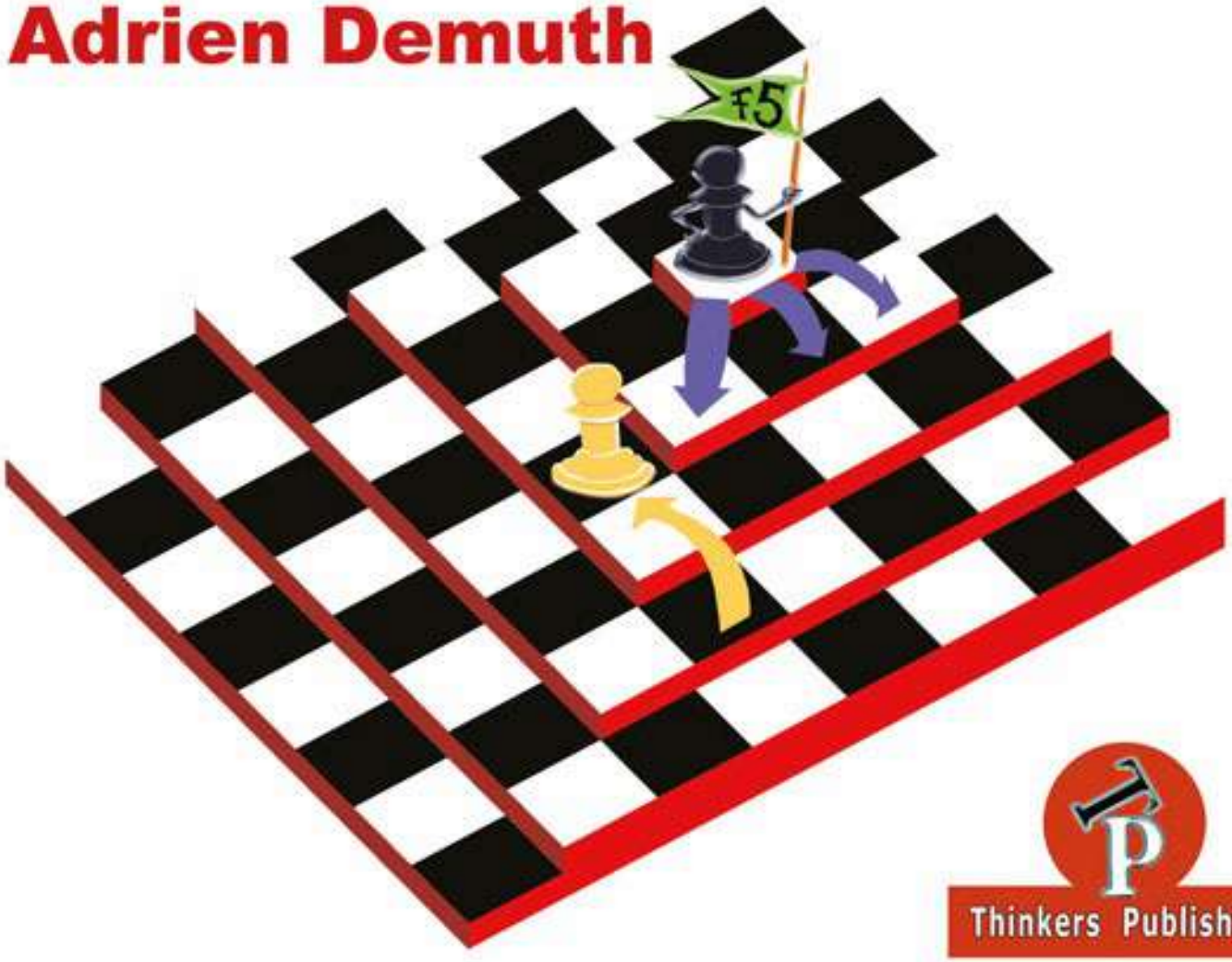
The Modernized Dutch Defense

Adrien Demuth



Thinkers Publishing

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The Modernized Dutch Defense

by

Adrien Demuth

Thinkers Publishing 2019



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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

Finding the right opening against 1.d4 has always been a difficult task. Keeping the balance between a solid position and having decent winning chances is very difficult. If you have experienced this problem, have you ever tried the Leningrad Variation of the Dutch Defense? When you play 1...f5, your opponent understands that you are not afraid and are out to win the game. Some White players like this, since they will also get more winning chances, but your choice might also unsettle many others.

For a long time, my trainers used to tell me that the Dutch Defense was quite dubious, and that there were many good ways to meet it and get an advantage with White. In fact the Dutch had a bad reputation in general, so they succeeded in convincing me for a while. But around 2013, some very strong players started to use it regularly; some of Kamsky's games were very impressive and even the World Champion, Magnus Carlsen, started to employ the opening occasionally. Most of the time when the Dutch appeared in top level games, Black's intention was to follow with an early ...g6, leading to the Leningrad Variation, probably the sharpest version of the opening! Now many strong grandmasters employ the Leningrad Variation from time to time.

After seeing these games which seemed to show that White was unable to find an edge in the main lines, I decided to work closely on the variation. First of all I got two of the most recent books on the Leningrad, by Malaniuk and Moskalenko, and even if I wasn't fond of every line, they were really inspiring. In 2015 I played my first games with the Leningrad. I even acquired a special feeling for this opening, because my first game with it was a win against GM Zakhartsov which was crucial in scoring my final GM norm in February 2015 at the Pfalz Open.

Since then I have included the Leningrad in my repertoire, even if only as my second or third choice main weapon, the reason being that I like to vary a lot, and I also like more positional openings.

After writing my first book almost two years ago on the Reti, I was kindly offered the opportunity by my editor to write another one on a subject of my own choosing. Obviously it was illogical to offer another repertoire for White, so the choice of the Leningrad for Black was obvious. The opening was a great source of interest to me, and I really wondered if I could devote a whole book to it. Also, I took a bet with my editor, Daniël Vanheirzeele, who didn't believe in the Dutch at all, that I would make him like the book so much that he would play the Leningrad from the Black side. Time will tell if I have succeeded!

Throughout the book I have tried not only to look for variations where there is always life and winning chances for Black, but also to offer decent continuations, not just say that 'Black has counterplay', when he might clearly be worse, which is the case in some books.

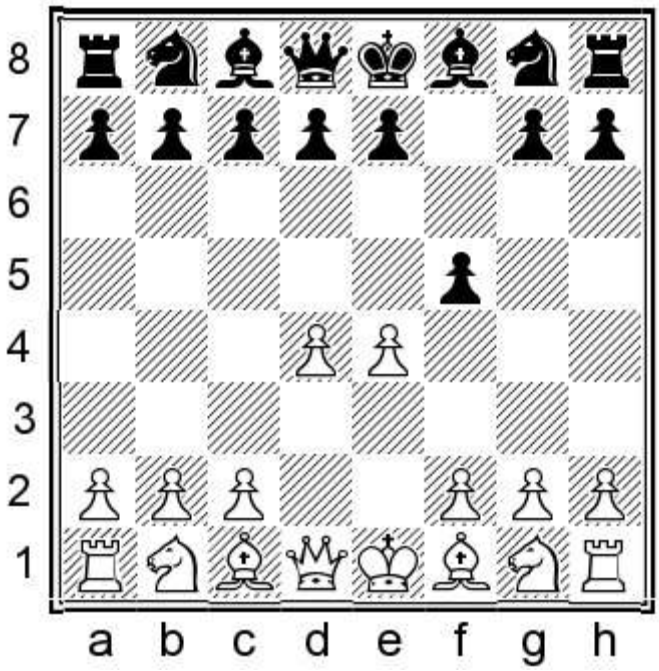
The work presented here is designed for every player willing to improve his or her general understanding of the Dutch Defense, especially of the Leningrad Variation, with both colors. It provides a full repertoire for Black not only against 1.d4, but also against 1.c4 and 1.♘f3. I believe that the material offered here can help players from club level to GM level, and I hope you will enjoy reading it as much I did writing it!

Adrien Demuth
Arpaillargues, June 2019

Part I
Early Sidelines after 1.d4 f5

Chapter 1
The Staunton Gambit

1.d4 f5 2.e4



Chapter Guide

Chapter 1 – The Staunton Gambit

1.d4 f5 2.e4 fxe4

a) 3.f3

b) 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.g4?!

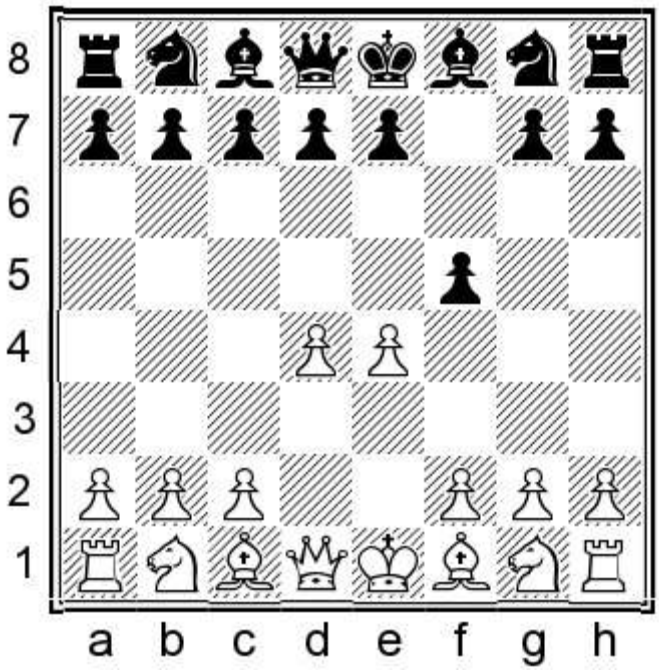
c) 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♗g5 ♘c6

d) 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♗g5 g6 5.--

e) 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♗g5 g6 5.h4

a) 3.f3

1.d4 f5 2.e4!?



Position after: 2.e4!?

Where better to start our work on the Dutch Defense than with the Staunton Gambit! Staunton was the first player to use this direct way to try to refute our system. He played it only once (to win a game in his match against Horwitz in 1846), but nevertheless chess literature retained his name for the opening. Even if it's a rare guest in top-level games, Black has to be careful, as it's easy to fall into a trap.

2...fxe4

Of course we have to accept the gift.

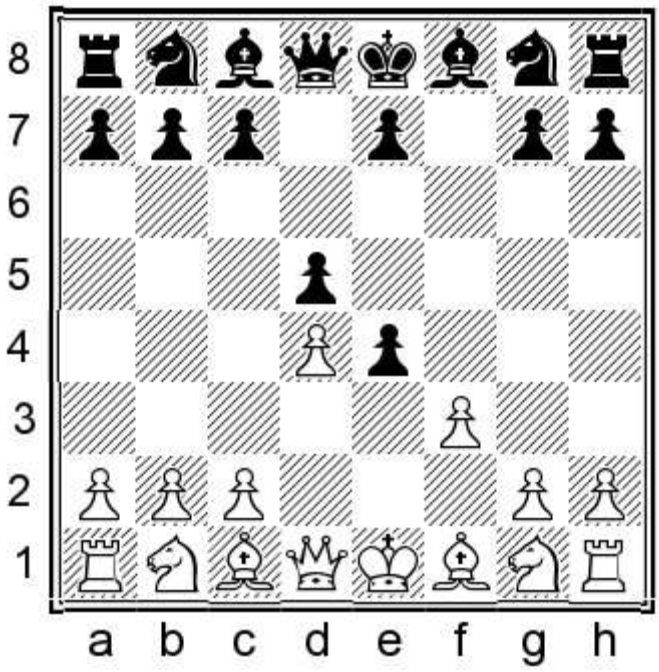
3.f3

I think it's illogical to start with this move, but it happens from time to time. It's reminiscent of the Blackmar-Diemer Gambit, except that Black hasn't moved any central pawn yet.

3...e6!?

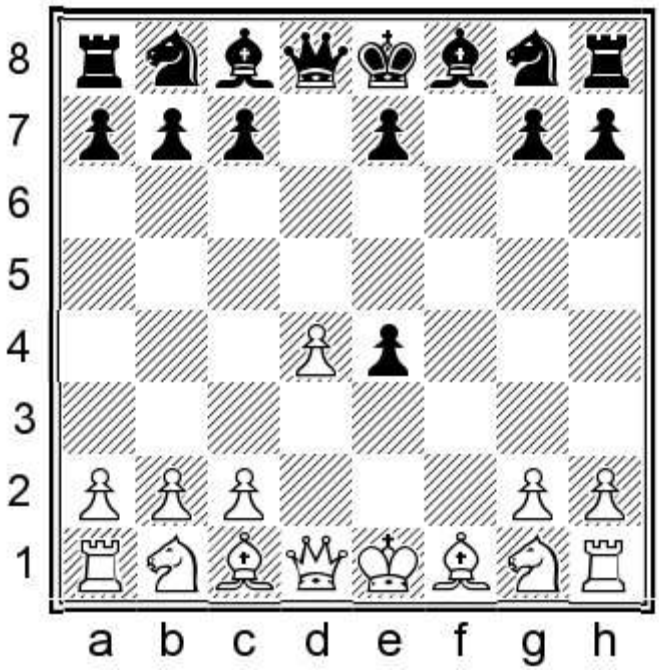
I like this less-known approach, especially because we don't get two ugly (even if quite strong) d-pawns. The idea is generally to continue with ...c7−c5!

3...d5



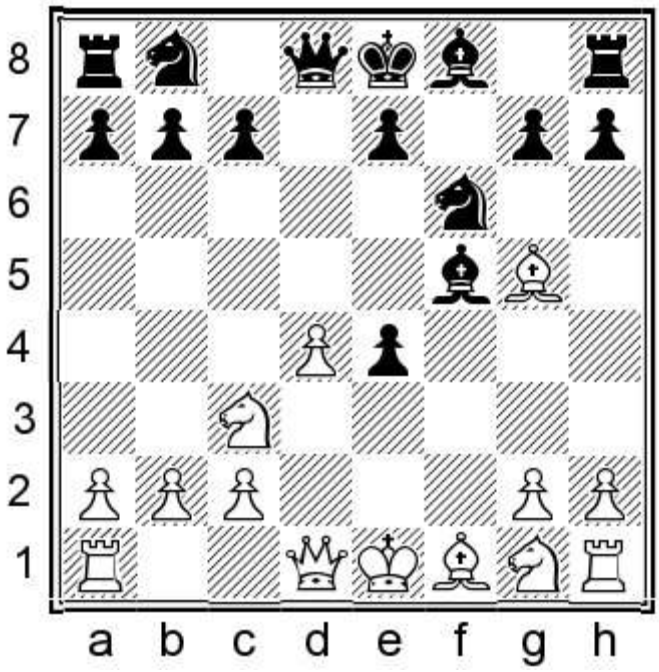
Position after: 3...d5

This is the move recommended by theory, and is completely playable. 4.fxe4 [4.c4 e6 5.♘c3 ♗b4 6.a3 ♗xc3+ 7.bxc3 ♘f6∓; 4.♘c3 ♘f6 5.fxe4 dxe4 transposes to 4.fxe4] 4...dxe4



Position after: 4...dxe4

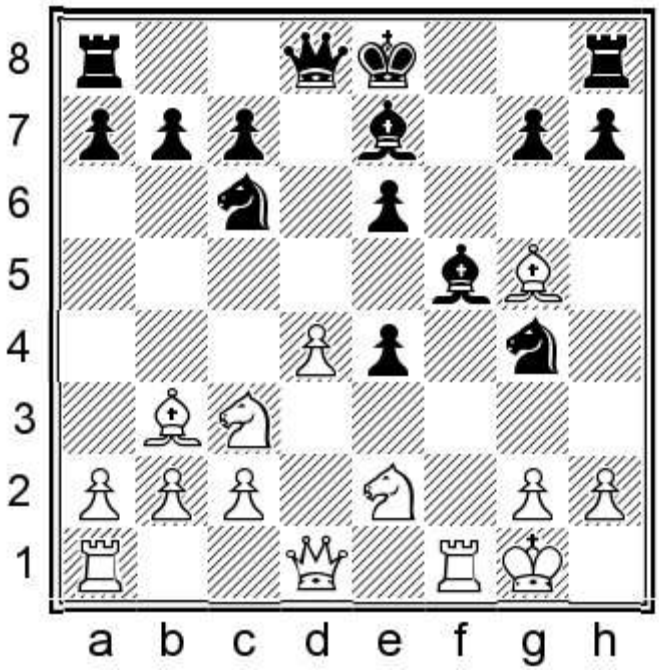
This may seem quite ugly for Black, but he has an extra pawn and will probably be able to put pressure on the center and disrupt White's development with the e4-pawn. 5.♘c3 [5.♗c4 ♘f6 6.♘e2 ♘c6!∓] 5...♘f6 6.♗g5 [6.♗c4 ♘c6 7.♘ge2 ♗g4∓] 6...♗f5!



Position after: 6...♗f5!

A) 7.♕e2?! Placing the queen in front of the bishop definitely looks strange. 7...♘c6 8.♗xf6 exf6 9.0-0-0 ♕d7! 10.♕e3 ♗b4∓

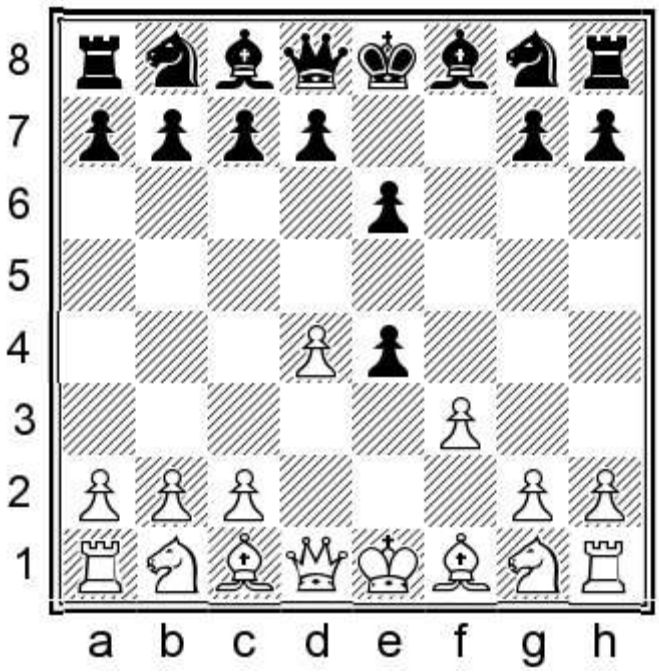
B) 7.♗c4 ♘c6 8.♘ge2 e6 Black is able to consolidate his center and has no problems at all. 9.0-0 [9.d5 ♘a5 10.♗b5+ c6 11.dxc6 bxc6 12.♕xd8+ ♖xd8∓] 9...♗e7! 10.♗b3 [10.♕e1 ♘a5∓; 10.d5? ♘xd5! ∓] 10...♘g4!



Position after: 10...♘g4!

Black trades the dark-squared bishops. The idea is to be able to bring the knight to e3, but it also allows him to accelerate queenside castling. 11.♗xe7 ♕xe7 12.♕d2 0-0-0∓

C) 7.♘ge2 e6 8.♘g3 ♗e7 9.♕d2 ♘bd7!∓ I prefer Black here, partly because it's still not clear how White will restore the material balance.



Position after: 3...e6!?

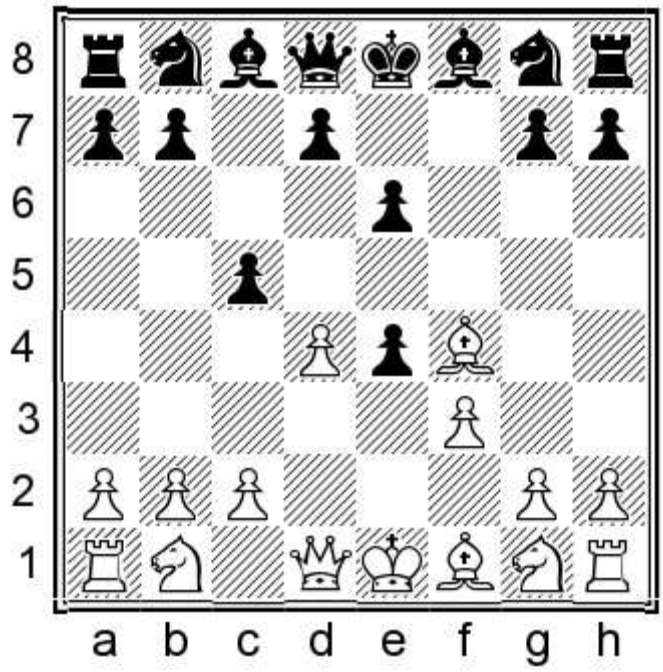
4.♘c3

The most played move.

A) 4.♘d2 is the computer's suggestion and has been tried a couple of times, but I still like Black after 4...c5!N 5.fxe4 [5.dxc5 ♘f6 6.fxe4 ♘c6 7.♘gf3 ♗xc5 8.♘b3 ♗b6∓ White probably regrets his early f2−f3.] 5...cxd4 6.♘gf3 ♘c6 7.♗b5 ♘h6!? An interesting maneuver, to keep the dark squares under control. 8.0-0 ♘f7 9.♘b3 g6 10.♘fxd4 ♗g7⇄

B) 4.fxe4?? ♕h4+ 5.♔e2 ♕xe4+ 6.♔f2 c5∓ Even if White is not totally lost here, his opening has been a big failure.

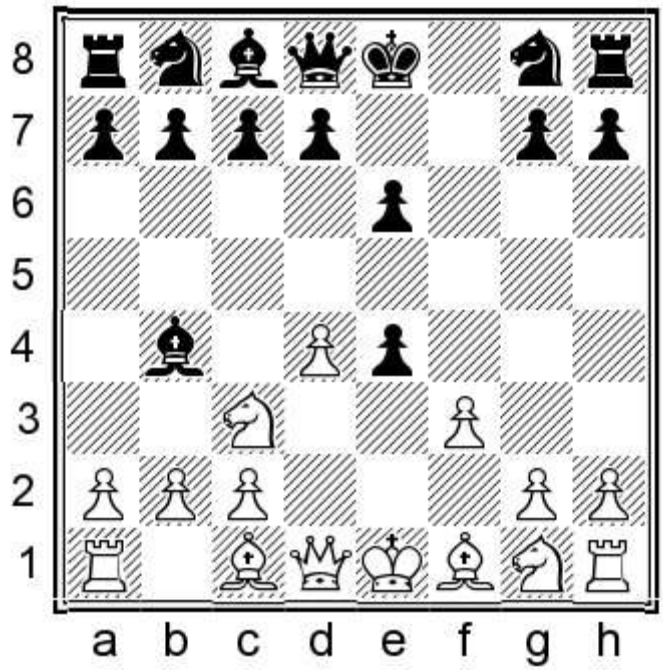
C) 4.♗f4 c5!N



Position after: 4...c5!N

White has weakened the dark squares, so it's logical to strike back directly with the idea of opening the a7-g1 diagonal. 5.♘c3 [5.dxc5 ♗xc5 6.♘c3 ♘f6 7.fxe4 0-0∓] 5...cxd4 6.♘b5 ♕a5+ 7.♕d2 ♕xd2+ 8.♔xd2 ♘a6 9.fxe4 ♗b4+ 10.♔c1 ♘f6∓

4...♗b4!



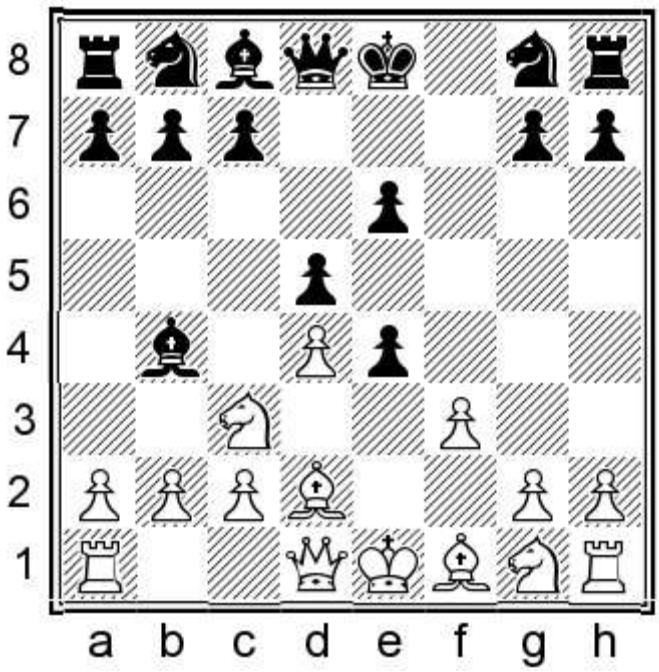
Position after: 4...♗b4!

5.♗d2

A) 5.♘h3?! exf3 6.♕xf3 ♕h4+ 7.g3 ♕xd4∓ Two extra central pawns are simply too much. White doesn't even have an advantage in development.

B) 5.♕e2 ♘c6!N 6.♗e3 ♘f6∓

5...d5!N



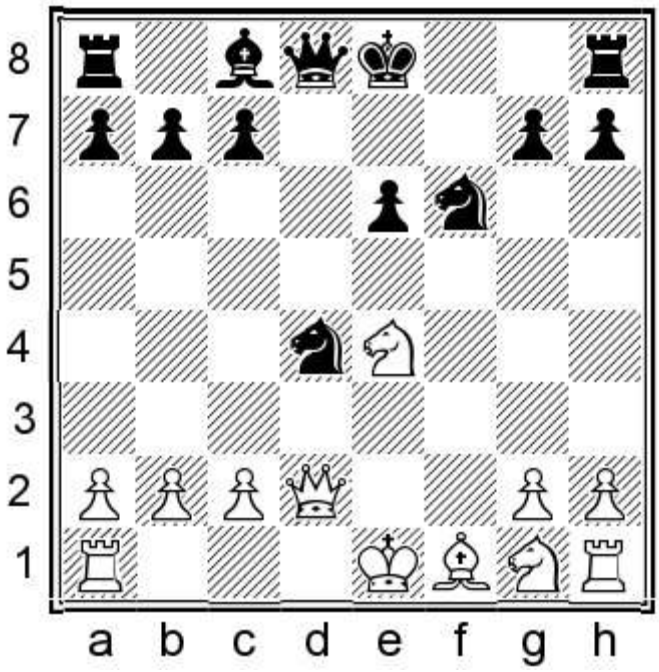
Position after: 5...d5!N

I believe that, played now, this is an improvement over the lines with 3...d5.

6.♕e2

6.a3 ♗xc3 7.♗xc3 ♘c6 8.♕e2 ♘f6 9.0-0-0 0-0∓

6...♘c6 7.fxe4 ♘xd4 8.♕d3 dxe4 9.♘xe4 ♗xd2+ 10.♕xd2 ♘f6∓

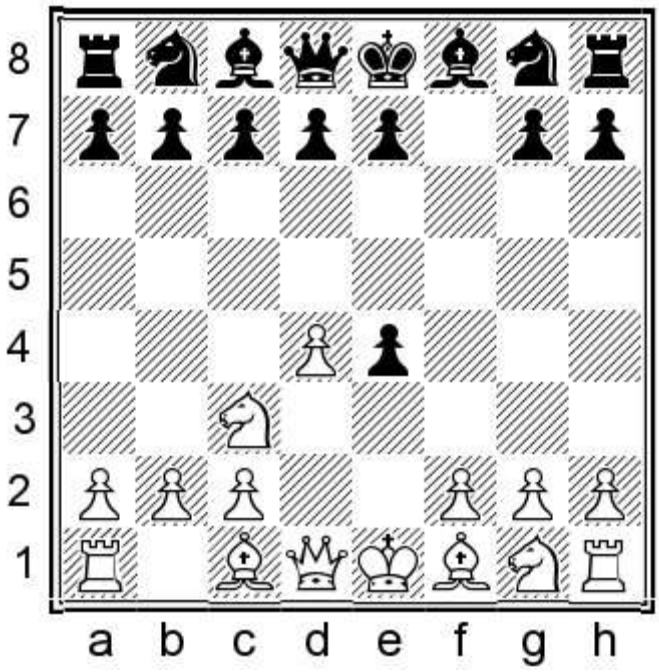


Position after: 10...♘f6∓

Black has managed to keep his extra pawn and has the better prospects.

b) 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.g4?!

1.d4 f5 2.e4!? fxe4 3.♘c3



Position after: 3.♘c3

In most games White starts with this move, which is going to be our main continuation.

3...♘f6

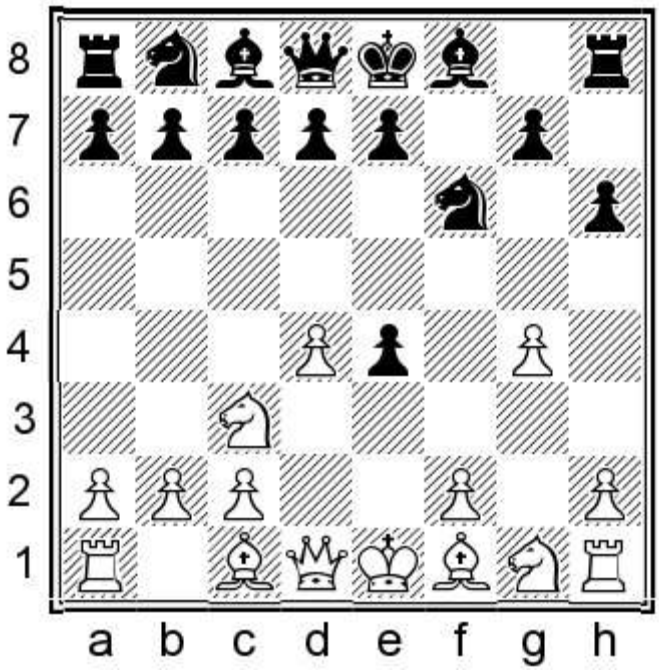
3...d5? This is the classical mistake and you have to keep the pattern in mind: 4.♕h5+ g6 5.♕xd5±.

4.g4?!

I believe this is objectively wrong, but Black has to play a slightly illogical – to my eyes – move.
4.f3 d5 transposes to the line 3.f3 d5 that we covered earlier.

4...h6!

This is the kind of move Black usually doesn't want to make!



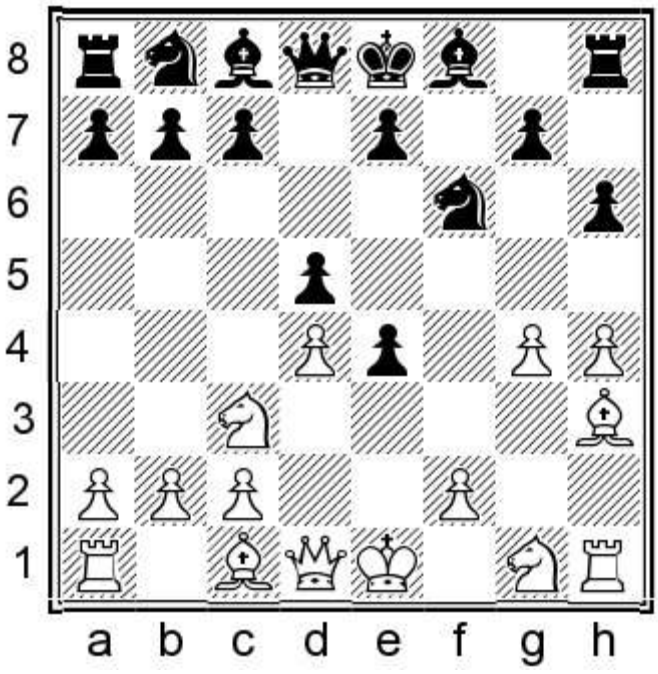
Position after: 4...h6!

It weakens the kingside, and if a bishop was miraculously dropped on to g6, the outcome would be painful. But be assured, it won't happen.

5.f3

A) 5.♗g2 This might seem the logical follow-up, but it's not strong enough. 5...d5!∓

B) 5.h4 d5 6.♗h3

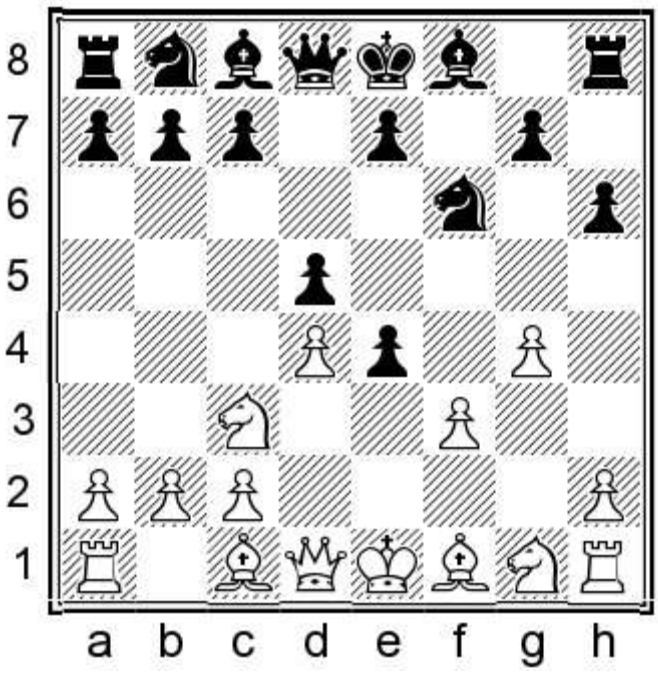


Position after: 6.♗h3

6...♘c6! [6...g5!? is an appealing option as well, and the position can soon get crazy.] 7.g5?! ♗xh3 8.♘xh3 hxg5 9.♘xg5 [9.hxg5 ♕d7! 10.gxf6 exf6–+ The knight is lost, and so is White's position.] 9...♕d6∓

C) 5.g5 hxg5 6.♗xg5 d5 7.f3 – see the line 5.f3 d5 6.g5 hxg5 7.♗xg5.

5...d5!



Position after: 5...d5!

6.h3

This has been by far the most played move by White, but without much success.

A) 6.♗g2 c5! It's clear here that, as often, when one faces a flank attack, one must react in the center. 7.fxe4 [7.dxc5 ♘c6 8.fxe4 ♗xg4 9.♗f3 ♗xf3 10.♕xf3 d4∓] 7...cxd4 8.♘xd5 [8.e5?! dxc3 9.exf6 exf6∓] 8...♘c6 9.♘h3 e6∓

B) 6.♗f4 c5 7.♘b5 ♘a6 8.dxc5 e5 9.♗xe5 ♗xc5∓

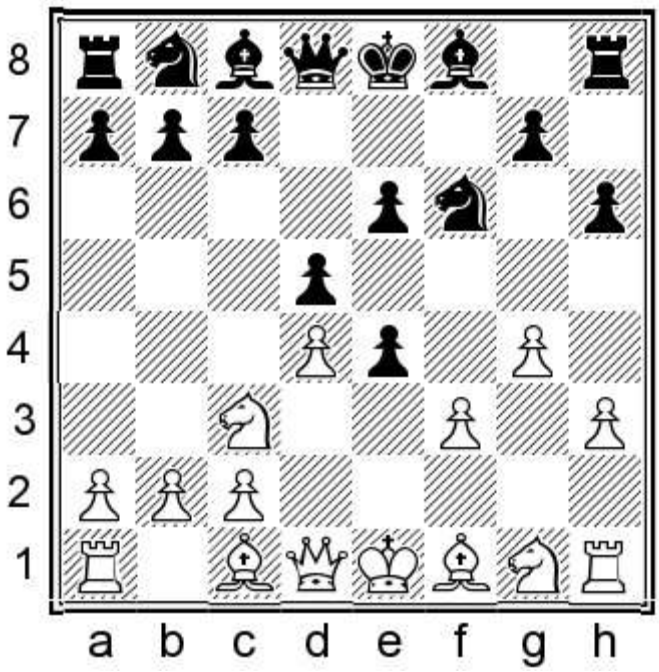
C) White remains worse after 6.g5 hxg5 7.♗xg5 ♗f5 8.♗g2 ♘c6! 9.fxe4 ♘xe4 10.♗xe4 ♗xe4 11.♘xe4 dxe4 12.d5 ♘b4∓.

D) 6.fxe4 Slightly illogical since g4 is no longer protected.

D1) 6...e5? has been played by a strong grandmaster, but it fails to convince the computer, and White followed with a powerful sequence: 7.g5! hxg5 8.dxe5 ♗g4 9.♗e2 ♗xe2 10.♕xe2 ♘xe4 11.♘xe4 dxe4 12.♕xe4± ½-½ (30) Kasyan, A (2348) – Miroshnichenko, E (2670), Tashkent 2011.

D2) 6...dxe4 Simplest is best here. 7.h3 ♘c6 8.♗e3 e6 9.♕d2 ♗b4∓

6...e6!



Position after: 6...e6!

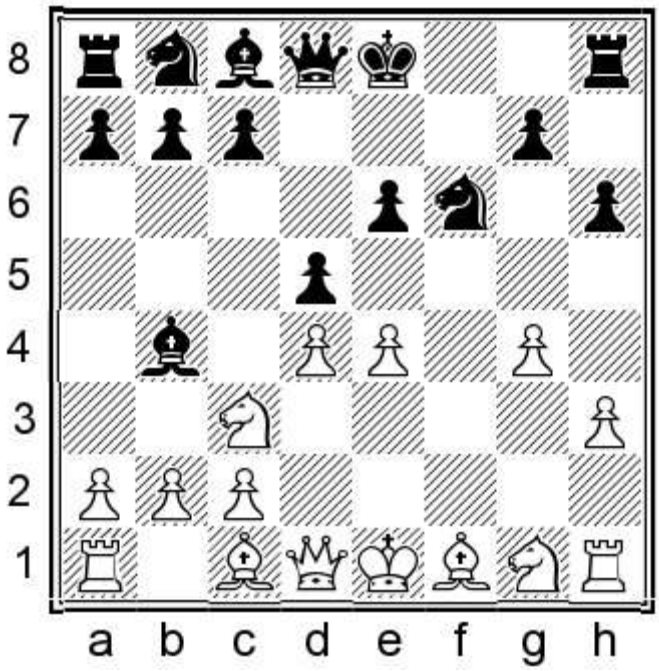
As g4 is no longer a target, we can change our mind and develop our dark-squared bishop.

7.fxe4

White tries to destroy Black's pawn structure, but things are not that simple.

7.♗g2 c5! 8.fxe4 cxd4 9.♕xd4 ♘c6 10.♕a4 ♗b4∓

7...♗b4!N



Position after: 7...♗b4!N

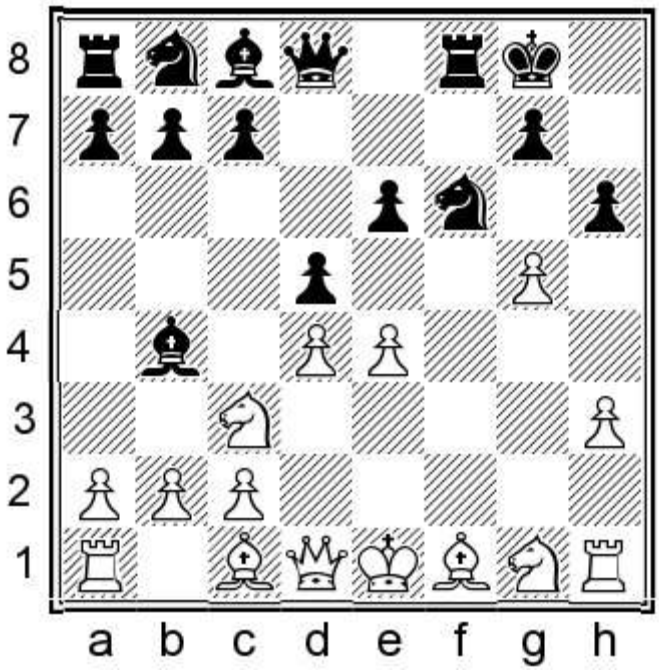
This is the point: Black can take advantage of White's lack of development and the holes in his camp.

8.g5!

The only challenging move, otherwise it's not difficult for Black to be better.

8.e5 ♘e4–+ ...♘xc3 and ...♕h4 are two threats which are hard to parry.

8...0-0!!



Position after: 8...0-0!!

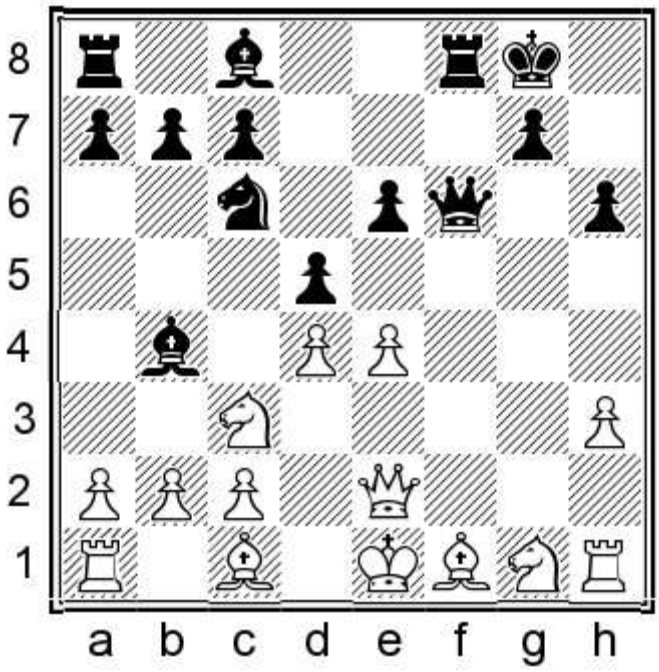
A very strong sacrifice. Black bets ev-erything on his attack.

9.gxf6

9.gxh6 e5! [9...♘xe4 is fine as well, but I prefer this beautiful move.] 10.♗g5 [10.hxg7 ♖f7! 11.♗g5 ♕d6∓ The queen is heading to g3, and White is in deep trouble.] 10...gxh6 11.♗h4 ♘c6∓

9...♕xf6 10.♘ge2!

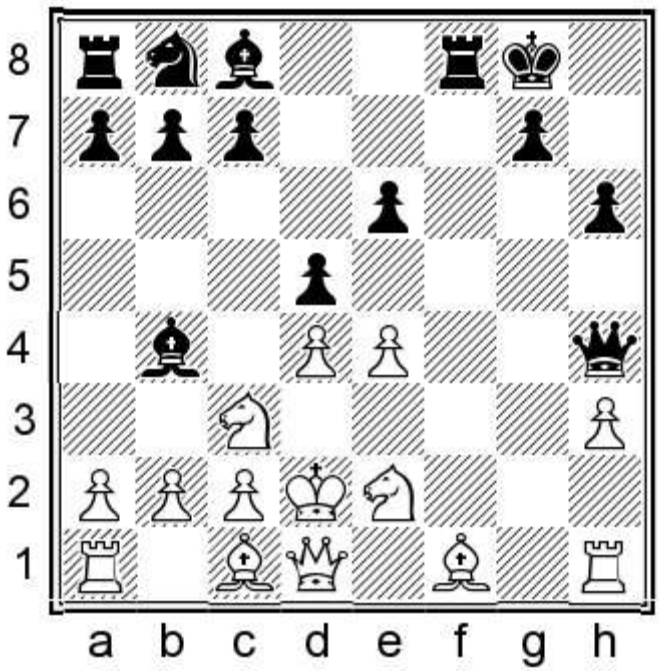
10.♕e2 ♘c6!



Position after: 10...♘c6!

11.♗e3 [11.♕g2 e5! 12.dxe5 ♕h4+ 13.♔d1 ♘xe5–+] 11...♘xd4 12.♗xd4 ♕xd4–+

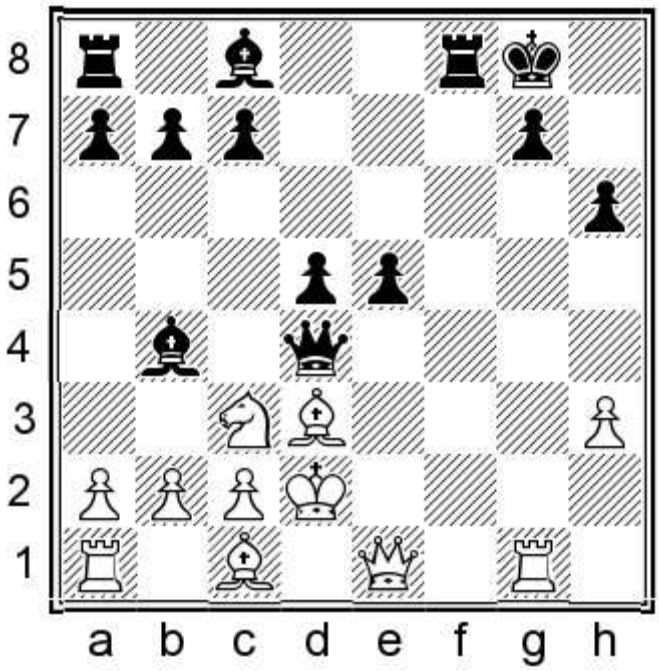
10...♕h4+ 11.♔d2



Position after: 11.♔d2

I don’t think many players would like to play this as White. Black needs to be precise, as he is a piece down, but objectively he has more than enough compensation.

11...♘c6 12.♕e1 ♕xe4 13.♖g1 ♘xd4 14.♘xd4 ♕xd4+ 15.♗d3 e5∓

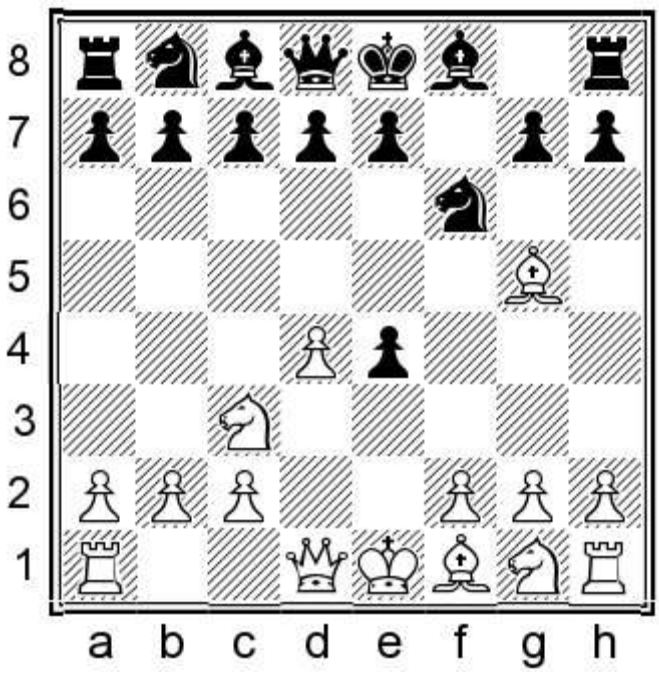


Position after: 15...e5∓

I doubt that White will hold this for very long.

c) 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♗g5 ♘c6

1.d4 f5 2.e4!? fxe4 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♗g5!



Position after: 4.♗g5!

This is the main continuation. It is hard to give global advice in this kind of position as the play is far too concrete. It may also be difficult to remember the critical lines, as you might encounter this only about once a year. That is partly why I decided to choose quite a simple line here, based on healthy principles, instead of more abstract lines. But first, let's discuss one of the main lines before moving on to my main recommendation, 4...g6, in the next subchapter.

4...♘c6!?

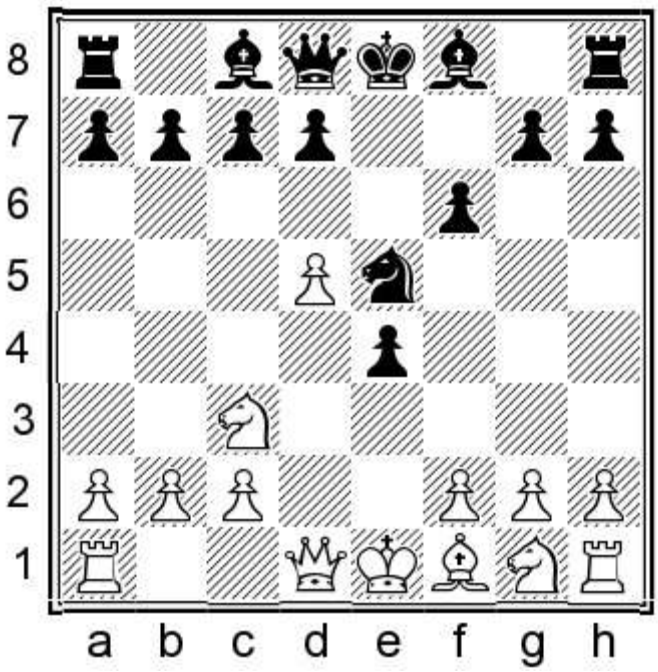
Even if it's not the line I would play, I'll give you the gist of my analysis if you want to investigate it.

A) In one of the first games where the Staunton Gambit occurred, Black went wrong immediately by falling for an obvious trick: 4...d5? 5.♗xf6 exf6 6.♕h5+ g6 7.♕xd5±, and Anderssen, the legendary attacking player, easily converted his advantage in the game Anderssen, A – Dufresne, J Berlin 1851, 1-0 (26).

B) 4...c6!? I hesitated about offering this instead of 4...g6, but I feel White can obtain the better middlegame after the thematic 5.f3!↑. I am not fond of the lines I checked in this variation for Black – and we are already very low on development.

5.d5

A) 5.♗xf6?! exf6 6.d5 ♘e5

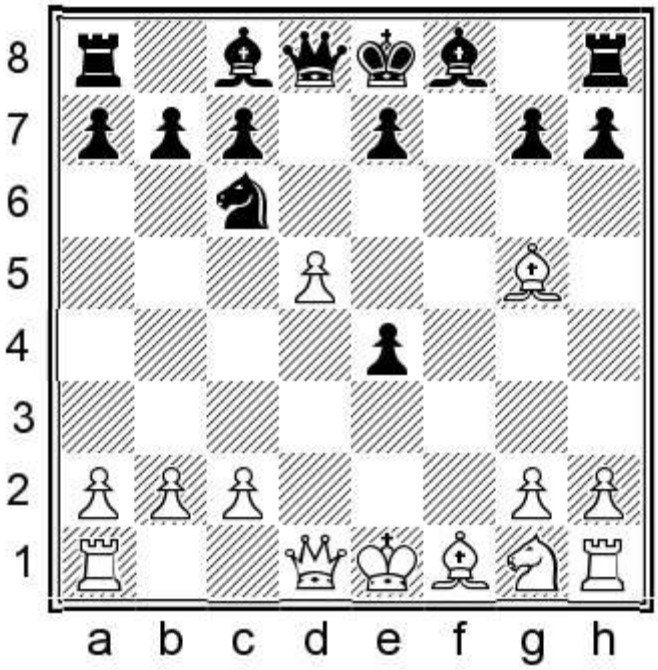


Position after: 6...♘e5

These lines where White has already given up his bishop pair are not so frightening and in general they're quite easy to play. Black just needs to develop his pieces and try to open the position as much

as possible. 7.♕d4 [7.♘xe4? f5 8.♘g3 ♗c5 9.♗e2 0-0 10.♘h3 ♕h4 11.♕d2 f4∓] 7...♗e7 8.♘xe4 d6 9.f4 ♘g6=

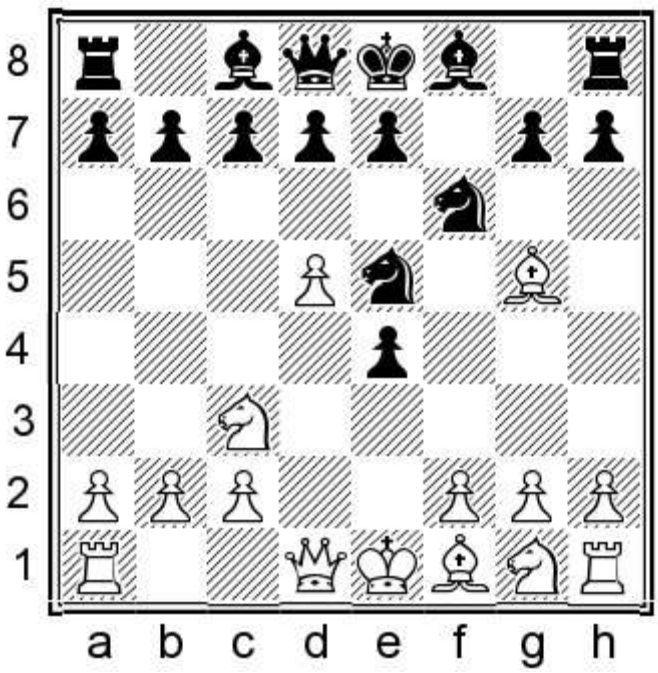
B) 5.f3 d5 6.fxe4 [6.♗b5 ♕d6! 7.fxe4 ♘xe4 8.♘xe4 dxe4 9.♕d2 ♗g4∓] 6...♘xe4 7.♘xe4 dxe4 8.d5



Position after: 8.d5

This is the kind of line that I am not so fond of. Our structure is quite damaged, and I feel it's going to be difficult to win such a position. 8...♘e5! 9.♕d4 ♘f7 10.♗e3 e6 11.dxe6 ♗xe6 12.♕xe4 ♕d5=

5...♘e5

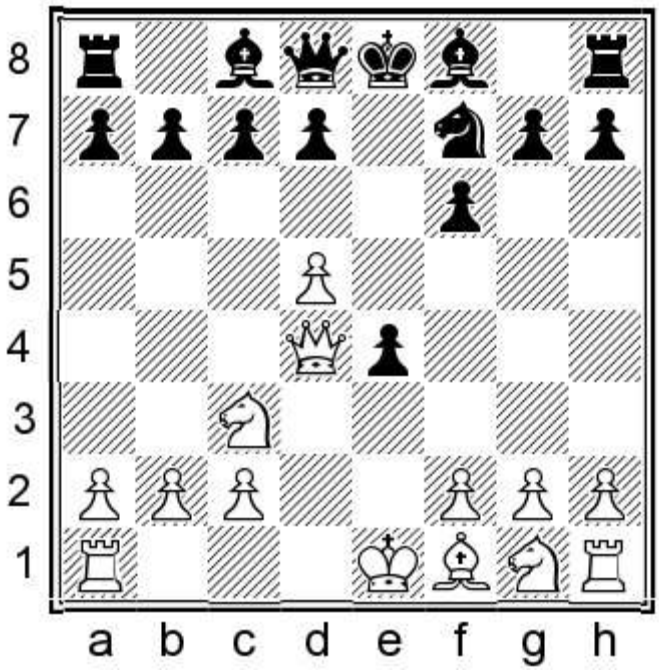


Position after: 5...♘e5

6.♕e2!

As pointed out by Simon Williams, this sideline is actually the best line for White. This is the reason why I decided not to offer 4...♘c6 as my main line.

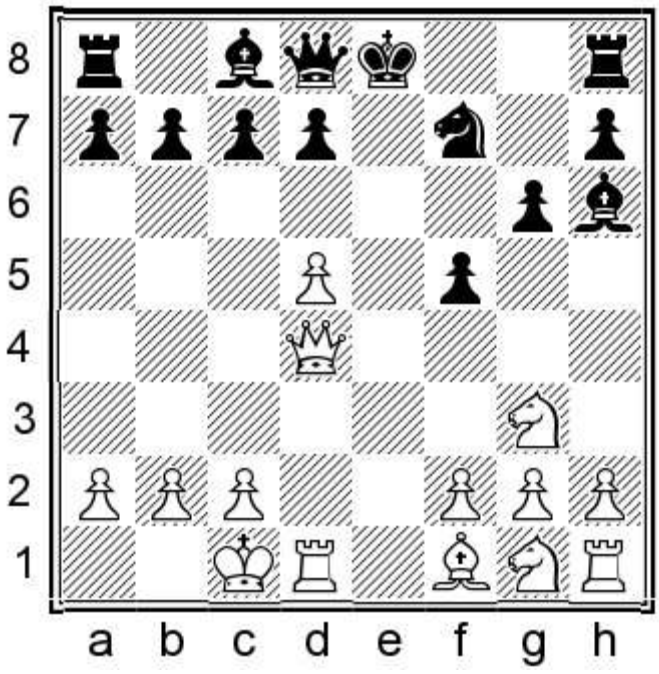
6.♕d4 ♘f7 7.♗xf6 [7.h4 gives Black enough time to counterattack in the center: 7...c6 8.0-0-0 ♕b6! 9.♗xf6 gxf6 10.♕xe4 ♕xf2 11.♘f3 ♗h6+ 12.♔b1 ♕e3=] 7...exf6



Position after: 7...exf6

A) 8.♕xe4+?! Of course White shouldn't try to trade queens. The compensation for his missing bishop is his activity, and most of it vanishes once the queens are traded. 8...♕e7 9.♕xe7+ [9.0-0-0 ♕xe4 10.♘xe4 f5 11.♘c3 ♗c5∓] 9...♗xe7∓

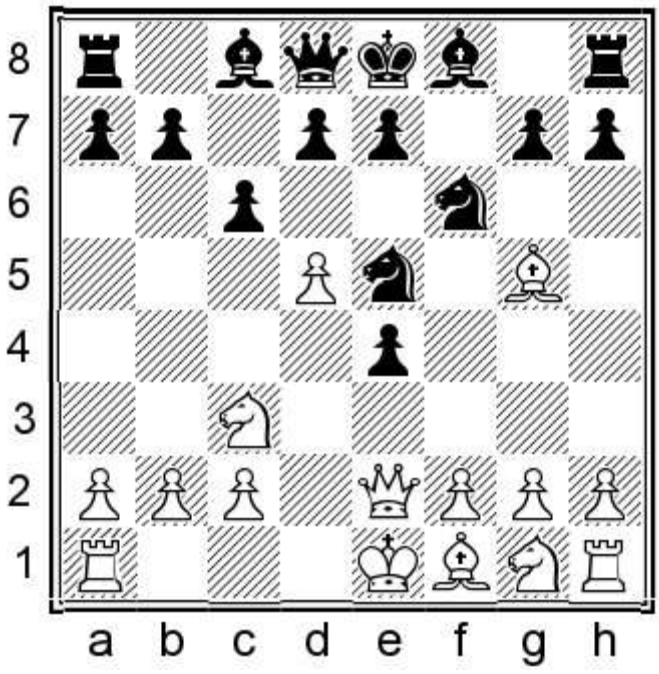
B) 8.♘xe4 f5 9.♘g3 [9.♘c3 c5 10.♕e3+ ♕e7 11.♘f3 ♕xe3+ 12.fxe3 ♘d6=] 9...g6 10.0-0-0 [10.h4 ♗h6↑] 10...♗h6+!



Position after: 10...♗h6+!

Without this move, Black would be in trouble. It is vital not to let ♖e1+ happen. 11.♔b1 [11.f4 0-0 12.♘f3 ♗g7 13.♕d2 b5 14.c3 c5 15.dxc6 dxc6∓] 11...0-0∓ This is why I don't think 6.♕d4 was the most accurate move. Black can develop a healthy position where he even gets the bishop pair, which gives him the better prospects in this opposite-side castling type of position.

6...c6



Position after: 6...c6

7.f4!

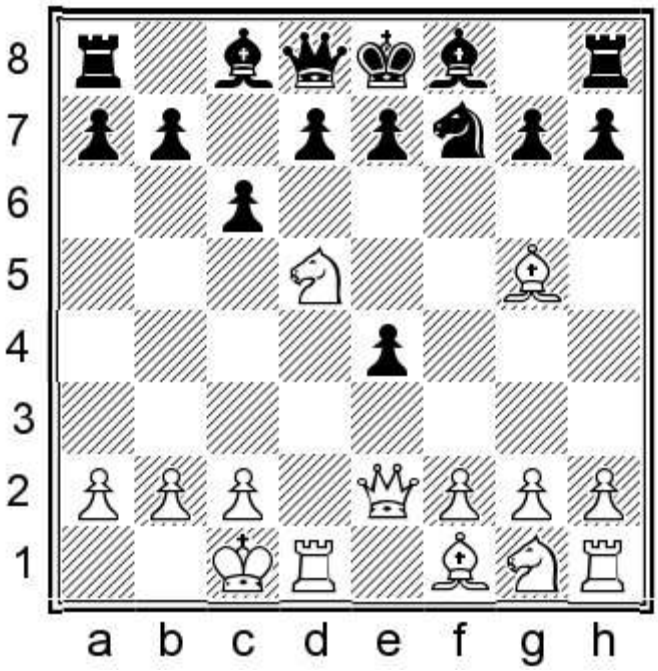
A good move!

A) 7.♗xf6 gxf6 8.0-0-0 [8.♕xe4?! e6!∓] 8...cxd5!? 9.♕h5+ ♘f7 10.♕xd5 [10.♘xd5 e6!∓] 10...e6 11.♕xe4 f5!⇄

B) 7.0-0-0 ♘xd5! Black tries to simplify the position.

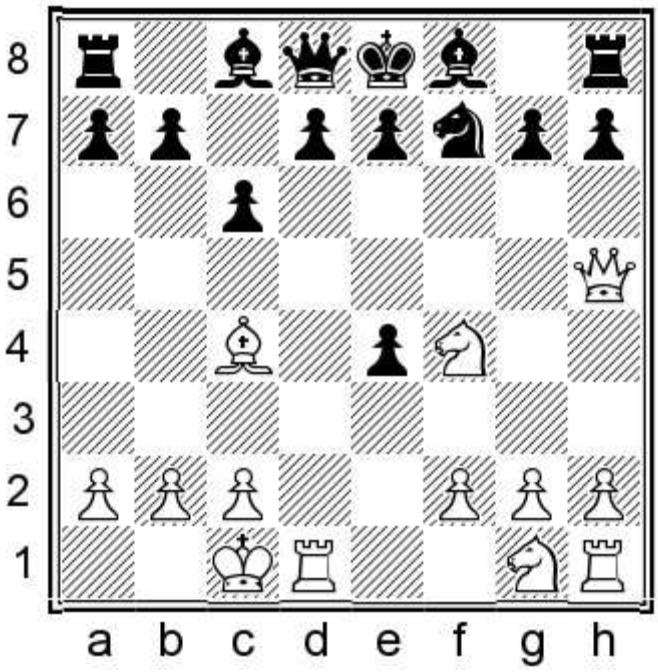
B1) 8.♘xe4!? d6 9.♘f3 [9.f4?! ♘f7 10.c4 ♘xg5!∓; 9.c4?! ♘f6 10.f4 ♘xe4! 11.♕xe4 ♘g4!∓] 9...♗g4∞

B2) 8.♘xd5 ♘f7!?



Position after: 8...♘f7!?

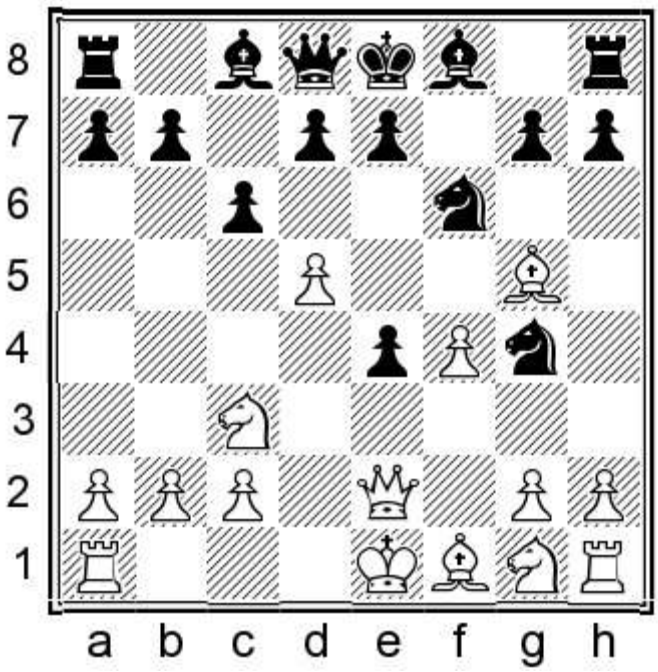
This very interesting intermediate move is the best try here, otherwise White will manage to keep the upper hand thanks to his active pieces. 9.♘f4!? [9.h4 cxd5 10.♖xd5 b6!⇄; 9.♗h4 cxd5 10.♖xd5 b6! ⇄; 9.♘h3 cxd5 10.♖xd5 b6! 11.f3 ♗b7 12.♖d1 exf3 13.gxf3 ♕c7!? 14.♗f4 ♕c5∓] 9...♘xg5 10.♕h5+ ♘f7 11.♗c4



Position after: 11.♗c4

11...g6! [11...d5? 12.♘xd5!→] 12.♗xf7+ ♔xf7 13.♘xg6 hxg6 14.♕xh8 ♕a5!⇄ with an unclear, messy position.

7...♘eg4!?

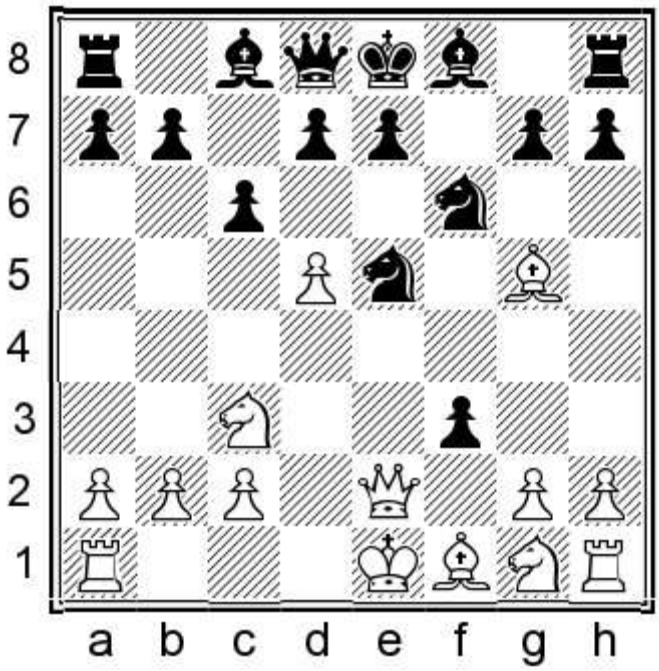


Position after: 7...♘eg4!?

A) 7...♘f7 8.♗xf6 exf6 9.♕xe4+ ♕e7 10.0-0-0 ♕xe4 11.♘xe4± I think White objectively keeps the

better position here. Even if Black has the bishop pair, his pieces lack coordination.

B) 7...exf3



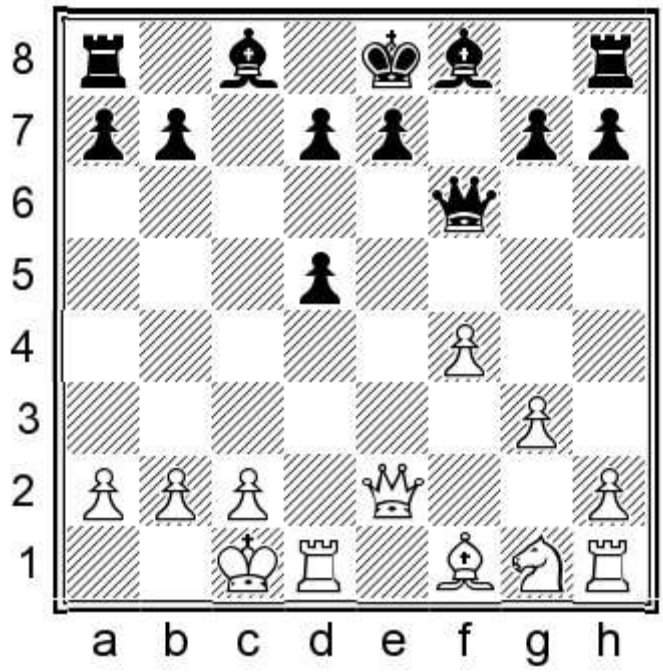
Position after: 7...exf3

This move countains a trap, but White has a solution. 8.♘xf3 [8.♕xe5? f2+!∓ Of course the pawn is untouchable.] 8...♘xf3+ 9.♕xf3 ♘xd5 10.♗c4→ Black needs to be accurate to survive.

8.0-0-0!

8.h3? ♕b6!∓

8...♕b6 9.♗xf6 ♘xf6 10.♘xe4 cxd5 11.♘xf6+ ♕xf6 12.g3!



Position after: 12.g3!

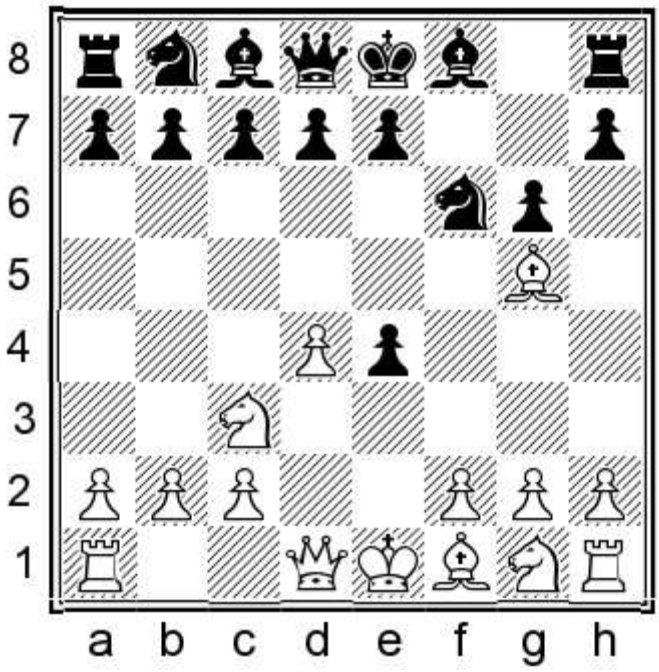
Both protecting the f4-pawn and preparing the development of the bishop on the long diagonal if needed.

12...g6 13.♖xd5 ♗g7 14.c3 0-0 15.♘f3! ♖b8 16.♕e3!±

Black is trying to develop a counterattack on the dark squares, but you have to be very optimistic to believe it will work so easily.

d) 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♗g5 g6 5.--

1.d4 f5 2.e4!? fxe4 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♗g5! g6!?



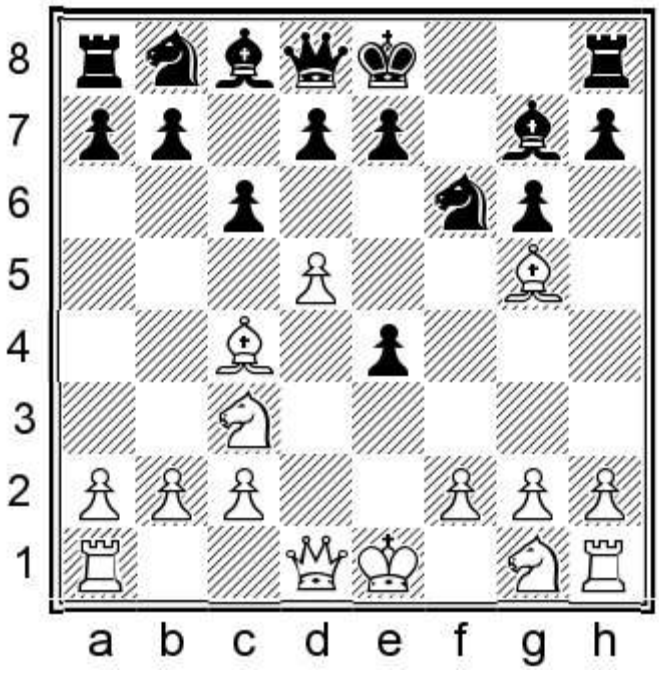
Position after: 4...g6!?

I'm choosing one of the possible deviations from the main line. It gives White a lot of choices, but none of them seems particularly frightening. In addition, playing a fianchetto is more in the spirit of the Leningrad Variation which I am covering in this work. Usually in the Dutch Defense, when a bishop is on g5, playing ...g6 is bad due to ♗xf6, leaving Black with ugly doubled f-pawns, but as we have already traded on e4, that is not the case here. Now White has a large range of choices (as is often the case when you play a non-forcing move).

First we will consider various moves which are not connected with any particular idea, then in the next subchapter, we will check the two ways for White to directly threaten our kingside.

5.f3

A) 5.♗c4!? c6!? Black prepares ...d5. White can choose whether to prevent it or not, but only on this occasion! 6.d5!? The only way to prevent ...d5. [6.f3 d5 7.♗b3 I feel that Black should be fine. His pawn on d5 is strong, blocking most of White's play. 7...exf3 8.♘xf3 ♗g7 9.0-0 0-0⇄] 6...♗g7

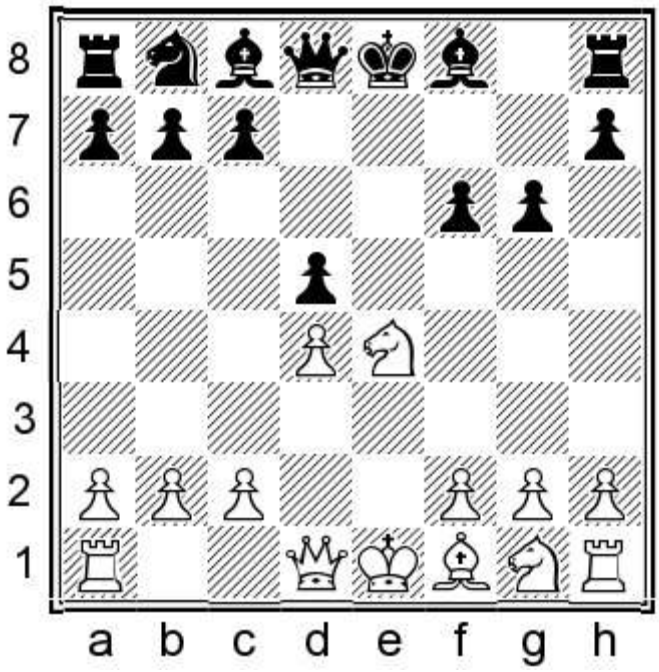


Position after: 6...♗g7

A1) 7.♕d2?! cxd5 8.♗xd5 Here, instead of 8...♕a5 as played in Shen, V (2394) – Kamsky, G (2673), Chicago 2015, 0-1 (37), the computer shows that Black can just take the bishop pair: 8...♘xd5 9.♘xd5 [9.♕xd5 e6! 10.♕d2 ♕b6 11.0-0-0 d5∓] 9...♘c6 10.0-0-0 d6 11.♔b1 h6! 12.♗f4 e6 13.♘c3 d5∓

A2) 7.♘ge2 e6!? I like this move. We force White to let us have a pawn on d5. 8.dxe6 [8.♘xe4 0-0!? 9.dxe6 d5 10.♗b3! ♗xe6↑ is similar to the main line.] 8...d5 9.0-0 ♗xe6 10.♘xe4! 0-0 11.♗b3 [11.♘xf6+ ♗xf6 12.♗xf6 ♕xf6 13.♗d3 ♘d7∓] 11...♘bd7 12.c3 ♗f7 13.♘xf6+ ♘xf6↑ I still prefer Black here. His pawn on d5 restricts White's play and he has the f-file at his disposal to achieve something on the kingside.

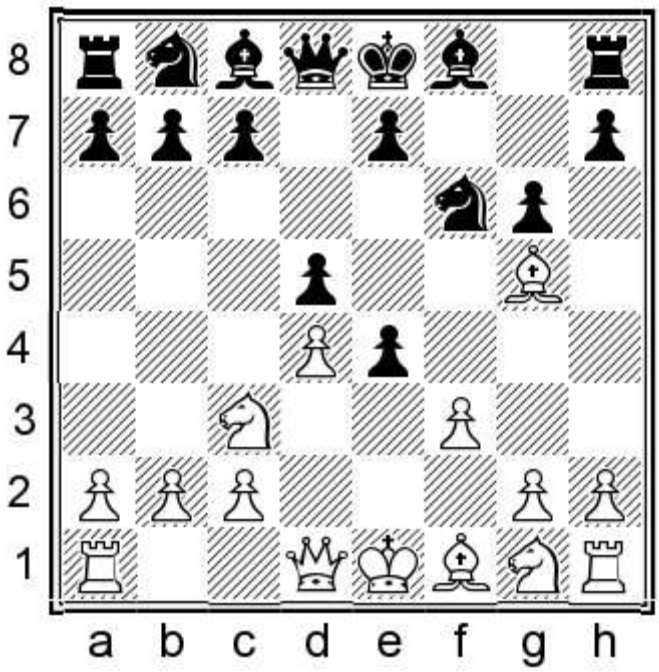
B) 5.♗xf6?! This move should definitely be considered a mistake. If White is in such a hurry to regain his pawn, he shouldn't be playing a gambit line. 5...exf6 6.♘xe4 d5!



Position after: 6...d5!

7.♘g3 [7.♘c3 ♗h6!? 8.♗d3 ♘c6 9.♘f3 ♗e6 10.0-0 ♕d7 11.♖e1 0-0∓] 7...♕e7+!? 8.♕e2 If White puts another piece on e2, Black can play ...♕b4+. 8...♘c6 9.c3 ♗h6 10.♕xe7+ ♘xe7 11.♗d3 ♔f7∓

5...d5



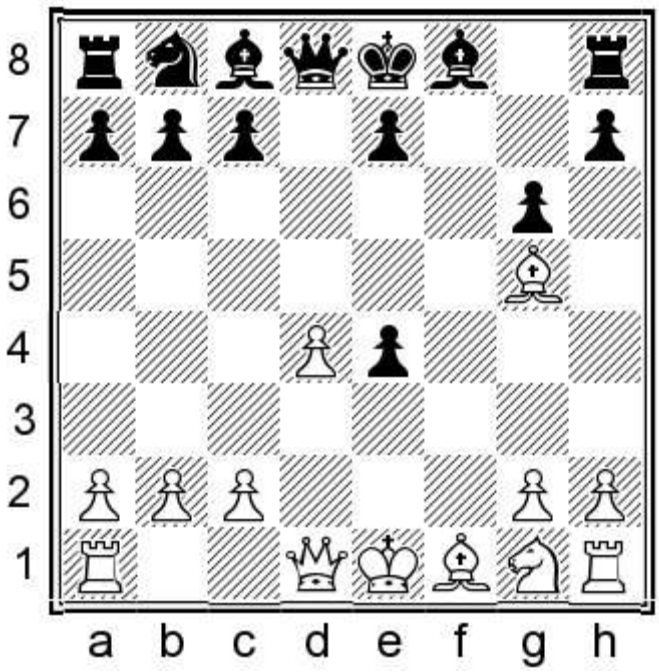
Position after: 5...d5

6.fxe4

A) 6.♗xf6?! exf6 7.fxe4 dxe4 8.♘xe4 f5 9.♘c3 ♕e7+! White has no choice but to trade queens, otherwise he will have problems on the dark squares, such as e3, which is really weak already. 10.♕e2 ♕xe2+ 11.♗xe2 ♗e6∓

B) 6.♕d2 has already been seen with the move order 5.♕d2 d5 6.f3.

6...♘xe4 7.♘xe4 dxe4



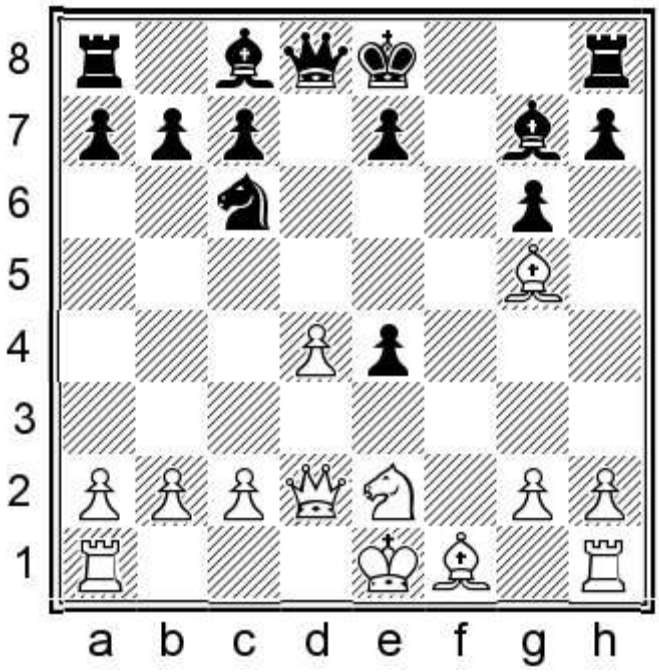
Position after: 7...dxe4

True, Black has an ugly pawn structure, but he will try to counterattack quickly against the d4-pawn.

8.♗c4

In my opinion not very accurate, but it's the most played move, so I will keep it as my main line. Of course it's a natural square for the bishop, but it's not clear that it will be able to remain there for very long.

A) 8.♕d2 ♗g7 9.♘e2 ♘c6

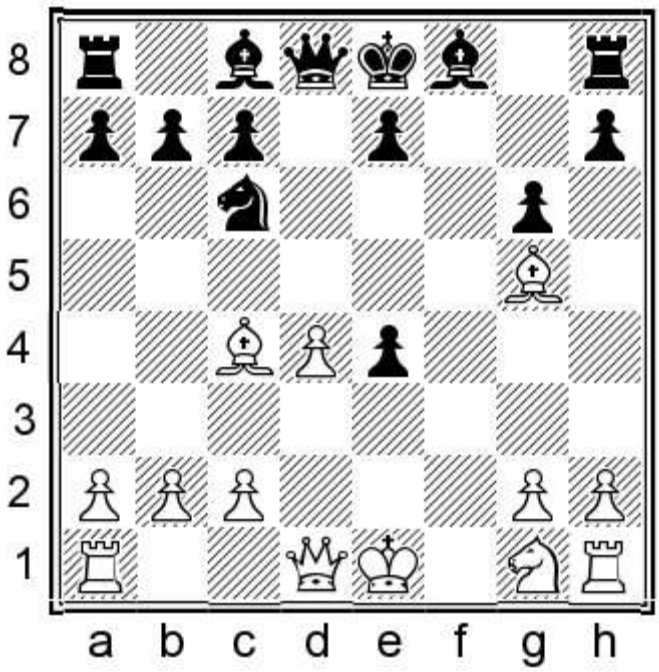


Position after: 9...♘c6

10.d5 [10.0-0-0 ♕d5! Black develops his queenside actively and will be able to castle afterwards. 11.♔b1 ♗e6 12.b3 0-0-0 13.♗e3 ♕d6∓] 10...♘e5 11.♘c3 c6 12.0-0-0 ♗f5 13.dxc6 ♕xd2+ 14.♖xd2 ♘xc6=

B) 8.♗b5+N 8...♘c6 9.♕d2 ♗g7 10.0-0-0 0-0 11.♘e2 ♕d6⇄

8...♘c6!



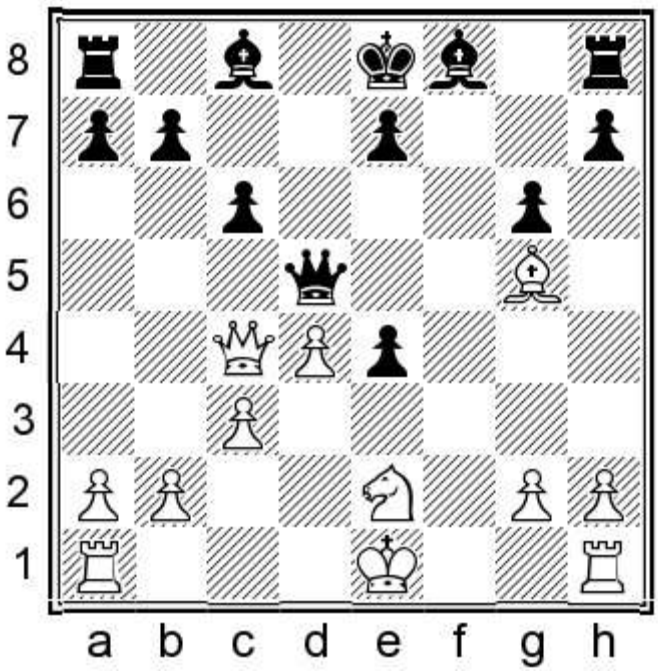
Position after: 8...♘c6!

9.c3

9.♘e2N 9...♘a5 We are very glad to trade this bishop; our light squares are going to be grateful. 10.♗b3 ♘xb3 11.axb3 ♗g7 12.0-0 ♗f5∓

9...♘a5! 10.♗e2

A) 10.♘e2?! Allowing the trade so easily is a strange reaction for a grandmaster. Black gets the better position without any difficulty: 10...♘xc4 11.♕a4+ c6 12.♕xc4 ♕d5!

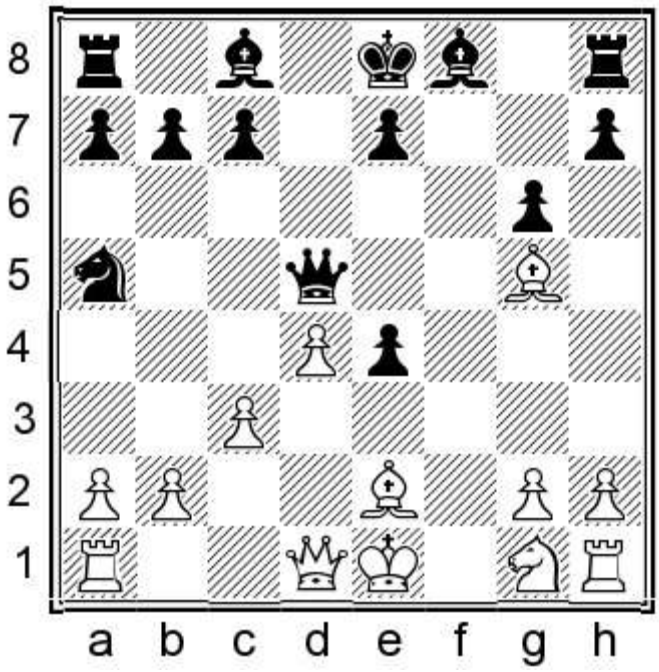


Position after: 12...♕d5!

13.♕xd5 cxd5 14.♘f4 e6 15.♗f6 ♖g8 16.c4 ♗b4+ 17.♔e2 ♖f8 18.♗e5 dxc4∓ Black is much better, even if he eventually only drew. Kouatly, B (2453) – Narciso Dublan, M (2520), Barcelona 2015.

B) 10.♗b3N 10...♘xb3 11.♕xb3 c6! 12.♘e2 ♕d5 Once again, the plan to trade queens in the center is very effective. 13.♗e3 ♕xb3 14.axb3 ♗e6 15.b4 ♗c4∓ The least we can say is that our light-squared bishop is having a great time with no natural predators!

10...♕d5!



Position after: 10...♕d5!

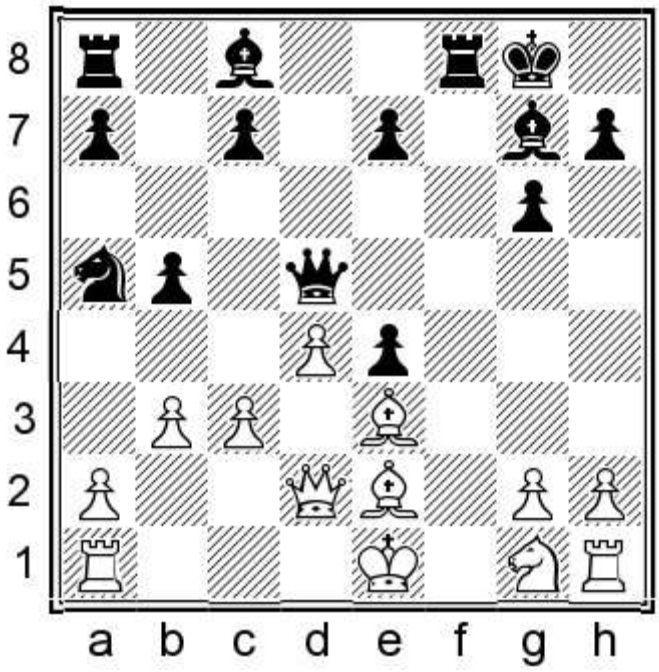
11.♗e3 ♗g7 12.b3

A necessary preventive move, otherwise ...♘c4 is going to be annoying.

12...0-0 13.♕d2

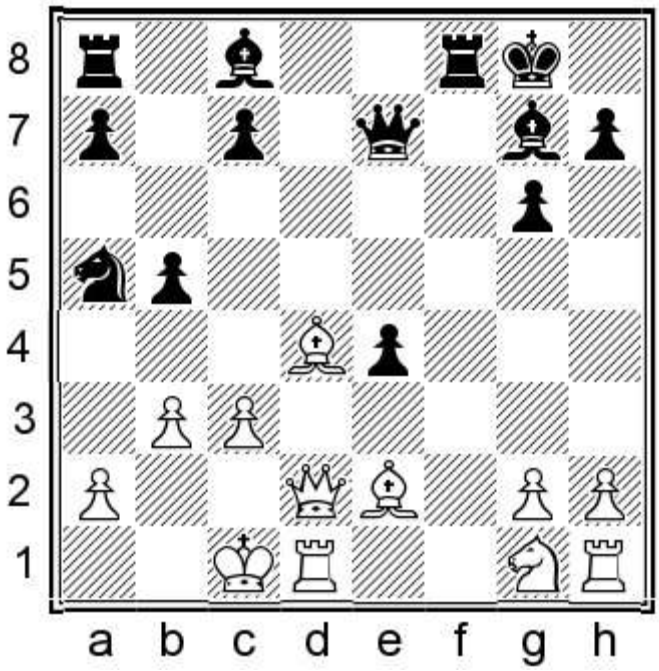
Thus far as in the game Alexiadis, H (2282) – Rychagov, A (2552), Kavala 2015, 0-1 (50). Now Black could have prevented White from doing anything in the center by varying with

13...b5!N



Position after: 13...b5!N

14.0-0-0 e5 15.dxe5 ♕xe5 16.♗d4 ♕e7∓

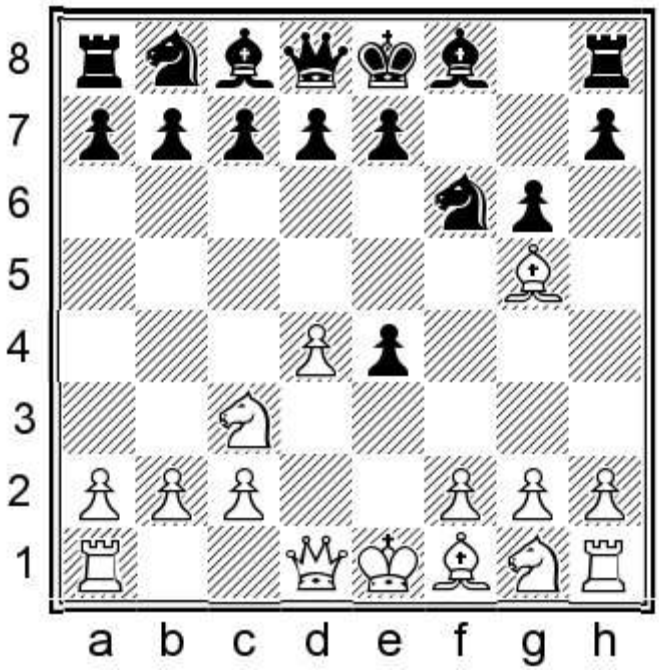


Position after: 16...♕e7∓

It’s not so simple for White to finish his development, and his castled position has already been undermined. Black clearly has the better chances.

e) 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♗g5 g6 5.h4

1.d4 f5 2.e4!? fxe4 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♗g5 g6



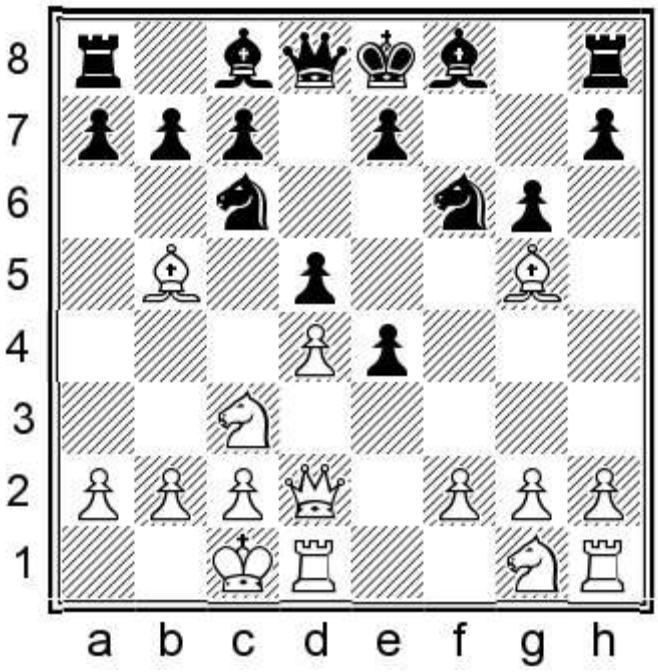
Position after: 4...g6

5.h4!?

One of the most aggressive approaches. Even if it's not the most played move there's a lot to say about it, so I decided to make it the main line.

5.♕d2 Continuing in the same spirit. White prepares 0-0-0, and will probably continue with h4−h5 and ♗h6 if he has time to. 5...d5

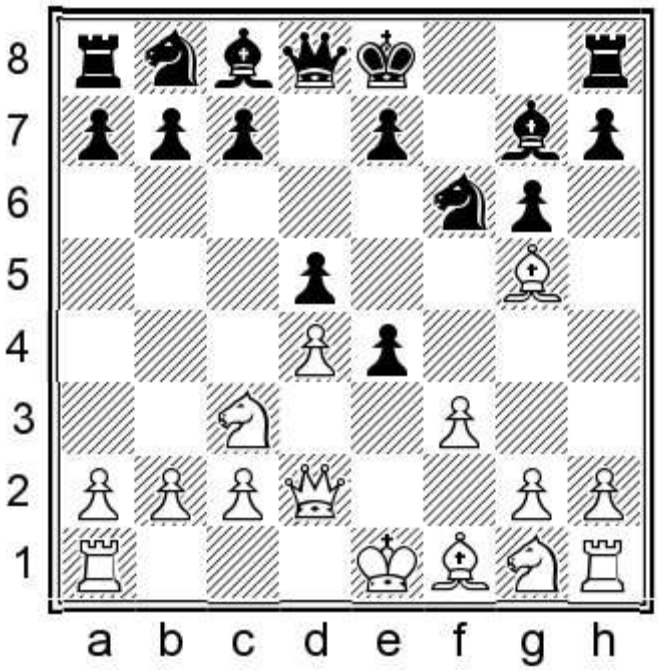
A) 6.0-0-0 ♘c6 7.♗b5



Position after: 7.♗b5

And now I would play the simple 7...♗g7N 8.f3 0-0 9.fxe4 ♘xe4 10.♘xe4 dxe4 11.♗c4+ ♔h8 12.♘e2 [12.h4? ♕xd4∓] 12...♕d6 13.♗e3 ♗g4!↑ Black still has an extra pawn, and his position is no less active.

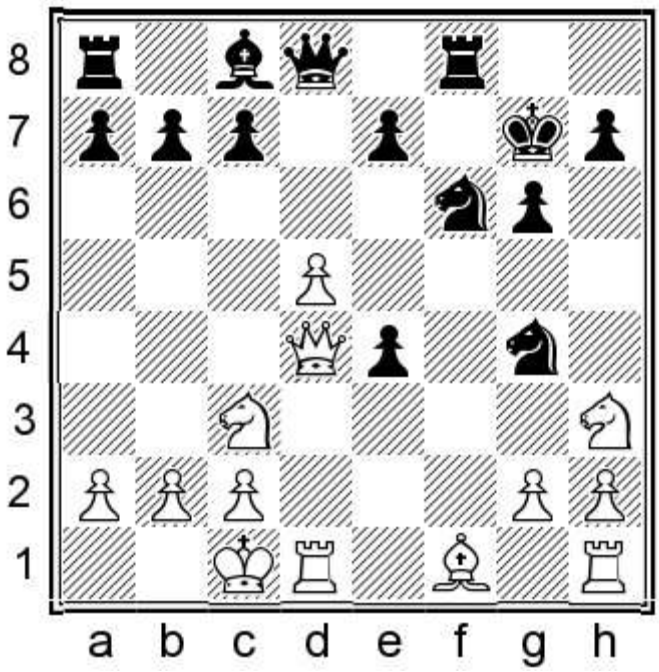
B) 6.f3 ♗g7



Position after: 6...♗g7

B1) 7.♗h6?! 0-0 8.0-0-0 ♘c6 9.♗xg7 ♔xg7 10.fxe4 dxe4 White hasn't achieved much by trading the

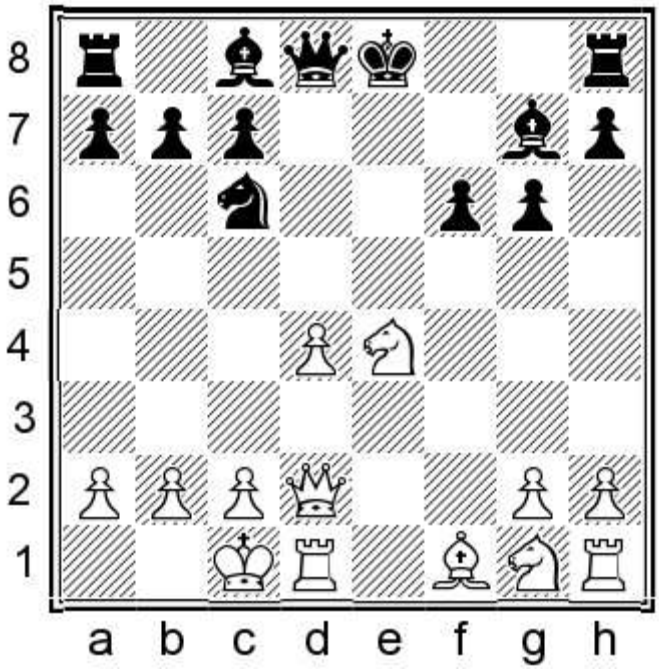
dark-squared bishops. Anyway, his attack on the h-file would have been too slow. 11.d5 ♘e5 12.♕d4 ♘eg4 13.♘h3



Position after: 13.♘h3

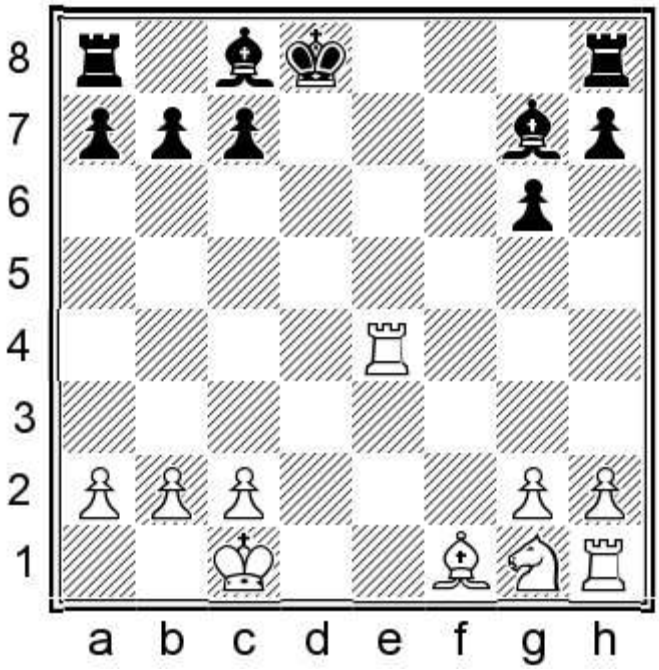
Nikolaou, S (2068) – Rychagov, A (2556), Paleochora 2015, 0-1 (42), and now 13...e5!N 14.dxe6 ♕xd4 15.♖xd4 ♗xe6 16.♘xe4 ♘xe4 17.♖xe4 ♖ae8∓.

B2) 7.0-0-0!? ♘c6 8.♗xf6 exf6 9.fxe4 dxe4 10.♘xe4



Position after: 10.♘xe4

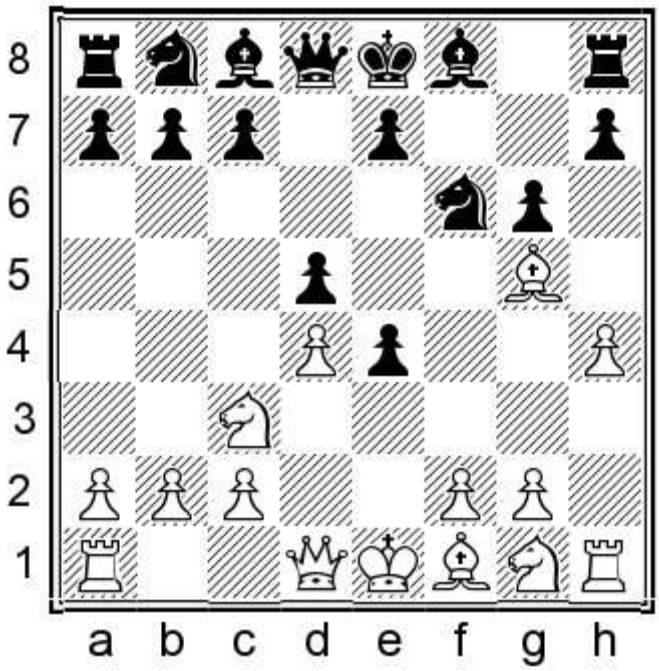
10...♕xd4!? The simplest way to get a good endgame. [10...f5 11.♘g5 ♕xd4 12.♕e1+ ♕e5 13.♘1f3 ♕xe1 14.♖xe1+ ♔f8 15.♗b5 ♖b8! Objectively the position is good for Black, but you need to remember this line, otherwise it looks a bit awkward. 16.h4 ♗f6 17.h5 h6 18.♘e6+ ♗xe6 19.♖xe6 ♔f7∓] 11.♕xd4 ♘xd4 12.♖xd4 f5 13.♖c4 fxe4 14.♖xe4+ ♔d8!∓



Position after: 14...♔d8!∓

The king is heading to c7. Black has the bishop pair, and can try to push without much risk.

5...d5!



Position after: 5...d5!

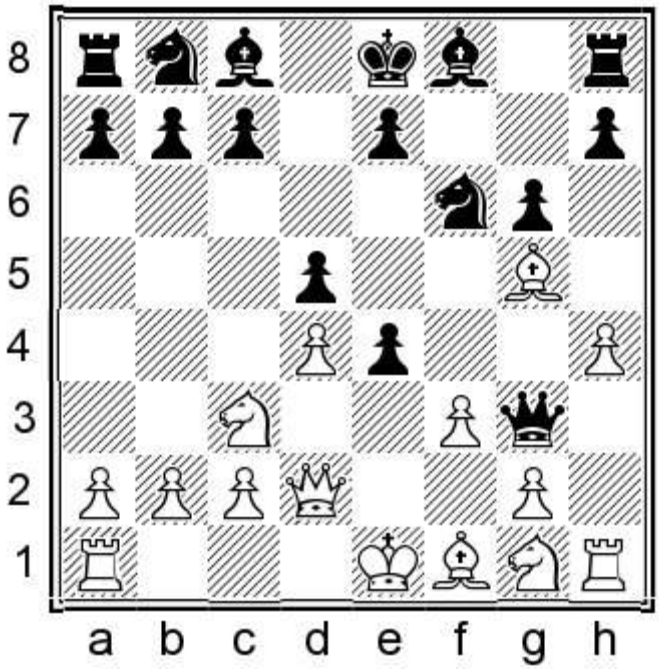
It seems necessary to delay the fianchetto in order to bring the light-squared bishop into play.

6.h5

A) 6.♕d2N 6...♘c6 7.0-0-0 ♗f5 8.f3 ♕d7 Quick development in the center is the best solution. 9.g4 ♗e6 10.fxe4 0-0-0! 11.♗xf6 exf6 12.g5 ♕f7=

B) 6.f3

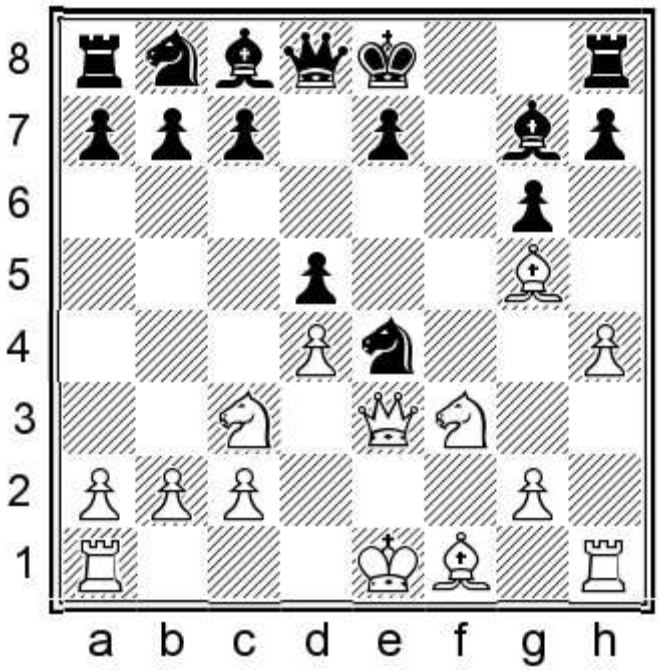
B1) 6...♕d6!? 7.♕d2 ♕g3+



Position after: 7...♕g3+

This is a decent alternative. The king loses some tempi in finding a safe haven, but so does our queen, so it shouldn't be seen as a great achievement either. [7...exf3!? 8.♘xf3 ♕g3+ 9.♔d1 c6 10.♘e5 ♘g4 11.♗f4 ♕f2 12.♘xd5! cxd5 13.♗b5+ ♘c6 14.♘xc6 a6 15.♗a4 ♗f5∓] 8.♔d1 ♕d6 9.♗xf6 exf6 10.fxe4 dxe4 11.♘xe4 ♕b6 12.c3 ♗f5=

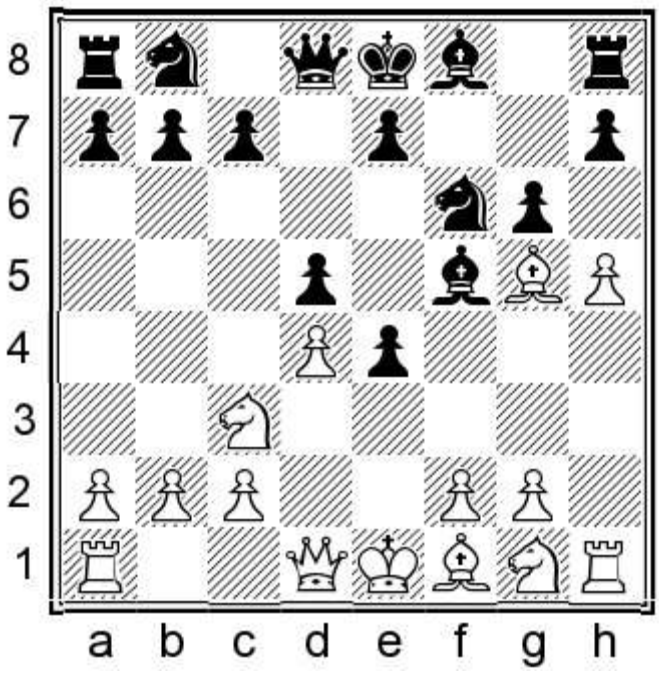
B2) 6...♗g7 7.♕d2 exf3 8.♘xf3 ♘e4 9.♕e3



Position after: 9.♕e3

9...♘c6! 10.0-0-0 ♘xc3 11.♕xc3 a6!∓ Black has nothing to worry about, so he can easily prevent ♗b5 before thinking about his own development.

6...♗f5!

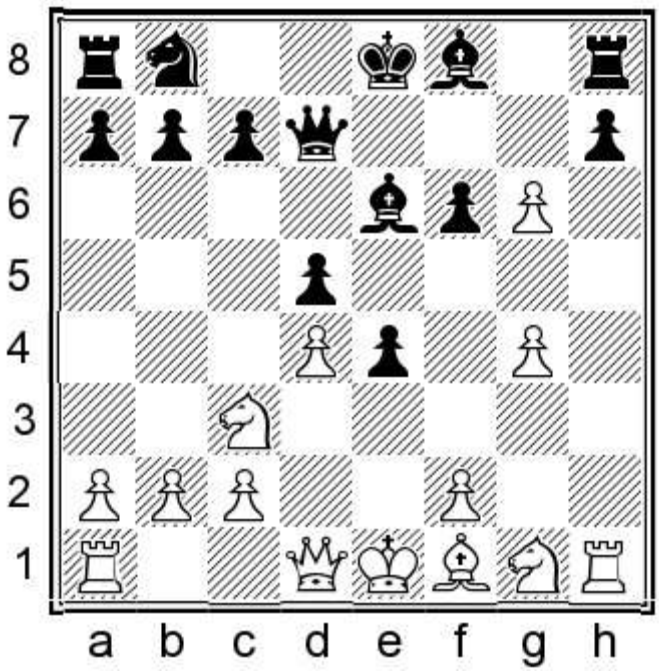


Position after: 6...♗f5!

7.♗xf6

7.♗e2 ♕d7 8.hxg6 ♗xg6 9.♘h3 ♘c6 10.♘f4 ♗f7 Black's position is too solid for White to crack, even with the hardest of tries. 11.♗xf6 exf6 12.♗h5 ♗b4! 13.♗xf7+ ♕xf7 14.♕h5 ♘e7∓

7...exf6 8.g4 ♗e6 9.hxg6 ♕d7!



Position after: 9...♕d7!

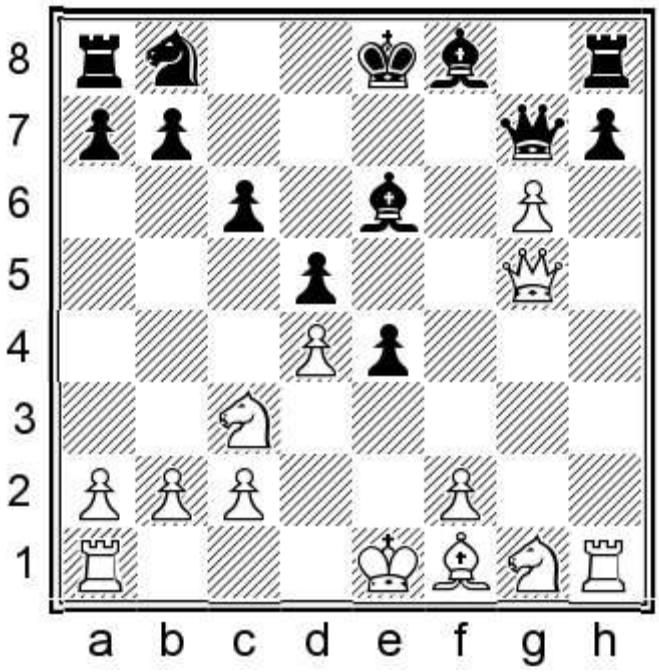
This strange-looking position has appeared on the board in a few games.

The general assessment should be about equal, but a lot can happen.

10.g5!

10.f4? ♗xg4 11.♗h3 ♗xh3 12.♖xh3 ♘c6 13.♕h5 0-0-0 14.gxh7 ♘xd4 15.0-0-0 ♗c5∓ ½-½ (34) Alvarez Fernandez, E (2385) – Anton Guijarro, D (2570), Linares 2013.

10...fxg5 11.♕h5 ♕g7 12.♕xg5 c6

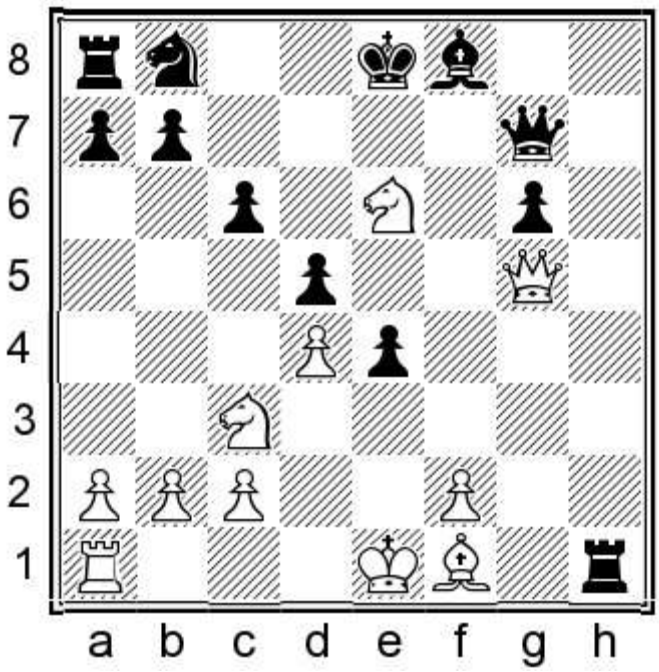


Position after: 12...c6

13.f3!?N

This is a slightly better version for White, as our center is starting to crack.

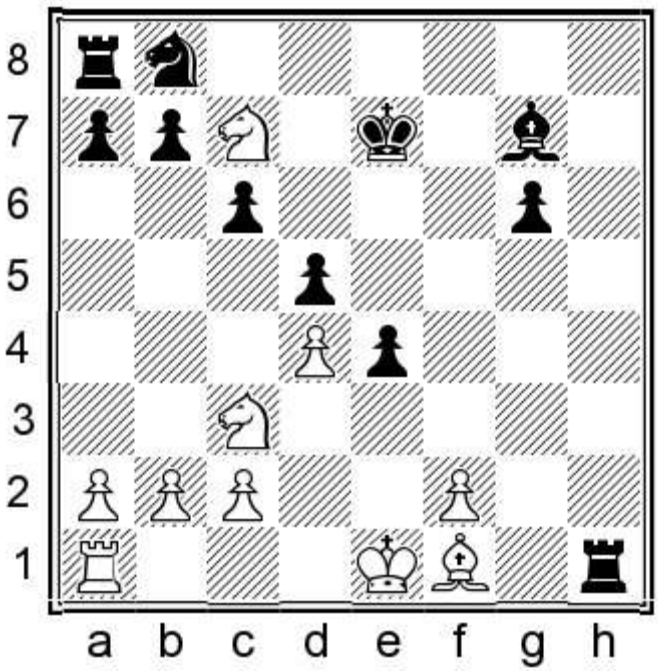
13.♘ge2 hxg6! Black has already proved that he is better here! 14.♘f4 [14.♖xh8 ♕xh8 15.♕xg6+ ♗f7 16.♕f5 ♘d7∓] 14...♖xh1 15.♘xe6



Position after: 15.♘xe6

The current position was seen in the game Trent, L (2470) – Anton Guijarro, D (2617), Gibraltar 2015,

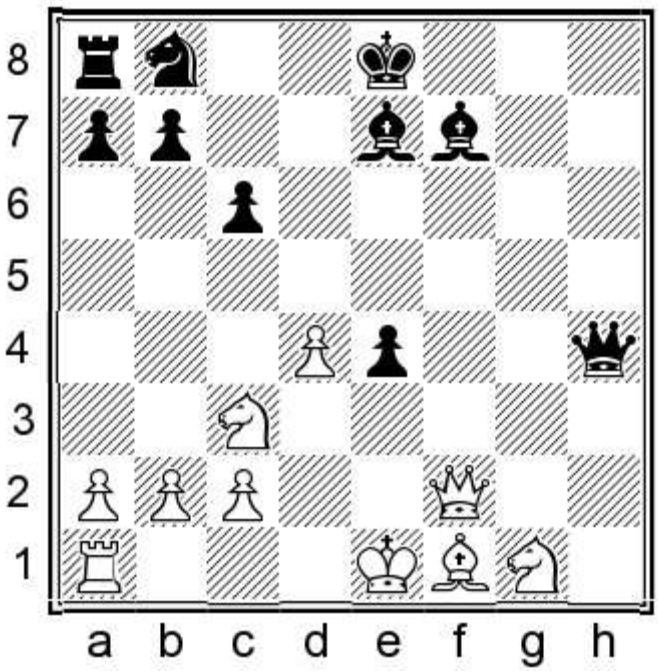
½-½ (23). Black could have done better here if he had found 15...♕e7!N 16.♕xe7+ ♔xe7 17.♘c7 White will temporarily be a piece up, but his knight on a8 won't survive very long. 17...♗g7



Position after: 17...♗g7

18.0-0-0 [18.♘xa8 ♗xd4 19.♘c7 ♔d6 20.♘e8+ ♔d7 21.♘xe4 ♔xe8∓] 18...♔d6 19.♘xa8 ♖h8! 20.♗g2 ♘a6∓ The dust settles and Black keeps a healthy extra pawn.

13...hxg6 14.♖xh8 ♕xh8 15.fxe4! ♗e7 16.♕xg6+ ♗f7 17.♕f5 ♕h4+ 18.♕f2 dxe4=

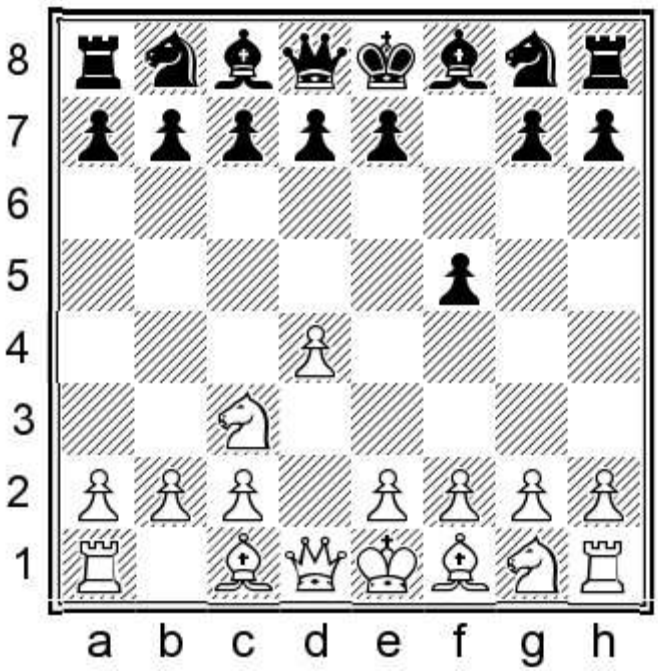


Position after: 18...dxe4=

The upcoming endgame is about equal. The white king is not in the best of spots, but Black should be careful not to finish up in an endgame a pawn down.

Chapter 2
The System with 2.♘c3

1.d4 f5 2.♘c3



Chapter Guide

Chapter 2 – The System with 2.♘c3

1.d4 f5 2.♘c3

a) 2...--, 2...d5

b) 2...♘f6 3.--, 3.♗f4

c) 2...♘f6 3.♗g5 --, 3...d5 4.f3 c5! 5.e4 ♘c6! 6.♘ge2

d) 2...♘f6 3.♗g5 d5 4.f3 c5! 5.e4 ♘c6! 6.♗b5!

e) 2...♘f6 3.♗g5 d5 4.♗xf6 exf6 5.e3 ♗e6 6.♘ge2, 6.♗b5

f) 2...♘f6 3.♗g5 d5 4.♗xf6 exf6 5.e3 ♗e6 6.♕f3

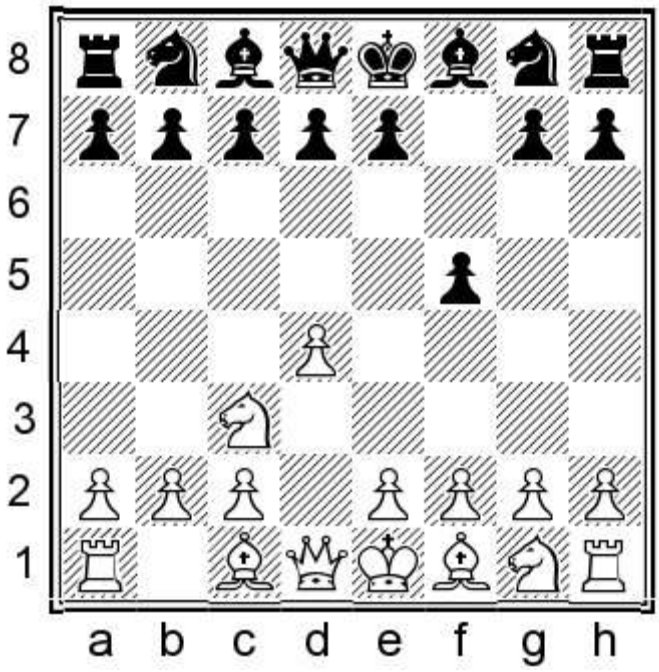
g) 2...♘f6 3.♗g5 d5 4.♗xf6 exf6 5.e3 ♗e6 6.♗d3

h) 2...♘f6 3.♗g5 d5 4.e3 e6 5.--, 5.♘f3 5...--, 5...♗e7 6.--

i) 2...♘f6 3.♗g5 d5 4.e3 e6 5.♘f3 ♗e7 6.♗d3 0-0 7.0-0 ♘e4

a) 2...--, 2...d5

1.d4 f5 2.♘c3



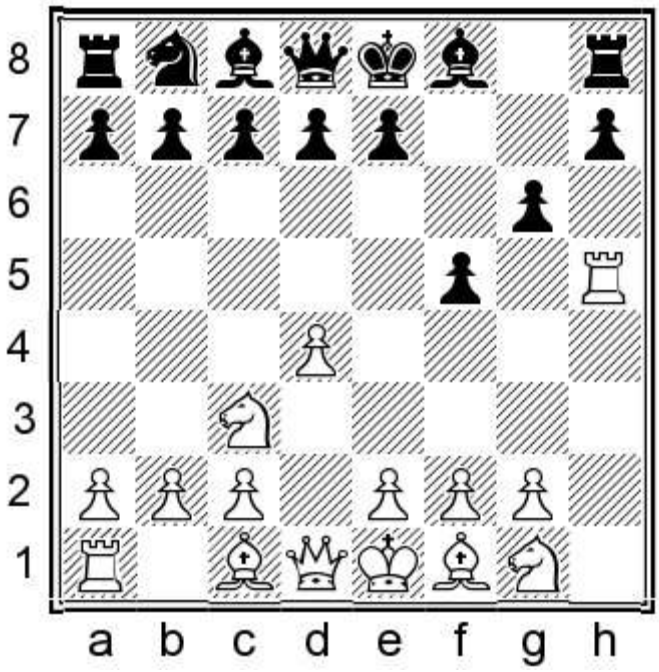
Position after: 2.♘c3

When I talk with people about the Dutch, I'm often asked, "The Dutch is very sharp and interesting, but do you start with 1...f5?". This is actually a decent question, as some people prefer to start with 1...e6, which implies two things: (i) they are OK with the French if White plays 2.e4, and (ii) they have to play the Classical or Stonewall, as the Leningrad is no longer possible. In order to play the Leningrad, Black has the option of 1...d6 or 1...g6 on the first move, but there are some drawbacks, such as 2.e4 obviously. So why do people ask about playing ...f5 on the first move? Mainly because they consider that the sidelines, especially on the second move, can be pretty annoying for Black. We are talking mainly about 2.♘c3 and 2.♗g5. I have played these lines myself as White too, but I am really confident in Black's chances. I considered the two main options after 2.♘c3 (we will discuss 2.♗g5 in the next chapter), but my choice went to 2...♘f6, because White is trying to play 3.e4, and we have to prevent it. The other means of doing so, 2...d5, failed to satisfy me fully because of 3.♗f4, which we will discuss in due course.

2...d5

This is the 'other' option, but I feel that in the Stonewall the bishop is stronger on f4 than on g5, so naturally White continues with 3.♗f4.

A) Before looking at 3.♗f4, let's consider the dubious 2...g6?. The aim is to develop the kingside without allowing ♗g5 as in the main line, which aims at destroying our pawn structure. 3.h4! White is ready for this flank attack. [3.e4!?±] 3...♘f6 [3...♗g7 4.h5 ♘c6 5.♘f3 d6 6.e4!±] 4.h5! ♘xh5 [4...♗g7 5.hxg6 hxg6 6.♖xh8+ ♗xh8 7.♕d2!± The queen heads for g5, and the g6-pawn is in great danger – as is the king after g6 falls...] 5.♖xh5!

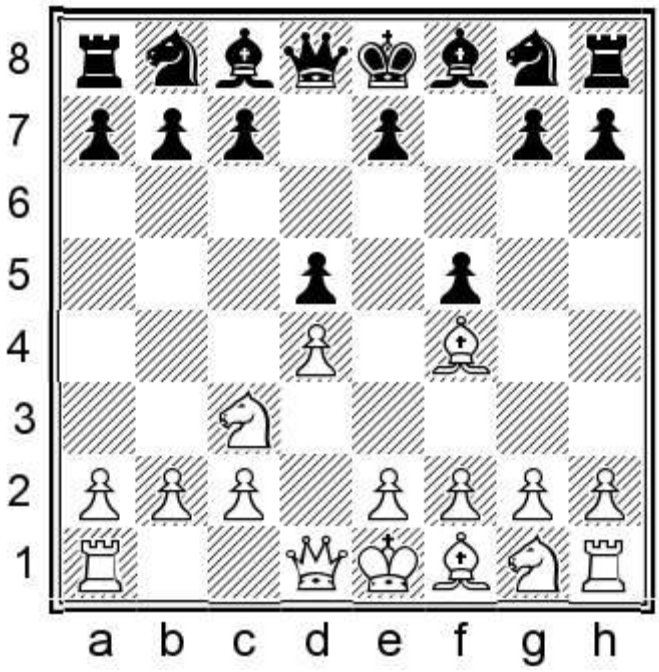


Position after: 5.♖xh5!

The thematic exchange sacrifice is strong in this case, and Black may suffer a quick and painful loss if he isn't careful. 5...gxh5 6.e4 d6 [6...♗g7?! 7.♕xh5+ ♔f8 8.♕xf5+ ♔g8 9.♘f3+–] 7.♕xh5+ ♔d7 8.♕xf5+ e6 9.♕h3± One pawn for the exchange, the better development and a long-term attack against the king are clearly more than enough compensation for White.

B) 2...e6?! It is almost a golden rule in the Dutch that you CAN'T let White play e2−e4 so easily, otherwise he will open the position, underlining the weaknesses you created by playing ...f7−f5. This case in no exception 3.e4! fxe4 [3...♗b4 4.exf5 exf5 5.♗d3 d6 6.♘h3!? ♘f6 7.0-0±] 4.♘xe4 ♘f6 5.♗d3 ♘c6 6.♘g5!? The threat is ♘xh7 followed by ♕h5+. 6...g6 7.♘xh7!? ♖xh7 [7...♘xh7? 8.♗xg6+ ♔e7 9.♗xh7+– ♗g5 is a deadly threat.] 8.♗xg6+ ♔e7 9.♗xh7 ♘xh7 10.♕d3 ♘f6 11.♗g5±

3.♗f4



Position after: 3.♗f4

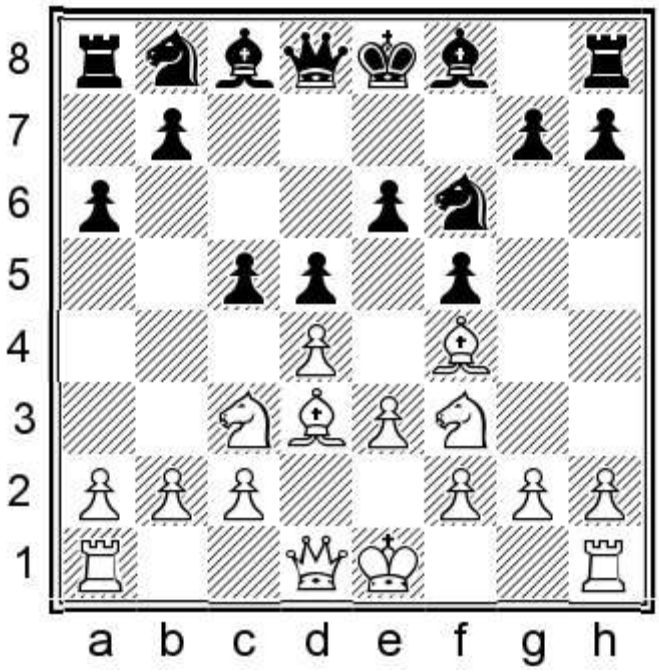
Now Black has various options, but none of them really satisfied me.

3...a6

This looks the best try. Black doesn't want to stay in a Stonewall; he wants to play ...c7−c5, but needs to prevent ♘b5 first.

3...♘f6 merely gives White the additional option of playing 4.♘b5!? ♘a6 5.e3 c6 6.♘c3 and Black has nothing better than 6...♘b8±.

4.e3 ♘f6 5.♘f3 e6 6.♗d3 c5



Position after: 6...c5

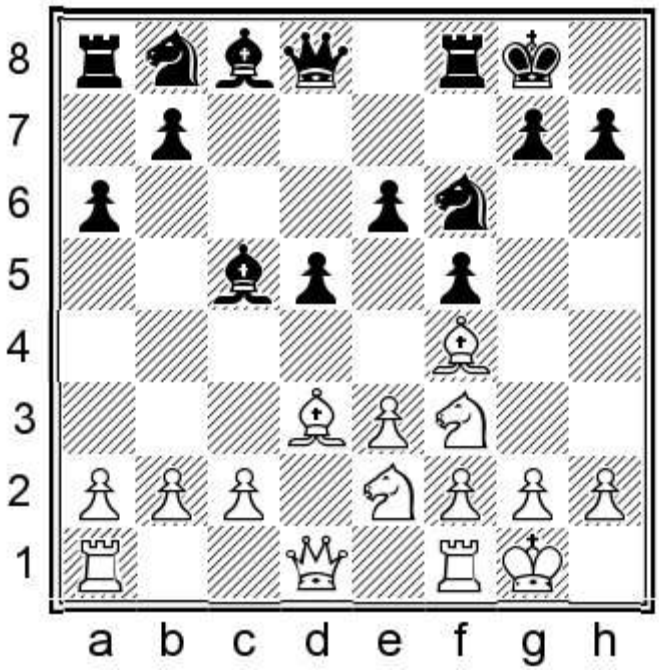
This is one of the critical lines.

During my preparation for some games I tried to make it work, but never managed to do so.

7.dxc5 ♗xc5 8.0-0 0-0

8...♘c6 9.♘e2 ♕e7 Black intends ...e5 on the next move. 10.♘ed4! 0-0 11.c4 This transposes to Kornev's idea that we discuss after 8...0-0.

9.♘e2!



Position after: 9.♘e2!

This strong maneuver is really annoying for Black. White intends both c2−c4 and ♘ed4, putting pressure on the center.

The position would be easy equality if the f-pawn was on f7, but here Black often remains rather weak on the central squares because of this pawn being on f5.

9...♘c6 10.c4 ♕e7

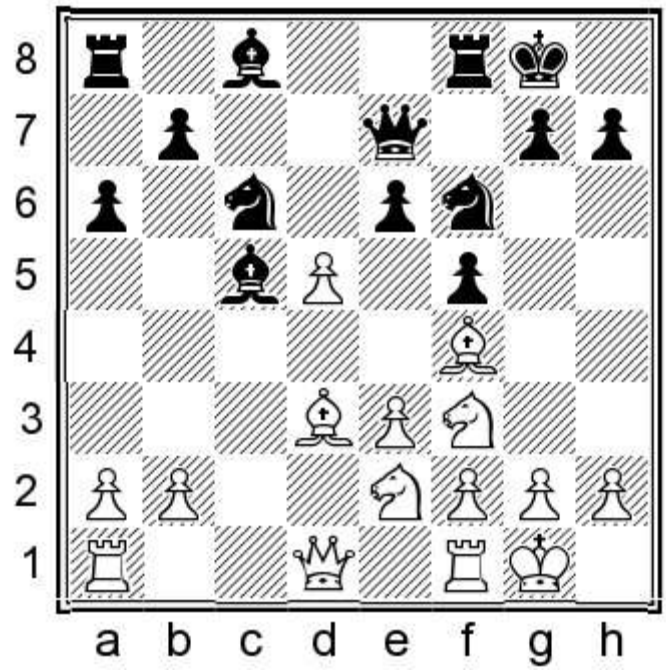
A) 10...♘b4 11.a3 ♘xd3 12.♕xd3 ♗d7 13.♘ed4±

B) 10...d4 11.exd4 ♘xd4 12.♘exd4 ♗xd4 13.♕e2±

11.♘ed4!?

This is Kornev's recommendation and I couldn't find equality here either.

11.cxd5



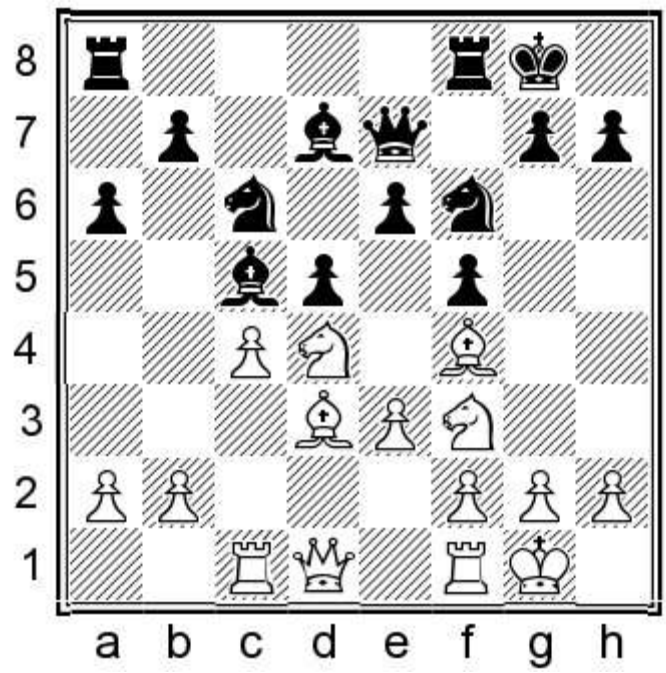
Position after: 11.cxd5

This is also a simple way to keep an edge. 11...♘xd5 12.♗g5 ♕d6 13.♗c4±

11...♗d7

11...♗xd4 12.exd4 dxc4 13.♗xc4±

12.♖c1

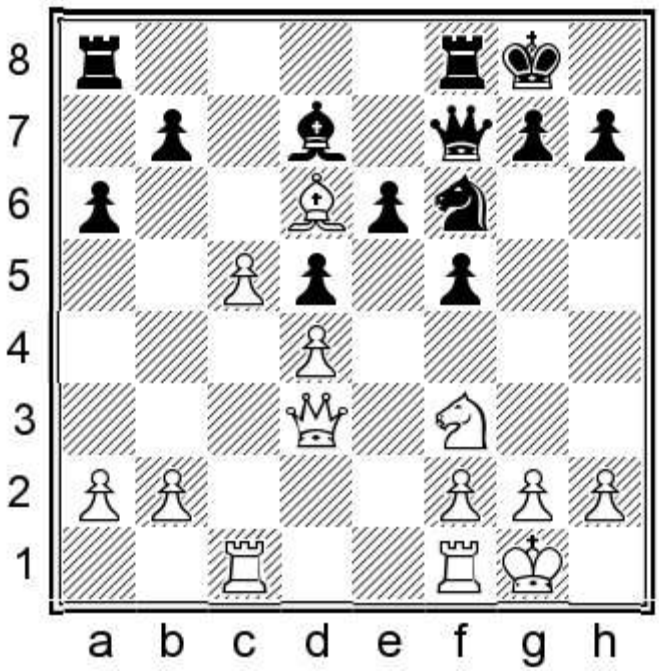


Position after: 12.♖c1

12...♗xd4

12...♗d6 13.♗xd6 ♕xd6 14.cxd5 ♘xd5 15.♗c4±

13.exd4 ♘b4 14.c5!? ♘xd3 15.♗d6 ♕f7 16.♕xd3±

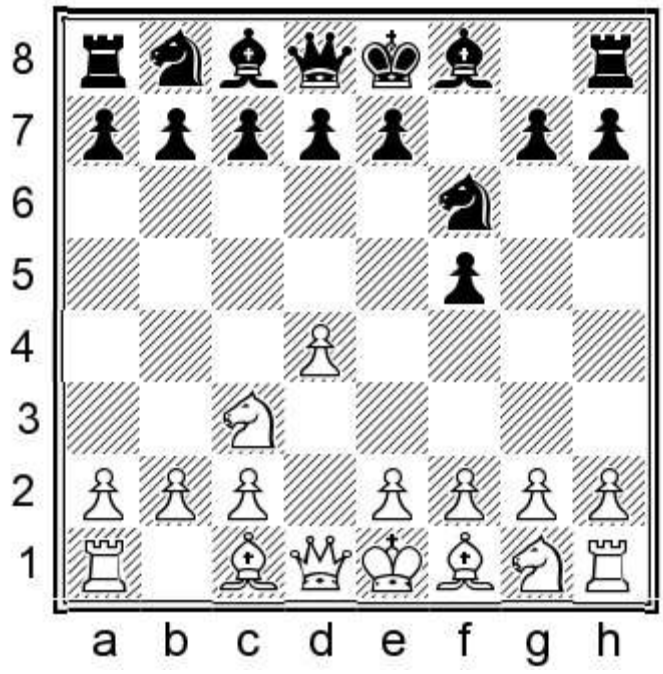


Position after: 16.♕xd3±

White's advantage is indisputable. The pressure on the e-file and dark squares is significant, and Black already has to fight for a draw.

b) 2...♘f6 3.--, 3.♗f4

1.d4 f5 2.♘c3 ♘f6



Position after: 2...♘f6

I think this is Black's best option. It invites White to keep fighting for the e4-square by placing the bishop on g5, which is why we wait before playing ...d5 (so that the bishop isn't on f4, objectively its best square when facing a Stonewall set-up).

3.♗f4!?

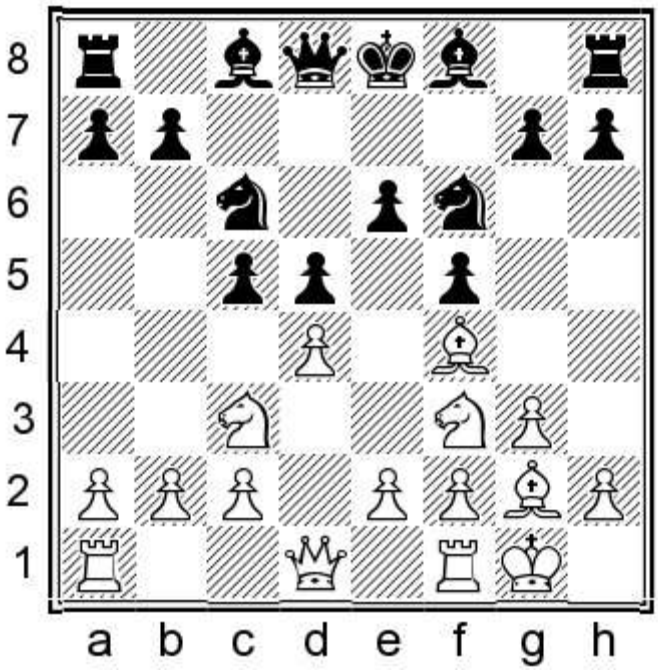
This is played far less than 3.♗g5, but I am not sure why. Indeed two of the main moves for Black here have major drawbacks.

A) 3.e4 fxe4 transposes into Chapter 1 on the Staunton Gambit.

B) 3.♘f3 will be analyzed later in Chapter 6.

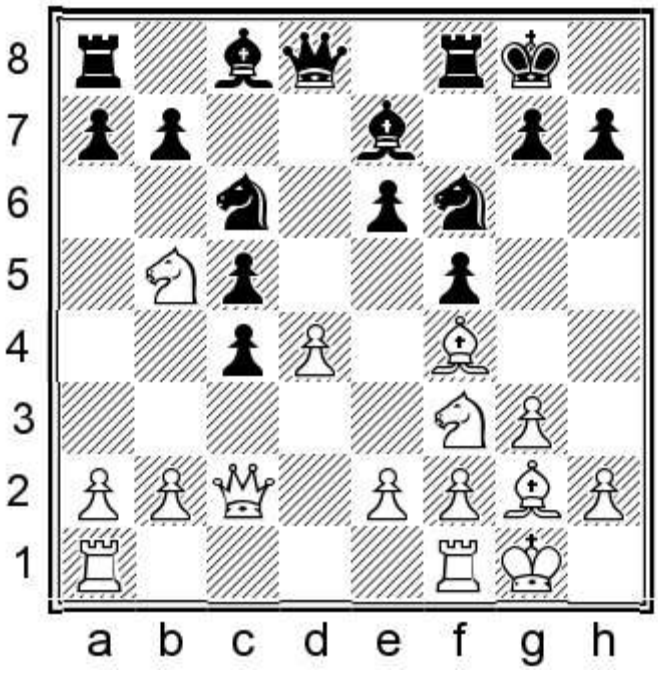
C) 3.f3 d5 4.e4 [4.♗g5 – see 4.f3 in the current chapter] 4...fxe4 5.fxe4 dxe4 Please refer to the 3.f3 line of Chapter 1.

D) 3.g3 I won't spend too long on this move as I believe we can reach an easy-to-play Stonewall where the knight on c3 is misplaced, e.g. 3...e6 4.♗g2 d5! 5.♘f3 c5 6.0-0 ♘c6 7.♗f4



Position after: 7.♗f4

7...♗e7!? [You can also start with 7...♗d7 or 7...a6 if you want to prevent ♘b5, but it's fine for Black.] 8.♘b5 0-0 9.♘c7 ♖b8 10.♘b5 ♖a8= I think objectively White should take the draw 'offer'. If he wants to continue things could turn bad really quickly: 11.c4 dxc4 12.♕c2?!



Position after: 12.♕c2?!

12...a6! 13.♘c7 g5!! Trying to deflect one of the two minor pieces that can grab this pawn:

D1) 14.♘xg5 ♘xd4 15.♕d1 [15.♕xc4 b5 16.♕d3 ♖a7–+] 15...♖a7 16.e3 h6 17.♘h3 ♘c6∓

D2) 14.♘xa8 gxf4 15.dxc5 ♗xc5 16.♕xc4 ♘e4 17.gxf4 b5 18.♕d3 ♕e7

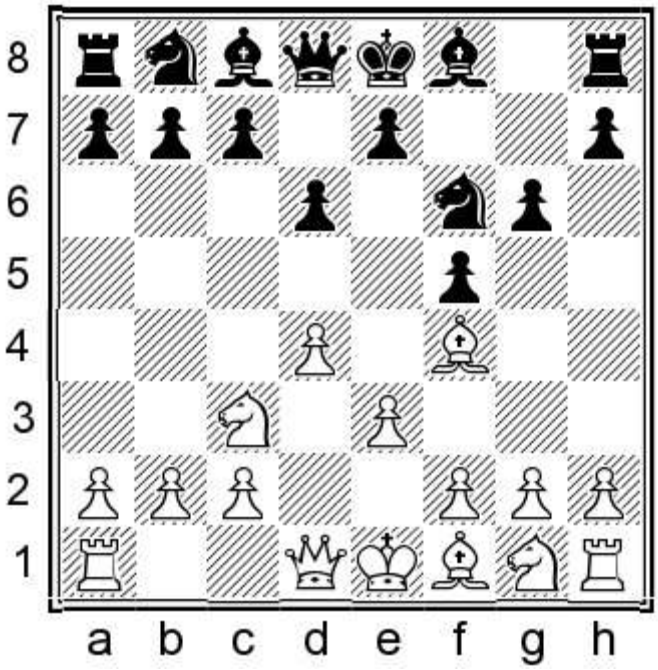
White is already fighting to avoid being really worse.

3...e6!?

Here comes my main move. I don't want to offer a Stonewall system; I want to play ...♗b4 as soon as I can if allowed to. White has to decide whether to let this happen or not.

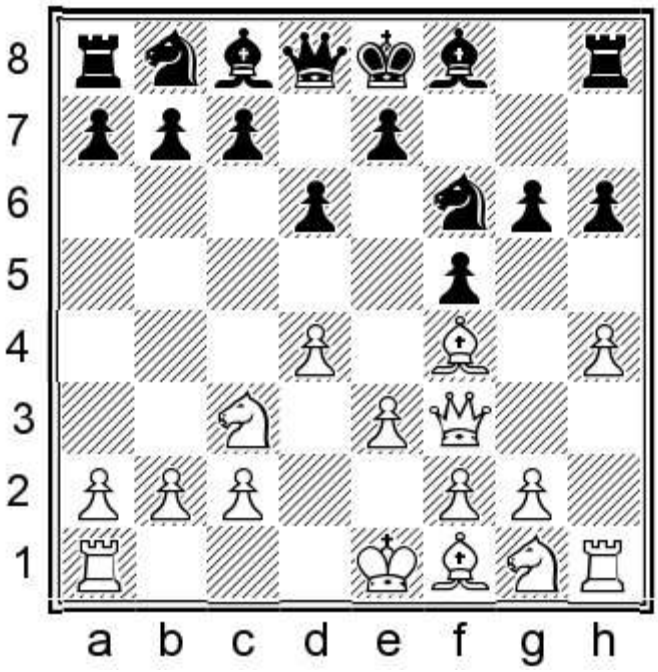
A) 3...d5 transposes to the 2...d5 line that we covered earlier. (We even said that in this precise position, 4.♘b5 is a decent idea that should lead to an edge for White.)

B) 3...d6 4.e3 g6



Position after: 4...g6

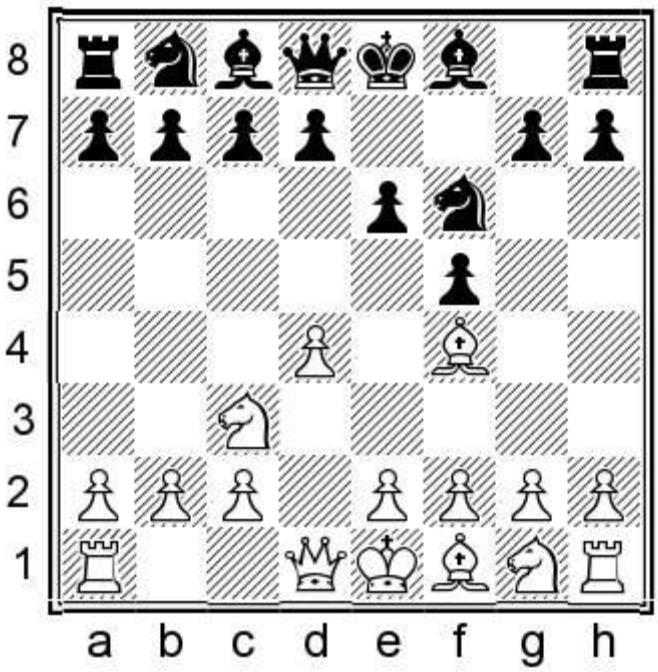
This is offered in some books as a decent set-up for Black, and it has been played in some games, but I don't really like it because of 5.h4! h6 [5...♗g7 6.h5 ♘xh5 7.♖xh5 gxh5 8.♕xh5+ ♔f8 9.0-0-0 ♕e8 10.♕h4→ I wouldn't like to be Black in this line as White always keeps annoying long-term compensation.] 6.♕f3↑



Position after: 6.♕f3↑

This is actually a transposition to another line I'm discussing in this book – see the next chapter (on the Göring Attack): 2.♗g5 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.h4 h6 5.♗f4 ♘f6 6.e3 d6 7.♕f3. This is going to be one of our main lines, and it transposes to our current position except that our bishop is still undeveloped on f8, the extra tempo being due to the c1-bishop going to f4 in two moves. One can argue that it can be useful in order to defend the g6-pawn with ...♖g8, but it's objectively worse, so I prefer not to enter this line.

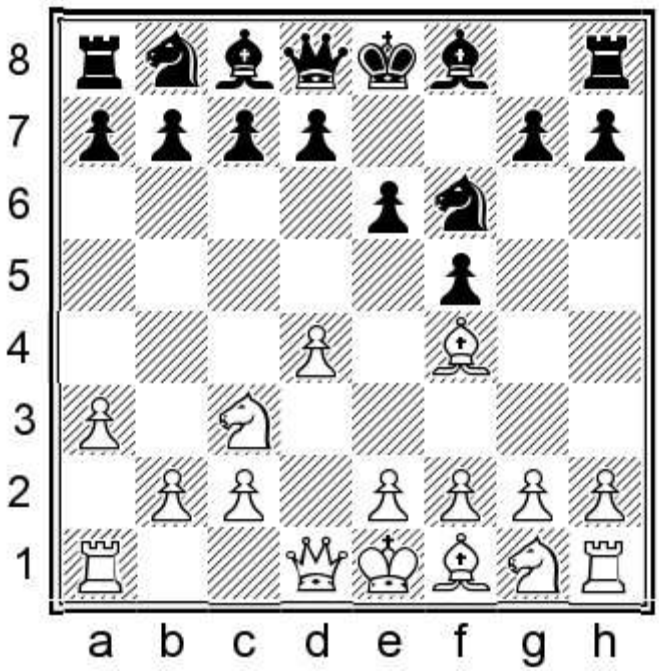
C) 3...g6 4.e3 ♗g7 5.h4 h6 6.♕f3 d6 leads to the same as 3...d6.



Position after: 3...e6!?

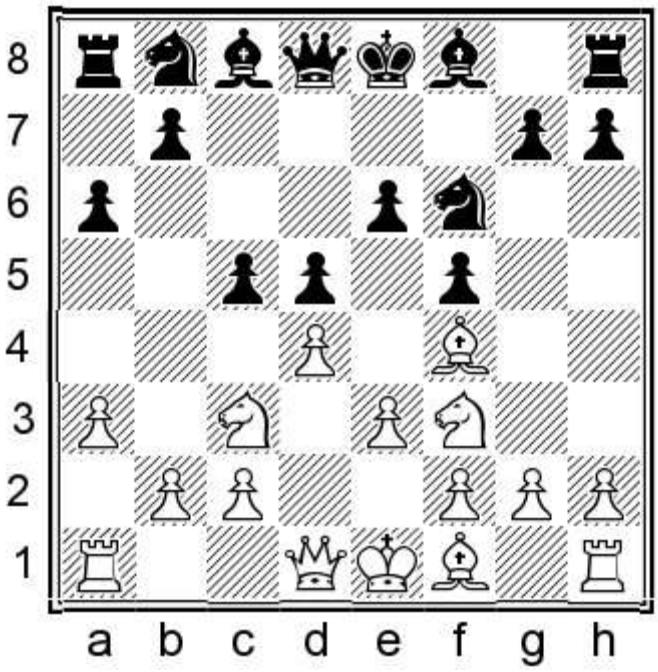
4.e3

A) 4.a3



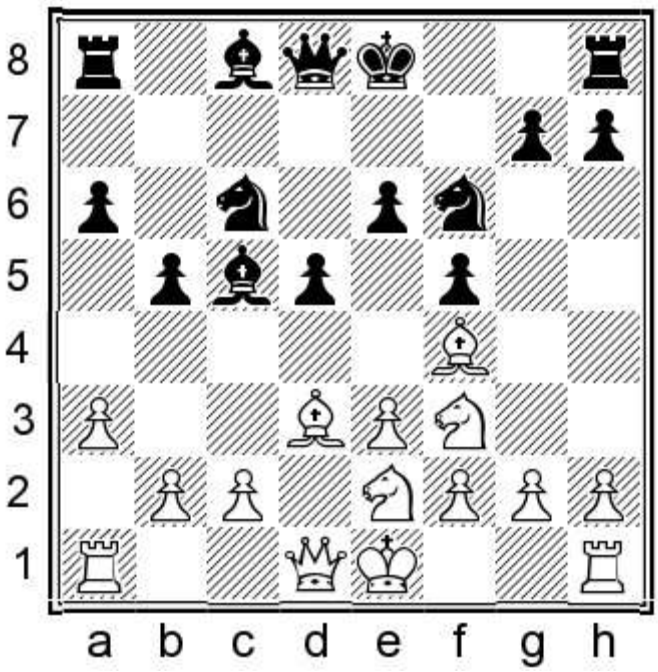
Position after: 4.a3

4...a6! [4...d5 5.♘b5 ♗d6 6.♘xd6+ cxd6 7.e3 Even if it's probably fine for Black, White can claim that he's managed to gain the bishop pair. We don't have to allow him this small victory.] 5.♘f3 [5.d5?! Trying to prevent ...d5 is obviously slow and more than fine for Black: 5...d6 6.dxe6 ♗xe6 7.e3 ♘c6∓] 5...d5 6.e3 c5



Position after: 6...c5

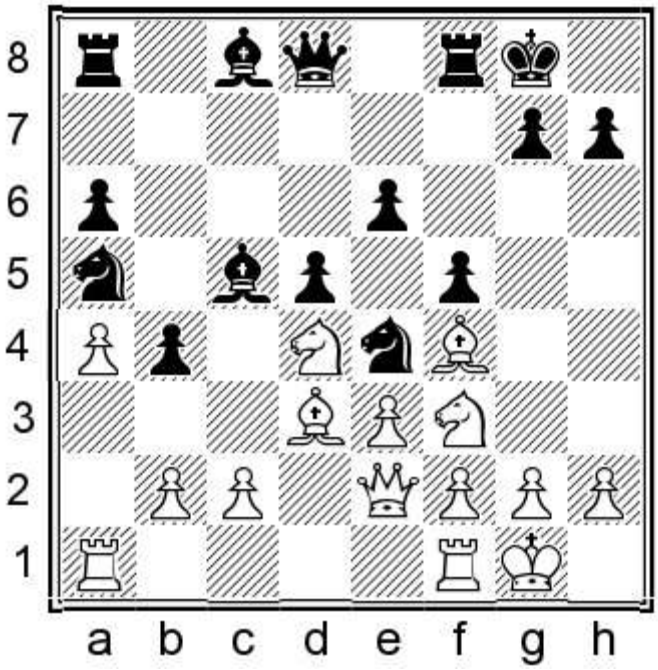
We have transposed into the line we discussed after 2...d5, but in this case White had to spend a tempo playing the useless move a2−a3, so we are fine here. 7.dxc5 [7.♗d3 ♘c6 8.0-0 c4 9.♗e2 ♗d6 10.b3 b5 11.a4 b4 12.♘a2 cxb3 13.cxb3 ♗xf4 14.exf4 ♕b6=] 7...♗xc5 8.♗d3 ♘c6 9.♘e2 [9.0-0?! This is too slow. 9...♗d6! (Δ...e5) 10.♗xd6 ♕xd6 11.♘e2 e5∓] White can try his logical knight maneuver, but as we have an extra move we can prevent c4 by playing 9...b5!?, e.g.



Position after: 9...b5!?

10.a4 [10.♘ed4 ♗d7 11.0-0 ♕e7↑ and Black is ready to advance his center. White's position can soon

become very awkward.] 10...b4! 11.♘ed4 ♘a5! 12.0-0 0-0 13.♕e2 ♘e4↑

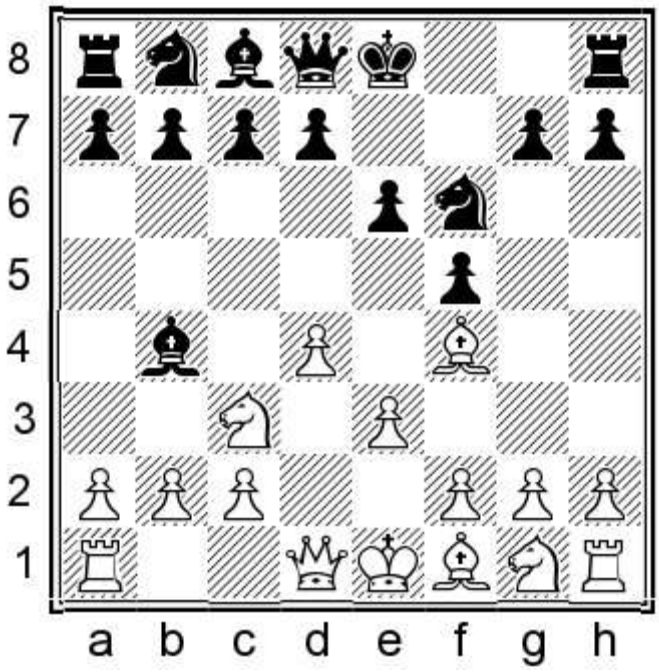


Position after: 13...♘e4↑

In this game with mutual chances, I would say 'objectively' that I prefer Black. He has put a lot of effort into containing White's play, and if he keeps doing so effectively, he should be able to get the better position.

B) 4.♘b5?! A few players have tried this move, but it looks strange here. 4...♘d5 5.♗d2 a6 6.♘a3 b5! ∓ After this rather stupid-looking line, Black remains better and can seize the initiative on the light squares.

4...♗b4!

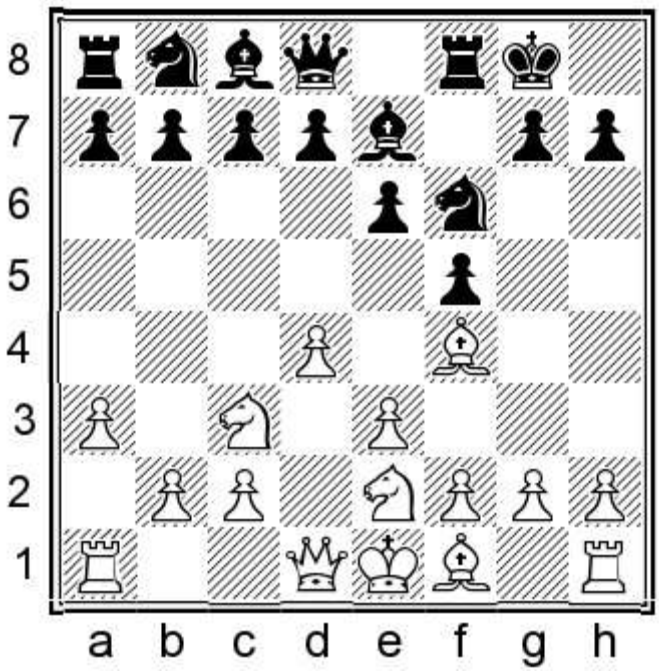


Position after: 4...♗b4!

Pinning the knight seems logical as it continues the fight for the central light squares.

5.♗d3

A) 5.♘e2!? The only way to avoid doubled c-pawns. Obviously White is unlikely to play this, as it looks ugly in terms of development. 5...0-0 6.a3 ♗e7



Position after: 6...♗e7

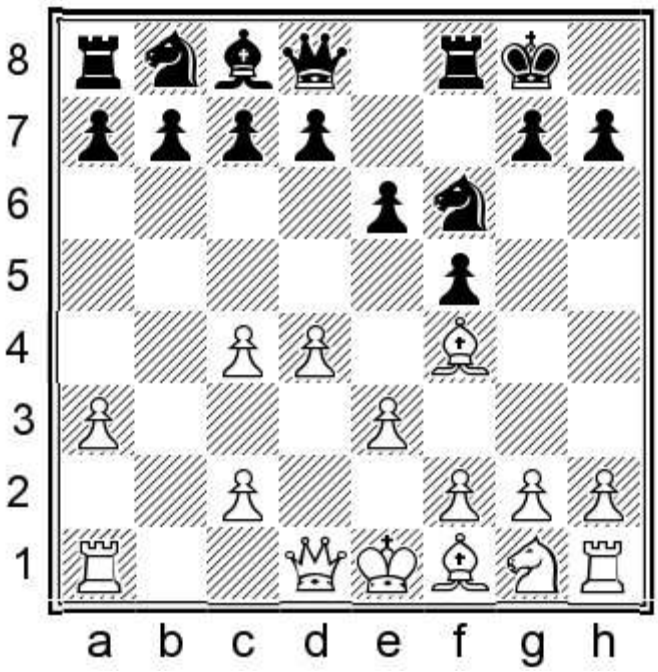
White has to find a weird plan in order to develop his kingside and castle.

A1) 7.g3 d6 8.♗g2 ♘bd7 9.0-0 e5 10.♗g5 c6∓

A2) 7.h4 is the computer's move, but it doesn't seem too impressive, as White's pieces are not so well-placed to set up an attack. 7...d6 8.h5 ♘bd7 9.♕d2 c6! 10.0-0-0 a5 11.h6 g6⇄ Black intends to continue with ...b5, with good attacking chances.

A3) 7.♘c1 b6 8.♗e2 ♗b7 9.0-0 d6 10.♘d3 c5↑

B) 5.a3 ♗xc3+ 6.bxc3 0-0 7.c4



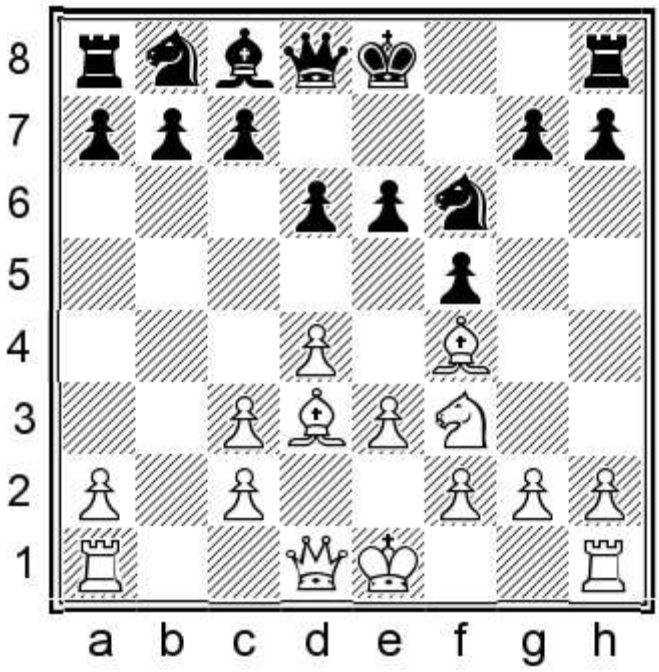
Position after: 7.c4

Here I would deviate from the game Bourached, A (1991) – Rendle, T (2359), Bunratty 2018, ½-½ (18), by playing 7...d6N 8.♘f3 ♘c6 9.♗g3 ♘e4∓

5...♗xc3+!

Of course we can't wait, otherwise White will continue with ♘e2 and the bishop on b4 will have to return to e7.

6.bxc3 d6 7.♘f3



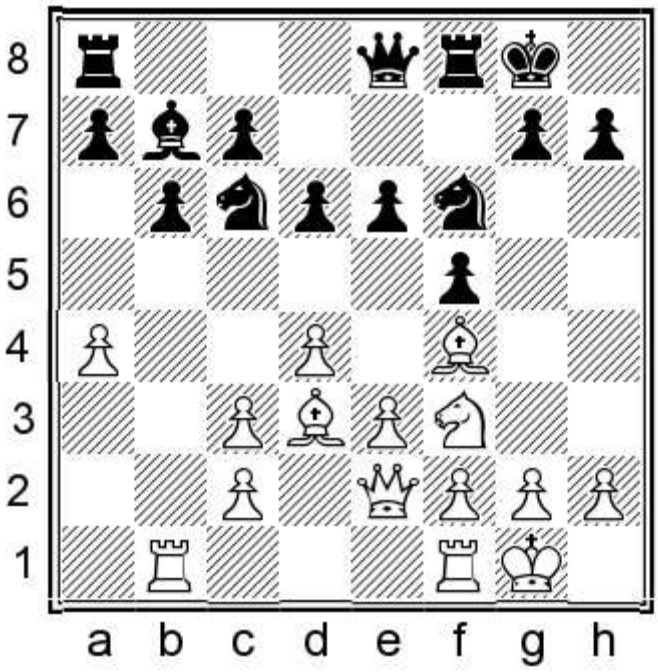
Position after: 7.♘f3

Here, instead of 7...♕e7 as played in the game Schroer, M (2102) – Reinderman, D (2573), Delft 2013, 0-1 (38), I would rather play

7...0-0 8.0-0 ♕e8!

I think the queen has more perspectives from here. It can go to either the queenside or, more likely, the kingside. Black will have really good prospects on the light squares.

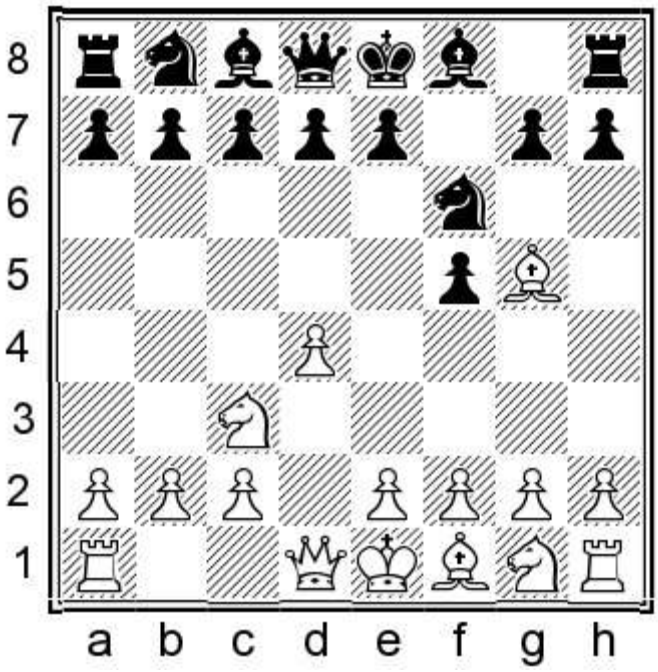
9.♖b1 b6 10.♕e2 ♗b7 11.a4 ♘c6∓



Position after: 11...♘c6∓

c) 2...♘f6 3.♗g5 --, 3...d5 4.f3 c5! 5.e4 ♘c6! 6.♘ge2

1.d4 f5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.♗g5!



Position after: 3.♗g5!

This is definitely more critical than 3.♗f4, indeed Black has to find a solution for his knight, since it can't go to e4 or simply be protected by ...♗g7. We need to decide which concession we want to make.

3...d5

Black keeps preventing e2−e4 by setting up a Stonewall pawn structure.

Granted, that's not my goal in this book, but it is fine here for at least two reasons:

(i) the knight on c3 is misplaced, as White is unable to use his c-pawn right now, and

(ii) the bishop on g5 would clearly be more useful on f4. (One of its main goals now is to be traded on f6.)

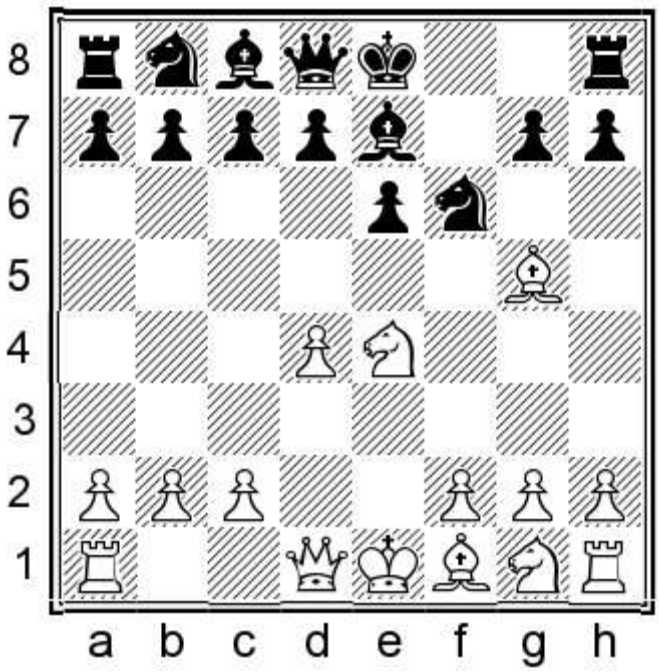
White has three main plans here:

(i) react in the center by means of f3/e4 (the choice of players who want to blast their opponents off the board);

(ii) take on f6 and then play against Black's weaknesses on d5 and f5, and (iii) develop his pieces easily and try to get the better middlegame.

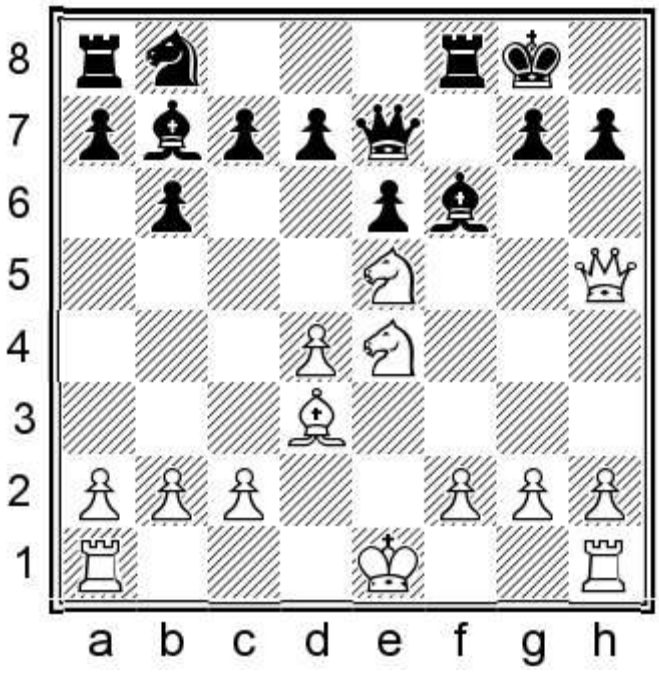
But first, let's examine Black's other possibilities:

A) 3...e6 This has been known to be quite dangerous for a long time, especially because of the following miniature which I will give in its entirety. Most of you will already know the finale of this game; now you know which opening it comes from. 4.e4 fxe4 5.♘xe4 ♗e7



Position after: 5...♗e7

6.♗xf6 ♗xf6 7.♘f3 b6 8.♘e5 Objectively the game isn't perfect, but nevertheless it's difficult for Black. 8...0-0 9.♗d3 ♗b7 10.♕h5 ♕e7

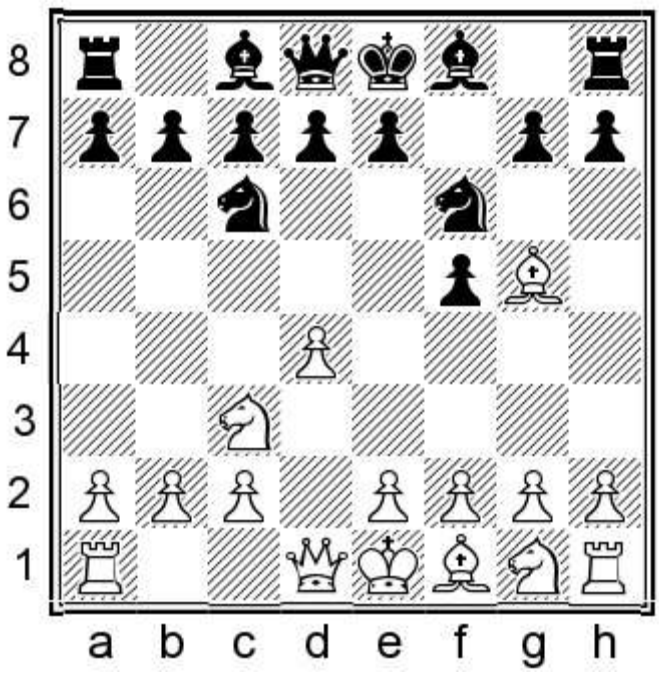


Position after: 10...♕e7

A well-known position, featuring one of the most famous queen sacrifices. 11.♕xh7+!! ♔xh7 12.♘xf6+ ♔h6 13.♘eg4+ ♔g5 14.h4+ ♔f4 15.g3+ ♔f3 16.♗e2+ ♔g2 17.♖h2+ ♔g1 18.♔d2# 1-0 Lasker, E – Thomas, G, London 1912.

B) 3...♘e4?! 4.♘xe4 fxe4 5.e3 d5 6.c4 c6 7.♘e2!± White is already ahead in development. It is also clear that it is going to be difficult for Black to develop his kingside while avoiding creating too many holes and weaknesses.

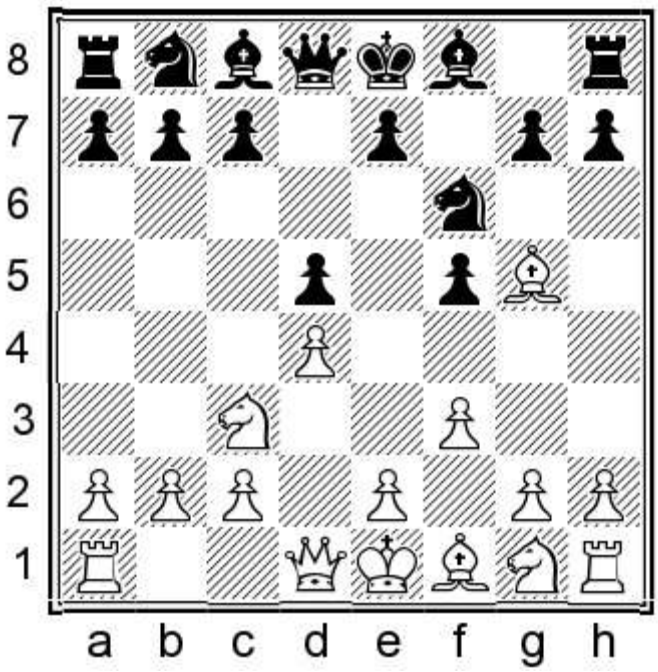
C) 3...♘c6?!



Position after: 3...♘c6?!

This has been tried a few times, but there is no reason why this early development of the knight should be particularly strong. 4.d5! ♘e5 5.♘f3! ♘f7 6.♗xf6 exf6 7.♕d3 g6 8.h4!→

4.f3!?



Position after: 4.f3!?

This is the less popular way to treat this position, but that might change because it is Kornev's recommendation in his repertoire for White after 1.d4. (Al-though I doubt it, as Black is clearly OK.)

4...c5!

We are the first to strike in the center. I think the only good continuation for White is to follow Kornev's idea.

5.e4!

5.e3?! e6 6.♕d2 Going for long castling is the logical continuation. 6...♘c6 7.♘ge2 ♗e7 8.0-0-0 0-0 9.♔b1 c4!?→ Closing the center is not forced at all, but it secures attacking prospects against the white king. Black will follow up with ...♖b8 and ...b5, when his attacking chances seem more concrete than White's.

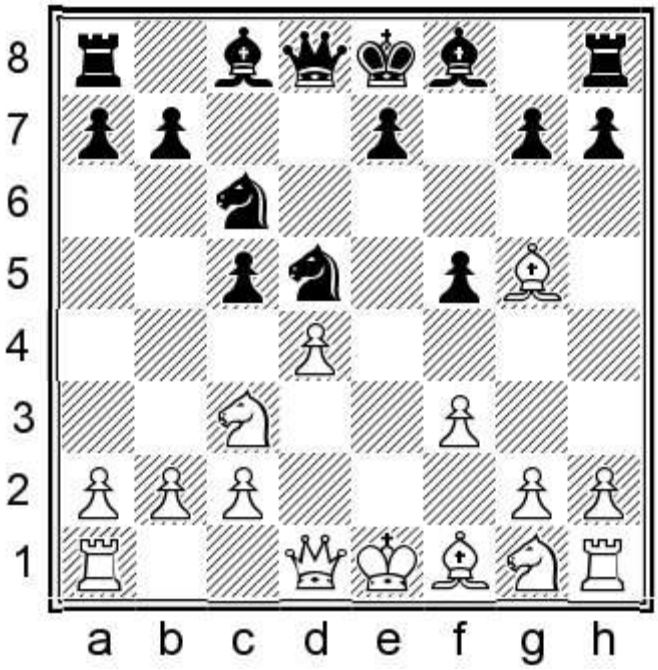
5...♘c6!

5...cxd4?! 6.♕xd4 ♘c6 7.♗b5±

6.♘ge2!?

This rare move is Kornev's recommendation! It must be treated with great caution.

6.exd5?! ♘xd5

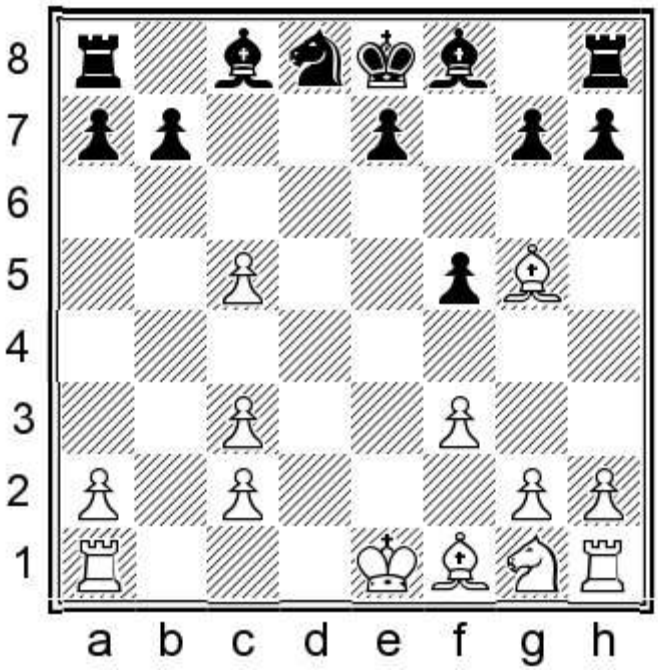


Position after: 6...♘xd5

Black's pawn structure may seem odd because of the pawns on c5 and f5, but it's compensated for by his activity in the center.

A) 7.♗b5 h6! 8.♘xd5 [8.♗h4? ♘e3–+] 8...hxg5 9.dxc5 e6 10.♘b4 ♕a5! 11.♗xc6+ bxc6 12.♕d2 ♗xc5 13.♘d3 ♗b6 14.♕xa5 ♗xa5+ 15.c3 ♗a6∓

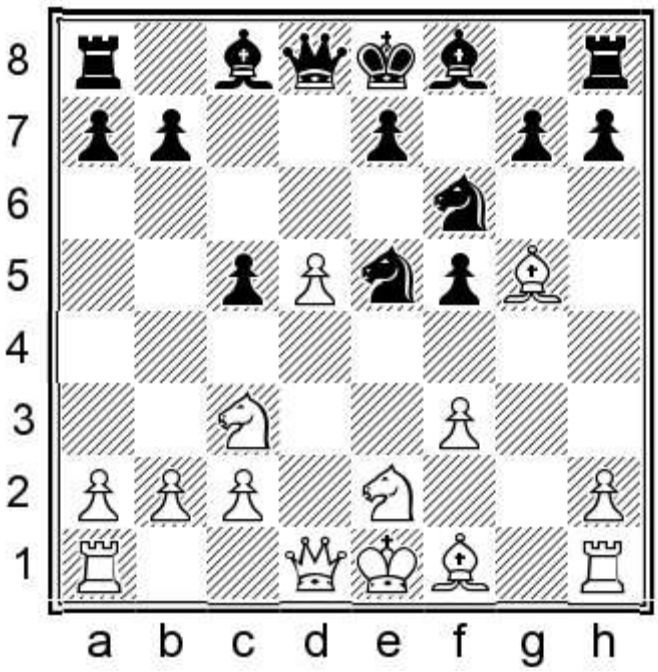
B) 7.dxc5 ♘xc3 8.♕xd8+ ♘xd8 9.bxc3



Position after: 9.bxc3

This kind of endgame is usually fine for Black. The missing pawn is obviously compensated for by the tripled c-pawns, and the c5-pawn will most likely fall. White may get some activity, but I think Black keeps the upper hand if he plays precisely. 9...♗d7! [9...e5?! 10.♗b5+ ♘c6 11.♗e3 ♗d7 12.0-0-0± In this case, it's not so easy to regain the pawn.] 10.0-0-0 e6 11.f4 [11.♗e3 ♖c8 12.♘h3 ♗xc5 13.♗d4 ♗xd4 14.cxd4 0-0∓] 11...♘f7 12.♘f3 ♗xc5↑

6...dxe4 7.d5 exf3 8.gxf3 ♘e5



Position after: 8...♘e5

9.♘f4

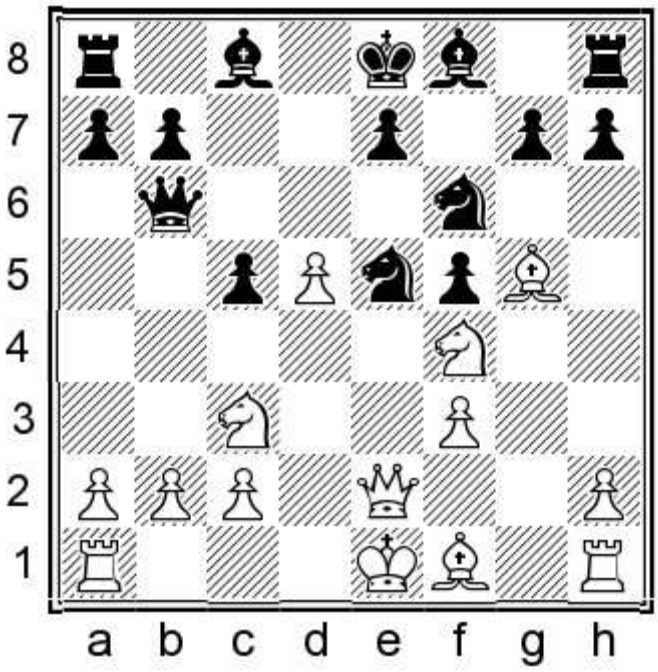
This is the whole concept behind White's pawn sacrifice. White takes control of some important squares, and the development of Black's kingside doesn't seem too obvious.

9.♘g3 ♗d7! 10.♕e2 ♘f7 11.♗xf6 gxf6 12.0-0-0 ♗h6+ 13.♔b1 ♘d6∓

9...♕b6!

9...a6 is less good, but still a decent alternative, though ultimately I prefer White: 10.♕e2 ♕d6 11.♕e3 ♘f7 12.h4! h6 13.♗xf6 gxf6 14.h5⩲.

10.♕e2

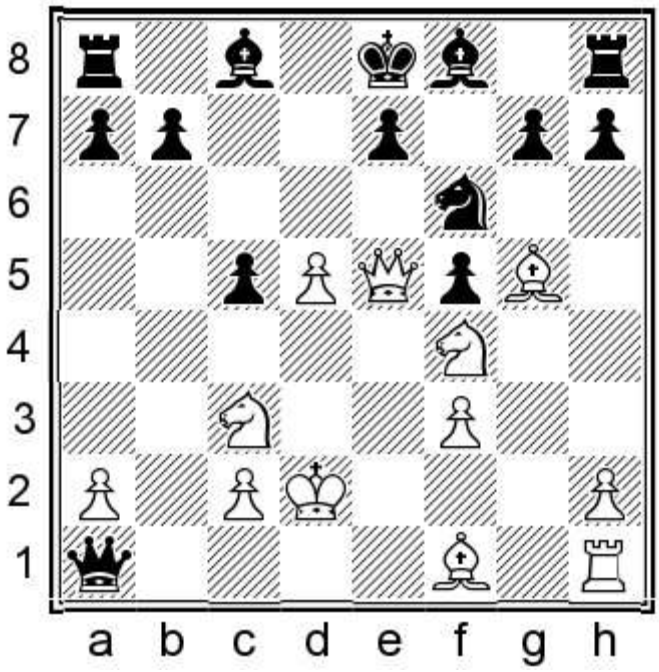


Position after: 10.♕e2

10...♘f7!

This strong reply was played in the only game that reached this position.

10...♕xb2?! This greedy continuation is Kornev's main line. I think we need to deviate from this forcing line: 11.♕xe5 ♕xa1+ 12.♔d2

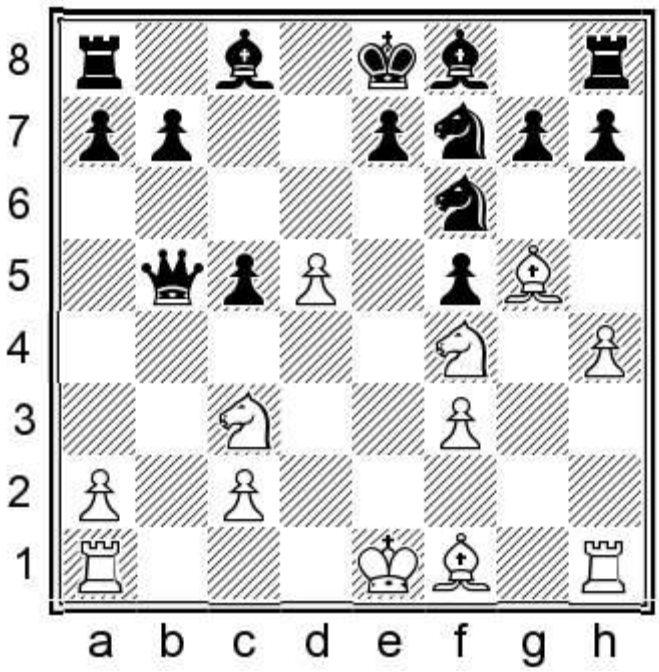


Position after: 12.♔d2

Black is an exchange and two pawns up, but, as in the romantic 19th century, greed is punished severely: 12...♗d7 [12...c4 13.d6 ♗d7 14.♘fd5 ♘xd5 15.♕xd5 ♗c6 16.♕e6 ♗d7 17.♕xc4 e6 18.♕c7+–] 13.♕c7 ♕b2 14.♗b5 ♗xb5 15.♖b1 ♕xb1 16.♘xb1 ♗d7 17.♕xb7 ♖d8 18.♔c1 g6 19.d6±

11.♗xf6

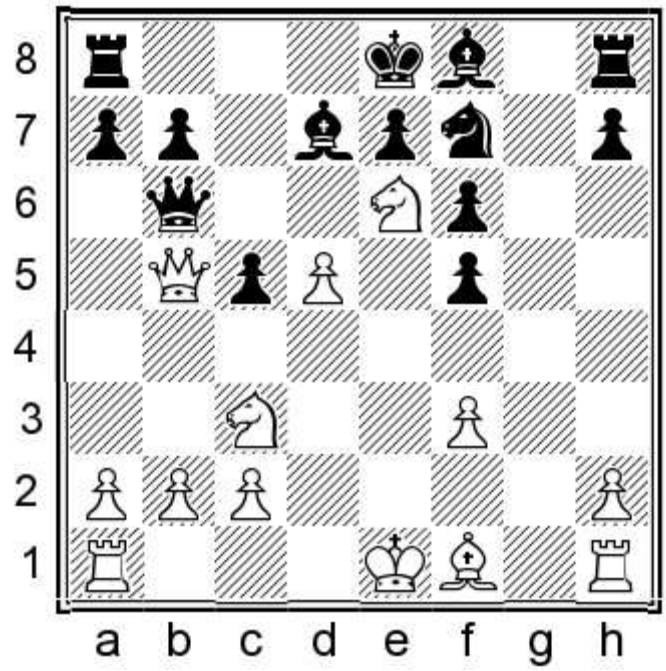
11.h4 ♕xb2! 12.♕b5+ ♕xb5



Position after: 12...♕xb5

13.♘xb5 [13.♗xb5+ ♔d8 14.♘e6+ ♗xe6 15.dxe6 ♘d6⇄] 13...♔d7!?N [13...♔d8 is also fine for Black, as in the following game: 14.0-0-0 ♘d6 15.♘e6+ ♗xe6 16.dxe6 a6 17.♘xd6 exd6 18.♗h3 ♔c7∓ 19.♗xf5 ♗e7 20.h5 ♖ae8 ½-½ Sadkowsky, D (2235) – Bomans, A (2248), Charleroi 2018.] 14.0-0-0 a6 15.♘c3 ♔c7 16.♘e6+ ♗xe6 17.dxe6 ♘d6∓ White doesn't have enough compensation for two pawns.

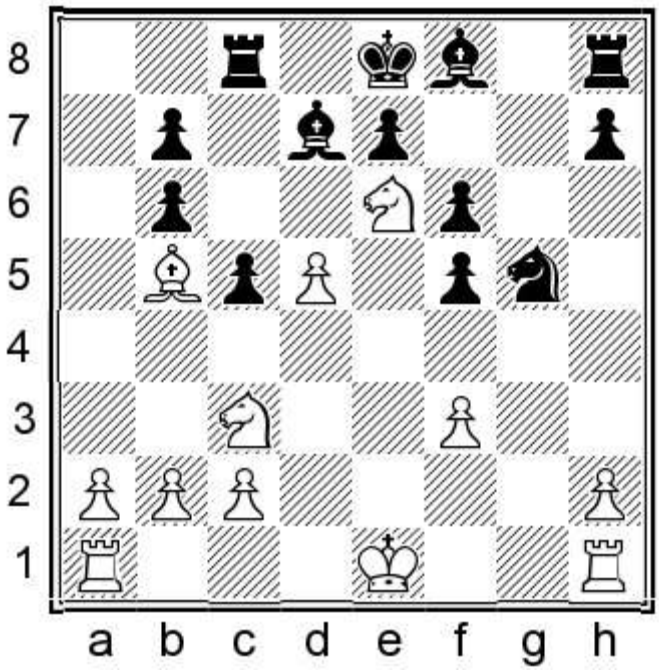
11...gxf6 12.♕b5+ ♗d7 13.♘e6



Position after: 13.♘e6

13...♖c8! 14.♕xb6 axb6 15.♗b5 ♗xb5

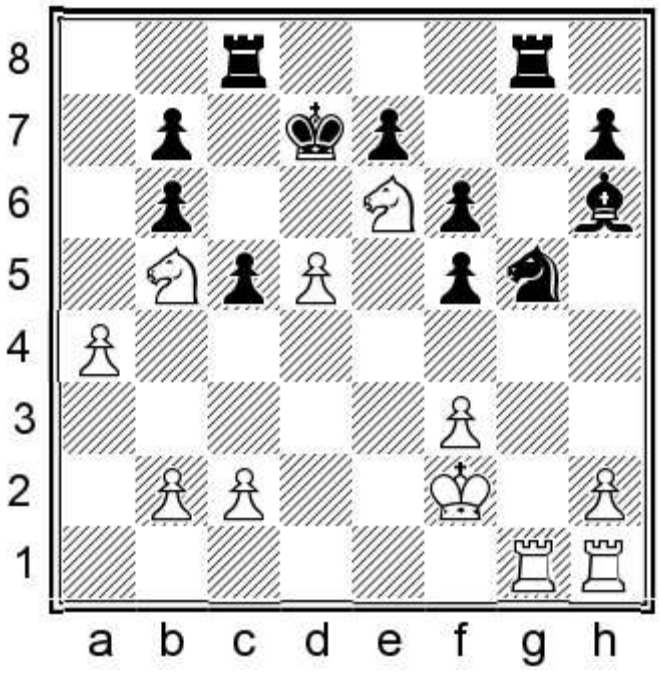
15...♘g5!?



Position after: 15...♘g5!?

Black manages to get rid of the annoying e6-knight. He will keep his extra pawn but it seems that White can maintain the balance. 16.♔f2 ♖g8!? [16...♗xb5 17.♘xb5 ♘xe6 18.dxe6 ♗h6∞] 17.h4 [17.♗xd7+ ♔xd7 18.♘xf8+ ♖cxf8 19.h4 ♘f7 20.♘a4 ♔c7 21.♖ae1=] 17...♘xe6 18.dxe6 ♗xb5 19.♘xb5 ♗h6 20.♘c3 ♖d8 21.♖ad1 ♗d2 22.♘b1 ♗f4 23.♖xd8+ ♔xd8 24.♖d1+ ♗d6 25.♘c3=

16.♘xb5 ♔d7 17.♔f2 ♗h6 18.a4 ♖hg8 19.♖ag1 ♘g5∓

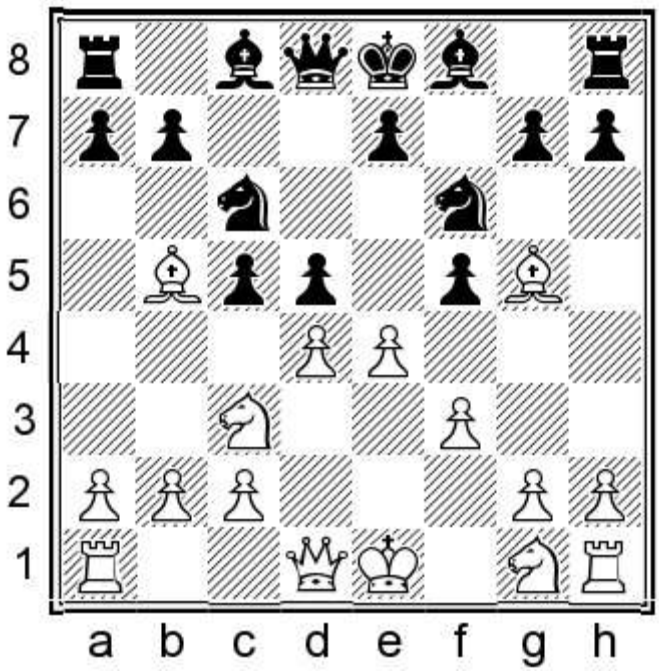


Position after: 19...♘g5∓

It’s not easy to convert this position, but Black is definitely the one trying to win.

d) 2...♘f6 3.♗g5 d5 4.f3 c5! 5.e4 ♘c6! 6.♗b5!

1.d4 f5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.♗g5! d5 4.f3!? c5! 5.e4! ♘c6! 6.♗b5!

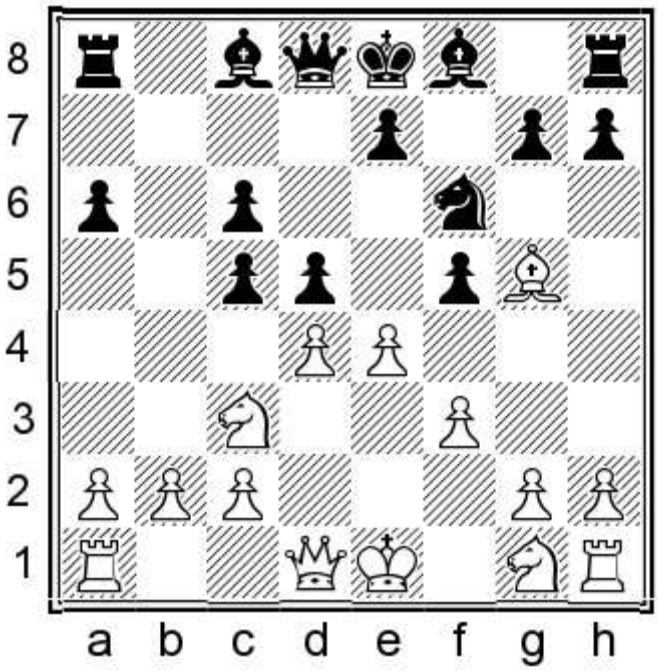


Position after: 6.♗b5!

Both players are increasing the tension in the center. Obviously simplification will take place sooner or later; the aim of each side is to obtain the more favorable version for itself. Black has two main possibilities. I prefer to be the first to make a decision in the center.

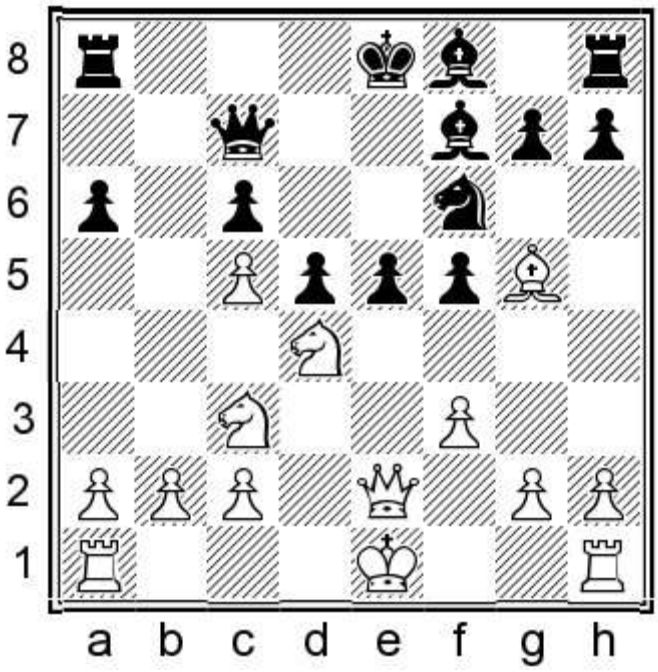
6...fxe4!?

6...a6 This appeals to me less, as White has at least two continuations which are fine for him. 7.♗xc6+ bxc6



Position after: 7...bxc6

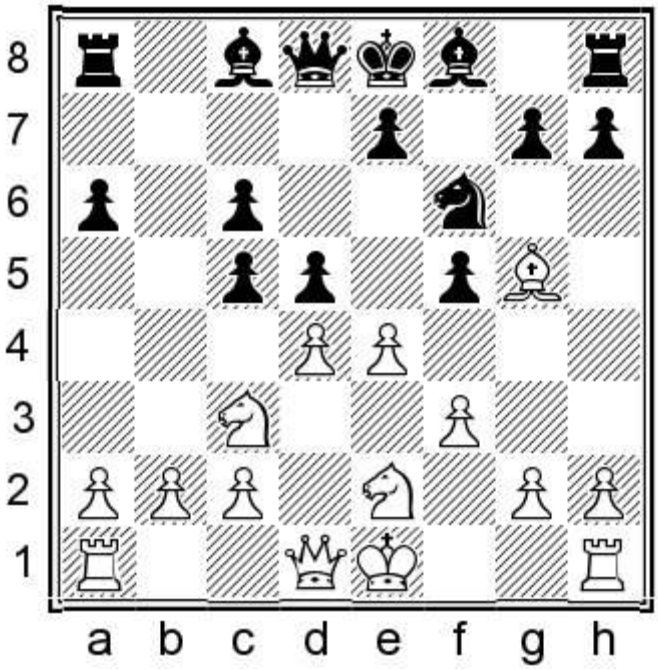
A) 8.e5 ♘d7 9.e6!? This line is also quite difficult to face over the board. 9...♘f6 10.♘ge2 ♗xe6 11.dxc5 ♗f7 12.♘d4 e5 13.♕e2 ♕c7



Position after: 13...♕c7

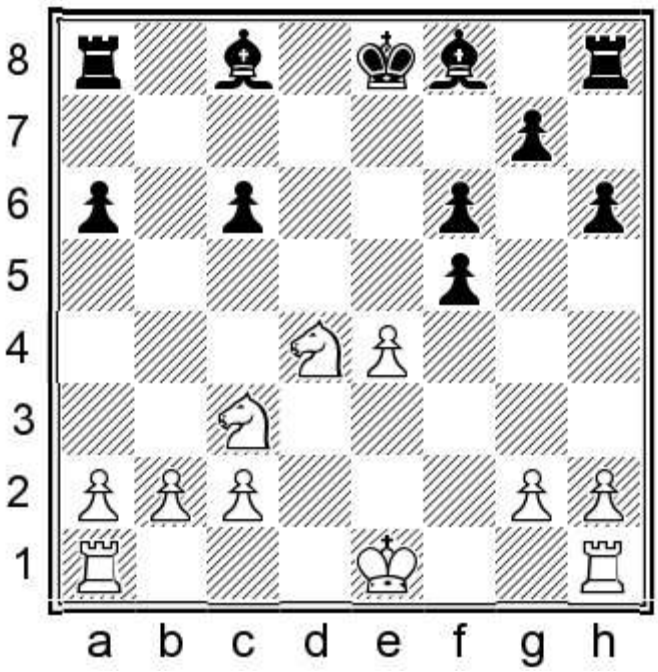
14.♘a4 [14.♘xf5 ♗g6 15.♘h4 ♗f7=] 14...♘d7 15.0-0-0 ♘xc5 16.♘xc5 ♗xc5 17.♗f4 ♗xd4 18.♖xd4 0-0 19.♗xe5 ♖fe8 20.f4= Even if Black is not under huge pressure, he is still fighting for a draw. This depressing sort of line is the kind I hate coming out of the opening.

B) 8.♘ge2!



Position after: 8.♘ge2!

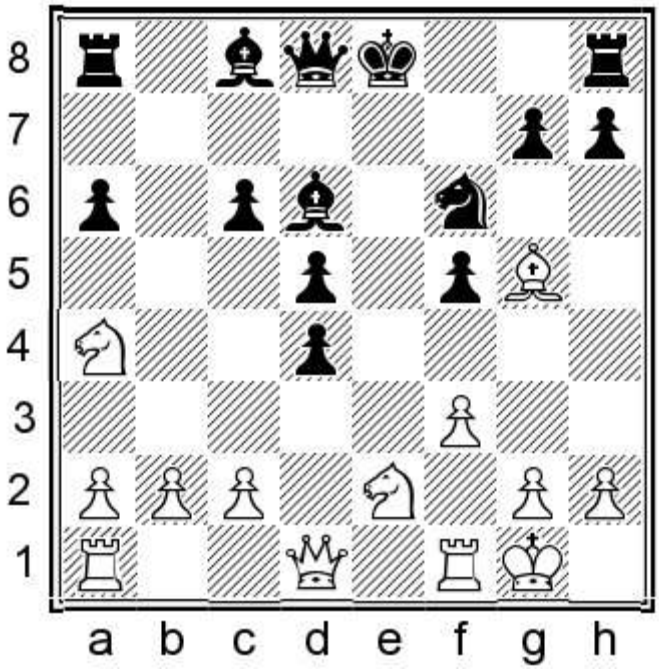
This move has been played a few times recently. 8...e6 [8...dxe4 9.fxe4 cxd4 10.♕xd4 ♕xd4 11.♘xd4 h6 12.♗xf6 exf6



Position after: 12...exf6

This happened in the game Bajarani, U (2509) – Babarykin, S (2339), Baku 2016, 1-0 (41), but Black is the only one in danger. 13.♘xf5N 13...♗xf5 14.exf5 0-0-0 15.♖d1±] 9.exf5 exf5 10.0-0 ♗d6 11.♘a4

cxd4



Position after: 11...cxd4

Once again, even if Black drew in Fier, A (2607) – Ju, W (2548), Auckland 2016, ½-½ (32), I believe that White keeps an edge. 12.♕xd4 0-0 13.♖fe1±

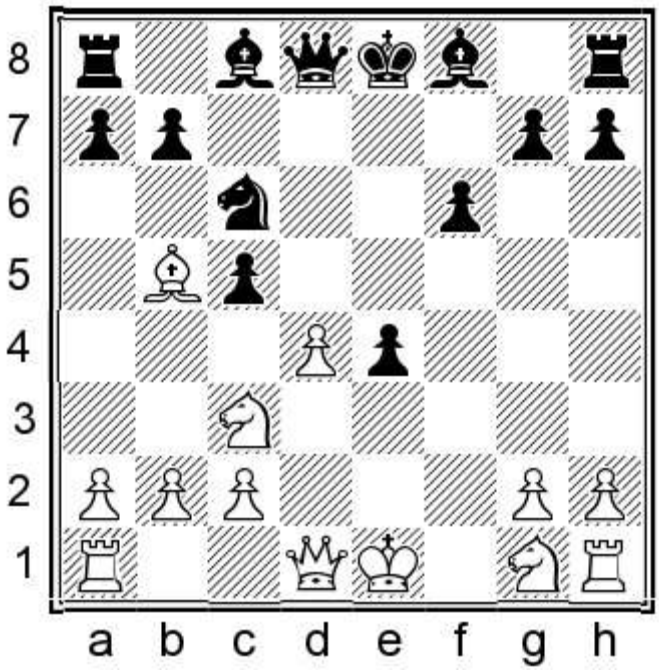
Back to 6...fxe4!?.

Again, in this very tense situation, White has different ways to handle the position.

7.dxc5!N

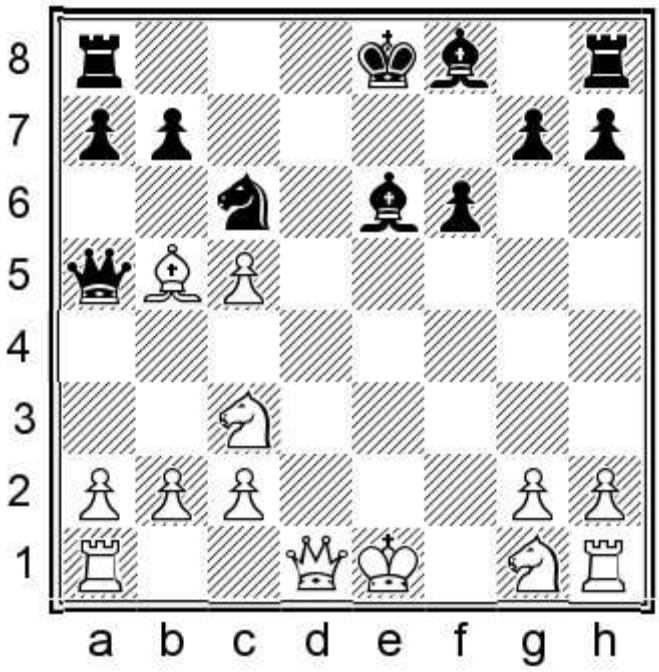
This novelty is the computer's recommendation for White. It doesn't seem so logical to let Black have a mobile pawn center, but on the other hand we need to keep this center strong. It's easy to go wrong for both sides.

A) 7.♗xf6?! exf6 8.fxe4 dxe4



Position after: 8...dxe4

A1) 9.dxc5?! This occurred in the game Neuman, P (2423) – Navara, D (2737) Slovakia 2016, 0-1 (39), but Black should now prefer 9...♗e6!N 10.♘xe4 ♕a5+ 11.♘c3

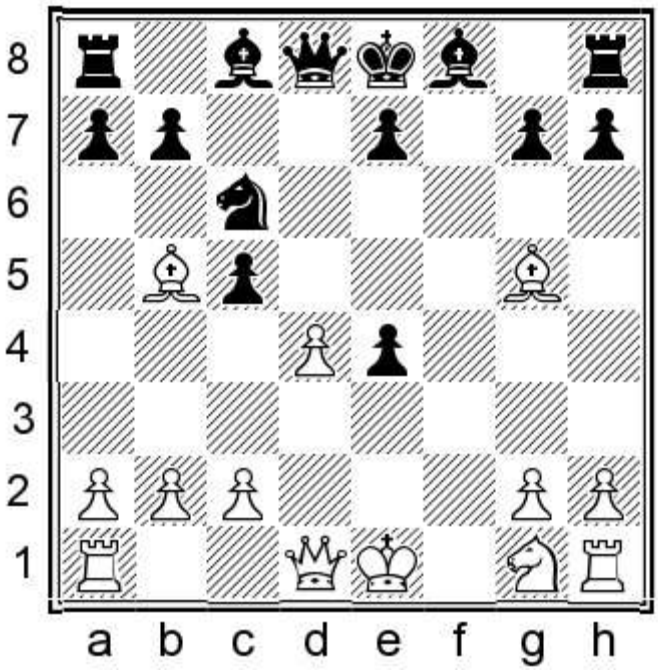


Position after: 11.♘c3

11...♖d8 [11...♗xc5?? 12.♕h5++– is a trap quite easy to fall into if you play too fast.] 12.♕h5+ g6 13.♕f3 ♔f7!→ Black has the bishop pair in this completely open position, and his attack has good chances of success.

A2) 9.d5 a6 10.♗a4 b5 11.dxc6 ♕xd1+ 12.♖xd1 bxa4 13.♘ge2 ♖a7=

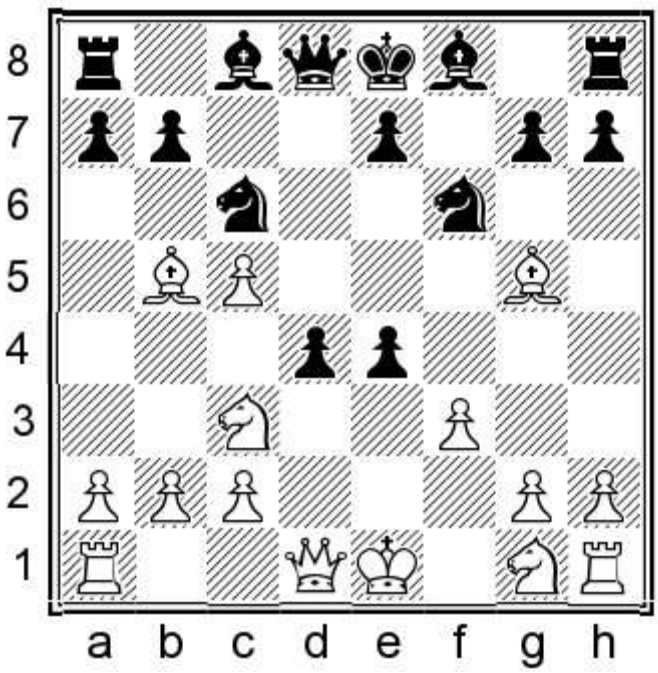
B) 7.fxe4 ♘xe4 8.♘xe4 dxe4



Position after: 8...dxe4

9.♘e2 [9.d5? ♕a5+ 10.♕d2 ♕xb5 11.dxc6 ♕xc6∓] 9...♕a5+ 10.♘c3 cxd4 11.♕xd4 ♕xb5 12.♘xb5 ♘xd4 13.♘xd4 ♗d7= White should be able to hold the draw with precise play, but already he has almost no chances of winning.

7...d4



Position after: 7...d4

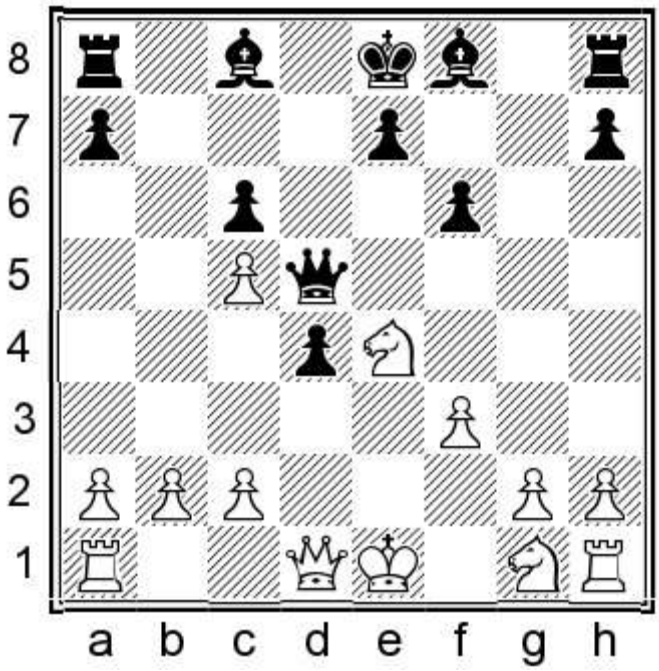
8.♗xc6+

8.♘xe4?? ♕a5+–+

8...bxc6 9.♘xe4 ♕d5! 10.♗xf6

10.♕d3 ♗f5 11.♗xf6 exf6 12.0-0-0 ♗xc5 13.♔b1 ♗b6 14.♘e2 0-0-0⇄

10...gxf6!



Position after: 10...gxf6!

Sometimes we need the e-pawn to play ...e5 but we especially need it as protection in front of the king! In this line, White often grabs a few pawns, but our compensation is great, and he needs to keep cool and calm to hold the position.

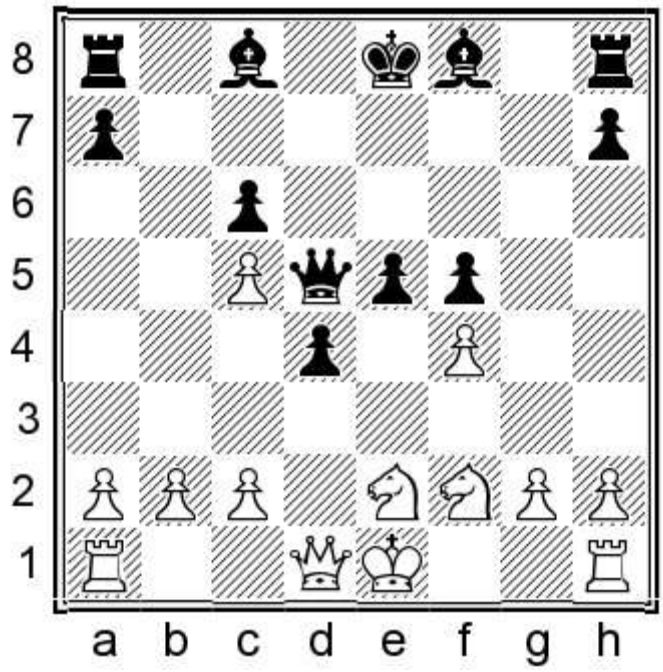
11.♘e2

11.♕e2 ♔f7! 12.♕d3 a5 13.♖d1 ♖g8♾

11...f5 12.♘f2

12.♘4g3 e5 13.♕d3 ♗xc5 14.♘xf5 a5 15.♘eg3 0-0 16.0-0 ♔h8♾ Black definitely has good compensation.

12...e5 13.f4!?



Position after: 13.f4!?

This computer-like move is aimed at destroying Black's center.

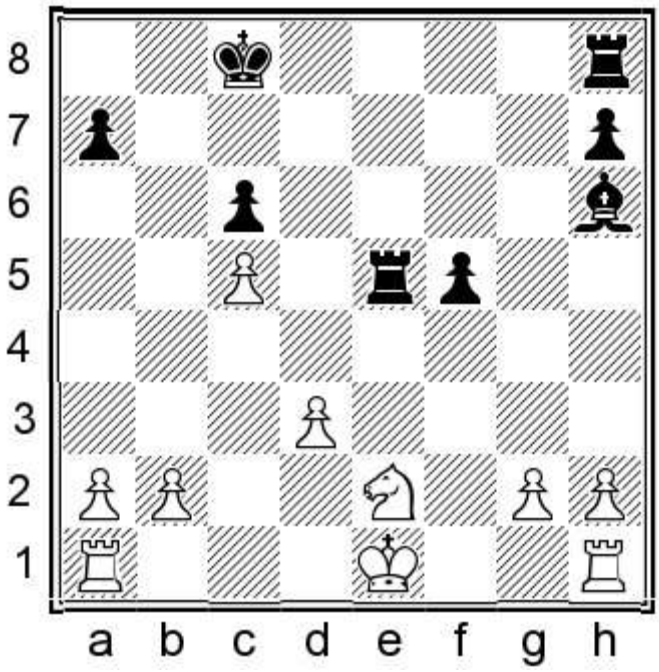
13...♗a6! 14.fxe5 ♗h6

Look at those two beautiful bishops!

15.♕xd4

15.0-0 ♗e3 16.♔h1 ♖g8 17.♘g3 ♗xf1 18.♕xf1 ♕e6!=

15...0-0-0 16.♕xd5 ♖xd5 17.♘d3 ♗xd3 18.cxd3 ♖xe5



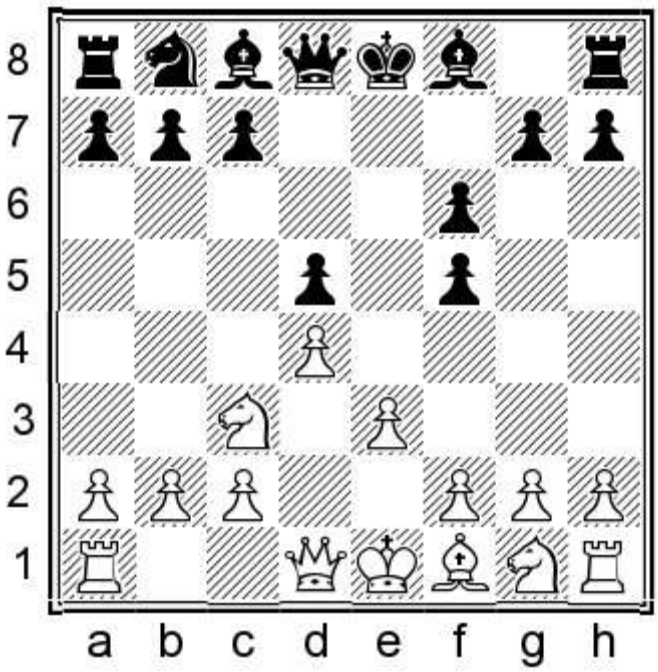
Position after: 18...♖xe5

19.♔f2 ♖he8 20.♘c3 ♗e3+ 21.♔f3 ♗xc5 22.g3! ♖e3+ 23.♔g2 ♖xd3=

The smoke has cleared, and the most likely result is a draw.

e) 2...♘f6 3.♗g5 d5 4.♗xf6 exf6 5.e3 ♗e6 6.♘ge2, 6.♗b5

1.d4 f5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.♗g5! d5 4.♗xf6 exf6 5.e3



Position after: 5.e3

This positional approach is the old main line, but it seems that Black has already proved the solidity of his system, and it doesn't enjoy the favor of theory anymore.

