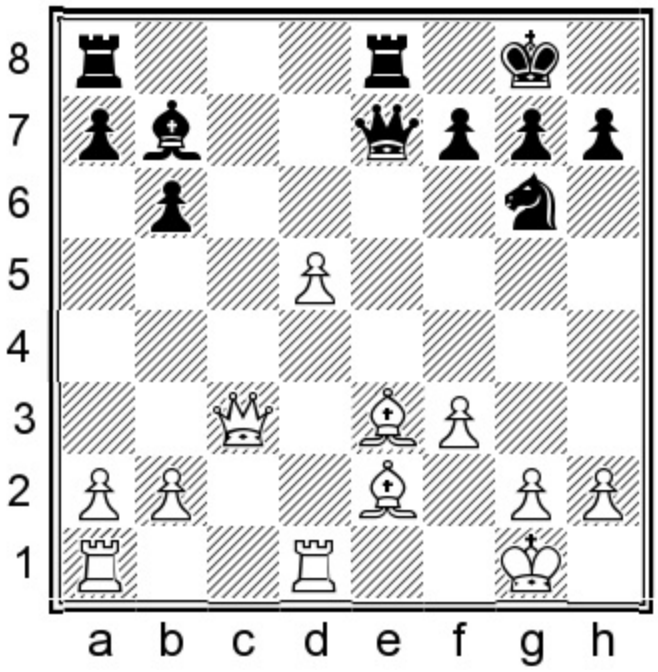


Position after: 13...♕e7

14.♖ad1

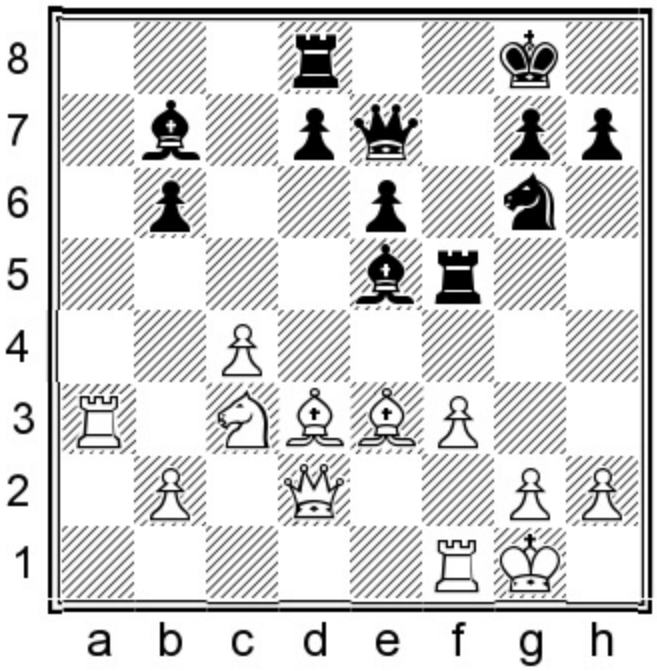
It was difficult for me to come up with a plan here. We have options of slowly advancing on both the queenside and kingside, but Black's pieces seem well placed to prevent us from doing anything immediately. For example, we can't play f2-f4 as our e4-pawn is hanging. If we support our e4-pawn with ♗d3, Black will annoy us with ...♘e5. We also can't afford to spend too much time with preparations, as Black will quickly play for either ...d7-d5 or ...♗e5 and ...f7-f5. Therefore, I decided the best way to continue was to trade dark-squared bishops and then continue with either f2-f4 or a3-b4 – or perhaps both. I think the best way to handle the position is to play against Black's knight which, as I've mentioned numerous times, seems misplaced to me.

A) The problem with 14.♖fd1 is that it allows 14...d5! 15.cxd5 ♗xc3 16.♕xc3 exd5 17.exd5 ♖fe8 18.♔f2 ♕h4+ 19.♔g1 ♕e7=



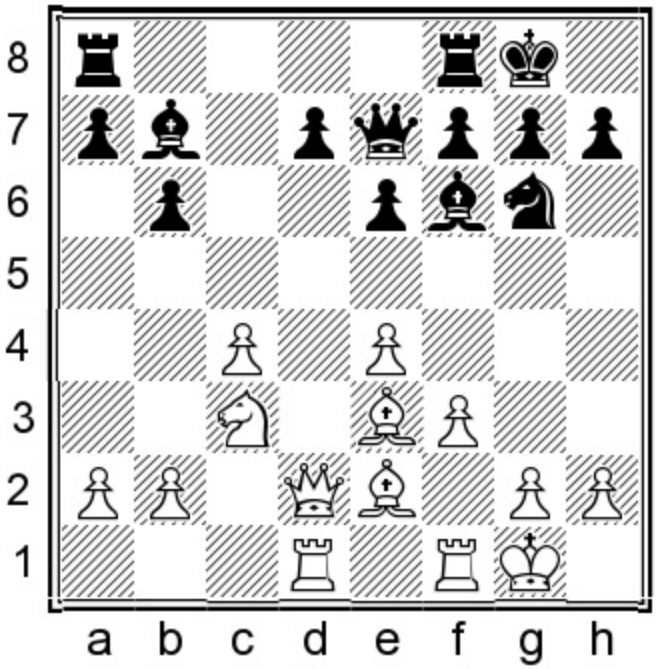
Position after: 19...♕e7=

B) 14.a4 was Caruana's choice, using the third rank to defend his e3-bishop in view of a possible ...d5. However, Black was able to achieve a good game and demonstrated that the a4-a5 plan wasn't that effective. 14...♖ad8 [14...d5 15.cxd5 ♗xc3 16.♕xc3 exd5 17.exd5 ♖fe8 18.♖a3!±] 15.♖a3 ♗e5 16.a5 f5! 17.axb6 axb6 18.exf5 ♖xf5 19.♗d3



Position after: 19.♗d3

In Caruana – Radjabov, Bucharest 2013, Black should've kept his rook on the f-file with 19...♖ff8! 20.♗xg6 hxg6 21.♗xb6 ♖b8∞ Black has enough activity to compensate for the pawn deficit.

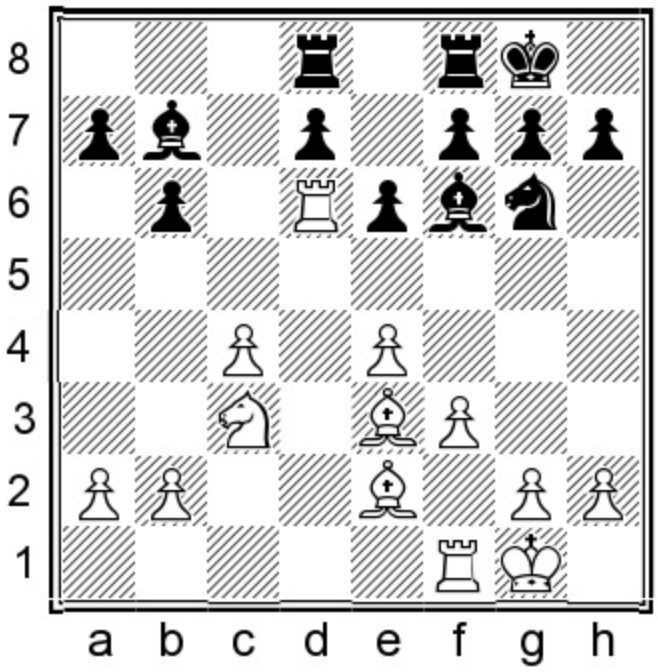


Position after: 14.♖ad1

14...♖fd8

A) 14...♖ad8?! It feels like Black's rooks should stand on c8 and d8, and after 15.♕d6 [15.♗d4!?±]

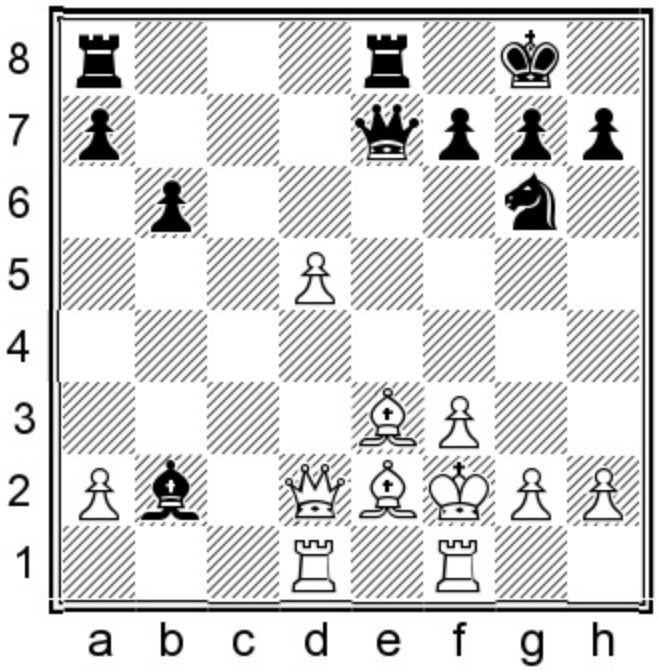
15...♕xd6 16.♖xd6



Position after: 16.♖xd6

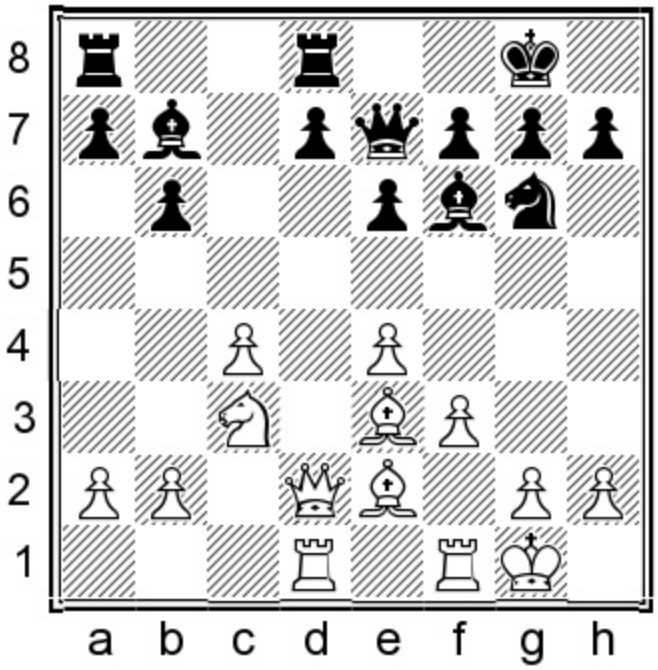
16...♗e5 [16...♗xc3 17.bxc3 ♗a6 18.f4!↑] 17.♖d2 ♘f4 18.♗d4 ♘xe2+ 19.♘xe2 ♗c7 20.♖fd1± White was pressing in Predojevic – Anton Guijarro, Skopje 2014.

B) Black's attempt of 14...d5 isn't as effective as it was after 14.♖fd1 for concrete reasons. 15.exd5! exd5 [15...♗xc3 16.♕xc3 exd5 17.♖fe1± and White's rooks are well placed to keep the advantage.] 16.♘xd5 ♗xd5 17.cxd5 ♖fe8 18.♔f2 ♗xb2



Position after: 18...♗xb2

In the parallel line after 14.♖fd1, White's rook would be hanging on a1. Here, we are able to play 19.♗b5! and after 19...♗e5 20.g3 ♖ed8 21.♔g2± our bishop-pair and passed d-pawn are enough to claim an advantage.



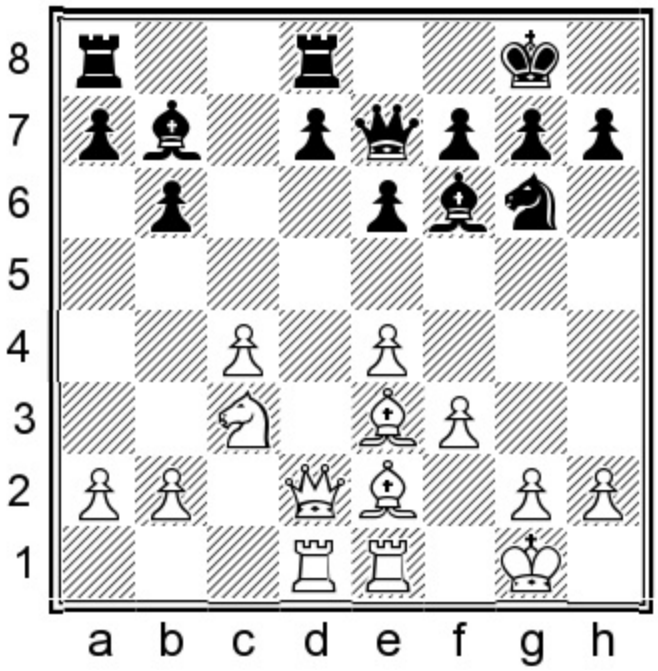
Position after: 14...♖fd8

15.♗d4

Apparently the most logical, but we can gain an advantage by holding off on this for one move.

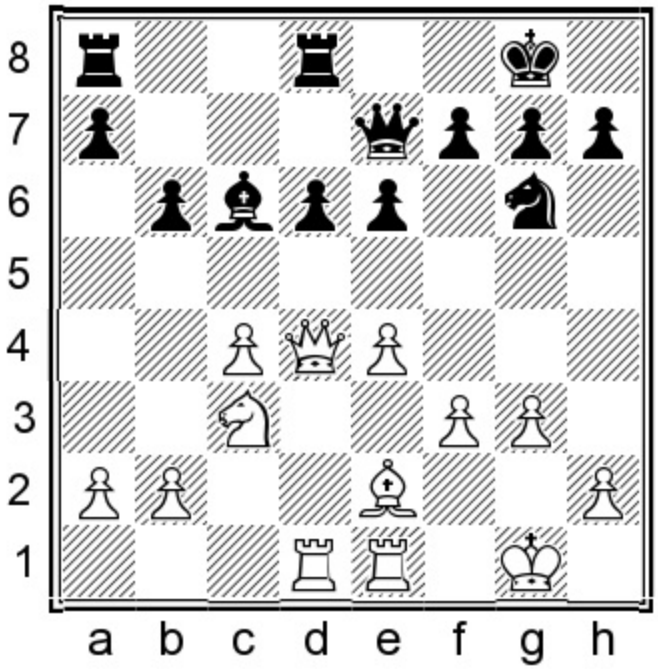
A) Here 15.♕d6 isn't as accurate because of the possibility of 15...♕xd6 16.♖xd6 ♗xc3! 17.bxc3 ♗a6∞, and Black's a8-rook will naturally come to the c8-square, unlike after 14...♖ad8.

B) 15.♖fe1!?



Position after: 15.♖fe1!?

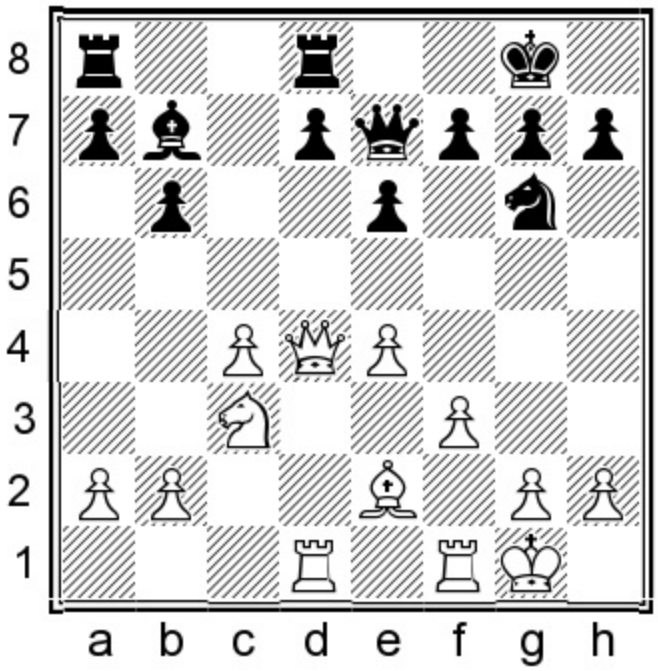
In my opinion, this is the most pragmatic move. Although we'd prefer to keep our rook on f1 to support a future f3-f4 push, by playing 15.♖fe1 we render ...d7-d5 unplayable. This means that we gain an advantage over our mainline after a future ♗d4. I'll illustrate a couple of variations but the same plan remains of trying to exchange dark-squared bishops before advancing with f3-f4. 15...♗c6 [15...h6 16.♗d4 ♗g5 17.♕c2± The break ...d7-d5 is impossible, so we'll calmly follow up with g2-g3 and f3-f4.; 15...♕f8 16.♗d4 ♗xd4+ 17.♕xd4±] 16.g3 d6 17.♗d4 ♗xd4+ 18.♕xd4±



Position after: 18.♕xd4±

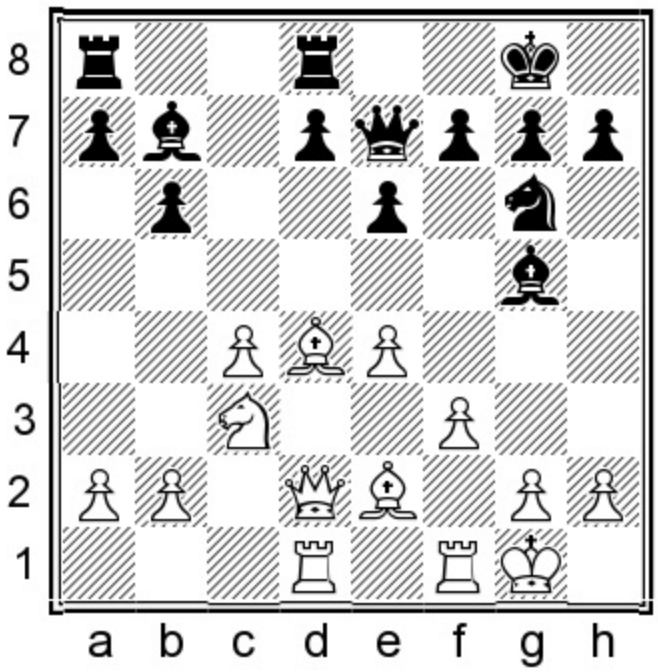
15...♗g5!

15...♗xd4+ seems to be worse: 16.♕xd4



Position after: 16.♕xd4

16...♘f4 [16...d6 Aiming to bring the Black knight to d4 isn't the right plan just yet. 17.g3 e5 18.♕e3 ♘f8 19.♖d2 ♘e6 20.♖fd1 ♗c6 21.♗f1 ♘d4 22.♘e2 ♘e6 23.♗h3±] 17.♖fe1 e5 18.♕d6 [18.♕e3? ♕g5–+] 18...♕xd6 19.♖xd6± White has a better ending, but Black definitely has good chances to hold.



Position after: 15...♗g5!

16.♕c2

A) Of course not 16.f4? ♘xf4! 17.♖xf4 e5–+

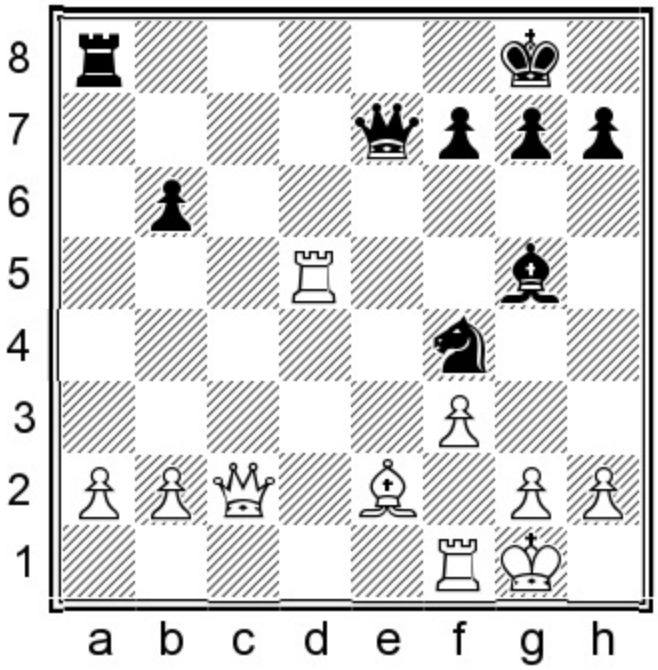
B) 16.♗e3 simply repeats moves.

16...d5!

Black manages to directly equalise with this strike.

16...♘f4 17.♖fe1 ♘xe2+ 18.♕xe2± White can continue with ♗f2 and doubling the rooks on the d-file.

17.cxd5 exd5 18.exd5 ♗xd5 19.♗xb6 axb6 20.♘xd5 ♖xd5! 21.♖xd5 ♘f4



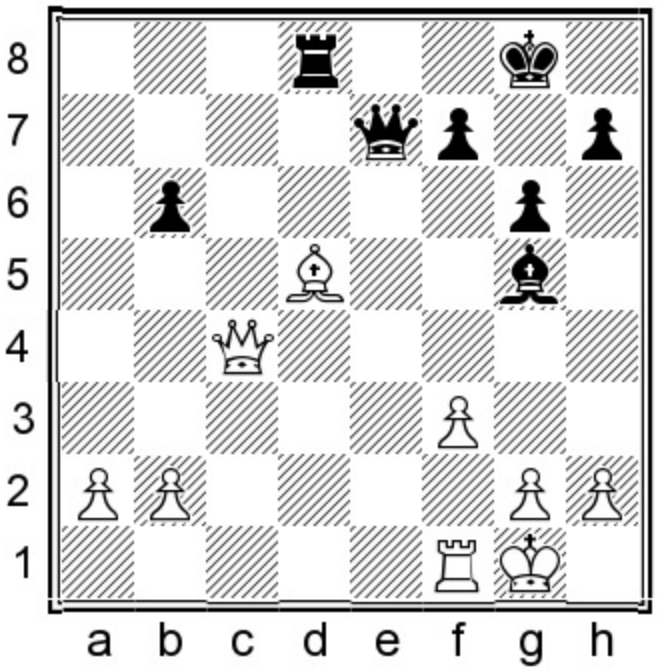
Position after: 21...♘f4

22.♗c4

A) 22.♖xg5 ♕xg5 23.g3 ♕c5+!=

B) 22.♖d2 ♕e3+ 23.♔h1 ♘h3! 24.gxh3 ♕xd2 25.♕xd2 ♗xd2 26.♖d1 White can play on here for a while, but draw probabilities remain extremely high.

22...♘xd5 23.♗xd5 ♖d8 24.♕c4 g6=

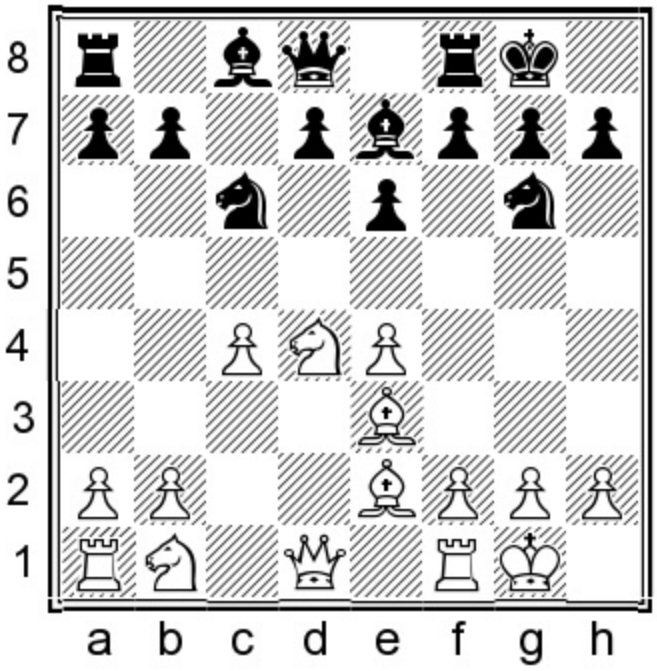


Position after: 24...g6=

If White's pawn was on f2, then things would be different. In this case, I can't find a kingside construction which would guarantee the safety of the white monarch. Therefore, it appears that 15.♖fe1! is the most challenging option for Black to deal with – and illustrates the necessity to be extra cautious that Black isn't able to play ...d7-d5.

f) 6...♘g6 7.♗e3 ♗e7 8.♗e2! 0-0 9.c4 b6

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4!? cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♘g6 7.♗e3 ♗e7 8.♗e2! 0-0 9.c4

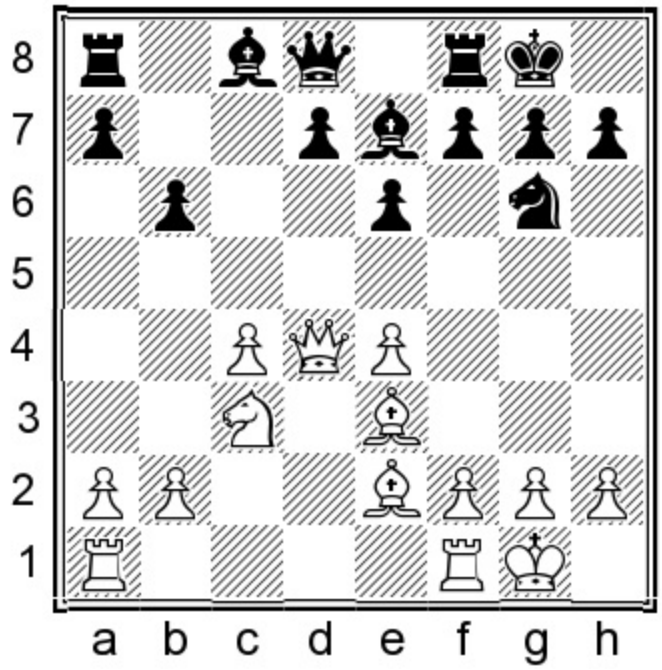


Position after: 9.c4

Here we will consider Black's closely linked options of playing ...b6 on move 9 or 10.

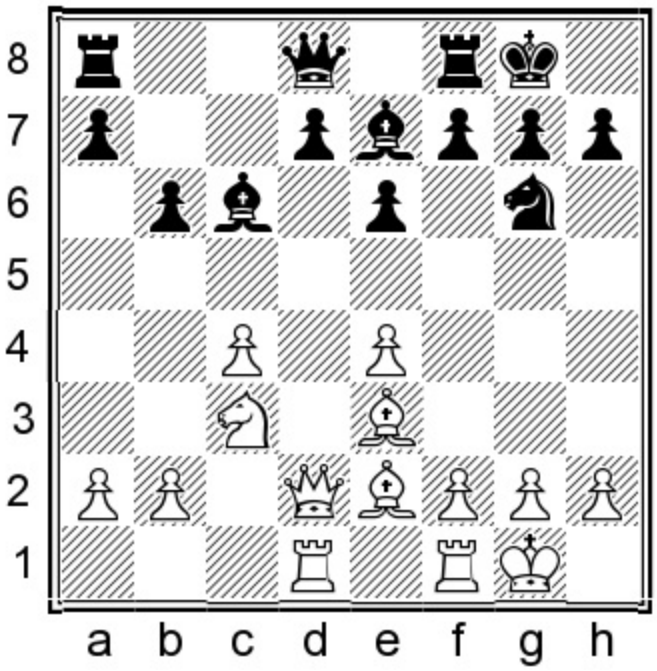
9...b6

9...♘xd4 10.♕xd4 b6 is also a possibility, and Black embarks on a similar plan to the main line. This position has occurred in several high quality games. 11.♘c3



Position after: 11.♘c3

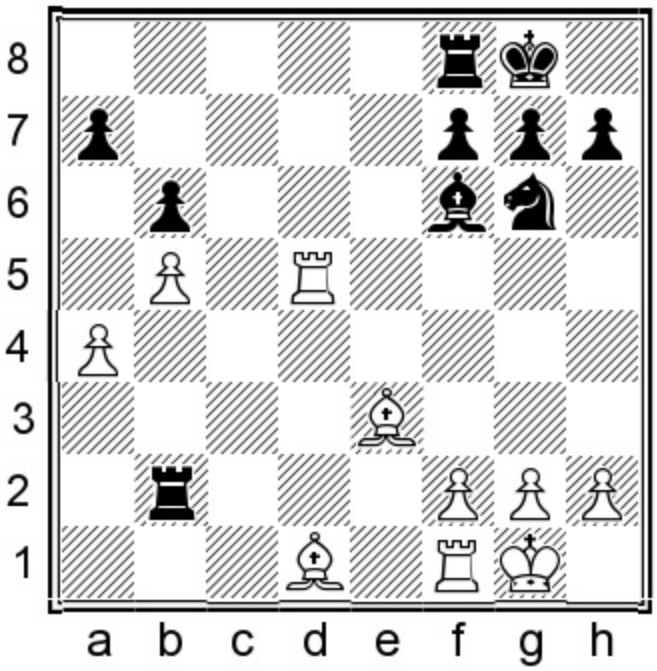
11...♗b7 [11...♗f6 leads back to the previous subchapter.; 11...♗c5 12.♕d3 d6 13.♖ad1 ♗b7 14.a3±] 12.♖ad1 [12.♖fd1 was seen in the entertaining game Leko – Gelfand, Hengshui 2019. However, I think the rook stands better on f1 to support future ideas of f2-f4.] 12...♗c6 [Black doesn't have time for 12...♗f6 anymore, and is forced to spend a move defending his d7-pawn. 13.♕xd7 ♕xd7 14.♖xd7 ♗xc3 15.♖xb7 ♗xb2 16.♖d1±] 13.♕d2



Position after: 13.♕d2

A useful pre-emptive move. We retain the possibility of ♗d3 if we want it.

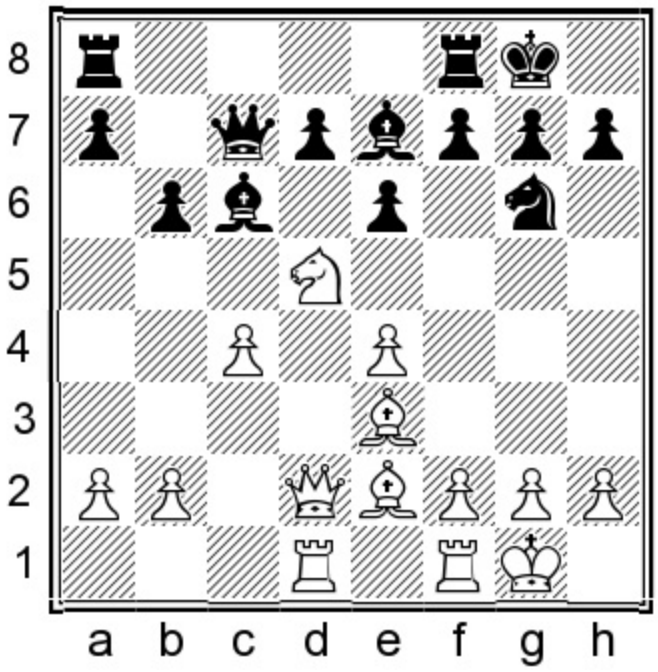
A) 13...♖c8 14.a3 ♗f6 15.♘b5!? ♗xb5 16.cxb5 d5 17.exd5 ♕xd5 18.♕xd5 exd5 19.♖xd5 ♖c2 20.♗d1 ♖xb2 21.a4±



Position after: 21.a4±

The bishop-pair gives White some winning potential, and we can soon start to target Black's queenside pawns.

B) 13...♕c7 14.♘d5!

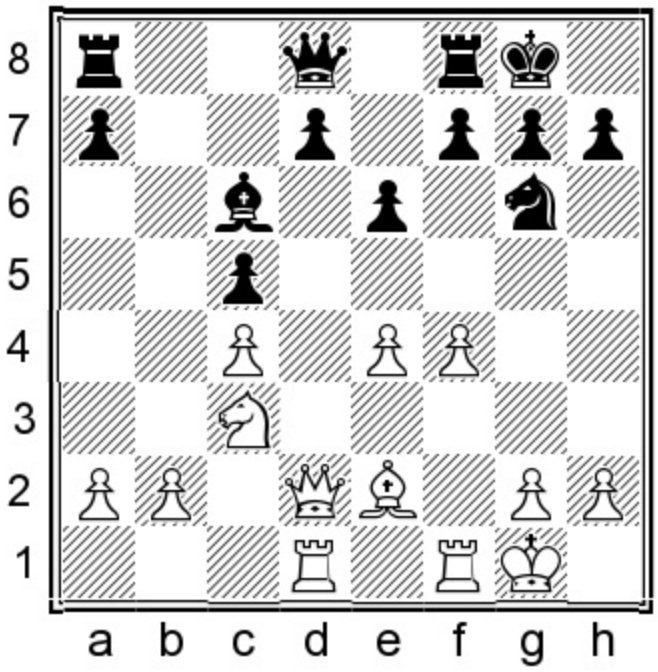


Position after: 14.♘d5!

A typical motif. 14...exd5 15.cxd5 ♗b7 16.d6 ♗xd6 17.♕xd6 ♕xd6 18.♖xd6 ♗xe4 19.♖xd7±

C) 13...♗b4 14.f3 ♕f6 15.♖c1 ♖ac8 16.a3 ♗c5 17.♗xc5 bxc5 18.b4!±

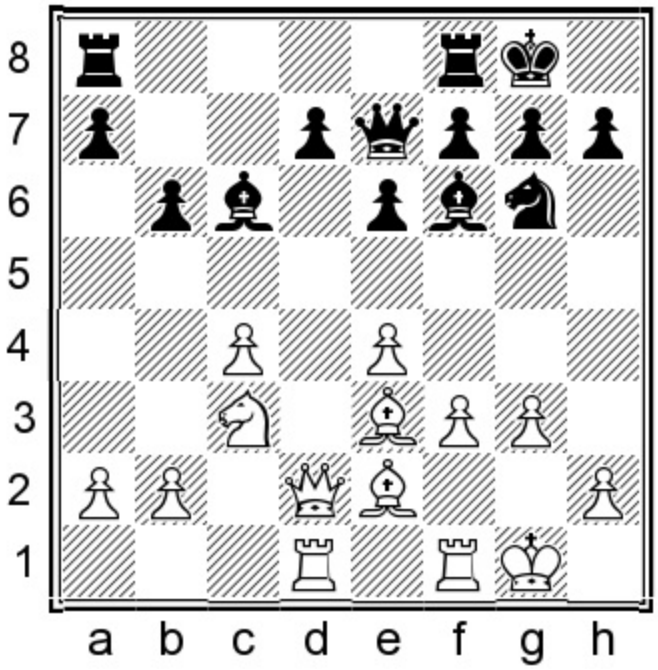
D) 13...♗c5?! 14.♗xc5 bxc5 15.f4



Position after: 15.f4

This position occurred in Areshchenko – Fedorov, Calimanesti 2016. Having exchanged the dark-squared bishops under favourable conditions, White is doing very well, and the game could have continued: 15...♕e7 16.g3± White's play is easy and natural, for example with ♕e3, doubling rooks on the d-file, and at the right moment pushing h4-h5 and possibly even e4-e5.

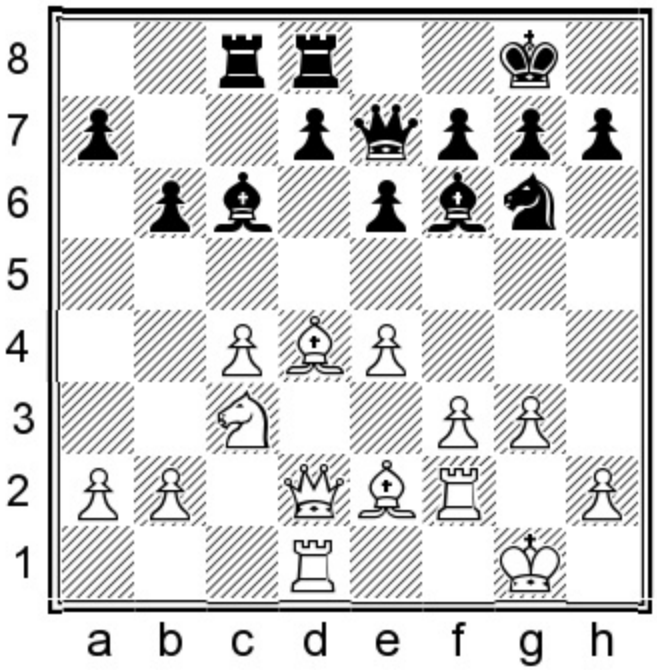
E) 13...♗f6 Here Black hasn't managed to play ... ♕c7 or ...♖ad8 yet. Therefore, White has enough time to consolidate and establish a stable edge. 14.f3 ♕e7 15.g3



Position after: 15.g3

E1) 15...♖ad8 In Chitescu – Vaclav, ICCF email 2011, the best continuation for White was 16.♖f2! [16.♗d4 ♗xd4+ 17.♕xd4 f5! unnecessarily gives Black activity.] 16...d6 17.♗d4 ♗xd4 18.♕xd4 ♕g5 19.♕d2 ♕c5 20.f4!±

E2) 15...♖ac8 16.♖f2 ♖fd8 17.♗d4 Now we're in time to trade bishops without allowing the possibility of ...♗g5.

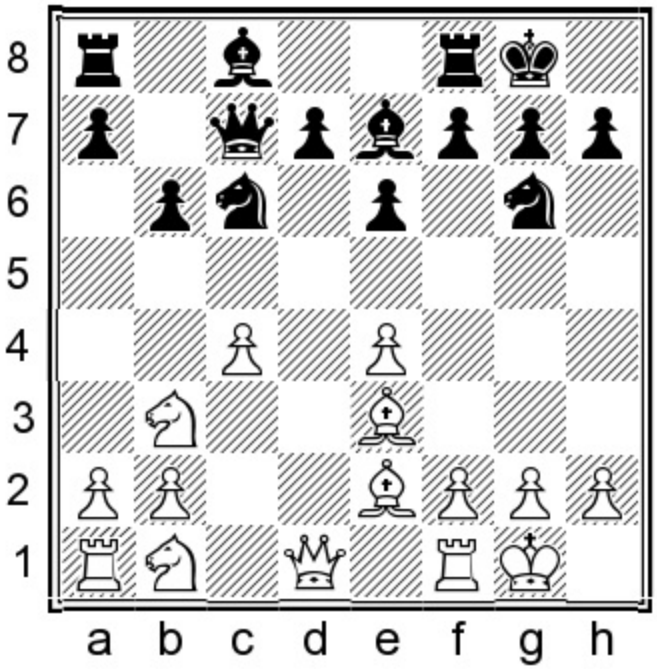


Position after: 17.♗d4

17...♗xd4 18.♕xd4 f6 19.f4 ♘h8 20.a3 ♘f7 21.b4 ♔h8 22.♕e3± Black is still ultra-solid, but it's safe to say that White has a small edge.

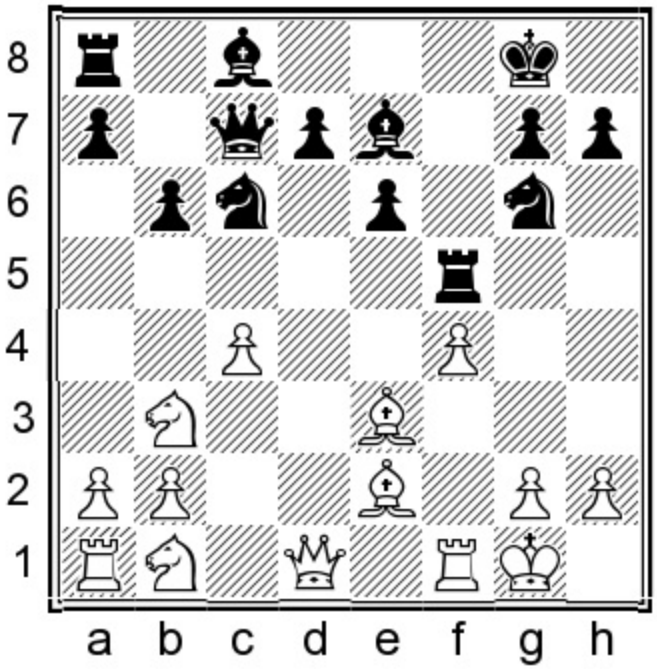
10.♘c3

10.♘b3 This was my original intention, but Black has a surprising way to take advantage of the early knight retreat. 10...♕c7! Black threatens to annoy us with ...♘f4, so we have to respond to this. [10...♗b7 11.♘c3 ♖c8 will transpose to 10.♘c3.]



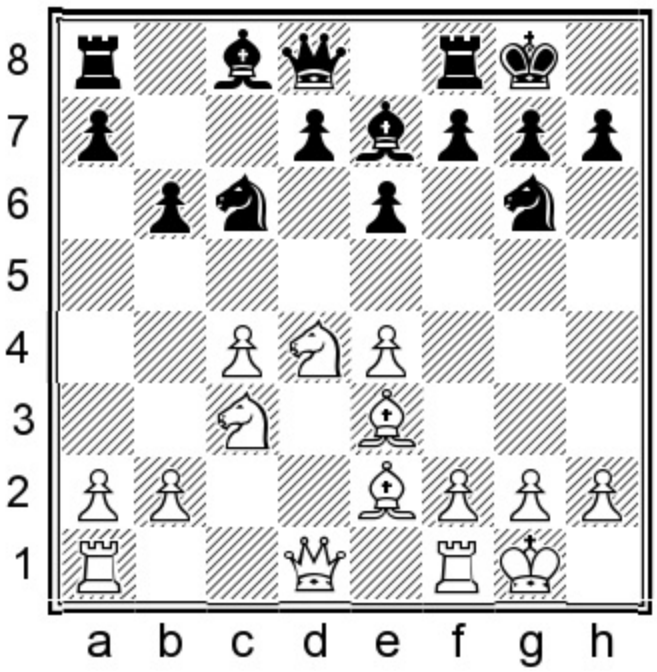
Position after: 10...♕c7!

11.f4 [11.g3 ♗a6! 12.f4 ♘a5!∞; 11.♕d2 ♗b7 12.♘c3 ♘ce5! 13.c5 bxc5 14.f4 c4!∞] 11...f5 12.exf5 ♖xf5



Position after: 12...♖xf5

13.♗d3 [13.g3 ♗b7 14.♘c3 ♖af8⇄ Black also looks like he has good counterplay here.] 13...♖xf4! Black wouldn't have this resource if he played ♗b7 first, as we'll see in the line after 10.♘c3.
14.♗xf4 ♘xf4∞

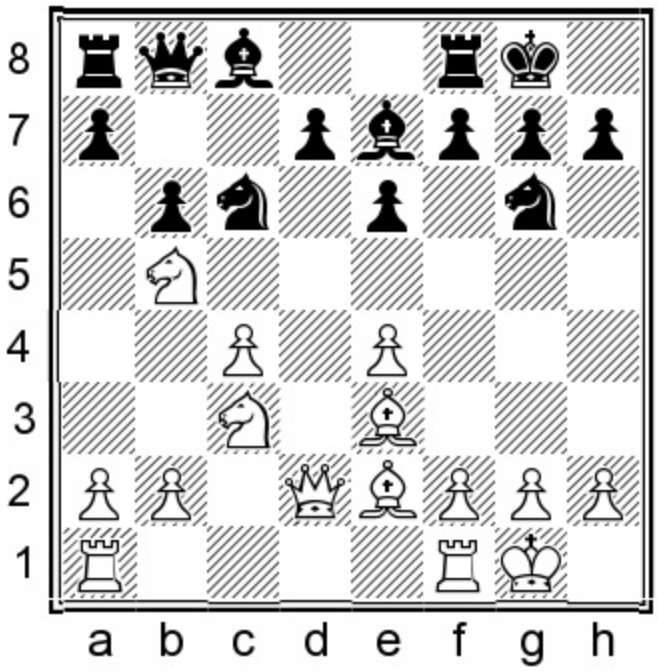


Position after: 10.♘c3

10...♗b7

A) 10...♘xd4 11.♕xd4 ♗b7 will transpose to 9...♘xd4.

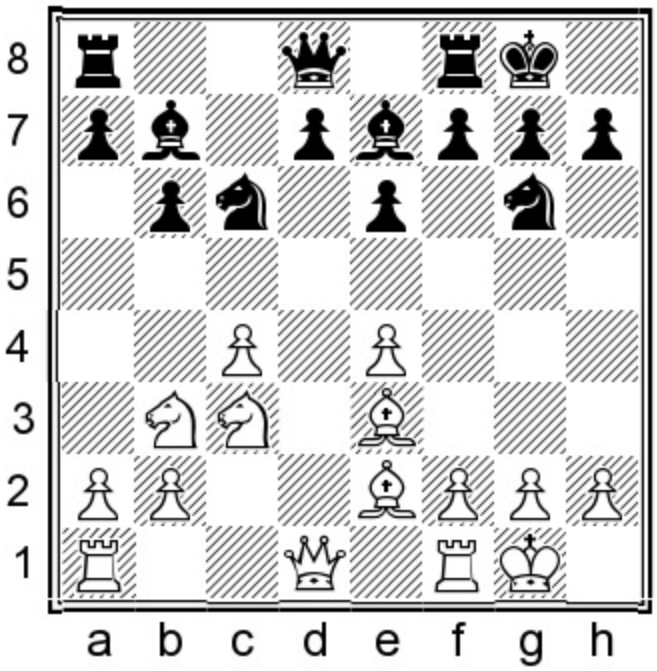
B) Black isn't in position to play an early 10...♕c7, as he'll immediately be hit by 11.♘db5! ♕b8 12.♕d2±



Position after: 12.♕d2±

As usual, if Black wants to remove our knight from b5, he'll have to weaken his queenside pawns in the process.

11.♘b3!

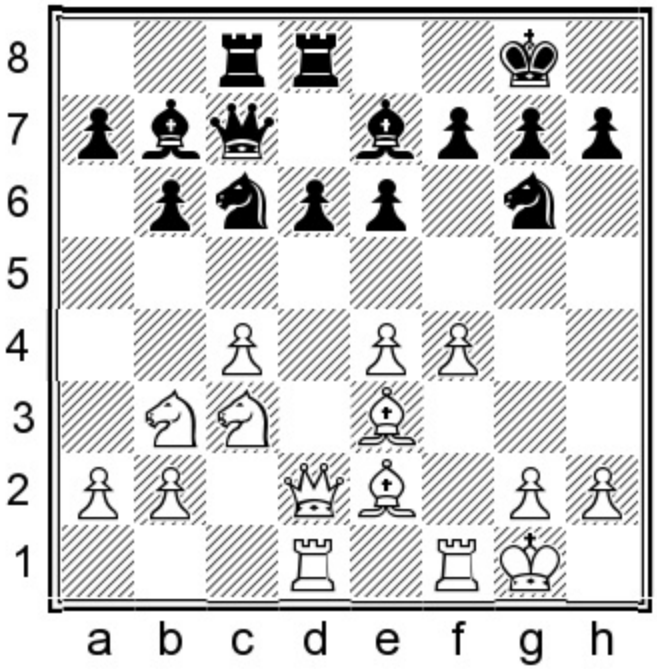


Position after: 11.♘b3!

Now White is in a good position to retain his knight.

11...f5

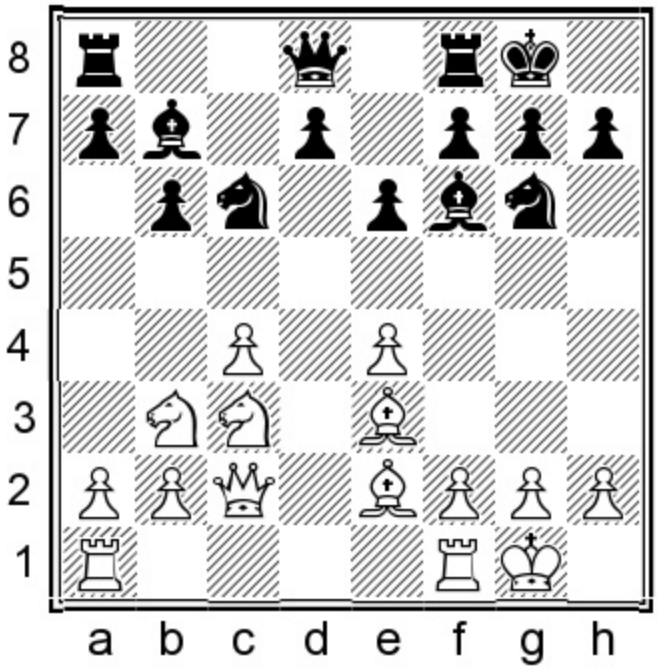
A) 11...♖c8 12.f4! d6 13.♕d2 [13.♘b5!? is always an interesting option, as Black doesn't really want to weaken his pawns with ...a7-a6.] 13...♕c7 14.♖ad1 ♖fd8



Position after: 14...♖fd8

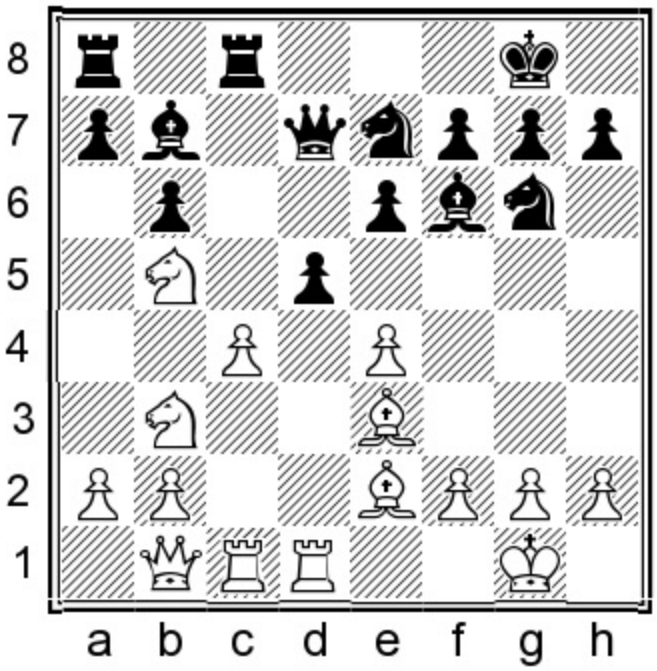
15.f5! ♘ge5 16.♘b5 ♕b8 17.♕e1 White will bring his queen to g3 and Black's position looks increasingly passive

B) 11...♗f6!? This is a clever way for Black to try and play ...d7-d5, by bringing his c6-knight to e7. 12.♕c2! If Black wants to play ...d7-d5, it feels like one of our rooks should occupy the d-file, rather than the queen. [After 12.♕d2 ♘ce7! 13.♗d4 ♗xd4 14.♘xd4 d5 15.exd5 exd5 16.♖fd1 it feels like White's advantage is slowly dissipating.]



Position after: 12.♕c2!

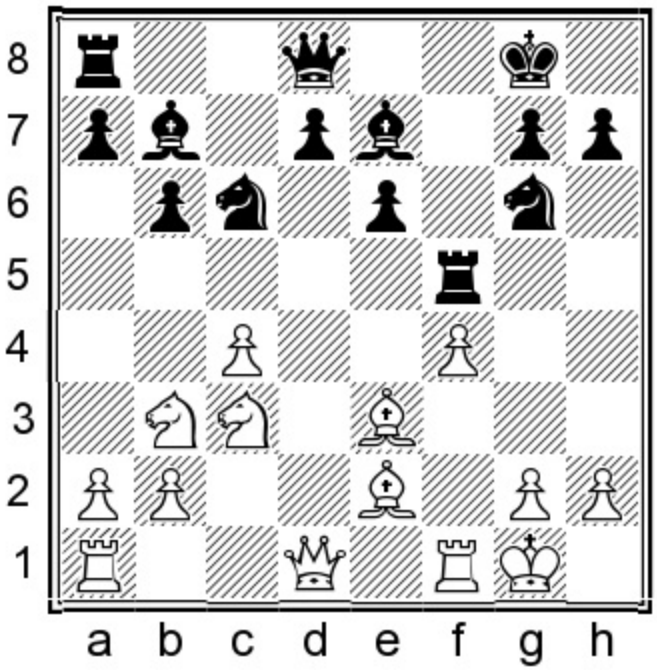
12...♘ce7 [12...♖c8 13.♖ad1±; 12...♗xc3 13.♕xc3 ♘ce7 14.f3 d5 15.♖fd1± The bishop-pair is enough for White to claim an edge.] 13.♘b5! d5 14.♖fd1 ♕d7 15.♖ac1 ♖fc8 16.♕b1±



Position after: 16.♕b1±

The position is still very tense, but Black's moves seem difficult to come by. Meanwhile, White can continue to make progress with f2-f4, perhaps followed by g2-g3 and h4-h5.

12.exf5 ♖xf5 13.f4!



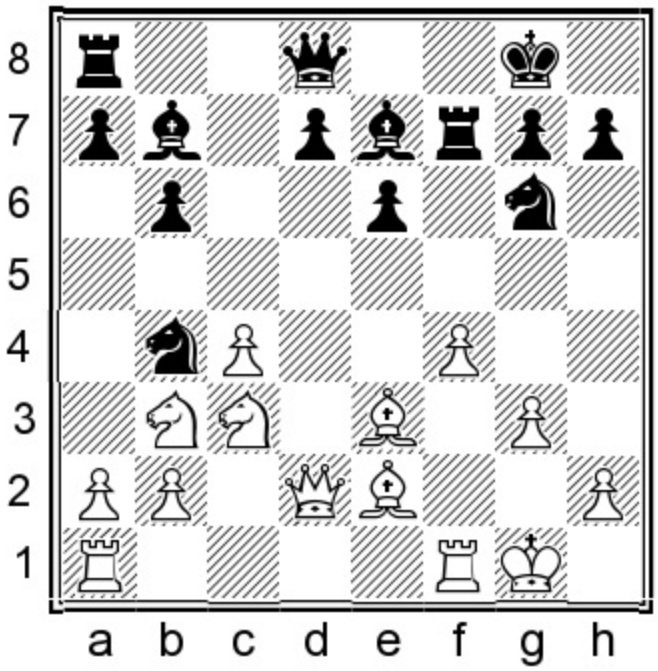
Position after: 13.f4!

Black can't capture on f4 as he could after 10.♘b3.

13...♖f7

After 13...♕c7 White can avoid the a8-rook joining the action by throwing in the move 14.♘b5! ♕c8 15.♖c1±

14.g3 ♘b4 15.♕d2±

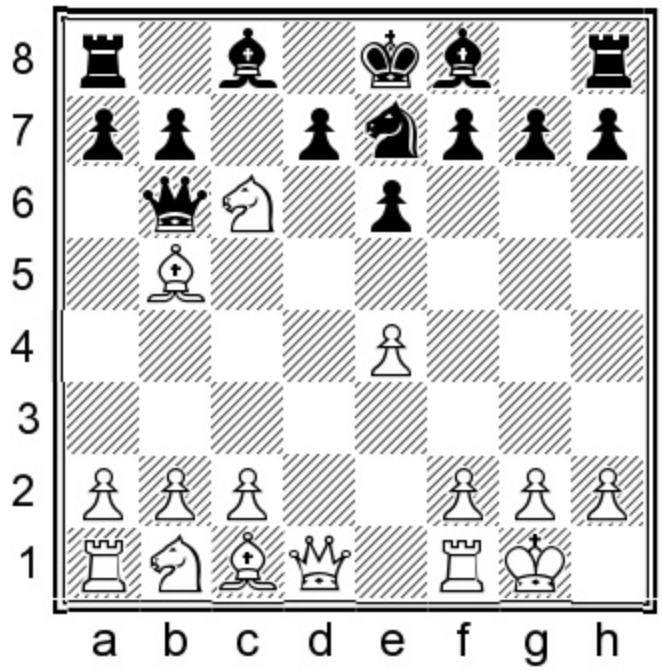


Position after: 15.♕d2±

White was clearly better and converted his advantage in Ivanchuk – Moiseenko, Izmir 2016.

Chapter 9
4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4 cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♕b6 7.♘xc6 --

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4 cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♕b6 7.♘xc6



Chapter Guide

Chapter 9 – 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4 cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♕b6 7.♘xc6 --

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4!? cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♕b6 7.♘xc6

a) 7...♕xb5?!

b) 7...♘xc6

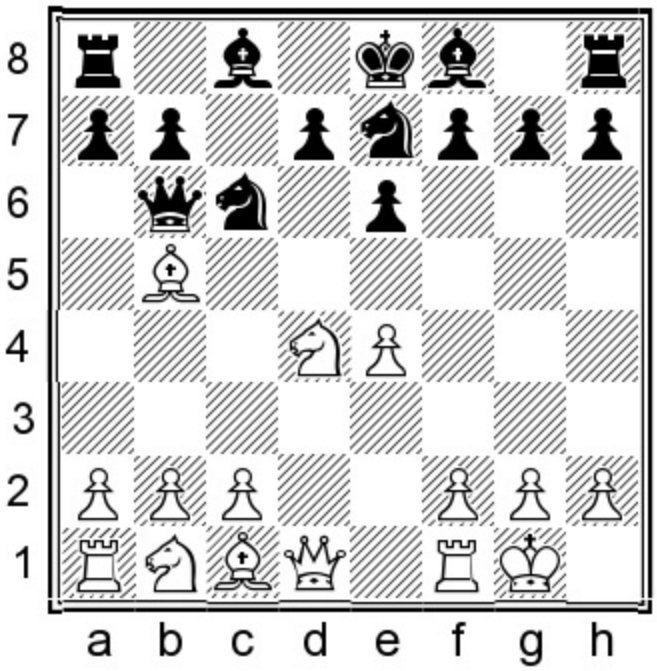
c) 7...dxc6 8.♗c4 ♘g6 9.♔h1! ♕c7!? with 12...--

d) 7...dxc6 8.♗c4 ♘g6 9.♔h1! ♕c7!? with 12...0-0

e) 7...dxc6 8.♗c4 ♘g6 9.♔h1! e5

a) 7...♕xb5?!

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4!? cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♕b6



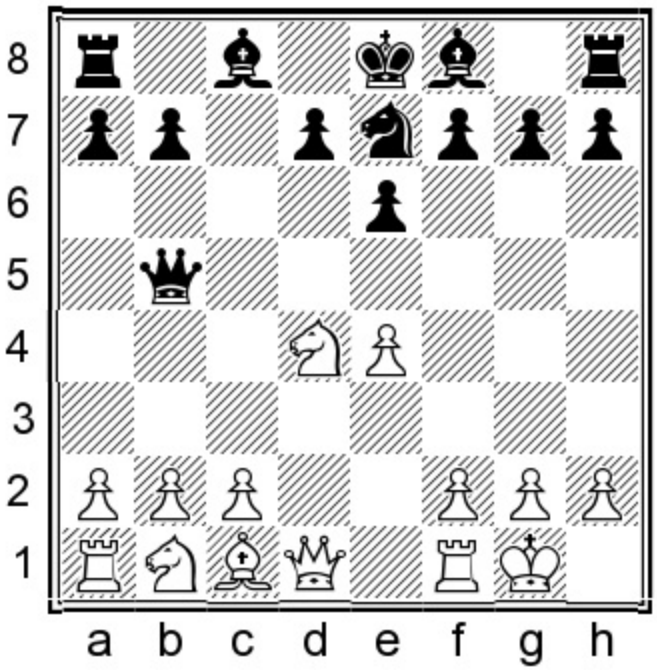
Position after: 6...♕b6

The main move. Now, after White captures on c6, Black has no fewer than four reasonable captures, of which I will cover all but 7...bxc6 here and defer that move for the next chapter.

7.♘xc6 ♕xb5?!

The reason this move is scarcely played is because when our knight retreats to d4, it will be a much bigger nuisance to Black than was the bishop on b5. The power of the d4-knight is often underestimated in Sicilians.

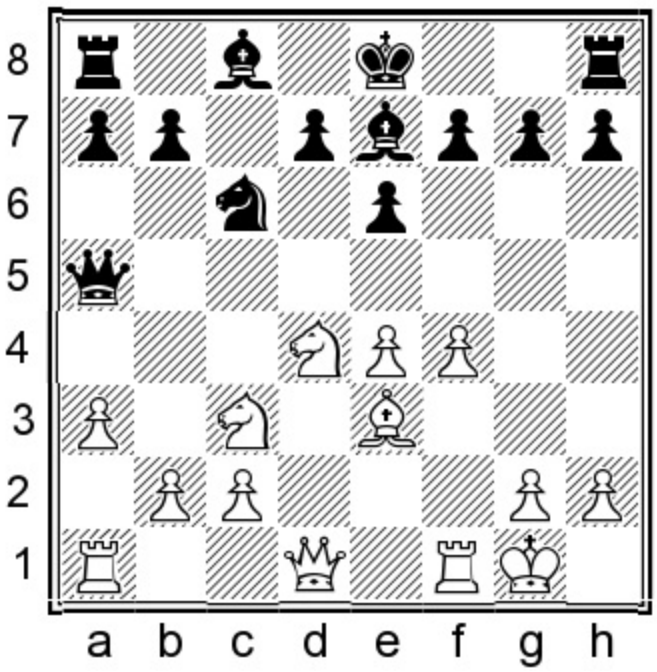
8.♘d4



Position after: 8.♘d4

8...♕b6

A) 8...♕e5 9.f4 ♕a5 10.♘c3 ♘c6 11.♗e3 ♗e7 [11...♗c5 12.♖f2! A clever way to threaten ♘b3. 12...♗xd4 13.♗xd4 0-0 14.♗e3±] 12.a3

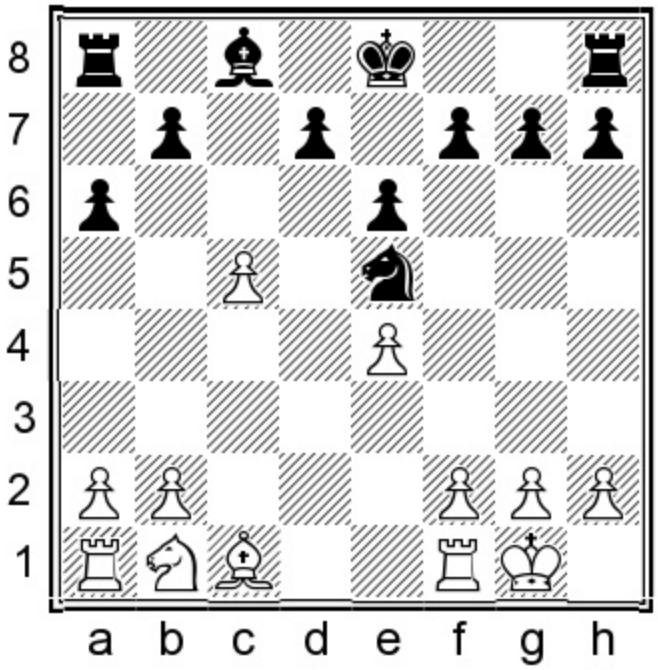


Position after: 12.a3

12...0-0 [12...a6 13.f5→ If Black castles kingside, f5-f6 is always on the cards.] 13.♘db5 a6 14.♘d6

♕c7 15.e5 f6 16.♘ce4 fxe5 17.f5!+– A clear example of the value of having two knights on the board!

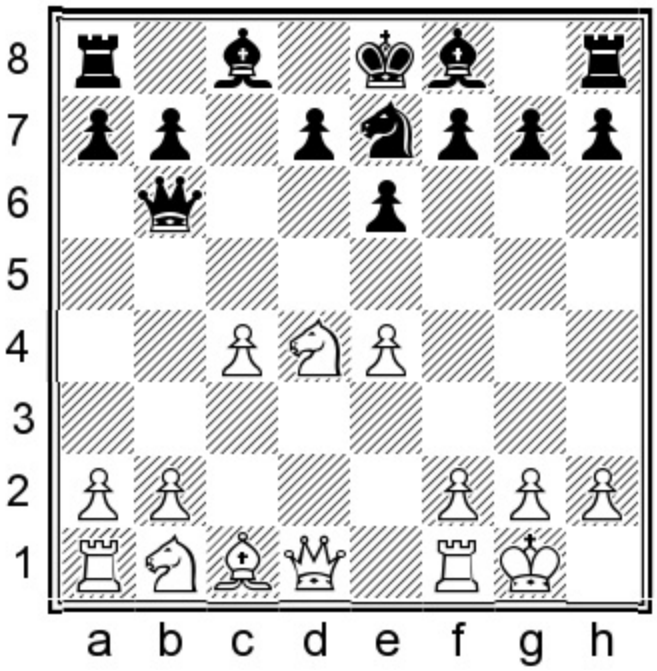
B) 8...♕a5 Similarly to 8...♕e5, ♘c3 is also perfectly good – but the Maroczy structure works just as well here. 9.c4 ♘c6 [9...a6 10.♘c3 ♘c6 11.♗f4! Black won't be able to avoid the trade of dark-squared bishops. 11...♗e7 12.♘xc6 dxc6 13.♗d6±] 10.♘b5 a6 11.♘d6+ ♗xd6 12.♕xd6 ♕e5 13.♕xe5 ♘xe5 14.c5!



Position after: 14.c5!

The ending is much better for White due to the comparable strength of our opposite-coloured bishop. Even if Black wins a pawn, our piece activity will prove to be decisive. 14...♘d3 15.♗e3 ♘xb2 16.♘d2+–

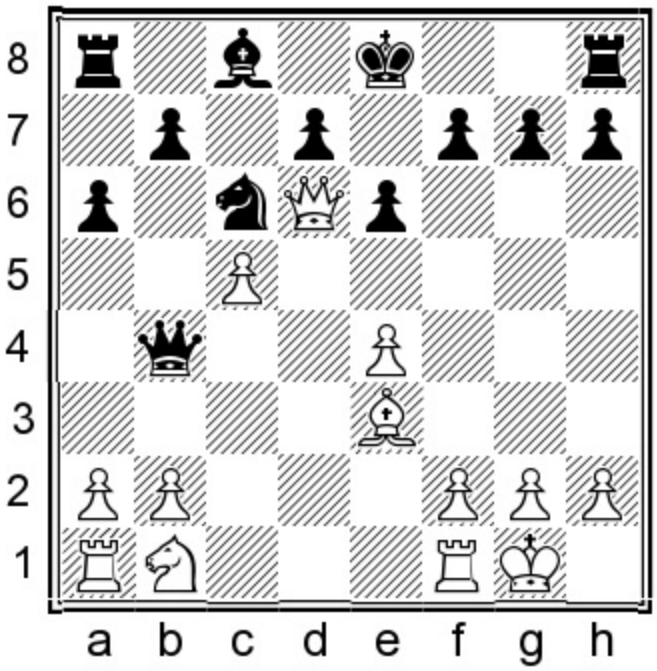
9.c4!



Position after: 9.c4!

9...♘g6

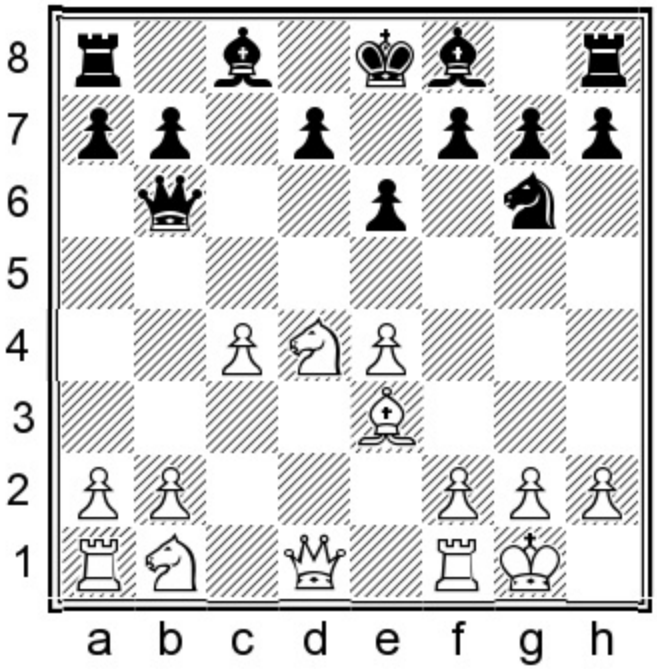
9...♘c6 10.♘b5 a6 11.♗e3 ♕a5 12.♘d6+ ♗xd6 13.♕xd6 ♕b4 14.c5!



Position after: 14.c5!

Analagous to what we've already discussed; Black can take all the pawns he'd like, but it can't compare to our piece activity. 14...♕xe4 15.♘d2 ♕e5 16.♘c4 ♕xd6 17.♘xd6+ ♔e7 18.♖ad1±

10.♗e3!?



Position after: 10.♗e3!?

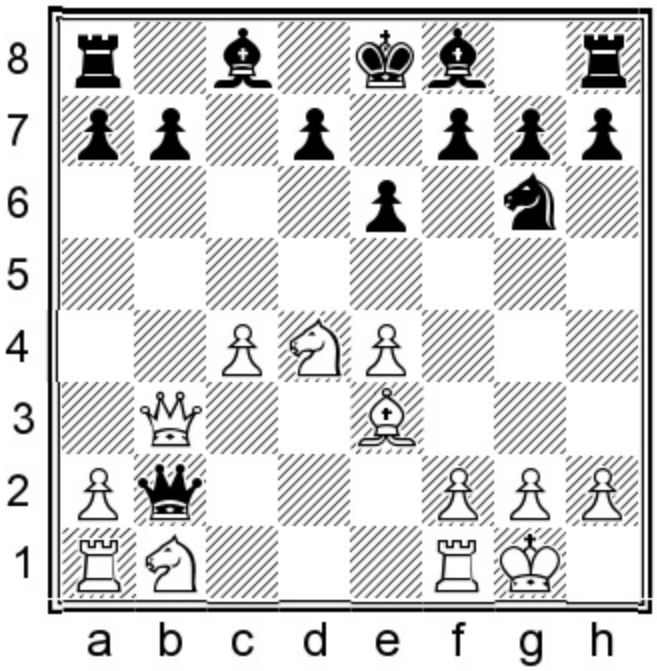
Not the only option; for instance, 10.♘c3 also looks strong.

10...♕xb2

A) 10...♕c7 11.♘b5 ♕b8 12.c5 ♗e7 13.♘d2 a6 14.♘d6+ ♗xd6 15.cxd6 ♕xd6 16.♘c4+–

B) 10...a6 11.♘c3 ♕c7 12.f4 ♗c5 13.♕h5 b6 14.♖ad1 ♗b7 15.♖f2→ We can continue attacking on whichever side of the board Black castles on.

11.♕b3!

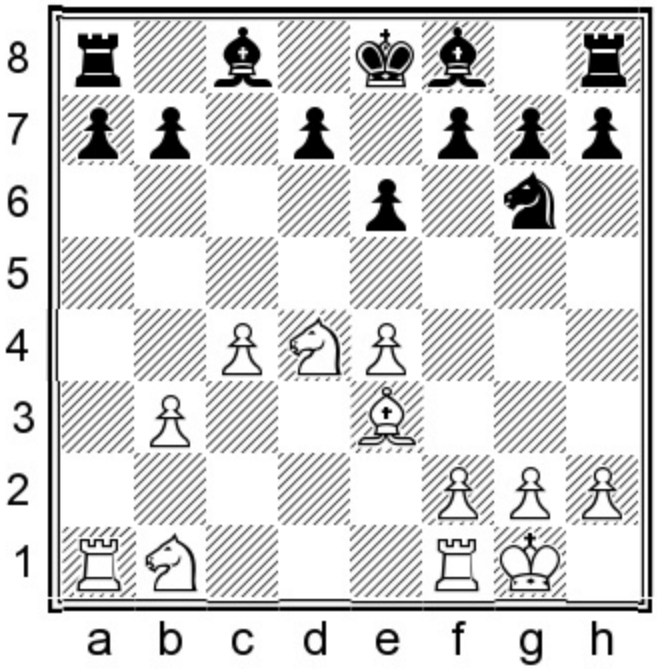


Position after: 11.♕b3!

11...♕xb3

11...♕xa1 12.♘c3 ♕xf1+ 13.♔xf1 Black's weaknesses will be even more easily exploited with this material balance. 13...♗d6 14.♘db5 ♗b8 15.♕a3+–

12.axb3

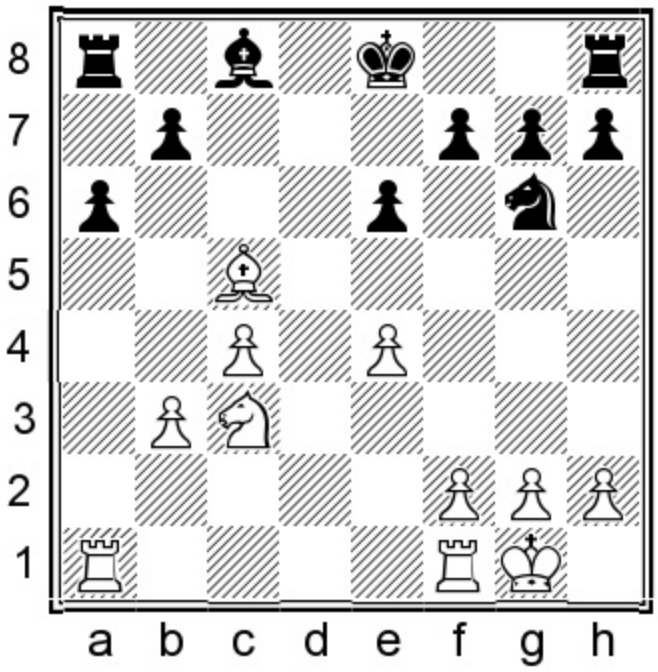


Position after: 12.axb3

12...♗c5

12...♗e7 13.♘b5 ♗f6 14.♖xa7 ♖xa7 15.♗xa7± The biggest problem for Black is that he'll have to lose a pawn if he ever wants to get his c8-bishop in the game.

13.♘xe6 dxe6 14.♗xc5 a6 15.♘c3±

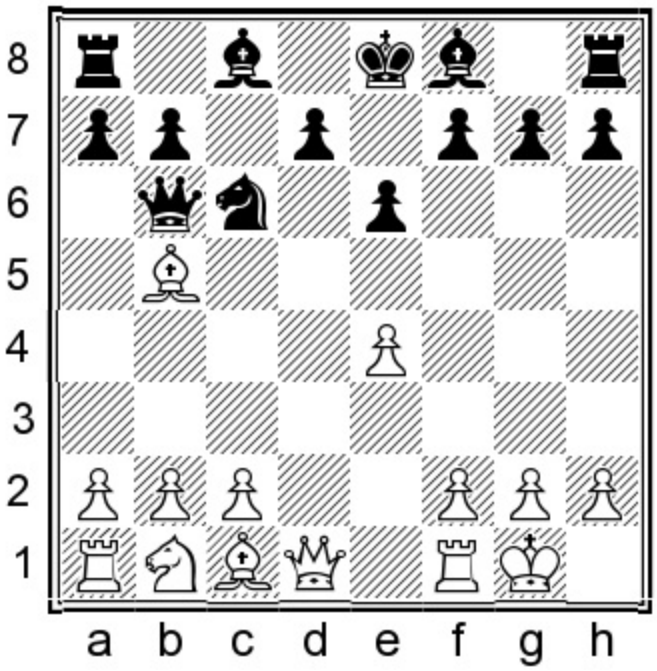


Position after: 15.♘c3±

The threat is simply ♘b5.

b) 7...♘xc6

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4!? cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♕b6 7.♘xc6 ♘xc6



Position after: 7...♘xc6

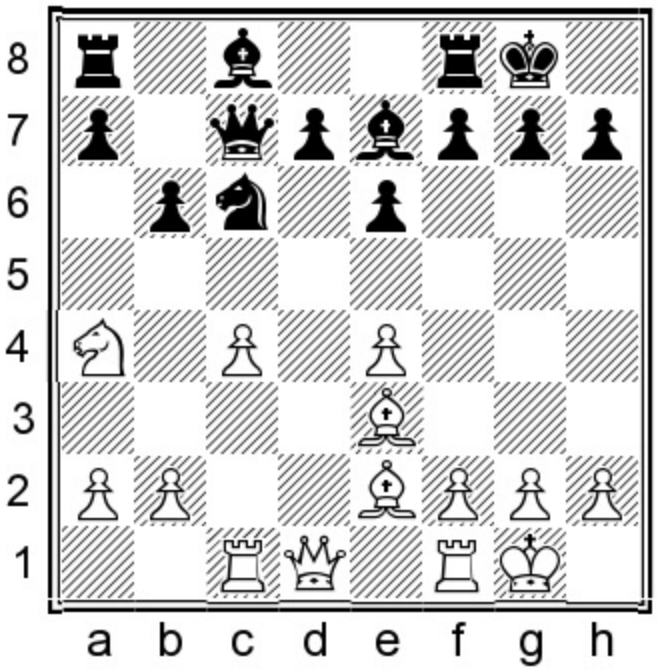
Compared to the lines that we saw after 6...♘g6, Black's queen is really misplaced on b6. Therefore, all of the following variations will simply be better versions of similar positions we've already encountered.

8.♗e2!

As previously mentioned, we'd rather have our bishop on e2 before proceeding with a Marcozy structure.

8...♗e7

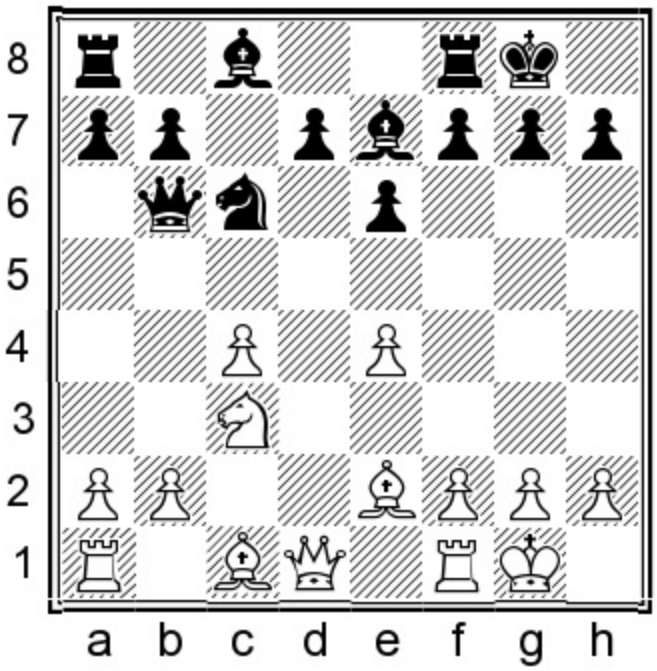
8...♗c5 9.♘c3! [I refrain from playing 9.c4 here, because it kind of justifies Black's set-up. 9...0-0 10.♘c3 d6 11.♘a4 ♕d8=] 9...♕c7 10.♘a4 ♗e7 11.c4 0-0 12.♗e3 b6 13.♖c1±



Position after: 13.♖c1±

We've reached a comparatively fantastic version of the positions encountered after 6...♘g6 (discussed in Chapter 8). White can continue with ♕d2 and ♖fd1, before choosing ideas such as a3-b4 or f2-f4.

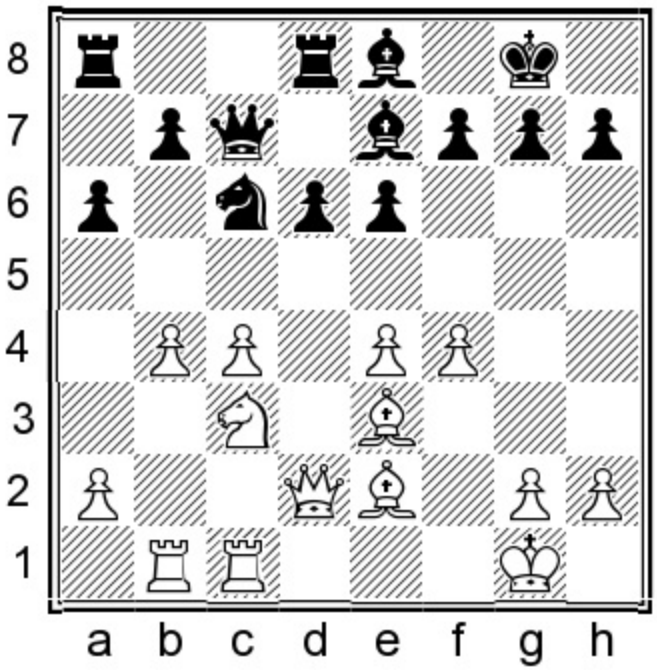
9.c4 0-0 10.♘c3



Position after: 10.♘c3

10...♗f6

A) 10...d6 11.♖b1! A clever way to prepare queenside expansion. 11...♗d7 12.♗e3 ♕c7 13.f4 a6 14.♕d2 ♖fd8 15.b4 ♗e8 16.♖fc1±



Position after: 16.♖fc1±

We can re-route our queen to g3 and continue to play on both sides of the board.

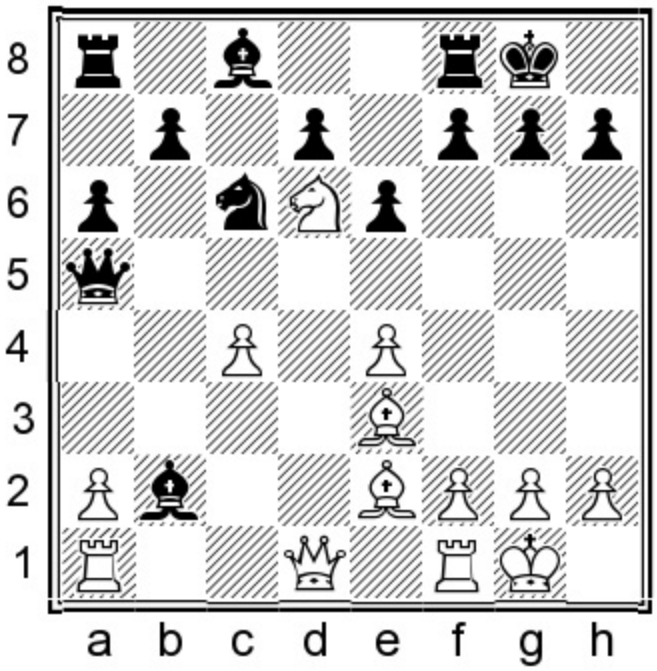
B) 10...a6 11.♖b1!±

11.♘b5!

Preparing ♗e3.

11...♘d4

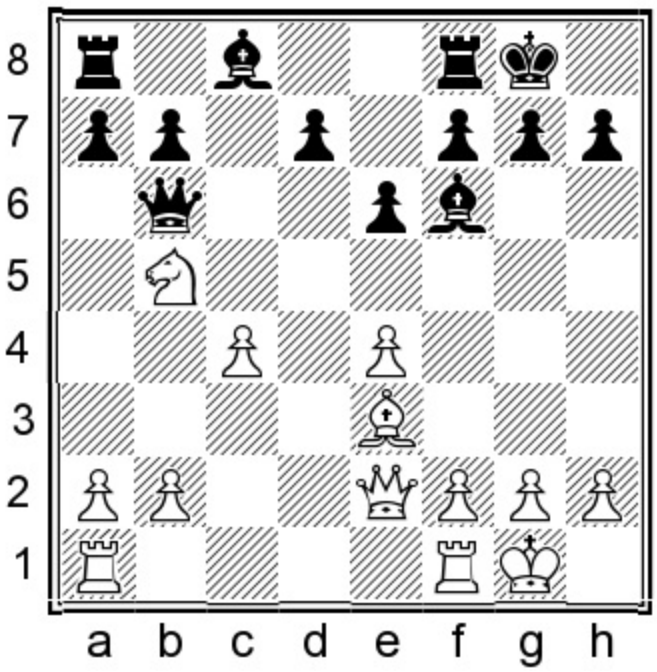
11...a6 12.♗e3 ♕a5 13.♘d6 ♗xb2



Position after: 13...♗xb2

14.c5!? A cool illustration of Black's deficient pieces. [14.♖b1 Is also great. 14...♗e5 15.a4 ♗xd6 16.♕xd6 ♕xa4 17.♖fc1±] 14...♗xa1 15.♕xa1 ♕c7 16.♖d1 f6 17.f4⩲ Invariably, Black's position looks increasingly difficult to play.

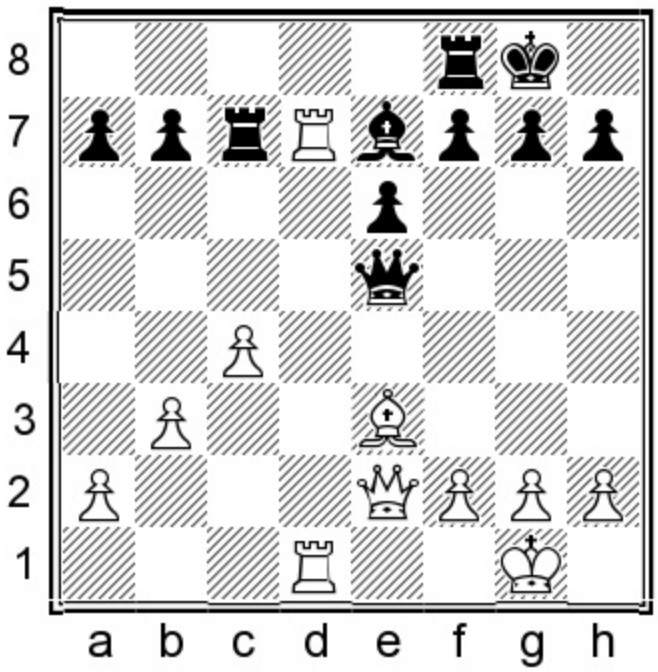
12.♗e3 ♘xe2+ 13.♕xe2



Position after: 13.♕xe2

Black has managed to trade off a set of minor pieces, but his lack of development will be telling.

13...♕c6 14.♖ad1! ♕xe4 15.♘d6 ♕e5 16.b3 ♗e7 17.♘xc8 ♖axc8 18.♖xd7 ♖c7 19.♖fd1±

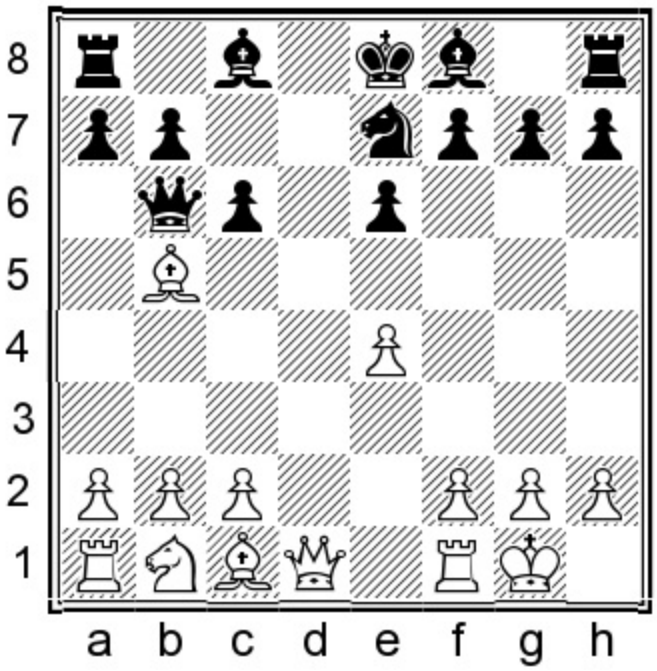


Position after: 19.♖fd1±

Black faces a depressing and, most likely, practically losing endgame.

c) 7...dxc6 8.♗c4 ♘g6 9.♔h1! ♕c7!? with 12...--

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4 cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♕b6 7.♘xc6 dxc6



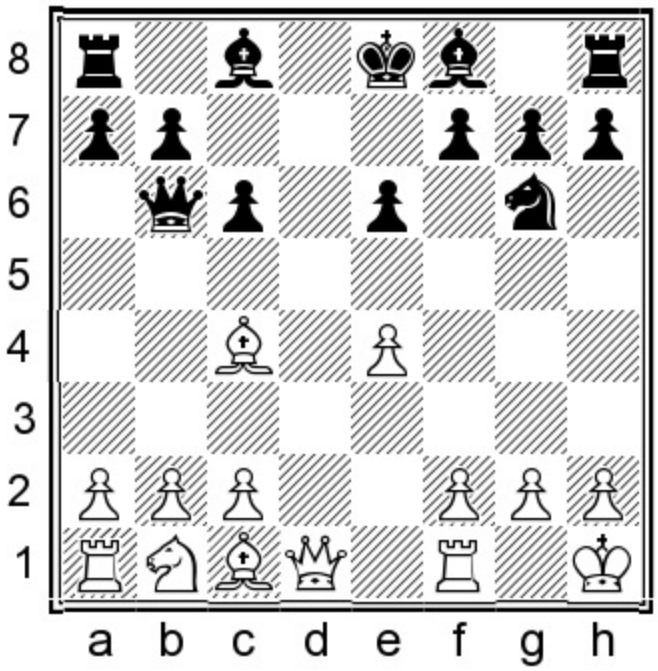
Position after: 7...dxc6

This move has proven to be less popular than its counterpart, 7...bxc6. The position kind of reminds of the Sicilian Kan line: 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.♗d3 ♘c6 6.♘xc6 dxc6. In that position, if White doesn't play accurately Black easily gets a comfortable version of the symmetrical position. Similarly here, if we're not careful Black can play moves such as ...♘g6, ...♕c7 and ...♗d6 and not face any problems. Therefore, we need to be really accurate and play very forcing ideas to achieve something in this almost-symmetrical position.

8.♗c4

This bishop retreat makes the most sense, as if Black plays ...e6-e5 the bishop is perfectly positioned to attack f7. In other scenarios, our underlying plan is to play ♔h1 and f2-f4 – as the variations will show. Again, the bishop acts perfectly in supporting potential f4-f5 ideas.

8...♘g6 9.♔h1!



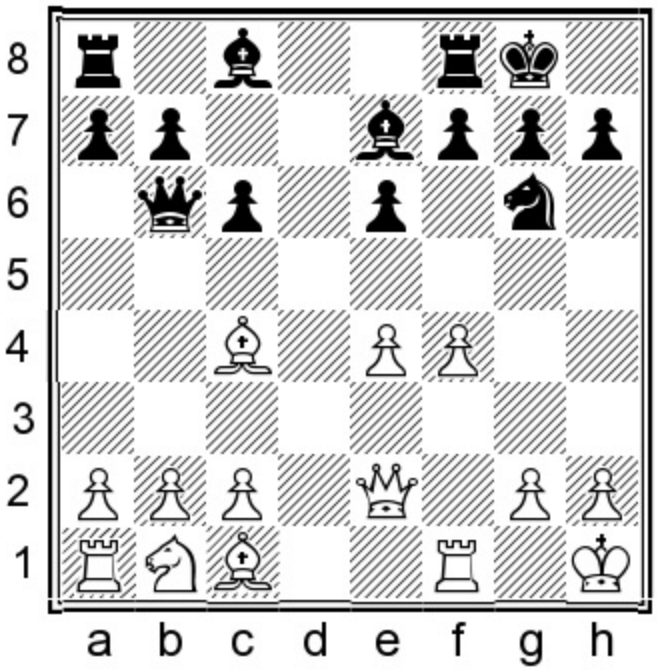
Position after: 9.♔h1!

Many options have been tried here, but the preparatory king move makes the most sense to me. We immediately threaten to play f4-f5, and give Black a choice about whether or not he should play ...e6-e5.

9...♕c7!?

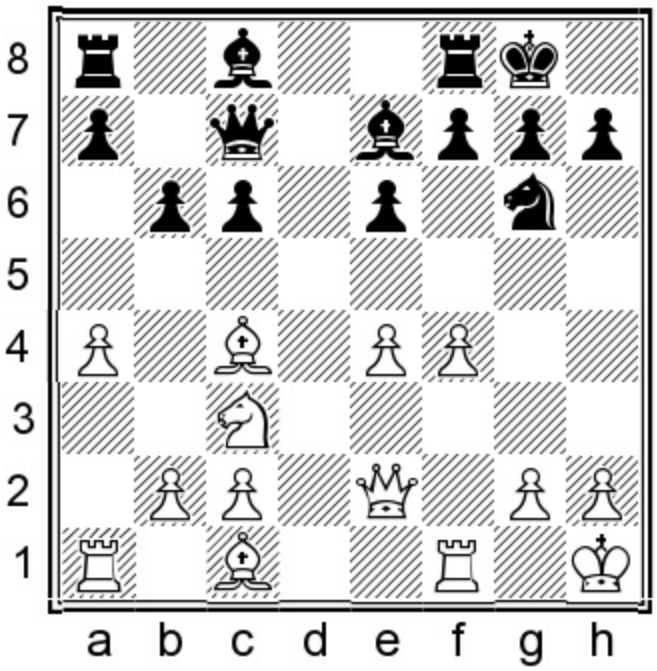
Black decides against playing ...e6-e5 whilst simultaneously delaying castling, choosing to develop his c8-bishop first.

9...♗e7 10.f4 0-0 11.♕e2 This natural developing move is best, as we haven't decided between e4-e5 or f4-f5 yet.



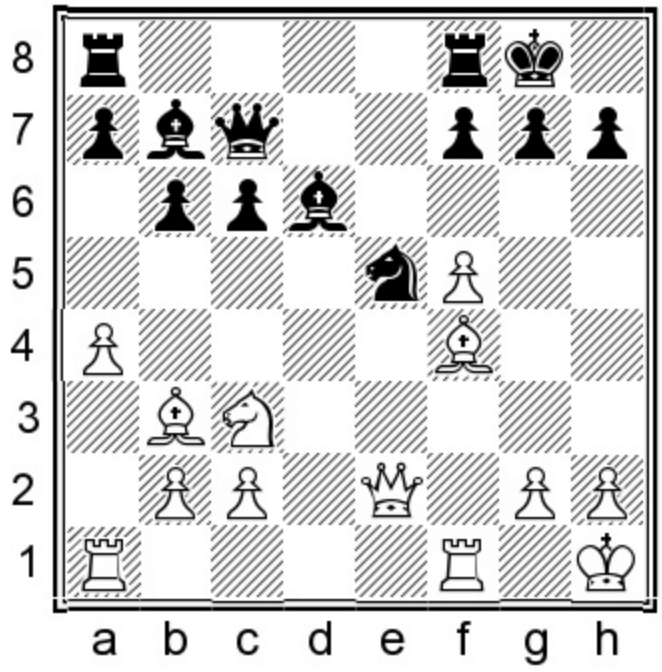
Position after: 11.♕e2

Ideally, we want to include all of our pieces before we embark on one of the pawn pushes. 11...♕c7 [11...e5 An attempt to control the dark-squares fails to work for tactical reasons, as Black's knight will be trapped. 12.f5 ♘f4 13.♕f3! h6 14.♗b3 ♕c7 15.h4!+– Followed by g2-g3.] 12.a4! [12.♘c3 allows Black the option of 12...b5! 13.♗d3 b4! 14.♘b1 c5 Black has a good game here.] 12...b6 13.♘c3



Position after: 13.♘c3

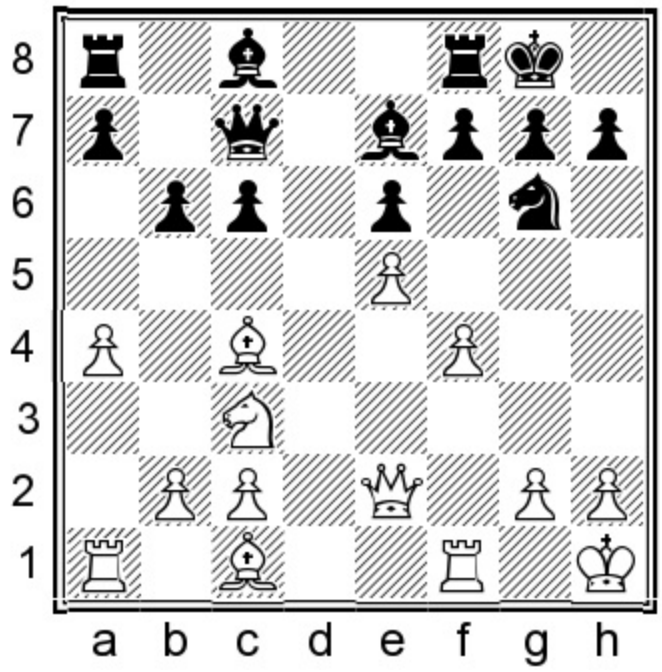
A) 13...♗b7 We have enough control on the position to proceed with 14.f5! exf5 15.exf5 ♘e5 16.♗f4 ♗d6 17.♗b3 Black is already lost. His knight is basically trapped, and we are also threatening to disrupt his kingside with f5-f6.



Position after: 17.♗b3

17...♖ae8 18.♖ad1 ♗c8 19.♘e4+–

B) 13...♗f6 In order to avoid the catastrophic consequences after 13...♗b7, Black decides to induce White to play e4-e5, so that f4-f5 isn't as effective. 14.e5 ♗e7

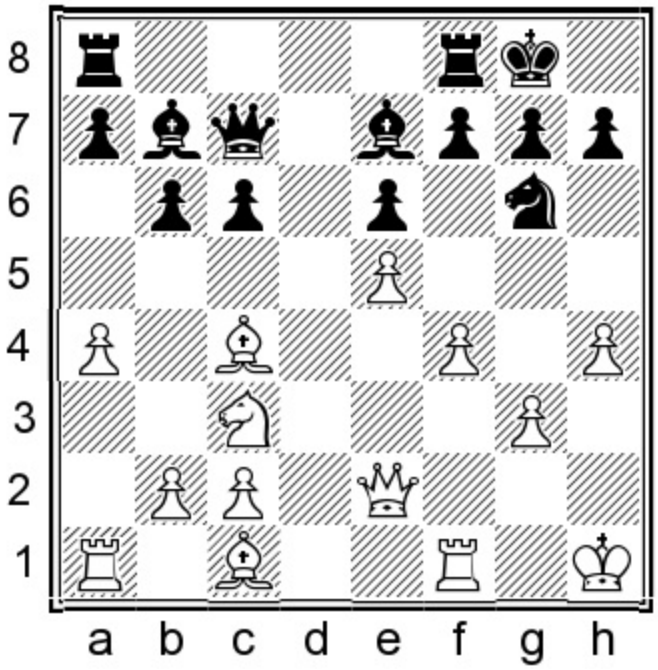


Position after: 14...♗e7

B1) Attacking in the same vein as some of the lines that we saw after 9...♕c7 where Black castled early isn't as effective here, because we've wasted a couple more moves compared to those positions, e.g. 15.♗d3 ♗b7 16.♖f3 ♖ad8 17.♖h3 c5 18.♕h5 h6 19.♗e3 ♖xd3! 20.cxd3 ♖d8⇄

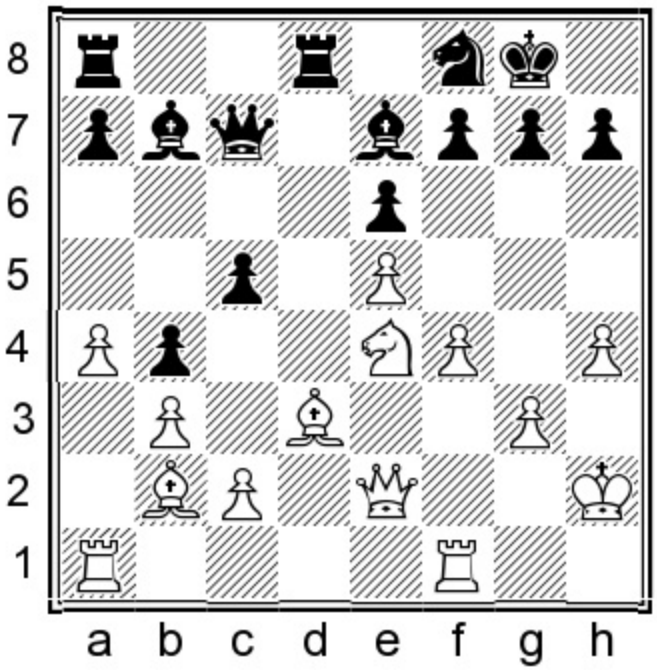
B2) 15.g3! Now that we've played e4-e5, this is the best strategy to employ. We'll immediately follow 15.g3 with 16.h4, and I really like this set-up. It's a very thematic way of using our kingside pawns to dominate Black's knight, and we always have the possibility to slowly build an attack against the Black king. Our king will never be weak as Black's attacking potential is very limited. The following variations will illustrate some really nice ways to play the position.

B2.1) 15...♗b7 16.h4!



Position after: 16.h4!

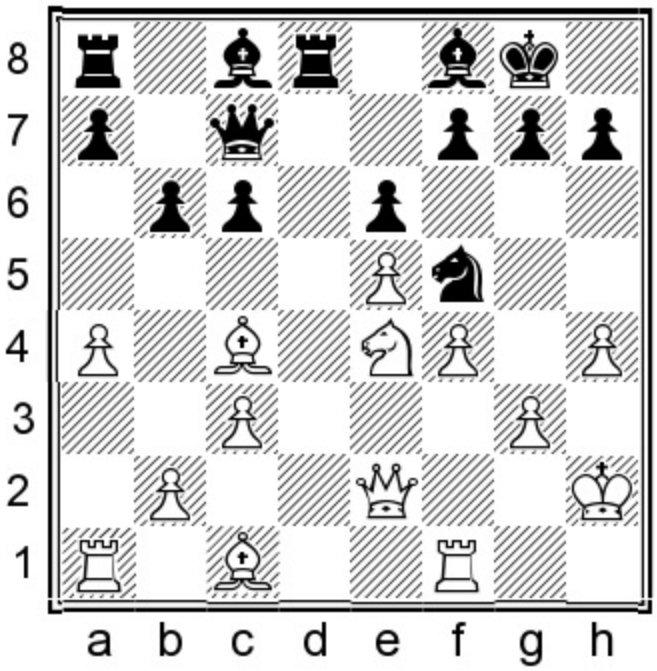
16...b5 [16...c5+ 17.♔h2 ♖fd8 18.h5 ♘f8 19.f5! exf5 20.♖xf5 ♘e6 21.♗e3+– Followed by ♖af1, and Black is defenceless.] 17.♗d3 c5+ 18.♔h2 b4 19.♘e4 ♖fd8 20.b3 ♘f8 21.♗b2±



Position after: 21.♗b2±

This position encapsulates what I like most about our kingside pawn set-up. It's so easy and logical to play, and extremely difficult for Black to defend his king. We have numerous attacking ideas at our disposal, and our play is very likely to be decisive.

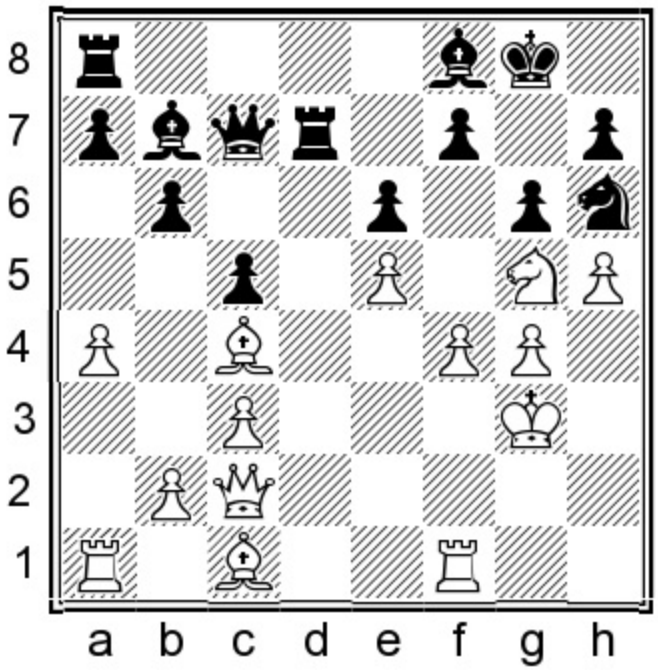
B2.2) 15...♖d8 16.h4! ♗f8 17.♔h2 ♘e7 18.♘e4 ♘f5 19.c3!



Position after: 19.c3!

Black has managed to maneouvre his knight to f5, but we continue to dominate it with our pawns.

The c2-square now becomes free to our queen for even more attacking potential. 19...c5 20.h5 ♗b7 21.♘g5 ♖d7 [21...h6 22.♘xe6+–] 22.g4 ♘h6 23.♕c2! g6 24.♔g3!

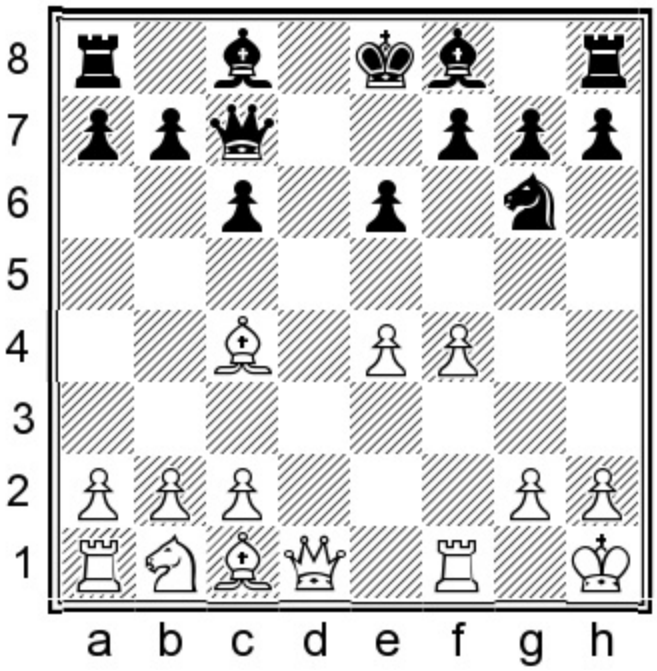


Position after: 24.♔g3!

Our king is a fundamentally adequate defender of the g-pawn, and the h-file is now free to be utilised by our rooks. 24...♖ad8 25.hxg6 hxg6 26.♗e3 ♗g7 27.♖f2+– Followed by ♖h2. Our attack looks like it'll be decisive.

9...e5 is covered in the last subchapter.

10.f4



Position after: 10.f4

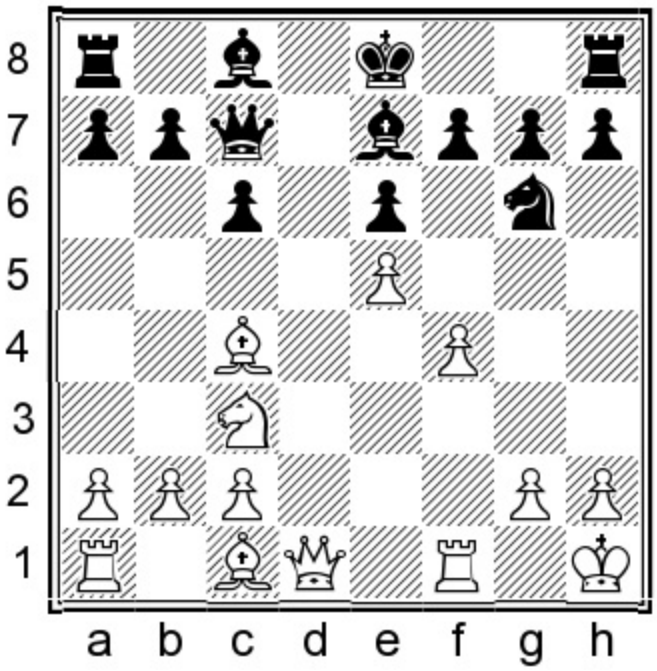
10...♗d6

10...♗e7 11.a4 0-0 [11...b6 12.♘c3 ♗b7 13.f5!+– This demonstrates why Black is so keen to induce the move e4-e5.] 12.♘c3 b6 13.♕h5 ♖d8 14.♗e3 ♗d6 15.e5± White's kingside attack was in full progress in Petrov – Loiseau, Zadar 2018.

11.e5!

11.f5 ♘e5 justifies Black's set-up.

11...♗e7 12.♘c3



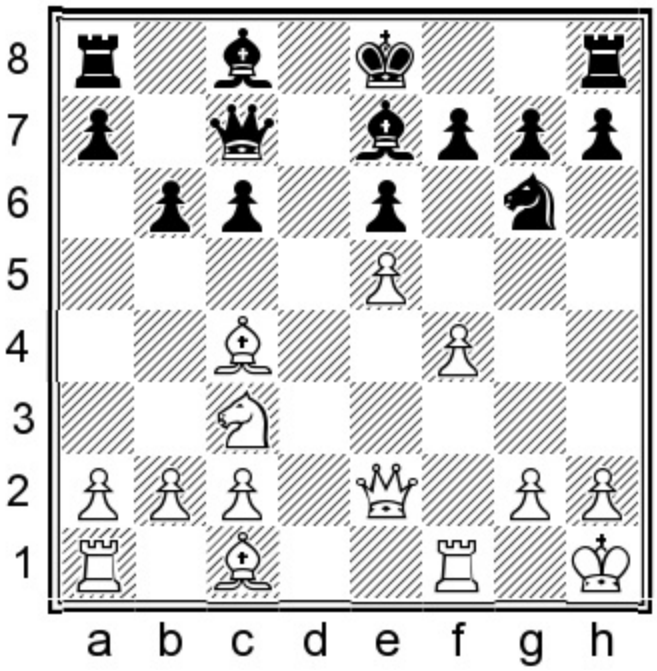
Position after: 12.♘c3

12...b5

Played in a correspondence game, but I don't really like this move. It creates a queenside target which White is able to effectively exploit, so it appears that 12...b6 is perhaps a safer choice for Black. The White bishop is going to d3 anyway, and this just gives us another target to try and exploit on the queenside.

A) 12...b6!?

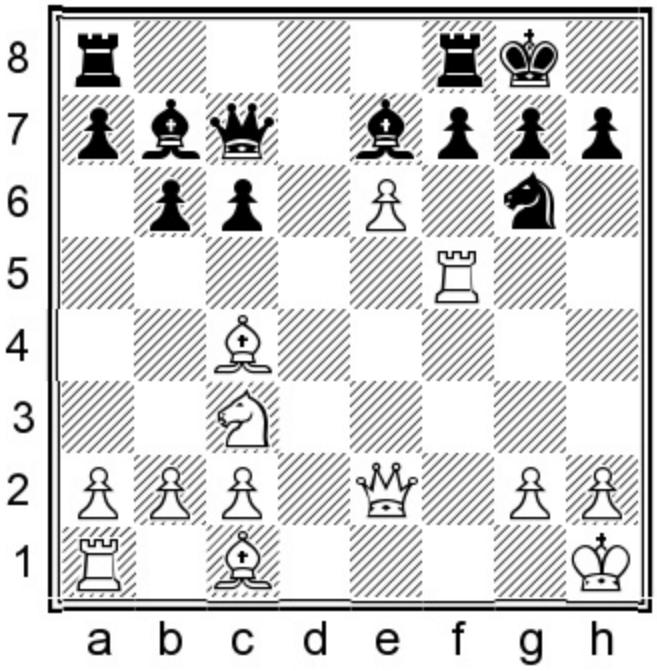
A1) 13.♕e2



Position after: 13.♕e2

Black now gets an improved version of a very similar position after 9...♗e7.

A1.1) 13...♗b7?! 14.f5! exf5 15.♖xf5 0-0 16.e6



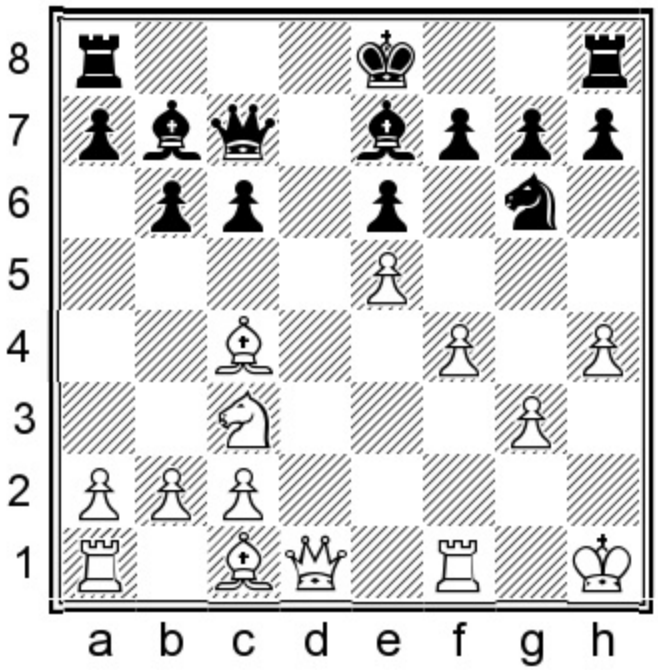
Position after: 16.e6

16...f6 [16...fxe6 17.♕xe6+ ♔h8 18.♖h5+– White has a winning attack here.] 17.♗e3± The position is still very complex, but for now White's e6-pawn remains a strength rather than a weakness.

A1.2) 13...0-0?! 14.♖f3→

A1.3) 13...♘h4! A really important move. Black has time to reposition the knight before it gets dominated by our pawns. 14.♗e3 ♗b7 15.♗f2 ♘f5 Black still has the option of castling queenside, and I think it's safe to say that the knight stands significantly better on f5 than it did on g6.

A2) 13.g3! Having spent a long time analysing this position, I finally realised that it's best to start with 13.g3 in order to prevent Black's knight from relocating to f5. 13...♗b7 14.h4! Continuing to avoid opposite-side castling positions.

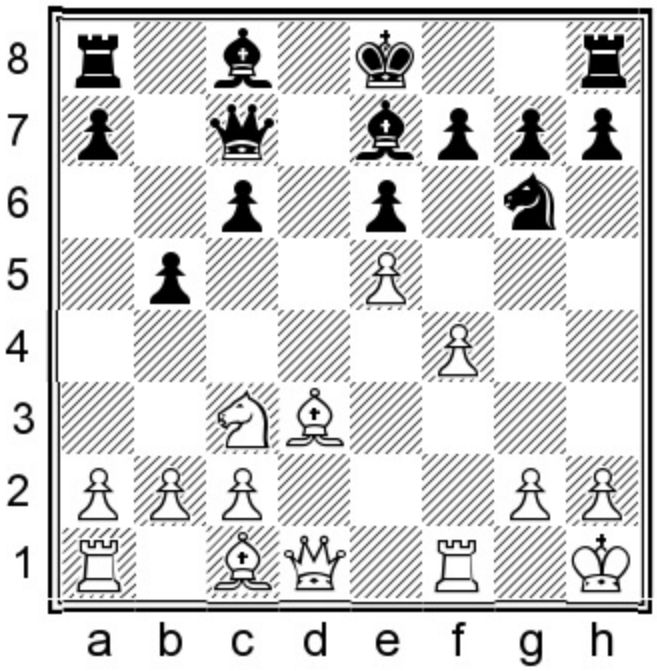


Position after: 14.h4!

14...♖d8 [14...0-0 15.♔h2±] 15.♕e2 ♘f8 16.♘e4 ♘d7 17.♔h2± Black has re-routed his knight, but White's position seems very pleasant to me. The whole concept of an early 13.g3 can be explored further by the reader, but I'm pretty confident that it's the right approach in this position.

B) 12...0-0 I will consider this separately due to featuring in a Caruana game.

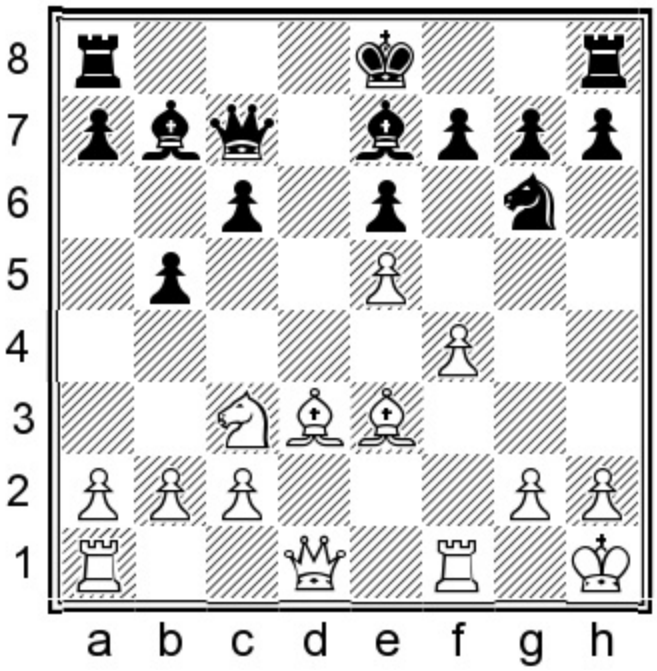
13.♗d3



Position after: 13.♗d3

13...a6

13...♗b7 14.♗e3

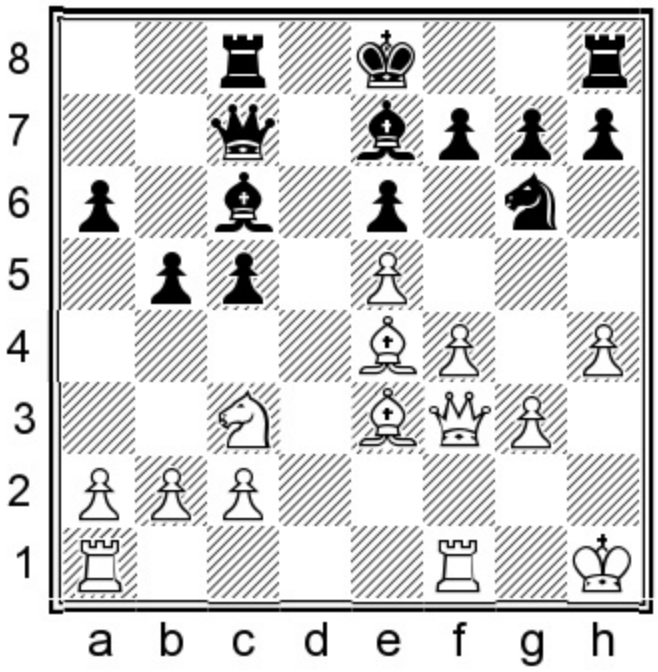


Position after: 14.♗e3

A) Of course, 14...0-0 is met with the usual 15.♕h5→

B) 14...a6 15.♗e4 c5 [15...0-0 16.♕f3±; 15...♖d8 16.♕e2 0-0 17.g3± The g3-pawn might hinder our

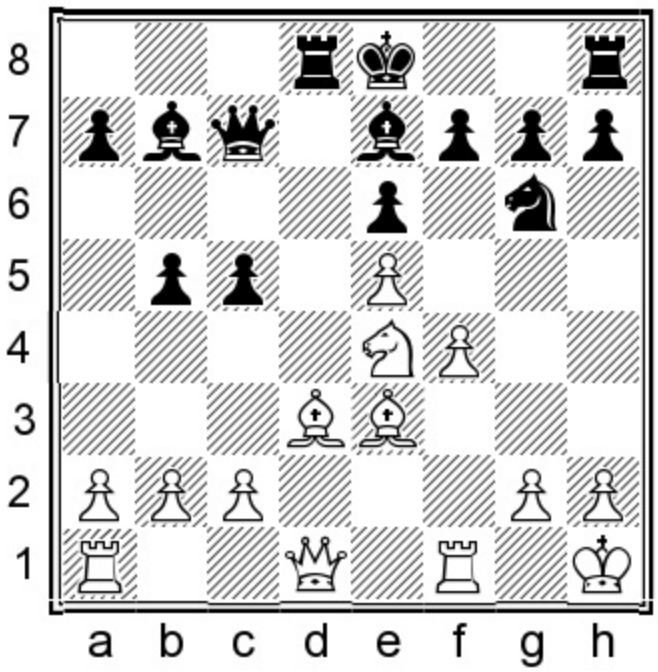
♖f3-h3 plan, but it gives rise to the possibility of h4-h5.] 16.g3! ♗c6 17.♕f3 ♖c8 18.h4→



Position after: 18.h4→

We'll encounter this idea more and more in future variations. Black is dicouraged from castling because of the prospect of h5-h6, and his knight seems to be running out of squares.

C) 14...♖d8!? Black is trying to play ...c6-c5 without wasting time on ...a7-a6. 15.♘e4 c5

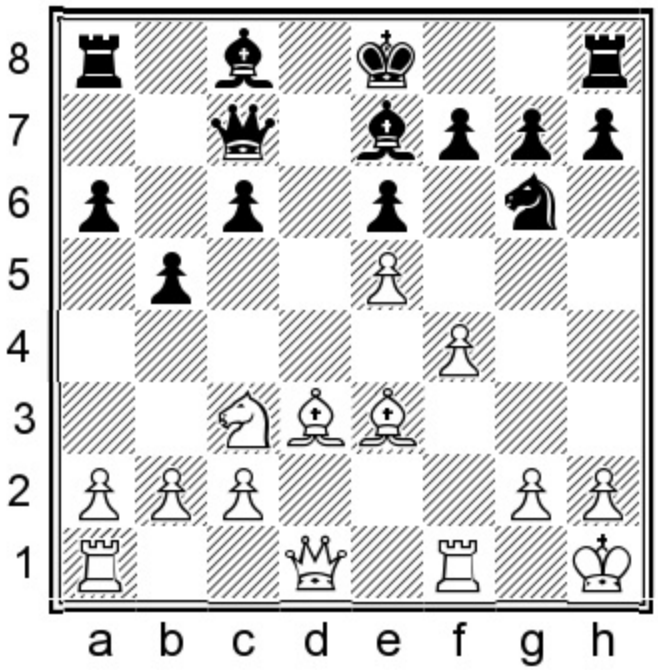


Position after: 15...c5

16.♘d6+! An important intermediate move. [16.♗xb5+ ♔f8 17.♕f3 ♘h4–+] 16...♗xd6 17.♗xb5+

♗c6 [17...♔f8 18.exd6 ♖xd6 19.♕e1±] 18.♗xc6+ ♕xc6 19.exd6 ♘h4 20.♕d2 ♘f5 21.♗f2± Black's queenside pawns will be difficult to defend.

14.♗e3



Position after: 14.♗e3

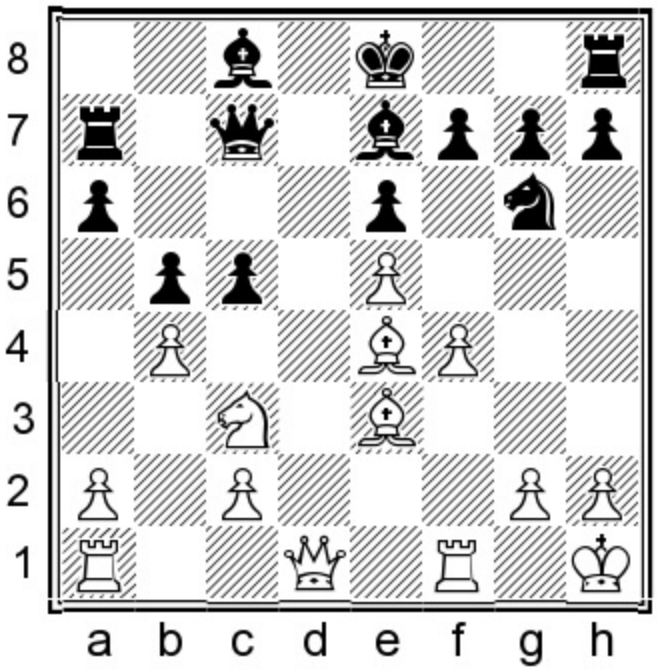
14...c5!?

14...♗b7 transposes to 13...♗b7.

15.♗e4! ♖a7

15...♗b7 transposes to 13...♗b7.

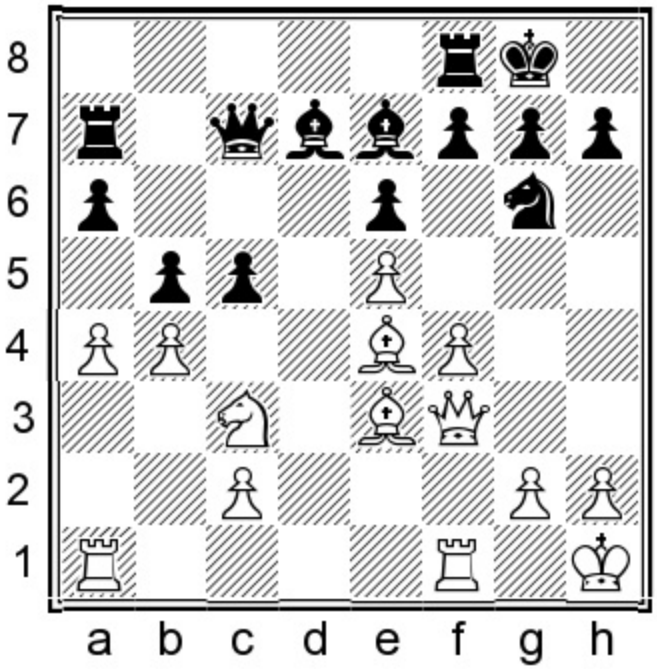
16.b4!



Position after: 16.b4!

Suddenly Black faces a difficult task of trying to remove his rook from the pin.

16...0-0 17.♕f3 ♗d7 18.a4!



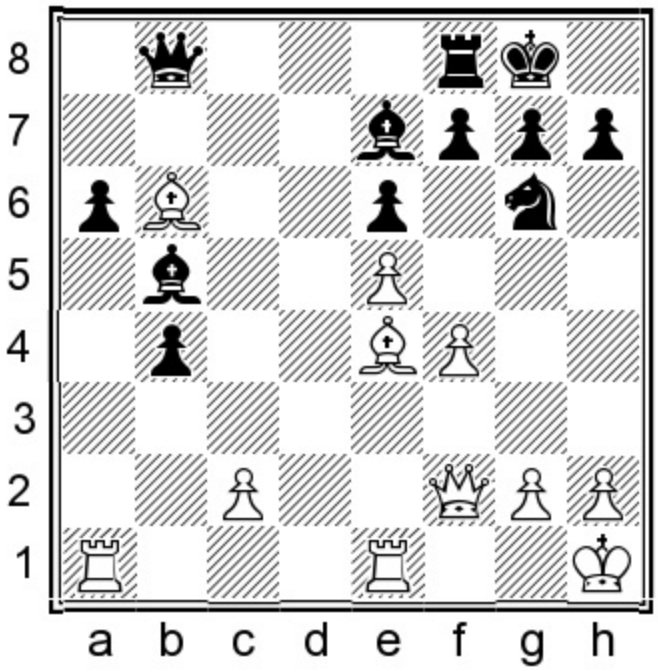
Position after: 18.a4!

This variation best illustrates how we can attain effective queenside action against Black's b5-pawn.

18...cxb4

Gaining two pieces for a rook looks extremely dangerous for Black due to our resulting passed a-pawn.

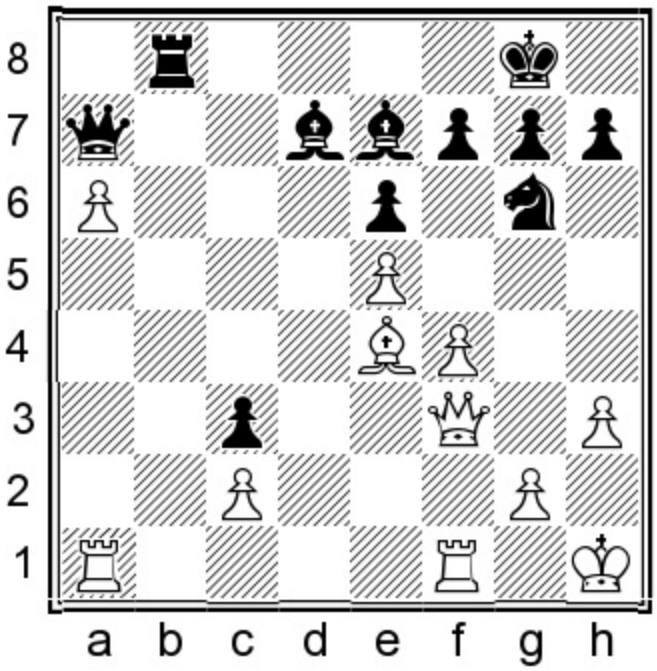
18...bxa4 19.♘xa4 cxb4 Black was forced to sacrifice the exchange, but we would prefer to capture it without losing our dark-squared bishop. 20.♕f2! ♗xa4 21.♗xa7 ♗b5 22.♗b6 ♕b8 23.♖fe1±



Position after: 23.♖fe1±

White has the advantage, and if Black captures another pawn we can force the exchange of dark-squared bishops.

19.♗xa7 ♕xa7 20.axb5 bxc3 21.bxa6 ♖b8 22.h3!

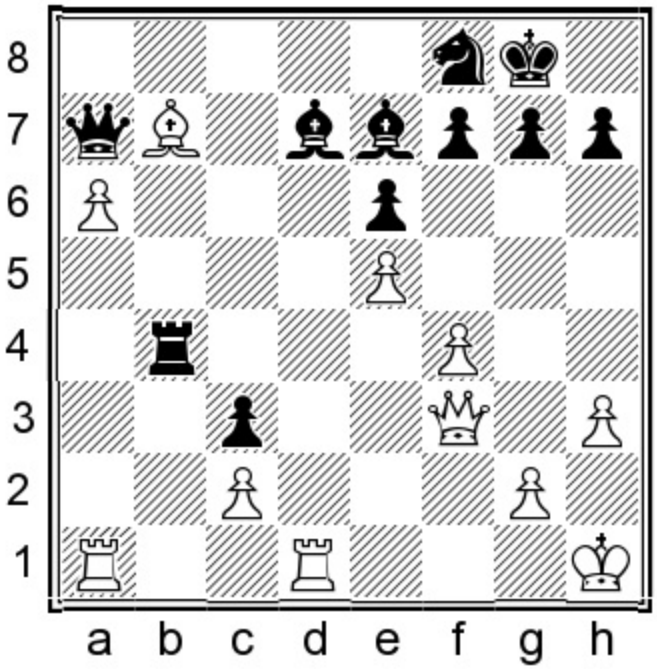


Position after: 22.h3!

The position doesn't require immediate action and we can improve our king.

22...♗c5

22...♖b4 23.♖fd1 ♘f8 24.♗b7



Position after: 24.♗b7

Now the plan is to use our d1-rook to capture the c3-pawn. 24...♖c4 25.♖db1! h6 26.♗e4 ♗b4

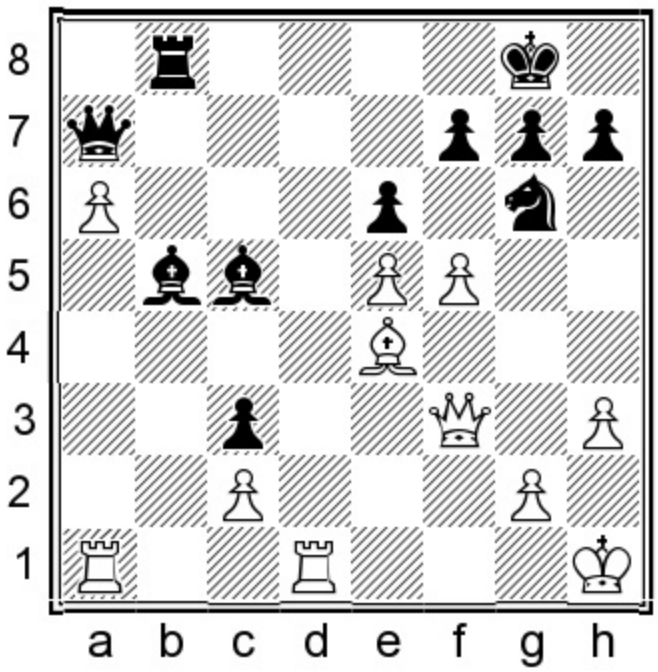
27.♖b3+– Followed by ♖ab1 and ♖b7.

23.♖fd1 ♗b5

23...♗e8 24.♕xc3 ♘xf4 25.♖db1+– is also hopeless for Black.

24.f5!

Now that Black has put all of his pieces on the queenside, we can switch back to attacking the king.



Position after: 24.f5!

24...♘f8

A) 24...exf5 25.♕xf5 ♘f8 26.e6! fxe6 27.♕e5↑ It's difficult to find a move for Black.

B) 24...♘xe5 25.♕xc3 ♘c4 26.fxe6 fxe6 27.♕g3 ♘e3 28.♖db1±

25.f6↑

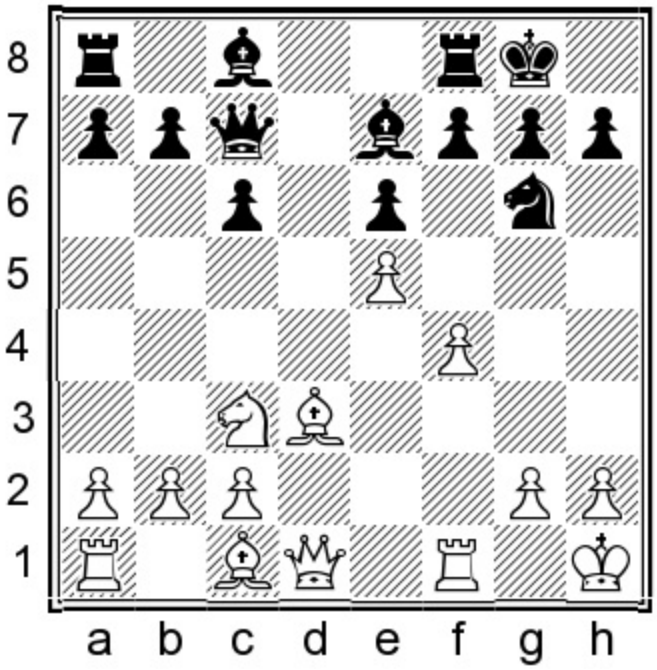
Black will ultimately struggle to control both sides of the board.

d) 7...dxc6 8.♗c4 ♘g6 9.♔h1! ♕c7!? with 12...0-0

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4 cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♕b6 7.♘xc6 dxc6 8.♗c4 ♘g6 9.♔h1! ♕c7!? 10.f4 ♗d6 11.e5! ♗e7 12.♘c3 0-0

This seems suspect but quite critical.

13.♗d3!



Position after: 13.♗d3!

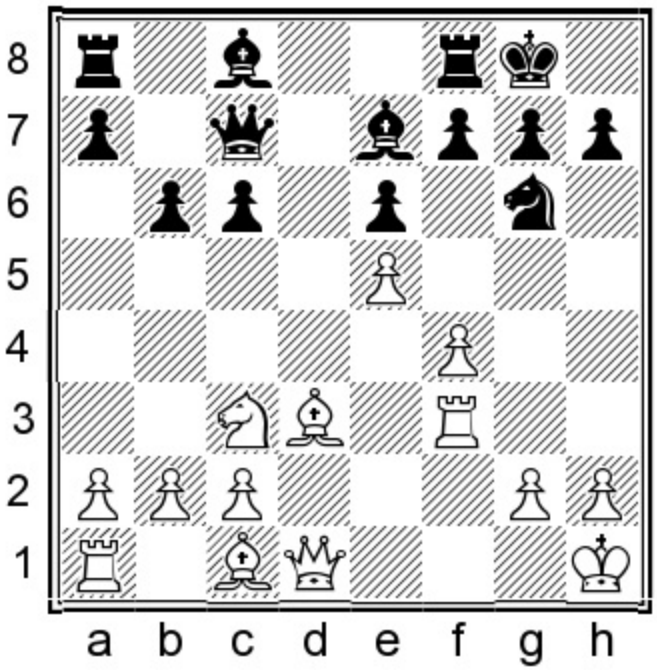
Suddenly our plan of ♖f3, ♖h3 and ♕h5 becomes dangerous.

13...c5!

The direct attempt to remove our d3-bishop.

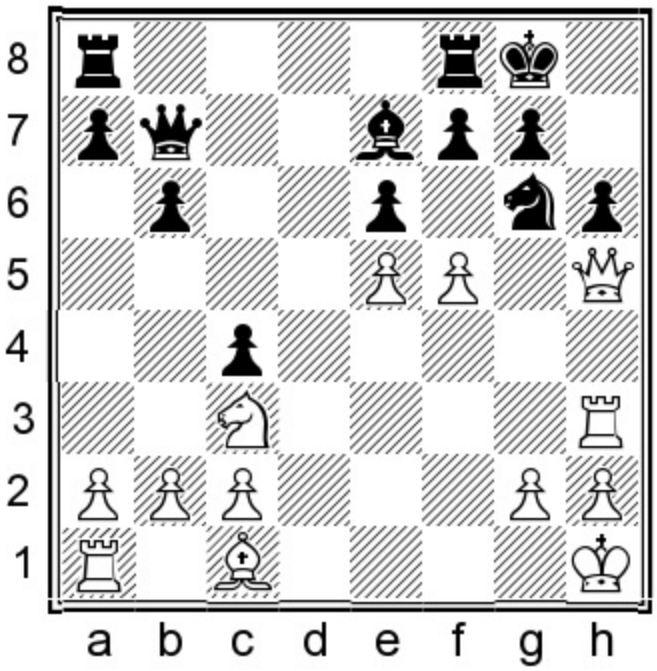
A) 13...b5 14.♖f3 b4 15.♘e4 c5 16.♖h3 c4 17.♕h5 h6 18.♘f6+! Black's counterplay was evidently too slow. 18...♗xf6 19.exf6 cxd3 20.fxg7+–

B) 13...b6?! This position was reached in Caruana – Lenic, Tbilisi 2017. Caruana continued with 14.a4, but I see no reason to reject the direct 14.♖f3!



Position after: 14.♖f3!

14...c5 [14...♗b7 15.♖h3 h6 16.♕g4±] 15.♖h3 c4 16.♕h5 h6 17.♗e4! [17.♗xg6 fails to consider our back-rank weakness. 17...fxg6 18.♕xg6 ♕xe5!∞] 17...♗b7 [After 17...♖b8 18.♗e3 ♗c5 19.♗xc5 bxc5 20.♖g3± White has solved his back-rank problems. At the very least, we'll win a pawn after capturing on g6.] 18.♗xb7 ♕xb7 19.f5!

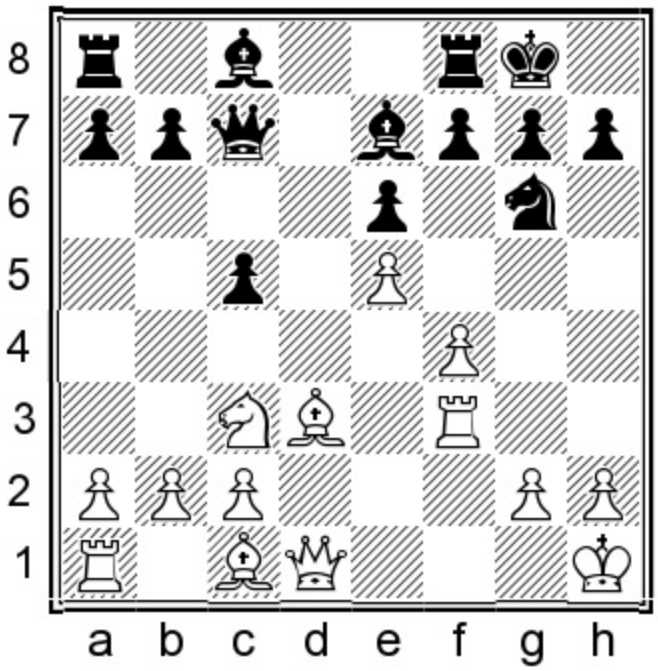


Position after: 19.f5!

Opening lines for a new piece to join the attack. 19...exf5 20.♗xh6 gxh6 21.♕xh6 ♗h4 [21...♖fd8

22.♖h5!+– Black doesn't have a good answer to the simple ♕h7+ and ♖xh5.] 22.♖xh4 ♘xh4 23.♕xh4 ♖ae8 24.♖f1 f6 25.exf6 ♕h7 26.♕g3+ ♔h8 27.♘d5+– Next ♔g1 followed by a rook lift will be decisive.

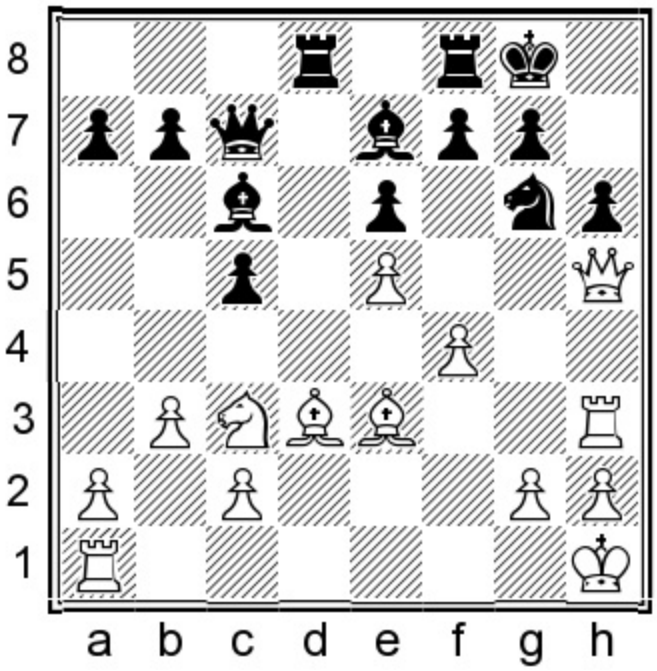
14.♖f3



Position after: 14.♖f3

14...c4

A) 14...♗d7 15.b3! ♗c6 16.♖h3 ♖ad8 17.♕h5 h6 18.♗e3→

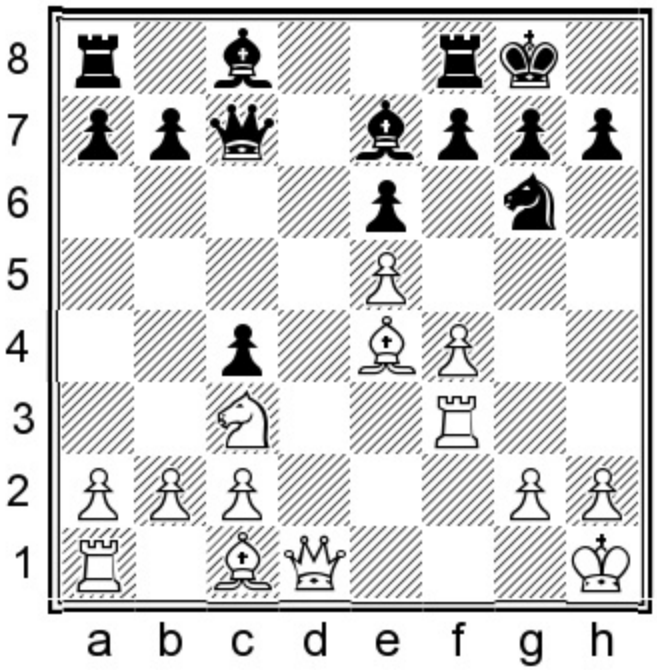


Position after: 18.♗e3→

Followed by ♘e4 and ♘f6+. It is very likely that Black will have to sacrifice an exchange on d3, although the resulting positions will clearly be favourable for us.

B) 14...♖d8 15.♖h3 h6 [15...c4 16.♕h5 cxd3 This leads to mate. 17.♕xh7+ ♔f8 18.♕h8+ ♘xh8 19.♖xh8#] 16.♕g4→ Black's kingside feels like it will soon collapse.

15.♗e4

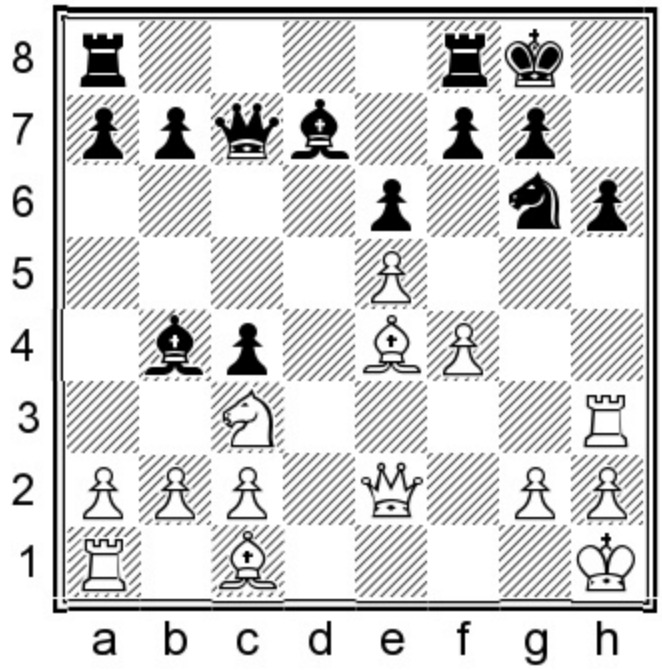


Position after: 15.♗e4

15...♗d7

15...♖d8 16.♕e2→ The c4-pawn is a weakness, and White can continue in similar vein with ♖h3, ♗e3 and ♕h5.

16.♕e2 ♗b4 17.♖h3 h6

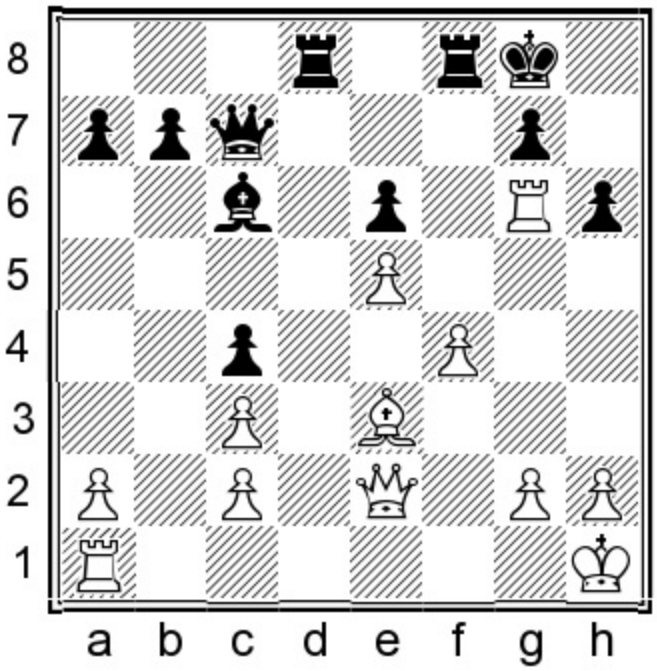


Position after: 17...h6

Now that we've created a weakness on g6, the rook can switch back to g3.

18.♖g3! ♖ad8 19.♗e3 ♗xc3 20.bxc3 ♗c6 21.♗xg6 fxg6 22.♖xg6±

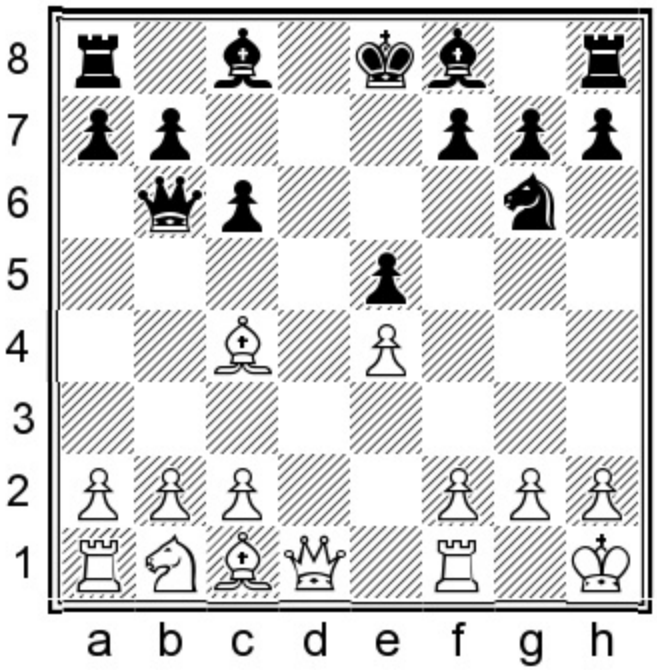
The presence of opposite coloured bishops doesn't reduce our winning chances.



Position after: 22.♖xg6±

e) 7...dxc6 8.♗c4 ♘g6 9.♔h1! e5

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4 cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♕b6 7.♘xc6 dxc6 8.♗c4 ♘g6 9.♔h1! e5



Position after: 9...e5

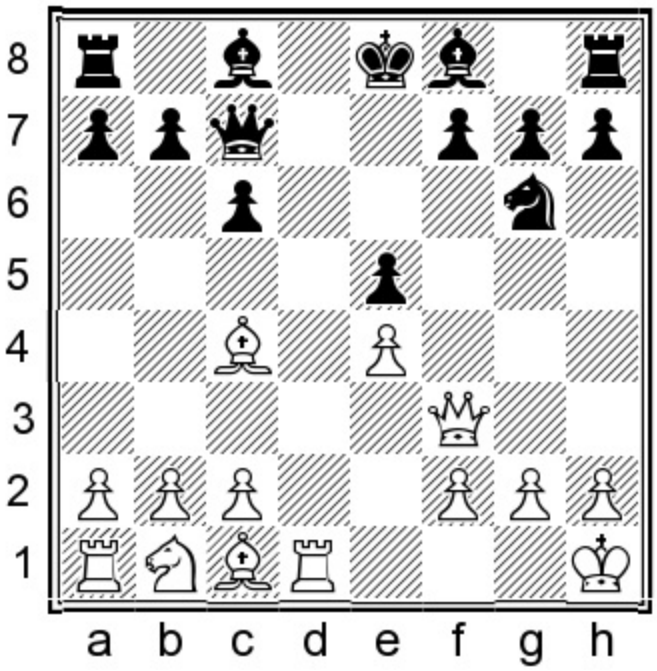
Black directly prevents f2-f4, but opens up new lines of attack for us. It's important to note that if we make slow moves, Black will achieve easy equality through quick development. Therefore we want

to keep creating threats, in order to make life difficult for Black.

10.♕f3 ♕c7

10...♗e6 11.♗xe6 fxe6 12.♕g4+– White was already winning in Tiba – Oros, Mukachevo 2019.

11.♖d1!

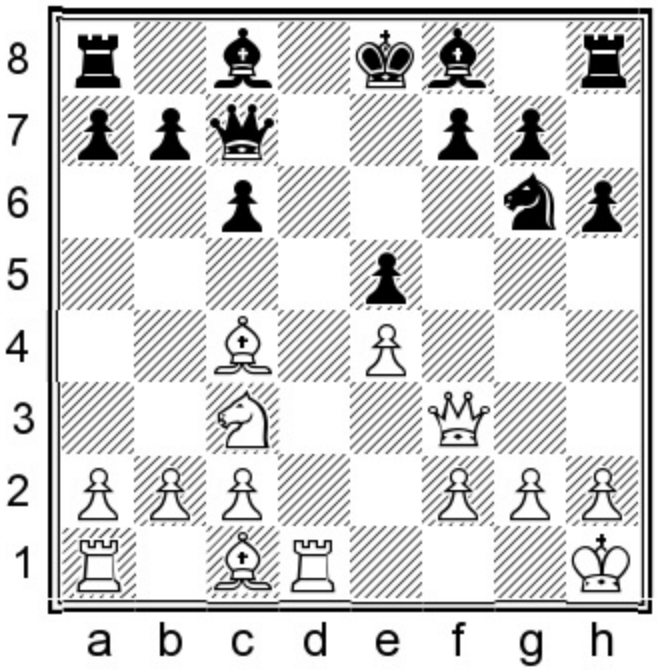


Position after: 11.♖d1!

11...♘f4

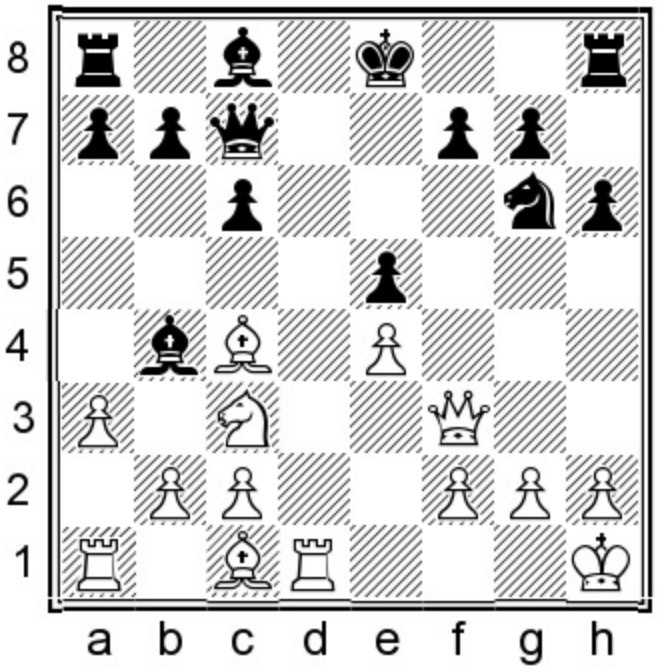
A) 11...♗c5 I'll use this move to demonstrate what our threat is. 12.♗xf7+! ♕xf7 13.♖d8+ ♔e7 14.♗g5++–

B) 11...h6 Now White is no longer able to take on f7, as we don't have the follow up of ♗g5+. Nevertheless, 11...h6 weakens the g6-square, and our advantage is once again close to decisive. 12.♘c3



Position after: 12.♘c3

12...♗b4 [12...♗c5 13.♘a4 ♗b6 14.b3 0-0 15.♗a3 Black can't move his f8-rook and must give up the d5-square. 15...c5 16.♘c3±] 13.a3! This forces Black to make a choice. Does he want to give up the bishop-pair or should he retreat?

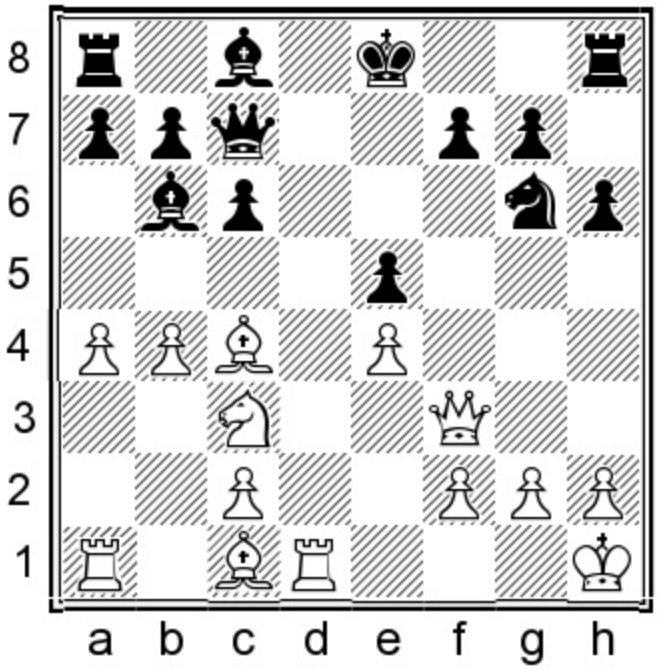


Position after: 13.a3!

B1) 13...♗xc3 14.♕xc3 0-0 15.♗e3 With the bishop-pair advantage, White has a comfortable edge. Simple chess will suffice here. 15...♖e8 16.♖d2 ♗e6 17.♗xe6 ♖xe6 18.♖ad1 ♘f8 19.♗c5± Black

can’t really prevent us from capturing on f8 and invading with ♖d7.

B2) 13...♗a5 14.b4 ♗b6 15.a4!

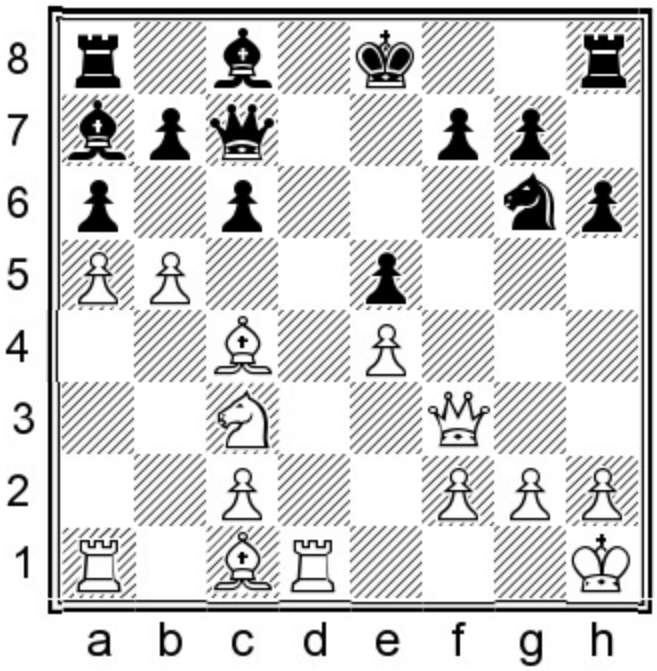


Position after: 15.a4!

Opening up new avenues for our c1-bishop, whilst Black’s dark-squared bishop looks increasingly short of squares. The variations will demonstrate that whenever Black plays ...♗d4, we can respond with ♕g3. Ordinarily this will hit both the g6-knight (if Black has already castled), as well as exploiting the g3-c7 pin to threaten the d4-bishop. If Black is forced to play ...♗xc3, the resulting positions will clearly favour White.

B2.1) 15...a5 This enables the a3-f8 diagonal to be opened. 16.♗a3! axb4 17.♗xb4+–

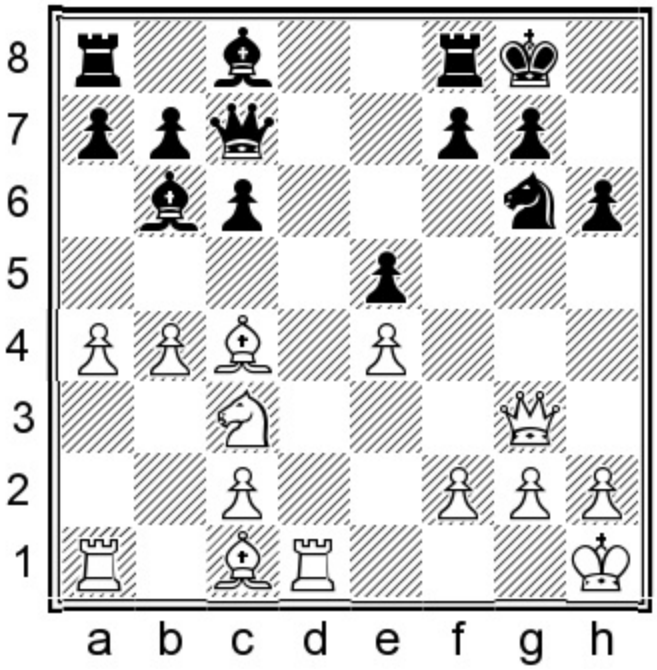
B2.2) 15...a6 16.a5 ♗a7 17.b5!



Position after: 17.b5!

The opening of the a3-f8 diagonal ensures that our ♗xf7 tactic comes into play again. 17...axb5 [After 17...♗d4 18.bxa6 bxa6 19.♖b1 0-0 20.♕g3+– Black is forced to give up the bishop-pair, and the resulting position will be technically winning for White.] 18.♗xf7+! Once again! 18...♕xf7 19.♖d8+ ♔e7 20.♗a3+ c5 21.♘d5++–

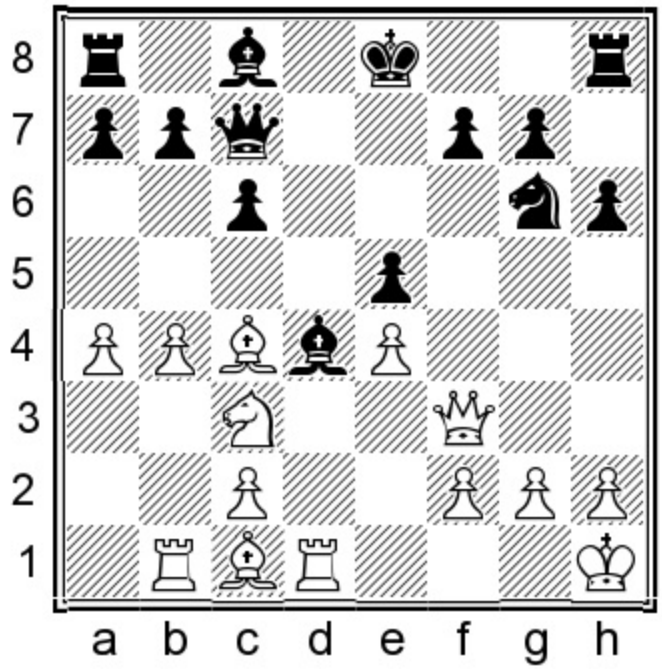
B2.3) 15...0-0 16.♕g3! Along with ♕xg6, White is also threatening a4-a5.



Position after: 16.♕g3!

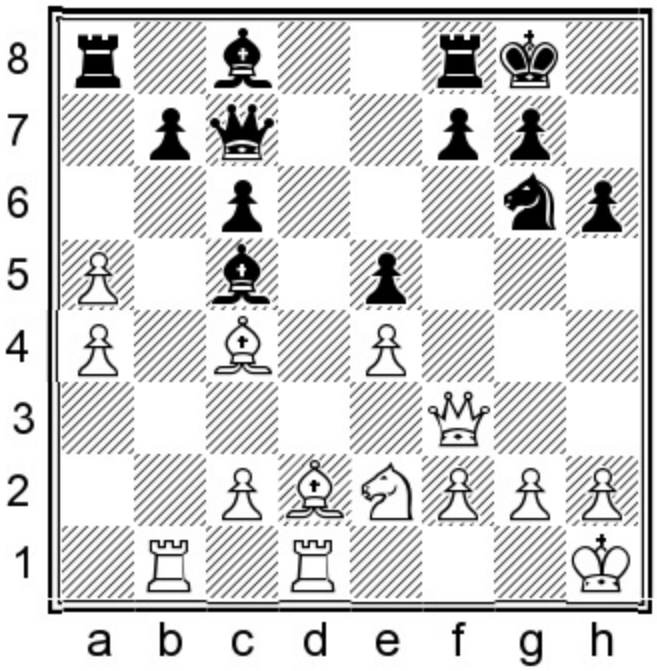
16...♘f4 [16...♔h7 17.a5 ♗d4 18.♖xd4+–] 17.♘e2! ♕e7 [17...♘xe2 18.♗xe2+– Black can't prevent the twin threats of a4-a5 and ♗xh6.] 18.♘xf4 exf4 19.♗xf4 ♕xe4 20.♗xh6 ♕g4 21.a5 ♕xg3 22.fxg3 ♗d8 23.♗e3 ♗f6 24.♖ab1± Black has lost a pawn, and faces a tough fight to save the game.

B2.4) 15...♗d4 16.♖b1



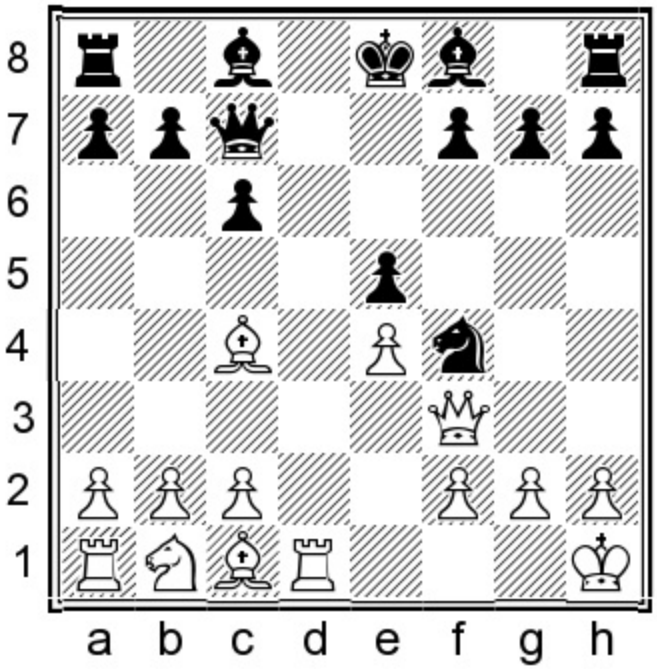
Position after: 16.♖b1

16...a5 [16...0-0 17.♕g3 ♗xc3 18.♕xg6! Playing for a direct attack is even stronger than claiming the bishop-pair here. 18...♔h8 19.♕h5 ♗e6 20.♖b3! ♗xc4 21.♖xc3 ♗e6 22.♗xh6+–] 17.bxa5 ♗c5 18.♗d2 0-0 19.♘e2



Position after: 19.♘e2

The knight is re-routed to join the attack. 19...♗e6 20.♗xe6 fxe6 21.♕h5 ♖f6 22.f3± Now that Black has doubled his pawns, it makes more sense to play ♘c1-d3.



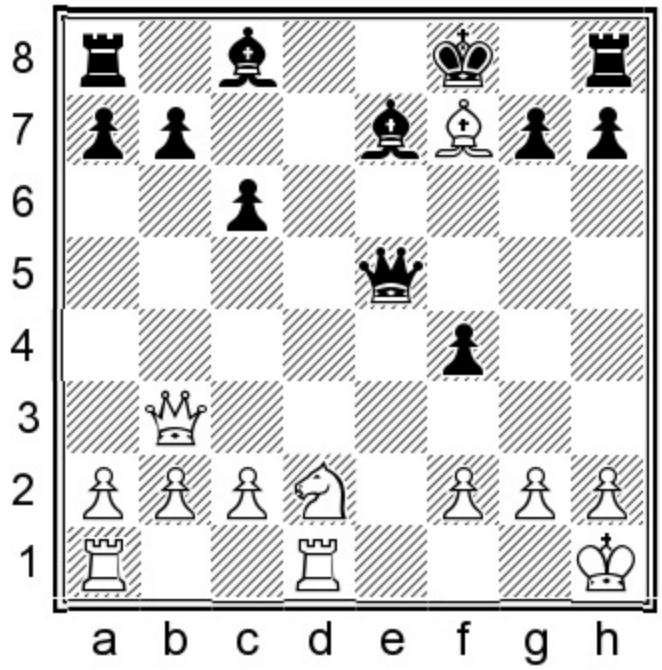
Position after: 11...♘f4

12.♘d2!?

This idea is quite neat – we will attack the e5-pawn by playing ♕c3 and ♘f3, undermining the f4-

knight in the process.

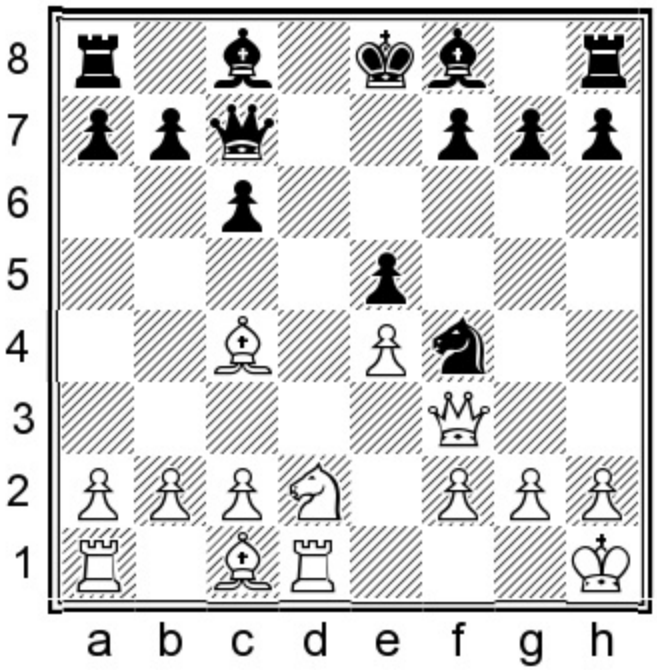
12.♗xf4 is the most forcing way of playing, trying to rapidly open the position. 12...exf4 13.e5! ♕xe5 14.♕b3 Black should probably return the pawn, or he'll face problems castling. 14...♗e7 [14...♕f5 15.♘d2 ♗e7 16.♖e1 b5 17.♕f3! ♖b8 18.♗d3 ♕f6 19.a4 a6 20.♘e4 ♕e5 21.b4!↑ Black can't castle, because of the threat of ♘c5 followed by ♕e4.] 15.♗xf7+ ♔f8 16.♘d2



Position after: 16.♘d2

A) 16...♕b5! 17.♕xb5 cxb5 18.♗d5± White is better but the position has simplified enough that Black can also feel confident in his drawing chances. It's a two-results position, although Black held pretty comfortably in the correspondence game Nataf – Strautins, ICCF email 2015.

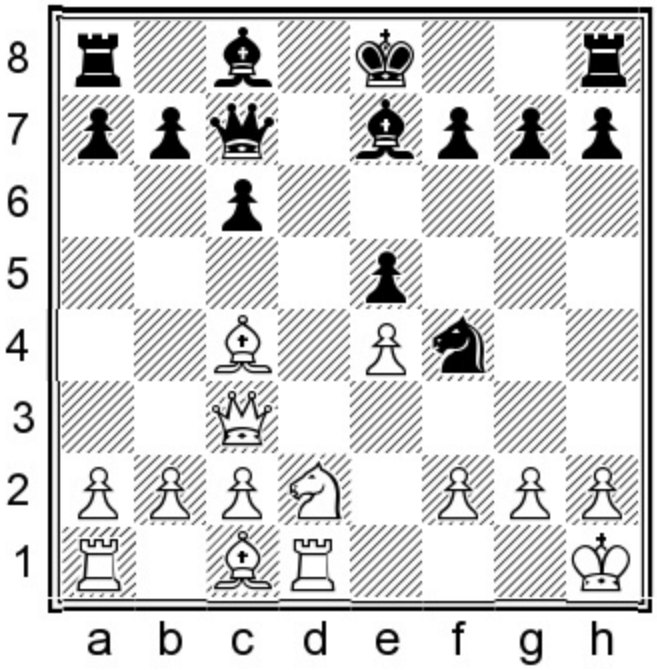
B) 16...♕f6 If Black doesn't try to exchange queens, his king will be perpetually weak. 17.♗c4 b5 18.♗f1 ♗e6 19.c4 ♖d8 20.♘f3↑



Position after: 12.♘d2!?

12...♗e6

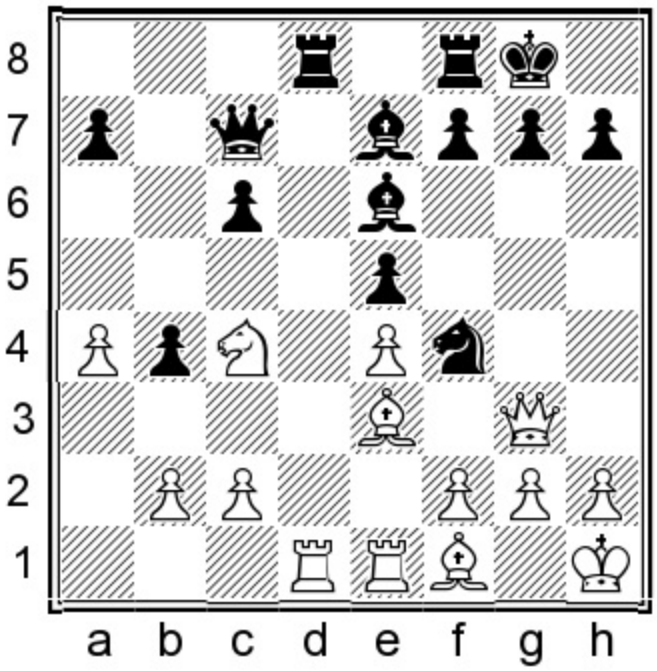
12...♗e7 13.♕c3!



Position after: 13.♕c3!

A) 13...♕d6 14.♖e1 b5 15.♗f1 0-0 16.a4 b4 We've now acquired the c4-square for our knight, and just need to co-ordinate our pieces properly. 17.♕g3 ♕c7 18.♘c4 ♗e6 19.♗e3 ♖ad8 20.♖ad1±

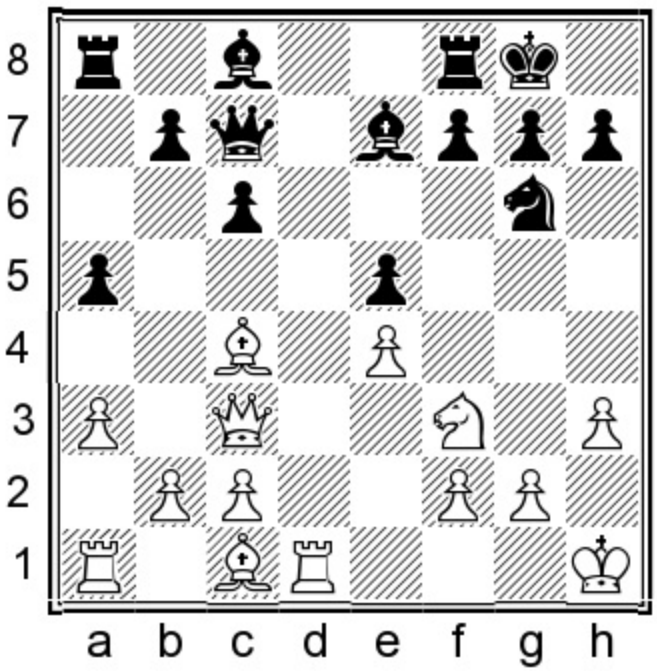
Black's queenside pawns look like nice long-term targets.



Position after: 20.♖ad1±

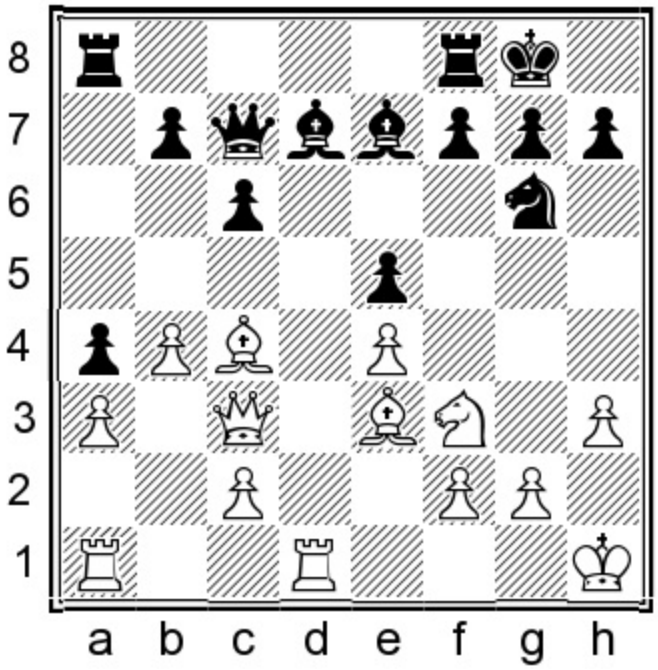
B) 13...0-0 14.♘f3 ♘g6 15.h3 h6 16.♗e3 b6 17.a4± Followed by the usual plan of doubling rooks on the d-file. Black's f8-rook is tied down to the f7-pawn, and in future positions Black's queenside pawns will likely prove to be weaknesses.

C) 13...a5 14.♘f3 ♘g6 15.a3 0-0 16.h3



Position after: 16.h3

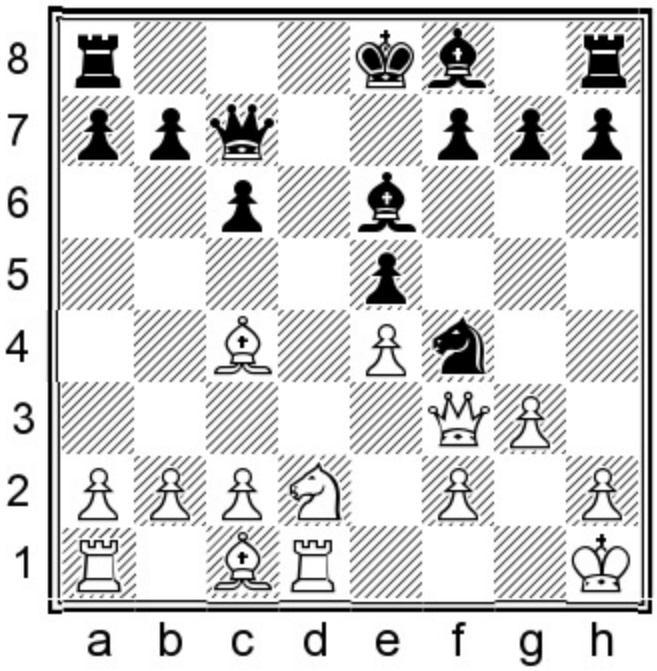
Our edge is quite clear. Black's c8-bishop is restricted, and we have consistent pressure on the e5- and f7-pawns. Our pieces are better placed, and we can continue by doubling rooks on the d-file. 16...♗d7 17.♗e3 a4 [17...h6 18.♖d2 ♖ad8 19.♖ad1± Black might be solid, but we are dictating the play.] 18.b4!



Position after: 18.b4!

18...axb3 19.cxb3 ♖fd8 20.b4 ♗e8 21.♖dc1± We can continue to probe on the queenside, while Black remains really passive.

13.g3



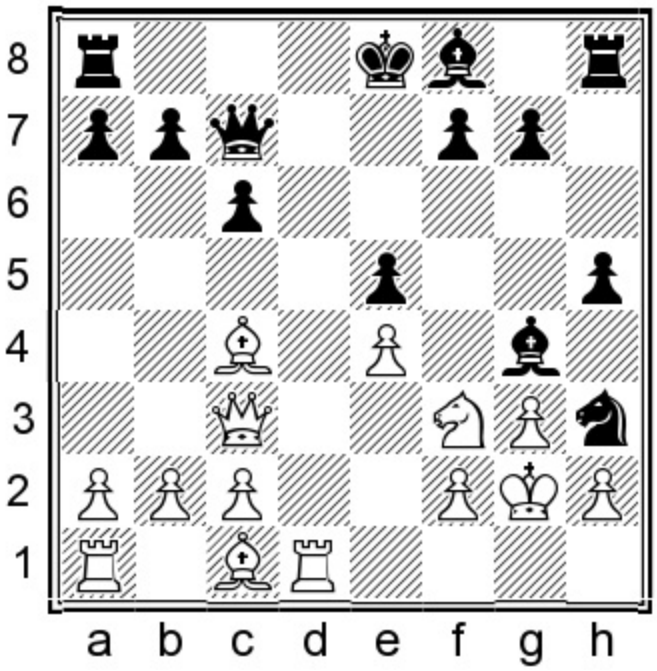
Position after: 13.g3

13...h5

An attempt to complicate things doesn't change the evaluation of the position, as long as White plays accurately.

13...♗xc4 14.♘xc4 ♘e6 15.♕c3 f6 16.♗e3 ♗e7 17.a4± White's minor pieces are superior, and Black will face long-term problems on the light-squares.

14.♕c3 ♘h3 15.♔g2 ♗g4 16.♘f3



Position after: 16.♘f3

16...♗e7

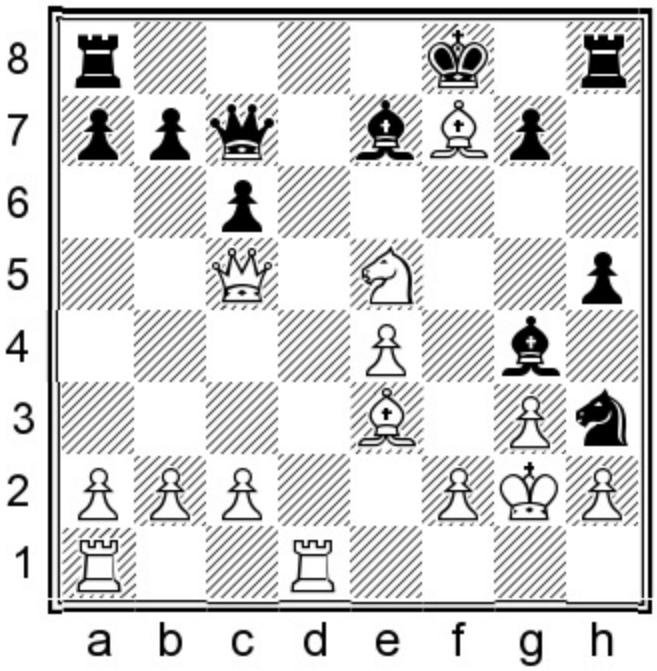
A) 16...♗d6 17.♖xd6! ♕xd6 18.♕xe5+ ♕xe5 19.♘xe5+– Black will be losing even more material here.

B) 16...f6 17.♗e3± I'm not sure where Black will be castling.

17.♘xe5! ♗f6

17...♗xd1 18.♗xf7+ ♔f8 19.♗b3+– and Black has too many pieces hanging.

18.♗xf7+ ♔f8 19.♕c5+ ♗e7 20.♗e3!



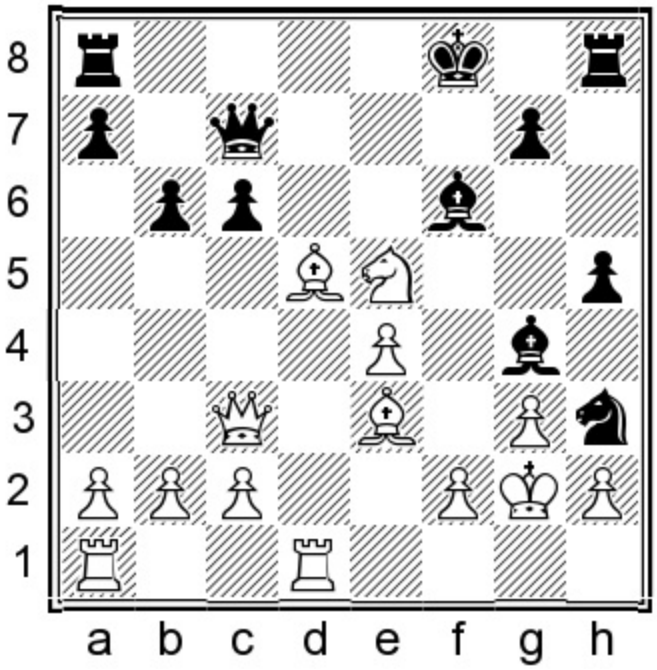
Position after: 20.♗e3!

A really nice move that co-ordinates all of White's pieces!

20...b6 21.♕c3

21.♕xc6!? is a strong alternative. 21...♕xc6 22.♘xc6 ♔xf7 23.f3 ♗e6 24.f4 ♗g4 25.♘e5+ ♔e8 26.♖d5⩲ Black's knight will remain out of play for the foreseeable future.

21...♗f6 22.♗d5



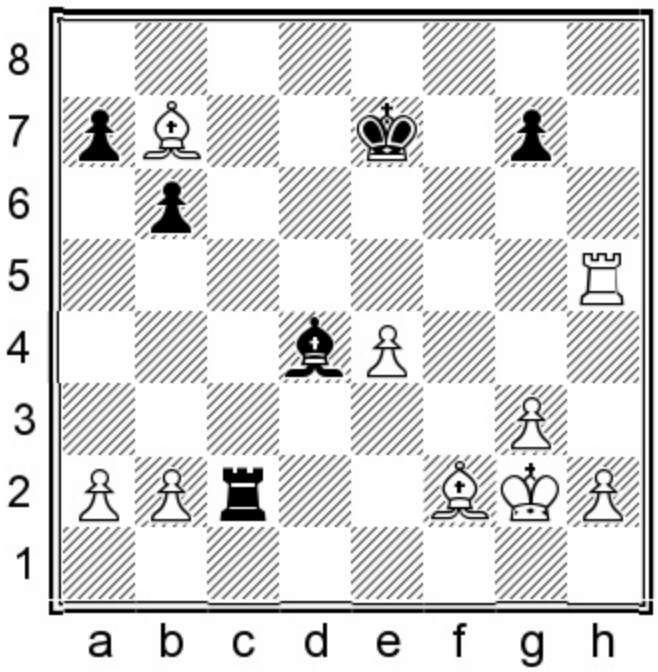
Position after: 22.♗d5

Now the position will simplify, but White's advantage persists.

22...♕xe5

22...♗xe5 23.♕xc6 ♕xc6 24.♗xc6 ♗xd1 25.♖xd1 ♘xf2 26.♗xf2 ♖c8 27.♗b7± transposes to 22...♕xe5.

23.♕xe5 ♗xe5 24.♗xc6 ♗xd1 25.♖xd1 ♘xf2 26.♗xf2 ♖c8 27.♗b7 ♖xc2 28.♖d8+ ♔e7 29.♖xh8 ♗d4 30.♖xh5±



Position after: 30.♖xh5±

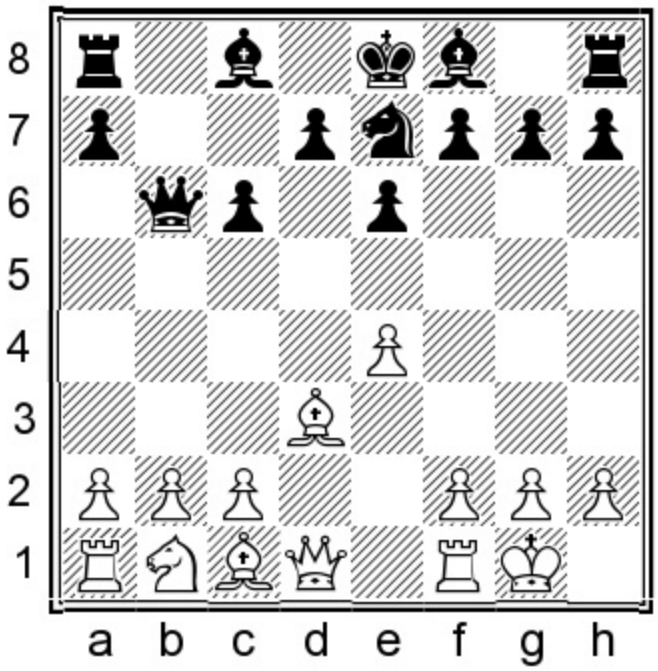
Black faces a long struggle ahead in his quest for a half point.

Conclusion to Chapter 8 & 9

5.d4 against 3...e6 is a very interesting way of aiming to achieve a superior version of Taimanov-like positions. As we discussed, the main issue for Black in Chapter 8 is that his g6-knight is misplaced. This problem is escalated to a whole new level if we are able to launch an attack against the Black king, and a key idea in coordination with a kingside attack is to place our kingside pawns on f4, g3 and h4. This is extremely useful in suppressing the g6-knight, and making life very unpleasant for Black. After 7...dxc6 (Chapter 9), the symmetrical nature of the position doesn't in any way equate to objective equality. We have numerous ways to achieve a pleasant edge, the easiest of which is probably to play for f2-f4 as quickly as we can. The more popular b-pawn recapture is seen in the next chapter.

Chapter 10
4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4 cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♕b6 7.♘xc6 bxc6 8.♗d3

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4 cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♕b6 7.♘xc6 bxc6 8.♗d3



Chapter Guide

Chapter 10 – 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4 cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♕b6 7.♘xc6 bxc6 8.♗d3

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4!? cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♕b6 7.♘xc6 bxc6 8.♗d3 ♘g6 9.c4

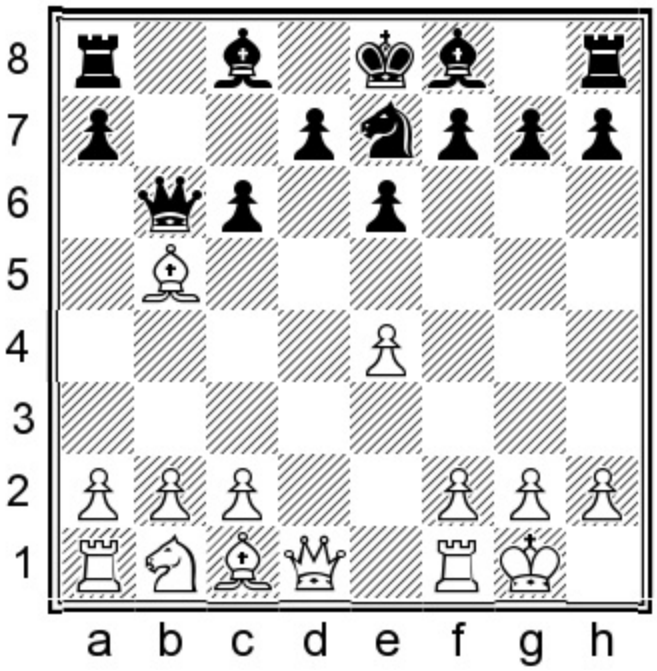
a) 9...♗c5!? 10.♘c3 ♗d4

b) 9...♗c5!? 10.♘c3 ♕c7

c) 9...♗e7

a) 9...♗c5!? 10.♘c3 ♗d4

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4 cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♕b6 7.♘xc6 bxc6



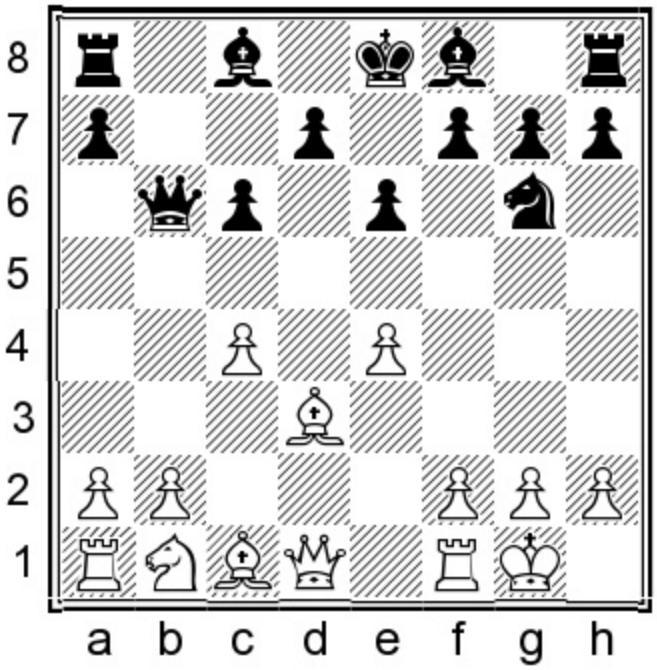
Position after: 7...bxc6

8.♗d3

The most popular choice in practical games – the bishop on d3 is well placed for future attacking possibilities.

8.♗e2 is seen in the next chapter.

8...♘g6 9.c4

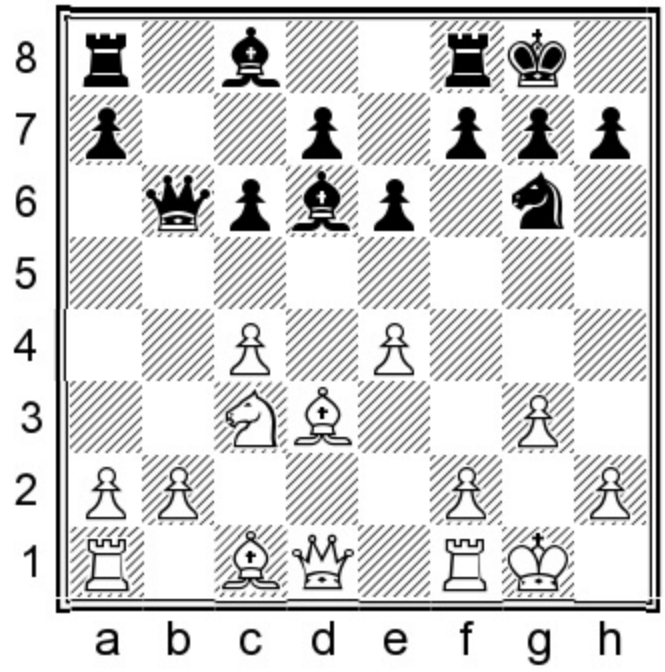


Position after: 9.c4

9...♗c5!?

This is the move I was most concerned about when I began analysing 7...bxc6, and was recently played by Baskaran Adhiban in his win over Michael Adams. The point is that, in all variations, Black's bishop will be more active on c5 than on e7. He will be stopping our ideas with ♗e3 and f2-f4, and at some point will likely try and solidify his bishop on d4 with ...d7-d6 and ...e6-e5. However, after a lengthy amount of time trying to comprehend this position, I realised that in a lot of lines we can simply play ♗e3 anyway and recapture with our f-pawn. Positionally this is quite satisfactory as we are restricting Black's g6-knight and controlling more dark-squares. Furthermore, we are opening the f-file for our rook to utilise. It will be clear in the variations that follow that this idea is most effective when Black has already played ...e6-e5, as his knight will find itself even more restricted.

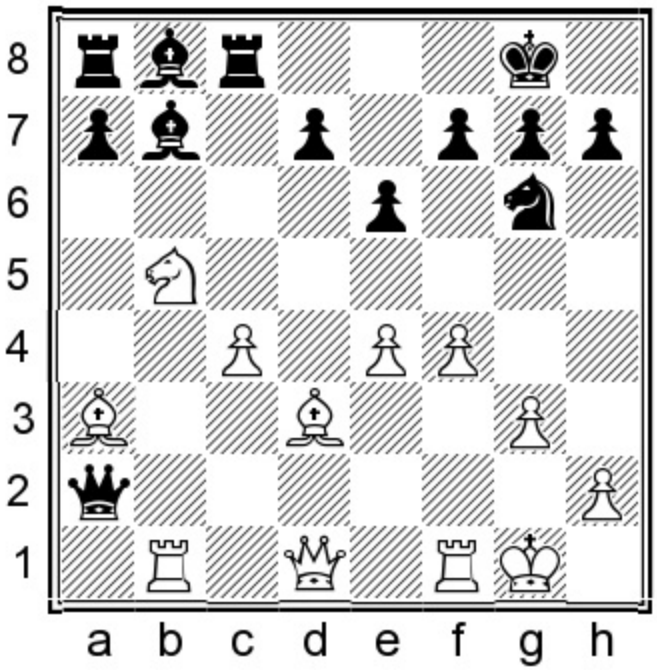
A) 9...♗d6 has been played a few times but isn't going to significantly change our own plan. 10.♘c3 0-0 [10...♕c7 11.g3 h5 In Shirov – Hamitevici, Kishinev 2014, the simplest way for White to continue would have been 12.♗e3 h4 13.c5 ♗e7 14.f4± As we already know, opening the h-file is usually counter-productive for Black.] 11.g3



Position after: 11.g3

Similarly to lines after 9...♗e7, we'll be playing the same plan involving ♖b1, ♗e3 and f2-f4. On multiple occasions, we've witnessed that g2-g3 is extremely constructive in preparing h4-h5 ideas.

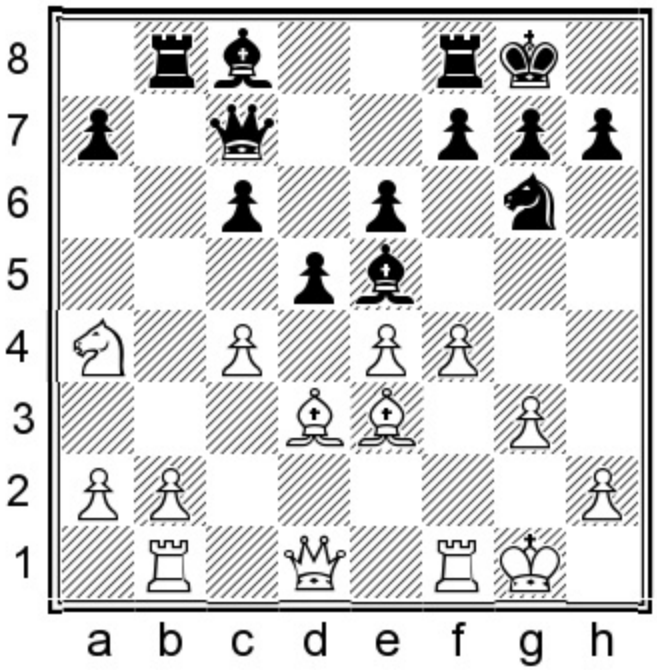
A1) 11...c5 12.f4 ♗b7 13.♗e3! If Black doesn't capture on b2, we'll follow up with ♖f2 and h4-h5. 13...♕xb2 14.♘b5 ♗b8 15.♗xc5 ♖c8 16.♖b1 ♕xa2 17.♗a3!+– The black queen is trapped.



Position after: 17.♗a3!+−

A2) 11...♗e7 12.♘a4 ♕c7 13.c5! We are a useful tempo up compared to the corresponding line after 9...♗e7.

A3) 11...♗e5 12.♘a4 ♕c7 13.♗e3 ♖b8 14.♖b1 d5 15.f4



Position after: 15.f4

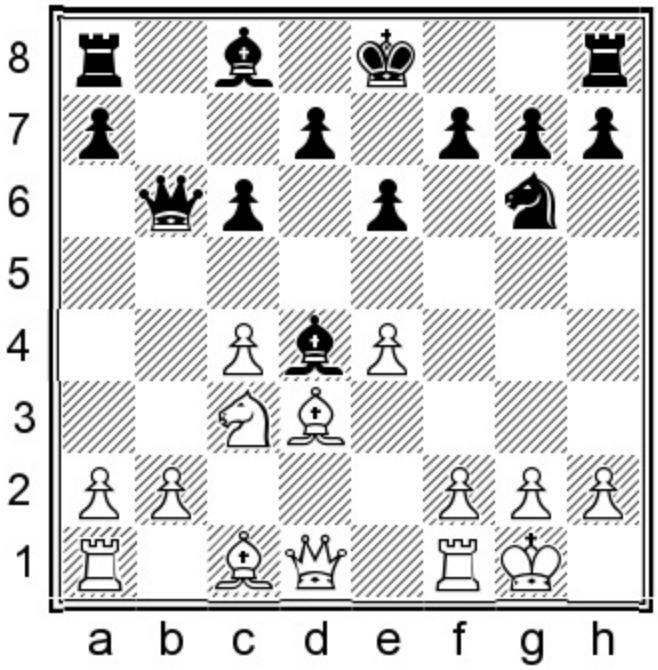
15...dxe4 [15...♗f6 16.e5 ♗e7 17.♕c2±] 16.♗xe4± Black's pawn structure is inferior, and his queenside pawns look like easy targets for White.

B) For 9...♗e7 see subchapter c.

10.♘c3

Immediately threatening ♘a4. We will consider the immediate 10...♗d4, followed by Adhiban's choice of 10...♕c7. Both ideas are interchangeable but there a few distinct subtleties.

10...♗d4

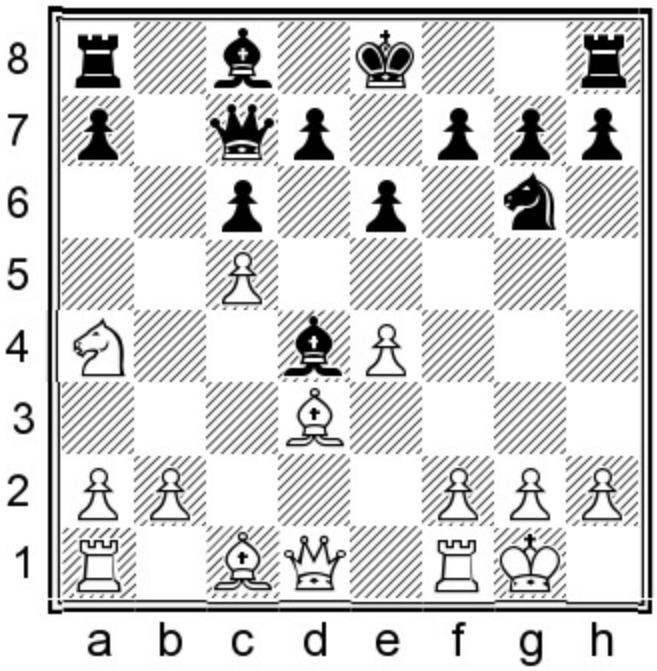


Position after: 10...♗d4

11.♖b1!

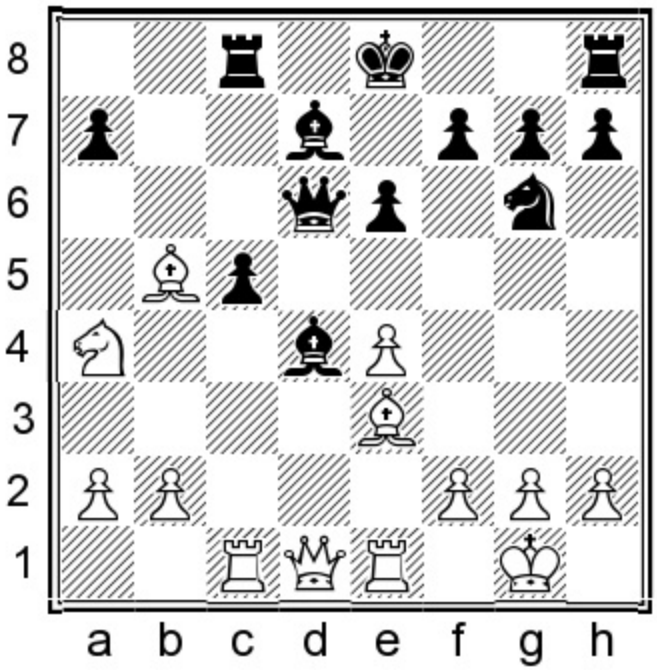
I really like this idea – the point is to directly play against Black's previous move. We want to play ♘e2 and b2-b4, kicking the bishop away and gaining space on the queenside.

The immediate 11.♘a4 is also a perfectly good option. 11...♕c7 12.c5!



Position after: 12.c5!

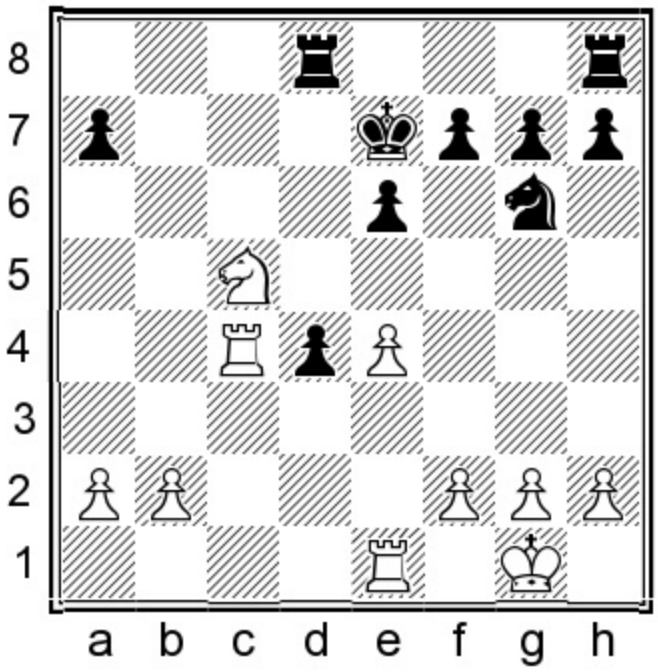
12...d5 [12...0-0 13.♖e1 d6 14.cxd6 ♕xd6 15.♗e3 c5 16.♗f1± White's position seems more pleasant here.] 13.cxd6 ♕xd6 14.♖e1 [14.♗e3!? This is already a viable option, though after 14...♗xe3 15.fxe3 0-0 16.♕c2 ♕e5 the extent of White's advantage is debatable.] 14...c5 15.♗e3 ♗d7 16.♖c1 ♖c8 17.♗b5!



Position after: 17.♗b5!

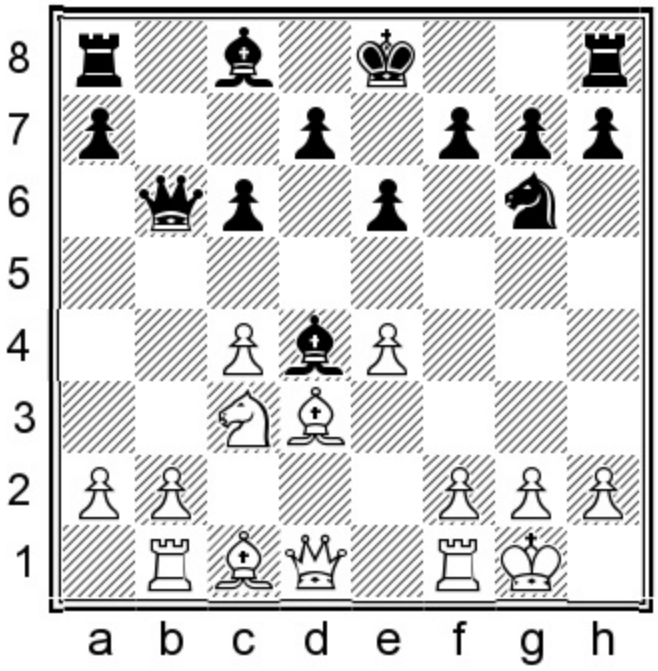
An important move, ensuring that Black doesn't get any activity by delaying castling. 17...♗xb5

18.♗xd4 ♖d8 19.♕b3 cxd4 20.♕xb5+ ♕d7 21.♕xd7+ ♔xd7 22.♘c5+ ♔e7 23.♖c4±



Position after: 23.♖c4±

White has very good chances in this endgame. The d-pawn isn't a danger, whilst Black will find it hard to maintain the a7-pawn.



Position after: 11.♖b1!

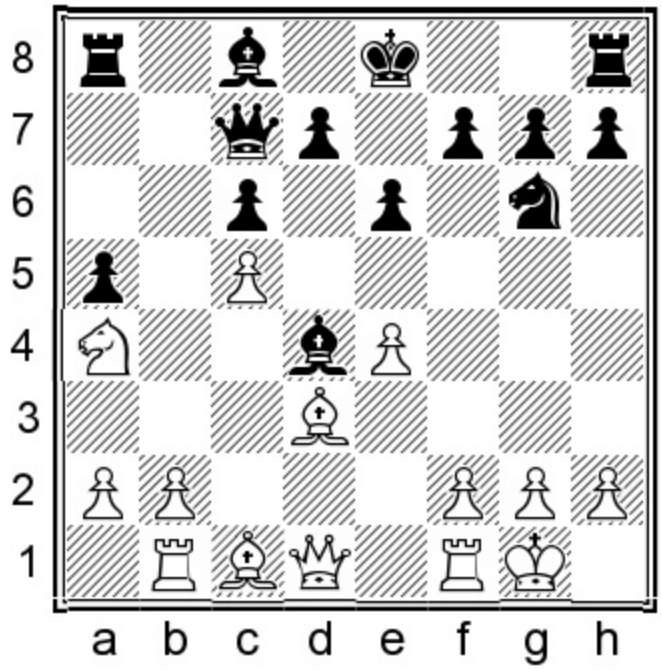
11...a5

11...0-0 12.♘e2 ♗c5 13.b4! ♗e7 14.♗e3 ♕c7 15.f4± The position is very pleasant for White, and we have good strategies on both sides of the board.

12.♘a4!

Now that we have gained the b6-square, our idea with c4-c5 is even more effective.

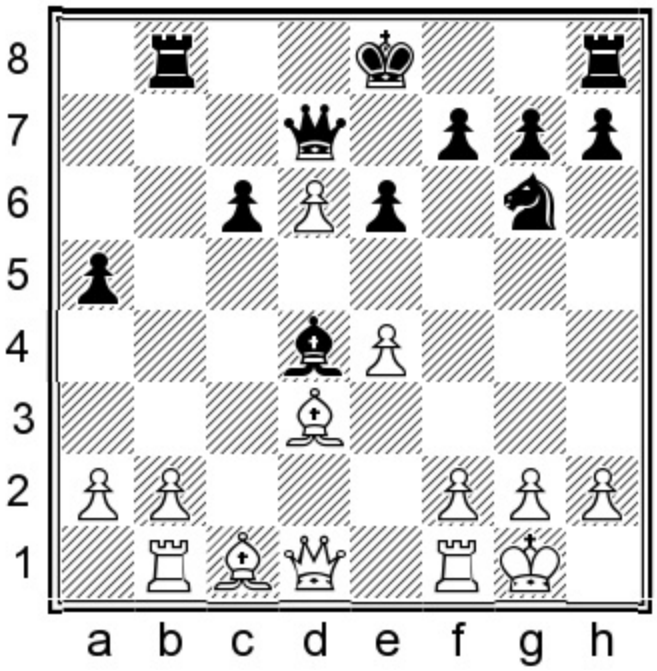
12...♕c7 13.c5



Position after: 13.c5

13...0-0

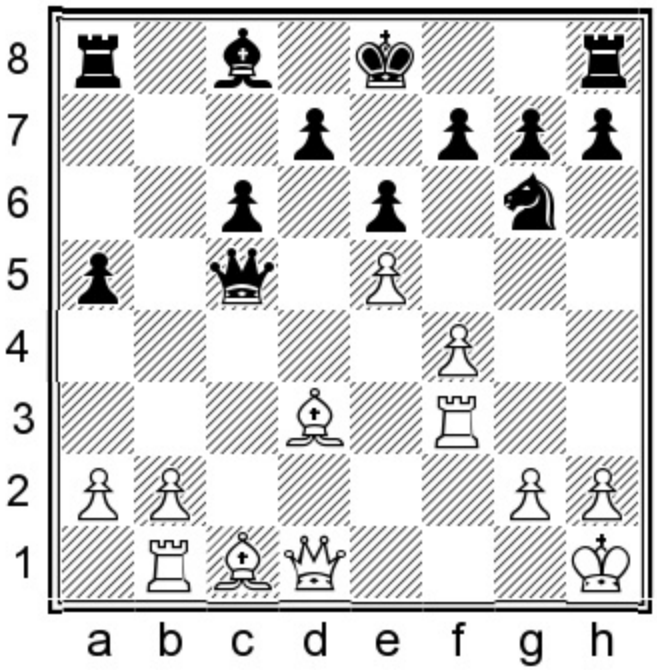
A) 13...d6 14.♘b6 ♖b8 15.♘xc8 ♕xc8 [15...♖xc8 16.♗a6+–] 16.cxd6 ♕d7



Position after: 16...♕d7

17.♗b5! ♕xd6 18.♗xc6+ ♕xc6 19.♕xd4± White is a comfortable pawn up.

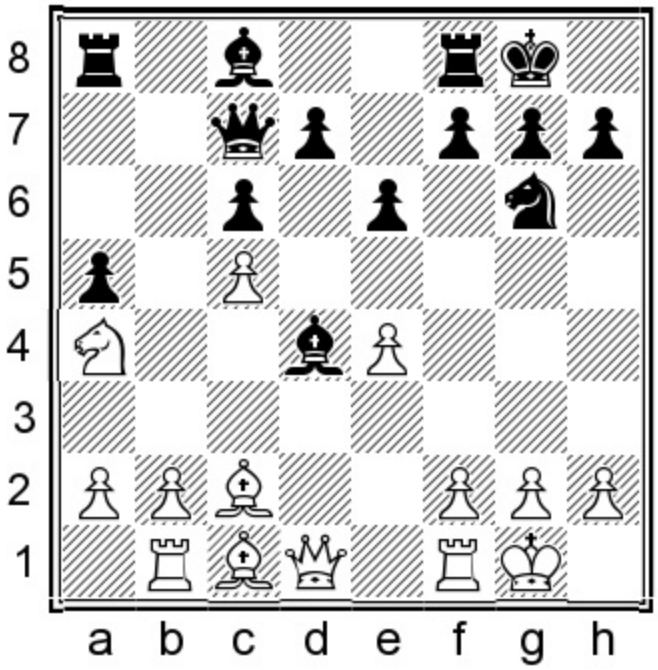
B) 13...♕e5 14.♔h1! ♗xc5 15.f4 ♕d6 16.e5 ♕e7 17.♘xc5 ♕xc5 18.♖f3↑ White had fantastic compensation for the pawn in Trofimov – Eschert, ICCF email 2018.



Position after: 18.♖f3↑

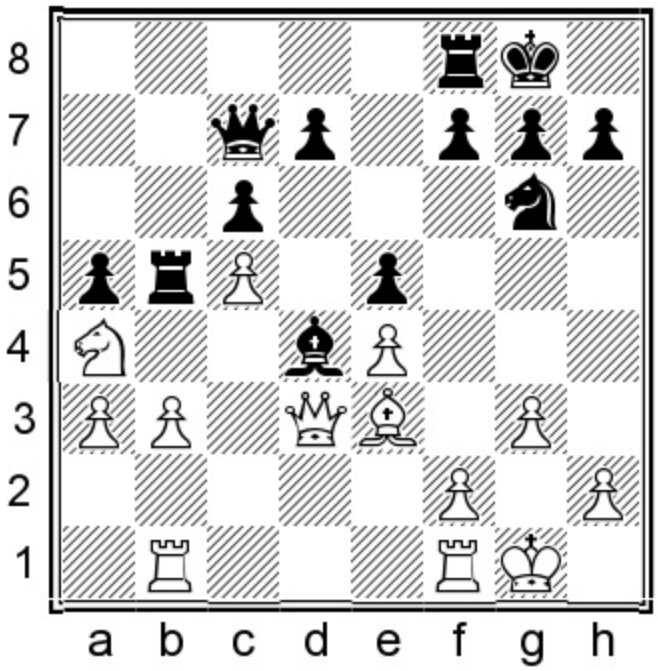
14.♖e1!

As Black hasn't committed his pawn to e5 yet, we ideally want to recapture on e3 with our rook. My original intention was 14.♗c2, but this gives Black the option to hone in on our c-pawn.



Position after: 14.♗c2

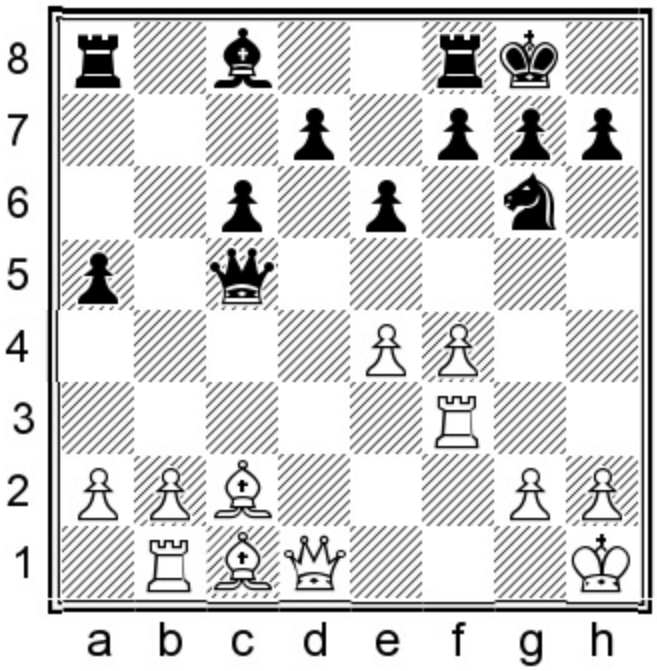
A) 14...e5 15.♗e3! was the point of 14.♗c2. This is a dream scenario for when we can play this ♗e3 idea. 15...♗a6 [15...♗xe3 16.fxe3± Positionally White is dominating.] 16.♗d3 ♗xd3 17.♕xd3 ♖ab8 18.b3 ♖b4 19.a3 ♖b5 20.g3



Position after: 20.g3

Black is forced to capture on e3, and his knight will really struggle. 20...♗xe3 21.fxe3!±

B) 14...♕e5! Black's best chance, as currently the c5-pawn is his biggest constraint. 15.♔h1 ♗xc5 16.f4 ♕d4 17.♘xc5 ♕xc5 18.♖f3∞



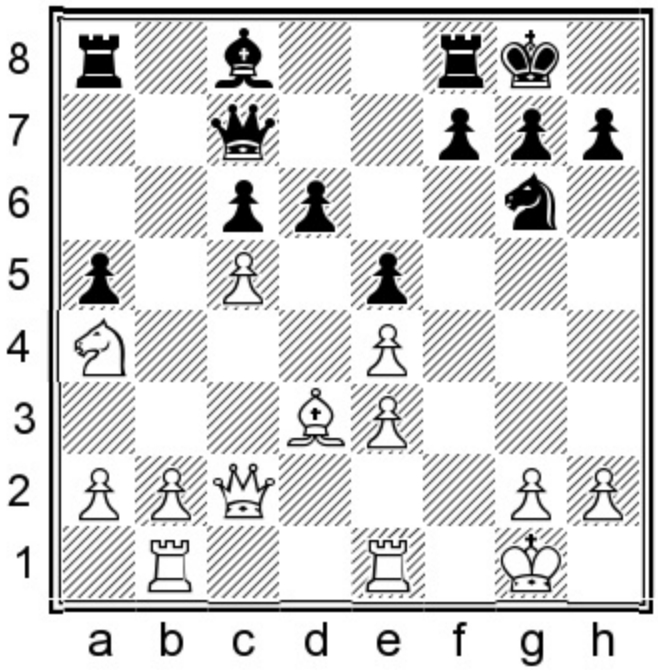
Position after: 18.♖f3∞

The bishop-pair give us adequate compensation, but I believe we had a more convincing option on move 14.