5...♗e6!

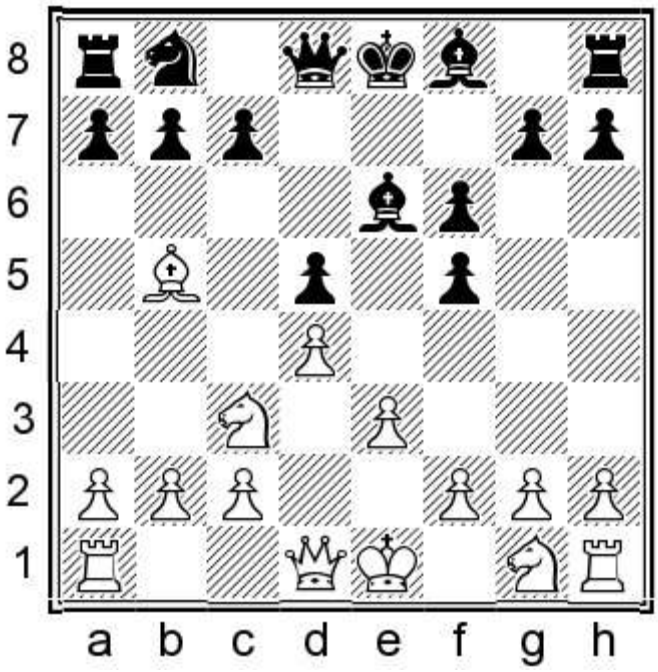
The most played move and also the most logical. It's pretty certain that the light-squared bishop will go to e6, whereas we are not so sure about the other pieces.

Also, don't be afraid: it won't be so easy for White to place a strong knight on f4, chasing this bishop and ruling the board.

6.♘ge2

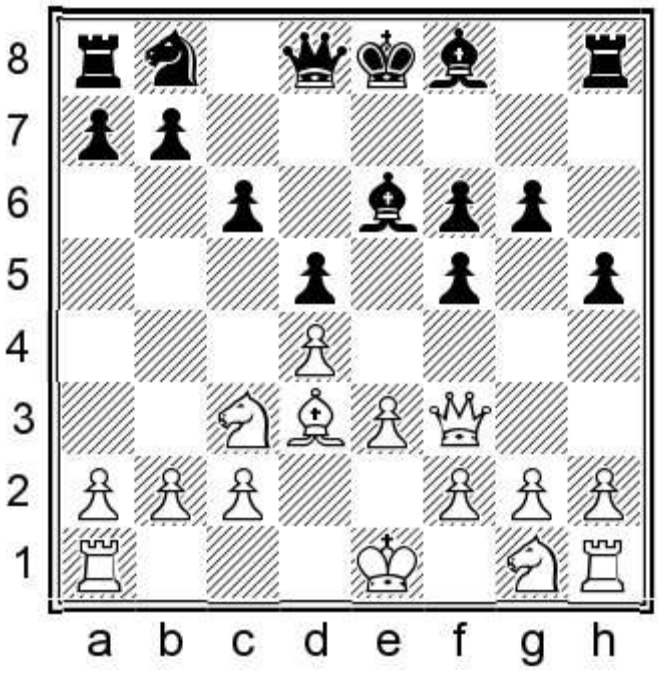
This logical move can be met in two different ways, depending on your fighting mood.

6.♗b5+



Position after: 6.♗b5+

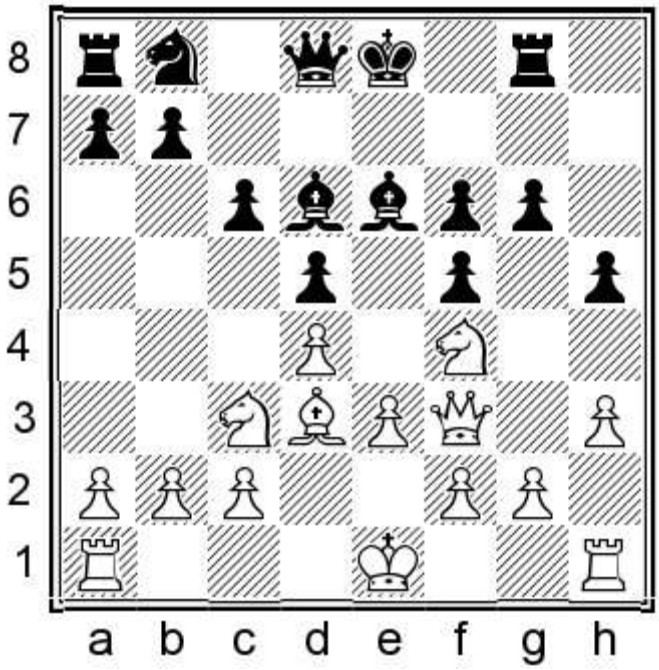
This has been tried a few times recently. White agrees to give up a tempo in order to prevent ...♘c6, as in the main line. 6...c6 [6...♘c6?! 7.♗xc6+ bxc6 8.♘a4!↑ White has good chances of getting two strong knights in this closed position.] 7.♗d3 g6 8.♕f3 h5!?



Position after: 8...h5!?

This is directed against White's plan of pushing g2−g4. 9.h3 [9.♘ge2 ♘d7 10.♘f4 ♗f7 We have transposed into a better version of the 6.♘ge2 line, with the pawn on h2 instead of h4.] 9...♖g8!

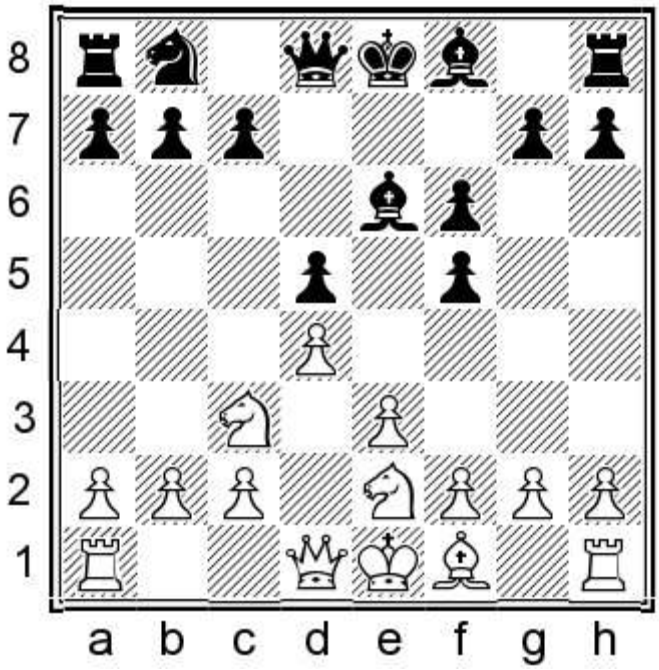
Protecting the g6-pawn is necessary. 10.♘ge2 ♗d6 11.♘f4



Position after: 11.♘f4

This was played in the game Ma, Q (2645) – Yu, Y (2760), China 2018, ½-½ (47). I would now prefer to keep the bishop pair by playing 11...♗f7!N 12.g4!? hxg4 13.hxg4 fxg4 14.♕xg4 f5 15.♕g2 ♘d7 16.0-0-0 ♕f6⇄ with mutual chances.

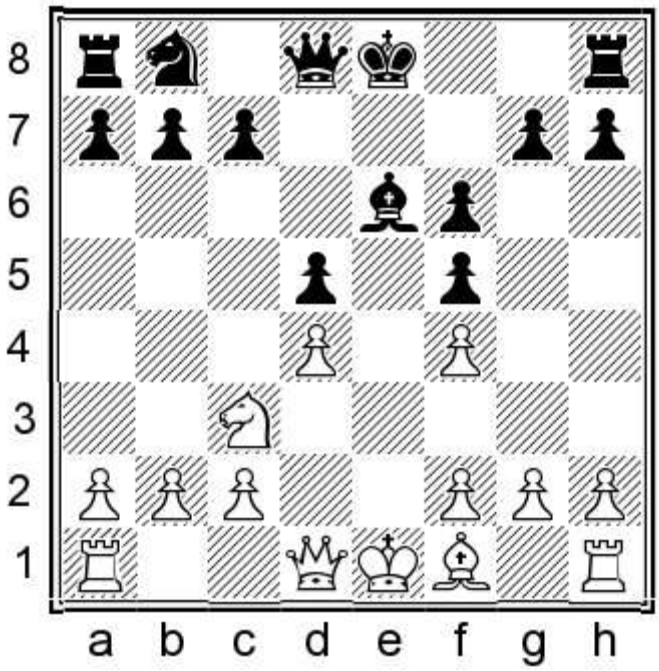
Back to 6.♘ge2.



Position after: 6.♘ge2

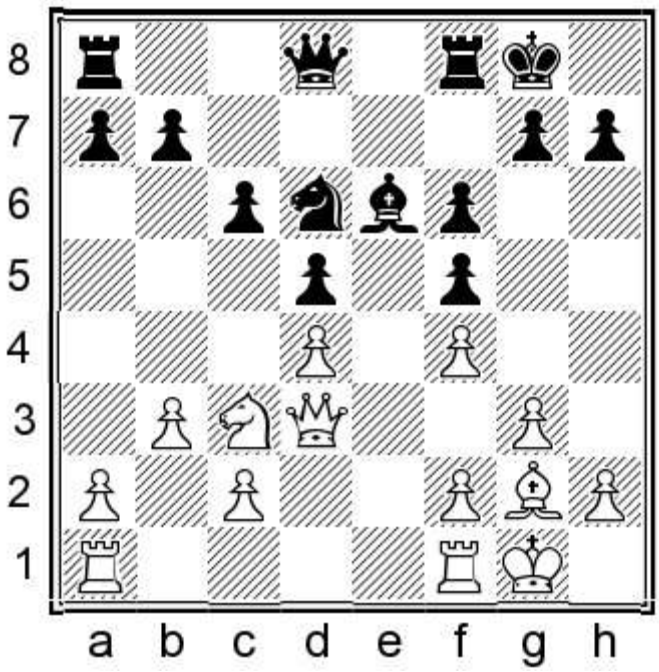
6...c6!?

This fighting approach has been played by the Dutch specialist Vladimir Malaniuk, quickly reaching a comfortable game. 6...♗d6 is a more down-to-earth decision. Black decides to eliminate the knight as soon as it reaches f4. This is less ambitious, but quite efficient. 7.♘f4 ♗xf4 8.exf4



Position after: 8.exf4

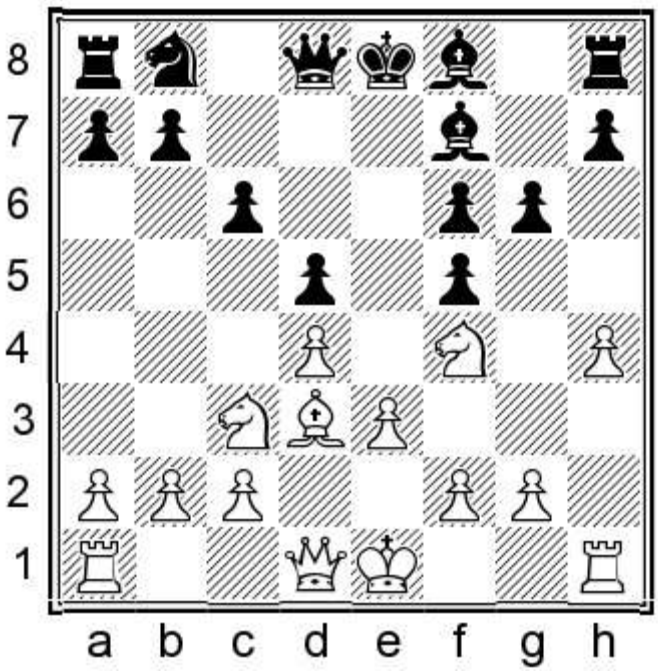
Black is obviously slightly worse due to his bad bishop, but it's really hard for White to create anything, as his own bishop is not doing great either. For instance a game between two strong GMs continued 8...c6 9.g3 ♘d7 10.♗g2 ♘b6 11.0-0 0-0 12.♕d3 ♘c4 13.b3 ♘d6=



Position after: 13...♘d6=

when perhaps White is symbolically better. Even if he didn't deserve to, White went on to lose in Granda Zuniga, J (2646) – L'Ami, E (2605), Reykjavik 2015, 0-1 (81).

7.♘f4 ♗f7 8.♗d3 g6 9.h4



Position after: 9.h4

9...h5!

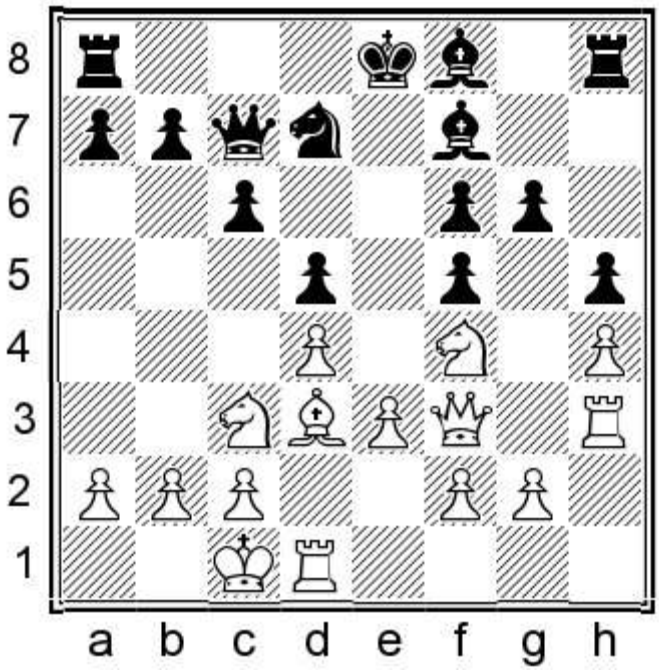
Black shouldn't be too scared of the g6-weakness. The only way to attack it is to put a heavy piece on g3, when we could play either ...♗d6, pinning the knight, or ...♖g8.

9...♘d7 10.h5 Allowing this advance is also possible, but not necessary, and doing so justifies White's play. 10...♖g8 11.♕f3 ♗d6 12.0-0-0 ♕e7 13.hxg6 hxg6 14.♖h7↑ White has some initiative, with ♘fxd5 coming, for example.

10.♕f3?!

According to the computer this move is not great, but it's quite logical for a human player.

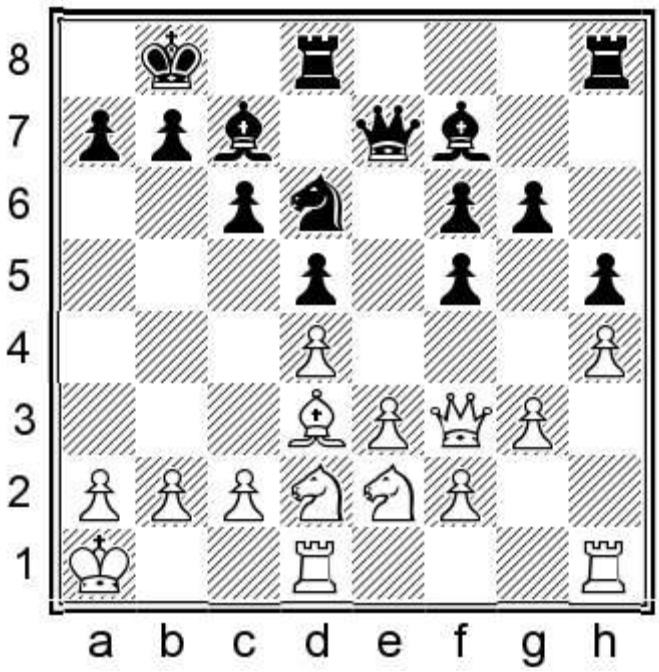
10...♘d7 11.0-0-0 ♕c7 12.♖h3



Position after: 12.♖h3

As we said, this idea is going to fail.

12...0-0-0 13.♖g3 ♖h6!? 14.♘fe2 ♗d6 15.♖h3 ♔b8 16.♖hh1 ♖hh8 17.♔b1 ♘b6 18.g3 ♕e7 19.♔a1 ♗c7 20.♘b1 ♘c8 21.♘d2 ♘d6



Position after: 21...♘d6

Black has achieved the first part of his plan, whereas White hasn't been able to come up with an

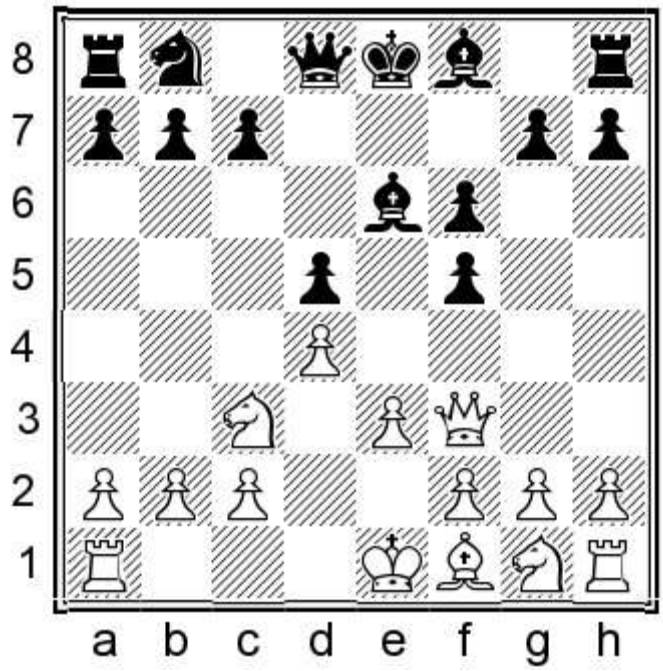
effective one.

22.♖c1 ♘e4∓

Jegorovas, A (2265) – Malaniuk, V (2471), Kaunas 2016, ½-½ (56).

f) 2...♘f6 3.♗g5 d5 4.♗xf6 exf6 5.e3 ♗e6 6.♕f3

1.d4 f5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.♗g5! d5 4.♗xf6 exf6 5.e3 ♗e6! 6.♕f3!?



Position after: 6.♕f3!?

This is more or less a waiting move. White waits until the knight is developed in order to pin it if possible.

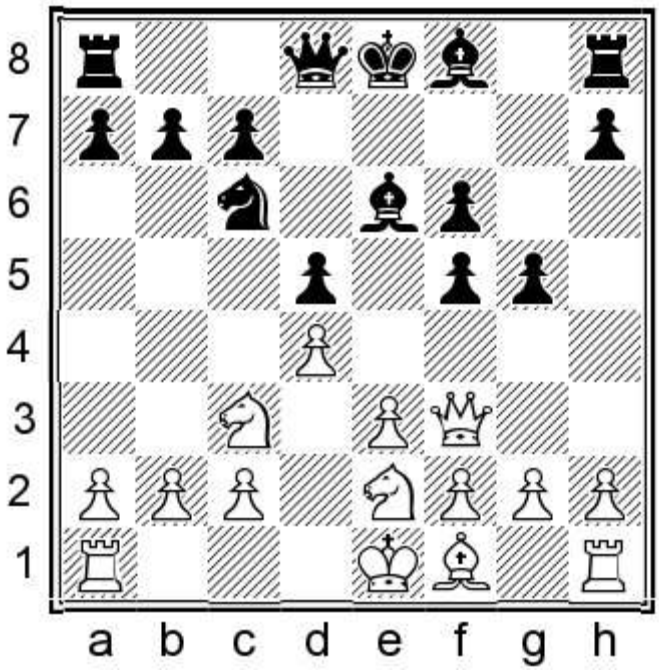
6...♘c6

Still, as there is no other obvious useful move, I accept being pinned!

7.♗b5!?

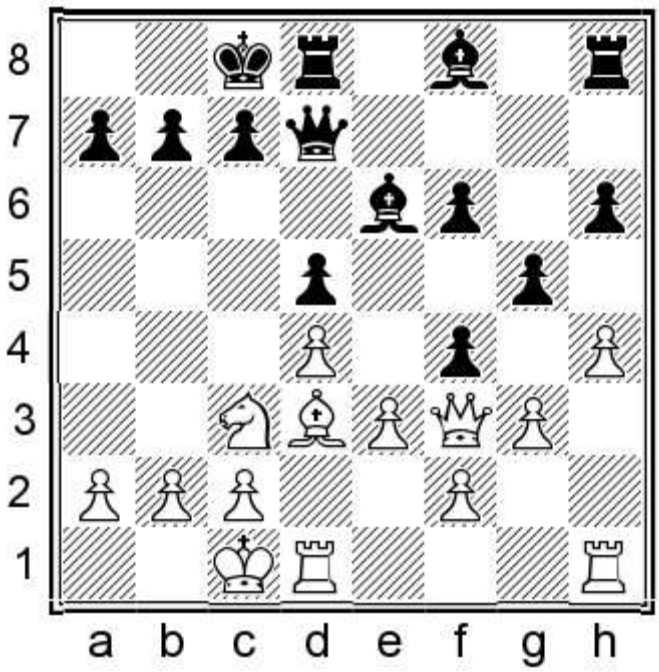
This is why White started with 6.♕f3, so it's logical to consider it the main line.

A) 7.♘ge2 Compared to the 6.♘ge2 line, the situation has changed a little. Now the queen on f3 seems a bit exposed, so we can try to block White's pieces by playing 7...g5!?N.



Position after: 7...g5!?N

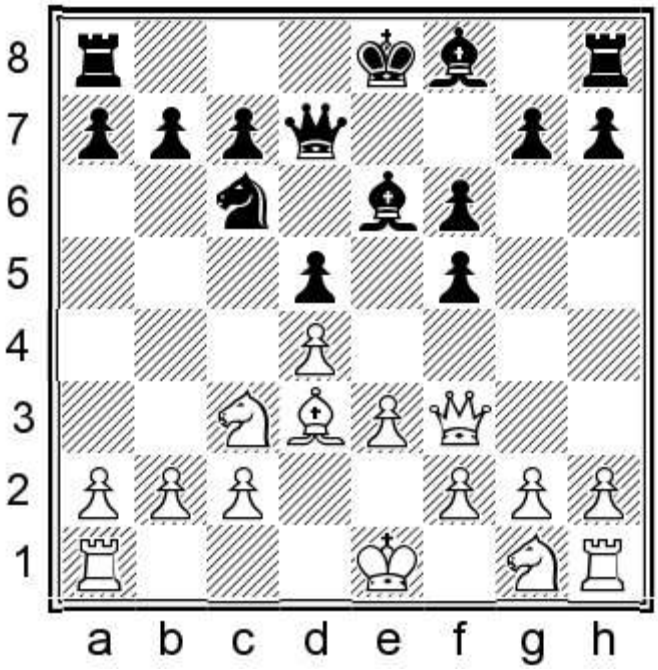
In the previous games, Black had tolerated the knight on f4, but it's not necessary. 8.h4 [8.♘g3 ♕d7 9.♗d3?! The pawn is not in immediate danger because of the strong 9...♘b4!∓. The f5-pawn is tactically untouchable.] 8...h6 9.g3 ♕d7 10.♘c1 [10.0-0-0 0-0-0 11.♔b1 ♔b8 12.♘c1 ♘a5↑ I prefer Black's prospects on the queenside.] 10...0-0-0 11.♘d3 ♘b4! 12.0-0-0 ♘xd3+ 13.♗xd3 f4!



Position after: 13...f4!

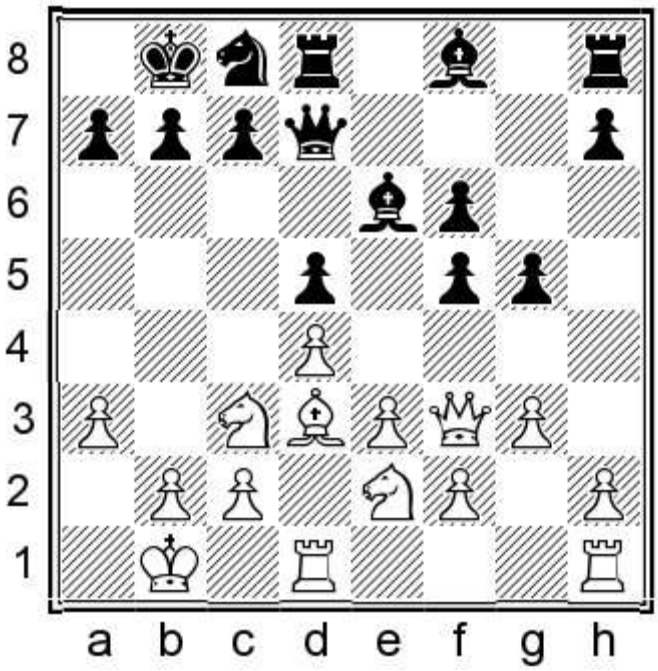
This underlines the problems of having the queen somewhat stuck on f3! Black frees himself under favorable circumstances. 14.exf4 ♗g4 15.♕e3 ♗xd1 16.♘xd1 ♖g8∓

B) 7.♗d3 ♕d7!?



Position after: 7...♕d7!?

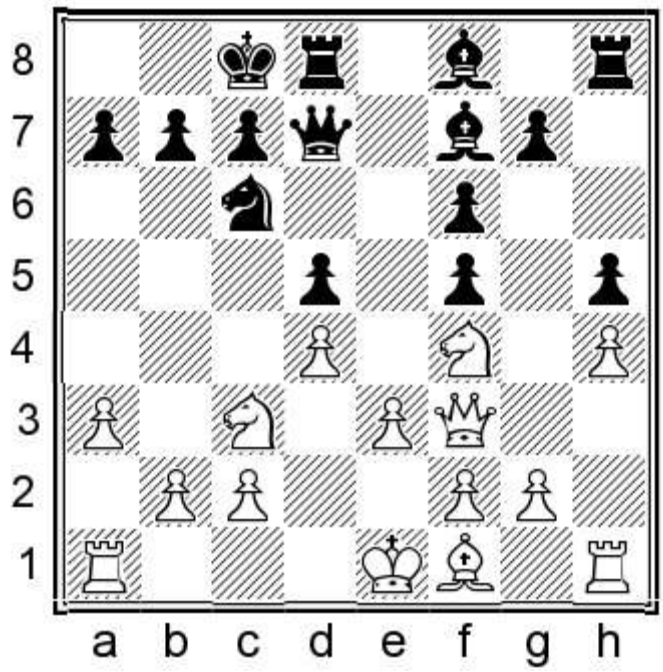
8.a3 A necessary loss of time. [8.♘ge2 ♘b4=] 8...0-0-0 9.♘ge2 g5! 10.0-0-0 [10.♘g3? White's play is too naive. Obviously this fails tactically. 10...f4! 11.exf4 ♘xd4 12.♕e3 ♘xc2+! 13.♗xc2 d4∓] 10...♔b8!? 11.g3 [11.h3 h5! White starts wondering why he committed his queen to f3! 12.♘g3? g4! 13.♕e2 f4!∓] 11...♘e7!? 12.♔b1 ♘c8!



Position after: 12...♘c8!

We have already seen this strong maneuver which clearly gives Black easier play. 13.♘c1 ♘d6∓

C) 7.h4 Considering the problems encountered by the queen on f3 in the previous line, it is tempting for White to secure its position. 7...♕d7 8.♘h3 0-0-0 9.a3 h5! 10.♘f4 ♗f7=



Position after: 10...♗f7=

We have already considered this kind of position (in the 6.♘ge2 line for instance). Black easily secures his kingside, then tries to bring the knight to e4 via e7–c8–d6.

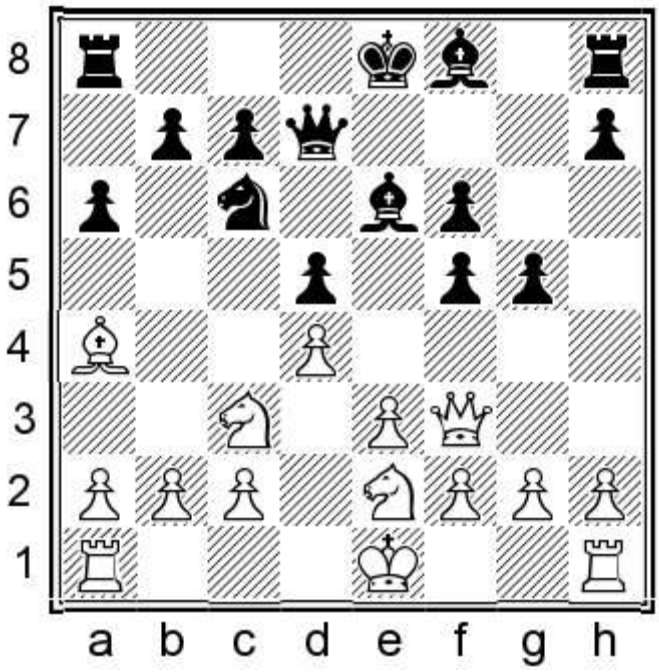
7...♕d7!?

Analysis indicates that 7...♕d6 is probably as good, but it seems simpler to remember to always put the queen on d7.

8.♘ge2 a6 9.♗a4

9.♗xc6 ♕xc6 10.♘f4 ♗b4! 11.♘xe6 ♕xe6 12.0-0 ♗xc3 13.bxc3 b5!=

9...g5!



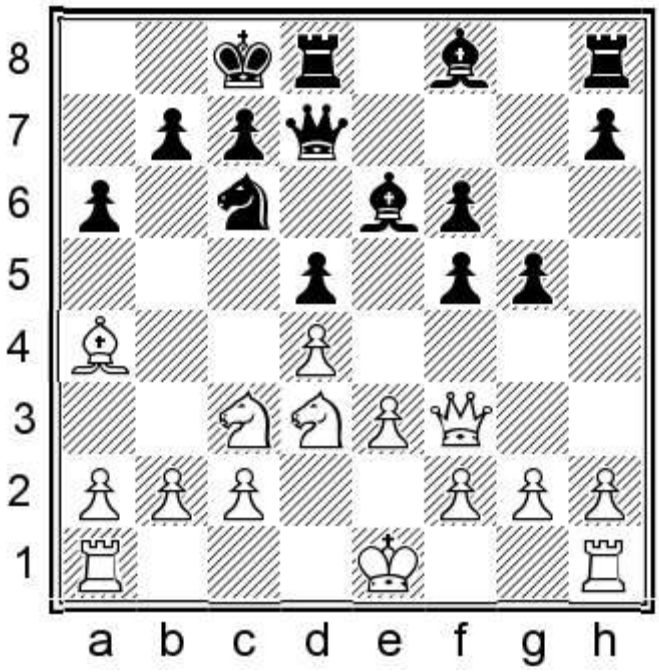
Position after: 9...g5!

Stopping the knight from coming to f4. We have already met this idea in the 7.♘ge2 line, to which it is very similar.

10.♘c1

10.h4 contains no threat at all, so we can just play on the other side, e.g. 10...0-0-0 11.0-0-0 ♔b8 12.♔b1 b5! 13.♗b3 ♘a5↑

10...0-0-0 11.♘d3

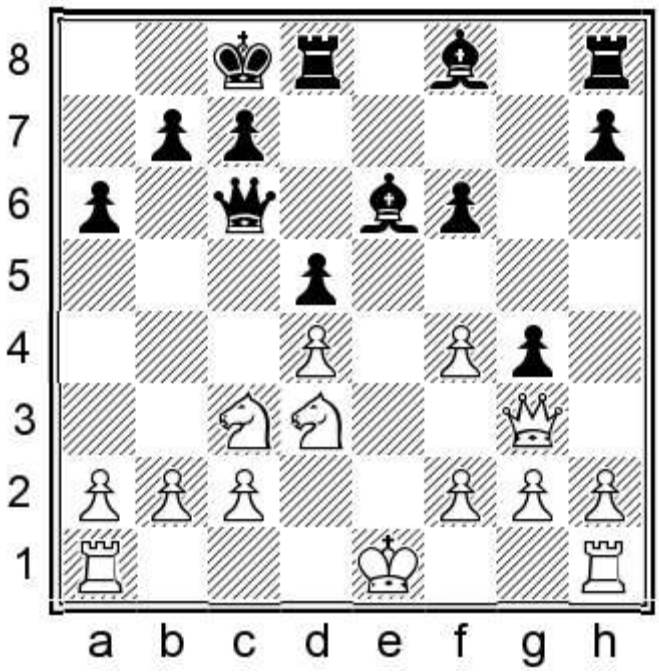


Position after: 11.♘d3

It seems smart for White to start with this maneuver before playing 0-0-0, when the knight's route would be obstructed by the king.

11...b5!

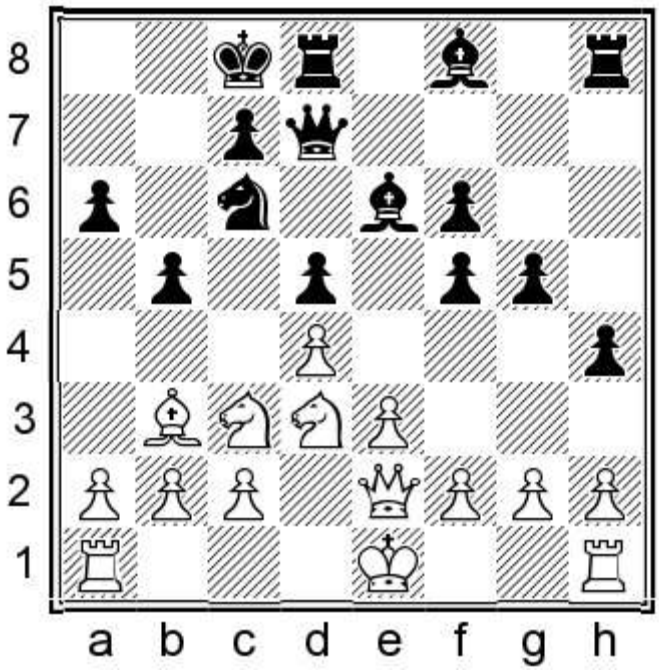
11...f4 I actually reached this position as White a few years ago, but I didn't really remember the game! Probably my opponent rushed a bit with this advance, but we will see that it could also have been very interesting for Black. 12.♗xc6 ♕xc6 13.exf4 g4 14.♕g3



Position after: 14.♕g3

14...♕c4?! [14...♗f5! 15.0-0-0 a5→ The pawn runs to a3 in order to weaken my castled position, leading to a dangerous attack.] 15.0-0-0 ♕xd4 16.♖he1= ♗f5? Play would have been balanced after 16...♕b6, but my opponent missed an easy tactical idea: 17.♘e5! ♕b4 18.♘f7 ♗d6 19.♘xd5!+– 1-0 (24) Demuth, A (2541) – Grimberg, G (2281), Saint Quentin 2015.

12.♗b3 h5 13.♕e2 h4↑

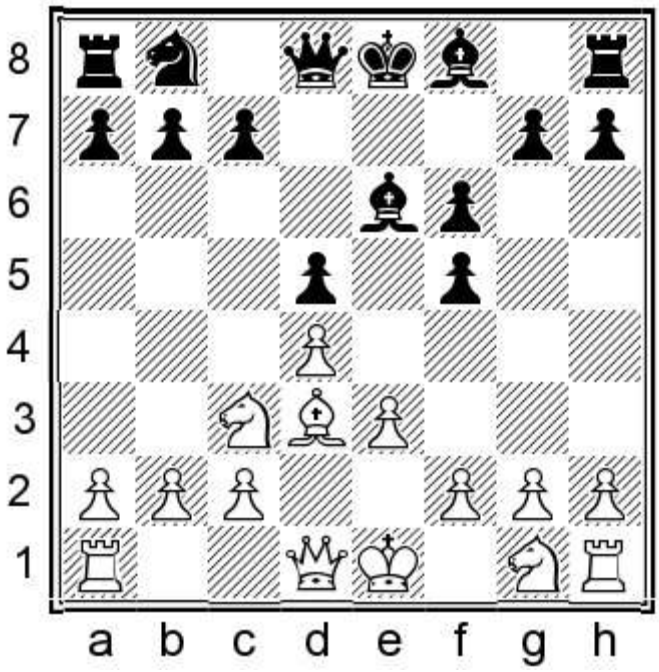


Position after: 13...h4↑

I'm not sure where White should castle as his king can end up in trouble on both sides! Black has the initiative.

g) 2...♘f6 3.♗g5 d5 4.♗xf6 exf6 5.e3 ♗e6 6.♗d3

1.d4 f5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.♗g5! d5 4.♗xf6 exf6 5.e3 ♗e6! 6.♗d3



Position after: 6.♗d3

6...♘c6!? 7.♘ge2

A) 7.♕f3 – see 6.♕f3 ♘c6 7.♗d3.

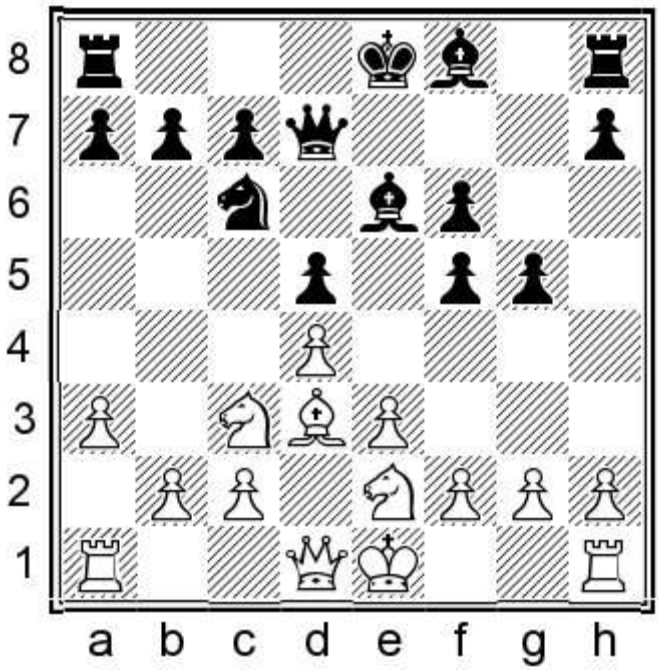
B) 7.a3 ♕d7 8.♘ge2 – see 7.♘ge2. [8.♕f3 has already been analyzed via 6.♕f3 ♘c6 7.♗d3 ♕d7 8.a3.]

7...♕d7 8.a3

8.♘f4 ♗f7 9.a3 ♘e7!? 10.♕f3 h5 11.h4 0-0-0 12.♕g3 g6= Let's reiterate that Black has no problems at all on g6, and will bring his knight to e4 via c8 and d6.

8...g5!?

Black has a lot of moves at his disposal, but this is my preference. First, it stops ♘f4, the obvious continuation.

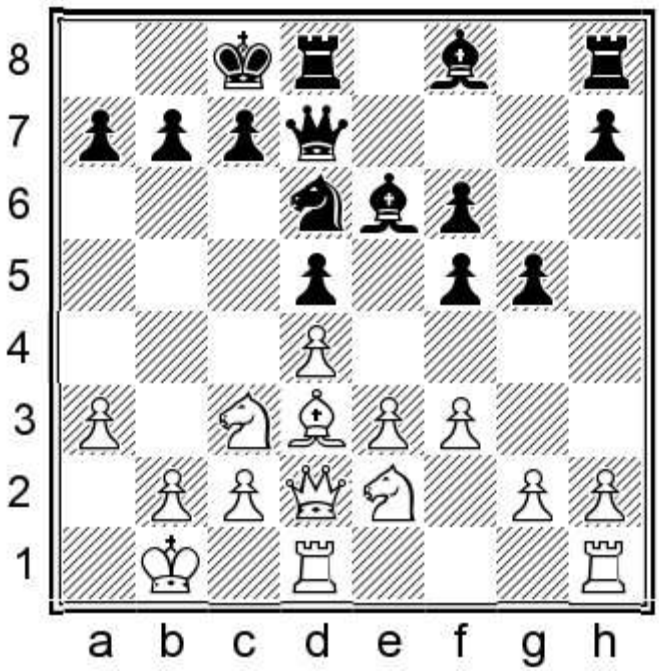


Position after: 8...g5!?

Second, it's a useful waiting move. Black shouldn't rush with queenside castling, because with 8.a3, White not only prevents ...♗b4 but may also be intending to play b4 and ♘a4 to start an attack on the queenside. My plan is to castle only once White has castled queenside too.

9.f4!?

9.♕d2 ♘e7!? 10.0-0-0 ♘c8 11.♔b1 ♘d6 12.f3 0-0-0



Position after: 12...0-0-0

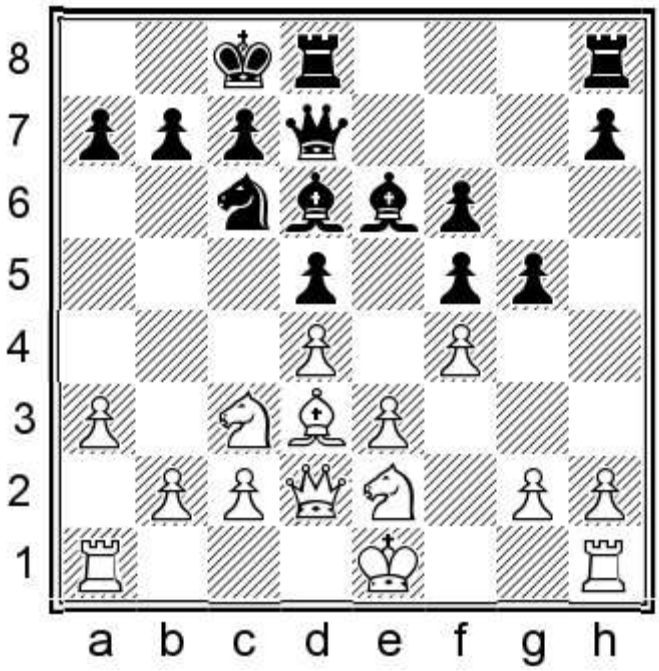
13.e4!? fxe4 14.fxe4 dxe4 15.♘xe4 ♘xe4 16.♗xe4 ♔b8= The position is more or less balanced, but I think Black can be satisfied with the opening of the position because of his bishop pair.

9...♘e7!?N

9...♗d6 10.♕d2 [10.fxg5 fxg5 11.h4 gxh4 12.♖xh4 0-0-0 13.♕d2 ♖dg8 14.♘f4 ♖g4=]

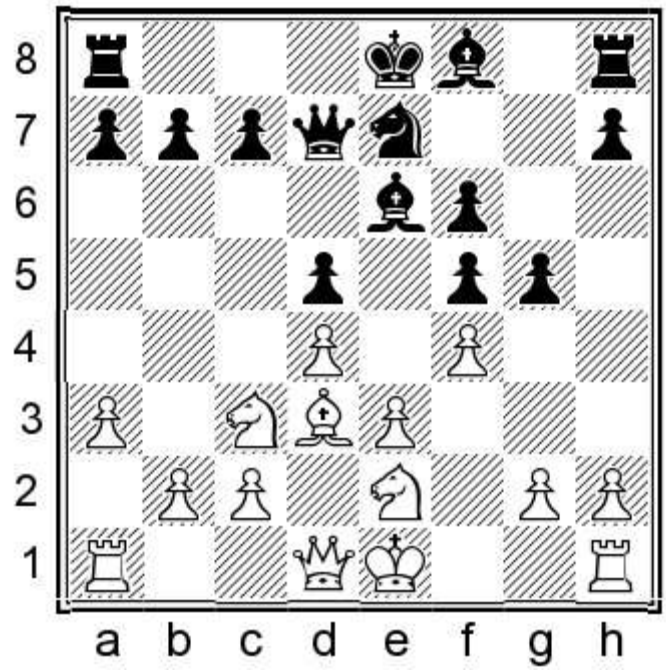
A) 10...h6 I am not fond of the way Nakamura treated the position. He closed the kingside very early, then had to hold the balance on the other side, but it wasn't easy. 11.0-0 g4?! 12.♖fc1 a6 13.♘d1 ♘e7 14.b3 ♔f7 15.c4 c6 16.c5 ♗c7 17.b4± with an interesting game which finally ended in a draw, Iturrizaga Bonelli, E (2627) – Nakamura, H (2778), Istanbul 2012, ½-½ (30).

B) 10...0-0-0



Position after: 10...0-0-0

This looks superior, but the game is objectively balanced. 11.0-0-0 ♖hg8 [11...♘e7 12.♘b5 ♔b8 13.♘xd6 ♕xd6] 12.g3 ♔b8 This closed position seems balanced. 13.♘a4 ♘b4! 14.axb4 ♕xa4 15.c3 ♖g7=



Position after: 9...♘e7!?N

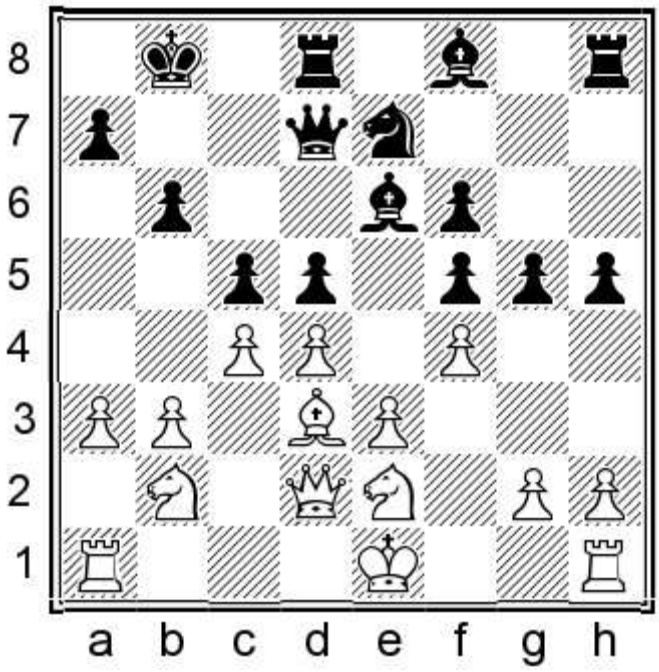
10.♕d2

10.b3 ♘c8 11.♘a4 b6 12.c4 ♘d6⇄

10...0-0-0 11.b3

This is necessary if White intends ♘a4.

11...♔b8 12.♘a4 b6 13.♘b2 h5 14.c4 c5!⇄

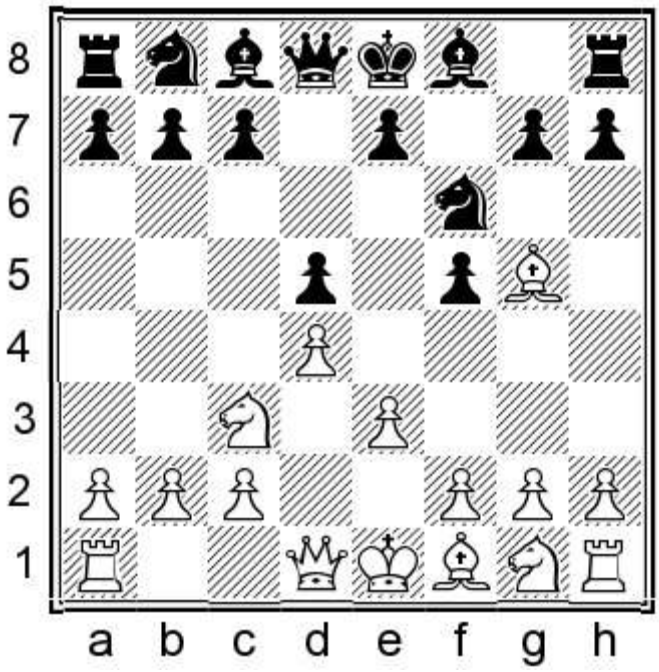


Position after: 14...c5!⇄

The fight is raging across the whole board, but Black is definitely doing fine.

h) 2...♘f6 3.♗g5 d5 4.e3 e6 5.--, 5.♘f3 5...--, 5...♗e7 6.--

1.d4 f5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.♗g5! d5 4.e3



Position after: 4.e3

Recently this move has emerged as the main line, probably because White wasn't achieving much in the 4.♗xf6 variation.

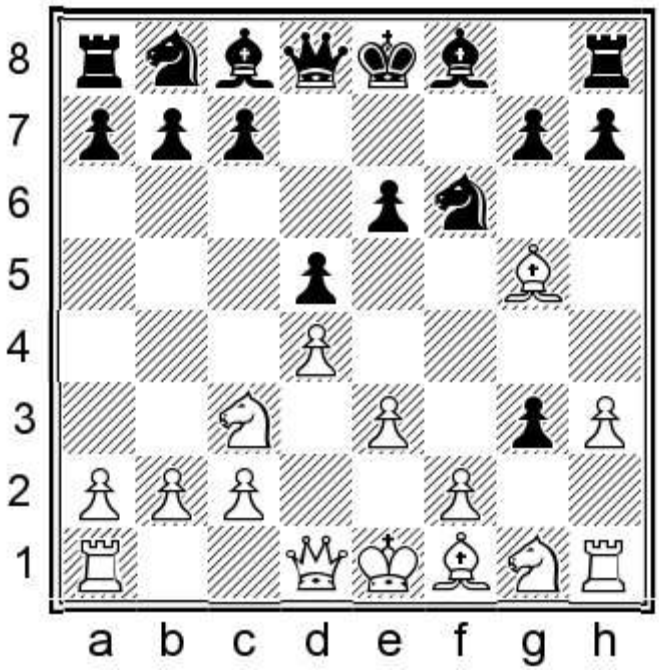
He actually just wants to fight against a Stonewall system, claiming that his pieces are quite well placed to do so.

4...e6

4...♗e6!? is an interesting possibility which has been played a couple of times by super-GM Ian Nepomniachtchi. Despite being fully playable, I find it too original.

5.♘f3

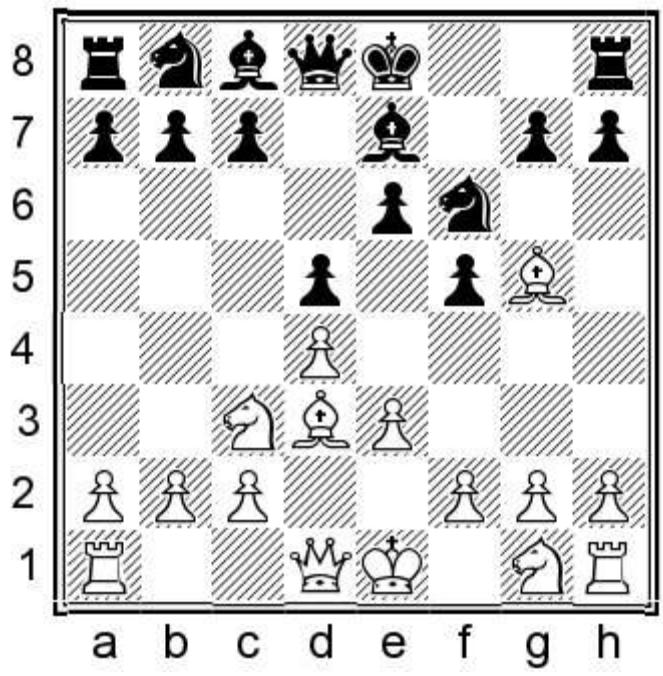
A) 5.g4 This move has been tried a few times, but Black has a natural reaction that works well: 5...fxg4 6.h3 g3!



Position after: 6...g3!

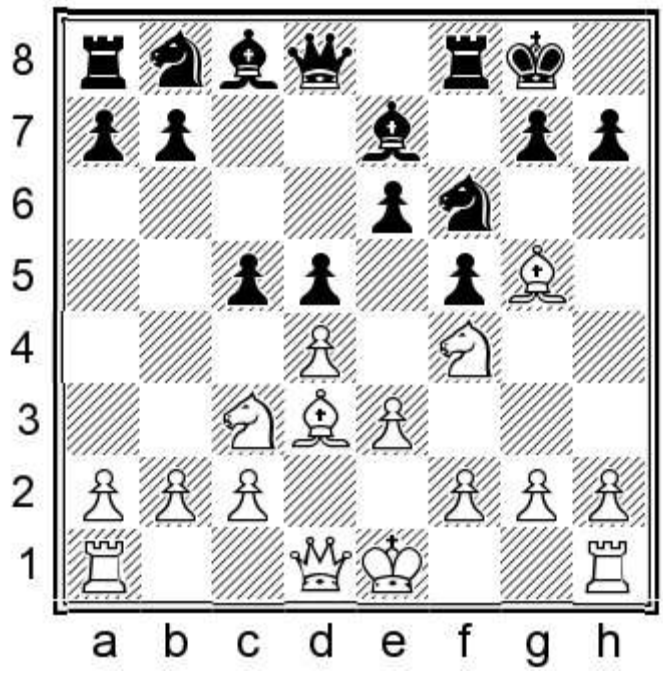
Giving the pawn back in order to deprive White of potentially dangerous play on the h-file. 7.fxg3 ♗d6 8.♘ge2 0-0 9.♕d2 c5 10.0-0-0 ♘c6⇄ With opposite side castling the battle is always very tense and murky, but I think Black is doing fine so far.

B) 5.♗d3 ♗e7



Position after: 5...♗e7

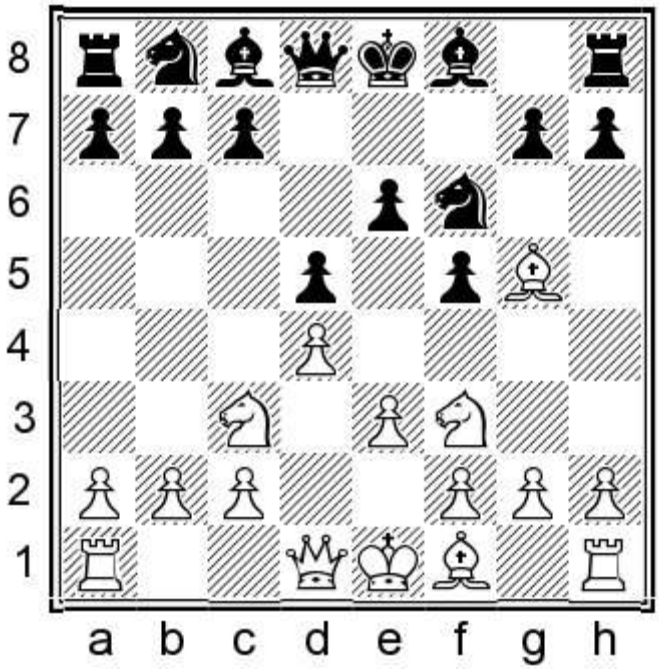
6.♘ge2 There is no reason to prefer putting the knight here as the important square is e5, and it's usually the other knight that comes to e2. [6.♘f3 – see the main line] 6...0-0 7.♘f4 This position was reached in the high level game Zhou, W (2635) – Yu, Y (2738), China 2016, ½-½ (31), but I think Black could easily have been better by playing 7...c5!



Position after: 7...c5!

8.0-0 ♘c6 9.dxc5 ♗xc5 10.♘h5 ♗e7 11.♘xf6+ ♗xf6 12.♗xf6 ♕xf6∓

Back to 5.♘f3.



Position after: 5.♘f3

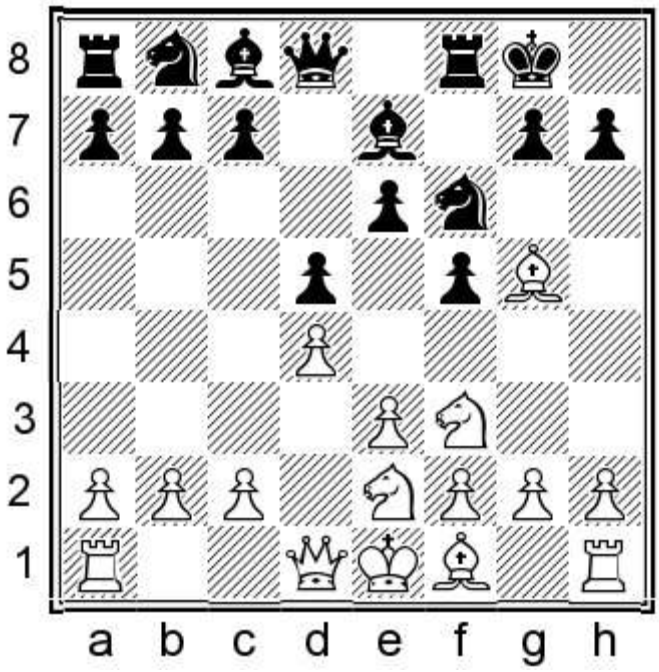
5...♗e7!?

5...a6 This was my first idea. It's less played, but has scored well for White who, unfortunately, seems to have at least one very promising continuation: 6.g4!? fxg4 7.♘e5 ♗e7 8.h3 g3 9.f4! White secures his center and will take the pawn later, but with the rook! 9...0-0 10.♖g1± 1-0 (18) Ovsejevitsch, S (2602) – Nguyen, P (2397), Ceske Budejovice 2018.

6.♗d3!

White should finish his development and allow his knight the possibility of going to e2. White has tried a couple of other knight moves, but in both cases it seems too early to make this kind of decision.

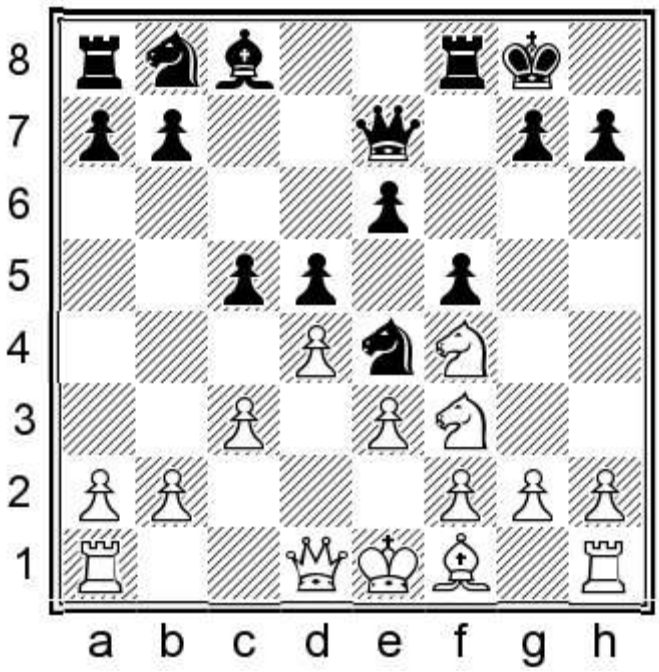
A) 6.♘e2 0-0



Position after: 6...0-0

A1) 7.c4N 7...c5! White is still far from castling, so we should punish him! 8.dxc5 ♘a6 9.♘c3 [9.cxd5 ♘xd5 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.♘ed4 ♘xc5 12.♗c4 ♘b6 13.♗b3 ♔h8 14.0-0 e5↑] 9...♘xc5 10.cxd5 ♘ce4! 11.dxe6 ♗xe6 12.♕xd8 ♖fxd8↑

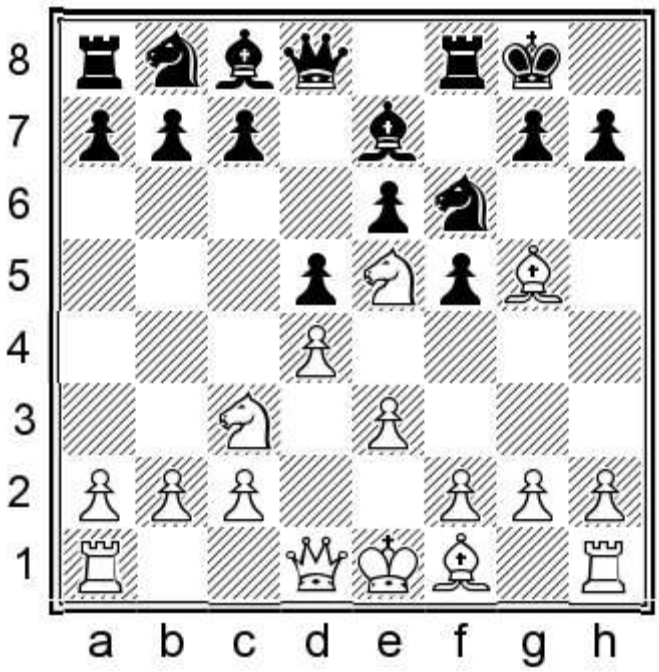
A2) 7.♘f4 ♘e4 8.♗xe7 [8.h4N Computers like this move, but it's far from obvious from a human point of view. It's true that we can't play ...h6 because of the g6-square, but White will sooner or later have to castle, probably short, so h4 will prove to be a weakness. 8...c5 9.♗e2 ♘c6 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.0-0 ♖d8⇄] 8...♕xe7 9.c3 c5



Position after: 9...c5

White didn’t get much out of placing his knight early on f4, and has also lost the possibility of putting it on d4, so it seems that this move order is a fail. 10.♗d3 c4 11.♗c2 b5 12.0-0 ♘c6 13.a3 a5↑

B) 6.♘e5 I think that this move is dubious. 6...0-0

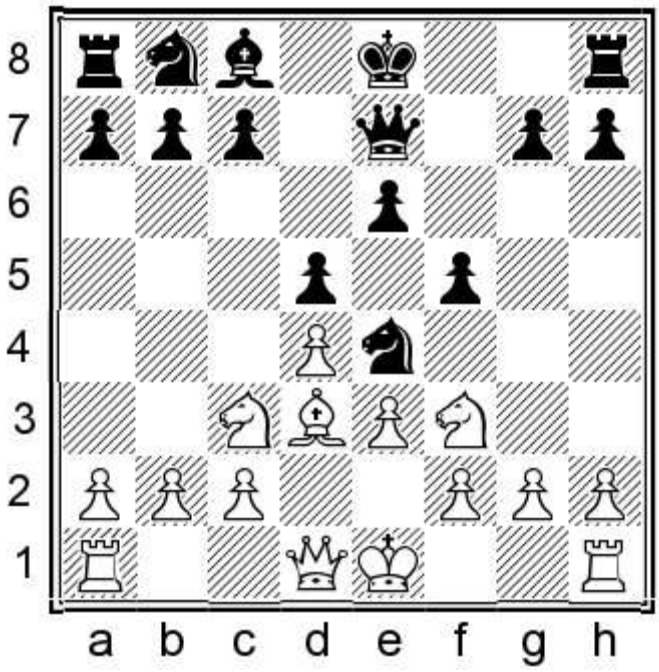


Position after: 6...0-0

7.♗d3 [7.♗e2 c5 8.0-0 ♘c6 9.f4 ♗d7! 10.♕d2 ♗e8 11.♖ad1 ♖c8∓ I don’t see many perspectives for White here. Both players have employed a Stonewall set-up, but Black’s simply seems better.] 7...c5 8.0-0 ♘c6! 9.♘xc6 bxc6 10.♘a4 cxd4 11.exd4 ♗d6∓ Black should make sure that the dark squares never become a problem, but right now it doesn’t seem dangerous. He will continue with ...♕c7, threatening to both move the f6-knight and grab h2.

6...0-0

6...♘e4!? If you are convinced that 7...♘e4 in the main line is a decent way to handle the opening, you can start with this move. It will merely transpose. 7.♗xe7 ♕xe7

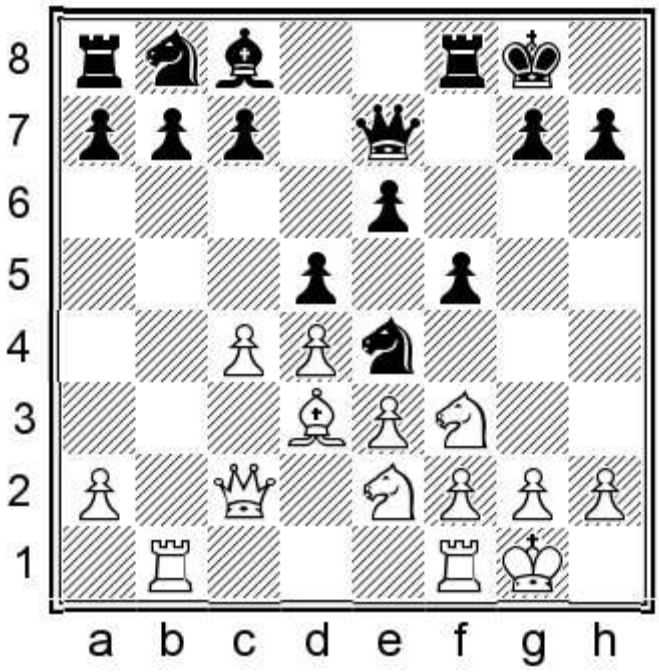


Position after: 7...♕xe7

White may even find himself in trouble here if he doesn't wish to allow ...♘xc3.

A) 8.0-0 0-0 – see the main line. [8...♘xc3?! is not a real threat, because White will easily trade at least one of his doubled c-pawns. 9.bxc3 0-0 10.c4±]

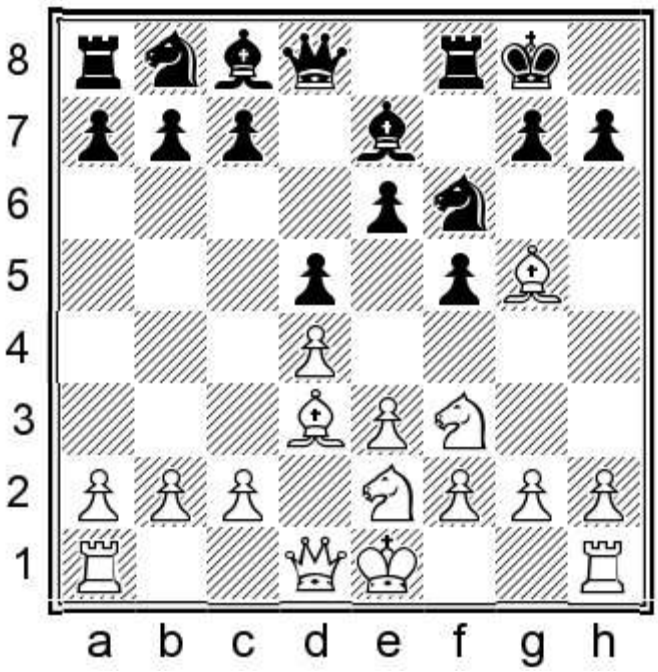
B) 8.♘e2 ♕b4+! This can come as an annoying surprise. Black simply grabs the b2-pawn. White will have to show compensation, but it's not that easy. 9.c3 ♕xb2 10.0-0 0-0 11.c4 ♕b4 12.♕c2 ♕e7 13.♖ab1



Position after: 13.♖ab1

13...a5! Taking space. 14.cxd5 exd5 15.♖fc1 c6 16.♘e5 ♘d7∓ Black is solid and easily keeps his extra pawn. Of course White has long-term compensation, but the pressure is not that great.

7.♘e2



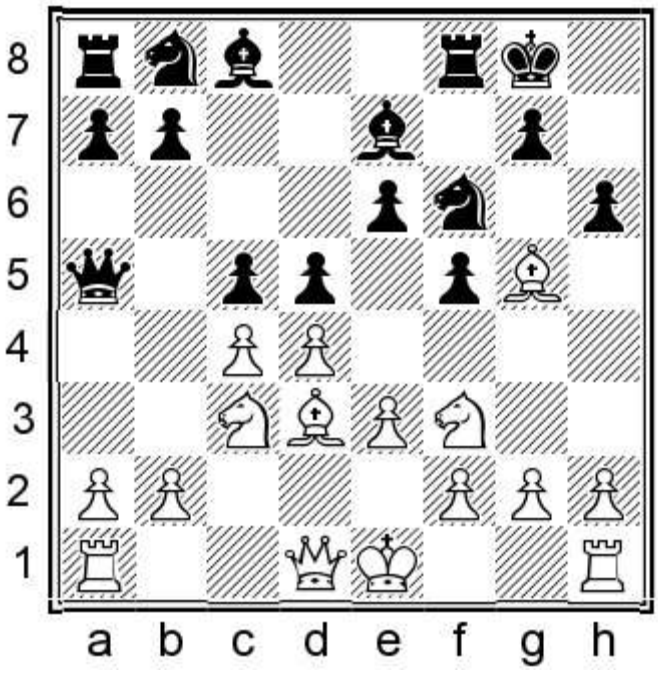
Position after: 7.♘e2

Some players have tried to speed up c2−c4, but it doesn't make much difference as the move will hardly be possible without castling first.

7...♘e4

7...c5!? I tried this move against the strong Israeli GM Tamir Nabaty.

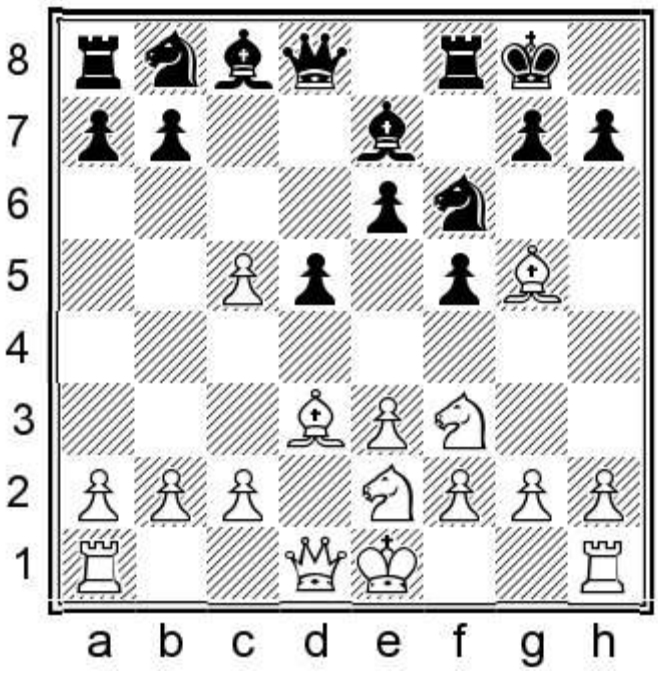
A) 8.c4 ♕a5+! [8...b5!? 9.cxb5 c4 10.♗c2 a6⩱ in the spirit of the Benko Gambit is also very interesting.] 9.♘c3 h6!



Position after: 9...h6!

An important move, in order to put more pressure on d4. 10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.0-0 dxc4 12.♗xc4 ♘c6! 13.dxc5 ♕xc5 14.♕b3 ♕e7= Play is balanced. White can't really take advantage of our pawn on f5, which can sometimes prove to be a weakness, but not in this case.

B) 8.dxc5!

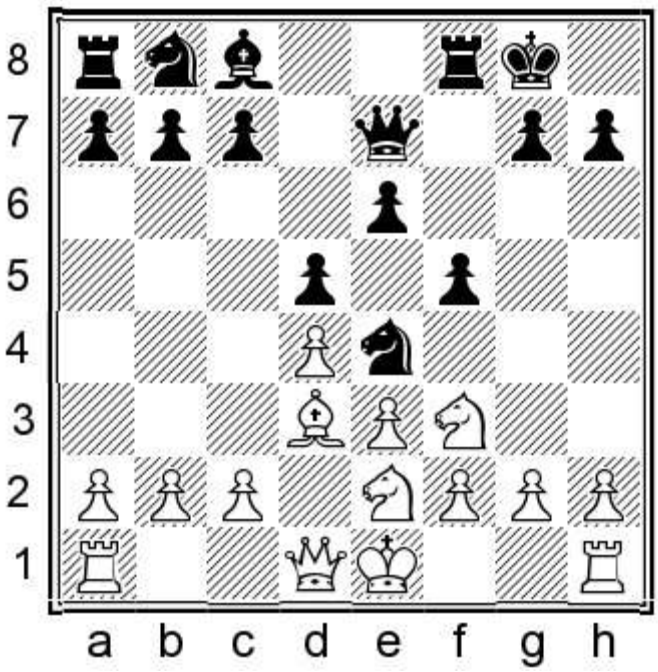


Position after: 8.dxc5!

8...♕a5+ 9.c3 ♕xc5 10.0-0 ♘c6 11.♘ed4 ♘e4 12.♗xe7 ♕xe7 13.c4! ♘xd4 14.exd4 dxc4 15.♗xc4±

After a series of good moves, White has managed to keep a small edge. The game Nabaty, T (2644) – Demuth, A (2548), Teplice 2017 finally ended in a draw, ½-½ (36).

8.♗xe7 ♕xe7



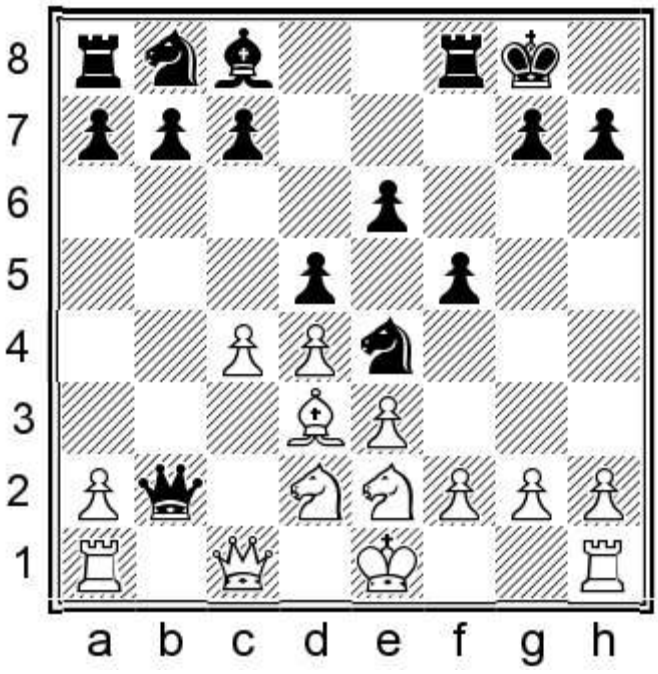
Position after: 8...♕xe7

9.a3

This may be an improvement over the main line; the idea is quite sophisticated.

A) 9.0-0 This most logical move transposes into the main line, seen in the next subchapter.

B) 9.c4?! is too early: 9...♕b4+ 10.♘d2 [10.♔f1?! dxc4! 11.♗xe4 fxe4 12.♘d2 ♘c6 13.♘xe4 ♕xb2∓] 10...♕xb2 11.♕c1



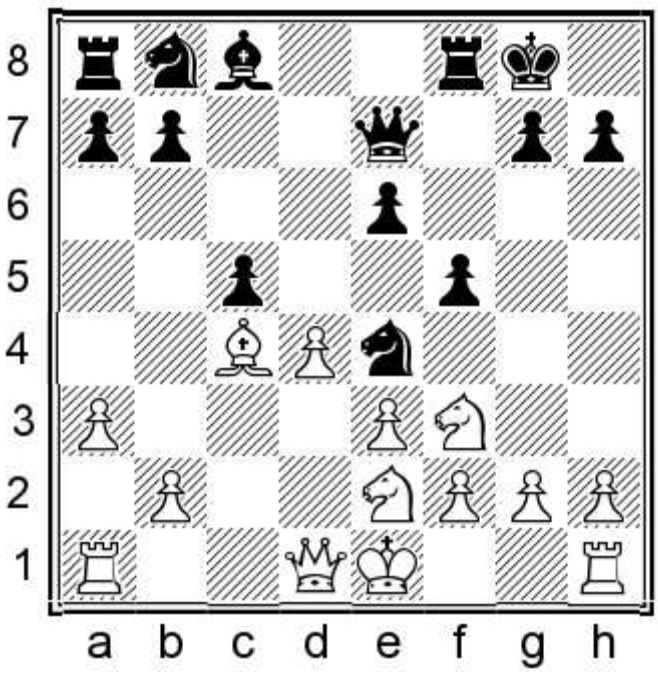
Position after: 11.♕c1

It seems that White has nothing better than this sad move. We have several ways to reach a good position, e.g. 11...♕b4! 12.f3 ♘xd2 13.♕xd2 ♕d6∓. We could have traded queens, but it's absolutely fine to keep them on the board too.

9...b6!?

I prefer to change my mind and take advantage of the fact that 9.a3 wasn't such a useful move.

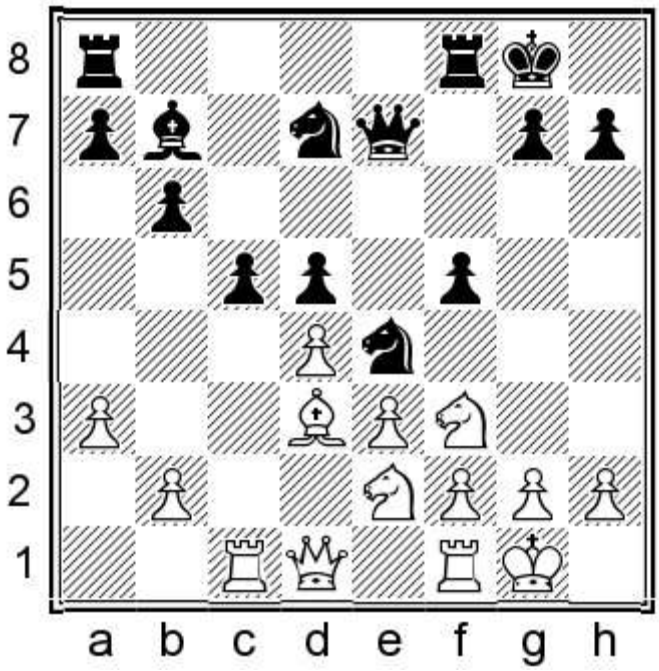
9...c5?! Let's see what might be wrong with this move: 10.c4 dxc4 11.♗xc4



Position after: 11.♗xc4

11...♘d6?! The wrong idea, as White has already played a2−a3. [11...♘c6 12.dxc5 ♕xc5 13.♖c1 ♕e7 14.0-0±] 12.♗a2! This is a huge improvement over the main line (next subchapter). 12...c4 won't gain a tempo on the bishop, and it has already reached a good square in order to get rid of the c4-pawn. 12...c4 13.b3! b5 14.bxc4 ♘xc4 15.0-0±

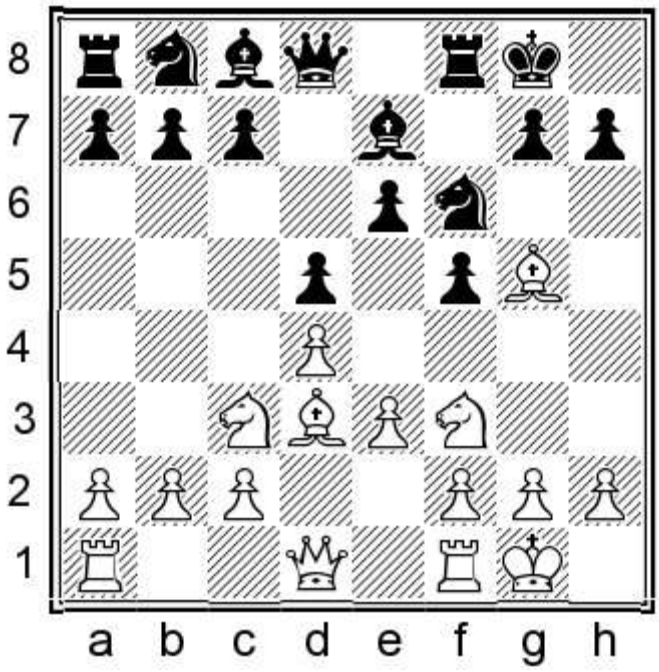
10.0-0 ♗b7 11.c4 ♘d7 12.cxd5 exd5 13.♖c1 c5!⇄



Position after: 13...c5!⇄

i) 2...♘f6 3.♗g5 d5 4.e3 e6 5.♘f3 ♗e7 6.♗d3 0-0 7.0-0 ♘e4

1.d4 f5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.♗g5! d5 4.e3 e6 5.♘f3 ♗e7!? 6.♗d3! 0-0 7.0-0



Position after: 7.0-0

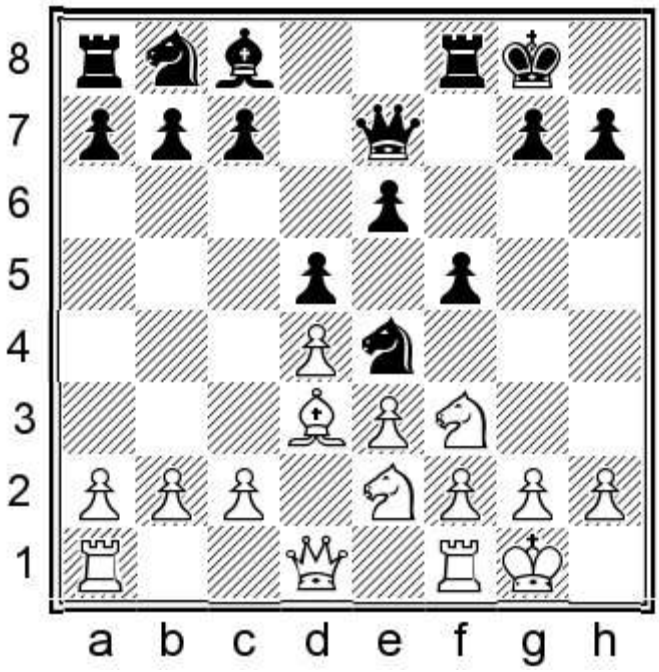
7...♘e4!

I am confident that this move solves Black's problems. It's unusual to be willing to trade the dark-squared bishops when you play a Stonewall system, but here it will enable Black to develop his play in the center quickly.

8.♗xe7

8.♗f4?! Obviously this is too slow, and Black takes over the initiative. 8...g5! 9.♗e5 ♘c6↑

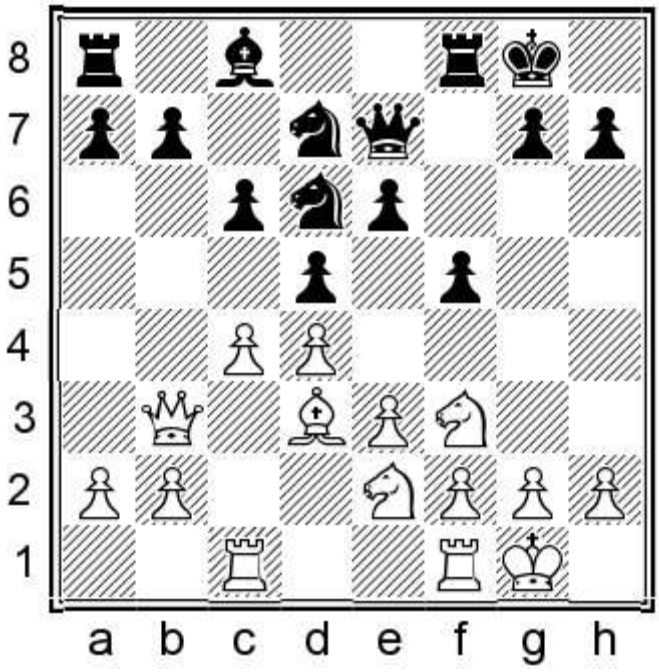
8...♕xe7 9.♘e2



Position after: 9.♘e2

9...c5!

9...♘d6 Of course, we have to mention Carlsen's game, even if it was 'only' in a blitz tournament, as he sometimes shows very good ideas. Here he played a set-up in his style, but it's probably not the best way to fight for equality: 10.♖c1 ♘d7 11.c4 c6 12.♕b3



Position after: 12.♕b3

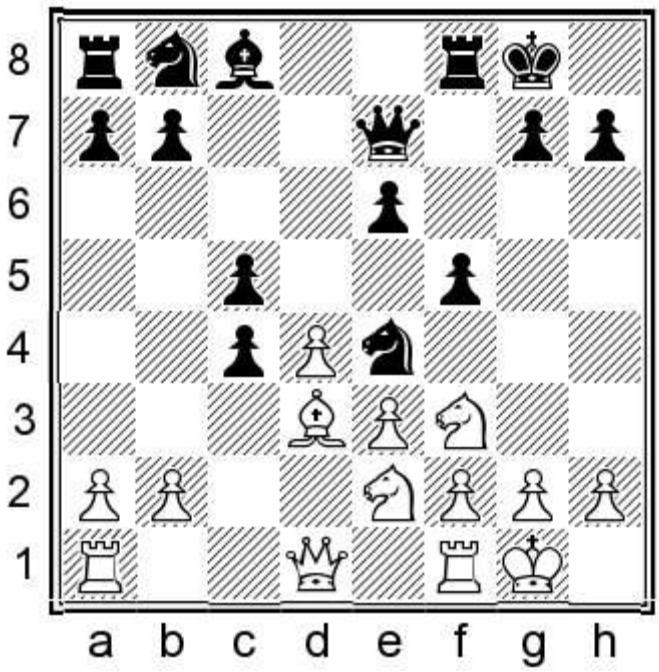
12...♔h8?! 13.♕a3 a5 14.♘e5 ♔g8 15.f4± Magnus was soon going to be better, but right now he is in a

bit of trouble, So, W (2770) – Carlsen, M (2855), Leuven 2016, ½-½ (45).

10.c4!

This is the obvious reaction. White is willing to open the center under favorable circumstances, and has to act now.

10...dxc4!



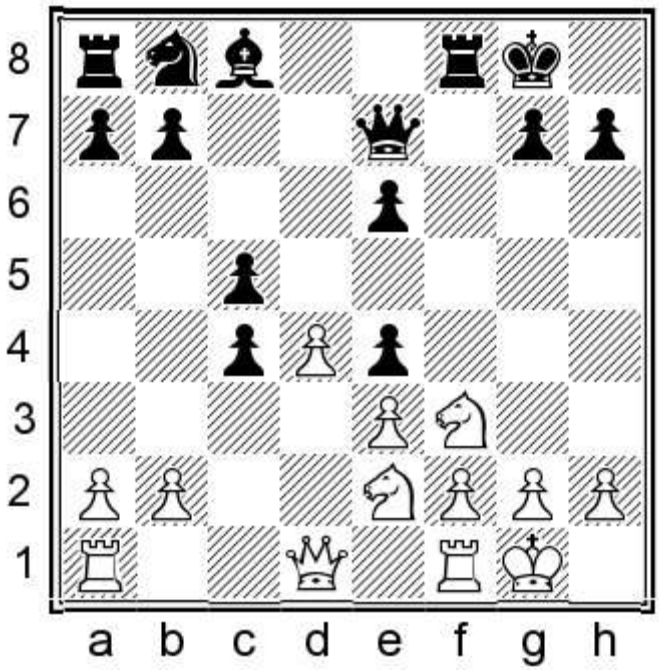
Position after: 10...dxc4!

Now White has a tough choice. He can either take back the pawn or give up his bishop in order to destroy our pawn structure.

11.♗xc4

This has been White's choice in most cases.

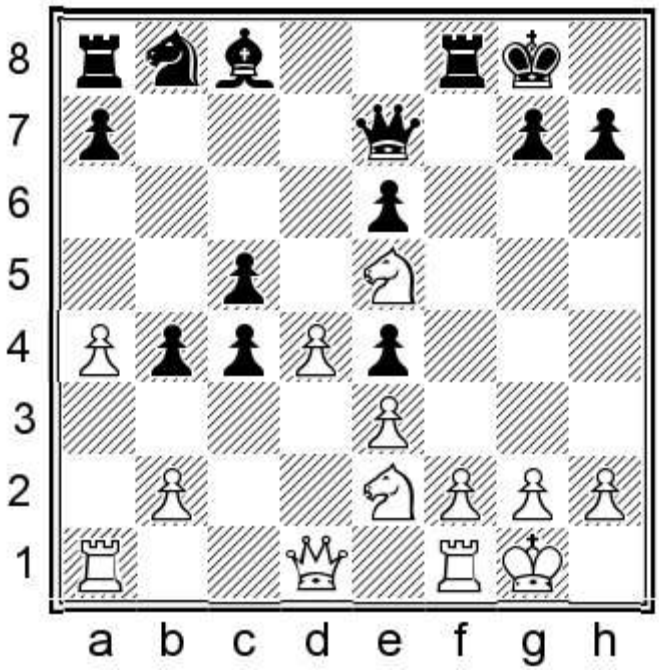
11.♗xe4 fxe4



Position after: 11...fxe4

A) 12.♘d2!?N 12...cxd4 13.♘xd4 e5! 14.♘b5 a6 15.♘c3 ♗e6 16.♘dxe4 b5 The knight on e4 is a monster, so Black needs to create counterplay with his pawn majority on the queenside, and/or try to trade that knight. 17.a3 ♘d7 18.♕e2 ♗f5=

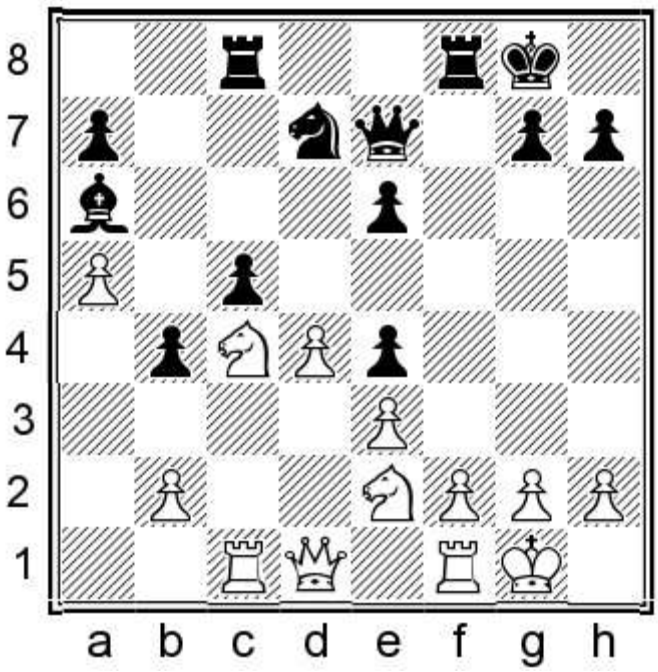
B) 12.♘e5 b5!? 13.a4 b4



Position after: 13...b4

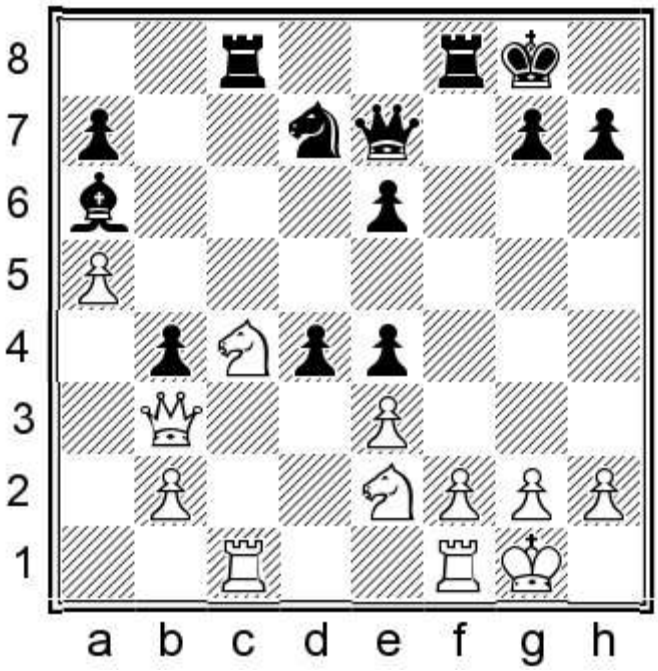
B1) 14.♘xc4 ♗a6 As you will see, this pin is going to be very annoying for White. 15.♖c1 ♘d7

16.a5 ♖ac8 Black has been playing very actively, and White was unable to solve his problems over the board.



Position after: 16...♖ac8

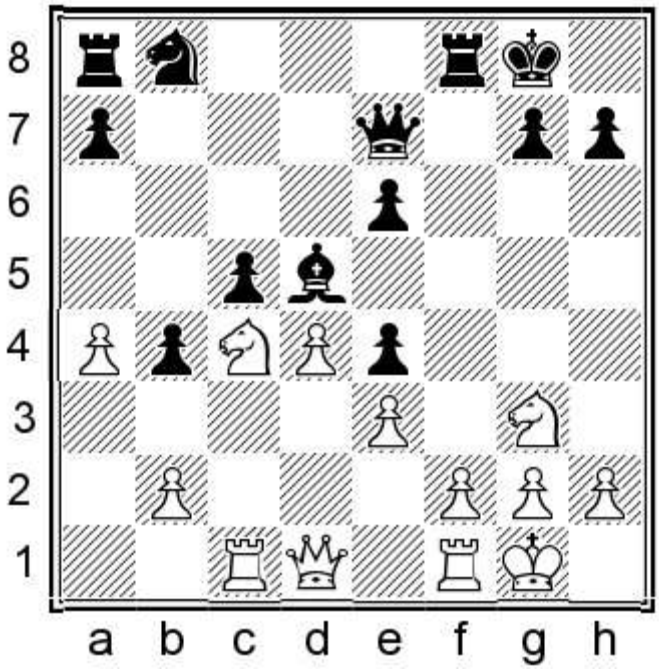
After 17.♕b3? White lost in Van Wely, L (2658) – L'Ami, E (2606), playchess.com 2016, 0-1 (30). [He could have been more direct with 17.d5!, the only way for him to keep the balance: 17...♖fd8 18.♘g3 ♗xc4 19.d6! ♕f8 20.♖xc4 ♘f6 21.♕c2 ♕xd6 22.♘xe4 ♘xe4 23.♕xe4=.] 17...cxd4!



Position after: 17...cxd4!

18.exd4 [18.♘xd4 ♘c5 19.♕xb4 ♕f6∓] 18...♘f6! 19.♖c2 ♘d5 Black has devastating play. 20.♖fc1 [20.♘e3 ♖xc2 21.♕xc2 ♕g5! 22.♘xd5 exd5–+] 20...♕f6–+

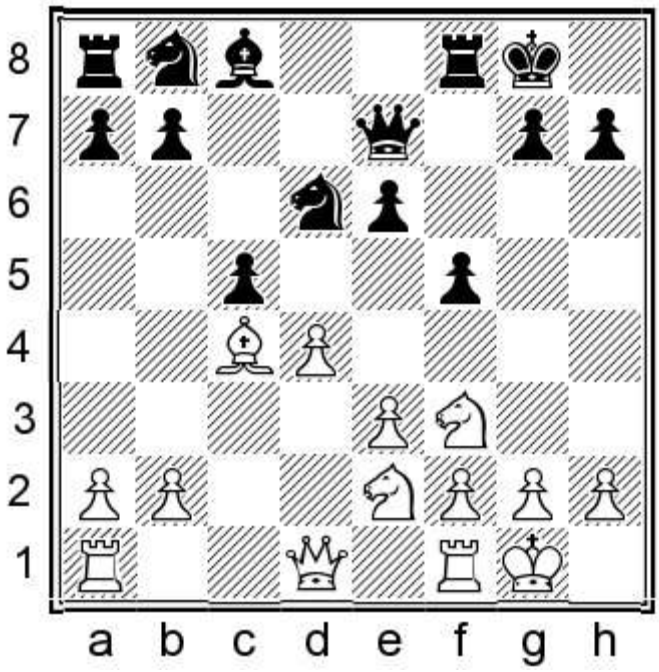
B2) 14.♘g3 ♗b7 15.♖c1 ♗d5 16.♘xc4



Position after: 16.♘xc4

This position occurred in Dambacher, M (2490) – Reinderman, D (2591), Germany 2016, ½-½ (44). I think Black should now play 16...cxd4 17.♕xd4 ♘c6 18.♕d1 ♖ad8 19.♕e2 b3= He will continue with ...♘b4 or ...♕b4 with good prospects on the queenside in order to compensate for his pawn structure in the center.

11...♘d6!

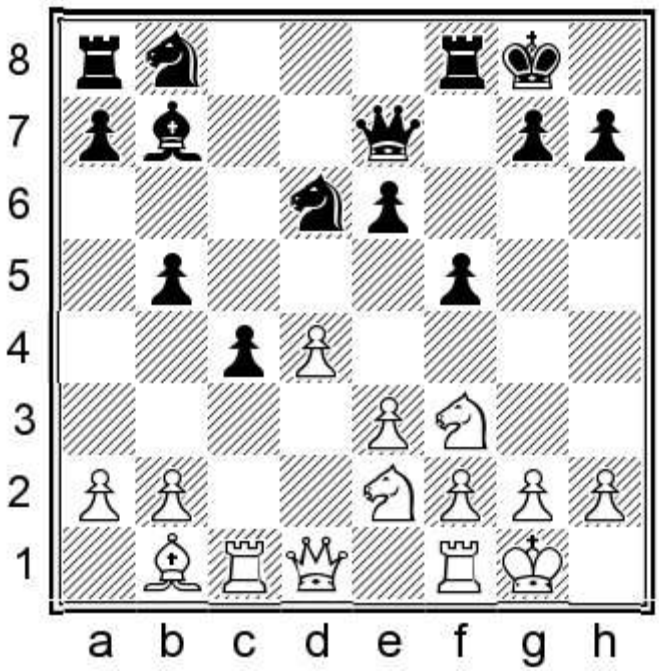


Position after: 11...♘d6!

A very important resource. Black pushes back the bishop and gains the initiative on the queenside.

12.b3

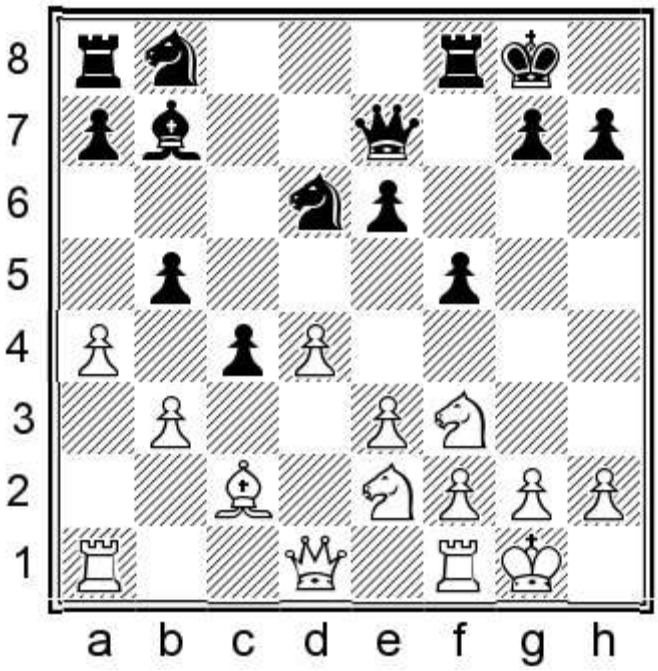
A) 12.♖c1 A small refinement compared to 12.♗d3, if White wants to place the bishop on b1. It's not necessarily better though, because it's not clear the rook does much on c1. 12...b5 13.♗d3 c4 14.♗b1 ♗b7



Position after: 14...♗b7

15.♘f4 In the top-level blitz game, Aronian, L (2792) – Giri, A (2782), Paris 2016, ½-½ (43), Giri chose 15...♗d5. It's even simpler to just finish development. [15.♘e5 ♘d7 16.♘xd7 ♕xd7 17.♘f4 a5∓] 15...♘d7N 16.b3 ♖ac8 17.bxc4 bxc4 18.♕e2 c3↑ Black's c-pawn is becoming a real thorn in White's side.

B) 12.♗d3 c4 13.♗c2 b5 14.b3 ♗b7 15.a4



Position after: 15.a4

Massive trades on the queenside are coming, and the position seems to be quite balanced. After 15...a6 16.axb5 axb5 17.♖xa8 ♗xa8 18.bxc4 ♗xf3 19.gxf3 bxc4 20.f4 ♘c6= the game logically ended in a draw in Rychagov, A (2550) – L'Ami, E (2606), Cappelle-la-Grande 2015.

12...b6!

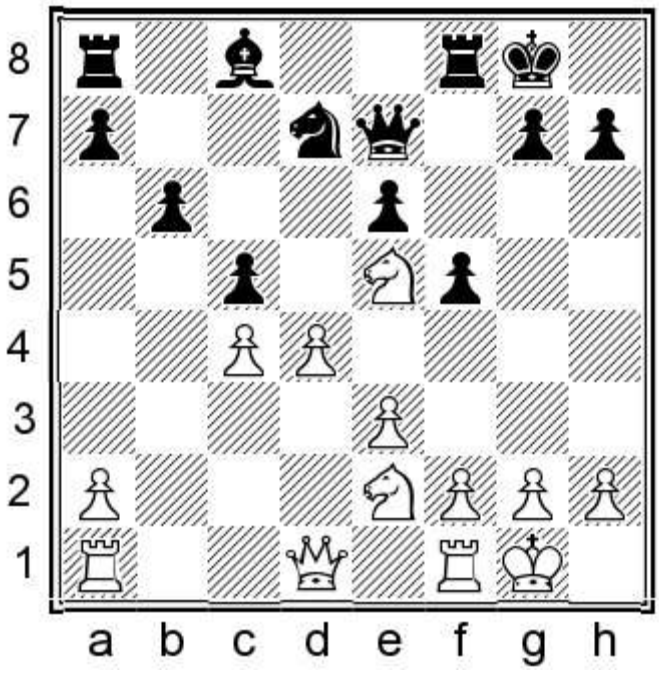
It's very logical to bring the bishop to the long light-squared diagonal.

13.♘e5

A) 13.dxc5 ♘xc4 14.bxc4 ♕xc5=

B) 13.♘f4 ♘xc4 14.bxc4 ♖d8 15.♕e2 ♗b7 16.♖fd1 ♘d7⇄

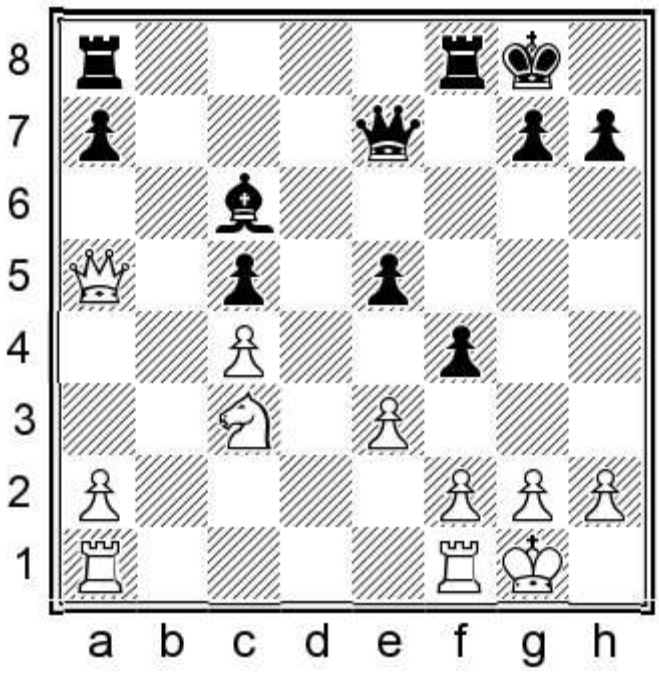
13...♘xc4 14.bxc4 ♘d7!



Position after: 14...♘d7!

Vallejo Pons treats the position in a very refined manner. As shown by the following moves, Black gets a very easy position to play.

15.♘xd7 ♗xd7 16.dxc5 bxc5 17.♕d2 ♗c6 18.♕a5 e5 19.♘c3 f4↑



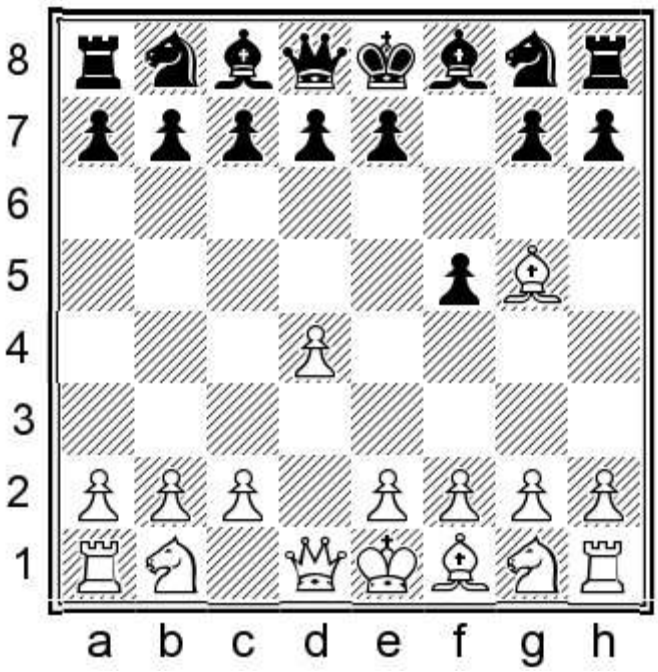
Position after: 19...f4↑

With promising play on the kingside. White had to be precise in order to keep the balance, and the draw

was agreed after a few more moves in Vidit, S (2651) – Vallejo Pons, F (2684), Berlin 2015, ½-½ (25).

Chapter 3
The Göring Attack 2.♗g5

1.d4 f5 2.♗g5



Chapter Guide

Chapter 3 – The Göring Attack 2.♗g5

1.d4 f5 2.♗g5

a) 2...--, 2...g6 3.--, 3.e3 ♗g7 4.--

b) 2...g6 3.e3 ♗g7 4.♘d2

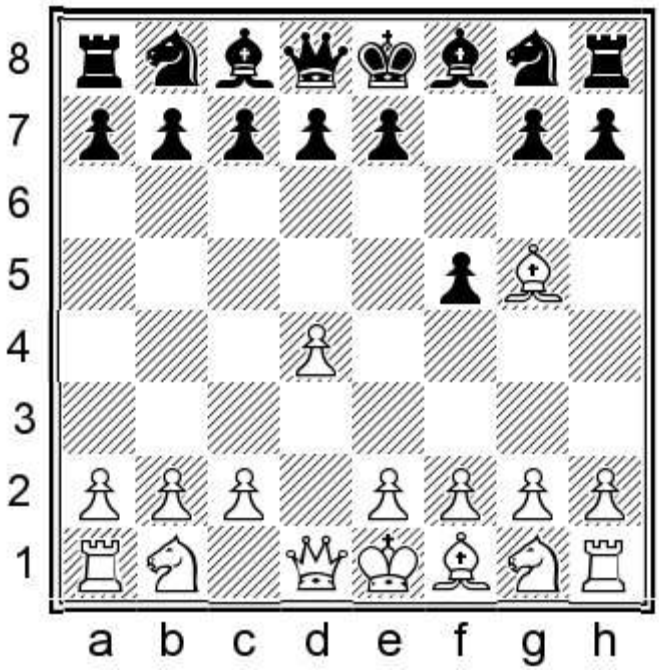
c) 2...g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.--, 4.e3

d) 2...g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4

e) 2...g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.h4

a) 2...--, 2...g6 3.--, 3.e3 ♗g7 4.--

1.d4 f5 2.♗g5



Position after: 2.♗g5

Apart from the three main moves, 2.c4, 2.♘f3 and 2.g3, which might all lead to the same classical main line, we come to the last principled alternative, 2.♗g5. It is played more often than the Staunton Gambit and only slightly less than 2.♘c3.

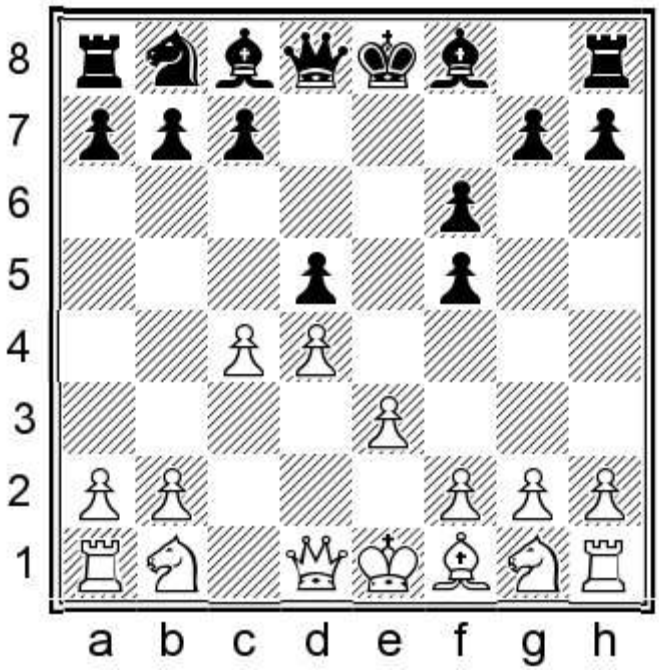
The main alternatives have one thing in common: they fight directly for the important e4-square and aim to play e2−e4 in favorable circumstances if possible. We will have a look at all the other sidelines in the next chapter.

First, let's name it. The 2.♗g5 line is called 'The Göring Attack'. It is very aggressive and is aimed at preventing ...♘f6 or ...e6. It also invites Black to start pushing his pawns to chase the bishop with ...h6 and ...g5, in order to use the weakened e8-h5 diagonal. As this is White's aim, I decided not to enter this line, and to offer the line starting with 2...g6.

2...g6!?

The idea is simple: White wanted to prevent ...♘f6, so we will fianchetto first, then develop the knight. As ...g6 is not a real developing move, White has several possibilities to try to take advantage of its provocative nature. We should be ready to meet them.

A) 2...♘f6 Some people play in similar fashion to the 2.♘c3 variation, but the knight is not yet on c3, which gives White some additional ideas. 3.♗xf6 exf6 4.e3 d5 5.c4!?



Position after: 5.c4!?

This is a way for White to take advantage of the fact the knight is not obstructing the march of the c-pawn.

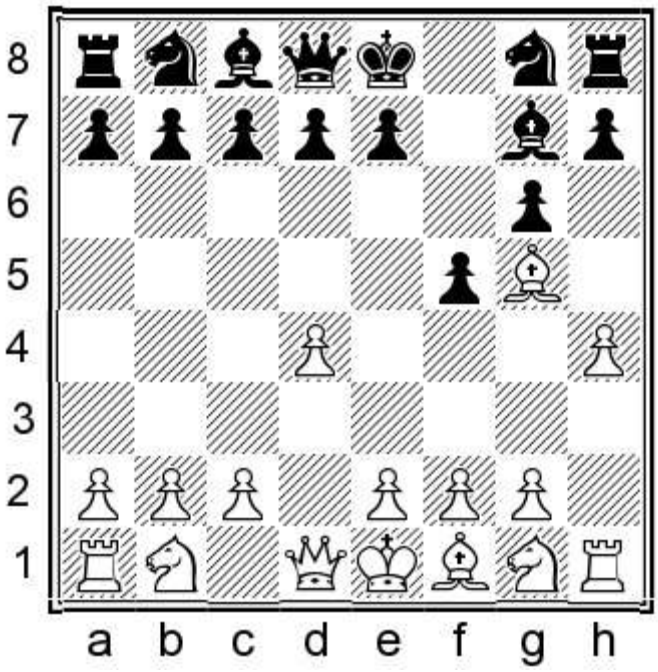
B) 2...h6 3.♗h4 g5 There is a lot of theory starting from this position. Of course the bishop is not trapped, as White can advance his e-pawn with the mating threat of ♕h5. Many players might be happy to enter these lines, but in general I think that it is White who has more fun here.

3.e3

White players have recently been trying this move, and it is becoming more popular. I believe that, apart from the main line, this is the most interesting try for White.

A) 3.e4 has little independent value. Play will most probably continue 3...fxe4 4.♘c3 d5 5.f3 as White doesn't have anything better. After 5...♘f6 it transposes into the main line of Chapter 1 on the Staunton Gambit.

B) 3.h4 ♗g7

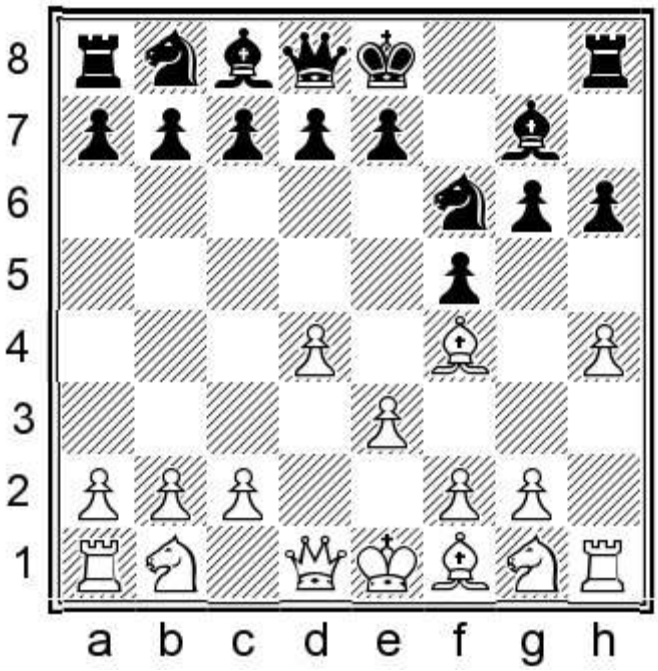


Position after: 3...♗g7

B1) 4.♘c3 This has been played in most games, and transposes to our main line.

B2) 4.h5?! h6 5.♗c1 Do you see a better square for the bishop? Sad, but I don't. After 5...g5∓ White hasn't achieved much, and his pawn on h5 looks more like a weakness than a threat to Black.

B3) 4.e3 h6 5.♗f4 ♘f6



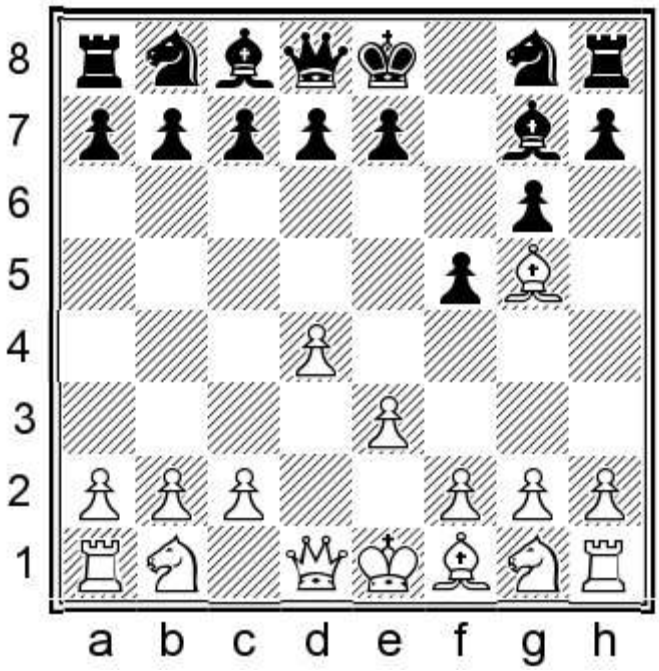
Position after: 5...♘f6

6.♘f3 [6.♘c3 transposes once again] 6...d6 7.♗c4 ♘c6 8.♘c3 e6!⇄ We will soon become familiar

with this type of position. Black's plan is to follow up with ...♕e7, ...♗d7 and probably ...0-0-0.

C) 3.♘d2 has been played frequently, but has no independent value. Indeed after 3...♗g7 4.e4 [4.e3 transposes to 3.e3 ♗g7 4.♘c3] 4...fxe4 5.♘xe4 transposes into the line with 3.♘c3.

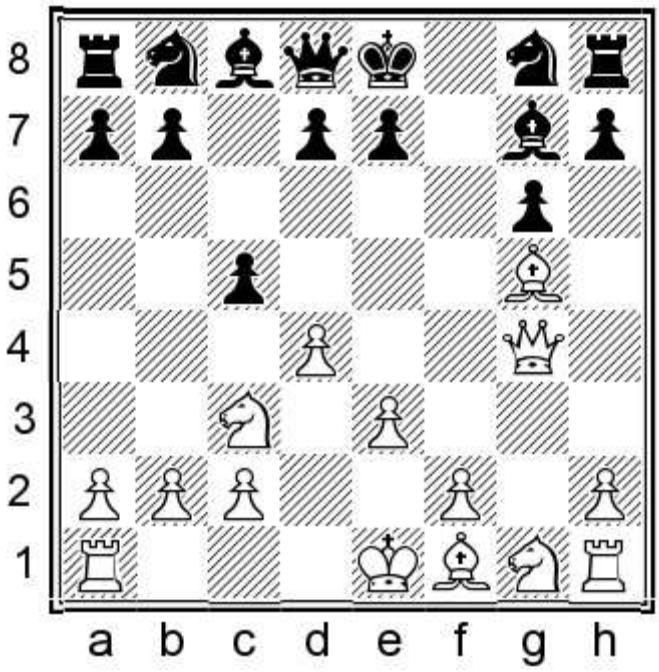
3...♗g7



Position after: 3...♗g7

4.♘f3

A) 4.g4 This rare guest makes perfect sense as it not even a sacrifice, but White will lose a few important tempi regaining the pawn. 4...fxg4 5.♕xg4 [5.h3 c5! 6.hxg4 ♕b6 7.♘e2 cxd4 8.exd4 d6⇄ The moves in this sequence are far from forced, but show how Black should seek counterplay.] 5...c5!? 6.♘c3



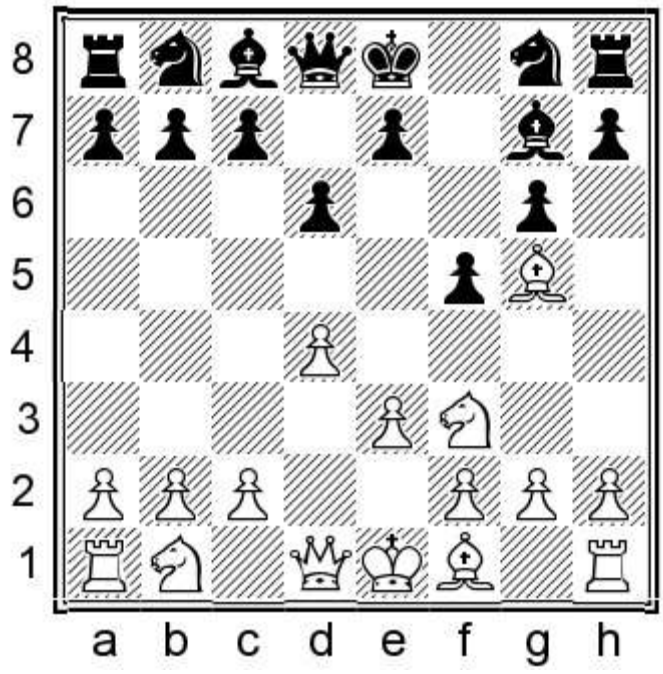
Position after: 6.♘c3

I would now vary from 6...♕a5, as played in the game Vaisser, A (2540) – Spraggett, K (2526), France 2001, ½-½ (18), by playing 6...d6 7.♗b5+ ♘c6 8.♕g2 a6 9.♗xc6+ bxc6 10.dxc5 [10.♕xc6+?! ♗d7 11.♕e4 ♖b8 12.0-0-0 ♕b6∓] 10...d5 11.♘ge2 ♕a5 12.♘d4 ♕xc5↑. The situation is tense, but Black will soon get the better middlegame thanks to his bishop pair and mobile center.

B) 4.♘c3 – see 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e3.

4...d6

Most players prefer to start with 4...♘f6, but I feel it can be useful to be able to push ...e5 quickly, as Topalov did in the following game.

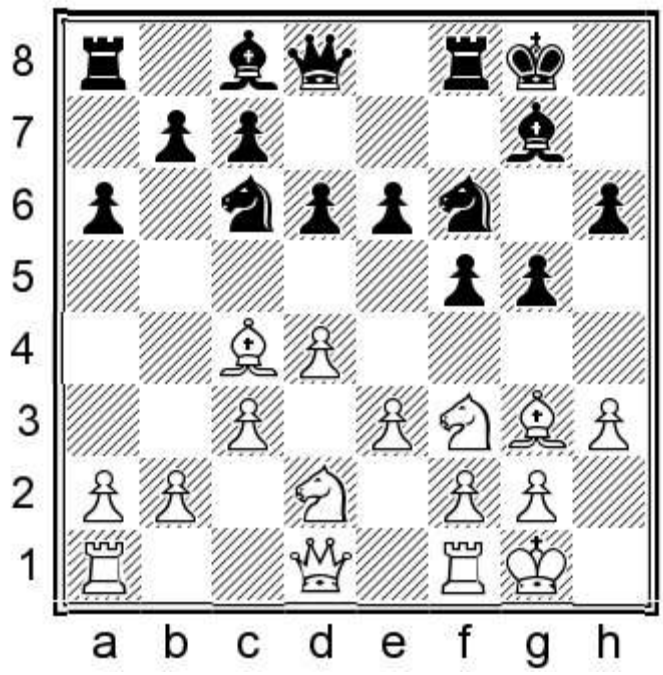


Position after: 4...d6

5.c4

A) 5.h4 h6 This is an additional advantage to starting with 4...d6: here White is unable to play ♗xf6 (since there is no knight on f6!) in order to gain time and attack the g6-pawn soon. 6.♗f4 ♘f6⇄ This is already a better version than the main line since the f3-square is usually occupied by the queen.

B) 5.♗c4 has been the most frequently played move. White takes advantage of the weak light-squared diagonal. 5...h6 6.♗h4 g5 7.♗g3 e6 8.c3 ♘f6 9.h3!? 0-0 10.♘bd2 ♘c6 11.0-0 a6!?±



Position after: 11...a6!?±

This is a situation we are going to meet many times in this book. The computer seems to like White, but I believe Black's position is fine for a practical game. As the evaluation is about 0.3, I can't objectively say that the position is equal, so I'll leave a +/= at the end of the line.

Why do I go against the computer's evaluation? Probably because I think it considers Black's castled position to be too exposed. In a computer game this might well be true, but for us poor humans, things are different.

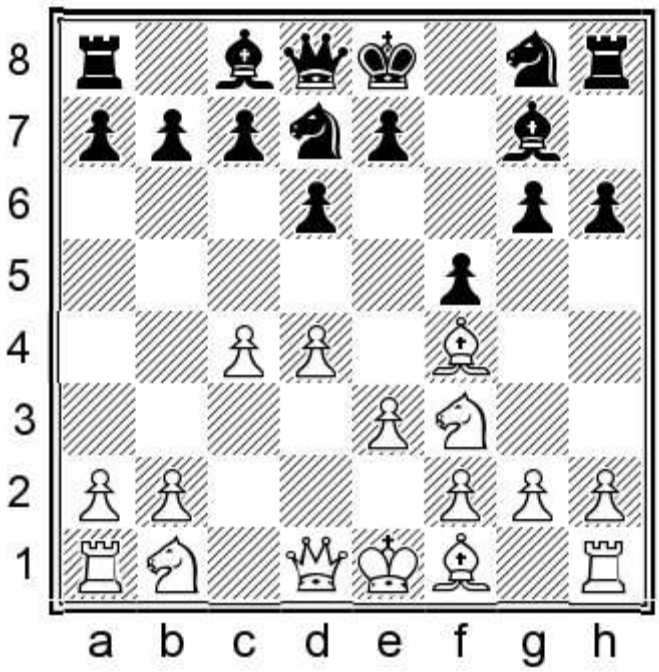
Black has a lot of flexibility. He is trying to play ...b5, in order to place the bishop on b7 later. Even if White prevents that with a2−a4, we will simply continue with ...♕e7, ...♔h8, and, for instance, ...e5 at some point. This seems to provide good prospects in the center and on the kingside, and it can soon become very awkward to play as White. On the other hand, I think the computer idea for White is to continue with ♗d3, ♕c2 and e4, in order to get decent play in the center and a straightforward plan.

5...h6 6.♗f4

6.♗h4 ♘f6 7.♘c3 0-0 8.♕c2 c5!? 9.d5 g5 10.♗g3 ♘h5⇄

6...♘f6!

6...♘d7 Topalov tried a different path in Monte Carlo, and play soon became quite wild:

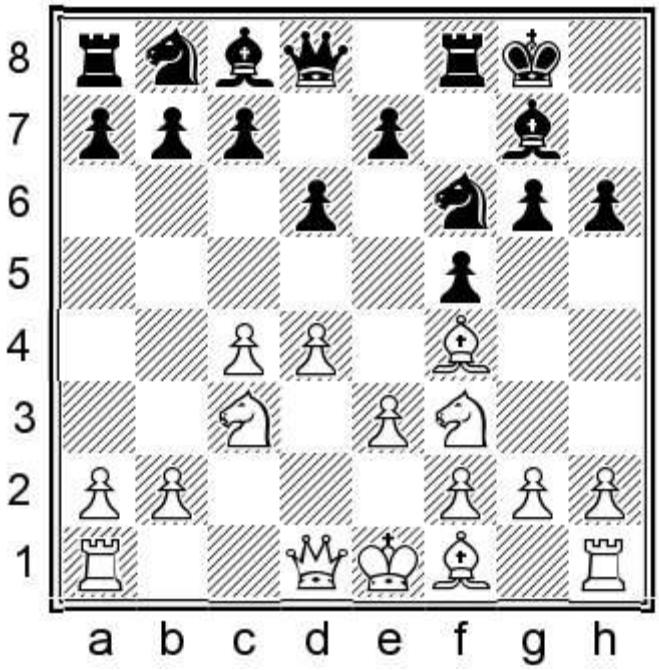


Position after: 6...♘d7

7.♘c3 e5 8.♗g3 g5 9.h3 ♘e7 10.♗e2 0-0 11.0-0 f4 12.♗h2 exd4 13.♘xd4 ♘e5 14.exf4 gxf4 15.♔h1± Even if Black has decent play, I consider this position to be easier to play for White, as shown in the game Grischuk, A (2747) – Topalov, V (2775), Monte Carlo 2011, 1-0 (44). White will stop the f-

pawn, and keeping the attack going is not so simple.

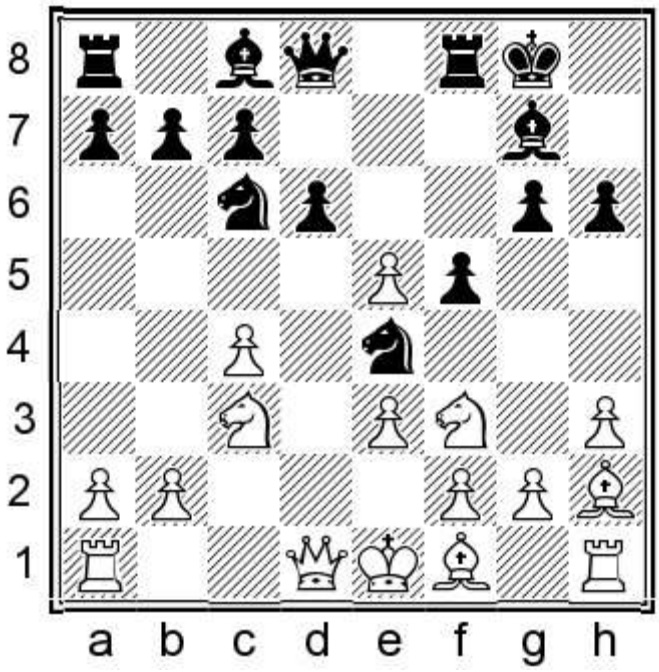
7.♘c3 0-0



Position after: 7...0-0

I won't analyze this position, as it's a transposition to the 3.♗f4 line of chapter 6, except that here we have the extra move ...h6. This is a huge improvement, since trying to exchange the f4-bishop is one of Black's main ideas. I'll just give the following line, which I think is quite important if White wants to save his dark-squared bishop.

8.h3 ♘c6 9.♗h2 e5 10.dxe5 ♘e4!→

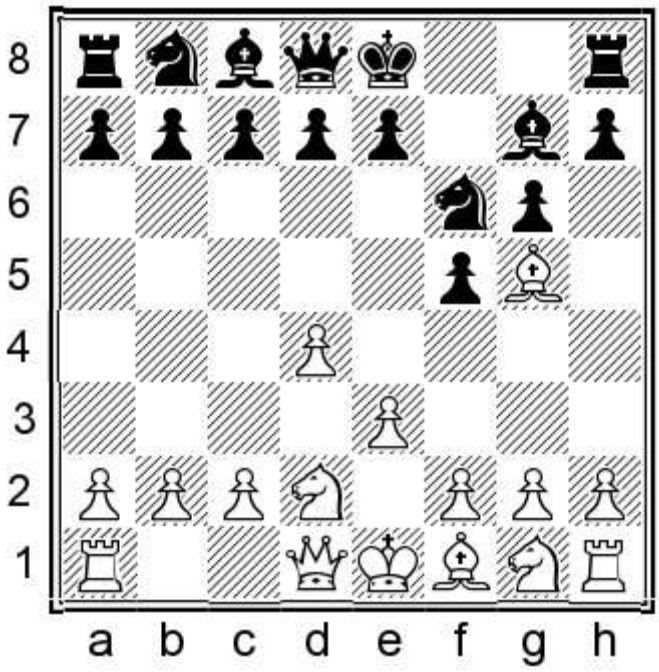


Position after: 10...♘e4!→

White has some problems. He is unable to take the knight without completely disrupting his coordination.

b) 2...g6 3.e3 ♗g7 4.♘d2

1.d4 f5 2.♗g5 g6 3.e3 ♗g7 4.♘d2 ♘f6



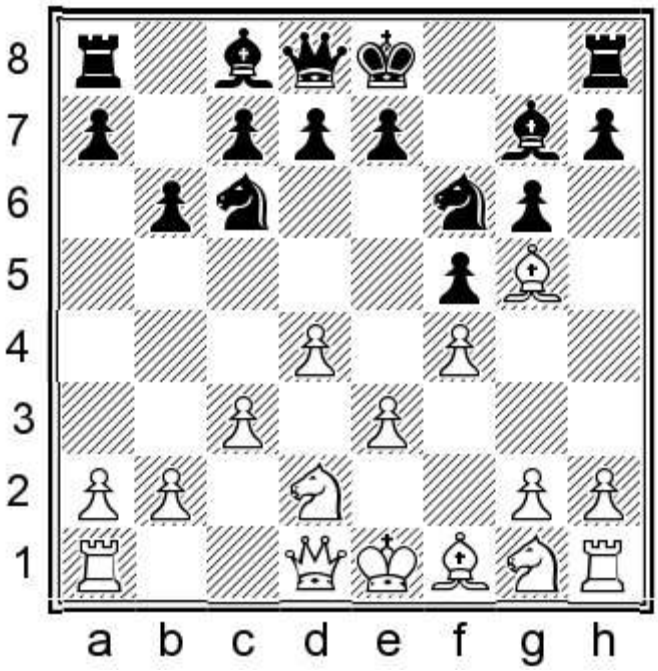
Position after: 4...♘f6

5.h4!?

This can be dangerous in this particular move order. Most of our natural responses are not so great.

A) 5.c3 ♘c6!? This is a rare move at this point, but I think it is the most flexible one.

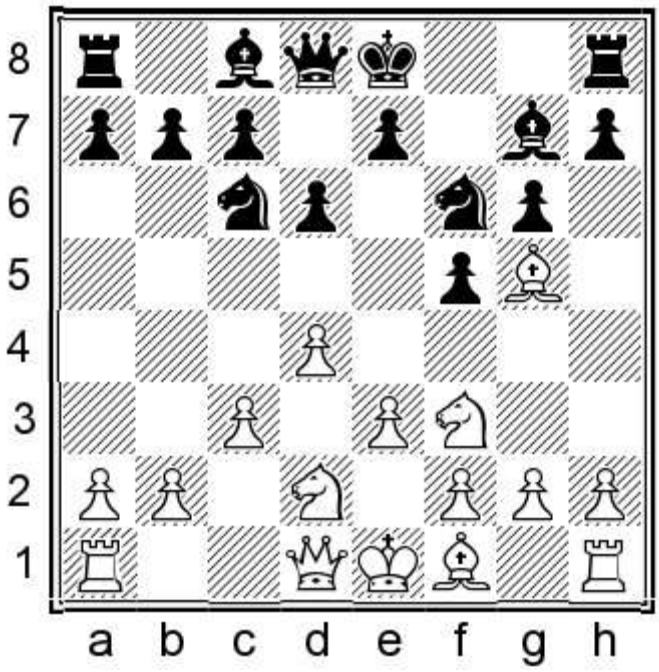
A1) 6.f4!? b6



Position after: 6...b6

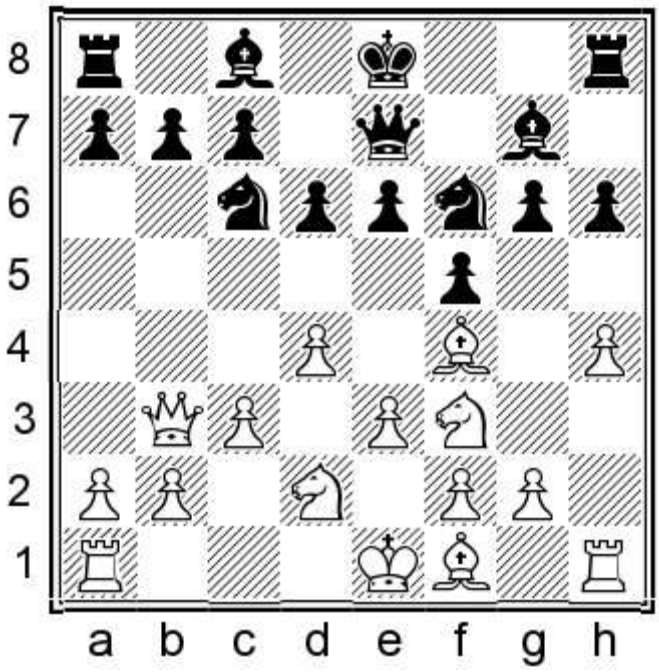
The play is unusual, but I quite like the way Black has treated the position. 7.♗d3 ♗b7 8.♘gf3 0-0 9.0-0 ♕e8 10.♕e2 ♘d8 11.♗a6 [11.e4 fxe4 12.♘xe4 ♘e6± I think White is objectively better, but Black is very solid and should gain the bishop pair. Many things can happen here.] 11...♗xa6 12.♕xa6 ♘f7 ½-½ Crouch, C (2403) – Bellin, R (2361), Birmingham 2001.

A2) 6.♘gf3 d6



Position after: 6...d6

7.♕b3 [7.♗b5 a6 8.♗xc6+ bxc6 Our structure is damaged, but the light squares are not an issue anymore. 9.0-0 ♖b8 10.♖b1 0-0=] 7...e6 8.h4N [8.e4 h6! 9.♗xf6 ♕xf6 10.♗d3 0-0⇄] 8...h6 9.♗f4 ♕e7

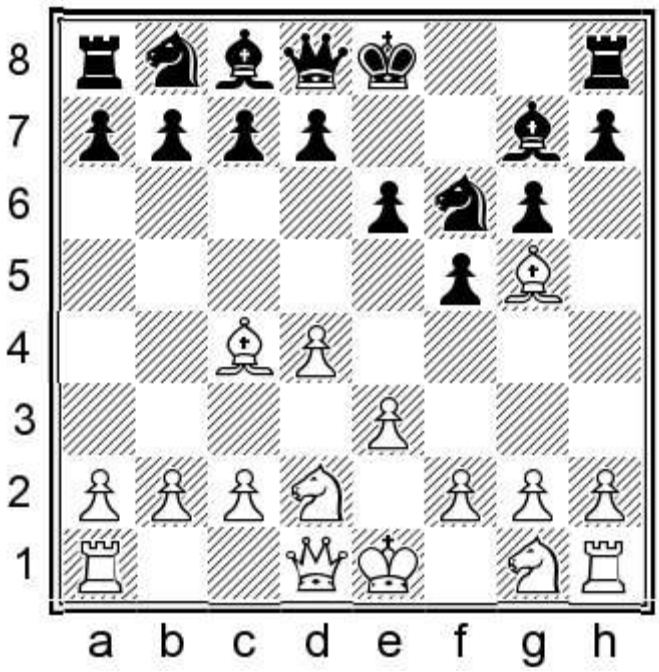


Position after: 9...♕e7

As in the main line, this pawn structure is very decent for Black. He will probably try to castle queenside, and the pseudo-sacrifice with ...♗d7 might even be possible at some point. The real issue

for White is that he doesn't control the center, and Black will soon react. 10.0-0-0 e5! 11.♗g3 a6!?↑, preventing ♗b5. White's play lacks direction.

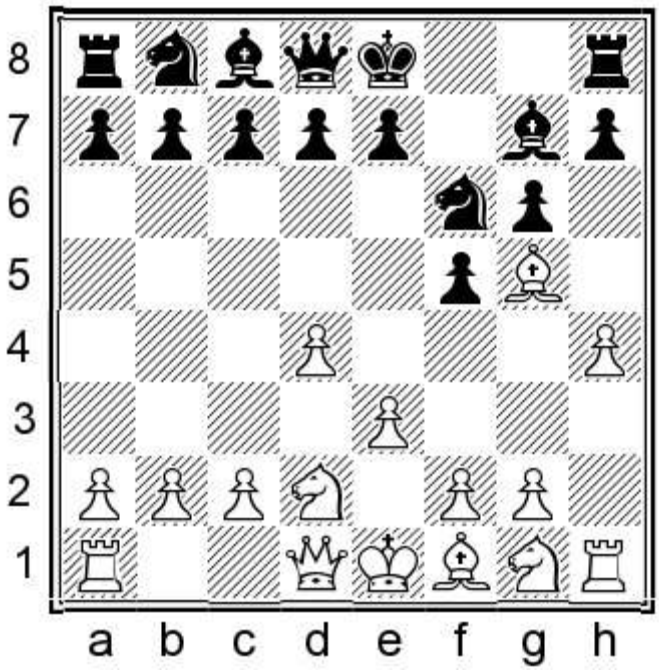
B) 5.♗c4 e6!?



Position after: 5...e6!?

The bishop probably chose its square too soon because of this move: 6.♘e2 [6.♘gf3 ♘c6 7.e4 h6 8.♗xf6 ♕xf6 9.e5 ♕f7=] 6...h6 7.♗f4 0-0 8.♗g3 ♘h5 9.♗e5 ♘c6 10.♗xg7 ♔xg7=.

Back to 5.h4!?.



Position after: 5.h4!?

5...♘g4!?N

This is an interesting novelty to prevent White's ideas. There are a few hidden points to the move, the main one being simply to avoid the possibility of ♗xf6.

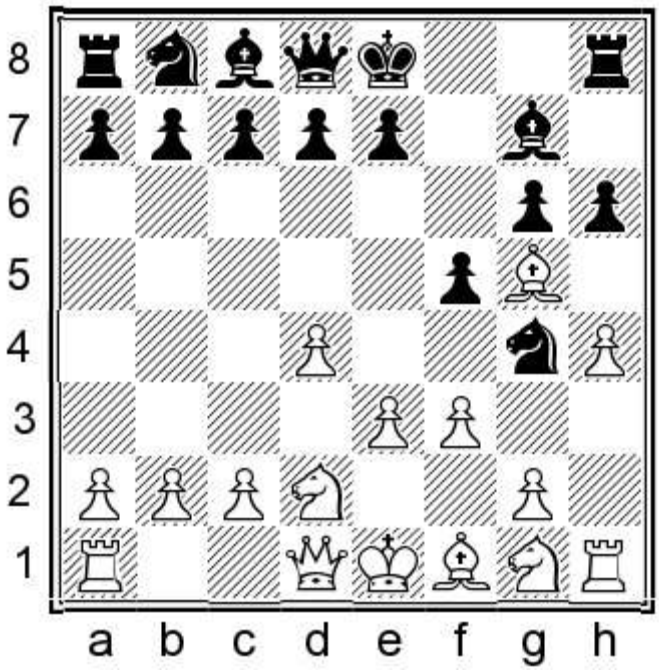
A) 5...d6?! 6.h5! ♘xh5 7.♖xh5 gxh5 8.♗c4!?⩲ As usual in this sort of line, lots of compensation will soon appear.

B) 5...h6?! 6.♗xf6 ♗xf6 7.♘h3↑ Heading directly towards the weak g6-pawn. White is definitely better here.

6.f3

6.h5?! h6 7.♗f4 g5 8.♗g3 d6⇄

6...h6!



Position after: 6...h6!

7.♗f4!

7.fxg4 hxg5 8.♘gf3 d5 9.♘xg5 ♗f6!→ White will lose some tempi and soon his extra pawn too.

7...e5!

A very important counterattack, otherwise Black's opening makes no sense at all.

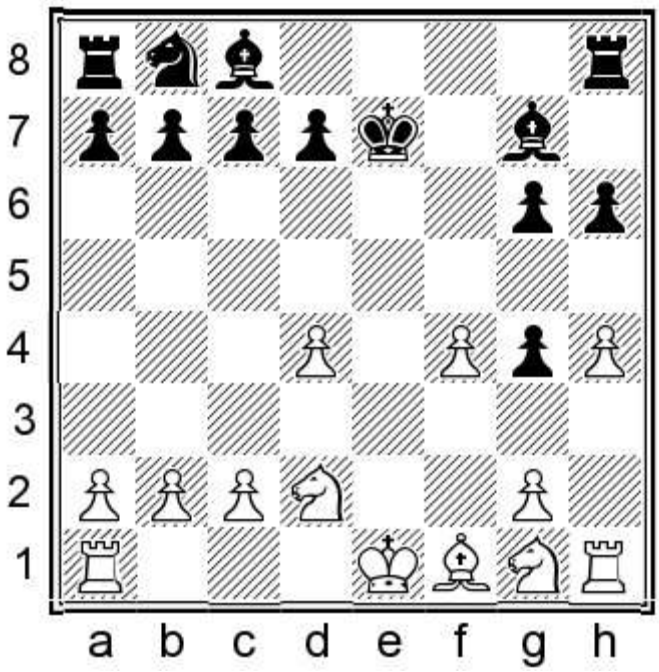
8.fxg4

8.dxe5?! ♘xe5∓

8...exf4 9.exf4

9.gxf5 fxe3 10.♘c4 d5 11.♘xe3 0-0→

9...♕e7+ 10.♕e2 fxg4 11.♕xe7+ ♔xe7∞

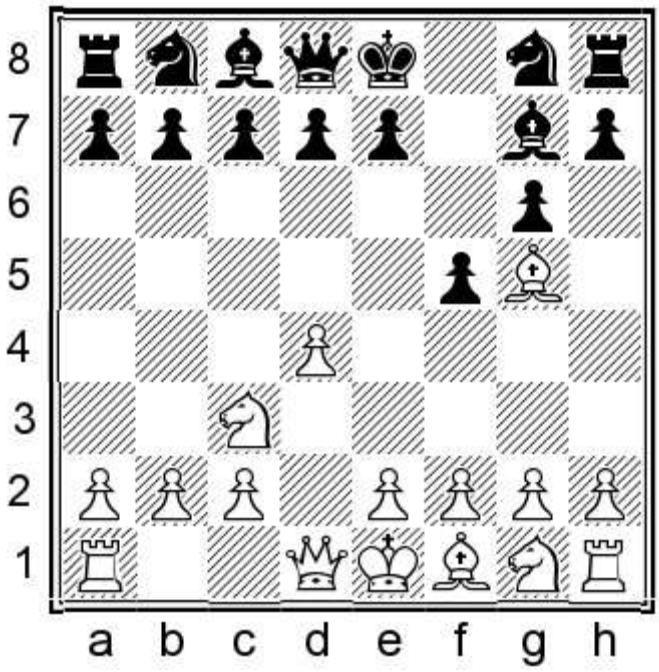


Position after: 11...♔xe7∞

The computers believe White is slightly better, probably because of the exposed black monarch, but Black should be able to level the game with adequate play. I wouldn't be afraid to play this position over the board.

c) 2...g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.--, 4.e3

1.d4 f5 2.♗g5 g6!? 3.♘c3 ♗g7



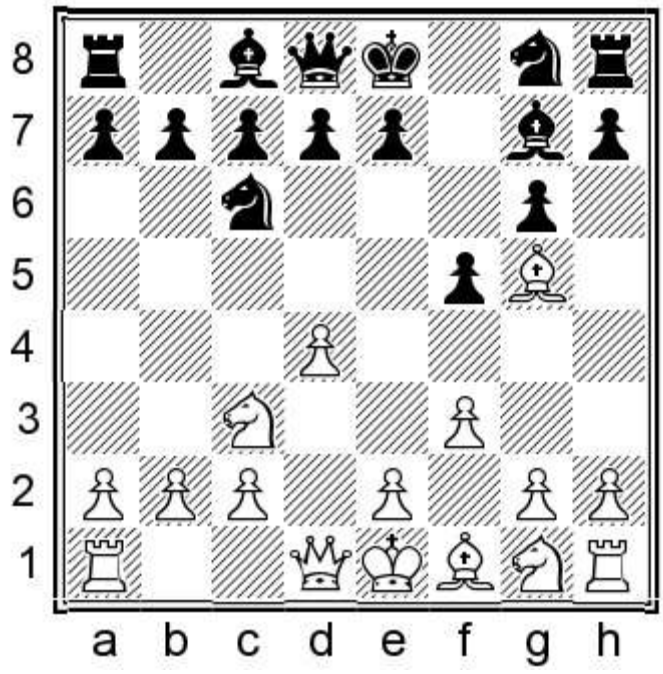
Position after: 3...♗g7

In the Dutch Defense, we usually try to prevent White from playing e4 so easily, so if we let it happen here, we should be confident that it's not a big deal. But White isn't forced to play it. 4.h4 has become very popular recently, and I'll make it the main line, due to the great results it has achieved.

4.e3!?

A very tricky move. Black has gone wrong in most of the games here (granted, it's easy to do so) but he has a rather strange set-up which has proved to be effective against White's opening.

4.f3 ♘c6

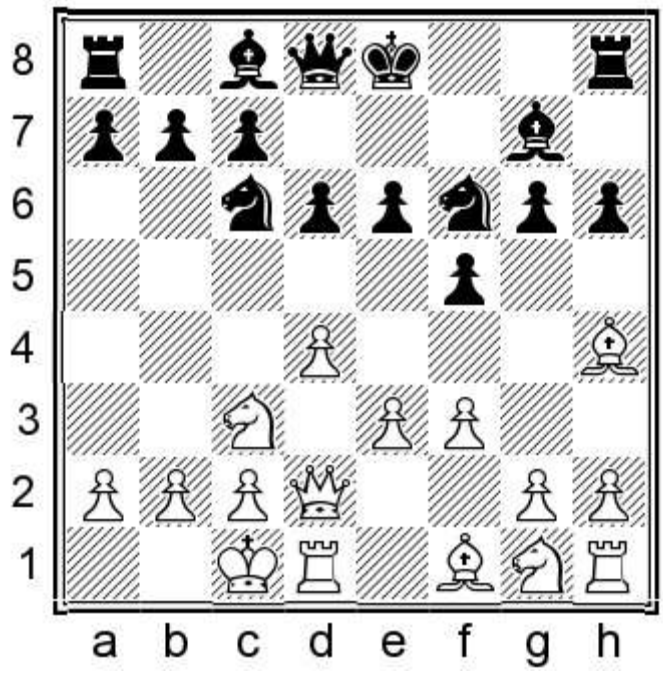


Position after: 4...♘c6

5.e3 [5.d5 ♘e5 6.e4 fxe4 – see the line arising after 4.e4 fxe4 5.f3 ♘c6]

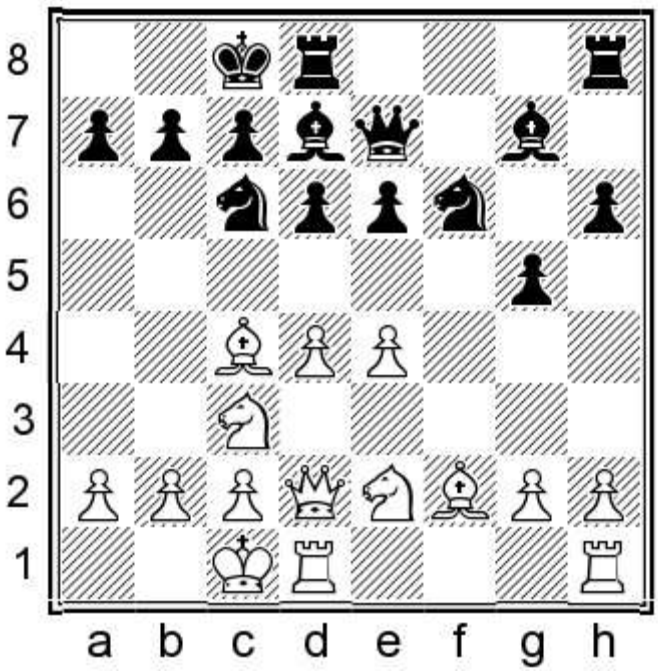
A) 5...♘f6 I will show the first few moves of the following game in order to illustrate the dangers for Black if he doesn't play carefully. He was very quickly outplayed in the opening after 6.♕d2 d5?! 7.0-0-0 ♗e6 8.h3!? ♗f7 9.g4 e6 10.f4! ♕d7 11.♘f3 ♘g8 12.♗b5± 1-0 (52) Chigaev, M (2555) – Potapov, P (2479), Khanty-Mansiysk 2017.

B) 5...h6!?N 6.♗h4 ♘f6 7.♕d2 e6 8.0-0-0 d6



Position after: 8...d6

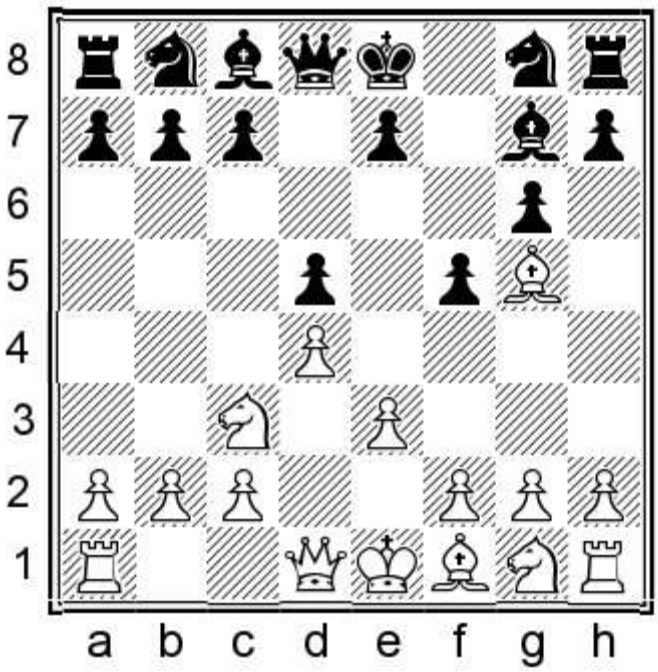
Once again, I use this very flexible pawn structure. 9.♗c4 ♕e7 10.♘ge2 g5 11.♗f2 ♗d7 12.e4 fxe4 13.fxe4 0-0-0⇄



Position after: 13...0-0-0⇄

White is probably symbolically better according to the principles of the ‘center’, but Black is really solid, and his pieces have good prospects, especially along the f-file.

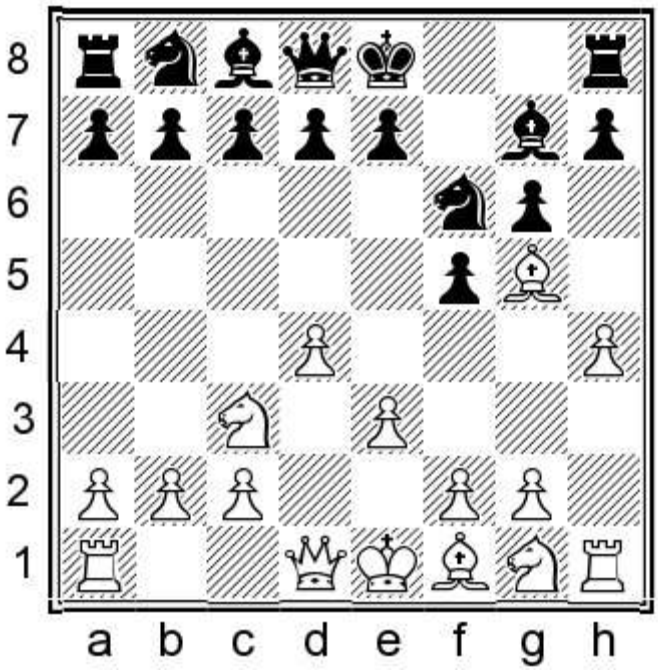
4...d5!



Position after: 4...d5!

A Stonewall with a kingside fianchetto might seem weird. It's only justified here because White has committed himself by playing an early ♘c3. If you ask me if I believe it's objectively equal, I would say no, but I think it's fully playable, hasn't been refuted, and is hard to play for White in a practical game, as shown by the good overall results for Black.

4...♘f6?! This logical-looking move is definitely wrong. 5.h4!



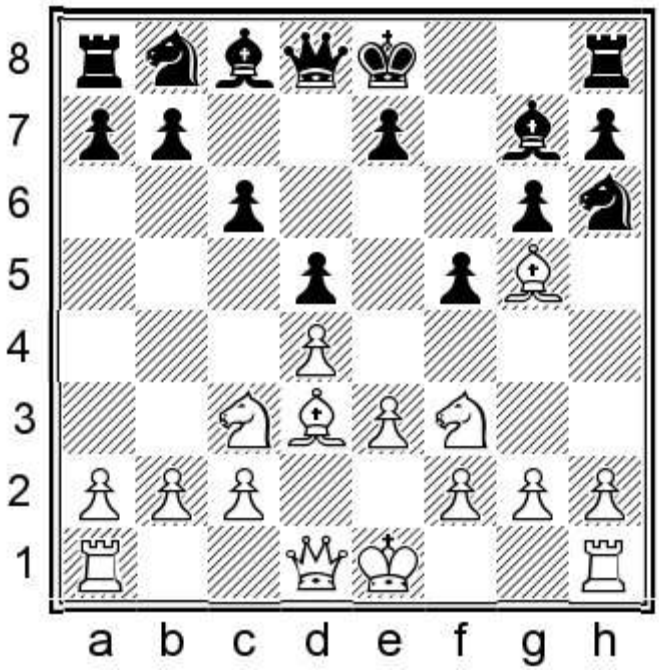
Position after: 5.h4!

5...d5 [5...♘e4 6.♘xe4 fxe4 7.h5±; 5...h6?! 6.♗xf6 ♗xf6 7.♕f3± is exactly what you should avoid. The g6-pawn is in huge trouble. 5...0-0?! 6.h5! ♘xh5 7.♖xh5 gxh5 8.♘d5! ♗f6 9.♕xh5 c6 10.♘xf6+ exf6 11.♗h6 ♖f7 12.♘f3±] 6.h5 ♗e6 7.h6 ♗f8 8.♘f3± and in Lysyj, I (2643) – Potapov, P (2497), Minsk 2017, Black managed to escape, but it wasn't because of the opening – ½-½ (38).

5.h4!?

This seems the most logical continuation. White wants to take advantage of the early ...g6, and has already made all the other logical moves with that aim in mind.

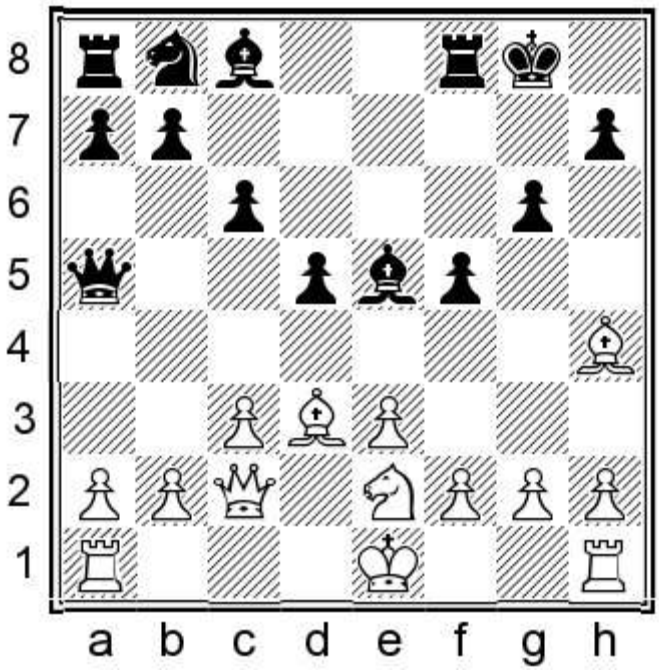
A) 5.♘f3 c6 6.♗d3 ♘h6!? The knight heads for f7 in order to control the dark squares. Black will free himself completely if he manages to play ...e5 in favorable circumstances.



Position after: 6...♘h6!?

A1) 7.♕d2 ♘f7 8.♗f4 [8.h4 is analyzed via 5.h4] 8...♘d7 9.0-0-0 e5! 10.dxe5 ♘dxe5=

A2) 7.♘e2 ♘f7 8.♗h4 ♕a5+!N This is stronger than 8...♕b6, which has already been played twice, and is faster in terms of realizing the central breakthrough: 9.c3 e5! 10.♘xe5 ♘xe5 11.dxe5 ♗xe5 12.♕c2 0-0



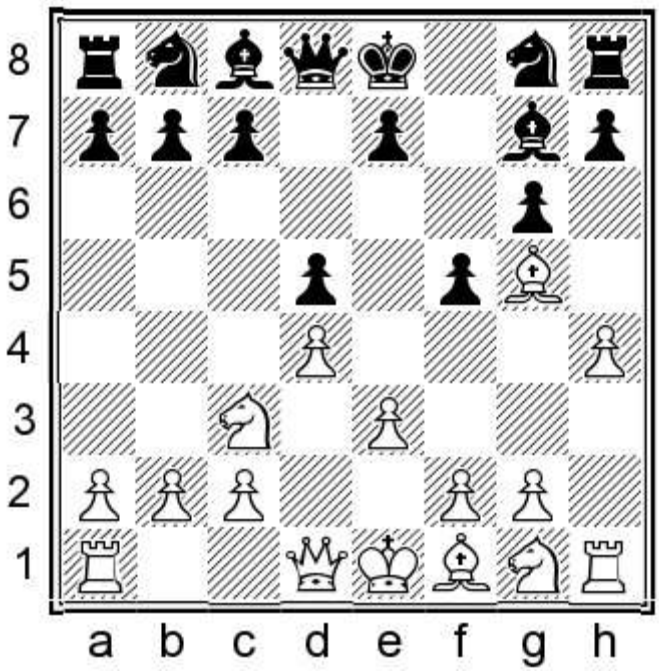
Position after: 12...0-0

Black's position may seem doubtful because he has advanced so many pawns, but it's really hard for

White to achieve anything. 13.0-0 [13.♘d4 ♘d7 14.0-0 ♕b6⇄] 13...♕c7 14.♗g3 [14.♘f4 ♗xf4 15.exf4 ♕xf4 16.g3 ♕d6 17.♖ae1 ♗e6 18.♖e2 ♘d7 19.♖fe1 ♘c5=] 14...♗xg3 15.hxg3 ♗e6 16.♘f4 ♗f7⇄

B) 5.♗d3 This move is included in the other plans, so it just amounts to the same thing. 5...c6 6.h4 – see 5.h4. [6.♘f3 – see 5.♘f3.]

Back to 5.h4.



Position after: 5.h4!?

5...c6

A very useful waiting move, anticipating an attack on the d5-square, and giving us the possibility of playing ...♘d7.

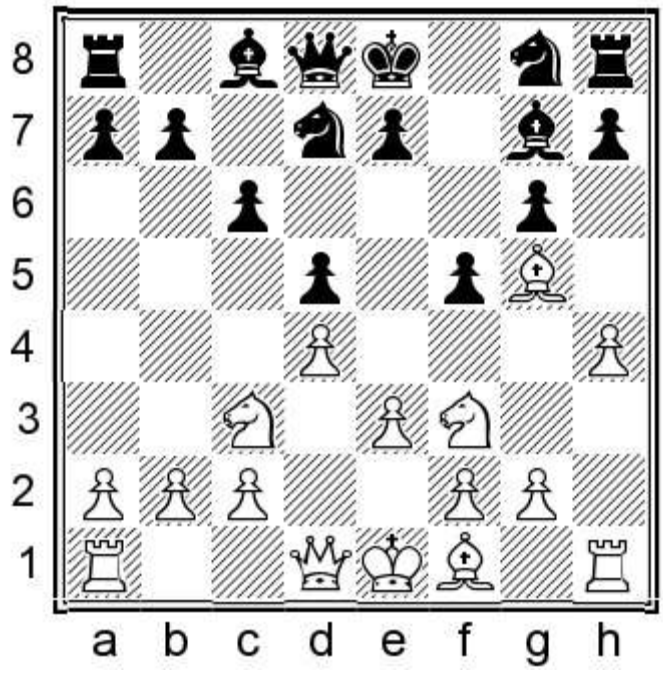
A) 5...♘f6? is the move White was waiting for: 6.h5 ♘xh5 [6...h6? 7.♗xf6 ♗xf6 8.hxg6+–] 7.♖xh5 gxh5 8.♕xh5+ ♔f8 9.♘f3±

B) 5...♘h6?! 6.♕f3 c6 7.♕g3 ♘f7 8.♗f4 ♘d7 9.♘f3±

6.♗d3

A) 6.♘f3

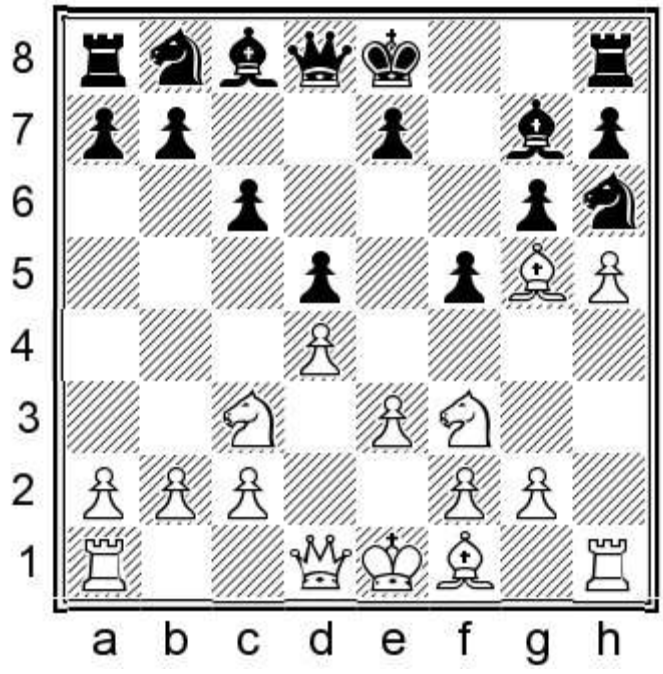
A1) 6...♘d7?!



Position after: 6...♘d7?!

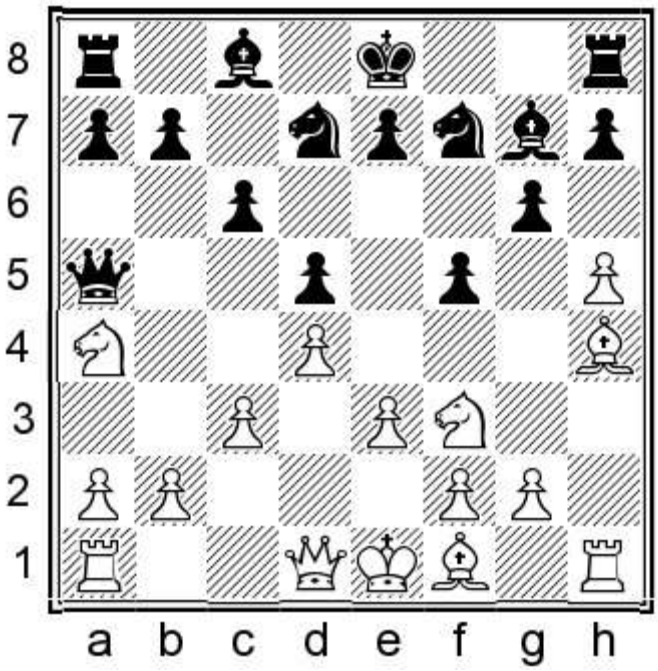
This has been played by Caruana! But it seems slightly inaccurate, because it lets White pursue his idea with h5 (which he missed in the game!) 7.♗d3 [7.h5! h6? is the usual reaction, but it works out badly for Black: 8.hxg6!! hxg5 9.♖xh8 ♗xh8 10.♘xg5±. ♘f7 and ♕h5 are very strong threats, and Black is unable to parry them properly.] 7...♘gf6 8.h5 ♕b6 9.♖b1 ♘e4 10.♗f4± 0-1 (36) Sunilduth Lyna, N (2536) – Caruana, F (2813), Douglas 2016.

A2) 6...♘h6! 7.h5



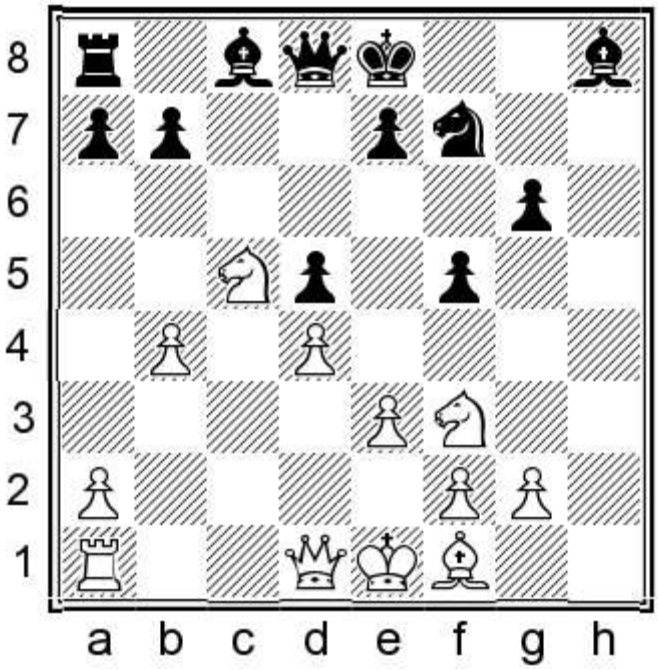
Position after: 7.h5

This is possible here as well, but is less dangerous than in the Caruana game above. 7...♘f7 8.♗h4 [8.h6 ♗f8 – 8...♗f6 was acceptable as well, but I prefer the text move. – 9.♗f4 e6 10.♘e5 ♘xe5 11.♗xe5 ♖g8 12.♗f4 ♘d7⇄] 8...♕b6 9.♘a4 ♕a5+ 10.c3 ♘d7



Position after: 10...♘d7

Black can break with either...c5 or ...e5, so White should take measures. 11.b4 [11.♗e2 b5! 12.♘c5 ♘xc5 13.b4! ♕a3 14.bxc5 ♕xc3+ 15.♔f1 a5!∞] 11...♕d8 12.c4 ♘f6 13.cxd5 cxd5 14.hxg6 hxg6 15.♗xf6 ♗xf6 16.♖xh8+ ♗xh8 17.♘c5

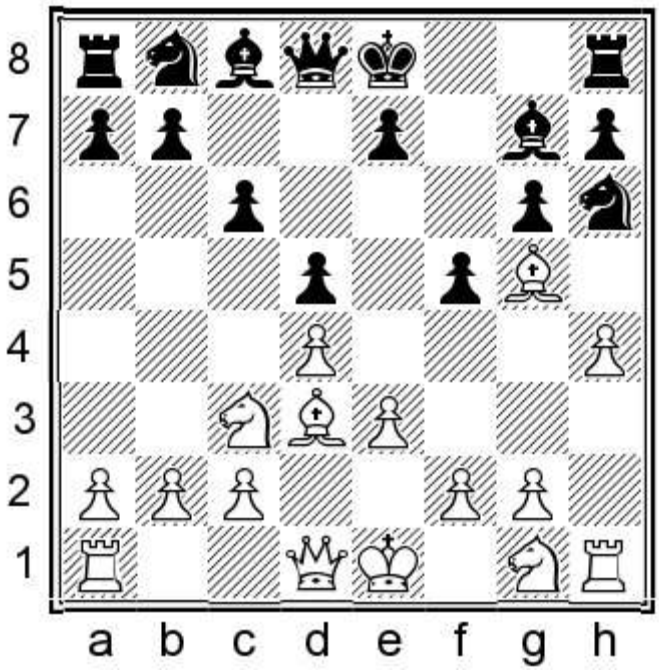


Position after: 17.♘c5

White might be visually better due to his strong knights, but this is fully playable for both sides.

B) 6.h5?! h6 7.♗h4 g5 8.♗g3 ♘f6⇄

6...♘h6



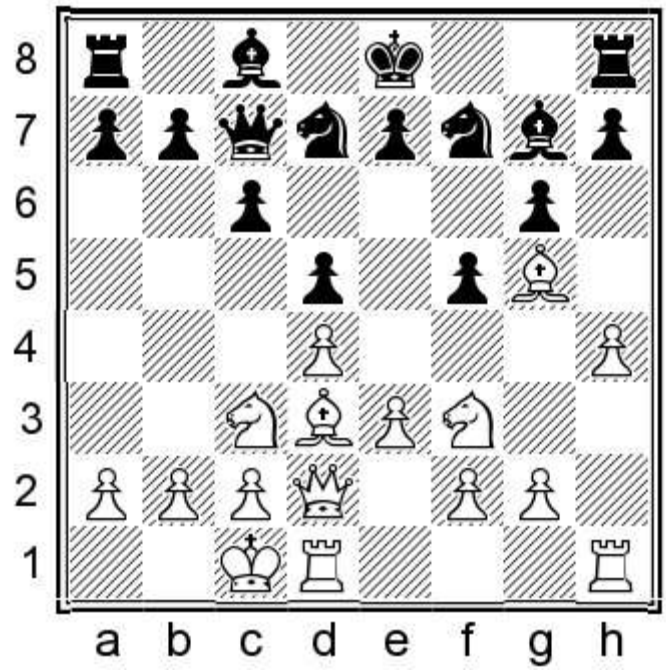
Position after: 6...♘h6

7.♘f3

7.♗xh6 Some players have tried this interesting move. Because we're in a closed position, it makes sense to get rid of the opponent's knights. 7...♗xh6 8.f4 This has been reached in a few games, including the notable Moiseenko, A (2707) – Miton, K (2603), Poznan 2014, ½-½ (54). Black tried to gain a tempo on the b2-pawn in order to accelerate his development. 8...♕b6 9.♕c1 ♘d7 10.♘f3 ♘f6 11.♘e5 0-0= In this very closed position, it's not clear what White should do. If he tries to advance with h5, it fails, e.g. 12.♗e2 c5! 13.h5? g5!∓ and White's center is about to collapse.

7...♘f7 8.♗f4

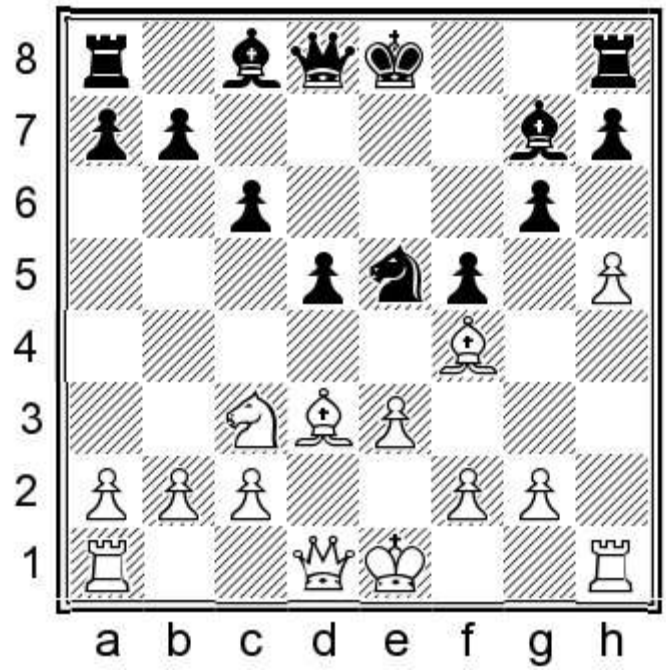
8.♕d2 ♘d7 9.0-0-0 ♕c7



Position after: 9...♕c7

10.h5! [10.♗f4 e5 11.dxe5 ♘dxe5 12.♘xe5 ♘xe5 13.♔b1 ♕e7=] 10...e5 11.dxe5 ♘dxe5 12.♗f4 ♕e7 13.hxg6 hxg6 14.♖xh8+ ♗xh8⇄ Again, this should be a slight edge for White, but nothing really worrying for Black.

8...♘d7 9.h5 e5 10.dxe5 ♘dxe5 11.♘xe5 ♘xe5



Position after: 11...♘xe5

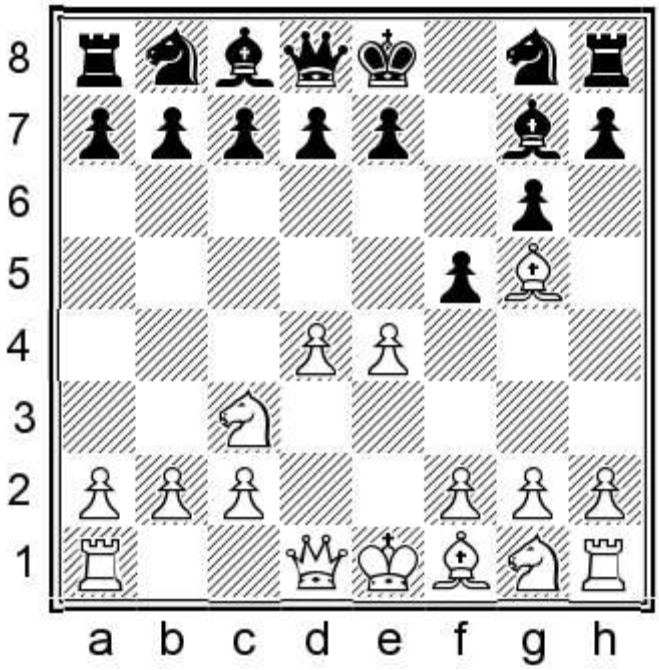
Black has moved a lot of pawns already, and the risk is to end up with a weakened position, but right now his pieces compensate and he should be fine, as proven by the following game.

12.♕d2 ♗e6 13.♘e2 ♕b6=

0-1 (43) Mirzoyan, D (2341) – Sandipan, C (2570), Yerevan 2017.

d) 2...g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4

1.d4 f5 2.♗g5 g6!? 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4

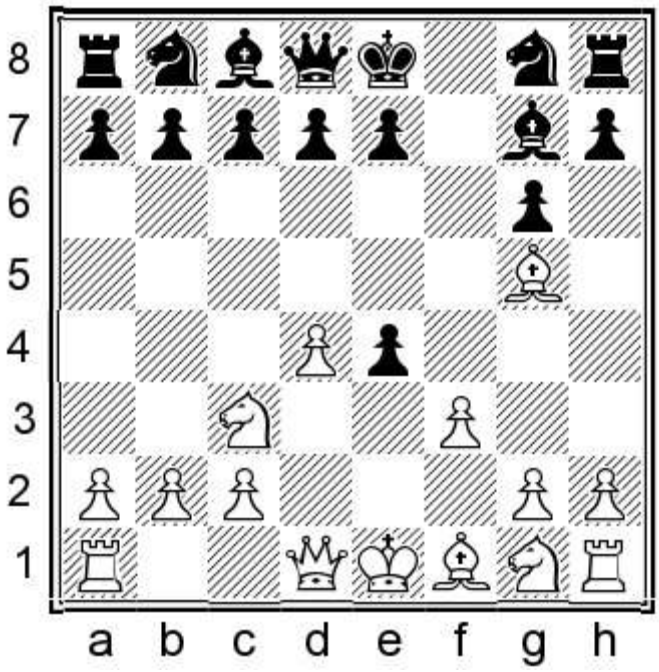


Position after: 4.e4

Logical, and the most played move. Even if it's not necessarily the most dangerous attempt, Black doesn't have any choice but to take.

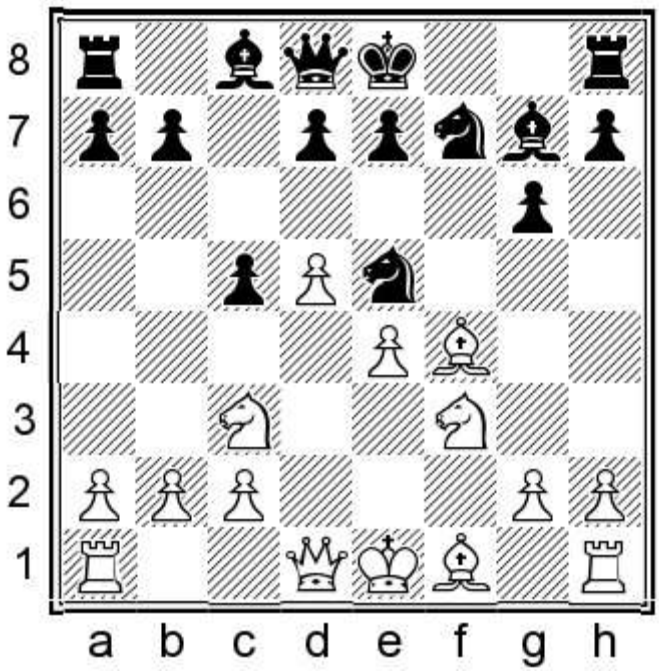
4...fxe4 5.♘xe4

5.f3?! Is rarely played, but can be frightening because at first sight it looks like a better version of the Staunton Gambit as we have spent two moves playing a fianchetto while White has developed two pieces. However we can make use of our bishop already being on g7!



Position after: 5.f3?!

5...♘c6! 6.d5 ♘e5 7.fxe4 ♘h6! A very important move. We are ready to castle, but also to defend the important knight on e5. 8.♘f3 [8.♕d2N 8...♘hf7 9.h4 c5!? 10.0-0-0 d6 11.♗e2 0-0↑] 8...♘hf7 9.♗f4!N [9.♗e3 0-0 10.♗e2 e6 11.0-0 d6 12.♘d4 exd5 13.exd5 ♕e7↑ White is unable to get rid of the super-strong knight on e5, so Black had the easier game in Csiszar, C (2429) – Kovachev, D (2208), Ohrid 2009, 0-1 (40).] 9...c5!

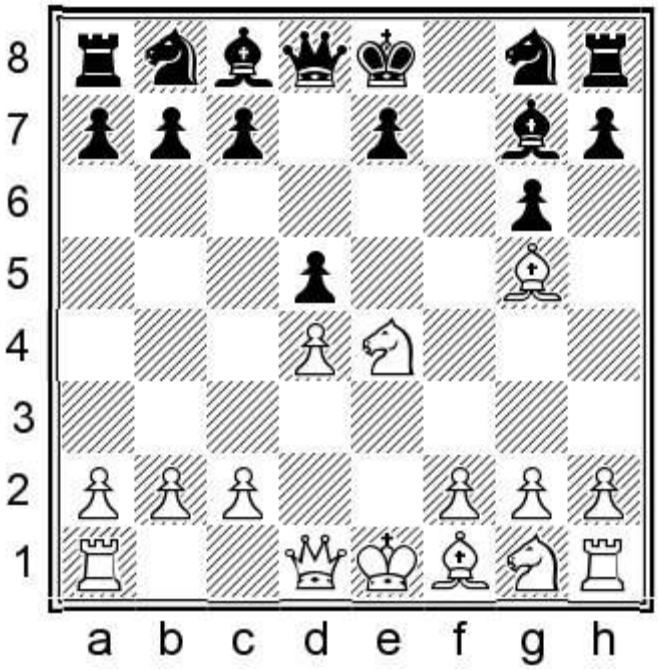


Position after: 9...c5!

10.♗e2 [10.d6 e6 11.♕d2 0-0 12.0-0-0 ♘xf3 13.gxf3 b5!→] 10...0-0 11.0-0 ♘xf3+ 12.♗xf3 d6∓ Black

has several advantages, e.g. his bishop on g7 is a monster and he should soon be able to start a pawn storm on the queenside by means of ...♗d7, ...a6, ...♖b8 (if needed) and ...b5!

5...d5

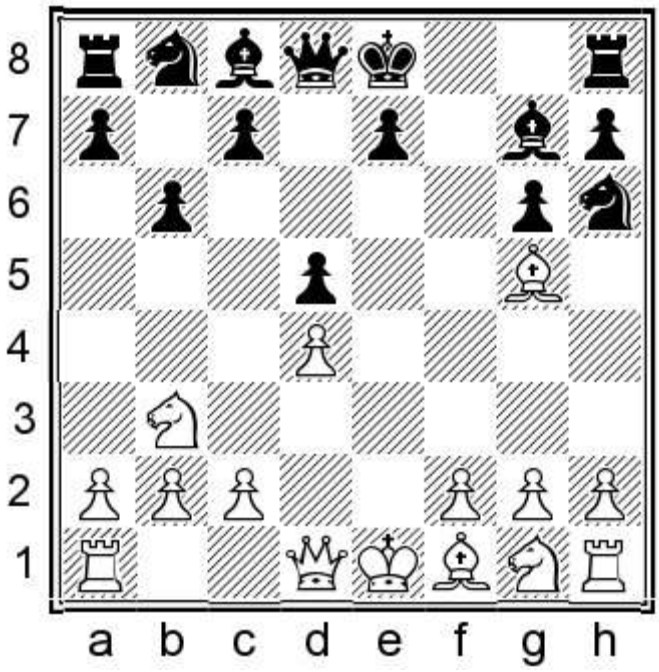


Position after: 5...d5

6.♘g3!?

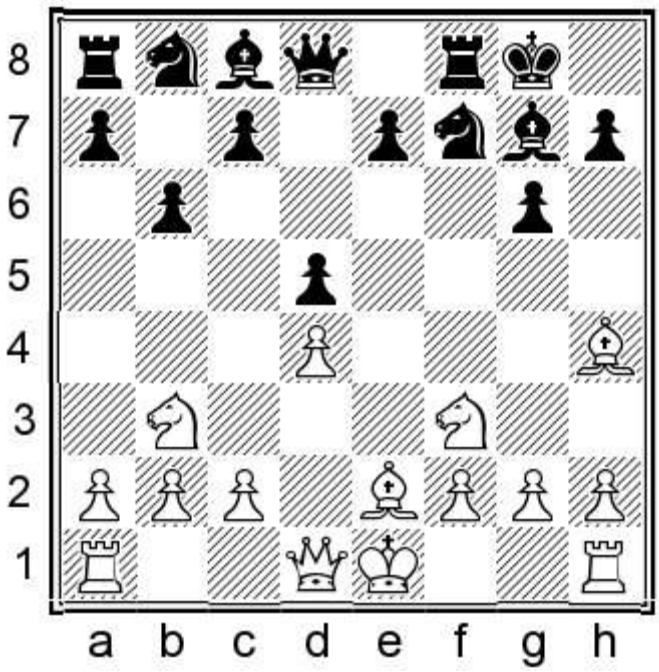
This has always been the move that gave me most problems, but I am happy with the solution that I have come up with.

A) 6.♘c5 I don't believe this is the right idea (heading towards b3 with no prospects), but strangely enough, it's the most frequently played move. 6...b6 7.♘b3 ♘h6!



Position after: 7...♘h6!

8.♘f3 [8.h4 ♘f7 9.♘h3 0-0 10.♕d2 ♘xg5 11.♘xg5 e5! White's knights are completely pointless. 12.dxe5 ♗xe5 13.c4 a5∓] 8...0-0 9.♗e2 [9.♕d2?! This only helps Black and takes away the d2-square from the b3-knight. 9...♘f7 10.♗f4 c5 11.c3 c4 12.♘c1 ♘c6 13.♗e2 ♗f5 14.0-0 ♕d7 15.♗d1 e5∓] 9...♘f7 10.♗h4

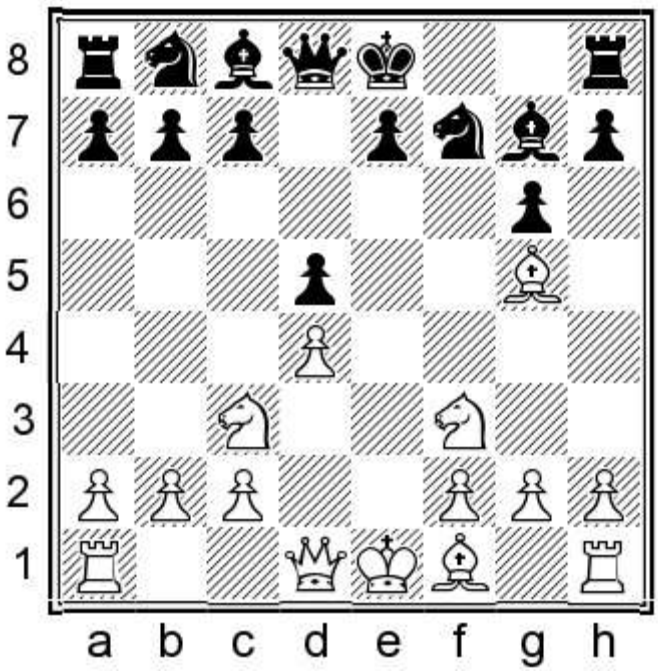


Position after: 10.♗h4

and now 10...c5!N 11.c3 c4 12.♘bd2 ♘c6 13.0-0 b5↑ improves on Black's play in the game Chernin,

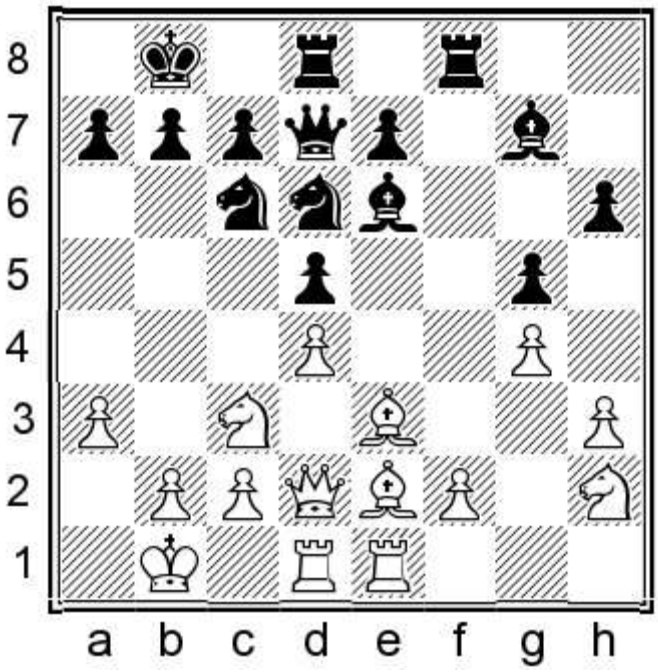
A (2584) – Nijboer, F (2567), Sanxenxo 2004, which was drawn at this point.

B) 6.♘c3 From time to time White prefers to retreat the knight to where it just came from. I found this very instructive game by Gata Kamsky, who, apart from his incredible strength, often employed the Dutch, so is a reference. 6...♘h6! 7.♘f3 ♘f7



Position after: 7...♘f7

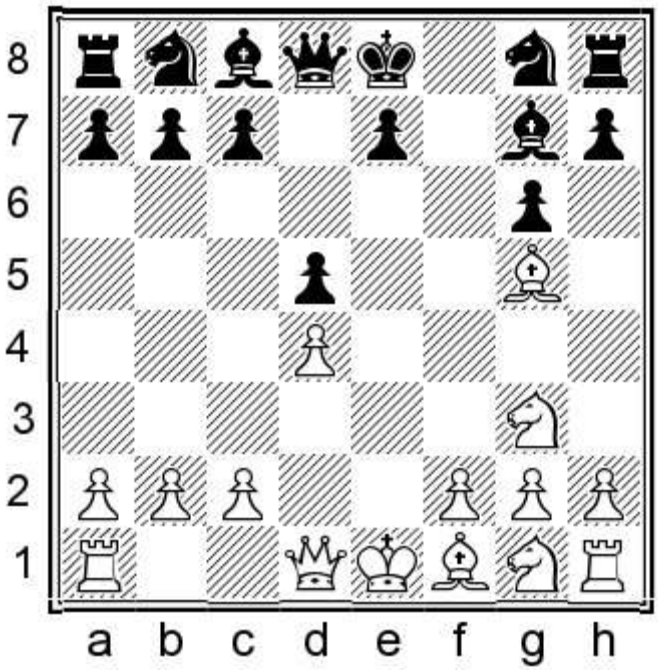
From here, the knight stops ♗h6 and protects the weak e5-square. It may also help Black to push ...e5 at some point. 8.♗e3 ♘c6 9.♕d2 ♗f5 10.♗e2 ♕d7 11.0-0-0 0-0-0 Castling short by Black would only encourage White's plan of pushing h4−h5. 12.♔b1 ♔b8 13.a3 h6 14.h3 g5 15.g4 ♗e6 16.♖he1 ♖hf8 17.♘h2 ♘d6∓



Position after: 17...♘d6∓

Kamsky's position seems better already, and his opponent collapsed in only seven moves from this position! 18.f3 ♗g8 19.♘b5 a6 20.♘xd6 ♕xd6 21.♘f1 e5 22.dxe5 ♕xe5 23.c3 d4 24.cxd4 ♕d5 0-1 Pardo Simon, D (2451) – Kamsky, G (2709), Gibraltar 2014.

Back to 6.♘g3.

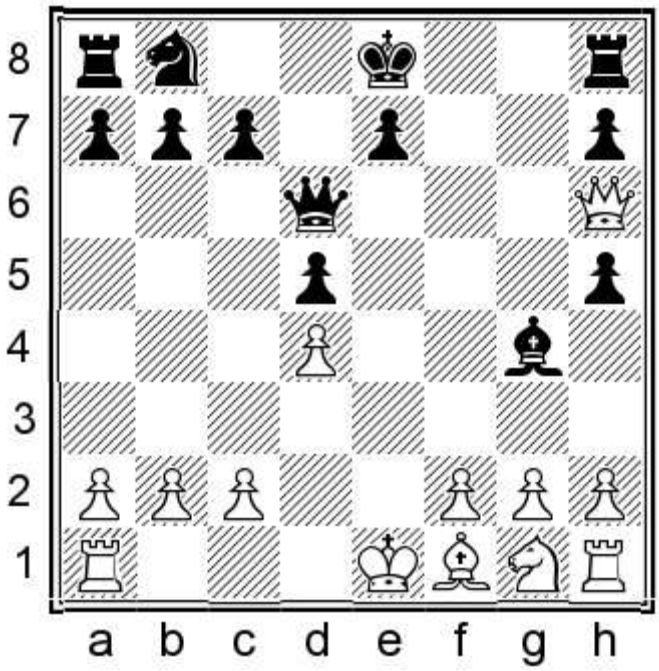


Position after: 6.♘g3!?

6...c5!

The best chance is to strike back directly in the center. Black has several choices here, but none of them seems too scary after thorough analysis.

6...♘h6 used to be theory's recommendation, but things are changing quickly, and it's no longer the current fashion. The position would be simple for Black if White didn't have the following resource: 7.♘h5! gxh5 [7...♗f8 8.♕e2 ♘c6 9.c3 gxh5!N 10.♗xh6 ♗g4 11.♕e3 ♗xh6 12.♕xh6 ♕d6 13.♕xd6 cxd6± is similar to the line with 7...gxh5.] 8.♗xh6 ♗g4 9.♕d2 ♗xh6 10.♕xh6 ♕d6

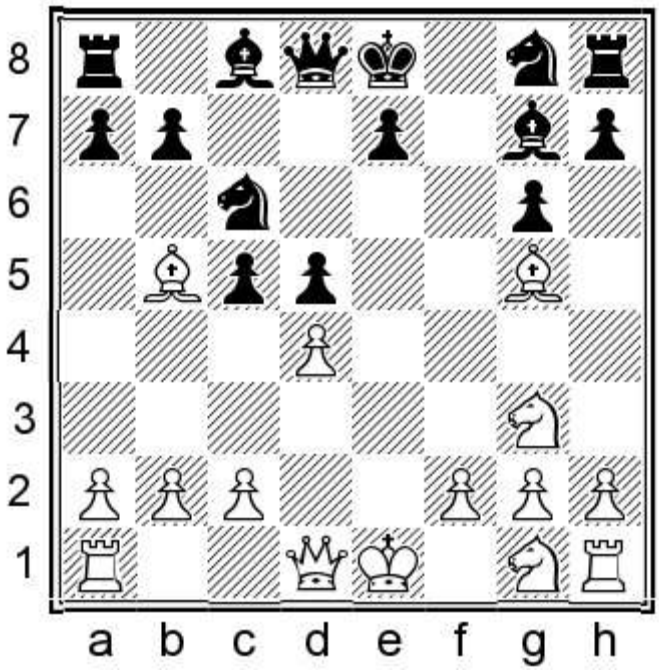


Position after: 10...♕d6

Because of his poor king, Black is keen to trade queens. Unfortunately, even if the following endgame is probably holdable, his winning chances are slim, so I prefer to avoid these kinds of lines. 11.♕xd6 cxd6 12.♗d3±

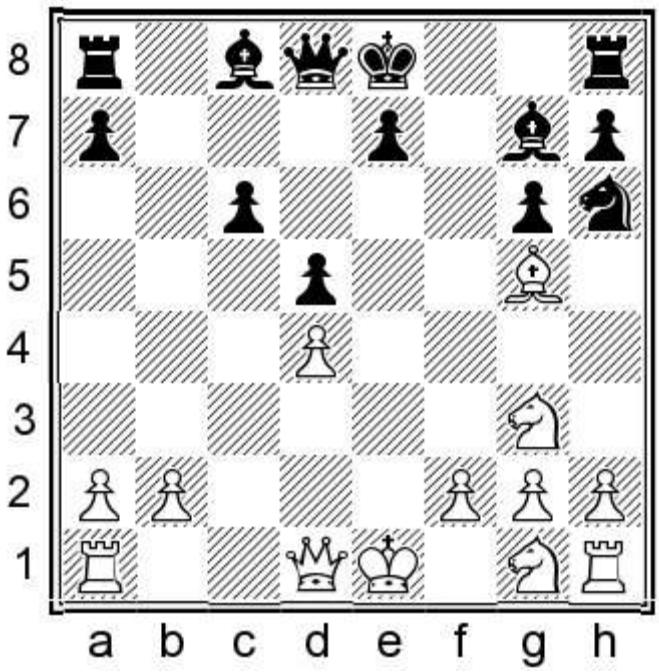
7.♘f3

A) 7.♗b5+?! ♘c6



Position after: 7...♘c6

White can't develop his kingside so simply because of the deadly threat of ...♕a5+. 8.c3 [8.♗xc6+ bxc6 9.c3 cxd4 10.cxd4 transposes] 8...cxd4 9.♗xc6+ [9.cxd4?? ♕a5+–+; 9.♘1e2 dxc3 10.bxc3 ♘f6 11.0-0 0-0 12.♘f4 e6 13.♖e1 h6 14.♗xf6 ♕xf6∓ Black was effortlessly better and won convincingly in Lubczynski, R (2431) – Janaszak, D (2384), Poronin 2016, 0-1 (29).] 9...bxc6 10.cxd4 ♘h6



Position after: 10...♘h6

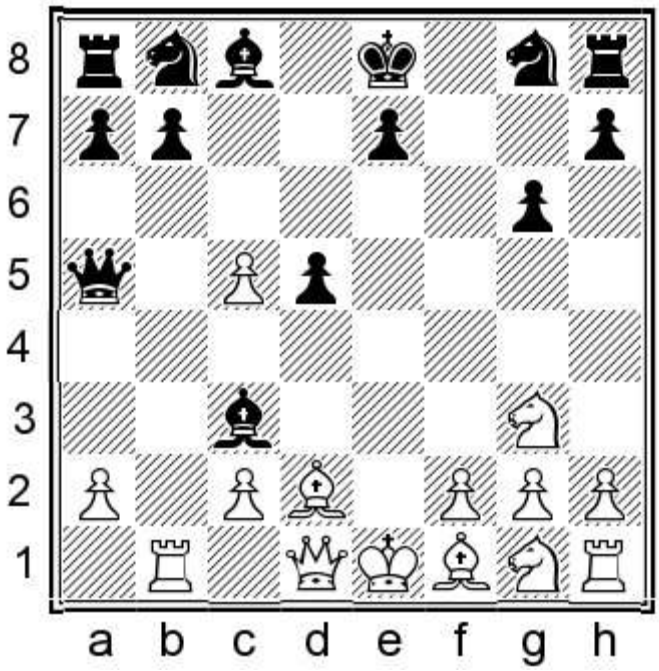
If Black manages to castle next move, he will be better thanks to the bishop pair in an open position

and his piece activity along the f-file and against the d4-pawn, so White has to grab some material to keep the game approximately balanced.

A1) 11.♘h5?! We have already seen this pattern in the 6...♘h6 line that we refrained from playing, but here it is much less dangerous, as the knight will soon be en prise here. 11...♗f8 12.♕e2 ♕d6 13.♘g3 [13.♘f6+? ♔f7 14.♗xh6 ♗xh6 15.♘g4 ♕b4+∓] 13...♘f7 14.♗e3 ♕b4+∓

A2) 11.♕c1! ♘f7 12.♕xc6+ ♗d7 13.♕xd5 ♘xg5 14.♕xg5 ♗xd4→ Black will probably regain the b2-pawn. He remains better thanks to his bishop pair, but the result is most likely to be a draw.

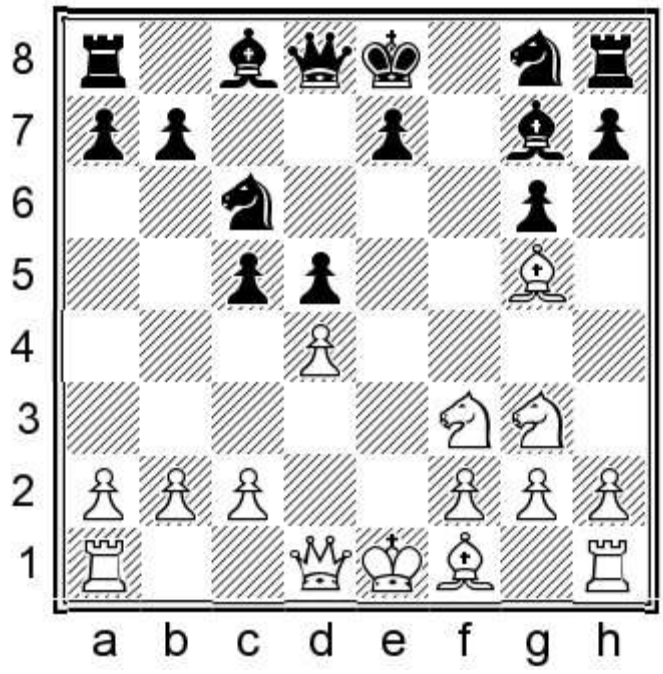
B) 7.dxc5 White has achieved good results with this move. He hopes that his poor pawn structure will be compensated for by his piece activity and lead in development, but that's not necessarily the case. 7...♗xb2 8.♖b1 ♗c3+ 9.♗d2 ♕a5!



Position after: 9...♕a5!

10.♗b5+ [10.♘f3 ♘f6 11.♖b3?! ♗xd2+ 12.♕xd2 ♕xd2+ 13.♔xd2 ♘bd7 14.♗b5 0-0 15.♗xd7 ♘xd7∓ ½-½ (56) Rakhmangulov, A (2395) – Firman, N (2542), Alushta 2011] 10...♗d7!N This novelty is necessary to keep the balance, as practice has shown that 10...♘c6 couldn't do the job. Black shouldn't be afraid of losing the b7-pawn, as he will grab the c5-pawn with the knight, gaining a tempo on the rook. 11.♘1e2 ♗xd2+ 12.♕xd2 ♕xd2+ 13.♔xd2 ♘f6 14.♘f4 ♗xb5 15.♖xb5 ♘bd7= White is more active, but Black is solid and has the better pawn structure. The game is roughly equal.

7...♘c6



Position after: 7...♘c6

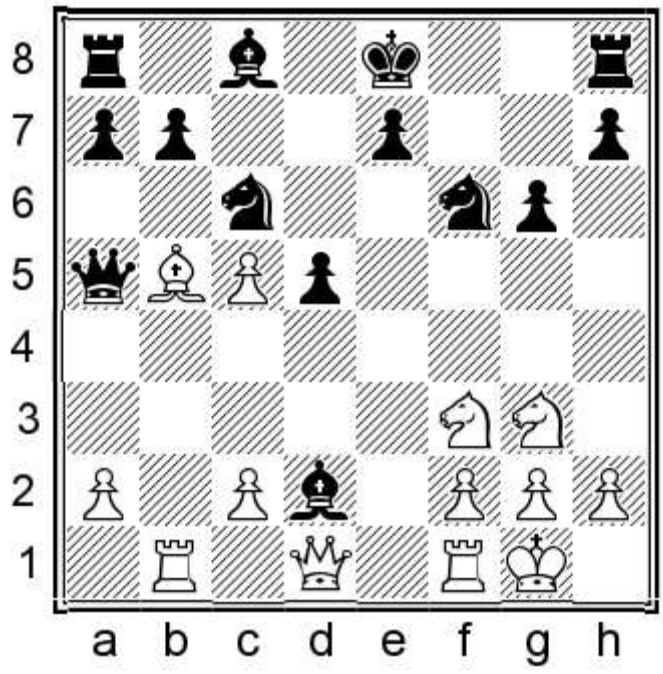
8.dxc5

White is unable to hold the center, so releasing the tension is best.

A) 8.♗b5?? ♕a5+–+

B) 8.c3?! ♕b6 9.♕d2 cxd4 10.cxd4 ♘xd4∓

8...♗xb2 9.♖b1 ♗c3+ 10.♗d2 ♕a5 11.♗b5 ♘f6 12.0-0 ♗xd2

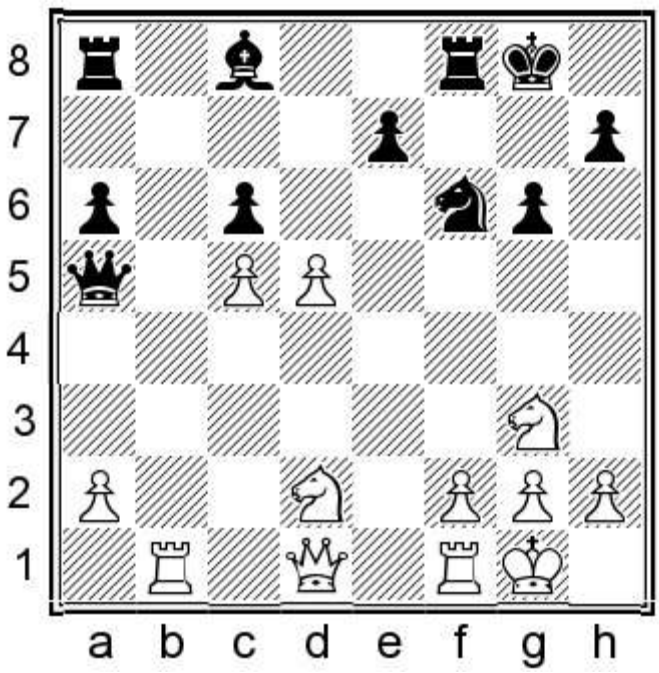


Position after: 12...♗xd2

13.♘xd2

13.♕xd2N 13...♕xd2 14.♘xd2 ♗d7 White doesn't seem to be in a position to cause Black any trouble here. 15.c4 [15.♖fe1 ♖c8 16.c4 a6 17.♗a4 ♘a5 18.♗xd7+ ♔xd7 19.♖bd1 ♖hd8 20.cxd5 ♖xc5=] 15...0-0-0 16.♖fe1 ♖he8 17.cxd5 ♘xd5=

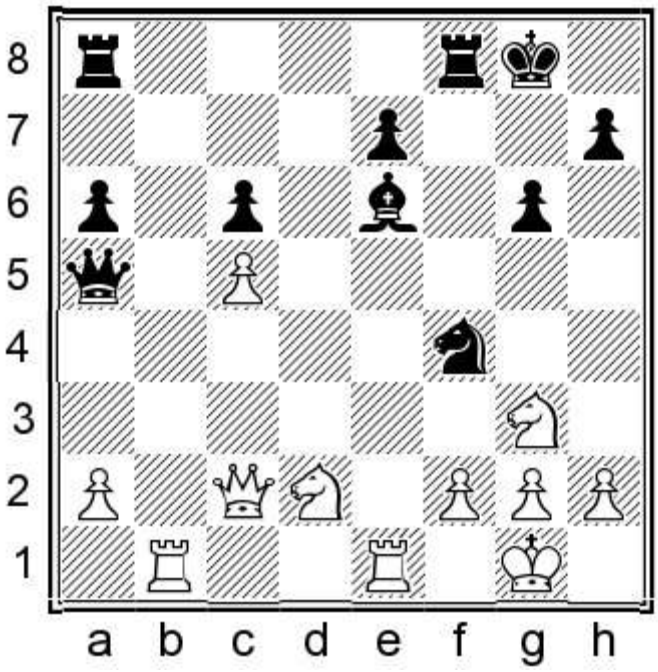
13...0-0 14.c4 a6 15.♗xc6 bxc6 16.cxd5



Position after: 16.cxd5

This position occurred in quite an old game by the Armenian superstar, Aronian, L (2649) – Nikolic, P (2647), Germany 2003, ½-½ (24). I think it's better to take back with the knight.

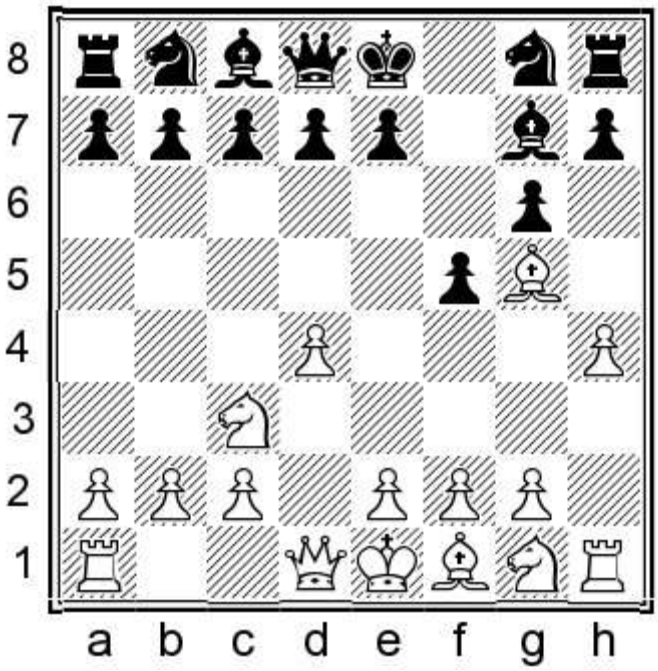
16...♘xd5!N 17.♕c2 ♗e6 18.♖fe1 ♘f4⇄



Position after: 18...♘f4⇄

e) 2...g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.h4

1.d4 f5 2.♗g5 g6!? 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.h4!?



Position after: 4.h4!?

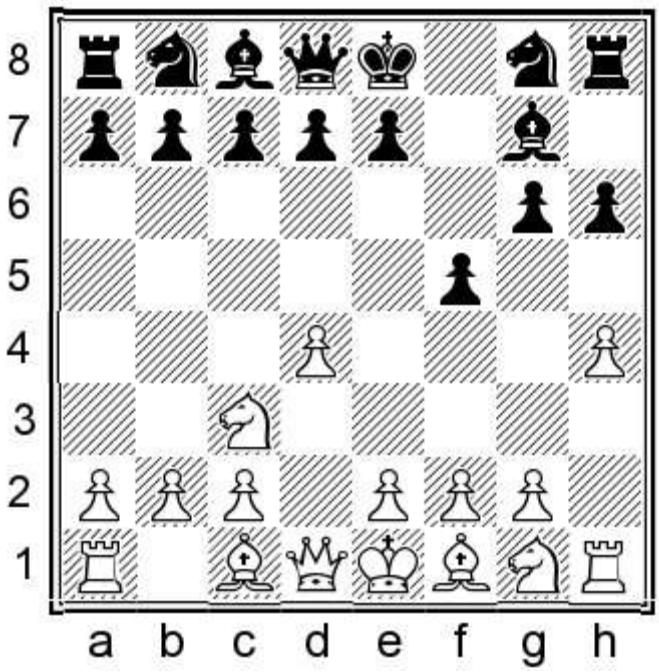
This has become the main line. White would be happy to keep advancing to h5, taking advantage of our knight still being on g8, but we have a solution.

4...h6!

This is necessary in order to continue with ...♘f6.

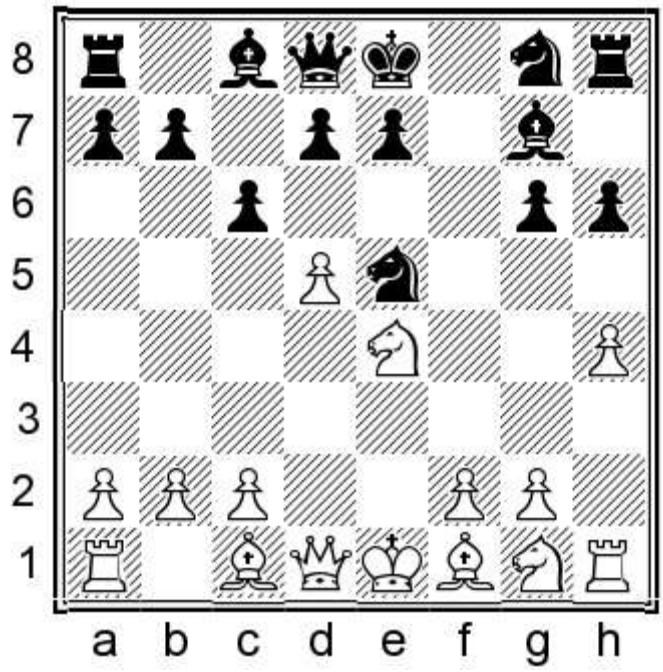
5.♗f4

5.♗c1 This very rare move occurred in one of my games. It was a big surprise for me, and I tried to react quickly in the center.



Position after: 5.♗c1

A) 5...♘c6!? This was my choice in the game, convinced that I had to strike back immediately. 6.d5 ♘e5 [6...♗xc3+ This is the idea, but I am not fond of it. 7.bxc3 ♘e5 8.♘f3 d6 9.♘xe5 dxe5 10.c4 ♘f6 11.♕d3↑ White has a weird pawn structure, but also the bishop pair, and Black's position is not without weaknesses.] 7.e4 fxe4 8.♘xe4 c6

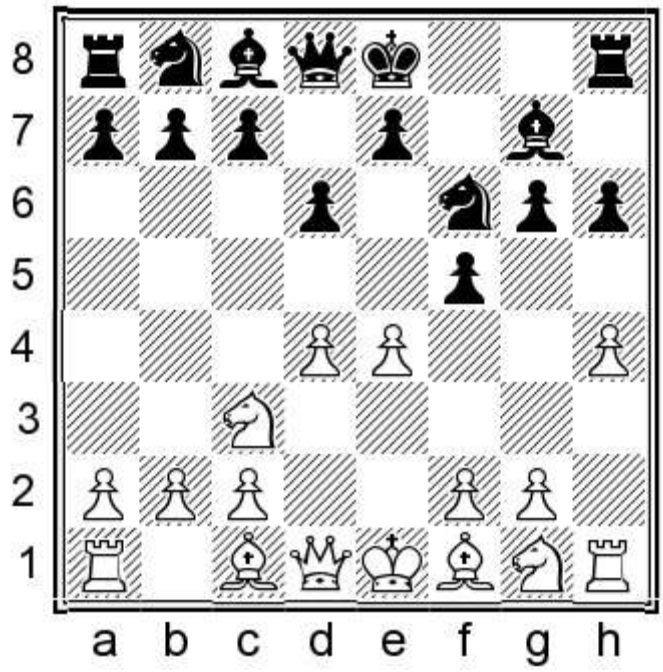


Position after: 8...c6

9.d6?! [9.c3!N This quiet move, simply preventing ...♕a5+ and blunting the pressure along the long diagonal, would have been very unpleasant to meet, as Black is actually out of useful moves. 9...d6 10.♘f3 ♘xf3+ 11.gxf3! ♗f5 12.♘g3±] 9...♘f6! 10.♘xf6+ ♗xf6 11.♕e2 ♘f7 12.dxe7= and this game against one of my friends ended peacefully, ½-½ Edouard, R (2621) – Demuth, A (2542), Guadeloupe 2018.

B) 5...♘f6?! It is easy to go wrong, as shown by 6.♘h3! d6?! 7.♘f4 ♔f7 8.e4! fxe4 9.♗c4+ e6 10.d5! ±.

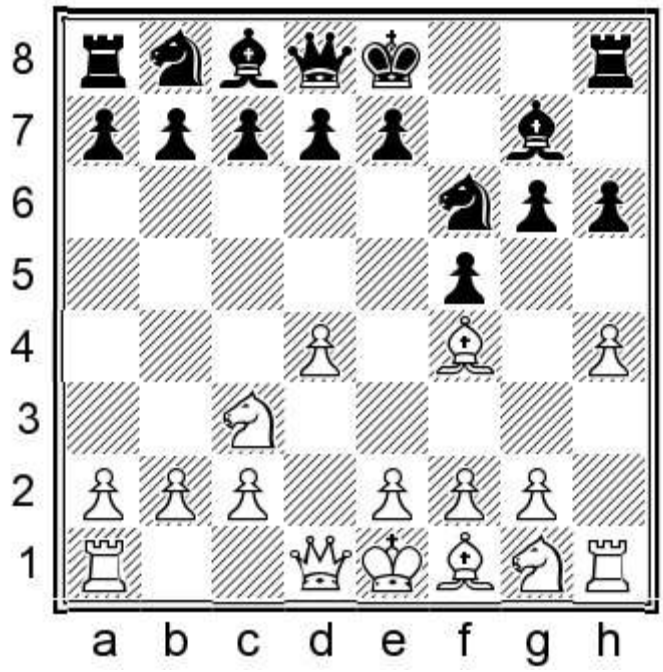
C) 5...d6!?N I think I would now choose a more down-to-earth approach. 6.e4 ♘f6



Position after: 6...♘f6

7.♗d3 [7.exf5 ♗xf5 8.♘f3 ♕d7 9.♗c4 ♘c6⇄] 7...♘c6!? 8.exf5 gxf5 9.d5 ♘b4!= Black has already gained some tempi, and I doubt if White will be able to make use of the weaknesses on the light squares.

5...♘f6



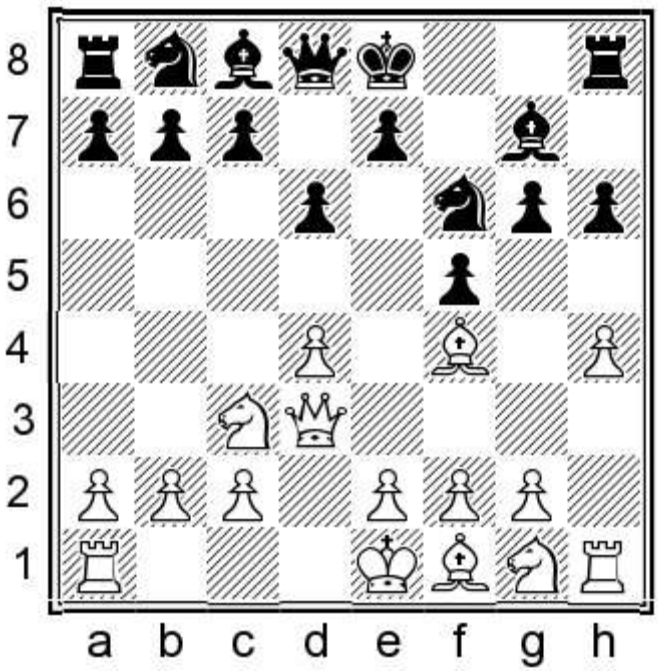
Position after: 5...♘f6

6.e3

A) 6.♕d2 is another approach, preventing ...0-0 and preparing 0-0-0. 6...d6 7.0-0-0 ♘c6! 8.d5 ♘e5 9.e3 0-0⇄

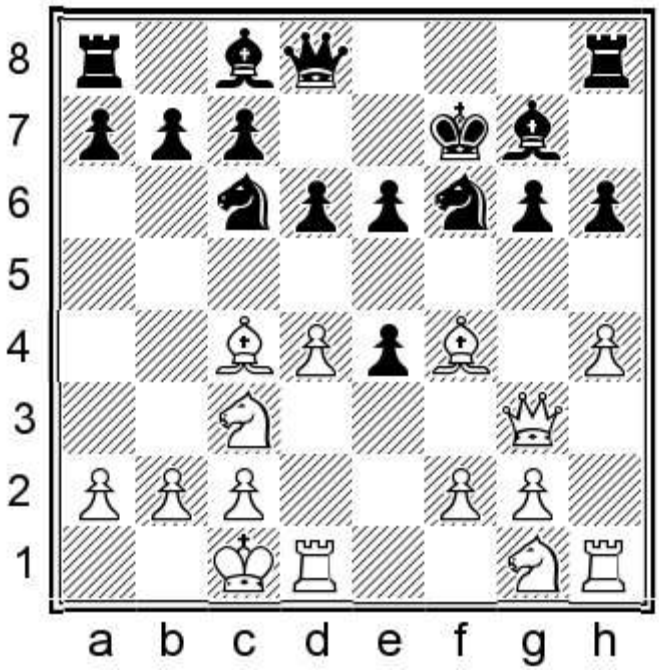
B) 6.♘f3 is rather passive as the knight doesn't do much here. 6...d6 7.e3 ♘c6 8.d5?! This typical mistake is not forced, but I consider this position to be harmless for Black. With classical play Black will be able to choose his most con-venient set-up. It may be with ...e6, ...♗d7 and ...♕e7, probably followed by ...0-0-0, or it may be to play for ...e5. It all depends on White's decisions. 8...e5! 9.dxc6 exf4 10.cxb7 ♗xb7 11.exf4 ♕e7+ 12.♗e2 ♗xf3! 13.gxf3 ♘h5∓

C) 6.♕d3 This will probably be similar to the main line. Even if White plays the queen to g3 more quickly than usual, it is still less played. 6...d6



Position after: 6...d6

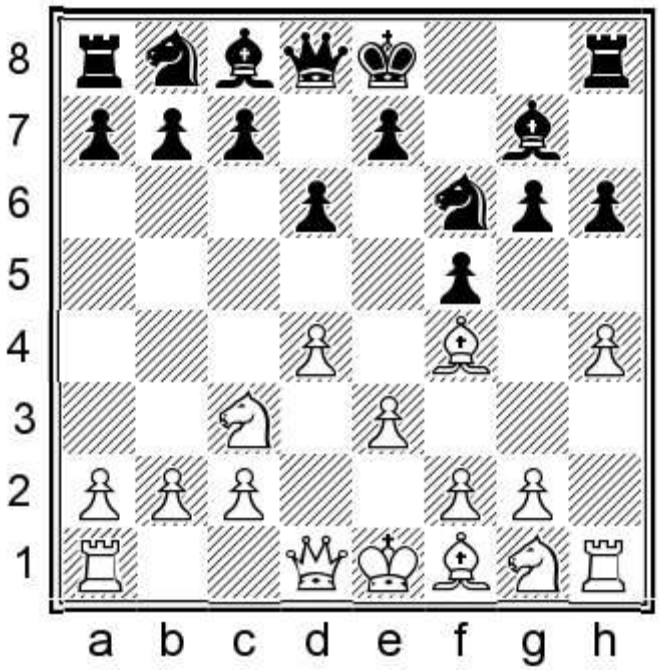
7.♕g3 [7.0-0-0 ♘c6 8.e3 e6 9.♘f3 ♗d7 10.e4 fxe4 11.♘xe4 ♘xe4 12.♕xe4 ♕f6⇄; 7.e4?! White is not ready to play this move. The queen isn't so well placed on d3, as it will be exposed in the event of exf5 ♗xf5. 7...♘c6!? 8.d5 ♘e5=] 7...♔f7 8.e4 [8.e3 ♘c6 transposes to the main line of this chapter.] 8...fxe4 9.♗c4+ e6 10.0-0-0 ♘c6=



Position after: 10...♘c6=

I consider this more or less level. We have an extra pawn that White is not yet able to win back, but on the other hand our king is in the center, even if I don't consider it to be in real danger. Black will probably follow up with ...♘a5 in order to get rid of the light-squared bishop.

6...d6



Position after: 6...d6

White has many moves at his disposal, but his main idea is clearly to aim at the g6-weakness.

7.♕f3!?

This is the main idea in this type of position: the queen is going to g3 when g6 will be in danger, but we have an effective defender – the king! My advice is to go for quick development.

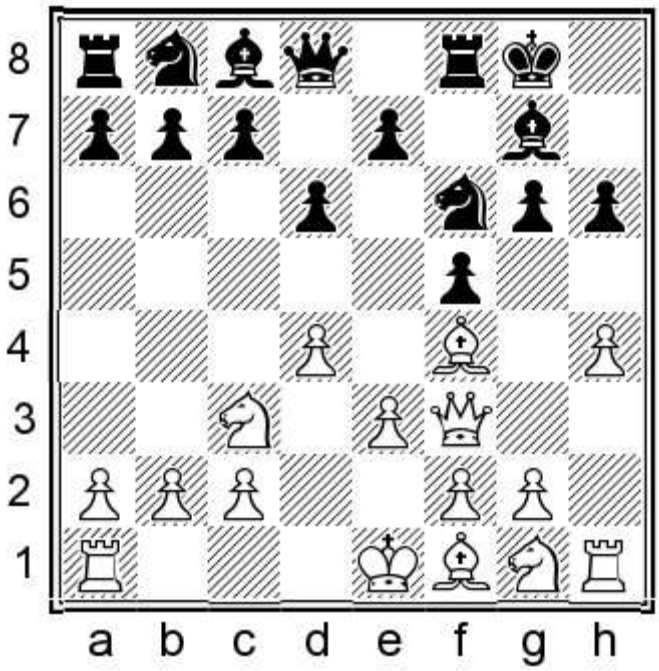
7...♘c6!

I really like this approach. I have been wanting to play it in a competitive game for a long time, but have not yet had the opportunity. It doesn't revolutionize the system, but I like the idea of keeping the king on f7.

A) 7...c6? 8.♕g3!N 8...♔f7 9.♗c4+ d5 10.♗e2±

B) 7...♘h5!? This is an interesting choice to confuse the issue and prevent ♕g3, but I prefer a developing move.

C) 7...0-0

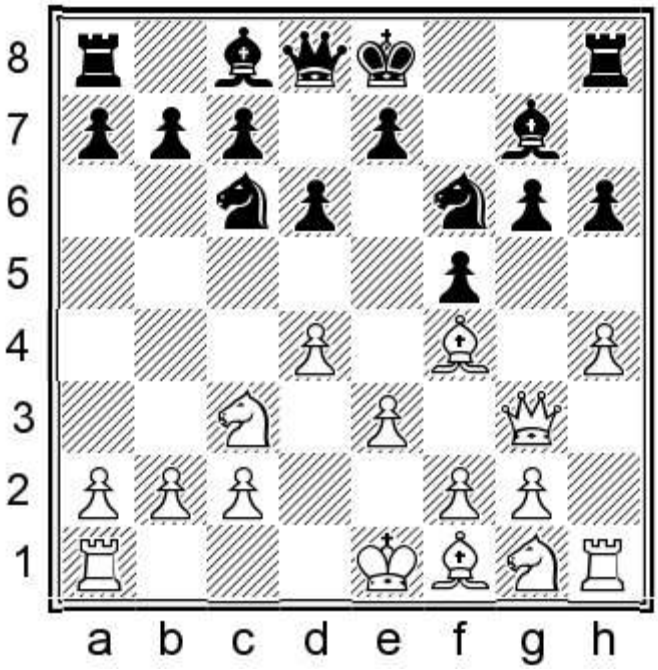


Position after: 7...0-0

Most players have chosen this path. The king is now able to protect g6 from h7 (where I don't think it is safer), or by playing ...♕e8. I don't think Black should go for opposite-side castling so readily. It has been analyzed from both sides in different books, and the general conclusion is that the positions are easier for White. 8.♗c4+ e6 9.♘ge2 ♘c6 10.a3 ♔h7 11.♗g5!→ This line is given by Schandorff as being very dangerous for Black, and I agree with him.

8.0-0-0

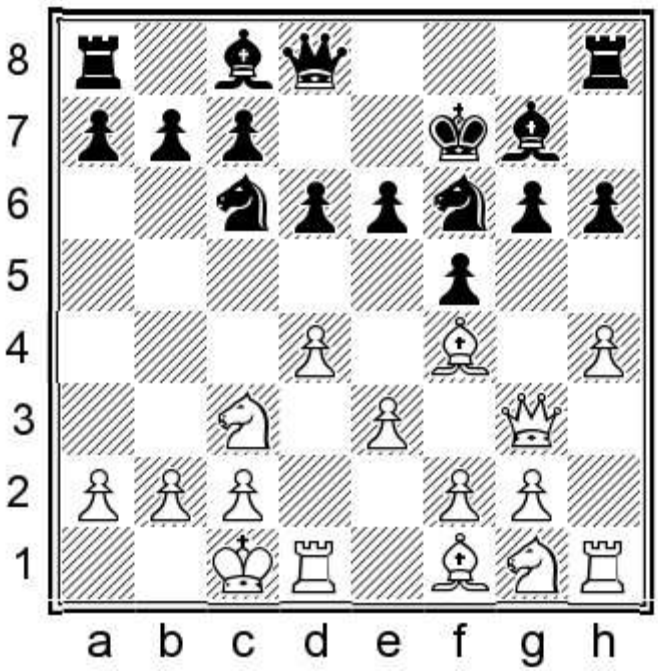
8.♕g3



Position after: 8.♕g3

8...♔f7 [The other way to defend the g6-pawn, 8...♘g4?!, is simply dubious. 9.0-0-0 e5 10.dxe5 ♘gxe5 11.♘f3± 1-0 (40) Donchenko, A (2552) – Kristiansen, J (2411), Aarhus 2015.] 9.♗c4+ e6 10.0-0-0 a6 11.a3 b5 12.♗a2 ♕e8⇄

8...e6 9.♕g3 ♔f7



Position after: 9...♔f7

10.♘h3!?N

A very sensible continuation. White protects his bishop (which can always be useful in case of ...♘h5), and intends to open the position with f3 and e4.

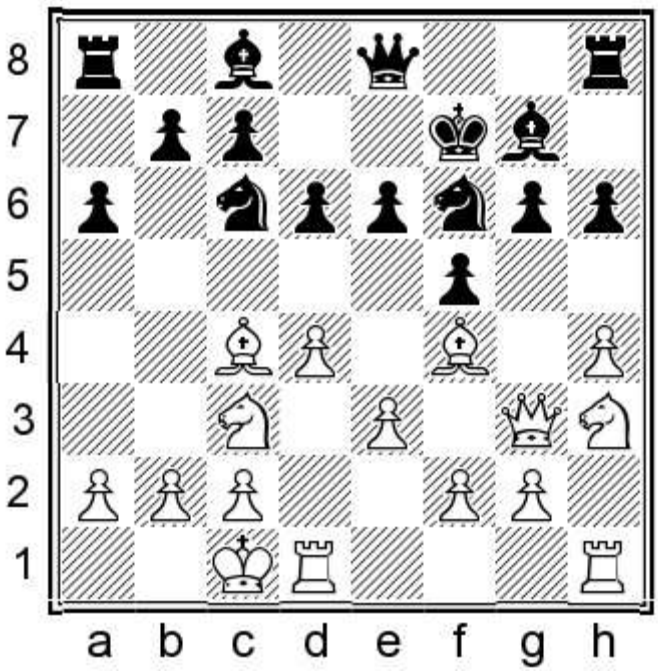
10.♗c4 – see 8.♕g3.

10...♕e8!

Also a multi-purpose move, defending the g6-pawn, allowing the king to move and intending to continue with ...e5.

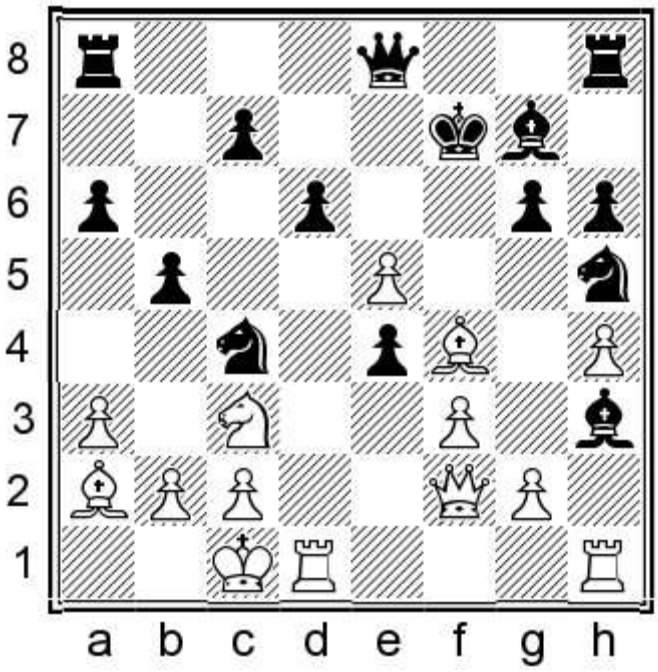
11.f3

11.♗c4 Sensible, in order to prevent ...e5, so we need to get rid of the bishop. 11...a6!



Position after: 11...a6!

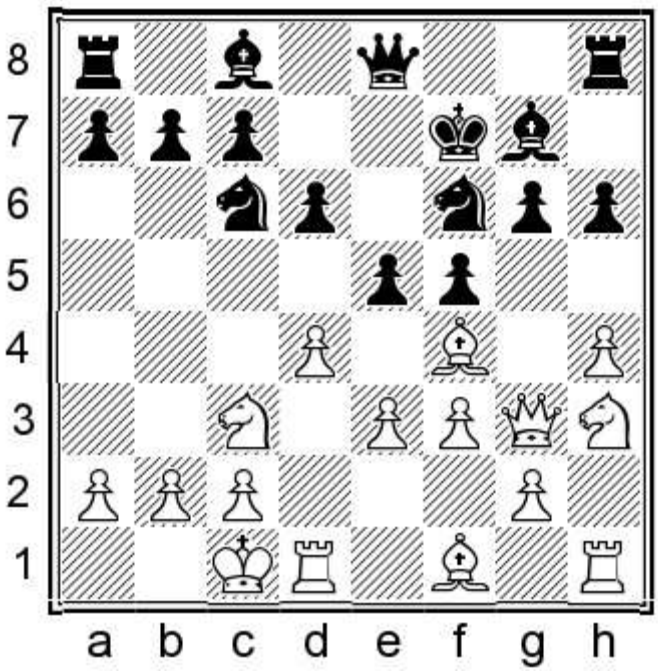
12.a3 [12.f3 b5 13.♗b3 b4 14.♘e2 ♘a5∓] 12...b5 13.♗b3! [13.♗a2 b4 14.axb4 ♘xb4 15.♗b3 a5!∓] 13...♘a5 14.♗a2 ♘c4 15.e4 fxe4 16.f3 e5 17.dxe5 ♘h5 18.♕f2 ♗xh3!∞



Position after: 18...♗xh3!∞

A messy position. White seems to be losing a piece, but the computer shows equality, e.g. 19.♗e3 ♗e6 20.g4 ♘xe5= White is able to regain his piece, but Black's king is safe and his pieces are active.

11...e5!



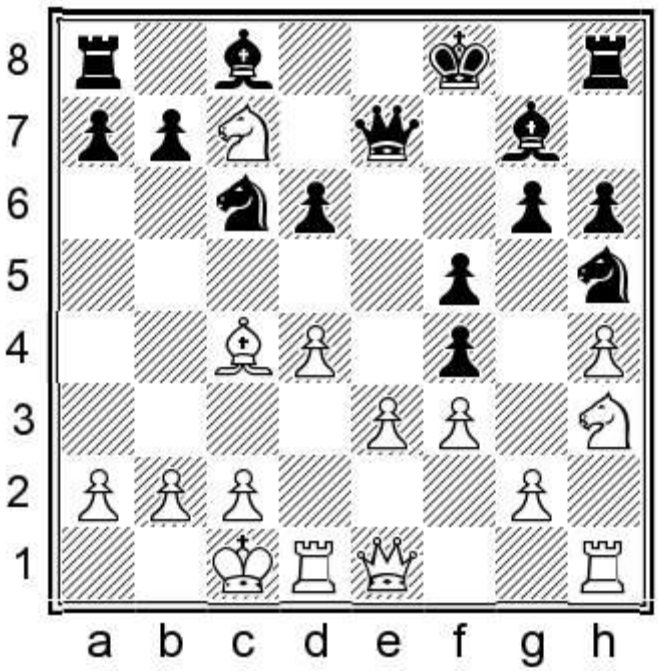
Position after: 11...e5!

The variations arising may be messy, but Black looks fine in every case.

12.♘b5!?

12.♗c4+ ♔f8

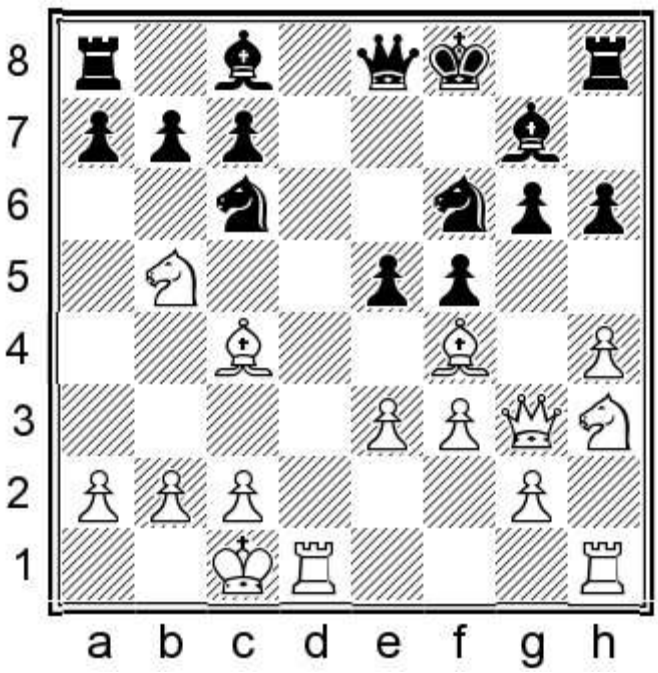
A) 13.♘b5 ♘h5! 14.♕e1 exf4 15.♘xc7 ♕e7



Position after: 15...♕e7

16.♘d5! ♕f7 17.♘b6 ♕e7 [17...axb6 18.♗xf7 ♔xf7 19.♘xf4 ♘xf4 20.exf4 ♖xa2∞ Again, a very messy position.] 18.♘d5=

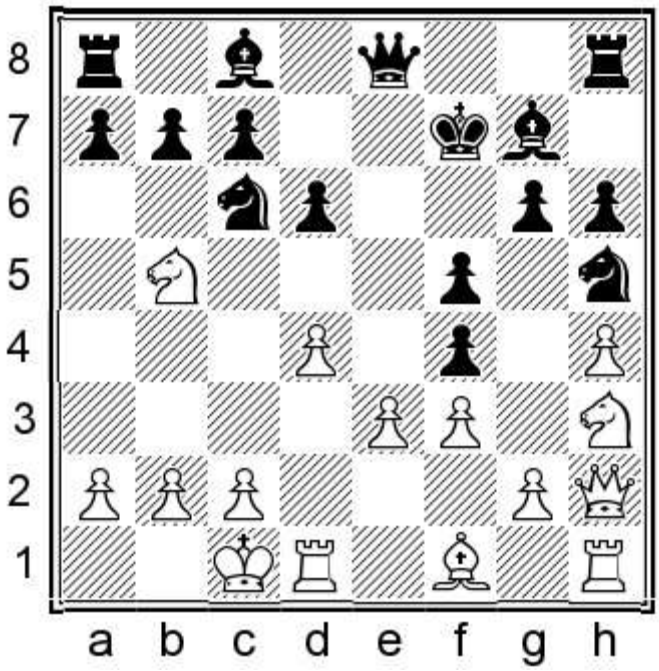
B) 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.♘b5



Position after: 14.♘b5

14...♘h5! [14...exf4 15.♘xf4+– White's knights are destroying the poor king on f8.] 15.♕f2 ♘a5! Black needs to be cold-blooded. Now the black knights are going to the flanks, to good effect. 16.♘xc7 ♕e7 17.♘xa8 ♘xc4 18.♗h2 ♔f7∓

12...♘h5 13.♕h2 exf4!



Position after: 13...exf4!

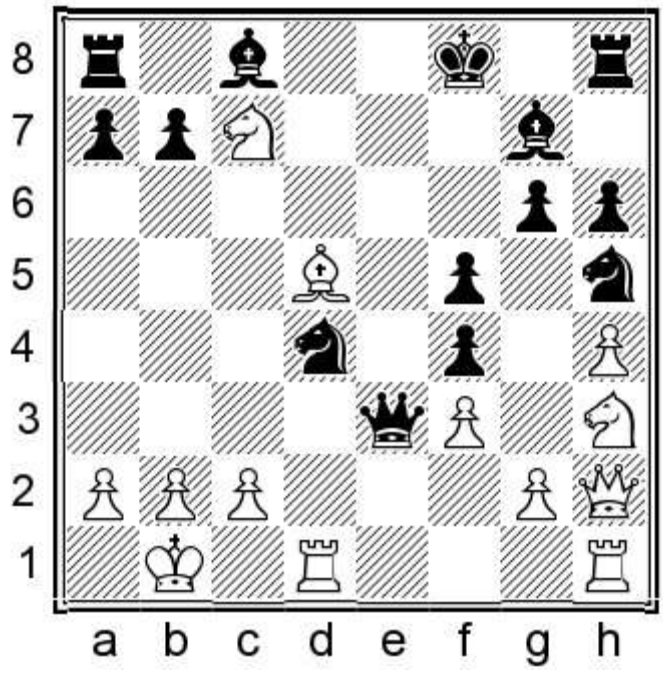
14.♗c4+!

14.♘xc7?? ♕xe3+ 15.♔b1 ♗e6–+

14...d5!

We will see why this 'gift' is very important.

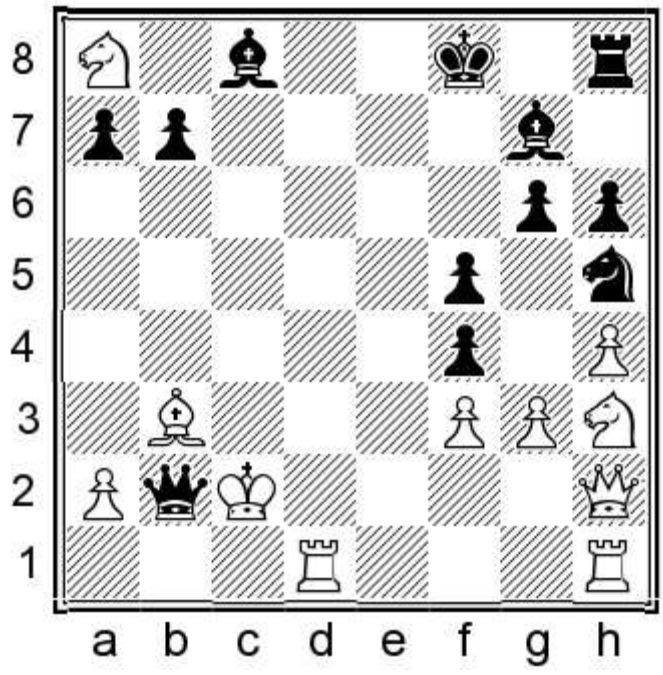
15.♗xd5+ ♔f8 16.♘xc7 ♕xe3+ 17.♔b1 ♘xd4



Position after: 17...♘xd4

18.♖he1!

18.♘xa8? ♘e2!! A terrible move for White. He is almost defenceless on the dark squares, and his king is in huge trouble. 19.♖d3 [19.♗b3? ♕e5 20.c3 ♘xc3+ 21.bxc3 ♕xc3 22.g3 ♕a1+ 23.♔c2 ♕b2+



Position after: 23...♕b2+

24.♔d3 ♕c3+ 25.♔e2 ♘xg3+ 26.♔f2 g5!–+ Simply protecting the super-important f4-pawn. 19.♖he1 was already seen in 18.♖he1.] 19...♕e5 20.c3 b5!∓ White is completely out of moves! A crazy

situation!

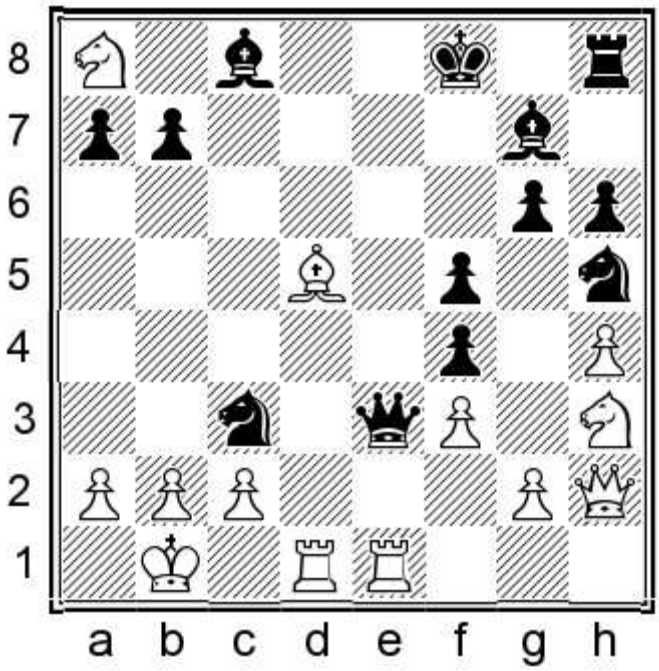
18...♘e2

Here is why we gave away the d-pawn, so that this move would be playable!

19.♗c4!

The only way to keep the balance!

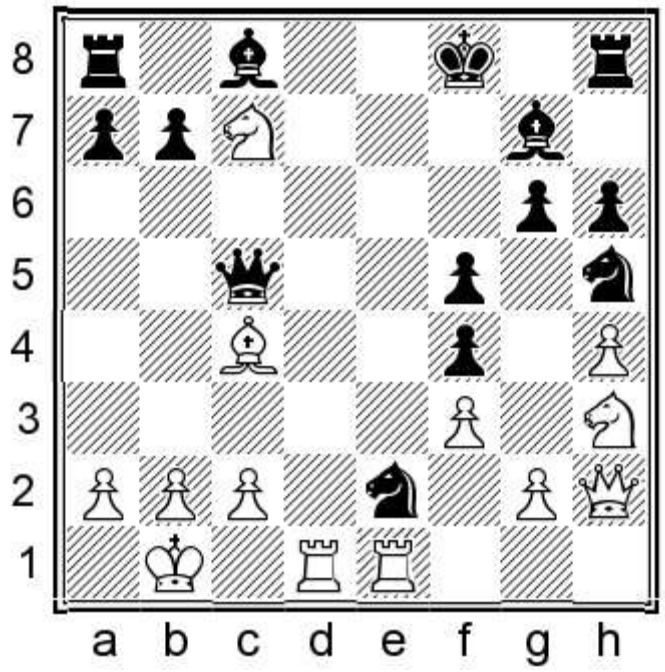
19.♘xa8 ♘c3+!



Position after: 19...♘c3+!

20.♔a1 [20.bxc3?? ♕xc3 21.♔c1 ♕a3+ 22.♔d2 ♗c3+ 23.♔e2 ♘g3+ 24.♔f2 ♕c5+–+ With mate.] 20...♕c5! 21.♘xf4 ♘xf4 22.♕xf4 ♘xd5 23.♕d2 ♘e7∓

19...♕c5□



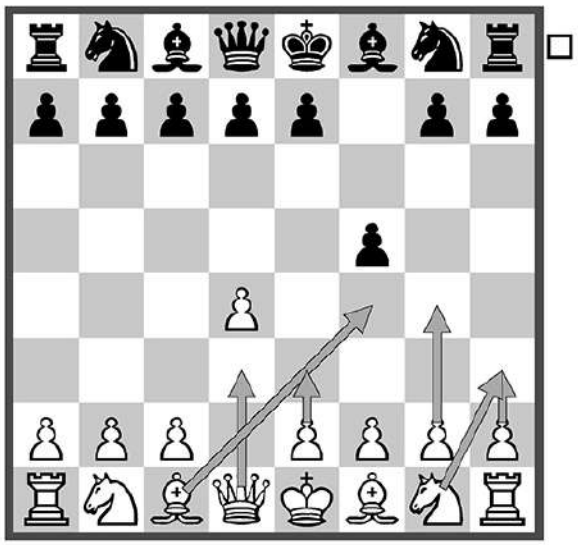
Position after: 19...♕c5□

20.♖d8+ ♔e7 21.♖d2 ♕xc4 22.♖dxe2+ ♔f7 23.♖e7+ ♔g8 24.♘xa8 ♕b4 25.♖xg7+ ♔xg7 26.♕g1 ♖d8=

Finally, the computer assesses this position as equal!

Chapter 4
Minor Lines on the Second Move

1.d4 f5



Chapter Guide

Chapter 4 – Minor Lines on the Second Move

1.d4 f5 2.--

a) 2.--, 2.e3

b) 2.♘h3

c) 2.♕d3 e6

d) 2.♕d3 ♘c6

e) 2.g4 d5 3.--

f) 2.g4 d5 3.g5

g) 2.h3 ♘f6 3.g4 d5 4.--

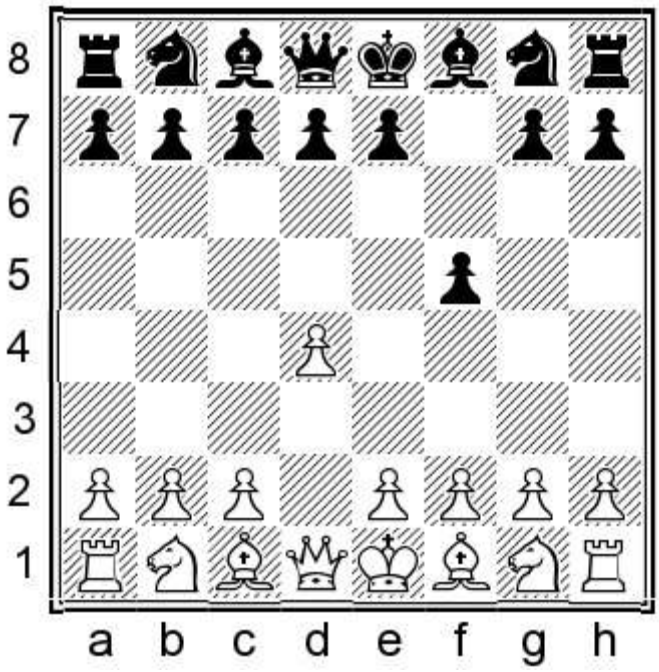
h) 2.h3 ♘f6 3.g4 d5 4.♘f3, 4.♘c3

i) 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 d6 4.--, 4.♘c3 e6 5.h3

j) 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 d6 4.♘c3 e6 5.♘f3, 5.♗d3

a) 2.--, 2.e3

1.d4 f5



Position after: 1...f5

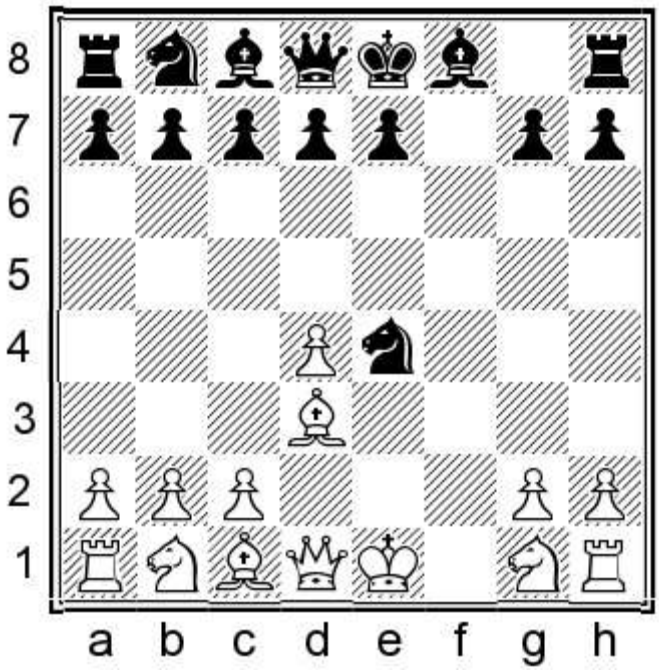
We have a lot of moves to deal with in this chapter on the early sidelines. I will focus mainly on the most important ones. In general, none of these lines should worry Black, but some of them contain venom, and it's important to know how to handle them, especially in the first few moves. It's also important to be aware that there might be transpositions into other systems.

2.e3

This timid-looking move has some followers. It is actually quite hard to analyze, so I won't go into it too deeply and will focus on quiet development by White.

A) 2.f3!? Although this is a rare attempt by White and, as we will see, there's not much to say about it, it's important to mention a trap:

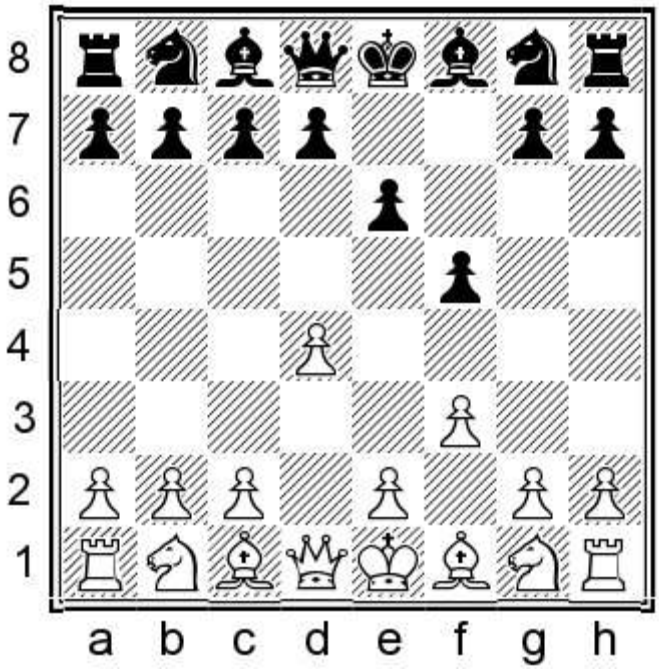
A1) The point behind White's play is that Black might think that 2...♘f6?! will prevent e2−e4, but that's exactly what White's waiting for. He can seize the initiative with 3.e4!, and it's hard to decline the offer, e.g. 3...fxe4 4.fxe4 ♘xe4 5.♗d3!



Position after: 5.♗d3!

5...d5 6.♘f3 ♘c6 7.0-0→ White is maybe not objectively better, but his initiative looks scary already, and I think his play is easier.

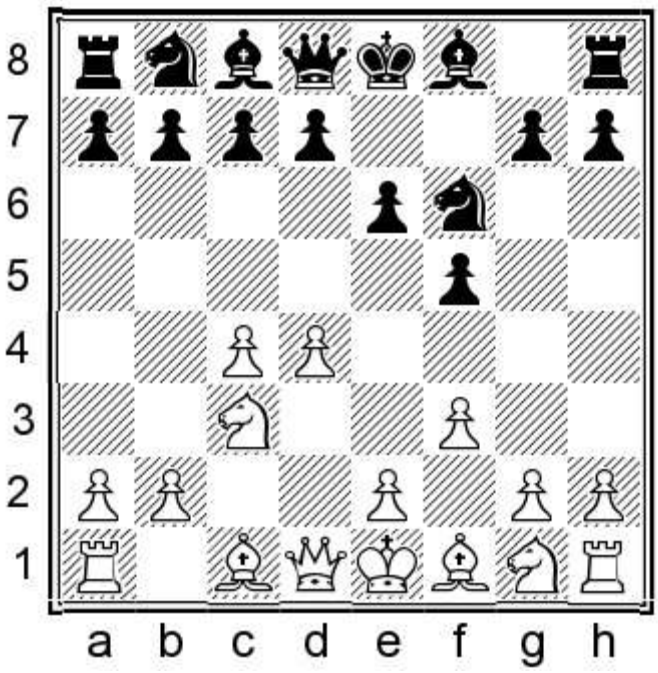
A2) 2...e6!?



Position after: 2...e6!?

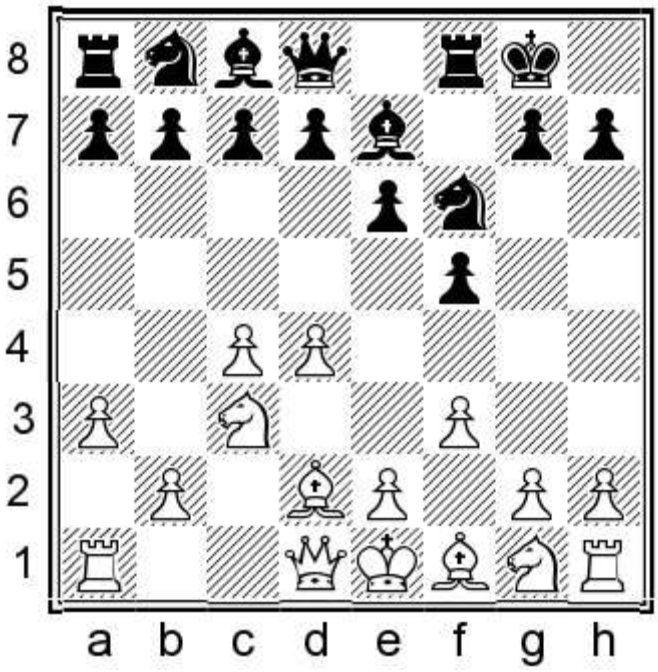
3.c4 [3.e4 is the most principled move, but I will stop the analysis here, as it transposes into Chapter 1 on the Staunton Gambit after 3.f3. 3...fxe4 And here it transposes. I will simply remind you that it

contains a trap: 4.fxe4?? ♕h4+∓; 3.♘c3 ♗b4!? 4.♕d3 b6!↑. 5...♗a6 is coming, and it's hard to see the point in White's play.] 3...♘f6 4.♘c3



Position after: 4.♘c3

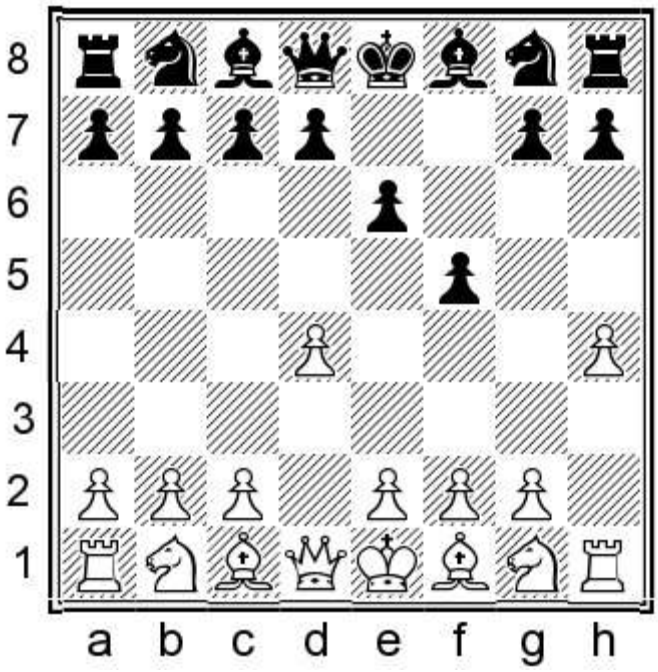
We have reached a position where quite a few games can be found. White's score is decent, but this system doesn't seem so dangerous, and is quite unlikely ever to happen with our move order. It's true that since ...e6 has been played we are now unable to play a Leningrad, but I am convinced that f2−f3 was a greater concession. 4...♗b4!? 5.♗d2 [5.a3?! ♗xc3+ 6.bxc3 c5 I consider this position akin to the Nimzo-Indian with 4.f3 or 4.a3, except that we already have a pawn on f5, which prevents a white pawn storm in the center. 7.e3 ♘c6 8.♗d3 0-0 9.♘e2 d6↑] 5...0-0 6.a3 ♗e7 This time I prefer not to give up the bishop pair. For some reason I can't really understand, 6...♗xc3 has been played most of the time.



Position after: 6...♗e7

7.e3 c5 8.d5 ♘a6⇄ Black will soon put pressure on the d5-pawn, and White is still far from castling.

B) 2.h4!? What an aggressive move! It obviously contains a lot of surprise value. Even if I don't think it's particularly dubious, it seems obvious that there are clever ways to meet it. My advice is to vary from ...♘f6. We do the same against 2.♘h3, but for different reasons. 2...e6!?

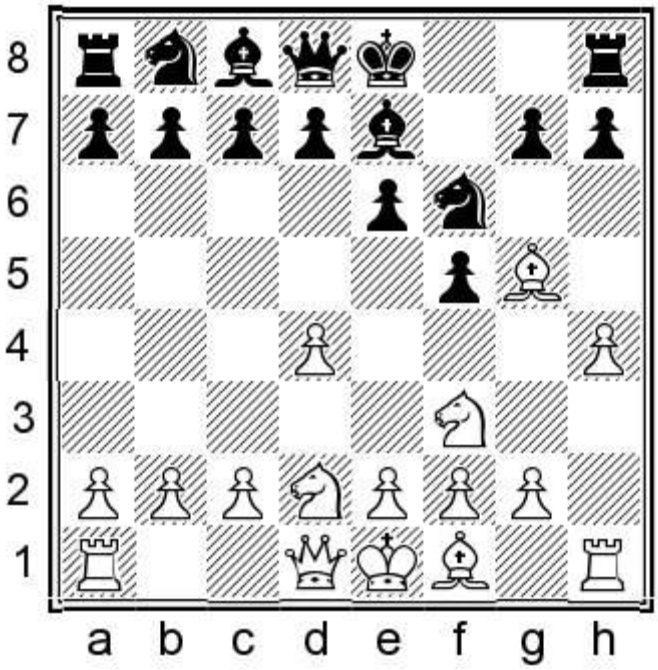


Position after: 2...e6!?

B1) 3.♗g5 only helps Black to get a comfortable middlegame. 3...♗e7 4.♗xe7 [4.♘f3 ♘f6 5.♘bd2

transposes to the following Andreikin – Nakamura game after 5...0-0.] 4...♕xe7 5.♘c3 ♘f6 6.♘f3 0-0 7.e3 b6↑

B2) 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♗g5 ♗e7 5.♘bd2

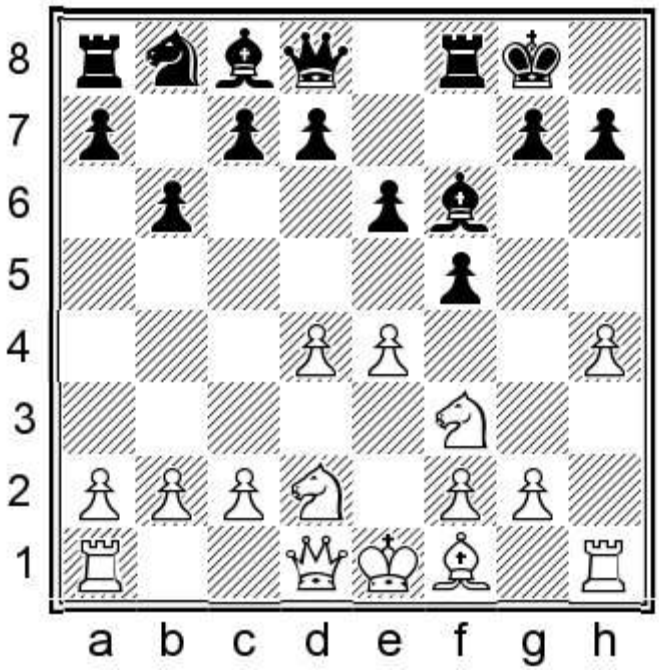


Position after: 5.♘bd2

I would now vary from a game played by Nakamura. (Strangely enough, he has played 2.h4 against the Dutch and faced it with Black.)

B2.1) 5...♘e4 6.e3 b6?! This dubious move order by Nakamura allowed Andreikin to grab a pawn easily: 7.♘xe4 fxe4 8.♘d2 ♗b7 9.♕h5+ g6 10.♕g4 h5 11.♗xe7 hxg4 12.♗xd8 ♔xd8 13.♗e2±. After this logical sequence a pawn falls, and White is much better, even if he couldn't manage to convert it into a win. Andreikin, D (2683) – Nakamura, H (2741), Moscow 2010, ½-½ (57).

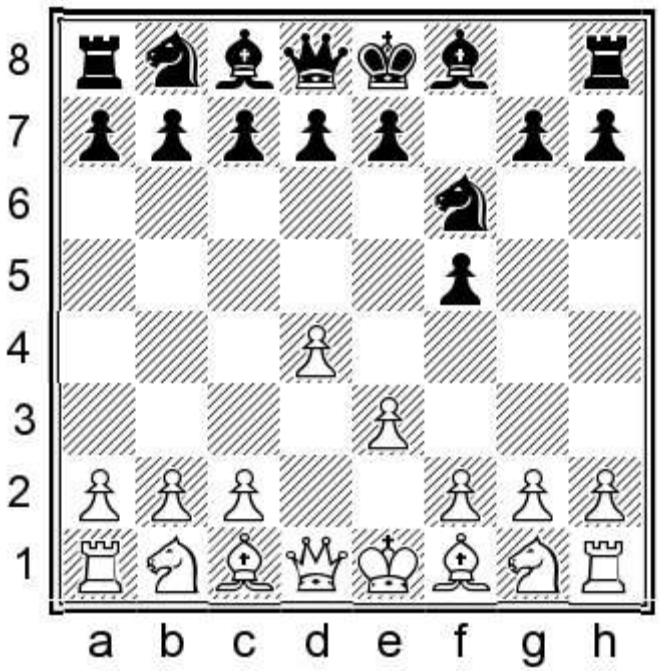
B2.2) 5...b6 6.♗xf6 [6.e3 ♗b7 7.♗d3 0-0 8.c3 c5⇄ White would definitely be better with the pawn on h2 instead of h4.] 6...♗xf6 7.e4 0-0!N This move is very important. It lets White decide what he should do in the center, but none of his options is really satisfactory.



Position after: 7...0-0!N

8.e5 [8.♗d3 d5 9.e5 ♗e7 10.g4 ♗a6 11.♗xa6 ♘xa6 12.g5 c5⇄] 8...♗e7 9.♗d3 c5!⇄ Black has the bishop pair, so decides to open the position as soon as he can.

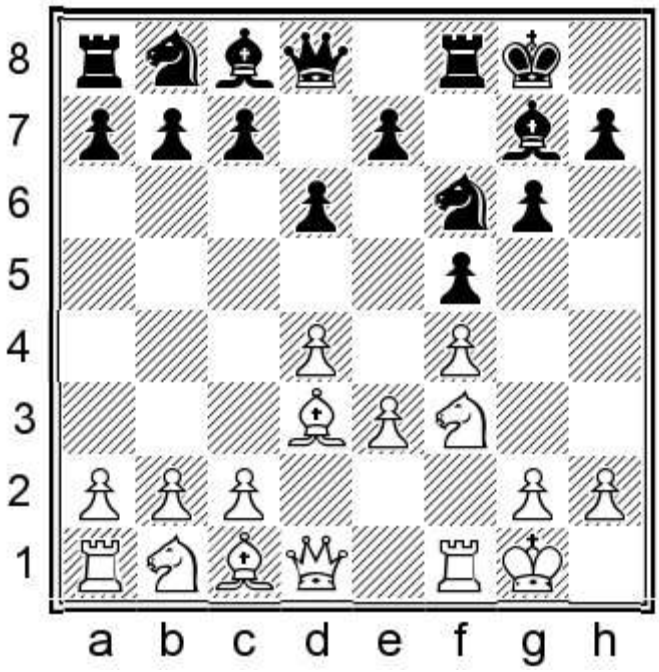
2...♘f6



Position after: 2...♘f6

3.♗d3

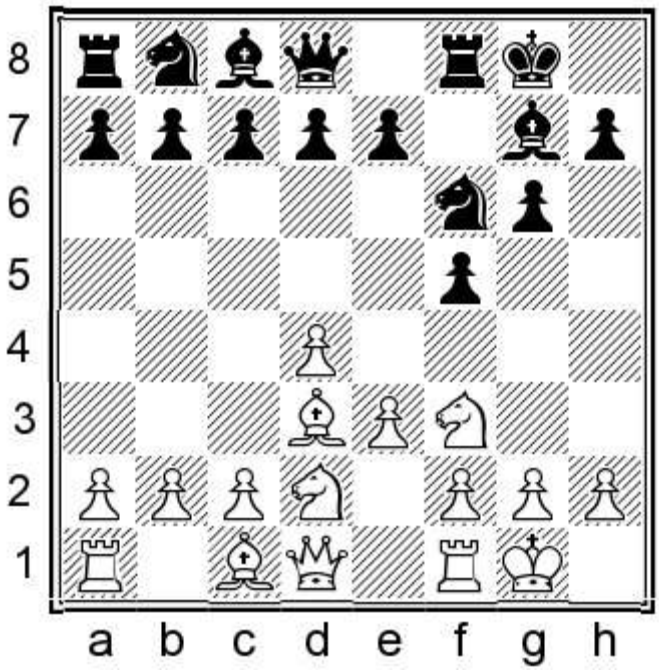
3.f4 A brief word about the Stonewall system with White. If Black is more ambitious than to play a Stonewall set-up himself, he can try to make use of the fact that his d-pawn is still able to control the e5-square in order to push ...e5 at some point, disrupting White's center. 3...g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.♗d3 0-0 6.0-0 d6



Position after: 6...d6

7.c4 [7.♘bd2?! ♘c6 8.c3 Careless play like this by White is only heading for disaster. 8...e5N 9.fxe5 dxe5 10.dxe5 ♘g4∓] 7...e5!?N A very interesting pawn sacrifice if you want to keep a tense middlegame, but not at all forced. 8.fxe5 dxe5 9.♘xe5 c5 10.d5 ♘xd5 11.♘xg6 [11.cxd5 ♗xe5∓] 11...hxg6 12.cxd5 ♕xd5 13.♘c3 ♕f7⇄

3...g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.♘bd2



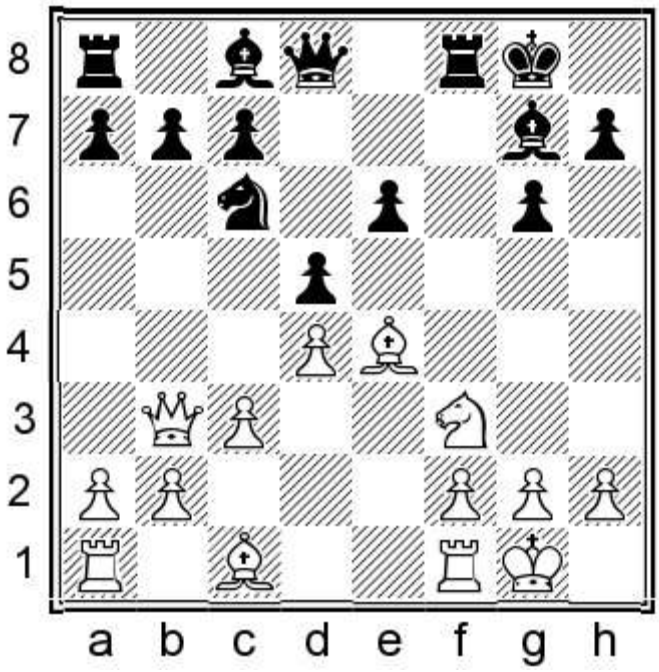
Position after: 6.♘bd2

White is playing in the spirit of the Colle System. Once again, as is usually the case in the Leningrad, our plan is to advance in the center with ...e5.

6...♘c6!? 7.c3 d6 8.e4

White can't wait anymore, otherwise we will easily seize the initiative.

8...fxe4 9.♘xe4 ♘xe4 10.♗xe4 d5 11.♕b3 e6



Position after: 11...e6

12.♗d3

12.♗g5?! This only helps us. 12...♕d6 13.♗d3 e5↑

12...♕d6

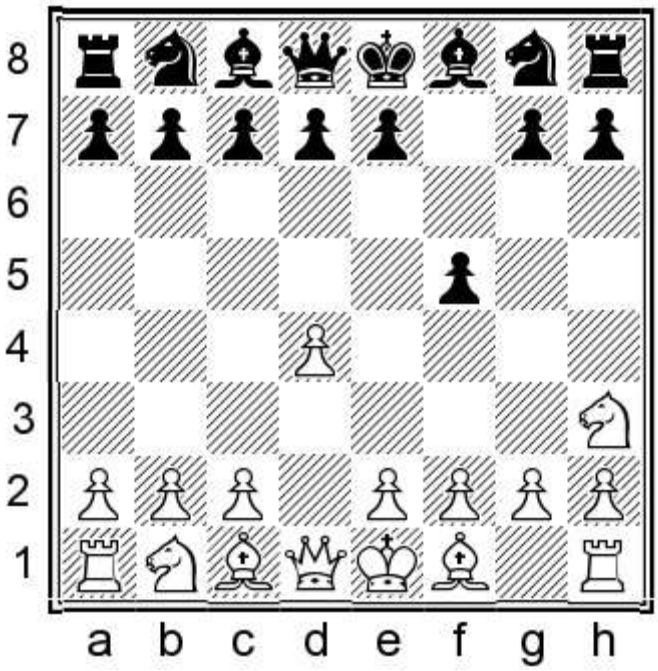
This important move centralizes the queen and prepares ...e5 with greater strength. Black doesn't seem in any trouble at all here, even if White plays logically.

13.♖e1 e5 14.dxe5 ♘xe5 15.♘xe5 ♗xe5 16.♗h6 ♖f7=

With a balanced middlegame.

b) 2.♘h3

1.d4 f5 2.♘h3



Position after: 2.♘h3

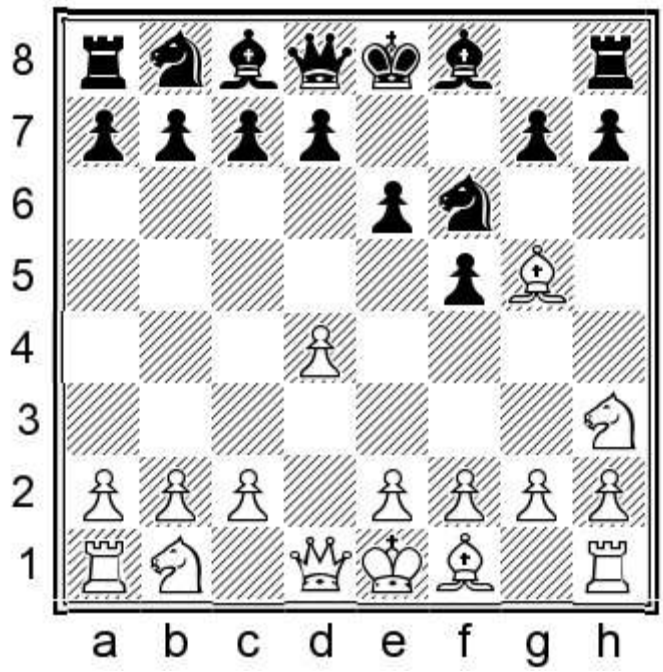
What a strange attempt! It's not unusual to place the knight on h3 against the Dutch, but rarely as early as move two. Even if it can transpose into other systems, White might have another idea in mind.

2...g6!?

Usually Black doesn't want to start with this move too early, but here White is unable to start an attack with h2−h4. It has been rarely seen in practice (only three times on move two is nothing!), but I

couldn’t find any problems with the move.

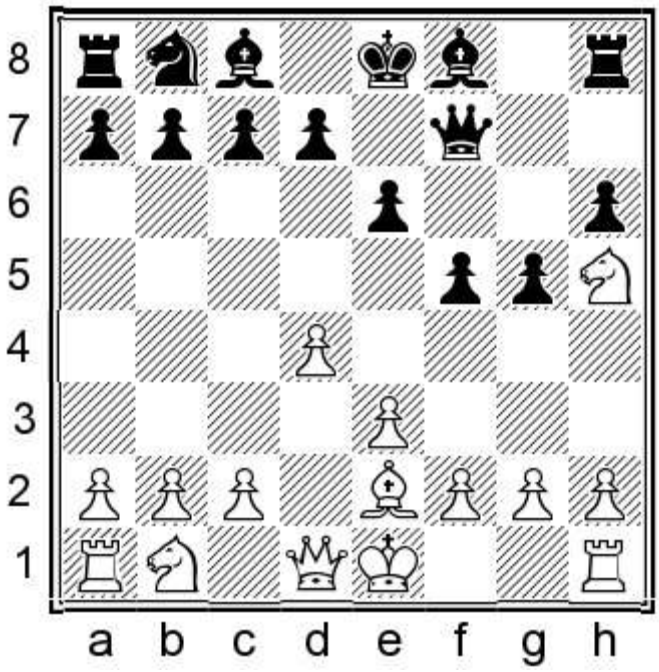
2...♘f6 If you play with the hand, White is able to use another interesting set up: 3.♗g5!? With the bishop on g5, and the knight coming to f4, White is clearly fighting for the light squares. 3...e6



Position after: 3...e6

A) White can also play 4.♘f4!? immediately with the intention of only playing e2−e3 once ...♗e7 has been played. Last summer I saw a friend of mine testing 4...d5 5.e3 ♕e7 6.♘d2 ♘bd7 7.c4 ♕f7, but his play was probably too original to be strong, and White was better in the opening after 8.cxd5 exd5 9.♗e2 ♗b4 10.♗xf6 ♗xd2+ 11.♕xd2 ♘xf6 12.♘d3± ½-½ (49) Admiraal, M (2479) – Lagarde, M (2615), Escaldes 2018.

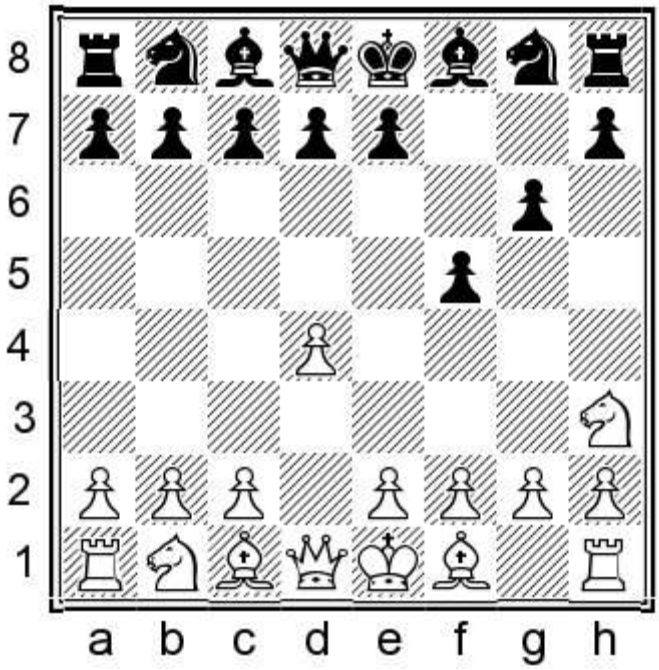
B) 4.e3 h6!? Black can try to get rid of the annoying bishop, but it’s more or less what White was waiting for. 5.♗xf6 ♕xf6 6.♘f4 g5 7.♘h5!? ♕f7 8.♗e2±



Position after: 8.♗e2±

The middlegame is interesting, but the knight on h5 is quite annoying too, and I believe this position is easier for White.

Back to 2...g6.



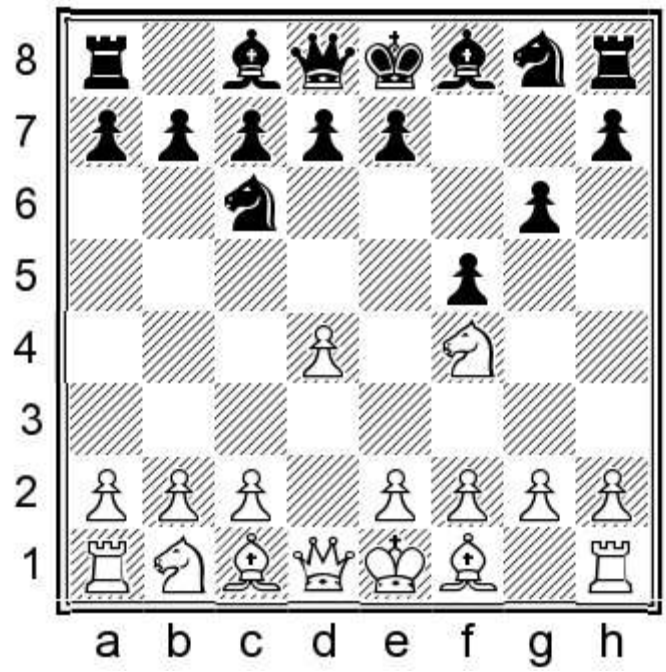
Position after: 2...g6!?

3.♘c3

If White doesn't want to play a quick h4, this is the other attempt to take advantage of Black's move

order.

A) 3.♘f4!?N A novelty on move three! Never move the same piece twice in the opening is a valuable saying which makes sense, but here White would like to take advantage of the early ...g6. 3...♘c6!

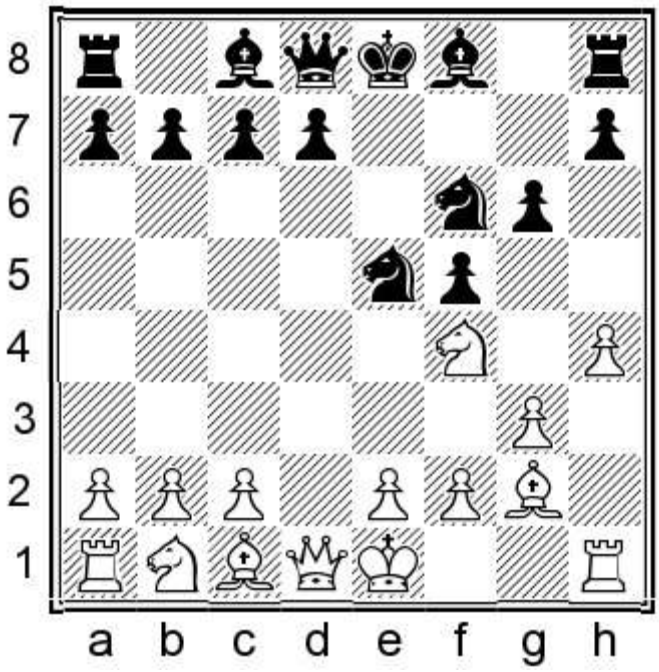


Position after: 3...♘c6!

White attacks on the flank, so we react in the center!

A1) 4.d5 ♘e5 5.h4 ♘f6 6.♘c3 c6! Black strikes back straight away in the center. [6...♗g7?! is a classic mistake with this kind of kingside set-up: 7.h5! g5?! 8.h6! A nasty intermediate move; Black is unable to play ...h6 himself. 8...♗f8 9.♘h3 g4 10.♘g5±] 7.g3 [7.h5?! g5 8.♘h3 h6∓] 7...e6!? 8.dxe6 dxe6 9.♕xd8+ ♔xd8=

A2) 4.h4 e5 5.dxe5 ♘xe5 6.g3 [6.h5?! g5 7.♘d3 ♘f7 8.c4 ♘f6 9.♘c3 h6⇄] 6...♘f6 7.♗g2

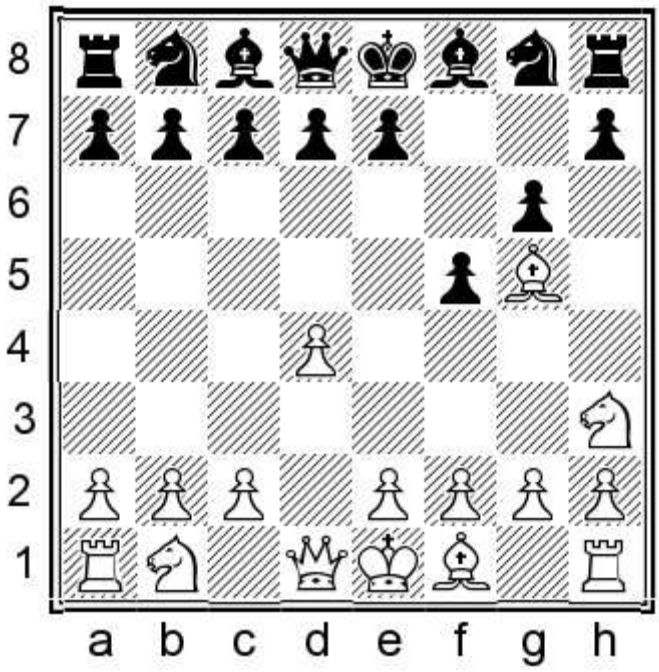


Position after: 7.♗g2

A2.1) 7...♗g7 is playable, but we don't want to justify White's early h4. 8.h5 c6! [8...g5? 9.h6±] 9.hxg6 hxg6 10.♖xh8+ ♗xh8 11.♕d6 ♕e7 12.♕xe7+ ♔xe7=

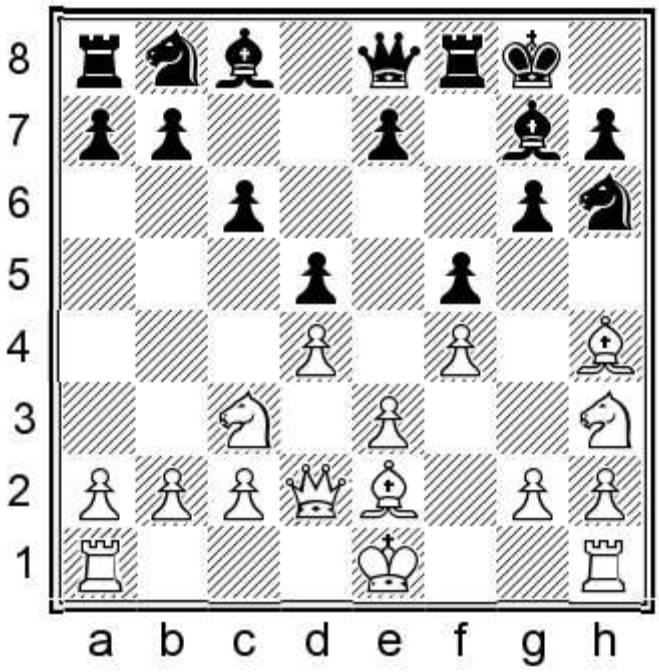
A2.2) 7...c6!? 8.♘d2 d5 9.0-0 ♗g7 Once White has castled we can place the bishop here. 10.c4!? If Black doesn't react he will remain passive for the rest of the game. 10...dxc4 11.♕c2 ♕d4 12.e3 ♕c5 13.b4! An interesting gambit in order to seize the initiative. 13...♕xb4 14.♖b1 ♕e7 15.♗b2 0-0⇄

B) 3.♗g5 This could have been reached in the second chapter if White had played ♘h3 on the third move, but we didn't consider it as it's almost never played.



Position after: 3.♗g5

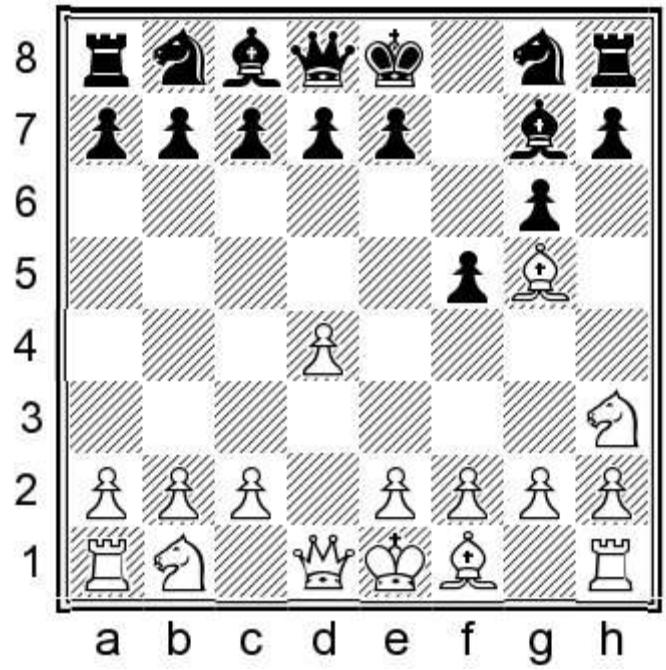
B1) 3...♘h6 is a playable option as well, but I prefer to give White less information. 4.♘c3 d5!? 5.♗h4 ♗g7 6.e3 c6 7.♗e2 0-0 8.♕d2 ♕e8 9.f4



Position after: 9.f4

In the following game White decided to play a Stonewall pawn structure too. I think Black can be happy about this, and he managed to get the upper hand: 9...♘d7 10.♘f2 ♘f6 11.h3 ♗e6 12.a4 ♘f7↑ ½-½ (53) Rajlich, I (2411) – Bui, V (2461), Budapest 2007.

B2) 3...♗g7N

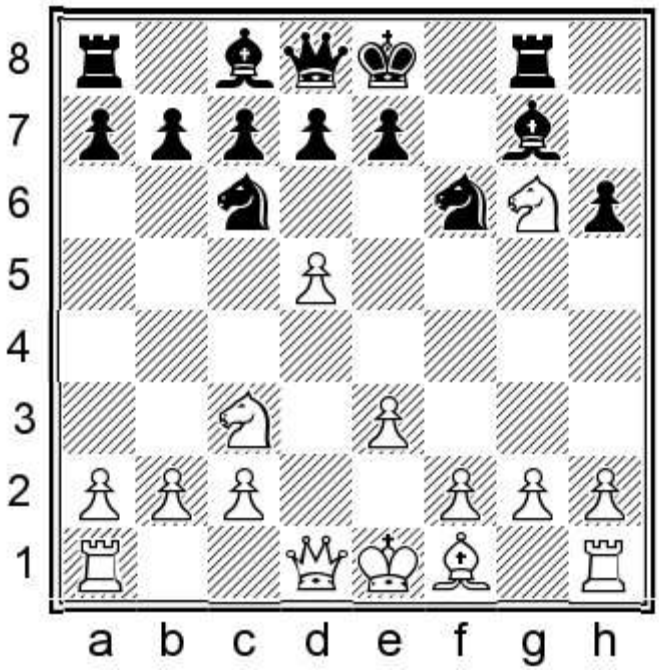


Position after: 3...♗g7N

B2.1) 4.e3 h6 5.♗f4 g5 6.♗g3 ♘f6 7.♘c3 d6 8.f3 ♘c6↑ We see the main drawback to an early ♘h3. White's concept has failed.

B2.2) 4.♘f4 ♘h6! Suddenly White's pieces seem awkwardly placed. 5.e3 ♘f7 6.h4 c6 7.♘c3 ♘xg5 8.hxg5 e5! 9.dxe5 ♗xe5∓ Black has the bishop pair and grabs the g5-pawn. He is behind in development, but White seems unable to activate his pieces quickly.

B2.3) 4.♘c3 h6 5.♗h4 [5.♗f4 d6 6.e4 ♘c6 7.♗b5 fxe4 8.♘xe4 a6 9.♗xc6+ bxc6= Once again, White would be better if only he hadn't placed the knight on h3.] 5...g5 6.♗g3 f4 The bishop is lost, but White gets some compensation. A funny computer line continues 7.♗xf4 gxf4 8.♘xf4 ♘c6 9.e3 ♘f6 10.♘g6 ♖g8 11.d5



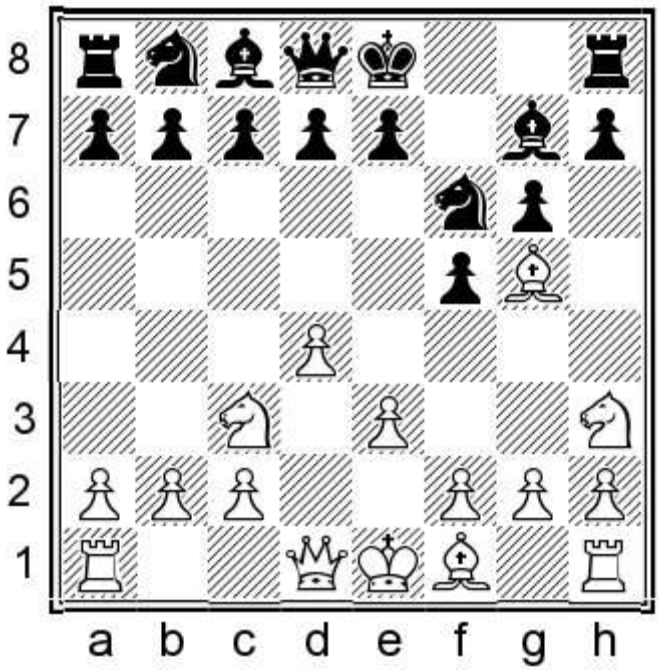
Position after: 11.d5

11...♘b4 12.a3 ♘bxd5! 13.♘xd5 ♘xd5 14.♕xd5 e6 15.♕h5 ♕g5 16.♕xg5 hxg5∓. The knight on g6 is in huge danger.

C) 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 transposes to Chapter 5.

3...♗g7

3...♘f6 4.♗g5! ♗g7 5.e3±

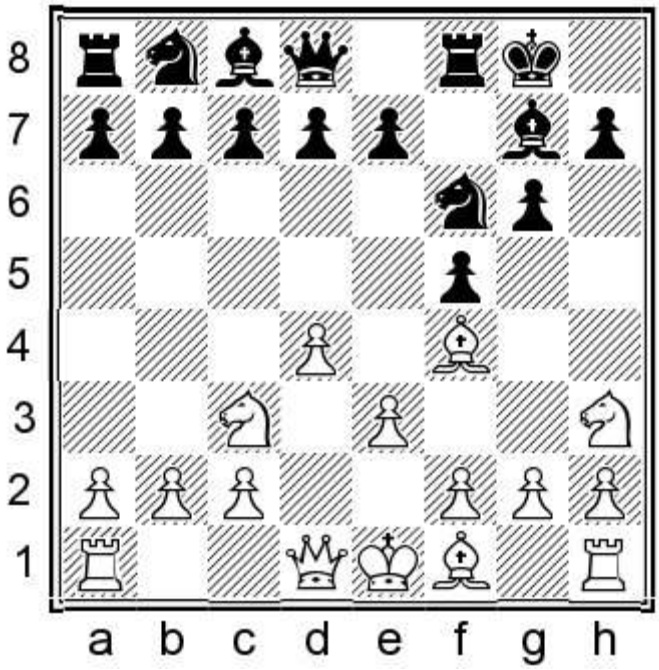


Position after: 5.e3±

In comparison to the 3.♗g5 line, Black is unable to get rid of the bishop. 5...h6? 6.♗xf6 This makes a major difference. 6...♗xf6 7.♘f4 ♔f7 8.g4!+–

4.e4

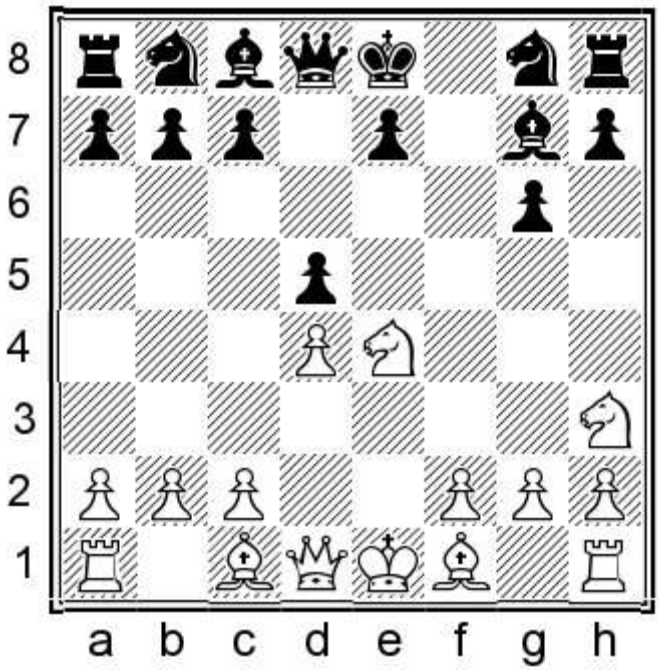
4.♗f4 ♘f6 5.e3 0-0



Position after: 5...0-0

White might not be worse, but the knight on h3 makes absolutely no sense here.

4...fxe4 5.♘xe4 d5



Position after: 5...d5

6.♘eg5!

White has already moved his knight three times, and might do so again, but at least it finds an active square here.

Other moves yield White no prospects, e.g. 6.♘g3?! ♘c6 7.c3 ♗xh3 8.gxh3 ♕d6∓. The black knights will soon find strong outposts.

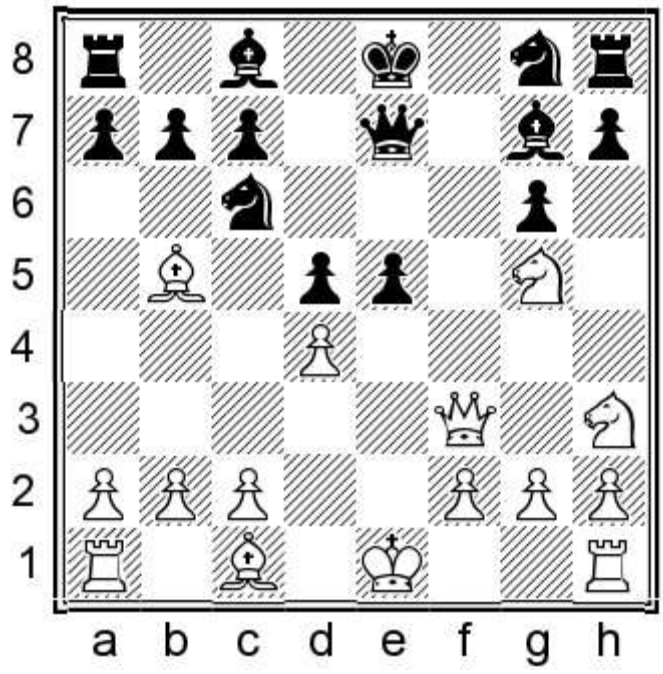
6...♘c6 7.♗b5

7.c3 This non-developing move is too slow. 7...e5! 8.dxe5 ♘xe5 9.f4 ♘g4∓

7...e5! 8.♕f3

8.dxe5 h6 9.♘f3 ♗xh3 10.gxh3 ♘ge7

8...♕e7!



Position after: 8...♕e7!

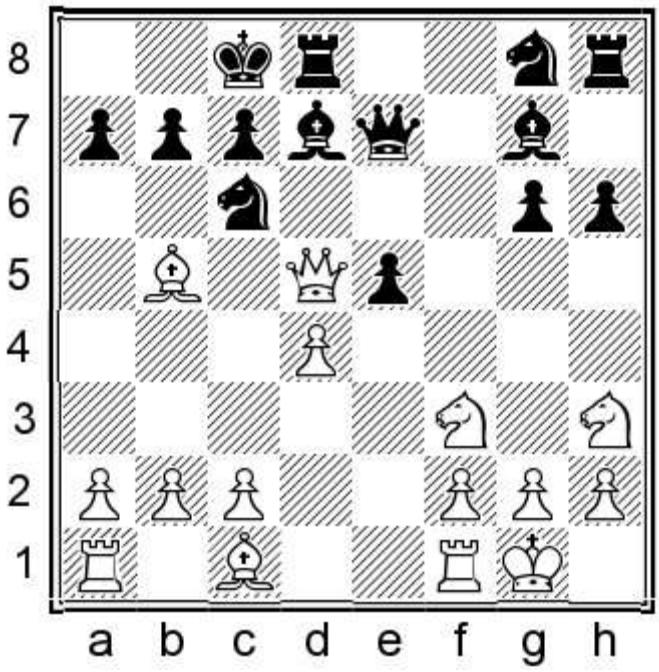
Offering the d5-pawn! If White takes it we gain some tempi for development.

9.♕xd5

A) 9.dxe5 ♕xe5+ 10.♔f1 ♕f5! 11.♕xf5 ♗xf5 12.♘f4 ♘ge7 13.♘ge6 ♗e5!= Everything is under control!

B) 9.0-0 h6! 10.♕xd5 ♗d7 transposes to the main line. [10...hxg5?? 11.♗xc6++–]

9...♗d7 10.0-0 h6 11.♘f3 0-0-0→

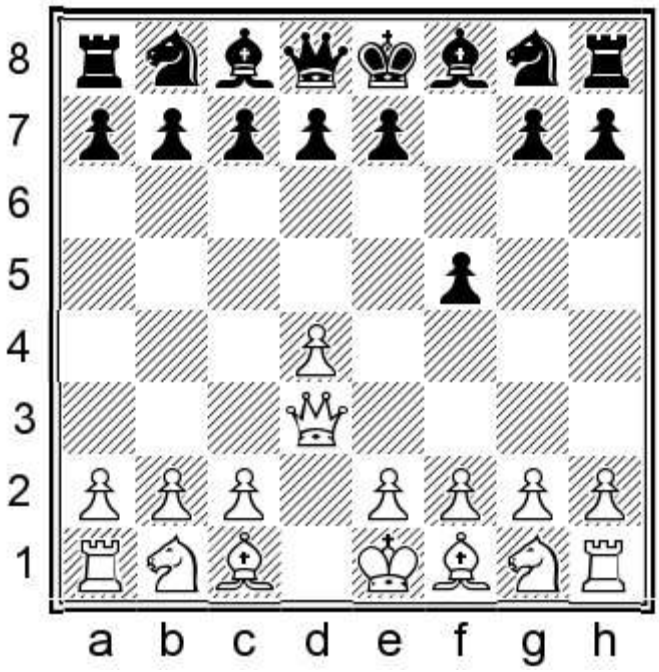


Position after: 11...0-0-0→

Engines give this line as equal, but I definitely prefer Black here as it's already difficult to find a good move for White.

c) 2.♕d3 e6

1.d4 f5 2.♕d3



Position after: 2.♕d3

This stunning variation used to be the pet line of my friend, IM Pierre Barbot. I had to face it on a couple of occasions against him, and it's definitely not so simple to handle as Black. The basic idea of centralizing the queen so early is to provoke a defensive move such as ...e6 or ...g6 before striking on the flank with g4.

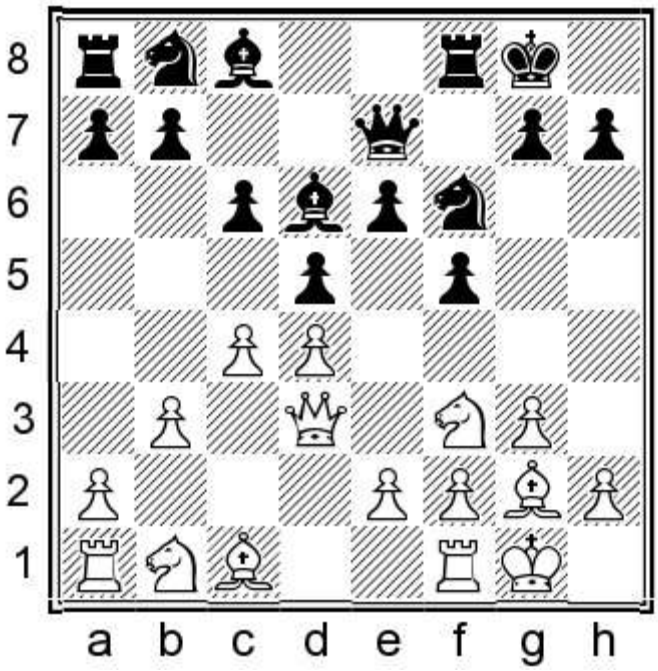
2...e6

This was my choice on the rare occasions I faced this line. I find it less committal than 2...d5. White has two ways to trade the f5-pawn in order to take a hold on the center.

2...d5!? Accepting a Stonewall structure is perfectly understandable against a queen on d3. The drawback is that you have to be aware of the different typical maneuvers in this pawn structure.

A) 3.♗f4 ♘f6 4.♘f3 e6 5.e3 ♗d6 6.♗e2 0-0 7.♘e5 c5! 8.c3 ♘c6= The queen on d3 is quite awkward in these systems.

B) 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.c4 c6 5.g3 e6 6.♗g2 ♗d6 7.0-0 0-0 8.b3 ♕e7!=



Position after: 8...♕e7!=

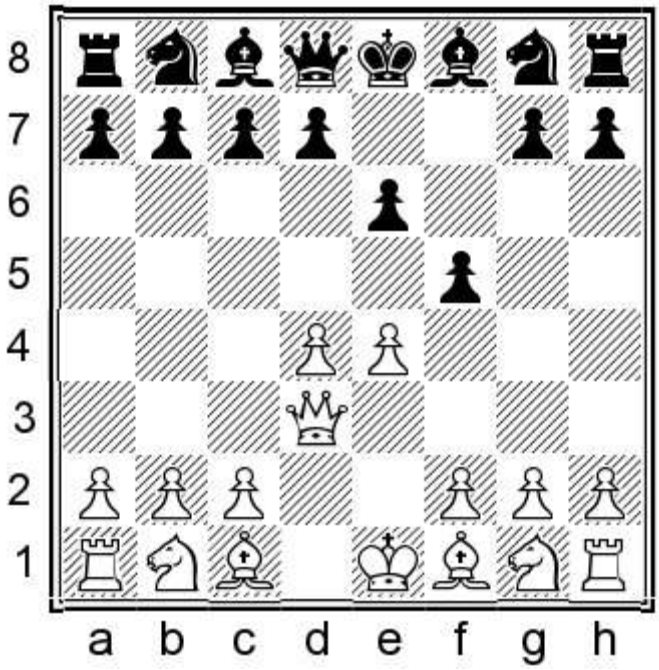
d3 is usually a useful square for the f3-knight in the Stonewall (via e5 or sometimes e1). Black will continue with ...b6, ...♗b7 and ...c5 with a comfortable position.

C) For 3.g4!? see the subchapter on 2.g4.

3.g4!?

I find this continuation more dangerous to handle for Black. One important thing to remember against this gambit is that you need to give the pawn back immediately in order to prevent White from opening too many lines.

3.e4?!



Position after: 3.e4?!

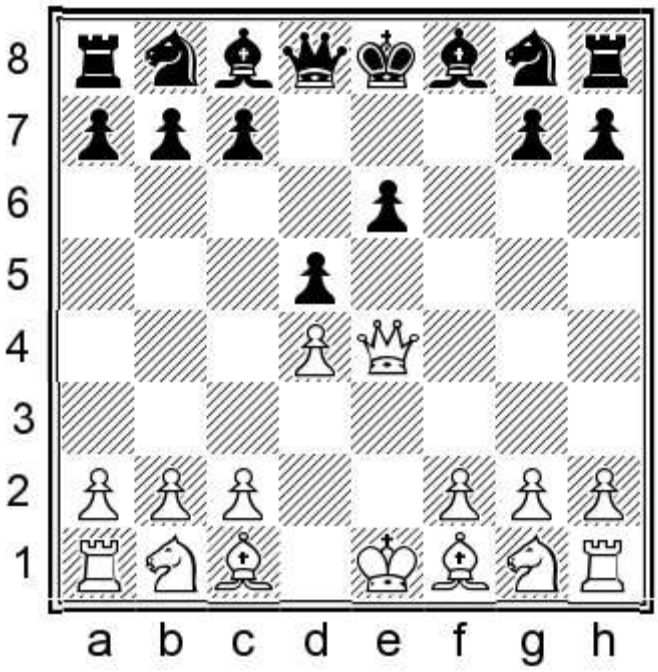
I can't really believe that White can hope for anything with the loss of so many early tempi with the queen, but it has its adherents. 3...fxe4 4.♕xe4

A) 4...♘f6 5.♕h4

A1) 5...c5!? is a decent alternative. Black wants to exploit his lead in development by opening the center. 6.♘f3 ♘c6 7.c3 d5 8.♗d3 ♗d6 9.0-0 0-0 10.♗g5 ♕c7!= This indirectly protects h7. Black is very active in this Tarrasch French-type position.

A2) 5...♗e7 6.♗d3 0-0 7.♘f3 ♘c6 Here White should have prevented ...♘b4 which happened in the game Lava, G (2220) – Rotstein, A (2485), Cesenatico 1998, 0-1 (67), by playing 8.c3!N 8...d5 9.♗g5 h6! 10.♗xh6 gxh6 11.♕g3+ ♔h8 12.♕g6→ Black almost has the draw in his pocket and should be able to hold.

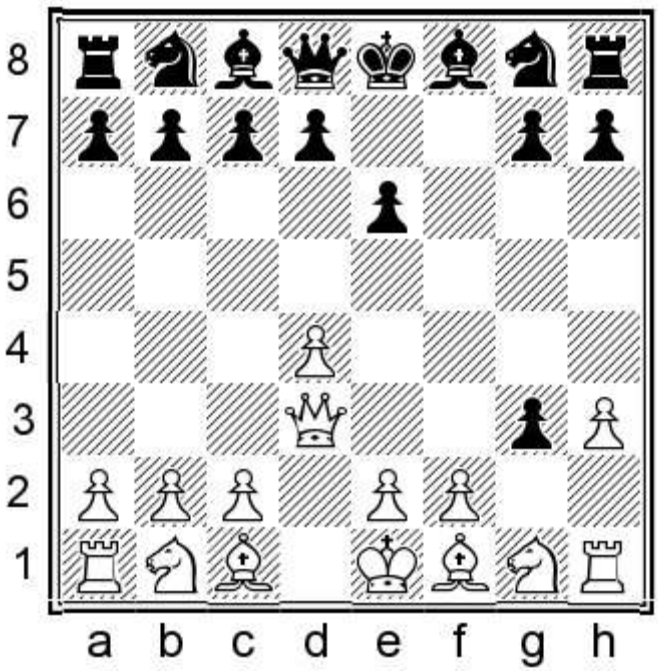
B) 4...d5!?



Position after: 4...d5!?

This has been played only once, but I think it's quite smart to avoid ♕h4 by starting with this move. 5.♕e3!N From here the queen at least tries to prevent a straightforward ...c5. Even if it happens at some point, I think it slows Black down. [5.♕d3?! c5! 6.♘f3 ♘f6 7.c3 ♘c6∓] 5...♘f6 6.♘f3 ♗e7 7.♗d3 c5 8.dxc5 ♘c6∞ Black has two central pawns and should get more than decent compensation (and might even soon get his pawn back).

3...fxg4 4.h3 g3!



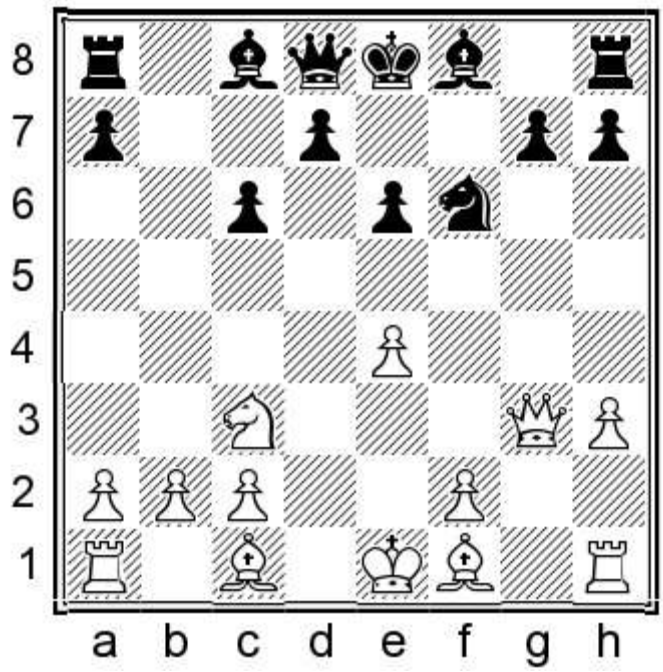
Position after: 4...g3!

Clearly best. The rook on h1 is probably sad, and that's a good thing!

5.fxg3

White seems able to develop faster, but Black can react in the center.

5.♕xg3!? ♘f6 6.♘f3 c5 7.♘c3 cxd4 8.♘xd4 ♘c6 9.♘xc6 bxc6 10.e4



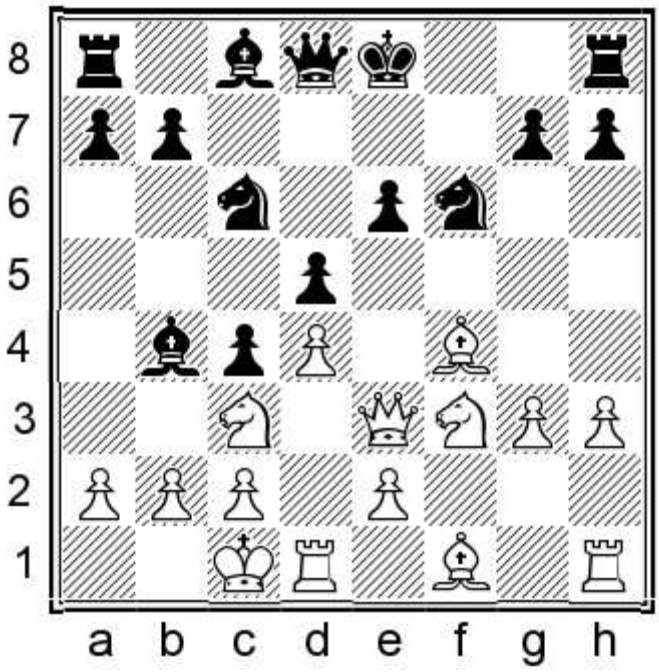
Position after: 10.e4

This occurred in the game Abergel, T (2517) – Kasimdzhanov, R (2681), France 2008, ½-½ (21). Black decided to occupy the center with 10...d5, but I would prefer 10...g6!? 11.♗e2 ♗b4 12.0-0 ♕a5 13.♗d2 ♘h5 14.♕d3 0-0⇄.

5...d5 6.♗f4 c5! 7.♘f3N

7.e3 ♘c6 8.♘f3 ♘f6 9.c3 cxd4 10.exd4 ♘h5 11.♖g1 ♘xf4 12.gxf4 ♕f6∓ ½-½ (43) Korchnoi, V (2566) – Volokitin, A (2681), Novi Sad 2009.

7...♘c6 8.♘c3 ♘f6 9.0-0-0 c4 10.♕e3 ♗b4⇄

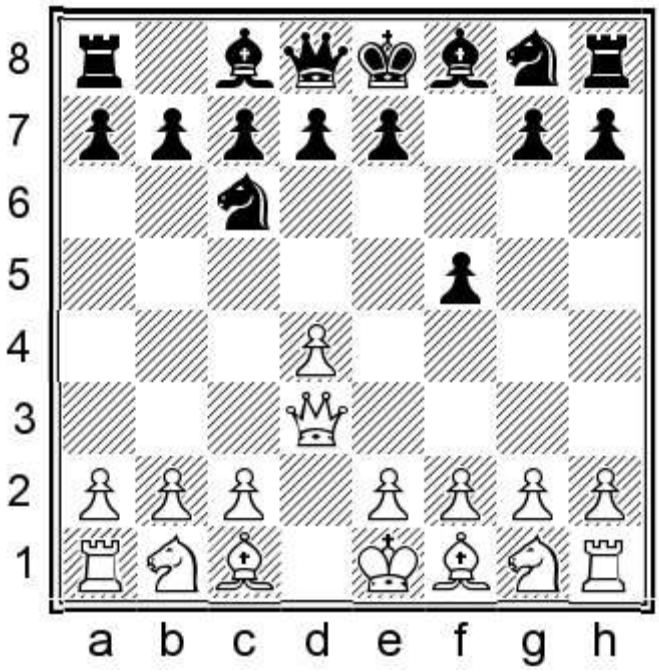


Position after: 10...♗b4⇄

With a complicated opposite side castling position (after ...0-0) where Black has already pushed a pawn to the fourth rank.

d) 2.♕d3 ♘c6

1.d4 f5 2.♕d3 ♘c6!?



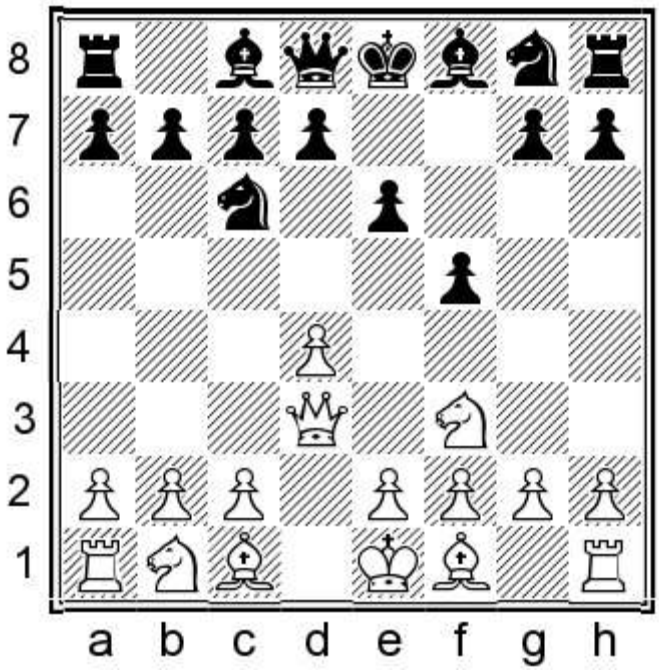
Position after: 2...♘c6!?

This move is almost a novelty! It has only been played three times, once in a high-level game by Cheparinov. Black doesn't want to waste time defending his f5-pawn, and develops a piece while counterattacking the central d4-pawn. I find this idea very interesting and original, even if it needs practical tests. If you want a more prosaic approach, I give some material on the two main moves, 2...d5 and 2...e6, which are perfectly playable.

3.♕xf5N

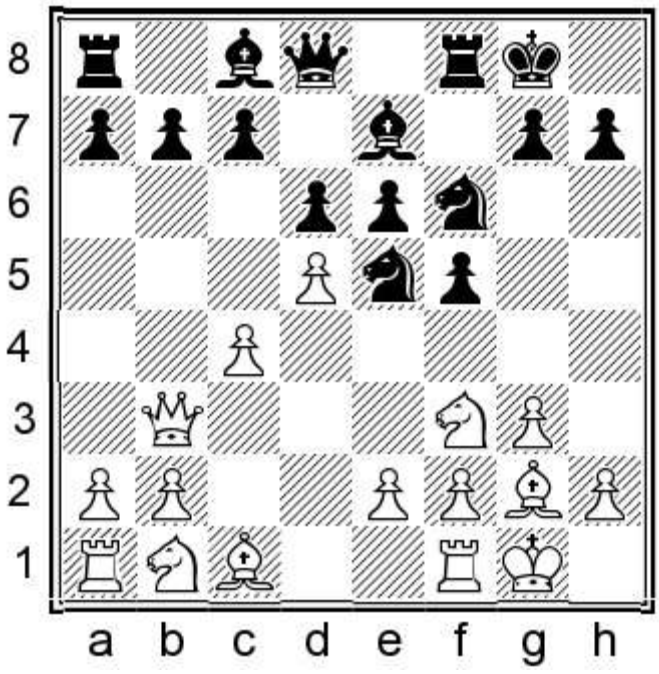
It might seem to White that Black loses material if he recaptures the pawn, so will probably be tempted to take it. This is a courageous decision of course, but some players like to pick up the gauntlet. Still, no-one has tried it yet!

A) 3.♘f3 e6



Position after: 3...e6

A1) 4.g3N This is probably a decent continuation for White. Black can develop normally, and at first sight it's hard to say who has made the greater concession with ♕d3 or ...♘c6. 4...♘f6 This is clearly fine for Black. 5.♗g2 ♗e7 6.0-0 0-0 7.c4 d6! 8.d5 ♘e5 9.♕b3

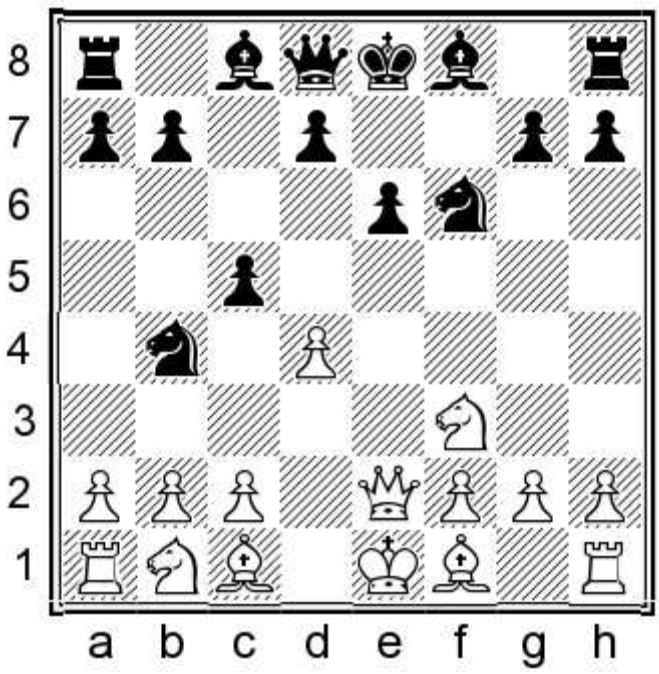


Position after: 9.♕b3

This kind of line exists in the Classical Dutch, but White doesn't spend two moves playing ♕b3, so I think Black is fine.

Surprisingly, this is actually a transposition to Chapter 11 on the Reti move-order! Check the main line with 1.♘f3 f5 2.d3 ♘c6 3.d4 e6. [9.♘xe5 dxe5 10.dxe6 e4!∓ With more space and fluid development, Black is already better.]

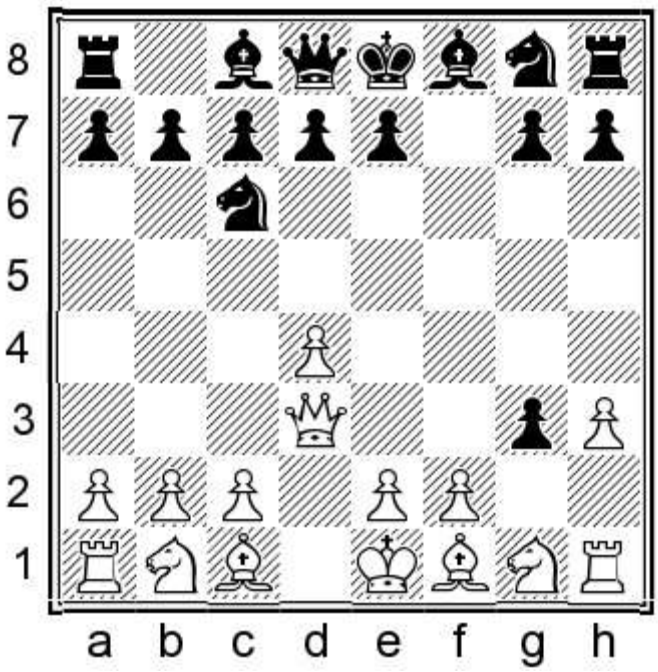
A2) 4.e4 Once again, this line simply can't be good as White loses too many tempi. 4...♘b4 5.♕e2 fxe4 6.♕xe4 ♘f6 7.♕e2 c5!



Position after: 7...c5!

Very aggressive play in the center is needed; the situation is easier for Black. 8.g3 cxd4 9.♘xd4 ♗c5 10.♘b3 ♗b6 11.♗g2 0-0 12.0-0 a5! Black is already better and went on to win convincingly in Michalik, P (2553) – Cheparinov, I (2699), Gibraltar 2018, 0-1 (38).

B) 3.g4?! In the same spirit, but it's not great. 3...fxg4 4.h3 g3!

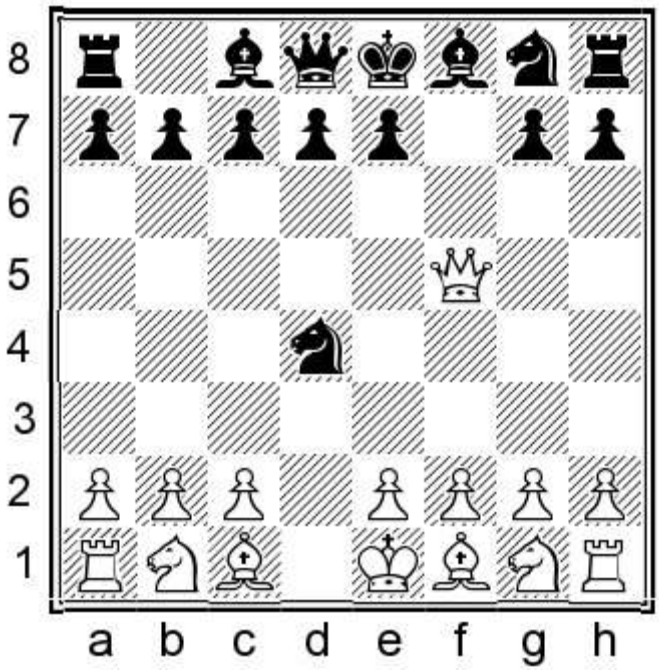


Position after: 4...g3!

This is a better version than the line with 2...e6 3.g4 as Black has an extra resource: 5.fxg3 e5! 6.d5 [6.♘f3 exd4 7.♘xd4 ♗d6 8.♘xc6 dxc6∓] 6...♘b4 7.♕d2 ♘f6 8.♘c3 ♗c5∓.

C) 3.d5 ♘b4 4.♕b3 e6! 5.dxe6 dxe6 6.♘c3 ♘f6 7.♘f3 a5! 8.a3 ♘bd5↑

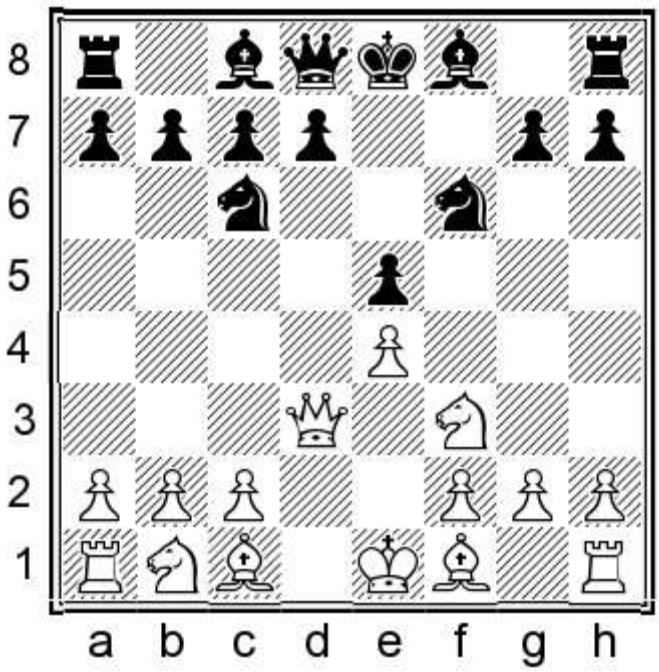
3...♘xd4



Position after: 3...♘xd4

4.♕h5+?!

4.♕d3 is safer, but not dangerous for Black. We can be happy to have traded our f-pawn for White's d-pawn. 4...e5 5.♘f3 [5.e3 ♘c6 6.c4 ♘f6 7.♘c3 ♗b4 8.♗d2 0-0 9.♘ge2 d6 10.♘g3 ♗e6⇄] 5...♘c6 6.e4 ♘f6

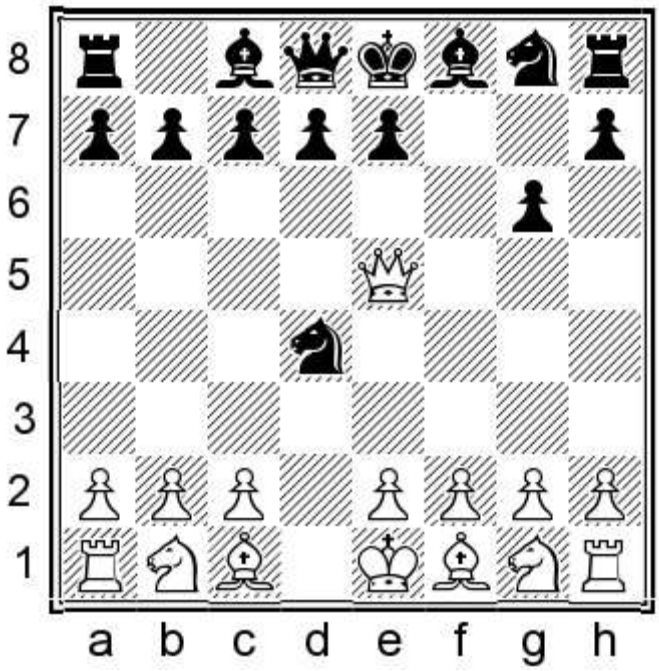


Position after: 6...♘f6

7.♗e3 White waits for us to move the f8-bishop or play ...d6 before developing the b1-knight in order to

avoid ...♗b4. [7.♘c3?! ♗b4 8.♗d2 d6 9.♗e2 0-0 10.0-0 ♔h8⇄; 7.♗e2 d5!? 8.♘bd2 dxe4 9.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 10.♘g5 ♔e8 11.♘gxe4 ♘b4⇄] 7...♗b4+!? 8.c3 Provoking this move in order to prevent ♘c3 seems a smart idea, even if it loses a tempo. 8...♗e7 9.♘bd2 0-0 10.♗e2 d6 11.0-0 ♔h8= 12.♖ad1?! ♘g4∓

4...g6 5.♕e5



Position after: 5.♕e5

At first this looks terrible for Black; it looks like he's losing a piece or burying the knight on a1, besides having some trouble with his king. But we will see why White shouldn't move his queen four times in the first five moves, even if it gains a piece!

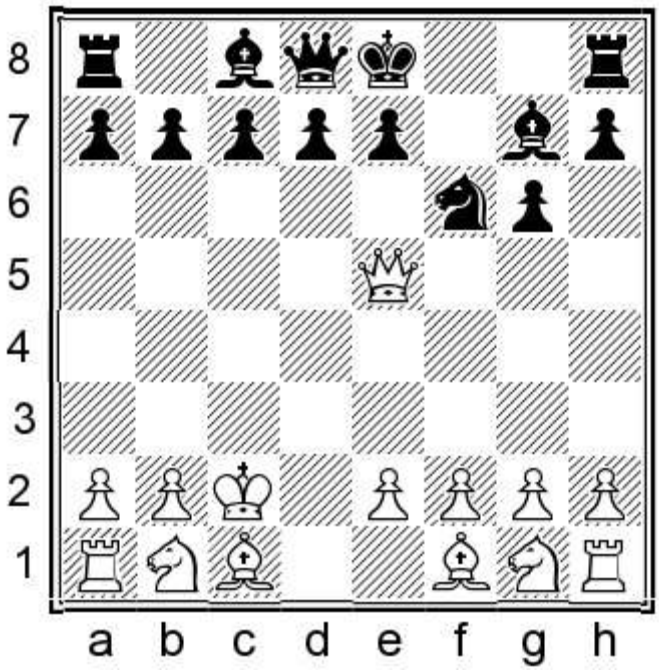
5...♘xc2+! 6.♔d1 ♘f6!!

Playing for the initiative at the cost of a piece.

7.♔xc2

So the brave knight succumbs, but Black has a pawn and the center, while White has developed absolutely nothing and both his king and queen are exposed!

7...♗g7



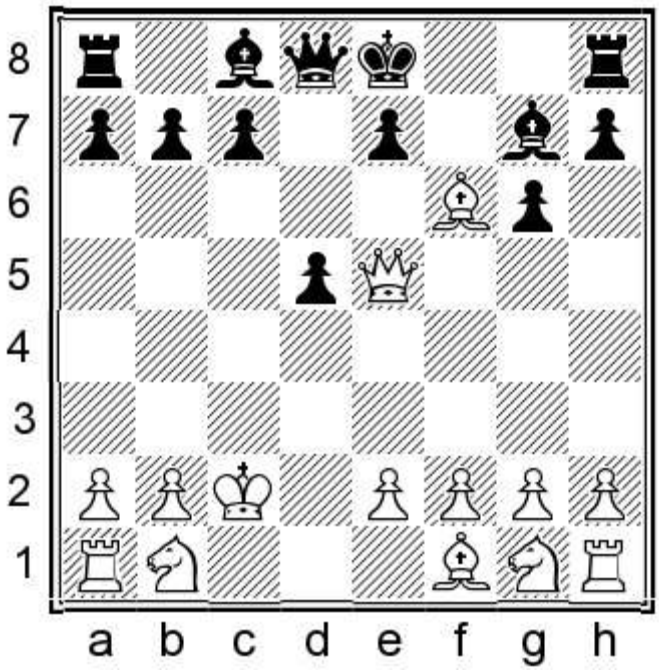
Position after: 7...♗g7

White has a lot of possibilities here. The computers claim it's equal, but it seems easier to go wrong with White, and is clearly more fun to play for our side!

8.♘c3

A) 8.e4 0-0 9.f3 White tries to blockade the light squares in order to prevent ...♗f5+, but it's quite slow and not so effective. 9...d5! 10.♘c3□ 10...c6! 11.♕g3 b5! 12.♕e1 ♕a5!→ with adequate play for Black. I doubt if White can survive this!

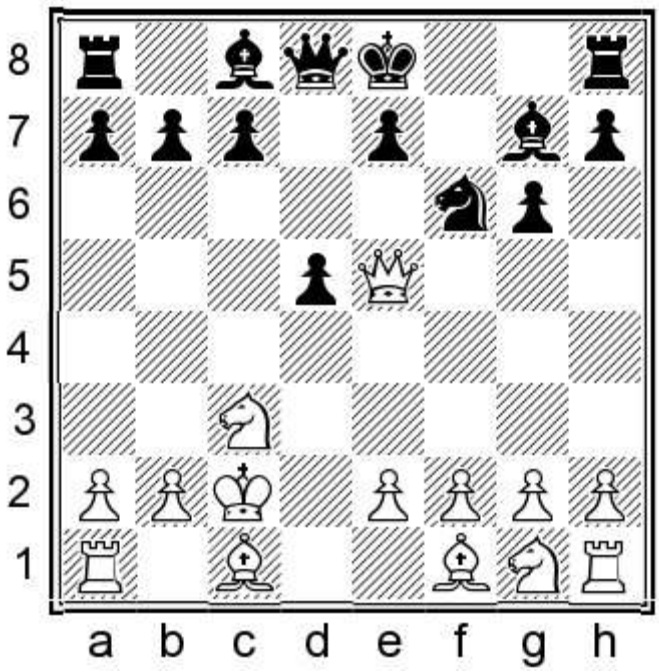
B) 8.♗g5 d5 9.♗xf6?!



Position after: 9.♗xf6?!

9...♗xf6 [9...♗f5+?? 10.♕xf5 gxf5 11.♗xg7+–] 10.♕g3 ♗f5+ 11.♔c1 0-0∓ You only need to look at those bishops to understand that White is in huge trouble.

8...d5!



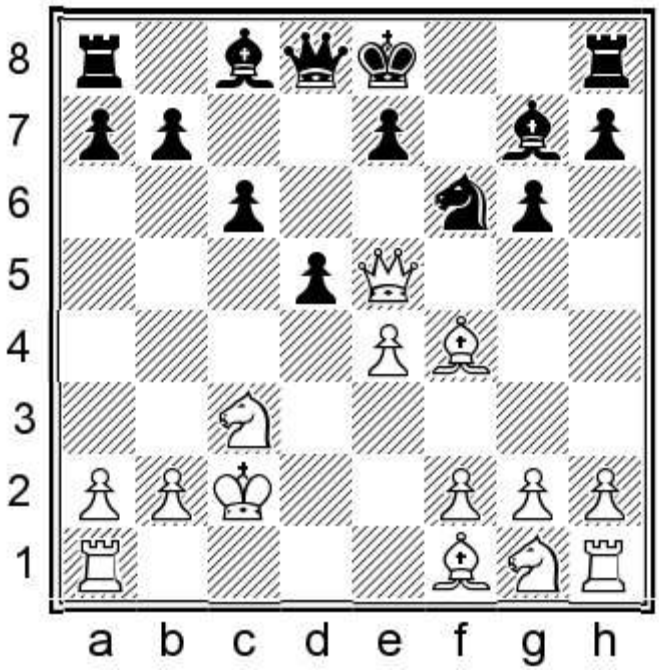
Position after: 8...d5!

9.♗g5

This seems like the best try. White puts pressure on d5, and we need to decide whether we want to protect it.

A) 9.♘f3 ♗f5+ 10.♔d1 ♘h5 11.♕xd5 ♗xc3 12.♕xd8+ ♖xd8+ 13.♘d2 ♗g7∓

B) 9.e4 c6 10.♗f4



Position after: 10.♗f4

B1) 10...♖f8!? Not the strongest, but pretty interesting! 11.♗g3 [11.♕c7 d4! 12.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 13.♘d1 ♘xe4 14.♗g3 ♖f5!⩱] 11...♕b6 12.♕c7 d4! 13.♕xb6 axb6 14.♘b1 ♘xe4 15.♘f3 ♘c5⩱

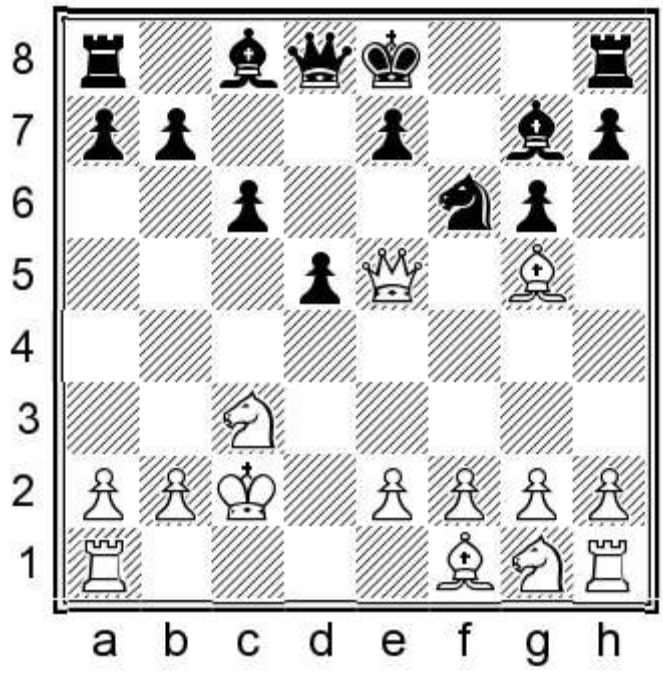
B2) 10...0-0?! 11.♕c7!±

B3) 10...♘h5! 11.♕c7 ♘xf4 12.♕xf4 ♕b6 13.♕d2 0-0 14.♘a4 ♕c7 15.♘c3 b5!→

9...0-0!

This leads by force to a balanced endgame where White has to be very careful.

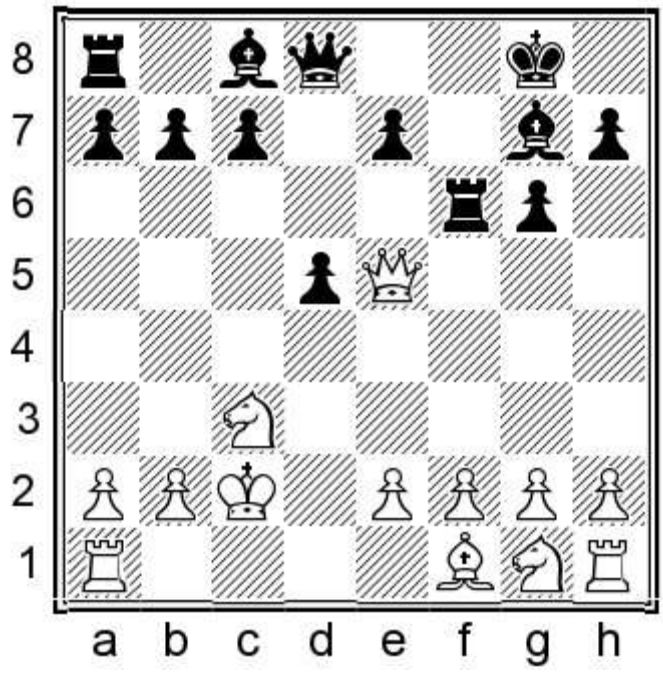
9...c6!?



Position after: 9...c6!?

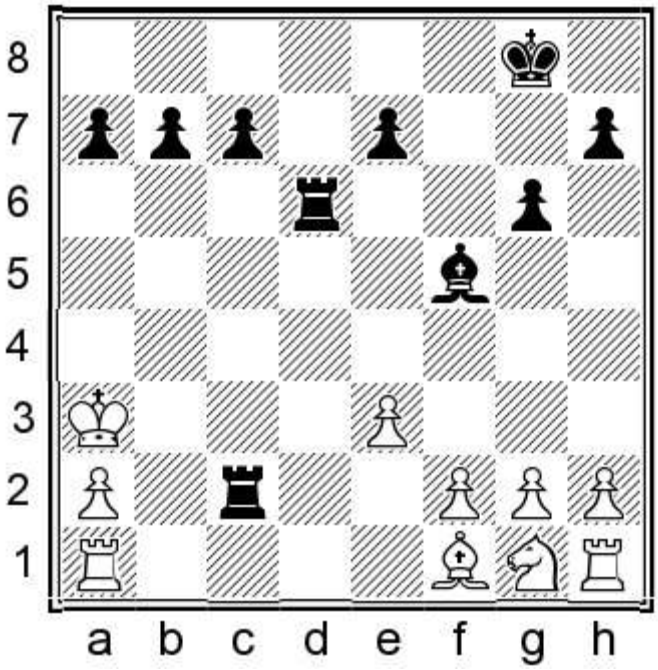
10.♗xf6! [10.♕g3? ♗f5+ 11.♔c1 d4–+ Black meets no obstacles at all, and his play is devastating.] 10...♗xf6 11.♕g3 ♕a5 [11...♗f5+ 12.e4 dxe4 13.♕e3 ♗d4 14.♖d1 ♗xe3 15.♖xd8+ ♖xd8 16.fxe3=] 12.e4 dxe4 13.♖d1 ♗f5 14.♕e3 b5→

10.♗xf6 ♖xf6!



Position after: 10...♖xf6!

11.♕xd5+ ♕xd5 12.♘xd5 ♗f5+ 13.♔c1 ♖c6+ 14.♘c3□ 14...♖d8 15.e3! ♗xc3 16.bxc3 ♖xc3+ 17.♔b2 ♖c2+ 18.♔a3 ♖d6!



Position after: 18...♖d6!

Black brings the rook to c3. White is still in big trouble.

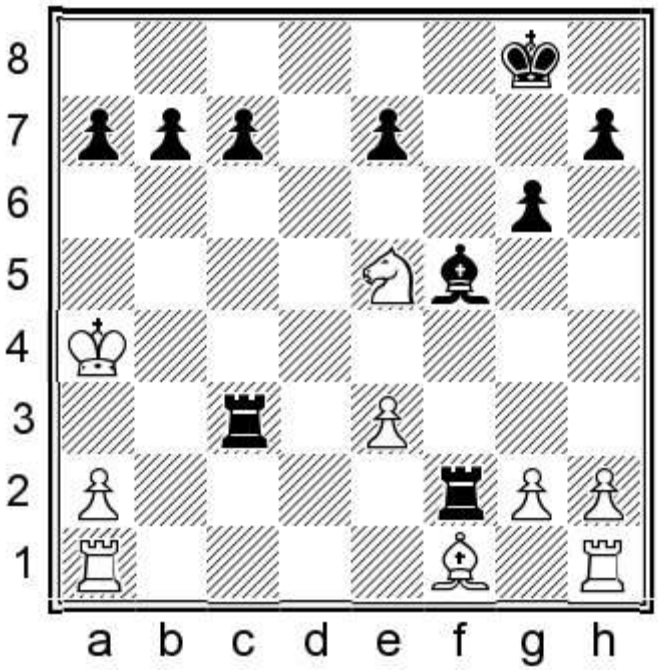
19.♘f3 ♖dc6 20.♘e5

20.♘d4? ♖6c3+ 21.♔a4 ♖b2 22.♘b3 c5! 23.♔a3 ♖bc2∓ ...c4 is coming next, and Black is almost winning.

20...♖6c3+!

20...♖2c3+ 21.♔b2! ♖c2+ 22.♔a3=

21.♔a4 ♖xf2



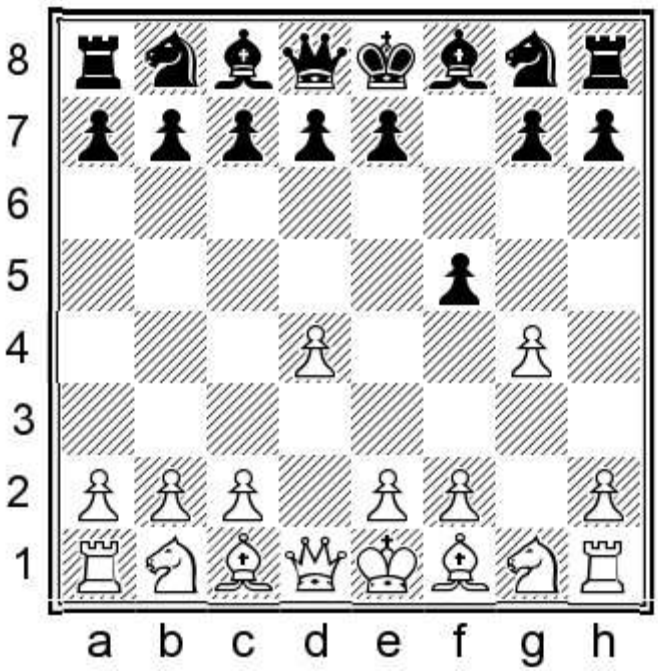
Position after: 21...♖xf2

Black already has two pawns for the knight, a few more might fall, and has dangerous activity, but White is resourceful and keeps the balance.

22.♗c4+ ♔g7 23.e4! ♗xe4 24.♖hf1 ♖f5!∞

e) 2.g4 d5 3.--

1.d4 f5 2.g4



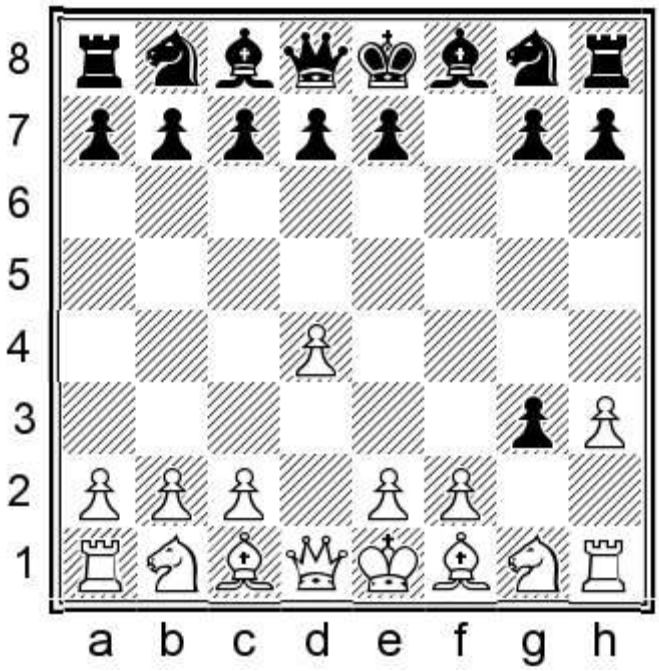
Position after: 2.g4

This variation is called the Krejcik Gambit. It is reminiscent of the Staunton Gambit, but the motivations are different. In this case, White wants to develop his kingside quickly, especially the rook on h1. The idea is similar to the lines with 2.♕d3 that we have already considered, and 2.h3, which we will see in the next part. My advice is to decline the gambit!

2...d5!?

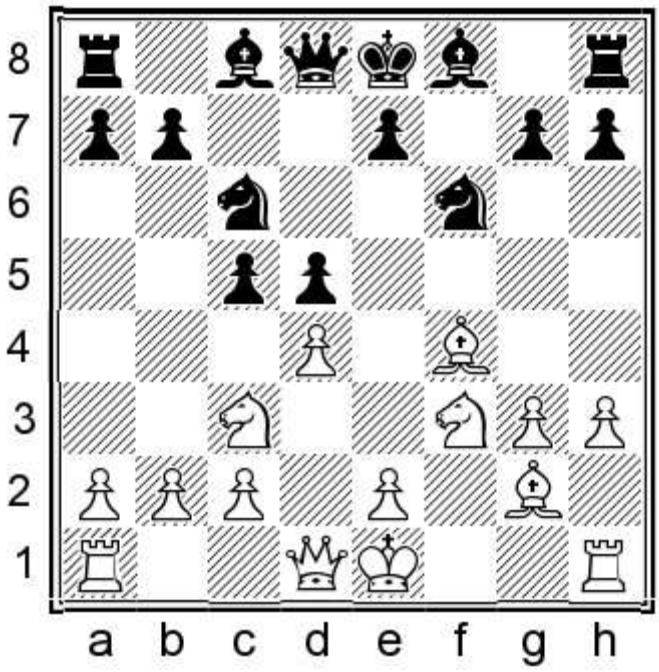
I like this approach whereby Black decides to keep the tension. It wasn't my suggestion after 2.♕d3, simply because g4 hadn't been played yet, and classical Stonewall positions don't suit me, but with the f5-pawn about to be traded, we can't speak about a Stonewall-type position.

2...fxg4 This isn't bad, but it's what White is waiting for. 3.h3 [3.e4?! d5! This is well known to be good for Black.] 3...g3



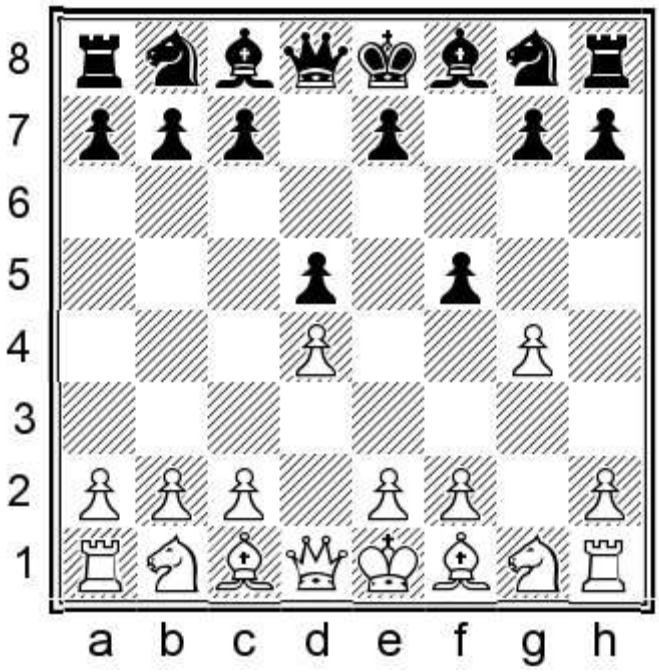
Position after: 3...g3

This has the reputation of being the best move, but I don't see why White can't claim a small initiative thanks to his lead in 'pawn development' with no real weaknesses. (Only the g3-pawn can sometimes be attacked if White isn't careful). [3...d5 is another possibility and would have been my choice if 2...d5 wasn't satisfactory.] 4.fxg3 d5 5.♗g2 ♘f6 6.♗f4 c5 7.♘f3 ♘c6 8.♘c3



Position after: 8.♘c3

White has developed quickly and logically. After 8...e6 we can deviate from the game Plat, V (2556) – Akshat, K (2395), Budapest 2018, ½-½ (134), with: 9.e4!N 9...dxe4 10.♘e5↑

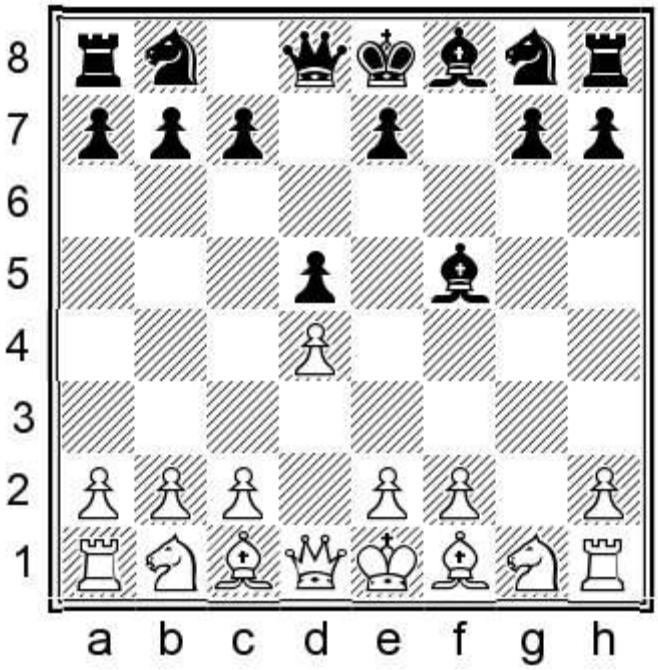


Position after: 2...d5!?

3.♕d3

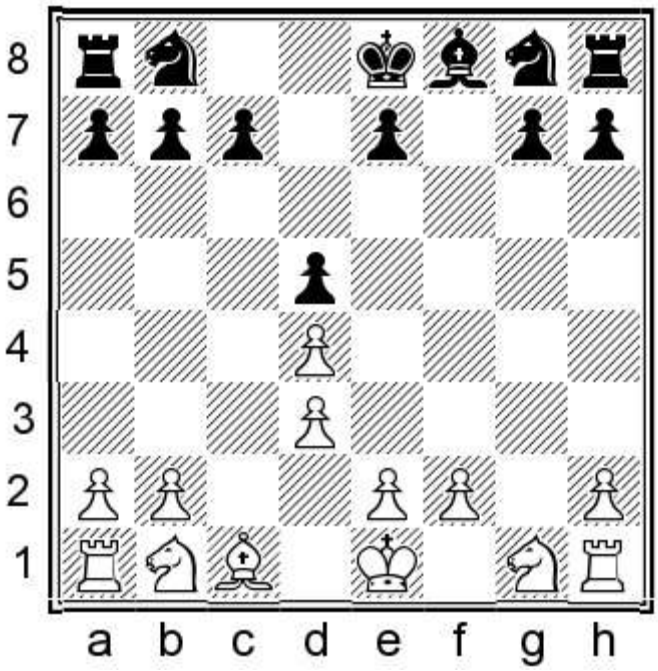
This position can sometimes arise with the move order 2.♕d3 d5 3.g4.

A) 3.gxf5?! This only helps Black's development. 3...♗xf5



Position after: 3...♗xf5

4.♗h3 [4.c4 ♘c6 5.♘f3 ♘f6 6.♘c3 0-1 (45) Teske, H (2518) – Kadziolka, B (2295), Bad Wiessee 2007. 6...e6 7.♗g2 ♗b4 8.0-0 0-0 9.cxd5 exd5∓ It's clearly more useful and safer to have the f-file open and not the g-file.] 4...♗xh3! [4...♕d7!? 5.♗xf5 ♕xf5 6.♕d3 ♕xd3 7.cxd3

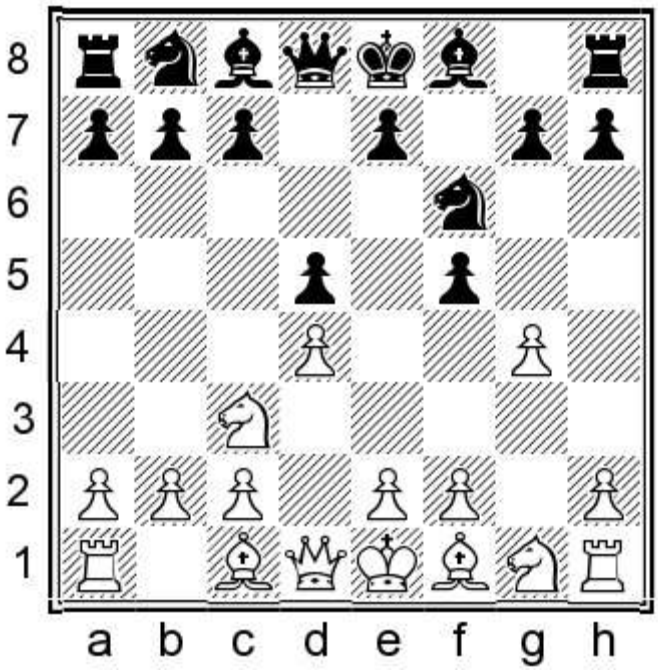


Position after: 7.cxd3

This was seen in Soln, P (2388) – Muzychuk, A (2508), Murska Sobota 2008, 0-1 (29). I would now

improve Muzychuk's play with 7...♘c6!N 8.♘f3 e6 9.♗f4 ♗d6⇄.] 5.♘xh3 ♕d7 6.♘f4 ♘c6 7.c3 e5! 8.dxe5 ♘ge7 9.e6 ♕d6 10.♘a3 a6⩲ White's development is pretty ugly and his king is unable to find a safe haven. Black is likely to regain his pawn soon with the better position thanks to his more harmonious pieces.

B) 3.♘c3 White can also wait, but it doesn't change our plan of action much. 3...♘f6!



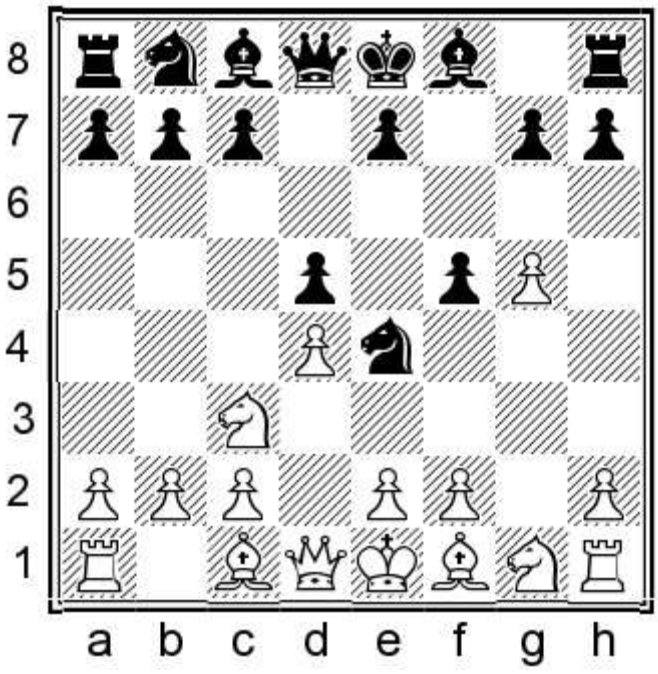
Position after: 3...♘f6!

Once again, we try to encourage White to take on f5.

B1) 4.h3 – see the next subchapter on 2.h3.

B2) 4.gxf5 ♗xf5 Things are pretty much the same as after 3.gxf5. 5.♗f4 [5.♗g5 ♘c6 6.e3 ♕d7 7.♘f3 ♘e4! 8.♖g1 e6 9.♘xe4 ♗xe4⇄] 5...e6 6.e3 ♘c6 7.♗b5 ♗d6 8.♘ge2 0-0 9.♖g1 ♗xf4 10.♘xf4 e5! 11.dxe5 ♘xe5∓. White should be concerned about his king on e1.

B3) 4.g5 ♘e4

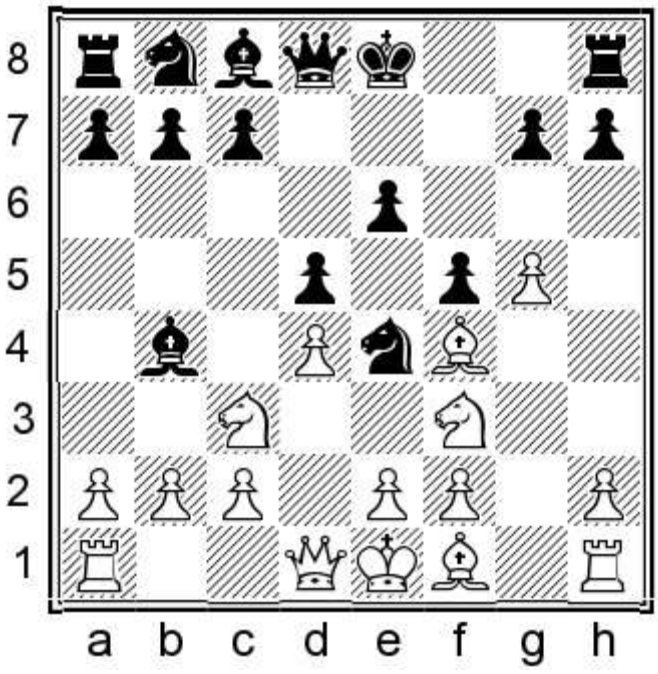


Position after: 4...♘e4

This looks like a worse version for White than 3.g5 because our knight can jump directly into the center. White will have trouble with this knight whether he takes it or not.

B3.1) 5.♘xe4 fxe4 6.f3 ♗f5 7.♗g2 e5! A strong central reaction by Black. 8.dxe5 ♘c6 9.fxe4 Even if Black went on to win in Al Rachib, A (2350) – Sulskis, S (2555), Elista 1998, 0-1 (25), he took back with the wrong piece. He should have played 9...dxe4! 10.♕xd8+ ♖xd8 11.c3 ♗c5 12.♘h3 0-0 13.♘f2 ♘xe5∓ with great play on the open files.

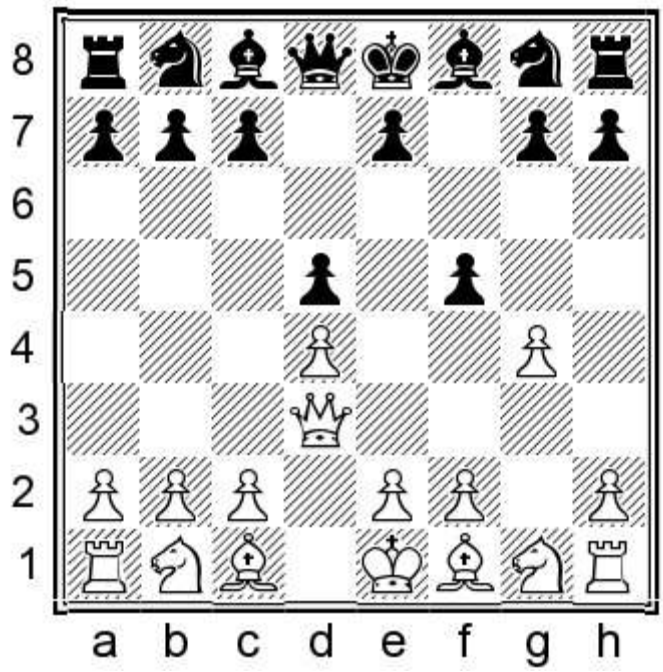
B3.2) 5.♘f3 e6 6.♗f4 ♗b4



Position after: 6...♗b4

After a few logical moves, White is about to lose a pawn already. 7.♕d3 c5 8.a3 ♕a5! 9.♗g2 ♘c6 10.0-0 ♗xc3 11.bxc3 ♕xc3∓

Back to 3.♕d3.



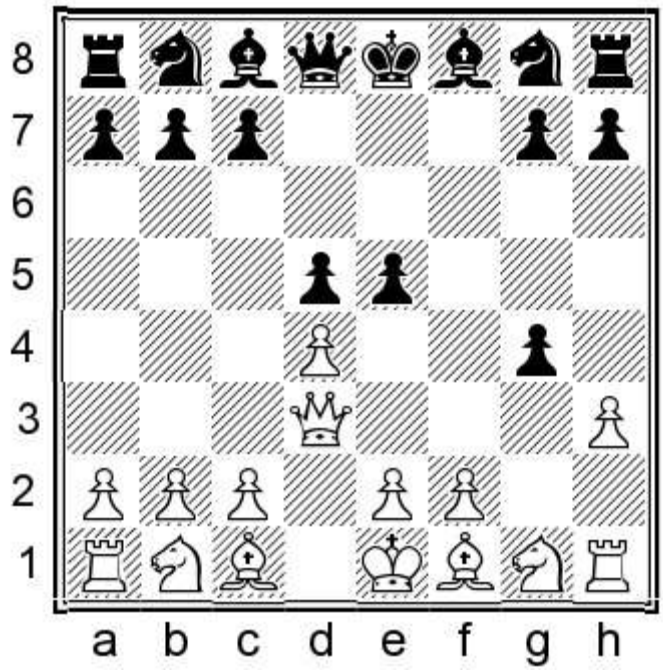
Position after: 3.♕d3

3...fxg4

I think it's OK now to take on g4, because the queen on d3 is exposed, whereas ...d5 was clearly a logical move.

3...g6!? Holding the center was Malaniuk's choice in his book on the Leningrad, but I am not fond of it. White's play on the dark squares may become annoying. 4.g5! [4.gxf5?! ♗xf5 5.♕b5+ ♘c6 6.c3 ♕d6 7.♗h3 ♗xh3 8.♘xh3 0-0-0∓] 4...c5 5.♘f3 ♘c6 6.c3 ♗g7 7.♗g2↑

4.h3 e5!N



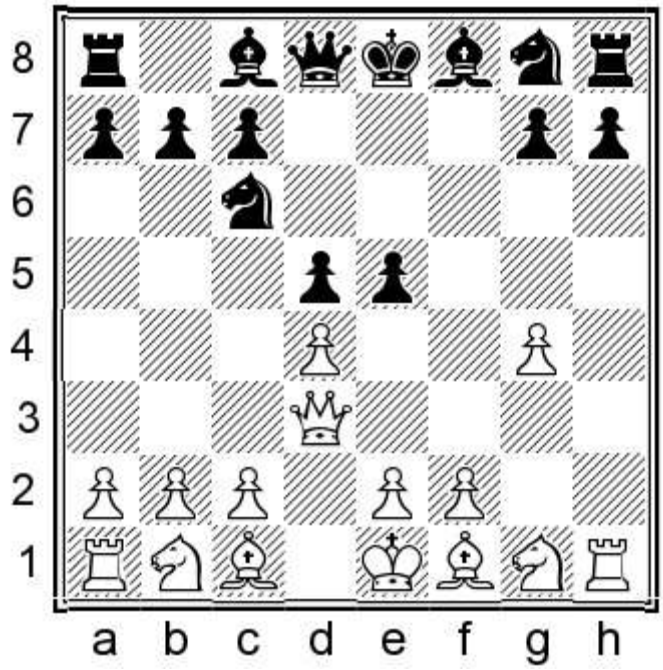
Position after: 4...e5!N

This strong reaction is actually a novelty. It is perfectly timed in order to take over the initiative.

5.dxe5

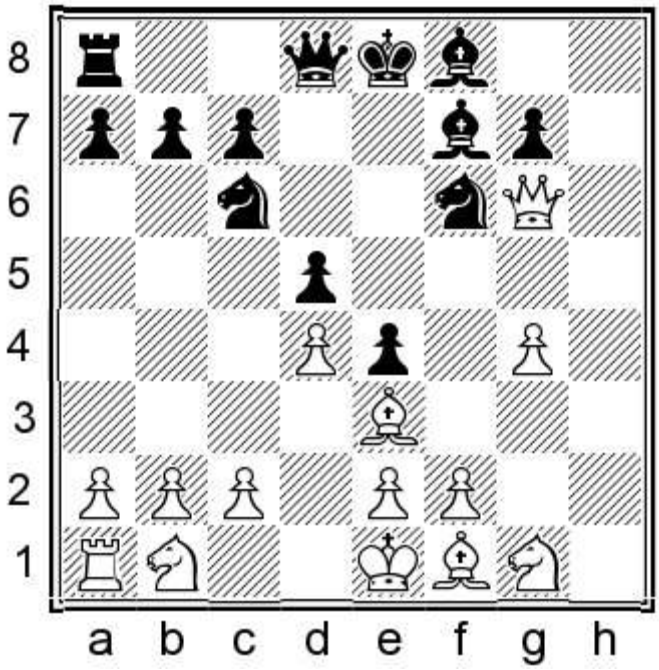
5.hxg4

A) 5...♘c6!?



Position after: 5...♘c6!?

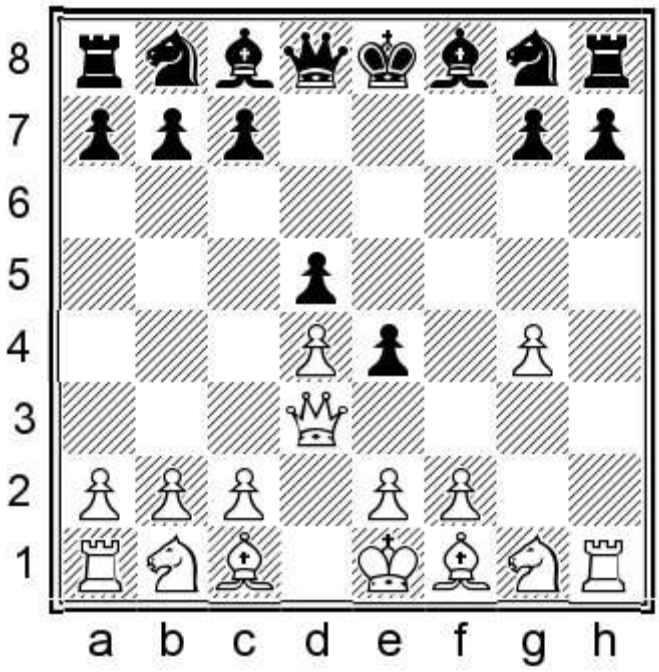
6.♖xh7 This variation leads to a funny position which is probably about equal, but interesting to play. [6.dxe5 ♘xe5 transposes to 5.dxe5.] 6...e4! 7.♕h3 ♖xh7 8.♕xh7 ♗e6 [8...♘ge7!? 9.♕h5+ g6 10.♕h8 ♗xg4 11.♗h6 ♔d7 12.♗g5! ♕e8⇄] 9.♗e3 ♘f6 10.♕g6+ [10.♕h4 ♗xg4 11.♘c3 ♕d7 12.♗h3 ♗xh3 13.♕xh3 0-0-0↑] 10...♗f7



Position after: 10...♗f7

The queen looks in trouble, but there is probably nothing better for Black than a draw. 11.♕f5 [11.♕g5 ♕d7 12.♘c3 ♗e6 13.♕g6+ ♗f7 14.♕g5 ♗e6=] 11...g6 12.♕g5 ♗e7 13.♘c3 ♘g8 14.♕f4 ♗d6 15.♕g5 ♗e7=

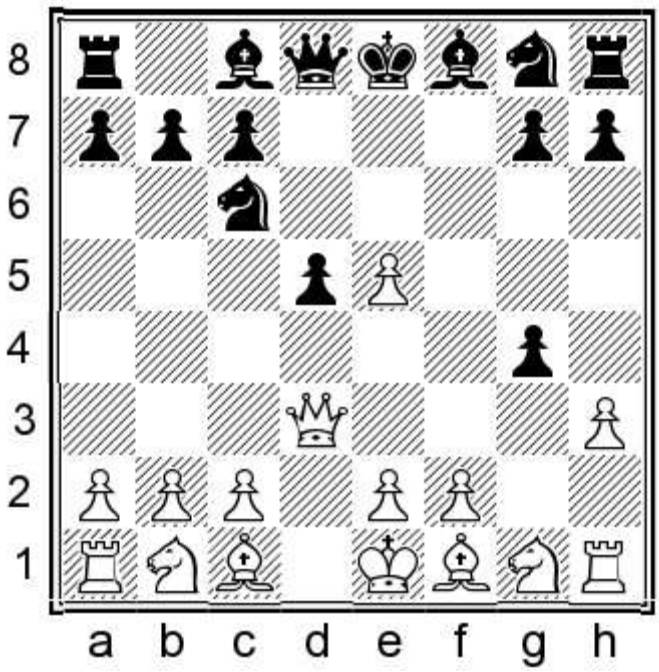
B) 5...e4!



Position after: 5...e4!

Probably the simplest way to play. Black blocks the center and has very easy development. 6.♕g3 ♘c6 7.♘c3 ♘b4 8.♔d1 ♗d6 9.♗f4 ♗xf4 10.♕xf4 ♗e6∓

5...♘c6!

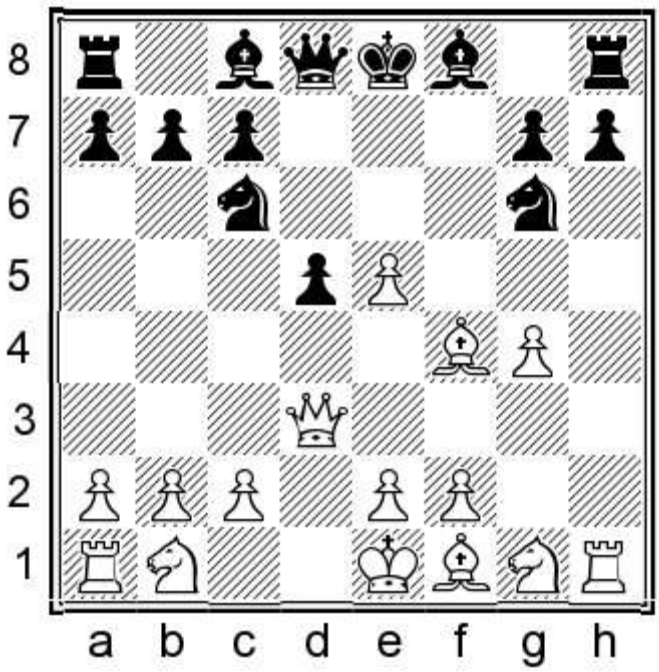


Position after: 5...♘c6!

This is a clever way to exploit the position of the white queen.

6.hxg4

6.♗f4 ♘ge7 7.hxg4 ♘g6

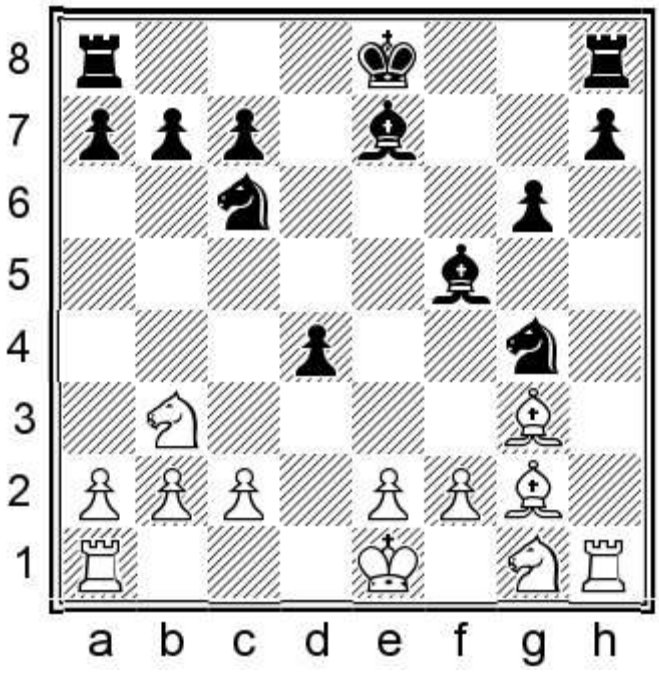


Position after: 7...♘g6

A) 8.♕g3 White can try to keep his extra pawn, but Black gains some more tempi: 8...♘xf4!? [8...♕e7!? 9.♘c3 ♘xf4 10.♕xf4 ♕b4 11.♕xb4 ♗xb4 12.♗g2 d4 13.a3 dxc3 14.♗xc6+ bxc6 15.axb4 cxb2 16.♖b1 ♗xg4 17.♖xb2 ♖b8=] 9.♕xf4 ♗c5 10.♘f3 ♖f8 11.♕g3 ♘d4 12.♘a3 ♕e7⩲.

B) 8.♕xg6+? Sometimes White gets some play with this kind of sacrifice thanks to his rook on h8, but it doesn't work well here as it's the only dangerous piece: 8...hxg6 9.♖xh8 ♗xg4–+.

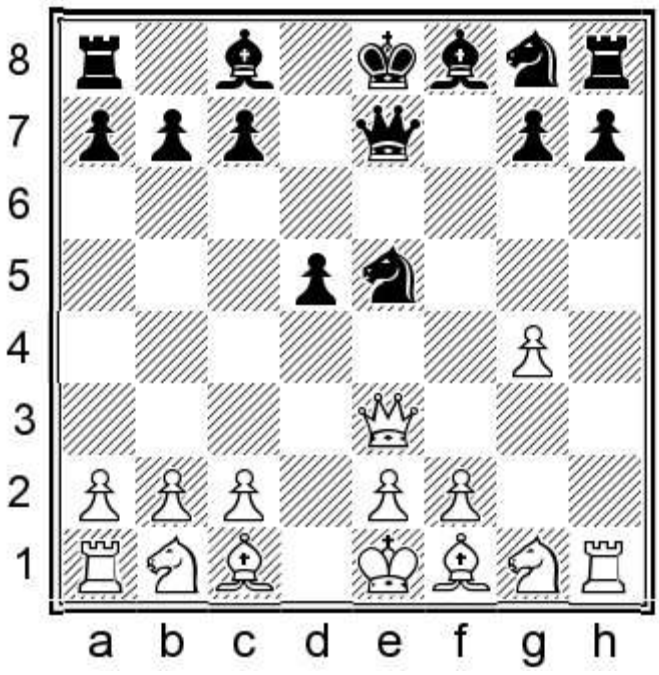
C) 8.♗g3 ♘gxe5 9.♕e3 d4 10.♕e4 ♕e7 11.♘d2 ♘xg4 12.♗g2 g6 13.♘b3 ♗f5 14.♕xe7+ ♗xe7



Position after: 14...♗xe7

White can regain his pawn, but he has to give up the bishop pair. 15.♗xc6+ [15.0-0-0?! 0-0-0 16.♗xc6 bxc6 17.♘xd4 ♗e4 18.♘gf3 h5∓] 15...bxc6 16.♘xd4 ♗d7=

6...♘xe5 7.♕e3 ♕e7



Position after: 7...♕e7

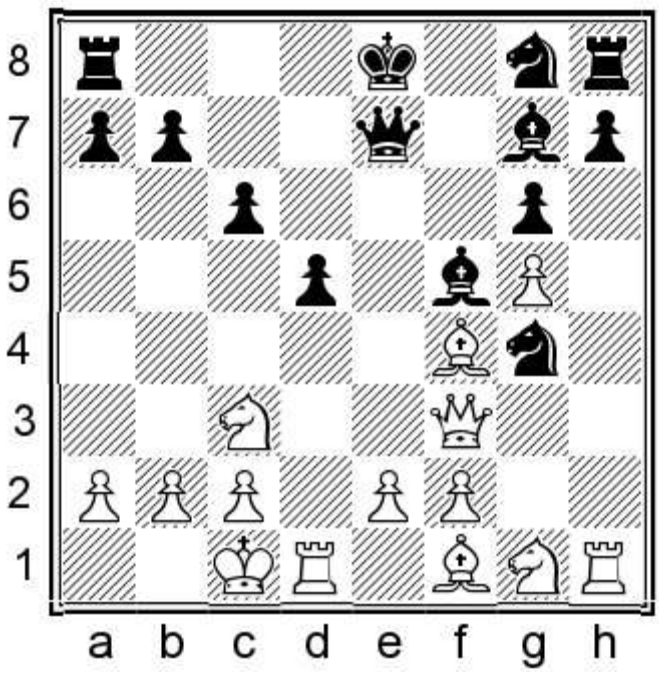
Already seven moves played and only one minor piece developed. It's not a beginners' game, just a

strange variation. Objectively Black should be able to seize the initiative. 7...♗d6!? 8.f4 d4 9.♕b3 ♘f7= This is a balanced middlegame, with a different type of play to the other line.

8.g5!

The pawn is no longer attacked, and also hampers the development of the black knight on g8.

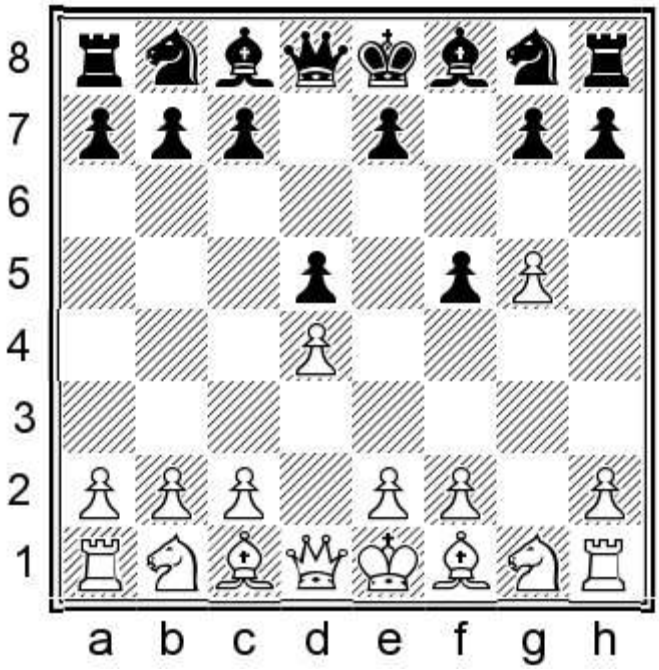
8...♘g4 9.♕f3 c6 10.♘c3 g6 11.♗f4 ♗g7 12.0-0-0 ♗f5∓



Position after: 12...♗f5∓

f) 2.g4 d5 3.g5

1.d4 f5 2.g4 d5!? 3.g5



Position after: 3.g5

I think this is the best option for White. It may look very strange, but the idea is actually quite sound. White starts a blockade on the dark squares, and makes our development harder because the g5-pawn prevents ...♘f6. In the long term, White has the idea of pushing his h-pawn as far as he can in order to expand on the kingside. In addition, if we let him settle a strong piece on e5, we can soon find ourselves in trouble, so we must react quickly!

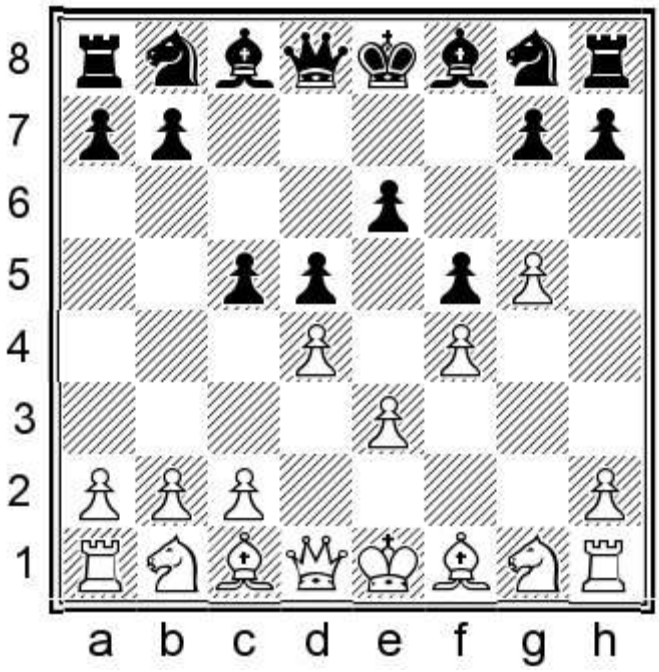
3...c5

The fight for the dark squares should start immediately.

4.c3

This has been played in most games. It's quite logical, as White wants to protect his d-pawn while still being able to play ♗f4.

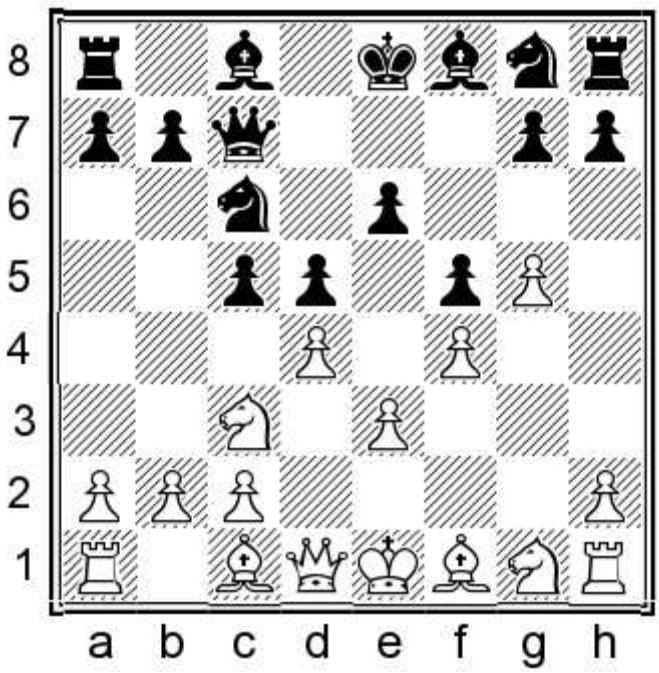
A) 4.e3 The kind of move we wanted to provoke. Now the bishop is stuck on c1 and can no longer reach f4. 4...e6 5.f4 [5.h4 ♗d7 6.♗g2 ♘c6 7.♘c3 ♕b6 8.♘ge2 h6 9.♘a4 ♕a5+ 10.c3 hxg5 11.hxg5 ♖xh1+ 12.♗xh1 c4!∓ and the ...b5−b4 advance will help Black gain some play on the queenside.]



Position after: 5.f4

A1) 5...h6? We will see that this reaction is fine in the 4.c3 line, but here Black forgets that the king is on an unprotected diagonal, and even if it's not so dangerous in a rather closed position, having your king on d7 after only six moves is not necessarily what you want. 6.♕h5+ ♔d7 7.♘c3±

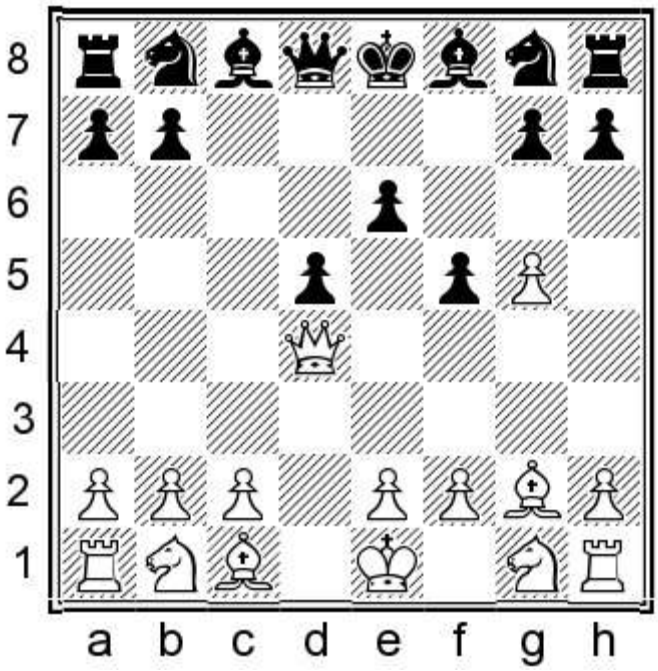
A2) 5...♘c6 6.♘c3 [6.♘f3?! This is too early as ♕h5+ is no longer possible. 6...h6! 7.♘c3 hxg5 8.♘xg5 ♘f6 Being able to develop the knight here makes our life much easier, and Black simply has the upper hand. 9.♗g2 ♗d7∓] 6...♕c7



Position after: 6...♕c7

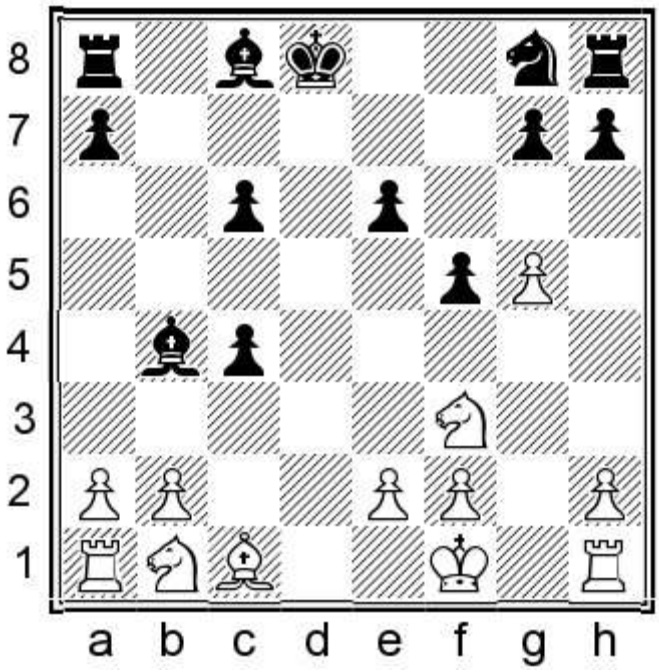
7.♗g2 ♗d7 8.♘f3 h6 9.h4 0-0-0 10.♗d2 hxg5 11.hxg5 ♖xh1+ 12.♗xh1 ♔b8= Play is roughly equal in this kind of closed position where both kings will soon be on the queenside. A possible plan could be to close the center with ...c5−c4, then try to bring the g8-knight to e4 via e7, c8 and d6. It's very likely that we will have time for that since this closed position permits slow maneuvers.

B) 4.♗g2 cxd4 5.♕xd4 e6



Position after: 5...e6

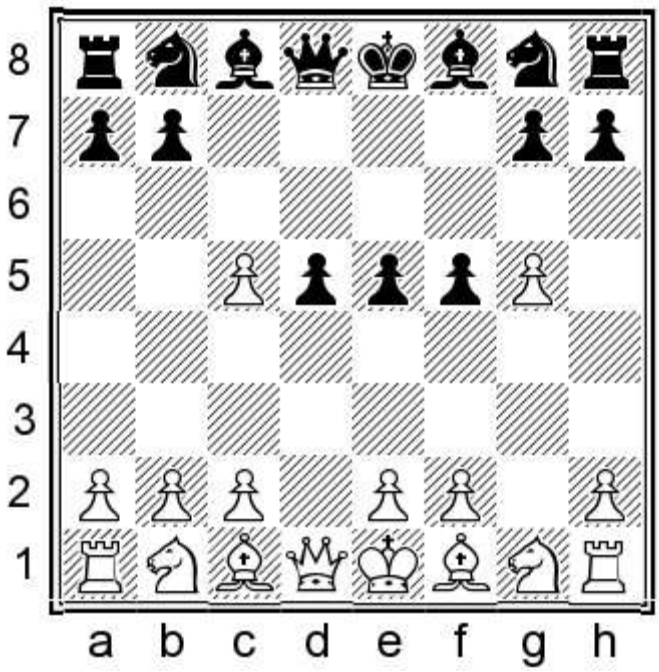
White is unable to destroy Black's center, and the e5-square already looks less problematic. 6.c4 ♘c6 7.♕d1 Black already looks much better. 7...♗b4+ 8.♔f1 dxc4 [8...♘ge7!?∓ also looks a pretty decent option if you prefer to keep pieces on the board.] 9.♗xc6+ bxc6 10.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 11.♘f3



Position after: 11.♘f3

This was played in Avagianos, S (2047) – Sivuk, V (2422), Paleochora 2011, 0-1 (31), and now I suggest an improvement with 11...♘e7N 12.♗d2 a5 13.a3 ♗xd2 14.♘bxd2 ♗a6∓.

C) 4.dxc5 e5!

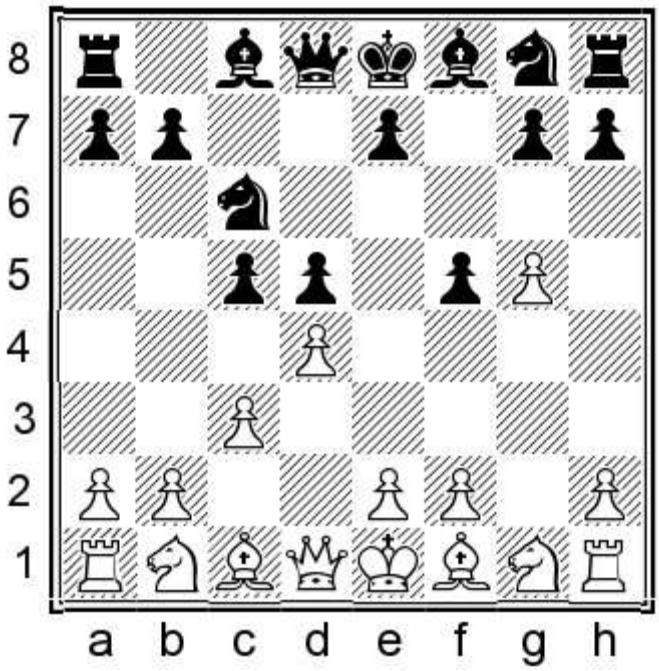


Position after: 4...e5!

So logical – but what a picture! Five pawns on the fifth rank, but the connected d5/e5/f5-pawns seem more impressive than the potentially weak c5- and g5-pawns. 5.♗g2 e4 6.b4 [6.♘h3 ♗xc5 7.♘f4 ♘e7

8.h4 ♘bc6 9.c3 ♕d6∓ Black's central pawns are blockaded, but he remains very dynamic.] 6...a5 7.c3 axb4 8.cxb4 ♘c6 9.♗d2 h6! 10.h4 hxg5 11.hxg5 ♖xh1 12.♗xh1 ♘ge7∓ Black is temporarily a pawn down, but has a huge center and better development.

4...♘c6

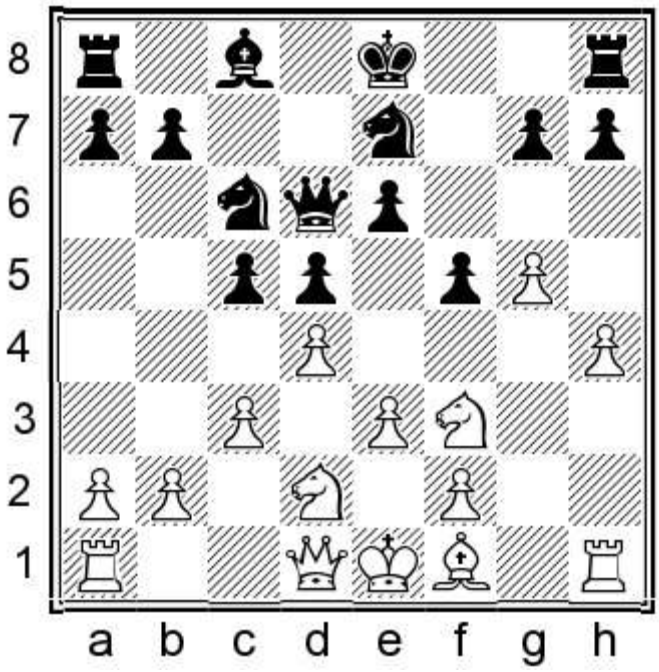


Position after: 4...♘c6

5.♘f3

5.f4?! goes against what we just said and allows the strong 5...h6!N 6.♗g2 [6.gxh6?! e5! 7.fxe5 ♕h4+ 8.♔d2 ♘xh6 9.♘f3 ♕e4∓ with a huge attack against the poor king.] 6...hxg5 7.fxg5 e6 8.♘f3 ♗d6∓

5...e6 6.♗f4 ♗d6 7.e3 ♘ge7 8.h4 ♕c7 9.♗xd6 ♕xd6 10.♘bd2



Position after: 10.♘bd2

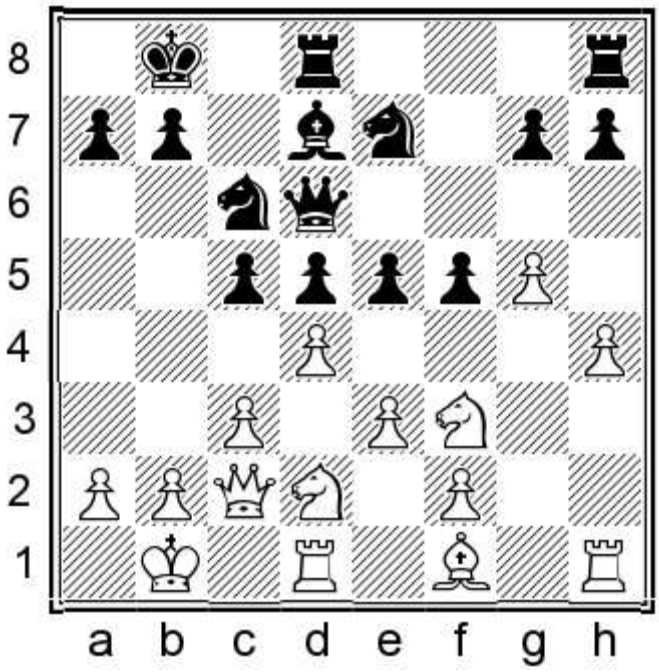
After decent play by both sides in Leniart, A (2368) – Muzychuk, M (2436), Lvov 2008, ½-½ (26), I think Black rushed into playing 10...e5. It seems better to finish development first.

10...♗d7N 11.♕c2 0-0-0 12.0-0-0 ♔b8

12...e5?! Once again, this is too early, but this time it is less obvious. 13.dxc5 ♕xc5 14.b4! ♕d6 15.b5 ♘a5 16.c4↑

13.♔b1 e5!

Now is the right time.



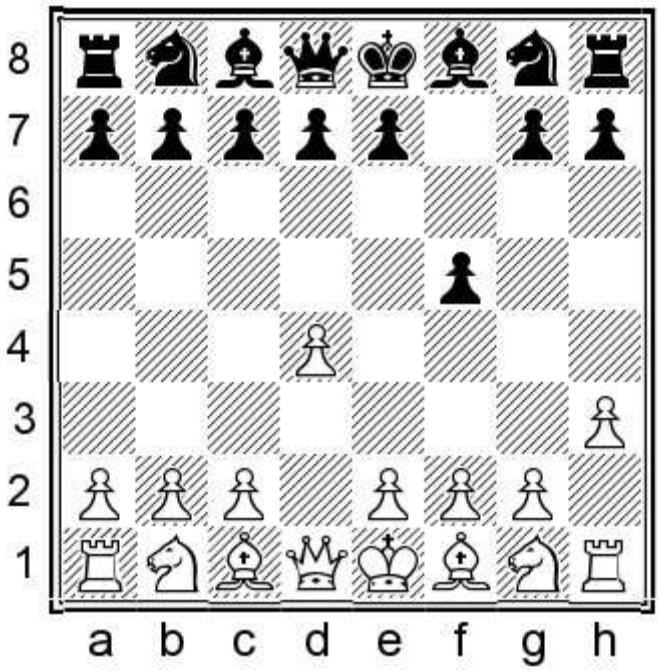
Position after: 13...e5!

14.♘xe5 ♘xe5 15.dxe5 ♕xe5 16.♘f3 ♕c7∓

Black has a strong and solid center and is definitely the one pushing for a win.

g) 2.h3 ♘f6 3.g4 d5 4.--

1.d4 f5 2.h3



Position after: 2.h3

In the same spirit as 2.g4, but a bit more cautious. For instance, Black can no longer decline the gambit by playing ...g3 after h3 here because White will take back on g4 immediately, opening the h-file for his rook. In our case, it doesn't change much, except that White has spent a tempo playing h3.

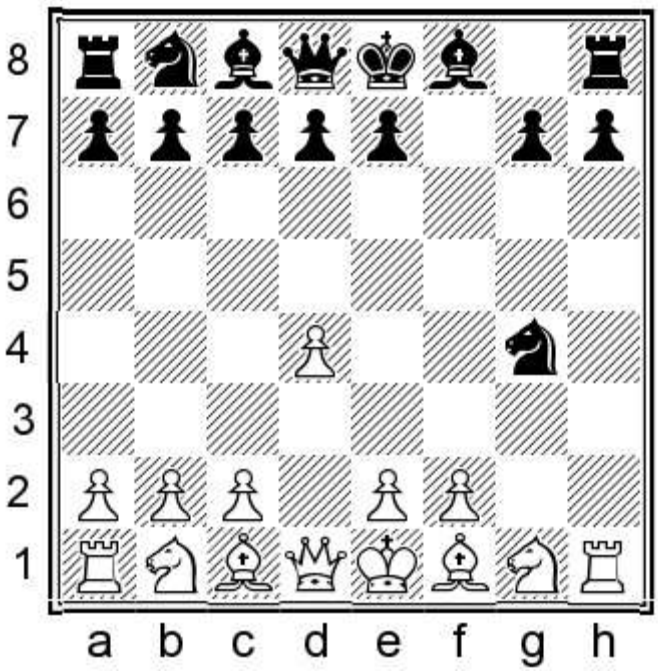
2...♘f6 3.g4

3.♘f3 – see the next chapter.

3...d5!

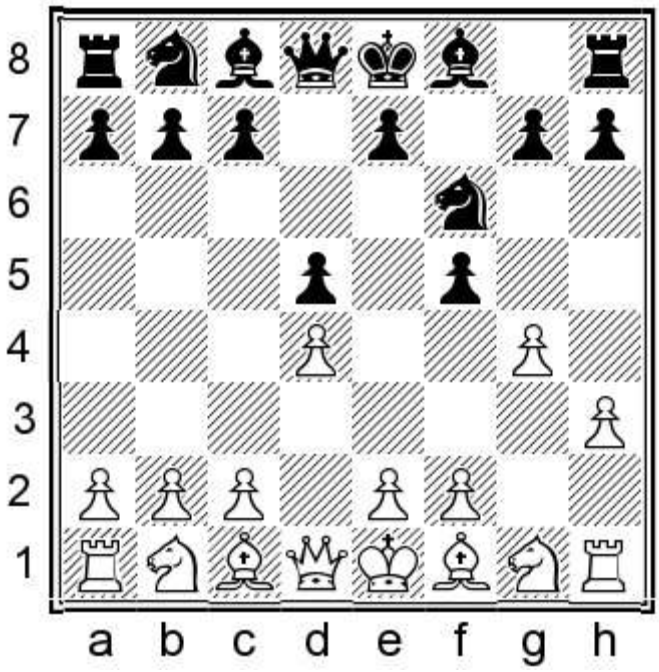
Compared to 2.g4, we have played ...♘f6, and White spent a tempo on h3, while it's not in our plan to ever take on g4.

3...fxg4 4.hxg4 ♘xg4?



Position after: 4...♘xg4?

This is exactly what White is waiting for: some open files and Black losing tempi in order to grab a stupid pawn. White can easily take over the initiative. 5.e4! [5.♕d3!?→ is very dangerous too, with the trick 5...♘f6 which loses on the spot to 6.♖xh7!+– and White either checkmates early or wins a whole rook.] 5...d6 6.♗e2 ♘f6 7.♘c3± Everybody loves White here.

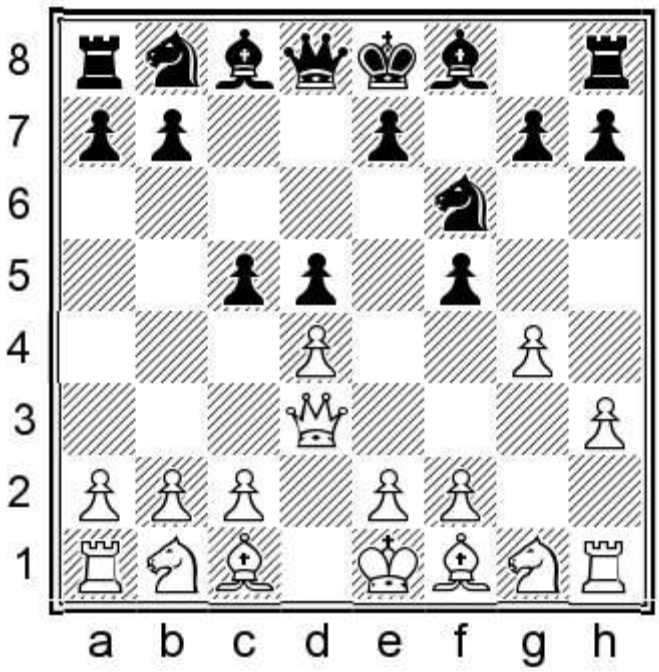


Position after: 3...d5!

4.g5?!

Once again the most played move, but I think it's already better for Black due to his strong knight.

A) 4.♕d3?! It's important to remember kids' principles sometimes – develop your minor pieces, not your queen! 4...c5!

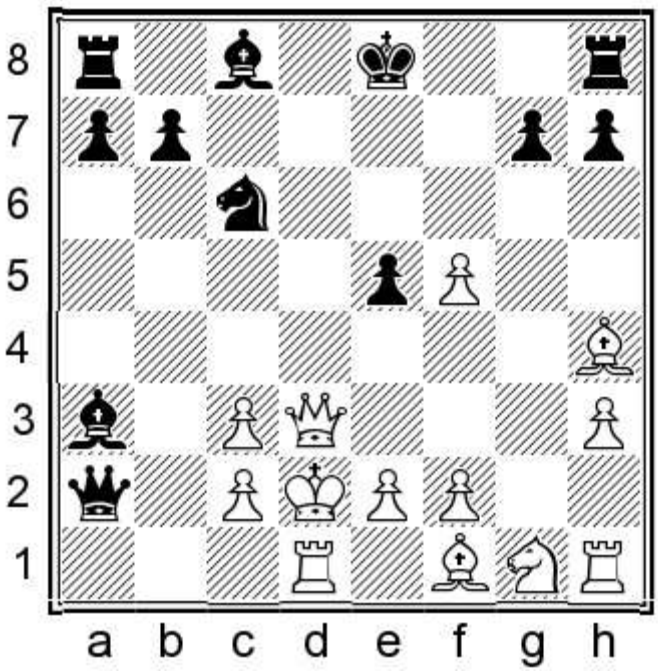


Position after: 4...c5!

5.dxc5 [5.gxf5 ♘c6! 6.c3 ♘e4! 7.♗g2 ♗xf5∓ Black already has a huge lead in development, and

White still has to solve the problems with his queen.] 5...e5! 6.gxf5 ♘c6 White is playing like a child, while Black is developing incredibly quickly. 7.♗g5 ♗xc5 8.♘c3 ♕a5

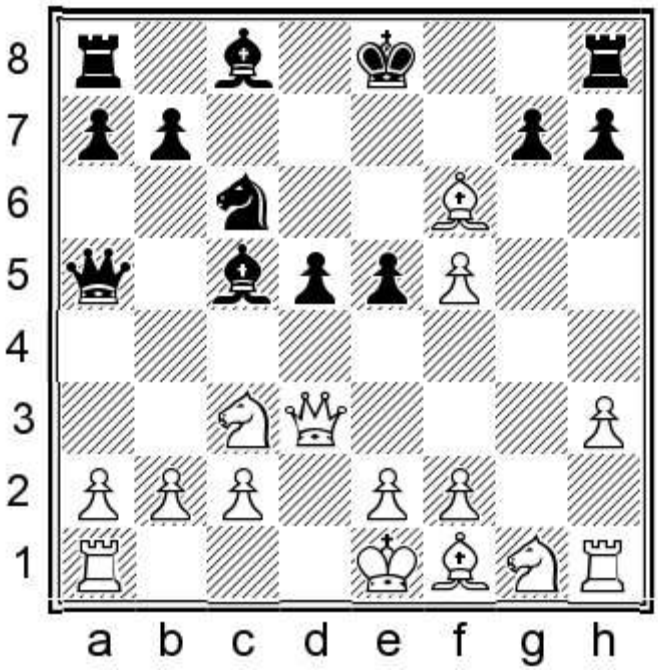
A1) 9.0-0-0 d4 Everything is going right for Black. 10.♗xf6 dxc3! 11.♗xg7 [11.♗h4 ♕xa2 12.bxc3 ♗a3+ 13.♔d2



Position after: 13.♔d2

13...♗e7!! 14.♗xe7 ♔xe7 15.♔e1 ♖d8–+] 11...♕xa2 12.bxc3 ♖g8–+

A2) 9.♗xf6!

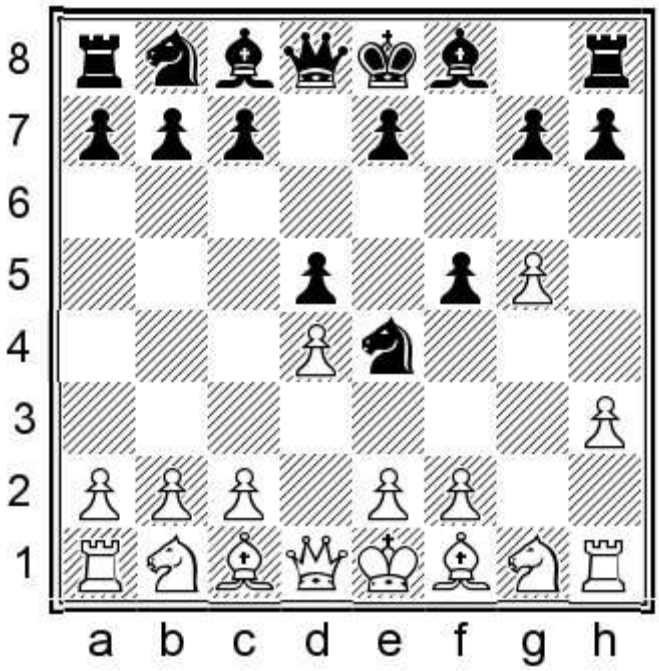


Position after: 9.♗xf6!

White's best chance is to take now, in order to avoid any intermediate moves. 9...gxf6 10.0-0-0 ♘b4 11.♕f3 ♘xa2+ [11...d4 12.e3 ♘xa2+ 13.♘xa2 ♕xa2 14.♗b5+ ♔e7 15.exd4∞] 12.♘xa2 ♕xa2 13.♕xd5 ♕a1+ 14.♔d2 ♗b4+ 15.♔e3 ♕a5⩲ A crazy position, but Black clearly has huge compensation for only one missing pawn.

B) 4.gxf5?! is obviously even worse than in the 2.g4 line.

4...♘e4

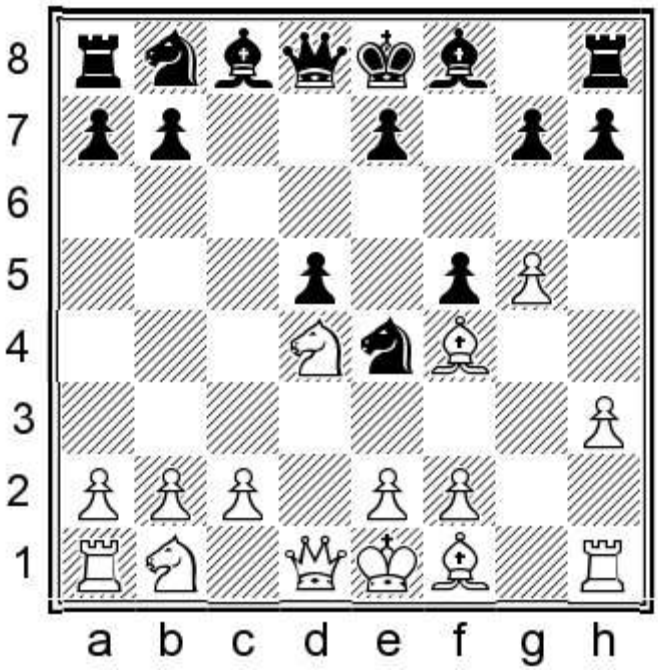


Position after: 4...♘e4

This is a huge improvement compared to the 2.g4 main line. The knight isn't stuck on g8, and even helps Black to drum up play, for instance against the f2-pawn.

5.♗f4?!

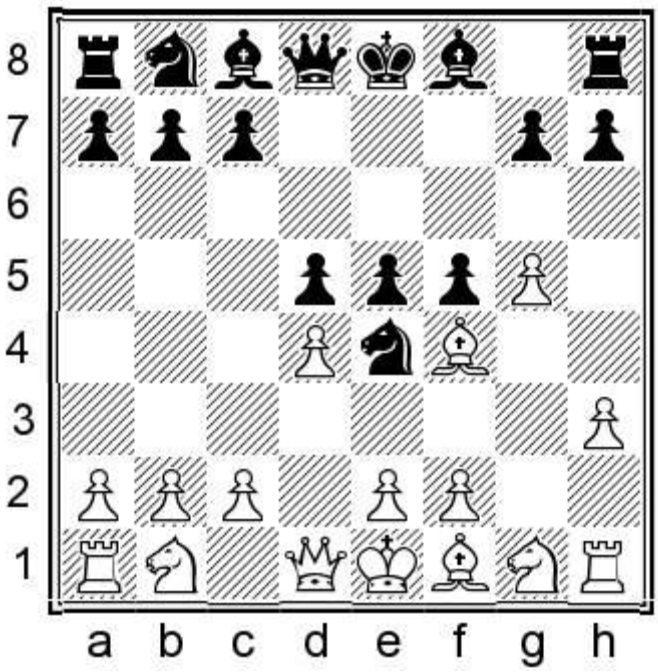
5.♘f3 c5 6.♗f4 [6.dxc5 e6 7.♗f4 ♗xc5 8.e3 ♕b6 9.♕c1 ♘c6∓; 6.♗g2 cxd4 7.♘xd4 e5 8.♘b3 ♘c6∓] 6...cxd4 7.♘xd4



Position after: 7.♘xd4

White has developed two minor pieces, but no longer has a pawn on d4, so Black should be able to rule the center with his pawns. 7...e6 8.e3 ♘c6 9.♘d2 ♗d6 10.♗xd6 ♕xd6∓

5...e5!



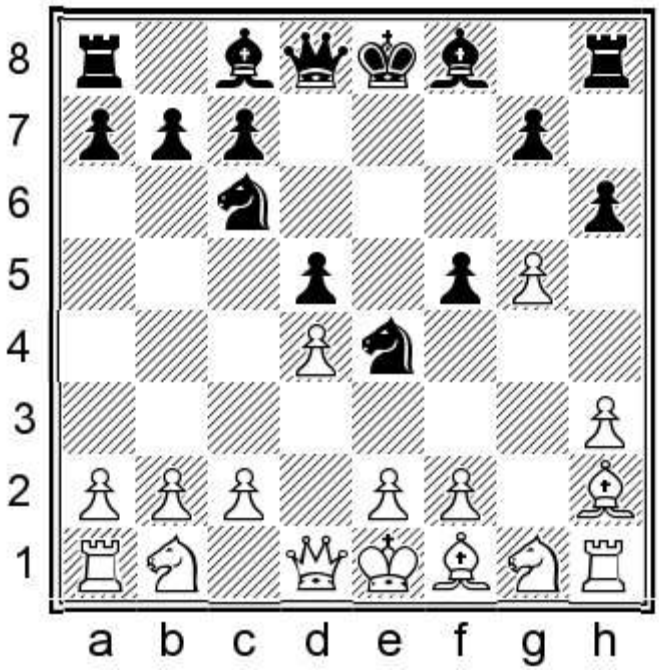
Position after: 5...e5!

A strong blow which underlines the weaknesses in White's camp caused by the advance of his kingside

pawns.

6.dxe5

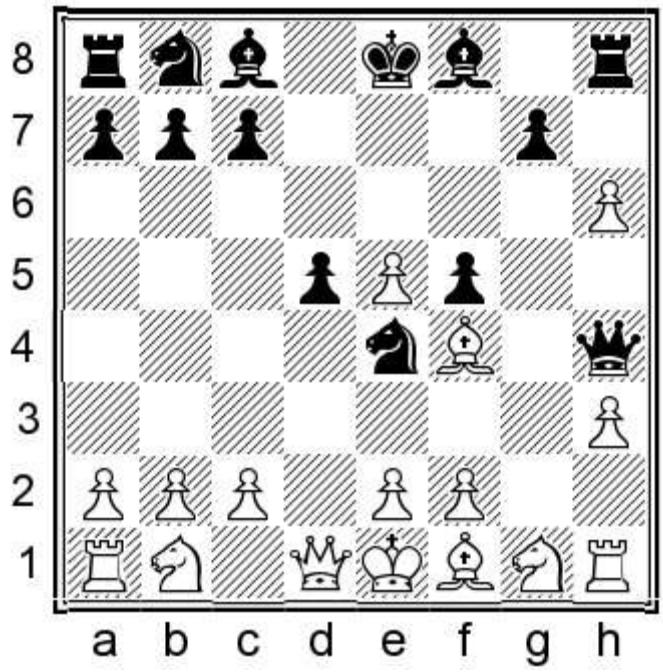
6.♗xe5 ½-½ (43) Feldmann, M (2154) – Windelband, J (2159), Germany 2006. 6...♘c6!N 7.♗h2 [7.♘f3 ♘xe5 8.♘xe5 ♕xg5 9.e3 ♗d6 10.♘d2 ♕f6 11.♘d3 0-0∓] 7...h6!?



Position after: 7...h6!?

8.gxh6? [8.e3 Of course this is the lesser evil, but the position isn't any good for White. 8...hxg5 9.f3 ♘d6 10.♘c3 ♗e6∓] 8...♕h4! White is unable to defend the f2-pawn properly. 9.♗g3 ♘xg3 10.♘f3 ♕xh6 11.fxg3 g5! 12.♗g2 g4–+

6...h6! 7.gxh6 ♕h4!



Position after: 7...♕h4!

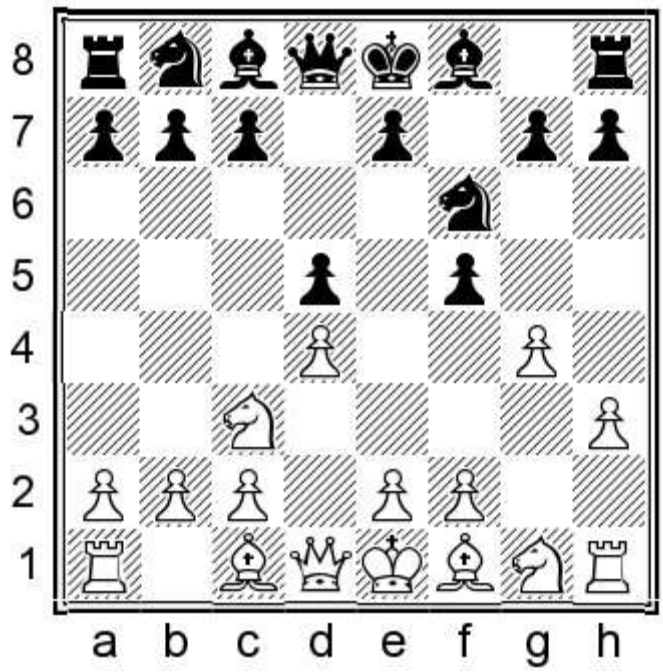
8.♗e3 f4 9.♗d4 c5 10.hxg7 ♗xg7 11.♘f3 ♕e7 12.♗c3 ♗e6∓

White is two pawns up, but with such awful development his position is almost desperate.

h) 2.h3 ♘f6 3.g4 d5 4.♘f3, 4.♘c3

1.d4 f5 2.h3 ♘f6 3.g4 d5! 4.♘f3

4.♘c3

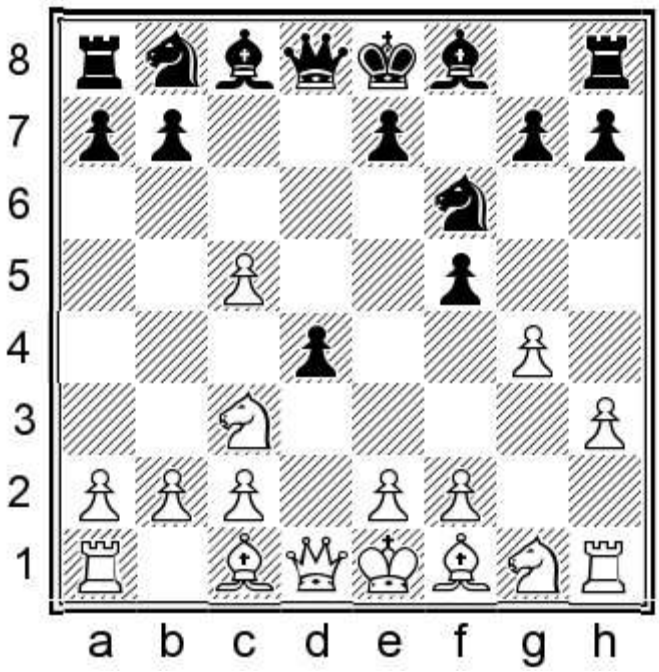


Position after: 4.♘c3

White is waiting for Black to take on g4, but it's not part of our plan. We can simply strike back in the center and exploit White's difficulty in holding the d4-pawn. 4...c5!?

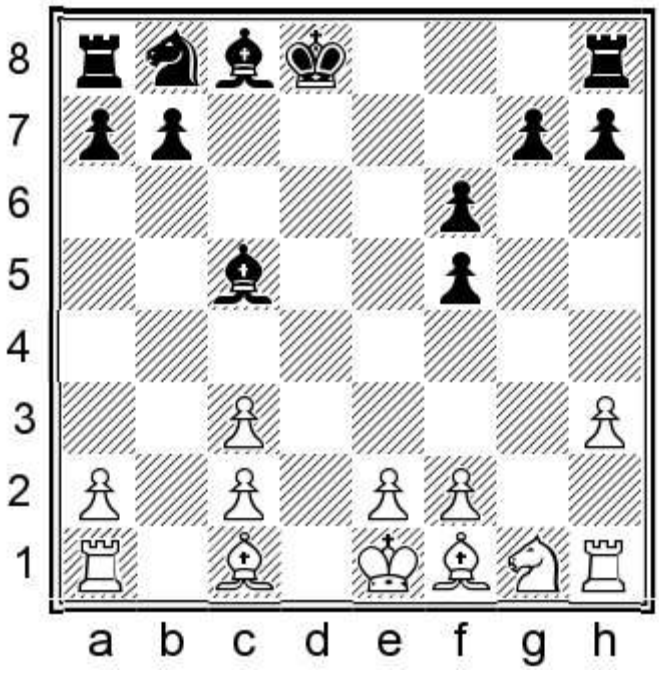
A) 5.e3 ♘c6 6.dxc5 [6.♗g2 fxg4! 7.hxg4 ♗xg4 8.f3 ♗f5∓ Black has finally decided to take the pawns, in favorable conditions.] 6...fxg4 7.hxg4 ♗xg4 8.♗e2 ♗xe2 9.♕xe2 e5∓

B) 5.dxc5 d4!



Position after: 5...d4!

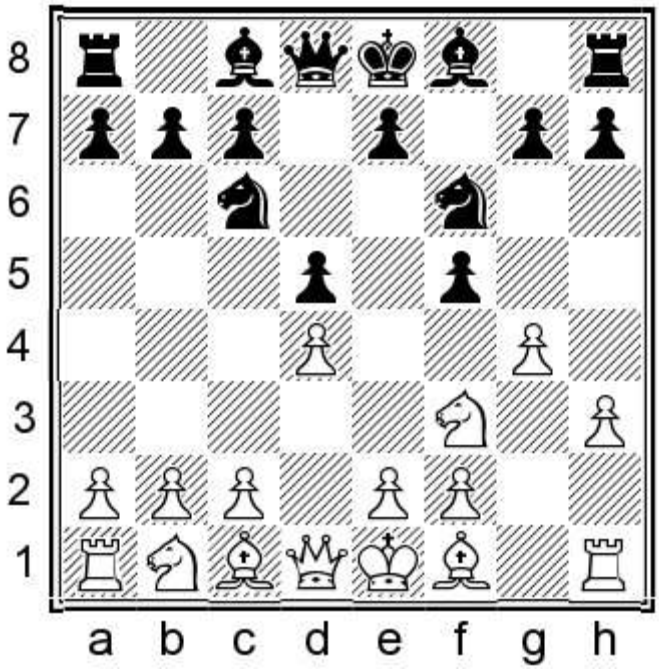
6.g5! The best chance, but Black easily obtains a favorable endgame. [6.♘b1?! e5 7.c3 ♗xc5 8.cxd4 exd4 9.♗g2 ♘c6∓] 6...dxc3!N 7.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 8.gxf6 exf6 9.bxc3 ♗xc5∓



Position after: 9...♗xc5∓

We have the better pawn structure, and White already has to struggle for a draw.

4...♘c6

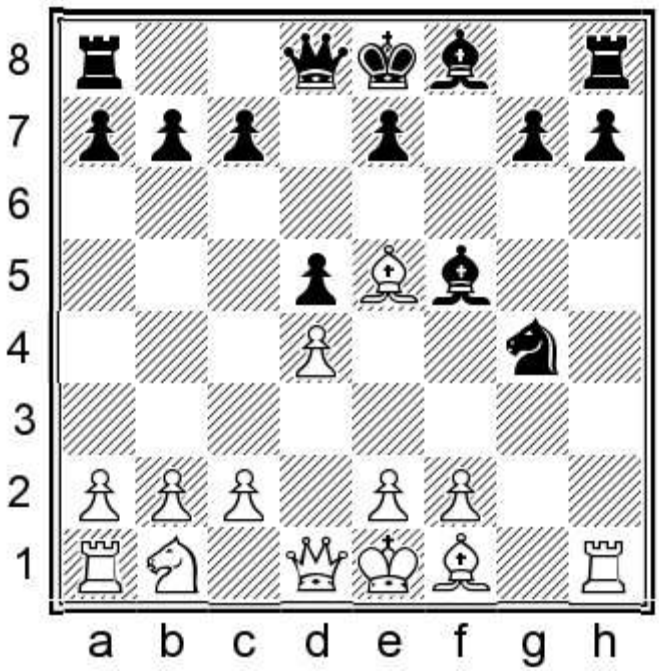


Position after: 4...♘c6

5.♘c3

A) 5.♗f4 fxg4 6.♘e5!?N This looks more interesting than simply retaking on g4, but has never been

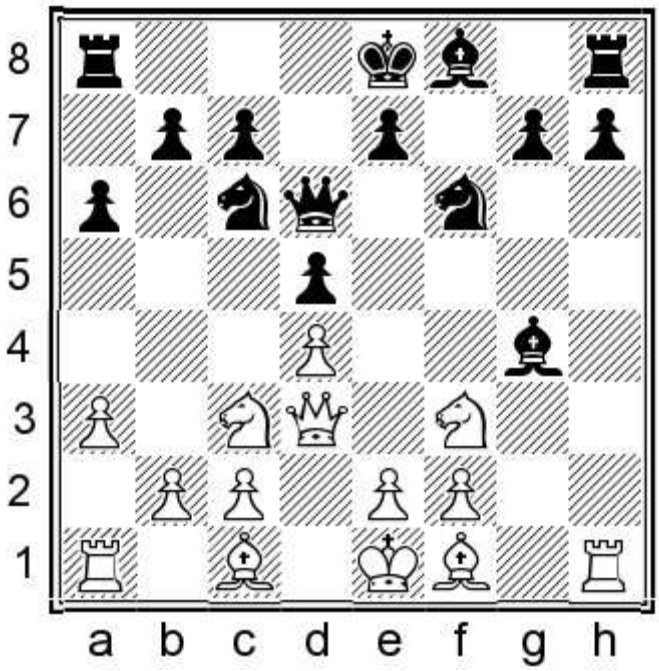
played. [6.hxg4 ♗xg4 7.♘e5 ♘xe5 8.dxe5 ♘h5 9.♗e3 g6! This protects the knight on h5 and finishes development. 10.♕d4 ♗f5 11.♘c3 e6 12.0-0-0 ♗g7∓] 6...♘xe5 7.♗xe5 ♗f5 8.hxg4 ♘xg4



Position after: 8...♘xg4

Now we take with the knight and gain a tempo on the bishop! 9.♗g3 [9.♗h3 ♕d7 10.♗xg4 ♗xg4∓] 9...e6 10.♕d2 ♗d6 11.♗h4 ♕d7∓

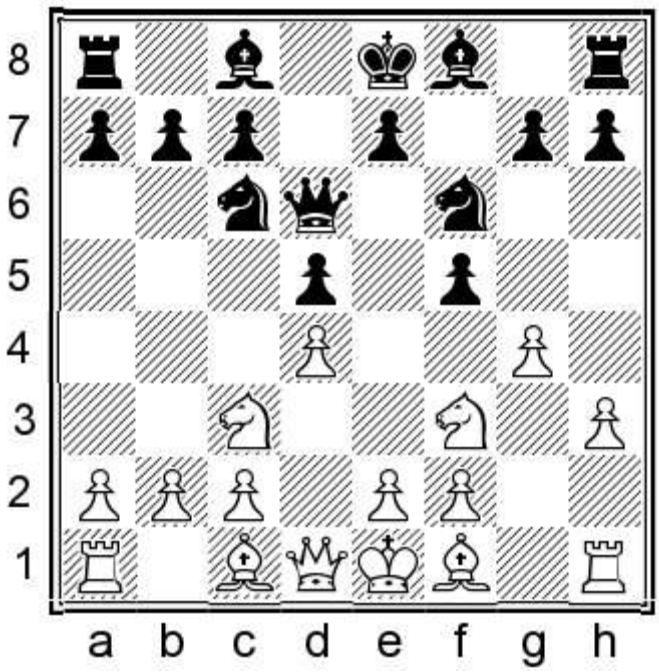
B) 5.♕d3 ♕d6! 6.♘c3 The knight jump to b5 can be seen as a threat. It seems logical to prevent it in order to keep our queen well placed on d6: 6...a6 7.a3 fxg4 8.hxg4 ♗xg4



Position after: 8...♗xg4

Black is finally able to grab this pawn, and by taking it he develops his bishop at the same time, which makes a huge difference. Of course White is far from lost, but he has to prove that he can find some compensation. 9.♗g5 0-0-0 10.0-0-0 e6∓

5...♕d6!?



Position after: 5...♕d6!?

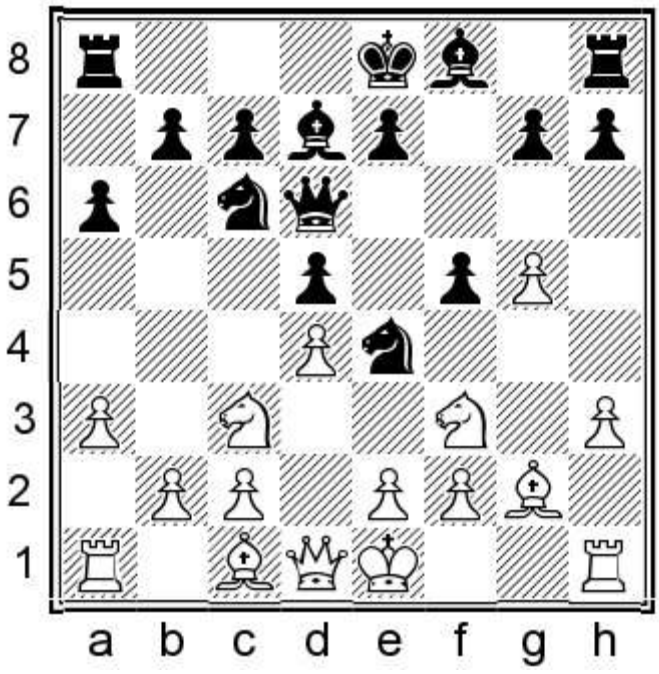
We have already seen that the queen is perfectly placed here. It may facilitate ...e5, and prevents the natural developing move ♗f4. It also prepares ...0-0-0, showing that playing h3/g4 was useless.

6.a3

A) 6.♘b5?! This move is not dangerous here, as the knight has to retreat immediately after 6...♕b4+∓.

B) 6.g5 ♘e4 7.a3 ♘xc3 8.bxc3 e5! 9.dxe5 [9.♘xe5 ♘xe5 10.♗f4?? ♘f3+–+] 9...♘xe5 10.♘xe5 ♕xe5 Material is still balanced, but that is White's only consolation. 11.♕d4 [11.♗g2 ♕xc3+ 12.♗d2 ♕c4∓] 11...♗d6∓ 12.♗g2 c6∓

6...a6! 7.g5 ♘e4 8.♗g2 ♗d7



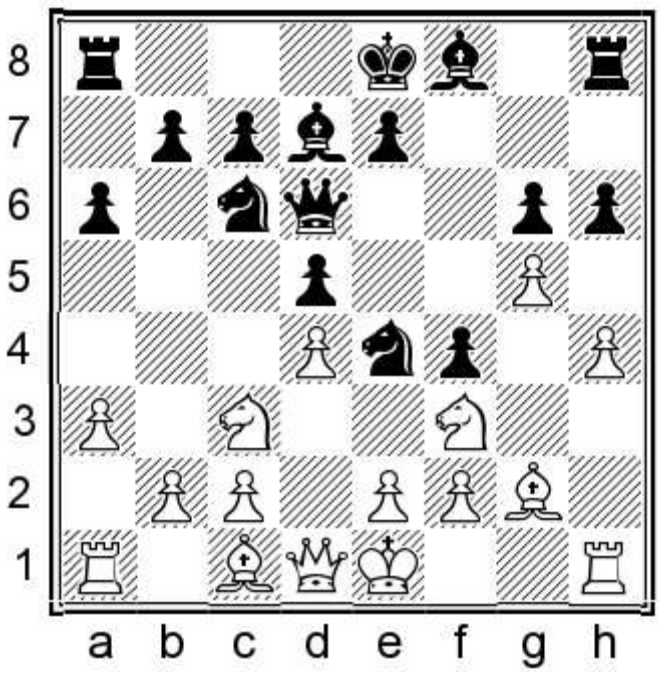
Position after: 8...♗d7

White is pretty much out of useful moves.