14...d6 15.♕c2 e5

15...dxc5 16.♗e3 ♗xe3 17.♖xe3±

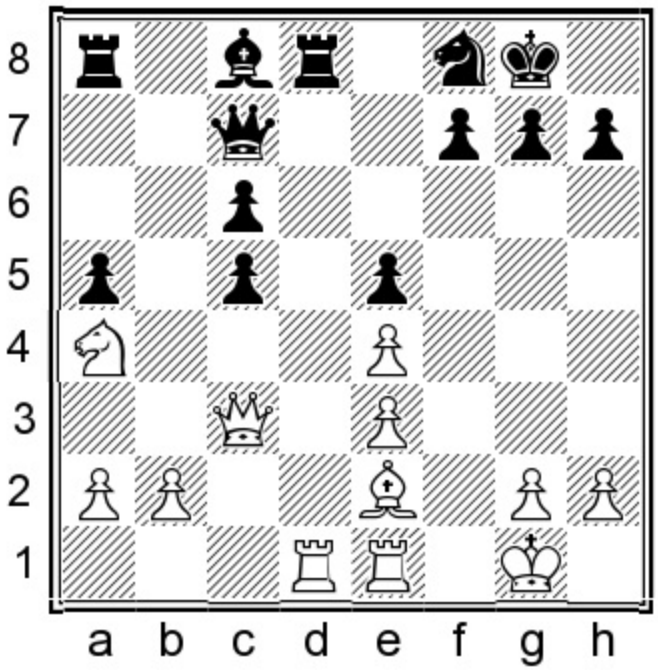
16.♗e3! ♗xe3 17.fxe3



Position after: 17.fxe3

Now that Black has executed ...e6-e5, it makes more sense to capture with the pawn! The line could continue:

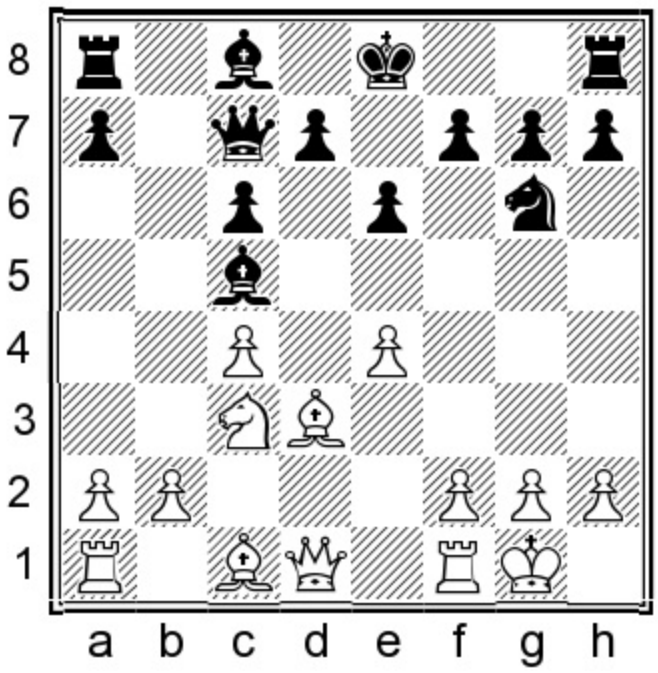
17...♖d8 18.♕c3 ♘f8 19.♗e2 dxc5 20.♖bd1±



Position after: 20.♖bd1±

b) 9...♗c5!? 10.♘c3 ♕c7

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4 cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♕b6 7.♘xc6 bxc6 8.♗d3 ♘g6 9.c4 ♗c5!? 10.♘c3 ♕c7



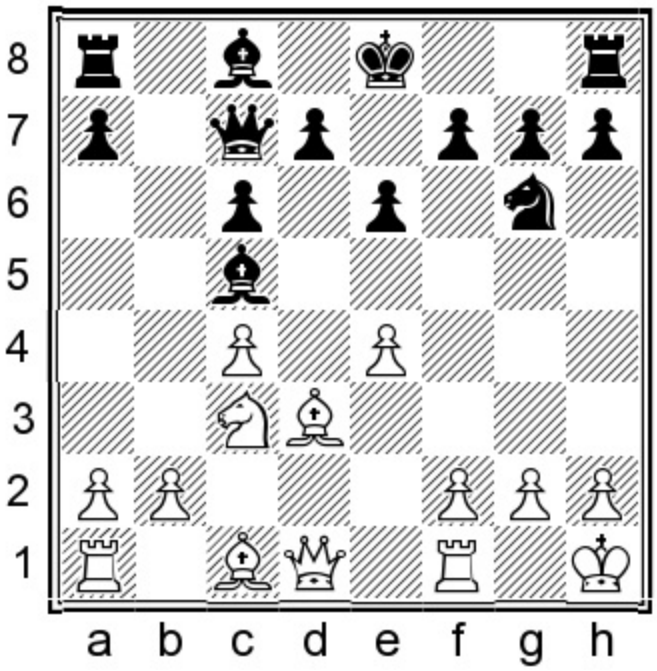
Position after: 10...♕c7

11.♖e1!?

My preference is for this move, as we want to have the option of capturing on e3 with our rook.

A) 11.♘a4 ♗d4 12.c5 transposes to the line after 10...♗d4 11.♘a4.

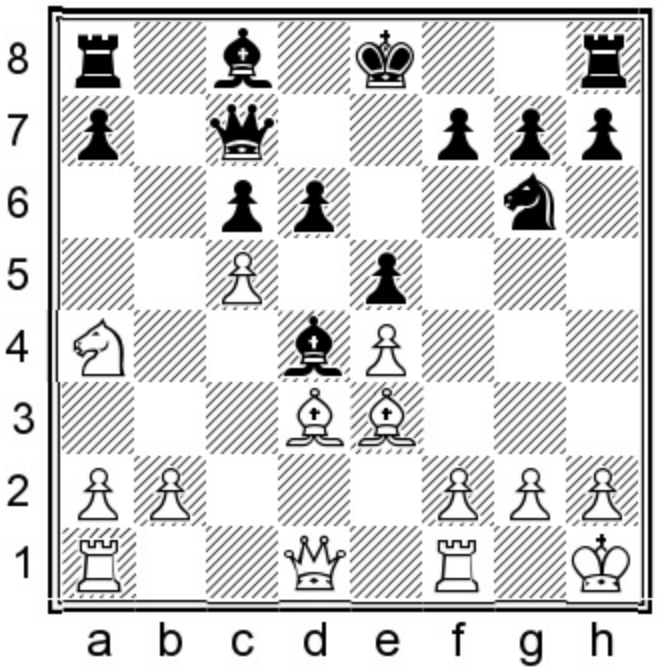
B) 11.♔h1!?



Position after: 11.♔h1!?

was played by Adams, intending f2-f4. In the game Adhiban achieved a nice position, but my analysis shows that Adams could've got a great game with some precise moves.

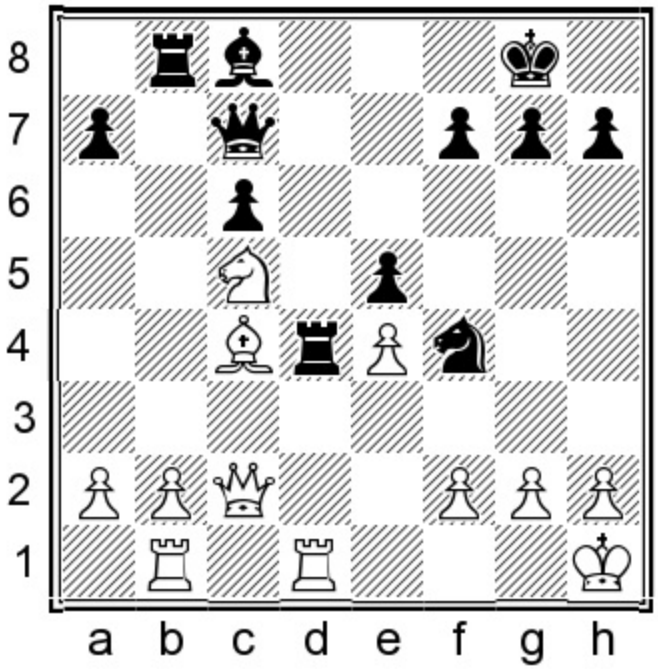
B1) 11...e5 12.♘a4 ♗d4 13.c5 d6 [13...d5 doesn't change our approach. 14.exd5 cxd5 15.♗e3! ♗xe3 16.fxe3 0-0 17.b4±] 14.♗e3!



Position after: 14.♗e3!

Adams was well aware of the positional benefits of this move. 14...dxc5 15.♕c2! Micky had time

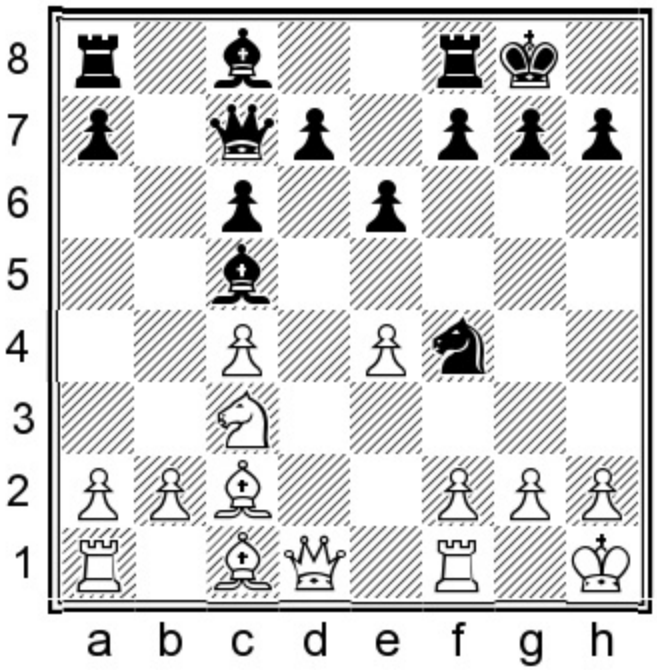
to protect the b2-pawn before capturing on c5. [15.♘xc5?! ♗xb2! 16.♖b1 ♗d4 seems like an unnecessary pawn to give away, and Black eventually converted an unclear position in Adams – Adhiban, Douglas 2018.] 15...♖b8 16.♖ab1 0-0 17.♘xc5 ♖d8 18.♗xd4 ♖xd4 19.♖fd1 ♘f4 20.♗c4± White has a lovely position.



Position after: 20.♗c4±

The advantage stems from a superior pawn structure and well-placed minor pieces, and the f4-knight can be kicked away with g2-g3 at the right moment.

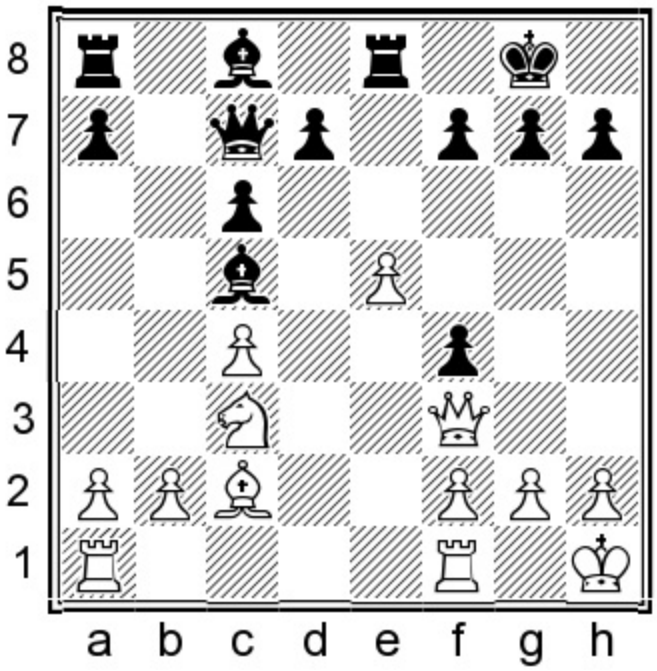
B2) 11...♘f4 is more accurate than the immediate 11...e5, as Black isn't entertaining our ♗e3 ideas just yet. 12.♗c2 0-0



Position after: 12...0-0

B2.1) 13.♗e3? As I previously mentioned, we need to be careful when playing this move. It usually only works positionally when Black has already played ... e6-e5, as his knight will be denied access to this important square. 13...♗xe3 14.fxe3 ♘g6∓

B2.2) 13.♕f3 e5 14.♗xf4 exf4 15.e5 ♖e8!=

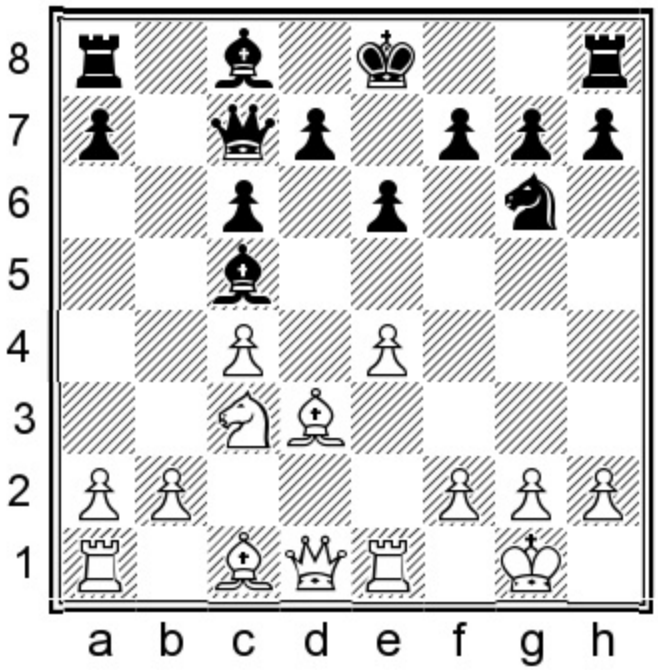


Position after: 15...♖e8!=

More analysis can certainly be done after 11.♔h1, but it's definitely an interesting idea by

Adams.

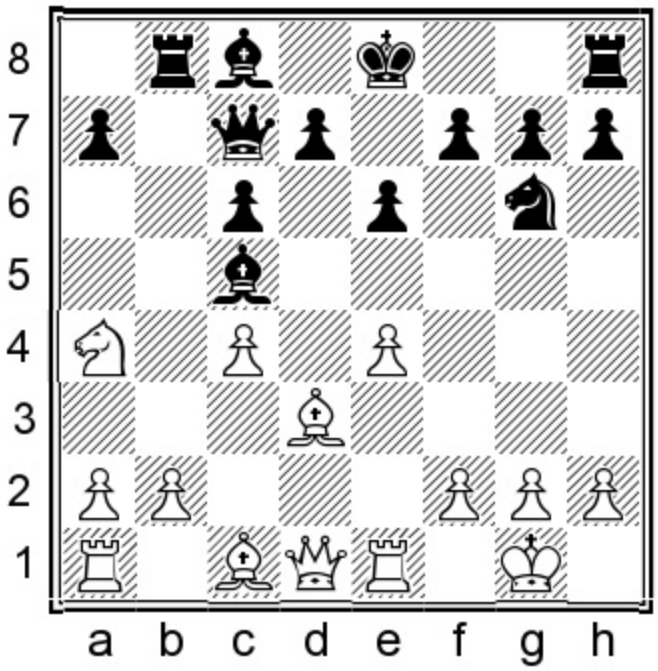
C) 11.♖b1 This has been the main choice in correspondence games, but Black isn't forced to play ...a7-a5. Instead, the best move is 11...♖b8 – and our mainline after 11.♖e1 seems to be an improved version of this position.



Position after: 11.♖e1!?

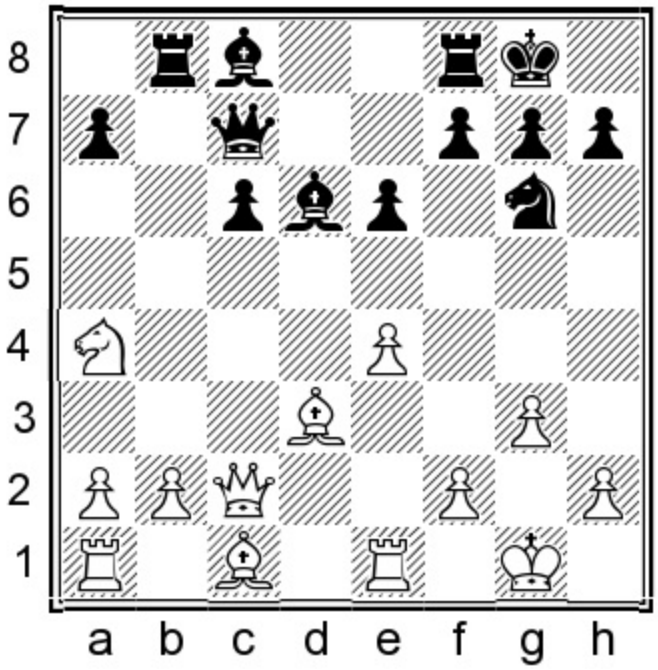
11...♗d4

A) 11...♖b8 12.♘a4



Position after: 12.♘a4

A1) 12...♗e7 Here, Black has simply wasted time with ...♗c5-e7, whereas we have usefully carried out our typical ♘a4 and c4-c5 plan. 13.c5 0-0 14.♕c2 d6 15.cxd6 ♗xd6 16.g3±

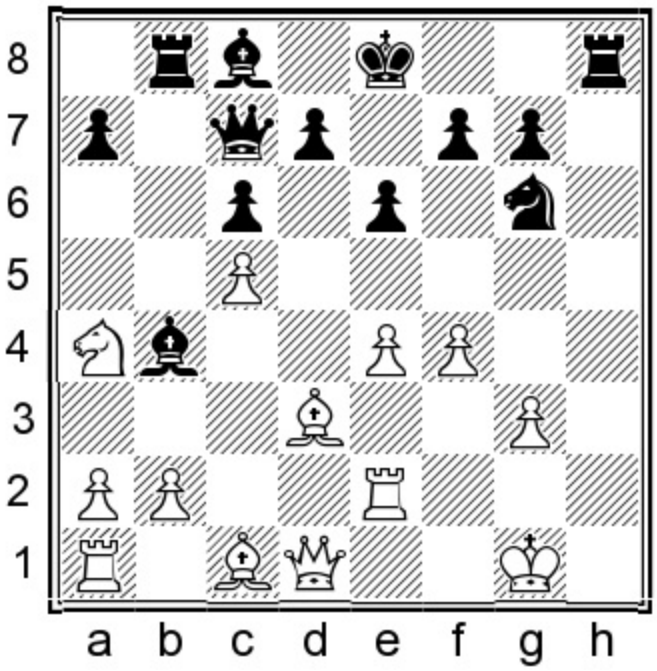


Position after: 16.g3±

We can compare this position to 11.♘a4 after 9...♗e7. In this case, Black doesn't have the time to play his effective ...c5-c4 idea.

A2) 12...♗d4 13.c5! 0-0 14.♗e3 ♗xe3 15.♖xe3±

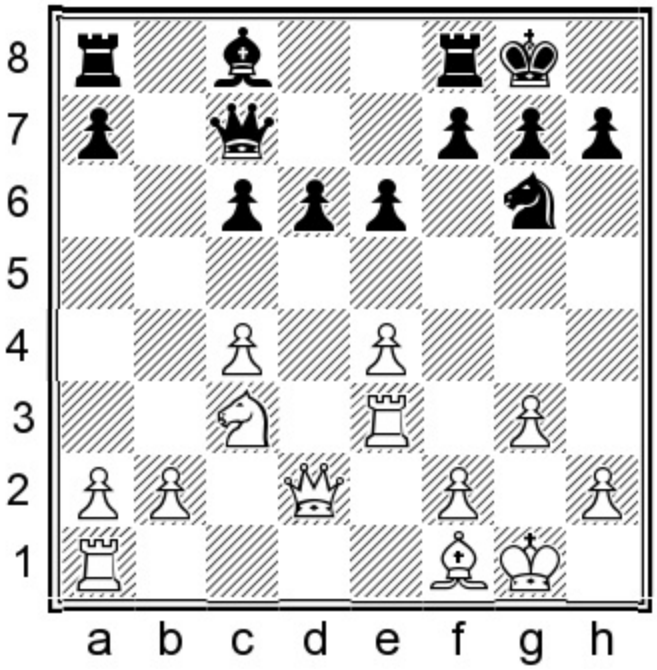
A3) 12...♗d6 13.g3 h5 [13...c5 14.f4 ♗b7 15.♘c3 0-0 16.h4! This typical set-up against Black's knight is evidently plausible in multiple variations. 16...♕d8 17.♗e3±] 14.f4 ♗b4 [14...h4 15.c5 ♗e7 16.♗e3±] 15.♖e2 h4 16.c5 hxg3 17.hxg3±



Position after: 17.hxg3±

Black hasn't achieved anything by opening the h-file, and his king is probably going to be the weaker one in the long-term.

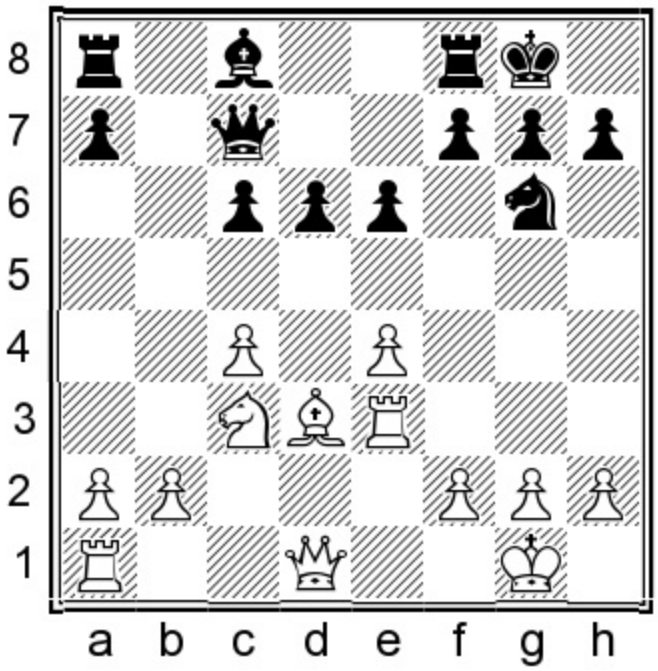
B) 11...♘f4 doesn't bother us. Our e1-rook is well placed to allow our bishop to retreat to f1, after which we'll threaten ideas such as e4-e5 – as well as the more simple g2-g3. 12.♗f1 0-0 13.g3 ♘g6 14.♗e3 ♗xe3 15.♖xe3 d6 16.♕d2±



Position after: 16.♕d2±

Followed by ♖d1 and either c4-c5 or f2-f4.

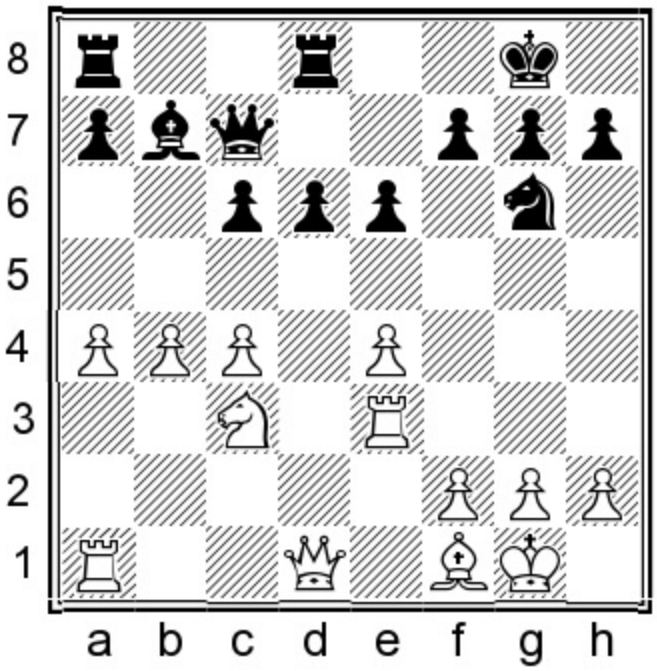
C) 11...0-0 12.♗e3 ♗xe3 13.♖xe3 d6 [13...e5 14.♗f1 Anticipating the move ...d7-d6, which can be well met with ♖d3. 14...♖b8 15.b3 ♘f4 16.c5 ♘e6 17.♕d6!±]



Position after: 13...d6

C1) 14.c5 was played in Kowalczyk – Hoffman, ICCF email 2017. After 14...d5! 15.exd5 exd5 16.♗xg6!? hxg6 17.♕d4⇄ we reach a curious position, which looks quite pleasant for White but where he lacks obvious targets, and if a couple of pieces come off then the d-pawn could be dangerous.

C2) 14.♗f1! It is important to retain focus on the d6-pawn and not let it be pushed to d5 under favourable circumstances. 14...♖d8 15.b4 ♗b7 16.a4

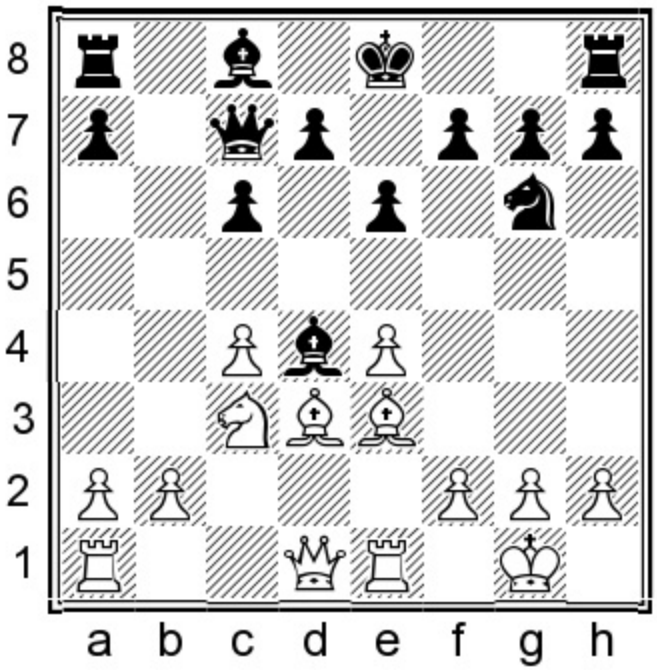


Position after: 16.a4

White's plan is simply a5, ♕d2 and then one or both rooks to the d-file. Black doesn't really have time to exploit the potential weakness on c5, as his knight is three moves away from that square, and not mind-blowingly powerful when it does get there: 16...a5 17.b5 ♘f8?! 18.♕d2±

D) 11...d6 12.♗e3 ♗xe3 13.♖xe3 transposes to 11...0-0, since it is highly unlikely Black can make do without castling in the next couple of moves. Additionally, White had the choice of 12.♘a4!?

12.♗e3



Position after: 12.♗e3

12...♗xc3

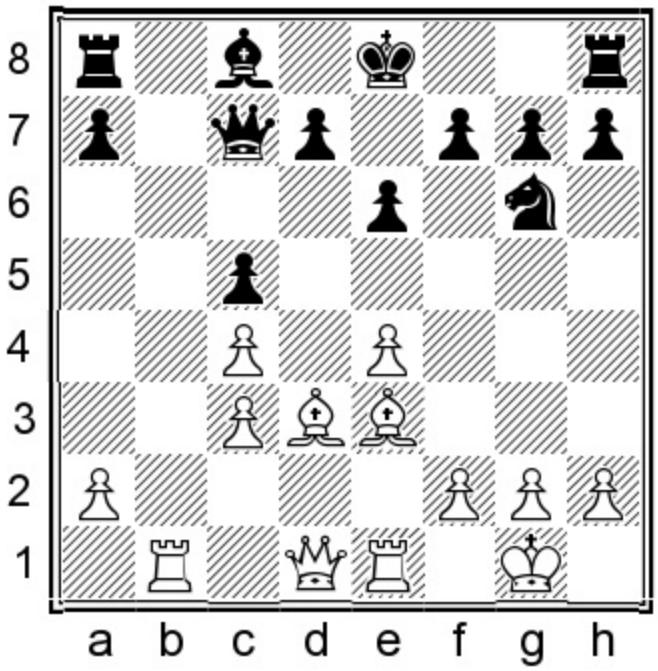
12...♗xe3 13.♖xe3 is just a better version of 11...0-0.

13.bxc3 c5

13...0-0 14.c5± is ideal for White.

14.♖b1

Our bishop-pair more than make up for the doubled-pawns.

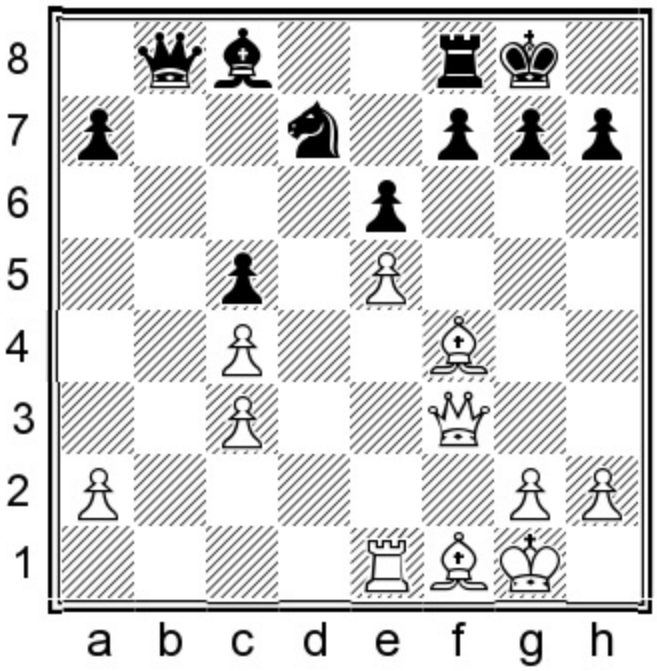


Position after: 14.♖b1

The following variations demonstrate some cool ideas that work predominantly because of the combination of our bishop-pair and development advantage.

14...0-0

14...♘e5 15.♗f1 d6 16.f4 ♘d7 17.e5! dxe5 18.fxe5 0-0 19.♕f3 ♖b8 20.♖xb8 ♕xb8 21.♗f4



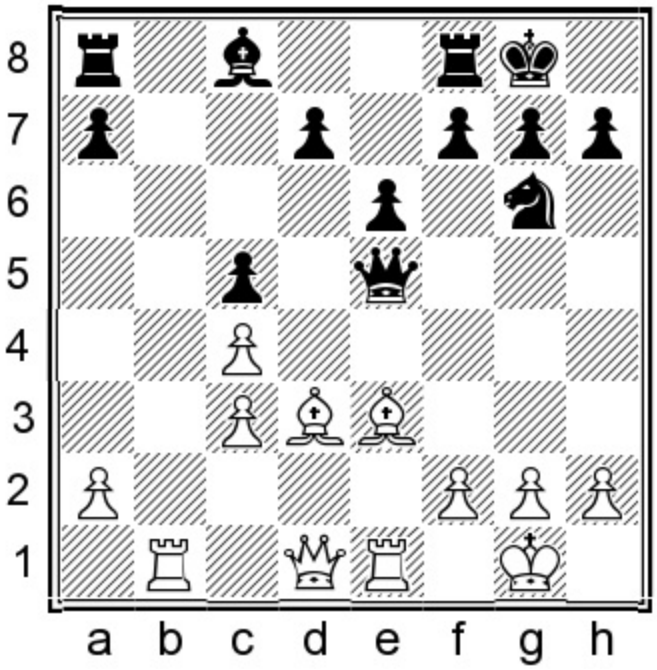
Position after: 21.♗f4

Black can win a pawn, but he'll find it increasingly difficult to cope with our attacking prospects. 21...♕b2 22.♗d3 ♕xa2 23.♖f1→

15.e5!

A thematic pawn sacrifice, opening lines for our bishops to attack the Black monarch.

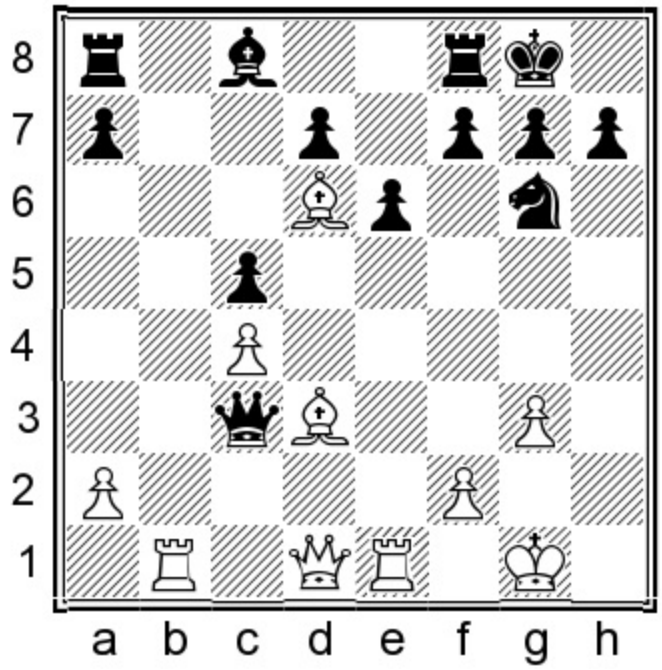
15...♕xe5



Position after: 15...♕xe5

16.♖b5!

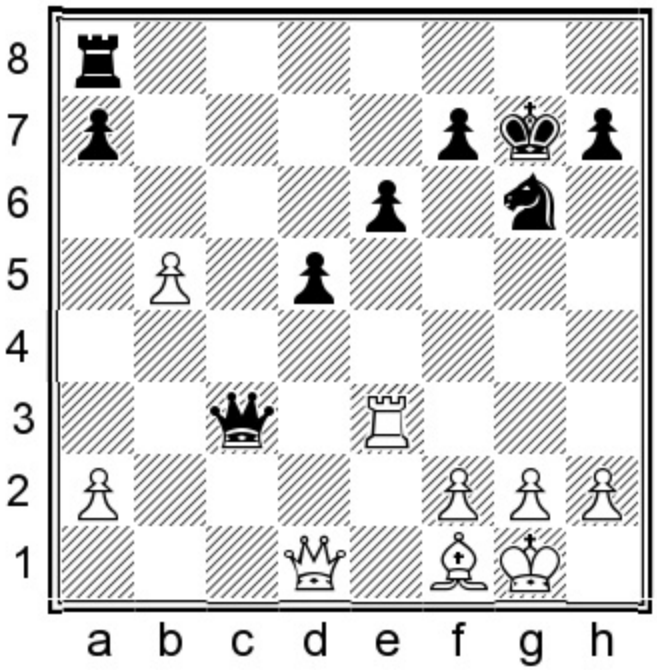
16.h4!? If Black doesn't capture on h4, h5-h6 will be very strong in attempting to exacerbate Black's dark-squared weaknesses. 16...♘xh4 17.g3 ♘g6 18.♗f4 ♕xc3 19.♗d6



Position after: 19.♗d6

We're winning an exchange by force, although Black remains relatively solid. 19...♗a6 [19...♖e8 20.♗e4±] 20.♗xf8 ♖xf8 21.♗f1±

16...♗a6 17.♗xc5 ♕c7 18.♗xf8 ♗xb5 19.♗xg7 ♔xg7 20.cxb5 ♕xc3 21.♗f1 d5 22.♖e3±

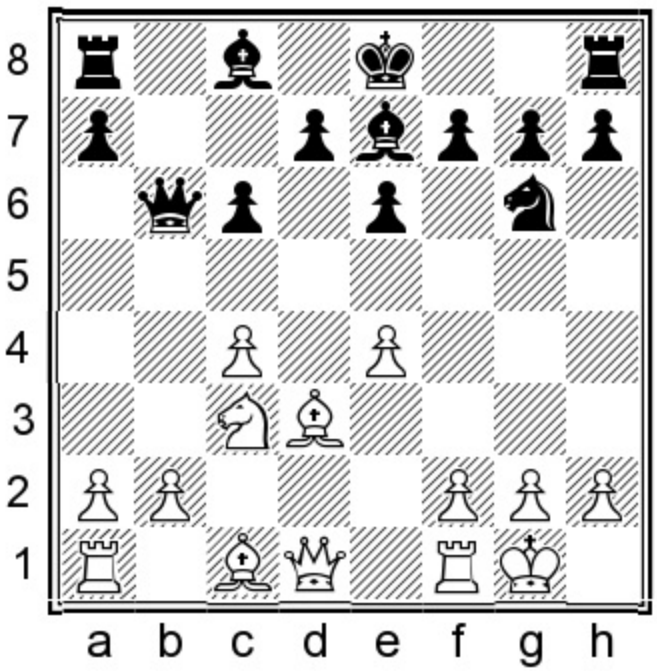


Position after: 22.♖e3±

Black's king is a big weakness and we also have a queenside majority, enabling us to play effectively on both sides of the board.

c) 9...♗e7

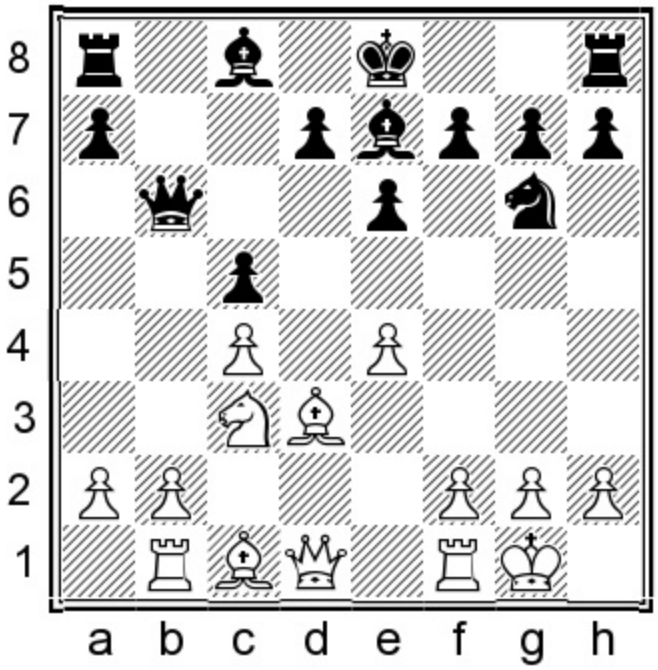
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4 cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♕b6 7.♘xc6 bxc6 8.♗d3 ♘g6 9.c4 ♗e7 10.♘c3



Position after: 10.♘c3

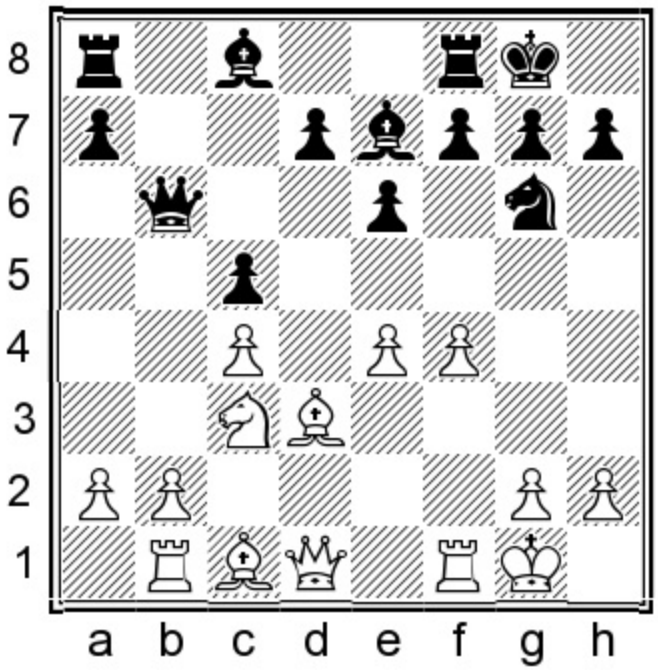
10...0-0

10...c5?! We'll analyse this move in more detail in the lines after 8.♗e2. For now, it's enough to know that this is an even better version for White; ...c6-c5 enables us to start attacking immediately, and the bishop on d3 is perfectly placed to support this plan. 11.♖b1



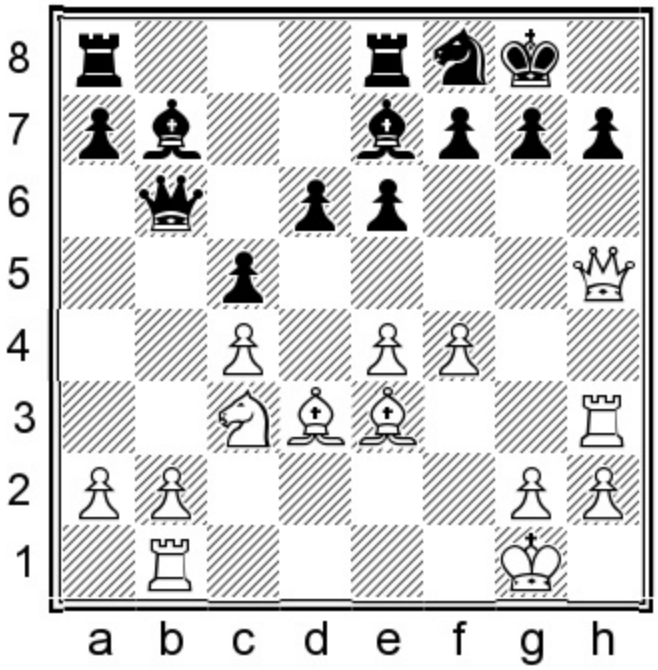
Position after: 11.♖b1

11...0-0 [11...d6 Even if Black delays castling, it doesn't make a difference to our approach. 12.f4 ♗f6 13.♕h5 ♗b7 14.f5! exf5 15.exf5 ♘e5 16.♗e4 0-0 17.♗xb7 ♕xb7 18.♘d5 ♘d7 19.♕f3±] 12.f4



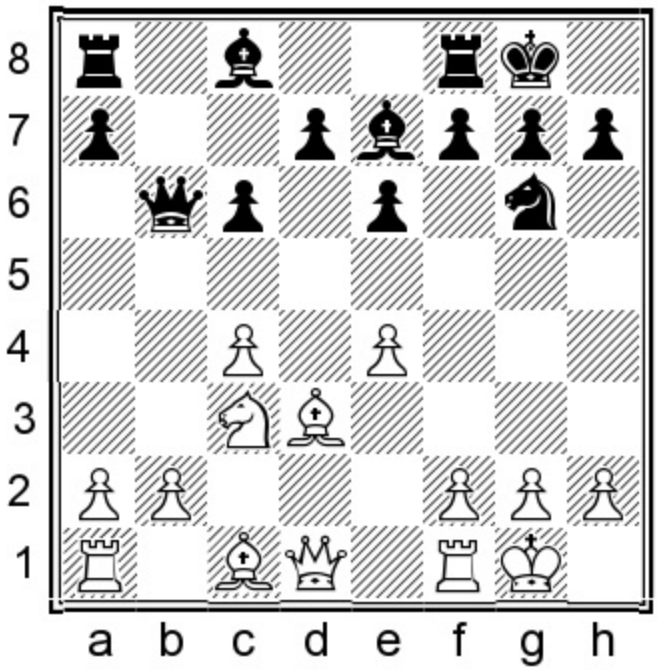
Position after: 12.f4

12...d6 [12...♗b7 13.♗e3 ♗c6 14.♕h5! The attack plays itself. 14...♕c7 15.♖f3 h6 16.♖bf1 ♖ab8 17.b3 ♗f6 18.♘e2→] 13.♕h5 ♗b7 14.♖f3 ♖fe8 15.♖h3 ♘f8 16.♗e3±



Position after: 16.♗e3±

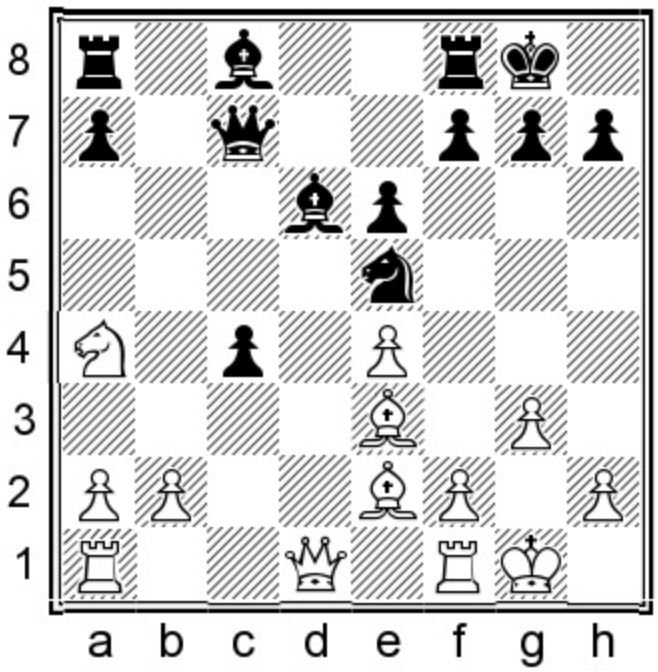
In addition to our attacking prospects, we also have additional possible avenues on the queenside with b2-b4. We can also choose the right moment to play e4-e5, whereas it is really difficult to come up with any ideas for Black.



Position after: 10...0-0

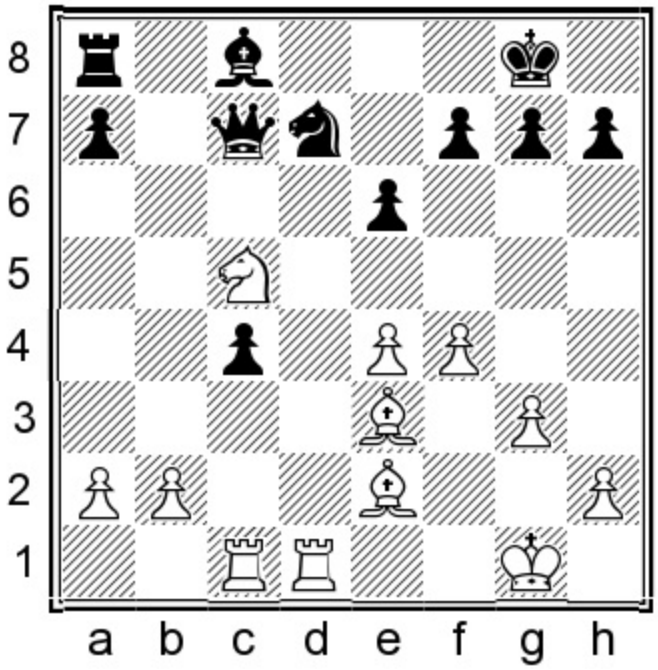
11.♖b1

11.♘a4 Multiple ideas associated with ♘a4 and c4-c5 have proven to be effective. However, in this exact position I think Black can generate enough activity associated with the exploitation of our light-squared bishop's positioning. 11...♕c7 12.c5 d5 13.cxd6 ♗xd6 14.g3 c5 15.♗e3 ♘e5 16.♗e2 c4!



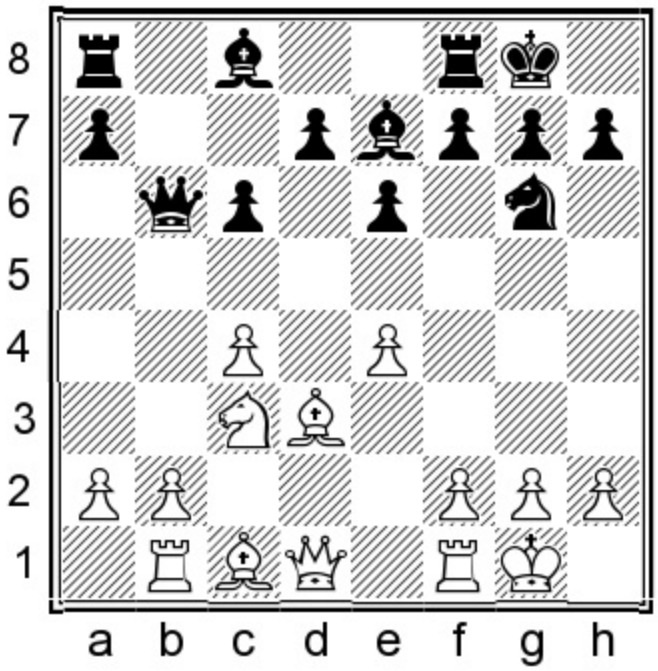
Position after: 16...c4!

A really important move, after which I haven't been able to find a path to an advantage for White. 17.♖c1 ♖d8 18.f4 ♗c5! Here White will sacrifice a queen for a rook and a piece, consequently generating a lot of activity. However, I did not find any of the variations fully convincing. 19.♘xc5 ♖xd1 20.♖fxd1 ♘d7



Position after: 20...♘d7

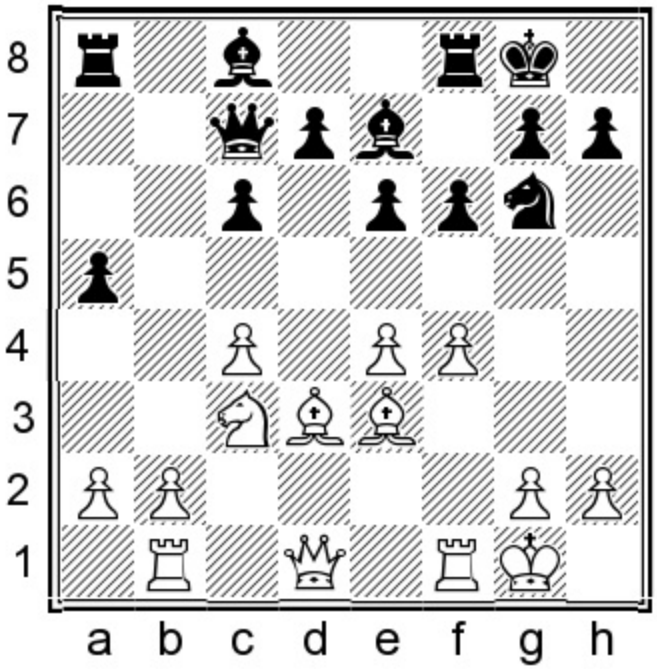
21.♘xe6! The best practical try, and Black needs to be accurate. [21.♖xc4 ♘xc5 22.♖xc5 ♕e7∞] 21...fxe6 22.♗xc4 ♔h8 23.♗xe6 ♕d8 24.f5 ♕e8 25.♖xc8 ♖xc8 26.♖xd7 ♕h5 27.♗d4 ♖c1+ 28.♔g2 ♕e2+=



Position after: 11.♖b1

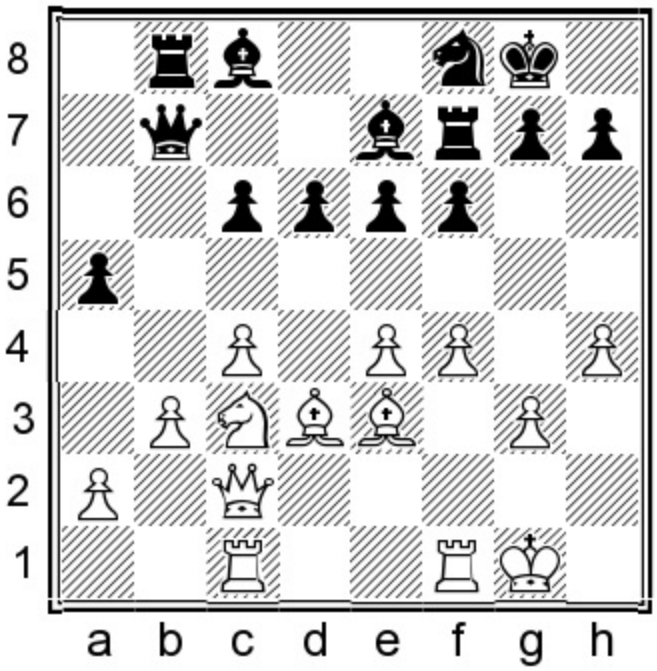
11...♕c7

A) The following game is a nice illustration of how to build up White's attack. 11...a5?! 12.♗e3 ♕c7 13.f4 f6



Position after: 13...f6

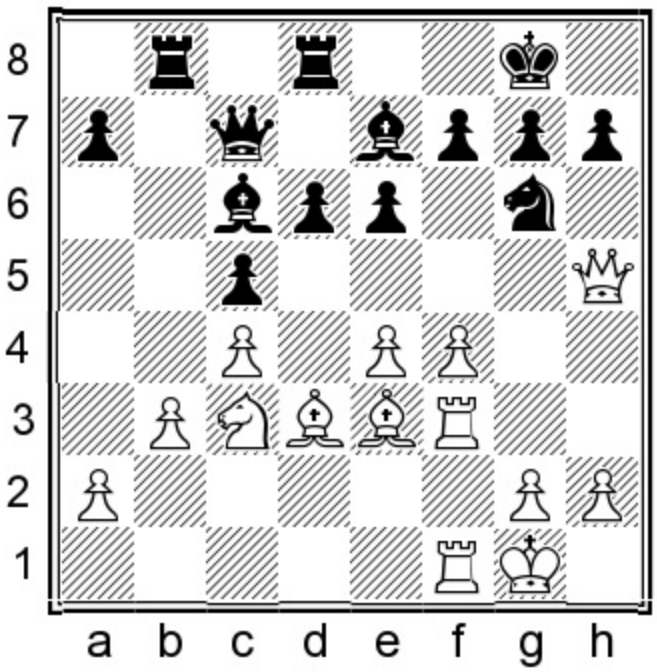
14.g3 [14.♕h5! was even stronger. 14...♖f7 15.♖f3→] 14...♖b8 15.♕e2 d6 16.h4! ♖f7 17.♕c2 [17.a3!?± As always, playing on both sides of the board is very effective.] 17...♘f8 18.♖bc1 ♕b7 19.b3±



Position after: 19.b3±

Black is completely passive and failed to put up any resistance in Santos Ruiz – Perpinya Rofes, Montcada 2017

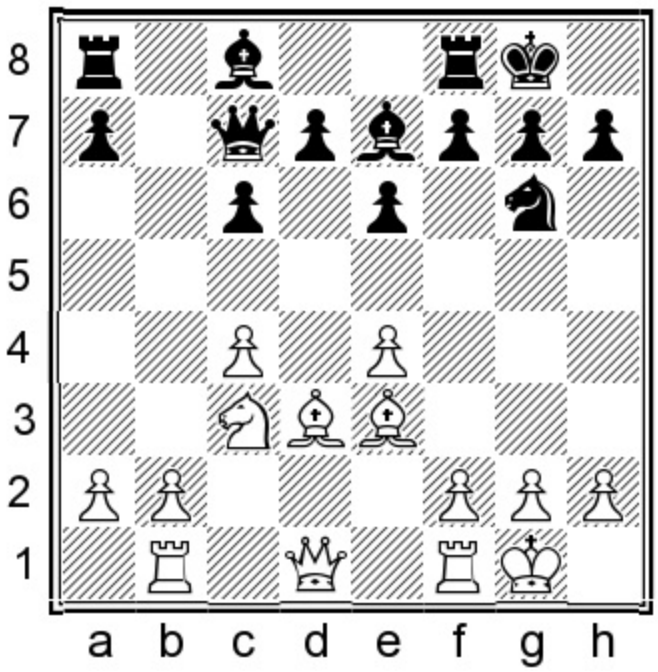
B) 11...♗a6 was played in a correspondence game. White produced an exemplary reaction demonstrating how to control Black's counterplay whilst simultaneously building our own kingside initiative. 12.♕a4! ♗b7 13.♗e3 c5 14.f4 ♕c7 15.♕d1! ♖ab8 16.♕h5 ♗c6 17.b3 ♖fd8 18.♖f3 d6 19.♖bf1→



Position after: 19.♖bf1→

White's pieces were perfectly placed to continue the attack in Tiits – Korabliov, ICCF email 2014.

12.♗e3

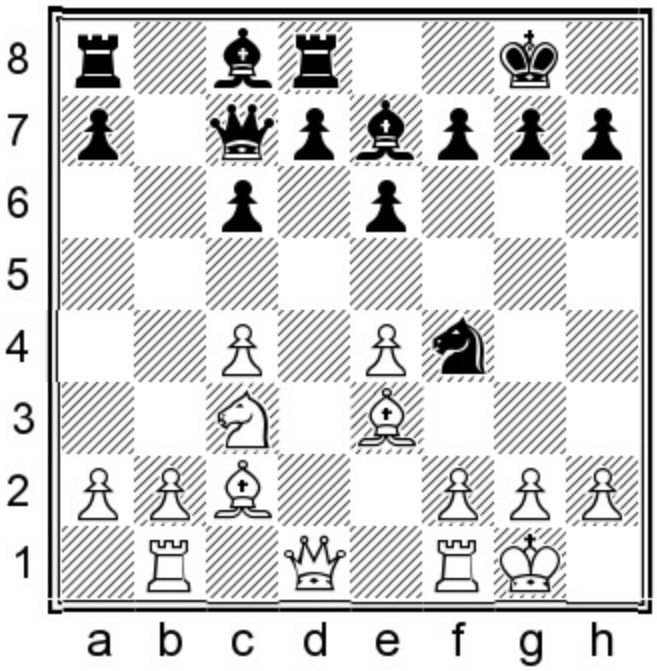


Position after: 12.♗e3

12...♖d8!

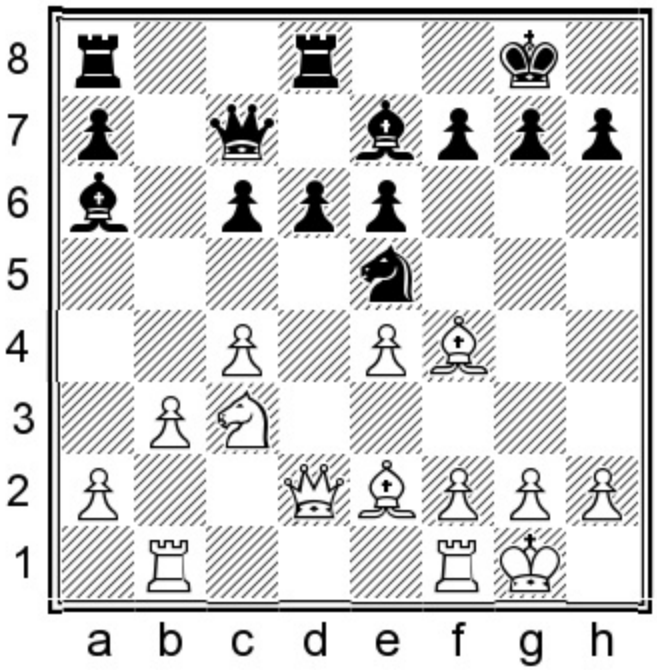
Directly playing for ...d7-d5 is Black's best equalising attempt.

A) 12...♘f4!? is an attempt to claim that the bishop was misplaced on d3 compared to e2. If we want to keep our light-squared bishop, we are forced to retreat it to c2. In the corresponding position after 8.♗e2, we are able to play the seemingly preferable 13.♗f3. 13.♗c2 [13.b4 ♕e5! 14.♘e2 ♘xd3 15.♕xd3 d5= Black is doing well.] 13...♖d8



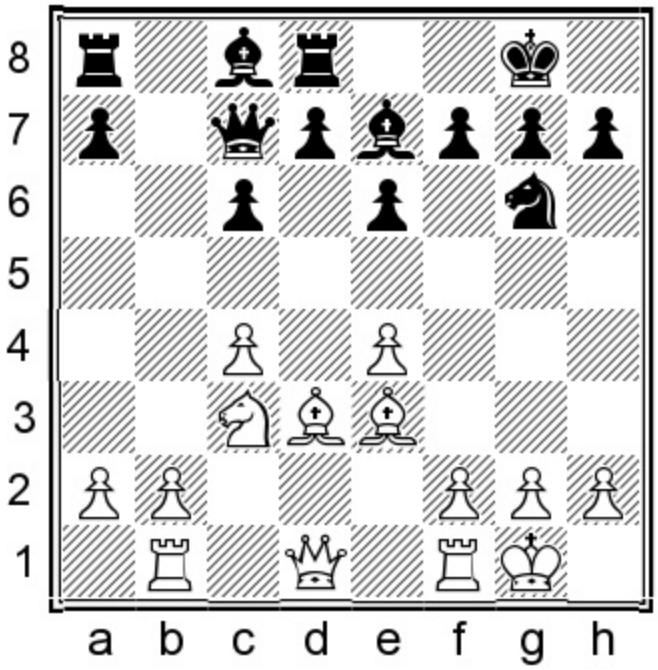
Position after: 13...♖d8

14.♕d2 [14.g3 ♘g6 15.f4 d5 16.exd5 cxd5 17.cxd5 ♗c5 18.♗xc5 ♕xc5+ 19.♖f2 exd5 20.♘a4 ♕d6 21.♕d4 We can try to claim an advantage here, but my instinct is that it's really not that much for White.] 14...♘g6 15.♗d3 We are forced to play more slowly here in order to mitigate the impact of a potential ...d7-d5 push. [15.f4 ♗a6 16.♗d3 d5=] 15...♗a6 16.♗e2 ♘e5 17.♗f4 d6 18.b3± White is still better, though I can't help but think that I would've preferred my bishop on e2 in the first place.



Position after: 18.b3±

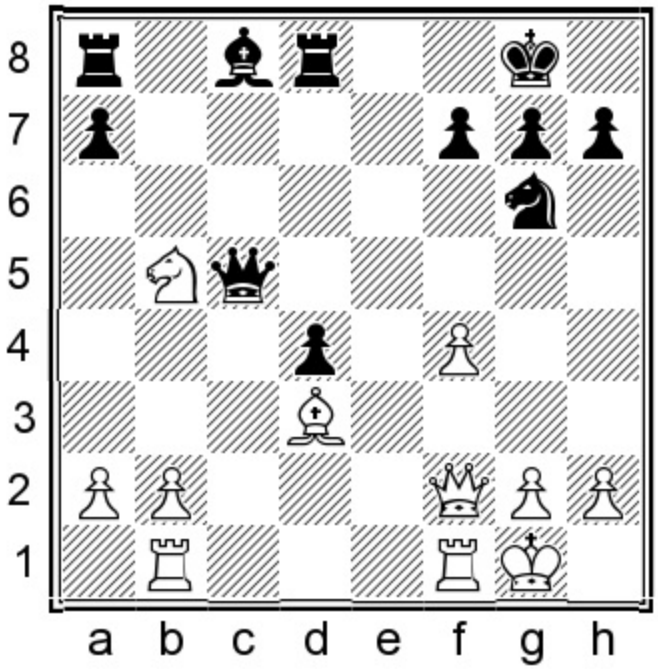
B) 12...e5? was a serious positional error in Caruana – Gelfand, Elancourt 2013. After 13.g3! d6 14.b4 ♗e6 15.♕d2± Black's knight was completely ostracised, and he faced an unenviable defensive task.



Position after: 12...♖d8!

13.b4!?

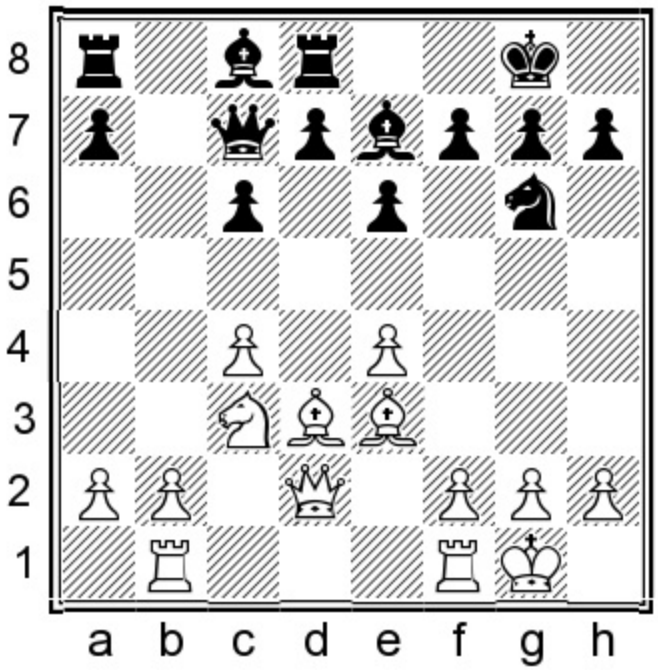
A) 13.f4 d5 14.cxd5 cxd5 15.exd5 ♗c5! 16.♕e2 exd5 17.♘b5 ♕b6 18.♗xc5 ♕xc5+ 19.♕f2 d4!



Position after: 19...d4!

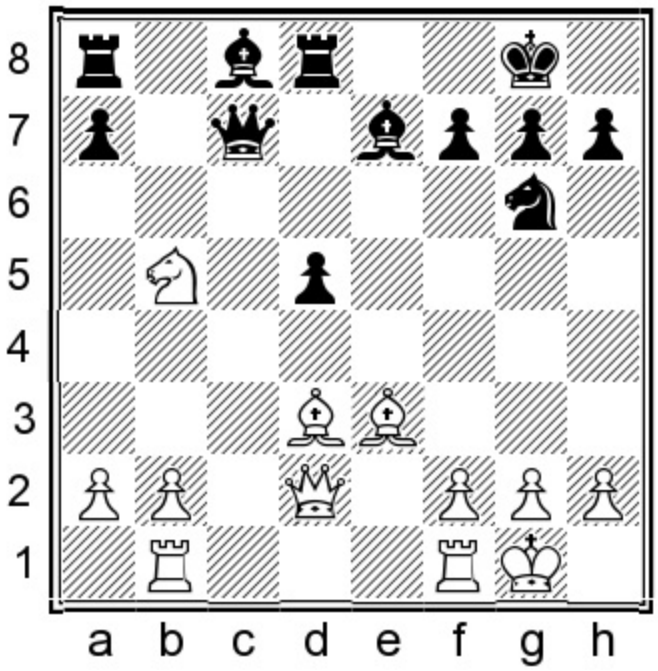
Analysing this position, I was unable to extract anything major for White. Our f2-f4 advance means that our king isn't totally safe, and overall I think Black has enough counterplay to make up for his weak d4-pawn.

B) 13.♕d2



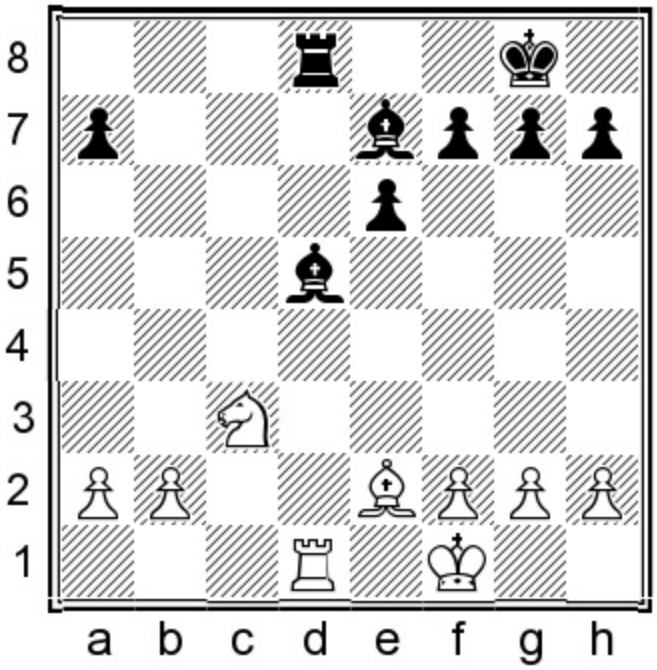
Position after: 13.♕d2

B1) It's too early for Black to play 13...d5?!, as our e3-bishop doesn't hang compared to the line after 13.f4. 14.exd5 cxd5 15.cxd5 exd5 16.♘b5±



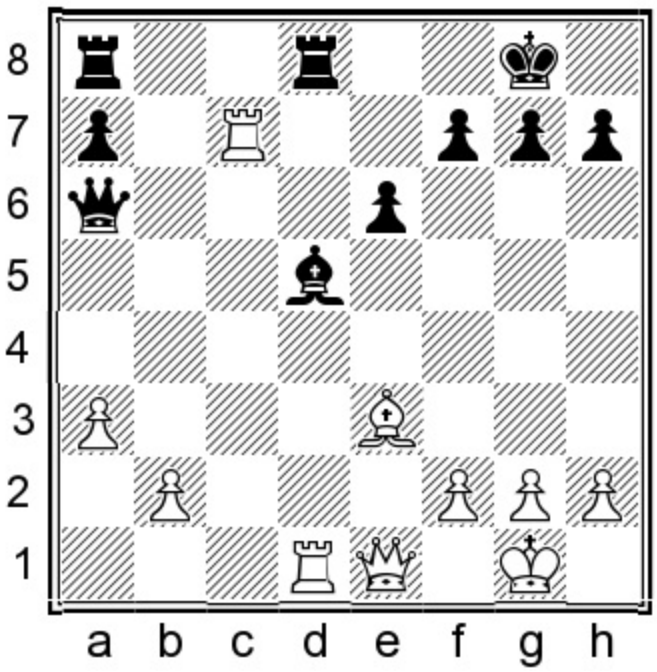
Position after: 16.♘b5±

B2) I also struggled to find anything after 13...♗b7!? 14.♖bd1 ♘e5 15.♗e2 d5 16.exd5 cxd5 17.cxd5 ♘c4 18.♗f4 ♘xd2 19.♗xc7 ♘xf1 20.♗xd8 ♖xd8 21.♔xf1 ♗xd5=



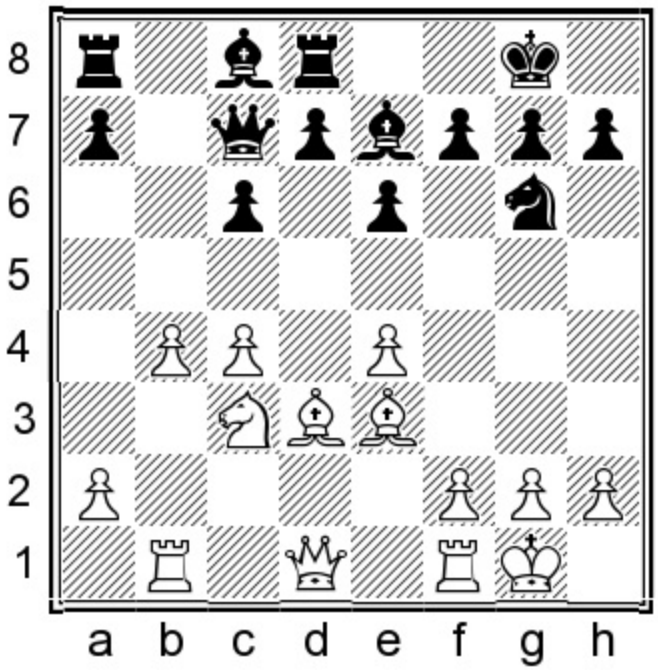
Position after: 21...♗xd5=

B3) 13...♘e5! The tempo against our d3-bishop means that Black is able to equalise without any problems. 14.♗e2 d5! 15.exd5 cxd5 16.cxd5 ♘c4 17.♗xc4 ♕xc4 18.♖fd1 ♗b7! 19.♖bc1 ♗b4 20.♕e1 ♕a6 21.a3 ♗xc3 22.♖xc3 ♗xd5 23.♖c7=



Position after: 23.♖c7=

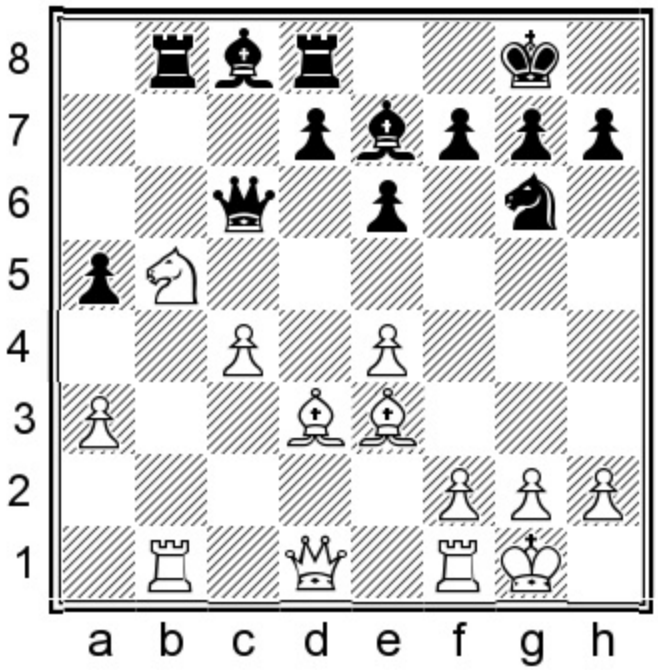
Black's ability to simplify the position was often based on gaining a tempo against our light-squared bishop.



Position after: 13.b4!?

13...d5

13...♖b8 14.a3 a5 15.b5 cxb5 [15...♗xa3 16.b6 ♕d6 17.e5→] 16.♘xb5 ♕c6



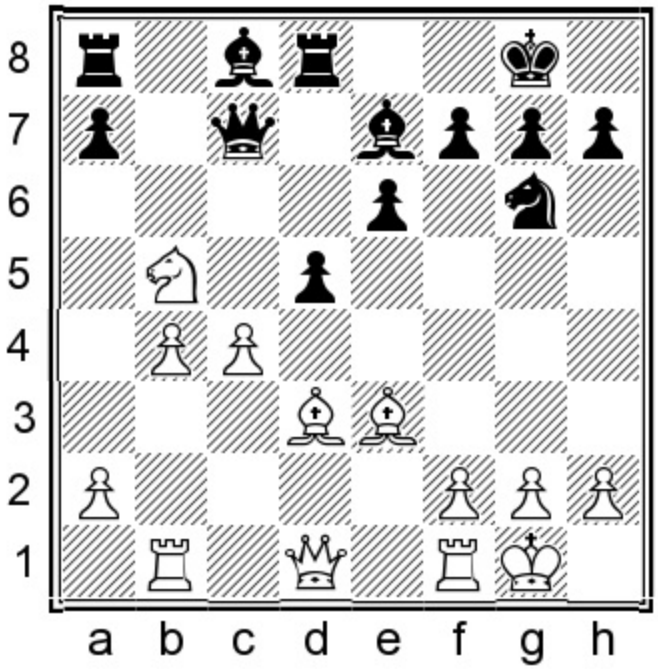
Position after: 16...♕c6

This is not a forcing position but I just had to check that we could avoid Black crashing through with ...d5 in all lines, for example: 17.♗a7 ♖a8 [17...♖b7 18.♗d4 ♗c5 19.♗c3] 18.♘d4 ♕d6 19.♗b6 ♖f8 20.♖e1±

14.exd5 cxd5

14...exd5 15.cxd5± forces Black to take on an IQP, with little by way of compensating activity.

15.♘b5

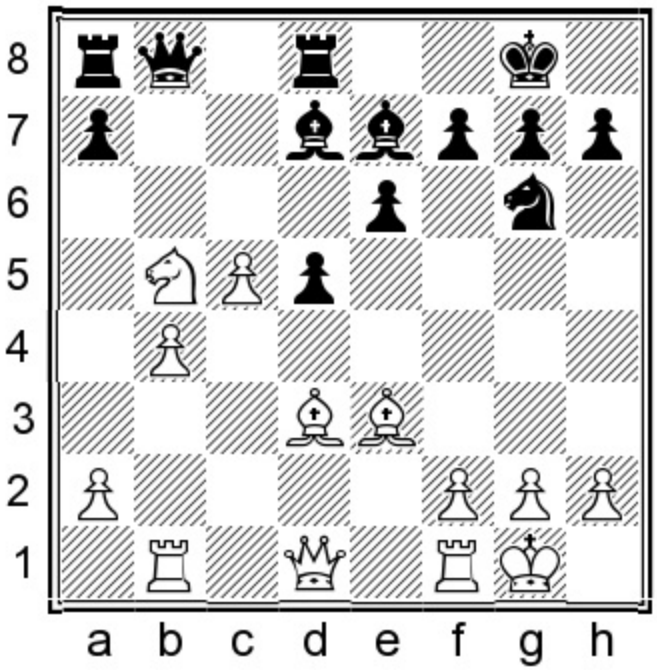


Position after: 15.♘b5

15...♕d7

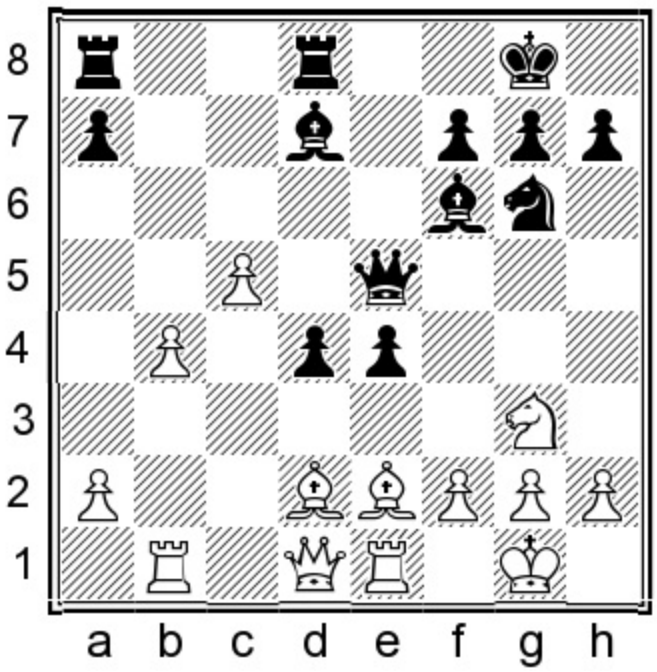
A) 15...♕c6 is the most restrictive of Black's queen moves. 16.cxd5 ♕xd5 transposing to the 16...♕xd5 note within 15...♕b7.

B) 15...♕b8 16.c5! Simply intending c6-c7. 16...♗d7 [16...e5 17.c6! ♖f8 18.♗c5 ♗xc5 19.bxc5±]



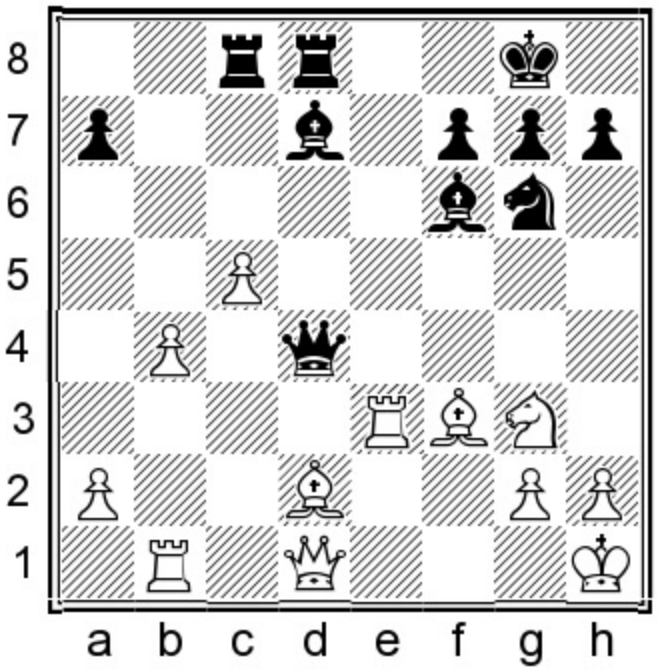
Position after: 16...♗d7

17.♘d4! White needs to be quite precise. [17.♘c3?! d4∓; 17.a4 e5 18.♕c2 ♗c6 19.♘a3 ♕c7! 20.b5 e4=] 17...e5 18.♘f5 ♗f6 [18...♗xf5 19.♗xf5 ♘h4 20.♗h3±] 19.♘g3 e4 [19...♕c8 20.f3 ♗e7 21.♕c2±] 20.♗e2 d4 21.♗d2 ♕e5 [21...♗c6 22.b5 ♗d5 23.c6 ♗e5 24.♕a4→] 22.♖e1



Position after: 22.♖e1

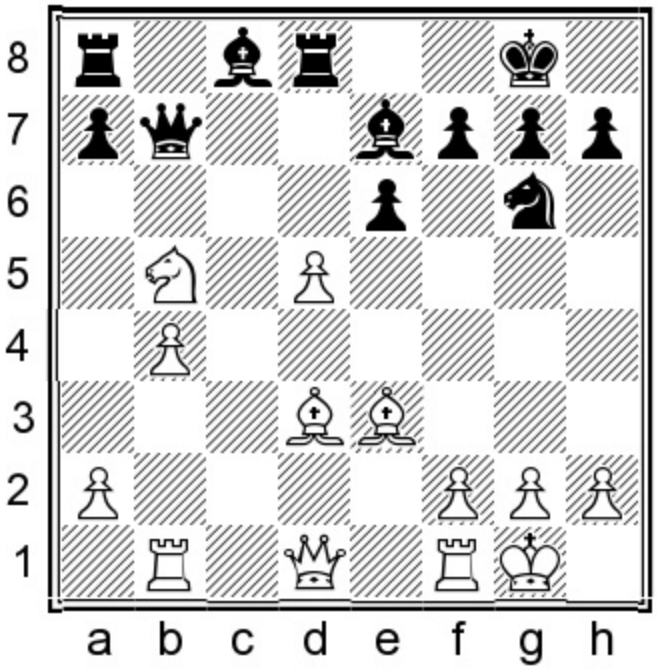
22...e3 [22...♗e6 23.♗f3; 22...♗h4 23.♗c4 ♗xg3 24.hxg3 ♗e6 25.♗xe6 ♕xe6 26.b5±] 23.fxe3 dxe3 24.♗f3 ♖ac8 25.♖xe3 ♕d4 26.♔h1!



Position after: 26.♔h1!

This is a very concrete position, but White threatens to consolidate next with ♘e4 and Black doesn't seem to have enough for a pawn. 26...♗g5 27.♘e2 ♕f6 28.♗c3 ♕a6 29.♕d4 ♗f6 30.♕d5 ♗b5 31.♕b3±

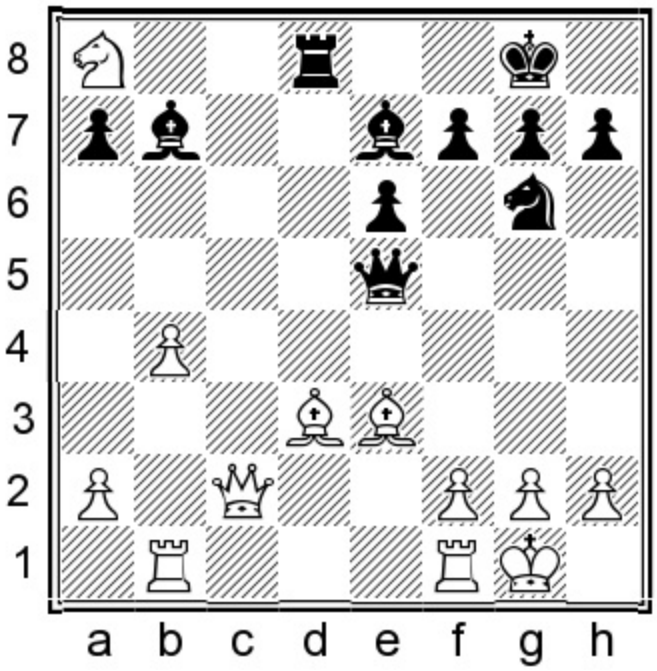
C) 15...♕b7!? In this version Black can extract some concessions before accepting an IQP. 16.cxd5



Position after: 16.cxd5

C1) 16...♖xd5 17.♕e2±, threatening ♗e4, is quite embarrassing for Black.

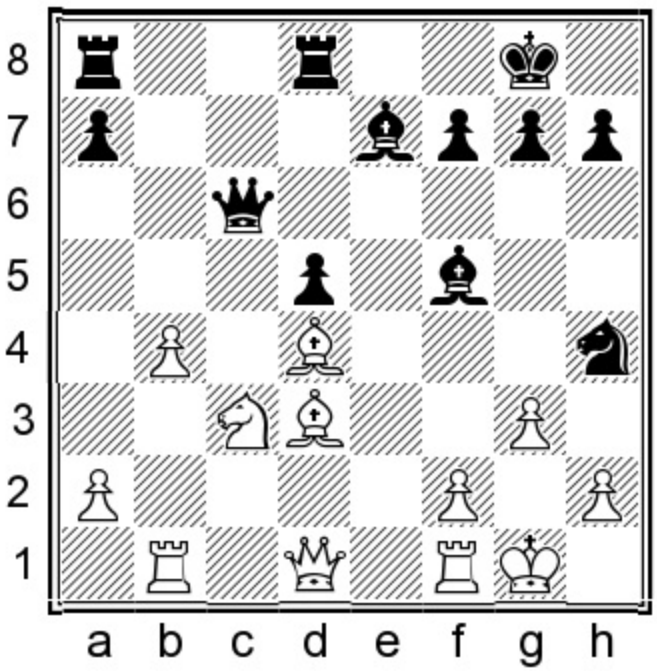
C2) 16...♕xd5!? 17.♘c7 ♕e5 18.♘xa8 ♗b7 19.♕c2 Black can't afford to grab the knight now because White will consolidate with ♖bd1.



Position after: 19.♕c2

19...♕d5 20.f3 ♕xd3 21.♕xd3 ♖xd3 22.♖b3! ♖xb3 23.axb3 ♗xa8 24.♖c1 ♗d5 25.♖c8+ ♗f8 26.b5±

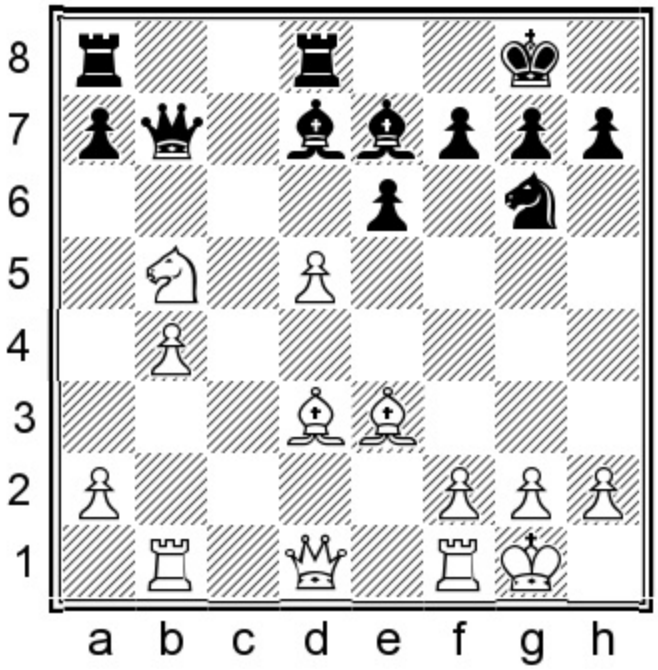
C3) 16...♘h4!? 17.♘c3 exd5 18.♗d4 ♗f5 19.g3 ♕c6!



Position after: 19...♕c6!

One specific trick that Black has to avoid passive defence with an IQP. However, he will lose the g7-pawn and this is enough to swing the balance in White's favour. The following play is nearly forced: 20.gxh4 ♕g6+ 21.♔h1 ♗xd3 22.♖g1 ♕f5 23.♖xg7+ ♔f8 24.♖c1 ♗f6 25.♖g3! [25.♗xf6!?] 25...♗xd4 26.♖xd3 ♗e5 27.♘xd5 ♕xf2 28.♖d2 ♕xh4 29.♕f3± with the better minor piece and strong pressure against Black's kingside.

C4) 16...♗d7



Position after: 16...♗d7

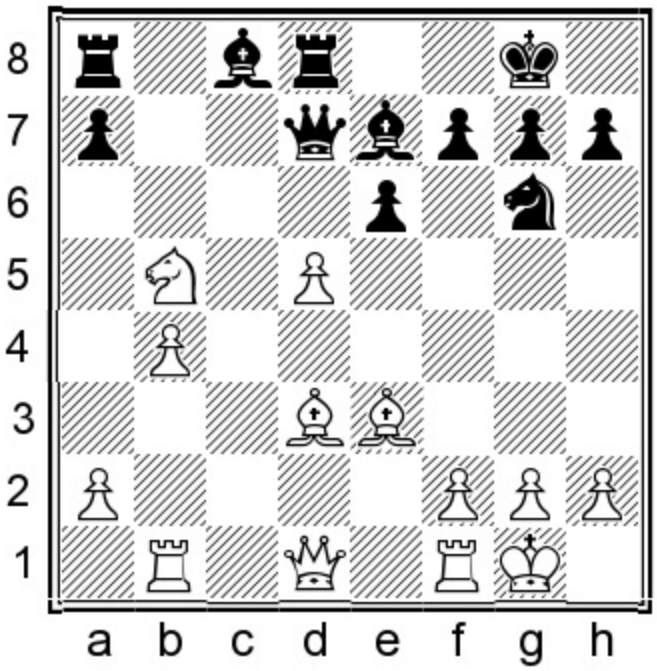
C4.1) 17.♘c3 exd5↑ gives Black decent play right now because White is still vulnerable along the d-file.

C4.2) 17.♘d4 ♕xd5 18.♕f3 ♕xf3 19.♘xf3

C4.3) 17.a4 ♗xb5! 18.♗xb5 [18.axb5 ♕xd5 19.♗e2 threatening ♗f3 might seem like a decent try to a human, but the computer is unimpressed.] 18...♖xd5 19.♕e2 ♘h4= The long diagonal gives Black decent counterplay.

C4.4) 17.♕e2! a6 [17...♖ab8 18.♘d4 ♕xd5 19.b5±; 17...♘e5 18.d6±; 17...exd5 18.♘d4±] 18.♘c3 exd5 19.♗d4 The point of 17.♕e2 was so that here Black wouldn't have ...♘f4. 19...♗d6 20.♕h5±

16.cxd5



Position after: 16.cxd5

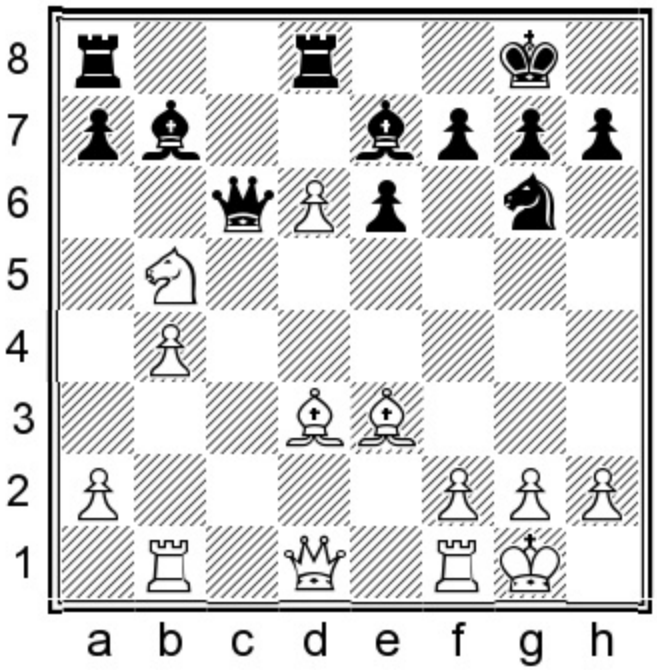
16...♗b7

16...♘e5 17.♗e2 exd5 18.♖e1 ♗a6 19.♗c5!±

17.d6 ♕c6!

Provoking White to weaken with f3.

Compare the line 17...♗xd6 18.♘xd6 ♕xd6 19.♗xg6 hxg6 20.♕xd6 ♖xd6 21.b5± when Black is not able to activate either of his rooks with tempo.

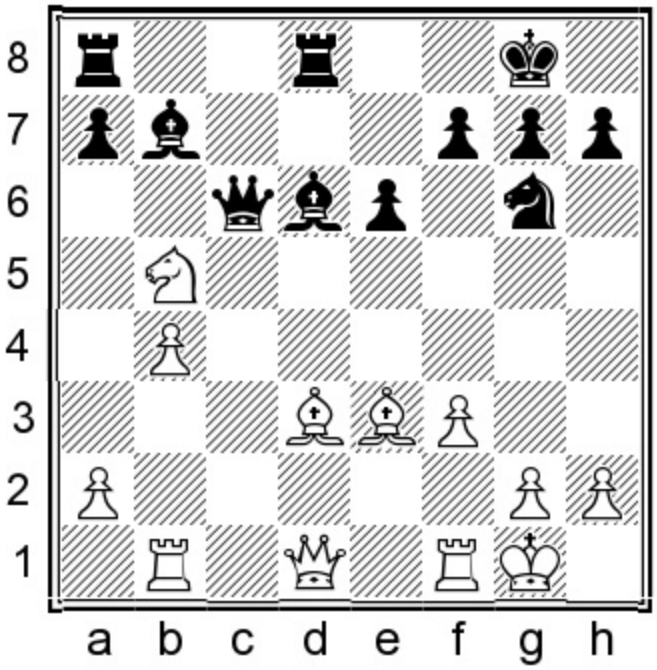


Position after: 17...♕c6!

18.f3

The other plausible attempt is 18.♕f3!? ♕xf3 19.gxf3 ♗xd6 20.♗e4 when Black has to be quite precise in view of the connected passers White will have on the queenside: 20...♗xe4 21.fxe4 ♗f4 22.♗xa7 ♖d7 23.a4 ♖b7 24.♖fd1 h5 25.♖a1 ♗e5 26.♖a2⩱

18...♗xd6

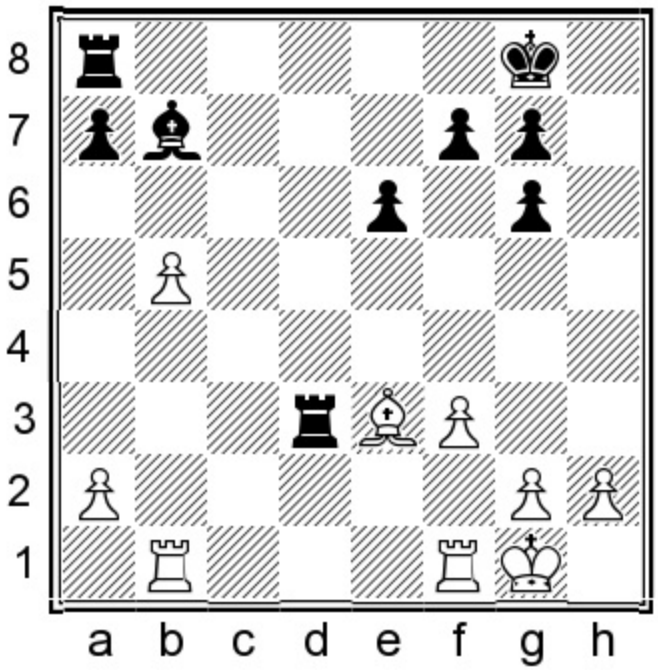


Position after: 18...♗xd6

19.♖c1!

White has to play bravely to get an advantage.

Compared to the 17...♗xd6 note, after 19.♘xd6 ♕xd6 20.♗xg6 hxg6 21.♕xd6 ♖xd6 22.b5 Black has 22...♖d3



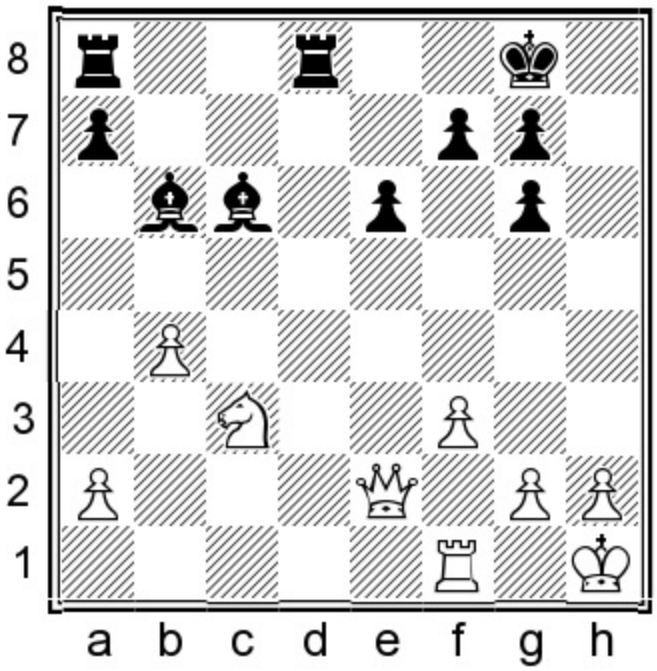
Position after: 22...♖d3

with tempo, and the endgame is not especially worrying for him. 23.♖b3 [23.♗c5 ♖c8 24.♗xa7 ♖a3=] 23...♖xb3 24.axb3 Stockfish indicates that White still has a small plus here, and indeed he risks absolutely nothing and has some certain practical chances due to the likely queenside passer. But Black should hold comfortably provided he stays calm, starting with a move like 24...f6.

19...♗f4! 20.♖xc6 ♗xe3+ 21.♔h1 ♗xc6 22.♕e2 ♗b6 23.♗xg6

On principle, White should trade off this knight. He should then seek to swap a pair of rooks to limit his liability, and use the queen and knight combo to generate threats on both sides of the board.

23...hxg6 24.♘c3±

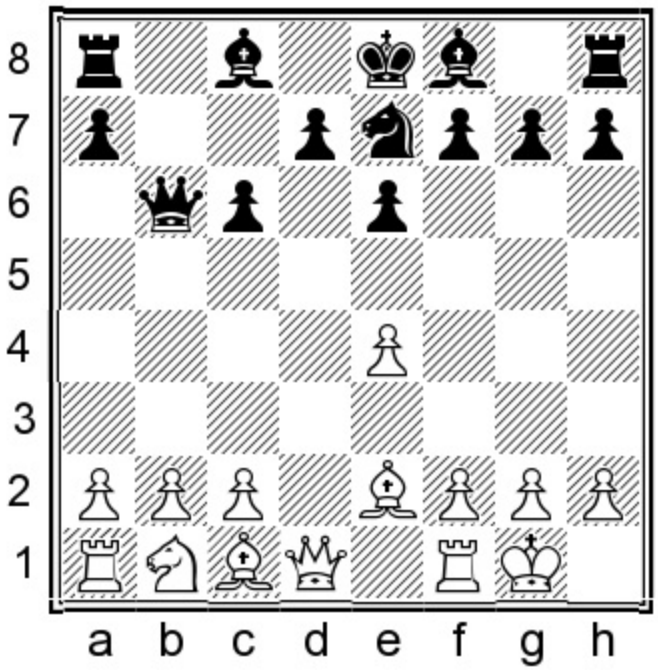


Position after: 24.♘c3±

Followed by ♖d1, with a reasonable edge for White.

Chapter 11
4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4 cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♕b6 7.♘xc6 bxc6 8.♗e2

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4 cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♕b6 7.♘xc6 bxc6 8.♗e2



Chapter Guide

Chapter 11 – 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4 cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♕b6 7.♘xc6 bxc6 8.♗e2

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4!? cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♕b6 7.♘xc6 bxc6 8.♗e2!? ♘g6 9.c4 ♗e7

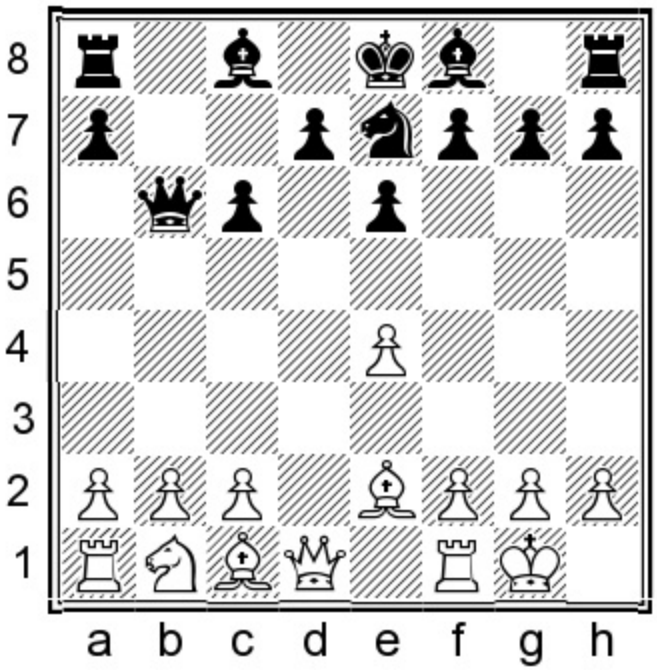
a) 10.♗e3!?

b) 10.♘c3 c5

c) 10.♘c3 0-0

a) 10.♗e3!?

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4 cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♕b6 7.♘xc6 bxc6 8.♗e2!?

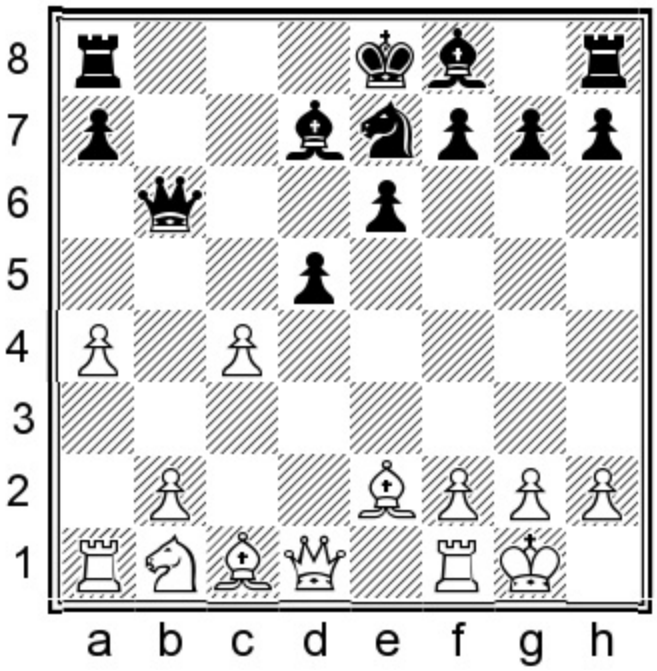


Position after: 8.♗e2!?

This retreat has predominantly been favoured in correspondence games, and our analysis after 8.♗d3 might demonstrate why. Whilst the bishop stands on a less attacking square, I haven't found a way for Black to directly equalise. This is because Black can't effectively attack our bishop with ...♘e5 or ...c5-c4, which was very significant in the lines after 8.♗d3.

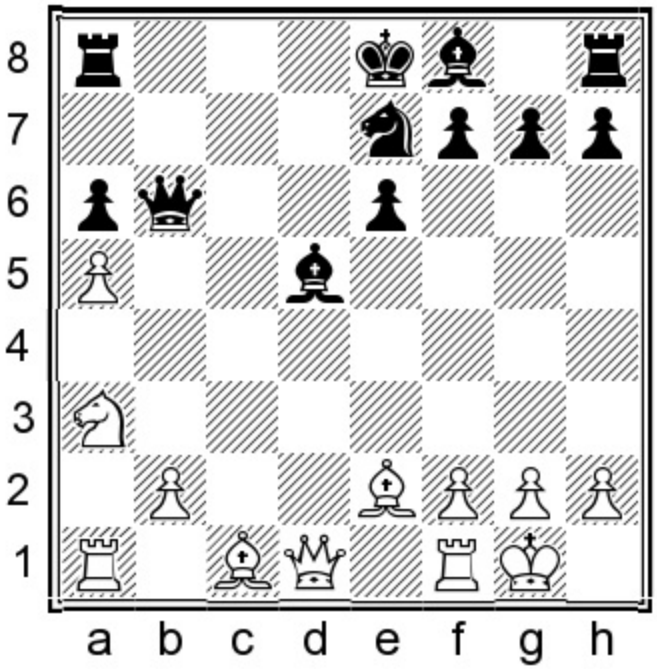
8...♘g6

Black's lack of development means that it's too early to play 8...d5. 9.exd5 cxd5 [9...exd5 10.c4±] 10.c4 ♗d7 11.a4! Immediately expanding on the queenside is the best way to exploit Black's premature central action.



Position after: 11.a4!

11...♗c6 [11...♖d8 12.♘a3 d4 13.a5 ♕b8 14.♕xd4±; 11...♕b7 12.♘a3 a6 13.♖b1! ♘g6 14.cxd5 exd5 15.b4 ♗e7 16.b5↑ White had a nice initiative in Repp – Pirs, GER email 2017.] 12.♘a3 a6 13.cxd5 ♗xd5 14.a5!

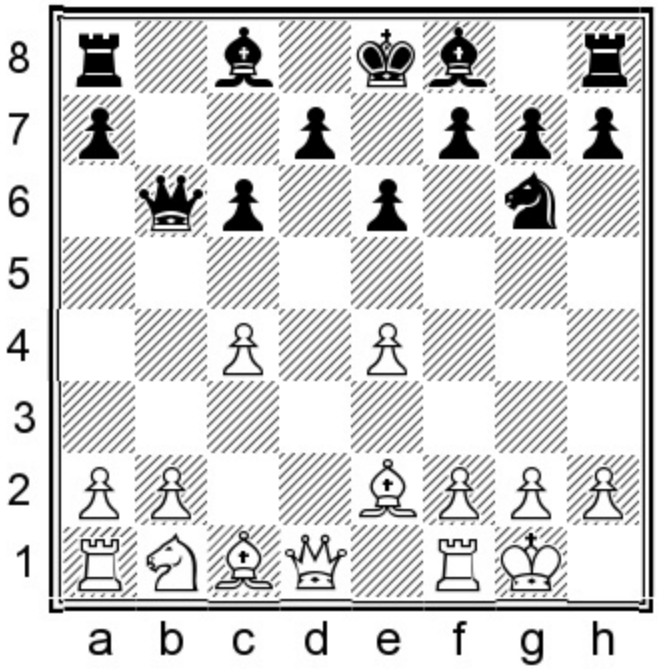


Position after: 14.a5!

If Black doesn't capture on a5, we can continue with ♘c4 and his a6-pawn will most likely fall. 14...♕xa5 15.♗d2 ♕c7 16.♘c4 ♘c6 17.♗e3± The threat of ♘b6 ensures that our initiative is far from

dissipating.

9.c4

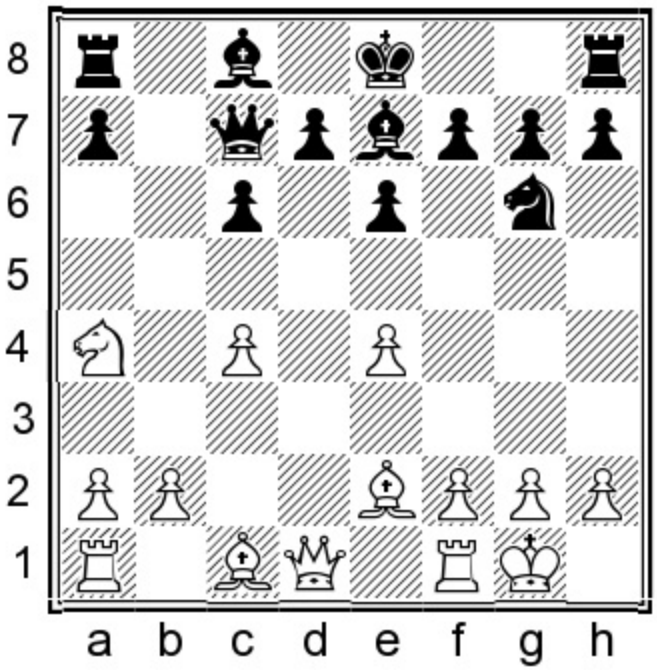


Position after: 9.c4

We've already gained some knowledge in analysing lines after 8.♗d3, but it's worth recapping what our plans are here. There are two ideas: 1) To play in an attacking way with f2-f4, which will require either ♔h1 or ♗e3 in order to remove the b6-g1 pin. In doing so, a preparatory move like ♖b1 might be necessary to defend the b2-pawn. It's very likely that we'll put our light-squared bishop back on d3 to support the attack – but only at the right moment, ensuring that Black doesn't have a way to exploit its position. 2) The other main idea in these positions is to try and exploit Black's pawn structure by playing c4-c5 when the opportunity presents itself. This will require similar preparatory moves to our first plan, such as ♗e3 and ♖b1, before playing b2-b4. It's likely that Black will play ...c6-c5 before we are able to achieve this positional victory. Therefore in both cases it is likely that we'll end up playing for f2-f4 and a kingside assault. It's important to note that the extra tempo we waste playing ♗b5-e2 and then ♗e2-d3 isn't a big deal.

9...♗e7

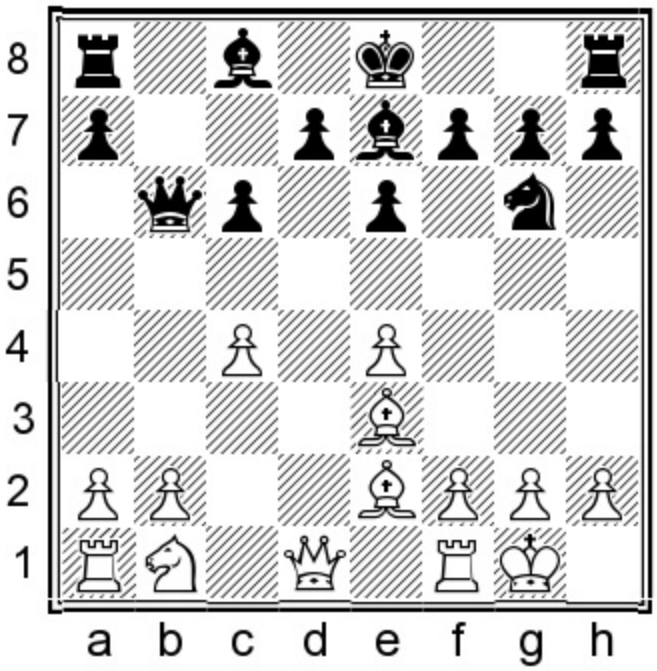
9...♗c5?! This doesn't really make sense now as Black doesn't have time to put his bishop on d4. For example: 10.♘c3 ♕c7 11.♘a4 ♗e7



Position after: 11...♗e7

12.c5! d6 13.cxd6 ♗xd6 14.g3 0-0 15.♗e3± We are a tempo up on the corresponding line after 9...♗e7.

10.♗e3!?



Position after: 10.♗e3!?

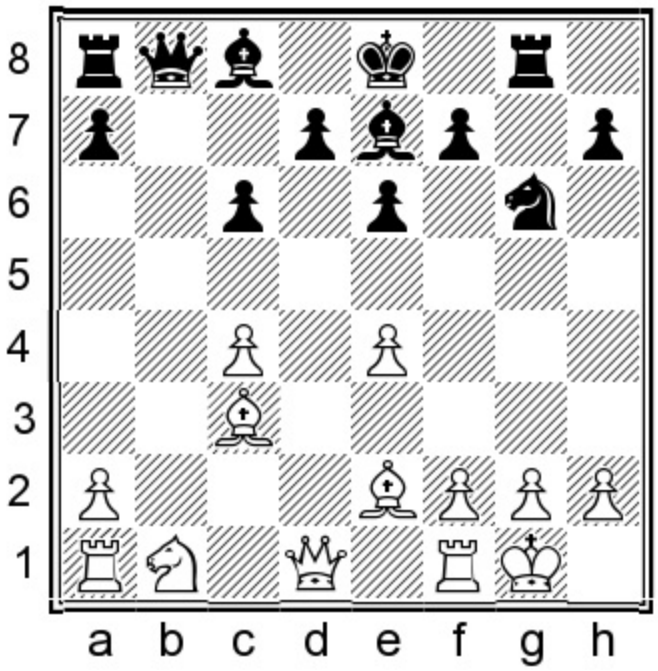
It might be quite sophisticated to start with this move, as we won't have to defend our b2-pawn with

♖b1. Nevertheless, there are downsides to this possibility. I wanted to present a shortened form of my analysis before proceeding with 10.♘c3, but I think there are a lot of instructive ideas that will be useful in gaining more knowledge about the position.

10...c5

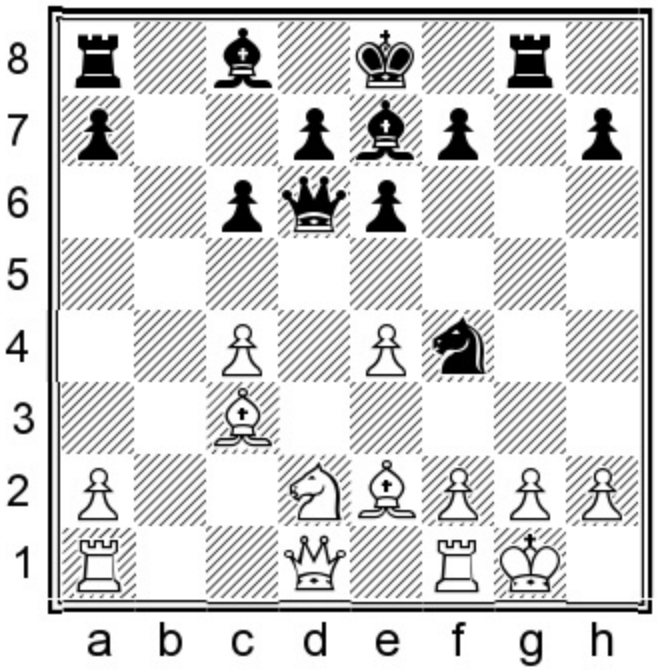
The most critical move. We're now forced to defend the b2-pawn with our queen, limiting its mobility for future attacking potential. Even so, the following variations are very helpful in understanding different ways to approach the position.

A) 10...♕xb2?! 11.♗d4 ♕b8 12.♗xg7 ♖g8 13.♗c3



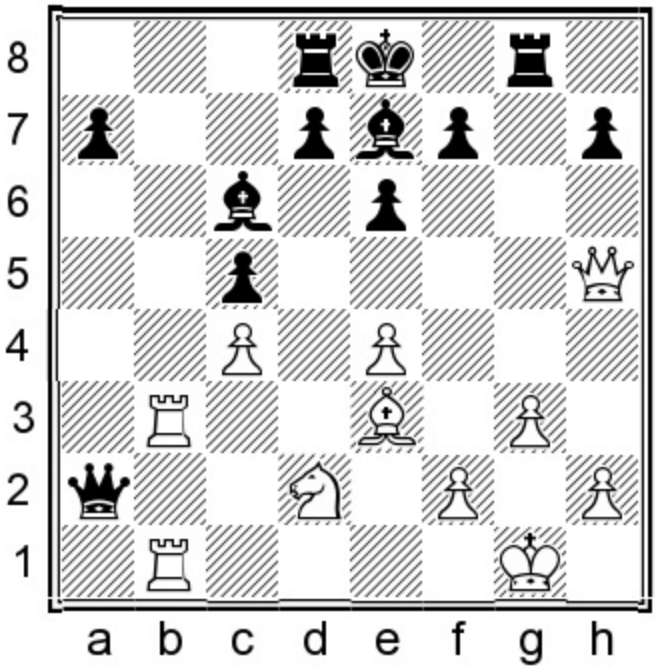
Position after: 13.♗c3

I think the most important criteria to assess this position is king safety – and Black doesn't really have a safe place for his king. In the long-term, it will be very easy for us to attack in the centre. 13...♕d6 [13...♘f4 14.g3 e5 15.♔h1 ♘xe2 16.♕xe2 d6 17.♘d2 ♗e6 18.♖ab1 ♕c8 19.c5!± In the long-term, Black will face multiple problems dealing with the safety of his king.] 14.♘d2 ♘f4



Position after: 14...♘f4

In both 13...♕d6 and 13...♘f4 Black is able to trade his knight for our light-squared bishop. We don't really mind this, as we'll get a lot of active development in the process. 15.g3 ♕a3 16.♗d4 c5 17.♗e3 ♘xe2+ 18.♕xe2 ♗b7 19.♖ab1 ♗c6 20.♖b3! ♕xa2 21.♖fb1 ♖d8 22.♕h5!→



Position after: 22.♕h5!→

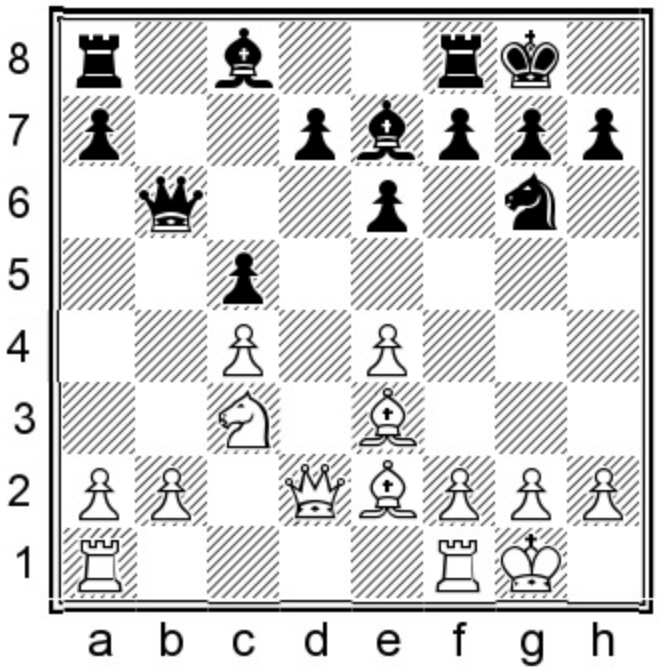
Black's position is collapsing.

B) 10...♕c7?! This gives us everything we want. We've now gained a tempo on all the lines after

10.♘c3, because we don't need to play ♖b1 anymore to defend the b2-pawn.

C) 10...♗c5 Black probably shouldn't move his bishop twice in two moves, especially considering that we're pretty happy to exchange dark-squared bishops. 11.♗xc5 ♕xc5 12.♕d2 0-0 13.♘c3 ♖d8 14.♖ad1±

11.♕d2 0-0 12.♘c3



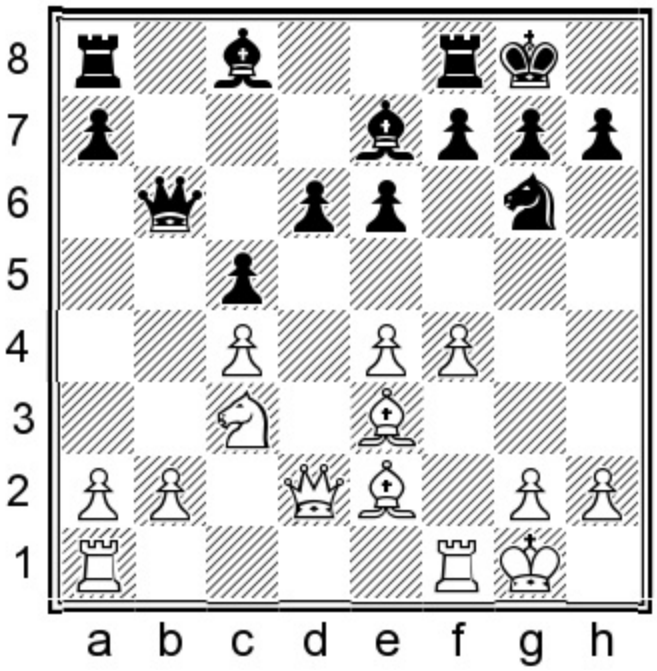
Position after: 12.♘c3

12...♗b7!?

Previous analysis has indicated that the natural ...d7-d6 will often transform into a weakness for Black to defend. If he doesn't have to play it, it's probably wise not to.

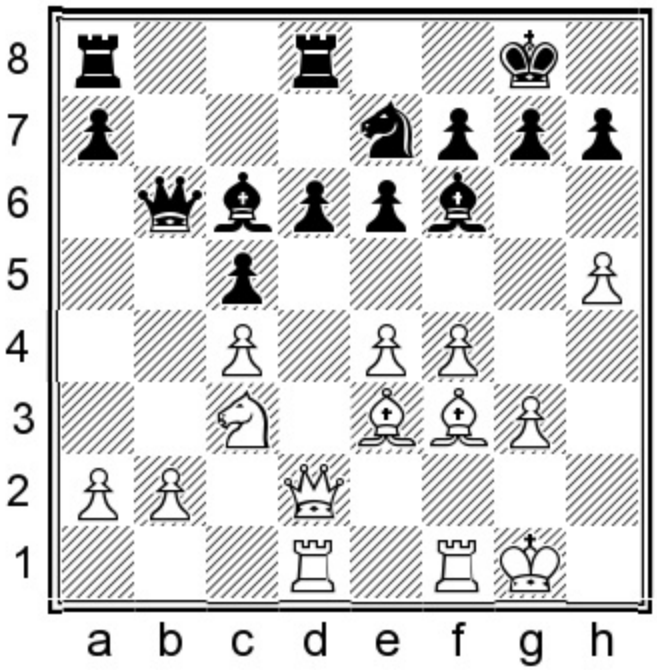
A) 12...d6

A1) 13.f4!?



Position after: 13.f4!?

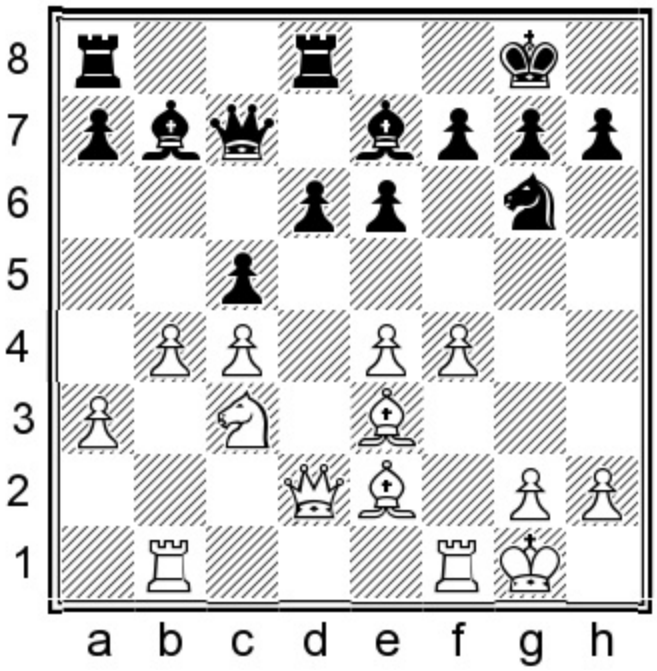
13...♗b7 [13...♗d7 14.g3! ♖fd8 15.h4 ♗f6 16.h5 ♘e7 17.♖ad1 ♗c6 18.♗f3



Position after: 18.♗f3

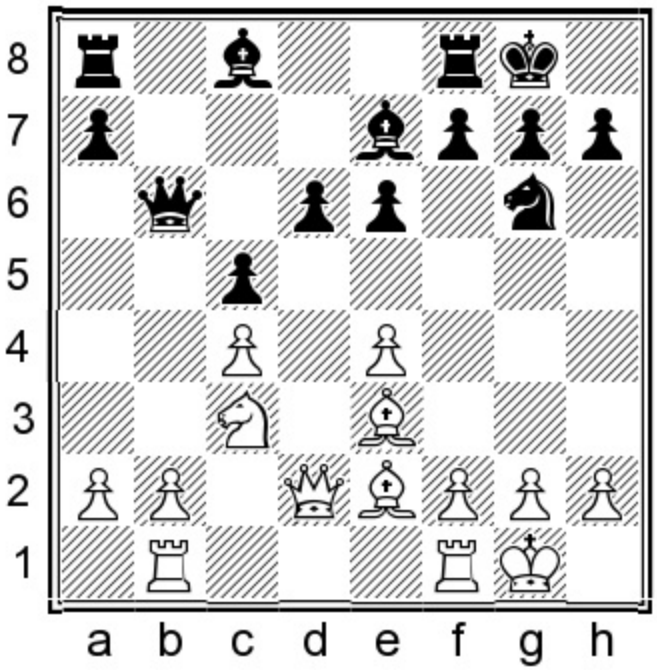
White's attacking potential looks really good, and we can continue by pushing the g-pawn without worrying about our own king safety. 18...h6 19.g4 ♖ab8 20.g5 hxg5 21.fxg5 ♗e5 22.♖f2→] 14.b4! Capitalising on Black's last move. [14.g3 ♗f6 15.♗f3 ♖fd8 16.h4 ♘e7 17.h5 h6 18.g4∞ This is also possible here, although I'd be a bit more worried about Black being able to counter with ...d7-

d5 at some point.] 14...♕c7 15.a3 ♖fd8 16.♖ab1± At the right moment, we can embark on our typical g3-h4 plan.



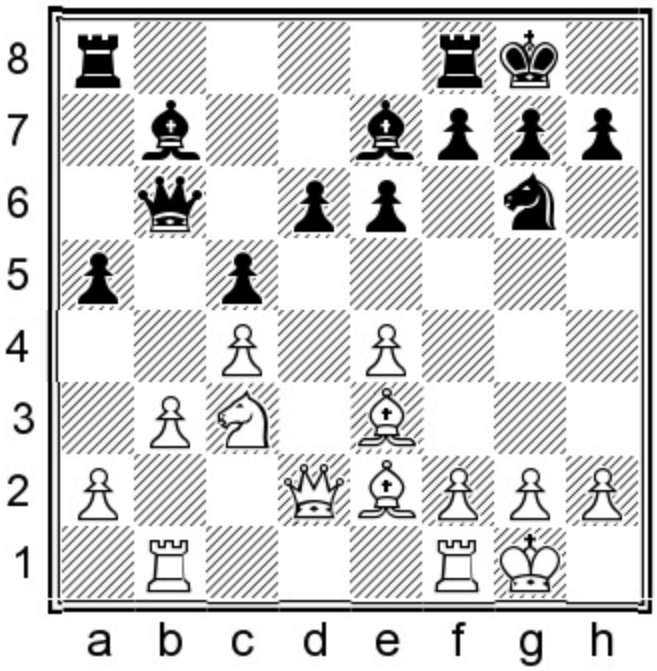
Position after: 16.♖ab1±

A2) 13.♖ab1 It's feasible to delay f2-f4 and play on the queenside first.



Position after: 13.♖ab1

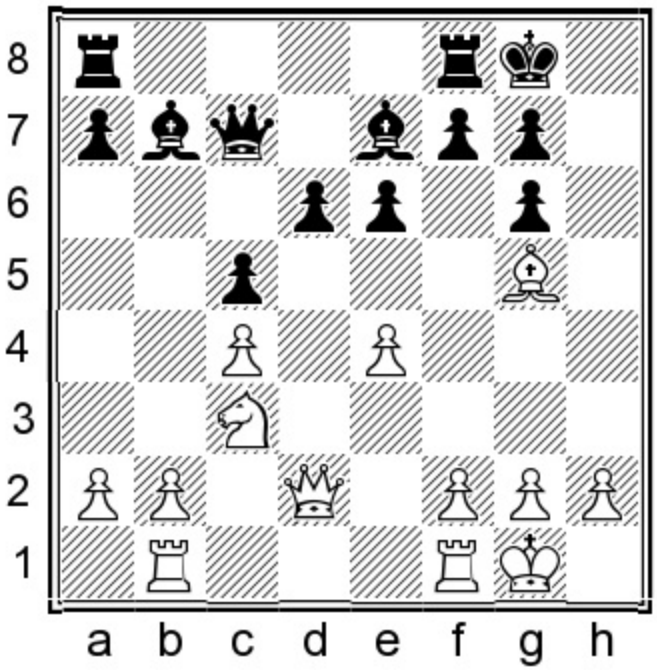
A2.1) 13...a5 The other way that Black can stop b2-b4, but in doing so he has weakened the b5-square. We can continue by revolving our piece placement around the d6-weakness. 14.b3 ♗b7



Position after: 14...♗b7

The correspondence game Janisch – Ilyasov, ICCF email 2015 continued with 15.♖fd1, but bringing the other rook to the centre seems far more natural to me. 15.♖bd1 ♖fd8 16.♗g5!±

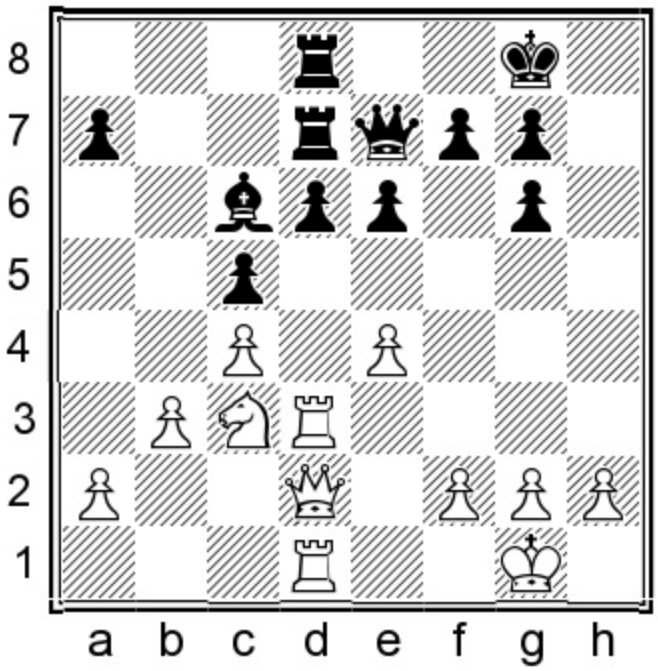
A2.2) 13...♕c7 14.♗h5!? ♗b7 15.♗xg6 hxg6 16.♗g5! I really like this idea, which perhaps justifies delaying f2-f4.



Position after: 16.♗g5!

We're trading all of our minor pieces to leave Black's light-squared bishop against our knight.

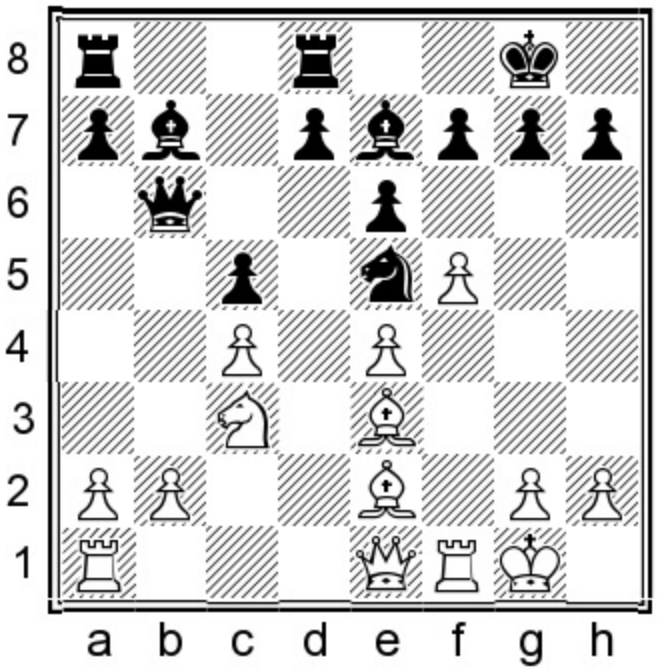
The resulting material balance will favour White, as Black's light-squared bishop will be dominated by our e4- and c4-pawns. The d6-pawn in particular will be a big weakness, and we can hone in on it by tripling major pieces on the d-file. 16...♖ab8 [16...f6 Black's attempt to keep the bishop-pair will create more weaknesses. 17.♗h4 ♗c6 18.♖bd1 a5 19.♗g3±] 17.♗xe7 ♕xe7 18.♖fe1 ♖bd8 19.♖bd1 ♖d7 20.♖e3 ♖fd8 21.♖d3 ♗c6 22.b3±



Position after: 22.b3±

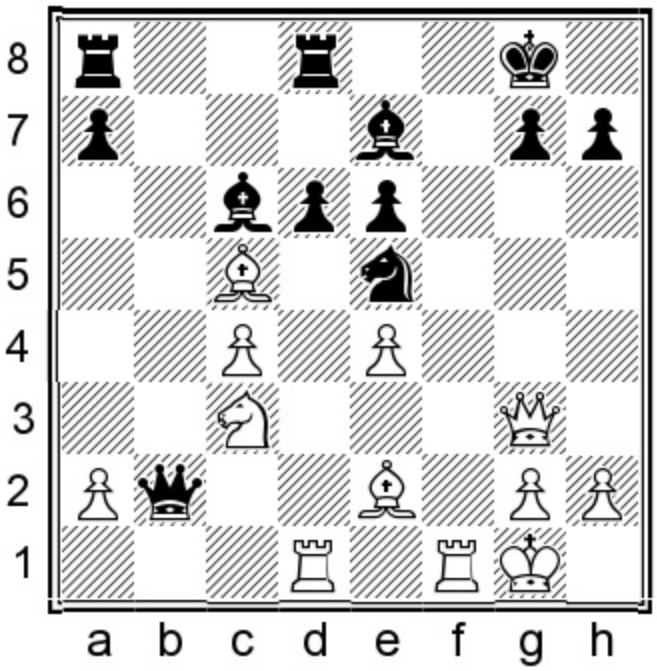
We can consider plans with f2-f4, or even trying to invade along the h-file.

B) 12...♖d8 Moving the rook away from the f-file induces us to push our f-pawn. 13.f4 ♗b7 14.f5 ♘e5 15.♕e1!



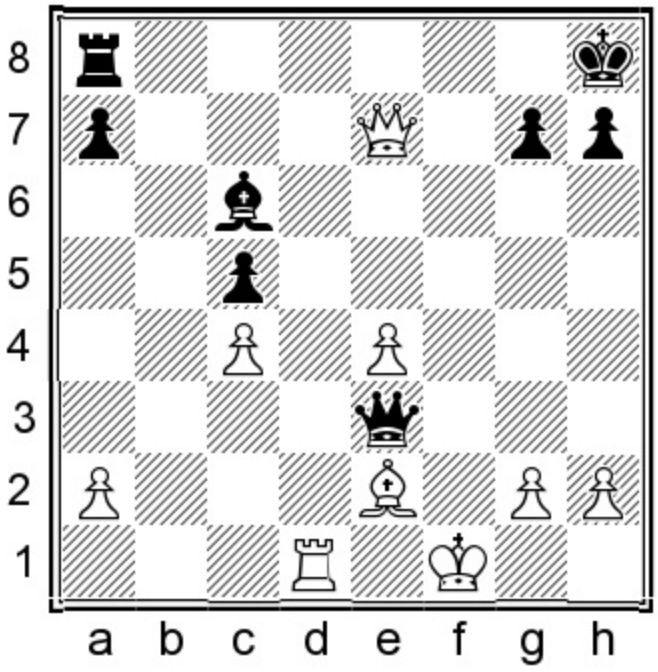
Position after: 15.♕e1!

A classic queen switch to the kingside. Black needs to support the c5-pawn before blocking the f-file with ...♗f6. 15...d6 16.fxe6 fxe6 17.♕g3 ♗c6 [17...♕xb2? is still impossible due to 18.♗h6 g6 19.♖ab1+–; 17...♖f8 18.♕h3 ♗c8 19.♖xf8+ ♗xf8 20.b3 g6 21.♖d1± Black's consolidated well, but the d6-pawn remains a weakness and White is still better.] 18.♖ad1 We're still allowing Black to capture on b2, as we have a different response in mind. 18...♕xb2 19.♗xc5!



Position after: 19.♗xc5!

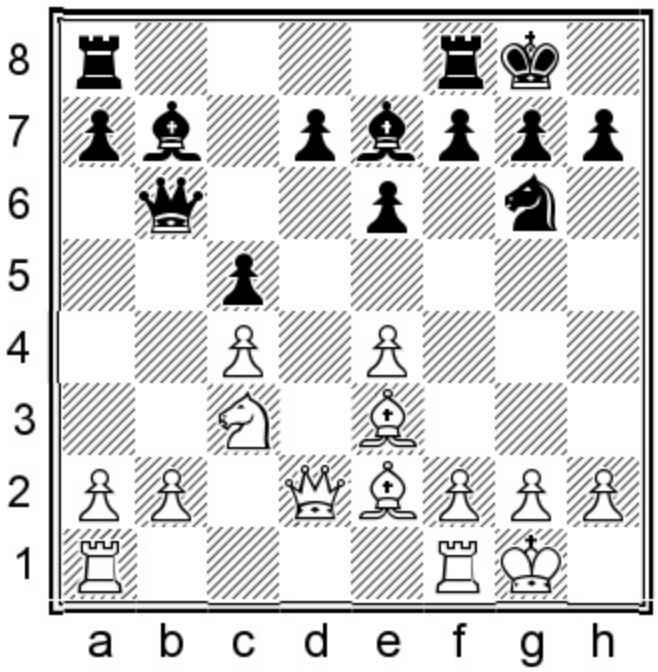
19...dxc5 [19...♖f8 20.♗d4 ♗a4 21.♖xf8+ ♖xf8 22.♖b1 ♕d2 23.♕e3 ♕xe3+ 24.♗xe3±] 20.♕xe5 ♖xd1 Black can't allow us to invade on f7. [20...♔h8 21.♖xd8+ ♖xd8 22.♖f7 ♕c1+ 23.♔f2 ♕g5 24.♕xg5 ♗xg5 25.♖c7±] 21.♕xe6+ ♔h8 22.♖xd1 ♕xc3 23.♕xe7 ♕e3+ 24.♔f1



Position after: 24.♔f1

24...h6 [24...♕xe4 25.♕xe4 ♗xe4 26.♖d7±] 25.♖d3 ♕xe4 26.♕xe4 ♗xe4 27.♖d7± The variations illustrate the scope of our attacking threat. Even if Black manages to trade queens, he still faces a difficult defensive task in the endgame.

Let's return to 12...♗b7.

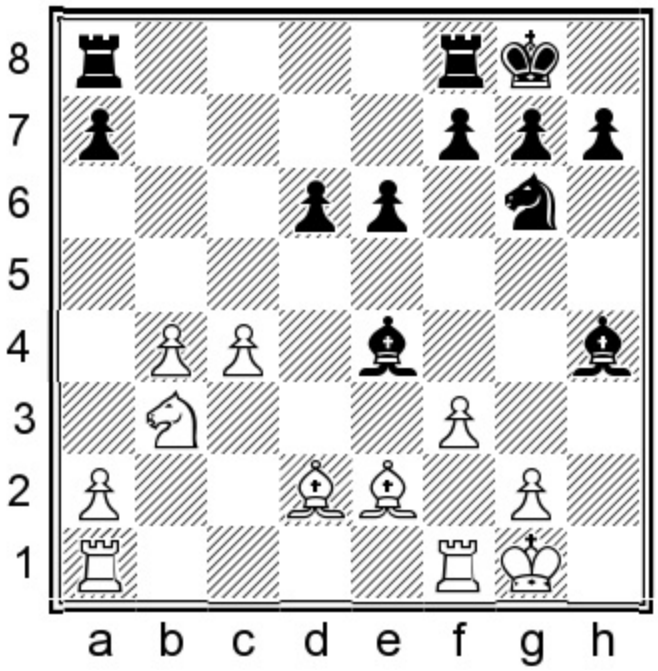


Position after: 12...♗b7!?

13.♕xd7

A) 13.h4!?

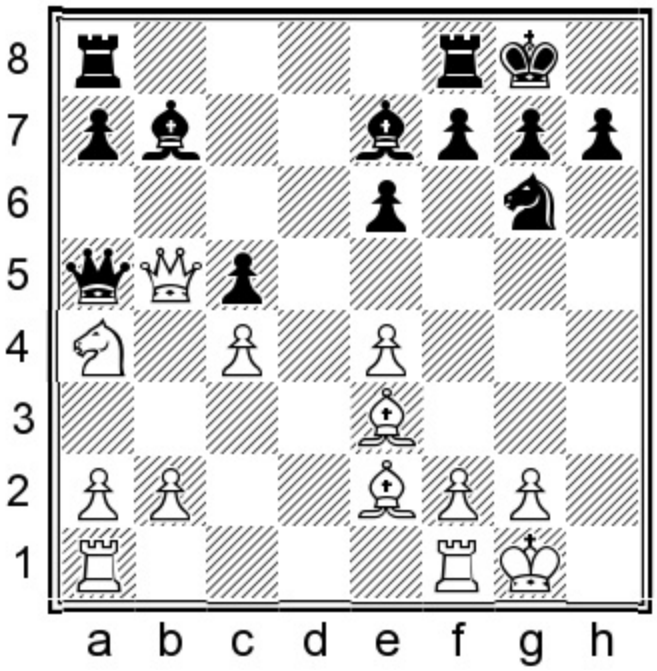
A1) 13...♗xh4 14.♘a4 ♕b4 15.♘xc5 ♕xd2 16.♗xd2 ♗c6 17.b4! d6 18.♘b3 ♗xe4 19.f3



Position after: 19.f3

Black's weak pawns on d6 and a7, combined with our superior minor pieces, provide more than enough compensation for the pawn deficit. 19...♗b7 [19...♗c2 20.♖fc1 ♗xb3 21.axb3±] 20.♖fd1 ♖fd8 21.b5± Followed by ♗b4 and a2-a4.

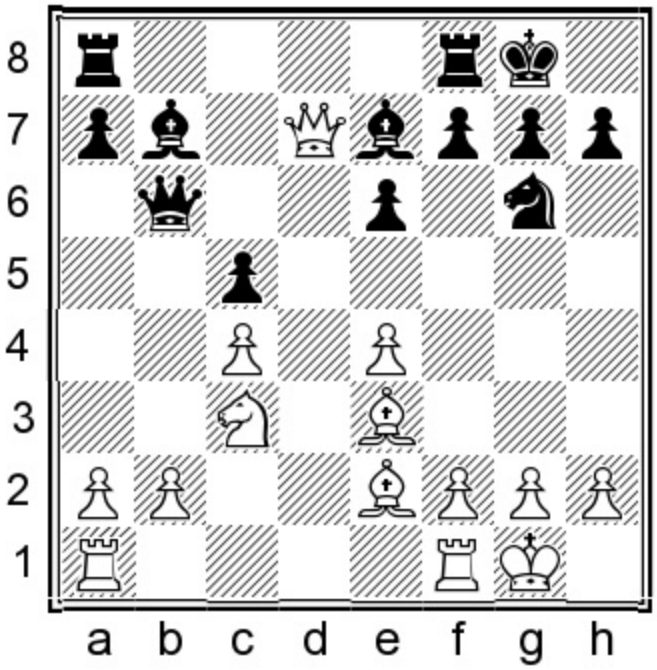
A2) An interesting idea to try and capture on d7 with a tempo. Black should take on h4, as otherwise h4-h5 will be strong. 13...♘xh4! 14.♕xd7 ♘g6 15.♘a4 ♕a5 16.♕b5



Position after: 16.♕b5

16...♕c7 [16...♕xb5 17.cxb5 ♗xe4 18.♖fc1±] 17.♘xc5 ♗c6⩲ This time Black is a pawn down. However, his pieces are better co-ordinated and, as a result, he probably has sufficient compensation.

B) 13.f4 Playing in the same vein as 12...d6 is entirely possible, but it seems to justify Black's previous move. 13...♖ad8 14.f5 ♘e5 15.b4 a6 [15...♕c7 16.b5⩲] 16.a4! ♕c7 17.b5 axb5 18.axb5 ♖a8 19.h3∞



Position after: 13.♕xd7

13...♗c6!

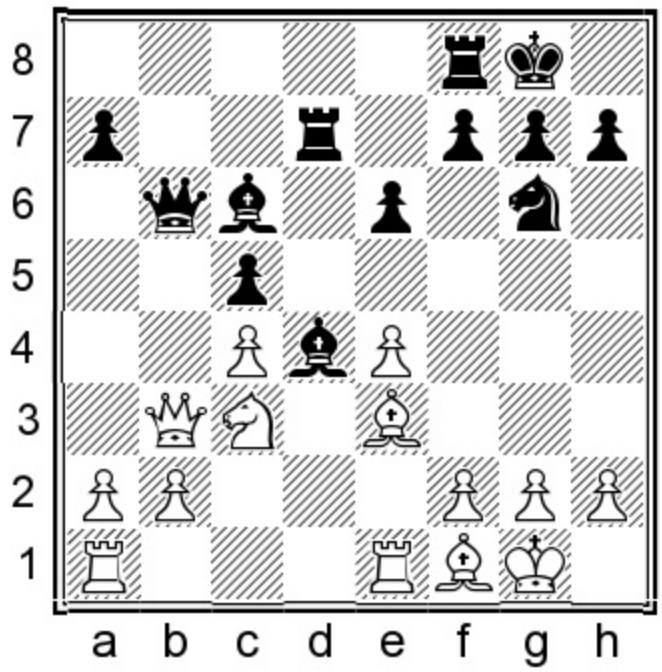
The point. Black sacrifices his d-pawn for activity on the d-file. The question now revolves around the extent of his compensation.

13...♕xb2 14.♖ab1 ♕xc3 15.♕xb7± Here, the bishop-pair ensures that White maintains constant pressure.

14.♕d2 ♖ad8 15.♕c2 ♗f6 16.♖fe1 ♗d4 17.♗f1 ♖d7 18.♕b3!

After some accurate moves from White, the position becomes increasingly difficult for Black to prove he has enough compensation for the pawn.

18.♖ad1?! ♖fd8 19.♗xd4 cxd4 20.♘b1 ♖b7 21.b3 ♕c5∞



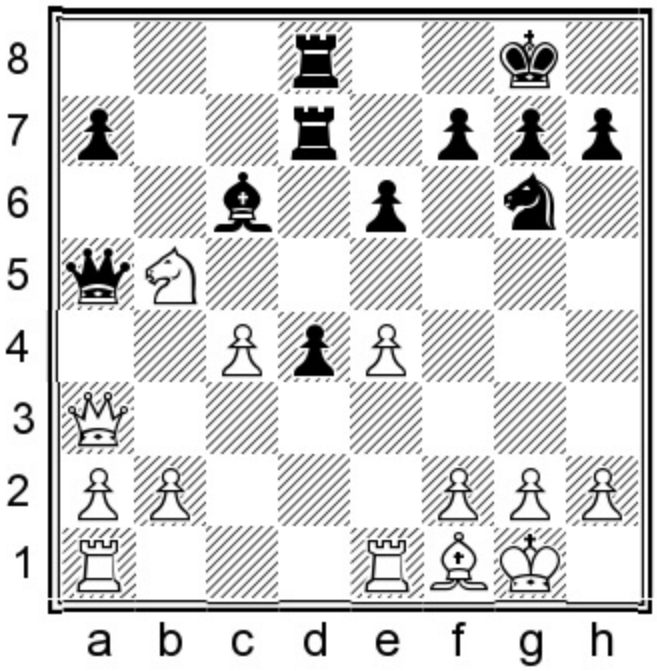
Position after: 18.♕b3!

18...♖b8

Black should keep the b-file open if he's exchanging queens, but White's the only one playing for anything.

A) 18...♗xe3 19.♖xe3 ♖fd8 20.♕xb6 axb6 21.a3±

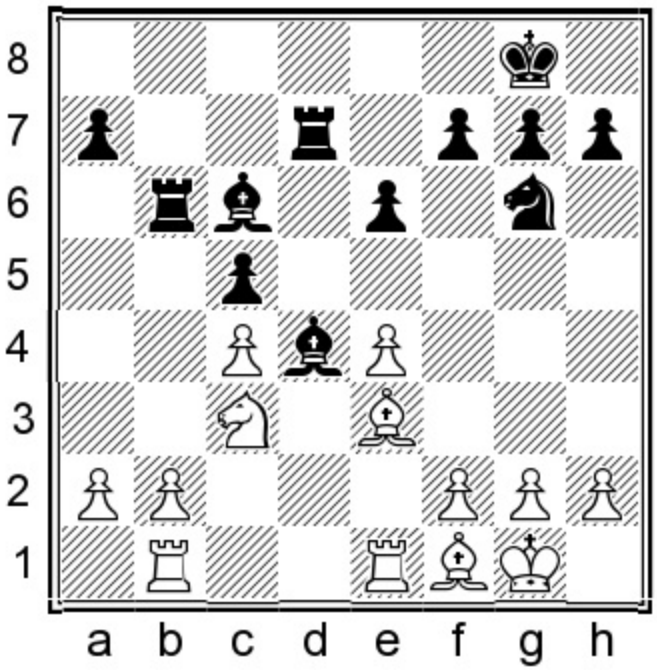
B) 18...♕a5 19.♘b5 ♖fd8 [19...♗xb5 20.cxb5±] 20.♗xd4 cxd4 21.♕a3!



Position after: 21.♕a3!

In the resulting queenless middlegame, Black's d-pawn can't compare to White's queenside passers. 21...♕xa3 22.♘xa3 ♖b7 23.b3 a5 [23...e5 24.c5!±] 24.♖ad1 a4 25.♘b5 axb3 26.axb3 e5 27.♖a1±

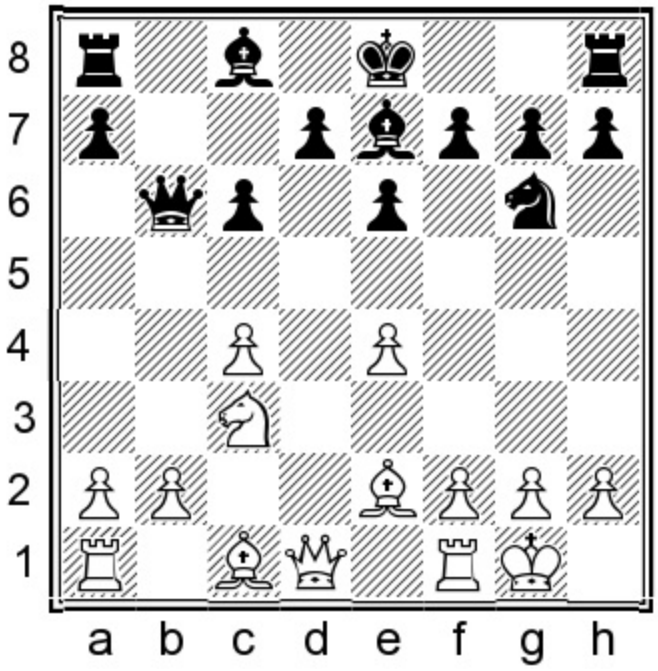
19.♕xb6 ♖xb6 20.♖ab1±



Position after: 20.♖ab1±

b) 10.♘c3 c5

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4 cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♕b6 7.♘xc6 bxc6 8.♗e2!? ♘g6 9.c4 ♗e7 10.♘c3



Position after: 10.♘c3

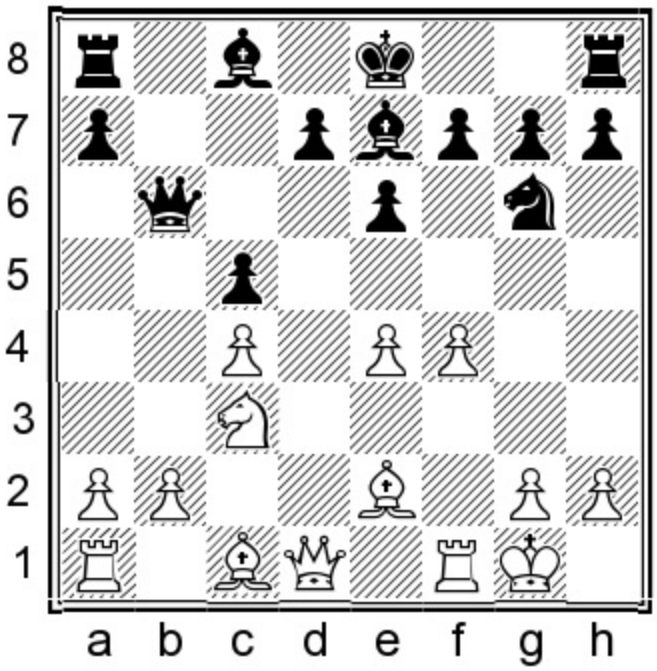
10...c5

By playing ...c6-c5 so quickly, Black enables us to begin our attack without having to play ♗e3 and ♖b1. Once again, the variations in this line are extensive but not forced. Rather than memorisation, we should focus on taking inspiration from some of the attacking ideas.

A) 10...0-0 is considered in the final subchapter.

B) 10...e5? As we saw after 8.♗d3, this move in general is a serious positional mistake if Black's g6-knight remains isolated. 11.g3! d6 12.♕c2 0-0 13.h4 ♖e8 14.♗e3 ♕c7 15.b4 ♘f8 16.b5±

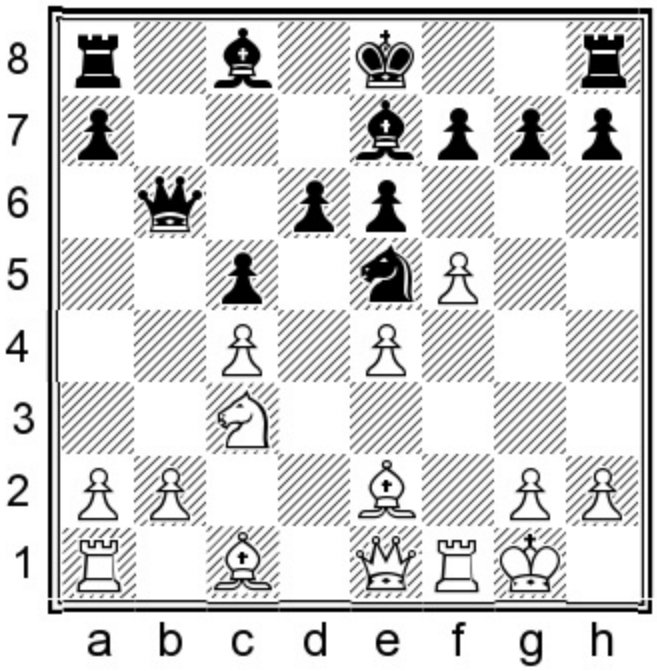
11.f4!



Position after: 11.f4!

11...0-0

11...d6 12.f5! ♘e5 13.♕e1



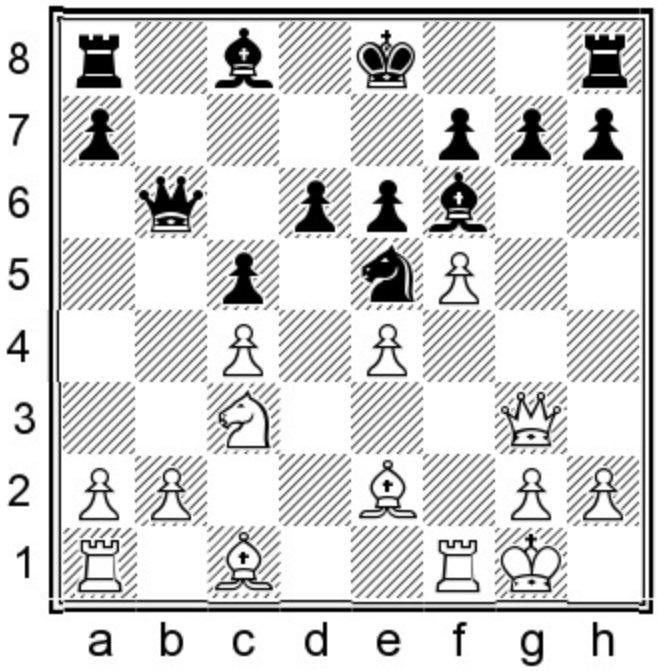
Position after: 13.♕e1

With our bishop on e2, this is the best way to include the queen in the attack.

A) 13...0-0 14.f6! gxf6 [14...♗xf6 15.♖xf6! gxf6 16.♗h6 ♖e8 17.♕g3+ ♘g6 18.♖f1+– Followed by

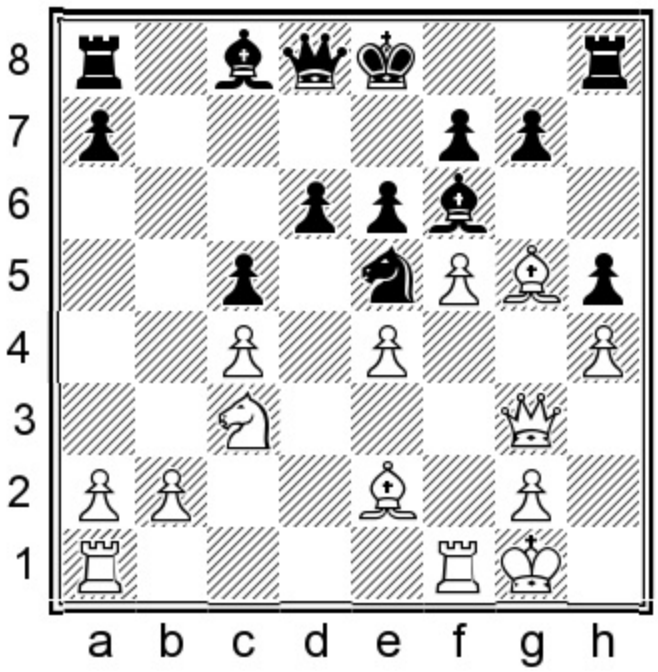
h4-h5.] 15.♗h6 ♗b7 16.♕g3+ ♘g6 17.♗xf8 ♖xf8 18.♖ae1± We are an exchange up and h4-h5 remains on the cards.

B) 13...♗f6 14.♕g3 Suddenly White has nice ideas involving fxe6 and ♖xf6.



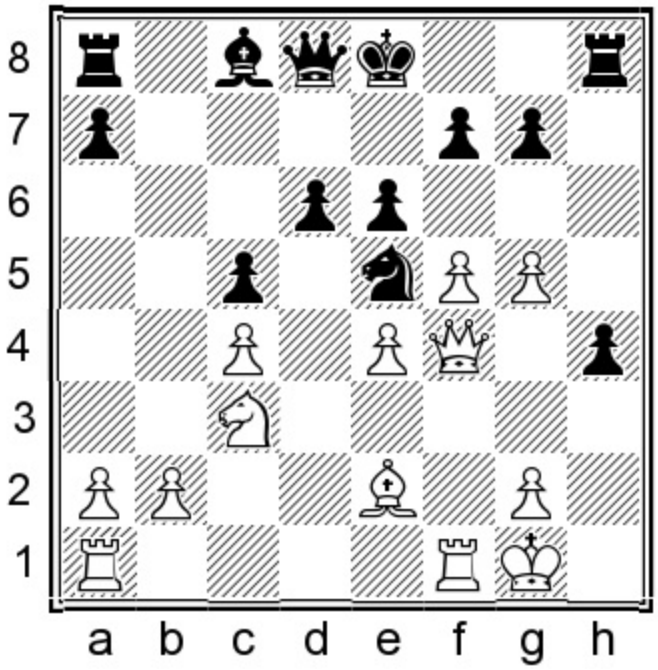
Position after: 14.♕g3

B1) 14...h5?! 15.h4! Black obviously has to castle queenside, as ...h7-h5 eliminated the kingside option. However, he may try to target the h4-pawn in the meantime. 15...♕d8 [15...♗d7 16.♗f4 0-0-0 17.♖ad1± After doubling rooks on the d-file, it is clear that White has a serious initiative.] 16.♗g5



Position after: 16.♗g5

16...♗xg5 [16...♖b8 17.♗xf6 gxf6 18.♖ad1 ♖xb2 19.♕g7 ♖f8 20.fxe6 ♗xe6 21.♘b5+–] 17.hxg5 h4 Black clearly doesn't have enough pieces to attack our king, but how else does he justify moving his h-pawn? 18.♕f4

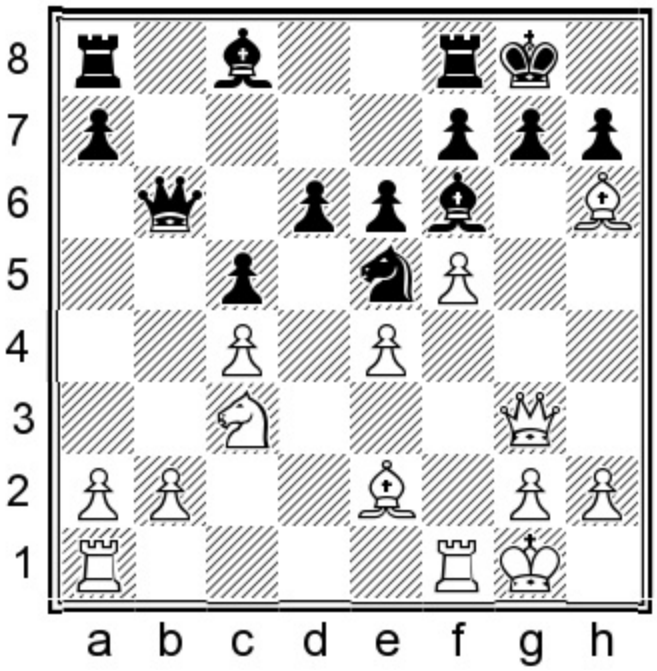


Position after: 18.♕f4

18...♗a6 [18...h3 19.gxh3! ♖xh3 20.♔g2 ♖h8 21.♖h1 ♖g8 22.♖ad1±] 19.♖ad1 ♕d7 20.fxe6 ♕xe6 21.♘d5 0-0-0 22.b4! h3 23.g3+– Evidently, White's attack is far more dangerous than Black's.

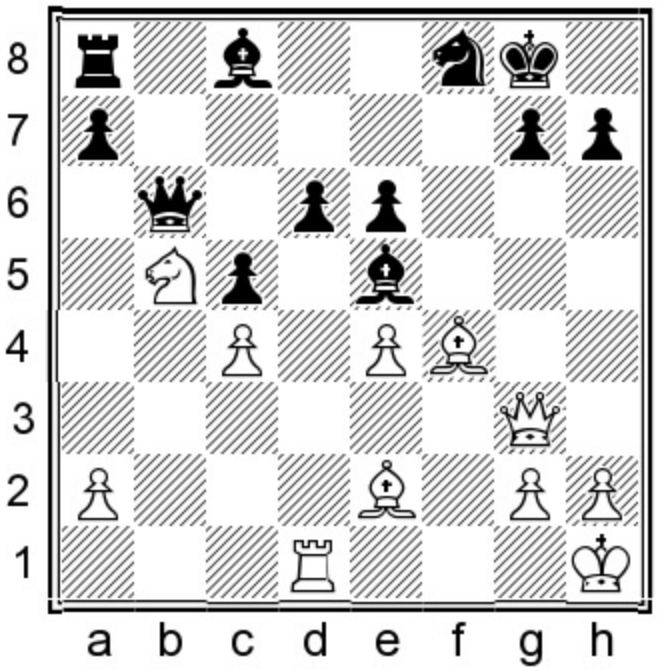
B2) 14...♗b7 15.fxe6 fxe6 16.♖xf6! gxf6 17.♗h5+ ♔d8 18.♕g7+–

B3) 14...0-0 15.♗h6!



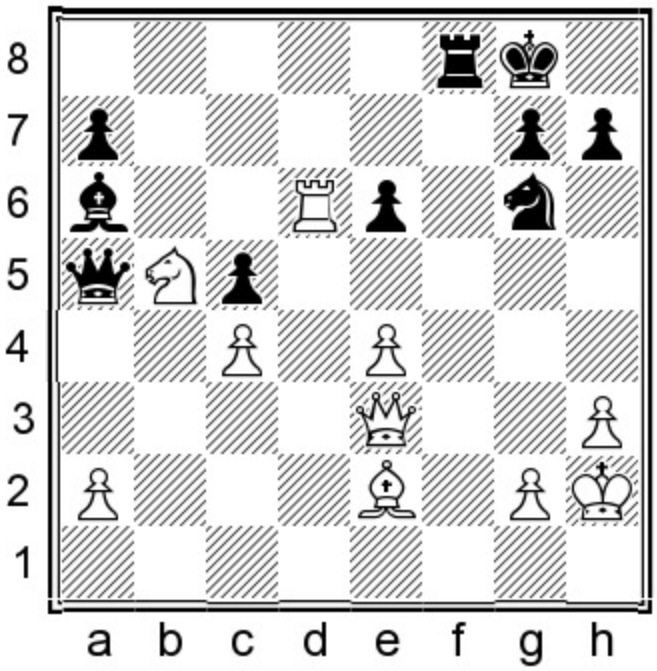
Position after: 15.♗h6!

The idea of dxe6 followed by ♖xf6 is very hard to prevent. 15...♘d7 [15...♕d8 16.♗xg7 ♗h4 17.♗f6+ ♗xg3 18.♗xd8 ♗xh2+ 19.♔xh2 ♖xd8 This forcing line has led to a better ending for us. The d6-pawn is weak, and we can use the h-file to target the h7-pawn.] 16.fxe6 ♗d4+ 17.♔h1 fxe6 18.♘b5! ♗xb2 [18...♗e5 19.♖xf8+ ♘xf8 20.♗f4 ♗xf4 21.♕xf4 ♘g6 22.♕xd6 ♕xd6 23.♘xd6±] 19.♖ad1 ♗e5 20.♖xf8+ ♘xf8 21.♗f4



Position after: 21.♗f4

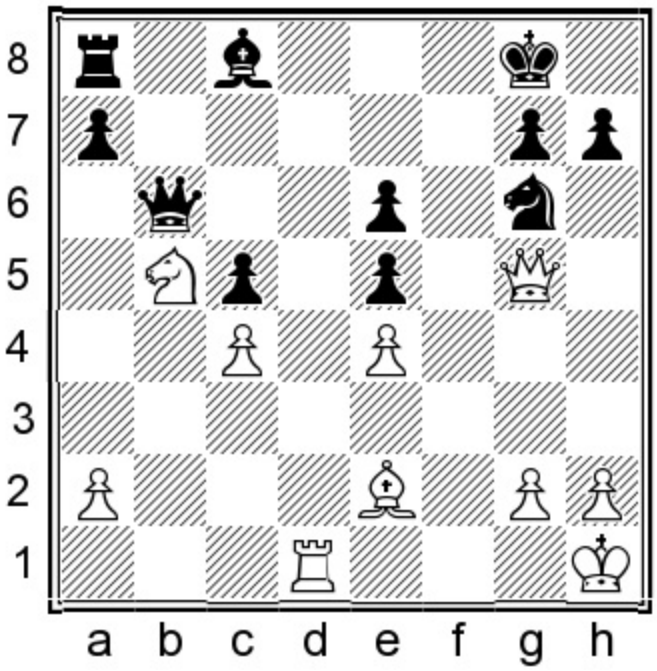
B3.1) 21...♗xf4 22.♕xf4 ♘g6 [22...e5 23.♕g3± and the d6-pawn falls.] 23.♕e3! ♗a6 24.♖xd6 ♕a5 25.h3! Improving our last piece and consolidating the position. 25...♖f8 26.♔h2



Position after: 26.♔h2

Black's pieces are struggling to get involved and if the b5-knight is ever captured, it will open up the c4-square for our bishop.

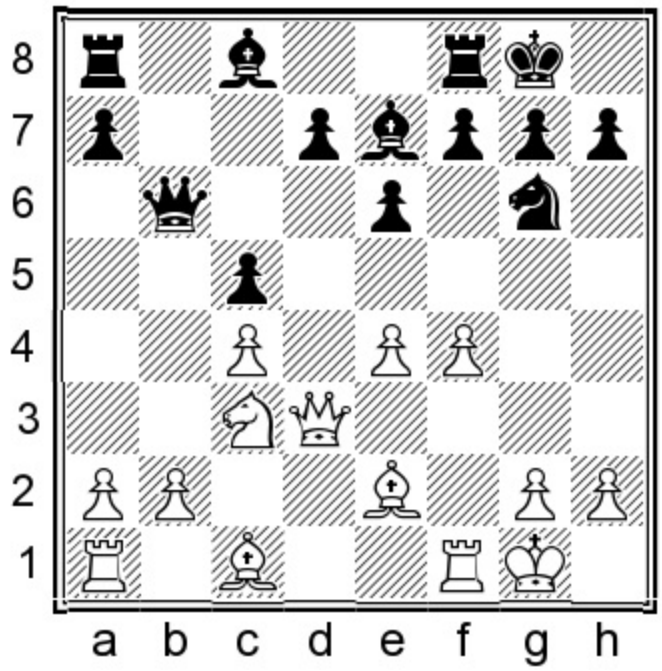
B3.2) 21...♘g6 22.♗xe5 dxe5 23.♕g5



Position after: 23.♕g5

Here, our piece activity gives us almost unstoppable attacking potential. 23...♗a6 [23...♗b7 24.h4! ♗xe4 25.h5 h6 26.♕e3+–] 24.h4 ♘f8 25.a4 ♗xb5 26.cxb5 Allowing our bishop to access the c4-square, introducing more support for our attacking prospects. 26...♕c7 27.♗c4→

12.♕d3!



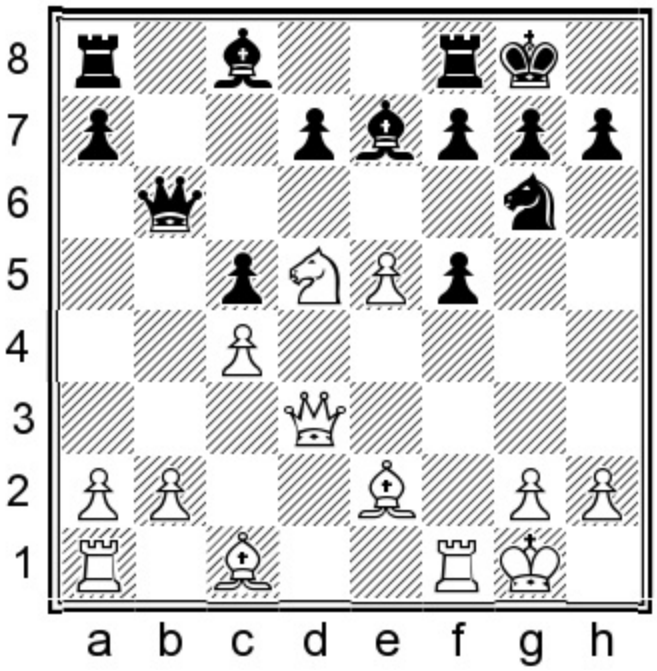
Position after: 12.♕d3!

An attacking theme worth remembering. On the one hand, we're keeping tabs on the d7-pawn, limiting the mobility of the c8-bishop. Simultaneously, the queen can quickly switch over to the kingside to join the attack. We're demonstrating that we have attacking possibilities despite the fact that our bishop sits on e2, rather than d3.

12...d6

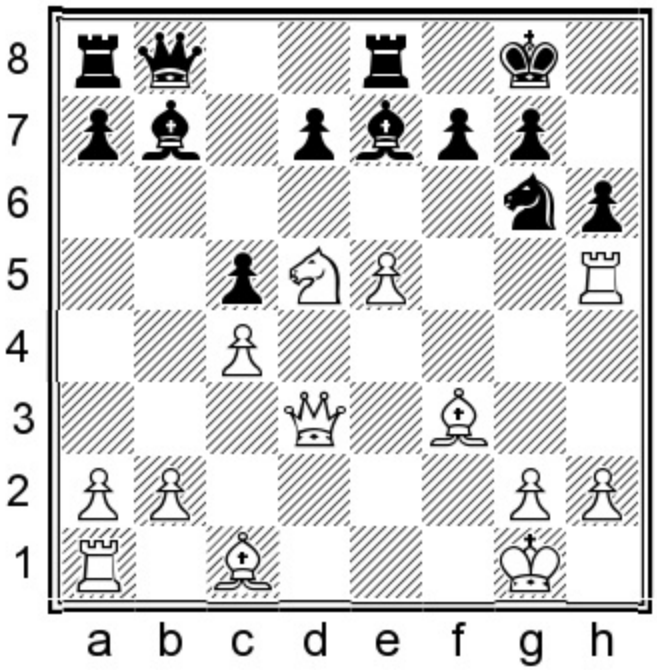
A) 12...♗b7 The pawn sacrifice is mistimed here. 13.♕xd7 ♖fd8 [13...♗c6 14.♕d1 ♖ad8 15.♕b3±] 14.♕b5± It looks close to a clear pawn up for White.

B) 12...♗f6 The classic idea of luring the e4-pawn to e5, reducing the danger of future f4-f5 pushes. However, it fails badly here. 13.e5 ♗e7 14.f5! exf5 15.♘d5



Position after: 15.♘d5

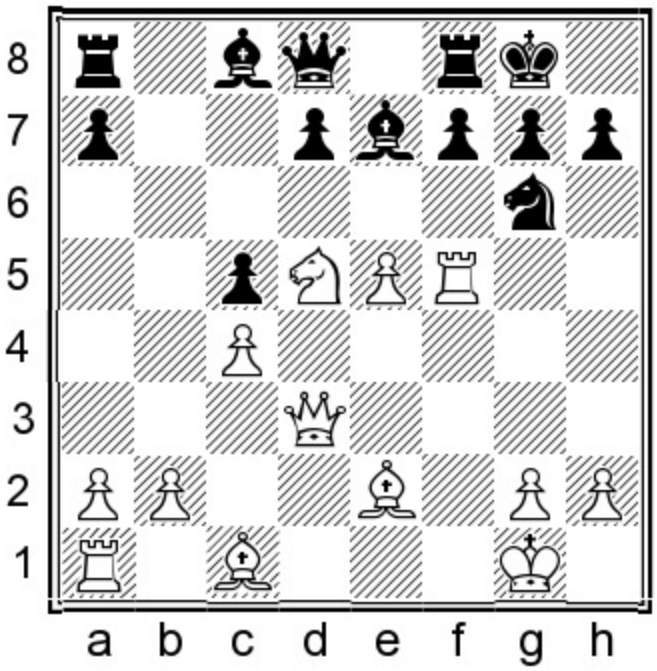
B1) 15...♕b8 16.♖xf5 ♖e8 [16...♗b7 17.♗f3 ♗d8 18.♖h5→] 17.♖h5 ♗b7 18.♗f3 h6



Position after: 18...h6

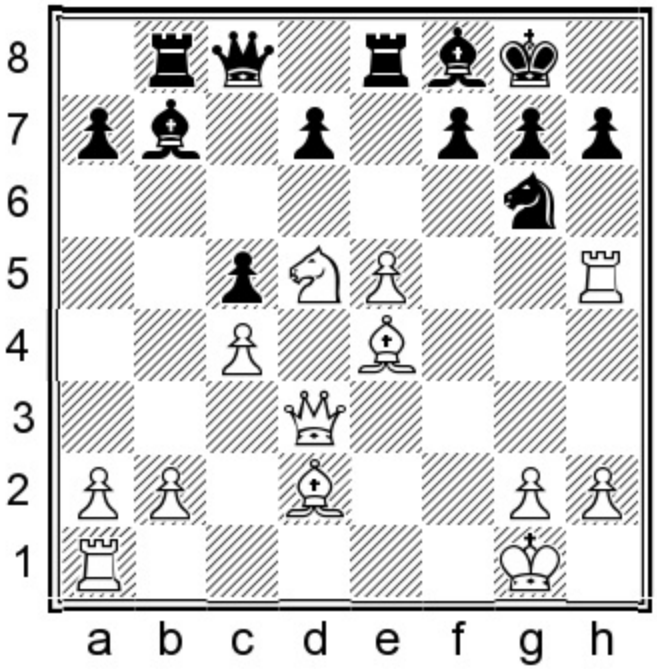
19.♗xh6! With Black's queenside pieces stranded, this sacrifice is bound to pay dividends. 19...gxh6 20.♖f1 ♗g5 21.♖xg5 hxg5 22.♘f6+ ♔g7 23.♘xe8+ ♕xe8 24.♗xb7 ♖b8 25.♗e4±

B2) 15...♕d8 16.♖xf5



Position after: 16.♖xf5

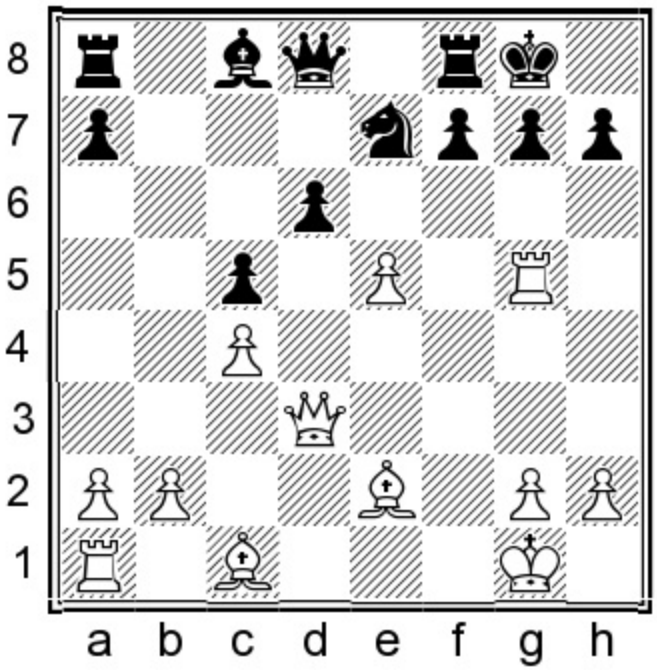
B2.1) 16...♖e8 17.♗f3 ♖b8 18.♖h5! ♗b7 [18...d6 19.♘xe7+ ♕xe7 20.exd6 ♕e1+ 21.♕f1 ♕b4 22.a3 ♕b6 23.b4! ♕xd6 24.♖d5 ♕f6 25.♗g5+–] 19.♗e4 White plans to switch the queen to h3. 19...♗f8 20.♗g5 ♕c8 21.♗d2!→



Position after: 21.♗d2!→

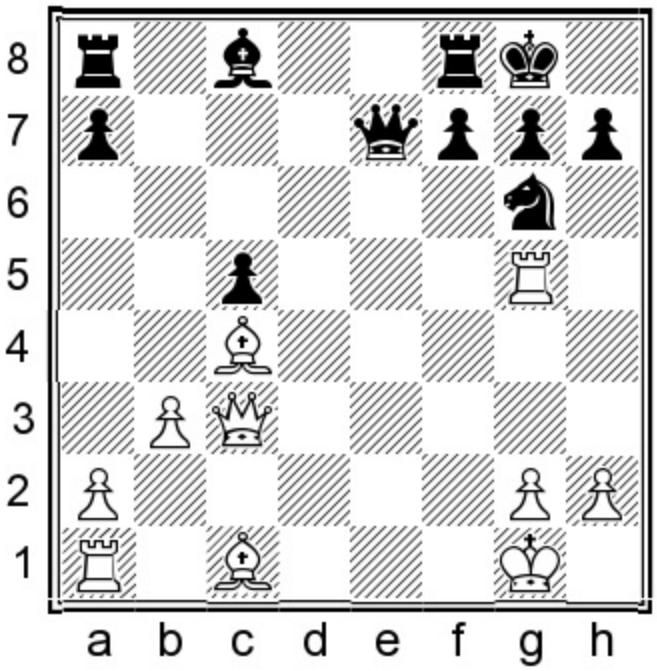
Protecting the e5-pawn, before bringing our a1-rook to join the attack.

B2.2) 16...d6 17.♘xe7+ ♘xe7 18.♖g5!



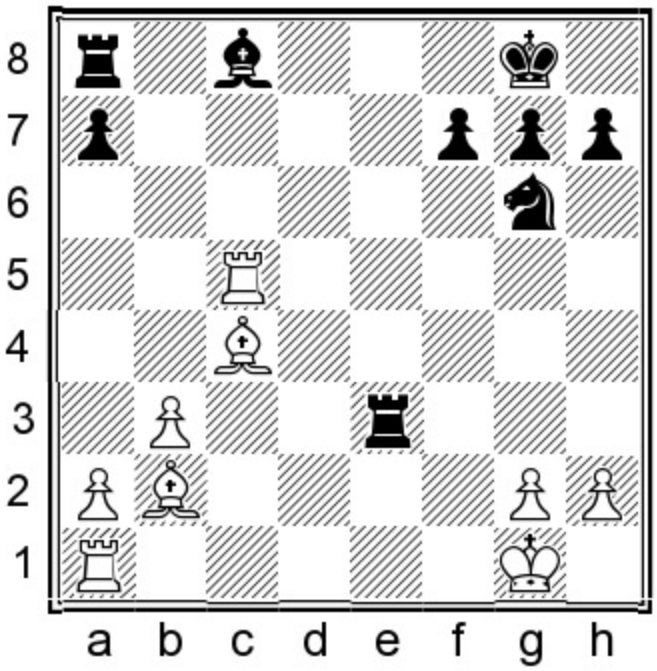
Position after: 18.♖g5!

As the variations illustrate, our bishop-pair are advantageous both in attack and in a possible ending. 18...d5 [18...dxe5 19.♖xe5+–; 18...h6 19.♖h5! dxe5 (or 19...d5 20.♗xh6!+–) 20.♖xe5+–] 19.cxd5 ♕xd5 [19...♘xd5 20.♖g3 ♘e7 21.♕xd8 ♖xd8 22.♗g5 ♖d7 23.♖b3!±] 20.e6! Black is tasked with the unenviable choice between defending a miserable ending or facing a dangerous-looking attack. 20...♕xe6 [20...♕xd3 21.exf7+ ♖xf7 22.♗xd3±] 21.♕c3 ♘g6 22.♗c4 ♕e7 23.b3!



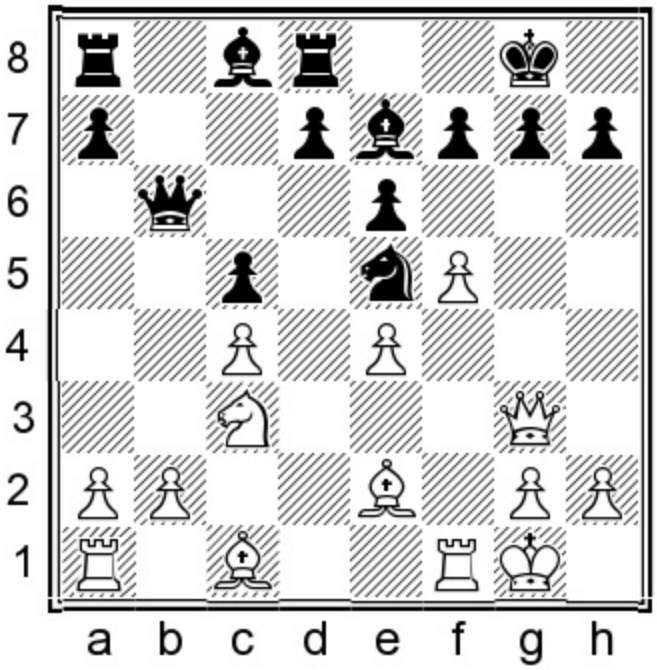
Position after: 23.b3!

23...♖e8 [23...♔h8 24.♗b2 f6 25.♖e1 ♕d7 26.♖d5 ♕c7 27.♕g3!+–] 24.♗b2 ♕e3+ At last Black is forced to exchange queens, but this doesn't ease his problems. 25.♕xe3 ♖xe3 26.♖xc5±



Position after: 26.♖xc5±

C) 12...♖d8 As we've previously seen, it might be wise for Black to leave his pawn on d7 rather than push ...d7-d6, as this can create a weakness. In this particular scenario, 12...♖d8 actually helps to demonstrate the use of our queen on d3. 13.f5! ♘e5 14.♕g3



Position after: 14.♕g3

C1) 14...♔h8 15.fxe6 [15.♕xe5? ♗d6∓] 15...♕xe6 16.♘d5 ♗d6 17.♗f4± Our knight is a monster on d5, and we can continue naturally with ♖ae1 and ♗h5.

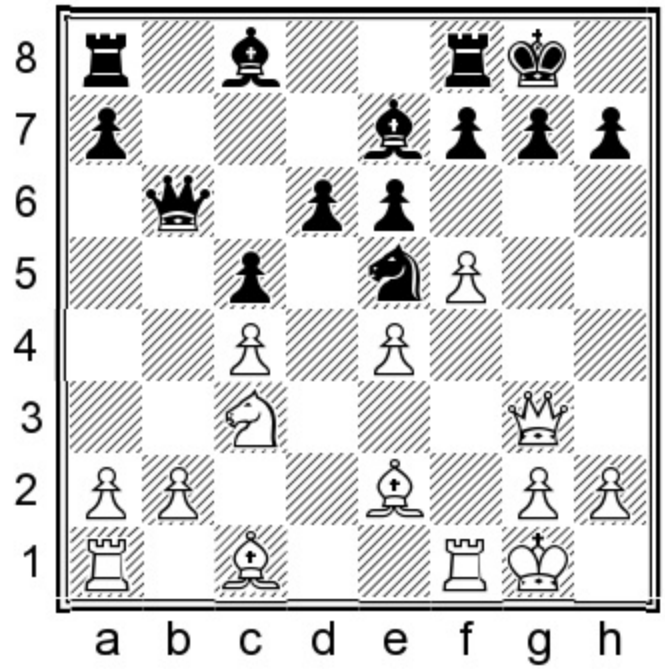
C2) 14...♗d6 15.♗g5 ♖f8 16.♘b5 ♗b8 17.f6! ♘g6 18.♕f2 gxf6 19.♗xf6+– At some point, ♕e3-h6 will be fatal.

C3) 14...f6 15.♗h6 ♗f8 16.♗f4 d6 [16...♕xb2?? 17.♖ab1 ♕a3 18.♗xe5 fxe5 19.f6+–] 17.b3+– Black has been forced to ruin his structure, and our attack continues to play itself with moves such as ♖ad1, fxe6 and ♘d5.

13.f5!

It might seem positionally wrong to give the Black knight the outpost on e5, but our attack is dangerous enough to compensate for this concession.

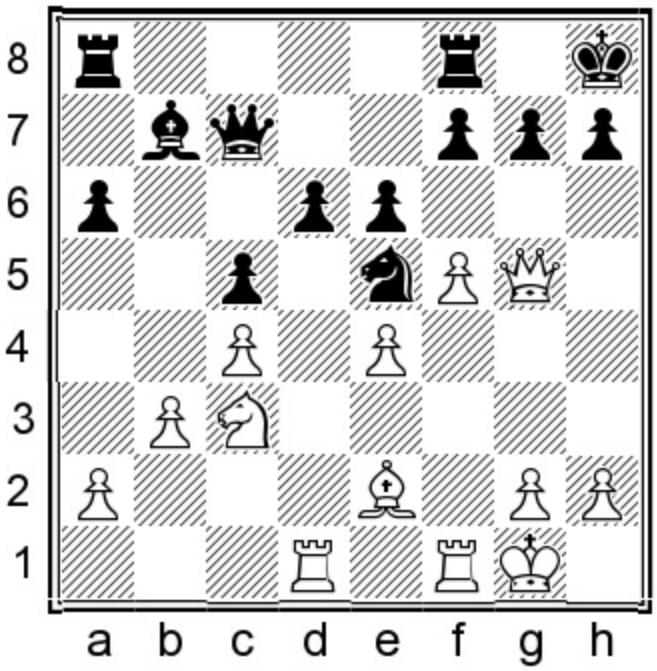
13...♘e5 14.♕g3



Position after: 14.♕g3

14...♗f6

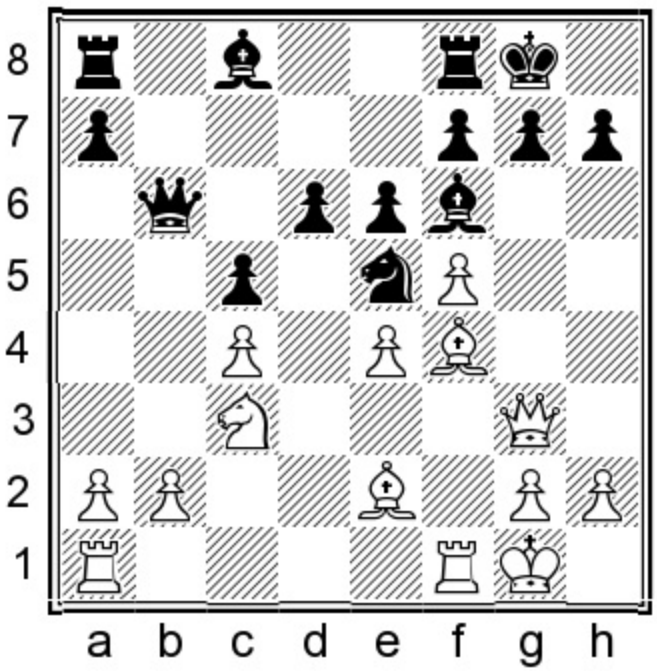
14...♔h8 This is Black's most sensible move, preventing our ♗h6 tricks. We can play a little more solidly, although our general attacking principles remain the same. 15.b3 ♗b7 16.♗f4 ♗f6 17.♖ad1 a6 18.♗g5! ♗xg5 19.♕xg5 ♕c7



Position after: 19...♕c7

20.♕h4 We can continue slowly. The removal of the dark-squared bishops has weakened Black's d6-pawn, while we still retain attacking possibilities with f5-f6 ideas. [20.f6!? also looks good. 20...♖g8 21.♖d2±]

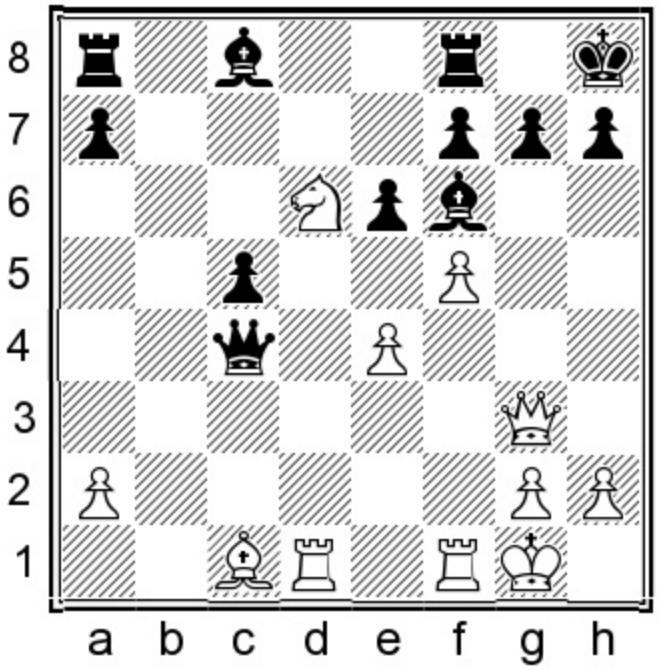
15.♗f4!



Position after: 15.♗f4!

15...♗b7

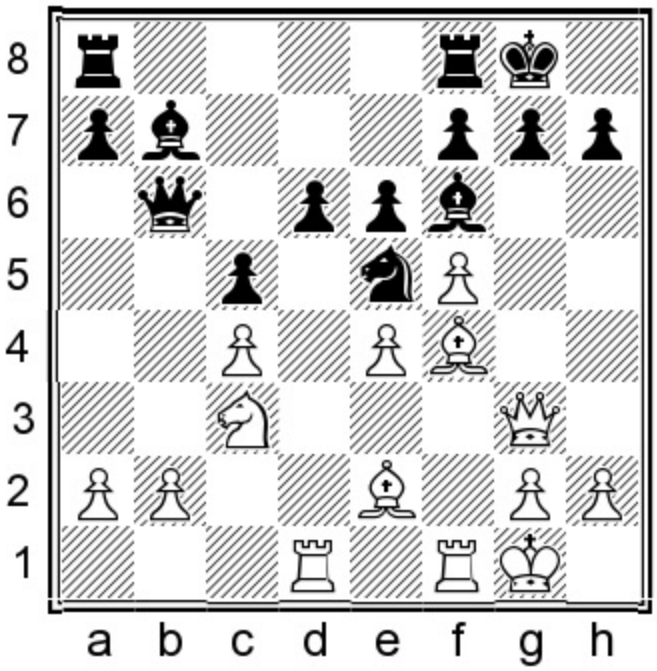
It seems too risky for Black to play 15...♕xb2 16.♖ab1 ♕a3 17.♖bd1 ♔h8 [17...exf5 18.♖xd6 ♗h4 19.♕xh4 ♕xc3 20.exf5 f6 21.♕f2±] 18.♗c1! ♕b4 19.♘b5 ♘xc4 20.♗xc4 ♕xc4 21.♘xd6



Position after: 21.♘xd6

21...♗d4+ [21...♕a4 22.e5 ♗h4 23.♕f3 ♗a6 24.f6!→] 22.♖xd4! ♕xd4+ 23.♗e3 ♕c3 24.f6 gxf6 25.♖c1 ♕d3 26.♕f3 f5 27.♖d1 ♕c3 28.exf5 ♗d7 29.♘xf7+ ♖xf7 30.♕xa8+ ♔g7 31.♕f3+–

16.♖ad1



Position after: 16.♖ad1

Again, the d6-pawn looks like a weakness.

16...a6

16...exf5 17.exf5 ♖ad8 18.♖d2±

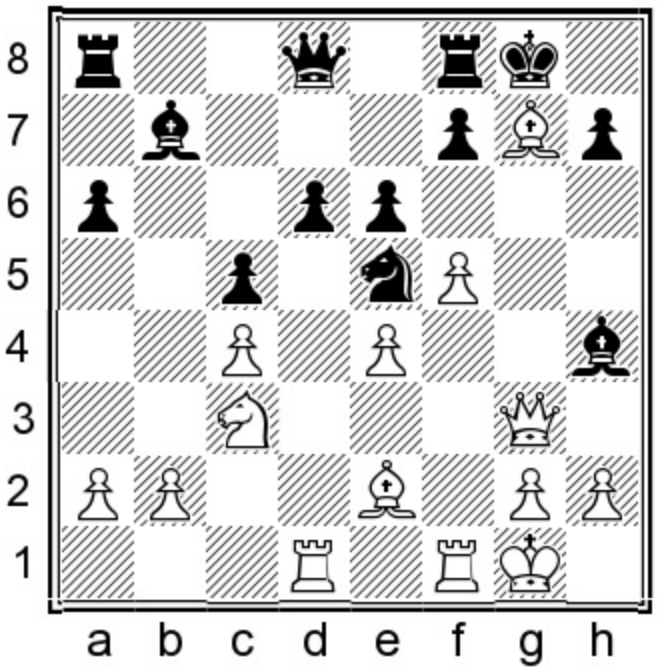
17.♗h6!

The same threat of fxe6 and ♖xf6 exists!

17...♕d8

17...♔h8 18.fxe6+–

18.♗xg7 ♗h4

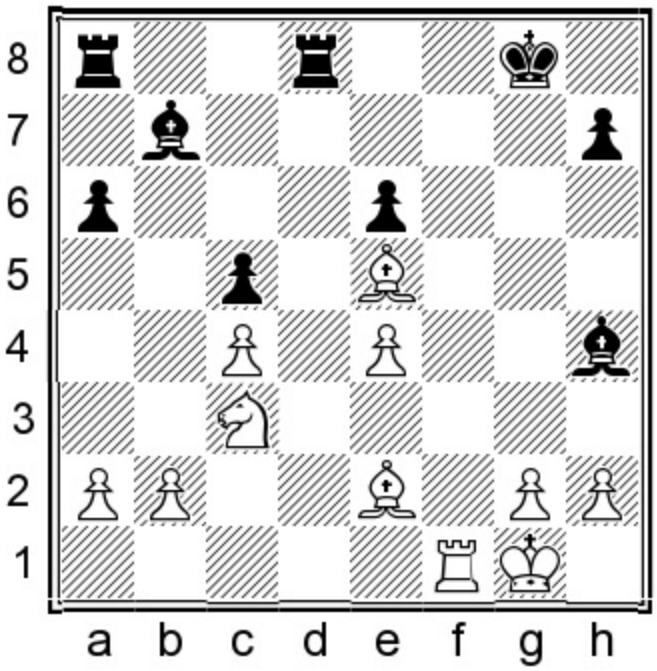


Position after: 18...♗h4

19.♕xe5!

White's minor pieces will be far superior in the resulting ending.

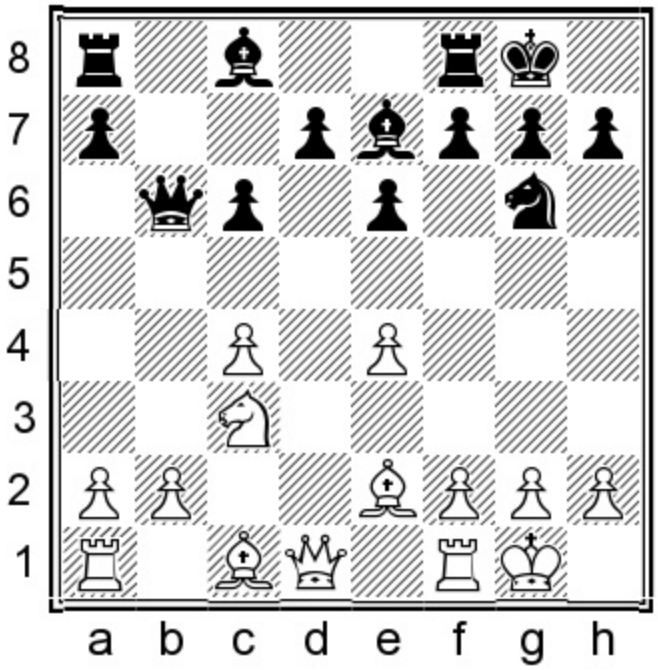
19...dxe5 20.♖xd8 ♖fxd8 21.fxe6 fxe6 22.♗xe5±



Position after: 22.♗xe5±

c) 10.♘c3 0-0

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.d4 cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♕b6 7.♘xc6 bxc6 8.♗e2!? ♘g6 9.c4 ♗e7 10.♘c3 0-0



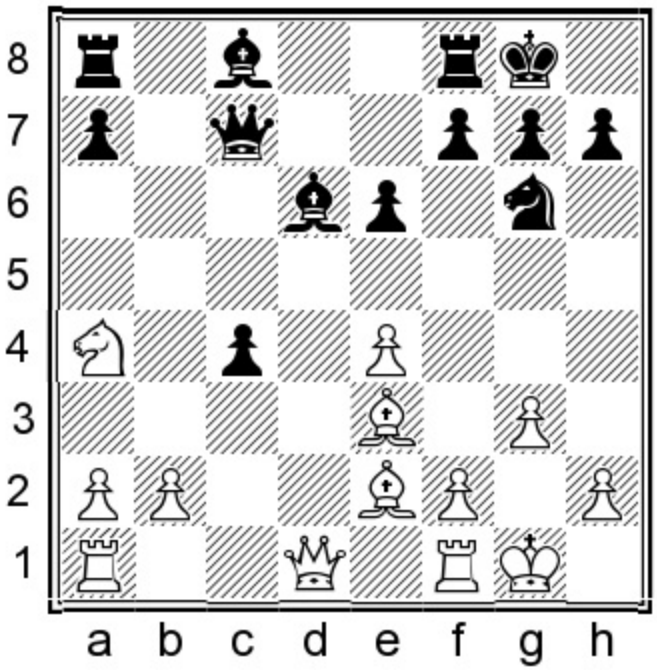
Position after: 10...0-0

11.♖b1

11.♘a4!? We've seen the combination of ♘a4 and c4-c5 numerous times. The line illustrates the benefit of having our bishop on e2 compared to d3, but I still think Black should continue with the same plan of playing ...c5-c4 as fast as possible. The fact that 11.♘a4 has never been played in correspondence chess demonstrates that it shouldn't be too concerning for Black.

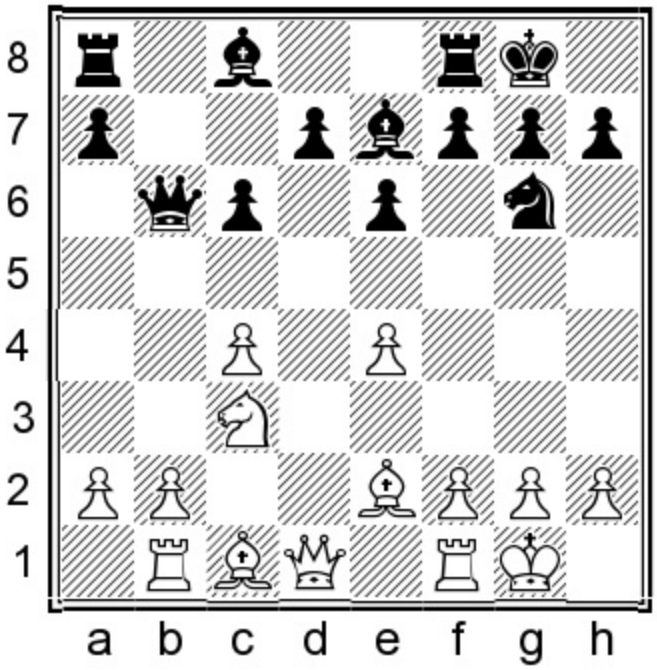
A) 11...♕a5 Here we will get similar positions to 11.♖b1, except that we haven't actually played ♖b1 (rather, we've wasted time with ♘a4 – it's very likely that at some point the knight will return to c3). 12.♗e3 d6 13.a3 c5 14.b4! ♕c7 15.♖b1±

B) 11...♕c7 12.c5 d5 13.cxd6 ♗xd6 14.g3 c5! 15.♗e3 c4!⇄



Position after: 15...c4!⇄

I'm sceptical about whether White has anything at all after this. The c-pawn looks like a weakness, but upon analysing the position I found that Black was able to generate a lot of counterplay through moves such as ...♗a6-b5 and ...♖ab8.

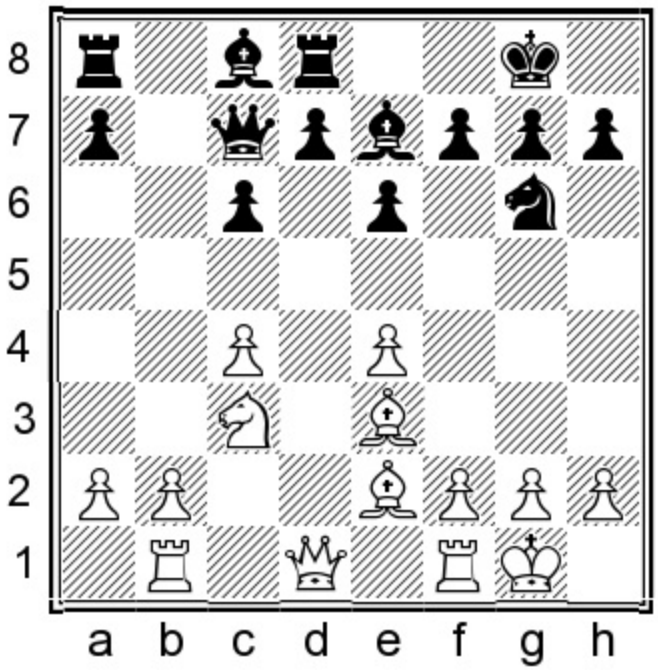


Position after: 11.♖b1

11...c5

Having wasted time on ♖b1, I don't think it's as effective to attack directly with ♕d3 as we saw after 10...c5. Instead, we can build our attack more slowly by returning our light-squared bishop to d3.

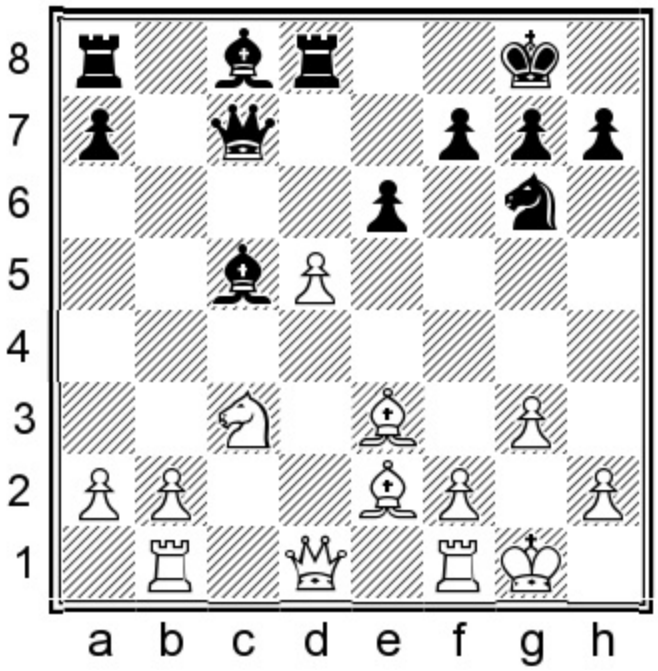
A) 11...♖d8 This seems like a critical try, as we need to be wary of quick ...d7-d5 ideas. 12.♗e3 ♕c7



Position after: 12...♕c7

A1) 13.f4 A naive move, allowing Black to gain sufficient counterplay. 13...d5! 14.cxd5 cxd5 15.exd5 ♗c5! 16.♕c1 ♕b6 17.♗xc5 ♕xc5+ 18.♔h1 ♖b8!⇄

A2) 13.g3!? Another reasonable way of approaching the position. 13...d5 [13...d6 14.f4 ♗b7 15.♗f3 a6 16.h4±] 14.cxd5 cxd5 15.exd5 ♗c5 The difference to 13.f4 is that our e3-bishop isn't hanging now.

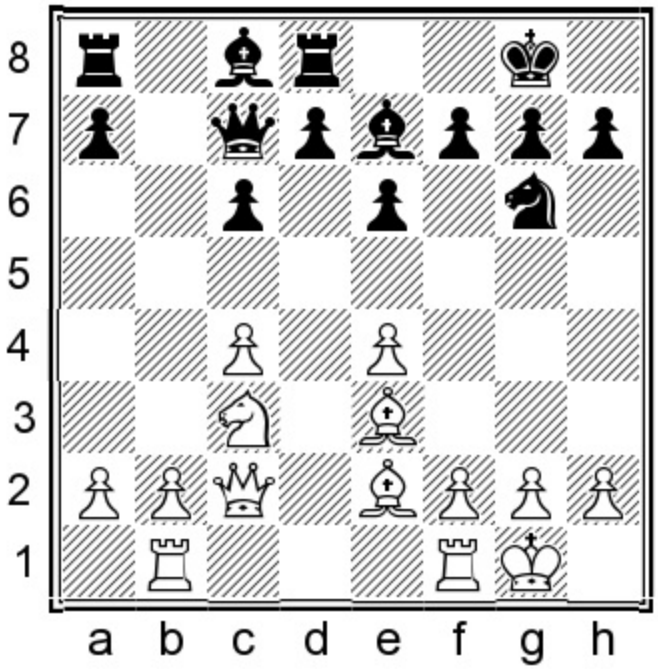


Position after: 15...♗c5

16.♘b5 ♕e7 17.♗xc5 ♕xc5 18.♖c1 ♕b6 19.♖c6 ♕b7 20.♘d6±

A3) 13.c5? fails as our h2-pawn will be hanging in the end. 13...d5! 14.cxd6 ♗xd6∓

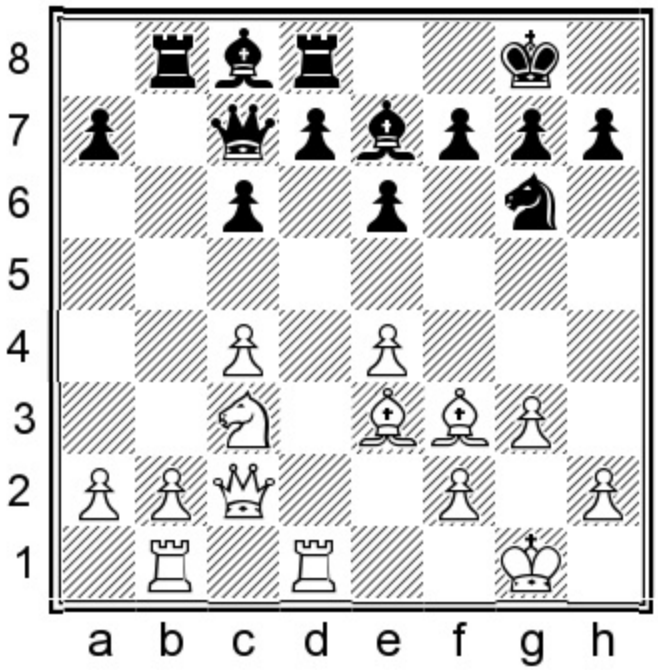
A4) 13.♕c2 It's probably a good idea to take our queen off the d-file so that ...d7-d5 possibilities aren't as effective.



Position after: 13.♕c2

A4.1) 13...d5 14.cxd5 cxd5 15.exd5 exd5 16.♖fd1±

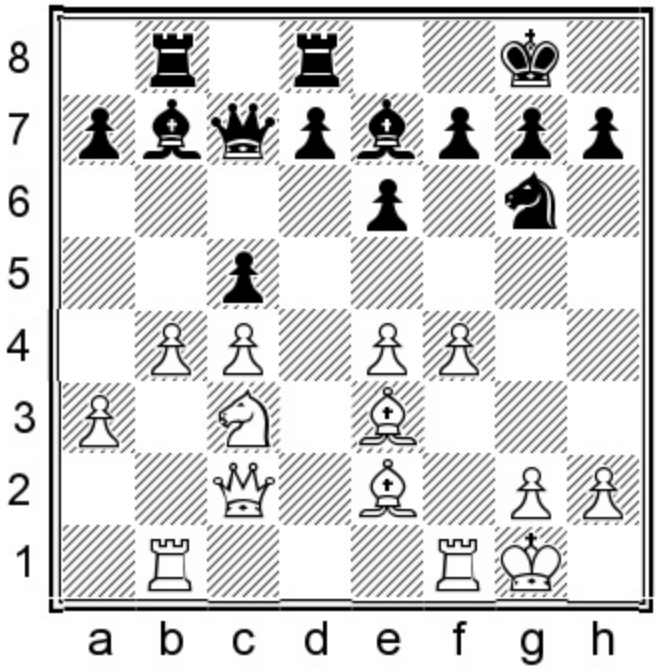
A4.2) 13...♘f4 After our bishop goes to f3, we can hit the knight with g2-g3 before continuing with our usual plan. 14.♗f3 ♖b8 15.g3 ♘g6 16.♖fd1



Position after: 16.♖fd1

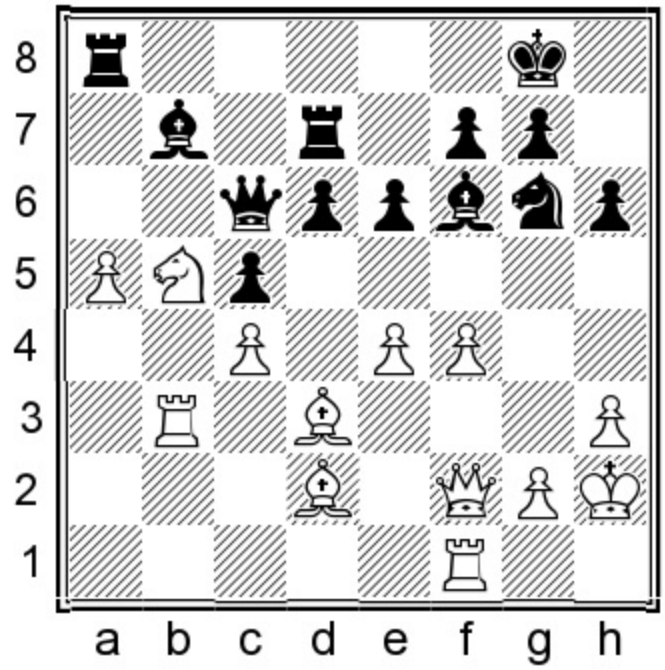
16...c5 [16...d6 17.b4±] 17.♘b5 ♕b7 18.♗g2±

A4.3) 13...c5 14.a3 ♗b7 15.b4 ♖ab8 [15...f5?! 16.exf5 ♘h4 17.f6! ♗xf6 18.♘e4±] 16.f4!



Position after: 16.f4!

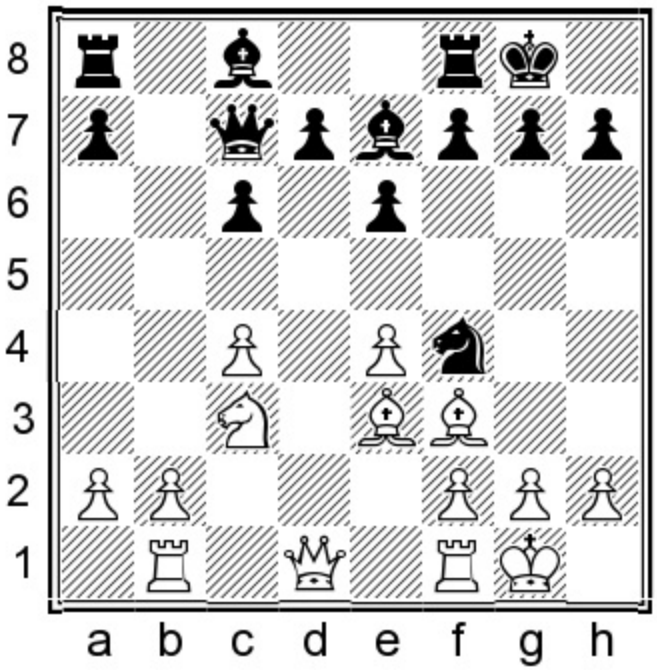
The following line isn't forced by any means, but is a good example of a way that we can combine queenside and kingside play. 16...a6 17.♗d3 ♗a8 18.b5 axb5 19.♘xb5 ♕c6 20.a4 d6 21.a5 ♗f6 22.h3 h6 23.♔h2 ♗b7 24.♕f2 ♖a8 25.♗d2 ♖d7 26.♖b3!→



Position after: 26.♖b3!→

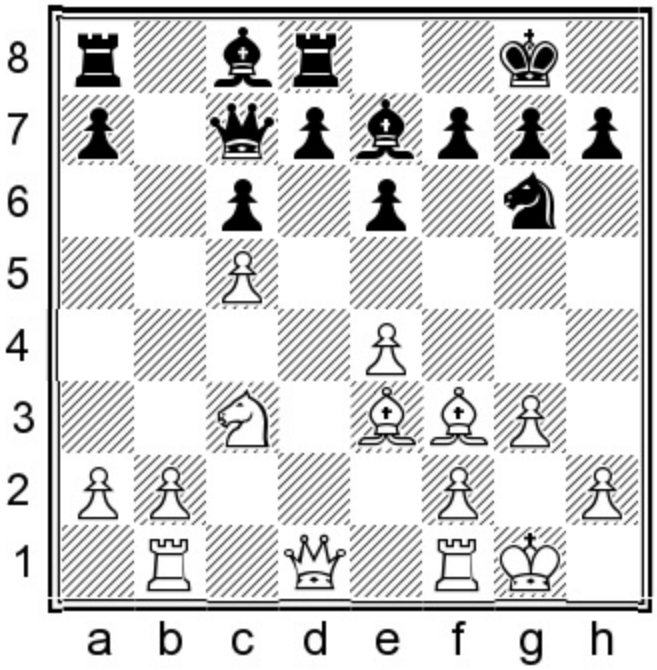
The rook lift allows the f1-rook to support the queenside, but also lends itself to ideas such as ♖b3-g3.

B) 11...♕c7 Directly playing for ...♘f4 was the exact idea which made me initially analyse 8.♗e2 as an alternative. Now we'll be able to see why the bishop stands better on f3 than on c2 after being attacked by ...♘f4. 12.♗e3 ♘f4 13.♗f3



Position after: 13.♗f3

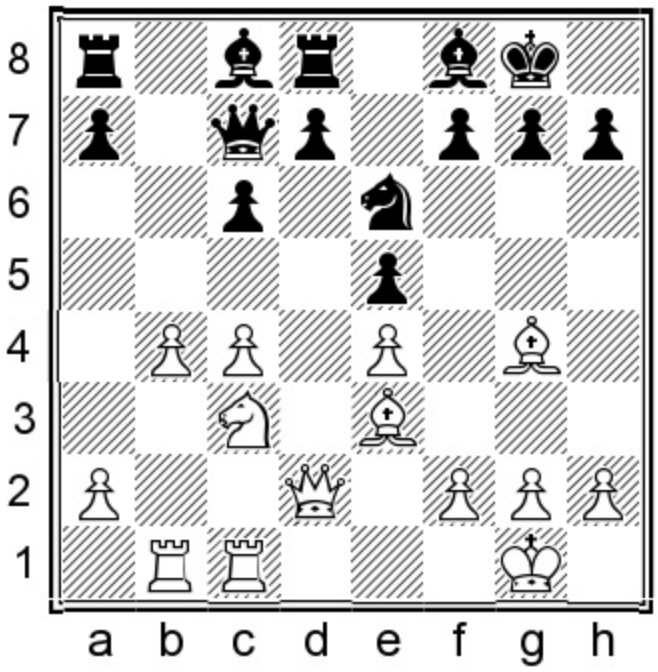
B1) 13...♖d8 14.g3 ♘g6 15.c5!± With our bishop on f3 it only takes one move to drop it back to e2 – its ideal position in these c4-c5 scenarios. Furthermore, the c2-square is left free for the queen, and our knight never even had to go to a4 to enable c4-c5.



Position after: 15.c5!±

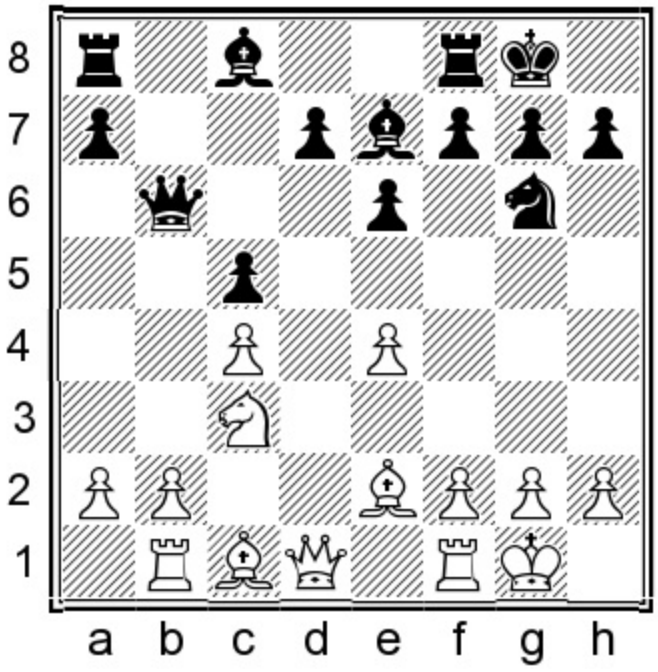
B2) 13...e5?! Even though the Black knight can retreat to e6, this move still looks to be a positional error. Black loses any possibility of breaking with ...d7-d5, and also faces difficulties over coming

up with a concrete plan. 14.♕d2 ♘e6 15.b4 ♖d8 16.♖fc1 ♗f8 17.♗g4±



Position after: 17.♗g4±

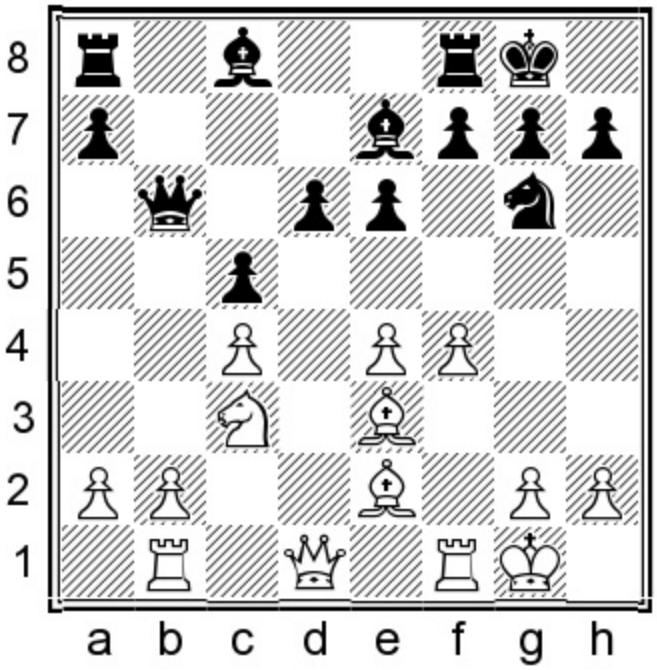
As our kingside progress is evidently hindered, we can devote most of our attention to queenside expansion with a2-a4 and b4-b5 or c4-c5 possibilities. On the kingside, we still retain the idea of bringing our c3-knight to g3 and pushing h4-h5. If Black isn't careful, ♘d5 might be a useful trick to play. There are a plethora of options for White, whereas I'm not really sure what Black is aiming for.



Position after: 11...c5

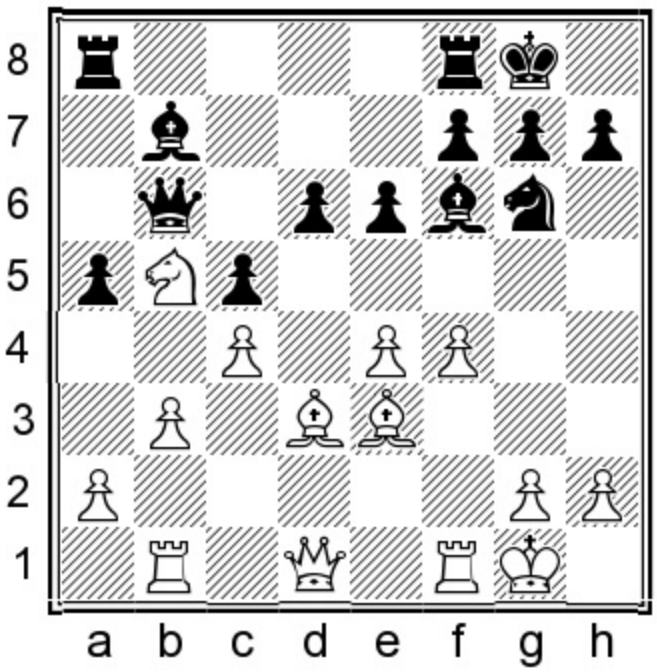
12.♗e3

12.f4!? It's completely plausible to delay ♗e3 and go for this immediately. 12...d6 [12...♕c7 13.g3! The same idea once again. 13...♗b7 14.h4±] 13.♗e3



Position after: 13.♗e3

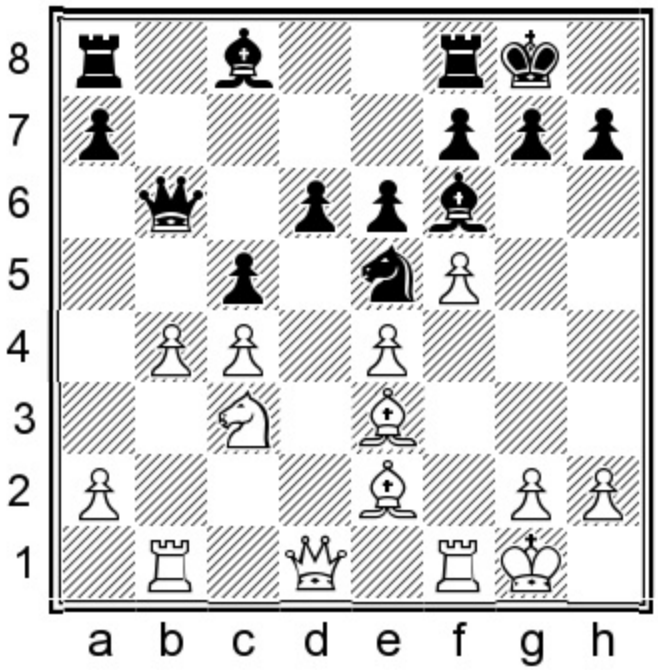
A) Every correspondence game which has reached this position has seen 13...a5!? It's understandable to want to prevent b2-b4, but in turn we gain the b5-square – which practically looks very useful as we look to target the d6-pawn in the future. 14.♗d3! ♗f6 15.♘b5 ♗b7 16.b3±



Position after: 16.b3±

In practical terms, this position is beginning to appear extremely one-sided as we build up our attack on the kingside with moves like ♕h5 and ♖f3.

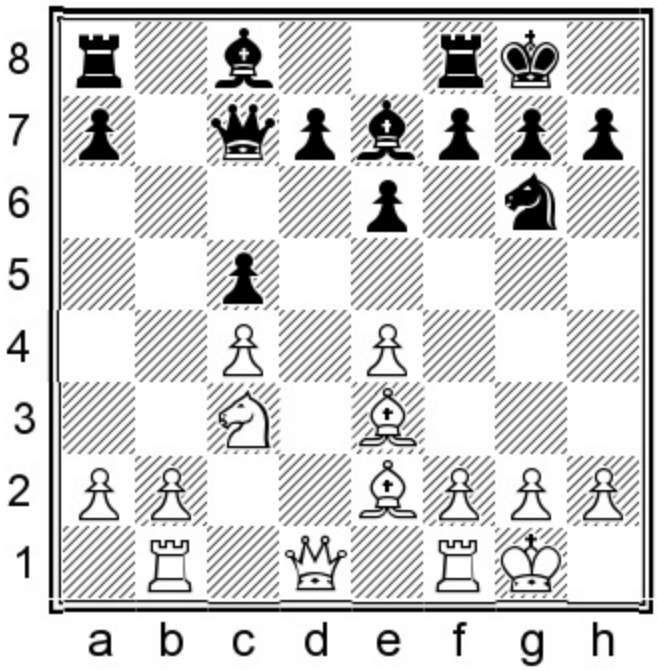
B) 13...♗f6 14.f5 ♘e5 15.b4!



Position after: 15.b4!

This variation is a nice example of how we can sustain expansion on both sides of the board. 15...♕c6 16.b5 ♕c7 17.♕d2± Now we can continue with ideas such as a2-a4, as well as ♗g5 to exchange bishops. The d6-pawn will always remain a weakness.

12...♕c7

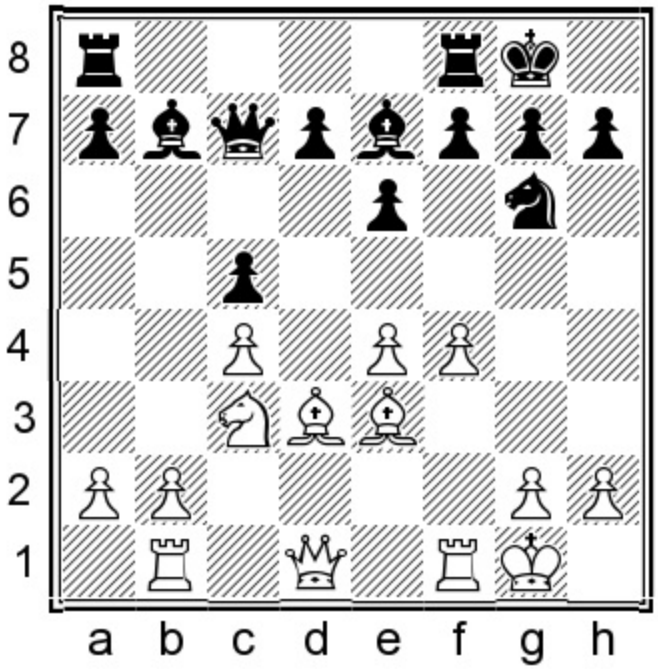


Position after: 12...♕c7

13.f4

13.a3!? followed by b2-b4 is another good plan.

13...♗b7 14.♗d3!



Position after: 14.♗d3!

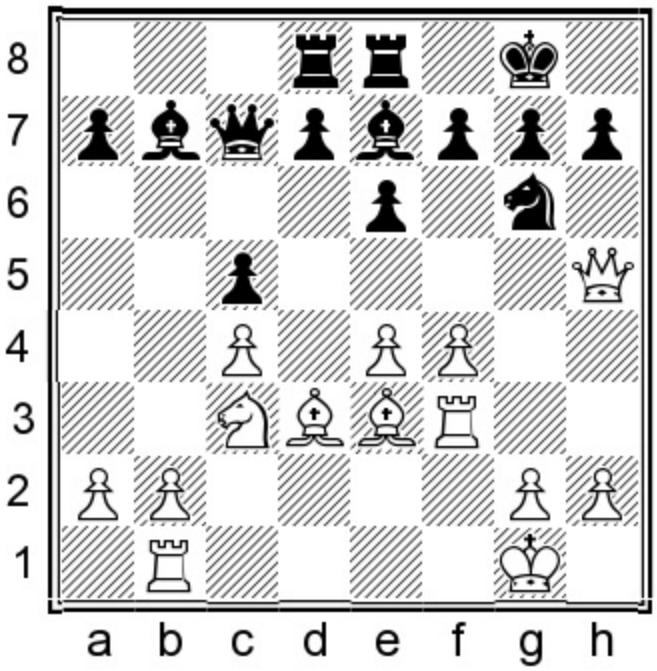
Now that Black can't exploit our d3-bishop, it can finally help the attack! Moreover, it enables our queen to jump to h5 in one move.

14...♖ad8

A) 14...d6 15.♕h5 ♗f6 16.♖f3 ♖fe8 17.♖h3 h6 18.♖g3! ♗c6 19.♖f1±

B) 14...♖ab8 15.♕h5→ Tiits – Korabliov, ICCF email 2014.

15.♕h5 ♖fe8 16.♖f3



Position after: 16.♖f3

To be honest, I was tempted to leave my analysis here and just say that White's attack looked extremely dangerous. But Black does have a few defensive ideas, and it's always useful to play through the variations – even just to gain a feel for various attacking motifs.

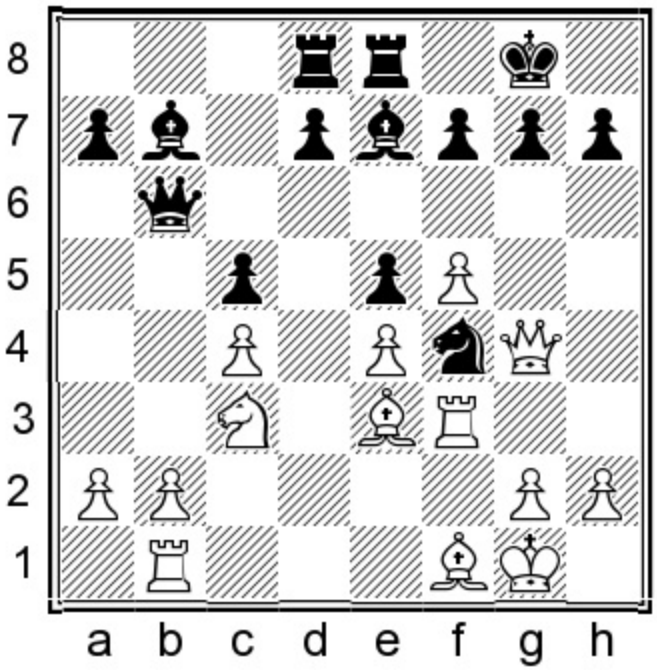
16...d5!?

The computer defence to our dangerous-looking attack. It looks almost suicidal to allow our d3-bishop into the attack, but it's useful to delve into Black's defensive resources.

A) 16...e5 17.f5 ♘f4 18.♕g4! Black desperately wanted us to capture on f4, but we can't afford to give him all the dark squares yet.

A1) 18...♘xd3 19.♗h6 ♗f8 [19...g6 20.♖xd3+–] 20.♗xg7+–

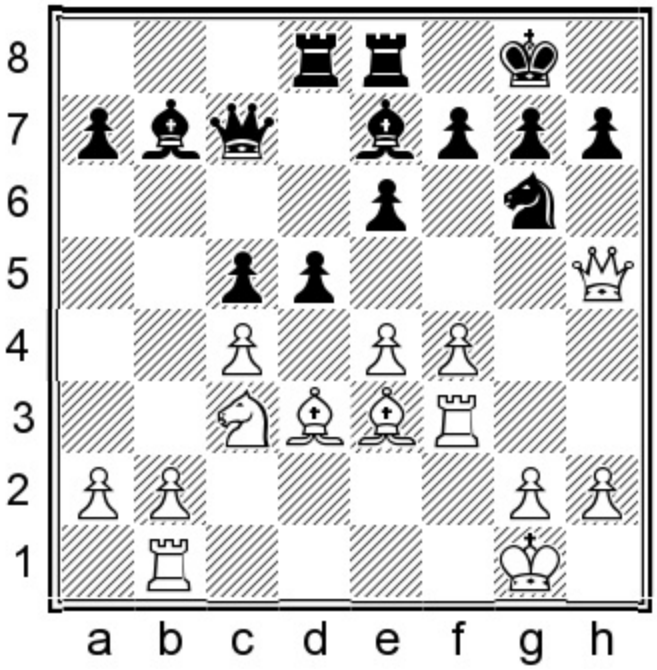
A2) 18...♕b6 19.♗f1±



Position after: 19.♗f1±

We still have to be careful about playing g2-g3 as Black has ...h7-h5 winning our queen. Otherwise, Black has lost the d5-square in playing 16...e5. We also always have the option of switching to the queenside with ideas such as ♖f2, followed by a2-a3, b2-b4 and ♘d5 at the right moment.

B) 16...d6 is Black's safest continuation, but after 17.♖h3 ♘f8 18.♗d2!, our bishop will maneouvre to c3 and give the attack extra energy.



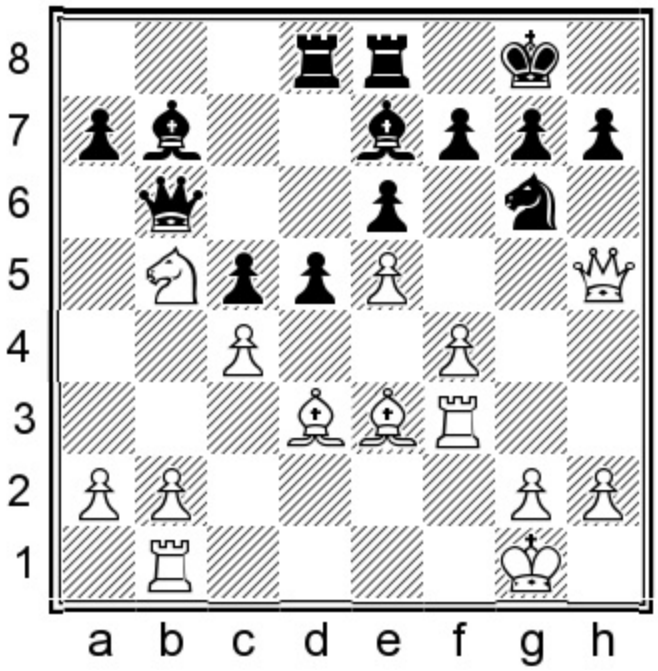
Position after: 16...d5!?

17.♘b5!

The pawn structure with f4 and e5 seems like our ideal method to reduce Black's counterplay, and this is the best way to achieve it. Once again, the following variations are pretty wild, but still relatively instructive.

17.♖h3 leads to some crazy positions. 17...h6 18.f5 exf5 19.♗xh6 gxh6 20.exf5 ♘f4 21.♖g3+ ♗g5 22.♖xg5+ hxg5 23.♕xg5+ ♔f8 24.f6 ♖e6!∞ and somehow Black is holding on.

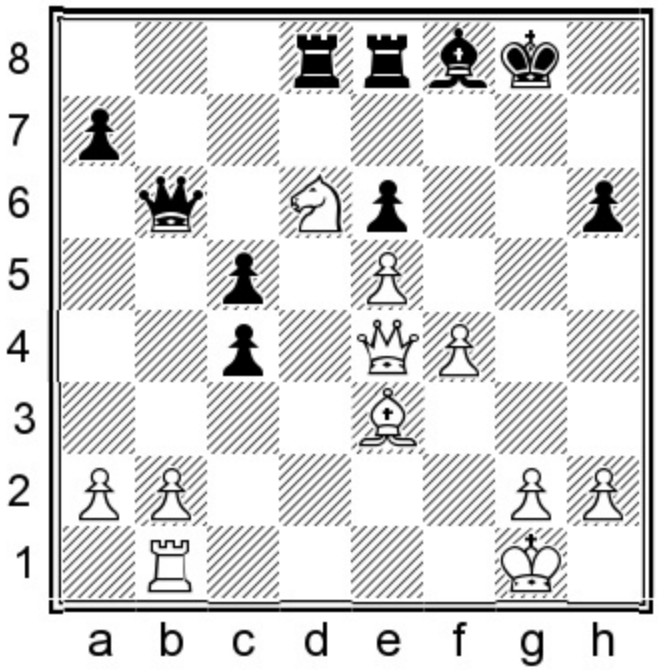
17...♕b6 18.e5!



Position after: 18.e5!

18...f5

18...dxc4 19.♖h3 h6 20.♗xg6 fxg6 21.♕xg6 ♗f8 22.♖xh6 ♗e4 23.♕xe4 gxh6 24.♘d6!



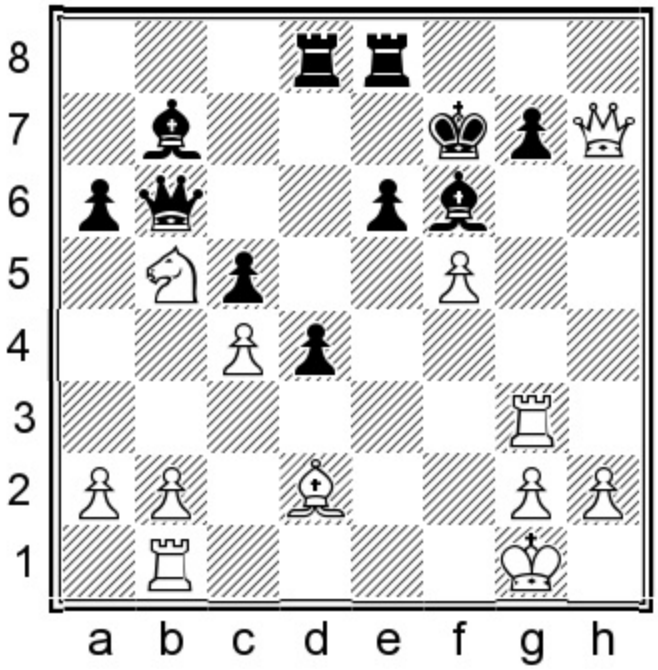
Position after: 24.♘d6!

Black will have to take on d6 to avoid losing an exchange, but his dark-squares will be fatally weak. 24...♗xd6 25.♕g6+ ♔h8 26.♕xh6+ ♔g8 27.♕g5+ ♔h7 28.exd6 ♕xd6 29.♖f1+–

19.exf6 ♗xf6 20.♖h3 ♘f8 21.♗xh7+ ♘xh7 22.♕xh7+ ♔f7 23.♖g3! d4

23...dxc4 24.♘c3 ♖h8 25.♕g6+ ♔f8 26.f5+–

24.♗d2 a6 25.f5!

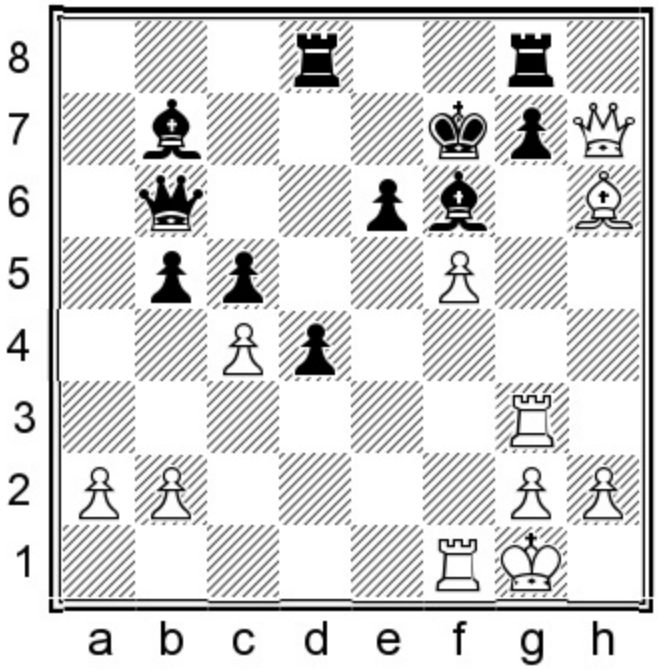


Position after: 25.f5!

Our b5-knight now acts as a decoy. Black will waste time capturing the irrelevant piece whilst we proceed to tap away at his defences.

25...exf5

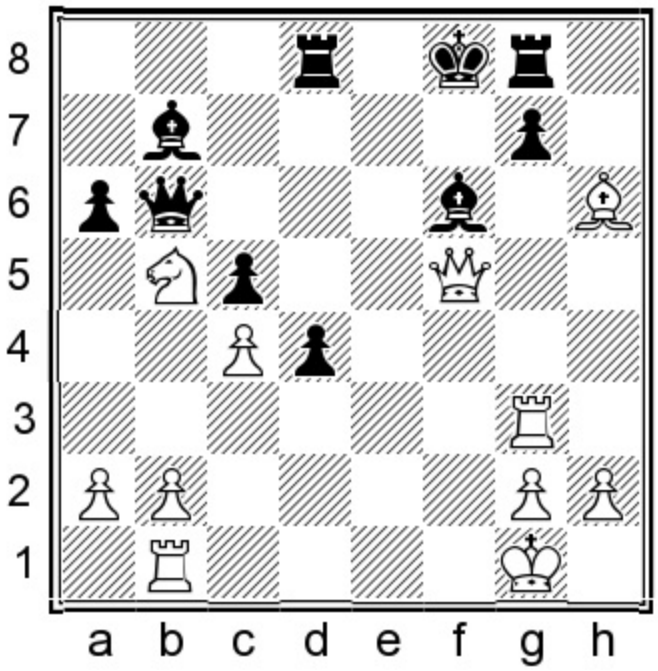
After 25...axb5 26.♗h6 ♖g8 the only winning move is the amazingly calm 27.♖f1!+–



Position after: 27.♖f1!+–

preferring not to commit to fxe6-lines while it is still possible that f6 might be a more handy square for the pawn.

26.♗h6 ♖g8 27.♕g6+ ♔f8 28.♕xf5

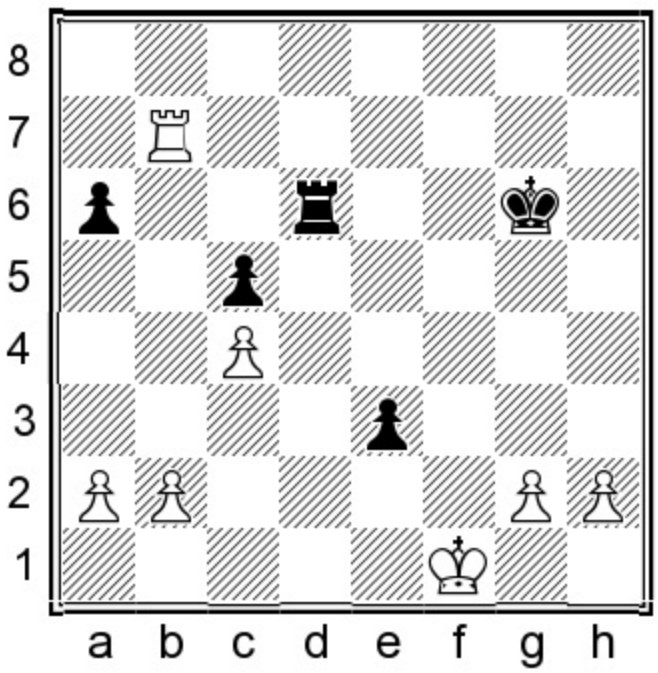


Position after: 28.♕xf5

28...gxh6

28...♗c8 29.♕h7 axb5 30.♖f1 ♖d7 31.♗g5 ♖f7 32.♗xf6 ♖xf6 33.♖xf6+ ♕xf6 34.♖f3+–

29.♖xg8+ ♔xg8 30.♕g6+ ♔h8 31.♖f1 ♕e6 32.♕xh6+ ♔g8 33.♖xf6 ♕e3+ 34.♕xe3 dxe3 35.♘d6 ♔g7 36.♖f7+ ♔g6 37.♖xb7 ♖xd6 38.♔f1±



Position after: 38.♔f1±

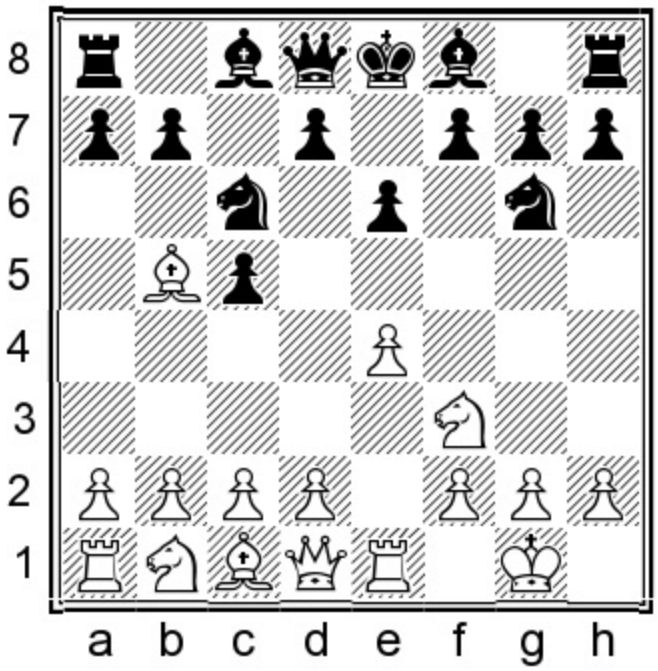
At the end of a crazy line, we reach the same conclusion that we've seen in much of the analysis. Despite our original attacking intentions, even the endings are often much more preferable for White.

Conclusion to Chapter 10 & 11

Right on move 8 we faced a critical choice, which the reader has hopefully been able to make for themselves by now. 8.♗d3 has been considerably more popular in practical games, and is certainly a fine option. However, my main concern is that Black has clever ways to achieve quick counterplay – my analysis demonstrates that a quick ...d7-d5 and ...♘e5/...♘f4 has the potential to cause all kinds of trouble even if it doesn't quite equalise. The key thing to learn from these positions is that it's often very sensible to lose a tempo in the name of denying Black counterplay. Therefore, if we want to make the most of the misplaced g6-knight and head for a kingside attack, I think 8.♗e2 is the best way to go.

Chapter 12
4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.♖e1 ♘g6

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.♖e1 ♘g6



Chapter Guide

Chapter 12 – 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.♖e1 ♘g6

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.♖e1 ♘g6 6.c3

a) 5...-- alternatives

b) 6...d5 7.h4!N --

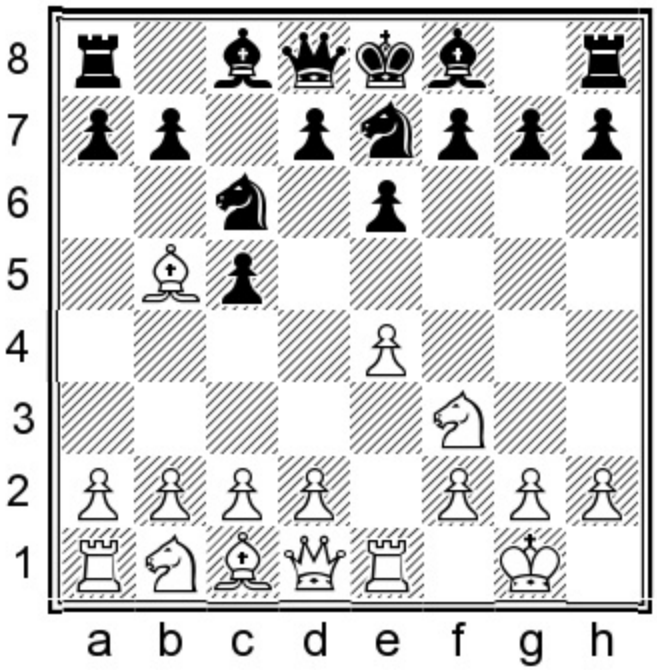
c) 6...d5 7.h4!N dxe4

d) 6...♗e7 with 10...--

e) 6...♗e7 with 10...f6

a) 5...-- alternatives

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.♖e1

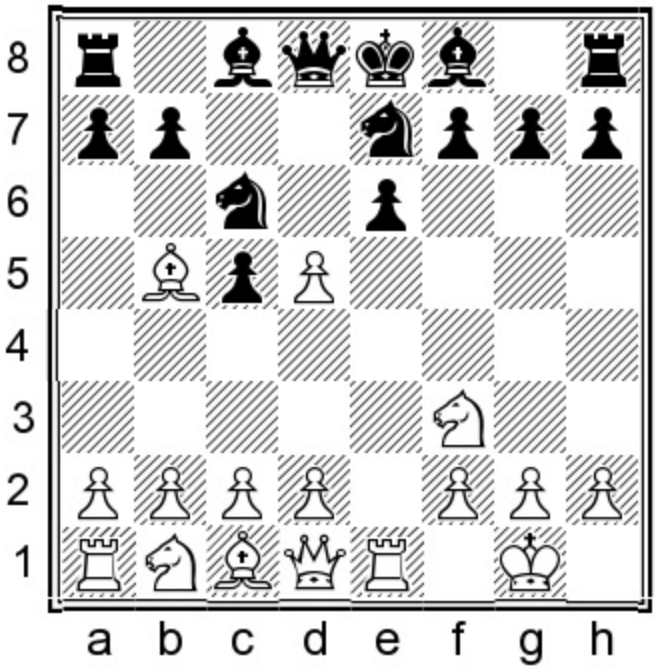


Position after: 5.♖e1

5...♕b6

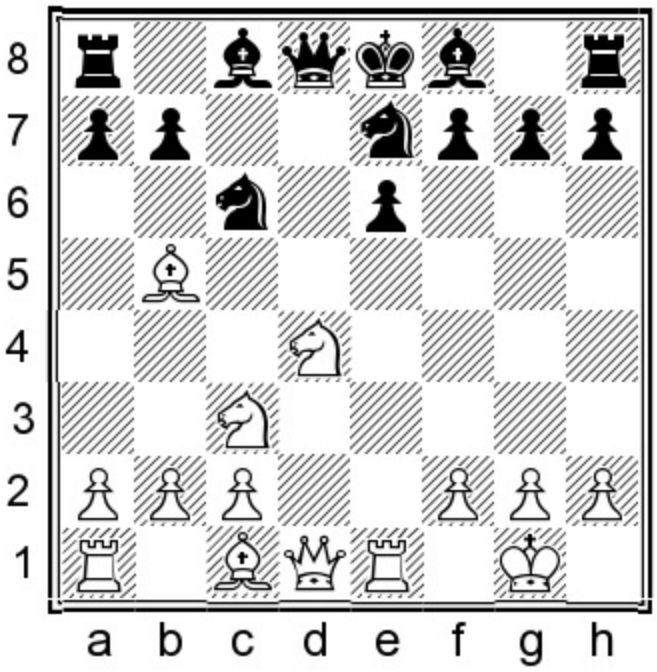
Attacking the b5-bishop like this only presents us with a minor inconvenience, and the Black queen will soon find itself misplaced.

A) 5...d5?! Black will find that it's too early to open the centre without driving away our b5-bishop first. 6.exd5



Position after: 6.exd5

A1) 6...♕xd5 7.♘c3 ♕d8 8.d4 cxd4 9.♘xd4

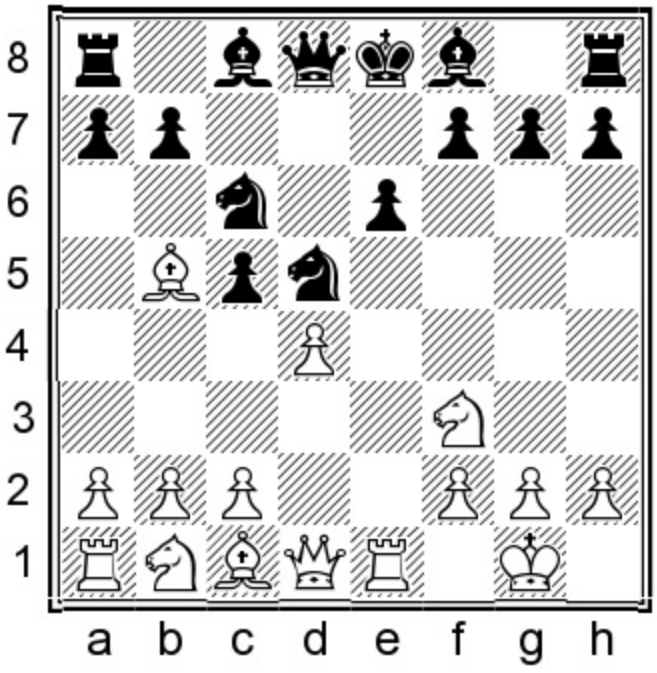


Position after: 9.♘xd4

9...a6 [9...♗d7 10.♘e4! Our knights create too many threats and the attack is decisive. 10...♘g6 11.♘f5 a6 12.♗f1 ♕c7 13.b3 e5 14.♘fd6+ ♗xd6 15.♘xd6+ ♔f8 16.♗c4+–] 10.♘xc6 ♕xd1 [10...bxc6 11.♗d3+–] 11.♘d4+ axb5 12.♖xd1+–

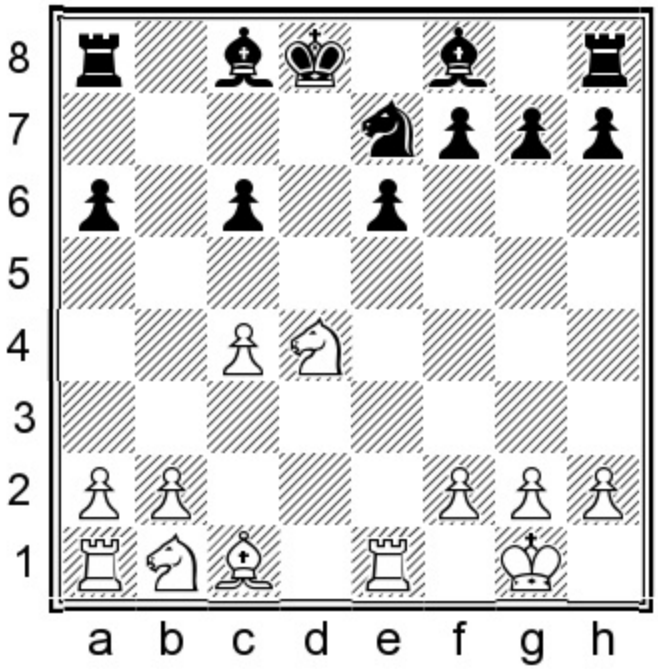
A2) 6...exd5 7.d4 It's clear that this is already winning for White. 7...♗e6 8.dxc5 ♘f5 9.♗g5 ♗e7 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.♕d3+–

A3) 6...♘xd5 7.d4



Position after: 7.d4

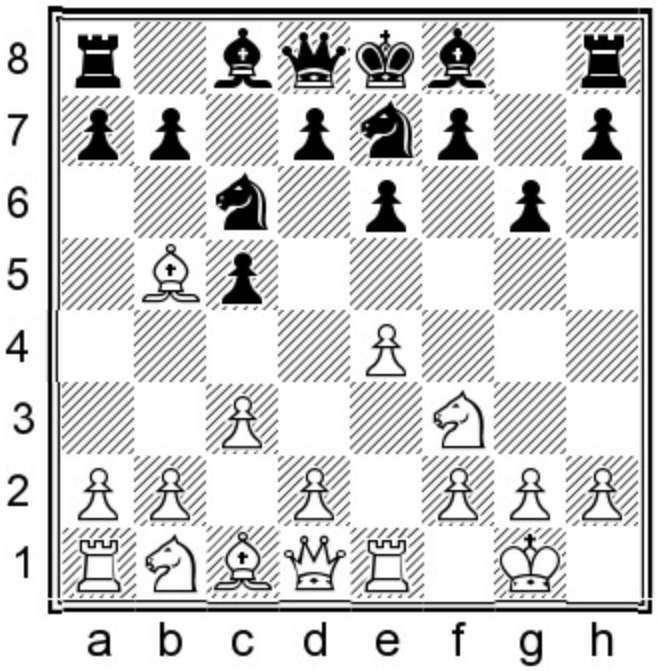
7...cxd4 [7...♘f6 8.♘c3 ♗e7 9.dxc5 ♕xd1 10.♖xd1 ♗xc5 11.♗xc6+ bxc6 12.♘e5±] 8.♕xd4! Our knight on f3 is better suited to the e5-square, and from d4 the queen has options to either exchange on d8, or switch to g4. 8...a6 9.♗xc6+ bxc6 10.c4 ♘e7 11.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 12.♘d4±



Position after: 12.♘d4±

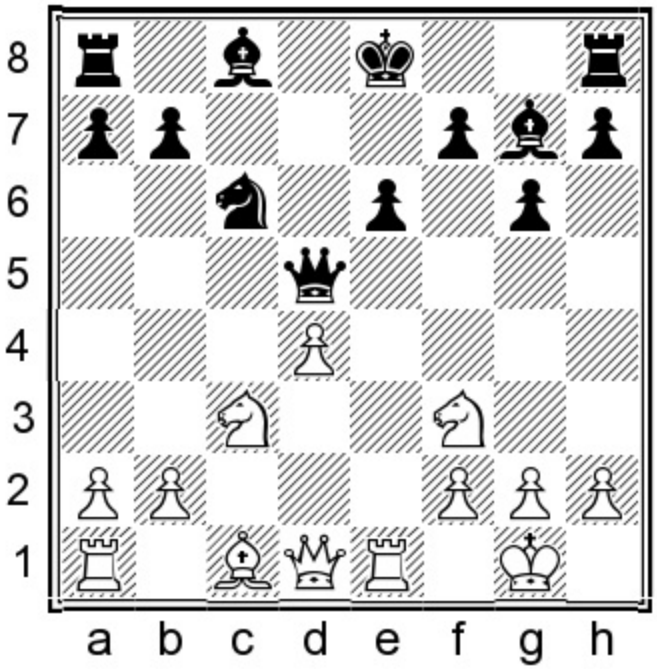
Black faces a depressing endgame.

B) 5...g6?! Although this is an entirely normal way for Black to continue developing his pieces, our lead in development should be enough to exploit his weakened dark-squares. 6.c3



Position after: 6.c3

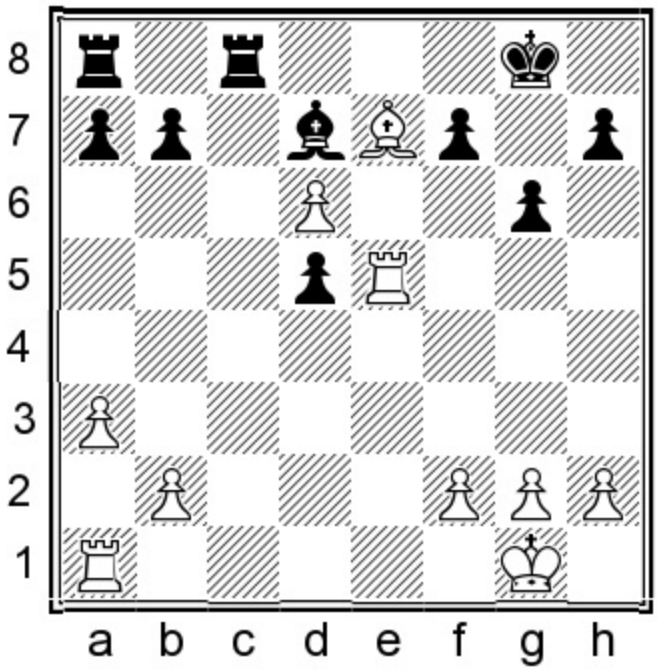
6...♗g7 [6...a6 7.♗xc6 ♘xc6 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 ♗g7 10.♘c3 0-0 11.e5!±] 7.d4 cxd4 8.cxd4 d5 [8...0-0 9.d5±; 8...♕b6 9.♘a3!±] 9.♗xc6+! ♘xc6 [9...bxc6 10.e5 0-0 11.♘c3± Followed by ♘a4.] 10.exd5 ♕xd5 11.♘c3



Position after: 11.♘c3

Our initiative is very strong as Black can't stop d4-d5 on the next move. 11...♕a5 [11...♕d8 12.d5 ♘e7 13.♕a4+ ♗d7 14.♕a3+–] 12.d5 ♘b4 13.d6! ♗d7 14.♗g5 0-0 15.a3 ♘d5 [15...♘c6 16.b4 ♕f5

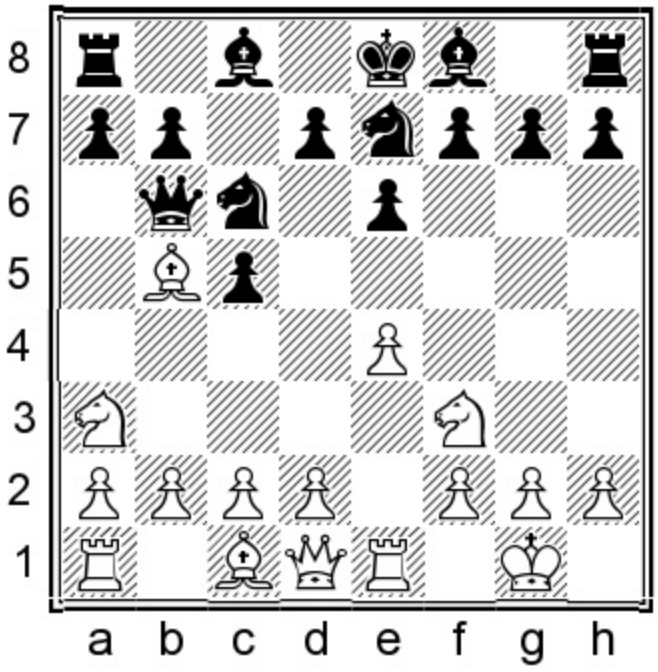
17.♖c1±] 16.♘xd5 ♕xd5 17.♕xd5 exd5 18.♗e7 ♖fc8 19.♘e5 ♗xe5 20.♖xe5±



Position after: 20.♖xe5±

The whole variation has been pretty much forced, and Black has to suffer with a clearly inferior opposite-coloured bishop. Our d6-pawn also continues to be a big threat.

6.♘a3!

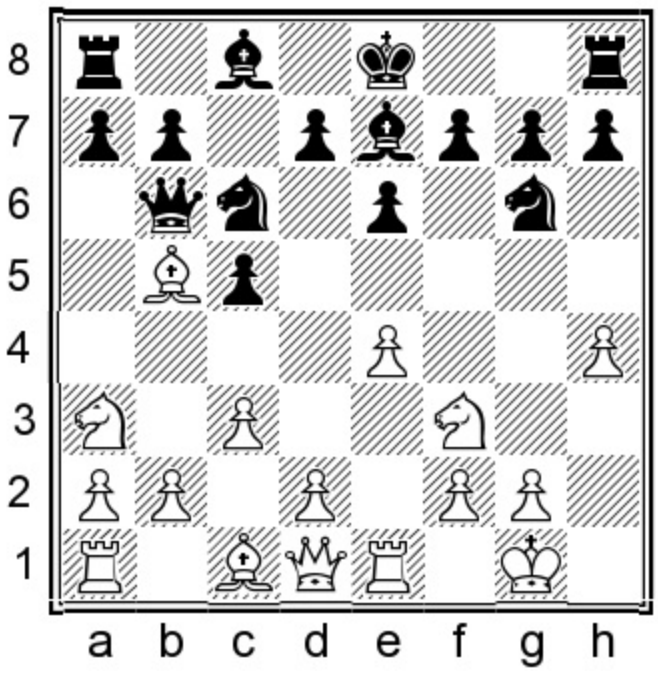


Position after: 6.♘a3!

White threatens the immediate ♘c4.

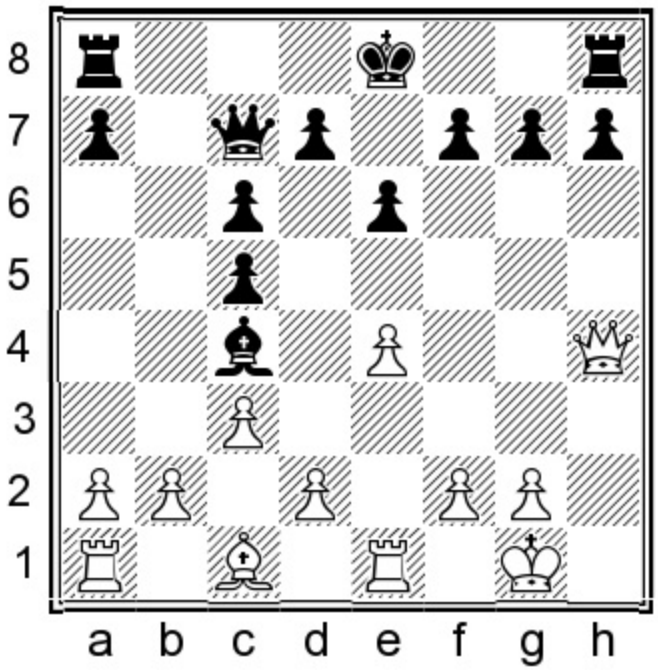
6...a6

6...♘g6 7.c3 ♗e7 We are following the game Sepp – Svidler, Rostov on Don 1993. Here White missed a nice tactical shot. [7...a6 8.♗c4 ♗e7 9.d4 cxd4 10.cxd4 0-0 11.♘c2± Followed by ♗e3 or even d4-d5.] 8.h4!



Position after: 8.h4!

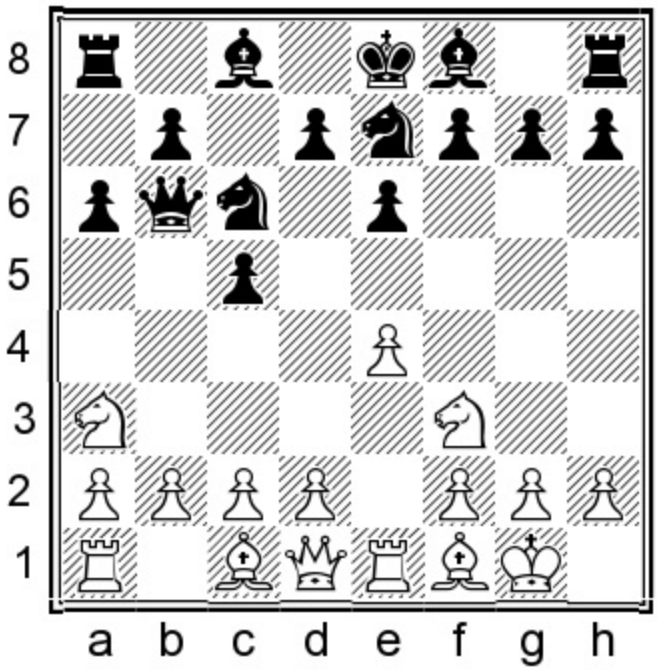
A sacrifice that we'll continue to come across. Black can't simultaneously capture on h4 and protect the d6-square – yet h4-h5 is also a big threat. 8...♘xh4 [8...0-0 9.h5 ♘ge5 10.♘xe5 ♘xe5 11.h6! g6 12.d4↑; 8...h5 A move Black never really wants to make, as castling now looks really doubtful. 9.♗a4 ♕d8 10.d4 cxd4 11.cxd4 d5 12.♘b5! a6 13.♘c3±] 9.♘xh4 ♗xh4 10.♘c4 ♕c7 11.♗xc6 bxc6 [11...♕xc6 12.♕g4 ♗f6 13.e5+–] 12.♕g4 ♗a6 13.♕xh4 ♗xc4



Position after: 13...♗xc4

Despite White's pawn deficit, he is completely dominating after the next few precise moves. 14.d4! cxd4 15.b3! ♗a6 16.♗a3 f6 17.e5! c5 18.cxd4 0-0 19.♗xc5±

7.♗f1

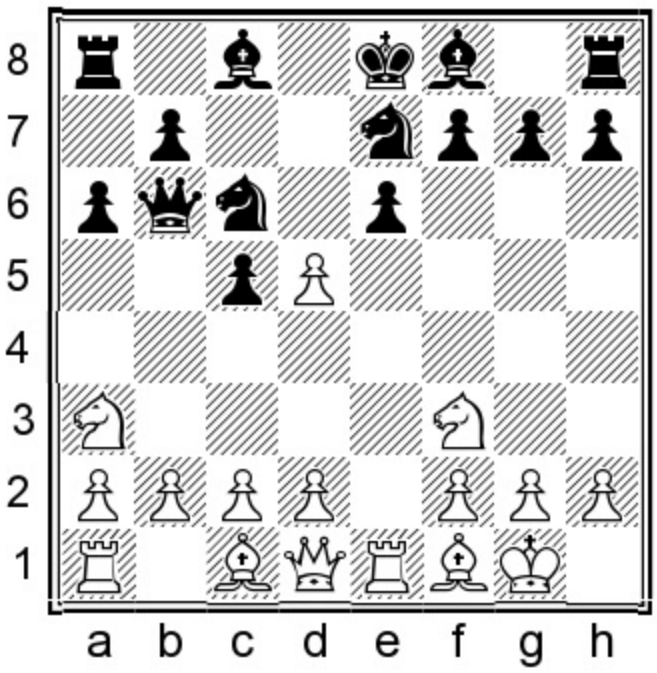


Position after: 7.♗f1

7...♕c7

Black can’t afford to let ♘c4 come with a tempo.

A) 7...d5?! It’s easy to see that Black’s pieces aren’t co-ordinated well enough to support this central break. 8.exd5

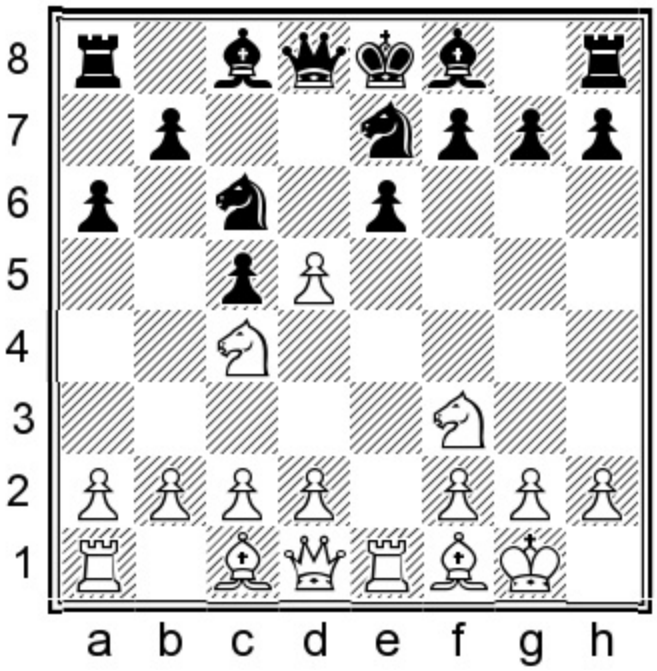


Position after: 8.exd5

A1) 8...exd5 9.c3 g6 10.d4 ♗g7 [10...cxd4 11.c4! ♗e6 12.♘g5+–] 11.dxc5 ♕xc5 12.♗e3 ♕a5 13.♕b3 ♕c7 14.♗b6 ♕d6 15.♖ad1±

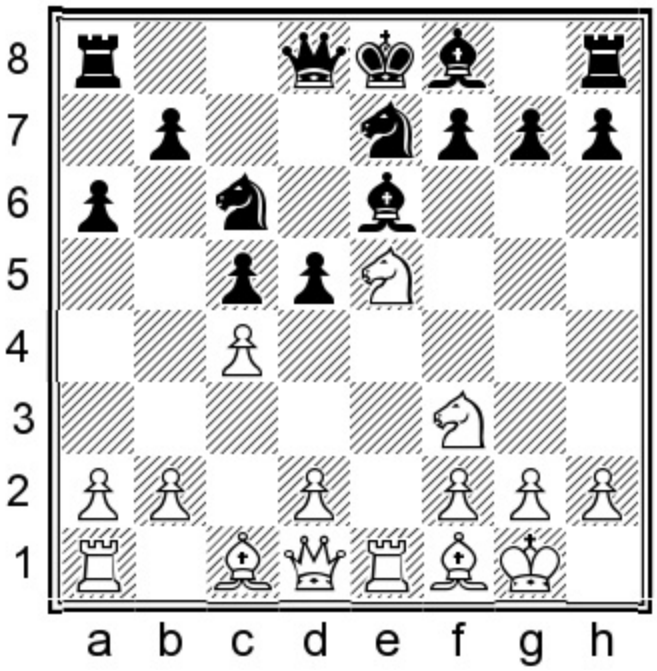
A2) 8...♘xd5 9.♘c4 ♕c7 10.d4 cxd4 11.♘xd4 ♗c5 12.♘xc6 bxc6 [12...♕xc6 13.♕g4 g6 14.♗h6+–] 13.b3 0-0 14.a3 ♖d8 15.♕f3±

B) 7...♕d8 8.♘c4 d5 White is basically two tempi up on the lines after 5...a6 and 6...d5. But we can’t rest on our laurels, and should continue playing with the initiative. 9.exd5



Position after: 9.exd5

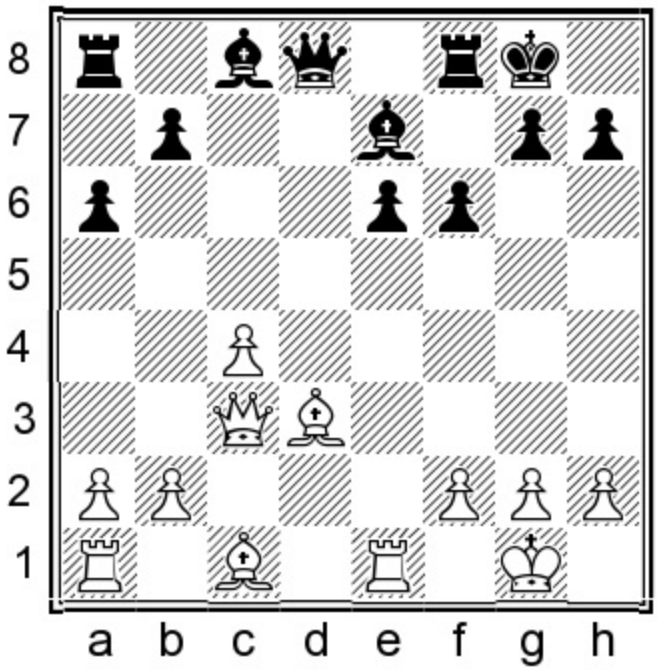
B1) 9...exd5 10.♘ce5 ♗e6 11.c4!



Position after: 11.c4!

11...d4 [11...dxc4 12.♗xc4 ♗xc4 13.♘xc4 g6 14.d4+–] 12.♘g5 ♘xe5 13.♖xe5 ♕d6 14.♖xe6! fxe6 15.♕f3+–

B2) 9...♘xd5 10.d4 ♗e7 11.♘ce5 ♘xd4 [11...♘xe5 12.♘xe5 cxd4 13.♕xd4 0-0 transposes to 11...♘xd4.] 12.♘xd4 cxd4 13.♕xd4 0-0 14.c4 f6 15.♘d3 ♘b4 16.♕c3 ♘xd3 17.♗xd3±

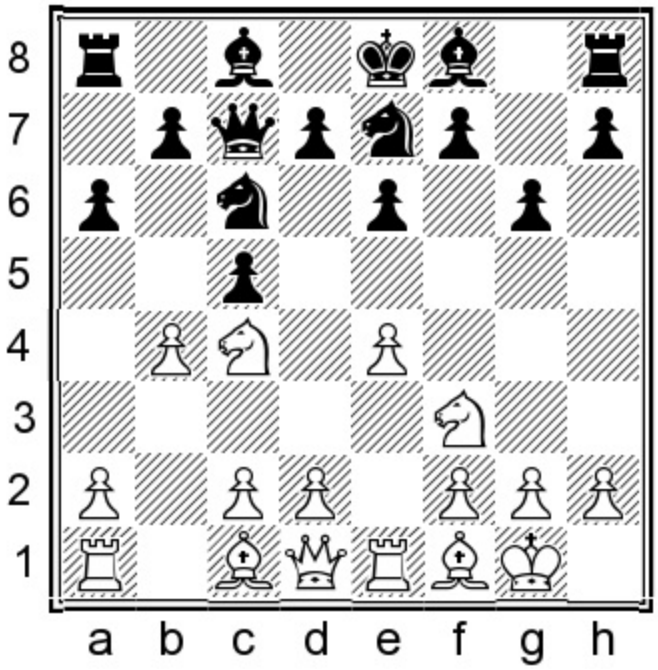


Position after: 17.♗xd3±

Black has emerged relatively unscathed, but we still have a nice edge.

C) 7...♘g6 8.♘c4 ♕c7 9.c3 transposes to 7...♕c7.

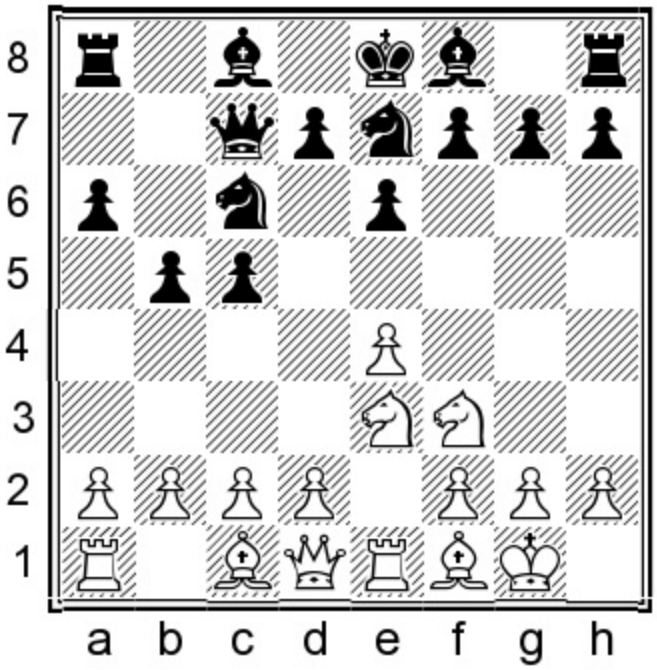
D) 7...g6? 8.♘c4 ♕c7 9.b4! Perhaps the best illustration of how to exploit Black's dark-squares.



Position after: 9.b4!

9...♗g7 10.bxc5 ♗xa1 11.d4+–

8.♘c4 b5 9.♘e3



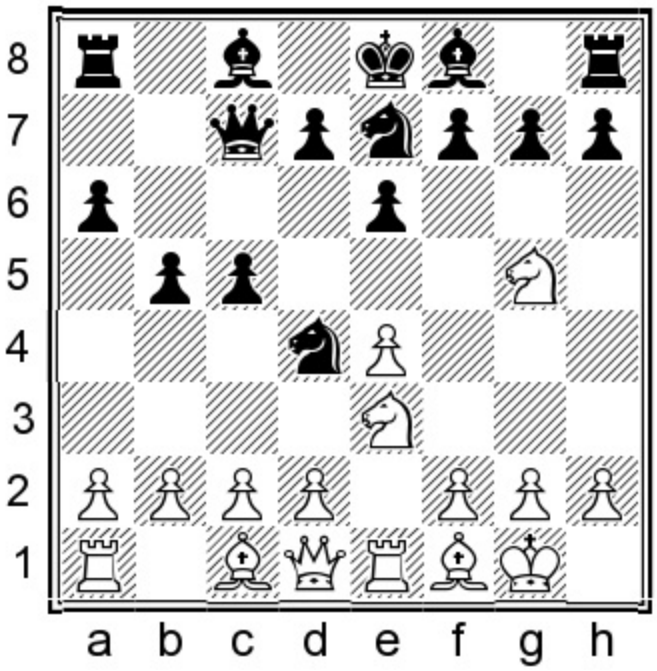
Position after: 9.♘e3

Our knight stands really well on e3. It controls the central squares, enables c2-c3 and d2-d4 to be played, and also has the possibility to jump to the kingside with ♘g4 ideas.

9...♘d4

9...♘g6 Our advantage will be clear-cut if Black doesn't try to challenge the centre. 10.c3 ♗e7 11.d4 cxd4 12.cxd4 0-0 13.g3±

10.♘g5!

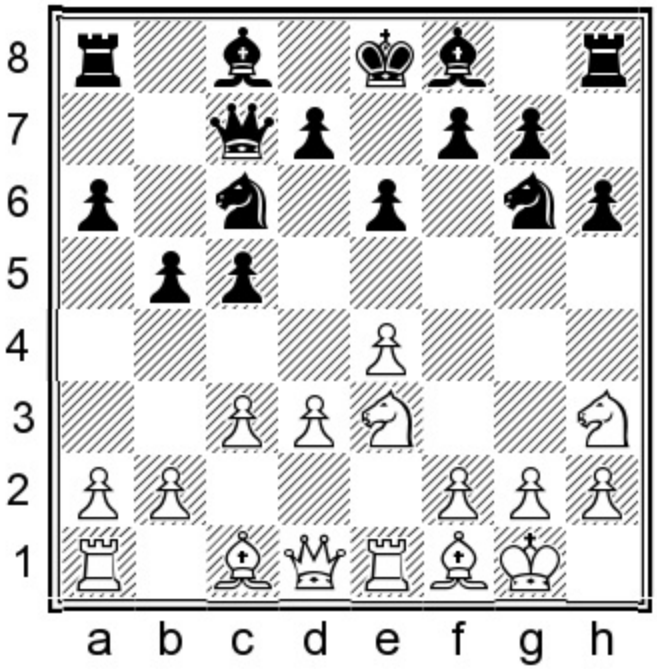


Position after: 10.♘g5!

A clever idea. Black's knight on d4 won't be exchanged, and instead we'll gain tempi when playing c2-c3 and d2-d4.

10...♘g6

10...h6 11.♘h3 ♘g6 12.c3 ♘c6 13.d3!?



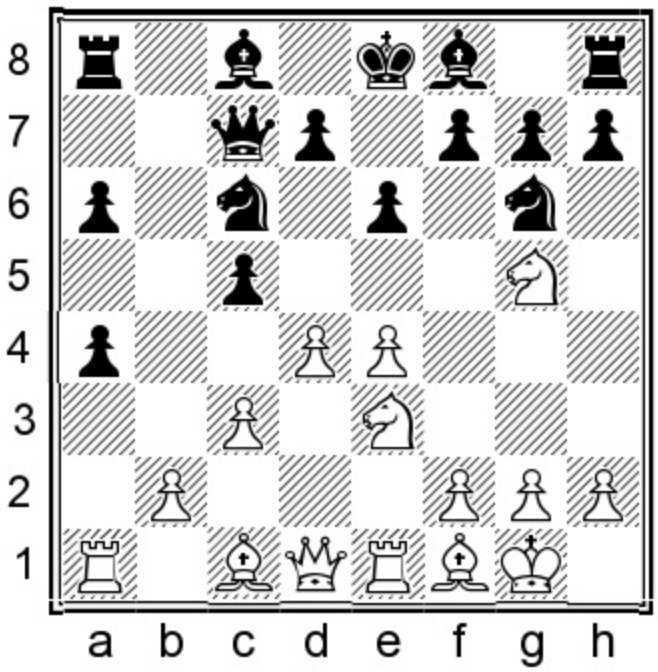
Position after: 13.d3!?

This demonstrates how we can vary our pawn set-up depending on the scenario. In this case, we'll make use of the fact that our f3-knight stands on h3, enabling f2-f4 to be played. [13.a4± is also very good.] 13...♗b7 14.g3 ♗e7 15.f4 0-0 16.♕h5 ♖fe8 17.♘g4→

11.c3 ♘c6 12.a4 bxa4

12...♗b7 13.axb5 axb5 14.♖xa8+ ♗xa8 15.♗xb5± is just a pawn.

13.d4±

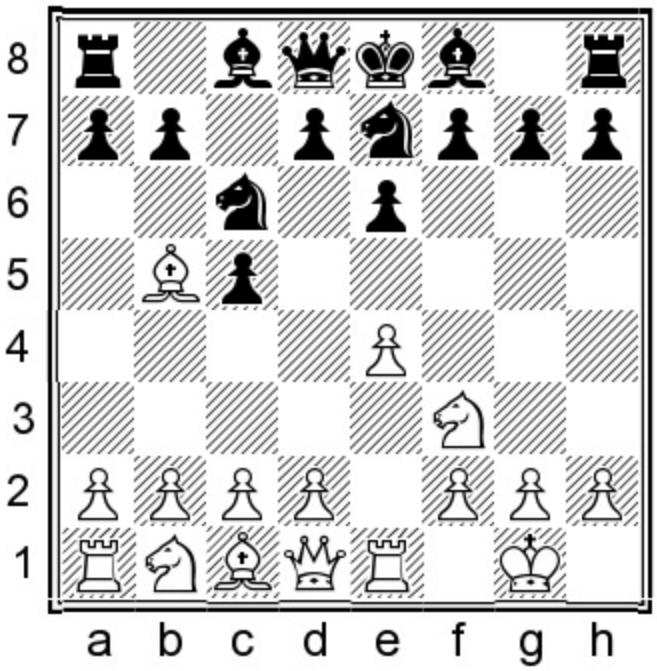


Position after: 13.d4±

White has a large positional advantage.

b) 6...d5 7.h4!N --

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.♖e1



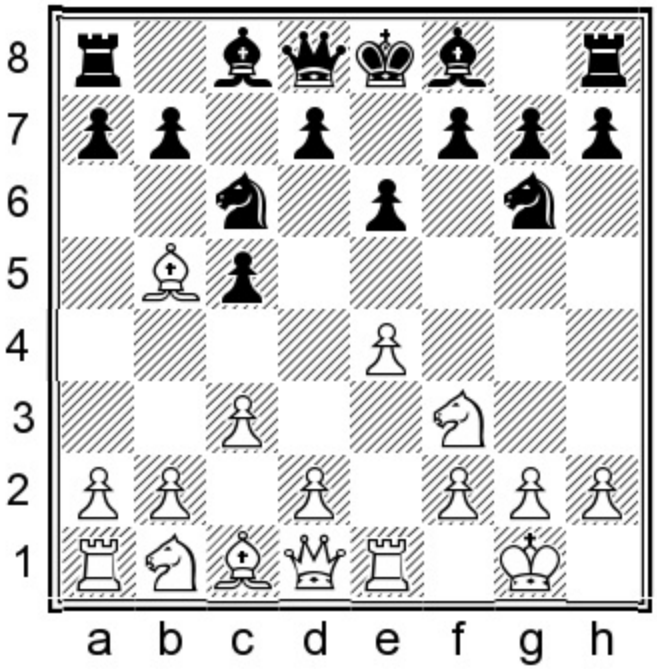
Position after: 5.♖e1

5...♘g6

It's natural for Black to put his knight on g6 before making any critical decisions.

Out of all the lines featuring ...d5, perhaps the best is 5...a6 6.♗f1 d5 as discussed at the end of this chapter.

6.c3

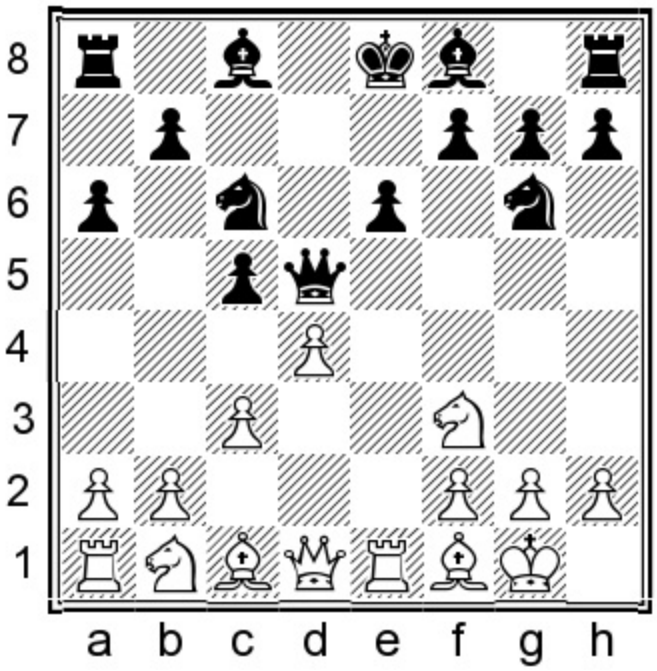


Position after: 6.c3

6...d5

This has been played a fair number of times, preventing White from taking over the centre with d2-d4. In particular, Carlsen deployed it to achieve a comfortable draw against Wang Hao at Wijk aan Zee 2013. However, I have found a really cool novelty to punish Black for what seems like a somewhat premature central push.

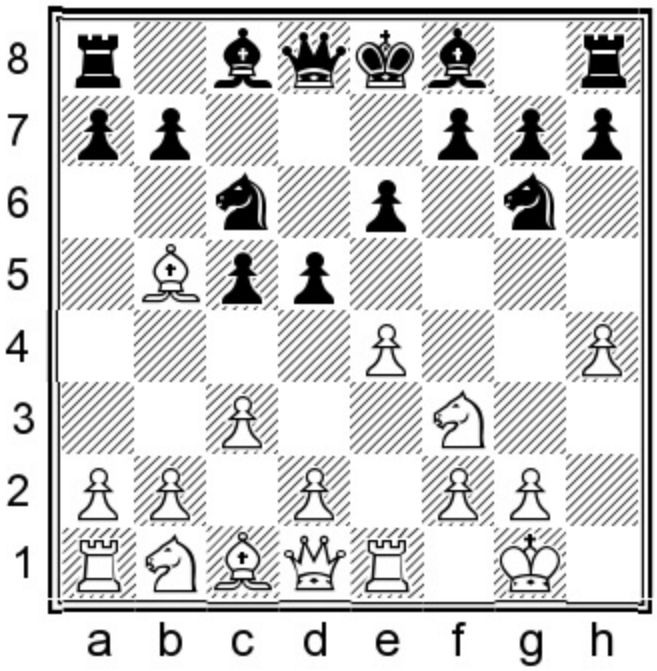
6...a6 7.♗f1 d5?! In this case, my novelty isn't applicable. Nevertheless, we can make use of the fact that our bishop is on f1 by adopting a fianchetto-placement. The position begins to look like a favourable version of another Anti-Sicilian line: 2...e6 3.g3. [7...♗e7 is covered in the final subchapters.] 8.exd5 ♕xd5 9.d4



Position after: 9.d4

9...♗d6 [9...♗e7 10.c4 ♕d6 11.d5 exd5 12.cxd5 ♘b4 13.♘c3 ♗f5 14.♘d2+–] 10.g3! 0-0 [10...cxd4 11.♘xd4 ♘xd4 12.cxd4 0-0 13.♘c3 ♕a5 14.♗g2±] 11.♗g2 ♕h5 12.♗e3 cxd4 [12...♖d8 13.♘bd2 cxd4 14.♘xd4±] 13.♘xd4 ♕xd1 14.♖xd1± The ending is clearly preferable for White.

7.h4!N



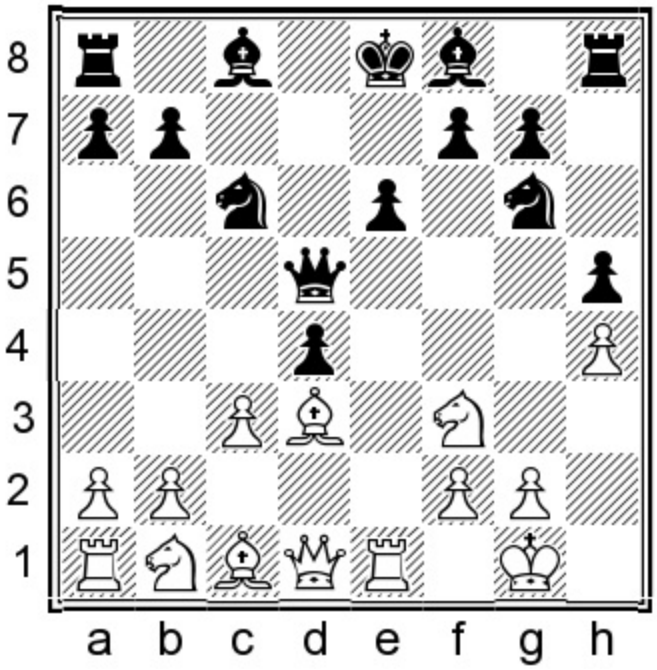
Position after: 7.h4!N

Using tactics, we are trying to harass Black's knight on g6 before he can complete development.

7...a6

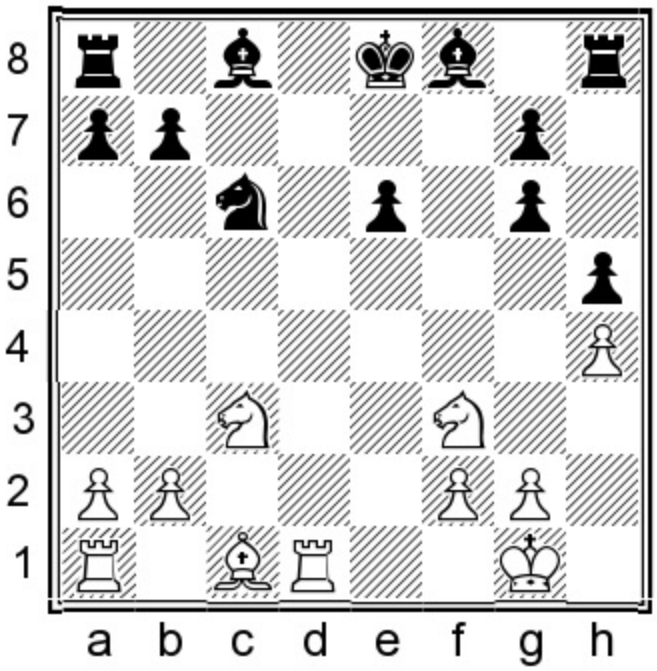
A) 7...dxe4 is the subject of the next subchapter.

B) 7...h5 8.exd5 ♕xd5 9.d4 As I've already mentioned, Black rarely wants to play ...h7-h5 as this structure can only favour White when Black's knight stands on g6. 9...cxd4 10.♗d3! Black faces an uncomfortable choice about whether to allow us to take on g6.



Position after: 10.♗d3!

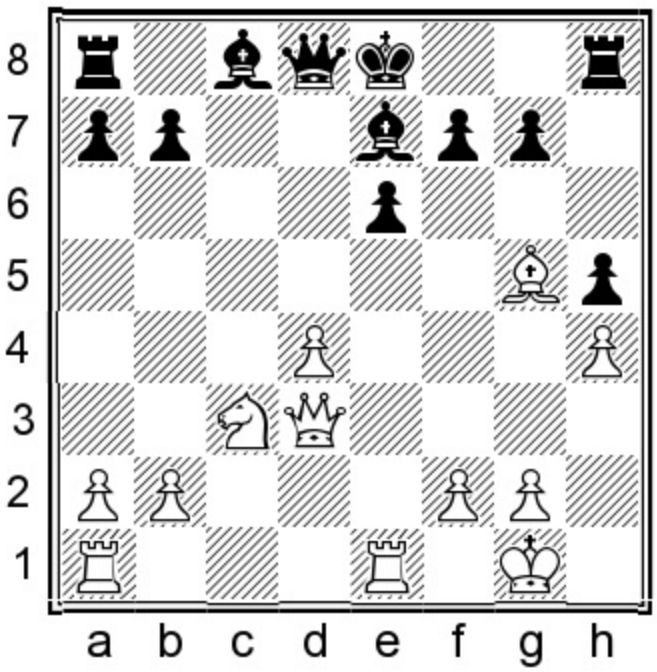
B1) 10...dxc3 11.♘xc3 ♕d8 12.♗xg6 ♕xd1 13.♖xd1 fxg6



Position after: 13...fxg6

Black might be a pawn up, but the endgame is close to losing. 14.♘b5 ♔f7 15.♘g5+ ♔g8 16.♘c7 ♖b8 17.♘cxe6±

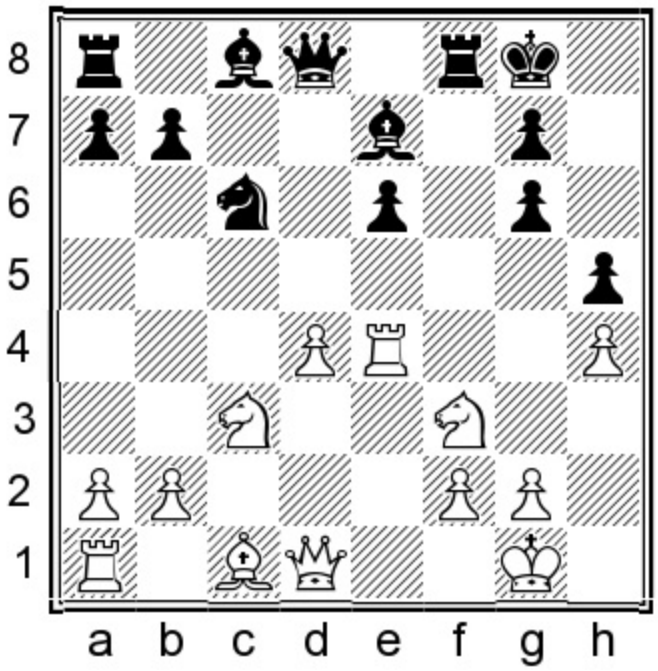
B2) 10...♘ge5 11.♘xe5 ♘xe5 12.cxd4 ♘xd3 13.♕xd3 ♕d8 14.♗g5 ♗e7 15.♘c3!



Position after: 15.♘c3!

15...♗xg5 [15...0-0 16.♗xe7 ♕xe7 17.♕g3±] 16.hxg5 ♕xg5 17.♖e5 ♕d8 18.d5±

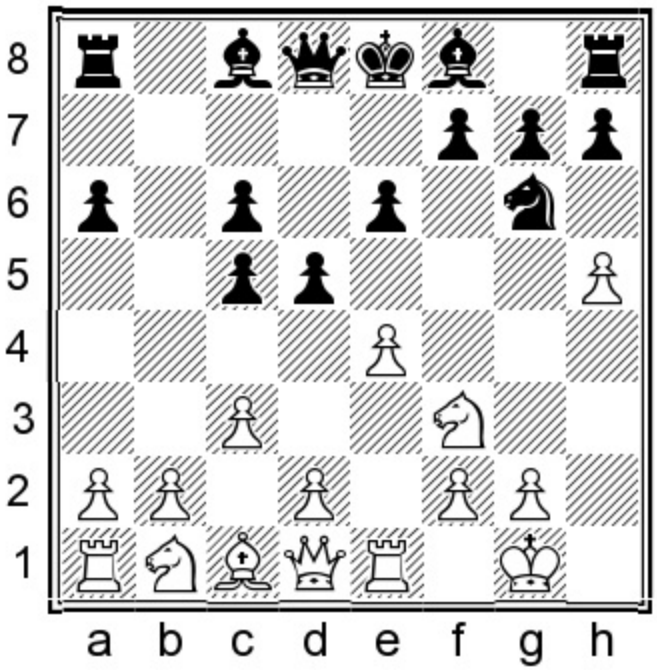
B3) 10...♗e7 11.♗xg6 fxg6 12.cxd4 0-0 13.♘c3 ♕d8 14.♖e4! We're in complete control. Black's pawn structure is ruined, and if he doesn't do anything radical we can choose the right moment to swap dark-squared bishops with ♗g5.



Position after: 14.♖e4!

14...e5 15.♕b3+ ♔h8 16.dxe5 ♗g4 17.♘g5 ♗f5 18.♖e1 ♘d4 19.♘f7+ ♔g8 20.♘xd8+ ♘xb3 21.axb3 ♖fxd8 22.♗g5±

8.♗xc6+ bxc6 9.h5

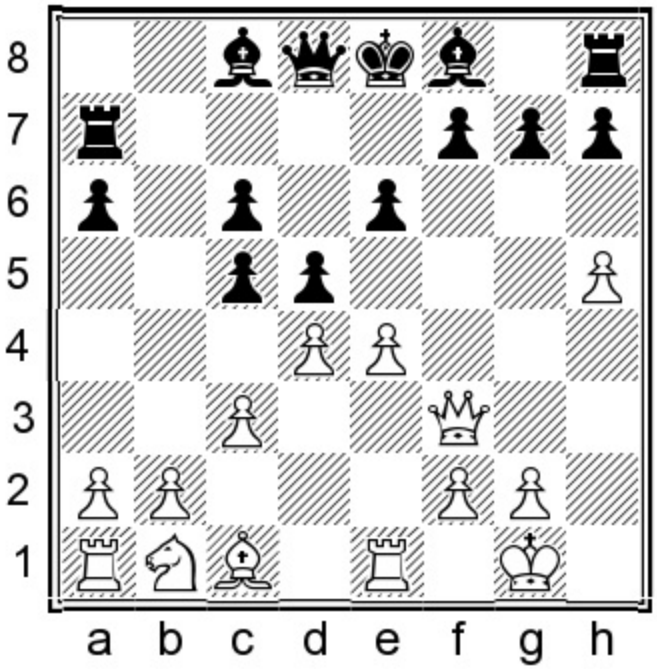


Position after: 9.h5

9...♘f4

The most critical move, justifying 7...a6. Black threatens both the h5-pawn and ♘d3 ideas.

A) 9...♘h4 10.d4! ♘xf3+ [10...♗e7 11.♘e5 Black's knight on h4 is suddenly stranded. 11...♕b6 12.g3 f6 13.♘g4 f5 14.♘e5+–; 10...cxd4 11.♘xd4 dxe4 12.♕g4! ♘f5 13.♕xe4 ♘xd4 14.cxd4± Whenever Black castles kingside, he will always have to be wary of h5-h6 ideas.] 11.♕xf3 ♖a7

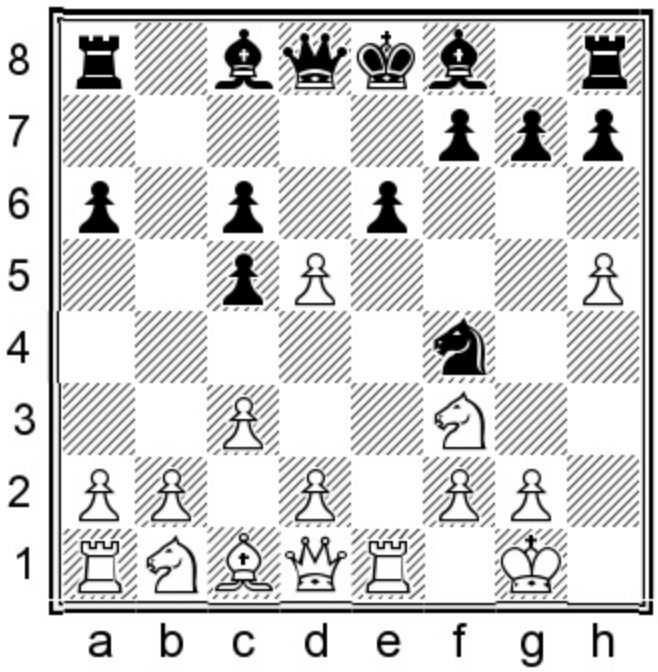


Position after: 11...♖a7

Black should try and develop unconventionally as he doesn't want to castle into h5-h6, but after a few moves I'm struggling to see what his plan is. 12.♘d2 cxd4 13.cxd4 h6 14.♕g3±

B) 9...♘e7 10.d3± We've achieved a typical Rossolimo advantage here.

10.exd5



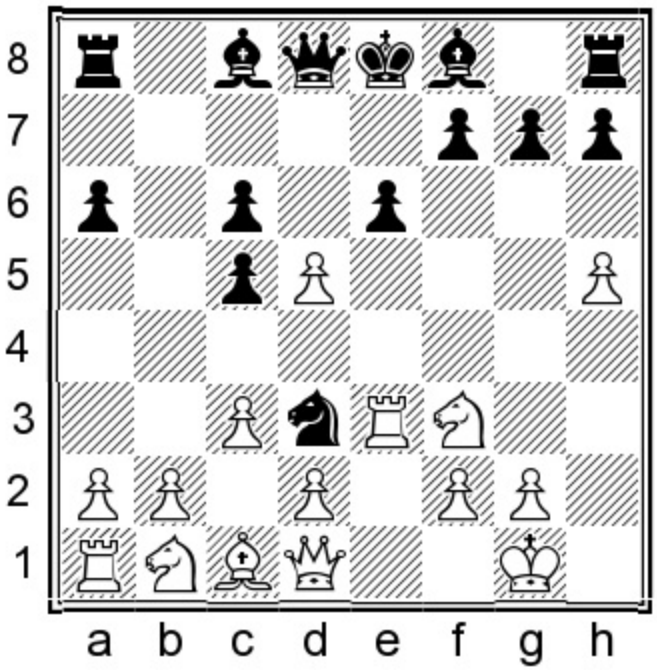
Position after: 10.exd5

10...♘d3

A) 10...cxd5? 11.♕a4++–

B) 10...♕xd5? Black will undoubtedly face piece coordination problems after 11.d4 ♗d6 12.dxc5 ♕xc5 13.♗e3 ♕d5 14.♕a4 ♘xh5 15.c4+–

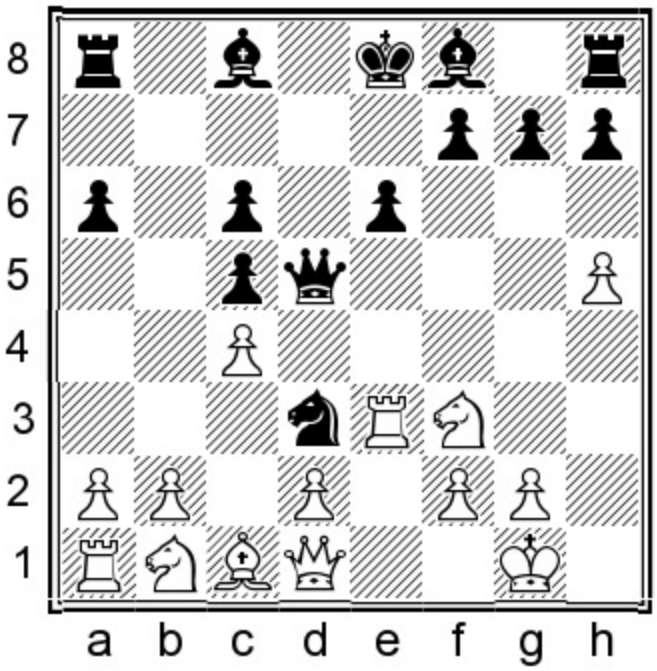
11.♖e3



Position after: 11.♖e3

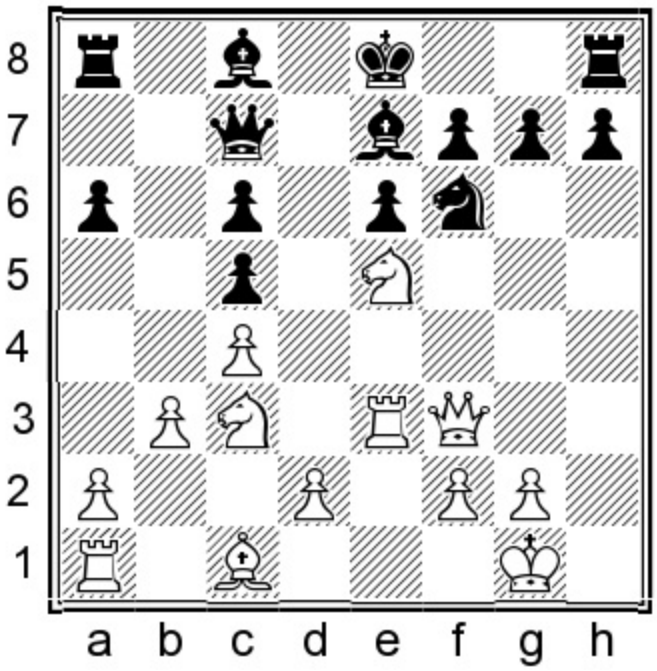
11...c4

A) 11...♕xd5 Black will forever be riddled by his ruined pawn structure after 12.c4!



Position after: 12.c4!

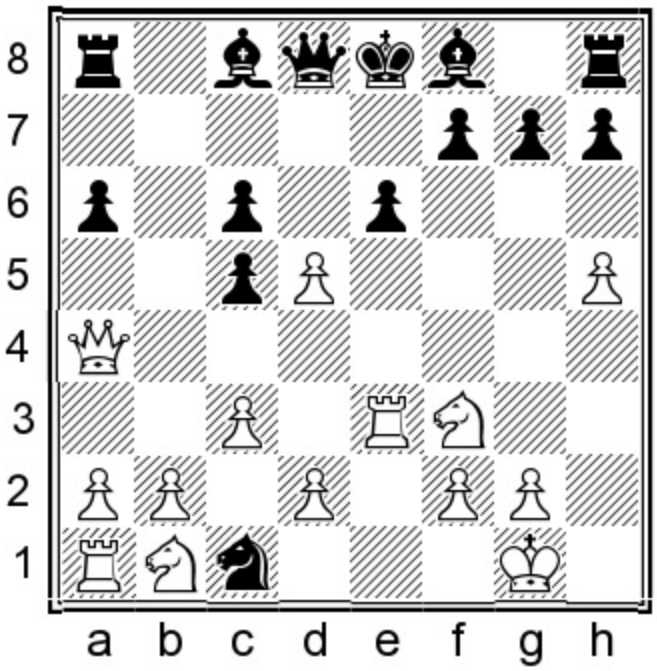
12...♕d8 [12...♕xc4 13.♘c3 ♘xc1 14.♖xc1 ♕f4 15.♘e4 ♗e7 16.♘xc5 0-0 17.♘e5±] 13.♘c3 ♗e7 14.♕c2 ♘f4 15.♘e5 ♕c7 16.♕e4 ♘xh5 17.♕f3 ♘f6 18.b3±



Position after: 18.b3±

Even though we've lost the h5-pawn, White has tremendous compensation. I'm not sure if Black's light-squared bishop will ever play a part in the game, whereas our pieces are perfectly positioned to build a kingside attack.

B) 11...♘xc1 12.♕a4!

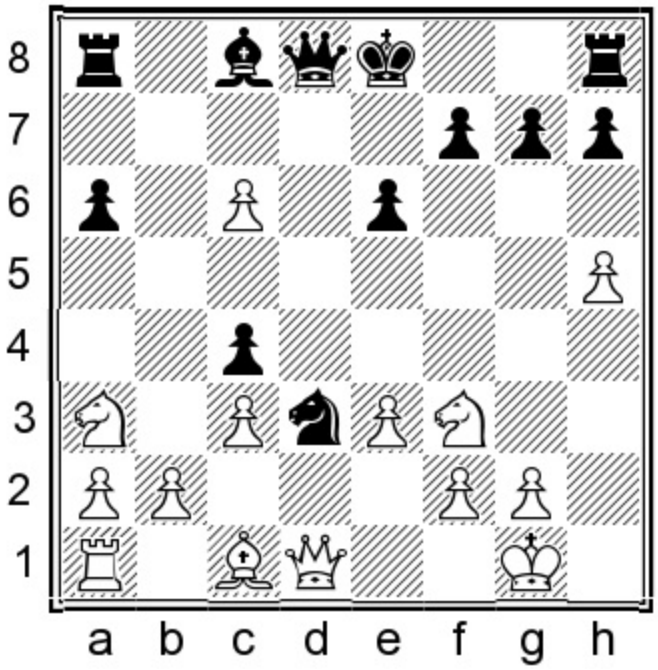


Position after: 12.♕a4!

The knight is trapped, and we'd much rather capture it with our rook on a1 than our queen.

12...♕xd5 [12...♗e7 13.dxe6 ♗xe6 14.♘a3±] 13.♘a3 ♗e7 14.h6! gxh6 15.♖xc1±

12.dxc6! ♗c5 13.♘a3! ♗xe3 14.dxe3



Position after: 14.dxe3

The material balance is approximately equal, but Black has further weaknesses and we still have a strong initiative.

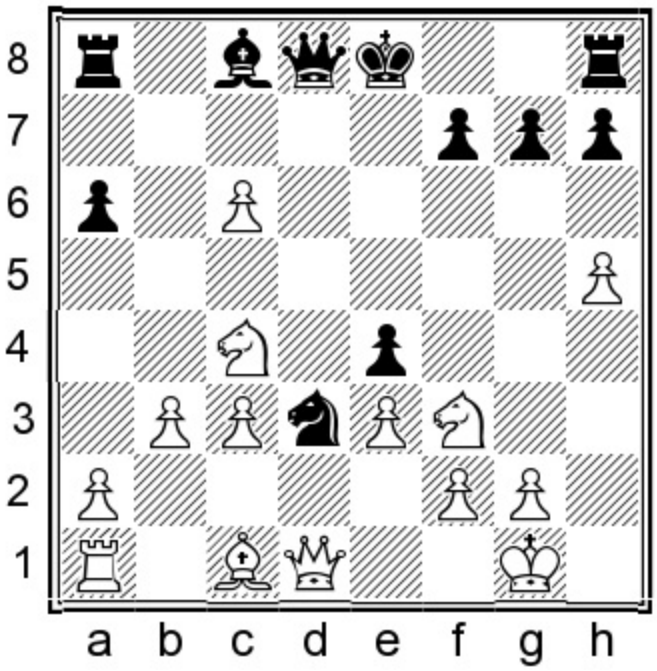
14...e5

14...♕d5 15.♕a4+–

15.♘xc4 e4

15...♗e6 16.♕a4 ♕c7 17.b3 0-0 18.♗a3 ♖fd8 19.♘d6! ♖xd6 20.♗xd6 ♕xd6 21.♖d1±

16.b3!!

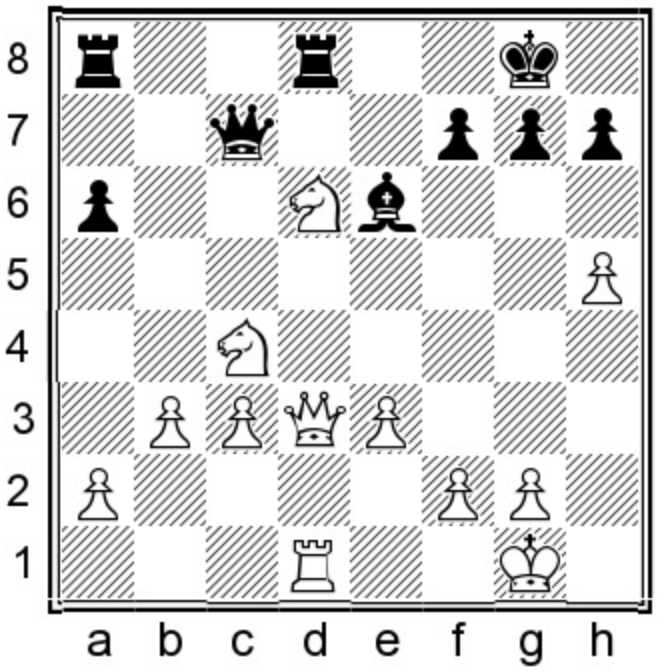


Position after: 16.b3!!

16...♘xc1

16...exf3 17.♗a3+– is decisive.

17.♘fd2! ♘d3 18.♘xe4 0-0 19.c7 ♕xc7 20.♕xd3 ♖d8 21.♘ed6 ♗e6 22.♖d1±

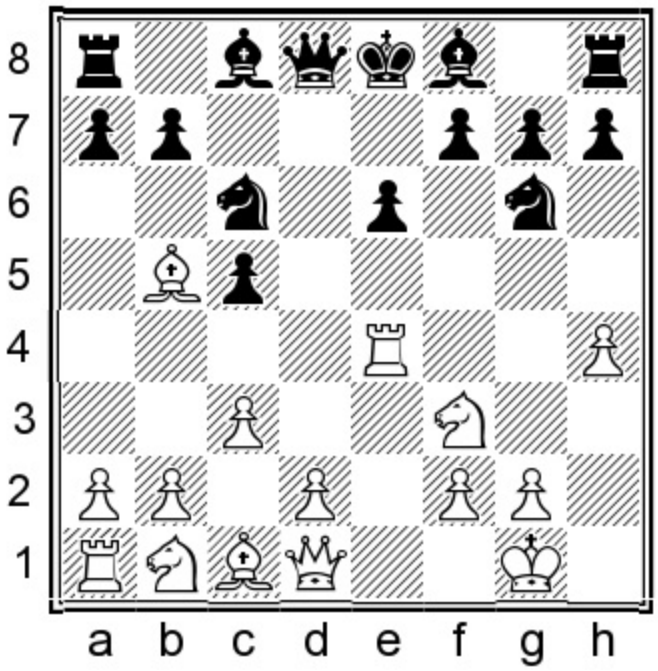


Position after: 22.♖d1±

After an extremely tactical variation, White emerges with three pawns for the exchange, more active pieces and continual possibilities of disrupting Black's kingside with h5-h6.

c) 6...d5 7.h4!N dxe4

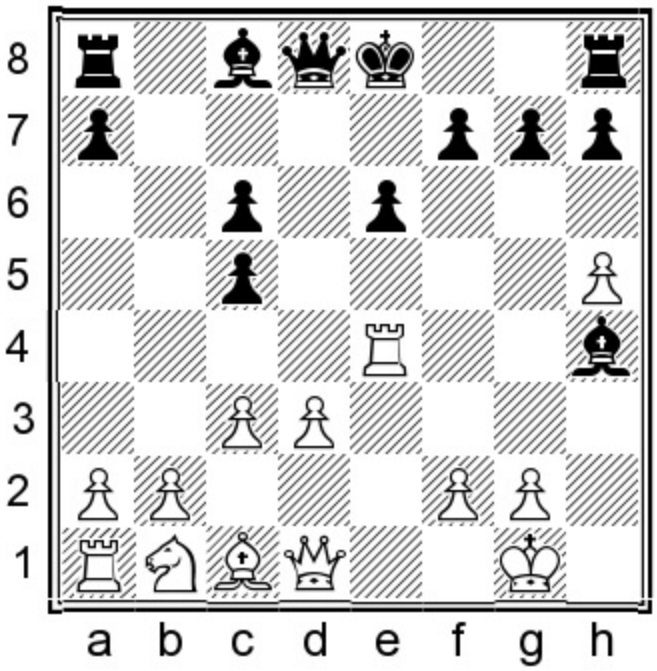
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.♖e1 ♘g6 6.c3 d5 7.h4!N 7...dxe4 8.♖xe4



Position after: 8.♖xe4

8...♗d6

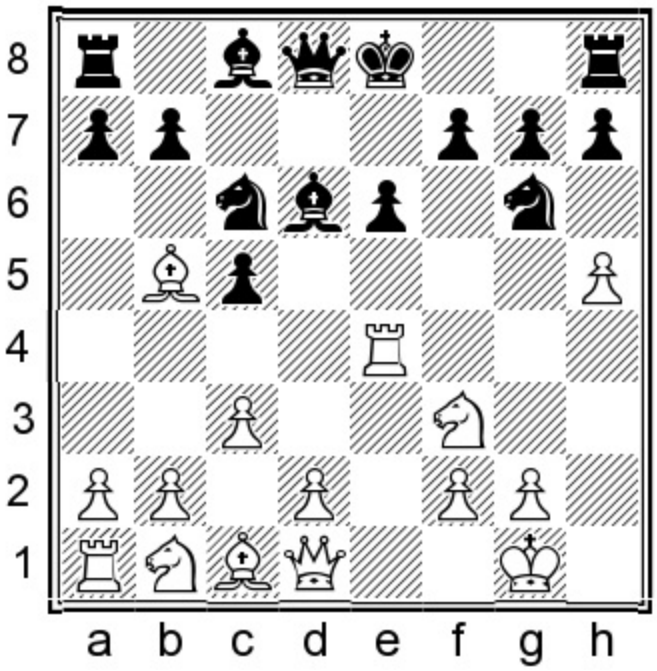
8...♗e7 9.♗xc6+ bxc6 10.h5 ♘h4 [10...♕d5 11.♕a4 ♘f8 12.♖e5 ♕d8 13.d3±] 11.♘xh4 ♗xh4 12.d3



Position after: 12.d3

Again, Black's position is unappealing. His queenside pawns are ruined, his bishop on c8 is out of the game, and our h4-h5 advance has given us attacking potential on the kingside. For example: 12...0-0 13.h6 f5 14.♖e1 f4 15.♘d2 ♖f5 16.♕f3 e5 17.d4!±

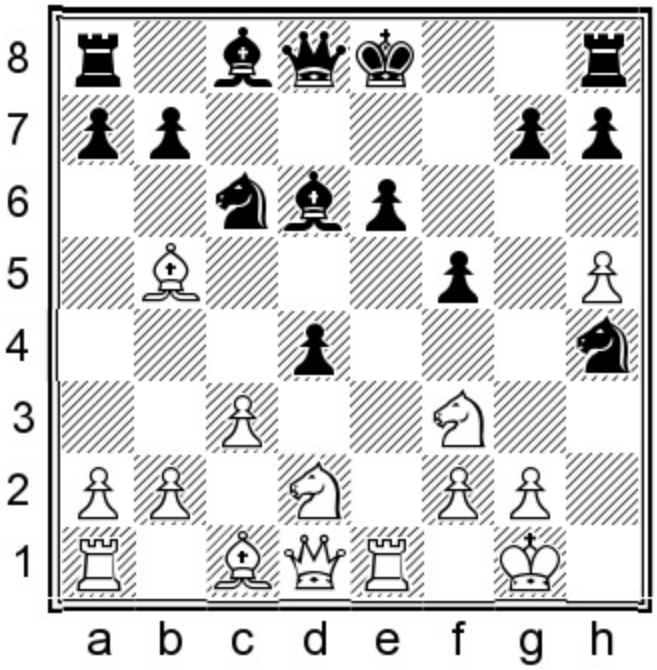
9.h5



Position after: 9.h5

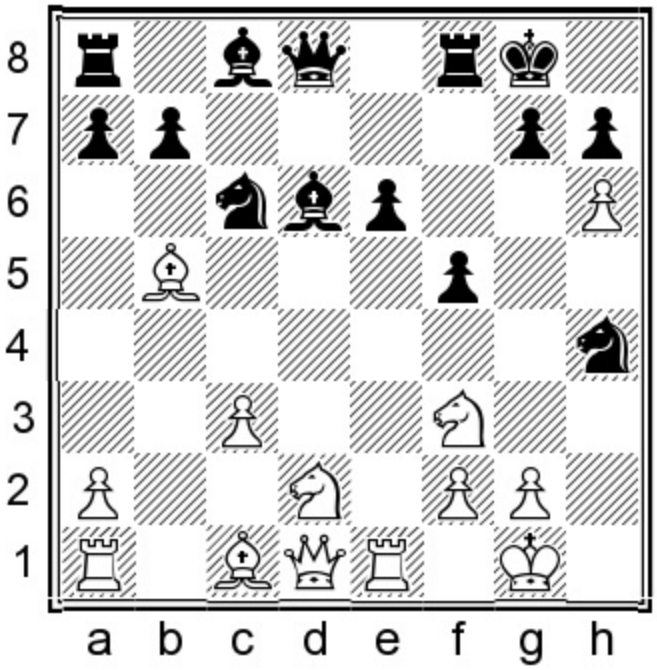
9...♘ge7

9...f5 The following lines illustrate how we can play actively to maintain our initiative, whilst simultaneously preventing Black from getting a grip on the game. 10.♖e1 ♘h4 11.d4 cxd4 12.♘bd2!



Position after: 12.♘bd2!

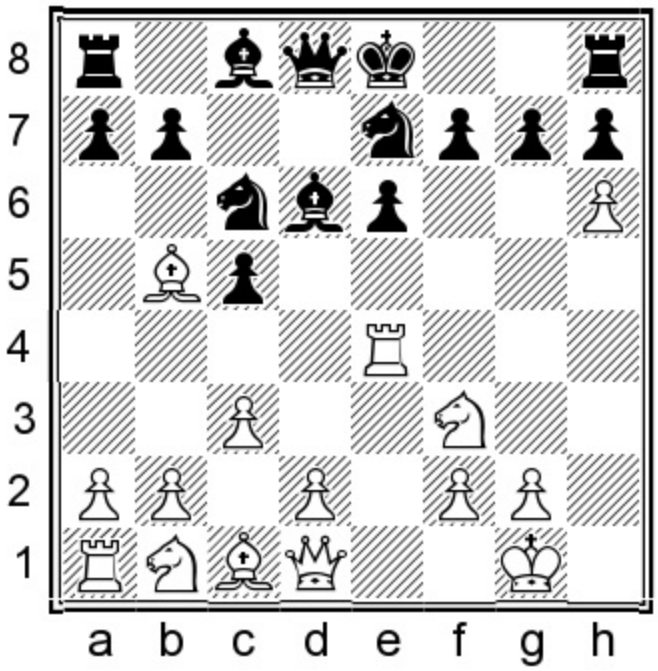
12...0-0 [12...dxc3 13.♘c4 ♗c7 14.♕xd8+ ♗xd8 15.♘fe5+– Black's knight on h4 is trapped.] 13.h6! The benefit of having played h4-h5; now Black's king will be perpetually weak. 13...dxc3 14.bxc3



Position after: 14.bxc3

14...♗c7 [14...gxh6 15.♘xh4 ♕xh4 16.♘f3 ♕e7 17.♗xh6+–] 15.♕a4 ♘xf3+ 16.♘xf3 ♗d7 17.♗g5 ♕e8 18.♕h4 ♕g6 19.♖ab1 ♖f7 20.♗e2± Black has to watch out for ♗h5 ideas, whilst he also has problems on the queenside to deal with.

10.h6!

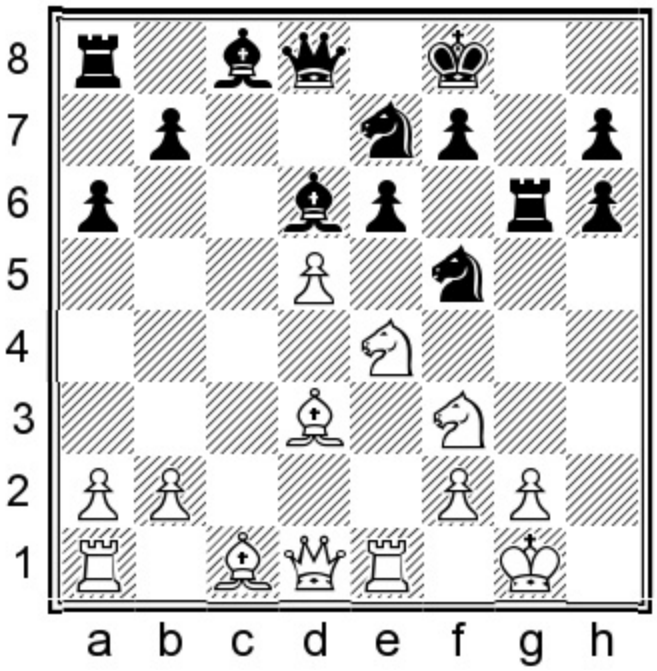


Position after: 10.h6!

10...a6

A) 10...0-0 11.hxg7 ♔xg7 12.d4 ♘g6 13.♘a3 ♗e7 14.♘c2± Black's king is terminally weak and ideas such as ♕d2-h6 look very appealing.

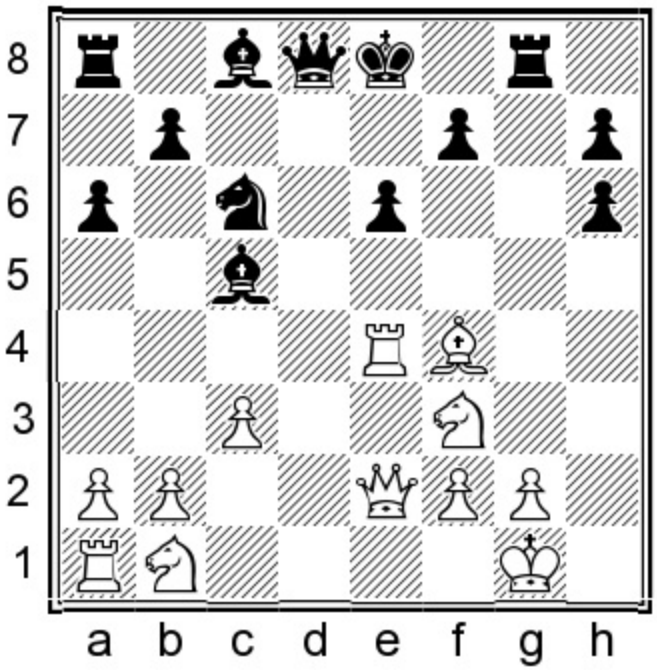
B) 10...gxh6 11.d4 ♖g8 12.♖e1! We don't need the rook on e4 anymore, as Black obviously isn't castling kingside. 12...a6 13.♗f1 cxd4 14.cxd4 ♘f5 [14...♘d5 15.♘c3±] 15.d5 ♘ce7 16.♘c3 ♔f8 17.♗d3 ♖g6 18.♘e4↑



Position after: 18.♘e4↑

Black can capture on d5, but his extra pawns don't make up for his weak king and inferior piece activity.

11.♗xc6+ ♘xc6 12.d4 ♖g8 13.♕e2 gxh6 14.dxc5 ♗xc5 15.♗f4



Position after: 15.♗f4

Although Black has tried to use our h5-h6 advance to his benefit, his king will now probably have to

remain in the centre. Furthermore, queenside development looks like another big issue yet to be solved.

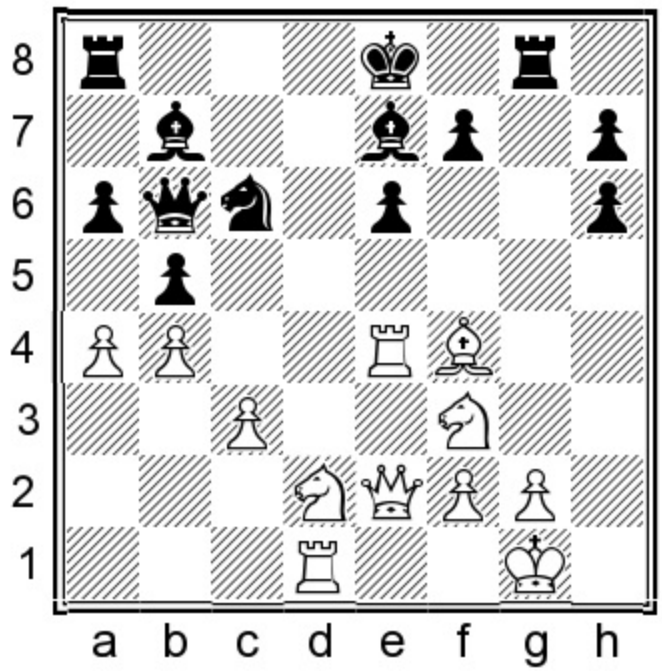
15...b5 16.b4!

Kicking the bishop away. This will also be very useful if Black ever decides to castle queenside.

16...♗e7 17.♘bd2 ♗b7 18.♖d1 ♕b6

18...♕d5 19.♘f1 ♕f5 20.♘g3 ♕f6 21.c4!±

19.a4!



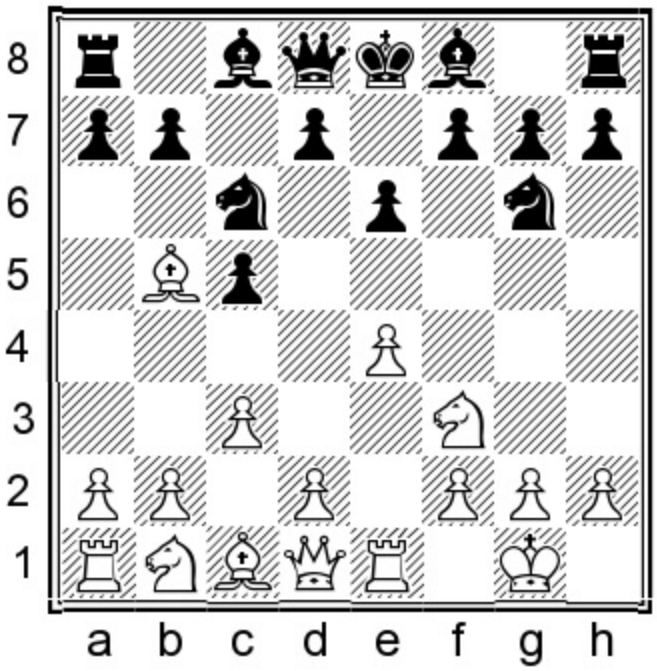
Position after: 19.a4!

Black will probably have to sacrifice a pawn to stay afloat, but this won't ease his difficulties.

19...♖d8 20.♗e3 ♕c7 21.axb5 axb5 22.♕xb5±

d) 6...♗e7 with 10...--

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.♖e1 ♘g6 6.c3

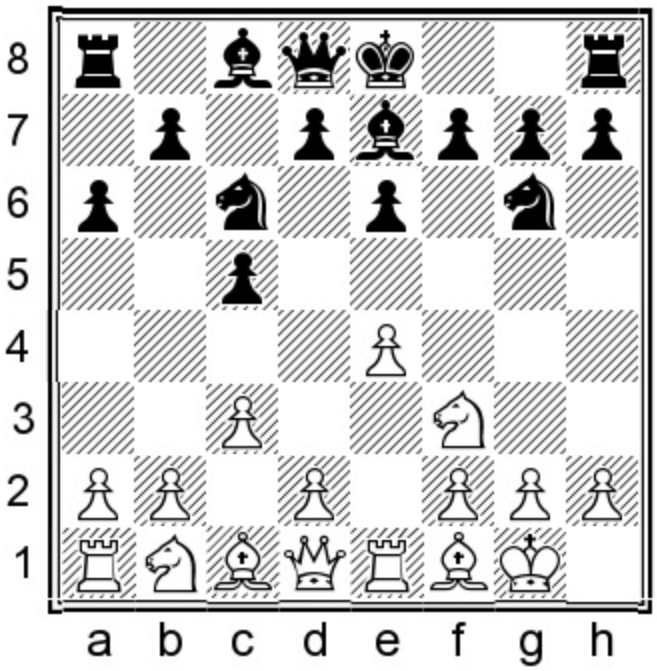


Position after: 6.c3

6...♗e7

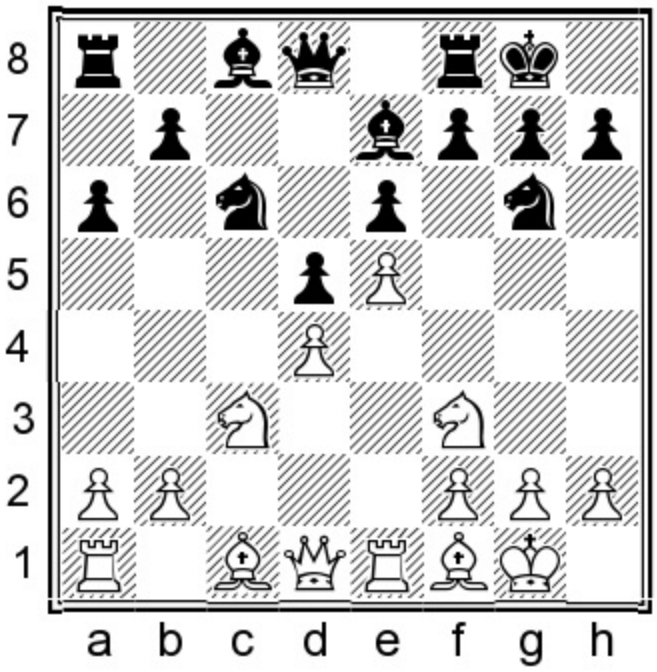
A more solid option than 6...d5. Black allows us to play d2-d4 but plans to meet it immediately with ...d7-d5.

6...a6 7.♗f1 ♗e7



Position after: 7...♗e7

I think these lines are just a favourable version of the lines after 6...♗e7. The additions of ...a7-a6 and ♗f1 can only benefit White. For example, our plan of ♘a4-c5 is more enticing now that Black has weakened his queenside squares a little bit. Moreover, with our bishop on f1, we have a choice about going back to d3 or playing g2-g3 and ♗g2. This may be more attractive as we can still carry on with our typical plan of h4-h5 – but with the knowledge that we can create additional security around our king. 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 d5 10.e5 0-0 11.♘c3

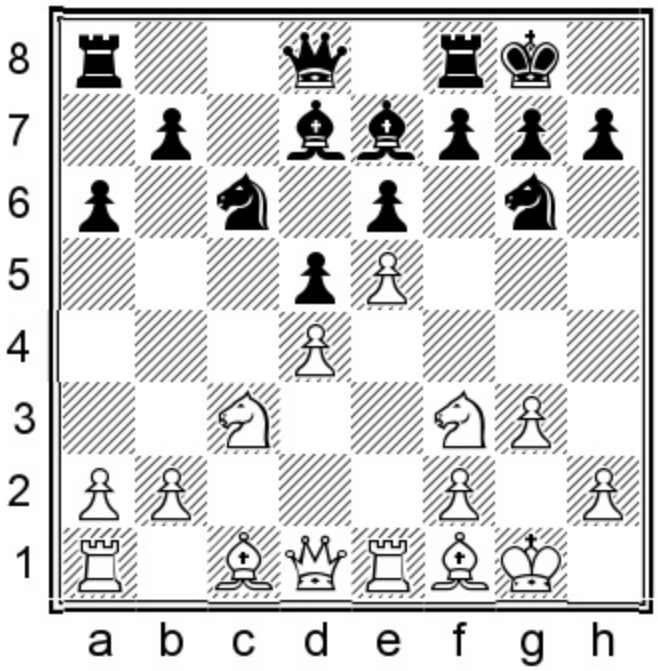


Position after: 11.♘c3

A) 11...f6 12.exf6 ♗xf6 13.♗e3 ♗d7 14.♘a4! ♗e7 [14...b6 15.♖c1±] 15.a3 b5 16.♘c5 ♗xc5 17.dxc5± Now Black has additional dark-squared weaknesses to deal with, and we retain the option of utilising our bishop on g2 or d3.

B) 11...♘h4 wasn't a convincing attempt to alleviate Black's problems in the correspondence game Marrero Rodriguez – Rost, ICCF email 2015. After 12.♘xh4 ♗xh4 13.♗e3 ♗d7 14.♖c1± White was very comfortable with chances on both sides of the board in Ni – Wang China 2013.

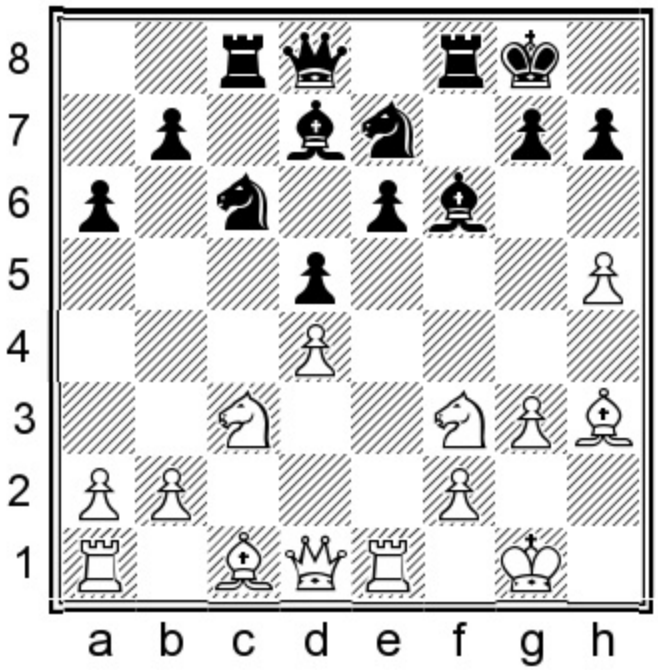
C) 11...♗d7 12.g3!



Position after: 12.g3!

We're keeping our options open; the bishop can support the attack on d3, or it can protect our king on g2. Meanwhile g2-g3 is always useful for supporting h2-h4.

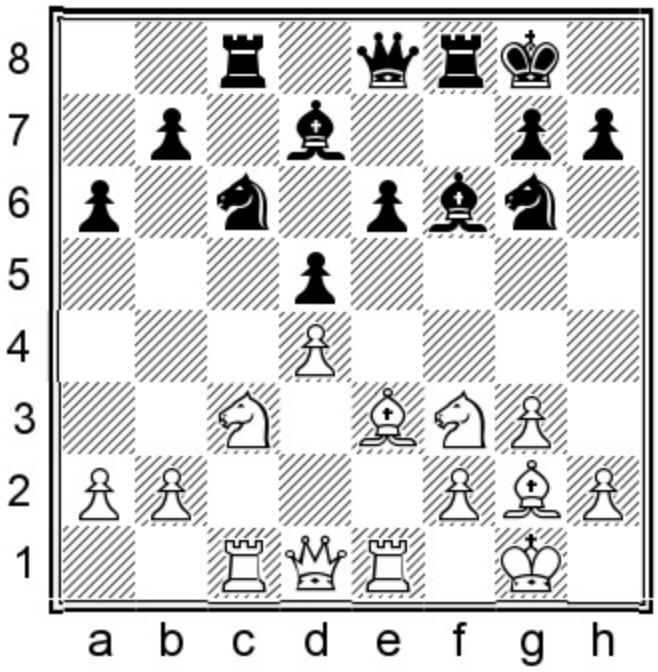
C1) 12...♖c8 13.h4 f6 [13...♘a5? 14.h5 ♘h8 15.♗d3!→ Followed by ♗c2 and ♕d3.] 14.exf6 ♗xf6 15.h5 ♘ge7 16.♗h3!



Position after: 16.♗h3!

Another option for the bishop! 16...♕e8 17.♗g4 ♕f7 18.♗f4±

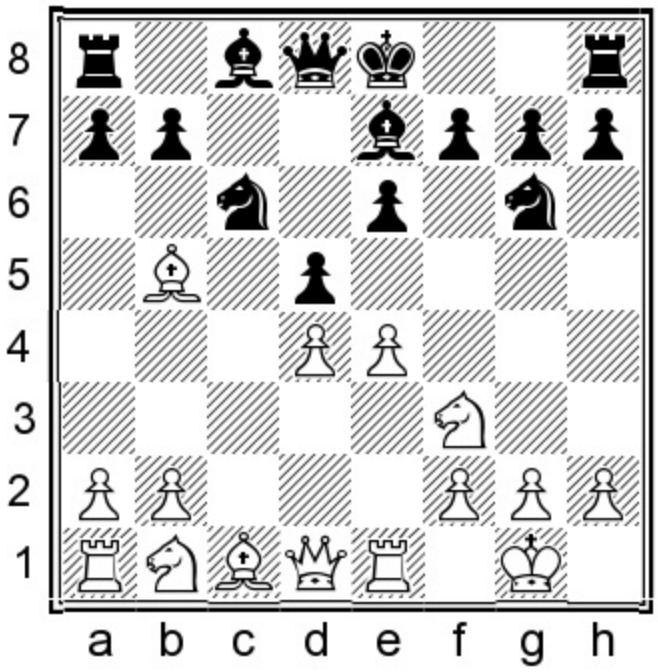
C2) 12...f6 13.exf6 ♗xf6 14.♗e3 [14.h4? ♗xh4!∓] 14...♖c8 15.♖c1 ♕e8 16.♗g2!



Position after: 16.♗g2!

With Black opening the f-file quickly, it might be more wise to put our bishop on g2 here and play for ♘a4-c5 ideas, e.g. 16...♗d8 17.h4 ♕f7 18.♘a4! b6 19.♕d3± It's a difficult job for Black to deal with all of his weaknesses. We can continue with ♖c3 and ♖ec1.

7.d4 cxd4 8.cxd4 d5



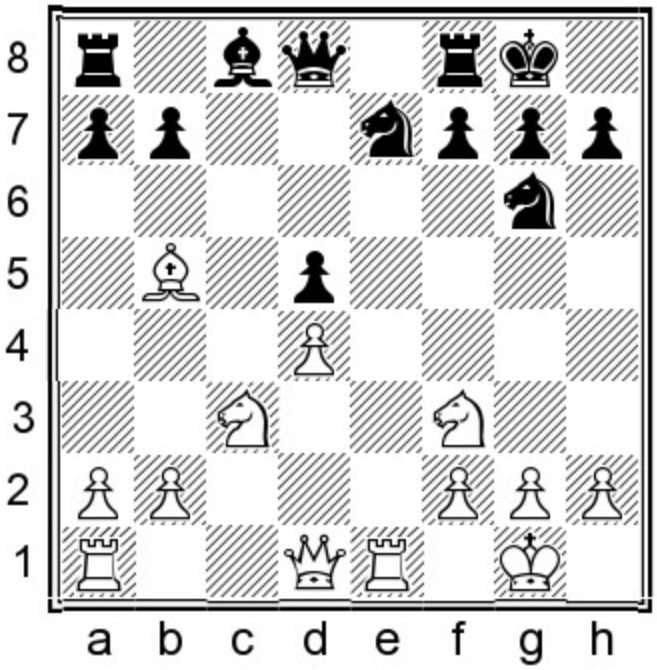
Position after: 8...d5

9.e5!

The most critical choice, trying to exploit the awkwardness of the Black knight on g6, and play for a kingside attack.

A) 9.♘c3!? I wasn't able to find any advantage if we play with an IQP.

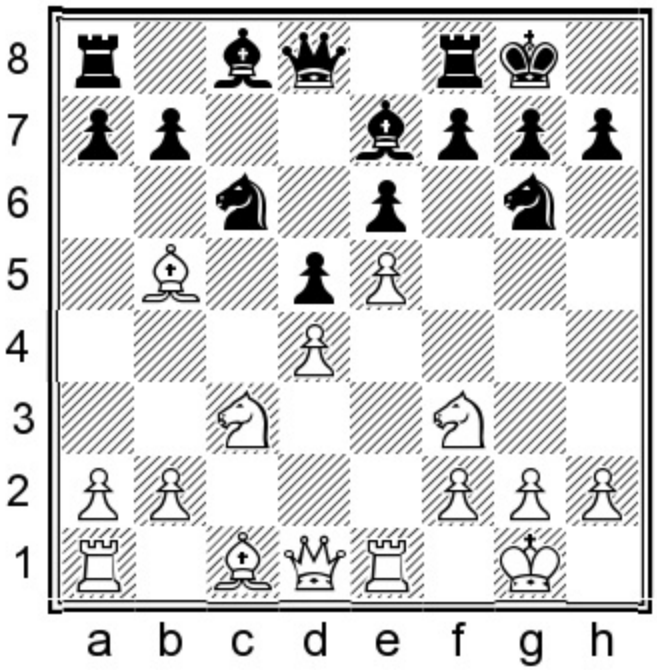
B) 9.exd5 is pleasant for White, but nothing more. 9...exd5 10.♗g5 0-0 11.♗xe7 ♘cxe7 12.♘c3⩲



Position after: 12.♘c3⩲

This is a viable option, but with a few accurate moves Black will equalise pretty easily.

9...0-0 10.♘c3

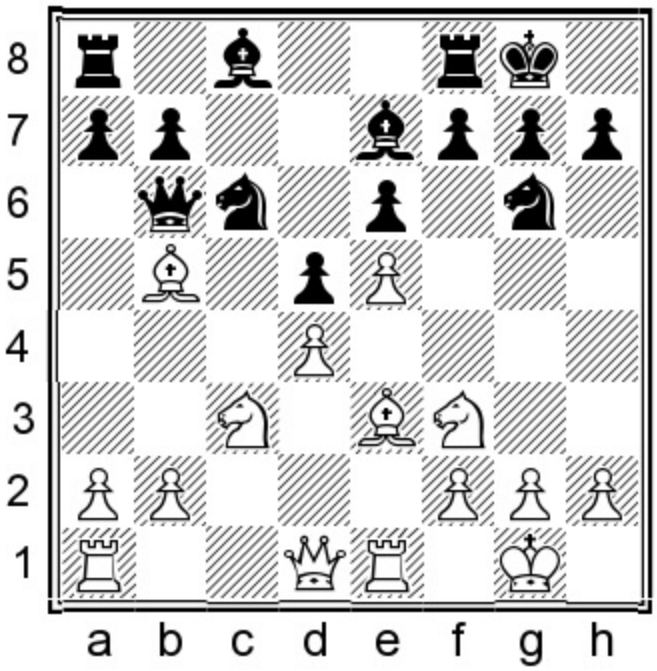


Position after: 10.♘c3

Sooner or later it will probably be necessary for Black to play ...f7-f6; it just depends if he wants to play it immediately or develop some of his other pieces first.

10...♗d7

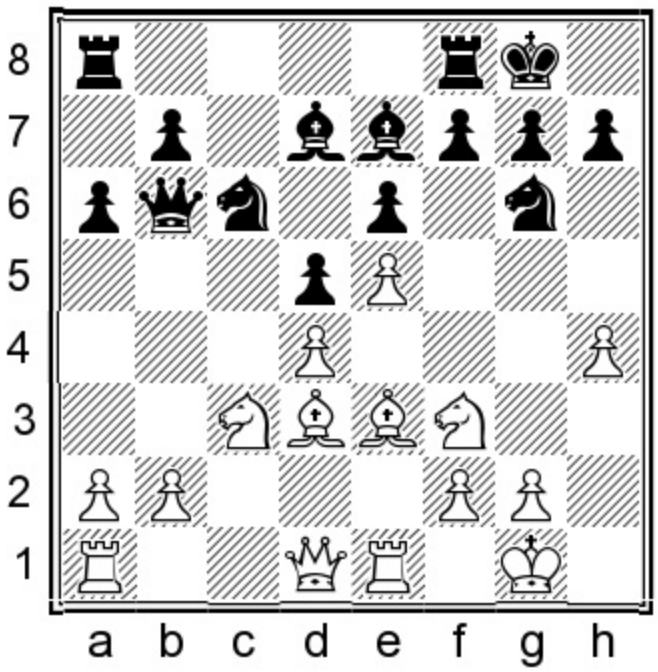
10...♕b6?! If Black delays ...f7-f6 for too long he could get in trouble. His queen also stands badly on b6, as this line demonstrates. 11.♗e3



Position after: 11.♗e3

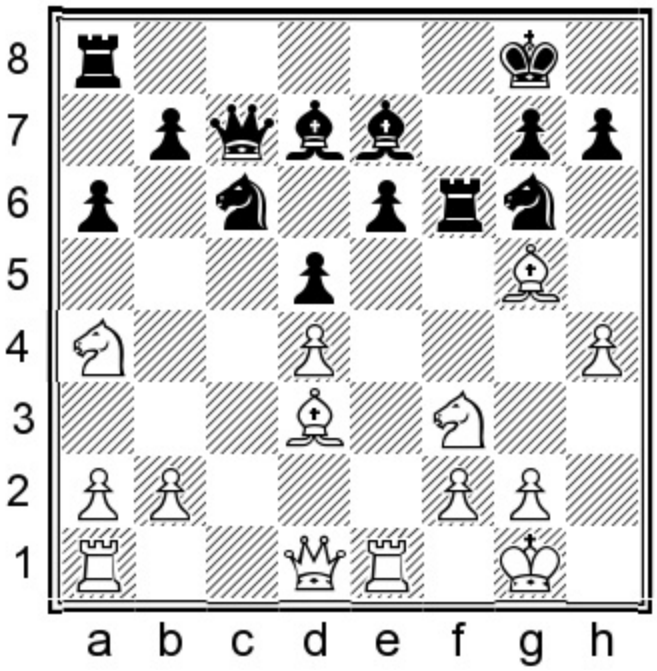
A) 11...♗d7 12.g3! f6 13.exf6 ♖xf6 [13...♗xf6 14.h4 ♖ae8 15.h5 ♘ge7 16.♗d3→] 14.♘e5 ♕c7 15.♘xd7 In general, capturing this so-called 'bad bishop' with our knight is actually beneficial for White in these structures as Black's e6-pawn will be difficult to defend: 15...♕xd7 16.♗e2± followed by ♗g4.

B) 11...a6 12.♗d3 ♗d7 [12...♕xb2? 13.♘a4 ♕a3 14.♗c1 ♕b4 15.♗d2 ♕a3 16.♖e3+– and Black's queen is trapped.] 13.h4!



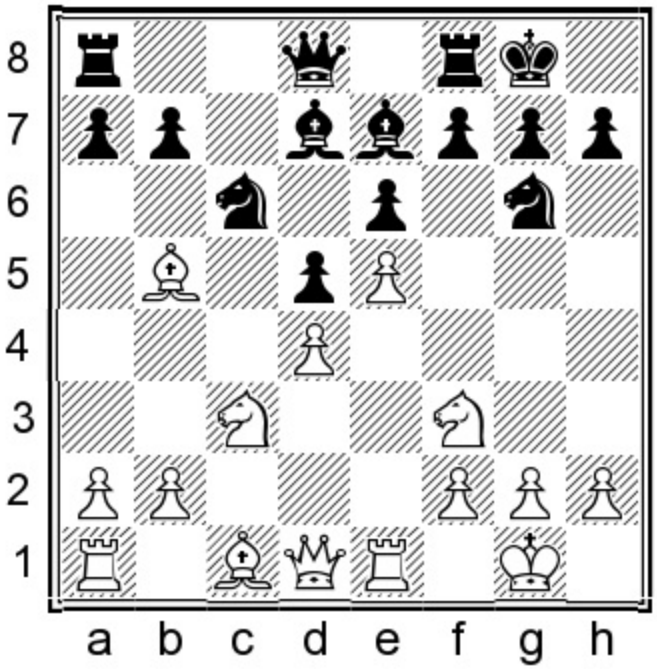
Position after: 13.h4!

13...f5 [13...♘xh4? 14.♘xh4 ♗xh4 15.♕h5+–] 14.exf6 ♖xf6 [14...♗xf6 15.♗xg6 hxg6 16.♘a4 ♕d8 17.♘c5+–] 15.♘a4 ♕c7 16.♗g5



Position after: 16.♗g5

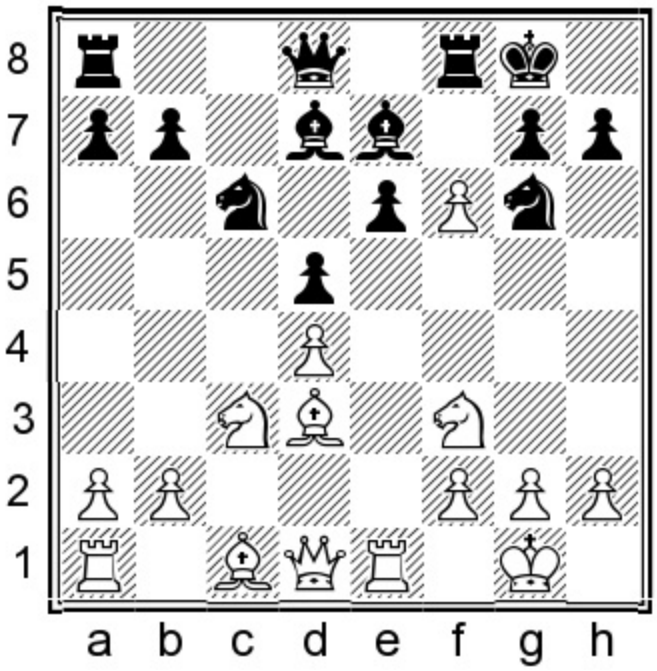
Now Black must give an exchange or find his structure completely ruined. In both cases White's advantage is likely to be decisive. 16...♘f4 [16...♖f7 17.♗xg6 hxg6 18.♗xe7 ♖xe7 19.♘c5+–] 17.♗xf6 ♗xf6 18.♖c1+–



Position after: 10...♗d7

11.♗e3

11.♗d3!? An interesting idea, endeavouring to take advantage of ...f7-f6 by capturing on g6 and playing for the e5-square. 11...f6 [11...♖c8 12.♗e3 transposes to 11.♗e3.] 12.exf6



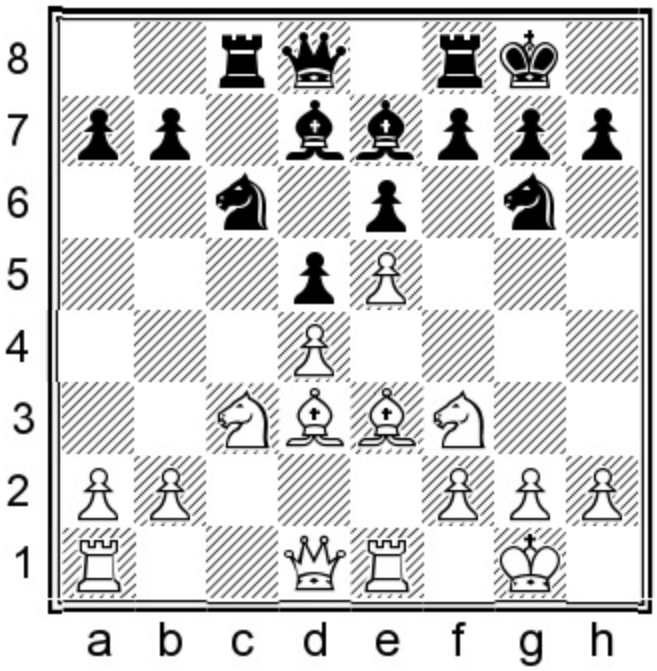
Position after: 12.exf6

12...♖xf6 [12...♗xf6?! 13.♗xg6 hxg6 14.♗e3±] 13.♗xg6 ♖xg6 14.♗f4 ♖f6 15.♗g3 ♗e8 16.♘e5 ♖c8 17.♖c1± Black is solid, but it's fair to say that White has a positional edge.

11...♖c8

11...f6 12.exf6 ♗xf6 transposes to 10...f6 (see the last subchapter).

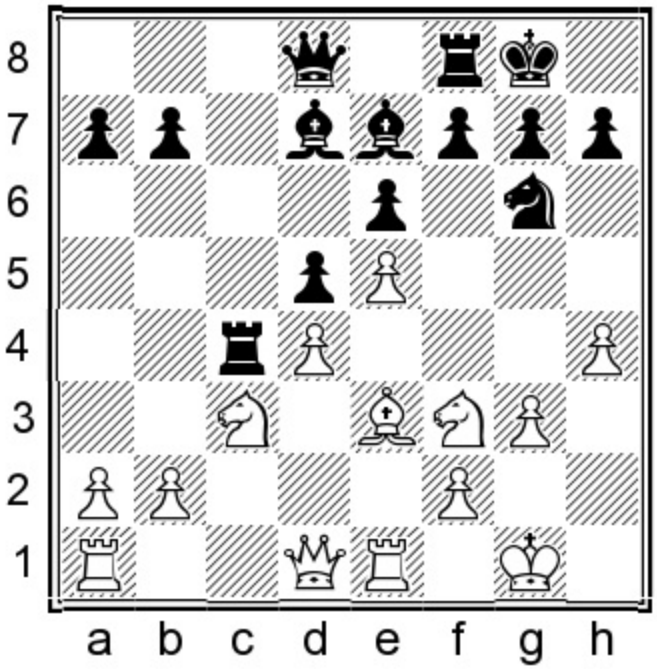
12.♗d3



Position after: 12.♗d3

12...f6

12...♘a5 Invariably, Black often finds that delaying ...f7-f6 for too long will lead to an unpleasant scenario. 13.g3! ♘c4 14.♗xc4 ♖xc4 15.h4



Position after: 15.h4

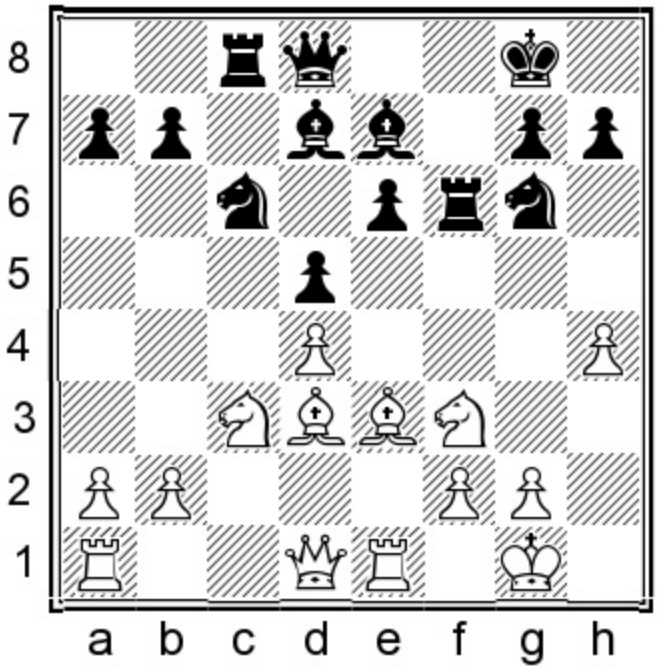
15...f5 [15...f6 16.h5 ♘h8 17.exf6 ♗xf6 18.♘e2± Our e2-knight will make its way to d3 via f4, giving

White a fantastic hold.] 16.exf6 ♗xf6 17.h5 ♘e7 18.♘e2 ♘f5 19.♕d3 ♗b5 20.b3 ♖b4 21.♕d2 ♗xe2 22.♖xe2± White has a very pleasant edge.

13.exf6 ♖xf6

13...♗xf6?! 14.♗xg6 hxg6 15.h3±

14.h4!

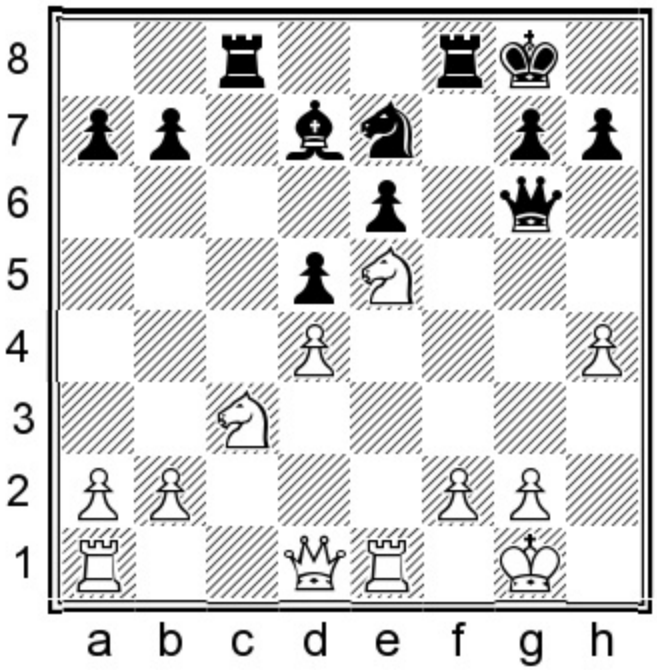


Position after: 14.h4!

14...h6?!

This doesn't feel right, and invites interesting attacking prospects from White.

After the restrained 14...♕e8, supporting the g6-knight so that Black isn't forced to ruin his structure, the trade of dark-squared bishops will once again ensure that White has a nice hold. 15.♗g5 ♖f8 16.♗xg6 ♕xg6 17.♗xe7 ♘xe7 18.♘e5±



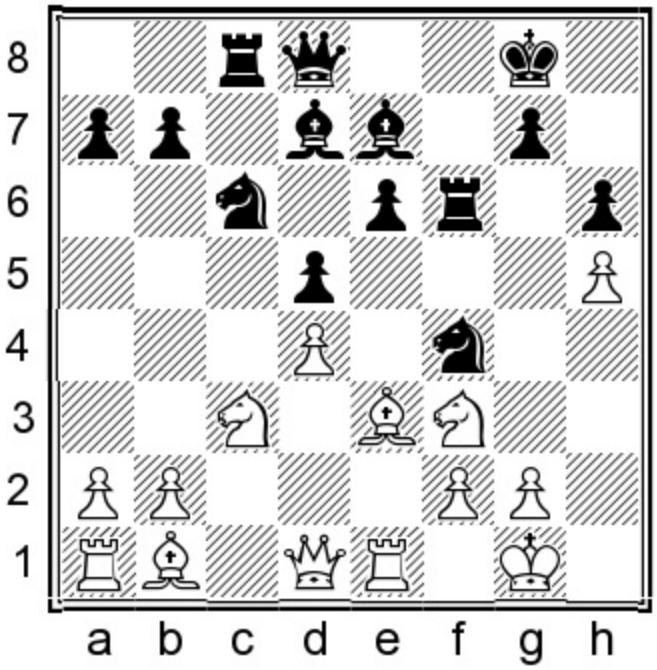
Position after: 18.♘e5±

White even has ideas of ♖e3-g3.

15.h5!

This pawn will most likely be sacrificed, but Black's resulting knight on h5 will be helpless in preventing our ♗b1 and ♕d3 set-up from being decisive.

15...♘f4 16.♗b1

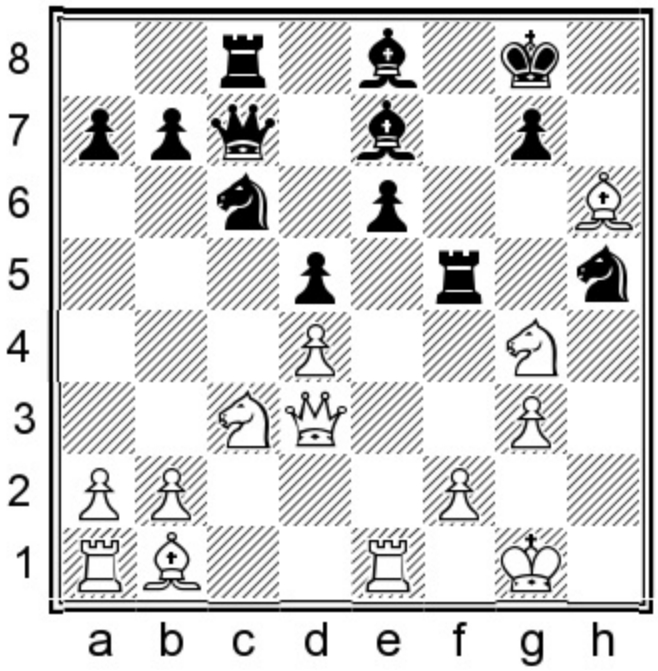


Position after: 16.♗b1

16...♘xh5

Black enters a forcing line where we emerge with an advantage.

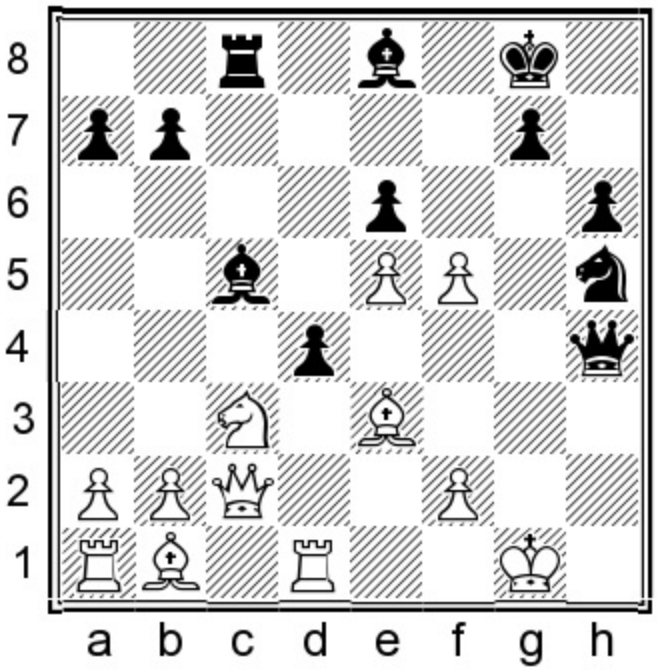
16...♕c7 17.g3! ♘xh5 18.♘e5 ♗e8 19.♘g4 ♖f8 20.♕d3 ♖f5 21.♗xh6!



Position after: 21.♗xh6!

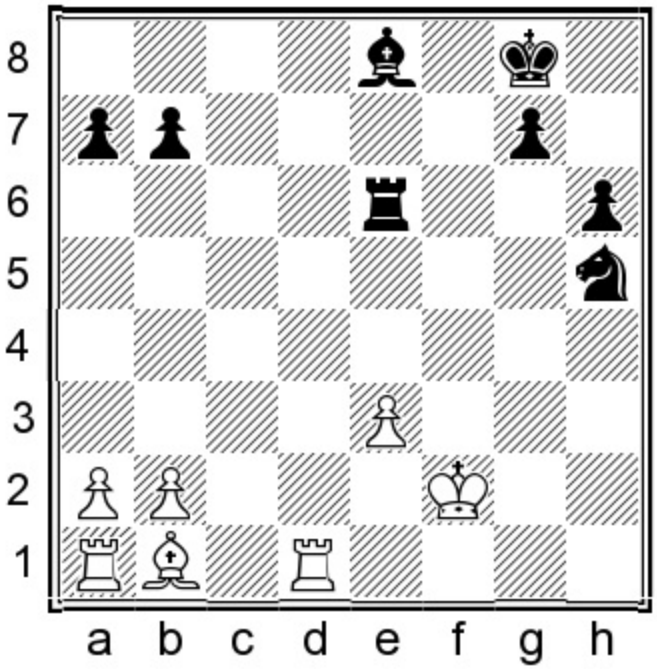
21...♗d7 [21...gxh6 22.♖xe6+–] 22.♗d2± Material is balanced, but Black's king finds itself in an even more precarious position than before.

17.♘e5 ♗e8 18.♕c2 ♖f5 19.g4 ♘xe5 20.dxe5 d4 21.♖d1 ♗c5 22.gxf5 ♕h4



Position after: 22...♕h4

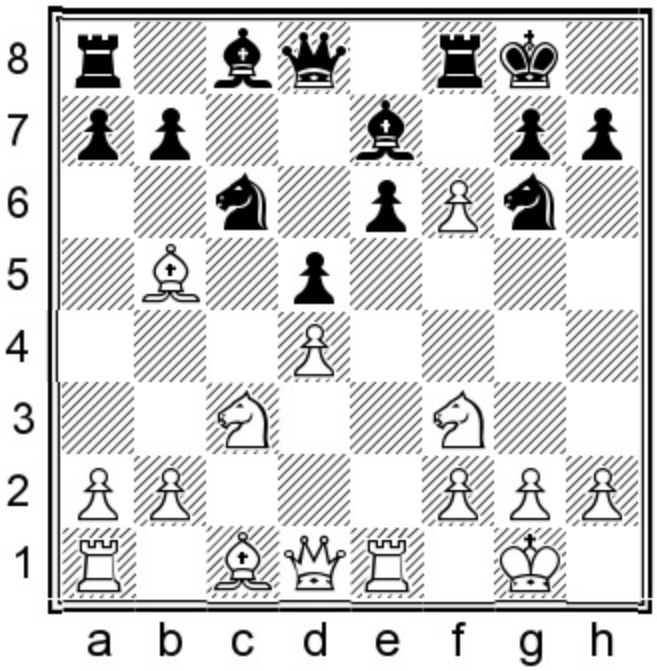
23.♕e4 ♕xe4 24.♘xe4 dxe3 25.♘xc5 ♖xc5 26.fxe3 ♖xe5 27.fxe6 ♖xe6 28.♔f2±



Position after: 28.♔f2±

e) 6...♗e7 with 10...f6

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.♖e1 ♘g6 6.c3 ♗e7 7.d4 cxd4 8.cxd4 d5 9.e5! 0-0 10.♘c3 f6 11.exf6

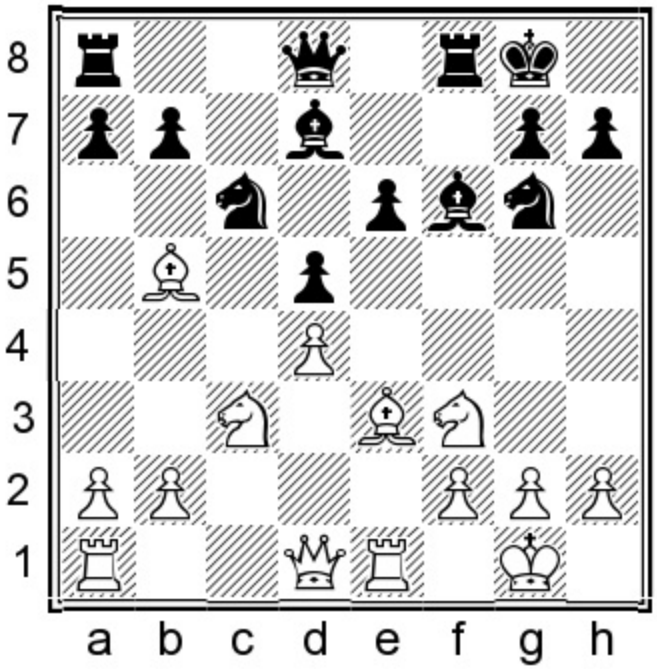


Position after: 11.exf6

11...♗xf6

11...♖xf6 allows us to exchange dark-squared bishops, inceasing our control over the central squares and ensuring a positional advantage. 12.♗g5 ♖f8 13.♗xe7 ♘cxe7 14.g3!± We can continue with ♗f1-g2, followed by h4-h5.

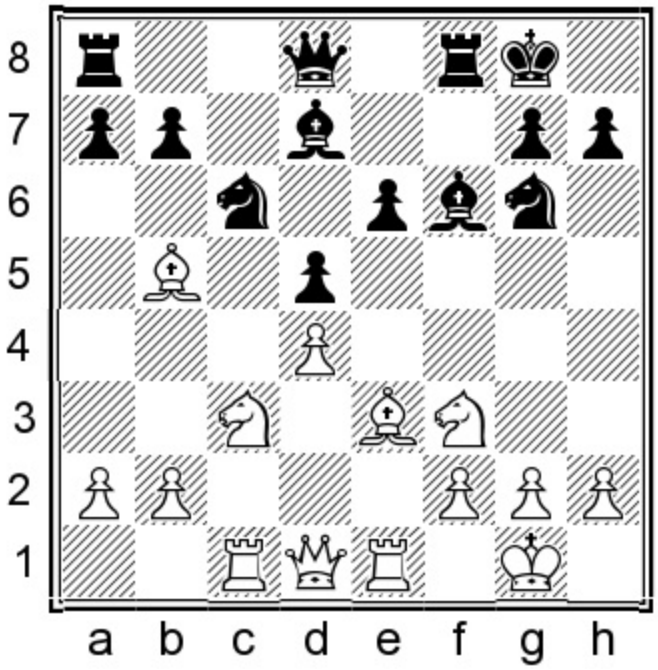
12.♗e3 ♗d7



Position after: 12...♗d7

13.♖c1

13.♘a4!? also seems interesting and makes life unpleasant for Black e.g. 13...b6 14.♘c3! a6 15.♗d3 It can be argued that the loss of time was beneficial, in that Black's queenside pawns are a little weaker compared to the mainline.



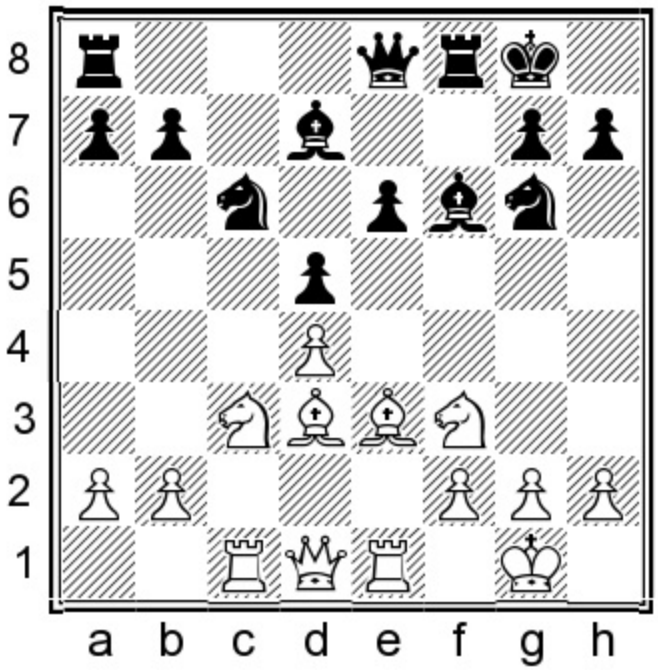
Position after: 13.♖c1

13...♕e8

A) 13...♘h4 Black may strive to exchange knights before we play g2-g3 and h2-h4, although the position remains comfortable enough for us. 14.♘xh4 ♗xh4 15.g3 ♗f6 16.♘a4±

B) 13...♖c8 14.♗d3 ♘h4 15.♘xh4 ♗xh4 16.♘a4 ♕f6 17.♖f1± The threat of ♘c5 is still unpleasant for Black to deal with. If he ever plays ...b7-b6 he risks allowing ideas such as ♗a6.

14.♗d3



Position after: 14.♗d3

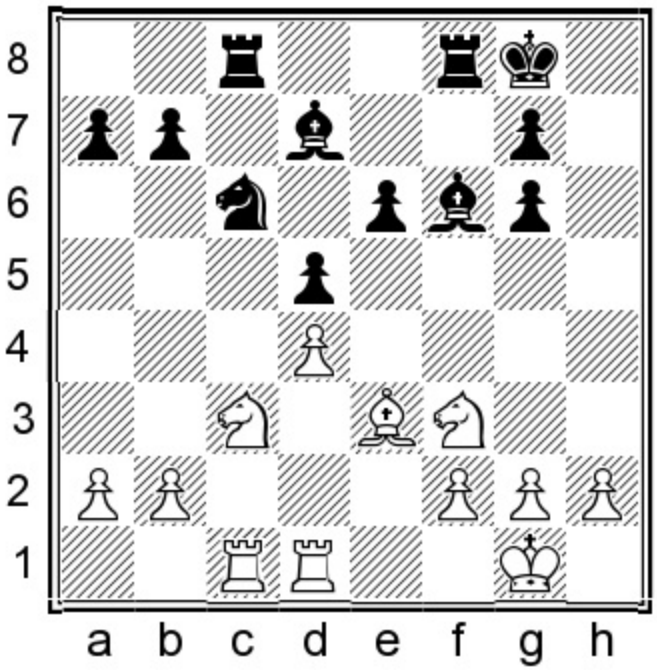
14...♕f7

14...♘h4 15.♘g5! g6 16.♕g4 ♘f5 17.♗xf5 gxf5 18.♕d1!±

15.♕c2

Now we force Black to double his pawns, and White has good chances in the resulting ending.

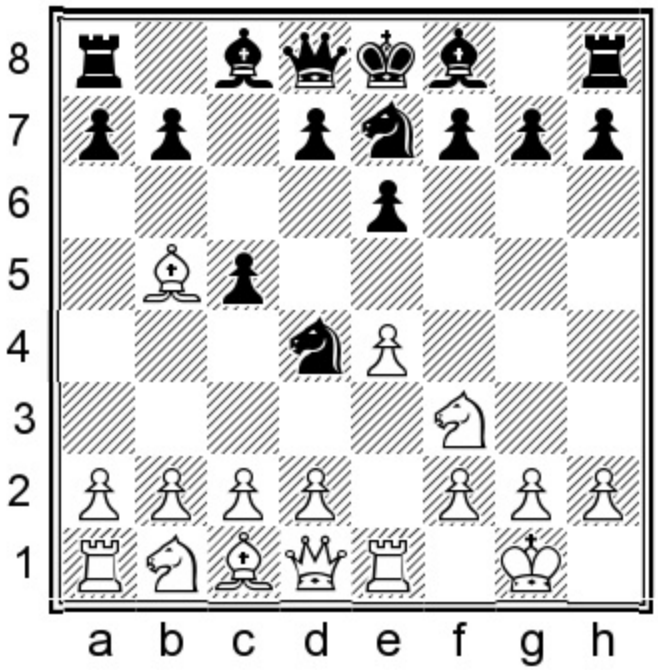
15...♖ac8 16.♗xg6 ♕xg6 17.♕xg6 hxg6 18.♖ed1±



Position after: 18.♖ed1±

Chapter 13
4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.♖e1 ♘d4

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.♖e1 ♘d4



Chapter Guide

Chapter 13 – 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.♖e1 ♘d4

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.♖e1 ♘d4 6.♘xd4 cxd4 7.c3

a) 7...♘c6

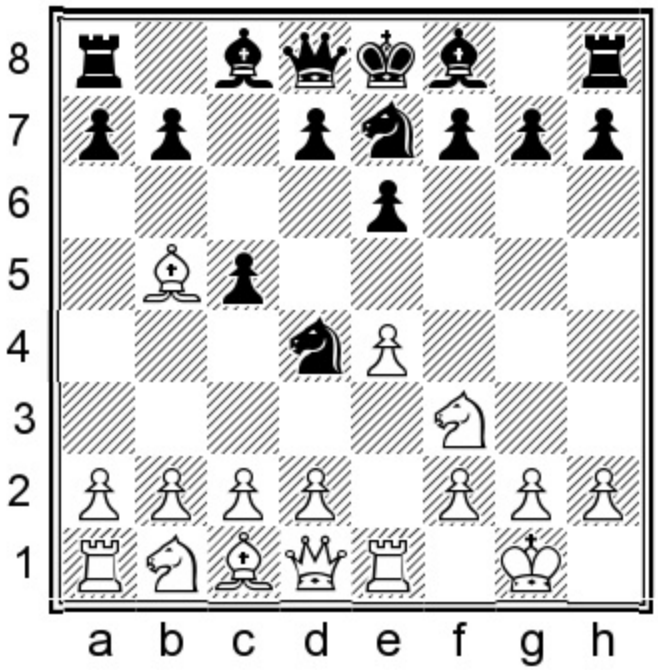
b) 7...a6 8.♗f1 ♘c6 9.b4! dxc3

c) 7...a6 8.♗f1 ♘c6 9.b4! ♗e7

d) 7...a6 8.♗f1 ♘c6 9.b4! d5

a) 7...♘c6

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.♖e1 ♘d4



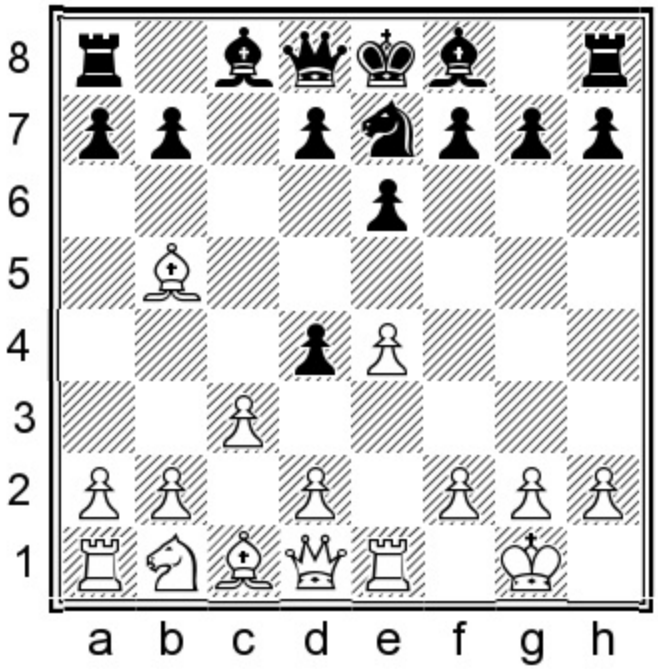
Position after: 5...♘d4

Quite a popular move. Black ventures to exchange one pair of knights before replacing his c6-knight with the one on e7.

6.♘xd4

6.♗f1 has also been played, but the most forcing continuation appeals to me more.

6...cxd4 7.c3



Position after: 7.c3

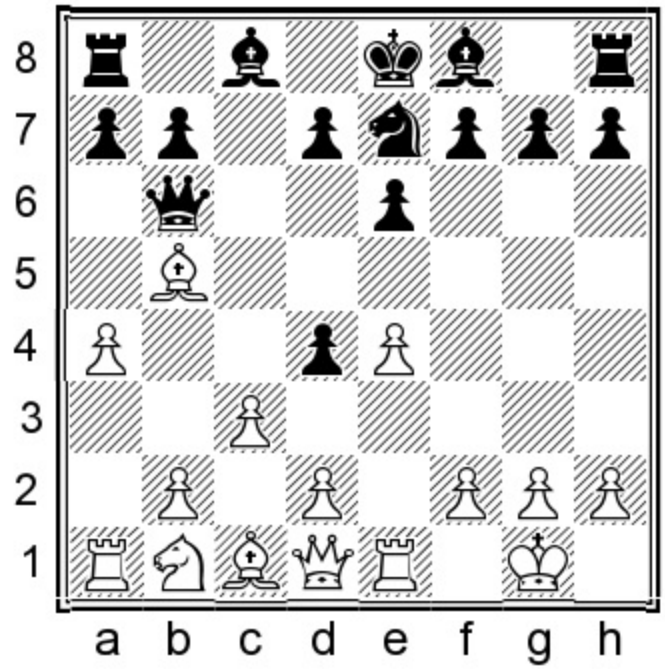
The game now primarily revolves around control of the d4-square.

Back in 2012, Caruana played 7.d3 in a game against Boris Gelfand, but it's not as direct as the text move.

7...♘c6

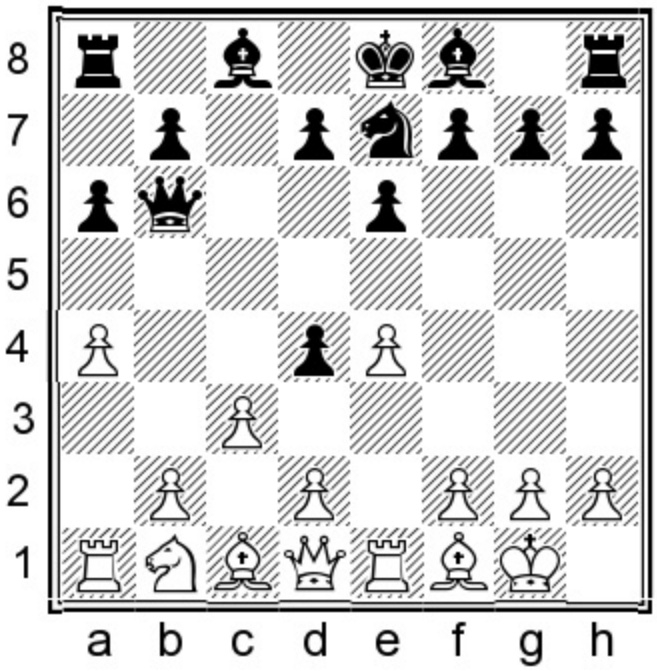
This is less common than 7...a6 (next subchapters), because Black is allowing us to retain the option of capturing on c6 at any moment.

A) 7...♕b6 8.a4!



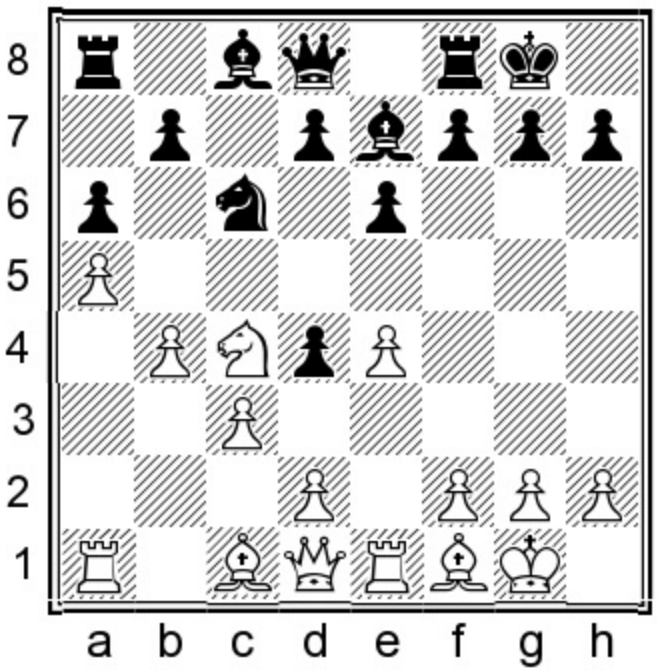
Position after: 8.a4!

We'll see this queenside approach in more detail after 7...a6. The main principle is that we're trying to suppress Black's counterplay, and create weaknesses in Black's position which our minor pieces will attempt to exploit. 8...a6 [8...♘c6 9.b4! ♗e7 10.♘a3 0-0 11.♗f1 The threat of ♘c4 and b4-b5 means that Black should release the central tension, but the resulting position is extremely comfortable for White. 11...dxc3 12.dxc3 ♗f6 13.♗e3 ♕d8 14.♕c2 b6 15.♖ad1±] 9.♗f1



Position after: 9.♗f1

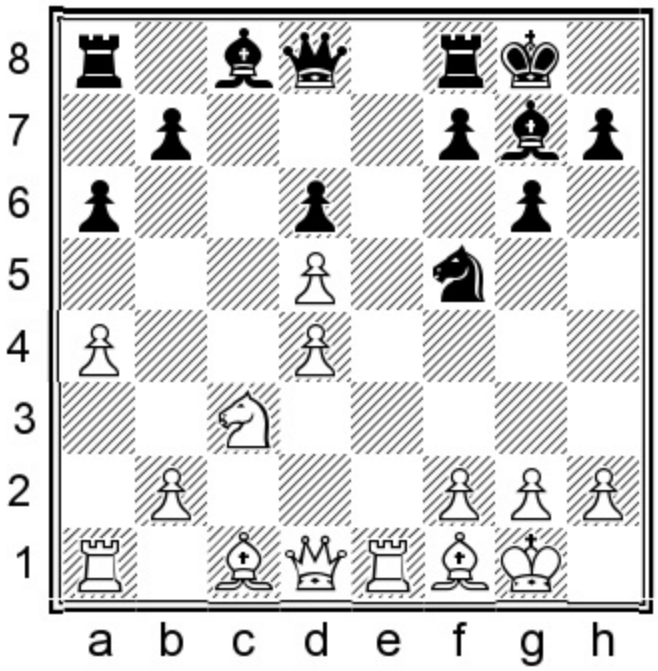
9...♘c6 [9...d5 10.♘a3 g6 11.exd5 ♘xd5 12.♘c4 ♕d8 13.a5 ♗g7 14.♕a4+ ♗d7 15.♘d6+ ♔f8 16.♕a3+–] 10.♘a3 [10.b4± is also good, and should transpose to 10.♘a3.] 10...♗e7 11.b4 0-0 12.a5 ♕d8 13.♘c4±



Position after: 13.♘c4±

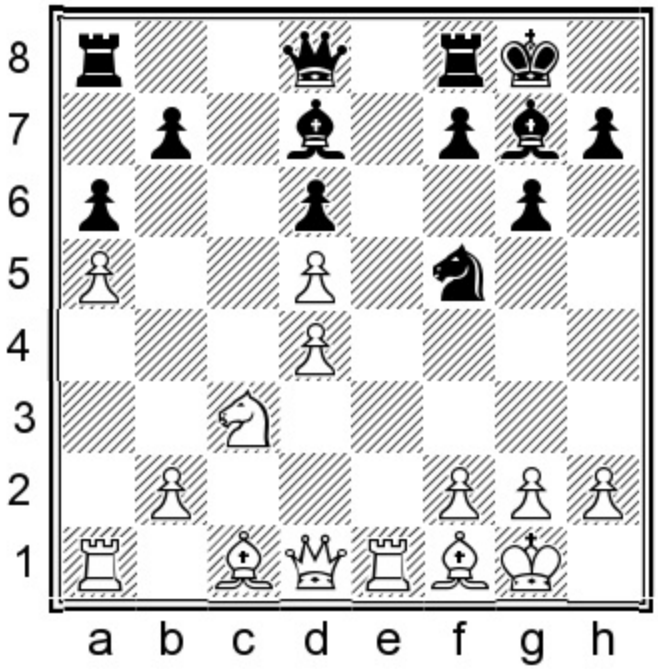
We'll discuss these positions in more detail after 7...a6, but it's evident that White's queenside expansion has been a success.

B) 7...g6?! An unusual attempt to retain control of the d4-square, and it should be refuted with accurate play. 8.cxd4 ♗g7 9.d5 exd5 10.exd5 0-0 11.♘c3 a6 12.♗f1 ♘f5 13.a4! d6 14.d4!



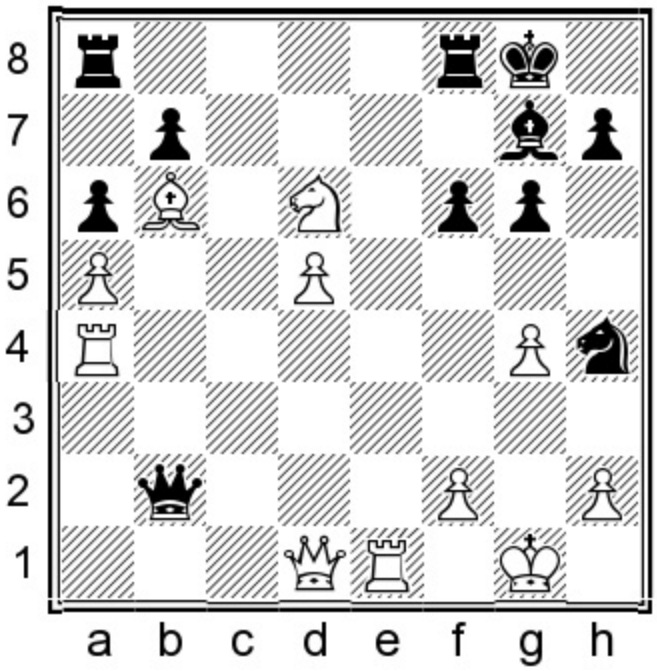
Position after: 14.d4!

A key idea, returning the sacrificed pawn to achieve a better position with superior piece activity. 14...♗d7 [14...♕a5 15.g4! ♘xd4 16.♖e4 ♘b5 17.♗xb5 axb5 18.♘xb5±; 14...♘xd4 15.a5 ♗f5 16.♘e4± Unless Black captures on e4 and gives us the bishop-pair, his d6-pawn will be very weak.] 15.a5



Position after: 15.a5

15...♘xd4 [15...♕f6 16.♘e4 ♕xd4 17.♗f4 ♕xd1 18.♖exd1±] 16.♘e4 ♗b5 17.♗g5 f6 18.♗e3 ♘f5 19.♗b6 ♕d7 20.♗xb5 ♕xb5 21.g4 ♘h4 22.♘xd6 ♕xb2 23.♖a4!+–

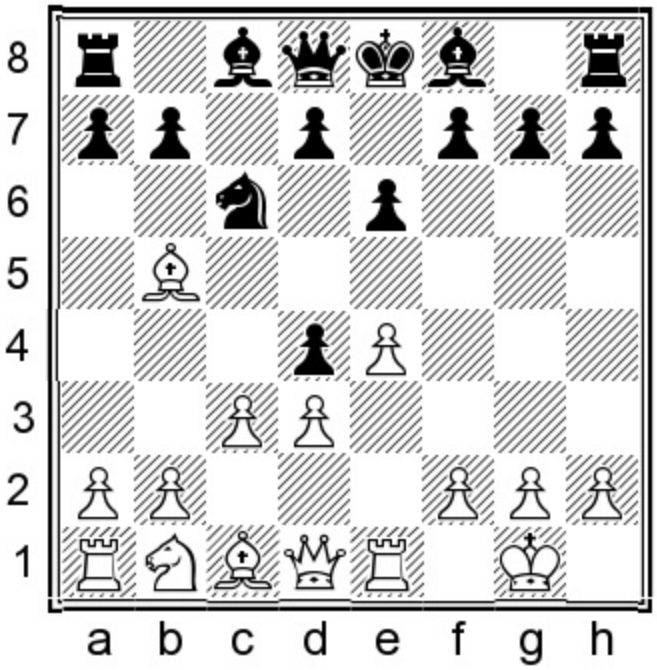


Position after: 23.♖a4!+–

White has total dominance.

C) It doesn't make sense to play 7...dxc3?!, as this just relinquishes control of the centre and gives White an easy advantage. 8.♘xc3 a6 9.♗a4 b5 10.♗c2 ♗b7 11.d4±

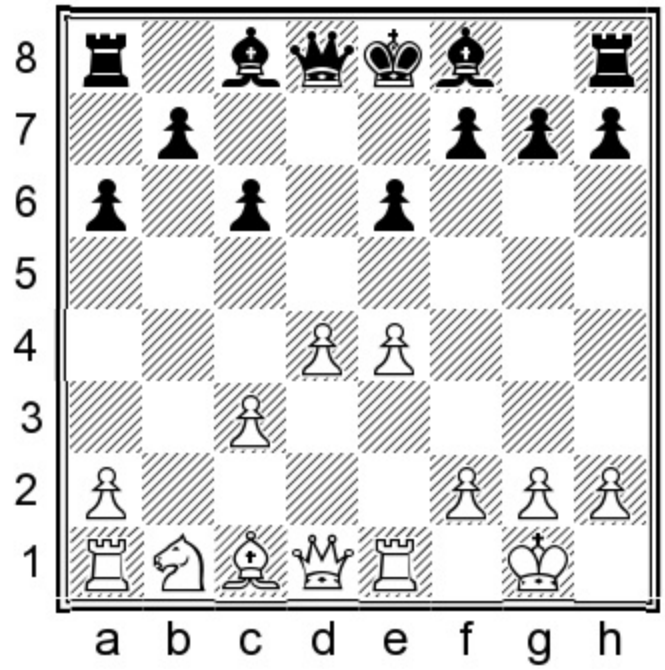
8.d3



Position after: 8.d3

8...a6

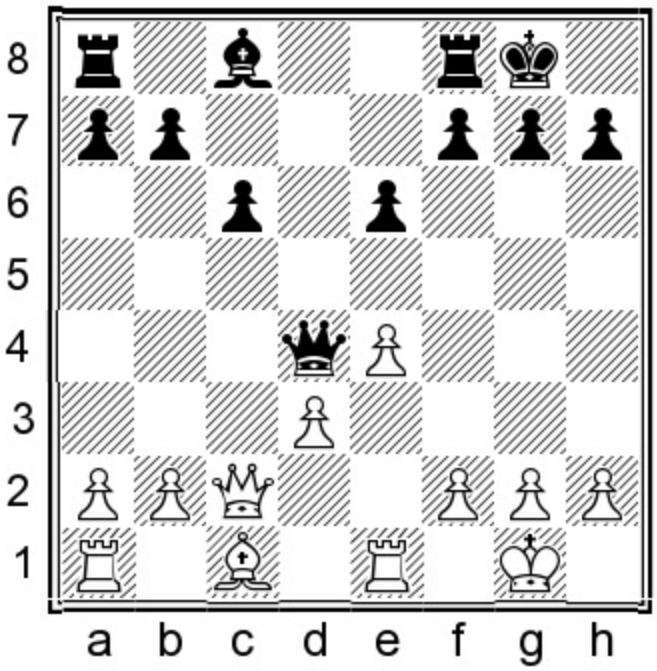
A) 8...dxc3 concedes the centre and gives White an easy game. 9.bxc3 a6 10.♗xc6 dxc6 [10...bxc6 11.d4± Followed by ♗e3 and ♘d2.] 11.d4



Position after: 11.d4

11...e5!? 12.dxe5 ♕xd1 13.♖xd1 ♗g4 14.♖d3 ♗e2 15.♖d2 ♖d8 16.♖xd8+ ♔xd8 17.♗e3± There's no direct way for Black to recapture his sacrificed pawn.

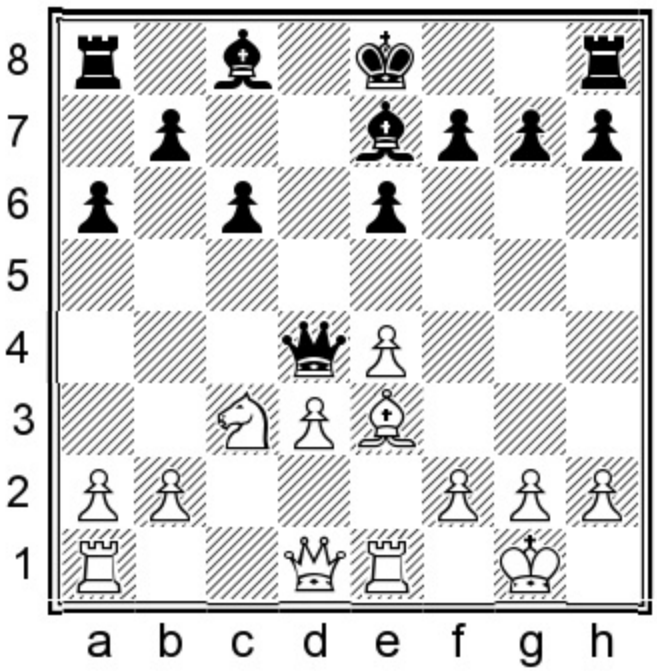
B) 8...♗c5 9.♘d2 Black can't prevent ♘b3, and the position will invariably lead to an opposite-coloured bishop middlegame. It should generally be more pleasant for us, courtesy of our extra central pawn. 9...0-0 [9...a6 10.♗xc6 dxc6 11.♘b3 ♗b6 12.cxd4 ♗xd4 13.♘xd4 ♕xd4 14.♗e3 ♕xb2 15.♗c5±] 10.♘b3 ♗b6 11.♗xc6 dxc6 12.♘xd4 ♗xd4 13.cxd4 ♕xd4 14.♕c2



Position after: 14.♕c2

14...♕f6 [14...e5 15.♗e3 ♕d7 16.♖ad1± This was also favourable for White in Grego – Gazi, ICCF email 2015.] 15.♗e3 e5 16.♕c3± Followed by ♖ad1, f2-f3 and d3-d4 at the right moment. We should be careful not to allow Black to play ...c6-c5 – for example, by meeting ...b7-b6 with b2-b4.

9.♗xc6 dxc6 10.cxd4 ♕xd4 11.♘c3 ♗e7 12.♗e3



Position after: 12.♗e3

12...♕f6

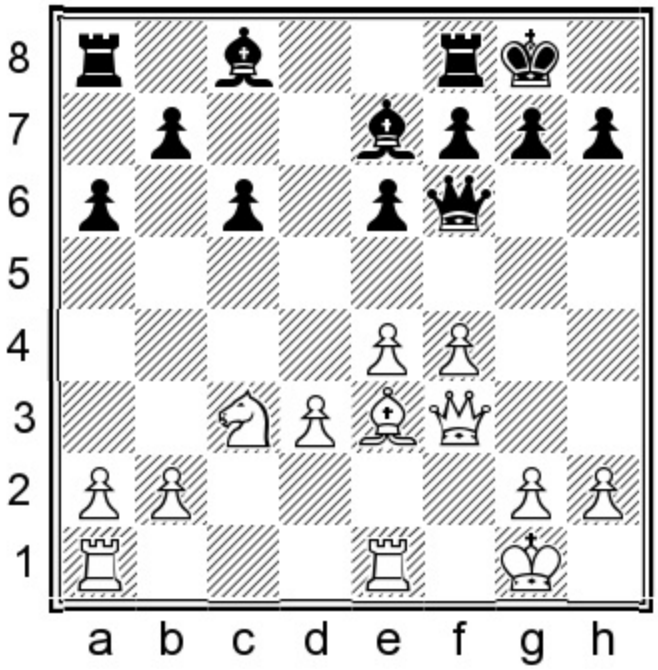
12...♕d8 In Janocha – Alekseenko, Wroclaw 2014, the natural 13.d4± would have been unpleasant for Black to deal with.

13.f4!?

I like this option as we'll always meet ...e6-e5 with f4-f5, and Black's bishop on c8 will struggle to get in the game.

13.d4± also seems like a solid edge.

13...0-0 14.♕f3



Position after: 14.♕f3

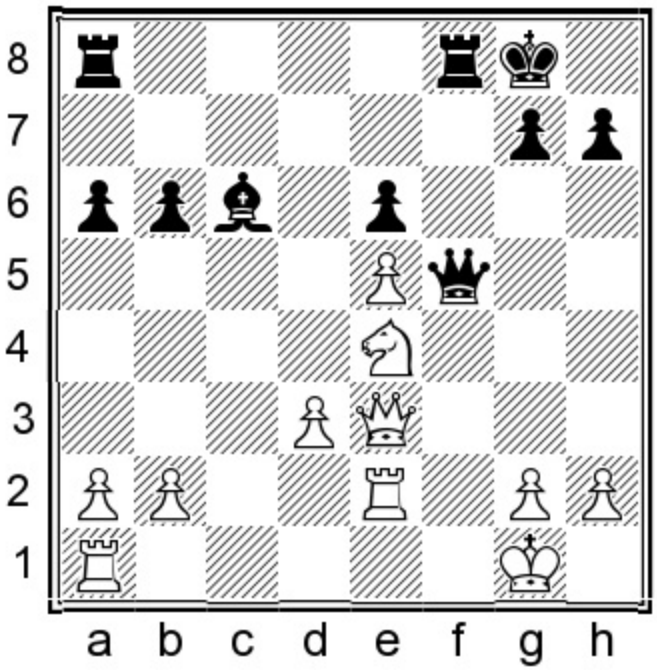
14...c5

14...e5 15.f5 b5 16.♖ac1 ♕d6 17.♘e2 ♗b7 18.♖ed1 ♖fd8 19.♘g3 The knight can jump to h5 and we have good potential for a kingside attack. 19...♖ac8 20.♗b6 ♖e8 21.♗c5 ♕c7 22.f6!? ♗xf6 23.♘h5→

15.e5! ♕f5 16.♘e4

Black loses a pawn.

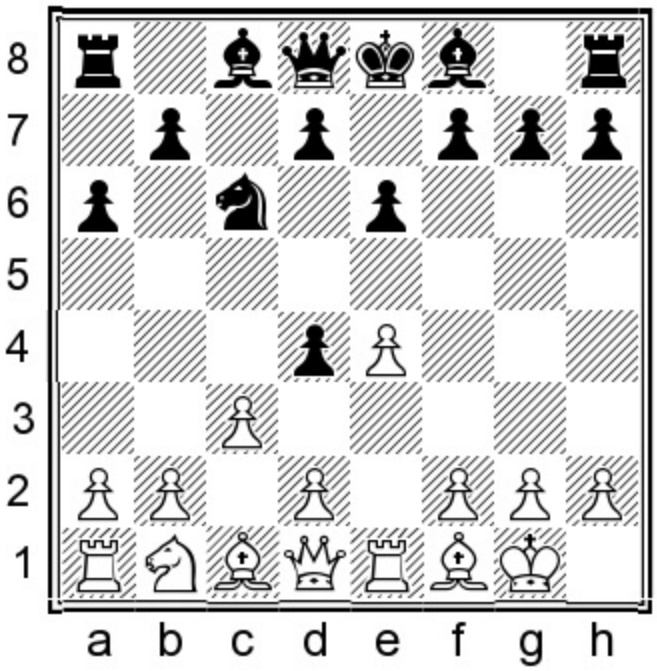
16...♗d7 17.♗xc5 ♗xc5+ 18.♘xc5 ♗c6 19.♕e3 f6 20.♖e2 b6 21.♘e4 fxe5 22.fxe5±



Position after: 22.fxe5±

b) 7...a6 8.♗f1 ♘c6 9.b4! dxc3

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.♖e1 ♘d4 6.♘xd4 cxd4 7.c3 a6 8.♗f1 ♘c6



Position after: 8...♘c6

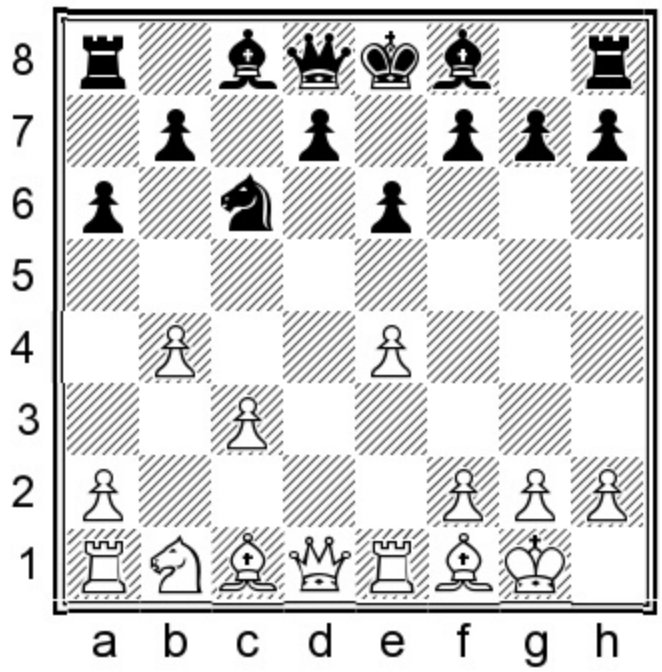
We should take a step back and try to understand what Black's plan is. Primarily, he wants to maintain absolute control of the d4-square. He can achieve this with either ...g7-g6 and ...♗g7, or with

...♗c5. Furthermore, his c8-bishop may come into the game via ...b7-b5 and ...♗b7 – possibly followed by the central break ...d7-d5. With these salient points in mind, we can plan to suppress Black's intentions whilst simultaneously contesting control of the d4-square ourselves.

9.b4!

A fascinating plan, which has only been played in correspondence chess. Traditional thinking would aim to attack the d4-square with moves like d2-d3 and ♘d2-f3. However, in practice Black has rarely faced any major problems. The text move prevents Black's bishop on f8 from coming to c5, and we have a future idea of a2-a4 and b4-b5 which will remove the Black knight's control of d4. To add to this, we also have possibilities of ♘a3, a4-a5 and ♘c4, taking advantage of the weak b6-square. Black has three reasonable replies, which I will treat in separate subchapters.

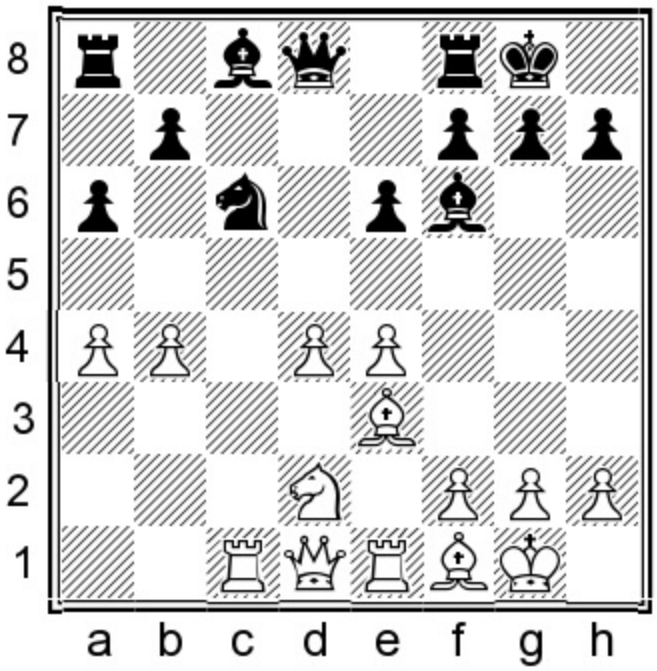
9...dxc3 10.dxc3



Position after: 10.dxc3

10...♕f6

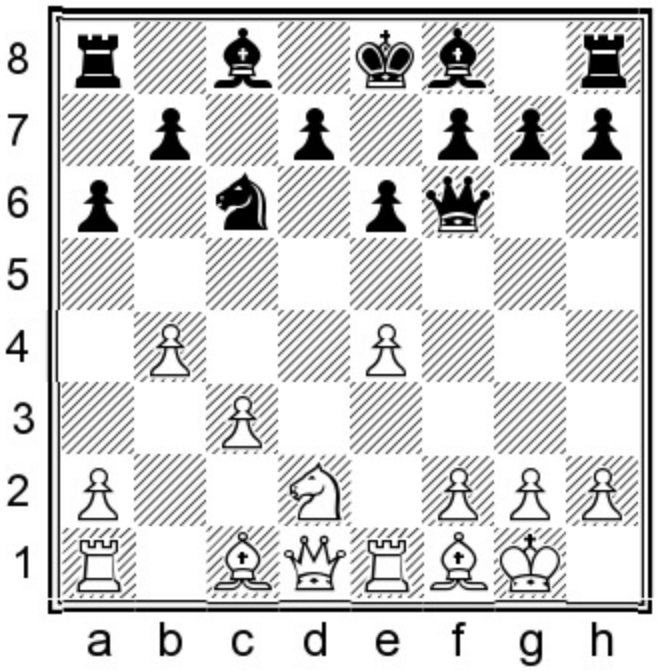
10...♗e7 11.♗e3 0-0 [11...♗f6 12.♗c5±] 12.♘d2 It's hard to see what else there is to do with Black apart from a central break with ...d7-d5, but in all cases we can secure an advantage for White. 12...♗f6 [12...d5 13.exd5 exd5 Otherwise the b6-square becomes a real issue. 14.♘b3± White has the favourable version of an IQP position. After pushing a4-a5, we can continue developing naturally with ♕d2 and ♖ad1.] 13.♖c1 d5 14.a4! d4 15.cxd4



Position after: 15.cxd4

15...♗xd4 [15...♘xd4 16.♘c4 e5 17.a5±] 16.b5 ♗xe3 17.♖xe3 axb5 18.axb5 ♘e5 19.♖ec3± White's rapid queenside play continues to inhibit Black's development.

11.♘d2!



Position after: 11.♘d2!

11...♕xc3

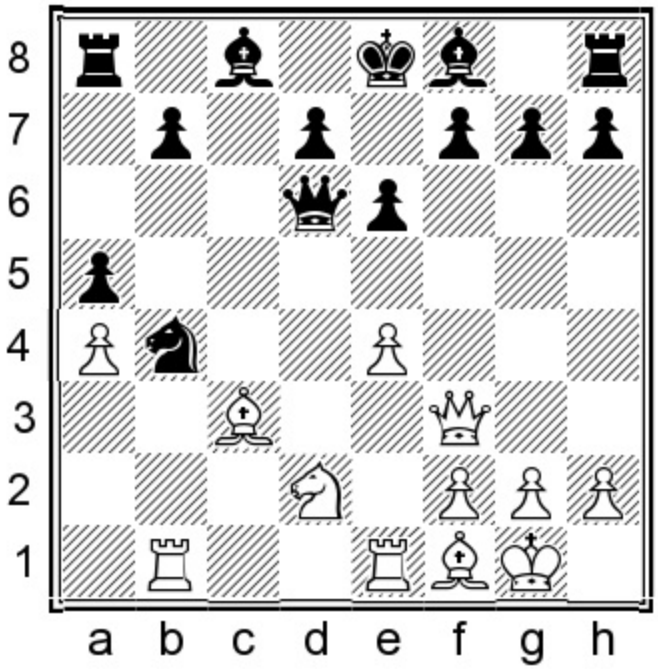
Capturing the pawn looks suicidal, but the alternatives don't fare any better.

A) 11...♘e5 12.a3± Followed by ♗b2 and c3-c4.

B) 11...♗e7 12.♘c4 0-0 13.e5+–

12.♖b1 ♕f6

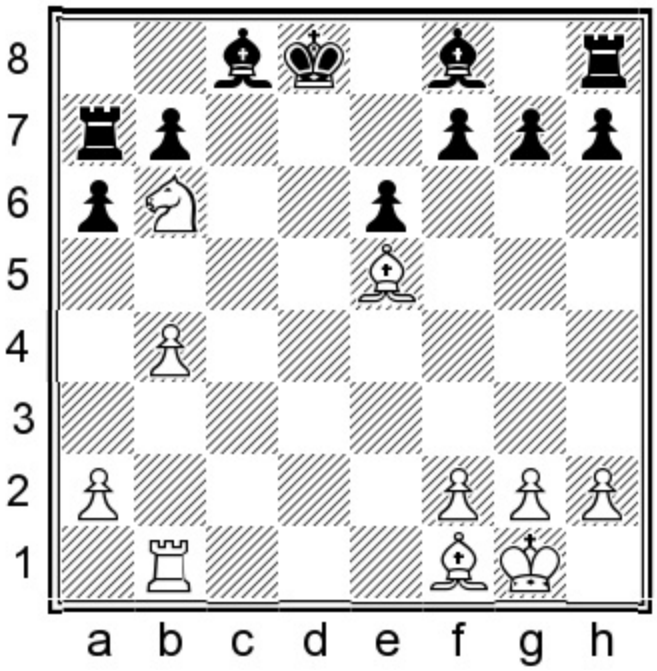
12...♕d4 13.♗b2 ♕d6 14.a4! b5 [14...♘xb4 15.♗c3 a5 16.♕f3+–



Position after: 16.♕f3+–

Followed by ♘c4, and White is crushing.] 15.axb5 axb5 16.♗xb5 ♖b8 17.♗xc6 dxc6 18.♕e2 ♖xb4 19.♘c4 ♕c5 20.♗a3+–

13.e5! ♘xe5 14.♗b2 d6 15.♘c4 ♕d8 16.♖xe5! dxe5 17.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 18.♘b6 ♖a7 19.♗xe5+–

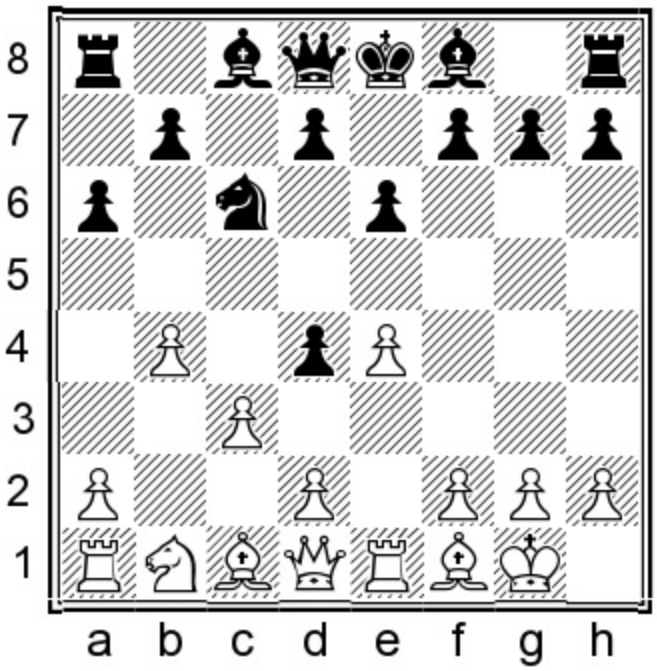


Position after: 19.♗xe5+−

Black's rook on a7 is lost.

c) 7...a6 8.♗f1 ♘c6 9.b4! ♗e7

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.♖e1 ♘d4 6.♘xd4 cxd4 7.c3 a6 8.♗f1 ♘c6 9.b4!

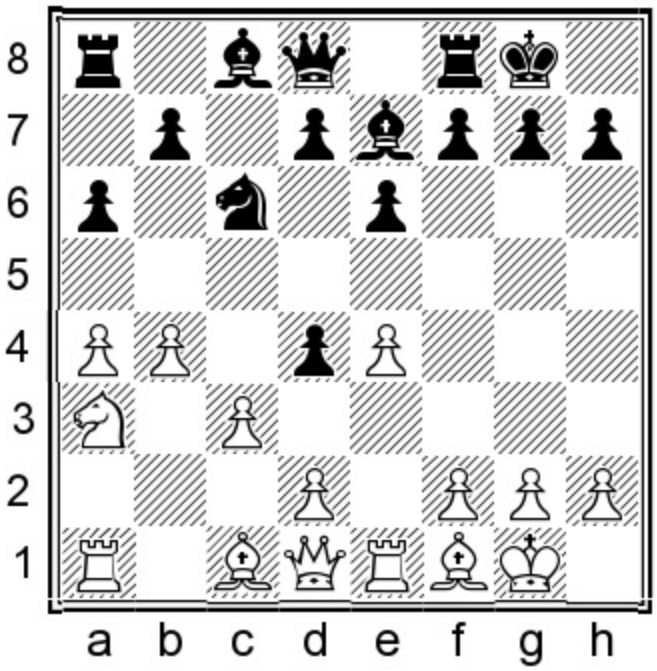


Position after: 9.b4!

9...♗e7

The text is less combative than 9...d5, which I have kept for subchapter d.

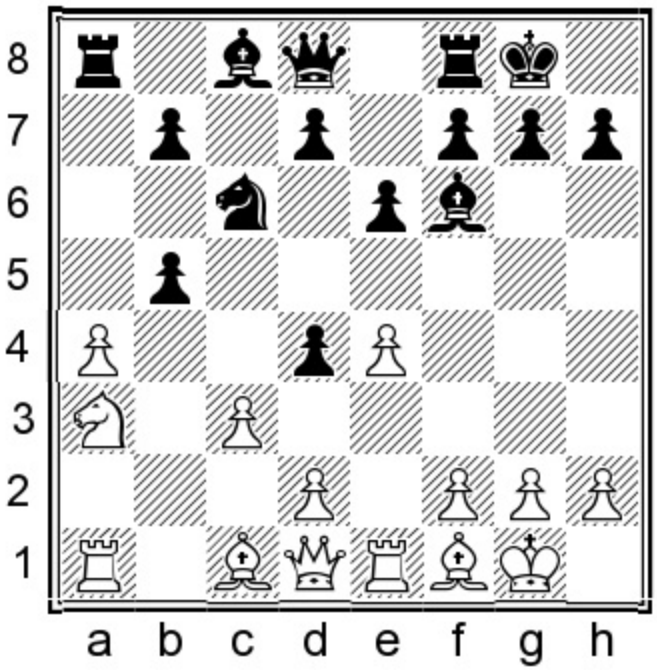
10.a4 0-0 11.♘a3



Position after: 11.♘a3

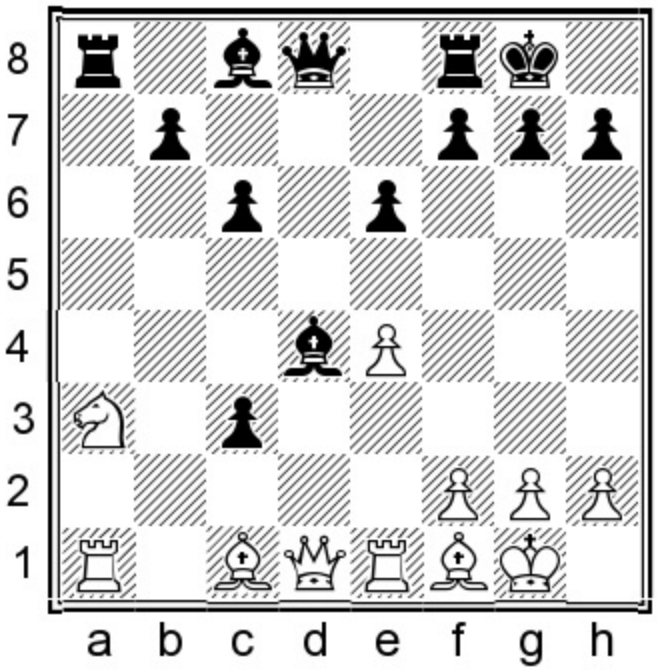
11...dxc3

11... ♗f6 [11...a5? 12.b5 ♘e5 13.cxd4+–; 11...d5 12.exd5 exd5?! (12...♕xd5 transposes to 9...d5) 13.b5 axb5 14.axb5 ♘b8 15.cxd4 ♘d7 16.♗b2±] 11...♗f6 12.b5 axb5



Position after: 12...axb5

A) My original intention was to play 13.axb5 with the idea that after 13...dxc3 we have 14.d4 [14.bxc6? c2], but I wasn't convinced after 14...♗xd4! 15.bxc6 dxc6∞



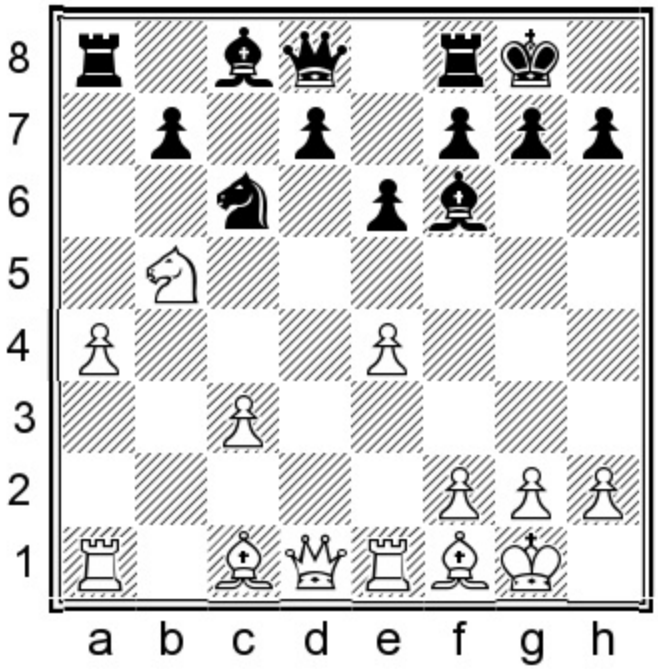
Position after: 15...dxc6∞

It seems to me that Black has adequate compensation for the piece – although of course, 13.axb5 can easily be analysed in more detail.

B) 13.♘xb5! We are simultaneously putting pressure on the d4-pawn, whilst introducing ideas of

♗a3 followed by implementing a minor piece on the d6-square.

B1) 13...dxc3 14.dxc3

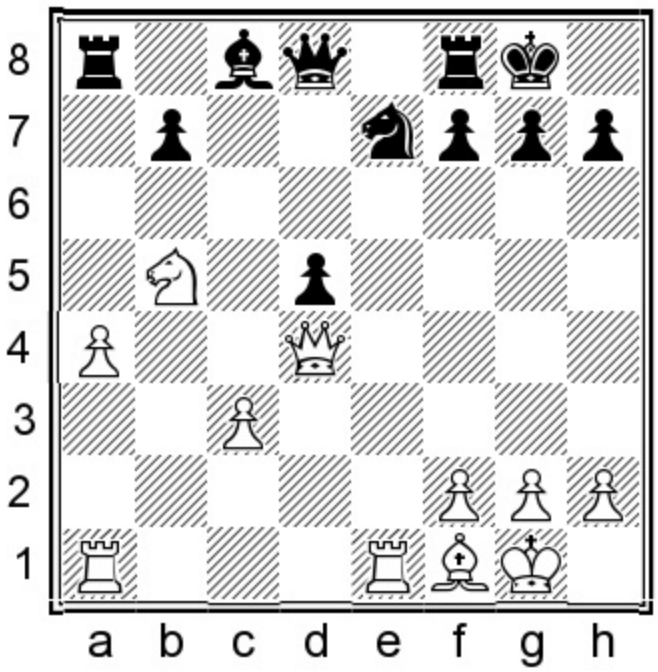


Position after: 14.dxc3

B1.1) 14...b6 15.♗f4± [15.♗a3 is also good and transposes to 13...b6.]

B1.2) 14...♗e7 15.♗e3 d5 16.♕f3 dxe4 17.♕xe4 ♗d7 18.♖ad1±

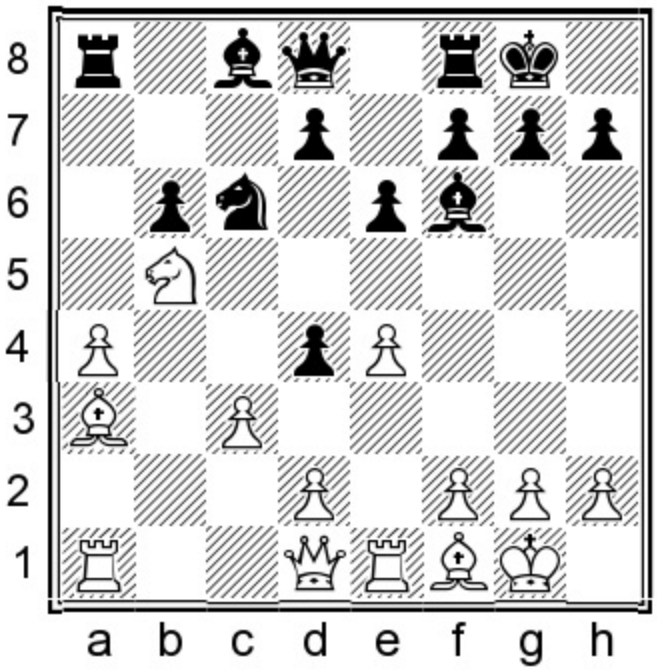
B1.3) 14...d5 15.♗a3 ♗e7 16.exd5 exd5 17.♗xe7 ♘xe7 18.♕d4±



Position after: 18.♕d4±

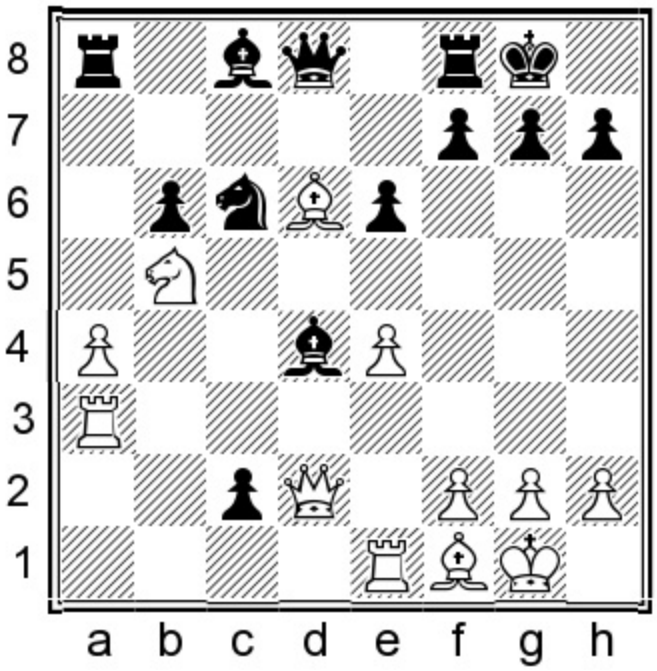
The position may have simplified but Black still has his work cut out. As well as our positional hold, White can think about kingside attacking ideas with ♗d3 and ♖e3.

B2) 13...b6 14.♗a3



Position after: 14.♗a3

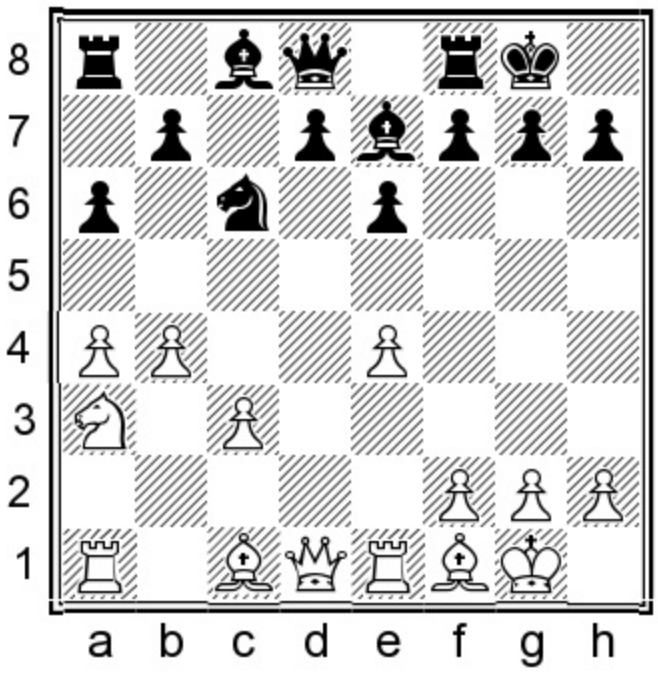
14...dxc3 [14...♗e7 15.cxd4+–; 14...♖e8 15.♗d6+–] 15.d4!? [There also doesn't seem to be a problem with the simple 15.dxc3 ♗e7 16.♘d6 ♗a6 17.c4±] 15...c2 [15...♗e7 16.d5 ♘a5 17.♗xe7 ♕xe7 18.♘c7 ♖a7 19.♖c1!±] 16.♕d2 d6 [16...♗e7 17.d5±] 17.♗xd6 ♗xd4 18.♖a3!



Position after: 18.♖a3!

18...♗b2 19.♖d3 c1=♕ 20.♖xc1 ♗xc1 21.♕xc1± Black won't be able to keep his exchange.

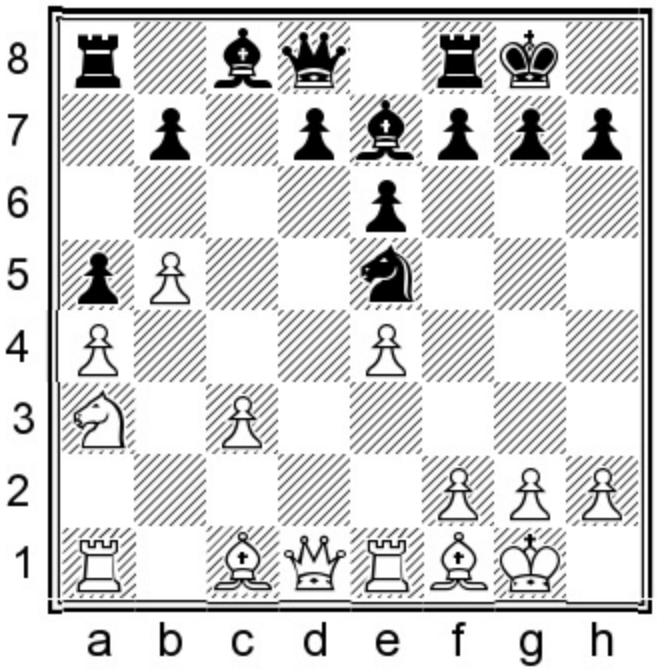
12.dxc3



Position after: 12.dxc3

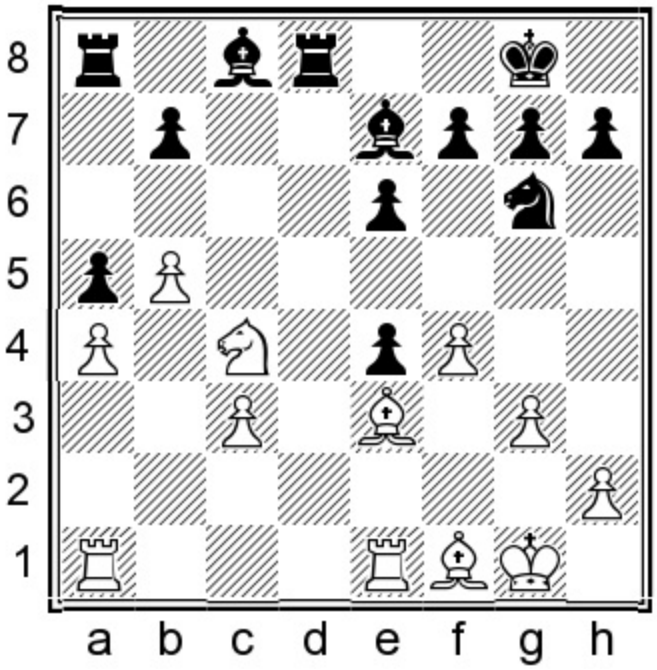
12...♗f6

A) 12...a5 We also have an adequate response if Black tries to directly prevent our c3-b4-a5 pawn structure. 13.b5 ♘e5



Position after: 13...♘e5

A1) 14.f4 is also very good, and the following line demonstrates an instructive idea. 14...♘g6 15.♗e3 d5 16.g3! dxe4 17.♕xd8 ♖xd8 18.♘c4±



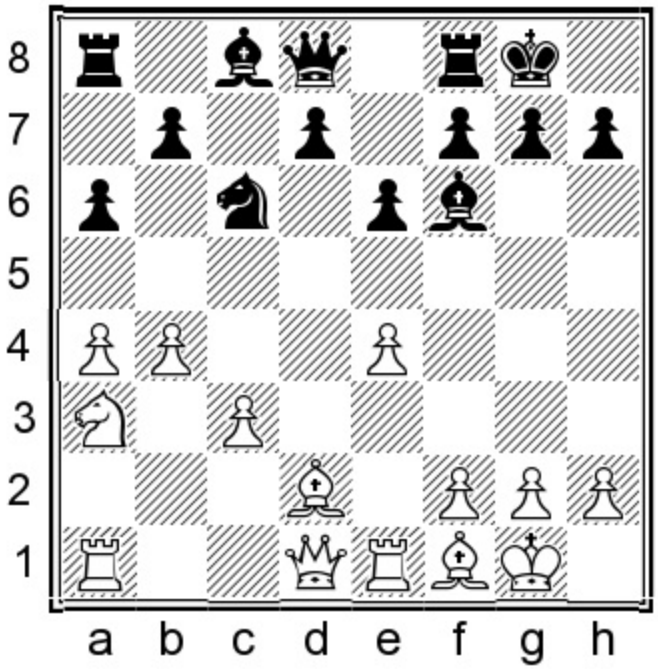
Position after: 18.♘c4±

White sacrifices a pawn, but Black's pieces are completely cramped and out of the game. Once again, we see the example of Black's g6-knight being dominated by our kingside pawns.