9.♗e3

9.0-0 0-0-0 10.♕d3 h6!→

9...h6! 10.h4 f4 11.♗c1 g6∓

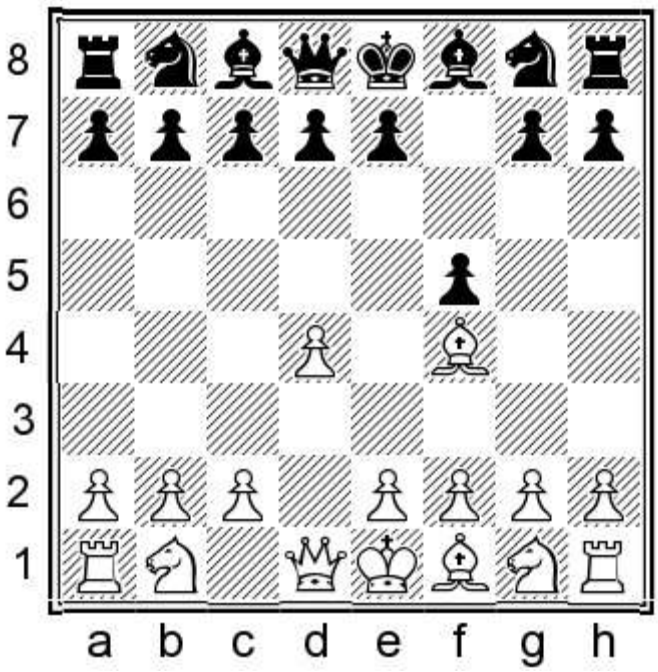


Position after: 11...g6∓

Who wants to be White here? Certainly not me!

i) 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 d6 4.--, 4.♘c3 e6 5.h3

1.d4 f5 2.♗f4!?



Position after: 2.♗f4!?

Of all the moves examined in this chapter, I think this is the most interesting for White, especially against a Leningrad player. If you want to play the Classical Defense with ...e6 and ...d6, then it's not a real problem, but for the Leningrad player there may be some move order issues. Let's see why!

2...♘f6

There is no real choice, as it would be more committal to start with a pawn move.

3.e3

It took me a while here to decide what line to offer. White has played very flexibly, and has many set-ups at his disposal.

A) 3.♘f3 We will discuss this move in Chapter 6.

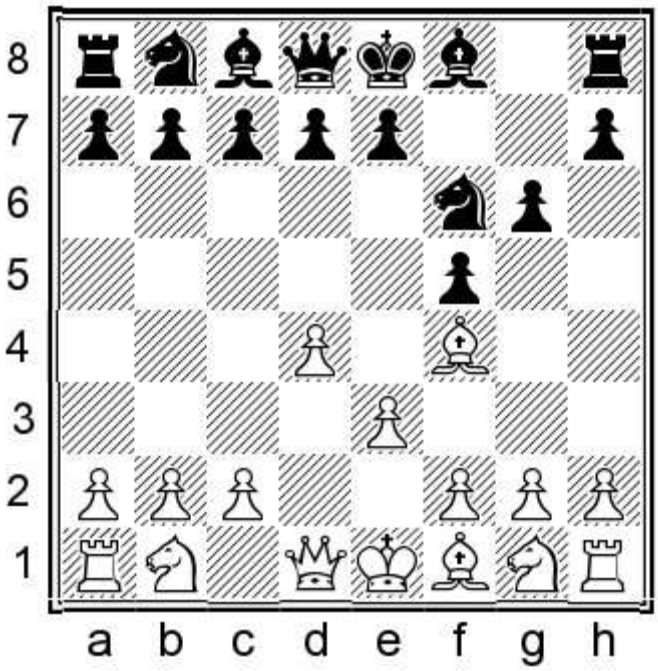
B) 3.♘c3 We have already considered this position in Chapter 2.

3...d6!

This flexible move was finally my choice! Black is ready to choose between ...e6 or ...g6, depending on

White's next move.

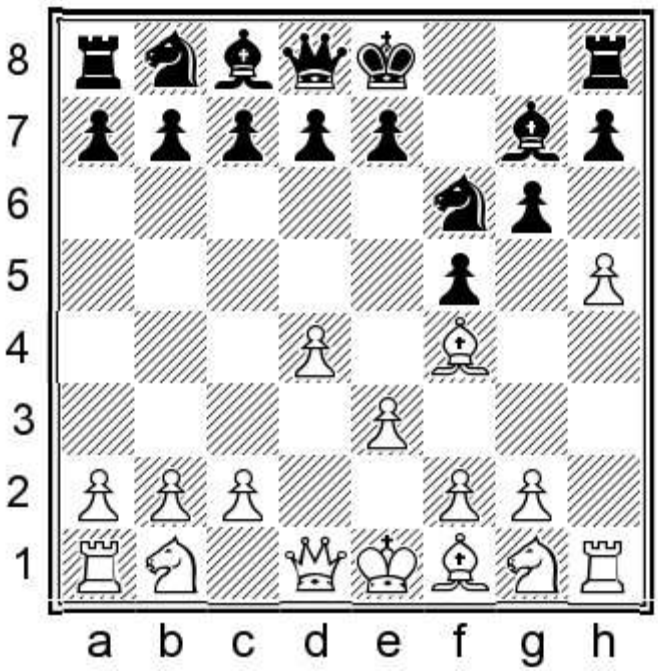
3...g6?!



Position after: 3...g6?!

You might wonder what's wrong with this move. Even more confusing, you'll see my advice in the line with ♘f3 instead of e3 is to play 3...g6. So what's the difference? 4.h4!

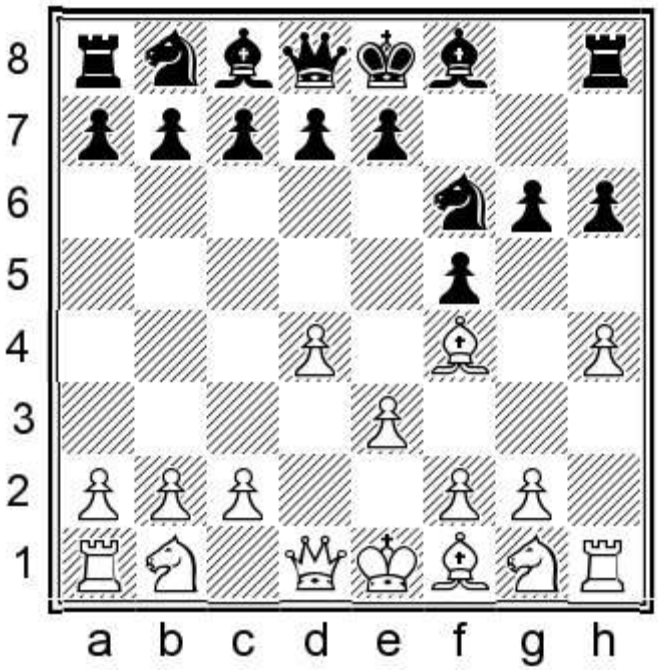
A) 4...♗g7?! 5.h5!



Position after: 5.h5!

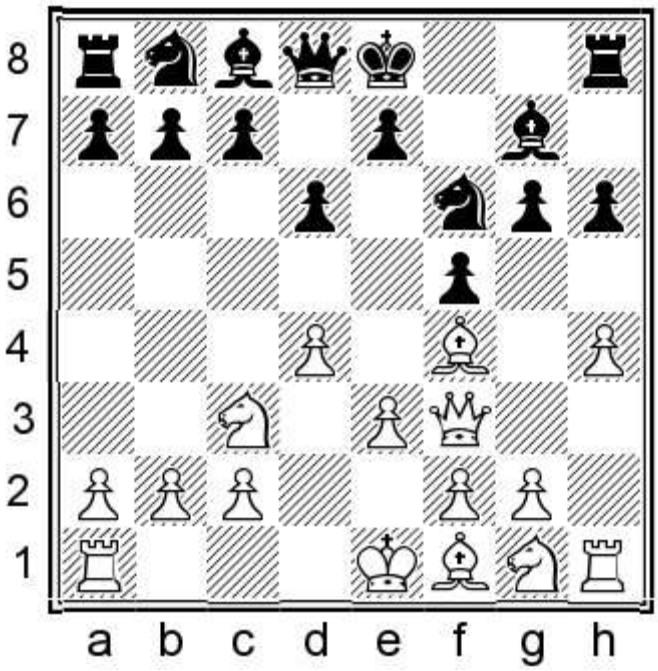
5...♘xh5? [5...0-0 6.hxg6 hxg6 7.♕f3± The g6-pawn is a big weakness and White's attack is easy to follow. The situation is already serious for Black. 5...d6 Maybe the lesser evil, but the opening has obviously been a failure. 6.h6 ♗f8 7.♘f3±] 6.♖xh5 gxh5 7.♕xh5+ ♔f8 8.♕xf5+ ♔g8 9.♘c3+– The computer already considers this position lost for Black.

B) Since the queen is still eyeing the h5-square, 5.h5 is a threat we need to parry, so 4...h6!



Position after: 4...h6!

5.♘c3 [5.c4 d6 6.♘c3 ♗g7 7.♘f3 ♘bd7 8.♕c2 c5 9.d5 a6 10.h5 g5 11.♗g3 ♕a5 12.♗d3 ♘e4 13.♗xe4 fxe4 14.♘d2 ♗xc3 15.bxc3 ♘f6=] 5...♗g7 6.♕f3 d6±

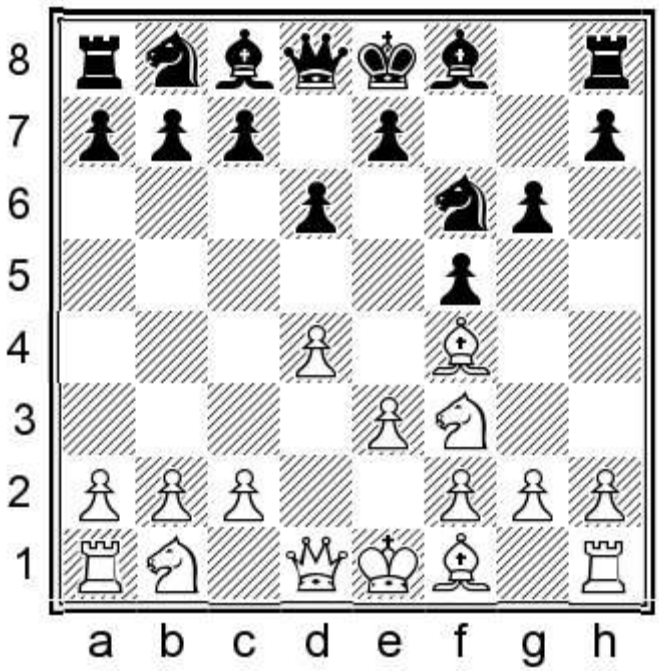


Position after: 6...d6±

We have already covered this position in Chapter 3 on 2.♗g5, but it was Black to play there, due to the loss of tempo by the dark-squared bishop. Obviously in this kind of critical line (I remind you that our king should soon reach the f7-square to protect the g6-pawn), this makes a big difference, and I didn't even try to make this line playable.

4.♘c3

4.♘f3 g6



Position after: 4...g6

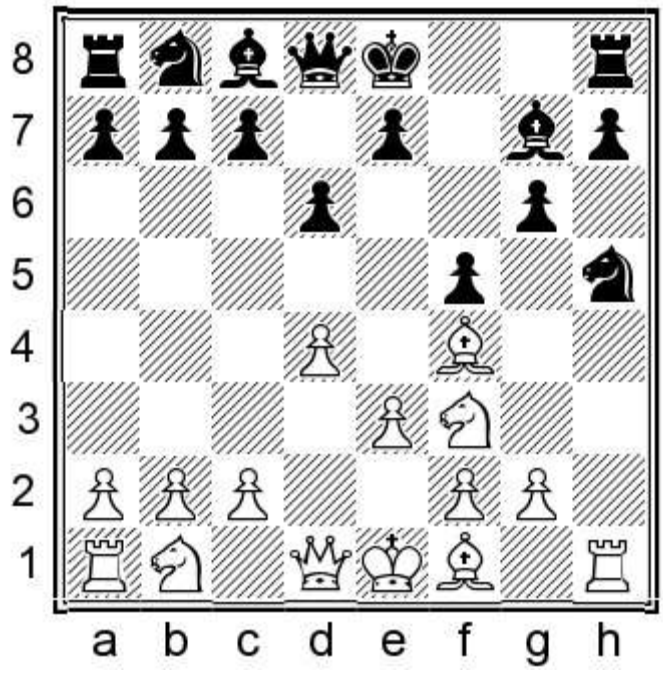
This is very likely to transpose to Chapter 6 with 3.♗f4. Right now the only difference is that we were not supposed to play ...d6 so early, but it is in our plans a few moves later. We will focus here only on the differences it can make.

A) 5.c4 This is the kind of move (like 5.♗e2 or 5.♘bd2) that will make no difference compared to chapter 6. 5...♗g7 6.♘c3 0-0 transposes to chapter 6 with 3.♗f4.

B) 5.h4!? Clearly less frightening since the knight is on f3, but still interesting. The problem is that White will need to move again in order to allow ♕xh5. 5...♗g7

B1) 6.♗c4 e6 Black is using the very solid type of set-up that we met a lot in the variations in chapters 2 and 3 with 2.♘c3 and 2.♗g5. White might be tempted to sacrifice straight away, but it fails, e.g. 7.h5? ♘xh5 8.♖xh5 gxh5 9.♘g5 ♕f6! This cold-blooded move is very efficient. 10.♕xh5+ ♕g6 11.♕h2 ♘c6∓

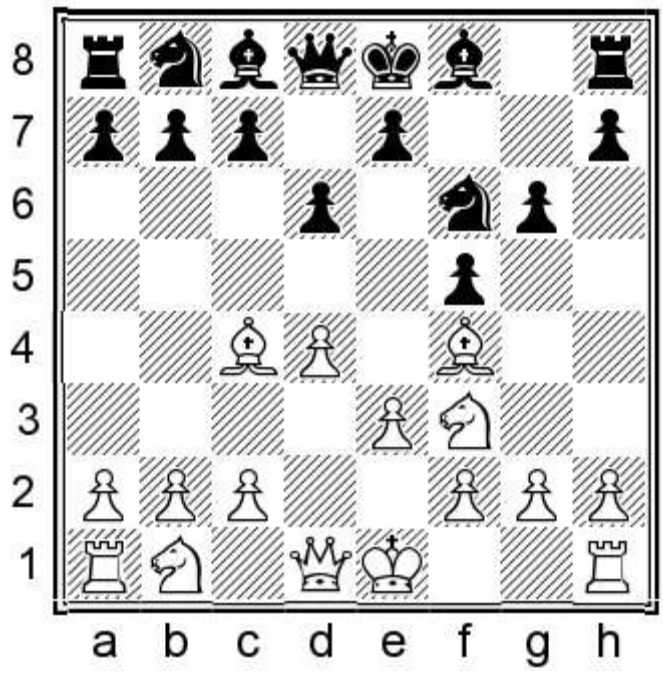
B2) 6.h5 ♘xh5!



Position after: 6...♘xh5!

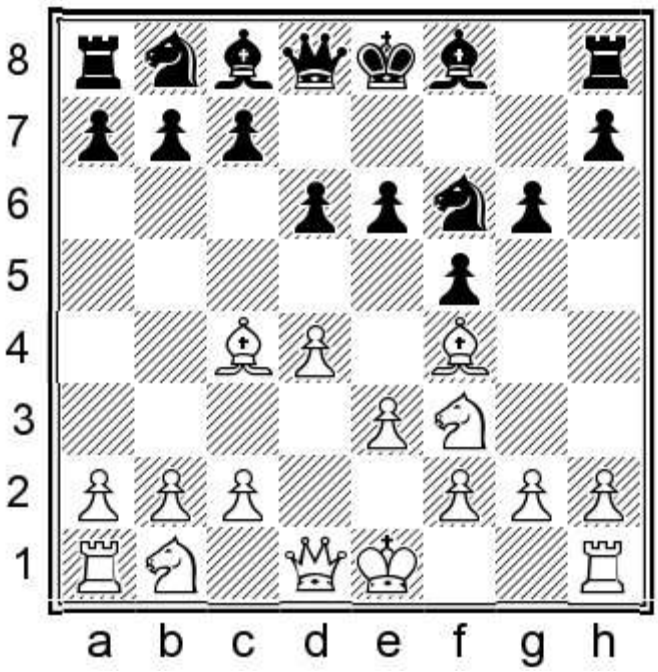
7.♖xh5 gxh5 8.♘g5 0-0□ Normally Black doesn't have time for this move, and this is a major difference. 9.♕xh5 [9.♘c3 e6 10.♕xh5 h6 11.♘f3 ♕f6⇄] 9...h6 10.♘f3 ♕e8 11.♕h4 [11.♗c4+ Preventing ...♗e6, but allowing another type of development: 11...e6 12.♕h4 b5! 13.♗d3 ♖f6∓.] 11...♖f6 12.♘c3 ♗e6∓ Obviously the game is still complicated, but White usually gets a lot more compensation when he sacrifices the exchange on h5. I think this position is totally fine for Black, and playable for White in order to get a tricky position.

C) 5.♗c4



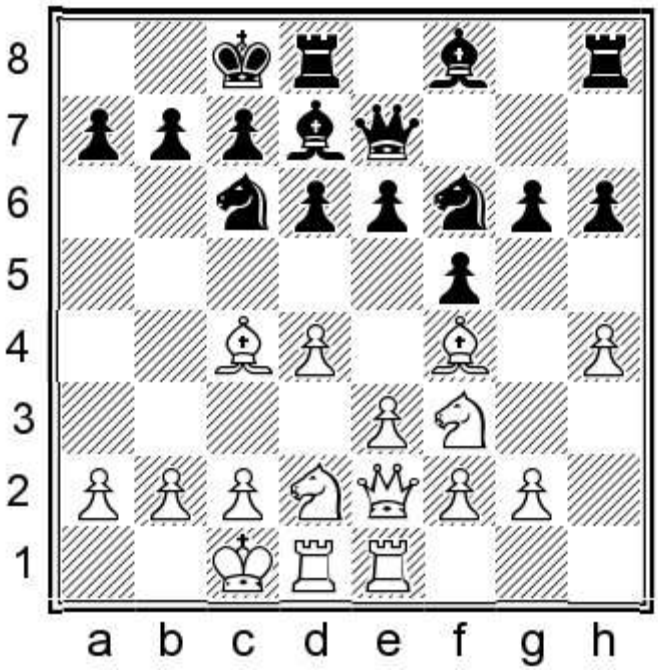
Position after: 5.♗c4

Against this move we need to adjust what we want to play in chapter 6 (because if ...d6 hasn't been played yet, Black follows with ...e6, in order to play ...0-0, then...b6). Of course it's a minor problem. 5...e6 [If 5...♗g7 White has the opportunity to be pretty annoying with 6.♘g5! d5 7.♗b3 0-0±. Black will probably gain a few tempi, but we can't say that we are happy with this Stonewall pawn structure.]



Position after: 5...e6

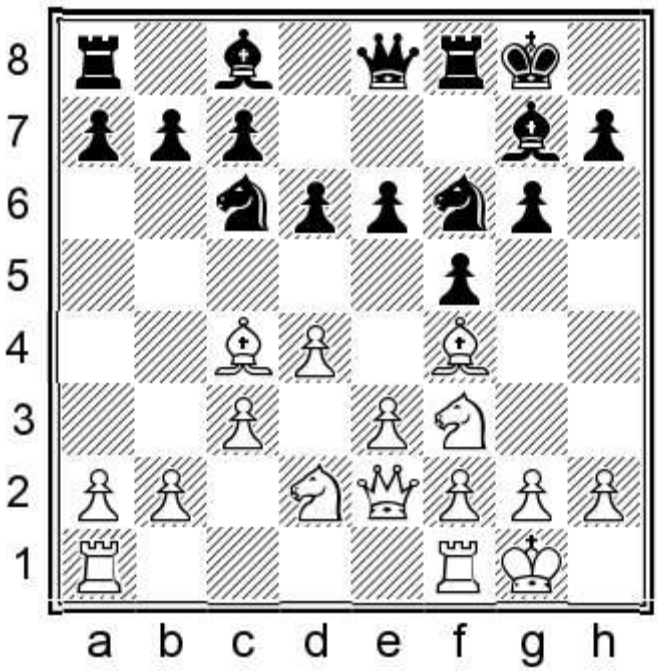
C1) 6.h4 I don't think that this kind of move should give Black much to worry about. 6...h6!? 7.♘bd2 ♘c6 8.♕e2 ♕e7 9.0-0-0 ♗d7 10.♖he1 0-0-0∓



Position after: 10...0-0-0∓

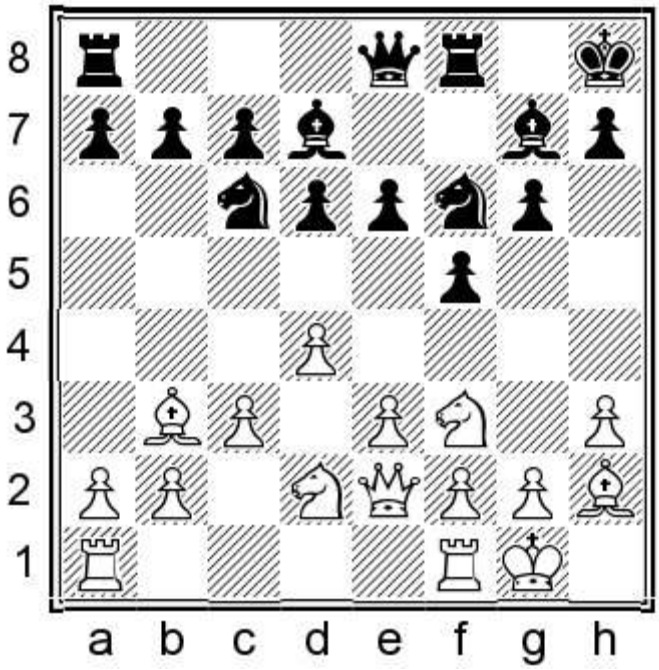
After a few logical moves we can already say that Black has the better position, thanks to his flexibility in the center. 11.♗b5 ♗g7! [11...a6 12.♗xa6!? bxa6 13.♕xa6+ ♔b8 14.♘c4∞ The position that occurred in the game Leenhouts, K (2499) – Eliet, N (2385), Belgium 2017, 0-1 (49), is maybe acceptable for Black, but quite difficult to play, and I wouldn't be happy to meet it.] 12.♔b1 White doesn't have much to do, so waits. 12...♔b8 13.♗g3 a6!∓ Finally! ♗xa6 isn't possible anymore, so we can chase the bishop: 14.♗a4?! ♘xd4∓.

C2) 6.0-0 ♗g7 7.♘bd2 ♘c6 8.♕e2 0-0 9.c3 ♕e8



Position after: 9...♕e8

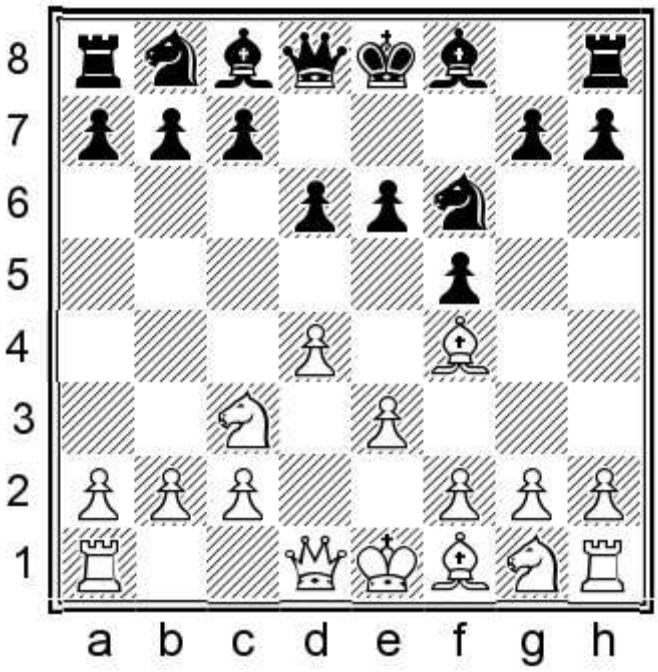
10.♗b3 [10.e4?? This move is never possible with a bishop on c4: 10...fxe4 11.♘xe4 ♘xe4 12.♕xe4 d5–+] 10...♔h8 11.h3 [11.e4?! ♘h5! The bishop on f4 can also be in trouble. 12.♗g3 f4 13.♗h4 h6⇄ The position is unclear. We might win a piece, but circumstances aren't so bad for White.] 11...♗d7 12.♗h2



Position after: 12.♗h2

This position was reached in the game Dausch, R (2350) – Gofshtein, L (2539), Neuhausen 2007, 0-1 (36). Black struck in the center right on time with 12...e5! 13.dxe5 ♘xe5 14.♘xe5 dxe5 15.e4 f4! 16.♘f3 a5⇄.

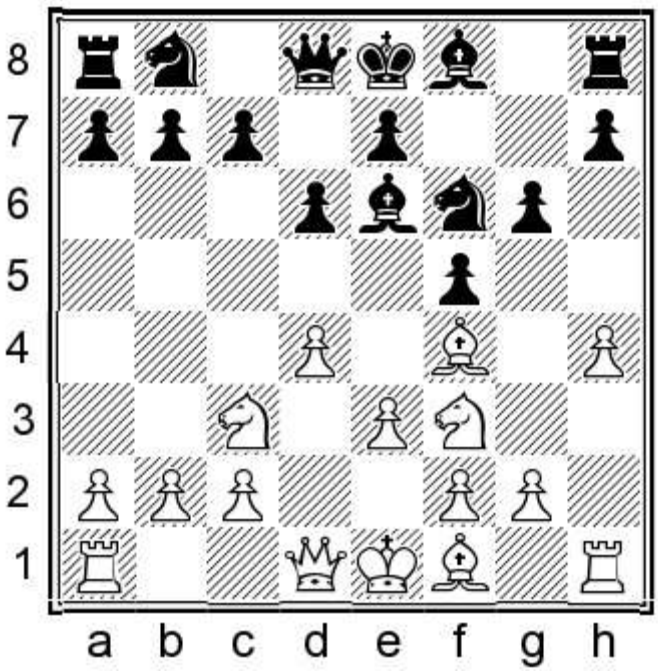
4...e6!?



Position after: 4...e6!?

Finally I think we should accept a Classical Dutch system, but only because White has committed his knight to c3. We won't enter a main line, though, and it seems acceptable to me.

4...g6 Kamsky tried this move once, but White still has the possibility of launching an attack on the h-file. 5.h4 ♗e6 6.♘f3!



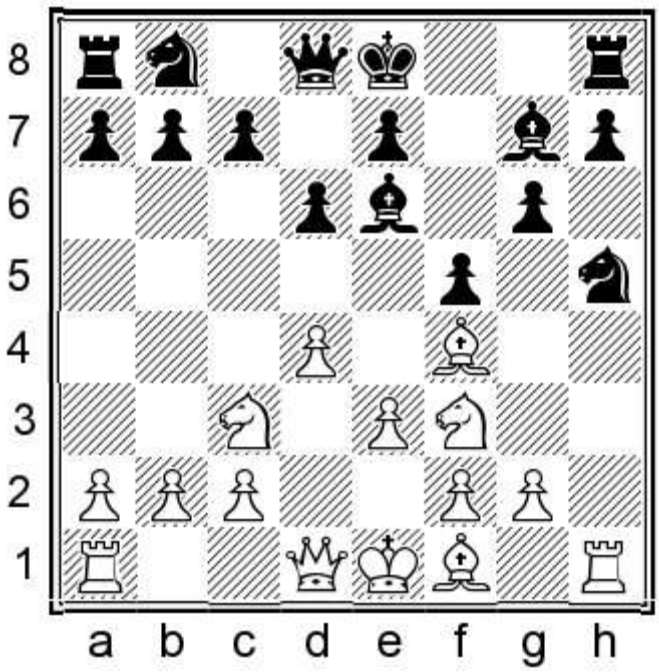
Position after: 6.♘f3!

[6.h5!? ♘xh5 7.♖xh5 gxh5 8.♕xh5+ ♗f7 This is an improvement for Black compared to other lines

involving ♖xh5 ideas, as the king doesn't have to move. Still, White seems to be better. 9.♕xf5 ♘c6 10.d5±]

A) 6...h6?! Kamsky didn't take advantage of his move order and played this rather timid move. After 7.♗d3 c6 8.e4 fxe4 9.♘xe4 ♘xe4 10.♗xe4± White was much better and eventually won in Morozevich, A (2683) – Kamsky, G (2637), Sochi 2016, 1-0 (26).

B) 6...♗g7!? 7.h5! ♘xh5

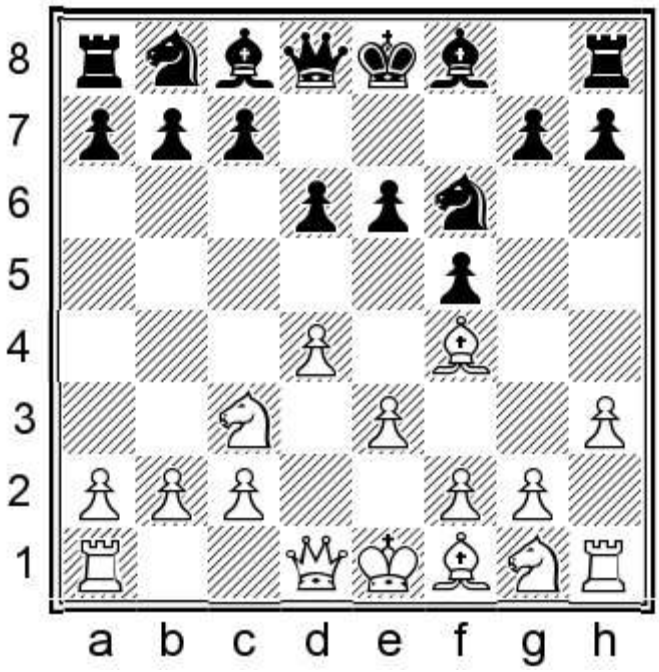


Position after: 7...♘xh5

8.♖xh5! gxh5 9.♘g5 ♗g8 The bishop is protecting the light squares, but White keeps a dangerous and long-term initiative. 10.♕xh5+ ♔f8 11.0-0-0→

5.h3

This useful move has several goals. The main idea is to give the bishop a retreat square, but in this precise situation I think White is still aiming at a quick attack on the kingside.



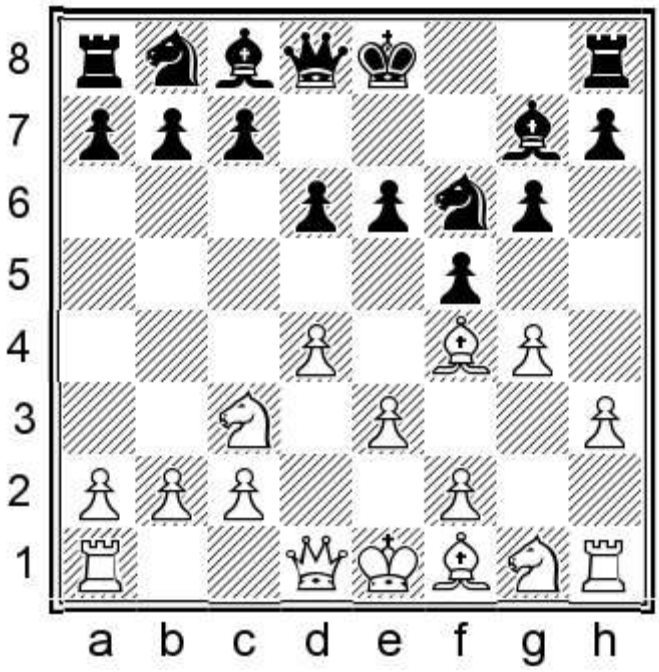
Position after: 5.h3

As we haven’t committed ourselves with ...g6, White seeks another breakthrough: he wants to play g4 and open the g-file.

5...♗e7

We can let him continue with his idea.

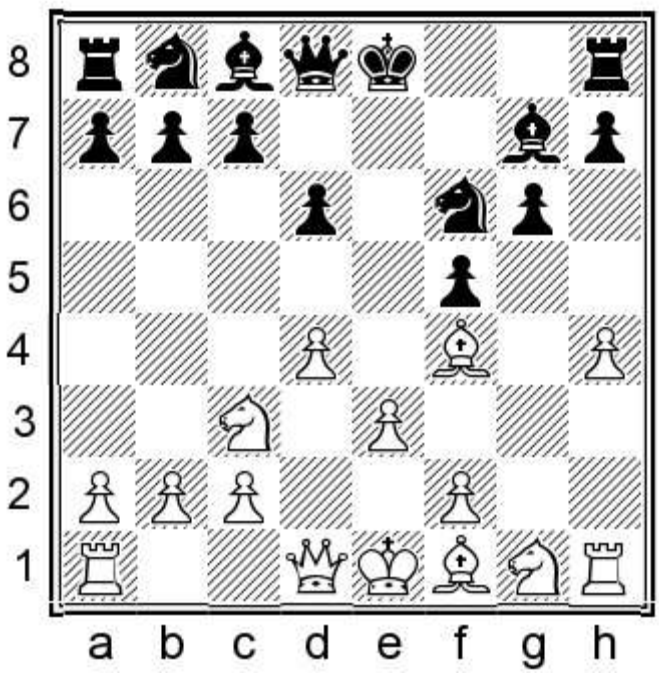
5...g6 There is also a way of transposing into the set-ups we have already considered in Chapter 3. It protects f5 one more time, and the center is still very flexible. The choice depends on what kind of position you prefer. 6.g4 ♗g7



Position after: 6...♗g7

A) 7.♗c4 This is quite logical too, but doesn't give Black much to worry about. 7...♕e7 8.gxf5 exf5 9.♕f3 ♘c6 10.0-0-0 ♗d7 11.♗g5 0-0-0 12.♘ge2 ♖de8 13.♘f4 ♕f8 14.♗xf6 ♕xf6⇄ The game Aczel, G (2573) – Nester, I (2353), Alba Iulia 2017, eventually finished in a draw.

B) 7.gxf5! exf5 8.h4!



Position after: 8.h4!

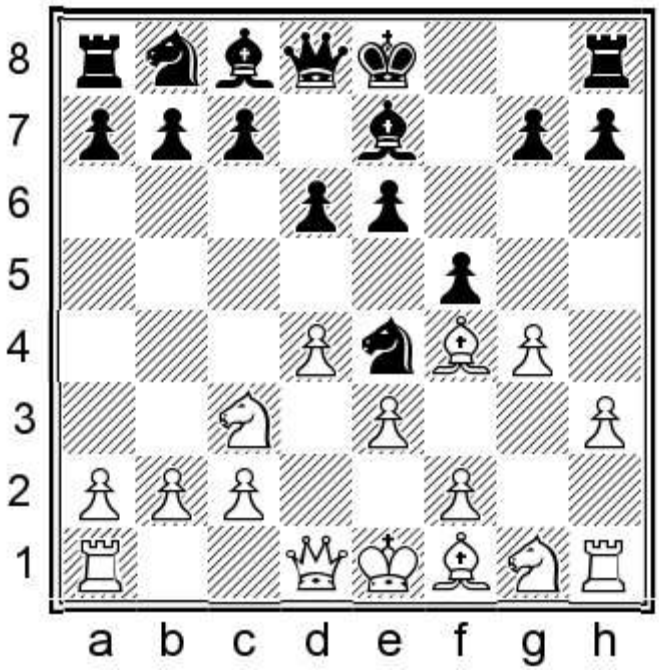
White is proceeding quite slowly, but his plan is straightforward.

B1) 8...♘c6 9.h5 ♘e4 10.♘xe4 fxe4 11.hxg6 hxg6 12.♖xh8+ ♗xh8 13.c3± White remains slightly better. He has a solid center and easy development, while his future ♕d1–b3 won't let us castle long so easily.

B2) 8...h6?! 9.♕f3 ♘c6 10.0-0-0 ♘e7 11.♗c4 c6 12.♕g2±

B3) 8...♗e6 9.h5 ♘xh5 10.♖xh5 gxh5 11.♕xh5+ ♗f7 12.♕xf5±

6.g4 ♘e4!?

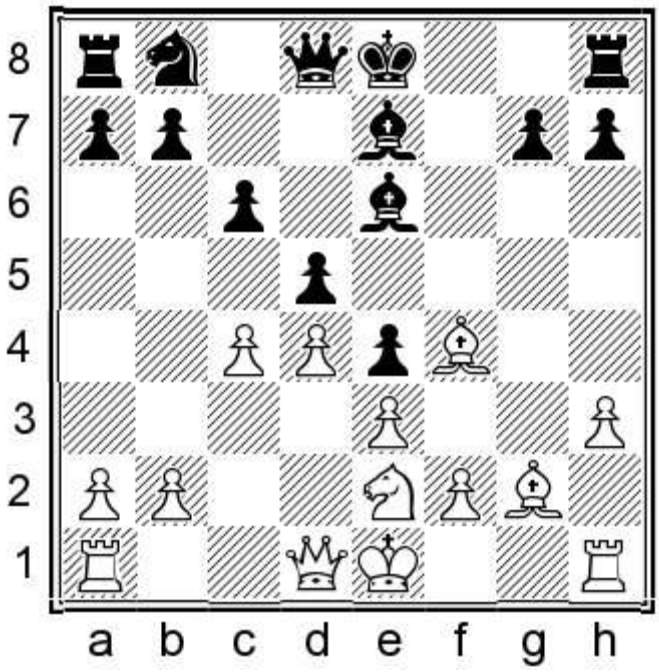


Position after: 6...♘e4!?

7.gxf5

7.♘ge2 0-0 8.♗g2 d5 9.♘xe4 fxe4 10.c4 b6⇄ White has neglected the a6-f1 diagonal, so the light-squared bishop heads to a6, where it will be very annoying.

7...exf5 8.♘xe4 fxe4 9.♗g2 d5 10.c4 c6 11.♘e2 ♗e6=

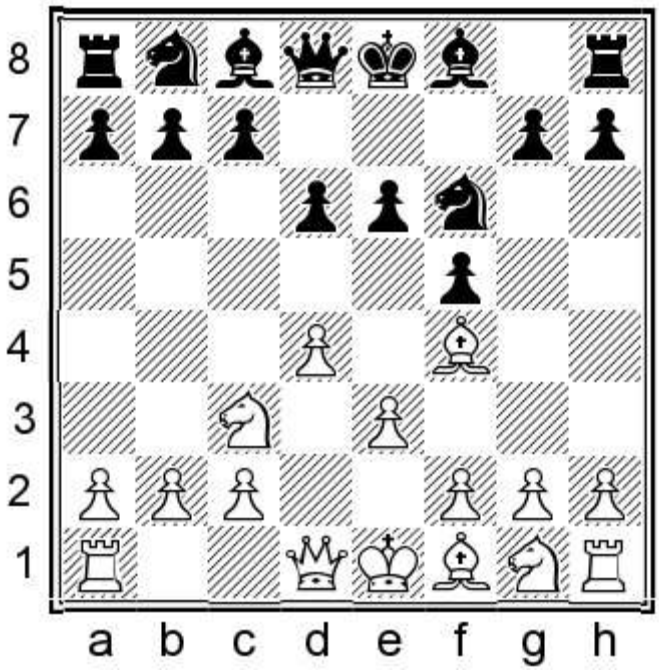


Position after: 11...♗e6=

Play is more or less balanced. Black is trying to exploit his space advantage. The drawback is that the bishop on f4 is quite powerful, however we may be able to trade it in the next few moves.

j) 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 d6 4.♘c3 e6 5.♘f3, 5.♗d3

1.d4 f5 2.♗f4!? ♘f6 3.e3 d6! 4.♘c3 e6!?



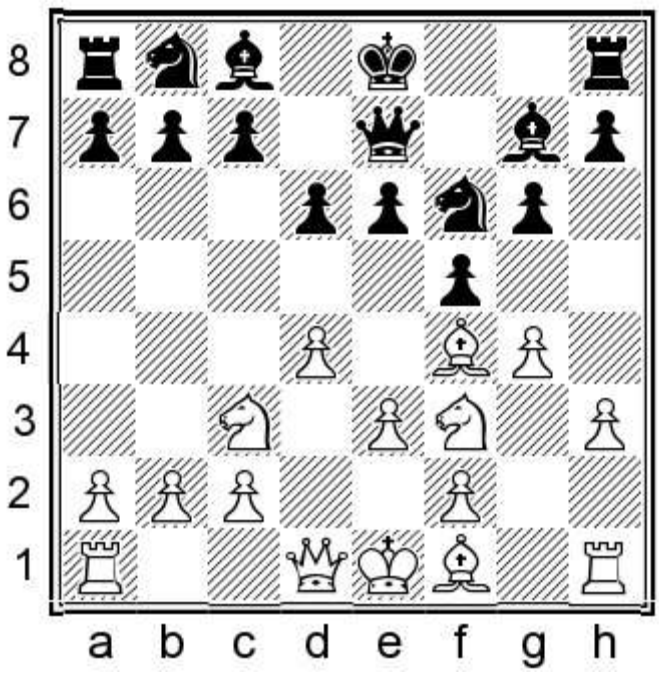
Position after: 4...e6!?

5.♗d3

As this is the most flexible move, I think it deserves to be the main line.

5.♘f3

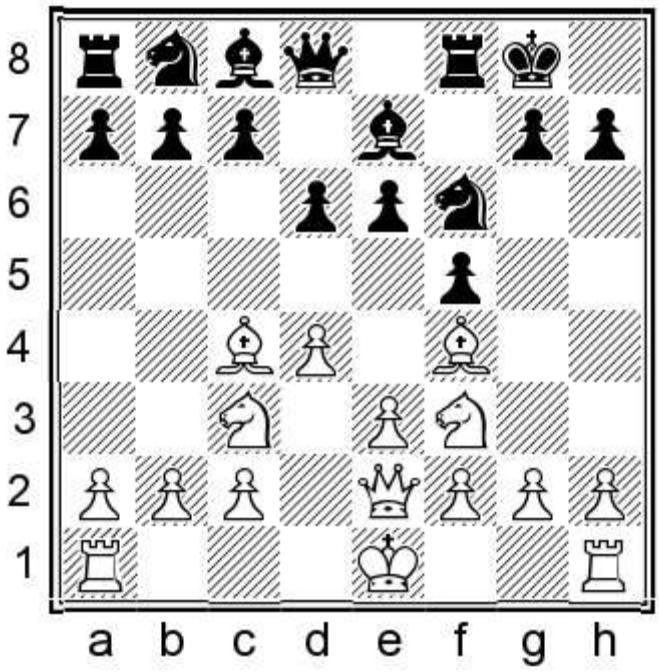
A) 5...g6 Once again we can fianchetto the bishop, if we prefer. 6.h3 ♗g7 7.g4 ♕e7



Position after: 7...♕e7

8.♖g1 [8.gxf5 exf5 9.h4!? ♗e6 10.h5 ♘xh5 11.♖xh5 gxh5 12.♘g5 ♗f7 13.♕f3 ♘c6∞] 8...fxg4 9.hxg4 ♘c6⇄ White eventually won, but play was complicated in Prie, E (2499) – Garbisu de Goni, U (2448), Bergara 2010.

B) 5...♗e7 6.♗c4 [6.♗d3 It is too late to be thinking about opening the center: 6...0-0 7.e4?? fxe4 8.♘xe4 ♘xe4 9.♗xe4 ♖xf4–+] 6...0-0 7.♕e2



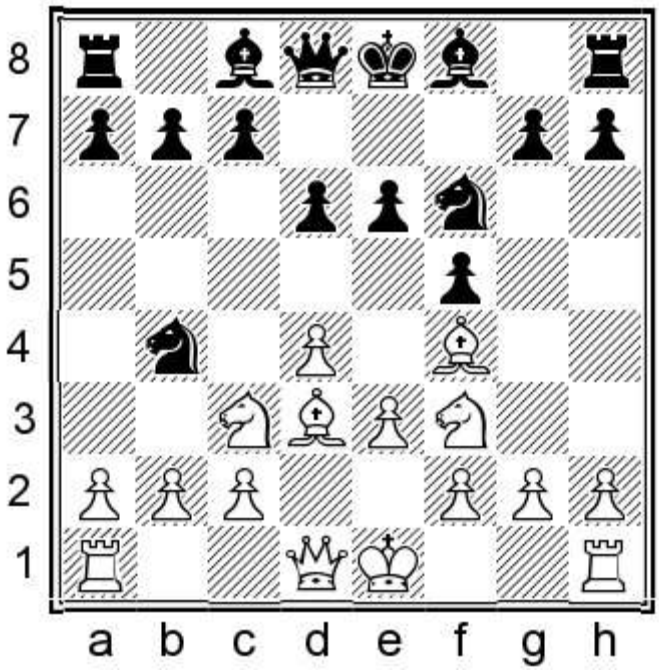
Position after: 7.♕e2

7...♘e4! 8.♗b3 [8.0-0 d5 9.♗d3 g5 10.♗e5 ♘c6↑] 8...♘xc3!? 9.bxc3 ♘c6 10.0-0 g5 11.♗g3 ♘a5↑ Black gets the bishop pair and also has a dangerous initiative on the kingside.

5...♘c6!?

White was threatening e3−e4, so keeping an eye on the d4-pawn seems a good way to prevent it.

6.♘f3 ♘b4!?N

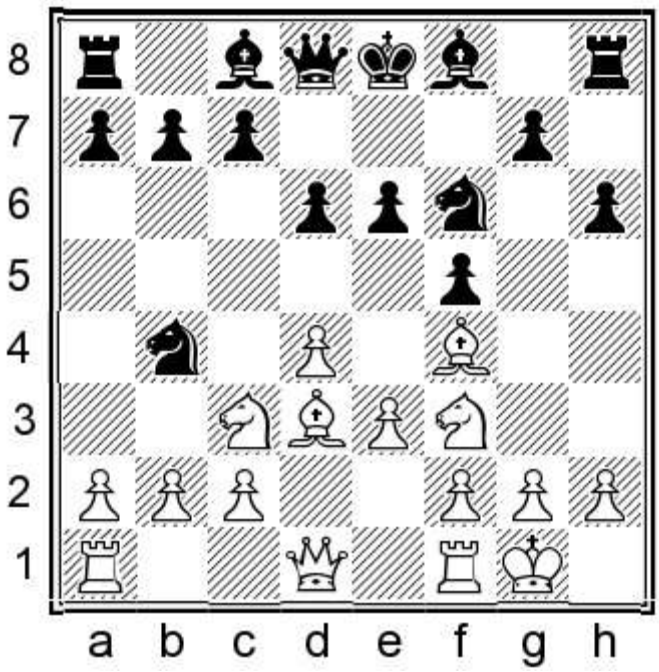


Position after: 6...♘b4!?N

This was a novelty when I first considered this line, but since then it has been played in an amateur game. Black disturbs the bishop, but also heads towards the d5-square. If the bishop moves, and if we trade the c3-knight, we will have full control of the e4-square! White now has various options: he can open the center, keep the bishop pair, or simply castle in order to wait for Black to commit himself.

7.♗e2

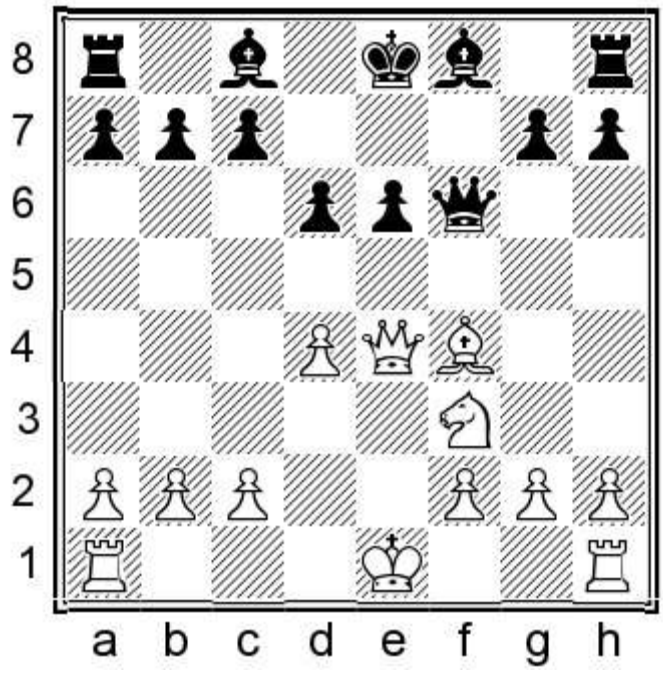
A) 7.0-0 h6



Position after: 7...h6

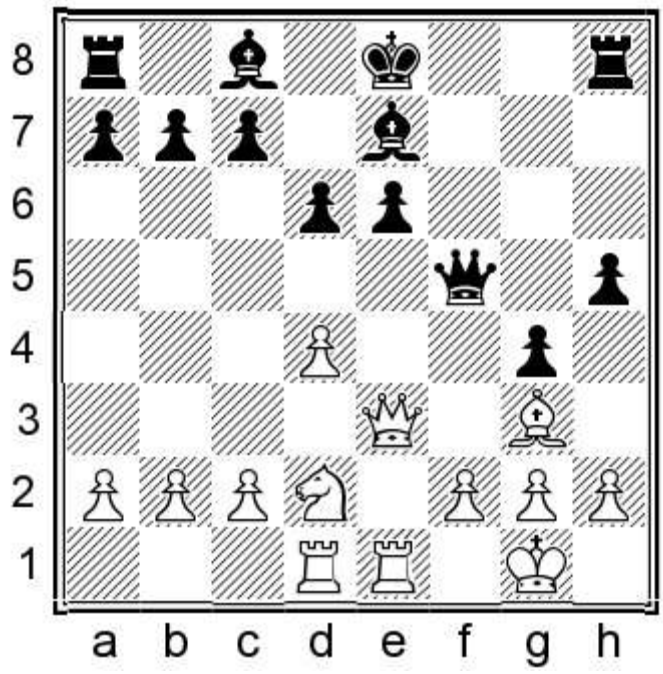
Black is not under any kind of pressure and can think about expanding on the kingside. 8.e4 [8.h3 ♘xd3 9.♕xd3 g5 10.♗h2 ♗g7 11.e4 fxe4 12.♘xe4 0-0⇄] 8...fxe4 9.♘xe4 ♘xd3 10.♕xd3 ♘xe4 11.♕xe4 ♕f6 This is a transposition into the next line, 7.e4.

B) 7.e4 fxe4 8.♘xe4 ♘xd3+ 9.♕xd3 ♘xe4 10.♕xe4 ♕f6



Position after: 10...♕f6

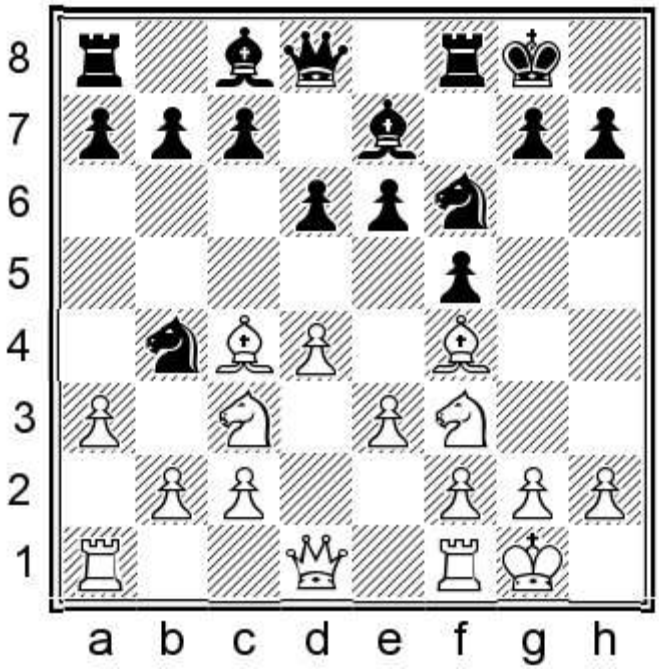
11.0-0 [11.0-0-0 h6 12.♖he1 ♗e7 13.♔b1 0-0 14.♗g3 ♕f5∓ White's play in the center is nothing special. Black should be able to exploit his bishop pair.] 11...h6 This is always useful if you want to play ...♗e7 without allowing ♗g5, trading the dark-squared bishops. 12.♖fe1 ♗e7 13.♖ad1 g5 14.♗g3 ♕f5! 15.♕e3 g4 16.♘d2 h5↑



Position after: 16...h5↑

It looked like Black had to finish his development quickly and castle, but he is actually not in any danger, so he first starts activity on the kingside before deciding what to do with his king.

C) 7.♗c4 ♗e7 8.0-0 0-0 9.a3



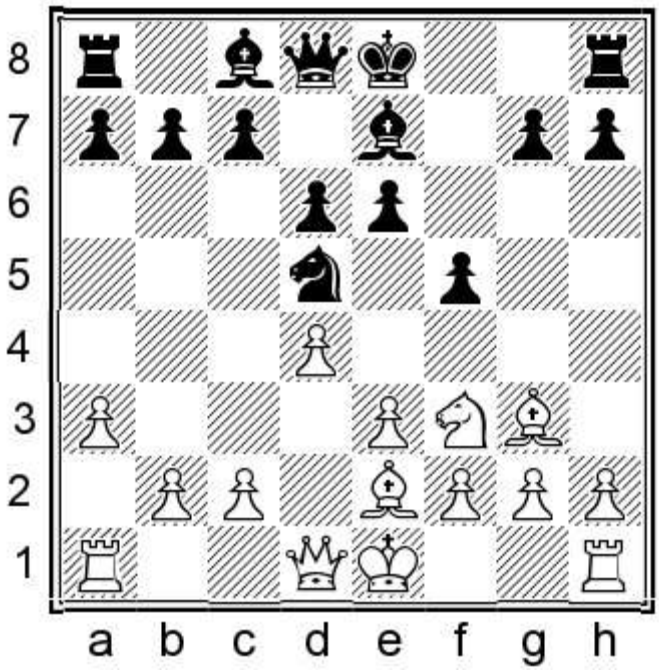
Position after: 9.a3

Sooner or later this move will push our knight to the center. We gladly accept. 9...♘bd5 10.♘xd5 exd5 11.♗a2 b5!? 12.c3 ♗e6=

7...♗e7 8.a3 ♘bd5 9.♘xd5 ♘xd5

9...exd5 10.c4 Compared to 7.♗c4, White has this extra possibility at his disposal. 10...0-0 11.♖c1 ♗e6 12.♕b3↑

10.♗g3



Position after: 10.♗g3

10...b6!

Before castling, we would like to make sure of being the first on the diagonal.

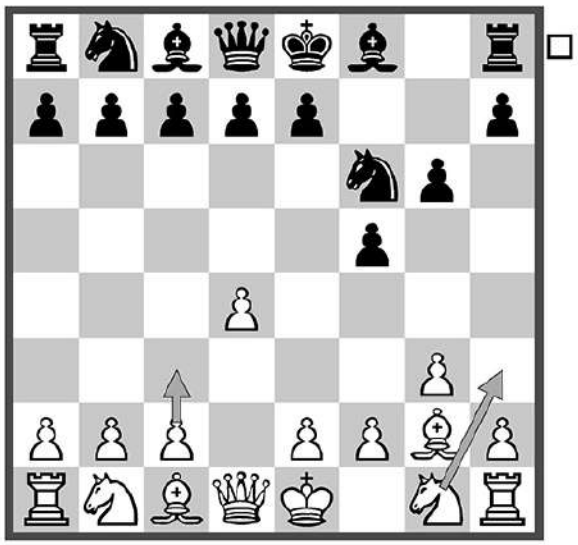
10...0-0 11.c4 ♘f6 12.♘d2 b6 13.♗f3 Black is still fine, but this makes our life a little bit harder. 13...♖b8 14.0-0 c5=

11.c4 ♘f6 12.0-0 ♘e4 13.♕c2 0-0 14.♗d3 ♗b7=

I like Black here. He has various plans, including the possibility of ...g5, both gaining activity and possibly chasing the minor pieces on f3 and g3.

Chapter 5
Systems Including an Early c3 and/or ♘h3

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6



Chapter Guide

Chapter 5 – Systems Including an Early c3 and/or ♘h3

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6

a) 4.h4

b) 4.c3 ♗g7 5.--

c) 4.c3 ♗g7 5.h4

d) 4.c3 ♗g7 5.♕b3 ♘c6 6.h4

e) 4.c3 ♗g7 5.♕b3 ♘c6 6.♘f3

f) 4.c3 ♗g7 5.♕b3 ♘c6 6.♘d2

g) 4.c3 ♗g7 5.♕b3 ♘c6 6.♘h3

h) 4.♘h3 ♗g7 5.♘f4 ♘c6 6.--

i) 4.♘h3 ♗g7 5.♘f4 ♘c6 6.d5

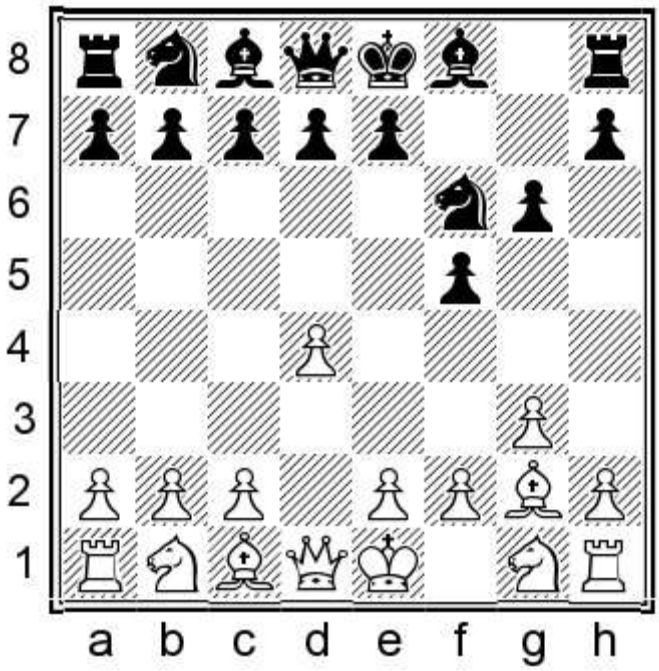
j) 4.♘h3 ♗g7 5.♘f4 ♘c6 6.d5 (8.e4)

k) 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3 0-0 6.♘h3

l) 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3 0-0 6.♘h3 (8.0-0)

a) 4.h4

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6



Position after: 3...g6

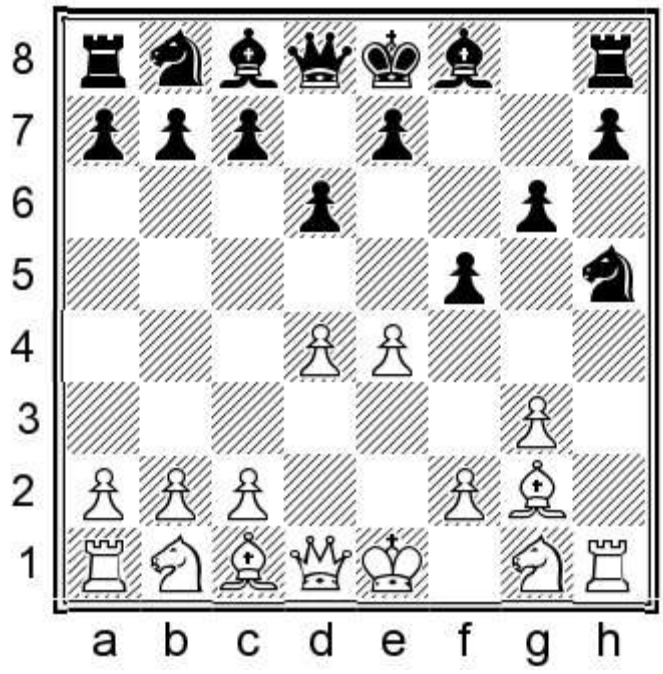
With 3...g6 Black shows that he is planning to play a Leningrad. White has a wide range of systems at his disposal. Even if he has started with the very common fianchetto against the Dutch, he still has a lot of choices. In this chapter, we will focus on several systems which generally omit c4. First, we will consider the aggressive 4.h4, then the little move 4.c3, which looks innocent, but has the idea of preventing us from castling, then we will focus on 4.♘h3, generally with the idea to follow with ♘f4 and h4, directly attacking our g6-pawn.

4.h4!?

This has rarely been seen, as it seems illogical to play g3 then h4. Nevertheless 5.h5 may come as some kind of threat.

4...♗g7

4...d6!? If Black wants to avoid the perpetual that is possible after 4...♗g7, he can try this move. 5.h5!? ♘xh5 6.e4

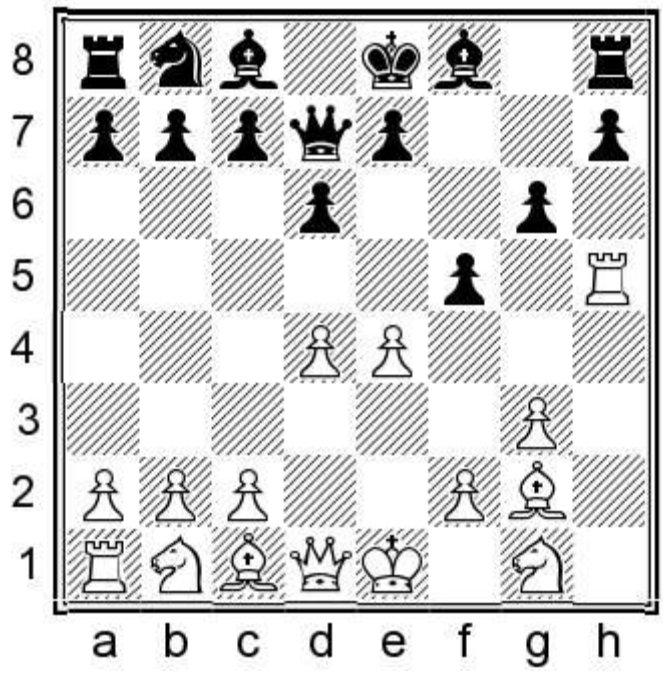


Position after: 6.e4

A) 6...c6? Nakamura once played this, but objectively it's not very good as Black is unable to take back on f5. 7.exf5 ♗g7 8.♘c3 ♘f6 9.fxg6 hxg6 10.♖xh8+ ♗xh8 11.♘ge2 ♗f5 12.f3 ♘bd7 13.g4 ♗e6 14.♘f4± White is much better, even if he eventually lost in Mamedyarov, S (2763) – Nakamura, H (2741), Moscow 2010, 0-1 (52).

B) 6...♕d7!

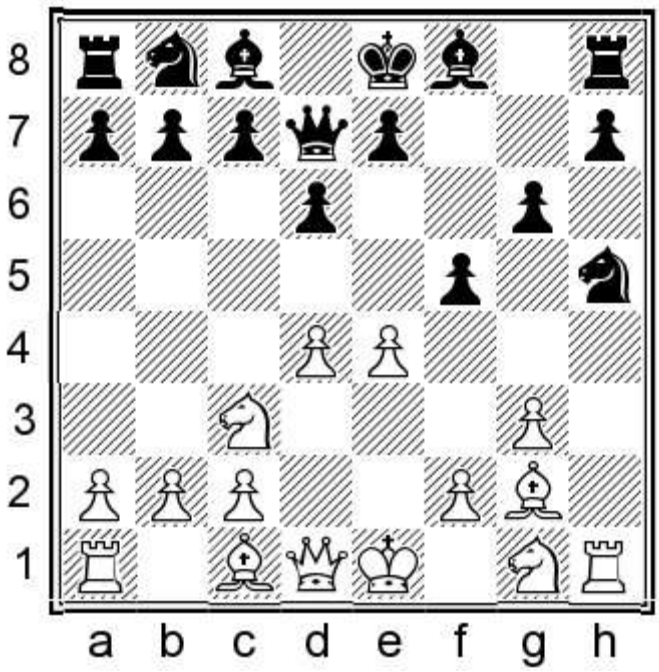
B1) 7.♖xh5?!



Position after: 7.♖xh5?!

Black isn't really afraid of this as he has taken the precaution of clearing the d8-square for his king: 7...gxh5 8.♕xh5+ [8.♘h3 ♗g7 9.♕xh5+ ♔d8 10.♘g5 ♕e8 11.♘f7+ ♔d7 12.d5 ♖f8 13.♕xf5+ e6 14.dxe6+ ♕xe6 15.♕xe6+ ♔xe6∞] 8...♔d8 9.exf5 ♘c6 10.♘f3 ♗g7∓.

B2) 7.♘c3!

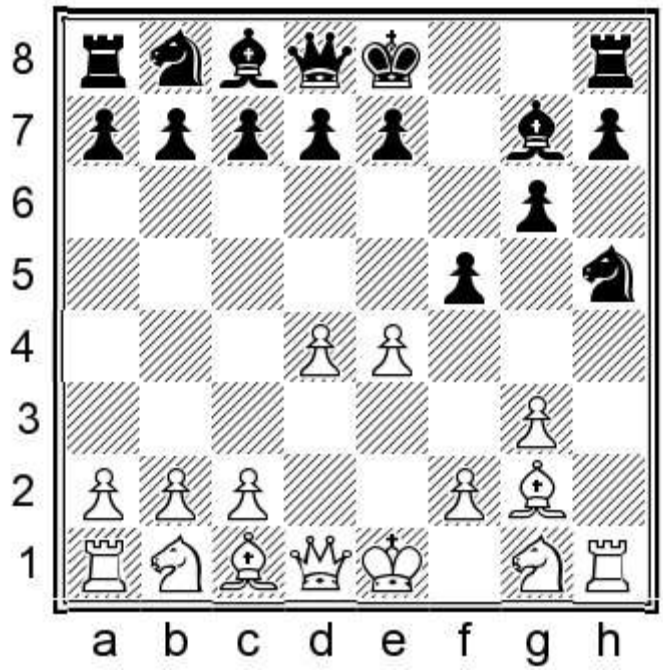


Position after: 7.♘c3!

Black is a pawn up but White definitely has some compensation. I am not really willing to play this position, but I'll give a possible way to keep going: 7...♘c6! 8.♘f3 fxe4 9.♘xe4 ♘f6∞.

5.♘h3

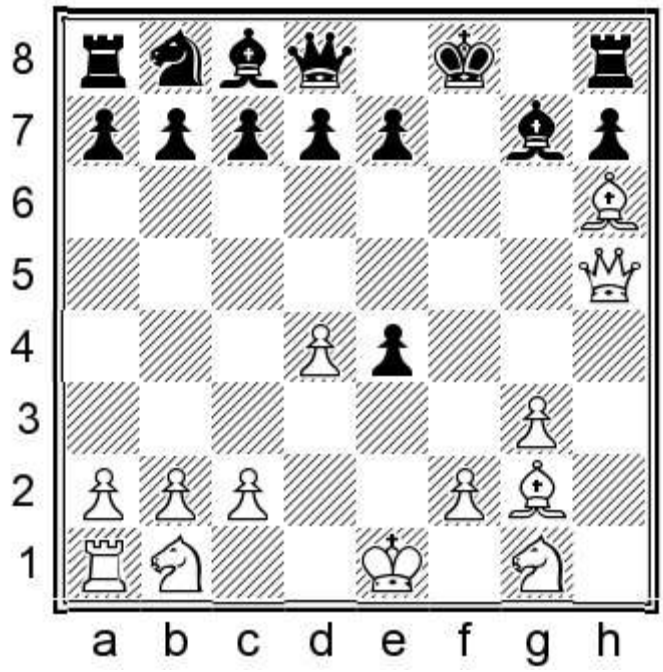
5.h5!? ♘xh5 6.e4!



Position after: 6.e4!

A) 6...e6 7.♖xh5! [≤ 7.exf5 exf5 8.♖xh5 ♕e7+!∞] 7...gxh5 8.♕xh5+ ♔f8 9.exf5 ♕e8 10.♕h4 exf5+ 11.♔f1 ♘c6 12.♘c3!↑

B) 6...fxe4! is objectively the best reaction, otherwise White will get a lot of play. 7.♖xh5 gxh5 8.♕xh5+ ♔f8 9.♗h6!

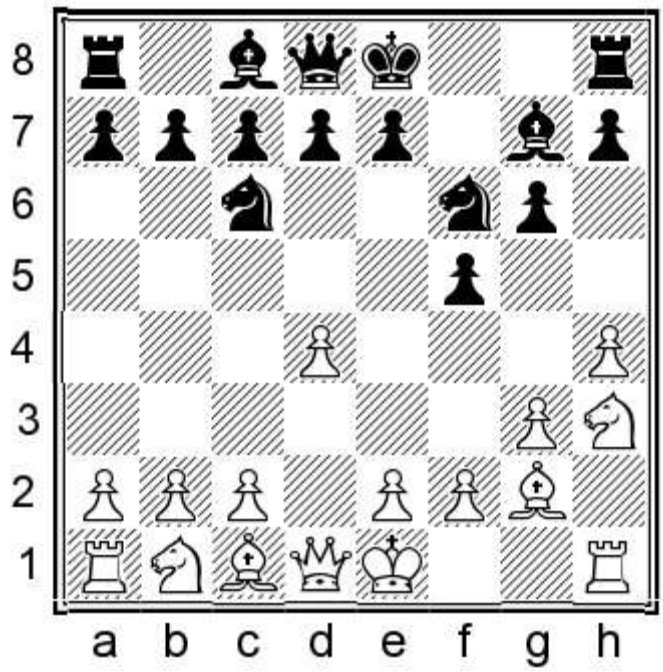


Position after: 9.♗h6!

9...d5 10.♗xg7+ ♔xg7 White has nothing better than to take a draw, and Black can't escape it:

11.♕g5+ ♔f7 12.♕h5+ ♔f8 13.♕h6+ ♔e8 14.♕h5+=.

5...♘c6



Position after: 5...♘c6

6.♘c3

6.c3!? e5! transposes into the line 5.h4 ♘c6 6.h5 of the first subchapter on the 4.c3 line.

6...d5

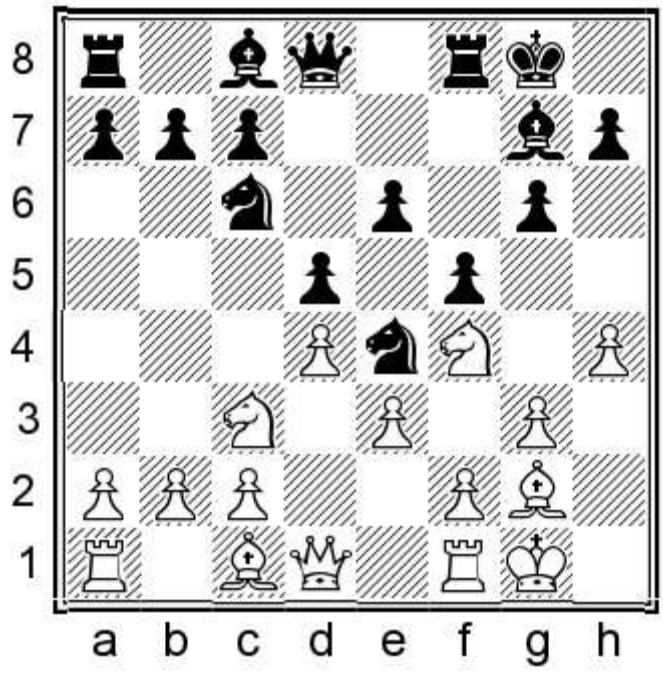
I don't often advise playing a Stonewall system, but I do so here because White has played many committal moves such as h4 and ♘h3.

7.♘f4

A) 7.h5?! ♘xh5 8.♘xd5 ♘xd4 9.c3 ♘e6∓

B) 7.♗f4 ♘e4 8.♘b5!? [8.e3 ♘xc3 9.bxc3 ♘a5⇄] 8...0-0 9.♘xc7 This is a very dangerous concept by White, as Black is ready to free himself with ...e5. 9...♖b8 10.c3 [10.♘b5? e5!∓] 10...e5 11.dxe5 ♕xc7 12.♕xd5+ ♔h8≅

7...e6 8.0-0 0-0 9.e3 ♘e4!?⇄

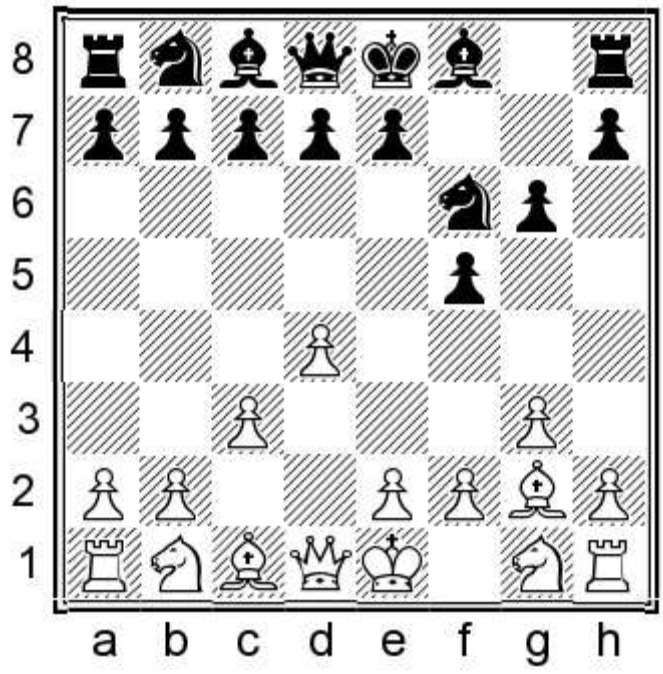


Position after: 9...♘e4!?⇄

Black will generally follow with moves like ...b6, ...♘a5/e7 and ...c5 before deciding where his light-squared bishop should go.

b) 4.c3 ♗g7 5.--

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.c3



Position after: 4.c3

As we said in the previous subchapter, this move generally intends 5.♕b3 to prevent us from castling, but White has other options that we will look at now.

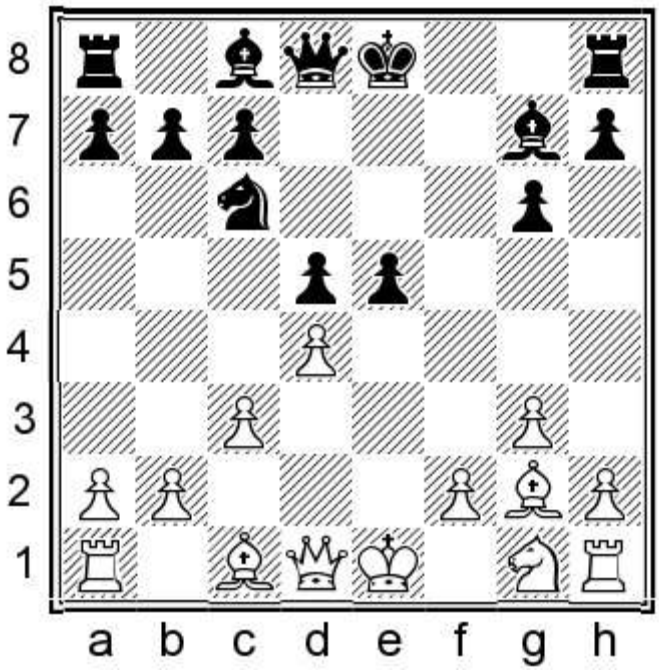
4...♗g7

Now the situation is quite simple. Black will want to play ...0-0 at the first opportunity, but sometimes White either prevents it or threatens something like a push in the center or on the h-file, which might make Black defer castling. To my eyes, 4.c3 was a concession, and the only way to try to fully justify it is to play 5.♕b3 as in the next subchapter, but other moves have been tried in practice.

5.♘f3

Of course this can't be a bad move, but it doesn't really justify 4.c3.

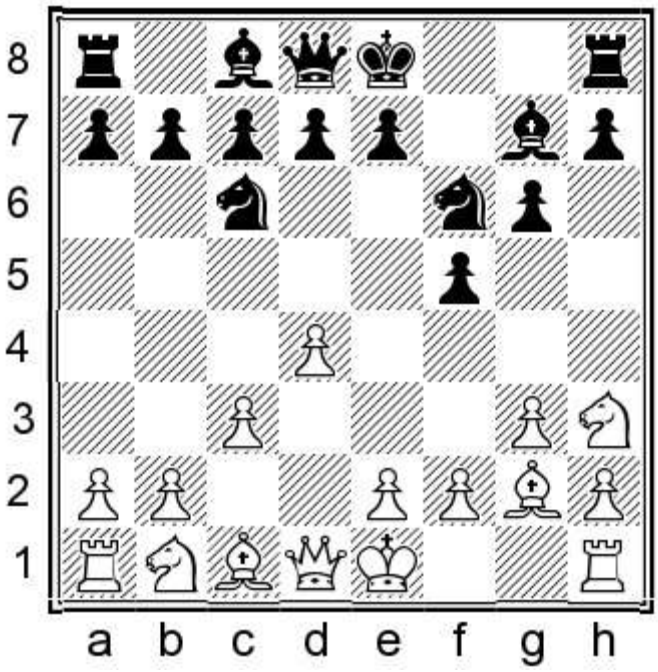
A) 5.♘d2 ♘c6 6.e4 A reasonable way to justify White's development, but it's not so frightening for Black. [6.♘h3 − see 5.♘h3.] 6...fxe4 7.♘xe4 ♘xe4 8.♗xe4 d5! 9.♗g2 e5!



Position after: 9...e5!

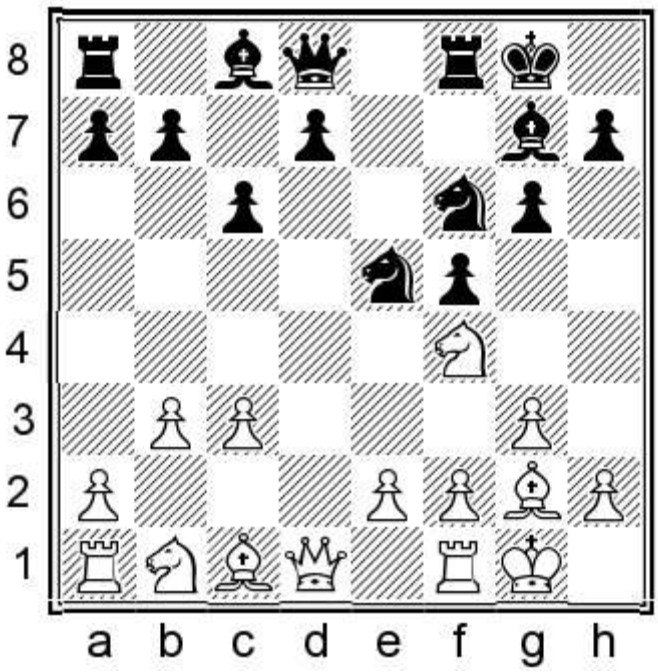
When Black takes over the initiative in the center so easily, he can hardly be worse. 10.dxe5 ♘xe5 11.f4! A good way to get rid of the knight and try to follow with ♘f3, but Black won't let that happen. [11.♘f3 ♗g4 12.h3 ♗xf3 13.♗xf3 c6! 14.0-0 0-0 15.♗g2 ♕d7↑; 11.♕xd5?! ♗f5! 12.♕xd8+ ♖xd8 13.♗g5 ♖d7 14.♘e2 ♘d3+ 15.♔f1 0-0∓] 11...♗g4! 12.♘e2 ♘c6 13.h3 ♗e6 14.♗e3 ♕d7=

B) 5.♘h3 ♘c6



Position after: 5...♘c6

B1) 6.♘f4 e5! 7.dxe5 ♘xe5 8.0-0 [8.♕b3 c6 9.♗e3 ♕e7 10.0-0 d5=] 8...c6 9.b3 0-0=



Position after: 9...0-0=

10.c4? White is too tempted to prevent ...d5, but at the cost of weakening the diagonal! 10...♘fg4! And I believe that White has to lose some material: 11.♘c3 ♘xh2! 12.♔xh2 ♘g4+ 13.♔g1 ♗xc3∓.

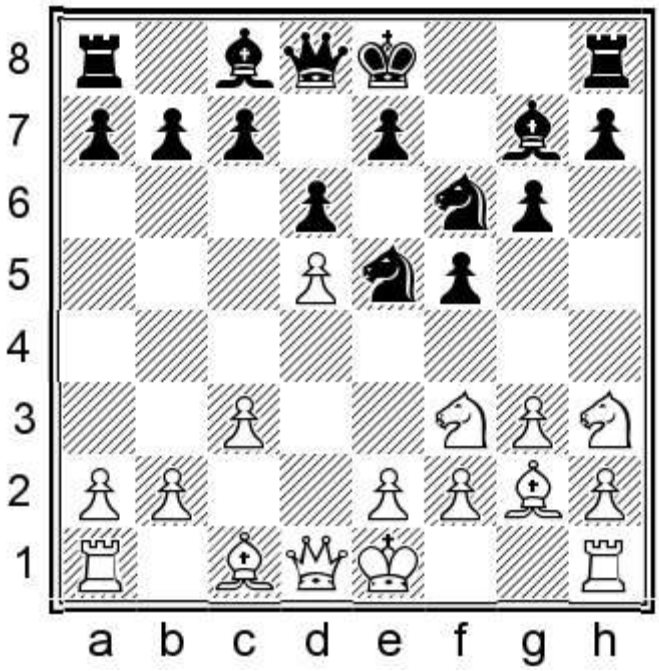
B2) 6.♕b3 − see the main line.

B3) 6.♘d2

B3.1) 6...d5 is possible, but, as I've said, I don't like to play a Stonewall set-up, especially since the white knights are not so badly placed in order to reach the e5- and f4-squares, which are important in this opening.

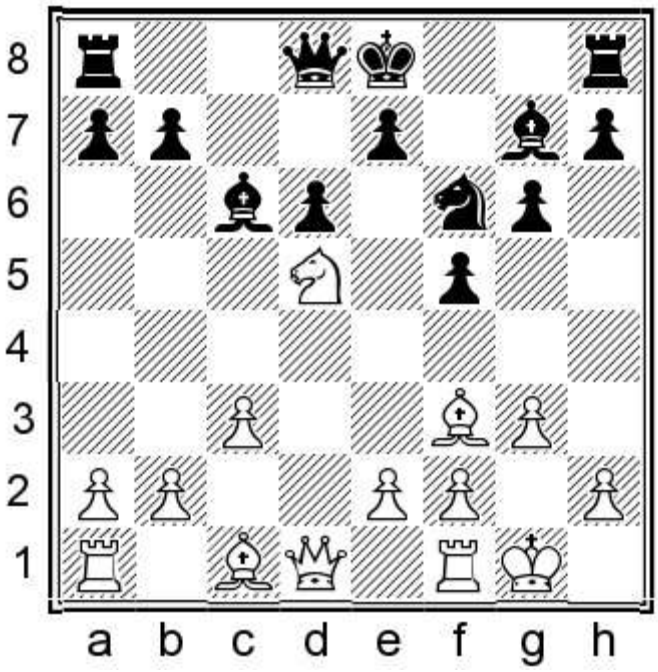
B3.2) 6...e5? 7.d5 ♘e7 8.d6 cxd6 9.♘c4 0-0 10.♘xd6±

B3.3) 6...d6!? 7.d5 ♘e5 8.♘f3!



Position after: 8.♘f3!

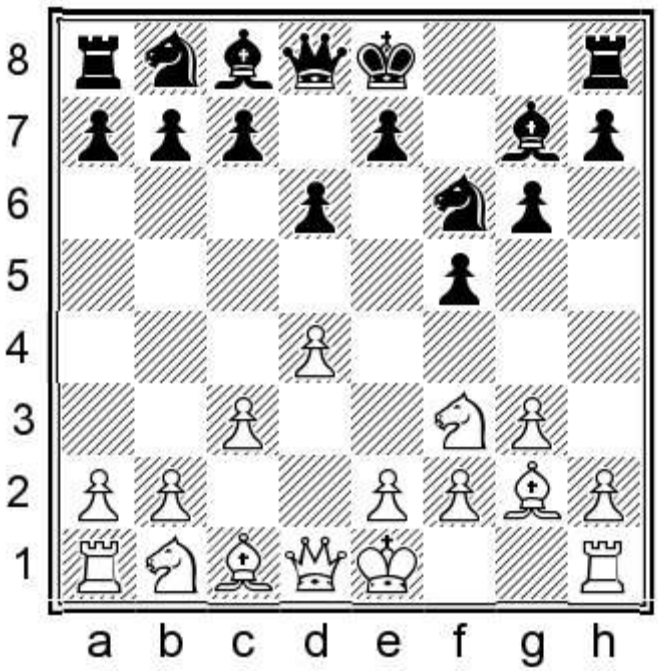
8...♘xf3+ [8...0-0 9.♘f4 ♘xf3+ 10.♗xf3 c6] 9.♗xf3 [9.exf3?! e5! 10.dxe6 ♗xe6 11.f4 c6 12.0-0 h6! This cuts the knight out of play, and is clearly worth a few moves with the king. 13.♖e1 ♔f7∓] 9...♗d7!?N 10.♘f4 c6 11.0-0 cxd5 12.♘xd5 ♗c6



Position after: 12...♗c6

I couldn't find any major problems for Black in this position. 13.♕b3 ♕d7 14.♘f4 d5!= Of course we can't let the knight reach the e6-square. Black is fine after this move.

5...d6



Position after: 5...d6

Delaying castling may help Black to advance ...e5 in favorable conditions.

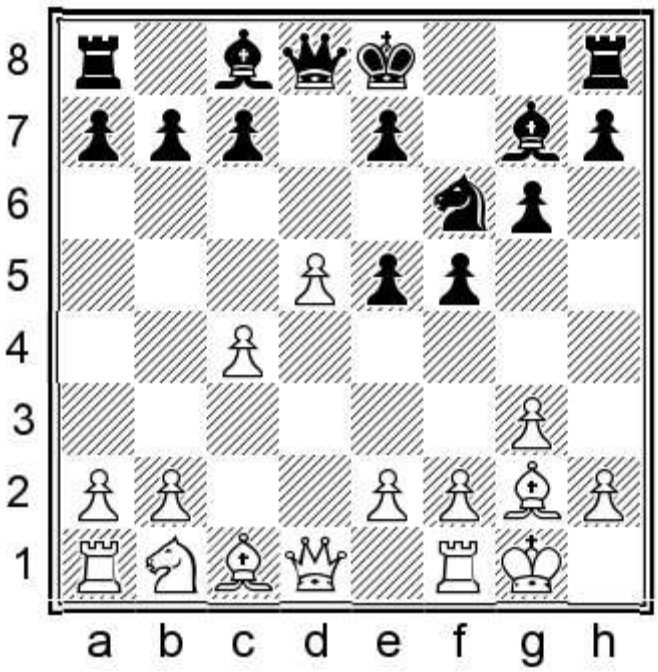
6.0-0 ♘c6 7.d5

A very logical attempt, but the knight can safely jump towards the center.

A) 7.♕b3 − see the move order 5.♕b3 ♘c6 6.♘f3 d6 7.0-0.

B) 7.♘bd2 0-0 [7...e5?! It seems that Black is not yet ready for this. 8.dxe5 dxe5 9.e4 0-0 10.exf5 gxf5 11.♘c4±] 8.♖e1 [8.b4 a6 9.♕b3+ e6 10.a4 ♗d7 11.♖e1 ♘e4⇄] 8...e5! The inclusion of ...0-0/♖e1 clearly favors Black, as he will get some play on the f-file, e.g. 9.dxe5 ♘xe5 10.♘xe5 dxe5 11.e4 f4→.

7...♘e5 8.♘xe5 dxe5 9.c4



Position after: 9.c4

If White wants to do anything, this will have to be played sooner or later. This position is actually very similar to a main line − consider the position we will reach in Chapter 10 before 7...c6. Instead, 7...♘c6 8.d5 ♘e5 9.♘xe5 dxe5 looks a lot like this position, except that ♘c3 and ...0-0 have already been played, and it is White to play, while it's Black to play here! This extra tempo will help us to get a comfortable position.

9...e6!?

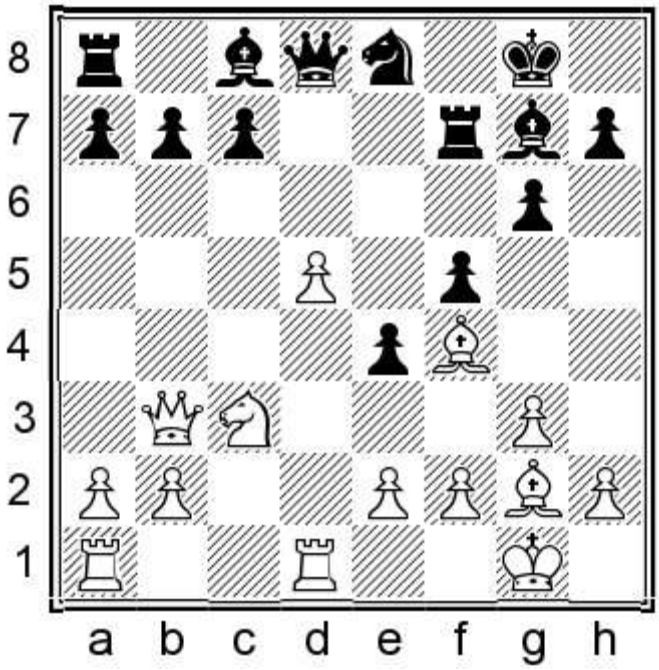
Usually this move is very hard to realize for Black because White has already played ♕b3, with ♖d1 and c5 to follow soon, but here it's fully playable.

10.♘c3 exd5 11.cxd5 0-0 12.♕b3

12.e4 f4 13.♗d2 ♘h5 14.♖c1 ♖f7↑ Black has a very decent initiative on the kingside, and I like his

prospects here.

12...♖f7 13.♖d1 e4 14.♗f4 ♘e8⇄

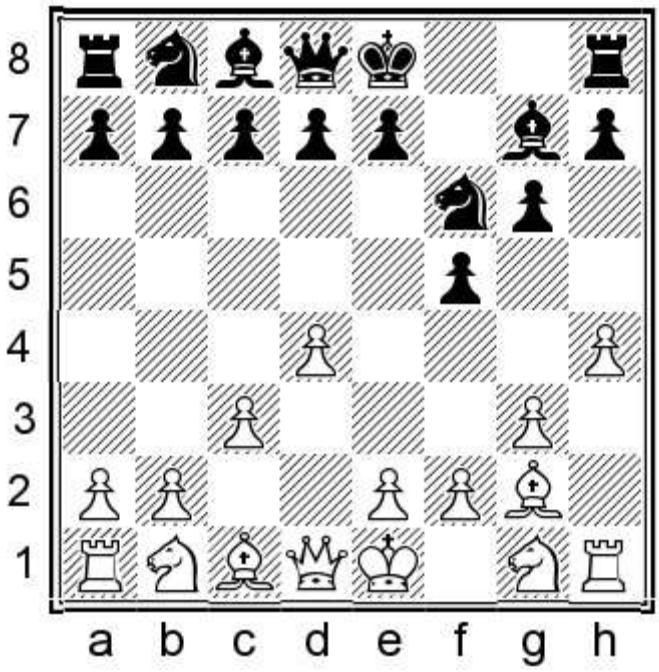


Position after: 14...♘e8⇄

From d6 the knight will play a major role in holding the queenside as well as the center. At some point ...g5 will happen in order to start an attack on the kingside.

c) 4.c3 ♗g7 5.h4

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.c3 ♗g7 5.h4

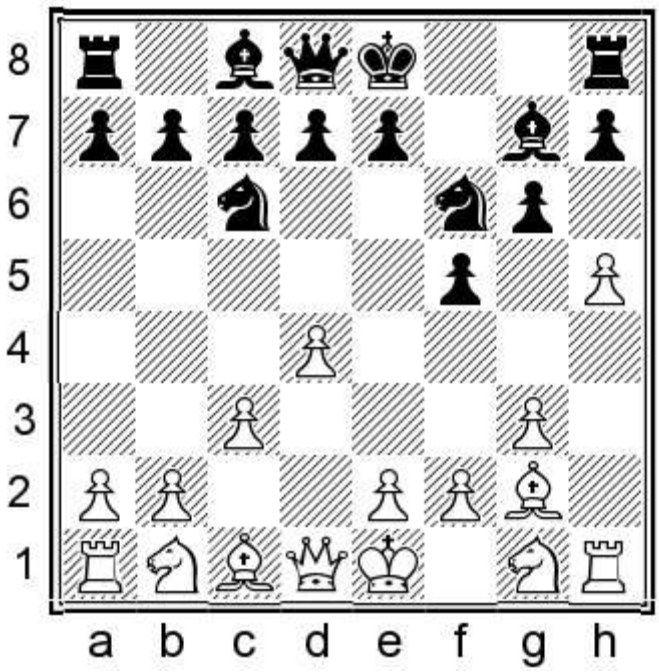


Position after: 5.h4

If White wants this move to be dangerous, he should probably do it on the previous move, as we analyzed in the first subchapter, but that doesn't mean it's bad now, and it can be seen as a more positional approach in order to secure the f4-square for a knight.

5...♘c6!? 6.♘h3

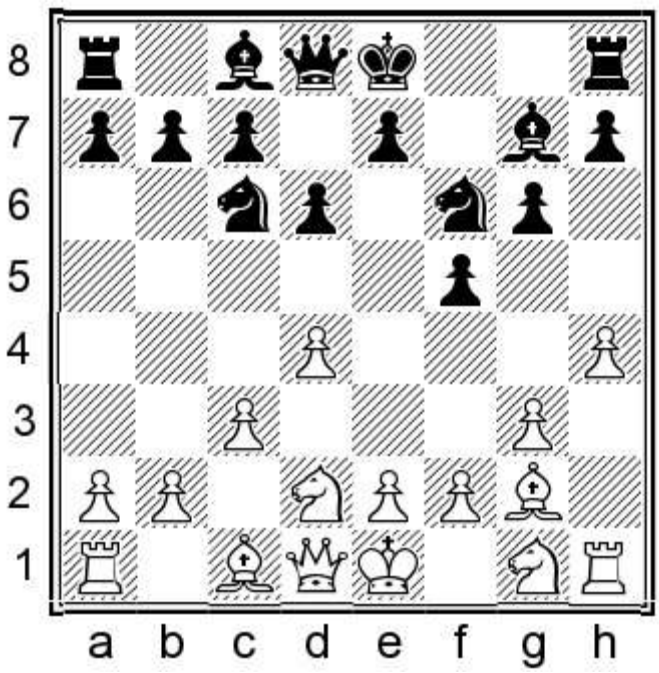
A) 6.h5N



Position after: 6.h5N

This immediate shot seems to bring nothing except a perpetual check after 6...♘xh5 7.e4 fxe4 8.♖xh5 gxh5 9.♕xh5+ ♔f8 10.♗h6 [10.♕f5+ ♔g8 11.♕xe4 d6 12.♘f3 e5 13.dxe5 ♘xe5 14.♘xe5 ♗xe5∓ We can't say that the black monarch is safe, but is it really worth an exchange here? I don't think so, as I don't see any real danger.] 10...d5 11.♗xg7+ ♔xg7 12.♕g5+ ♔f7 13.♕h5+= There is no good way for Black to escape the perpetual, and White does not have enough to try to play on.

B) 6.♘d2 d6



Position after: 6...d6

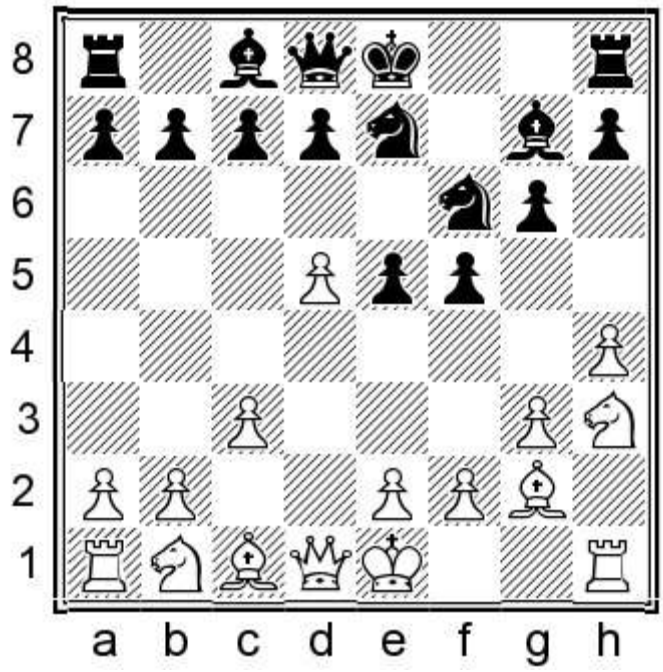
B1) 7.d5 ♘e5 8.♘h3 c6 9.♘f4 This is very similar to lines we will meet in the subchapter on 4.♘h3, except that White has played c3 and ♘d2, two moves that don't fight for the important d5-square. 9...cxd5 10.♘xd5 ♘xd5 11.♗xd5 e6 12.♗g2 d5=

B2) 7.♘h3N 7...e5 Compared to the 6.♘h3 line, this looks like a better version for Black as he keeps a pawn on e5, preventing the knight from reaching the desired f4-square. 8.♘c4 ♕e7 9.♗g5 h6 10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.♘e3 ♕f7=

6...e5!?

Always a logical reaction when Black wants to prevent ♘f4. Here it leads to a long, fairly forced line.

7.d5 ♘e7!N



Position after: 7...♘e7!N

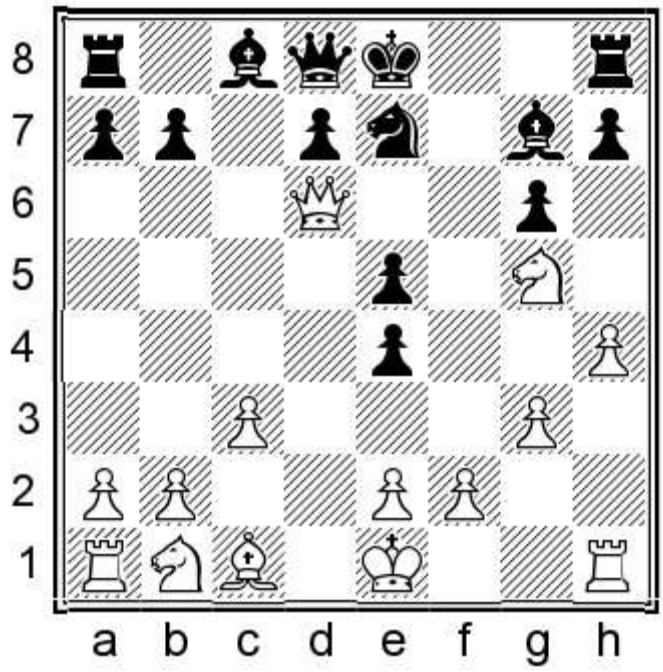
Much better than retreating to b8, as once played.

8.d6

8.c4?! d6∓ White has done some strange things and as a result Black is many tempi up in a perfect King's Indian set-up.

8...cxd6 9.♕xd6 ♘e4! 10.♗xe4 fxe4 11.♘g5

Black's position seems very difficult, but he has a way to break free.

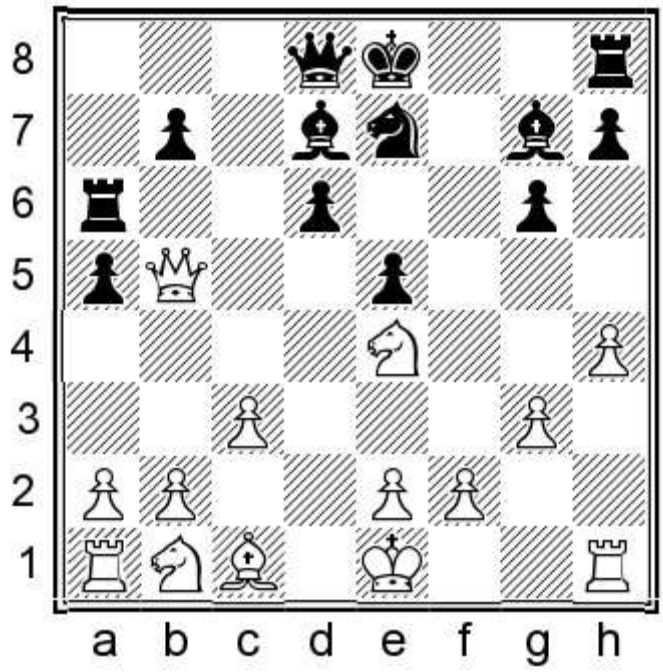


Position after: 11.♘g5

11...a5! 12.♘xe4 ♖a6 13.♕c5 d6!

13...d5?! It would be great if we could chase the knight away so easily − we would even be much better − but White has a strong resource at his disposal: 14.♗g5! dxe4 15.♗xe7 ♕xe7? 16.♕xc8++–.

14.♕b5+ ♗d7



Position after: 14...♗d7

15.♕d3

15.♕xb7 ♖b6 16.♕a7 ♘c6 17.♘xd6+ ♔f8 The queen seems trapped, but White has an escape: 18.♗g5□ 18...♘xa7 19.♗xd8 ♖xd6 20.♗xa5 ♔f7⇄.

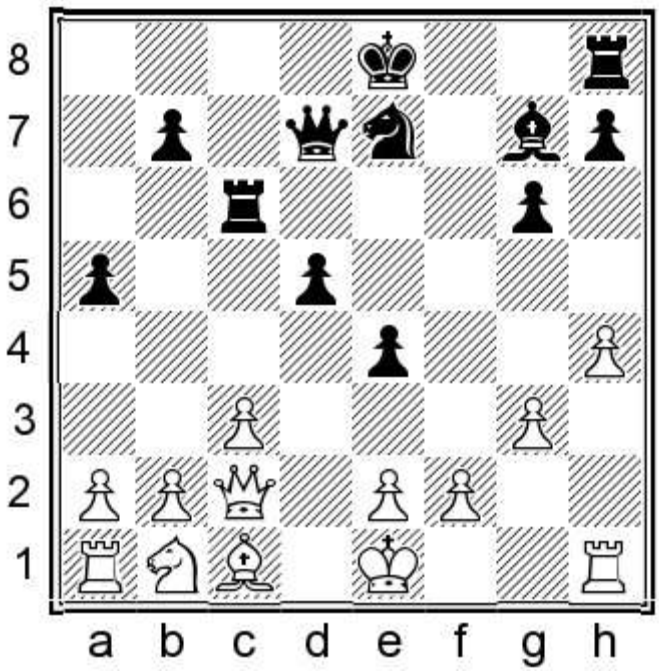
This double-edged endgame seems to favor Black thanks to his big lead in development and the bishop pair, but four pawns against a piece is something we should not underestimate.

15...d5 16.♘c5 e4 17.♕c2

17.♕d1 ♖c6 18.♘xd7 ♕xd7 19.♗f4 b5⩲

17...♖c6 18.♘xd7 ♕xd7⩱

Black has great compensation.

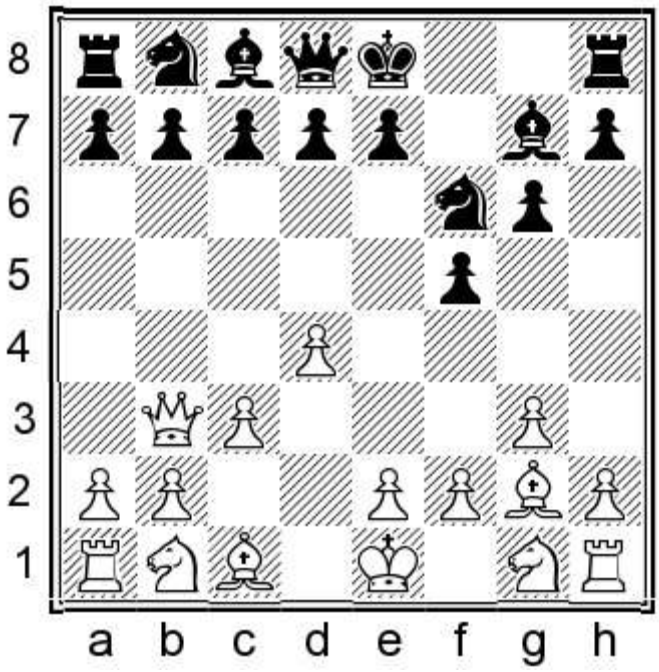


Position after: 18...♕xd7⩱

It’s not clear if White will be able to castle safely, as his kingside is already quite weakened.

d) 4.c3 ♗g7 5.♕b3 ♘c6 6.h4

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.c3 ♗g7 5.♕b3!



Position after: 5.♕b3!

White is trying to prevent Black from castling. By doing so, he wants to provoke either ...d5 or ...e6, and we would not necessarily be happy to put all our pawns on light squares.

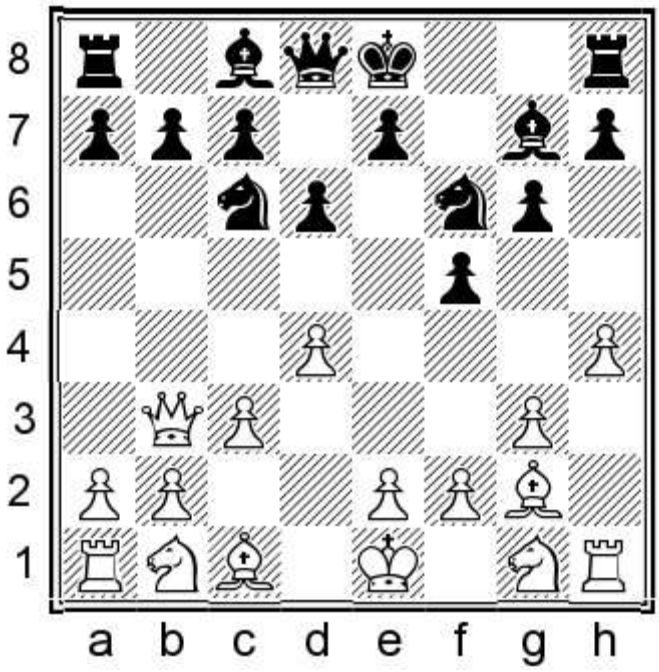
5...♘c6!?

As we will see, in the end we will often play ...d5, since there is no other way to be able to to castle without putting a pawn on the diagonal, but first we would like to have freed our position with ...e5 in order not to have a hole on this square.

6.h4!?

I am surprised that this move has been played so rarely. It's true that it doesn't look so impressive, as the idea of playing h5 seems irrevelant, but it secures the f4-square for a knight.

6...d6

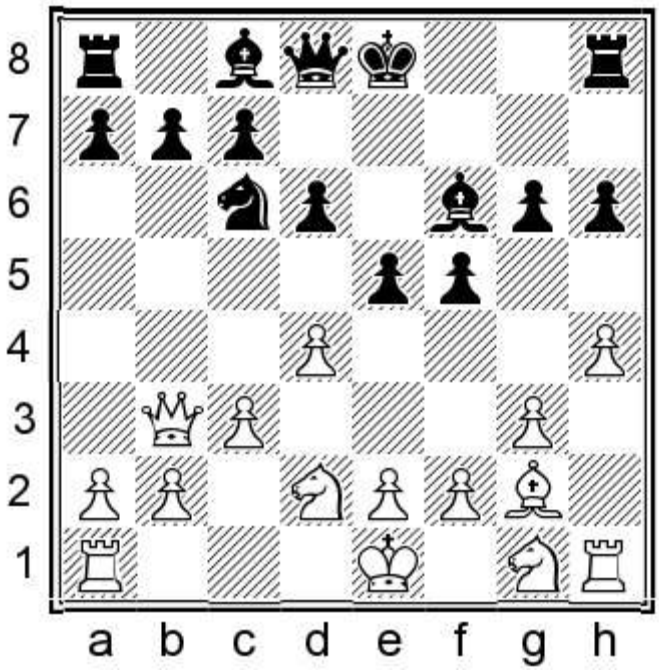


Position after: 6...d6

As usual, we're playing for ...e5.

7.d5

7.♗g5 h6 8.♗xf6 ♗xf6 9.♘d2 e5



Position after: 9...e5

A) 10.e3 My computer wants to keep a flexible position, but I don't really believe it can be very

annoying. The only thing is that it's quite complicated to castle, but the king can reach a safe place anyway. 10...a5 11.a4 ♔f8 12.♘e2 ♔g7 13.0-0-0 ♕e8⇄

B) 10.dxe5 ♘xe5 11.♘h3 c6 12.♘f4 ♕b6! Trading queens would of course be desirable for Black. 13.♕c2 ♗d7 14.♘f3 ♖g8 15.♖d1 d5 16.♘d4 0-0-0↑ I like the way Black easily got a very nice position in Girya, O (2505) – Muzychuk, A (2576), Monaco 2017, ½-½ (69).

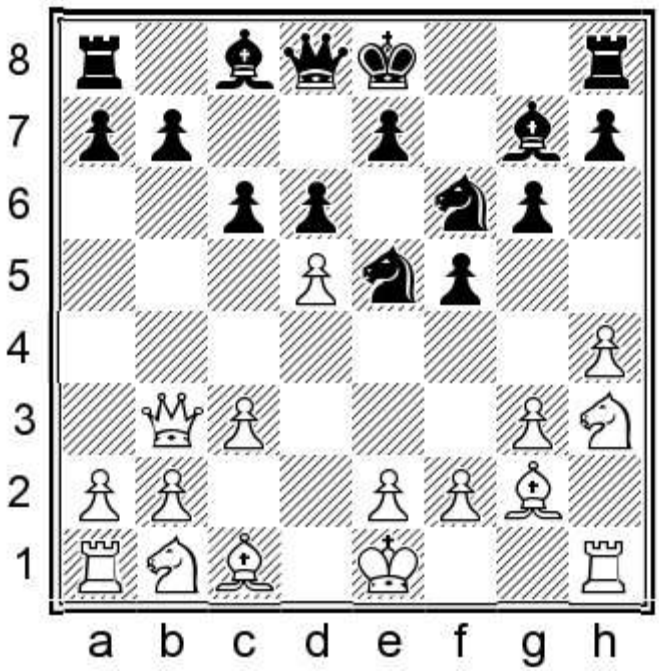
7...♘e5!

When the knight can't be traded, it's obvious that the most convenient square is e5.

8.♘h3

8.♘f3 0-0 9.♘xe5 dxe5 10.c4 e6 11.0-0 exd5 12.cxd5 ♖f7↑

8...c6!



Position after: 8...c6!

A well-timed challenge in the center by our Dutch specialist Anton Guijarro.

9.dxc6?!

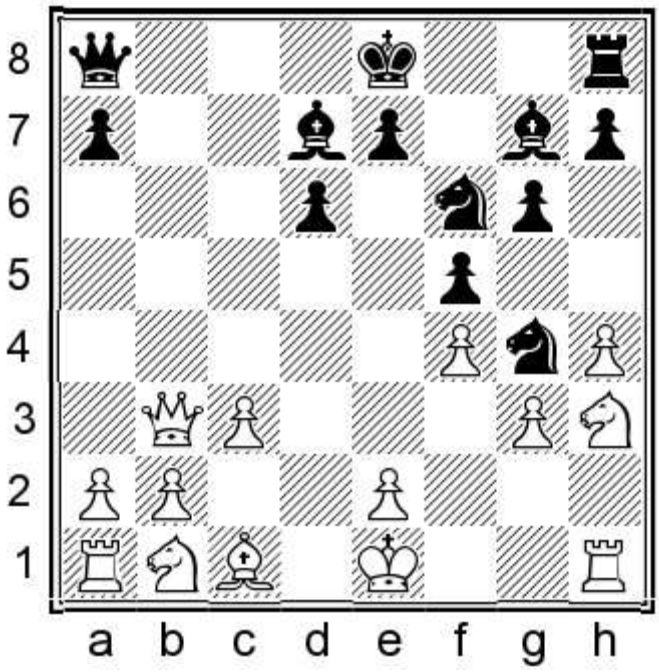
9.♘f4! was probably necessary in order to keep the balance: 9...cxd5 10.♘xd5 e6 11.♘xf6+ ♗xf6 12.♘a3 ♕e7⇄.

9...bxc6!N

Once again, Black is ready to give up material in return for active pieces and great compensation. The

following line is very nice for Black; it's likely that the Spanish GM considered the line and believed, wrongly, that it was too risky. He managed to win after 9...♘xc6 10.♘f4 ♘a5 11.♕d1 0-0 12.h5±, but I prefer to avoid this kind of attack for White, which seems quite easy to play. Saraci, N (2382) – Anton Guijarro, D (2642), Skopje 2018, 0-1 (29).

10.f4 ♘eg4 11.♗xc6+ ♗d7 12.♗xa8 ♕xa8



Position after: 12...♕xa8

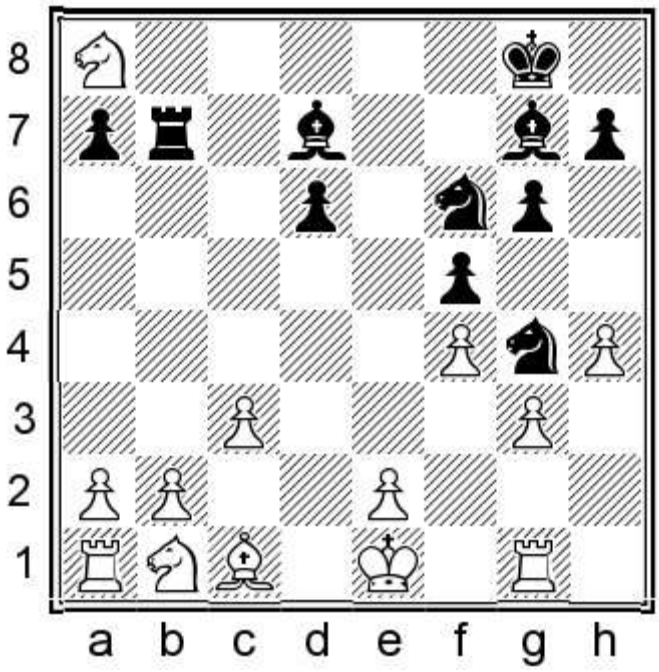
13.♖g1

13.0-0 In French, we have a chess expression which says that White is castling 'cemetery side'. It's very likely that his king will face huge trouble here. 13...♘h5 14.♖f3 [14.c4 ♗d4+ 15.e3 ♘xg3–+] 14...♗c6 15.♖d3?! ♗h1!–+

13...e6 14.♘g5 0-0!

Even stronger than 14...♔e7.

15.♘xe6 ♖b8! 16.♘c7+ ♖xb3 17.♘xa8 ♖b7!∓

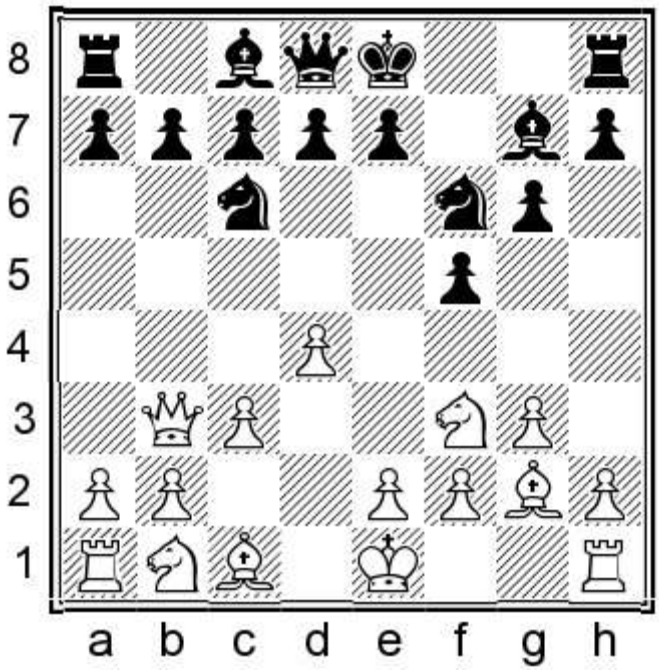


Position after: 17...♖b7!∓

The knight is trapped and will be eaten alive after ...♗c6 and ...♖e7. White will be left with very bad pieces and a far from obvious material advantage.

e) 4.c3 ♗g7 5.♕b3 ♘c6 6.♘f3

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.c3 ♗g7 5.♕b3! ♘c6!? 6.♘f3



Position after: 6.♘f3

With this move White tries to prevent Black from playing ...e5.

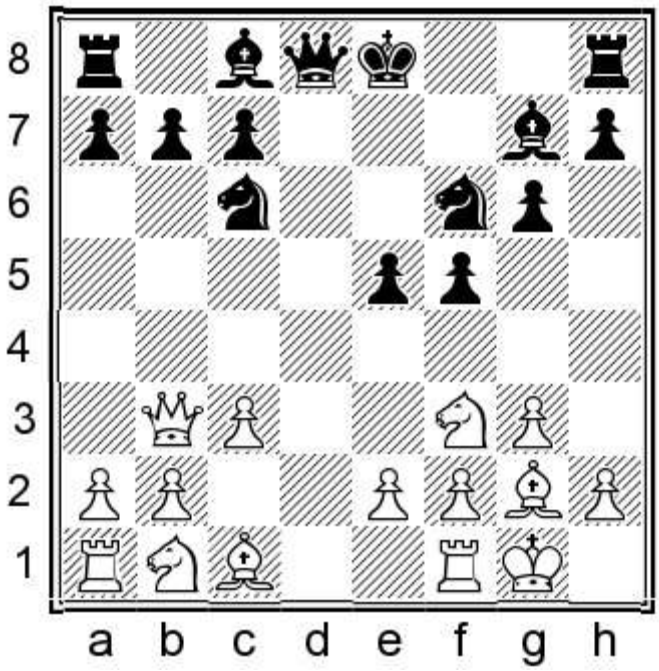
6...d6!?

This is not a novelty, but a large majority of players have chosen 6...e6 instead. However I believe we can fight for ...e5 if we are allowed to.

7.d5

I think this is the reason why Black has been afraid of playing 6...d6, but we have solutions.

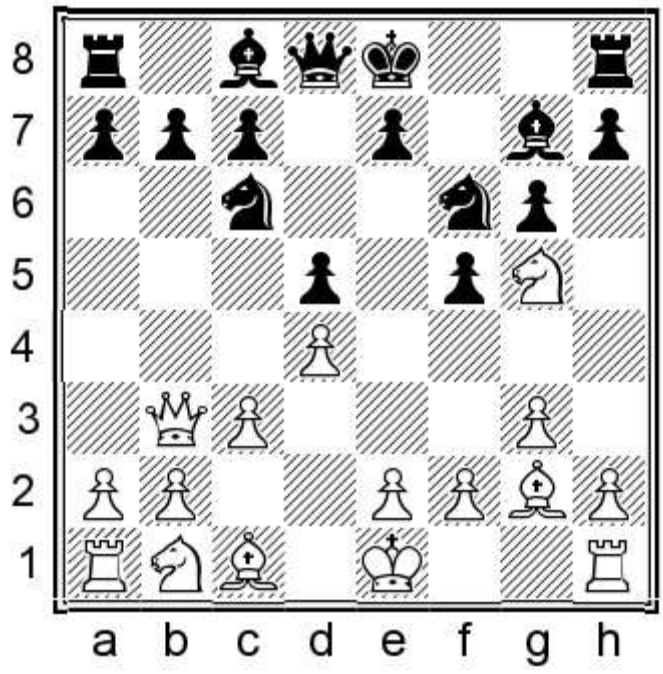
A) 7.0-0 e5 8.dxe5 dxe5 The position is quite open and we are unable to castle, but White fails to achieve anything because his pieces are not particularly well placed.



Position after: 8...dxe5

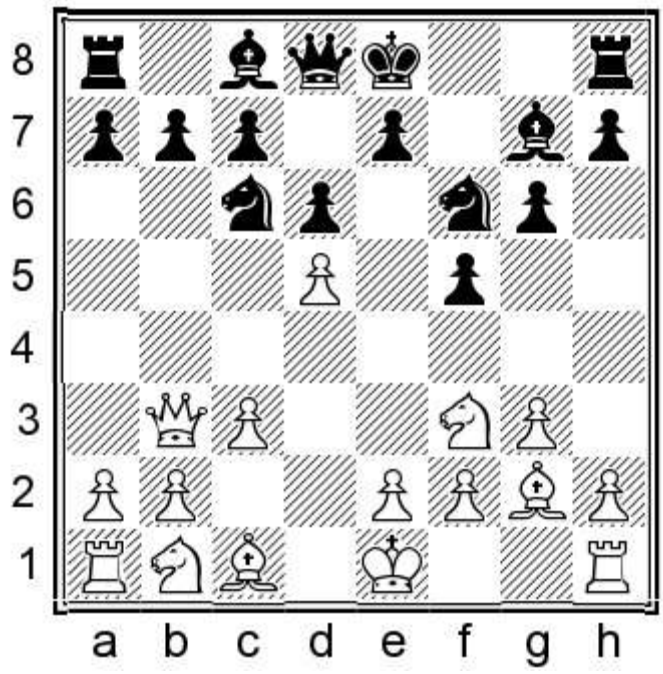
9.♖d1 [Or 9.♗g5 h6 10.♖d1 ♕e7] 9...♕e7 10.♗g5 [10.♘fd2?! e4 11.♘c4 ♖b8!∓ Black follows with 12...♗e6 and is much better.] 10...h6 11.♗xf6 ♗xf6 12.e4! ♔f8! 13.♘bd2 ♔g7 14.♘c4 f4↑

B) 7.♘g5 d5



Position after: 7...d5

8.h4 [8.♘f3 White has decided the pawn structure, but Black has played ...d5 for free! He can get an easy position by playing ...e6, ...0-0 and ...b6.] 8...e5 9.dxe5 ♘xe5 10.♗f4 ♕e7 11.♗xd5 Otherwise Black is perfectly OK. 11...♘d3+ 12.♔f1 ♘c5! [12...♘xf4?! 13.gxf4 ♘xd5 14.♕xd5 h6? 15.♖h3+–] 13.♕c4 ♘xd5 14.♕xd5 ♗d7∓



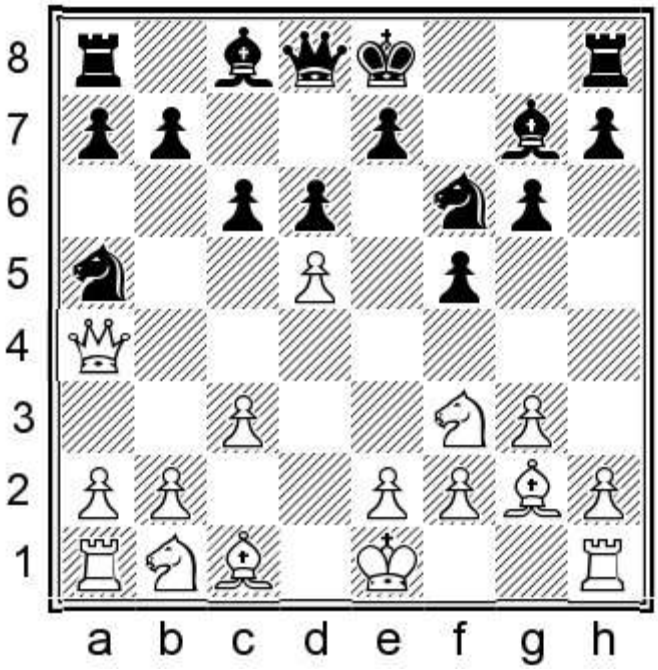
Position after: 7.d5

7...♘a5!?N

I like this approach. Black wins another tempo on the queen, although the knight will find itself in trouble, and we might need to sacrifice a pawn, but under favorable conditions.

7...♘e5 is fully playable too. 8.♘xe5 dxe5 9.0-0 0-0 10.c4 We discussed this kind of position in the 5.♘f3 line. The ideas are similar.

8.♕a4+ c6



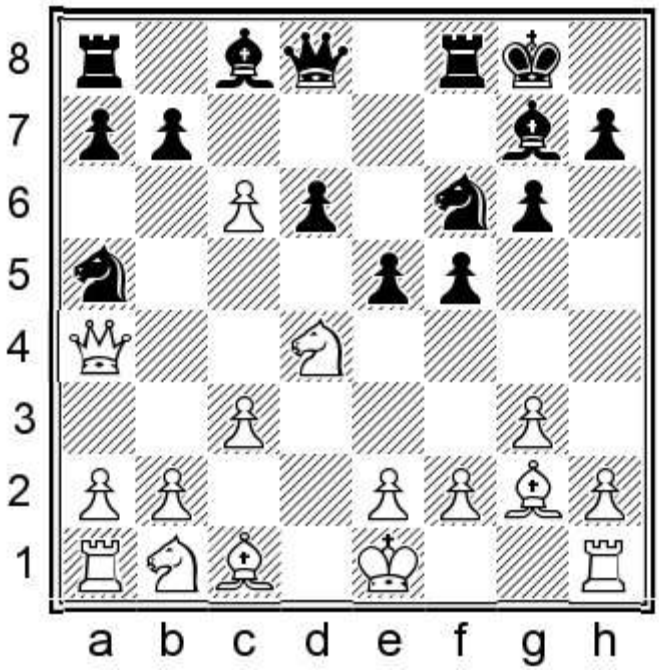
Position after: 8...c6

9.b4!?

With this move White tries to refute Black's idea by winning a pawn, but it creates weaknesses and is quite slow.

A) 9.♘d4 This move is quite challenging, but I came up with a very good solution.

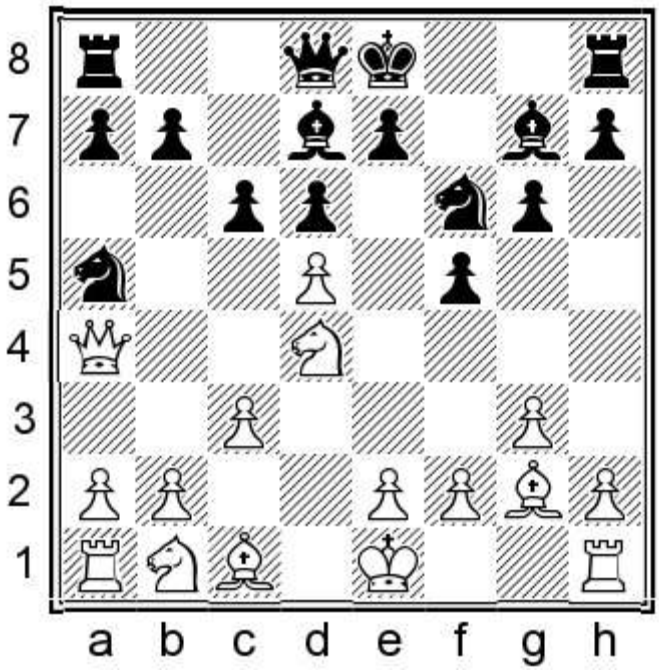
A1) 9...0-0 10.dxc6 e5



Position after: 10...e5

This approach was my first idea, but I realized that White is able to keep his extra pawn in conditions that are not so bad for him. 11.c7! [11.cxb7?! ♘xb7 12.♘b3 ♕e7 13.0-0 a5! 14.♖d1 ♗d7 15.♕a3 ♗e6⩲] 11...♕xc7 12.♘b5 ♕d8 13.♘xd6 ♕xd6 14.♕xa5± Obviously we have some compensation, but we will have to prove it, and I think White can hope for an edge here.

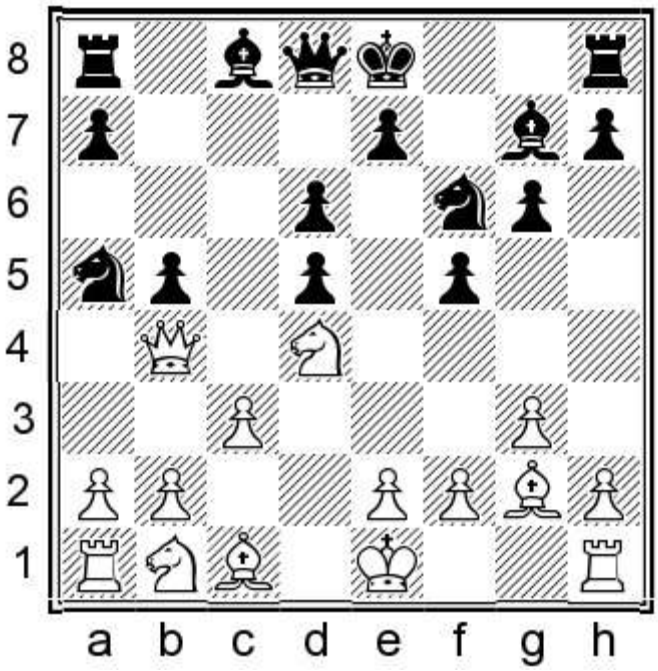
A2) 9...♗d7?!



Position after: 9...♗d7?!

10.♘xc6! [≤ 10.dxc6 This more logical move fails after 10...♘xc6 11.♘xc6 ♕c7!∓. A strong intermediate move that secures the material balance, and thus an edge for Black thanks to his great center.] 10...♕c8! [10...bxc6 11.dxc6 ♘xc6 12.♗xc6±] 11.♕xa5 bxc6 12.dxc6 ♗xc6 13.♗xc6+ ♕xc6 14.0-0±

A3) 9...b5! Other moves failed to convince me. 10.♕b4 cxd5



Position after: 10...cxd5

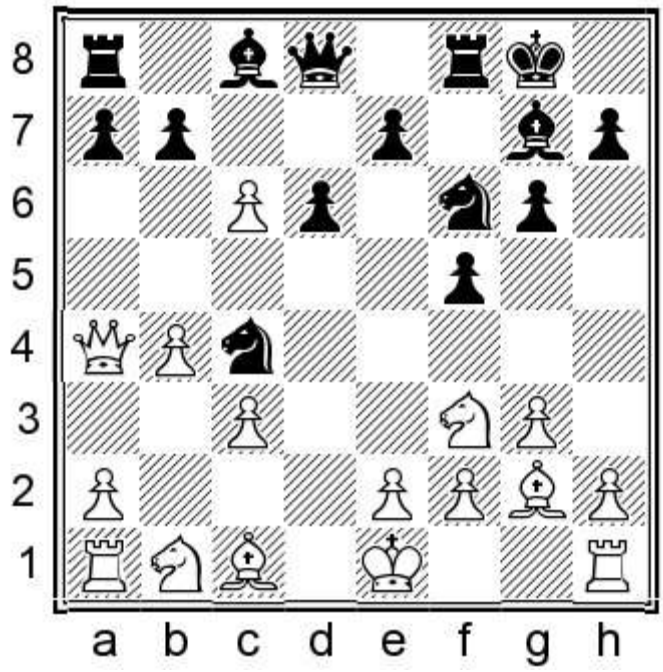
A3.1) 11.♗xd5?! Giving up the bishop like this is very dangerous. 11...♘xd5 12.♕xb5+ ♕d7! 13.♕xd5 [13.♕xa5 ♗b7 14.0-0 e5!∓ This time it's also very hard for White, as we have managed to keep our light-squared bishop, so White's king is really likely to suffer.] 13...♗b7 14.♕xa5 ♗xh1 15.f3 ♖c8 16.♘a3 ♖c5 17.♕b4 a5 18.♕b6 ♗g2∓

A3.2) 11.♕xb5+?! ♗d7 12.♕d3 ♘e4 13.0-0 0-0∓ Black's center is impressive, and he also has the open b- and c-files.

A3.3) 11.a4! A far from easy, but strong, move. White has given up the center, but at least he will get the a-file and a strong pawn on b5. 11...♘c4! 12.axb5 ♕c7 13.0-0 0-0 14.♘d2 ♘b6 15.♘c6 e5↑ Of course I like Black here, but at least White is still in the game.

B) 9.dxc6 ♘xc6 10.♘d4 ♗d7 11.♘xc6 ♕c7!∓

9...♘c4 10.dxc6 0-0!

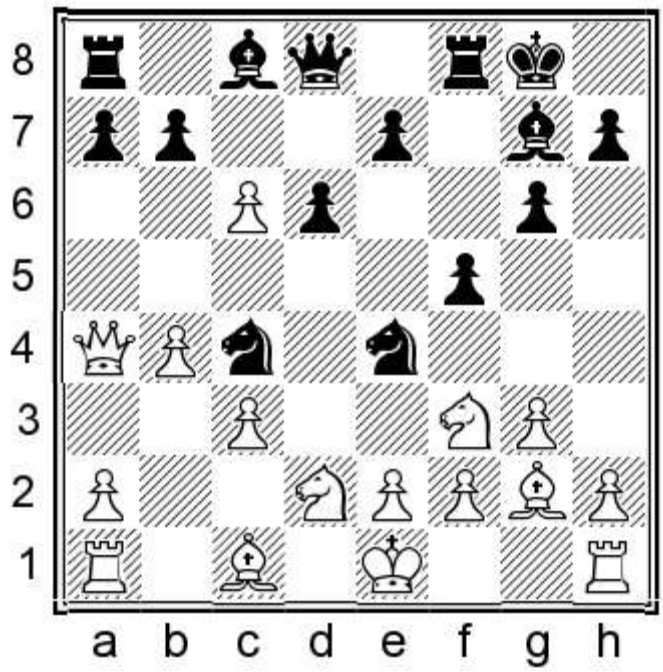


Position after: 10...0-0!

11.♘d4

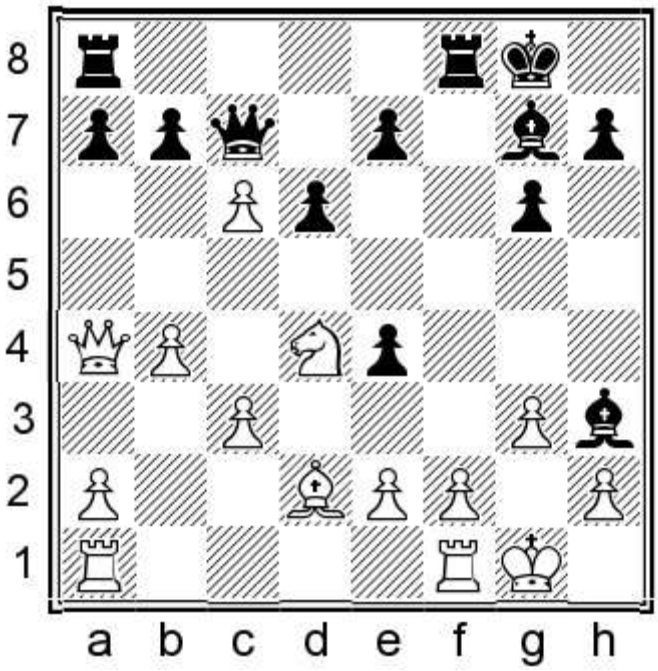
I think this is the most critical move. White blocks our main dangerous diagonal, and his own bishop on g2 is now creating threats against b7.

A) 11.♘bd2 ♘e4!



Position after: 11...♘e4!

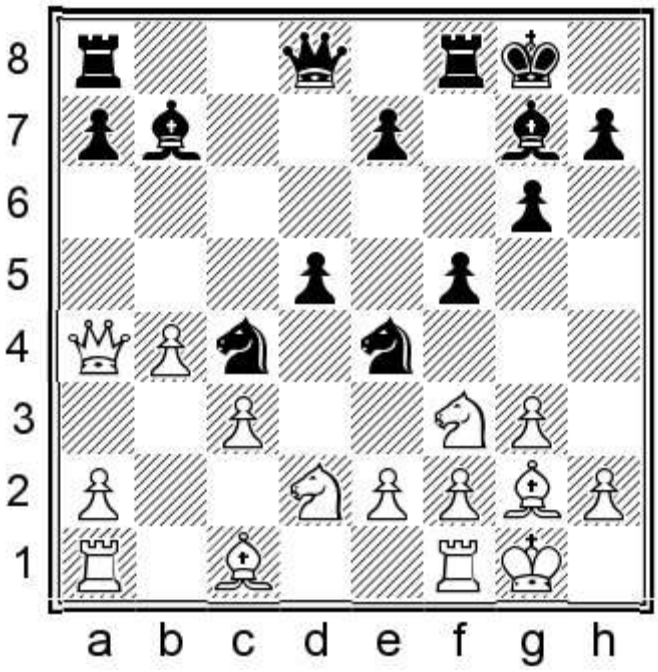
12.♘d4! [12.♘xe4?! fxe4 13.♘d4 d5 14.0-0 ♕d6 15.cxb7 ♗xb7⩲ Black has very active pieces which clearly compensate for the missing pawn.] 12...♘cxd2 13.♗xd2 ♕c7 [13...♘xd2?? 14.cxb7 ♗xb7 15.♗xb7+–] 14.♗xe4 fxe4 15.0-0 ♗h3!



Position after: 15...♗h3!

Here too Black has good long-term compensation. I think White should try to trade the dangerous h3-bishop: 16.♕b3+ [16.♖fd1 ♗xd4 17.cxd4 ♕xc6⇄ is balanced too.] 16...♔h8 17.♘e6 ♕xc6! 18.b5 [18.♘xf8? e3! Black has too many threats. 19.f3 exd2–+] 18...♗xe6! 19.bxc6 ♗xb3 20.cxb7 ♖ab8 21.axb3 ♖xb7=.

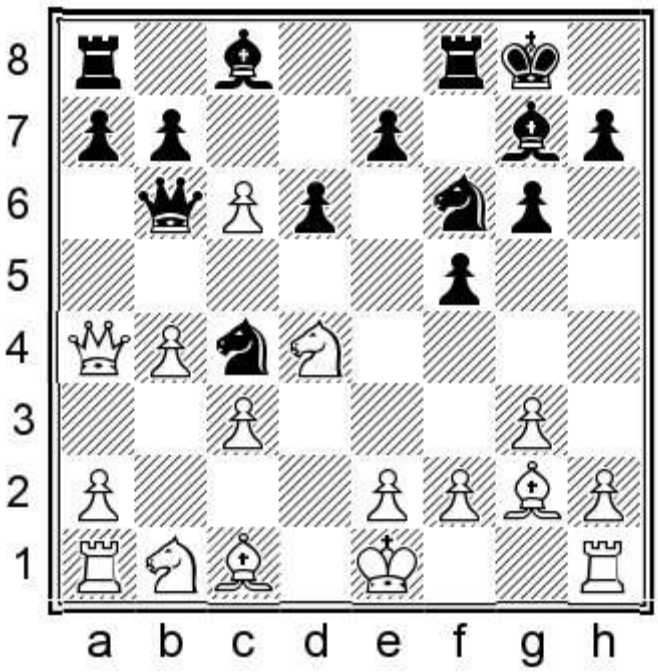
B) 11.cxb7?! Securing an extra pawn really helps Black. 11...♗xb7 12.0-0 d5!? 13.♘bd2 ♘e4∓



Position after: 13...♘e4∓

The c3-pawn is under attack, and every black piece is perfectly placed. He definitely has enough compensation.

11...♕b6!

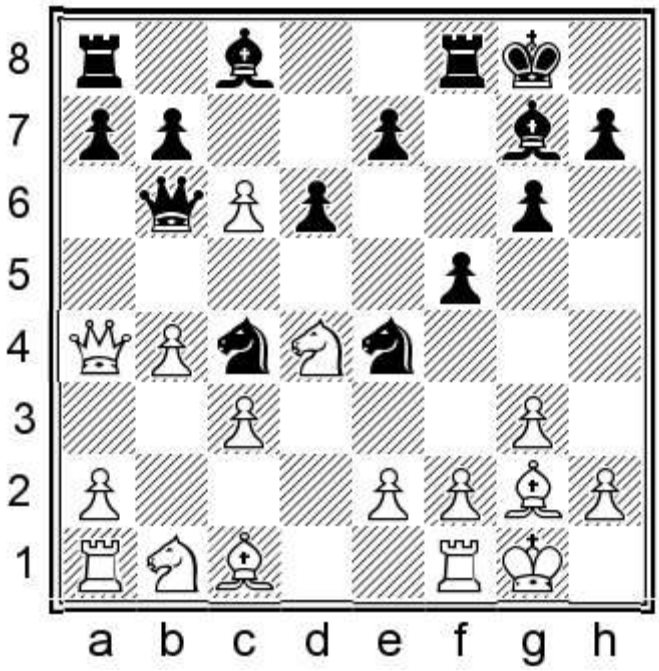


Position after: 11...♕b6!

12.0-0

12.cxb7? ♗xb7 13.♗xb7 ♕xb7 14.0-0 White is threatening to bring the knight to e6, but it actually won't do much there. 14...♖fc8!∓ Black is objectively better. White's development and pawn structure are really bad.

12...♘e4!?

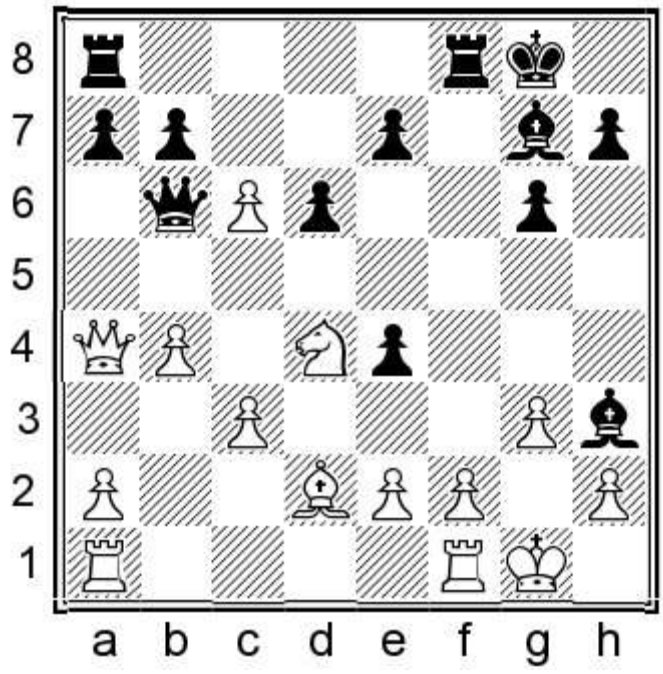


Position after: 12...♘e4!?

Black is considering new tactical motifs on the long diagonal, such as ...♘xc3, but he is also able simply to get a strong center by starting with ...d5 and then maybe ...e5.

I actually believe that White doesn't have many other choices than to trade minor pieces in the center (which will incidentally be very similar to 11.♘bd2).

13.♗xe4 fxe4 14.♘d2 ♘xd2 15.♗xd2 ♗h3



Position after: 15...♗h3

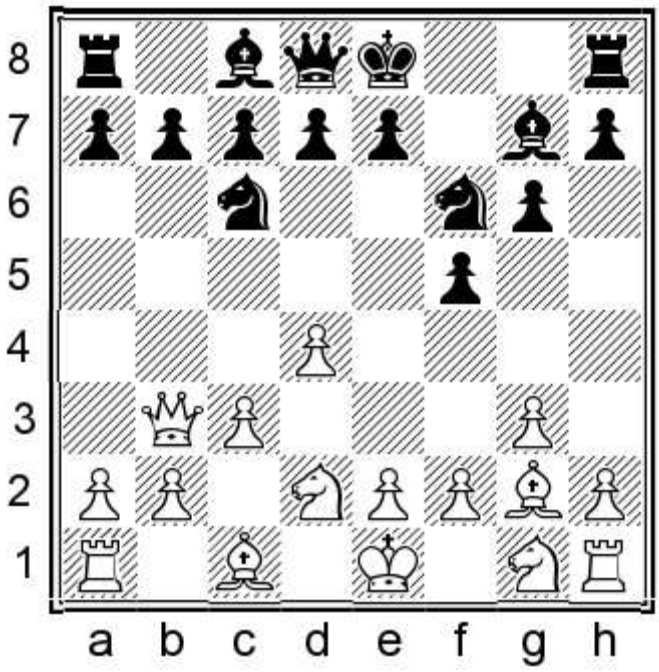
This was already seen in 11.♘bd2, except that our queen was on c7.

16.♕b3+! ♖f7 17.♘e6 ♗xf1 18.♖xf1 ♕xc6 19.b5 ♕d7 20.♘g5 e6 21.♘xf7! ♕xf7 22.c4 d5⇄

Stockfish still prefers White slightly, but from a human perspective the position looks fine for Black.

f) 4.c3 ♗g7 5.♕b3 ♘c6 6.♘d2

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.c3 ♗g7 5.♕b3! ♘c6!? 6.♘d2



Position after: 6.♘d2

6...d5

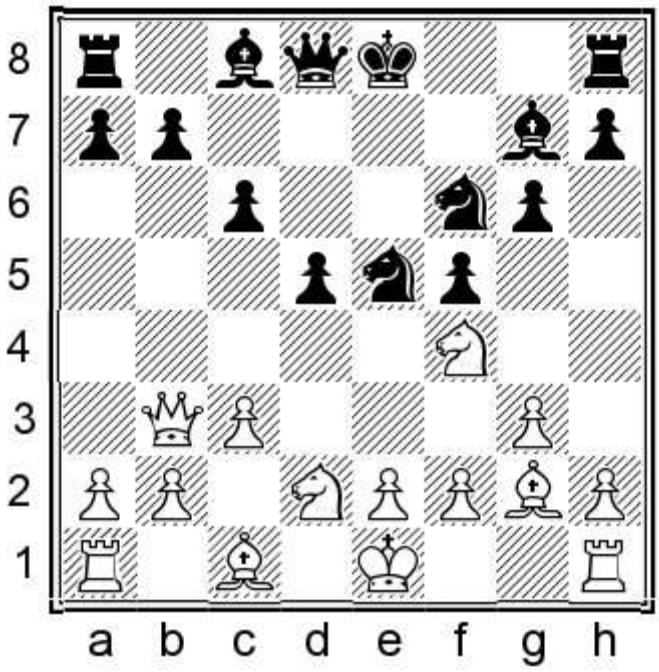
In this case it makes sense to start with this move as 6...e5 is not fully playable. The reason is that White has just developed his knight on d2, so both his knights are eyeing the f3-square (even if h3 is a very reasonable square for the g1-knight).

6...e5?! If we try a similar sacrifice as against 6.♘h3, things won't work so well. The reason is that the e4-square is not available for our knight, and the g1-knight will find a much more useful square on f3 than on h3. 7.♗xc6 bxc6 [7...dxc6 8.dxe5 ♘g4 9.f4±] 8.dxe5 ♘d5 9.♘gf3±

7.♘df3!

I think this is the best option. It prevents ...e5 and allows the other knight to develop on h3.

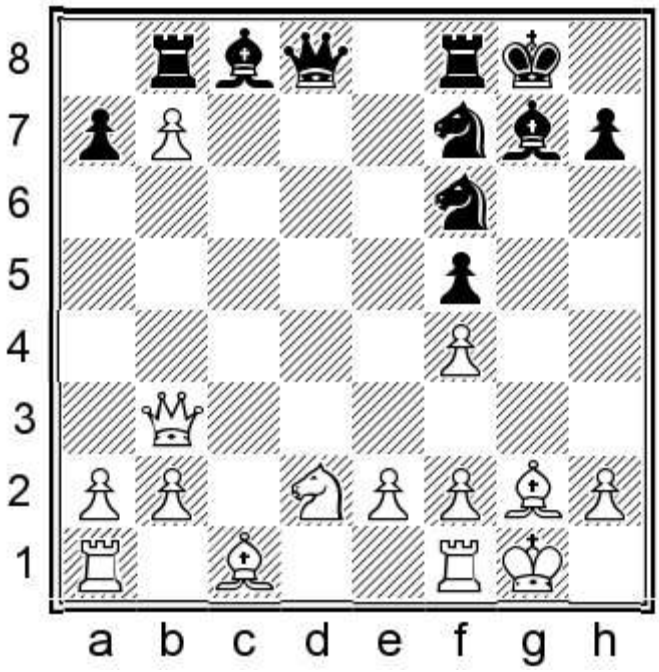
A) 7.♘h3 is the most played move in the current position, but it makes our life easier as we are allowed to open the center: 7...e5 8.dxe5 ♘xe5 9.♘f4 c6



Position after: 9...c6

The situation is quite simple. If White does nothing, we will continue with either ...0-0 or ...♘e4 with a great center and no problems at all, so he should react as quickly as possible.

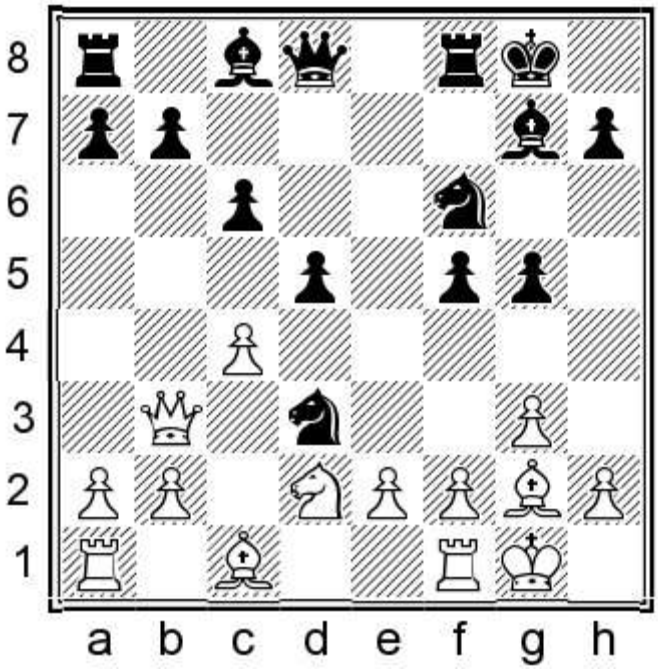
A1) 10.0-0 0-0 11.c4 g5! This works even better than after 10.c4. 12.♘d3 [12.cxd5? gxf4 13.gxf4 ♘f7 14.dxc6 ♖b8 15.cxb7



Position after: 15.cxb7

15...♗xb7! It's already clear that this was a worse version for White than after 10. c4, but this move

renders White's concept completely irrelevant. 16.♗xb7 ♕e7–+] 12...♘xd3

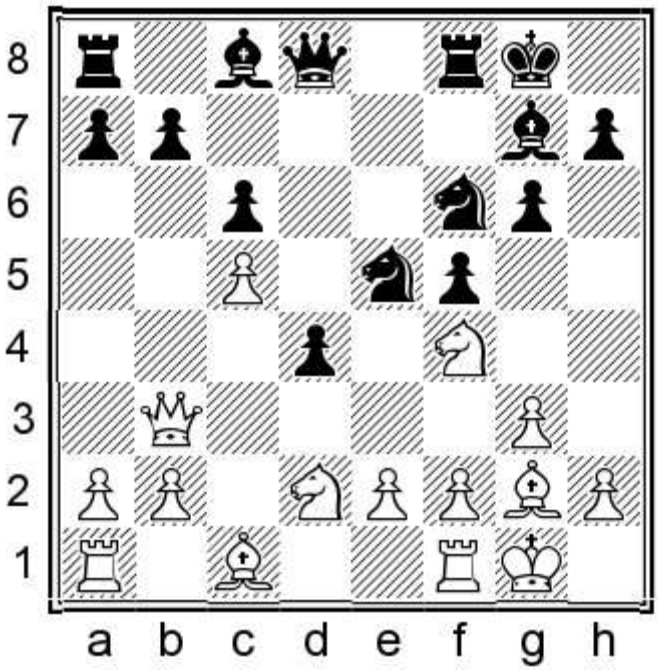


Position after: 12...♘xd3

13.♕xd3 [13.exd3 f4 14.♖e1 ♔h8 15.♘f3 g4 16.♘e5 f3 17.♗f1 d4↑] 13...♗e6 14.cxd5 ♘xd5∓ Black dominates in the center and will continue with ...f4 to get play on the kingside.

A2) 10.c4!?

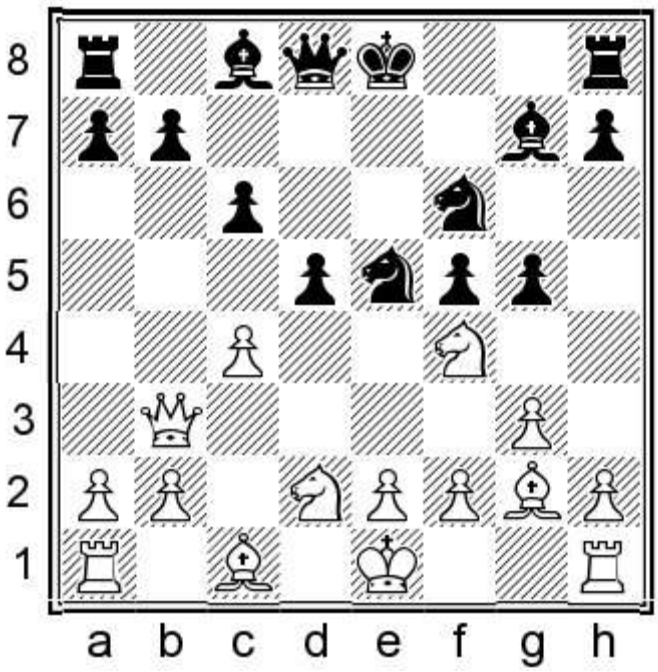
A2.1) 10...d4 Having an isolated d-pawn is out of the question, so this is the most logical answer if you don't think about 10...g5. 11.0-0 0-0 12.c5+



Position after: 12.c5+

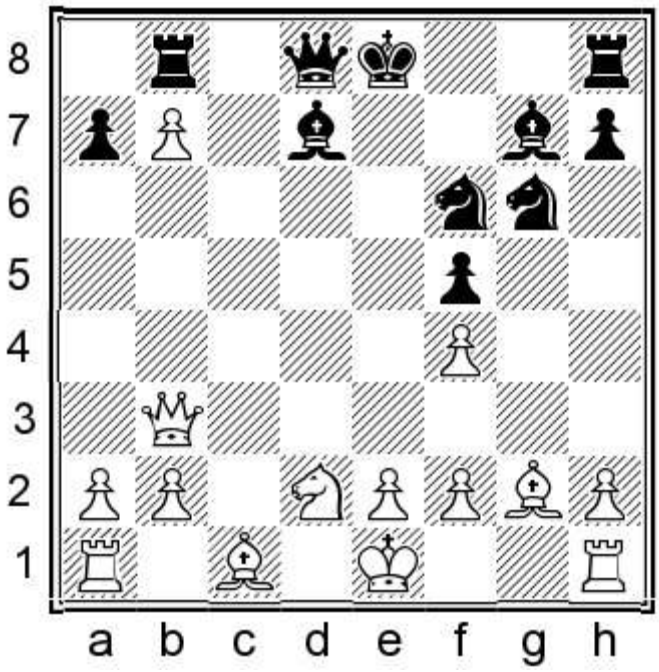
This prevents Black from playing ...c5 himself, so his d4-pawn may become weak at some stage. 12...♔h8 13.♘f3 [13.♘c4 ♘xc4 14.♕xc4 ♖e8 15.♖d1 g5 16.♖xd4 ♕e7 17.♘d3 ♘d5∞] 13...♘e4 14.♕c2 ♖e8 15.♖d1↑ Black is walking on eggshells; his position is not so easy to handle.

A2.2) 10...g5!N



Position after: 10...g5!N

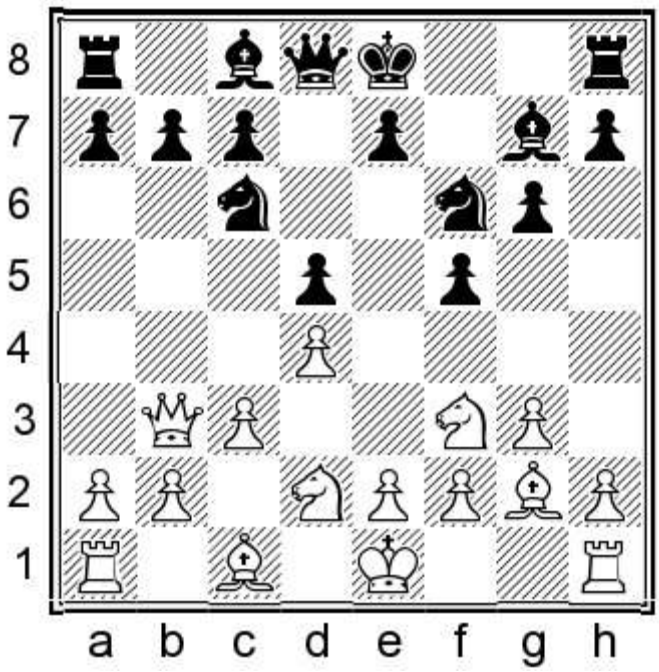
I also really like this possibility, leading to a very complicated and unbalanced position. 11.cxd5! [11.♘d3 ♘xd3+ 12.♕xd3 ♗e6 13.♕e3 ♕e7 14.♕xg5 dxc4 15.0-0 0-0↑] 11...gxf4 12.gxf4 ♘g6 13.dxc6 ♖b8! 14.cxb7 ♗d7∓



Position after: 14...♗d7∓

White has four pawns for a piece, and Black is currently unable to castle, but White has still to finish his development, and both b7 and f4 might fall soon. The game is very complicated.

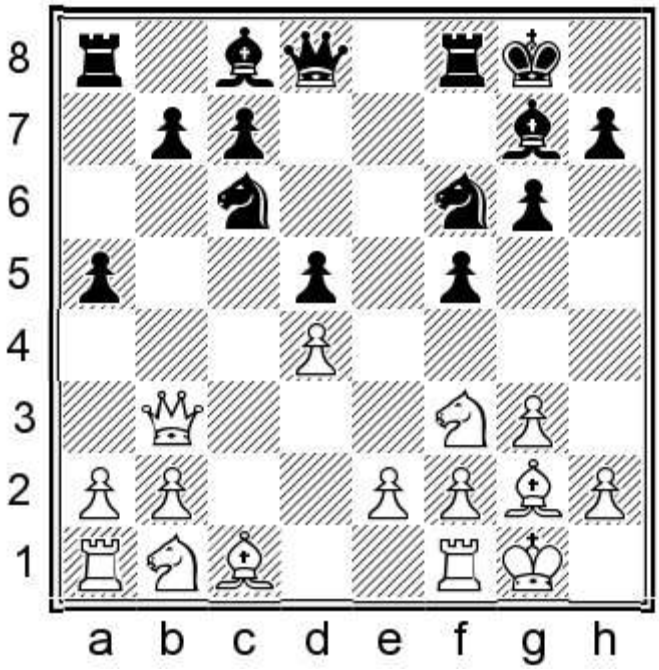
B) 7.♘gf3?!



Position after: 7.♘gf3?!

I don't like this move because the knights are getting in each other's way. 7...a5!? 8.0-0 [8.a4 e6 9.0-0 0-0 10.♖d1 ♖e8 11.♘e5 ♘xe5 12.dxe5 ♘g4 13.c4 ♘xe5 14.cxd5 ♖a6⇄] 8...0-0 9.c4 [9.♘e5 ♘xe5

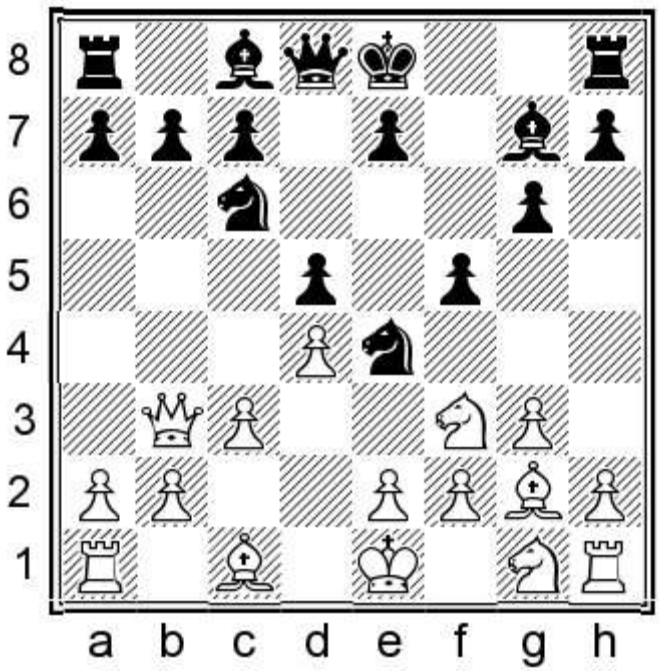
10.dxe5 a4 11.♕d1 ♘e4 12.f4 b5∓] 9...e6 10.cxd5 exd5 11.♘b1



Position after: 11.♘b1

White is so out of useful moves that this might look necessary. Of course White can't hope for an edge after losing a tempo with the c-pawn and two with the knight. 11...a4 12.♕d1 ♘e4↑

7...♘e4



Position after: 7...♘e4

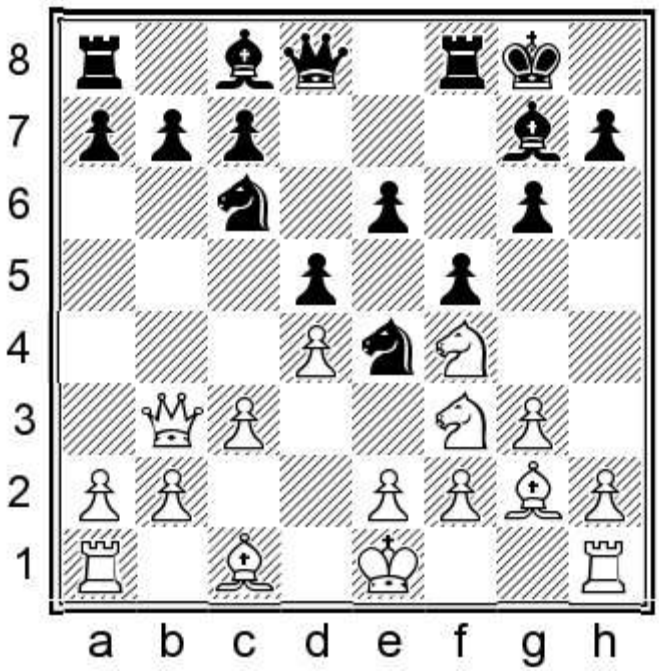
8.♘h3

8.♗f4 Normally the g1-knight dreams about this square, but if White wants to prevent ...e5 again, he has no other choice. 8...0-0 9.h4 ♘a5 10.♕c2 c5 11.e3 e6⇄

8...0-0

8...e5?! was my initial idea, because I like the idea of solving the opening problems with a more forcing line, but analysis shows that it brings Black more problems than satisfaction. For instance after 9.dxe5 ♘xe5 10.♘xe5 ♗xe5 11.f3 ♘f6 12.♗g5!± White intends 0-0-0 and e4 with a very dangerous initiative.

9.♘f4 e6



Position after: 9...e6

We have reached a Stonewall pawn structure with a kingside fianchetto, which won't happen so often in this book. To compensate, White has had to play a few strange and not so useful moves, such as c3 and ♕b3, and more knight maneuvers than usual. Now White can play strategically, exploiting the fact that he hasn't castled yet and that his rook is still on h1.

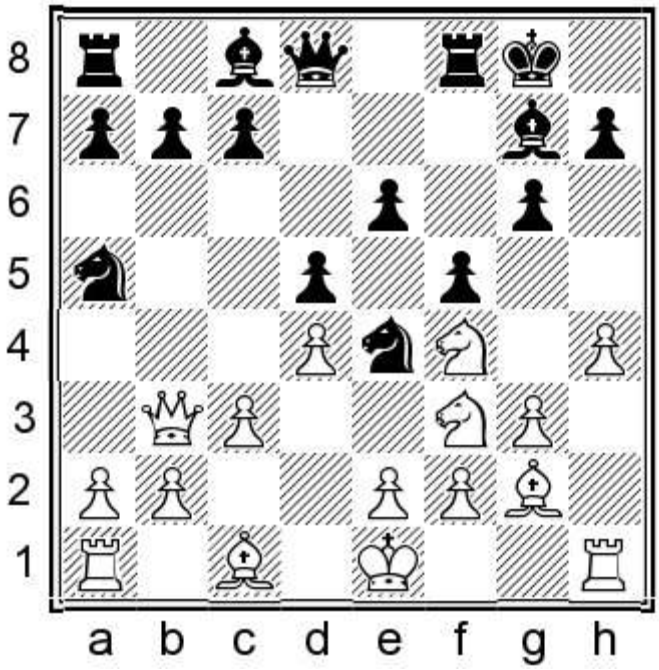
10.h4!?

This looks more dangerous, but it's not clear if White is really threatening 11.h5, as we would be able to reply 11...g5 (even if we need to consider the intermediate 12.h6). But at least the idea is in the air.

10.♘d3!? is the positional approach, but it actually causes Black trouble in fighting for the initiative. 10...♘a5!?N I think this is the more active way to react. Black frees the c-pawn in order to bring it to c5 quickly. 11.♕c2 I don't think the queen's square makes much difference. 11...b6! 12.0-0 c5 13.♗f4

♗a6!↑ Black is ready to follow with ...♖c8, with very decent play on the queenside.

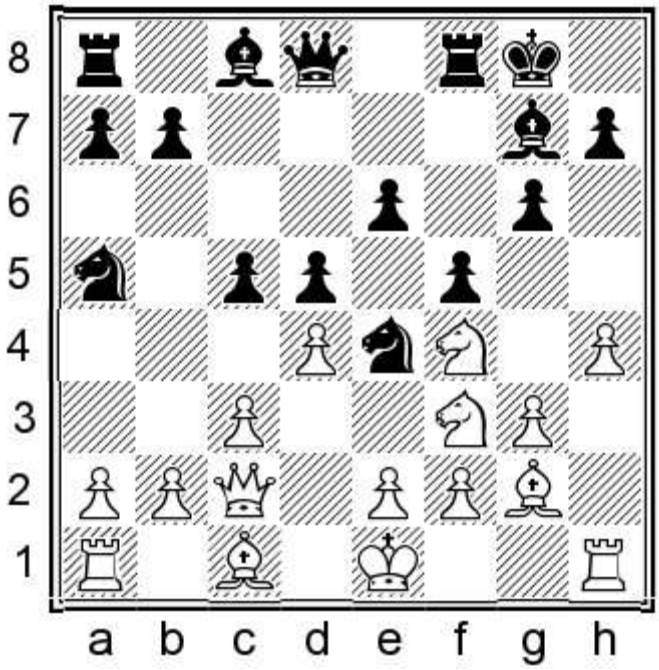
10...♘a5



Position after: 10...♘a5

11.♕c2

11.♕d1 has been played too, but it doesn't make much difference. 11...c5!N



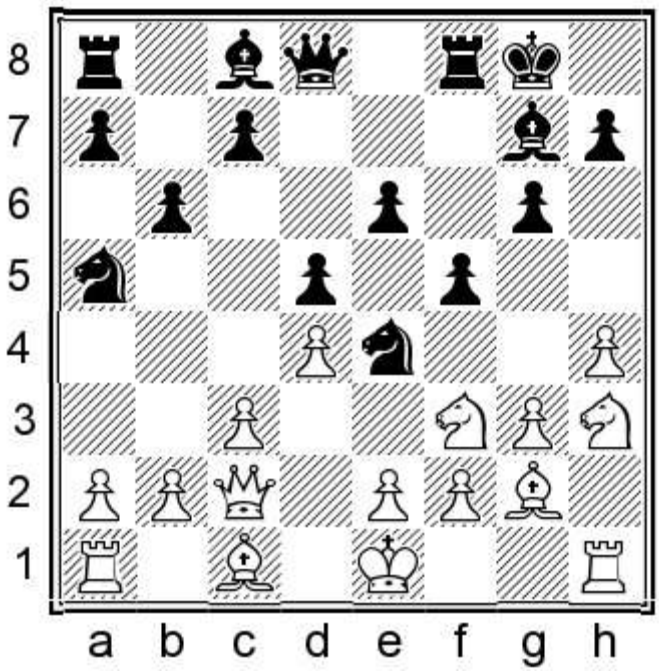
Position after: 11...c5!N

Probably stronger than 11...♘c4, which has already been played in two games. [11...b6!? would also be similar to our main line.] 12.0-0 [12.dxc5 ♕e7! 13.♘d3 ♖d8! Black is in no rush to take the pawn back as White is not really able to defend it properly. Black plans to bring his knight back to c6, and then maybe push ...e5. 14.h5 g5 15.h6 ♗f6∓] 12...♕b6 13.e3 ♗d7↑

11...b6

11...c5!? 12.dxc5 e5 13.♘d3 ♘c6 14.b4 ♕e7∞

12.♘h3!N

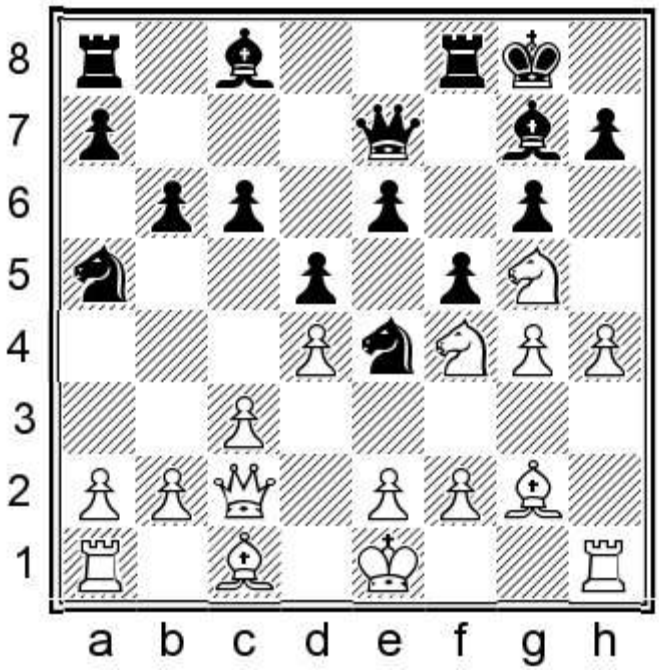


Position after: 12.♘h3!N

Stockfish claims this to be the best. Of course, from a human point of view, it's hard to consider such a move, but Stockfish's reason is that it wants to push h5 without allowing ...g5.

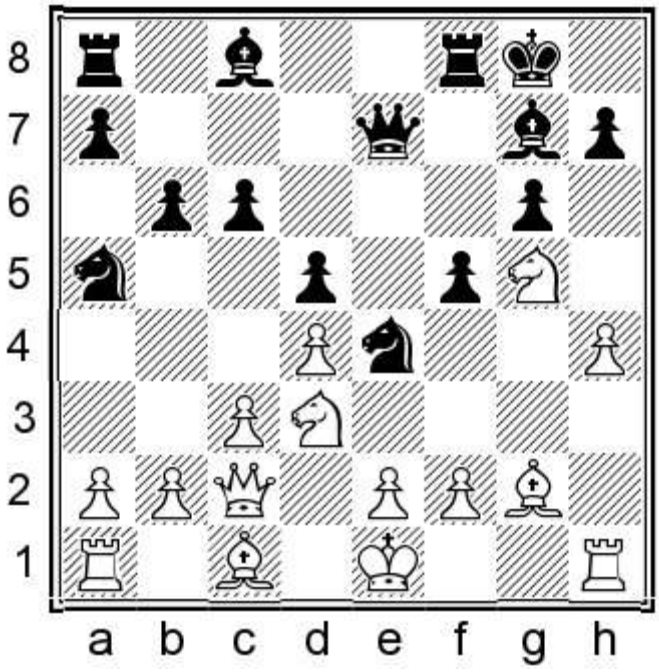
A) 12.h5 g5! 13.h6 ♗h8 14.♘h5 c5↑ It's not so clear what White has really achieved by playing h5. Our position is still very solid.

B) In the last game that reached this position, White tried the dubious 12.♘g5?!. The idea isn't very clear to me, as White doesn't really want to take on e4. I guess his idea was to follow with 12...♕e7 13.g4, but with 13...c6!



Position after: 13...c6!

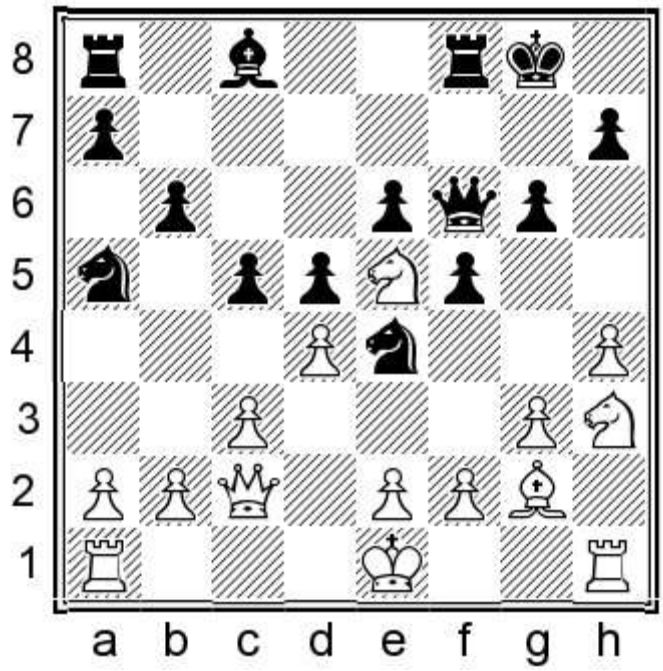
his opponent showed the best way to react. By protecting the d-pawn, he is able to take back on f5 with the e-pawn. 14.gxf5 [14.♘xh7!? A computer continuation, but it shouldn't bring White more than equality, e.g. 14...♔xh7 15.h5 gxh5! 16.♖xh5+ ♔g8 17.♗xe4 fxe4 18.♘g6 ♕f6 19.♘xf8 ♕xf8= and White still needs to show why he gave up material.] 14...exf5 15.♘d3?!



Position after: 15.♘d3?!

Now in the game Hausrath, D (2481) – Markgraf, A (2523), Germany 2016, ½-½ (48), Black could have gone 15...♗a6! 16.♘f3 ♖ae8 17.♘fe5 c5!∓ with a very nice initiative.

12...♗f6 13.♗g5 c5 14.♗xf6 ♕xf6 15.♘e5↑

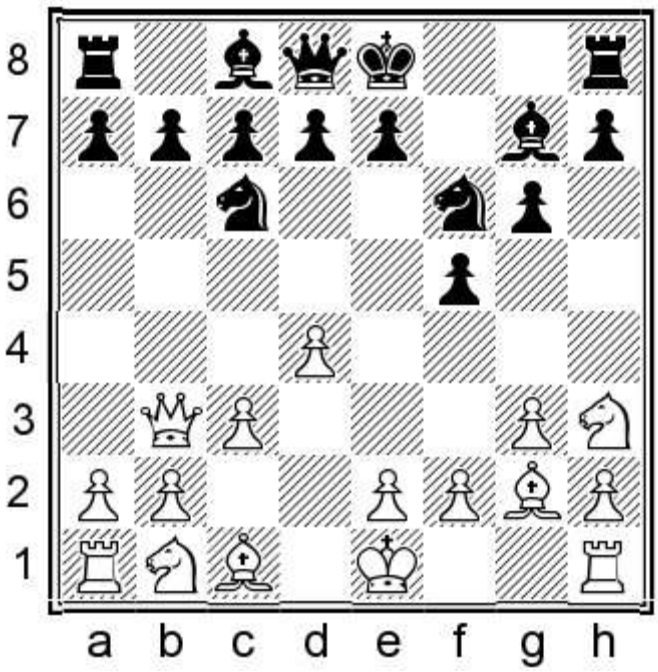


Position after: 15.♘e5↑

White may still be objectively better, but it's a minimal edge.

g) 4.c3 ♗g7 5.♕b3 ♘c6 6.♘h3

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.c3 ♗g7 5.♕b3! ♘c6!? 6.♘h3



Position after: 6.♘h3

This has been the most popular move recently. I faced this position one of the first times I played the Dutch a few years ago. I played 6...d5 because I thought I had to go for a Stonewall set-up, but that's not actually the case, and I am very happy to be able to show that we can directly open the center.

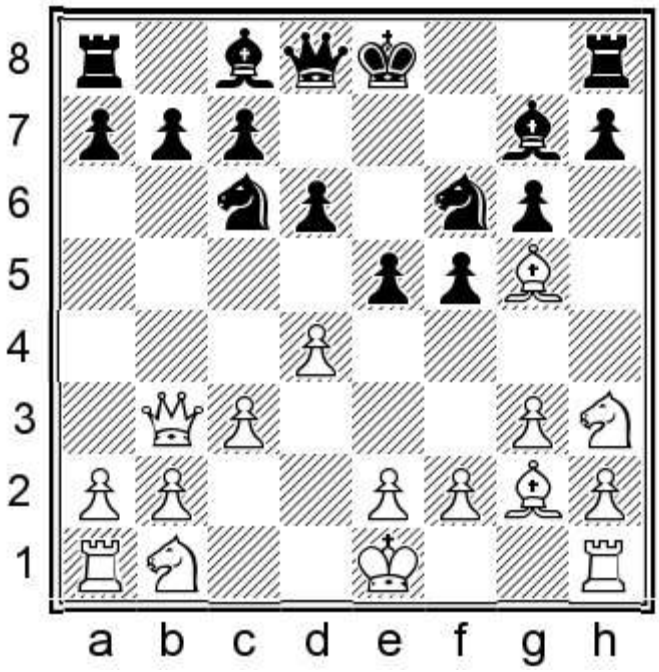
6...e5!

This move is a rare guest. At the time of writing it has been played only ten times, with pretty good results for Black. It has been quite rare that White employed a challenging line.

7.♗xc6

I believe that only with this move can White challenge his opponent's concept. The lines can get crazy very quickly, and we only have a few practical games at our disposal.

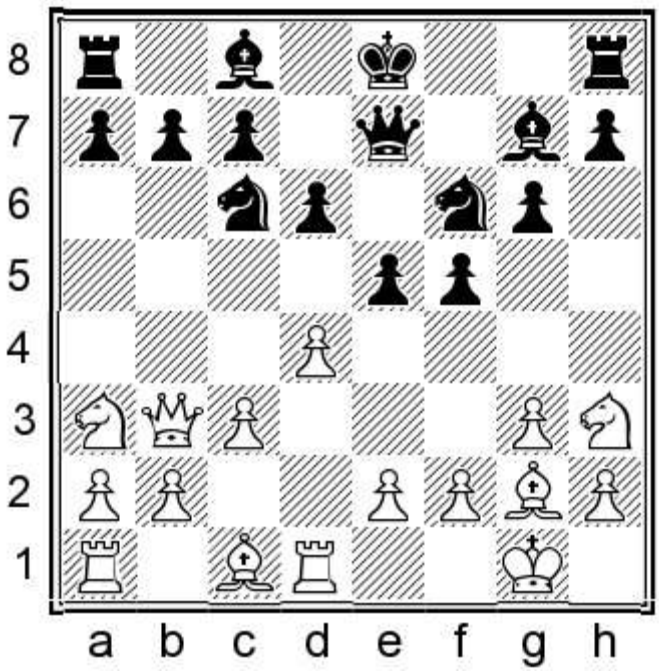
A) 7.♗g5N 7...d6



Position after: 7...d6

8.dxe5 [8.♗xc6+? bxc6 9.dxe5 dxe5 10.♘a3 ♕d5∓] 8...♘xe5 9.♘f4 Black doesn't face many problems as long as he controls the light squares in his camp. 9...♕d7 10.♘d2 c6 11.♖d1 a5↑

B) 7.0-0N 7...d6 8.♖d1 ♕e7 9.♘a3

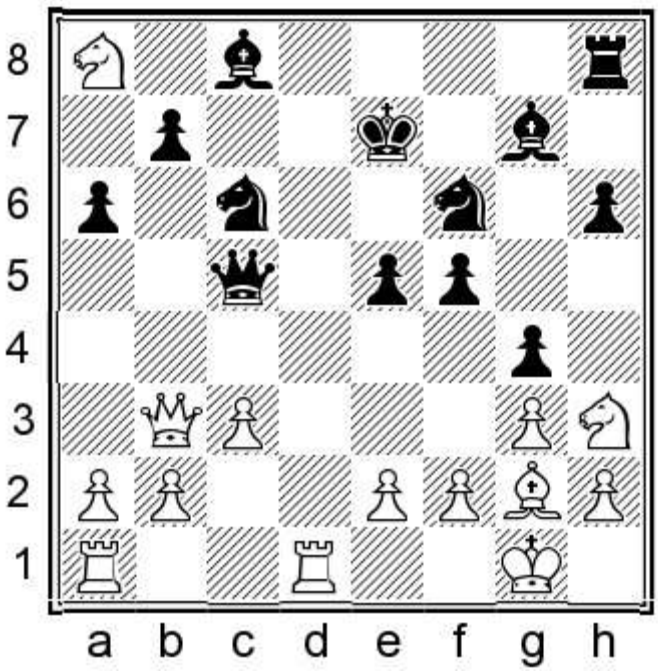


Position after: 9.♘a3

This is the start of a real computer line. The knight is heading mysteriously towards b5.

B1) 9...h6 10.♘b5

B1.1) 10...g5 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.♗e3 a6 13.♗c5! It seems crazy that such a move can work, but it does. 13...♕xc5 14.♘xc7+ ♔e7 15.♘xa8 g4

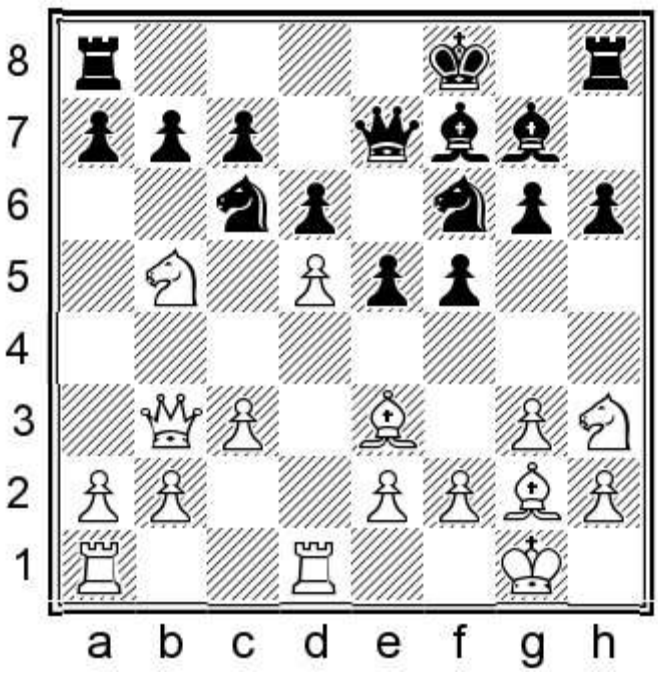


Position after: 15...g4

Both knights are in trouble, but White manages to handle the position very well with 16.♘b6! ♗e6 17.♗d5±.

B1.2) 10...a6 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.♕a3! The point! 12...♕xa3 13.♘xc7+ ♔f7 14.bxa3±

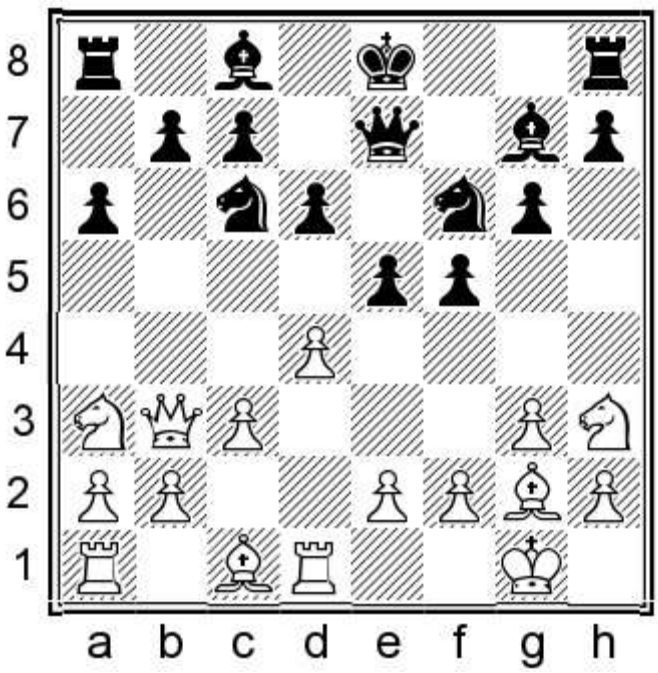
B1.3) 10...♔f8 11.♗e3 ♗e6 12.d5 ♗f7



Position after: 12...♗f7

13.♘xa7! ♘xa7 14.♕xb7 ♖d8 15.♗xa7±

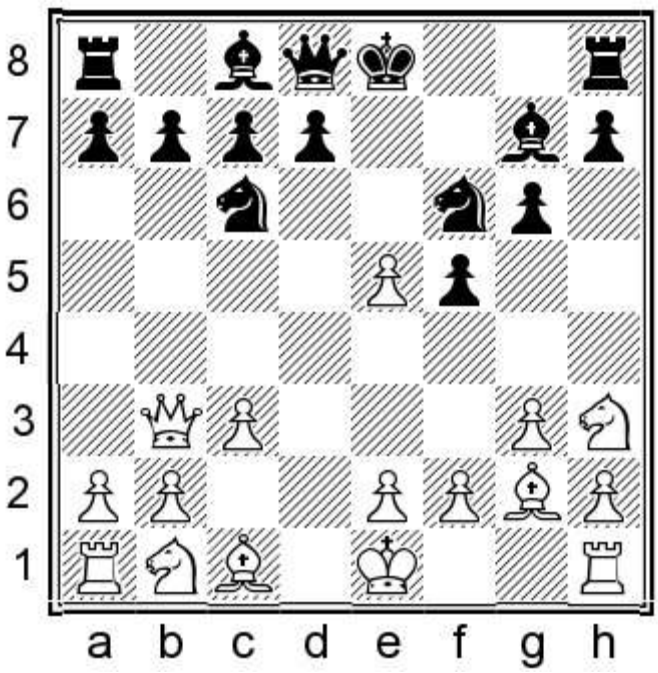
B2) 9...a6!



Position after: 9...a6!

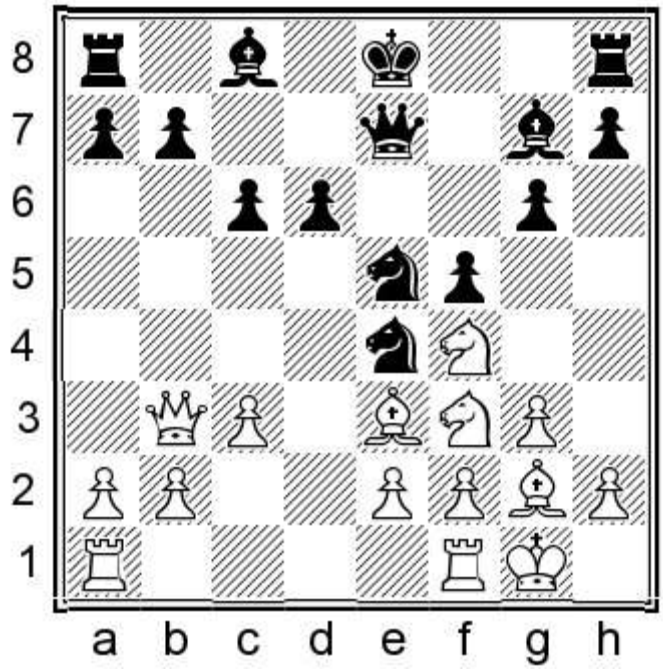
The simplest reaction may be to prevent it. 10.♗e3 [10.♗g5 h6 11.♗xf6 ♗xf6 12.e4 ♕f7!?=] 10...e4 11.♗g5 b5!⇄ The game is complicated, but I believe in Black's position here.

C) 7.dxe5?!



Position after: 7.dxe5?!

This is the most played move, but it doesn't give Black many problems to solve. Still, it's an understandable reaction when you face 6...e5. 7...♘xe5 8.0-0 c6! 9.♘d2 [9.♗f4 ♕e7 10.♘d2 d5 11.♗xe5 ♕xe5 12.c4 ♘e4↑] 9...♕e7 10.♘f4 d6 [10...d5 was another possibility, but Anna Muzychuk preferred to keep a piece secured on e5.] 11.♘f3 ♘e4 12.♗e3



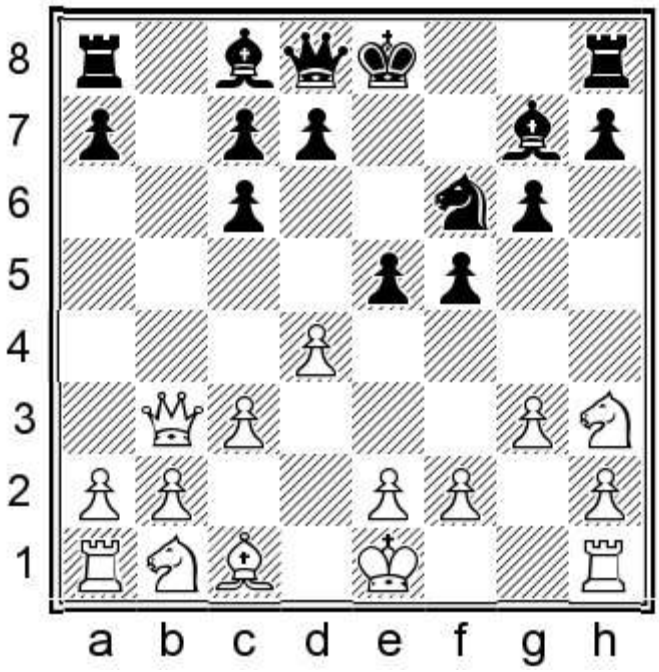
Position after: 12.♗e3

Black was already safe and the game quickly ended in a draw in Papaioannou, I (2624) – Muzychuk, A (2542), Chalkida 2009, ½-½ (18). Nevertheless, I think Black could have annoyed White more with 12...♘g4! 13.♗d4 ♗xd4

C1) 14.♘xd4 g5!?↑ [14...♘d2?! 15.♘xc6! ♘xb3 16.♘xe7 ♘xa1 17.♘ed5 ♔f7 18.♖xa1∞]

C2) 14.cxd4 g5 15.♘d3 ♗e6 16.♕c2 0-0-0↑

7...bxc6



Position after: 7...bxc6

We can take with the other pawn too, but I prefer to open lines on the queenside.

8.dxe5

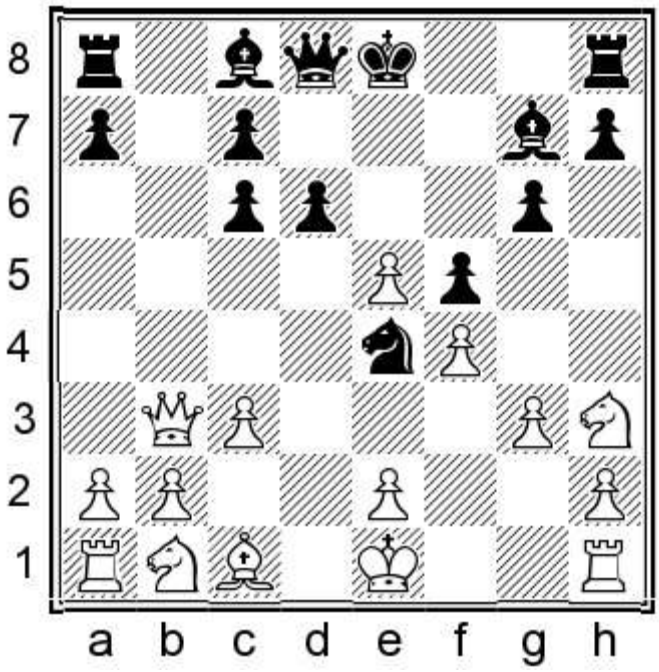
8.♘g5 ♘d5 9.dxe5 ♗xe5 10.0-0 ♗a6↑

8...♘e4!

8...♘g4?? Please don't repeat this painful defeat for Black. 9.♗g5 1-0 Dresen, U (2227) – Vogel, C (2078) Hilden 2004.

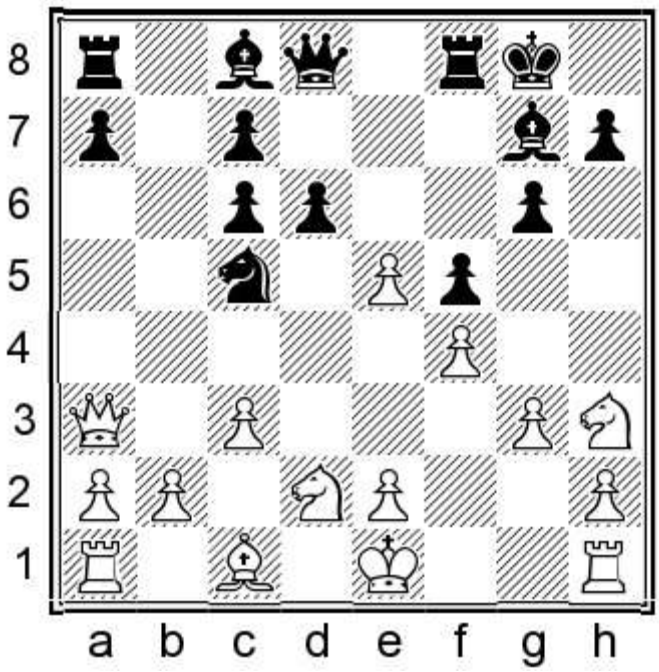
9.f3

9.f4!? d6



Position after: 9...d6

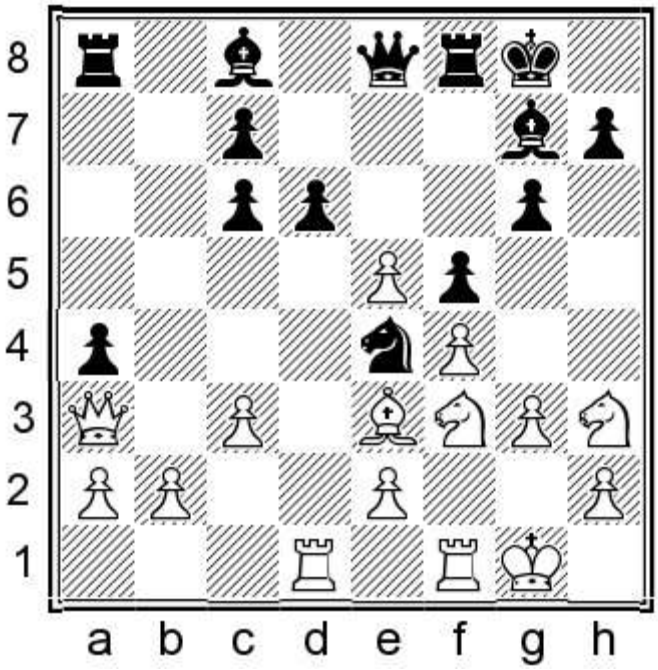
10.♘d2 [10.exd6 cxd6 11.♘g5 ♘xg5 12.fxg5 d5 13.0-0 0-0 14.♗f4 ♖e8⩲ Black can't be worse in so open a position with White having some weaknesses.] 10...♘c5 11.♕a3! [11.♕c2 dxe5 12.fxe5 ♗xe5↑ If it's so easy to regain the pawn, Black is fine. He has a damaged pawn structure, but great bishops, and White doesn't have such a great pawn structure either.] 11...0-0



Position after: 11...0-0

A) 12.0-0 This is more logical to my eyes, but it seems to be less accurate. 12...a5! 13.♘f3 a4 Trying to paralyze the white queen, which can't really move, and if it does leave its spot on a3, we will be

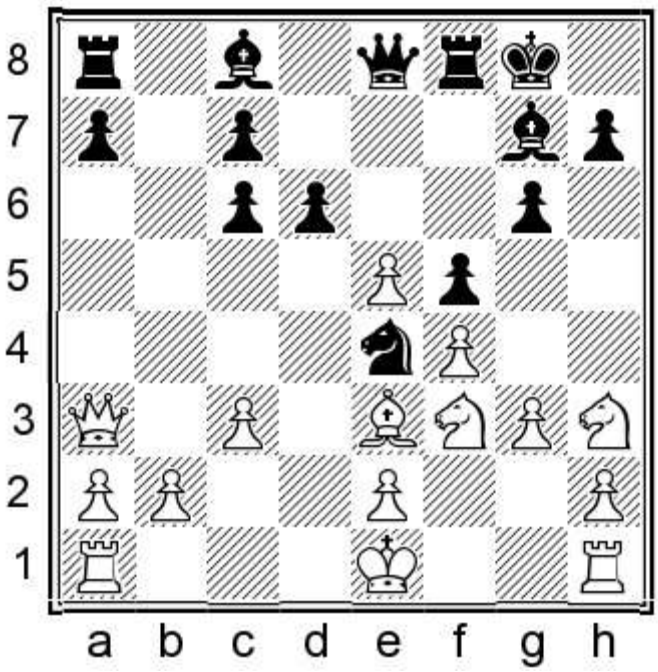
able to play ...a3, weakening the long dark-squared diagonal. 14.♗e3 ♘e4 15.♖ad1 ♕e8!



Position after: 15...♕e8!

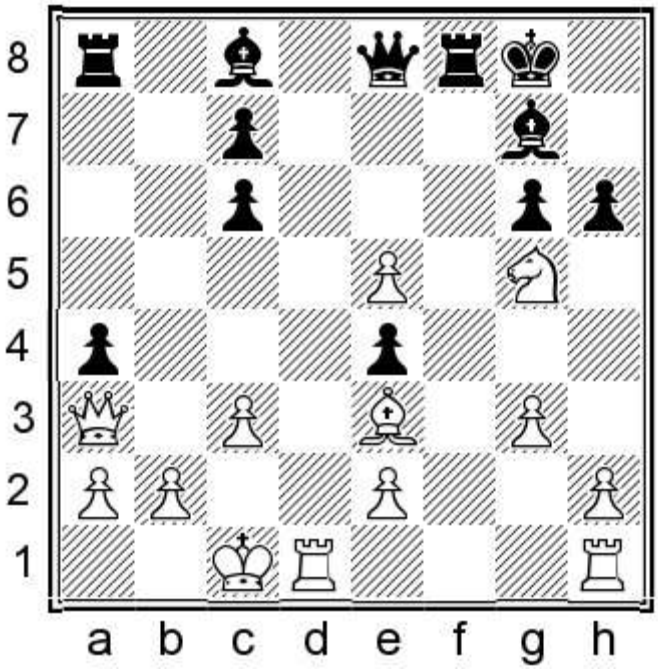
Black now has too much tactical pressure, and forces White to do something in the center. 16.exd6 [16.♘f2 ♗a6! 17.♖fe1 c5↑] 16...♘xc3 [16...cxd6 17.♗d4] 17.bxc3 ♕xe3+ 18.♖f2 ♖d8 [18...cxd6 19.♕xd6 ♕xc3 20.♘hg5 ♖a7⇄] 19.♖d3 ♕b6 20.dxc7 ♕xc7⩲

B) 12.♘f3!? Opening up the possibility of a quick ♗e3. Even if I don't believe in the likelihood of White playing 0-0-0, it prevents us from playing ...a5–a4 as we saw in 12.0-0. 12...♕e8! 13.♗e3 ♘e4



Position after: 13...♘e4

B1) 14.0-0-0 a5! 15.♘f2 a4 16.♘xe4 fxe4 17.♘g5 dxe5 18.fxe5 h6!

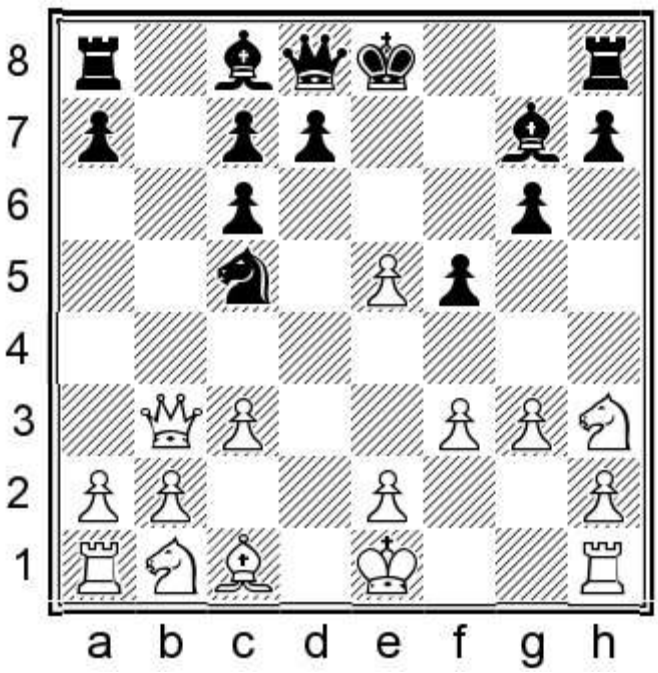


Position after: 18...h6!

19.e6□ 19...♖f5 [19...hxg5?? 20.e7 ♖f7 21.♖d8+–] 20.e7 ♗d7 21.♘h3 ♗f6=

B2) 14.0-0 Again Black enjoys very good compensation for the missing pawn. 14...a5 15.♘f2! [15.exd6 ♘xg3! 16.hxg3 ♕xe3+ 17.♔h1 cxd6 18.♕xd6 ♗e6∓] 15...a4⩱ White has many equivalent moves, but none of them seems to bring him any edge.

9...♘c5



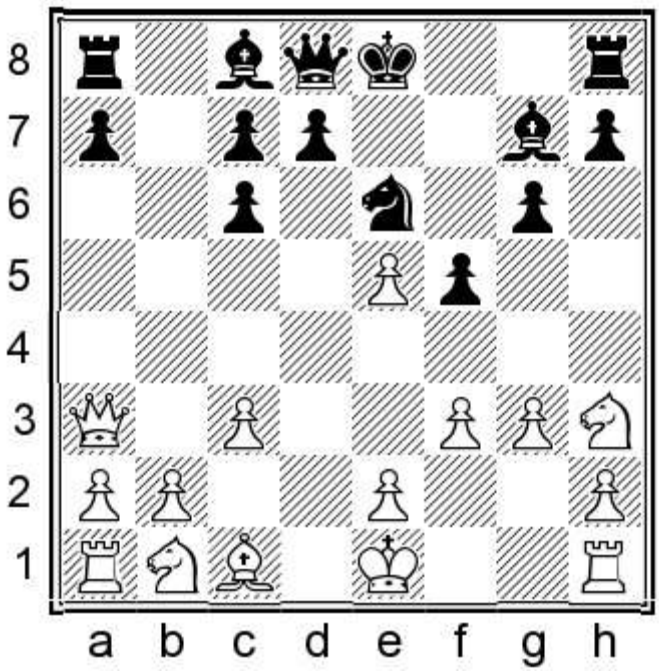
Position after: 9...♘c5

10.♕a3

10.♗g5!? This leads by force to a balanced endgame. 10...♘xb3 11.axb3 ♕xg5 12.♘xg5 ♗xe5= White might think that he's better here, for instance by pressurizing the a-pawn, but the bishop pair in an open position gives Black enough for equality.

10...♕e7!

10...♘e6?!

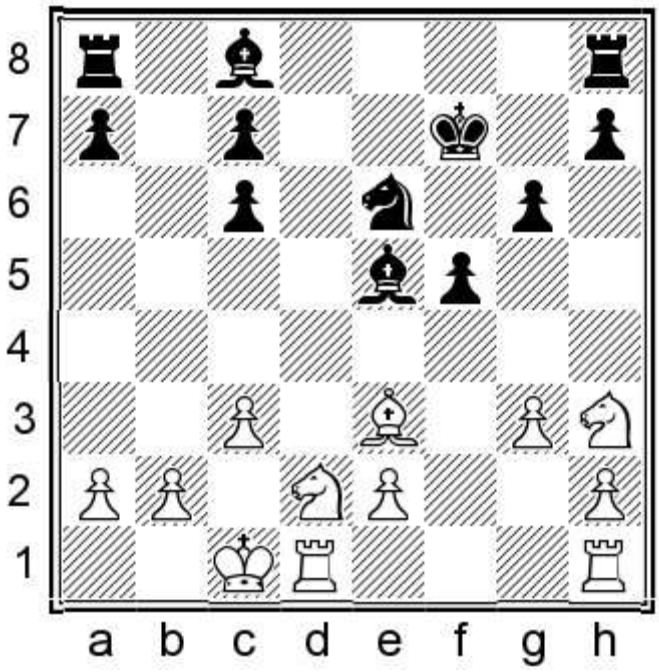


Position after: 10...♘e6?!

11.♘f4!N White gets a slight edge after this move. [11.f4? d6! 12.exd6 cxd6 13.♘d2 0-0 14.0-0 ♖e8 15.♘c4 d5 16.♘e5 ♕b6+ 17.♘f2 ♗a6∓ Black is much better, even if she didn't manage to convert in Zhukova, N (2432) – Muzychuk, M (2167), Kusadasi 2006, ½-½ (36).] 11...♕e7 [11...♗xe5 12.♘xe6 dxe6 13.♕a4±] 12.♘d3! d6 13.♗f4 c5 14.♘d2±

11.♗e3

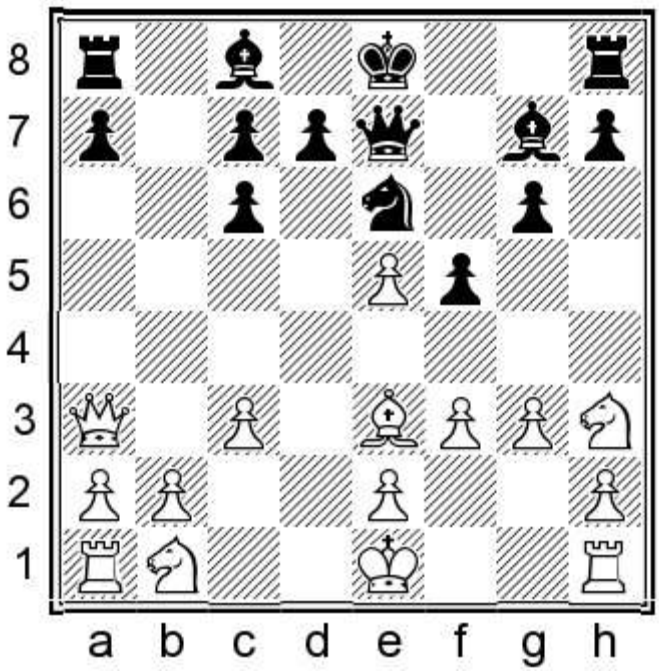
11.f4 d6 12.♗e3 ♘e6 13.♘d2 dxe5 14.♕xe7+ ♔xe7 15.fxe5 ♗xe5 16.0-0-0 ♔f7⇄



Position after: 16...♔f7⇄

Black's pawn structure is damaged, but he should be able to drum up some play quickly, e.g. by starting with ...Ba6, attacking the e-pawn, in order to force a rook to come to e1 to passively protect it.

11...♘e6



Position after: 11...♘e6

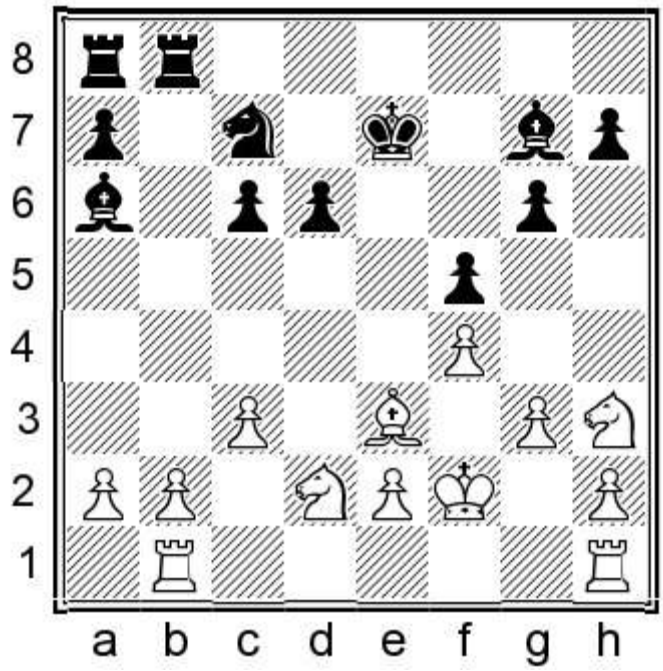
12.♕xe7+

12.f4 d6⩱ transposes to 11.f4.

12...♔xe7 13.f4 d6 14.exd6+ cxd6 15.♘d2 ♗a6!

It's very important to prevent White from playing 0-0-0. On c1, the king could be a great protector of the pawn on b2.

16.♔f2 ♖hb8 17.♖ab1 ♘c7⩱

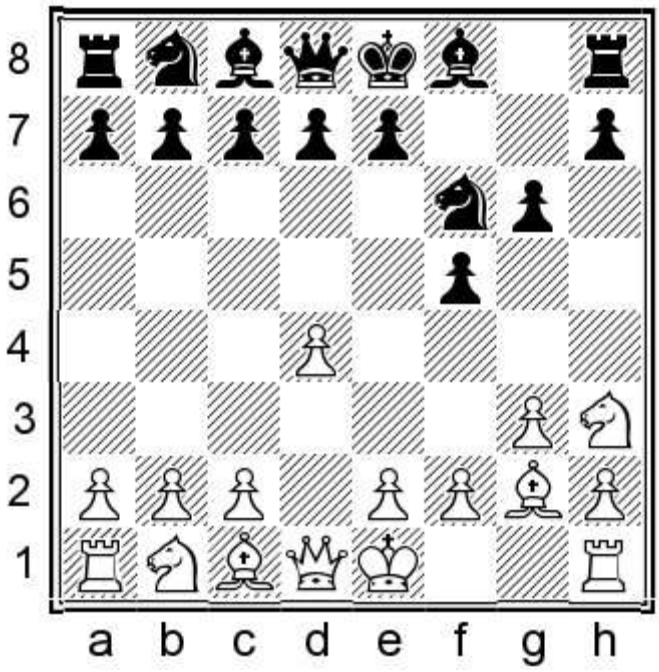


Position after: 17...♘c7⩱

The knight is heading for d5. White's task is far from easy.

h) 4.♘h3 ♗g7 5.♘f4 ♘c6 6.--

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.♘h3



Position after: 4.♘h3

This is in the same spirit as the previous line we examined with 4.c3. The knight doesn't want to bother the bishop on g2, so looks at the f4-square, from where it has good control over some important squares, especially d5 and e6 obviously, but it shouldn't be underestimated that it also keeps an eye on g6. In addition it could lend weight to a future h4−h5. On the other hand it doesn't control the e5-square, and this prompts us to try to reply with ...e5 at some point. I have tried to keep this in mind in the lines I have chosen.

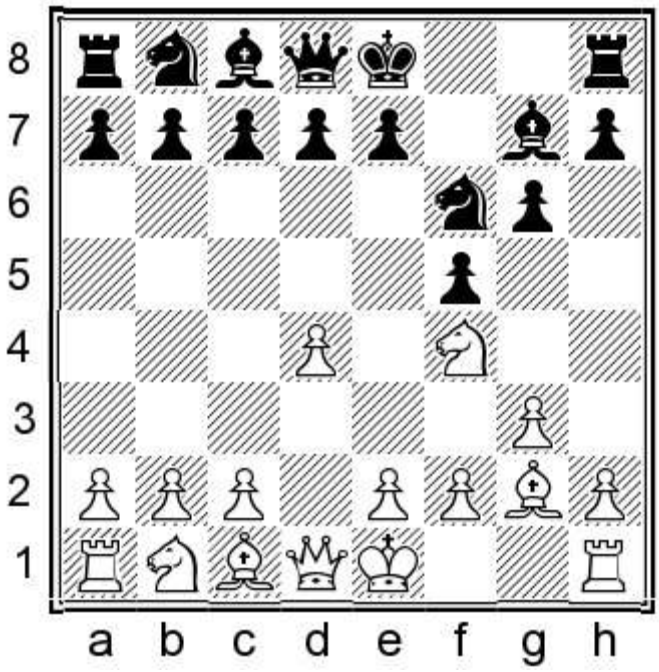
4...♗g7

4...d6!? is the other interesting move order. Black tries to prevent ♘f4 by threatening ...e5. White generally plays 5.d5, and play is quite different from the present chapter.

5.♘f4

A) 5.c3 ♘c6 transposes to the previous subchapter with 5.♘h3.

B) 5.0-0 is not in the spirit of the position. At best for White it will transpose to a reasonable version of the last subchapter of this chapter.



Position after: 5.♘f4

5...♘c6!

Black wants to reply with ...e5 as soon as he can. From e5, the knight will protect the g6-pawn (always useful in case of h4−h5), and it will be very hard for White to dislodge it, as the main square to attack it (with a pawn or the c1-bishop) is f4, a square that the knight doesn't want to leave any time soon.

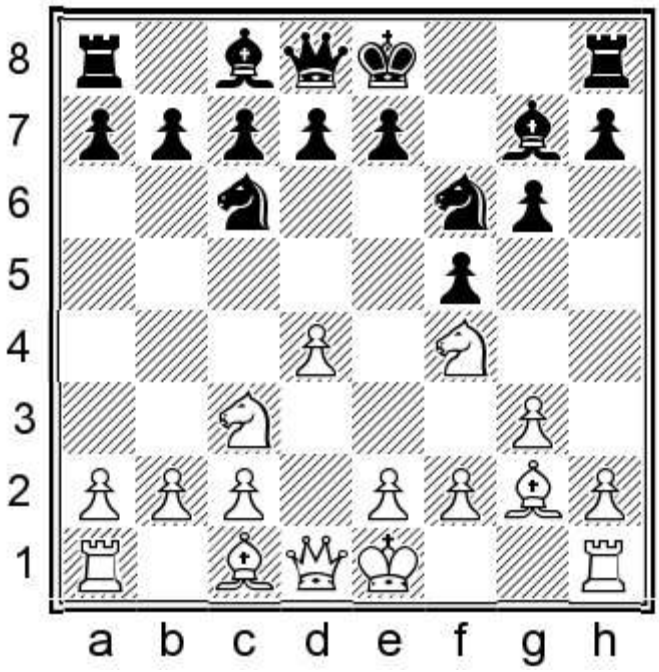
A) 5...0-0? This innocent move is very compromising. White gets a lot of play on the h-file and against the g6-pawn: 6.h4! d6 7.c3! c6 8.h5! g5 9.h6! ♗h8 10.♘h3 g4 11.♘g5±.

B) 5...g5?! The concept of chasing the knight fails very quickly: 6.♘d3 h6 7.h4! g4 8.♘f4±.

6.h4!?

White follows his plan with this move, but recently it has been played less than 6.d5, which we will consider in the next subchapters.

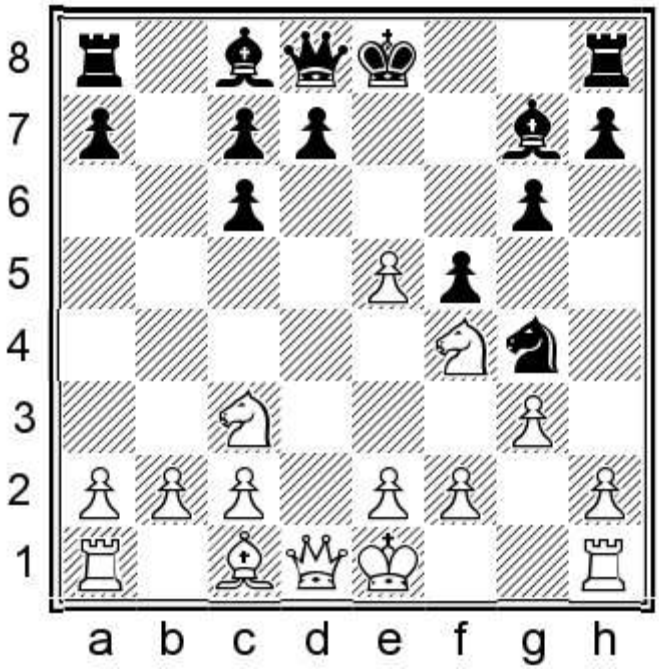
6.♘c3



Position after: 6.♘c3

In general, the knight is badly placed in front of the c-pawn. If Black manages to play ...d5, White won't be able to challenge it with c4, and I don't see how he can reasonably prevent it. 6...e5!

A) 7.♗xc6?! bxc6! 8.dxe5 ♘g4!