A2) 14.♗e3 d6 [14...d5 15.exd5 exd5 16.♗d4±] 15.♖a2!± Followed by ♖d2 and ♘c4.

B) 12...b6 13.♗e3 ♗b7 14.♘c4+–

13.♗d2!



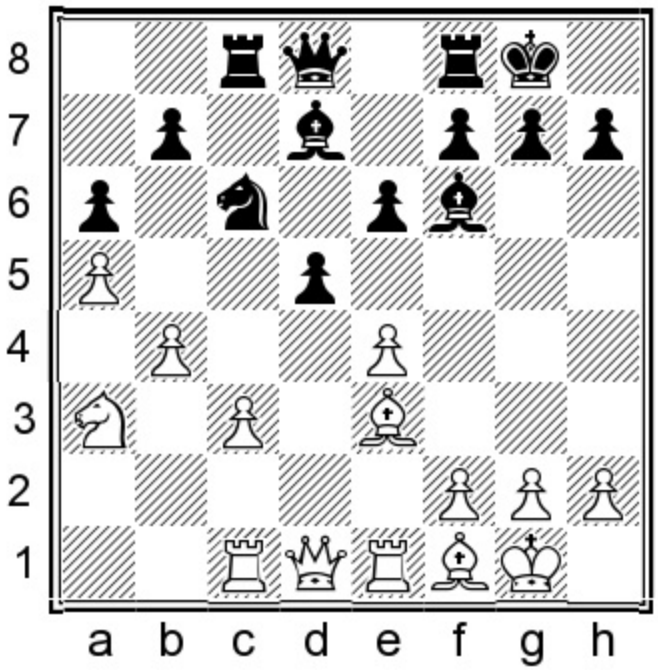
Position after: 13.♗d2!

13...d5

A) 13...d6 14.a5±

B) 13...b6 14.f4! d6 15.♖c1 ♗b7 16.♗e3± The b6-pawn looks to be fatally weak.

14.a5 ♗d7 15.♖c1 ♖c8 16.♗e3



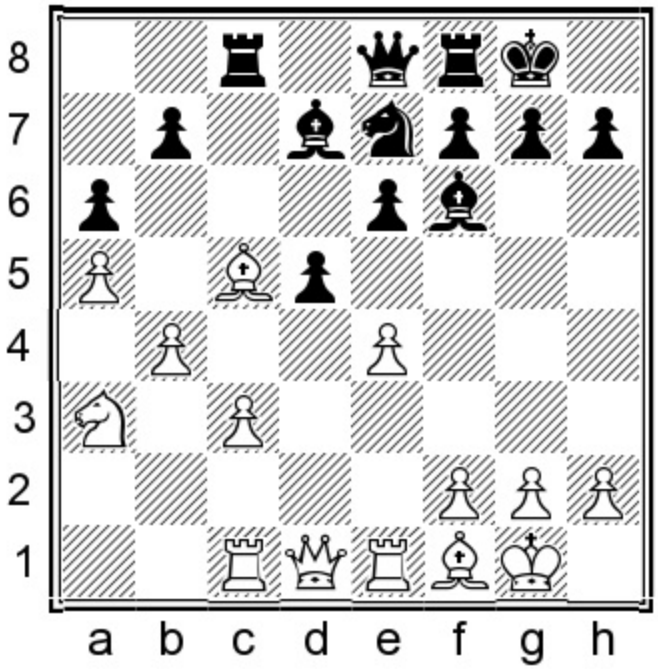
Position after: 16.♗e3

Having protected our c-pawn, we reach our typical scenario. It looks increasingly difficult for Black to find moves.

16...♘e7

16...dxe4 17.♗b6 ♕e8 18.♘c4+–

17.♗b6 ♕e8 18.♗c5!



Position after: 18.♗c5!

Completely paralysing Black, and now his best chance is probably to sacrifice an exchange. Even still, my analysis shows that we can retain an advantage.

18...♕d8

18...♖xc5 19.bxc5 ♕c8 20.♕b3 ♕xc5 21.♕xb7 ♕xa3 22.♕xd7 dxe4 23.♖c2±

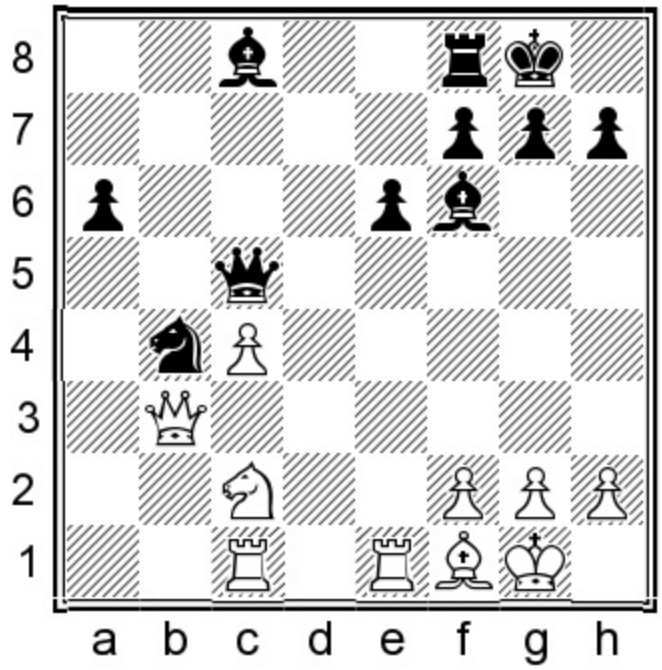
19.exd5 ♖xc5

19...exd5 20.♗b6 ♕e8 21.♕d2±

20.bxc5 ♘xd5 21.♕b3

21.c4 was also advantageous for White in Sergeev – Valeinis, ICCF email 2015.

21...♕xa5 22.♕xb7 ♗c8 23.♕b3 ♕xc5 24.c4 ♘b4 25.♘c2±

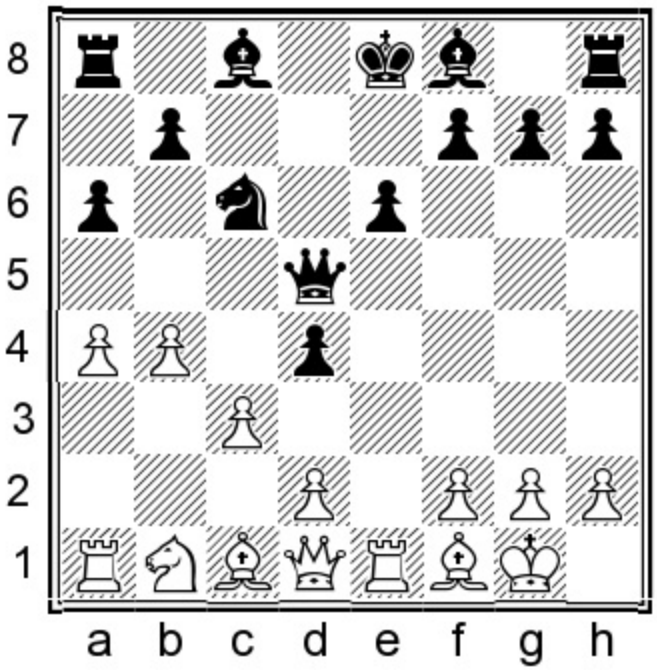


Position after: 25.♘c2±

Black is pretty solid, but there's no doubt that White has the better chances.

d) 7...a6 8.♗f1 ♘c6 9.b4! d5

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.♖e1 ♘d4 6.♘xd4 cxd4 7.c3 a6 8.♗f1 ♘c6 9.b4! d5 10.exd5 ♕xd5 11.a4!

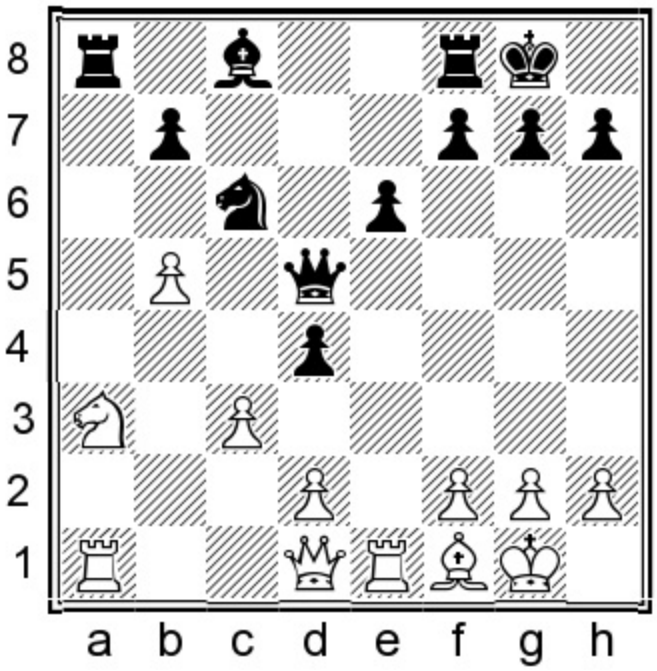


Position after: 11.a4!

As we've already discussed, the plan is simply to play ♘a3, ♘c4 and either a4-a5 or b4-b5 depending on the circumstances.

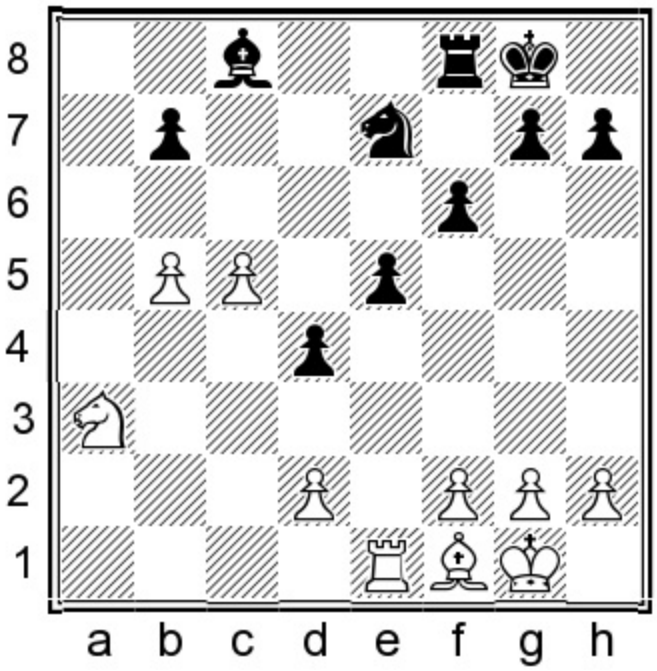
11...♗e7

11...♗d6 12.♗a3!? [12.♘a3 also seems perfectly good, but I want to illustrate the variety of options that our queenside-expansion plan entails.] 12...0-0 13.b5 ♗xa3 [13...axb5 14.axb5 ♘d8 15.♗xd6 ♖xa1 16.♗xf8 ♔xf8 17.♕c2± Black can't stop our threats of both ♕xh7 and cxd4.] 14.♘xa3 axb5 15.axb5



Position after: 15.axb5

15...♘e5 [15...♘e7 16.c4 ♕c5 17.♘c2 ♖xa1 18.♕xa1 e5 19.♕a3 ♕xa3 20.♘xa3 f6 21.c5±



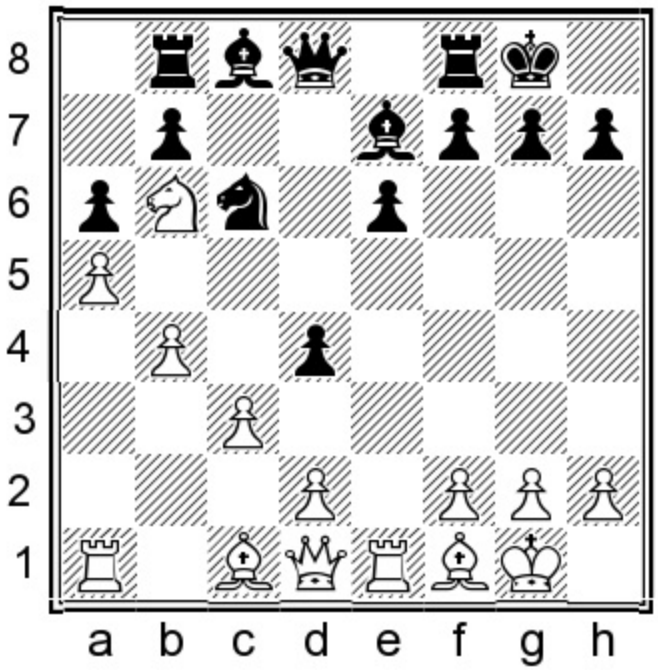
Position after: 21.c5±

We've somehow transposed into a Reti-like structure, but this ending looks to be technically winning for White.] 16.♘c2 ♖xa1 17.♕xa1 d3 18.♘d4 ♘g4 19.f4! The d3-pawn is lost. 19...♕d6 20.g3 e5 21.fxe5 ♘xe5 22.♖e3±

12.♘a3 0-0 13.♘c4 ♖b8

13...♕d8 14.a5±

14.♘b6 ♕d8 15.a5



Position after: 15.a5

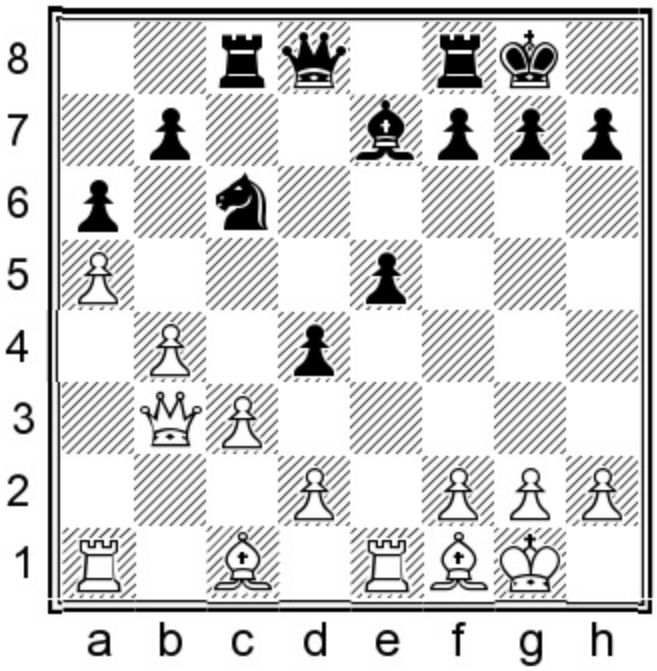
If Black plays ...e6-e5 we can capture the c8-bishop, and our queenside majority paired with control of the light-squares appears to be an advantageous combination.

15...e5

A) The lesser evil is probably 15...♕c7 16.♕b3±.

B) 15...♗d7 16.♕b3 e5 17.♘xd7 ♕xd7 18.g3±

16.♘xc8 ♖xc8 17.♕b3

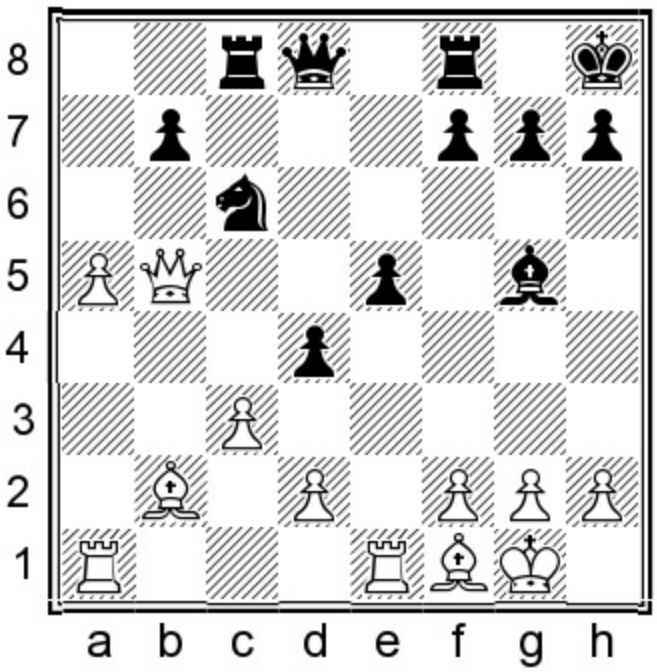


Position after: 17.♕b3

The following lines are illustrations of how we can proceed to make use of our queenside majority.

17...♗g5

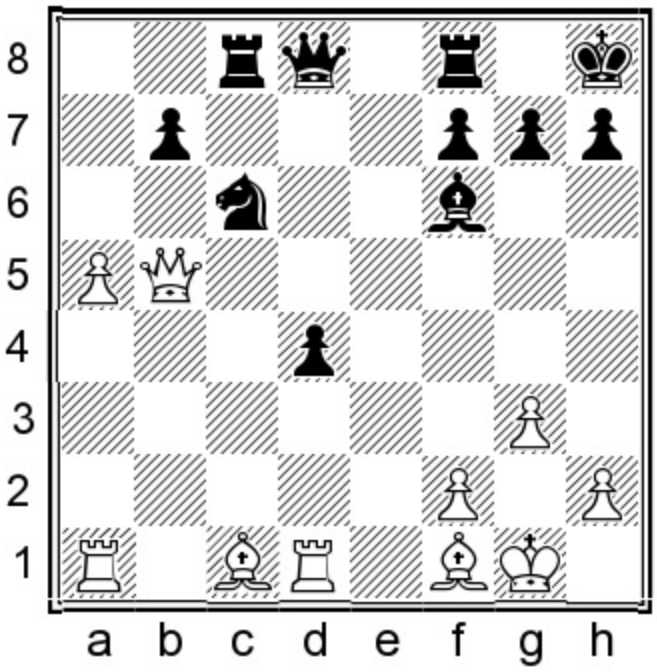
17...♔h8 18.b5 axb5 19.♕xb5 ♗g5 20.♗b2!



Position after: 20.♗b2!

20...f5 [20...♗xd2 21.♖ed1 ♗g5 22.g3! Our light-squared bishop will be very strong on the h1-a8

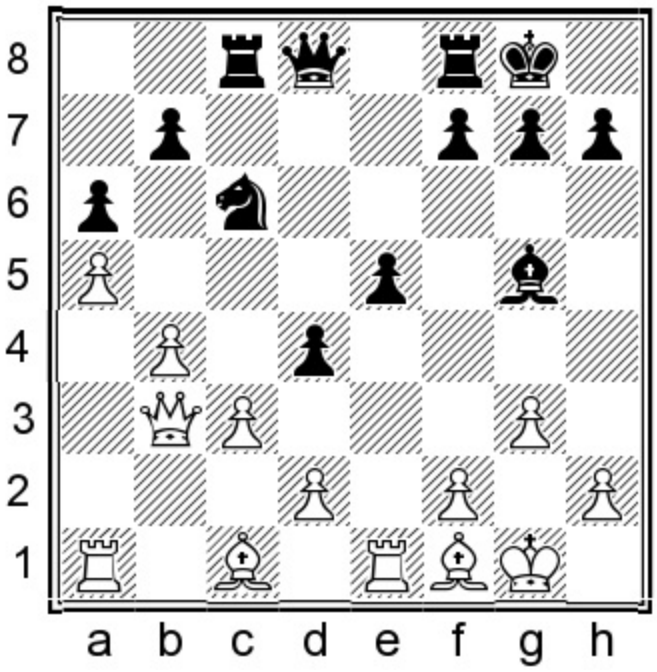
diagonal. 22...♗f6 23.cxd4 exd4 24.♗c1!



Position after: 24.♗c1!

The bishop stands better on d2, where it protects the a5-pawn. 24...♕d7 25.♖b1 ♖fe8 26.♗d2± Followed by ♖dc1 and ♗g2.] 21.cxd4 ♘xd4 [21...exd4 22.♗a3 ♖f7 23.♗c4 ♖fc7 24.d3+–] 22.♗xd4 ♕xd4 23.♕xb7±

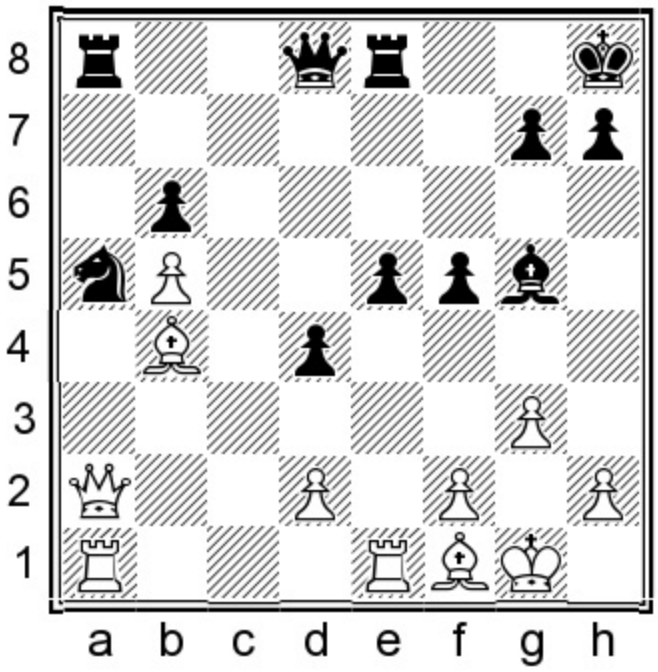
18.g3



Position after: 18.g3

Our plan is very simple. We want to play c3-c4 at the right moment, followed by ♗g2 and a push of our queenside majority. It also appears that Black's counterplay with ...f7-f5 is too late.

18...♔h8 19.c4 f5 20.b5! axb5 21.cxb5 ♘xa5 22.♕a2 ♖a8 23.♗a3 ♖e8 24.♗b4 b6



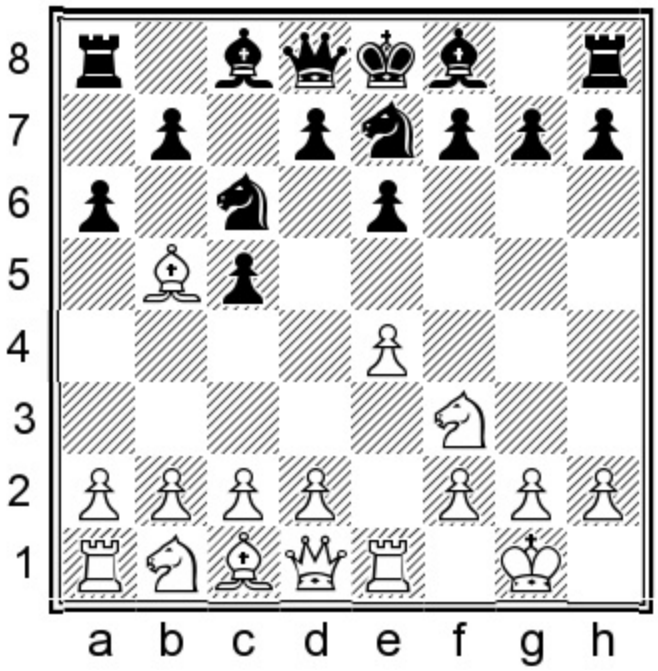
Position after: 24...b6

25.f4! exf4 26.♕f7!±

The bishops dominate and tactics work in White's favour.

Chapter 14
4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.♖e1 a6

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.♖e1 a6



Chapter Guide

Chapter 14 – 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.♖e1 a6

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.♖e1 a6 6.♗f1 d5 7.exd5 ♘xd5 8.d4

a) 8.--

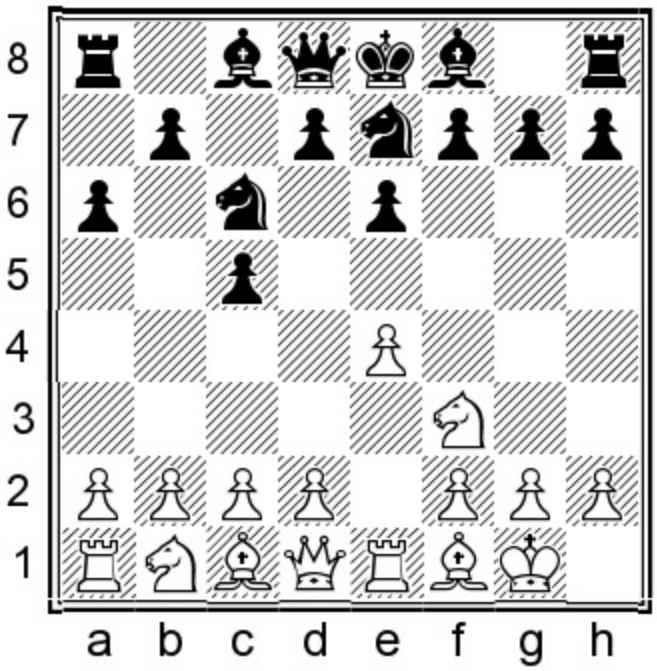
b) 8...♘f6

a) 8.--

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.♖e1 a6

If Black wants to carry out his plan of ...d7-d5, it makes sense to drive the bishop back before breaking in the centre.

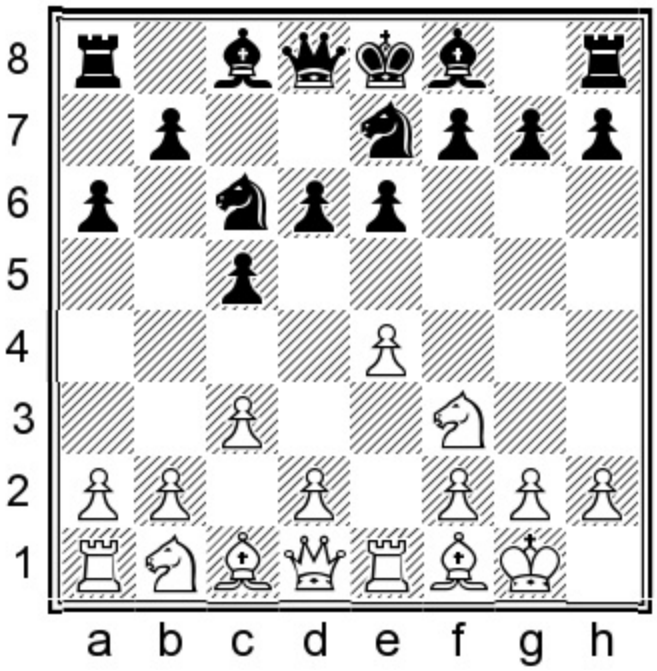
6.♗f1



Position after: 6.♗f1

6...d5

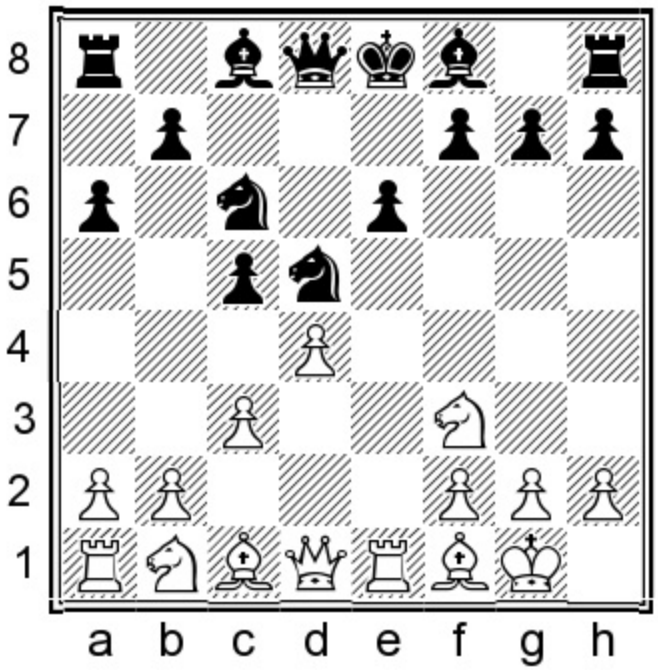
6...d6 has been played quite a few times but seems to give us a very easy game. 7.c3



Position after: 7.c3

A) 7...d5!? An interesting attempt to try and take advantage of our last move, as we don't have the possibility of ♘c3 anymore. Nevertheless, this shouldn't worry us too much and after 8.exd5 ♘xd5

9.d4



Position after: 9.d4

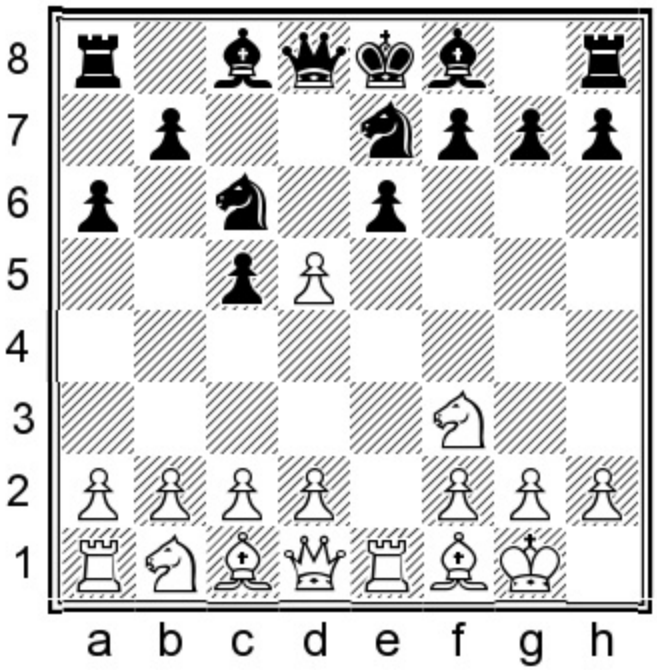
we will get a similar version to 6...d5, e.g. 9...cxd4 10.♘xd4 ♗d7 11.♘f3±

B) 7...♘g6 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 ♗e7 10.♘c3±

C) 7...e5 8.h3! Restricting Black's light-squared bishop before breaking in the centre with d2-d4. 8...g6 9.d4 cxd4 10.cxd4 exd4 11.♘xd4 ♗g7 12.♘xc6 bxc6 13.♘c3±

7.exd5

7.d3 is the other main move but, as I've mentioned numerous times, I always prefer the most forcing lines.



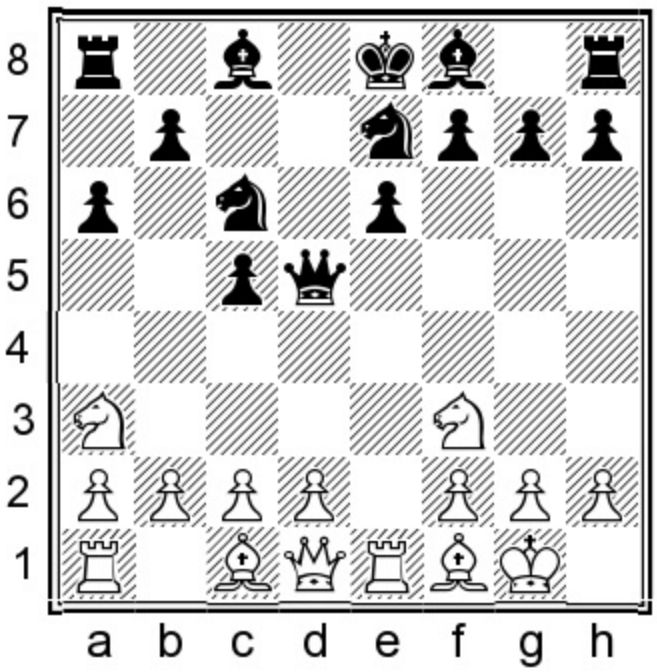
Position after: 7.exd5

7...♘xd5

The mainline, and the only time when Black doesn't face major issues whilst trying to play ...d7-d5.

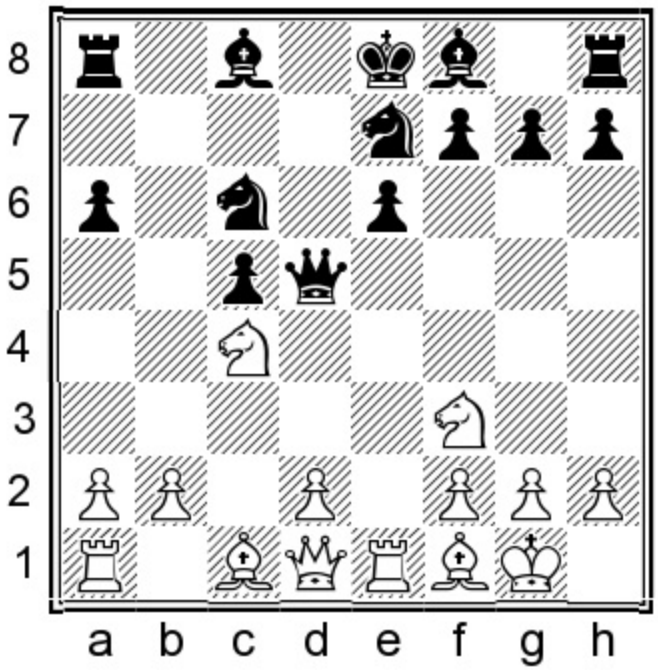
A) 7...exd5? 8.d4± Black's attempt at developing his pieces in the next few moves will likely cost him at least a pawn.

B) 7...♕xd5 8.♘a3! We're immediately creating threats of ♘c4-b6.



Position after: 8.♘a3!

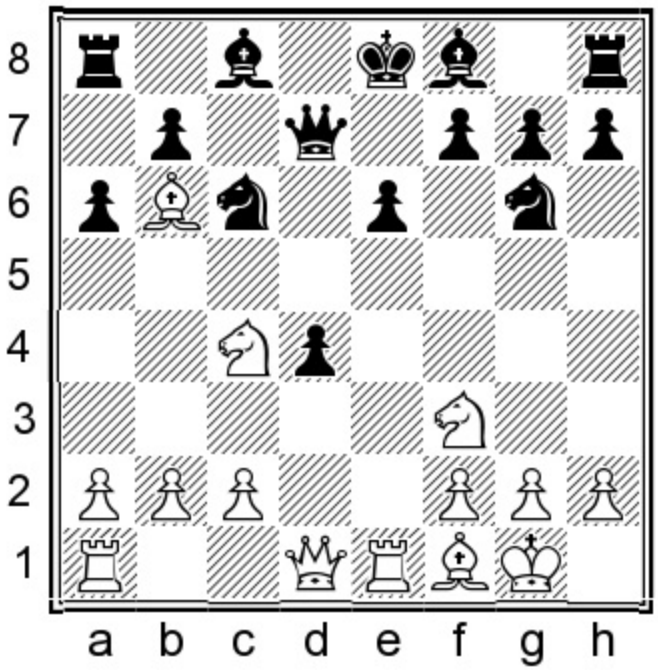
B1) 8...b5? 9.c4! Black wastes two moves and is already lost. 9...bxc4 10.♘xc4



Position after: 10.♘xc4

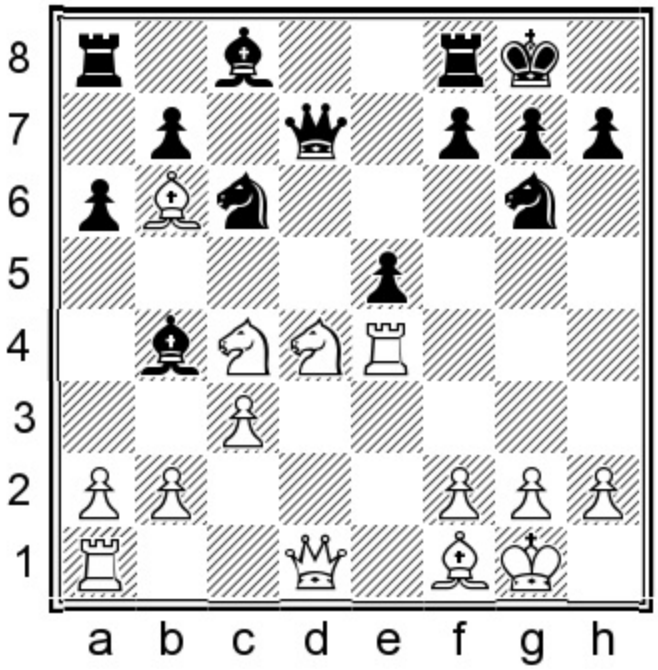
10...♕d8 [10...♖b8 11.d4! cxd4 12.♗f4+–] 11.♕a4 ♕c7 12.d4 ♘d5 13.♘ce5 ♗b7 14.♗d2 ♗e7 15.dxc5+–

B2) 8...♖b8 Planning to meet ♘c4 with ...b7-b5. 9.d4! cxd4 10.♗f4 ♖a8 11.♘c4 ♘g6 We're not obliged to capture the exchange with 12.♘b6, and have a better way to keep Black under pressure. 12.♗c7 ♕d7 13.♗b6!



Position after: 13.♗b6!

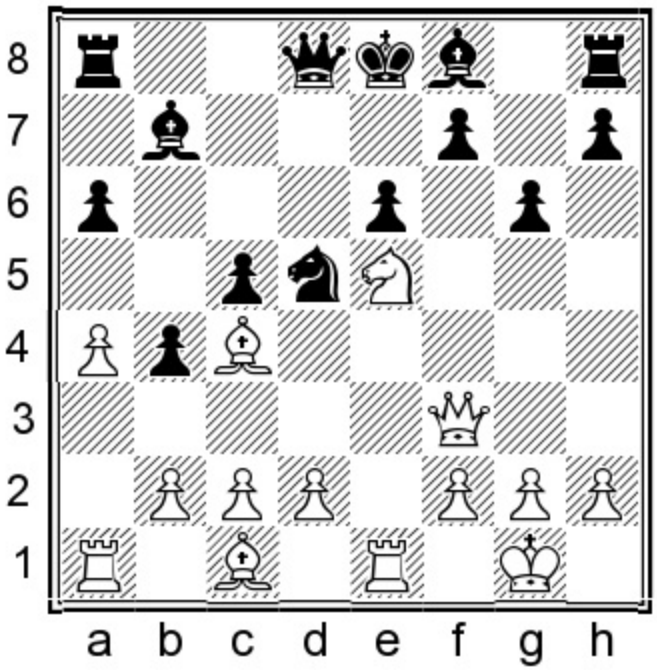
13...♗b4 [13...♗e7 14.♘xd4 0-0 15.g3± Our light-squared bishop will stand fantastically on g2, and the position will remain extremely difficult for Black to play.] 14.♖e4! 0-0 15.♘xd4 e5 16.c3!



Position after: 16.c3!

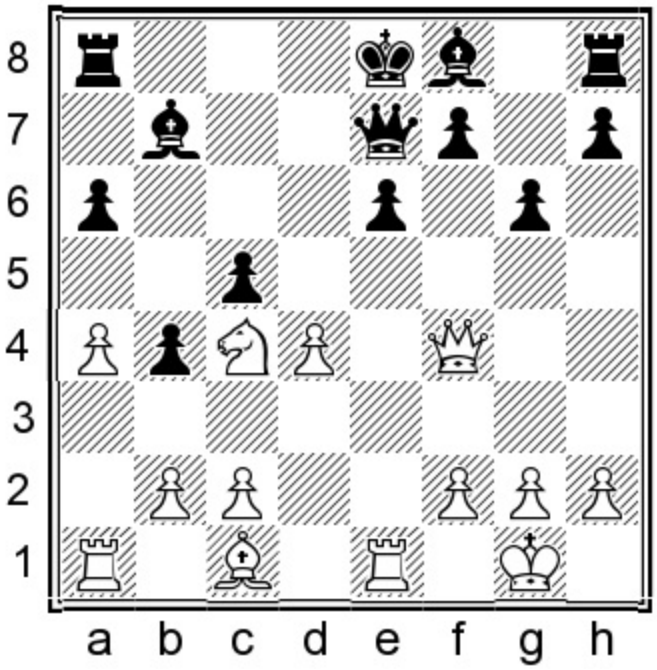
16...exd4 [16...♗e7 17.♘b3±] 17.cxb4 White's dominance will remain unchallenged. 17...♕d5 18.♖e1 ♗e6 [18...♘xb4 19.♗c7±] 19.♗c5±

B3) 8...♕d8 9.♘c4 b5 10.♘ce5 ♗b7 11.a4! ♘xe5 12.♘xe5 b4 13.♗c4 As Black's kingside development is still primitive, we are in a good position to play for tactical motives. In particular, Black has big problems defending the f7-square. 13...♘d5 14.♕h5 g6 15.♕f3



Position after: 15.♕f3

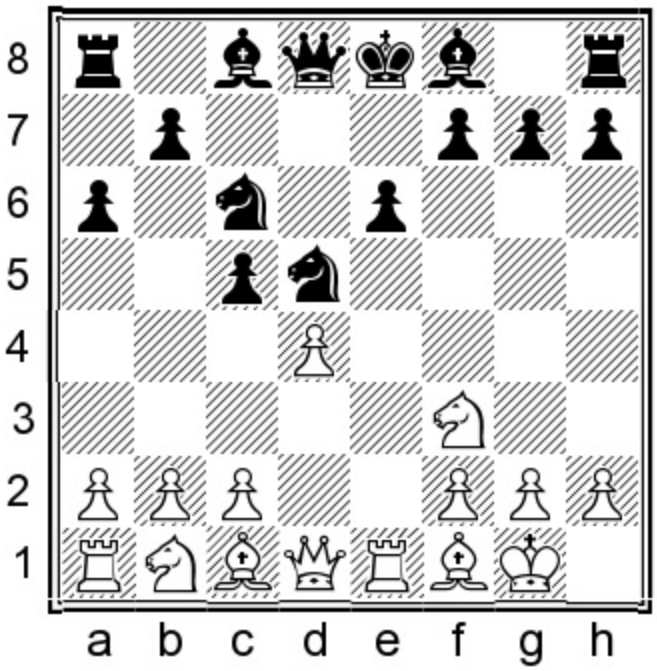
15...♕e7 [15...♕c7 16.♘xf7! ♕xf7 17.♗xd5 ♕xf3 18.♗xf3 ♗xf3 19.gxf3 ♔d7 20.♖e4±] 16.d4! ♘b6 [16...cxd4 17.♗g5 ♕c7 18.♗f6 ♖g8 19.♗xd5 ♗xd5 20.♕f4+–] 17.♕f4 ♘xc4 18.♘xc4±



Position after: 18.♘xc4±

The bishop on g7 remains stuck due to the possibility of ♘d6+.

8.d4

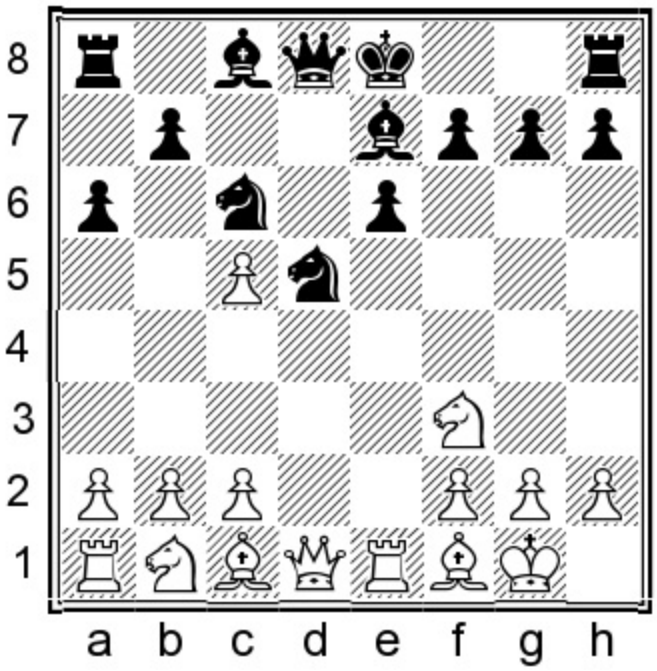


Position after: 8.d4

The resulting exchange on d4 will lead to a scenario where we have a pawn majority on the queenside, whilst Black has a majority on the kingside. In general, one often finds that the weaker player gets outplayed in such structures – so I will offer some rules for the White side to facilitate a better understanding of what to do. Firstly, it is always a good idea to keep at least one set of knights on the board. If all four sets of knights are removed, Black's chances of suppressing our queenside advance and focusing on his own kingside intentions may increase. Secondly, as Black has already played ...a7-a6, we should give a lot of attention to possibilities of pushing c4-c5. A queen trade will often benefit White as it will be even easier to exploit the b6-weakness, for example with ♗e3 and ♘d2-c4. Whilst Black may try to get counterplay in the centre and on the kingside, a premature ...e6-e5 advance may weaken the d5- and f5-squares, which our knight could make use of. Black has tried many ideas from this position, and we need to play accurately to ensure that we retain an advantage. If not, Black will easily be able to equalise.

8...cxd4

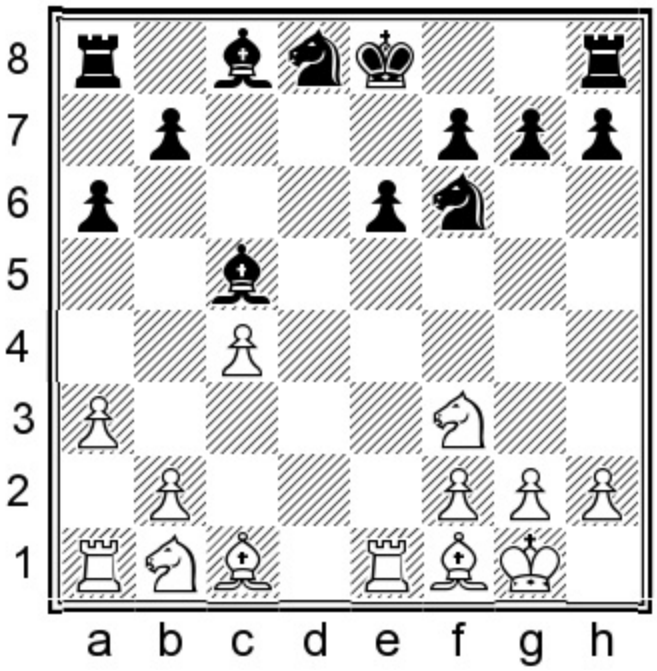
A) 8...♗e7?! 9.dxc5!



Position after: 9.dxc5!

A1) 9...0-0 10.a3 a5 [10...♗xc5 11.b4 ♗e7 12.c4 ♘f6 13.♘c3 ♕xd1 14.♖xd1 ♗d7 15.♗e3±] 11.c4 ♘f6 12.♕c2 ♗xc5 13.♘c3± Forcing Black to play ...a6-a5 is very beneficial for us. Exchanging dark-squared bishops seems like a good idea here too, as well as our typical plan of g2-g3 and ♗g2.

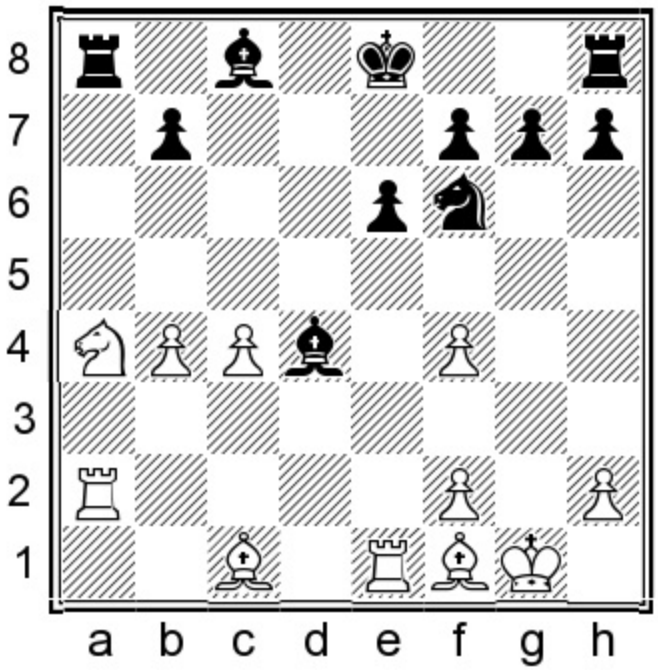
A2) 9...♗xc5 10.c4 Once again, Black faces a difficult endgame. 10...♘f6 11.♕xd8+ ♘xd8 12.a3



Position after: 12.a3

12...a5 [12...♘c6 13.b4 ♗a7 14.♗b2 Followed by ♘bd2, c2-c5, ♘c5 and even g2-g3 and ♗g2.]

13.♘c3 ♘c6 14.♘a4 ♗a7 15.b4! ♘d4 16.♖a2! ♘xf3+ 17.gxf3 axb4 18.axb4 ♗d4 19.f4→

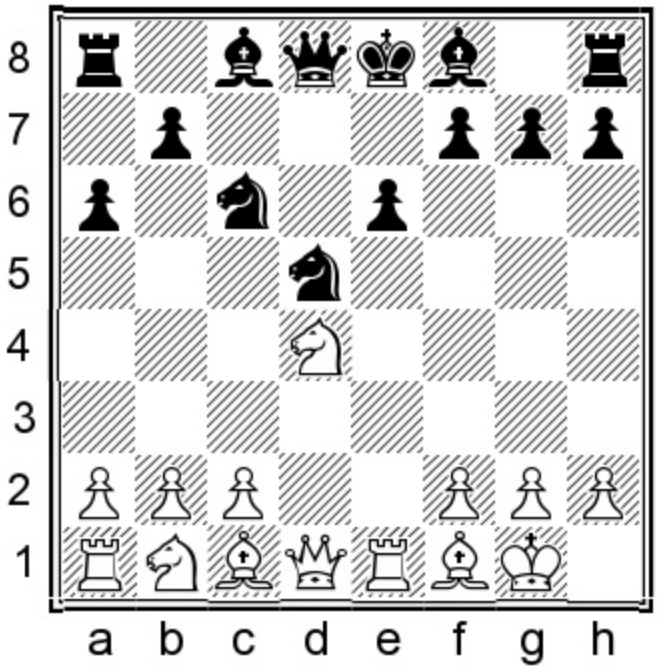


Position after: 19.f4→

Black's b7-pawn is a bigger weakness than our doubled-pawns. In fact, our doubled-pawns can be very effective in halting Black's kingside advances.

B) The main move 8...♘f6 is considered in subchapter b.

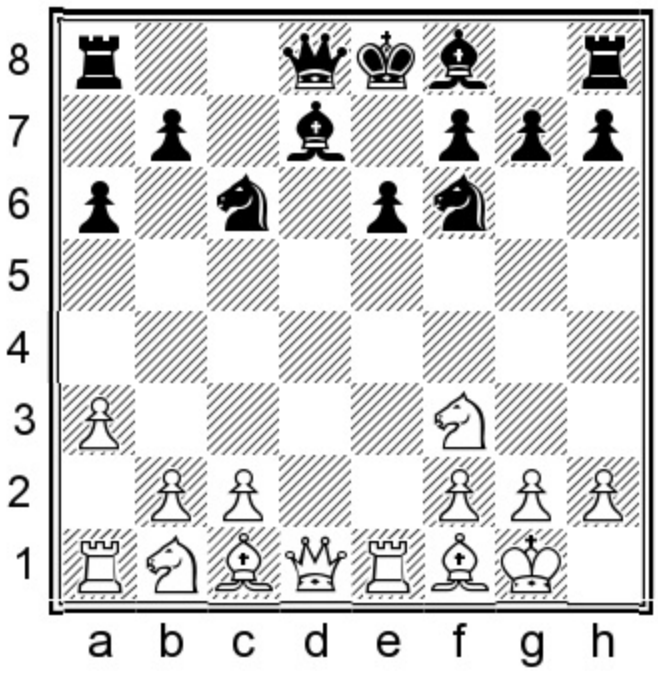
9.♘xd4



Position after: 9.♘xd4

9...♘db4

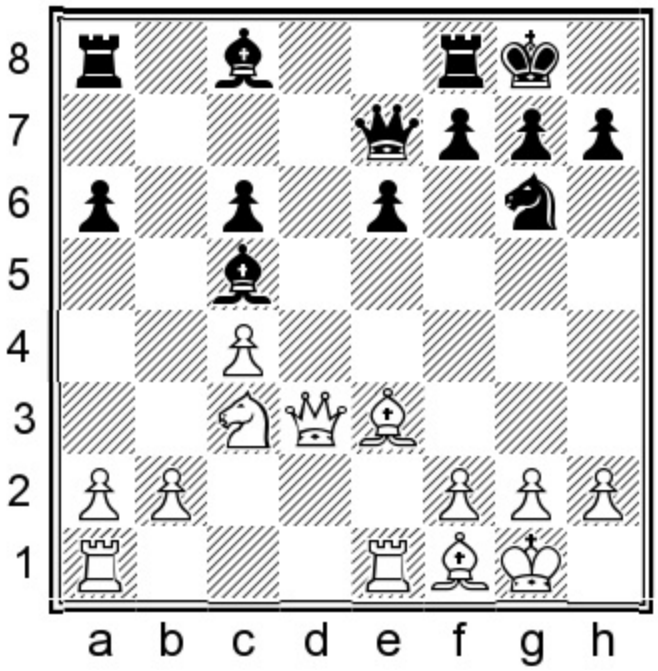
A) 9...♗d7 should transpose to similar positions after 8...♘f6, and we'll always play the same way, aiming to push our queenside pawns. 10.♘f3! Preventing Black's idea of 10...♘xd4 and 11...♗c6. 10...♘f6 11.a3



Position after: 11.a3

11...♕c7 [11...a5 12.♘c3 ♗e7 13.♗f4±] 12.b4 ♗d6 13.♗b2 0-0 14.♘bd2 Followed by c2-c4, and possibly relocating our light-squared bishop to g2.

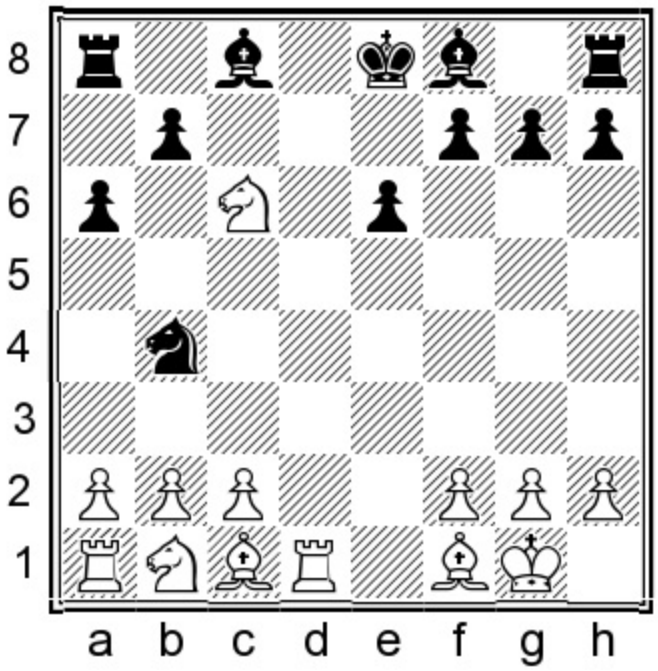
B) 9...♗c5?! 10.♘xc6 bxc6 11.c4 ♕f6 [11...♘f6 12.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 13.♘d2±] 12.♕e2 ♘f4 In Petrosian – Belous, Katowice 2014, White should've continued with 13.♕d2! ♘g6 14.♘c3 ♕e7 15.♕d3 0-0 16.♗e3±



Position after: 16.♗e3±

C) 9...♘xd4 10.♕xd4 ♘b4 11.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 12.♖e2!±

10.♘xc6 ♕xd1 11.♖xd1



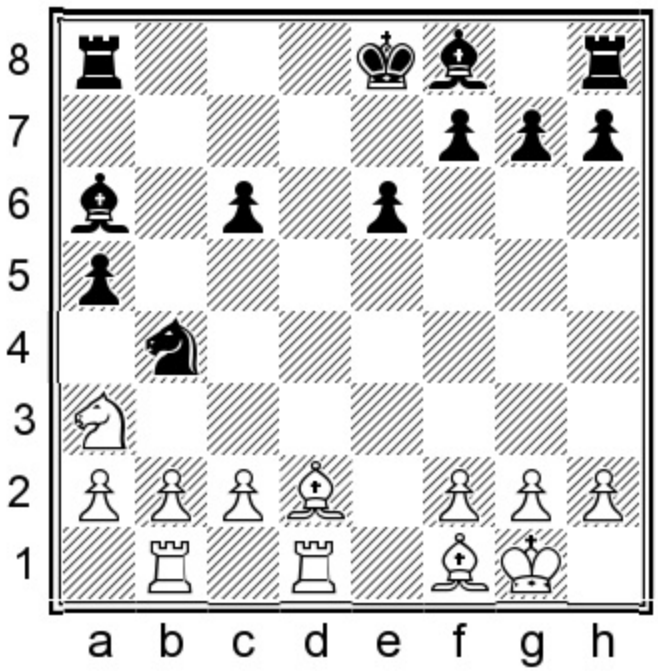
Position after: 11.♖xd1

11...bxc6

11...♘xc6 will give us a very pleasant ending. As I already mentioned, the removal of the queens further weakens Black's b6-square. 12.♘c3 ♗d7 13.♘e4 ♗e7 14.c3 e5 15.♗e3±

12.♘a3 a5 13.♗d2 ♗a6 14.♖ab1!

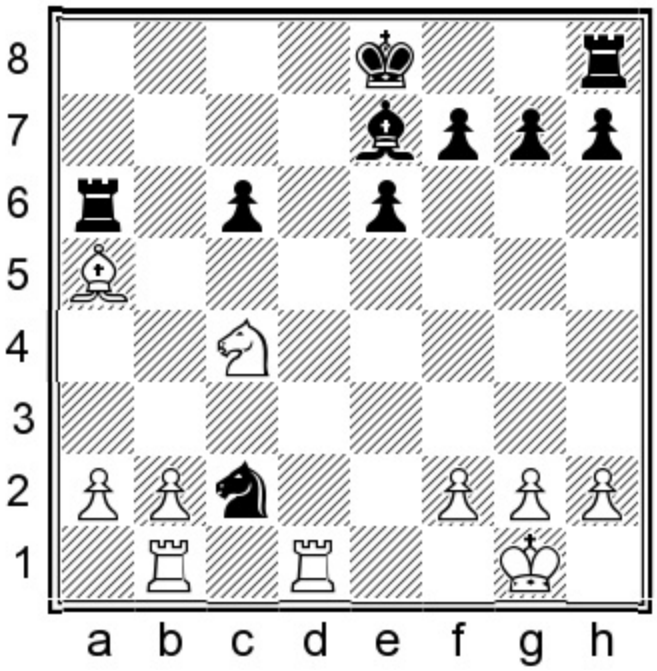
An excellent example of prophylaxis.



Position after: 14.♖ab1!

White doesn't want his rook to be hit by a future ...♘xc2 or ...♘xa2.

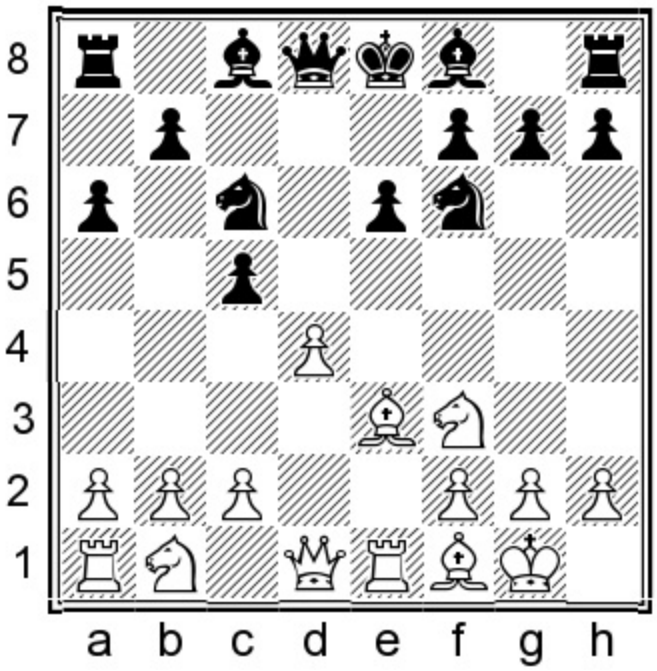
14...♗e7 15.♗xa6 ♖xa6 16.♘c4 ♘xc2 17.♗xa5±



Position after: 17.♗xa5±

b) 8...♘f6

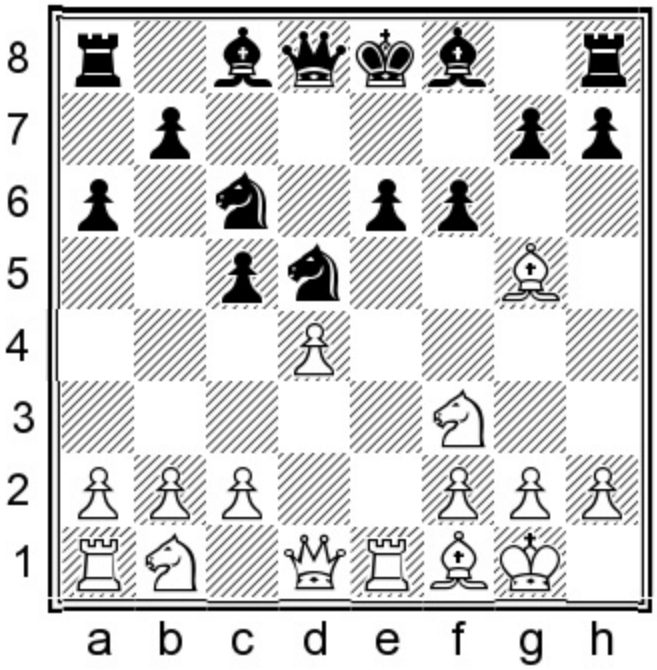
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.0-0 ♘ge7 5.♖e1 a6 6.♗f1 d5 7.exd5 ♘xd5 8.d4 ♘f6 9.♗e3



Position after: 9.♗e3

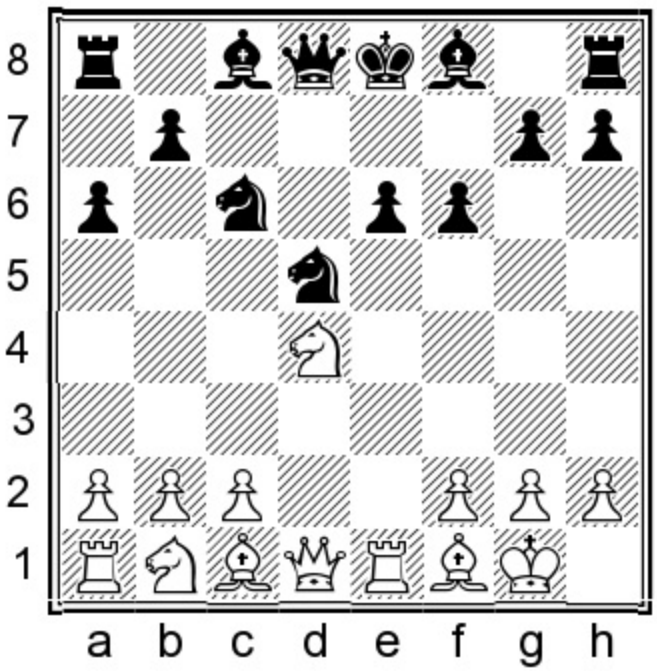
9...cxd4

A) 9...♘d5!? An attempt at a repetition which has been tried by some very strong players. 10.♗g5 The critical test of Black's 9th move. [10.♗c1 ♘f6 11.♗e3= leads to a premature conclusion.] 10...f6 [10...♗e7? 11.♗xe7 ♕xe7 12.c4 ♘f6 13.d5+–]



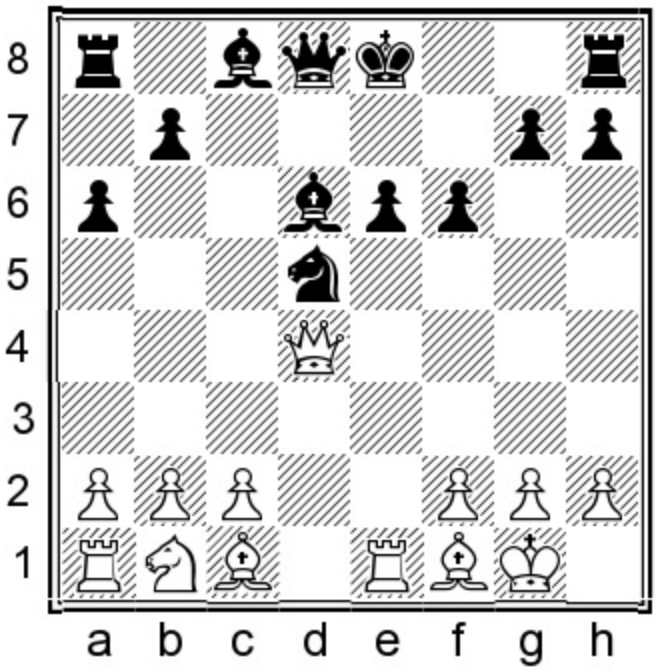
Position after: 10...f6

11.♗c1! [11.c4!? Another plausible continuation, which has been favoured in correspondence games. 11...♘de7 12.♗e3 cxd4 13.♘xd4 ♘xd4 14.♗xd4 ♘f5 15.♗c3 ♕xd1 16.♖xd1 ♗d7 17.b4±] 11...cxd4 [11...♗e7 12.c4 ♘c7 13.♗e3 cxd4 14.♘xd4 ♘xd4 15.♗xd4 e5 16.♗b6±] 12.♘xd4



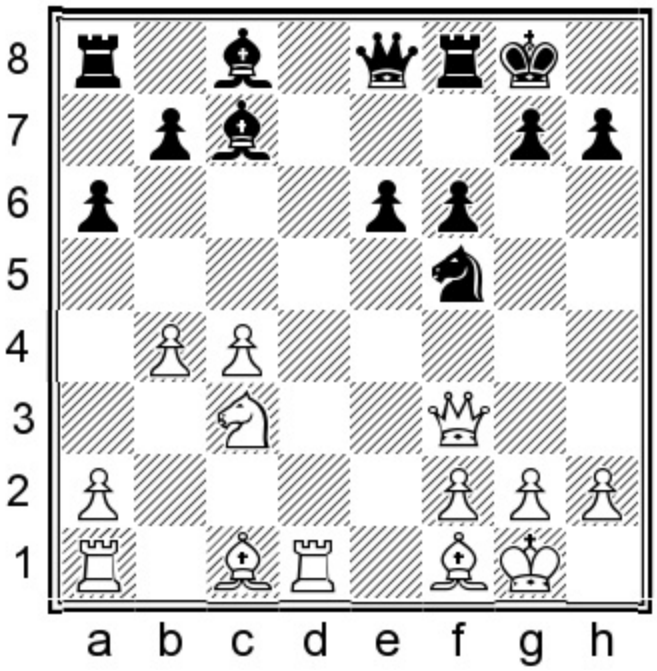
Position after: 12.♘xd4

12...♘xd4 [12...♘db4 13.c3 ♘xd4 14.cxd4 ♗e7 15.♘c3± White already had a big advantage out of the opening and converted in Salgado Lopez – Lagarde, Skopje 2018.] 13.♕xd4 ♗d6



Position after: 13...♗d6

We have been following Vidit – Lenic, chess.com 2018. Here I suggest 14.♕d3!N – with the point of relocating it to the f3-square. 14...0-0 15.c4 ♘e7 [If 15...♘b4, the game may continue 16.♕b3 ♕c7 17.h3 ♗c5 18.♘c3 ♘c6 19.♘e4 ♗d4 20.♗e3 f5 21.♗xd4 ♘xd4 22.♕c3 e5 23.♘d2 Followed by c4-c5, b2-b4 and possibly even f2-f4.] 16.♖d1 ♗c7 17.♕f3 ♕e8 18.♘c3 ♘f5 19.b4±

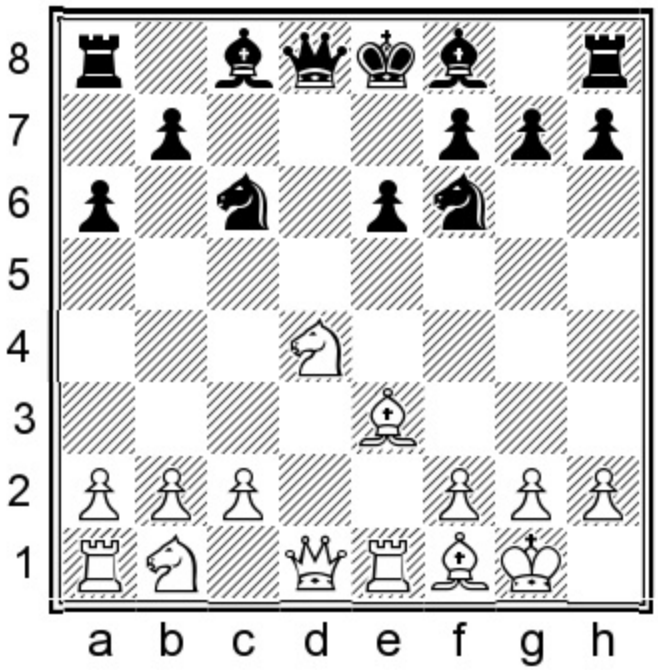


Position after: 19.b4±

We can follow the usual plan of expanding on the queenside. Black's f5-knight looks a bit misplaced, but it's hard to see how to improve his minor pieces.

B) 9...♗e7 10.c4 cxd4 [10...0-0 11.♘c3 cxd4 12.♘xd4 is another transposition.] 11.♘xd4 ♗d7 12.♘c3 We've transposed back to our mainline.

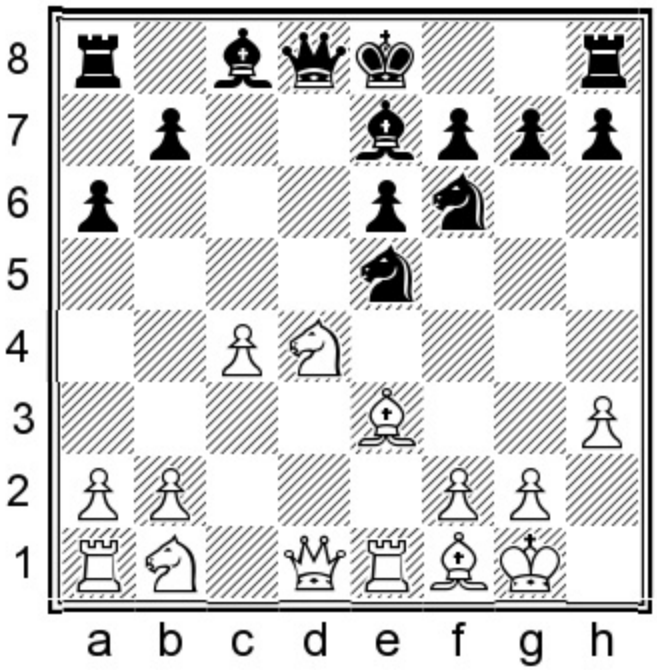
10.♘xd4



Position after: 10.♘xd4

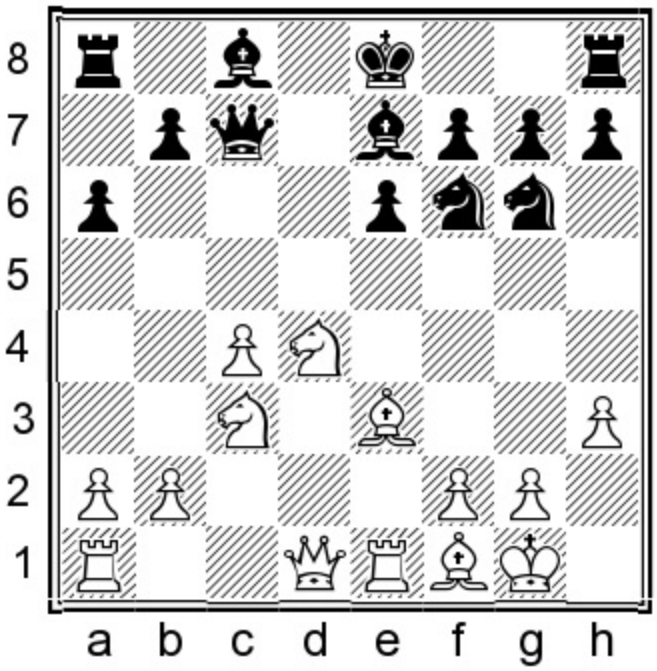
10...♗d7

A) 10...♘e5 11.h3! ♗e7 12.c4



Position after: 12.c4

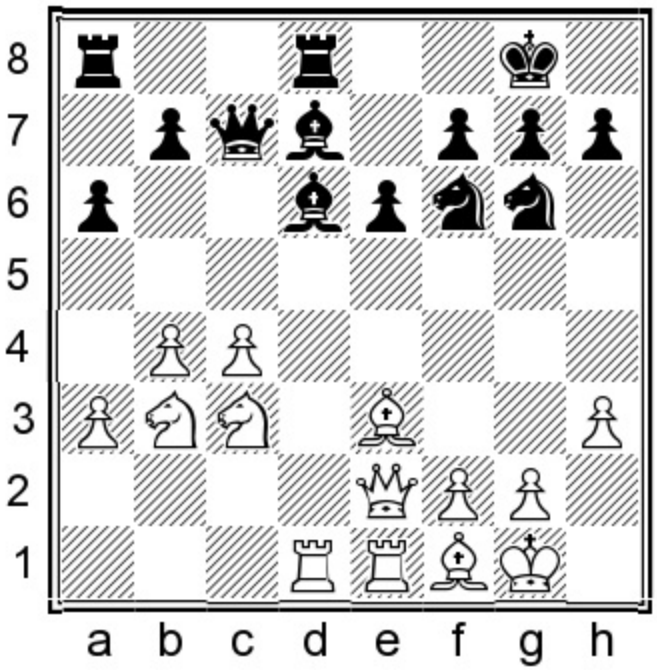
A1) 12...♘g6 Black wants to play ...♕c7, but needs to stop ♗f4 first. 13.♘c3 ♕c7



Position after: 13...♕c7

We have been following Topalov – Radjabov, Stavanger 2013. In the game, White failed to get anything out of the b6-weakness. To speed the process along, I suggest the improvement 14.b4! 0-0 15.c5 ♖d8 16.♕c2± Black will continue to suffer against our b4-c5 pawn structure.

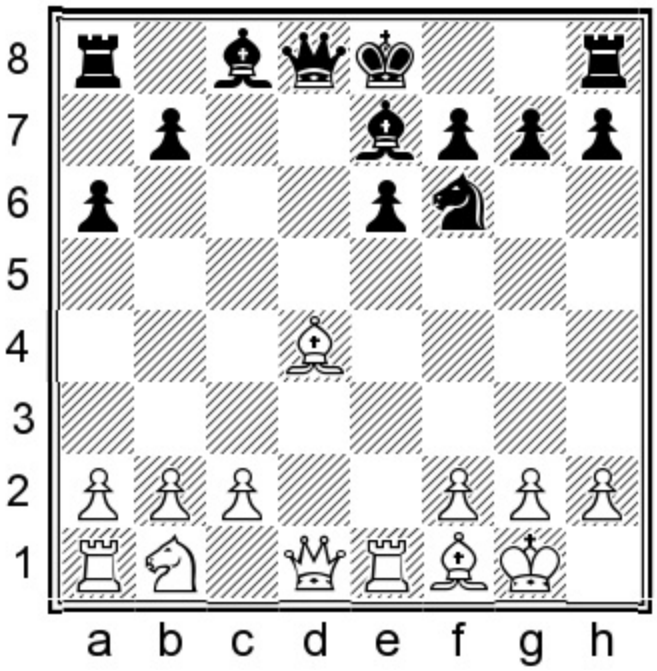
A2) 12...0-0 13.a3 ♕c7 14.♕e2 ♖d8 15.♘c3 ♘g6 16.b4 ♗d6 17.♖ad1 ♗d7 18.♘b3±



Position after: 18.♘b3±

Once again, we can choose when to play c4-c5. Alongside this plan, we also have typical ideas of g2-g3, ♗g2 and ♘a5 to continue pressuring the Black queenside.

B) 10...♘xd4 11.♗xd4 ♗e7

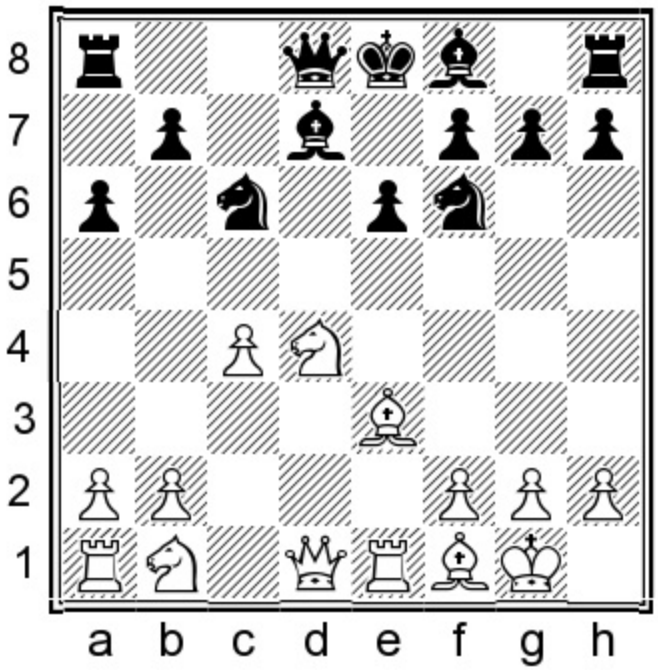


Position after: 11...♗e7

12.a4!?N An interesting alternative to 12.c4. Taking advantage of the fact that Black has already captured on d4, we can bring our b1-knight to c4 via a3. [12.c4 0-0 13.♘c3 ♗d7 should tranpose

back to 11...♘xd4 after 10...♗d7.] 12...0-0 13.♘a3 ♗d7 14.♘c4 ♗c6 15.♘b6 ♖b8 16.a5 ♕d6 17.♘c4 ♕d5 18.♘e5 ♖fd8 19.♗b6±

11.c4

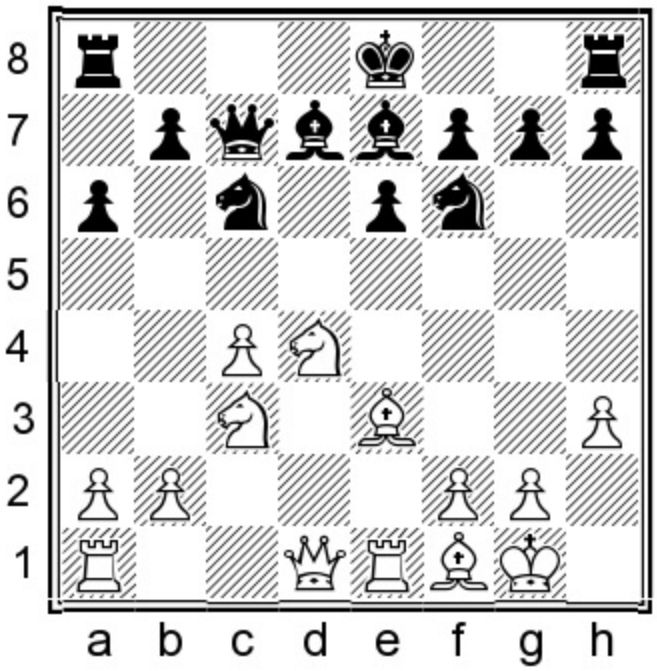


Position after: 11.c4

11...♘xd4

Probably the best time for Black to capture on d4 – in particular because it prevents us from playing ♘f3.

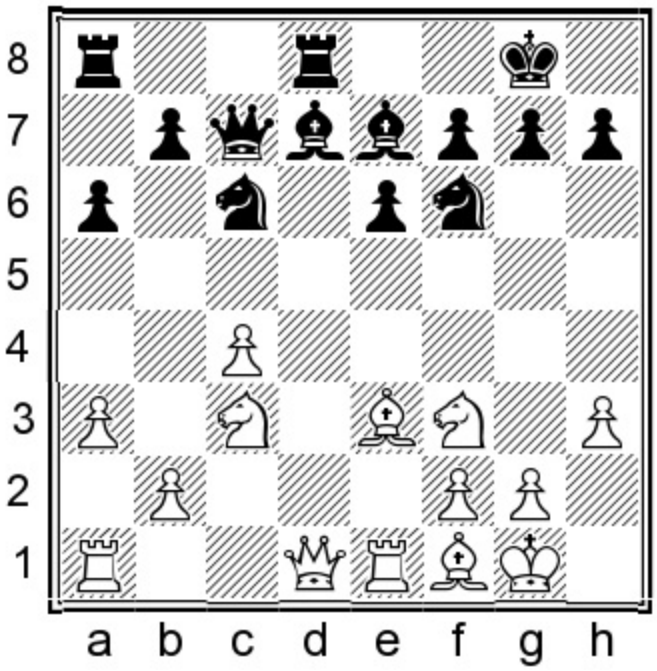
A) 11...♗e7 12.♘c3 ♕c7 13.h3



Position after: 13.h3

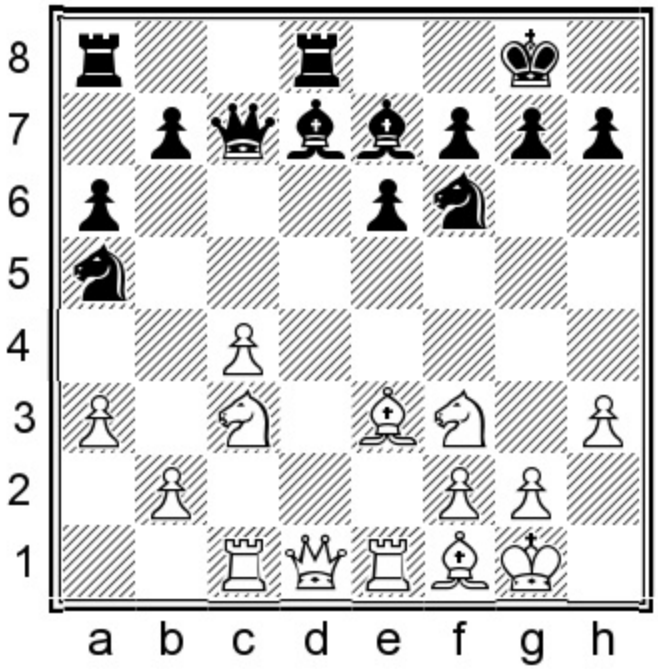
A1) The ship has sadly sailed if Black still wanted to capture on d4. 13...♘xd4 14.♗xd4 ♗c6 [14...0-0 15.♘d5!±] 15.♘d5! [15.♗e5 is also strong. 15...♕d8 16.♕c2 0-0 17.a3 a5 18.♘b5!? ♗xb5 19.cxb5 ♖c8 20.♕e2±] 15...exd5 16.♗xf6 gxf6 17.cxd5 0-0-0 18.♕e2 ♖xd5 19.♕xe7 ♕xe7 20.♖xe7 ♖d7 21.♖ae1± Black faces a miserable ending.

A2) 13...0-0 14.♘f3! ♖fd8 [14...♗d6 Exchanging dark-squared bishops doesn't upset White. 15.c5 ♗f4 16.♗xf4 ♕xf4 17.a3 ♖fd8 18.b4 ♗e8 19.♕c2± White converted his small edge to victory in Pessoa – Romm, ICCF email 2010.] 15.a3



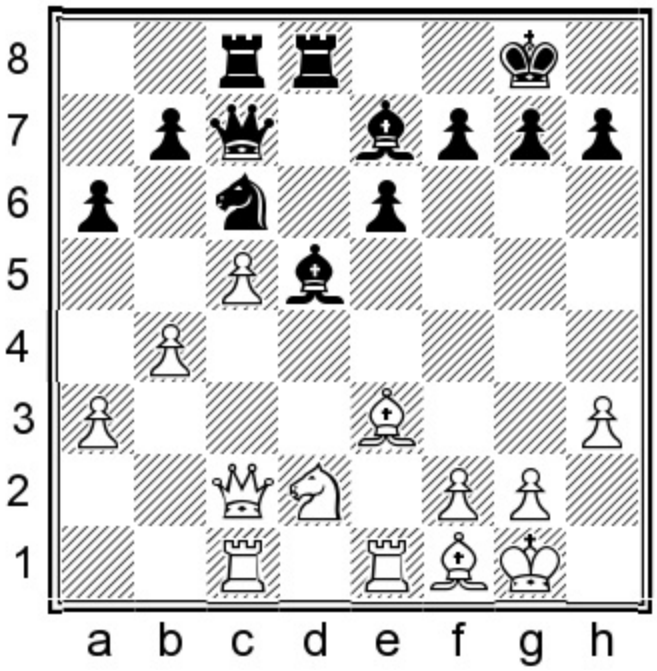
Position after: 15.a3

Even though we've kept both sets of knights on the board, our plan remains the same. In the next few moves, we'll play b2-b4 and c4-c5. Our f3-knight can be redirected to c4 via d2, and our f1-bishop as usual has the nice possibility of sitting on g2. It's important to see how to react if Black tries to interrupt our plans. 15...♘a5!? 16.♖c1!



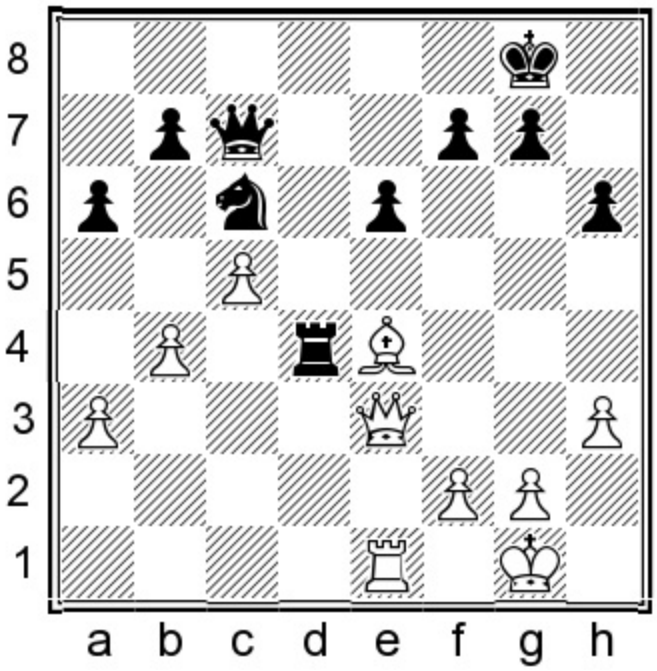
Position after: 16.♖c1!

16...♖ac8 [16...♘xc4?! 17.♗xc4 ♕xc4 18.♘e5 ♕c8 19.♗b6 ♖e8 20.♘d5± Black must concede an exchange, and probably the game.] 17.c5! Despite Black's best efforts, we can still enact our ideal queenside pawn structure. 17...♗c6 18.♘d2 ♘d5 19.♘xd5 ♗xd5 20.b4 ♘c6 21.♕c2



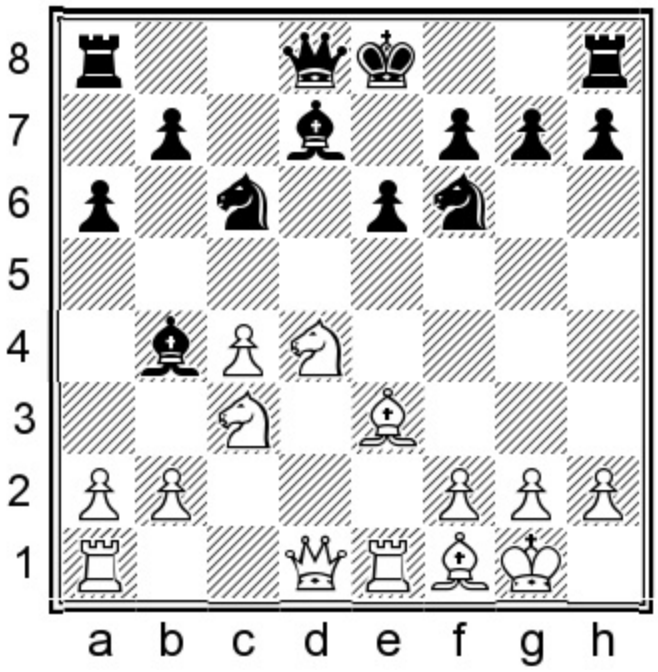
Position after: 21.♕c2

21...h6 [21...a5 22.b5! Black's a-pawn is in danger of becoming isolated. 22...♘e5 23.♕a4 ♘d7 24.b6 ♕e5 25.♕xa5±; 21...♗f6 22.♘c4 ♗xc4 23.♕xc4±] 22.♘c4 ♗xc4 23.♕xc4 ♗g5 24.♕e4! I don't want to recapture on e3 with the f-pawn. [24.♖cd1 ♖xd1 25.♖xd1 ♗xe3 26.fxe3 ♕e5 27.♕f4 a5=] 24...♖d5 25.♖cd1 ♗xe3 26.♕xe3 ♖cd8 27.♖xd5 ♖xd5 28.♗d3 ♖d4 29.♗e4± Black obviously has decent drawing chances, but White is always pressing.



Position after: 29.♗e4±

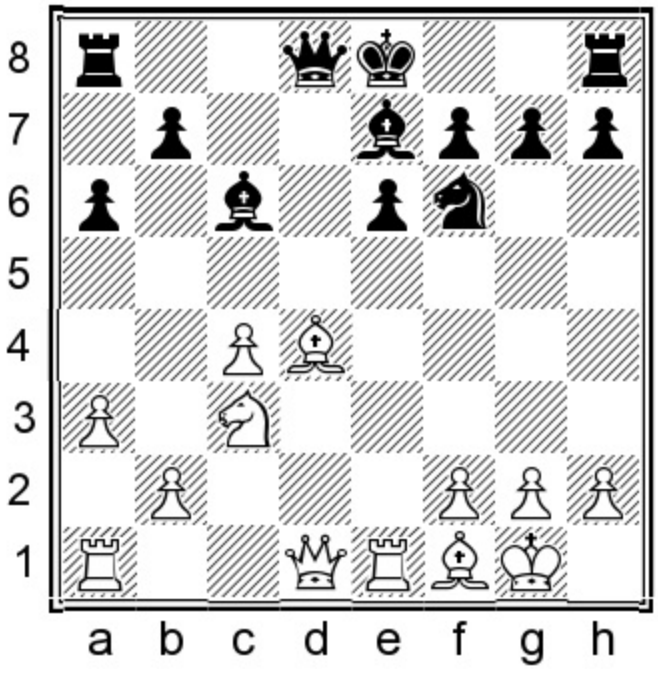
B) 11...♗b4 seems like a waste of time. 12.♘c3



Position after: 12.♘c3

12...0-0 [12...♗xc3?! is thematically wrong. 13.bxc3 0-0 14.♘b3±] 13.♖c1± followed by a2-a3 and b2-b4 with tempi.

12.♗xd4 ♗c6 13.♘c3 ♗e7 14.a3

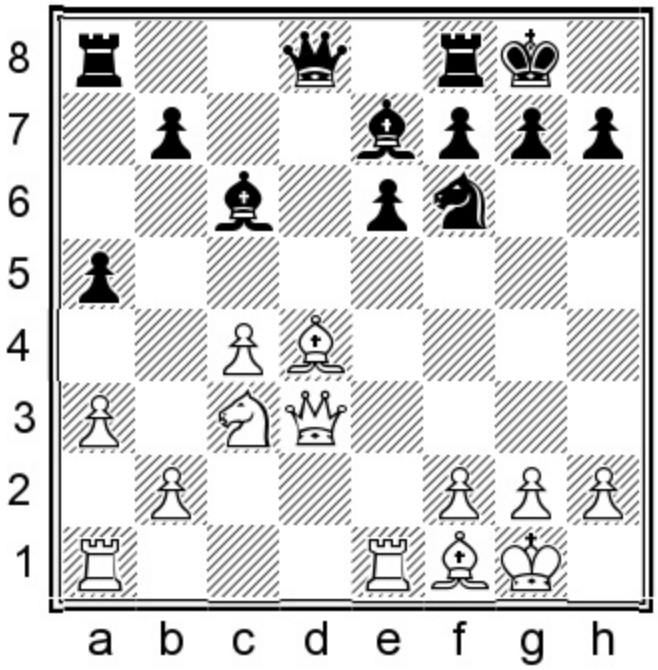


Position after: 14.a3

14...a5

14...0-0 If Black allows us to play 15.b4, we should have a very pleasant position – and correspondence games have scored extremely well from here. 15.b4 ♕d7 16.♕d2 ♘g4 17.♖ad1 ♕c7 18.g3 ♖fd8 19.♕e2 h5 20.h3 ♗f6 21.♗xf6 ♘xf6 22.♕e3±

15.♕d3 0-0

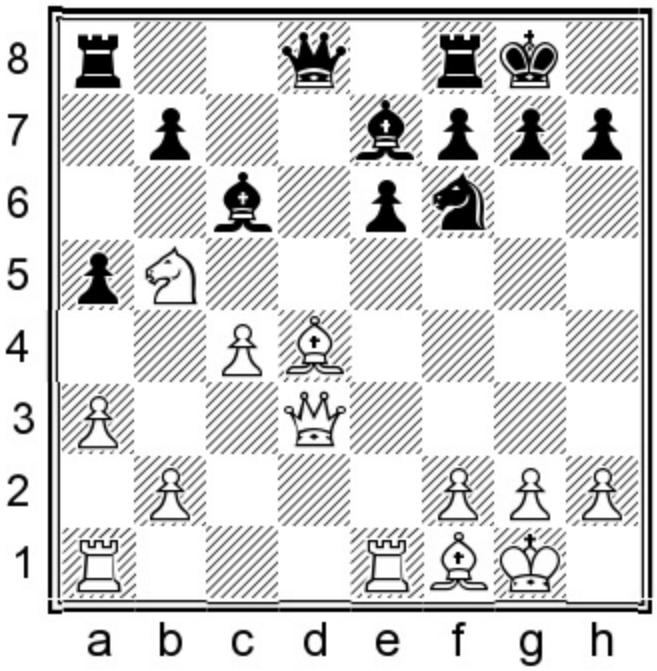


Position after: 15...0-0

16.♖ad1

This was played by Carlsen and the game is quite instructive in how we should slowly press from a slightly better position.

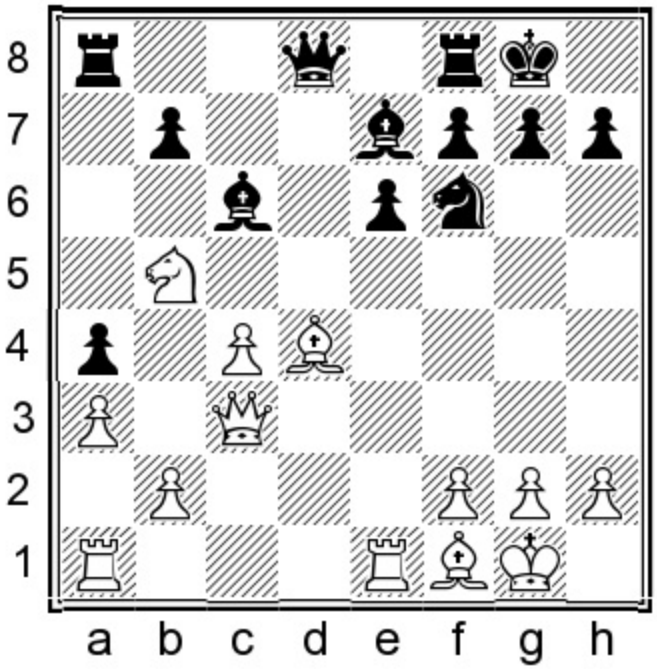
16.♘b5!? Attempting to exploit the weakness created from Black's 14th move. In my opinion, this is a slight improvement.



Position after: 16.♘b5!?

A) 16...♗xb5 17.cxb5 Despite our doubled-pawns, the bishop-pair gives us really good prospects on the queenside. 17...♖c8 18.♖ac1±

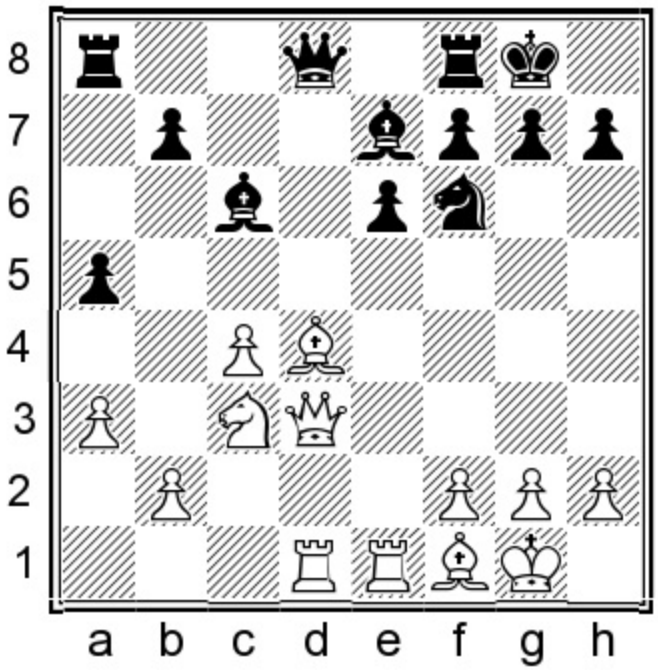
B) 16...a4 It's also logical for Black to fix our queenside structure. I can't deny that Black is extremely solid, but at some point it appears that he'll have to play ...♗xb5 and accept a worse position. For example: 17.♕c3



Position after: 17.♕c3

17...♕c8 [17...♕a5 18.♕g3!→] 18.♕e3 ♖d8 19.♖ad1±

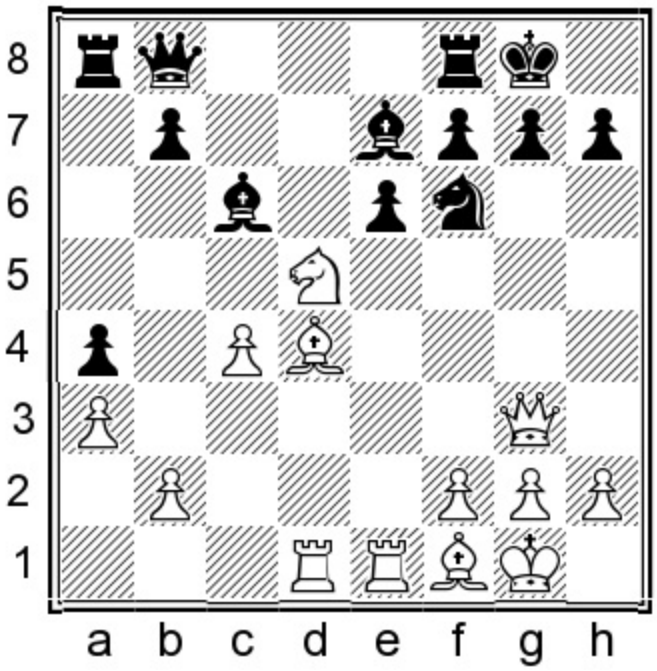
C) 16...♕c8 Black wants to bring his rook to d8, so it's probably correct to take our queen off the d-file too. 17.♕e3 ♗xb5 18.cxb5 ♘d5 19.♕f3 ♗f6 20.♗xf6 Even in positions with bishop vs knight, we're able to exert pressure. 20...♘xf6 21.g3±



Position after: 16.♖ad1

16...♕c7

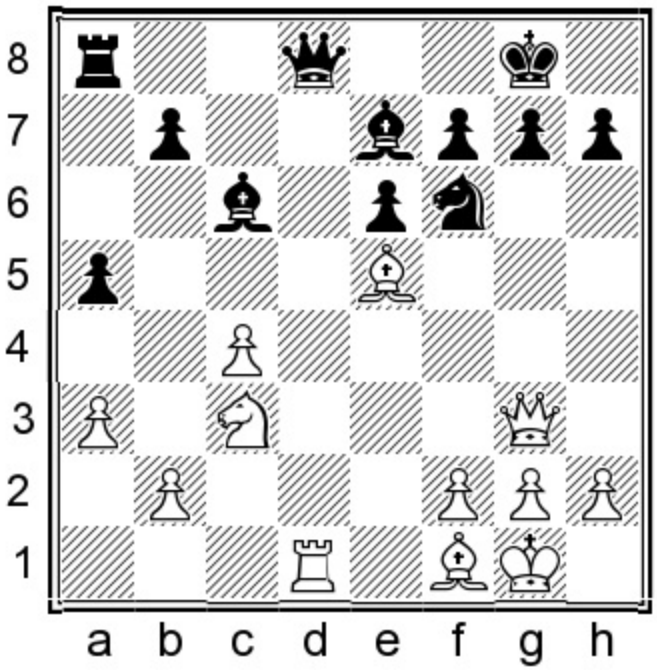
16...a4!? This was suggested by my friend Daniel Fernandez as an improvement. 17.♕g3! The big threat is ♘d5, so Black has to be very careful. 17...♕b8 18.♘d5!



Position after: 18.♘d5!

18...exd5 [18...♗xd5 19.♗e5 ♕d8 20.cxd5 exd5 21.♗c4 ♕b6 22.♗xd5±] 19.♖xe7 ♕xg3 20.hxg3 dxc4 21.♗xc4± White has the bishop-pair advantage and can continue to press without risk.

17.♗e5 ♕b6 18.♕g3 ♖fd8 19.♖xd8+ ♕xd8 20.♖d1



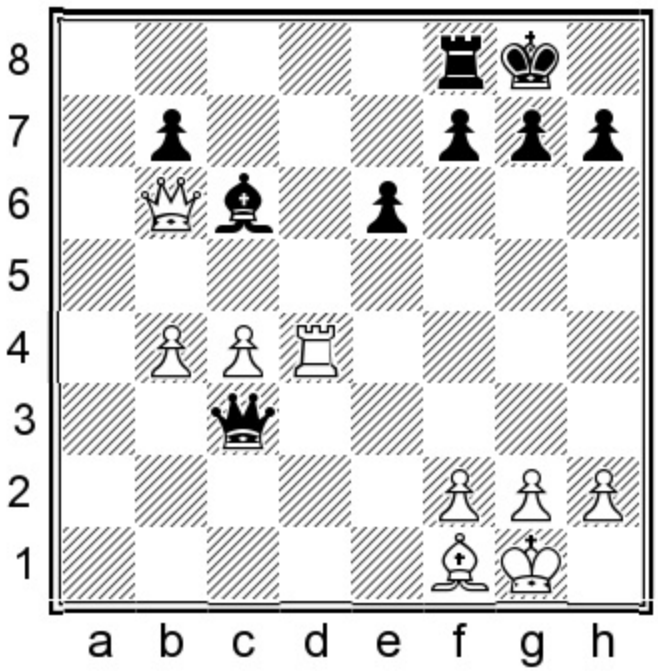
Position after: 20.♖d1

20...♕b6?

Black's queen gets slightly misplaced and White can embark on a kingside offensive.

20...♕f8! is the most accurate defence, when White is struggling to prove anything.

21.♗d4 ♕b3 22.♖d3 ♕c2 23.b4 axb4 24.axb4 ♘h5 25.♕e5 ♗f6 26.♕xh5 ♗xd4 27.♖xd4 ♕xc3 28.♕a5 ♖f8 29.♕b6



Position after: 29.♕b6

White's advantage stems from the fact that the b7-pawn is very weak, and his queenside majority is much further advanced than Black's hopes of pushing his kingside pawns.

29...e5 30.♖d1 g6 31.b5 ♗e4 32.♕f6 h5 33.h4 ♗f5 34.♖d5 ♕c1 35.♕xe5±

White converted with ease in Carlsen – Gelfand, London (Candidates Tournament) 2013.

<u>Conclusion to Chapter 12, 13 & 14</u>

5.♖e1 is comparatively less forcing than 5.d4, as we are essentially waiting to see how Black continues before revealing our hand. It's imperative to note that this system presents the possibilities of a wide array of different structures, but I hope that I've successfully demonstrated how we can attempt to play for an advantage in each scenario. If Black is too hasty in opening the centre he will be quickly punished, and this point is exemplified in subchapters a till c of Chapter 12. Then we encountered a transition to a French structure, where the key theme involved creating threats on both sides of the board. Black's g6-knight and ...a7-a6 pawn push were the main areas we aimed to exploit.

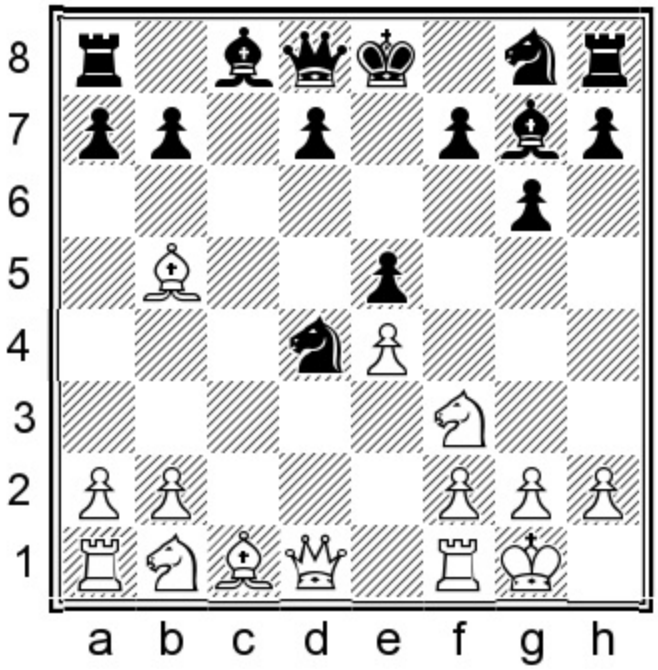
Next, 5...♘d4 (Chapter 13) was an attempt by Black to close the centre and prevent any ♗xc6 possibilities. However, in this case, we can rapidly attack the d4-square with a unique idea of pushing our queenside pawns. I think the idea of 9.b4 relegates this move to somewhere behind 5...a6 in

importance within this line. Finally, 5...a6 and 6...d5 (Chapter 14) is Black's best bet of achieving equality. Even so, we are still capable of causing Black problems by quickly expanding on the queenside, and the pawn set-up of a2-a3, b2-b4 and c2-c4-c5 is another key idea. Attempts to prevent this queenside structure with ...a6-a5 have the downside of weakening the b5-square.

Part V
3...g6

Chapter 15
4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 e5 with 7...♘xd4

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 e5 6.d4 cxd4 7.cxd4 ♘xd4



Chapter Guide

Chapter 15 – 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 e5 with 7...♘xd4

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 e5 6.d4! cxd4 7.cxd4 ♘xd4

a) 5...♕b6 alternative

b) 6...exd4 alternative

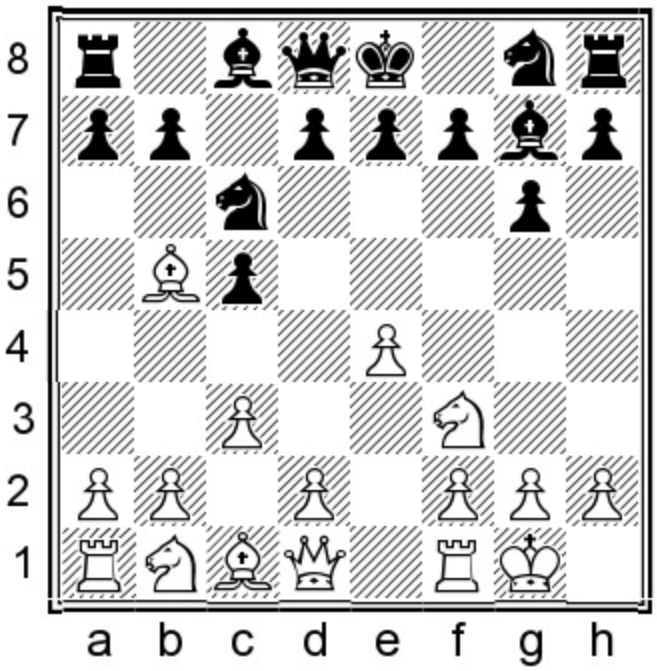
c) 8.♘xd4 exd4 9.♗f4! ♘e7

d) 8.♘xd4 exd4 9.♗f4! a6

e) 8.♘c3!?

a) 5...♕b6 alternative

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3



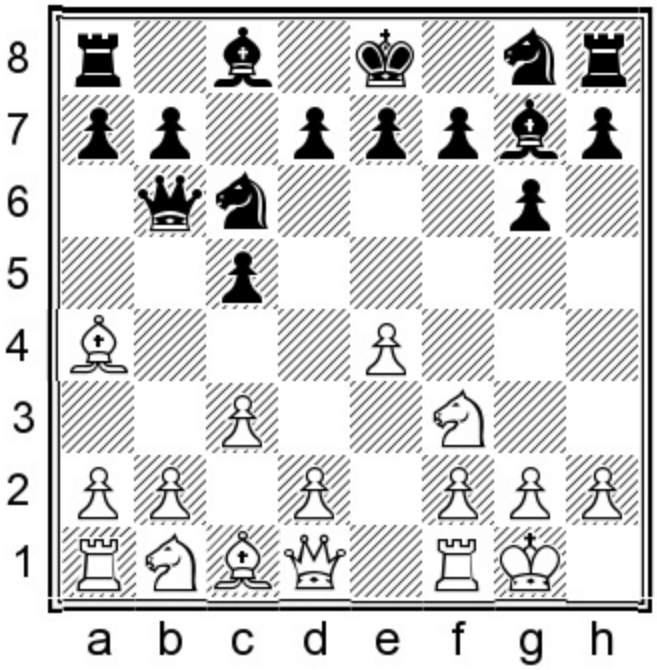
Position after: 5.c3

5...♕b6

This isn't a great move, but it's been played several times in practical games so it's necessary to check.

For the rest of this chapter we will be looking at the immediate 5...e5.

6.♗a4!



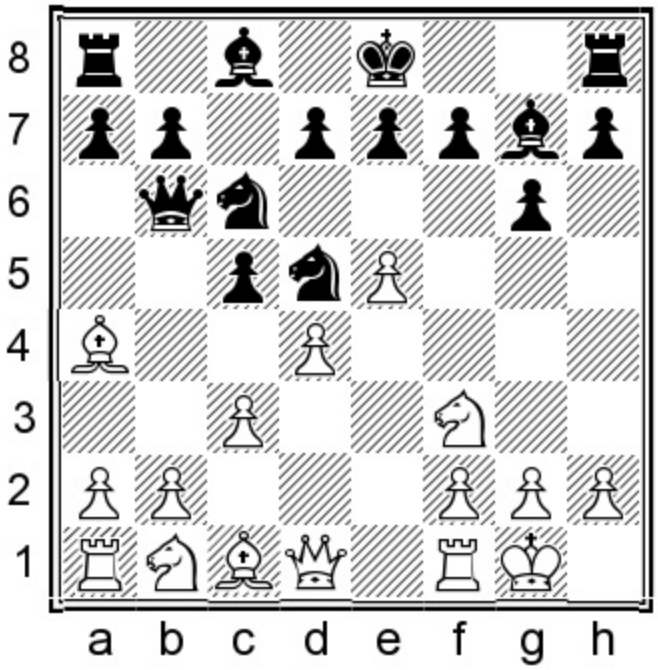
Position after: 6.♗a4!

The b6-queen is very awkwardly placed, and likely to be hit by a knight on c4 at some point.

6...e5

Obviously Black is trying to control the d4-square as much as possible, but that won't bother us at all.

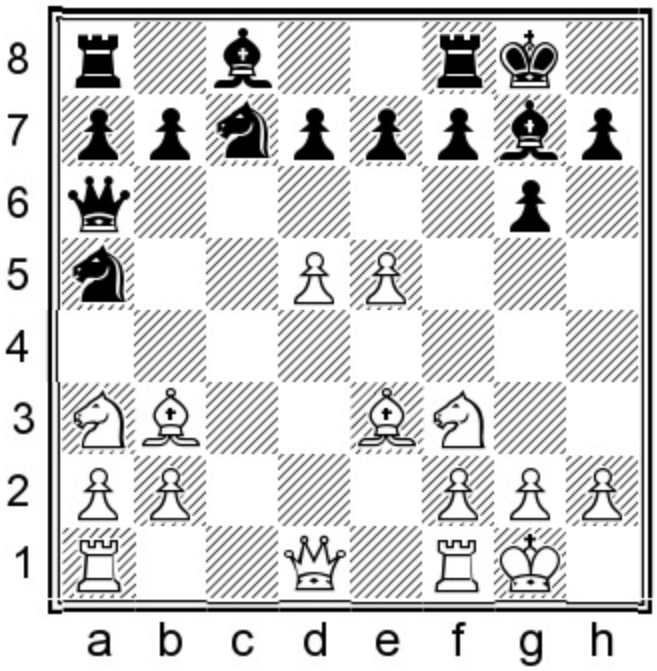
A) 6...♘f6 7.e5! Rather than ♖e1 as we'll see after 5...♘f6, here e4-e5 is very strong as the Black knight isn't able to drop to b6 anymore. 7...♘d5 [7...♘g4 8.d4+–] 8.d4



Position after: 8.d4

A1) 8...0-0 9.dxc5 ♕xc5 10.b4 ♕c4 11.♖e1 [11.♗b3? doesn't work as Black escapes with 11...♘xc3!] 11...♘c7 [11...d6 12.♗b3 ♘xc3 13.♕c2± Now ...♘e2+ isn't possible anymore.] 12.♗b3 ♕g4 13.h3 ♕h5 14.♖e4!+– Our e5-pawn completely destroys the activity of Black's pieces. Whilst ♖h4 is always on the cards, the simple ♘d2-f1-g3 is also a real threat.

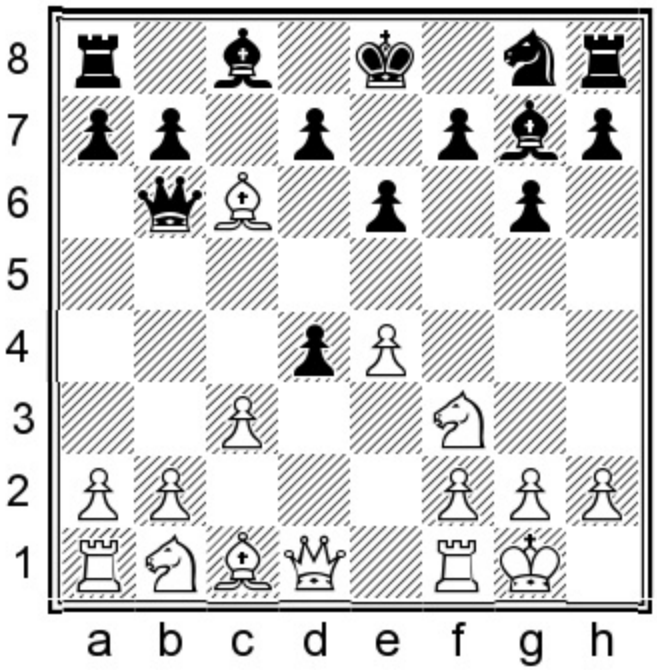
A2) 8...cxd4 9.♗b3! Here Black would really like to play ...♘b6, but that's not possible. 9...♘c7 10.cxd4 0-0 11.♗e3 ♘a5 12.d5 ♕a6 13.♘a3±



Position after: 13.♘a3±

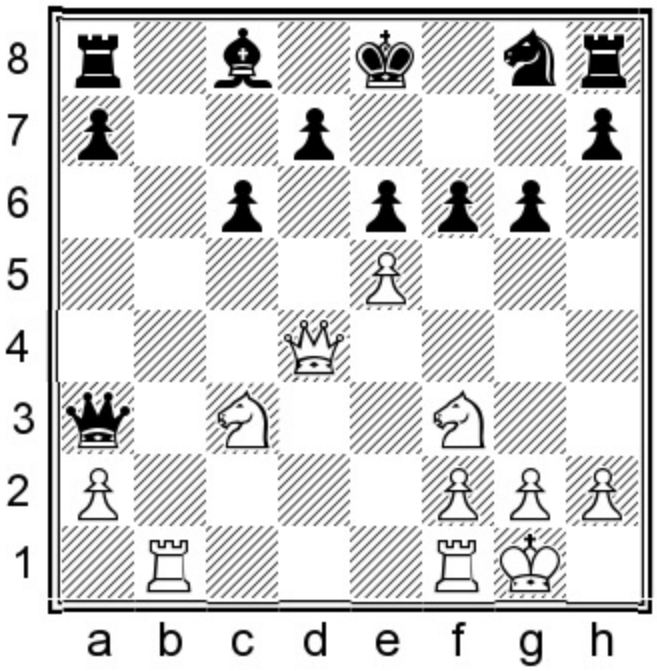
The Black queen is oddly misplaced, and White's central pawns epitomise our dominance.

B) 6...e6 This move simply creates more dark-squared weaknesses, and therefore we should open the position to exploit the weak squares. 7.d4! cxd4 8.♗xc6



Position after: 8.♗xc6

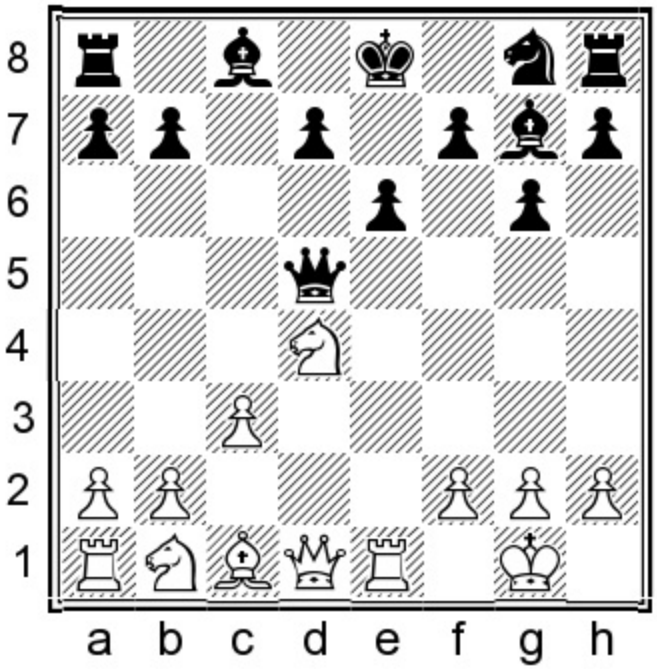
B1) 8...dxc3 9.♘xc3 bxc6 10.♗e3 ♕xb2 11.♗d4 Once the dark-squared bishops come off, the game is pretty much over. 11...♗xd4 12.♕xd4 f6 13.♖ab1 ♕a3 14.e5+–



Position after: 14.e5+−

B2) 8...dxc6 9.cxd4 ♘e7 10.♘c3 0-0 11.e5± Followed by ♘e4 and ♗g5.

B3) 8...♕xc6 9.♘xd4 ♕xe4 10.♖e1 ♕d5

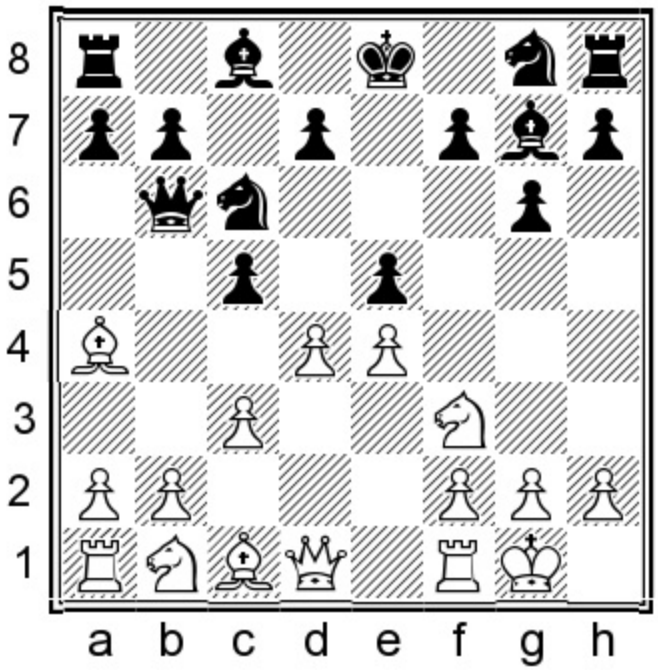


Position after: 10...♕d5

11.♘xe6! Reaching an ending which is hopeless for Black. 11...♕xd1 12.♘xg7+ ♔f8 13.♖xd1 ♔xg7 14.♘a3+–

B4) 8...bxc6 9.cxd4 ♘e7 10.♘c3 0-0 11.♖e1 It's pretty difficult to see what to do with Black, and our position plays itself – basically just to control the dark-squares with e4-e5 and ♘e4, and/or ♕d2 and ♗h6 e.g. 11...d6 12.♗f4 ♖d8 13.♕d2±

7.d4!

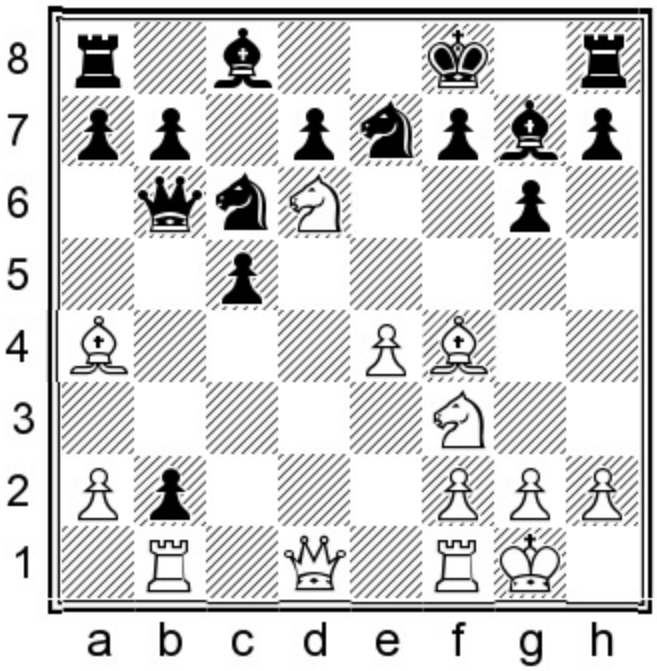


Position after: 7.d4!

The only way to fully exploit the weaknesses that Black has created.

7...cxd4

7...exd4 8.♘a3! Highlighting just how misplaced the b6-queen is. 8...♘ge7 9.♗f4 dxc3 10.♘c4 cxb2 11.♘d6+ ♔f8 12.♖b1+–

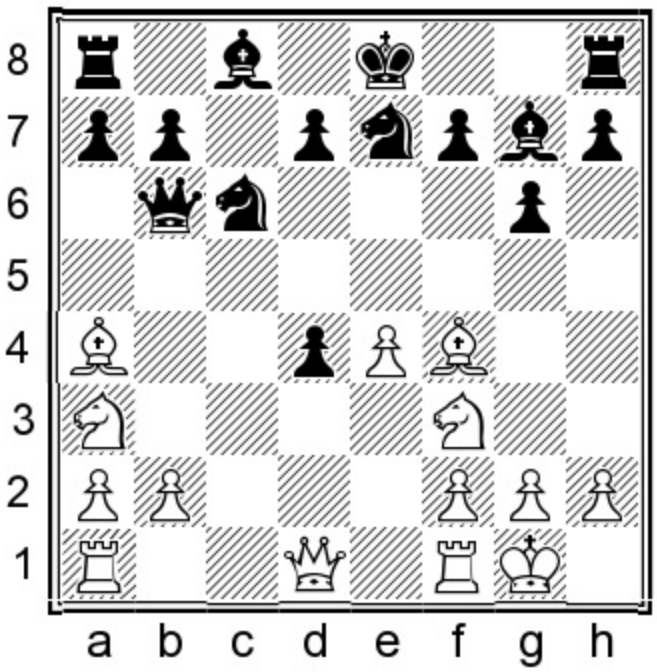


Position after: 12.♖b1+−

Followed by ♗b3 – our d6-knight renders the Black position completely passive.

8.cxd4 ♘xd4

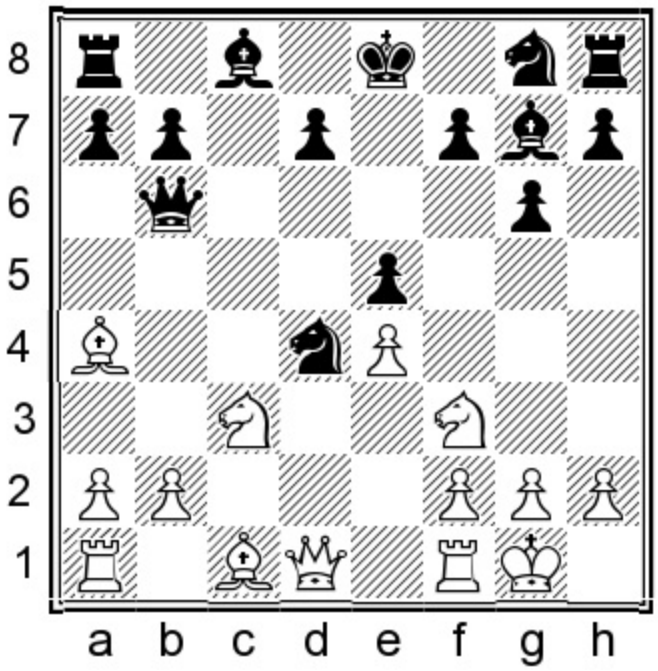
8...exd4 9.♘a3 ♘ge7 10.♗f4 Our typical ♗d6 ideas in this line are accompanied by possibilities of ♘b5 and ♗c7, trying to trap the Black queen.



Position after: 10.♗f4

10...0-0 11.♗d6 a6 [11...♖e8 12.♘b5+– Black will be losing some material.] 12.♗b3!+– Far stronger than capturing the exchange with ♗xc6, and the power of the two bishops on d6 and b3 is clearly demonstrated in all of the lines after 5...e5.

9.♘c3!



Position after: 9.♘c3!

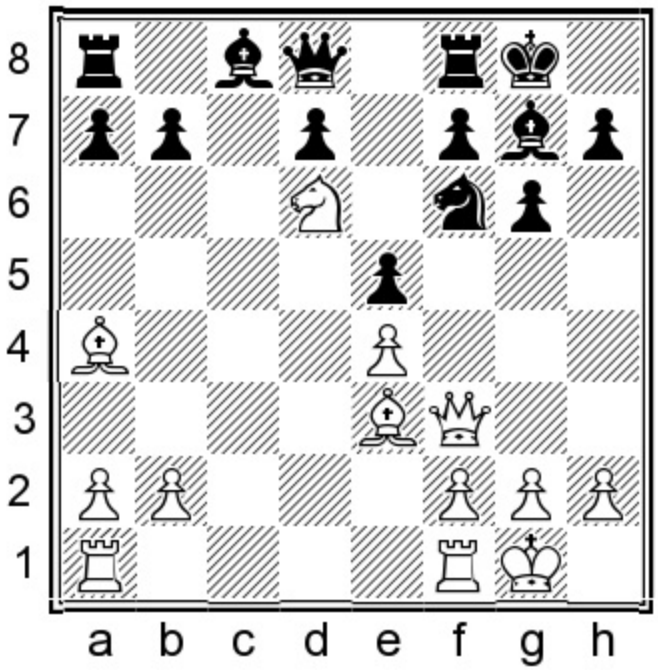
This time we can utilise the weak d5-square to attack the queen and capitalise on our initiative.

9...♘xf3+

9...♘e7 10.♗g5 f6 11.♗e3 ♘xf3+ 12.♕xf3 ♕d8 13.♗b3+– Black is never going to castle.

10.♕xf3 ♘f6 11.♗e3 ♕d8 12.♘b5 0-0 13.♘d6+–

For just a pawn our pieces suppress all of Black's play, and the inevitable centralisation of the rooks will undoubtedly win some material.

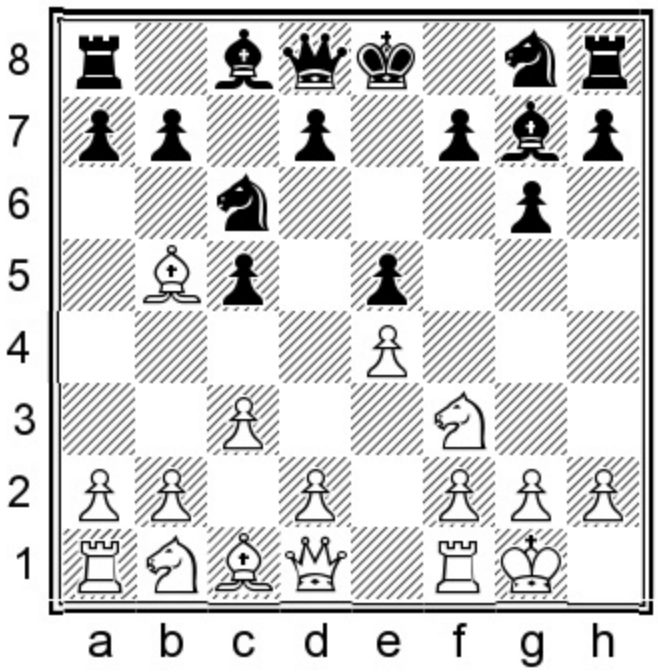


Position after: 13.♘d6+−

b) 6...exd4 alternative

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 e5

5...♘f6 is the other main move, and will be examined in Chapter 17.

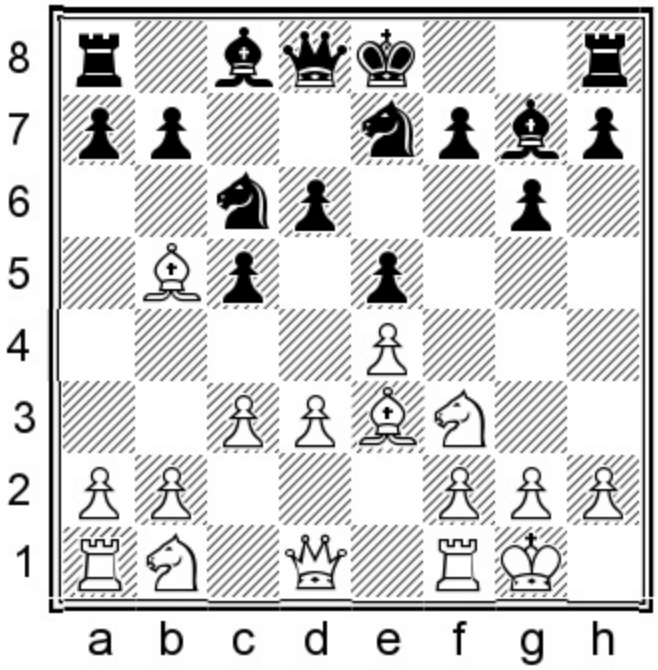


Position after: 5...e5

6.d4!

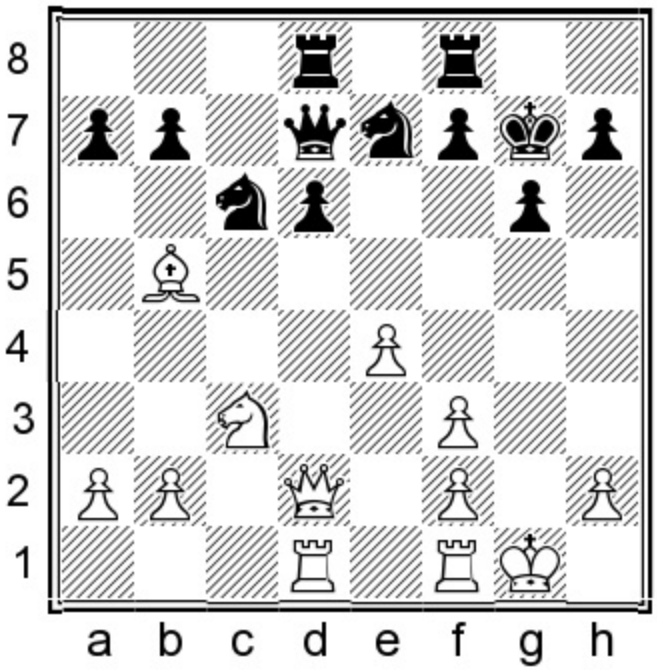
This pawn sacrifice is the only feasible way to aim to play for any possible advantage, or to cause Black any problems. Black has many different ways to respond, but has to be extremely careful not to be significantly worse.

6.d3 This slower attempt has also been tried, aiming to play ♗e3 before d2-d4 to avoid sacrificing a pawn. However, the line shows that this shouldn't cause Black any problems. 6...♘ge7 7.♗e3 d6



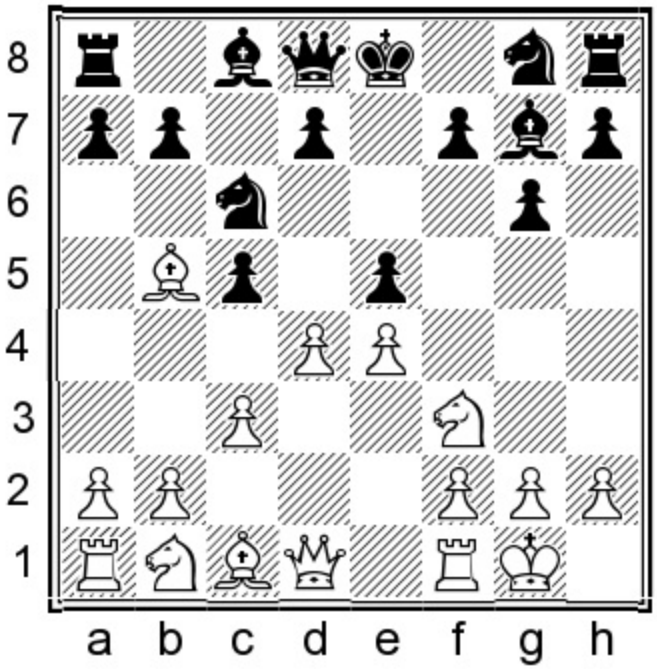
Position after: 7...d6

8.d4 [8.h3 is too slow. 8...0-0 9.d4 cxd4 10.cxd4 f5!∞ Suddenly Black has an initiative.] 8...exd4 9.cxd4 ♗g4 More accurate than the usual 9...0-0. 10.♘c3 ♗xf3 11.gxf3 cxd4 12.♗xd4 0-0 13.♗xg7 ♔xg7 14.♕d2 ♕d7 15.♖ad1 ♖ad8



Position after: 15...♖ad8

In my opinion, Black is absolutely fine here. The d6-pawn is hardly a weakness, and at some point Black has a nice idea of playing ...f7-f6 and ...g6-g5 followed by ...♘g6. This takes advantage of White's seemingly weak dark-squares on the kingside.



Position after: 6.d4!

6...exd4

The more natural 6...cxd4 will be examined shortly.

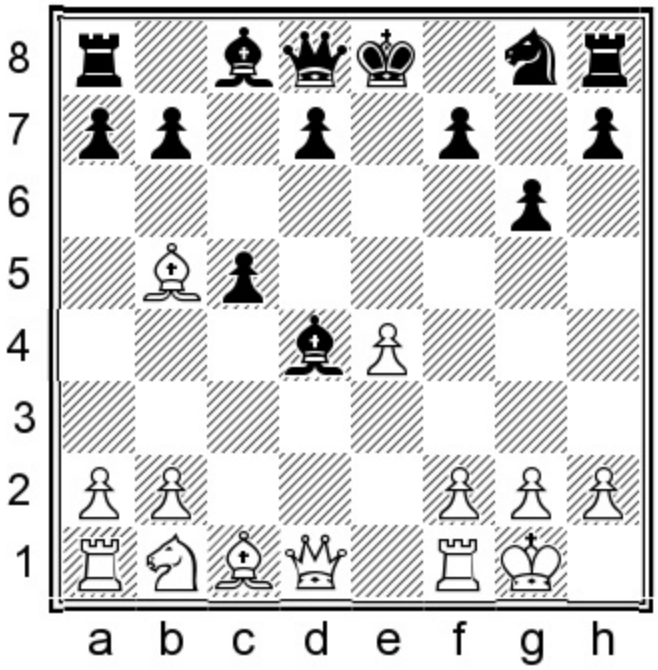
7.cxd4 ♘xd4

7...cxd4 will transpose to 6...cxd4

8.♘xd4 ♗xd4?

Here Black accepts the pawn sacrifice without 'ruining' his own pawn structure. However, the bishop is misplaced on d4 and furthermore, we still have the c3-square for our knight to utilise.

8...cxd4 again transposes to the lines after 6...cxd4

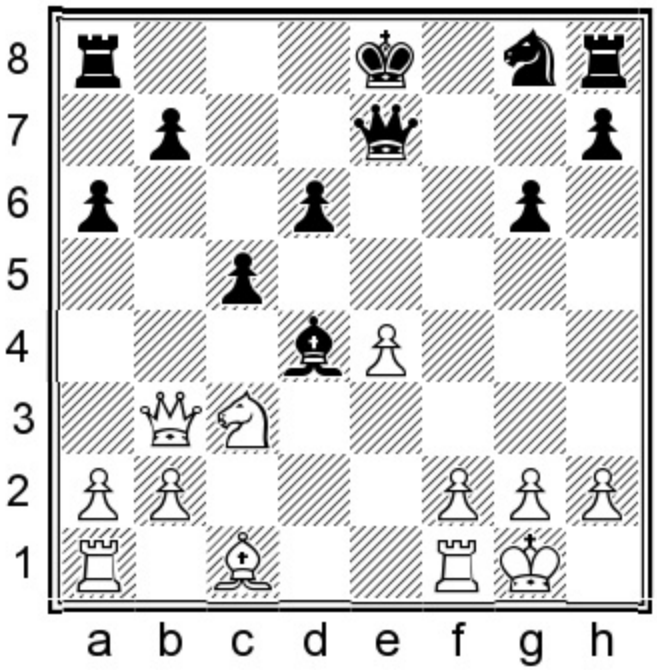


Position after: 8...♗xd4?

9.♗e3!N

The same thematic idea that we saw in our analysis after 3...e6.

9.♘c3 is simpler, and also achieves a pleasant position. 9...a6 [9...♘e7 allows 10.♗h6 a6 11.♗a4 b5 12.♗b3→ I don't really know where Black is planning to castle, and we can also probe on the queenside with moves like a2-a4.] 10.♗c4 d6 Black hasn't allowed ♗c1-h6 for the time being, but he still faces a big problem on f7. 11.♕b3 ♗e6 12.♗xe6 fxe6 13.♕xe6+ ♕e7 14.♕b3±

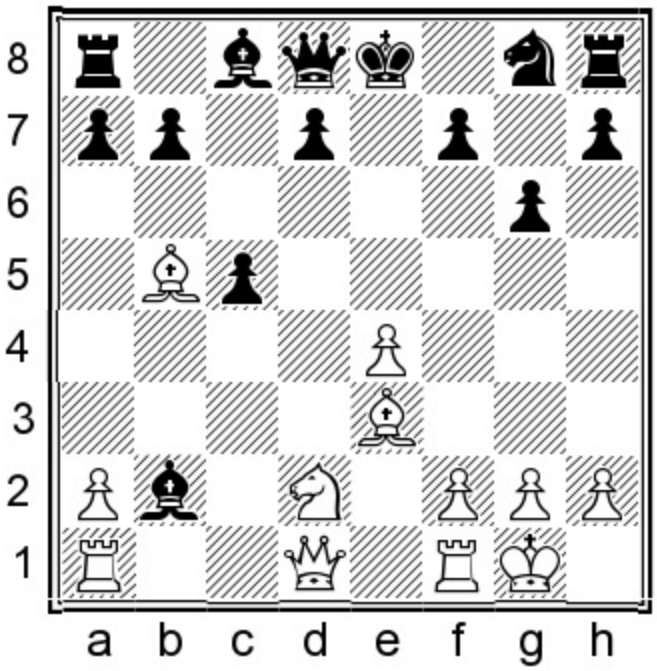


Position after: 14.♕b3±

This time Black has light-squared problems everywhere and his king still faces a dilemma about how to get safe.

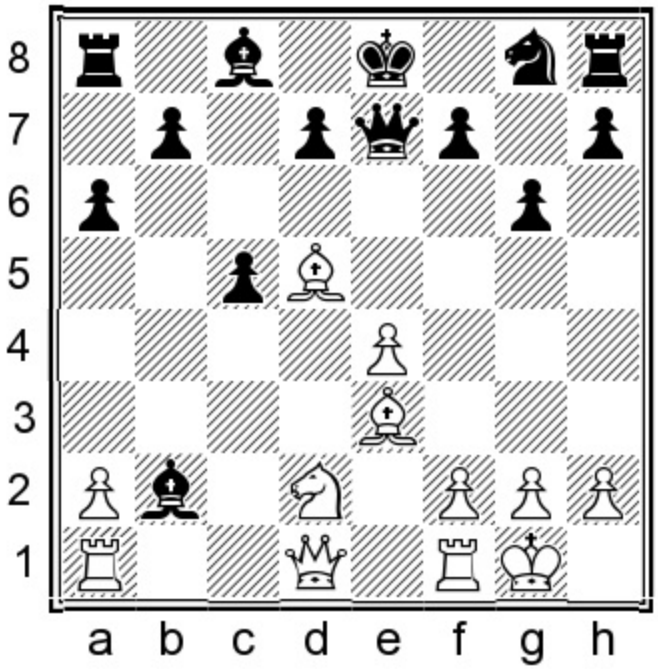
9...♗xe3

A) 9...♗xb2? It's quite obviously just going to be a disaster for Black if he continues to neglect development in order to capture more material. 10.♘d2



Position after: 10.♘d2

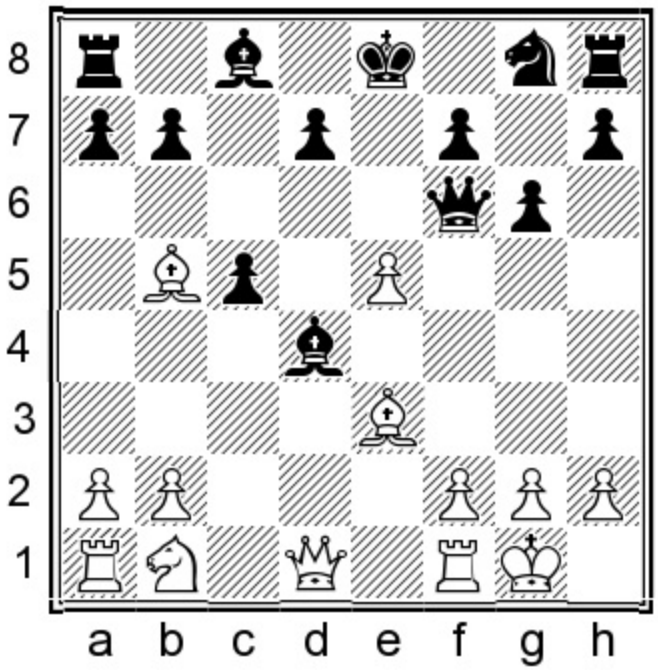
10...a6 [10...♗xa1 11.♕xa1 f6 12.♘c4+–] 11.♗c4 ♕e7 [11...d6 12.♗xf7+ ♔xf7 13.♕b3+ ♔g7 14.♕xb2+ ♕f6 15.♕b6+– Black is completely lost as his king will never be safe.] 12.♗d5!



Position after: 12.♗d5!

Making room for the knight to jump to c4. 12...♘f6 13.♘c4 ♗xa1 14.♕xa1 h6 15.♗xc5+– By playing 9...♗xb2, Black traded his best defensive piece for our a1-rook – with evidently devastating consequences.

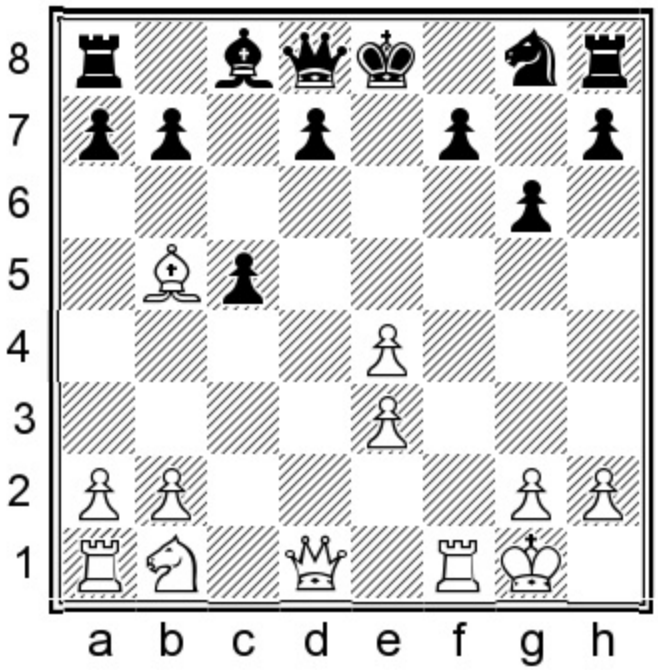
B) 9...♕f6 10.e5!



Position after: 10.e5!

Sacrificing another pawn to open lines. 10...♗xe5 [10...♕xe5 11.♖e1 ♔f8 12.♘c3+– Continuing with logical attacking moves will prove our already decisive advantage.] 11.♘d2 ♘e7 12.♘e4 ♕b6 13.a4 0-0 14.♗xc5 ♕e6 15.f4 ♗xb2 16.♖e1! As always, we don't really care if Black exchanges his dark-squared bishop for our a1-rook. 16...a6 17.♖b1!+– Followed by ♘g5 and ♗xe7, our advantage is once again decisive.

10.fxe3



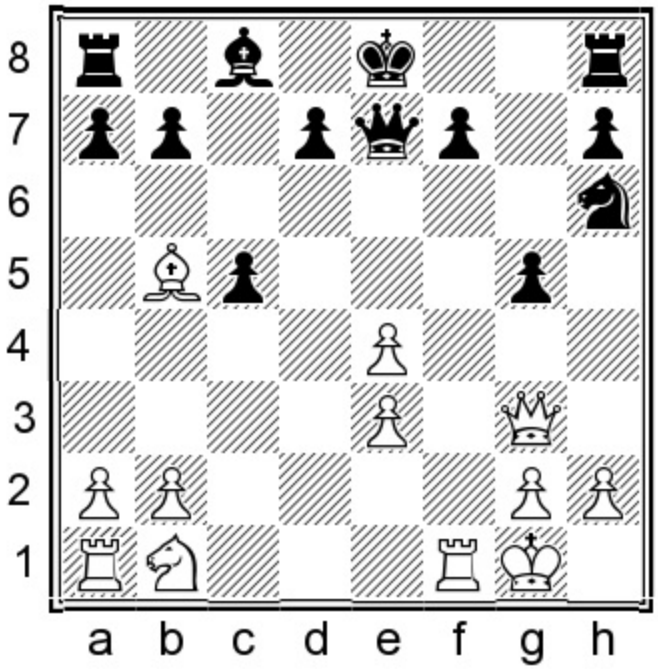
Position after: 10.fxe3

White is a pawn down, and has isolated doubled pawns. Despite this, there are far more positives in our position. Black's development is virtually non-existent, and as a result the f7-pawn is a big target. Moreover, our doubled pawns can translate into an advantage. We control more central squares, and the opening of the f-file activates our f1-rook. If we get the chance, we can hope to push e4-e5 in order to further exploit Black's dark-squared weaknesses – before possibly jumping ♘c3-e4 with our knight.

10...a6

It makes the most sense to divert the bishop away from b5 before playing ...♘h6, so that ...d7-d6 is possible at any moment to stop White playing e4-e5.

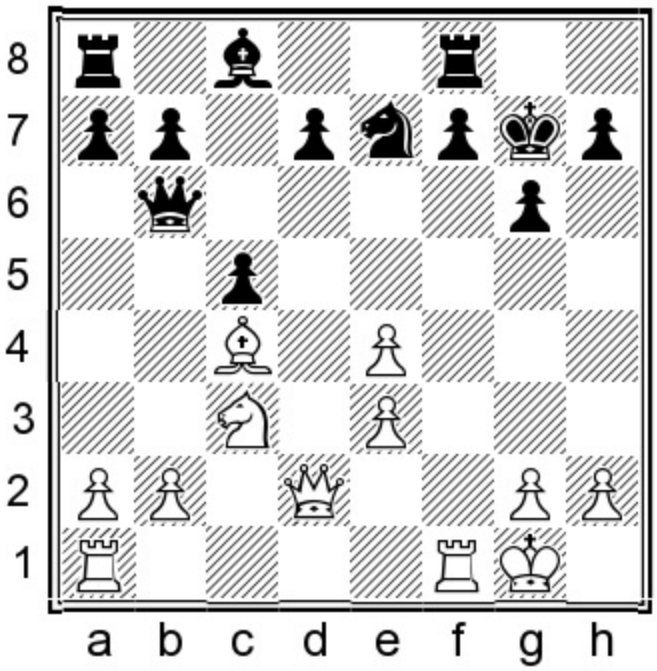
A) 10...♘h6? 11.♕d6 ♕e7 12.♕f4 g5 13.♕g3



Position after: 13.♕g3

13...a6 [13...0-0 14.e5 a6 15.♗e2 Followed by ♖f1-f6 or ♘c3-d5, which will be decisive.] 14.♘c3!+– Emphasizing exactly why it's really important to play ...a7-a6 before ...♘g8-h6.

B) 10...♘e7 11.♘c3 ♕b6 [11...0-0 12.♕d6 b6 13.♖f6+– After we play ♖af1 and ♗c4, Black can resign.] 12.♗c4 0-0 13.♕d2 ♔g7 [13...d6 14.♖f6+–]

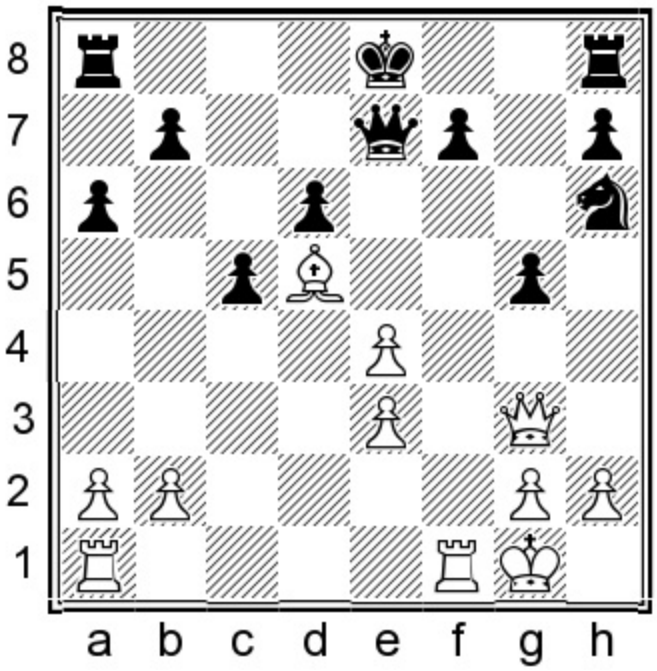


Position after: 13...♔g7

14.♖xf7+! ♖xf7 15.♗xf7 ♔xf7 16.♖f1++– ♕f2 on the next move will end the game.

11.♗c4 ♘h6 12.♕f3!

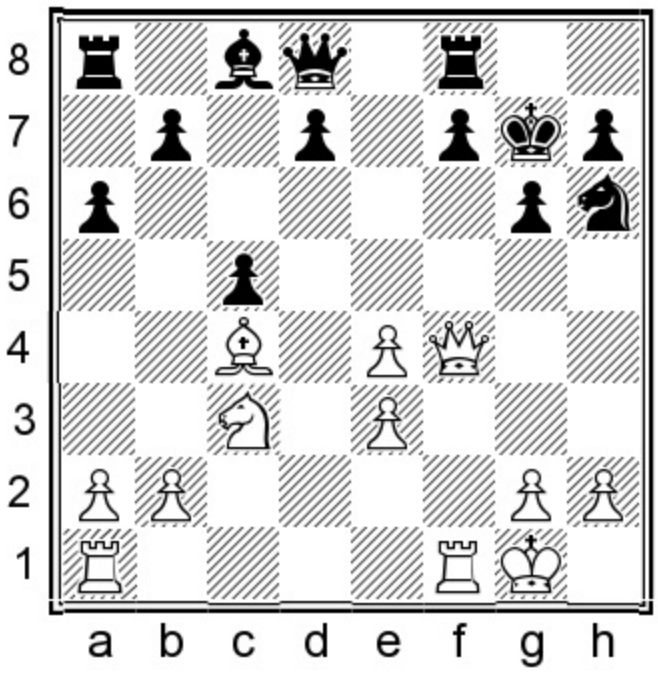
The difference compared to 10...♘h6 can be seen in the following variation, where Black is able to play ...d7-d6 to stop us playing e4-e5: 12.♕d6 ♕e7 13.♕f4 g5 14.♕g3 d6 15.♘c3 ♗e6 16.♘d5 ♗xd5 17.♗xd5±



Position after: 17.♗xd5±

However, White still has a fantastic position, and can continue by doubling rooks on the f-file.

12...0-0 13.♕f4 ♔g7 14.♘c3



Position after: 14.♘c3

Now the problem with ...d7-d6 is that ♖ad1 will simply win a pawn.

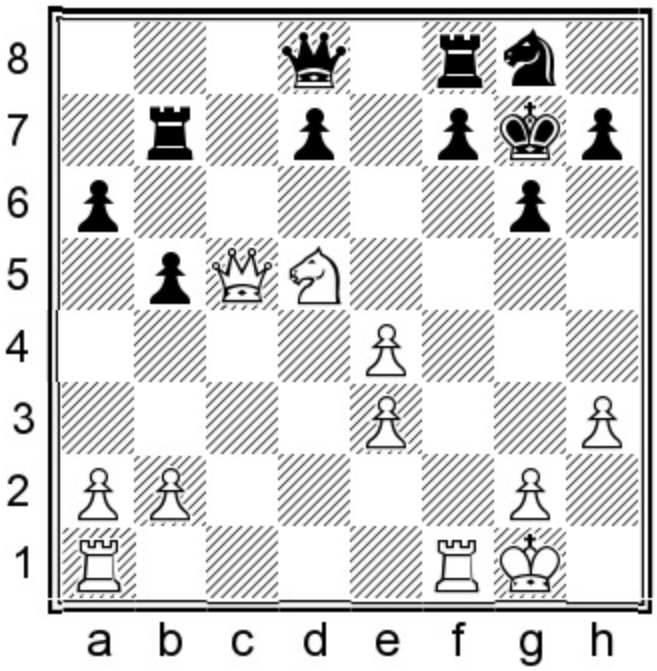
14...b5 15.♗d5 ♖a7 16.♕d6

We're still a pawn down but Black's pieces are all over the place, and we can continue to cramp his position.

16...♖c7 17.h3!

Controlling the h6-knight and further restricting Black's activity.

17...♗b7 18.♗xb7 ♖xb7 19.♘d5 ♘g8 20.♕xc5±

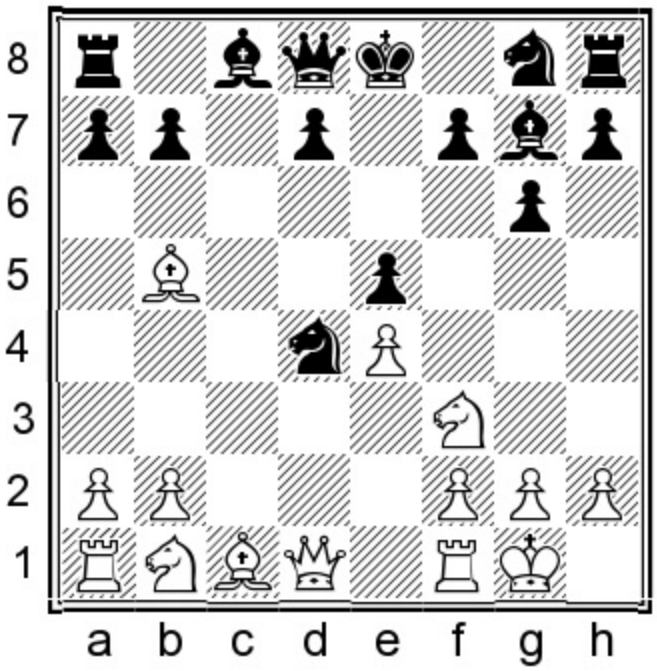


Position after: 20.♕xc5±

We've regained the pawn, and Black's position is probably already indefensible.

c) 8.♘xd4 exd4 9.♗f4! ♘e7

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 e5 6.d4! cxd4 7.cxd4 ♘xd4



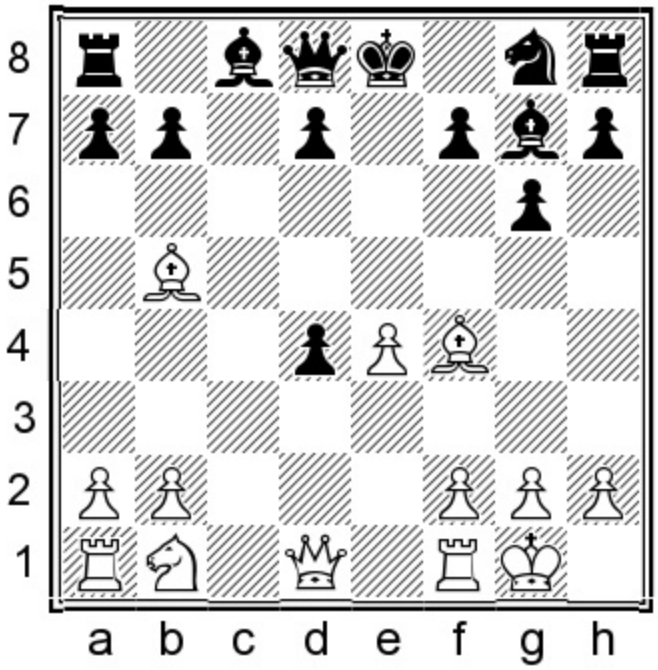
Position after: 7...♘xd4

Exchanging knights should be beneficial for White, as it facilitates a future advance of f2-f4 and e4-e5.

8.♘xd4

8.♘c3!? should be considered as well (see the last subchapter).

8...exd4 9.♗f4!



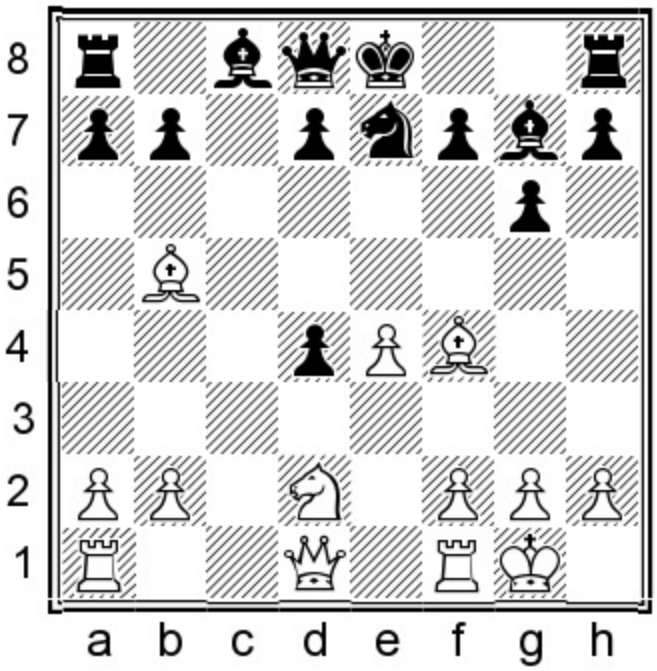
Position after: 9.♗f4!

White's main plan in positions where Black has captured on d4 with a pawn is to place his dark squared bishop on d6 and attempt to squeeze Black's position. Our main compensation derives from our fundamentally more active pieces. Having traded the f3-knight, we can aim to solidify the bishop on d6 by pushing e4-e5 at some point. The bishop on d6 will cause Black problems as he tries to develop, and his best bet is to try and remove it as quickly as he can.

9...♘e7

The most popular move. It makes sense to leave the bishop on b5 for the time being, as 10.♗d6 would be a mistake due to the possibility of 10...♕b6!

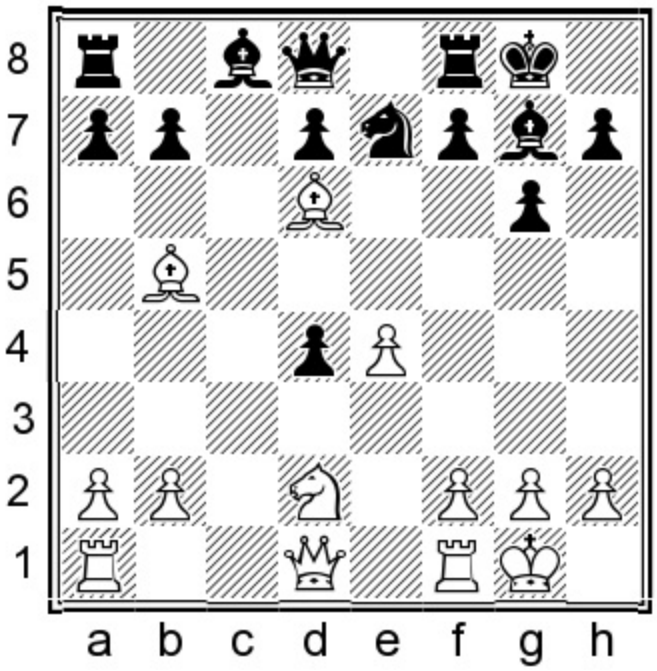
10.♘d2



Position after: 10.♘d2

10...a6

10...0-0 11.♗d6

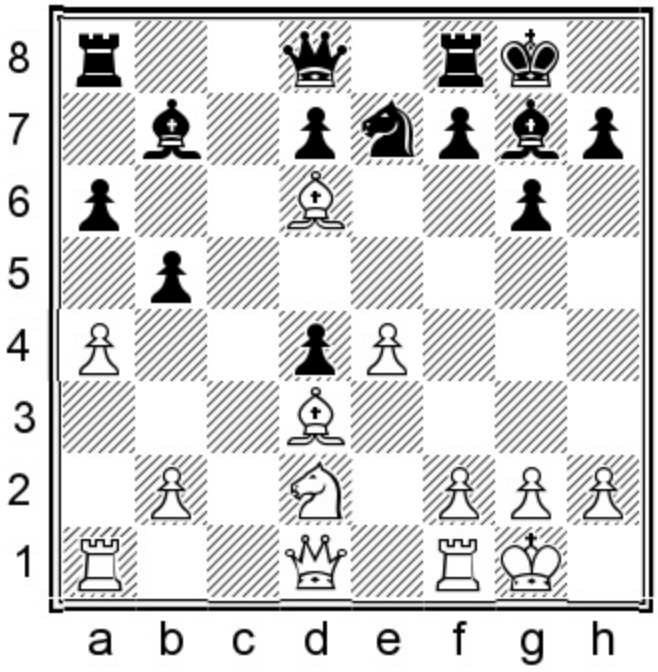


Position after: 11.♗d6

Removing the bishop on d6 is still Black's immediate concern, and he can choose between three plans. He can either try to play ...♖a6, or ...♗b7 and ...♘c8. He also has the option of ...♖e8-e6. We'll

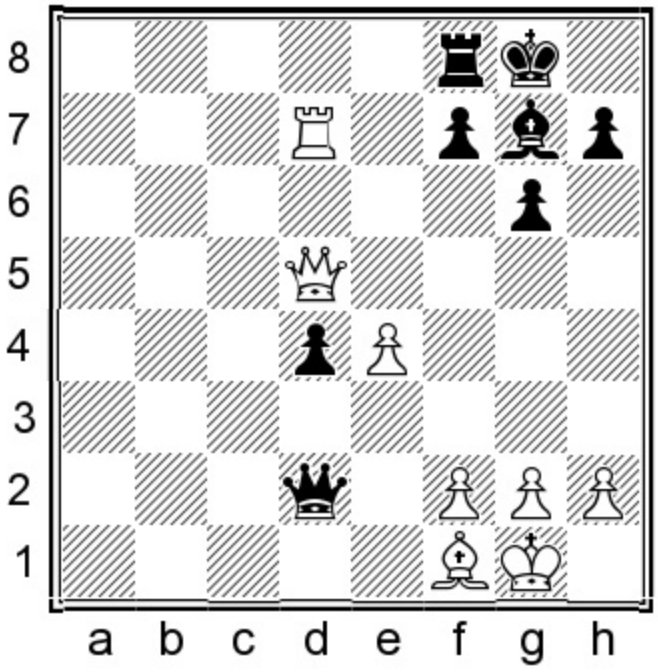
look at all three options and see how we can maintain our initiative.

A) 11...a6 12.♗d3N As always in lines after 7...♘xd4, I prefer this move to 12.♗c4 as Black can't win a tempo with ...b7-b5. 12...b5 Now Black threatens ...♗b7 and ...♘c8, but we can make use of our tempo gained by playing ♗d3 instead of ♗c4. 13.a4! ♗b7 Black should return the pawn, but it won't improve his activity.



Position after: 13...♗b7

For instance, see this sample line: 14.axb5 axb5 15.♕b3 ♖e8 16.♕xb5 ♘c8 17.♕xb7 ♖xa1 18.♖xa1 ♘xd6 19.♕d5 ♕b6 20.♖a6 ♕xb2 21.♖xd6 ♕xd2 22.♖xd7 ♖f8 23.♗f1±

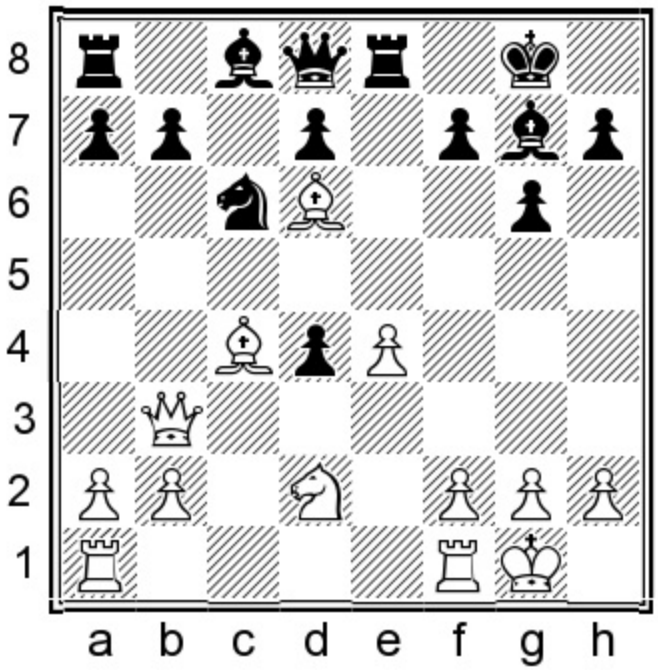


Position after: 23.♗f1±

We've reached an opposite coloured bishop middlegame/endgame where only White can be better. Black is tied down to the f7-pawn, and we can continue with h2-h4 and g2-g3, before playing ♗f1-c4 at the right moment. At some point Black will have to sacrifice a pawn with ...d4-d3, after which he faces an arduous defensive task.

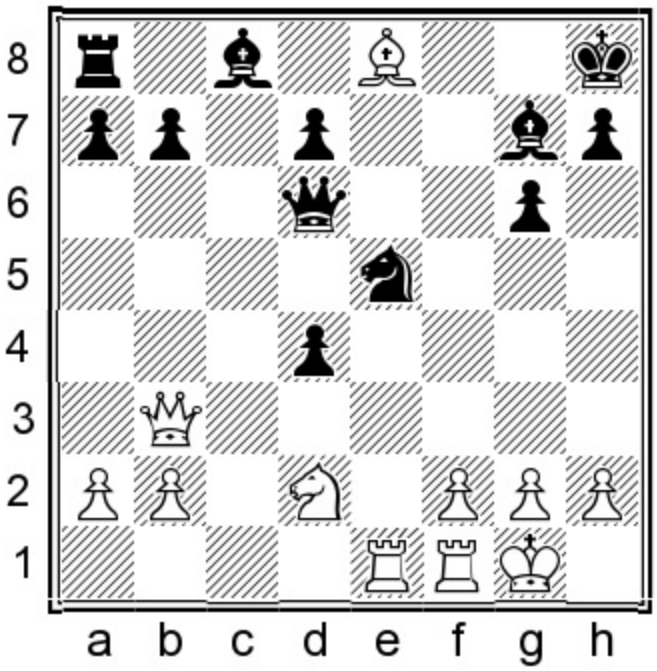
B) 11...♕b6? just loses after 12.♗xe7 ♖e8 13.♘c4!+–

C) 11...♖e8 12.♕b3 ♘c6 13.♗c4



Position after: 13.♗c4

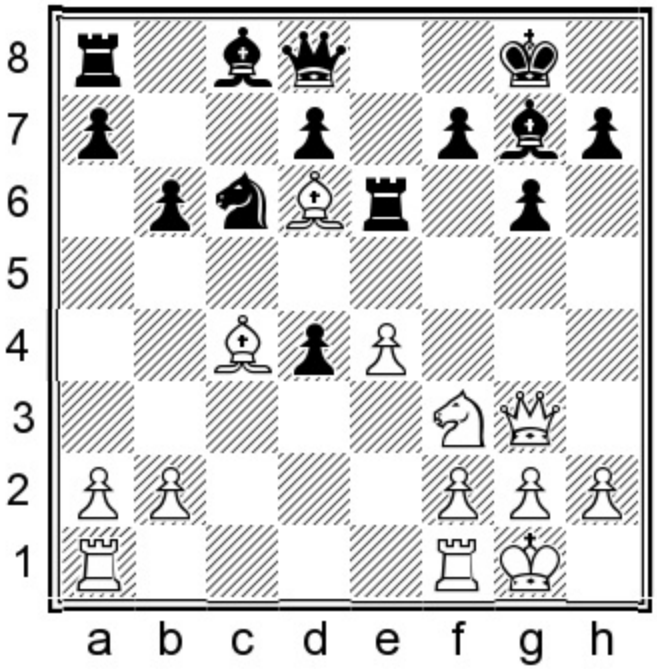
C1) 13...♕f6 14.e5! A typical pawn sacrifice like we've seen in previous variations, opening the e-file and allowing our knight to jump to e4. 14...♘xe5 15.♖ae1 ♕xd6 16.♗xf7+ ♔h8 17.♗xe8±



Position after: 17.♗xe8±

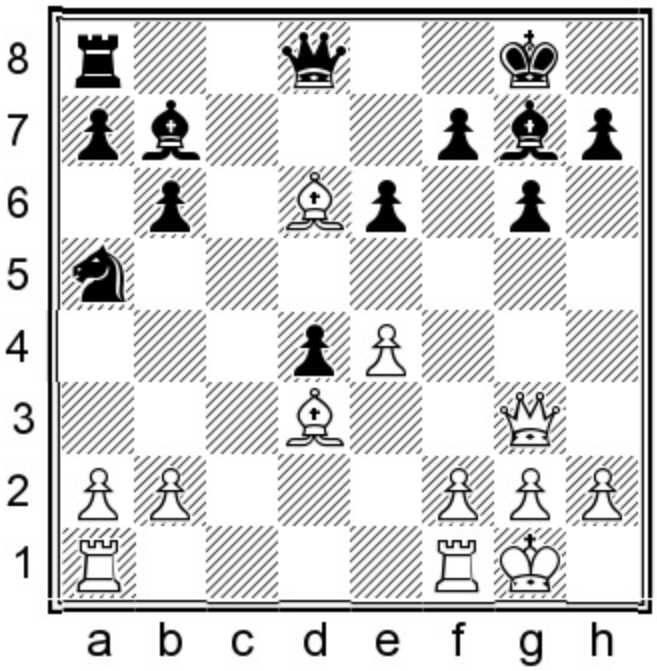
Black doesn't have any compensation for the exchange, and we can continue with f4-f5 and a renewed attack on Black's king.

C2) 13...♖e6 The point of 11...♖e8 and 12...♘c6, but we don't have to capture the exchange just yet. 14.♕g3! Even though we can't play f4-f5 anymore, ♘f3-g5 is another really strong plan. 14...b6 15.♘f3



Position after: 15.♘f3

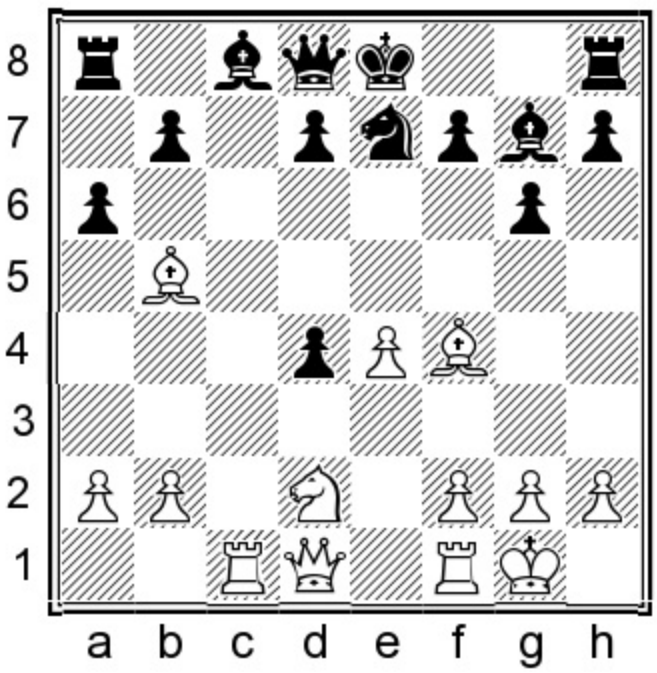
15...♗b7 [15...♖xe4 16.♗xf7+ ♔xf7 17.♘g5+ We're capturing the exchange in much better circumstances than if we had played 14.♗xe6.] 16.♘g5 ♘a5 17.♘xe6 dxe6 18.♗d3+–



Position after: 18.♗d3+–

It's beneficial to capture on e6 with our knight, as by keeping our bishop-pair we can reduce the comparative value of Black's bishop-pair. We can now follow by bringing our rook on a1 to the centre, as well as maintaining ideas of h4-h5 and e4-e5.

11.♖c1!



Position after: 11.♖c1!

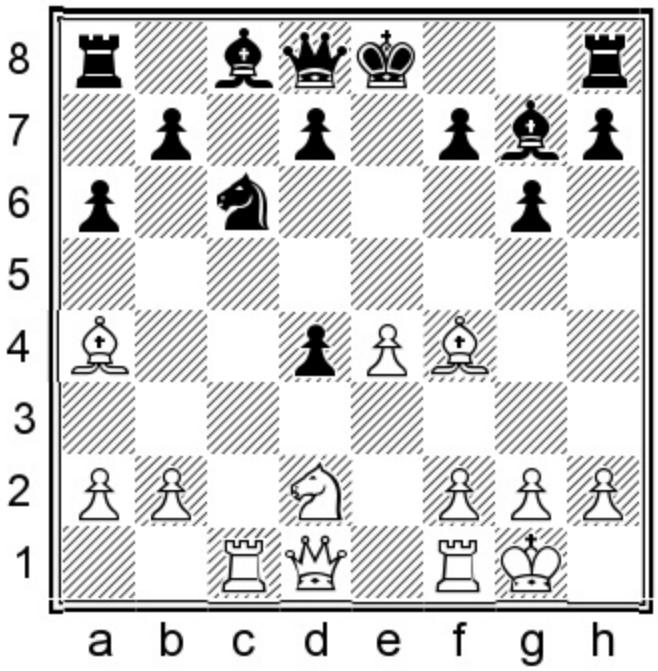
A really important move, as otherwise Black would simply be getting a better version of all the lines that we see after 9...a6. In this case, he is forced to play 11...♘c6, destroying the effectiveness of ...b7-b5, ...a6-a5 and ...♖a6.

11...♘c6

11...0-0 12.♗c7 ♕e8 13.♕a4! The only way I can describe Black's position is that he's basically getting strangled. 13...♘c6 14.♗d6+–

12.♗a4N

12.♗c4 was played in Zambon – Paniagua, Pellestrina 1979, but after 12...d6 we would really like the possibility to play ♘c4!

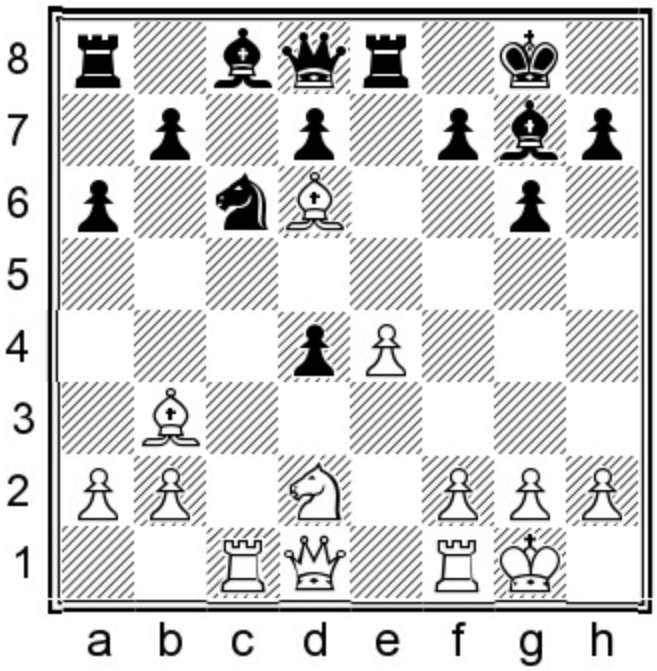


Position after: 12.♗a4N

12...0-0

12...♕f6 13.♗g3 b5 14.♗b3 0-0 15.♗d5!± Followed by ♘b3 or e4-e5, and here we don't even need our bishop on d6 to control the position.

13.♗d6 ♖e8 14.♗b3



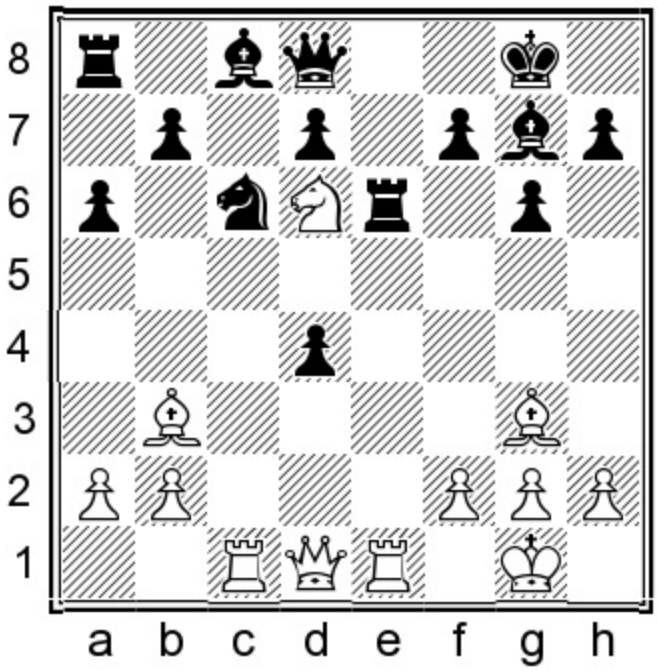
Position after: 14.♗b3

We'll see more examples of the power of our two bishops on b3 and d6 in the variations after 7...exd4, but it's already clear how they suffocate Black. Black's plan always revolves around removing at least one of the bishops, and he has two ways to try and achieve that here.

14...♗f8

More natural than 14...♖e6, but Black won't be able to alleviate any of his problems as, even though he gets rid of the d6-bishop, he's now creating dark-squared weaknesses for himself.

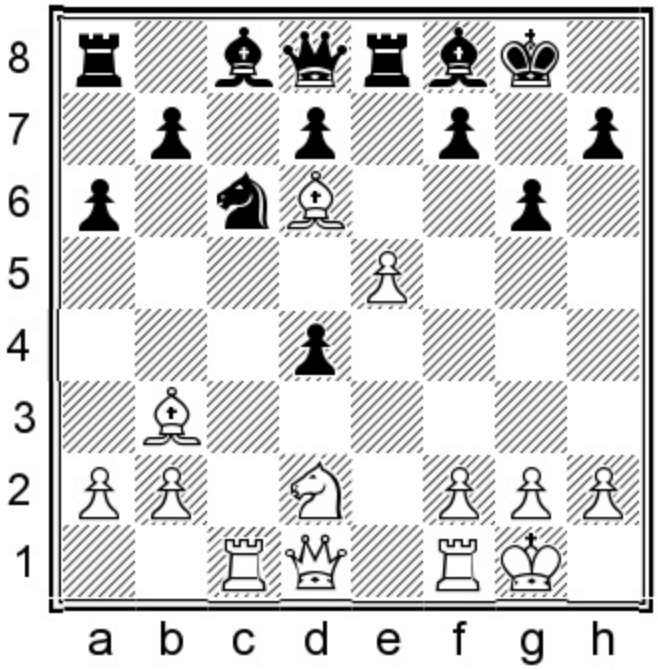
14...♖e6!? 15.♗g3! We'll always have the option to capture the rook, but right now it makes more sense to keep our bishops. Here in particular, we have a nice plan of playing f4-f5. 15...♖e8 16.♘c4! It's not only a bishop on d6 which can frustrate Black. 16...♖xe4 17.♘d6 ♖e6 18.♖e1!±



Position after: 18.♖e1!±

Sacrificing the e4-pawn is beneficial for us as it opens up the e-file. We can continue with normal moves and capture on e6 when the time is right.

15.e5!

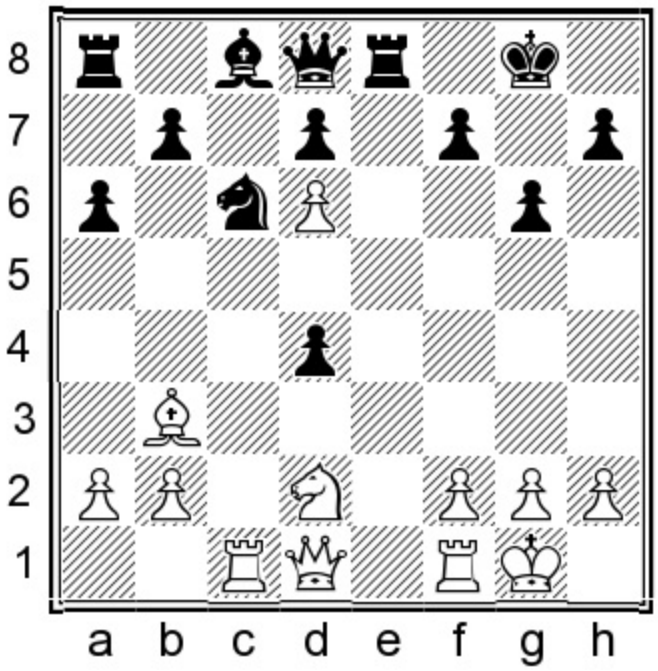


Position after: 15.e5!

15...♗xd6

15...♘xe5 16.♘e4+– Once again, sacrificing our e-pawn is beneficial to open the e-file and allow our knight new squares to jump to. If Black does nothing, we'll continue with ♖e1, threatening f2-f4. It's quite hard to see how Black can actually do anything without losing material.

16.exd6



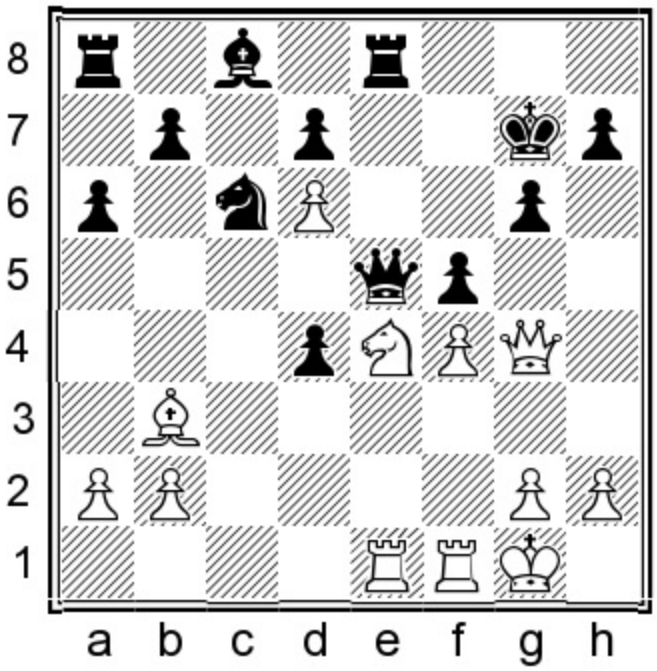
Position after: 16.exd6

We're playing on a strong initiative here, as the d6-pawn is quite vulnerable. In the meantime though, the pawn cuts the Black position in two, meaning that his queenside pieces can't impact the game. Therefore, we need to play as actively as possible in order to ensure that we aren't worse.

16...♕f6 17.♕g4! ♔g7

17...♕xd6 18.♘e4 ♕e5 19.♖ce1 ♔g7 20.f4 ♕f5 21.♕xf5 gxf5 22.♘d6+– Despite being two pawns down, White is completely winning.

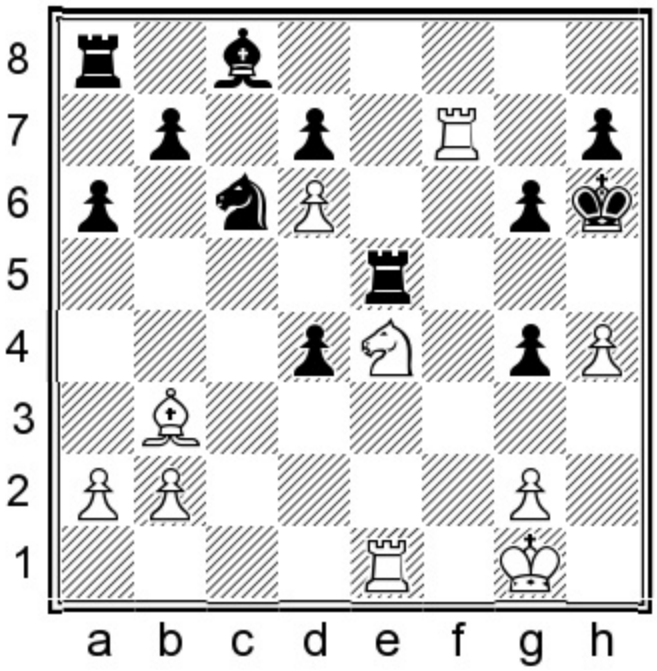
18.♘e4 ♕e5 19.♖ce1! f5 20.f4!



Position after: 20.f4!

The point. Even with the queens off the board, the fact that the d6-pawn cuts Black's position in half means that we are basically playing with a rook and bishop advantage. In this case, it's still important to play quickly and target Black's king before he manages to involve all his pieces in the game.

20...fxg4 21.fxe5 ♖xe5 22.♖f7+ ♔h6 23.h4!



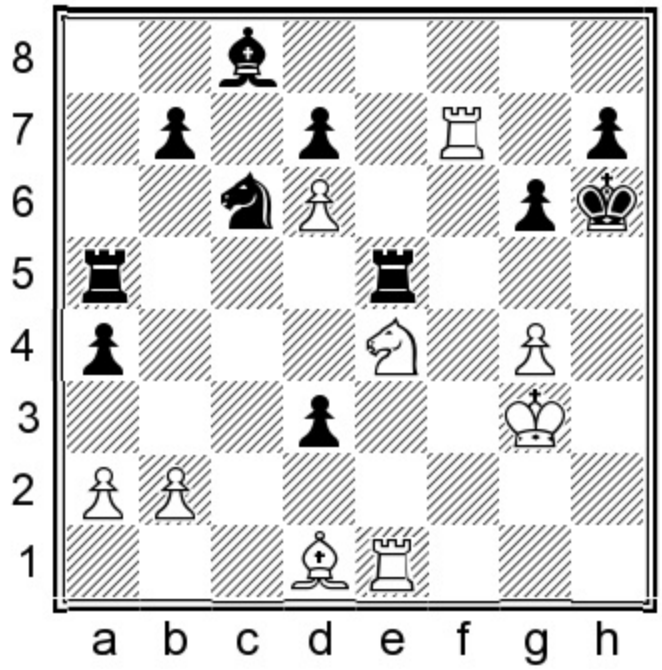
Position after: 23.h4!

If Black doesn't capture on h3, then ♘g5 will lead to mate.

23...gxh3 24.g4!

Trapping the Black king, so that we have enough time to play ♔h2 and ♔xh3. This will open the h-file for our rook on e1 to utilise.

24...a5 25.♔h2! a4 26.♗d1 ♖aa5 27.♔xh3 d3 28.♔g3+–

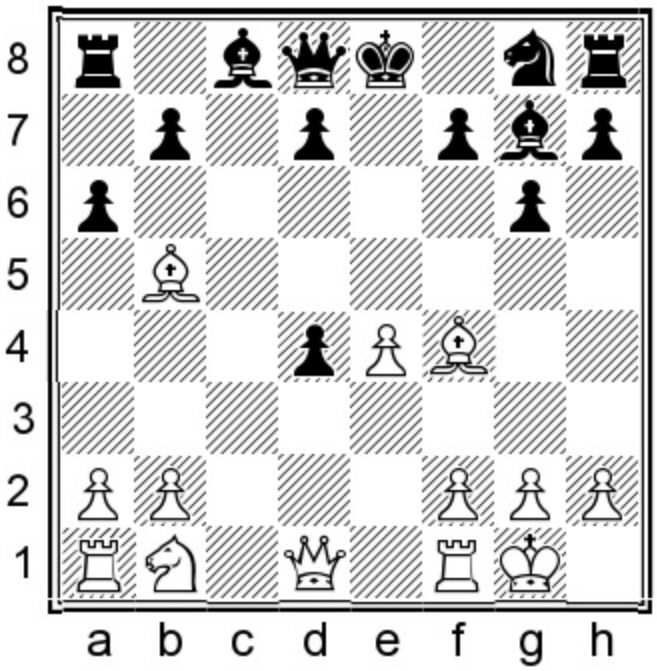


Position after: 28.♔g3+–

Black is forced to capture on e4, but the game shouldn't continue much longer.

d) 8.♘xd4 exd4 9.♗f4! a6

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 e5 6.d4! cxd4 7.cxd4 ♘xd4 8.♘xd4 exd4 9.♗f4! a6



Position after: 9...a6

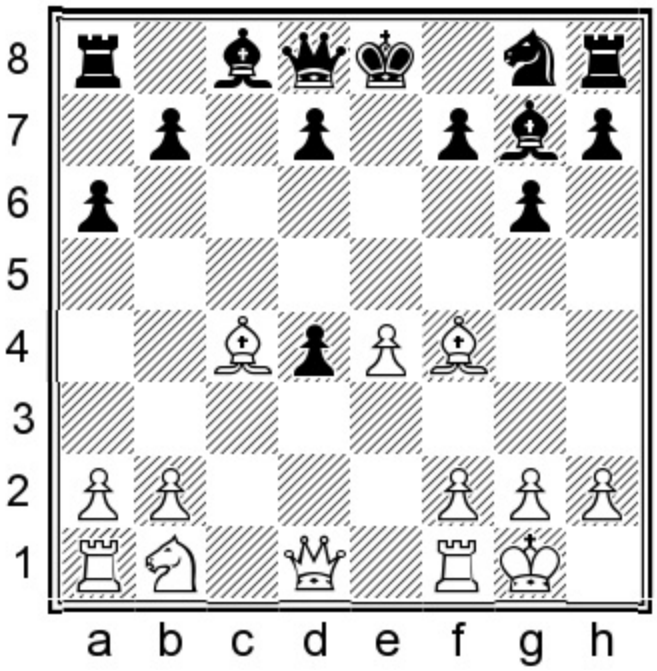
Black's idea to play ...d6 before we put a bishop on that square is only successful in the line after 7...cxd4. This is because Black's c6-knight is much more important than our f3-knight for a variety of reasons, as we will see.

10.♗d3!?N

Now that we've come across Black's counter-attacking idea of ...b7-b5, ...a6-a5 and ...♖a6, it seems to make more sense to put our bishop on d3 so that Black doesn't win a tempo with ...b7-b5. The downside is that our bishop is a little less active on d3.

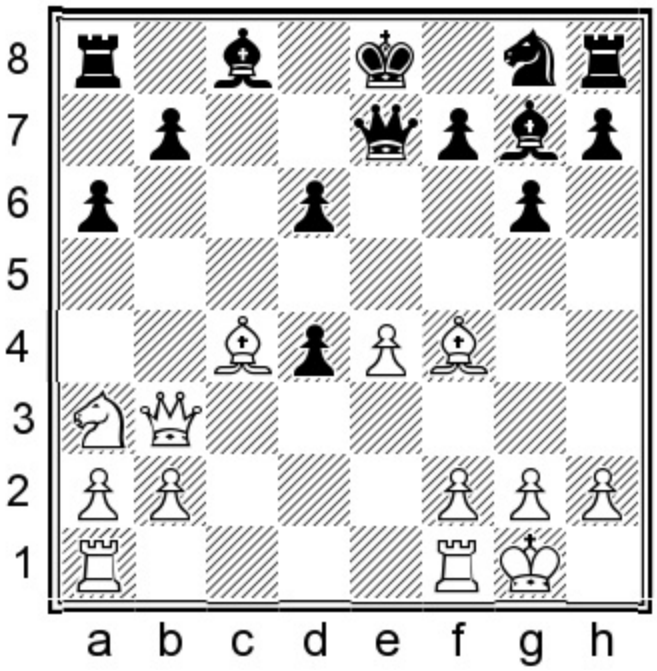
In this line we'll encounter positions which are less unclear, grounded on us gaining a small edge.

10.♗c4 is also a decent alternative. Black can't respond to ♕b3 with ...♘a5, compared to the line after 7...exd4.



Position after: 10.♗c4

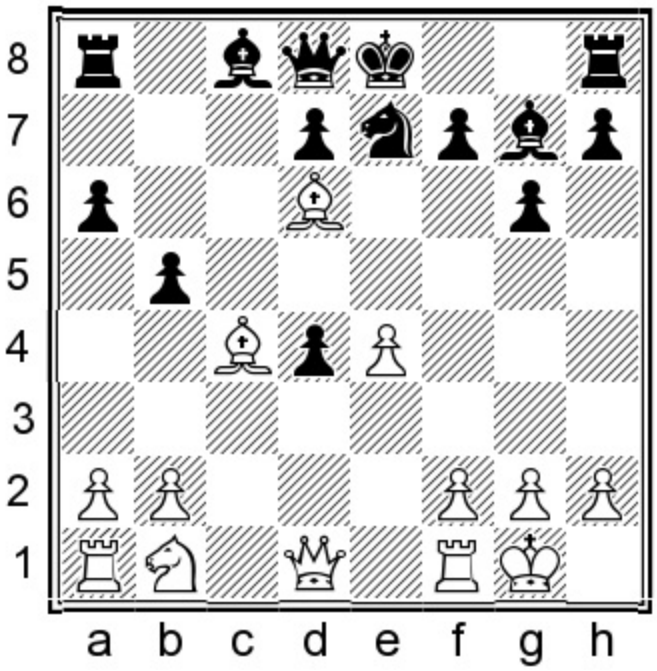
A) 10...d6 11.♕b3! Black will never be able to protect both his f7- and d6-pawns. 11...♕e7 12.♘a3



Position after: 12.♘a3

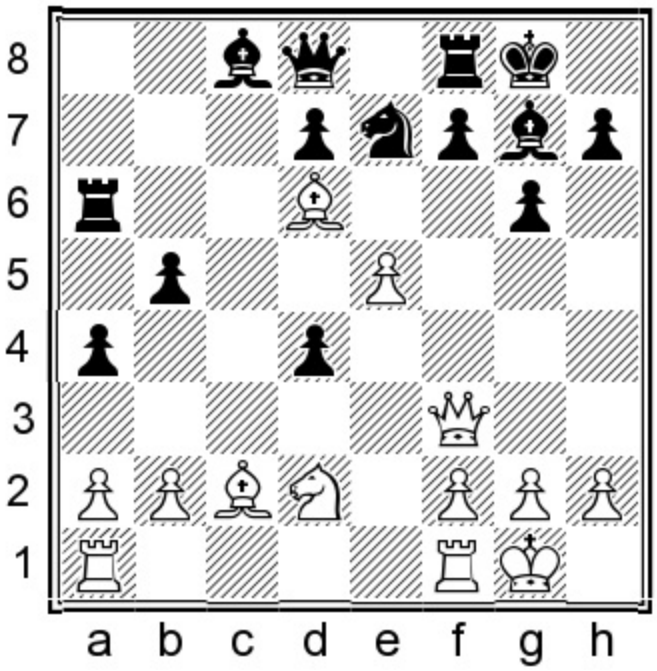
12...♗e5 [12...♘f6 13.♕b4 a5 14.♕xd6+– Our piece activity will be too much for Black to deal with, who also has problems castling.] 13.♗d2! It will be very unpleasant for Black to meet f2-f4.
13...♘f6 14.f4 ♘xe4 15.♗b4 ♗g7 16.♖ae1 f5 17.♗d5+– Followed by ♘a3-c4.

B) 10...♘e7 11.♗d6 b5



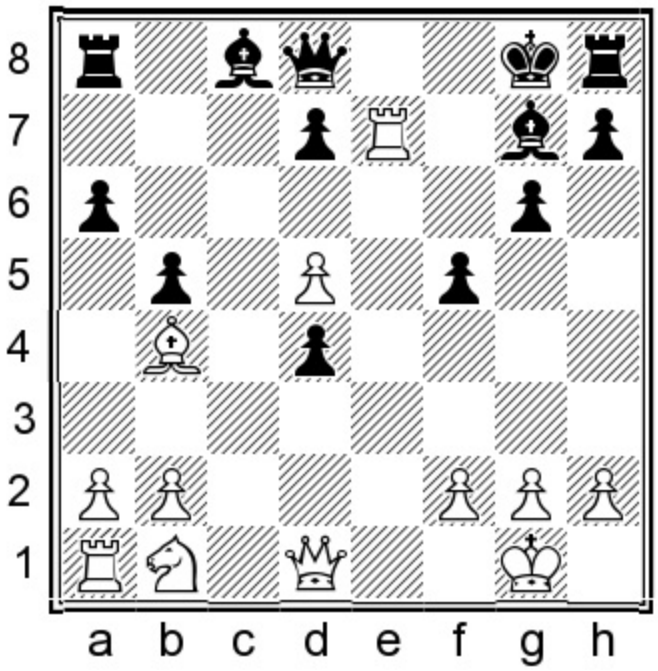
Position after: 11...b5

Black's plan to get rid of the d6-bishop is to play ...a6-a5 and ...♖a6, in order to sacrifice an exchange. The other plan of ...♗b7 and ...♘c8, as we'll see in the line after 7...cxd4, isn't so effective here, as Black needs his c6-knight to counter our ♕f3 ideas. The benefit of not having his c6-knight is that a rook on a6 will directly hit the d6-bishop. 12.♗d5!? [12.♗b3 runs into: 12...0-0 13.♕f3 a5! 14.♘d2 ♖a6 15.e5 a4 16.♗c2



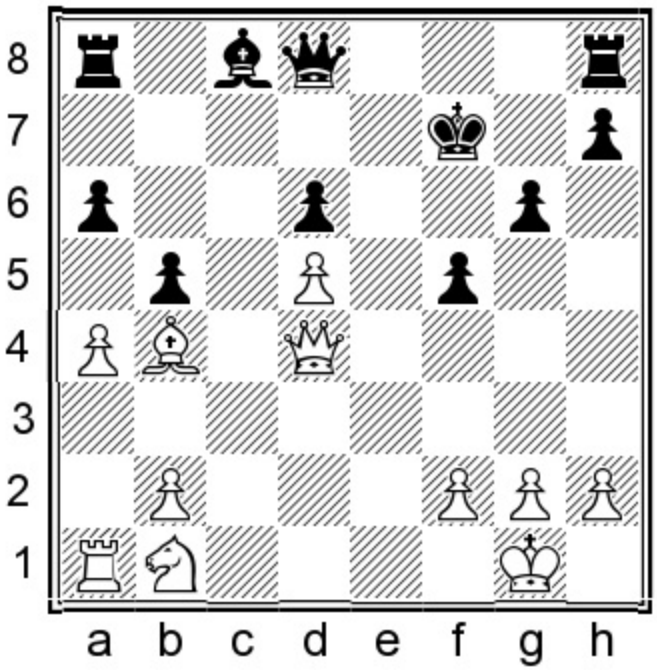
Position after: 16.♗c2

16...♖xd6! Black has good compensation for the exchange, with the bishop-pair and an extra pawn. 17.exd6 ♘c6 18.♖fe1 ♕b6⩲] 12...♘xd5 [12...♖a7? 13.♕c2± with the idea of ♕c5 is very strong, and if 13...♕b6 we can play 14.e5!±] 13.exd5 f5 Black's only move, of course, but if he has time to play ...♔f7 and ...♖e8 then only he can be better. Therefore we need to act quickly. 14.♖e1+ ♔f7 15.♖e7+ ♔g8 16.♗b4!



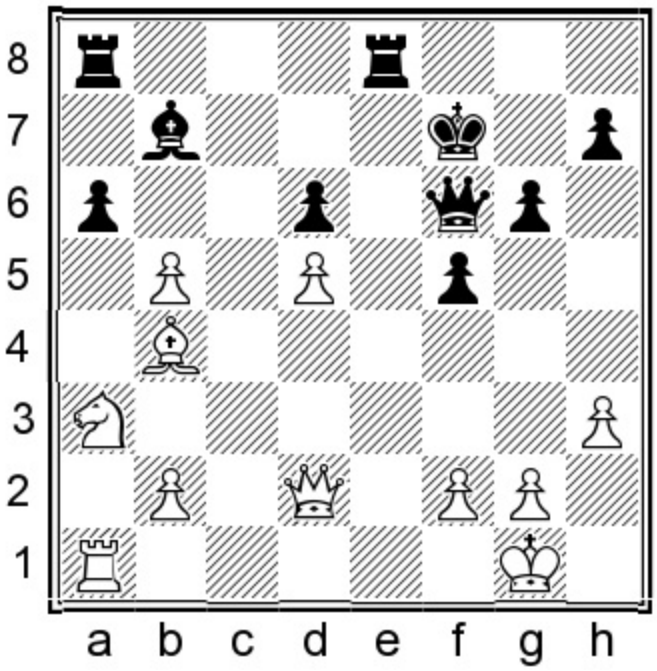
Position after: 16.♗b4!

We're now planning to capture on g7 and d4, and it's difficult for Black to stop us doing that. 16...d6 [16...♗f8 17.d6+– Followed by ♕xd4 after exchanging on e7.; 16...♗f6 17.d6+– This is exactly the same thing, as ♕b3+ is also an unstoppable threat.] 17.♖xg7+ ♔xg7 18.♕xd4+ ♔f7 19.a4!



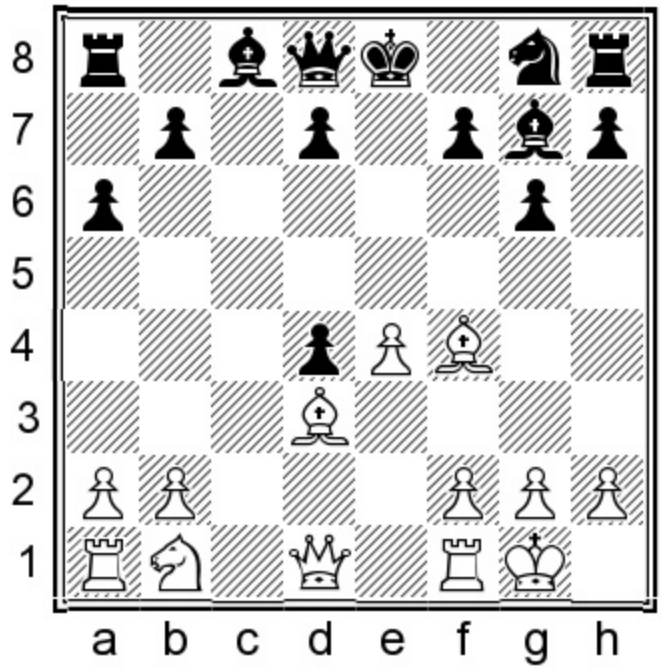
Position after: 19.a4!

We don’t have any pawns for our exchange, but our pieces are more active and Black still has all his dark-squared weaknesses. The position is unclear but White’s minor pieces have the potential to dominate here. 19...♖g8! Black wants to remove the pin before playing ...♕f6. [19...♗b7 20.♗c3 ♖g8 21.♘d2± Black is already in danger of not having any good moves left.] 20.axb5 ♕f6 21.♕d2 ♖e8 22.h3 ♗b7 23.♘a3∞



Position after: 23.♘a3∞

Black has got an improved version of 19...♗b7 as his pieces are much more active, but he still faces the same dark-squared weaknesses. The position can be analysed in further detail, but 12.♗d5 is definitely an interesting prospect.

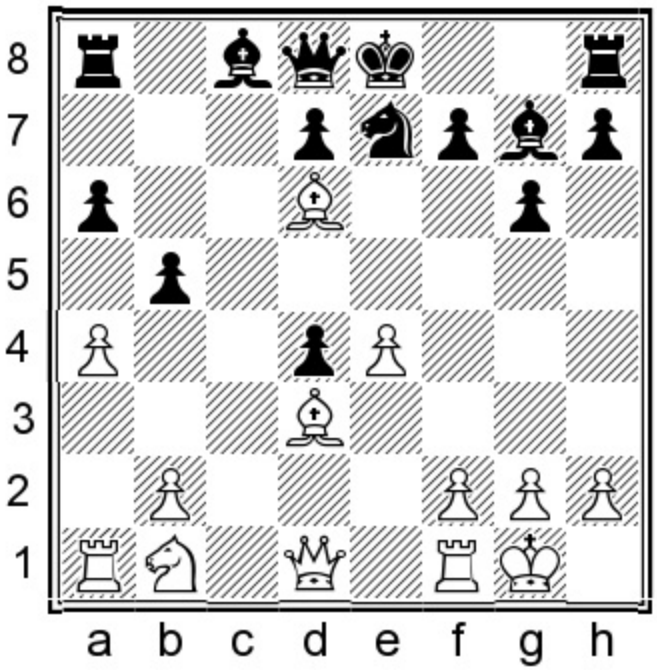


Position after: 10.♗d3!?N

10...d6

This is an improved scenario for Black as opposed to the line after 10.♗c4, because we no longer have the possibility of ♕b3. However the difference for White is that our knight can jump to c4 to attack the weak d6-pawn.

10...♘e7 11.♗d6 b5 [11...0-0 12.♘d2 transposes to a line after 9...♘e7.] 12.a4! The benefit of having our bishop on d3.

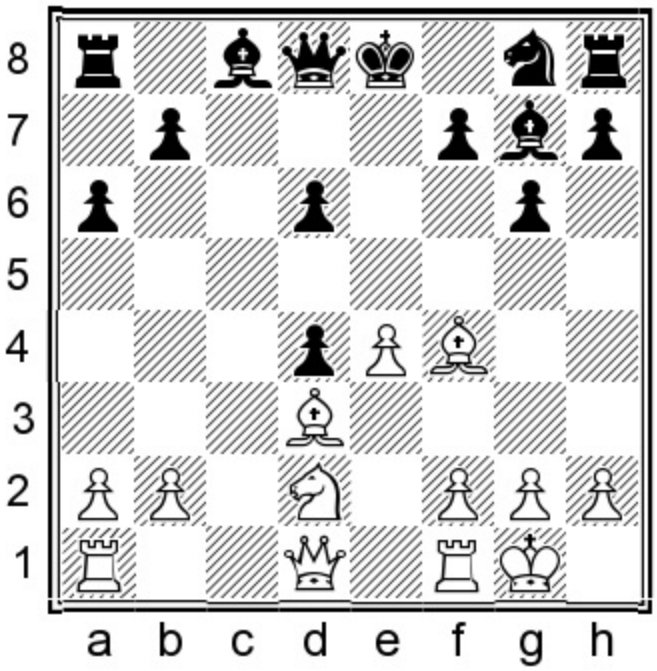


Position after: 12.a4!

A) 12...♗b7 13.axb5 axb5 14.♖xa8+– Whatever Black captures with, we'll play ♘a3 and ♘xb5. Having won our pawn back, Black's position will be clearly inferior as our pieces are just much more active, and we will also have a passed b-pawn.

B) 12...bxa4 13.♕xa4 0-0 14.♘d2 We've reached another position which is just really easy to play. We can combine ideas of ♕b3 and ♗c4 with f4-f5 or f2-f4 and e4-e5, depending on circumstance. To be honest Black's position looks pretty horrible as he hardly has any counter-attacking plans.

11.♘d2

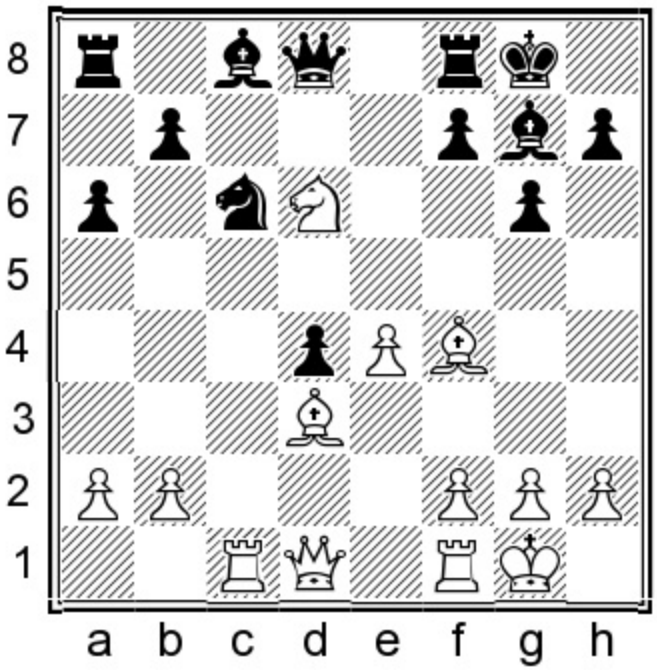


Position after: 11.♘d2

Black has two options: he can either return the pawn and allow us to capture on d6, or he can give up his bishop pair in order to try and hold onto the pawn.

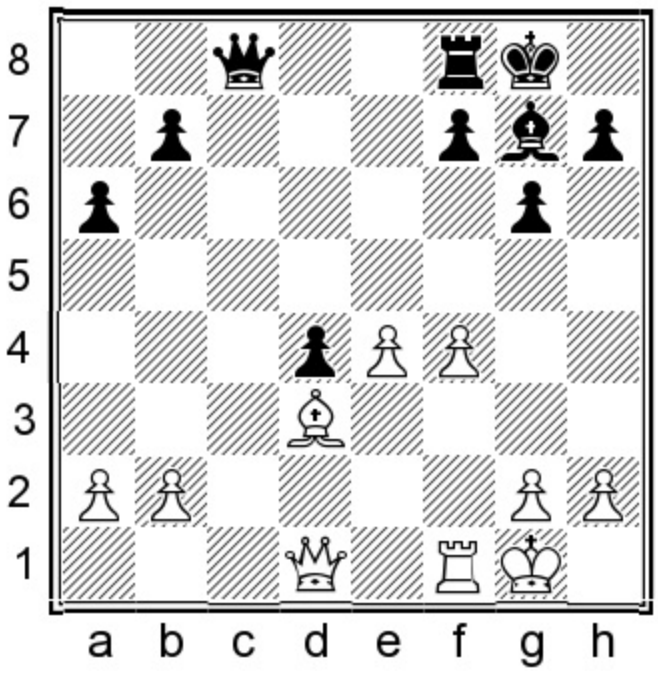
11...♗e6

A) 11...♘e7 12.♘c4 0-0 Black won't be as passive in this variation, but only White can be better due to our superior pawn structure. 13.♘xd6 ♘c6 14.♖c1



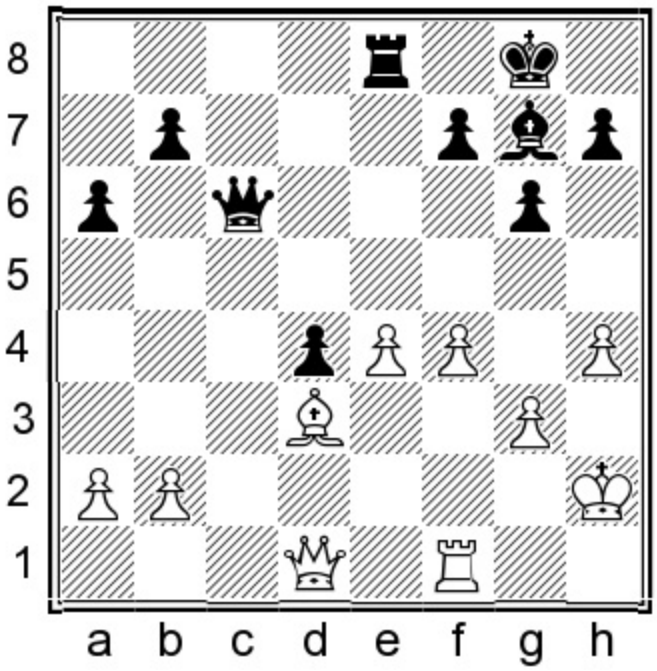
Position after: 14.♖c1

Black needs to get rid of the d6-knight before he can move his c8-bishop, and he has two ways to achieve this. 14...♘e5 [14...♗e5 15.♖xc6! ♗xf4 16.♖xc8 ♖xc8 17.♘xc8 ♕xc8 18.g3 ♗h6 19.f4± With a very similar position to the line after 14...♘e5.] 15.♗xe5! ♗xe5 16.♘xc8 ♖xc8 17.♖xc8 ♕xc8 18.f4 ♗g7



Position after: 18...♗g7

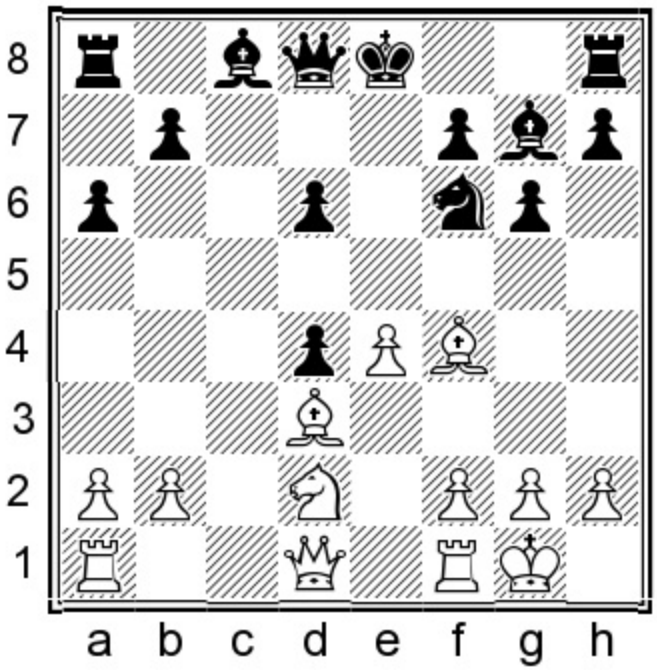
A typical opposite coloured bishop middlegame where White holds the advantage. We can continue in many different ways, and our advantage stems from our better pawn structure as we have a greater ability to create weaknesses in Black's kingside. Through the creation of these weaknesses, we can aim to expose light-squares and utilise our d3-bishop more effectively than Black can use his g7-bishop – which will ultimately be the difference in such positions. 19.h4!? ♖e8 20.♔h2 ♕c6 21.g3±



Position after: 21.g3±

Followed by e4-e5, and h4-h5 at the right moment. If Black plays ...h7-h5 himself, this will only exacerbate his kingside problems as the g6-pawn will be more weak.