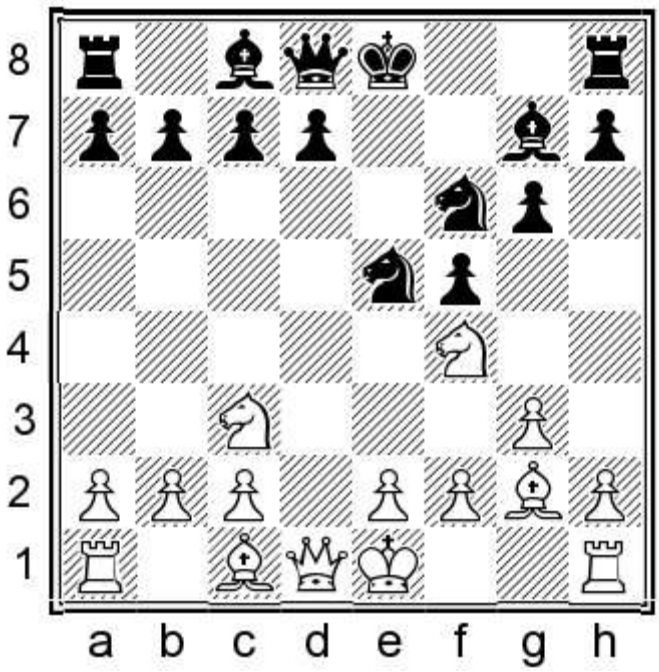


Position after: 8...♘g4!

I don't really understand White's point. His extra pawn is doomed, and he has given up his important fianchettoed bishop.

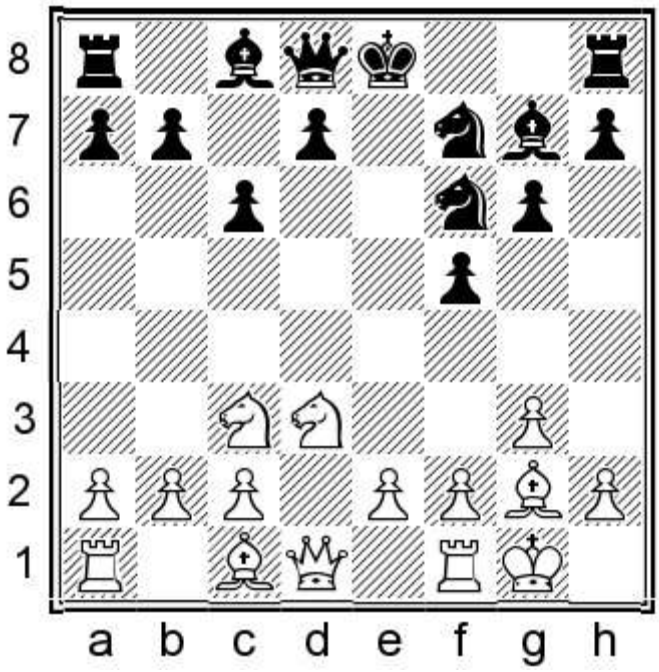
9.e4?! [9.e6! was a lesser evil, but Black is fine anyway: 9...d6! 10.0-0 ♘e5 11.♗e3 0-0∓.] 9...♘xe5 10.exf5 ♗a6 11.♘d3 ♕f6∓ Black is much better and scored a quick win in Plischki, S (2398) – Laznicka, V (2657), Pardubice 2015, 0-1 (18).

B) 7.dxe5 ♘xe5



Position after: 7...♘xe5

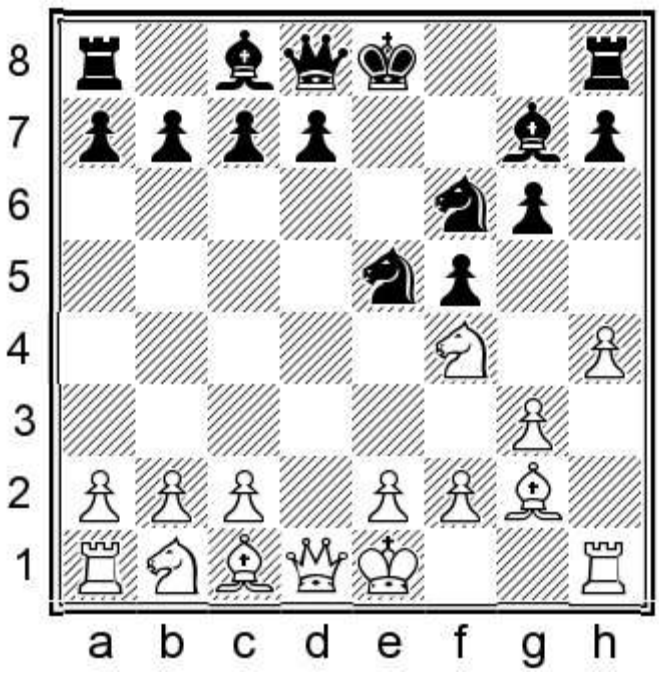
8.0-0 [8.h4 − see the 6.h4 line with 8.♘h3; 8.e4?! fxe4 9.♘xe4 ♘xe4 10.♗xe4 c6! 11.0-0 d5 − we will analyze this position with e4 delayed.] 8...c6! This forces White to make a decision, because it's his last chance to play e4. 9.♘d3 [9.e4? is tempting, but it doesn't solve all the problems, as Black keeps a very comfortable position. 9...fxe4 10.♘xe4 ♘xe4 11.♗xe4 d5 12.♗g2 0-0∓] 9...♘f7



Position after: 9...♘f7

10.b3!?N [10.♗e3 ♘g4!?N 11.♗f4 d5 12.h3 ♘f6∓; 10.e4 fxe4 11.♘xe4 ♘xe4 12.♗xe4 d5 13.♗g2 0-0∓] 10...0-0 11.♗b2 d5 12.e3⇄ The computer claims that this position is balanced. In general I agree, but I like Black's space advantage.

6...e5! 7.dxe5 ♘xe5

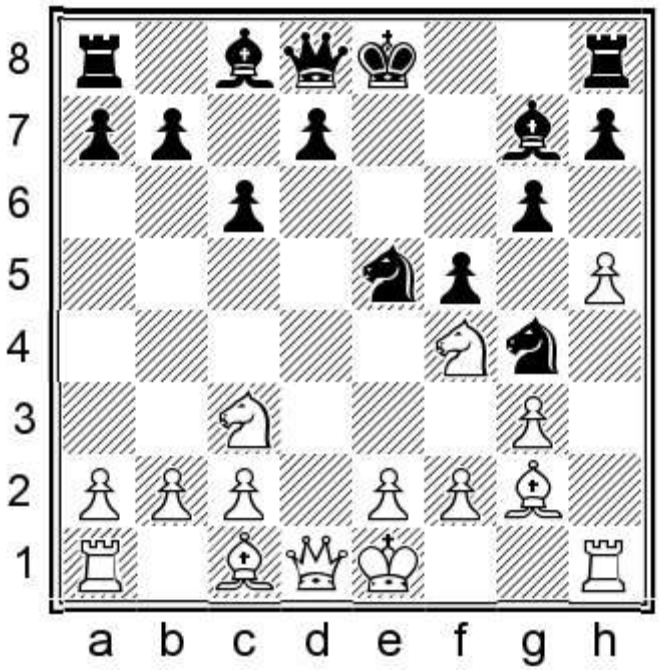


Position after: 7...♘xe5

The situation has changed. Black has managed to free himself in the center and protects the g6-pawn as it's very hard for White to get rid of the knight on e5 as long as his knight is on f4.

8.h5

8.♘c3 This position may also arise via the 6.♘c3 move order. As in many 1.d4 systems, I think it's very committal to place the knight in front of the c-pawn, something I'm not fond of. 8...c6 9.h5 [9.♕d6N At least White is trying to do something, but we can chase the invader: 9...♘f7 10.♕a3 d6∓.] 9...♘fg4!?



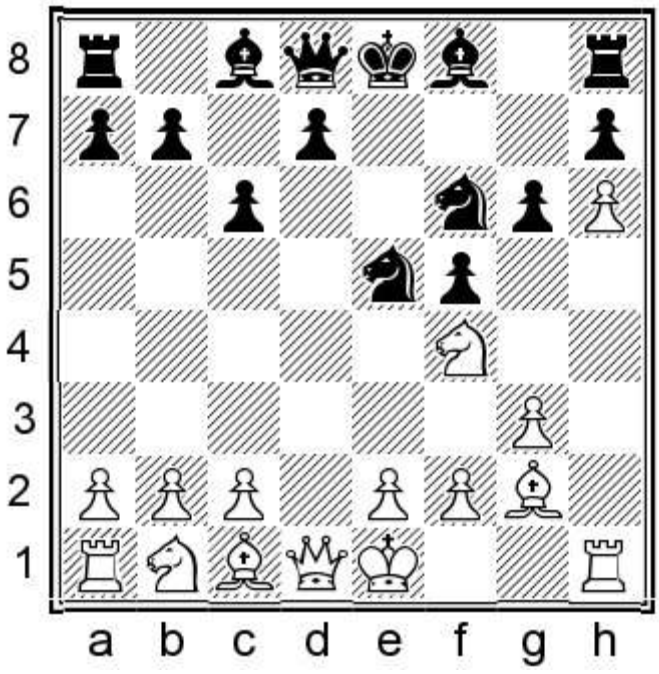
Position after: 9...♘fg4!?

An interesting idea to prevent h6. It can also be mentioned that ...♕b6 might be a threat which will force White to make a concession in order to protect the f2-pawn. 10.f3 [10.hxg6 hxg6 11.♖xh8+ ♗xh8 12.♕d6 ♗f6!∓ 13.f3? ♕b6! 14.fxg4 ♕g1+ 15.♗f1 ♕xg3+ 16.♔d1 ♘xg4∓ White is in huge trouble, especially since Black also has the vicious threat of ...g5 to win his piece back.] 10...♘h6 11.hxg6 hxg6 12.♘d3 ♘hf7 13.♖xh8+ ♗xh8∓ Black will follow with ...d5 on the next move and is just slightly better.

8...c6!

8...♘fg4?! works less well this time: 9.hxg6 hxg6 10.♖xh8+ ♗xh8 11.♕d5±.

9.h6 ♗f8

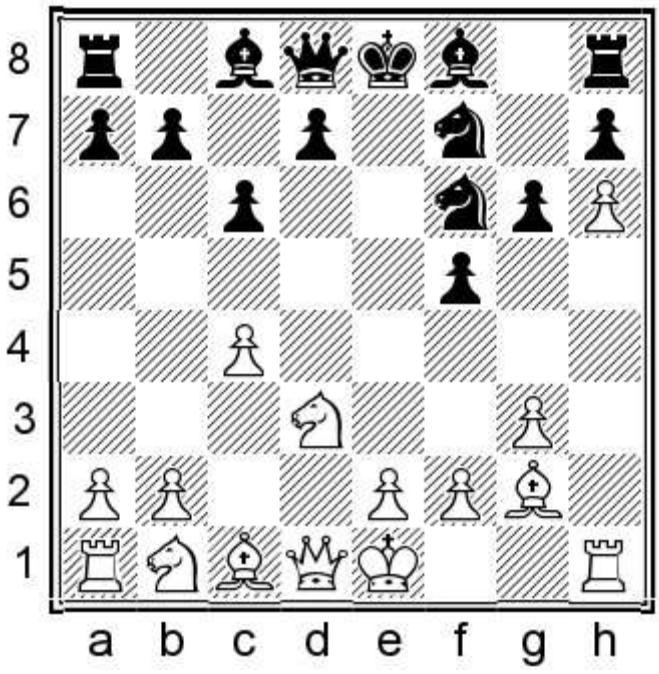


Position after: 9...♗f8

When White manages to force ...♗f8 with the advance of his h-pawn, it's usually a great achievement. The difference here is that White doesn't have great development, for instance the knight on f4 blocks the protection of the h6-pawn by the c1-bishop, and the bishop on g2 is clearly attacking a rock on c6. Our plan is now to get rid of this annoying pawn if we can.

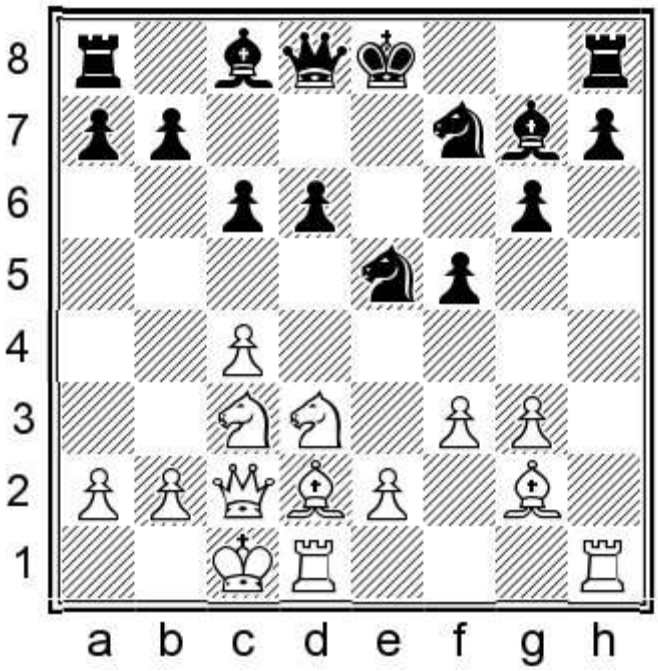
10.♕d4!?

10.♘d3?! I think this move just helps Black to attack the h6-pawn. 10...♘f7 11.c4



Position after: 11.c4

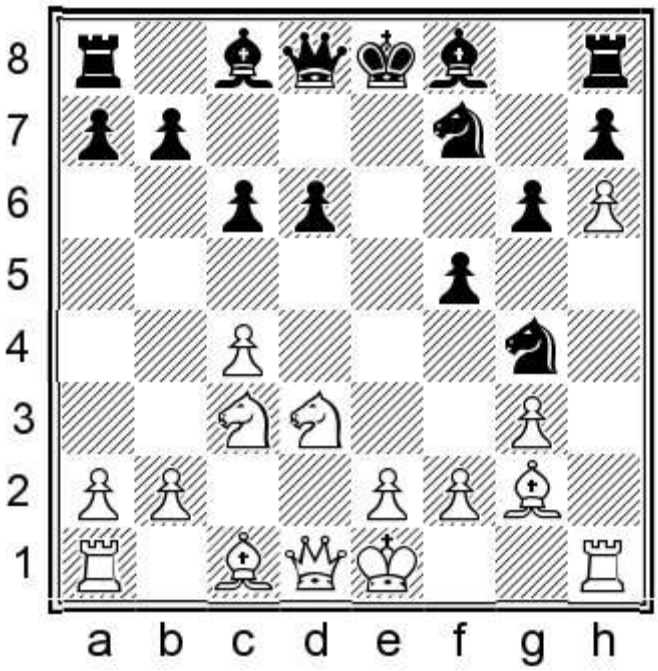
A) 11...♘g8 This looks neither very different nor bad, as the idea is the same, but it's a little less active and less flexible. 12.♘c3?! [12.♗e3! This makes a major difference with 11...♘g4. 12...♘gxh6 13.♗d4 ♖g8 14.♘d2↑] 12...♘gxh6 13.♕c2 ♗g7 14.♗d2 d6 15.0-0-0 ♘g4 16.f3 ♘ge5∓



Position after: 16...♘ge5∓

As White didn't exploit the bad position of the knight, Black has got a similar version of 11...♘g4 and a good position. Lysyj, I (2635) – Kotsur, P (2559), Moscow 2011, 0-1 (55).

B) 11...♘g4!N 12.♘c3 d6



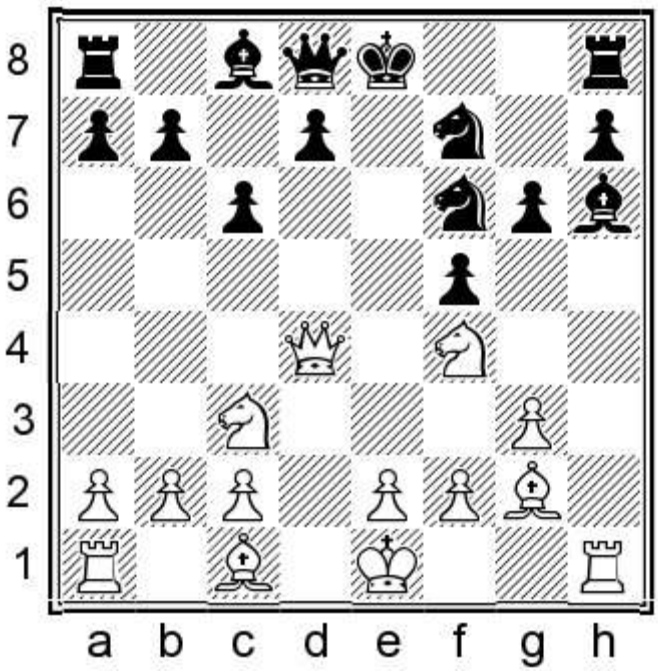
Position after: 12...d6

13.♕c2 [13.e4 ♗xh6 14.♗xh6 ♘gxh6 15.♕e2 0-0 16.0-0-0 ♘g4∓] 13...♘gxh6 14.b3 ♗g7 15.♗b2 0-0 16.0-0-0 ♘g4∓ The use of the rook on the h-file doesn't fully compensate for the missing pawn.

10...♘f7N

Only 10...♕e7 has been tried before, but I think Black should try to get rid of the h6-pawn as soon as possible, as it is the reason why our development is still difficult.

11.♘c3 ♗xh6!



Position after: 11...♗xh6!

This isn't forced, but there are no tactics to refute it.

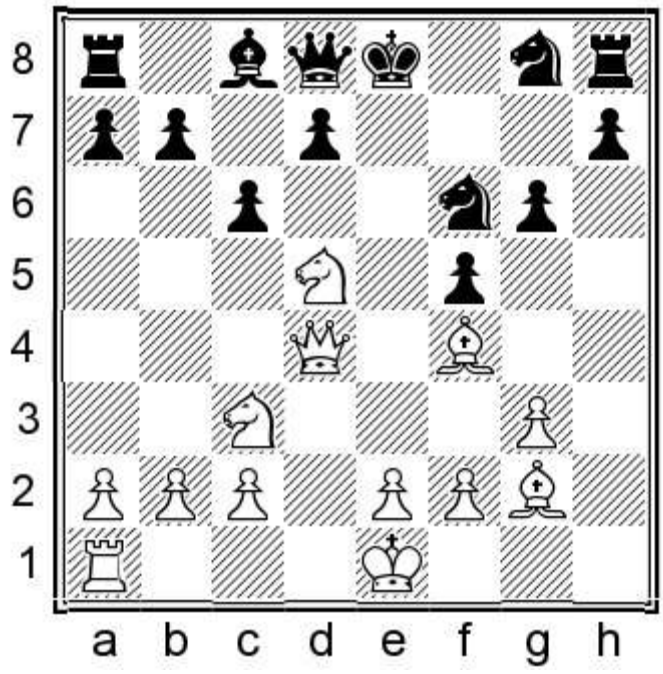
12.♖xh6!

The best try, and the start of a very interesting line where White always remains some material down, but tries to strangle Black.

A) 12.♕e3+ ♔f8 13.b3 ♗g7 14.♗b2 d5 15.0-0-0 ♕d6∓ Our center is strong, and White can't show enough compensation for the pawn.

B) 12.♘h5 ♘xh5 13.♗xh6 ♕b6 14.♗g7 ♕xd4 15.♗xd4 0-0∓

12...♘xh6 13.♘fd5! ♘hg8 14.♗f4!



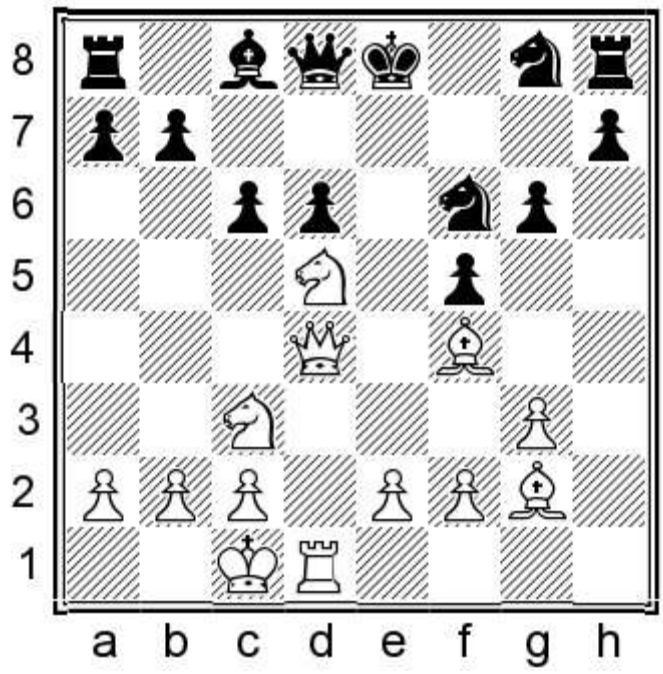
Position after: 14.♗f4!

A very nice concept by White.

14...d6!

It's very important to prevent ♗d6, otherwise we will get no play at all.
14...cxd5 15.♗d6 ♔f7 16.♘xd5±

15.0-0-0!



Position after: 15.0-0-0!

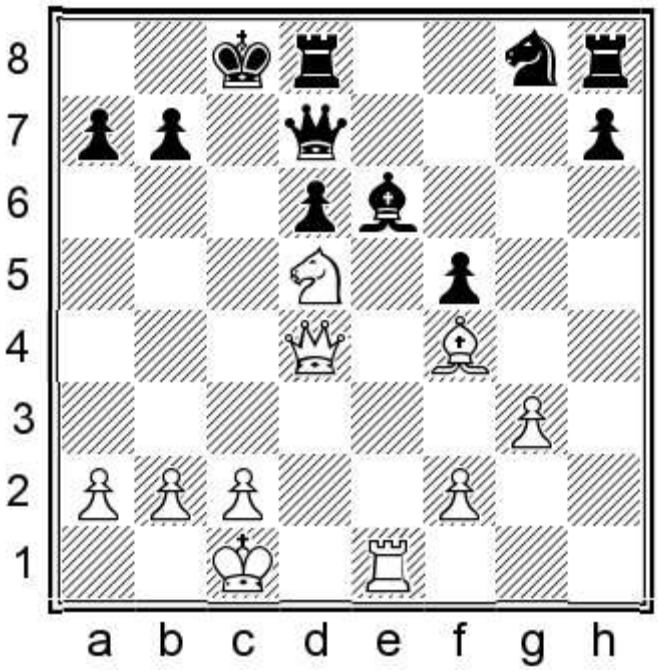
The most challenging continuation.

15.♘e3 d5 16.0-0-0 ♗e6 17.♘a4 ♕e7 18.c4 ♔f7 19.cxd5 ♗xd5 20.♘xd5 cxd5 21.♗xd5+ ♘xd5 22.♕xh8 ♖c8+=

15...♗e6 16.e4!

Basically, White couldn't find such a line over the board, so he has to be in his prep if he plays something like this.

16...cxd5 17.exf5! gxf5 18.♖e1 ♕d7 19.♗xd5 ♘xd5 20.♘xd5 0-0-0



Position after: 20...0-0-0

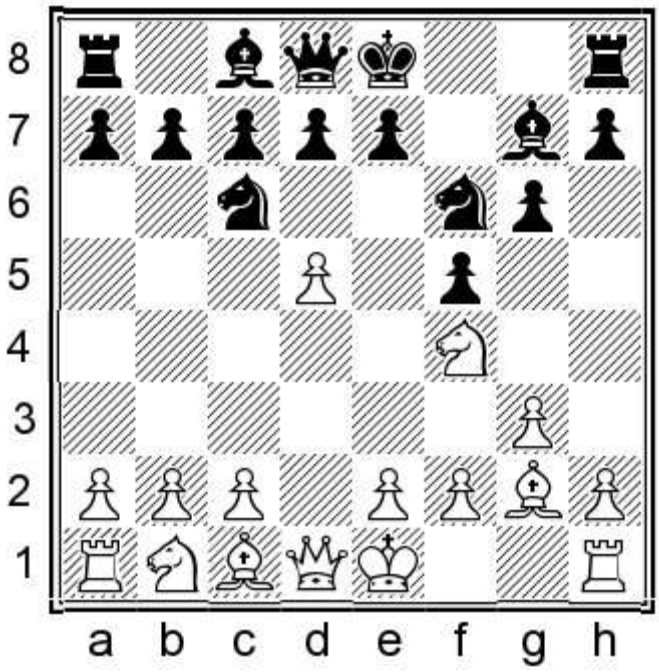
21.♖xe6

21.♕c3+!? ♕c6 22.♖xe6 ♕xc3 23.♘xc3 h6! 24.♘b5 ♔d7 25.♖xd6+ ♔e7=

21...♕xe6 22.♕c4+ ♔d7 23.♕b5+ ♔c8 24.♕c4+=

i) 4.♘h3 ♗g7 5.♘f4 ♘c6 6.d5

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.♘h3 ♗g7 5.♘f4 ♘c6! 6.d5



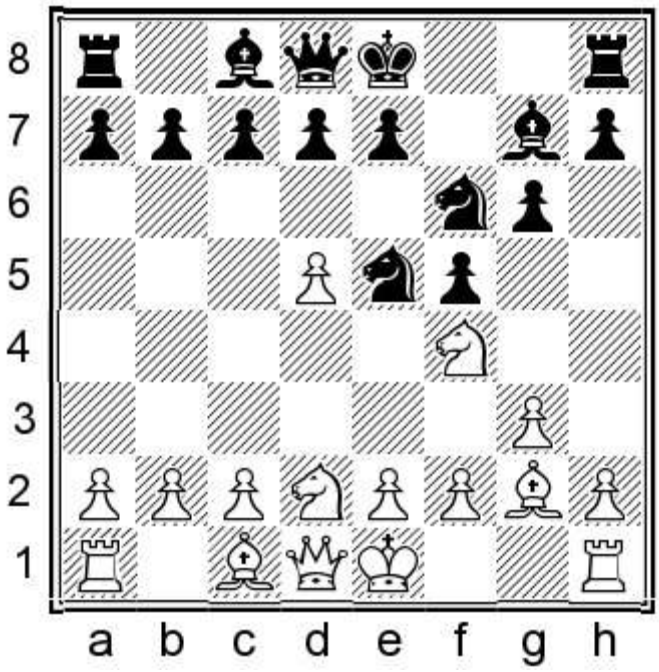
Position after: 6.d5

This move is the only decent way to prevent ...e5, but it doesn't stop the knight from coming to that square, so play is sometimes very similar, except that it is more closed, as no pawns have been traded.

6...♘e5 7.♘c3

This is the most sensible continuation. White defends his central pawn better, and prepares to bring the e-pawn into play.

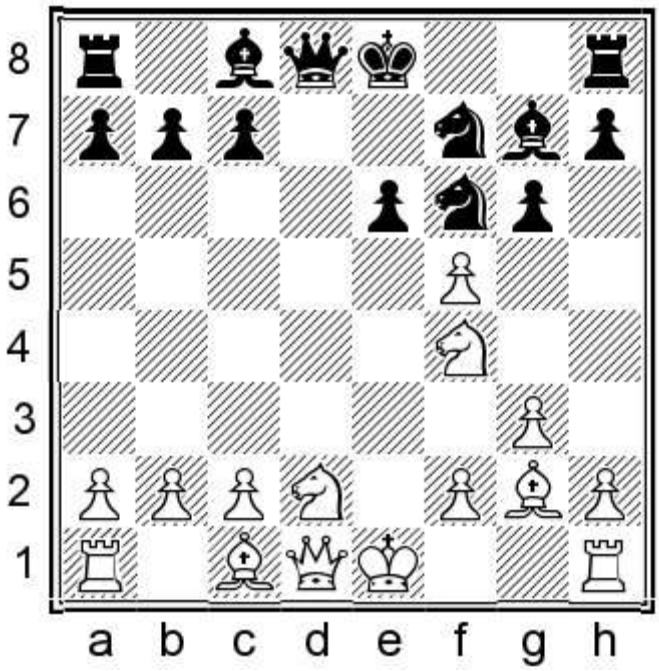
A) 7.♘d2!?



Position after: 7.♘d2!?

This is considerably less played than 7.♘c3, probably because the knight seems less active on this square and doesn't control the d5-square, but it's actually quite decent.

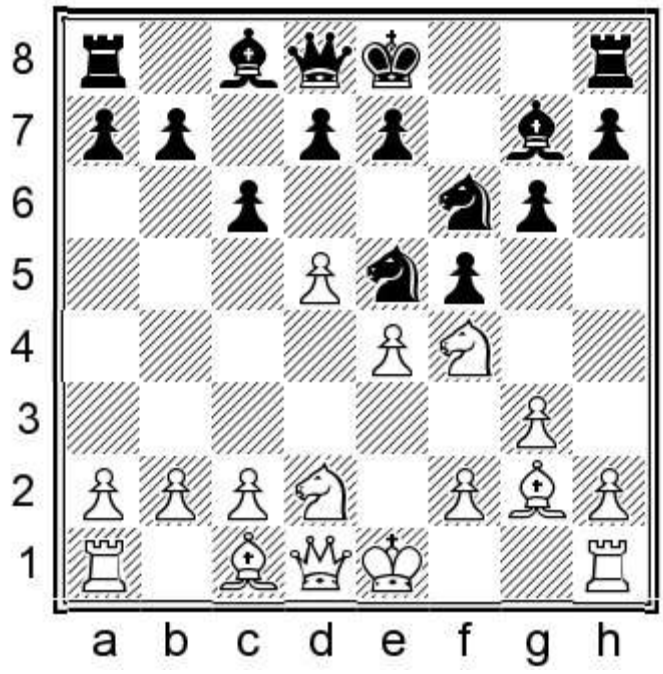
A1) 7...♘f7 has been played by a couple of strong players, but I like it less, mainly because it's not in the spirit of our other selected variations. 8.e4! [8.0-0 e6 9.dxe6 dxe6 10.♘c4 0-0 11.♕xd8 ♖xd8= Black is doing fine, and the more experienced player went on to win in Demidov, M (2523) – Kamsky, G (2676), Sochi 2017, 0-1 (56).] 8...e5!? 9.dxe6 dxe6 10.exf5



Position after: 10.exf5

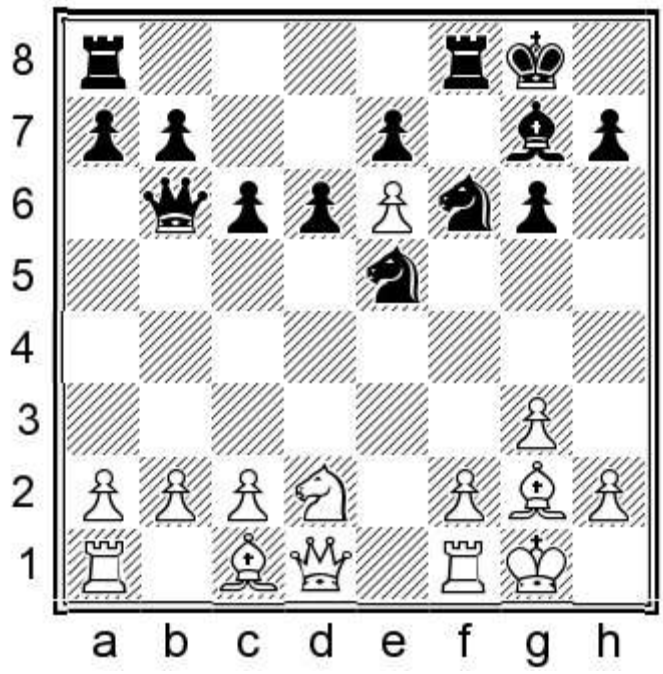
10...gxf5!N Taking back with this pawn is probably more dynamic, but I think White keeps a slightly better position. [10...exf5 11.♕e2+ ♕e7 12.♕xe7+ ♔xe7 13.0-0± Black managed to win, but for the time being he is clearly worse. Berend, F (2350) – Bauer, C (2520), Metz 1998, 0-1 (60).] 11.0-0 e5 12.♘d3 0-0⇄

A2) 7...c6 8.e4



Position after: 8.e4

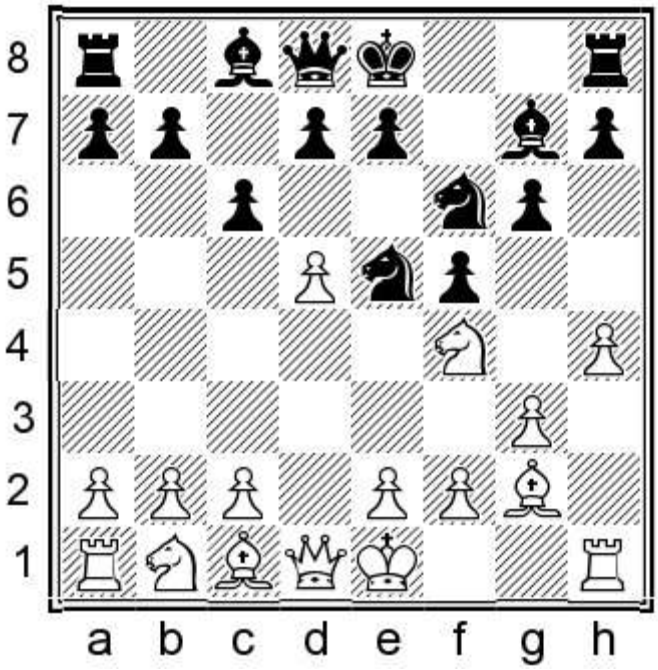
8...d6!? In order to play fully in the same spirit. [8...fxe4 9.♘xe4 As we will see in the 7.♘c3 line, this is a slightly worse version than what we want to obtain.] 9.exf5 [9.0-0 0-0 10.exf5 ♗xf5 11.♘e6 ♗xe6 12.dxe6 amounts to the same.] 9...♗xf5 10.♘e6 [≤ 10.♘b3 0-0 11.0-0 ♗g4! 12.f3 ♗d7↑] 10...♗xe6 11.dxe6 0-0 12.0-0 ♕b6⇄



Position after: 12...♕b6⇄

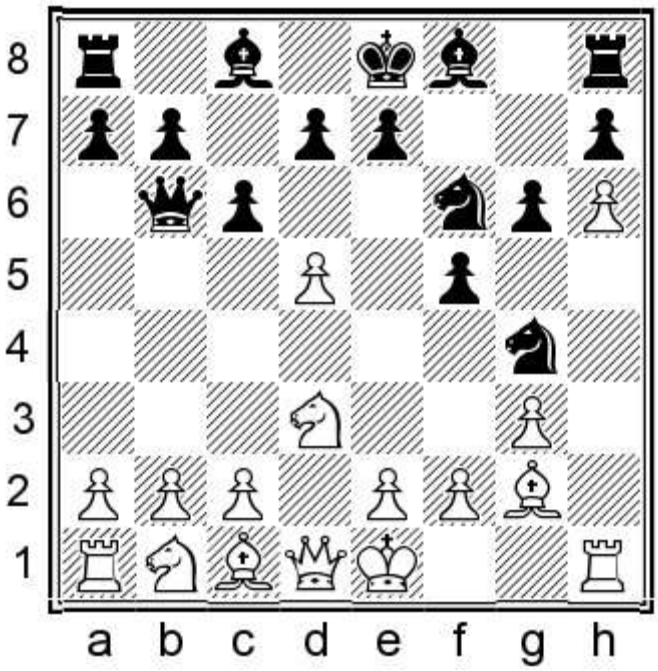
White has gained the bishop pair, but Black's pieces are active. The outcome of the game will depend on Black's ability to maintain his activity.

B) 7.h4 c6



Position after: 7...c6

8.h5 [8.♘c3 − see 7.♘c3 c6 8.h4] 8...♕b6!? 9.h6?! [9.♗e3!? ♕xb2 10.♗d4 ♕b4+ 11.c3 ♕d6⩱ This position is very complicated. White still needs to prove his compensation.] 9...♘eg4! 10.♘d3! [10.hxg7?? ♕xf2+ 11.♔d2 ♕e3+ 12.♔e1 ♕xg3+ 13.♔d2 ♕xf4+ 14.♔c3 ♕e5+ 15.♔b3 ♖g8–+] 10...♗f8



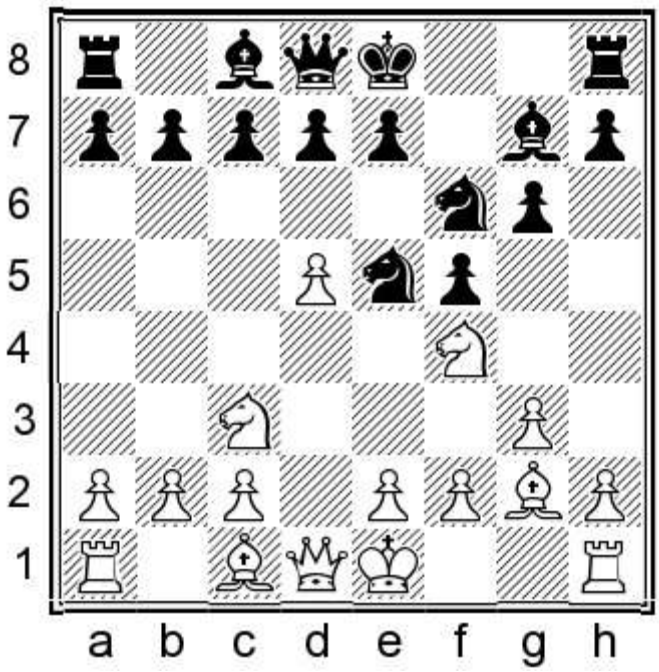
Position after: 10...♗f8

Our bishop is back on f8, but that is White's only achievement. The rest of his position is pretty alarming.

B1) 11.c4 e5! 12.dxe6 dxe6 13.f3 [13.♘c3?! e5!∓] 13...♘e3 14.♗xe3 ♕xe3 15.♕d2 ♕xd2+ 16.♘xd2 e5! 17.♘xe5 ♗e6⩱

B2) 11.♘c3 cxd5 12.♗xd5! Sadly for White, giving up the bishop is the only solution to get the pawn back. [12.♘xd5?? ♘xd5 13.♗xd5 ♕a5+–+] 12...♘xd5 13.♘xd5 ♕c6 14.♘3f4 e6 15.f3 ♘e5 16.♘c3 b6∓

C) 7.0-0 c6 8.♘c3 is just another move order to 7.0-0 c6 8.♘c3.



Position after: 7.♘c3

7...c6!

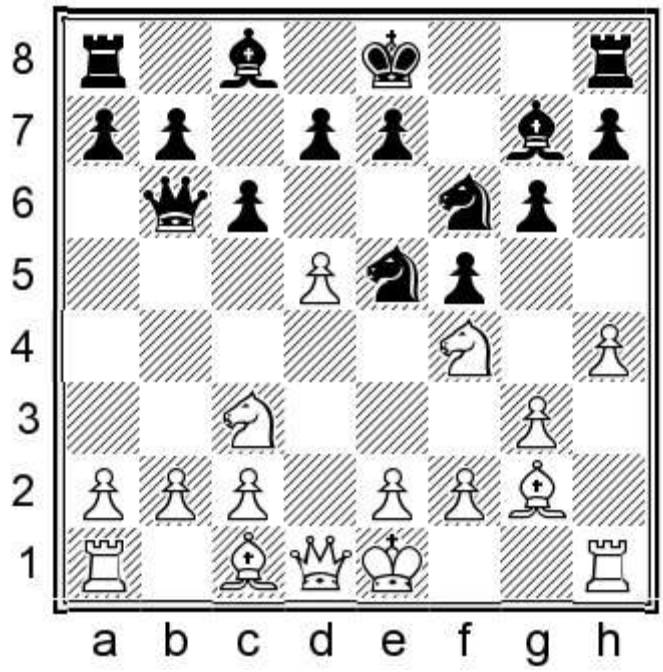
In this opening Black should keep in mind that activity is very important. Trying to get rid of the d5-pawn is the first priority in the position.

7...0-0 Again it is slightly inaccurate to start by castling because White can seize the initiative on the kingside with 8.h4 c6 9.h5↑.

8.h4

We will consider 8.e4 in the next subchapter.

8...♕b6!?N

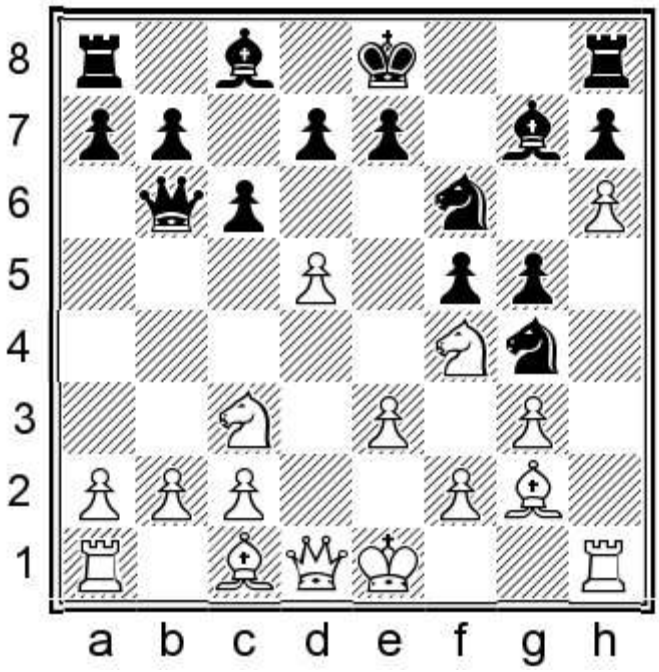


Position after: 8...♕b6!?N

Black had many moves at his disposal, but I preferred this one. For instance, he had already tried 8...♘f7, which is a very decent alternative, but the idea of attacking the f2-pawn, in order to encourage White to castle or play e3 (in both cases stopping the action of one the white piece), seems promising and original.

9.♗e3

The most challenging move, making no concessions. White encourages his opponent to grab the 'poisoned pawn' in order to take over the initiative. 9.h5?! This move falls in exactly with Black's idea. 9...♘eg4! 10.e3 [10.0-0?! e5! 11.dxe6 dxe6 12.hxg6 e5! 13.♘h3 hxg6∓] 10...g5! 11.h6!



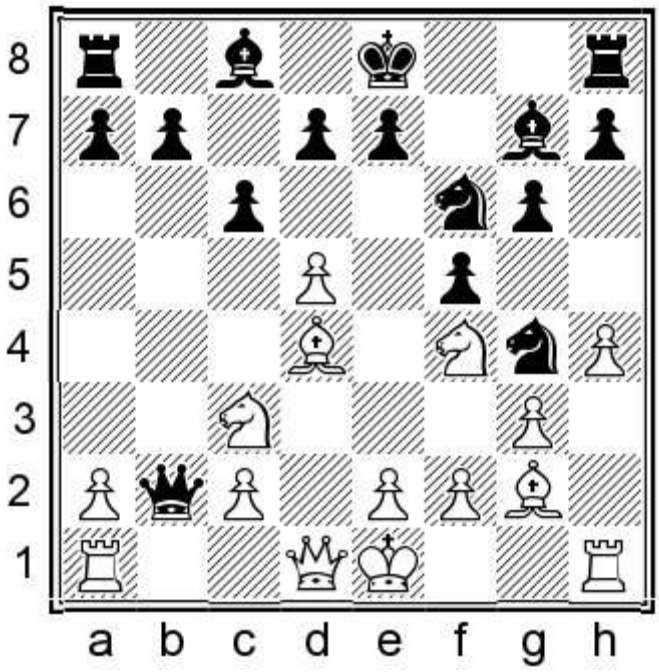
Position after: 11.h6!

Otherwise Black will play ...h6 and have no problems at all. 11...♘xh6 12.♘h5 ♘xh5 13.♕xh5+ ♘f7∓ Black has some pressure to handle, but he is quite safe and has an extra pawn.

9...♕xb2!

Of course we came here in the frame of mind to take it.

10.♗d4! ♘eg4

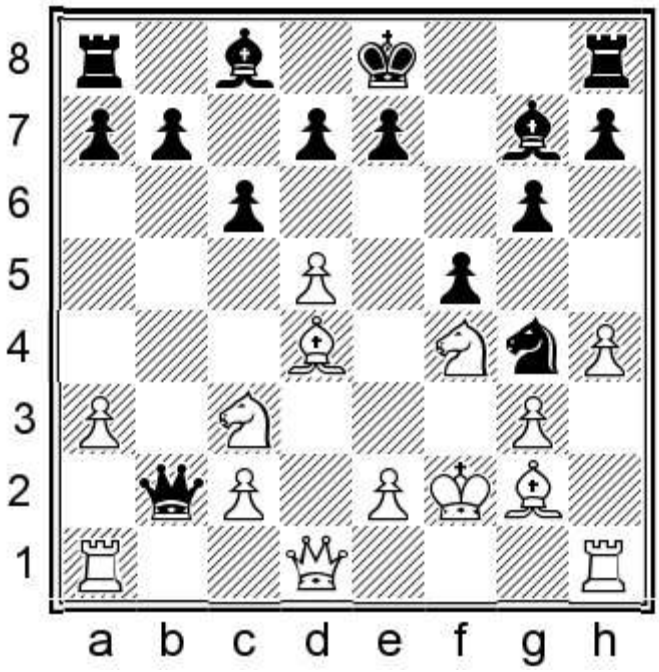


Position after: 10...♘eg4

Now many moves are possible for White, but Black seems to hold in every variation.

11.e4

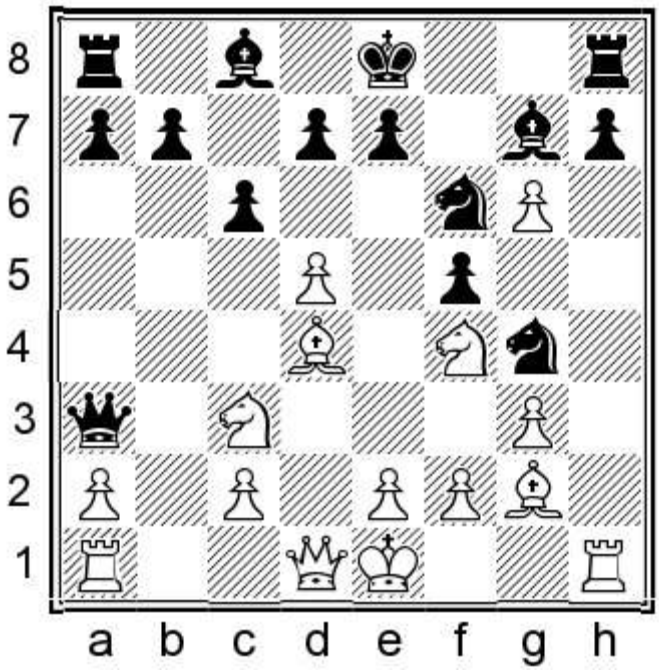
A) 11.a3!? A nasty move, trying to trap the queen with ♘d3 or ♖a2. 11...♘xf2! 12.♔xf2 ♘g4+



Position after: 12...♘g4+

13.♔f3□ [13.♔e1? This fails painfully due to 13...♕xc3+! 14.♗xc3 ♗xc3+ 15.♔f1 ♘e3+ 16.♔f2 ♘xd1+ 17.♖axd1 e5–+.] 13...♘e5+ 14.♔e3 ♘g4+ 15.♔f3=

B) 11.h5 This seems a bit 'off topic', as it's now far from the action. 11...♕a3 [11...c5!? 12.♘d3 ♕a3 13.♘xc5 b6 14.♘b3 ♗a6⇄] 12.hxg6



Position after: 12.hxg6

12...e5! 13.dxe6 dxe6→ Black is threatening ...e5, and White is struggling to parry it.

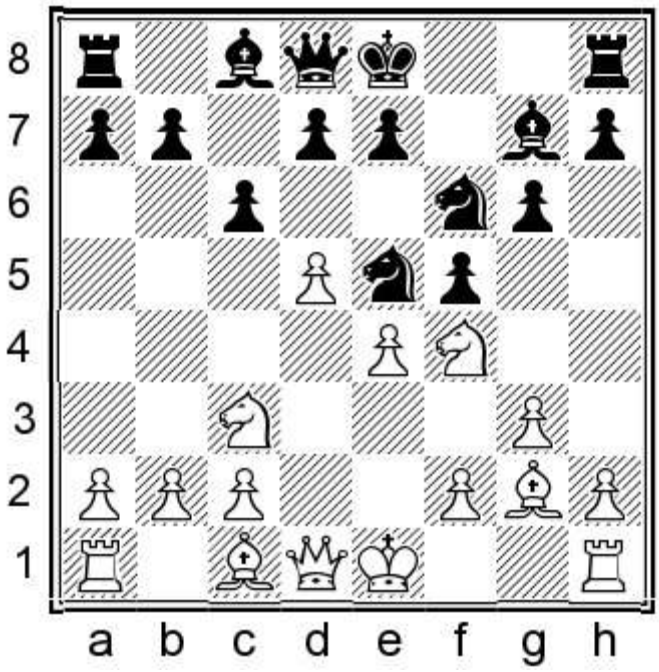
C) 11.0-0?! gives Black time to reorganize himself: 11...♕a3 12.e4 0-0 13.exf5 gxf5 14.f3 ♘e3! 15.♗xe3 ♕xc3 16.♗d4 ♕a5∓.

11...♕a3! 12.e5 ♘xd5 13.♘cxd5 cxd5 14.♘xd5 0-0!∞

Black is a pawn up, and the e5-pawn is under attack. In compensation, White's pieces are very well centralized and coordinated. This is pretty complicated!

j) 4.♘h3 ♗g7 5.♘f4 ♘c6 6.d5 (8.e4)

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.♘h3 ♗g7 5.♘f4 ♘c6! 6.d5 ♘e5 7.♘c3 c6! 8.e4



Position after: 8.e4

This is the most played move. It's the logical continuation after 7.♘c3, so it's no real surprise.

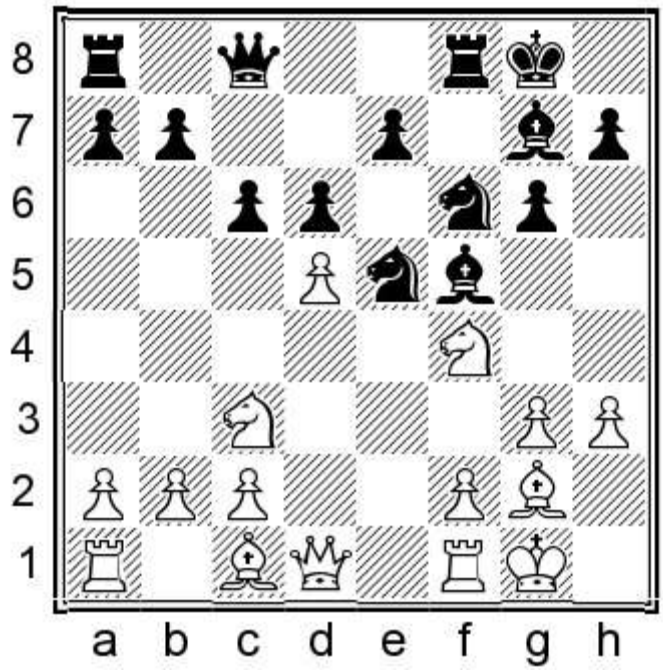
8...d6!

It's always hard to play this kind of waiting move when there is so much tension in the center. That's probably why it has been played less than 8...fxe4, but I think it's simply stronger.

8...fxe4?! This is probably inferior because opening the position favors White here. 9.♘xe4 ♘xe4 [9...♘xd5 10.♘xd5 cxd5 11.♕xd5± e6? 12.♘d6+ ♔f8 13.♕c5+–] 10.♗xe4 cxd5 11.♗xd5 e6 12.♗g2 0-0 13.0-0±

9.0-0

9.exf5 ♗xf5 10.h3 0-0 11.0-0 ♕c8!?N

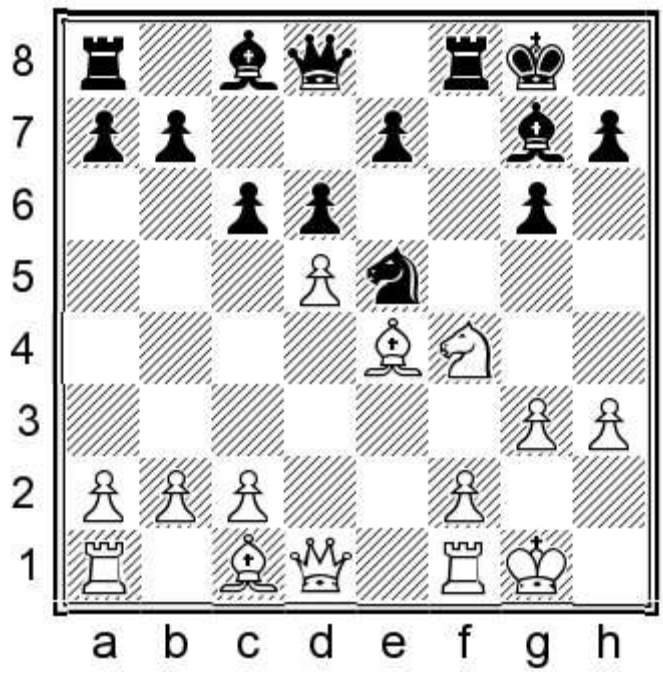


Position after: 11...♕c8!?N

I like the idea of forcing White to commit himself on the kingside. 12.g4 ♗d7 13.♖e1 ♔h8=

9...0-0 10.exf5

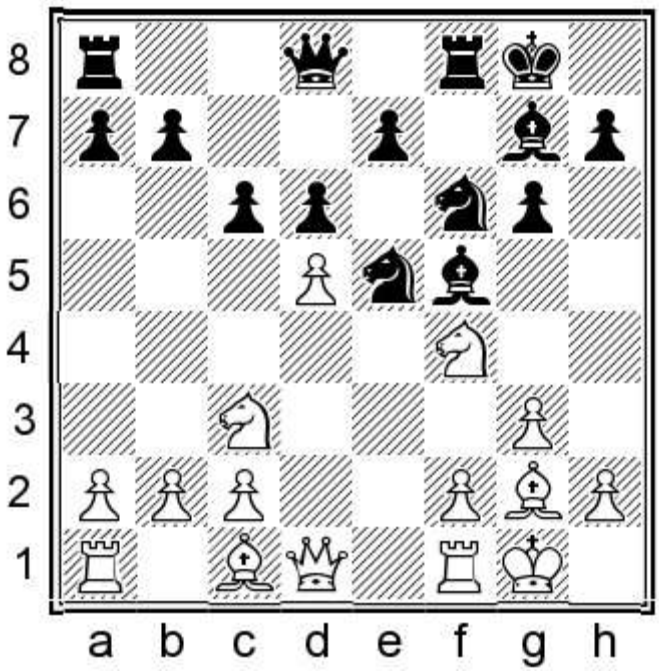
10.h3?! Believing that Black is unable to do anything in the center, and that he is waiting, is just a dream. 10...fxe4 11.♘xe4 ♘xe4 12.♗xe4



Position after: 12.♗xe4

12...e6! A very nice way to take full control of the center. 13.♘xe6 ♗xe6 14.dxe6 d5 15.♗g2 ♕f6↑

10...♗xf5



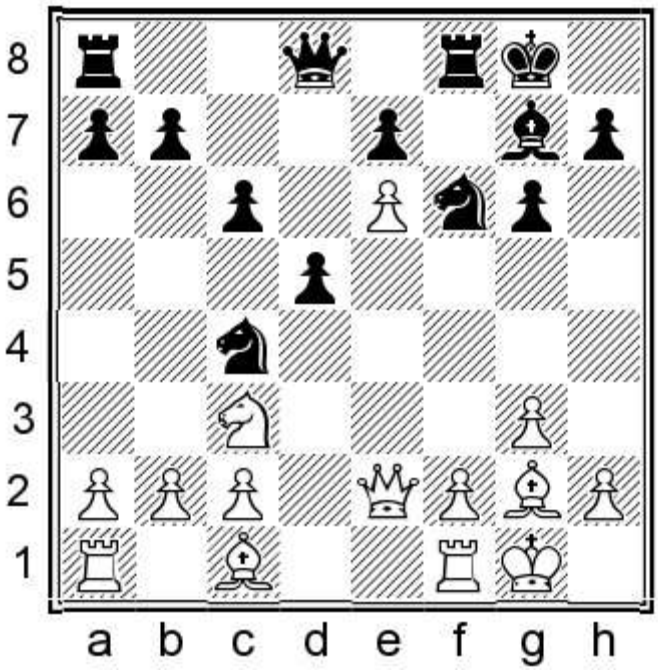
Position after: 10...♗xf5

It's easy to see that there is a hole on e6. Obviously a knight would be very powerful there, but getting there is the hardest part. White has tried a few different moves in this position.

11.♘ce2

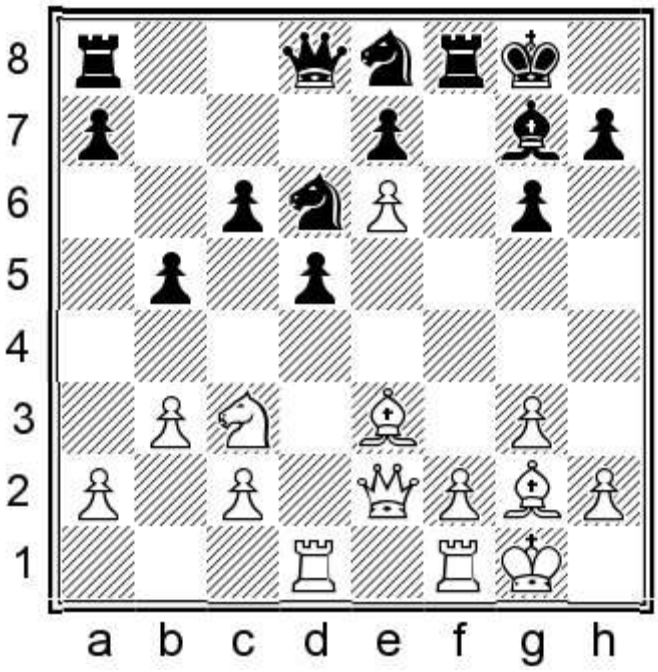
A) 11.h3 – see 9.exf5.

B) Playing 11.♘e6 straight away isn't too worrying for us. White gains the bishop pair, but our knights are not worse in this situation. 11...♗xe6 12.dxe6 d5 13.♕e2 ♘c4!



Position after: 13...♘c4!

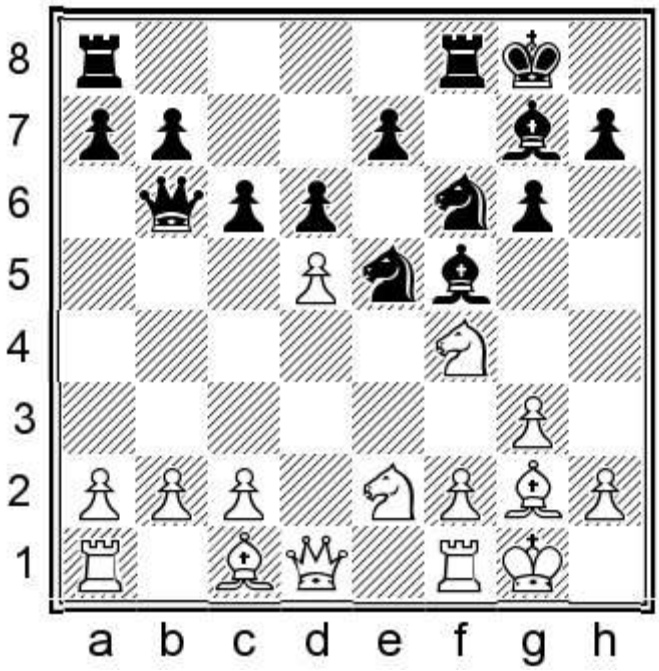
14.♖b1 [14.b3 ♘d6 15.♗b2 b5!↑ is very similar to the game.] 14...♕a5 15.b3 ♘d6 16.♗d2 ♕d8 17.♖bd1 b5 18.♗e3 ♘fe8!∓



Position after: 18...♘fe8!∓

This happened in the game Milanovic, D (2564) – Strbac, M (2296), Sombor 2009, ½-½ (64). I think Black's position is preferable: his pieces are well placed, he is soon going to attack the e6-pawn, and White doesn't have any open files at his disposal.

11...♕b6!?



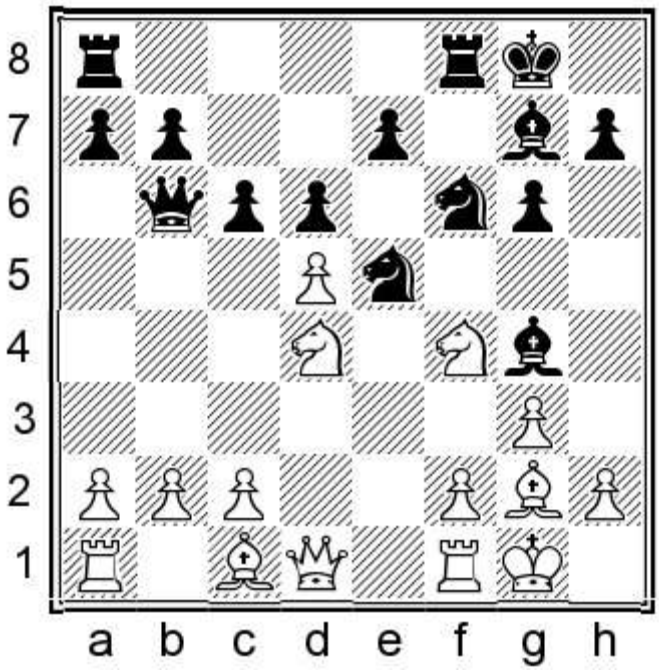
Position after: 11...♕b6!?

Cleverly preventing ♘d4!

12.c3!N

I believe this is the right move. White insists on playing ♘d4.

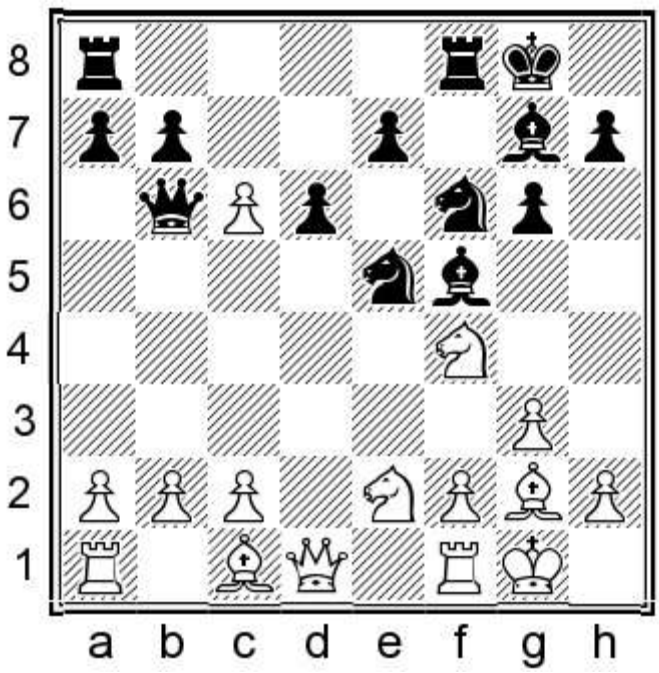
A) 12.♘d4?! ♗g4!



Position after: 12...♗g4!

13.f3?! This mistake occurred in the game Vasilevich, T (2377) – Malaniuk, V (2522), Odessa 2007, 0-1 (41), but Black didn't exploit the possibilities of his position to the full. [13.♕d2 ♘xd5 14.♘fe6 ♘c7!? 15.♘xf8 ♖xf8 16.h3 ♗d7∓ Black has amazing pieces compared to White's, and a great center once it starts to advance − definitely worth an exchange.] 13...♘xf3+! 14.♗xf3 ♗xf3 15.♖xf3 ♘xd5 16.c3 e5∓

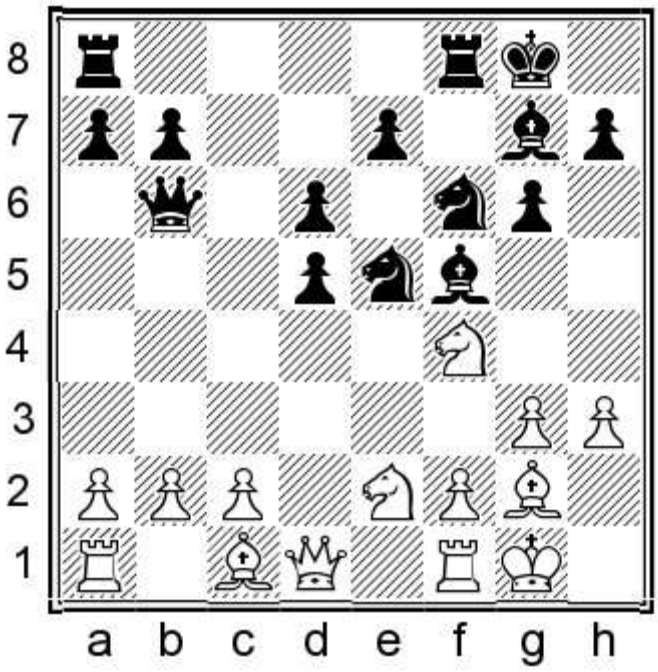
B) 12.dxc6



Position after: 12.dxc6

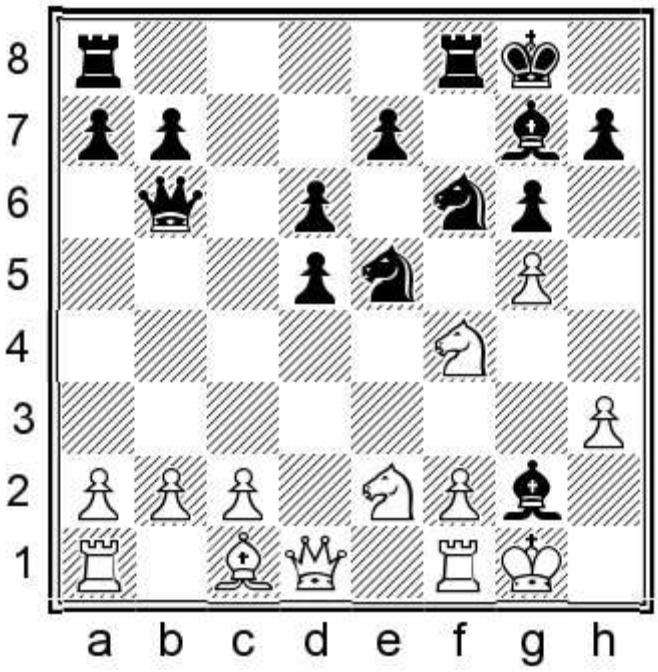
This leads nowhere since White doesn't have any chance to use the e6-square anymore. 12...♘xc6 13.h3 e5 14.g4 ♗d7 15.♘d5 ♘xd5 16.♗xd5+ ♔h8 17.♗e3 ♕a6=

C) 12.h3 cxd5!



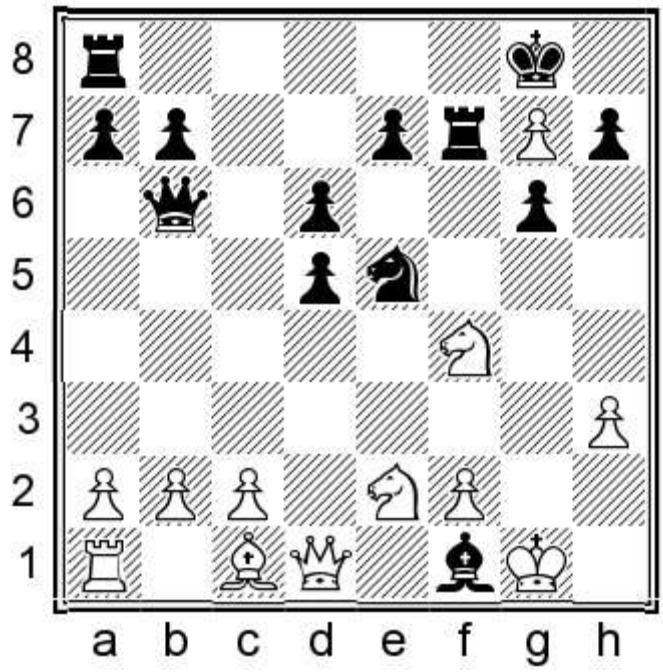
Position after: 12...cxd5!

13.g4 [13.♘xd5 ♘xd5 14.♕xd5+ e6 15.♕xb7 ♕xb7 16.♗xb7 ♖ab8 17.♗g2 ♘c4!∓ This is a clearly worse version of the main line.] 13...♗e4 14.g5 ♗xg2!



Position after: 14...♗xg2!

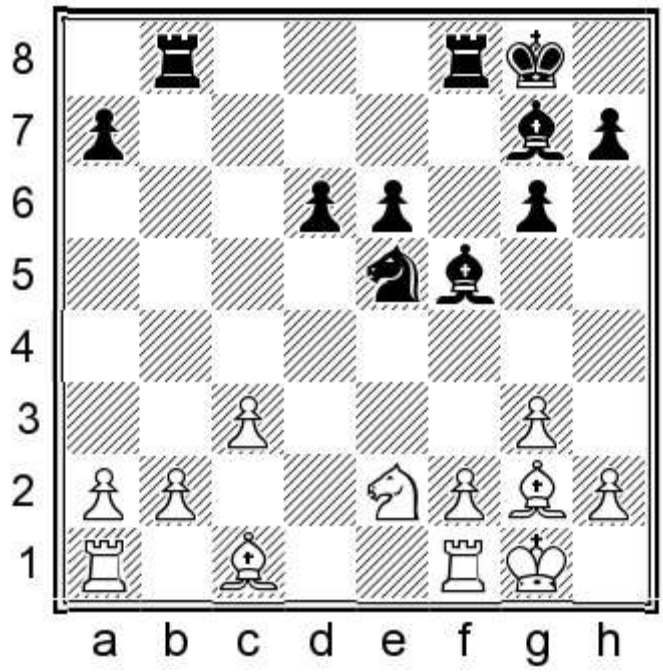
Here White committed a mistake (even if he won) in Barsov, A (2510) – Borisek, J (2560) Al Ain 2012, 1-0 (36). He should have played 15.gxf6!N [15.♔xg2 as played in the game is worse: 15...♘e8!N 16.♘e6 ♖f7 17.f4 ♘d7 18.♕xd5 ♘c7 19.♘xc7 ♕xc7∓] 15...♗xf1 16.fxg7 ♖f7



Position after: 16...♖f7

17.♔xf1□ [17.♕xf1? ♘f3+ 18.♔h1 ♕c6–+ White is defenseless against ...e5 and ...d4 in both possible orders.] 17...g5! 18.♗e3 ♕b4 19.♘xd5 ♕h4→ Despite being material down, Black enjoys a very powerful attack and is better!

12...♘xd5! 13.♘xd5 cxd5 14.♕xd5+ e6 15.♕xb7 ♕xb7 16.♗xb7 ♖ab8 17.♗g2



Position after: 17.♗g2

White seems to have a healthy extra pawn, but things are different if Black plays precisely.

17...♗d3! 18.♖e1 ♗c4

The new threat is ...♘d3.

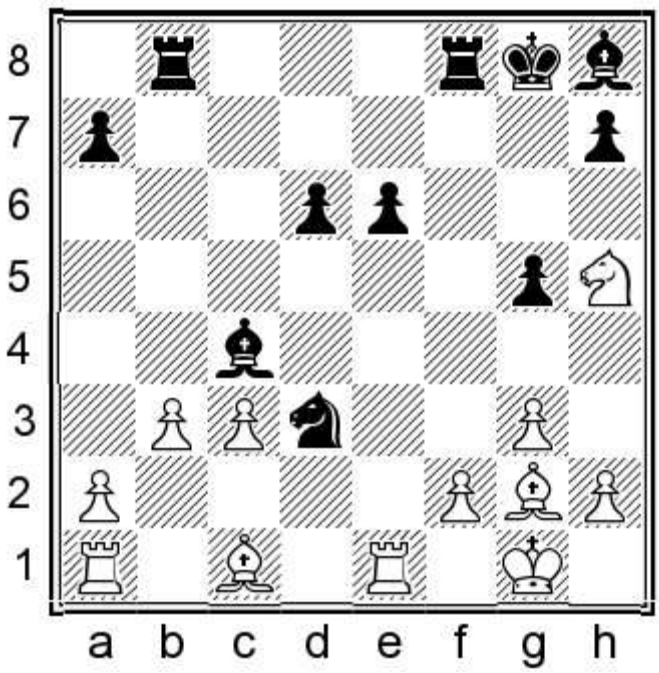
19.♘f4

19.b3?! ♘d3 20.♖d1 ♘xc1 21.♘xc1 ♗xc3 22.♖b1 d5∓

19...g5 20.♘h5

20.♘xe6!? Simplifying the position seems a reasonable choice. 20...♗xe6 21.f4 gxf4 22.gxf4 a5 23.fxe5 ♗xe5⩱ White is far from developing his queenside, so Black is doing fine.

20...♗h8 21.b3 ♘d3!⩱

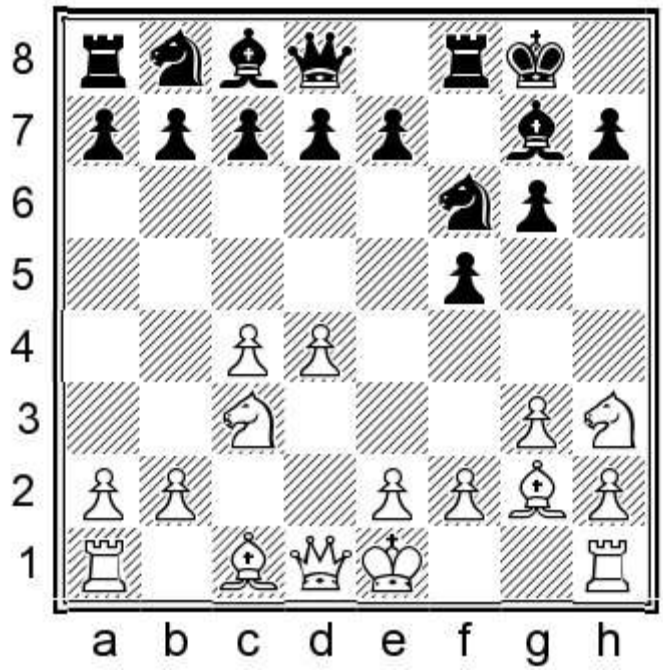


Position after: 21...♘d3!⩱

Play is probably about equal, but still very complicated.

k) 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3 0-0 6.♘h3

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3 0-0 6.♘h3



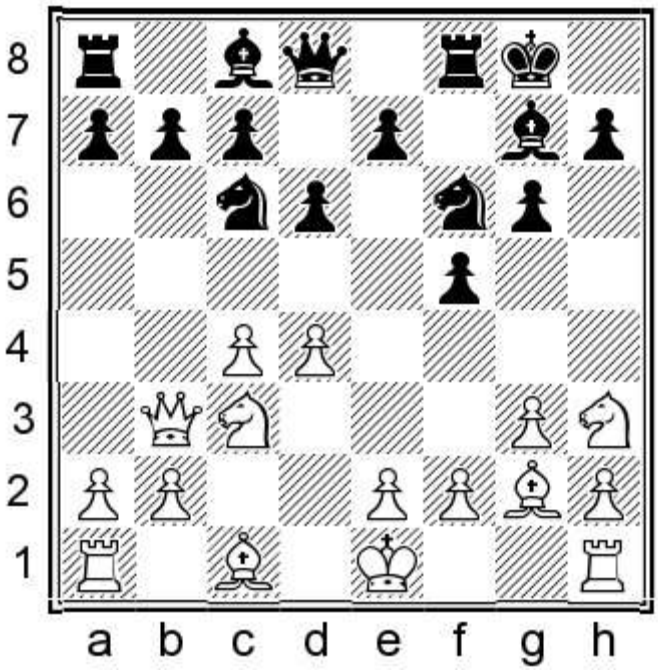
Position after: 6.♘h3

This is the last subject of the current chapter. It is very close to the main line, but with slightly different ideas. The knight is heading to f4 in order to control the e6-square. On the other hand, the e5-square is not under control, so White will quickly have to prevent ...e7−e5. This part could have been included in the chapter about the main line as it can be really similar, but I preferred to include it here with the other ♘h3 ideas.

6...d6 7.d5

The main continuation. White prevents ...e5 before thinking about castling.

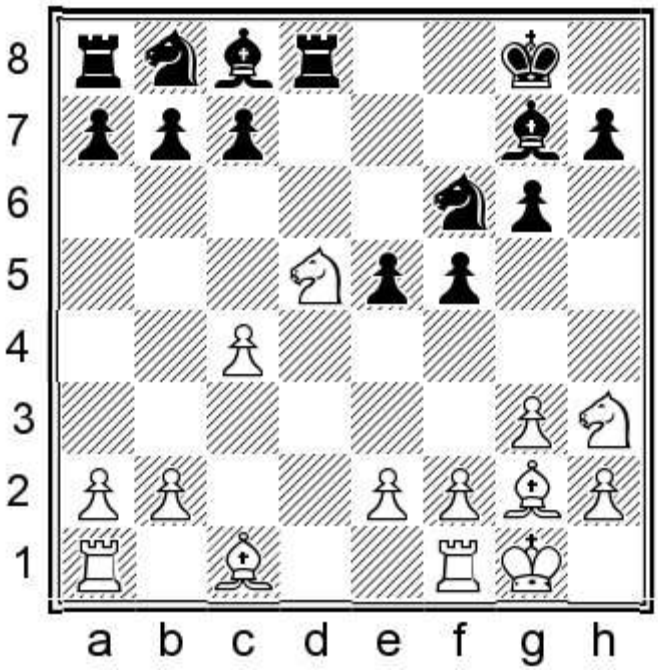
A) 7.♕b3?! I don’t think White is prepared for this slightly illogical move, especially as the d4-pawn is not protected at all! 7...♘c6



Position after: 7...♘c6

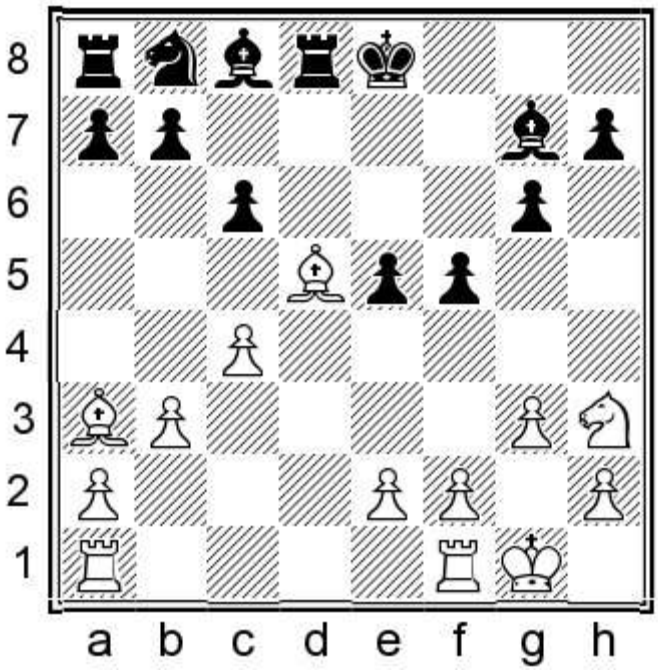
8.e3 [8.d5?! ♘a5 9.♕a4 c5 10.dxc6 bxc6 11.0-0 ♗d7∓ White has completely abandoned the center and his play is leading nowhere.] 8...e5! 9.c5+ ♔h8 10.cxd6 cxd6= Black has already reacted in the center and is doing really well.

B) 7.0-0 If White allows ...e5, we should go for it, even if it requires accuracy. 7...e5! 8.dxe5 dxe5 9.♕xd8 ♖xd8 10.♘d5



Position after: 10.♘d5

I think this is the only way to try to cause Black worries. White is trying to take advantage of the weak light-squared diagonal in front of the king. 10...♘xd5! 11.♗xd5+ ♔f8 12.b3 [12.♗g5 ♖e8 13.♗e3 ♘a6!= Black follows with ...c7−c6, and has no problems at all.] 12...c6! 13.♗a3+ ♔e8

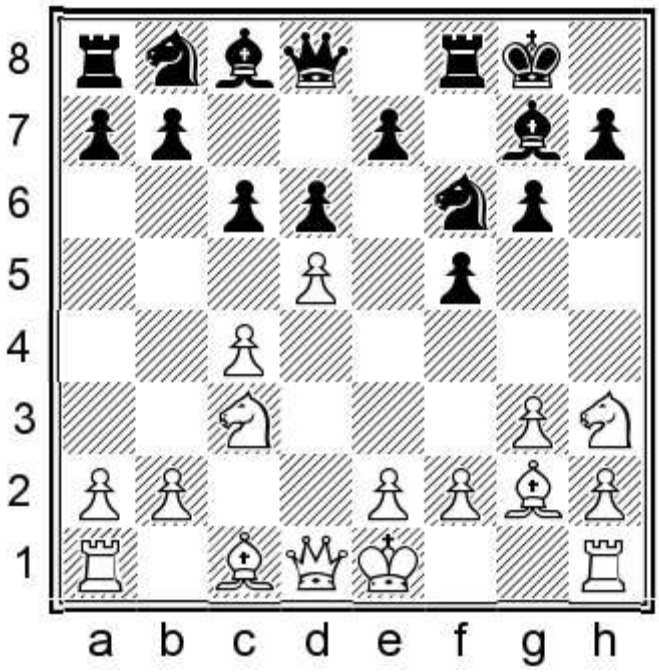


Position after: 13...♔e8

14.♗g8 This looks the most annoying continuation, but we have excellent responses. [14.♗g2 a5!↑ It's true that the king on e8 is overexposed compared to the usual lines, but there is no way for White to take advantage of it.] 14...h6 15.♖ad1 ♗f6!= Black follows with ...♗e7 and looks fine.

C) 7.♘f4 c6 White has no real other choice than to play 8.d5, transposing to the text.

7...c6



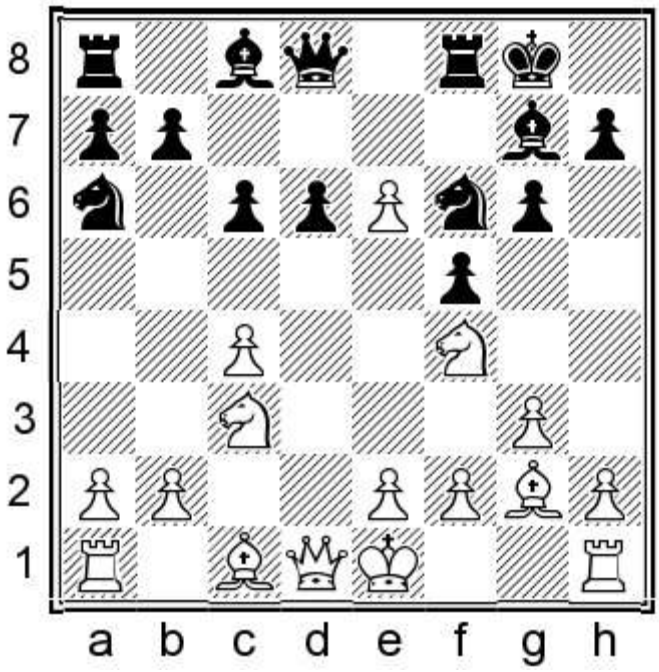
Position after: 7...c6

8.♘f4

Even this move doesn't really prevent our logical reaction.

8.0-0 − see the next subchapter.

8...e5 9.dxe6 ♘a6!?



Position after: 9...♘a6!?

It is also possible to continue with 9...♕e7 in order to regain the pawn, but I generally prefer to keep the bishop pair.

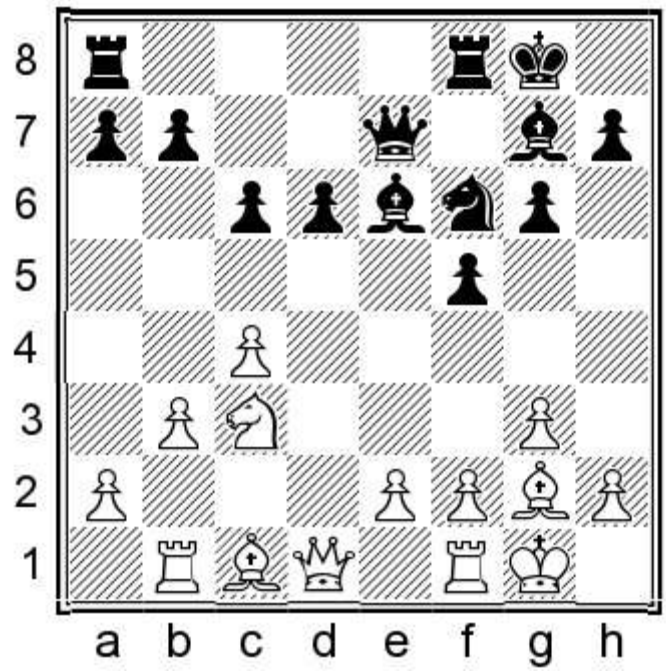
10.h4

The most aggressive approach, and a pretty decent one. I think it requires an original treatment by Black.

A) 10.♗e3? g5! 11.♘d3 ♘g4 12.♗d2 ♗xe6∓

B) 10.0-0 ♘c5

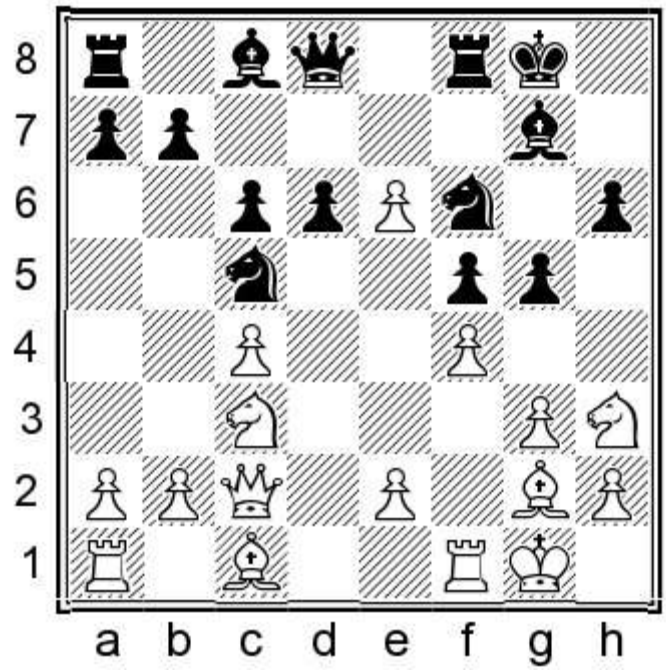
B1) 11.♖b1 ♘xe6 12.♘xe6 [12.b3 ♘xf4 13.♗xf4 ♘h5 14.♗d2 f4!↑] 12...♗xe6 13.b3 ♕e7



Position after: 13...♕e7

This position is very similar to the main line that we will consider in Chapter 10. One pair of knights has already been traded, but it doesn't change the essence of the position. 14.♗a3 ♖ad8 15.♕d2 ♘d7!? This precise maneuver towards c5 is very interesting. For tactical reasons, White is unable to take on d6 and Black will solve his problems with the d6-pawn on the next move. 16.♖bd1 [16.♗xd6? ♗xc3 17.♗xe7 ♗xd2 18.♗xf8 ♔xf8∓] 16...♘c5=

B2) 11.♕c2 g5 I like this aggressive move which has only been played twice. 12.♘h3 [12.♘d3 ♘xe6 13.e3 ♕e7 14.b3 ♗d7= Black transfers his bishop to g6 where it will have good prospects once he advances with ...f5−f4.] 12...h6 13.f4!



Position after: 13.f4!

[13.♕xf5? Of course this greedy approach is easily refuted. 13...♗xe6 14.♕c2 ♕d7∓] 13...g4 14.♘f2 ♗xe6 15.b3 This position was reached in the game Kozul, Z (2620) – Gazik, I (2320), Sarajevo 2015, 1-0 (59). Now Black decided to attack the g3-pawn quickly with 15...h5!? 16.♗e3 h4 17.♖ad1 ♕e7⇄ with a really tense position.

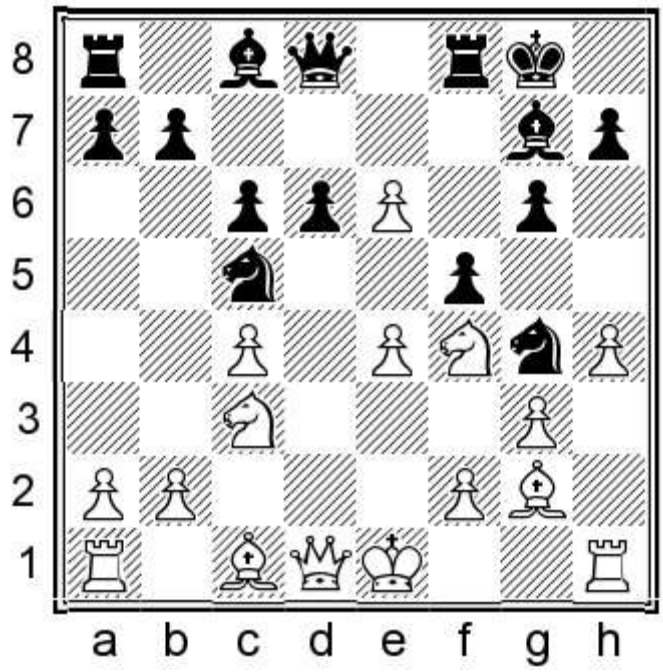
10...♘g4!?

10...♘c5 11.h5 g5 12.h6!↑ A really annoying intermediate move, and the idea we are trying to prevent when we play 10...♘g4 (with the same moves, ...♗xc3 would now win a piece for Black).

11.e4

11.0-0 ♘c5 12.e4 ♗xe6 13.♘xe6 ♘xe6 14.exf5 gxf5⇄

11...♘c5



Position after: 11...♘c5

12.exf5

A) 12.0-0 ♗xe6 – see 11.0-0.

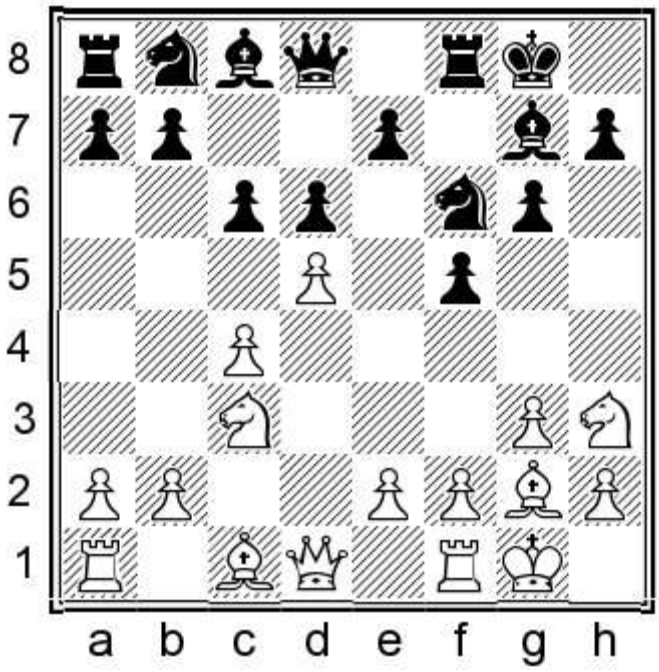
B) 12.h5 As we will see, this move doesn't create a real threat. 12...♗xe6 13.hxg6 hxg6 14.♘xg6?! Taking this pawn is too risky. White will soon regret not having castled yet. 14...fxe4 15.0-0 [15.♘xf8?? ♘d3+–+] 15...♕e8!→ 16.♘xf8?? ♕h5–+

12...gxf5 13.0-0 ♗xe6 14.♘xe6 ♘xe6

And again we transpose to the 11.0-0 line.

l) 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3 0-0 6.♘h3 (8.0-0)

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3 0-0 6.♘h3 d6 7.d5 c6 8.0-0

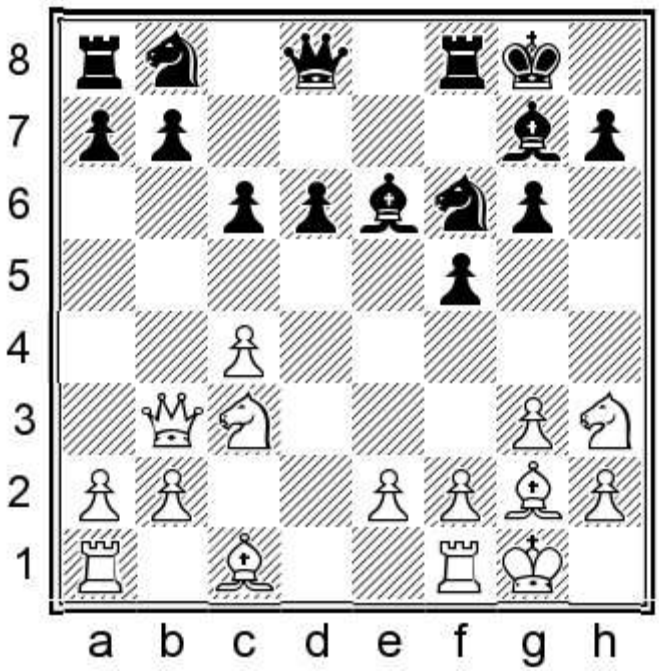


Position after: 8.0-0

8...h6!?

In my opinion this rare move is really interesting as it's directly aimed at the knight on h3 which can find itself out of squares if we manage to play ...g6−g5. In practice White hasn't shown any dangerous continuation.

8...e5 If we compare Chapter 10 with 8.d5, this move seems acceptable, but as we will see, the new positioning of the knight on h3 instead of f3 gives White an additional continuation. 9.dxe6 [9.e4 cxd5 10.cxd5 h6 11.f3 ♕b6+ 12.♘f2 fxe4 13.fxe4 ♘a6=] 9...♗xe6 10.♕b3!



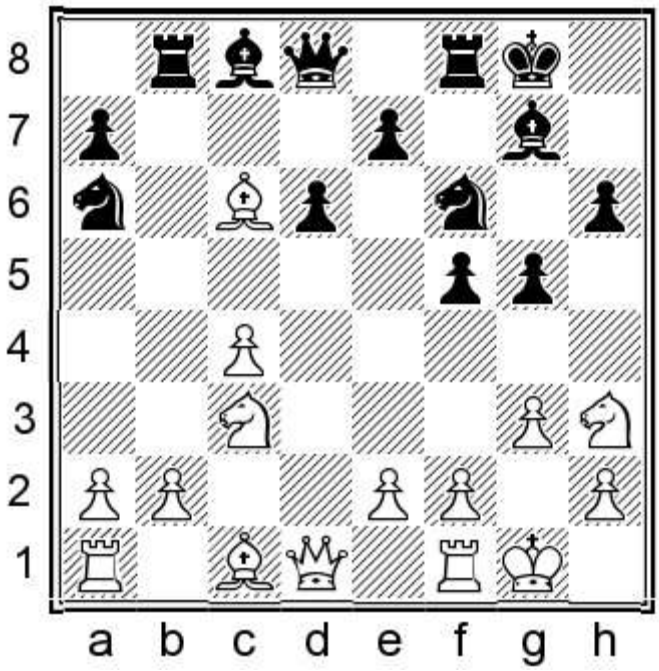
Position after: 10.♕b3!

I feel that White keeps the better position after this move, even if it's still playable for Black. The main difference with Chapter 10 is that 10...b5 is impossible in view of 11.♘xb5, so I prefer to avoid this line. 10...♕c7 11.♘g5 ♗f7 12.♗f4 [12.♘xf7 ♖xf7 13.♗f4 ♘h5 14.♗e3 ♘d7 15.♖ad1 ♗e5=] 12...♘bd7 13.♘xf7 ♖xf7 14.♖ad1 ♘e5 15.e4 fxe4 16.♘xe4 ♘xe4 17.♗xe4 ♖af8∞

9.♖b1

The most common move by a short edge, but it's not a problem at all.

A) 9.♕b3 ♘a6! 10.dxc6 [10.♘f4 g5 11.♘d3 cxd5 12.cxd5 b6= Black follows with ...♘c5, with a great position.] 10...bxc6 11.♗xc6 I don't feel that this can be good for White. 11...♖b8 12.♕d1 [12.♕a3 ♘b4 13.♗a4 g5→] 12...g5!

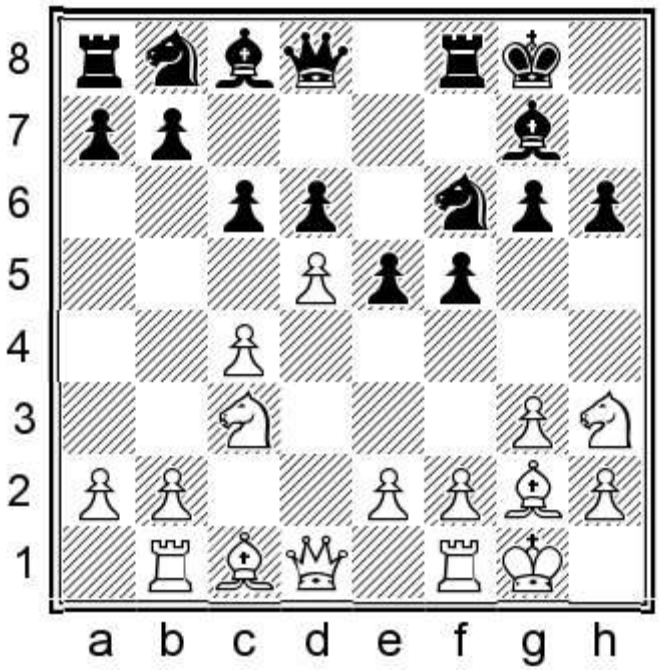


Position after: 12...g5!

13...f4 is an obvious threat. 13.♗g2 ♘e4 14.♘xe4 fxe4→ Black has a great position, and the knight on h3 is still in huge danger.

B) 9.♘f4 g5 10.♘d3 [10.♘g6 Even if it can be complicated, this more or less condemns the knight! 10...♖e8 11.f4! ♔h7 12.fxg5 hxg5 13.e4 ♕b6+ 14.♔h1 ♔xg6 15.exf5+ ♔f7 16.♗xg5 ♘bd7∞] 10...e5 11.dxe6 ♗xe6= White has lost a few tempi with the knight, giving us time to expand on the kingside. We are clearly fine.

9...e5!



Position after: 9...e5!

Now this works better!

10.dxe6 ♗xe6 11.b3

11.♕b3?! ♕e7! This is now good for Black since ♘g5, chasing our bishop off the important diagonal, is not possible.

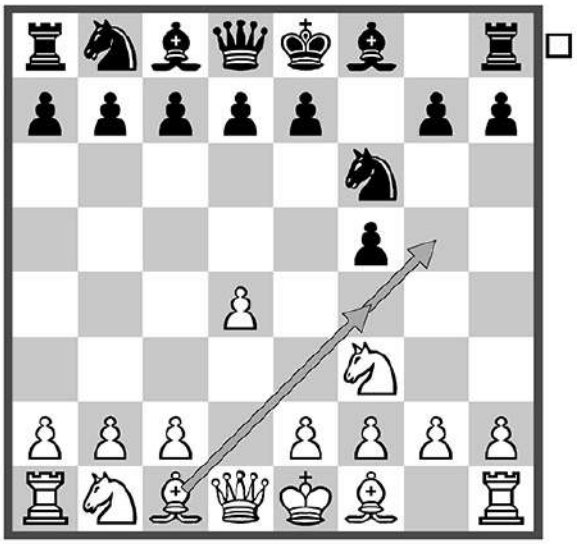
11...♘a6 12.♗a3 ♘c5=

We have reached a classical position with the knight on h3, where it actually seems worse than on f3. It will probably take two moves to bring it back to d3. The position is roughly balanced, and we will continue with ...♕e7, ...♗f7 and probably ...g5.

Part II
Classical Systems

Chapter 6
Sidelines for White on Move Three

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6



Chapter Guide

Chapter 6 – Sidelines for White on Move Three

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6

a) 3.--

b) 3.♗g5 e6 4.--, 4.♘bd2 ♗e7 5.--, 5.♗xf6

c) 3.♗g5 e6 4.♘bd2 ♗e7 5.e3

d) 3.♗f4 g6 4.e3 ♗g7 5.♗c4

e) 3.♗f4 g6 4.e3 ♗g7 5.♗e2 0-0 6.--

f) 3.♗f4 g6 4.e3 ♗g7 5.♗e2 0-0 6.0-0 d6 7.h3 e6 8.c4

g) 3.♗f4 g6 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3 d6 6.--

h) 3.♗f4 g6 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3 d6 6.e3 0-0 7.--, 7.c5

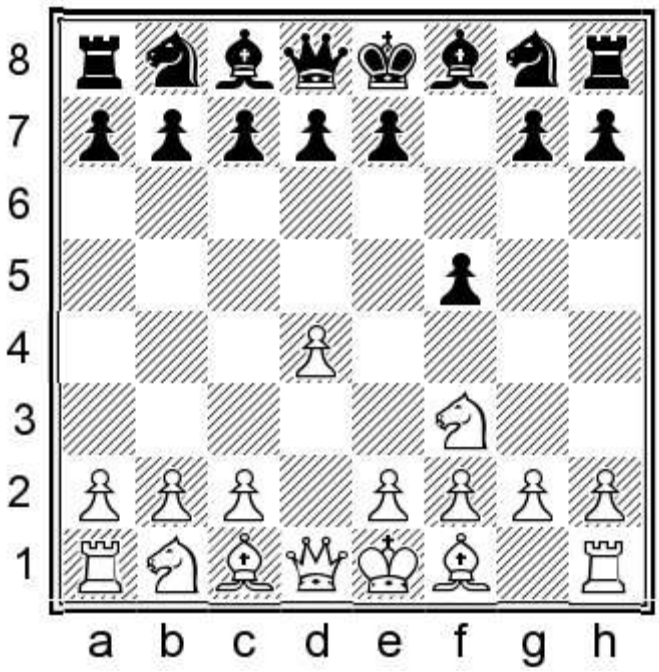
i) 3.♗f4 g6 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3 d6 6.e3 0-0 7.c5 ♔h8 8.♗c4

j) 3.♗f4 g6 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3 d6 6.e3 0-0 7.h3

k) 3.♗f4 g6 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3 d6 6.e3 0-0 7.♗e2

a) 3.--

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3



Position after: 2.♘f3

We still have quite a way to go on our road to the main line of the Leningrad system. Many players start with this move which may lead to the main lines if White continues with g3, ♗g2 and later c4, but it may also be a sign that he wants to employ another system. Some are quite harmless, others are more interesting. I will try to make things simple, despite all the possible transpositions!

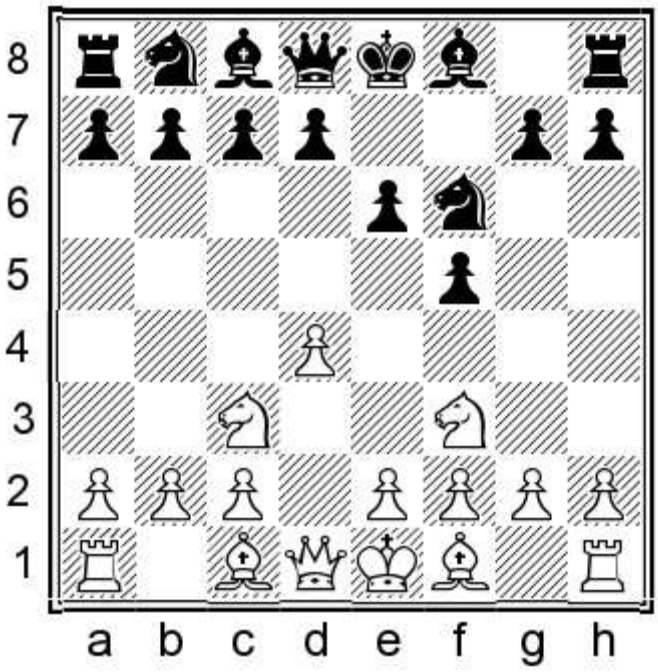
2...♘f6

If you want to avoid some of the lines in this chapter (especially those with ♗g5), you can start with 2...g6!?. It may seem less logical, but I actually couldn't find a real problem, as h4 is hardly possible with ♘f3 already played.

3.h3

A) 3.e3 g6 4.♗d3 For these lines with e3, see Chapter 4 on the early sidelines with 2.e3.

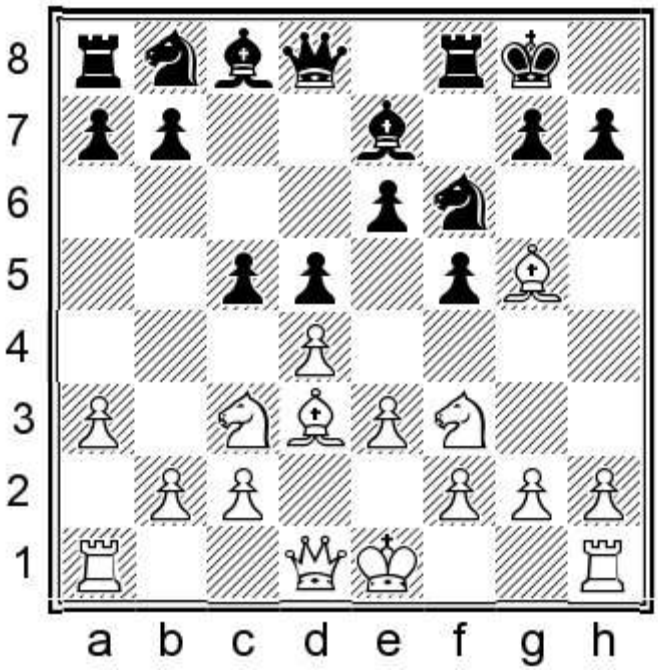
B) 3.♘c3 e6!



Position after: 3...e6!

Punishing White for playing ♘c3 too early. This intends 4...♗b4, pinning the knight and securing the e4-square for our knight.

B1) 4.a3 White has no other choice if he wants to prevent ...♗b4, but it is a precious loss of time. 4...d5 5.♗g5 [5.♗f4 − We already considered this line in Chapter 2.] 5...♗e7 6.e3 0-0 7.♗d3 c5↑



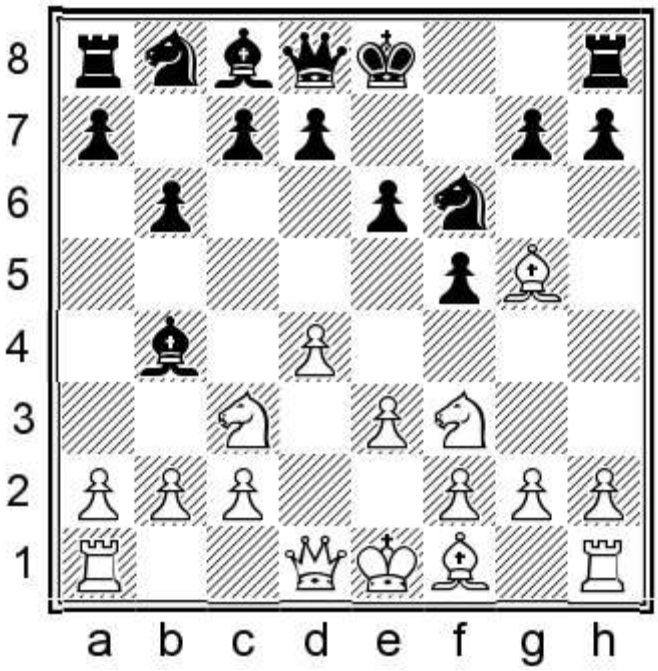
Position after: 7...c5↑

We considered this kind of position in Chapter 2, but White didn't have to spend a tempo playing a3,

so Black should easily be fine.

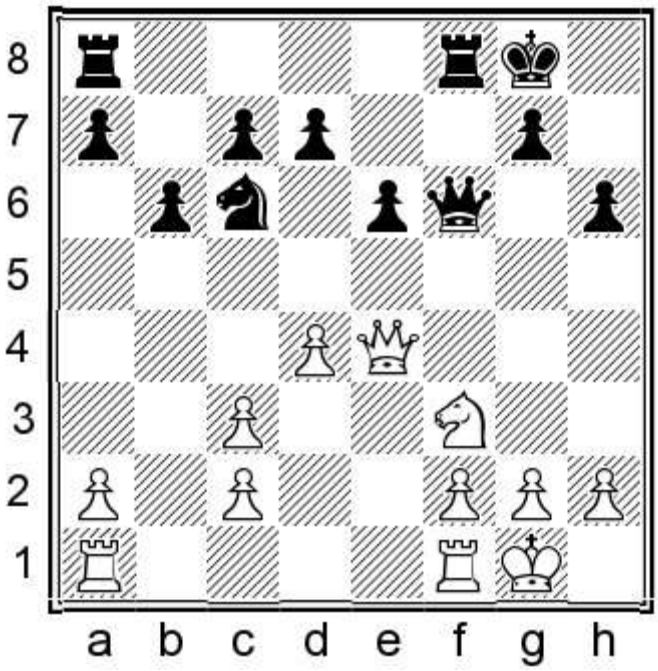
B2) 4.♗f4 ♗b4 5.e3 ♘e4 6.♕d3 0-0 7.a3 ♗xc3+ 8.bxc3 b6∓

B3) 4.♗g5 ♗b4 5.e3 b6



Position after: 5...b6

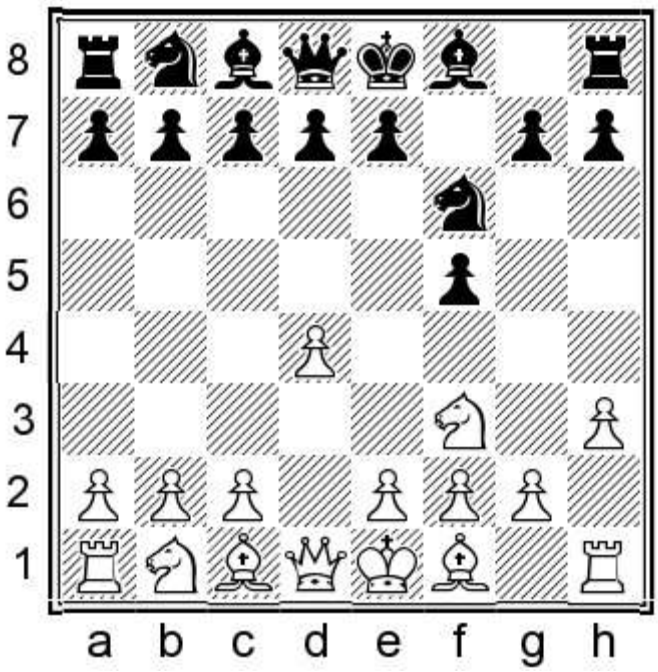
Black understands that the battle for the light squares is paramount, a fight he is about to win. 6.♗d3 ♗b7 7.0-0 ♗xc3 8.bxc3 0-0 9.♕e2 h6 10.♗xf6 ♕xf6 11.e4 fxe4 12.♗xe4 ♗xe4 13.♕xe4 ♘c6∓



Position after: 13...♘c6∓

Black remains better thanks to the pawn structure. For instance in the endgame, he will be able to place an annoying rook on a5 via f5. Black won easily in Hamdouchi, A (2314) – Williams, S (2550), France 2009, 0-1 (26).

Back to 3.h3.

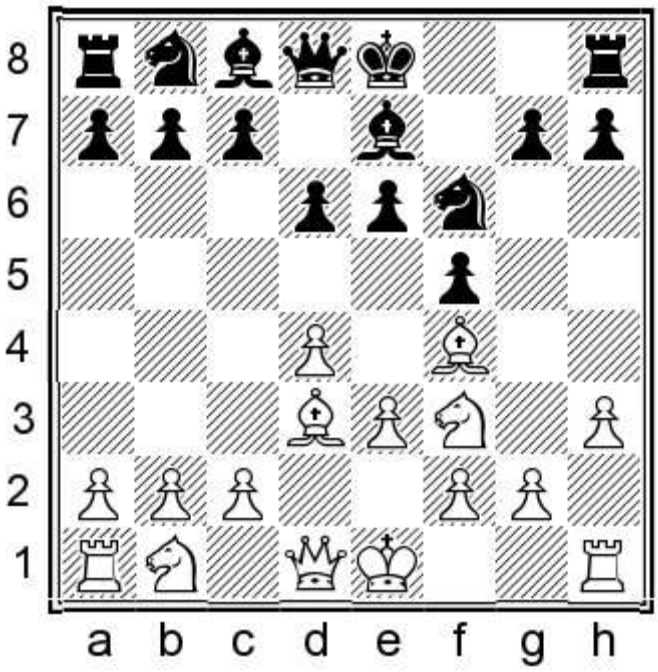


Position after: 3.h3

3...g6

Our goal is to play a Leningrad. I don't think we have any other choice here, e.g.

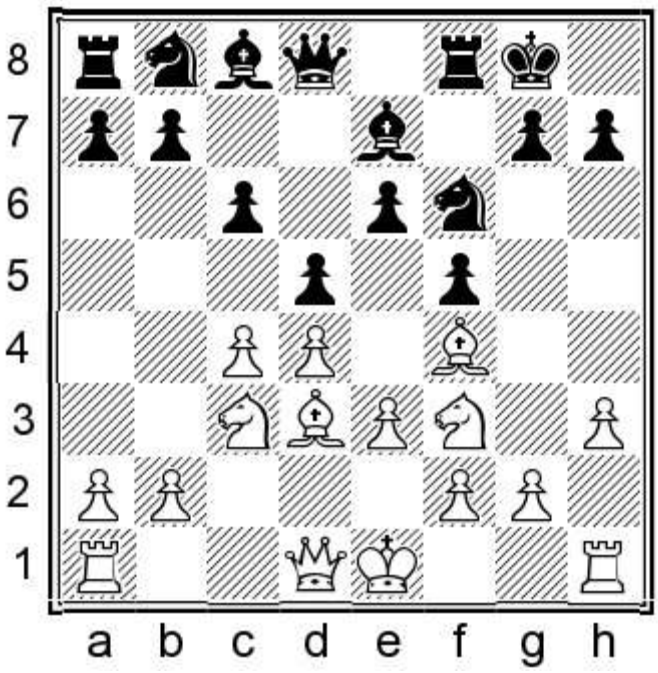
A) 3...e6 4.♗f4 d6 5.e3 ♗e7 6.♗d3



Position after: 6.♗d3

This is a very decent way for White to fight against the Classical Dutch, and it's not to my taste. h3 is absolutely normal in this line, so there is no loss of time for White.

B) 3...d5 I don't want to play this move if White hasn't already played g4 as he hasn't played any really compromising moves. For instance he can play 4.♗f4 e6 5.e3 ♗e7 6.c4 c6 7.♘c3 0-0 8.♗d3.



Position after: 8.♗d3

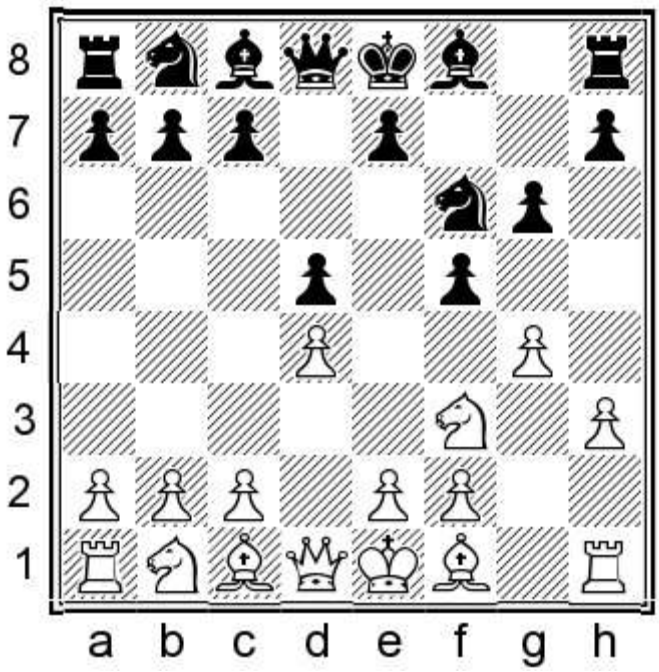
These kinds of lines are dangerous for Black. White will probably continue with ♕c2, g4 and 0-0-0,

with a promising initiative.

4.g4

4.♗f4 ♗g7 5.e3 − You will find the same position in the next subchapters on 3.♗f4.

4...d5!



Position after: 4...d5!

Always the same motifs: we wait for White to commit himself with g4 before playing this move. We have already played ...g6, which is not very useful in this pawn structure, but it's not awful either.

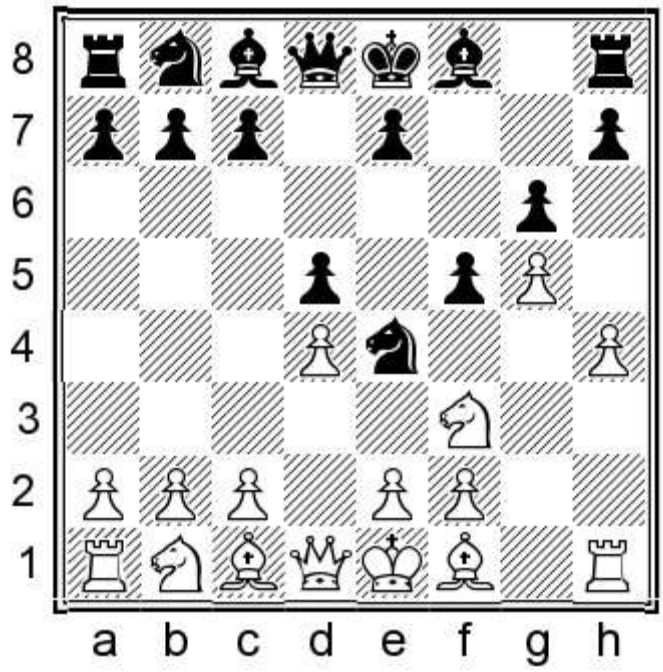
5.g5

5.gxf5 ♗xf5 6.♗g2 ♗g7∓

5...♘e4

≤ 5...♘h5 6.e3 ♗g7 7.♗e2 e6 8.♖g1 c5 9.♘h4!± This is why the knight is worse on h5 than in the center. White went on to win in Ivanisevic, I (2662) – Atalik, S (2565), Kragujevac 2015, 1-0 (41).

6.h4



Position after: 6.h4

6...h6!?

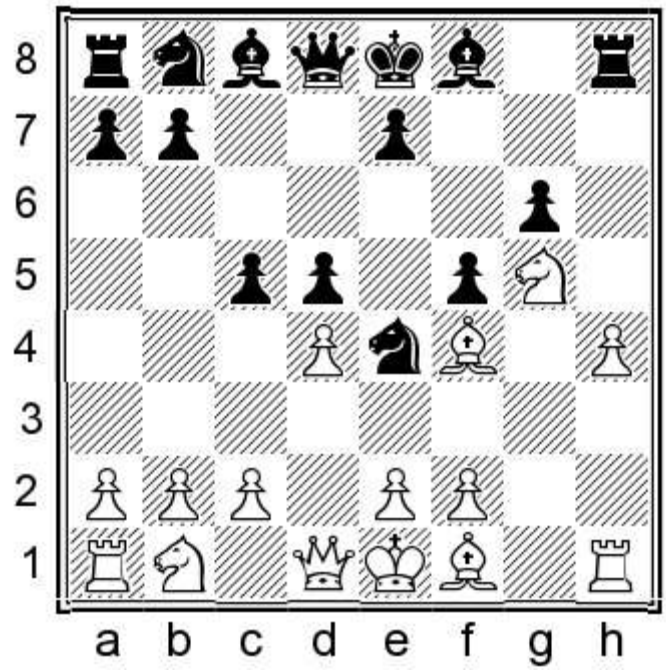
I prefer to take matters in hand and not let White decide when he wants to push h5.

6...c5 7.h5 ♗g7!? 8.h6 ♗f8 9.♗f4 ♘c6⇄

7.♗f4

7.gxh6 ♕d6 8.♗g2 ♗xh6 9.♗xh6 ♖xh6=

7...hxg5 8.♘xg5 c5



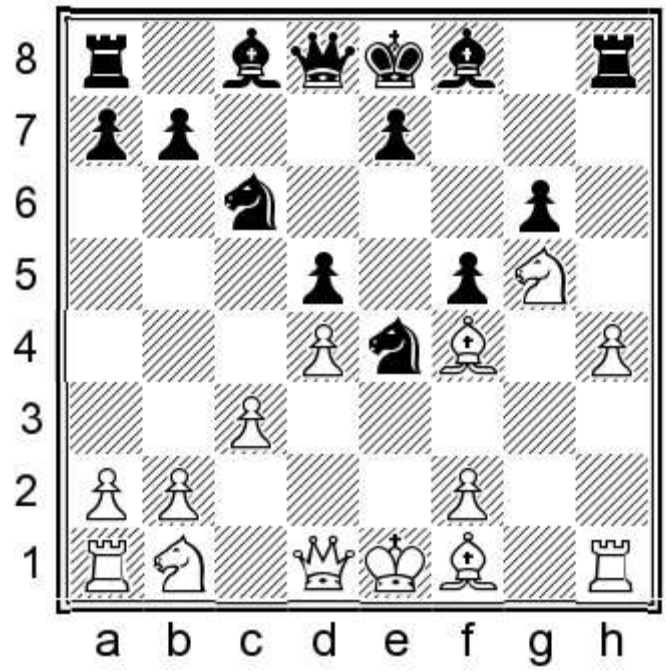
Position after: 8...c5

There is already a lot of tension, and one thing is clear: there is only a slight chance that either side can castle in the short term.

9.e3

9.dxc5 ♘c6! 10.♗g2 e5 11.♘xe4 dxe4 12.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 13.♗g5+ ♔e8 14.♘c3 ♗xc5⇄

9...♘c6 10.c3?! cxd4! 11.exd4



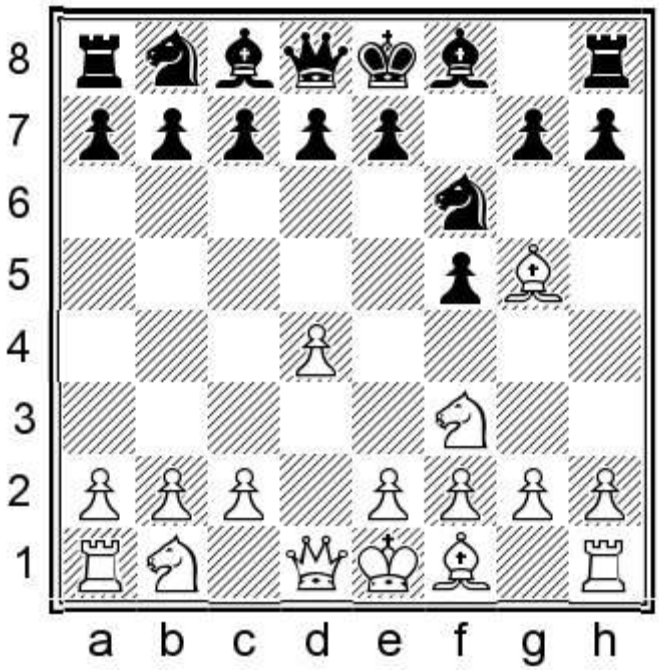
Position after: 11.exd4

11...e5! 12.dxe5 ♗c5 13.♘xe4 fxe4∓

b) 3.♗g5 e6 4.--, 4.♘bd2 ♗e7 5.--, 5.♗xf6

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗g5

This system has gained some popularity recently. I was also very interested in it as White for some time. White wants to take the knight in order to destroy Black's pawn structure, but the other idea can be to trade this knight in order to be able to play e4 at some point.



Position after: 3.♗g5

3...e6

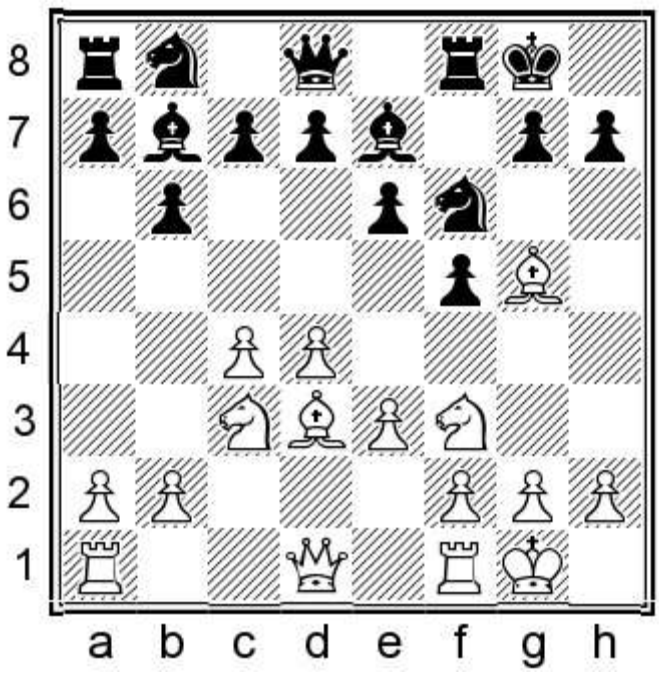
I think this move deserves most attention. Black is ready to take back on f6 with the queen.

3...♘e4!? may seem like a typical reaction. It's a decent continuation, but I think that, contrary to the Trompowsky variation, White can make use of the f5-pawn already having advanced by playing 4.h4. We can't really take the bishop because it would be very hard to get rid of the pressure on the h-file.

4.♘bd2

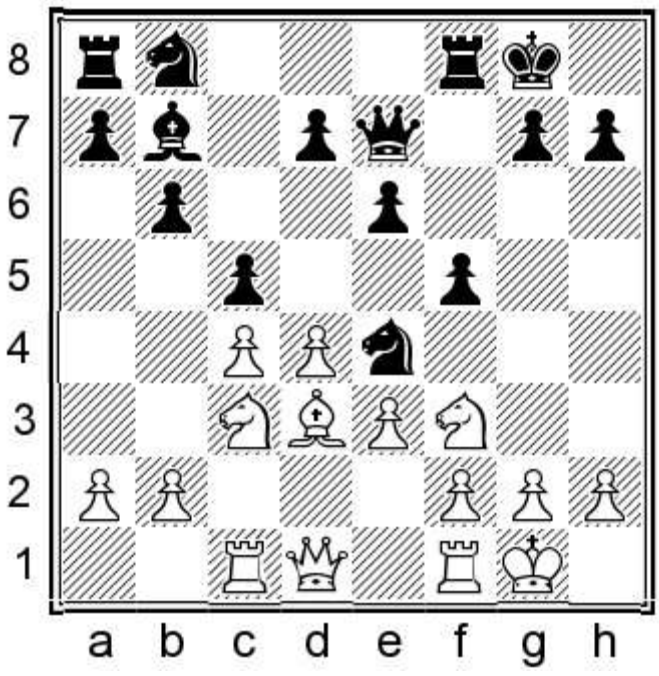
A) 4.♘c3 – see 3.♘c3 e6 4.♗g5.

B) 4.e3 ♗e7 5.c4 is less usual, but after all is quite logical. White doesn't take control of the e4-square, so I think we should do so ourselves. [5.♗d3 b6 6.♘bd2 − see 5.e3] 5...0-0 6.♘c3 b6 7.♗d3 ♗b7 8.0-0



Position after: 8.0-0

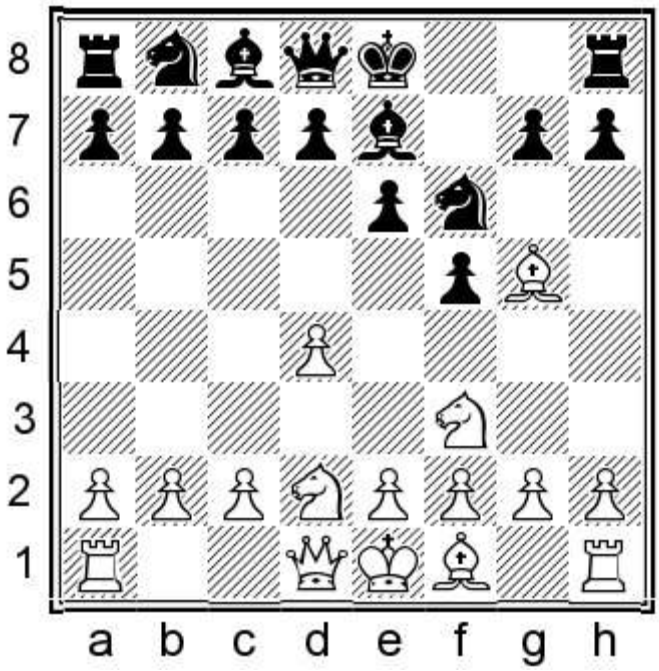
So far as in an old game between two strong players, Nogueiras Santiago, J (2575) – Yusupov, A (2610), Rotterdam 1989, ½-½ (69). While Yusupov opted for the strange-looking 8...♘c6, I would prefer 8...c5! 9.♖c1 [9.d5 ♘xd5! 10.cxd5 ♗xg5 11.dxe6 dxe6 12.♗c4 ♘c6 13.♗xe6+ ♔h8=; 9.♕e2 ♘e4 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.♖ad1 ♘xc3 12.bxc3 ♗xf3 13.♕xf3 ♘c6=] 9...♘e4 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7=



Position after: 10...♕xe7=

It's really hard for White to get rid of the knight on e4. This resembles some Nimzo-Indian lines, but I believe this version is very good for Black. 11.♕c2?! ♘xc3 12.bxc3 ♗xf3 13.gxf3 d6∓

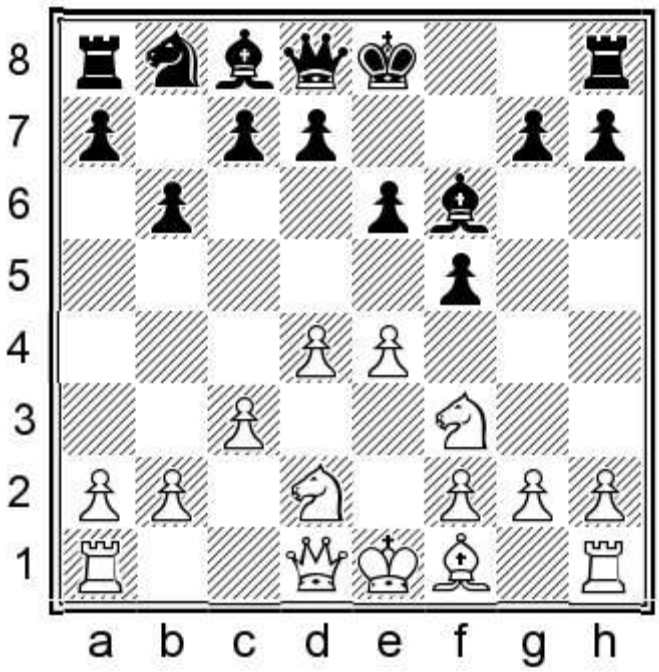
4...♗e7



Position after: 4...♗e7

5.♗xf6

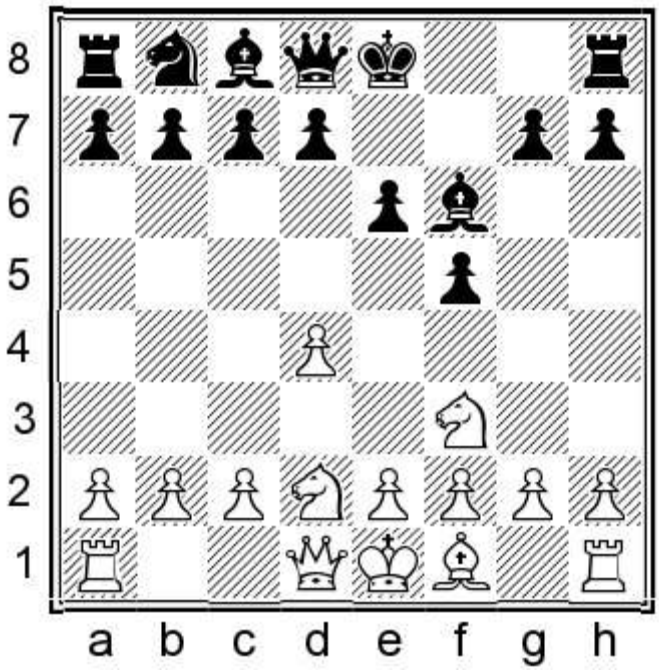
After 5.c3 Ivanchuk chose 5...b6, but I don't like it. It seems too slow when White hasn't already spent a tempo moving his e-pawn. [Black should instead play 5...0-0, and wait for 6.e3 before playing ...b6, with a very similar position to the next subchapter (and c3 is quite useless).] 6.♗xf6 ♗xf6 7.e4



Position after: 7.e4

7...♗b7 [7...0-0 8.♗d3 d5 9.exf5 exf5 10.0-0 g6 11.♖e1↑ With the extra move c3, this is a slightly better version for White than the 5.e3 line.] 8.♗d3 g6 9.h4↑ 0-1 (22), Topalov, V (2752) – Ivanchuk, V (2769), Astana 2012.

5...♗xf6



Position after: 5...♗xf6

6.e4

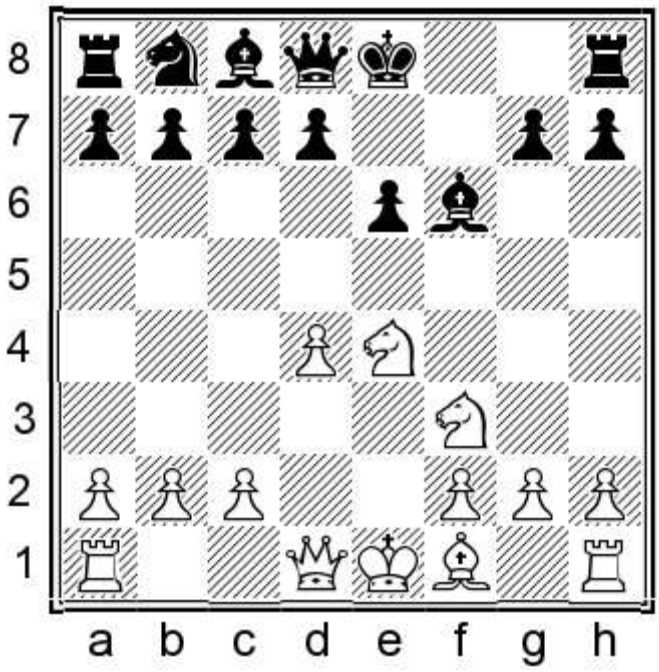
This has been played much more often than the 5.e3 line (next subchapter), but hasn't been so popular recently, which is why it's not my main line in this variation. We'll try to understand why it's been played less recently.

6.e3 makes no sense after taking on f6: 6...0-0 7.♗d3 c5 8.0-0 ♘c6 9.c3 b6∓.

6...0-0!

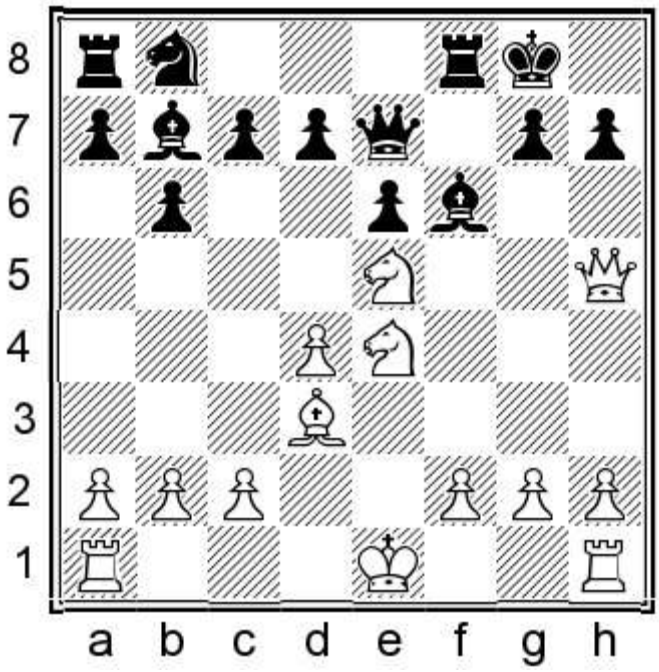
I think this is a very important move. Black shouldn't allow a knight to the dominant e4-square.

≤ 6...fxe4 7.♘xe4



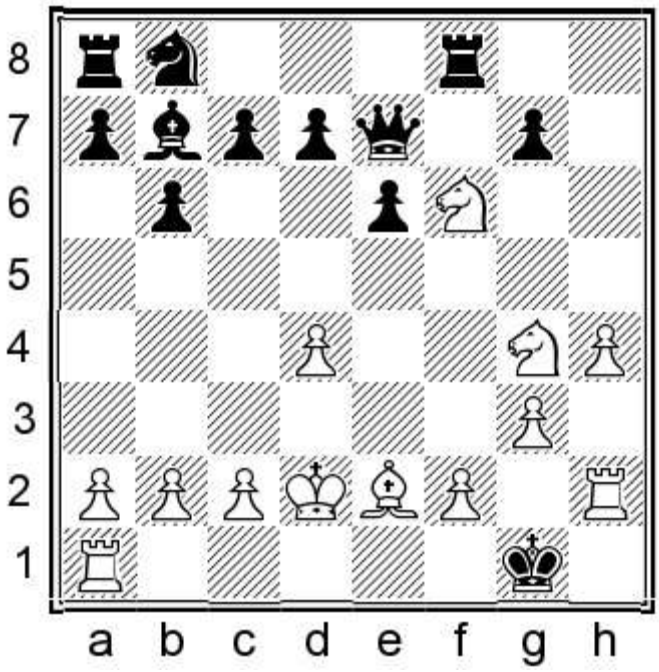
Position after: 7.♘xe4

This has been known to be very dangerous since the beginning of the 20th century! Let me show you a spectacular game that you may already know: 7...b6 8.♘e5 0-0 9.♗d3 ♗b7 10.♕h5 ♕e7



Position after: 10...♕e7

11.♕xh7+!! A fantastic queen sacrifice, leading to a forced mate. 11...♔xh7 12.♘xf6+ ♔h6 [12...♔h8 13.♘g6#] 13.♘eg4+ ♔g5 14.h4+ ♔f4 15.g3+ ♔f3 16.♗e2+ ♔g2 17.♖h2+ ♔g1 18.♔d2#

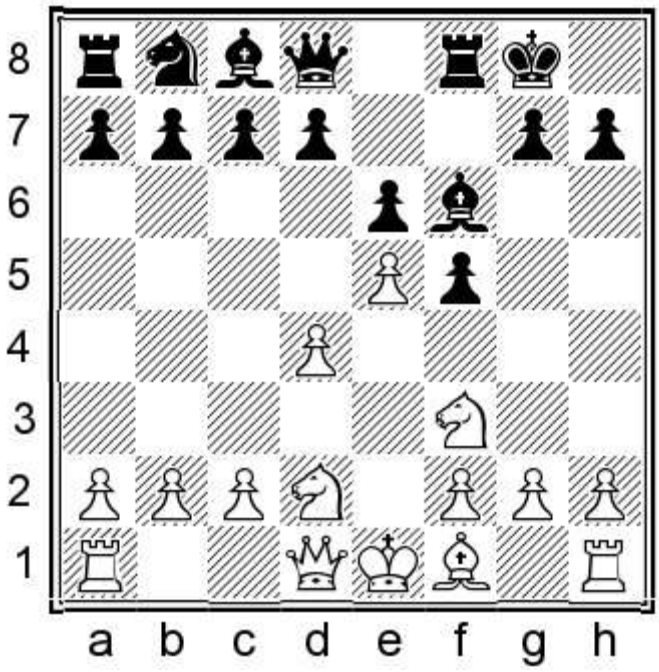


Position after: 18.♔d2#

1-0 Lasker, E – Thomas, G, London 1912.

7.♗d3

7.e5 White can close the center, but we have the ...c5 or ...d6 pawn breaks to open the position.

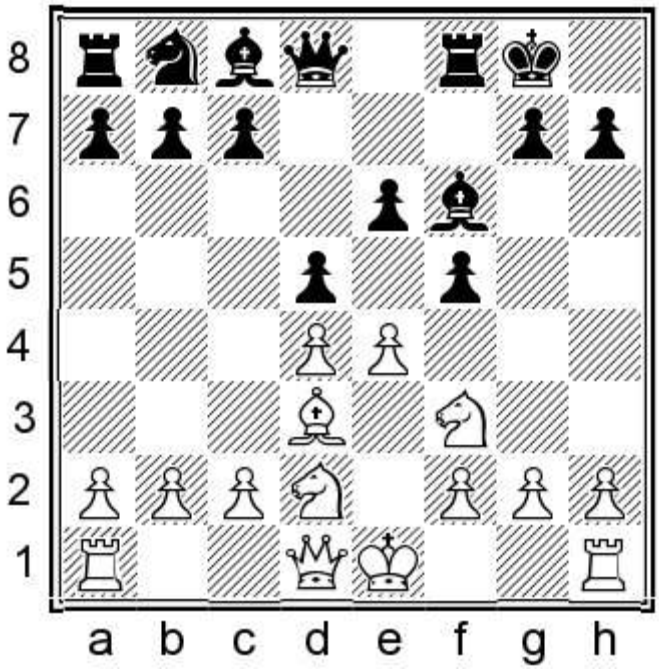


Position after: 7.e5

7...♗e7 8.♗c4 [8.♗d3 d6 9.c3 ♘d7 10.0-0 dxe5 11.dxe5 ♘b6 12.♗c2 ♗d7!∓] 8...d5 9.exd6 [9.♗d3 b6

transposes to the line starting with 7.♗xf6] 9...cxd6 10.♕e2 d5 11.♗d3 ♘c6⇄

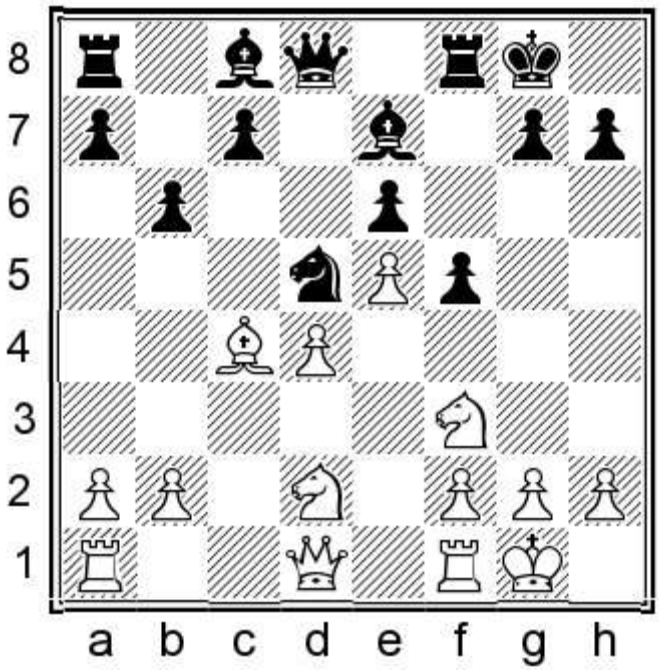
7...d5!



Position after: 7...d5!

8.exf5

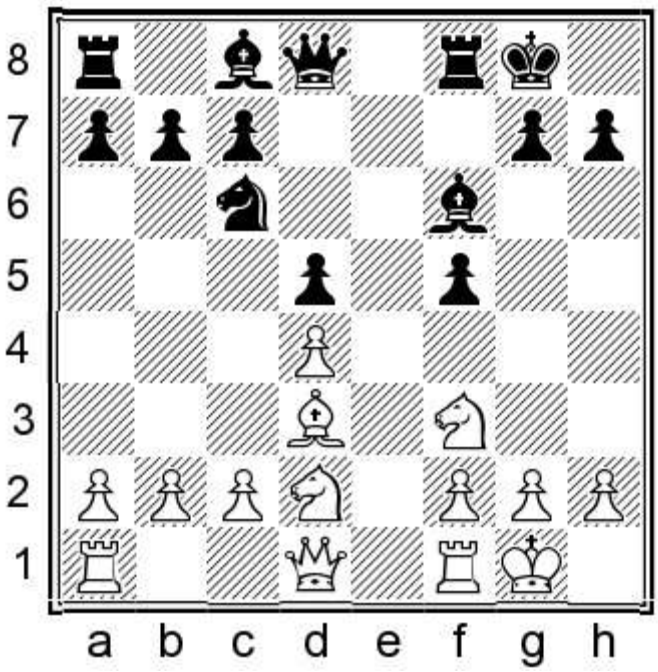
8.e5 ♗e7 9.c4 ♘c6! 10.cxd5 ♘b4 11.♗c4 ♘xd5 12.0-0 b6∓



Position after: 12...b6∓

Black has full control of the very important d5-square. He will be able to put a lot of pressure on d4, or can attack White's center with ...c5.

8...exf5 9.0-0 ♘c6



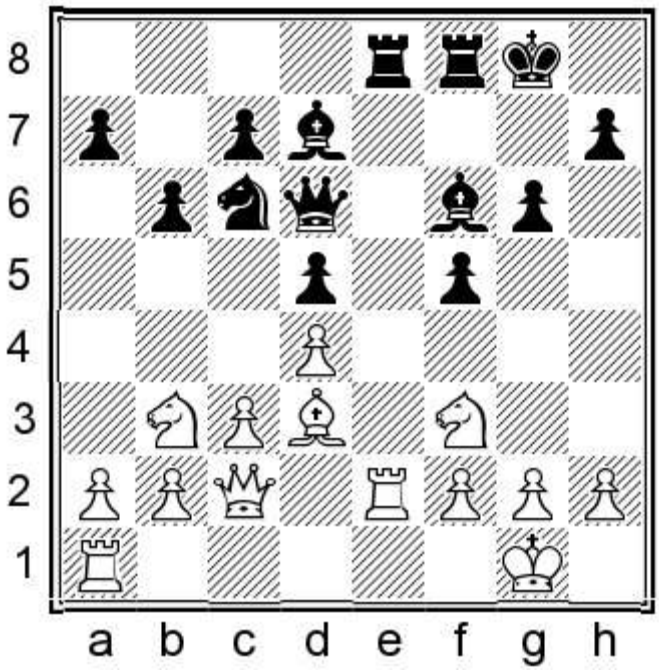
Position after: 9...♘c6

We have no problems at all. As we will see in the following game, only Black can play for an advantage here.

10.♘b3

10.c3 ♕d6 11.♕c2 g6 12.b4 ♗d7 13.♖fe1 ♖ae8=

10...♕d6 11.♖e1 ♗d7 12.c3 b6 13.♕c2 g6 14.♖e2 ♖ae8∓

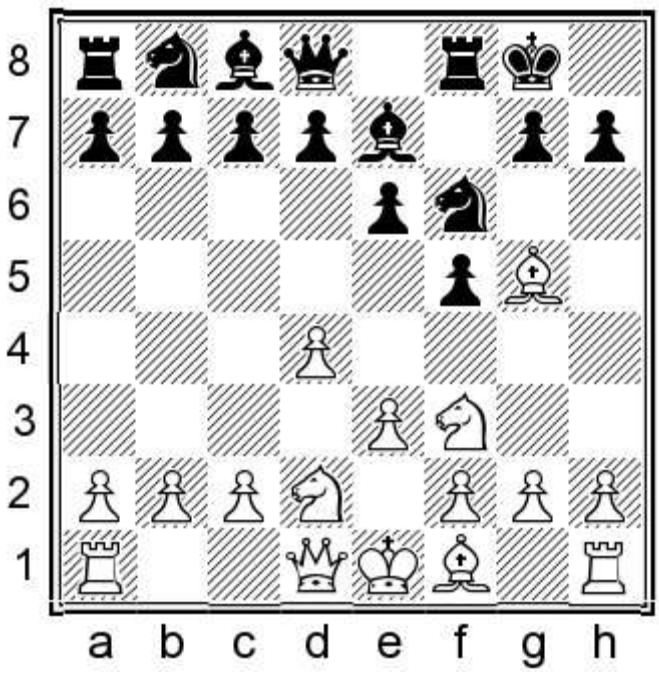


Position after: 14...♖ae8∓

None of the white minor pieces can find any interesting squares. In the long term, Black can try to play ...c5 in order to improve the range of his dark-squared bishop. Nevertheless, a draw was agreed after some fight in Harikrishna, P (2709) – Giri, A (2749), Germany 2014.

c) 3.♗g5 e6 4.♘bd2 ♗e7 5.e3

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗g5 e6 4.♘bd2 ♗e7 5.e3 0-0

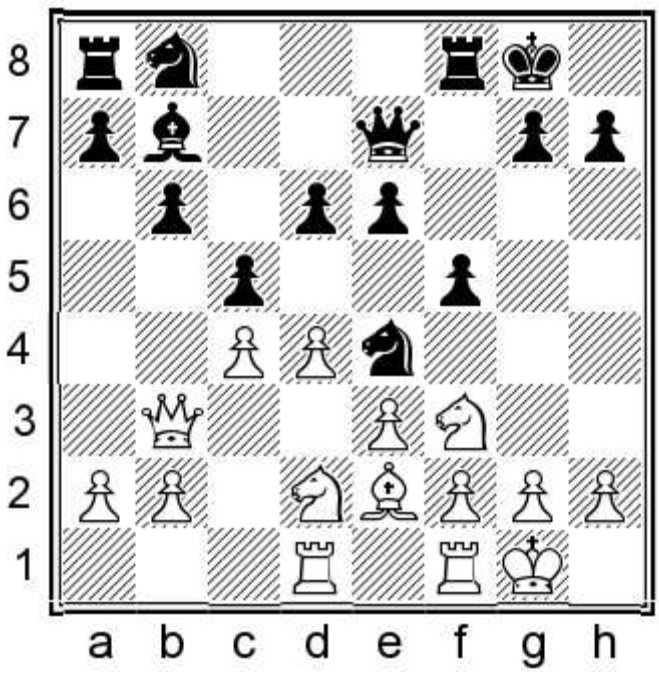


Position after: 5...0-0

6.♗d3

This is the more refined continuation. Compared to 5.♗xf6, White keeps more options. His g5-bishop is still alive, so he will exchange on f6 only if he considers it useful. Black should keep in mind that ♗xf6 followed by e4 (even with a lost tempo), is still an option, but it's also possible to play in other ways.

6.♗e2 This is less logical because it doesn't fight for the e4-square. 6...b6 7.0-0 ♗b7 8.c4 c5! 9.♕b3 ♘e4 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.♖ad1 d6



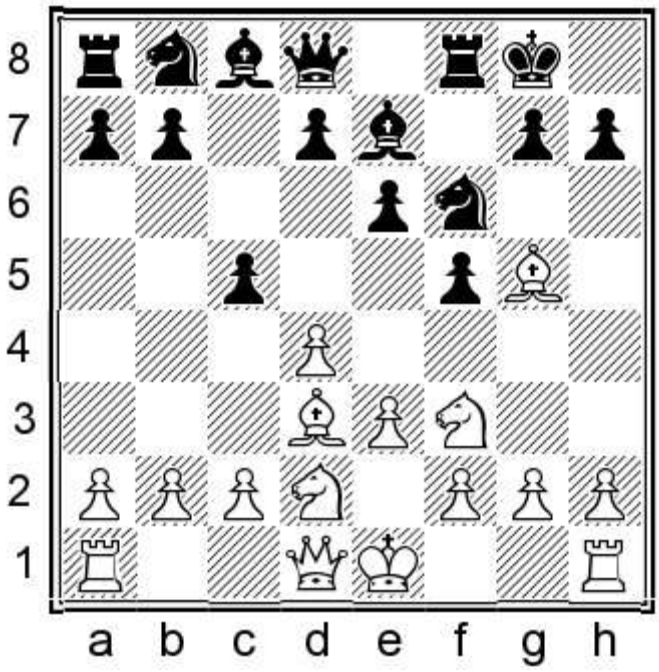
Position after: 11...d6

Our play is really flexible. We can continue with ...♘d7 and then ...♖f6 if we feel we can launch an attack on the kingside.

12.♘xe4 White tries to fight against this plan, but the following game shows that it's not easy for him to find some play: 12...fxe4 13.♘d2 cxd4 14.exd4 d5 15.f3 ♘c6 16.♕e3 ♕f6⇄ 0-1 (52) Blomqvist, E (2574) – Klein, D (2509), chess.com 2017.

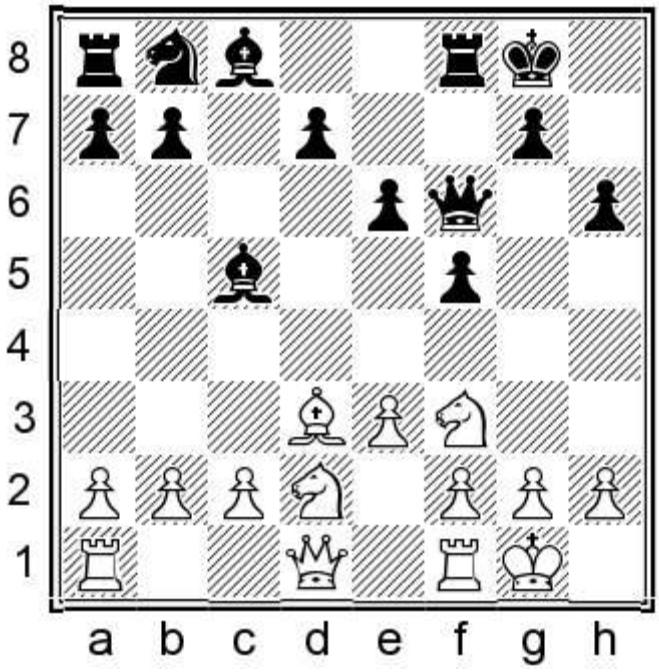
6...b6

6...c5!?



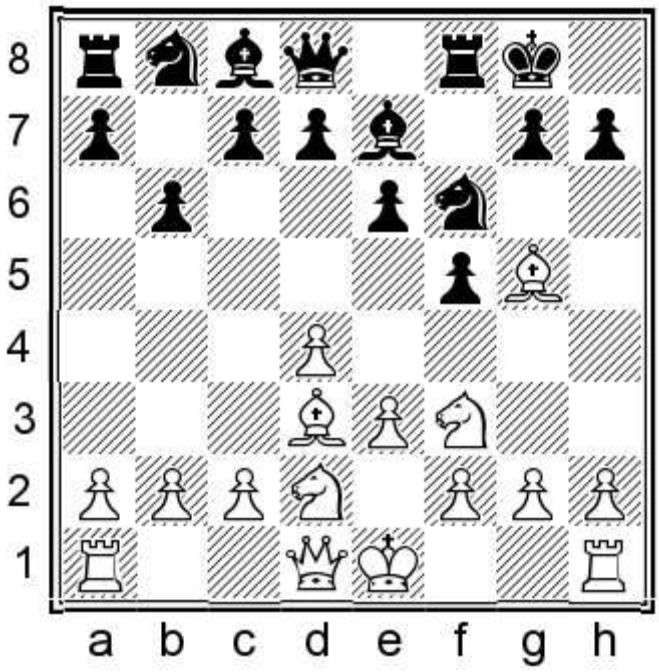
Position after: 6...c5!?

If you want to avoid the simplification arising in the main line after, for instance, 7.e4, you have the possibility of this continuation which should amount to the same as the main line in most cases. 7.dxc5 This is the only drawback to starting with this move, because we currently can't take back with the b6-pawn. [7.c3 b6 8.♕e2 ♗b7 9.0-0 ♘e4] 7...♗xc5 8.0-0 h6 9.♗xf6 ♕xf6



Position after: 9...♕xf6

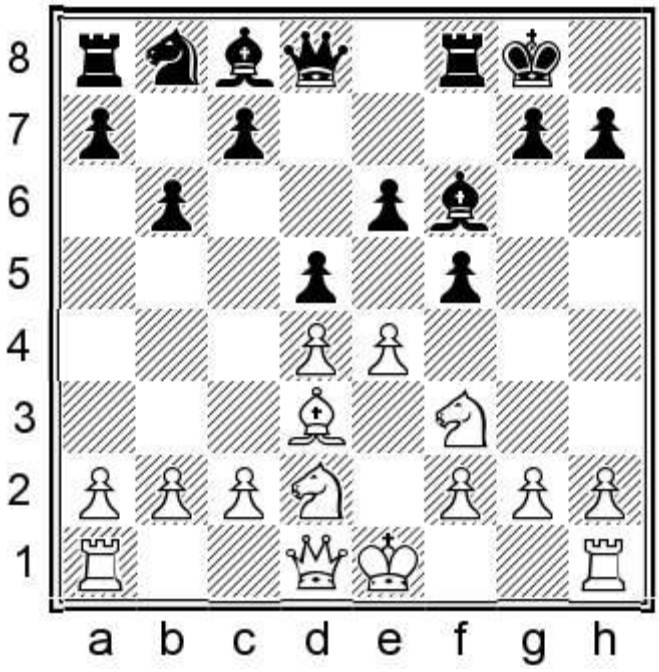
10.e4! [10.c3?! d5↑] 10...♕xb2 11.exf5 exf5 12.♗c4+ ♔h8 13.♘b3 ♗b4∞ Things are pretty unclear. White has some compensation for the pawn, but doesn't seem to have a direct path to follow.



Position after: 6...b6

7.♕e2

A) 7.♗xf6 Obviously this makes little sense now. We will be able to play similar lines to 5.♗xf6 with the extra move ...b6, which can be useful in some cases. 7...♗xf6 8.e4 d5! [8...fxe4 9.♘xe4 ♗b7 10.♕e2↑ White will castle queenside and try to work up an attack.]

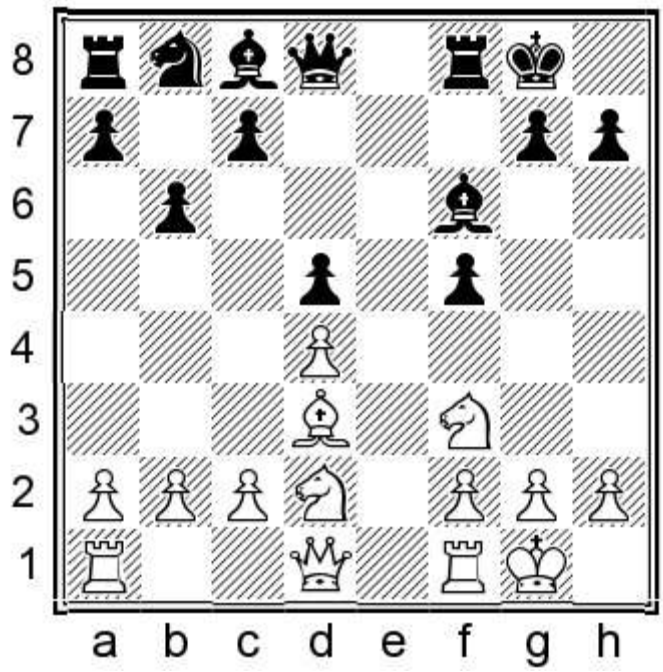


Position after: 8...d5!

A1) 9.e5?! ♗e7 10.0-0 c5 11.c3 ♘c6 12.♕e2 g5!∓ White has no prospects at all. His knights have no

squares and Black can improve his position on both sides with his pawns and bring his c8-bishop into play with ...♗d7−e8−h5. He is probably already much better.

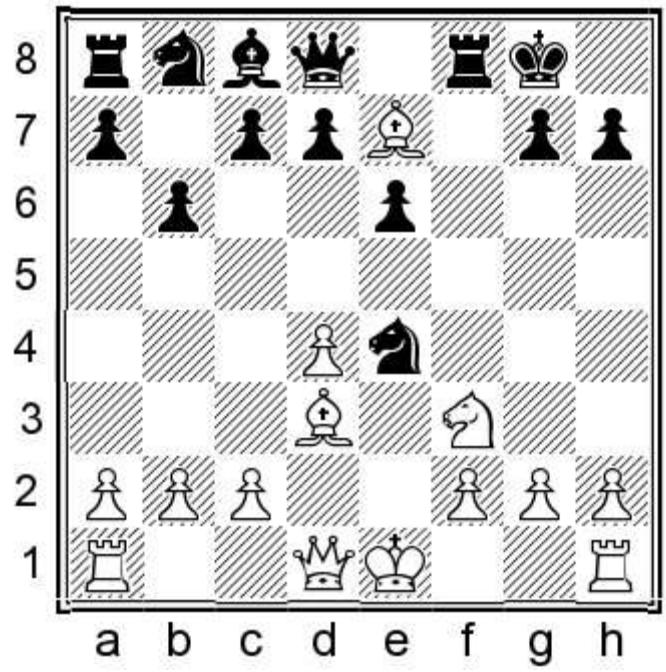
A2) 9.exf5 exf5 10.0-0



Position after: 10.0-0

10...♘c6 [10...c5 This is tempting, but we can't really unbalance the game. 11.c3 ♘c6 12.♗b5! ♕c7 13.♖e1↑ I think this is even easier for White, as he may be able to get the e5-square for one of his knights.] 11.c3 ♕d6↑ This is similar to the Harikrishna – Giri game that we discussed in the 5.♗xf6 line. Black is the one who is pushing.

B) 7.e4 This line seems to lead more or less to a forced draw. It looks surprising to assess something like this while no pieces have been traded, but analysis suggests it is the case. 7...fxe4 8.♘xe4 ♘xe4 9.♗xe7



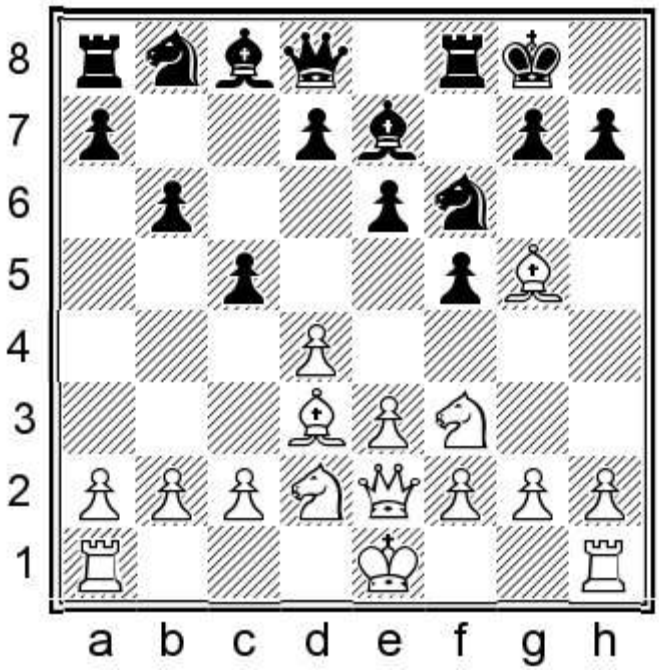
Position after: 9.♗xe7

9...♘xf2!? [9...♕xe7 10.♗xe4 d5 11.♗d3 c5 12.0-0 ♘c6 13.♖e1±]

B1) 10.♘g5!? looks surprising, but is actually playable. 10...♕xe7?? [10...g6 11.♗xd8 ♘xd1 12.♖xd1 ♖xd8 is just a transposition] 11.♗xh7+ ♔h8 12.♕h5+–

B2) 10.♗xd8 ♘xd1 11.♖xd1 ♖xd8 12.♘g5 g6 [12...h6?? 13.♗h7+! ♔f8 14.0-0+ ♔e7 15.♖f7+ ♔d6 16.♘f3+–] 13.0-0 It's clear that White's play is dangerous. We need to trade his bishop in order to reduce the tension. 13...♗a6! 14.♖f2 ♗xd3 15.♖xd3 ♘c6 16.♖f7 h6 17.♖h3 hxg5 18.♖hh7= And that's that, perpetual is unavoidable.

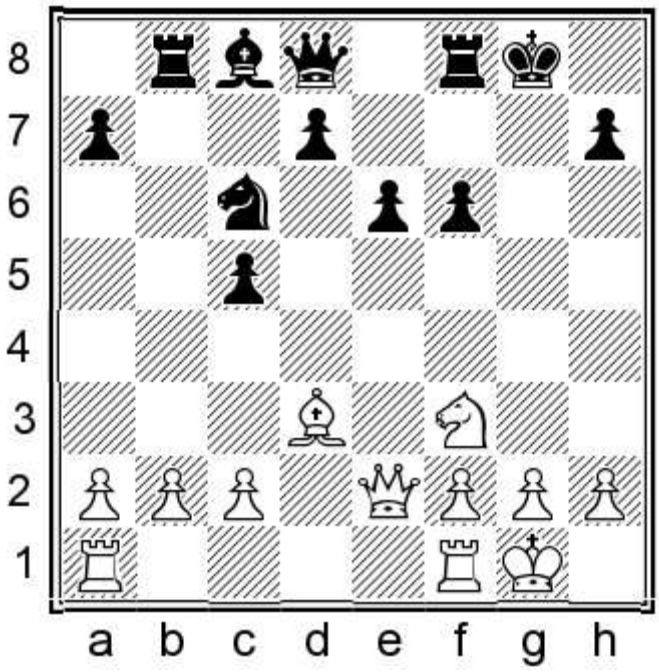
7...c5



Position after: 7...c5

8.c3

8.e4 fxe4 9.♘xe4 ♘c6 10.dxc5 bxc5 11.♘xf6+ ♗xf6 12.♗xf6 gxf6!? 13.0-0 ♖b8⇄



Position after: 13...♖b8⇄

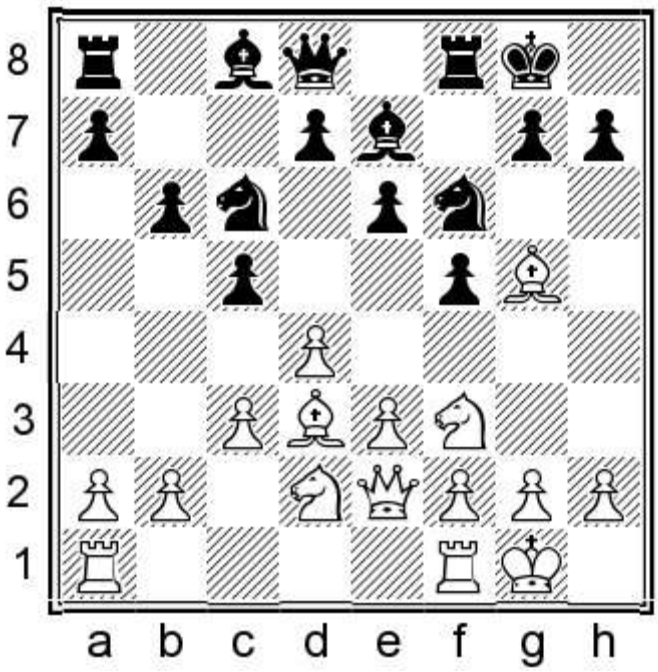
A difficult position to assess. On the one hand Black has many pawns in the center, which might become very strong; on the other it's easy to go wrong and suffer because of the weaknesses.

Both sides will need to be very accurate in the few next moves.

8...♘c6

This has been played by the top Czech GM, David Navara. It seems that White missed a good opportunity to seize the advantage.

9.0-0



Position after: 9.0-0

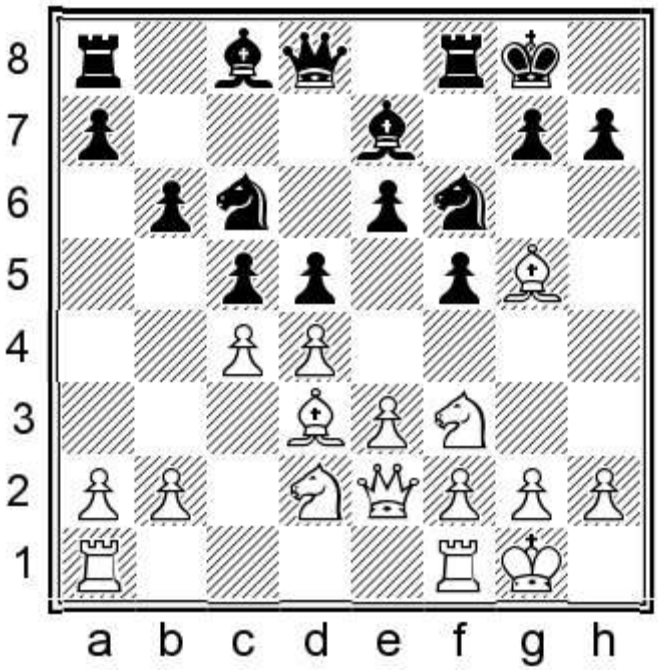
9...d5!?N

This is acceptable in order to prevent any e4 ideas, but it means you have to play a Stonewall pawn structure, which might not suit your style. Personally I think it would be my choice.

9...♗b7 This logical move has already been played once. In the game Nikolaidis, I (2519) – Navara, D (2726), Heraklio 2017, 0-1 (60), White could have played 10.dxc5!N 10...bxc5 11.e4 fxe4 12.♘xe4±. I'm not fond of Black's pawn structure, which might prove to be quite weak.

10.♘e5

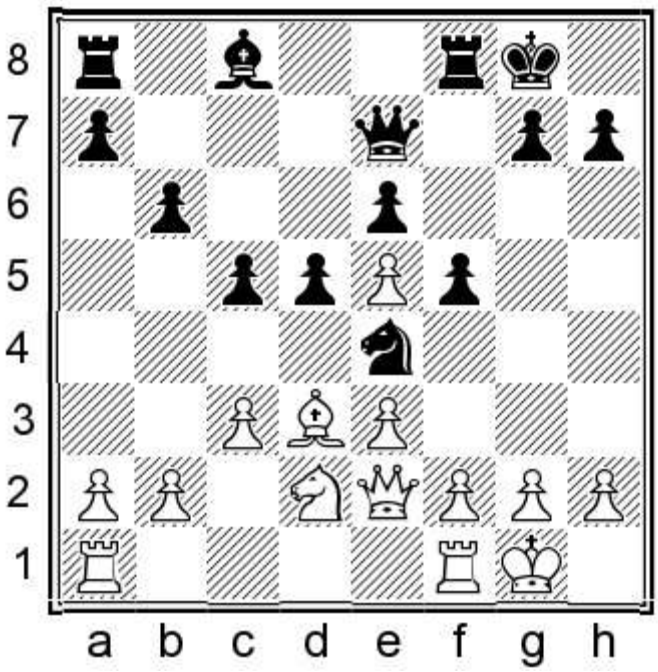
10.c4



Position after: 10.c4

This might be tempting in order to weaken our queenside, but it doesn't really work due to 10...♘b4! 11.♗b1 h6 12.♗f4 ♗a6↑.

10...♘xe5 11.dxe5 ♘e4 12.♗xe7 ♕xe7=



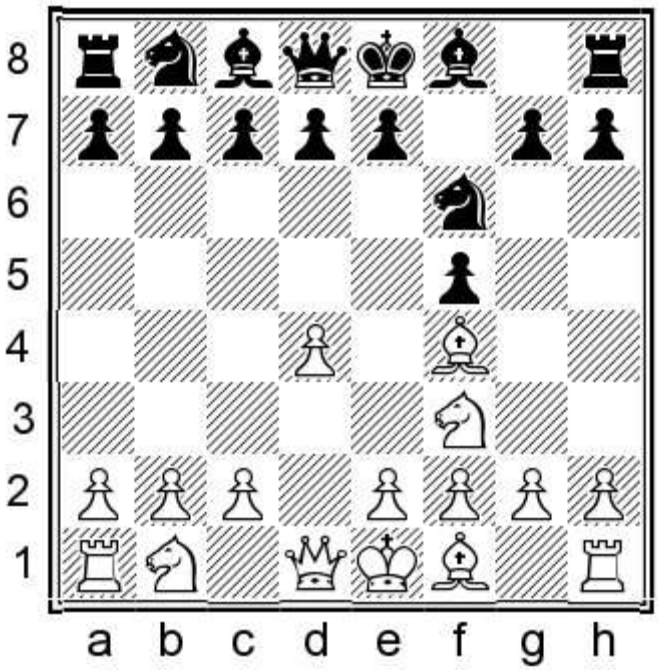
Position after: 12...♕xe7=

Usually in the Stonewall Black is unhappy when he is left with his light-squared bishop because of its

passivity due to the pawns being on same-colored squares, but here it's quite different. It can quite easily come into play from b7 and the ...d5−d4 push, opening the center. White shouldn't be tempted into taking on e4, which would instead open lines for our rooks.

d) 3.♗f4 g6 4.e3 ♗g7 5.♗c4

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗f4



Position after: 3.♗f4

The London System against the Dutch Defense is relatively rare. Overall it is played less than against other defenses, probably because it doesn't fight for the e4-square, at least not immediately. As against other defenses, it's a very reliable and flexible system for White, and shouldn't be underestimated.

3...g6

White has various ways to develop his pieces. We must distinguish two main kinds of development: (i) when White refrains from playing c4 (we will consider these lines now) and (ii) when White wants better control of the center by playing c4 sooner or later (which we will discuss later in the chapter).

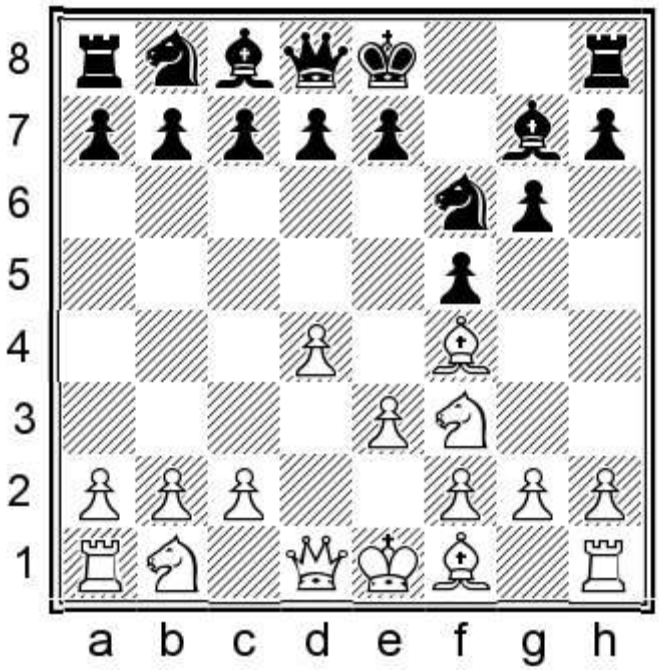
4.e3

A) 4.h3 ♗g7 5.e3 0-0 6.♗e2 d6 7.0-0 transposes into the main line with 7.h3, as in Aronian – Caruana, Zürich rapid 2014.

B) 4.h4 ♗g7 5.e3 d6 This exact position has already been discussed in the previous chapter, in the 2.♗f4 subchapter.

C) 4.c4 – see the next subchapter.

4...♗g7



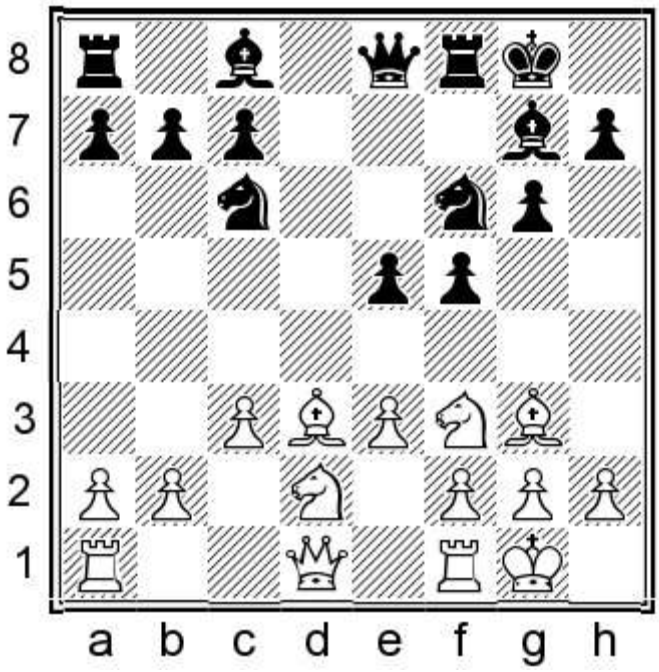
Position after: 4...♗g7

5.♗c4

This is the main move in the current position, but I consider the idea with ♗e2 to be more important, as it may appear via various move orders – see the next subchapter.

5.♗d3 Some people might want to place the bishop here in order to have the possibility of playing e4 at some point. My first impression is that this makes it the most logical square, but it has only been seen rarely, for some reason or other. 5...d6

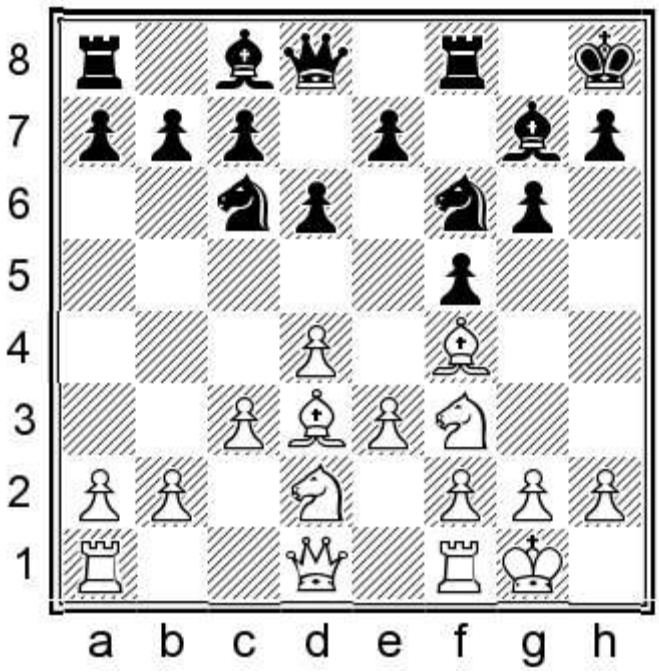
A) 6.0-0 0-0 7.♘bd2 ♘c6 8.c3 ♕e8 9.♗g3 e5 10.dxe5 dxe5



Position after: 10...dxe5

11.♗b5 [11.♗c4+ ♔h8=] 11...♘h5 12.♕b3+ ♔h8 13.♗xc6 bxc6 14.♕a3 ♘xg3 15.hxg3 a5 16.e4 f4⇄

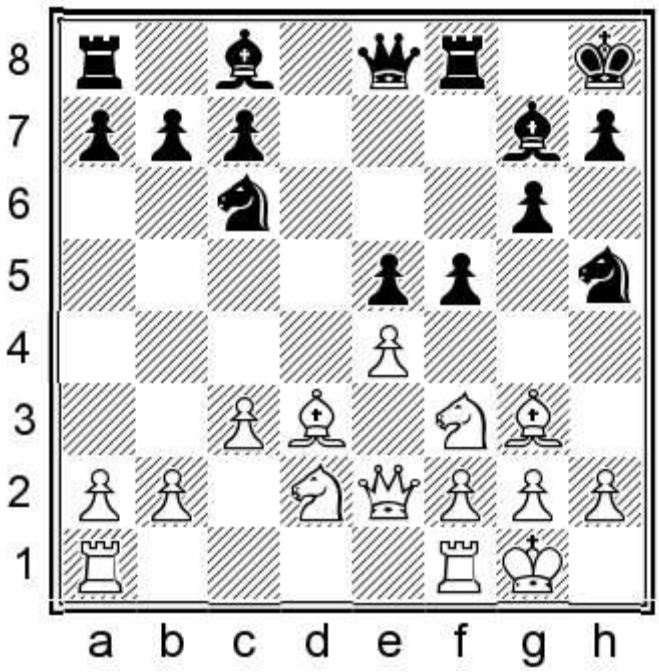
B) 6.♘bd2 ♘c6 7.0-0 0-0 8.c3 ♔h8!



Position after: 8...♔h8!

This is always a useful move when there is no pawn on c4, and especially when we want to push ...e5. It prevents any checks, and here it contains a nasty trap if White does nothing to protect the d3-bishop or move it. 9.♕e2 [9.a4? The kind of move White doesn't have time for. 9...e5!∓ 10.dxe5?! dxe5

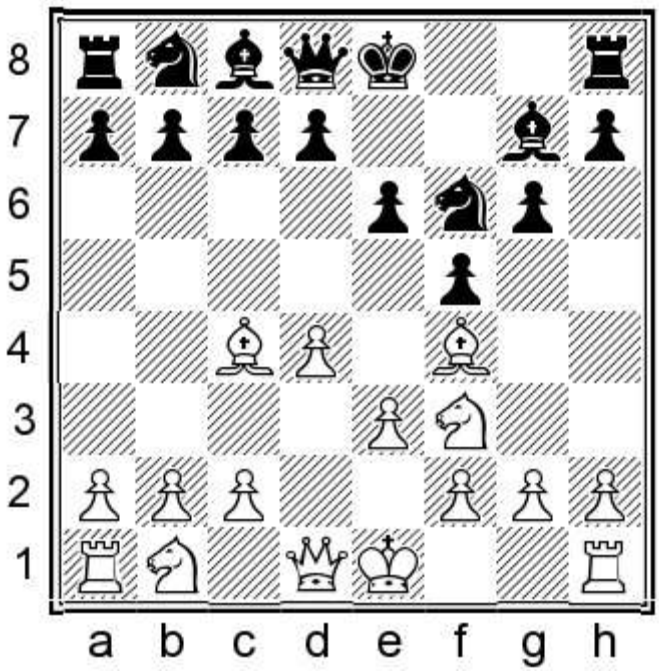
White would escape with ♗c4+ if our king was still on g8. 11.♘xe5 ♘xe5 12.♗xe5 ♕xd3–+; 9.h3? meets with the same punishment after 9...e5!∓] 9...♕e8 10.♗g3 e5 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.e4 ♘h5!∓



Position after: 12...♘h5!∓

Black doesn't only want to take on g3, he may want to win the bishop with ...f4 and ...h6, threatening ... g5, with no tactic for White against the knight on h5 because it is protected by the queen.

5...e6!?



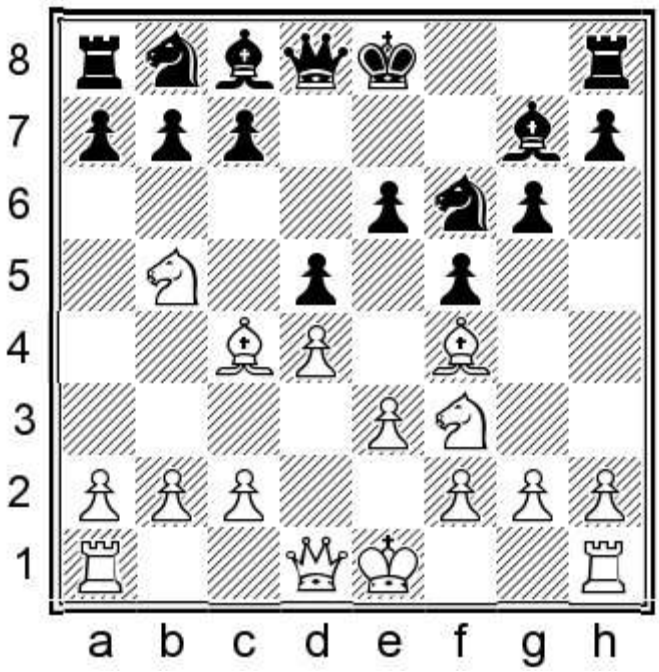
Position after: 5...e6!?

Some players have tried 5...d5. It’s probably playable, but I’m not fond of a Stonewall set-up, even if it gains a tempo on the bishop.

6.h3

A) 6.♘c3

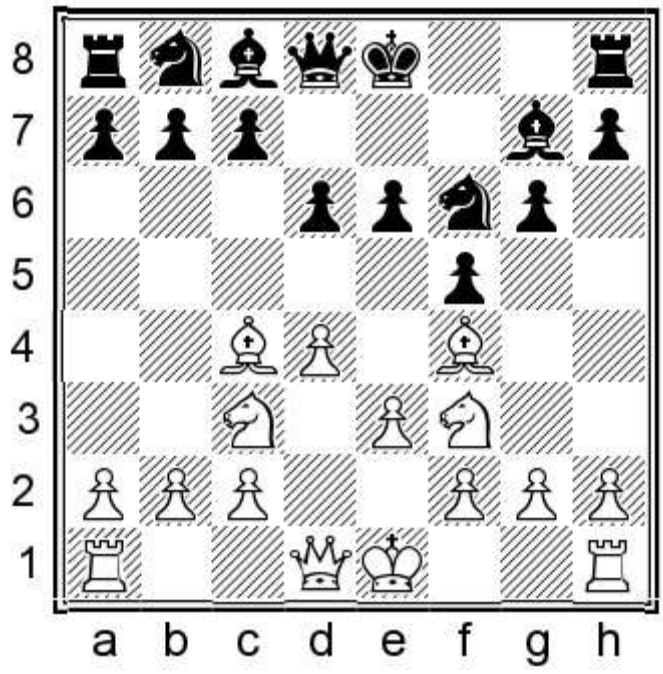
A1) 6...d5?! 7.♘b5!N



Position after: 7.♘b5!N

This new possibility is quite sound for White. 7...♘a6 [7...dxc4 8.♘xc7+ ♔e7 9.♘xa8 ♘a6 10.♘e5 ♗d7 11.♘xc4 ♕xa8 12.♕d3±] 8.♗b3 0-0 9.c4 c6 10.♘c3±

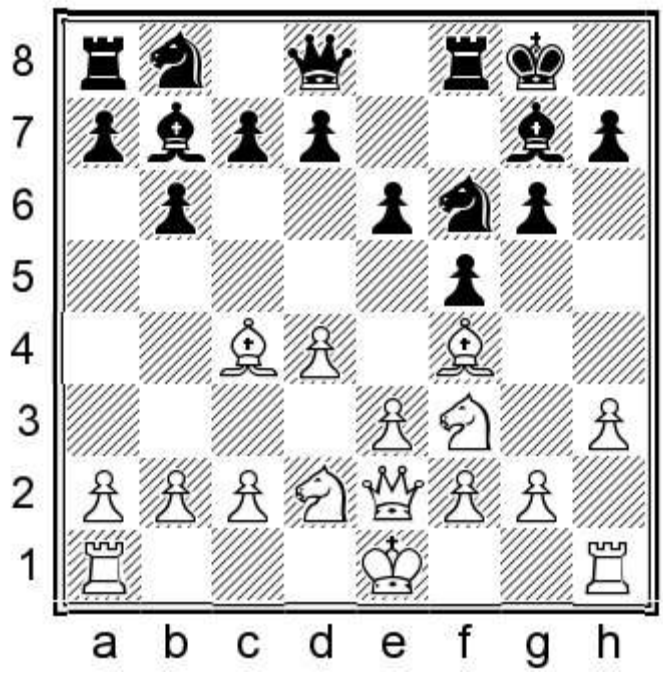
A2) 6...d6



Position after: 6...d6

White's development looks like the first moves a child learns. I don't think it's particulary bad, but White might soon find himself out of moves, and with pieces that may find themselves in Black's way. 7.h4 [7.♘g5?! It is crazy that some White players have opted for this stupid-looking move. Black simply protects his pawn, and will easily chase the white knight. 7...♕e7 8.♕e2 h6 9.♘f3 g5 10.♗g3 a6↑] 7...0-0 8.♕e2 a6!? 9.a4?! ♘c6 10.0-0-0 ♕e8∓

B) 6.♘bd2 0-0 7.h3 b6 8.♕e2 ♗b7↑



Position after: 8...♗b7↑

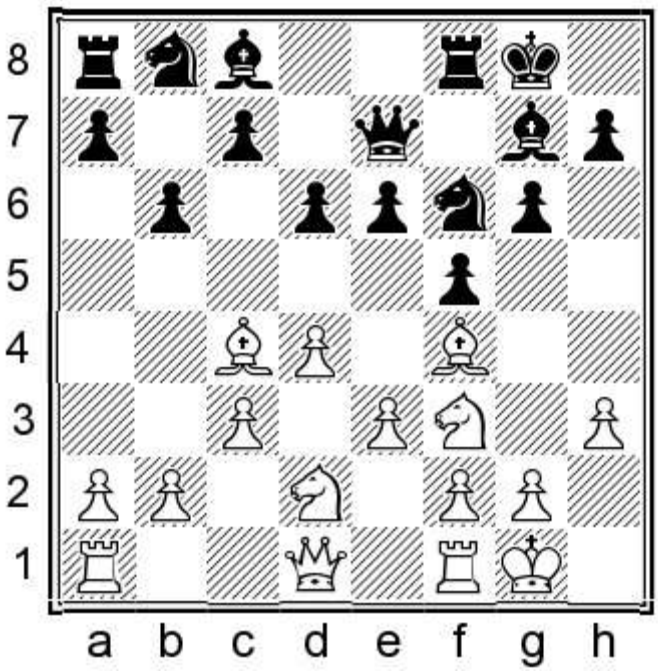
Black has an easy-to-play position. White might want to start a double-edged attack with opposite-side castling, but he is not the one with the easier attack. 9.0-0-0?! d5 10.♗d3 c5! 11.c3 c4 12.♗c2 b5 13.g4 ♘c6 14.♖dg1 b4 15.♘e5?! [15.♘b1 ♕a5∓] 15...bxc3 16.bxc3 ♕a5–+ White collapsed in the game Dezelin, M (2350) – Malaniuk, V (2505), Budapest 1990, 0-1 (33).

6...0-0

6...d6 7.♘bd2 ♘c6 Against this type of slow play by White, it can also be tempting for Black to opt for a quick reaction in the center, but unfortunately it fails rather painfully: 8.0-0 ♕e7 9.♖e1! e5? 10.e4!± A nice crush in the center, which proves that Black shouldn't keep his king in the center for too long.

7.♘c3

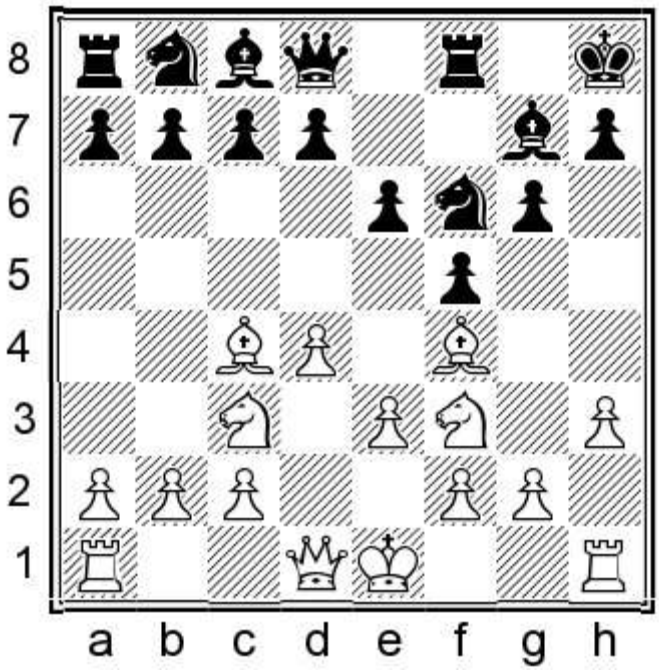
7.0-0 d6 8.c3 ♕e7 9.♘bd2 b6!



Position after: 9...b6!

I like this approach. We don't make any decisions with the b8-knight and take possession of the long light-squared diagonal. 10.♖e1 ♗b7 11.♕c2 ♘bd7 12.♗h2 ♔h8 13.♗d3 e5! 14.dxe5 dxe5 15.e4 f4↑

7...♔h8!?



Position after: 7...♔h8!?

Without paying too much attention to the theoretical and accuracy aspects, let's consider a game by the Dutch Defense specialist, David Anton Guijarro.

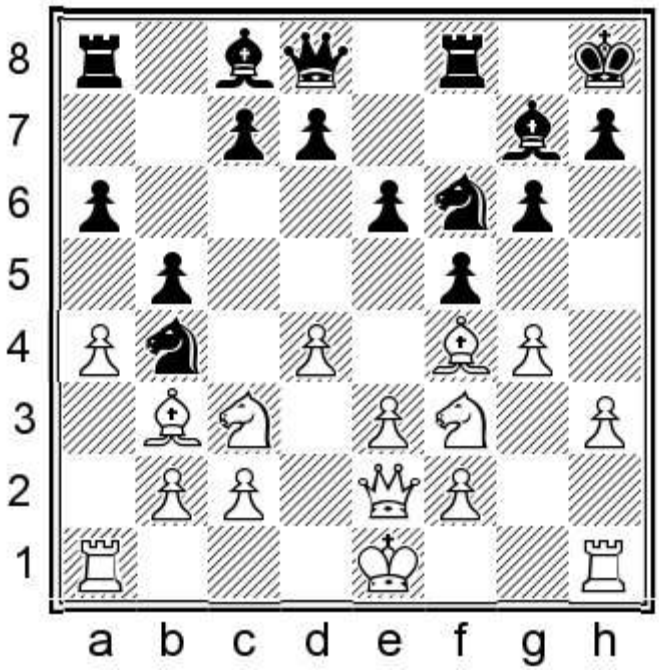
8.g4 a6

Black immediately seeks counterplay on the queenside.

9.a4 ♘c6 10.♕e2 ♘b4

White has prevented the main idea of ...b5, but has given away the important b4-square.

11.♗b3 b5

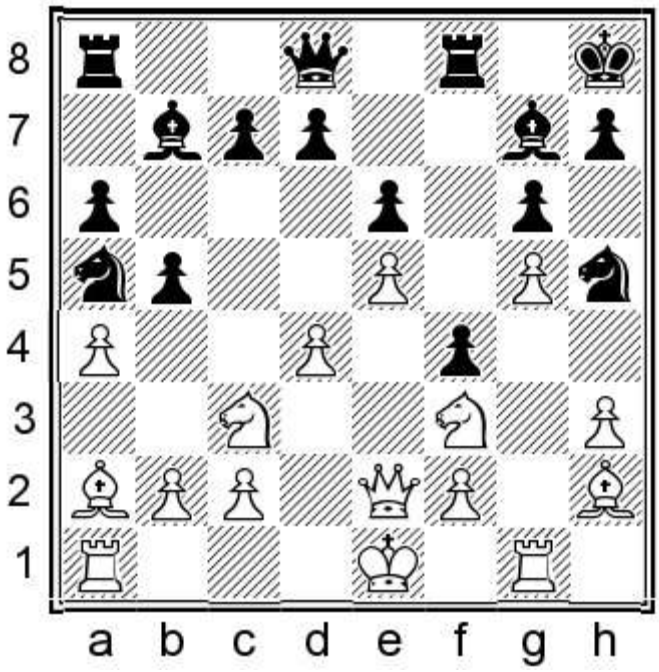


Position after: 11...b5

12.g5

12.axb5 ♗b7 13.b6! This strong move may have been missed by both players. 13...cxb6 14.♗d6 a5 15.♗xf8 ♕xf8± Of course even here Black has decent practical compensation.

12...♘h5 13.♗h2 ♗b7 14.♖g1 f4 15.e4 ♘c6 16.e5 ♘a5 17.♗a2



Position after: 17.♗a2

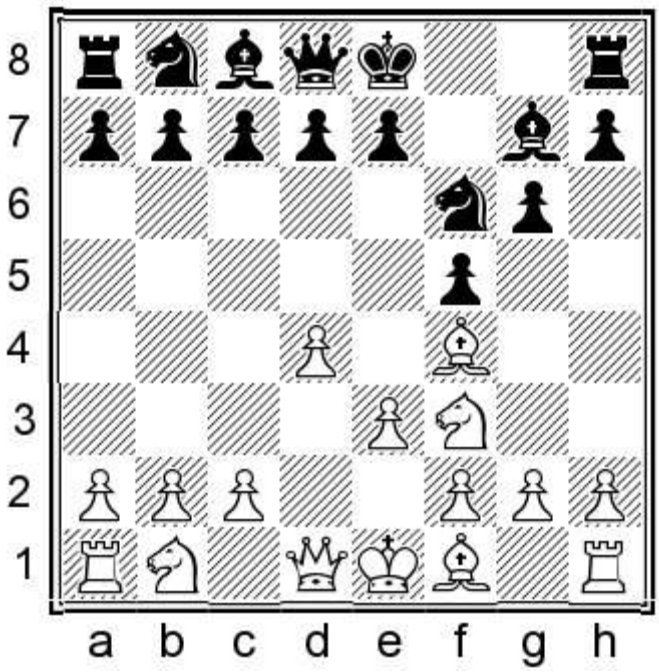
Black managed to confuse White in this original middlegame in Moreno Trujillo, A (2522) – Anton Guijarro, D (2607), Madrid 2015, 0-1 (37), but missed that he could have completely destroyed his center with

17...♗xf3!N 18.♕xf3 c5! 19.dxc5 ♕c7∓

with a crushing position.

e) 3.♗f4 g6 4.e3 ♗g7 5.♗e2 0-0 6.--

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗f4 g6 4.e3 ♗g7

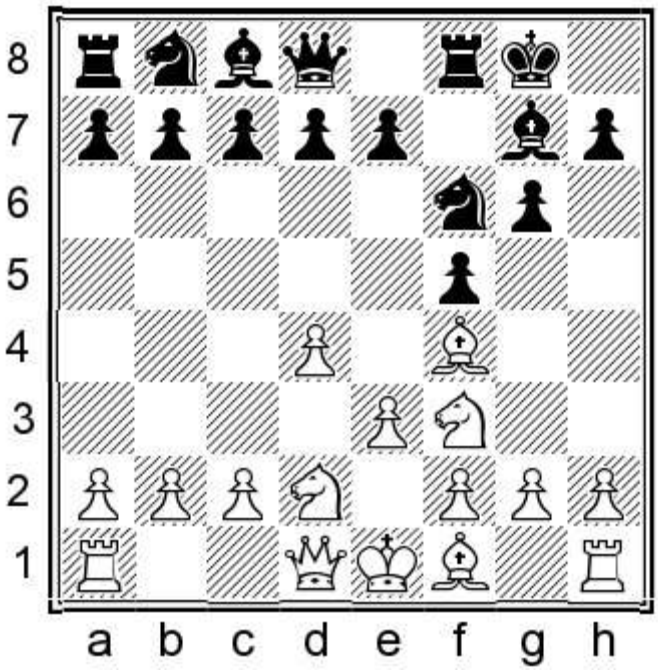


Position after: 4...♗g7

5.♗e2

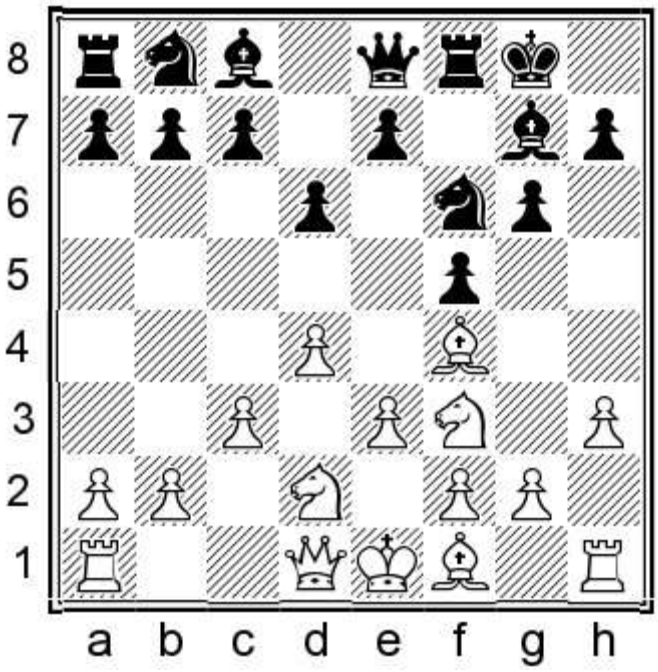
This modest move is the most logical to my eyes. The bishop can't come under attack, it prepares kingside castling and retains complete flexibility.

5.♘bd2 Chances are that this move will transpose into other variations, but we can still have a look at other lines. 5...0-0



Position after: 5...0-0

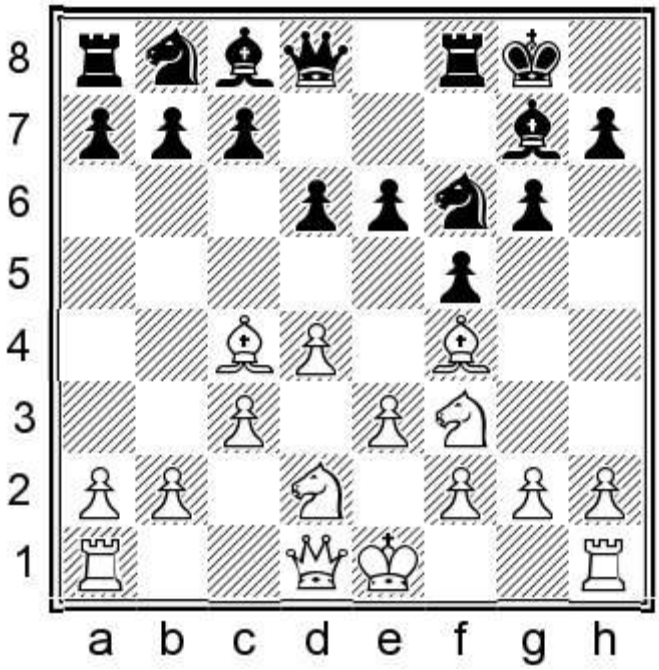
A) 6.h3 d6 7.c3 [7.♗e2 e6 8.0-0 b6 9.c4 ♗b7 10.b4 Even this kind of pawnstorm on the queenside can't achieve much as Black is very solid on this part of the board. 10...♘bd7 11.a4 a5 12.b5 ♕e7↑] 7...♕e8!?



Position after: 7...♕e8!?

Of course, as we have already seen, playing with ...e6 and ...b6 is possible, but here White has already played two slow moves (h3 and c3), so we should be able to counter immediately in the center, e.g. 8.♗c4+ ♔h8 9.0-0 ♘c6 10.♕c2 e5 11.dxe5 ♘xe5 12.♘xe5 dxe5 13.♗h2 ♗d7=.

B) 6.c3 d6 7.♗c4+ e6



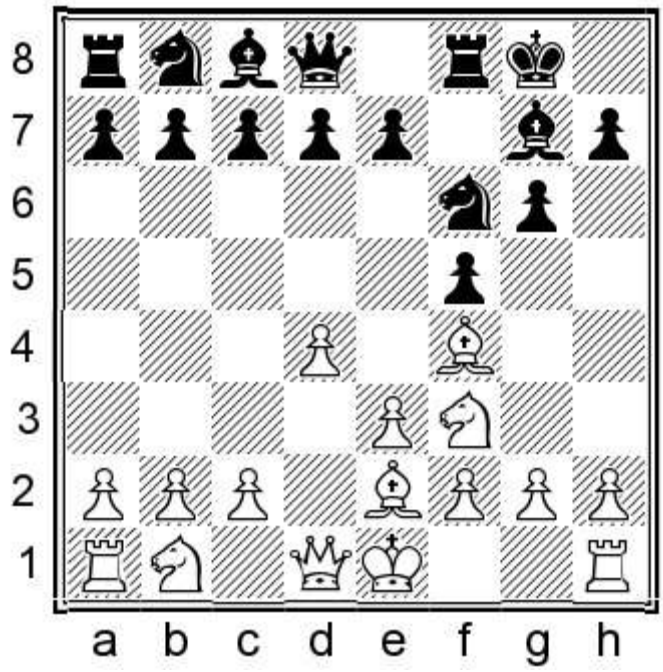
Position after: 7...e6

8.♕b3 [8.h3 ♕e7 9.0-0 b6!? We already reached this position in the previous subchapter.] 8...♕e7

B1) 9.♘g5?! This leads nowhere. 9...♖e8!? [9...d5!? 10.♗e2 c5∓ is better for Black too] 10.0-0 h6 11.♘gf3 b6↑

B2) 9.0-0 ♘c6 10.♗d3 ♔h8 Black is ready to play 11...e5 if he is allowed to. 11.♗g5 h6 12.♗xf6 ♕xf6 13.e4 e5=

5...0-0



Position after: 5...0-0

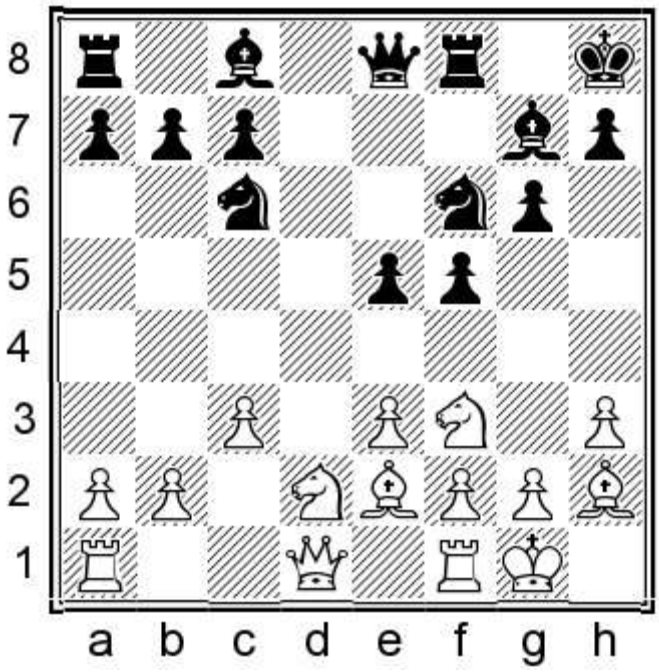
6.0-0

A) 6.c4

A1) 6...♘e4?! We will see a similar idea after 7.c4 in the present subchapter, but it works less well here. The difference is that White hasn't castled yet, and can take advantage of his rook on the h-file (and the f6-knight having left its post) by continuing with the logical 7.h4!↑.

A2) 6...d6 7.♘c3 − see the next subchapter.

B) 6.♘bd2 d6 7.c3 ♕e8 8.0-0 ♘c6 9.h3 e5 10.dxe5 dxe5 11.♗h2 ♔h8⇄ Black has managed to free himself in the center, but his e5-pawn is under pressure, so we can't say that he is better. Play might continue with

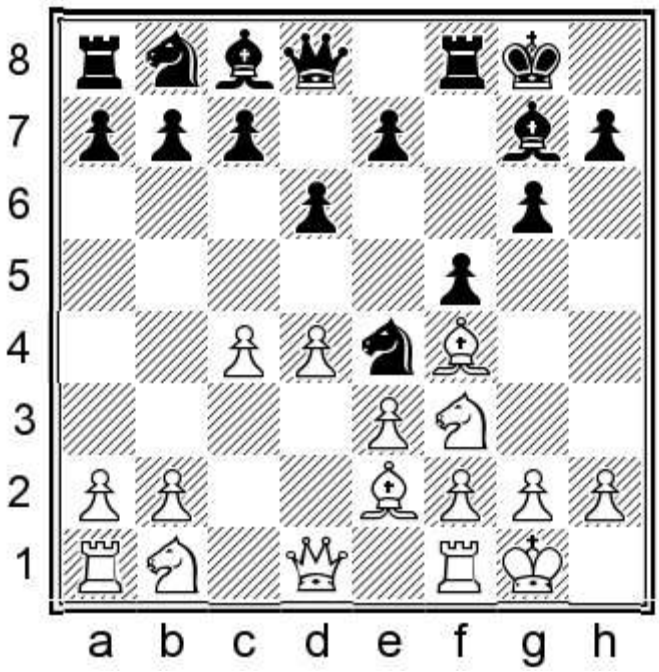


Position after: 11...♔h8⇄

12.♗b5!? ♘d7 13.♘c4 a6 14.♗xc6 bxc6 15.♕a4 ♘b6 16.♘xb6 cxb6= which is still more or less balanced.

6...d6 7.h3

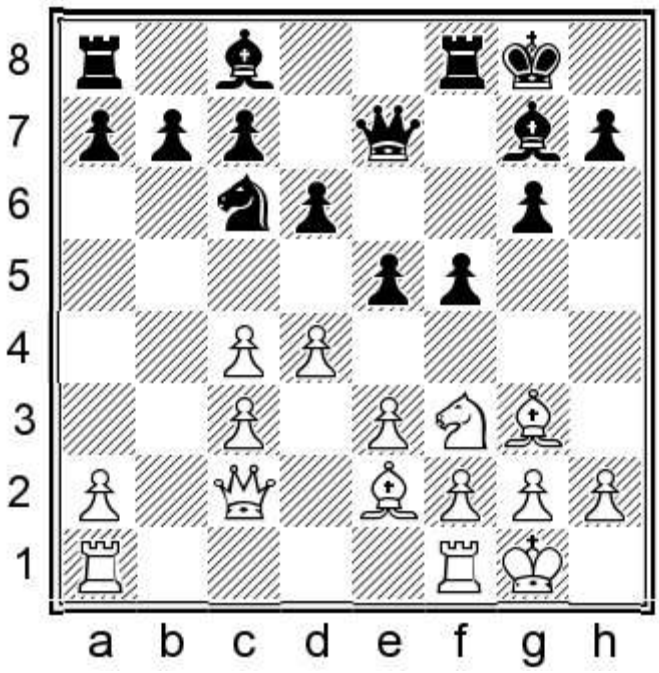
7.c4?! This is quite a poor moment to play c4 as Black now has the possibility to anticipate ♘c3 with 7...♘e4!N



Position after: 7...♘e4!N

A) 8.♘bd2? Trying to avoid doubled pawns in this way is tempting, but definitely dubious. Curiously there is a lack of coordination in White's camp after 8...e5! 9.dxe5 dxe5 10.♘xe4 [10.♘xe5? ♕xd2–+; 10.♗g3 ♘xg3 11.hxg3 e4–+] 10...exf4 11.♕xd8 ♖xd8 12.♘c3 fxe3 13.fxe3 ♘a6∓.

B) 8.♘c3 ♘xc3 9.bxc3 ♘c6 10.♕c2 e5! 11.♗g3 ♕e7∓



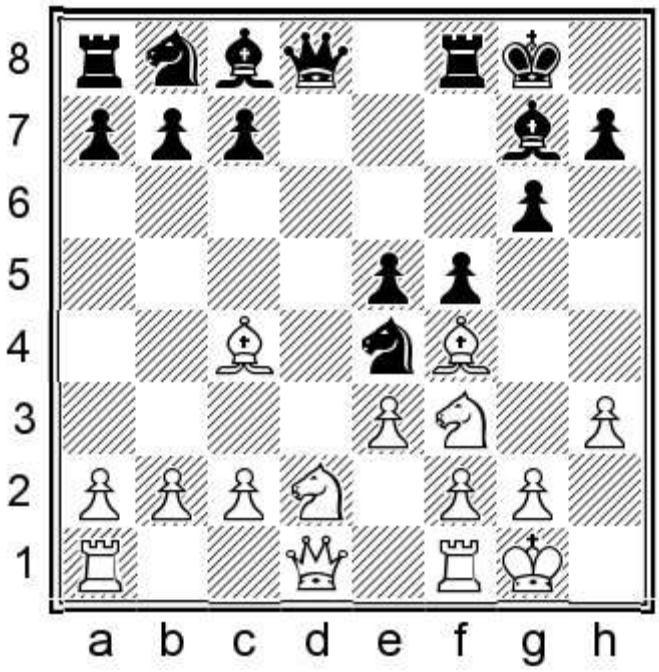
Position after: 11...♕e7∓

Black will follow with ...b6, perhaps playing ...♗a6 and ...♘a5 in order to lay siege to the c4-pawn.

7...e6

Black is no hurry. It may seem like a loss of time, given the idea of pushing ...e5 at some point, but Black is actually not sure yet whether he wants to. He will simply improve his position first, then decide whether it's possible or not, depending on what White has done in the meantime.

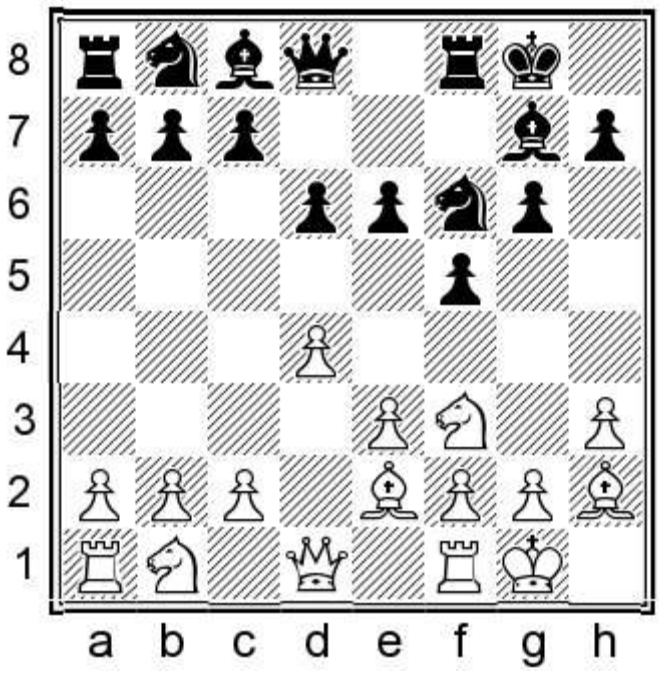
7...♘e4?! If White doesn't start with c4, this move is clearly less effective. 8.♘bd2 e5 9.dxe5 dxe5 10.♗c4+



Position after: 10.♗c4+

This possibility is a major difference. Now Black will face problems with the f7-square. 10...♔h8 11.♘xe4 ♕xd1 12.♖axd1 exf4 13.♘eg5±

8.♗h2!?



Position after: 8.♗h2!?

The idea of securing the position of the bishop first is quite decent. White waits for Black to do

something.

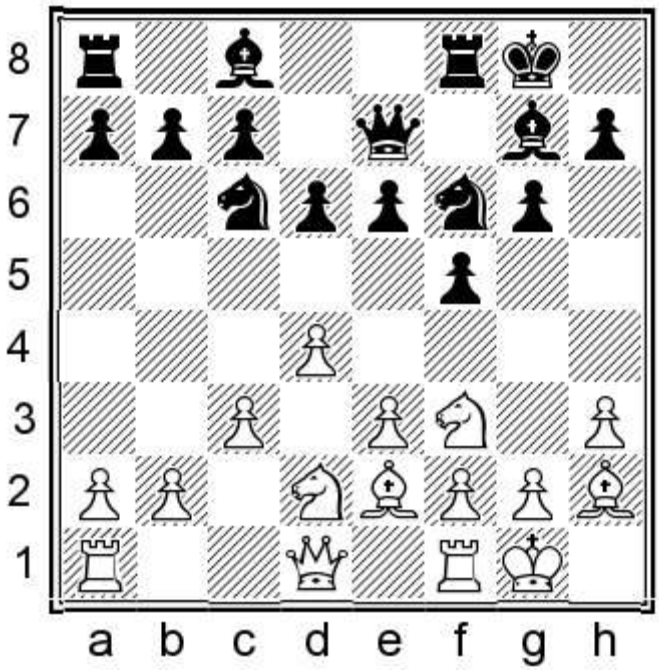
A) 8.♘bd2 b6 has already been seen in the 5.♘bd2 line.

B) 8.c4 will be analyzed in the next subchapter.

8...b6!?N

I prefer this approach, not deciding yet where the b8-knight is going.

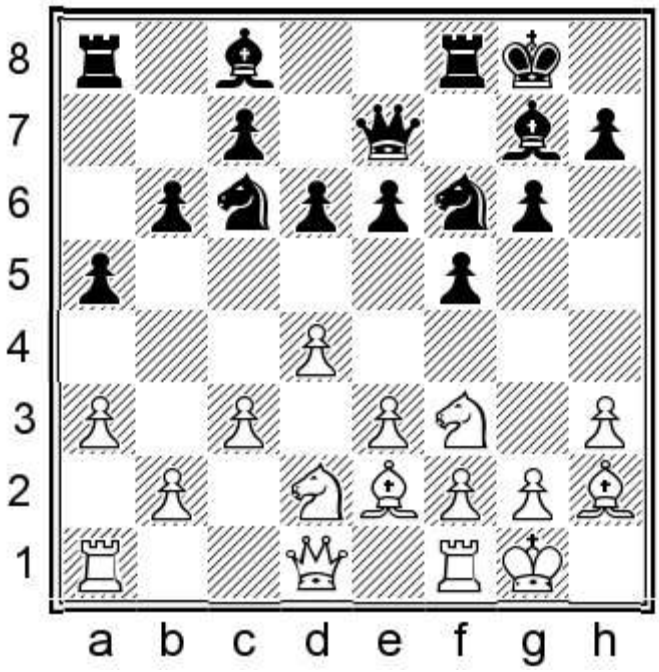
8...♘c6 9.♘bd2 ♕e7 10.c3



Position after: 10.c3

This position has been reached via various move orders. Black is doing fine, but should be patient before undertaking direct action.

A) 10...a5 11.a3?! doesn't make much sense, as b4 will hardly be a great idea. In Bromberger, S (2532) – Georgiadis, N (2473), Austria 2016, Black managed to get the upper hand after 11...b6

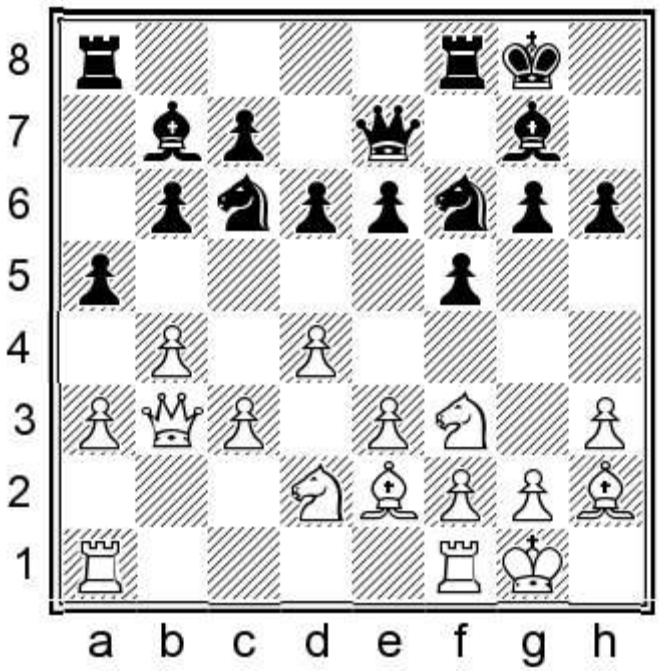


Position after: 11...b6

12.c4 [12.b4 ♗b7 13.b5 ♘b8 14.a4 ♘bd7 15.c4 e5∓] 12...e5 13.c5 bxc5 14.dxc5 ♔h8 15.♖c1 ♘d8 16.cxd6 cxd6 17.♘c4 ♗a6↑. I like Black and his impressive center here. He eventually won, 0-1 (54).

B) 10...e5 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.♗b5 e4 13.♗xc6 bxc6 14.♘d4 c5⇄ Black has more space, but his queenside pawn structure is damaged. It's not clear whether this will be a cause of concern or not.

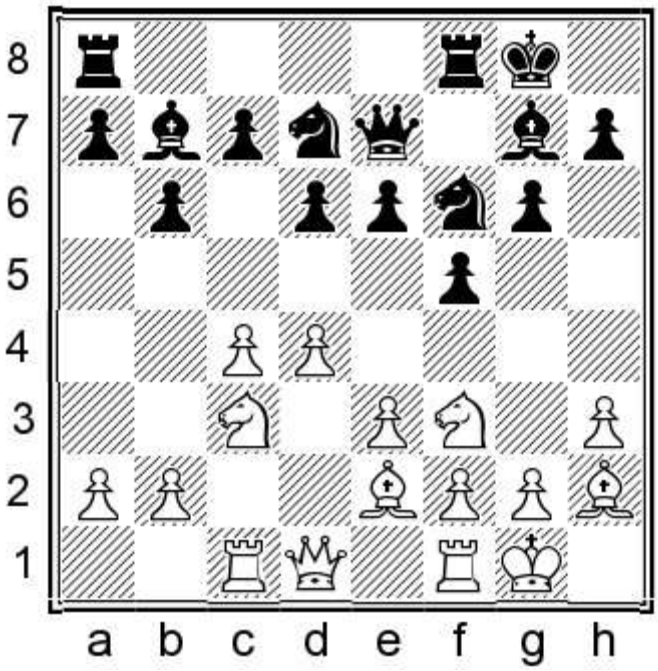
C) 10...b6 11.b4 a5 12.♕b3 ♗b7 13.a3 h6



Position after: 13...h6

Maybe the only inaccuracy in Black's opening. Caruana is getting ideas of pushing ...g5, but could have done so by starting with ...♘d8 and ...♘f7, as in the next few moves. 14.c4 ♘d8 15.c5 axb4 16.axb4 ♘f7 17.♘h4 ♔h7 18.cxd6 cxd6 19.♘c4 ♗d5= Black has a few weaknesses, but he has an amazing light-squared bishop, and good prospects on the kingside and in the center. The top level game Aronian, L (2826) – Caruana, F (2781), Zürich 2014, quite logically ended in a draw.

9.c4 ♗b7 10.♘c3 ♕e7 11.♖c1 ♘bd7



Position after: 11...♘bd7

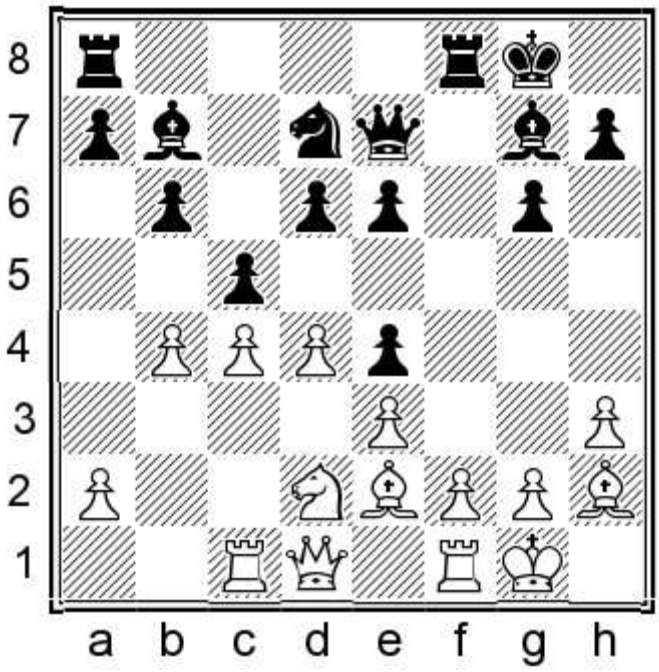
12.b4!

12.♘d2 e5 13.♗f3!? e4 14.♗e2 White has lost two tempi, but has forced Black to close the center, which can be seen as an achievement. 14...c5!?= Nevertheless, it seems clear that Black has enough play to easily keep the balance.

12...♘e4!?

12...e5?! 13.c5! White forcefully opens the queenside, and it's important to remember that our king is still on g8. White is clearly better in every line, e.g. 13...bxc5 14.bxc5 ♔h8 15.♘b5! dxc5 16.♘xe5±.

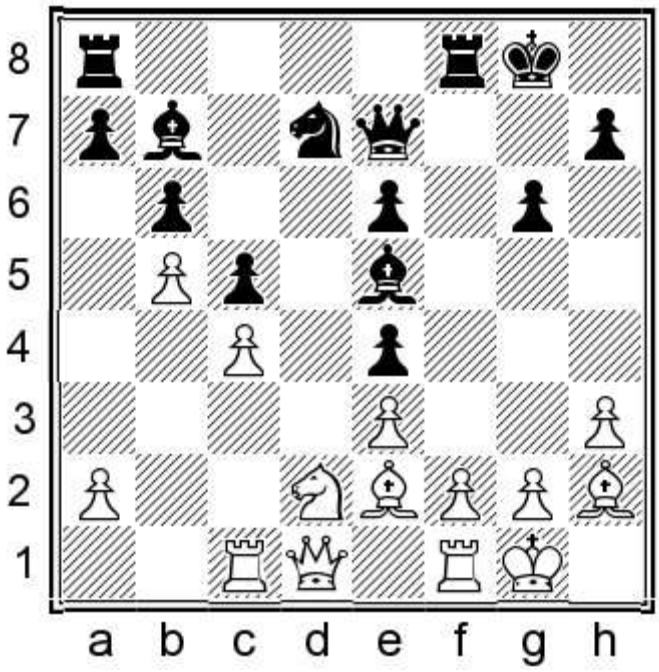
13.♘xe4 fxe4 14.♘d2 c5!



Position after: 14...c5!

15.♕c2

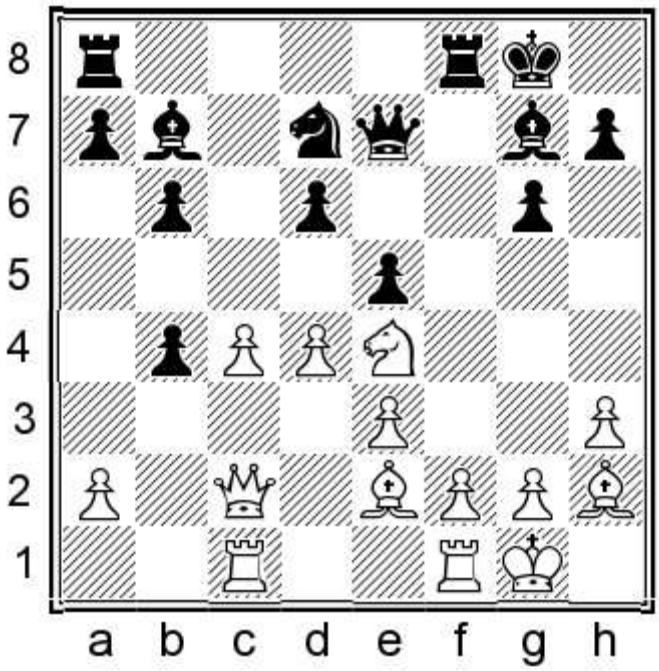
15.dxc5 dxc5 16.b5 ♗e5!⇄



Position after: 16...♗e5!⇄

Black wants to bring his knight to e5, but doesn't want to allow the bishop to take it. Thus trading the bishop first is necessary.

15...cxb4 16.♘xe4 e5↑

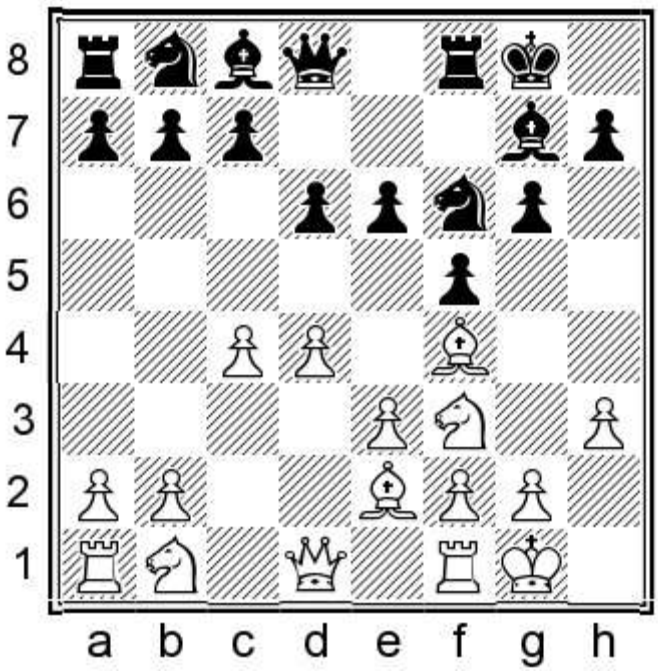


Position after: 16...e5↑

The position is very unbalanced. I like having both our bishops fianchettoed, waiting for the position to open even more.

f) 3.♗f4 g6 4.e3 ♗g7 5.♗e2 0-0 6.0-0 d6 7.h3 e6 8.c4

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗f4 g6 4.e3 ♗g7 5.♗e2 0-0 6.0-0 d6 7.h3 e6 8.c4



Position after: 8.c4

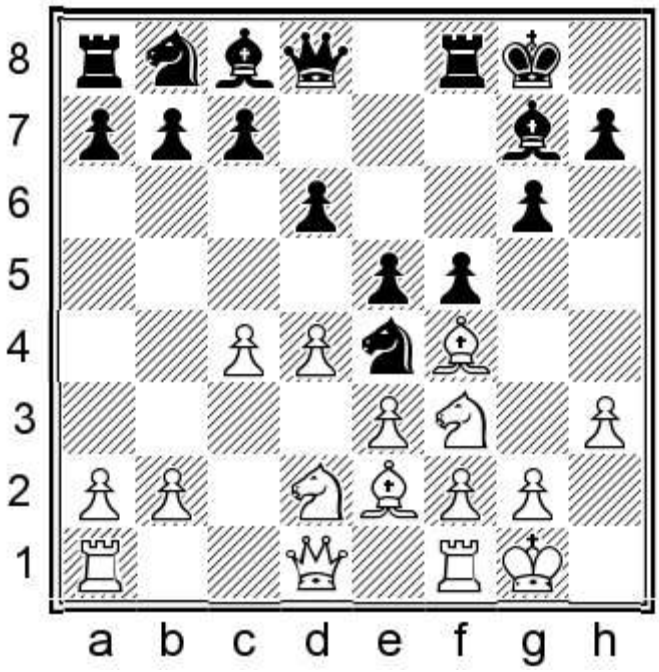
8...♘e4!?N

As in the 7.c4 line of the previous subchapter, I like this move. I think Black has never tried it because he may have missed the idea after 9.♘bd2. It more or less effectively prevents the knight on b1 from developing and helps control the e5-square. 8...♕e7 9.♘c3 b6 10.♖c1 [10.♗h2 ♗b7 was seen in the 8.♗h2 b6 line.] 10...♗b7 11.b4 ♘bd7 12.c5 bxc5 13.bxc5 ♘d5 14.♕b3±

9.♘c3

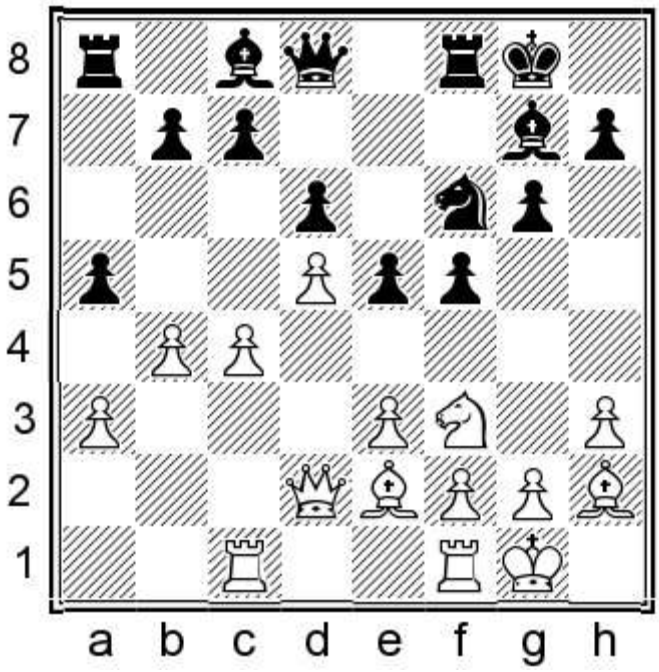
A principled response. White doesn't want to slow down his development, and accepts what he considers to be 'good' doubled pawns. I'm not so sure about this assessment.

A) 9.♘bd2?! e5!



Position after: 9...e5!

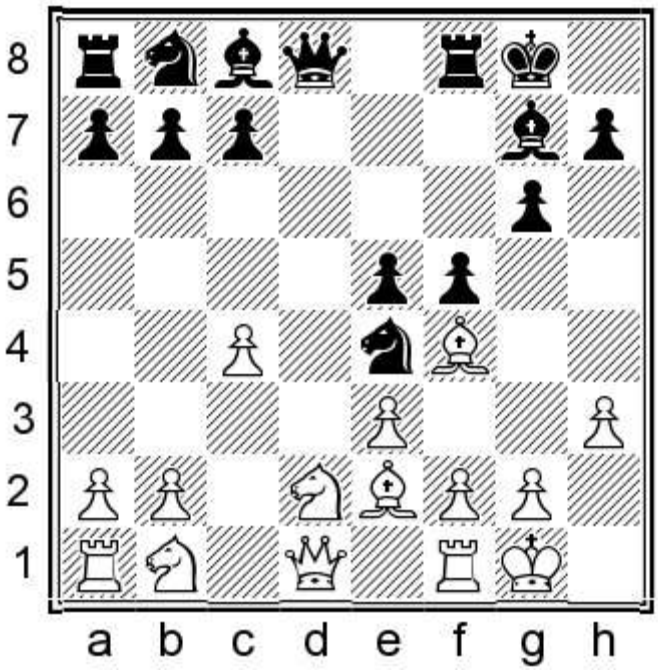
Compared to the 7.c4 ♘e4 line of the previous subchapter, White has the extra move h3. Of course it's a huge improvement as the bishop can reach a safe haven on h2, but it's not enough to think of any advantage. 10.♗h2! [10.dxe5 dxe5 11.♗h2 ♘xd2 12.♕xd2 ♕xd2 13.♘xd2 ♘c6 14.♖ad1 ♗e6= is objectively equal, even if easier to play from the black side.] 10...♘c6 11.d5 [11.dxe5 ♘xd2 12.♕xd2 dxe5 13.♕d5+ ♔h8 14.♕xd8 ♖xd8 15.♖ad1 ♗e6∓] 11...♘xd2 12.♕xd2 ♘b8 13.b4 ♘d7 14.♖ac1 a5 15.a3 ♘f6↑



Position after: 15...♘f6↑

A very good kind of King's Indian for Black.

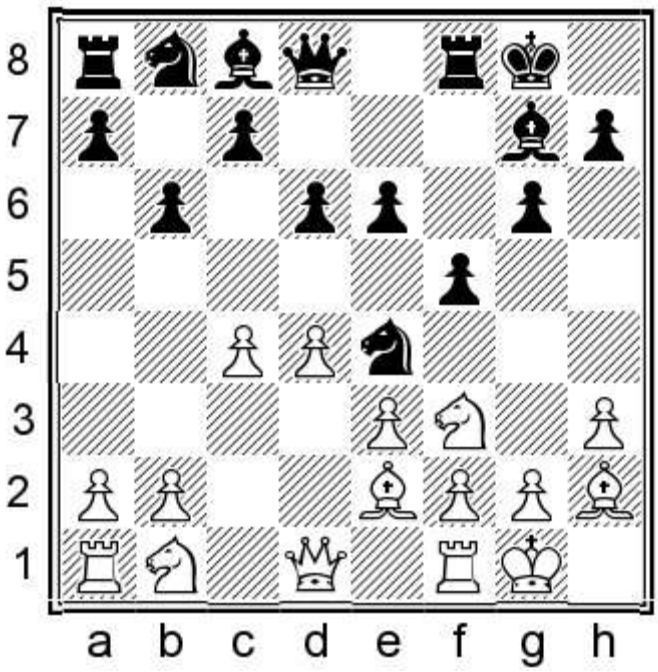
B) 9.♘fd2?! e5! 10.dxe5 dxe5



Position after: 10...dxe5

11.♗h2 [11.♘xe4? exf4!∓] 11...♘xd2 12.♕xd2 ♕xd2 13.♘xd2 ♘c6↑

C) 9.♗h2 b6

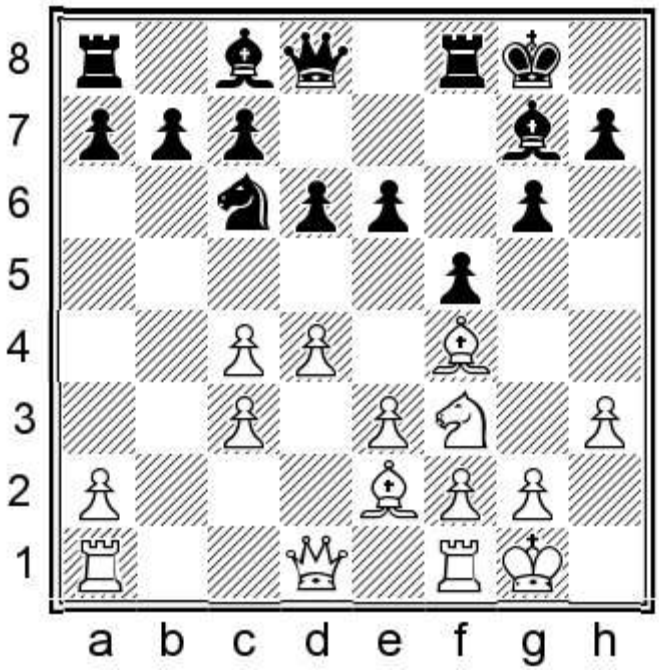


Position after: 9...b6

10.♘bd2 Of course ...e5 is no longer possible as it doesn't gain a tempo on the f4-bishop. The

simplest is to trade these knights. [10.♕b3 ♗b7 11.♘c3 ♘xc3 12.♕xc3 ♘d7∓] 10...♘xd2 11.♘xd2! ♗b7 12.♗f3 ♗xf3 13.♕xf3 ♘d7= Black will follow with ...e5 (or ...a5 first if he can, in order to prevent the pawns advancing too fast on the queenside), with a balanced middlegame.

9...♘xc3 10.bxc3 ♘c6



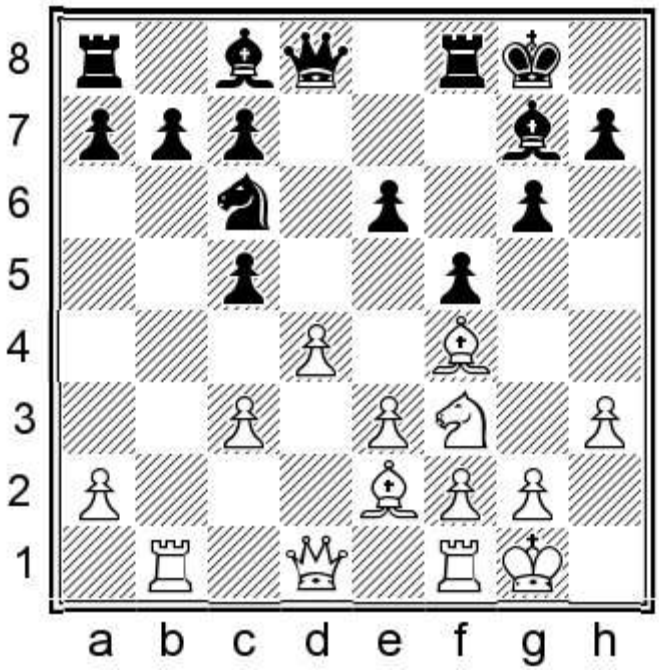
Position after: 10...♘c6

I think White should quickly resolve the issue of his doubled pawns, trying to trade them in some way or other in the center, otherwise Black will continue with ...b6 and ...♗a6 in order to attack the c4-pawn.

11.d5!?

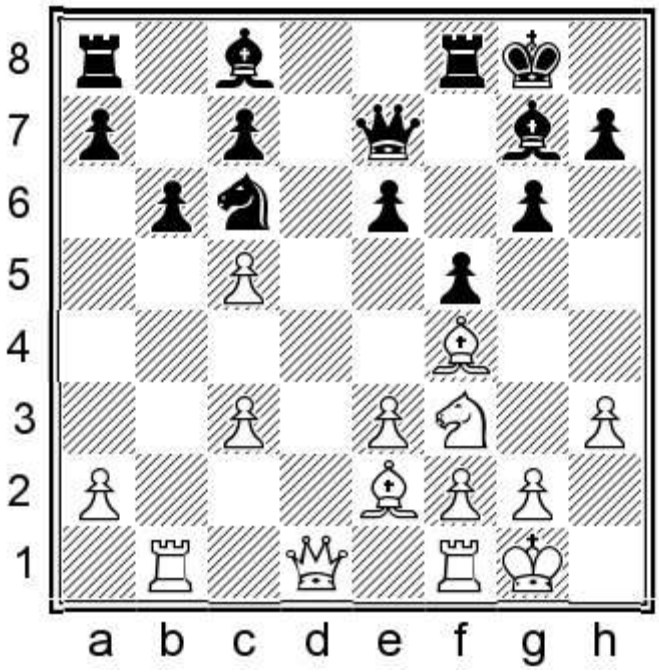
This is dynamically interesting. The main drawback is that it gives away the c5-square, but Black needs to be precise in order to be able to exploit it.

11.c5!? This is one way to get rid of the doubled pawns. At least it tries! 11...dxc5 12.♖b1



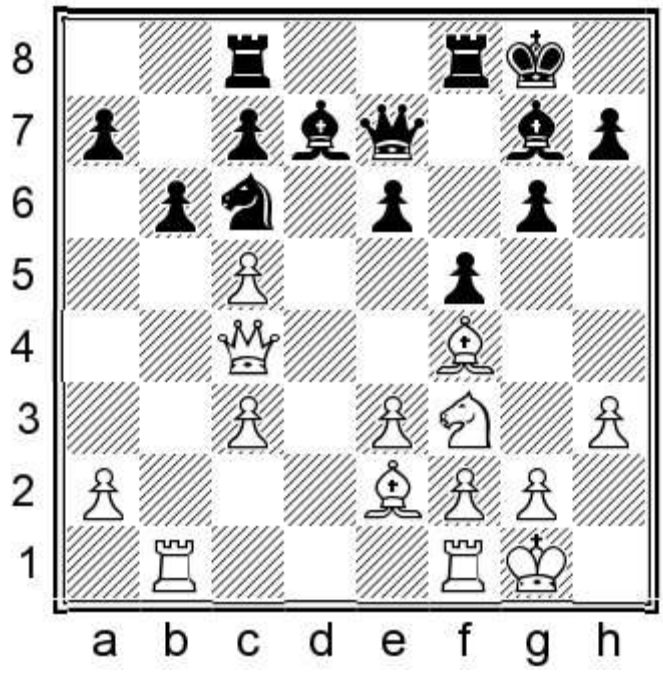
Position after: 12.♖b1

12...b6 [12...cxd4?! 13.cxd4 ♘e7 14.♕b3 ♘d5 15.♗h2⩲ White has interesting compensation on the b- and c-files. I prefer his position here, as I don't think our extra pawn is worth much.] 13.dxc5 ♕e7!



Position after: 13...♕e7!

It looks like White and Black are playing 'who wants to get doubled c-pawns', and neither wants to win! Obviously the remaining pawns would be really weak. 14.♕a4 [14.cxb6?! axb6 15.♕c2 e5 16.♗h2 ♗e6∓] 14...♗d7 15.♕c4 ♘a5 16.♕b4 ♘c6 17.♕c4 ♖ac8!?=



Position after: 17...♖ac8!?=

If Black doesn't want to allow a draw so easily, he can simply protect his c-pawn, then continue with ...h6 and ...g5 in order to gain some initiative on the kingside.

Play is about equal, but Black's plan is quite clear.

11...♘e5!

From here, the knight is sometimes able to reroute to d7 and then c5.

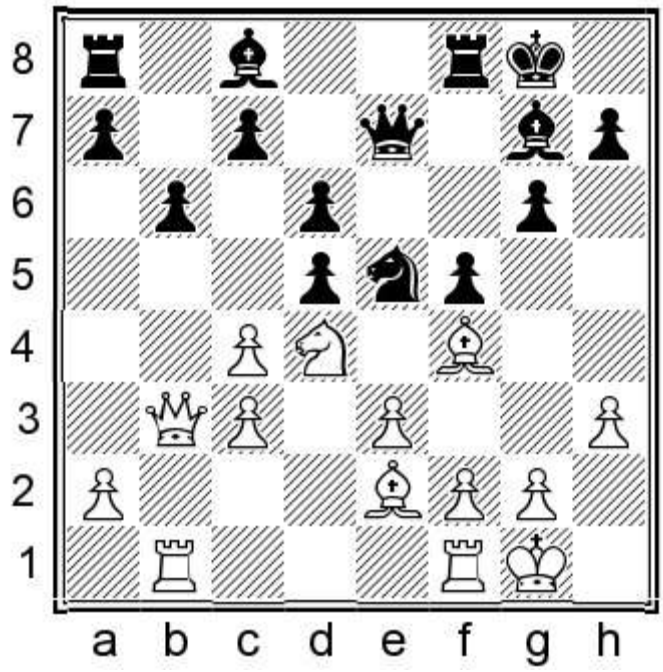
12.♘d4

12.♘xe5 dxe5 13.♗h2 ♕e7∓

12...♕e7!

Bearing in mind that we don't really want to take on d5, we have to protect the e6-pawn. White lacks active moves.

13.♖b1 b6 14.♕b3 exd5!



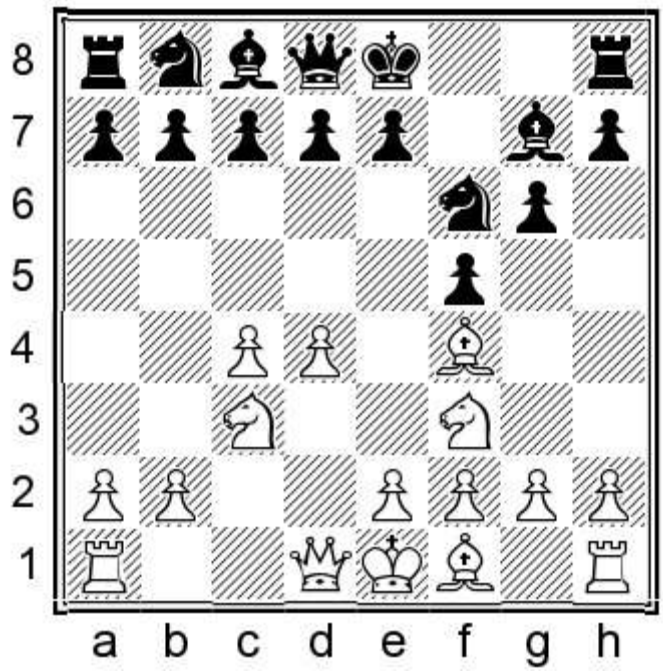
Position after: 14...exd5!

Finally we agree to undouble the c-pawns under favorable circumstances in order to reorganize our pieces. The knight heads for c5.

15.cxd5 ♘d7 16.♘e6! ♘c5 17.♘xc5 bxc5=

g) 3.♗f4 g6 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3 d6 6.--

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗f4 g6 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3



Position after: 5.♘c3

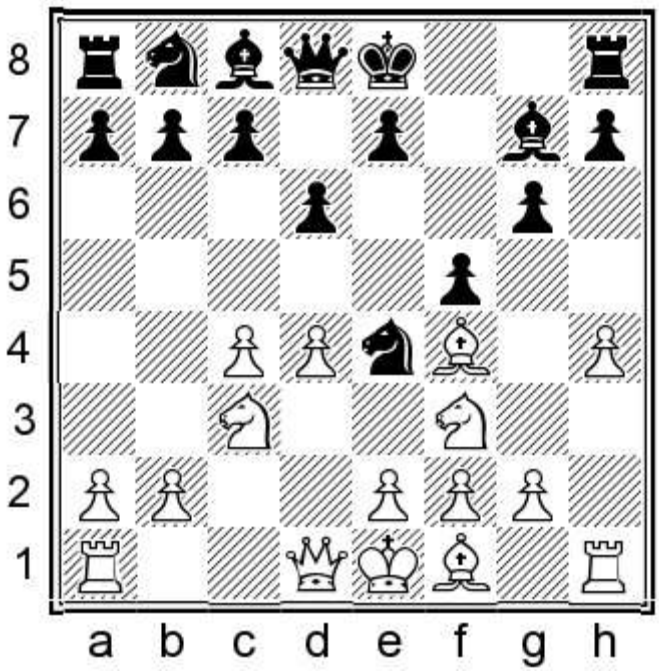
5...d6

There are a couple of reasons why I decided to start with this move instead of the logical 5...0-0. The main one is that it is more flexible, as it allows Black to continue with ...♘c6, in order to take quicker measures in the center. The second is that it is more convenient to do so, as this position may arise via the move order 1.d4 f5 2.c4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 d6 (it's safer to start with this move, as we will see in Chapter 9) 4.♘f3 g6 5.♗f4.

6.♕c2

A) 6.d5 This is a thematic move in the Dutch Defense when Black goes ...d6. White is trying to get control of the light squares, but here it clearly fails because of 6...e5! 7.dxe6 ♗xe6 8.e3 0-0 9.♗e2 ♘a6=.

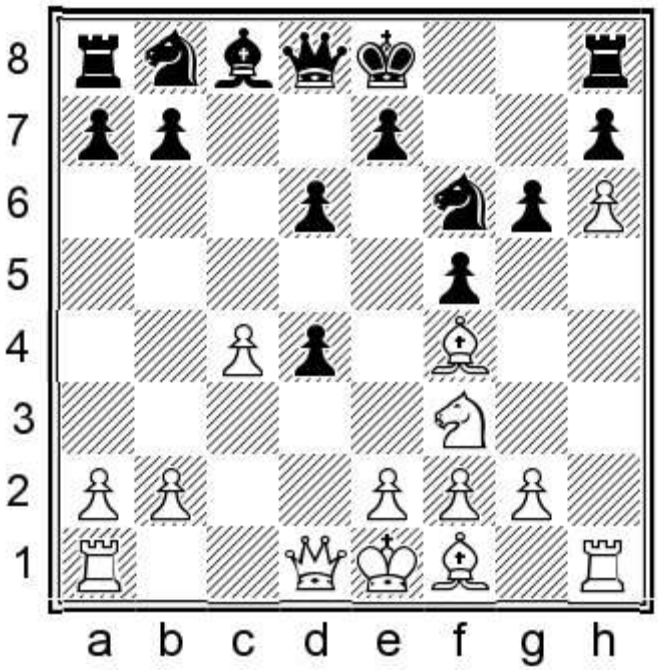
B) 6.h4 Normally this can't be seen as a real threat, as the knight on f3 is not well placed for the idea of pushing h4−h5. Nevertheless, Black should always seek counterplay in the center. 6...♘e4!?N



Position after: 6...♘e4!?N

I like this approach. Black wants to react with ...c5 on the next move.

B1) 7.h5 c5! 8.h6 [8.hxg6 hxg6 9.♖xh8+ ♗xh8 10.e3 ♘c6↑] 8...♗f6 9.♘d5 cxd4 10.♘xf6+ ♘xf6

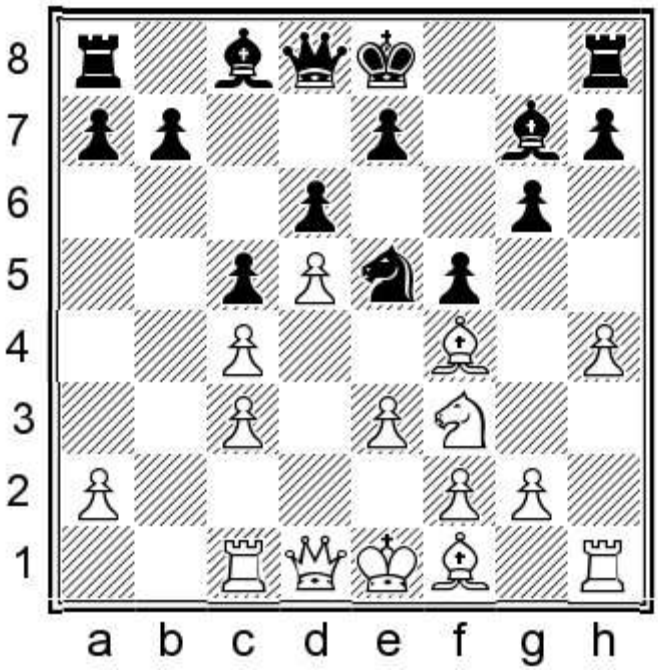


Position after: 10...♘xf6

Black has lost his important fianchettoed bishop. On the other hand he has taken the d-pawn, and it is quite difficult for White to regain it in favorable conditions. 11.♕xd4 e5 12.♕e3□ 12...♘e4!∓

B2) 7.♘xe4 fxe4 8.♘g5 ♗f5 9.g4!? ♗xg4 10.h5 gxh5 11.♘xe4 0-0⇄

B3) 7.e3 c5 8.♖c1 ♘c6 9.d5 ♘xc3 10.bxc3 ♘e5∞

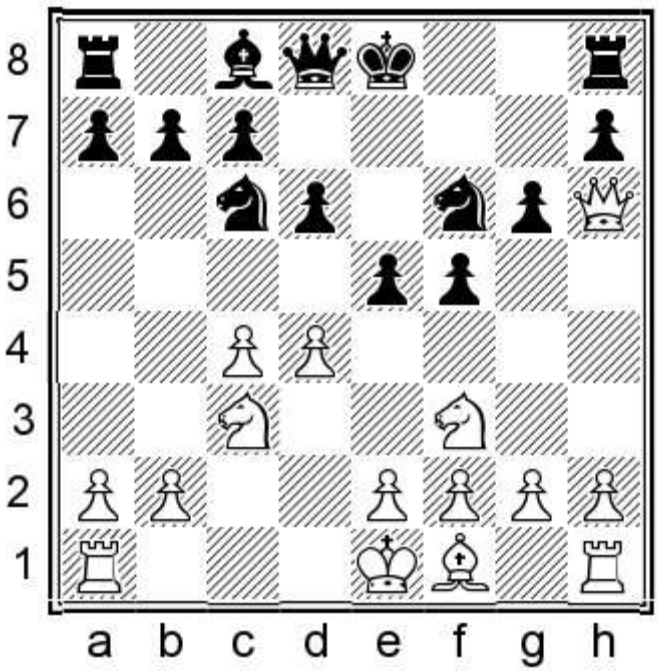


Position after: 10...♘e5∞

C) 6.g3 0-0 7.♗g2 We will discuss this kind of option in Chapter 10 about the sidelines on the 7th

move.

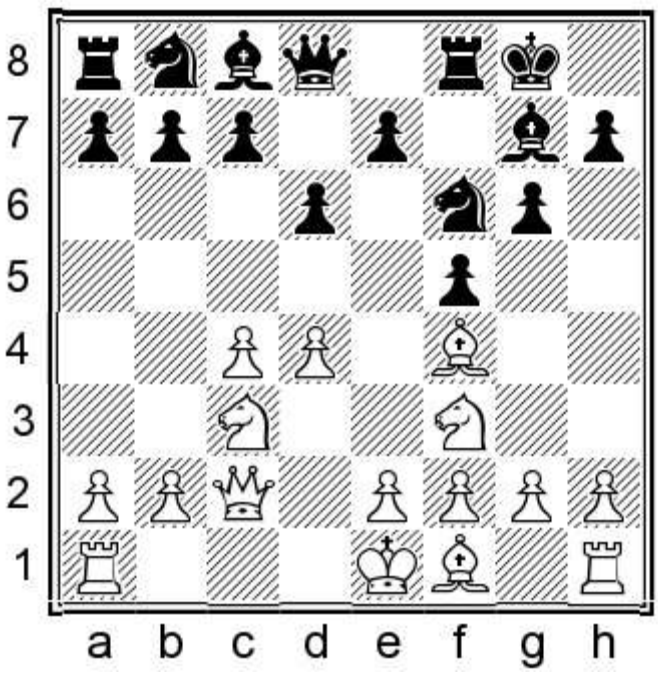
D) 6.♕d2 This is a naive approach. Of course ♗h6 isn't a dangerous threat. 6...♘c6!? 7.♗h6 [7.d5 e5! 8.♗h6 ♗xh6 9.♕xh6 ♘b4∓ The queen has to come back, otherwise White's position might collapse straight away. 10.0-0-0? ♘g4∓] 7...♗xh6 8.♕xh6 e5!↑



Position after: 8...e5!↑

Black is probably going to prepare to castle kingside, as will White, and remain with the better center.

6...0-0



Position after: 6...0-0

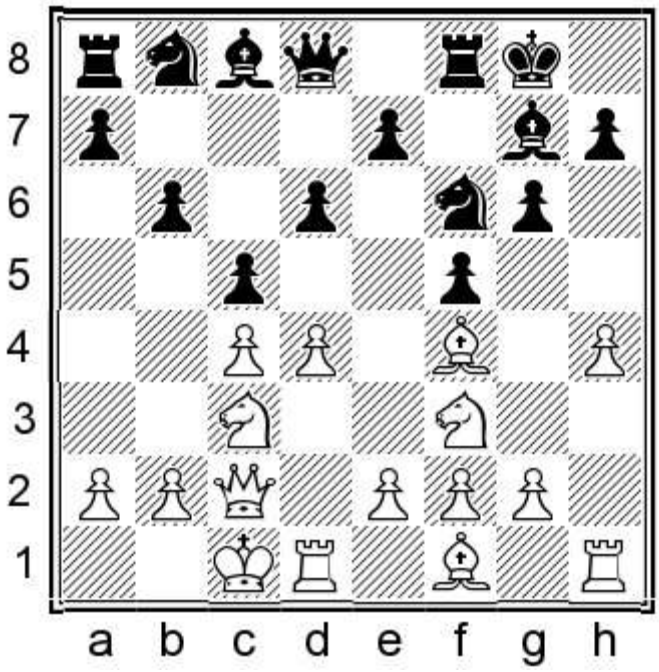
7.0-0-0

7.e4? It's not so simple to open the center. White has to ensure that the conditions are in his favor, and this is clearly not the case here, especially because of the potentially hanging bishop on f4. 7...fxe4 8.♘xe4 ♘xe4 9.♕xe4 ♘c6! 10.♗e3 ♘b4–+ The threat of ...♗f5 is quite nasty.

7...b6!?

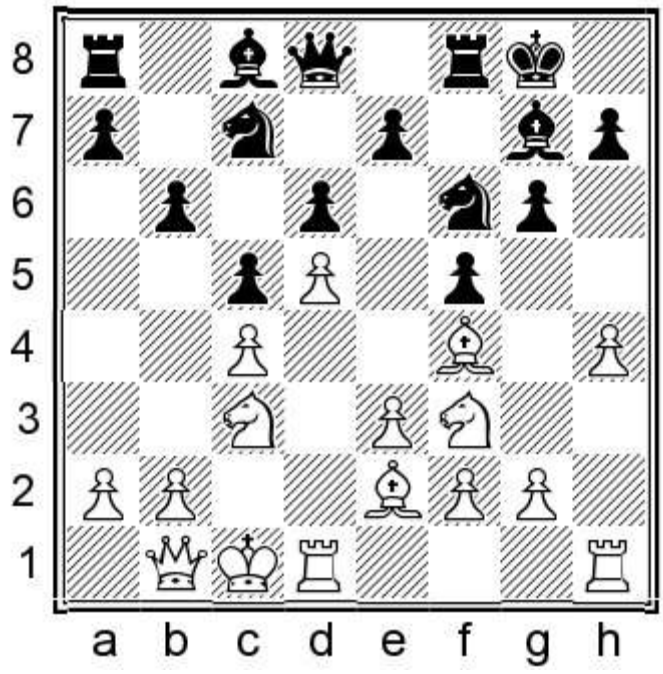
Black has enough time to prepare ...c5, and his attack is easy to follow. For instance the game might continue 7...♘e4!?N, a promising pawn sacrifice which opens many lines. I won't analyze it though, because I believe it's not needed to get a fine position.

8.h4 c5



Position after: 8...c5

9.e3 ♘c6 10.d5 ♘b4 11.♕b1 ♘a6 12.♗e2 ♘c7→

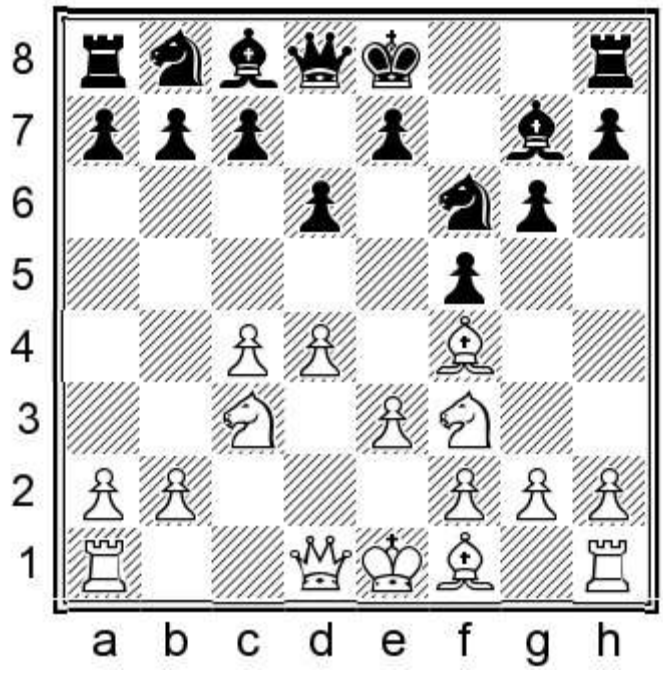


Position after: 12...♘c7→

Black is ready to follow with ...a6 and ...b5, with good attacking prospects on the queenside.

h) 3.♗f4 g6 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3 d6 6.e3 0-0 7.--, 7.c5

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗f4 g6 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3 d6 6.e3



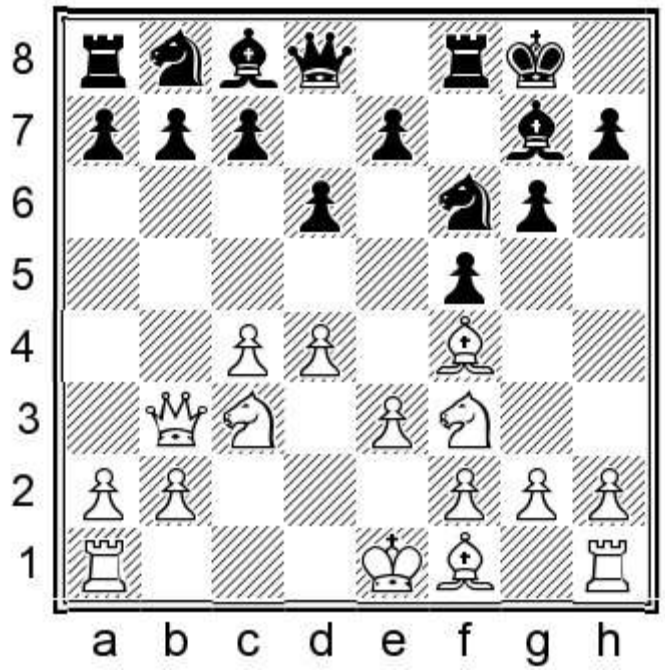
Position after: 6.e3

This is obviously the main move, and all the other possibilities have been explored in the previous subchapter. Note that White's move order on the last two moves could vary, e.g. 4.e3.

6...0-0 7.c5!?

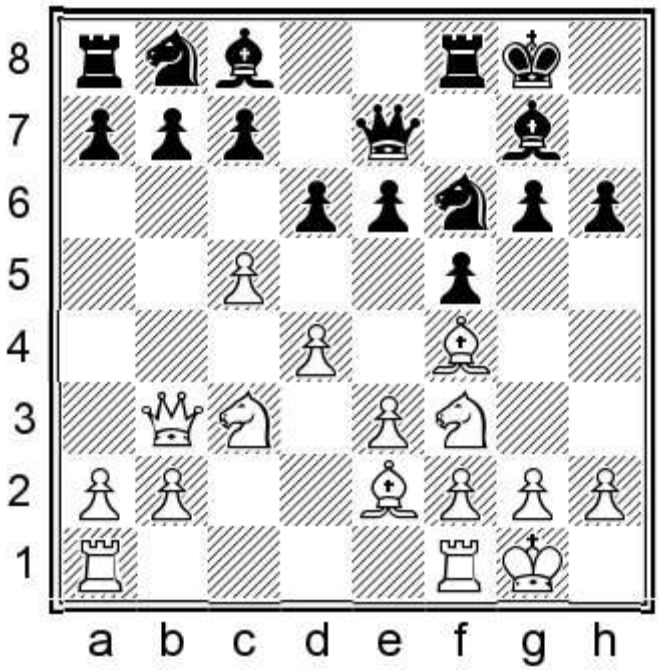
This idea, which we also meet in some lines of the King's Indian, has increased in popularity recently. The general idea is to trade the c-pawn and make ...e5 harder to achieve as the position will be 'too open' for that to be good.

A) 7.♕b3



Position after: 7.♕b3

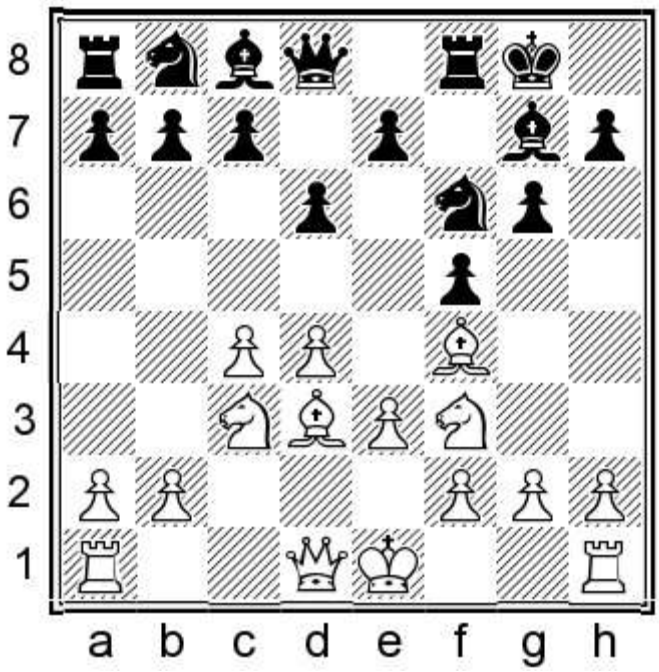
White sometimes places his queen here, but without much success. It can be annoying for Black because it eyes both the pawn on b7 and the king on g8, but I don't think it should make us change our plan. 7...e6 [7...♔h8 has been played more often, but I don't see why we should lose a tempo like that.] 8.♗e2 ♕e7 [8...♘e4 This interesting move implies an exchange sacrifice that leads to a complicated game: 9.♘xe4 fxe4 10.♘d2 ♖xf4! 11.exf4 ♘c6 12.♘xe4 ♘xd4 13.♕d1 ♗d7 14.0-0 ♗c6 15.♗d3 ♕e7⩱] 9.0-0 h6!? 10.c5



Position after: 10.c5

We will see the same idea in the 7.c5 line. 10...g5 11.cxd6 cxd6 12.♗g3 ♘h5 13.♘d2 ♘xg3 14.hxg3 ♘c6⇄ ½-½ (21) Melkumyan, H (2654) – Salem, A (2642), chess.com 2018.

B) 7.♗d3



Position after: 7.♗d3

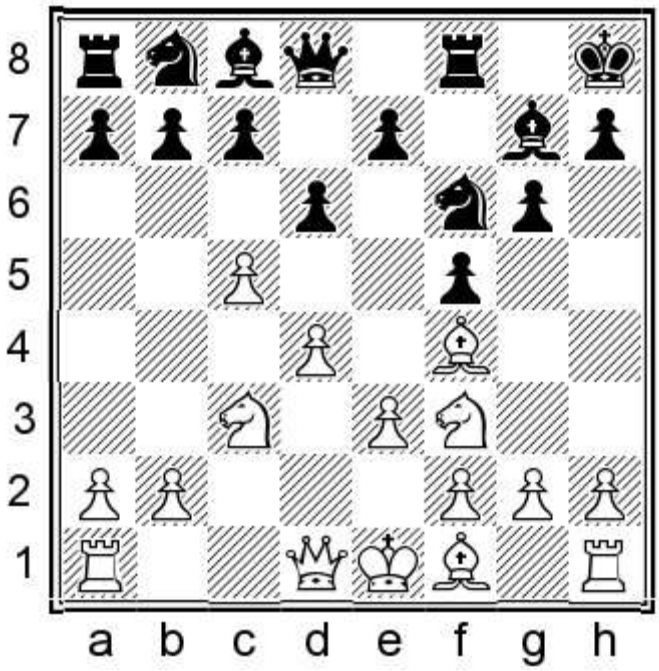
We have already said that the bishop is generally not great on d3. 7...♘h5!?

B1) 8.♗g5 h6 9.♗h4 g5 10.♘d2 ♘f6 11.♗g3 e5!∓

B2) 8.0-0 If White had developed his bishop on e2 instead of d3, 8.0-0 would have been the most natural continuation. Here we can take advantage of the bad position of the bishop on d3 with 8...♘c6 9.d5 ♘b4 10.♗e2 h6⇄. Black has various ways to break in the center such as ...c6, ...e6 or ...e5, and also has the possibility of expanding on the kingside by means of ...g5. I like all these possibilities, while it's not clear what White should do.

B3) 8.♗g3 ♘xg3 9.hxg3 e5 10.♗c2 exd4 11.exd4 ♖e8+∓

7...♔h8!

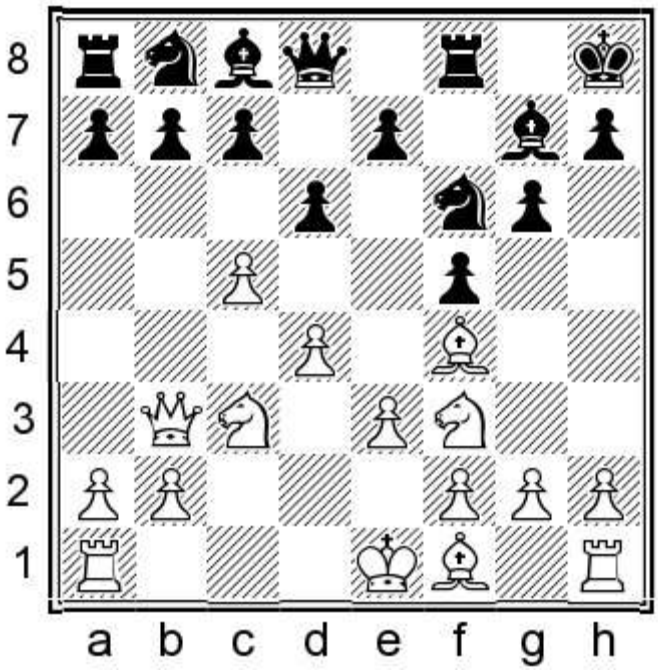


Position after: 7...♔h8!

8.h4

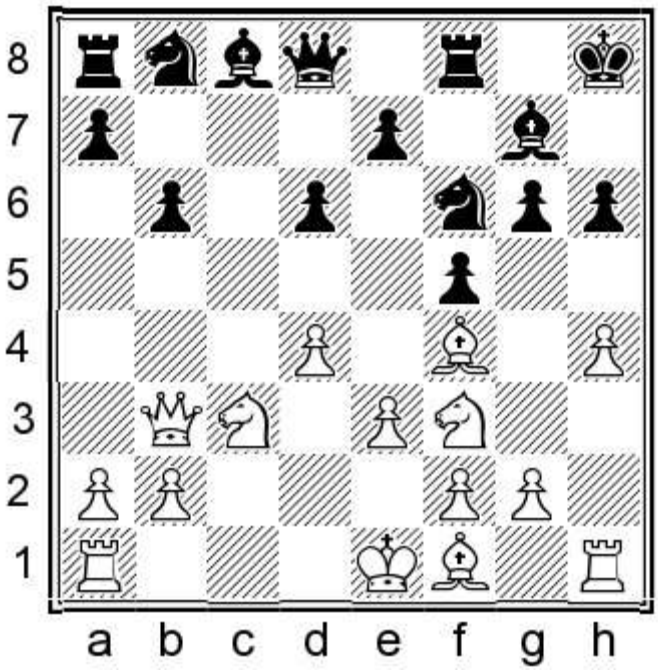
For 8.♗c4! see the next subchapter.

8.♕b3 While I was working on this specific line, I saw a totally random bullet game on Lichess between Andrew Tang (well known on the website under the user name 'penguingim1') and Magnus Carlsen − and Magnus was quickly busted as Black.



Position after: 8.♕b3

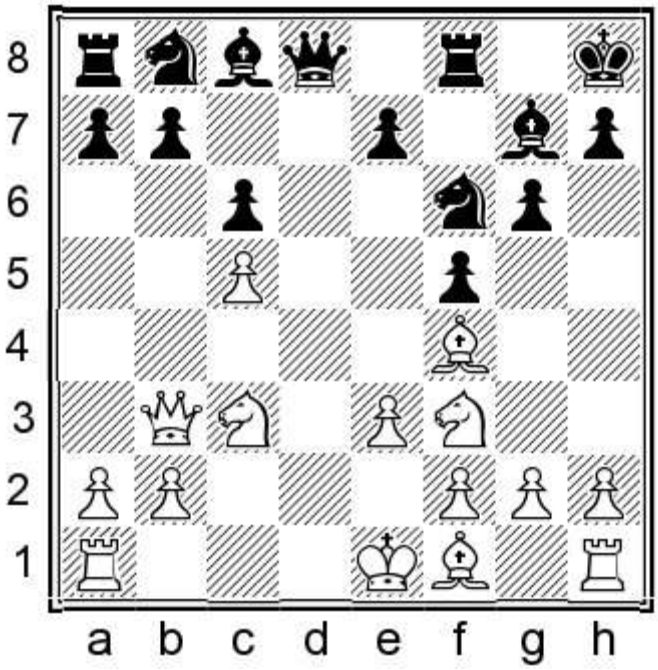
A) 8...b6?! This was played In the above-mentioned game. The value of a bullet game can be doubtful, but White managed to show how he can quickly put pressure on Black: 9.cxd6 cxd6 10.h4! h6



Position after: 10...h6

11.h5! [11.♘g5± was enough to bring White a pleasant advantage in the game. Black has long-term problems on the light-squared diagonal which he was unable to solve.] 11...♘xh5 [11...g5 12.♗xg5! hxg5 13.h6+–] 12.♖xh5 gxh5 13.♕d5+–

B) 8...dxc5 9.dxc5 [9.♘g5? cxd4 10.exd4 ♕xd4!∓] 9...c6!



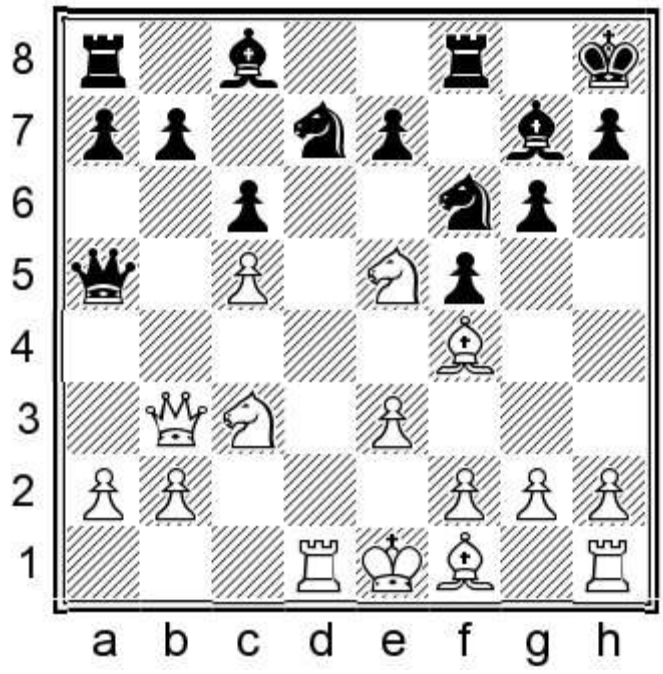
Position after: 9...c6!

This is an efficient way to play. The queen gets new prospects on the queenside and we can play ...♘d5 if the pressure on the diagonal gets too strong.

B1) 10.♘g5? ♘d5! 11.h4 ♘xc3 12.bxc3 e5 13.♗h2 [13.♘f7+ ♖xf7 14.♕xf7 exf4 15.♖d1 ♗xc3+ 16.♔e2 ♘d7–+] 13...♕e7∓

B2) 10.h4 ♕a5 11.♘e5 ♘bd7 12.♘f7+ ♔g8= Once again there is no good discovered check, and White has to settle for the perpetual.

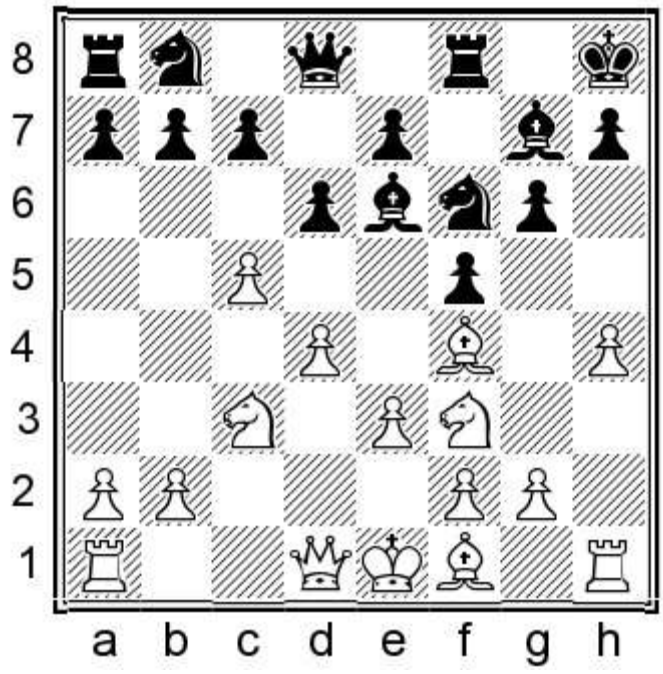
B3) 10.♖d1 ♕a5 11.♘e5 ♘bd7!



Position after: 11...♘bd7!

12.♘f7+ ♔g8 13.♘h6+ [13.♗c4? White has no threat at all. 13...♘xc5 14.♘g5+ ♔h8–+] 13...♔h8= Black has to take the draw. Obviously he can't go for the mirage of mate with 14.♕g8+?? ♘xg8–+ Oops.

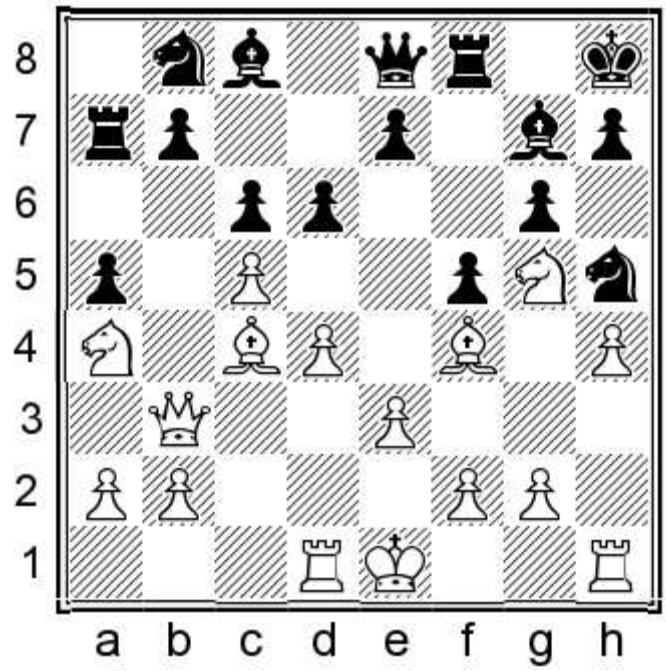
8...♗e6!



Position after: 8...♗e6!

A strong novelty at the time by Anton Guijarro. The bishop comes out to protect the light-squared diagonal and can drop back to g8 if White goes for ♘g5 at some point.

8...♘h5?! Two weeks before his game with White against Anton Guijarro, Mamedyarov tried this move with Black against Gupta. It's easy to understand that after the poor position he got from the opening he wanted to play it with the other side. 9.♕b3 a5 10.♖d1 If Black takes on f4, it will strengthen White's center, which is why 8...♘h5 was not great. 10...c6 11.♘a4 ♖a7 12.♘g5 ♕e8 13.♗c4+–



Position after: 13.♗c4+–

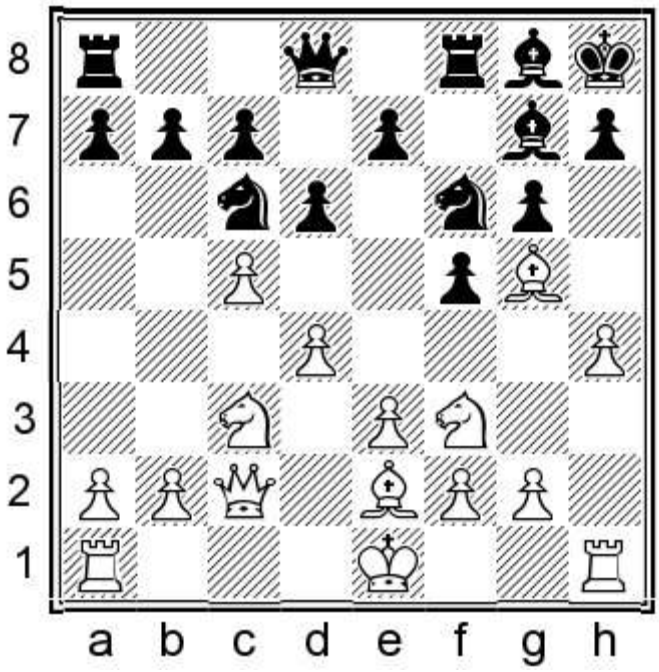
Black was in big trouble in Gupta, A (2625) – Mamedyarov, S (2756), Reykjavik 2015. The Azeri super-GM escaped with a draw, but it wasn't thanks to the opening (½-½, 51).

9.♕a4

The idea behind this move is that White wants to trade the light-squared bishops in order to have a chance to place a knight on e6.

His next move will be ♗c4 if Black does nothing.

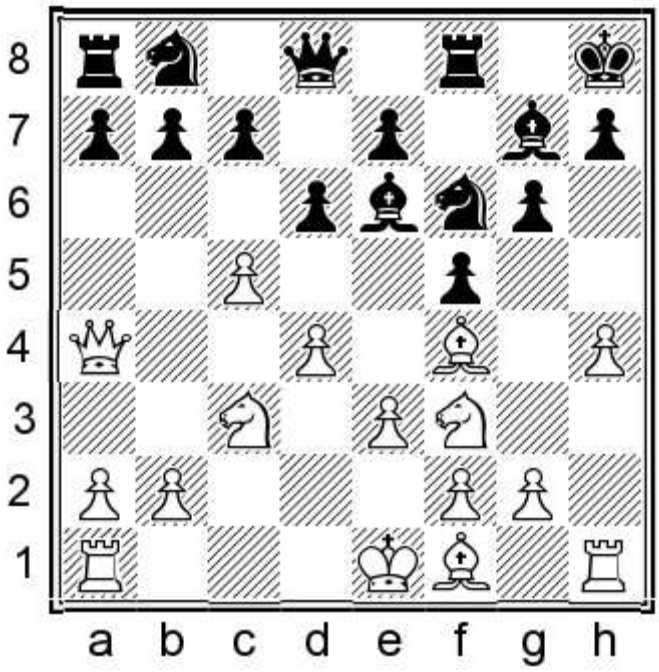
9.♗e2 ♗g8 10.♕c2 ♘c6 11.♗g5?!



Position after: 11.♗g5?!

This position occurred in Lalith, B (2587) – Sanchez Jerez, E (2257), Gibraltar 2017, 1-0 (29). Black is able to open the center with 11...dxc5! 12.dxc5 ♕e8! This prepares ...e5 and at the same time prevents 0-0-0. 13.0-0 [If 13.0-0-0? ♘b4! 14.♕b1 ♘e4!–+ White's queenside collapses immediately.] 13...e5 14.e4 ♘d4! 15.♘xd4 exd4 16.♘b5 fxe4 17.♘xc7 ♕e5 18.♘xa8 d3!–+

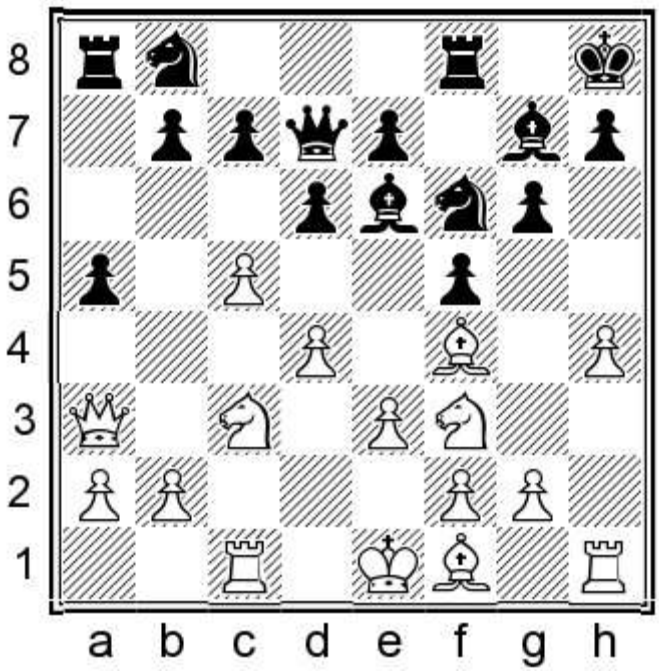
Back to 9.♕a4.



Position after: 9.♕a4

9...♕e8!N

9...♕d7 The Spanish grandmaster opted for this square, but I think it's slightly less accurate, as the d7-square is normally reserved for the knight. 10.♕a3!N [10.♗b5 c6 11.♗e2 ♗g8 12.♖d1 b5!? 13.cxb6?! ♕b7 14.♘g5 axb6∓ Black is already better and went on to win against his super-strong opponent in Mamedyarov, S (2756) – Anton Guijarro, D (2614), Moscow 2015, 0-1 (42).] 10...a5 11.♖c1



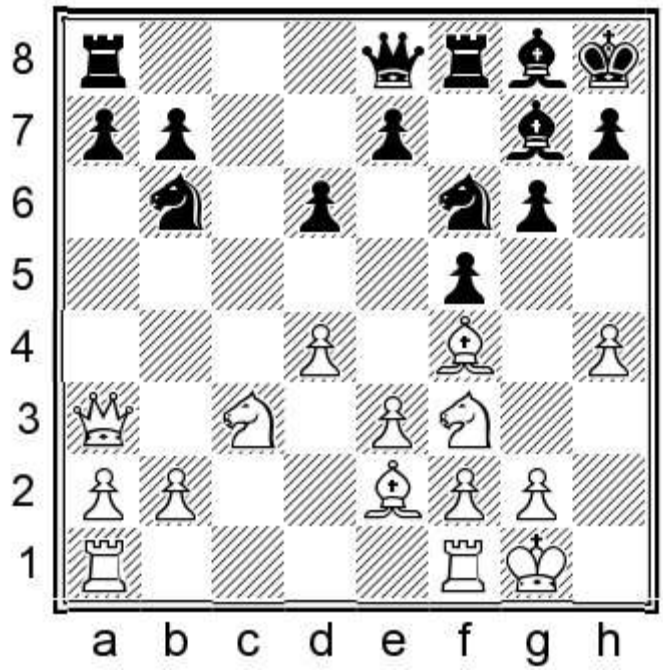
Position after: 11.♖c1

White seems to enjoy the easier position, and if Black is not careful his position can quickly become dangerous. For instance 11...♘c6?! 12.♗b5 ♕d8 13.h5!± would be dubious. This is well timed, as Black is unable to take with the knight because of d5.

10.♕a3

10.♕xe8 Endgames are clearly harmless. 10...♖xe8 11.♗e2 ♘bd7 12.0-0 ♖ac8 13.b4 ♘d5 14.♘xd5 ♗xd5= Black doesn't have any real weaknesses and has a firm grip of the light squares.

10...♘bd7 11.♗e2 ♗g8! 12.cxd6 cxd6 13.0-0 ♘b6⇄

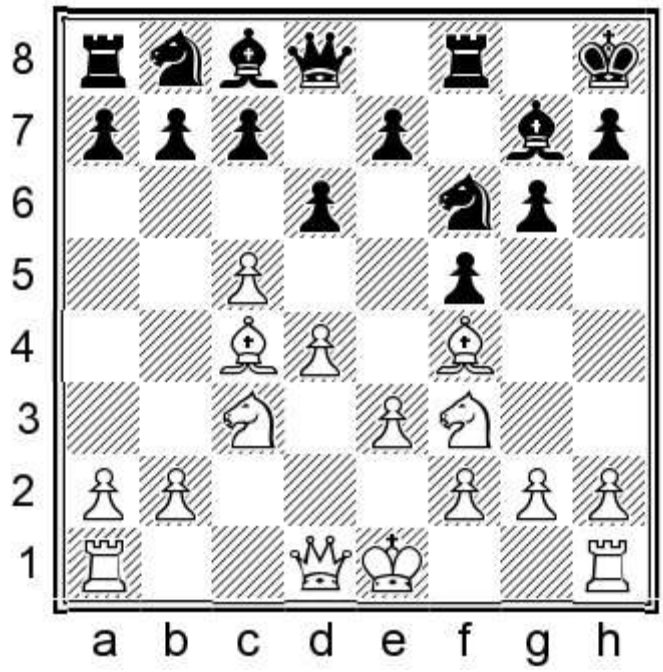


Position after: 13...♘b6⇄

This definitely looks easier for Black.

i) 3.♗f4 g6 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3 d6 6.e3 0-0 7.c5 ♔h8 8.♗c4

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗f4 g6 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3 d6 6.e3 6...0-0 7.c5!? ♔h8! 8.♗c4!

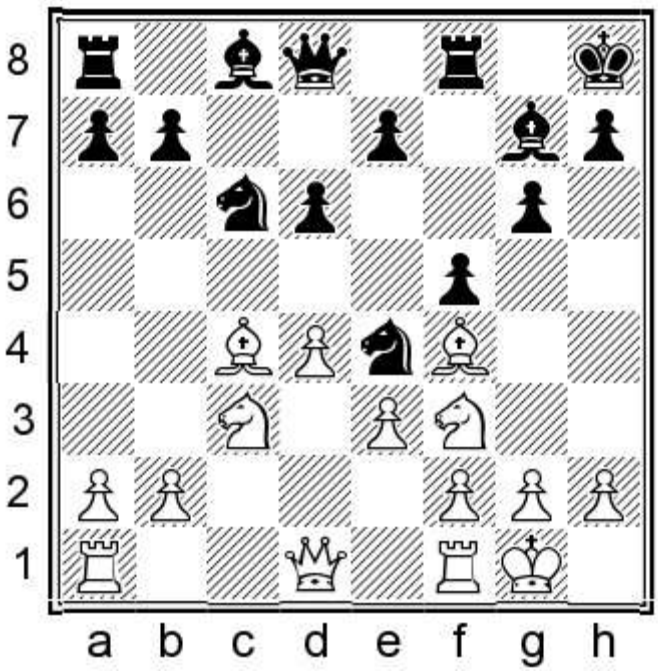


Position after: 8.♗c4!

I think this is more effective than 8. h4, because it takes possession of the light-squared diagonal straight away, before Black plays ...♗e6.

8...♘c6 9.h4

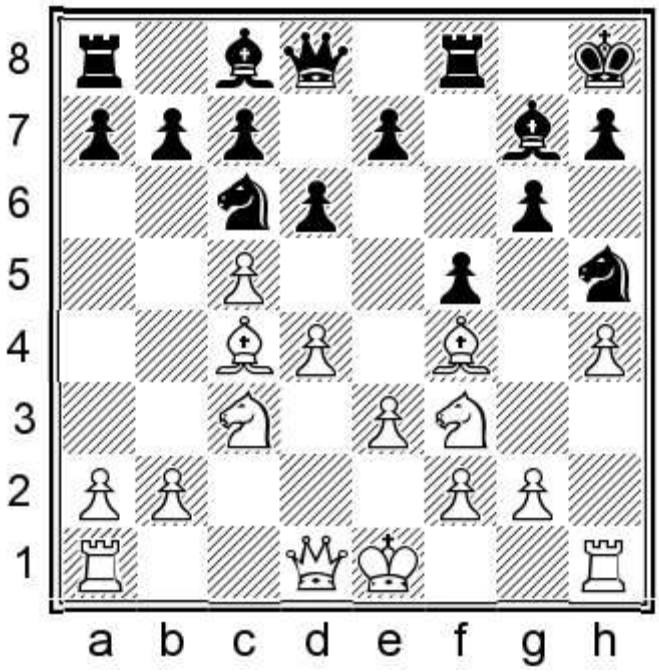
After 9.0-0 ♘e4 10.cxd6 Black had to decide which pawn should take back, and 10...exd6 was probably a mistake in Nielsen, P (2639) – Gretz, D (2309), Germany 2017, 1-0 (46). 10...cxd6



Position after: 10...cxd6

It seems important to keep the option of ...e5 at some point. Also, the pawn on c7 can become a target on the c-file. 11.♖c1 e5! 12.dxe5 ♘xc3! 13.bxc3 [13.♖xc3?! dxe5 14.♕xd8 ♖xd8 15.♗g5 ♖d6∓ Both the c3-rook and g5-bishop can be in trouble in the next few moves.] 13...dxe5 14.♕xd8 ♖xd8 15.♗g3 h6=

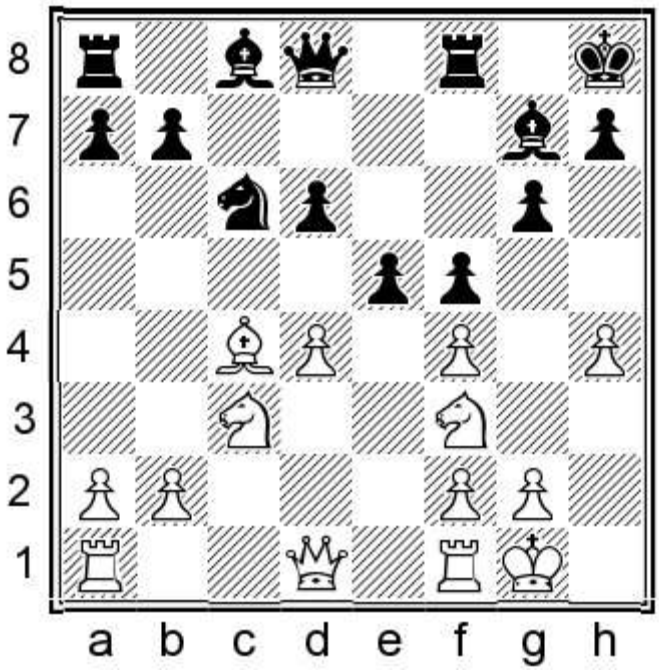
9...♘h5!?N



Position after: 9...♘h5!?N

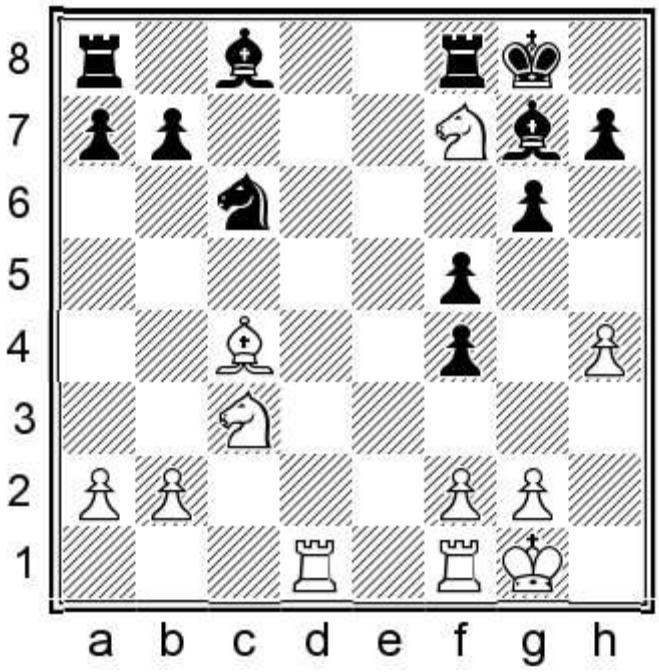
10.0-0

A) 10.cxd6 cxd6 11.0-0 ♘xf4 12.exf4 e5



Position after: 12...e5

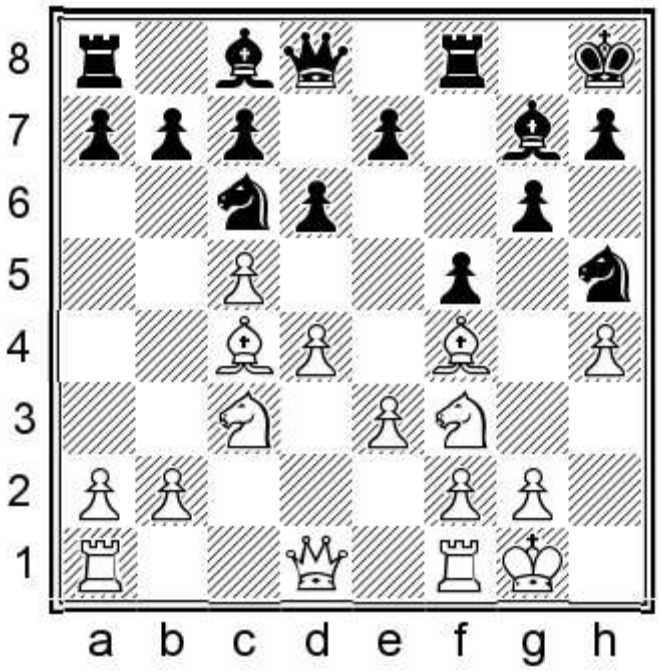
Opening the center seems adequate. The only issue is to keep an eye on the dangerous possibility of ♘g5−f7+. 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.♘g5 [14.♕xd8 ♖xd8 15.♘g5 ♖d4! 16.♘f7+ ♔g8 17.♘xe5+ ♔f8 18.♗b3 ♘xe5 19.fxe5 ♗xe5 20.♖fe1 ♗f6=] 14...♕xd1 15.♖axd1 exf4 16.♘f7+ ♔g8



Position after: 16...♔g8

There is no particularly strong discovered check. 17.♘d6+ ♔h8 Of course White can decide to take a draw, but he can't delay, otherwise we will parry the possibility. 18.♖fe1 ♘e5 19.♗d5 ♖b8=

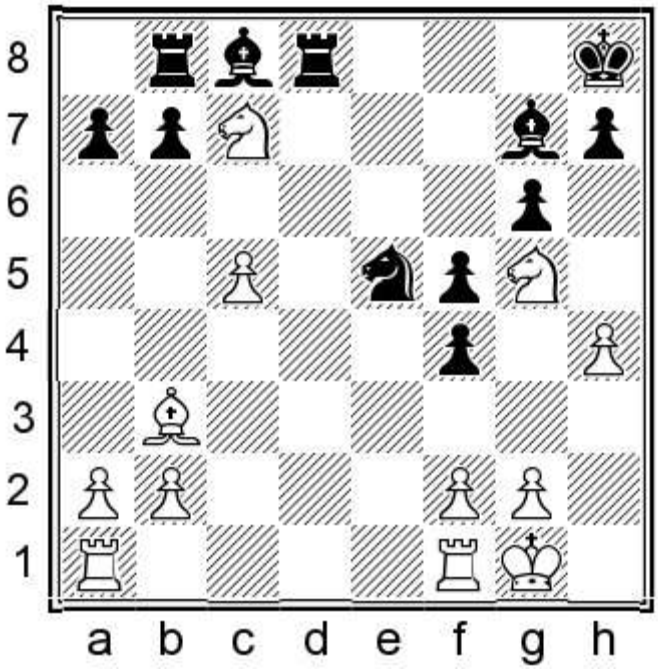
B) 10.♗h2 f4! 11.0-0 ♗g4 12.♗e2 e5!↑ Black puts a lot of effort into trying to take over the initiative, and he is about to succeed.



Position after: 10.0-0

10...♗d7

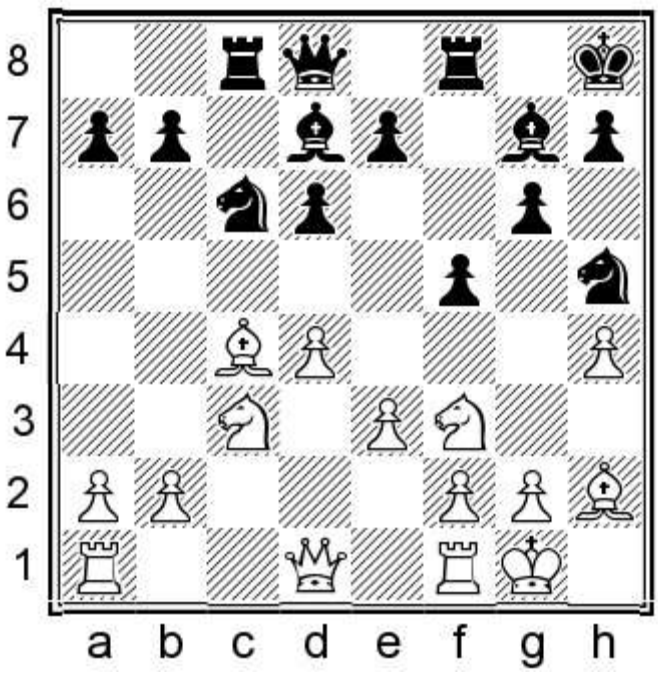
10...♘xf4?! 11.exf4 dxc5 12.dxc5 e5 13.♕xd8 ♖xd8 14.♘b5 exf4 15.♘xc7 ♖b8 16.♘g5 ♘e5 17.♗b3±



Position after: 17.♗b3±

Black faces some difficulties here in organizing his pieces. There are problems with both e6 and f7, and even if he solves them he seems to be slightly worse.

11.cxd6 cxd6 12.♗h2 ♖c8



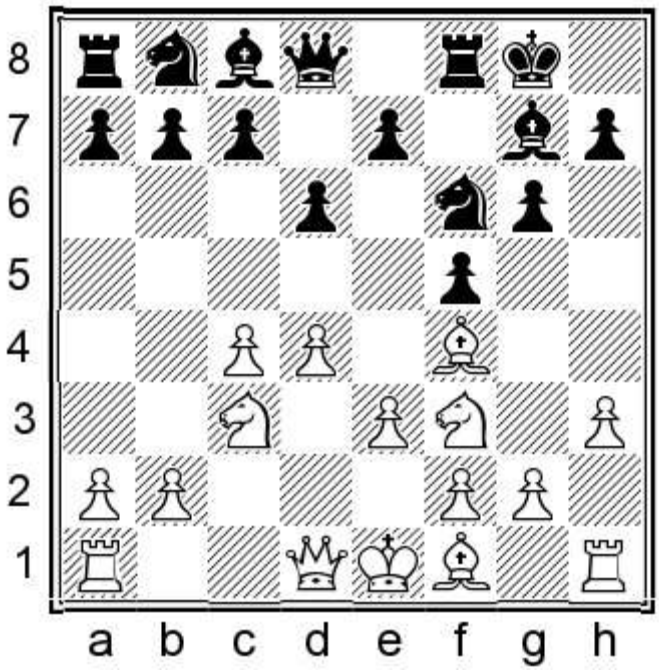
Position after: 12...♖c8

13.♘g5 ♘xd4! 14.♘f7+ ♖xf7 15.♗xf7 ♘e6⩱

Black will have a pawn and the bishop pair to compensate for the missing exchange. Anything can happen!

j) 3.♗f4 g6 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3 d6 6.e3 0-0 7.h3

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗f4 g6 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3 d6 6.e3 0-0 7.h3



Position after: 7.h3

This is the second main alternative for Black after 7.♗e2, which we will consider in the next subchapter.

It has been played less often than 7.♗d3, which I think is a dubious position for the bishop.

7...♘e4!?

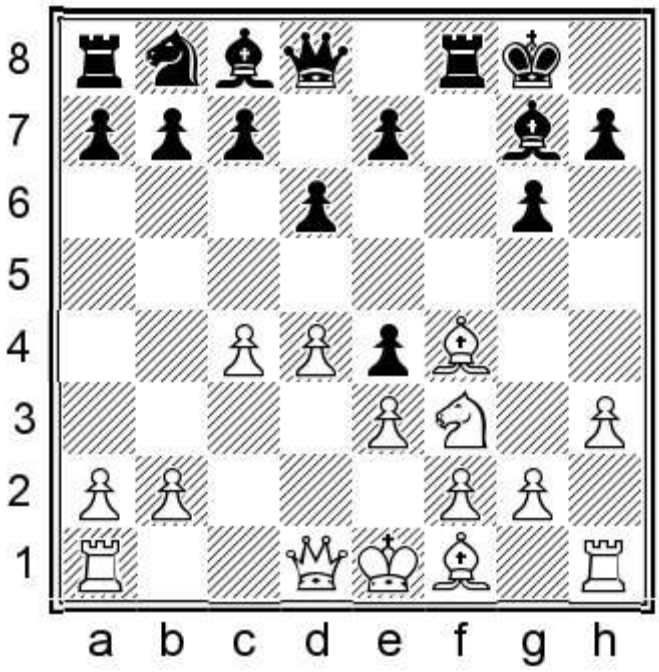
Almost never played in practice, but I think it's a very interesting attempt to solve all the problems immediately.

8.♘xe4

This is the principled move. Unfortunately for White, it doesn't work so well.

8.♗e2 ♘xc3 9.bxc3 We have already discussed this position in the last subchapter on the lines without c4. Black has the possibility of continuing with ...♘c6, ...b6 and ...♗a6 to put pressure on the c4-pawn.

8...fxe4



Position after: 8...fxe4

9.♘d2!

Here I struggled to find a good continuation, but I am happy with what I found.

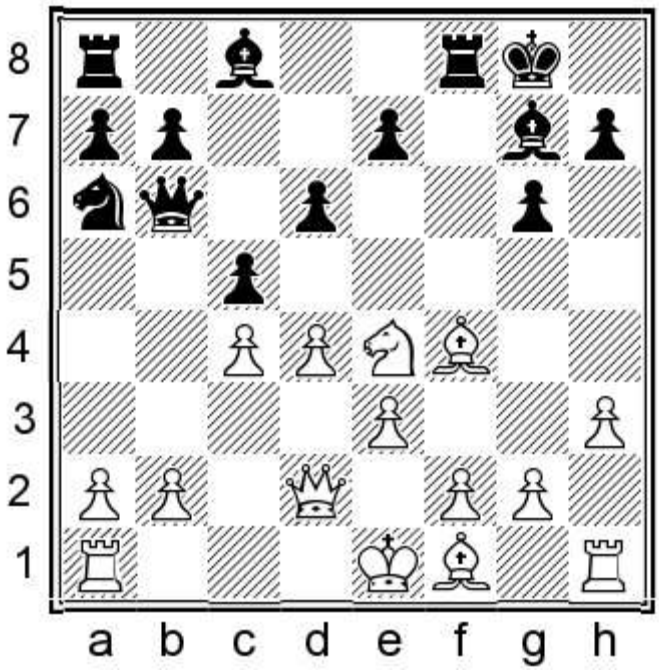
9.♘g5 c5!? 10.♕d2 cxd4 11.exd4 ♗xd4 12.♕xd4 ♖xf4 13.♕d2 ♖f8 14.♘xe4 ♘c6=

9...c5!N

I think this move is necessary to keep the balance.

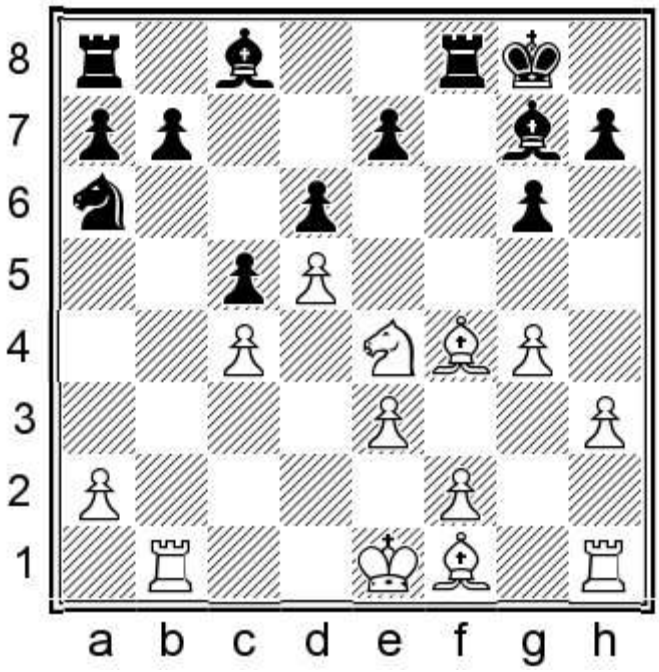
A) 9...♗xd4?! 10.exd4 ♖xf4 11.g3 ♖f8 12.♘xe4 ♘c6 13.♗g2 ♗f5 14.d5 ♘e5 15.b3± White has the better minor pieces and some weaknesses to exploit in Black's camp.

B) 9...♘a6!? 10.♘xe4 c5 11.♕d2 ♕b6



Position after: 11...♕b6

12.d5 [12.♖d1 cxd4 13.exd4 ♕xd4 14.♕xd4 ♗xd4 15.♗h6 ♗g7 16.♗xg7 ♔xg7± also favors White thanks to his better pawn structure] 12...♕xb2 13.♕xb2 ♗xb2 14.♖b1 ♗g7 15.g4!



Position after: 15.g4!

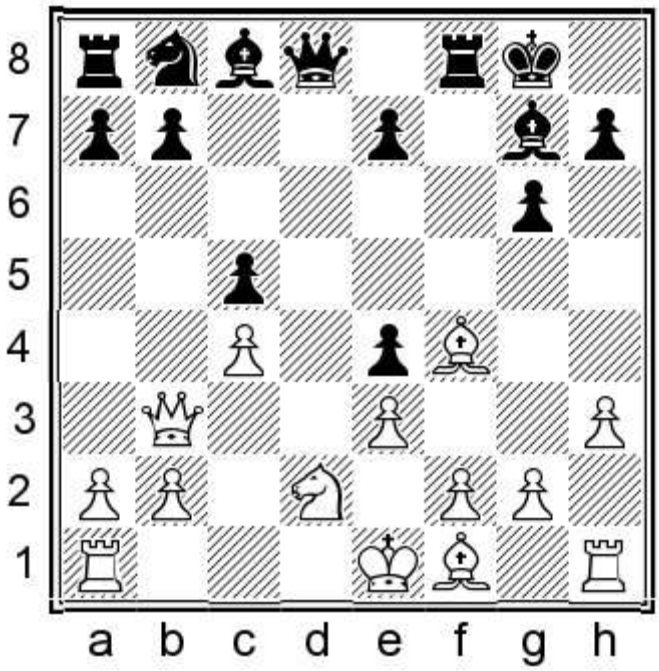
Taking away the f5-square from the bishop. This is slightly better for White, even if Black is still very solid. 15...b6⇄

10.dxc5

10.♘xe4?! cxd4 11.♗e2 ♕a5+ 12.♕d2 ♕xd2+ 13.♘xd2 dxe3 14.♗xe3 ♗xb2∓

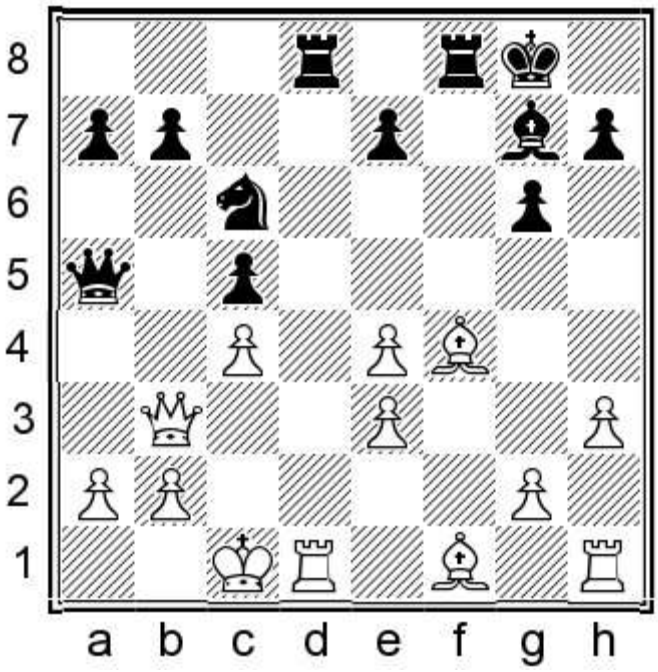
10...dxc5 11.♗e2

11.♕b3



Position after: 11.♕b3

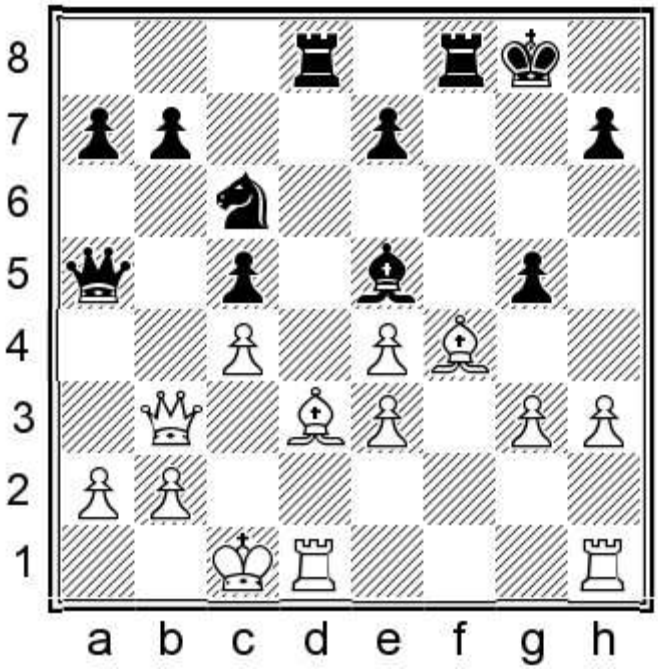
It’s also very logical to find a way to protect the b2-pawn. On c2 the queen could quickly come under attack from our knight. 11...♘c6! 12.0-0-0 ♕a5 13.♘xe4 ♗f5 14.f3 [14.♘g3 ♗c8!= It’s important for Black to threaten ...e5, so White more or less has to repeat moves with 15.♘e4.] 14...♗xe4 15.fxe4 ♖ad8



Position after: 15...♖ad8

A) 16.♗e2 ♘d4! 17.exd4 ♖xf4 18.dxc5 ♖f2→ All Black's pieces are playing in this attack with opposite-colored bishops and opposite-side castling! It clearly favors Black whose initiative is well worth two pawns.

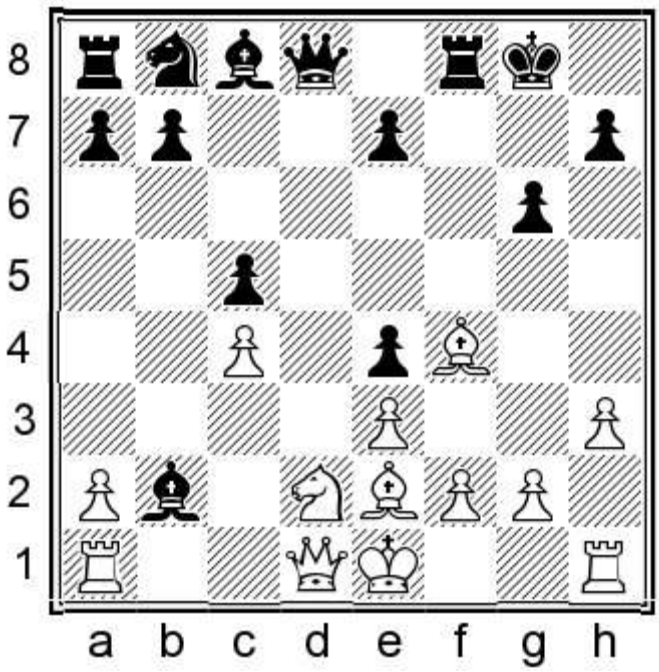
B) 16.♗d3 ♗e5 Black has a lot of squares, files and diagonals at his disposal. White's position seems about to collapse, but somehow he still has ways to keep the balance. 17.g3 [17.♖hf1 ♗xf4 18.exf4 ♘d4 19.♕a3 ♕xa3 20.bxa3 e5!=] 17...g5!



Position after: 17...g5!

18.♗xe5 [18.♗xg5?? ♖f2–+] 18...♘xe5 19.♗e2 ♖f2 20.♖xd8+ ♕xd8=

11...♗xb2

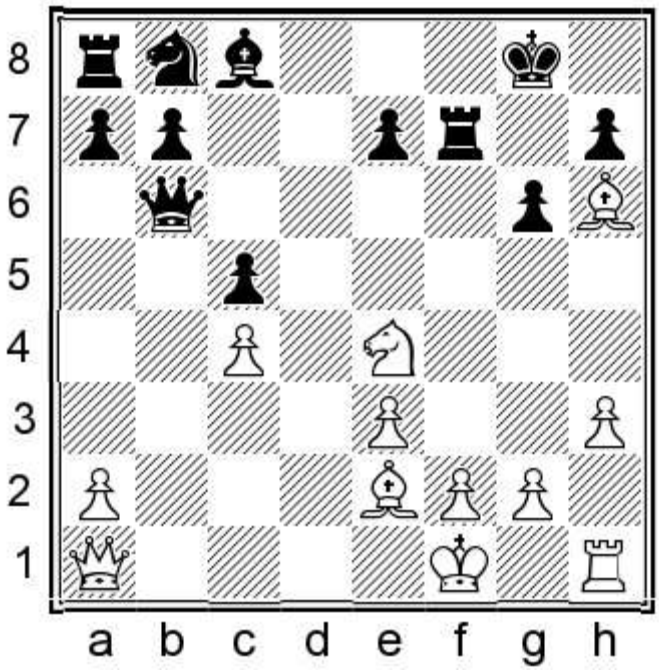


Position after: 11...♗xb2

12.♗h6!

12.♖b1 ♗c3∓

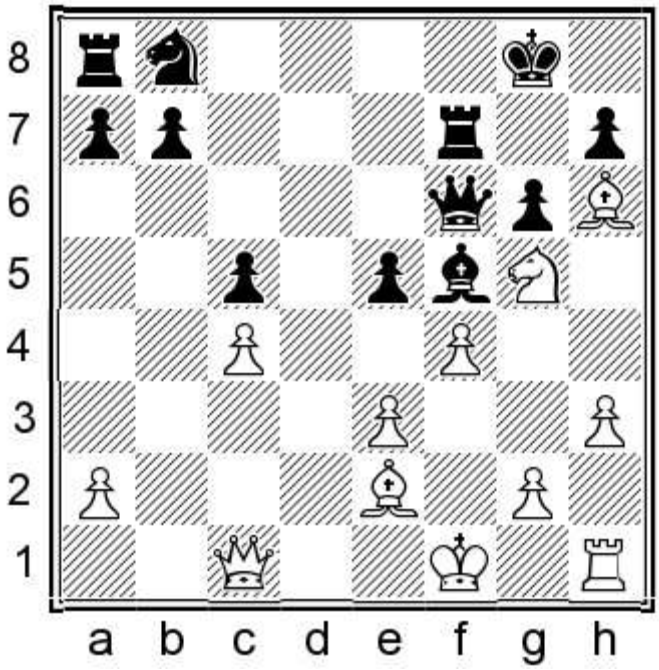
12...♗xa1 13.♕xa1 ♖f7 14.♘xe4 ♕a5+ 15.♔f1 ♕b6



Position after: 15...♕b6

White definitely has some compensation, but it doesn't seem to bring him any edge. Play might continue with

16.f4 ♗f5 17.♘g5 ♕f6 18.♕c1 e5♒



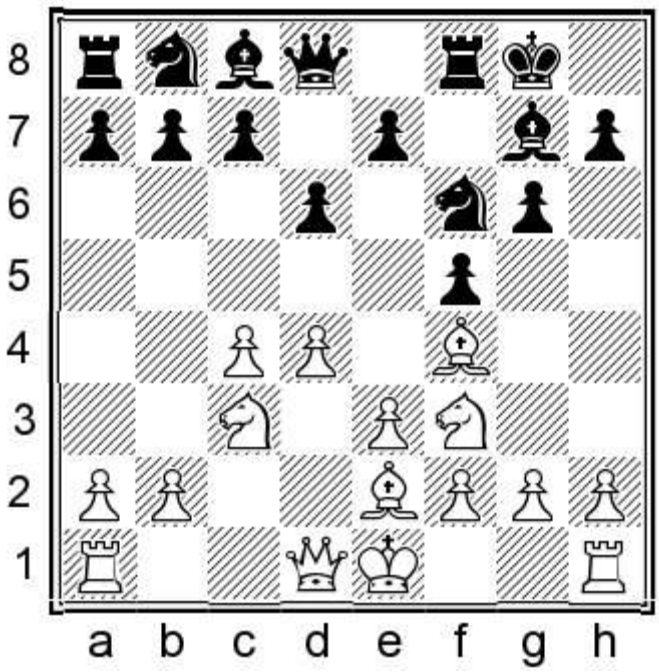
Position after: 18...e5♒

A very complicated position has arisen. I would still pick Black, but objectively both sides are still in

the game!

k) 3.♗f4 g6 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3 d6 6.e3 0-0 7.♗e2

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗f4 g6 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3 d6 6.e3 0-0 7.♗e2



Position after: 7.♗e2

7...♘e4!?

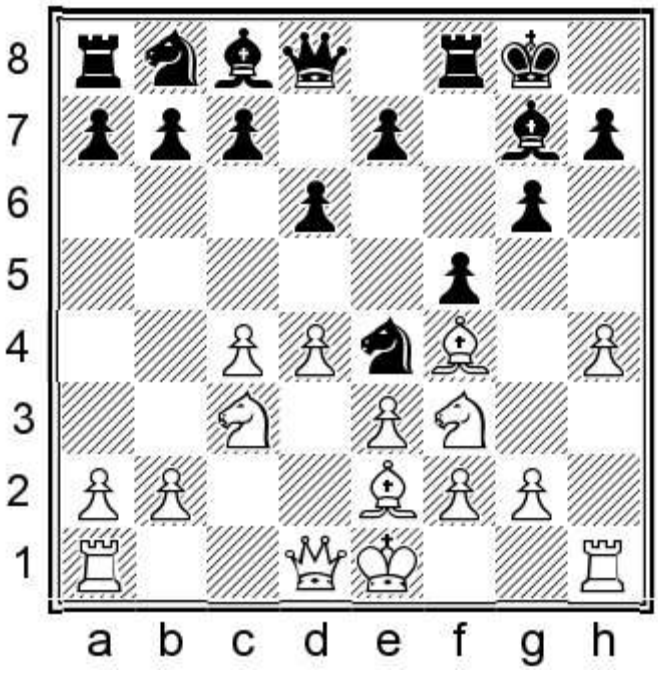
Trying to solve the problems directly in the same spirit as against 7.h3. This simplifies the position, and Black hopes that he can keep the balance.

The interesting 7...♘c6!? was my first idea. Aronian played this position three times as White, and couldn't manage to win, despite showing an edge in the later ones. Carlsen himself also played it, so it has been considered the main line ever since.

8.♘xe4N

This is clearly the critical attempt to refute Black's cheeky knight incursion in the center.

A) 8.h4

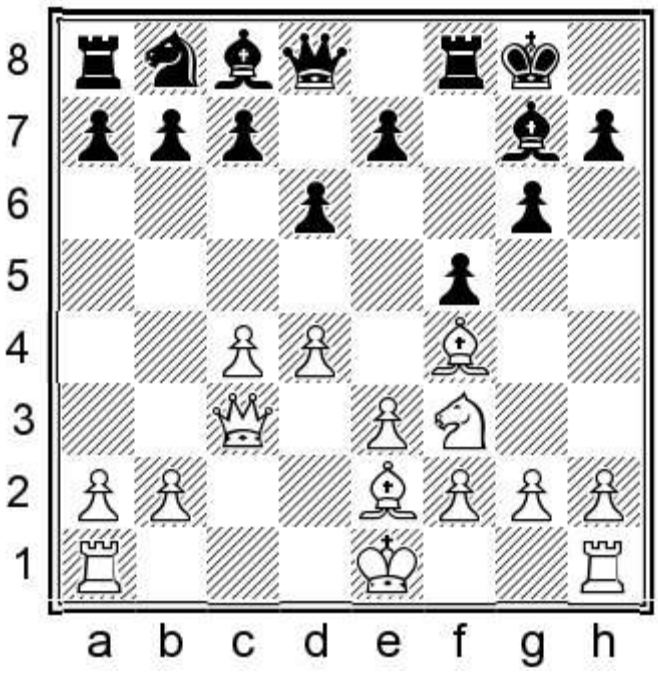


Position after: 8.h4

This makes sense, and has been tried once, but Black is quick to react in the center with 8...♘c6!N 9.♕b3 [9.h5 e5! 10.dxe5 dxe5 11.♗h2 ♘xc3 12.bxc3 ♕e7∓] 9...e5 10.♗g5 ♘xg5 11.hxg5 e4 12.♘d2 ♘a5 13.♕a3 b6↑.

B) 8.0-0 has already been analyzed with a different move order in the subchapter about lines without an early c4 in the 7.c4 ♘e4 8.0-0 line.

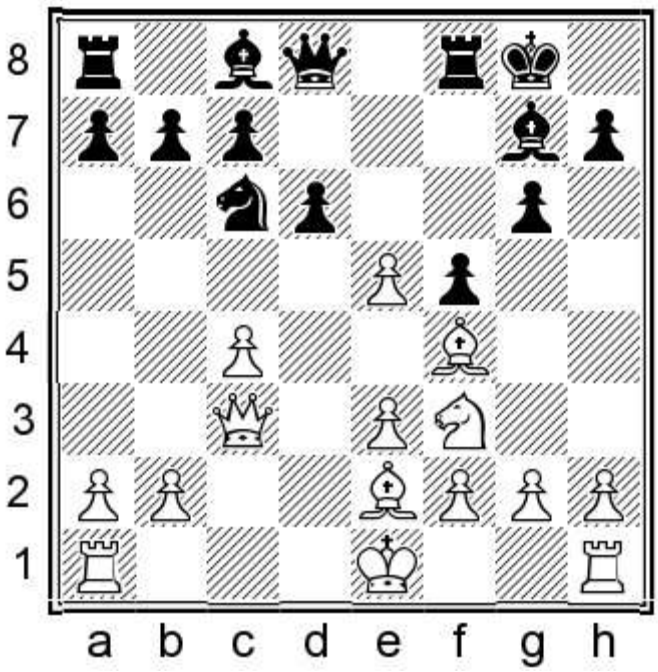
C) 8.♕c2 ♘xc3 9.♕xc3



Position after: 9.♕xc3

C1) 9...♘c6!? 10.c5! ♔h8!? [10...e5 11.dxe5 dxe5 amounts to the same.] 11.cxd6 cxd6 12.0-0 ♕e8⇄ is a way to keep pieces on the board and keep fighting for the win.

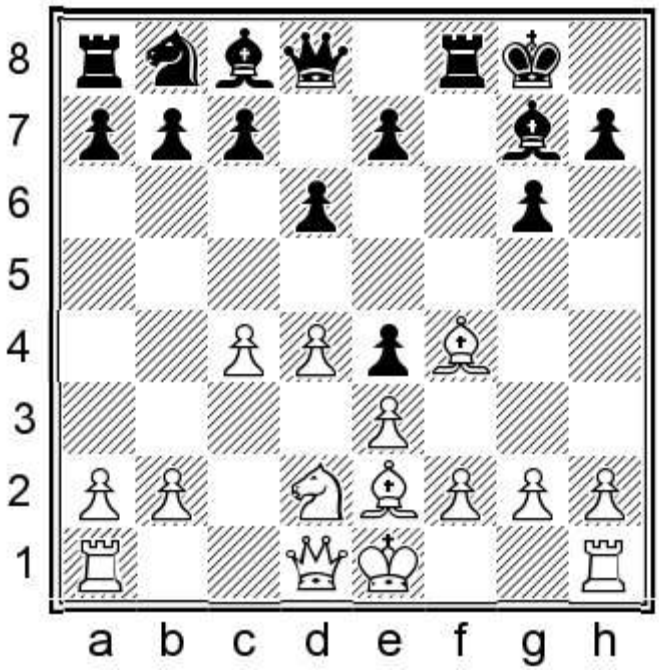
C2) It's possible to start more slowly with 9...e5!?, which seems to solve our problems and reach an equal position. 10.dxe5 ♘c6



Position after: 10...♘c6

11.c5! This creates the possibility for White to give an important check. [11.0-0-0?! ♕e8!∓] 11...dxe5 12.♗xe5 ♘xe5 13.♘xe5 ♕e7 14.♕b3+ The point of 11.c5. 14...♗e6 15.♗c4 ♗xe5 16.♗xe6+ ♔h8 17.0-0 ♕xc5 18.♕xb7 ♕d6=

8...fxe4 9.♘d2

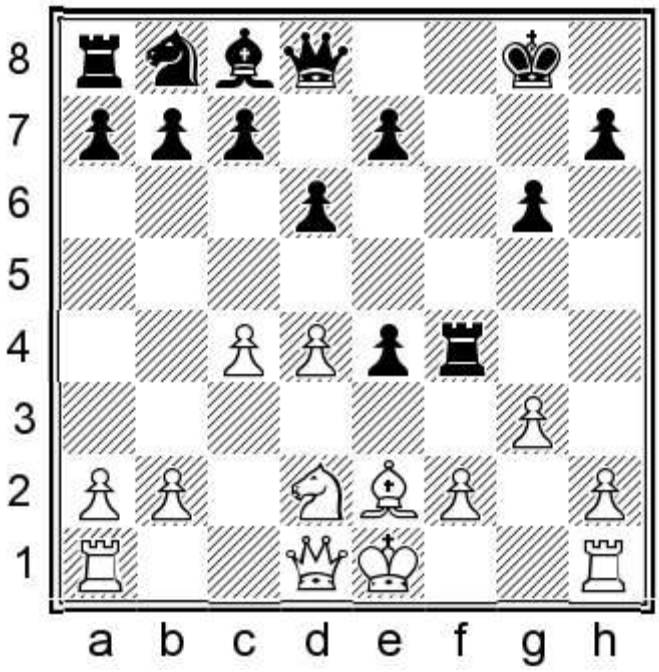


Position after: 9.♘d2

9...♗xd4!

9...c5 Be aware that we can't play in similar fashion to the 7.h3 line because here White is ready to castle: 10.dxc5! dxc5 11.0-0 ♘c6 12.♘xe4 ♗xb2 13.♖b1 ♗e5 14.♗h6±.

10.exd4 ♖xf4 11.g3



Position after: 11.g3

11...♖f7!

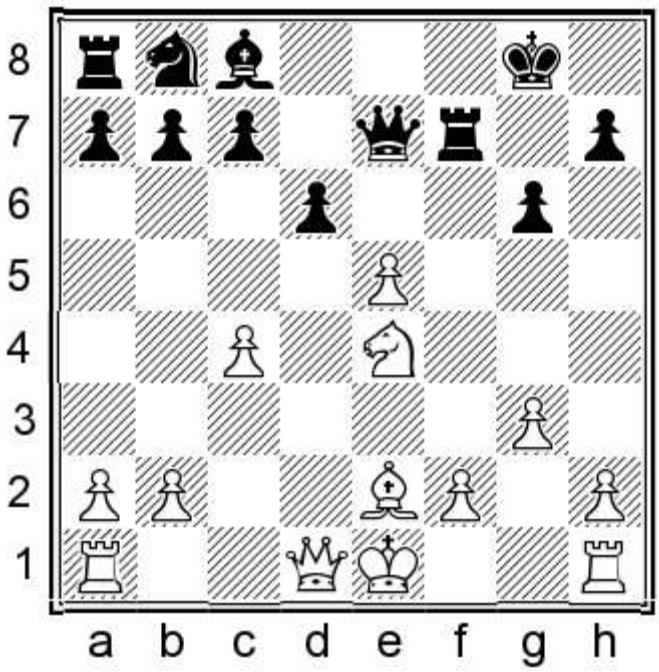
The right square! It might seem weird to place the rook on a square where it could come under attack from a knight on g5, but the reason is that it's very important to prevent the possibility of ♕d5 with check.

11...♖f8 12.♘xe4 ♗f5 [12...e5 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.♕d5+ ♕xd5 15.cxd5±] 13.♘c3 e5 14.dxe5 dxe5 15.♕d5+ ♕xd5 16.cxd5±

12.♘xe4 e5! 13.dxe5

13.0-0 ♗f5 14.♘c3 ♘c6 15.dxe5 dxe5= Black has been fighting to reach the d4-square with the knight, which compensates for the relative weakness of the e5-pawn.

13...♕e7!

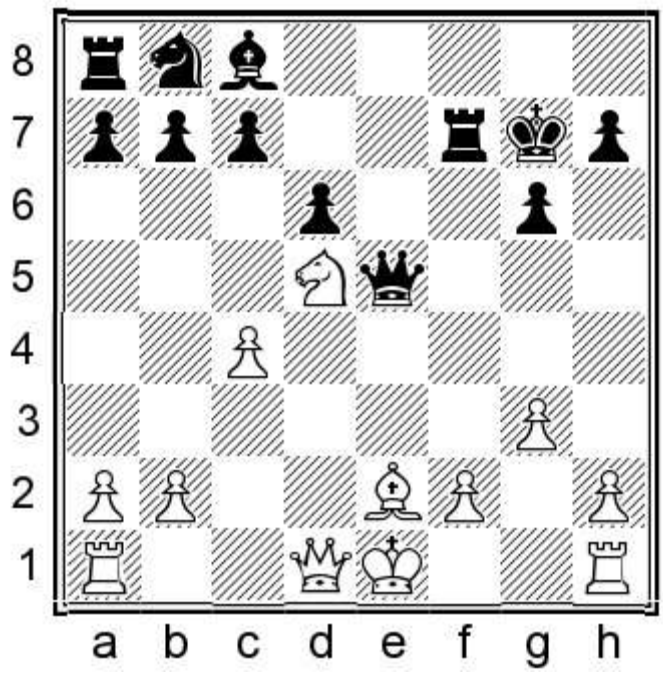


Position after: 13...♕e7!

White is ahead in development, but hasn't castled yet, so we have time for a move such as this.

14.♕d5

14.♘f6+ ♔g7 15.♘d5 ♕xe5



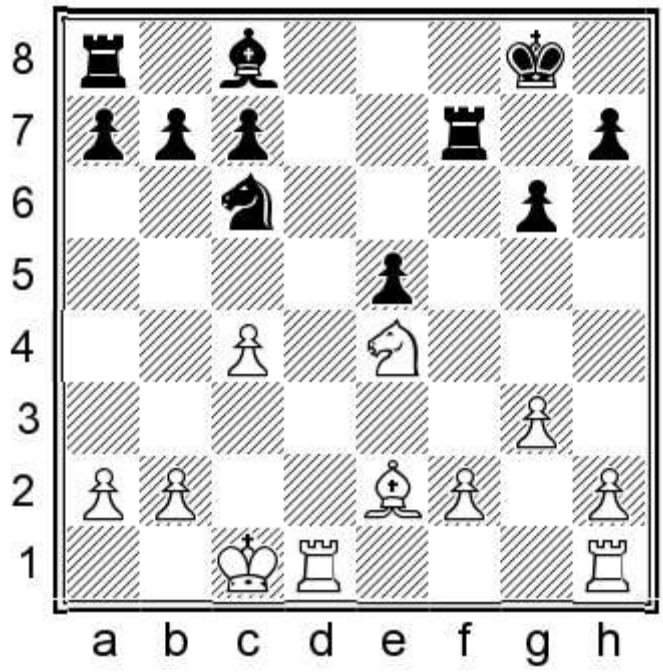
Position after: 15...♕xe5

16.0-0 It seems that Black is only playing with two major pieces, but he will quickly develop the others with a good game. [16.♕d2 ♗g4 17.f4 ♕xe2+ 18.♕xe2 ♗xe2 19.♔xe2 c6 20.♘c3 ♘d7=] 16...♘c6 17.♕d2 ♗h3 18.♖fe1 ♕d4! 19.♕xd4+ ♘xd4∓

14...♕xe5 15.♕xe5

15.0-0-0 ♕xd5 16.cxd5 ♗f5=

15...dxe5 16.0-0-0 ♘c6=

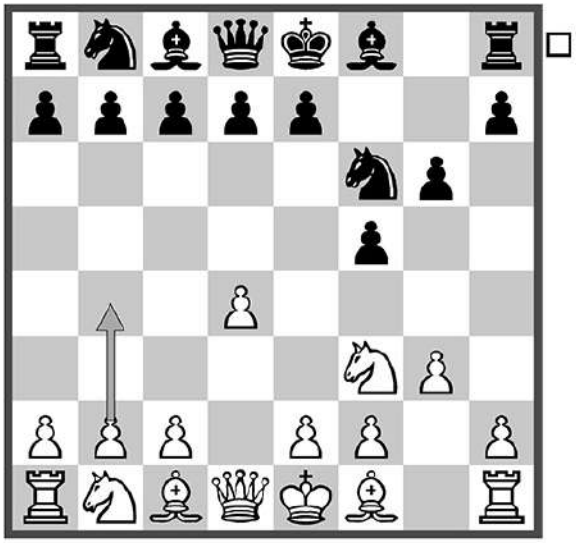


Position after: 16...♘c6=

The knight on e4 is strong, but can be traded, and the pawn on e5 is weak, but is compensated by the impressive knight coming to d4, where it will rule the board. The game is objectively balanced.

Chapter 7
Lines with an Early b4

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6



Chapter Guide

Chapter 7 – Lines with an Early b4

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6

a) 4.b4

b) 4.c4 ♗g7 5.b4

c) 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.b4

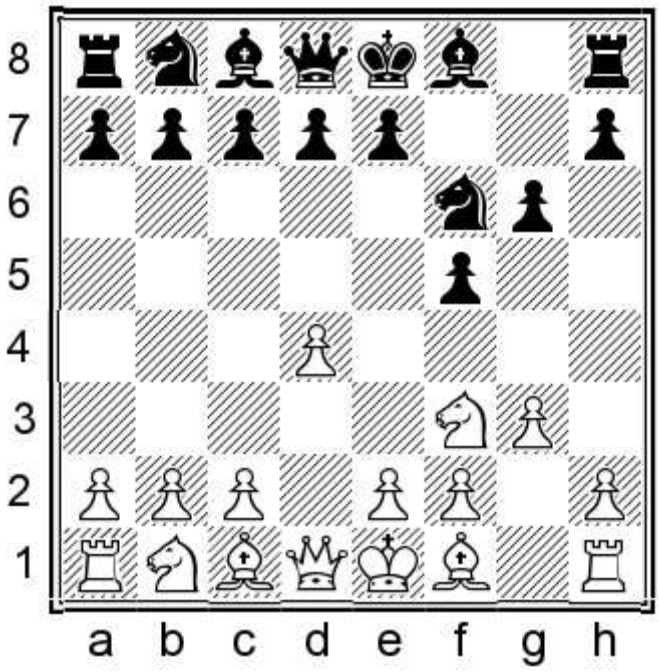
d) 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.c4 0-0 6.b4

e) 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 d6 7.b4?!

f) 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.b4

a) 4.b4

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6



Position after: 3...g6

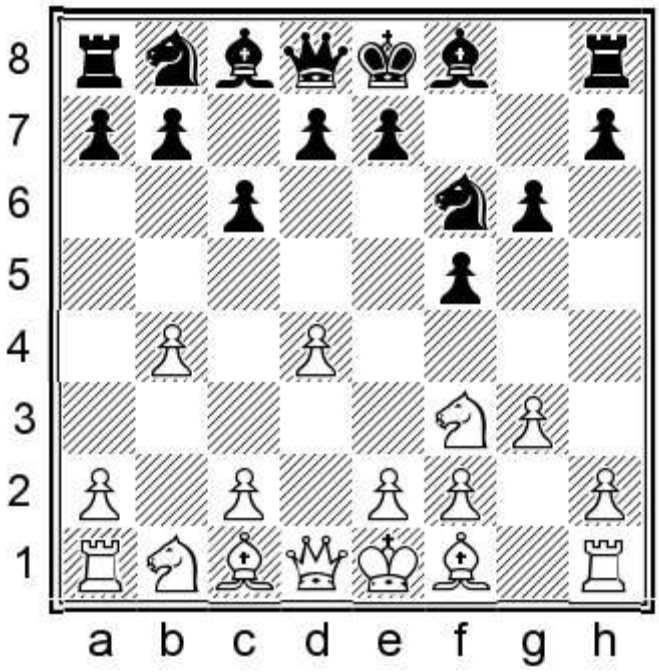
In this chapter we will focus on systems and variations where White plays an early b4 at some point. It's not a move you see in every opening (especially sometimes as early as move 4!), but it's quite reasonable against the Dutch. The reasons are simple: (i) it's not an opening with immediate tension in the center; (ii) it's logical considering each player's plan: Black develops his play on the kingside, so his long-term aim is to attack in this area, therefore (iii) it's logical for White to start massive pawn expansion on the other side to create counterplay.

As we will see, b2−b4 can't be played as a random move, thinking it's always fine. Its strength depends on the situation. It's also worth mentioning that in the few lines where White plays b4 very early, it makes no difference whether he has played ♗g2 instead of ♘f3, as the lines will most likely transpose sooner or later.

4.b4!?

Of course we have to look at this move right now! It's not very popular, probably because it's not so logical to play b4 right after playing g3 without completing the fianchetto with ♗g2. Also, I believe that it's a bit too early.

4...c6!?



Position after: 4...c6!?

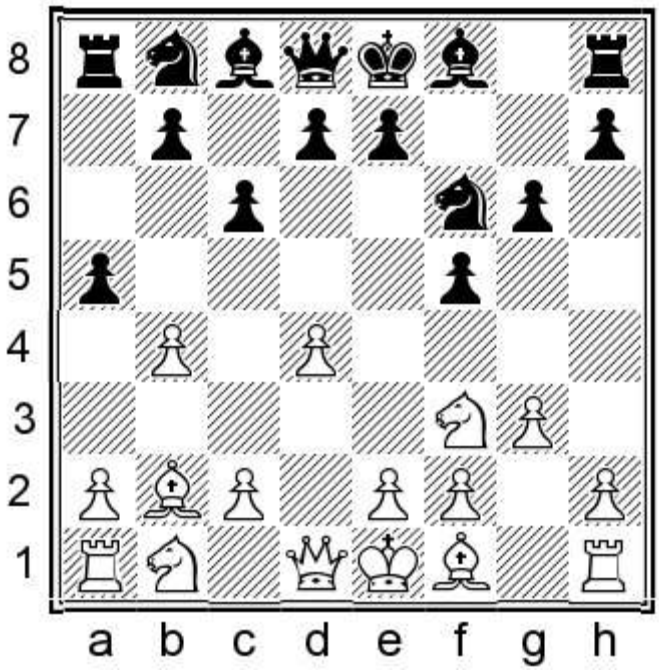
This is the kind of line where precise knowledge of theory is not essential. Knowing the ideas behind what you are doing is more important than exact moves. That's why, for this chapter, I decided to be rigorous and respond with an immediate ...c6 each time White plays b4, in order to challenge him on the queenside with either ...a5 or ...d5, depending on the situation. I will make a couple of exceptions when b4 is played after the sixth move, such as in the main line.

5.♗b2

A) 5.c4 ♗g7 transposes to 4.c4 ♗g7 5.b4.

B) 5.♗g2 ♗g7 − see 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.b4. As you can see, this is also very convenient for the move order.

5...a5!N

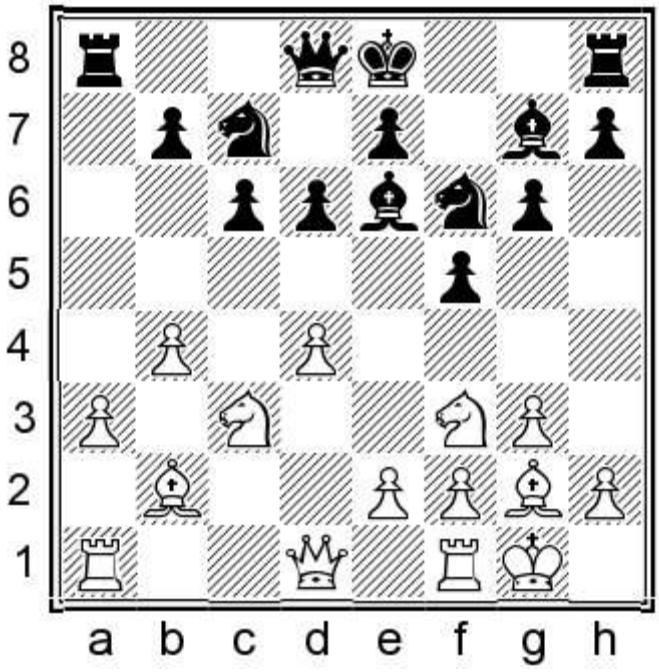


Position after: 5...a5!N

We were already in a very rare situation, but this move has never been tried before. It forces White to do something with his b-pawn while b4−b5, usually the logical continuation, isn't really possible.

6.a3

A) The other way to defend the b4-pawn, 6.c3, is not very impressive, because the c-pawn is going to be traded for an a-pawn. 6...axb4 7.cxb4 ♘a6 8.a3 ♘c7 9.♗g2 d6 10.0-0 ♗g7 11.♘c3 ♗e6∓

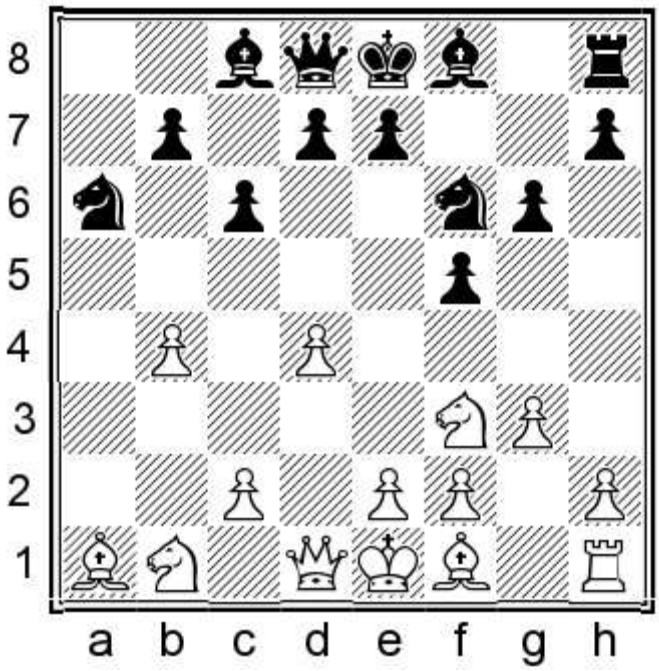


Position after: 11...♗e6∓

Black has good control of the light squares: c4, d5 and e4 will be a source of problems for White.

B) 6.b5?! I don't believe in a such an early pawn sacrifice, and of course we accept it: 6...cxb5 7.e3 b4 8.a3 e6 9.axb4 ♗xb4+ 10.c3 ♗e7 11.♗g2 d5∓.

6...axb4 7.axb4 ♖xa1 8.♗xa1 ♘a6!



Position after: 8...♘a6!

As we can see, White is unable to play c4 in this line, so his opening can be considered a failure.

9.c3

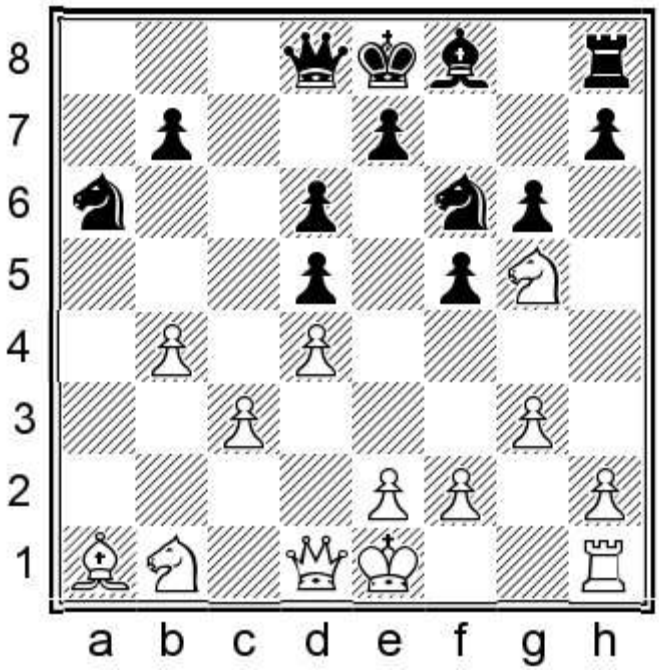
The bishop on a1 is unlikely to be happy with what has happened on the previous few moves!

9...d6 10.♗g2 ♗e6!? 11.♘g5?!

11.♘bd2 ♗h6!? 12.0-0 b5↑

11...♗d5! 12.♗xd5 cxd5∓

Black gets great squares, and the c3-pawn is a long-term weakness.

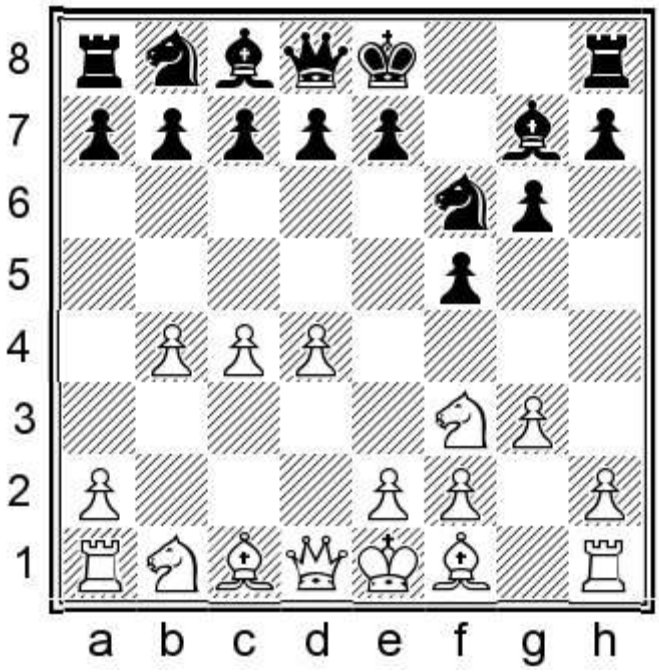


Position after: 12...cxd5∓

In the meantime, White cannot really make use of the e6-square.

b) 4.c4 ♗g7 5.b4

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.c4 ♗g7 5.b4



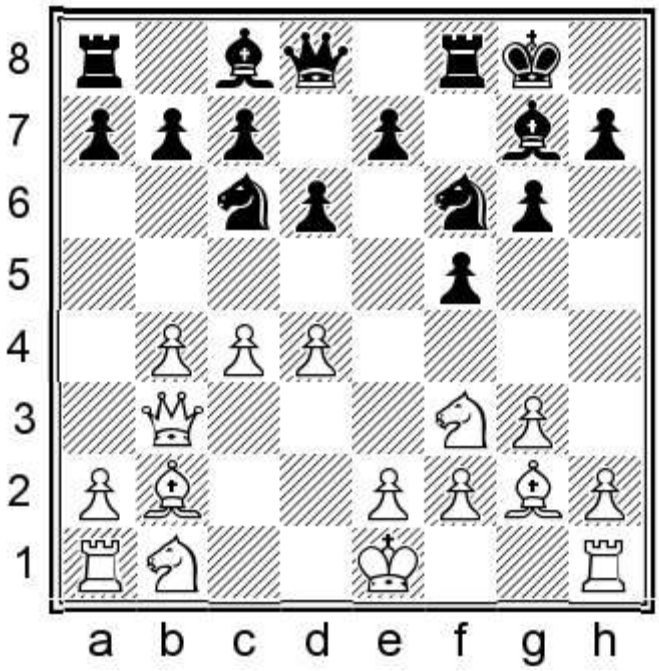
Position after: 5.b4

In my opinion it makes more sense to play b4 after c4 (compared to the 4. b4 line).

5...c6

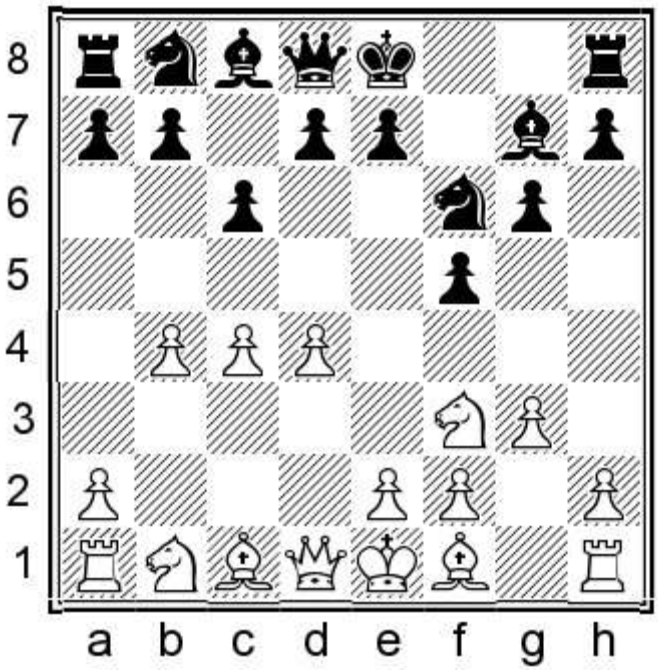
As I already said, once b4 is played, we respond with ...c6.

5...♘c6!? I was very close to proposing this move instead of systems with ...c6. The basic idea is that b4−b5 is quite compromising as the knight would jump to a5, threatening c4, with the possibility of continuing with ...d5. It's interesting and, I believe, fully playable, but I didn't recommend it because of the following line: 6.♕b3! d6 7.♗b2 0-0 8.♗g2



Position after: 8.♗g2

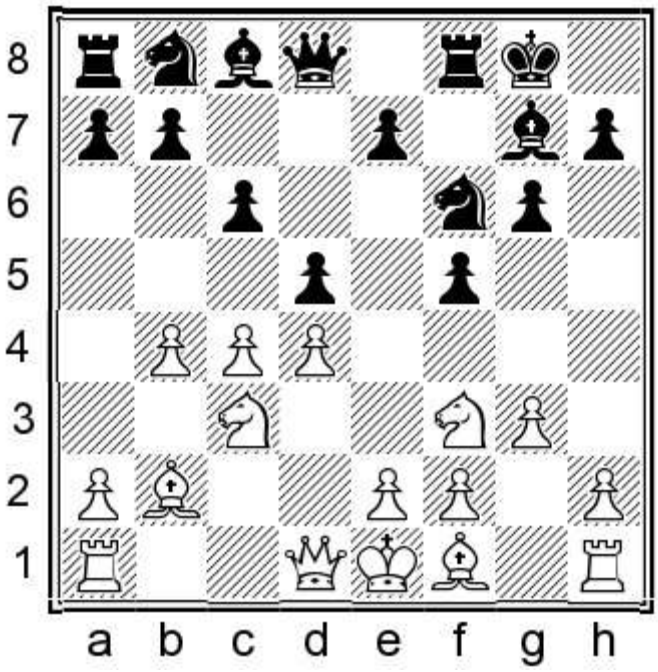
8...♕e8! Black plays to free himself with ...e5, as is often the case in the Leningrad Dutch. 9.♘bd2 e5 10.dxe5 ♘xe5 11.0-0↑ Maybe I'm wrong, but I believe that this sort of position is always easier to play for White. He has possible pressure on the queenside, and Black is nowhere close to having an attack.



Position after: 5...c6

6.♗b2

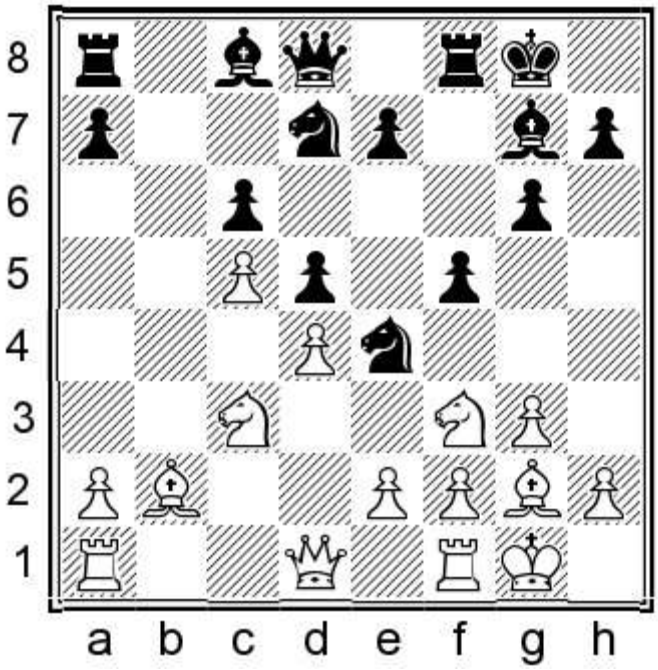
A) 6.♘c3 It's quite rare to see the knight coming here, as it is usually more useful on d2, where it doesn't block the long diagonal and protects c4. 6...0-0 7.♗b2 d5



Position after: 7...d5

A1) 8.c5?! We will meet this move in other variations, but it's not a great idea to close the center even more in order to gain some space. The bishop might find itself looking very stupid on b2.

8...♘e4 9.♗g2 b6 10.0-0 bxc5 11.bxc5 ♘d7



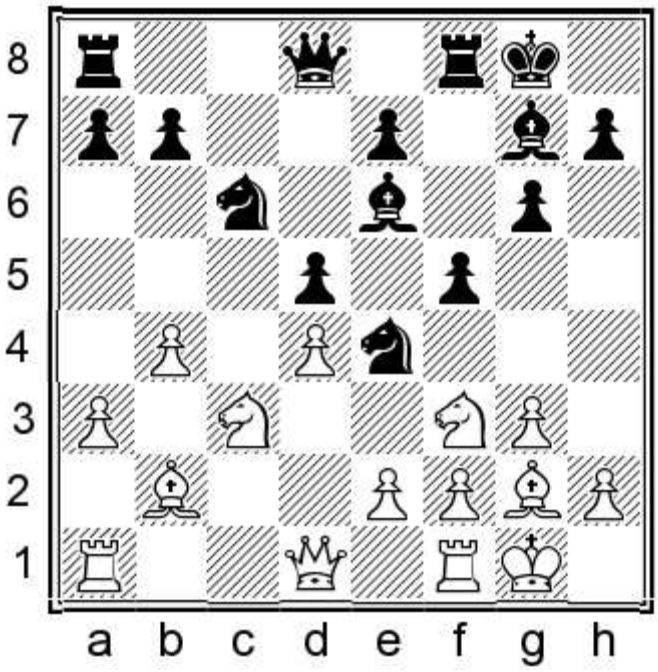
Position after: 11...♘d7

Black starts to threaten ...♘dxc5, and might also have the idea of playing ...e5. 12.♕c2 ♖b8 13.♖ab1 ♕c7∓ Black may follow with ...♗a6, and ...e5 is an increasing possibility.

A2) 8.e3N This is a real computer move. It seems to think that the bishop is much more useful on e2 than g2, so accepts that g3 was just a weakening move and loss of time. I doubt if many players will think that way! 8...♘e4 9.♕b3 ♗e6 10.♗e2 ♘a6⇄

A3) 8.♗g2? Of course White is not ready to sacrifice the c4-pawn: 8...dxc4 9.0-0 ♘d5 10.a3 ♘d7 11.e3 ♘7f6 12.♕e2 b5∓.

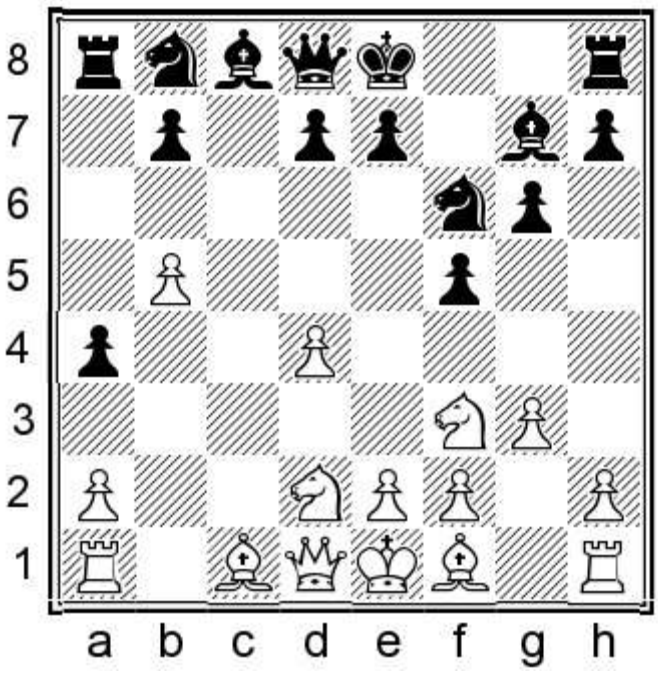
A4) 8.cxd5 cxd5 9.♗g2 ♘c6 10.a3 ♗e6 11.0-0 ♘e4=



Position after: 11...♘e4=

Black gets an active position, and can exploit the weak spots in White's camp, such as c4. The game Girya, O (2436) – Muzychuk, A (2593), Dilijan 2013, ended in a draw.

B) 6.♘bd2 This is very similar to 6.♗b2, as White is going to play both moves anyway, and it has the same idea of delaying castling. We can respond in similar fashion: 6...a5! 7.b5 cxb5 8.cxb5 a4!

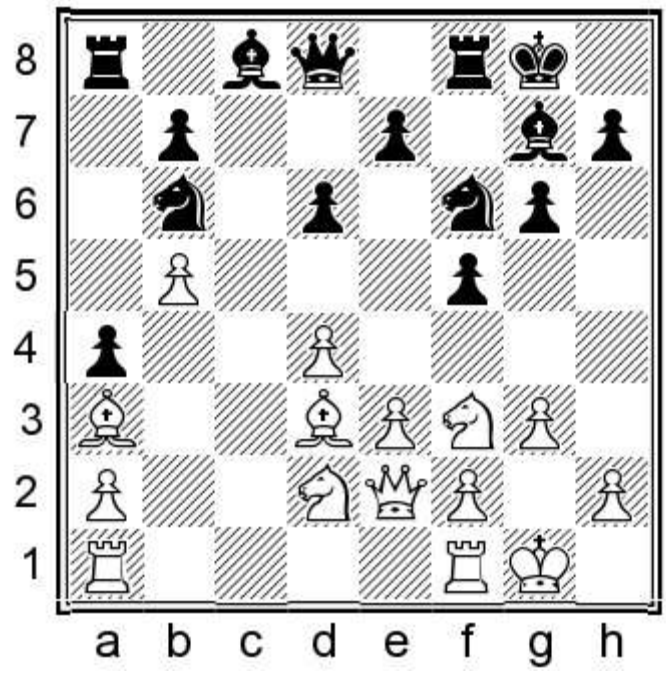


Position after: 8...a4!

This move prevents White from playing a4 himself, and frees the a5-square for the queen or a rook. It

means that White will always have to keep an eye on his b5-pawn.

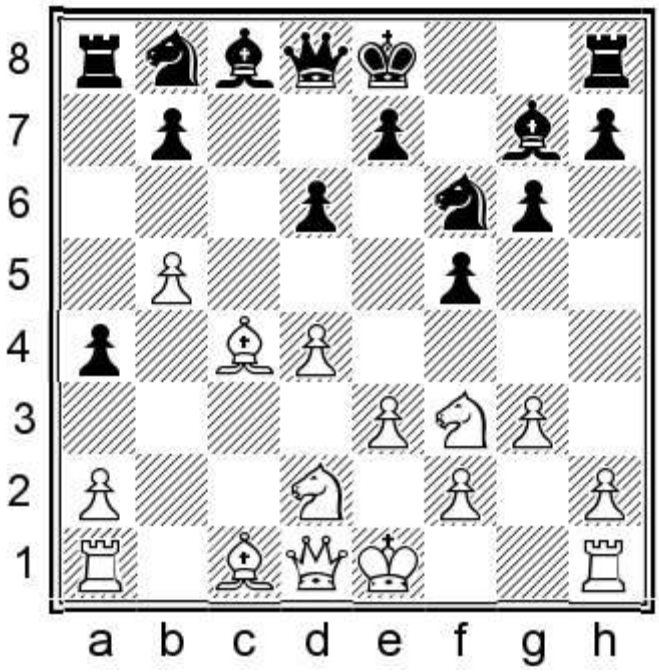
B1) 9.♗a3!? This is a way to exploit the move order where ♗b2 is delayed, but it's not particularly annoying. 9...d6 10.e3 ♘bd7 11.♗d3 ♘b6 12.0-0 0-0 13.♕e2



Position after: 13.♕e2

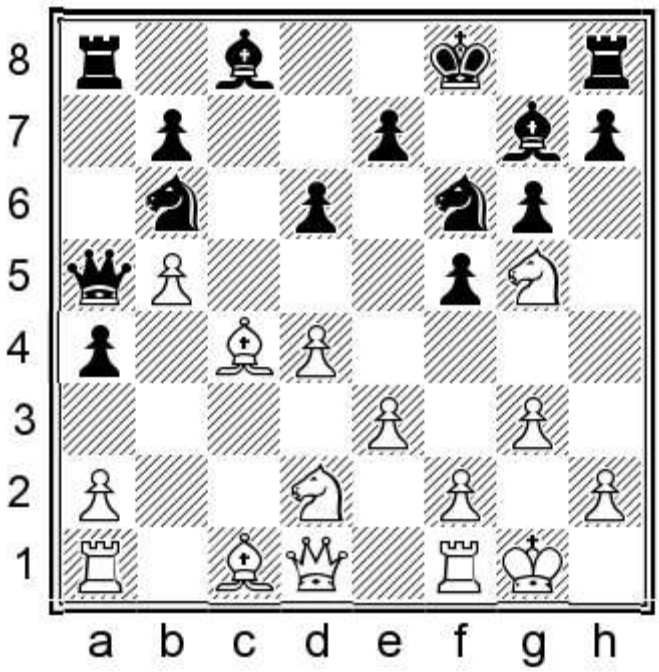
This position was reached in the game Iotov, V (2503) – Ikonnikov, V (2588), France 2006, 0-1 (24). Black now played the safety move 13...♔h8, but I think it's simpler and stronger to develop with 13...♗e6!N 14.♘c4 ♘bd5 15.♖fc1 ♘e4⇄. The position is more or less balanced, but White's play seems slightly unnatural.

B2) 9.e3 d6 10.♗c4



Position after: 10.♗c4

We've already said that it's quite difficult for humans not to place the bishop on g2 once g3 has been played, but the bishop is quite decently placed on c4 − until it gets chased! 10...♕a5!? 11.0-0 ♘bd7 12.♘g5 ♘b6 13.♘e6 [13.♗f7+? ♔f8 14.♗e6 h6 15.♗xc8 ♖xc8 16.♘e6+ ♔f7 17.♘xg7 ♔xg7∓] 13...♔f7! 14.♘g5+ ♔f8



Position after: 14...♔f8

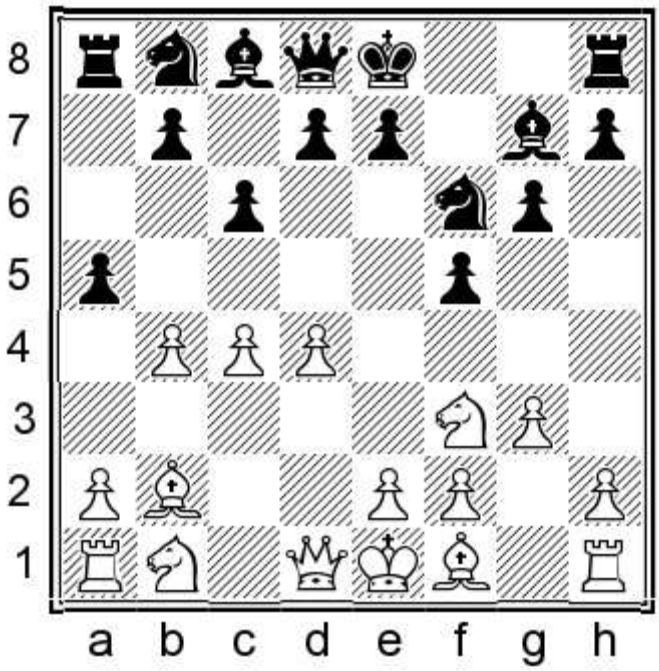
B2.1) 15.♘e6+ ♔g8! We don't even let White take a draw! The king is perfectly safe here, as there

is no interesting discovered check! After 16.♘xg7+ ♔xg7 17.♗e2 ♗e6∓ Black's pieces are much more active, and his bishop on g7 was useless anyway.

B2.2) 15.♕e2! d5 16.♗d3 ♘e4⇄

C) 6.♗g2 − see the move order 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.b4 c6 6.c4.

6...a5

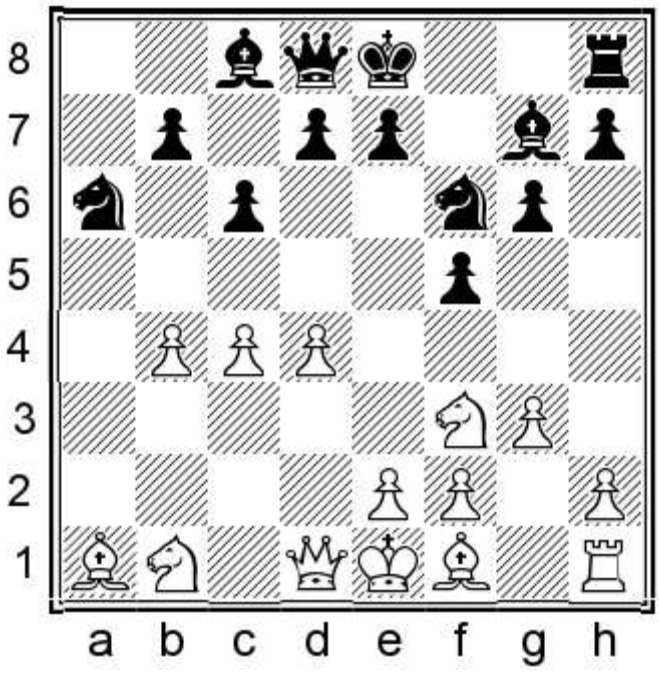


Position after: 6...a5

7.b5

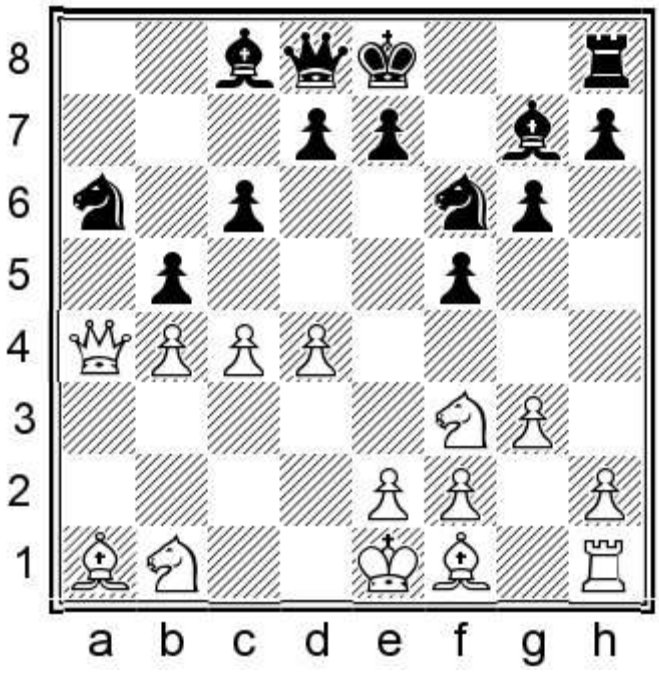
Ambitious, but committal at the same time.

7.a3 axb4 8.axb4 ♖xa1 9.♗xa1 ♘a6!



Position after: 9...♘a6!

10.♕a4 This position was reached in a game by the Dutch Defense specialist in Gozzoli, Y (2377) – Malaniuk, V (2556), Cap d'Agde 2002, 0-1 (26). Here Black missed a nice pawn sacrifice allowing him to take over the initiative with minimum risk (as he will most probably regain his pawn easily). [10.b5? cxb5 11.cxb5 ♕a5+∓; 10.♕b3 Probably best, but Black gets the light squares after 10...b5! 11.cxb5 cxb5 12.♗g2 e6= 13.0-0?! 13.d5 was necessary, but even here Black can play 13...0-0 and get a very decent position. 13...♗b7∓] 10...b5!N



Position after: 10...b5!N

11.cxb5 cxb5 12.♕xb5 ♕c7 13.♗c3 ♘e4 14.♕a5 ♗b7 15.♗g2 0-0 16.b5 [16.0-0?? ♘xc3 17.♕xc7 ♘xe2+ 18.♔h1 ♘xc7–+] 16...♖c8!= White still needs to find accurate moves in order to keep the balance. It is worth mentioning that the natural moves are actually mistakes: 17.♕xc7? [17.bxa6?? ♕xa5 18.♗xa5 ♖c1#] 17...♘xc7 18.♗b4 ♘xb5 19.0-0 ♘xd4∓.

7...a4

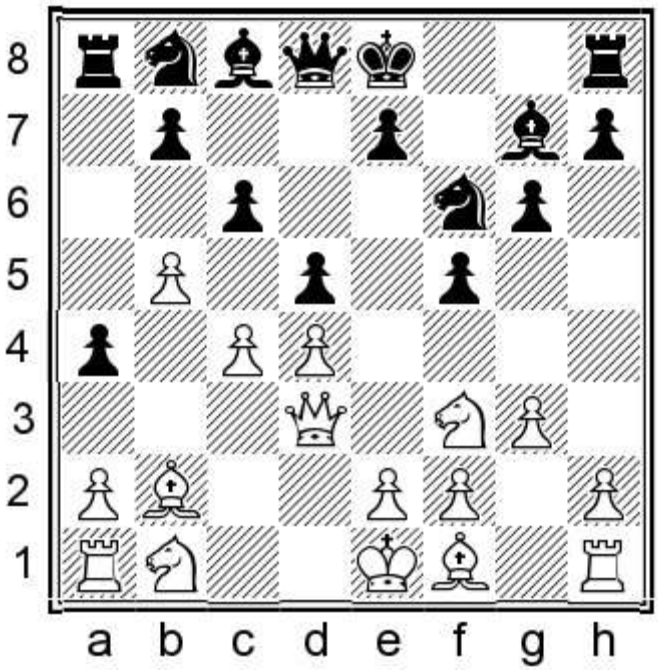
We are familiar with this idea in the 6.♘bd2 line. The only game that reached this position saw the move

8.♕d3

This is quite logical: the queen controls the important a3- and e4-squares. Cheparinov won a nice game, but I think Black can react directly in the center.

8.e3N 8...cxb5 9.cxb5 d6 10.♘c3 ♕a5 11.a3 ♘bd7⇄

8...d5!

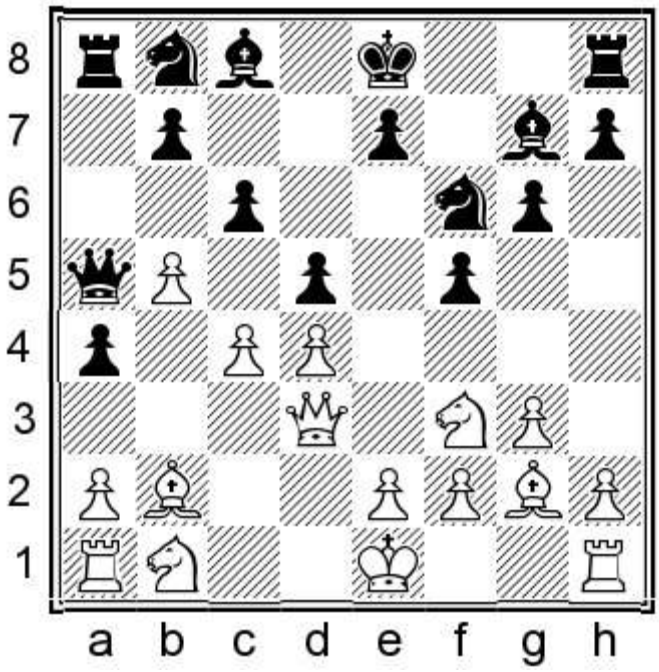


Position after: 8...d5!

9.♗g2

9.♘c3?! ♗e6! 10.cxd5 ♘xd5 11.a3 ♘b6∓ As often, White has some problems on the light squares.

9...♕a5+



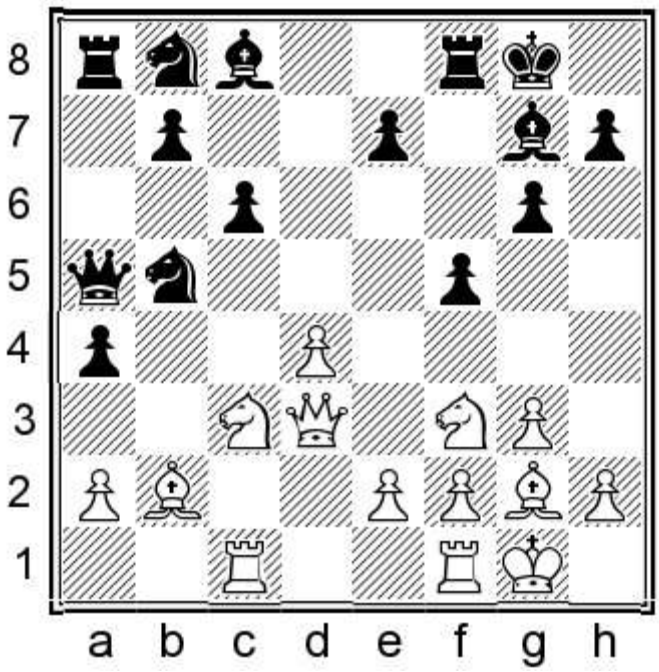
Position after: 9...♕a5+

10.♘c3!

10.♗c3 dxc4! 11.♕xc4 ♕xb5∓

10...♘e4 11.♖c1 dxc4 12.♕xc4 ♘d6 13.♕d3 ♘xb5 14.0-0 0-0⩱

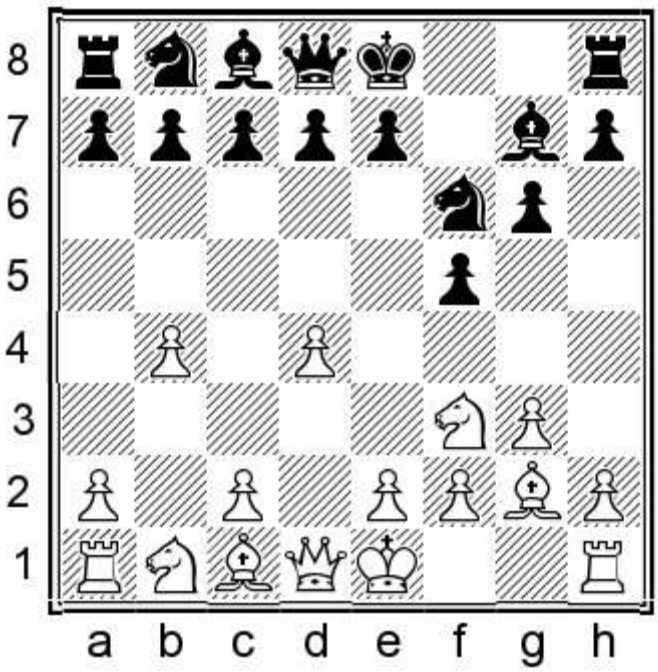
White still needs to be accurate in order to keep some compensation, but his position is far from desperate here.



Position after: 14...0-0♾

c) 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.b4

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.b4



Position after: 5.b4

5...c6 6.c4

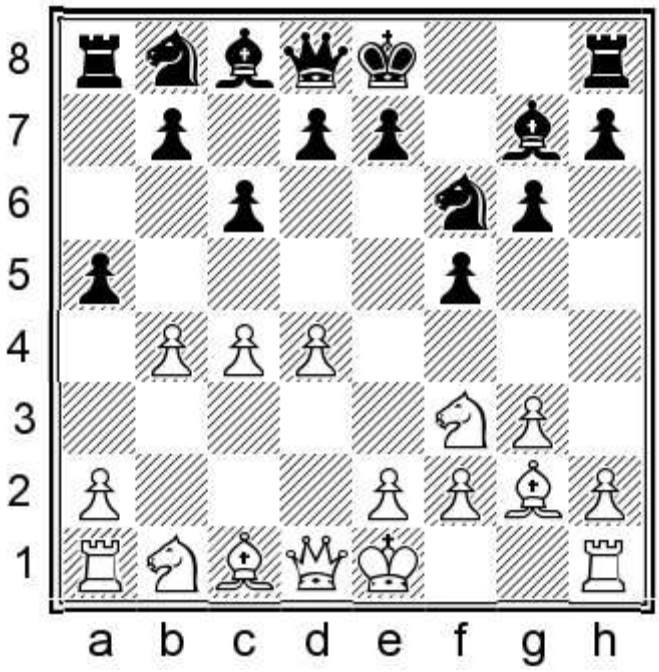
6.♗b2 a5 This position has been analyzed in the line with 4.b4.

It's true that ♗g2/♗g7 wasn't included, but it won't make any major difference, so I think it would be redundant to analyze this again.

6...d5!

We've already said that this position may arise with the move order 4.c4 ♗g7 5.b4 c6 6.♗g2.

6...a5

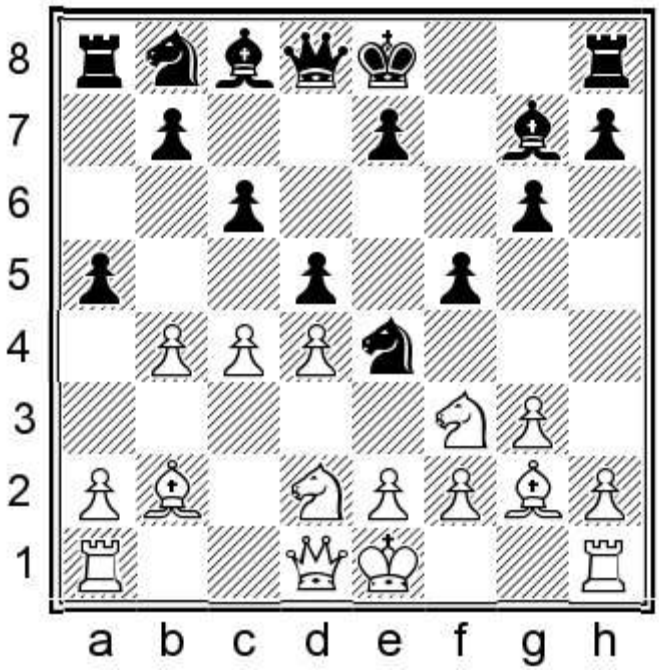


Position after: 6...a5

I'm not advising this move anymore. The reason comes after the following moves: 7.b5 a4?! [7...d5 8.♘c3 ♘e4 9.♕d3 dxc4 10.♕xc4 ♘xc3 11.♕xc3 cxb5 Black gains a pawn, but will suffer on the light squares. 12.♕b3! b4 13.♘g5 ♖f8 14.♗d5!±] 8.0-0 It's mainly because this move can be played so readily that Black can't easily start his initiative on the queenside. Also, the queen won't be able to come to a5 safely, as long as the bishop on c1 has the possibility of going to d2. 8...cxb5 9.cxb5 d6 10.♘c3±

7.cxd5

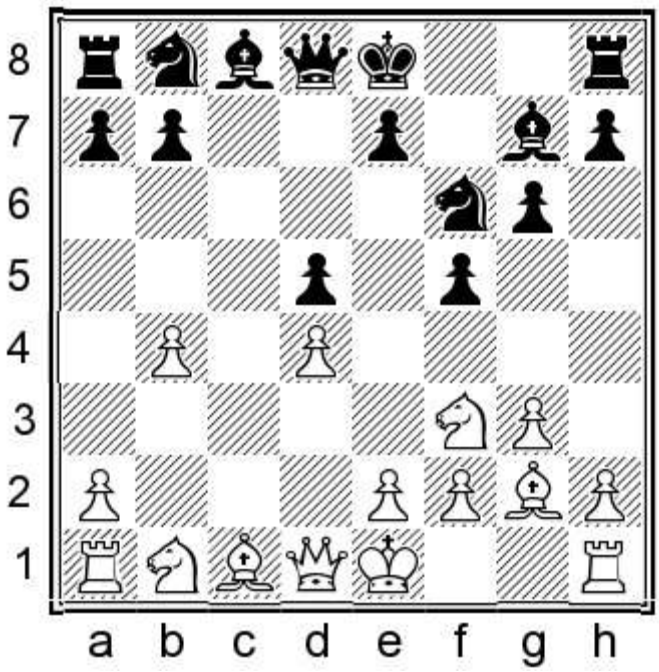
7.♘bd2 ♘e4 8.♗b2 a5



Position after: 8...a5

This position will be considered in our main line with 0-0 included for both sides. Obviously it doesn't change much, and will transpose sooner or later.

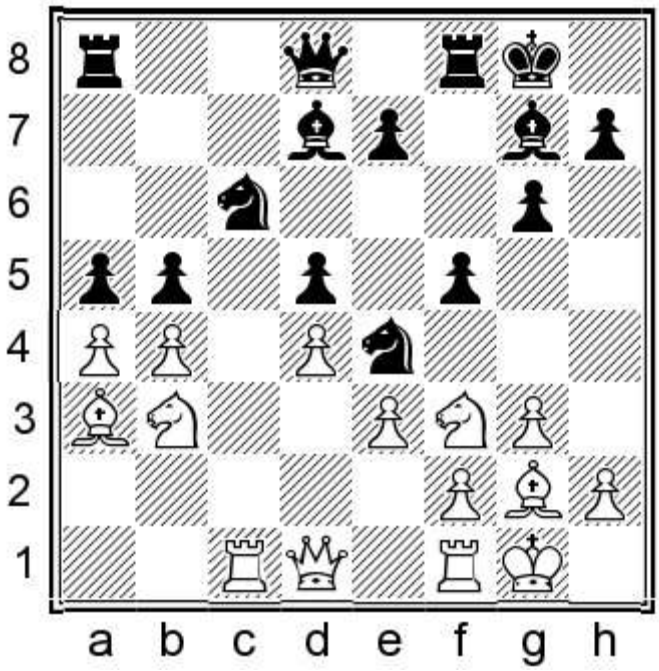
7...cxd5



Position after: 7...cxd5

8.0-0

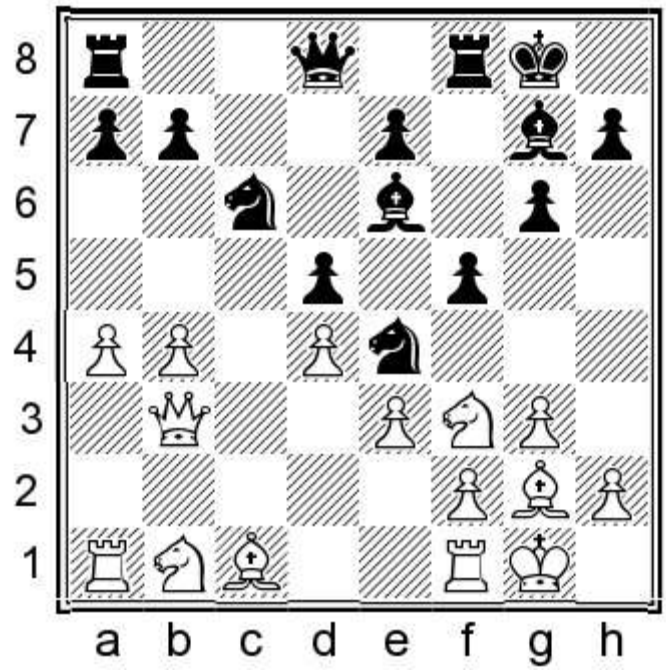
8.a4!? Even when White has traded the c-pawns, it's quite reasonable for him to take as much space as he can. In the following game Black tried to fight for space in the same area of the board; I think his play was interesting. 8...♘e4 9.♗a3 ♘c6 10.e3 0-0 11.0-0 a6! Black prepares ...b5, as well as preventing b4–b5 by White. 12.♘bd2 b5!? 13.♖c1 ♗d7 14.♘b3 Of course when there are pawns on b5 and d5 the c5-square feels neglected, but so is c4 in White's camp. And here Black even managed to free himself and trade the queenside pawns. Unfortunately, after a long fight and against a strong opponent, it wasn't enough to achieve a draw. 14...a5!=



Position after: 14...a5!=

1-0 (107) Van Wely, L (2689) – Collas, D (2394), Haguenau 2013.

8...0-0 9.e3 ♘c6 10.♕b3 ♘e4 11.a4 ♗e6



Position after: 11...♗e6

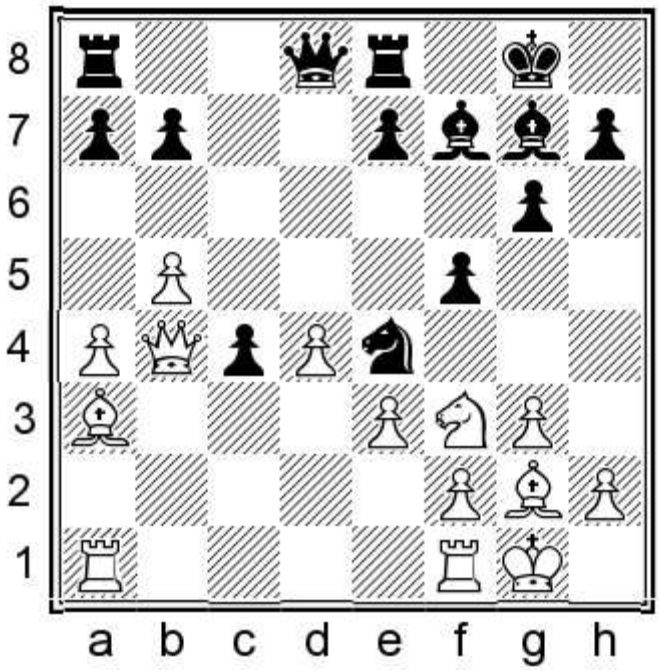
We are already familiar with the plan of playing ...a6 and ...b5.

If you don’t like it, or if you want to keep an unbalanced position as much as possible, you can choose the following kind of plan.

12.♗a3 ♗f7!? 13.b5 ♘a5 14.♕b4 ♖e8

14...♘c4!? 15.♕xe7 a6⩱ is playable too, but you have to be confident in your position.

15.♘bd2 ♘c4 16.♘xc4 dxc4=

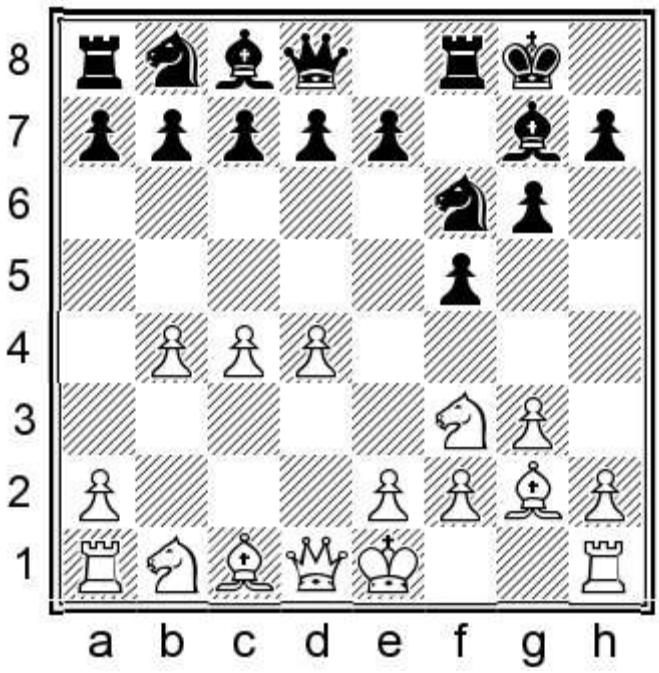


Position after: 16...dxc4=

The c4-pawn can be seen as a source of satisfaction for Black as long as it doesn't become a weakness.

d) 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.c4 0-0 6.b4

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.c4 0-0 6.b4



Position after: 6.b4

White has managed to advance all his pawns, but it doesn't change the situation much.

6...♘c6!?

This seems like a very provocative move because the brazen knight can be chased by two pawns, but right now we will see that it is fine.

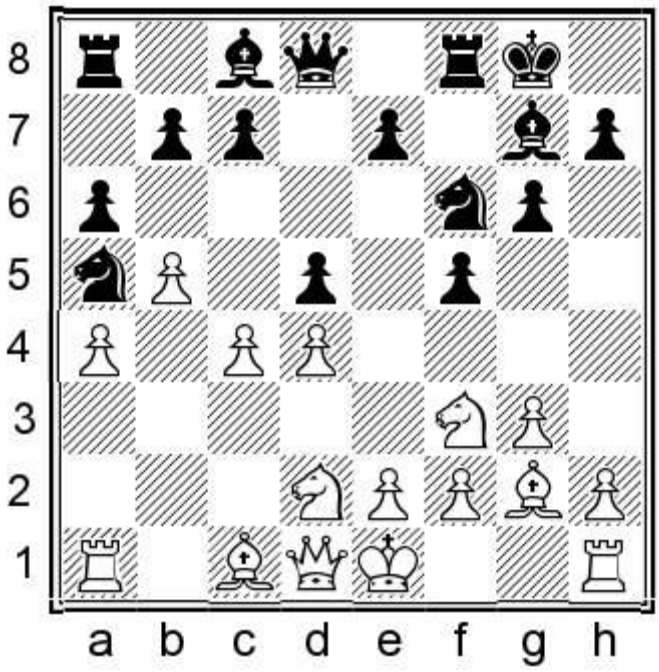
6...c6!? There is absolutely nothing wrong with this move. It's going to be similar to lines already discussed, but I would like to show how you can sometimes use another idea which works perfectly well in this exact situation.

7.a3

A very sensible continuation, trying to retain every option at his disposal.

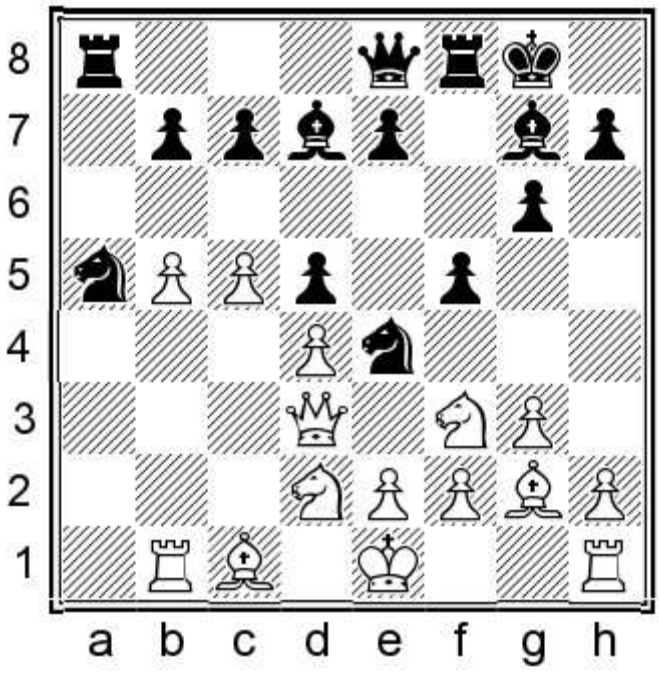
Other options are:

A) 7.b5 Maybe the most logical move, but it gives away the a5-square and the queenside pawns may experience some problems. 7...♘a5 8.♘bd2 a6 9.a4 d5!



Position after: 9...d5!

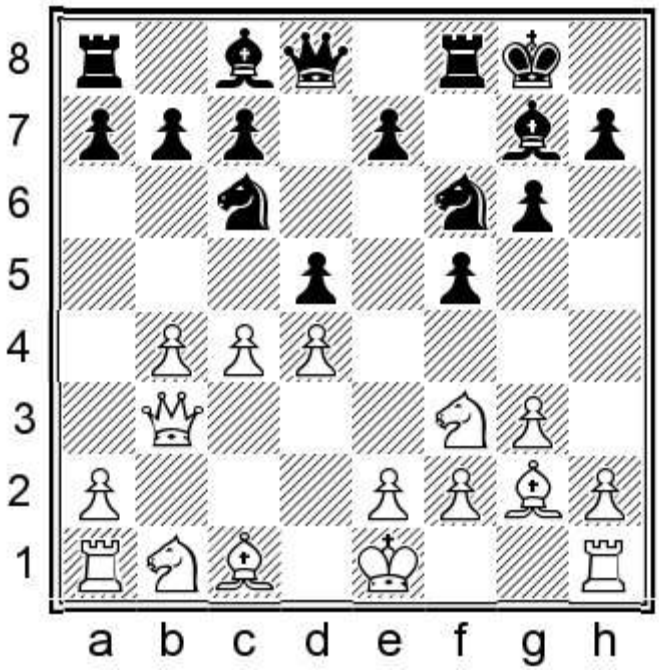
It's essential to try to break up White's queenside right now when he is not ready, in order to force him to make some concessions. 10.c5 [10.cxd5?! axb5 11.axb5 ♕xd5 12.0-0 ♕xb5∓] 10...♘e4 11.♕c2 axb5 12.axb5 ♗d7 13.♖b1 ♕e8 14.♕d3



Position after: 14.♕d3

14...c6! 15.bxc6 ♘xc6!? Other pieces could have taken on c6, but I prefer this option. 16.0-0 ♖a4 17.e3 ♘a5↑

B) 7.♕b3?! In a note to the 4.b4 line, I mentioned that I've usually preferred ...c6 to ...♘c6 because of this move, but here Black is fine. 7...d5!

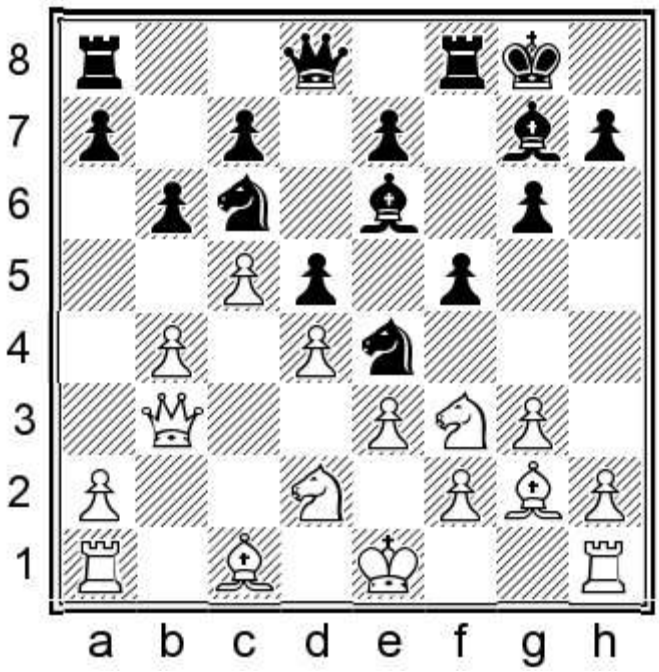


Position after: 7...d5!

White doesn't have a good way to meet this move.

B1) 8.♘c3 ♗e6! This forces the c-pawn to advance, as taking on d5 clearly gives Black too much immediate activity. 9.c5 ♗f7 10.0-0 ♘e4 11.e3 e5!↑ This pawn is untouchable due to ...d4. Black has a great position.

B2) 8.♘bd2 ♗e6 9.c5 ♘e4 10.e3 b6!∓

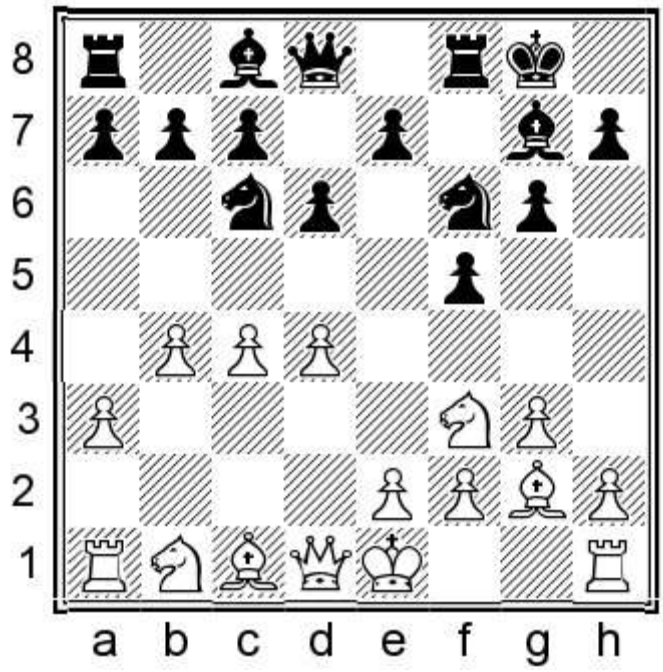


Position after: 10...b6!∓

White has some problems if he doesn't take on b6, either on the b-file or on the long dark-squared diagonal, and if he does take, Black doesn't lack space and is more than fine.

B3) 8.♗b2 dxc4 9.♕xc4+ ♕d5! 10.♕xd5+ White has to trade queens if he wants to keep the material balance. [10.♕c1 ♘xb4 11.0-0 ♕d6∓] 10...♘xd5 11.a3 ♘b6! The point. The knight heads for a4 or c4, depending on what is allowed, and in addition Black might be able to free himself with ...e5 in the near future. 12.e3 ♘a4 13.♗c3! a5↑

7...d6!



Position after: 7...d6!

8.♗b2

8.d5?! ♘e5! 9.♘xe5 dxe5 10.♗b2 e4 11.♘c3 e6!↑ The bishop on g2 is buried and the position is very promising for Black.

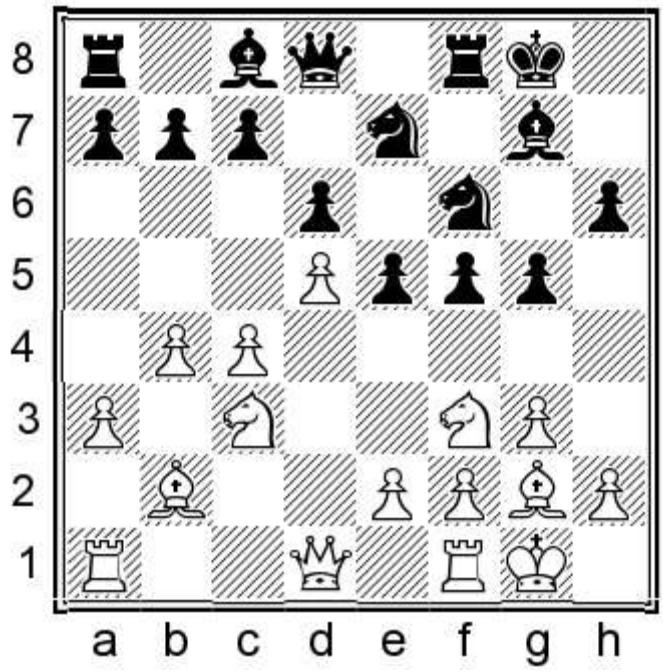
8...e5!

This is exactly what White was trying to prevent, but we still manage to play it! As we will see, the idea is definitely valid.

9.dxe5

Of course the critical reaction.

9.d5 ♘e7 10.0-0 h6 11.♘c3 g5↑



Position after: 11...g5↑

Let's compare this with similar positions arising in the King's Indian. It's true that this kind of attack is not so popular against KID lines with g3, but here Black has managed to play ...f5 without having to lose two tempi with the f6-knight, and White has played a3 and ♗b2 which are quite useless (and maybe even worse than if they hadn't been played) because from b2 the bishop is unable to protect anything on the kingside. So it seems more than playable for Black.

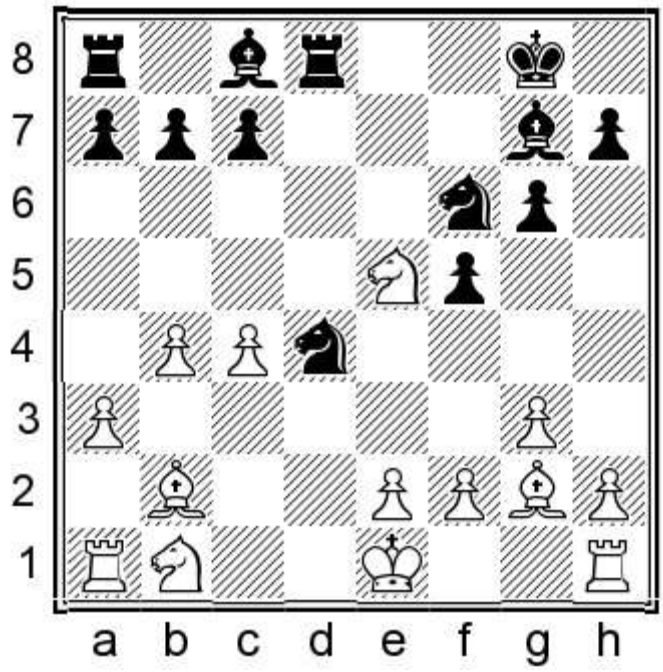
9...dxe5!N

Black once tried 9...♘g4 to be sure of taking the pawn back, but the text move is simply stronger.

10.♕xd8 ♖xd8 11.♘xe5□

Of course if White doesn't take he will have to face ...e4 at some point with a great center for Black.

11...♘d4!

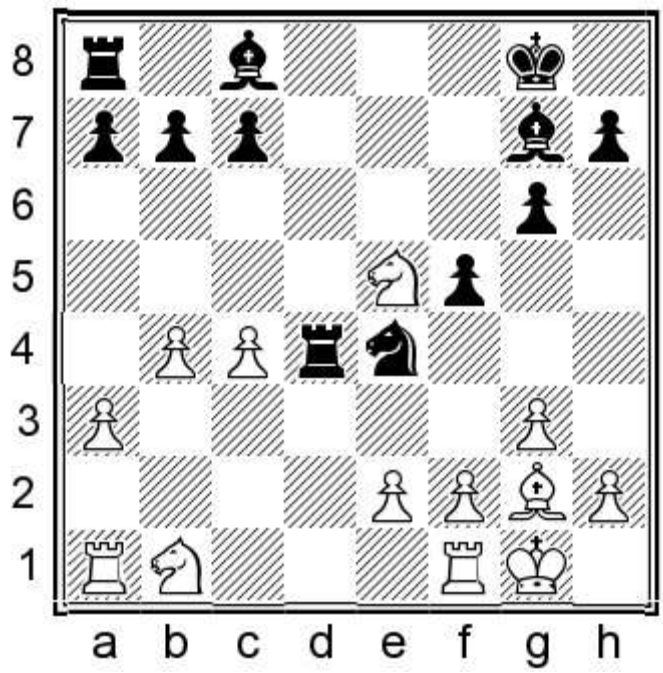


Position after: 11...♘d4!

This is the point! We force the important dark-squared bishop to take the dangerous knight in order to have long-term compensation on the diagonal.

12.♗xd4 ♖xd4 13.♘d2

A) 13.0-0 ♘e4!

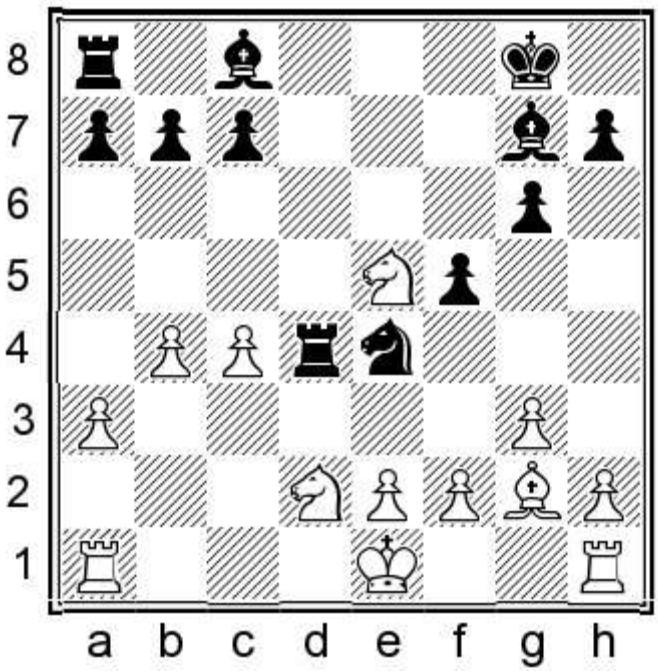


Position after: 13...♘e4!

14.♘f3 [14.f4 ♗xe5 15.fxe5 ♗e6 16.c5 a5 17.♗xe4! ♖xe4 18.♘c3 ♖xe5∓] 14...♖xc4 15.♘bd2! ♘xd2 16.♘xd2 ♖c2 17.♖ad1 c6∓ With the bishop pair and an active rook, Black has the upper hand (even if White might be able to escape by means of b5 at some stage).

B) 13.f4 ♘g4 14.♘xg4 fxg4 15.e3 ♖d3 16.♔e2 ♖xe3+ 17.♔xe3 ♗xa1↑

13...♘e4

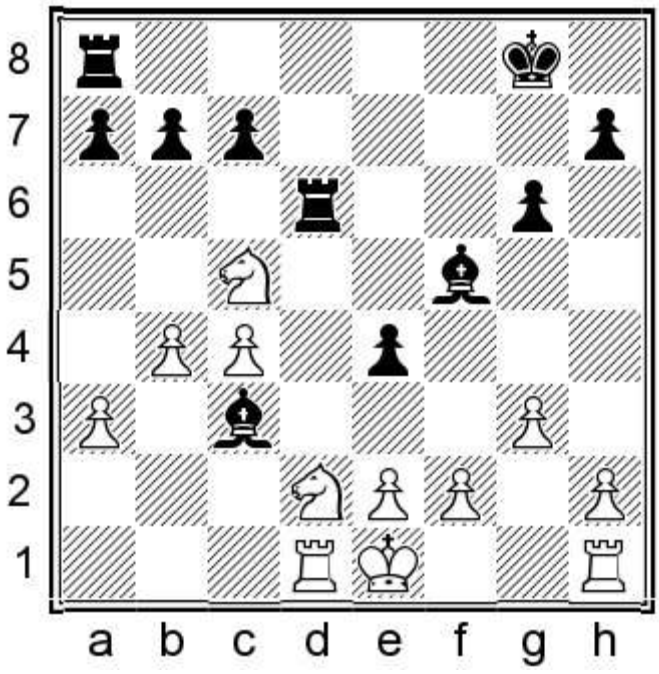


Position after: 13...♘e4

Once again White has an unpleasant choice of lines that all look easier for his opponent.

14.♘xe4

A) 14.♘d3 ♖d6! 15.♖d1 ♗c3 16.♗xe4 fxe4 17.♘c5 ♗f5!

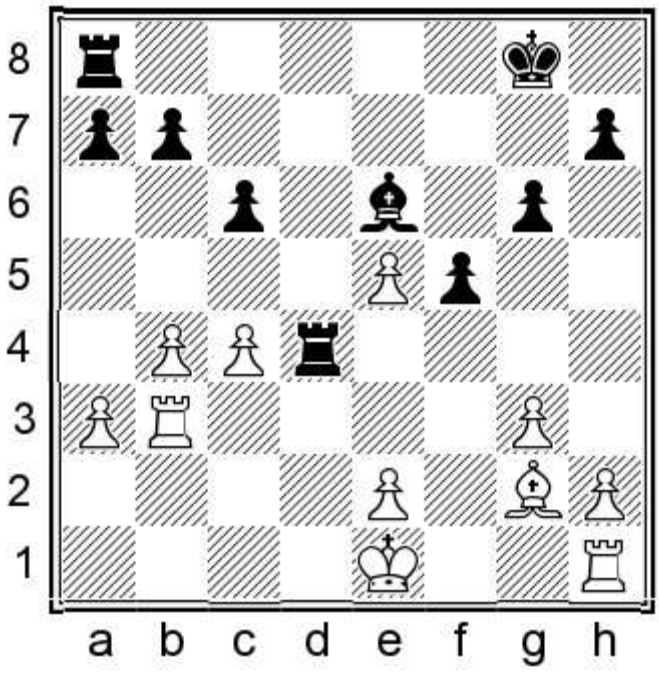


Position after: 17...♗f5!

White is in trouble with his knight on d2, but fortunately for him he can get rid of our pinning bishop. 18.♘a4! ♗g7 19.♘c5! [19.♘b3? e3!–+ The deadly new threat is ...♗c2, winning one of the knights.] 19...b6 20.♘cxe4 ♖d7 21.♖c1 It's essential to break the pin. 21...♖ad8→ Black is two pawns down, but his compensation is fantastic, and he is actually much better.

B) 14.f4!? This is the computer's solution to save the game, but it's highly unlikely that a human would choose it. (While it doesn't lose a piece, it looks quite ugly.) 14...♘xd2

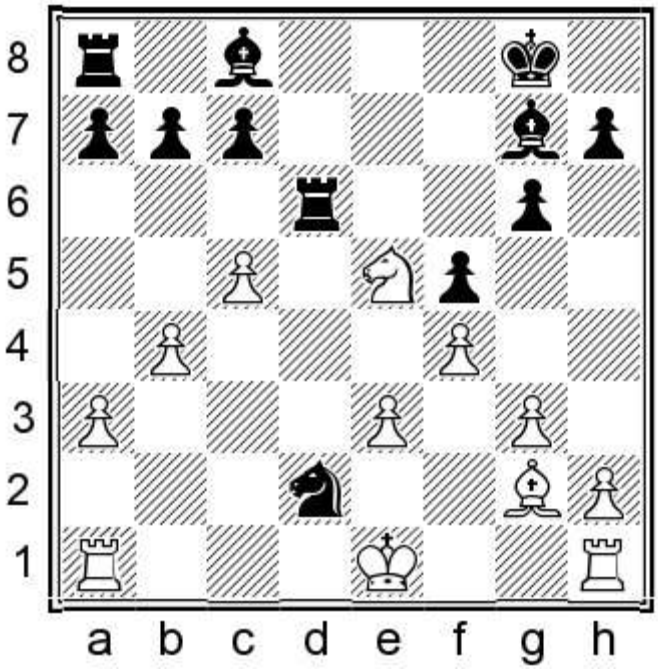
B1) 15.♖d1 ♘b3 16.♖b1 ♗e6 17.♖xb3 ♗xe5 18.fxe5 c6∓



Position after: 18...c6∓

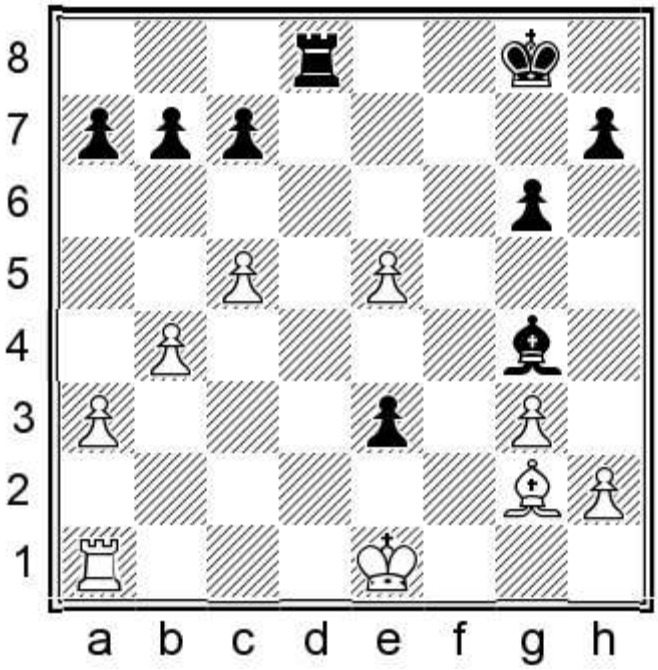
We will take the c-pawn, and clearly keep the better pawn structure. It's very hard to defend this kind of endgame with White, as there are already no winning prospects at all.

B2) 15.e3! Cold-bloodedness is needed. 15...♖d6 16.c5



Position after: 16.c5

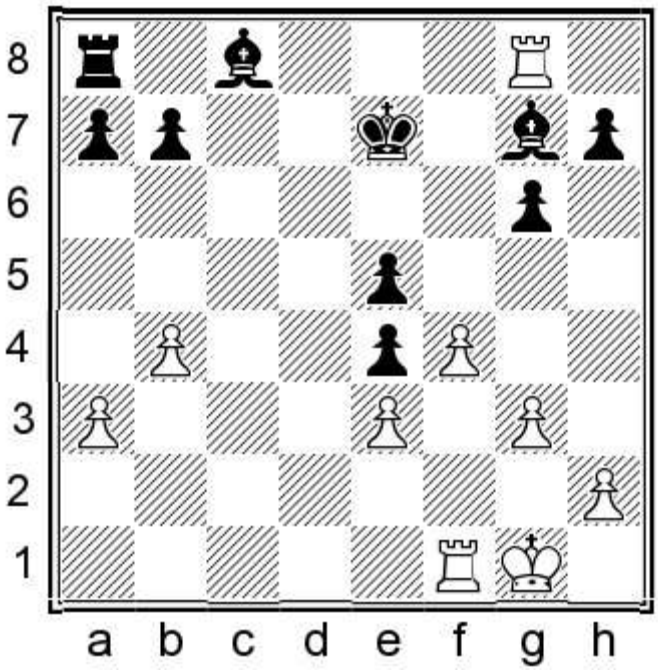
B2.1) 16...♗xe5 17.fxe5 ♖d3 18.♔e2 ♖d8 19.♖hd1 f4! This line looks very promising too, but it only leads to a draw. 20.♖xd2 ♗g4+ 21.♔e1 fxe3 22.♖xd8+ ♖xd8



Position after: 22...♖xd8

23.h3□ 23...♖d2! 24.♗xb7 ♗xh3 25.♖d1 ♖c2 26.♖d3 ♖c1+ 27.♖d1 [27.♔e2?? ♗f1+–+] 27...♖c2 28.♖d3=

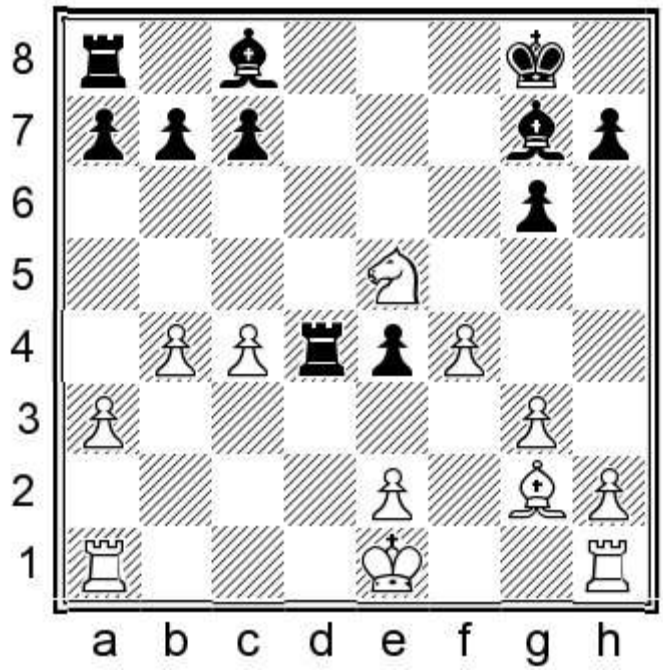
B2.2) 16...♘e4!? A very clever way to give up the rook, as the knight will remain pinned on e5. White has to understand what's going on, and it's very easy to lose track in the maze of variations. 17.cxd6 cxd6 18.♗xe4 fxe4 19.♖d1 dxe5 20.♖d8+ ♔f7 21.0-0! ♔e7 22.♖g8



Position after: 22.♖g8

On the verge of defeat, White manages to escape with one of the multiple move repetitions that Black can now choose. For instance the game could end in a draw after 22...♗f8 23.fxe5 ♗f5 24.g4 ♗xg4 25.♖f6 ♖c8 26.♖h8 h5 27.♖h7+ ♔e8 28.♖h8 ♔e7 29.♖h7+=

14...fxe4! 15.f4□

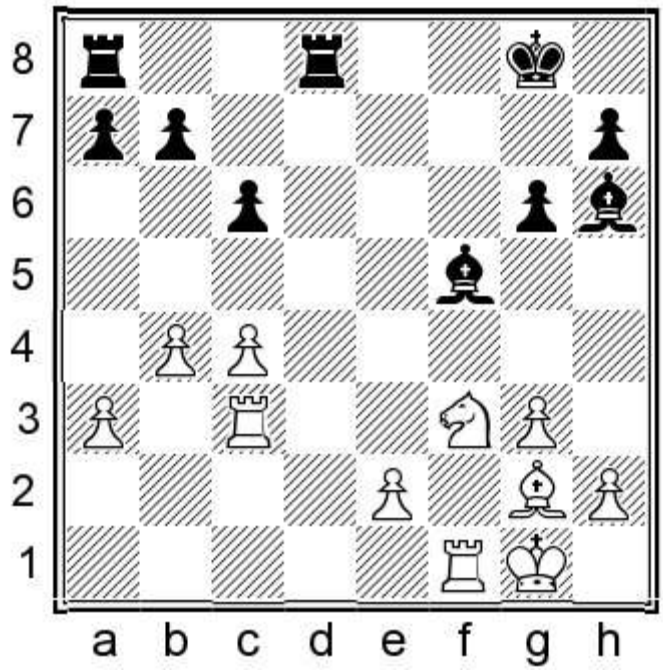


Position after: 15.f4□

15...exf3 16.♘xf3 ♖d8!

16...♖xc4 17.♖d1 ♗f5 18.♘e5!= We have regained the pawn, but suddenly White has a few tactical tricks at his disposal and should be able to keep the balance.

17.♖c1 ♗h6 18.♖c3 ♗f5 19.0-0 c6⩱

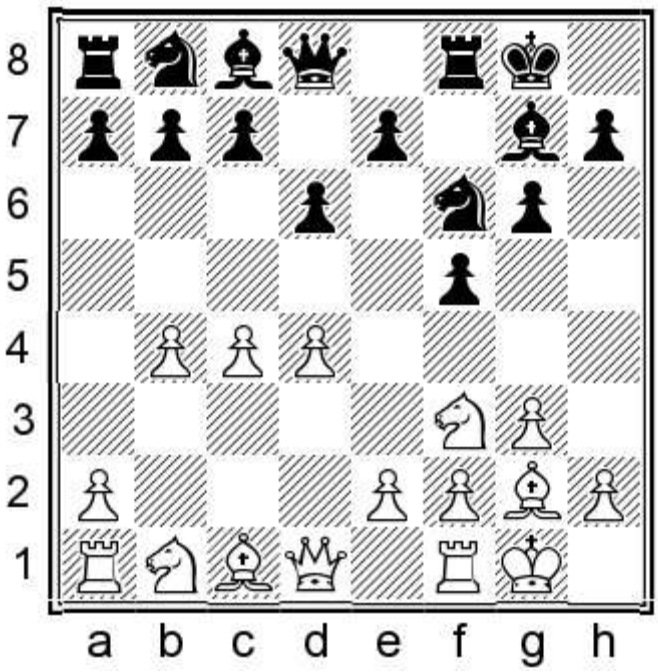


Position after: 19...c6⩱

I still prefer Black here. It's very unlikely that White will threaten anything with his e-pawn.

e) 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 d6 7.b4?!

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 d6 7.b4?!



Position after: 7.b4?

This might seem a clever move order, as ...c6 no longer seems logical, now that we have committed ourselves with 6...d6 (playing ...d5 at some point now would be a big loss of tempo). But, of all the b4 lines you have seen in this chapter, this is clearly the worst, as there is a very simple − and obvious − way for Black to refute it. However it has been played no fewer than 200 times, which is approximately the same as most of the other b4s in this chapter.

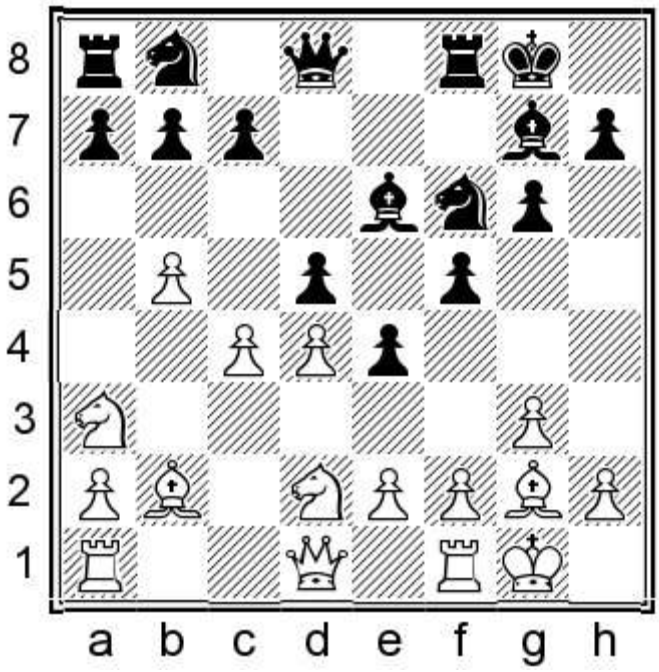
7...e5!

It's very logical that this move works. With the bishop not yet on b2, it's hardly imaginable that the pawn on e5 can be taken twice.

8.dxe5

Most games have seen this move. At least White's position seems less depressing when the center has been opened.

8.♗b2 In a few games White tried to hold the center like this, but it's very favorable for Black to take some space and close the center: 8...e4! 9.♘fd2 [9.♘e1 is probably even worse as the knight won't get back into play so easily after 9...d5 10.cxd5 ♘xd5 11.♘c3 c6 12.♘xd5 cxd5∓.] 9...d5 10.b5 ♗e6 11.♘a3



Position after: 11.♘a3

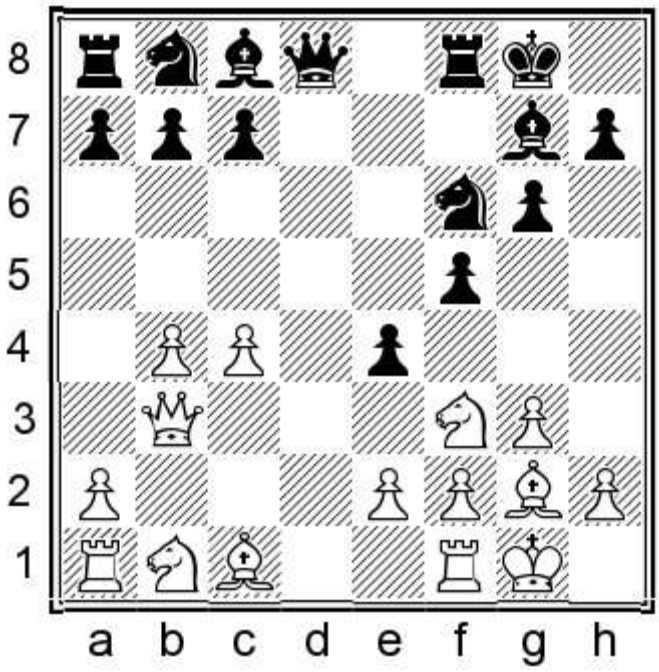
11...a6! 12.♕b3 axb5 13.cxb5 ♘bd7∓ White's queenside is a massive fail, and Black's center easily gave him an edge in Loos, R (2377) – Milov, L (2405), Bavaria 2016, 0-1 (38).

8...dxe5!

There's no need for preparatory moves like ...♘g4 or ...♘fd7 as the tactics are in Black's favor.

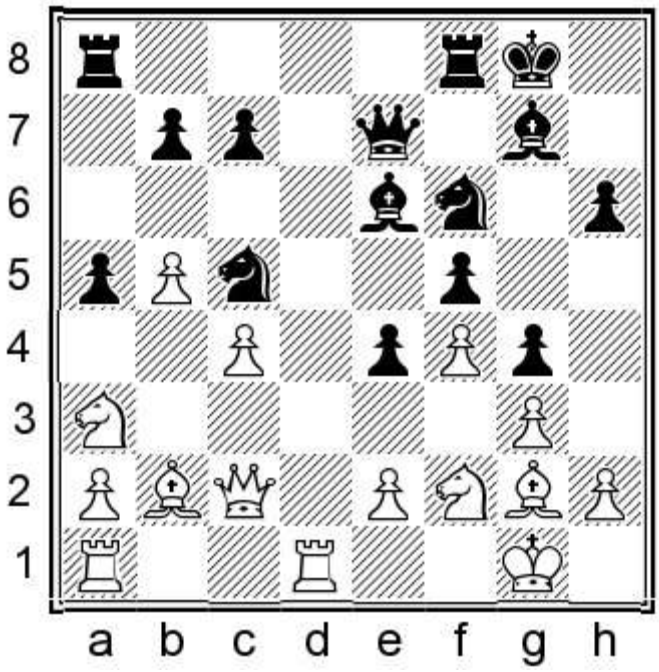
9.♗b2

A) 9.♕b3 is the other logical move, especially as the opening indicates that White is a kind of attacking player, so may want to prevent any possibility of a queen trade. 9...e4!



Position after: 9...e4!

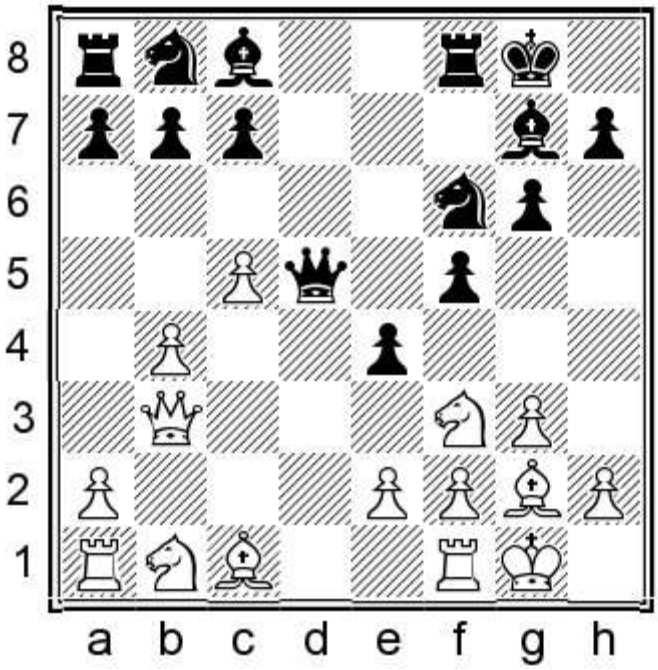
A1) 10.♘g5?! h6 11.♖d1 ♕e8 12.♘h3 g5 Black is much better. As we will see in the following line, even the pawns on the queenside may prove to be weak, whereas that was supposed to be White's strong side. 13.f4 g4 14.♘f2 ♗e6 15.♘a3 a5! 16.b5 ♘bd7 17.♗b2 ♘c5 18.♕c2 ♕e7∓



Position after: 18...♕e7∓

Thus far a game between two chess legends, Korchnoi, V (2673) – Spassky, B (2549), St Petersburg 1999. Spassky has the upper hand, but the prime of his chess career was already past, and the game quickly ended in a draw.