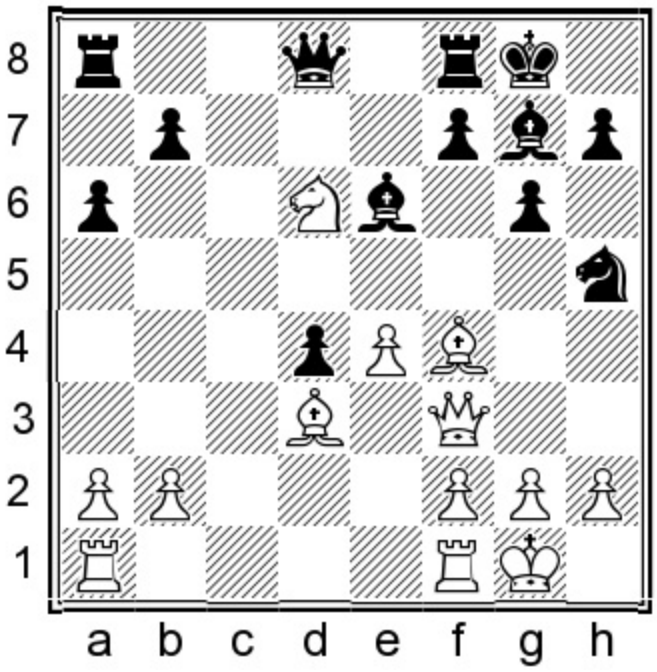
B) 11...♘f6



Position after: 11...♘f6

B1) 12.♘c4?! It's less effective to embark on our typical plan of ♘c4 and ♘xd6 here, as Black's knight is better placed on f6 to counter this idea. 12...0-0 13.♘xd6 [13.♗xd6 ♖e8∓ and Black

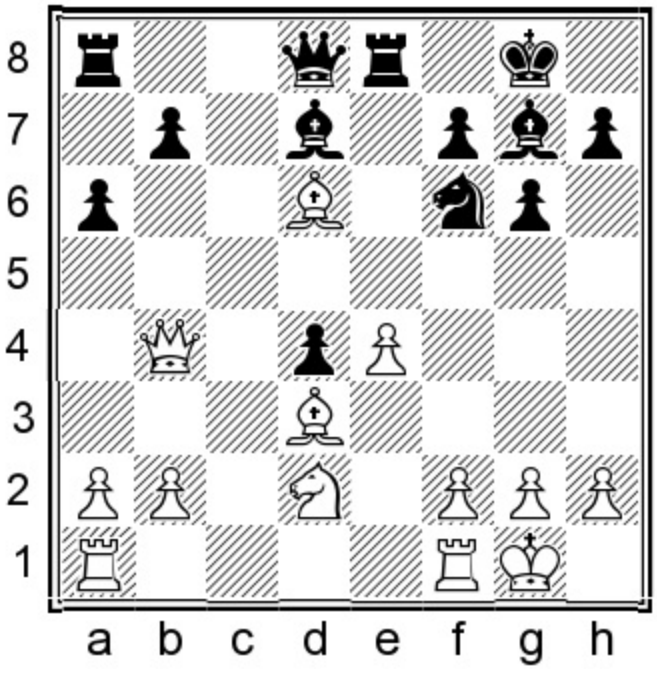
doesn't have any problems.] 13...♘h5 14.♕f3 ♗e6∓



Position after: 14...♗e6∓

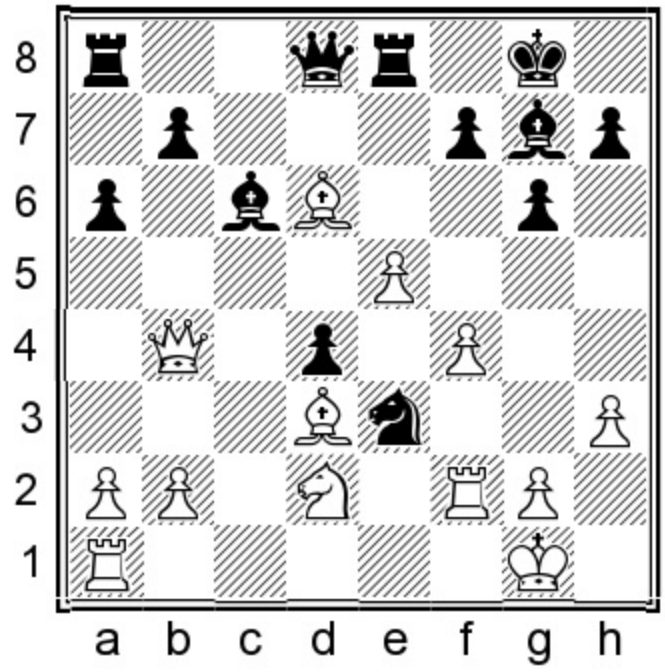
Black will gain the bishop pair and probably better prospects

B2) 12.♕a4+! A really important move to remember. It demonstrates how we can attack the d6-pawn in a variety of ways, depending on how Black chooses to develop. 12...♗d7 13.♕b4 0-0 14.♗xd6 ♖e8



Position after: 14...♖e8

15.e5 The benefit of not having our f3-knight is most evident in this line, as we can easily support our e5-pawn with an f2-f4 advance. [15.♕xb7 is also possible but I don't see a reason to make things unclear after 15...♗b5!∞] 15...♘g4 16.f4 ♗c6 17.h3 ♘e3 18.♖f2±



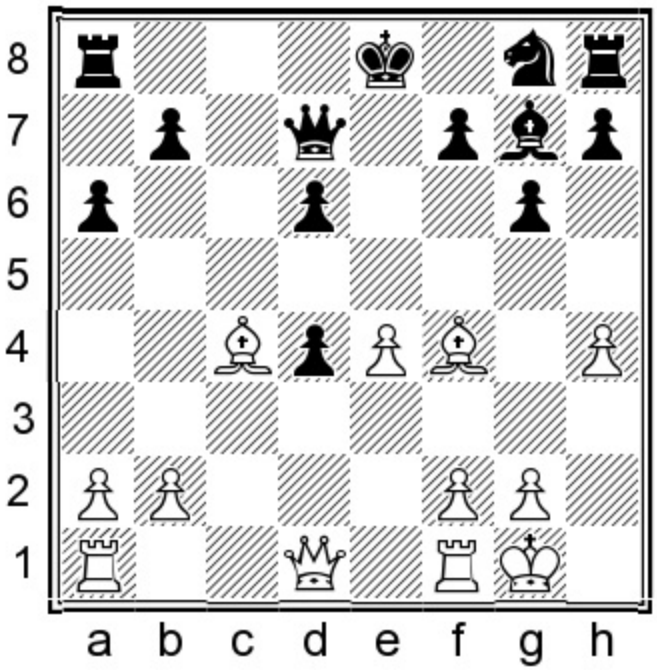
Position after: 18.♖f2±

The f4-e5 pawns help to suppress Black's bishop on g7, making the d4-pawn a weakness (although one which we have to be careful to capture). I'm not sure how big our advantage is here, but it's definitely much more pleasant to play with White. At some point ♗e4 will also make sense, and if Black tries to exchange his g7-bishop for our d6-bishop, he will create dark-squared weaknesses for himself which we can probably take advantage of in the future.

12.♘c4 ♗xc4 13.♗xc4 ♕d7

Note ♕d1-b3 was a big threat.

14.h4!?



Position after: 14.h4!?

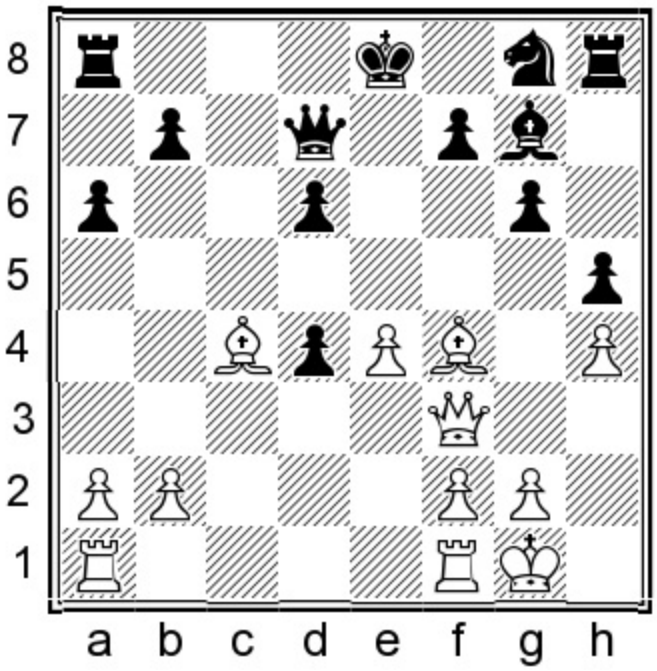
I really like this idea. White accepts that he won't be retrieving his sacrificed pawn, and instead aims to utilise his bishop-pair by attacking on the kingside.

The most important advantage for White here is that our light-squared bishop can't really be contested.

14...♘e7

A) 14...♖c8 15.♖c1 doesn't really change anything.

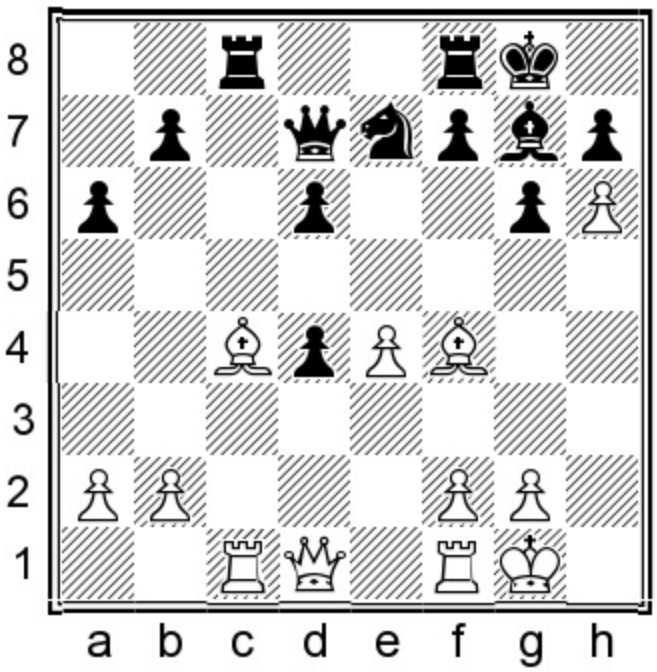
B) 14...h5 15.♕f3!



Position after: 15.♕f3!

15...♘h6 [15...♘f6 16.e5 dxe5 17.♗xe5 Without the addition of h2-h4 and ...h7-h5 Black would have the h5-square to jump to with his knight. Here, however, he is completely losing. 17...♕f5 18.♕xb7 0-0 19.♗d6+–] 16.♕g3! ♖d8 17.f3± Black can't castle as the g6-pawn is hanging.

15.h5 ♖c8 16.♖c1 0-0 17.h6!



Position after: 17.h6!

Typical AlphaZero play.

17...♗f6

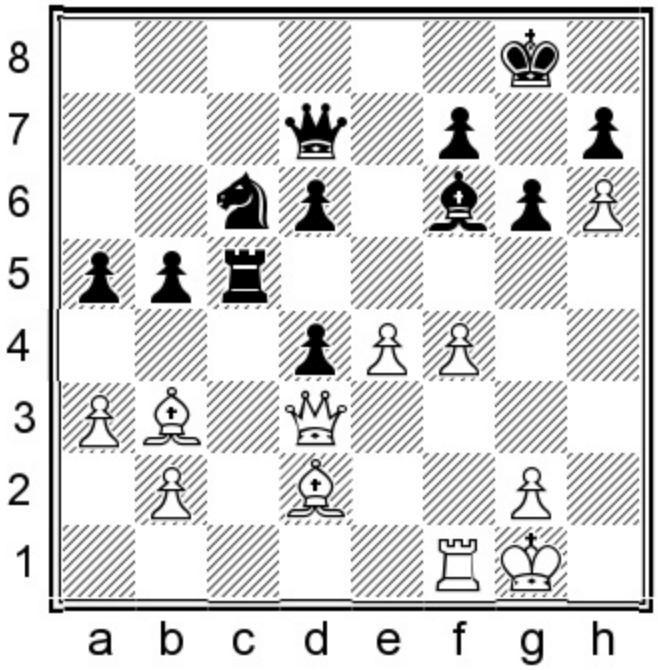
The following line emphasizes Black's difficulties. The engine doesn't give any advantage for White, but practically I think Black's position is much more unpleasant to play.

18.♗d2!

Enabling us to play f2-f4 whenever we like.

18...b5 19.♗b3 ♖xc1 20.♕xc1 ♖c8 21.♕b1 ♖c5 22.♕d3 ♘c6 23.f4 a5 24.a3⩱

Black always has to look out for threats such as e4-e5, and our light-squared bishop remains extremely powerful.

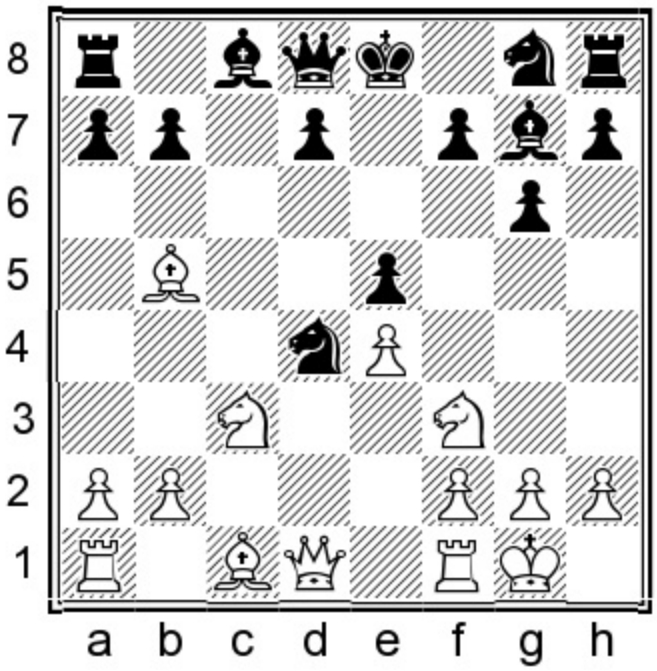


Position after: 24.a3⩱

The h6-pawn, which can't be removed, is also very well placed to weaken Black's king, so he also needs to constantly think about his back-rank in the future.

e) 8.♘c3!?

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 e5 6.d4! cxd4 7.cxd4 ♘xd4 8.♘c3!?

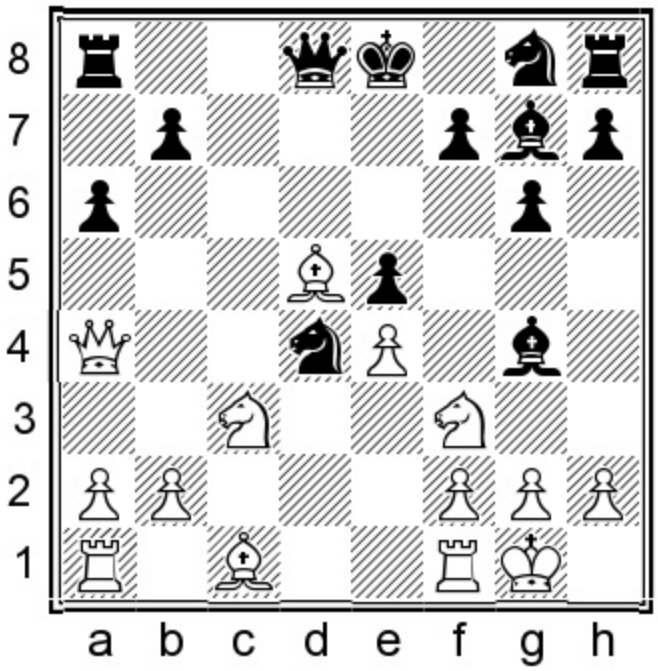


Position after: 8.♘c3!?

A sophisticated alternative. Often Black's doubled d-pawns can be problematic for us in preventing ♘c3. In this case, Black's d5-square becomes a much more obvious area of exploitation, in addition to the already weak d6-square.

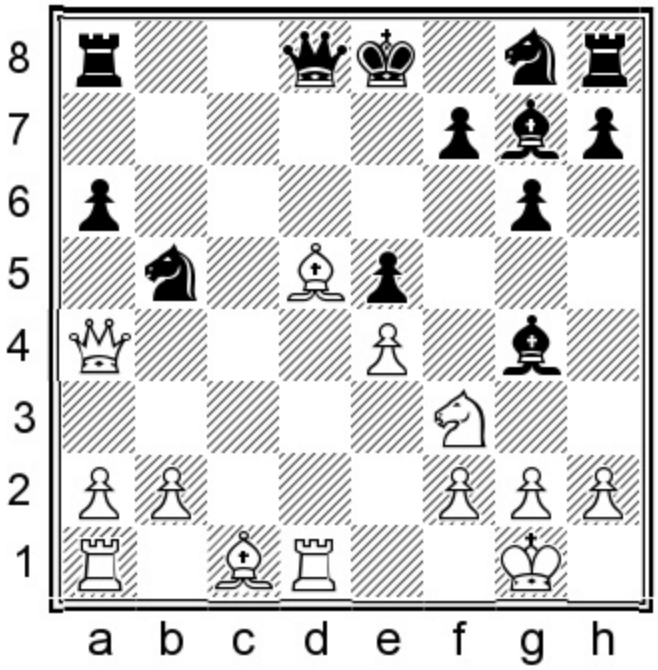
8...♘e7!

A) 8...a6?! 9.♗c4 d5!? This may be the best practical option for Black. By returning the pawn, he becomes less cramped and tries to reduce his development deficit. [9...♘xf3+ 10.♕xf3 ♘f6 11.♗g5! Black can't stop our positional threat of ♗xf6 followed by ♘d5. 11...h6 12.♗xf6 ♕xf6 13.♕e3±] 10.♗xd5 ♗g4 11.♕a4+!



Position after: 11.♕a4+!

A1) 11...b5 12.♘xb5! Black's lack of kingside development will pay the price here as we ultimately have too many threats for him to deal with. 12...♘xb5 13.♖d1

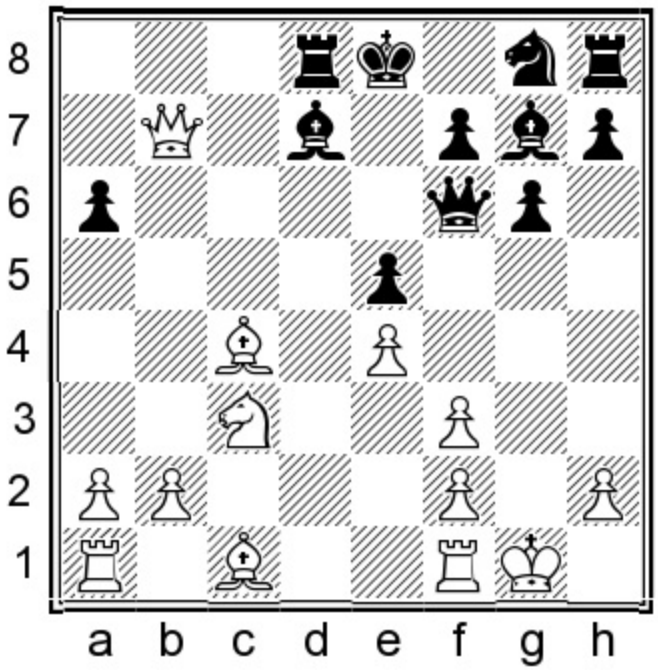


Position after: 13.♖d1

13...♔f8 [13...♕c8 14.♗xa8 ♕xa8 15.♖d6+– Followed by ♖xa6, regaining our piece.] 14.♗xa8 ♕xa8 15.♖d5+– Black's basically playing without his h8-rook and we can just continue with normal moves, as well as always considering capturing on e5. Our rooks here are much more

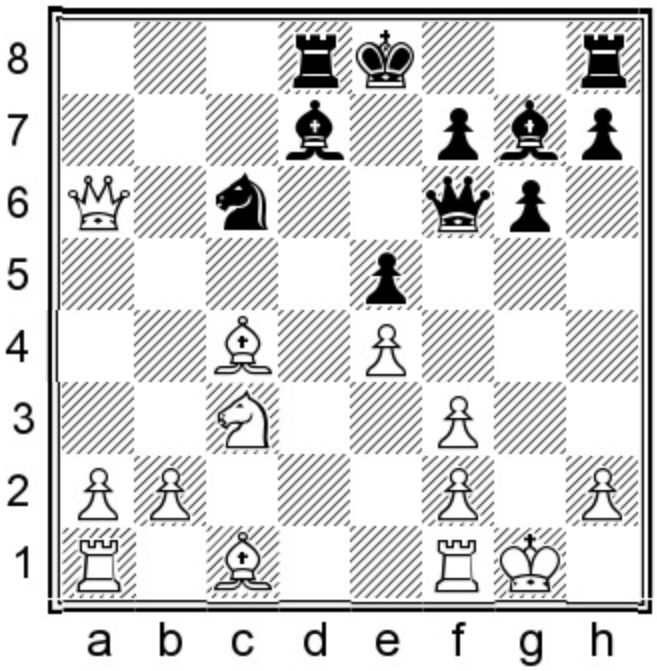
powerful than Black's minor pieces due to the open lines.

A2) 11...♗d7 12.♕b4 ♘xf3+ 13.gxf3 Black's queenside pawns are most likely lost, and ♖d1 also looks like it'll cause Black serious problems. 13...♕f6 [13...♘e7 14.♖d1 ♖b8 15.♕d6+– and Black is still struggling to castle due to the possibility of ♗g5.] 14.♕xb7 ♖d8 15.♗c4!



Position after: 15.♗c4!

The bishop move plays two roles: it comes back to defend the king, and facilitates the possibility of ♘c3-d5. 15...♗c8 [15...♕xf3 16.♗e2 ♕h3 17.♕xa6+– Followed by ♕a6-d3, and Black can't make use of our open king.] 16.♕b4 ♘e7 [16...♕xf3 17.♗e2 ♕h3 18.♖d1+– and Black's king is clearly the weaker one here.] 17.♕a4+ ♗d7 18.♕xa6 ♘c6

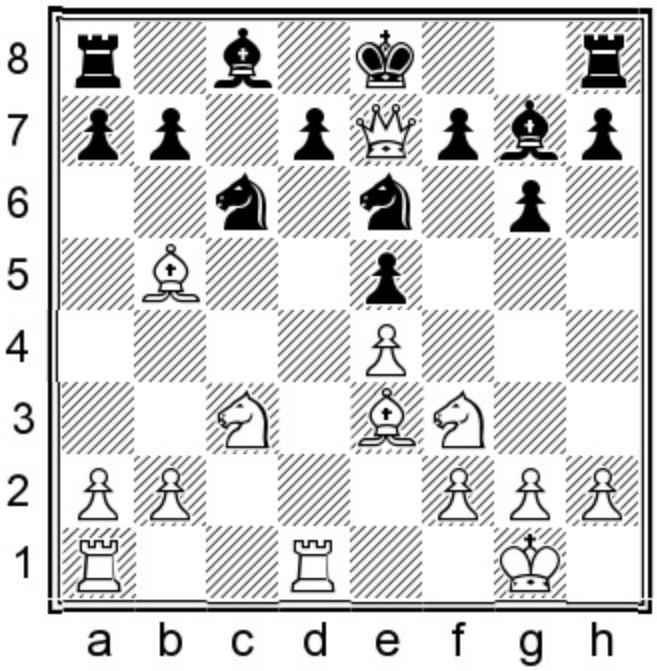


Position after: 18...♘c6

We still need to be careful that our pieces don't get too stranded on the queenside as Black does threaten mate in two moves with ♗h3 and ♕xf3, but fortunately we have a nice practical way to simplify matters. 19.♗d5! 0-0 [19...♕xf3 20.♕e2 ♕h3 21.♗xc6 ♗xc6 22.f3+– And we can literally just push our a-pawn down the board, as Black doesn't threaten our king anymore] 20.♗xc6 ♗h3 21.♕e2! ♗xf1 22.♔xf1 ♕xc6 23.a4+ We've sacrificed an exchange but our queenside pawns provide more than adequate compensation. Moreover, the c3-knight looks set to dominate against Black's major pieces and his g7-bishop.

B) 8...♘xb5? is clearly bad after 9.♘xb5 d5 10.♕c2!+–

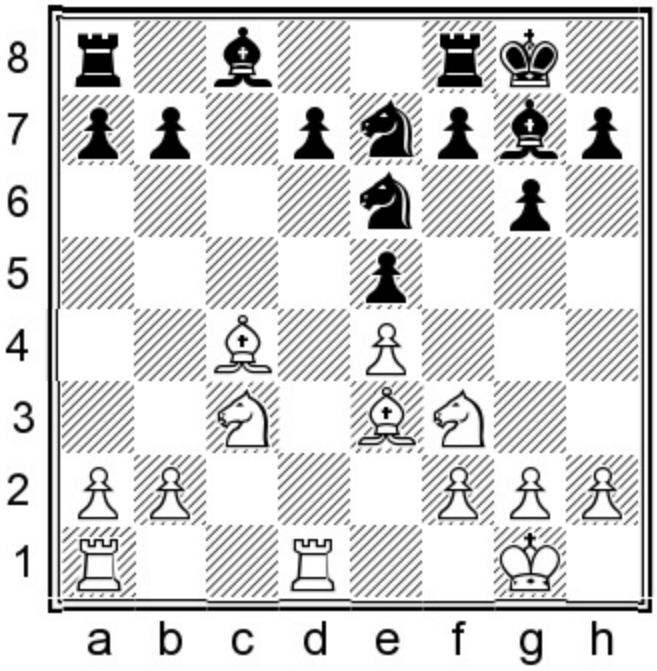
C) 8...♘e6 The point is that Black wants to now place his g8-knight on c6. However it's still much easier to play with the White pieces, and Black will soon feel cramped: 9.♗e3 ♘e7 [9...a6 of course fails due to 10.♘d5!+–] 10.♕d6 ♘c6 11.♖fd1 ♕e7 12.♕xe7+



Position after: 12.♕xe7+

Despite being a pawn down, we can confidently exchange queens as Black's struggles in activating his pieces will still remain the same.

C1) 12...♘xe7?! 13.♗c4! Enabling our c3-knight to jump to b5, which will cause Black a lot of difficulties. 13...0-0

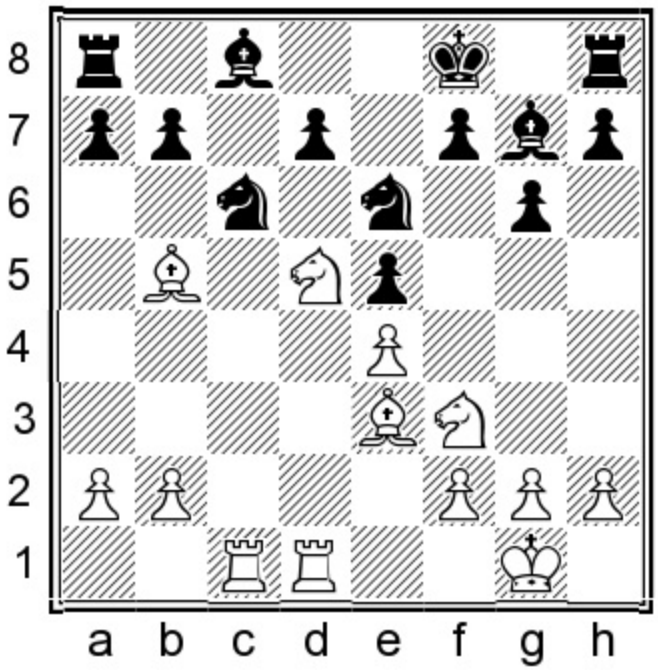


Position after: 13...0-0

14.♗xe6! dxe6 [14...fxe6 15.♗c5 ♗f6 16.♗d6± We'll win our pawn back whilst simultaneously

maintaining our suppression of Black's development.] 15.♗c5 ♗f6 16.♗d6± Black faces quite an arduous task in defending this position.

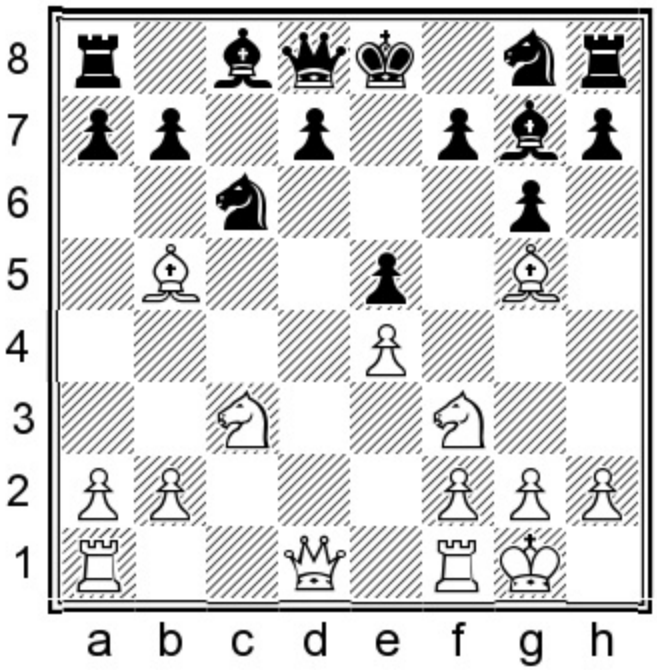
C2) 12...♔xe7 13.♘d5+ ♔f8 14.♖ac1♕



Position after: 14.♖ac1♕

It's really difficult to see how Black can develop pieces without losing at least one pawn. In the meantime, we can continue to improve our pieces – for example with ♘d2-c4. We also have ideas of expanding on both sides of the board, with a2-a4 and h2-h4 both interesting prospects. Once again, it's so much more pleasant for White than Black – despite the pawn difference.

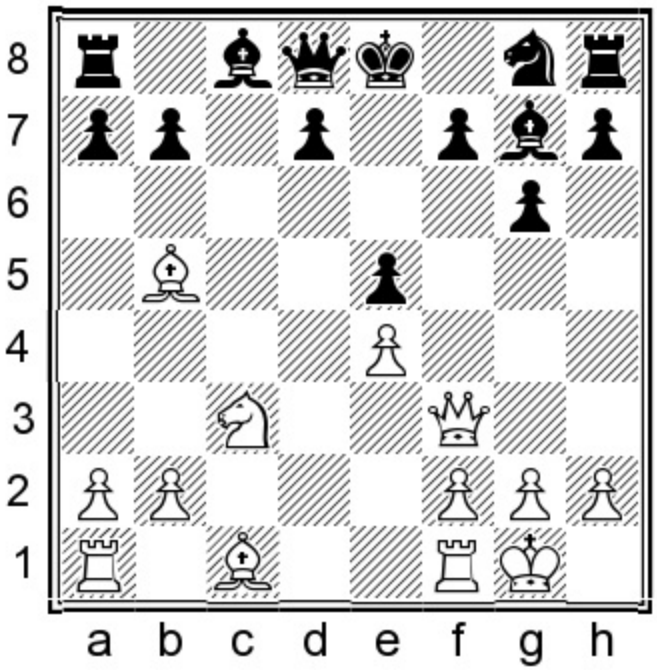
D) 8...♘c6 Invariably, wasting time by moving the same piece can only spell trouble for Black. 9.♗g5



Position after: 9.♗g5

9...♘f6 [9...f6 10.♗e3 ♘ge7 11.♗c4+– It looks very unlikely that Black's king will ever be safe.] 10.♕d6 ♕e7 11.♕xe7+ ♘xe7 12.♘xe5± It's very hard for Black to achieve both an exchange of queens and maintenance of his pawn advantage, as this variation has illustrated.

E) 8...♘xf3+ 9.♕xf3



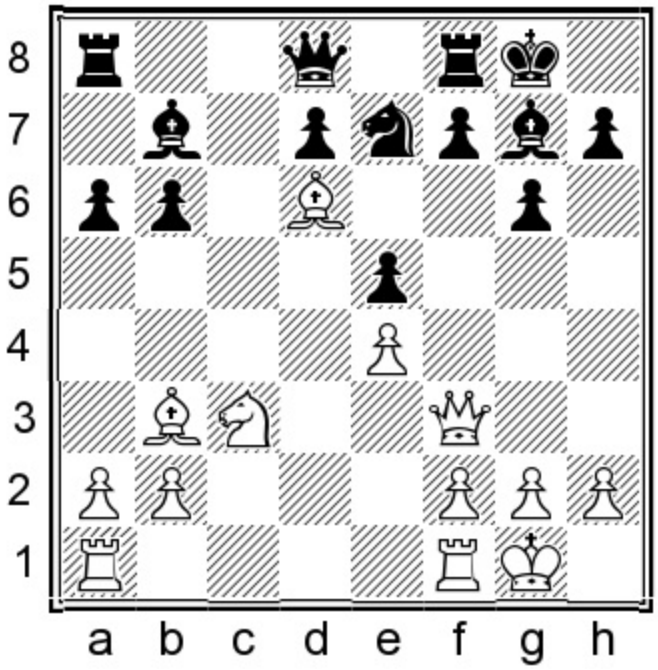
Position after: 9.♕xf3

E1) 9...♘e7 10.♗g5 0-0 [10...f6? 11.♗c4!+– is neat and just winning.] 11.♖ac1± In typical fashion,

Black keeps the pawn but struggles in a really cramped position. We'll just continue with normal moves and our advantage should soon prove decisive, as Black's position is pretty much impossible to play without losing material at some stage.

E2) 9...♘f6 10.♗g5 h6 11.♗xf6 ♕xf6 12.♕e3 0-0 13.♘d5 ♕g5 14.♖ac1 ♕xe3 15.fxe3!± Black faces a difficult defensive task.

E3) 9...a6 10.♗a4 ♘e7 11.♗e3! This time we can exploit the weak b6-square that Black created on his 9th move. 11...0-0 [11...♘c6 obviously allows 12.♘d5±] 12.♗c5! Putting our bishop on the d6-square in rather unorthodox fashion, but it does the job. 12...b6 13.♗d6 ♗b7 14.♗b3±

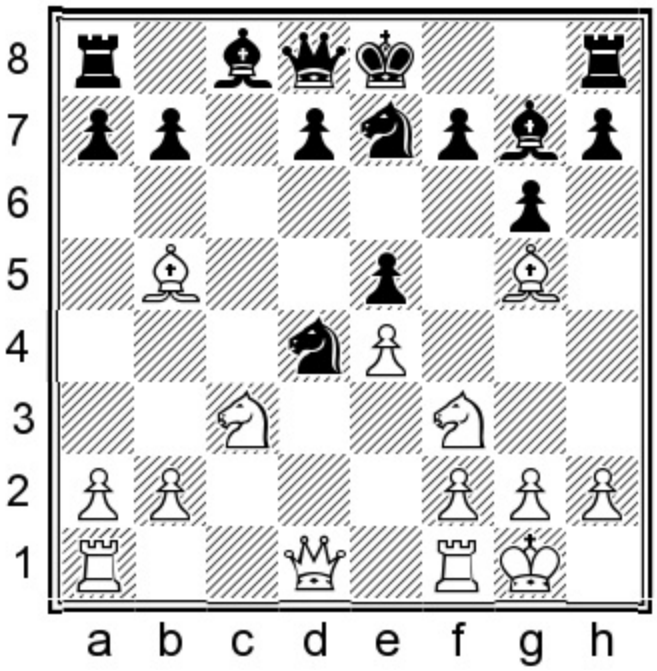


Position after: 14.♗b3±

If we want to win our pawn back immediately, it should be good enough to play ♕g3 on our next move. The combination of our bishops on d6 and b3 exhausts Black of so many options, and this is a recurring theme that we'll encounter in future variations.

9.♗g5

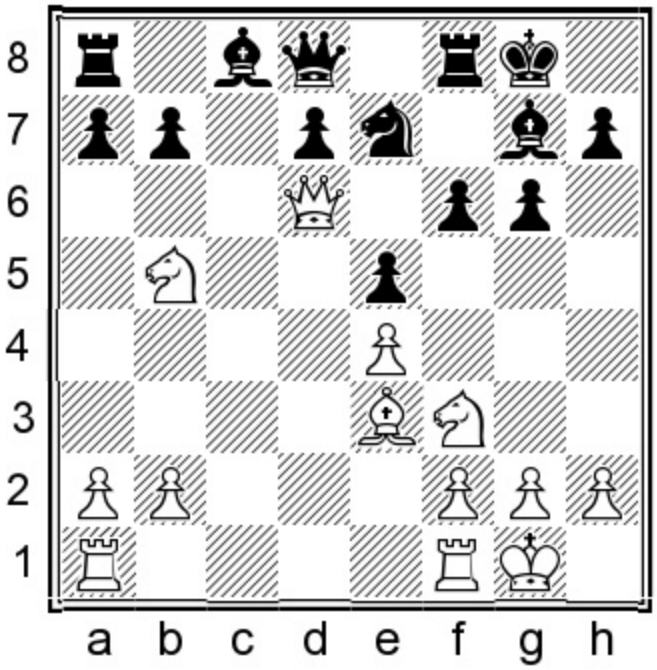
9.♗e3?! Trying to transpose to the line after 8...♘e6 doesn't really work as Black has the immediate option of 9...♘ec6!∓



Position after: 9.♗g5

9...♘e6

A) 9...♘xb5 10.♘xb5 0-0 11.♕d6 f6 12.♗e3

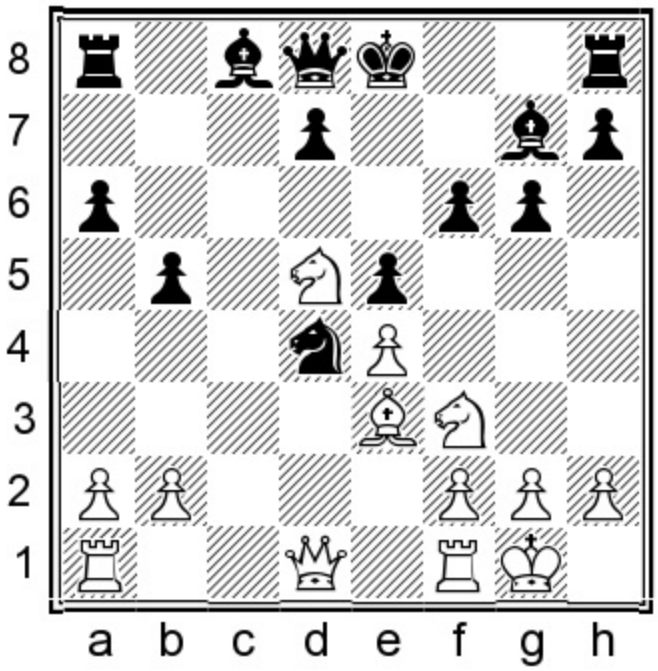


Position after: 12.♗e3

This position was reached in Delorme – Darrigues, Sautron 2007. Despite achieving king safety, Black faces the usual problems of getting any kind of piece activity. 12...♘c6 13.♕d5+ ♔h8 14.♘d6

♕e7 [14...♘e7 15.♕b3+– The knight fork is unstoppable.] 15.♖ac1 ♕e6 16.♖fd1± Black can't really exchange queens here, and we can start expanding on the queenside to drive away the c6-knight and open lines for our rooks.

B) 9...f6 10.♗e3 a6 11.♗c4 b5 12.♗d5 ♘xd5 13.♘xd5±



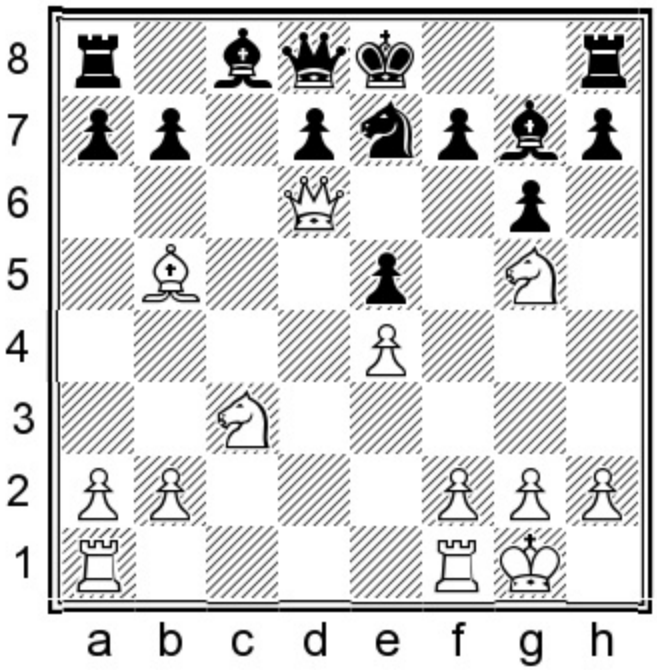
Position after: 13.♘xd5±

Black can't stop us from capturing on d4, as otherwise a future ♗b6 and ♖c1 will be decisive.

10.♕d6!

Even though our position looks aesthetically pleasing, we are still a pawn down and have to consistently maintain our initiative. In this case, it is wise to exchange the bishop on g5 and focus on bringing more pieces into the game.

10...♘xg5 11.♘xg5



Position after: 11.♘xg5

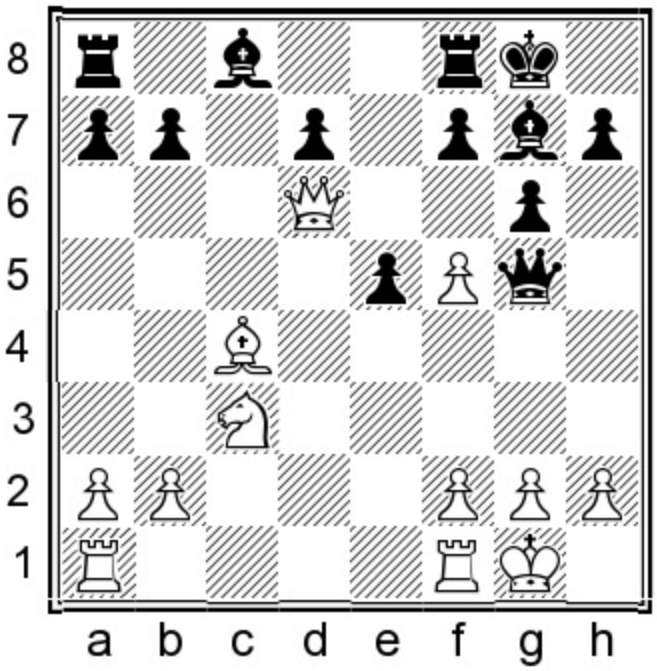
11...0-0

11...♕b6 12.♕xb6 axb6 13.♖fd1± Our bishop is now a permanent fixture on b5, and Black can't castle without losing the d7-pawn. If he moves his e7-knight, the d5-square will become vacant for our c3-knight.

12.♗c4!

If Black doesn't do anything drastic here then we'll follow up with f2-f4, increasing our pressure on the f7-pawn.

12...♘f5! 13.exf5 ♕xg5

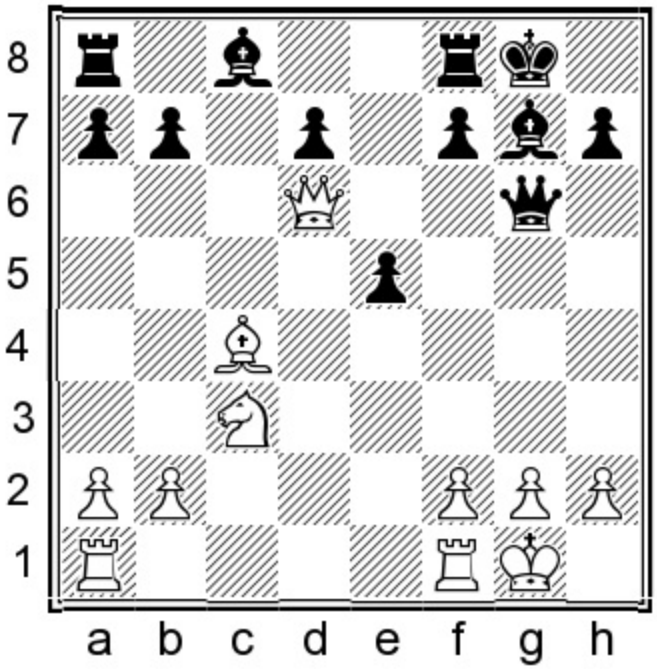


Position after: 13...♕xg5

14.♘d5!?

Black is now forced to sacrifice an exchange, but with the position opening up he has decent compensation with the two bishops.

Another interesting line is 14.fxg6 ♕xg6 [14...hxg6 15.♘e4+– followed by ♗d5 and Black simply can't develop anything.]



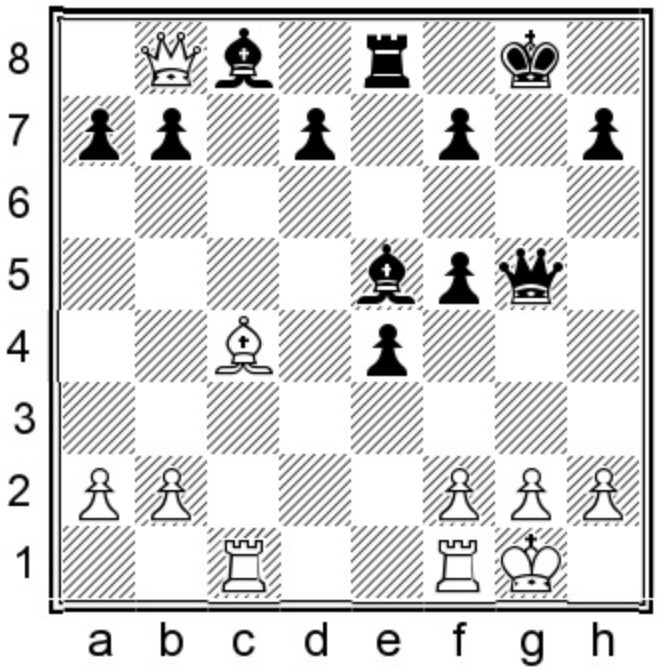
Position after: 14...♕xg6

15.♖ad1 [15.♕a3!? d5 16.♗xd5 ♔h8 17.♖ad1± with a development advantage.] 15...♕xd6 16.♖xd6 ♔h8 17.♖fd1 f5 [17...a6?! 18.♖b6±] 18.♗b5↑ White has a little pressure in this endgame, though it is quite drawish.

14...gxf5 15.♘c7 ♖b8 16.♘e8 ♖xe8 17.♕xb8 e4!

Black threatens to play ...♗e5 and ...e4-e3 to weaken our dark squares, so we need to try and counter attack.

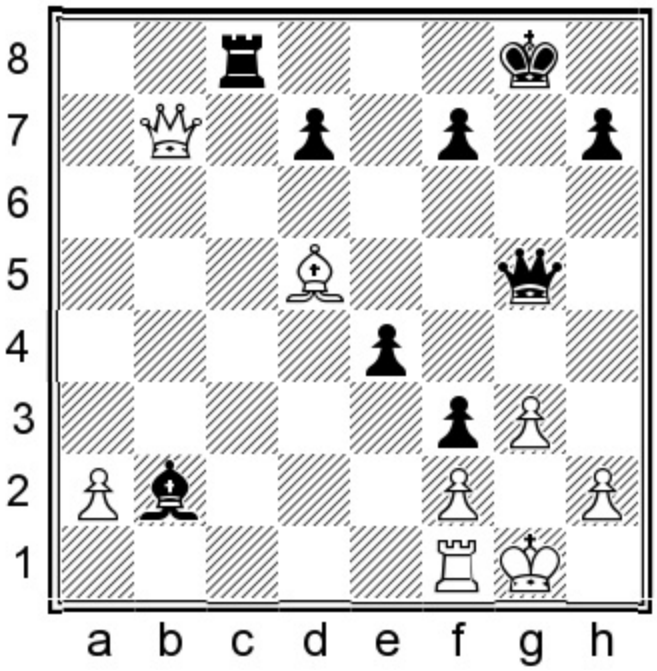
18.♖ac1 ♗e5



Position after: 18...♗e5

19.♕a8

19.♕xa7 f4 20.♗d5 ♗xb2 21.♖xc8 ♖xc8 22.♕xb7 f3 23.g3



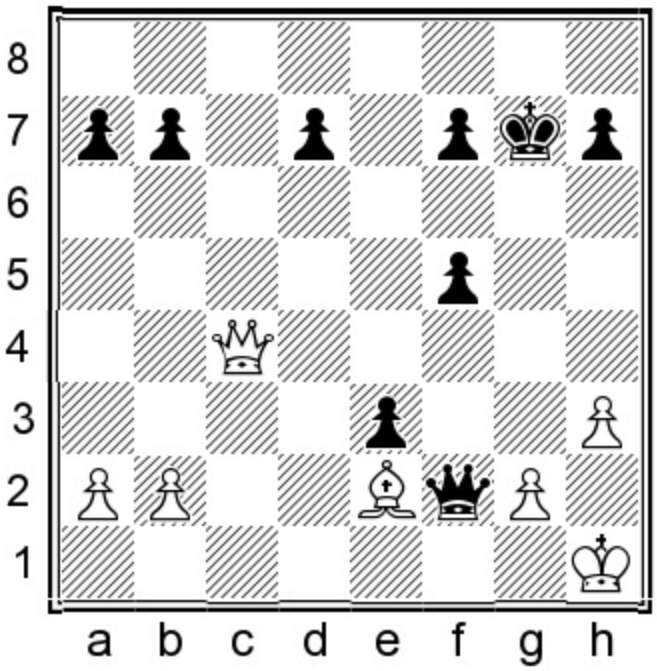
Position after: 23.g3

23...♕c1! 24.♕b4 ♗d4 25.♗xe4 ♕xf1+ 26.♔xf1 ♖c1+ 27.♕e1 ♖xe1+ 28.♔xe1 We're still pressing but Black should be able to draw with relative ease.

19...e3!

Sacrificing another piece to reach an amazing position where we can't really make any progress.

20.f4 ♗xf4 21.♗e2 ♕h4 22.h3 ♕g3 23.♖xf4 ♕xf4 24.♖xc8 ♕f2+ 25.♔h1 ♖xc8 26.♕xc8+ ♔g7 27.♕c4



Position after: 27.♕c4

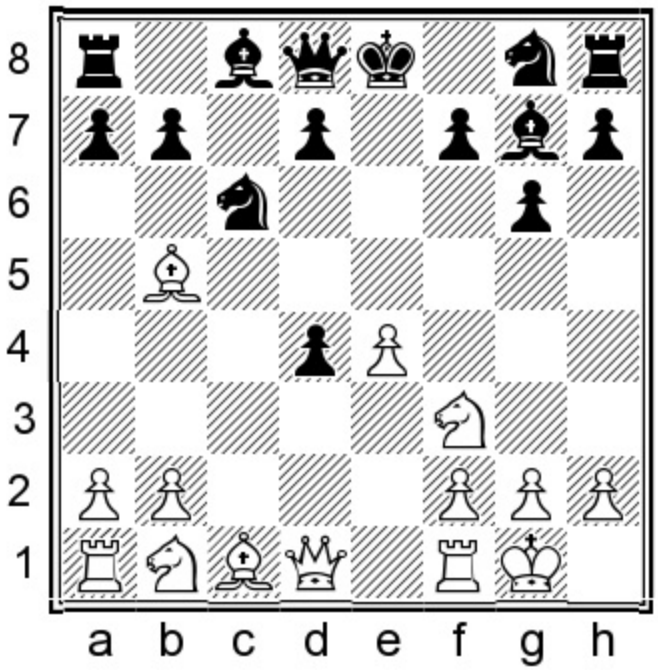
The line has been completely forced so far, and incredibly Black is absolutely fine here because it's impossible to ever use our king.

27...f4 28.♕d4+ ♔g8 29.♕d1 d5 30.♕f1 h5!=

A really important move for Black to play, and now we can't exchange queens or we'll just be losing as it's impossible to ever get our king in the game.

Chapter 16
4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 e5 with 7...exd4

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 e5 6.d4 cxd4 7.cxd4 exd4



Chapter Guide

Chapter 16 – 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 e5 with 7...exd4

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 e5 6.d4! cxd4 7.cxd4 exd4 8.♗f4

a) 8...♘ge7

b) 8...a6 9.♗a4 b5

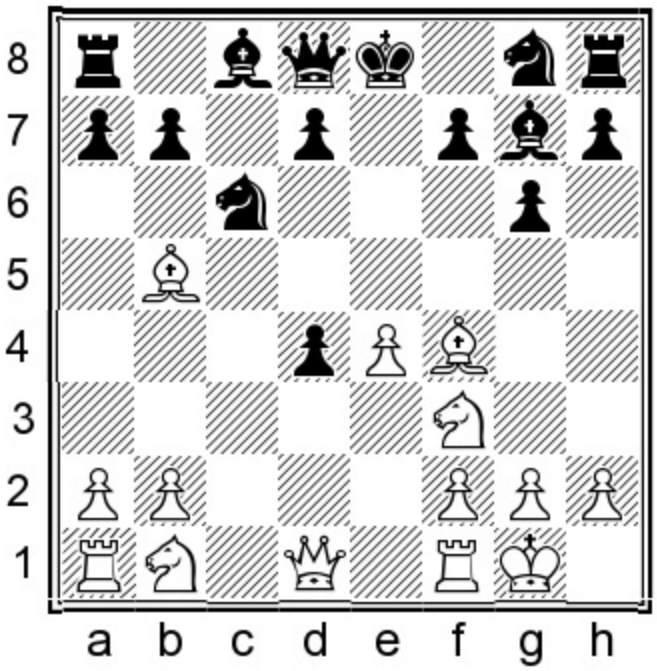
c) 8...a6 9.♗a4 ♘ge7 10.♗d6 (with 15.a4!?)

d) 8...a6 9.♗a4 ♘ge7 10.♗d6 (with 15.h4!?)

e) 8...a6 9.♗a4 ♘ge7 10.e5!?N

a) 8...♘ge7

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 e5 6.d4! cxd4 7.cxd4 exd4 8.♗f4



Position after: 8.♗f4

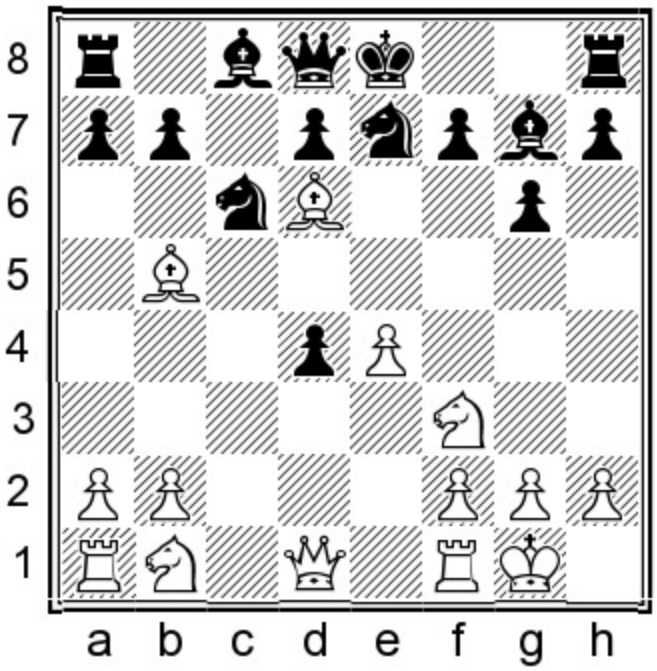
The difference compared to 7...♘xd4 is that the f3- and c6-knights remain on the board. We still have the same plan of playing ♗d6 and attempting to cramp Black's position, but the addition of the knights changes the complexity of the game. For example, the knight on c6 helps to counter ideas of ♕b3 and ♗c4, and also stops a possible ♕a4+ and ♕b4 to attack the d6-pawn – as we saw in the lines after 7...♘xd4. On the other hand, the c6-knight also stops Black's interesting possibility of playing ...b7-b5, ...a6-a5 and ...♖a6 to attack the d6-bishop. Therefore, Black's best method to remove our dark-squared is to try and play ...♗b7 and ...♘c8 as quickly as possible. As we will see, Black can only equalise if he does this absolutely immediately – and even then we have interesting possibilities to try and create new problems for Black.

8...♘ge7

This has been played a lot more than 8...a6, but is actually the inferior move. The difference can be seen after understanding why Black might play 8...a6 immediately. By immediately making us decide where to put our bishop, Black can respond wisely based on what White decides to play.

8...a6 The best move, which will be examined next.

9.♗d6

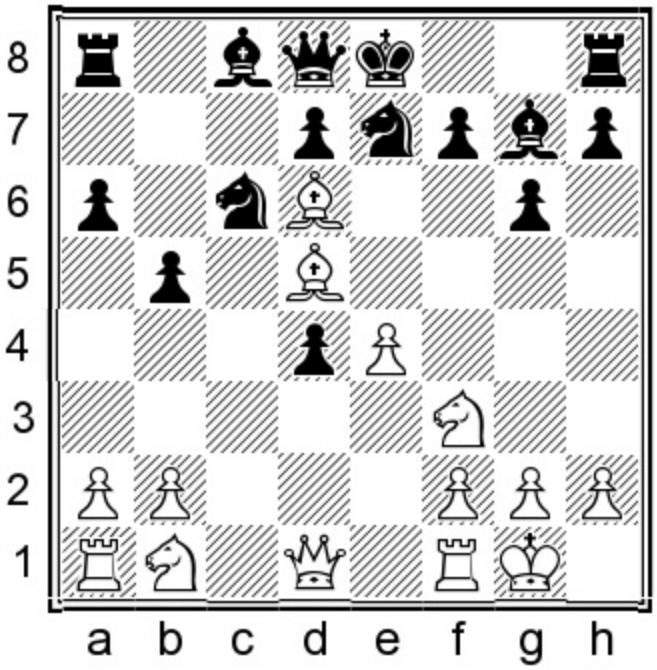


Position after: 9.♗d6

9...0-0

This has been played numerous times, even by strong players such as Fedoseev. However, after castling Black will face real problems trying to get rid of the bishop on d6.

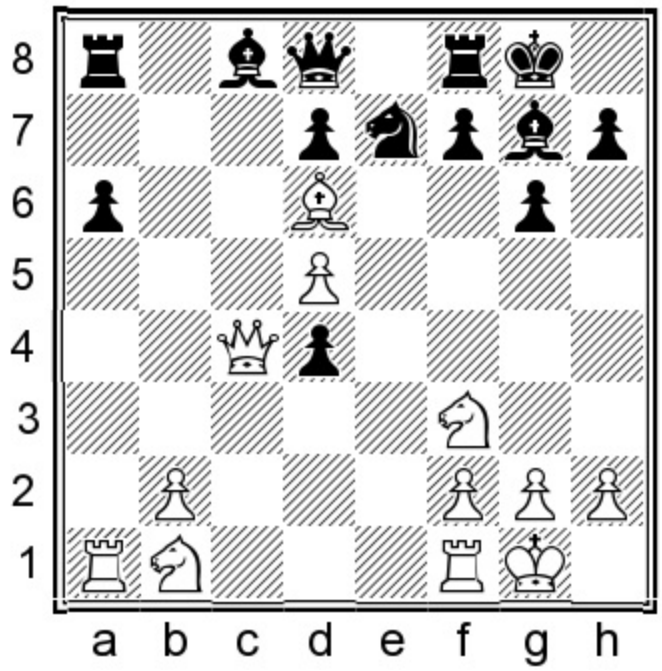
A) 9...a6 It makes sense for Black to keep going with his plan of ♗b7 and ♘c8 to remove the d6-bishop. 10.♗c4 b5 [10...0-0 11.a4 transposes to 9...0-0] 11.♗d5!N



Position after: 11.♗d5!N

This line emphasizes the difference between 8...a6 and 8...♘ge7. If we play ♗b3 instead of ♗d5, we'll transpose to the mainline after 8...a6. However the fact that we could play 10.♗c4 instead of 10.♗a4 with our bishop already on d6, means that we have this option. The difference between having our light-squared bishop on d5 rather than b3 can be seen in the following variation.

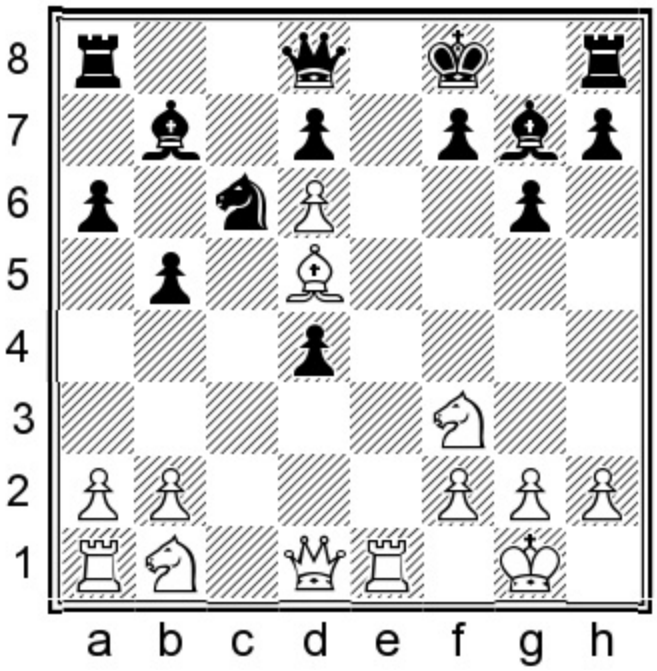
A1) 11...0-0 Black can also switch plans to sacrifice an exchange on d5. However, we will always be able to maintain an advantage as long as we keep playing actively. 12.a4! bxa4 [12...♗b7 13.axb5 axb5 14.♖xa8 ♕xa8 15.♗xc6 ♘xc6 16.♗xf8 ♕xf8 17.♕b3 ♘b4 18.♘bd2±] 13.♕xa4 ♘xd5 14.exd5 ♘e7 15.♕c4



Position after: 15.♕c4

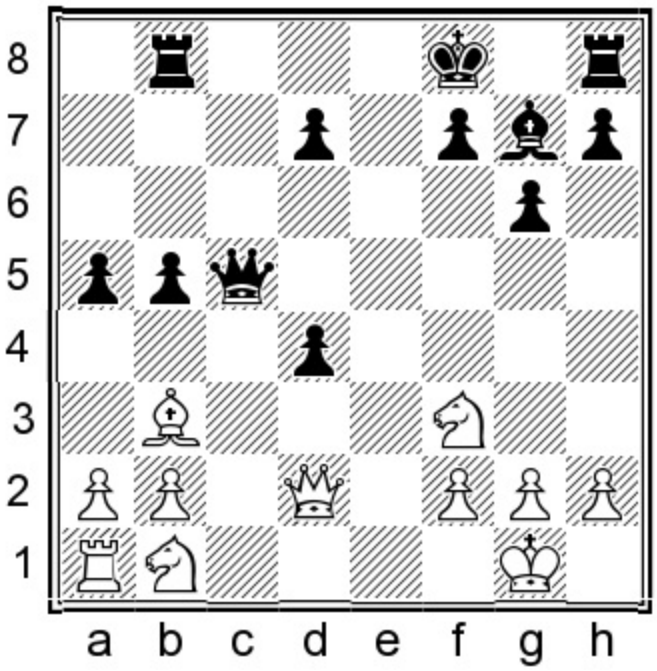
It's very difficult to find a move which doesn't lose material for Black here, so it's probably best for him to sacrifice an exchange. 15...♘f5 16.♗xf8 ♕xf8 Once again, Black doesn't have full compensation for the exchange, and the position seems more pleasant to play with for White, e.g. 17.♕b3!± Restricting Black's queenside development, and facilitating ♘a3-c4.

A2) 11...♗b7 Naturally continuing with the plan of playing ...♘c8. 12.♖e1 ♘c8 13.e5 ♘xd6 14.exd6+ ♔f8



Position after: 14...♔f8

The mainline after 8...a6 sees this corresponding position, but with White's bishop on b3 instead of d5. The small difference allows a significant possibility for White here. 15.♖e7! ♘xe7 16.dxe7+ ♕xe7 17.♗xb7 ♖b8 18.♗d5 The two minor pieces are clearly better than Black's rook, and all we need to do now is develop our queenside pieces. 18...♕c5 19.♗b3 a5 20.♕d2!

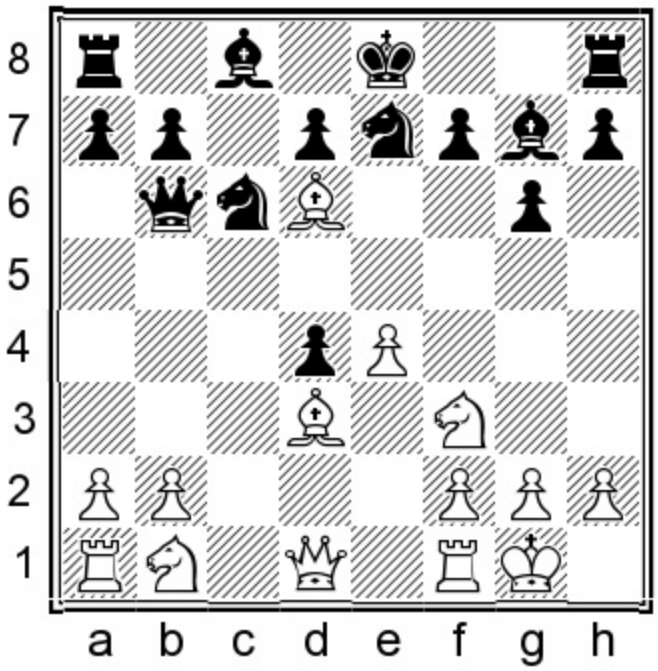


Position after: 20.♕d2!

Allowing the bishop to drop back to d1. 20...♖c8 21.♘a3 a4 22.♗d1 Followed by ♘c2-b4-d3, and

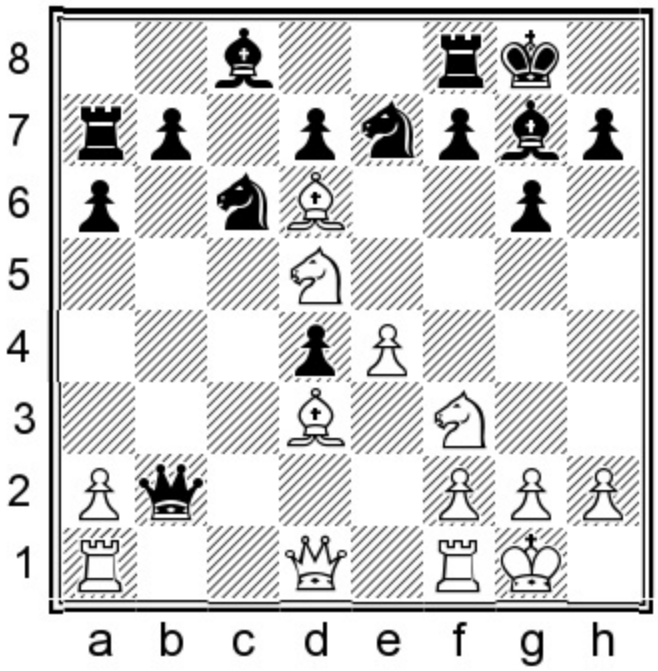
we can slowly start to establish control. 22...d3? fails due to 23.♘e1!+–

B) 9...♕b6? The second most common move but quite a big mistake, as the queen will naturally find itself completely misplaced on b6. 10.♗d3



Position after: 10.♗d3

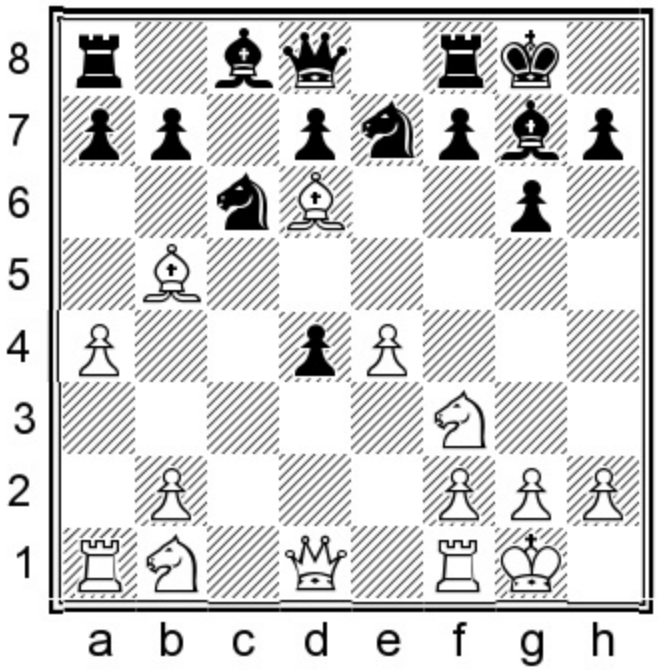
10...♕xb2 is also going to be very bad after [10...0-0 11.♘a3 a6 12.b4!+– Followed by either ♘c4 or b4-b5, and it's evident that Black has lost critical time.] 11.♘a3 0-0 12.♘b5 a6 13.♘c7 ♖a7 14.♘d5



Position after: 14.♘d5

Our three minor pieces combine to trap the Black queen. 14...♖e8 15.♖e1+– The threat of ♖e2 is unstoppable.

10.a4!

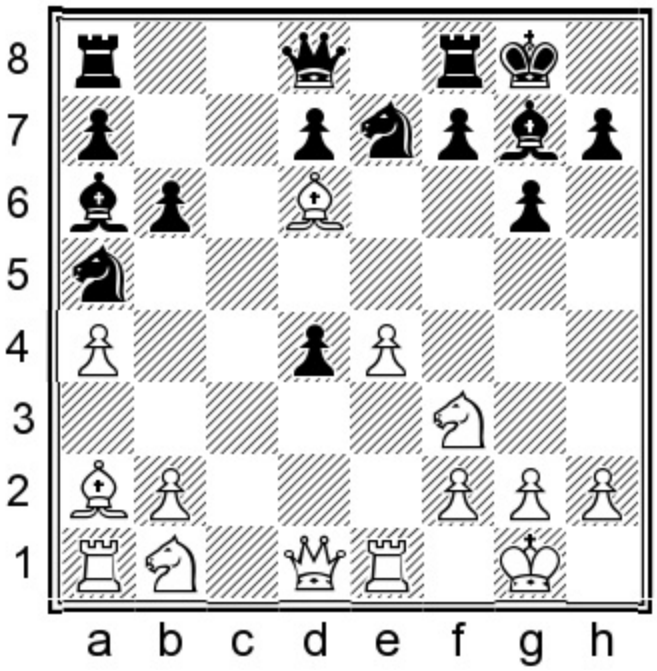


Position after: 10.a4!

Most players (including correspondence) prefer either ♘bd2 or ♘a3, but I really like the text move as we're essentially following our main concept of cramping Black.

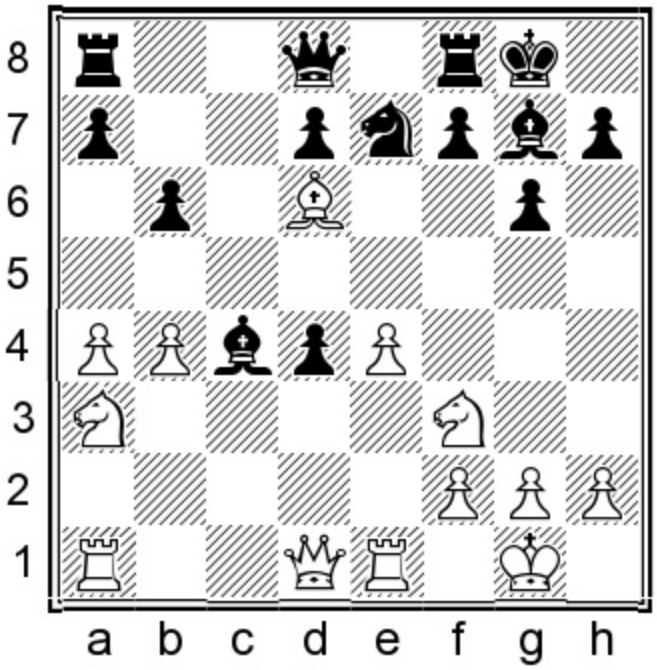
10...a6

Black can also start with 10...b6 but it doesn't make a huge difference. We'll still continue with our plan of putting our light-squared bishop on the a2-g8 diagonal. 11.♖e1 ♗b7 12.♗c4! Now ...♘c8 will of course lose an exchange, and any attempt from Black to play ...♖e8 in preparation of ...♘c8 will be met with an attack on the f7-pawn. 12...♘a5 13.♗a2 ♗a6 A benefit of playing ...b7-b6 without ...a7-a6 is that Black has this square for his bishop.



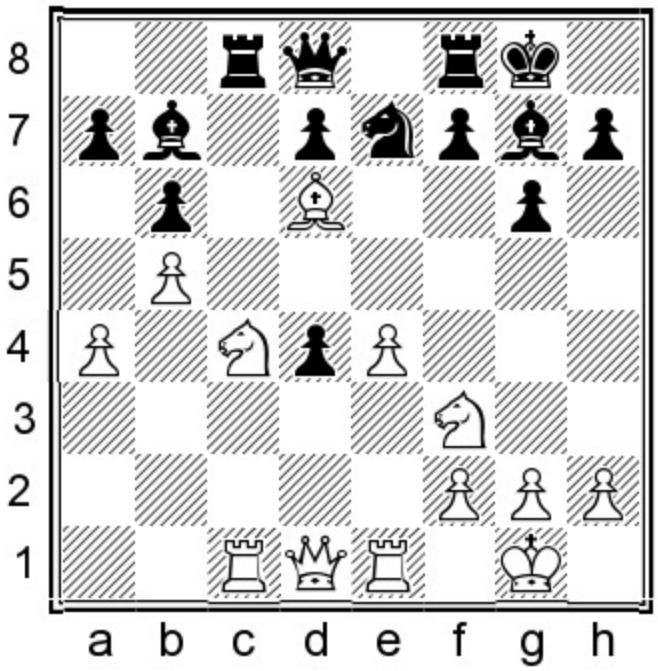
Position after: 13...♗a6

He now plans to attack our bishop on d6 with a knight on c4 rather than on c8. But the time wasted in carrying out this attack means that we can just continue to develop with the knowledge that we'll always hold an advantage, even without our light-squared bishop. 14.b4! ♘c4 15.♗xc4 ♗xc4 16.♘a3



Position after: 16.♘a3

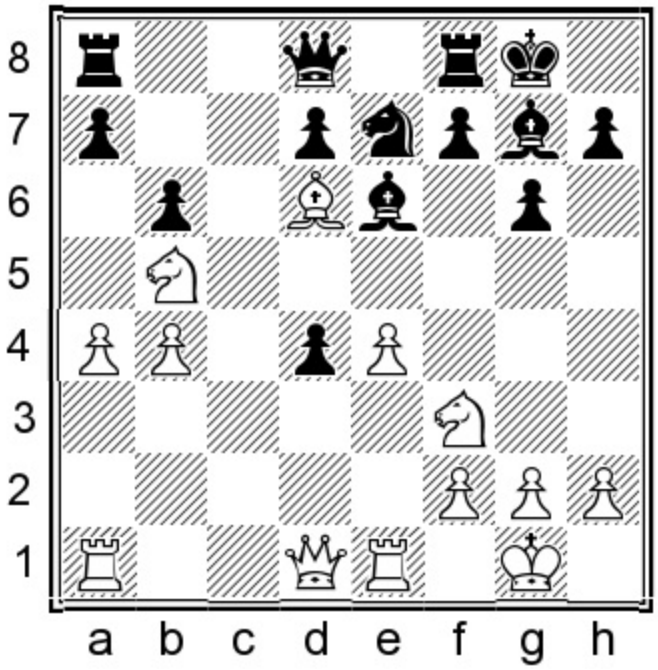
A) 16...♗a6 17.b5 ♗b7 18.♖c1 Black still doesn't have time to play ...♖e8 and ... ♘c8, and our comparatively superior pieces yields us a decisive advantage. 18...♖c8 19.♘c4



Position after: 19.♘c4

19...♗h6 [19...♖e8 20.♗a3!+– A resulting knight on d6 will be even more powerful than the bishop was.] 20.♕xd4! Perhaps a little unecessary, but it's thematic and still easily winning. 20...♗xc1 21.♖xc1 f6 22.♖d1+– Followed by ♘e3-g4.

B) 16...♗e6 17.♘b5

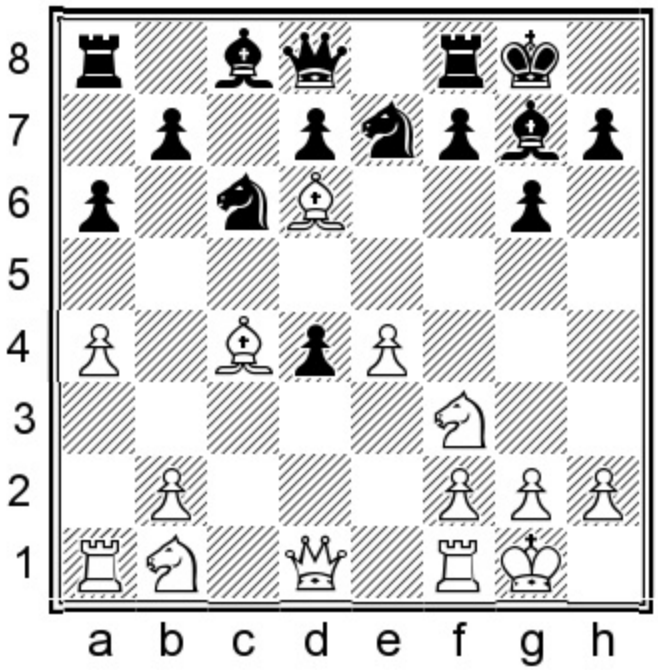


Position after: 17.♘b5

17...♘c6 [17...♗g4 18.h3 ♗xf3 19.♕xf3+– This doesn't really change anything, and if nothing else

we can continue with e4-e5 and ♘xd4.; 17...a6 18.♘c7 ♖a7 19.♖c1 ♗g4 20.h3 ♗xf3 21.♕xf3+– Our pieces are paralysing Black.] 18.e5+– We can choose if we ever actually want to capture on f8, but simply capturing on d4 next will ensure a significant advantage.

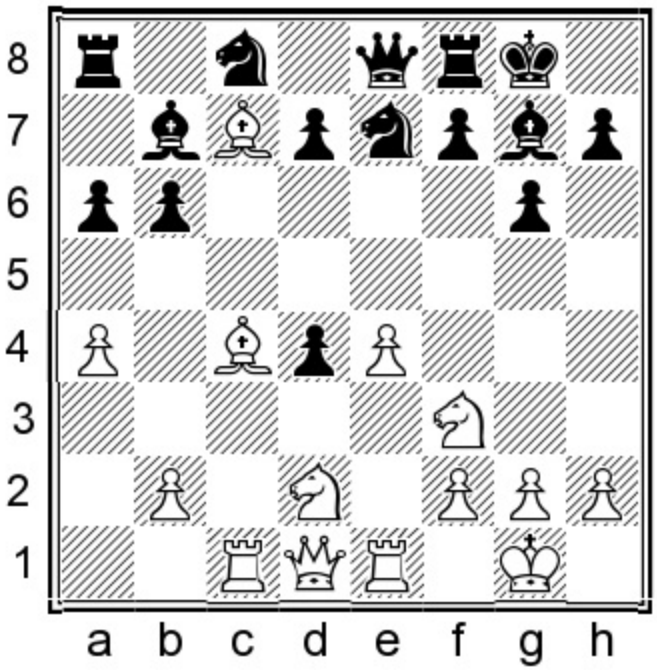
11.♗c4



Position after: 11.♗c4

11...♘a5

11...b6 12.♘bd2 ♗b7 [12...♘a5 transposes to 11...♘a5.] 13.♖e1 ♘a7 14.♖c1 ♘ac8 15.♗c7! ♕e8



Position after: 15...♕e8

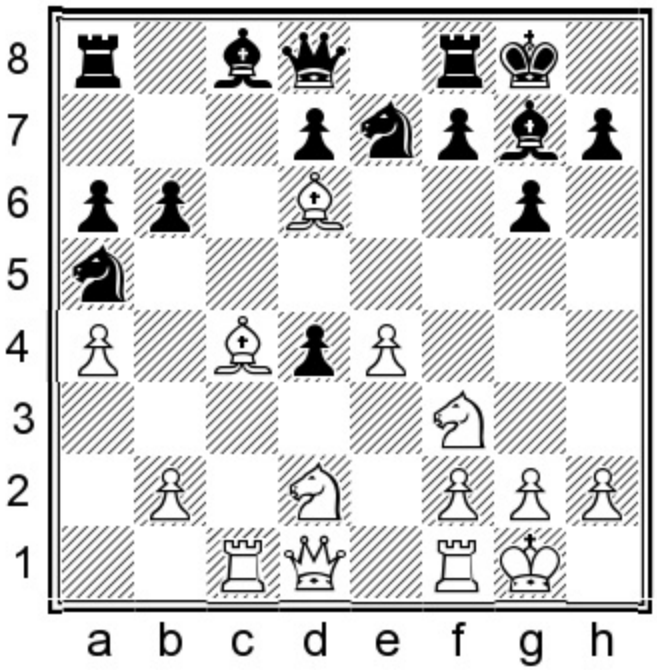
We have a few ways to continue, but simplest to me seems 16.e5± followed by ♘e4 and capturing on d4 whenever we like. [16.♗e5 is also very strong.]

12.♘bd2!

Black can't capture on c4 as his b6-square will be too big of a weakness, so it makes sense to play ♘bd2 rather than ♗a2.

12...b6 13.♖c1

13.♗a2 ♘b7! is Black's idea here.



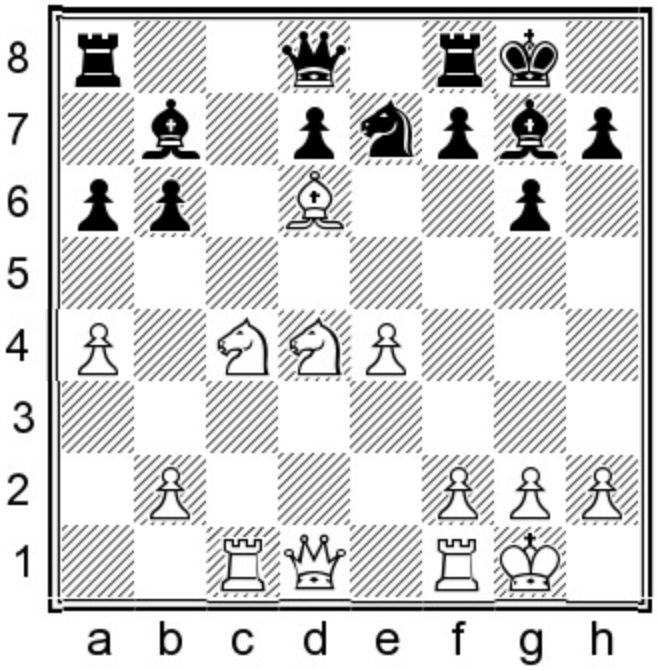
Position after: 13.♖c1

13...♘xc4

A) 13...♗b7 14.♗a2 Followed by b2-b4 and typically, I'm not sure what Black can do next.

B) 13...♘b7 14.♗c7!+– Illustrating the point of 13.♖c1.

14.♘xc4 ♗b7 15.♘xd4



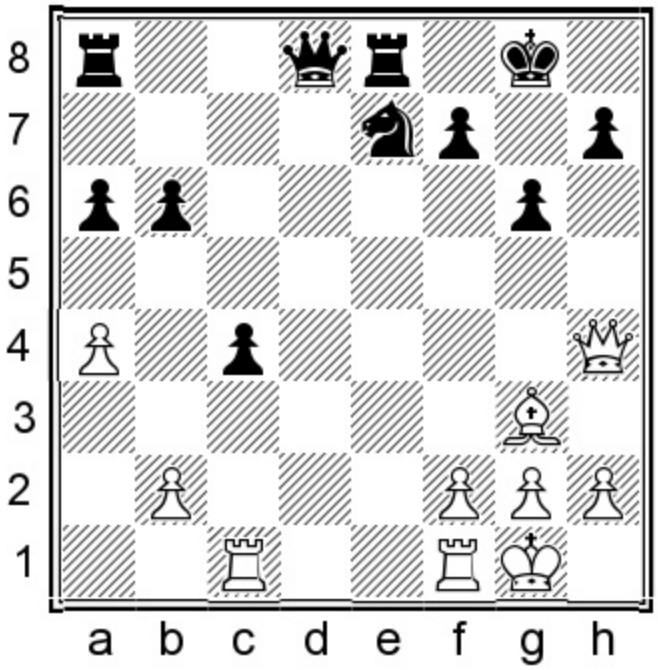
Position after: 15.♘xd4

Although Black has simplified a little bit, we've won our pawn back and now just have a really pleasant position.

15...♖e8 16.♗g3

The threat of ♘d6 requires immediate action.

16...♗xd4 17.♕xd4 ♗xe4 18.♕xe4 d5 19.♕h4 dxc4



Position after: 19...dxc4

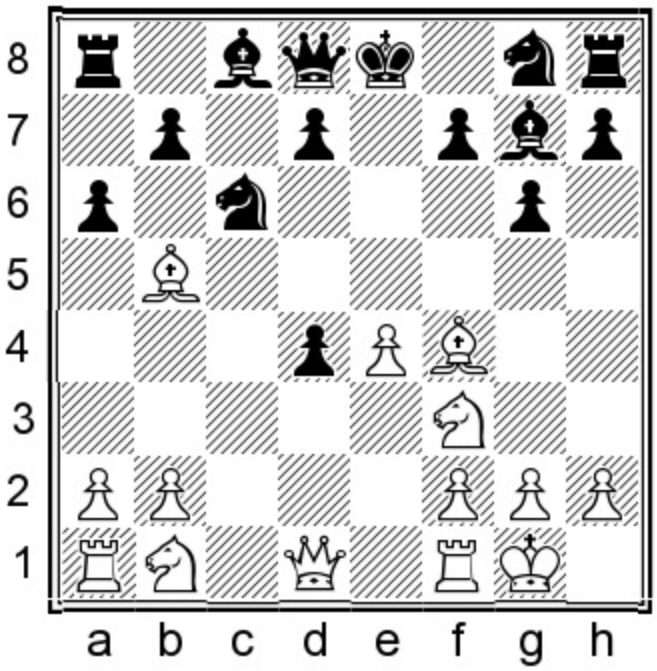
By trading his g7-bishop, Black has now created dark-squared weaknesses.

20.♖fd1 ♕c8 21.♖xc4 ♕f5 22.h3±

Followed by ♖cd4, and White has a clearly significant advantage.

b) 8...a6 9.♗a4 b5

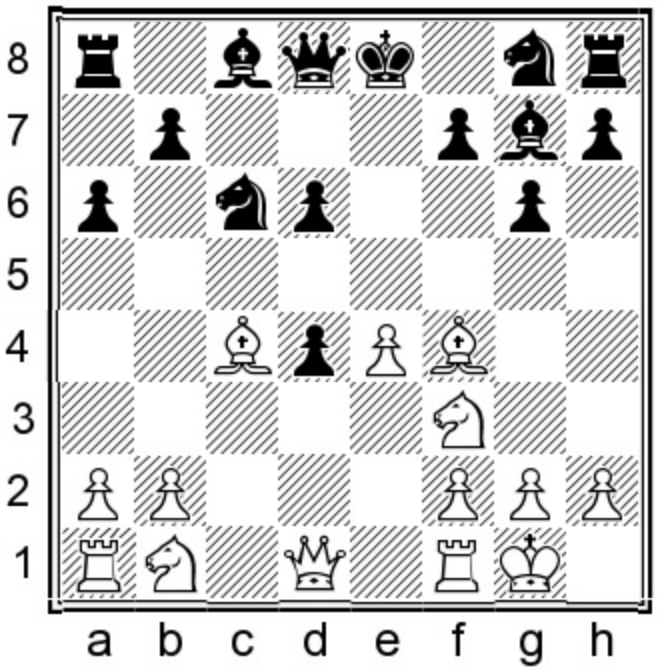
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 e5 6.d4! cxd4 7.cxd4 exd4 8.♗f4 a6



Position after: 8...a6

9.♗a4

A) 9.♗c4 d6!



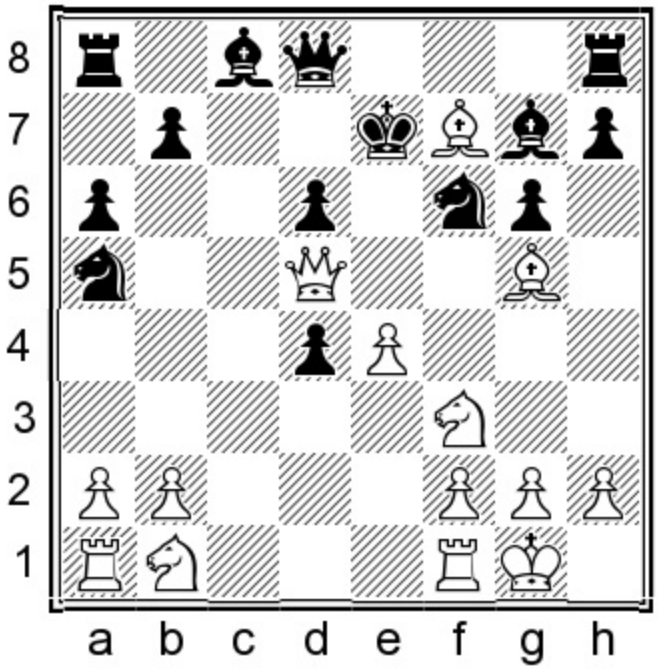
Position after: 9...d6!

The point of an early ...a7-a6. We can't implement our bishop on d6 but, more importantly, Black is able to meet ♕b3 with ...♘a5. White has to be accurate to maintain equality here.

A1) 10.♘g5 is another option, but after 10...♘h6 I didn't find anything concrete and it seems that Black is perfectly fine.

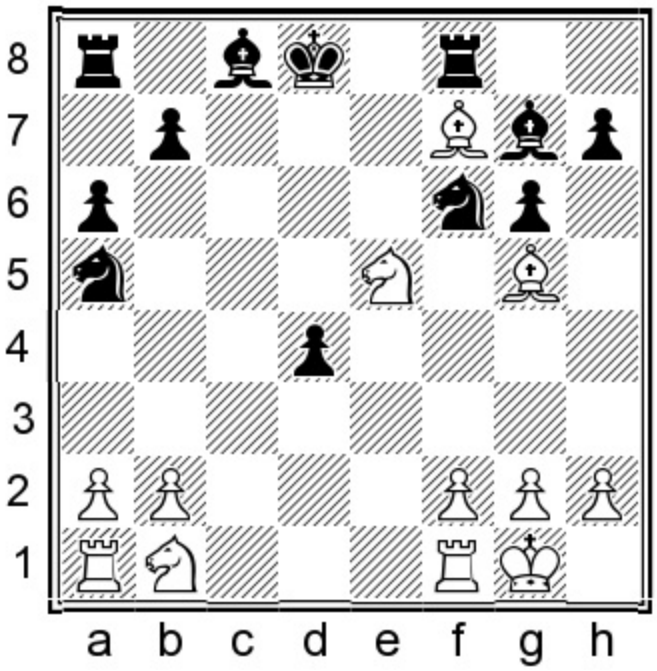
A2) I tried to play slowly against Miguel Santos Ruiz with 10.♘bd2?, but slowly Black took over and was pretty much just a clear pawn up. 10...♘f6 11.♖e1 0-0 12.♗b3 h6 13.h3 ♖e8 14.♖c1 Here if 14...♖e7∓ was played, Black would be in complete control. [14...d5?± Haria – Santos Ruiz, New Delhi 2019.]

A3) 10.♕b3 This line should just lead to a forced draw, as long as both sides are careful. 10...♘a5! [10...♕d7? 11.♘bd2 ♘f6 12.♕a3 0-0 13.♗xd6±] 11.♗xf7+ ♔e7 12.♕d5 ♘f6 13.♗g5



Position after: 13.♗g5

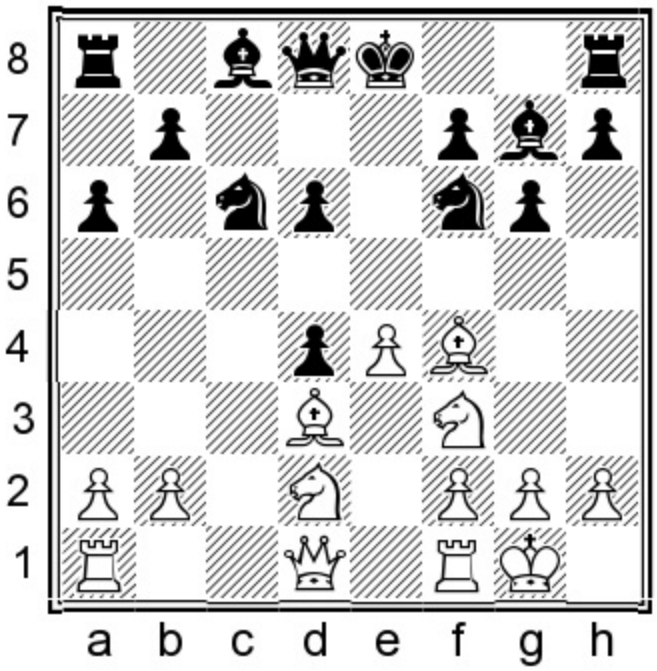
It seems like White is hanging on by a thread, but Black doesn't have a good way to take advantage of our uncoordinated pieces. 13...♖f8 [13...♘c6 14.♕b3 ♘a5 15.♕d5= is a possible repetition.] 14.e5 dxe5 15.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 16.♘xe5=



Position after: 16.♘xe5=

If Black wants, he can reach this ending, but I would think that Black is the one who has to be slightly careful not to be worse. In any case, if Black wants to force a draw, he can always play 13...♘c6.

B) 9.♗d3?! d6 10.♘bd2 ♘f6!



Position after: 10...♘f6!

The difference compared to the corresponding variation after 8...♘xd4 is that here, we don't have

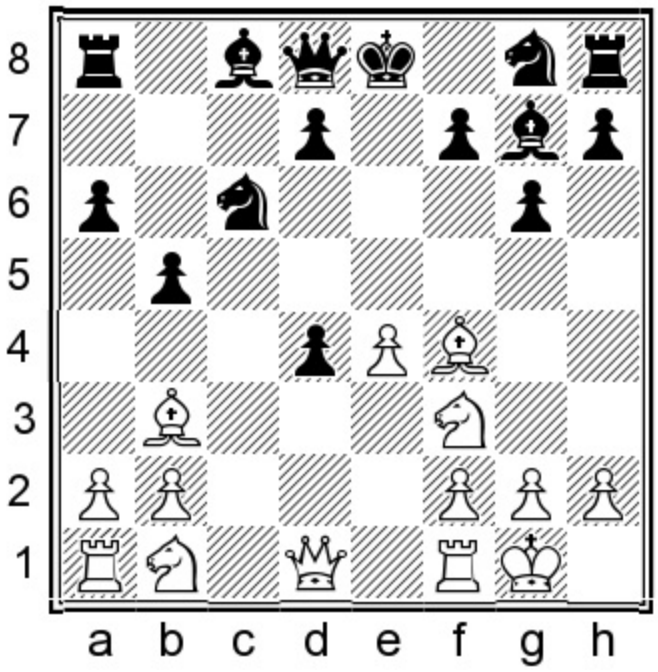
the possibility of ♕a4+ and ♕b4. 11.♘c4 0-0 12.♗xd6 ♖e8∓

9...b5

It's probably one move too early for ...b7-b5, as here we can try and exploit it by countering with a2-a4 on the next move.

9...♘ge7 will be covered next.

10.♗b3

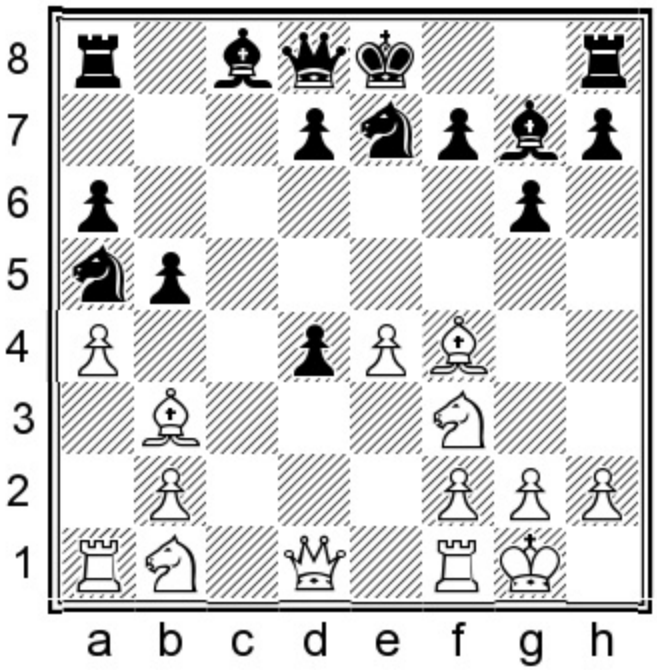


Position after: 10.♗b3

10...d6

10...♘ge7 11.a4!

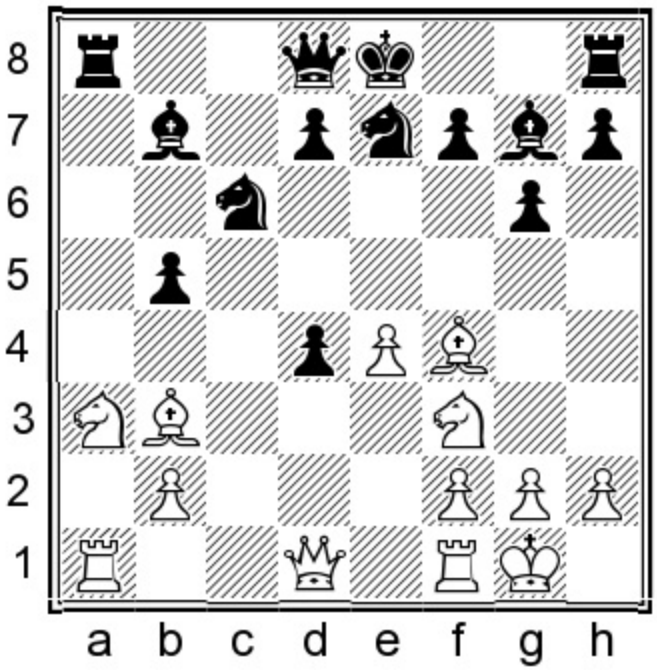
A) 11...♘a5



Position after: 11...♘a5

Black can also try to directly equalise by returning the pawn immediately, but we'll still be able to cause some problems. 12.♘xd4 0-0 13.axb5 ♗b7 [13...♘xb3 14.♘xb3 ♗b7 15.♘c5+–] 14.♗a2! d5 15.♗g5 h6 16.♗xe7 ♕xe7 17.♗xd5 ♗xd5 18.exd5 axb5 19.♘xb5 ♗xb2 20.♖a2±

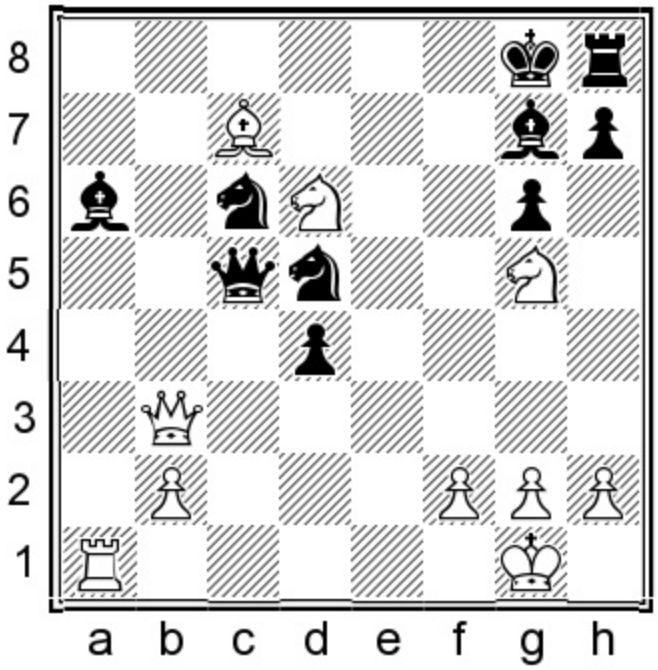
B) 11...♗b7 12.axb5 axb5 13.♘a3



Position after: 13.♘a3

13...♕b6 Black is still able to meet 14.♗d6 with ...♘c8, but we have a new possibility to seize the

initiative. [13...♗a6 14.♖e1 0-0 15.♗d6±] 14.♗xf7+! ♔xf7 15.♕b3+ d5 [15...♔f8 16.♘c4!+–] 16.♘xb5 ♔g8 [16...♘a5 17.♕b4 ♘c8 18.exd5 ♗xd5 19.♘g5+ ♔g8 20.♖fe1+–] 17.♗c7 ♕c5 18.♖xa8+ ♗xa8 19.♖a1 ♗b7 20.♘d6 ♗a6 21.exd5 ♘xd5 22.♘g5!+– Black will end up losing a piece due to our wide array of threats.

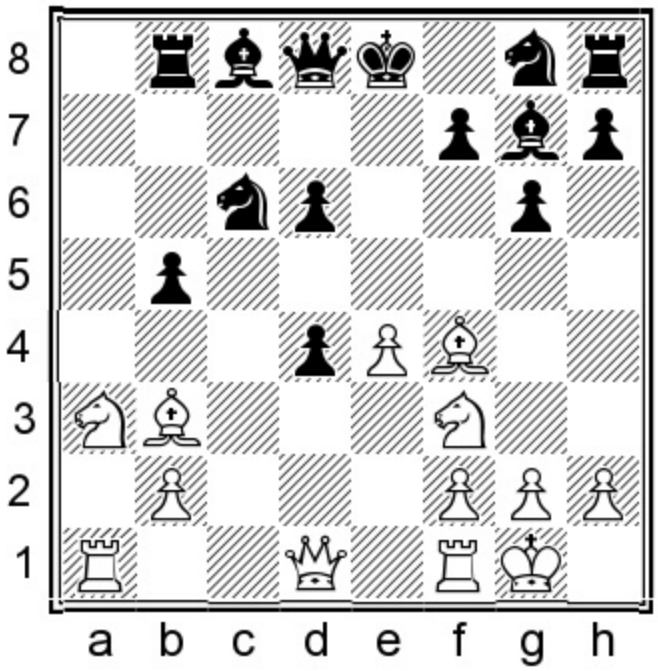


Position after: 22.♘g5!+–

11.a4 ♖b8

11...♗b7 12.axb5 axb5 13.♘a3 The b5-pawn, and most likely the d6-pawn soon after, will be lost.

12.axb5 axb5 13.♘a3

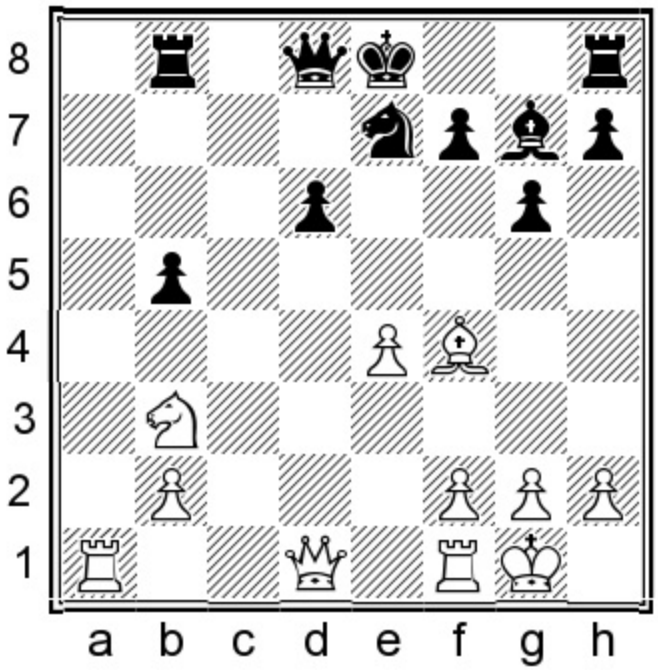


Position after: 13.♘a3

This time the plan is to simply play ♘c2 and ♘xd4.

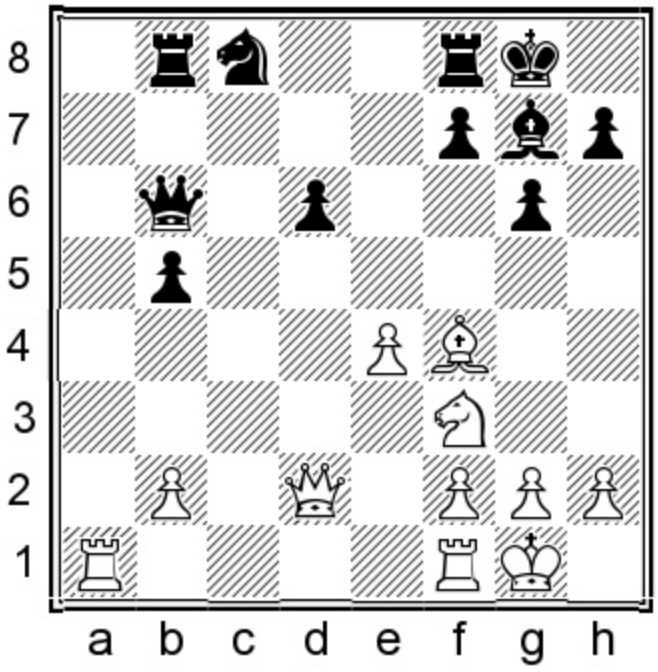
13...h6

Black wants to play ...♕f6, but of course this would be met by ♗g5 on the previous move.
13...♘ge7 14.♘c2 ♗e6 15.♘cxd4 ♘xd4 16.♘xd4 ♗xb3 17.♘xb3



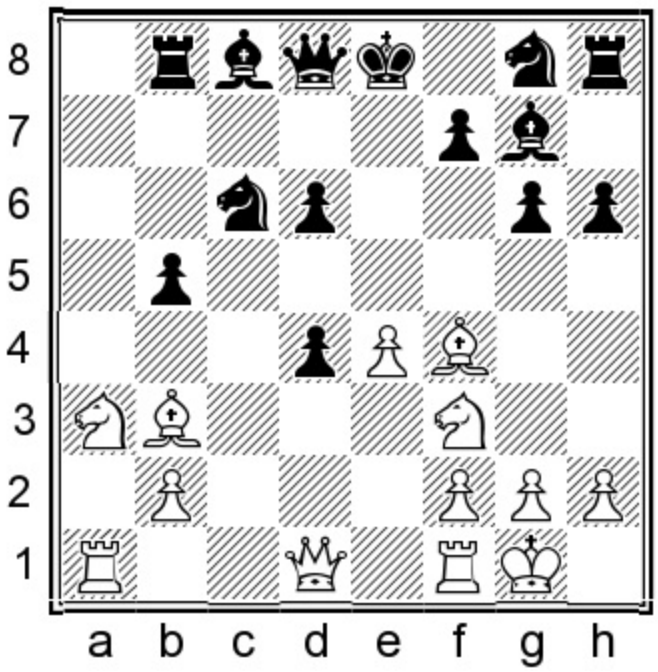
Position after: 17.♘xb3

Black may have simplified by trading a few pieces, but the position isn't equal by any stretch of the imagination. 17...♘c8 [17...♗xb2 18.♖a6 ♗e5 19.♗h6±] 18.♘d4 ♕b6 19.♘f3 0-0 [19...♗xb2 20.♗h6!+– is the point.] 20.♕d2



Position after: 20.♕d2

The d6-pawn is a weakness and our pieces are still much more active. We can press without any risk, and certainly hold at least a small edge. 20...♕b7 21.♖ae1 ♖a8 22.♗h6±

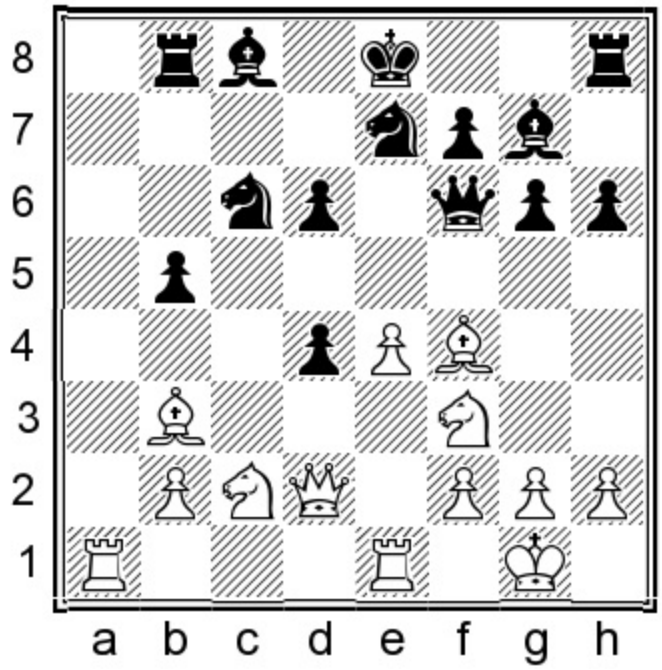


Position after: 13...h6

14.h3!

I want to leave the knight on a3 for the moment – to target the b5-pawn with ♕e2.

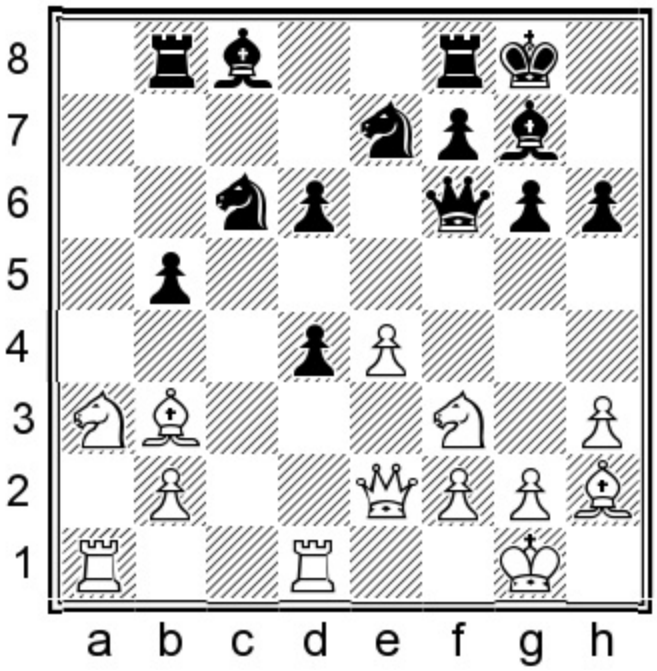
14.♘c2 ♕f6 Black's just about keeping his extra pawn intact, but the awkward positioning of his queen means that we'll able to keep creating threats and maintain our initiative. [14...♗g4 15.h3 ♕f6 16.hxg4! ♕xf4 17.♘cxd4 ♘ge7 18.♘xc6 ♘xc6 19.g3 ♕f6 20.♖a6 ♘d4 21.♘xd4 ♕xd4 22.♖xd6+–] 15.♕d2 ♘ge7 16.♖fe1



Position after: 16.♖fe1

Now e4-e5 is a threat, and Black can't really castle as the h6-pawn will hang. 16...g5 17.♗g3 0-0 18.e5 dxe5 19.♘xe5 ♖b6 20.♖ac1↑

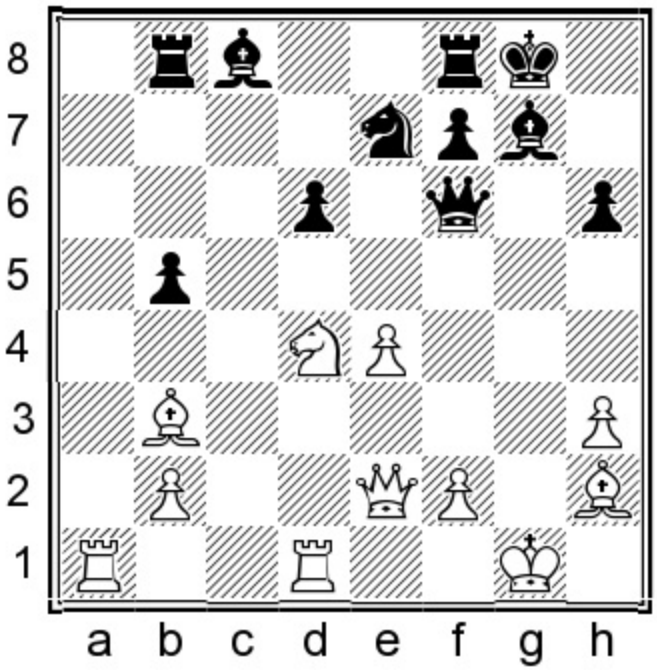
14...♕f6 15.♗h2 ♘ge7 16.♕e2 0-0 17.♖fd1



Position after: 17.♖fd1

Black probably needs to try ...g5-g4 to gain some kind of counterplay, or we'll simply pick up either the b5- or d4-pawn and the game will be quite one-sided.

17...g5 18.♘c2 g4 19.♘fxd4! ♘xd4 20.♘xd4 gxh3 21.gxh3



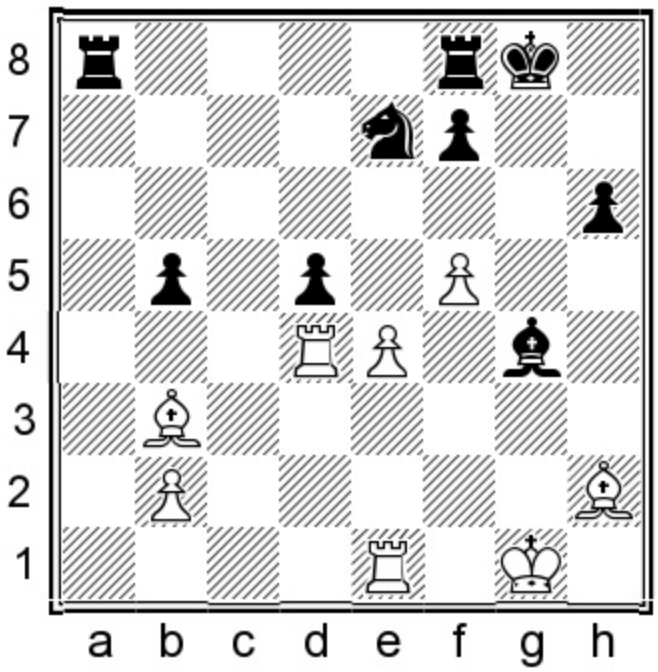
Position after: 21.gxh3

The fact that the d6-pawn remains a weakness, compounded by our more active pieces, means that we

have more than adequate compensation for the pawn.

21...♗xh3

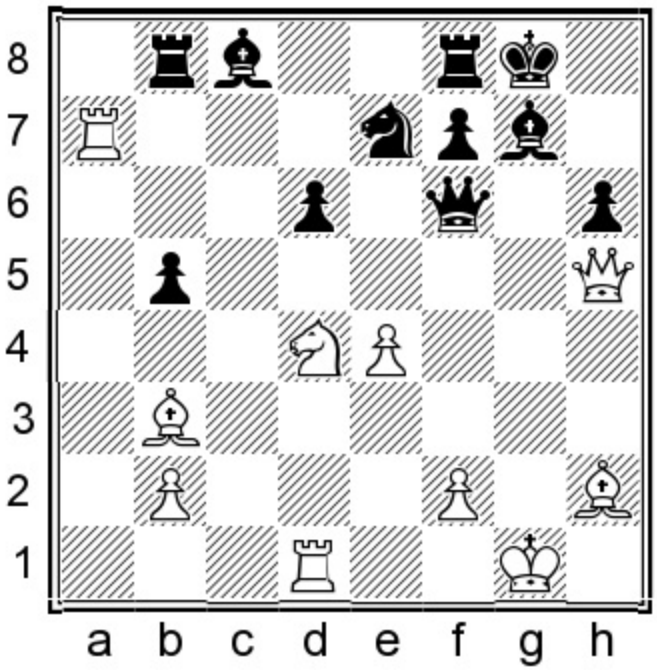
21...♕h4 22.♕e3 ♗xh3 23.♖d3 ♕g4+ 24.♕g3 ♖a8 25.♖e1 ♗e5 26.f4 ♗xd4+ 27.♖xd4 d5 28.♕xg4+ ♗xg4 29.f5±



Position after: 29.f5±

The bishop pair and Black's weak king means that Black faces a struggle to hold this ending.

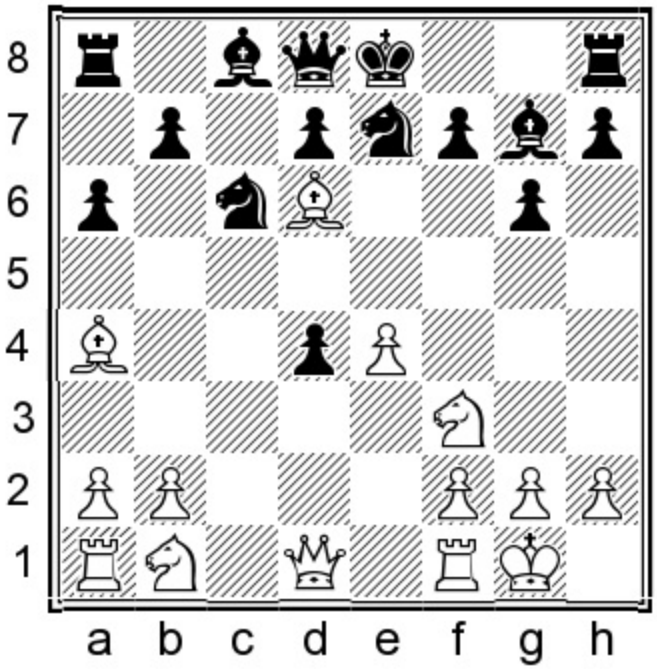
22.♕h5 ♗c8 23.♖a7↑



Position after: 23.♖a7↑

c) 8...a6 9.♗a4 ♘ge7 10.♗d6 (with 15.a4!?)

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 e5 6.d4! cxd4 7.cxd4 exd4 8.♗f4 a6 9.♗a4 ♘ge7 10.♗d6

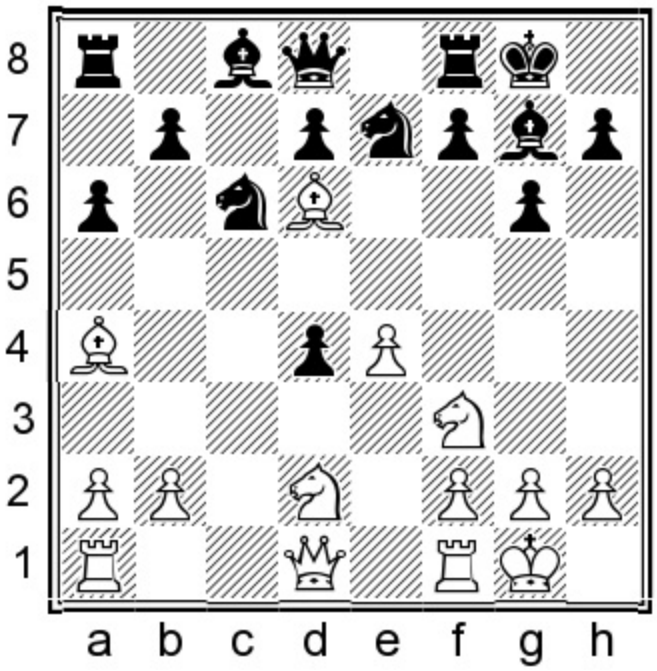


Position after: 10.♗d6

This is the most natural continuation, but Black is just in time to kick our bishop away.

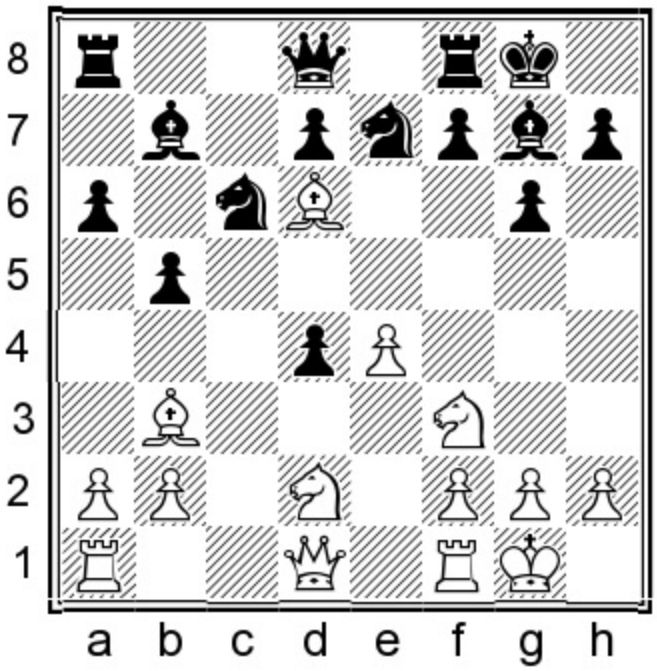
10...b5

10...0-0?! is obviously a mistake, as it will be very difficult to remove the bishop on d6 now. 11.♘bd2



Position after: 11.♘bd2

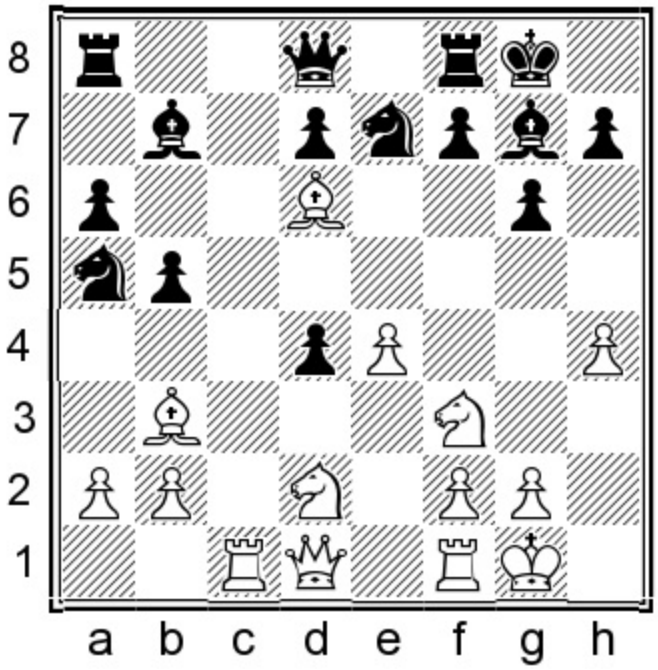
11...b5 [11...b6 12.♖c1 ♗b7 13.♗b3 h6 14.e5+– White was already completely winning in Adams – Mieles Palau, Caleta 2020.] 12.♗b3 ♗b7



Position after: 12...♗b7

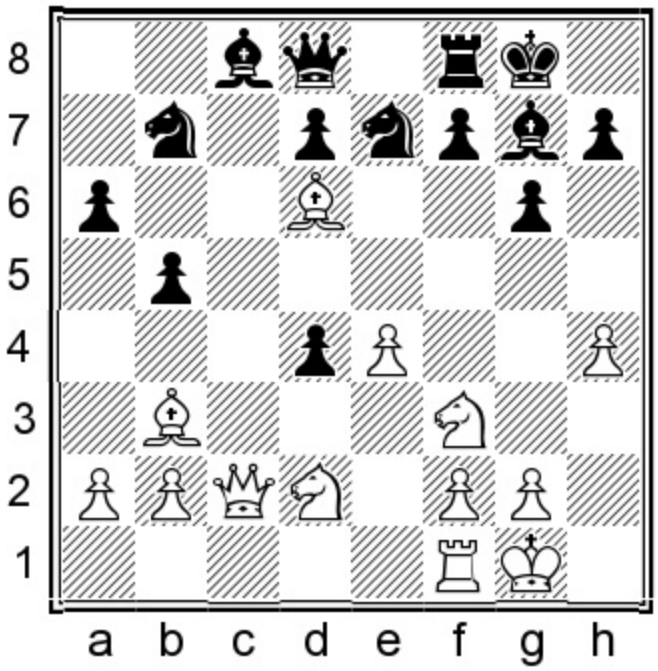
A) 13.♖e1 h6 14.e5 ♘a5 [14...♖e8 allows us to end the game quickly after 15.♗xf7+! ♔xf7 16.♕b3+ ♔f8 17.♘h4+–] 15.♖c1! We may have to give up the bishop-pair, but our pieces are still very active and we're easily winning back the d4-pawn at our leisure. 15...♘xb3 16.♘xb3 ♖c8 17.♖xc8 ♗xc8 18.♘c5±

B) 13.h4!? The AlphaZero way of playing. I'll present a shortened form of my analysis here, as the ideas remain applicable to other variations. 13...♘a5 14.♖c1



Position after: 14.♖c1

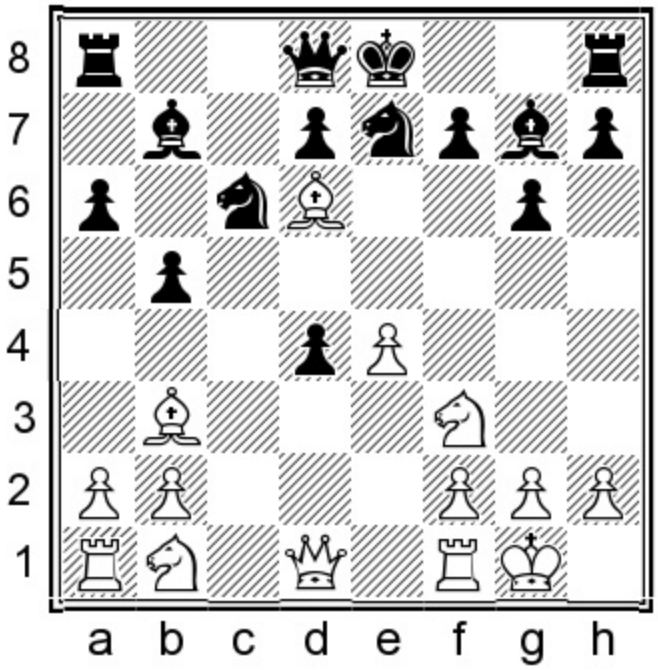
14...♖c8 [14...♗c6 15.♖e1 d3 16.h5! ♗xb2 17.hxg6 hxg6 18.♖b1 ♗c3 19.♖e3 b4 20.a3 ♘xb3 21.♕xb3 a5 22.♖xd3± The b4-pawn will also be lost.] 15.♖xc8 ♗xc8 16.♕c2 ♘b7



Position after: 16...♘b7

Black finds another way to remove our bishop on d6, but his pieces end up being very misplaced and simple chess should suffice for White here. 17.♗c7 ♕e8 18.♗f4 d6 [18...♕d8 19.♖c1 d6 20.♕c7↑] 19.♖c1 h6 20.♕c7 ♕d8 21.♘e1±

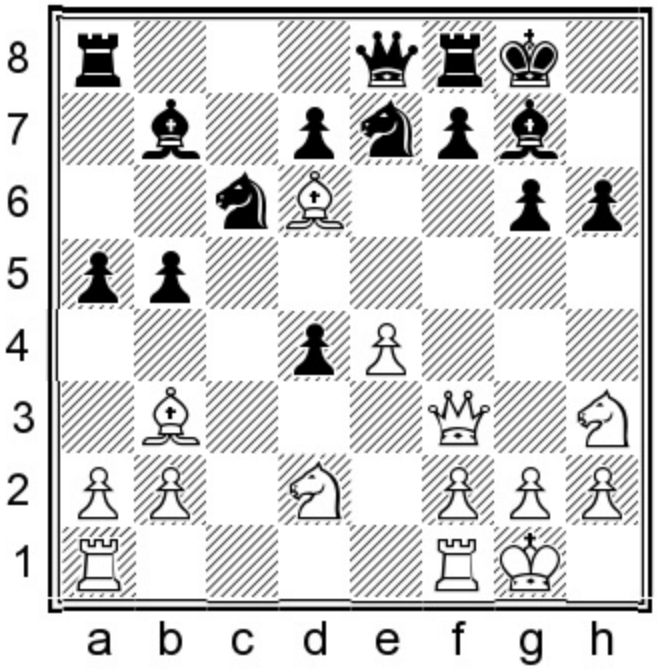
11.♗b3 ♗b7



Position after: 11...♗b7

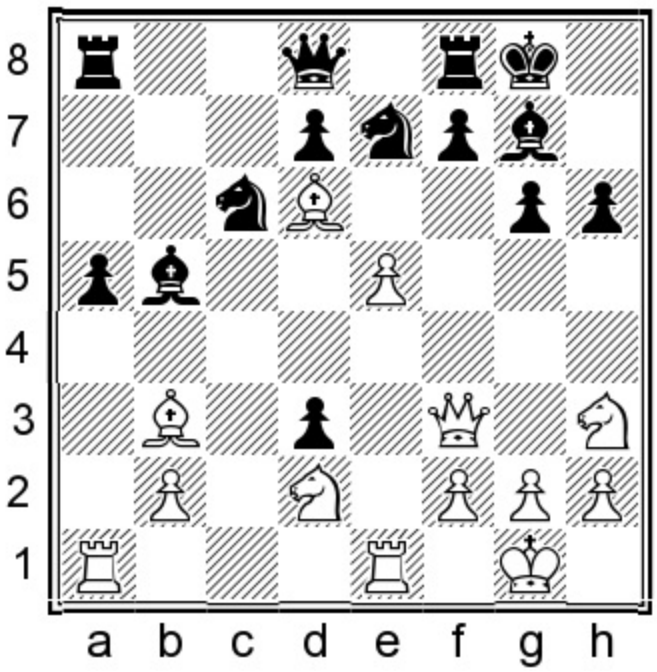
12.♖e1

12.♘g5!? This move illustrates that we are actually able to force Black to castle before he plays ...♘c8. On the downside, we'll be wasting a lot of time with our pieces, so Black should be able to generate enough counterplay. 12...0-0 13.♕f3 ♕e8 14.♘d2 h6 15.♘h3 a5!



Position after: 15...a5!

16.a4 [16.♖fe1 ♕d8 17.♖ac1 ♕b6 It's becoming increasingly difficult for White to prove enough compensation for the pawn.] 16...bxa4 17.♖xa4 ♕d8 18.♖e1 ♗a6 19.e5 ♗b5 20.♖aa1 d3!



Position after: 20...d3!

The threat of ...♘d4 forces us to exchange bishops, after which I think Black is okay. 21.♗c4 ♗xc4 22.♘xc4 d2! 23.♘xd2 ♖e8= Followed by ...♘c8 or ...♘f5, and Black is unravelling. In fact, White has to be careful not to be worse, as the e5-pawn could easily become a weakness.

12...♘c8!

The reason why Black has delayed castling – it's imperative to kick away our bishop at the earliest opportunity.

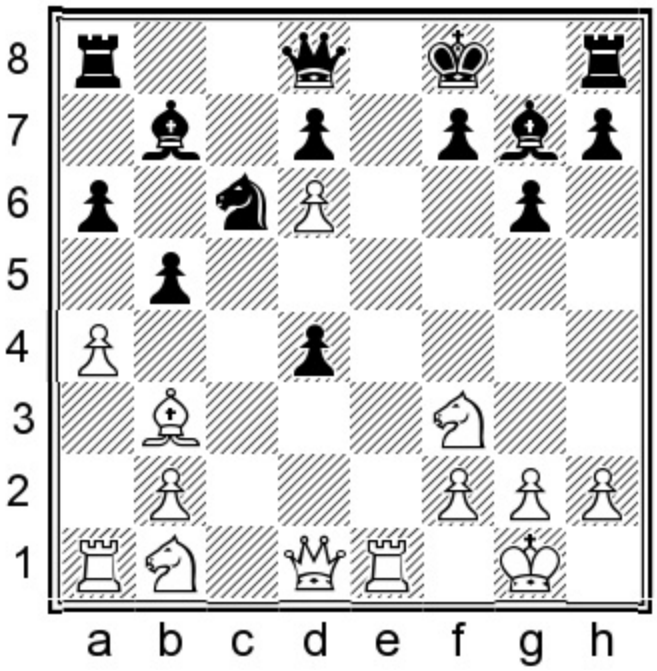
13.e5

The critical test of Black's play.

13...♘xd6 14.exd6+ ♔f8

Black is a pawn up and has the bishop-pair. On the other hand, his king is obviously a bit weaker than ours, and the d6-pawn is a short-term strength as it helps us to create threats.

15.a4!?



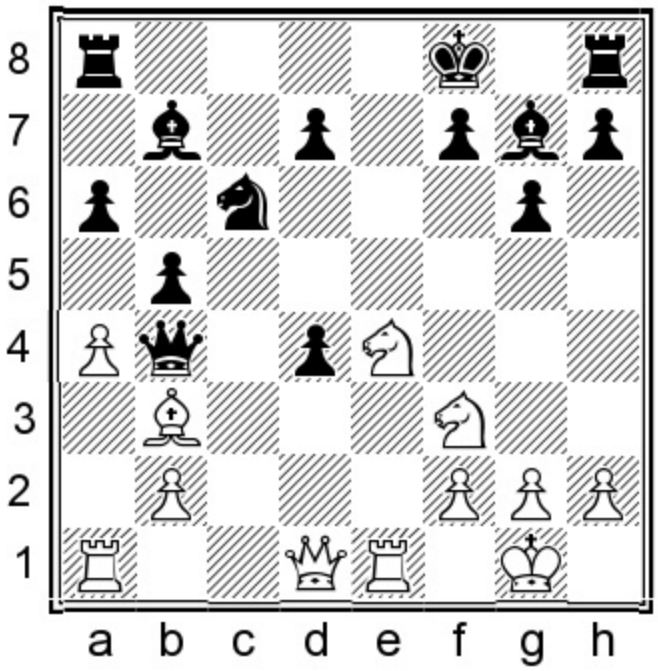
Position after: 15.a4!?

This appears to be a safer option than the 'gung-ho' 15.h4 (see the next subchapter), and was played in the only correspondence game to reach this position. The position is still extremely complex and there are many tricks which Black has to watch out for.

15...♗f6!

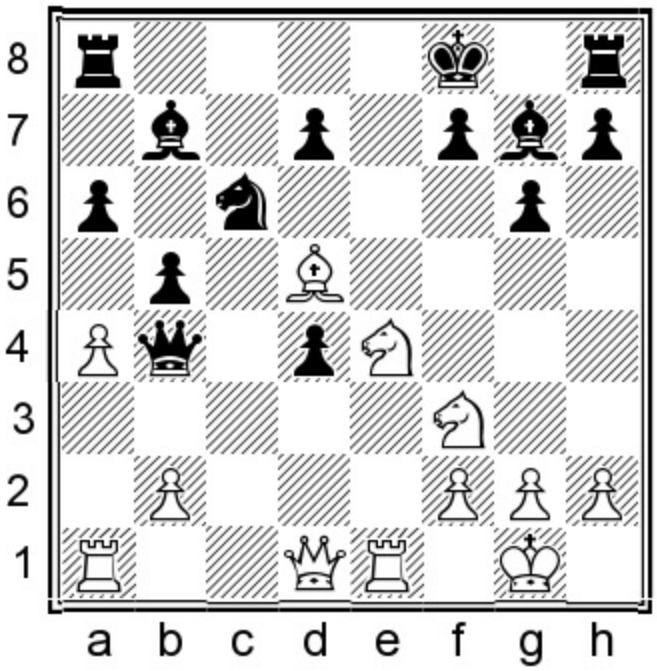
The correct approach in all lines after 14...♔f8 is for Black to prioritise king-safety.

15...♕f6?! In practical terms, it's quite dodgy for Black to capture another pawn rather than prioritise his king-safety. 16.♘bd2 ♕xd6 17.♘e4 ♕b4



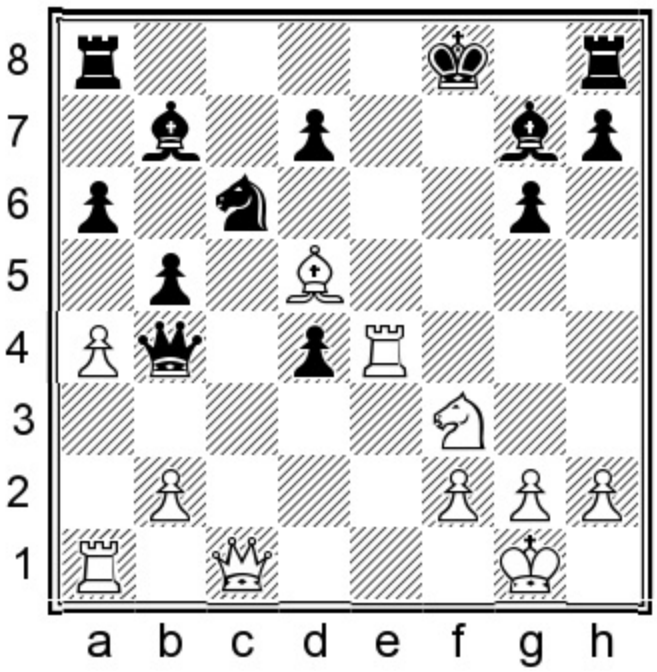
Position after: 17...♕b4

18.♗d5! The best way to continue to pose Black problems. [18.axb5 was only enough for a draw after 18...axb5 19.♖xa8+ ♗xa8 20.♘eg5 ♘d8 21.♘xf7 ♗xf3! 22.♘e5! ♗xe5 23.♕xf3+ ♔g7 24.♖xe5 ♖f8 25.♕d5 ½-½ Tauscher – Sydlik, Remote email 2012.]



Position after: 18.♗d5!

A) Black can't try to kick our knight away with 18...f5 because we have a clever resource. 19.♕c1! [19.♘eg5?! ♗f6! 20.♘f7 ♖g8∓] 19...fxe4 [19...♘d8 20.♗xb7 ♘xb7 21.♕c7 fxe4 22.♕xb7 ♖e8 23.♖xe4 ♖xe4 24.♕xe4±] 20.♖xe4

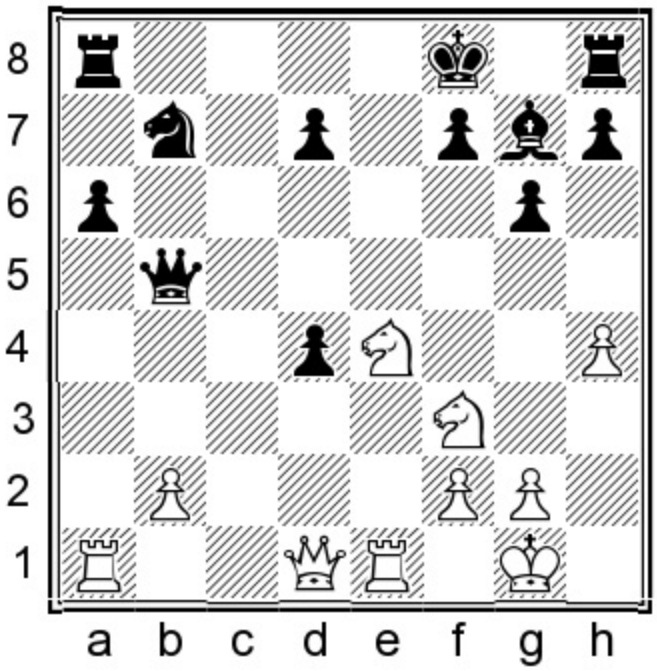


Position after: 20.♖xe4

For the piece sacrifice, White has a really dangerous attack. 20...♕d6 21.♕g5! ♘d8 22.♖f4+ ♔e8 23.♗xb7 ♘e6 [23...♘xb7 24.♖e1++–] 24.♖e4 ♖b8 25.♗d5±

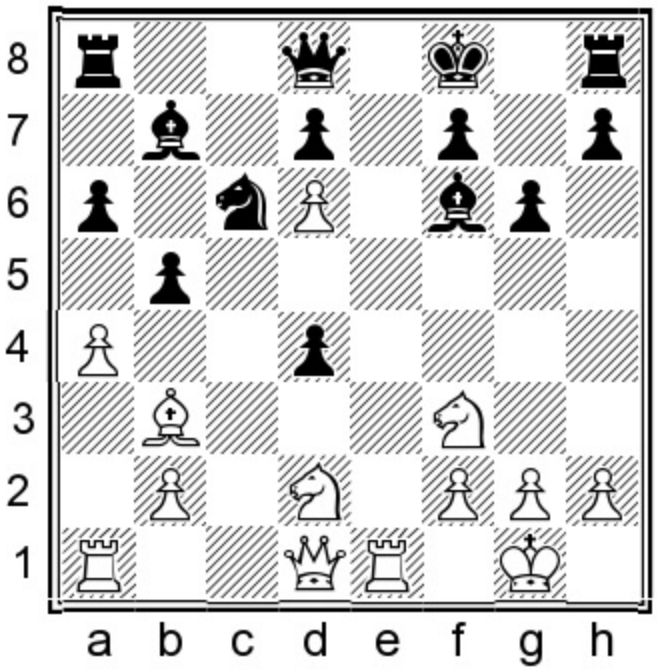
B) 18...♖e8 19.axb5 axb5 20.♖a3!⩱

C) 18...♘a5 19.♗xb7 ♘xb7 20.axb5 ♕xb5 21.h4!± White will win at least one pawn back, and Black's difficulties won't ease anytime soon.



Position after: 21.h4!±

16.♘bd2

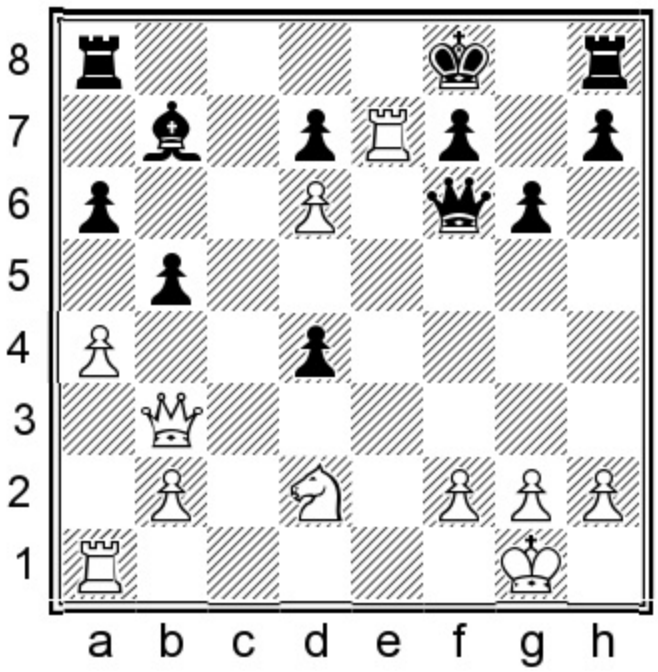


Position after: 16.♘bd2

16...♔g7

I couldn't really find anything convincing for White after this, although I doubt that we're worse. I'll present a shortened form of my analysis, and the reader may choose to go deeper into the position if they wish.

16...♘a5 17.♘e5! We can't really stop Black from capturing our bishop, and therefore we have to play as actively as possible. 17...♗xe5 [17...♘xb3 18.♘xb3 bxa4 19.♘c5 ♗c6 20.♘xc6 dxc6 21.d7↑] 18.♖xe5 ♕f6 [18...♘c6 19.♖e2 ♔g7 20.♘e4↑] 19.♖e7 ♘xb3 20.♕xb3

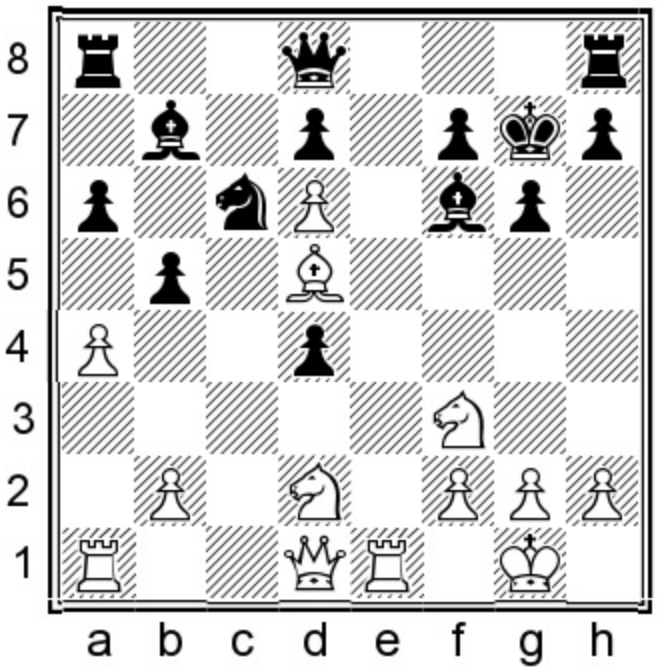


Position after: 20.♕xb3

20...♗c6 [20...♔g7 21.♖xd7 ♗c6 22.♖c7↑] 21.f3! bxa4 22.♕c4 ♖e8 23.♘e4 ♗xe4 24.♖xe8+ ♔xe8 25.fxe4± Black's poor structure means he is not out of the woods yet.

17.♗d5

17.axb5 axb5 18.♖xa8 ♗xa8 19.♗d5 h5!∓



Position after: 17.♗d5

17...bxa4!

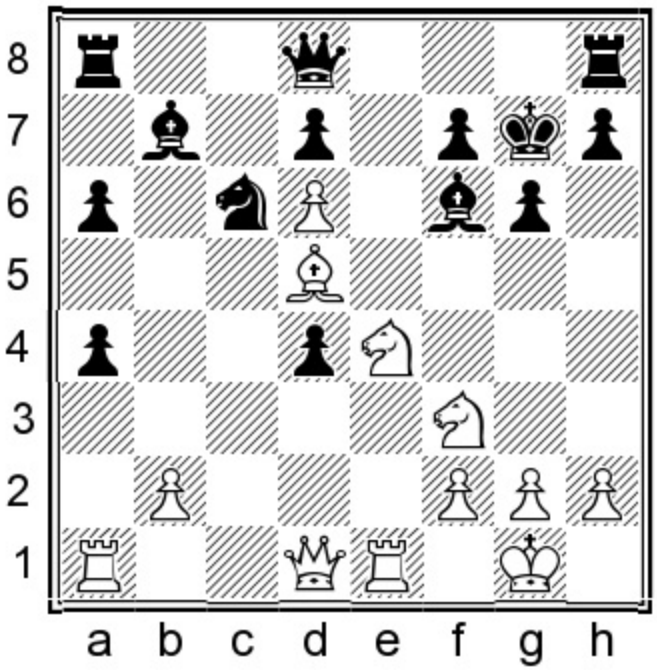
Black shouldn't allow his b5-pawn to turn into a weakness. Subsequently, he opens the b-file for his a8-rook to utilise.

A) 17...♘a5 18.♗xb7 ♘xb7 19.♘e4 ♖c8 20.axb5 axb5 21.♘xd4 b4 22.♕d2±

B) 17...h5!? It's logical for Black to try and develop his h8-rook this way. 18.♘e4 h4 19.axb5 axb5 20.♖c1 ♖h5 21.♖c5!⩱

18.♘e4

18.♖xa4 ♖b8!∞



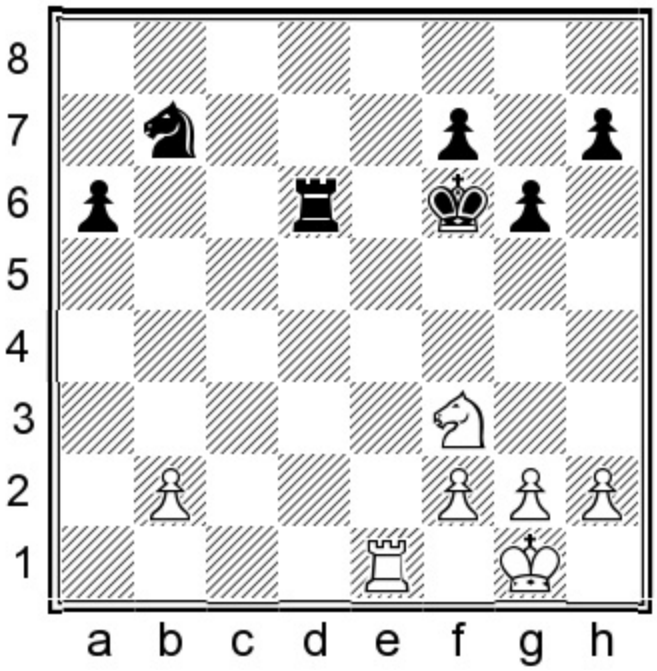
Position after: 18.♘e4

18...♖e8

Black has consolidated well, and White is the one playing for a draw now.

18...♖b8 19.g4!? h6 20.♖xa4 ♖e8 21.♖a3∞

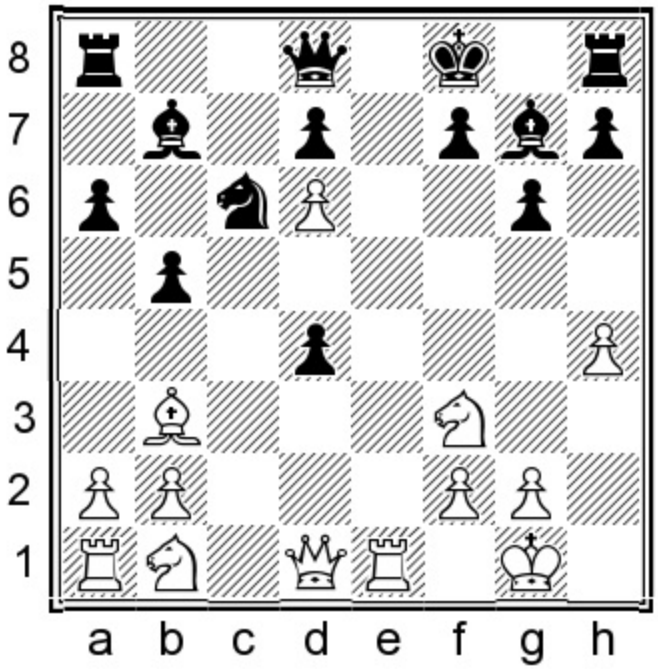
19.♕xa4 ♖b8 20.♘c5 ♖xe1+ 21.♖xe1 ♕a5 22.♕xa5 ♘xa5 23.♘xd7 ♖d8 24.♘xf6 ♔xf6 25.♗xb7 ♘xb7 26.♘xd4 ♖xd6 27.♘f3=



Position after: 27.♘f3=

d) 8...a6 9.♗a4 ♘ge7 10.♗d6 (with 15.h4!?)

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 e5 6.d4! cxd4 7.cxd4 exd4 8.♗f4 a6 9.♗a4 ♘ge7 10.♗d6 b5 11.♗b3 ♗b7 12.♖e1 ♘c8! 13.e5 ♘xd6 14.exd6+ ♔f8 15.h4!?



Position after: 15.h4!?

The 'AlphaZero' option: I analysed this move over a year ago, and it was very recently tested by Caruana in the 2020 Altibox Norway Chess tournament. The immediate threat is ♘g5, although we do have further ambitions of an h5-h6 push.

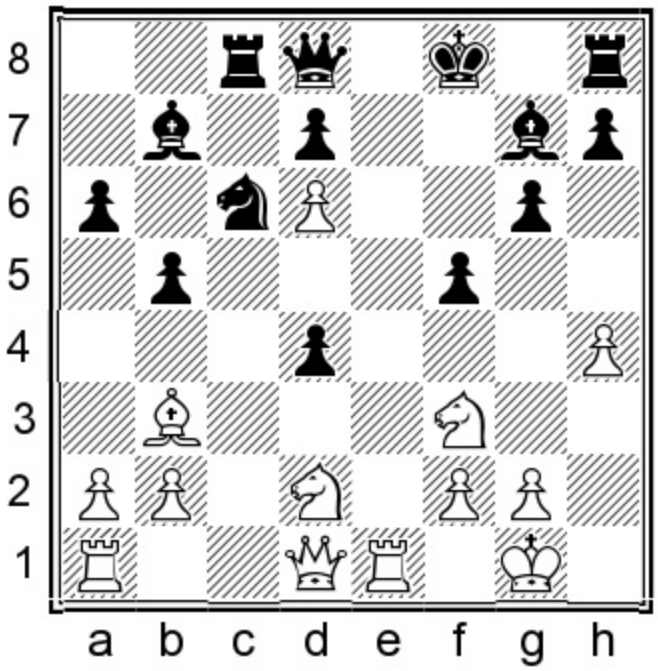
15...♗f6!

Black needs to defend against our threat of ♘g5. It also enables his king to go to g7.

A) 15...♕f6 Directly trying to capture our d6-pawn enables us to activate our pieces with tempi. 16.♘bd2 ♕xd6? 17.♘e4 ♕c7 18.♖c1+–

B) 15...d3?! 16.♘c3±

C) 15...♖c8?! This is too slow, and enables White to seize the initiative. 16.♘bd2 f5

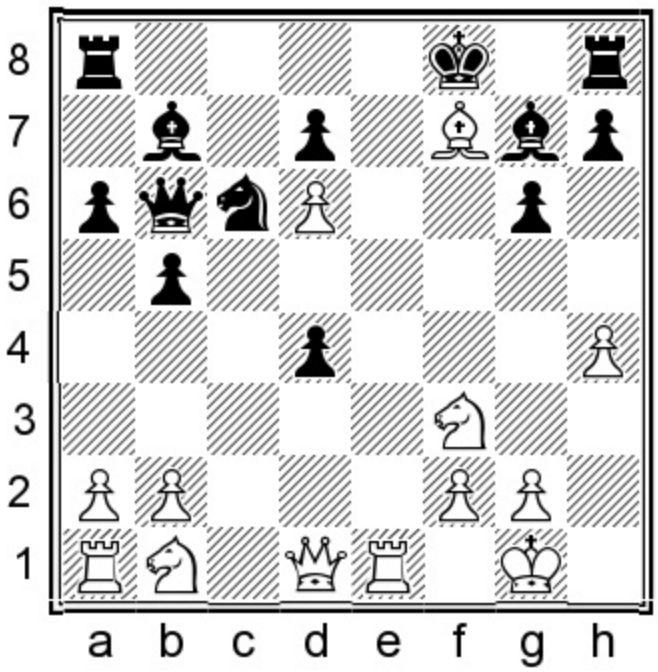


Position after: 16...f5

17.♘g5 ♘e5 18.♘df3 ♗xf3 19.♘xf3 ♘c4 20.♘xd4±

D) 15...♕b6

D1) 16.♗xf7

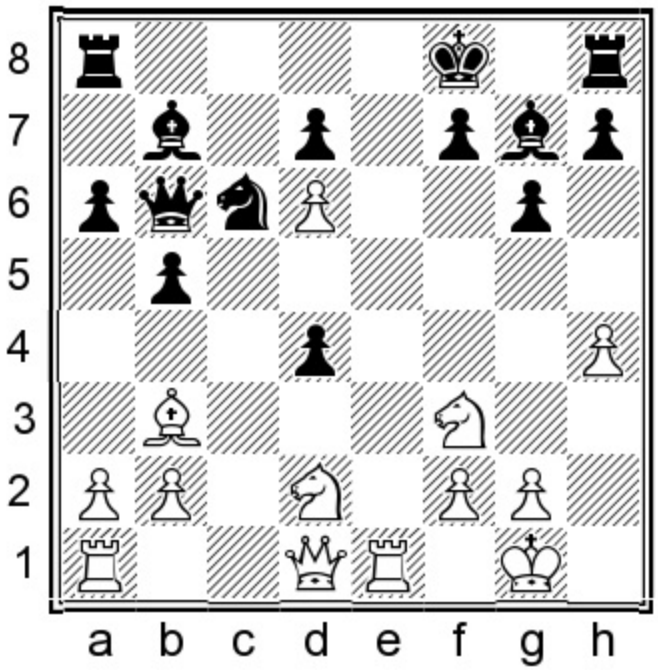


Position after: 16.♗xf7

16...♘a5! [16...♔xf7? 17.♘g5+ ♔f8 18.♕f3+ ♔g8 19.♕f7#] 17.b4 ♕xd6 18.bxa5 ♔xf7 19.♘g5+

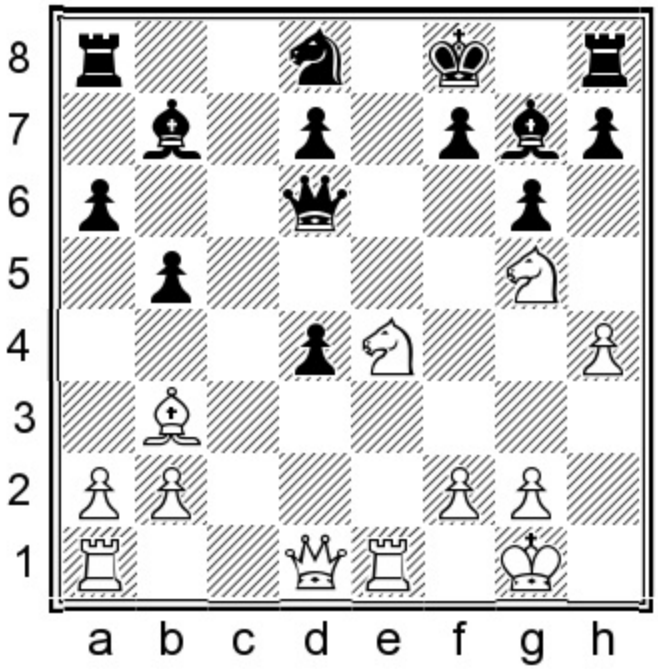
♔g8 20.♘c3 ♕c6 21.♘ce4 h6 22.♖c1 ♕d5 23.♘f3 The game is still complex, although the bishop-pair probably gives Black the favourable long-term chances.

D2) 16.♘bd2



Position after: 16.♘bd2

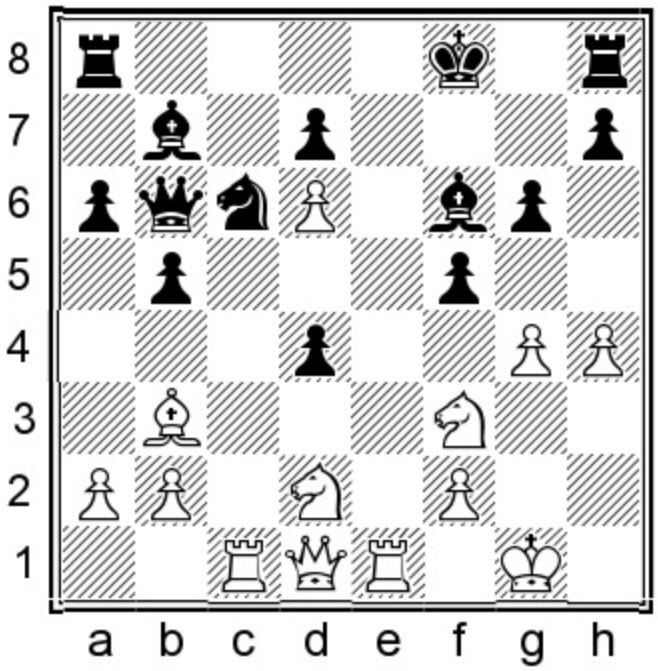
D2.1) 16...♘d8 17.♘g5! ♕xd6 18.♘de4



Position after: 18.♘de4

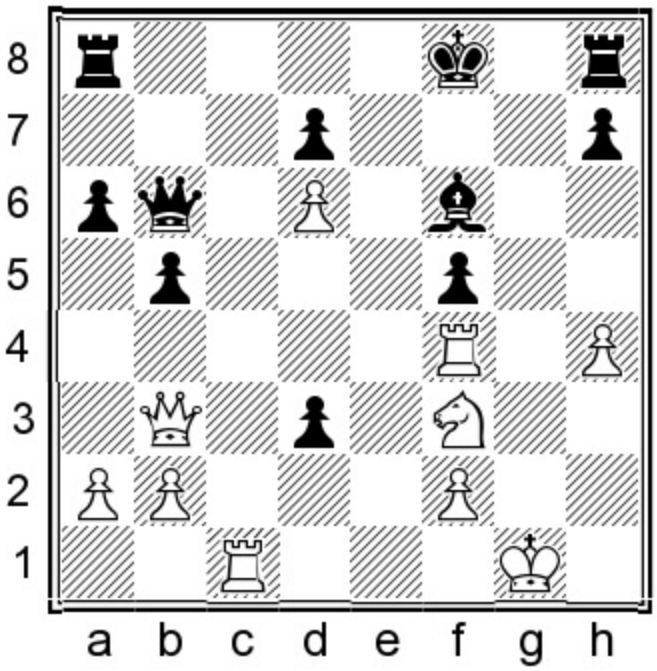
18...♗xe4 [18...♕b6 19.♖c1 ♗xe4 20.♘xe4 ♘e6 21.♕f3→ White has a close-to-winning attack.] 19.♘xe4 ♕e7 20.♘g5 ♕f6 21.♖c1 ♘e6 22.♗xe6 fxe6 23.♖c7±

D2.2) 16...f5 A necessity to stop ♘e4, signalling the shakiness of Black's position. 17.♖c1 ♗f6 [17...d3 18.♘e4!! fxe4 19.♖xe4 ♗f6 20.♖f4 ♔g7 21.♖xf6 ♔xf6 22.♕xd3+–] 18.g4!



Position after: 18.g4!

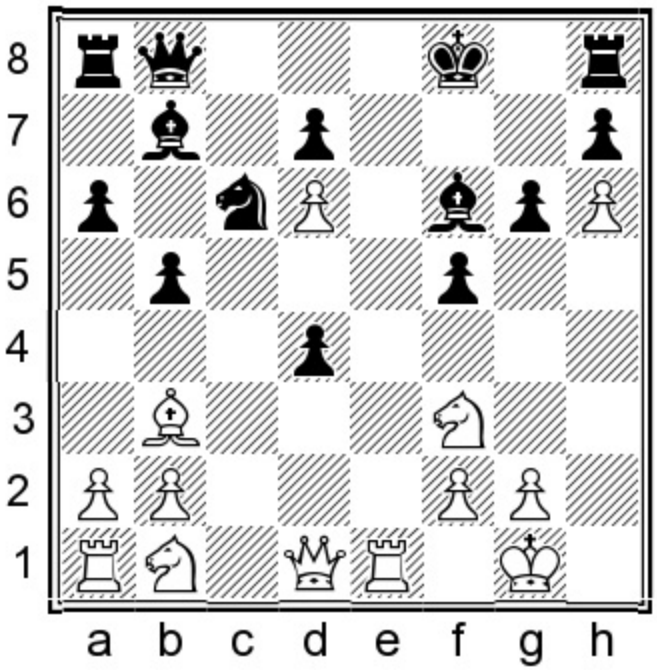
18...d3 [18...♘d8? 19.g5 ♗g7 20.♕e2+–; 18...fxg4? 19.♘e4 ♕d8 20.♘fg5 ♘e5 21.♖c5 h6 22.♖xe5 hxg5 23.♖e8+! ♕xe8 24.♘xf6+–] 19.gxf5 ♘d4 [19...gxf5 20.♘g5 ♕d4 21.♖c5! ♕g4+ 22.♕xg4 fxg4 23.♘de4± With a renewed initiative.] 20.♘e4 ♘xb3 21.♕xb3 ♗xe4 22.♖xe4 gxf5 23.♖f4→



Position after: 23.♖f4→

Our attack continues, and Black isn't out of the woods just yet.

E) 15...f5?! is an engine move, but in practical terms it feels like Black is weakening his king far too much. 16.h5 ♕b8 17.h6 ♗f6



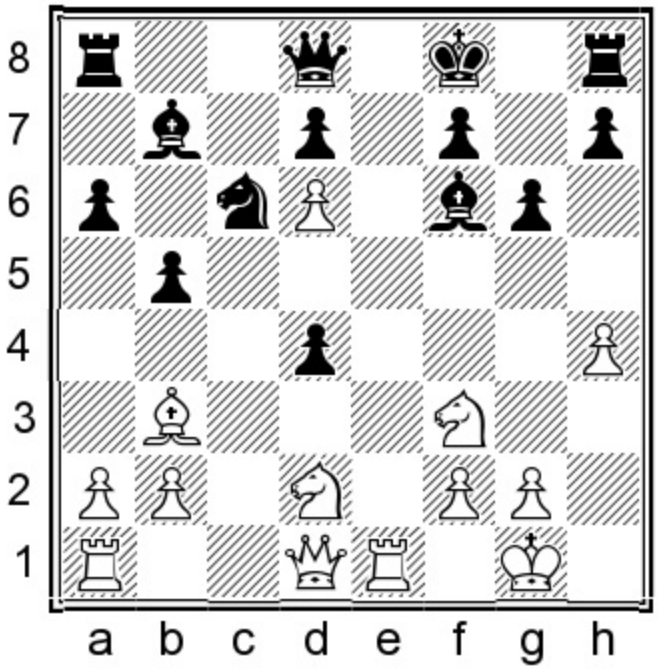
Position after: 17...♗f6

18.♘c3! ♕xd6 19.♘d5 ♘e5 20.♘xf6 ♘xf3+ 21.gxf3 ♕xf6 22.♕d2+– Black's king is too weak to survive here.

F) 15...h6?! 16.h5 g5 17.♘bd2 g4 18.♖c1! gxf3 19.♕xf3 ♕f6 20.♕h3 ♕xd6 21.♘e4 ♕e7 22.♘c5+–

16.h5

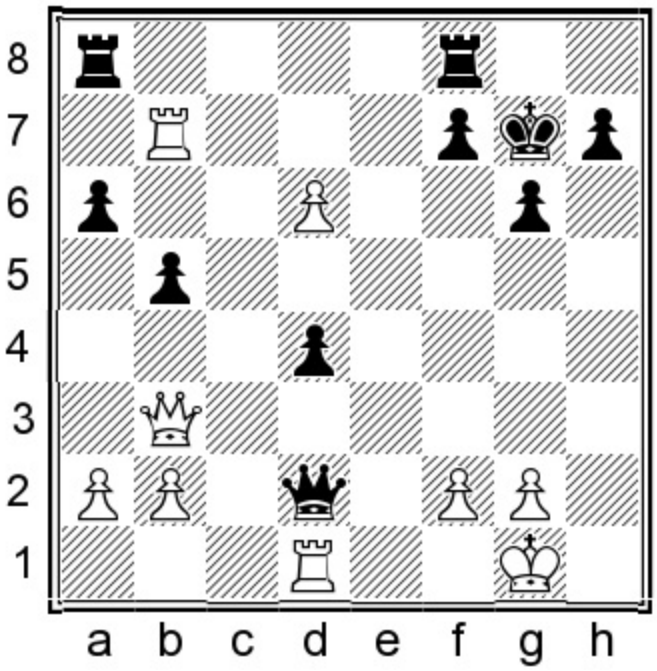
16.♘bd2!?



Position after: 16.♘bd2!?

Caruana's choice, and this is no less testing for Black than the text move.

A) 16...♘a5?! 17.♘e5! The following forcing line results in good pressure for White: 17...♘xb3 18.♕xb3 ♗xe5 19.♖xe5 ♕xh4 20.♖e7 ♕f4 21.♖ae1 ♔g7 22.♖xd7 ♖hf8 23.♖xb7 ♕xd2 24.♖d1±

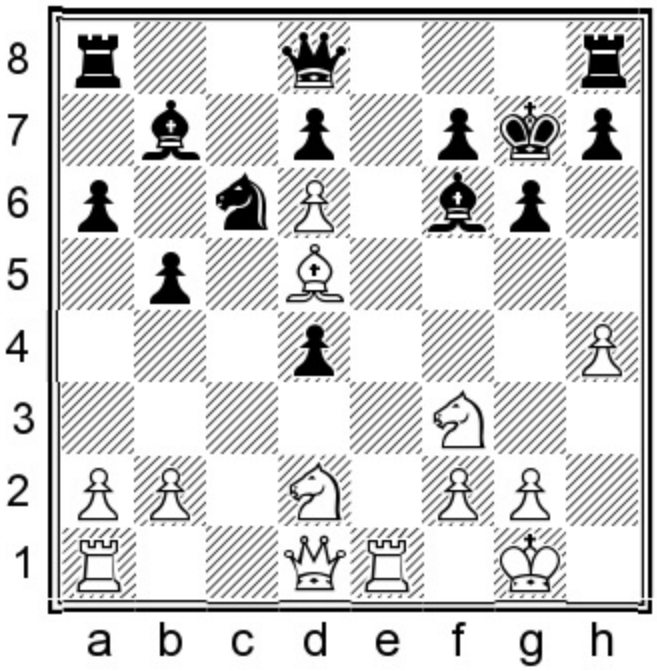


Position after: 24.♖d1±

The d-pawn will fall, after which Black's position remains unpleasant.

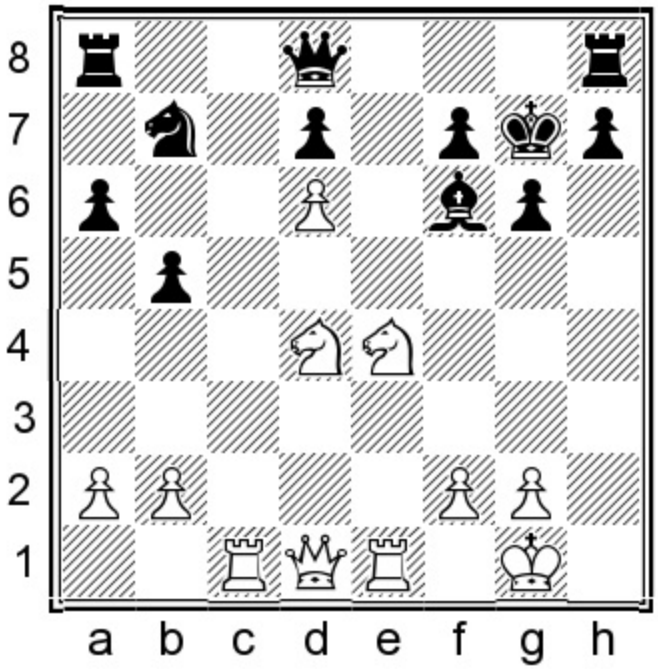
B) It's too early to grab the pawn with 16...♗xh4?!, as White generates a fine initiative. 17.♖e4 ♗g5 [17...♗f6 18.♖f4+– Either ♘e4 or ♘g5 on the next move will dismantle Black's defences.] 18.♘xg5 ♕xg5 19.♘f3 ♕c5 20.♕d2 ♔g7 21.♖c1 ♕xd6 22.♘xd4 ♔g8 23.♕e3↑

C) 16...♔g7 17.♗d5



Position after: 17.♗d5

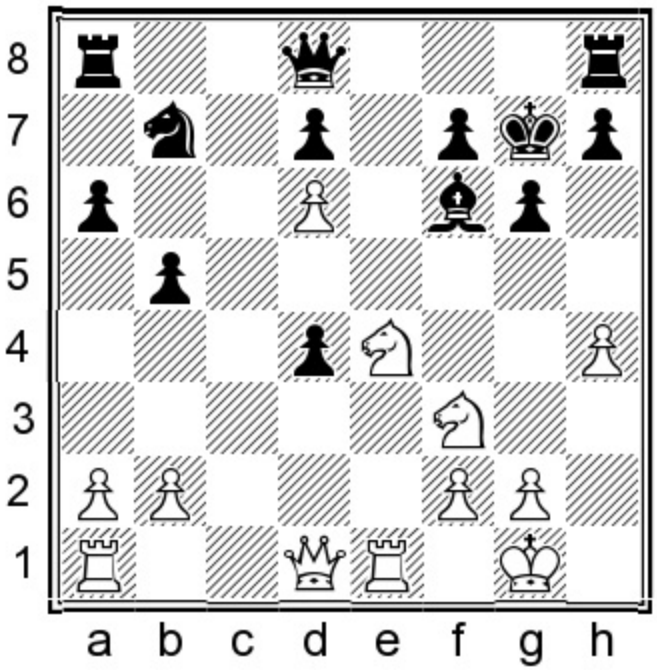
C1) The materialistic 17...♗xh4! is Black's best option, although he still remains under pressure. 18.♘e4 ♗f6 [18...♖c8 19.♕d2 ♗f6 20.♖ac1 transposes to 19...♖c8 after 18...♗f6.] 19.♖c1 ♘a5 [If Black refrains from attempting to trade our bishop on d5, we can slowly start to apply pressure on the kingside, e.g. 19...♖c8 20.♕d2 ♖e8 21.♕f4≅] 20.♗xb7 ♘xb7 21.♘xd4



Position after: 21.♘xd4

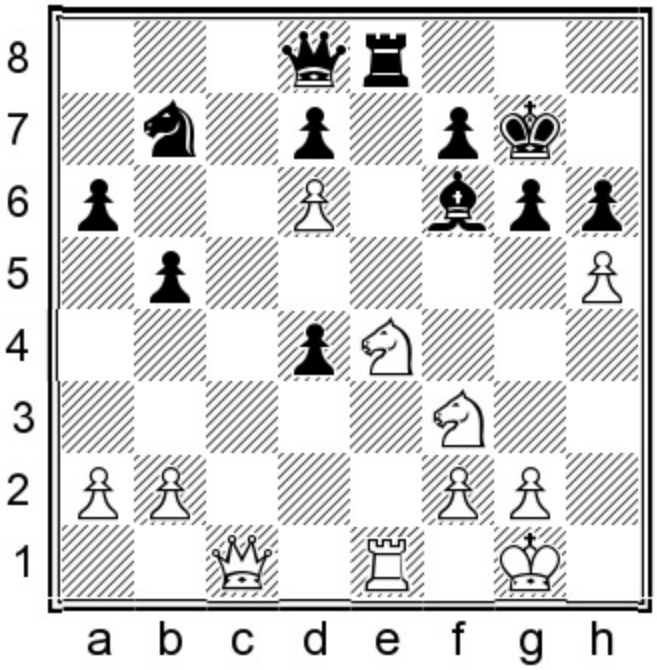
21...♖e8 [21...♖c8? 22.♖xc8 ♕xc8 23.♘xf6 ♔xf6 24.♘f3!+– A check on the a1-h8 diagonal will be decisive.] 22.♘f3 ♖e6! After a few accurate moves from Black, I was unable to find anything better than a repetition. [22...♗xb2? 23.♖c7 ♖b8 24.♕d5+–] 23.♘d4 ♖e8 24.♘f3=

C2) 17...♘a5?! 18.♗xb7 ♘xb7 19.♘e4



Position after: 19.♘e4

19...♖e8 [19...h5 If Black prevents our h-pawn from advancing, we'll switch over to queenside play. 20.a4! ♖c8 21.axb5 axb5 22.♖a7 ♘c5 23.♘xf6 ♕xf6 24.b4! ♘e6 25.♘e5↑; 19...♖c8 20.g4!+–] 20.h5 ♖c8 21.♖c1 ♖xc1 22.♕xc1 h6

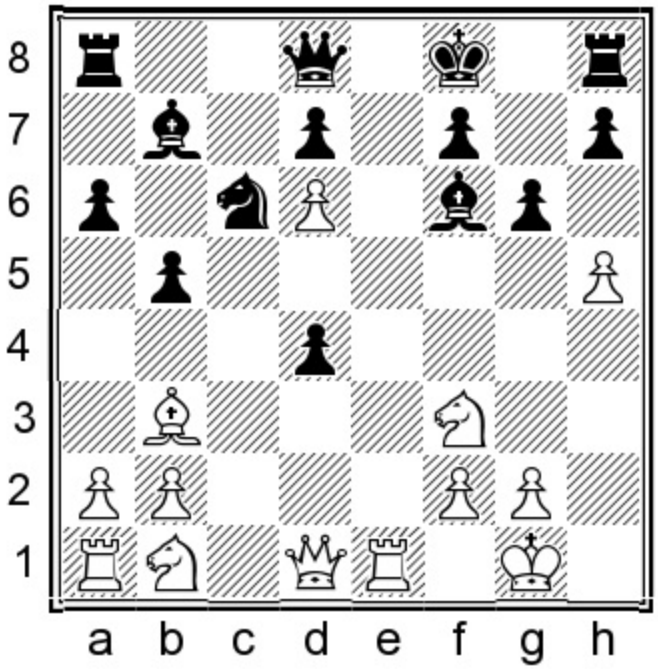


Position after: 22...h6

In Caruana – Carlsen, Stavanger 2020, the best continuation followed: 23.♕d2 d3 24.hxg6 fxg6 25.♕xd3! ♗xb2 [25...♘a5 26.♖c1 ♘c6 27.♖xc6! dxc6 28.♘c5±] 26.♖e2 ♗a1 27.a4!± Black's weak

king, combined with his uncoordinated pieces, means he must contend with a practically lost position.

Let’s return to 16.h5.

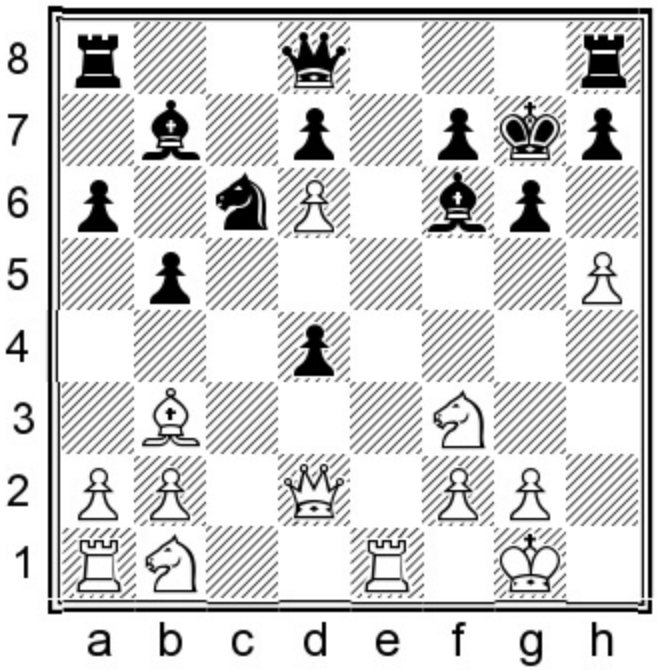


Position after: 16.h5

16...♔g7

16...♘a5 17.h6 ♕b6 18.♘bd2 ♕xd6 19.♘e4 ♗xe4 20.♖xe4 ♘xb3 21.♕xb3⩲ White has excellent compensation for the two pawns here.

17.♕d2

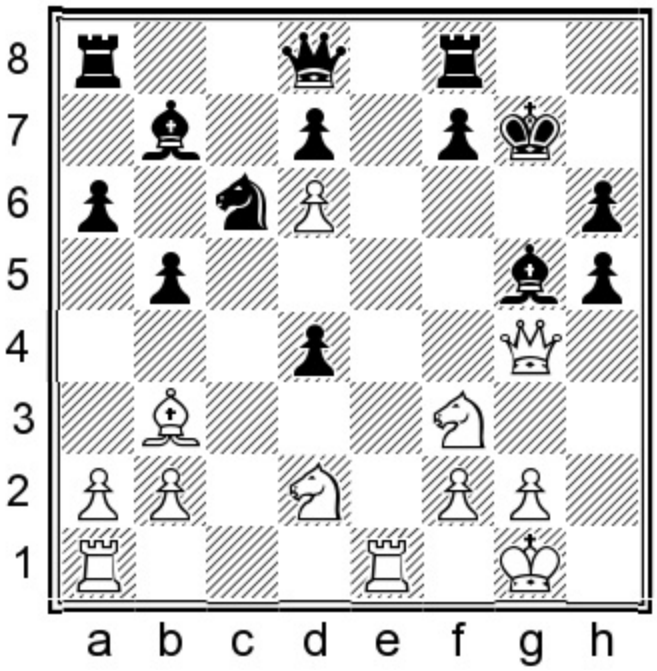


Position after: 17.♕d2

17...♖e8

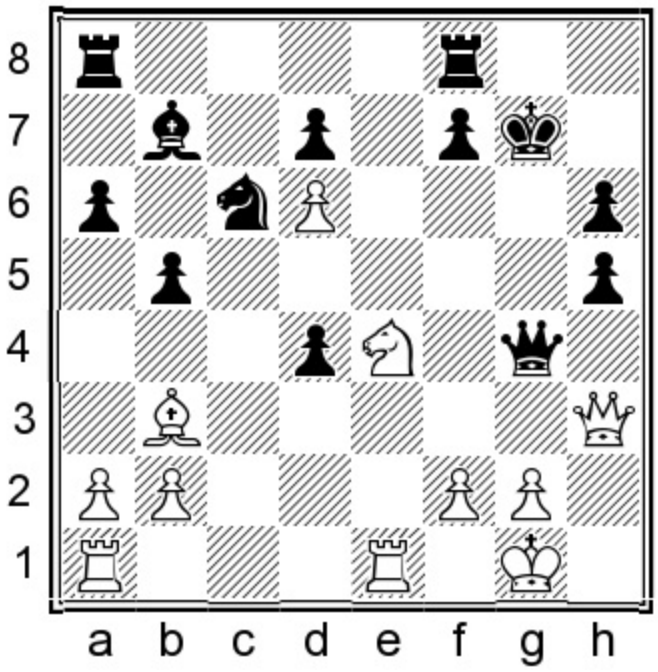
Once again, it seems very unnecessary for Black to allow our pawn to come to h6.

17...h6! 18.♕f4 [18.hxg6 It probably favours Black if we open the f-file. 18...fxg6 19.♕f4 ♖f8∓] 18...♖f8 19.♘bd2 ♗g5 20.♕g4 gxh5



Position after: 20...gxh5

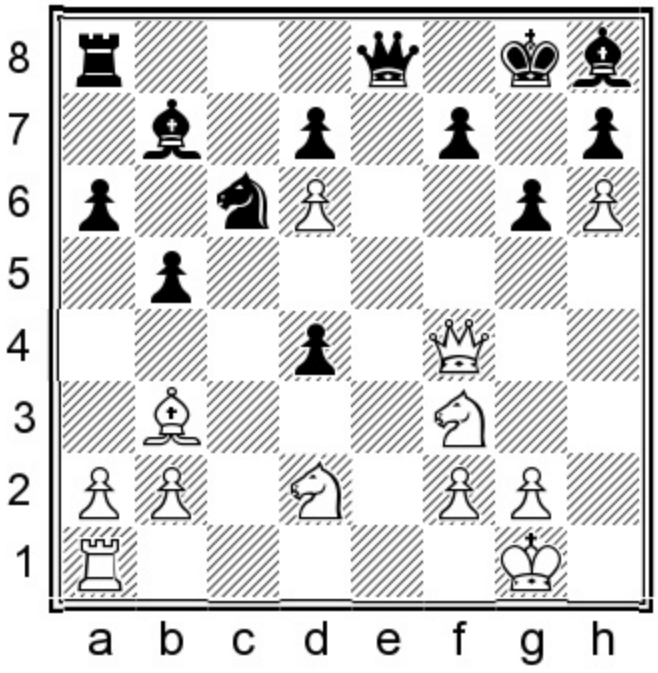
21.♕h3! [21.♕xh5 ♗xd2 22.♘xd2 ♕g5∓] 21...♗xd2 22.♘xd2 ♕g5 23.♘e4 ♕g4



Position after: 23...♕g4

This time Black is able to force the queens off. 24.♕xg4+ hxg4 25.♘c5 ♖a7 26.f3= After a series of accurate moves from Black, he's consolidated to an ending in which he will struggle to lose.

18.h6+ ♔g8 19.♖xe8+ ♕xe8 20.♕f4 ♗h8 21.♘bd2



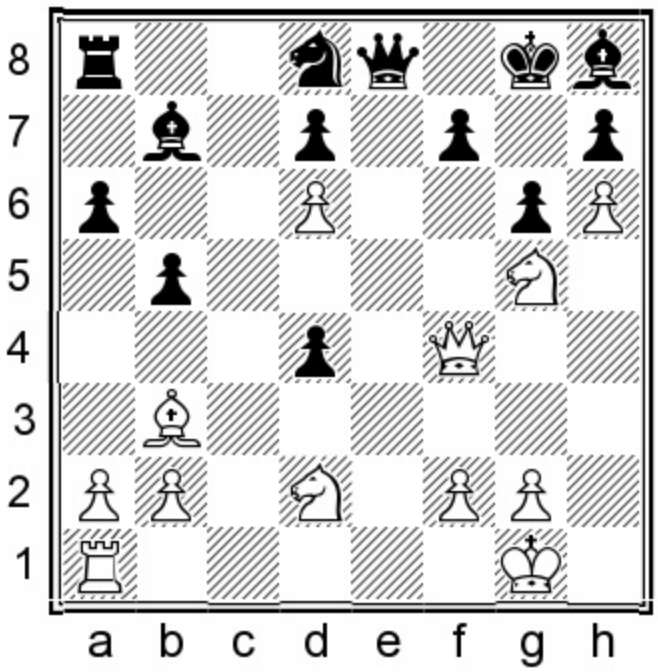
Position after: 21.♘bd2

21...♘d8

Black plans to bring his knight to e6 to consolidate the position, but White has ways to keep the attack going.

21...♘e5 22.♖e1 ♗xf3 23.gxf3+–

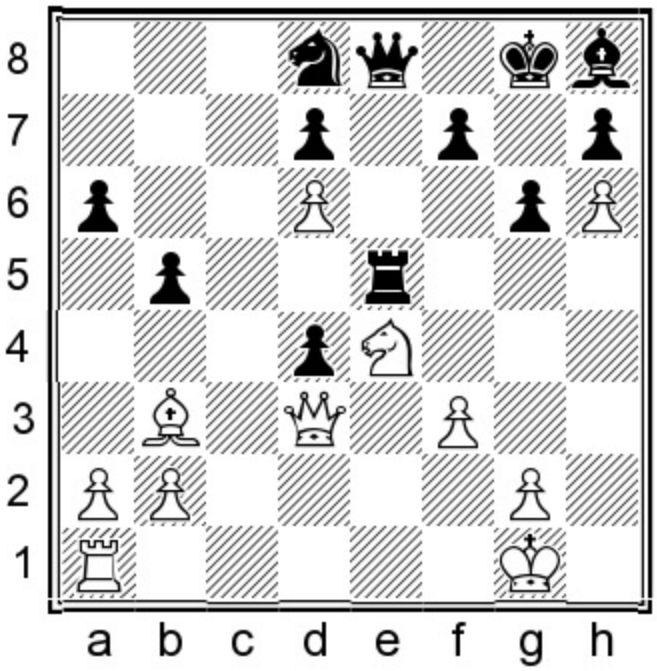
22.♘g5



Position after: 22.♘g5

22...d3

22...♖c8 23.♘df3 ♗xf3 [23...♘e6 24.♘xe6 fxe6 25.♘e5⩲] 24.♕xf3 ♖c5 25.♘e4 ♖f5 26.♕d3 ♖e5 27.f3⩲ The game remains complex, with chances for both sides. Nevertheless, our h6-pawn continues to irritate Black's king.

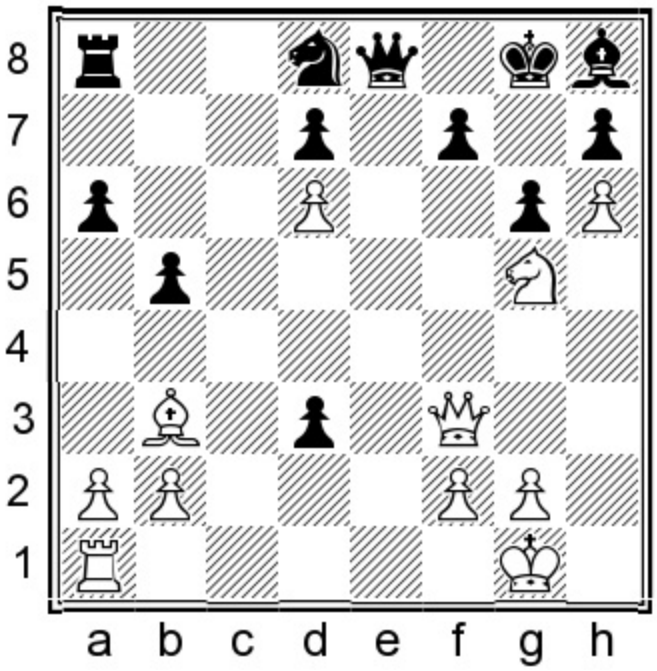


Position after: 27.f3⩱

23.♘df3 ♗xf3

23...♘e6 24.♘xe6 fxe6 25.♘g5 ♕f8 26.♘xe6! ♕xf4 27.♘xf4+ ♔f8 28.♘xd3±

24.♕xf3



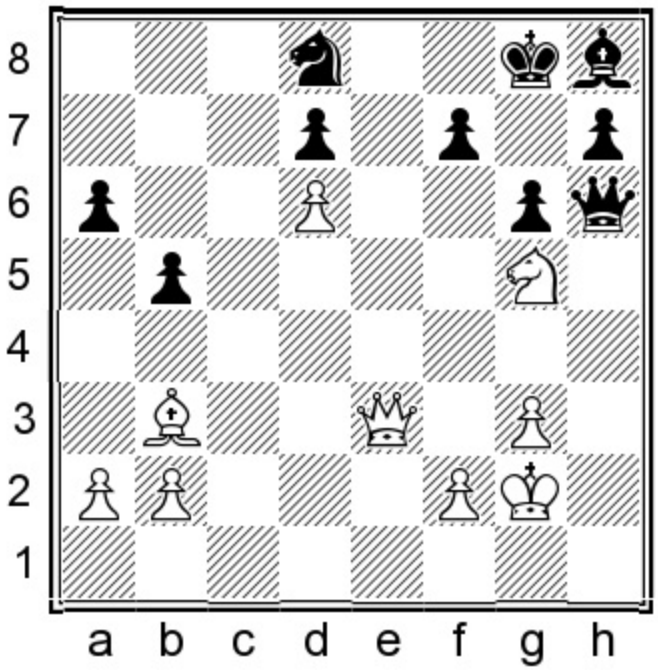
Position after: 24.♕xf3

The engine says Black is equal, but the position still looks fairly dodgy to me.

24...♖c8 25.♖d1 d2

25...♗xb2 26.♕xd3 ♕e5 27.♘f3 ♕e8 28.a4⩲

26.g3 ♖c1 27.♔g2 ♖xd1 28.♕xd1 ♕f8 29.♕xd2 ♕xh6 30.♕e3⩲

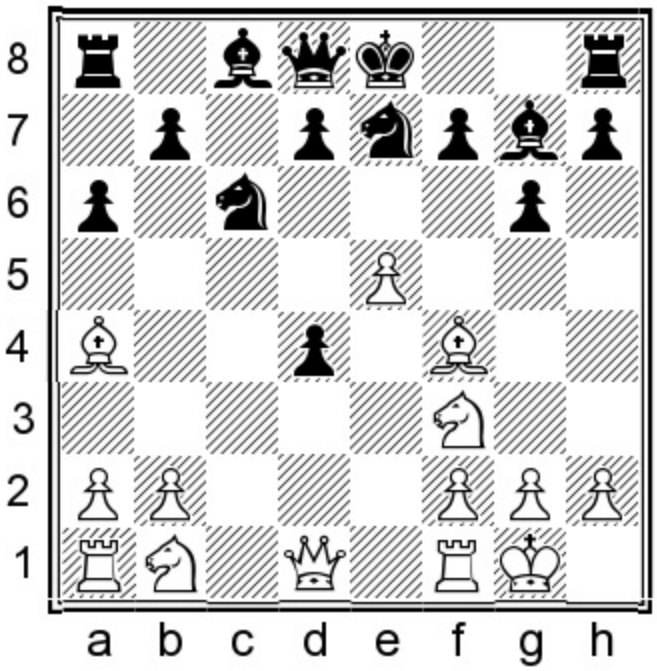


Position after: 30.♕e3⩲

White still has an initiative, although Black's accurate moves have ensured that the game will probably peter out to a draw.

e) 8...a6 9.♗a4 ♘ge7 10.e5!?N

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 e5 6.d4! cxd4 7.cxd4 exd4 8.♗f4 a6 9.♗a4 ♘ge7 10.e5!?N

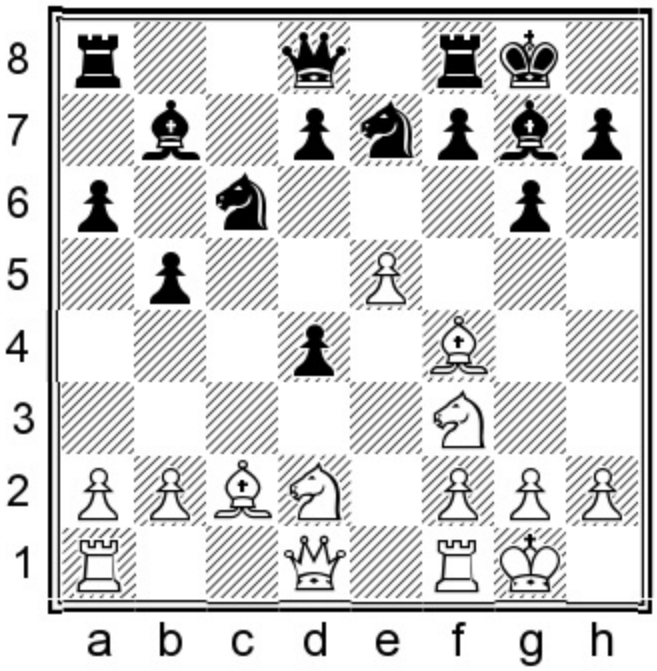


Position after: 10.e5!?N

Having considered 10.♗d6, we understood that Black has enough time to hit us with ...b7-b5, ...♗b7 and ...♘c8. The text move is an interesting alternative. In this case, we're playing against the g7-bishop and isolating Black's d4-pawn.

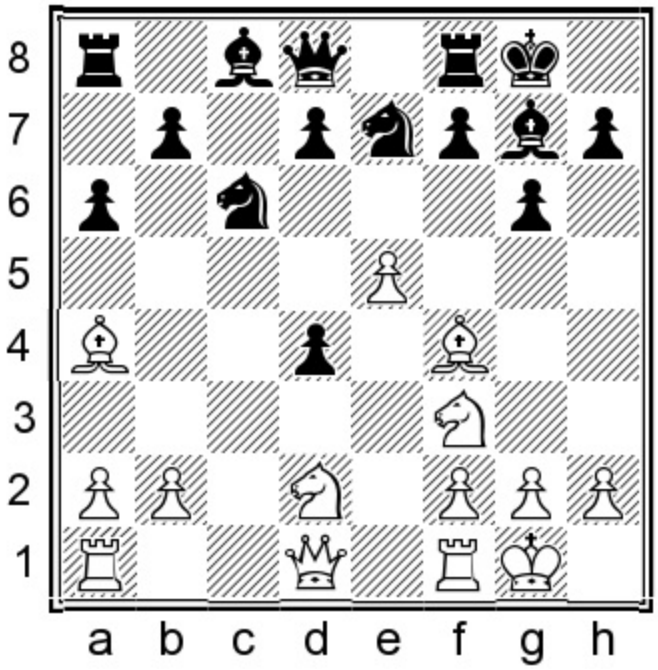
10...0-0

10...b5 11.♗c2 ♗b7 12.♘bd2 0-0 will just transpose to the mainline.



Position after: 12...0-0

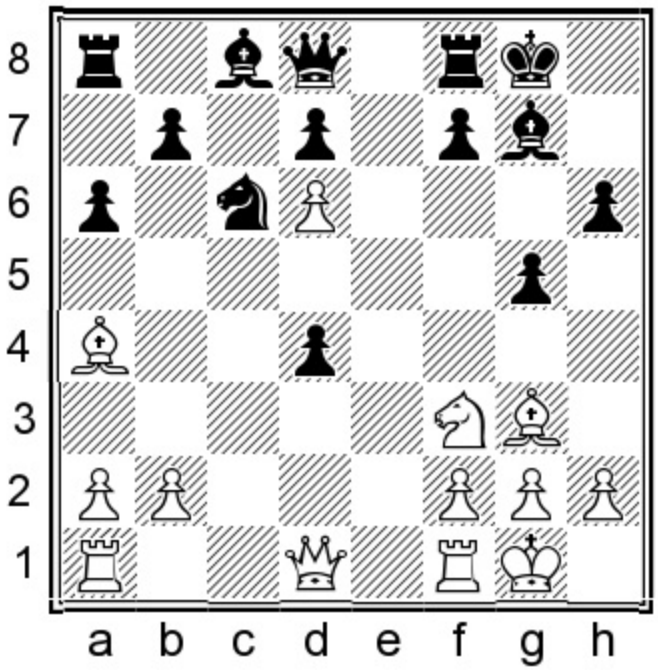
11.♘bd2



Position after: 11.♘bd2

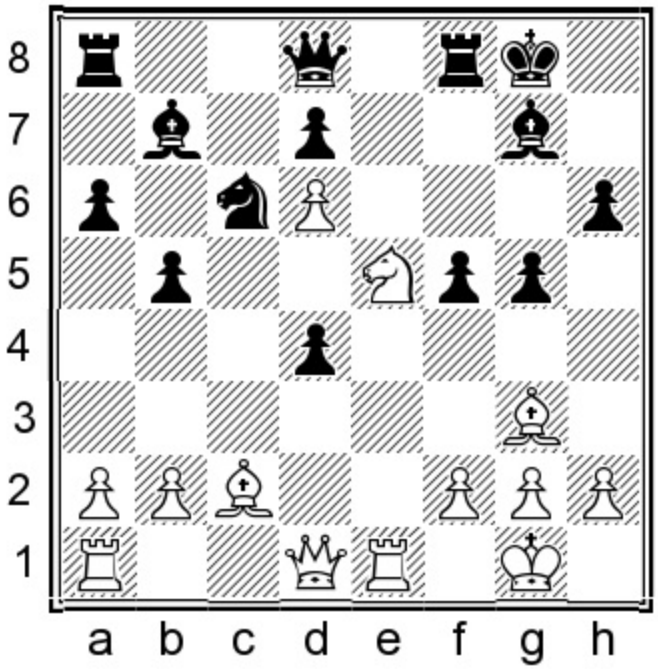
11...b5!

A) 11...h6!? It's logical for Black to want to control the g5-square. 12.♘e4 g5 13.♗g3 [13.♗xg5!? is an interesting alternative. 13...hxg5 14.♘fxg5 ♘f5 15.♕h5 ♘h6 16.f4⩱] 13...♘f5 14.♘d6! ♘xd6 15.exd6



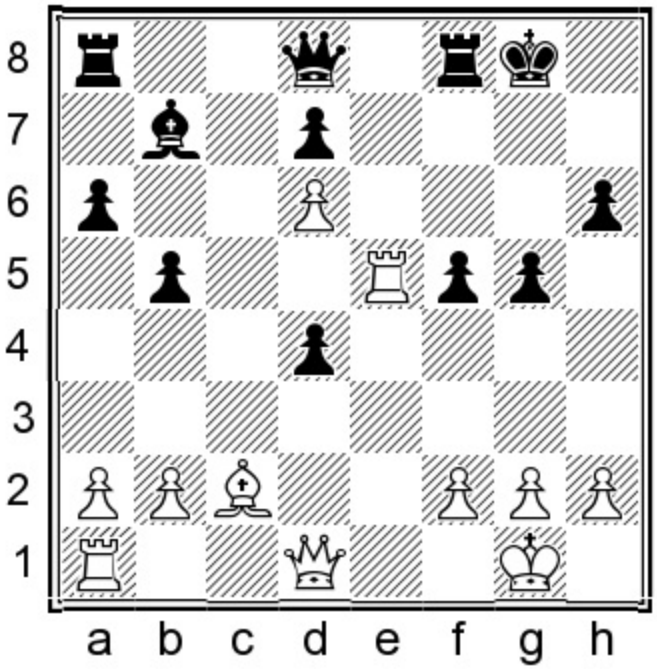
Position after: 15.exd6

We've reached a similar position to those encountered after 10.♗d6. However, this time we've retained our dark-squared bishop – and Black has created more kingside weaknesses with ...h7-h6 and ...g6-g5. 15...b5 16.♗c2 ♗b7 17.♖e1 f5 Continuing with kingside expansion, although this is also consistent in creating more kingside weaknesses for us to exploit. [17...♖c8 18.♗f5! ♖e8 19.♕d2♾ With h2-h4 on the cards, it's safe to say that White has pretty good compensation for the pawn.] 18.♘e5!



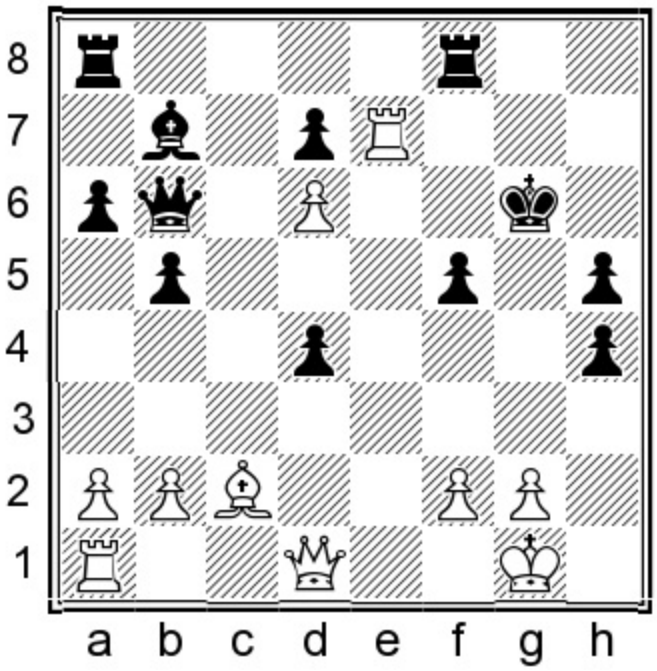
Position after: 18.♘e5!

18...♘xe5 [18...f4? 19.♕d3+–; 18...♖e8 is also adequate according to the engine, although Black will have to play really accurately in the ensuing positions to maintain equality. 19.♘xc6 ♖xe1+ 20.♕xe1 ♗xc6 21.♗xf5 ♕f6 22.♗d3↑] 19.♗xe5 ♗xe5 20.♖xe5



Position after: 20.♖xe5

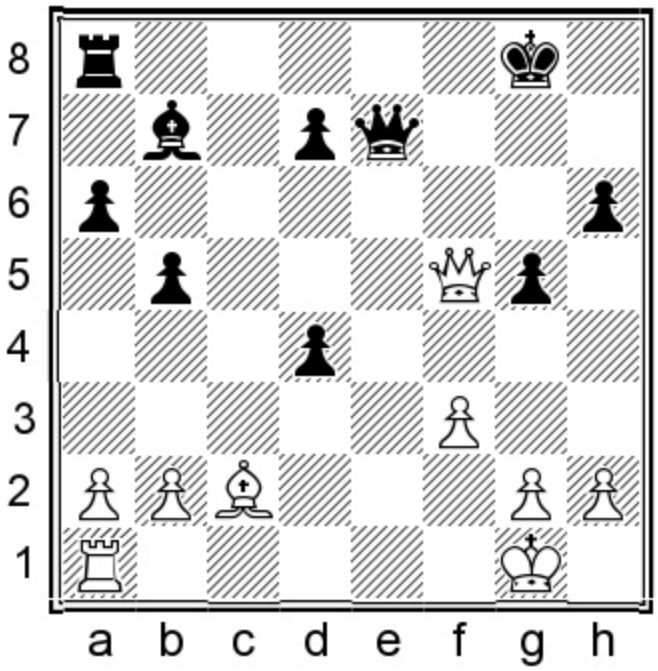
A1) 20...♕b6? Black doesn't have enough protection around his king here, and the following variation is a nice example of our attacking possibilities. 21.♗b3+ ♔g7 22.♖e7+ ♔g6 23.h4! gxh4 24.♗c2 h5



Position after: 24...h5

25.♖h7!! ♔xh7 26.♕xh5+ ♔g7 27.♕g5+ ♔h7 28.♗xf5+ ♖xf5 29.♕xf5+ ♔g7 30.♕g5+ ♔f7 31.♕f4+ ♔g6 32.♖e1+–

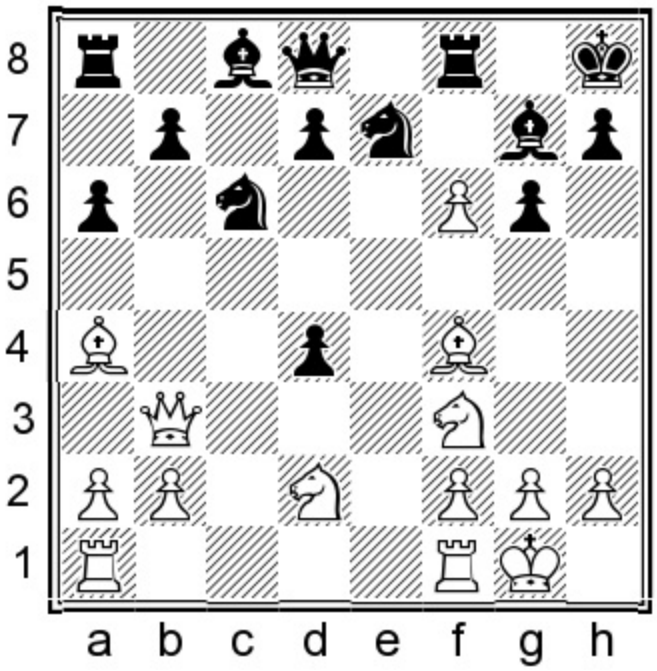
A2) 20...♕f6 21.♖xf5 ♕xd6 22.♕d3 ♖xf5 23.♕xf5 ♕e7 24.f3→



Position after: 24.f3→

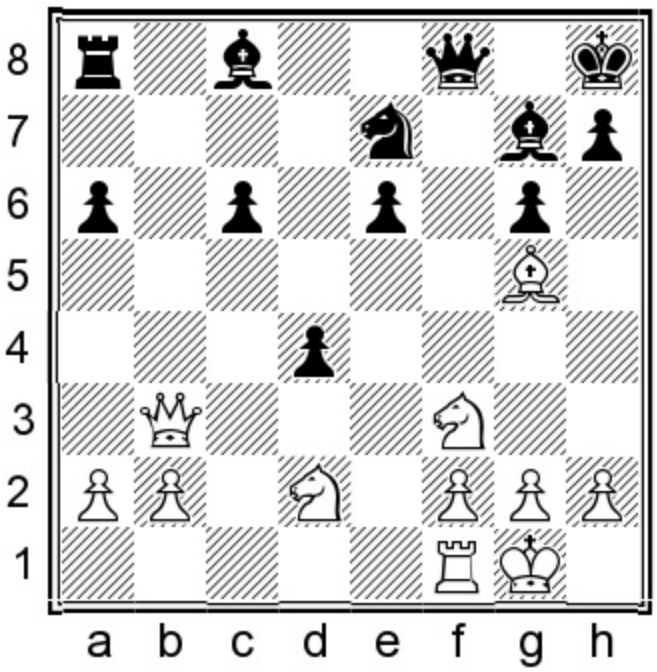
The position is still objectively equal, but I think it's fair to say that White is the only one playing for anything.

B) 11...f6 The natural challenge to our e5-blockade, but Black will face a surprising amount of kingside difficulties. 12.♕b3+ ♔h8 [12...♖f7? 13.exf6 ♗xf6 14.♘e4 d5 15.♘xf6+ ♖xf6 16.♗g5 ♖f5 17.♗xc6 bxc6 18.♖fe1 ♖a7 19.♕a3+–] 13.exf6 Black will remain a pawn up, but our pieces are very well placed to continue playing on an initiative.



Position after: 13.exf6

B1) 13...♖xf6 14.♗g5 ♖e6 15.♗xc6! The transformation in pawn structure will work in White's favour. 15...bxc6 [15...dxc6?? 16.♖ae1+– and Black will lose due to the g5-d8 pin.] 16.♖ae1! ♕f8 [16...c5 17.♗f4!± Followed by ♖xe6 and ♖c1.; 16...h6 17.♗f4 a5 18.♖xe6 dxe6 19.♗e5±] 17.♖xe6 dxe6

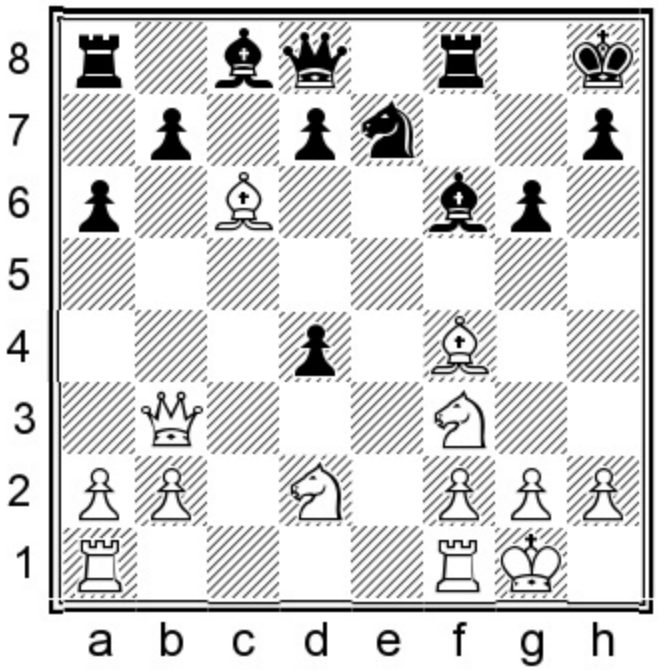


Position after: 17...dxe6

18.♖e1 Black's pawn structure looks really damaged, and it feels like we'll be winning at least one

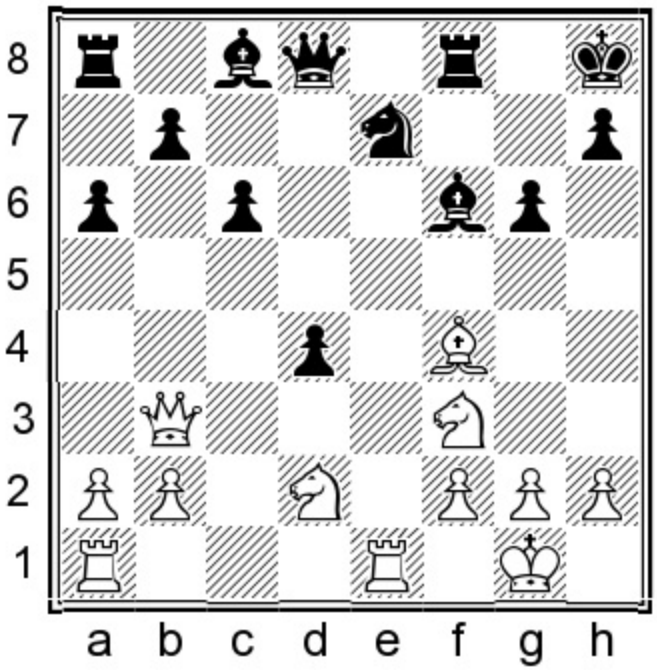
pawn back. The position also suits our knights, as there are lots of holes for them to jump to. [18.♖c1 ♘d5 19.♘e4⩲ also looks good.] 18...♘d5 19.♕c4 c5 20.♘b3 ♗d7 21.♕xc5 d3 22.♕xf8+ ♗xf8 23.♘e5±

B2) 13...♗xf6 14.♗xc6!



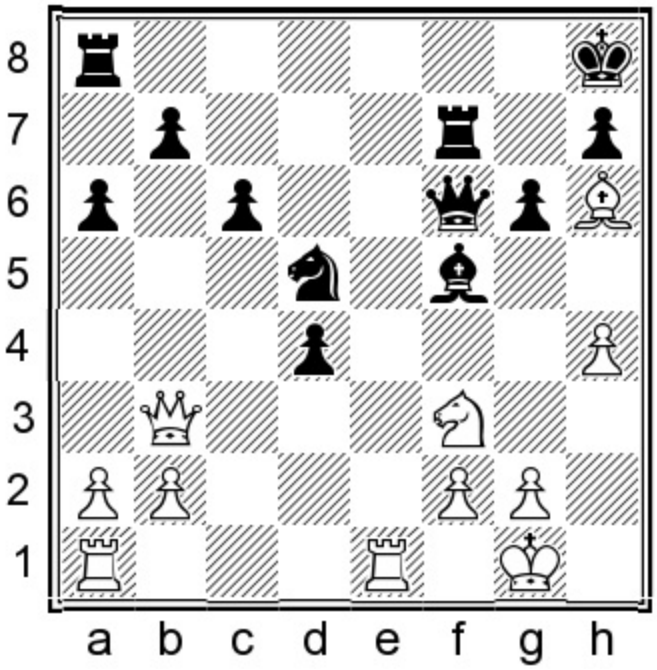
Position after: 14.♗xc6!

Even though Black can recapture with his d-pawn, we still hold a fine initiative. In particular, a likely trade of dark-squared bishops will enable us to exploit even more weaknesses. 14...dxc6 [14...bxc6 15.♗d6+–; 14...♘xc6 15.♘e4 ♗e7 16.♗h6 ♖f5 17.♖fe1 d5 18.♘g3 ♖f6 19.h4!± We have a variety of threats for Black to contend with such as ♗g5, ♘e5 or even h4-h5.] 15.♖fe1



Position after: 15.♖fe1

B2.1) 15...♘d5 The most natural move, although White can continue to play logical attacking moves. 16.♗h6 ♗g7 [16...♖f7 17.♘e4 ♗f5 18.♘xf6 ♕xf6 19.h4!

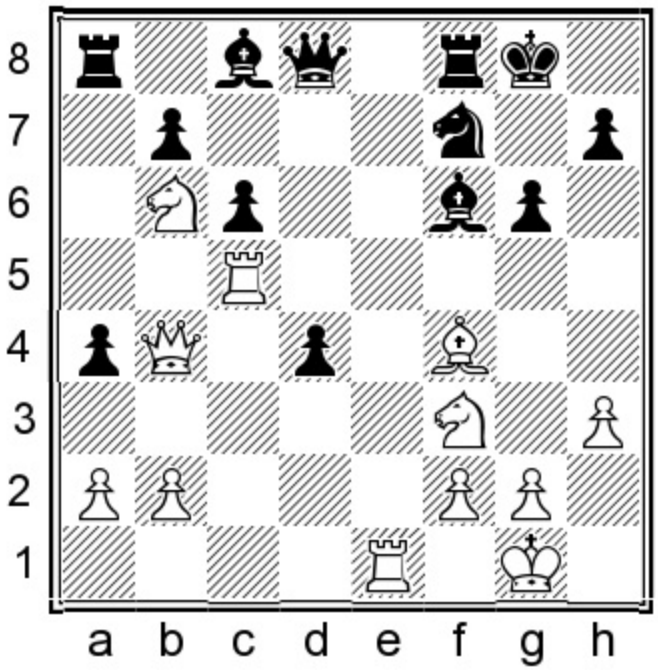


Position after: 19.h4!

Invariably, opposite coloured bishops favour White. The following variation isn't forced, but shows a nice example of White's dominance. 19...♗g4 20.♗g5 ♕f5 21.♘e5! ♕xf2+ 22.♔h1+–] 17.♗xg7+ ♔xg7 18.♘xd4± The exchange of dark-squared bishops ensures that White has a long-

term edge.

B2.2) 15...♘f5 16.h3! It's very difficult for Black to find moves here. 16...a5 17.♖ac1 [17.a4 ♖a6 is Black's idea.] 17...a4 18.♕b4 ♔g8 19.♖c5! ♘d6 [19...♗e7 20.♕c4++–] 20.♘c4 ♘f7 21.♘b6

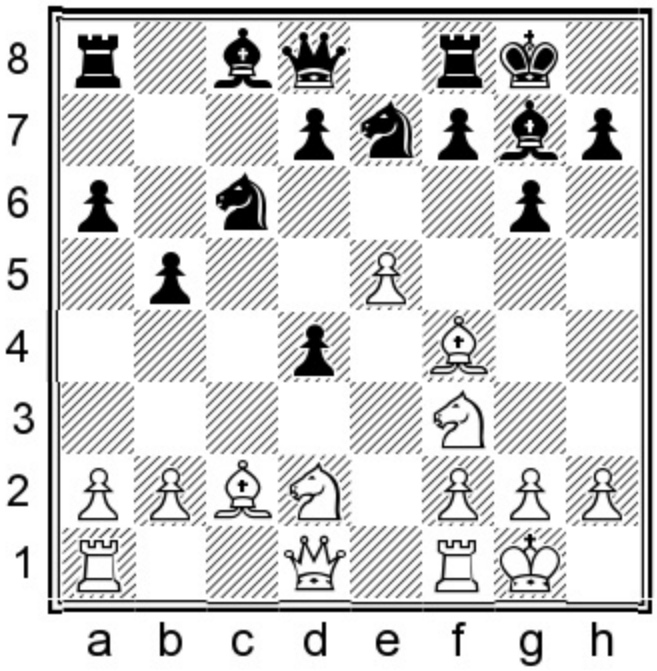


Position after: 21.♘b6

21...♖a7 [21...♖a6 22.♘xc8 ♕xc8 23.♘xd4± Black has more weaknesses, and needs to play very accurately to stay in the game.] 22.b3!? A practical way to keep Black thinking about what to do. [22.♘xc8 ♕xc8 23.♘xd4± is a safe edge.] 22...axb3 23.♕xb3 ♖e8 24.♖cc1⩲

C) 11...♘d5 is always met with 12.♗g5 and doesn't really accomplish anything, as we'll probably play ♗b3 on the next move.

12.♗c2!

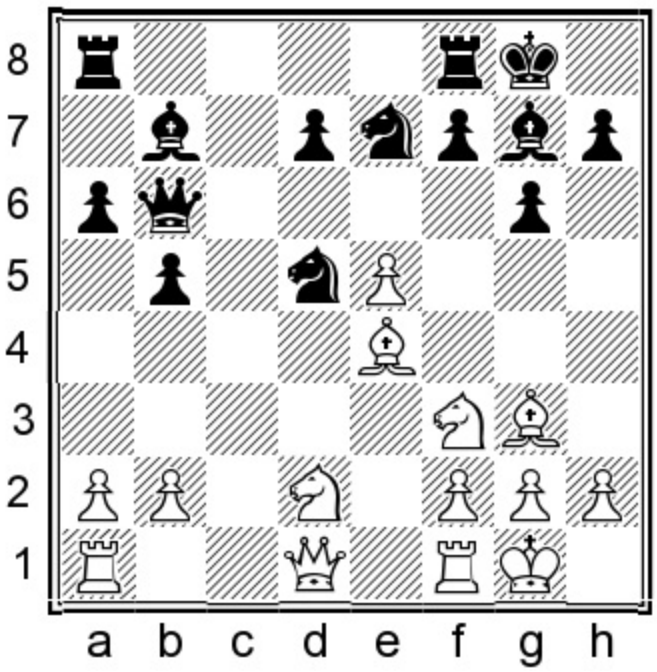


Position after: 12.♗c2!

12.♗b3 wasn't a bad move, but I like having the option of playing ♗e4 here.

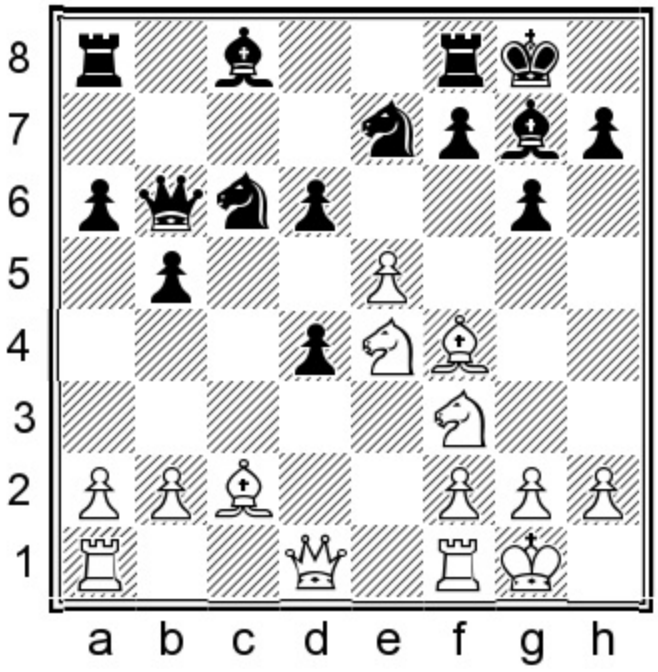
12...♗b7

A) 12...♘b4 Black can sacrifice the d4-pawn to activate his pieces, but in the ensuing positions we'll be able to hold down a pleasant edge. 13.♗e4 ♘bd5 14.♗g3 ♗b7 15.♘xd4 ♕b6 16.♘4f3±



Position after: 16.♘4f3±

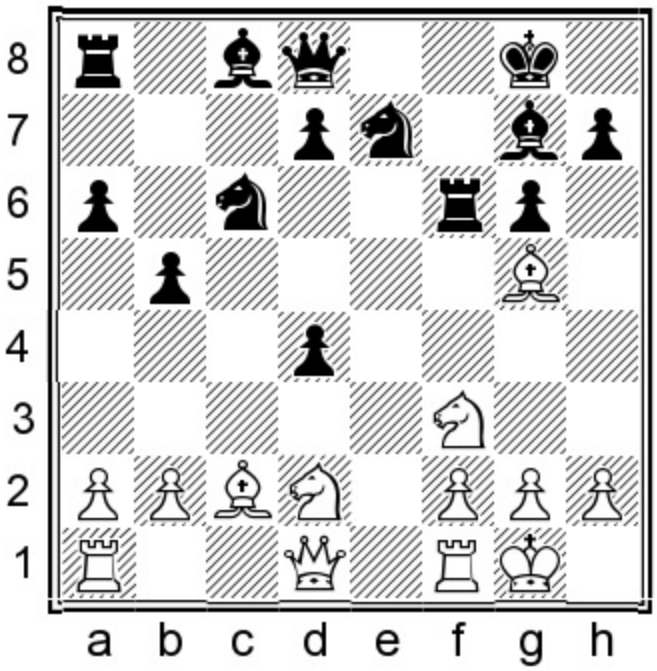
B) 12...♕b6!? Black delays moving his bishop on c8, as he has a direct idea in mind. 13.♘e4 [13.♖e1 ♘d5 14.♗g3 ♘e3! 15.fxe3 dxe3 16.♔h1 exd2 17.♕xd2 ♗b7 White has nothing better than a repetition here. 18.♗f2 ♕c7 19.♗g3=] 13...d6!



Position after: 13...d6!

The pawn sacrifice is the cleanest way for Black to achieve equality. 14.exd6 [14.♘xd6 ♗g4=] 14...♘d5 15.♗g3 ♗f5 16.♘eg5 ♗xc2 17.♕xc2=

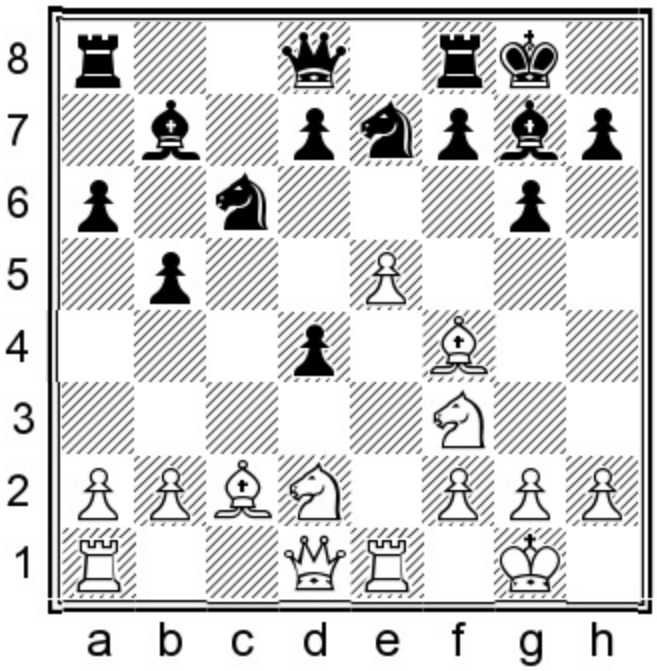
C) 12...f6?! Compared to 11...f6, this version suits White even more as Black has created additional weaknesses with ...b7-b5. 13.exf6 ♖xf6 [13...♗xf6 14.♗d6!+– Followed by ♗b3+ and ♘e4, and White is basically just winning.] 14.♗g5



Position after: 14.♗g5

14...♖e6 [14...♖f8 15.♖c1±] 15.♘b3 ♕b6 16.♖c1± Followed by ♗b1 and ♘c5.

13.♖e1

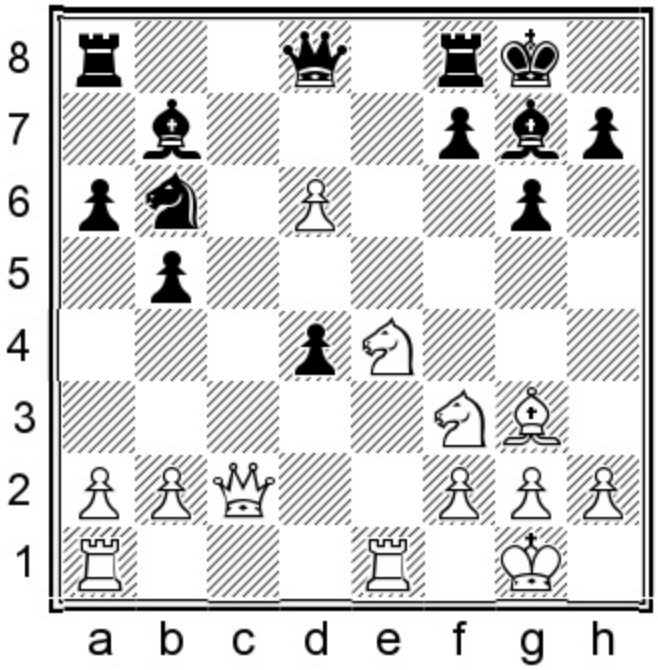


Position after: 13.♖e1

It's important to over-protect the e5-pawn before carrying out other ideas.

13...♕b6

13...♘d5 is a slightly more artificial way to get equality. 14.♗g3 d6!? [14...♘b6 15.h4!↑ Not the only option, but a nice indication of the various ways we can continue our initiative.] 15.exd6 ♘cb4 16.♘e4 ♘xc2 17.♕xc2 ♘b6!⇄

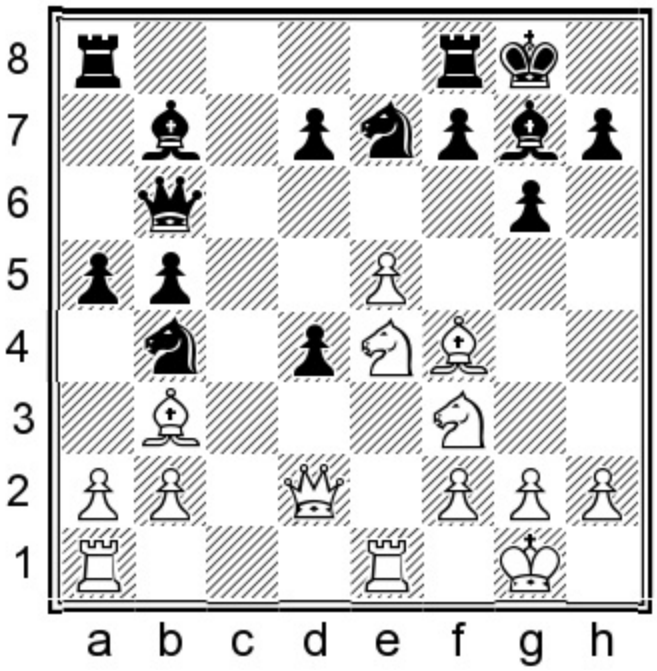


Position after: 17...♘b6!⇄

14.♘e4 ♘b4

14...♘d5 15.♗g3 ♘a5 16.♘d6 ♘b4 17.♘xd4±

15.♗b3 a5 16.♕d2!

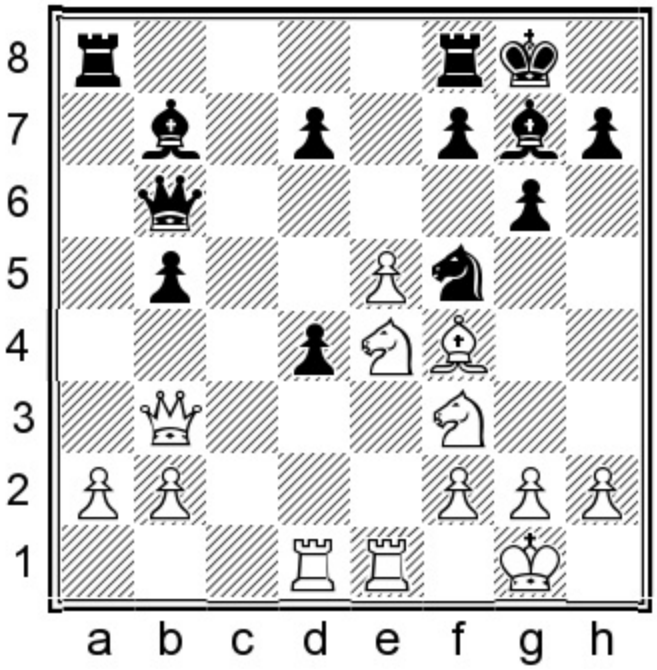


Position after: 16.♕d2!

If Black continues with ...a5-a4, we can either capture on b4 or play ♗d1.

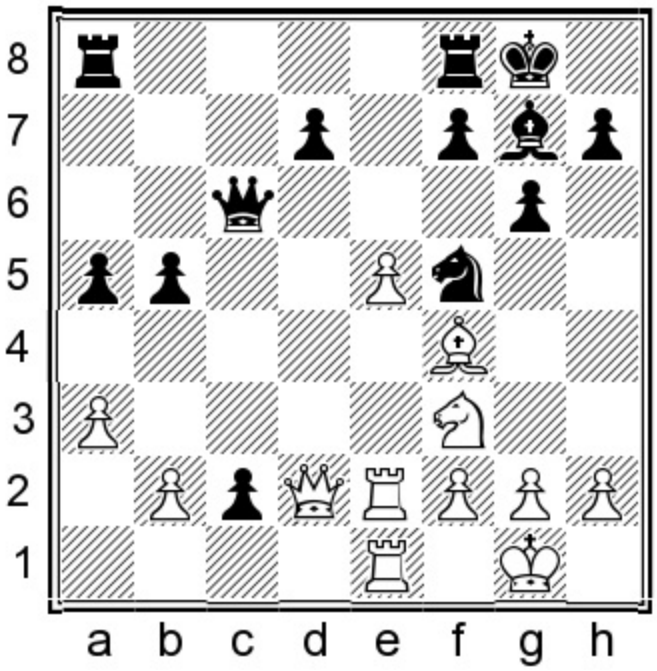
16...♘f5 17.♖ad1 d3

17...a4 18.♕xb4 axb3 19.♕xb3±



Position after: 19.♕xb3±

18.a3 ♗xe4! 19.♖xe4 ♕c6 20.♖de1 ♘c2 21.♗xc2 dxc2 22.♖4e2=



Position after: 22.♖4e2=

After a series of accurate moves, the position remains equal as Black can't hold on to his extra pawn.

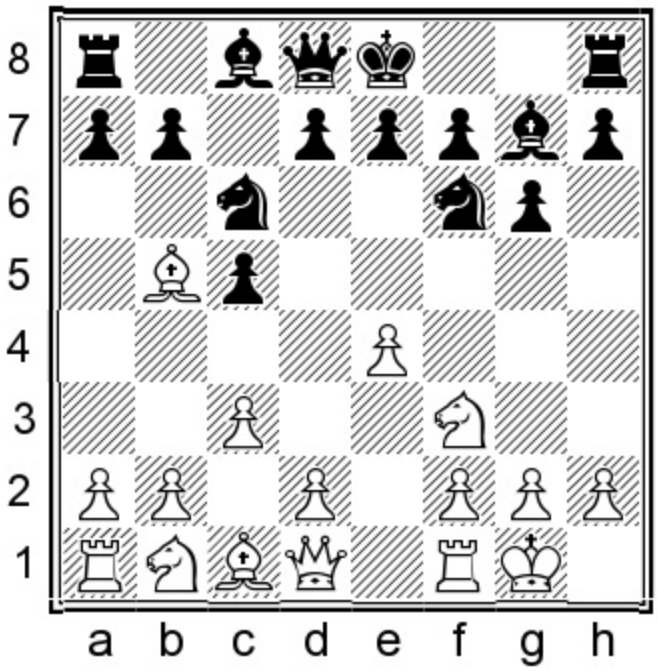
Conclusion to Chapter 15 & 16

In these chapters, we've deeply analysed Black's attempt (...e7-e5) to prevent us from establishing central control. As a result, my analysis has focused on exploiting the weaknesses that the ...e7-e5 push has created. The fact that we sacrifice a pawn to generate an initiative suggests that we need to be exceptionally accurate, or else it is possible that Black will be able to emerge with an advantage. If we are successful in remembering some key moves, Black will face an increasingly unpleasant position – which I believe is practically close to winning for White. The variations that we discussed demonstrate that Black often ends up so cramped, he struggles to move any of his pieces. This is especially pronounced in case Black opts for the knight trade with 7...♘xd4, covered in Chapter 15.

Black's best option is clearly to attempt to remove our d6-bishop as fast as possible – starting with 8...a6. Despite this, in Chapter 16 I have demonstrated how we can continuously create practical difficulties for Black, with three separate lines that might involve either a2-a4 or h2-h4 or both, but in either case with Black suffering on the dark squares. The variety of testing lines available to us starting on move 10 makes Black's preparation task in this line a thankless one.

Chapter 17
4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 ♘f6

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 ♘f6



Chapter Guide

Chapter 17 – 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 ♘f6

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 ♘f6 6.♖e1 0-0 7.d4

a) 5...a6 alternative

b) 7...a6 8.♗xc6 dxc6 9.e5

c) 7...a6 8.♗xc6 dxc6 9.h3!?

d) 7...cxd4 8.cxd4 d5 9.e5 ♘e4 10.♘c3!? ♘xc3

e) 7...cxd4 8.cxd4 d5 9.e5 ♘e4 10.♘c3!? ♗f5

f) 7...d5 8.e5 ♘e4 9.♗xc6!?

g) 7...d5 8.e5 ♘e4 9.♗e3

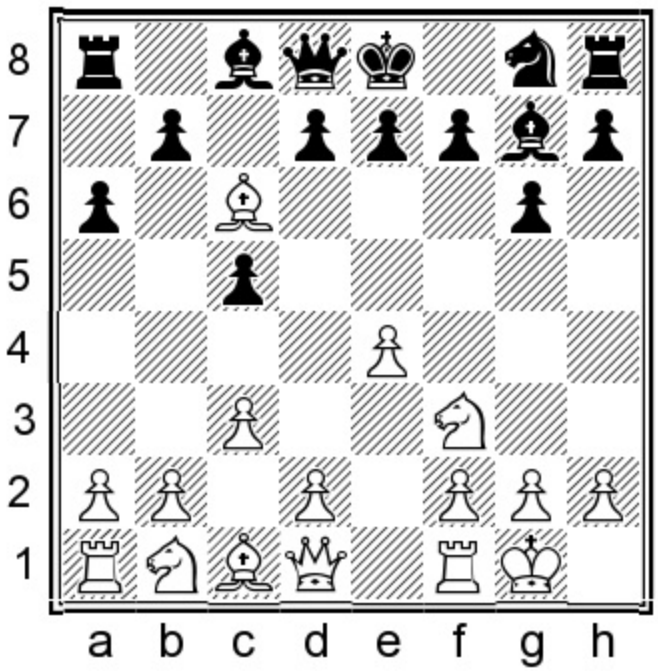
a) 5...a6 alternative

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 a6

This has been played a lot, but it's clearly inferior to 7...a6 for reasons that we'll discover upon

further examination.

6.♗xc6

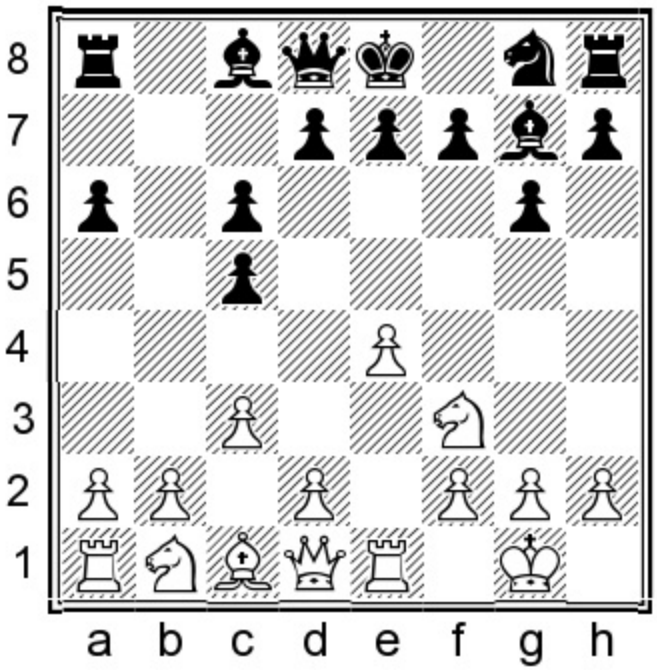


Position after: 6.♗xc6

6...dxc6

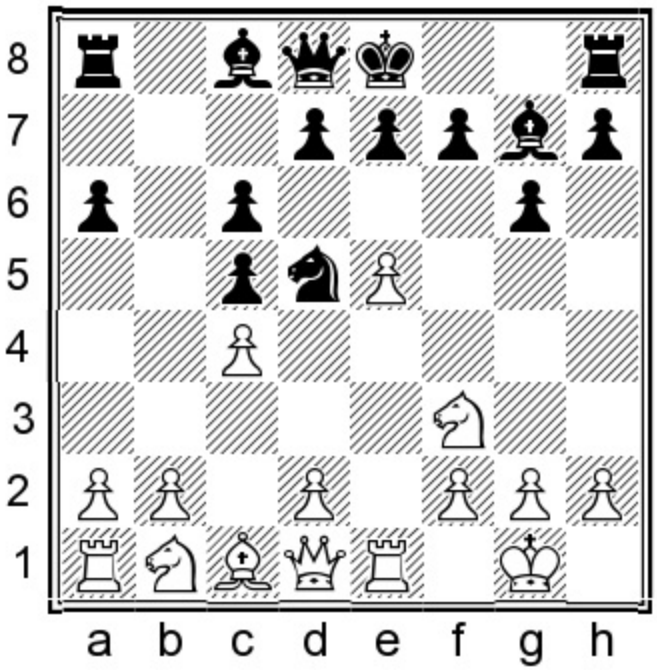
Rather than play d2-d4 immediately we can prepare it, and ultimately should get a good position by just playing normal moves. This is the crucial difference between 5...a6 and 5...♘f6 6.♖e1 0-0 7.d4 a6 (which is covered next.)

6...bxc6 7.♖e1!? 7.d4 has been played significantly more and does seem more natural, but with 7.♖e1 we are simply getting a better version of the line: 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.♗xc6 bxc6 5. 0-0 ♗g7 6.♖e1.



Position after: 7.♖e1!?

Compared to that position, we have played c2-c3 and Black has played ...a7-a6. If you check the lines that I give after 4.♗xc6, it's quite evident how this benefits us. 7...♘f6 [7...♘h6 8.d4 We are pretty much a move up on lines after 4.♗xc6 bxc6.; 7...d6 8.e5! ♗g4 9.exd6 ♕xd6 10.h3 ♗xf3 11.♕xf3±; 7...d5?! 8.e5 ♗g4 9.d4! cxd4 10.cxd4 ♘h6 11.♘bd2±] 8.e5 ♘d5 9.c4!

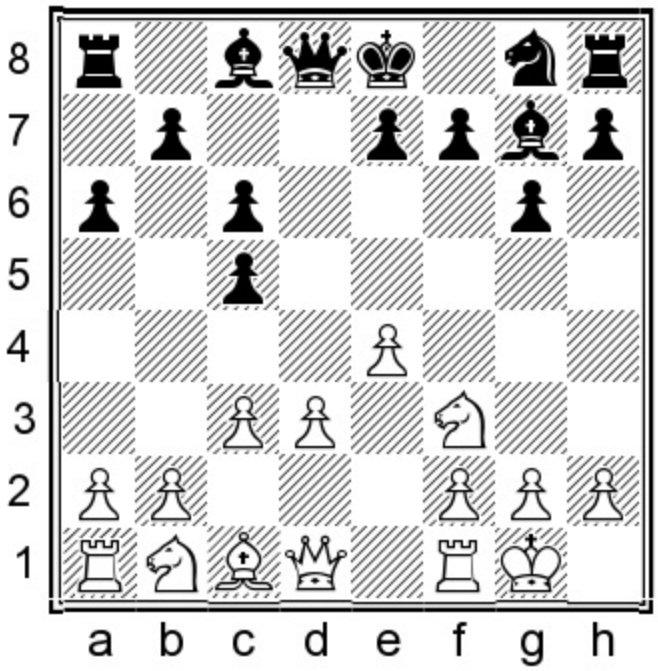


Position after: 9.c4!

The only difference in the corresponding variation after 4.♗xc6 bxc6 is that Black has a pawn on a6

rather than a7. In my opinion, the pawn on a6 can't be beneficial for Black: it prevents ...♗c8-a6, and perhaps weakens the b6-square. We will continue to play in exactly the same way as I demonstrate in the lines after 4.♗xc6 bxc6.

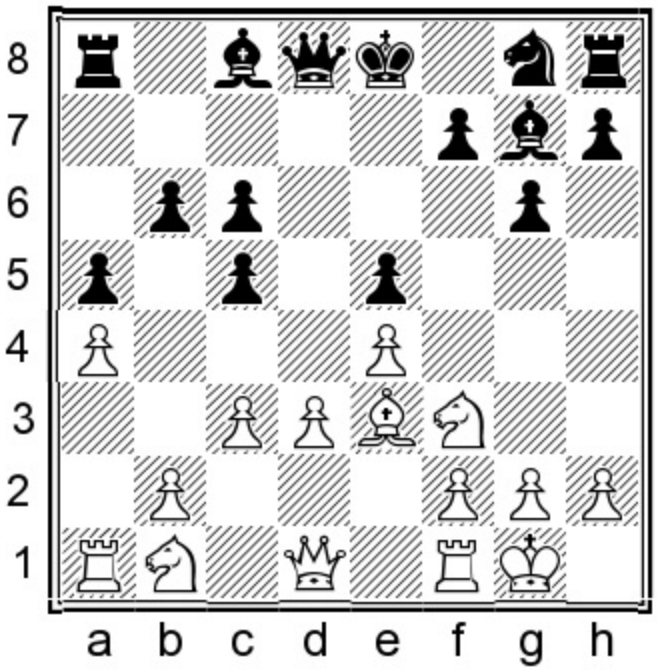
7.d3



Position after: 7.d3

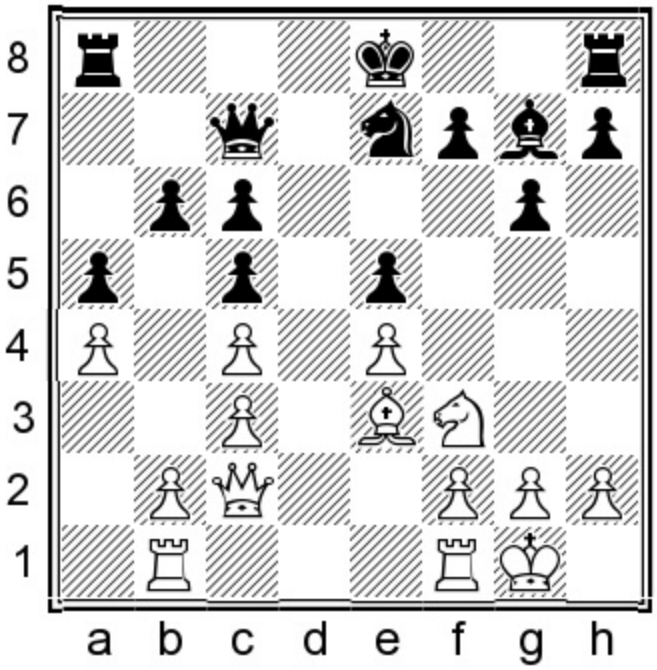
7...♘f6

A) 7...e5?! Black has wasted time playing ...a7-a6, and so this move should really be punished. 8.a4! a5 [8...♘e7 9.a5 and the c5-pawn will fall, e.g. 9...0-0 10.♗e3 ♕d6 11.♘a3+– followed by ♘c4 and ♗xc5.] 9.♗e3 b6



Position after: 9...b6

Now that we have fixed Black's queenside pawns in such a way, we can just position our pieces so that a b2-b4 break will be effective. 10.♕c2 ♘e7 11.♘bd2 ♗a6 [11...0-0 12.♘c4 ♕c7 13.b4+–] 12.♘c4 ♗xc4 13.dxc4 ♕c7 14.♖ab1!

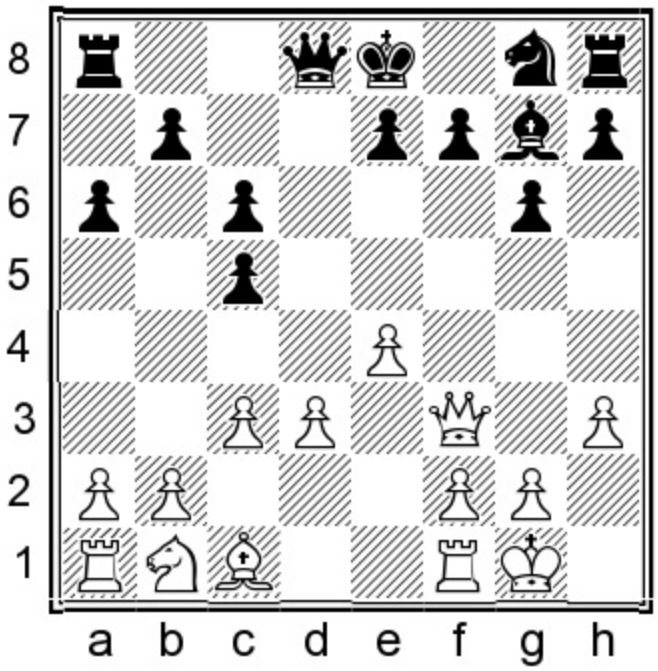


Position after: 14.♖ab1!

Simply playing for b2-b4, after which Black's position will become seriously unpleasant. 14...0-0 15.b4 axb4 16.cxb4 cxb4 17.c5! b5 18.♖xb4± Black's minor pieces play no role in the game, and

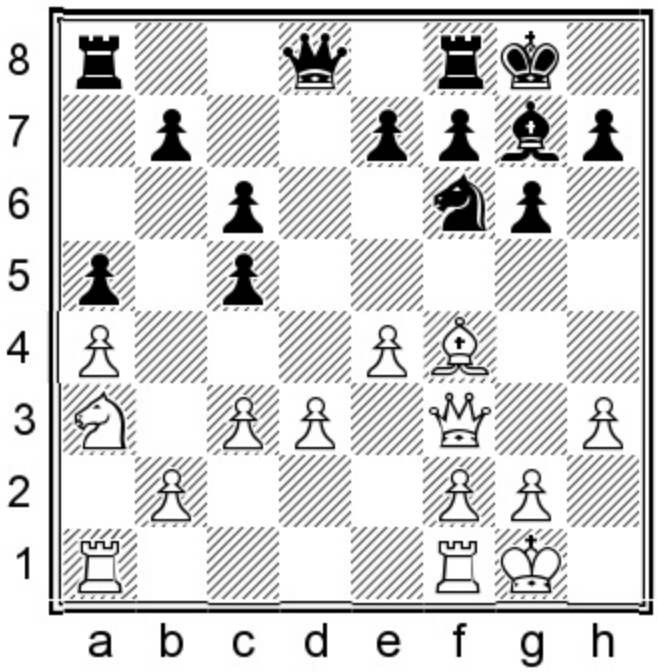
after an anticipated bxa4, we can re-route our f3 knight to c4 via d2.

B) 7...♗g4 It also doesn't seem too difficult to prove an advantage here, as it's a little early for ...♗g4 – especially as Black has already wasted time with ...a7-a6. 8.h3 ♗xf3 9.♕xf3



Position after: 9.♕xf3

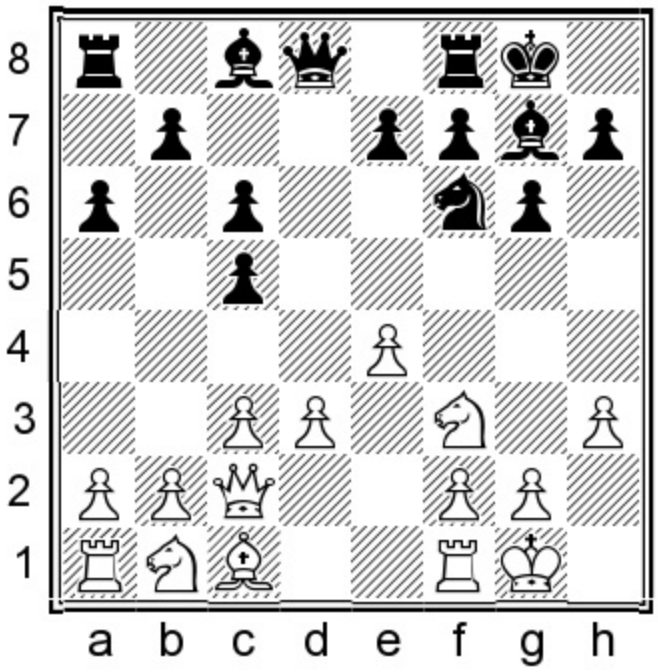
9...♘f6 [9...e5 is typical, but after 10.♘d2 ♘f6 11.♘c4 Black's wasted time pays the price as 11...♕c7 is met with 12.d4! cxd4 13.cxd4 exd4 14.♗f4 ♕e7 15.♘d6+ ♔f8 16.♖fe1+– We'll follow up with a combination of ♖ad1, e4-e5 and ♕b3.] 10.a4 a5 Otherwise we would've played a4-a5. 11.♘a3 0-0 12.♗f4±



Position after: 12.♗f4±

Once again, normal moves have quite easily led to a good position – it's difficult to come up with a plan for Black, whereas we can think about d3-d4 ideas after bringing our rooks to the centre.

8.h3 0-0 9.♕c2



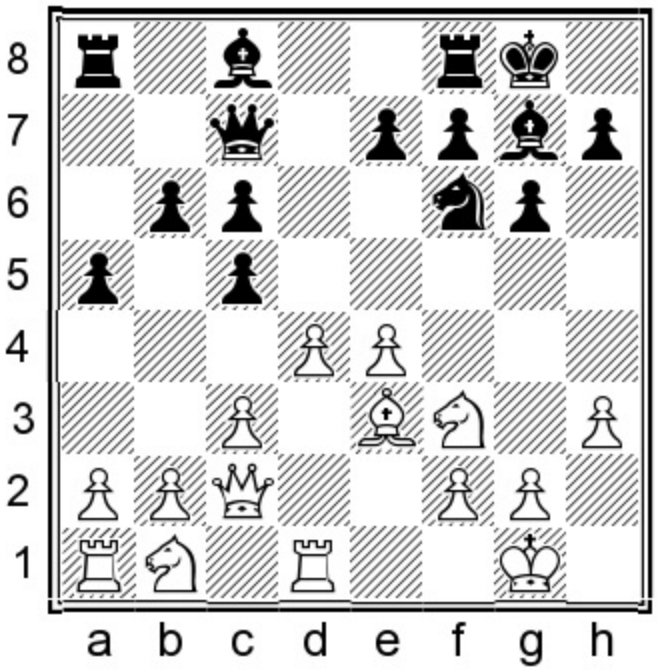
Position after: 9.♕c2

I'm not certain that the order of the next few moves matter too much, but our plan remains the same – to prepare a d3-d4 push, and take control of the centre.

9...♕c7 10.♗e3 b6 11.♖d1

It's also of course possible to play 11.d4 immediately

11...a5 12.d4

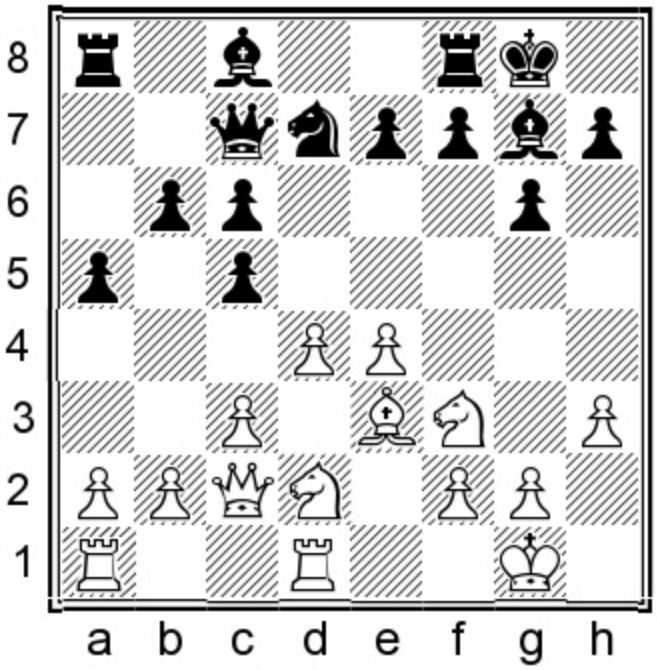


Position after: 12.d4

12...♘d7

12...cxd4 doesn't change much apart from giving us the c3-square for our knight. 13.cxd4 ♗b7 14.♘c3 c5 15.d5!± It's quite difficult for Black to contest our central pawns, and the b5-weakness compounds his problems.

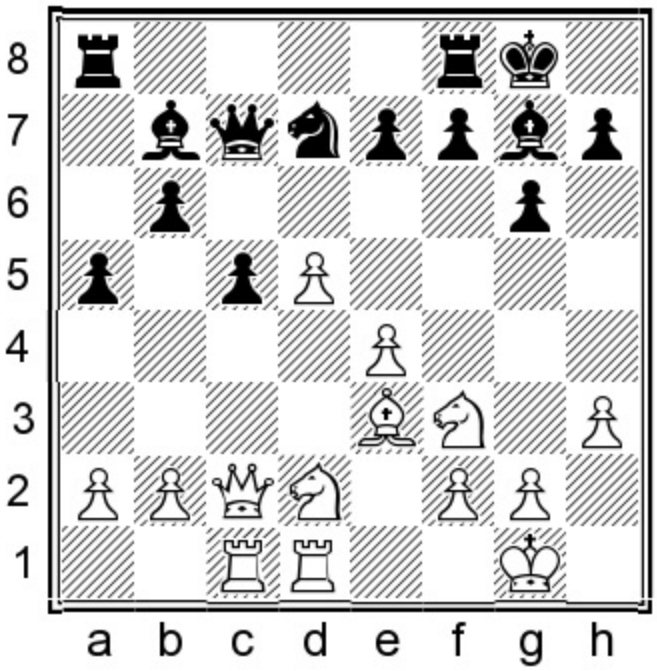
13.♘bd2



Position after: 13.♘bd2

13...♗a6

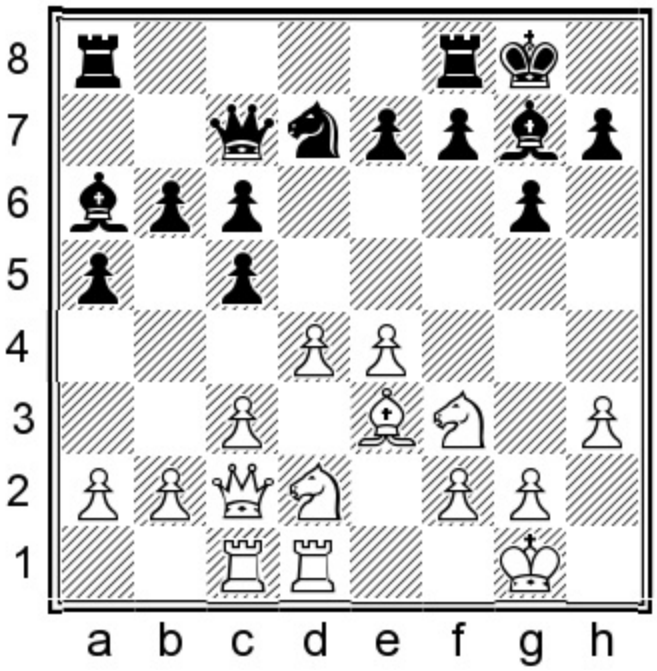
13...cxd4 14.cxd4 c5 15.♖ac1 ♗b7 [15...♗a6 transposes to 13...♗a6.] 16.d5!±



Position after: 16.d5!±

It's quite evident that we have a pleasant edge, and we'll continue with ♘c4 and possibly d5-d6. If necessary, we can solidify the knight on c4 with a2-a4.

14.♖ac1!



Position after: 14.♖ac1!

Preparing for the inevitable ...cxd4 capture.

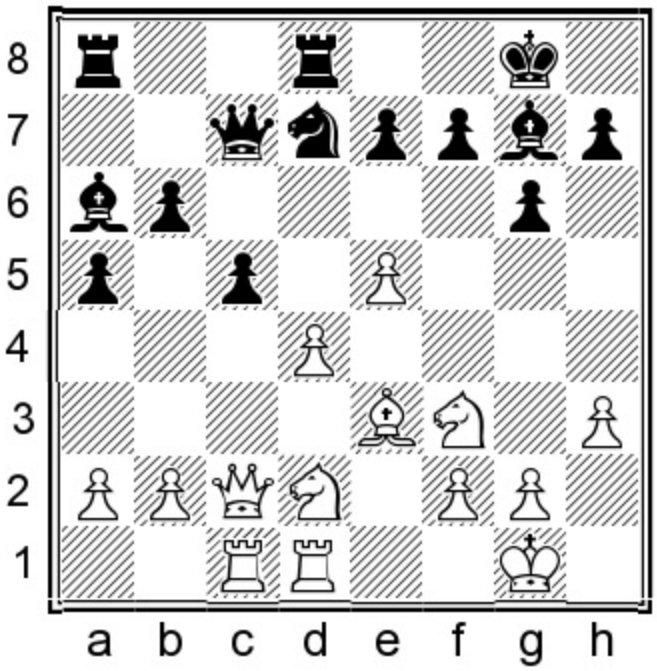
14...♖fd8

14...cxd4 15.cxd4 c5 16.a4! ♖fc8 17.d5!± Followed by ♘c4 and possibly ♗g5.

15.e5!

Exploring different avenues. This time we restrict the g7-bishop and open the e4-square for our knight to jump to.

15...cxd4 16.cxd4 c5



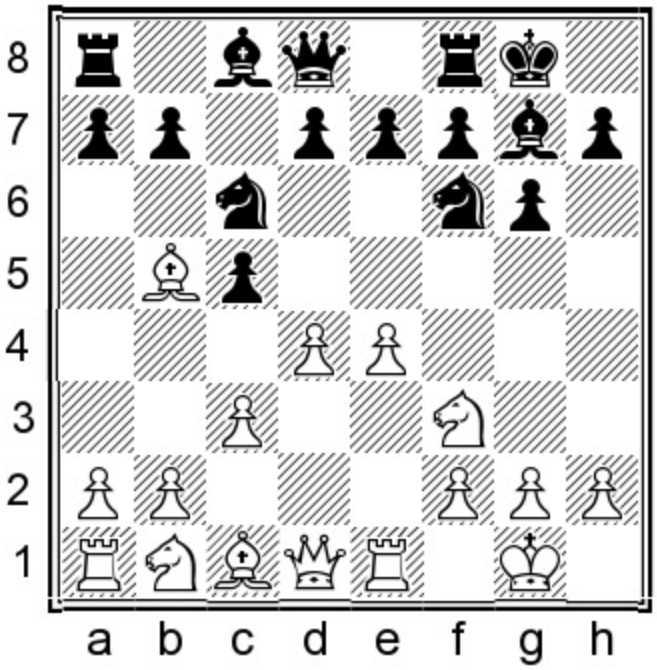
Position after: 16...c5

17.e6! fxe6 18.♕e4 ♘f8 19.♕g4±

Black faces a difficult task defending this position.

b) 7...a6 8.♗xc6 dxc6 9.e5

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 ♘f6 6.♖e1 0-0 7.d4

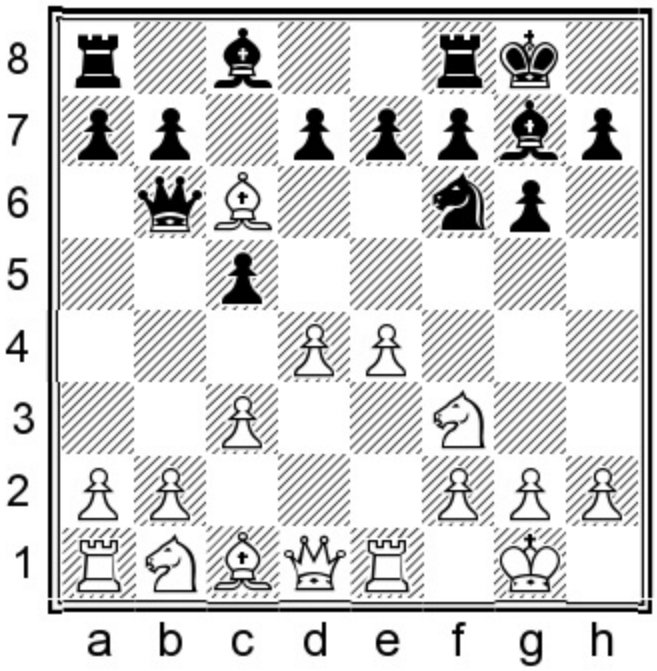


Position after: 7.d4

7...a6

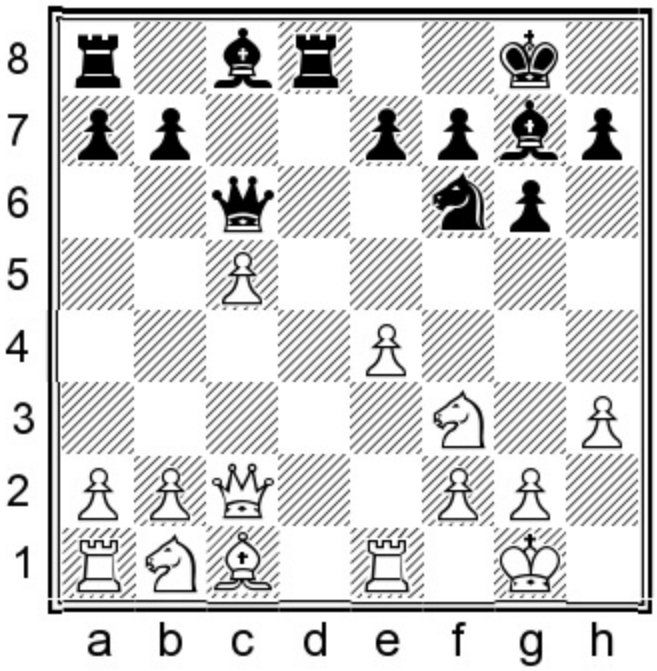
Our analysis of 5...a6 demonstrated that White should prepare d2-d4, rather than playing it immediately. To this end, the text move seems to be the best moment for Black to play ...a7-a6 – as we've now committed to an early d2-d4 push. 7...a6 has been tested by Carlsen, Adhiban and Anton Guijarro in the past year, and looks to be an excellent practical try. In my opinion, it provides Black with a more dynamic game than in the lines we'll encounter after the more popular 7...d5.

7...♕b6!? is another interesting possibility which I expect to gain traction soon. 8.♗xc6 Probably the most critical test. [The point is that if we continue normally with 8.♗a4 then after 8...d5 9.e5 ♘e4 Black has already played ...♕b6 compared to our mainline – which is clearly beneficial for him.]



Position after: 8.♗xc6

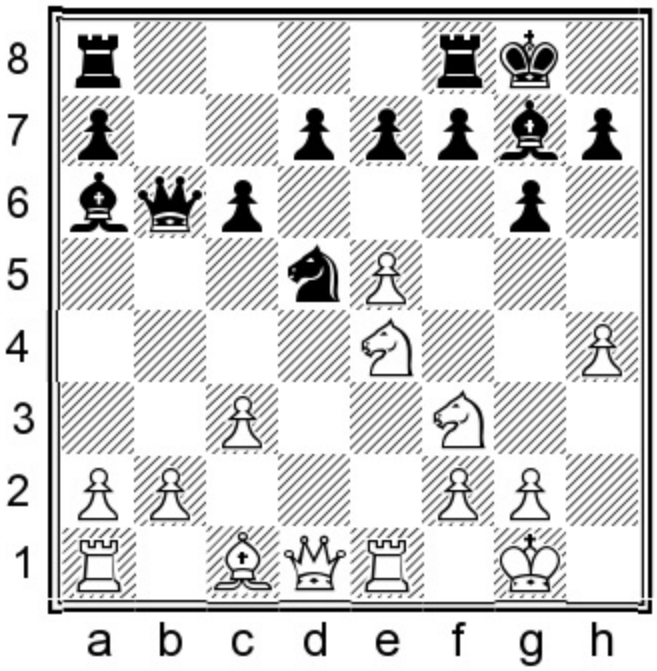
A) 8...dxc6 9.h3 ♖d8 10.♕c2 It appears that White has a very solid central foundation, but Black has a forcing way to try and equalise. 10...cxd4 11.cxd4 c5! 12.dxc5 ♕c6



Position after: 12...♕c6

Black has sacrificed a pawn, but suddenly his pieces look pretty active. He's also threatening ...b7-b6 which will win the pawn back. 13.♘c3! [13.♘e5 ♕c7 14.♘d3 ♘xe4!∞; 13.♗f4 b6 14.♘bd2 ♕xc5 15.♕xc5 bxc5 16.♖ac1 ♘d7=] 13...♕xc5 14.♗e3 ♕c4 15.♖ad1± My feeling is that White is still a touch better, but Black also seems very comfortable.

B) 8...bxc6!? An attempt to maintain a dynamic game, but I think White has very good chances here. 9.e5! ♘d5 [9...♘e8 10.dxc5 ♕xc5 11.♗e3 ♕b5 12.♘a3!± This looks good for White.] 10.dxc5 ♕xc5 11.♘bd2 ♕b6 12.♘e4 ♗a6 13.h4! The position calls for this move and the following variations demonstrate some of our attacking possibilities.

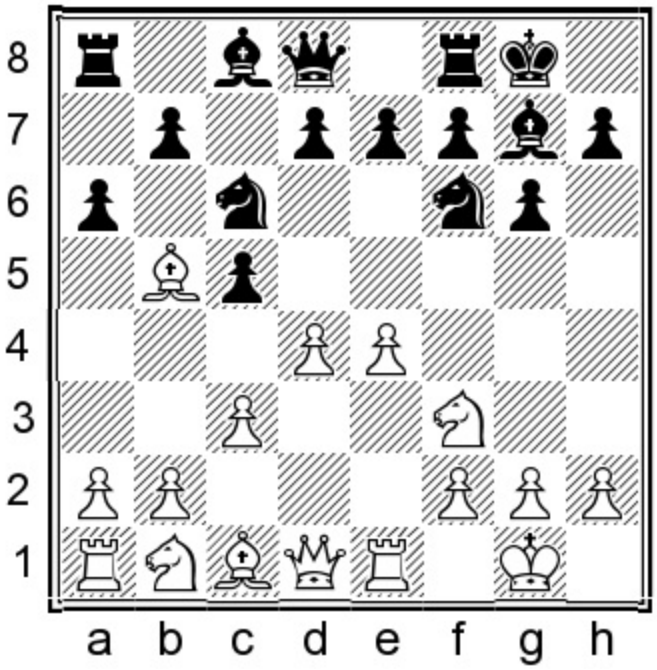


Position after: 13.h4!

B1) 13...d6 14.exd6 exd6 15.h5! [15.♘xd6? ♖ad8] 15...♖fe8 16.h6 ♗f8 17.♘fg5→

B2) 13...f6 14.h5! fxe5 15.hxg6 hxg6 16.♘h4 ♘f6 17.♕c2 d5 18.♗e3 ♕b8 19.♘c5 ♗c8 20.♕xg6±

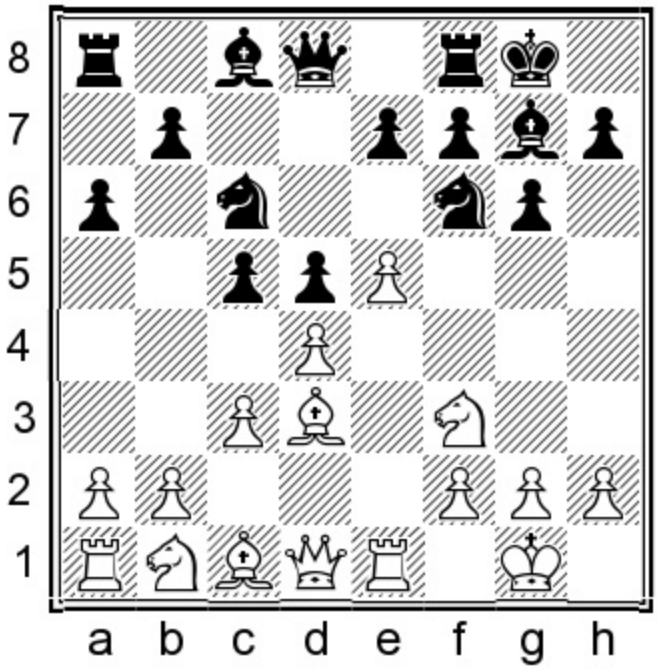
B3) 13...f5 14.♘eg5! Black's kingside structure is weakened and it won't be too difficult to exploit it. 14...h6 15.♘h3 e6 16.♘f4! ♘xf4 17.♗xf4 ♕xb2 18.♕xd7 ♖fe8 19.♕xc6±



Position after: 7...a6

8.♗xc6

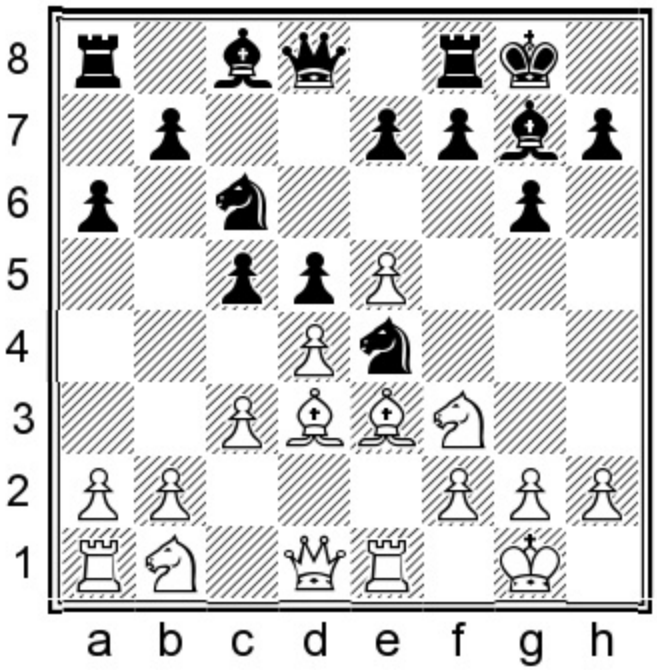
A) 8.♗d3 Compared to the positions after 7...d5, White lacks the option to capture on c6 now. Compared to the ones after 7...cxd4, he lacks the c3-square for his knight. This motivates Black's next move and explains why he has good chances of equality. 8...d5 9.e5



Position after: 9.e5

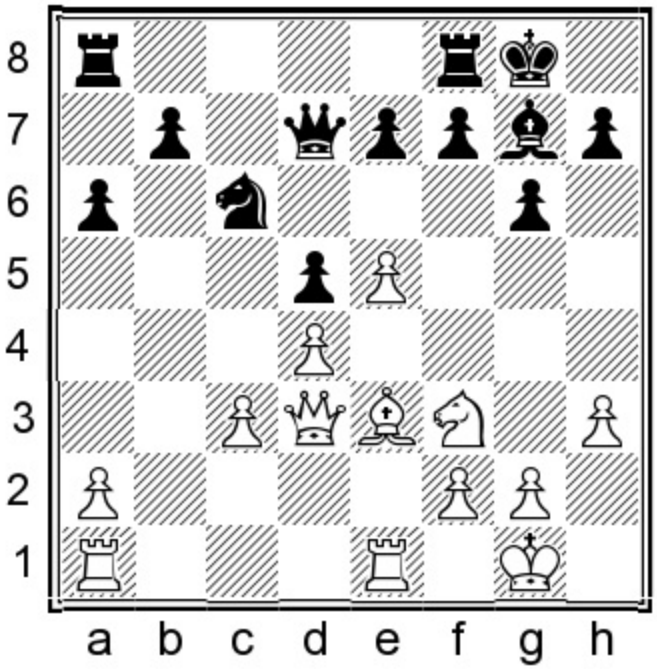
A1) 9...♘e8?! was played in Anand – Carlsen, Wijk aan Zee 2020. Here White's best continuation was to restrict Black's light-squared bishop with 10.h3!± and Black must either give up the c5-pawn or allow White to use the c3-square.

A2) 9...♘e4! 10.♗e3 It appears that all of the subsequent positions are very slightly inferior to 7...d5, because we don't have the option to capture on c6 and inflict Black with some positional weaknesses. [10.♗xe4? dxe4 11.♖xe4 ♕d5∓; 10.♘bd2?! ♘xd2 11.♗xd2 ♗g4 12.♗e3 cxd4 13.cxd4 f6! Black had a good game in Khanin – Adhiban, Moscow 2019.]



Position after: 10.♗e3

A2.1) 10...♗g4 11.h3 cxd4! An important intermediate move to stop us from taking on c5. 12.cxd4 ♗f5 13.♘c3 ♘xc3 14.bxc3 ♗xd3 15.♕xd3 ♕d7=

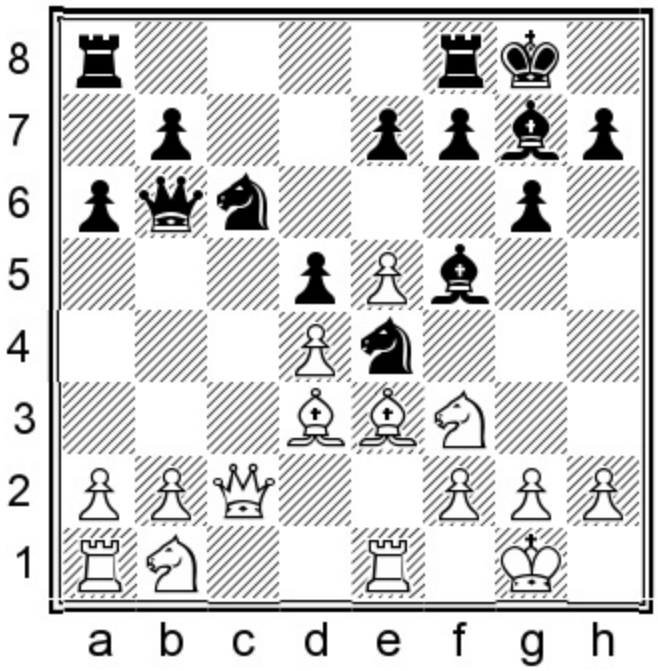


Position after: 15...♕d7=

We've reached another typical position that we will encounter more of after 7...cxd4, where we trade knights after playing ♘c3. However here, I think Black has adequate counterplay with ideas such as ...♘a5-c4. Analysis of the lines after 7...cxd4 hopefully clarifies why this position is

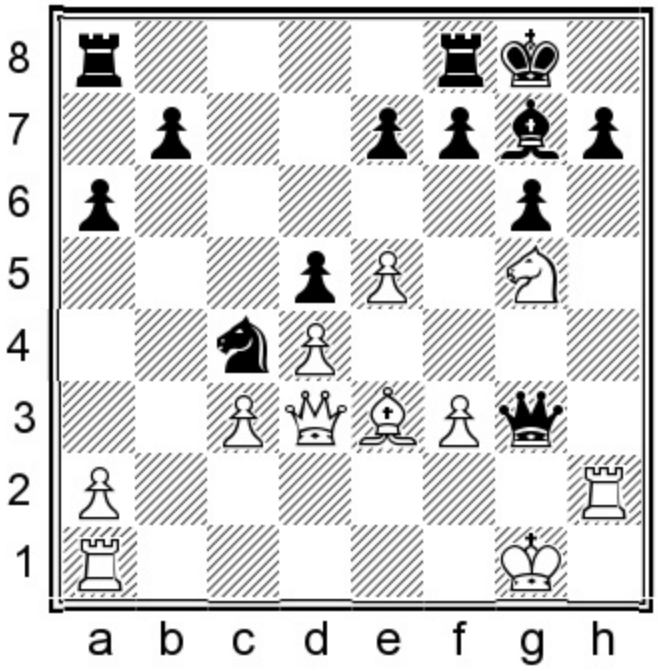
slightly inferior to the corresponding ones after 7...cxd4.

A2.2) 10...♕b6! Possibly not the only move to get equality, but certainly good enough. 11.♕c2 cxd4 12.cxd4 ♗f5



Position after: 12...♗f5

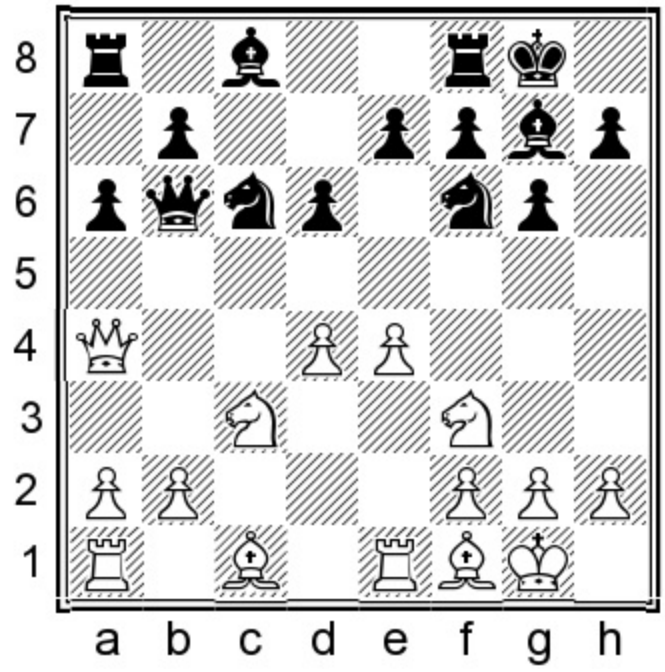
13.♘c3 ♘xc3 14.bxc3 ♗xd3 15.♕xd3 ♘a5 16.h4 ♕e6 17.♘g5 ♕g4 18.f3 ♕xh4 19.♖e2 ♘c4 20.g3 ♕xg3+ 21.♖g2 ♕h4 22.♖h2 ♕g3+



Position after: 22...♕g3+

23.♔h1 [23.♖g2 ♕h4 24.♖h2=] 23...♘xe5 24.dxe5 ♕xe5⩱ Black had good compensation for the piece and went on to win in Grandelius – Anton Guijarro, Prague 2020. To be honest, I couldn't really find a convincing way for White to play after 10...♕b6, though the reader is always welcome to investigate further!

B) 8.♕a4 shouldn't be problematic for Black. 8...cxd4 9.cxd4 ♕b6 10.♘c3 d6 11.♗f1



Position after: 11.♗f1

11...e5! 12.dxe5 ♘g4 13.♕c2 ♘gxe5 14.♘xe5 dxe5=

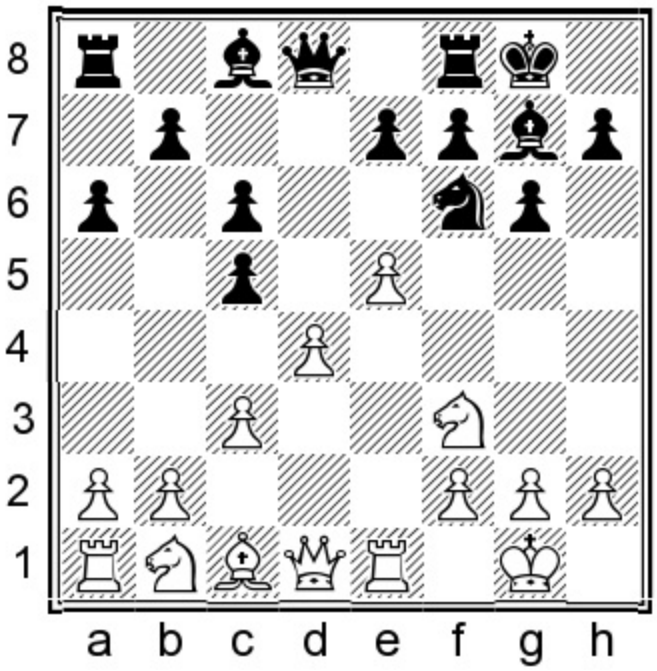
8...dxc6

8...bxc6 just loses a pawn after 9.e5 ♘d5 10.dxc5 ♕a5 11.b4+–

9.e5

This is testing, and Black needs to respond accurately.

9.h3 is given as an extra option in subchapter c.



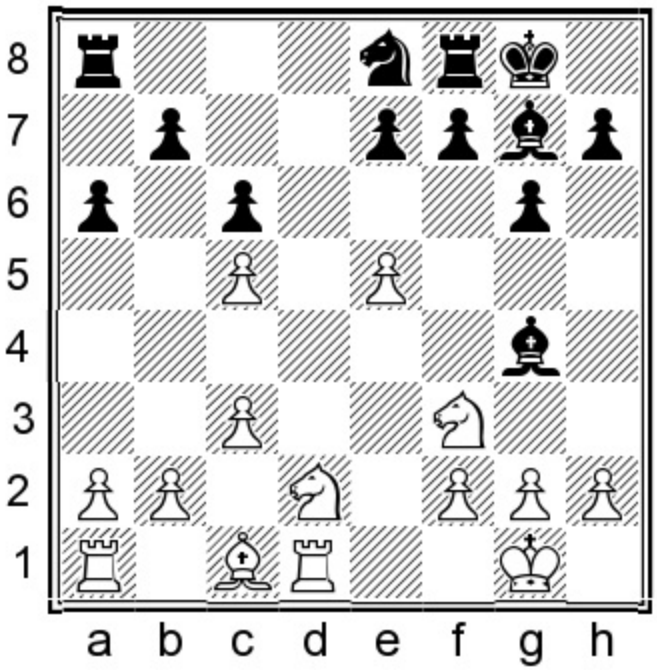
Position after: 9.e5

9...♘d7!

It's pretty clear that Black can't allow us to capture on c5.

A) 9...♘d5 Once again, the best move is simply to capture the pawn. 10.dxc5 ♗g4 11.♘bd2 and White will have an advantage.

B) 9...♘e8 was played in Rahmilevitz – Greenfeld, Israel 2020, but I don't see a reason not to capture the pawn. 10.dxc5 ♕xd1 11.♖xd1 ♗g4 12.♘bd2



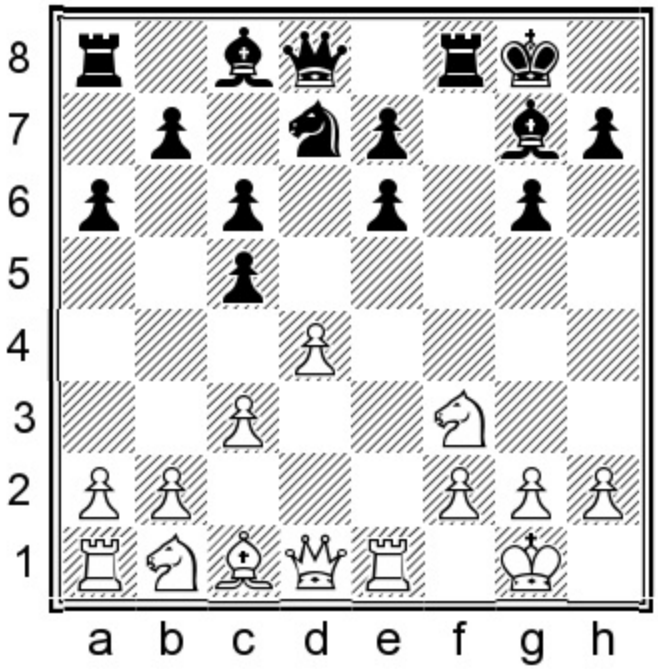
Position after: 12.♘bd2

Black will find himself in trouble if he tries to regain his pawn. 12...♗xe5? 13.h3 ♗xf3 14.♘xf3 ♗f6 15.♖d7+–

10.e6

The logical follow-up, and the best practical decision. We sacrifice a pawn to ruin Black's structure.

10...fxe6

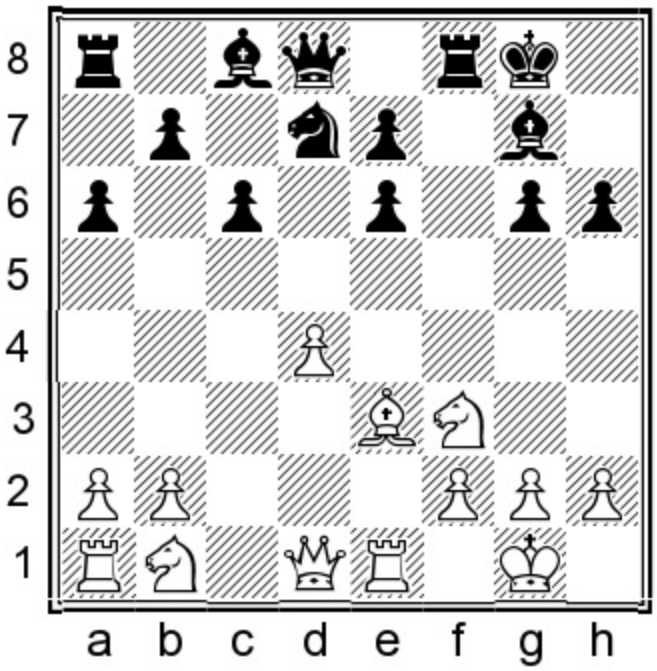


Position after: 10...fxe6

11.♗e3

Here I think it makes sense for Black to try and return the pawn.

11.♗g5!? might be an improvement over 11.♗e3 as it could induce Black to further weaken his kingside pawns. 11...h6 [11...cxd4 12.cxd4 c5 13.♕e2 ♖f7 14.♗e3⩲] 12.♗e3 cxd4 13.cxd4⩲

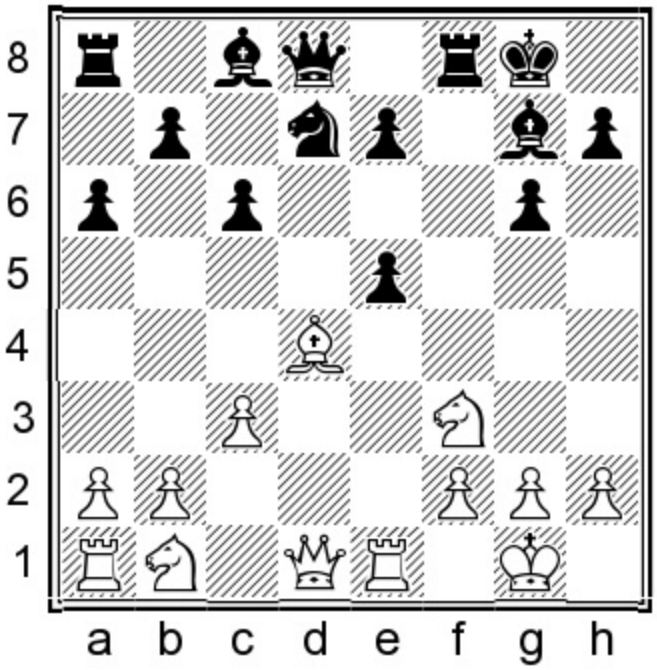


Position after: 13.cxd4⩲

11...♕b6?!

Attempting to hold onto the pawn will give us a dangerous initiative.

11...cxd4 Black does have the ability to bail out here: 12.♗xd4 e5!

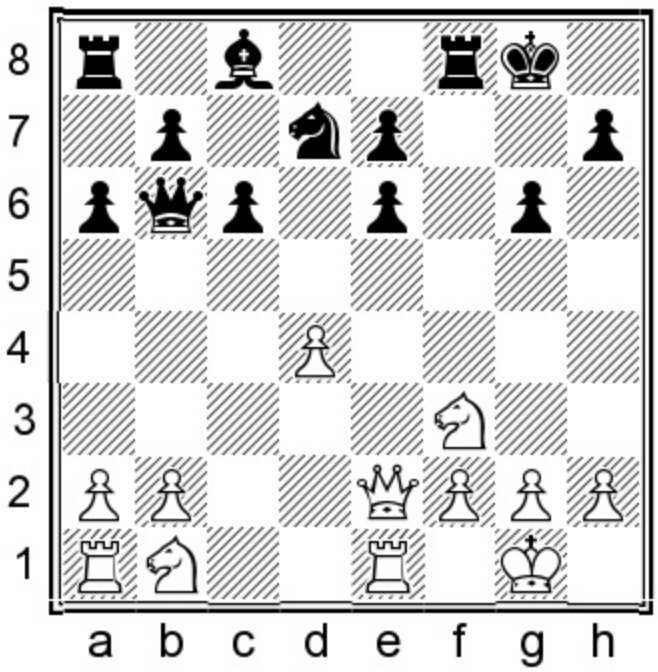


Position after: 12...e5!

The best practical decision. 13.♕b3+ ♔h8 14.♘xe5 ♘xe5 15.♗xe5 ♗xe5 16.♖xe5 ♕d6 17.♖e3± when

White is definitely slightly better, but I guess Black has very good drawing chances too.

12.♕e2 cxd4 13.♗xd4 ♗xd4 14.cxd4



Position after: 14.cxd4

14...e5

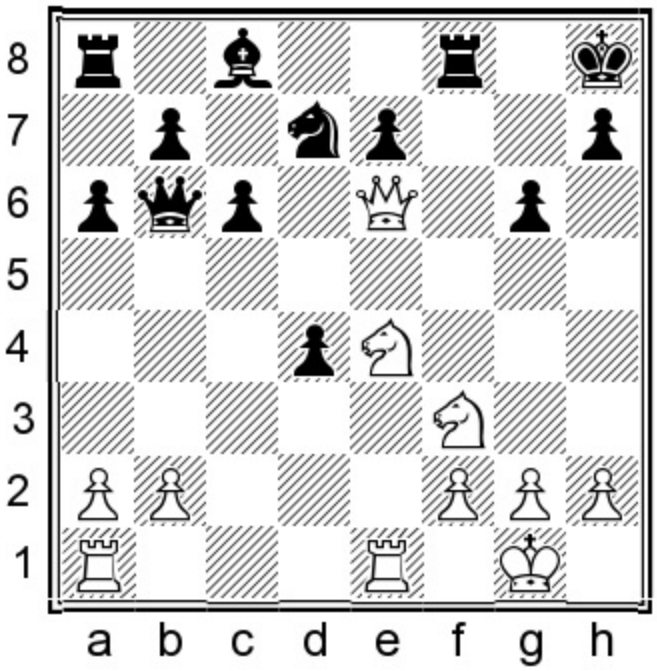
14...♘f6 15.♘a3 c5 16.♘c4 ♕a7 17.♘ce5 cxd4 18.♖ad1+–

15.♘c3 exd4 16.♕e6+ ♔h8

16...♔g7 17.♕xe7+ ♖f7 18.♘a4 ♕c7 19.♕a3±

17.♘e4→

Black's king faces continuing pressure.



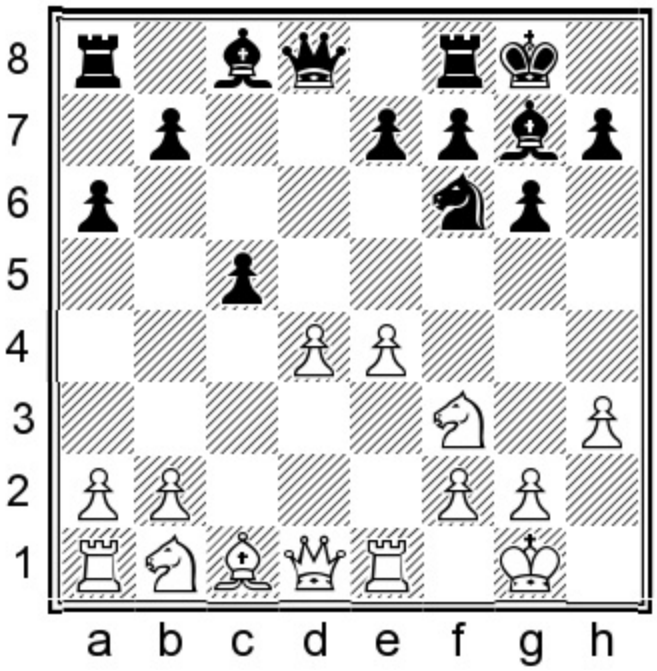
Position after: 17.♘e4→

c) 7...a6 8.♗xc6 dxc6 9.h3!?

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 ♘f6 6.♖e1 0-0 7.d4 a6 8.♗xc6 dxc6 9.h3!?

Stopping ...♗g4 looks like the best way of consolidating the centre, but Black has a way of continuing to dynamically challenge our space advantage.

9...cxd4 10.cxd4 c5!

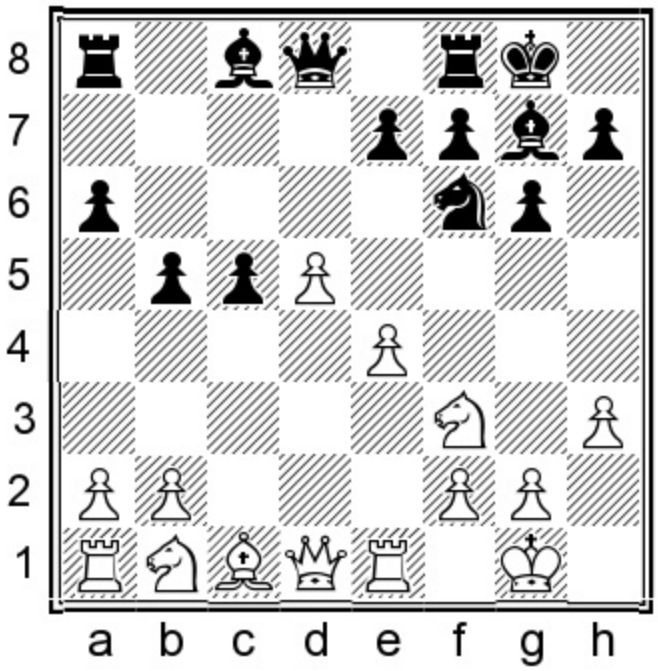


Position after: 10...c5!

11.d5

11.e5 is the alternative, but the following line illustrates that Black is absolutely fine. 11...♘d7 12.♗e3 b5 13.♘c3 ♗b7 14.dxc5 ♘xe5 15.♘xe5 ♗xe5 16.♗h6 ♗xc3 17.bxc3 ♖e8=

11...b5!

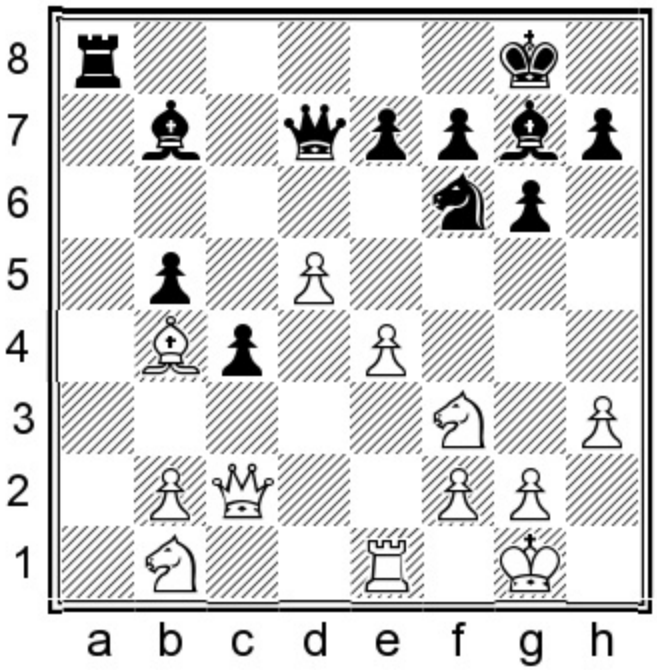


Position after: 11...b5!

Although White has an extra central pawn, Black's counterplay rests on three things: 1) His bishop-pair. 2) His ability to weaken our central pawns by playing ...e7-e6 at the right moment. 3) The potential of creating counterplay by pushing his queenside pawns.

12.♘c3

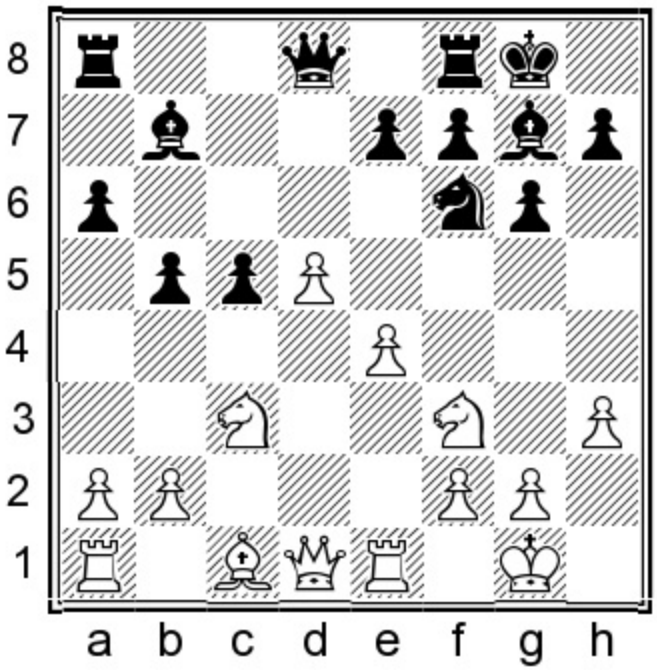
12.♕c2 was played in Vitiugov – Anton Guijarro, Prague 2020. Although White won the game, I don't think Black had any problems out of the opening. 12...c4! 13.a4 ♗b7 14.♗d2 ♕d7 15.axb5 axb5 16.♖xa8 ♖xa8 17.♗b4



Position after: 17.♗b4

Here, David Anton played 17...♘h5. Instead, 17...e6! would have handed Black the initiative.

12...♗b7



Position after: 12...♗b7

13.♗f4

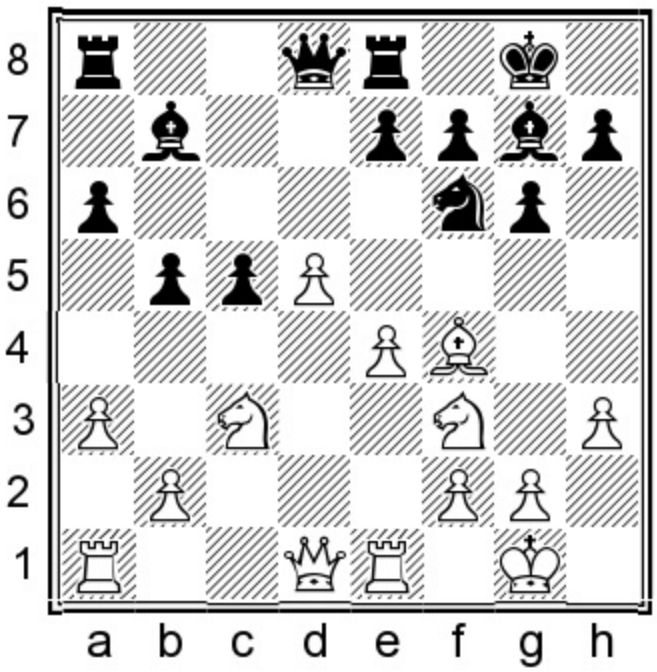
I'm wary of analysing too deeply here, considering the dearth of practical games from this position. I think the most important thing to take away from the following variations is the importance for Black to play ...e7-e6 – and how in turn, we can try to make Black's life difficult, and search for ideas to push our central pawns. It's evident that there are a plethora of complex ideas here, and it would definitely be an interesting position for the reader to explore further.

13.♗g5 h6 14.♗h4 In Yudin – Muthaiah, Chennai 2020, the natural 14...c4! followed by ...♘d7-c5 would have given Black a good game.

13...♖c8!?

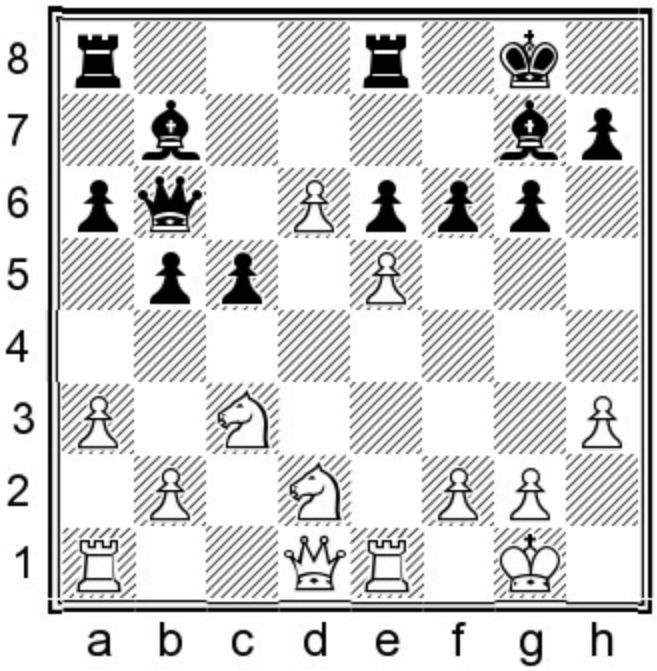
Black prepares for ...e7-e6 by protecting the c5-pawn, in case of a future ♗d6.

13...♖e8 It turns out that this move doesn't really threaten to implement ...e6 on the next move. 14.a3!



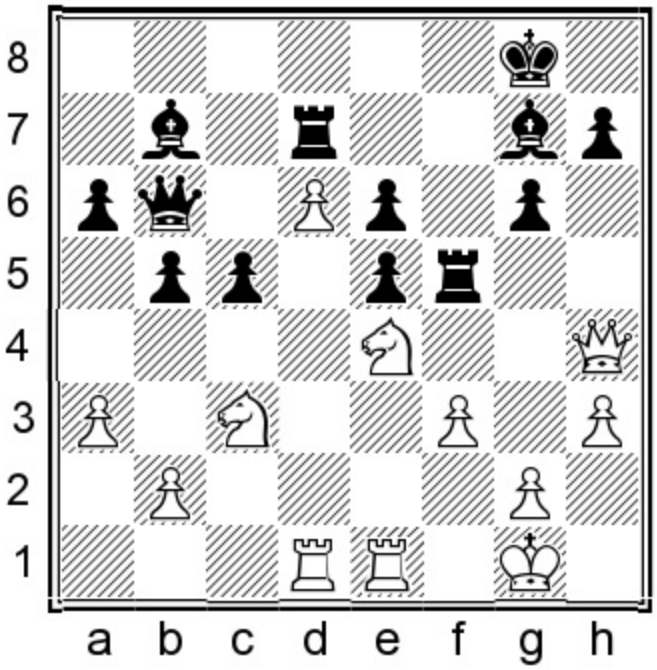
Position after: 14.a3!

A) 14...e6?! The immediate central push gives us an interesting option: 15.♗g5! ♕b6 16.♗xf6 ♗xf6 17.e5 ♗g7 18.d6 f6 19.♘d2!



Position after: 19.♘d2!

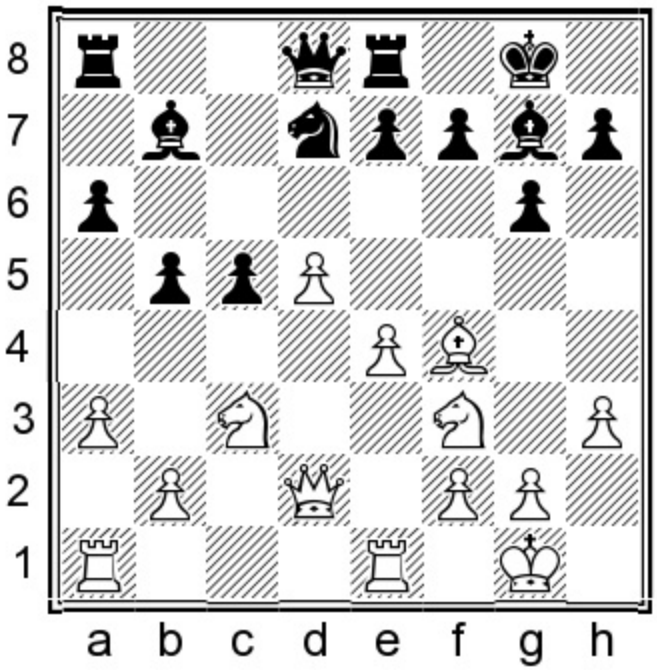
We'll once again sacrifice a pawn to ruin Black's structure, whilst simultaneously suppressing his bishop-pair. 19...fxe5 20.♘de4 The position seems significantly easier for White to play, for example: 20...♖f8 21.♕g4 ♖f5 22.♖ad1 ♖d8 23.♕h4 ♖d7 24.f3±



Position after: 24.f3±

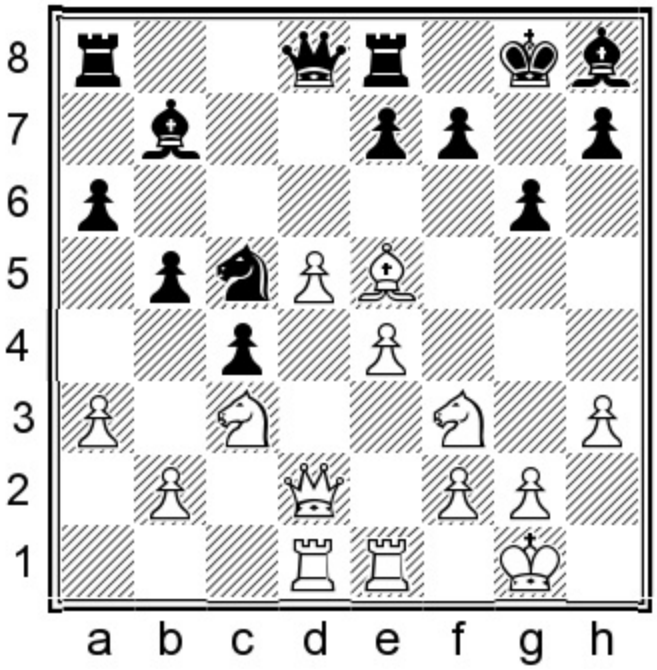
It's not obligatory to exchange queens on f2, but even the ending is favourable for White.

B) 14...♘d7 With the plan of ...c5-c4 and ...♘c5. 15.♕d2



Position after: 15.♕d2

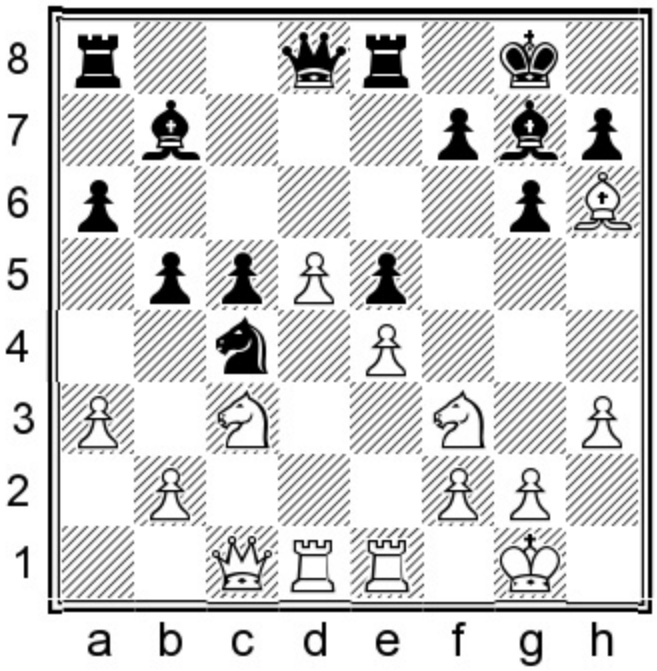
B1) 15...c4 16.♗h6 ♗h8 As usual, Black should refrain from exchanging bishops. 17.♗e3 Preventing Black from playing ... ♘c5. 17...♕c7 18.♗f4 ♕d8 19.♖ad1 ♘c5 20.♗e5!?



Position after: 20.♗e5!?

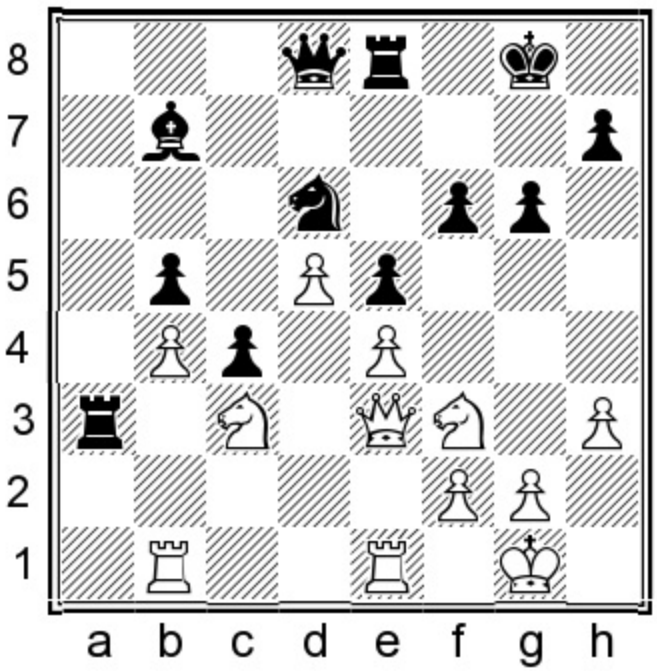
We're so keen to exchange off Black's dark-squared bishop that we don't mind sacrificing an exchange to accomplish it. 20...♘d3 [20...f6 21.♗d4±] 21.♗xh8 ♘xe1 22.♖xe1 ♔xh8 23.♘g5 ♔g7 24.e5≅

B2) 15...♘b6!? The knight is most annoying on this square. 16.♖ad1 e5□ [16...e6 17.d6! ♘c4 18.♕c1±; 16...♘c4 17.♕c1±] 17.♗h6 ♘c4 18.♕c1



Position after: 18.♕c1

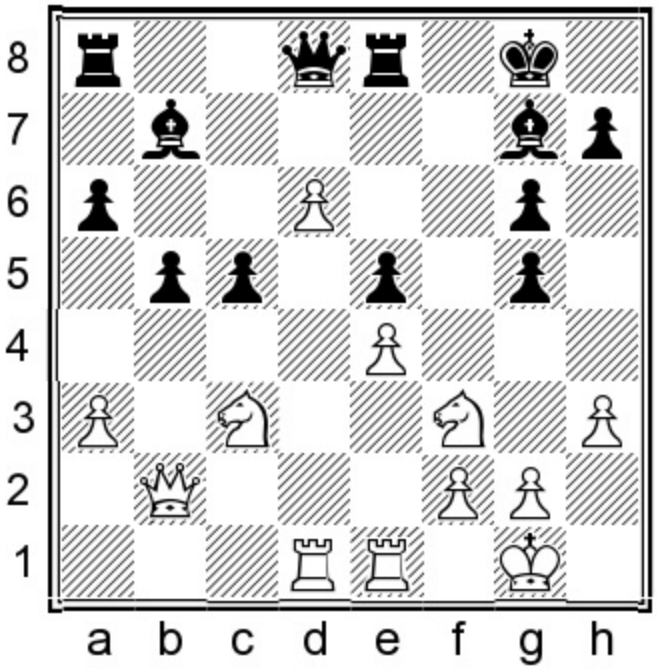
B2.1) 18...♗xh6 19.♕xh6 f6 20.b3 ♘d6 A more solid approach for Black than the text move, although I think White should be better in these resulting positions. The following variation is just an example of how the game may continue. 21.♕e3 c4 [21...♖c8 22.♘d2 f5 23.f4!±] 22.b4 a5 23.♖b1 axb4 24.axb4 ♖a3



Position after: 24...♖a3

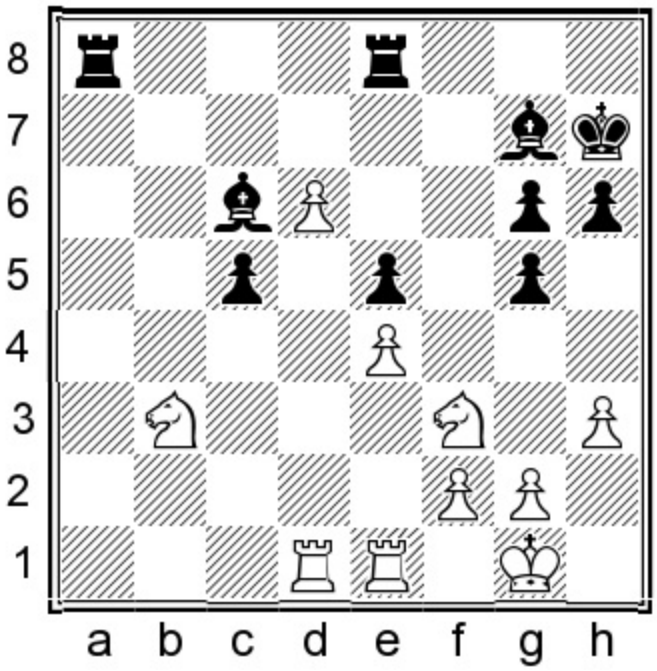
25.♘d2 ♕e7 26.♖a1 ♖ea8 27.♖xa3 ♖xa3 28.♘db1 ♖a6 29.♖e2 ♗c8 30.♖a2 ♖xa2 31.♘xa2 ♕c7 32.♘ac3 ♕b8 33.♕c5± White maintains good pressure in this ending.

B2.2) 18...♘xb2! The critical line, where White has a choice between a dynamic exchange sacrifice and an attempt to press in a slightly better ending. 19.♗g5 [19.♗xg7!? ♘xd1 20.♗xe5 f6 21.♗xf6 ♕xf6 22.♘xd1⩱ The position is very difficult to assess – everything depends on how much traction our central pawns can gain.] 19...f6 20.♕xb2 fxg5 21.d6 White threatens ideas of both ♘a4 and d7.

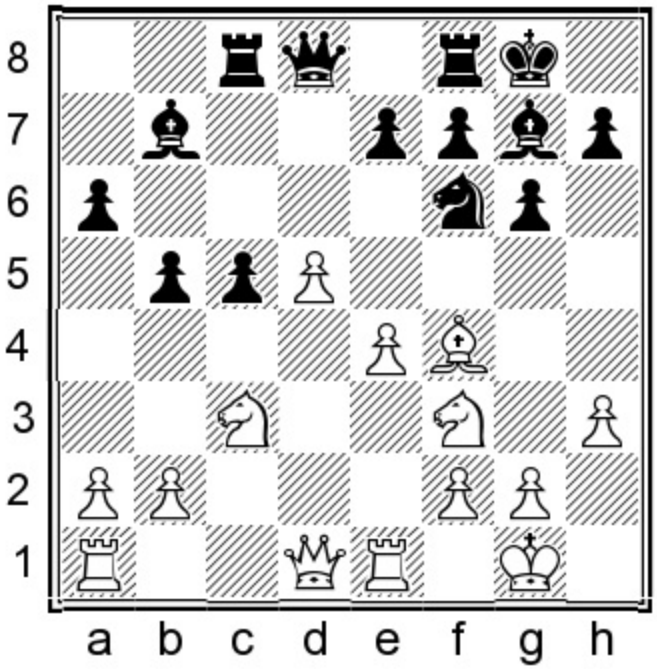


Position after: 21.d6

The machine finds a way for Black to give back the pawn and reach an ending, but with a bishop like the one on g7 this is no guarantee of a half point: 21...♗c6! 22.a4 h6 [22...b4 23.♕a2+ ♔h8 24.♘d5] 23.axb5 axb5 24.♘xb5 ♕b6 25.♕b3+ ♔h7 26.♘bd4 ♕xb3 27.♘xb3± with continuing pressure for White.



Position after: 27.♘xb3±

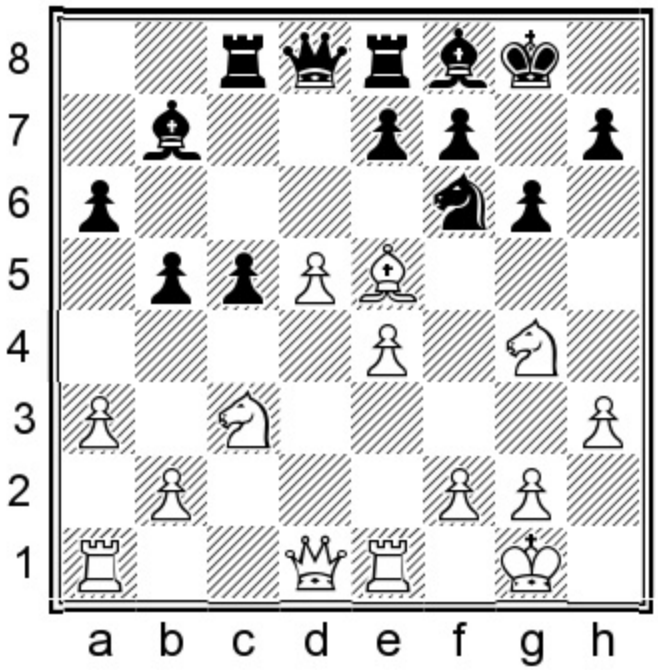


Position after: 13...♖c8!?

14.a3!?

14.♗e5 ♗h6! Black should try to play ...♘d7 without exchanging bishops. [14...♖e8 15.a3 e6 16.d6! ♘d7 17.♗xg7 ♔xg7 18.e5± looks good for White.; The point of 14.♗e5 becomes clear as after 14...e6 15.dxe6 ♕xd1 16.exf7+ ♖xf7 17.♖axd1± Black no longer has the possibility of ...♘xe4.; 14...♘d7 15.♗xg7 ♔xg7 16.♕d2±] 15.♘h2! ♖e8 [15...♘d7 16.♘g4! ♘xe5 17.♘xh6+ ♔g7 18.♘g4±] 16.♘g4

♗f8 17.a3



Position after: 17.a3

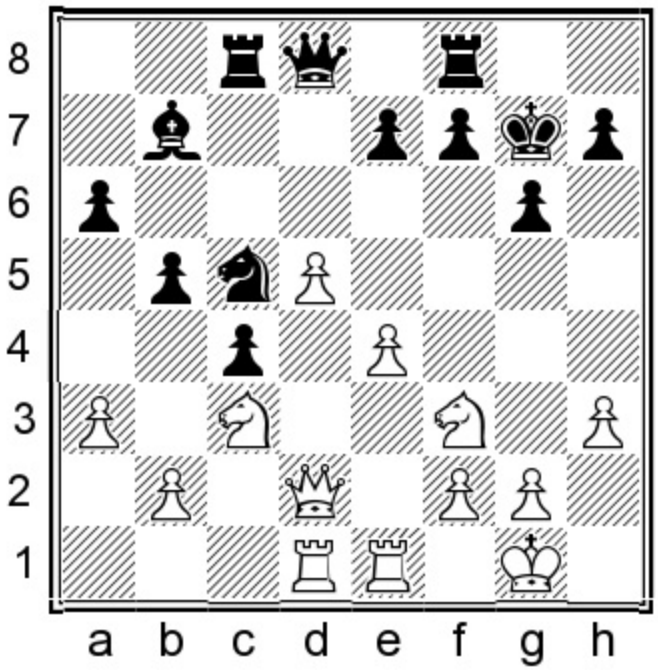
The position is still objectively equal, although perhaps the variation has clarified what our plans should be. Whilst continuously keeping an eye on ...e7-e6, it's also always a good idea to exchange dark-squared bishops.

14...♘d7

This seems most challenging. We can already see that Black will derive counterplay from getting a knight to d3.

After 14...e6 15.dxe6 ♕xd1 16.♖axd1 it appears that White has a more pleasant endgame. For example: 16...fxe6 17.♗d6 ♖fe8 18.e5 ♘d7 [18...♗xf3 19.gxf3 ♘d7 20.♔g2±] 19.♘g5 h6 20.♘ge4 g5 [20...♘xe5 21.♘xc5±] 21.h4! gxh4 22.f4!±

15.♕d2 c4 16.♗h6 ♘c5 17.♗xg7 ♔xg7 18.♖ad1⟳

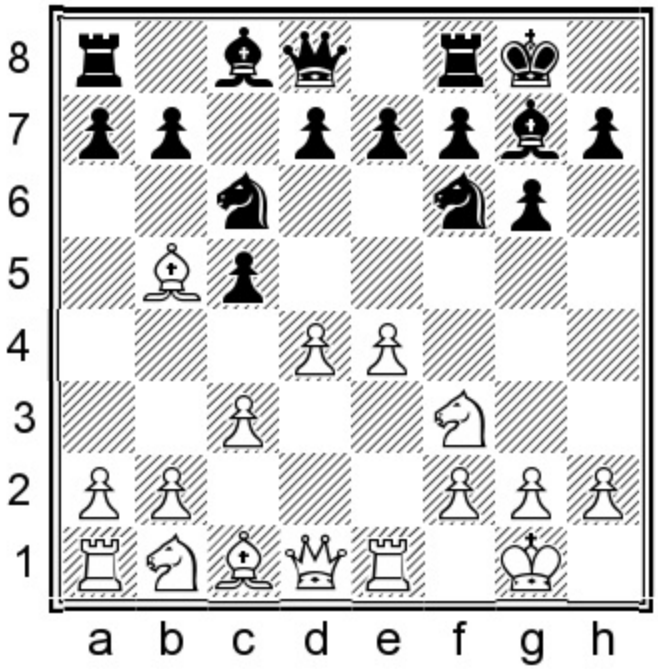


Position after: 18.♖ad1♁

White has slightly better central control and minor pieces. We can always challenge a d3-knight in the future by playing ♘e1.

d) 7...cxd4 8.cxd4 d5 9.e5 ♘e4 10.♘c3!? ♘xc3

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 ♘f6 6.♖e1 0-0 7.d4

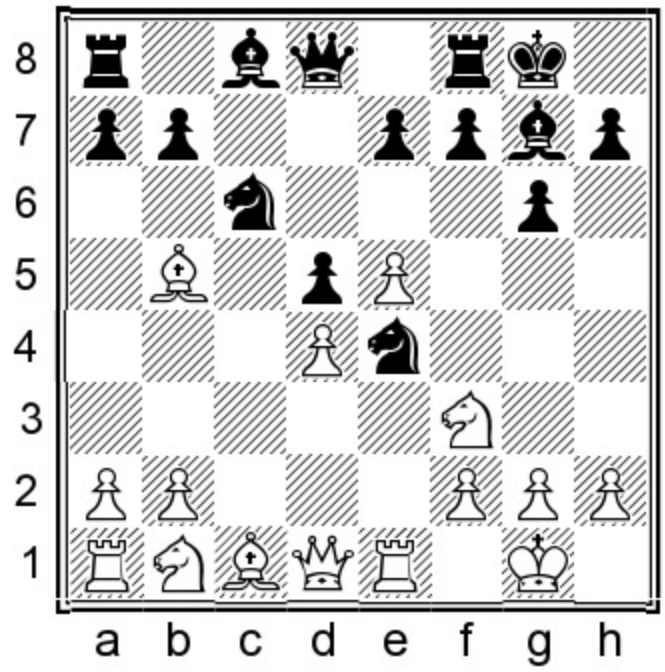


Position after: 7.d4

7...cxd4

The most common move ‘over-the-board’, but it gifts us the option of ♘c3 as opposed to 7...d5 (examined in the final subchapters.)

8.cxd4 d5 9.e5 ♘e4



Position after: 9...♘e4

Other knight moves don’t really make sense.

9...♘e8 10.♗xc6 bxc6 11.h3±

10.♘c3!?

The route-one approach to exchanging off Black’s e4-knight. We incur a slight positional weakness after the future ...♘xc3 bxc3, but claim that our piece activity and kingside attacking potential should make up for it.

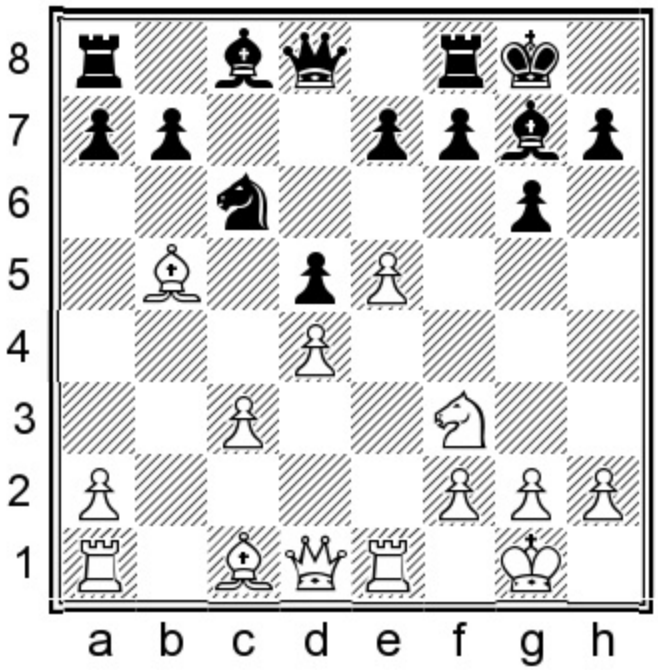
10.♗e3 transposes to 7...d5, but it’s interesting to examine taking the opportunity of playing ♘c3.

10...♘xc3

Capturing on c3 immediately should be beneficial for White compared to 10...♗f5, as we are even quicker with activating our pieces.

10...♗f5 is examined next.

11.bxc3

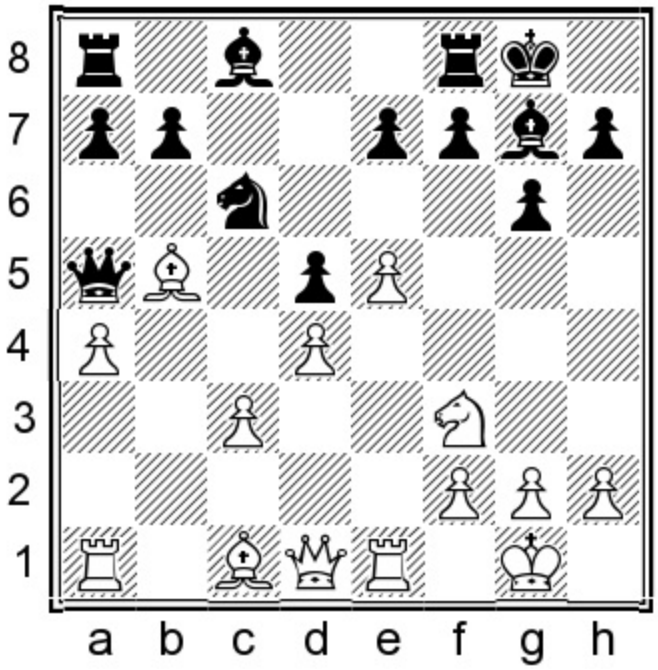


Position after: 11.bxc3

11...♘a5

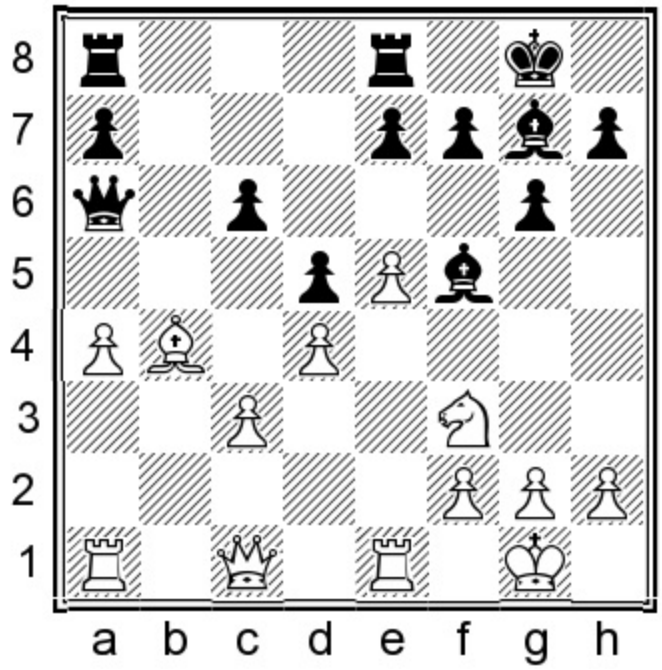
Having understood that we usually get very good positions after playing ♗xc6, a2-a4, and ♗a3, it makes a lot of sense for Black to avoid trading his knight.

A) 11...♕a5 was played in Pridorozhni – Bylino, Kazan 2015. As Black isn't threatening to capture on c3, we can continue normally with 12.a4!



Position after: 12.a4!

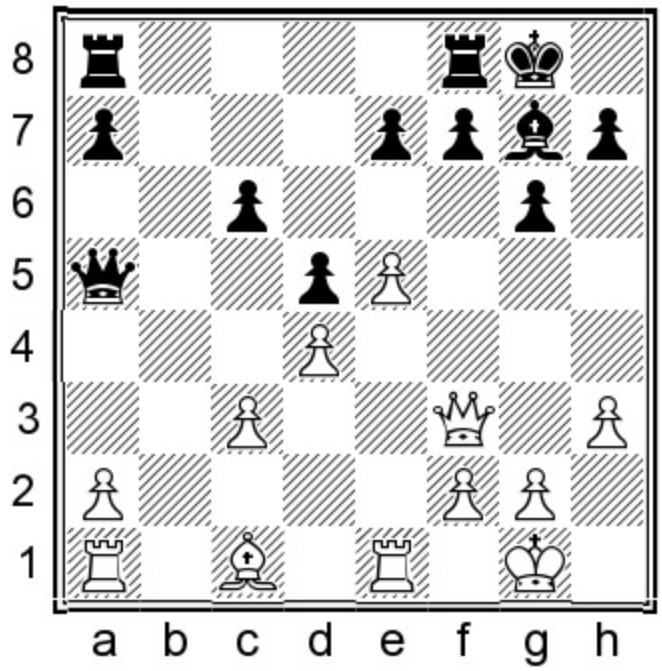
12...♗f5 [12...♕xc3? 13.♗d2 ♕b2 14.♖b1 ♕a2 15.♕c1+–; 12...♗g4 13.♗a3 ♕xc3 14.♖e3 ♕a5 15.♗xc6 bxc6 16.♗xe7± White had a significant advantage in Rada – Fees, ICCF email 2013.] 13.♗xc6 bxc6 14.♗a3 ♖fe8 15.♗b4 ♕a6 16.♕c1±



Position after: 16.♕c1±

The main problem for Black in nearly all of these lines is that his dark-squared bishop is completely out of the game.

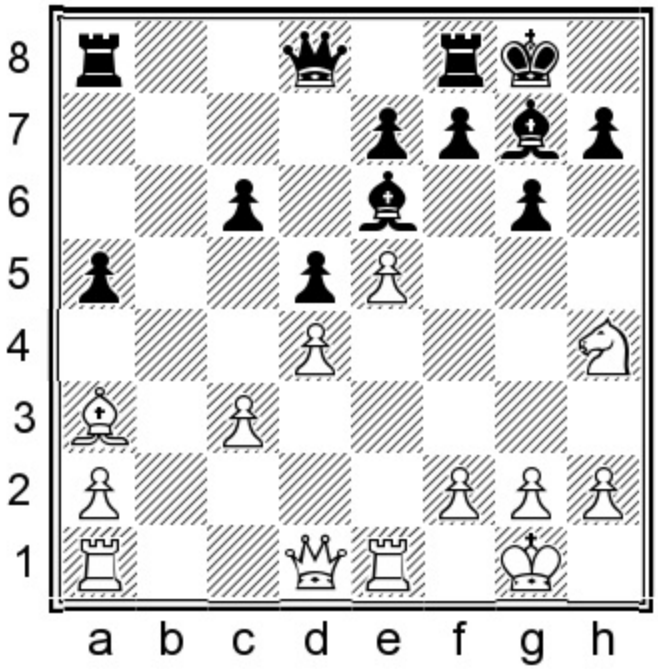
B) 11...♗g4 12.h3 ♗xf3 13.♕xf3 ♕a5 14.♗xc6 bxc6



Position after: 14...bxc6

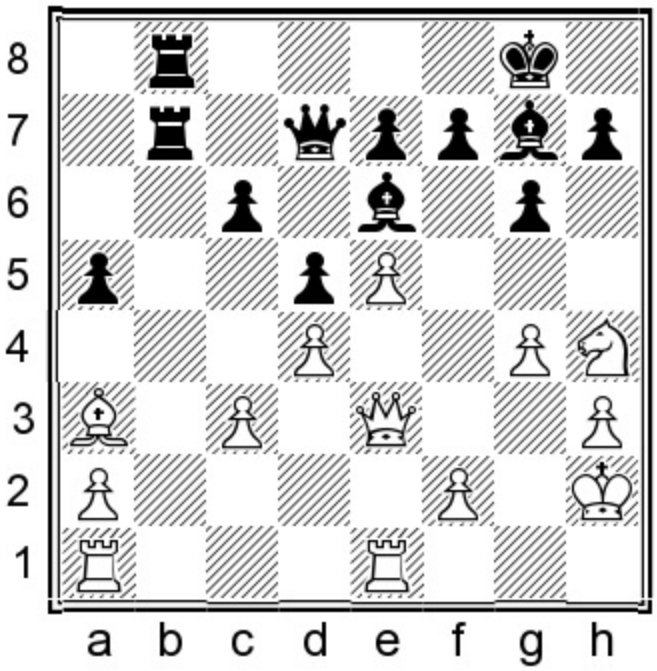
Invariably, we don't mind exchanging off a couple of minor pieces if Black is left with his rather useless bishop on g7. We have a couple of interesting ways to continue, but the simplest is just to activate our own dark-squared bishop. 15.a4 [15.h4!?→] 15...c5 16.♗a3 cxd4 17.cxd4 ♖fe8 18.♗c5± Followed by h4-h5.

C) 11...♗f5 12.♗xc6 bxc6 13.♗a3 a5 14.♘h4 ♗e6



Position after: 14...♗e6

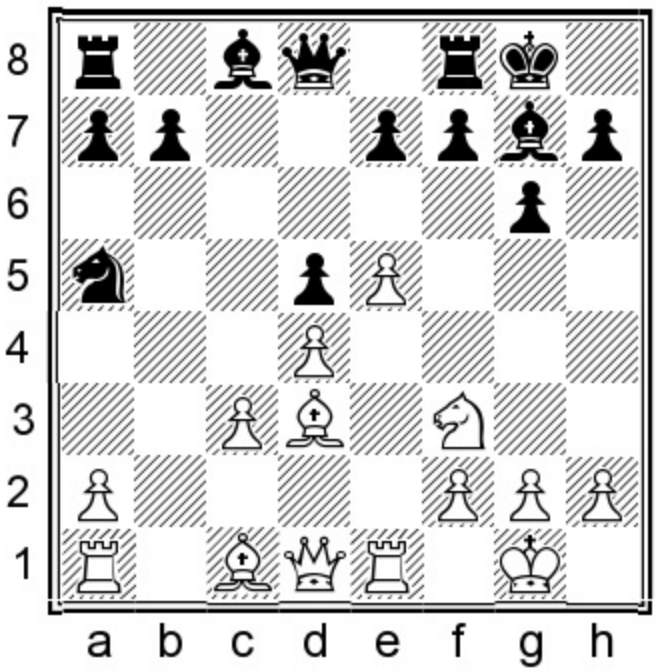
In Hracek – McShane, Germany 1999, White should have continued with quick kingside expansion, and the following variation illustrates how we can do this effectively. 15.♕d2 ♖b8 16.h3 ♕d7 17.g4! ♖b7 [17...f5 18.exf6 ♗xf6 19.♘g2±] 18.♕e3 ♖fb8 19.♔h2



Position after: 19.♔h2

Black doesn't have any entry points on the queenside, and our plan is obvious with f4-f5 and ♖g1. Black's best chance is to sacrifice a pawn, but we'll be able to contain his activity effectively. 19...c5 20.♗xc5 ♖b2 21.♘g2 ♗f8 22.♔g3 ♕a4 23.♖e2 ♕c4 24.♖d2±

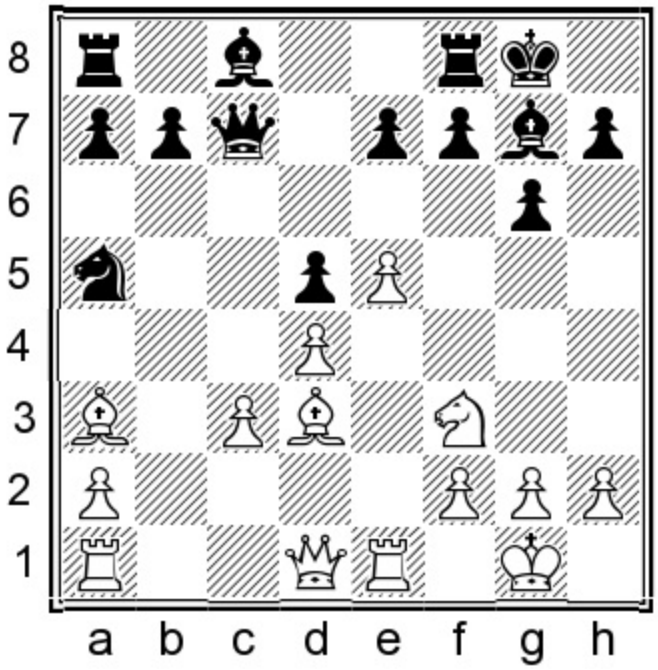
12.♗d3!



Position after: 12.♗d3!

Our bishop isn't doing anything on b5, so it's probably wise to retreat it and stop ...♗f5 in the process.

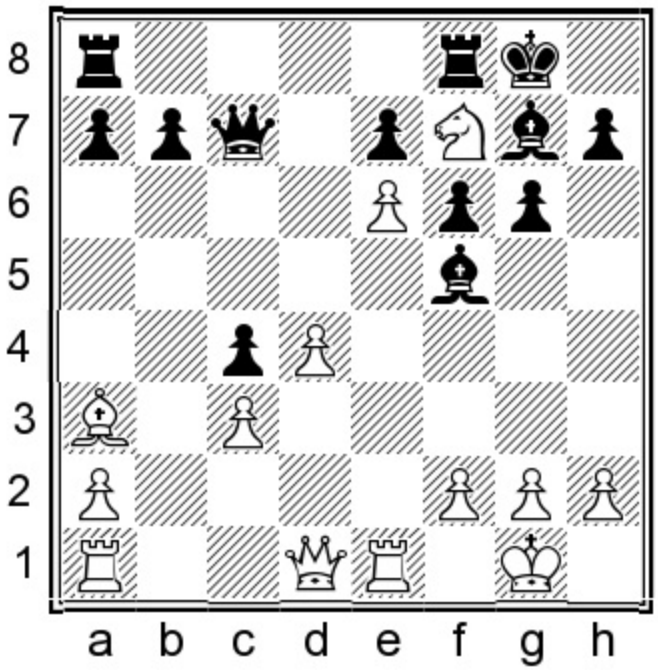
12...♕c7 13.♗a3



Position after: 13.♗a3

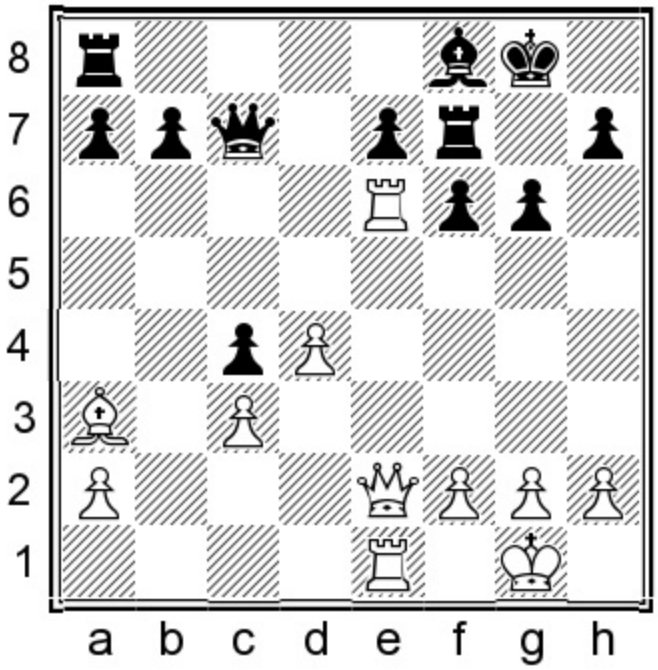
13...♗g4

A) 13...♘c4?! 14.♗xc4 dxc4 15.♘g5! ♗f5 [15...h6 16.♘e4 ♗e6 17.♘g3! Followed by either ♘e2-f4, f4-f5 or h4-h5.] 16.e6! f6 17.♘f7



Position after: 17.♘f7

17...♗xe6 [17...♕a5 18.♗xe7 ♖fe8 19.♗b4 ♕d5 20.♘d6 ♖xe6 21.♘xf5 ♕xf5 22.♖xe6 ♕xe6 23.h4±] 18.♖xe6 ♖xf7 19.♕e2 ♗f8 20.♖e1±

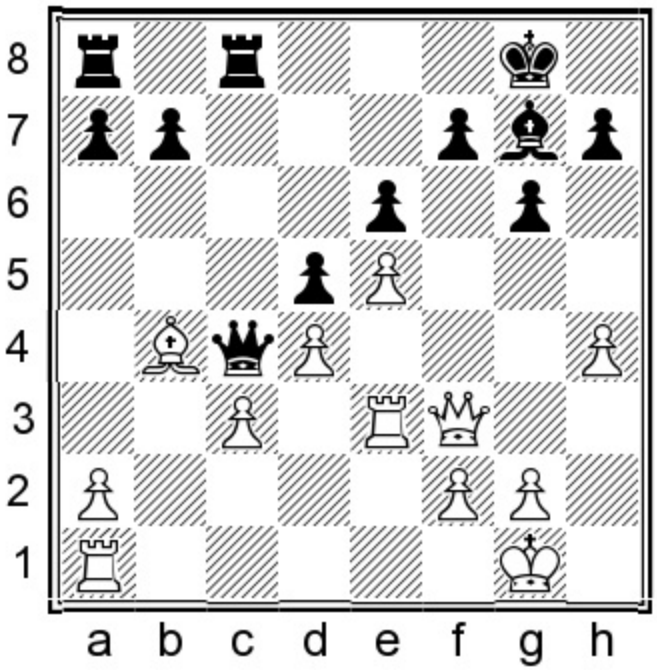


Position after: 20.♖e1±

Despite the pawn deficit, White is dominating.

B) 13...b6 was played in a couple of correspondence games, but if we're consistent in aiming to restrict Black's activity we should play the simple 14.h3!±

14.h3 ♗xf3 15.♕xf3 ♖fc8 16.♗b4 e6 17.h4 ♘c4 18.♗xc4 ♕xc4 19.♖e3



Position after: 19.♖e3

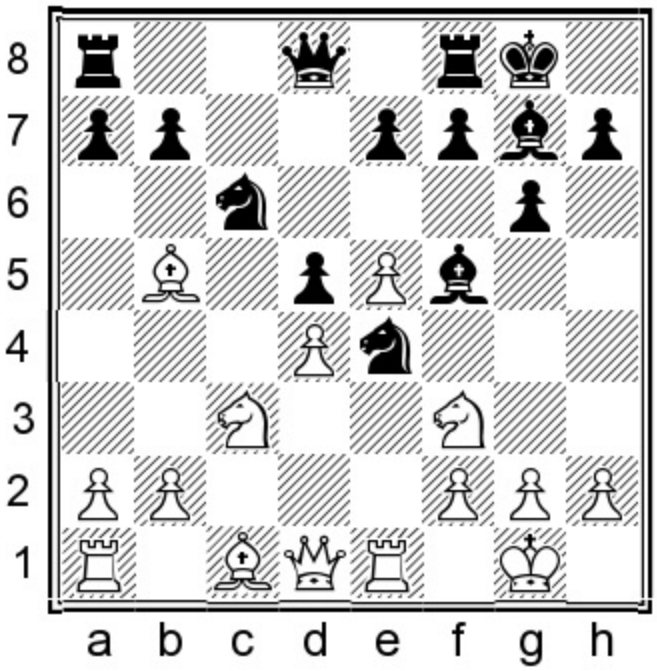
The engine doesn't think White has anything significant here, but I would argue that we have promising kingside attacking opportunities. If Black doesn't play ...h7-h5, we'll play h4-h5 followed by g2-g3, ♔g2 and ♖h1.

19...h5 20.♕d1 ♗h6 21.♖h3!↑

We still have interesting ideas, such as g2-g4.

e) 7...cxd4 8.cxd4 d5 9.e5 ♘e4 10.♘c3!? ♗f5

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 ♘f6 6.♖e1 0-0 7.d4 cxd4 8.cxd4 d5 9.e5 ♘e4 10.♘c3!? ♗f5



Position after: 10...♗f5

11.♗d3!

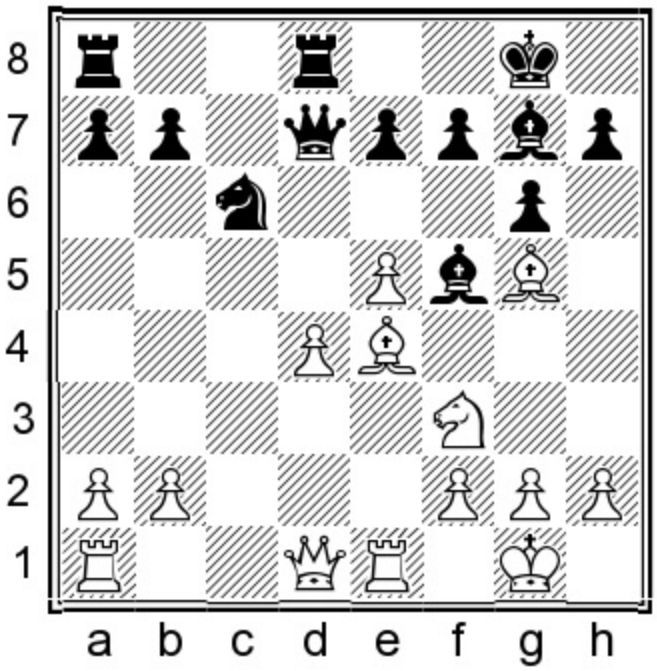
We want to force Black to capture on c3, after which we'll be looking to continue with the same plans as we've already examined – such as h2-h4, a2-a4 and ♗a3.

11.♘h4 was played in Kasparov – Shirov, Linares 2002, but things seemed pretty unclear after 11...♗e6 12.♗xc6 bxc6 13.♘a4 g5! 14.♘f3 f6!∞

11...♘xc3

Black can also try to sacrifice a pawn, but accurate play from us will ensure an advantage.

A) 11...♕d7 12.♘xe4 dxe4 13.♗xe4 ♖fd8 14.♗g5!

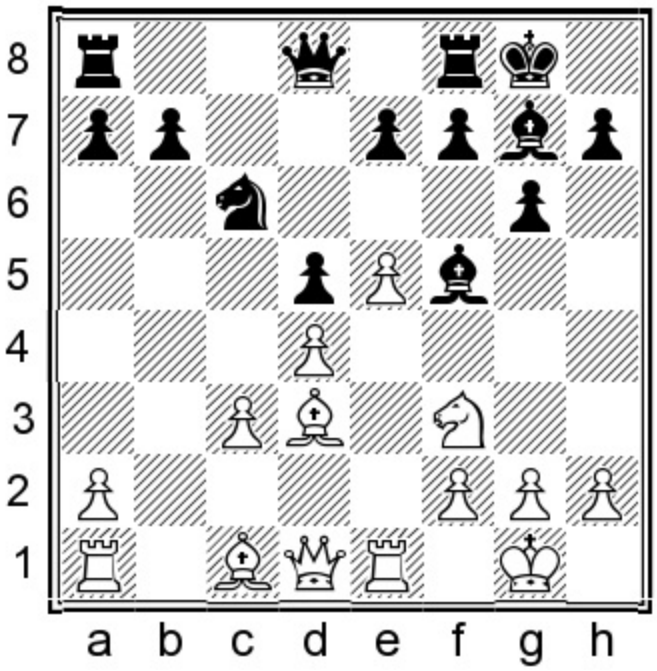


Position after: 14.♗g5!

14...♘xd4 [14...♗xe4 15.♖xe4 ♕f5 16.♕e1! ♘xd4 17.♘xd4 ♕xg5 18.h4±; 14...♖ac8 15.♗xc6 ♖xc6 16.d5 ♕xd5 17.♗xe7±] 15.♕xd4 ♕xd4 16.♘xd4 ♖xd4 17.♗xf5 gxf5 18.♗xe7 ♖e8 19.♗d6 f6 20.♗c5 ♖d5 21.♗xa7 fxe5 22.g3±

B) 11...♖c8 12.♘xe4 dxe4 13.♗xe4 ♗xe4 14.♖xe4 ♕d5 15.♖e1 ♖fd8 16.♗e3±

12.bxc3

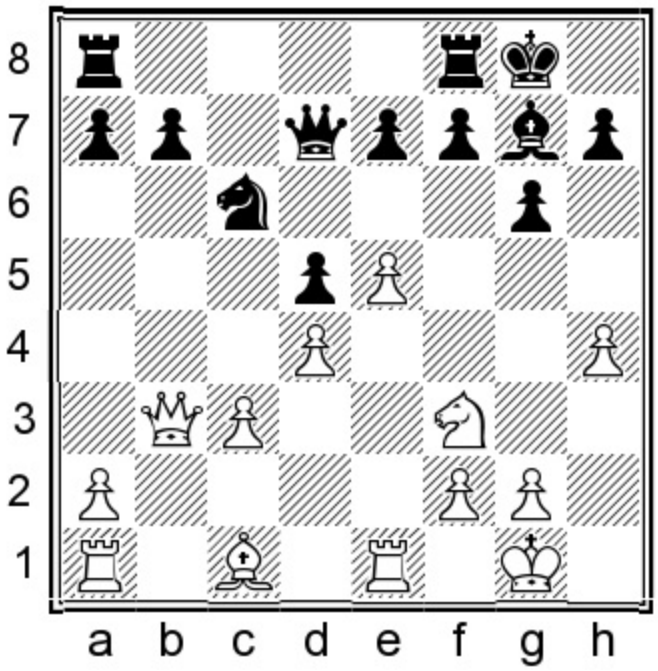


Position after: 12.bxc3

12...♕d7

12...♗xd3 doesn't really make sense, and after 13.♕xd3 ♕d7 14.h4↑ we have a nice position.

13.♗xf5 ♕xf5 14.♕b3 ♕d7 15.h4

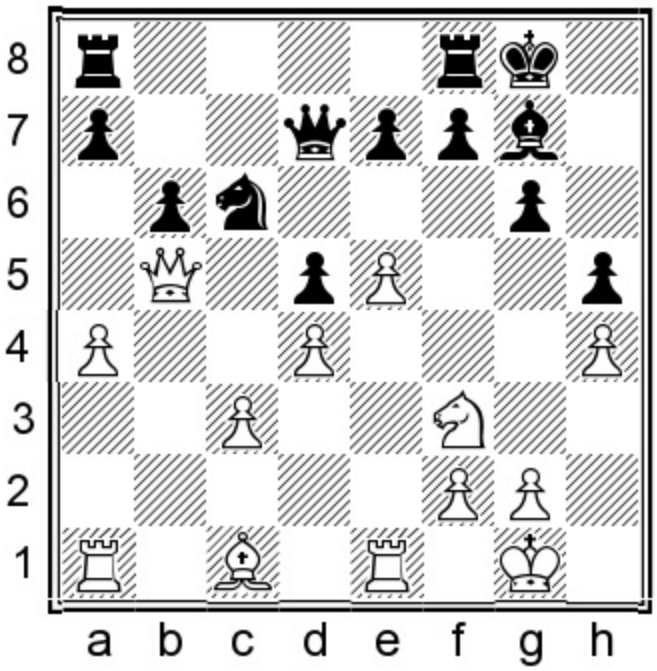


Position after: 15.h4

15...h6

Black attempts to meet h4-h5 with ...g6-g5. On the downside, 15...h6 weakens the g6-pawn.

A) 15...h5 If Black tries to directly stop us from playing h4-h5, he gives away the g5-square. Moreover, we can also think about switching our pressure to the queenside. 16.a4 [16.♗g5!? also looks good, e.g. 16...♖ac8 17.e6! fxe6 18.♖e2≅] 16...b6 [16...♖ac8 17.a5↑ We can still maintain ideas of ♘g5/ ♗g5, e5-e6 or g2-g4 depending on circumstance, whilst simultaneously pressuring Black's queenside pawns.] 17.♕b5 The queen is useful on this square – as the following variation demonstrates.



Position after: 17.♕b5

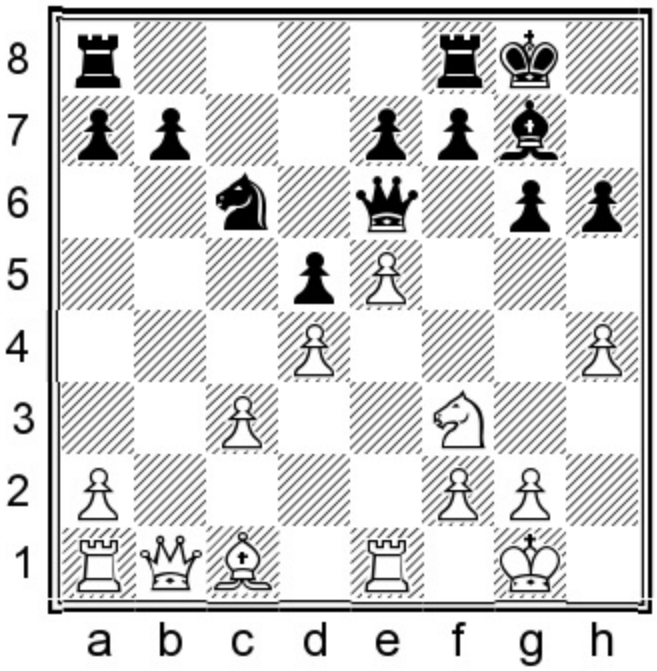
17...e6 18.♗g5 ♖fc8 19.g4! hxg4 20.♘h2± Our queen on b5 is ideally placed to switch back over to the kingside via e2, re-joining the attack.

B) 15...♖fc8 16.h5 ♘a5 17.e6! ♕xe6 [17...fxe6 18.♕d1±] 18.♕b4 ♕b6 19.♕xe7↑

16.♕b1!

Threatening e5-e6.

16...♕e6



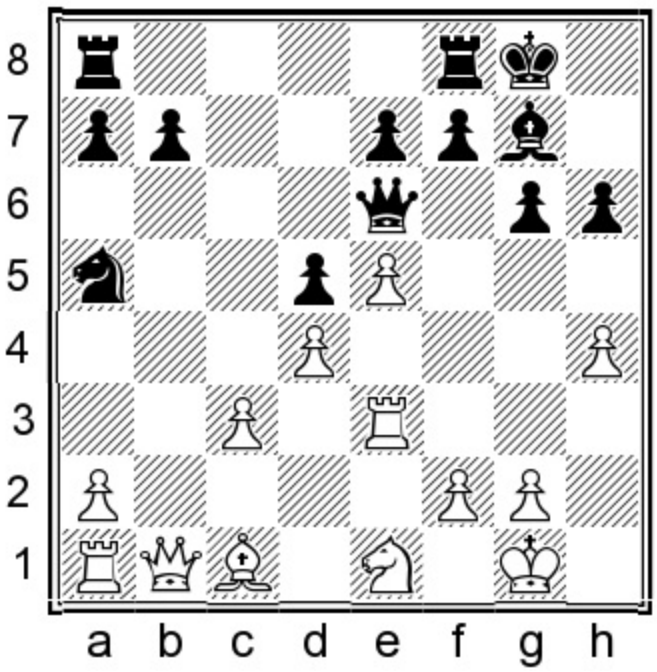
Position after: 16...♕e6

We have been following the game J. Van Foreest – Praggnanandhaa, Brest 2019. Here I like the move

17.♖e3!?N

The rook is always useful on this square, and enables us to maneouvre our f3-knight to d3 – where it will be better placed to try and exploit the awkward placement of Black's queen.

17...♘a5 18.♘e1



Position after: 18.♘e1

18...♖ac8

18...♕g4 19.♖g3 ♕xh4 [19...♕e4 20.♗a3±] 20.♕b5 b6 21.♕xd5±

19.♖g3 ♖c7

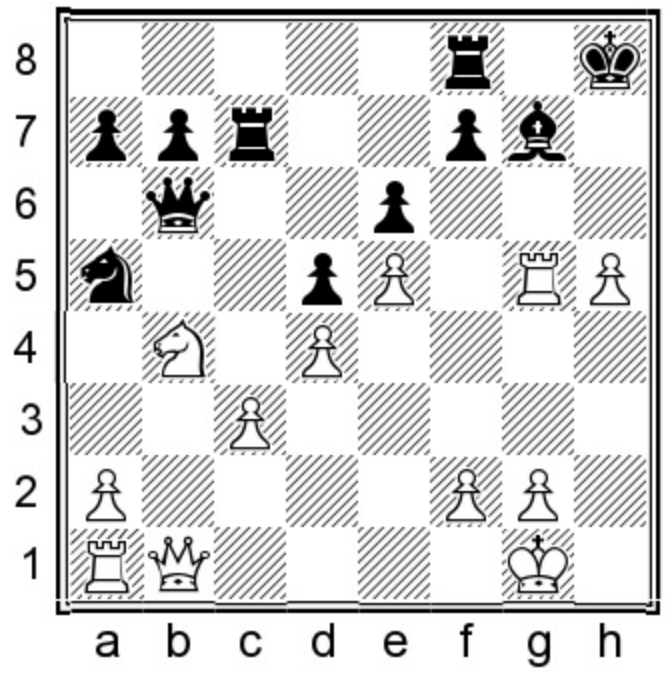
19...b6 20.♗d2 ♘c4 21.♗f4↑

20.♘d3 ♕b6 21.♘b4 e6

Black has had to make a series of accurate moves, but we can now sacrifice a piece to continue our initiative.

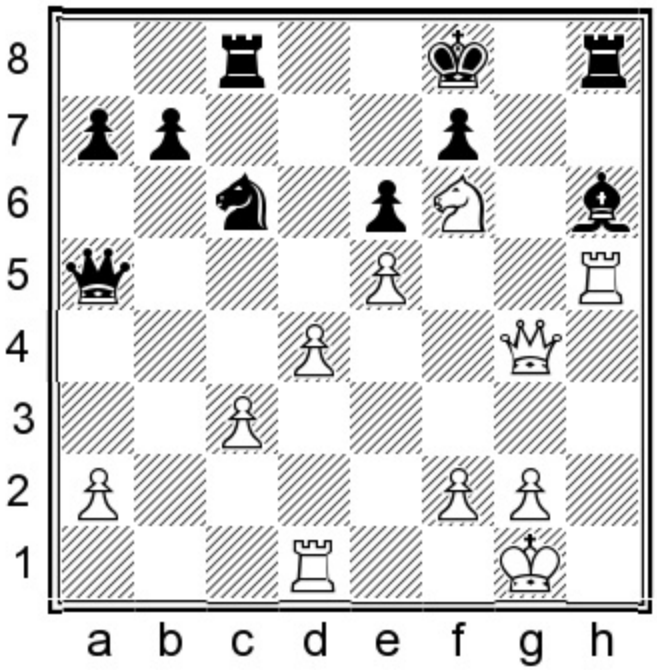
21...♖d8 22.h5 g5 23.♕f5 ♕e6 24.♕xe6 fxe6 25.f4+–

22.h5 g5 23.♗xg5! hxg5 24.♖xg5 ♔h8



Position after: 24...♔h8

25.h6 ♗xh6 26.♖h5 ♔g7 27.♕d3 ♖h8 28.♖b1 ♖cc8 29.♕g3+ ♔f8 30.♕h3 ♔g7 31.♖d1 ♘c6 32.♕g4+ ♔f8 33.♘xd5 ♕a5 34.♘f6→

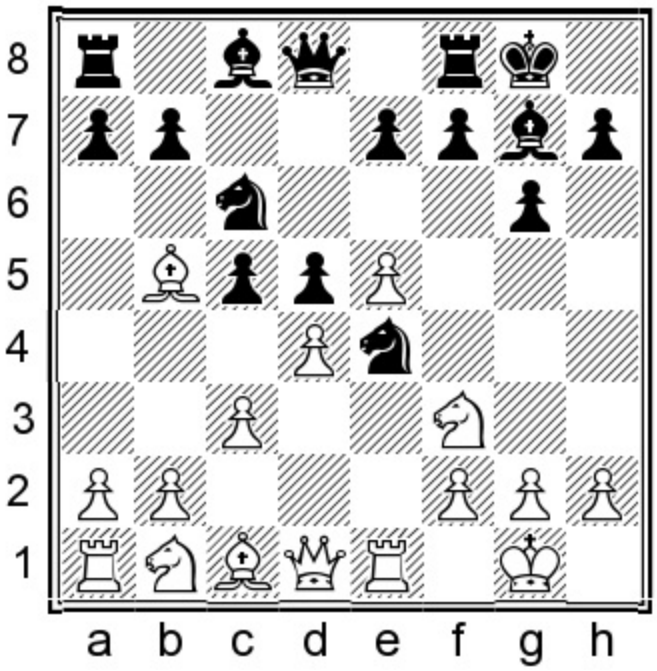


Position after: 34.♘f6→

The position looks very difficult for Black to defend in practical terms.

f) 7...d5 8.e5 ♘e4 9.♗xc6!?

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 ♘f6 6.♖e1 0-0 7.d4 d5 8.e5 ♘e4



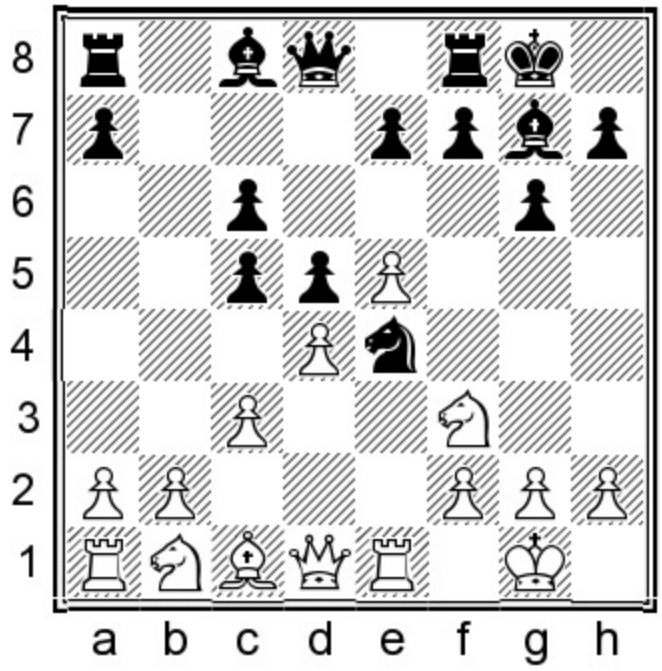
Position after: 8...♘e4

9.♗xc6!?

Playing this before ♗e3 prevents Black from having the option of 10...♕xc6. On the other hand, Black isn't required to play ...♕b6 anymore, and can continue with ...♖b8 on the next move. I'm not sure how big the differences between the two moves are, so I'll examine both 9.♗xc6 and 9.♗e3 and let you make your mind up about which move you want to start with. In any case, the ideas and plans behind both moves remain the same.

9.♘bd2 has also been tried at the highest level, but I can't find anything convincing for White after 9...cxd4 10.cxd4 ♕b6 11.♗xc6 ♕xc6=

9...bxc6



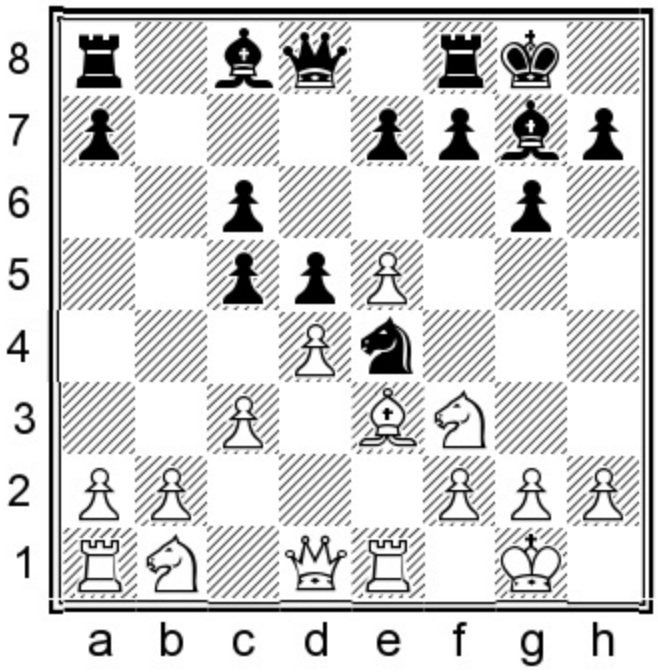
Position after: 9...bxc6

10.♗e3

Before we continue, it's worth discussing the point of capturing on c6 and playing ♗e3. As I've mentioned many times before, Black's biggest issue is that his dark-squared bishop is really suppressed by our c3-d4-e5 pawn structure. By playing ♗e3, we are pretty much forcing Black to capture on d4 and, having captured on c6, we've created a positional advantage on the queenside as Black's c6-pawn is weak. We can also look to exploit the c5-square, probably by ♘d2-b3. As usual, h4-h5 ideas don't look like a bad idea either. Although the computer often evaluates this position as close to equal, in practical terms it can often be very difficult for Black to play. Black has two main ideas to try and activate his pieces here. The first is to play ...♖b8 or ...♕b6 – provoking b2-b3 – after which he'll advance his a-pawn down the board to try and continue pressuring our queenside pawns. Simultaneously, Black will also be looking for the right moment to play ... f7-f6, in order to bring his

dark-squared bishop into the game. The variations that I give will illustrate how we can cope effectively with Black's queenside plan, whilst I'll also suggest ways to respond to ...f7-f6 – and, most importantly, how we should adapt our response based on the circumstance of the position.

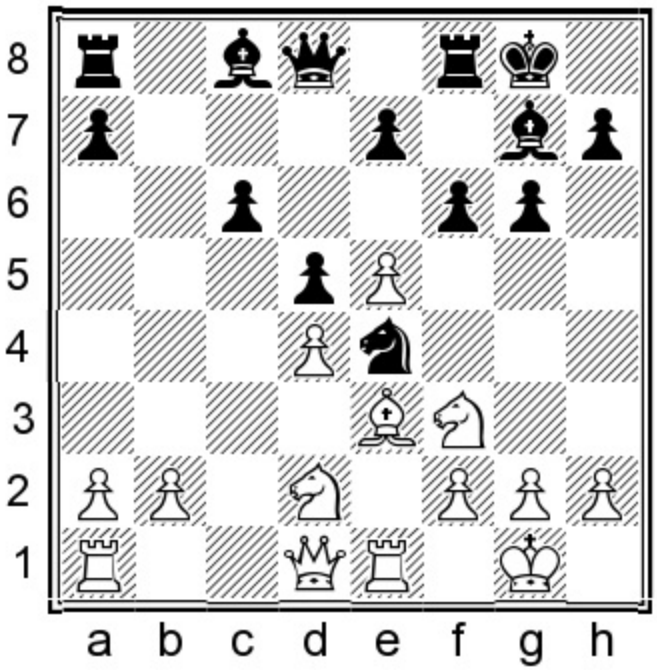
10.♘bd2 cxd4 11.cxd4 c5!=



Position after: 10.♗e3

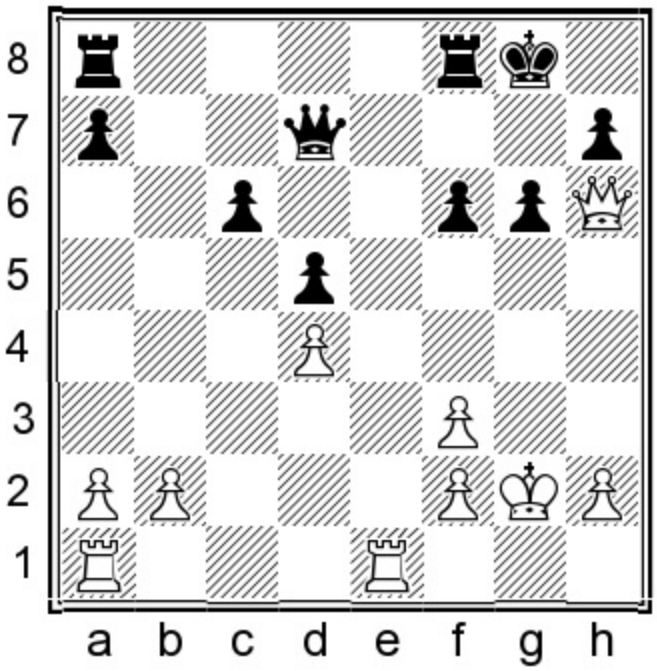
10...♖b8

A) 10...cxd4 11.cxd4 f6 [11...♕b6 will transpose to 9.♗e3.; 11...♖b8 transposes to 10...♖b8.] 12.♘bd2



Position after: 12.♘bd2

A1) 12...♘xd2 13.♕xd2 ♗g4 14.exf6 exf6 15.♗h6 ♗xh6 16.♕xh6 ♗xf3 17.gxf3 ♕d7 18.♔g2±

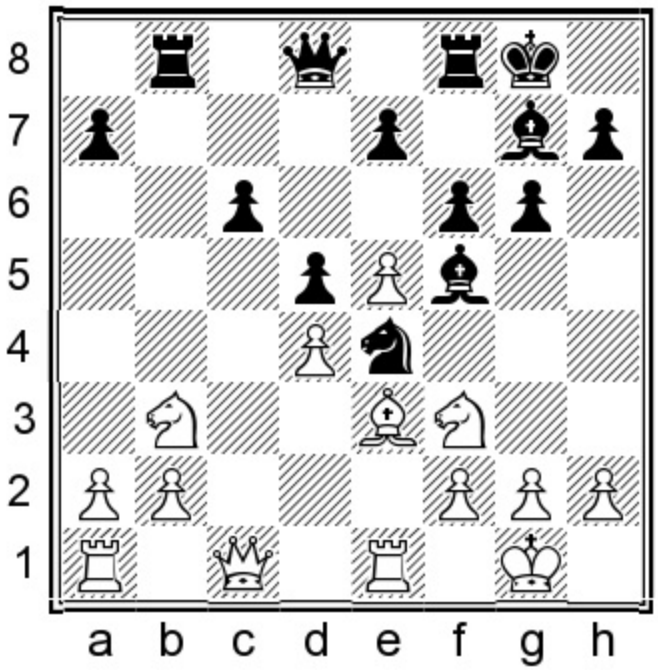


Position after: 18.♔g2±

This position was reached in Gharamian – Dardha, Batumi 2019. Although the game ended in a draw, I think White definitely has the better chances here. Black's king is weaker, and a good plan is to try and expand on the queenside. Black can't devote too many pieces to the queenside as he may find himself in danger of getting mated. The c6-pawn is targetable, and doubling rooks on the

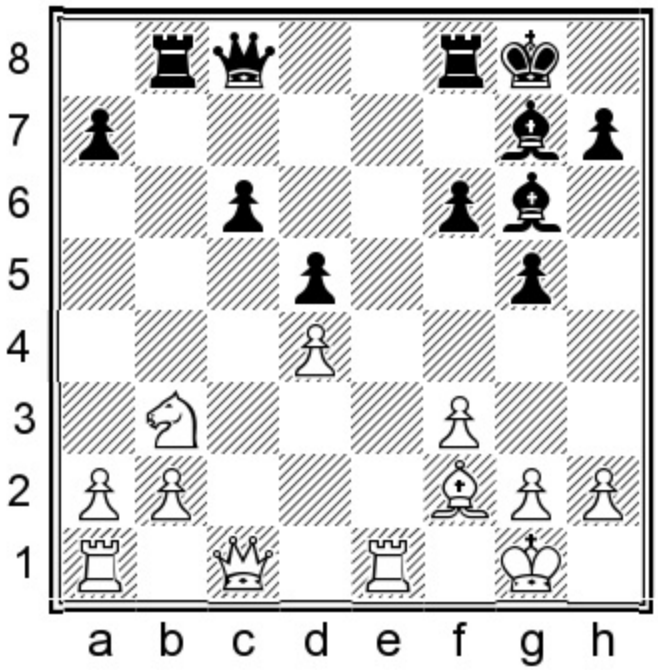
e-file can also be a decent idea.

A2) 12...♖b8 13.♕c1! ♗f5 [13...♘xd2 14.♗xd2 ♗g4 15.♗f4! ♖b4 16.exf6 exf6 17.♕xc6 ♖xb2 18.h3 ♗xf3 19.♕c3!±] 14.♘b3



Position after: 14.♘b3

14...♕c8 [14...♕b6 15.♘fd2 ♘xd2 16.♕xd2 fxe5 17.dxe5 ♕b4 18.♕e2±] 15.exf6 exf6 16.♘fd2 It's important to trade the Black's knight so that we can use the c5-square for our own knight. 16...g5 17.♘xe4 ♗xe4 [17...dxe4 18.♘a5 ♗d7 19.b3±] 18.f3 ♗g6 19.♗f2±

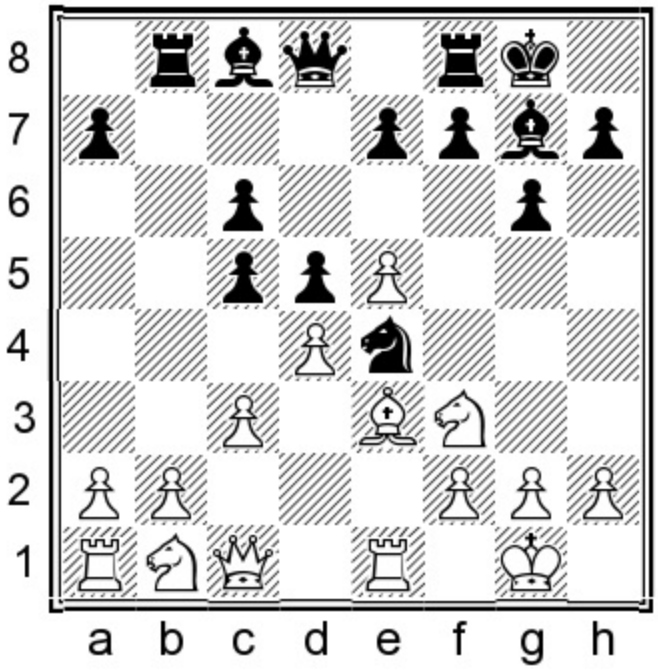


Position after: 19.♗f2±

White is better, with options to play on both sides of the board.

B) For the next few moves, Black can play 10...♕b6 transposing to 9.♗e3 but obviously having lost the option to take back on c6 with the queen.

11.♕c1

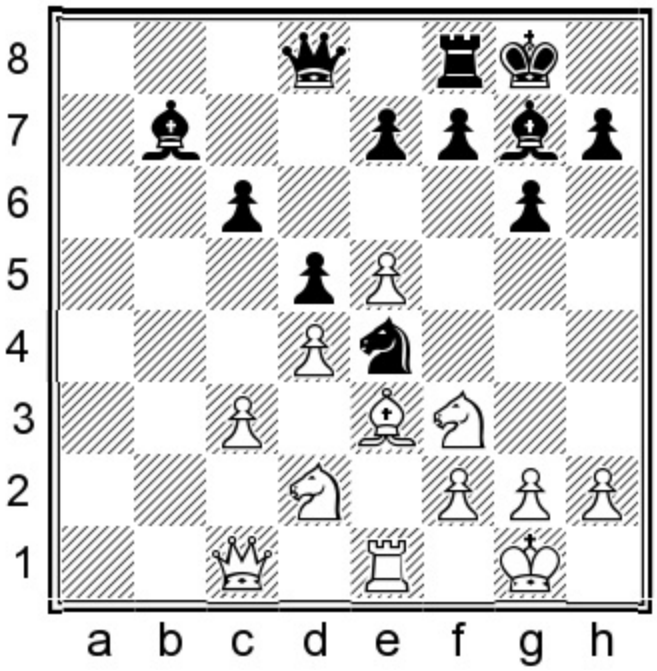


Position after: 11.♕c1

11...cxd4

11...c4

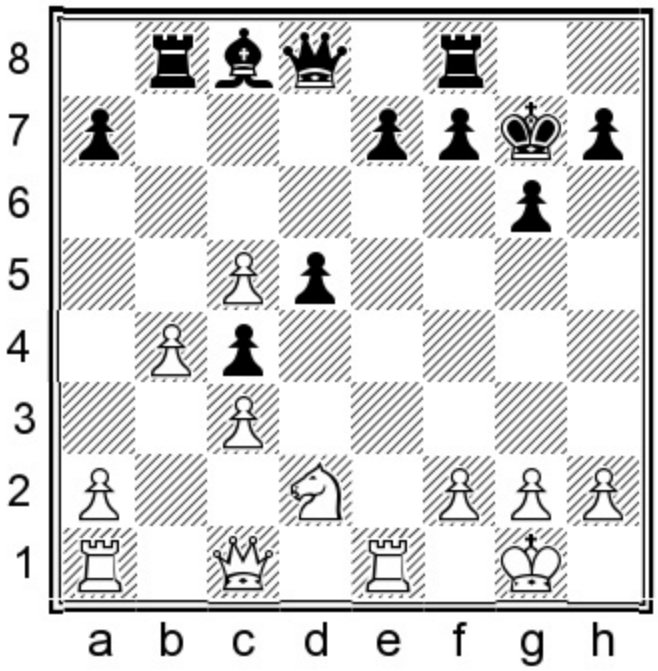
A) 12.b3!? This forcing attempt also looks very promising for White. 12...cxb3 13.axb3 ♖xb3 14.♖xa7 ♖b7 15.♖xb7 ♗xb7 16.♘bd2±



Position after: 16.♘bd2±

Material is balanced, and there aren't many pieces left on the board. However, Black's bishops look hopelessly inactive and we have a good opportunity to take control on both the queenside and kingside.

B) With this move, Black elects to keep the c-file closed and pressurise the b2-pawn. We have a couple of viable options here. 12.♘bd2 ♘xd2 [12...♗f5 13.b3 ♘xd2 14.♘xd2 ♗d3 15.♗f4±] 13.♘xd2 c5 This was played in Haria – Willow, London 2019. Here I should've calmly responded with [13...♗f5 14.b3 ♗d3 15.♗f4±] 14.dxc5! ♗xe5 15.♗h6 ♗g7 16.♗xg7 ♔xg7 17.b4!± The c-pawn is incredibly strong, and we dominate the dark-squares.



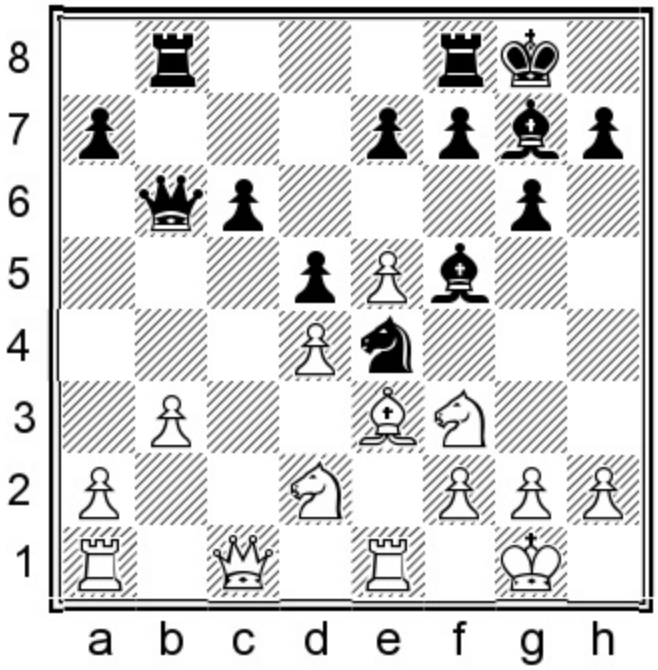
Position after: 17.b4!±

For example, we'll probably respond to ...f7-f6 with f2-f4.

12.cxd4 ♗f5 13.♘bd2 ♕b6

We'll see more examples of similar positions after 9.♗e3. For now, I'll just give a few lines to illustrate how we should attempt to set-up our pieces and respond to Black's play.

14.b3

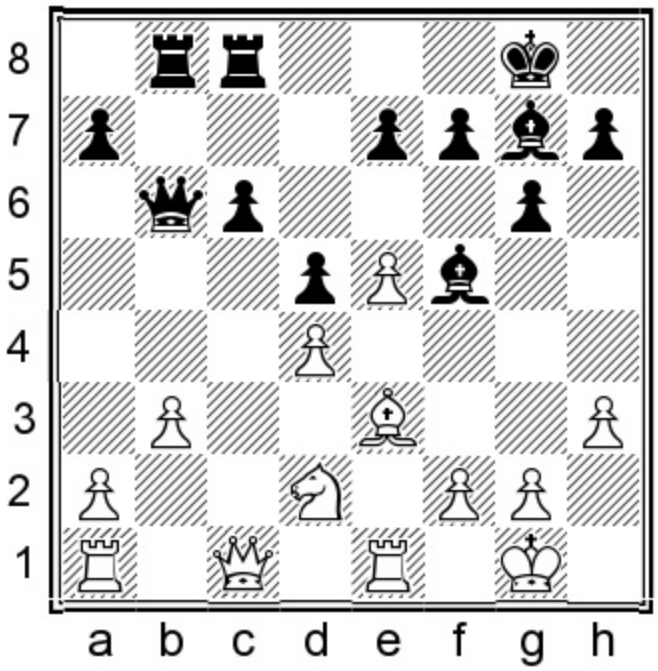


Position after: 14.b3

14...f6

A) 14...a5 15.♘xe4 ♗xe4 16.♘d2 ♗f5 17.♕c3 ♖bc8 18.♖ac1±

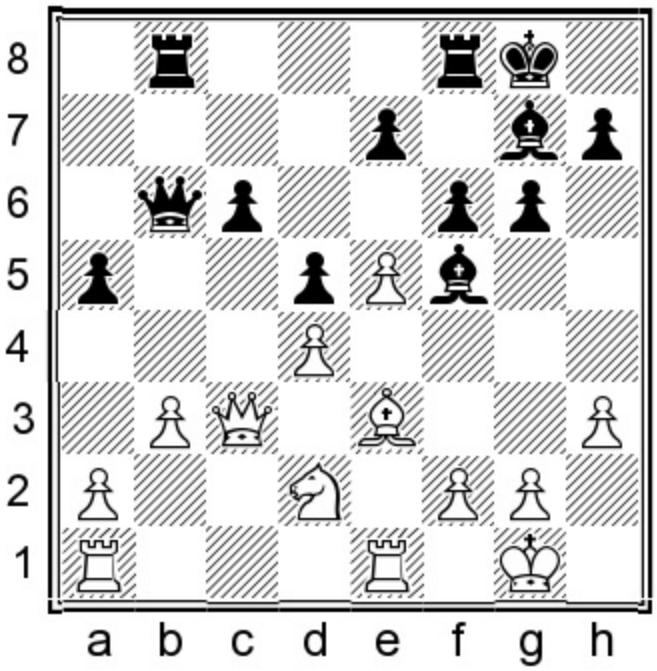
B) 14...♖fc8 15.♘xe4 ♗xe4 16.♘d2 ♗f5 17.h3±



Position after: 17.h3±

The point of h2-h3 is usually to prepare a future g2-g4 and f2-f4 (at the right moment, of course).

15.h3 a5 16.♘xe4 ♗xe4 17.♘d2 ♗f5 18.♕c3!



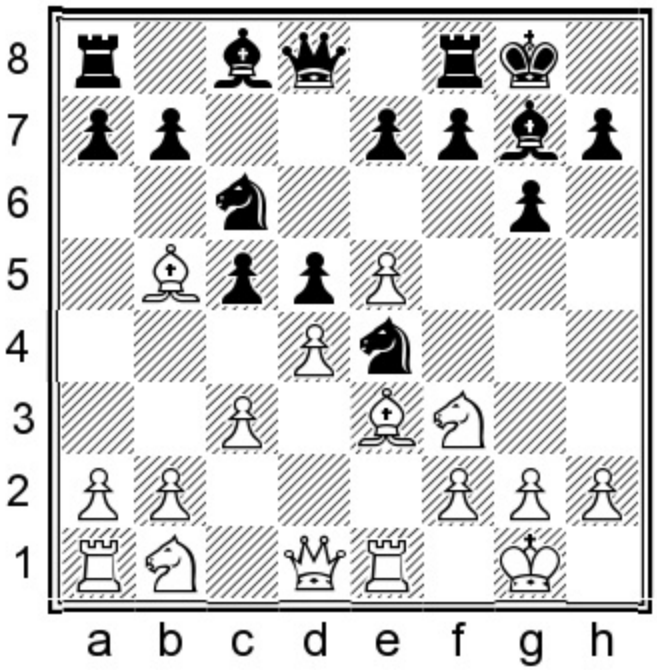
Position after: 18.♕c3!

Usually a very good square for the queen to stand on, keeping an eye on the e5- and b3-pawns, as well as the c5-square.

18...♖bc8 19.♖ac1±

g) 7...d5 8.e5 ♘e4 9.♗e3

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 ♘f6 6.♖e1 0-0 7.d4 d5 8.e5 ♘e4 9.♗e3

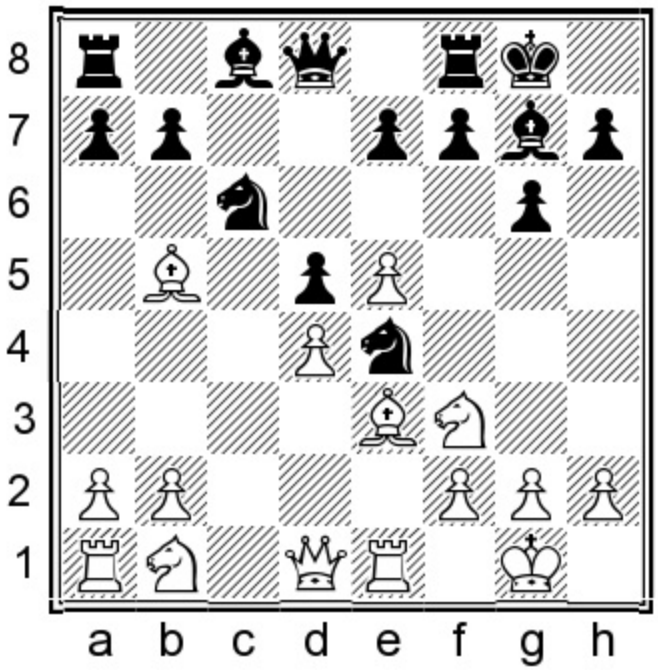


Position after: 9.♗e3

9...♕b6

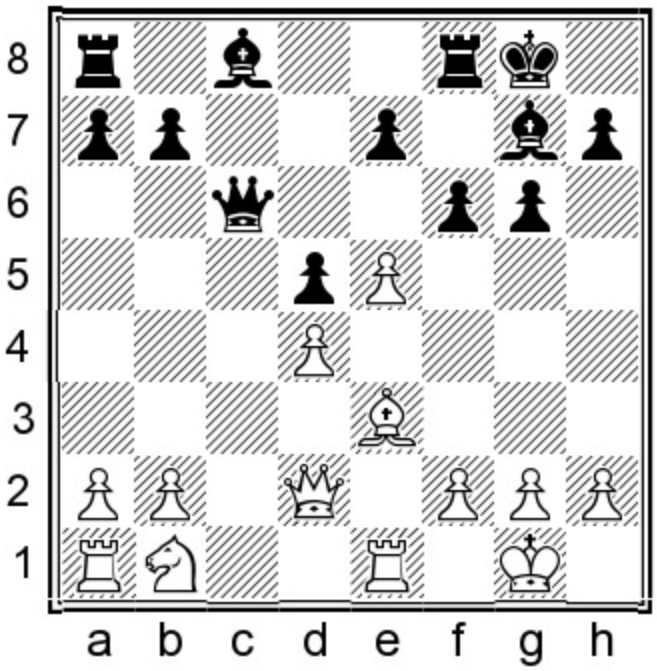
A) It's too early for 9...f6? 10.exf6 ♘xf6 11.dxc5+–

B) 9...cxd4 10.cxd4



Position after: 10.cxd4

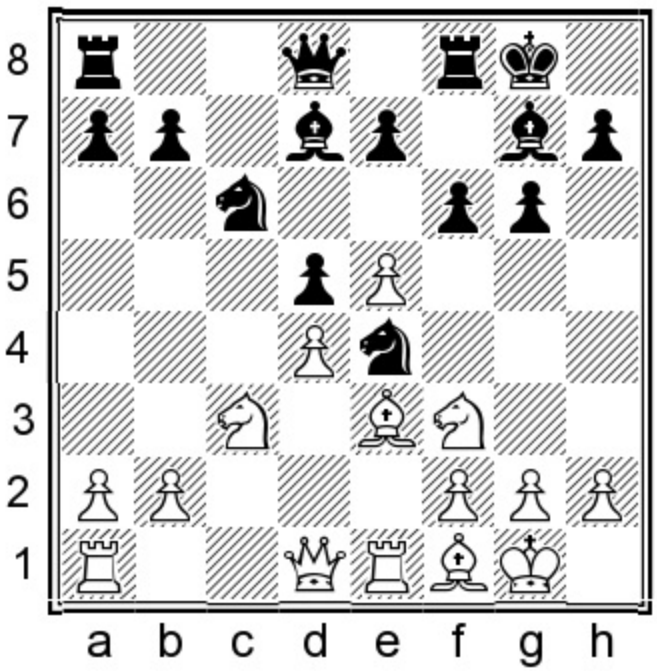
B1) 10...♕b6 11.♗xc6 ♕xc6 [11...bxc6 12.♕c1 transposes to 9...♕b6.] 12.♘fd2! ♘xd2 13.♕xd2 f6 In Kollars – Shirov, chess.com 2020, White could have immediately gone for kingside action. [13...♗f5 14.♘c3± also looks preferable for White.]



Position after: 13...f6

14.♗h6!N 14...♗e6 15.♘c3 ♖ac8 16.♗xg7 ♔xg7 17.h4→

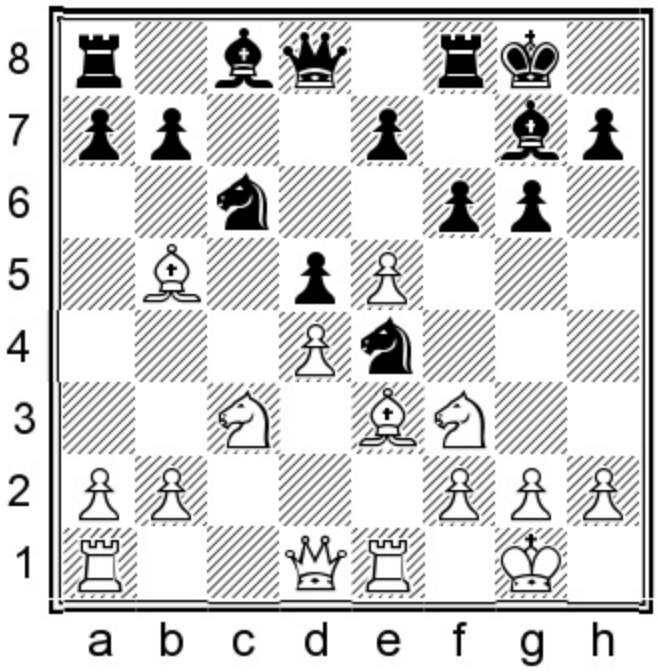
B2) 10...♗d7 Black threatens ...♘xe5, so it makes sense to retreat our bishop. 11.♗f1 f6 12.♘c3!



Position after: 12.♘c3!

One of the benefits of delaying the capture on c6 means that we haven't opened the b-file. To this end, ♘c3 becomes a real possibility again as our b-pawn can't be targeted. 12...♘xc3 [12...♗e6 13.♖c1 ♘xc3 14.bxc3 fxe5 15.♘xe5±] 13.bxc3 fxe5 14.♘xe5 ♘xe5 15.dxe5 ♗f5 16.♗d4 e6 17.a4±

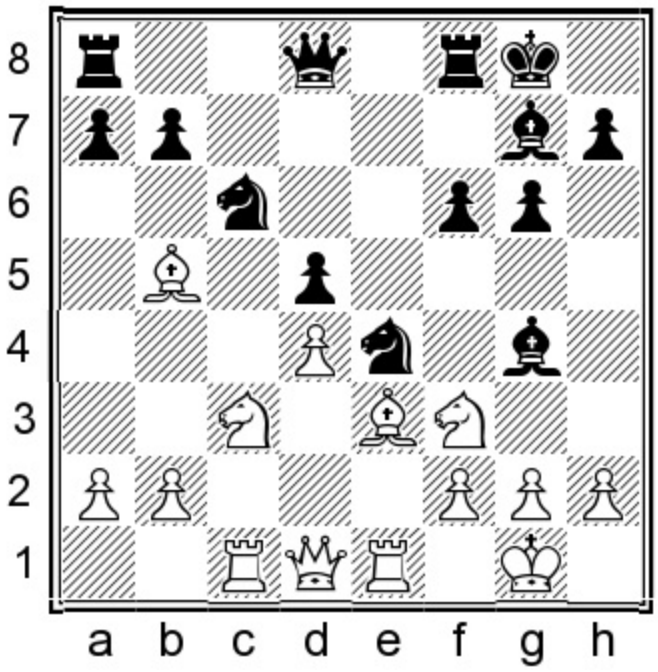
B3) 10...f6 11.♘c3!



Position after: 11.♘c3!

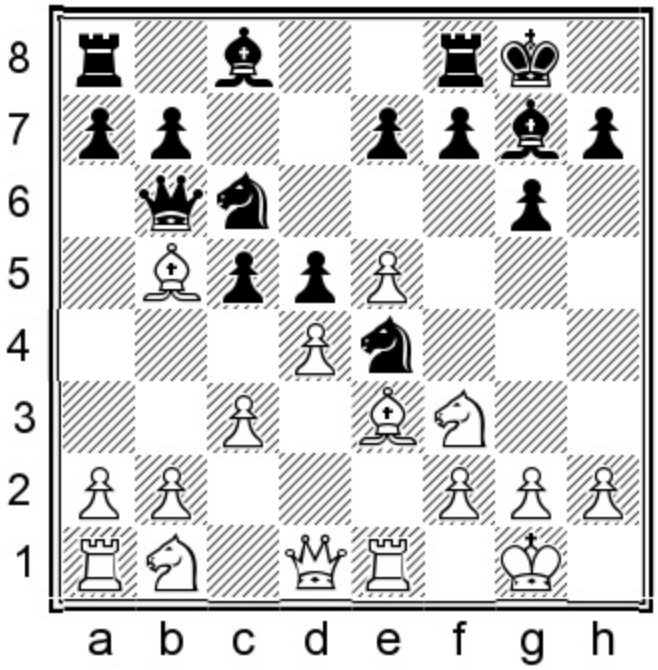
B3.1) 11...♘xc3 12.bxc3 fxe5 [12...♗g4 13.exf6 ♗xf6 14.♗e2± Adams – Fedorovsky, Karlsruhe 2020.] 13.♗xc6 e4 [13...bxc6 14.♘xe5± This is positionally very nice for White.] 14.♗xd5+ ♕xd5 15.♘d2±

B3.2) 11...♗g4 12.exf6 exf6 [12...♘xf6 13.♖c1± The pawn structure looks like it's favourable for White, and we'll follow up with h2-h3 to get out of the pin.] 13.♖c1



Position after: 13.♖c1

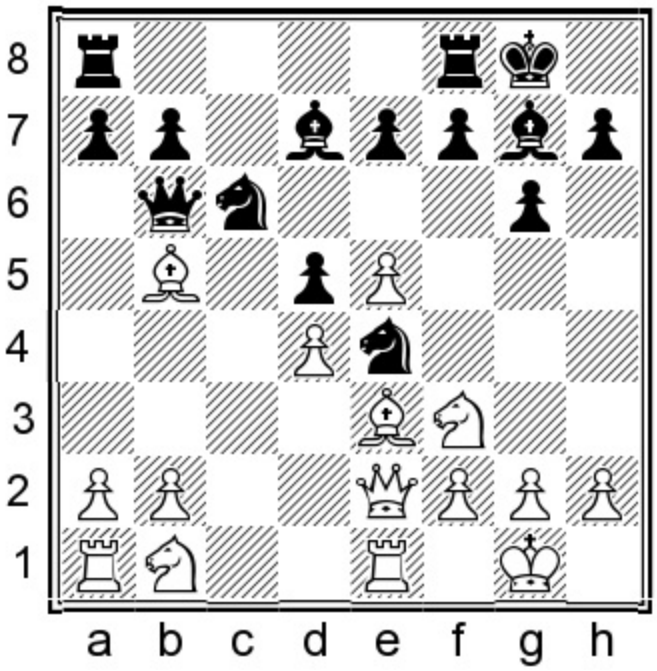
13...a6 [13...♗xf3 14.gxf3! ♘xc3 15.♖xc3± The bishop-pair look like they'll be very effective in this position.] 14.♗d3 ♘xc3 15.bxc3 ♖e8 16.h3 ♗e6 17.♘d2!± Followed by ♘b3-c5.



Position after: 9...♕b6

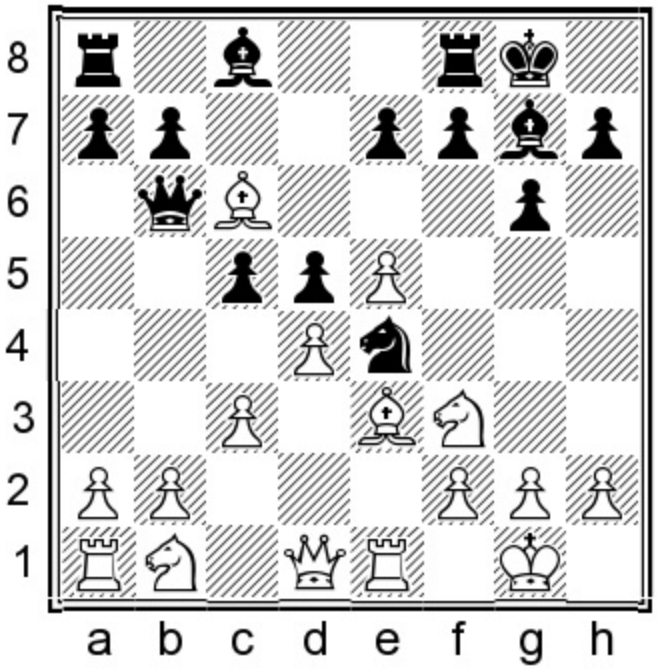
10.♗xc6

10.♕e2!? was played in Kollars – Lagunow, 2020, and is an interesting way to continue to delay the capture on c6. I think Black should respond with 10...cxd4 11.cxd4 ♗d7! This ensures that Black can respond to ♗xc6 with ...♗xc6.



Position after: 11...♗d7!

The variation may continue 12.♗a4 ♖fd8 13.h3 ♖ac8 14.♘c3 ♘xc3 15.bxc3 ♘a5, and it looks like Black is doing perfectly fine.

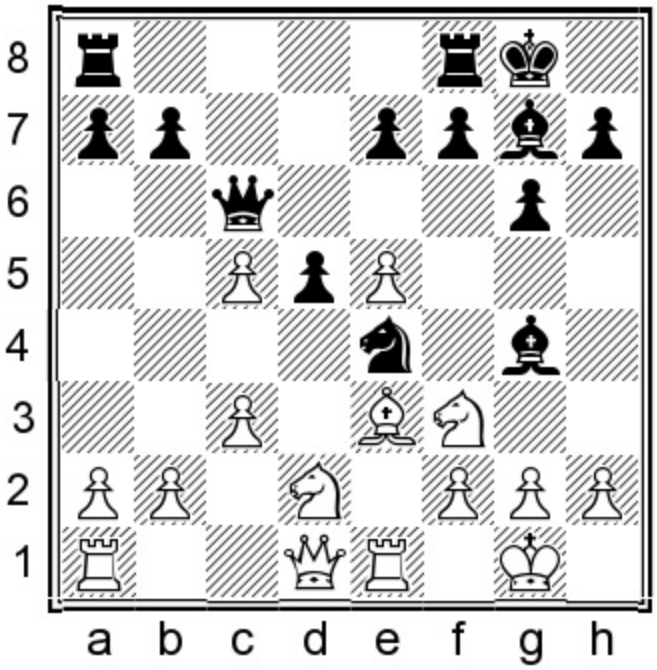


Position after: 10.♗xc6

10...bxc6

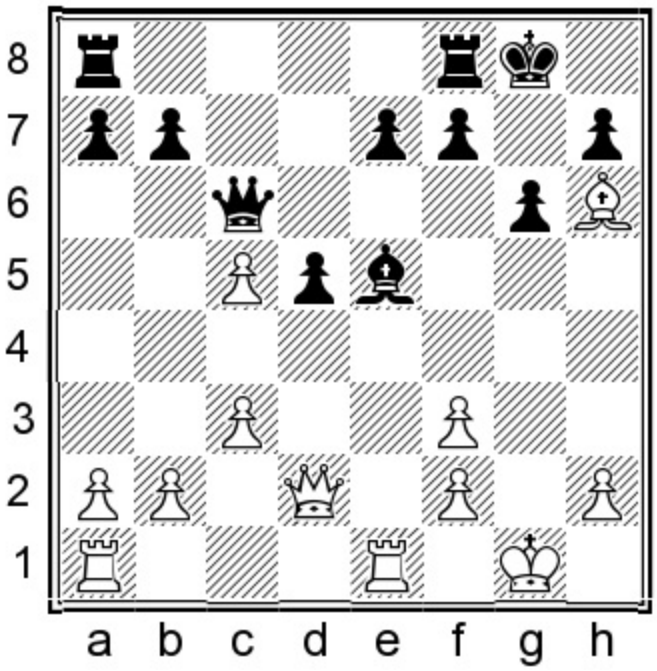
10...♕xc6 This is the option that Black gains when we delay ♗xc6 with 9.♗e3. 11.dxc5! The most

testing continuation. [11.a4?! seemed a bit slow in Adams – Saric, Batumi 2019.] 11...♗g4 [11...♘xc5 12.h3 b6 13.♘a3 a5 14.♘c2 h6 15.♘cd4± White gains a pleasant position here, although it's evidently completely playable for both sides.] 12.♘bd2



Position after: 12.♘bd2

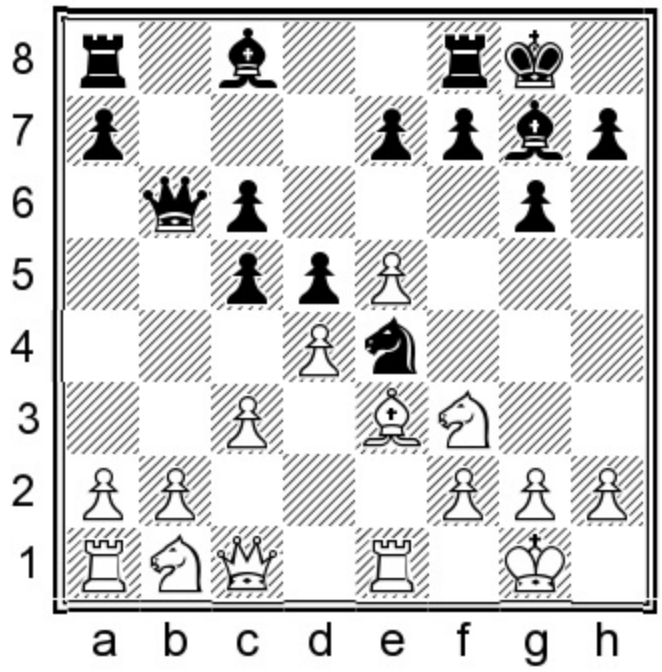
12...♘xd2 In Anand – Dubov, Wijk aan Zee, White overlooked a surprising resource. [12...♘xc5 13.h3 ♗xf3 14.♘xf3 ♖fc8 15.h4→; 12...♗xf3 13.♘xf3 ♘xc5 14.h4→] 13.♕xd2! ♗xf3 14.gxf3 ♗xe5 15.♗h6



Position after: 15.♗h6

Here it's wise to sacrifice the exchange with 15...♗f6, as after 15...♗g7 16.♗xg7 ♔xg7 17.♕d4+ ♔g8 18.♖xe7+– White is close to winning.

11.♕c1

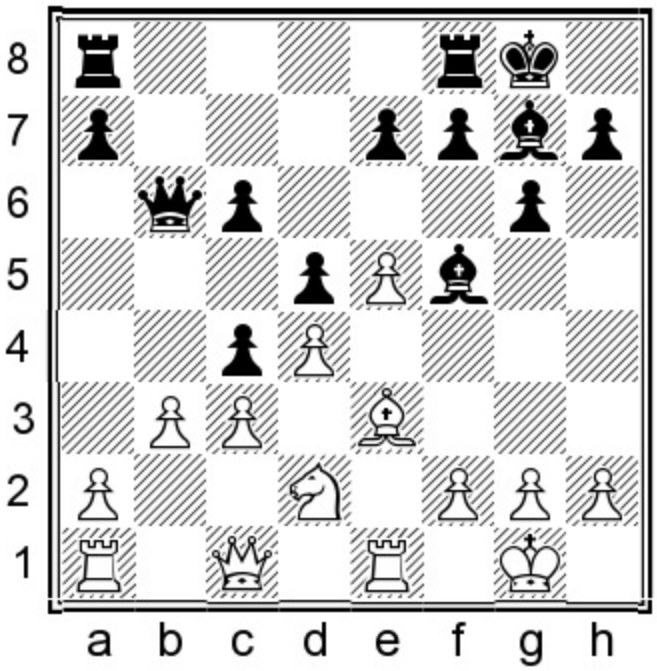


Position after: 11.♕c1

The point of 9.♗e3 now becomes abundantly clear; we've stabilised our centre, and prevent Black from playing ...cxd4 followed by ...c6-c5. Our positional hold of the c5-square in particular is extremely useful, and makes Black's life slightly uncomfortable. Moreover, our c3-d4-e5 pawn structure has the added effect of completely limiting Black's g7-bishop. In turn, we can start to think about possibilities of h4-h5 at some point.

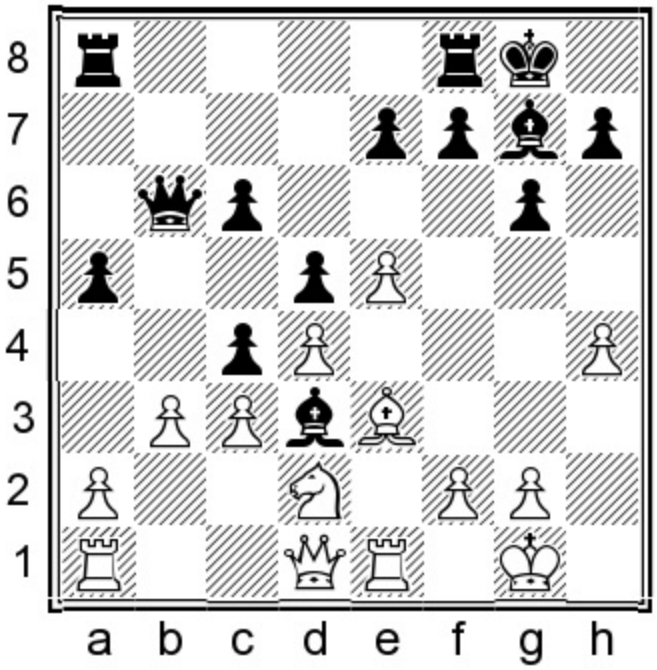
11...♖b8

A) 11...c4 This time we need to play ♘bd2 before b2-b3. 12.♘bd2 ♘xd2 13.♘xd2 ♗f5 14.b3



Position after: 14.b3

14...♗d3 [14...a5? was a weird pawn sacrifice played in Darini – Antipov, Qingdao 2019. After 15.bxc4 a4 White should have just played 16.c5!+– before transferring his attention to kingside ventures.] 15.h4! Whilst maintaining tension on the queenside, we can embark with our standard kingside plan. 15...a5 16.♕d1!

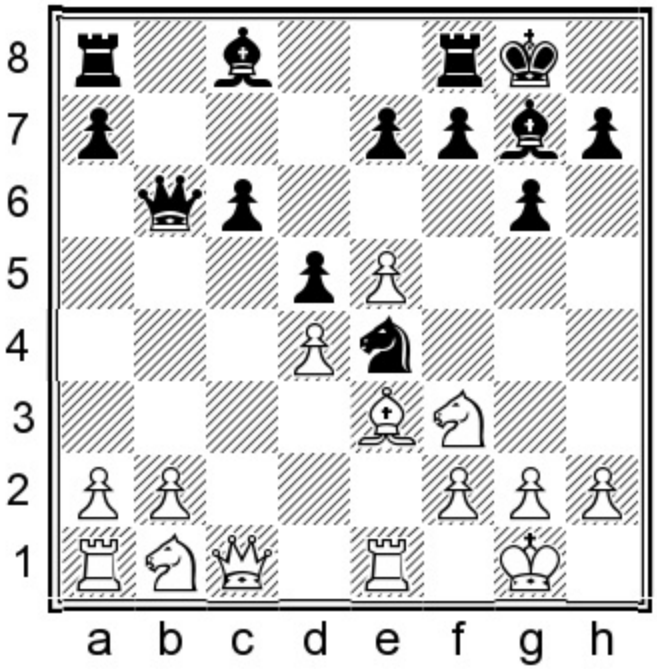


Position after: 16.♕d1!

16...h6 [16...a4 17.bxc4 dxc4 18.h5→] 17.bxc4 dxc4 18.♘b3! cxb3 19.♕xd3 a4 20.♖ab1 ♖fb8

21.axb3 axb3 22.e6±

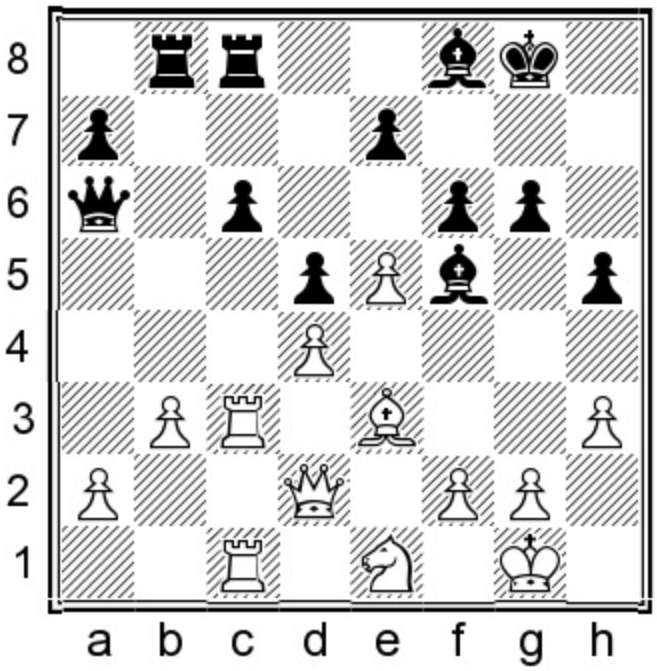
B) 11...cxd4 12.cxd4 It's difficult to provide concrete variations in this line, as both sides have a number of possibilities. As usual, the lines that I do provide should be looked at with a particular focus on piece placement and ideas – rather than memorisation of the exact moves. In particular, it's important to understand how to play on both sides of the board. Invariably, my suggestions will be predicated on the aim of making Black's life as difficult as possible.



Position after: 12.cxd4

B1) 12...f6 13.♘c3! ♗f5 14.h3 ♖ab8 15.b3±

B2) 12...♖b8 I really like the following game, because it's a great illustration of how White primarily established control of the queenside before building up a kingside attack. 13.b3 ♕a5 14.♘bd2 ♗f5 15.♘xe4 ♗xe4 16.♘d2 ♗f5 17.♕b2! The queen stands well here, allowing us to double rooks on the c-file. 17...♖fc8 18.♖ec1 ♗f8 19.♖c3 ♕a6 20.♘f3 ♗e4 21.♘e1 h5 22.h3 ♗f5 23.♖ac1 f6 24.♕d2!

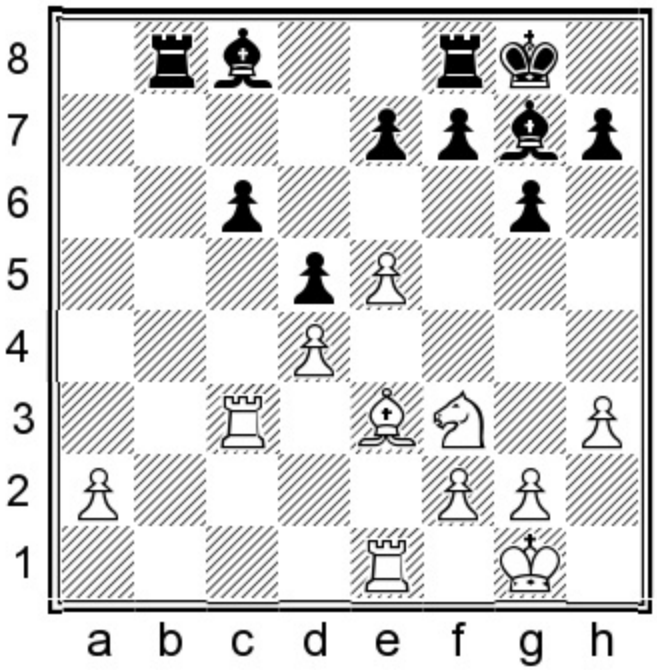


Position after: 24.♕d2!

It's already positionally winning for White, as our kingside attack looks to be unstoppable. White converted efficiently in Smeets – Mamedov, Wijk aan Zee 2020.

B3) 12...♗f5 13.♘fd2! ♘xd2 14.♘xd2 a5 15.♘b3 ♖fb8 16.♖e2±

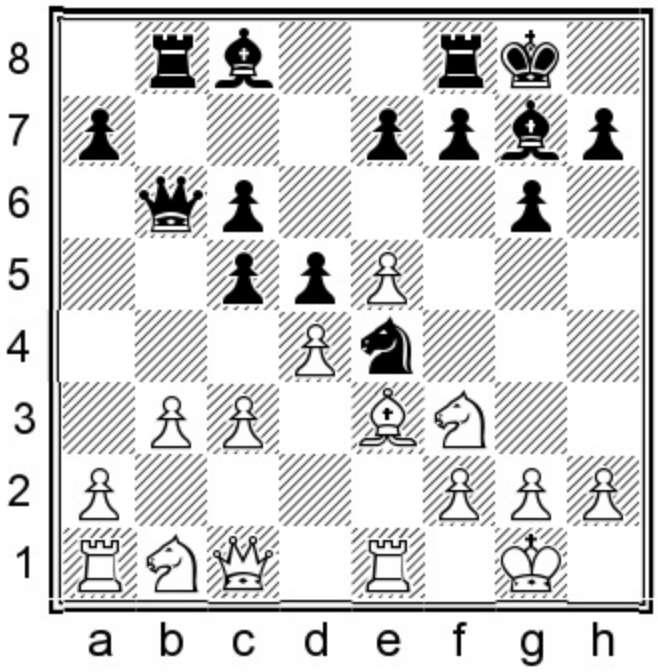
B4) 12...a5 13.♘c3 ♘xc3 14.♕xc3 a4 A typical idea to create an isolated pawn on b3, but this shouldn't be a huge problem for us. [14...♗f5 15.b3±] 15.h3 ♖b8 [15...♗f5 16.♖ac1 ♖fb8 17.g4 ♗c8 18.♖c2±] 16.b3! axb3 17.♖ab1 ♕b4 18.♖xb3 ♕xc3 19.♖xc3



Position after: 19.♖xc3

The combination of our passed a-pawn and the weak c6-pawn makes this a tough queenless middlegame for Black. 19...♗d7 20.a4 ♖a8 21.♖a1 f6 22.a5 ♖fb8 23.♗f4 ♖b7 24.exf6 exf6 25.♗d6±

12.b3



Position after: 12.b3

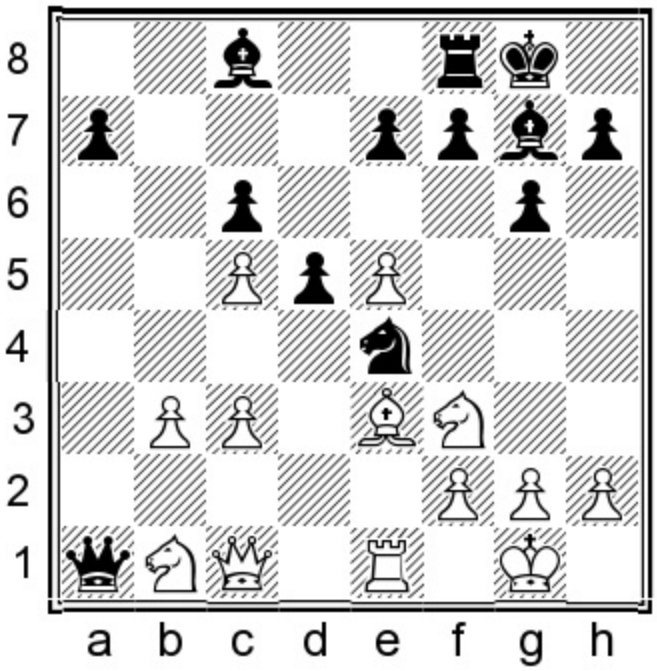
12...♕a5

The start of a forcing variation. 12...cxd4 13.cxd4 transposes back to 11...cxd4.

13.dxc5

13.♘fd2 cxd4 14.cxd4 c5!=

13...♖xb3 14.axb3 ♕xa1

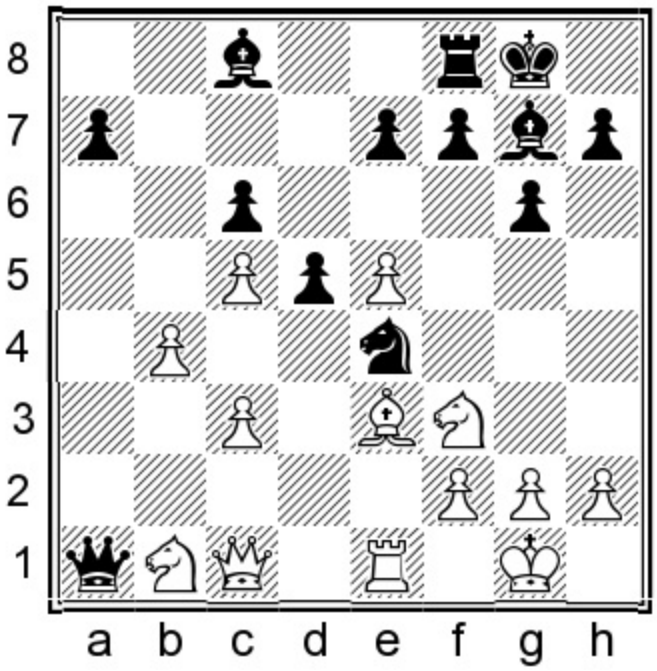


Position after: 14...♕xa1

15.b4

The structure has slightly changed. We've acquired the d4-square for our knight – which will be especially helpful in targeting the weak c6-pawn. However, this will also allow Black's dark-squared bishop into the game. Before playing ♘d4, it's important to weigh up the potential strength of our queenside pawns.

15.♘d4 was played with success in Gukesh – Scherbakov, Moscow 2019, but I couldn't find anything for White after 15...♕a6 16.♕a3 ♕xa3 17.♘xa3 ♗xe5 18.f3 ♘xc5 19.♘xc6 ♗xc3 20.♘xe7+ ♔g7 21.♖d1 ♘xb3 22.♘xd5 ♗e5 23.♗xa7=

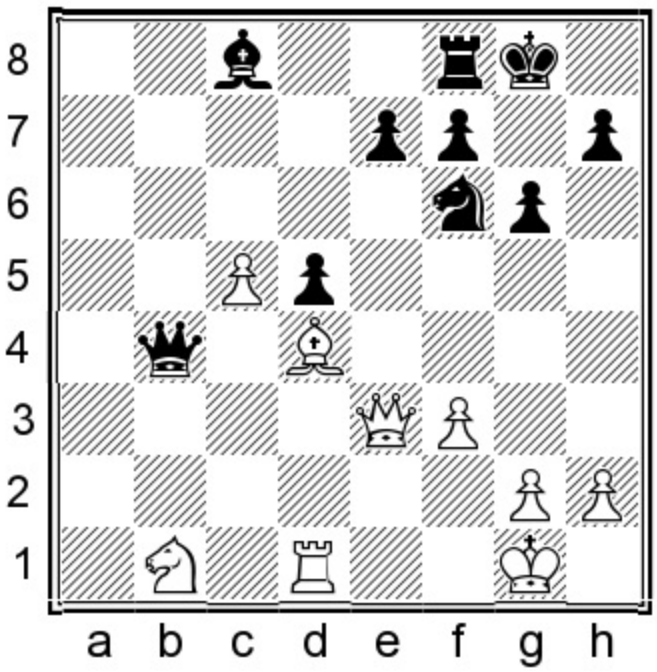


Position after: 15.b4

15...♕a4

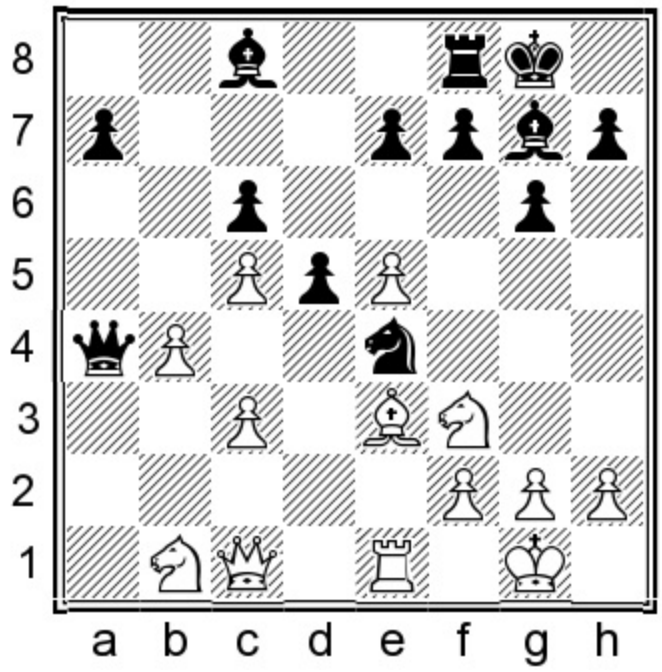
A) 15...♖e8 16.♘d4! ♗xe5 17.♘xc6 ♗g7 18.f3! The resulting ending will be extremely difficult for Black to handle, due to our passed c-pawn. 18...♘xc3 19.♘xc3 ♕xc3 20.♕xc3 ♗xc3 21.♖c1 ♗d7 22.♘xa7 ♗xb4 23.c6 ♗c8 24.c7 ♗d6 25.g3±

B) 15...a5 16.♘d4! axb4 17.cxb4 ♗xe5 18.♘xc6 ♗f6 19.f3 ♕a4 20.♘d4 ♗xd4 21.♗xd4 ♕xb4 22.♖d1 ♘f6 23.♕e3±



Position after: 23.♕e3±

Despite once again being a pawn down, White is significantly better due to our more active pieces and dangerous passed c-pawn.



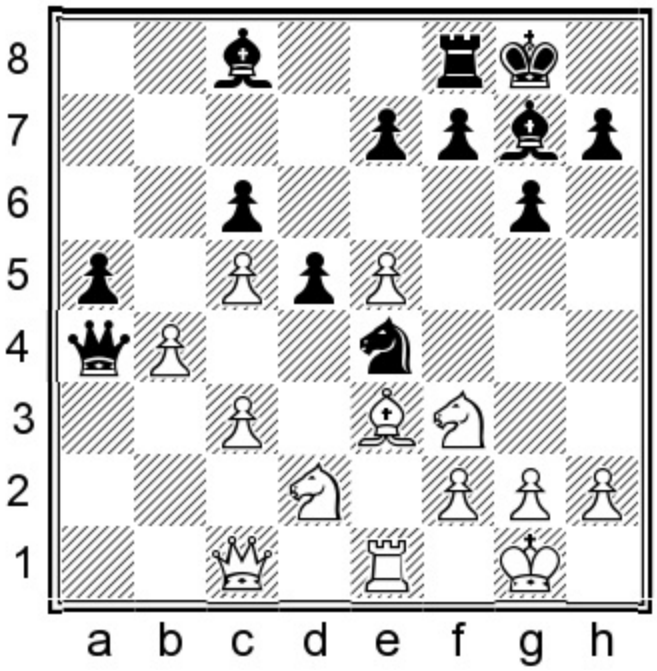
Position after: 15...♕a4

16.♘bd2N

16.♘d4!? This interesting pawn sacrifice was played in both Caruana – Dubov, Wijk aan Zee 2020, as well as an earlier correspondence games. In the Caruana game, Dubov ended up facing practical difficulties which eventually led to a White victory. However, I don't think 16.♘d4 is as problematic for Black as the text move.

16...a5

16...♘xd2 17.♕xd2 a5 18.♗h6!±



Position after: 16...a5

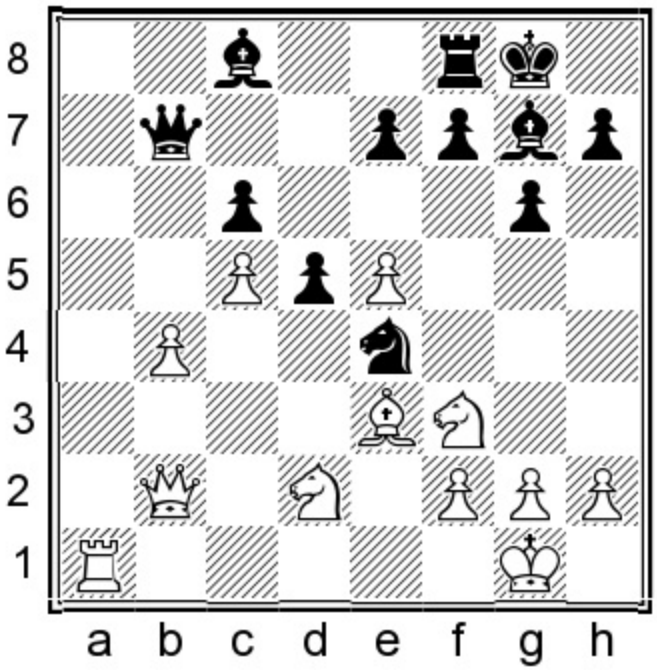
17.♕b2!

17.♕a1!? Whilst I would prefer to retain queens for the time being, this is certainly a plausible option which gives White a favourable endgame. 17...♕xa1 18.♖xa1 ♘xc3 19.♖xa5 ♗b7 20.♘b3 ♖a8 21.♖xa8+ [21.h4±; 21.g4±] 21...♗xa8 22.g4! ♔f8 23.h4±

17...axb4 18.cxb4 ♕b5

18...♗f5 19.♖a1 ♕b5 20.♖a7±

19.♖a1 ♕b7



Position after: 19...♕b7

It's logical for Black to protect against a seventh-rank invasion, but White should still be doing well.

20.h3 ♗f5 21.♖a5 ♖a8 22.♘b3±

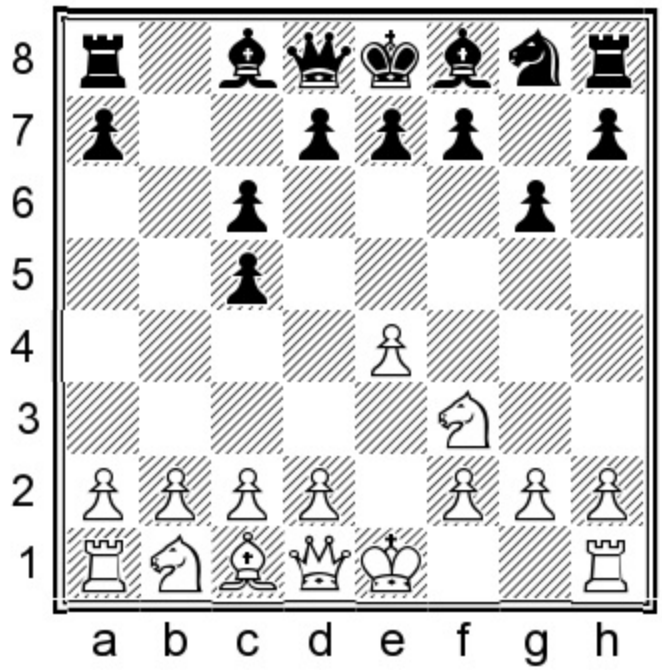
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.♗xc6 bxc6 5.0-0 ♗g7 6.♖e1

Conclusion to Chapter 17

If Black doesn't want to enter the sharp and often extremely complex lines associated with 5...e5, 5...♘f6 looks like the way to go. As we saw, the main idea revolved around contesting the centre with ...d7-d5 and ...♘e4. The latest trend from there so far is for White to play a combination of ♗xc6 and ♗e3 (in one or other order; see the final two subchapters), the point of which is to positionally weaken Black's c5-square, and have the ability to play on both sides of the board. Instead of entering this line, perhaps Black's most attractive option is to play 7...a6 (subchapters b and c) and enjoy the dynamic possibilities associated with a ...c6-c5 push. In any case, I hope my analysis demonstrated that even here, we have a variety of options – for example, the choice between whether we want to play a complex and dynamic middlegame after 9.h3, or settle for a slight edge after 9.e5.

Chapter 18
4.♗xc6 bxc6

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.♗xc6 bxc6



Chapter Guide

Chapter 18 – 4.♗xc6 bxc6

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.♗xc6 bxc6 5.0-0 ♗g7 6.♖e1

a) 6...♘f6 7.e5 ♘d5 8.c4 ♘c7 9.d4 cxd4 10.♕xd4 --

b) 6...♘f6 7.e5 ♘d5 8.c4 ♘c7 9.d4 cxd4 10.♕xd4 ♘e6

c) 6...♘h6!? 7.c3 0-0 8.d4

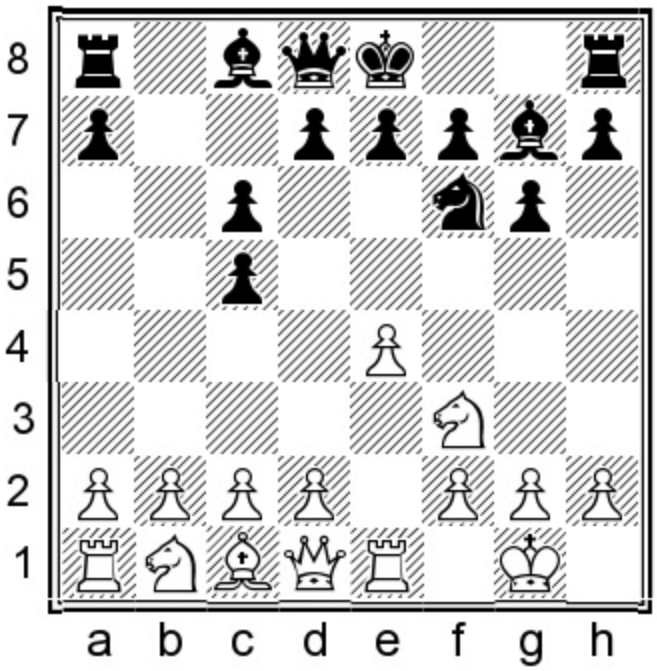
d) 6...♘h6!? 7.c3 0-0 8.h3

e) 6...♖b8!?

f) 6...♕c7

a) 6...♘f6 7.e5 ♘d5 8.c4 ♘c7 9.d4 cxd4 10.♕xd4 --

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.♗xc6 bxc6 5.0-0 ♗g7 6.♖e1 ♘f6

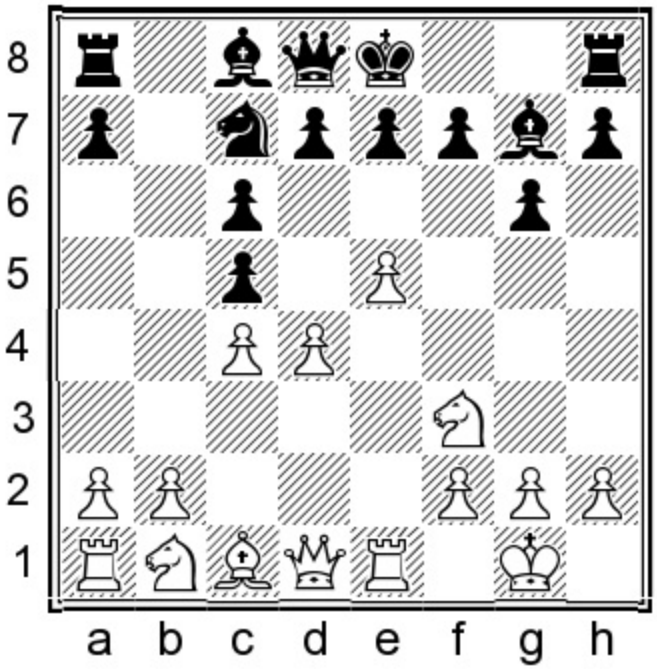


Position after: 6...♘f6

The old mainline. Black wants to wait for us to play e4-e5 before hitting it with ...d7-d6 at the right moment.

7.e5 ♘d5 8.c4 ♘c7 9.d4

9.b3 is another option, but I don't see any problems with the text move.



Position after: 9.d4

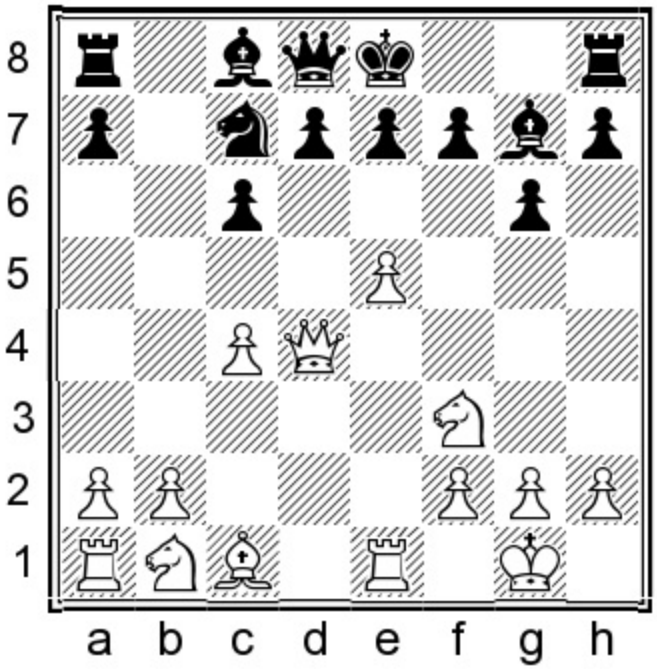
9...cxd4

Nothing else makes sense.