A2) 10.c5+?? This innocent move actually loses material immediately: 10...♕d5!

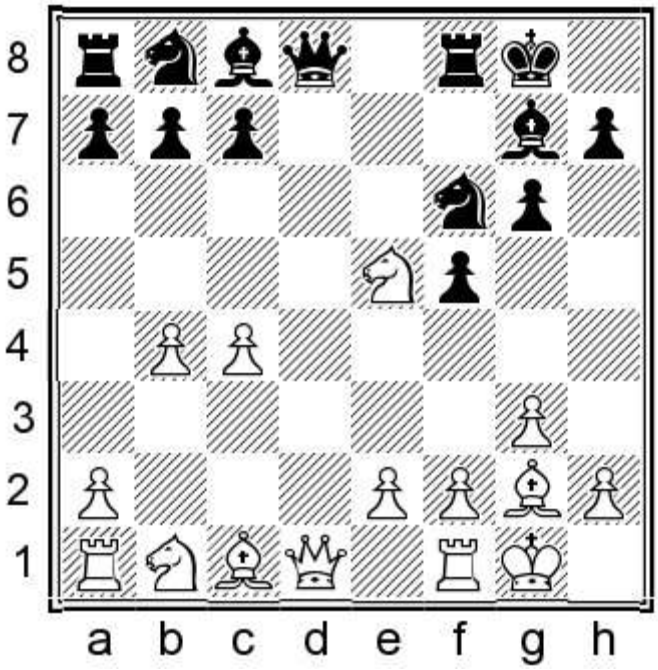


Position after: 10...♕d5!

Black offers the trade of queens, but White can't take because it would open the long diagonal (which makes us wonder why White waited for so long without playing ♗b2). 11.♘d4 [11.♘e5 ♕xb3 12.axb3 ♘g4–+] 11...♕xb3 12.axb3 ♘d5 13.♗b2 ♘xb4–+

A3) 10.♖d1 ♕e8 From e8, the queen can't be attacked with a possible ♗a3 or ♗c5, and it prepares the transfer to h5 after ...g5. 11.♘d4 ♘c6 12.♗b2 ♘xd4 13.♗xd4 ♗e6∓

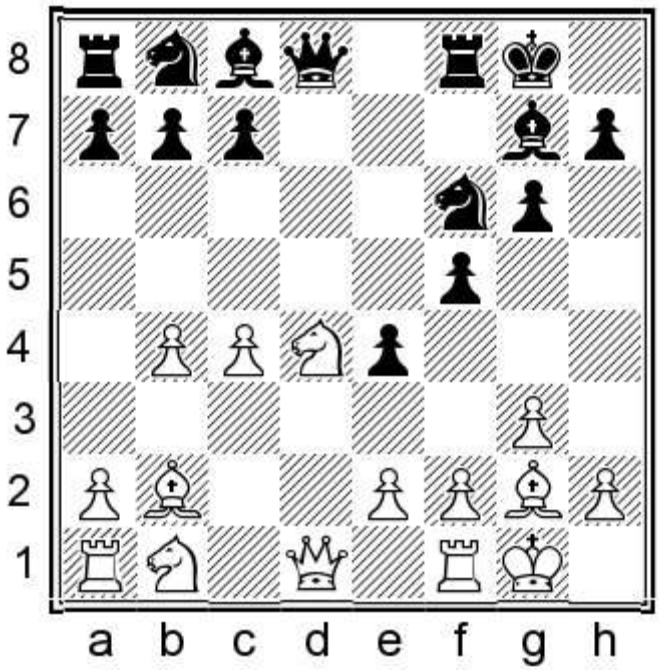
B) 9.♘xe5?



Position after: 9.♘xe5?

9...♘fd7! [≤ 9...♕xd1 Unfortunately, this move doesn't really work properly: 10.♖xd1 ♘fd7 11.f4 ♘xe5 12.fxe5 ♗xe5 13.♗h6!∓. The resource that keeps Black in the game!] 10.♕d5+ ♔h8 11.f4 ♘c6 12.♗b2 ♘dxe5 13.fxe5 ♕e7∓ Black has the better pawn structure while White remains with many weaknesses and a strange-looking queen on d5, ready to be chased.

9...e4 10.♘d4



Position after: 10.♘d4

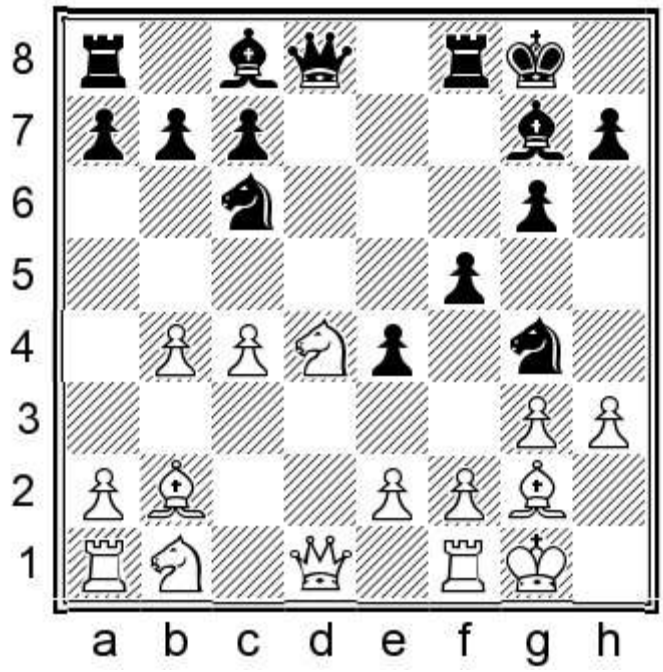
10...♘g4!

10...a5!? Disrupting White's harmony on the queenside immediately is also possible. There are actually many ways to get a small edge with Black; you just need to choose the one you feel most comfortable with! 11.b5 c5 12.bxc6 ♘xc6 13.♘b5 ♗e6 14.♘1a3 ♕e7∓ and Black went on to win a nice game in Akshat, K (2342) – Caspi, I (2487), Escaldes 2017, 0-1 (37).

11.c5!?

This is probably the best move. White prevents ...c5, obviously, but also moves likes ...♘c6, as ♕b3+ would protect the bishop on b2 because of the check.

A) 11.h3 Of course after this move our idea is not to move the knight, as we can take advantage of the long diagonal with 11...♘c6!

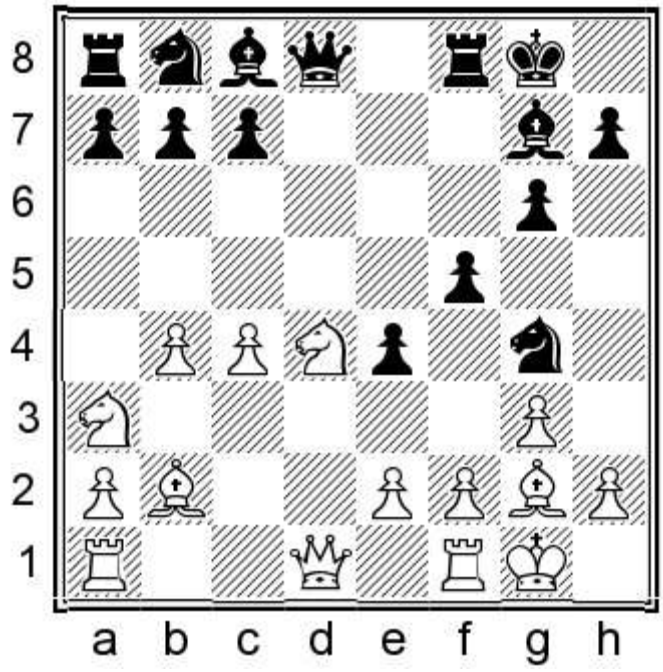


Position after: 11...♘c6!

A1) 12.♘xc6? This even loses material: 12...♕xd1 13.♖xd1 ♗xb2 14.♘e7+ ♔f7 15.♘xc8 [15.hxg4 ♔xe7–+] 15...♘e5!–+.

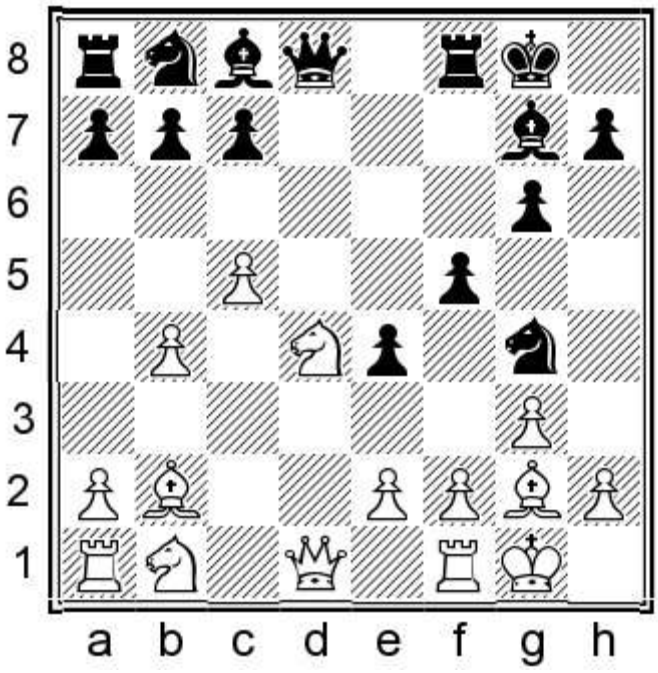
A2) 12.hxg4 ♘xd4↑ White needs to take care because of the problems of discovery against the bishop on b2.

B) 11.♘a3



Position after: 11.♘a3

This move was tried in the game Milov, V (2622) – Lu, S (2546), Dubai 2014, 0-1 (53), but once again we can simply increase the pressure against the d4-knight: 11...♘c6N 12.♘ac2 ♘ce5 13.c5 a5! 14.b5 ♘c4 15.♗c3 ♘ge5∓. Black is having a lot of fun with his knights which can basically do anything!



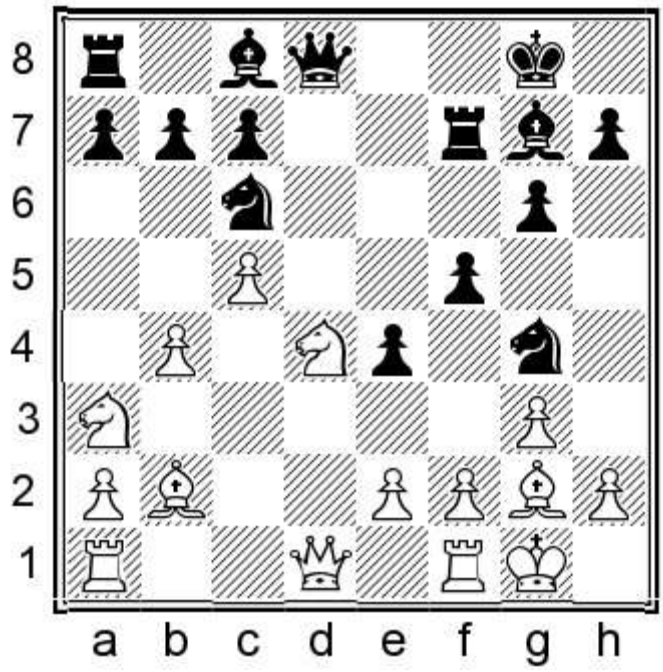
Position after: 11.c5!?

11...♖f7!

Protecting against possible checks and thus making ...♘c6 possible again!

11...♕d5!?∓ This centralizing move is also very interesting, but I would like to follow Svidler's game instead.

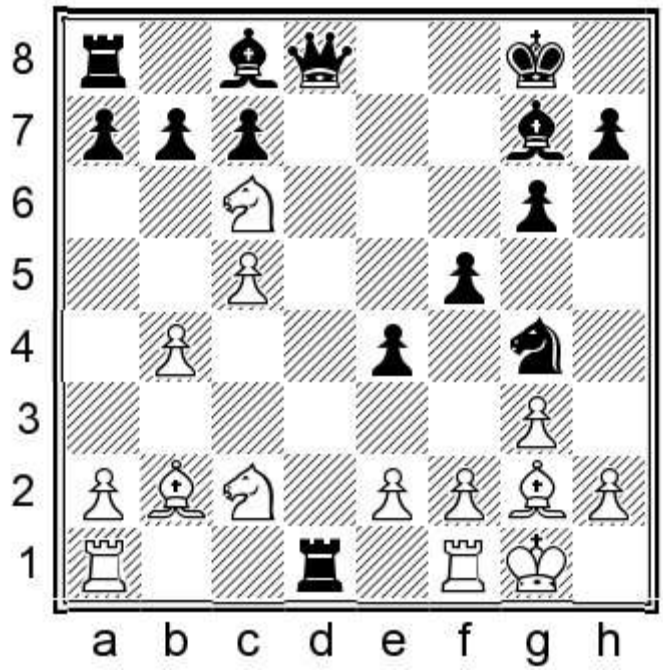
12.♘a3 ♘c6



Position after: 12...♘c6

13.♘xc6?!

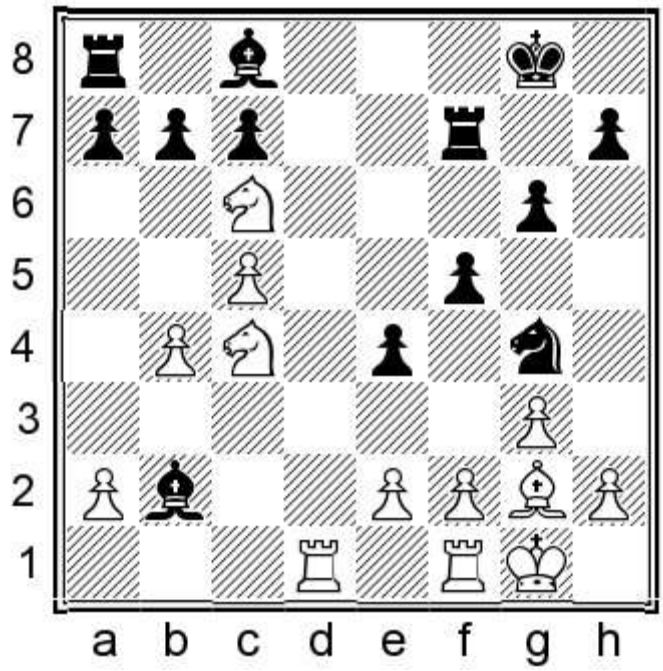
13.♘ac2 ♖d7!? [13...♘xd4!? 14.♗xd4 ♖d7 15.e3 ♘e5∓ is playable too if you want to keep more pieces on the board.] 14.♘xc6 ♖xd1



Position after: 14...♖xd1

15.♖axd1 [15.♘xd8 ♖xf1+ 16.♖xf1 ♗xb2 17.♖d1 reaches the same position with a different move order!] 15...♕e8 16.♖d8 ♕xd8 17.♘xd8 ♗xb2 18.♖d1 ♘e5∓

13...♕xd1 14.♖axd1 ♗xb2 15.♘c4



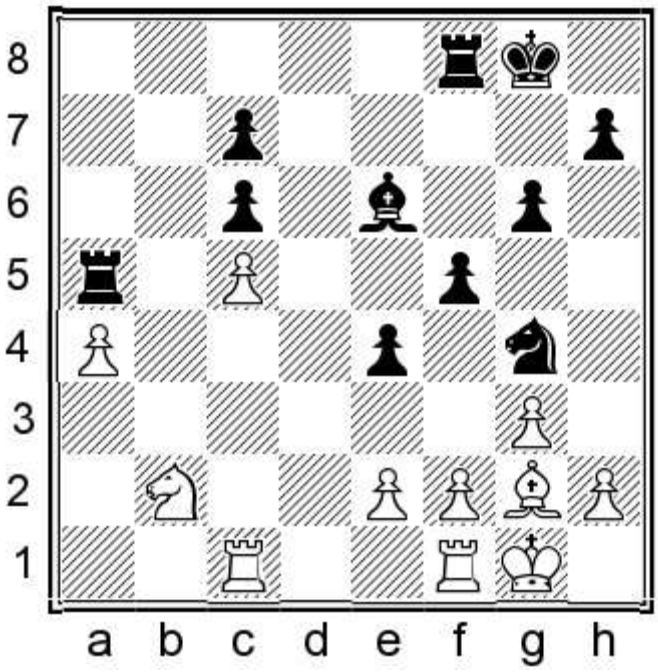
Position after: 15.♘c4

Black won a very nice game, Lenic, L (2659) – Svidler, P (2753), Dubai 2014, 0-1 (39), but he could probably have improved his play with the very unnatural possibility of giving back the bishop pair, destroying his own pawn structure, in order to destroy White's queenside in return.

15...bxc6!N 16.♘xb2 a5 17.bxa5

17.a3 axb4 18.axb4 ♖a2 19.♖b1 ♖d7∓

17...♖xa5 18.a4 ♖f8! 19.♖c1 ♗e6∓

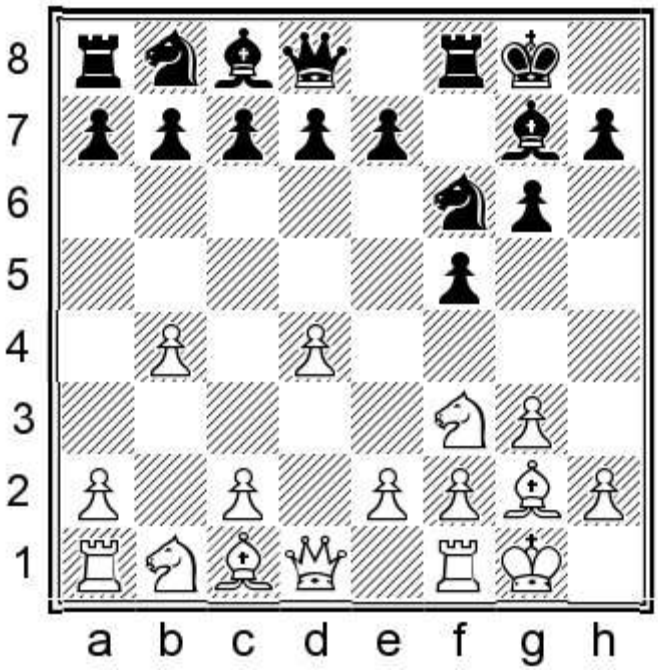


Position after: 19...♗e6∓

White has many weak pawns and passive pieces. He will have a hard time trying to draw this position.

f) 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.b4

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.b4



Position after: 6.b4

When we think of the b4-system against the Leningrad Dutch, we probably think of this very position. Indeed, this is probably the best moment to play it.

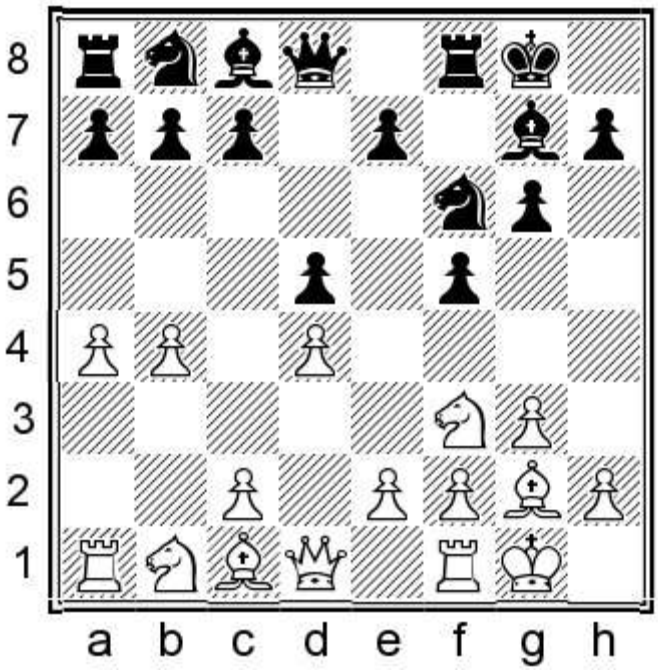
6...d5!?

At the beginning of this chapter I said that I was going to try to offer ...c7−c6 as an automatic response to b2−b4 in most cases. Here I will make another exception, as I believe that Black can react more quickly.

7.♗b2

Of course, this is the most logical continuation, so I will keep it as the main line, but objectively it might be a step in the wrong direction. Now that Black has played ...d5, the bishop's most logical spot could be f4. That's why we should also have a look at other moves.

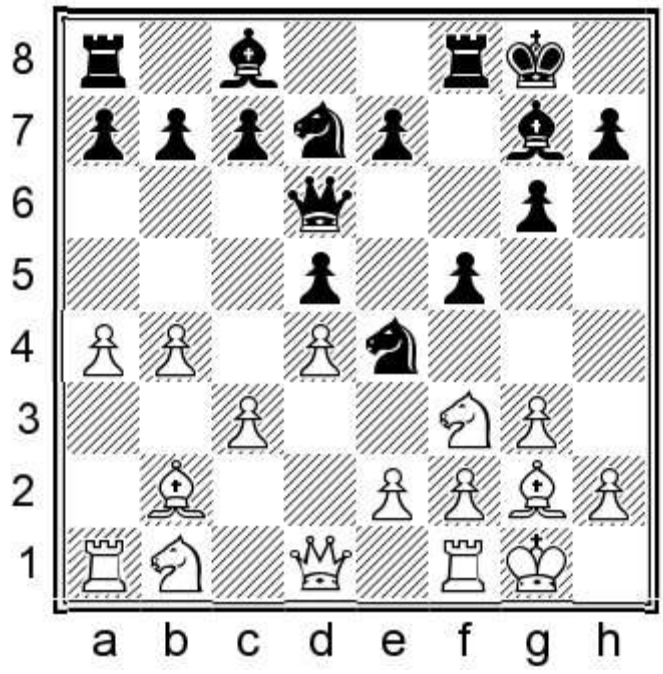
A) 7.a4!?



Position after: 7.a4!?

To my eyes, this is one of the most logical follow-ups. White takes more space on the queenside, and kind of deters Black from bringing his queen to d6 (often a normal idea, as we will see). It also keeps open the possibility of playing ♗f4. 7...♘e4 Also a very logical continuation. The knight is strong here, and it may now jump to d6 in order to invade the weak c4-square. I think this plan is too slow, but it's important to keep it in mind.

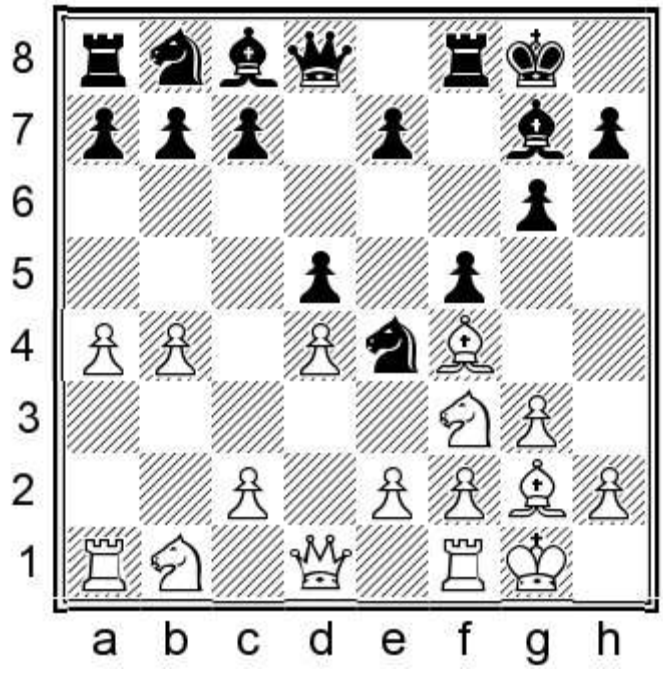
A1) 8.♗b2 ♕d6!? 9.c3 ♘d7



Position after: 9...♘d7

Black has reacted very effectively in the center and is ready to continue with ...e7−e5. 10.♘bd2 [10.a5 b5! Now White has to decide whether to take or not, but if he doesn't, his queenside initiative has vanished for the rest of the game. 11.axb6 cxb6 12.♕b3 ♘df6 13.♗c1 ♗b7 14.♗f4 ♕c6⇄] 10...e5! 11.c4 ♘xd2 12.♘xd2 e4 13.b5 ♖e8= White has some initiative on the queenside, but we can be satisfied with our advances in the center.

A2) 8.♗f4

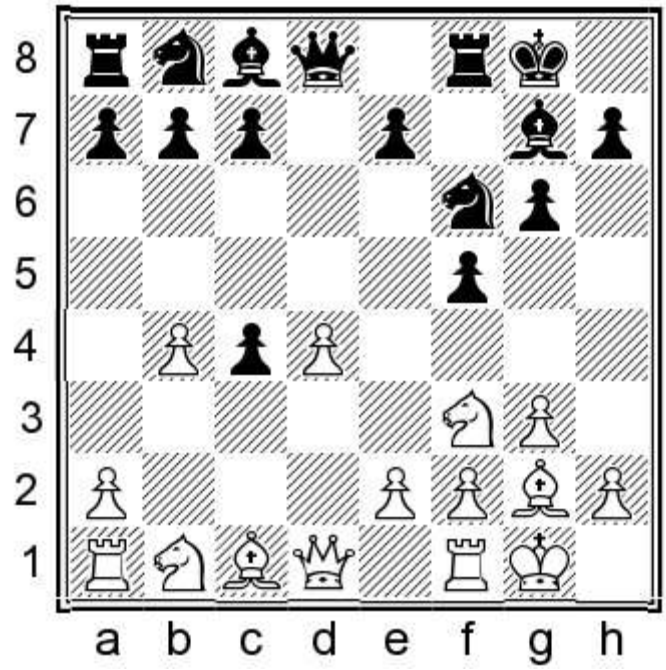


Position after: 8.♗f4

A2.1) 8...♗e6 This original move was tried by Sadler. His position was very playable even if he eventually went on to lose: 9.♕c1 ♘d7 10.♗h6 a5 11.♗xg7 ♔xg7 12.b5 c6 13.bxc6 bxc6 14.♘bd2 ♗f7= 1-0 (37) Van Wely, L (2691) – Sadler, M (2637), Wolvega 2012.

A2.2) 8...a5!N 9.b5 c5 10.e3 ♘d7⇄ Black is also fighting for the initiative.

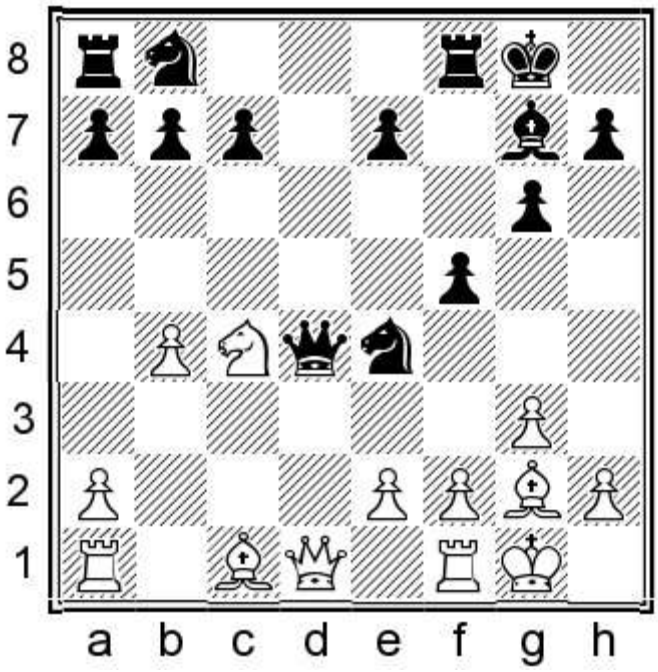
B) 7.c4?! This move is clearly over-optimistic. 7...dxc4!



Position after: 7...dxc4!

In Stonewall systems it's rarely a good idea to take on c4, even if White is unable to take back immediately. Here it's slightly different, as the pawn already being on b4 makes it playable. 8.♘a3! This is the right place for the knight as it prevents ...b7−b5. [8.♘bd2?! ♗e6 It's nearly impossible for White to get his pawn back now, as the d4-pawn would be hanging after ♘e5. He should try to get compensation, but even this is difficult. 9.♕c2 b5 10.♘g5 ♗d5∓]

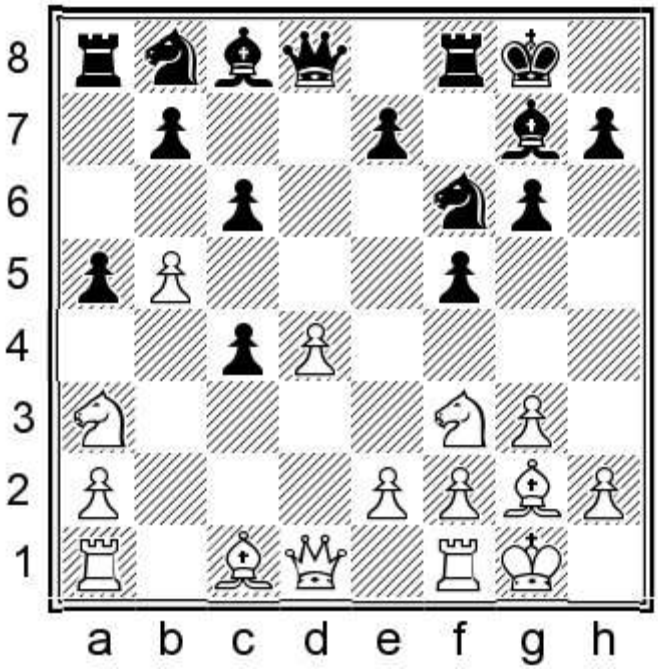
B1) 8...♗e6!? is very playable: 9.♘e5 ♘e4 10.♘axc4 ♗xc4 11.♘xc4 ♕xd4



Position after: 11...♕xd4

12.♕b3 ♕c3!= [12...♕xa1? 13.♗b2+–]

B2) 8...a5 9.b5 c6

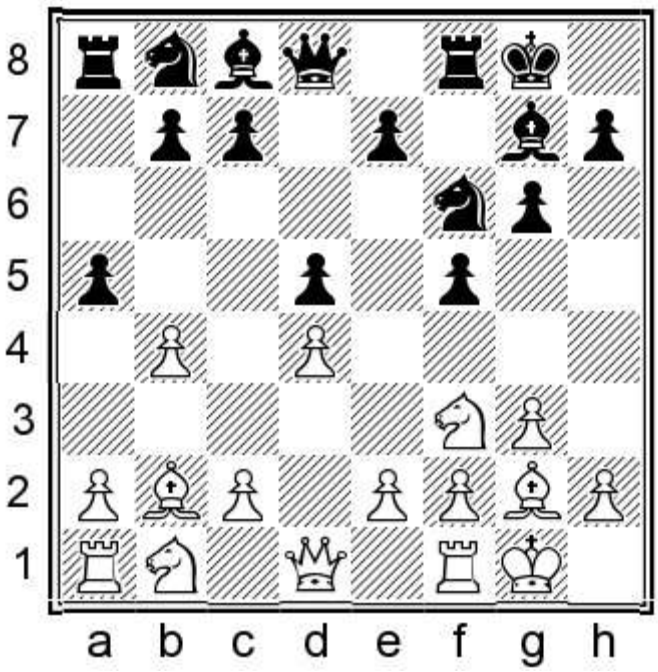


Position after: 9...c6

While White is trying to get his pawn back, we are destroying his queenside. 10.bxc6 [10.♗f4 ♗e6 11.♖c1 ♘e4 12.e3 cxb5 13.♘xb5 ♘a6=] 10...♘xc6 11.♘xc4 ♗e6 12.♘ce5 ♘xe5! 13.♘xe5 ♗d5= Black has a queenside majority and active pieces, and probably already has the easier position.

C) 7.c3 This innocent move doesn't do much except give us some time to react. 7...a5 8.b5 ♘e4 9.♗f4 c6 10.a4 ♘d7↑ Black has no problems and tries to bring his knight to b6.

7...a5!?N



Position after: 7...a5!?N

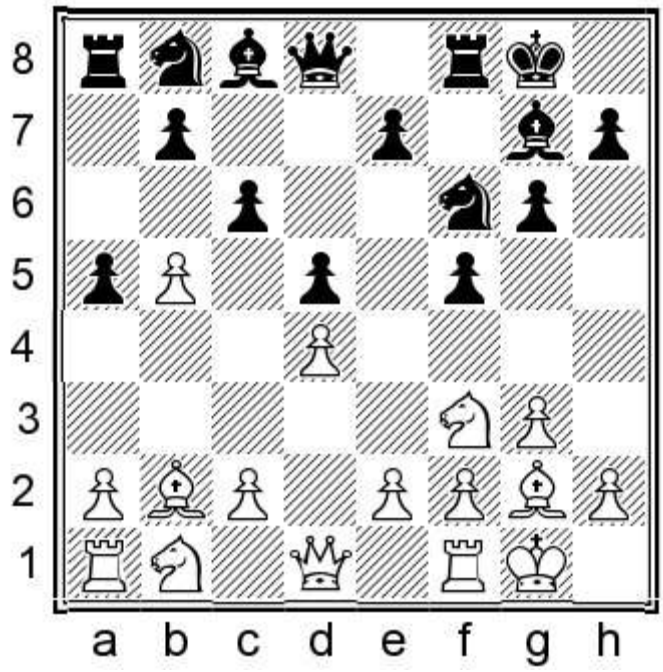
Black has tried many moves, but this one is a novelty. We have already seen this idea of inviting White to push b5, in order to keep harassing this pawn.

8.b5

A) 8.a3?! would only leave White with weak points, e.g. 8...axb4 9.axb4 ♖xa1 10.♗xa1 ♘bd7 11.♘bd2 ♘b6∓. It's hard to find a reason for having the pawn on b4 and the bishop on a1.

B) 8.c3 Keeping the tension also shows the limits of White's system, as he will clearly lack activity. 8...♘e4 9.e3 ♘d7 10.a4 ♘b6↑

8...c6



Position after: 8...c6

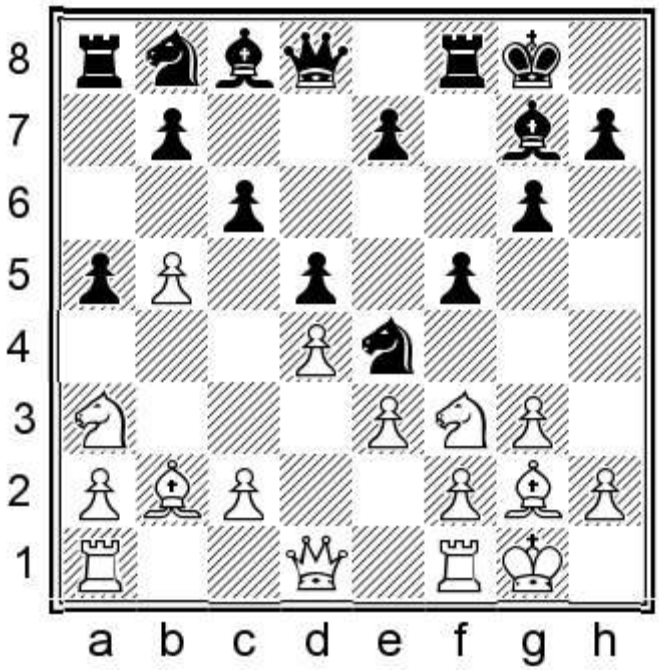
Now White has a choice of how to deal with his attacked pawn. He can either trade or protect it, but neither possibility is convincing.

9.♘a3!

A) 9.a4 cxb5 10.axb5 ♘bd7↑ The knight goes to b6, which is also good for Black.

B) 9.bxc6 ♘xc6 10.♘bd2 b5! Black develops a queenside initiative so easily. 11.a4 [11.♘b3?! If White thinks he will be able to occupy a weak point, he is clearly mistaken: 11...a4 12.♘c5 a3 13.♗c3 ♘e4∓.] 11...b4 12.♘b3 ♘e4∓

9...♘e4 10.e3

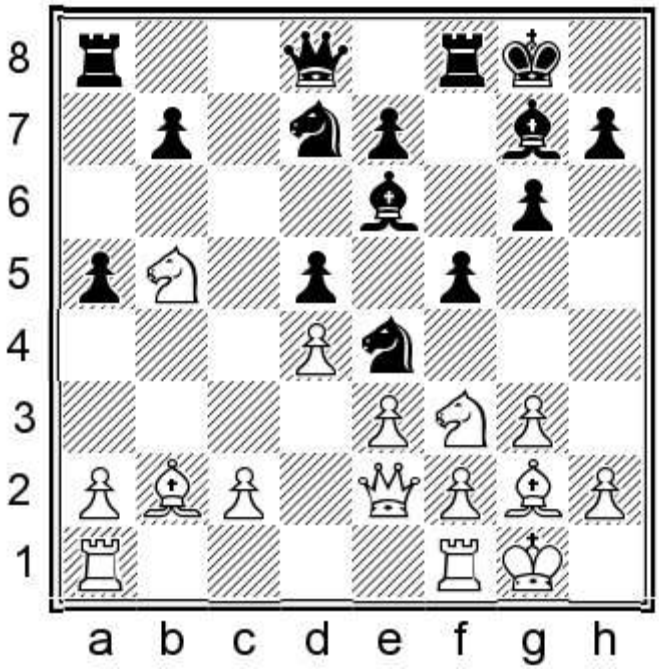


Position after: 10.e3

10...cxb5!

10...♗e6 11.♕e2 ♘d7 12.c4↑ This might give White some kind of initiative.

11.♘xb5 ♗e6 12.♕e2 ♘d7=



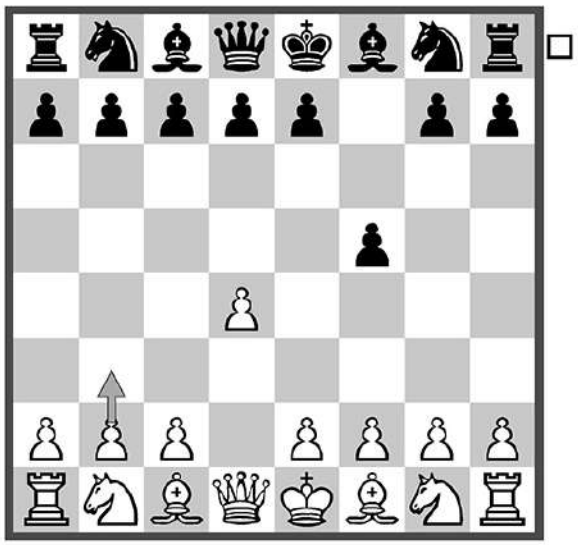
Position after: 12...♘d7=

It's true that the knight on b5 is strong, but we have easy play on the c-file, and again the possibility of

bringing a knight to c4. The game is balanced.

Chapter 8
Systems with b3

1.d4 f5



Chapter Guide

Chapter 8 – Systems with b3

Side lines

1.d4 f5

a) 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.b3 g6 4.♗b2 ♗g7 5.e3

b) 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.c4 g6 4.b3 (without g3)

c) 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.b3

d) 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 d6 7.b3?!

Main systems

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.b3 0-0 6.♗b2 d6 7.0-0 c6

e) 7.-- alternatives, 8.♘bd2 --, 8...a5 9.a3

f) 8.♘bd2 a5 9.--

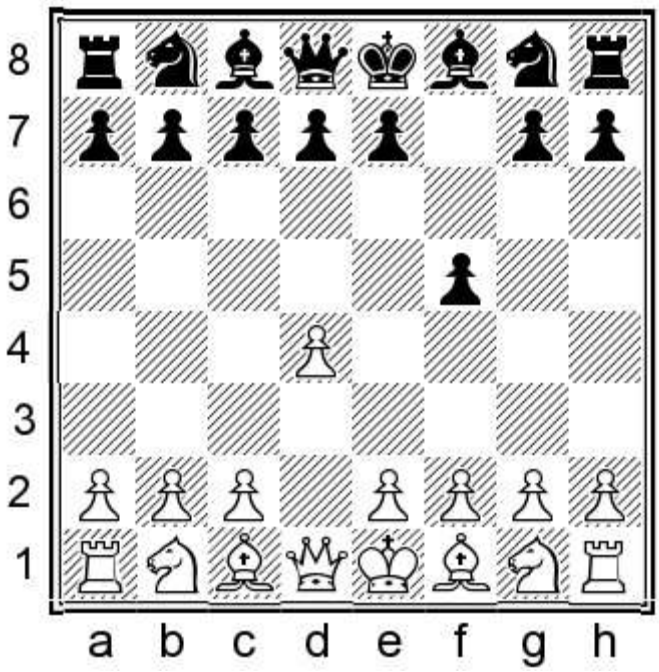
g) 8.♘bd2 a5 9.c4

h) 8.c4 ♘a6 9.--, 9.♘bd2 e5! 10.dxe5 ♘d7 11.--, 11.♗a3

i) 8.c4 ♘a6 9.♘bd2 e5! 10.dxe5 ♘d7 11.♕c2

a) 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.b3 g6 4.♗b2 ♗g7 5.e3

1.d4 f5

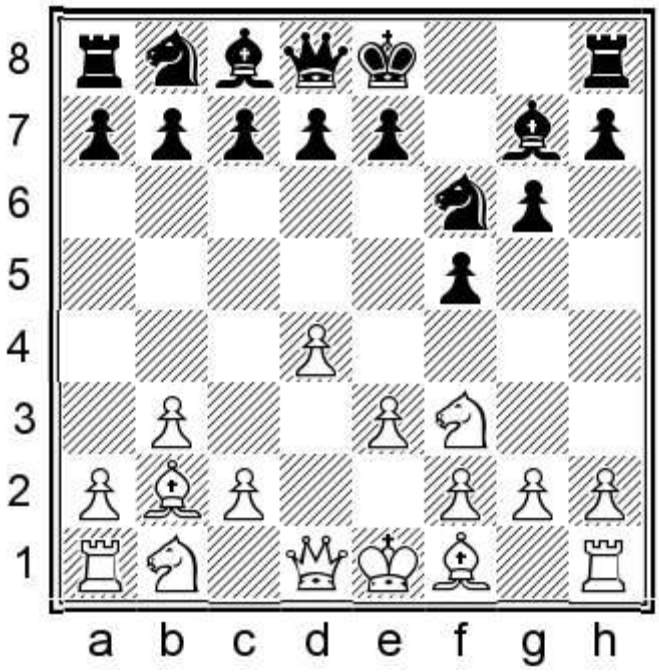


Position after: 1...f5

In the previous chapter we focused on lines where White plays b4, so it's logical to follow with the more prosaic idea of playing b3. This system is clearly more critical than those featuring b4, especially since it's Avrukh's recommendation in his books on 1.d4. The basic idea is to be ready to deal with Black's idea of playing ...e5 by either preventing it or countering it appropriately. Variations in this chapter start as early as move two, as there are many ways to play with b3 − it can be played with or without a kingside fianchetto, and with the knight on e2 or f3. I will try to be exhaustive on all the possibilities!

2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.b3 g6 4.♗b2 ♗g7 5.e3

This set-up is only rarely seen. It may be viewed as a Colle System against the Leningrad Dutch.



Position after: 5.e3

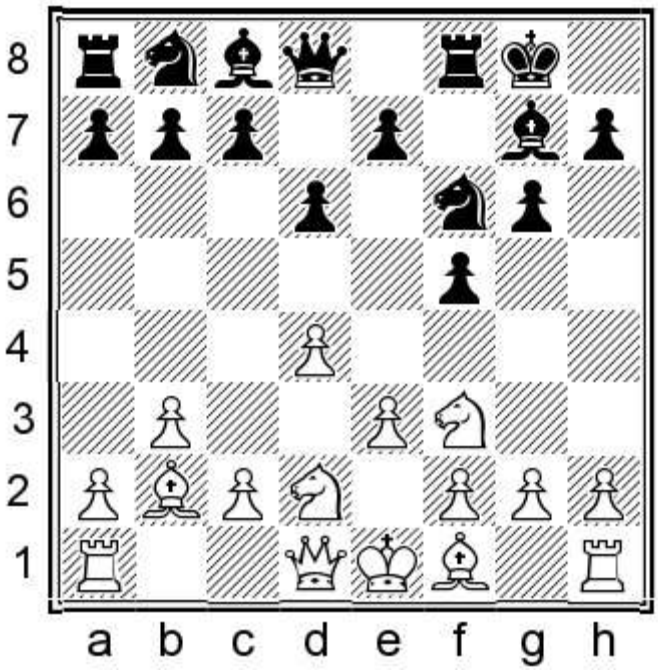
I don’t really believe in White’s concept, and we are likely to be faster in pushing ...e5 than White in pushing e4.

5...0-0

Now White has to make the hardest decision in his opening: where should the f1-bishop go? Players are divided about this, as every square can have advantages and disadvantages.

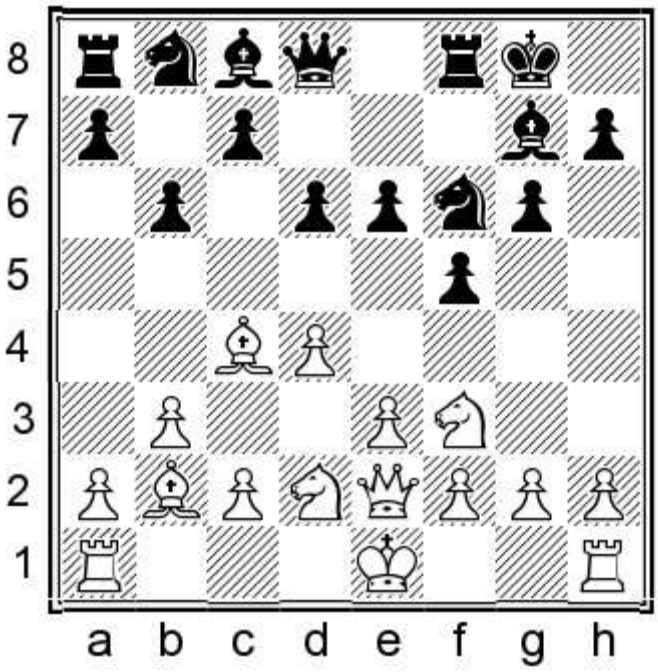
6.♗d3

6.♘bd2 d6



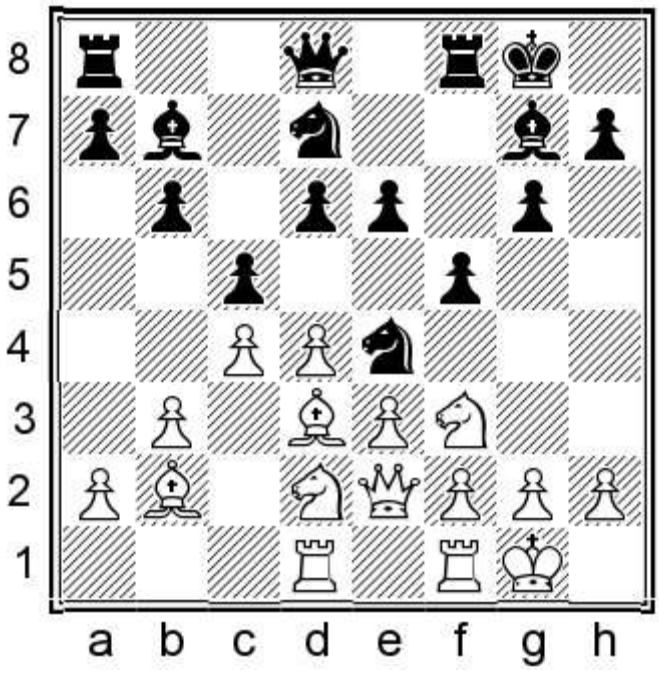
Position after: 6...d6

A) 7.♗c4+ From here the bishop slows down possibilities of playing ...e5, but it doesn't control the e4-square, and we can adjust our plans. 7...e6 8.♕e2 b6



Position after: 8...b6

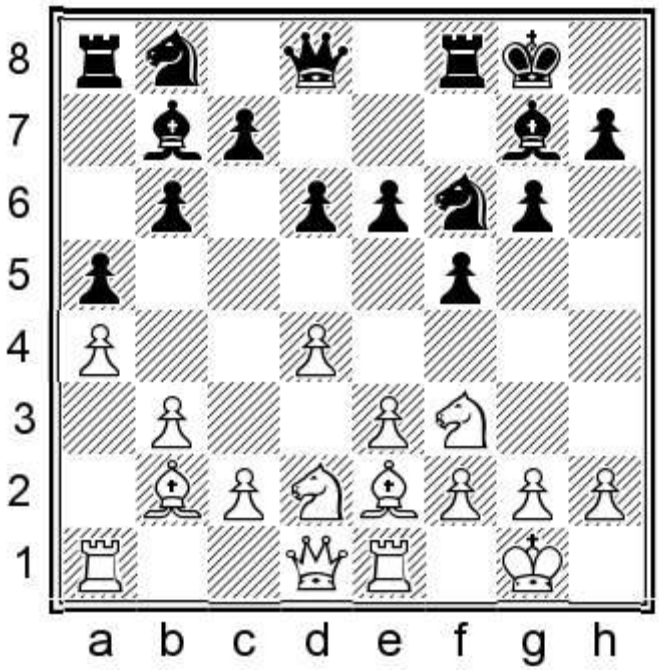
9.0-0 [9.e4?? Of course this is a blunder, and is one of the drawbacks of the bishop being on c4. 9...fxe4 10.♘xe4 ♘xe4 11.♕xe4 d5–+] 9...♘e4 10.♖ad1 c5 11.♗d3 ♗b7 12.c4 ♘d7∓



Position after: 12...♘d7∓

White finds himself without a plan, except maybe playing ♘e1 and f3, but it takes time and creates other weaknesses on the dark squares.

B) 7.♗e2 The bishop is modestly placed here. White will need to move it again if he wants to play e4. 7...e6 8.0-0 b6 9.♖e1 ♗b7 10.a4 a5↑



Position after: 10...a5↑

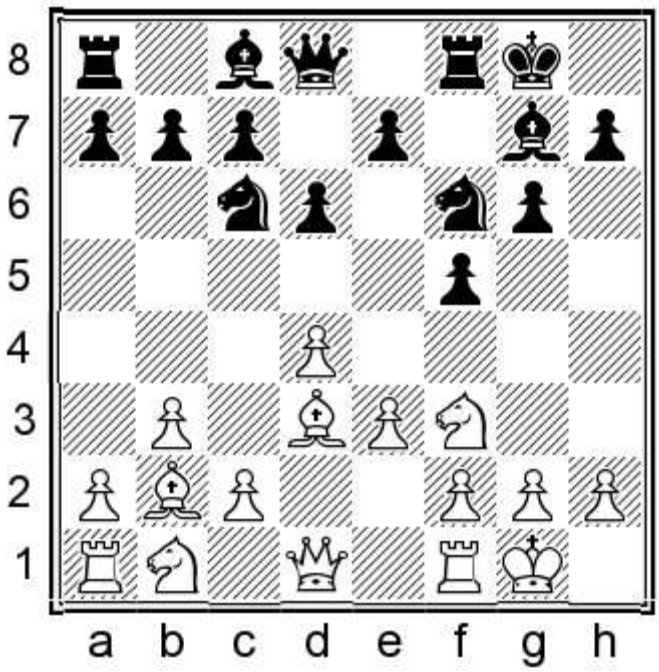
I prefer to stop White's ideas before continuing with ...♘bd7, ...♕e7 and ...e5 or ...c5. Black definitely

has the upper hand.

6...d6 7.0-0

7.♘bd2 ♘c6 8.0-0 doesn't change anything.

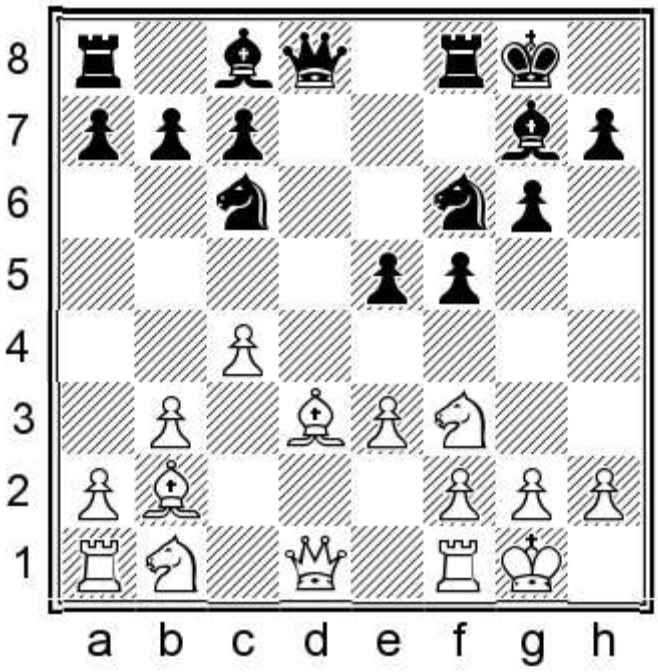
7...♘c6



Position after: 7...♘c6

8.♘bd2

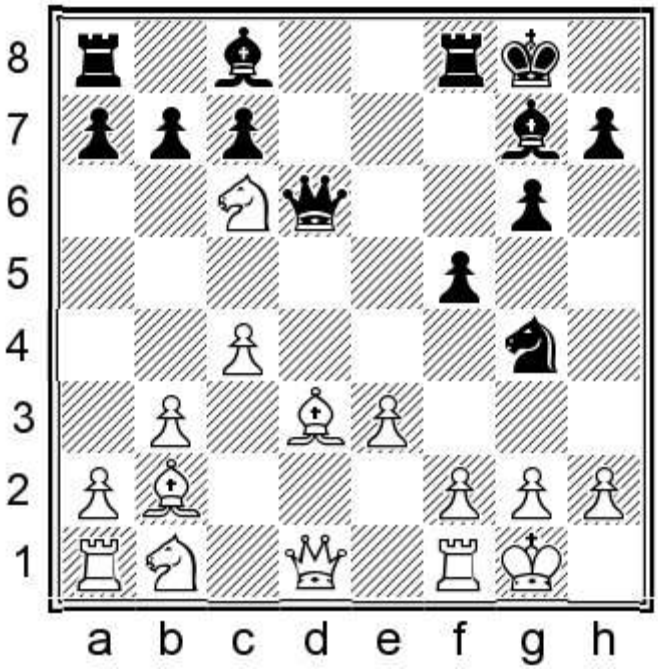
8.c4?! is even worse, as shown in the following variation: 8...e5 9.dxe5?! [9.d5N A necessity, since opening the position is worse for White. 9...♘b4 10.♗e2 ♘a6 11.a3 ♘c5 12.b4 ♘ce4↑ Black gets a fine version of a King's Indian.] 9...dxe5!



Position after: 9...dxe5!

This time this move is on, and clearly better for Black.

A) 10.♘xe5? ♘g4 White has too many hanging pieces and loses material. 11.♘xc6 ♕d6!

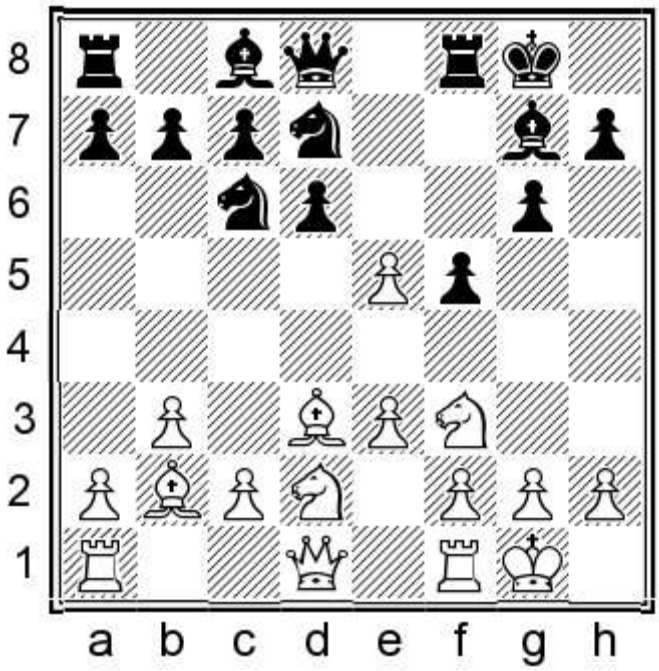


Position after: 11...♕d6!

The point! 12.♘e5 [12.g3 ♗xb2–+] 12...♘xe5 13.♗e2 ♕xd1 14.♖xd1 ♘f3+ 15.♗xf3 ♗xb2 16.♘d2 ♗xa1 17.♖xa1 ♖d8∓ Black should be able to convert his advantage quite easily.

B) 10.♗e2 ♕e7 11.♗a3 ♘b4 12.♘c3 a5∓

8...e5! 9.dxe5 ♘d7



Position after: 9...♘d7

This is the kind of variation where Black takes advantage of the position of the bishop on d3. It will come under fire from a knight on e5, or possibly the threat of a fork on e4.

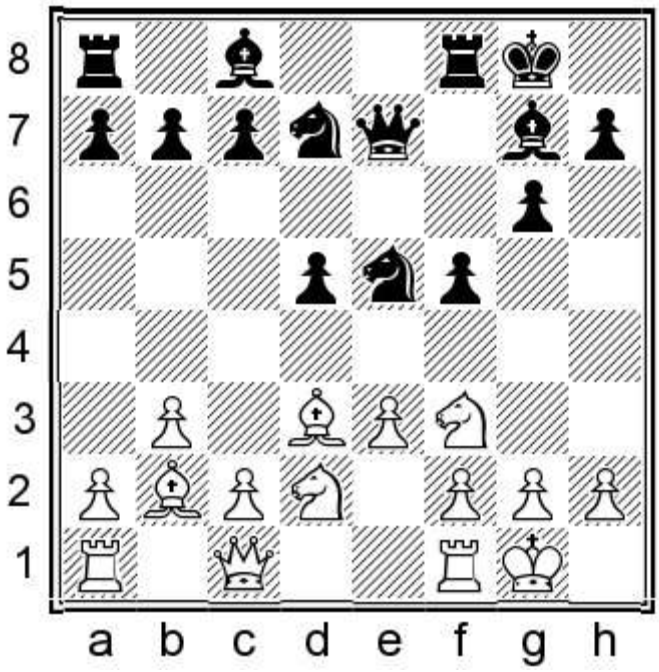
10.♖b1

Sooner or later White will need to protect the bishop if he doesn't want to suffer a nasty discovered check which would win it.

10.♘c4

A) 10...dxe5?! 11.e4! A strong reaction. Black seems to be tied to the protection of the e5-pawn. 11...f4 12.♖e1 ♖e8 13.♗f1 ♕f6 14.♘a5!± White would be happy to trade the knight (which isn't hanging, thanks to ♕d5+). I think he is slightly better here, even if Black won in Schnitzspan, L (2324) – Jankovic, A (2562), Germany 2014.

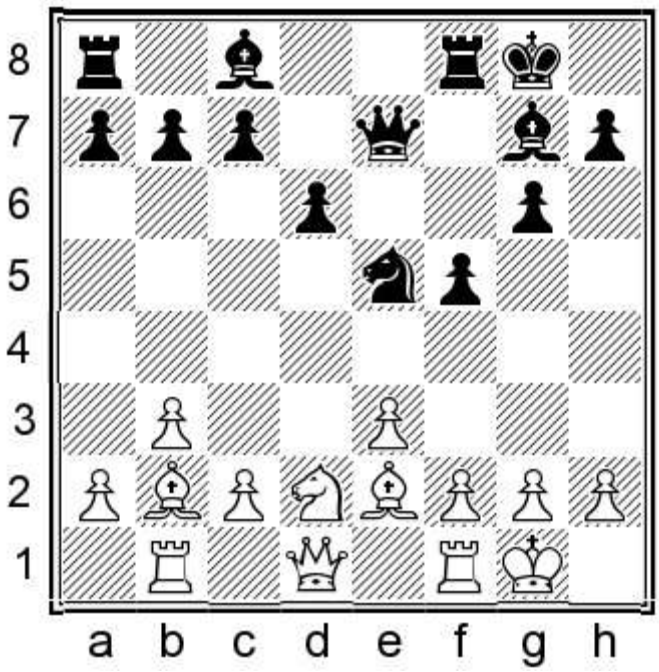
B) 10...d5! 11.♘cd2 ♘cxe5 12.♕c1 ♕e7↑



Position after: 12...♕e7↑

Black was ‘forced’ to push ...d5, which can be seen as a concession, but it enabled him to gain a few tempi.

10...♘dxe5 11.♘xe5 ♘xe5 12.♗e2 ♕e7⇄

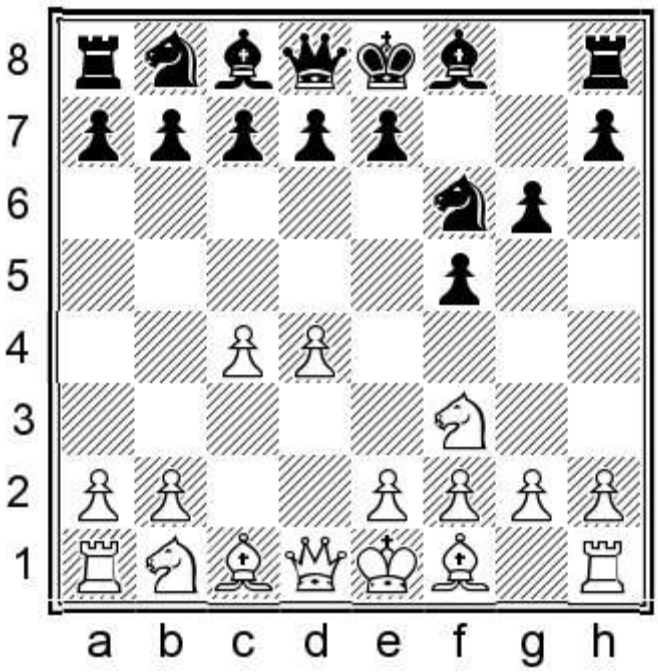


Position after: 12...♕e7⇄

The knight on e5 is strong and secures Black easy equality.

b) 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.c4 g6 4.b3 (without g3)

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.c4 g6



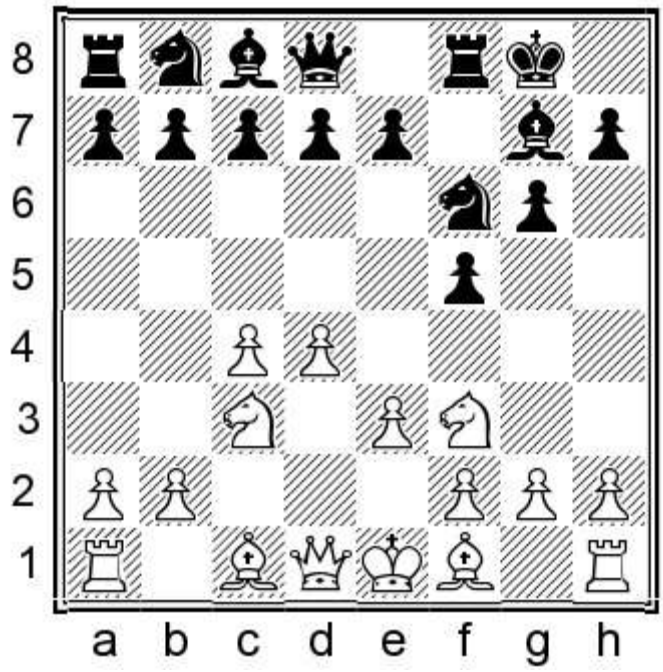
Position after: 3...g6

Now we will look at very similar positions to 3.b3 in the previous subchapter.

The difference is that White has already played c4. This can be seen as a drawback (as it deprives White of possibilities such as ♗c4+), or as an advantage (since ...♘c6 will be met with d5, a move not possible in the previous lines because the d5-square was not controlled by any white piece).

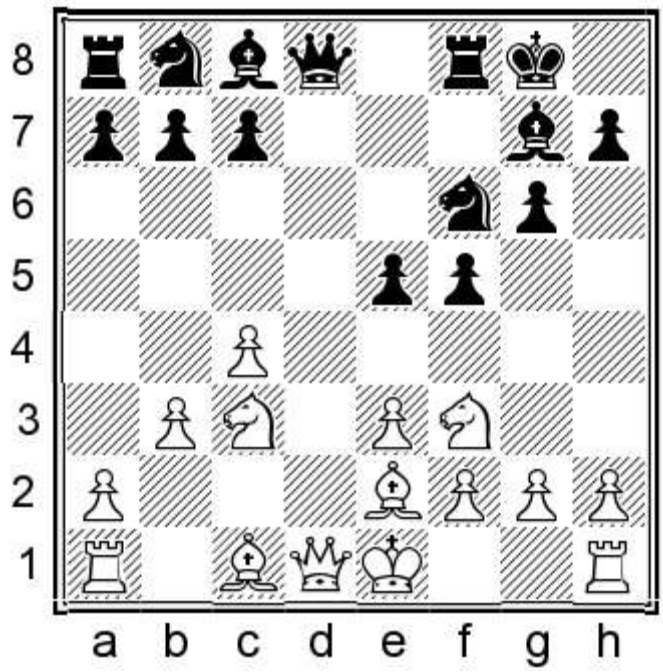
4.b3

4.e3 It's possible to start with this move, but it's risky to defer b3, as Black may be able to push ...e5, creating problems on the long diagonal. 4...♗g7 5.♘c3 0-0



Position after: 5...0-0

6.♗e2 The bishop is better placed here in view of the coming ...e5, as it won't be under threat from the pawn. [6.♗d3 d6 7.b3?! e5! This is one of the cases where White regrets having deferred b3... 8.dxe5 dxe5 9.♘xe5 ♘e4–+] 6...d6 7.b3 e5 This is not forced, for instance Black can also wait and start with ...♘e4. Here White can keep a decent position. 8.dxe5 dxe5



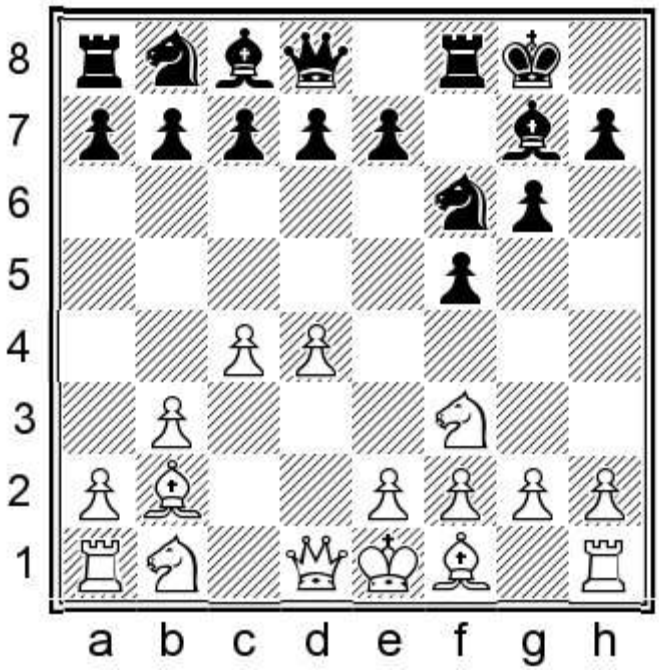
Position after: 8...dxe5

9.♗a3! [9.♘xe5?? ♘e4–+] 9...♖e8

A) 10.♕c2 e4 11.♖d1 ♘bd7 12.♘d4 c6 13.0-0 ♕c7= Both players might be happy with their position. White has active pieces, and Black has managed to get his pawn to e4, which is always a great achievement. Chances are probably balanced.

B) 10.♕xd8 ♖xd8 11.♘d5 ♘xd5 12.cxd5 e4 13.♘d4 ♗xd4 14.exd4 ♘d7⇄ A complicated endgame has arisen. If Black manages to control the bishop pair and grab the central pawns he will be more than fine, but White can try to develop a quick initiative on the c-file. Concrete play is required.

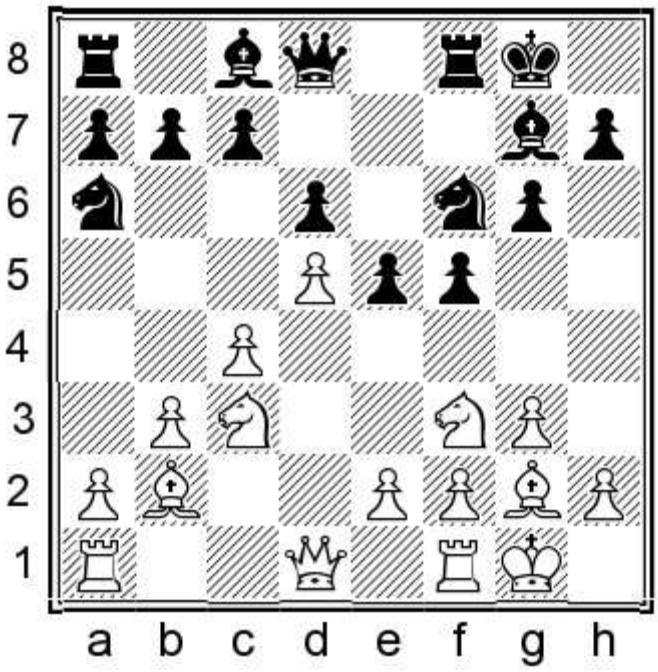
4...♗g7 5.♗b2 0-0



Position after: 5...0-0

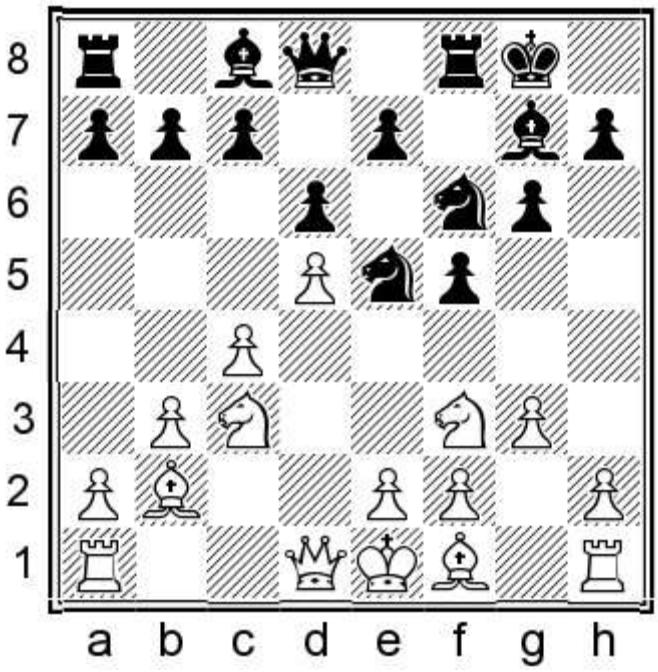
6.e3

A) 6.♘c3 d6 7.g3 [7.♕c2 c5 8.e3 f4 9.exf4 ♘c6 10.dxc5 ♗f5 11.♕d2 dxc5⩲] 7...♘c6 8.d5 [8.♗g2 e5 9.d5 ♘b4 10.0-0 ♘a6↑



Position after: 10...♘a6↑

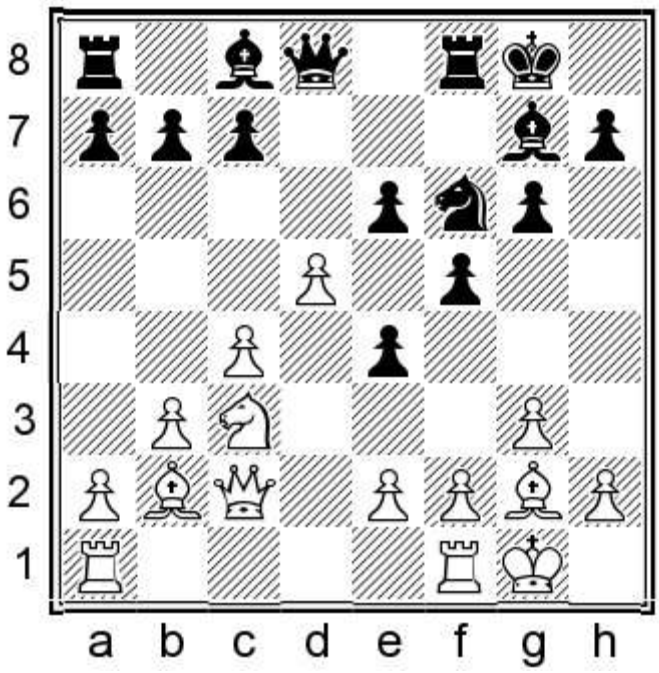
The knight drops back, en route to e4, and Black can be happy with his King's Indian type of position (where b3/♗b2 is hardly to be recommended).] 8...♘e5!?



Position after: 8...♘e5!?

We have already met this knight jump in Chapter 4. Black is ready to allow his pawns to be doubled, but will get a pawn mass in the center. We should also mention that b3/♗b2 is not normally in White's plan (he should usually go with c5, ♕b3 and ♖d1). 9.♘xe5 [9.♘d4 c5! As ♗g2 hasn't been played yet,

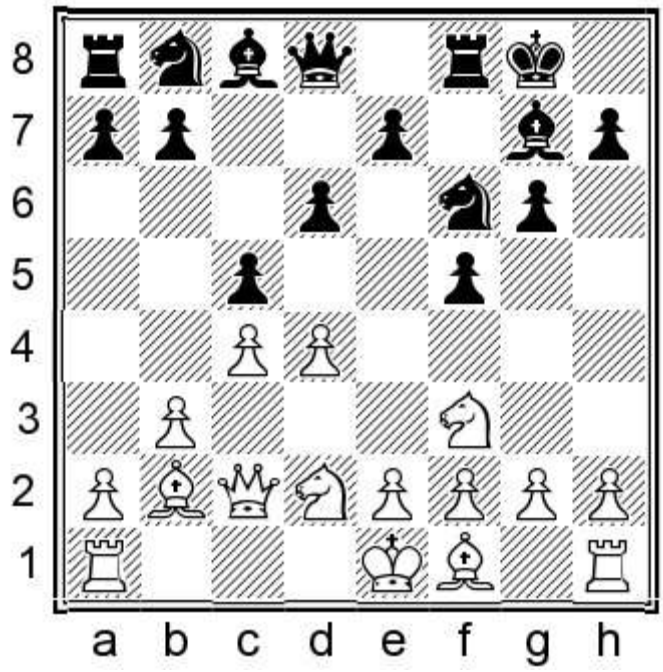
it’s easy to free ourselves in the center. 10.dxc6 bxc6 11.♗g2 ♕b6 12.0-0 ♗d7↑] 9...dxe5 10.♗g2 e4 11.0-0 e6 12.♕c2



Position after: 12.♕c2

12...♕e7 This move keeps more pieces on the board and retains flexibility. [12...exd5 13.♘xd5 c6 14.♘xf6+ ♗xf6 15.♖ad1 ♕e7 16.♗xf6 ♕xf6=] 13.♖ad1 ♗d7=

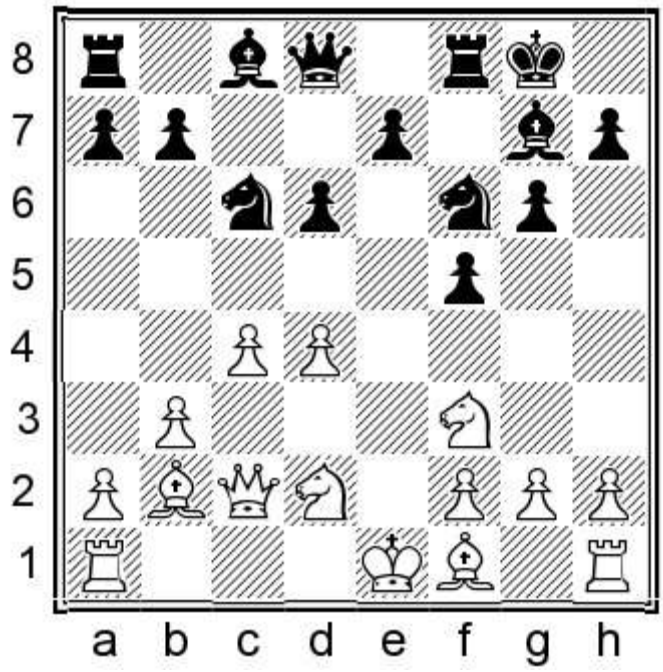
B) 6.♘bd2 d6 7.♕c2 Sometimes White decides to wait with his f1-bishop. It’s against the principle of speedy castling, but at least ♕c2 protects the b2-bishop, so ...e5 followed by ...♘d7 is no longer a good idea. [7.e3 − see 6.e3 d6 7.♘bd2; 7.g3?! e5! 8.dxe5 ♘fd7∓ We have already seen this motif; it’s easy to understand that Black will get a strong center, ready to advance.] 7...c5



Position after: 7...c5

B1) 8.d5 e5 9.dxe6 ♗xe6 10.e3 ♘c6 11.♗e2 f4! Black was already more than fine, but this move allows more pieces to come into play. Let's not forget that White's king is still on e1! 12.exf4 ♖e8 13.0-0 ♗f5 14.♕d1 ♘h5! 15.♗xg7 ♘xf4 16.♗b2 ♘xe2+ 17.♔h1 ♘b4∓ Our knights are a (k)nightmare for White.

B2) 8.e3 cxd4 9.exd4 ♘c6

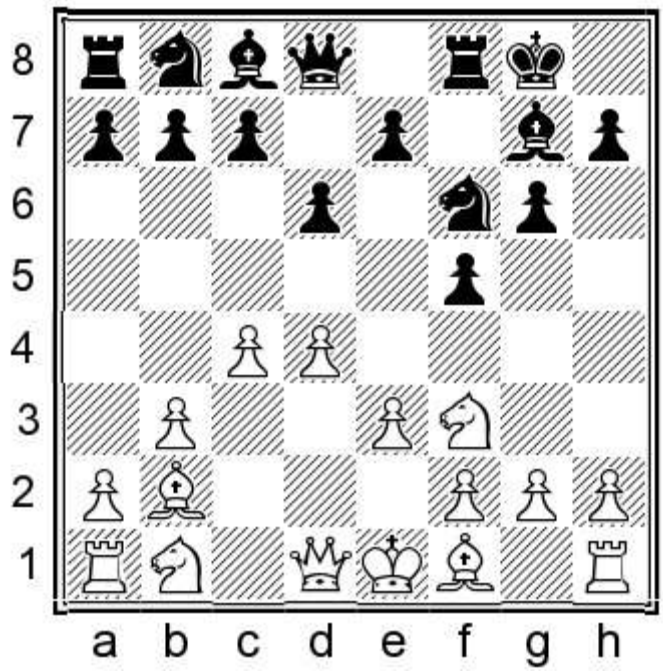


Position after: 9...♘c6

Here we see one of the drawbacks of the queen on c2. The c6-knight is not scared of being chased as it will gain an important tempo on the queen. 10.♗e2 ♘h5! The knight heads towards f4, and allows ...e5 to be played on the next move. 11.0-0 e5! 12.dxe5 ♘f4 13.♖fe1 dxe5∓

C) 6.g3 In the majority of games, White decided to transpose into the main systems with a double fianchetto, but a more classical move order, not delaying kingside development, was more natural.

6...d6



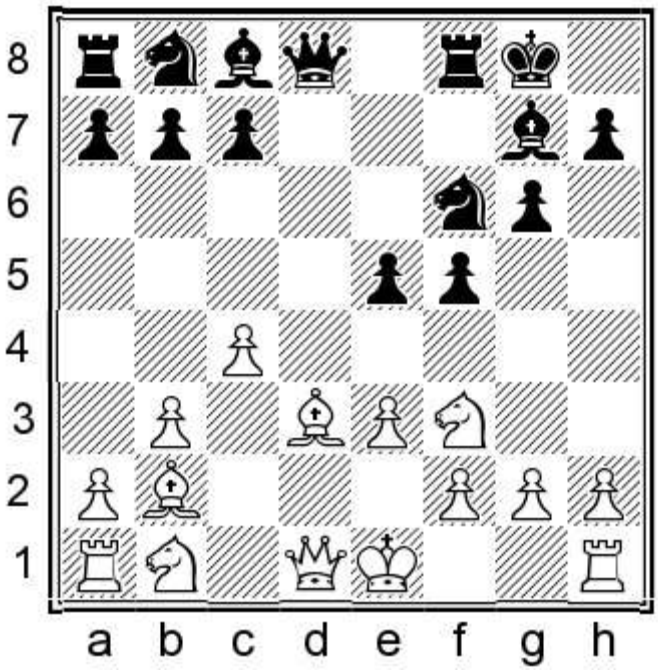
Position after: 6...d6

As in similar positions which we have seen a couple of times, White is once again at a crossroads concerning his development.

7.♗e2

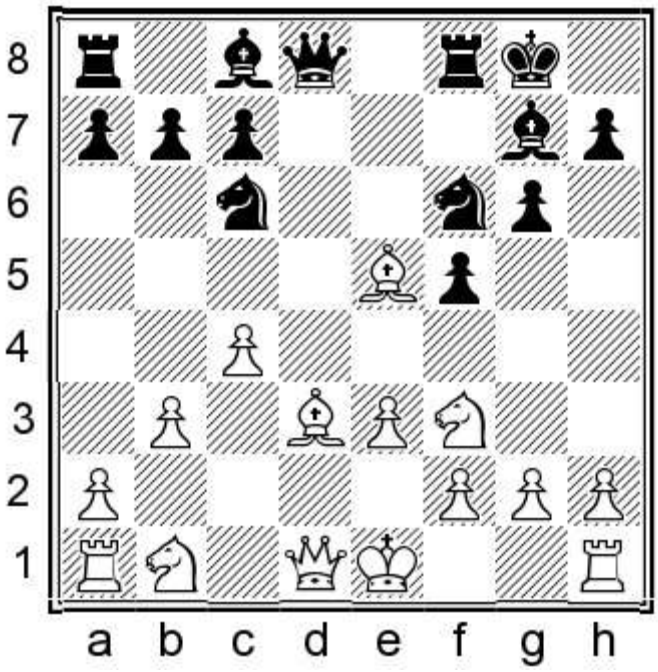
This is problably the move order where White is best placed to meet ...e5 ideas, so we'll change our mind and take advantage of the fact that the bishop can't control the e4-square.

A) 7.♗d3 To me, it's quite unlikely that White will be able to play e4, since he has already played c4. Of course if Black does nothing, it might become playable, but the chances that ...e5 is coming soon are great − as we see immediately! 7...e5! 8.dxe5 dxe5



Position after: 8...dxe5

9.♗xe5 The only possibility, otherwise White's development is clearly dubious. [9.♘xe5?? ♘g4! As usual, the pin on the long diagonal is just winning. 10.f4 ♘d7–+] 9...♘c6



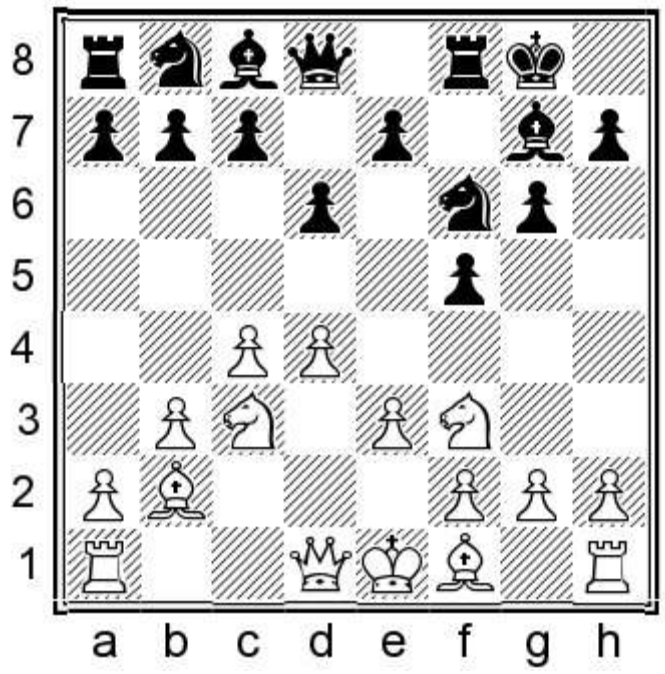
Position after: 9...♘c6

A1) 10.♗b2?! f4 [10...♘b4!? 11.♗e2 ♕xd1+ 12.♔xd1 ♘e4 13.♗xg7 ♔xg7 14.♖f1∞] 11.0-0 ♘b4 12.♗c2 ♕xd1 13.♗xd1 fxe3 14.fxe3 ♘d3 15.♗c3 ♗h6∓

A2) 10.♗c3 The bishop looks odd on this square, but at least it's protected and prevents ...♘b4.

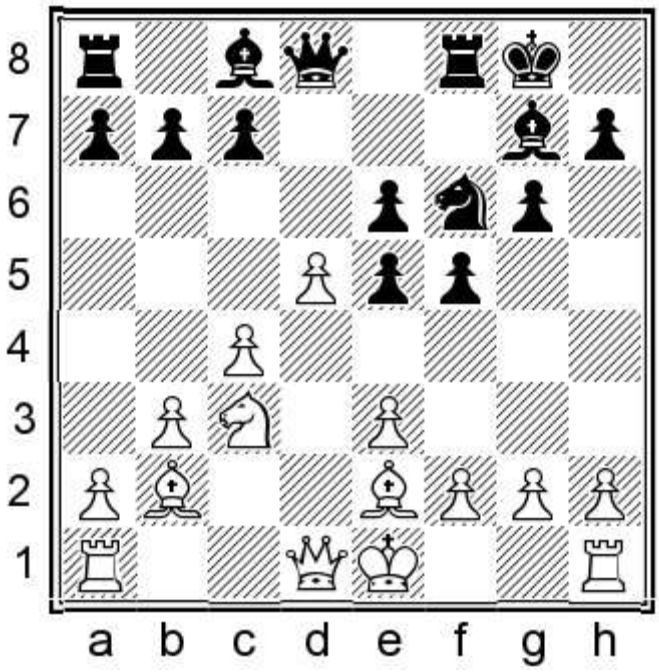
10...f4! 11.0-0 fxe3 12.fxe3 ♖e8♒ Black has the better development and will probably regain his pawn soon.

B) 7.♘c3



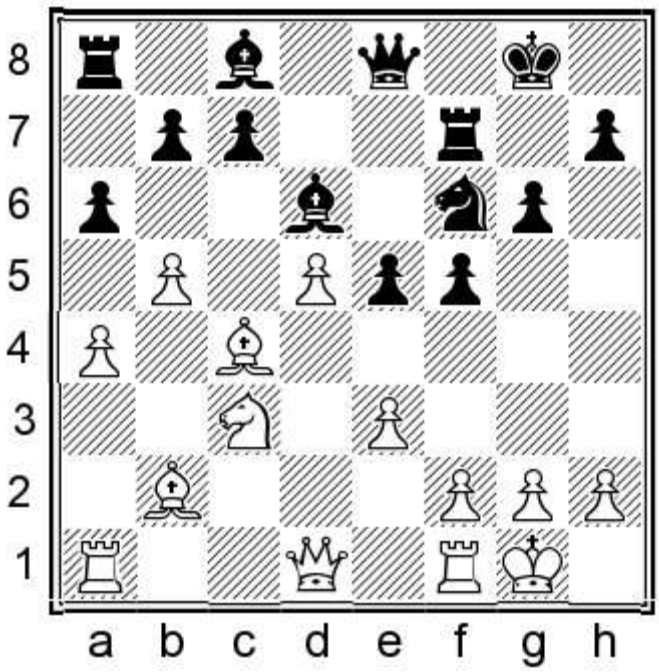
Position after: 7.♘c3

7...♘c6!? I like to fight for ...e5 as much as I can, and this move seems playable despite the possibility of 8.d5. [7...e6!? Of course the other plan that we have met a few times in this subchapter is perfectly playable too. 8.♗e2 ♕e7 9.0-0 b6⇄] 8.d5 [8.♗e2 e5 9.0-0 e4 On principle I like to advance to e4 if I can. The next mission is to stop White's advance on the queenside. 10.♘d2 a6!? Preventing a future b5, and waiting for White to decide on his next move. 11.a3 d5!⇄] 8...♘e5 9.♘xe5 dxe5 10.♗e2 e6N



Position after: 10...e6N

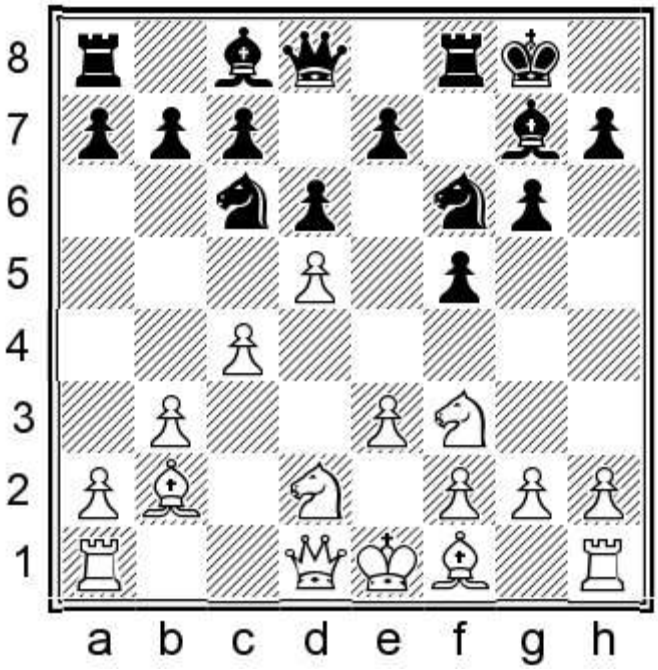
I don’t think Black experiences many problems here. 11.0-0 [11.e4 fxe4 12.0-0 exd5 13.cxd5 ♗f5=] 11...exd5 12.cxd5 a6 [12...♖f7?! doesn’t work very well here after 13.♗c4! ♕e8 14.d6 ♗e6 15.♘b5!. This is why we prefer to include ...a6/a4 in our variation. 15...♗xc4 16.bxc4 ♖d8 17.dxc7!! The pawn is simply too strong here. 17...♖xd1 18.♖axd1 ♖xc7□ 19.♘xc7±] 13.a4 ♖f7 14.♗c4 ♕e8! 15.b4 ♗f8 16.b5 ♗d6⇄



Position after: 16...♗d6⇄

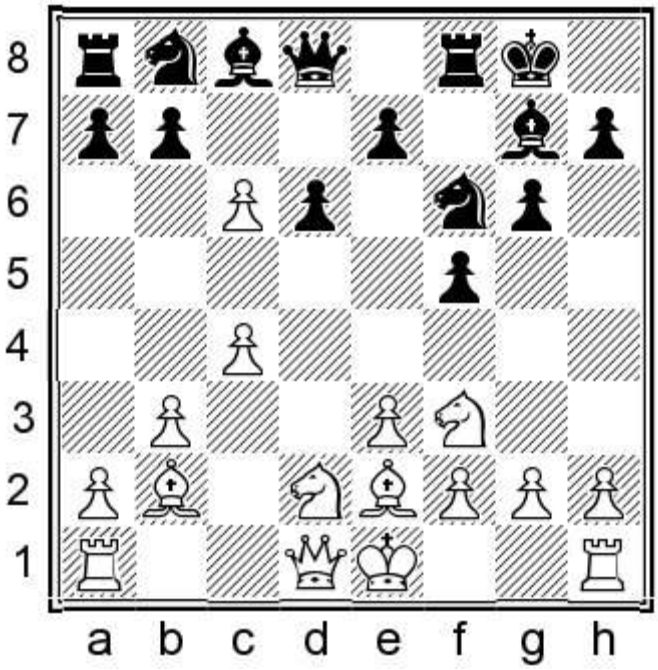
A very double-edged position has arisen. It is definitely hard for White to crack Black's queenside.

C) 7.♘bd2 ♘c6!? A nice idea in my opinion. White will probably want to prevent ...e5 with 8.d5. [Black can also play 7...e5 8.dxe5 ♘fd7= There is no problem with this continuation either.]



Position after: 8.d5

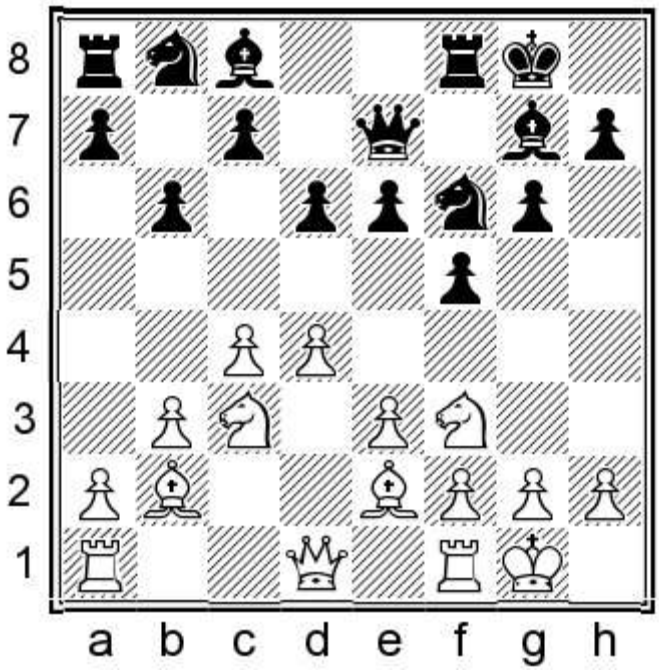
8...♘b8! The knight quietly returns. 9.♗e2 c6! The point. White can't protect his d-pawn, so he should probably take, and let Black have a free hand in the center. 10.dxc6



Position after: 10.dxc6

10...♘xc6 [10...bxc6!? 11.c5! d5 12.0-0 ♘fd7 13.♗xg7 ♔xg7 14.b4 e5± A complicated position! White has good prospects on the queenside, and while Black's development is dubious, his center is impressive.] 11.0-0 e5 12.♘b1! ♗e6 13.♘c3 h6 14.♕d2 ♕e7 15.♖ad1 ♖fd8⇄ Play is balanced.

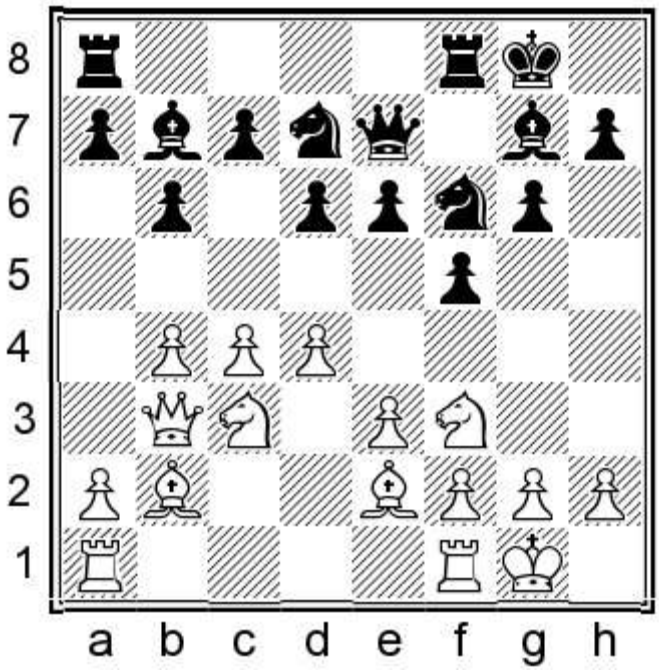
7...e6!? 8.0-0 ♕e7 9.♘c3 b6



Position after: 9...b6

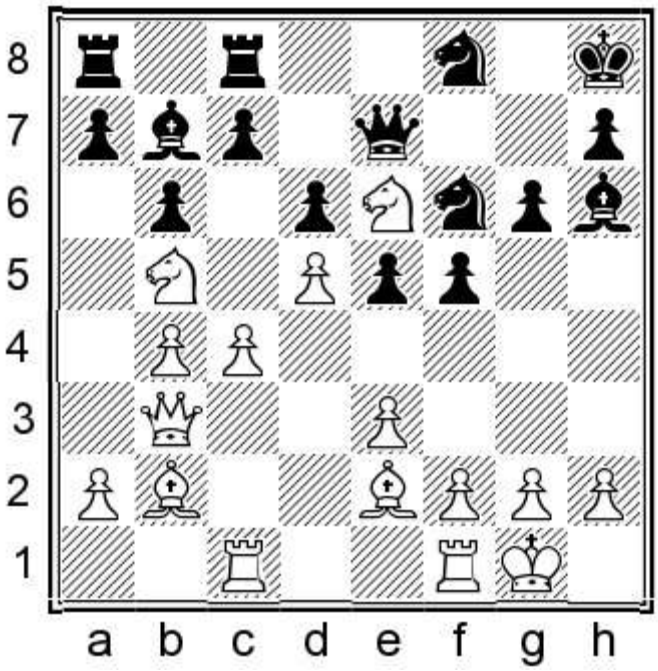
10.♘d2

10.b4 White has tried this logical move recently, but it costs him a tempo. 10...♗b7 11.♕b3 ♘bd7



Position after: 11...♘bd7

12.d5?! [12.b5 ♔h8 13.a4 a5! 14.♘d2 e5 15.♗f3 e4 16.♗e2 g5↑] 12...e5 13.♖ac1 ♔h8 14.♘g5 Don't worry, the knight won't stay on e6 for very long. First we force it to come in... 14...♗h6 15.♘e6 ♖fc8 16.♘b5 ♘f8!=



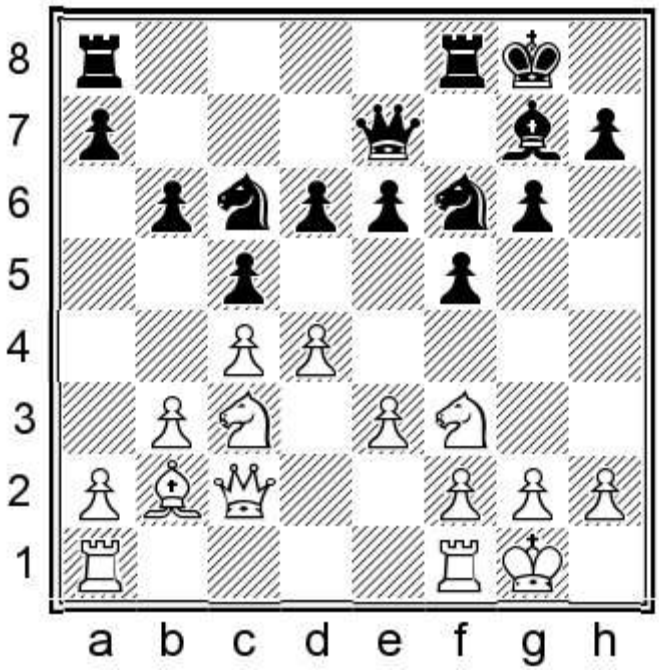
Position after: 16...♘f8!=

And now it is traded, and as Black manages to slowly develop his play, White's initiative vanishes. A draw was soon agreed in Nagy, G (2464) – Hoang Thanh Trang (2448), Hungary 2019.

10...♗b7

10...e5 If you don't want to trade the light-squared bishop, this could be the move for you, but be aware that it might be a bit too early. 11.c5!?↑

11.♗f3 c5 12.♗xb7 ♕xb7 13.♘f3 ♕e7 14.♕c2 ♘c6=

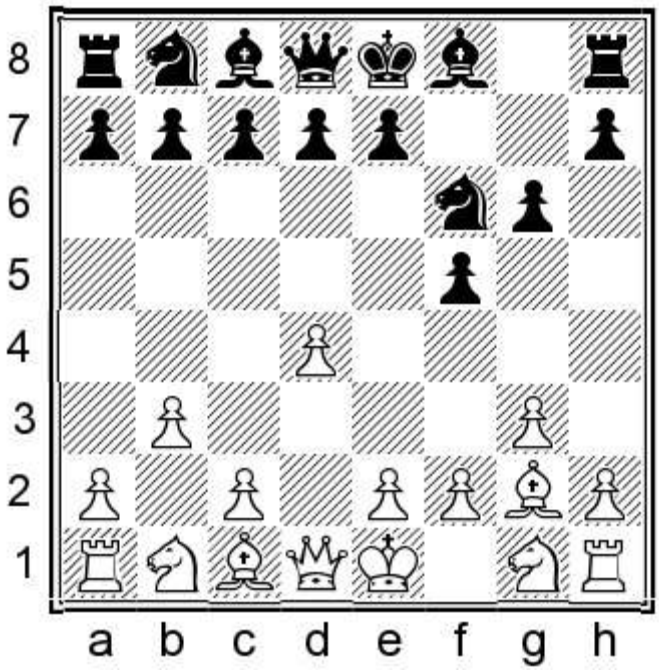


Position after: 14...♘c6=

I like Black in this flexible kind of position.

c) 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.b3

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.b3

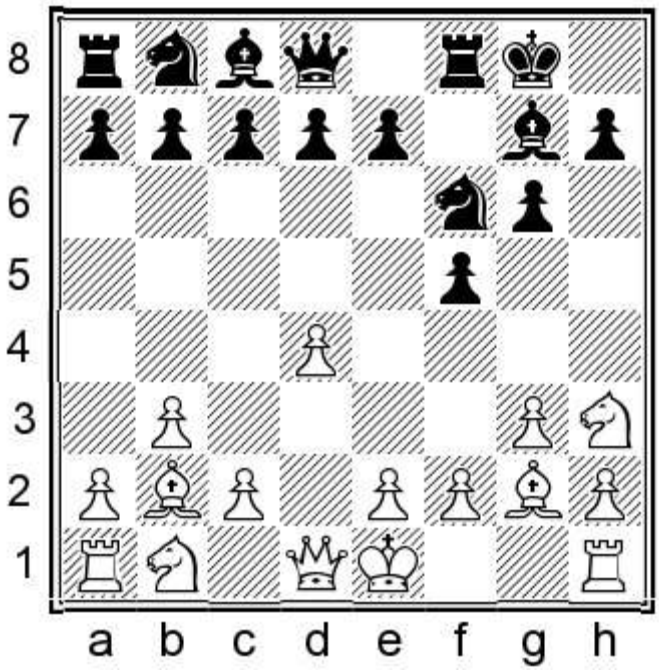


Position after: 4.b3

Playing b3 so quickly may transpose to the main subchapters, but White also has a few other set-ups that we will discuss now.

4...♗g7 5.♗b2 0-0 6.♘d2

A) 6.♘h3



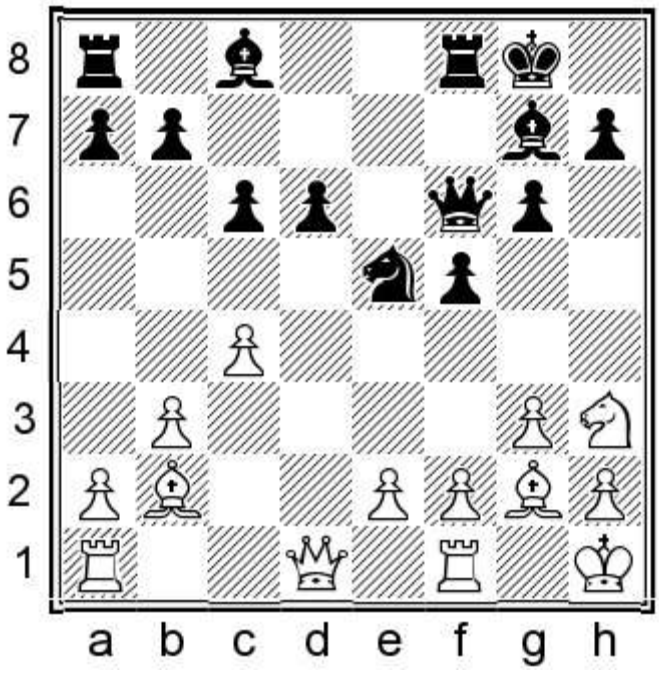
Position after: 6.♘h3

This has been seen in a few games. It is quite rare to associate b3 with ♘h3 (as the idea of playing b3 is generally to prevent ...e5), but at least it leaves both long diagonals open. 6...d6

A1) 7.c4 c6 8.0-0 e5!? 9.dxe5 ♘g4 This classical motif works well here because of the misplaced knight on h3. 10.♘c3 dxe5 11.e4 ♘a6⇄ Black has decent activity, and his dream is to bring a knight to d4, even though the road is quite long.

A2) 7.d5

A2.1) 7...♘bd7 8.0-0 ♘e5 9.c4 e6 10.♘c3 exd5 11.♘xd5 c6 12.♘xf6+ ♕xf6 13.♔h1±



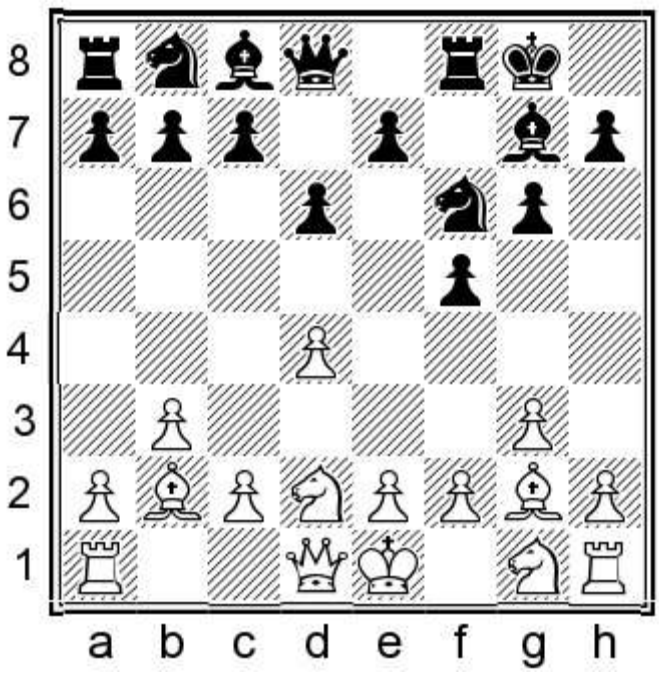
Position after: 13.♔h1±

I think White is always better in this kind of middlegame. The pawn on d6 is rather weak and Black doesn't have the same play as in the lines with 8.d5 of Chapter 10. White went on to win in Luther, T (2567) – Georgiadis, N (2473), Austria 2016.

A2.2) 7...c6 8.c4 e5 9.dxe6 ♗xe6 10.0-0 ♘a6 11.♘f4 ♗f7⇄ Play is very similar to Chapter 10.

B) 6.♘f3 transposes to the main line.

6...d6

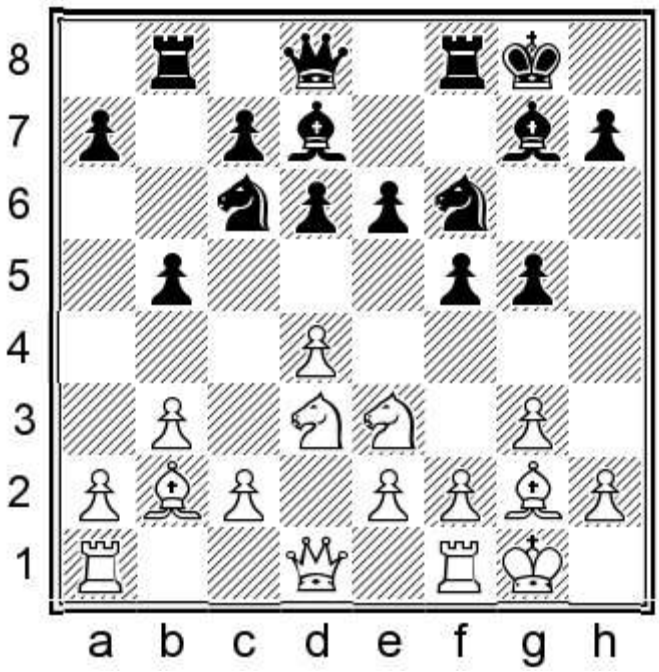


Position after: 6...d6

7.e4

This seems the critical way to take advantage of the move order. Unfortunately for White, he is not really ready for this!

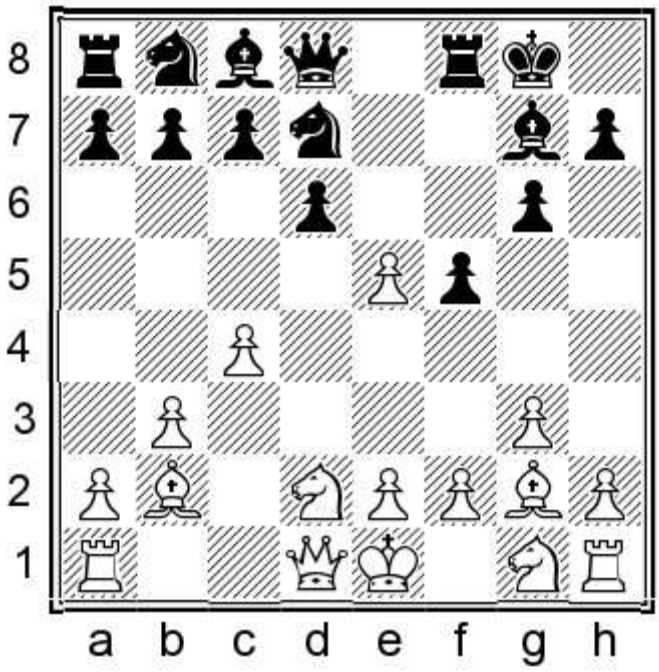
A) 7.♘h3 ♘c6 8.d5 [8.♘c4 e6 9.♘f4 ♗d7 10.0-0 g5 11.♘d3 b5 12.♘e3 ♖b8⇄



Position after: 12...♖b8⇄

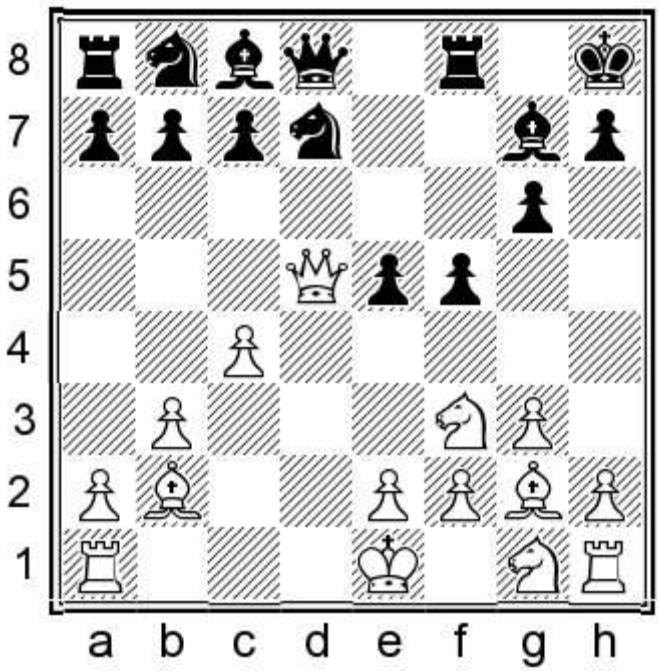
A very strange position. Many pawn breaks are possible, and the next few moves seem very important to determine who will take over the initiative.] 8...♘e5 9.c4 e6 10.0-0 ♕e7 11.♘f4 exd5 12.♘xd5 ♘xd5 13.♗xd5+ ♔h8= Black is ready to follow with ...f4 and develop his initiative on the kingside.

B) 7.c4 e5 8.dxe5 ♘fd7



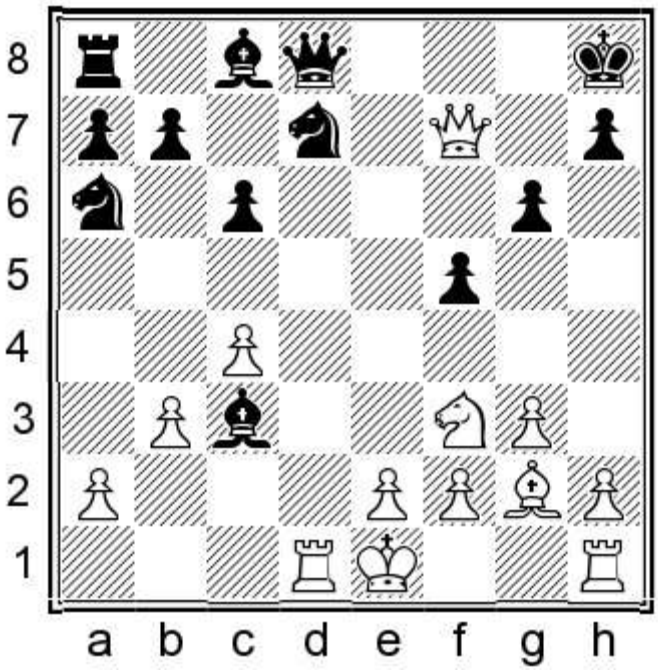
Position after: 8...♘fd7

It makes sense to put the knight here instead of g4 if we want to be sure of taking back on e5 with the pawn. (Due to h3 in the other case it might be impossible.) 9.♘df3?! The beginning of a bad idea, but the only way not to just be slightly worse. White can't hope for much with his knight still on g1, and the logical spot on f3 is taken. [9.♘h3 dxe5 10.0-0 ♕e7 11.♘f3 ♘c6 12.♕d5+ ♔h8 13.♖ad1 a5∓] 9...dxe5 10.♕d5+?! ♔h8



Position after: 10...♔h8

11.♘xe5? Unfortunately for White this is refuted easily. [11.♘h3 ♕e7∓ There is no reason for the queen to be on d5.] 11...c6! The queen is unable to maintain the protection of the knight, so White loses material. 12.♘f7+ ♖xf7 13.♕xf7 ♗xb2 14.♖d1 ♘a6 15.♘f3 ♗c3+

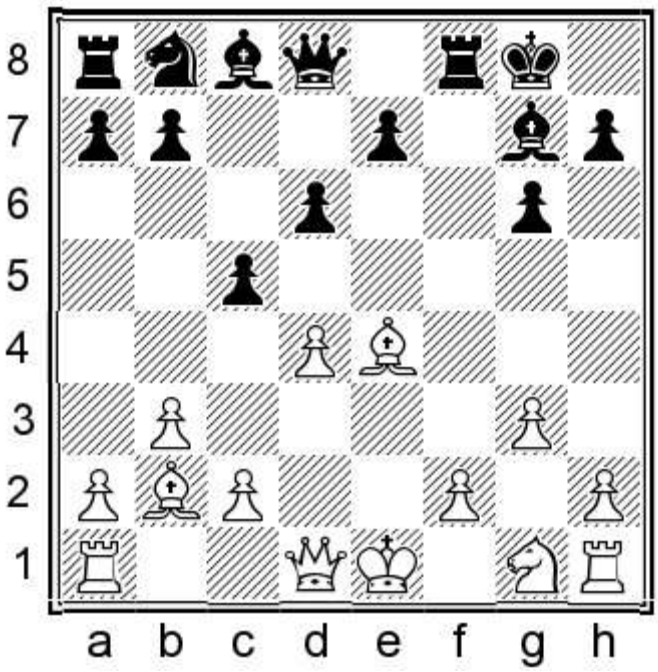


Position after: 15...♗c3+

We don't even let White develop his pieces correctly. 16.♔f1 ♕f8∓

C) 7.♘gf3 ♘c6 8.0-0 ♘e4 − once again, see the main subchapter.

7...fxe4 8.♘xe4 ♘xe4 9.♗xe4 c5!

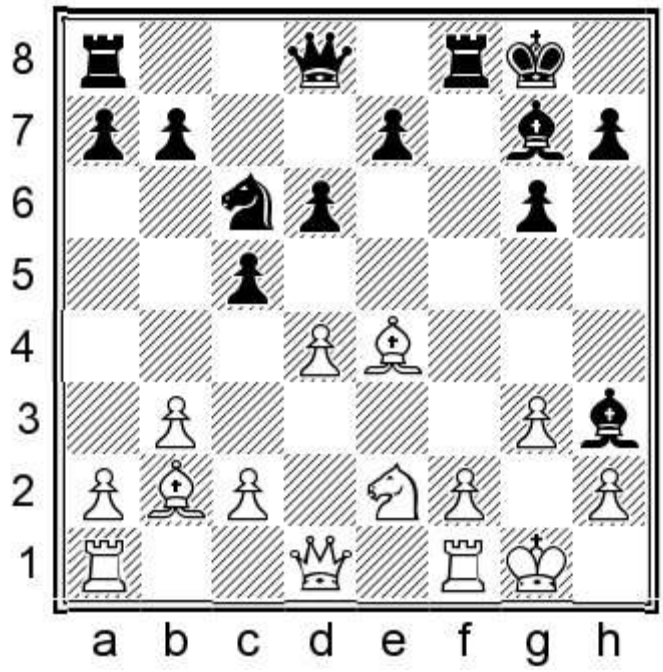


Position after: 9...c5!

Black strikes back in the center at once.

10.♘e2 ♘c6 11.♕d2

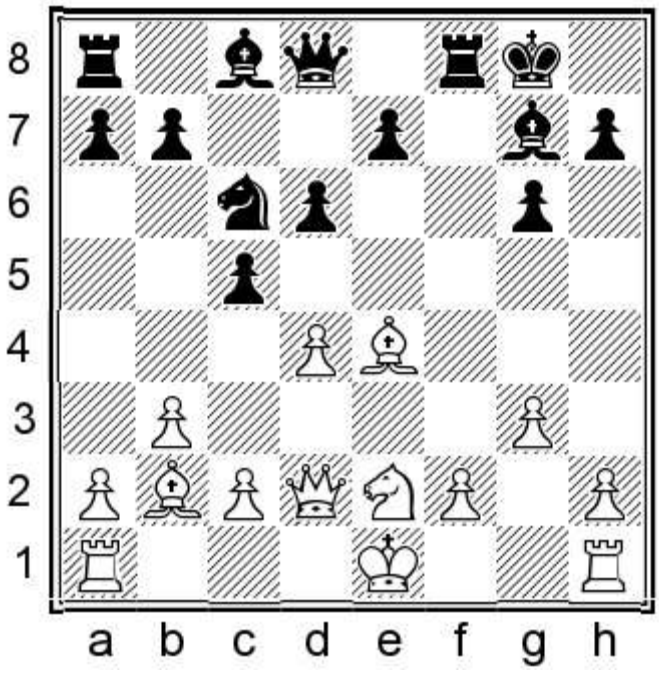
11.0-0 ♗h3!



Position after: 11...♗h3!

A) 12.♖e1 d5! 13.♗h1 Tolerating the bishop on h3 makes sense if White wants to keep his own bishop alive, but it's dangerous too! 13...cxd4 14.♘f4 [14.♘xd4 ♕b6! 15.♗xd5+ ♔h8 16.c3 e5 17.♘f3 ♖ad8∓ Black's advantage is overwhelming.] 14...♖xf4! 15.gxf4 e6 16.♕f3 ♗f5∓

B) 12.♗g2 ♗xg2 13.♔xg2 ♕d7 14.♕d2 ♕f5 15.♔g1 [15.f3 ♘xd4 16.♘xd4 cxd4 17.♗xd4 ♗xd4 18.♕xd4 ♕xc2+ 19.♖f2 ♕c6∓] 15...♖ad8↑ White is still under pressure.



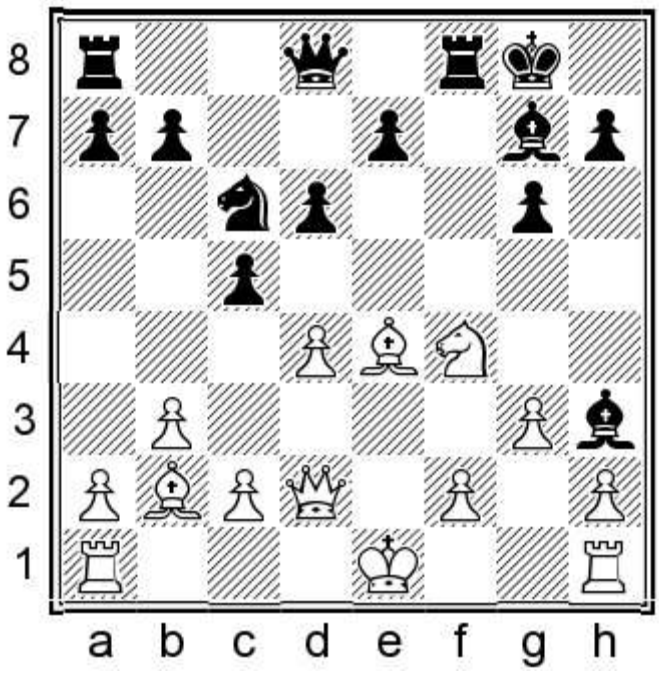
Position after: 11.♕d2

11...♗g4!?

This seems the simplest way to follow up.

A) 11...d5 12.♗g2 cxd4 13.♘xd4 e5 14.♘xc6 bxc6 15.c4=

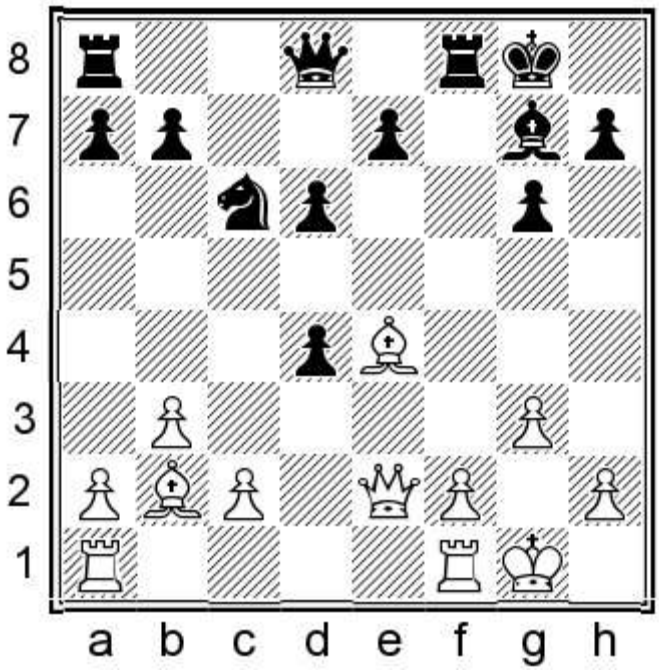
B) 11...♗h3 If you want a complicated game and long-term compensation, this move is made for you! 12.♘f4



Position after: 12.♘f4

Logical in order to get rid of the bishop, but it allows a nice exchange sacrifice. 12...♖xf4! 13.gxf4 [13.♕xf4?! d5 14.♗d3 ♘xd4∓] 13...d5 14.♗d3 ♘xd4 15.0-0-0 ♕d6 16.♕e3 ♗d7 17.♖he1 e6∓ Black has a massive center and full compensation.

12.0-0 ♗xe2 13.♕xe2 cxd4∓

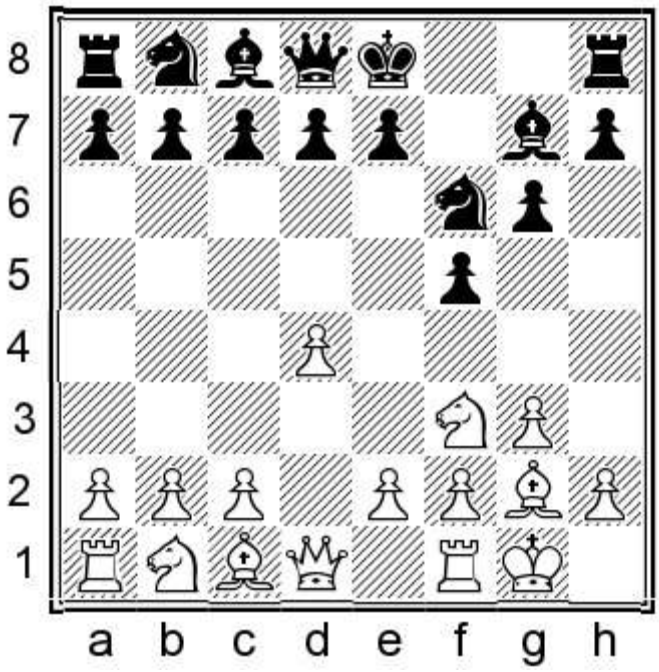


Position after: 13...cxd4∓

Black follows with ...e5 and keeps his extra pawn.

d) 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 d6 7.b3?!

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0



Position after: 5.0-0

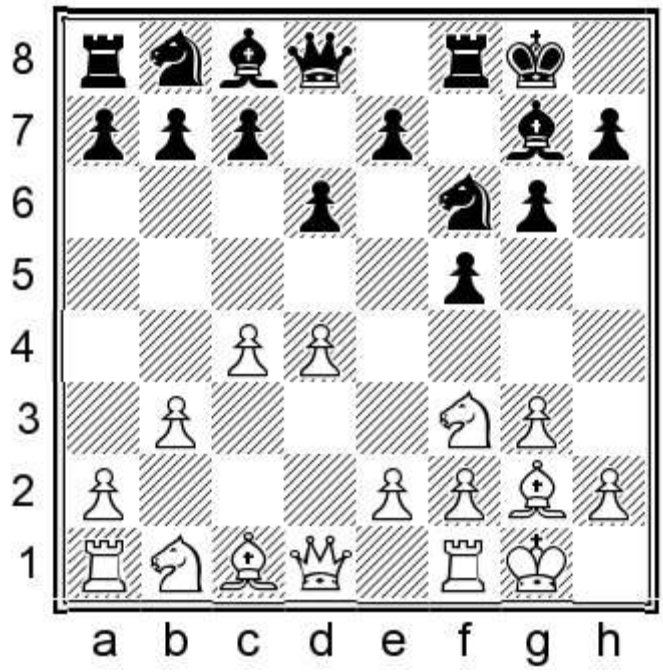
Some people start with 5.0-0 instead of the more usual 5.b3, thinking that it might be more flexible. That's actually not the case, since White denies himself a couple of other options on move 7 (see the next subchapters).

5...0-0 6.c4

This is by far the most played move, and is obviously not a bad one, but in association with 7.b3, it's a bad idea!

6.b3 d6 7.♗b2 − see the next subchapter of the current chapter.

6...d6 7.b3?!



Position after: 7.b3?!

In the previous chapter we considered the exact same position with b4 instead of b3 and said that it was a bad idea due to the following move.

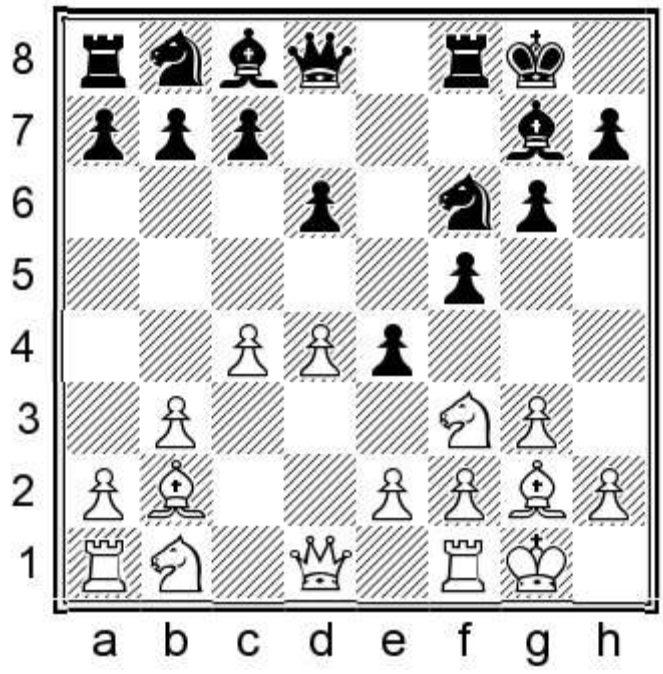
7...e5!

Once again this works well. Granted, it's less powerful than after 7.b4 since White is more solid as the pawn on b3 isn't hanging and protects the c4-pawn, but it's still good for Black!

8.dxe5!

I think White should open the position, otherwise Black's play is too simple.

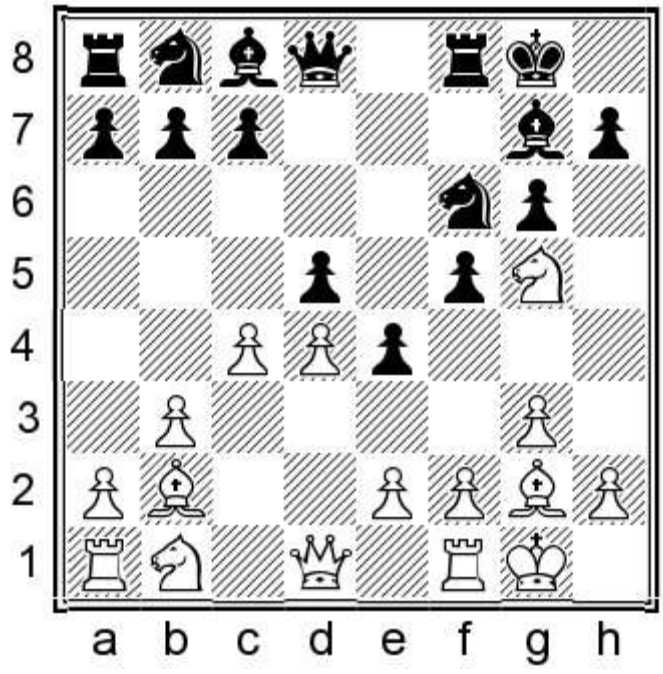
A) 8.♗b2 In my opinion committing the bishop to this square is even worse than committing the knight to c3, because in general White won't choose to develop the bishop to b2 if his d-pawn is likely to be blocked on d4. 8...e4!



Position after: 8...e4!

A1) 9.♘fd2 ♘c6 10.a3 h5!? In the following game, Black started his attack immediately, a very interesting decision. [10...e3 11.fxe3 ♕e7⩱] 11.e3 h4 12.♘c3 hxg3 13.hxg3 ♗d7 14.f3?! White is trying to give his king some fresh air, but the weakness of the g3-pawn is too important. 14...♘h5 15.♕e1 ♕g5∓ White lost a pawn and later the game in Garcia, J (2232) – Dzhumaev, M (2549), Manila 2008, 0-1 (33).

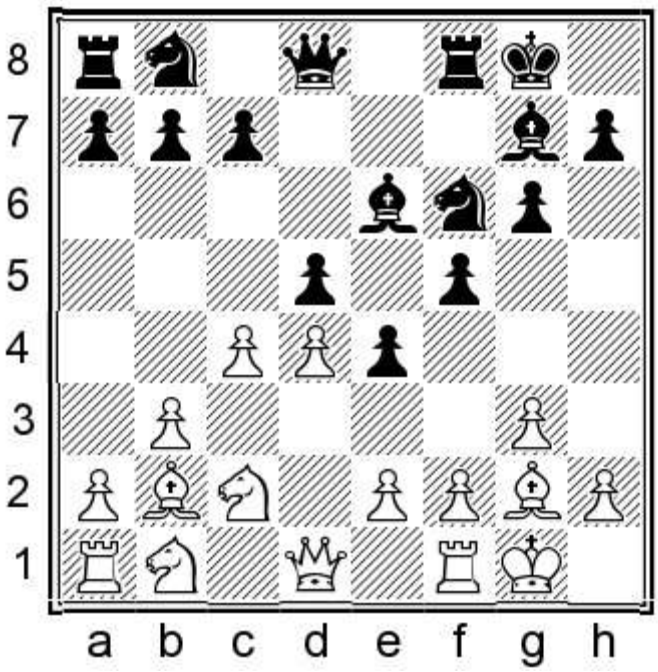
A2) 9.♘g5 d5!N



Position after: 9...d5!N

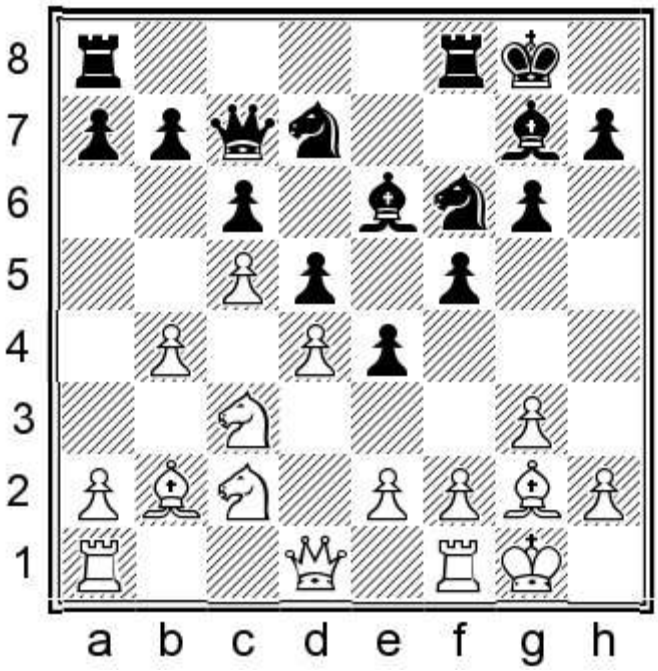
10.♘h3 [10.♘c3?! Falling into Black's trap. 10...dxc4 11.bxc4 ♘g4 12.h4 h6 13.♘h3 ♗xd4∓] 10...c6 11.♘c3 ♘a6 12.e3 ♘c7∓ Black is now ready to take back on d5 with his knights in order not to open the c-file and will now try to advance his pawns on the kingside.

A3) 9.♘e1 d5! 10.♘c2 ♗e6



Position after: 10...♗e6

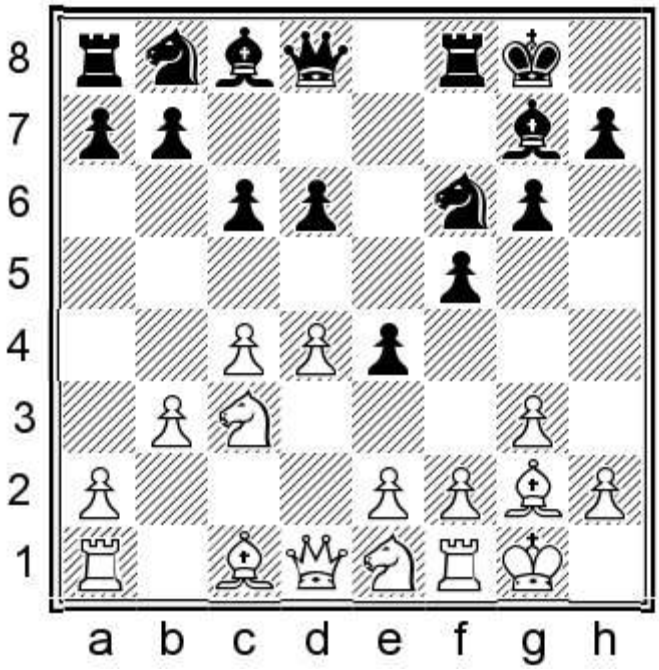
11.c5 [11.cxd5 ♘xd5 12.♘c3 c6 13.f3 Kind of necessary if White wants to find any activity, but it weakens the center. 13...exf3 14.♗xf3 ♘xc3 15.♗xc3 ♘d7∓; 11.♘c3?! dxc4! 12.♘e3 cxb3 13.axb3 ♘c6! 14.d5 ♘xd5–+] 11...♘bd7 12.♘c3 c6 13.b4 ♕c7



Position after: 13...♕c7

With this move Black intends 14...f4. 14.e3 g5 15.f4! exf3 16.♗xf3 ♘e4∓

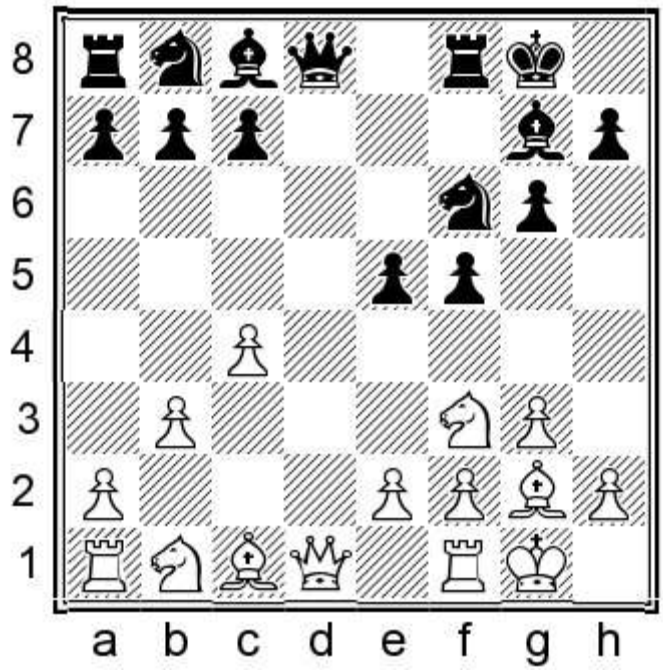
B) 8.♘c3 e4 9.♘e1 c6!



Position after: 9...c6!

When we don't have the knight on c6, it makes sense to follow with this move, intending ...d5. 10.♘c2 [10.d5? ♘xd5∓] 10...d5 11.♗g5 [11.♗a3 ♖e8 12.♖c1 ♗e6 13.cxd5 ♘xd5 14.♘xd5 ♕xd5!?∓] 11...h6 12.♗xf6 ♖xf6∓ White is unable to put enough pressure on the d5-pawn, so Black stands better thanks to his great center, and may start a kingside attack soon.

8...dxe5



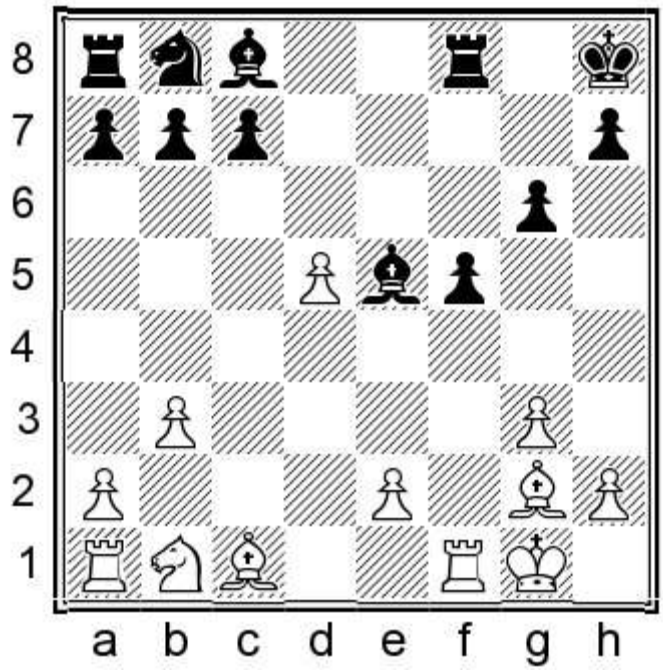
Position after: 8...dxe5

9.♗a3

The best try. White should aim to be as active as possible.

A) 9.♗b2 e4 10.♘g5 ♘c6 11.♘c3 ♕e7↑

B) 9.♘xe5?! ♘fd7! 10.♕d5+ ♔h8 11.f4 ♘xe5 12.fxe5 ♕xd5 13.cxd5 ♗xe5



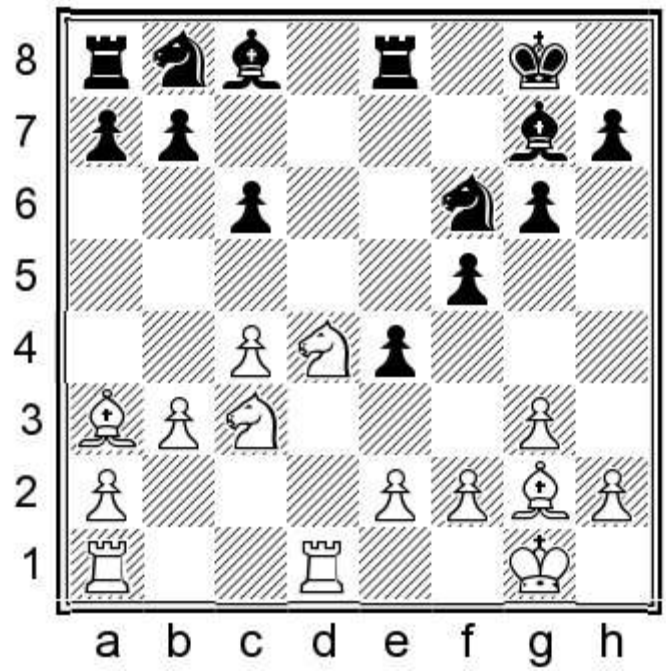
Position after: 13...♗xe5

14.♗h6! ♖e8 15.♘a3 ♗xa1 16.♖xa1 ♘a6⩱ At least White gets some compensation thanks to his two bishops and the weak spots in Black's camp.

9...e4!?

Black once tried this interesting exchange sacrifice. Despite looking dubious, it is really interesting. I would love to try it in a game.

9...♕xd1 This move has been played in most games, and Black has achieved fine results with it. It is fully playable and sufficient for equality, but it doesn't pose White many problems. 10.♖xd1 ♖e8 11.♘c3 e4 12.♘d4 [12.♘e1 c6 13.♖ac1 ♗e6 14.♘c2 ♘a6 15.♘d4 ♗f7=] 12...c6

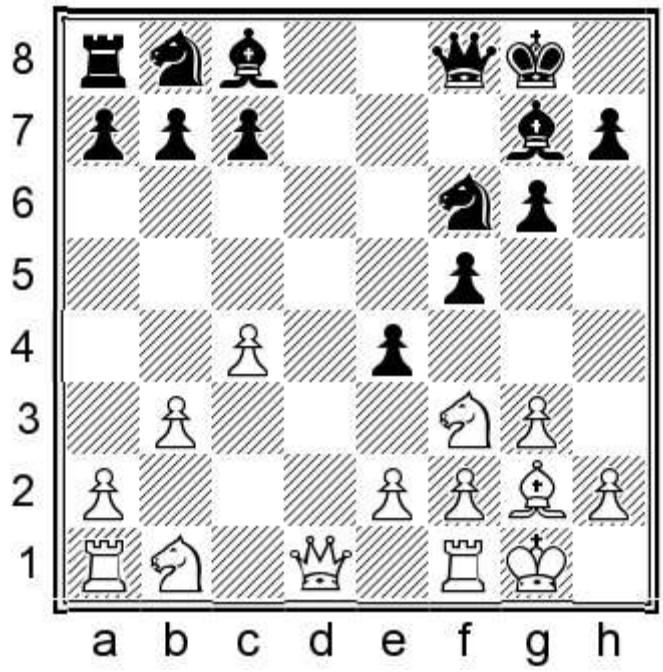


Position after: 12...c6

A) 13.♘c2 ♘bd7 14.♗b2 ♘c5 15.b4 ♘cd7 16.♘b1?! White employs a strange plan and gets punished. 16...♘b6 17.♘ba3 ♗e6 18.c5 ♘a4 19.♗d4 ♘d5∓ With lots of weaknesses, White ended up losing in Wagh, S (2356) – Harsha, B (2454), Abu Dhabi 2018, 0-1 (40).

B) 13.e3 ♘bd7 14.♖d2 ♘e5 15.♖ad1 ♗d7= Black has an interesting position with some holes to exploit, but White's activity compensates.

10.♗xf8 ♕xf8



Position after: 10...♕xf8

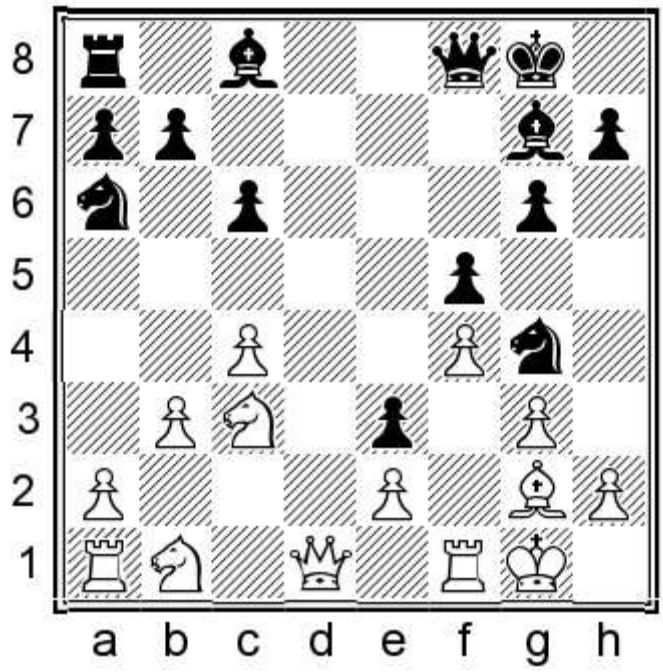
11.♘d4

11.♘e1 ♘g4! 12.♘c2 ♗xa1 13.♘xa1 ♗e6∓

11...♘e8!N

This move is just what Black was needing! The knight keeps the c7-pawn protected and opens the long diagonal. He will soon restore the material balance.

11...e3? Opening the diagonal for the g2-bishop is not really something Black should be doing. 12.f4 ♘g4 13.♘b5? After this move Black has a great option. [White should prefer 13.♘c2 ♗xa1 14.♘xa1 c6 15.h3± when Black is behind in development and will soon lose the important e-pawn.] 13...♘a6! 14.♘5c3 c6

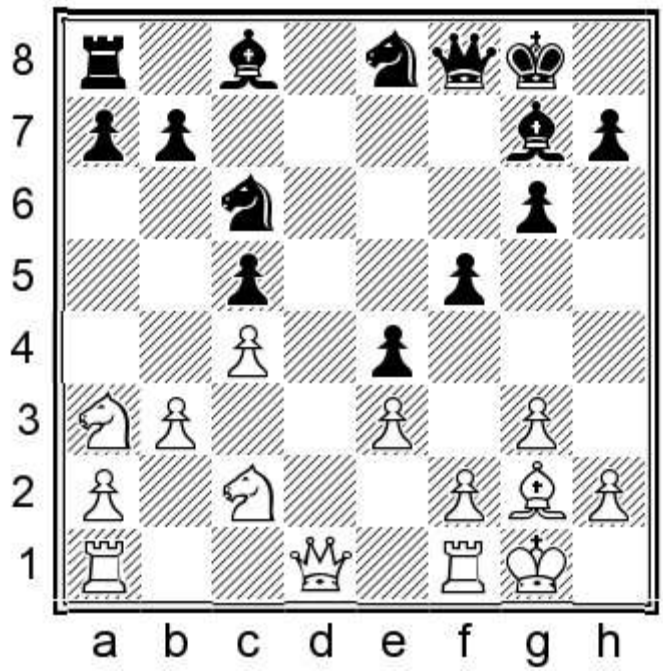


Position after: 14...c6

Black doesn't care about material; he simply paralyzes White. 15.♕c1 ♕e7 16.a3 ♘c5 17.♕c2 ♘e6 18.♖a2 ♘d4 19.♕d1 h5∓ White is almost out of moves and lost quickly in Puraev, A (2220) – Smirnov, P (2566), Tomsk 2011, 0-1 (28).

12.♕d2

A) 12.e3 c5 13.♘c2 ♘c6 14.♘ba3



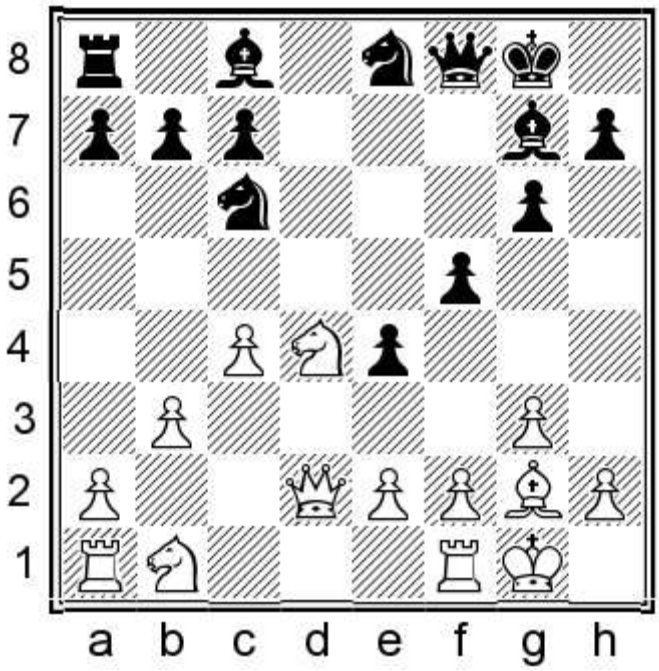
Position after: 14.♘ba3

14...♗xa1! [14...♗e6 Trying to play as in the Smirnov game is interesting, but less strong in this case. 15.♖c1 ♘e5 16.♕e2 a6 17.♖fd1 ♘d6⩲] 15.♕xa1 ♕e7∓ Black keeps more space and the upper hand.

B) 12.♘c3? c5! 13.♘db5 a6∓

C) 12.♘c2 ♘c6 13.♕d5+ ♕f7 14.♕xf7+ ♔xf7 15.♘ba3 ♗xa1 16.♖xa1 a5!↑ Black intends ...♘b4, retaining the initiative.

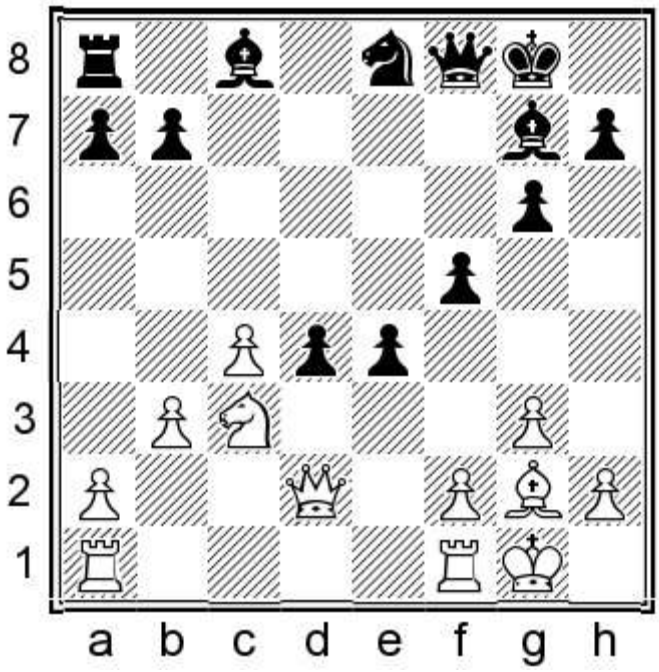
12...♘c6



Position after: 12...♘c6

13.♘xc6!

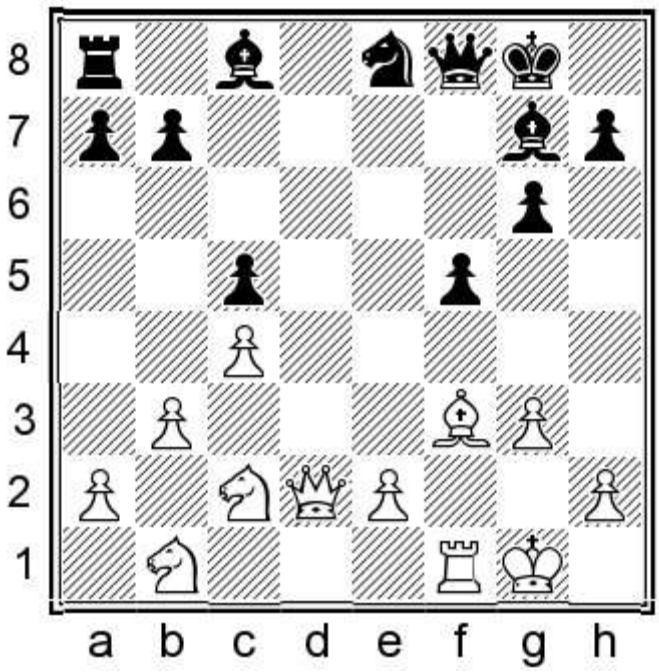
13.e3?! ♘xd4 14.exd4 c5! 15.♘c3 cxd4∓



Position after: 15...cxd4∓

Obviously this is crushing, and my only advice for White is to give back a piece on e4.

13...♗xa1 14.♘d4 c5 15.♘c2 ♗g7 16.f3! exf3 17.♗xf3=

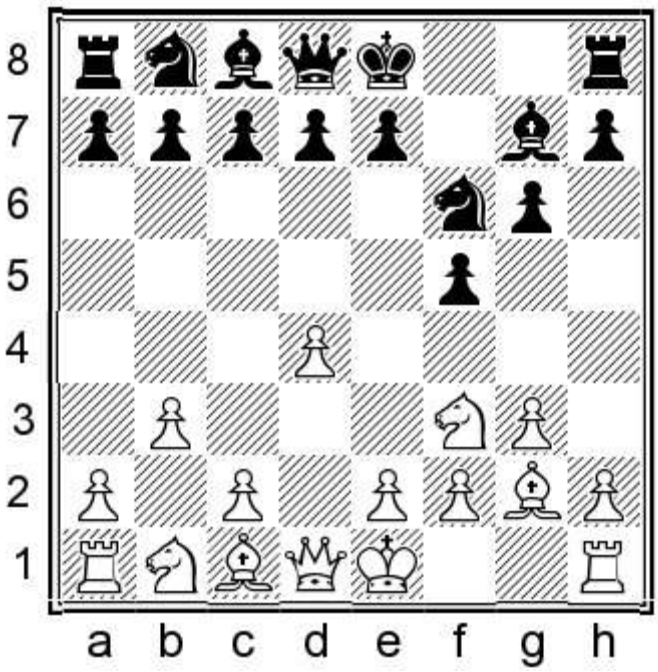


Position after: 17.♗xf3=

This should be about equal, as White will get some squares for his knights. On the other hand, the dark squares are suffering because of his missing bishop.

e) 7.-- alternatives, 8.♘bd2 --, 8...a5 9.a3

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.b3



Position after: 5.b3

This is the most precise move order for White. He doesn't allow any ...e5 ideas, as the bishop quickly goes to b2.

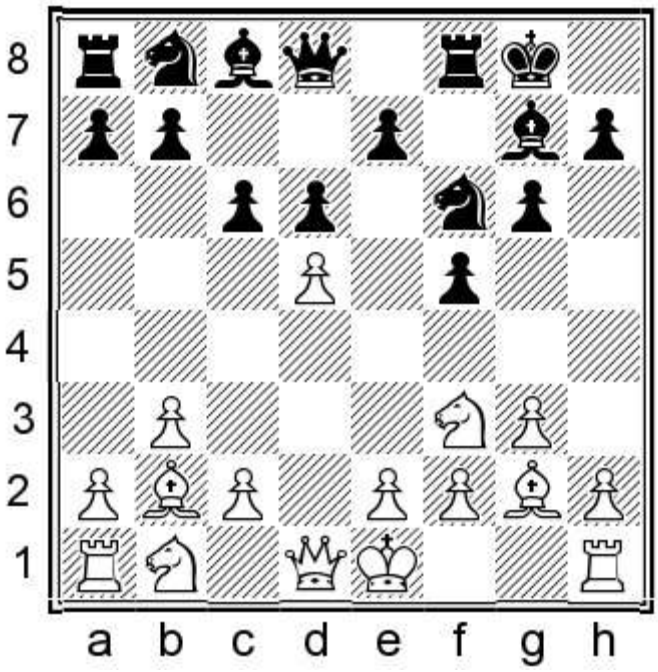
It also gives Black as little information as possible concerning the development of the c-pawn and b1-knight.

5...0-0 6.♗b2 d6

Now of course 7.0-0 is the main move, but we should have a look at other continuations as well, bearing in mind that they might transpose later.

7.0-0

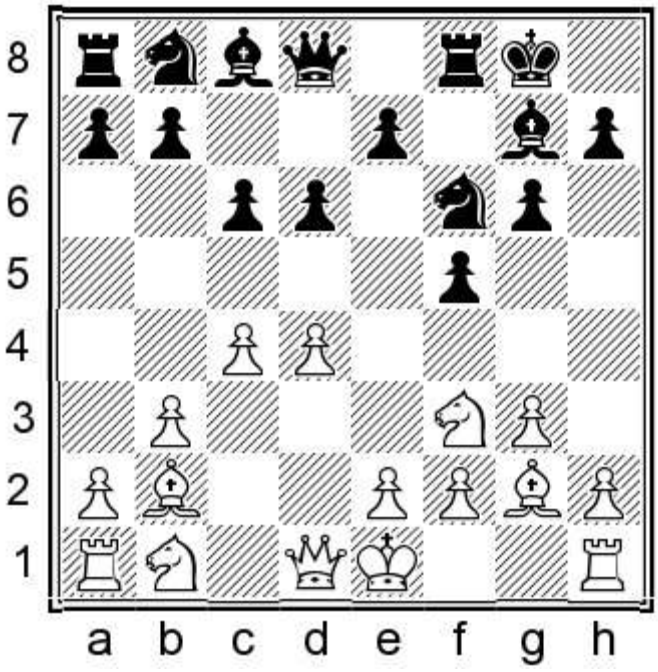
A) 7.d5?! This is a typical move when Black threatens ...e5, but here it's too soon. 7...c6!



Position after: 7...c6!

Immediately challenging White's pawn. 8.dxc6 [8.c4?! Dreaming of keeping the pawn here is just another mistake: 8...cxd5 9.cxd5 ♕a5+ 10.♘c3?! ♘e4∓.] 8...bxc6 9.0-0 e5 10.c4 ♘a6 11.♘c3 ♕c7∓

B) 7.c4 c6



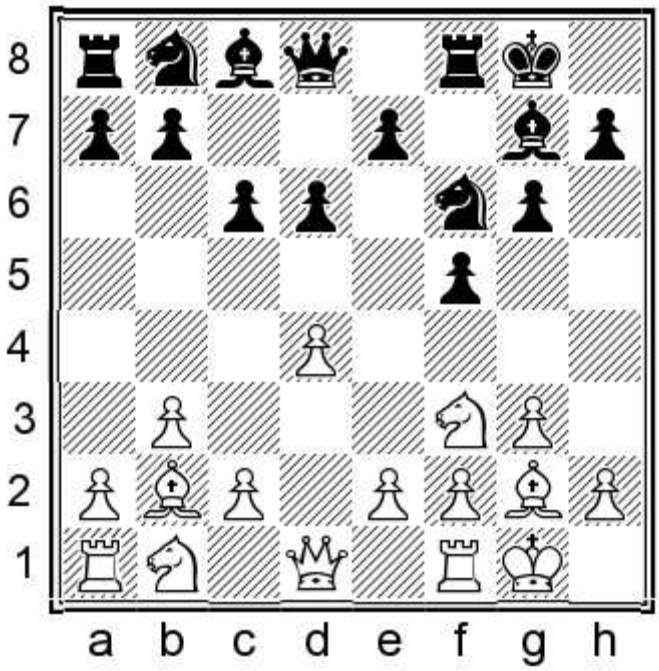
Position after: 7...c6

8.♘bd2 [8.0-0 White has transposed into the main line in most cases. We will discuss the position after 8.♘c3 ♘a6 9.0-0 later.] 8...♘a6 9.0-0 It makes little sense for White to postpone this move, so it

will probably transpose (unless he comes up with any crazy ideas!).

C) 7.♘bd2 c6 8.0-0 − see 7.0-0.

7...c6!?



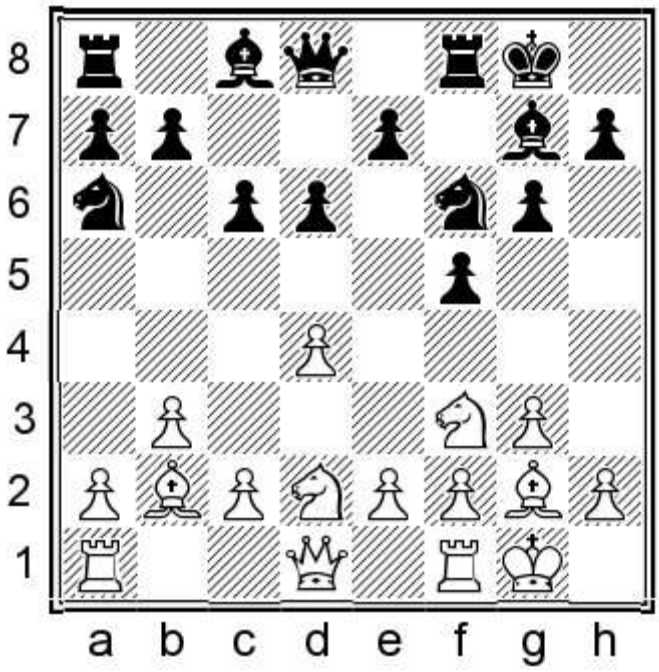
Position after: 7...c6!?

I believe this is the most fighting move; it's no coincidence that it has been played in most of the recent games by top players. Black once again prepares ...e5, but will do so slowly. Now White has two main ways to continue, 8.c4 and 8.♘bd2. I won't choose the same set-up for both as it allows different possibilities for White, but first let's have a look at what may seem the more timid move.

8.♘bd2 a5!

The knight can no longer come to c3, so I prefer to have the chance of playing ...a4 at some point (as well as preventing White from advancing too much on the queeside). This has been Black's decision in most recent games.

8...♘a6 In contrast to the next subchapter with 8.c4, this move is not my preference. The reason is mainly because White is able to fight for e2−e4 very quickly.

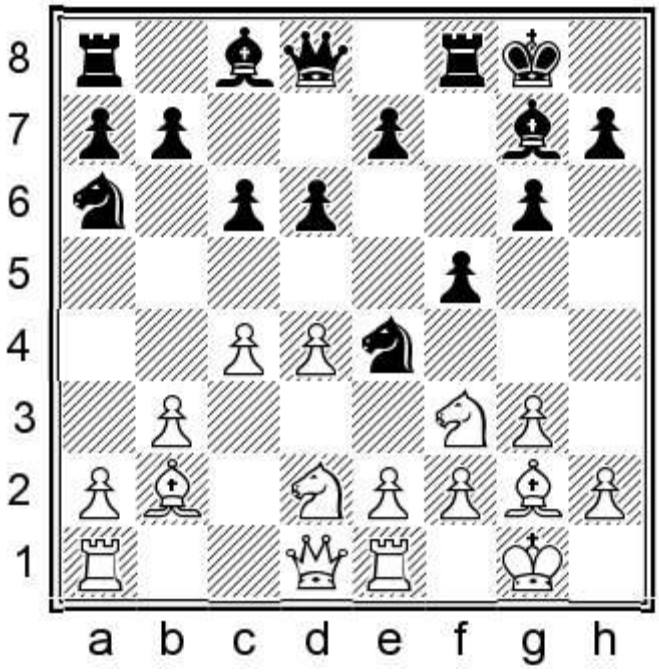


Position after: 8...♘a6

A) 9.c4 − see the main line in the next subchapter.

B) 9.♘e1!? This is another interesting approach, trying to play e4 at the earliest opportunity. 9...e5 If Black waits with this move, it will be even worse as White will be able to push e4. 10.dxe5 ♘d7 11.♘c4 dxe5 12.♕d6± White manages to keep the initiative thanks to his control of the d-file.

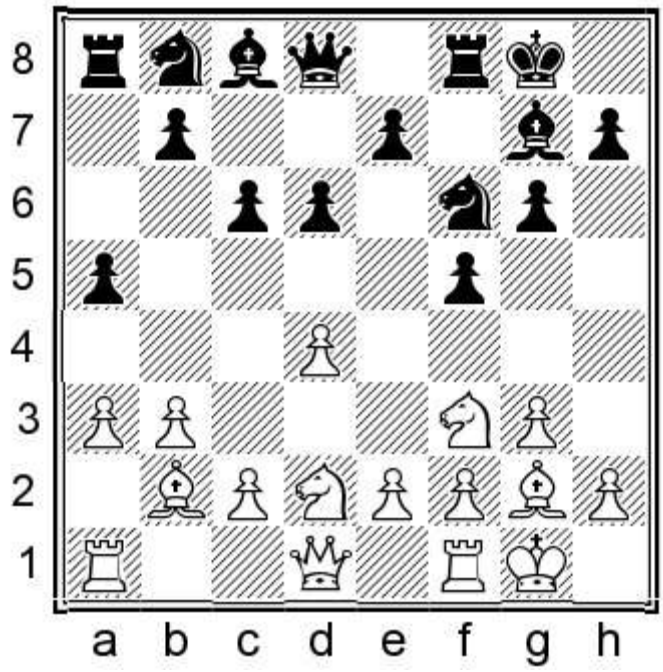
C) 9.♖e1! ♘e4 10.c4!?



Position after: 10.c4!?

White is in no hurry. He can wait for his opponent to make a decision. 10...♕c7 A logical attempt to control the e5-square once more. [10...e5?! clearly fails here: 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.♘xe4 fxe4 13.♕xd8 ♖xd8 14.♘g5±.] 11.♘xe4! fxe4 12.♘g5 [12.♘d2 d5 13.cxd5 cxd5] 12...d5 13.♖c1 Taking advantage of 10...♕c7. 13...♕b6 14.♕d2±

9.a3



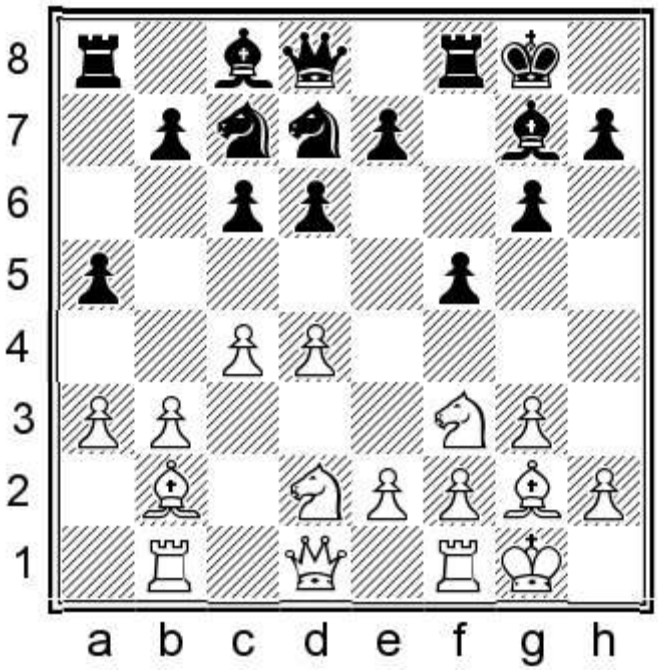
Position after: 9.a3

White anticipates ...a4, ready to respond with b4.

9...♘a6 10.♖e1

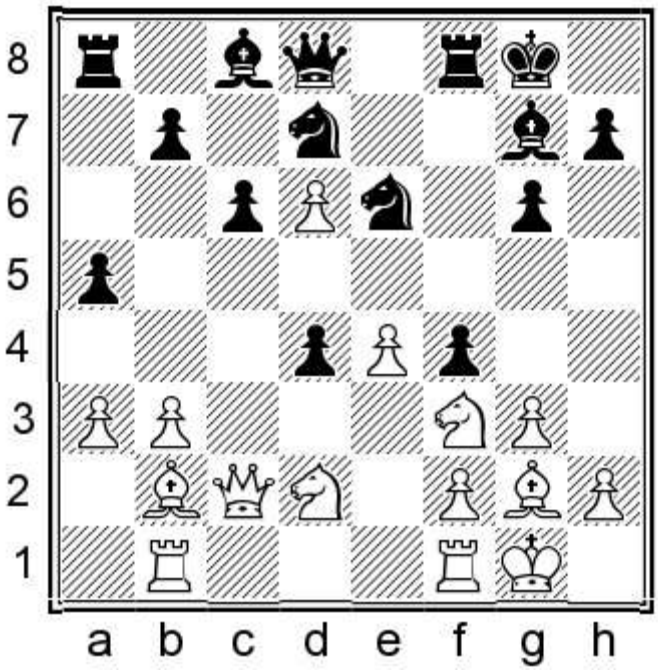
Preparing for e4 is still the most logical continuation.

A) 10.♖b1 Protecting the bishop is always an option. My suggestion is to regroup our pieces: 10...♘c7 11.c4 ♘d7



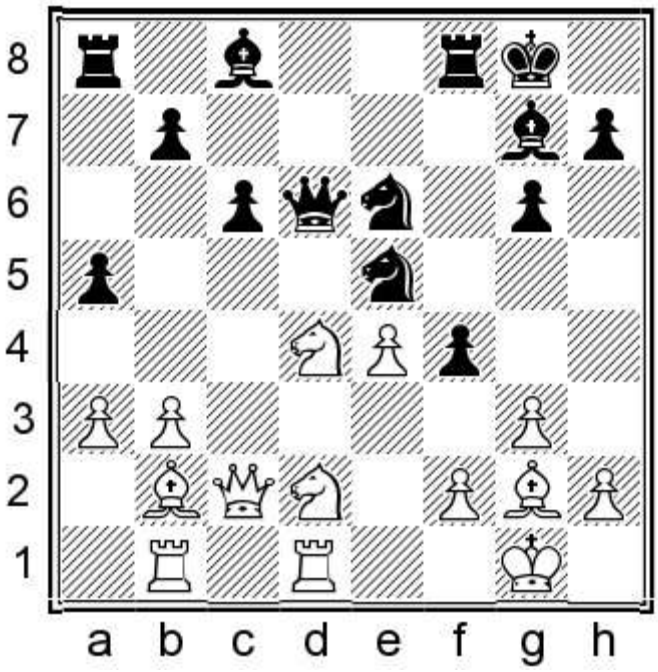
Position after: 11...♘d7

Black is aiming to play ...e5, so White goes first. 12.e4 f4! This is often a logical continuation when the f4-square is not well controlled by White. It keeps the position closed and creates an initiative on the kingside. The game might continue with 13.♕c2 e5 14.c5!? exd4 15.cxd6 ♘e6



Position after: 15...♘e6

16.♘xd4! ♘e5! This closes the long diagonal, and Black is ready to regain his pawn with a complicated position. [16...♘xd4? 17.♗xd4 ♗xd4 18.♕c4++–] 17.♖fd1 ♕xd6⇄

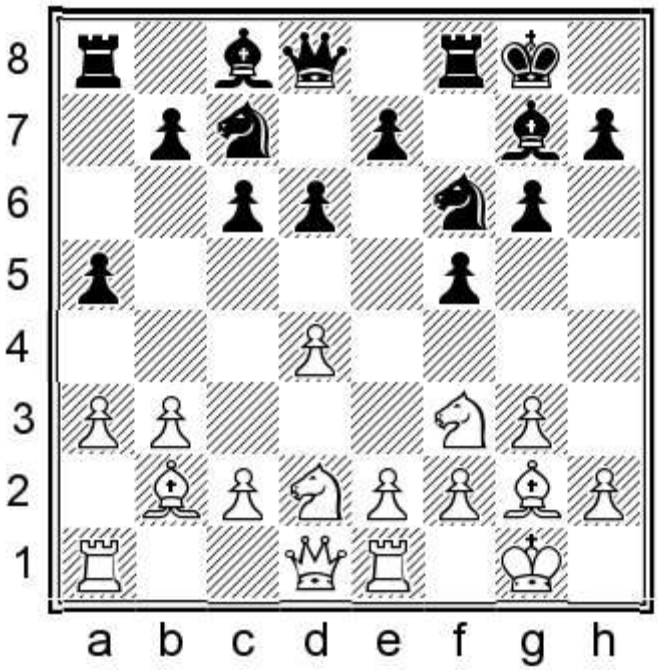


Position after: 17...♕xd6⇄

Objectively White might be slightly better, but our prospects on the kingside seem promising and easy to follow.

B) 10.c4 This is played in most cases, but see 10.a3 in the main line.

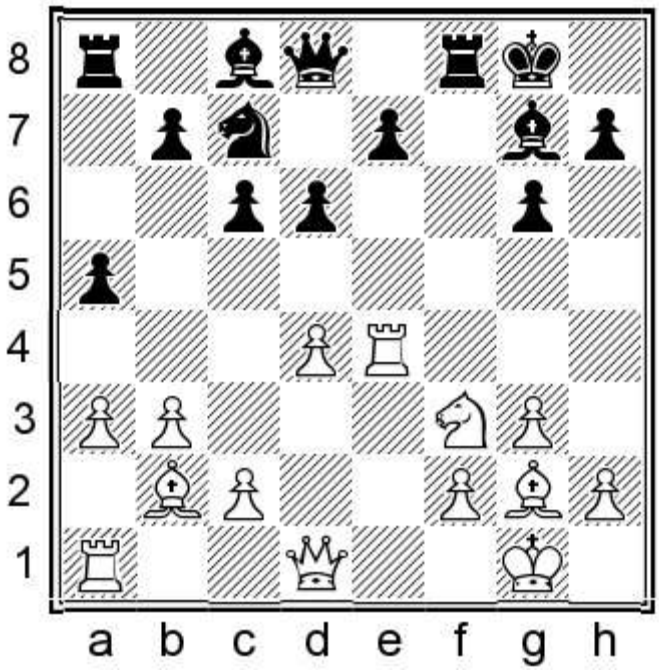
10...♘c7!?



Position after: 10...♘c7!?

11.c4!?

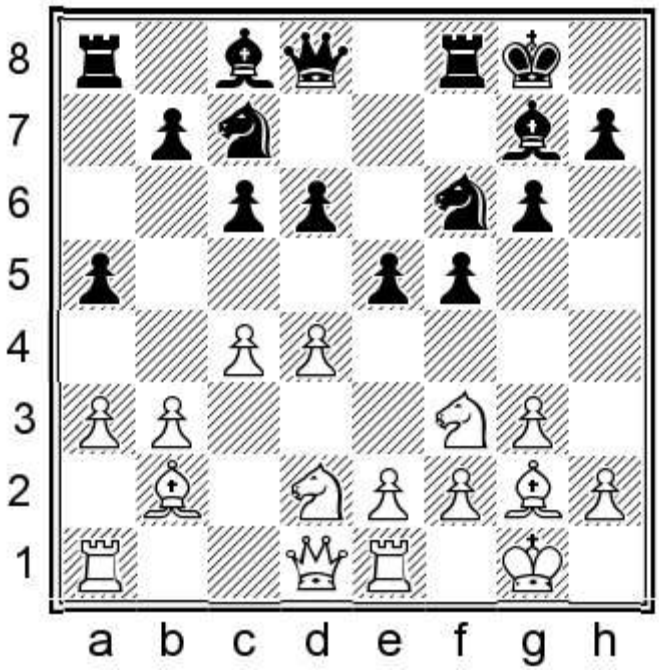
11.e4 This looks the most logical continuation, but it's actually not that great. 11...♘xe4 12.♘xe4 fxe4 13.♖xe4



Position after: 13.♖xe4

White has achieved one of his classical aims against the Leningrad Dutch, but it's not particularly great here as his other pieces at not very powerful. Black has at least two good ways to continue. 13...a4!? [13...♗f5 14.♖e1 ♕d7= is probably enough for equality, but I prefer the other continuation.] 14.b4 b5= This is another approach, trying to get more out of the light squares on the queenside.

11...e5!N



Position after: 11...e5!N

We have already seen this idea: Black has waited until c4 was played before playing ...e5, thus he won't have to face an annoying ♘c4 on the next move, attacking the dark squares.

12.dxe5

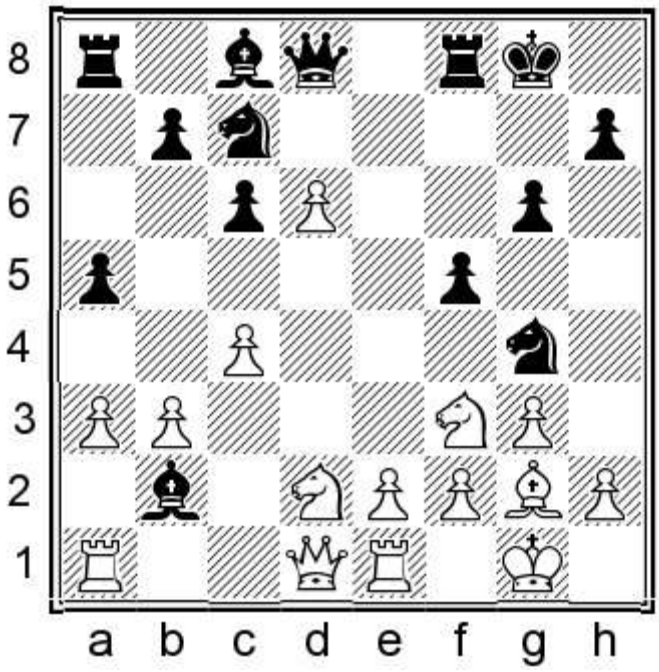
12.e4 ♘xe4 13.dxe5 d5! It seems important to keep a strong knight on e4. 14.cxd5 cxd5 15.♖c1 ♘e6⇄

12...♘g4 13.exd6

White temporarily wins a pawn, but I am not sure it will last very long.

13.♕c2 ♘xe5 14.♖ad1 ♕e7= Black can be satisfied with the way he has opened the position.

13...♗xb2

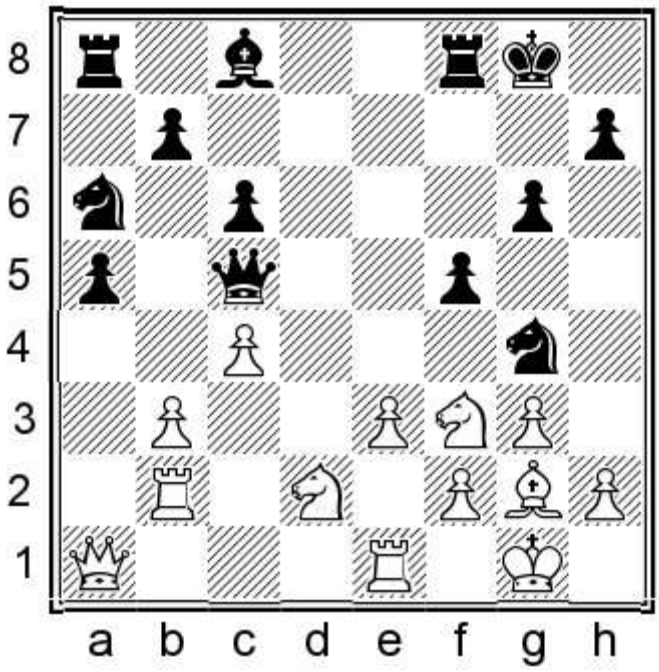


Position after: 13...♗xb2

14.♖a2!

An important intermediate move. White wants to get rid of the bishop while it's impossible to take on a3, so Black gives up his bishop in order to keep the material balance. 14.dxc7?! ♕e7 15.♖b1 ♗xa3=

14...♕xd6 15.♖xb2 ♕xa3 16.♕a1! ♕c5 17.e3 ♘a6⇄

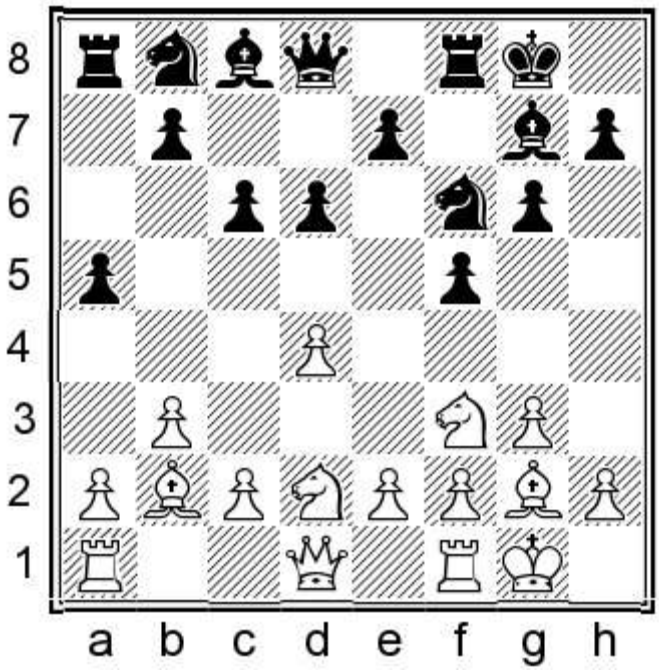


Position after: 17...♘a6⇄

The computer seems to prefer White, but to human eyes this looks fully playable for Black, who has good knights and a potentially dangerous queenside majority.

f) 8.♘bd2 a5 9.--

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.b3 0-0 6.♗b2 d6 7.0-0 c6!? 8.♘bd2 a5!



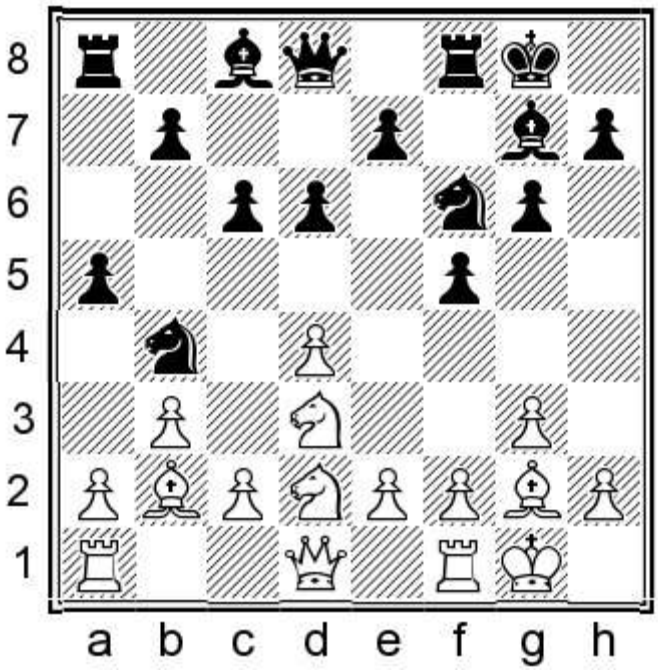
Position after: 8...a5!

9.♖e1!?

Curiously enough, this has only been rarely tried by White, whereas it's the most annoying move after 8...♘a6.

A) 9.♘e1 A few players have tried the same plan as against 8...♘a6, but it seems less effective, and Black has a strong reply.

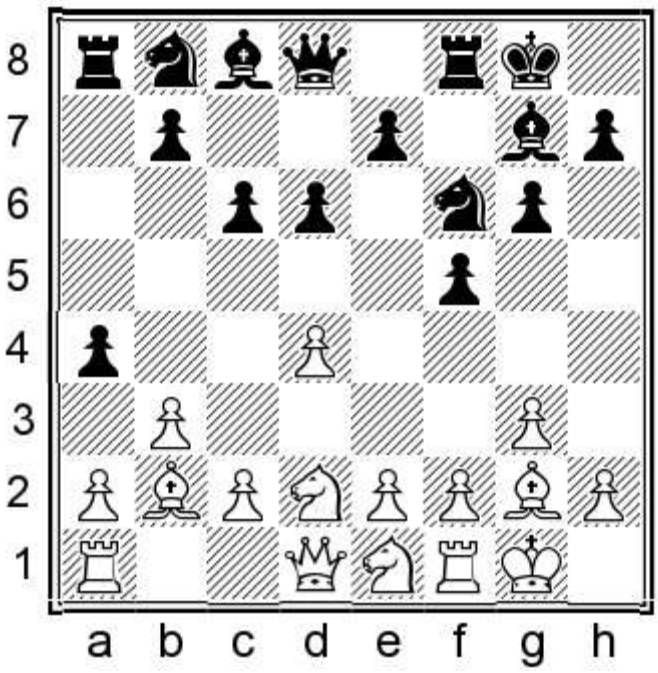
A1) 9...♘a6 This is playable, but less difficult to meet for White than B). 10.♘d3 [10.e4?! fxe4 11.♘xe4 ♘xe4 12.♗xe4 a4 13.c4 ♕b6∓ White's development is not impressive and he has to suffer pressure on the d4-pawn and along the a-file, plus his misplaced bishop on e4 will probably have to retreat soon.] 10...♘b4!?



Position after: 10...♘b4!?

11.♘xb4 axb4 12.a3 bxa3 13.♖xa3 ♖xa3 14.♗xa3 ♕a5 15.♗b2 ♗e6= Of course Black is not in any kind of trouble right now, but it's quite hard to unbalance the game, and he was unable to do so in Kurajica, B (2551) – Wang, H (2726), Istanbul 2012, ½-½ (65).

A2) 9...a4!

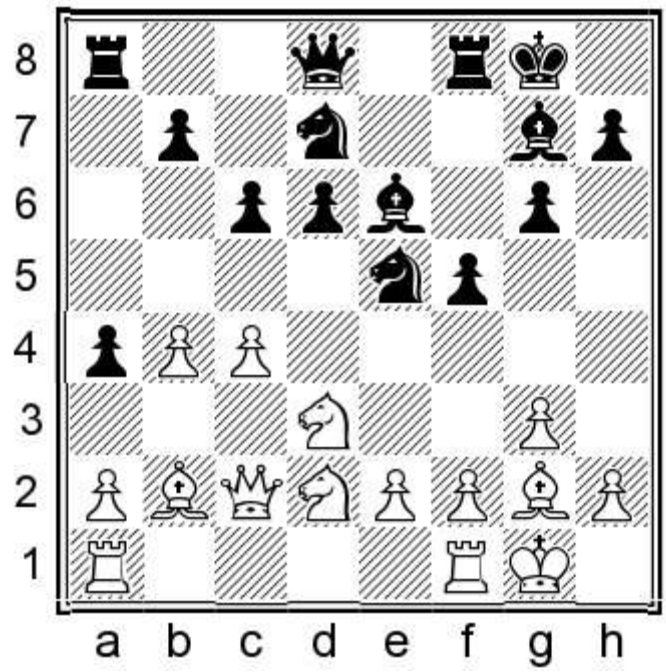


Position after: 9...a4!

A2.1) 10.e4?! is hardly satisfactory for White: 10...a3! 11.♗c1 [11.♗c3?! This makes things even

worse. 11...fxe4 12.♘xe4 ♘d5! The bishop can't retreat to d2 as d4 would be hanging. 13.♕e2 ♘xc3 14.♘xc3 e5!∓ White will miss the dark-squared bishop.] 11...e5!? With the bishop on c1 and knight on e1, it's logical to want to open the center. 12.dxe5 ♘xe4 13.♘xe4 fxe4 14.♗xe4 ♗xe5 15.♖b1 ♕f6∓

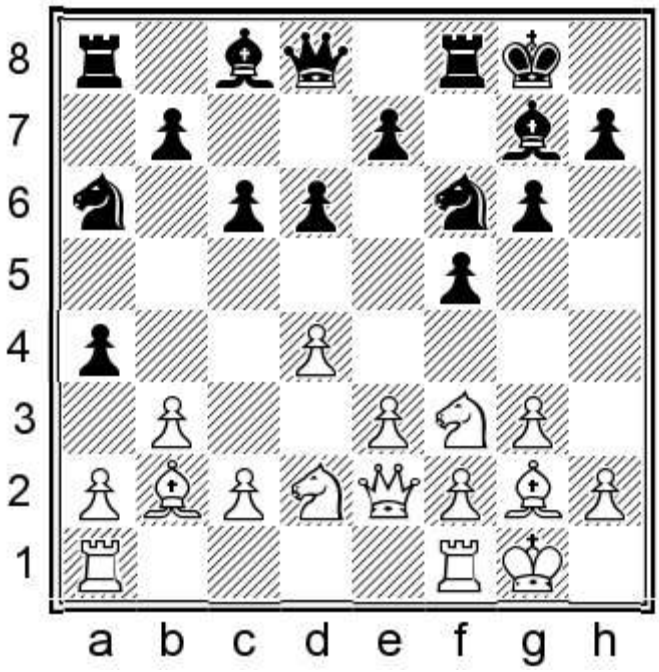
A2.2) 10.c4 e5! 11.dxe5 ♘g4 White is unable to play ♘c4 right now (that's why we had to wait before playing ...e5), so we are doing well. 12.♕c2 [12.♘d3 ♘xe5 13.♕c2 ♘a6 14.♘f3 ♕c7⇄] 12...♘xe5 13.b4 ♗e6 14.♘d3 ♘bd7=



Position after: 14...♘bd7=

Black has managed to free himself in the center, has centralized his pieces, and created some weaknesses in White's queenside. His opening can be qualified as a success (even if it's not enough to be better).

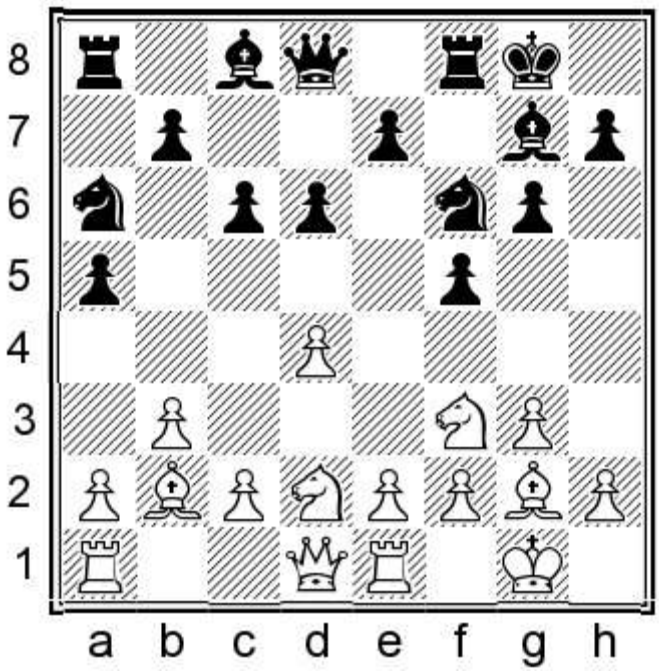
B) 9.e3 This is played from time to time in many variations, but it's not particularly ambitious. 9...♘a6 10.♕e2 Here I would probably deviate from the game Mancini, M (2240) – Pytel, K (2500), Chambery 1994, 0-1 (34), where Black followed a dubious plan starting with 10...h6, by playing 10...a4!?



Position after: 10...a4!?

11.c4 [11.bxa4 ♘c7⇄ Black will take the a4-pawn and get some play on the a-file.] 11...♘c7 12.e4 fxe4 13.♘xe4 ♗f5! 14.♘xf6+ exf6!=

9...♘a6

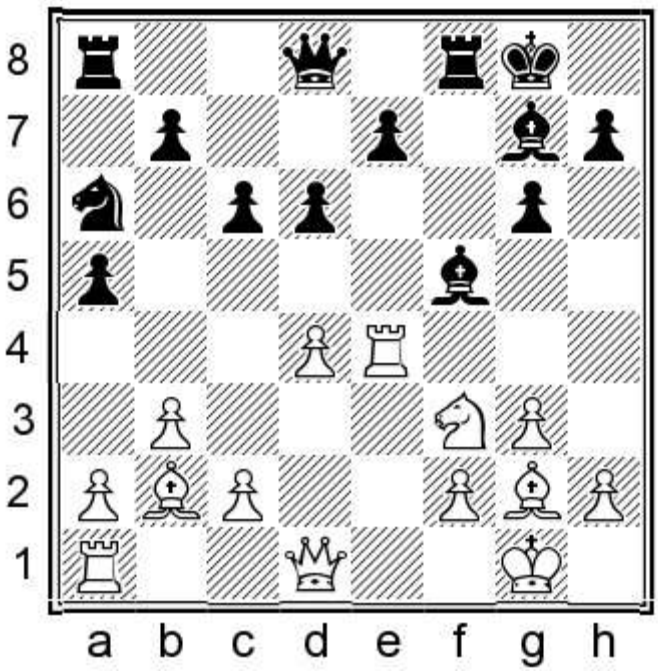


Position after: 9...♘a6

10.e4

This is the logical follow-up to White's last move. 10.a3 − see 9.a3 ♘a6 10.♖e1, which we've already considered.

10...fxe4 11.♘xe4 ♘xe4 12.♖xe4 ♗f5



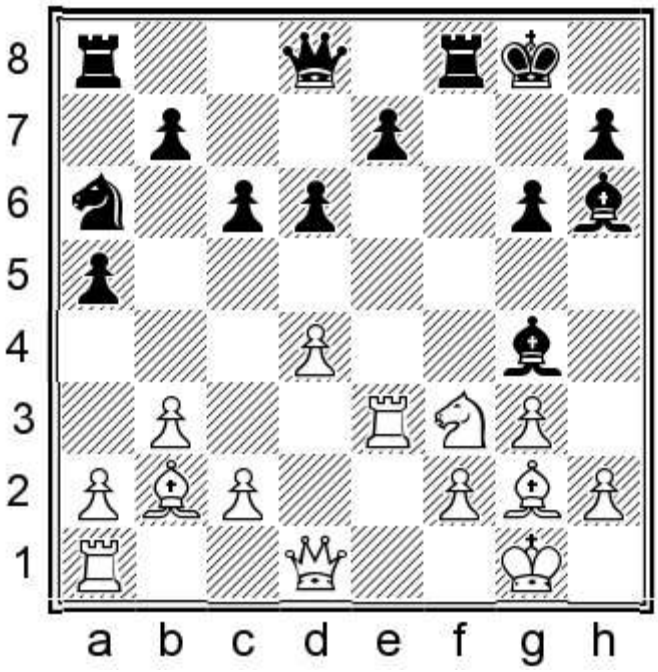
Position after: 12...♗f5

Now White has to decide which square is best for his rook.

13.♖e1

A) 13.♖h4?! This can be interesting, but here the rook doesn't do much. 13...♘c7 14.♕d2 a4↑

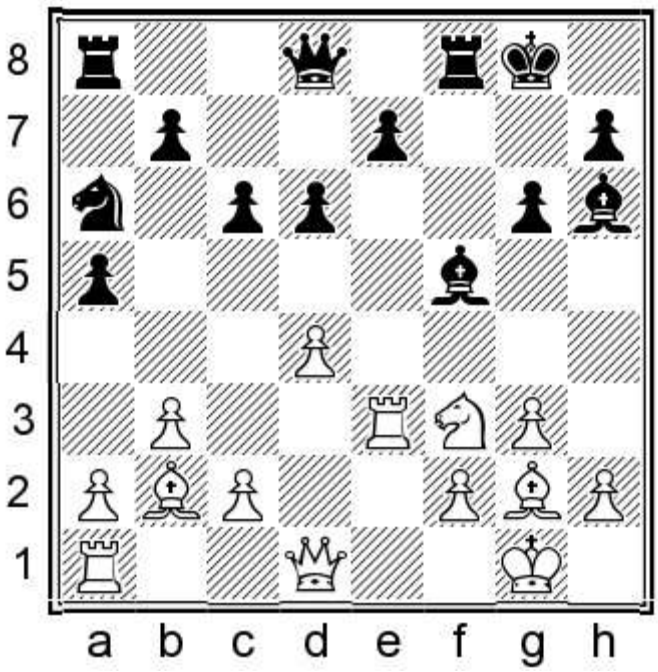
B) 13.♖e2 ♗g4 14.♖e3 ♗h6



Position after: 14...♗h6

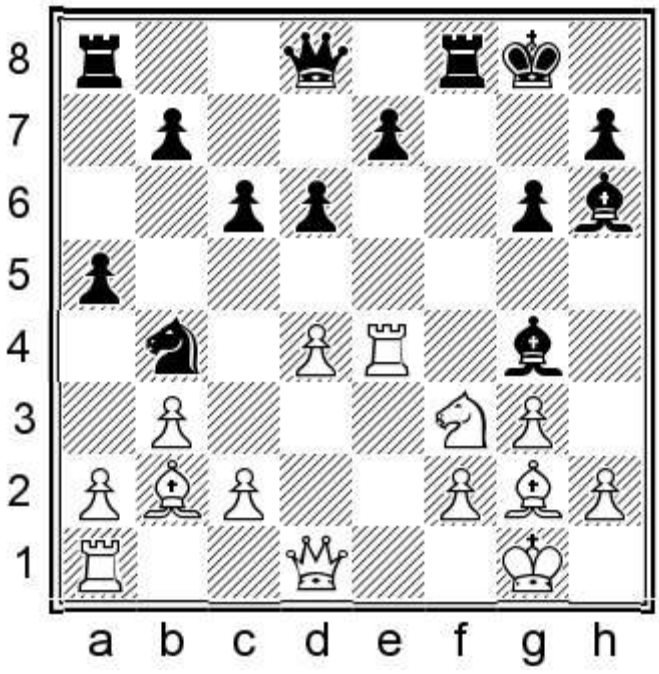
The choice is the same as after 13.♖e3 ♗h6 14.♖e2 ♗g4. 15.♖e4!? ♗f5 16.♖h4 ♗g7= The extra tempo compared to 13.♖h4 is useful, but not enough for a real initiative.

C) 13.♖e3 ♗h6!



Position after: 13...♗h6!

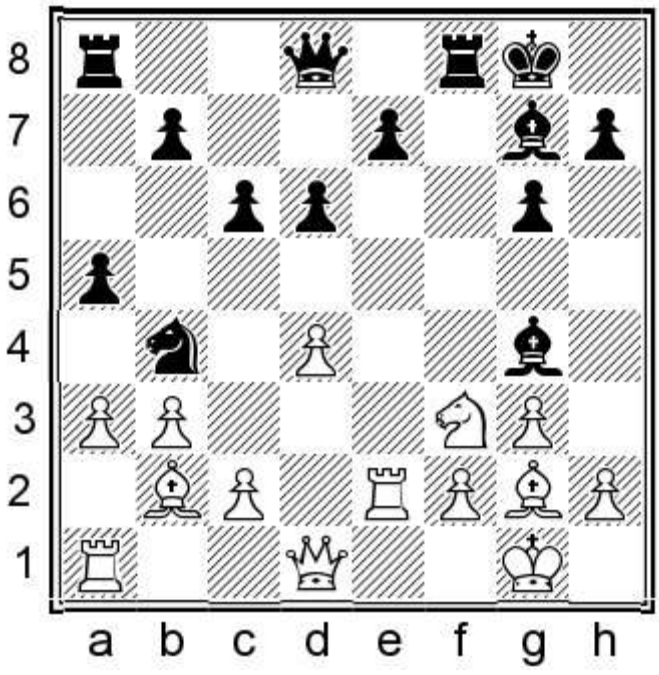
14.♖e1 [14.♖e2 ♗g4 15.♖e1 ♕d7!↑ Preventing h3 and threatening ...♕f5.] 14...♘b4 15.♖e2 ♗g4 16.♖e4 ♗f5 17.♖e2 ♗g4 18.♖e4



Position after: 18.♖e4

Black can already take the draw, but may want to continue the game, so I suggest 18...♗xf3!? 19.♗xf3 ♘xc2⇄, winning a pawn. He will have to face White's initiative in the following moves, but also gets the important d5-square for his knight (assuming that White doesn't take it, and simply moves the rook).

13...♘b4 14.♖e2 ♗g4 15.a3!?



Position after: 15.a3!?

15...♖xf3!

15...♗xf3 16.♗xf3 ♖xf3 17.axb4 ♖f7 18.bxa5 ♖xa5 19.♖xa5 ♕xa5=

16.h3

A) 16.♗xf3? ♗xf3 17.axb4 axb4!–+ Black will keep a safe extra pawn and the better bishop.

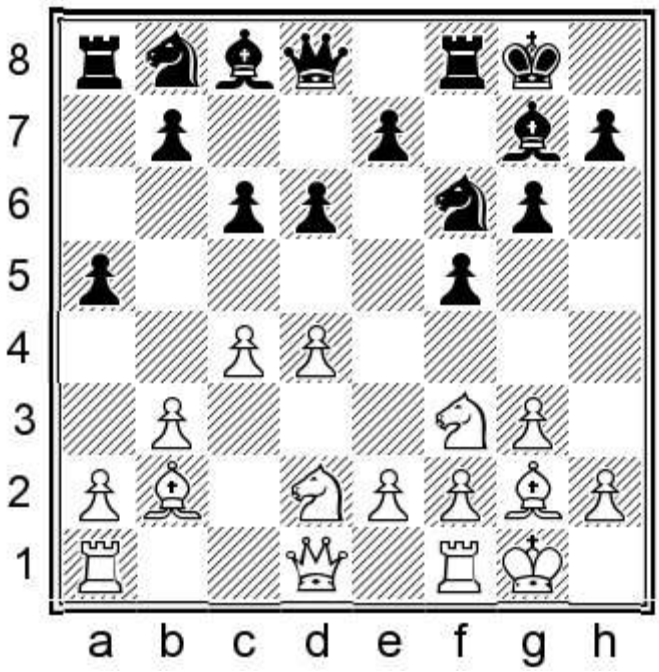
B) 16.axb4 ♖f7 17.f3 ♗xf3 18.♗xf3 ♖xf3 19.♖xa5 ♖b8!∓

16...♖xb3 17.cxb3 ♗xe2 18.♕xe2 ♘a6∞

White's activity (compensation) should be just enough to keep the balance, but he will need to play accurately.

g) 8.♘bd2 a5 9.c4

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.b3 0-0 6.♗b2 d6 7.0-0 c6!? 8.♘bd2 a5! 9.c4



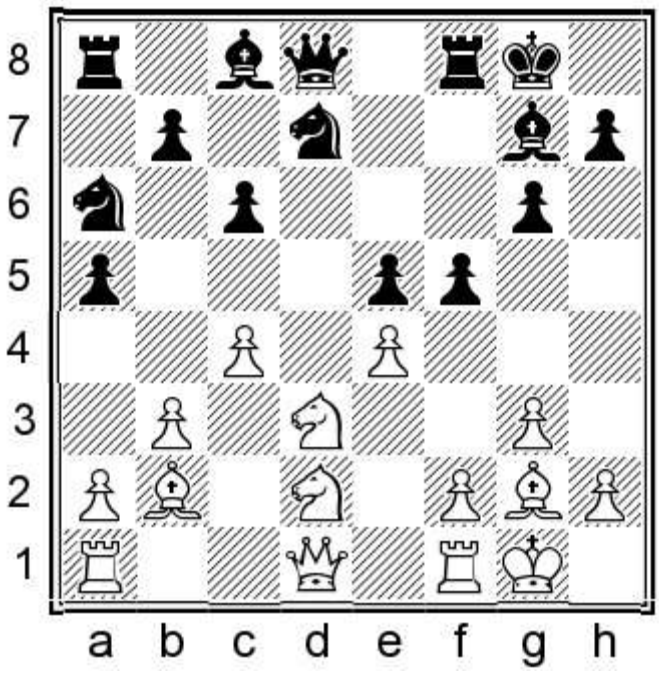
Position after: 9.c4

Probably the most logical move, especially if we consider that White may want the c2-square for his queen. From here, it will allow the opening of the position with e4.

9...♘a6 10.♕c2

This is the most played move, so will logically be our main line. Of course the black knight might come to b4, but it hardly does anything there. It's important to mention that the queen protects the bishop, so the usual tactical way to play ...e5 is not possible here.

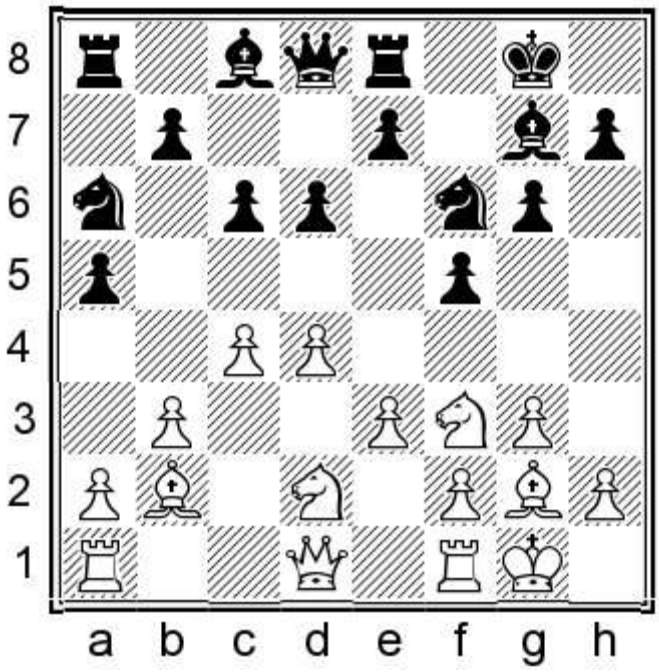
A) 10.♘e1 e5! White is doing things slowly, but was threatening e4. It's logical to be first! 11.dxe5 ♘d7 12.♘d3 dxe5 13.e4



Position after: 13.e4

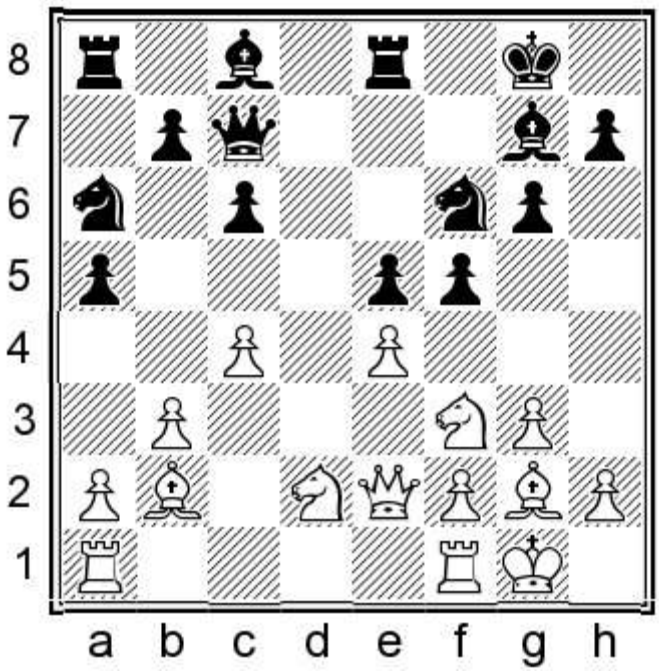
Definitely the most logical move, preventing ...e4, but it also weakens the d3-square. Black should have taken advantage of this by varying from Zhao, J (2583) – Wang, H (2733), Beijing 2012, 1-0 (95), with 13...♘ac5! 14.♘xc5 [14.♕c2 ♘xd3 15.♕xd3 ♘c5 16.♕xd8 ♖xd8 17.♖ad1 a4!↑] 14...♘xc5 15.♗a3 ♕b6 16.♕e2 f4!↑ Black not only has more space, but also the plan of bringing his knight to d4, underlining the weak spots in White's camp.

B) 10.e3?! ♖e8!



Position after: 10...♖e8!

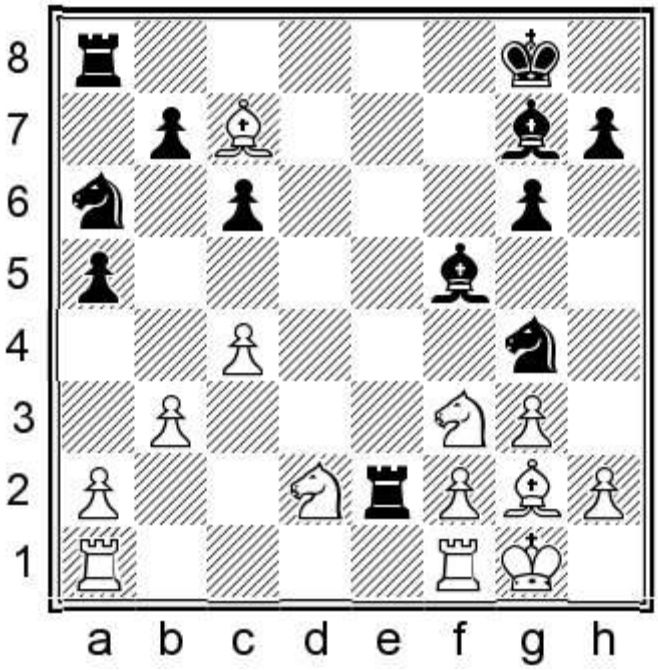
As White is playing slowly, we have time to prepare ...e5, and White can't really prevent it. 11.♕e2 Don't put a queen in front of a rook! [11.a3?! Way too slow. 11...e5! 12.dxe5 ♘g4 13.♕c2 dxe5 14.h3 ♘h6 15.♖ad1 ♕e7∓] 11...♕c7! 12.e4 Black will continue with ...e5 anyway, so he is more than fine: 12...e5! 13.dxe5 dxe5



Position after: 13...dxe5

14.exf5 [14.♖fe1 ♘c5 15.exf5 e4! 16.♘h4 gxf5∓] 14...♗xf5 15.♗xe5 [15.♘h4 ♗g4 16.f3 ♗c8↑ Black is very dynamic. He will soon bring his knight into play via c5 or b4, depending on White's move.]

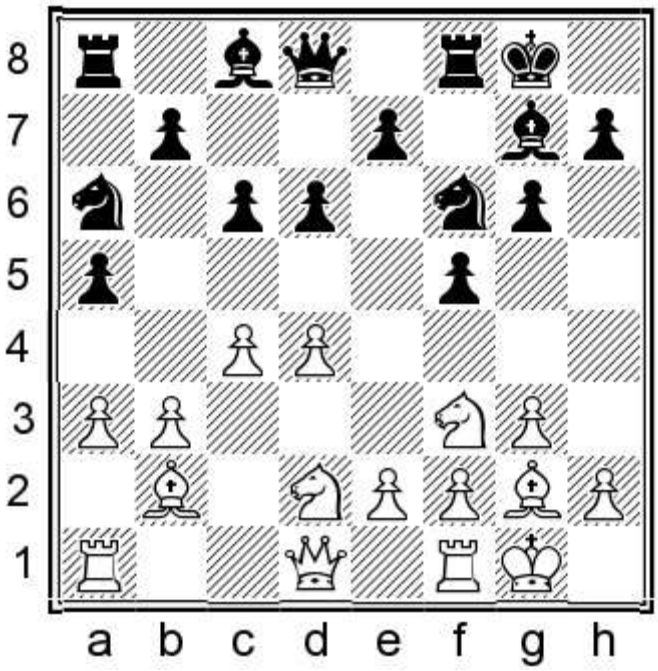
15...♘g4! 16.♗xc7 ♖xe2



Position after: 16...♖xe2

17.♗b6 [17.♗xa5? This is even worse, giving Black an open a-file. 17...♘c5! 18.♗b6 ♘d7 19.♗c7 ♗xa1 20.♖xa1 ♘xf2∓] 17...♗xa1 18.♖xa1 ♘b4∓.

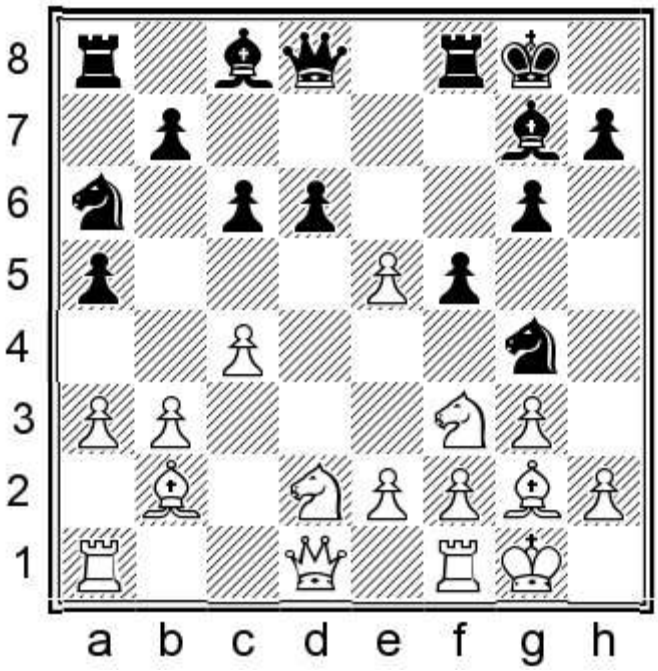
C) 10.a3



Position after: 10.a3

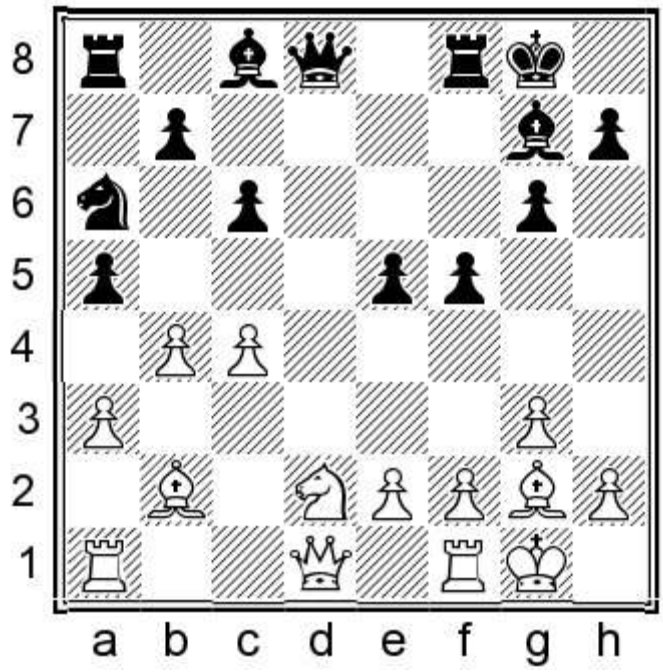
We have already seen that this move can be played with different move orders. The idea is to continue

with ♕c2 without fearing any knight jumps to b4. Black should probably strike back immediately in the center with 10...e5! It is no coincidence that this move has brought Black amazing results. 11.dxe5 ♘g4



Position after: 11...♘g4

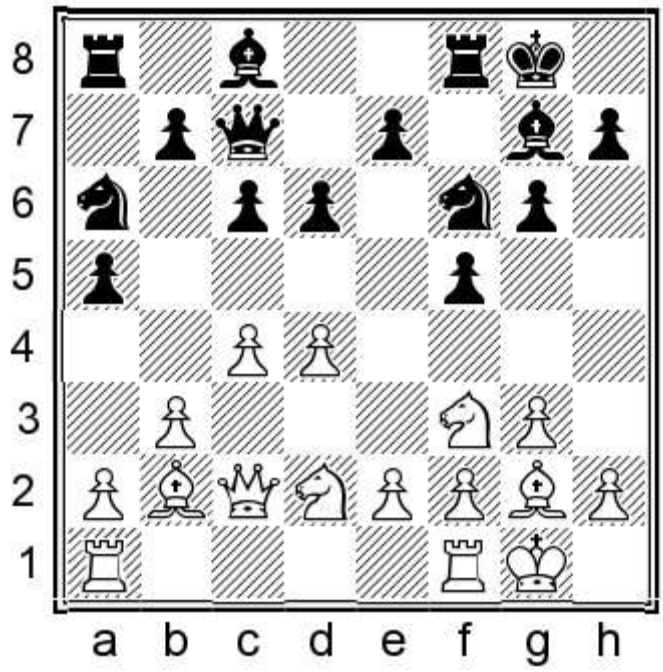
[11...♘d7 is probably equally good; it might encourage White to play h3, which would be both weakening and an unnecessary loss of time.] 12.b4N My computer wants to take advantage of the pin on the a-file. I'm not convinced that it's great, but I usually trust it, so I should mention the idea. [12.♕c2 Played in most games. 12...♘xe5 I don't think Black has any problems. We have considered this kind of position several times in this chapter already, and things seem to be going well. 13.♖ad1 ♕e7 14.e3 ♘c5⇄] 12...♘xe5 13.♘xe5 dxe5



Position after: 13...dxe5

14.b5 The point. 14...♘c7!? [14...♘c5 15.bxc6 e4 16.♗xg7 ♔xg7 17.cxb7 ♗xb7⩲] 15.bxc6 bxc6 16.♗xc6 ♖a6 17.♗a4 ♖d6 18.♗c3 ♗h6 19.e3 ♘e6 20.♕c2 ♗b7⩱ Black definitely has compensation due to White's weak castled position.