A) 9...♘e6 10.d5 cxd5 11.cxd5±

B) 9...d5 10.cxd5 ♕xd5 11.♘c3 ♕d7 12.♕a4! cxd4 13.♘xd4 c5 14.♘c6 ♗b7 15.♘a5 ♕xa4 16.♘xa4± White is just winning a pawn here.

10.♕xd4



Position after: 10.♕xd4

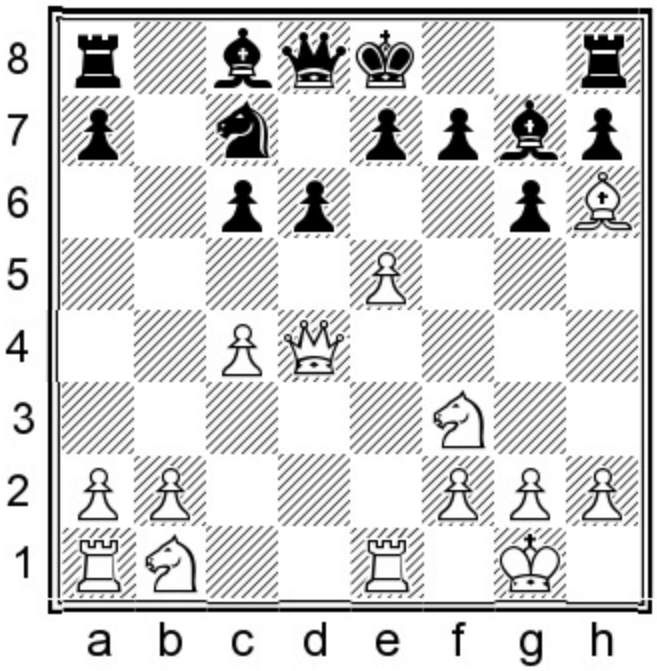
10...0-0?!

In general in this line, it's pretty risky for Black to castle kingside as our attack looks dangerous.

A) 10...♘e6 is possibly the best move and I examine it next.

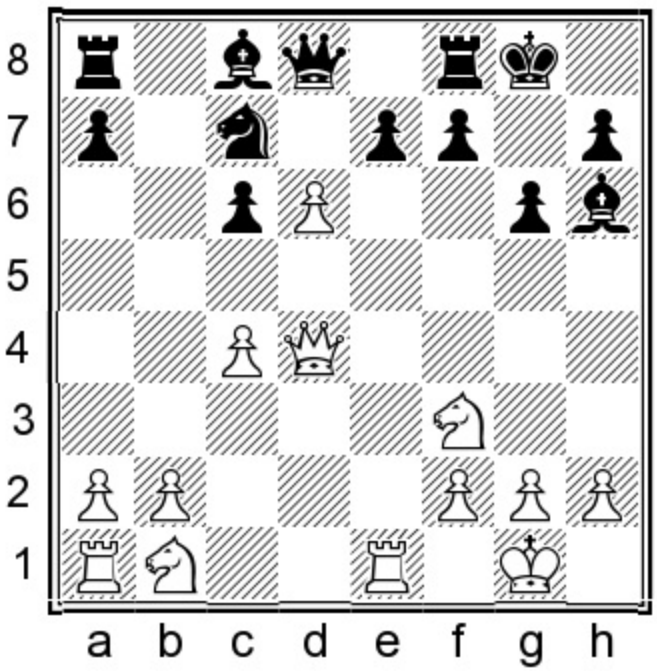
B) 10...d5 caught me by surprise in Haria – Carneiro, Lisbon 2018. I failed to spot that the simple 11.cxd5! was very strong, e. g. 11...♘xd5 [11...cxd5 12.♘c3 0-0 13.♕h4→] 12.♘c3 ♗e6 13.♕h4!±

C) 10...d6 11.♗h6!



Position after: 11.♗h6!

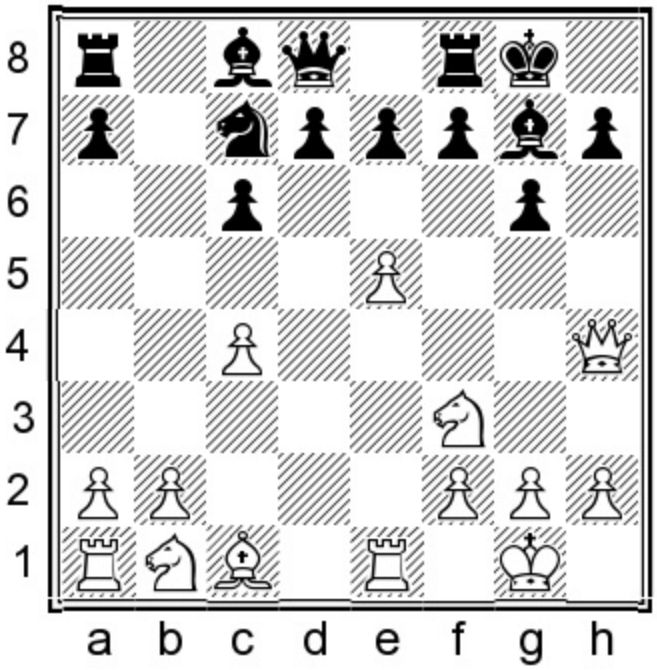
A useful trick to remember. 11...♗xh6 [11...0-0 12.♗xg7 ♘e6 13.♕e3 ♔xg7 14.exd6± Followed by ♘c3, and White is comfortably better.; 11...♘e6 12.♕e3 ♗xe5 13.♘xe5 dxe5 14.♕xe5 ♕d4 15.♕e2 ♗a6 16.♘d2+– White was already winning in Wang – Bu, Danzhou 2011.] 12.exd6 0-0



Position after: 12...0-0

The exchange sacrifice is possibly Black's best practical try, although White is still clearly on top. 13.dxe7 ♕xd4 14.exf8=♕+ ♔xf8 15.♘xd4 ♗g7 16.♘xc6 ♗xb2 17.♘d2 ♗xa1 18.♖xa1±

11.♕h4



Position after: 11.♕h4

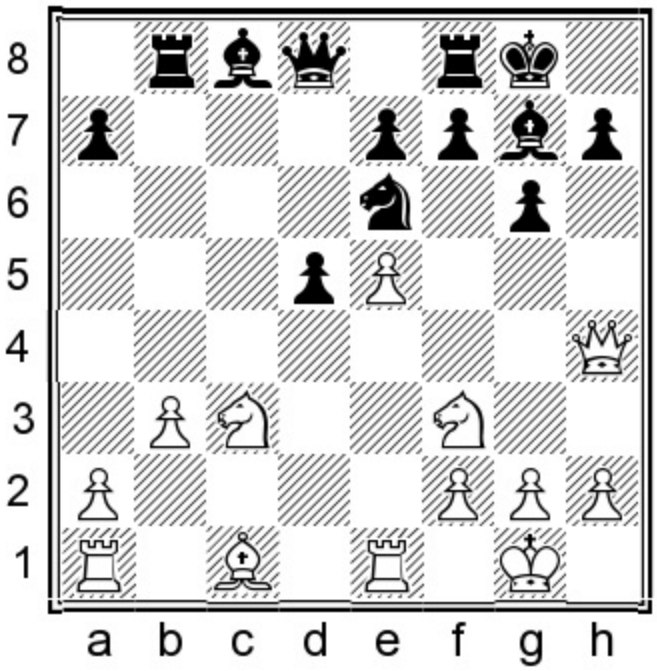
11...f6

A) 11...♘e6 transposes to 10...♘e6 in the next subchapter.

B) 11...♖b8 12.♘c3 doesn't exactly achieve anything for Black.

C) 11...d6 12.♗h6±

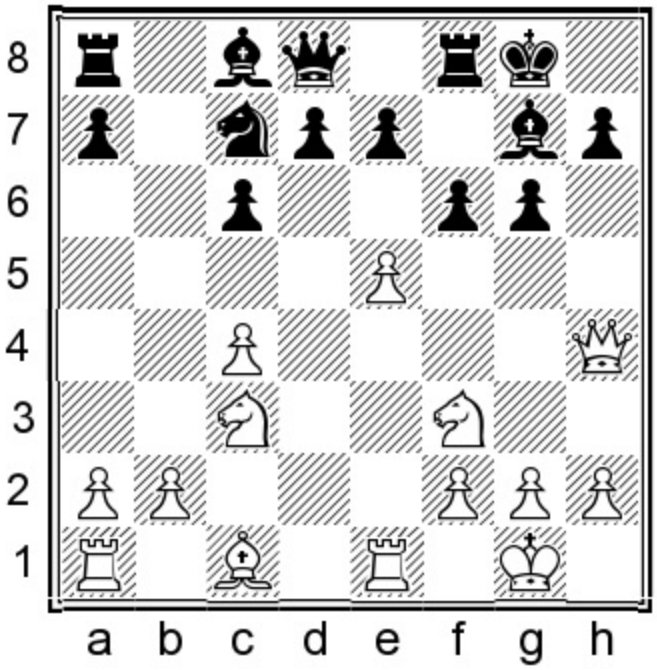
D) 11...d5 is an interesting attempt to gain activity, but White can keep the advantage by just playing simple moves. 12.♘c3 ♖b8 13.b3 ♘e6 14.cxd5 cxd5



Position after: 14...cxd5

15.♘e2 f6 16.♘ed4 ♘xd4 17.♕xd4 fxe5 18.♘xe5±

12.♘c3!

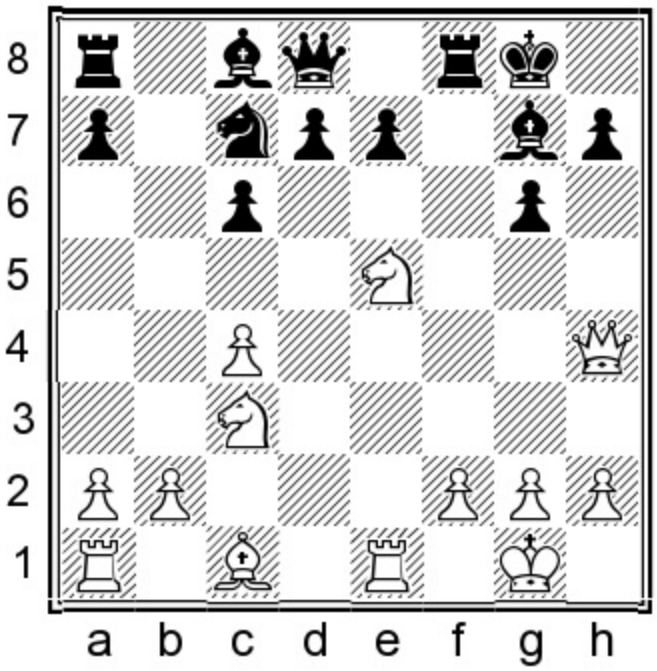


Position after: 12.♘c3!

This move seems to cause Black even more difficulties than the simple capture on f6.

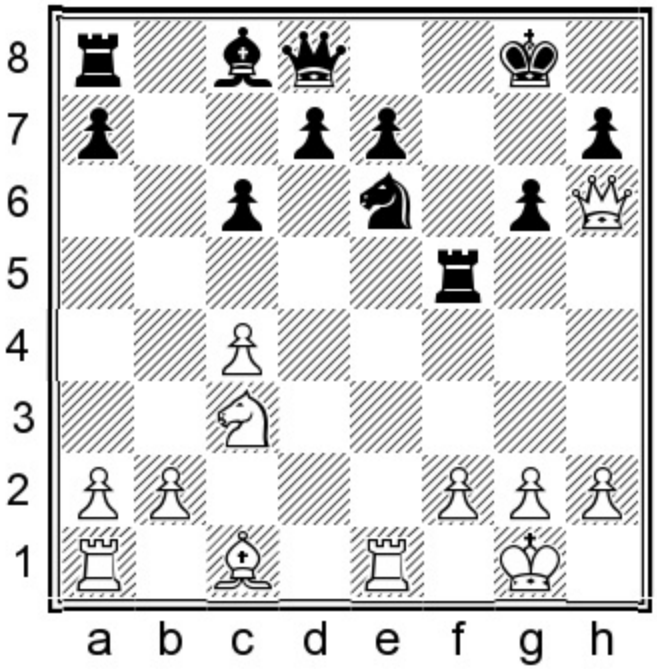
12...♘e6

A) 12...fxe5 13.♘xe5



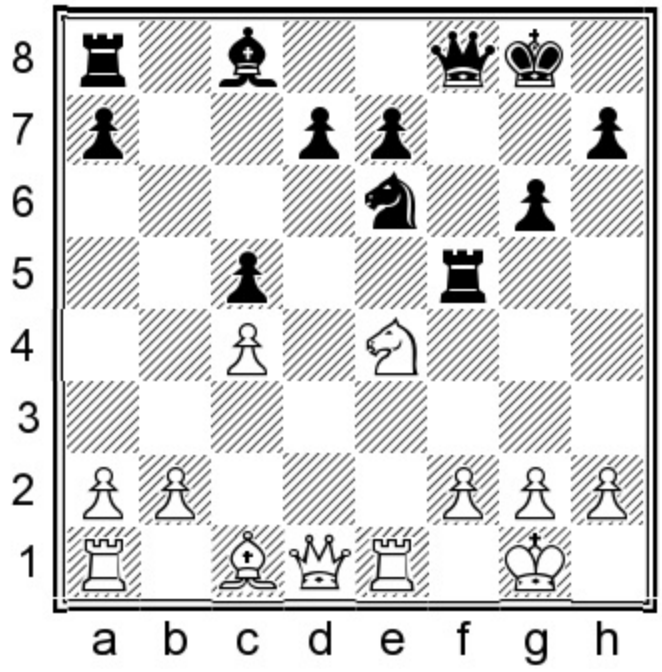
Position after: 13.♘xe5

13...♖f5 [13...♘e6 14.♗h6 ♗xh6 15.♕xh6 ♕b6 16.♘d3 ♕d4 17.♖ad1±] 14.♘g4! Black can't prevent the exchange of his dark-squared bishop, after which his king will be perenially weak. 14...♘e6 15.♘h6+ ♗xh6 16.♕xh6



Position after: 16.♕xh6

16...c5 [16...d5 was played in a couple of recent correspondence games. The best continuation for White seems to be 17.♘e2!± Followed by ♘g3, and a renewed initiative.] 17.♘e4 ♕f8 18.♕h4 ♖h5 19.♕g4 ♖f5 20.♕d1!



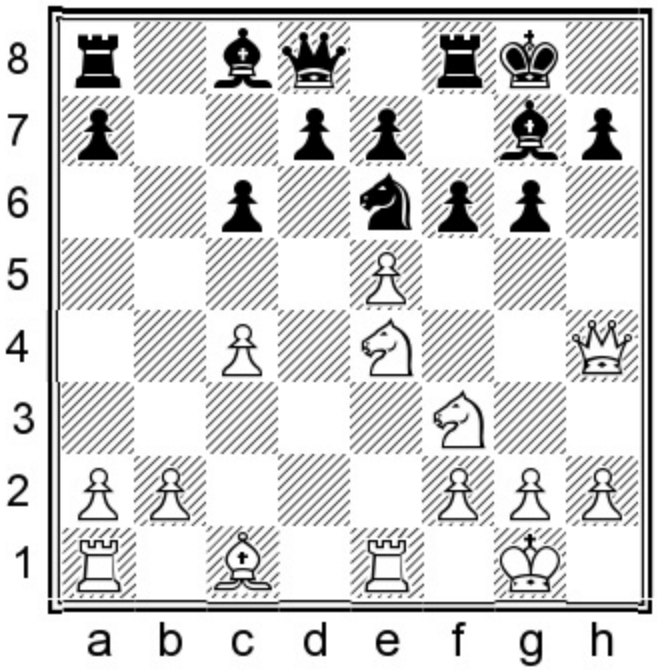
Position after: 20.♕d1!

Our queen has served its purpose on the kingside for the time being, and we can slowly complete the rest of our development. 20...a5 21.♗e3 d6 22.♘g3 ♖e5 23.♕d2±

B) 12...♗a6 13.b3±

C) 12...g5 was played in So – Andriasian, Moscow 2009. However, I can't believe that Black's kingside is stable, and after the simple 13.♕g3 ♘e6 14.exf6 exf6 15.♘e4± White is dominating.

13.♘e4



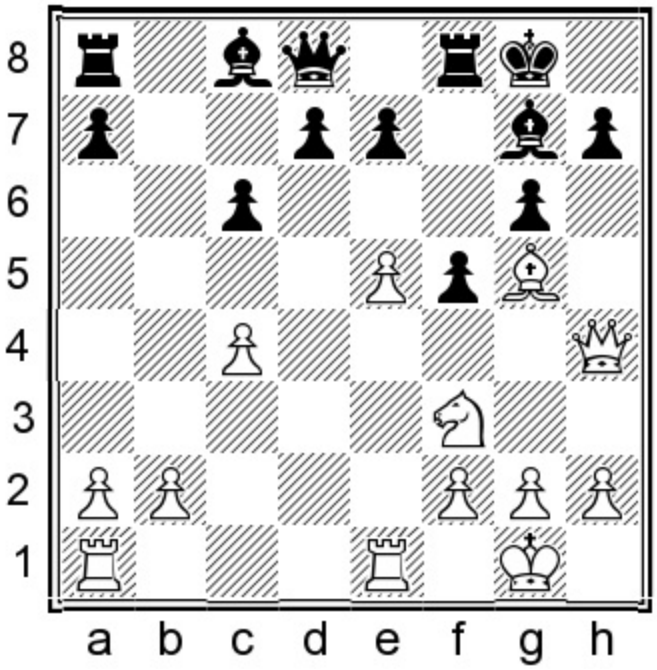
Position after: 13.♘e4

White's attack plays itself, whereas Black has to continuously prevent incurring large positional weaknesses.

13...fxe5

A) 13...♕c7 14.exf6 exf6 15.♗e3±

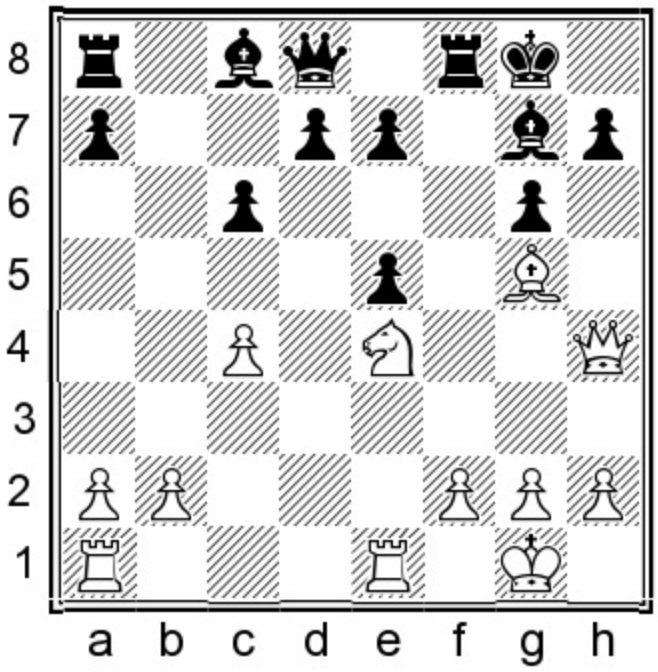
B) 13...f5? 14.♘eg5 ♘xg5 15.♗xg5



Position after: 15.♗xg5

This is already game-over, e.g. 15...♖f7 [15...♖e8 16.c5+–] 16.♗f4 ♖f8 17.♘g5 h6 18.♘f3 h5 19.♕g5 ♔h7 20.♘h4 ♕e8 21.♖e3+–

14.♘fg5 ♘xg5 15.♗xg5

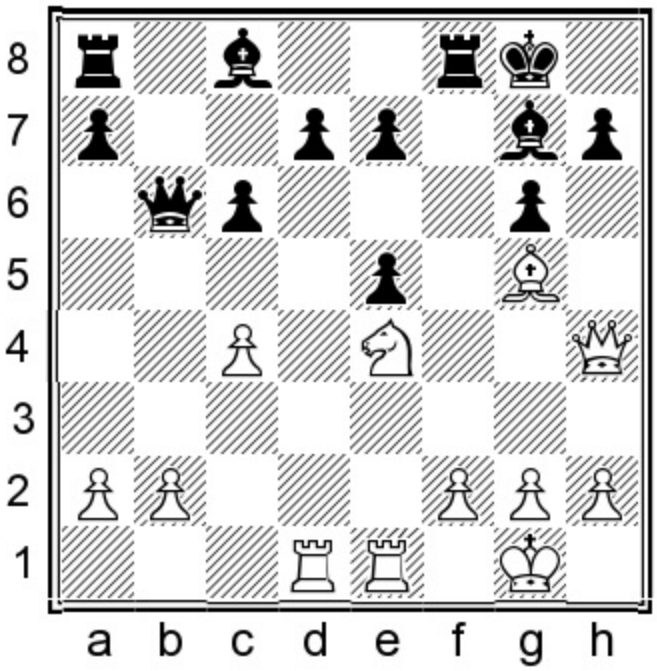


Position after: 15.♗xg5

15...♕b6

In Matinian – Sutovsky, Legnica 2013, White was doing very well after 15...♕c7 16.♗xe7 ♖f4 17.♕g5 d5 18.cxd5 cxd5 19.♘f6+ ♗xf6 20.♗xf6±

16.♖ad1!



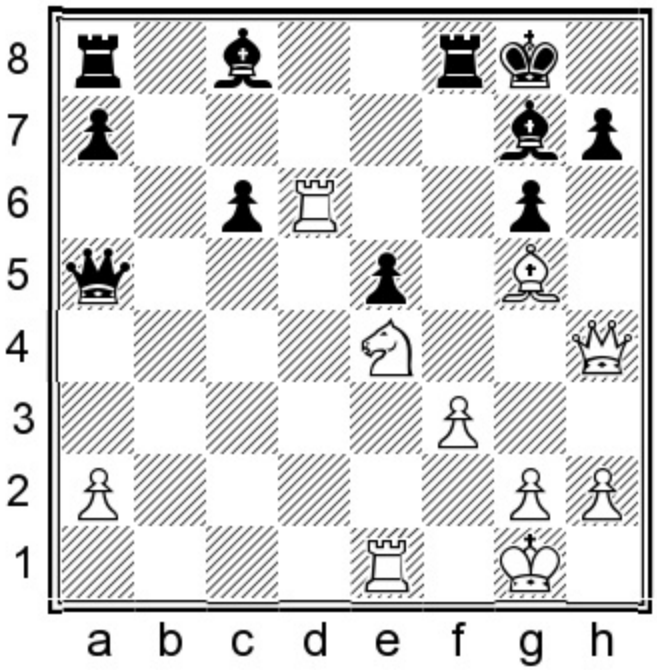
Position after: 16.♖ad1!

We allow Black to capture another pawn, but the activity of our pieces means that the position is almost winning in practical terms.

16...d5

Trying to return the pawns, though it is too late to gain equality from the opening.

A) 16...♕xb2 17.♖d2 ♕b6 18.c5 ♕a5 19.f3 d5 20.cxd6 exd6 21.♖xd6⩱

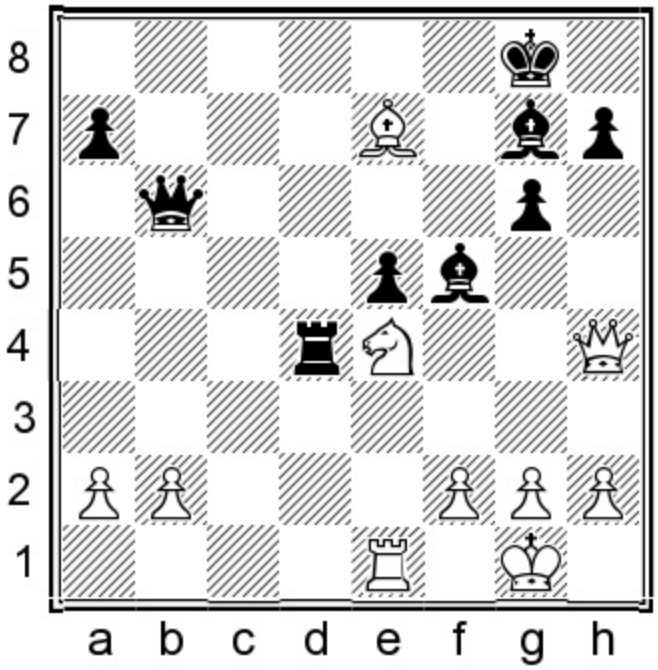


Position after: 21.♖xd6⩱

White was doing very well, before sadly blowing the game in Naiditsch – Sutovsky, Bilbao 2014.

B) 16...d6 17.c5! dxc5 18.♗e3±

17.cxd5 cxd5 18.♖xd5 ♗f5 19.♖d2 ♖ad8 20.♖xd8 ♖xd8 21.♗xe7 ♖d4



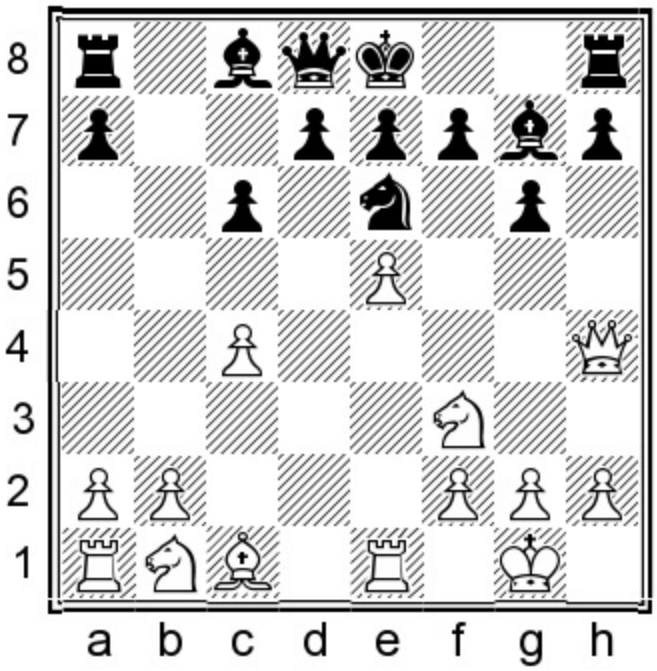
Position after: 21...♖d4

22.♘f6+ ♔f7 23.♕xh7 ♕b8 24.g4! ♗e6 25.g5±

Black is still far from safe.

b) 6...♘f6 7.e5 ♘d5 8.c4 ♘c7 9.d4 cxd4 10.♕xd4 ♘e6

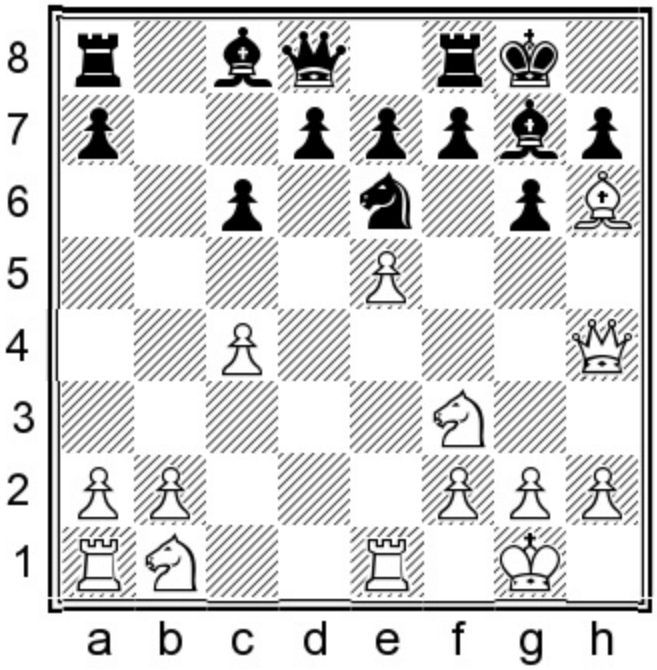
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.♗xc6 bxc6 5.0-0 ♗g7 6.♖e1 ♘f6 7.e5 ♘d5 8.c4 ♘c7 9.d4 cxd4 10.♕xd4 ♘e6 11.♕h4



Position after: 11.♕h4

11...d6

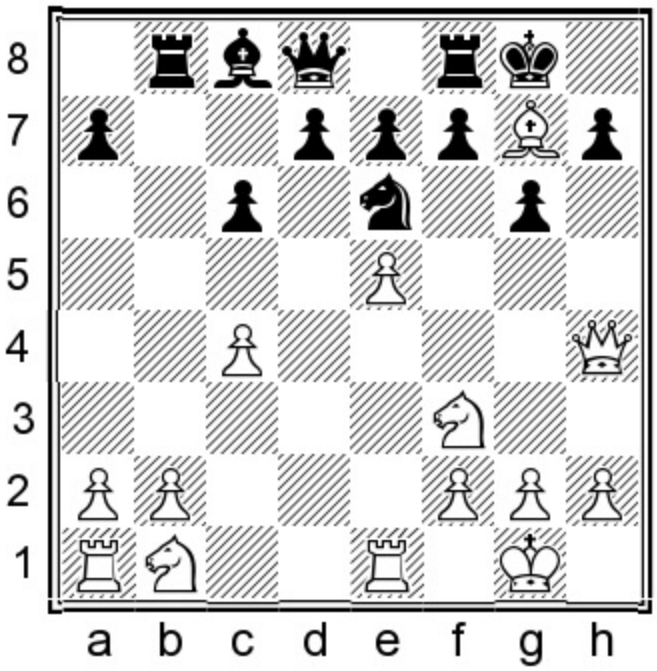
11...0-0?! Ordinarily, it appears that Black is castling into a quick attack. In particular, after the exchange of dark-squared bishops Black will also be significantly worse in a positional sense. 12.♗h6



Position after: 12.♗h6

12...♖b8 [12...f6 13.♗xg7 ♔xg7 14.♘c3± It's good enough to stop here and assess that White is

already doing extremely well.; 12...d5 13.♘c3 ♗b7 14.♖ad1 ♕c7 15.cxd5 cxd5 16.♘b5! ♕d7 17.♘bd4+– Pikula – Ljesar, Cetinje 2012.] 13.♗xg7



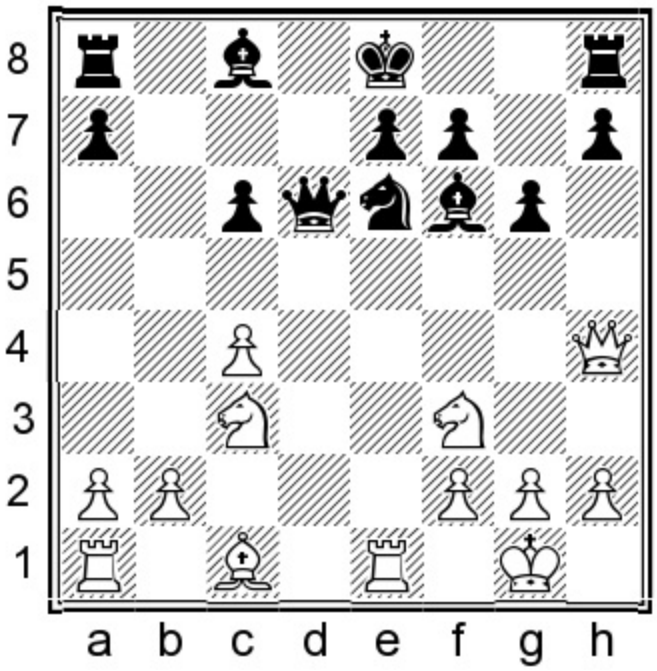
Position after: 13.♗xg7

13...♘xg7 Transferring the knight to f5 doesn't help Black's predicament. [13...♔xg7 14.b3 d5 In Pavlovic – Gomes, Gibraltar 2006, 15.exd6 exd6 16.♕g3!± looked very nice for White.] 14.b3 ♘f5 15.♕f4 d5 16.exd6 ♕xd6 17.♕xd6 exd6 18.♘c3±

12.exd6 ♕xd6 13.♘c3 h5!?

The only realistic way to prevent ♗h6.

13...♗f6

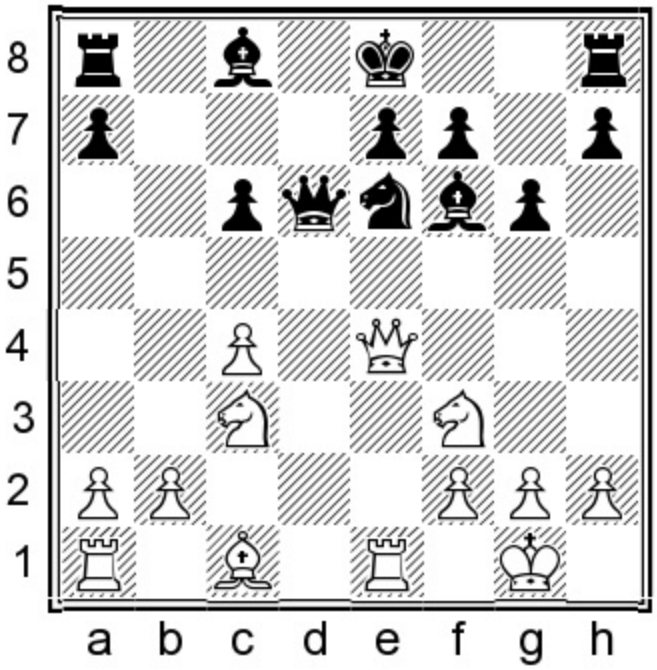


Position after: 13...♗f6

A) 14.♘e4 was played in Bocharov – Popov, Astana 2017, but I don't think the resulting ending is especially dangerous for Black to deal with.

B) 14.♗g5 ♘xg5 15.♘xg5 ♗f5 Black was fine in Kasimdzhanov – Gelfand, Tashkent 2016.

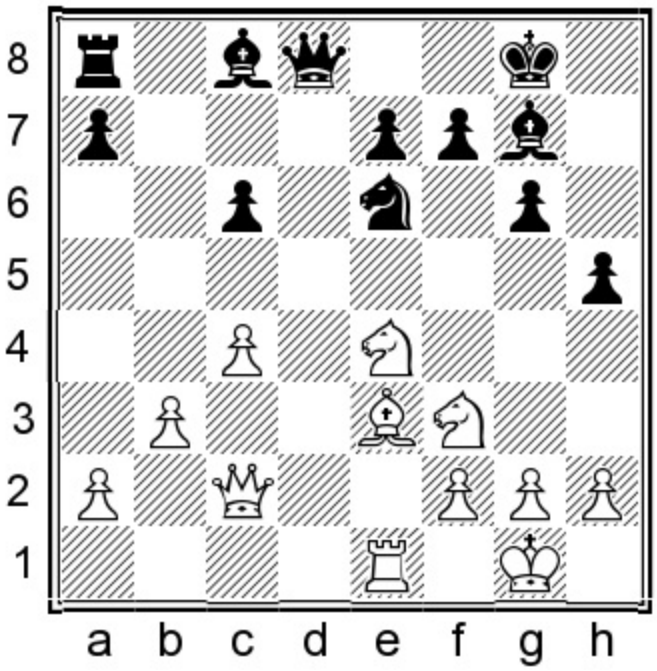
C) 14.♕e4!N The best way to play for a win, by maintaining as many pieces on the board as we can.



Position after: 14.♕e4!N

C1) 14...♖b8? 15.♗h6!+–

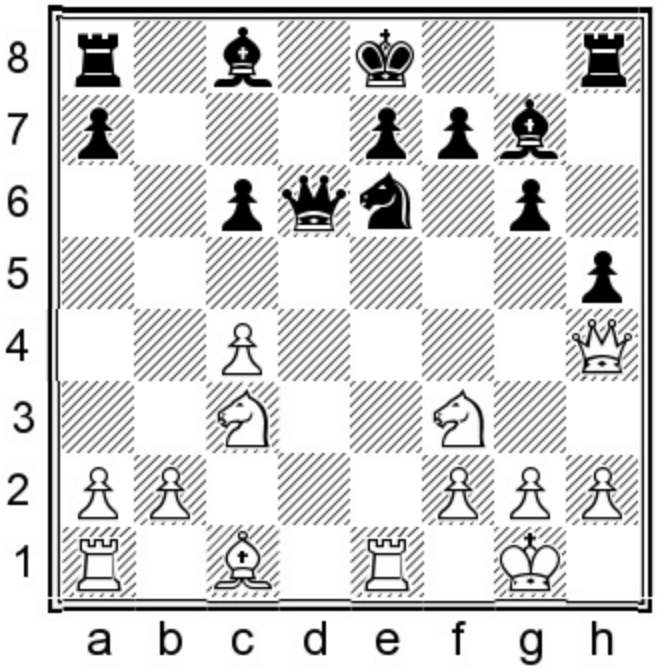
C2) 14...h5 A typical attempt to prevent ♗h6, but we can just continue with simple chess, and should be better. 15.♗e3 0-0 16.♖ad1 ♕c7 17.♕c2! ♖d8 18.♖xd8+ ♕xd8 19.♘e4 ♗g7 20.b3±



Position after: 20.b3±

We have a slightly superior pawn structure and more active pieces.

C3) 14...0-0 15.♗h6 ♖e8 16.♖ad1 ♕b8 17.♕c2 ♕b4 18.♘e4! It's always a typical idea to sacrifice the b2-pawn, and invariably we get good compensation here. 18...♕xb2 19.♕a4⩲



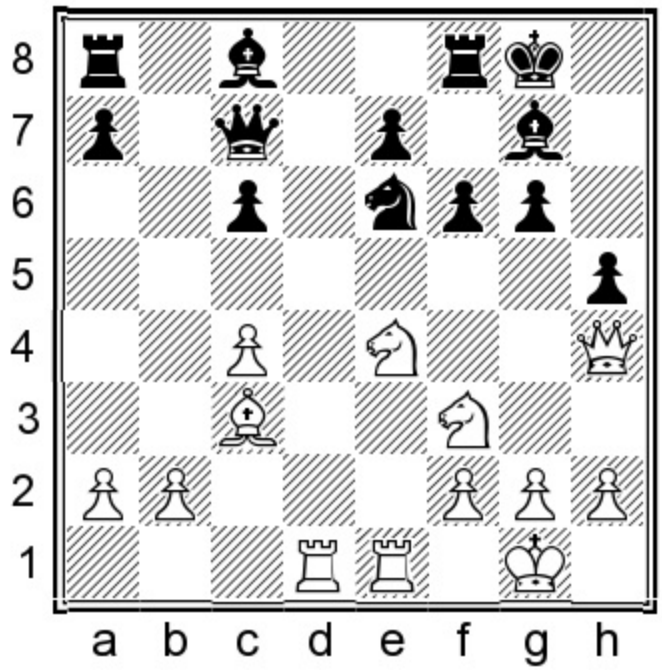
Position after: 13...h5!?

14.♗d2

14.♗e3!? Rather than play for ♘e4 and ♗c3, we are instead looking to expand on the queenside with ♘a4 and b2-b4. The variation may continue 14...♕c7 15.♖ad1 0-0 16.♘a4 ♖d8 17.♖xd8+ ♕xd8 18.♕e4 ♕d6 19.a3 ♗b7 20.b4±

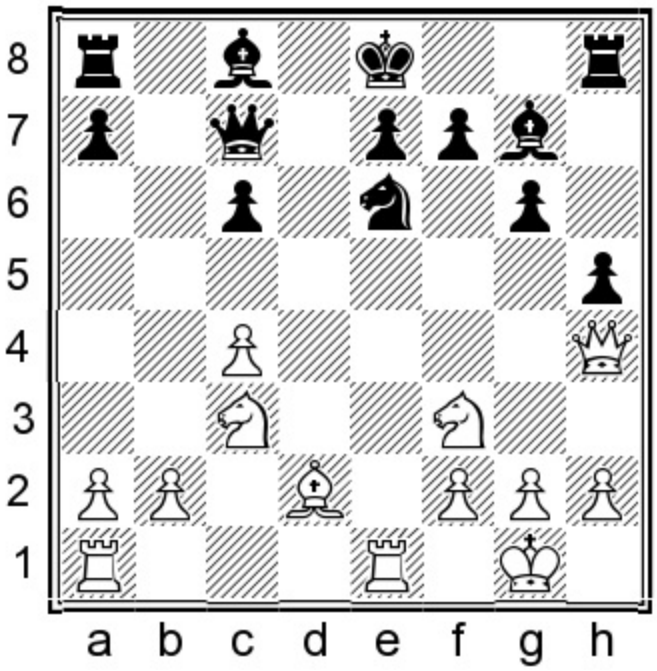
14...♕c7

14...0-0 15.♘e4 ♕c7 16.♗c3 f6 17.♖ad1



Position after: 17.♖ad1

17...♕f4? This was played in Bacrot – Blomqvist, chess.com INT 2017, where White missed the chance to capitalise. [17...♘f4 Even after this relatively better move White keeps an advantage. 18.♗a5! ♕xa5 19.♕xf4±] 18.♕xf4 ♘xf4 19.♘d4!+–



Position after: 14...♕c7

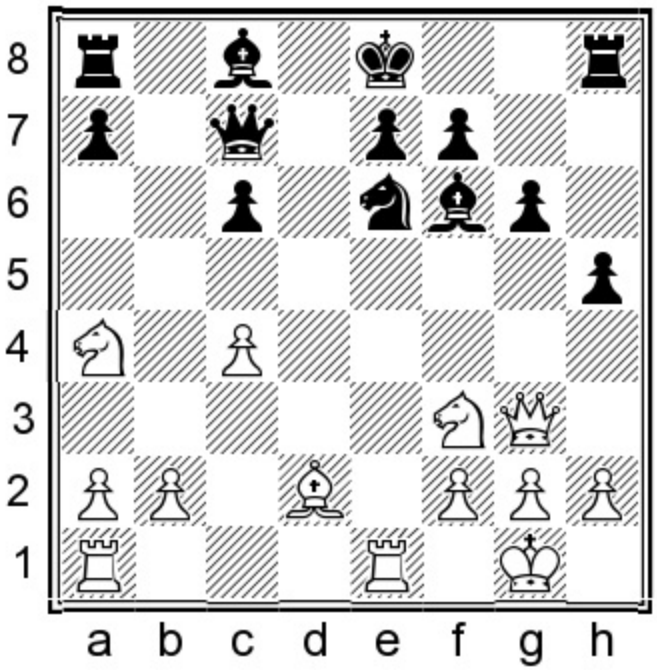
15.♘a4!

15.♘e4 allows Black the option of grabbing a pawn with 15...♗xb2

15...♗f6

15...0-0 16.♗c3±

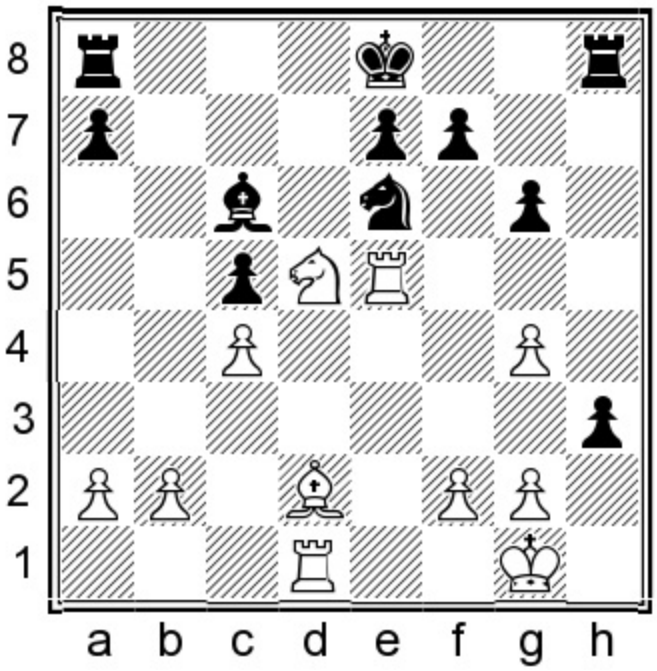
16.♕g3!



Position after: 16.♕g3!

The right moment to exchange queens. White has the better chances in the resulting ending, as Black's c-pawn is a weakness and our knights look to be better than the bishop-pair.

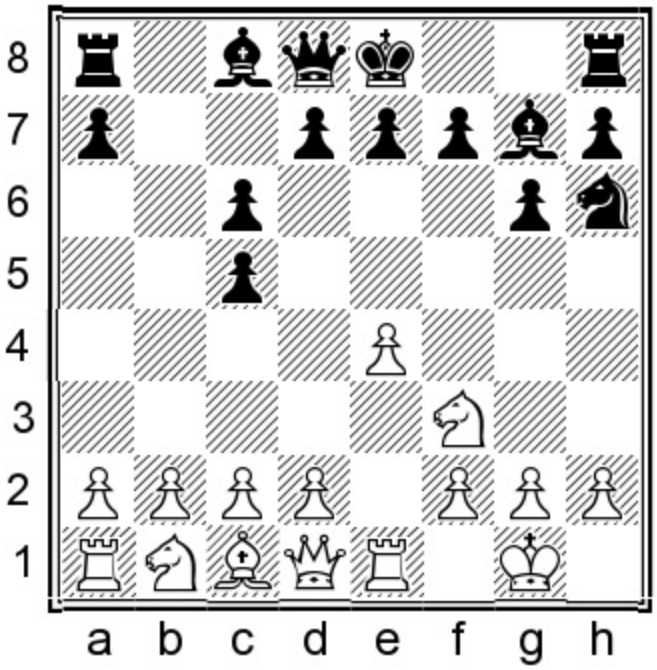
16...♕xg3 17.hxg3 c5 18.♖ad1 ♗d7 19.♘c3 ♗c6 20.♘e5 ♗xe5 21.♖xe5 h4 22.g4 h3 23.♘d5!±



Position after: 23.♘d5!±

c) 6...♘h6!? 7.c3 0-0 8.d4

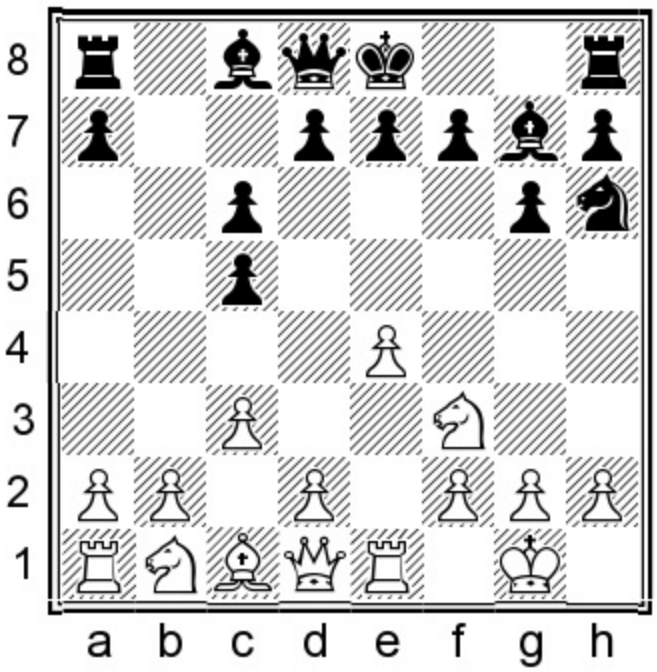
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.♗xc6 bxc6 5.0-0 ♗g7 6.♖e1 ♘h6!?



Position after: 6...♘h6!?

An interesting alternative which has grown in popularity throughout the last decade. Black will choose between ...d7-d5 or ...f7-f5, claiming that his knight is strategically better placed on h6 than f6 – in responding to a potential e4-e5.

7.c3

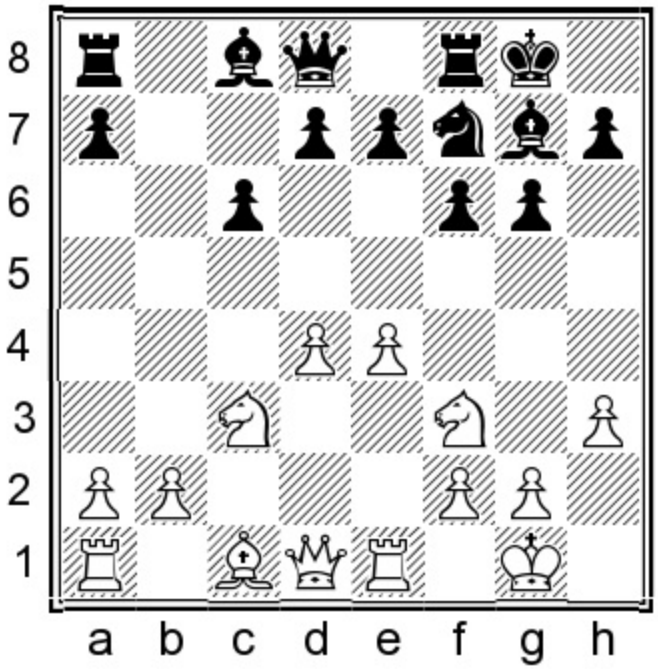


Position after: 7.c3

7...0-0

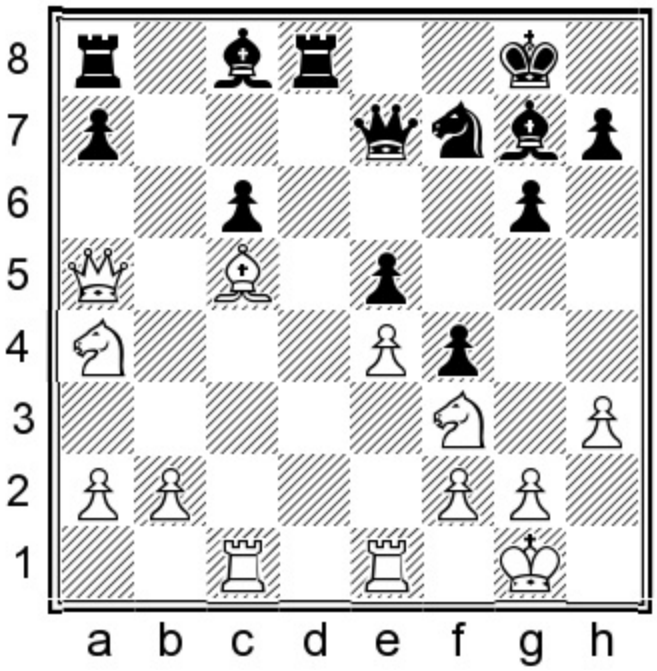
White has two options here. I've given 8.h3 as my mainline because it looks much easier to play, but 8.d4 also contains some interesting ideas and I've presented my analysis to allow the reader to explore it further if they wish.

7...f6 This has been played a few times, although it isn't at all challenging and White should have an easy advantage. 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 0-0 10.♘c3 ♘f7 11.h3



Position after: 11.h3

A) 11...e5 12.♗e3 d6 13.♖c1 ♕e7 14.♕d2 f5 15.dxe5 dxe5 16.♘a4 ♖d8 17.♕a5 f4 18.♗c5±

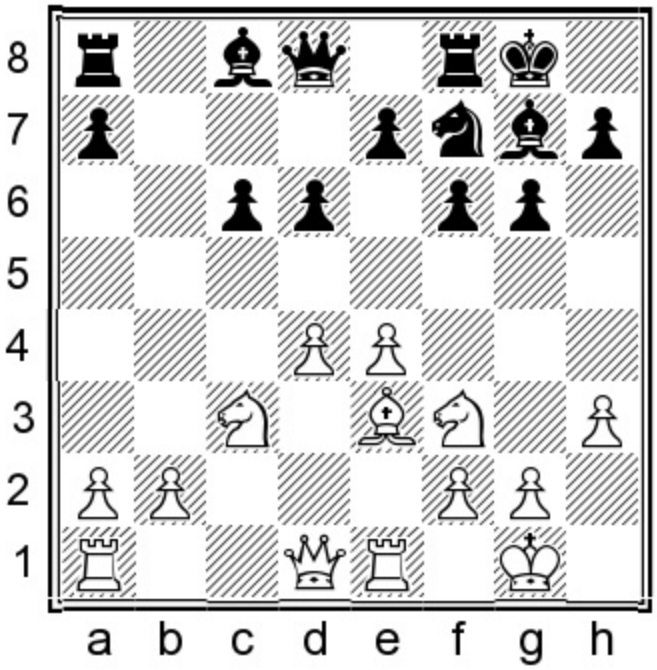


Position after: 18.♗c5±

White was already significantly better, and converted in Jakovenko – Barnaure, Antalya 2017.

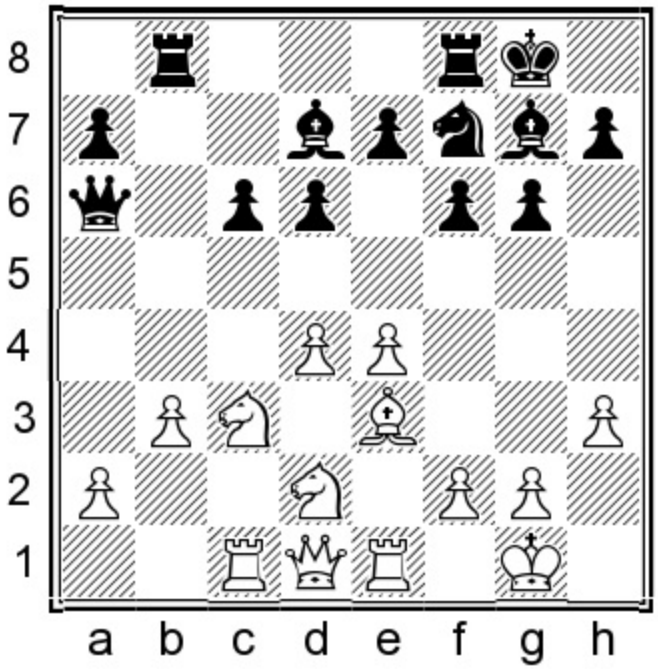
B) 11...d5?! This is positionally very dubious. 12.b3 ♖b8 13.♗a3 ♖e8 14.e5 fxe5 15.dxe5 d4 16.♕xd4 ♘xe5 17.♕e3±

C) 11...d6 12.♗e3



Position after: 12.♗e3

The following variations all illustrate how easy it is to play White's position. 12...♗d7 [12...♖b8 13.♕d2 a5 14.♖ac1 ♕b6 15.b3 ♕a6 16.♖ed1±; 12...f5 13.♖c1 fxe4 14.♘xe4 ♗e6 15.b3 ♕d7 16.♕d2 ♗d5 17.♘fg5 ♘xg5 18.♗xg5±] 13.♖c1 ♖b8 14.b3 ♕a5 15.♘d2 ♕a6

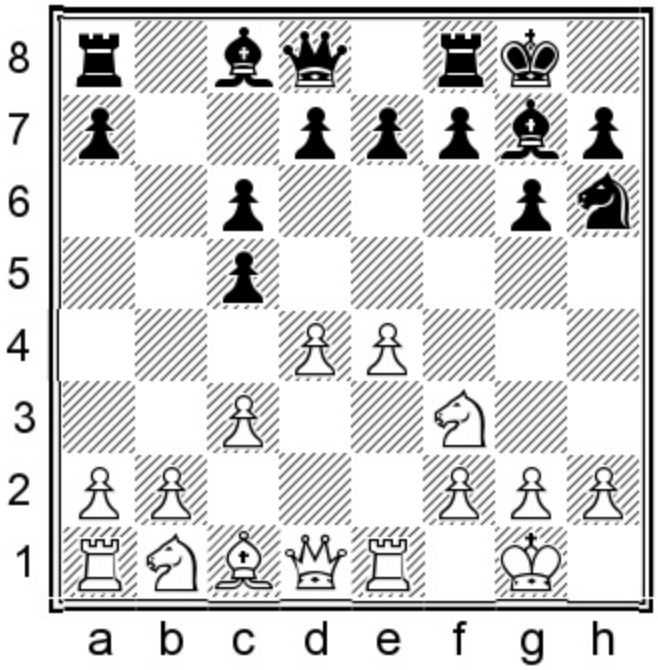


Position after: 15...♕a6

16.f4! ♖fd8 17.♘f3±

8.d4

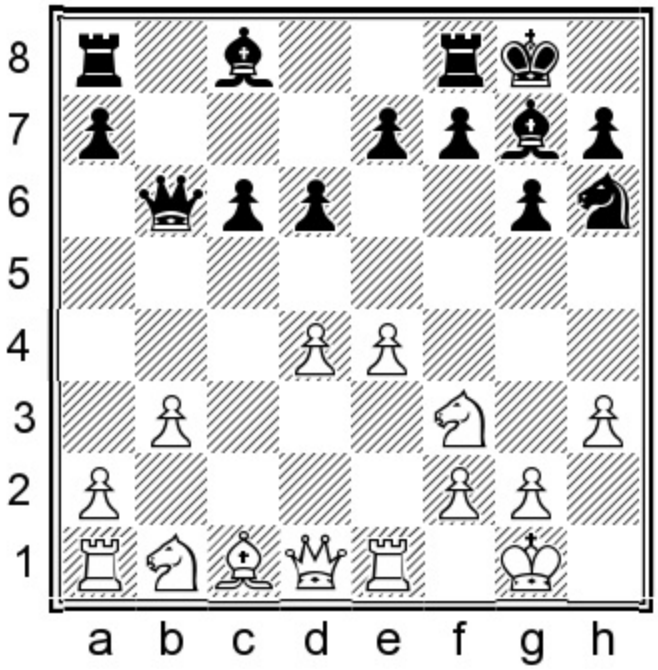
8.h3 is my preferred choice, and will be examined next.



Position after: 8.d4

8...cxd4

8...♕b6 has been played several times, but after 9.h3! White gets a comfortable game. 9...d6 [9...f6 10.b3! cxd4 11.cxd4 ♘f7 12.♘c3± White converted his advantage to victory in Roques – Molzahn, ICCF email 2015.] 10.b3 cxd4 11.cxd4



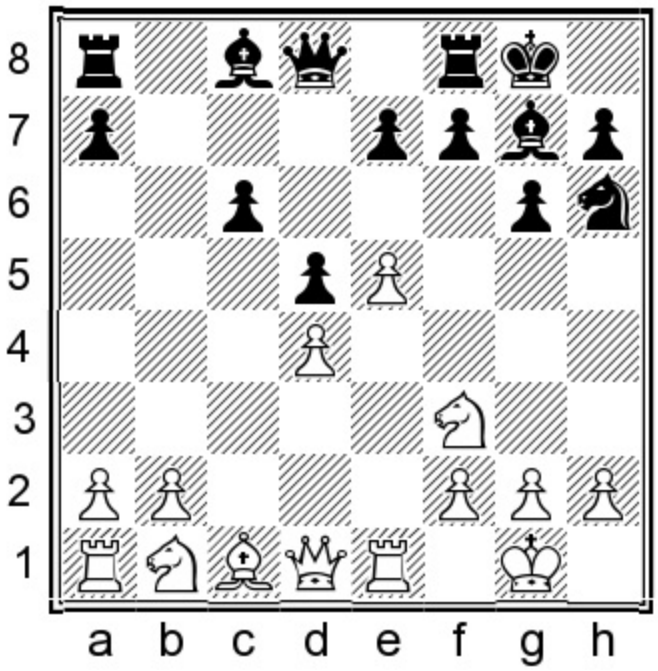
Position after: 11.cxd4

11...c5 [11...a5 12.♘c3±] 12.♗g5 f6 13.dxc5 dxc5 14.♗d2±

9.cxd4 d5

9...f5 10.e5 ♘f7 11.♘a3 We are simply a tempo up on the corresponding line after 8.h3.

10.e5



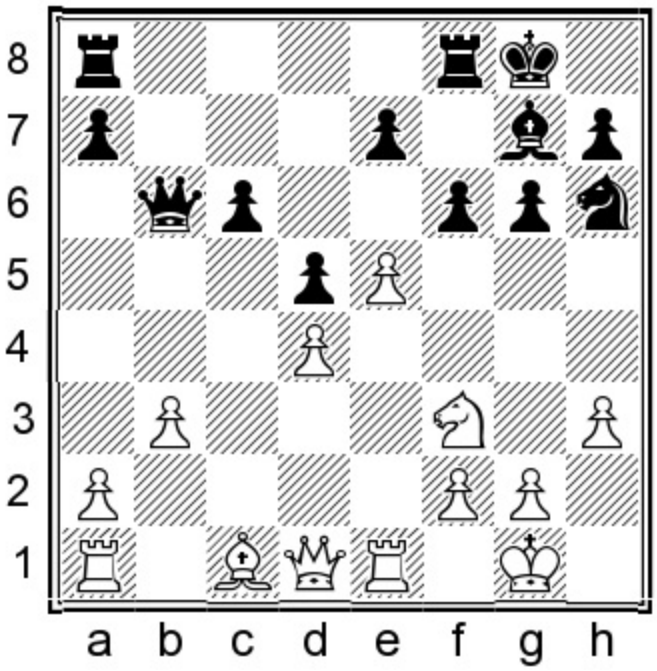
Position after: 10.e5

This position is very much reminiscient of the lines we saw after 4.0-0 and 5...♘f6. Our analysis will show that many of the ideas remain the same. As always, the main issue for Black is his dark-squared bishop – which he'll try to activate with ...f7-f6.

10...f6

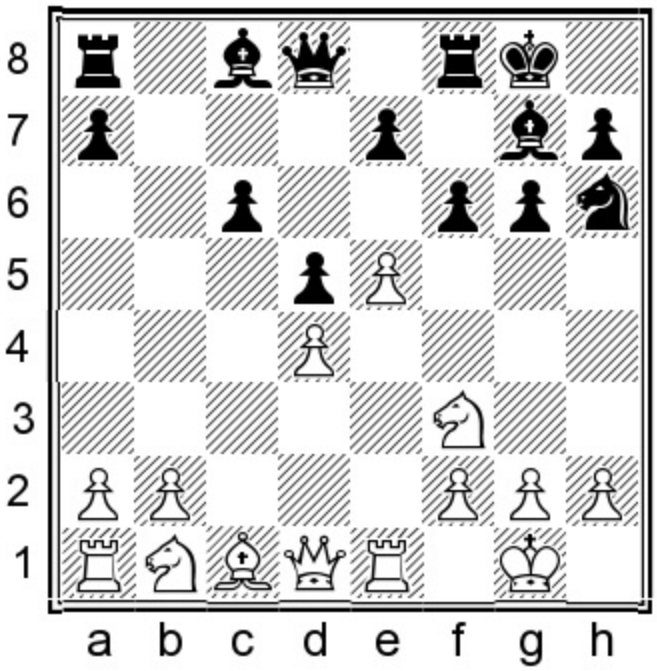
This is another moment where White has a lot of options, and my choice of analysis is grounded on illustrating a wide variety of ideas to inspire the reader.

10...♗g4?! I don't think it's a good idea for Black to trade off his only active bishop, as he'll be left with two fairly useless minor pieces. 11.♘bd2 ♕b6 [11...♕c8 was played in Ghaem Maghami – Maghsoodloo, Tehran 2019. It didn't cause White any difficulties in getting a pleasant position after 12.h3 ♗h5 13.♕c2±] 12.h3 ♗xf3 13.♘xf3 f6 14.b3



Position after: 14.b3

14...♘f5 [14...♘f7 15.♗a3 ♖fe8 16.♖c1±; 14...fxe5 15.♗xh6! ♗xh6 16.♖xe5±] 15.♗f4±

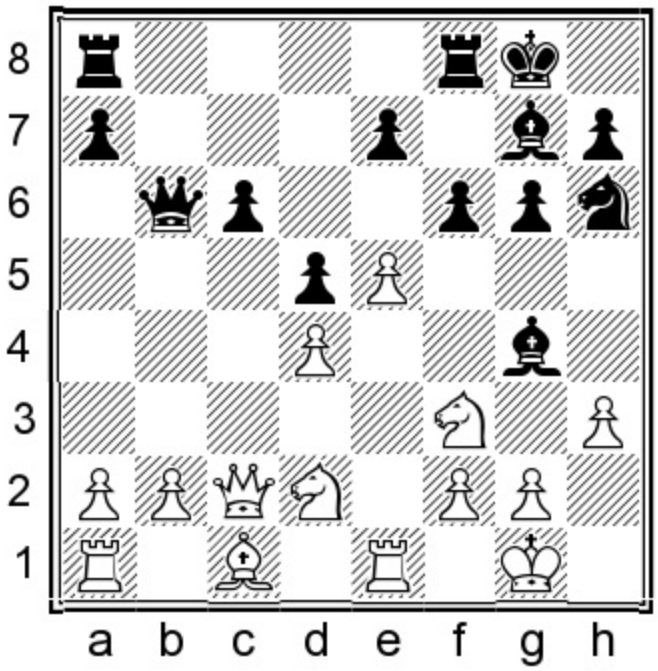


Position after: 10...f6

11.♘bd2

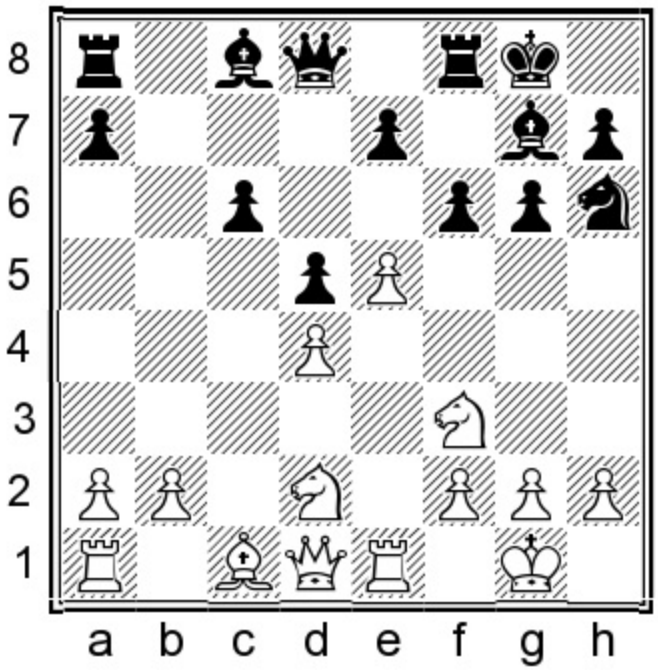
11.♕c2!? An interesting alternative, aiming to stop a quick ...c6-c5 break. 11...♗g4 As previously mentioned, Black will struggle for activity if he trades his light-squared bishop. [11...♕b6 12.♗xh6!

A concrete idea which demonstrates how, in this position, the pair of knights can more effective than the two bishops. 12...♗xh6 13.e6 ♕c7 14.♘c3 ♕d6 15.♕e2 ♕b4 16.h4!→] 12.♘bd2 ♕b6 13.h3



Position after: 13.h3

13...♗xf3 [13...fxe5!? 14.hxg4 ♘xg4 15.♘c4! dxc4 16.♕xc4+ ♔h8 17.♕e6 ♖f5 18.♖e4 ♘f6 19.♖xe5±] 14.♘xf3 ♘f5 15.exf6 exf6 16.b3±



Position after: 11.♘bd2

11...fxe5

A) 11...♘f7 12.e6! ♘d6 13.♕c2 ♕b6 14.♘b3± White was clearly on top and won a fantastic game in Kollars – Mikaelyan, Rome 2019.

B) 11...♗g4 This obviously doesn't both us after the simple 12.h3±.

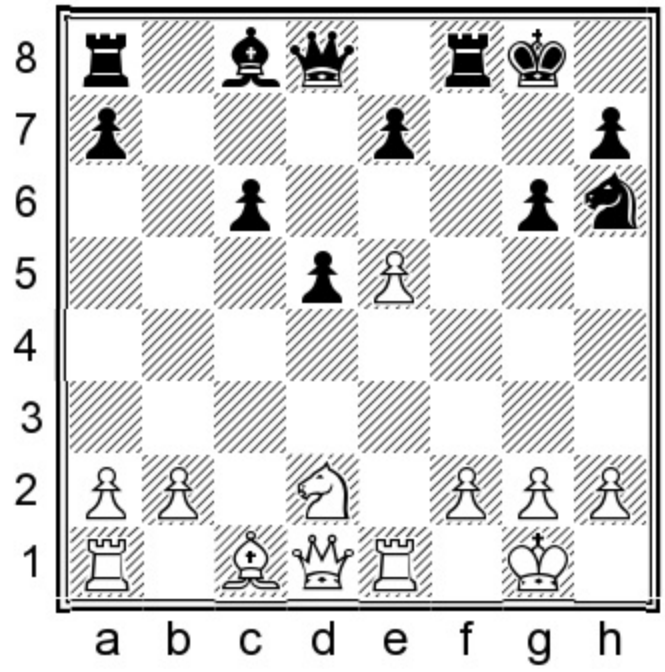
12.♘xe5

Black is pretty much forced to exchange off his dark-squared bishop, or White will be in complete control after either ♘b3 or ♘df3.

12...♗xe5 13.dxe5

This position has occurred in a few high level games, and is pretty difficult to assess. On the basis of opposite-coloured bishops, White is doing very well as Black has some obvious dark-squared weaknesses. On the other hand, Black's pieces look more active and he has the potential to cause us problems with moves such as ...♕b6 and ...♗a6. Black also has the possibility to advance his c- and d-pawns, whilst we may counter-attack on the kingside with a timely e5-e6.

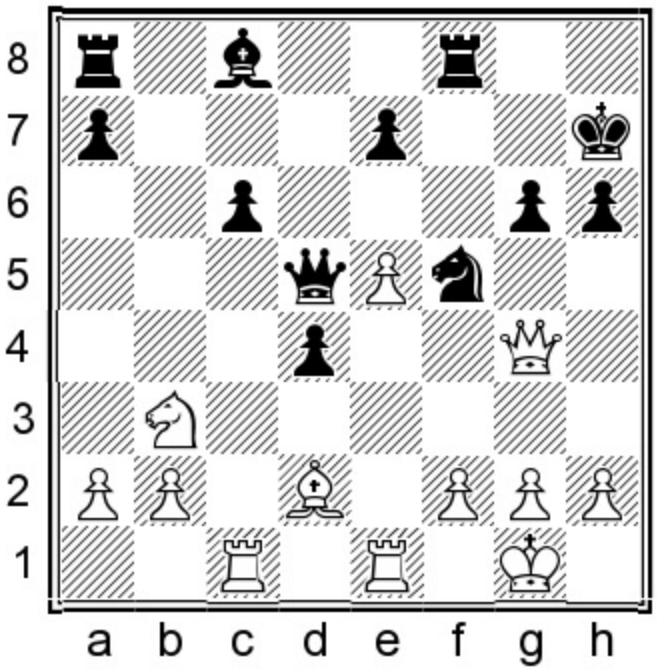
13.♖xe5 ♘g4 14.♖e2? ♕d6–+



Position after: 13.dxe5

13...♕b6

13...♘f5?! This looks to be too slow and gives us the opportunity to put our pieces on their ideal squares. 14.♘b3 d4 15.♗g5 h6 [15...♕d5 16.♖c1±] 16.♗d2 ♕d5 17.♕g4 ♔h7 18.♖ac1



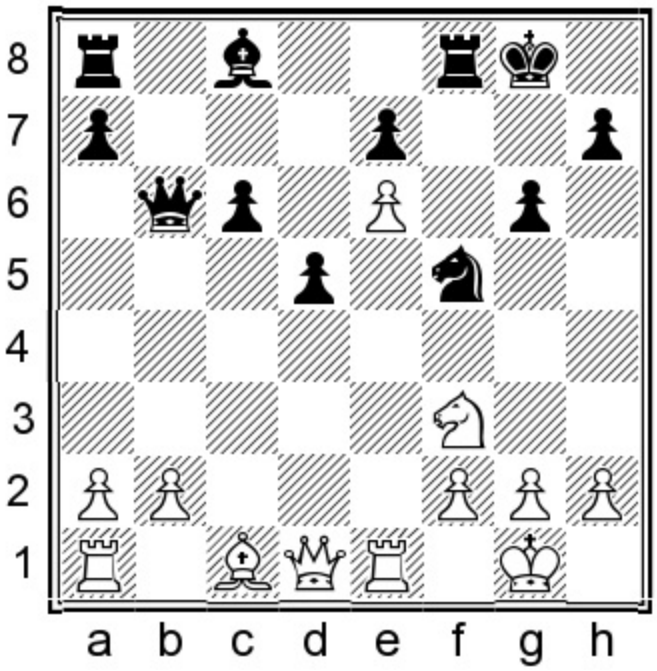
Position after: 18.♖ac1

18...♘e3 [18...♗e6 19.♖c5 ♕d7 20.♖ec1±] 19.♕g3! ♘f5 20.♕d3 ♖b8 21.e6!↑

14.♘f3 ♘f5

Many different moves have been tried in this position, but the direct approach is:

15.e6!?



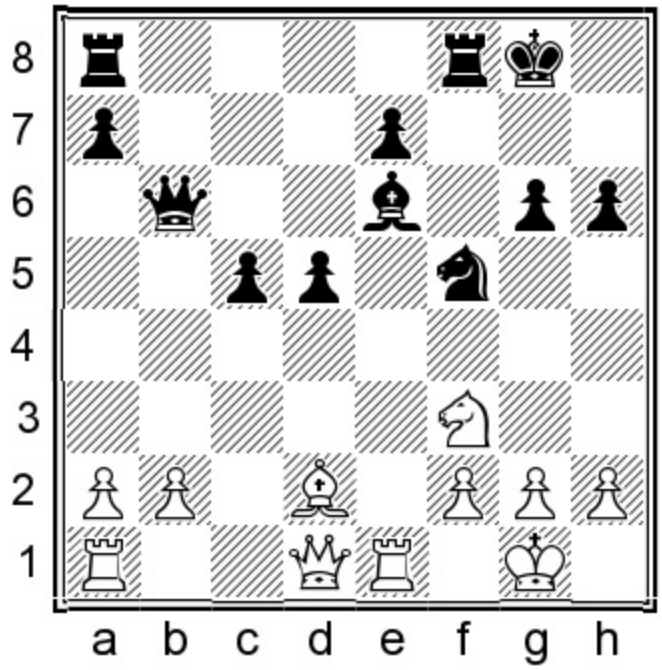
Position after: 15.e6!?

Preventing Black from taking over the initiative (...e6, ...c5 etc.)

15...♘h4!

After this move, I don’t see a path to an advantage.

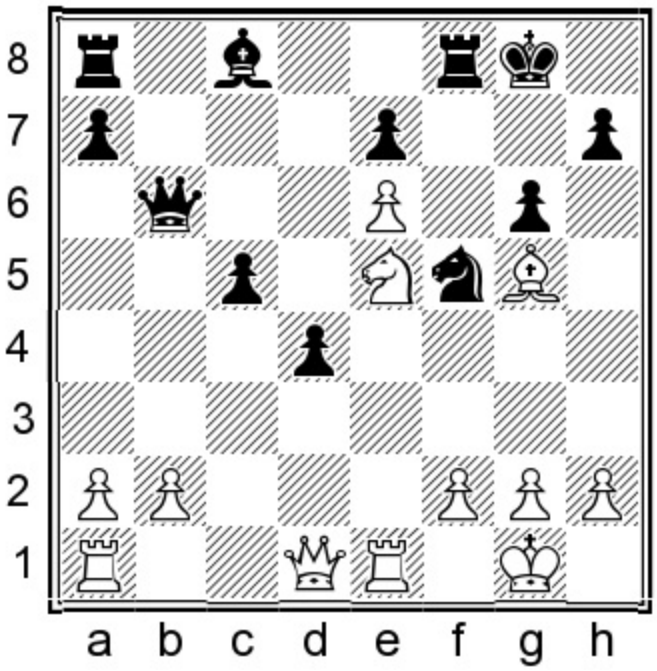
A) 15...c5 16.♗g5! The pawn sacrifice ensures that Black will face a more difficult game, despite being a pawn up. [16.♕xd5?! ♗b7∞] 16...h6 [16...♗b7 17.♘e5 ♕xe6 18.♕d2 d4 19.b3⩲] 17.♗d2 ♗xe6



Position after: 17...♗xe6

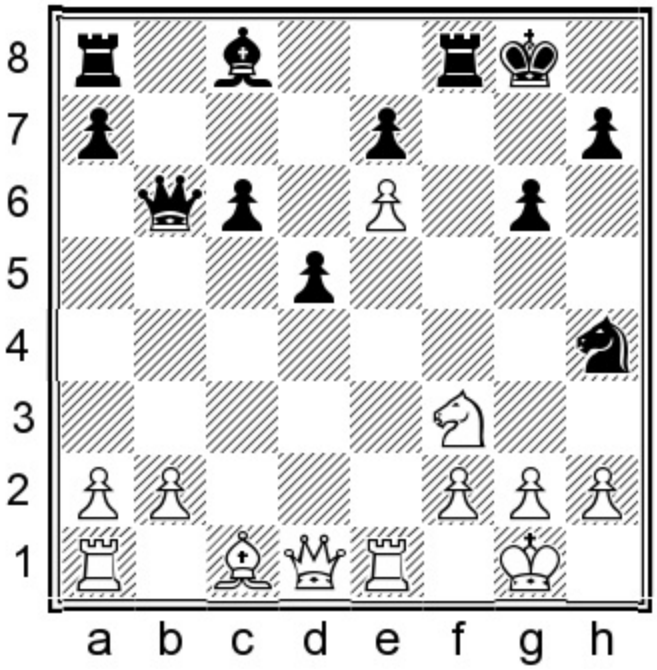
18.g4! ♘d4 19.♘xd4 cxd4 20.♗xh6 ♖f7 21.h3±

B) 15...d4 16.♘e5 c5 17.♗g5



Position after: 17.♗g5

Once again, the pawn sacrifice causes Black a few problems. 17...♗xe6 18.♕e2 ♘g7 [18...♗d5 19.♘d7] 19.♗xe7 ♖fe8 20.♗g5±



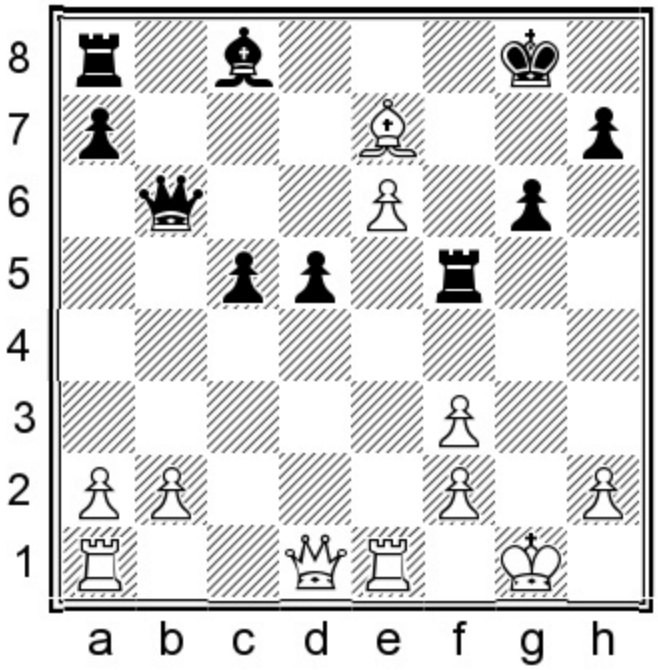
Position after: 15...♘h4!

16.♗g5

16.♗e3 ♘xf3+ 17.♕xf3 ♖xf3 18.♗xb6 ♖f6 19.♗c5 Neither side had hopes for victory in Kavc –

Sitorus, ICCF email 2016.

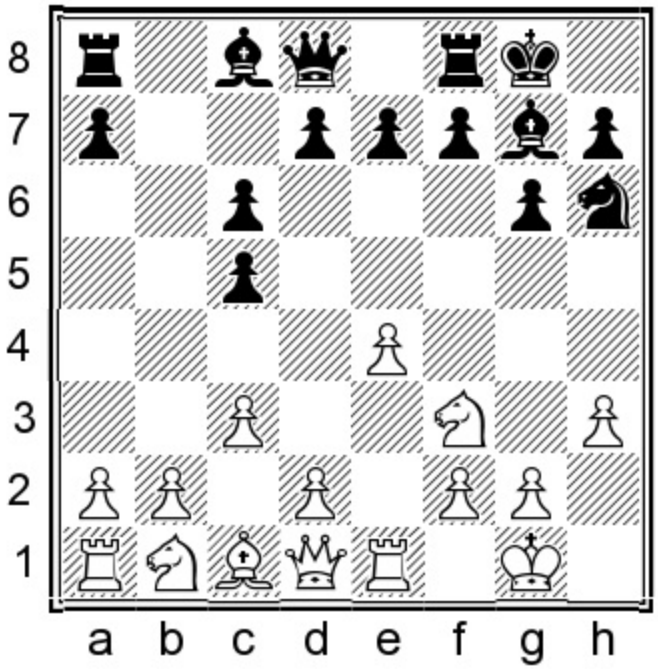
16...♘xf3+ 17.gxf3 ♖f5 18.♗xe7 c5!∞



Position after: 18...c5!∞

d) 6...♘h6!? 7.c3 0-0 8.h3

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.♗xc6 bxc6 5.0-0 ♗g7 6.♖e1 ♘h6!? 7.c3 0-0 8.h3

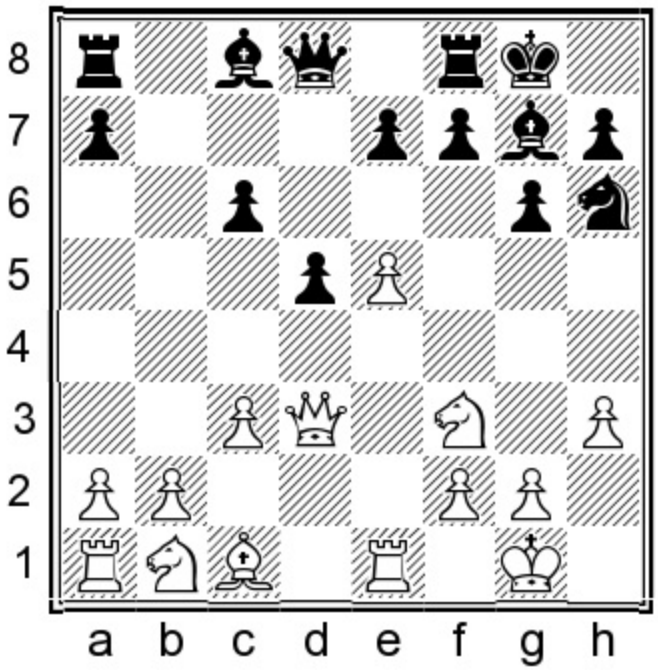


Position after: 8.h3

A very useful move, waiting to see which pawn break Black chooses to employ.

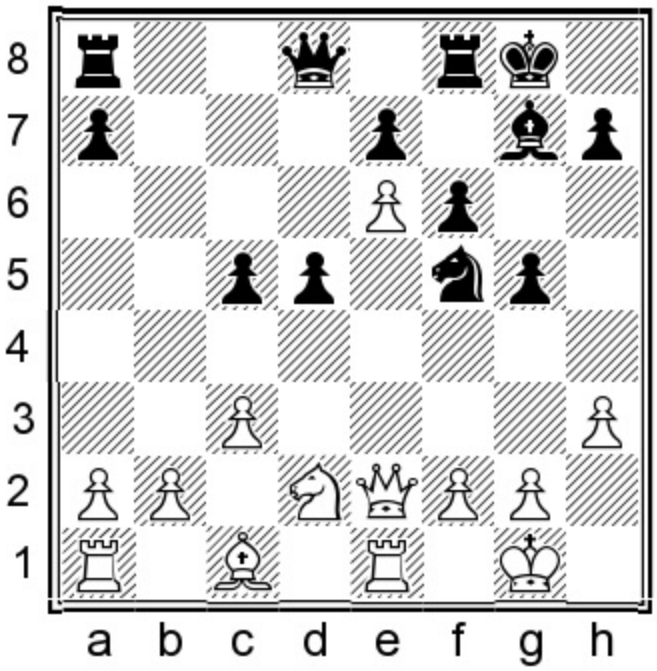
8...f5

8...d5 9.d3 c4 For a long time this looked to be a route to direct equality for Black, but White has a nice way to keep the advantage. 10.e5! In similar style to what we've seen before, we're restricting Black's dark-squared bishop and playing positionally on the dark-squares. Our plans will be similar to those we analysed after 8.d4. 10...cxd3 11.♕xd3



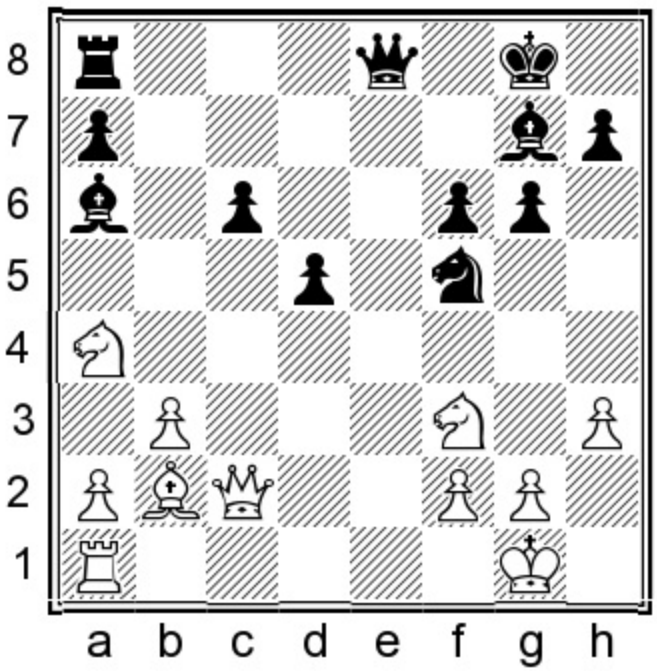
Position after: 11.♕xd3

A) 11...♗f5 12.♕e2 f6 13.e6! c5 14.♘h4! [14.g4?! gives Black the option to mix things up after 14...♘xg4! 15.hxg4 ♗xg4∞] 14...g5 15.♘xf5 ♘xf5 16.♘d2± Our e6-pawn is a big strength, and prevents Black from achieving any piece co-ordination.



Position after: 16.♘d2±

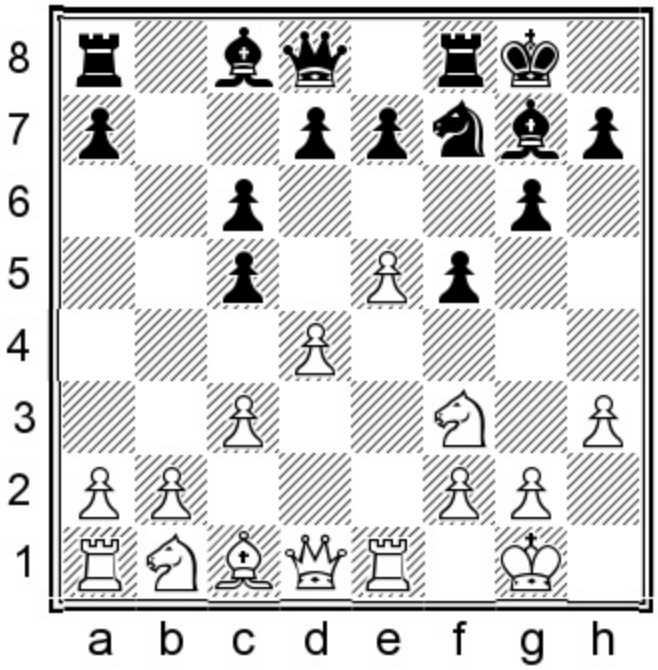
B) 11...f6 12.exf6 exf6 13.c4! ♘f5 [13...♗a6 Black will simply waste time if he tries to capture our pawn, as he won't be able to defend his weaknesses. 14.♗f4 ♗xc4 15.♕c2 ♘f7 16.♘bd2 ♗a6 17.♘d4±] 14.♘c3 ♗a6 15.♕c2 ♗xc4 16.b3 ♗a6 17.♘a4 ♖e8 18.♖xe8+ ♕xe8 19.♗b2±



Position after: 19.♗b2±

We have fantastic compensation for the sacrificed pawns. In particular, our knights can jump to some nice squares, and Black's g7-bishop remains extremely passive.

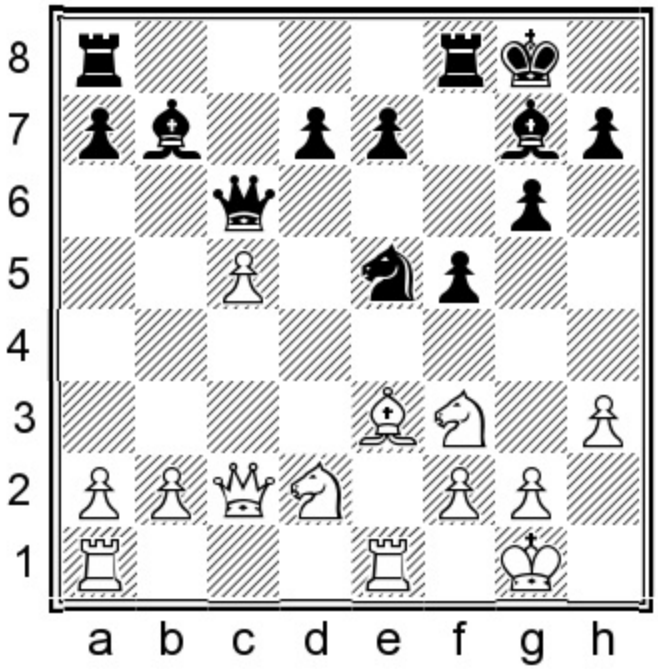
9.e5 ♘f7 10.d4



Position after: 10.d4

10...cxd4

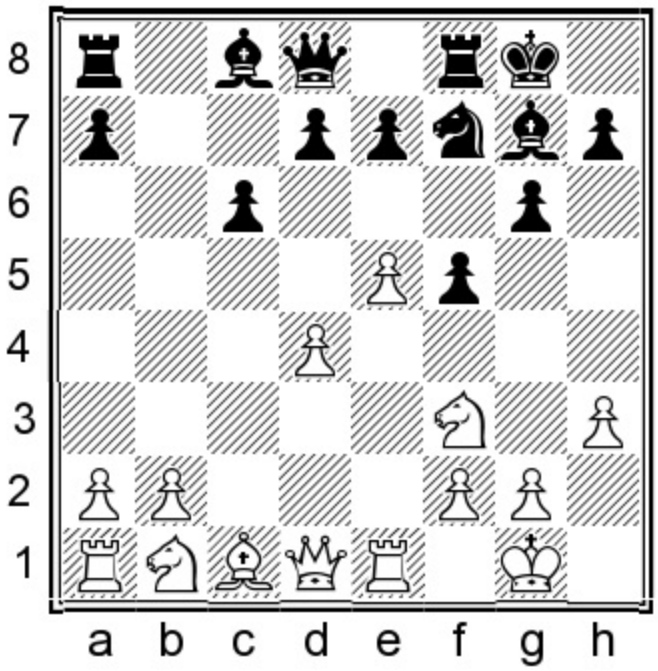
10...♕b6 11.♕c2! Anticipating a capture on d4 followed by ...c6-c5. 11...cxd4 12.cxd4 c5 13.dxc5 ♕c6 14.♗e3 ♗b7 15.♘bd2 ♘xe5



Position after: 15...♘xe5

As in the mainline Black is able to win his pawn back, but we have a nice advantage as we have a superior pawn structure. In particular, Black's central pawns are weaknesses and offer nice semi-open files for our rooks to stand on. 16.♖ad1 ♘f7 17.♘c4 ♕b5 18.b3 ♖ad8 19.♘g5±

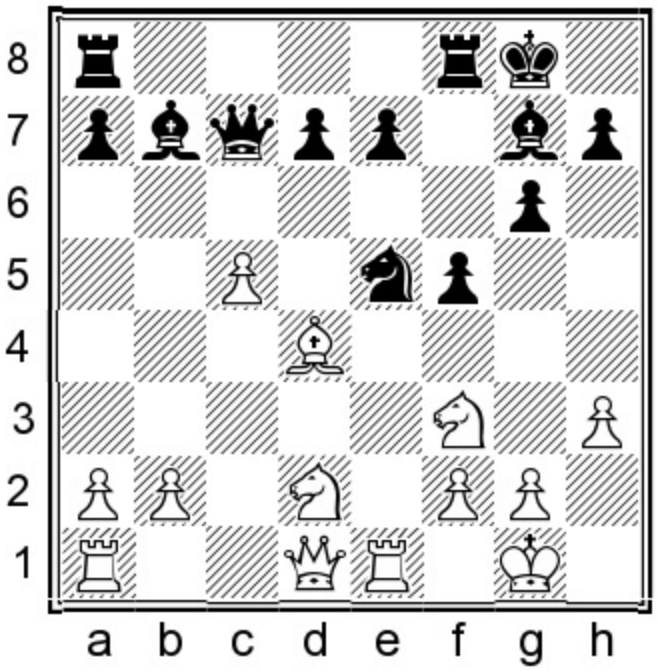
11.cxd4



Position after: 11.cxd4

11...♗b7

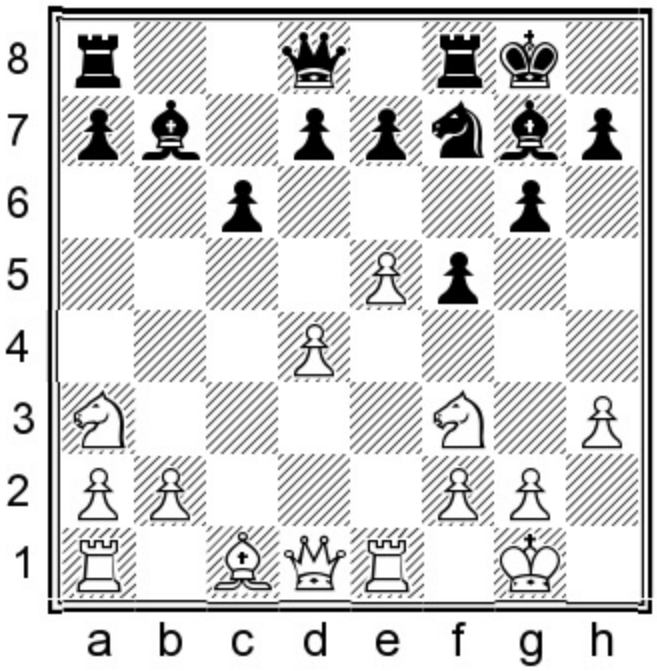
11...c5 12.dxc5 ♕c7 Our approach remains the same here. 13.♗e3 ♗b7 14.♘bd2 ♘xe5 15.♗d4!



Position after: 15.♗d4!

A clever trick. Black is forced to exchange dark-squared bishops, and after 15...♘xf3+ 16.♘xf3 ♗xf3? we are just winning with 17.♖xe7!+–

12.♘a3!

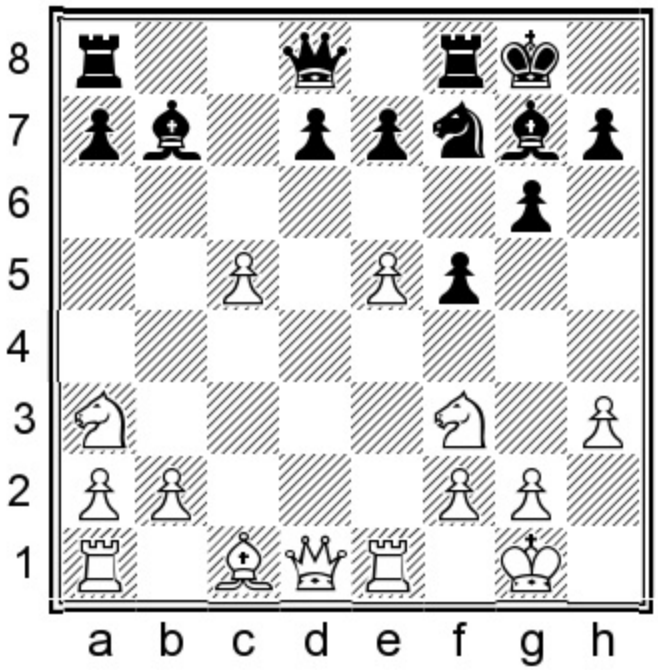


Position after: 12.♘a3!

More common in practice is 12.♘c3, but our knight stands far better on a3 as it can jump to c4 or c2.

12...♖c8

A) 12...c5!? 13.dxc5

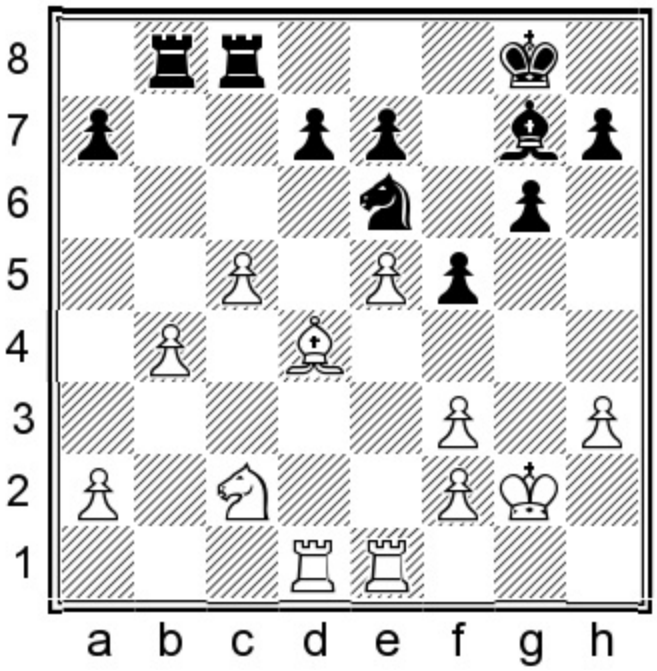


Position after: 13.dxc5

A1) 13...♕c7 14.♗e3 ♗xf3 15.♕xf3 ♘xe5 16.♕g3±

A2) 13...♗xf3 14.♕xf3 ♖c8 [14...♗xe5 15.♘c4 ♗f6 16.♖b1 also favours White] 15.b4 d6 16.♖d1 ♗xe5 17.♖b1 ♕d7 18.♕b3±

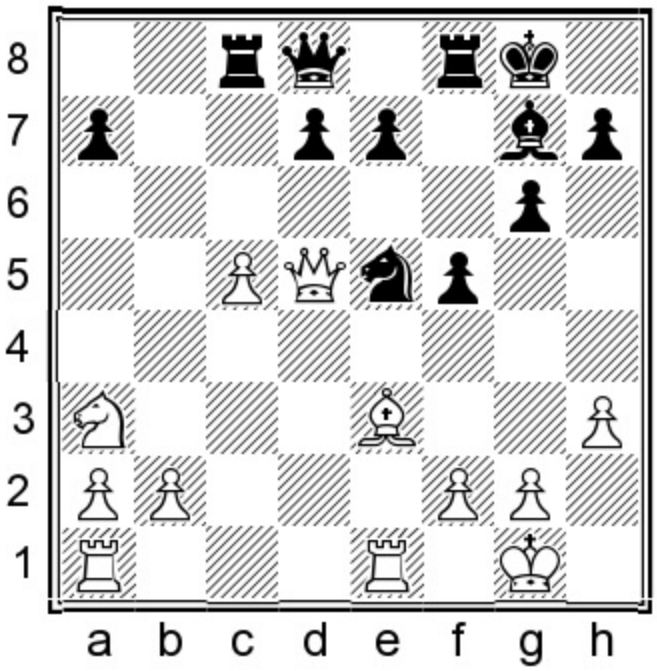
A3) 13...♕a5 14.♗e3 ♕b4 15.♕d4! ♕xd4 16.♗xd4 ♗xf3 17.gxf3 ♘g5 18.♔g2 ♘e6 19.♖ad1 ♖fc8 20.b4 ♖ab8 21.♘c2± In Svidler – Dubov, Hamburg 2019, the game was prematurely agreed a draw – in my opinion, White still has a pleasant edge.



Position after: 21.♘c2±

B) 12...d6 Black will be too passive here after 13.e6! ♘h8 14.♗f4 g5 15.♘xg5 h6 16.♘f7 ♘xf7 17.exf7+ ♖xf7 18.♕h5 ♖f6 19.♖ac1±

13.♗e3 c5 14.dxc5 ♗xf3 15.♕xf3 ♘xe5 16.♕d5+

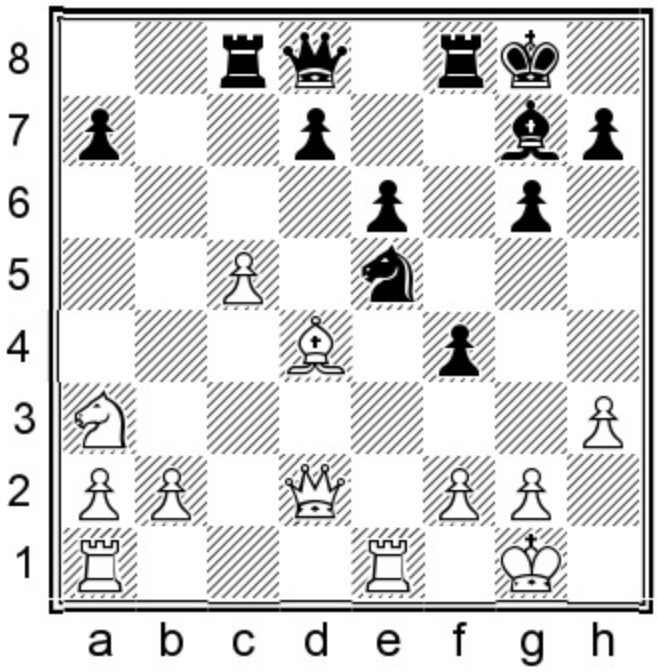


Position after: 16.♕d5+

16...e6

16...♘f7 17.♖ab1 e6 18.♕d3 ♕h4 19.f3!± This position was reached in several correspondence games, but White's position is definitively more pleasant.

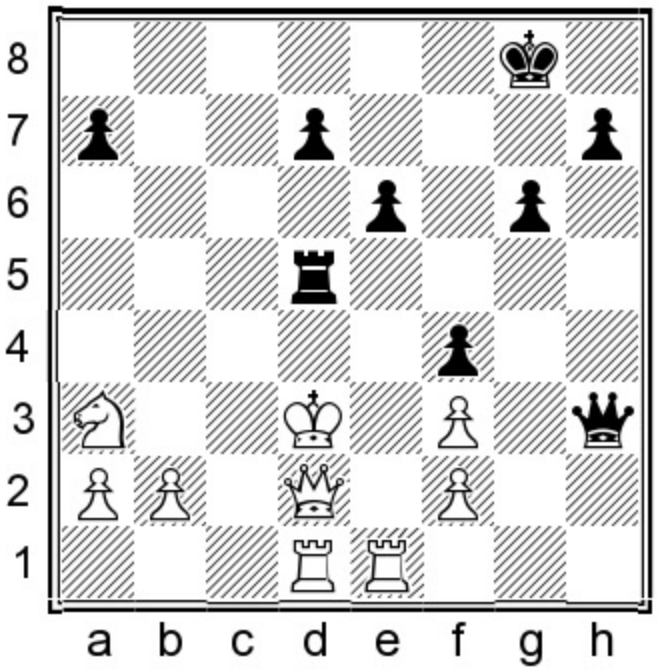
17.♕d2 f4 18.♗d4



Position after: 18.♗d4

18...♕g5

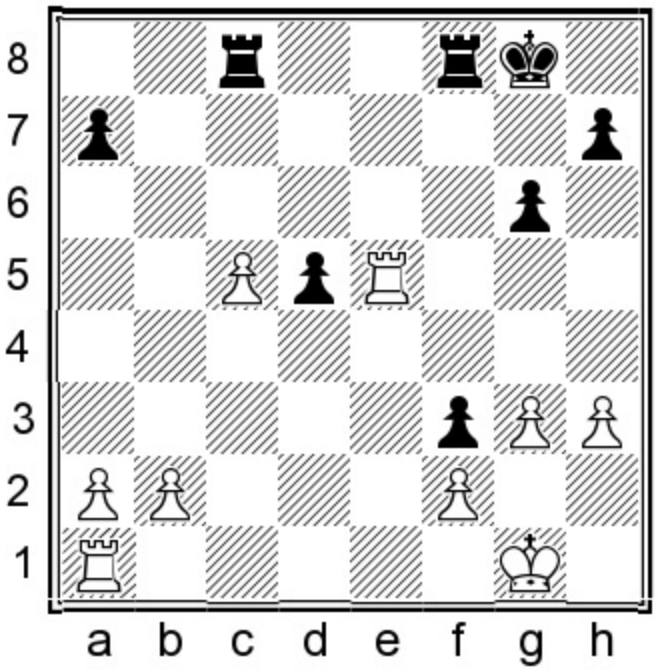
18...♖f5 Black attempted to go for the 'hack' in Wang Hao – Gelfand, but after 19.♖ad1 ♘f3+? 20.gxf3 ♕h4 21.♗xg7 ♖cxc5 22.♔g2 ♖g5+ 23.♔f1 ♕xh3+ 24.♔e2 ♖ge5+ 25.♗xe5 ♖xe5+ 26.♔d3 ♖d5+



Position after: 26...♖d5+

White should have played on with 27.♔c2!+– rather than 27.♔e2.

19.♗xe5 ♗xe5 20.♘c4 ♗g7 21.♕xd7 f3 22.g3 ♕d5 23.♕xd5 exd5 24.♘e5 ♗xe5 25.♖xe5



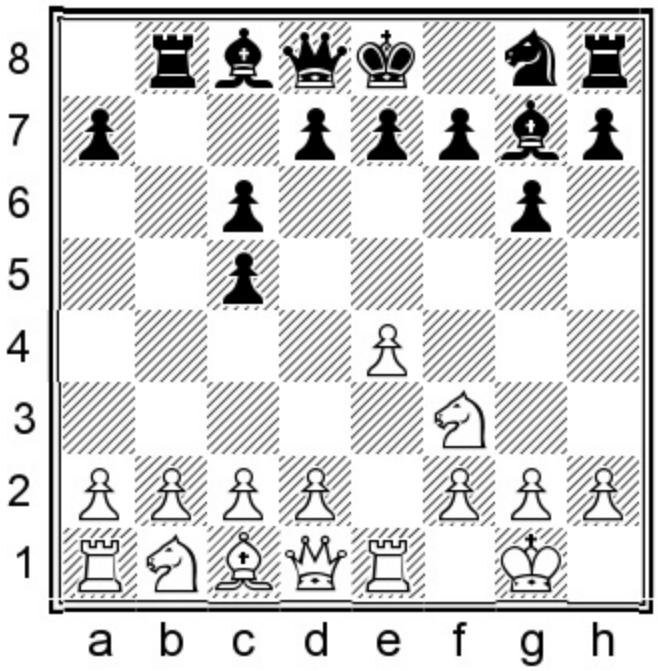
Position after: 25.♖xe5

White retains the better chances in this rook ending.

25...♖xc5 26.g4 ♖c2 27.♖xd5 ♖xb2 28.a4±

e) 6...♖b8!?

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.♗xc6 bxc6 5.0-0 ♗g7 6.♖e1 ♖b8!?



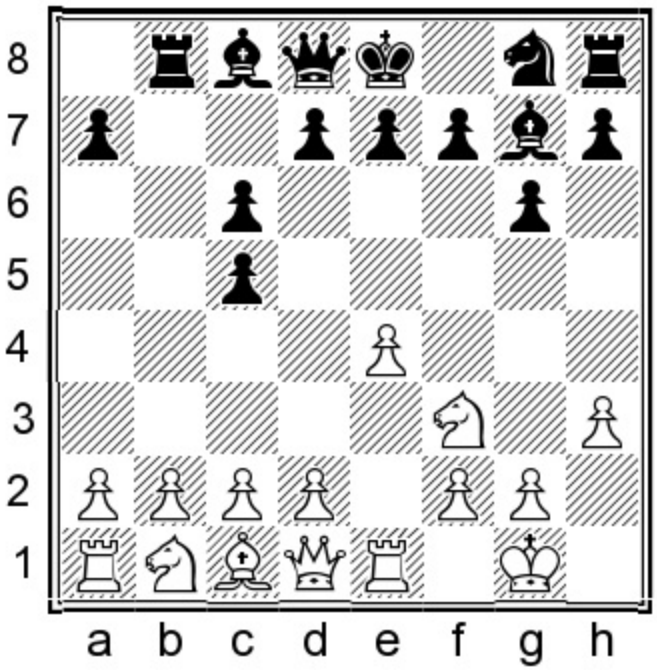
Position after: 6...♖b8!?

Quite a clever idea – Black is waiting for us to show our hand.

7.h3!

We respond with our own waiting move. As we know, h2-h3 is always very useful, and the following variations illustrate some really interesting ideas that we have at our disposal.

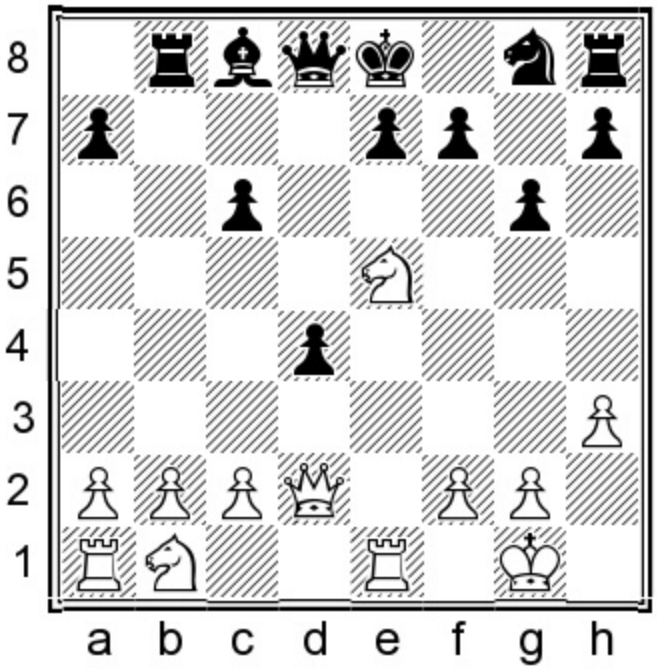
7.c3 This helps to illustrate the point of Black's 6th move, as after 7...♘f6 8.e5 ♘d5 9.c4 Black has gained a move over 6...♘f6.



Position after: 7.h3!

7...e5

A) 7...♘h6 8.d4! As we've played the useful h2-h3, Black's knight will find itself running out of squares. 8...cxd4 9.♗f4 d6 [9...♖b5 10.c3!±] 10.♕d2 ♘g8 11.e5 dxe5 12.♗xe5 ♗xe5 13.♘xe5

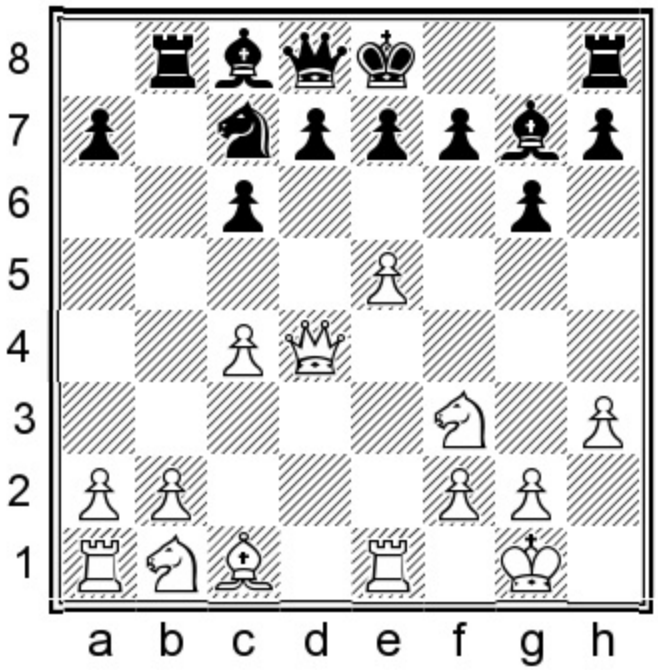


Position after: 13.♘xe5

13...♕d6 [13...♖xb2 14.♘c3! c5 15.♘a4 ♖b7 16.♘xc5 ♖c7 17.♘e4±] 14.♘a3 c5 15.♖ad1 ♗e6 16.c3

♘f6 17.♕h6±

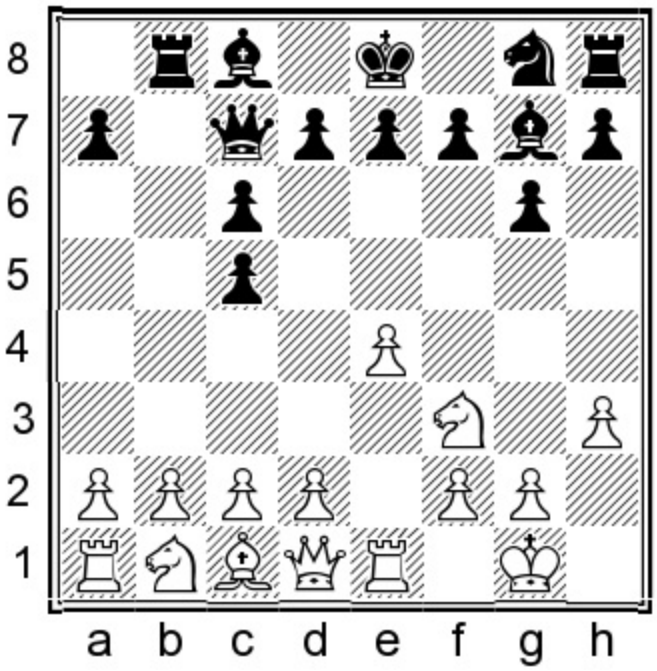
B) 7...♘f6 This line resembles 6...♘f6, with the addition of ...♖b8 and h2-h3. In my opinion, this benefits White – particularly when we realise that the a7-pawn is hanging in a lot of lines. 8.e5 ♘d5 9.c4 ♘c7 10.d4 cxd4 11.♕xd4



Position after: 11.♕xd4

Black now has to spend a move defending the a-pawn, and White gets a clearly preferable version of 6... ♘f6. 11...♖b7 12.♕h4 ♘e6 13.♘c3 d6 14.♗h6 0-0 [14...♗xe5 15.♘xe5 dxe5 16.♖xe5 f6 17.♖e2 ♔f7 18.♗e3±] 15.♖ad1 ♖d7 16.♗xg7 ♔xg7 17.♘g5±

C) 7...♕c7

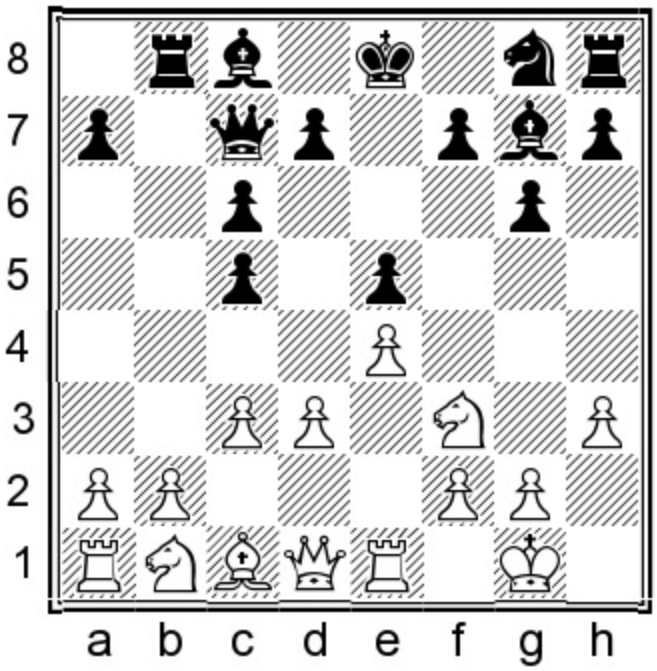


Position after: 7...♕c7

Another waiting move from Black. This correlates to 6...♕c7, with the additional ...♖b8 and h2-h3 having been played. The simplest move for me is 8.d3, which I also recommend after 6...♕c7, and the same lines will apply here.

C1) 8.c3 This was played in Giri – Grischuk, Stavanger 2015, and White reached a winning position very quickly. However, Black could have improved here with 8...d6! 9.d4 cxd4 10.cxd4 ♘f6 11.♘c3 0-0 Although White is still better, I don't think Black's position is particularly difficult to play.

C2) 8.d3 e5 [8...d6 9.e5!±; 8...f6 9.c3±] 9.c3

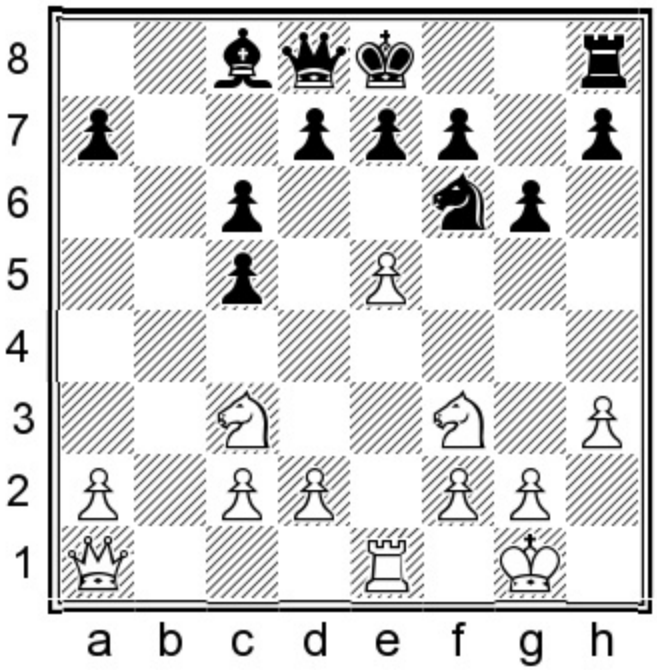


Position after: 9.c3

9...♘e7 [9...d6 10.d4 cxd4 11.cxd4 exd4 12.♗f4 ♘e7 13.♘xd4 ♖xb2 14.♘f3!±] 10.♗e3! d6 11.d4 cxd4 12.cxd4 ♖xb2 [12...exd4 13.♗xd4±] 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.♘c3±

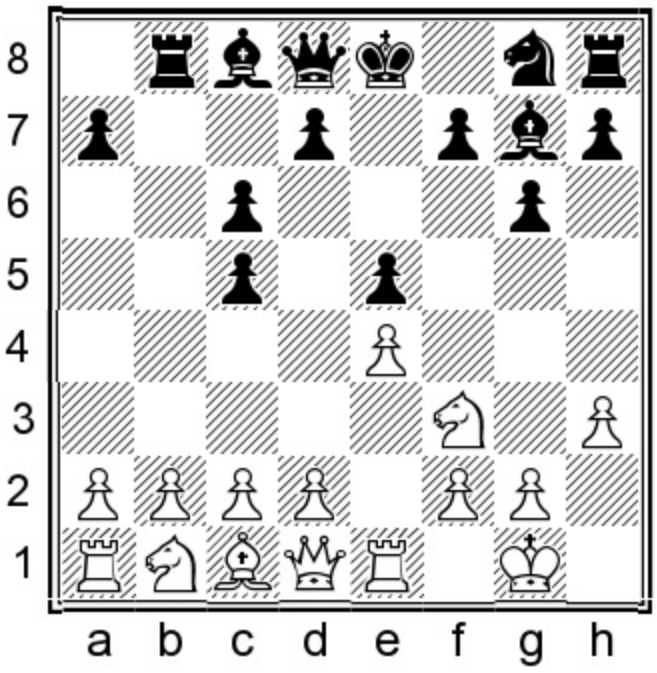
D) 7...♗xb2?! Usually it is too risky for Black to waste time capturing on b2, especially if he's exchanging off his dark-squared bishop. 8.♗xb2 ♖xb2 9.d4 ♕a5 10.♕c1 ♖b7 11.dxc5 ♕xc5 12.e5 d5 13.exd6 ♕xd6 14.♘c3±

E) 7...♖xb2?! 8.♗xb2 ♗xb2 9.♘c3 ♗xa1 10.♕xa1 ♘f6 11.e5



Position after: 11.e5

11...♘h5 [11...♘d5 12.♘e4 0-0 13.♘xc5 White recovered his pawn and held a comfortable advantage in Schnabel – Dunlop, ICCF email 2017.] 12.♘e4 0-0 13.♘xc5 d6 14.♘e4±

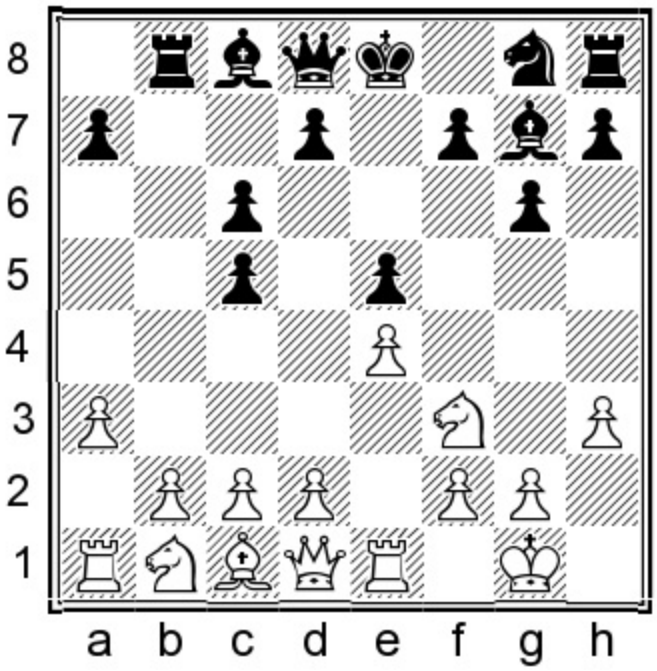


Position after: 7...e5

8.a3!?N

It seems logical to exploit Black's premature closure of the a1-h8 diagonal by launching a quick a3-b4 break on the queenside.

8.c3 This also leads to an advantage, but the text move helps to demonstrate the plethora of ideas that exist in these structures. 8...♘e7 9.d4 cxd4 10.cxd4 exd4 11.♘xd4 c5 12.♘b3 d6 13.♘c3 ♘c6 14.♗f4 ♘e5 15.♕e2 ♗e6 16.♖ed1±

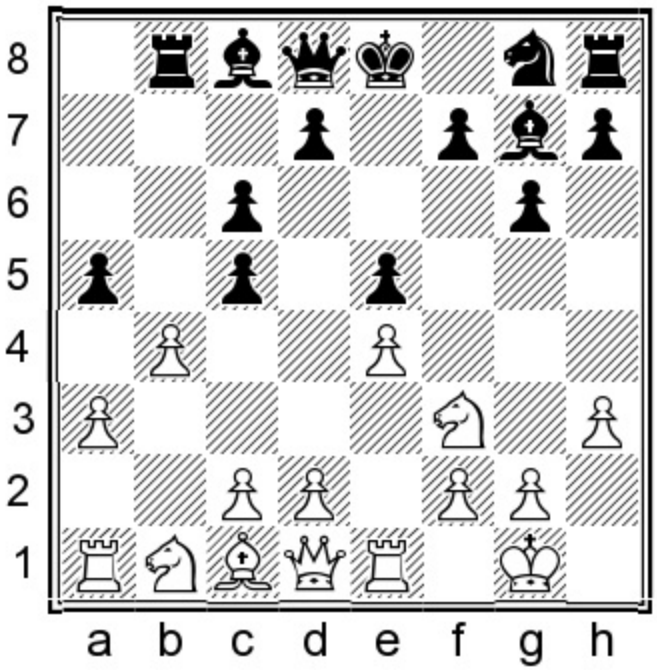


Position after: 8.a3!?N

8...♘e7

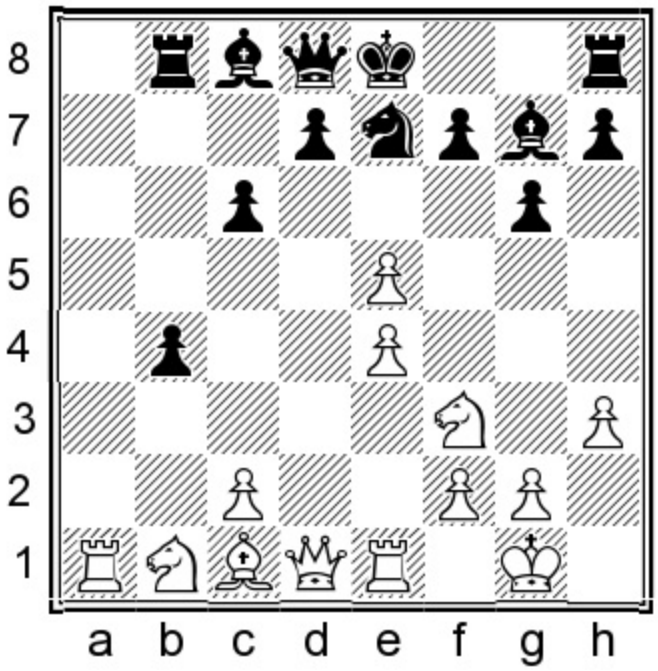
A) 8...d6 9.b4! cxb4 10.axb4 ♘e7 [10...♖xb4 11.d4!±] 11.c3 a6 12.d4 exd4 13.♘xd4 c5 14.bxc5 dxc5 15.♘e2 0-0 16.♗e3±

B) 8...a5 9.b4!



Position after: 9.b4!

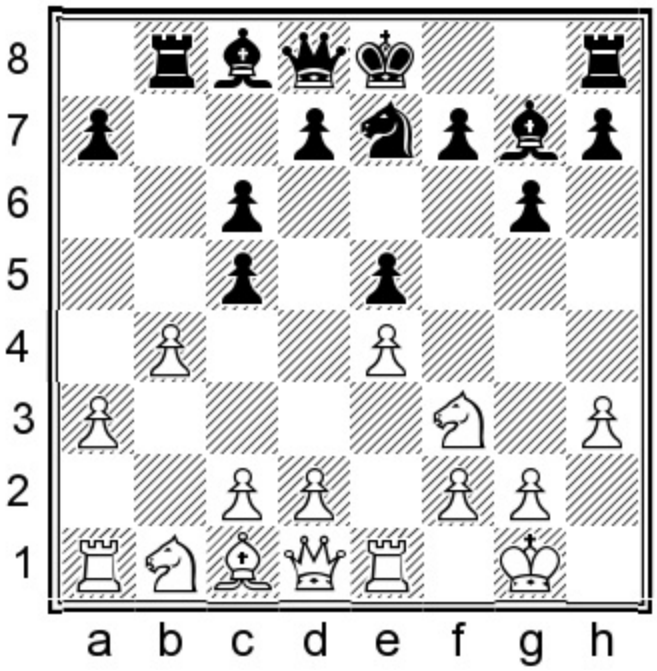
Regardless of whether we're sacrificing a pawn, this break is always likely to be very effective. 9...axb4 10.axb4 cxb4 [10...♖xb4 11.c3 ♖b7 12.d4! cxd4 13.cxd4 exd4 14.♗a3 d6 15.♘bd2 ♘e7 16.♘c4 c5 17.e5!± Black's central pawns will most likely all be lost now.] 11.d4! ♘e7 [11...d6 12.dxe5 dxe5 13.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 14.♗e3+– Due to our massive lead in development, any endgame will also be very promising for White.] 12.dxe5



Position after: 12.dxe5

12...d5 [12...d6 13.♖a7 dxe5 14.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 15.♖d1+ ♔e8 16.♘bd2±] 13.♗e3 0-0 14.♘bd2 dxe4 15.♘xe4 ♕xd1 16.♖axd1 ♘d5 17.♗c5 ♖d8 18.♗d6 ♖a8 19.♖d4 f6 20.♖c4 fxe5 21.♗xe5 ♗f8 22.♖xc6±

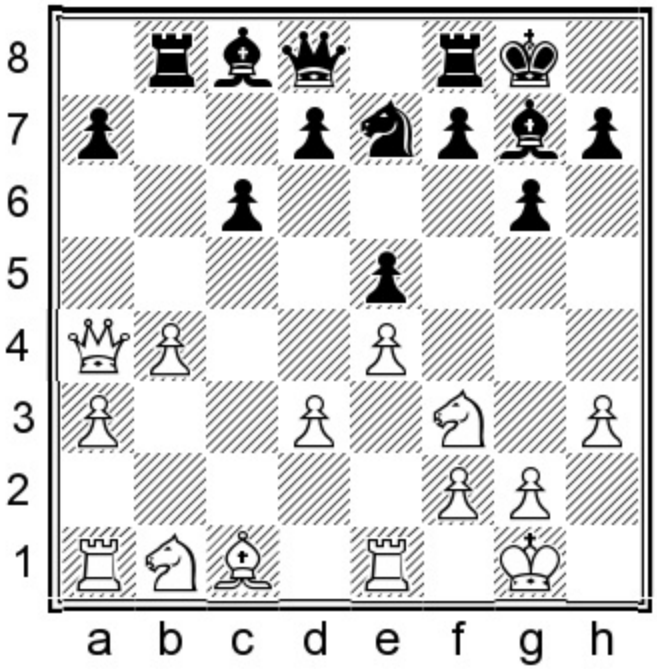
9.b4!



Position after: 9.b4!

9...cxb4

9...c4 Avoiding capturing on b4 will just give us a very pleasant position. 10.d4 cxd3 [10...exd4 11.♗f4 d6 12.♘xd4+–] 11.cxd3 0-0 12.♕a4

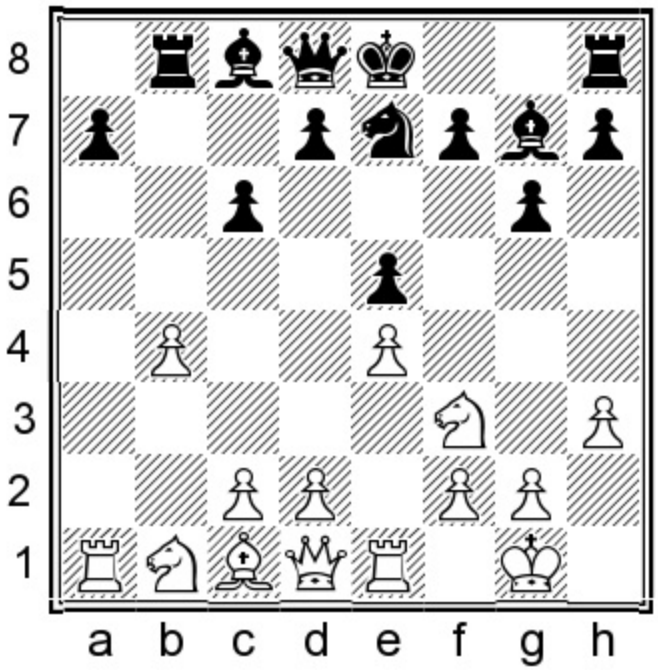


Position after: 12.♕a4

The main issue for Black here is that his pawn structure is weak – it's easy for us to target the e5- and

a7-pawns. 12...a6 [12...d6 13.♕xa7 ♗e6 14.♕e3±; 12...♖b7 13.♗e3 d6 14.♘bd2 h6 15.d4±] 13.♘c3 f5 14.♕b3+ ♔h8 15.exf5 ♖xf5 16.d4! exd4 17.♘e4 d6 18.♗g5±

10.axb4



Position after: 10.axb4

10...d6

10...a6 11.d4! exd4 12.♗f4 Another major issue for Black in a lot of these lines is that his b8-rook is very awkwardly placed, and can be hit with ♗f4 to gain a tempo. 12...d6 13.♕d2 0-0 14.♘a3 ♖b7 15.♘c4 ♖d7 16.h4!±

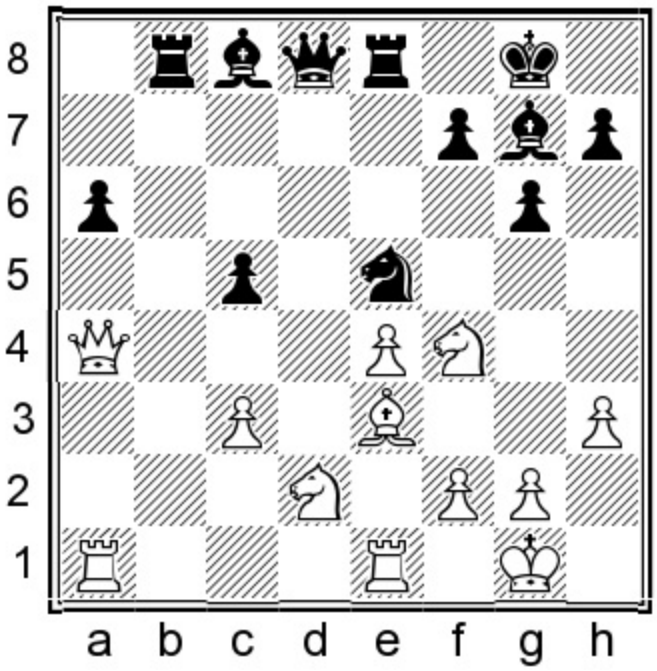
11.c3

This time we don't have the quick d2-d4 and ♗f4, but it's also good to continue slowly.

11...a6 12.d4 exd4 13.♘xd4

The reason why we are better is because Black's pawns are weaker, and harder to defend.

13...c5 14.bxc5 dxc5 15.♘e2 0-0 16.♗e3 ♘c6 17.♘d2 ♖e8 18.♕a4 ♘e5 19.♘f4±

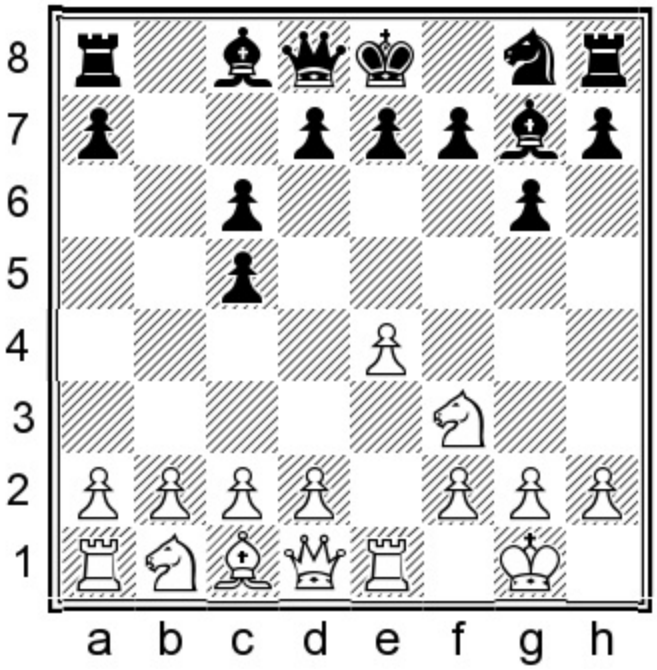


Position after: 19.♘f4±

Black will continue to face difficulties protecting his pawns, whilst our pieces have nice squares to jump to – ♘d5 is the most obvious example.

f) 6...♕c7

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.♗xc6 bxc6 5.0-0 ♗g7 6.♖e1

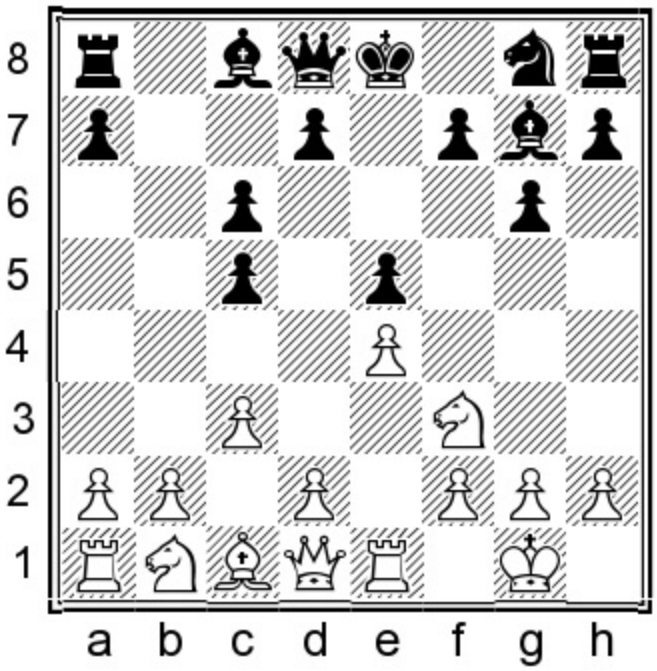


Position after: 6.♖e1

6...♕c7

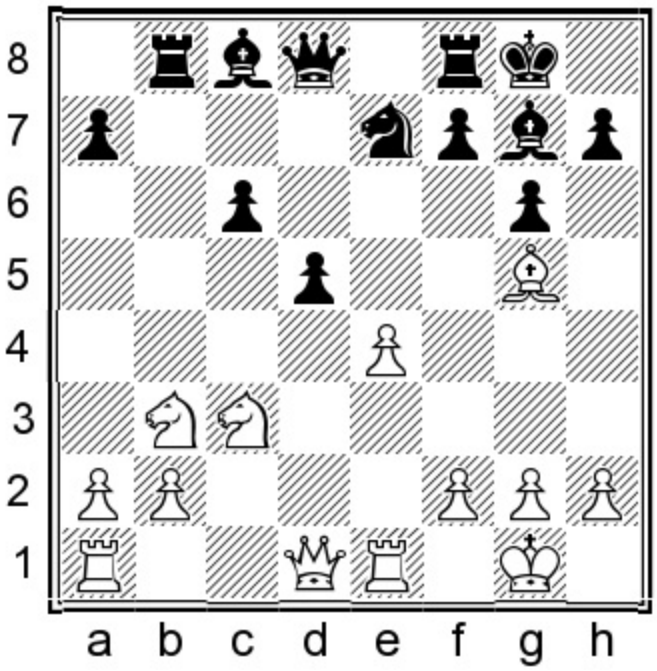
The latest trend in this line. Black wants to play ...d7-d6 without allowing us to meet it with e4-e5.

6...e5?! A comparison to 6...♕c7 7.d3 e5 will illustrate that this is even more favourable for White than in the aforementioned line. 7.c3



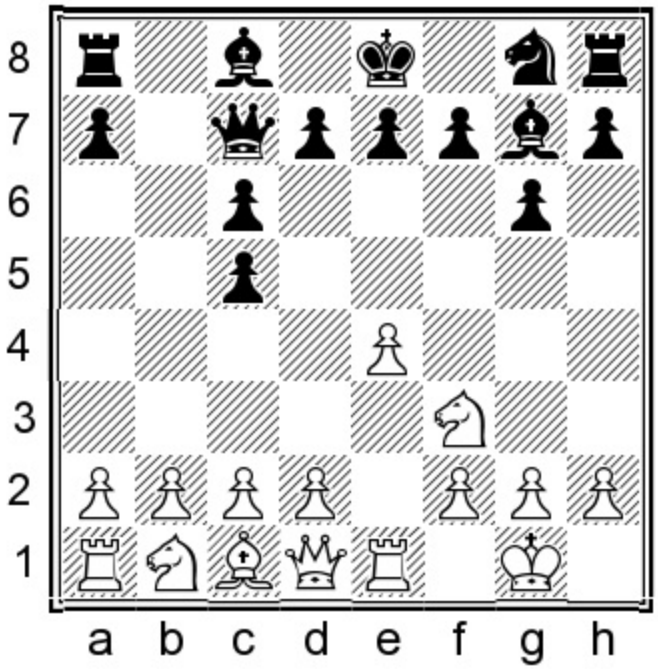
Position after: 7.c3

7...♘e7 [7...♕b6 8.d4! cxd4 9.cxd4 exd4 10.♘bd2 ♗a6 11.b3 c5 12.e5 ♘h6 13.♘e4 0-0 14.♗a3 ♖fc8 15.♖c1±] 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 exd4 10.♘xd4 0-0 11.♘c3 ♖b8 12.♘b3 d5 13.♗g5



Position after: 13.♗g5

13...h6 [13...d4 14.♘a4±] 14.♗e3 a5 15.♗c5 ♖e8 16.♕d2 ♗e6 17.♖ad1 ♔h7 18.h3 ♕c7 19.♘d4± White was already significantly better and won a nice game in Caruana – Iturrizaga Bonelli, chess.com INT 2018.

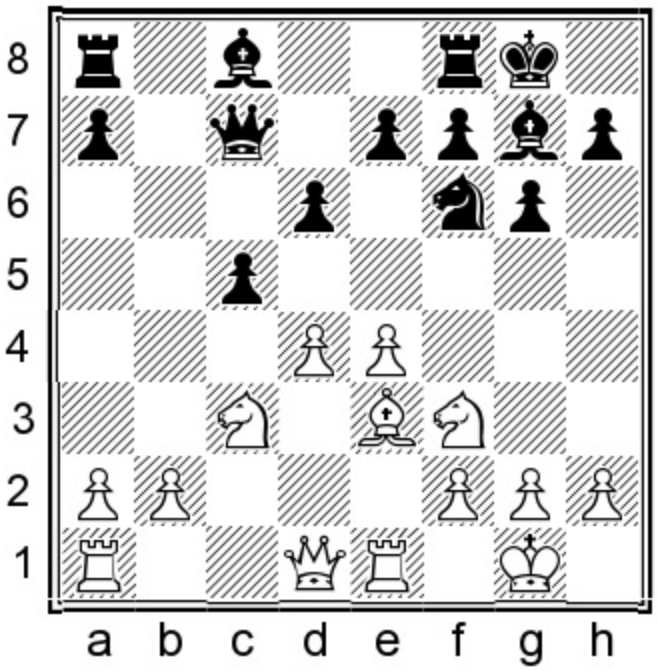


Position after: 6...♕c7

7.e5!?

This was played in Zierk – Le Quang Liem, chess.com INT 2020. We've already analysed this idea after 6...♖b8, and it's an interesting way to attempt to frustrate Black's set-up.

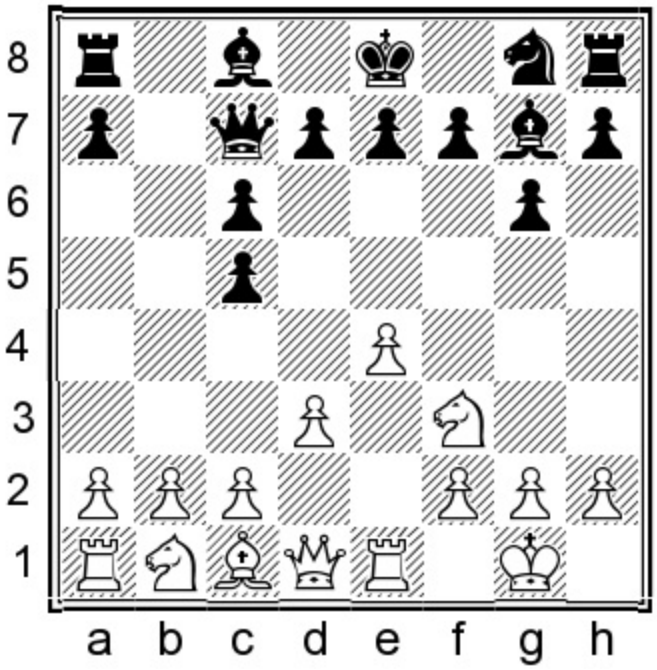
A) The point of Black's sixth move can be seen in this line: 7.c3 d6 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 ♘f6 10.♘c3 0-0 11.♗e3 c5!



Position after: 11...c5!

Black is in time to challenge the centre, and has a good game with the bishop-pair.

B) 7.d3!? An alternative and perhaps simpler idea to 7.e5. Here we continue to wait for Black to show his hand, with a specific idea in mind after 7...d6.

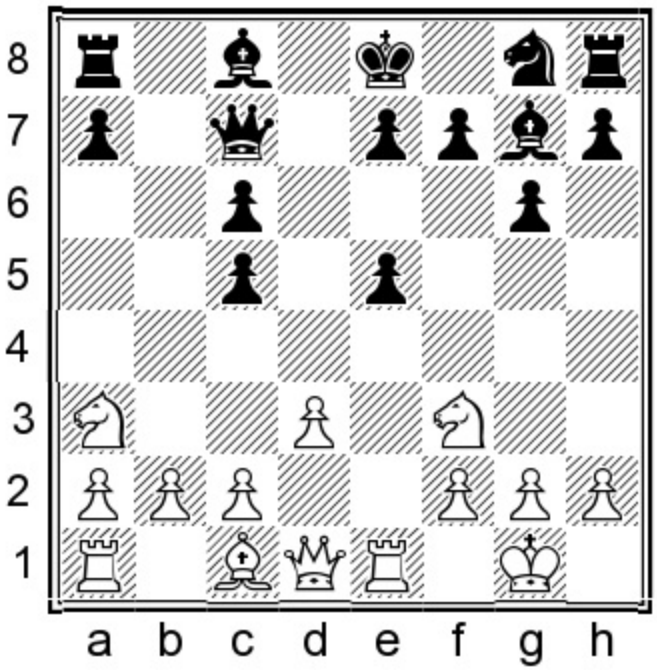


Position after: 7.d3!?

B1) 7...f6 8.c3 ♘h6 9.d4 cxd4 10.cxd4 0-0 11.♘c3±

B2) 7...d6 8.e5! We'll examine a very similar pawn sacrifice in the line with 7.e5. The point is that

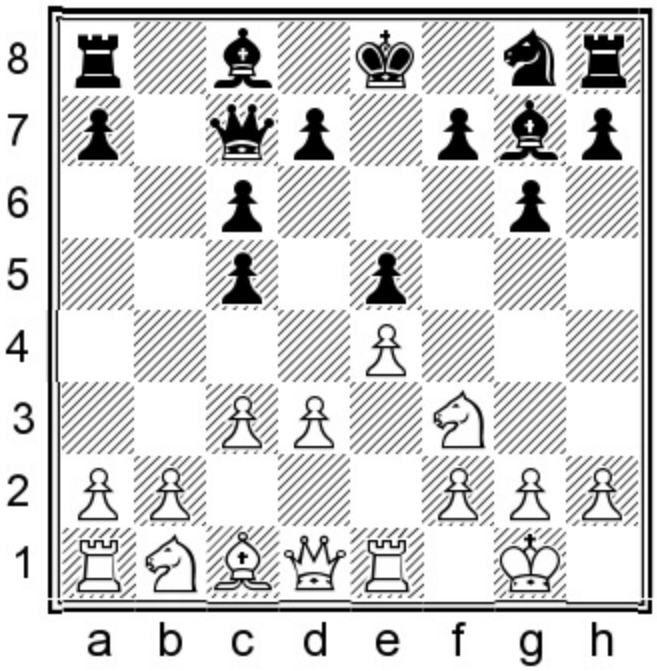
Black's c-pawns will be even further weakened, and we'll likely be able to capture at least one of them in the future. 8...dxe5 9.♘a3



Position after: 9.♘a3

9...f6 [9...♘h6 10.♗xh6 ♗xh6 11.♘xe5±] 10.♗e3 ♘h6 11.♗xc5±

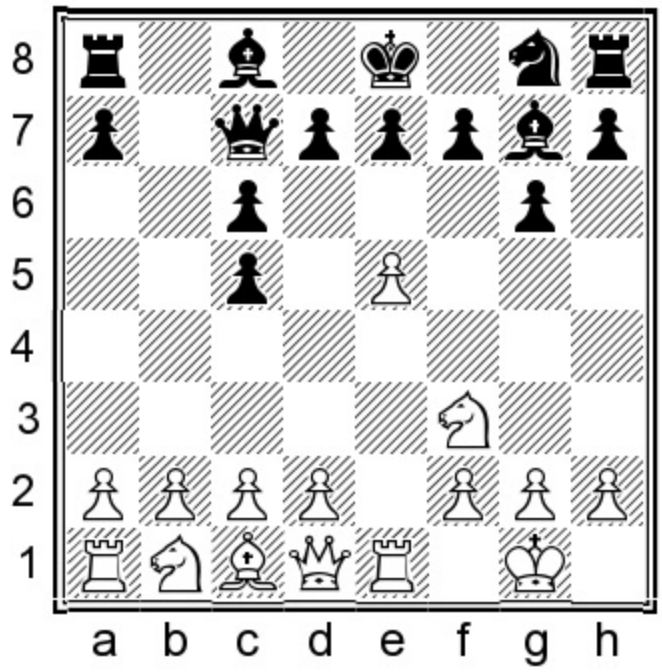
B3) 7...e5 8.c3! As Black has played ...e7-e5, we can revert back to opening the centre with our typical c3-d4 plan. Although we are basically a tempo down over 6...e5, this is still very much favourable for White. [8.b4!? is a fun alternative, and was tested in Horwitz – Khairullin, ICCF email 2018.]



Position after: 8.c3!

8...♘f6 [8...d6 9.d4 cxd4 10.cxd4 exd4 11.♘xd4 ♘f6 12.♘c3 0-0 13.♗f4 ♘h5 14.♗e3±] 9.d4 cxd4 10.cxd4 exd4 11.♕xd4 0-0 12.♘c3 ♘g4 [12...♕b6 13.♗f4±] 13.♕d1 ♖b8 14.h3 ♘e5 15.b3± With an easy game.

Let's return to 7.e5.



Position after: 7.e5!?

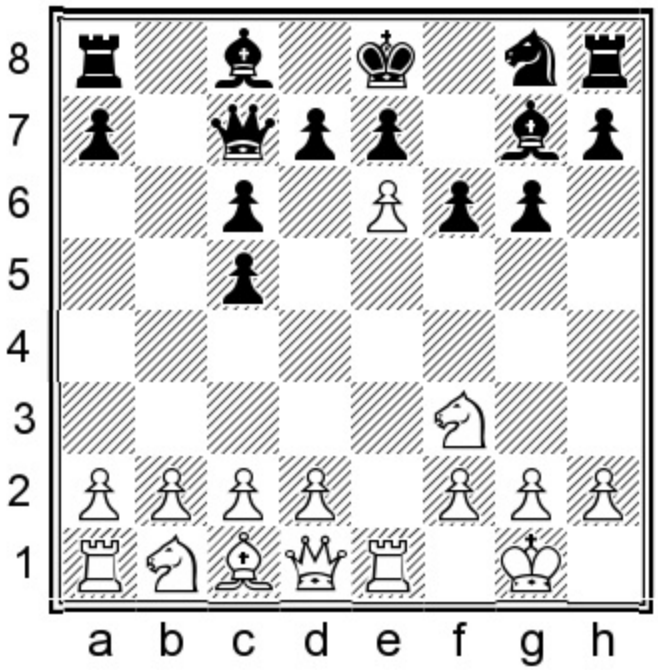
7...f6

The most logical way to challenge our seventh move, and was played by Le Quang Liem. Here I recommend an interesting idea to continue to make Black's life difficult.

7...♘h6 8.d3 0-0 9.♗f4 d6 10.♕c1 ♘f5 11.♘bd2± This looks very pleasant for White.

8.e6!N

We've seen an example of a pawn sacrifice to destroy Black's structure many times, and this is no different.

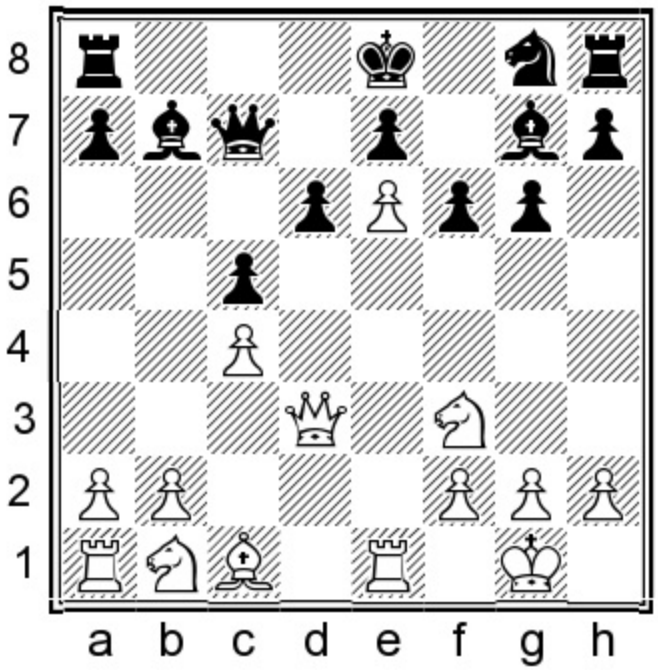


Position after: 8.e6!N

8...dxe6

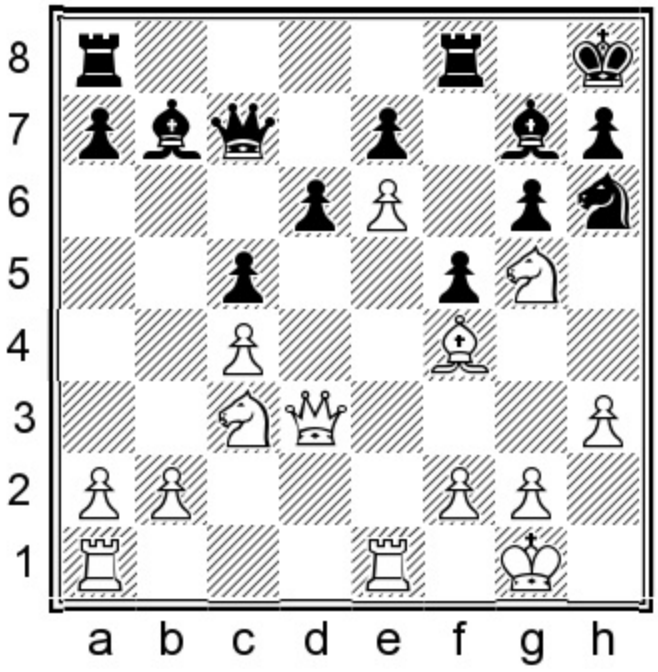
In this case, we can just continue with simple chess – knowing that we'll probably be recovering the pawn in the future due to Black's very weak isolated doubled c-pawns.

8...d6 Declining the sacrifice looks fairly risky, as Black will have to contend with an annoying e6-pawn for a long time. 9.d4 cxd4 10.♕xd4 ♗b7 11.c4 c5 12.♕d3



Position after: 12.♕d3

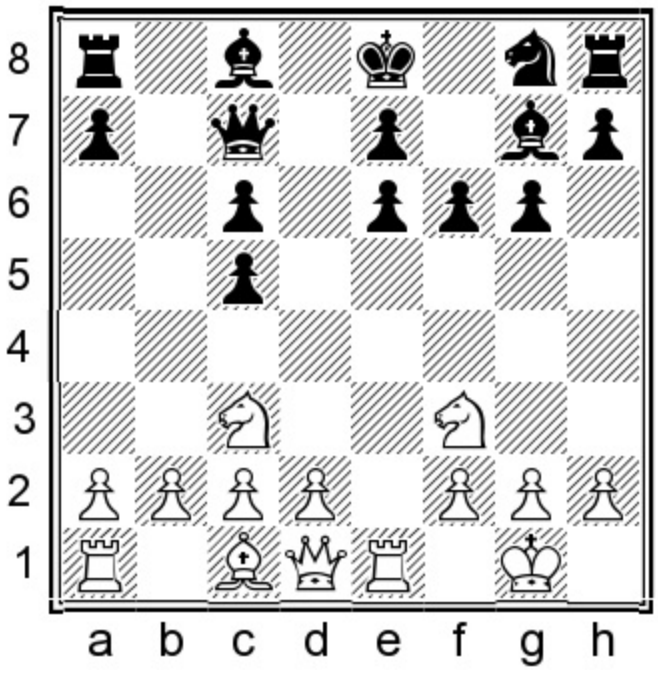
12...♘h6 [12...f5 13.♘g5! ♘f6 14.♘f7 0-0 15.♘c3 ♘g4 16.♗f4±] 13.h3 0-0 14.♘c3 f5 15.♗f4 ♔h8 [15...♘g4? Black fails to re-route the knight to f6 after 16.♘b5! ♕b6 17.hxg4 fxg4 18.♗g5 gxf3 19.♗xe7+–] 16.♘g5±



Position after: 16.♘g5±

I think the variations demonstrated that declining the pawn sacrifice will only make Black's life even more difficult.

9.♘c3

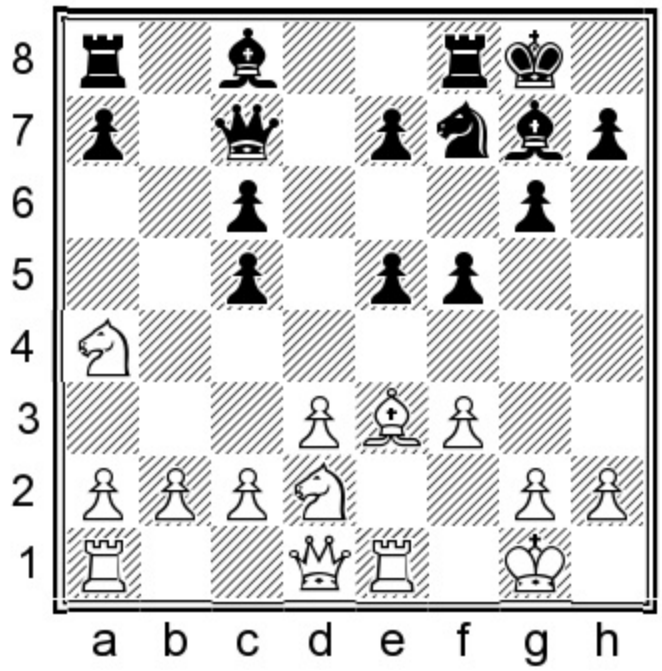


Position after: 9.♘c3

9...e5

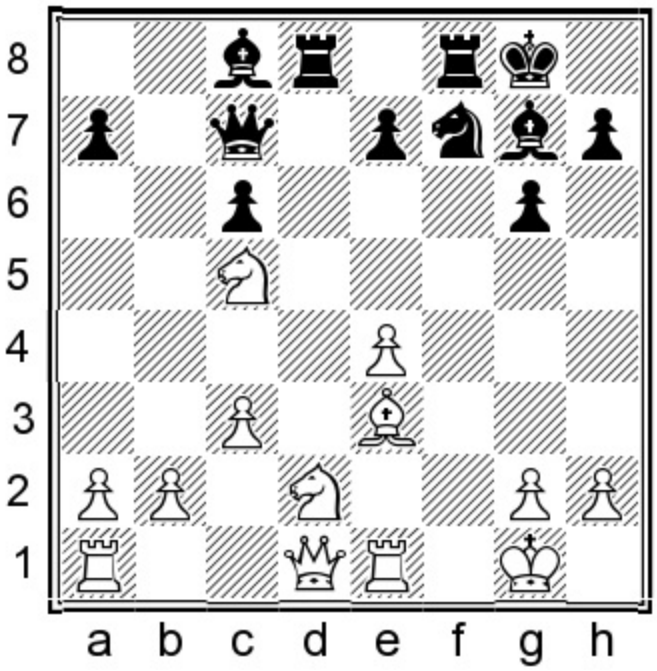
9...♘h6 10.♘e4 ♕a5 11.d3 c4 12.♗xh6! ♗xh6 13.d4!± Maintaining our structure as we'd prefer to capture the c-pawn with a piece.

10.d3 ♘h6 11.♗e3 ♘f7 12.♘d2 f5 13.♘a4 0-0 14.f3



Position after: 14.f3

14...c4 15.♘xc4 e4 16.dxe4 fxe4 17.fxe4 ♗a6 18.♘d2 ♖ad8 19.♘c5 ♗c8 20.c3±



Position after: 20.c3±

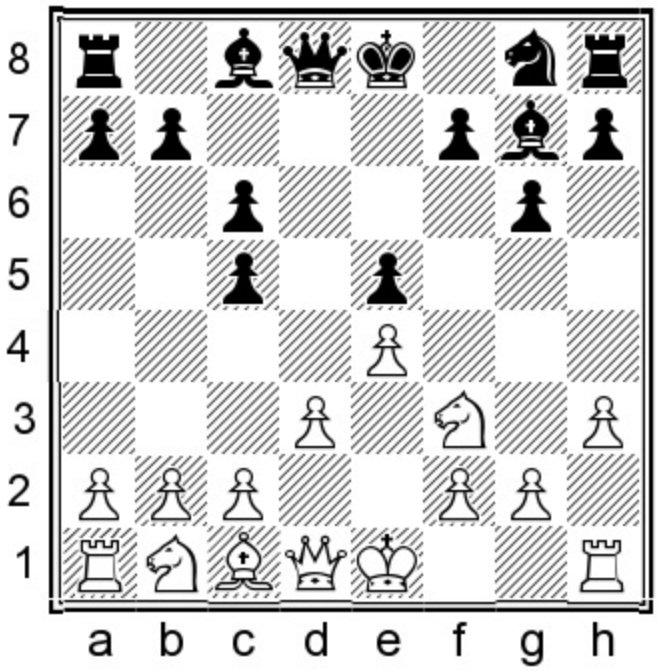
This variation was just an example of how the game may continue, but generally I think White will be recapturing the pawn with favourable circumstances.

Conclusion to Chapter 18

The recapture 4...bxc6 is perhaps more aggressive than its counterpart 4...dxc6, and the chapter demonstrated Black's wide array of follow-ups. However, this was probably the chapter where I found the most original ideas for White, the majority of which are associated with positional pawn sacrifices. Black's latest development has been the cautious waiting move 6...♕c7 (subchapter f), but even here the amazing idea of 8.e6!N seems to create huge practical problems for Black.

Chapter 19
4.♗xc6 dxc6 with 6...e5

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.♗xc6 dxc6 5.d3 ♗g7 6.h3 e5



Chapter Guide

Chapter 19 – 4.♗xc6 dxc6 with 6...e5

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.♗xc6 dxc6 5.d3 ♗g7 6.h3 e5

a) 5...-- alternatives

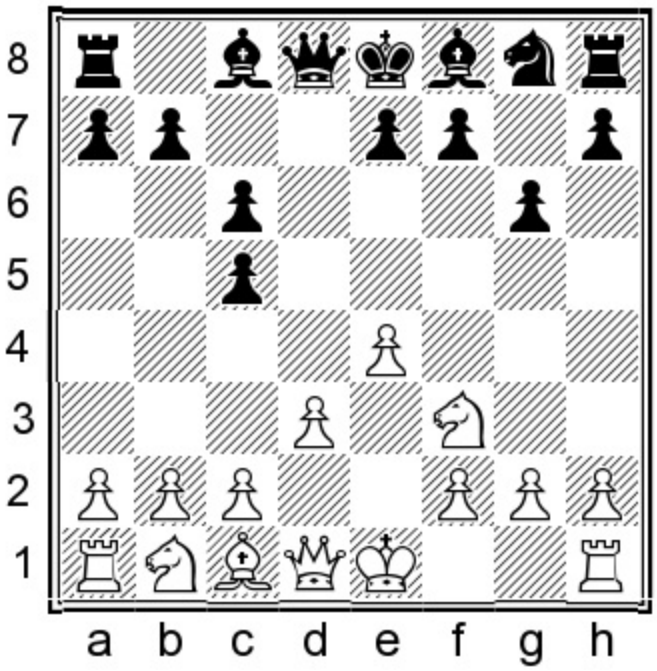
b) 6...-- alternatives

c) 7.0-0

d) 7.a4!?

a) 5...-- alternatives

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.♗xc6 dxc6 5.d3



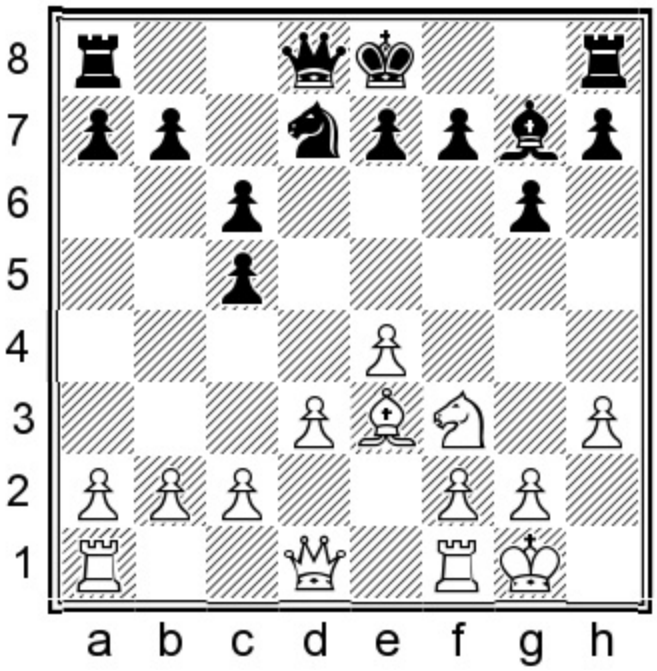
Position after: 5.d3

When Black doesn't play 5...♗g7, he'll usually opt for an unorthodox set-up to take us out of preparation.

5...♕c7!?

An idea which has been recently been tested several times by Dubov. Black will play ...e7-e5 without ...♗g7. He will then probably set up with ...f7-f6, ...♘h6-f7 and ....♗e6, before perhaps advancing the kingside pawns.

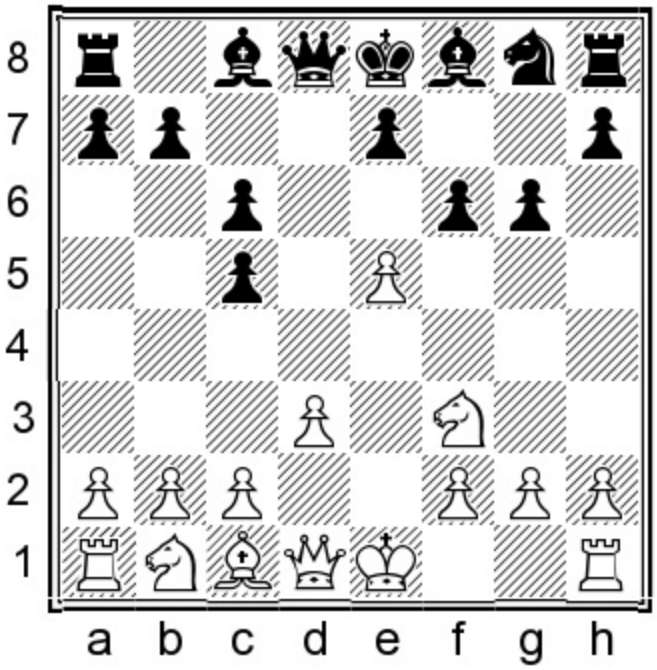
A) 5...♗g4 In general it doesn't really make sense to exchange off the light-squared bishop for nothing, and White should be able to gain an easy advantage. 6.♘bd2 ♗g7 7.h3 ♗xf3 8.♘xf3 ♘f6 9.0-0 ♘d7 10.♗e3 Our plan will revolve around taking the centre with c2-c3 and d3-d4.



Position after: 10.♗e3

If Black tries to contest the centre with ...e7-e5, we will play a2-a4, ♘d2-c4 and possibly f2-f4. 10...0-0 [10...b6 11.c3 0-0 12.♕c2 e5 13.a3± The a3-b4 break is also very effective here. The variations have illustrated how Black's position can deteriorate quickly if he elects to trade off his light-squared bishop.] 11.c3 e5 12.♕b3 ♕b6 [12...♕c7 13.a4 a5 14.♘d2±] 13.♕c2 ♕c7 14.a4 a5 15.♘d2±

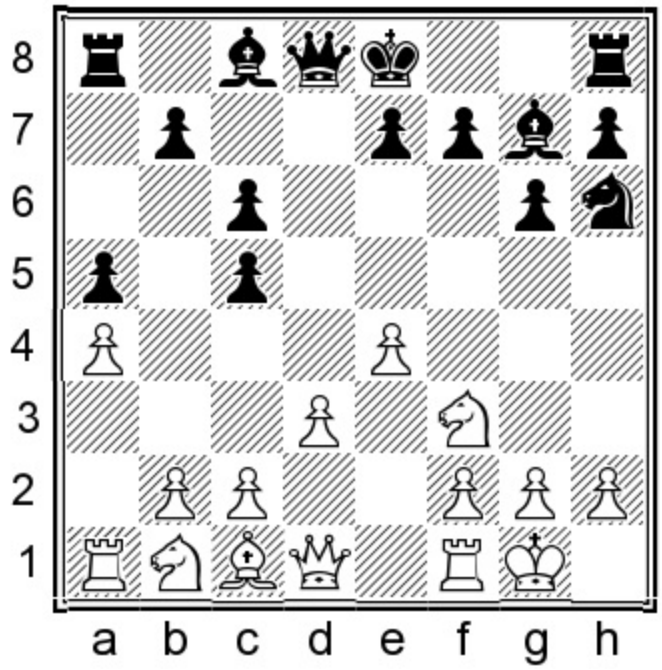
B) 5...f6 6.e5!



Position after: 6.e5!

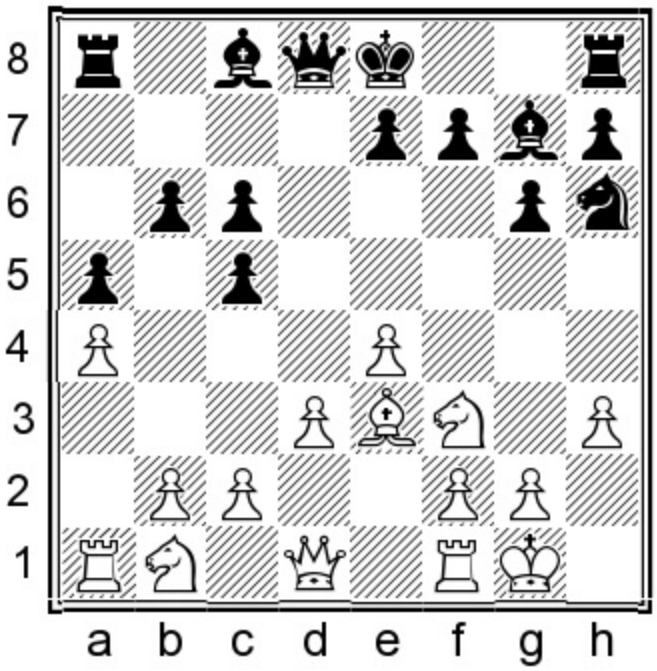
Playing a normal move like h2-h3 would probably transpose to 5...♕c7, but we shouldn't pass up on an opportunity like e4-e5 if we have the possibility to play it. 6...♗g4 7.♘bd2 fxe5 8.0-0 ♗g7 9.h3 ♗xf3 10.♘xf3±

C) 5...♘h6?! This is very similar to the line that we'll look at with 6...♘h6. In any case, the knight is really misplaced on this square. 6.0-0 ♗g7 7.a4! a5



Position after: 7...a5

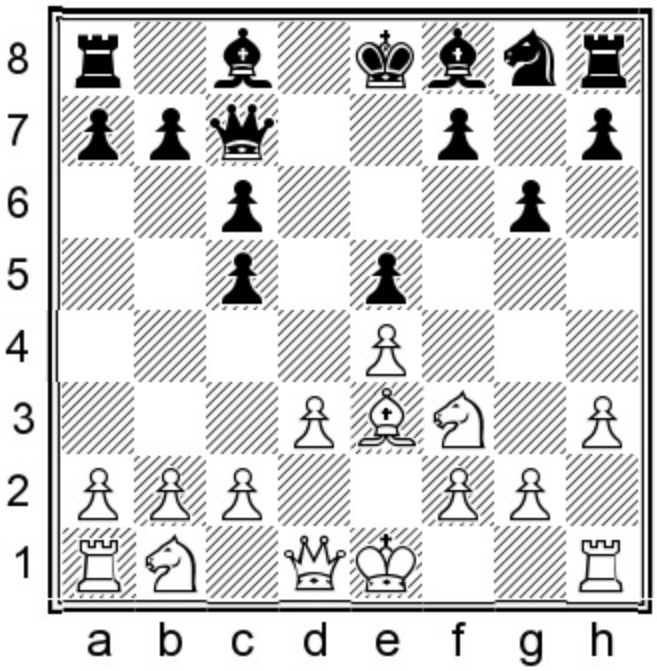
Otherwise a4-a5 followed by ♗e3 will be very strong. 8.♗e3! Immediately targetting the h6-knight. 8...b6 [8...♗xb2 9.♘bd2! ♘g4 10.♗xc5 ♗xa1 11.♕xa1 0-0 12.♖b1± White has tremendous compensation for the exchange here.] 9.h3



Position after: 9.h3

9...f6 Black is usually forced to play this in order to allow ...♘f7. We can just continue with simple chess and occupy the centre. [9...♗xb2 10.♘bd2! ♗g7 11.♖b1±] 10.♖e1 ♘f7 11.c3 e5 12.d4±

6.h3 e5 7.♗e3

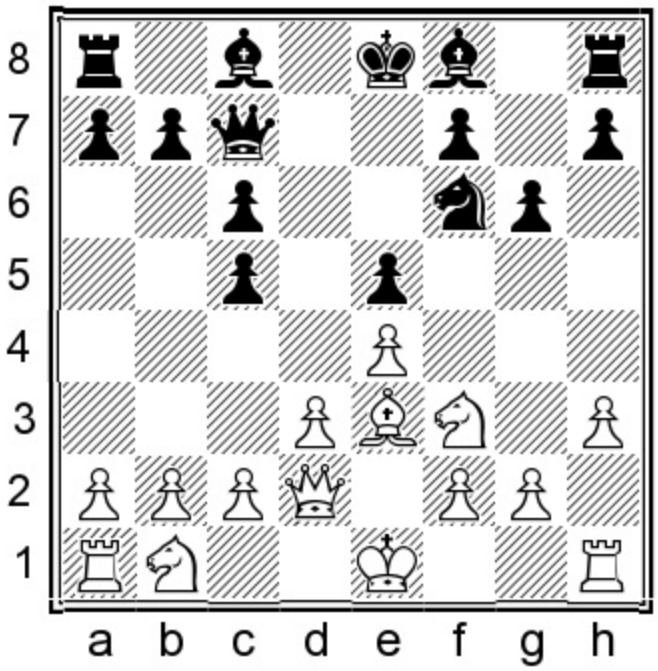


Position after: 7.♗e3

7...f6

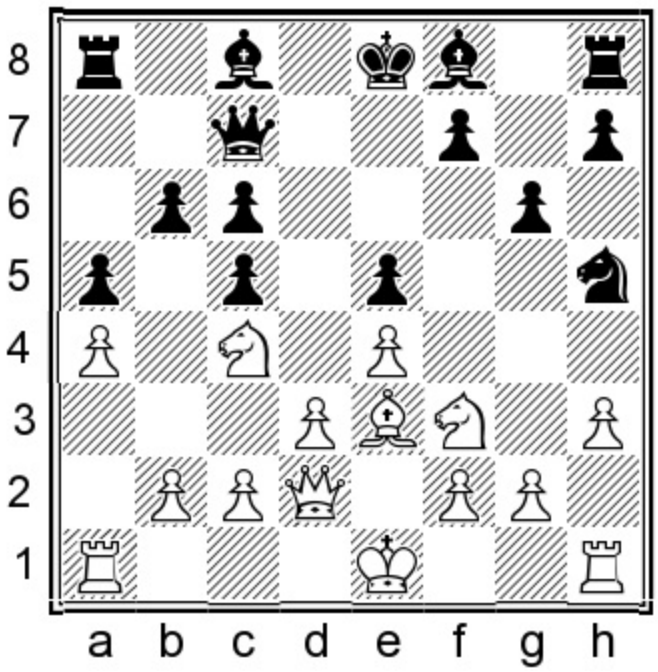
This position was reached in Giri – Dubov, Paris 2019. Giri continued with 8.♕d2, but I would prefer to leave this square for my f3-knight to jump to.

7...♘f6 An alternative plan may be to try and quickly re-route the Black knight to e6 – via h5 and f4. 8.♕d2!



Position after: 8.♕d2!

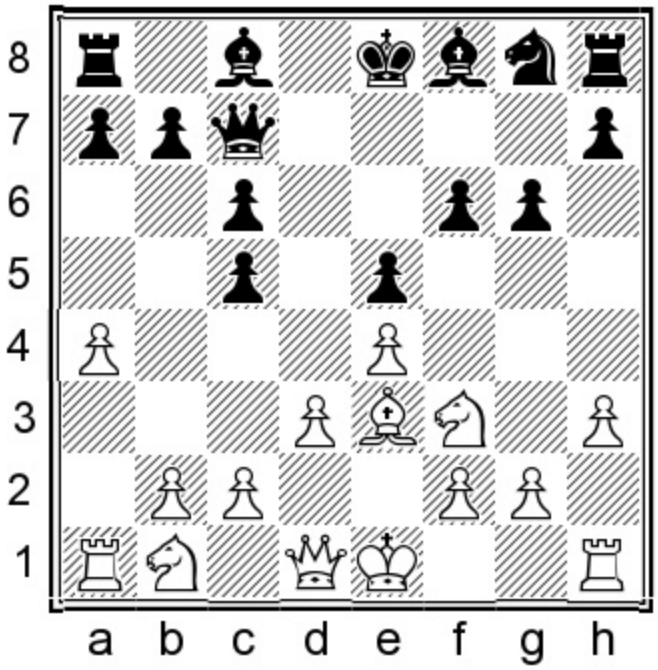
Avoiding committing the b1-knight to c3 yet, firstly because the queen might want that square, and secondly because the knight might still go to a3 or d2. 8...b6 [8...♘h5 9.♕c3! f6 10.♗xc5±] 9.a4! a5 10.♘a3 ♘h5 11.♘c4



Position after: 11.♘c4

With the knight ostracised on h5, we should rapidly target Black's queenside pawns. 11...f6 [11...♗g7 12.b4! axb4 13.0-0 ♘f4? 14.a5+–] 12.g4! This is another important point. 12...♘f4 13.♗xf4 exf4 14.0-0-0 ♗g7 15.d4!±

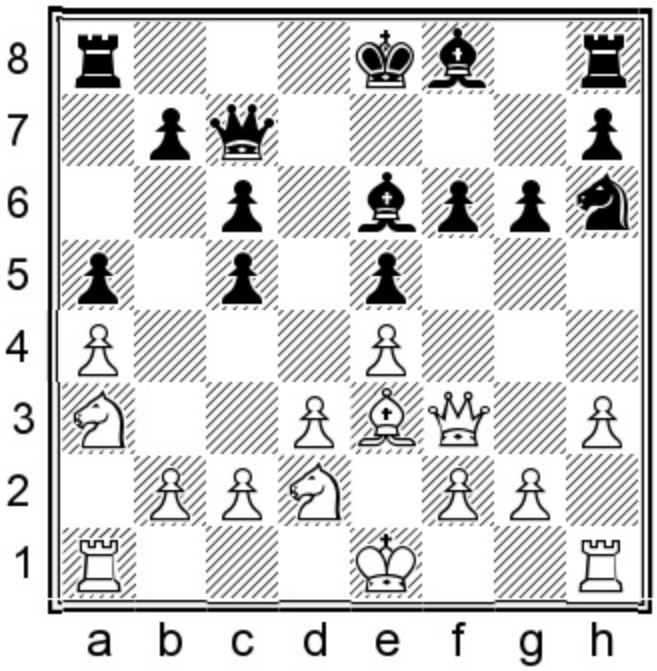
8.a4!?



Position after: 8.a4!?

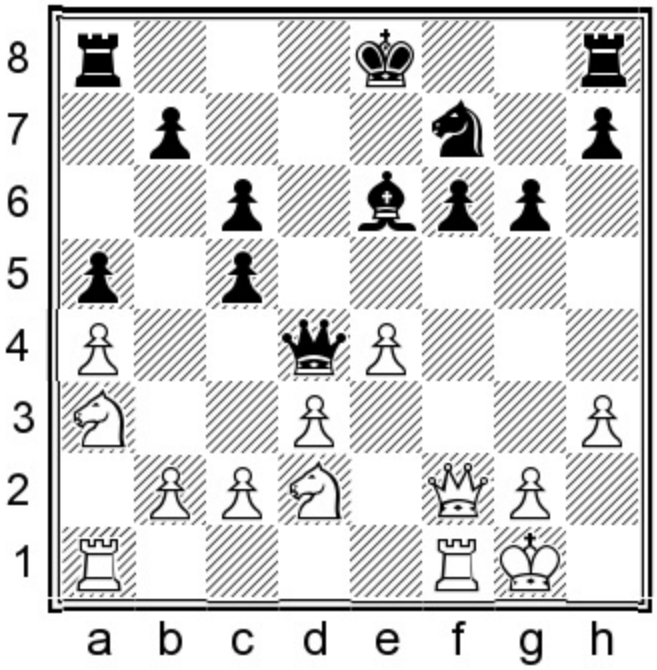
8...♘h6

8...a5 9.♘fd2! By jumping with this knight to d2, we're immediately playing for natural f2-f4 ideas. At the same time, we can support our knight on c4 with ♘a3 to ensure that Black doesn't have a timely ...♗xc4. 9...♗e6 10.♘a3 ♘h6 [10...♗d6 11.♘ac4±] 11.♕f3!



Position after: 11.♕f3!

Placing the queen on g3 completes the necessary preparation for f2-f4. 11...♕d8 [11...f5 12.exf5 ♘xf5 13.♘e4±] 12.♕g3 ♘f7 13.f4 exf4 14.♗xf4 ♗d6 15.♗xd6 ♕xd6 16.♕f2 ♕d4 17.0-0!

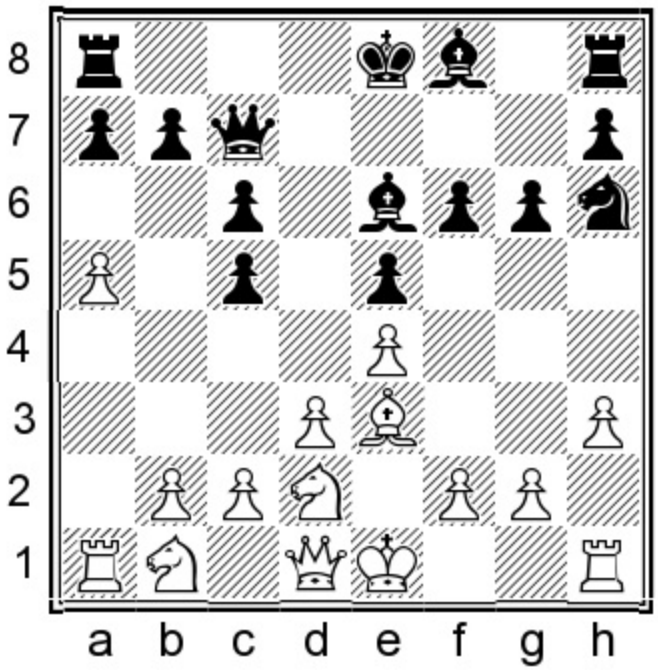


Position after: 17.0-0!

The resulting queenless middlegame will be favourable for White. 17...♔e7 18.♘ac4 ♕xf2+ 19.♔xf2 ♗xc4 20.♘xc4 ♘e5 21.b3±

9.♘fd2 ♗e6 10.a5

In this case, we'll still play for f2-f4.



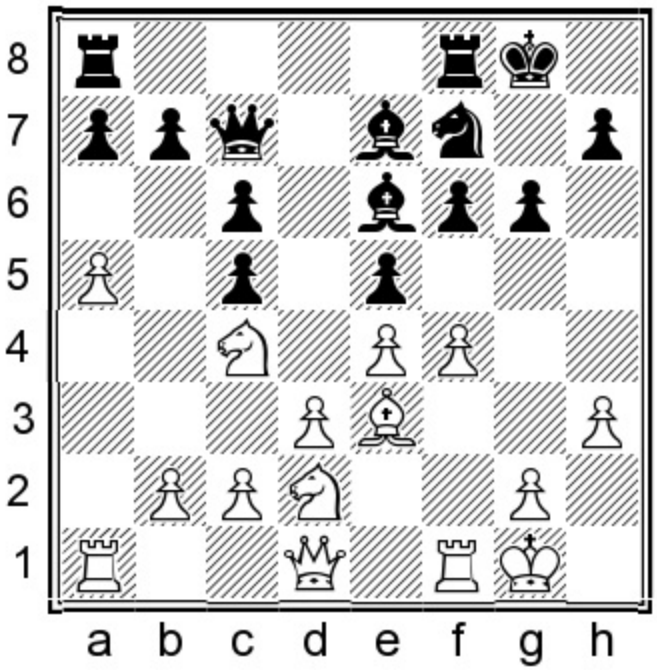
Position after: 10.a5

Black may also have to worry about his c5-pawn being weak at some point.

10...♘f7 11.0-0 ♗d6 12.♘a3 0-0

12...0-0-0 13.♘ac4±

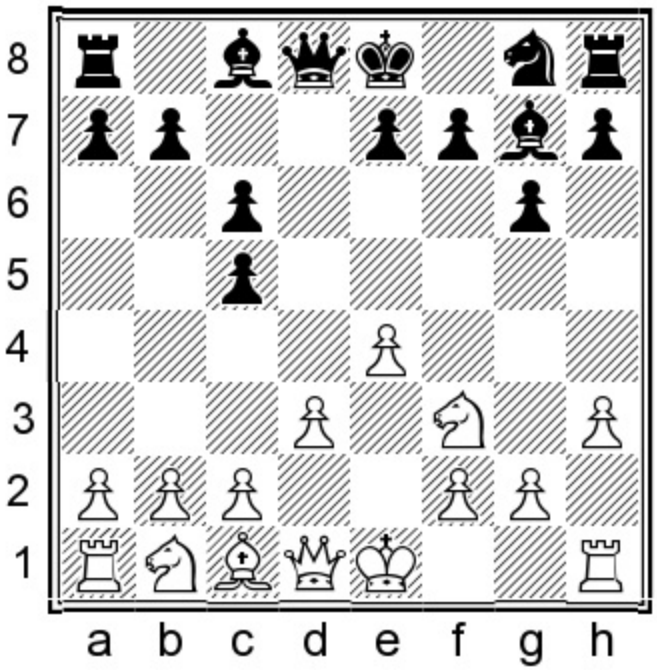
13.♘ac4 ♗e7 14.f4±



Position after: 14.f4±

b) 6...-- alternatives

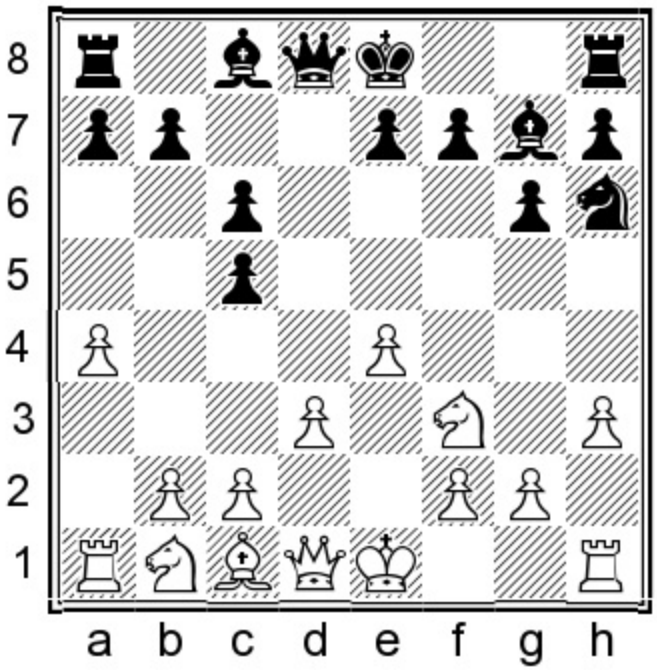
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.♗xc6 dxc6 5.d3 ♗g7 6.h3



Position after: 6.h3

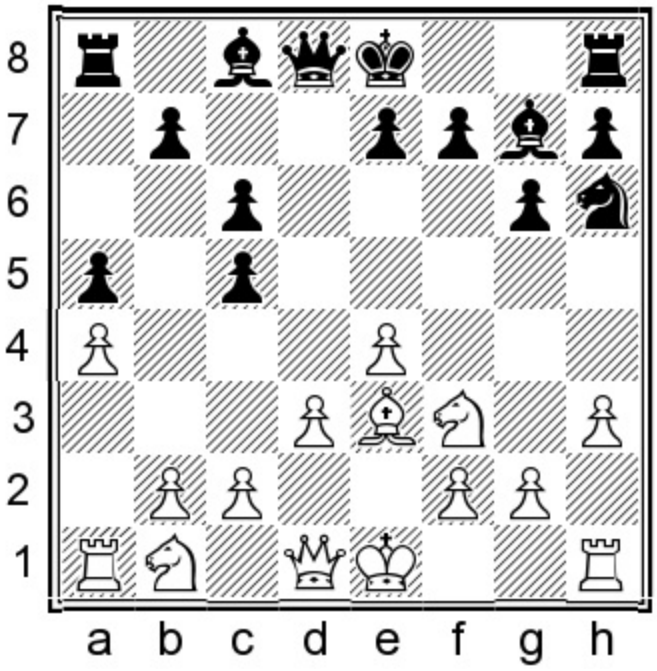
6...b6

A) 6...♘h6?! As I mentioned after 5...♘h6, the knight will find itself really misplaced here – especially given that we've included the moves ...♗g7 and h2-h3. 7.a4!



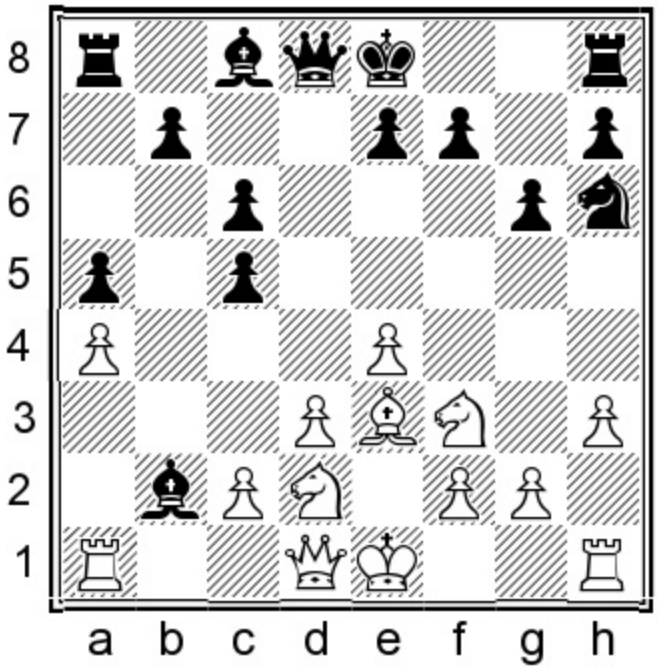
Position after: 7.a4!

Necessary before we develop the c1-bishop. 7...a5 [7...0-0 8.0-0 f5 9.♗xh6! ♗xh6 10.exf5 ♗xf5 11.♘bd2±; 7...f5 8.♗xh6 ♗xh6 9.exf5 ♗xf5 10.♘bd2 ♗g7 11.0-0 ♕c7 12.♘c4±; 7...f6 8.a5 We'll follow this up by honing in on Black's c5-pawn. 8...♘f7 9.0-0 e5 10.♗e3 ♕e7 11.♘c3 ♘d8 12.♘d2 ♘e6 13.♘a4 0-0 14.♘b3±; 7...b6 8.a5 ♖b8 9.♗f4 ♖b7 10.♕d2 ♘g8 11.e5+–] 8.♗e3!



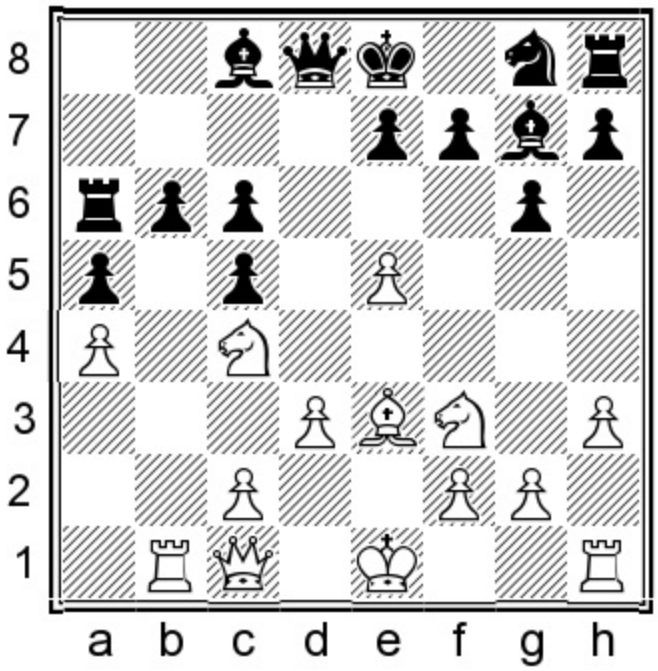
Position after: 8.♗e3!

8...♗xb2?! Capturing the pawn will only lead to disastrous consequences for Black. [8...b6 9.♕c1 ♘g8 10.♘a3± Black's opening play has clearly been unsuccessful.; 8...f5 9.♘bd2 0-0 10.0-0 b6 11.♗xh6 ♗xh6 12.exf5 ♗xf5 13.♖e1±; 8...♕b6 9.♘bd2 ♗e6 10.0-0 f5 11.♖e1 0-0 12.♘g5 ♗f7 13.♘xf7 ♖xf7 14.♘c4+–] 9.♘bd2!



Position after: 9.♘bd2!

9...♗g7 [9...♘g8 10.♖b1 ♗d4 11.♗xd4 cxd4 12.♕c1± Black won't be able to retain his pawn on d4.] 10.♖b1 b6 [10...0-0 11.♗xc5 f5 12.0-0 ♘f7 13.exf5 gxf5 14.♘c4+–] 11.♘c4 ♖a6 12.♕c1 ♘g8 13.e5± Black is still technically a pawn up, but he is completely tied up.



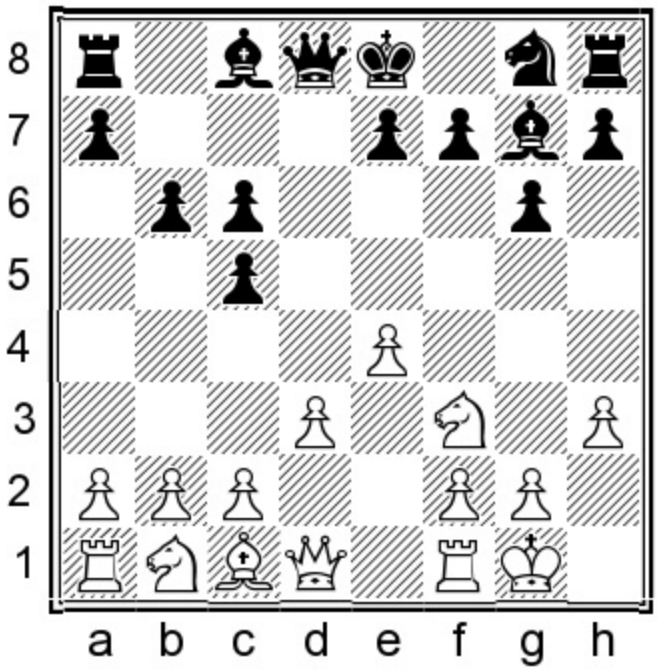
Position after: 13.e5±

B) 6...h6 This will just transpose to one of our mainlines after 7.♘c3.

C) 6...e5 is analysed in the next two subchapters.

D) 6...♘f6 will take up the following chapter.

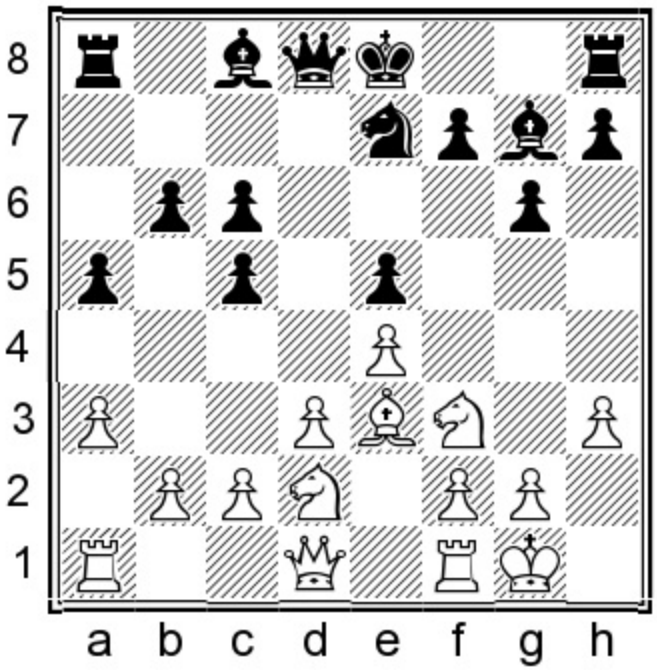
7.0-0



Position after: 7.0-0

7...♘h6

A) 7...e5 Here we'll continue in the same vein as we do after 6...e5, with an emphasis on rapid queenside action. 8.a3 a5 9.♗e3 ♘e7 10.♘bd2

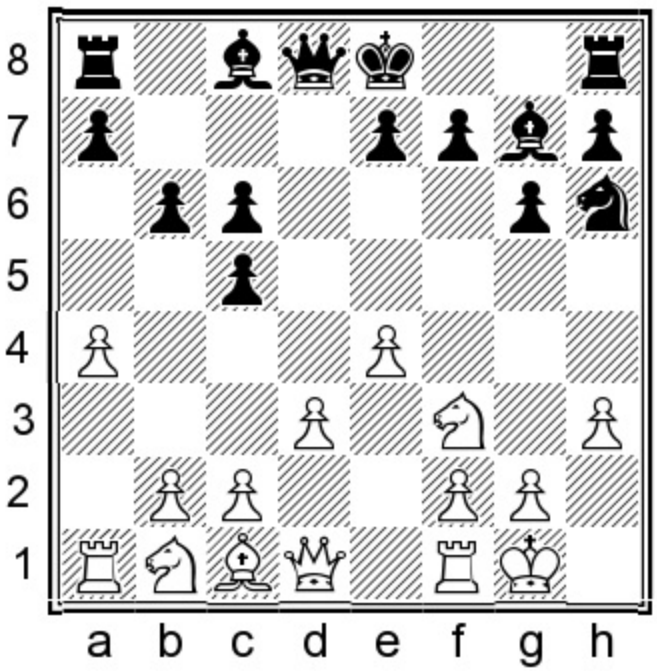


Position after: 10.♘bd2

10...♗a6 [10...a4 11.b4! cxb4 12.♘c4! c5 13.axb4↑ Rodi Maletich – Pecka, ICCF email 2017.] 11.♕b1! a4 12.b4 axb3 13.♕xb3 0-0 14.a4±

B) 7...♘f6 will transpose to one of our lines after 6...♘f6.

8.a4!



Position after: 8.a4!

Invariably, our plan remains exactly the same.

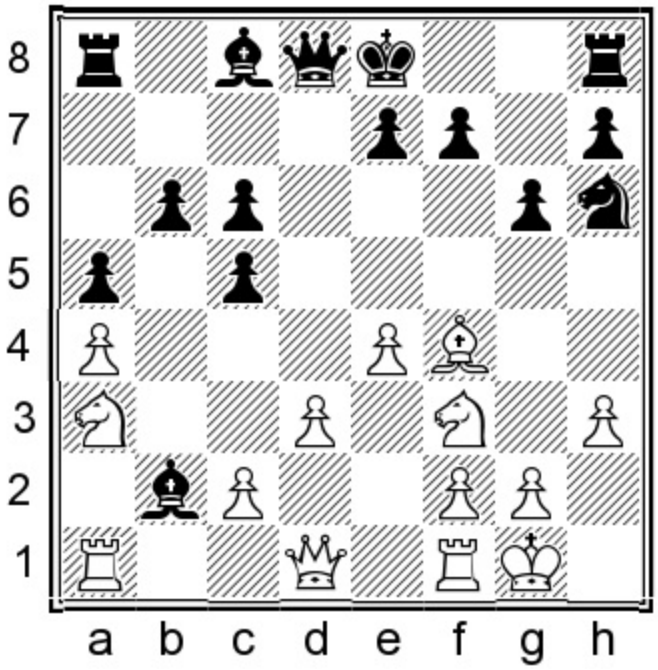
8...a5

A) 8...f6 9.a5 ♖b8 10.axb6 axb6 11.e5±

B) 8...e5 9.a5 ♖b8 10.axb6 axb6 11.♘xe5+–

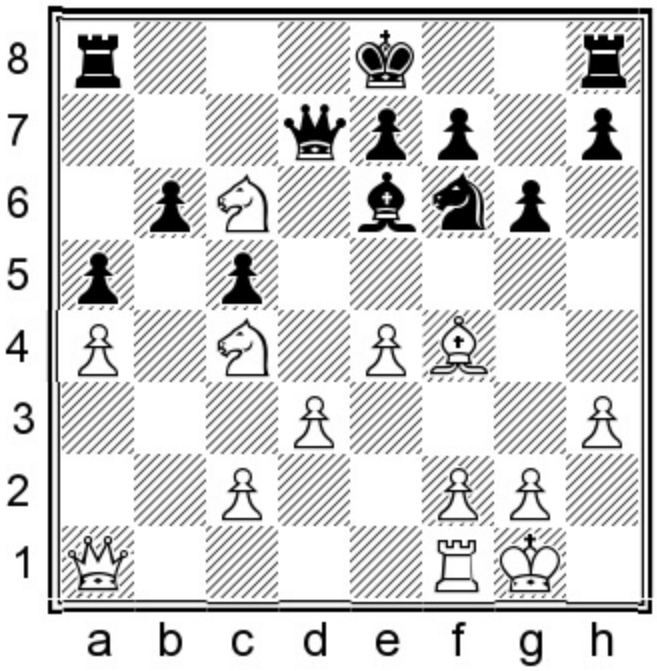
9.♗f4 f6

A) 9...♗xb2 10.♘a3!



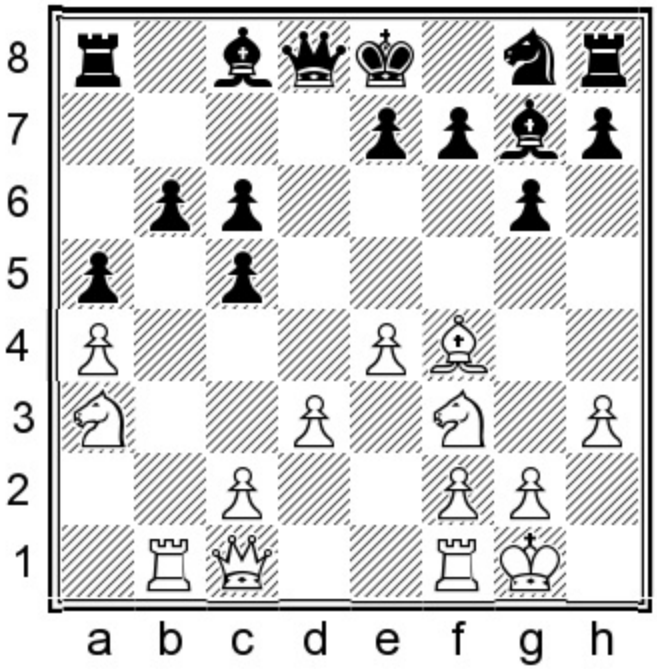
Position after: 10.♘a3!

10...♗g7 [10...♘g8 11.♘c4! Black's queenside pawns will collapse regardless of whether he captures the exchange. 11...♗xa1 12.♕xa1 ♘f6 13.♘fe5 ♗e6 14.♘xc6 ♕d7



Position after: 14...♕d7

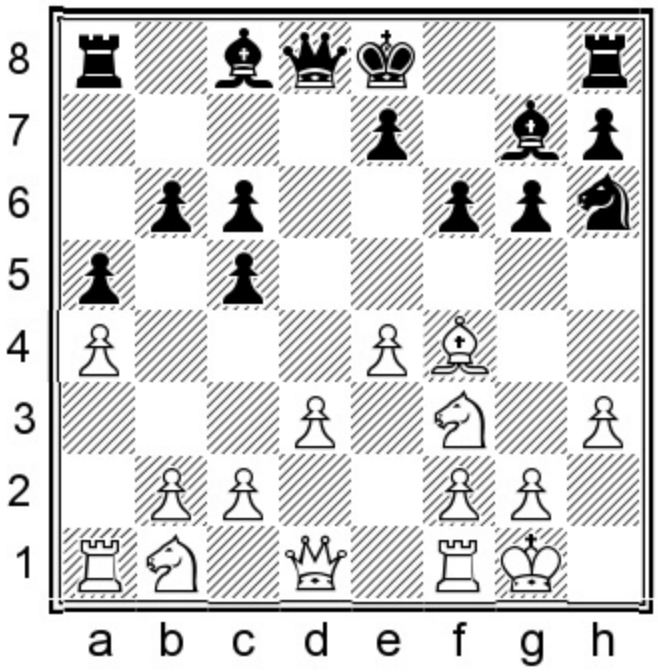
15.♘xe7 ♕d4 16.♕c1 ♗xc4 17.♘c6 ♕d7 18.♘e5 ♕e6 19.♘xc4±] 11.♕c1 [The immediate 11.♖b1± was also very strong in Zavrazhnov – Vecek, ICCF email 2014.] 11...♘g8 12.♖b1



Position after: 12.♖b1

Once again, it's practically impossible for Black to defend his b6-pawn. When this falls, his whole queenside pawn structure collapses. 12...♘f6 13.♘c4 ♘d7 14.♗h6 0-0 15.♗xg7 ♔xg7 16.♘xb6 ♘xb6 17.♕b2+ f6 18.♕xb6±

B) 9...f5 10.♖e1 0-0 11.♘bd2±

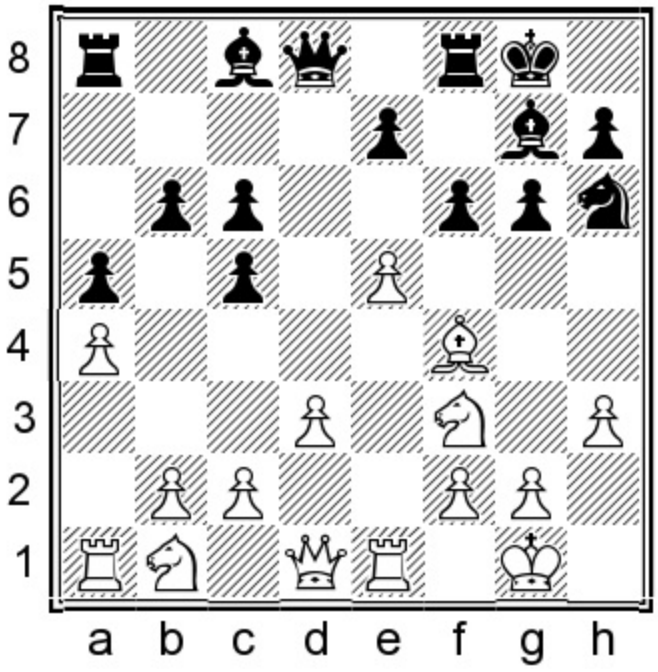


Position after: 9...f6

10.e5!

Another opportunity to play e4-e5 which we can't turn down. Black will be extremely passive here.

10...0-0 11.♖e1



Position after: 11.♖e1

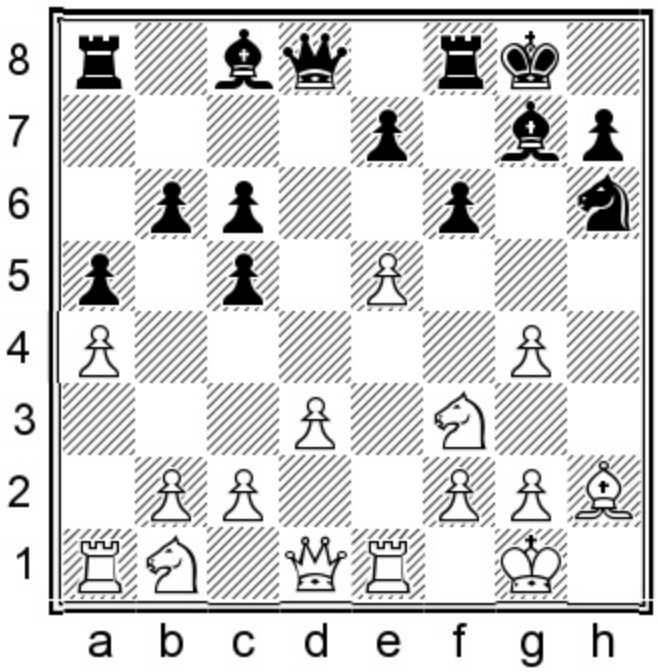
11...g5

It probably makes sense for Black to continue to try and mix things up, but White keeps a healthy advantage with a couple of accurate moves.

A) 11...♘f7 12.♘bd2 fxe5 13.♘xe5 ♘xe5 14.♗xe5+–

B) 11...♘f5 12.♘bd2 ♘d4 13.exf6 exf6 14.♘xd4 cxd4 15.♘c4+–

12.♗h2 g4 13.hxg4



Position after: 13.hxg4

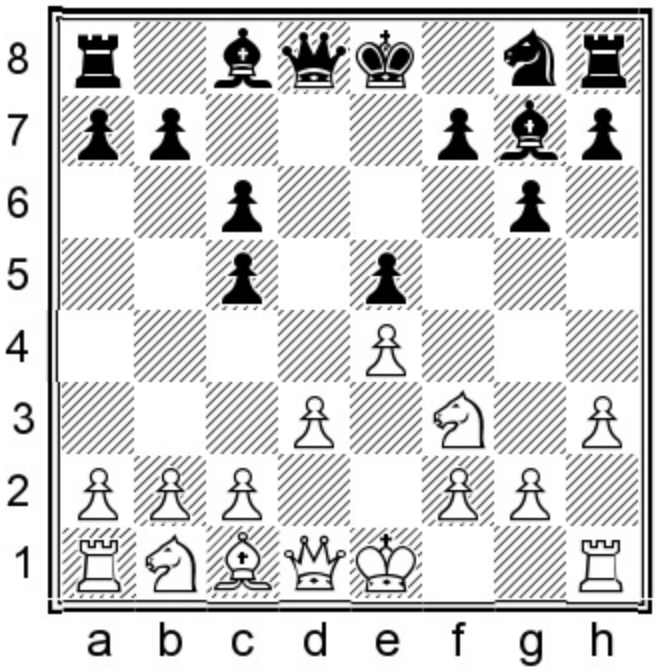
13...♘xg4

13...♗xg4 14.♘bd2 ♘f5 15.♖e4! h5 16.♕f1!± Followed by ♖ae1.

14.♗g3 f5 15.♕d2±

c) 7.0-0

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.♗xc6 dxc6 5.d3 ♗g7 6.h3 e5



Position after: 6...e5

The early ...e7-e5 push used to annoy me a few years ago. I always wanted to set up with ♗e3, ♘c3 and 0-0 before either playing a2-a3 and b2-b4 or ♘h2 and f2-f4. However, I found that Black was often very quick with ...♘e7, ...h7-h6 and ...f7-f5 – and my bishop on e3 would often be in danger of getting hit with ...f5-f4. Therefore, I settled on recommending two different plans against 6...e5. One possibility is to play a2-a4 immediately, hoping to push a4-a5 and target Black's queenside pawns. Another interesting idea is to play a2-a3 and b2-b4, gaining space on the queenside before developing our queenside pieces. This takes advantage of the fact that Black has, perhaps prematurely, closed the a1-h8 diagonal.

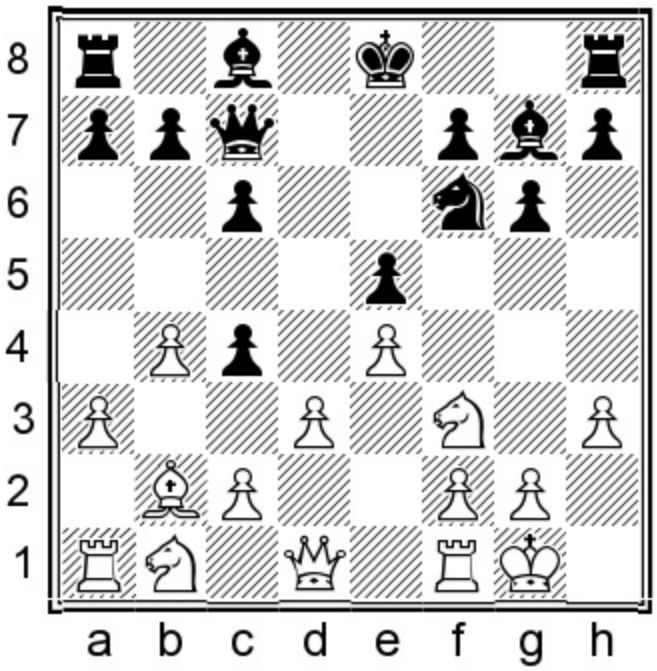
7.0-0

Black's plans with an early ...e7-e5 are either to target our e3-bishop with ...f7-f5 and f5-f4, or to play a quick ...♘f6-d7-f8-e6. As we've castled and are delaying our queenside minor-piece development, Black's continuation of ...♘f6-d7-f8 looks the most logical here. First of all, he needs to defend the e5-pawn.

I have also analysed 7.a4 in the next subchapter.

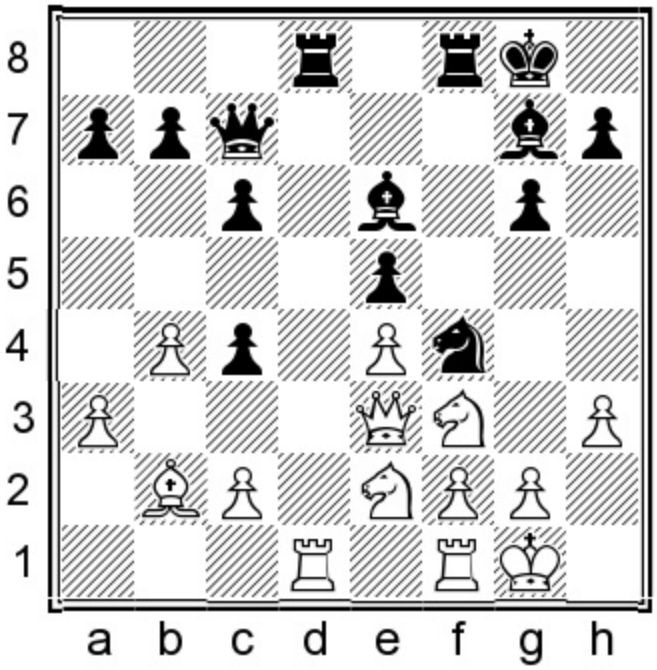
7...♕e7

A) 7...♕c7 8.a3 ♘f6 9.b4 c4 This was played in David – Cheparinov, Patras 2019. Here I don't see any reason not to continue with the natural 10.♗b2



Position after: 10.♗b2

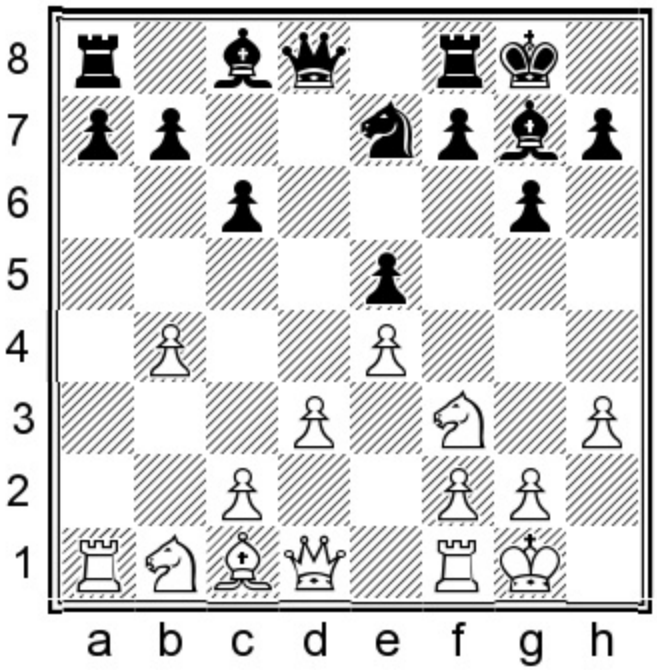
10...♘h5 [10...cxd3 11.♗xe5 dxc2 12.♕xc2 ♕e7 13.♗d4±] 11.d4! f6 Black can't afford to open the position yet. 12.♘c3 ♗e6 13.♕d2 ♘f4 14.dxe5 fxe5 15.♘e2 ♖d8 16.♕e3 0-0 17.♖ad1±



Position after: 17.♖ad1±

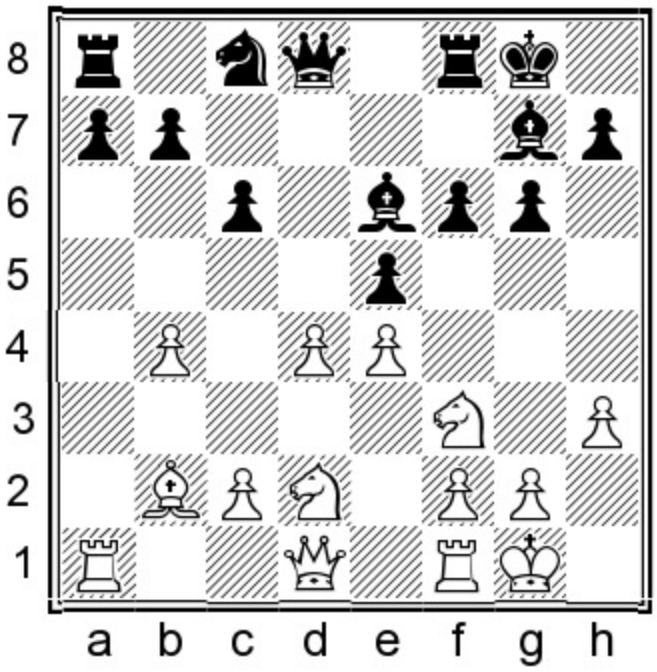
In practical terms Black has a dangerous-looking attack. However, his e5- and a7-pawns are weak. We can choose the right time to capture on f4, and will probably always look to exchange as much material as we can – with the knowledge that endings will most likely favour White.

B) 7...♘e7 8.a3 0-0 9.b4 cxb4 10.axb4



Position after: 10.axb4

The position seems very easy to play with White, and our next few developing moves are extremely logical. 10...♗e6 [10...h6 11.♗b2 ♕d6 12.♘bd2 b5 13.♘b3± White already had a big positional advantage in Zhang – Carow, Berlin 2015.] 11.♘bd2 ♘c8 12.♗b2 f6 13.d4!

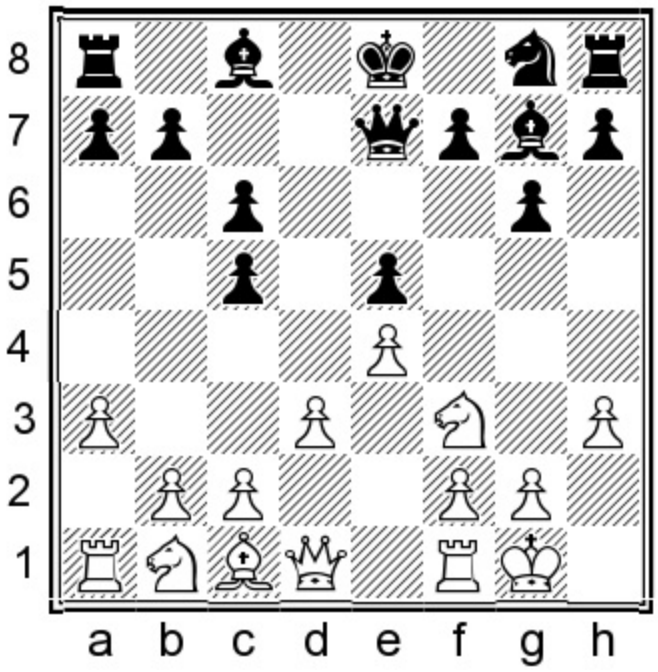


Position after: 13.d4!

Always a good response to ...f7-f6. 13...exd4 14.♘xd4 ♗f7 15.c4!± We need to continuously keep

an eye out for ...f6-f5, but for now Black's bishop-pair are well contained. A follow-up of c4-c5 looks logical.

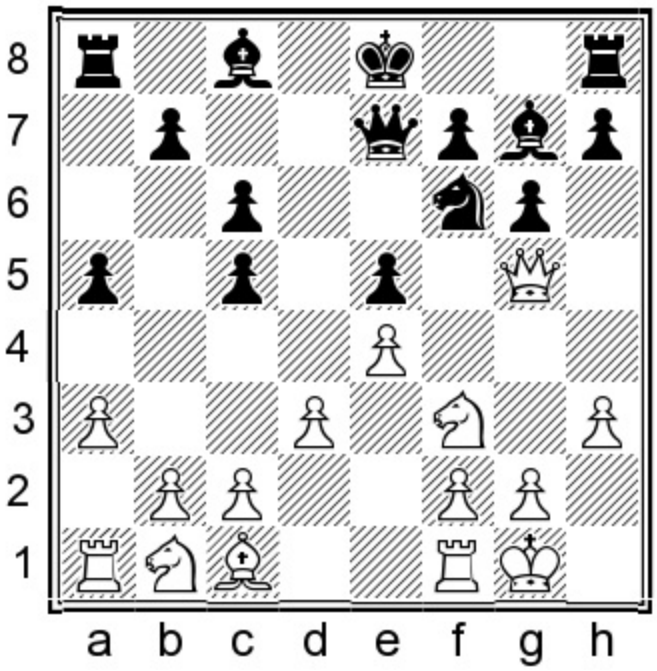
8.a3



Position after: 8.a3

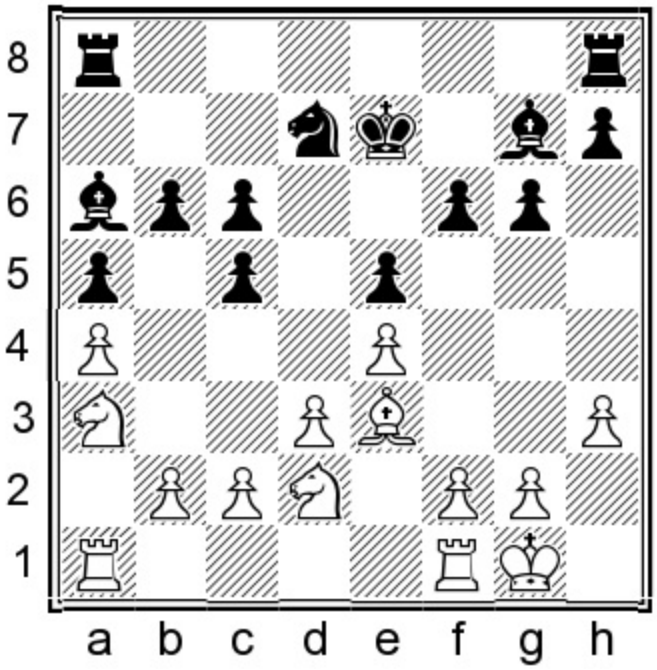
8...♘f6

8...a5 Black prevents us from playing b2-b4, but weakens his queenside structure. Here I found an interesting idea to quickly attempt to exchange queens. 9.♕d2!? ♘f6 [9...h6 10.♕c3! Black will struggle to develop his g8-knight, and we are once again threatening b2-b4.] 10.♕g5!



Position after: 10.♕g5!

A) 10...♘d7 11.♕xe7+ ♔xe7 12.a4 The queenless middlegame looks good for White. Black's queenside structure is weakened, and once we finish developing our minor pieces we'll probably break with f2-f4. 12...f6 13.♘a3 b6 14.♗e3 ♗a6 15.♘d2±



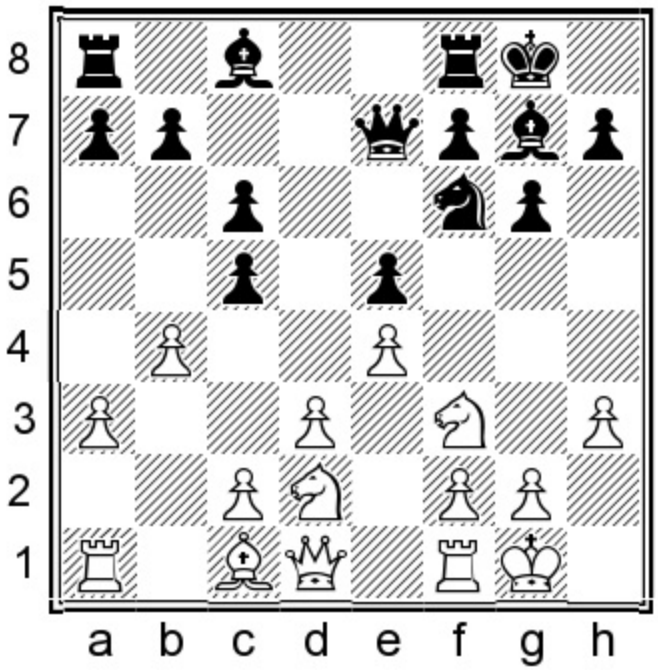
Position after: 15.♘d2±

B) 10...0-0 11.♕xe5 ♕xe5 12.♘xe5 ♘xe4 13.♘xg6! hxg6 14.dxe4 ♖e8 15.♖e1± I don't think Black has enough compensation for the pawn here.

9.♘bd2 0-0

9...♘d7 Black doesn't have time to achieve ...♘d7-f8-e6 before castling, as we'll be able to open up the a3-f8 diagonal with severe consequences. 10.b4 ♘f8 11.bxc5 ♕xc5 12.a4±

10.b4

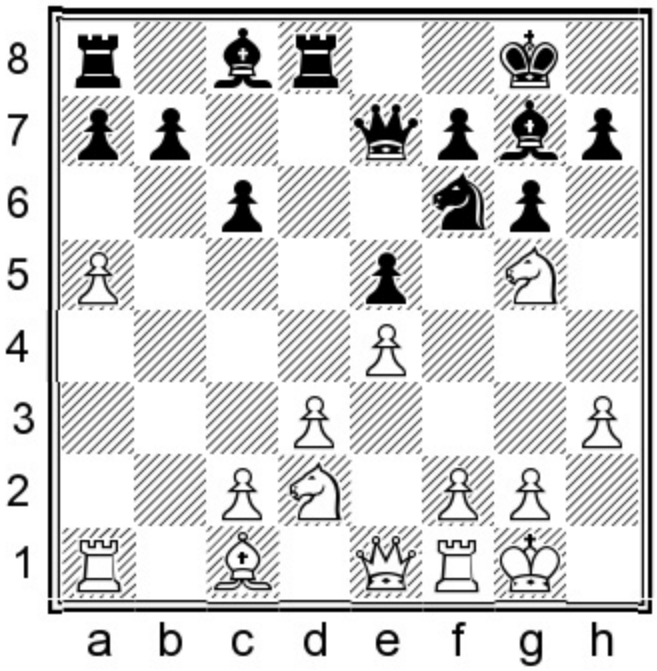


Position after: 10.b4

Black has several ways to continue developing, but the variations illustrate that our plan is usually very straightforward.

10...♖d8

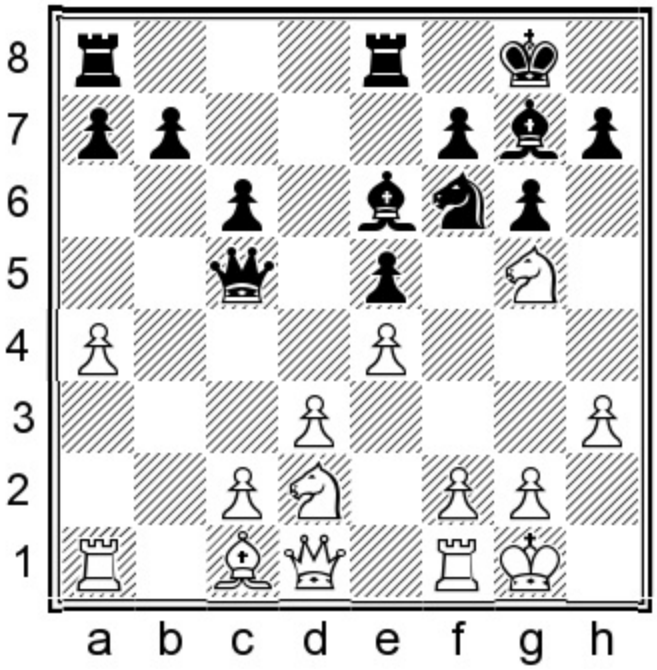
A) 10...♗e6 11.bxc5 [11.♘xe5 ♘g4!∞] 11...♕xc5 12.a4 ♖fd8 13.♘g5! ♗c8 14.a5 ♕e7 15.♕e1



Position after: 15.♕e1

Our idea is to support our knight on c4 with ♕c3. 15...♘h5 16.♘c4 f6 17.♘f3 c5 18.♖b1 ♗e6 19.♕c3±

B) 10...♖e8 11.bxc5 ♕xc5 12.a4 ♗e6 [12...♕e7 13.♘c4 ♕c7 14.a5 ♘h5 15.♗e3 ♗e6 16.♘fd2±] 13.♘g5



Position after: 13.♘g5

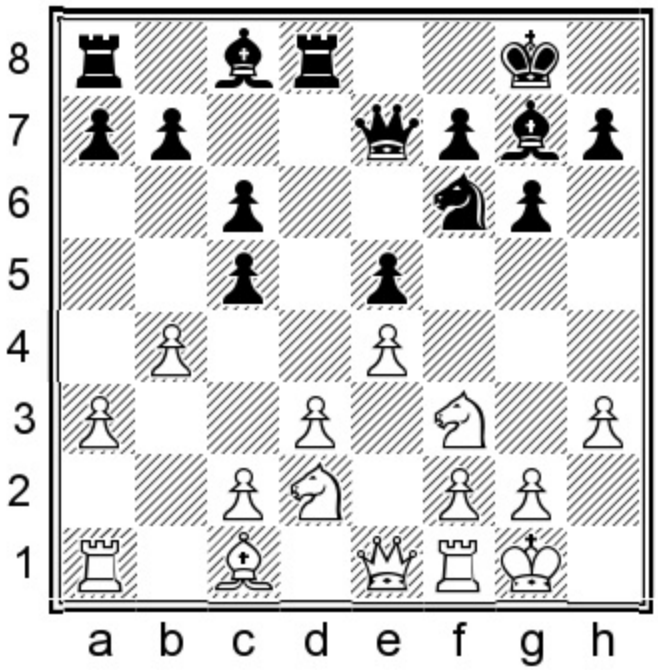
If Black concedes his bishop-pair, our claim to an advantage can't be rejected. 13...♕e7 14.♘xe6

♕xe6 15.♘b3±

C) 10...♘h5 11.♘b3 cxb4 12.axb4 ♘f4 13.c3± We'll probably capture on f4 next, followed by e4-e5.

D) 10...♘d7 11.♘c4 b6 12.♕e1! ♗a6 13.♕c3±

11.♕e1!



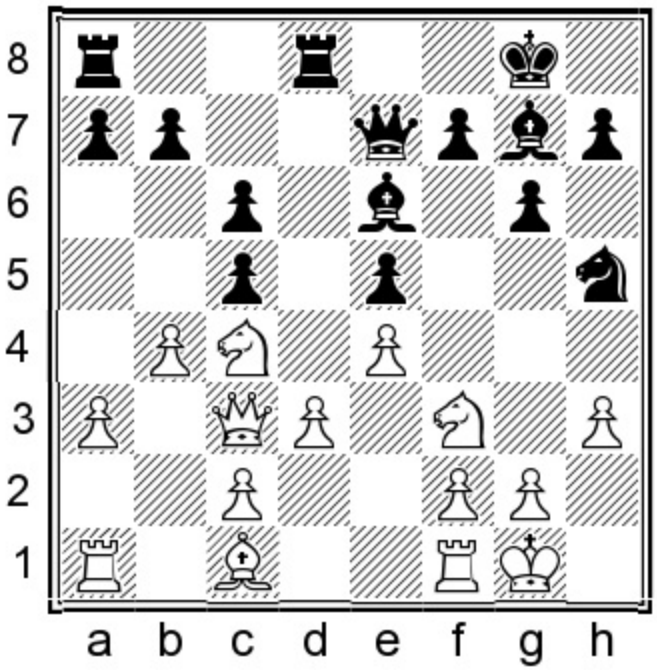
Position after: 11.♕e1!

As always, the maneouvre ♕e1-c3 looks like the right approach.

11...♘h5

11...cxb4 12.axb4 ♕xb4?! [12...♗e6 13.♘g5! ♗d7 14.♘c4± Followed by ♕c3 next.] 13.♗a3± Black will concede the e5-pawn after something like ♘c4 on the next move.

12.♘c4 ♗e6 13.♕c3±



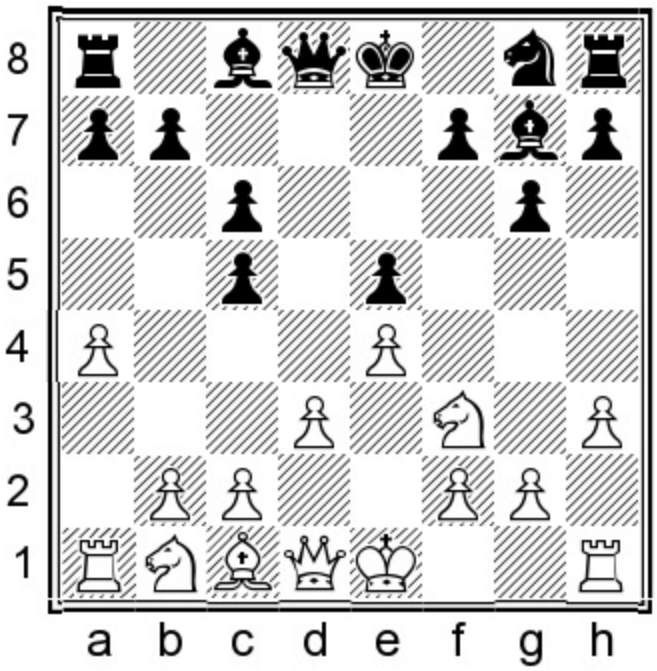
Position after: 13.♕c3±

Black is usually very solid in the variations after 10.b4. Nevertheless, I think I've shown some nice ways to play for White – particularly the ♕e1-c3 maneouvre.

If you aren't convinced by the quick a2-a3 and b2-b4 approach, we have a perfectly good alternative on move 7 (see the following subchapter).

d) 7.a4!?

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.♗xc6 dxc6 5.d3 ♗g7 6.h3 e5 7.a4!?



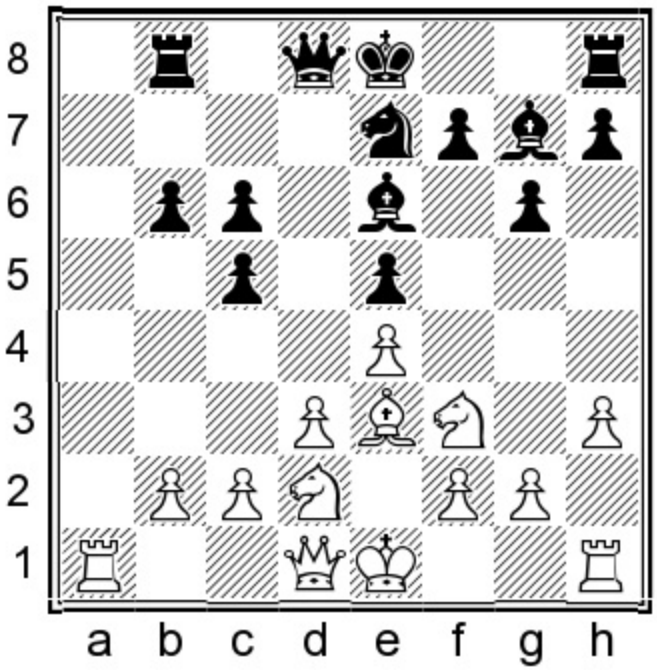
Position after: 7.a4!?

I have decided to provide this as an extra option because the line illustrates how Black's queenside pawns can easily become weak.

7...a5

Black can prevent us from playing a4-a5, but he may weaken his queenside pawns in the process.

A) 7...♘e7 It's logical to opt against playing ...a7-a5, considering that b2-b4 was often an uncomfortable move to meet for Black. In this case, we'll continue with a4-a5, and Black will have to worry about his c5-pawn being a weakness. 8.a5 ♖b8 [8...0-0 9.♗e3 ♕d6 10.♘bd2 ♗e6 11.♘g5± Black will struggle to hold onto his c5-pawn.] 9.♗e3 b6 10.♘bd2 ♗e6 11.axb6 axb6

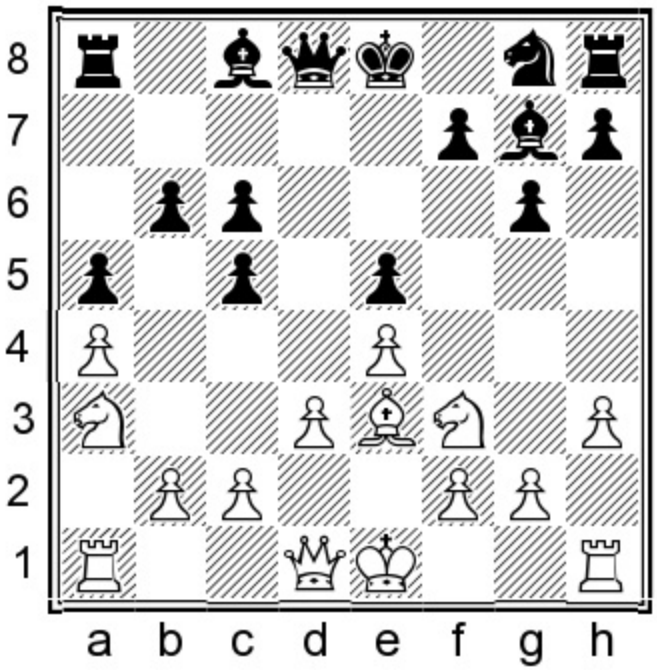


Position after: 11...axb6

12.♘c4! ♗xc4 13.dxc4 ♕c7 [13...♕xd1+ Trading the queens also suits White. 14.♔xd1 ♘c8 15.♔e2 ♘d6 16.♘d2±] 14.h4! 0-0 15.h5↑ White will continue with h5-h6 before castling kingside, pursuing avenues on both sides of the board.

B) 7...♘f6 Trying to revert back to the mainline plan with ...♘f6-d7 doesn't work, as we can capture on e5 and attain a better ending. 8.♘xe5 ♘xe4 9.♘xf7 ♘xf2 10.♘xd8 ♘xd1 11.♔xd1 ♔xd8 12.♗g5+ ♔d7 13.♘c3±

8.♗e3 b6 9.♘a3

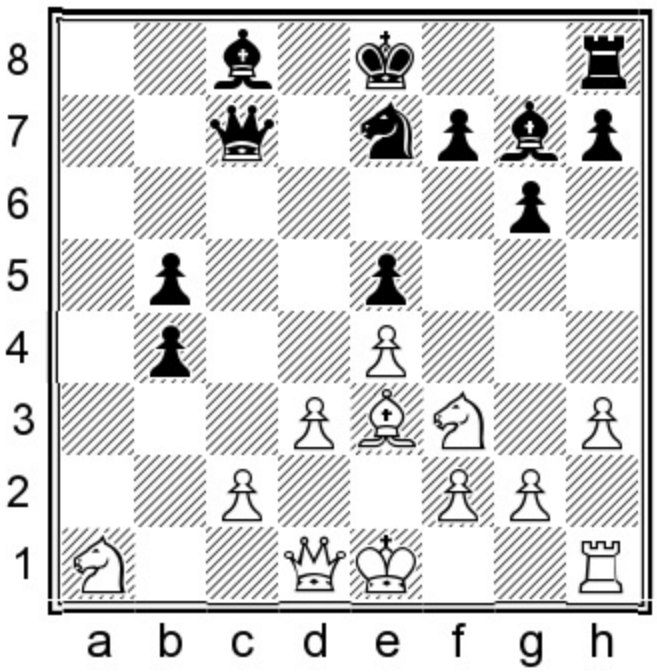


Position after: 9.♘a3

Our plan is now to play ♘c4 followed by b2-b4.

9...♕c7

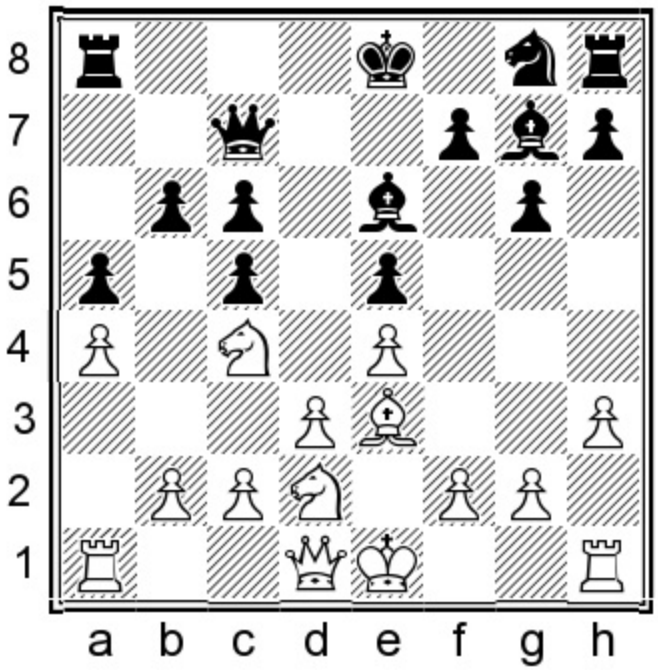
A) 9...♘e7 10.♘c4 ♕c7 11.b4! b5 [11...axb4?! 12.a5!± undermines the c5-pawn with catastrophic consequences.] 12.axb5 cxb5 13.♘xa5 cxb4 14.♘b3 ♖xa1 15.♘xa1± Oral – Bartak, Czechia 1993.



Position after: 15.♘xa1±

B) 9...f6 10.♘c4 ♗e6 11.♘fd2 ♘e7 12.b4! White had a big advantage in Collutiis – Rago, Amantea 2011.

10.♘c4 ♗e6 11.♘fd2



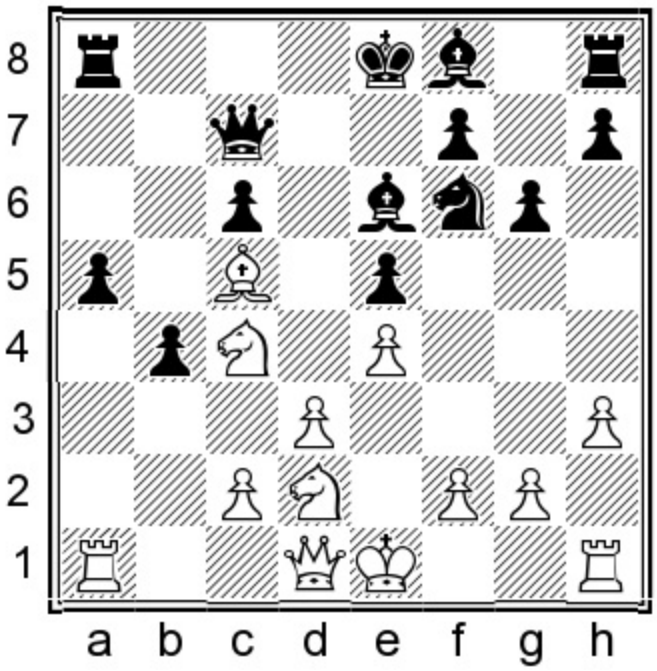
Position after: 11.♘fd2

11...♘f6

11...♘e7 12.0-0 0-0 13.f4!±

12.0-0

12.b4 isn't as convincing here. 12...axb4 13.a5 bxa5 14.♗xc5 ♗f8∓

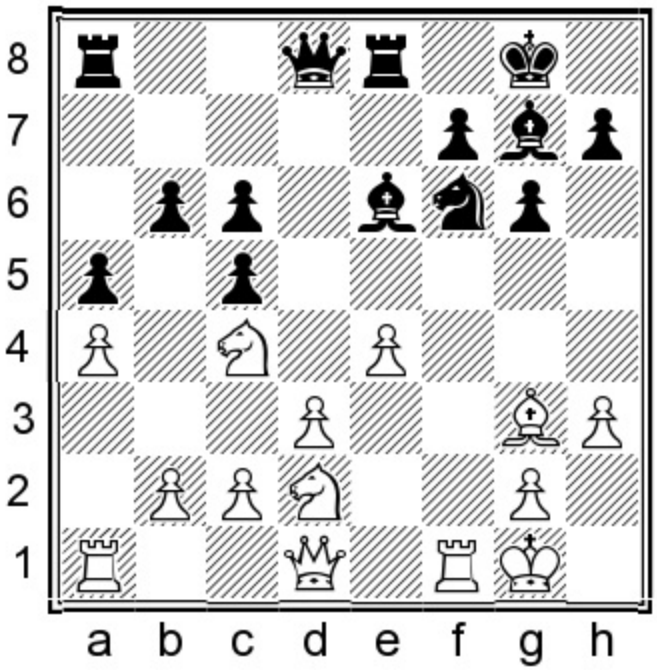


Position after: 14...♗f8∓

12...0-0 13.f4!

As we've played ♘fd2, it makes sense to adapt to the circumstances and embark upon a different plan.

13...exf4 14.♗xf4 ♕d8 15.♗d6 ♖e8 16.♗g3±

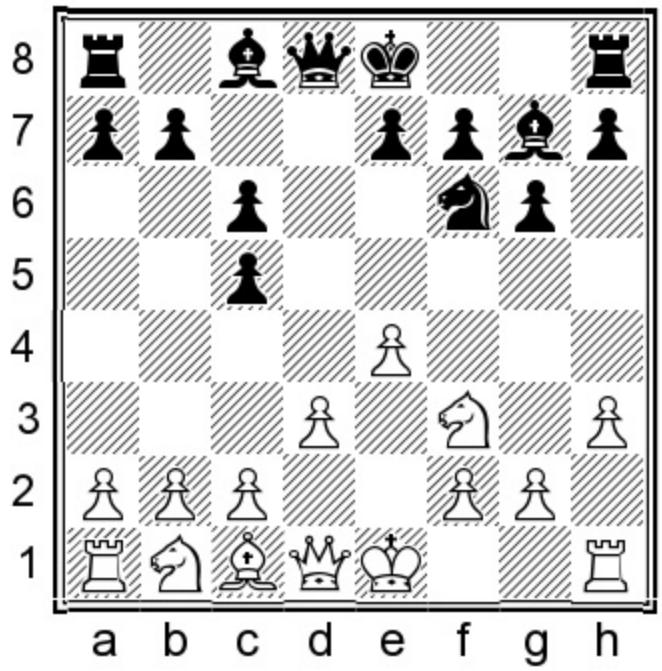


Position after: 16.♗g3±

Black’s position is solid but I feel like his queenside pawns will be long-term weaknesses.

Chapter 20
4.♗xc6 dxc6 with 6...♘f6

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.♗xc6 dxc6 5.d3 ♗g7 6.h3 ♘f6



Chapter Guide

Chapter 20 – 4.♗xc6 dxc6 with 6...♘f6

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.♗xc6 dxc6 5.d3 ♗g7 6.h3 ♘f6 7.♘c3

a) 7...0-0 8.0-0 --

b) 7...0-0 8.0-0 ♘d7

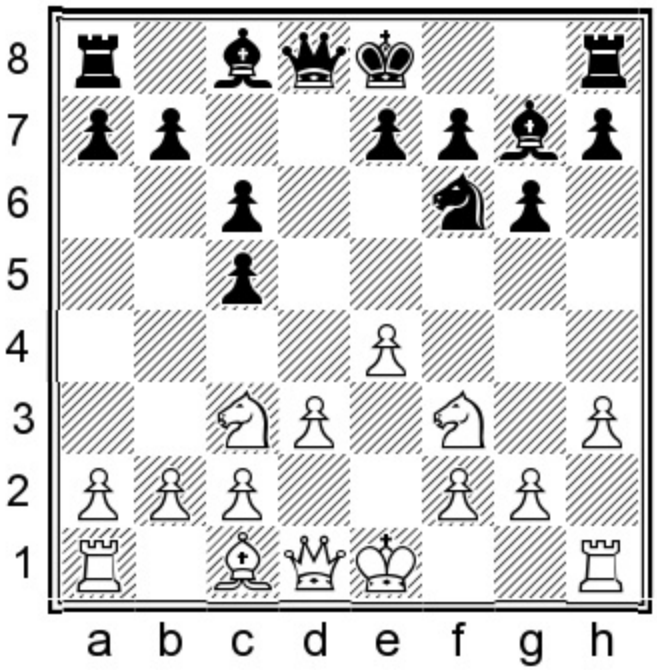
c) 7...♕c7!?

d) 7...♘d7 8.♗e3 e5 9.♕d2 h6 10.0-0 ♕e7

e) 7...♘d7 8.♗e3 e5 9.♕d2 h6 10.0-0 b6

a) 7...0-0 8.0-0 --

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.♗xc6 dxc6 5.d3 ♗g7 6.h3 ♘f6 7.♘c3

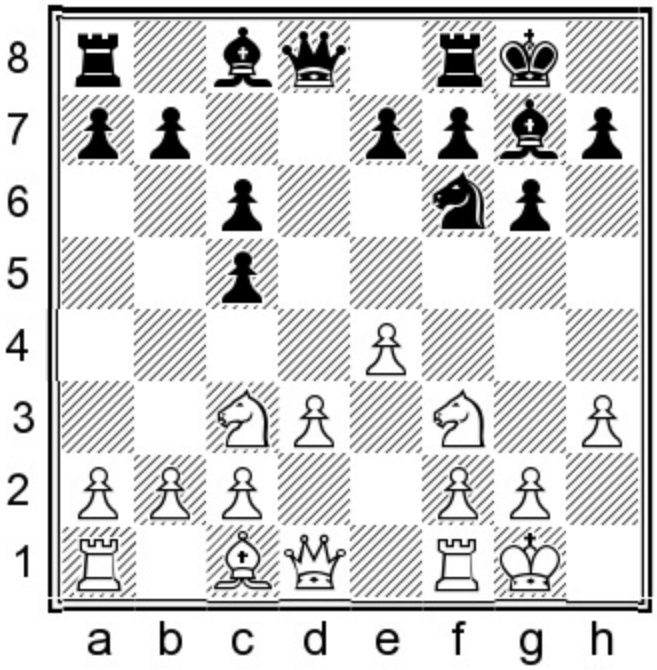


Position after: 7.♘c3

7...0-0

7...♕c7!? may attempt to do away with not only ...♘d7 but also ...0-0; this is covered in subchapter c.

8.0-0



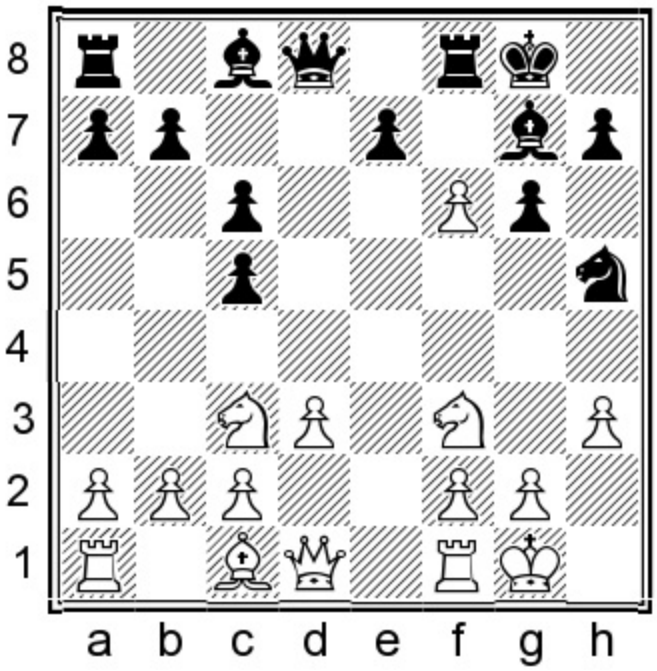
Position after: 8.0-0

Black has already castled, and it's logical that we also prioritise king safety before deciding where to develop our bishop. Black will now try to play for ...e7-e5, and he has a few preparatory options.

8...♕c7

A) 8...e5? It's not possible to play this move immediately. 9.♘xe5 ♘xe4 10.♘xe4 ♗xe5 11.♘xc5± White was just a pawn up in Van Kampen – Pileckis, Riga 2013.

B) 8...♘h5 Black wants to play ...e7-e5 and insert his knight on f4. However, we have an obvious continuation which prevents him from enacting his plan. 9.e5! f5 [9...♗h8 10.♘e4 b6 11.♗h6 ♖e8 12.♕d2±] 10.exf6

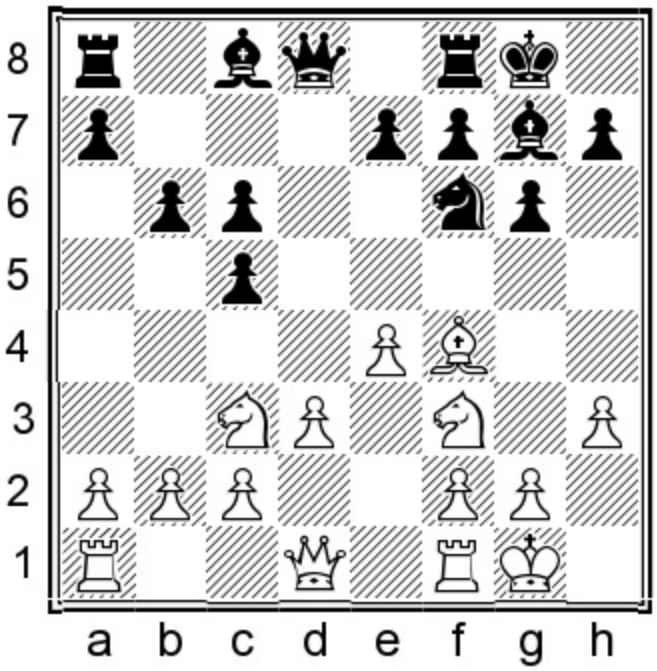


Position after: 10.exf6

10...♘xf6 [10...exf6 Black will hardly get any compensation for the piece here. 11.g4 g5 12.gxh5 ♗xh3 13.h6! ♗xh6 14.♖e1 ♗g4 15.♖e3 f5 16.♕f1 f4 17.♖e1+–] 11.♗f4± Recapturing with the knight saves the piece, but Black will have to contend with an inferior pawn structure for the rest of the game.

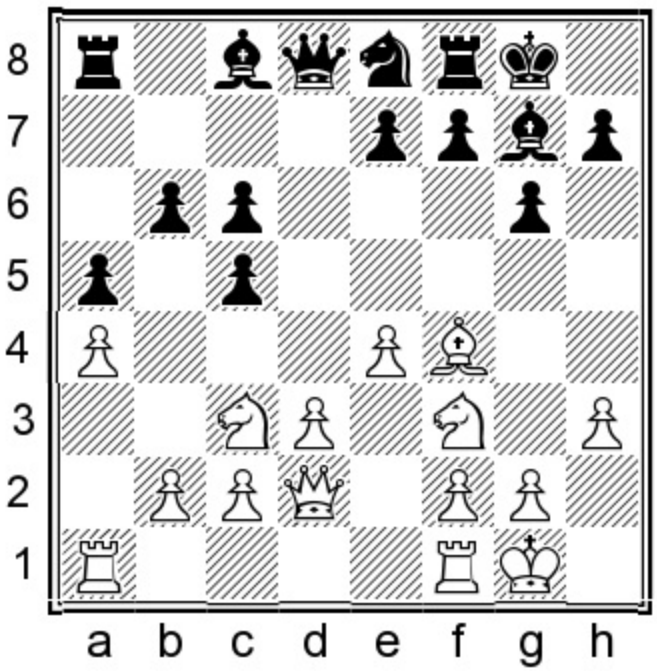
C) 8...♘d7 is covered in the next subchapter.

D) 8...b6 9.♗f4! The benefit of delaying the development of our bishop.



Position after: 9.♗f4!

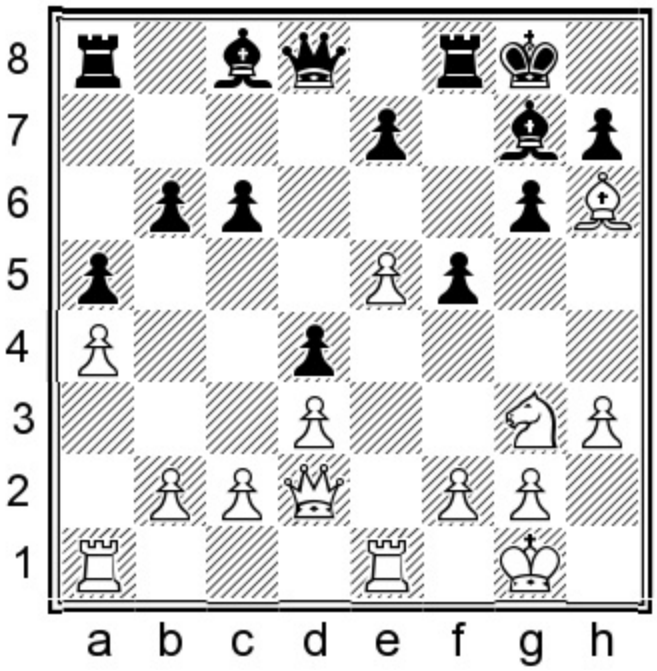
Here Black will find it very difficult to achieve ...e7-e5. 9...♘e8 [9...h6 10.♕d2 ♔h7 11.a4 a5 12.♖ad1 ♘e8 13.♗g3 ♘c7 14.d4 As Black hasn't been able to play ...e7-e5, this break is evidently favourable for White. 14...cxd4 15.♘xd4±; 9...♘h5 10.♗h2±; 9...♘d7 10.e5!±] 10.a4 a5 11.♕d2



Position after: 11.♕d2

We simply have a favourable version of the lines after 8...♘d7. Our plan remains the same – to exchange off the dark-squared bishops, and play either f2-f4 or d2-d4 depending on circumstance.

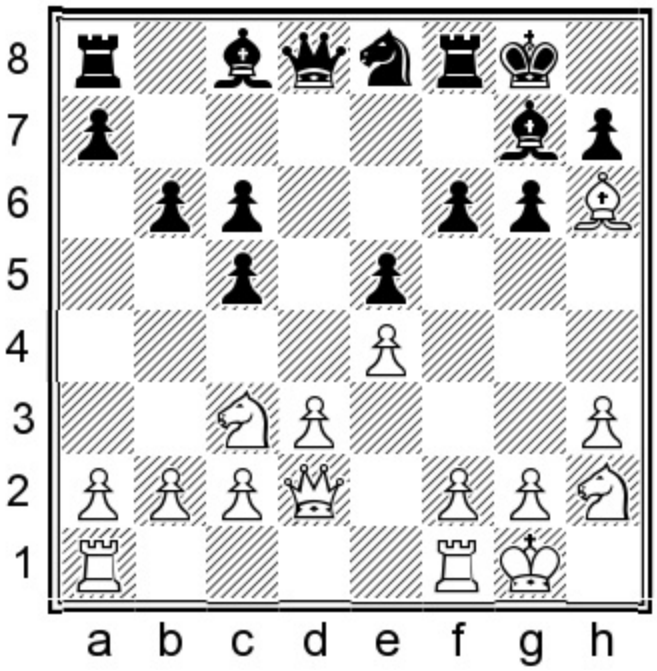
11...f6 [11...♘c7 12.♗h6 ♘e6 13.♗xg7 ♔xg7 14.♘e2±] 12.e5! ♘c7 13.♖fe1 ♘e6 14.♗h6 ♘d4 15.♘xd4 cxd4 16.♘e4 f5 17.♘g3



Position after: 17.♘g3

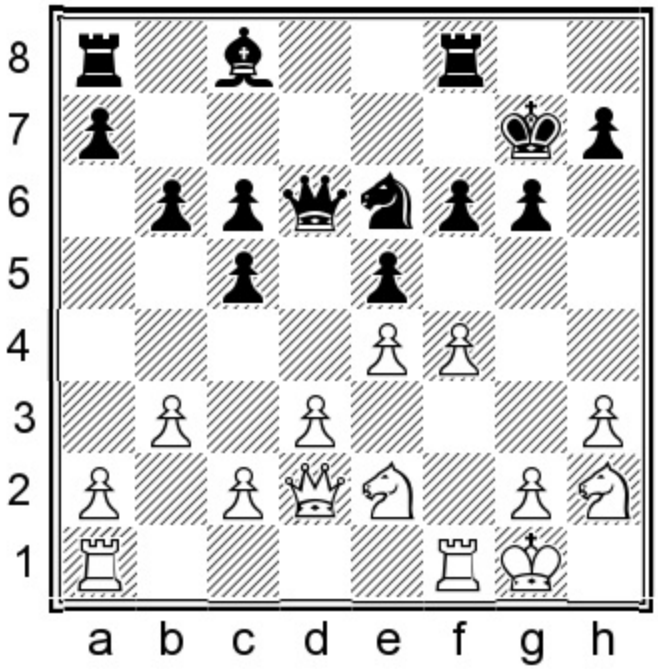
The transformation in structure suggests that our play should be entirely kingside oriented, and the exchange of dark-squared bishops will considerably facilitate this approach. 17...c5 18.h4→

E) 8...♘e8 9.♗e3 [9.♗f4 This isn't as effective here. 9...f6 10.e5 g5!∞] 9...b6 10.♕d2 Our plan is very similar to the variations after 8...♘d7. 10...e5 11.♗h6 f6 12.♘h2



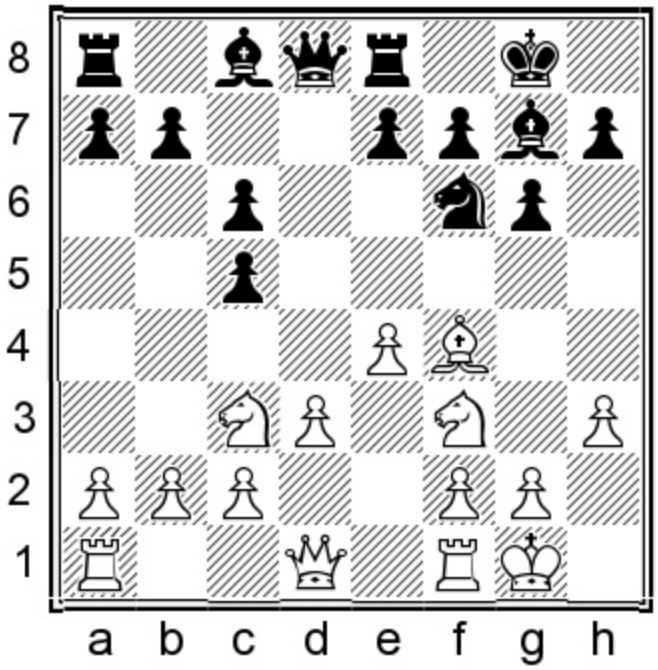
Position after: 12.♘h2

12...♕d6 [12...g5!? This is the correspondence mainline. However, I like White's practical chances after 13.♗xg7 ♘xg7 14.a4 a5 15.♘d1!±] 13.b3 ♘c7 [13...♗xh6 14.♕xh6 ♘c7 15.♘e2 a5 16.a4 ♘e6 17.f4±] 14.♘e2 ♘e6 15.♗xg7 ♔xg7 16.f4±



Position after: 16.f4±

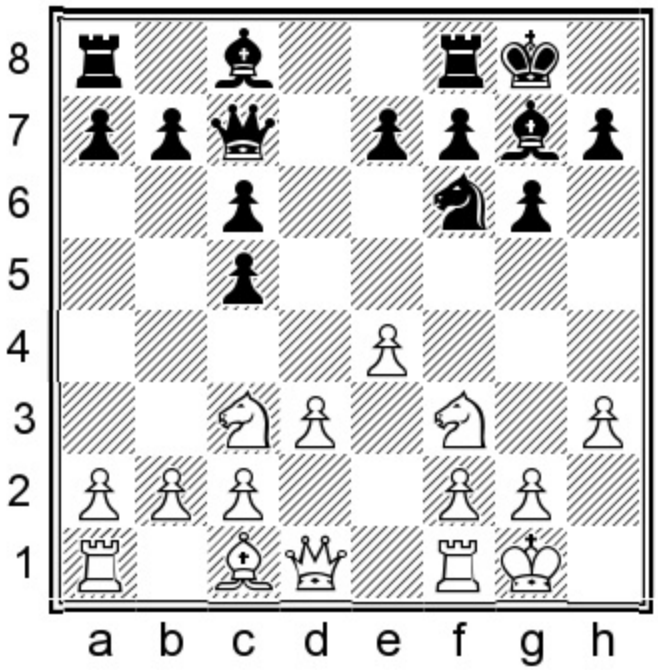
F) 8...♖e8 A relatively popular correspondence move, but there aren't any underlying subtleties that we need to worry about. 9.♗f4!



Position after: 9.♗f4!

F1) 9...♘d7 10.♕d2 [10.e5!?] 10...e5 11.♗h6 transposes to the next subchapter.

F2) 9...♘h5 10.♗e3 ♕d6 [10...b6 11.e5±] 11.a4! a5 [11...e5 12.a5± Followed by ♘a4 and ♘d2-c4.] 12.♘d2 e5 13.♘c4 ♕e7 14.♘b6 ♖a6 15.♘xc8 ♖xc8 16.g3±



Position after: 8...♕c7

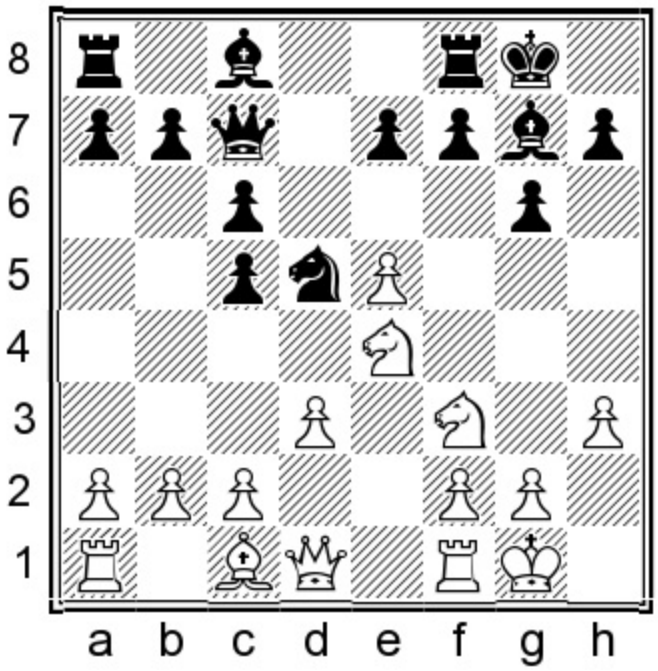
9.e5!?

9.a4!? Playing without e4-e5 also seems relatively promising, e.g. 9...a5 10.♗e3 b6 11.♘d2 e5 12.f4 exf4 13.♗xf4 ♕d8 14.♔h1±

9...♘d5

9...♘d7 10.e6! fxe6 11.♖e1 ♘f6 12.♕e2±

10.♘e4

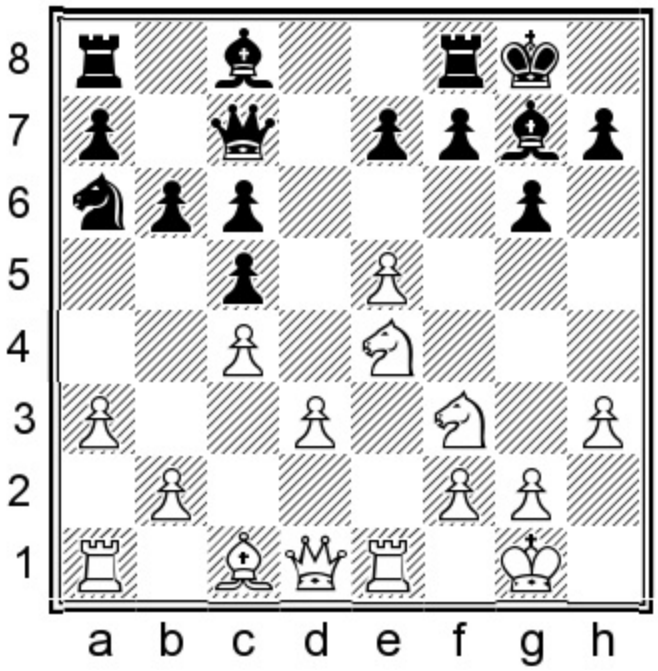


Position after: 10.♘e4

10...b6

10...♗xe5 11.♘xe5 ♕xe5 12.♘xc5± This seems preferable for White too.

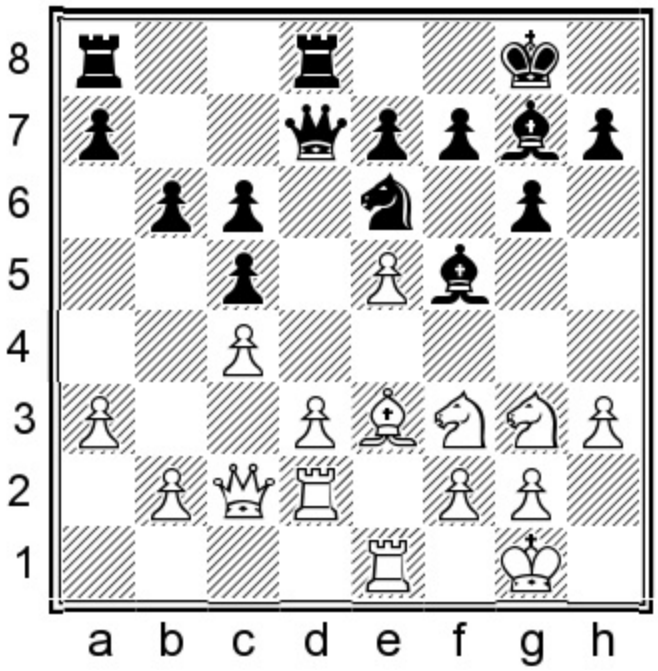
11.c4! ♘b4 12.a3 ♘a6 13.♖e1



Position after: 13.♖e1

Black is cramped and his knight is out of the game. Our plan should now revolve around supporting the e5-pawn, whilst bringing our pieces into the centre with the target of achieving a d3-d4 pawn break. Consider the following illustrative line:

13...♖d8 14.♘g3 ♗e6 15.♕c2 ♕d7 16.♖d1 ♘c7 17.♗e3 ♗f5 18.♖d2 ♘e6 19.♖e1



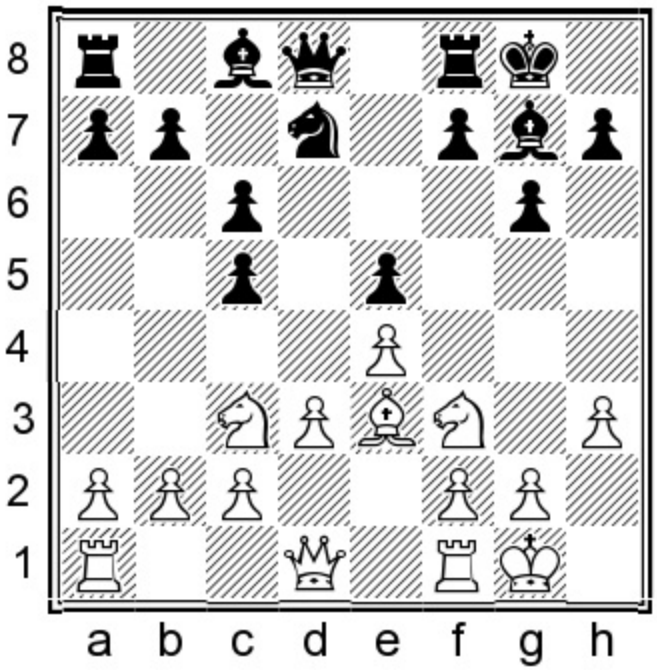
Position after: 19.♖e1

We can capture on f5 at our leisure.

19...♕c7 20.♖dd1 ♗xe5 21.♘xf5 gxf5 22.♗xc5 ♗f6 23.♗b4±

b) 7...0-0 8.0-0 ♘d7

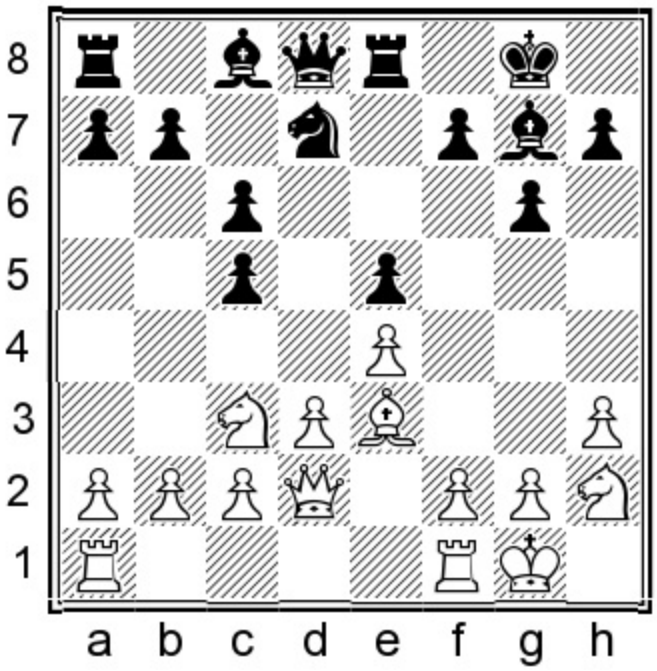
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.♗xc6 dxc6 5.d3 ♗g7 6.h3 ♘f6 7.♘c3 0-0 8.0-0 ♘d7 9.♗e3 e5



Position after: 9...e5

Preventing d4 for the time being, and completing Black's early opening plan. It's worth taking a step back and understanding what we're playing for. As Black has castled quickly, he's signalled that he doesn't mind us playing ♗e3, ♕d2 and ♗h6 – in an attempt to exchange off the dark-squared bishops. The resulting positions will always be slightly better for White, but Black will maintain that he's very solid. As there are often a great deal of possibilities, I've elected to show some model games rather than analyse endless variations – but the model games are excellent in demonstrating key ideas in these lines. Our plan usually remains the same – exchange off dark-squared bishops, attempt to create a queenside weakness with a2-a4, and at the right moment push f2-f4, possibly entering into an endgame if circumstances are favourable.

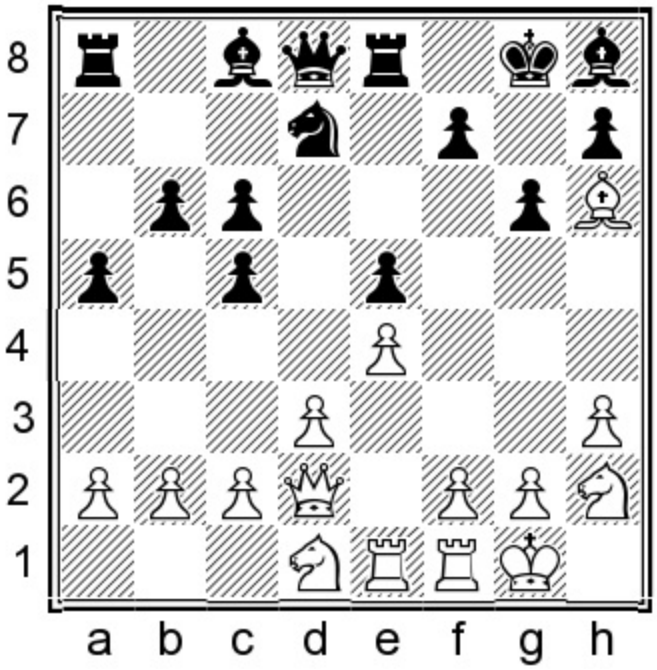
10.♕d2 ♖e8 11.♘h2



Position after: 11.♘h2

11...♕e7

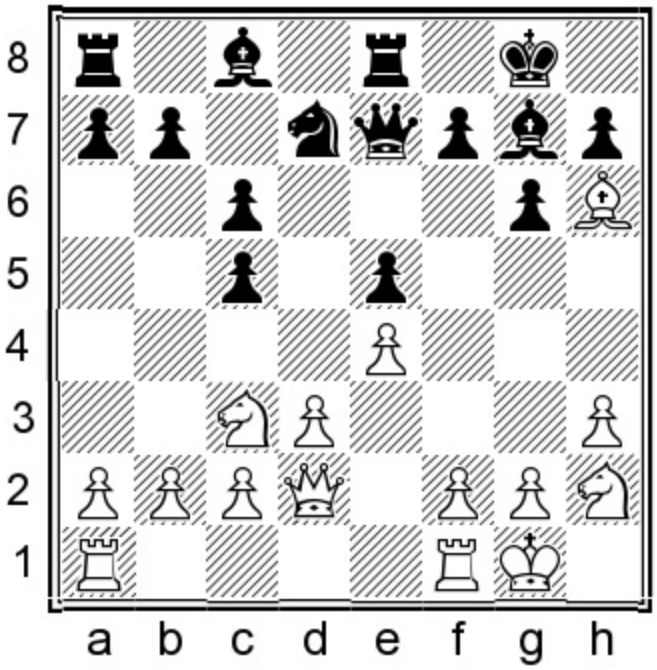
11...b6 12.♗h6 ♗h8 13.♖ae1 a5!? Black has a good score in correspondence games from this position, but after 14.♘d1!N



Position after: 14.♘d1!N

followed by ♘e3 and f2-f4, White has very good attacking potential.

12.♗h6



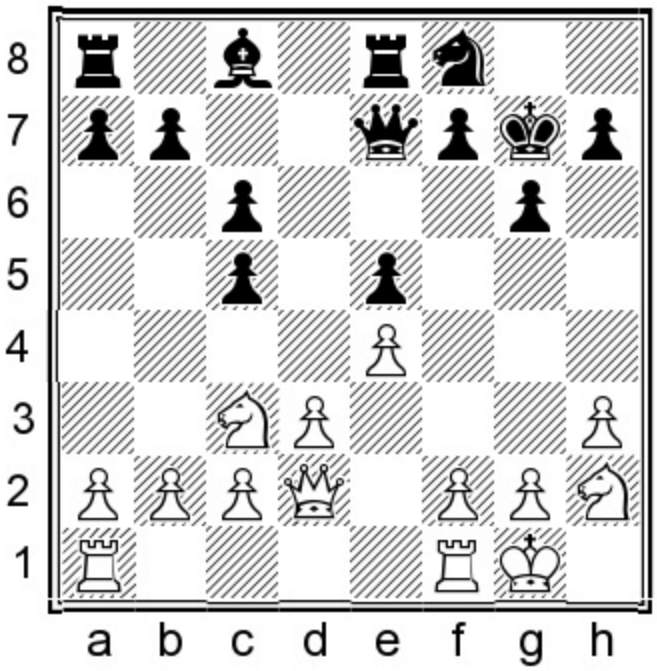
Position after: 12.♗h6

Black has a choice here about whether he wants to allow the trade of dark-squared bishops.

12...♗h8

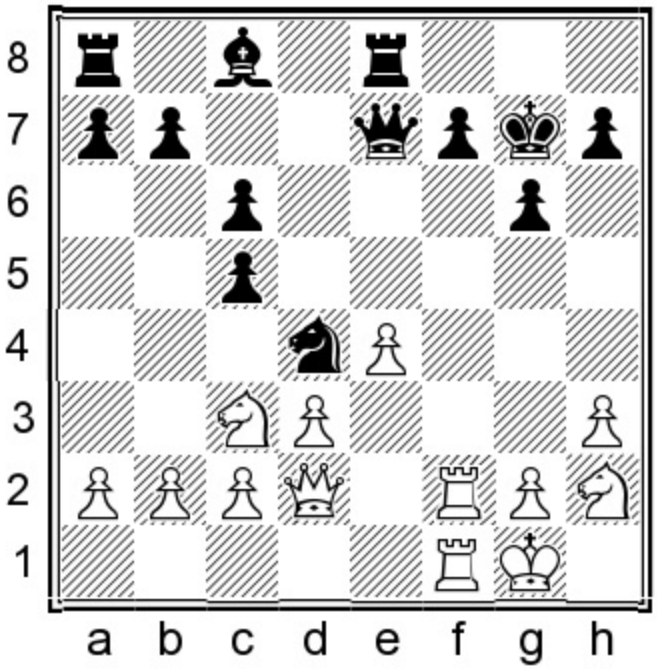
Judging from our analysis of how exposed Black's king is after the trade of dark-squared bishops, it makes a lot of sense to maintain the g7-bishop. I'll now present two games which made a big impression on me as a young kid, when I started out learning the Rossolimo.

12...♘f8 13.♗xg7 ♔xg7



Position after: 13...♔xg7

A) The immediate 14.f4 is of course possible. 14...exf4 15.♖xf4 ♘e6 16.♖f2 [16.♖ff1! was even stronger, as after 16...♕g5 White can avoid the queen exchange with 17.♕f2!±] 16...♘d4 [16...♕g5! was necessary, although White is still better after 17.♘f3 ♕xd2 18.♘xd2±] 17.♖af1

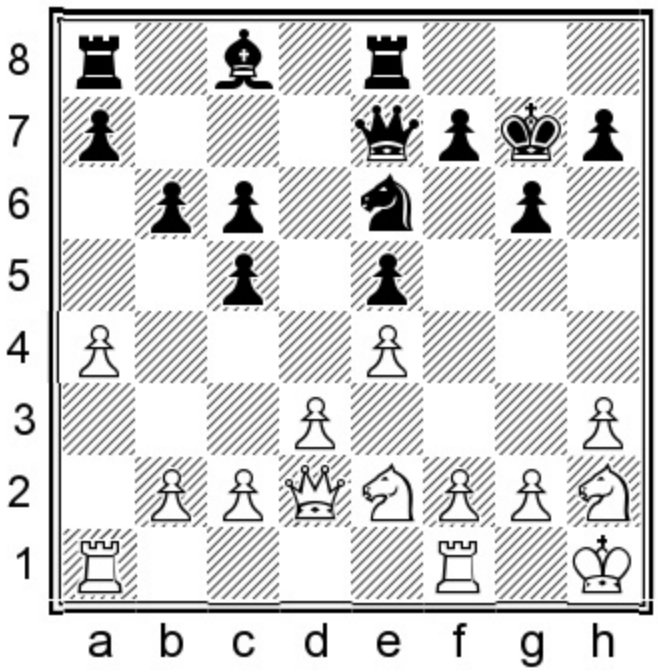


Position after: 17.♖af1

White is already very close to winning, as Black's king is far too exposed to be able to defend the attack. 17...♖f8 18.♘d1! ♗e6 19.♘e3 h5 20.c3 ♘b5 21.♘f5+! ♗xf5 22.exf5 ♕f6 23.fxg6+–

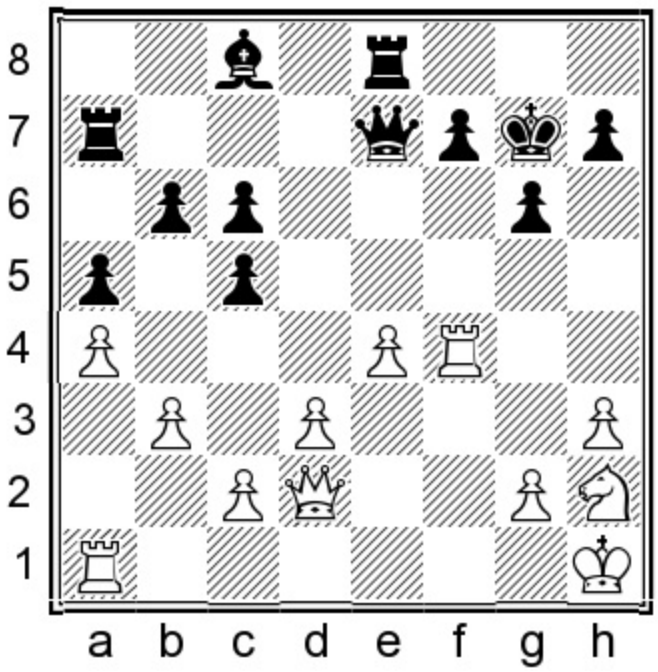
Demchenko – Santos, Lisbon 2018.

B) 14.♘e2!? Continuing to prepare f2-f4 was played by Robin Van Kampen. 14...♘e6 15.♔h1 b6 16.a4! It's always helpful to create a queenside weakness before playing f2-f4.



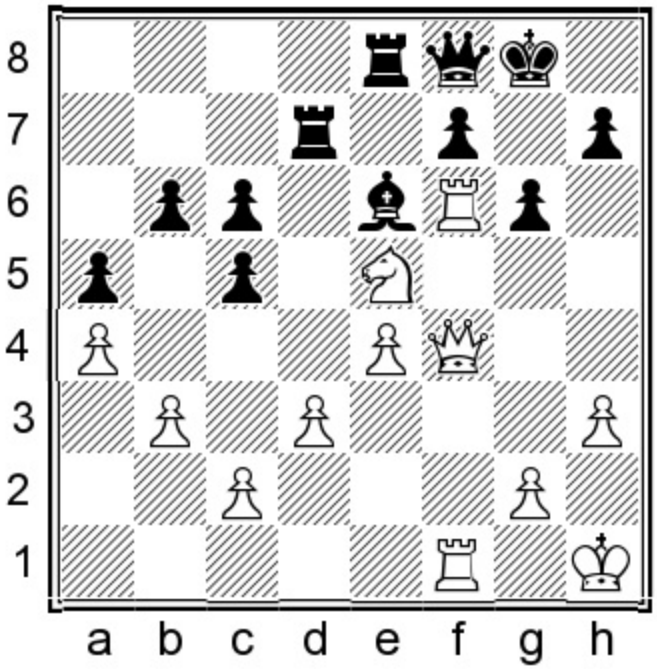
Position after: 16.a4!

16...a5 17.b3 ♖a7 18.f4 exf4 19.♘xf4 ♘xf4 [19...♘d4 seems to put up more resistance, but White should also be doing very well after the simple 20.♘f3±] 20.♖xf4



Position after: 20.♖xf4

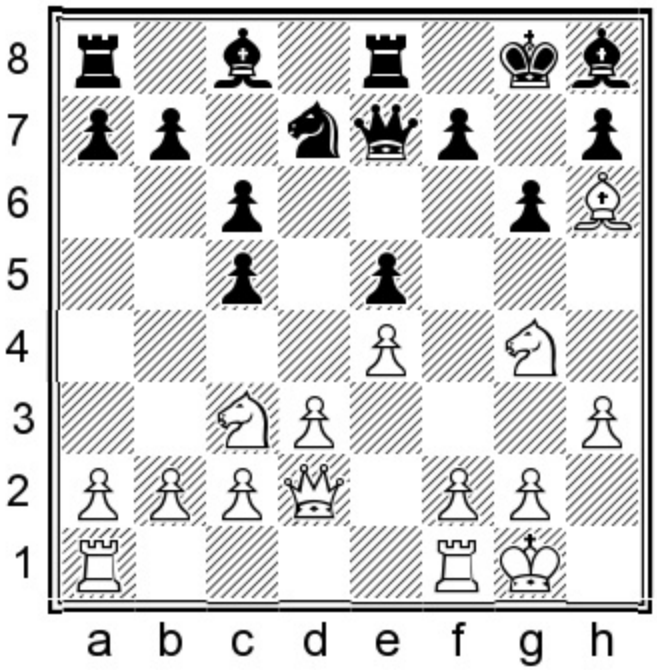
The big problem for Black is that the exchange of dark-squared bishops has weakened his dark-squares. The game illustrates how to take exploit these weaknesses. 20...♕e5 [20...f6 21.♖af1 ♖f8 22.♕c3± This also looks very much one-sided, and a follow-up of ♘f3 and e4-e5 is strong.] 21.♖af1 ♔g8 22.♖f6! ♗e6 23.♕h6 ♕d6 24.♘f3 ♕f8 25.♕f4 ♖d7 26.♘e5+–



Position after: 26.♘e5+–

White was completely crushing in Van Kampen – Ribera Bazan, Tromso 2014.

13.♘g4



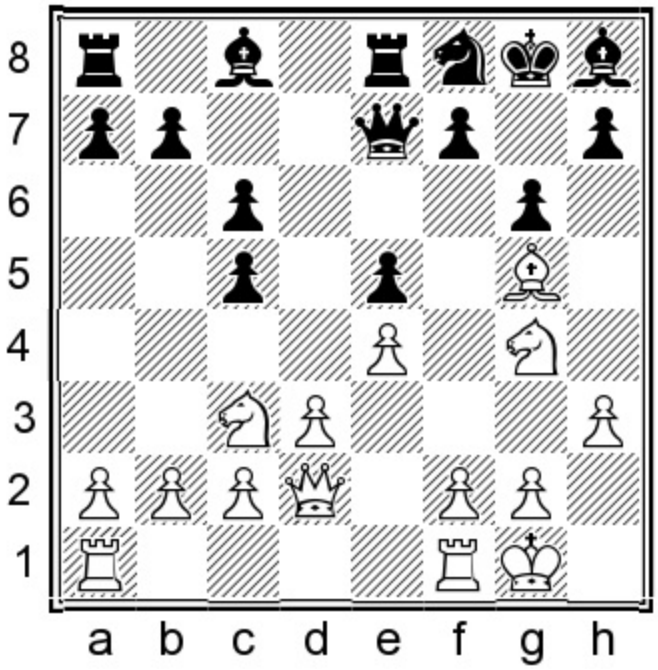
Position after: 13.♘g4

We'll continue our attack in normal fashion, although it's worth delaying f2-f4 until we've grouped our pieces accordingly for the pawn break.

13...♘f8

13...♘f6 14.f3! ♘h5 15.♘e2 ♘f4 16.♘xf4 exf4 17.c3 g5 18.h4 f6 19.g3! White had a big advantage in Bolignano – Senzacqua, ICCF email 2016.

14.♗g5!

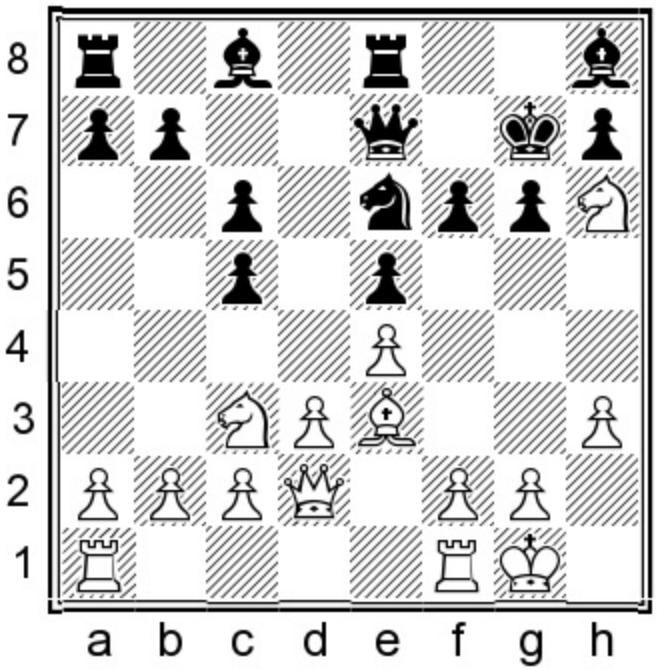


Position after: 14.♗g5!

14...f6

14...♕c7 15.♘h6+ ♔g7 16.f4+–

15.♘h6+ ♔g7 16.♗e3 ♘e6

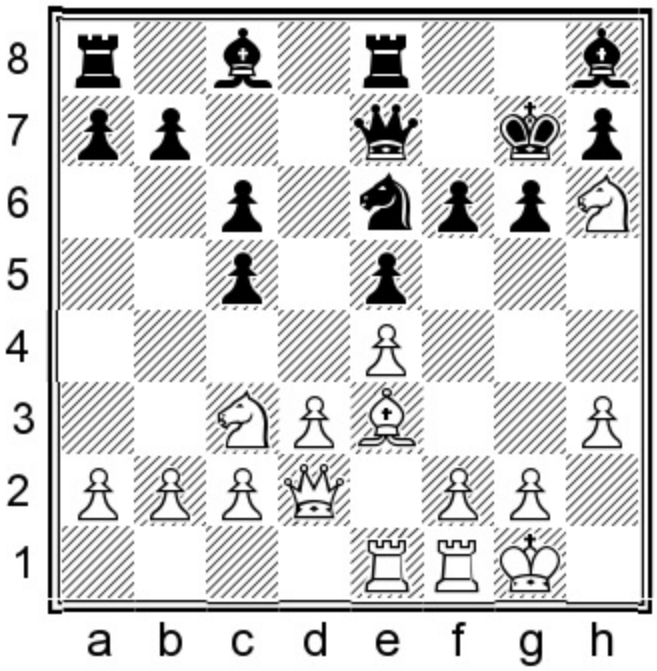


Position after: 16...♘e6

This position has been reached in two high-level practical games. Although I want to look at the games' continuation due to their instructive value, it's worth noting that White has a stronger alternative in this position.

17.♘e2

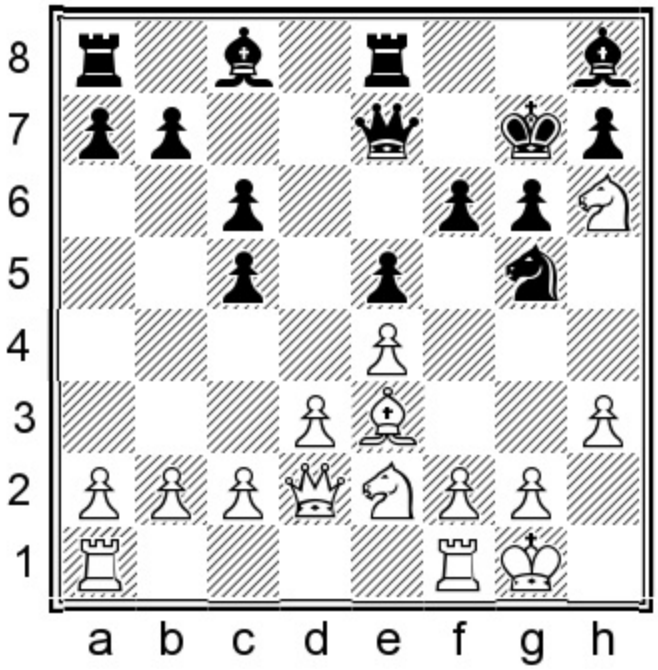
17.♖ae1!N Bringing the final piece into the game before playing f2-f4.



Position after: 17.♖ae1!N

The main point is that ...♘g5 rarely actually threatens ...♔xh6, as f2-f4 will have devastating consequences. 17...♗d7 [17...♘g5? 18.f4! exf4 19.♗xf4 ♔xh6 20.e5!+–] 18.♘e2 ♘g5 19.f4! exf4 20.♗xf4 ♔xh6 21.e5!+–

17...♘g5



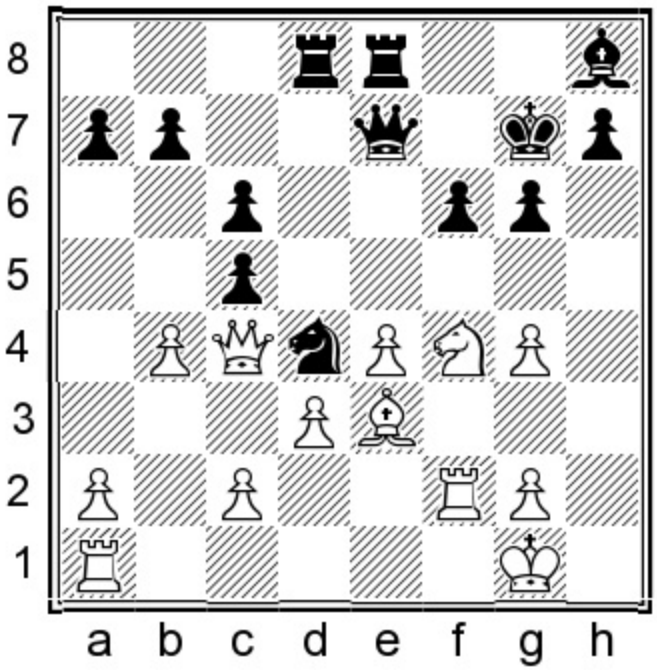
Position after: 17...♘g5

18.♘g4

18.f4!? exf4 19.♗xf4 ♔xh6 20.h4±

18...h5

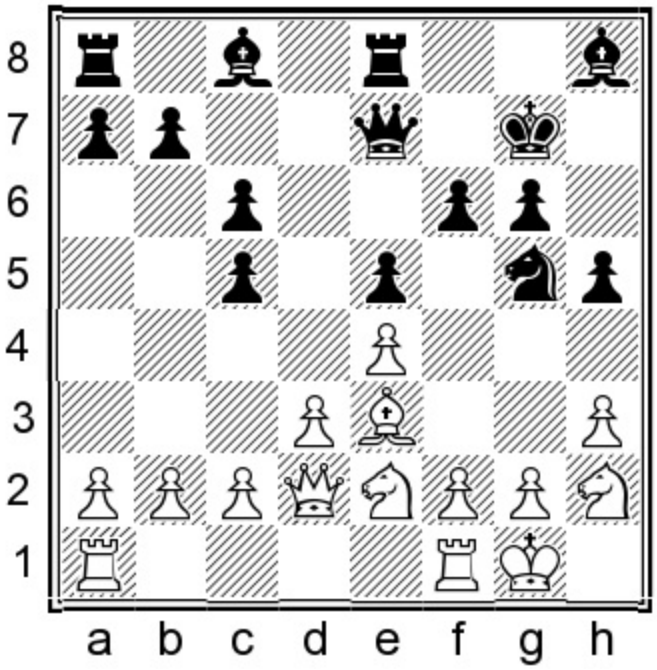
18...♗xg4? was played in Leko – Van Wely, Monte Carlo 2003. After 19.hxg4 ♖ad8 20.♕c3 ♘e6 21.f4 exf4 22.♘xf4 ♘d4 23.♖f2 ♔g8 24.♕c4+ ♔g7 25.b4!



Position after: 25.b4!

White was already close to winning.

19.♘h2

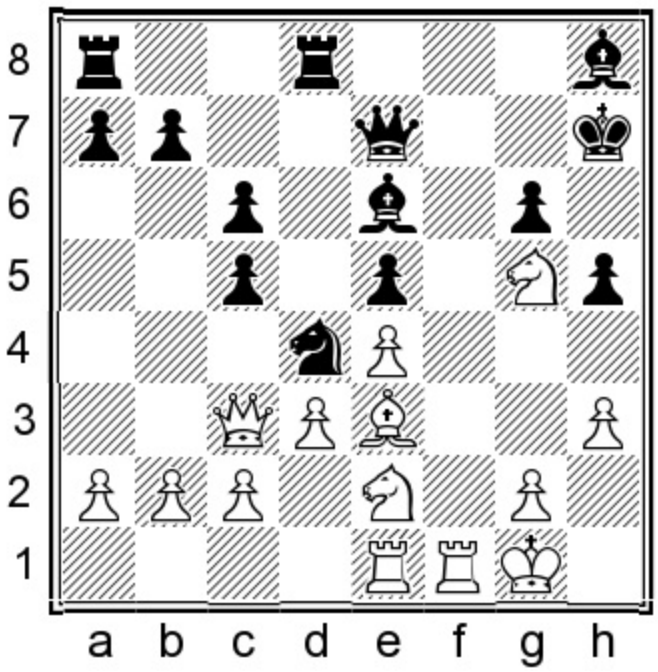


Position after: 19.♘h2

Even though White's knight has been forced back, the value of placing it on h6 was signified in how Black had to weaken his own kingside to prevent the knight from annoying him. The moves ...f7-f6

and, in particular, ...h7-h5, have given us even more kingside attacking potential.

19...♖d8 20.♕c3 ♘e6 21.f4! ♘d4 22.♖ae1 ♔h7 23.♘f3 ♗e6 24.fxe5 fxe5 25.♘g5+

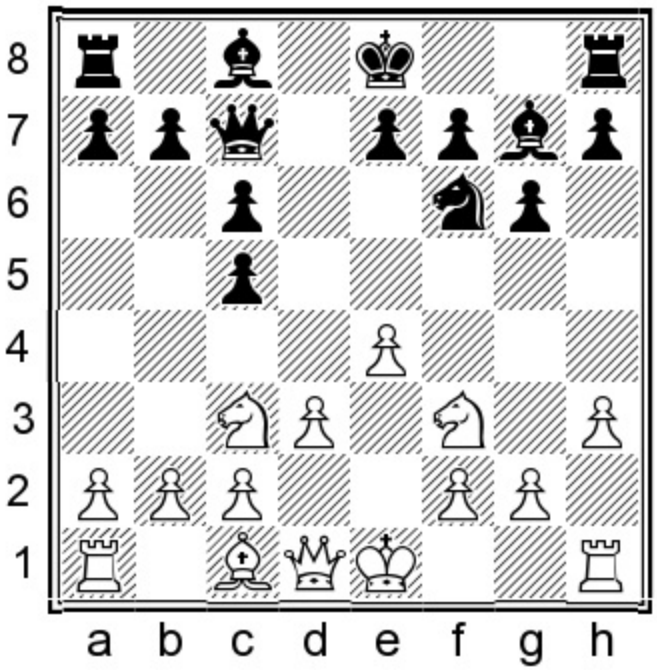


Position after: 25.♘g5+

Exploiting Black's ...h7-h5 – the g5-square is now a really nice outpost. Although the moves prior and post 25.♘g5+ weren't totally accurate, the game demonstrates how easy it is to develop an attack against Black's king when he castles early. White slowly continued to outplay his opponent and was victorious in Adams – Kramnik, Dortmund 2000.

c) 7...♕c7!?

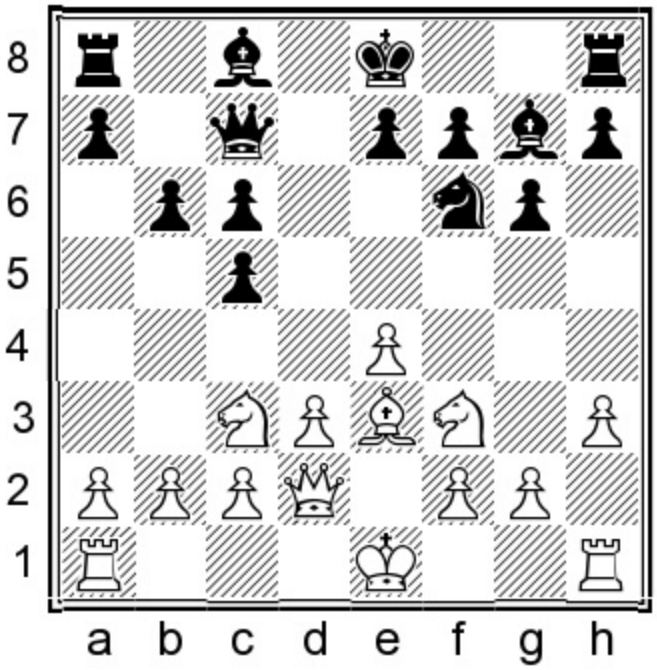
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.♗xc6 dxc6 5.d3 ♗g7 6.h3 ♘f6 7.♘c3 ♕c7!?



Position after: 7...♕c7!?

An attempt to play ...e7-e5 whilst keeping the knight on f6 won't affect our plans.

8.♗e3 b6 9.♕d2

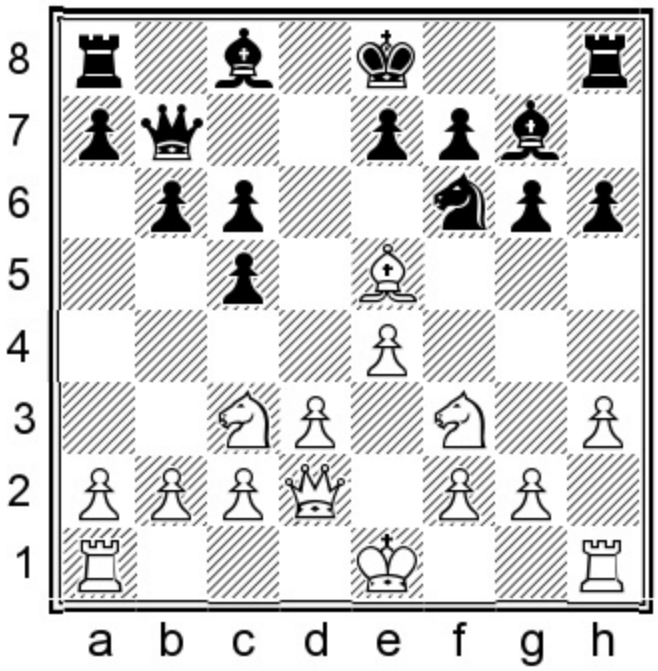


Position after: 9.♕d2

9...e5

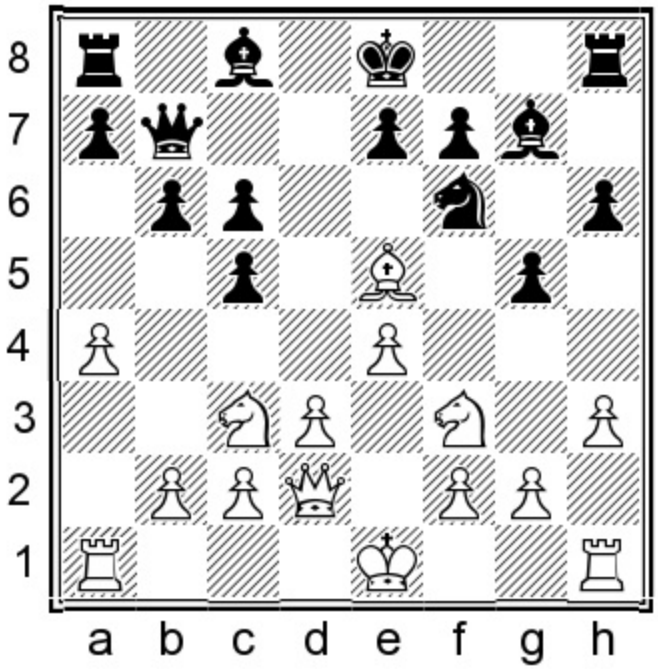
In this case we're able to exchange dark-squared bishops. Depending on circumstance, we should be aiming to play f2-f4 as endings will, in general, suit us.

9...h6 Black doesn't have time to prevent ♗h6, as we can exploit the placement of his queen. 10.♗f4 ♕b7 11.♗e5!



Position after: 11.♗e5!

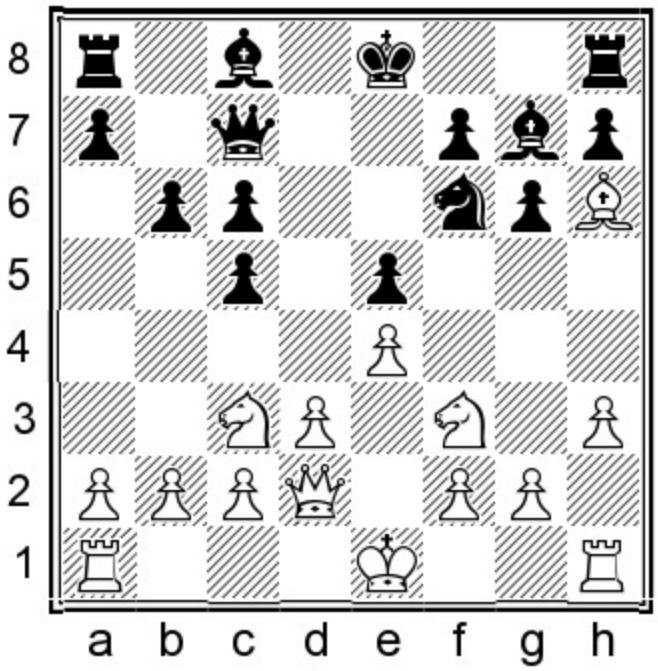
Black should now castle and play ...♘d7, but this is basically admitting defeat in his attempt to avoid trading bishops. It's worth checking what happens if he tries to continue playing in an unorthodox fashion. 11...g5 12.a4!



Position after: 12.a4!

12...a5 [12...g4 13.hxg4 ♗xg4 14.♕e3 h5 15.a5 ♗h6 16.♗f4 ♗g7 17.♘g5+– Black has only succeeded in increasing his own weaknesses.] 13.0-0-0! Not the only option, but as Black has played ...g6-g5 it's worth showing some of our nice attacking ideas. 13...b5 14.g4! ♗e6 15.♕e3 ♕b6 [15...0-0 16.♖dg1! c4 17.h4 ♘xg4 18.♖xg4 ♗xg4 19.♗xg7 ♔xg7 20.♘e5 b4 21.♘b1 ♗e6 22.hxg5+–] 16.♗xf6! ♗xf6 17.e5 ♗g7 18.h4 ♗xg4 19.♖dg1 h5 20.♘xg5+–

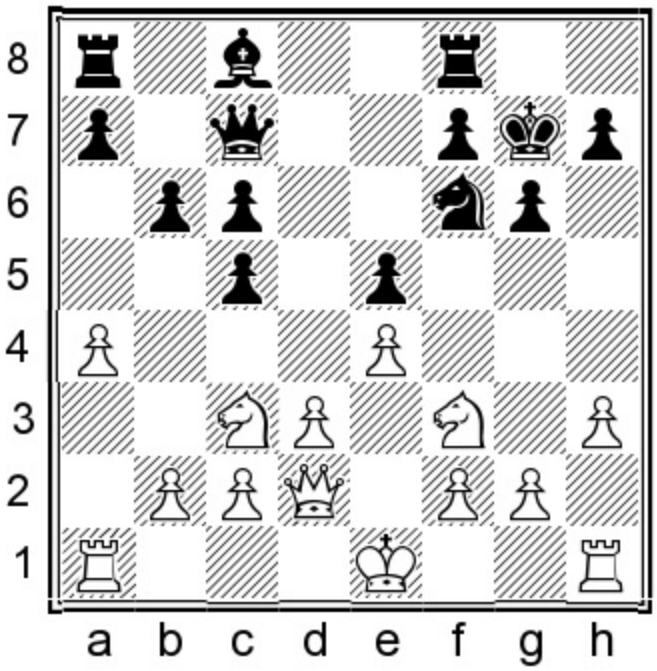
10.♗h6



Position after: 10.♗h6

10...♗xh6

10...0-0 As Black's knight remains on f6, the plan that we'll come across after 7...0-0 might not be as effective. Instead, immediately playing for f2-f4 and heading for an ending is probably our best bet for a clear edge. The following variation is just one possible way the game may continue, although it contains all of the ideas that we should be thinking about in such positions. 11.♗xg7 ♔xg7 12.a4!

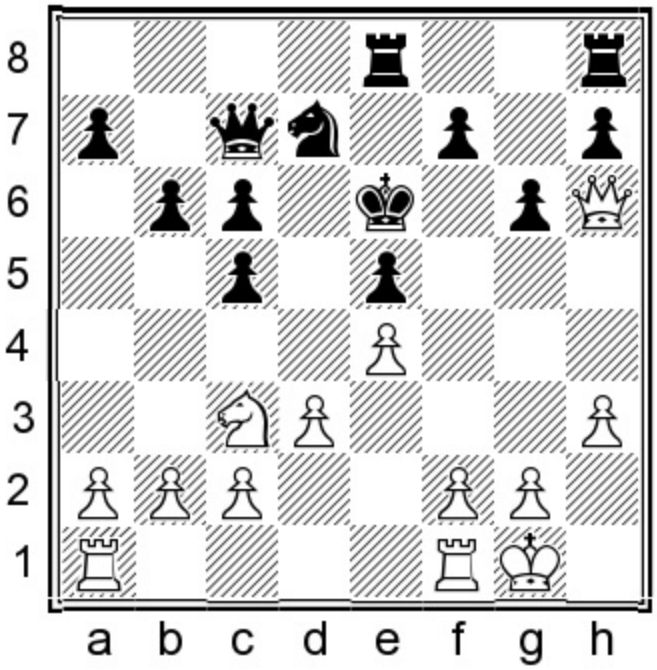


Position after: 12.a4!

Firstly, we create a weakness in Black's queenside pawns. 12...a5 13.b3 ♘h5 14.♘e2 ♔g8 15.♕h6 f6 16.♘d2 ♕g7 17.♕xg7+ ♘xg7 18.♖f1! Rather than castling, it makes more sense to keep the king in the centre. 18...♘e6 19.f4±

11.♕xh6 ♕e7

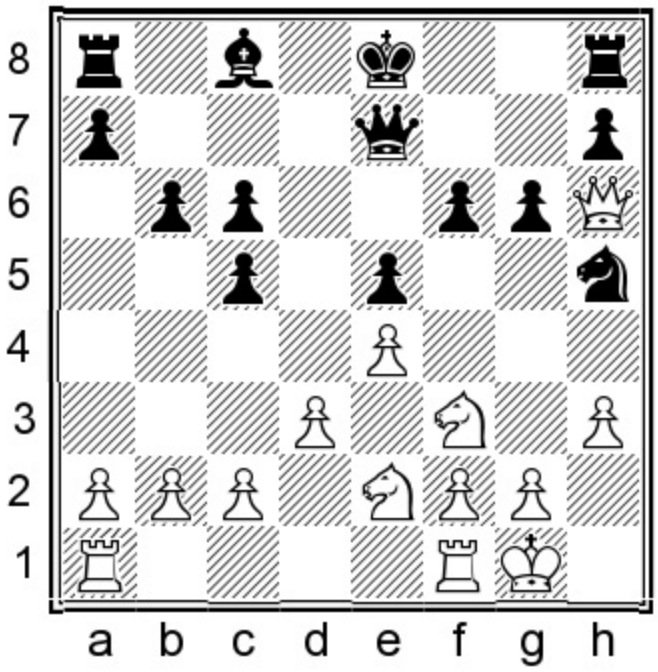
11...♗e6 12.♕g7! ♔e7 13.♕h6! It looks like we've wasted a couple of tempi, but Black's king is now stuck in the centre. 13...♘d7 14.♘g5 ♖ae8 15.♘xe6 ♔xe6 16.0-0



Position after: 16.0-0

Our plan will now revolve around achieving f2-f4. 16...♕d6 17.♘d1 ♕f8 18.♕d2 f6 19.♘e3 ♔f7 20.f4±

12.0-0 ♘h5 13.♘e2 f6

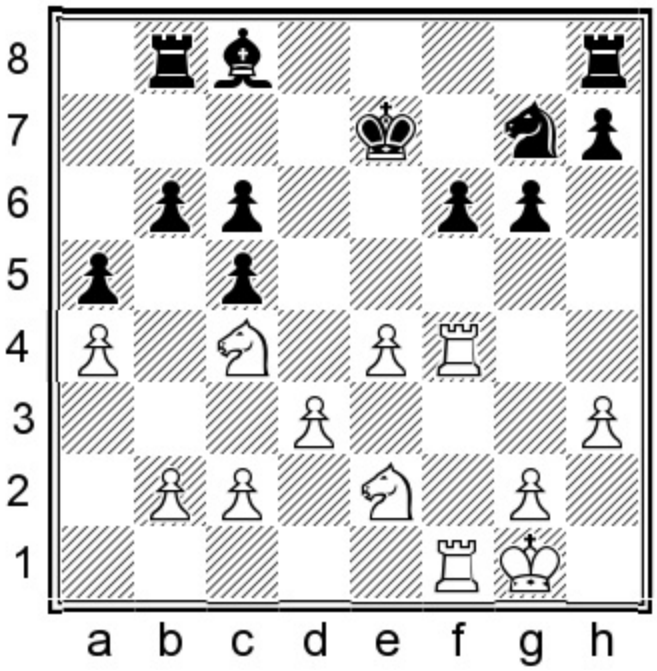


Position after: 13...f6

14.g4!?

The attempt to directly go for f2-f4 is completely viable.

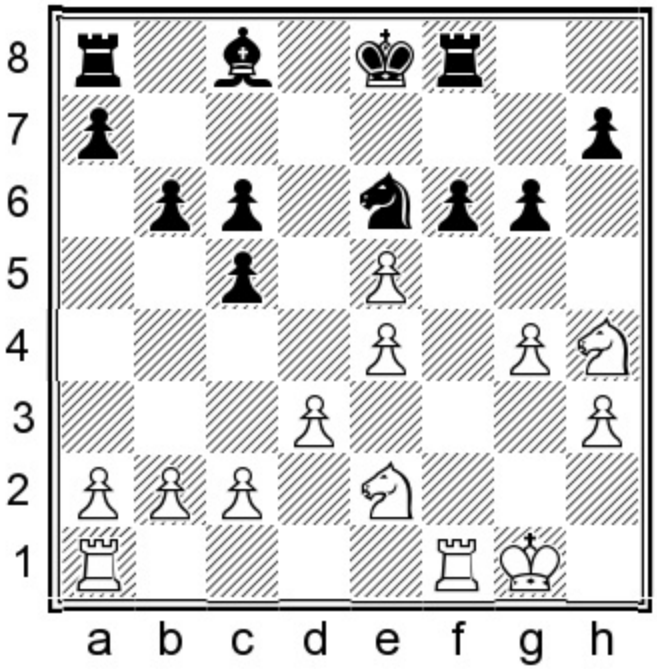
14.a4! I also really like the intermediate idea of creating a weakness on the queenside before heading towards an ending. 14...a5 15.♘d2 ♕g7 16.♕xg7 ♘xg7 17.♘c4 ♖b8 18.f4 exf4 19.♖xf4 ♔e7 20.♖af1±



Position after: 20.♖af1±

White had a sizeable advantage in Supi – Fier, Natal 2020.

14...♘g7 15.♘h4 ♕f8 16.f4 ♘e6 17.♕xf8+ ♖xf8 18.fxe5

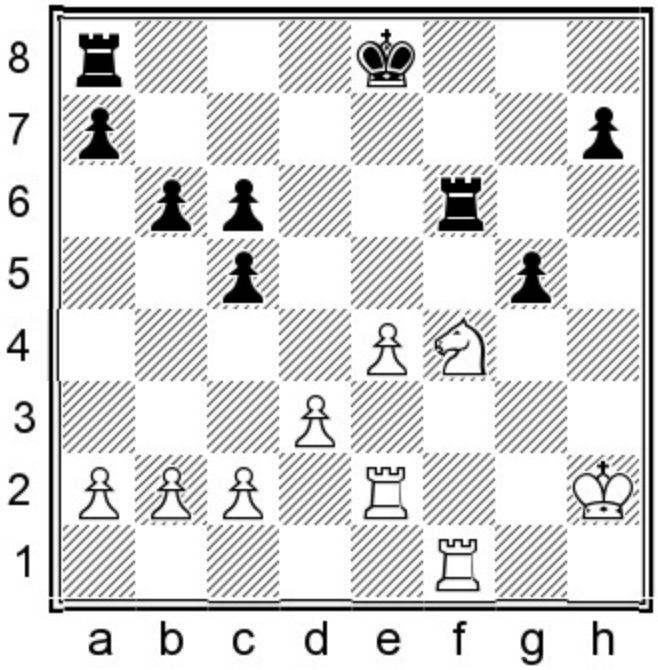


Position after: 18.fxe5

18...♘g5

18...fxe5 19.♖xf8+ ♔xf8 20.♘f3 ♘d4 21.♘exd4 exd4 22.♖f1±

19.exf6 ♘xh3+ 20.♔h2 ♗xg4 21.♖ae1 g5 22.♘g2 ♗xe2 23.♖xe2 ♘f4 24.♘xf4 ♖xf6



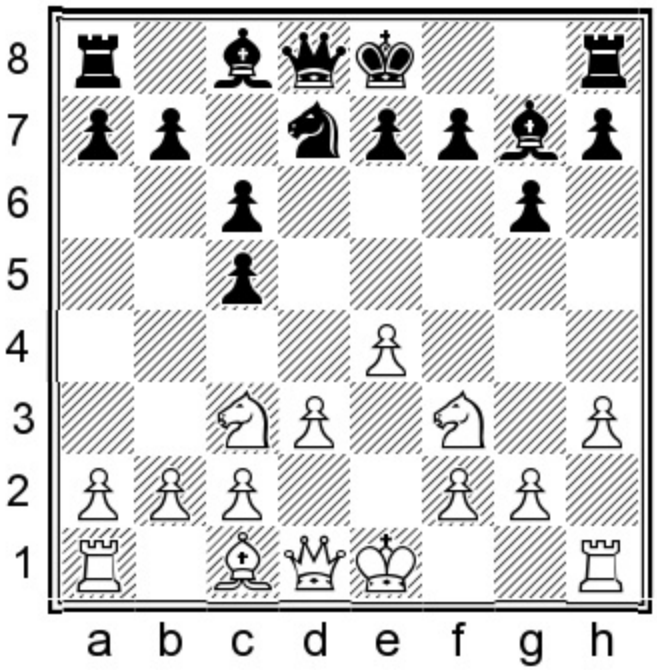
Position after: 24...♖xf6

25.♖g2! gxf4 26.♖g8+ ♖f8 27.♖xf8+ ♔xf8 28.♖xf4+±

White has very good chances in this endgame. For example, a king and pawn ending is completely winning.

d) 7...♘d7 8.♗e3 e5 9.♕d2 h6 10.0-0 ♕e7

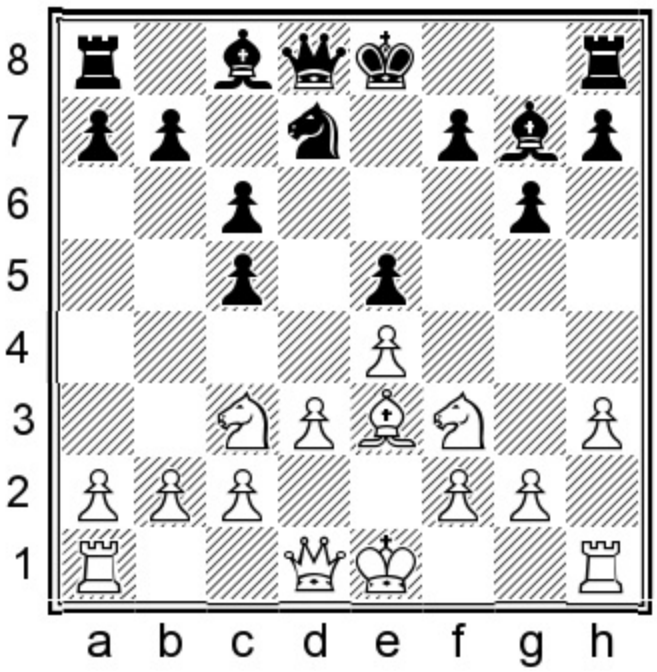
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.♗xc6 dxc6 5.d3 ♗g7 6.h3 ♘f6 7.♘c3 ♘d7



Position after: 7...♘d7

Our analysis after 7...0-0 demonstrates that it's very easy for us to build up a kingside attack – especially if we're able to exchange off the dark-squared bishops. We have also seen that the overly subtle ...♕c7 doesn't help Black. The text move is Black's attempt to maneouvre his knight and play ...e7-e5 before castling.

8.♗e3 e5

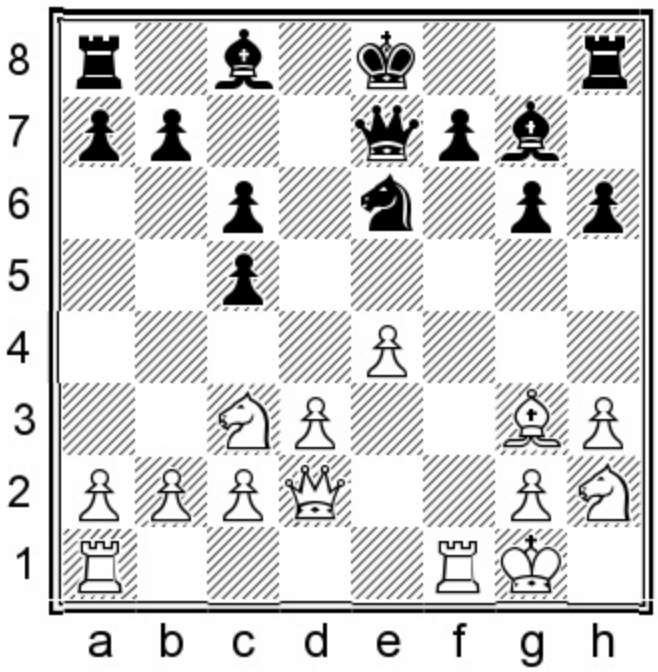


Position after: 8...e5

9.♕d2

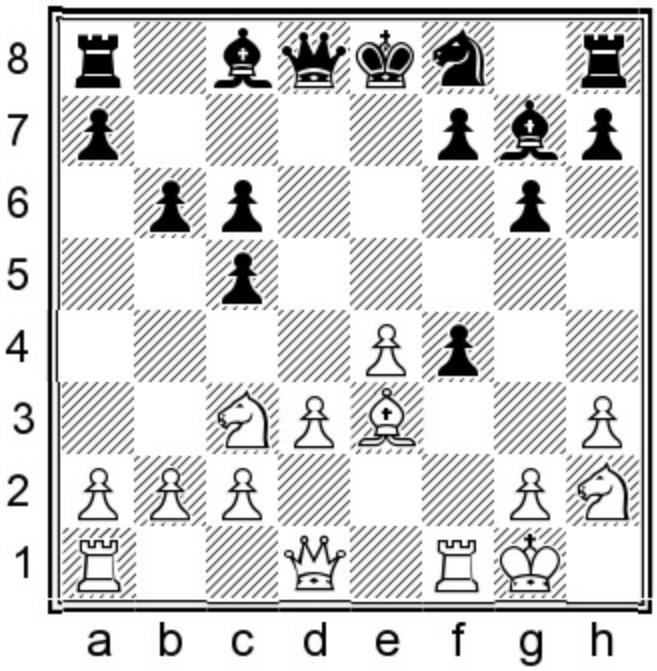
The most popular choice. In general I prefer playing ♕d2 before short castling, as it keeps the possibility of castling queenside if we so wish. We'll certainly encounter this option in at least one variation.

9.0-0 has been attempted more recently. 9...b6! Delaying ...♕e7 can be very useful for Black, as in some variations the queen is able to jump to the g5-square in one move. [The idea behind castling early can be seen after 9...♕e7 10.♕d2 h6 11.♘h2! ♘f8 12.f4 exf4 13.♗xf4 ♘e6 14.♗g3



Position after: 14.♗g3

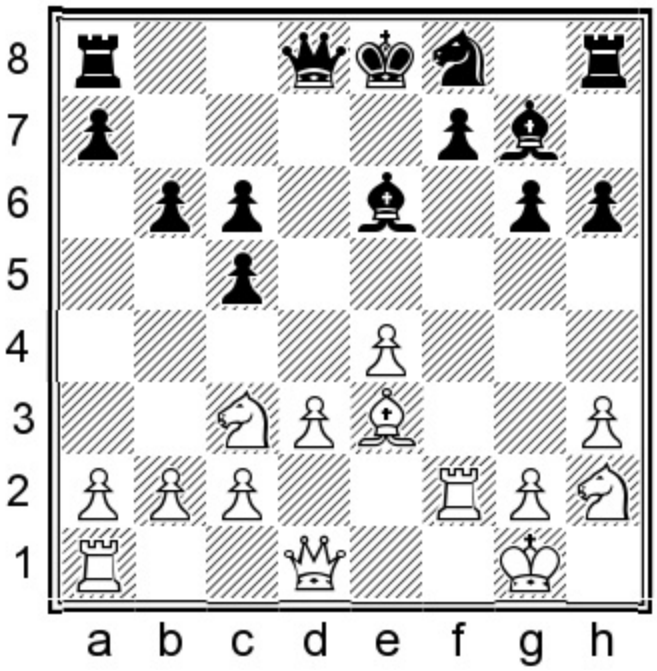
In this line, White is already doing well, and it transposes to our analysis after 10...♕e7 in our mainline.] 10.♘h2 [10.♕d2 h6 11.♘h2 ♘f8 12.f4 exf4 13.♗xf4 ♘e6 14.♗g3 ♕g5! I was unable to find any advantage here.] 10...♘f8 11.f4 exf4



Position after: 11...exf4

A) 12.♗xf4 ♘e6 13.♗g3 f6!∞ This demonstrates why we should play ♕d2 first, if we want to recapture with the bishop and play ♗g3. Usually this plan forces Black to play ...h7-h6, after which ...f7-f6 is structurally damaging.

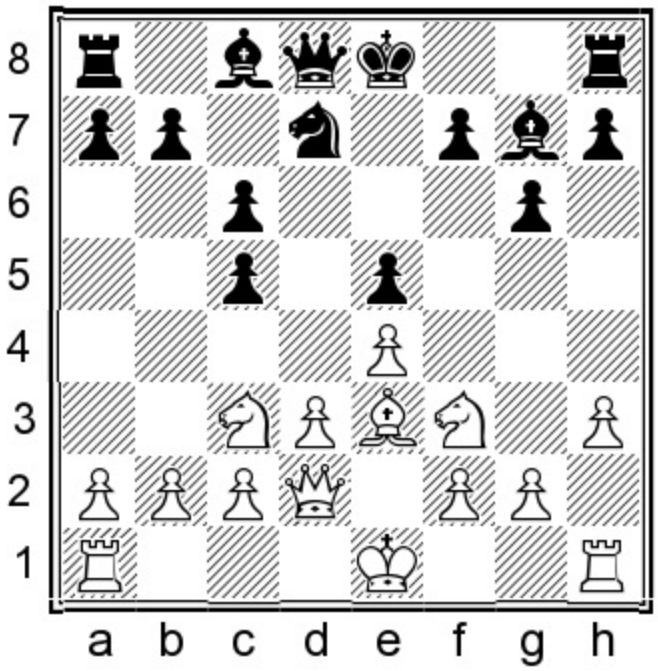
B) 12.♖xf4 ♗e6 13.♖f2 h6



Position after: 13...h6

We are currently following Caruana – Carlsen, London 2018, where Carlsen's plan of ...g6-g5 and

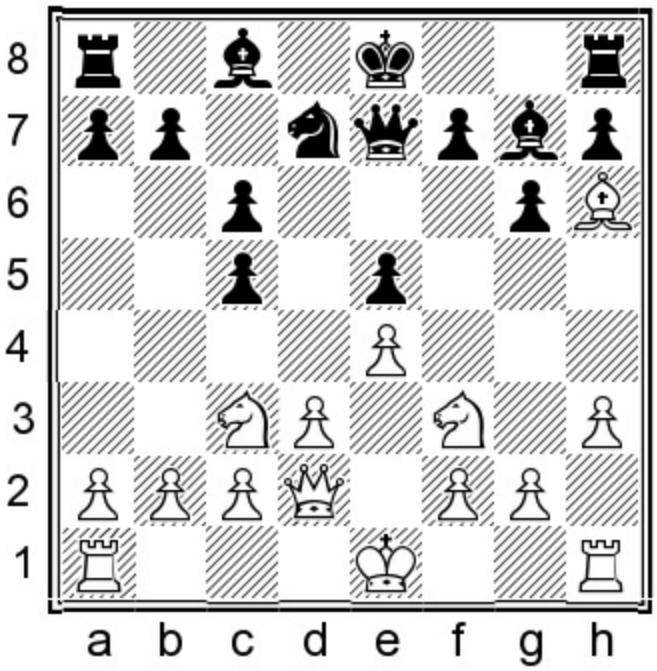
...♘g6 engendered an extremely promising position for Black. Further analysis with AlphaZero led Matthew Sadler to demonstrate in his excellent Youtube videos that 14.a4!? is the best try for White here – thematically aiming to weaken Black's queenside pawns before proceeding with kingside play. However, I was unable to find any practical advantage in the mainline that Sadler gave: 14...♘d7 15.a5 0-0 16.♕d2 ♔h7 17.♘f3 g5 18.♖af1 ♕c7 19.♘e2∞



Position after: 9.♕d2

9...h6

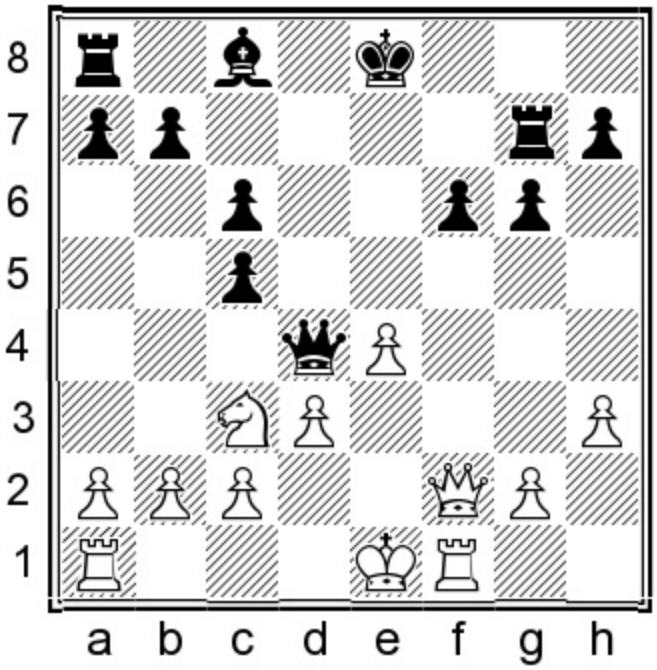
9...♕e7 As we saw after 7...0-0, Black always has the option to allow the exchange of dark-squared bishops. In general this is fairly uncritical and, as the variations illustrate, our plans will be very familiar. 10.♗h6



Position after: 10.♗h6

A) 10...0-0 11.♗xg7 ♔xg7 12.0-0± This basically leads to a transposition into the 7...0-0 line.

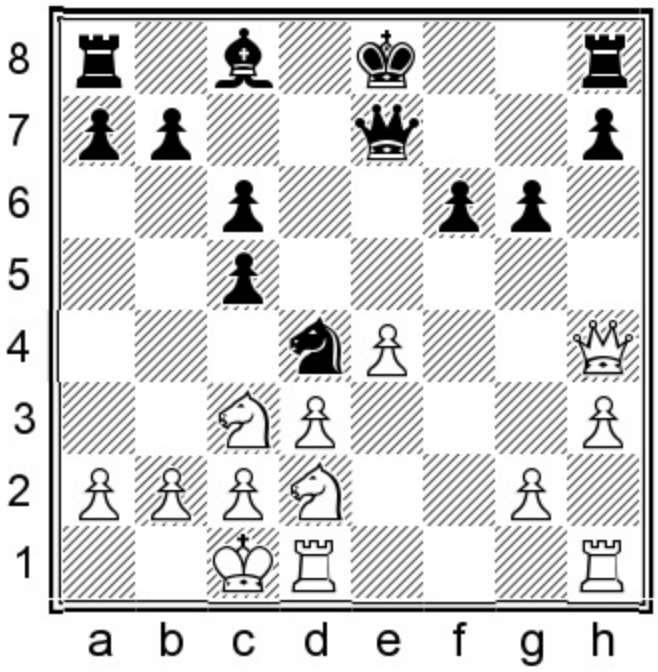
B) 10...♖g8?! A weird way to maintain the option to castle queenside, whilst also forcing us to capture on g7 as Black 'threatens' ...♗h8. 11.♗xg7 ♖xg7 12.♕h6 f6 13.♘d2 ♘f8 14.f4 exf4 15.♕xf4 ♘e6 16.♕f2 ♘d4 17.♘b3 ♕e5 18.♘xd4 ♕xd4 19.♖f1!±



Position after: 19.♖f1!±

White will always have favourable chances if the queens are traded.

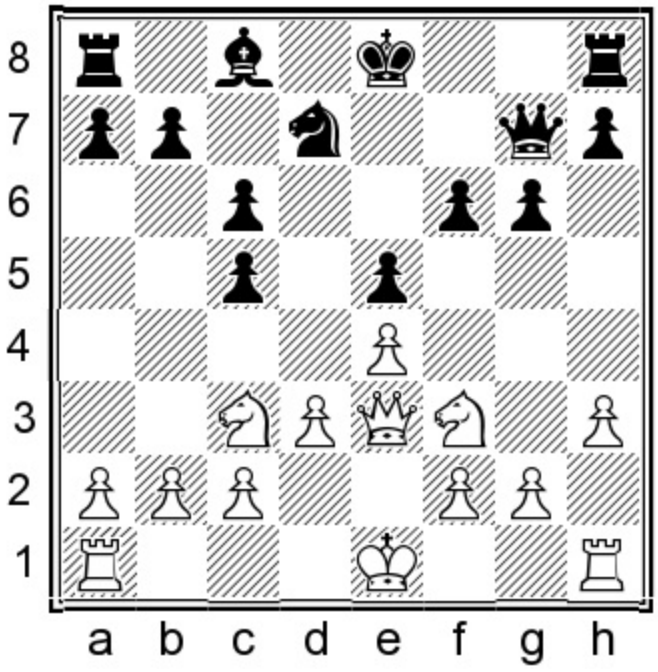
C) 10...♗xh6 11.♕xh6 f6 12.♘d2 ♘f8 13.f4 exf4 14.♕xf4 ♘e6 15.♕h4 ♘d4 16.0-0-0!±



Position after: 16.0-0-0!±

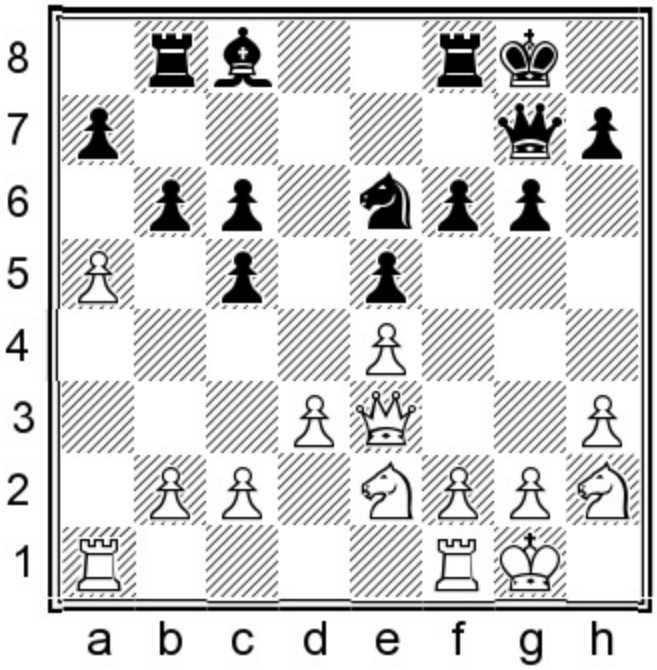
The benefit of not having short castled. Black's pawns are weak and we have an obvious plan of ♖hf1, ♖de1 and e4-e5.

D) 10...f6 11.♗xg7 ♕xg7 12.♕e3!? I prefer putting my knight on d2 as opposed to h2.



Position after: 12.♕e3!?

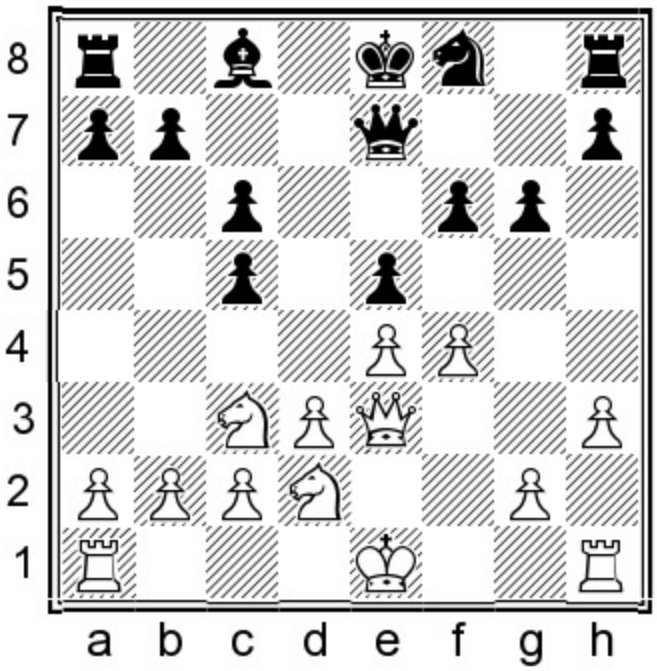
D1) 12...b6 13.a4!? Returning to the theme of weakening Black's queenside pawns before continuing with our normal plan. (13.♘d2 is another plausible move.) 13...♘f8 [13...a5 14.♘d2 ♗a6 15.0-0-0 0-0-0 16.h4! ♔b7 17.g3 ♘f8 18.f4 ♘e6 19.fxe5 fxe5 20.♖df1±] 14.a5 ♖b8 15.♘e2 ♘e6 16.♘h2 0-0 17.0-0±



Position after: 17.0-0±

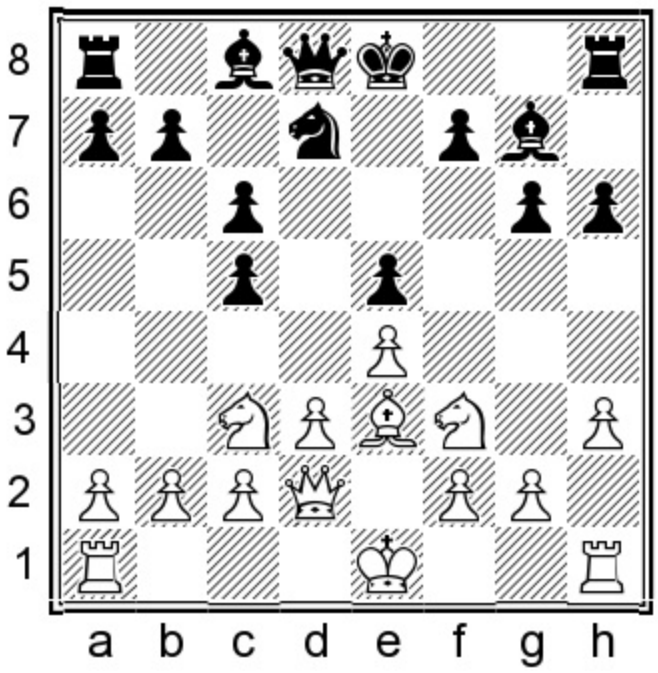
We can open the a-file at our leisure, whilst also waiting for the right moment to play f2-f4.

D2) 12...♕e7 13.♘d2 ♘f8 14.f4



Position after: 14.f4

14...♘e6 [14...exf4 15.♕xf4 ♘e6 16.♕h4 ♘d4 17.0-0-0! Our only option, but we can dedicate the exclamation mark to our decision to play ♕d2 before castling kingside. The variation may continue: 17...0-0 18.♖de1 ♖f7 19.♖hf1 ♗e6 20.♘d5 cxd5 21.exd5 f5 22.♕f2±] 15.fxe5 ♘d4 16.0-0-0 fxe5 17.♖hf1 ♗e6 [17...b5 18.♖de1 ♗d7 19.♘e2±] 18.♕g3±



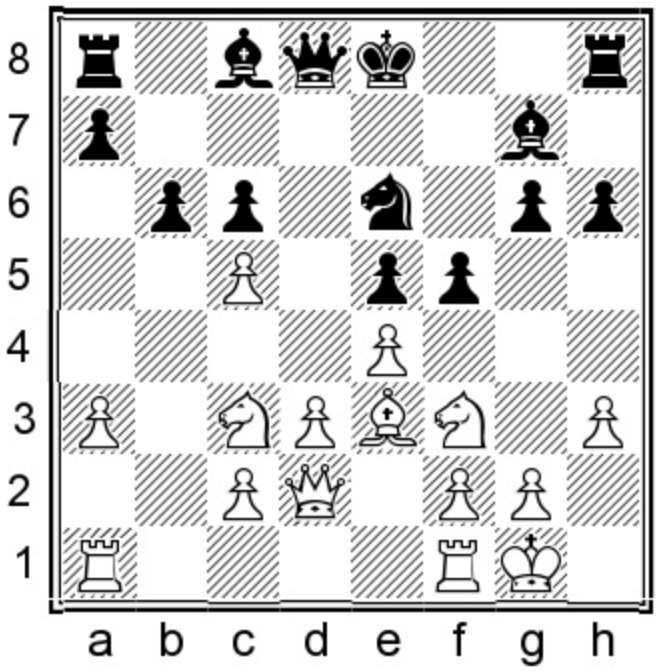
Position after: 9...h6

10.0-0

I couldn’t find a reason to continue to delay castling.

A) 10.♘h2 b6 11.f4 ♕h4+=

B) 10.a3 The direct queenside approach has been tried several times, but after 10...b6 Black suddenly takes over the initiative: 11.0-0 [11.b4 f5!⇄] 11...♘f8 12.b4 ♘e6 13.bxc5 f5!∞



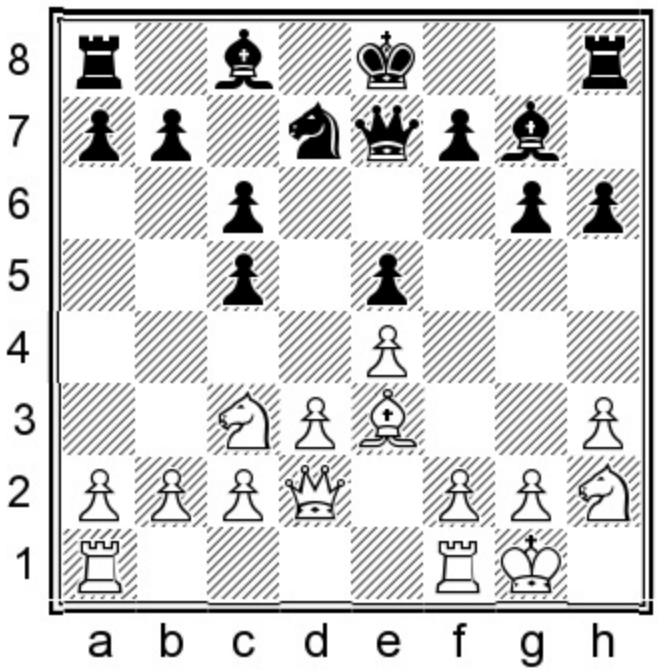
Position after: 13...f5!∞

This was too unclear for my liking.

10...♕e7

10...b6 is a subtle move-order difference that leads to some quite novel ideas being needed; see the last subchapter.

11.♘h2



Position after: 11.♘h2

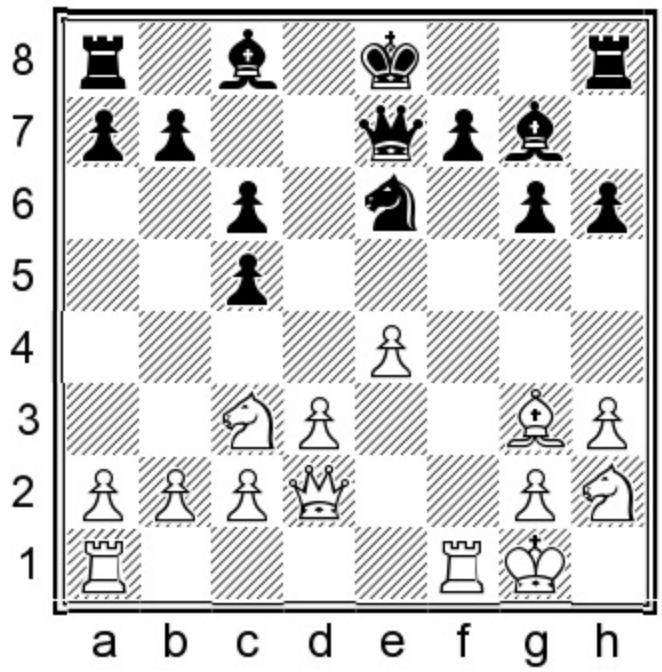
11...♘f8

11...g5?! Black makes a big concession to stop f2-f4, and we should be doing very well here after, for example, 12.♘e2±

12.f4 exf4 13.♗xf4 ♘e6

13...g5 14.♗g3 ♗e6 15.e5!± Followed by ♘f3 and ♘e4 looks very strong for White.

14.♗g3!

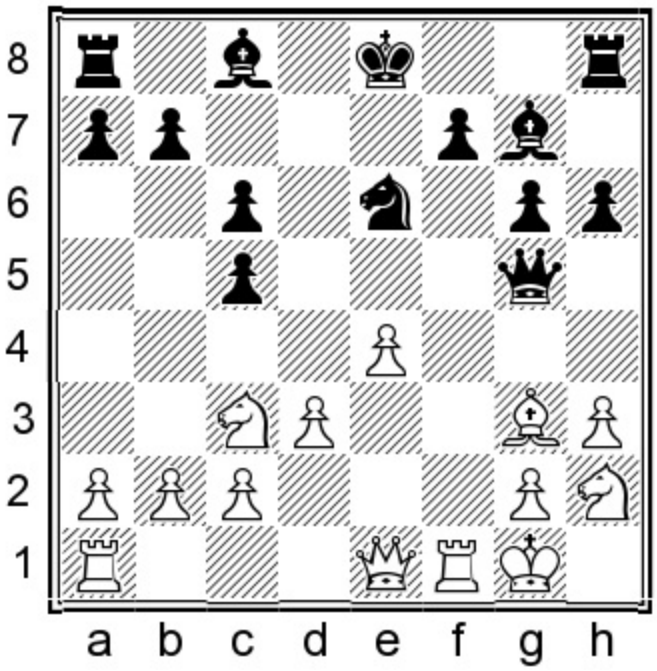


Position after: 14.♗g3!

As Black has already played ...♕e7, he'll have to waste another tempo with ...♕g5. The reason why this plan with 14.♗g3 is so strong is because, after we play e4-e5, Black will have a very hard time defending his dark-squared weaknesses. Our knights will be able to jump to g4 and e4, causing havoc on either the queenside or kingside – depending on where Black castles.

14...♘d4

A) 14...♕g5 15.♕e1

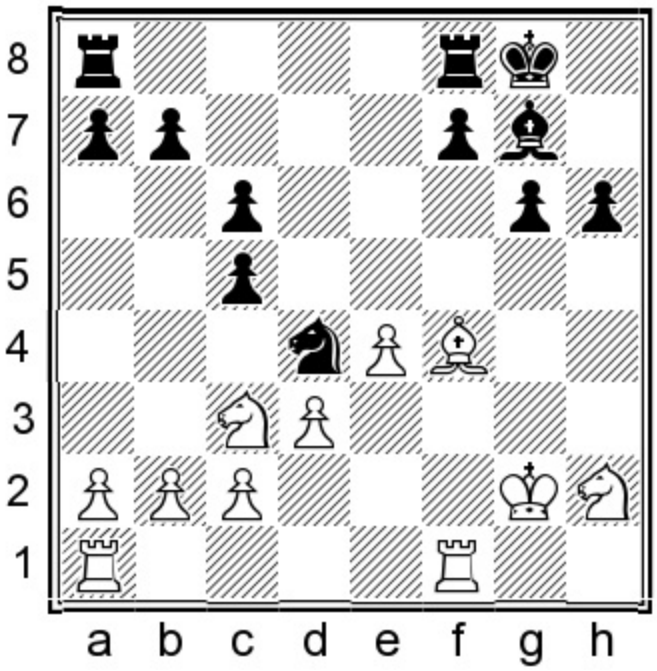


Position after: 15.♕e1

Black is a tempo down on the corresponding line after 10...b6.

A1) 15...♕e7 This has also occurred in correspondence games, but we can continue in typical fashion. 16.e5! ♘d4 17.♕f2 ♘f5 18.♖ae1 ♘xg3 19.♕xg3 0-0 [19...♗e6 20.♘e4±] 20.♘f3 ♗f5 21.♕f4± Followed by g2-g4 and ♘e4.

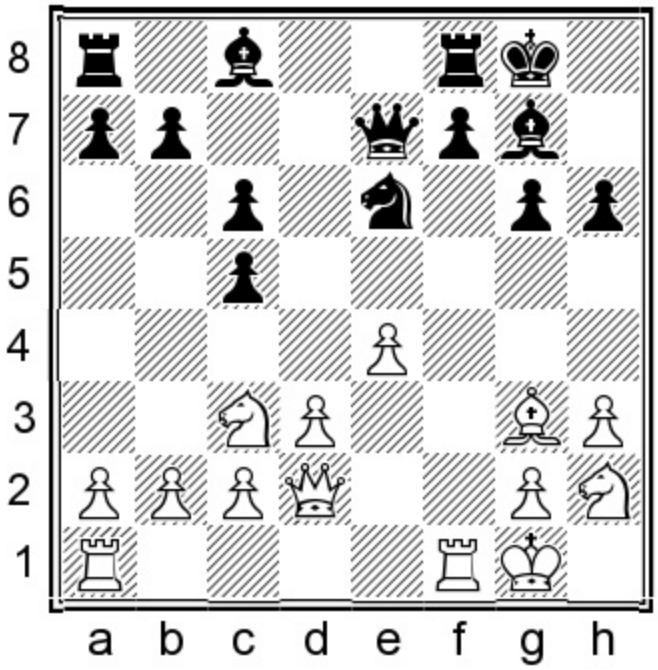
A2) 15...♘d4 16.♕f2 0-0 [16...♗e6 17.♗h4 ♕h5 18.♘g4±] 17.♗d6 ♗xh3 The start of a forcing variation. 18.♗f4! ♕xg2+ 19.♕xg2 ♗xg2 20.♔xg2



Position after: 20.♔xg2

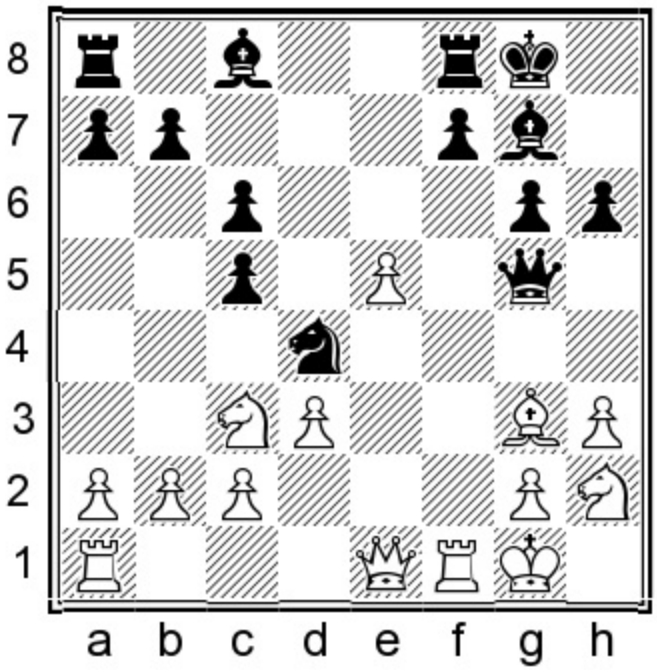
Black doesn't have enough compensation for the piece here. In the corresponding variation with the Black pawn on b6 instead of b7, Black has time to kick away our dark-squared bishop with ...g6-g5. Here, we have the option of ♗d6 – winning the c5-pawn. 20...♘xc2 21.♖ad1 ♖ad8 22.♖f2 ♘d4 23.♗e3± White converted his advantage to victory in Garau – Mason, ICCF email 2019.

B) 14...0-0



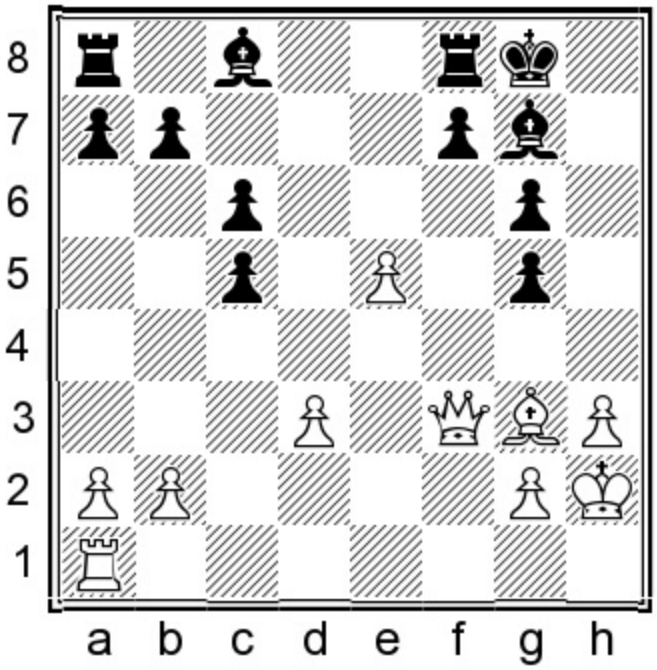
Position after: 14...0-0

B1) 15.e5 Considering how the main line progresses, this seems like the most natural continuation. However, a couple of recent correspondence games have proved that Black has a nice resource here. 15...♕g5 16.♕e1 ♘d4!



Position after: 16...♘d4!

17.♘e4 [17.♕f2 ♗xe5 18.♗xe5 ♕xe5 19.♖ae1 ♕g7 This seems pretty harmless for Black.] 17...♘xc2! The start of a variation in which Black sacrifices his queen for a rook and knight. 18.♕d1 ♘e3 19.♕f3 ♘xf1 20.♘xg5 ♘xh2 21.♔xh2 hxg5∞

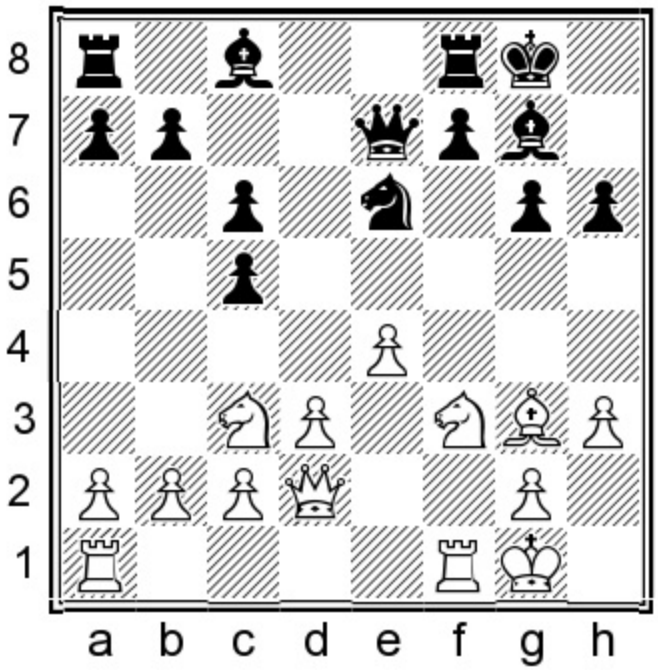


Position after: 21...hxg5∞

Ostensibly, the material balance suggests that White should be doing well. However, further analysis demonstrates that Black's pieces can co-ordinate extremely effectively. This line was

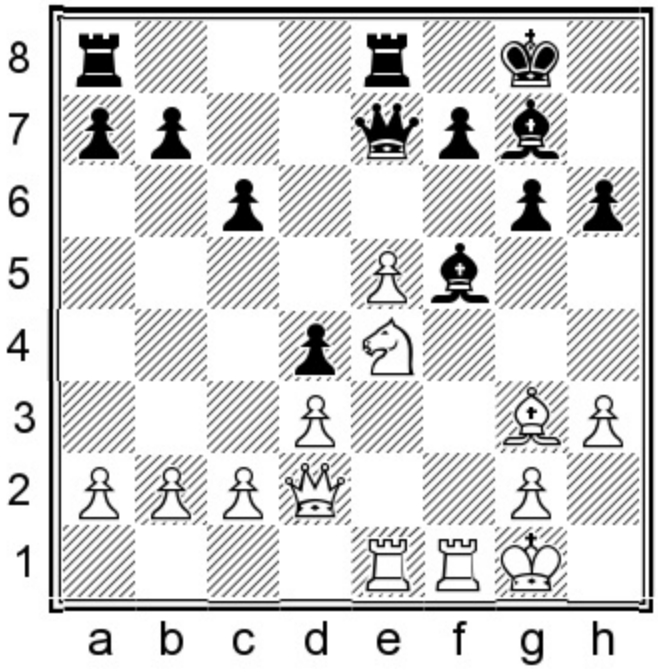
tested twice in 2018 correspondence games, and on both occasions White was unable to make any progress.

B2) 15.♘f3!N This isn't our ideal move, but I think it's necessary to prevent Black from playing ...♕g5.



Position after: 15.♘f3!N

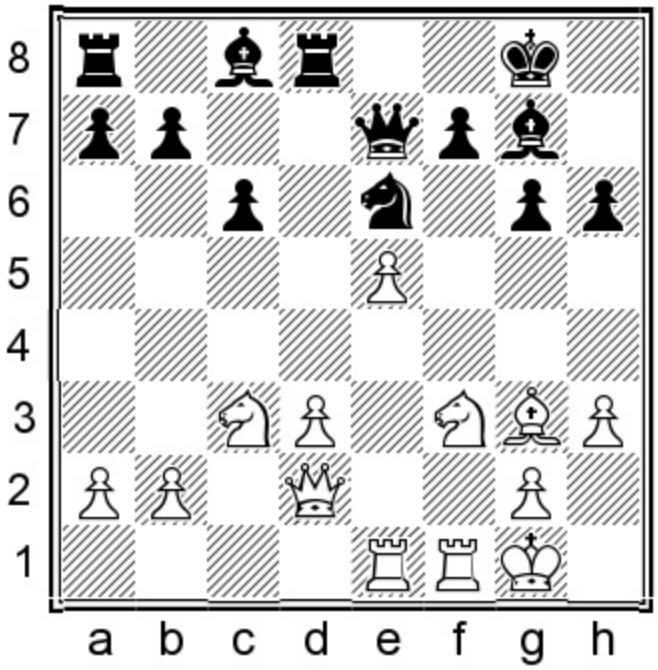
B2.1) 15...♘d4 16.♖ae1 ♖e8 17.e5 ♗f5 18.♘xd4 cxd4 19.♘e4



Position after: 19.♘e4

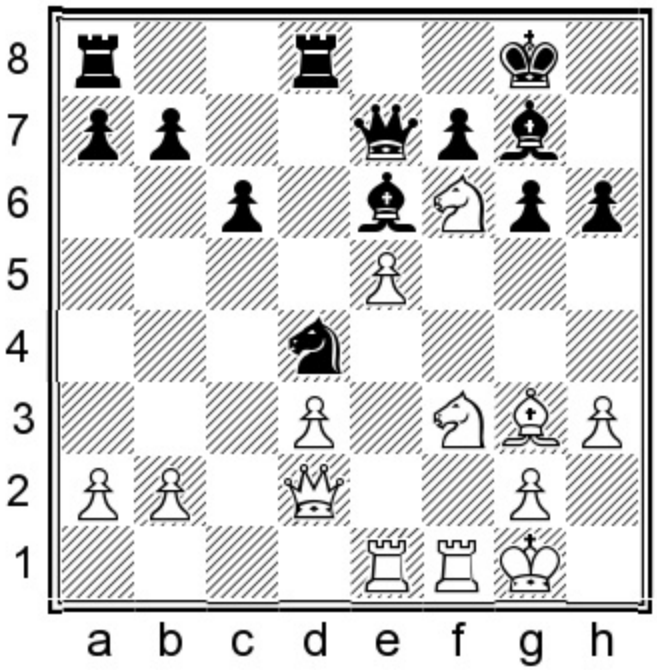
19...♗xe4 [19...♗xe5 20.♗xe5 ♕xe5 21.♕xh6±] 20.♖xe4± White has a comfortable advantage.

B2.2) 15...c4! Black continues to make the most of the position's dynamic features. I don't know how much of an advantage I can claim here, but here is one idea to obtain a slightly more pleasant position. 16.♖ae1 [16.d4 ♘xd4 17.♘xd4 ♖d8=; 16.dxc4 ♖d8 17.♕f2 ♘g5 18.e5 ♘xf3+ 19.♕xf3 ♖d2= recovers the pawn, with a decent position for Black.; 16.e5 cxd3 17.cxd3 ♘g5 18.♘xg5 ♕xg5 19.♗f4 ♕h5=] 16...cxd3 17.cxd3 ♖d8 18.e5



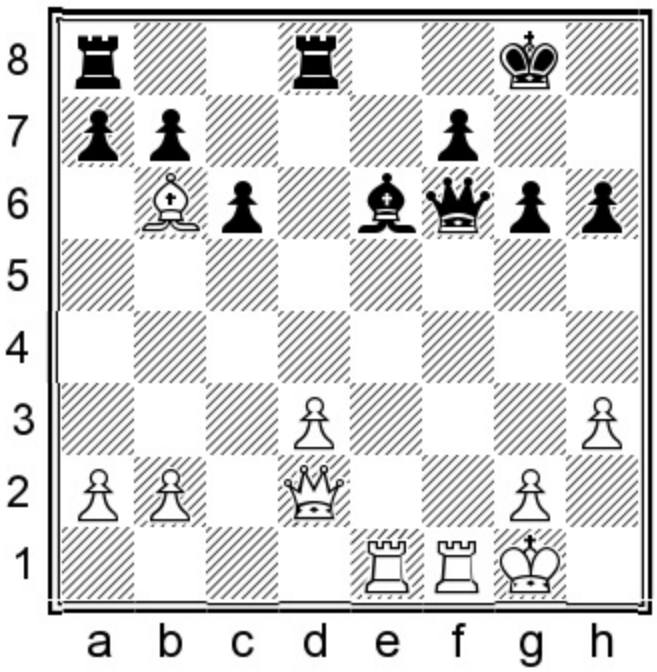
Position after: 18.e5

18...♘d4! [After the other knight trade 18...♘g5 White establishes his remaining knight on d6. 19.♘xg5 ♕xg5 20.♗f4 ♕h5 21.♘e4 ♗e6 22.♘d6 ♖d7 23.a3] 19.♘e4 ♗e6 20.♘f6+



Position after: 20.♘f6+

20...♗xf6 [20...♔h8 21.♖e4 Our f6-knight makes life slightly unpleasant for Black – and it's important to note that he will never want to trade off his dark-squared bishop.] 21.exf6 ♕c5 22.♘xd4 [22.♕xh6 ♘xf3+ 23.♔h1 ♕f8=] 22...♕xd4+ 23.♗f2 [23.♔h2 ♔h7=] 23...♕xf6 24.♗b6

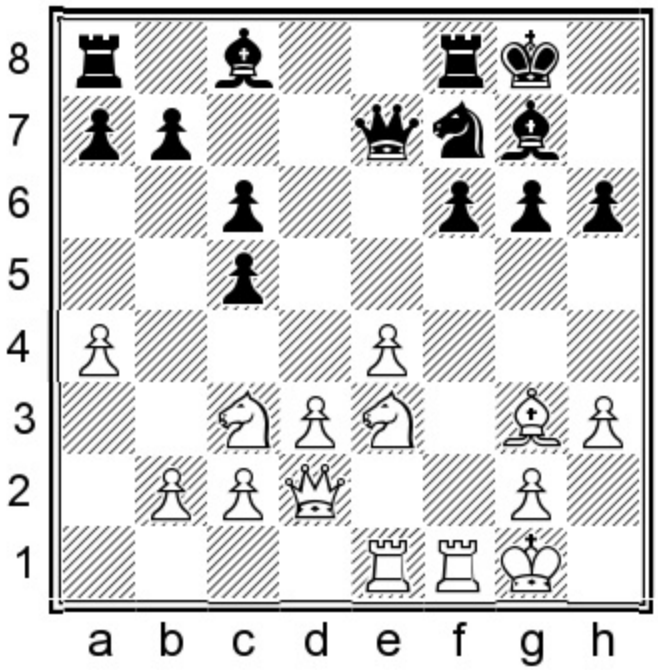


Position after: 24.♗b6

White wins an exchange, because Black's queen-sacrifice idea is rather unsatisfactory. Black can choose whether to have queens on (...♕h4) or off. After 24...♕g5 25.♕xg5 hxg5 26.♗xd8 ♖xd8

27.♖e3± he is extremely likely (but by no means certain) to make a fortress.

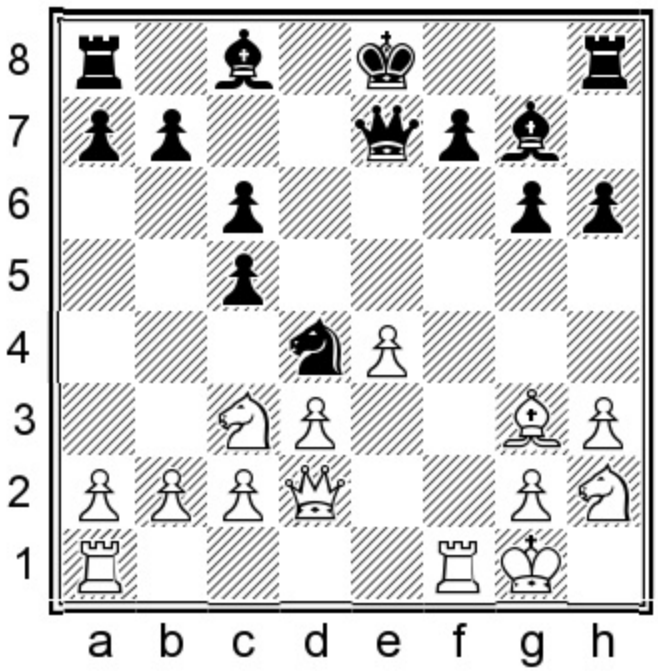
C) 14...f6!? This set-up is pretty solid and prevents us from playing e4-e5. Nevertheless, we should retain a pleasant advantage by just playing logical moves. 15.♖ae1 0-0 [15...♘d4 16.♘d5!±] 16.♘g4 ♘g5 17.♘e3 ♘f7 18.a4±



Position after: 18.a4±

Black is passive, and it's difficult to come up with a game-plan for him. On the contrary, a nice continuation for White is ♕f2 and ♘b1-d2-f3.

Let's return to 14...♘d4.



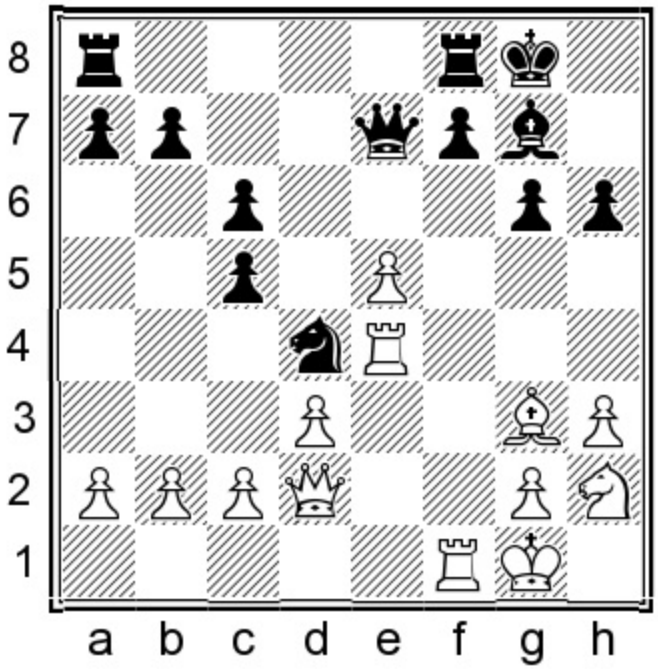
Position after: 14...♘d4

15.e5!?

Perhaps not necessary, but it demonstrates that ♖ae1 isn't always required to play e4-e5.

15.♖ae1 is simple and strong too, preparing e4-e5.

A) 15...0-0 16.e5 ♗f5 17.♘e4 ♗xe4 18.♖xe4

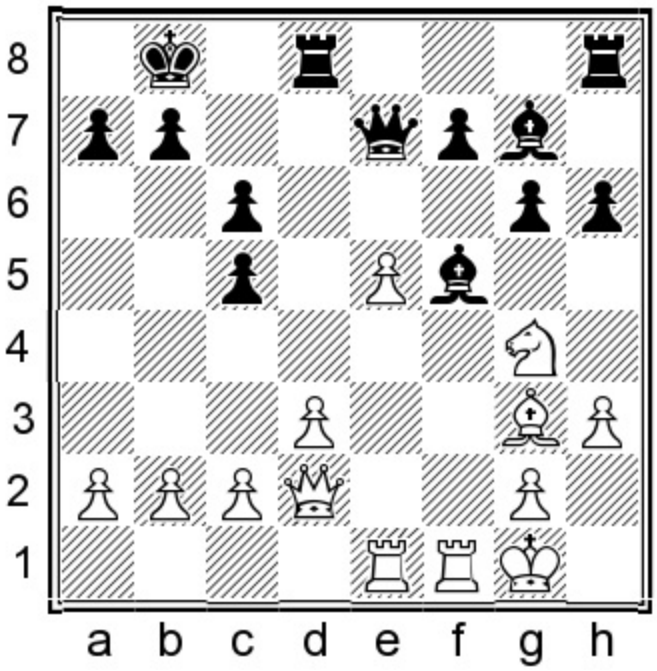


Position after: 18.♖xe4

It seems beneficial for Black to capture at least one of our knights, but the trade won't ease his difficulties. 18...h5 [18...♘f5 19.♗f2 ♖fe8 20.♘f3± Black will most likely lose a pawn after the forthcoming g2-g4.] 19.♗h4 ♕e6 [19...♕c7 20.♗f6] 20.g4!+–

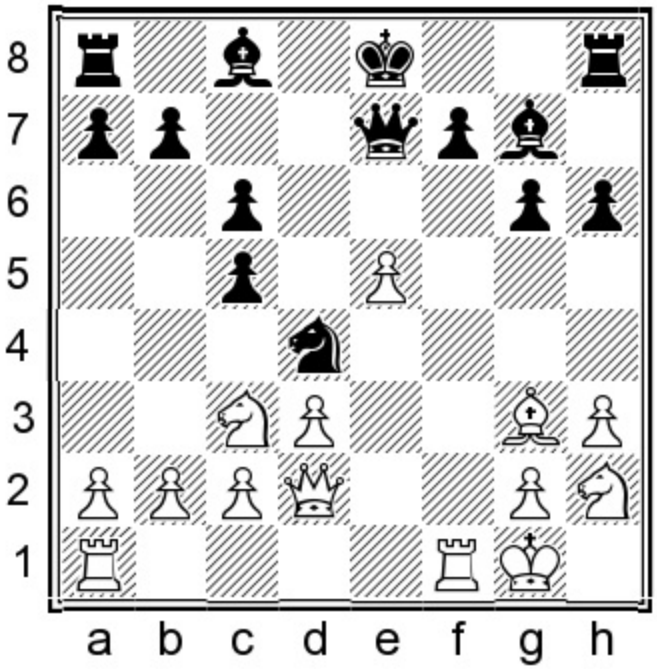
B) 15...h5 16.♗f4±

C) 15...♗e6 16.e5 0-0-0 17.♘e4 ♘f5 18.♘d6+! ♔b8 [18...♘xd6 19.exd6 ♖xd6 20.♘f3!± Most likely followed by ♕a5, and White's pieces are too active for Black to avoid significant material loss.] 19.♘xf5 ♗xf5 [19...gxf5 20.♘f3 ♖dg8 21.♔h1 h5 22.♗h4 ♕c7 23.b3±] 20.♘g4



Position after: 20.♘g4

The e5-pawn remains a thorn in Black's position, and his position is increasingly difficult to play. 20...♔a8 21.♘f6±

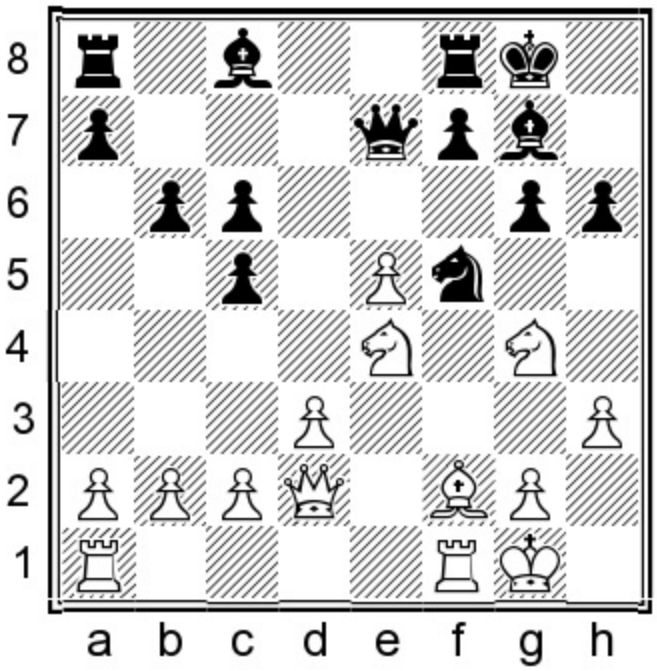


Position after: 15.e5!?

15...♗f5

A) 15...♘f5 16.♗f2 0-0 [16...♗xe5 17.♖ae1 Black has to trade off his dark-squared weaknesses,

which will only serve to exacerbate his problems. 17...♗xh2+ 18.♔xh2 ♗e6 19.♘e4 b6 20.g4 ♘d6 21.♘xd6+ ♕xd6+ 22.♗g3 ♕d7 23.♖f6!+–] 17.♘e4 b6 18.♘g4

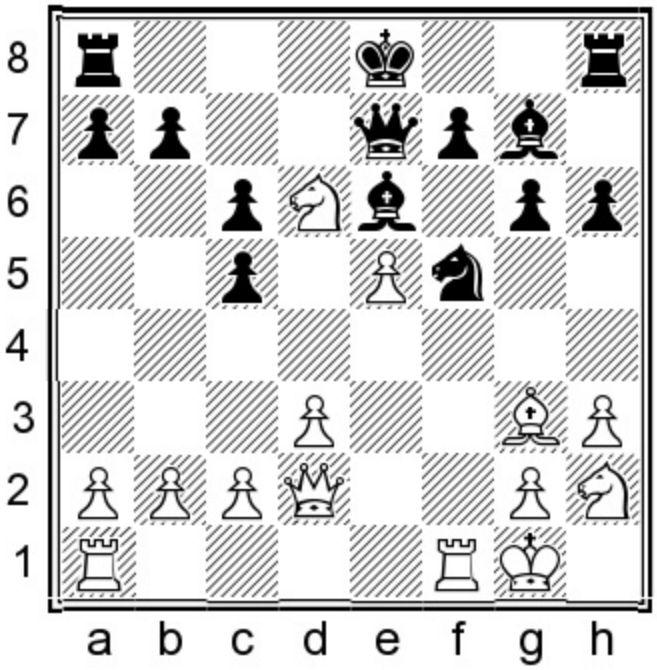


Position after: 18.♘g4

This is another illustration of how our e4-e5 push often creates completely winning positions for White. 18...♔h8 19.♕f4 ♗e6 20.♘gf6+–

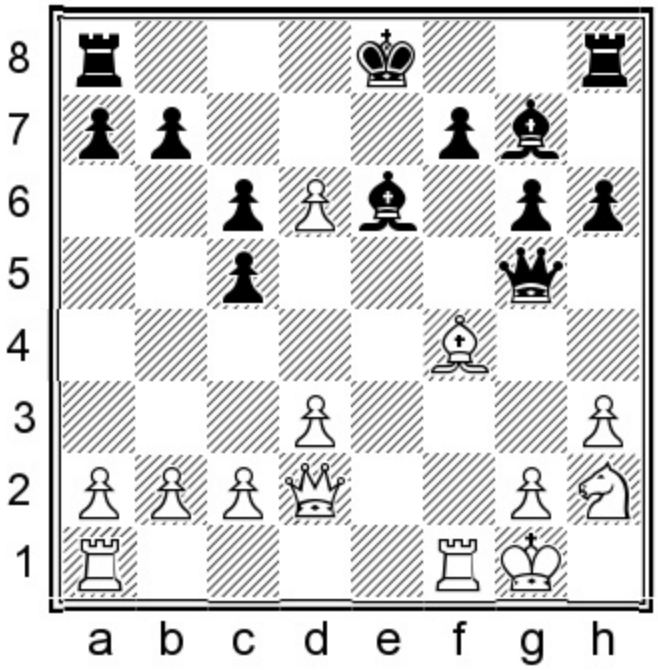
B) 15...0-0 16.♘e4 ♗f5 17.♘g4 ♗xe4 18.♘f6+! A necessary intermezzo. 18...♔h8 19.♘xe4±

C) 15...♗e6 16.♘e4 ♘f5 17.♘d6+!



Position after: 17.♘d6+!

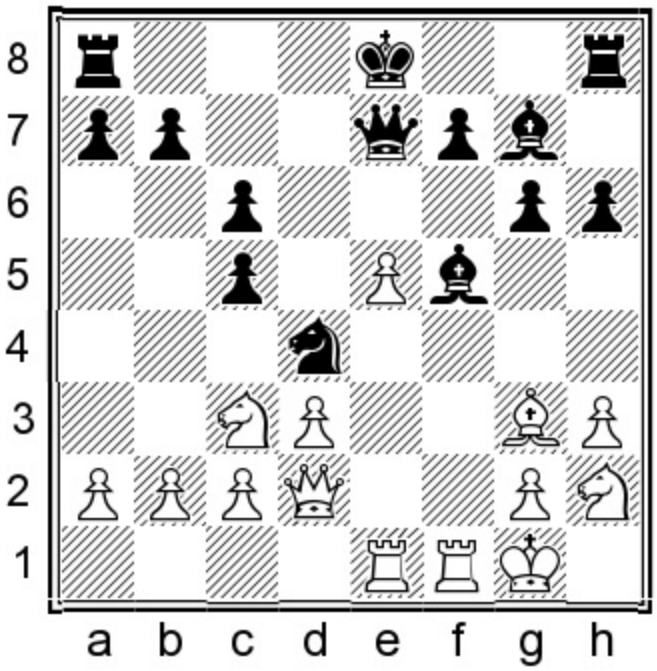
Another useful resource to keep in mind. A pawn on d6 is equally frustrating for Black to deal with, and increases the scope of our attacking possibilities by opening up the e-file. 17...♘xd6 18.exd6 ♕g5 [18...♕d8 19.♖ae1 0-0 20.c3 b6 21.♘f3±] 19.♗f4



Position after: 19.♗f4

19...♕d5 [19...♕d8 20.♘f3 g5 21.♗g3 0-0 22.♖ae1 ♖e8 23.d4 ♕b6 24.♗e5 f6 25.♗g3±] 20.♘f3 c4 21.d4 0-0 22.♖ae1 ♔h7 [22...♖fe8 23.c3±] 23.c3 ♖ad8 24.♕f2 ♖fe8 25.♖e2±

16.♖ae1



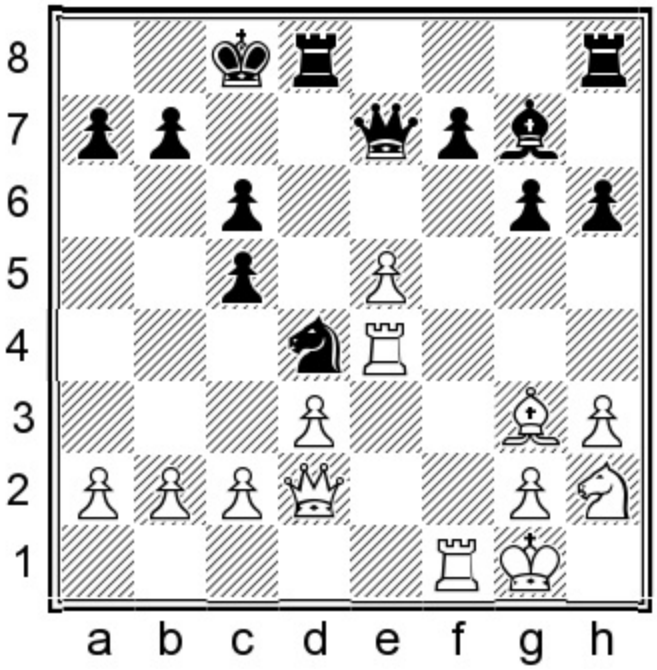
Position after: 16.♖ae1

16...0-0-0

A) 16...0-0 17.♘e4±

B) 16...h5 17.♘e4 ♗xe4 18.♖xe4±

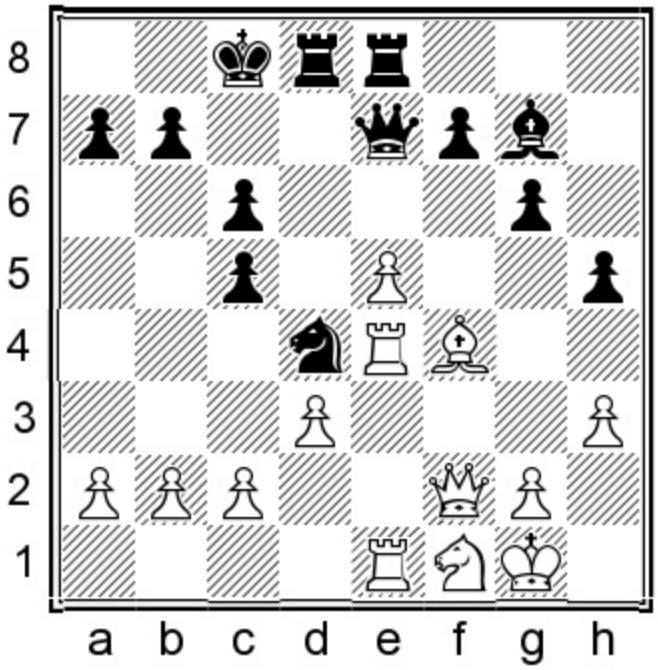
17.♘e4 ♗xe4 18.♖xe4



Position after: 18.♖xe4

18...♘f5

A) 18...♖he8 19.♕f2 [19.♕a5 is also strong, and led to a convincing victory in Fedorov – Glukhovtsev, ICCF email 2011.] 19...♘f5 20.♗f4 ♘d4 21.♖fe1 h5 22.♘f1±



Position after: 22.♘f1±

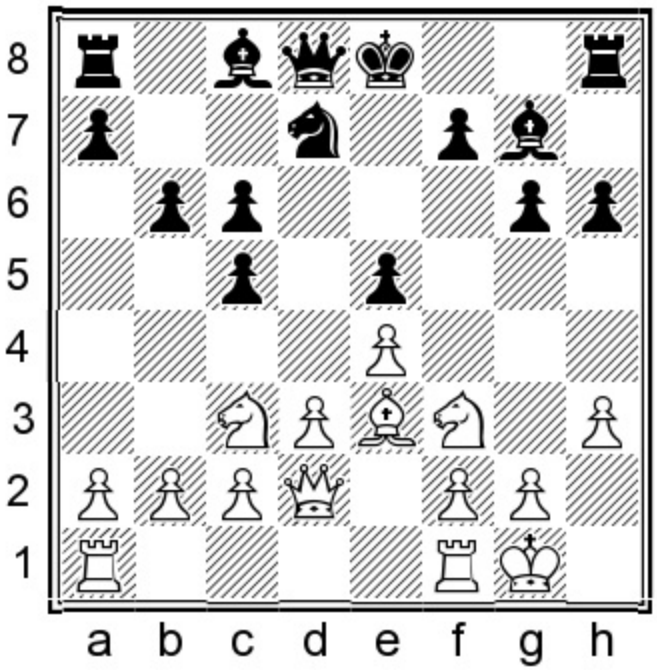
B) 18...b6 19.♘f3 ♘xf3+ 20.♖xf3±

19.♗f2±

Followed up with ♖fe1, ♘f3 and ♕c3. White won a nice game in Chouari – Haznedaroglu, ICCF email 2008.

e) 7...♘d7 8.♗e3 e5 9.♕d2 h6 10.0-0 b6

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.♗xc6 dxc6 5.d3 ♗g7 6.h3 ♘f6 7.♘c3 ♘d7 8.♗e3 e5 9.♕d2 h6 10.0-0 b6

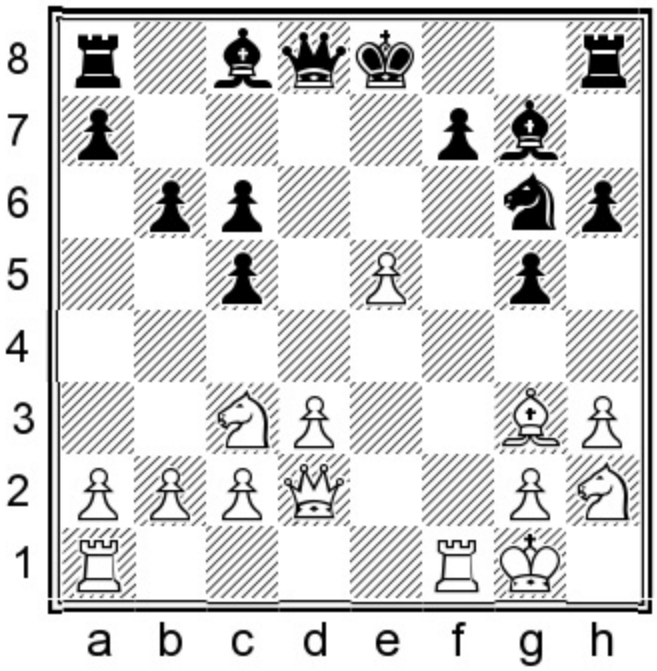


Position after: 10...b6

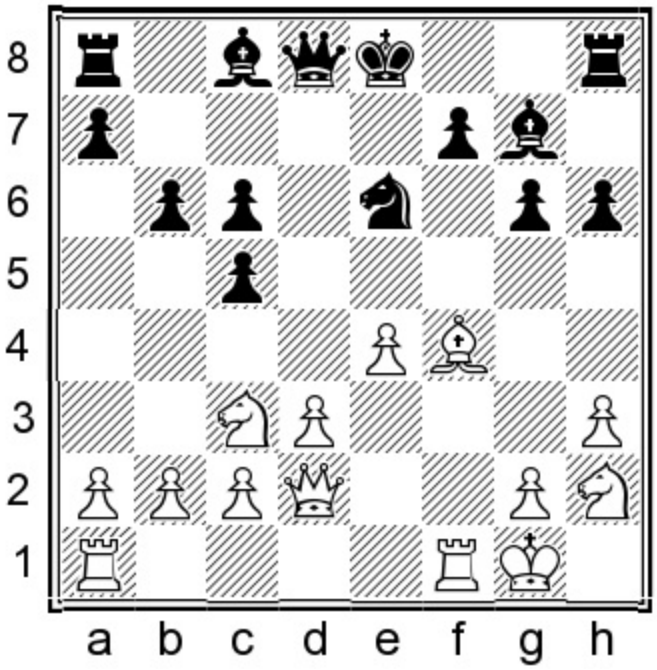
Arguably a better way to defend the c5-pawn than ...♕e7, as in certain variations Black can play ...♕g5 in one move rather than two. Our analysis will demonstrate the necessity of adapting to the subtle change and embarking on a slightly different plan.

11.♘h2 ♘f8 12.f4 exf4 13.♗xf4 ♘e6

13...g5?! 14.♗g3 ♘g6 15.e5±



Position after: 15.e5±

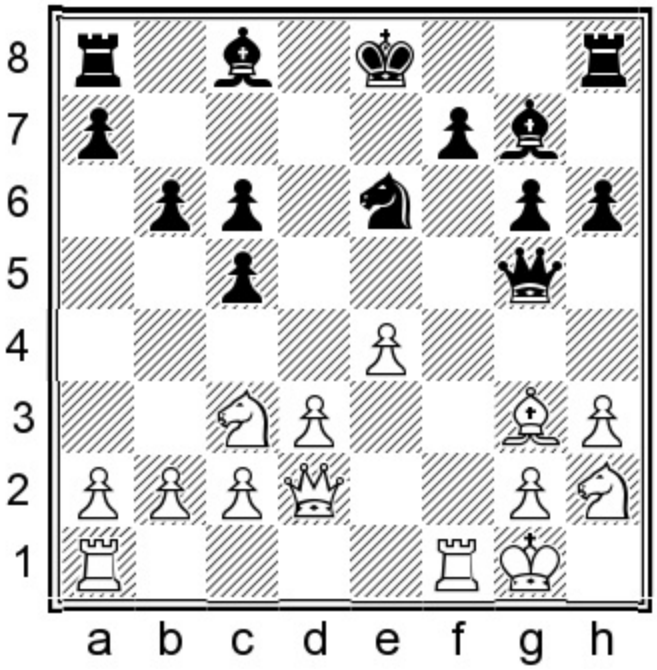


Position after: 13...♘e6

14.♗e3!

Preventing Black from playing ...♕g5. Although our bishop isn't ideally placed, we'll still play for the same plan with ♖ae1, e4-e5, ♘e4 and ♘g4.

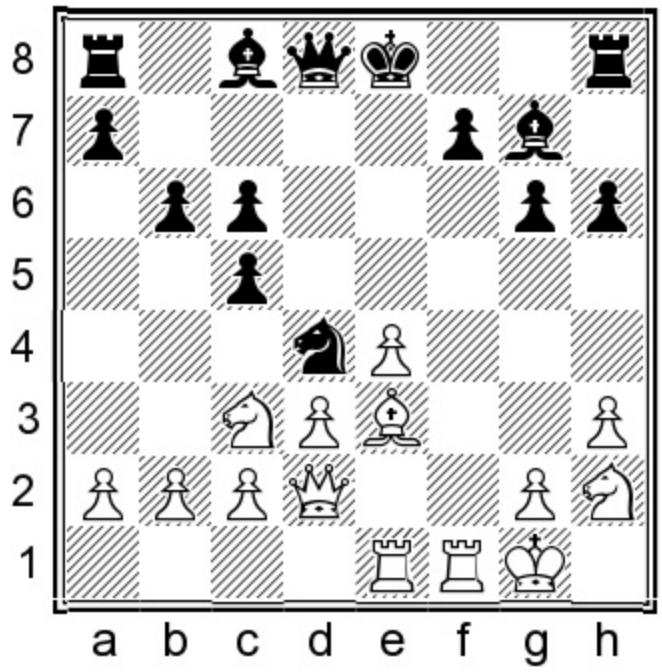
In this case, Black is doing fine after 14.♗g3 ♕g5! as his pawn is already on b6.



Position after: 14...♕g5!

The variation illustrates why the piece sacrifice is completely playable for Black here: 15.♕e1 ♘d4 16.♕f2 0-0 17.♗d6 ♗xh3 18.♗f4 ♕xg2+ 19.♕xg2 ♗xg2 20.♔xg2 g5 21.♗d2 ♘xc2 22.♖ad1 ♖ad8∞

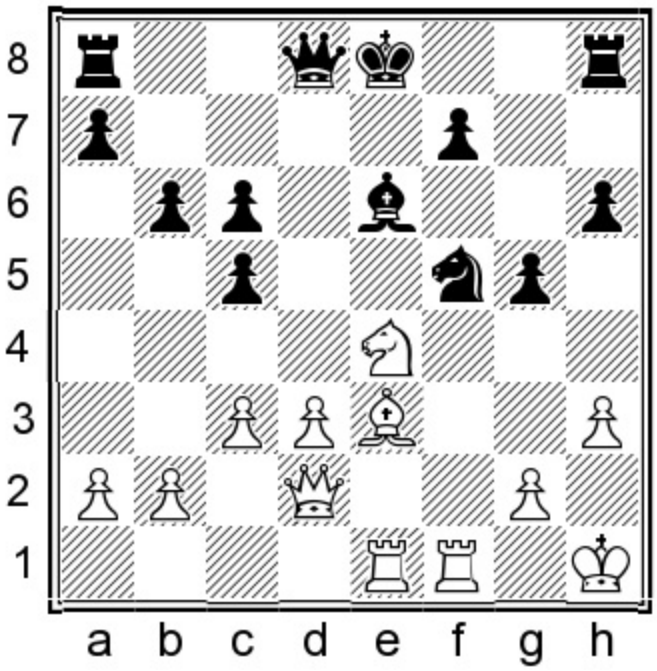
14...♘d4 15.♖ae1



Position after: 15.♖ae1

15...♗e6

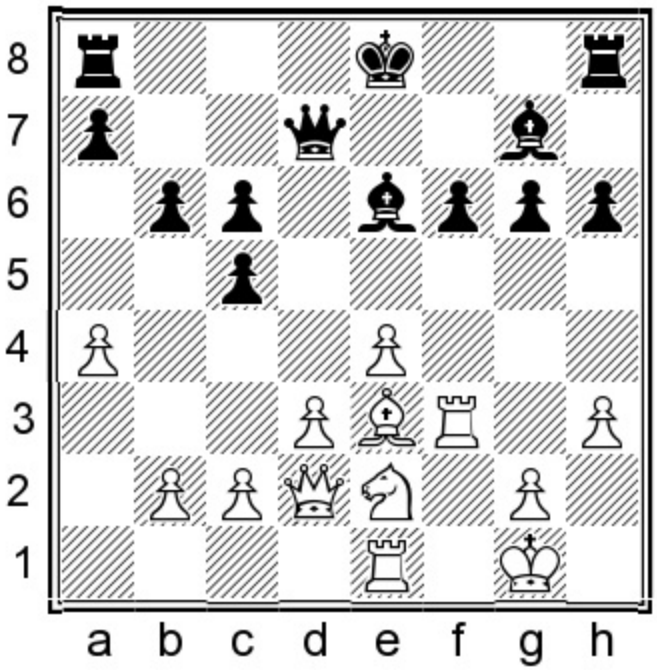
A) 15...g5 16.e5! ♗e6 [16...0-0 17.h4!+–] 17.♘e4 ♗xe5 18.c3 ♗xh2+ 19.♔xh2 ♘f5 20.♔h1!



Position after: 20.♔h1!

The trade of his g7-bishop means that Black is struggling on the dark-squares, and it's a great idea to maneouvre our own dark-squared bishop to h2. 20...♔f8 21.♗g1 ♖g8 22.c4 ♖g6 23.♕c3±

B) 15...f6 We saw a similar idea after 8.0-0. Here, Black's kingside pawns seem far too positionally weak to be able to cope with our activity. 16.♘f3! ♘xf3+ 17.♖xf3 ♗e6 18.♘e2 ♕d7 19.a4!

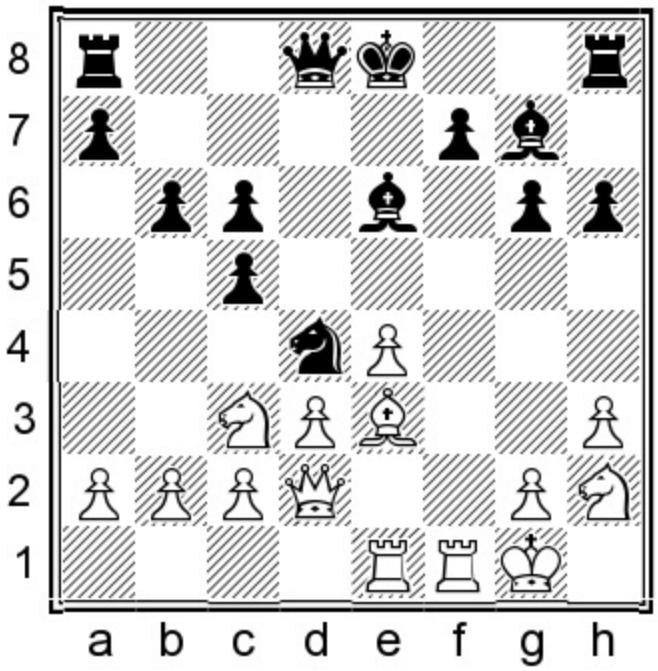


Position after: 19.a4!

It's evident that Black wants to castle queenside, and this move is always useful in probing at

Black's queenside pawns – attempting to create a weakness, which we can then aim to exploit. 19...a5 20.d4 cxd4 21.♘xd4 ♗f7 22.♖d1 0-0-0 23.b4!+–

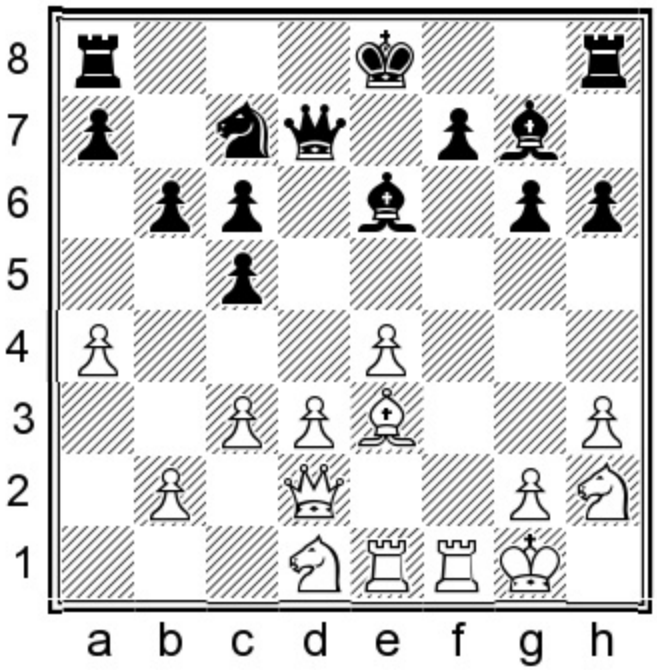
C) 15...♕e7 16.e5 ♗e6 17.♗f4 0-0-0 18.♘e4±



Position after: 15...♗e6

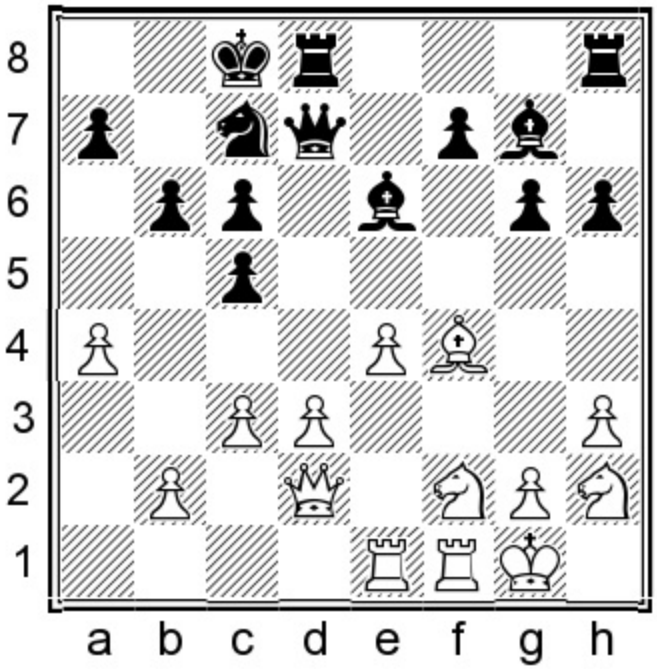
16.e5

16.♘d1!? An interesting alternative to the text move, seeking to remove Black's knight from the d4-square. On the downside, our knight on d1 will have considerably less options than it did on c3. I'll present a shortened form of my analysis for you to explore more at your own leisure. 16...♕d7 [16...g5 If Black prevents our bishop from returning to f4, our plan changes towards central action. 17.c3 ♘b5 18.a4 ♘c7 19.♘f3 ♕d7 20.d4±] 17.c3 ♘b5 18.a4 ♘c7



Position after: 18...♘c7

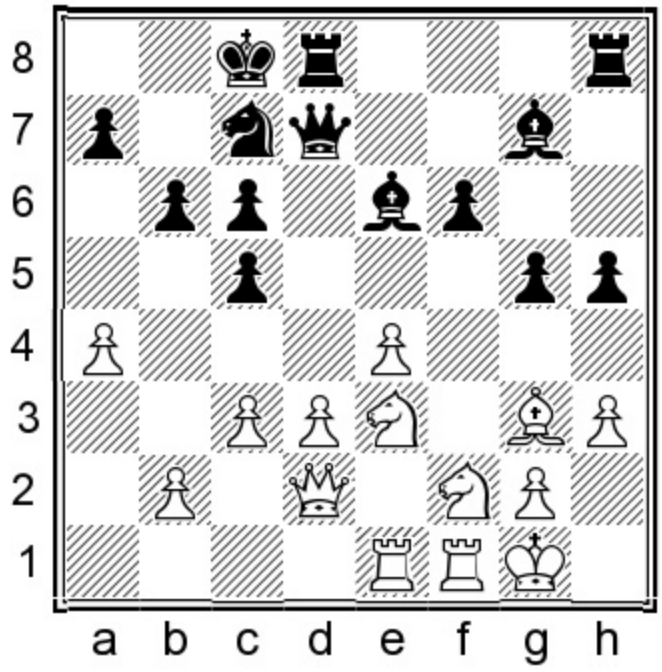
19.♗f4 [If White gets pushy in the centre with 19.♘f3 0-0-0 20.d4 then Black just calmly inflicts an IQP and waits: 20...cxd4 21.cxd4 f5! 22.♘c3 fxe4 23.♘xe4 g5⇄] 19...0-0-0 [19...g5 20.♗g3 0-0?! 21.♘e3±] 20.♘f2



Position after: 20.♘f2

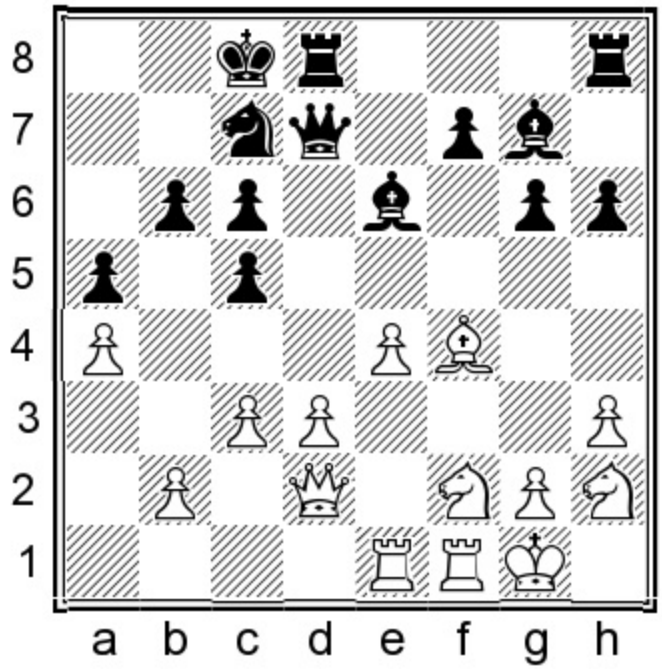
Now Black needs to try and create a mess on the kingside as otherwise White will land first with ♘f3 and b4. Meanwhile, Having kicked away Black's knight from d4, our position feels slightly easier to

play compared to the mainline after 16.e5. Nevertheless, we've lost a few attacking options, such as a4-a5 followed by ♘a4. It's also important to note that our d3-pawn can potentially be a weakness. 20...a5 [20...g5!? 21.♗g3 f6 22.♘hg4 h5 23.♘e3±



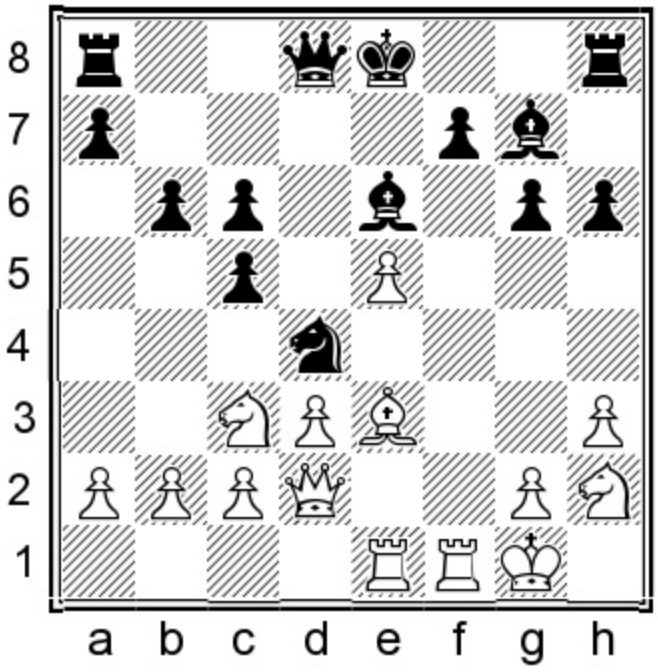
Position after: 23.♘e3±

White has enough control over the kingside to keep it in lockdown, as well as active plans for the future such as b4, a5 or ♘f5.; 20...f6 21.a5 g5 22.♗g3 h5 23.axb6 axb6 24.♖a1→]



Position after: 20...a5

21.♘hg4! [The following line demonstrates a possible way for Black to generate counterplay: 21.b4 g5! 22.♗xc7 ♕xc7 23.bxc5 bxc5 24.♘f3 h5!∞] 21...♔b7 22.e5 g5 23.♗g3 h5 24.♘f6 ♗xf6 25.exf6 ♖hg8 26.♗e5±

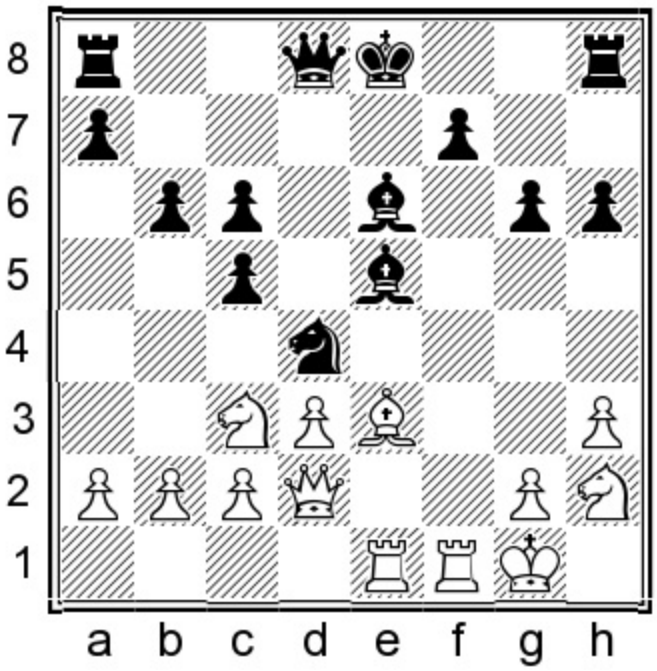


Position after: 16.e5

16...♘f5

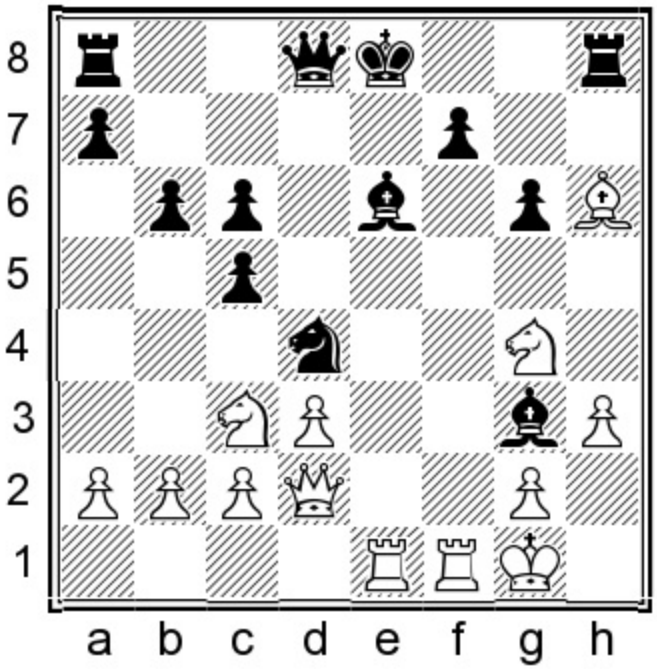
A) 16...♕c7 17.♘e4 0-0-0 18.♘d6+ ♔b8 19.♗f4 Despite having castled queenside, Black is still extremely passive as a result of our e5-pawn. 19...♘f5 [19...♔a8 20.♘f3±] 20.b3 ♗f8 21.♘xf5 gxf5 22.♘f3±

B) 16...♗xe5?!



Position after: 16...♗xe5?!

B1) 17.♗xh6!? An interesting alternative which leads to some crazy lines. It's probably better to read this for inspiration, rather than memorisation. 17...♗g3 18.♘g4



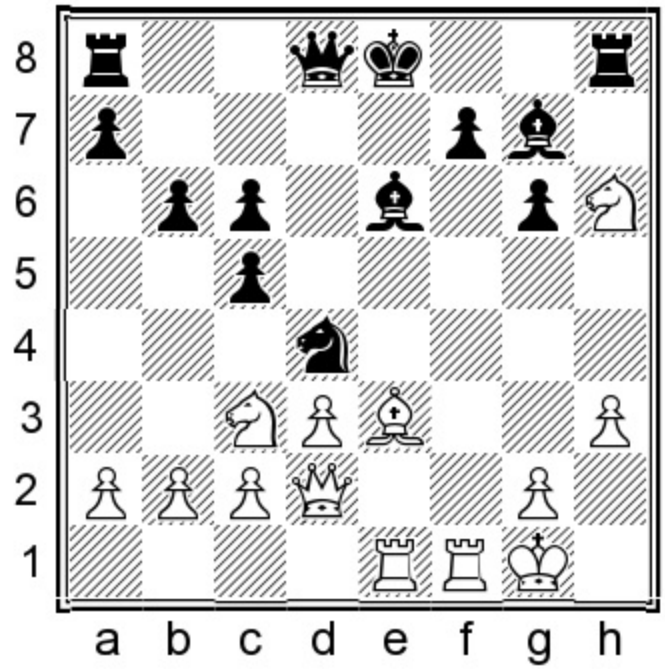
Position after: 18.♘g4

B1.1) 18...f5 19.♖e3! fxg4 [19...♖xh6 20.♖xe6+ ♘xe6 21.♕xh6+–] 20.♗g7 ♖g8 21.♗f6 ♕c7 22.♗xd4 0-0-0 23.♖xe6 cxd4 24.♘e4 gxh3 25.gxh3±

B1.2) 18...♗xe1 19.♖xe1 We've sacrificed an exchange, but claim that Black will really struggle

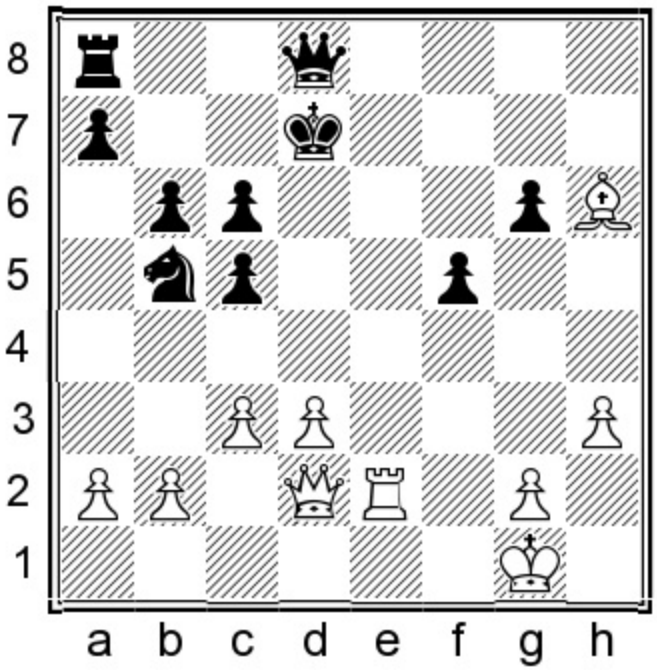
to defend his dark-squares. 19...♖xh6!? Possibly Black's best practical try. [19...♘f5 20.♗g5 ♕d4+ 21.♘f2 ♘d6 22.b3 0-0 23.♘e2⩲] 20.♕xh6 ♔d7 21.♘e5+ ♔c8 22.♖f1 ♘f5 23.♕f4 ♕d4+ 24.♕xd4 cxd4 25.♘e4 ♔c7=

B2) 17.♘g4! ♗g7 [17...♗g3 18.♘f6+ ♔e7 19.♘ce4; 17...♗xg4 18.♗f4! f6 19.♗xe5 fxe5 20.hxg4 ♕e7 21.♖xe5 ♕xe5 22.♖e1+–] 18.♘xh6



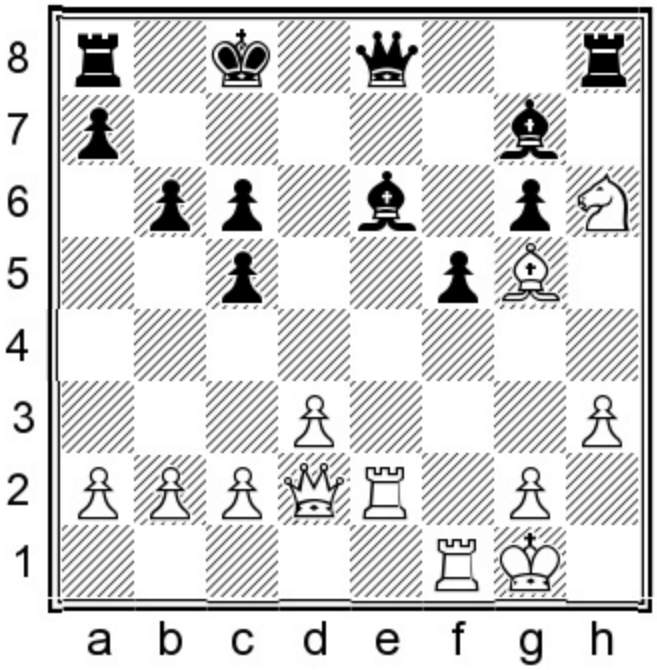
Position after: 18.♘xh6

B2.1) 18...f6 19.♖f2 Black is forced to unnaturally protect his bishop with his king, and the resulting position is definitely favourable for White. 19...♔d7 [19...♕d7 20.♗xd4 ♗xh6 21.♗e3 ♗g7 22.♘e4 0-0 23.♗xc5+–] 20.♘e4 f5 21.c3 ♘b5 22.♘g5 ♖e8 23.♖fe2 ♗xh6 24.♘xe6 ♖xe6 25.♗xh6 ♖xe2 26.♖xe2±



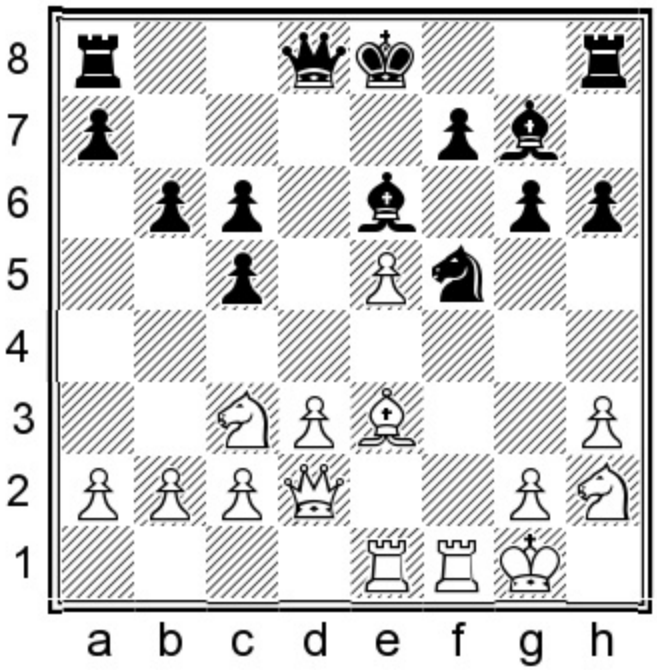
Position after: 26.♖xe2±

B2.2) 18...f5 19.♘e2! ♘xe2+ 20.♕xe2 ♔d7 [20...♕d5 21.♗f4 ♔d7 22.♘f7! ♖he8 23.♘d6 ♖e7 24.♔h2 ♗f6 25.♗g3 ♗g8 26.♕d2±] 21.♗g5 ♕e8 22.♕d2 ♔c8 23.♖e2±



Position after: 23.♖e2±

White keeps up the pressure and in practical terms, it looks increasingly difficult for Black to survive.

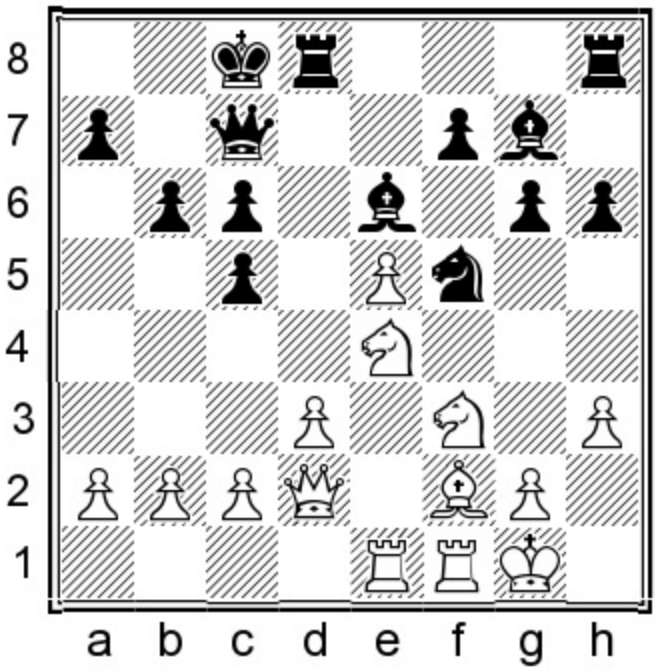


Position after: 16...♘f5

17.♗f2 ♕c7 18.♘f3 0-0-0

18...0-0 19.♘e4 ♗d5 20.g4 ♗xe4 21.♖xe4 ♘e7 22.c4±

19.♘e4



Position after: 19.♘e4

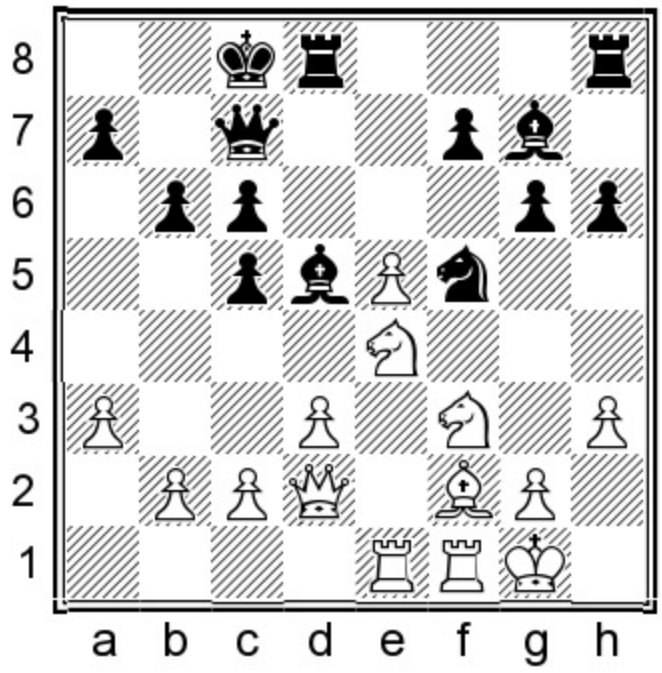
It looks like Black has successfully handled everything, as his king is safely tucked away on the queenside. Despite this, there are two things to acknowledge about the position. Firstly, Black's hopes of a kingside attack look extremely scarce – it will take a few moves to achieve anything of significance. Secondly, the fact that we've established a pawn on e5 restricts Black's piece mobility. This means that we'll be able to attack with our queenside pawns, knowing that Black will struggle for defensive resources.

19...♗d5

19...h5 20.b4! [20.a3 also looks good, e. g. 20...♗d5 21.b4 c4 22.a4 ♖he8 23.a5 b5 24.a6!→] 20...cxb4 21.♕xb4 ♖d5 22.♘eg5 ♗h6 23.♘xe6 fxe6 24.♕e4! Followed by ♖a1 and a4-a5. Our attack looks difficult to contain.

20.a4!?

20.a3

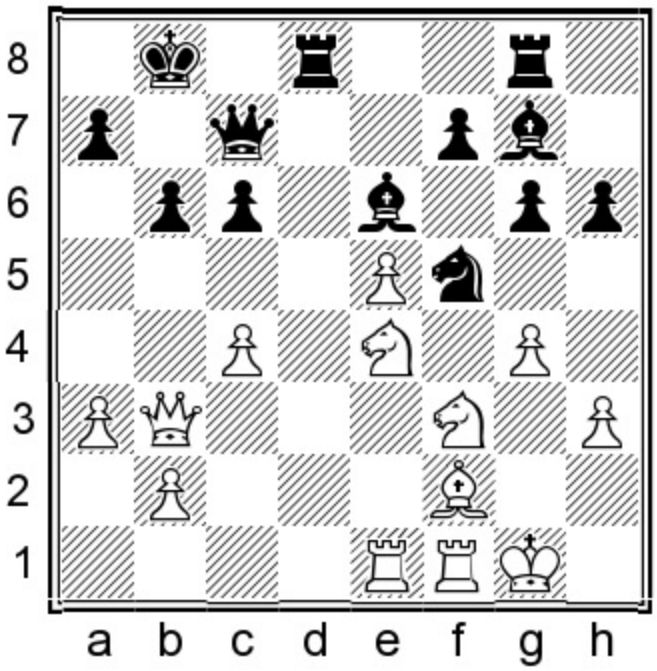


Position after: 20.a3

This is an alternative way of attacking on the queenside. I'll present a shortened form of my analysis as it's more important to focus on the attacking ideas, rather than exact variations.

A) 20...♖he8 21.c4 ♗xe4 22.♖xe4 f6 23.b4→

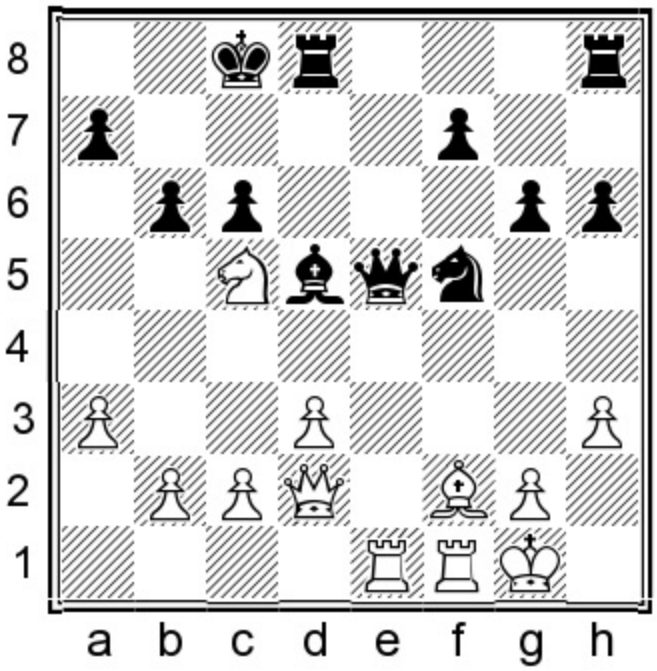
B) 20...c4?! An attempt to get rid of the doubled pawns is rarely good when Black has castled queenside. 21.g4! ♖hg8 22.♕e2 cxd3 23.♕xd3 ♔b8 24.c4 ♗e6 25.♕b3→



Position after: 25.♕b3→

Black always has to be wary about whether we can capture on f5. In the meantime, we'll continue to probe on the queenside.

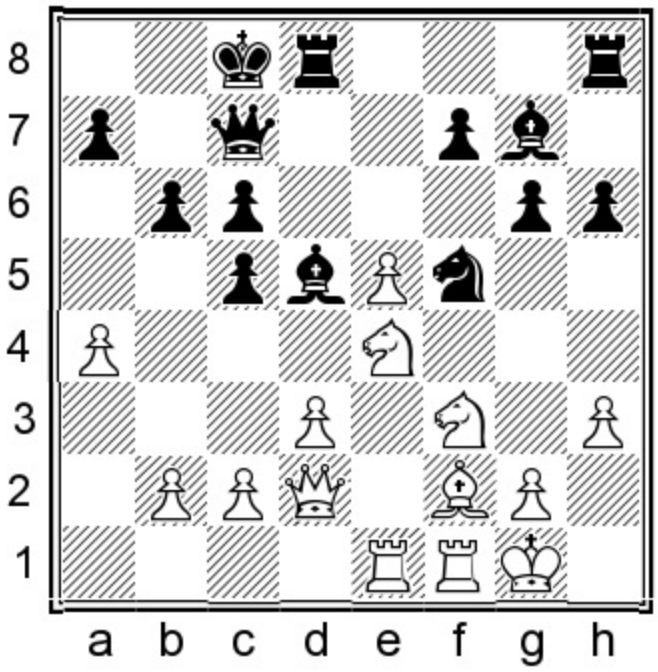
C) 20...♗xe5 The critical move. The resulting opposite-coloured bishop scenarios should favour White, as Black's king appears to be slightly weaker. 21.♘xe5 ♕xe5 22.♘xc5



Position after: 22.♘xc5

22...♕xb2 [22...♕f6 23.♘a4 c5 24.♘c3 ♗b7 25.♕f4±] 23.♕f4! bxc5 24.♖b1 ♕c3 25.♖b8+ ♔d7

26.♖b7+ ♔e8 27.♕c7 ♔f8 28.♕xd8+ ♔g7 29.♕c7±



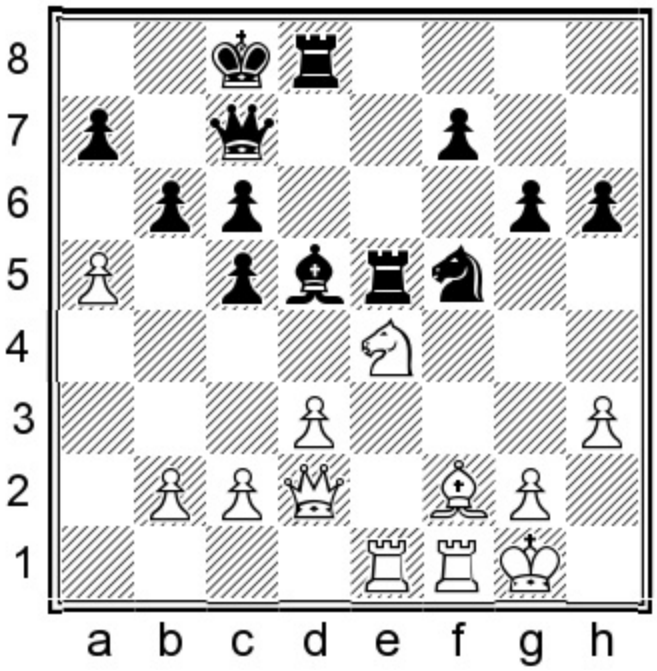
Position after: 20.a4!?

20...♖he8

A) 20...♗xe5 21.♘xe5 ♕xe5 22.♘c3! ♕c7 23.a5 Comparing the two kings, we're already close to winning. 23...♔b7 24.♖a1! ♖he8 25.♖fb1+–

B) 20...a5 21.g4 ♘d4 22.♘xd4 cxd4 23.♗xd4 ♗xe5 24.♗xe5 ♕xe5 25.♕f2±

21.a5 ♗xe5 22.♘xe5 ♖xe5



Position after: 22...♖xe5

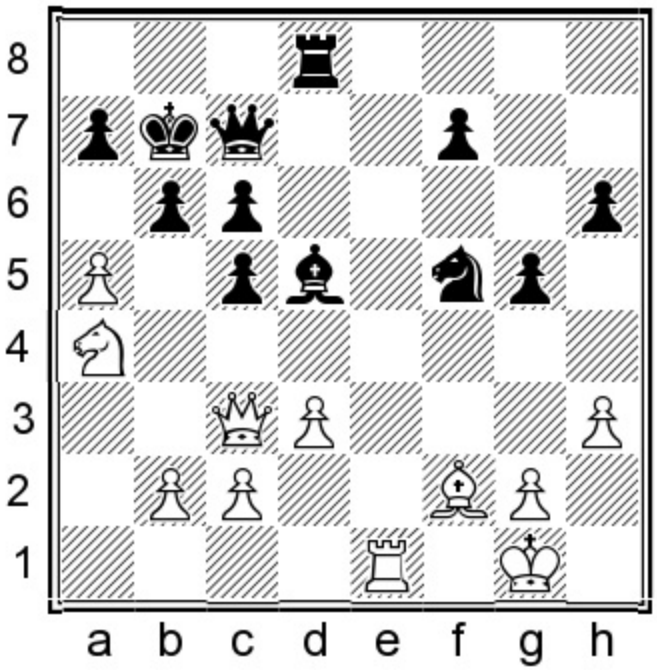
23.♘c3 ♖xe1 24.♖xe1 ♔b7 25.♘a4

The attack plays itself.

25...g5

Black plans to meet b2-b4 with ...♕f4, so we have to react accordingly.

26.♕c3

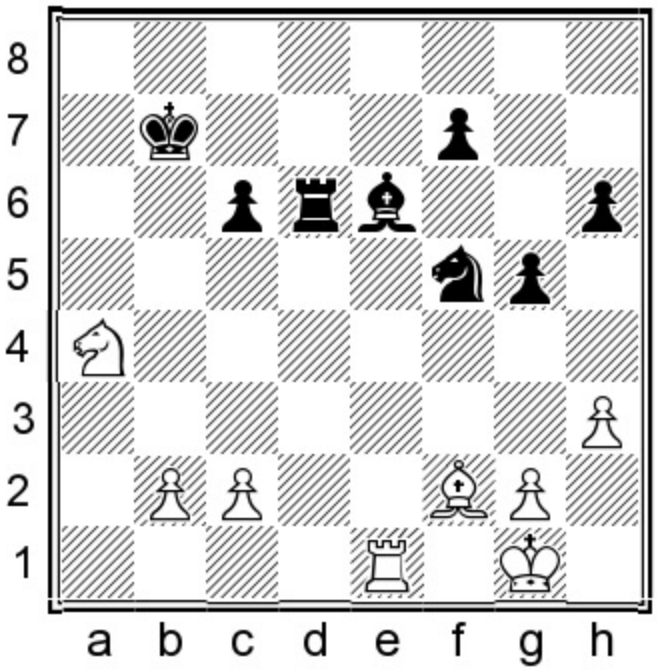


Position after: 26.♕c3

26...♕d6

26...♕f4 27.axb6 ♕xa4 28.♕f6+–

27.♕a3 c4 28.♕xd6 ♖xd6 29.axb6 axb6 30.dxc4 ♗xc4 31.♘xb6 ♗e6 32.♘a4±



Position after: 32.♘a4±

Black still has to suffer a bit before we'll agree to a draw.

Conclusion to Chapter 19 & 20

Although 4...dxc6 has historically been favoured due to Black's solid structure, it's evident from our analysis that Black's only way to prevent White from acquiring an easy edge is to play dynamically with 7...♘d7 and a quick ...e5. My recommendation in the very last subchapter of 14.♗e3 followed by 16.e5 ensures that we will gain excellent attacking possibilities and pressure on the dark-squared weaknesses regardless of whether Black castles queenside or kingside.

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