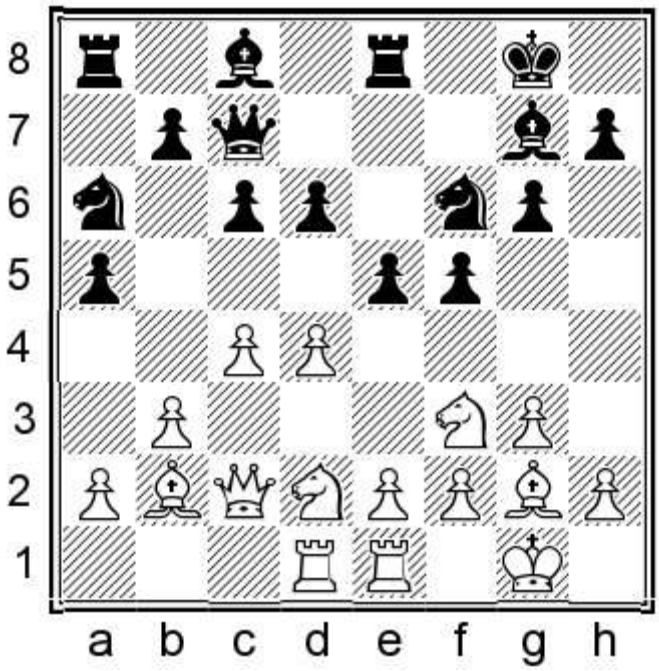
10...♕c7



Position after: 10...♕c7

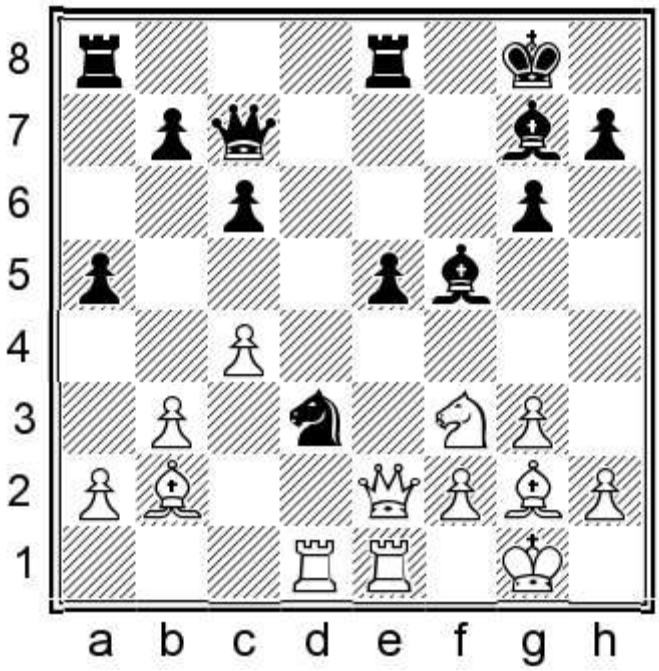
11.a3!

A) 11.♖ad1 White won't gain much by dispensing with a3 as it's needed to stabilize the position in order to play e4. 11...♖e8 12.♖fe1 e5!



Position after: 12...e5!

White is basically doing nothing, so Black takes over the initiative. 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.e4 ♘b4! 15.♕b1 fxe4 16.♘xe4 ♘xe4 17.♕xe4 ♗f5 18.♕e2 ♘d3!∓

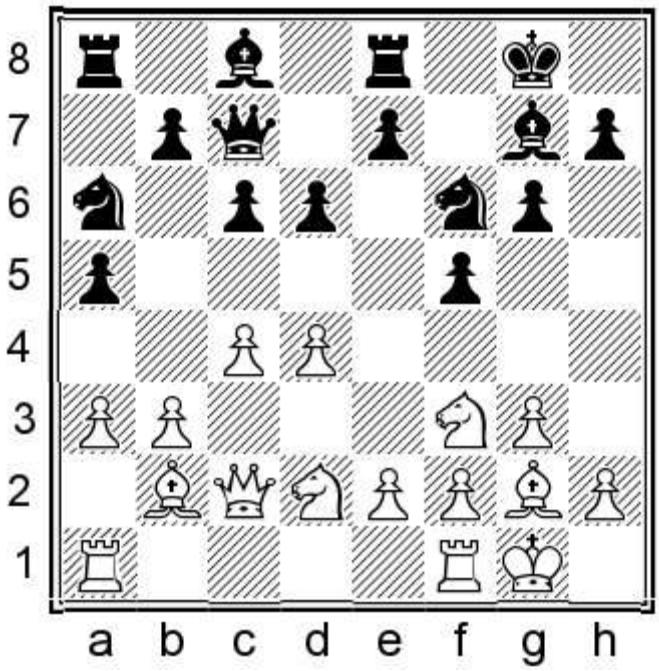


Position after: 18...♘d3!∓

A nice move that appeared in the game Unuk, L (2253) – Cheparinov, I (2709), Skopje 2018, 0-1 (48). Black uses a nice tactical idea to win some material. White collapsed here; he could have played the lesser evil 19.♖xd3 ♗xd3 20.♕xd3 e4 21.♖xe4 ♗xb2!∓. Black should be able to convert his advantage if he manages to keep a safe king.

B) 11.e4?! Of course this move is not great. 11...♘b4 12.♕b1 fxe4 13.♘xe4 ♘xe4 14.♕xe4 ♗f5 15.♕e2 e5!∓ And ...♗d3 is now a threat as ♕e6+ is not a possible escape anymore.

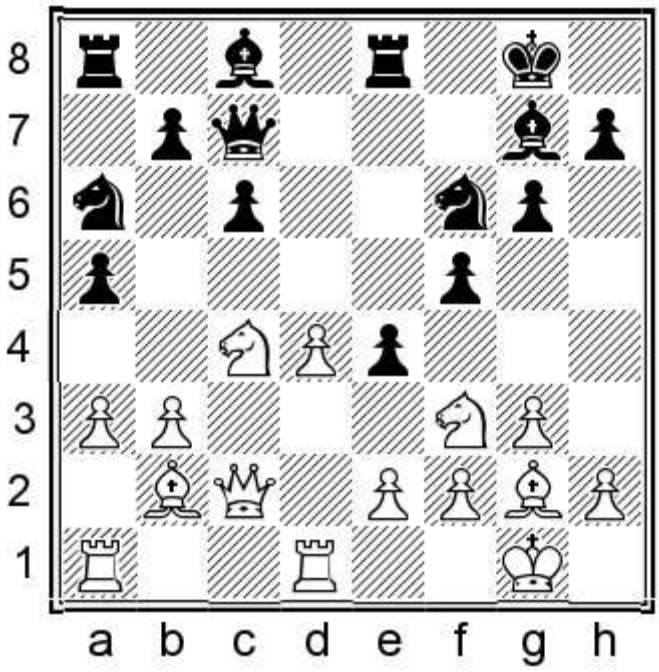
11...♖e8



Position after: 11...♖e8

12.e4

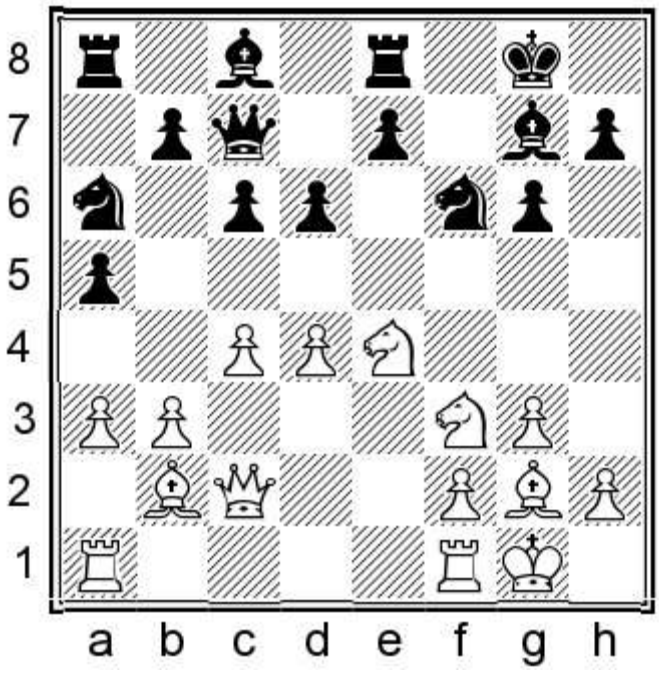
Most White players decide not to wait. 12.♖fd1 e5! 13.c5!? This gives White a few squares to use. [13.dxe5 dxe5 14.e4 ♘c5!↑] 13...e4! 14.cxd6 ♕xd6 15.♘c4 ♕c7



Position after: 15...♕c7

From here the queen still protects the a5-pawn. 16.♘fe5 ♗e6 Black has managed to set up a strong center which White must challenge, in my opinion. 17.f3 [17.♖ac1 ♘b8!? A decent way to bring the knight into play. 18.e3 ♘bd7∓] 17...exf3 18.exf3 [18.♗xf3 ♗d5!∓] 18...f4!?↑ This buries White's bishop on g2, and frees the f5-square for our own bishop. I like Black's play here.

12...fxe4 13.♘xe4

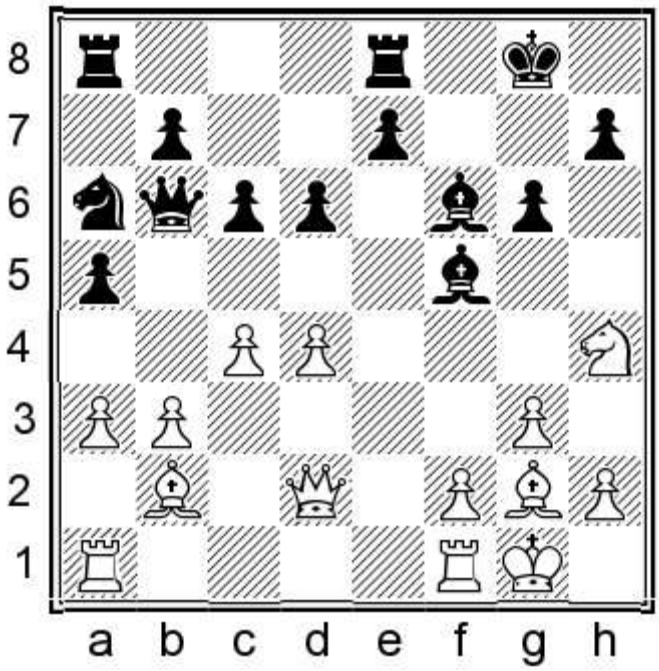


Position after: 13.♘xe4

Now we have a choice between two interesting continuations.

13...♘xe4!

13...♗f5!? After thorough analysis, this seems less strong because of 14.♘xf6+! [14.♘h4?! ♗xe4 15.♗xe4 ♘xe4 16.♕xe4 e5!↑] 14...♗xf6 15.♕d2 ♕b6 16.♘h4!



Position after: 16.♘h4!

White gets the better position with this strong move. 16...♕xb3?! [16...♗xh4 17.gxh4 e6 18.h5→ Of course, with the dark-squared bishop off the board, it may soon become very dangerous to handle this position.] 17.♘xf5 gxf5 18.♖ac1 ♕b6 19.♗c3 ♘c7 20.♖fe1±

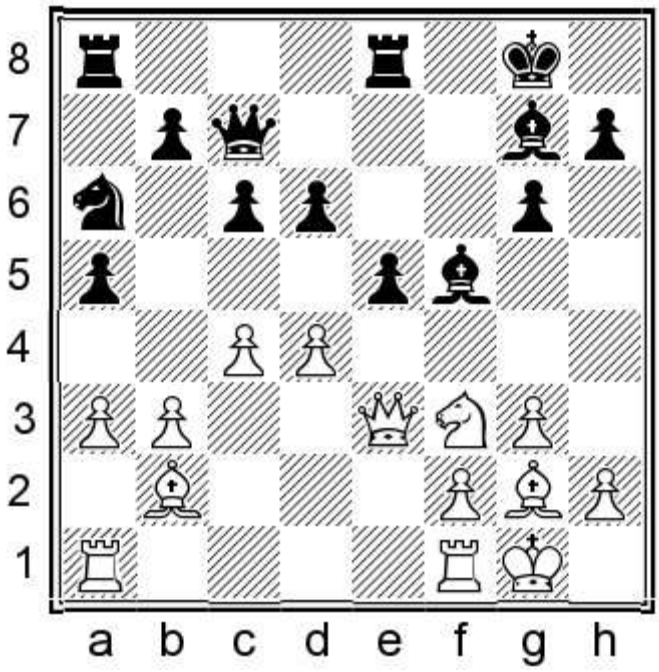
14.♕xe4 ♗f5

14...e5!? 15.dxe5 dxe5 16.♕e3 ♗f5 Finally transposing to the same position.

15.♕e3

15.♕e2 ♕b6! White shouldn't have left the b3-pawn without protection. 16.♕d1 e5↑

15...e5!

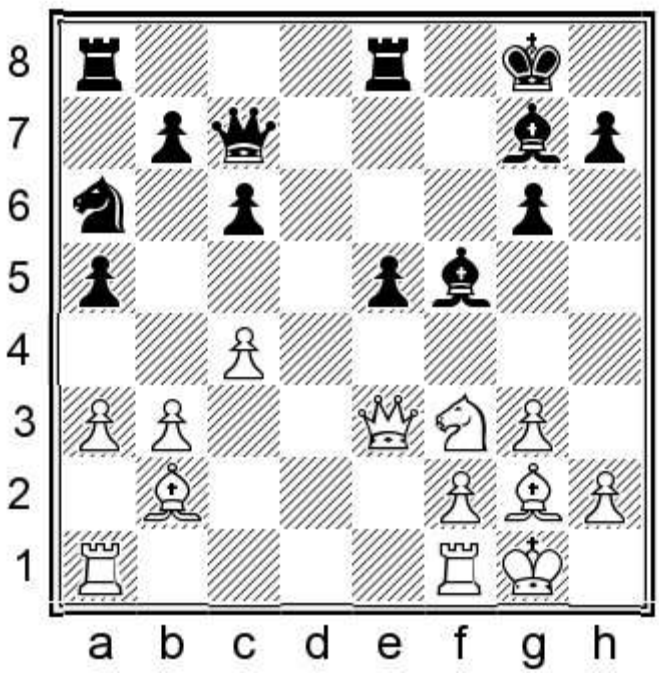


Position after: 15...e5!

16.dxe5

16.♖fe1N It's easy to criticize allowing the pawn to advance further, keeping a healthy pawn structure. 16...e4! 17.♘h4 ♕f7! 18.♘xf5 gxf5 19.f3 ♘c5↑

16...dxe5

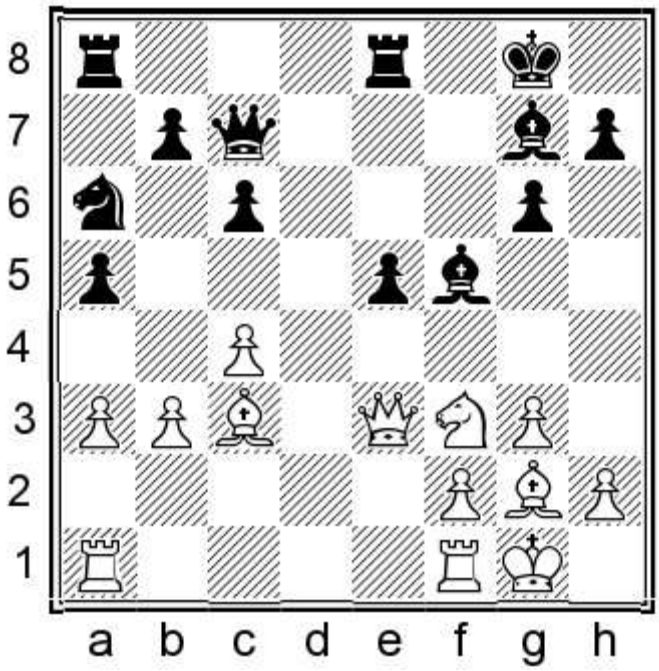


Position after: 16...dxe5

After a few logical moves, a critical position has arisen. Black has an isolated e-pawn, but it's too soon to say whether it will be a strength or a weakness. The next few moves should tell.

17.♘g5

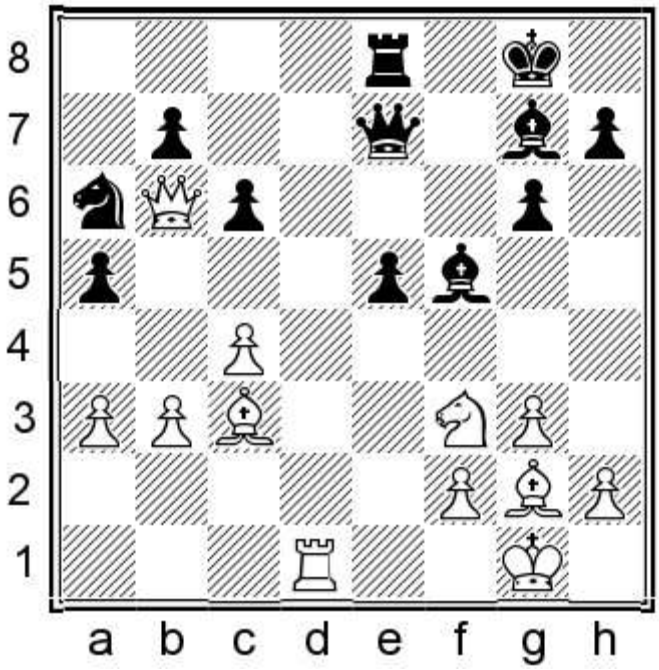
17.♗c3



Position after: 17.♗c3

This move occurred in quite an old game.

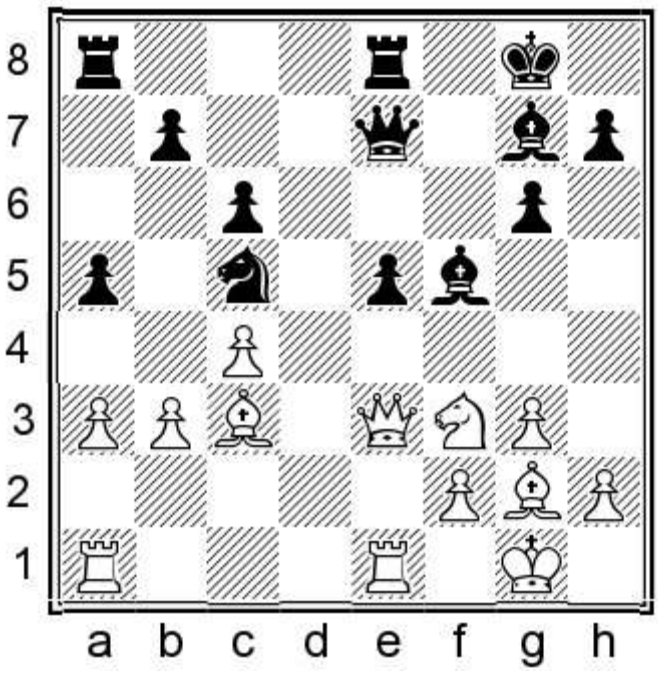
A) 17...♖ad8 18.♖ad1 ♖xd1 19.♖xd1 ♕e7 20.♕b6±



Position after: 20.♕b6±

Black has problems protecting his queenside, which is why I think the rook should remain on a8. 20...a4? 21.b4 e4 22.♗xg7 exf3 23.♗c3 fxg2 24.♕d4!+– and Black was unable to escape in Ikonnikov, V (2485) – Timmerman, G (2325), Huy 1993, 1-0 (33).

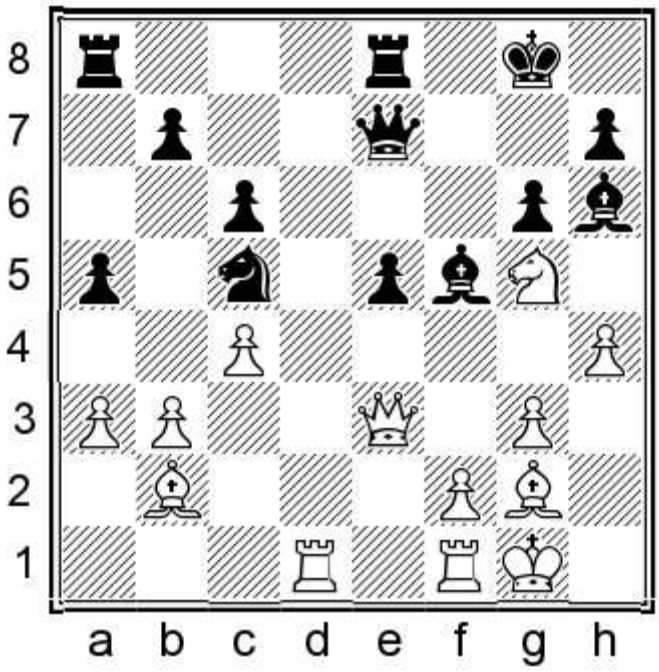
B) 17...♕e7!N The idea of this move is to allow ...♘c5. 18.♖fe1 ♘c5



Position after: 18...♘c5

19.♘xe5 [19.♘h4 ♗e6 20.♖ab1 ♕f8!⇄] 19...♘xb3 20.♖a2 ♕c5!↑

17...♗h6! 18.h4 ♕e7 19.♖ad1 ♘c5⇄



Position after: 19...♘c5⇄

The game is more or less balanced as Black has enough play to compensate for his isolated e-pawn.

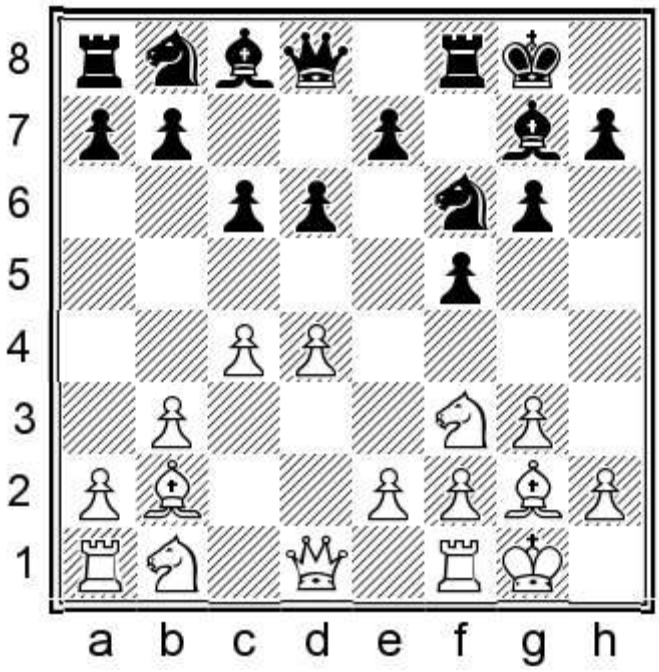
In a high-level game that reached this position, White didn't manage to find a safe path and soon found himself in trouble.

20.♖d2?! ♘e6! 21.f4 exf4 22.gxf4 ♘xg5 23.♕xe7 ♘f3+ 24.♖xf3 ♖xe7∓

Black clearly has the better endgame thanks to his pawn structure. He managed to convert it in Georgiev, K (2596) – Cheparinov, I (2693), Kozloduy 2018, 0-1 (55).

h) 8.c4 ♘a6 9.--, 9.♘bd2 e5! 10.dxe5 ♘d7 11.--, 11.♗a3

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.b3 0-0 6.♗b2 d6 7.0-0 c6!? 8.c4



Position after: 8.c4

This is played slightly more often than 8.♘bd2 which we considered in the previous subchapters.

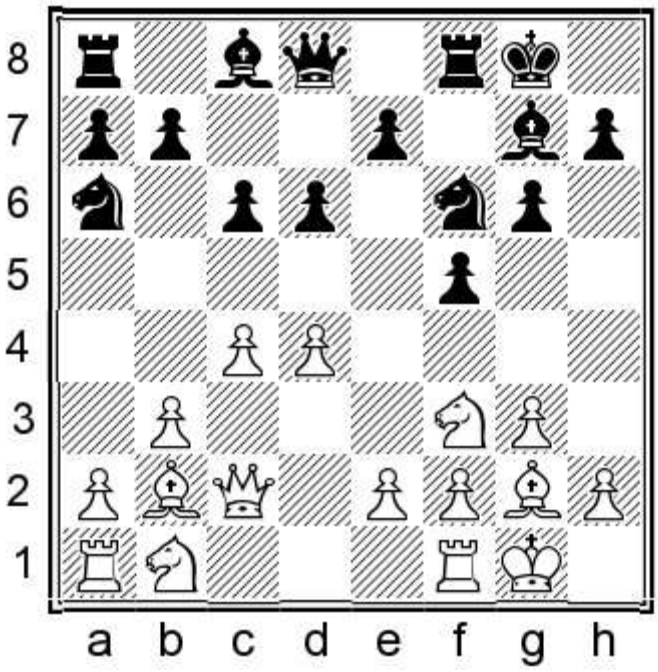
8...♘a6

8...a5 Now this move is more open to criticism. Indeed White is able to follow with 9.♘c3 and the idea of playing ...a4 is out of the question. I'll cut the analysis here.

9.♘bd2

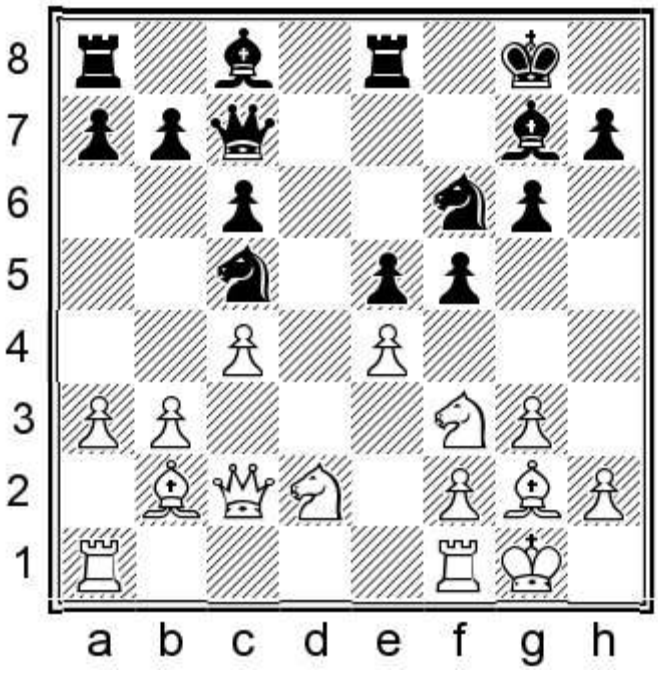
Placing the knight on d2 is generally the main option in the double fianchetto systems. It's no surprise that it's the most played move here, but Black has all the ingredients to free himself: the bishop on b2 is not protected and the knight on d2 is unable to reach c4 as the square is already occupied.

A) 9.♕c2



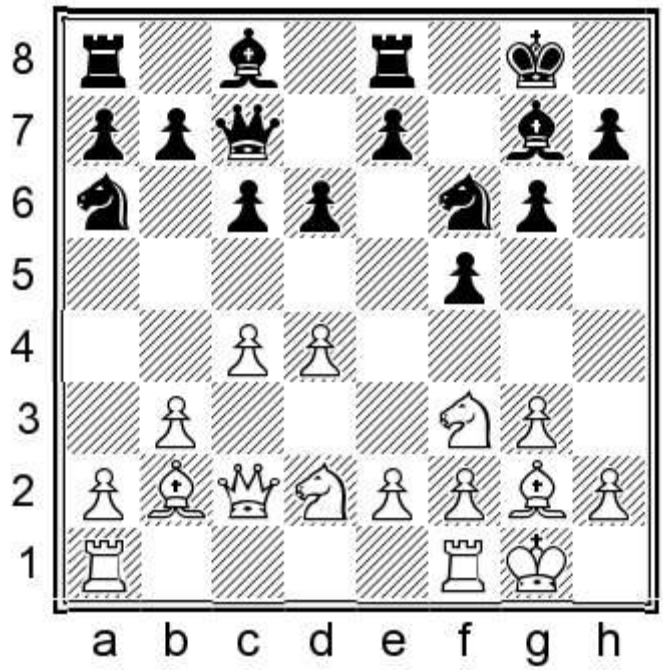
Position after: 9.♕c2

If White wants to prevent what happens after 9.♘bd2 (9...e5!), he should think about defending his bishop. This has actually scored insanely well for White. 9...♕c7! Black can take time to prepare ...e5. 10.♘bd2 [10.a3 ♖e8 11.♘bd2 e5! 12.dxe5 dxe5 13.e4 ♘c5



Position after: 13...♘c5

White is very close to collapsing in the center, but he can keep the balance with a nice jump controlling the f5-square: 14.♘h4! ♘cxe4 15.♘xe4 fxe4 16.♗xe4 ♘xe4 17.♕xe4 ♕f7=] 10...♖e8

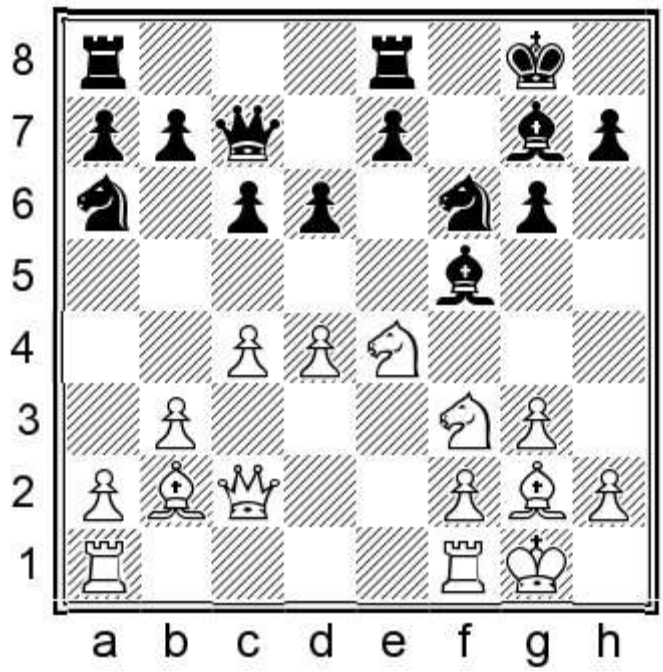


Position after: 10...♖e8

11.e4 [11.a3 e5 12.c5 e4 13.cxd6 ♕xd6 14.♘c4 ♕c7 15.♘fe5 ♗e6∓]

A1) 11...♘xe4 This continuation is less precise. 12.♘xe4 ♘b4 13.♕d2 [13.♕e2?! This is what Black was waiting for. 13...fxe4 14.♕xe4 e5 15.dxe5 ♗f5 16.♕h4 dxe5 17.♘g5] 13...fxe4 14.♕xb4 exf3 15.♗xf3± White remains very slightly better.

A2) 11...fxe4 12.♘xe4 ♗f5



Position after: 12...♗f5

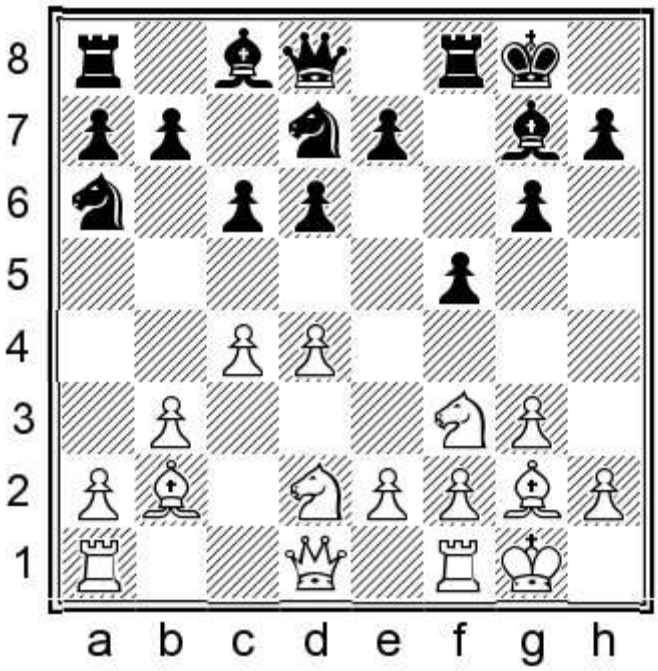
13.♘xf6+ [13.♘h4 ♘xe4 14.♗xe4 ♗xe4 15.♕xe4 e5! 16.dxe5 ♘c5 17.♕e3 ♗xe5 18.♗xe5 ♖xe5= Black's king is a bit weak, but he has activity and the better pieces.] 13...exf6! 14.♕d2 ♗e4= Black will probably trade a few pieces and keep a safe position.

B) 9.♘c3 Many players have preferred this move, but it's actually a transposition to Chapter 10 with 8.b3. I think it's a better choice than the other options that White has here.

9...e5!

Quickest is best! Black forces matters in order to sort out his position.

9...♘d7



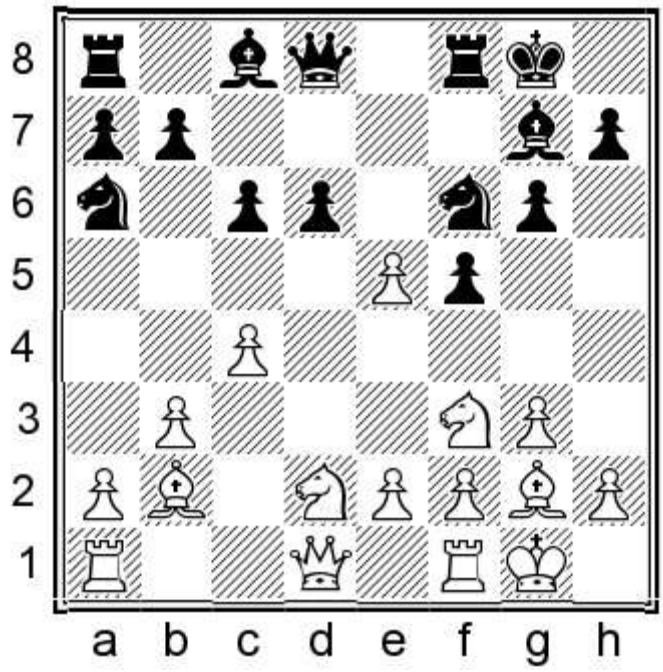
Position after: 9...♘d7

I investigated this interesting move for a while, as it seemed promising to me, but unfortunately the computers come up with a very strong idea:

A) 10.♘e1?! This was played in the game that gave me the idea of playing 9...♘d7, but it's too slow. 10...e5 11.e3 e4! 12.f3 d5 13.cxd5 cxd5∓ Black is definitely better and managed to win in Liu, Y (2474) – Cheparinov, I (2702), China 2018, 0-1 (33).

B) 10.e4! f4 11.♖e1 e5 12.c5! dxc5 13.d5!→ White follows with ♘c4 if he can, and the e5-pawn is in great danger.

10.dxe5



Position after: 10.dxe5

10...♘d7

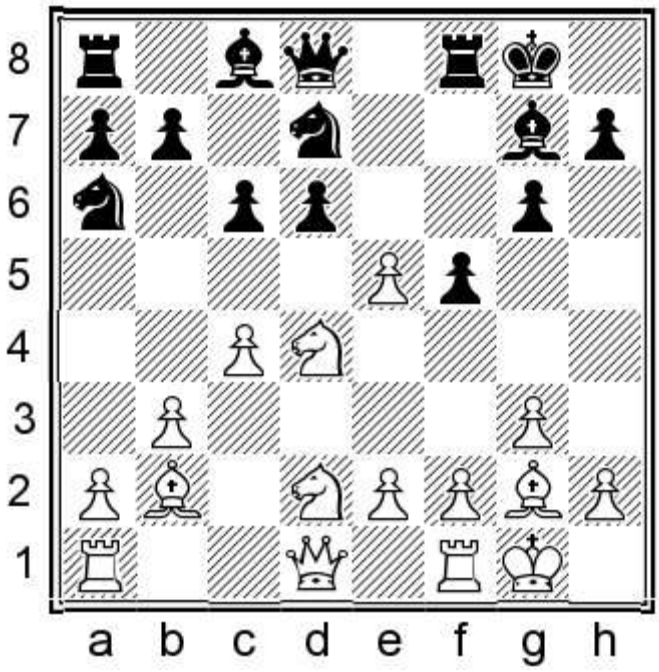
10...♘g4 shouldn't make much difference as Black will take back with the knight anyway. Now White has a range of moves at his disposal.

11.♗a3!?

With this move, White tries to force matters.

A) 11.e4?! f4!N There is no reason to deviate from this move which takes the initiative on the f-file. 12.♕e2 ♘xe5 13.♘xe5 dxe5↑

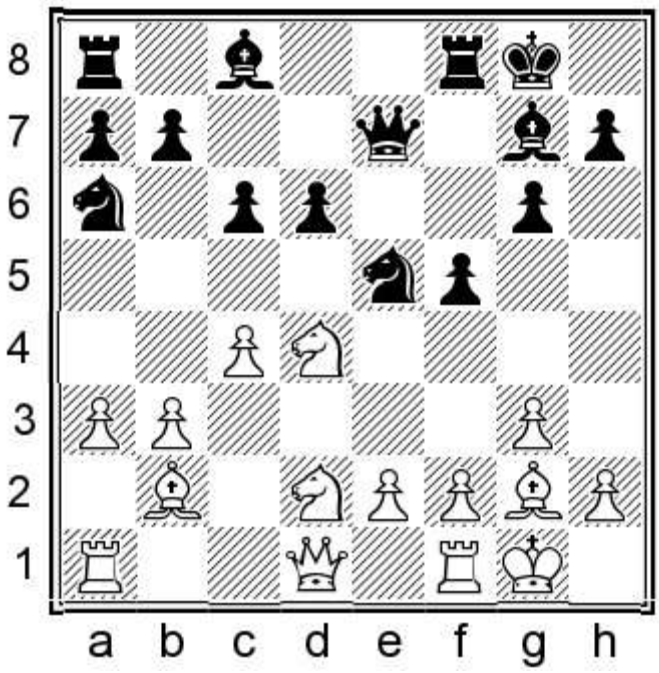
B) 11.♘d4!? At first this move looked slightly dubious. It lets our knight come to e5, while his knight is not doing much on d4 except not being open to trade



Position after: 11.♘d4!?

(and Black wouldn't have wanted to take it anyway). But then I found out that it was Avrukh's recommendation, which slightly changed my point of view.

Avrukh writes about the position: "This is the way to force Black to recapture on e5 with the knight rather than the pawn". I believe that Black is fine, but we need to improve on Avrukh's variation. 11...♘xe5 12.a3! I hadn't considered this move in my initial work, which is probably why I thought this line was harmless. White's plan is to follow with b3−b4 and put the queen on b3, which is more active. [12.♕c2?! This was my original analysis, but Black easily finds counterplay, and White's queen isn't doing anything great here. 12...f4 13.♖ad1 ♕e7 14.a3 ♗g4↑] 12...♕e7N



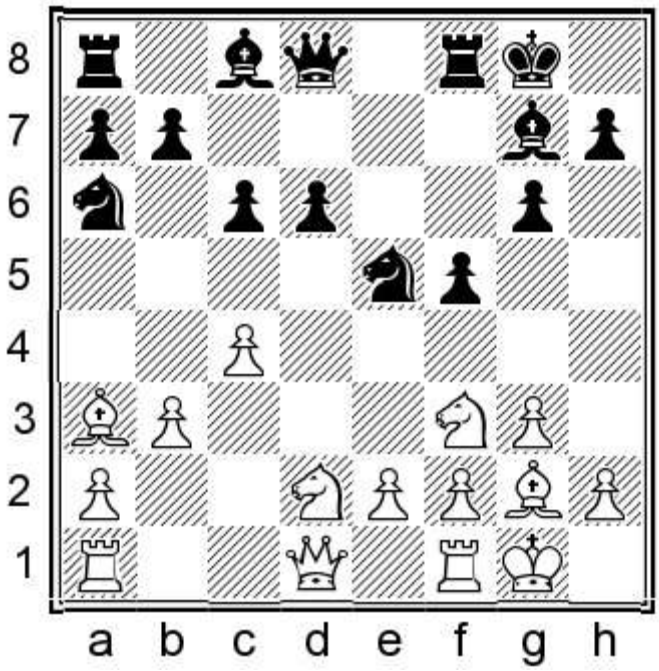
Position after: 12...♕e7N

Avrukh focused only on 12...♘c7, but it seems too passive. Black should be ready to counterattack. 13.b4 c5! This is the reason why we had to keep the knight on a6.

B1) 14.b5?! may seem logical, but White's pieces will lack activity. 14...♘c7 15.♘4b3 f4!↑ Black could already gain the bishop pair, but there is no hurry, and developing the initiative on the kingside is more important.

B2) 14.♘b5 Of course occupying the new weak square in Black's camp is the obvious main move. 14...♗e6 15.♕b3 ♘c7 It makes a lot of sense to counter the dangerous invader. All of Black's pieces are now doing well, enabling us to get enough counterplay. 16.♘xc7 ♕xc7⇄

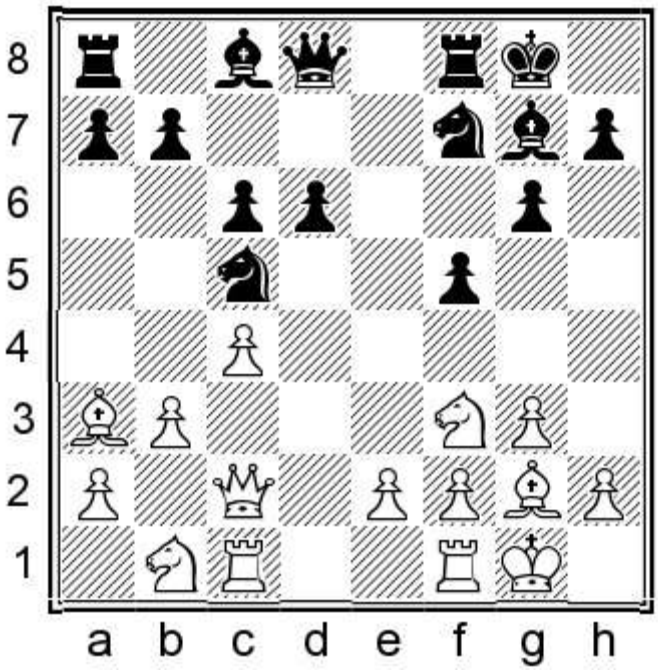
11...♘xe5



Position after: 11...♘xe5

12.♘xe5

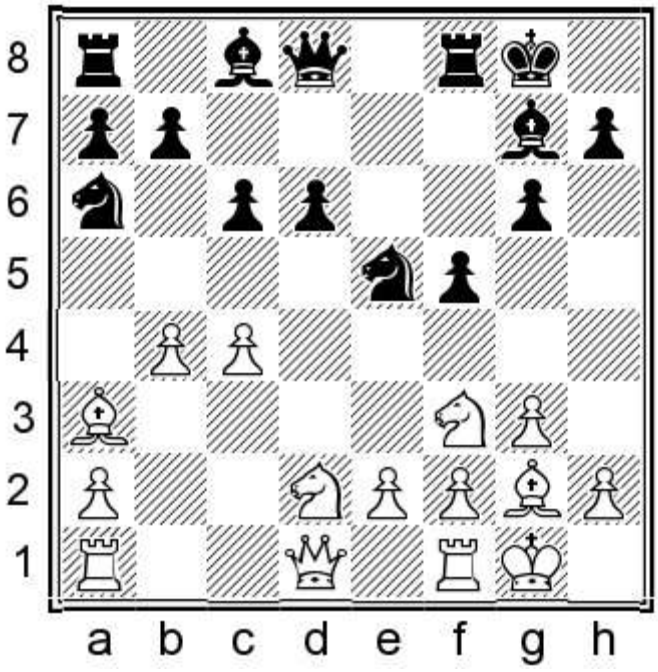
A) 12.♖c1 ♘f7 13.♘b1 ♘c5 14.♕c2



Position after: 14.♕c2

This position was reached in Musialkiewicz, P (2266) – Wcislo, D (2403), Poronin 2017, 0-1 (33). Now Black can strengthen his grip on the queenside: 14...a5N 15.♘c3 ♕e7 16.♖fd1 ♖e8 17.e3 ♗d7⇄.

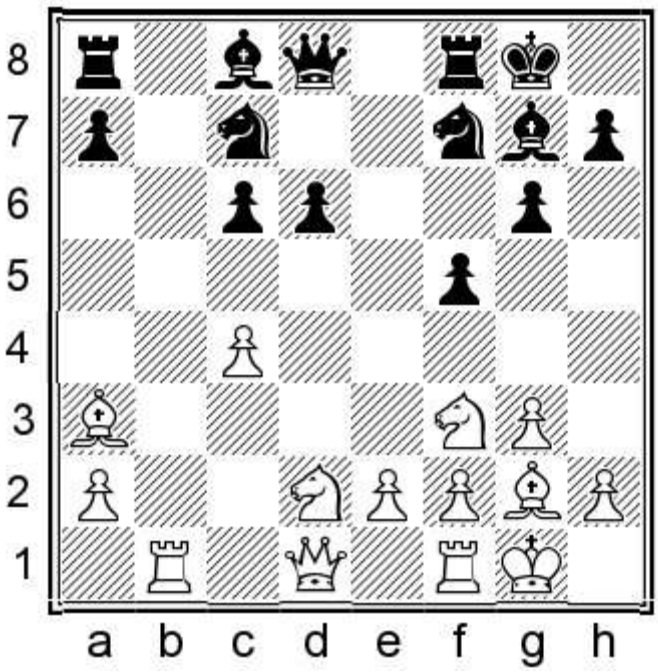
B) 12.b4!?N



Position after: 12.b4!?N

This surprising move (at least for a human) is Avrukh's novelty in this variation. It's probably not a bad one, but I don't think it changes the overall evaluation of the line 12...♘c7!? [12...♘xf3+?!

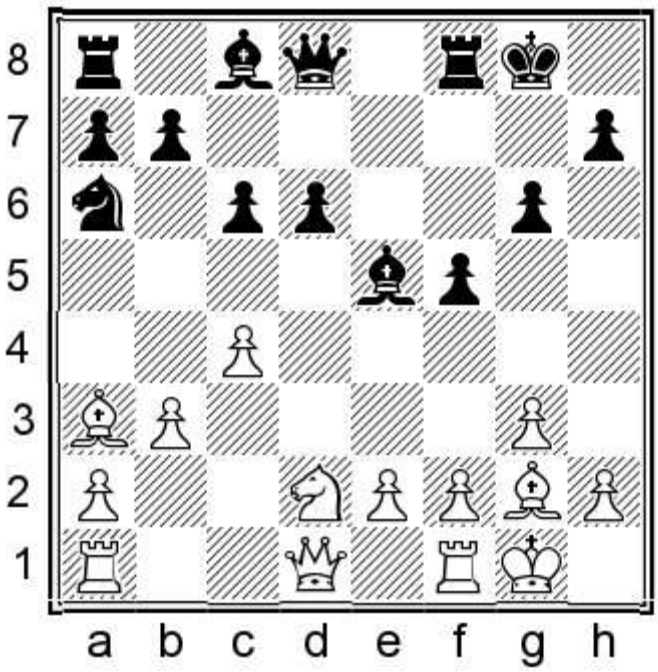
13.♘xf3 ♗xa1 14.♕xa1± would be an improved version of the main line for White, since he has managed to play b4 for free.] 13.b5 ♘f7 14.bxc6 bxc6 15.♖b1



Position after: 15.♖b1

Sooner or later, White will have to move this rook (even if we didn't want to take it). 15...♘e6⇄ Black will follow with ...♗d7, ...♕e7 and ...♖ab8 with a very decent position.

12...♗xe5



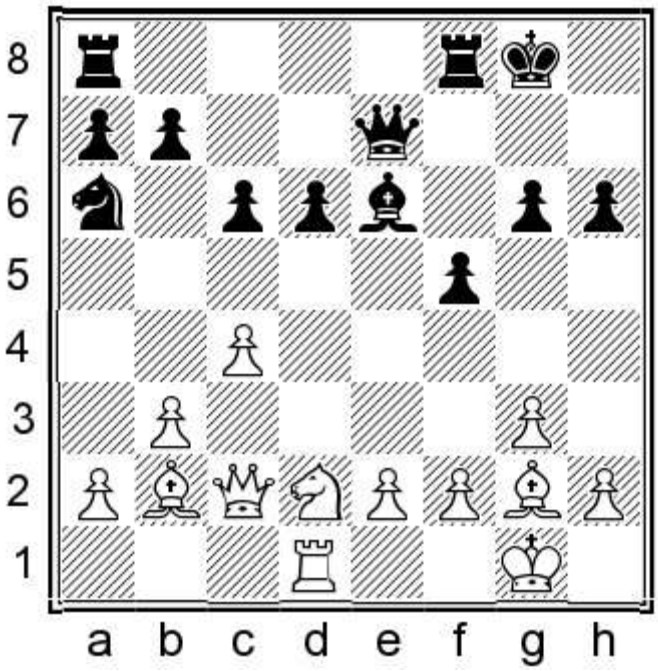
Position after: 12...♗xe5

13.♘f3!?

An interesting exchange sacrifice. White wants to gain the important dark-squared bishop.

I had known the game Shirov – Bareev (see below) for a long time, and thought it was too dangerous to play for Black, but I had never analyzed it before. It's actually fully playable, even if Black should react with great caution.

A) 13.♕c2 It's amusing to see that Shulman recently tried the same idea. I think that it's slightly less promising, but that's based only on the results of the two games. 13...♗xa1 14.♖xa1 ♕e7 15.♖d1 ♗e6 16.♗b2 h6!



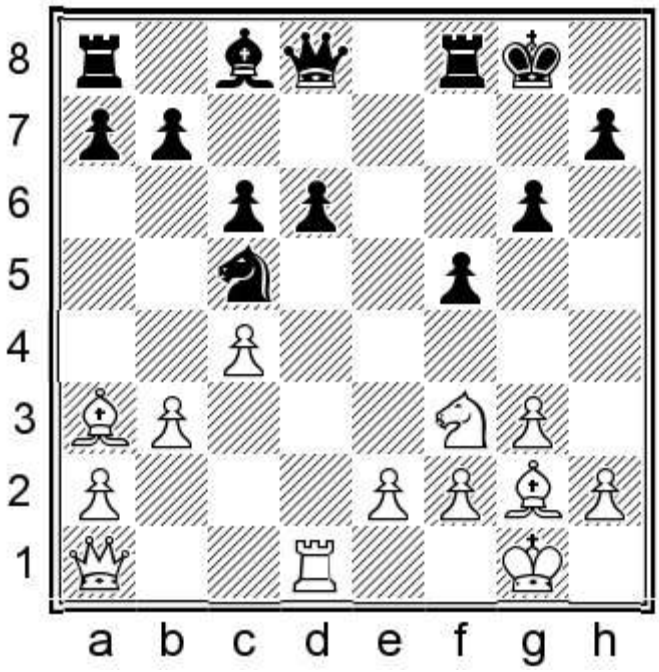
Position after: 16...h6!

Black is looking for a long-term safe spot for his king. 17.♕c3 ♔h7 18.b4 ♖ad8 19.♘f3 c5! 20.a3 d5! ∓ Black powerfully opens the position, which helped him convert his material advantage in Shulman, Y (2568) – Laznicka, V (2679), Arlington 2014, 0-1 (33).

B) 13.♖c1 A couple of players have preferred to keep the material balance, but it's not really dangerous. 13...♕a5! 14.♘b1 ♗e6 15.♕c2 ♖ad8 16.e3 ♖f7=

13...♗xa1 14.♕xa1 ♘c5 15.♖d1

Now White's threat is obvious. Black needs to find the right square for his queen.

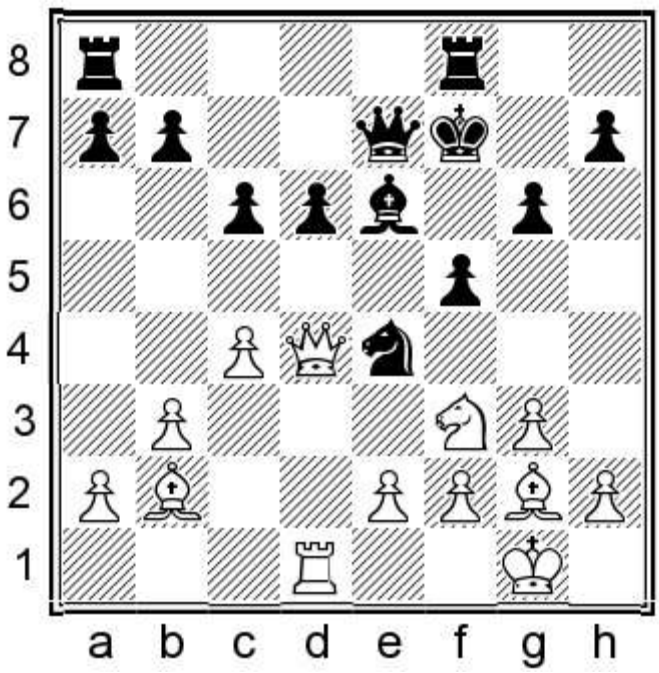


Position after: 15.♖d1

15...♕e7!N

Actually this is not a novelty anymore, since I played it myself a few weeks after writing this chapter. I didn't remember many of the ideas, but at least I remembered the main ones. Unfortunately it wasn't really helpful, because my strong opponent varied from what I had analyzed.

15...♕f6?! This is definitely Black's first mistake of the game as it helps White reorganize his forces, while every tempo counts a lot! 16.♕c1 ♕e7 17.♗b2 ♘e4 18.♕e3 ♗e6 19.♕d4 ♔f7

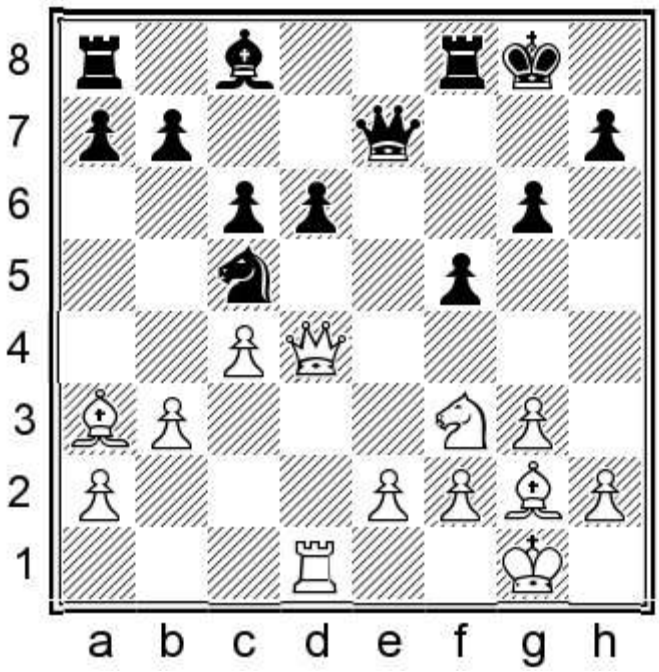


Position after: 19...♔f7

20.h4! ♖ad8 21.♘g5+ ♘xg5 22.hxg5 ♖d7 23.f4→ Black has a lot of threats and long-term compensation to deal with, and he didn't manage to solve his problems in the impressive game Shirov, A (2500) – Bareev, E (2590), Lvov 1990, 1-0 (38).

16.♕c1!?

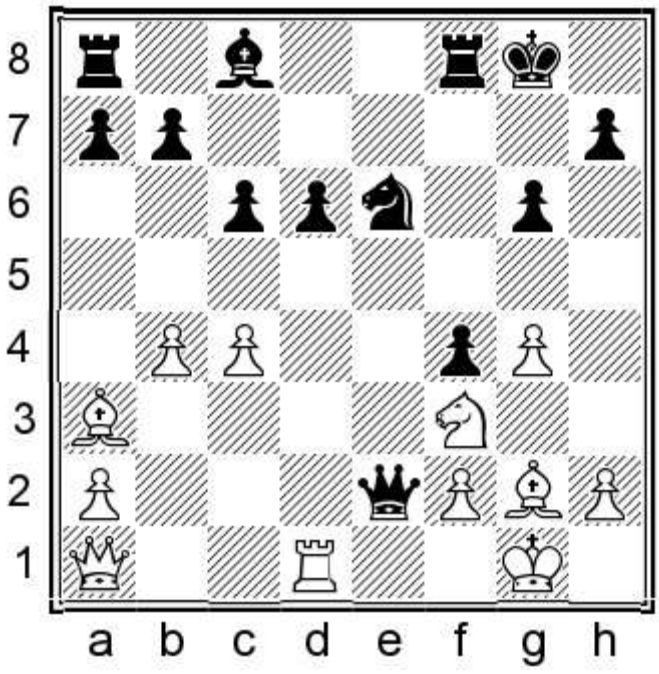
16.♕d4



Position after: 16.♕d4

This move, which I quite overlooked during my analysis, seems interesting.

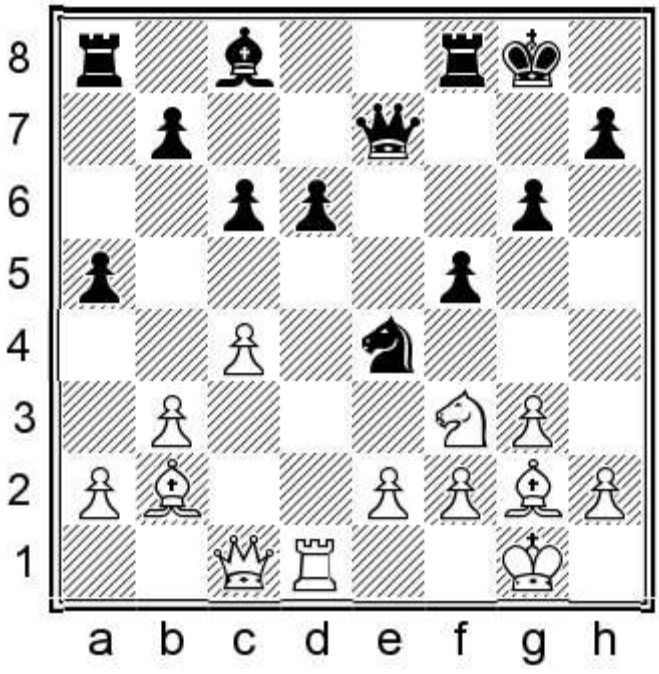
A) 16...♘e4 seems less precise. My opponent actually missed an important move, but he kept interesting compensation, and I totally collapsed a few moves later (which also shows the difficulty of playing this line as Black!). 17.♘d2 ♘c5 18.b4?! ♕xe2! 19.♘f3 ♘e6 20.♕a1 f4 21.g4!



Position after: 21.g4!

So far it has been a complicated game, but probably not worse for Black. However I now missed a decisive idea. 21...♕xc4? 22.♖xd6 ♘g7 23.♗f1! I completely overlooked this move, bringing the bishop to the diagonal my queen is standing on. 23...♕e4 24.♘e5 ♖e8 25.♗c4+ ♔h8 26.♗b2 ♗e6 27.♗xe6 ♘xe6 28.♘d7+ 1-0 Gledura, B (2630) – Demuth, A (2510), Skopje 2019.

B) 16...♕f6 17.♕d2 seems similar to 15...♕f6 16.♕c1, but there is actually a major difference. [17.♕xd6?! ♕xd6 18.♖xd6 ♘e4 19.♖d3 ♖e8∓] 17...♘e4! 18.♕c1 a5 19.♗b2 ♕e7∞

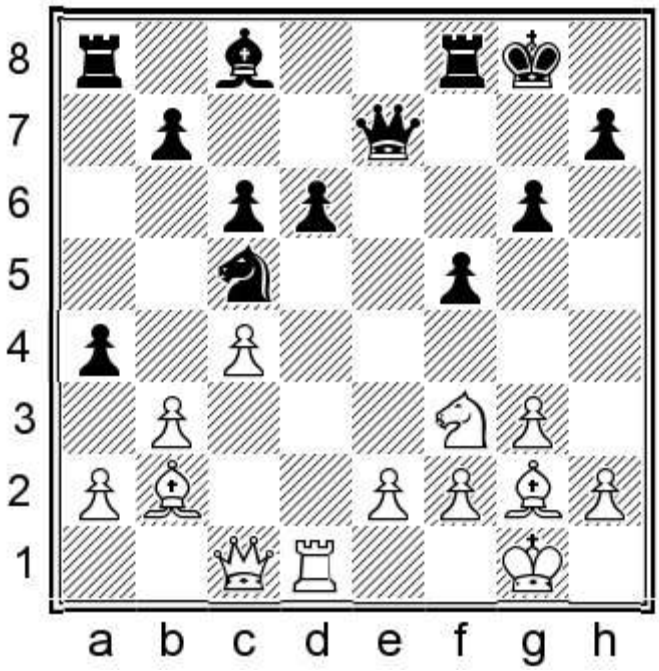


Position after: 19...♕e7∞

This is similar to the main line. Black intends to continue with ...a4 in order to help activate his rook, while White still needs to show his counterplay.

16...a5 17.♗b2 a4!

As stated it's a good idea to create counterplay on the a-file quickly in order to bring the rook into play.

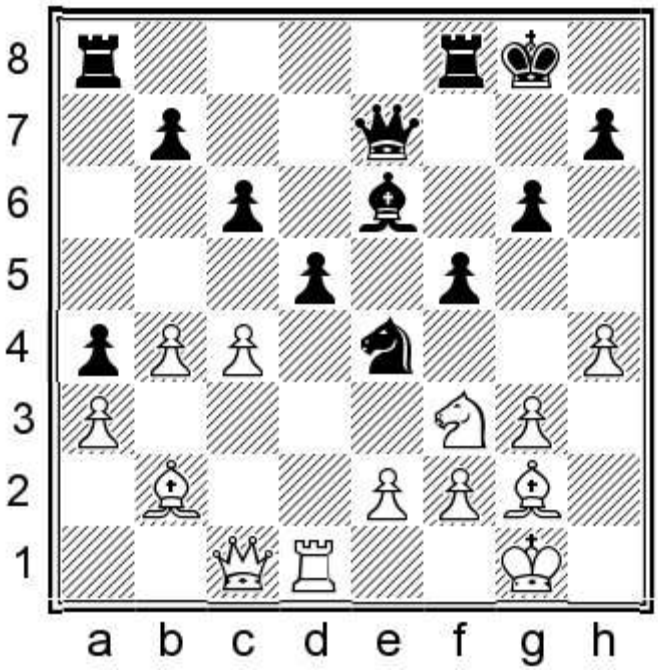


Position after: 17...a4!

18.b4

18.♕c3 ♔f7! 19.b4 ♘e4 20.♕d3 ♗e6∓

18...♘e4 19.a3 ♗e6 20.h4 d5!∓



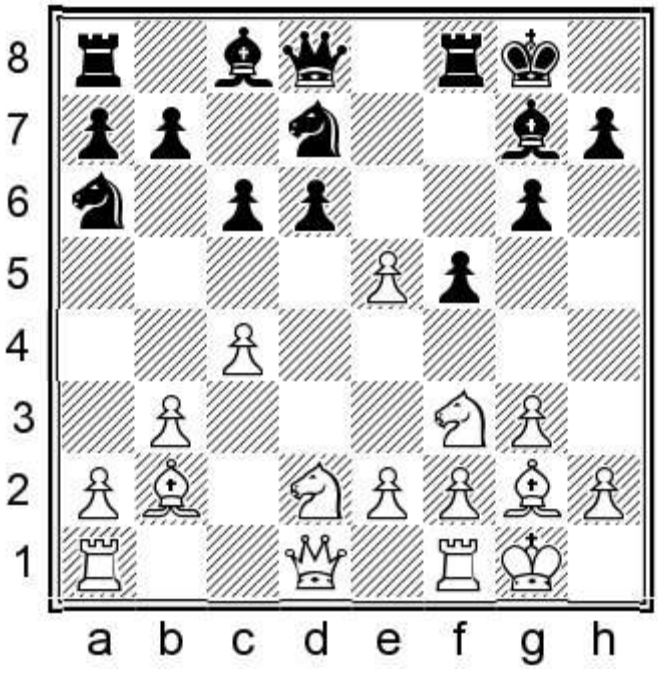
Position after: 20...d5!⩱

White has managed to stop our counterplay on the queenside, so we try to open the center in order to bring our rooks into play.

The position is complicated.

i) 8.c4 ♘a6 9.♘bd2 e5! 10.dxe5 ♘d7 11.♕c2

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.b3 0-0 6.♗b2 d6 7.0-0 c6!? 8.c4 ♘a6 9.♘bd2 e5! 10.dxe5 ♘d7



Position after: 10...♘d7

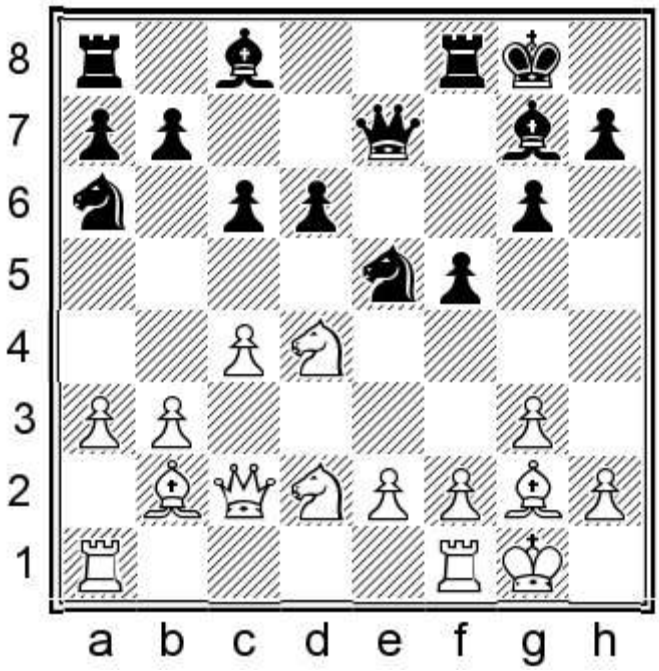
11.♕c2

This move is a novelty in the current position, but we will reach many games that arose from the 10...♘g4 move order.

11...♘xe5 12.♖ad1

White has opened the d-file, so it's logical to place the rook there straight away. Of course we didn't want to keep our queen on d8 forever, so it's not so annoying.

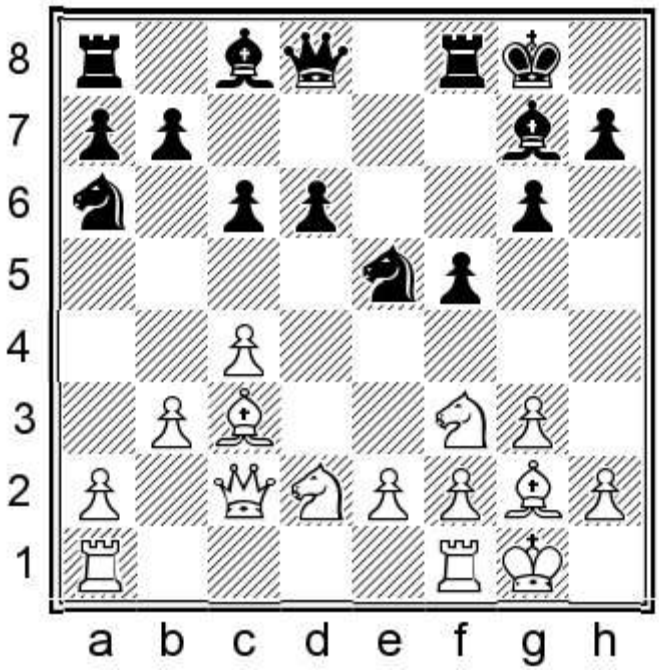
A) 12.a3 ♕e7 13.♘d4 This position occurred in the game Arizmendi Martinez, J (2529) – Pardo Simon, D (2468), Linares 2015, 0-1 (40). Even if Black won, he could have taken over the initiative immediately.



Position after: 13.♘d4

13...f4!N 14.b4 This weakens c4, but also prevents ...♘c5. [14.♖ad1?! ♗g4 15.♖fe1 ♘c5!→] 14...fxg3 15.hxg3 ♘g4 16.♕b3 ♕e5!→ Black transfers the queen to h5, and White will have to keep a knight on f3 in order not to be mated or lose the f2-pawn. This is quite unpleasant to meet for White!

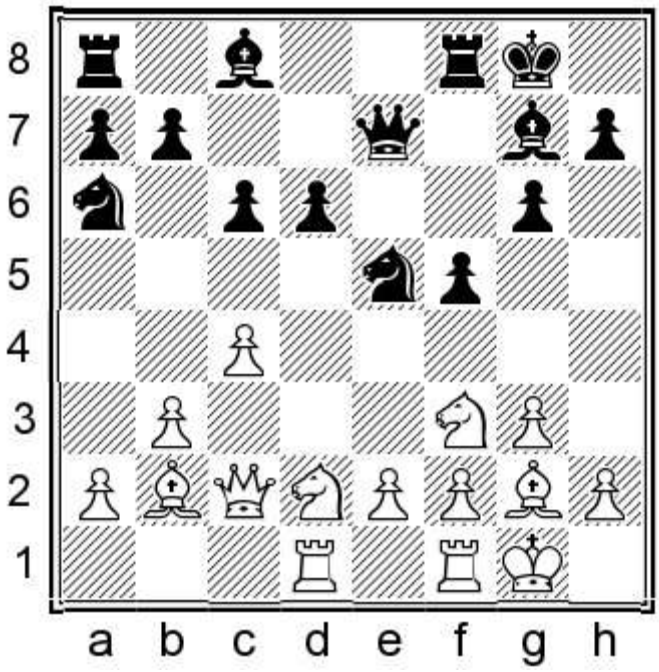
B) 12.♗c3



Position after: 12.♗c3

A strange attempt, however its two ideas are to prevent ...♘b4 and be able to follow with ♕b2. 12...f4N Not necessary at all, but very similar to the lines with 12.a3. 13.♕b2 ♕e7 14.♘xe5 ♗xe5 15.♗xe5 dxe5↑

12...♕e7



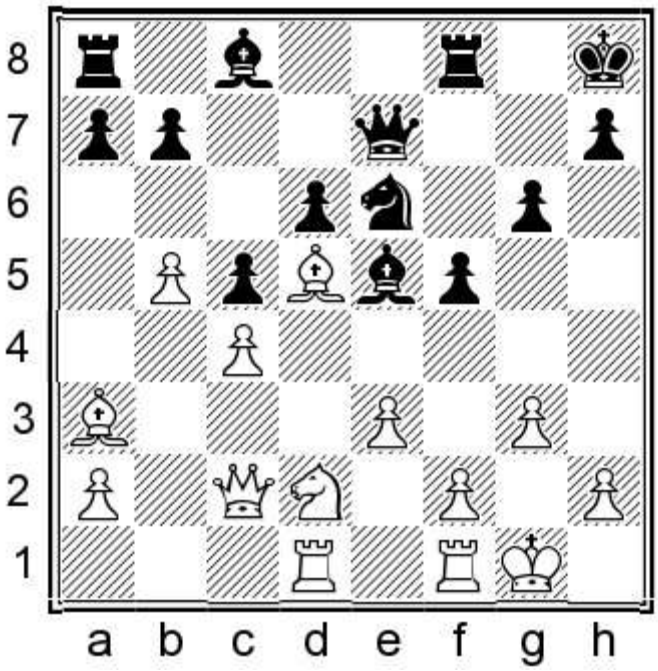
Position after: 12...♕e7

13.a3

White opts for slow measures against ...♘b4, wanting eventually to continue with b4, preventing ...♘c5. I believe we can react directly on the other side.

13.♗a3!? White may consider that the bishop doesn't have great prospects on its current diagonal, so moves it to attack the d6-pawn, at the same time preventing ...♘b4.

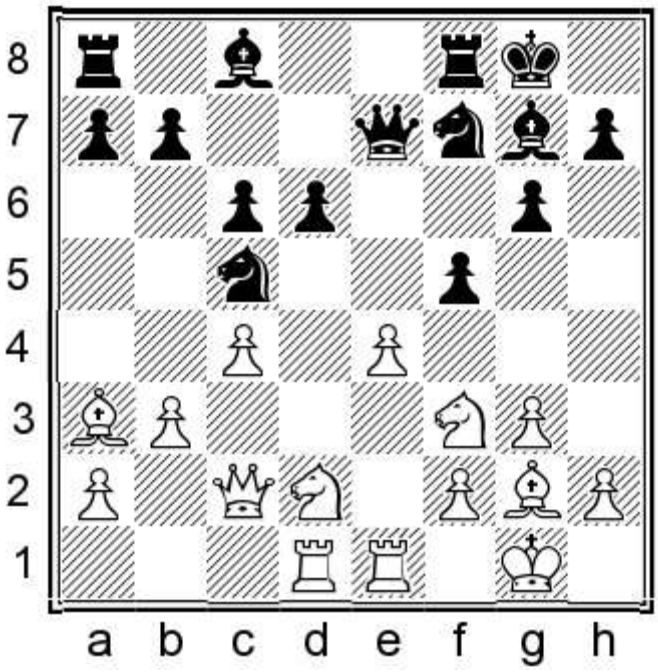
A) 13...♘c5 I am less fond of this approach, which has been tried in a couple of games. 14.♘xe5!N This is probably the best; it's not clear which piece should take back. [14.b4 ♘e6 15.♘b3?! f4 16.b5 c5 17.♕e4 ♖b8 Black gets a great position, and his opponent collapsed quickly. 18.♕d5 b6 19.♗c1 ♔h8 20.♗h3 ♘c7–+ 0-1 (23) Douriet Duany, A (2271) – Soto Hernandez, H (2437), Matanzas 2017] 14...♗xe5 [14...♕xe5 15.b4 ♘d7 16.♘b3± The pressure on the d6-pawn is quite significant, and Black's pieces are not well coordinated. 14...dxe5 Black remains with a pinned knight and it's difficult to break it. 15.♘b1! e4 16.♘c3 b6 17.♘a4±] 15.b4 ♘e6 16.b5 c5 17.♗d5 ♔h8 18.e3±



Position after: 18.e3±

White simply takes the d4-square away from the knight and will probably continue with ♘f3 and ♗b2, with good play on the long diagonal and an amazing bishop on d5.

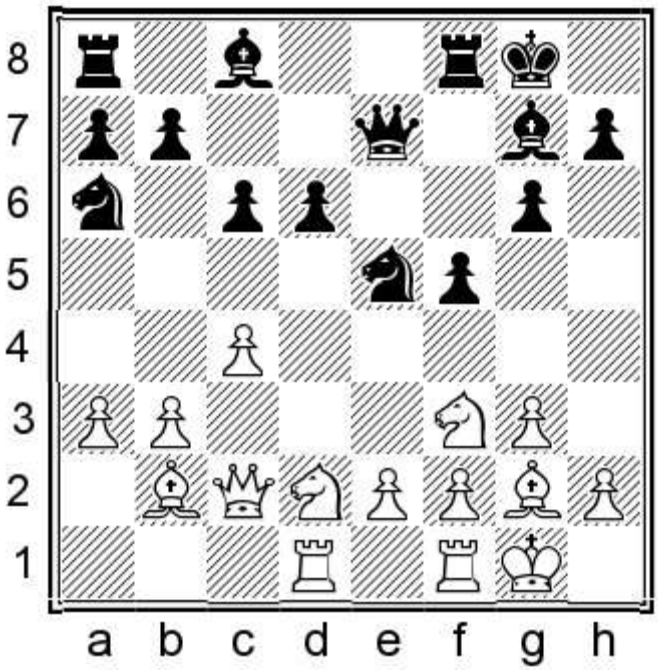
B) 13...♘f7! 14.e4 ♘c5 15.♖fe1



Position after: 15.♖fe1

B1) 15...fxe4?! It wasn't easy to handle the pressure. Now White gets an easy position, slightly better for him, which he managed to convert. 16.♘xe4 ♘xe4 17.♖xe4 ♕c7± 1-0 (73) Ikonnikov, V (2548) – Szabolcsi, J (2411), Baden 2001.

B2) 15...♖e8!N I believe that this is the right move. Black shouldn't waste any time in bringing his rook into play. 16.exf5 It's not clear what else White can play instead of this move, as all his pieces seem to have reached maximum effect, but even this move is not enough for an advantage. 16...♗xf5! Of course Black needed tactics to hold the position. 17.♖xe7 ♗xc2 18.♖de1 ♖xe7 19.♖xe7 ♗f6! 20.♖e3 a5=



Position after: 13.a3

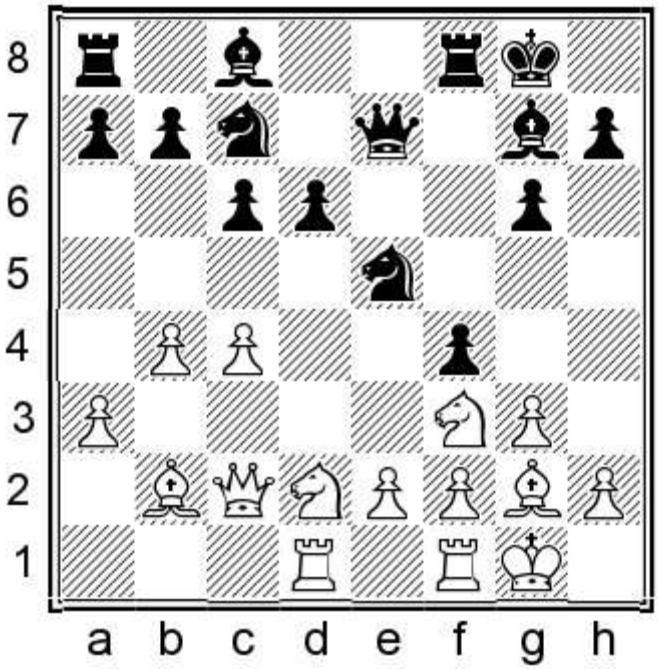
13...f4!?N

Black can immediately develop his initiative on the kingside. It will also allow him to develop his light-squared bishop on an active square.

13...♗e6 14.♘d4 ♗d7 15.e3 ♖ad8 16.b4± White still seems to have the better position, and eventually won in Kozhuharov, S (2450) − Filev, G (2329), Sunny Beach 2015, 1-0 (66).

14.♘xe5

14.b4 ♘c7

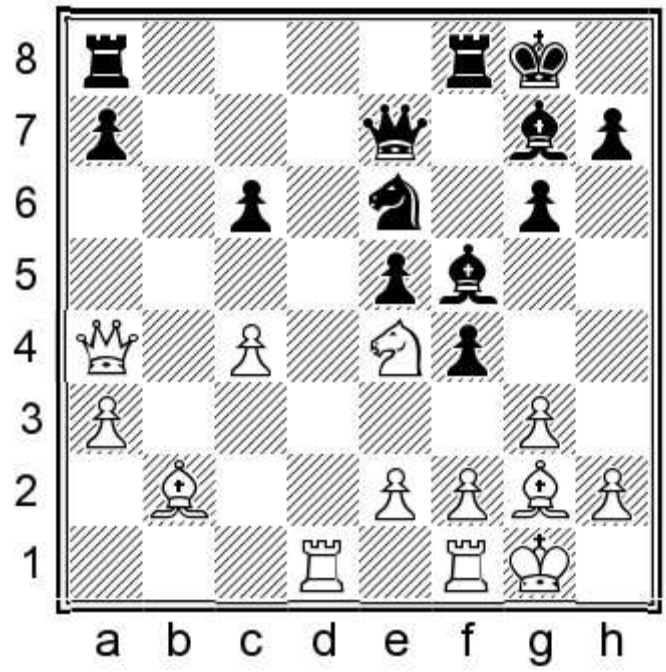


Position after: 14...♘c7

We can't go to c5? Never mind, we'll use the c7-square to transfer the knight towards e6 and d4.
15.♘xe5 dxe5 16.♘e4

A) ≤ 16...♗g4 17.♘c5! [17.♘d6 ♘e6 18.c5 ♘d4 − see the main line] 17...♘e6? [17...a5 18.♗c3 ♘a6!? 19.♘xa6 ♖xa6 20.b5±] 18.♖d7±

B) 16...♗f5! 17.b5 ♘e6 18.bxc6 bxc6 19.♕a4



Position after: 19.♕a4

White is about to win a pawn, but we can sacrifice it in order to activate all our pieces and get enough compensation. 19...♔h8 20.♕xc6 ♖ab8 21.♗c3 ♘d4 22.♗xd4 exd4 23.gxf4 ♖b2♾

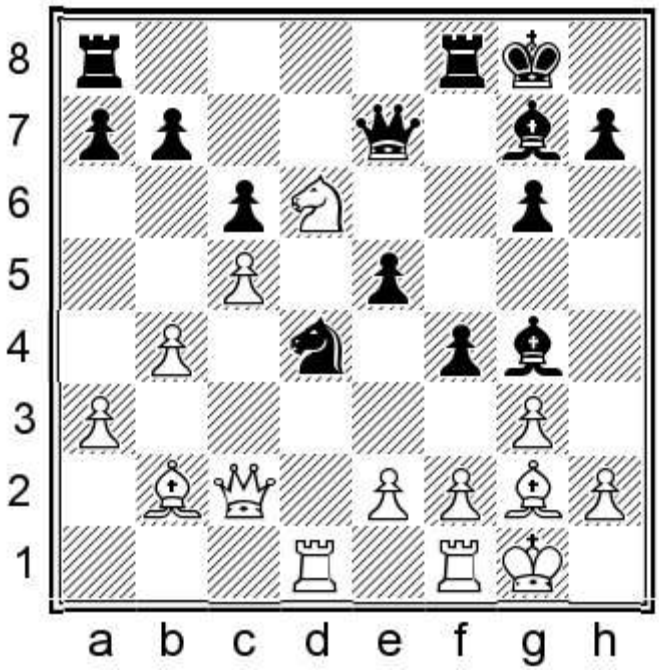
14...dxe5 15.♘e4 ♘c5 16.♘d6

16.♘xc5 ♕xc5 17.b4 ♕e7 18.b5 ♗f5 19.♕a4 c5⇄ White has the d5-square, so we should quickly develop our initiative on the kingside.

16...♗g4!?

16...♘e6 17.b4 ♘d4 18.♘xc8! ♖axc8 19.♕e4 ♕g5± Here White probably keeps a small edge due to his two bishops and his queen safely dominating from e4.

17.b4 ♘e6 18.c5 ♘d4⇄

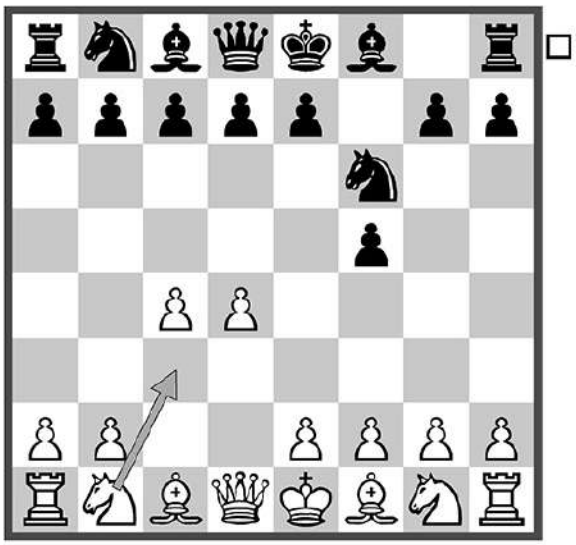


Position after: 18...♘d4⇄

The knight on d6 is strong, but our pieces have reached pretty active outposts, so it seems fully playable for Black.

Chapter 9
The Aggressive 2.c4 ♘f6 3.♘c3

1.d4 f5 2.c4 ♘f6



Chapter Guide

Chapter 9 – The Aggressive 2.c4 ♘f6 3.♘c3

1.d4 f5 2.c4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 d6 4.♗g5 ♘bd7 5.♕c2 g6

a) 3.♗g5?!

b) 3...g6

c) 4th and 5th move alternatives

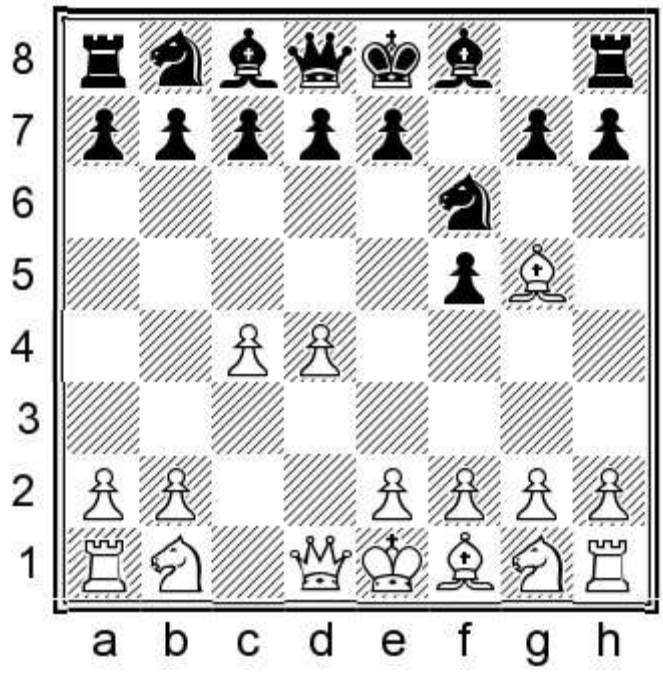
d) 6.♘f3, 6.e4

e) 6.e3, 6.h4 c6 7.--, 7.0-0-0 ♗g7 8,-- 8.e3

f) 6.h4 c6 7.0-0-0 ♗g7 8.♘h3

a) 3.♗g5?!

1.d4 f5 2.c4 ♘f6 3.♗g5?!



Position after: 3.♗g5?!

This strange-looking move has been played almost 200 times. I didn't really know which chapter to cover it in, but decided to place it here, as it is reminiscent of the main line that will be covered in this chapter after 3.♘c3 d6 4.♗g5.

3.♗f4 There is no reason for this move to have any independent value. White will follow with ♘f3, ♘c3 or both anyway, and it will transpose to Chapter 6 with 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗f4 after 3...g6.

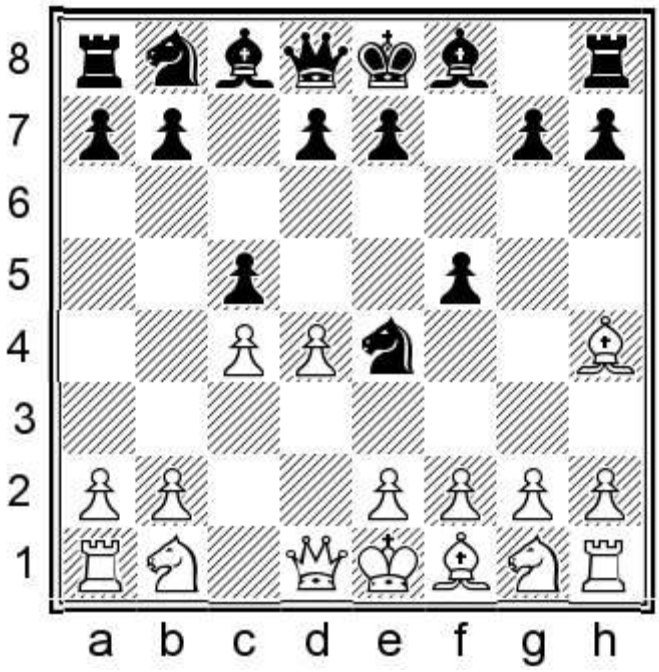
3...♘e4!?

This resembles a Trompowsky except that c4 and ...f5 have been included. I think this is to Black's advantage since White often experiences trouble on the a5-e1 diagonal towards his king since c3 is not playable anymore. 3...e6 is another safe option.

We chose this move in the same position with the knight on f3 instead of the move c4. I decided to go for the more dangerous 3...♘e4 because I believe we can exploit the weakness of the a5-e1 diagonal.

4.♗f4

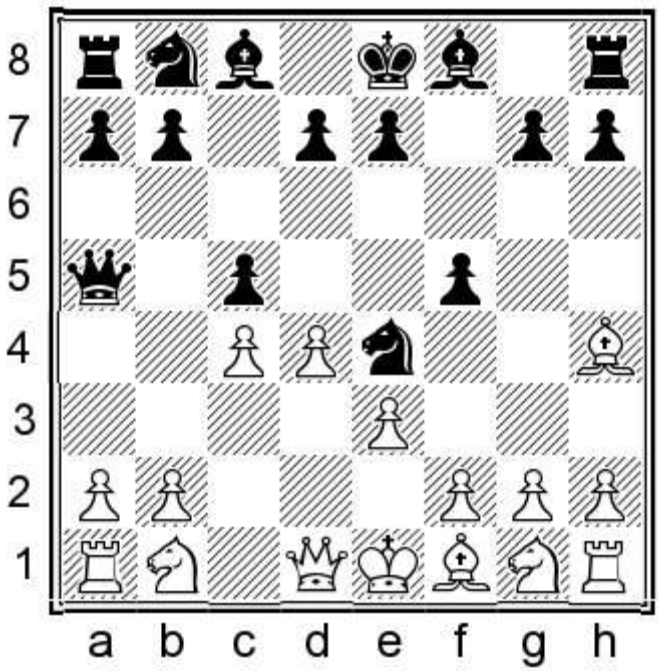
4.♗h4?! c5!



Position after: 4...c5!

The bishop has abandoned any possibility of protecting the a5-e1 diagonal. At the moment we can't use the f8-bishop, as moving the e-pawn is impossible, so logically we bring the queen into play.

A) 5.e3? ♕a5+!



Position after: 5...♕a5+!

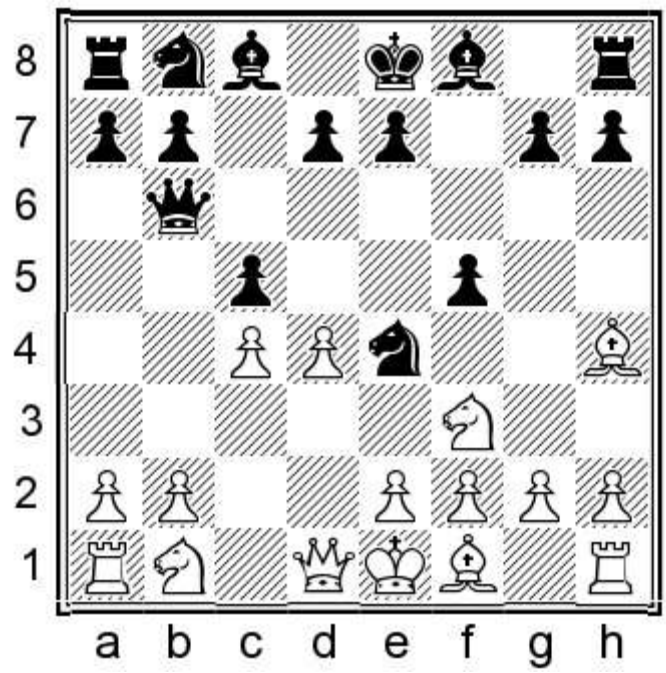
A1) 6.♘d2 g5! 7.♗g3 cxd4∓ This just wins a pawn since White is un-able to take back due to ...f4, winning a piece. And we should mention that ♕h5+ doesn't achieve much, as White will have to

protect the d2-knight afterwards.

A2) 6.♘c3 g5 [6...♘c6!? More than 100 years ago, the young Alekhine faced this position as White. He couldn't manage to cope with the pressure and was outplayed by his opponent: 7.♖c1 cxd4 8.exd4 e6 9.d5 ♘e5 10.♘f3 10...♘xf3+ 11.gxf3 ♘xc3 12.bxc3 ♗a3∓ 0-1 (50) Alekhine, A – Koyalovich, B, St. Petersburg 1912.] 7.♗g3 ♘xc3 8.♕d2 cxd4∓

B) 5.♘c3?! ♕a5 6.♖c1 g5!–+

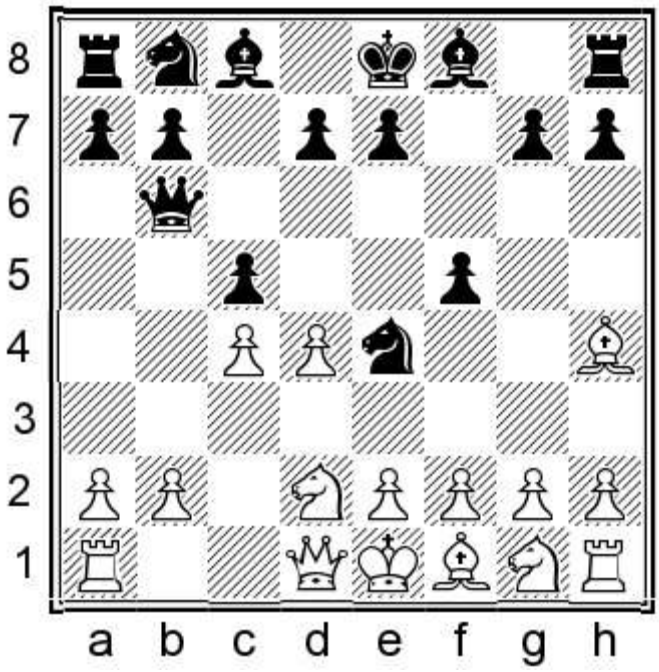
C) 5.♘f3 ♕b6!



Position after: 5...♕b6!

White experiences some problems protecting his pawns. 6.♘bd2 cxd4 7.♘xe4 fxe4 8.♘xd4 ♕xb2 9.♘b5□ 9...♕b4+! 10.♕d2 ♕xd2+ 11.♔xd2 ♘a6∓

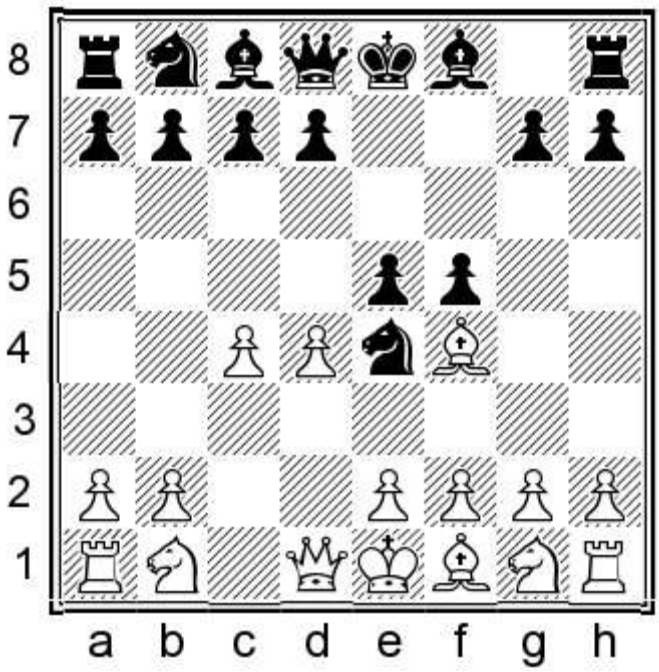
D) 5.♘d2 Maybe the lesser evil, but White is in trouble anyway. 5...♕b6!



Position after: 5...♕b6!

Black is winning a pawn, and there is nothing White can do about it. 6.♘xe4 fxe4 7.e3 ♕xb2 8.♘e2 ♕b4+ 9.♕d2 ♕xd2+ 10.♔xd2 cxd4 11.♘xd4 ♘a6∓

4...e5!



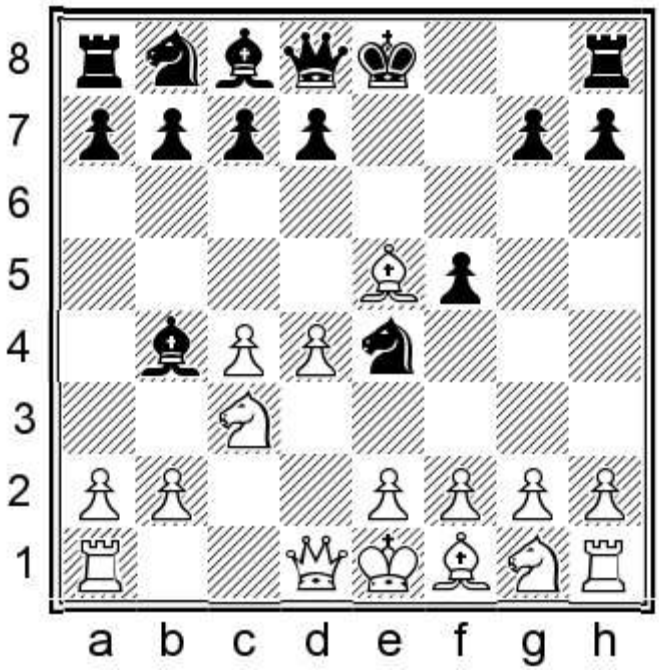
Position after: 4...e5!

I really like this move. Black gains a tempo in order to accelerate ...♗b4+ and get in other strong

moves.

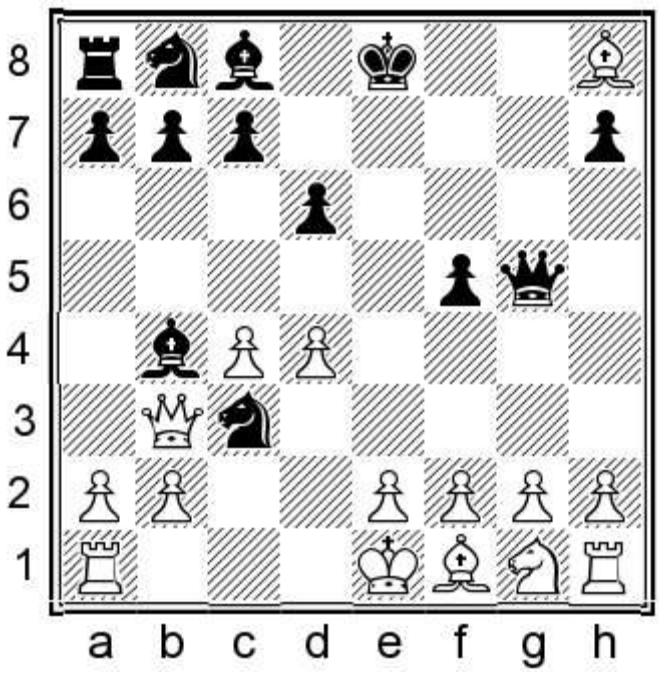
5.dxe5

5.♗xe5? It is definitely less logical to abandon control of the d2-square. 5...♗b4+ 6.♘c3



Position after: 6.♘c3

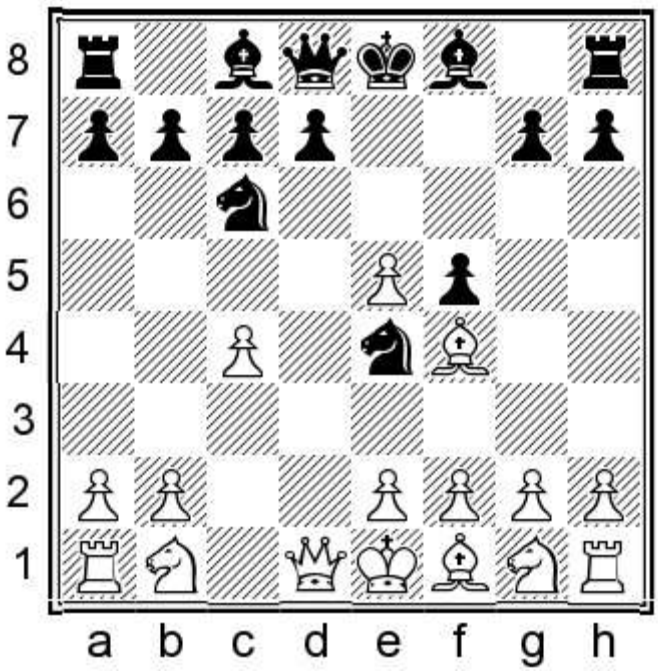
6...d6! A strong intermediate move. [6...♘xc3 7.♕b3 ♘xa2+ 8.♔d1 White is obviously in trouble, but he is going to regain his piece. 8...d6 9.♗xg7 ♕g5! 10.♕e3+□ 10...♕xe3 11.fxe3 ♖g8 12.♗h6 a5∓] 7.♗f4 [7.♗xg7? Tempting, but losing quickly, e.g. 7...♕g5! 8.♗xh8? ♘xc3–+ 9.♕b3?



Position after: 9.♕b3?

9...♘b1+! 10.♕xb4 ♕c1# A quick and painful mate.] 7...♘xc3 8.bxc3 ♗xc3+ 9.♗d2 ♗xd4∓ Winning the exchange was possible, but I prefer to grab a central pawn and keep the strong bishop.

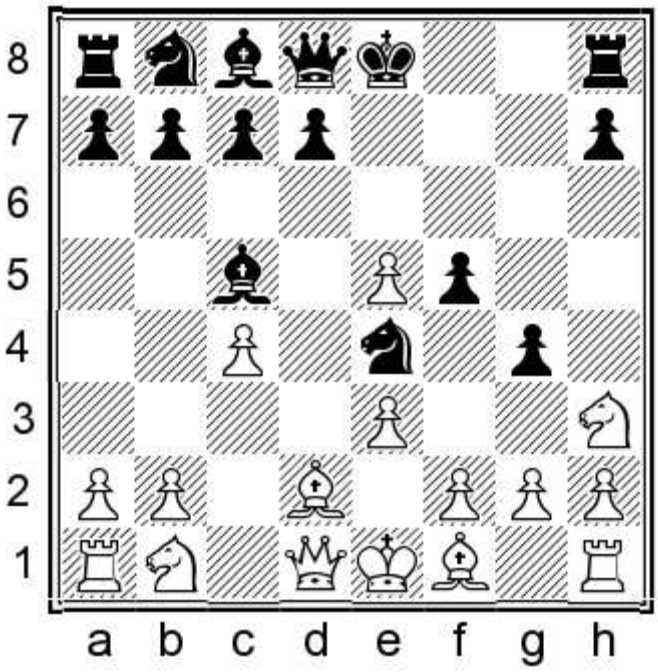
5...♘c6!?N



Position after: 5...♘c6!?N

It seems stronger to wait before making a decision about the bishop.

5...♗c5 6.♘h3! g5 7.♗d2!? g4 8.e3



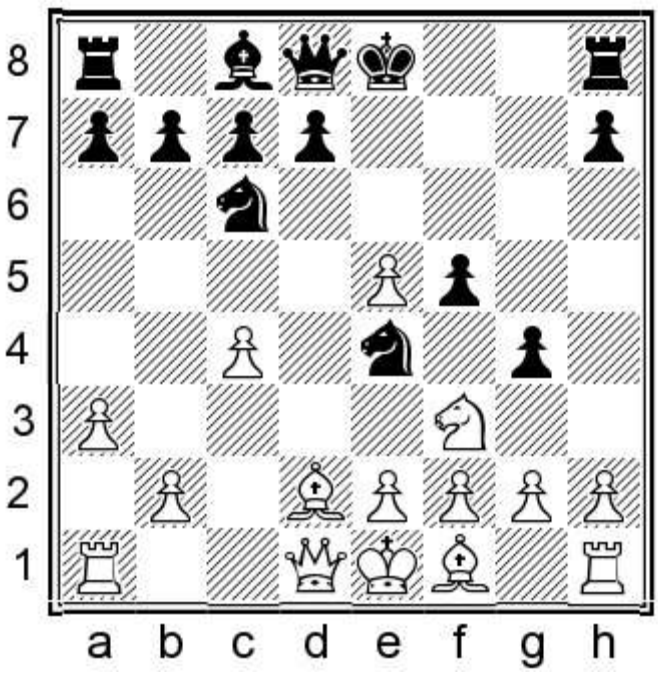
Position after: 8.e3

8...d6 [8...gxh3? 9.♕h5+ ♔e7 10.♕xf5+–] 9.b4 ♘xd2 10.♕xd2 gxh3 11.bxc5 dxe5 12.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 13.g3=

6.♘d2

6.♘c3 ♗b4 7.♖c1 ♕e7 8.e3 ♘xe5 9.♗xe5 ♕xe5 10.♘ge2 b6∓

6...♗b4 7.♘gf3 g5 8.a3 ♗xd2+ 9.♗xd2 g4



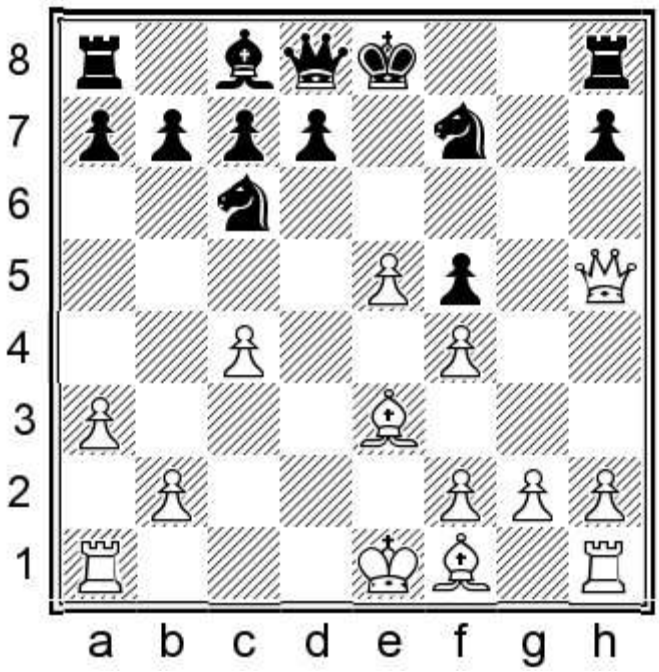
Position after: 9...g4

If the knight goes back to g1, Black has a great position, so White needs to be creative.

10.♗e3!

A sacrifice which results in a strong pawn chain and decent compensation for the piece.
Definitely a difficult move to find!

10...gxf3 11.exf3 ♘g5 12.f4 ♘f7 13.♕h5⩲

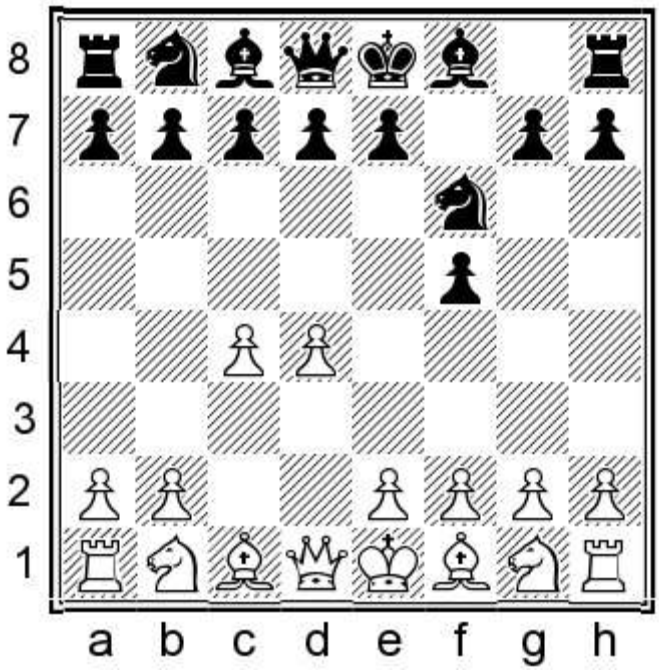


Position after: 13.♕h5⩲

White has some compensation, but he still needs to prove that it's sufficient in the long term.

b) 3...g6

1.d4 f5 2.c4 ♘f6



Position after: 2...♘f6

3.♘c3

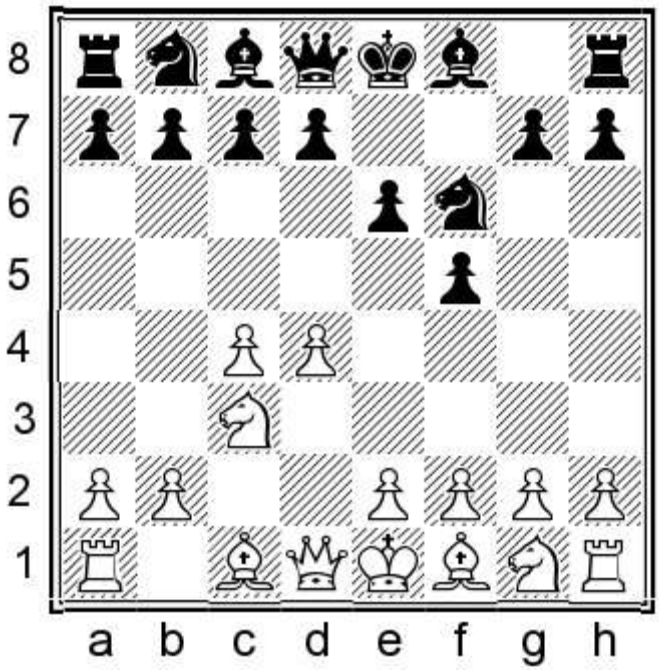
Recently many players have adopted this move order. White waits for 3...g6 in order to launch an attack with 4.h4.

As we will see, this idea is very dangerous, which is why I opted for the other, less committal, main option, 3...d6 (when 4.h4 would make little sense).

3...g6

This is the most played move, but I believe this is what White is waiting for. I think most Black players either didn't know about White's dangerous attempt, or didn't know that they had another option. Some, of course, believe in their position, but having worked on the line with both colors, I am not fond of Black's possibilities if White goes for the troublesome lines. I will show you the most critical lines for 3...g6 here, and will consider 3...d6 in the next subchapters.

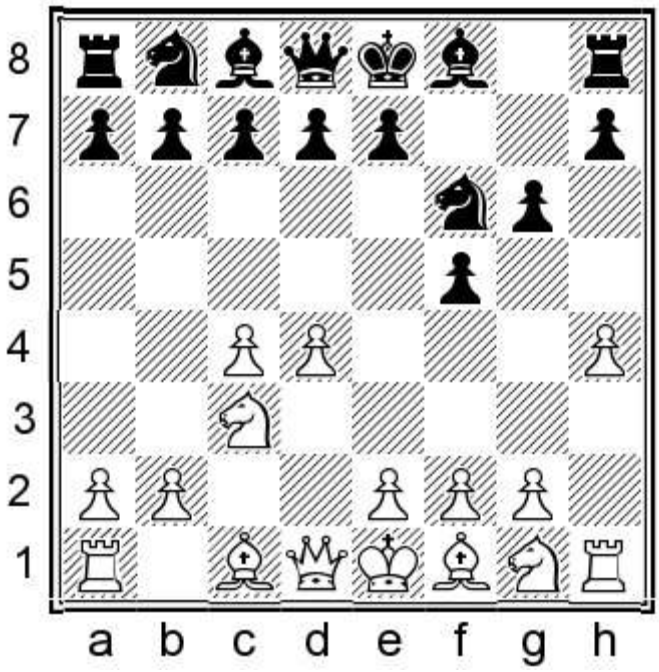
3...e6!?



Position after: 3...e6!?

We won't investigate this move as we don't want to play a Classical Dutch or a Stonewall system. However it's good to know that White's move order has the drawback of allowing this move, with the extra possibility of ...♗b4, compared to the lines where White develops the kingside first and castles before playing c4 and ♘c3.

4.h4!



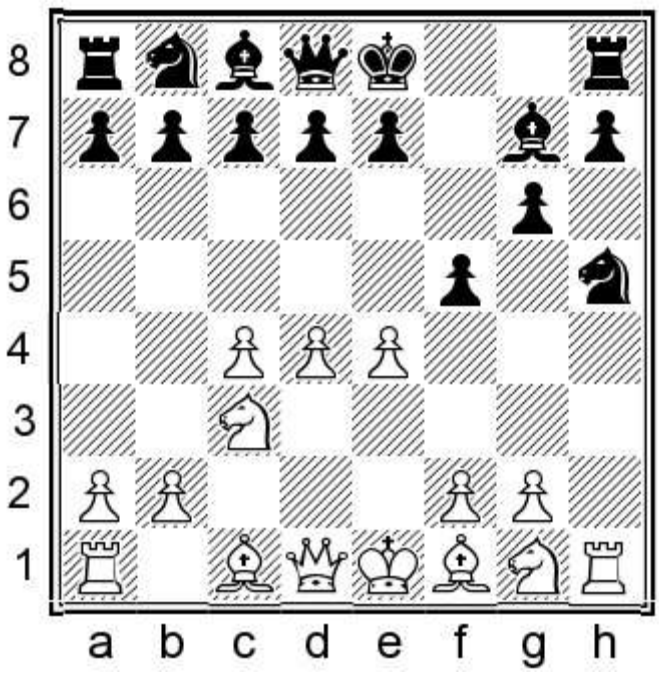
Position after: 4.h4!

I believe this is the critical test of this line. It's true that in most cases White simply played 4.♘f3, 4.g3 and even 4.♗g5 (which is quite illogical), but it is now well-known that the text move causes Black problems.

4...d6

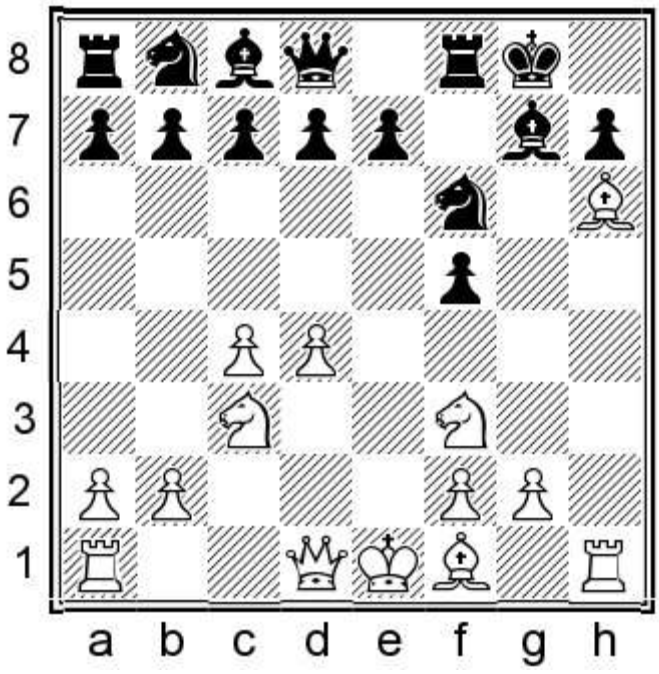
According to recent theory, this is the reliable response. Its aim is to be able to take back on f5 with the bishop, in order to develop quickly and keep the g6-pawn in its defensive position.

4...♗g7?! is probably even worse, e.g. 5.h5! ♘xh5 [5...0-0 6.hxg6 hxg6 7.♘f3 d6 8.♗g5±] 6.e4!



Position after: 6.e4!

6...♘f6 [6...fxe4? 7.♖xh5! is a well-known exchange sacrifice. Sometimes Black is basically fine, but in this case his king will struggle for a long time. 7...gxh5 8.♕xh5+ ♔f8 9.♗h6 d6 10.♘xe4→] 7.exf5 gxf5 8.♘f3 0-0 9.♗h6→



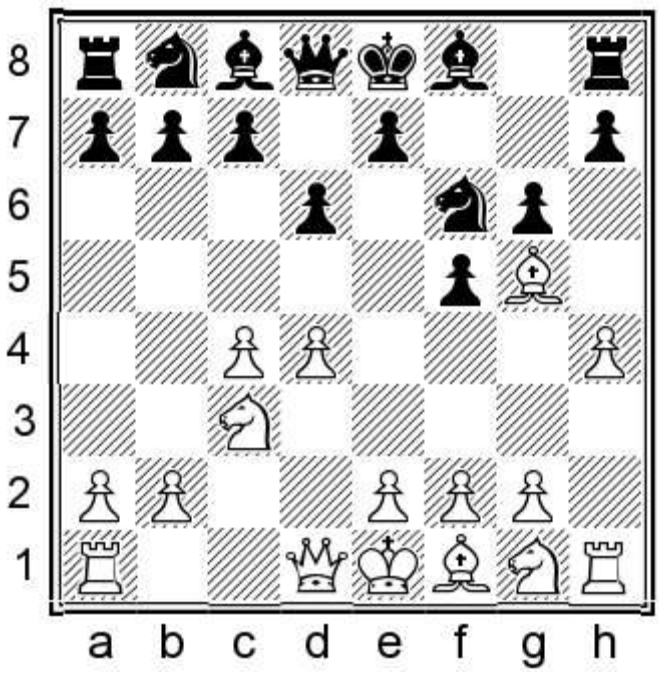
Position after: 9.♗h6→

White has managed to open the h-file without losing tempi, whereas Black has spent two moves moving his knight, so White's attack is effective. He will follow up with ♕d2 and 0-0-0 in order to bring the other rook into play quickly.

5.h5!

White's main idea, gaining time and developing the initiative.

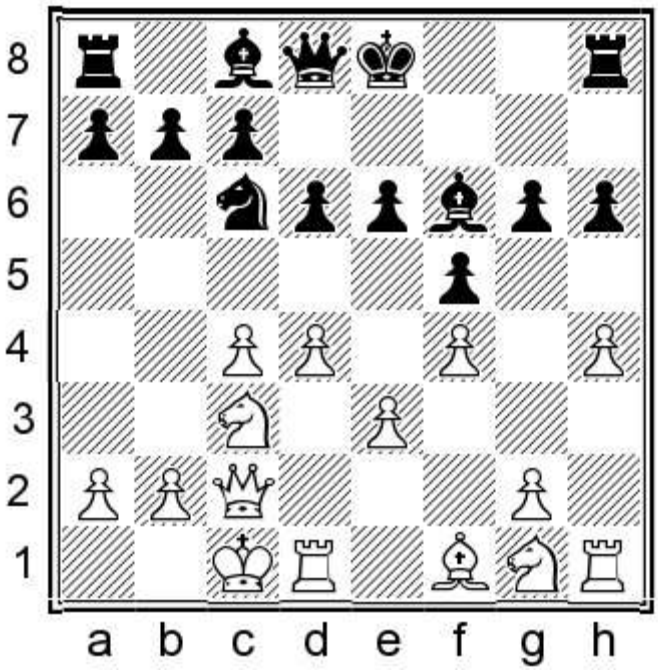
5.♗g5!?



Position after: 5.♗g5!?

White can also develop his queenside. This may transpose to our main line, except that we didn't have to play against ...♘bd7. 5...♗g7 6.♕c2

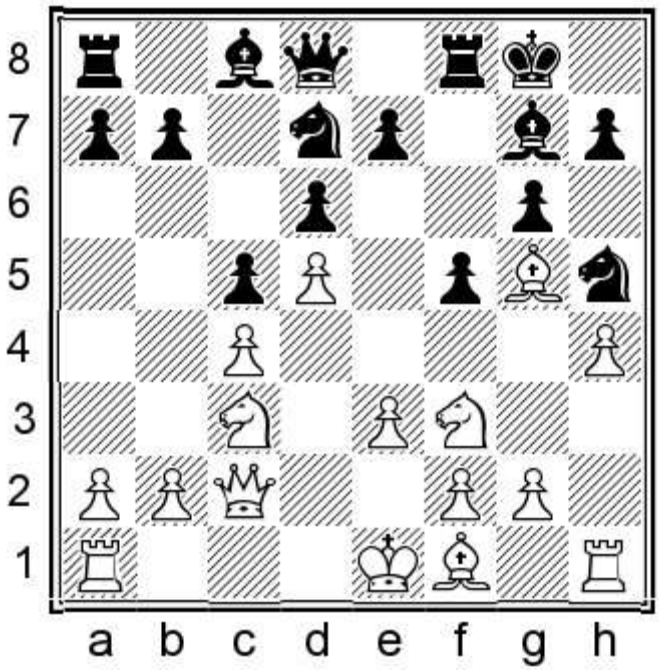
A) 6...♘c6!? is another interesting attempt to deviate from ...♘bd7, but the position seems simpler to handle for White. 7.e3 h6 8.♗xf6 ♗xf6 9.0-0-0 e6 10.f4!?



Position after: 10.f4!?

An interesting concept. White intends h5, and prevents both ...e5 and ...g5!. 10...♗xh4? 11.d5 exd5 12.cxd5 ♘b8 13.♘f3 ♗f6 14.g4± with an overwhelming advantage for White that he managed to convert easily in Lagarde, M (2615) – Beukema, S (2396), Belgium 2018, 1-0 (26).

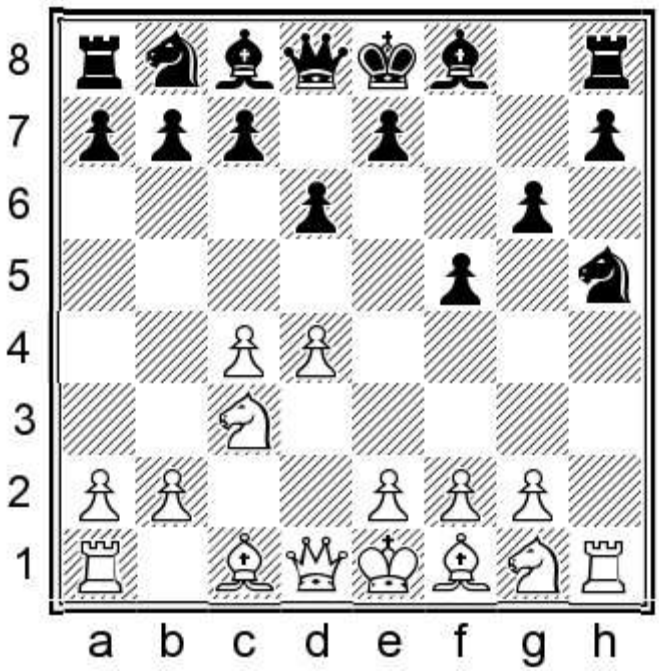
B) 6...c5!?N An interesting way to handle the position. 7.d5 [7.dxc5 dxc5 8.♖d1 ♕a5 9.♗d2 ♘c6! White is unable to get anything from the discovered attack after 10.♘d5 ♕d8 11.♗h6 ♕a5+□ 12.♗d2 ♕d8= Δ 13.♗c3 ♘d4!⇄.] 7...♘bd7 8.♘f3 0-0 9.e3 ♘h5



Position after: 9...♘h5

Granted, it seems weird to play both ...f5 and ...c5, but in this case it is quite reliable. The threat is simply to play ...h6 and grab the bishop pair. 10.e4 fxe4 11.♘xe4 ♘df6⇄

5...♘xh5

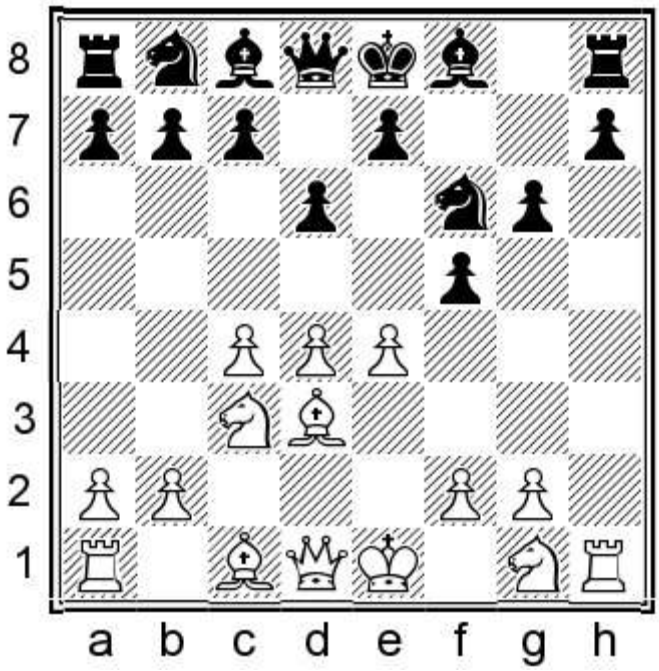


Position after: 5...♘xh5

6.e4!

6.♖xh5 is considered to be too early, even if it has been played in most cases. 6...gxh5 7.e4 fxe4 8.♕xh5+ ♔d7 9.♕g4+ ♔e8⇄ It's not clear whether White has a good way to keep playing, but Black looks fine.

6...♘f6 7.♗d3!



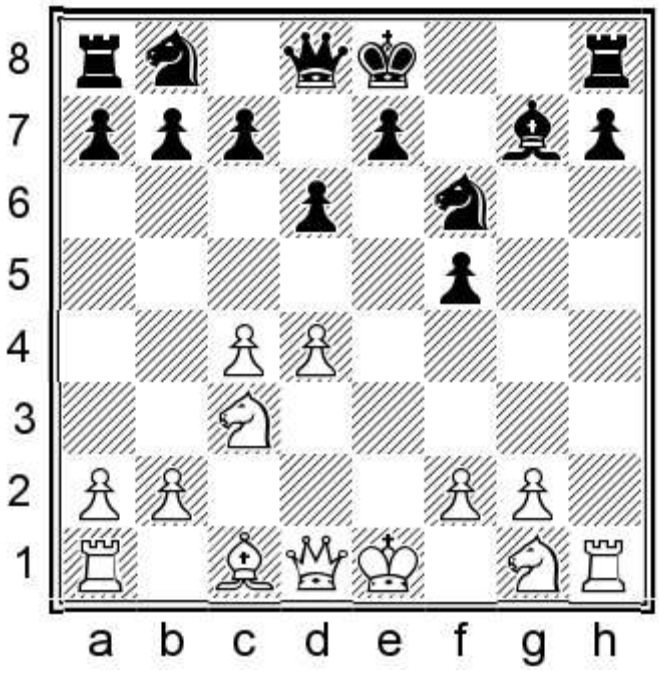
Position after: 7.♗d3!

Now taking on e4 would only help White develop his initiative and target the g6-pawn.

7...♗g7! 8.exf5

8.♘f3 fxe4 9.♘xe4 0-0 10.♘eg5 ♘c6⩲

8...♗xf5 9.♗xf5 gxf5⩲

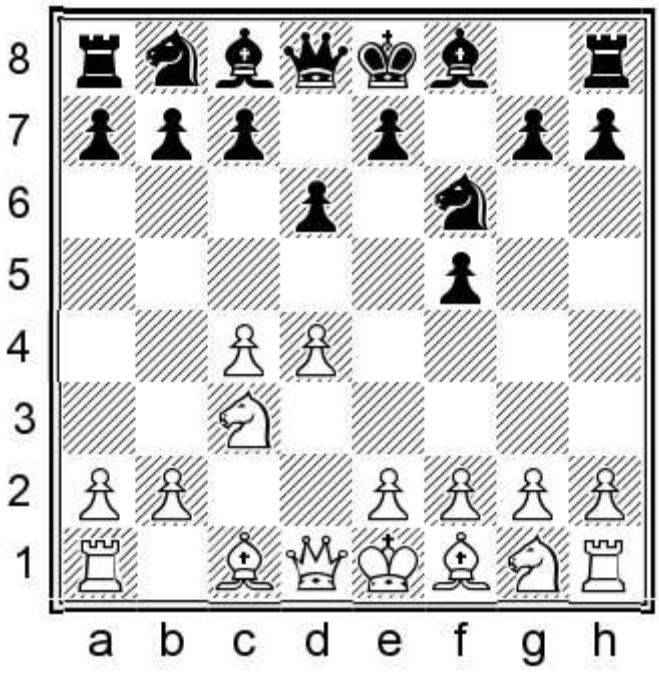


Position after: 9...gxf5⩱

Theory continues further in this line. Black is probably fine, but I feel it's easier to play as White. It's true that he has to justify his missing pawn, but his pieces are well placed.

c) 4th and 5th move alternatives

1.d4 f5 2.c4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 d6!?

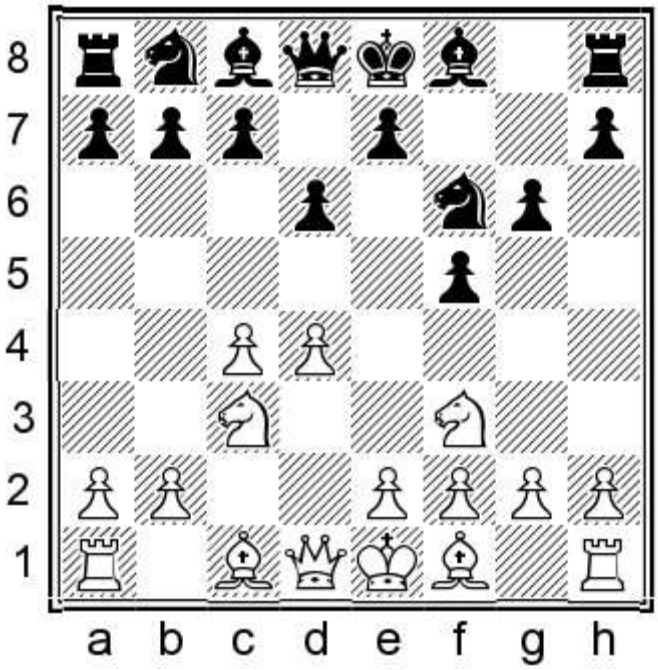


Position after: 3...d6!?

I've always preferred this less-played move. The idea is to delay ...g6 so that White is not tempted to attack with an early h4.

4.♗g5

A) 4.♘f3 In general, players only play this move with the idea of transposing into the main lines with g3. Other independent ideas are not great. 4...g6



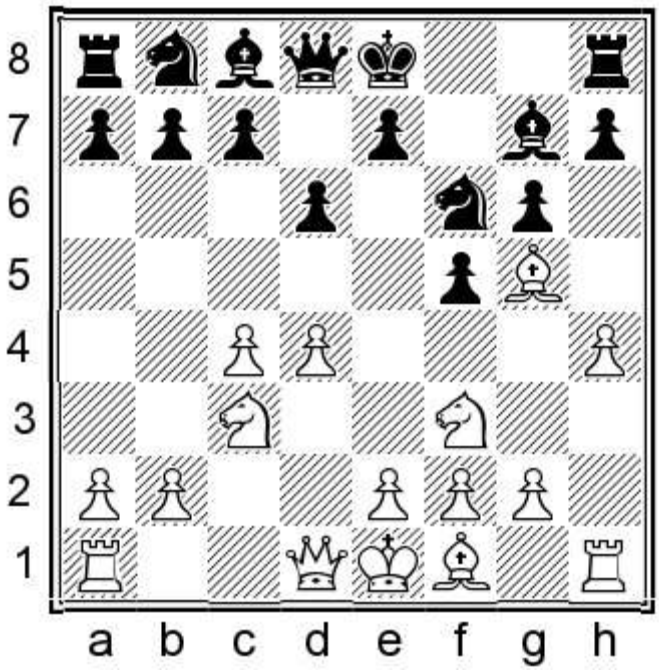
Position after: 4...g6

A1) 5.♕c2 ♗g7 6.♗g5 ♘bd7 − see the main line with 6.♘f3 ♗g7.

A2) 5.♗f4 A few players use the 3.♘c3 move order to transpose into this system which we covered in Chapter 6 with ...d6 already played. Fortunately, we were going to play ...d6 anyway, so it doesn't change anything for our repertoire, e.g. 5...♗g7 6.e3 0-0 and it has transposed to Chapter 6.

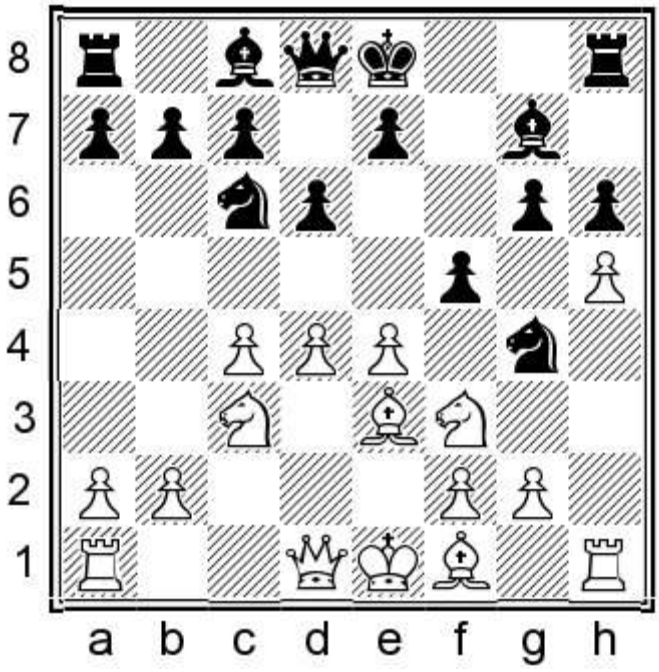
A3) 5.g3 ♗g7 6.♗g2 0-0 This is the classical main line. See the following chapters.

A4) 5.♗g5 ♗g7 6.h4!?



Position after: 6.h4!?

We have already seen that playing both h4 and ♘f3 doesn't make much sense, and that is still the case here. 6...♘g4!? I like this idea. This is a good square for the knight, and White has difficulties pushing h4−h5. 7.e4 [Black obviously wants to meet 7.h5?! with 7...h6, when there is no capture on f6: 8.♗d2 g5∓.] 7...h6 8.♗e3 ♘c6 9.h5!?



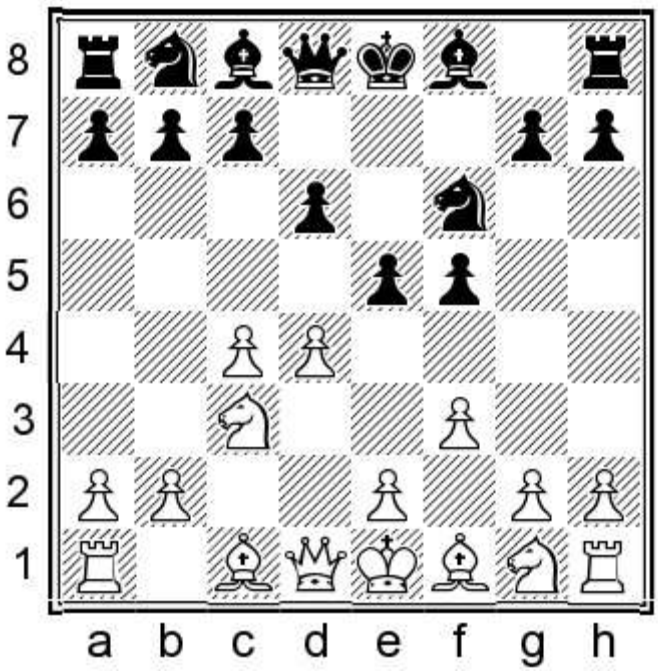
Position after: 9.h5!?

A4.1) 9...e5 10.dxe5 ♘xe3 11.fxe3 ♘xe5 12.hxg6 ♘xg6 13.♗d3± White's great activity compensates for his strange pawn structure and missing bishop. He won quickly in Moskalenko, V

(2505) – Avshalumov, A (2480), Paris 1992, 1-0 (20).

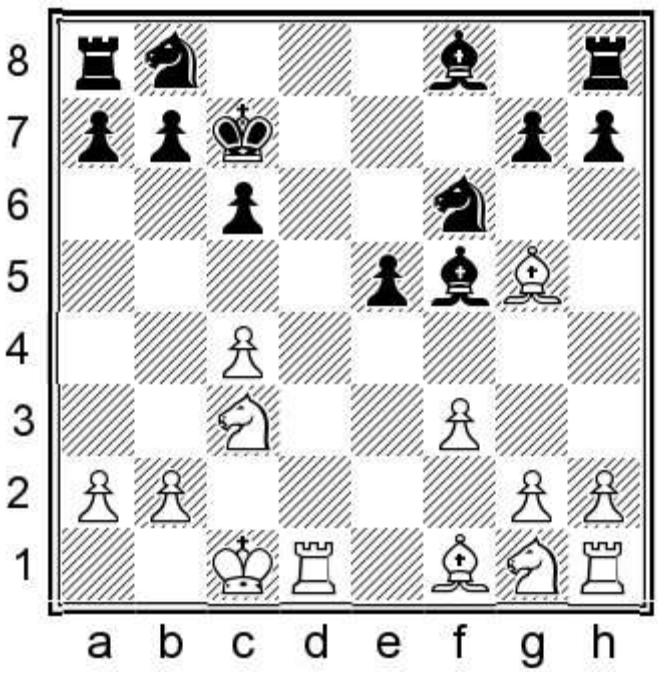
A4.2) 9...g5!N 10.exf5 ♗xf5 11.♗d3 ♕d7 12.0-0 0-0∓

B) 4.f3 e5!



Position after: 4...e5!

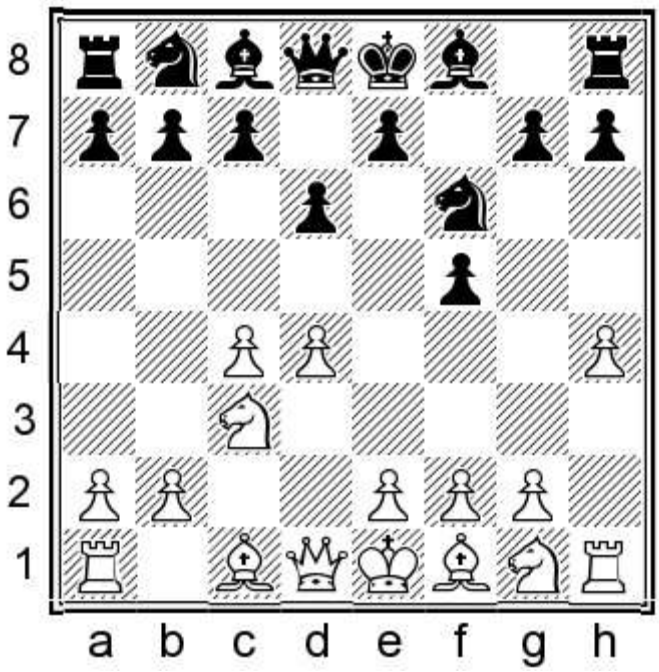
White was wanting to play e4, but he missed that our last move actually prepared ...e5, which white moves other than 4.f3 could have prevented. 5.dxe5 dxe5 6.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 It's hard to imagine that Black could have any problems if he is sufficiently precise. 7.♗g5 c6 8.e4 ♔c7 9.exf5 ♗xf5 10.0-0-0



Position after: 10.0-0-0

Black scored a fine win in Aliyev, R (2346) – Cheparinov, I (2718), Abu Dhabi 2018, 0-1 (33), but I would rather place the knight in the centre, instead of on a6, as in the game: 10...♘bd7 11.♗d3 ♗e6=.

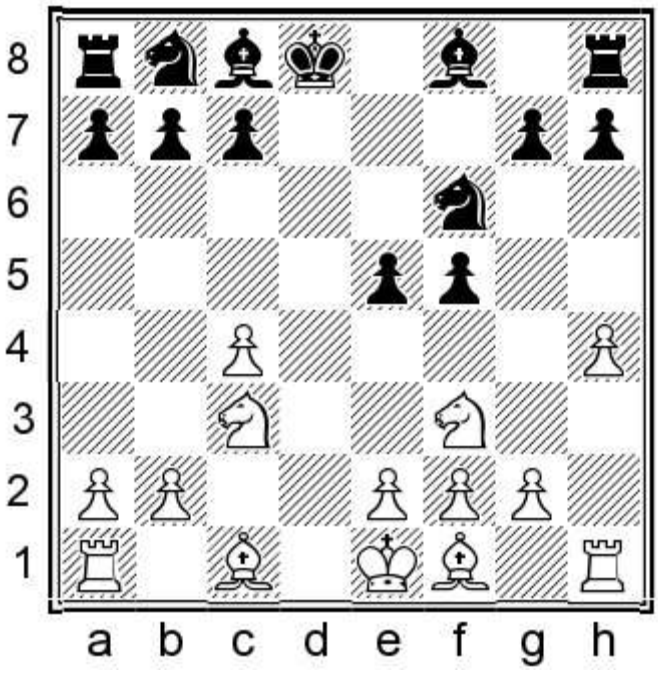
C) 4.h4



Position after: 4.h4

A few bold players have gone for this approach, trying to prevent Black from reaching a Leningrad system with ...g6. The drawback is the same as for 4.f3: it doesn't prevent ...e7−e5. 4...e5!

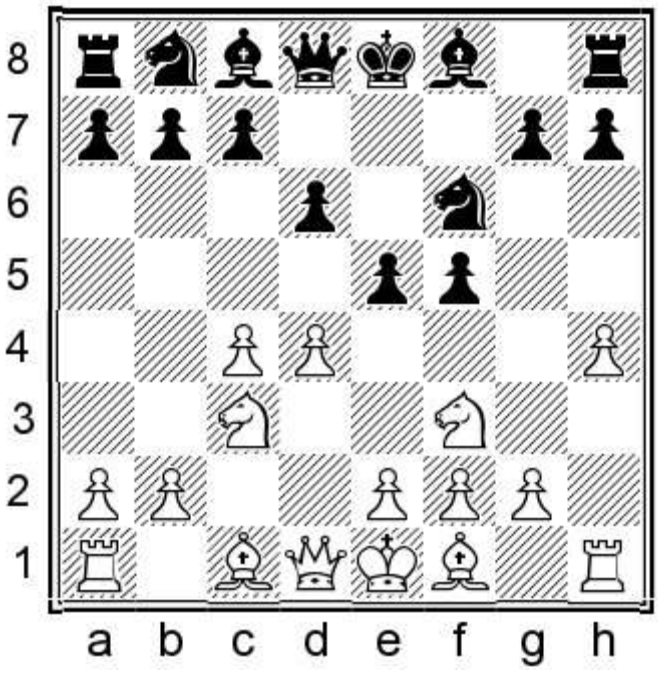
C1) 5.dxe5 dxe5 6.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 I don't think White can prove an advantage with such an early queen trade, especially since we took the center while White played h4. 7.♘f3



Position after: 7.♘f3

This position was reached in the game Zwardon, V (2430) – Kociscak, J (2473), Czech Republic 2016, 0-1 (69). I would now improve with 7...♘c6! 8.♗g5 ♗e6 9.0-0-0+ ♔c8= The f6-knight is ready to jump to g4, so White probably has to give up the bishop pair.

C2) 5.♘f3

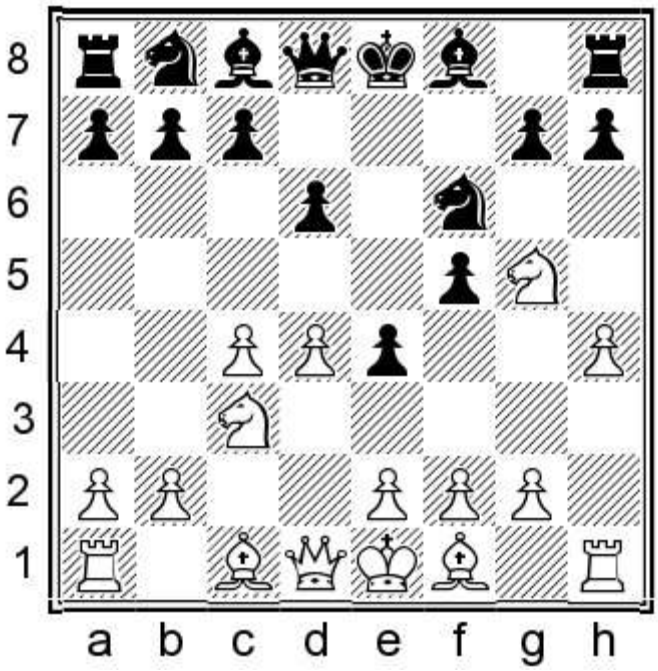


Position after: 5.♘f3

C2.1) 5...♘bd7?!N 6.♕c2! [6.e3 g6 7.♗e2 ♗g7 8.♘g5 ♕e7 9.♘b5 ♘b8!⇄] 6...e4 7.♘g5 ♘b6± is

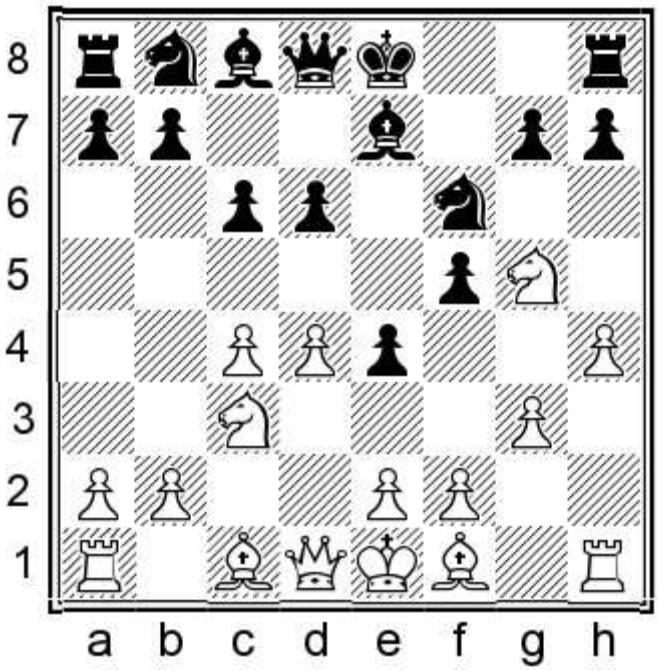
definitely a worse version.

C2.2) 5...e4 6.♘g5



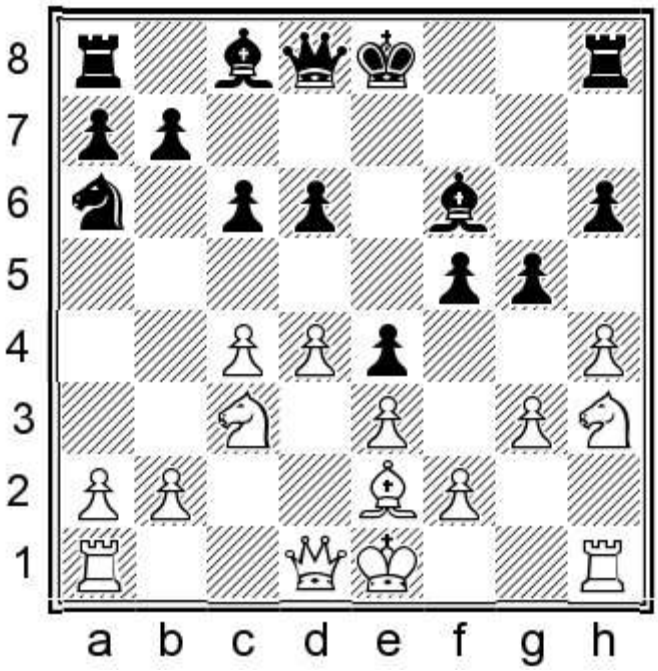
Position after: 6.♘g5

Transposing to a position that usually arises after 1.d4 d6 2.c4 e5 3.♘f3. The line chosen by White is not known to be particularly strong, and Black has achieved good results. 6...♗e7 7.g3 [7.e3 0-0 8.♗e2 c5 9.d5 h6 10.♘h3 ♘bd7 11.b3 ♘e5 12.♗b2 ♗d7 13.♕c2 a6 Black is going to follow with ...b5, and has a great position, ½-½ (40) Mirzoev, E (2443) – Mamedov, R (2689), Lvov 2017. 7.♘h3 0-0 8.♘f4 c6 9.g3 ♘a6 10.♗g2 d5↑] 7...c6



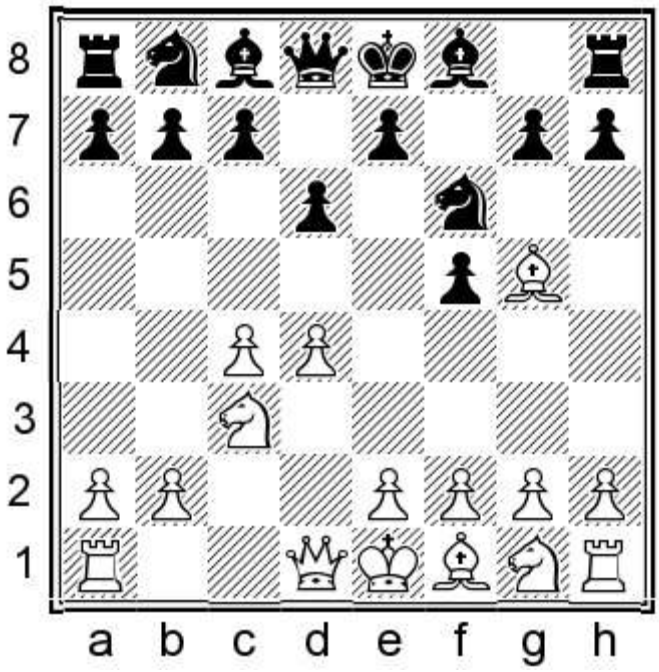
Position after: 7...c6

8.♘h3 [8.♗g2 0-0 9.♕b3 ♔h8 10.♗d2 ♘a6 11.0-0-0 ♘c7 12.f3 d5 13.cxd5 cxd5 14.♗f4 ♗d6∓ 0-1 (30) Maisuradze, N (2302) – Ivanchuk, V (2733), Cap d'Agde 2013] 8...♘a6 9.♗g5 h6 10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.e3 g5!? 12.♗e2



Position after: 12.♗e2

As in Wirig, A (2498) – Krasenkow, M (2642), Haguenau 2013, 0-1 (33). Even if Black isn't afraid of losing the right to castle, I think he should now have opted for quick development with 12...♗e6 13.♗h5+ ♔d7!∓. The king runs towards the queenside, and Black has a good initiative on the kingside and a strong bishop pair.



Position after: 4.♗g5

4...♘bd7

It's obviously necessary to defend the knight in order to avoid a dubious pawn structure.

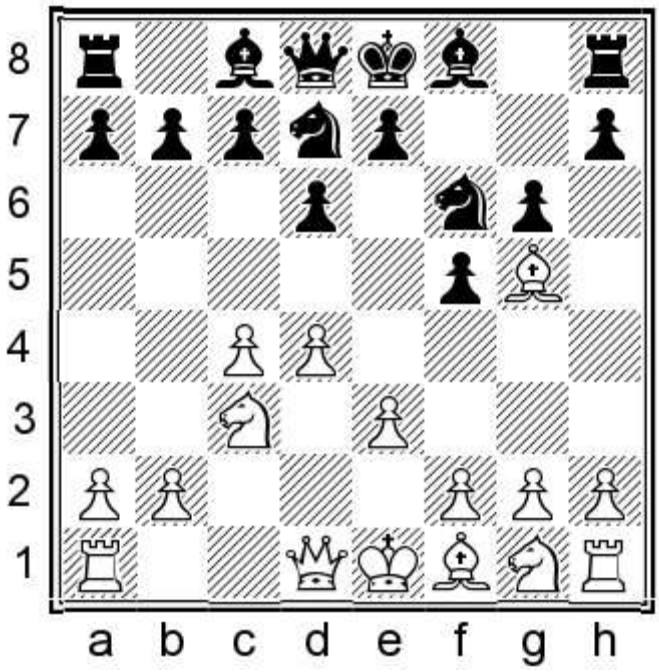
4...e6!? I believe that this move is also acceptable. In general, I am not fond of letting White advance with e4 so easily, but as he has already also played c4, his center may become weak. However I prefer the text move.

5.e3

Recently, a few games have continued with this quiet move. Although I don't think it's bad, it's definitely not the most troublesome.

5.e4?! I don't believe that this move makes much sense here. Black has different ways to get an acceptable position, e.g. 5...♘xe4!N 6.♘xe4 fxe4 7.♘e2 ♘f6 8.♘c3 g6! Black offers his pawn back, but at the price of the bishop pair. White has to decide if it's worth it, but either way Black just has the better position.

5...g6



Position after: 5...g6

6.h4

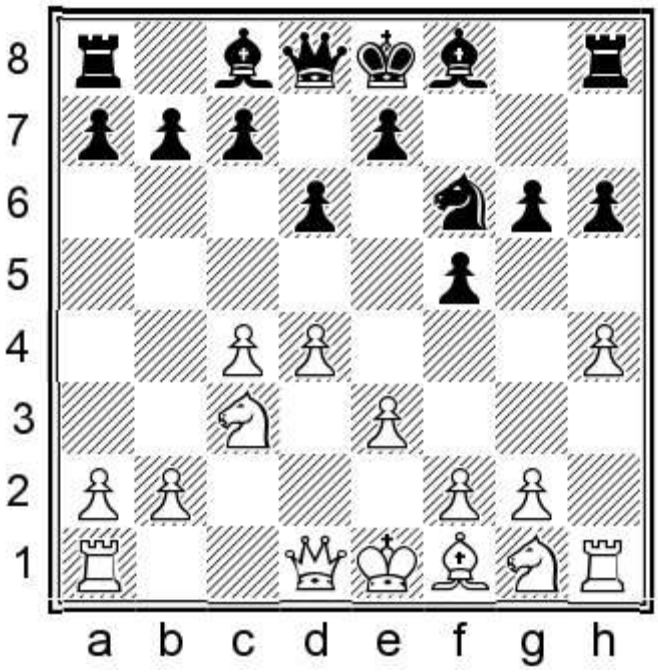
6.♘f3 ♗g7 7.♗d3 0-0 8.0-0 e5!= White can’t hope for an edge by playing such moves, allowing Black to react directly in the center.

6...h6! 7.♗xf6

White has to give up the bishop pair.

7.♗f4 e5!=

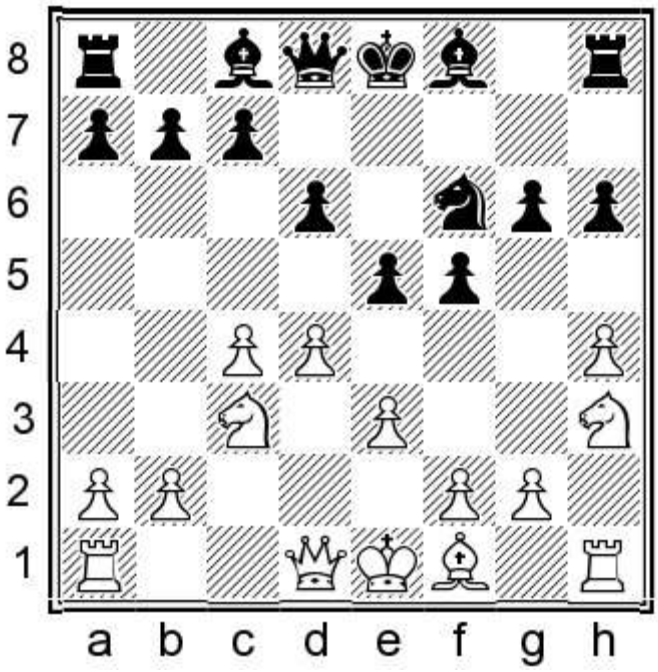
7...♘xf6



Position after: 7...♘xf6

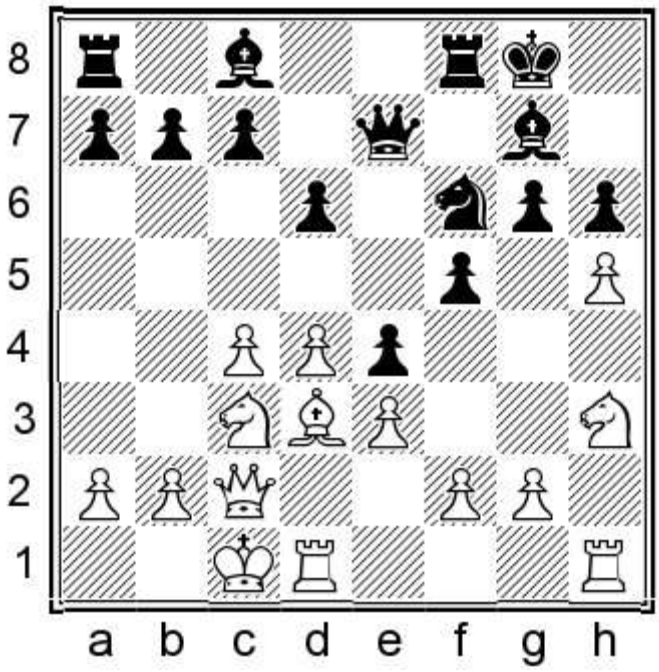
8.♕c2

8.♘h3?! trying to reach the f4-square, is naive. It would be great because of the weak g6-pawn, but fails immediately: 8...e5!



Position after: 8...e5!

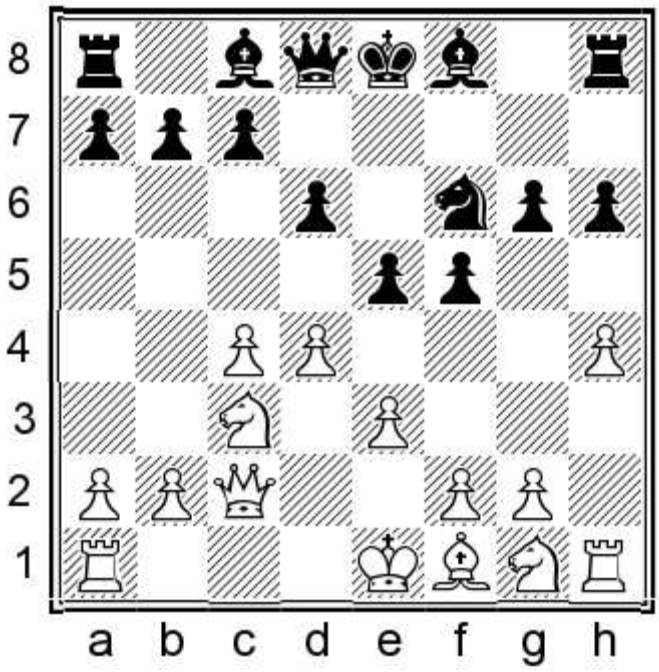
9.♕c2 [9.dxe5 dxe5 10.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 11.0-0-0+ ♗d7∓ The king is going to reach c7, when Black will enjoy his bishop pair and strong center.] 9...♗g7 10.0-0-0 ♕e7 11.♗d3 0-0 12.h5 e4!



Position after: 12...e4!

13.♗e2 [13.hxg6 This positional piece sacrifice was probably needed in order to keep chances, even if I still prefer Black. 13...exd3 14.♕xd3 c6! 15.♘f4 ♘e4∓] 13...g5∓ This position was reached in the game Rakhmanov, A (2667) – Kobalia, M (2628), Tallinn 2016, 0-1 (41). Black is more than fine since his opponent is unable to set up any kind of attack.

8...e5



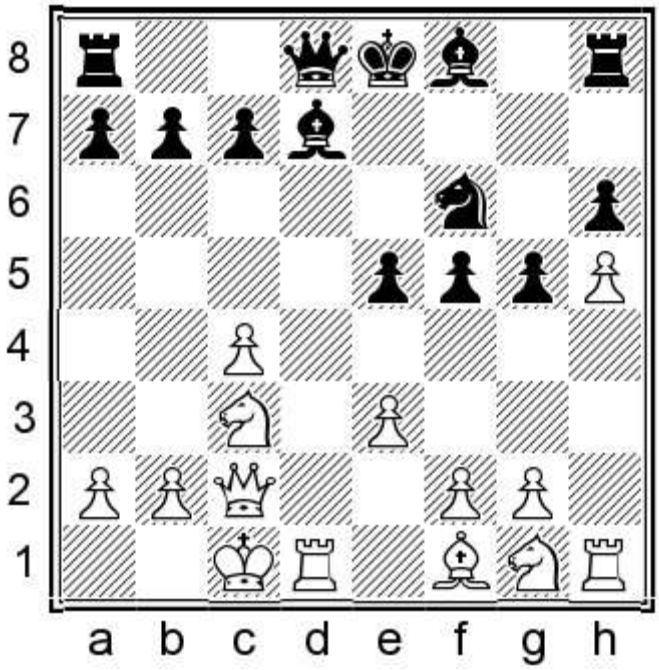
Position after: 8...e5

9.0-0-0!

9.dxe5 dxe5 10.♘f3 ♕e7 11.0-0-0 ♗g7=

9...♗d7 10.dxe5 dxe5 11.h5 g5⇄

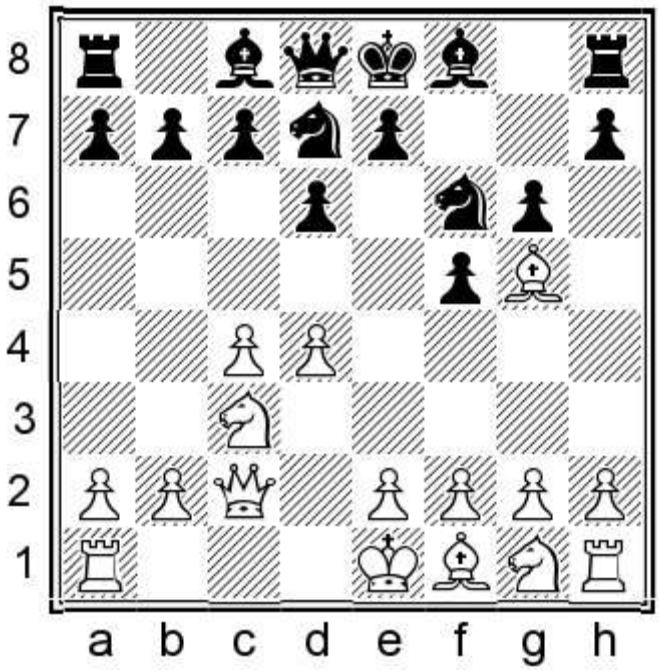
Of course Black has to be careful over the next few moves, but he has good prospects with his impressive pawns in the center.



Position after: 11...g5⇄

d) 6.♘f3, 6.e4

1.d4 f5 2.c4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 d6!? 4.♗g5 ♘bd7 5.♕c2 g6

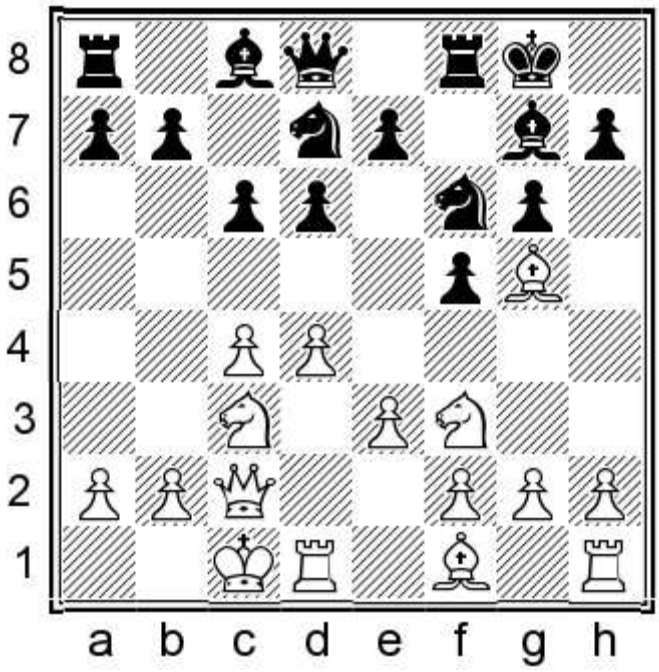


Position after: 5...g6

6.e4

This used to be theory's recommendation, but Black appears to be doing fine, so in the most recent games White has been trying something different. Still, we have to examine it thoroughly. We will consider 6.e3 and 6.h4 in the next subchapters.

6.♘f3 ♗g7 7.0-0-0 [7.e4 fxe4 8.♘xe4 ♘xe4 9.♕xe4 c5 is just a transposition − see 6.e4] 7...0-0 8.e3 c6!



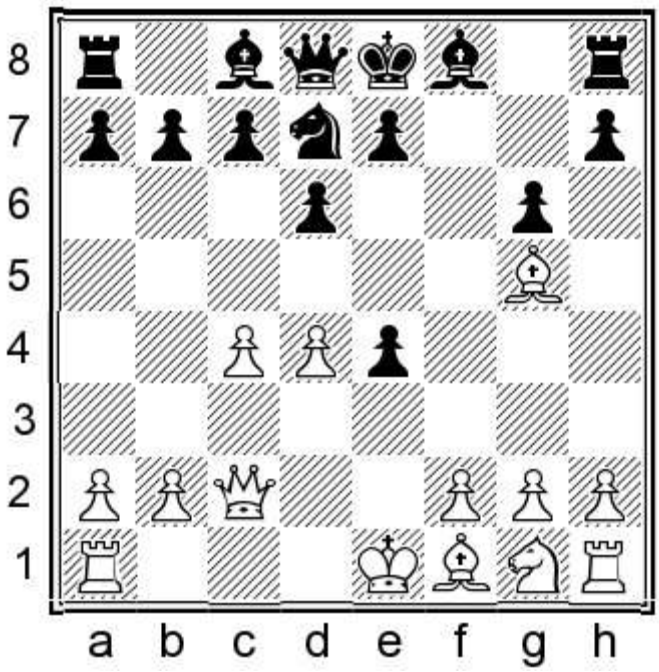
Position after: 8...c6!

9.h3 [9.♔b1 ♕e8 10.h3 e5↑] 9...♕e8 10.g4 I think this kind of development is the only decent plan for White, but Black is fully prepared to face it. 10...fxg4 11.♘h4 g3 12.f4 ♘b6 13.♗d3 e5!⇄ 0-1 (58) Wehmeier, S (2410) – Koch, W (2315), Germany 1996.

6...♘xe4

6...fxe4 Black generally prefers this move order, but it leaves White with another possibility, viz. 7.♘ge2!?. Black should be fine, but I prefer to avoid it.

7.♘xe4 fxe4



Position after: 7...fxe4

8.♕xe4

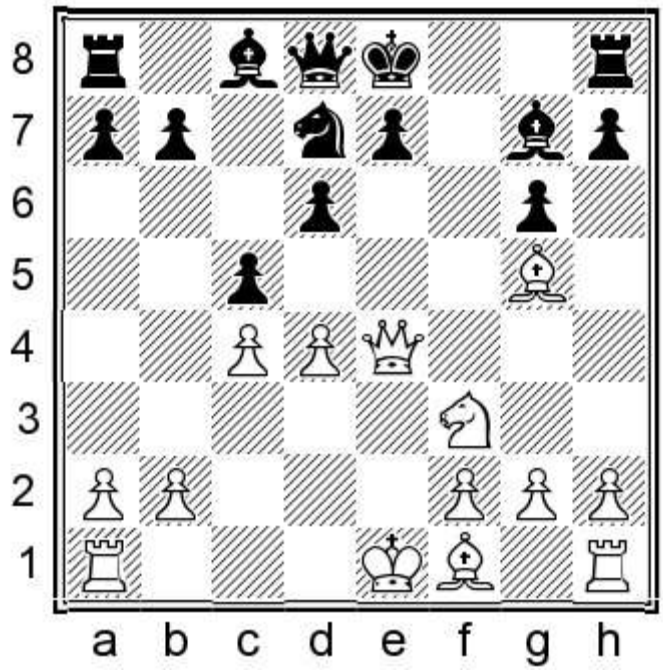
8.♘e2?! Now this move makes little sense. 8...♘f6 9.♘c3 ♗g7 10.♘xe4 ♘xe4 11.♕xe4 ♗f5∓

8...♗g7 9.♘f3

A) 9.0-0-0 c5 10.♘f3 White has to transpose to the main line.

B) 9.♗d3?! has been played a few times, but is already a serious mistake. 9...c5! 10.♘f3 cxd4∓ We have freed the c5-square for our knight, and the threat of it landing there is definitely a nuisance for White.

9...c5!



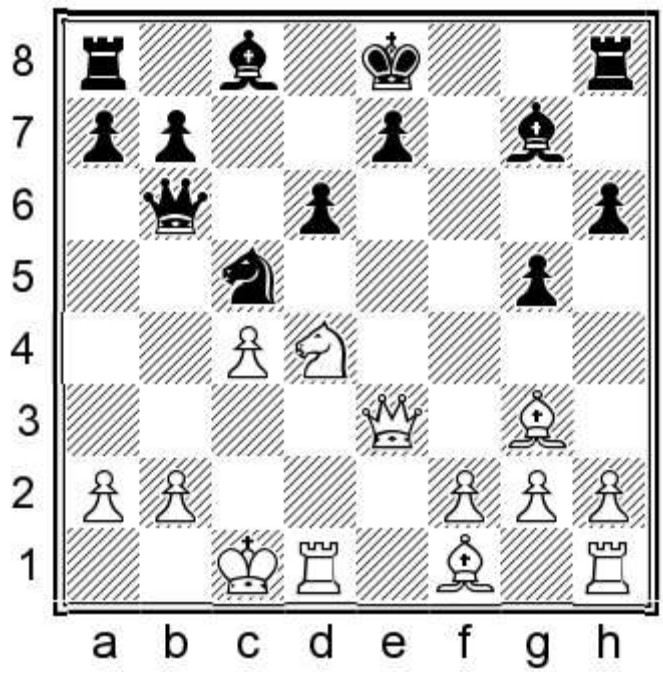
Position after: 9...c5!

It's very important to strike back in the center immediately. It also allows the queen to reach the queenside quickly if needed.

10.0-0-0 ♘f6!

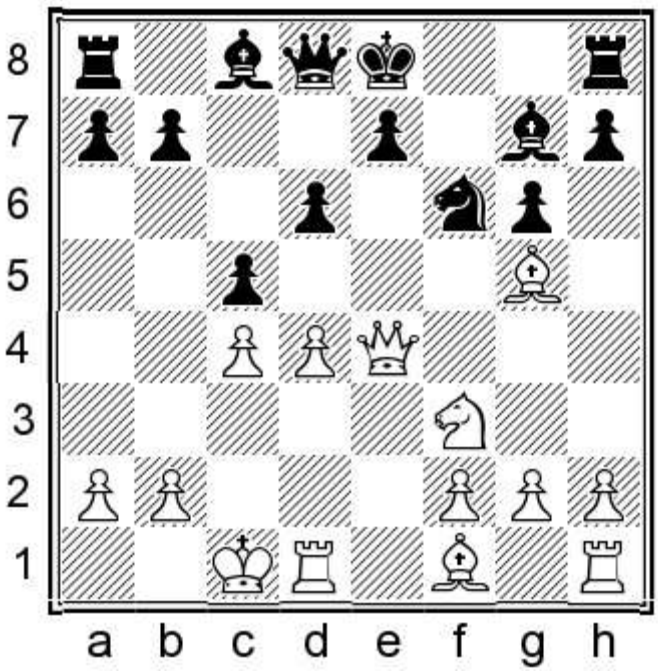
After this move, White has tried two different queen retreats, but they are not his only options.

I also quite like 10...cxd4!?, e.g. 11.♘xd4 ♘c5 12.♕e3 h6 13.♗h4 g5 14.♗g3 ♕b6!⇄



Position after: 14...♕b6!⇄

The drawback is that things can soon get really crazy, and you may need to memorize some lines in order to enter this maze. The other option is safer.

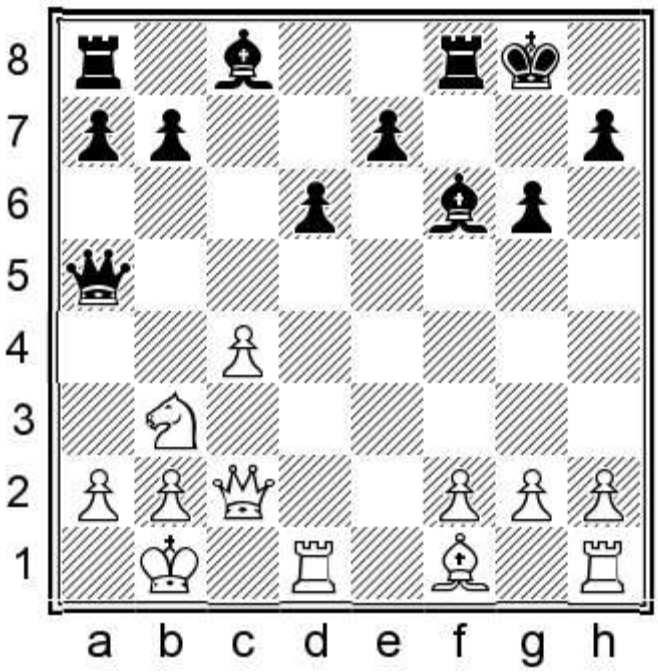


Position after: 10...♘f6!

11.♕e1

An unusual square for the queen, but from here it keeps an eye on e6 and the e7-pawn.

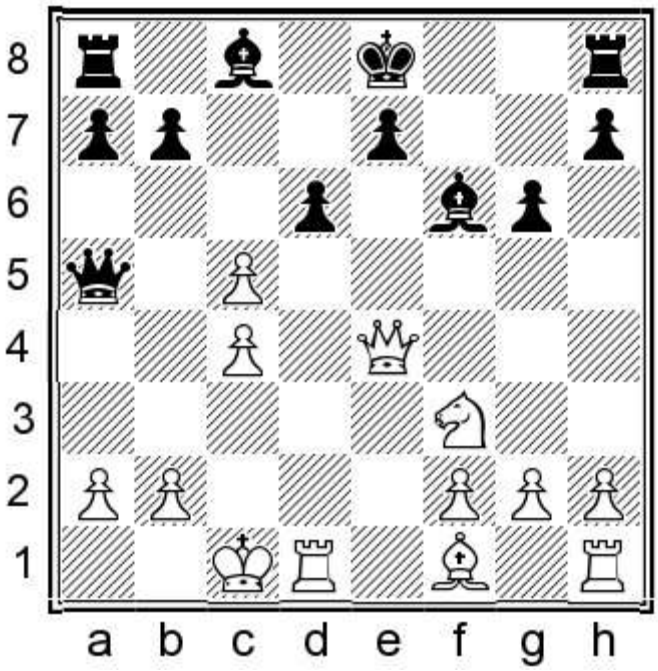
A) 11.♕c2?! cxd4 12.♘xd4 ♕a5! Attacking both a2 and g5, so White has to make concessions. 13.♗xf6 ♗xf6 14.♔b1 0-0 15.♘b3



Position after: 15.♘b3

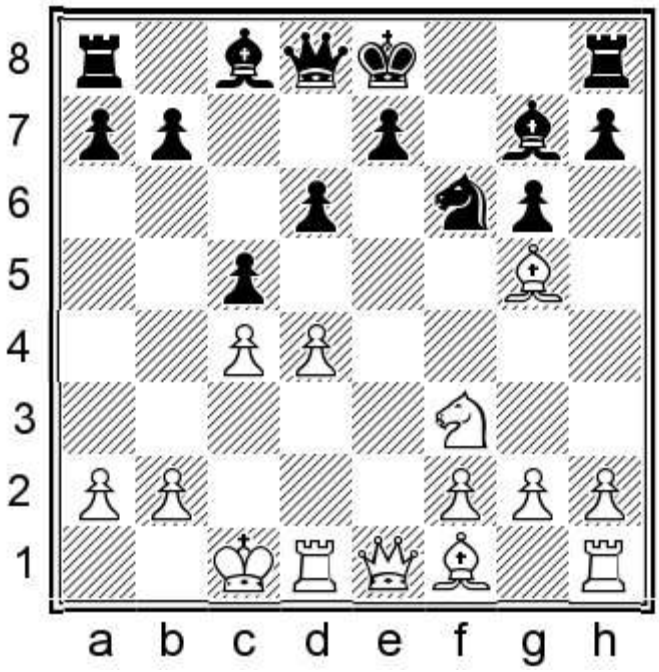
Even if Black won in Fidalgo, A (2187) – Martins, D (2397), Cascais 2018, 0-1 (71), we can improve his play with 15...♕c7 16.h4 a5→.

B) 11.♗xf6N This hasn't been tried yet. It looks a bit sad, as it's pretty obvious that Black's dark-squared bishop will be a monster, but at least it enables White to keep his queen in the center. 11...♗xf6 12.dxc5 ♕a5!



Position after: 12...♕a5!

White has no choice but to keep grabbing pawns. 13.cxd6 [13.a3 ♕xc5∓] 13...♕xa2 14.♕b1 [14.dxe7?? ♕xb2#] 14...♕a6! 15.dxe7 ♗e6 16.♗d3 ♔xe7! 17.♖he1 ♖ac8∓ In this completely wild position, Black's king looks the safer, so he retains the better chances. His missing pawn is totally irrevelant.



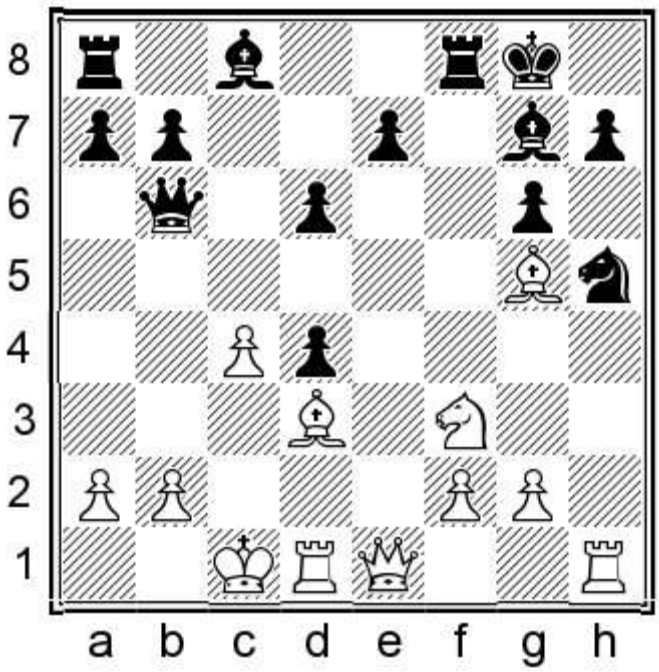
Position after: 11.♕e1

11...♕b6!N

11...♕c7 Even if this leads to a decent position, it's slightly less active. 12.♗d3 0-0 13.h3 ♗d7⇄ 0-1 (25) Saiyn, Z (2360) – Dastan, B (2409), Al Ain 2013.

12.dxc5

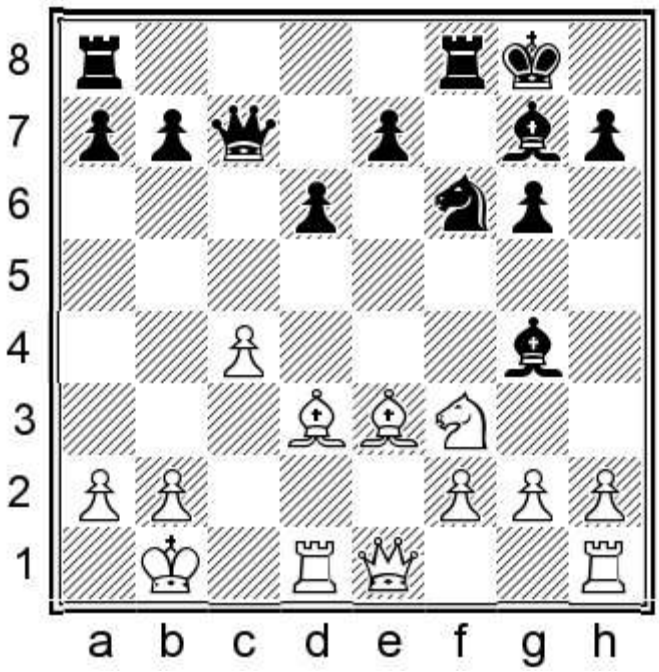
12.♗d3 0-0 13.h4 cxd4 14.h5 ♘xh5!



Position after: 14...♘xh5!

15.♗xe7 ♖xf3!? 16.gxf3 ♘f4∓ Black will soon open the long diagonal, as White will be unable to keep a piece on d3 without conceding material.

12...♕xc5 13.♗e3 ♕c7 14.♗d3 0-0 15.♔b1 ♗g4↑

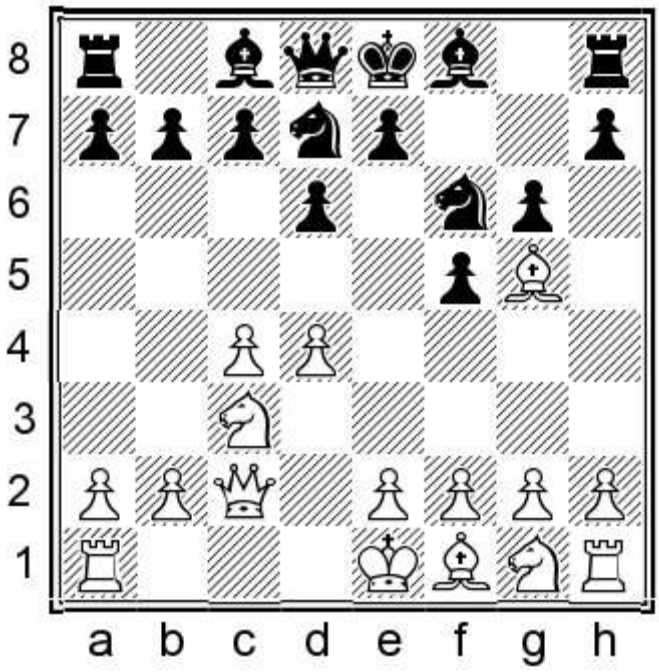


Position after: 15...♗g4↑

In this double-edged middlegame, Black's play on the queenside seems really easy to develop.

e) 6.e3, 6.h4 c6 7.--, 7.0-0-0 ♗g7 8,-- 8.e3

1.d4 f5 2.c4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 d6!? 4.♗g5 ♘bd7 5.♕c2 g6

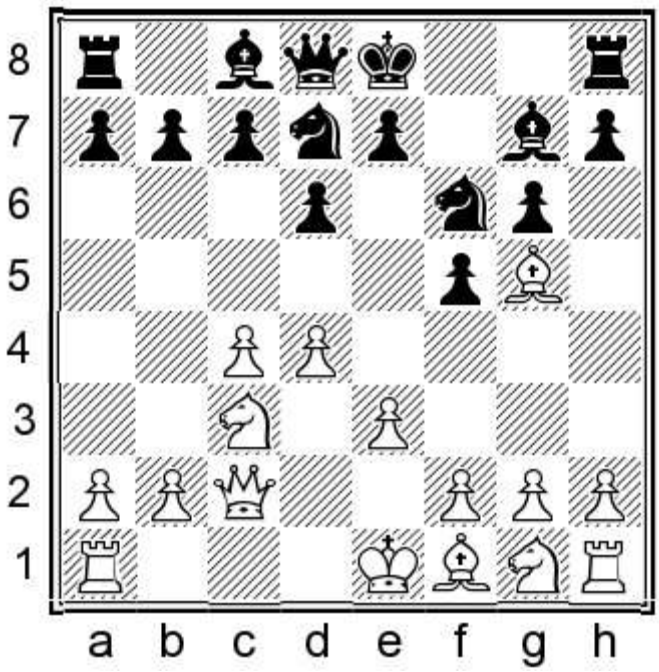


Position after: 5...g6

6.h4!?

This has been the most popular move recently. White shows his intentions on the kingside straight away.

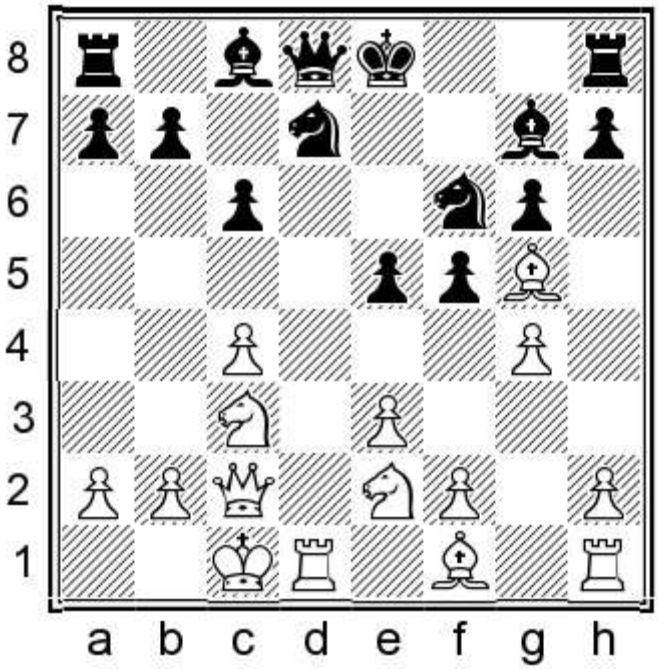
6.e3 can be played in the same spirit or as a different type of position. 6...♗g7



Position after: 6...♗g7

A) 7.h4 c6 8.0-0-0 − see the main line with 8.e3.

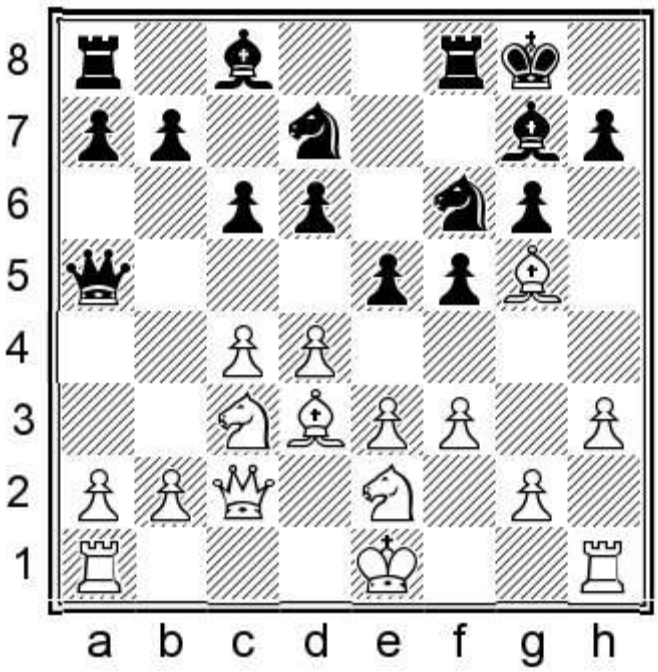
B) 7.♘ge2 e5 8.dxe5 dxe5 9.0-0-0 c6 10.g4!?



Position after: 10.g4!?

An interesting sacrifice in order to bring the e4-square under control. 10...fxg4 11.♘g3 ♕a5 12.h4 e4! 13.♘gxe4 0-0 14.♘d6 ♘e5 15.♗e2 ♘h5!?↑ and Black won a nice game in Piket, J (2615) – Topalov, V (2460), Oviedo 1992, 0-1 (38).

C) 7.♗d3 e5 White is more committed if we start with this move, directly threatening ...e4. 8.f3 0-0 9.♘ge2 c6 10.h3 ♕a5

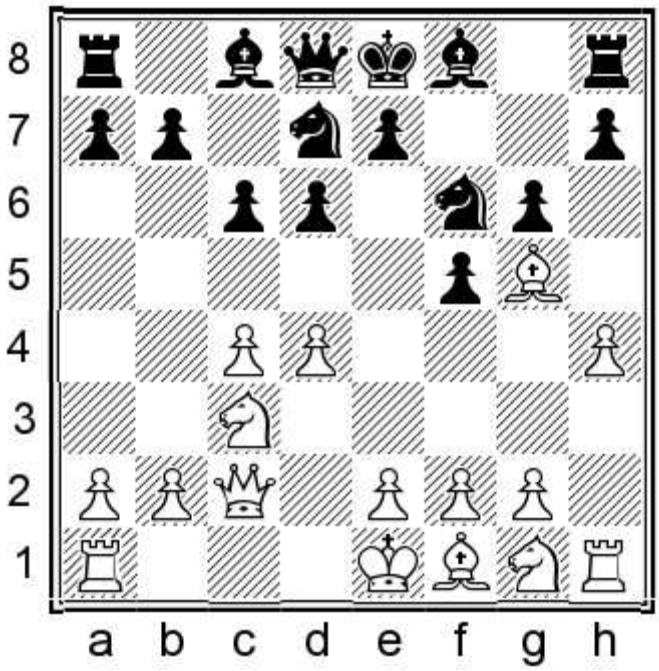


Position after: 10...♕a5

C1) 11.♕d2! This was necessary to keep the balance. 11...f4!? 12.exf4 exd4 13.♘xd4 ♖e8+ 14.♘de2 [14.♘ce2 ♕xd2+ 15.♔xd2 ♘c5 16.♖ae1 d5⩱] 14...♘b6⩲ Preparing ...d5 with a nice initiative.

C2) 11.♗h4? e4! An excellent strike by Nijboer. 12.fxe4 fxe4 13.♗xe4 ♘xe4 14.♕xe4 ♘b6 15.♕d3 ♕a6 16.b3 d5 White is unable to defend his pawn, and Black has a great position, even if he couldn't manage to convert it. 17.e4 dxc4 18.♕d1 ♕a5∓ ½-½ (28) Kazhgaleyev, M (2579) – Nijboer, F (2606), France 2007.

6...c6



Position after: 6...c6

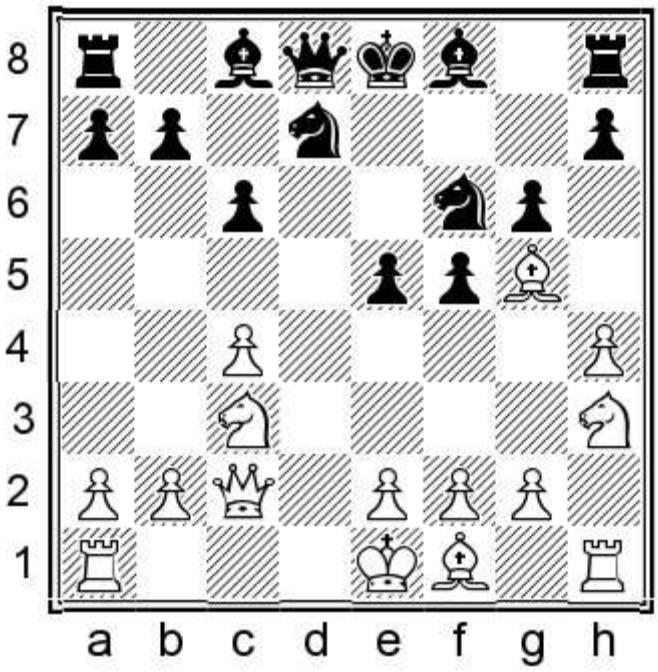
I prefer to start with this move, which is less usual than 6...♗g7, as I think it's more forcing. Indeed, by controlling the d5-square, Black is threatening to continue with ...e5.

6...e5? is clearly too early: 7.dxe5 dxe5 8.h5!±.

7.0-0-0

It seems natural to anticipate ...e5.

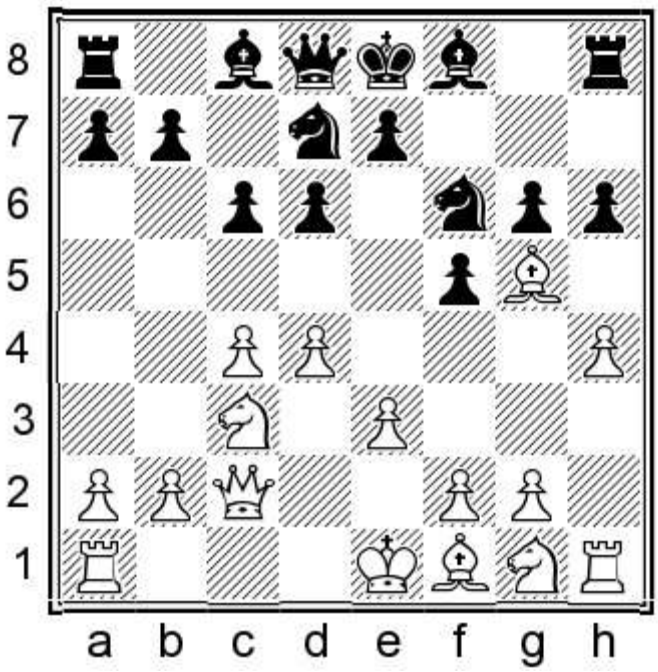
A) 7.♘h3?! The knight heads for the f4-square, but won't manage to reach it. 7...e5! 8.dxe5 dxe5!



Position after: 8...dxe5!

9.0-0-0 [9.h5?! is nothing compared to 8.h5 in the 6...e5 line. The reason is simply that White has no threats on the h-file. 9...♘c5! 10.♖d1 ♗d7∓] 9...h6 10.♗xf6 [10.♗e3 ♘g4 11.♗d2 ♗c5∓] 10...♕xf6∓

B) 7.e3 h6!?



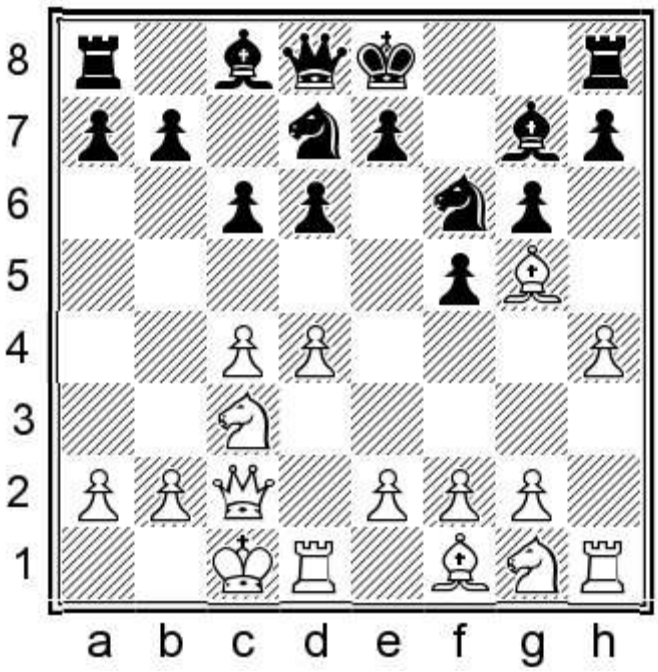
Position after: 7...h6!?

I like this move. True, it weakens the g6-pawn, but since White is unable to exploit it I prefer to force him to make a decision with his bishop.

B1) 8.♗xf6N 8...♘xf6 9.0-0-0 [9.♘h3 e5!∓] 9...♕a5 10.♘f3 e5! 11.♔b1 ♗g7⇄

B2) 8.♗f4 ♗g7!? 9.0-0-0 0-0 10.♗e2 ♕e8↑ White is unable to prevent ...e5 and we get an active position. It is no surprise that he lost in Mamedyarov, S (2775) – Ponomariov, R (2756), Riga 2013, 0-1 (35).

7...♗g7



Position after: 7...♗g7

8.e3

We will consider 8.♘h3 in the next subchapter.

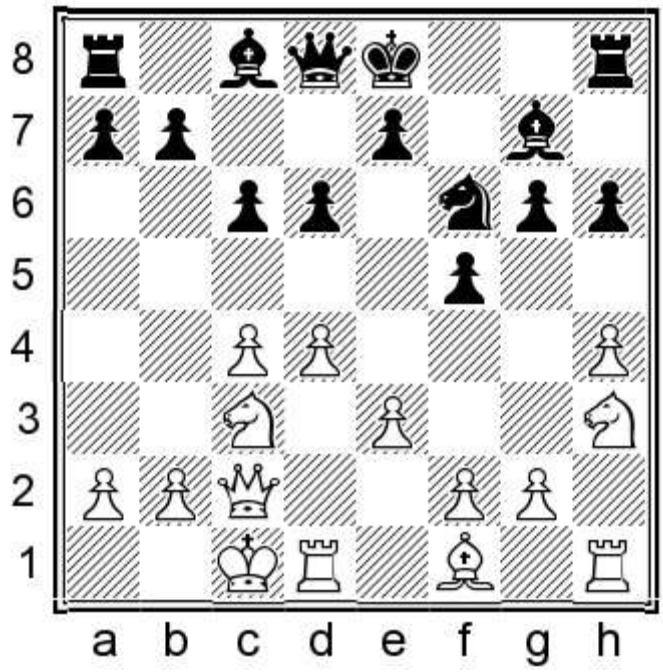
8...h6!?

I have investigated this interesting move which has the advantage of being reminiscent of the 7.e3 h6 line. 8...0-0!? is also very playable, and was actually the move order of the Mamedyarov – Ponomariov game mentioned above.

9.♗xf6

9.♗f4 has already already been seen in 7.e3 h6.

9...♘xf6 10.♘h3



Position after: 10.♘h3

This version seems slightly inferior as we are unable to advance with 10...e5, but it's still fully playable.

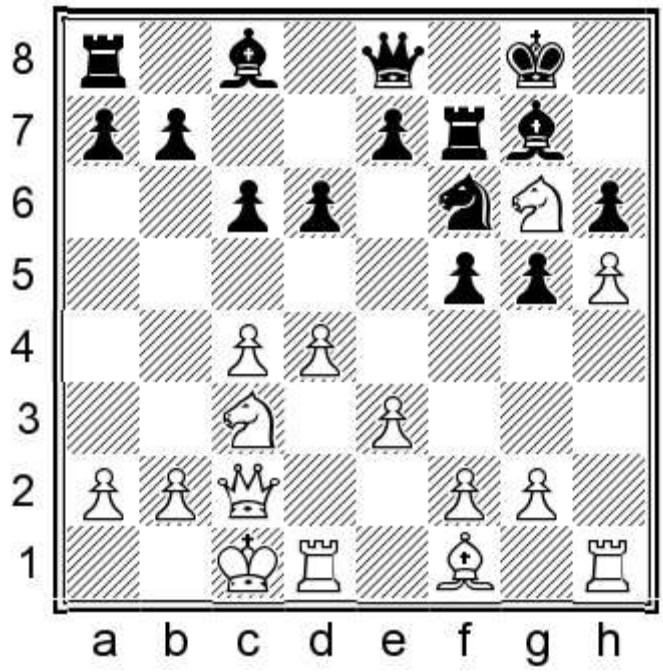
10...0-0 11.♘f4 ♕e8

Defending the g6-pawn and threatening 12...e5.

12.h5!

12.d5?! cxd5 13.♘cxd5 ♘xd5 14.♘xd5 ♕f7∓

12...g5 13.♘g6 ♖f7



Position after: 13...♖f7

The knight on g6 is annoying, but not necessarily stable, as Black may be able to make ...♘xh5 work at some point.

14.♗d3

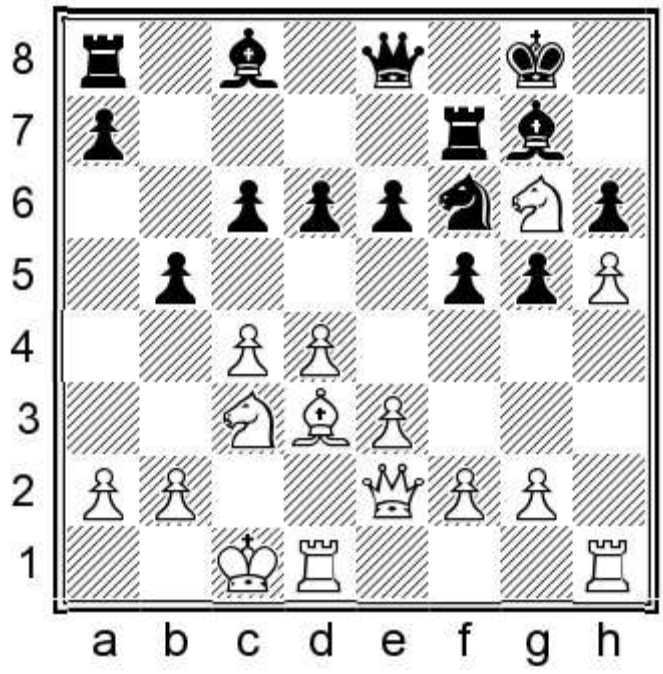
14.f3 ♘xh5! 15.♖xh5 ♖f6 16.♘xe7+ ♕xe7=

14...e6! 15.♕e2

White has to play this move if he wants to protect the h5-pawn properly.

15.♔b1?! ♘xh5! 16.♖xh5 ♖f6 17.♖h2 ♕xg6⩲

15...b5!?



Position after: 15...b5!?

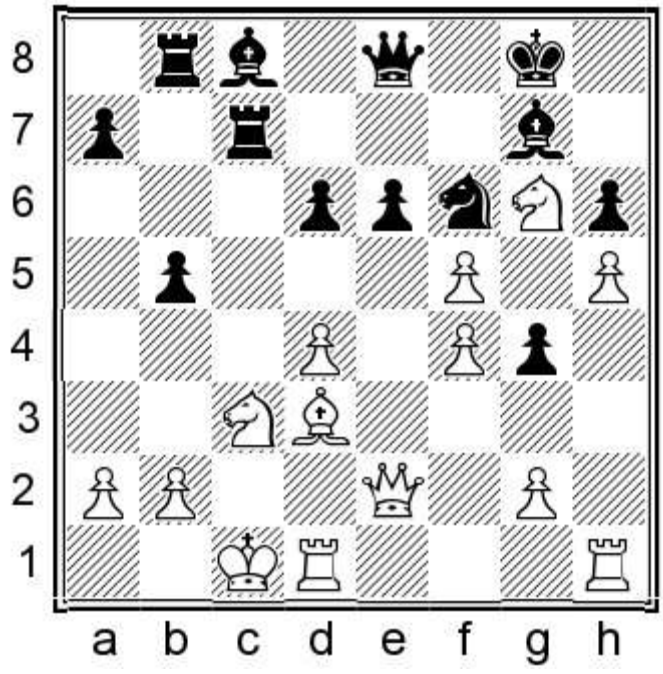
A pure computer move, even if I think it's actually pretty logical to launch the attack.

16.cxb5 ♖b8 17.f4

A) 17.bxc6?! ♕xc6∓

B) 17.♔b1 ♗d7 18.bxc6 ♗xc6 19.f3 ♖fb7→

17...g4 18.e4 cxb5 19.exf5 ♖c7



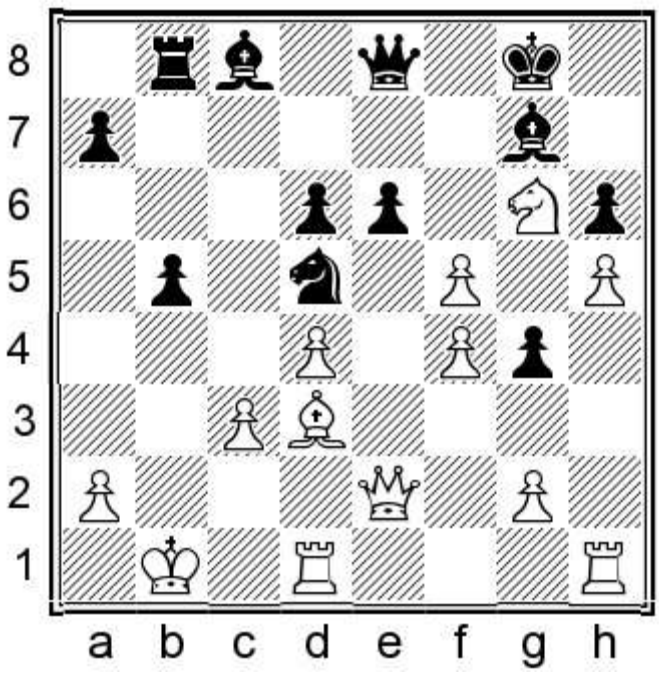
Position after: 19...♖c7

Material doesn't really count compared to the attack.

20.♔b1

20.♔d2 ♕f7! 21.fxe6 ♗xe6→

20...♖xc3 21.bxc3 ♘d5≅

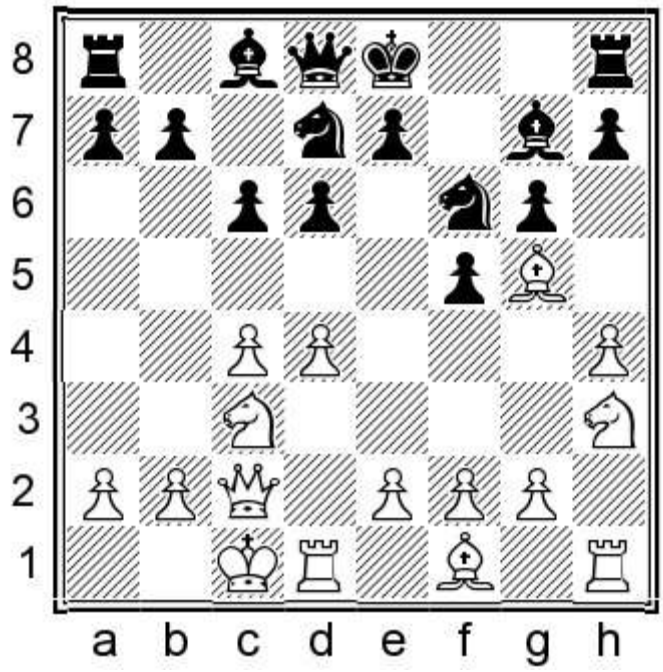


Position after: 21...♘d5≅

A very complicated position has arisen in which I like Black's chances.

f) 6.h4 c6 7.0-0-0 ♗g7 8.♘h3

1.d4 f5 2.c4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 d6!? 4.♗g5 ♘bd7 5.♕c2 g6 6.h4!? c6 7.0-0-0 ♗g7 8.♘h3



Position after: 8.♘h3

Many white players have tried this move. I actually faced it once recently, and wasn't convinced with the move I came up with.

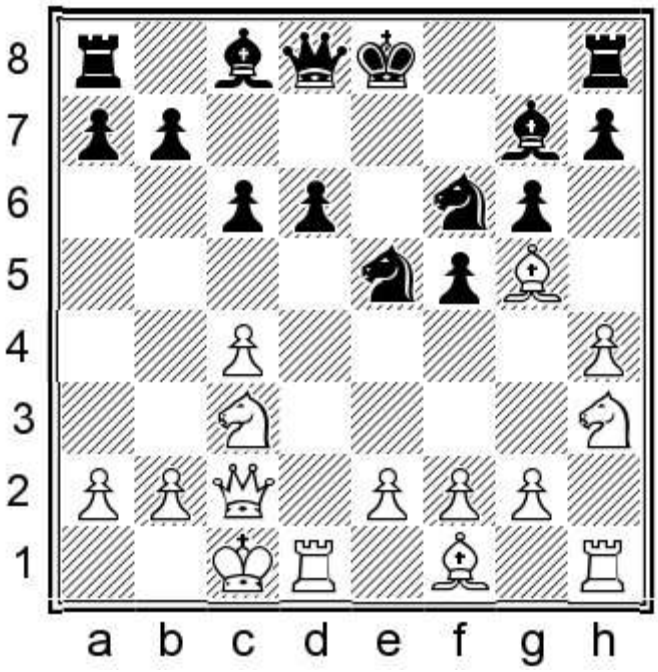
8...♕a5!?

This is the approach I like the most. Black removes his queen from the d-file in order to be able to push ...e5 and take back with the pawn. 8...e5 is the move I tried when I faced this line. At the board my opponent managed to find a quite complicated line to meet.

A) 9.e3?! h6 10.♗xf6 ♕xf6= I don't think Black should experience many problems here, mainly thanks to his bishop pair. He managed to win in Jones, G (2650) – Nijboer, F (2566), Netherlands 2016, 0-1 (80).

B) 9.e4 h6! 10.♗e3 f4 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.♗c5∞

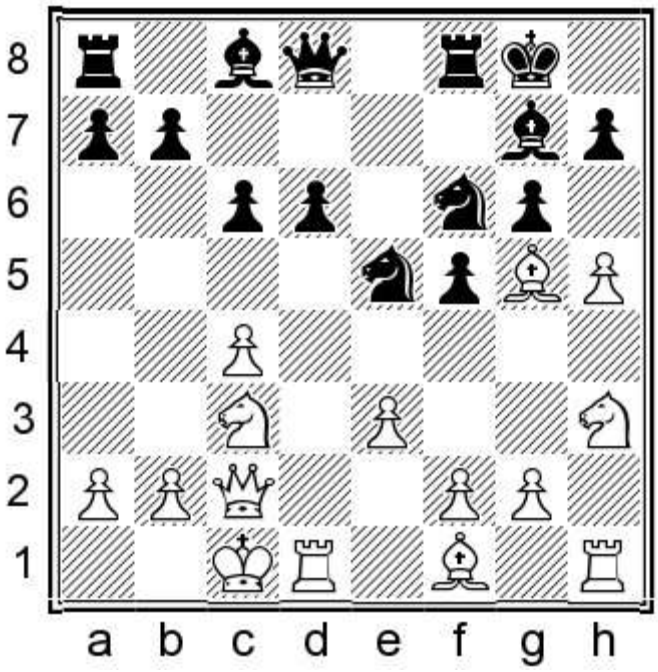
C) 9.dxe5 ♘xe5



Position after: 9...♘xe5

[9...dxe5 10.e4!± is obviously difficult for Black.] 10.e3! This quiet move is very strong. I thought for more than half an hour, but didn't come up with a good idea. [10.h5 ♘f7 11.♗h4 ♕a5 12.e3 ♘xh5 13.♘g5 ♘xg5 14.♗xg5 ♗e5= White obviously has enough compensation to keep the balance, 0-1 (34) Laurusas, T (2420) – Neiksans, A (2570), Vilnius 2014.]

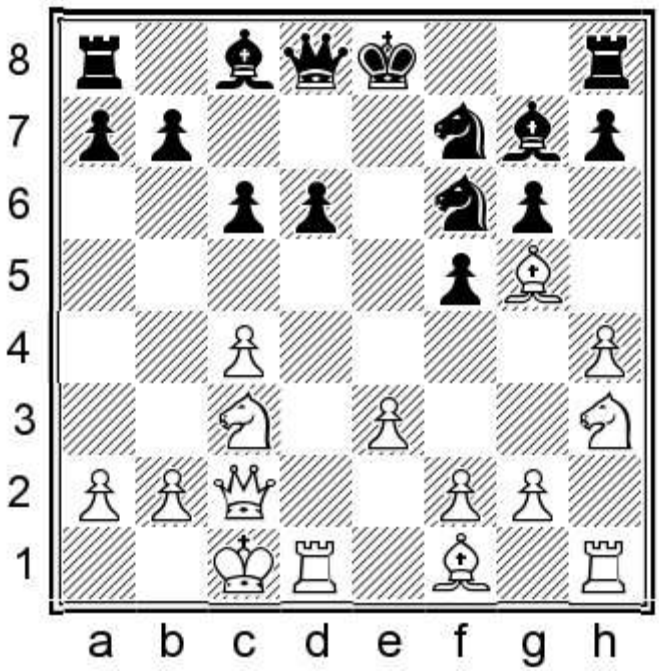
C1) 10...0-0? 11.h5!



Position after: 11.h5!

11...h6 [11...♕e7 12.hxg6 hxg6 13.♘f4±] 12.♗xf6 ♕xf6 13.hxg6 ♘xg6 14.♘e2!± White is clearly better. My opponent played a good game but spoiled his advantage, and the game finally ended in a draw, ½-½ (47) Alonso Rosell, A (2559) – Demuth, A (2517), Barcelona 2019.

C2) 10...♘f7!?N



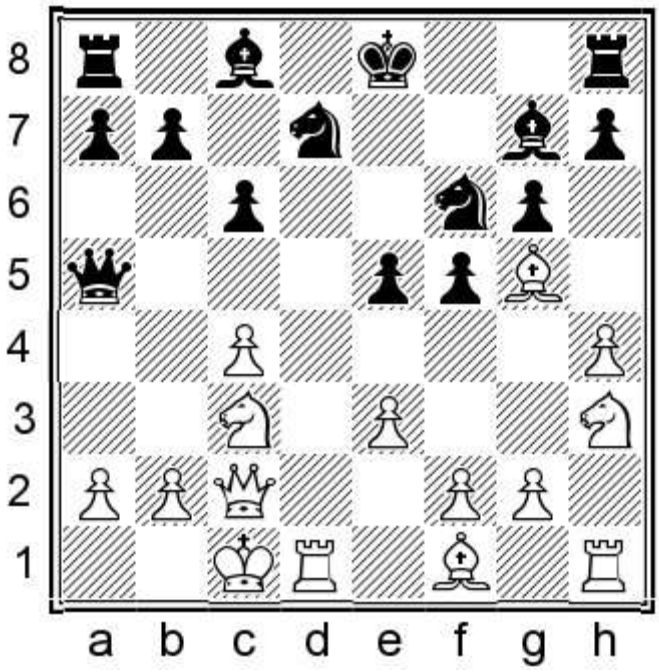
Position after: 10...♘f7!?N

This is probably the best move. I considered it, but didn't like the following line: 11.♗f4 ♕e7 12.♕d2!?± Black is losing the d6-pawn, and finding enough compensation doesn't seem so easy. I don't recommend this line.

9.♘f4

This is the most logical, and was played in both games that reached this position.

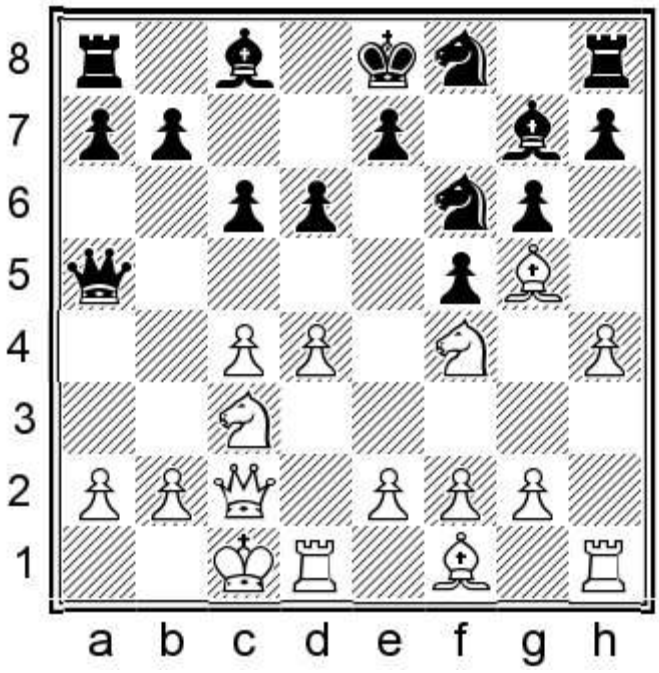
9.e3N 9...e5 10.dxe5 dxe5



Position after: 10...dxe5

11.♗e2 [11.e4?! This move is not a problem anymore because we are able to develop our pieces. 11...♘c5 12.exf5 ♗xf5 13.♕e2 0-0–+ ...♕xa2 is the nicest of the various threats!] 11...0-0 12.♔b1 ♘c5 13.h5 gxh5!⇄ I think it's better to have doubled h-pawns than to open the h-file and allow a weak g6-pawn. Black will follow with ...♗e6 with very good attacking chances on the queenside.

9...♘f8

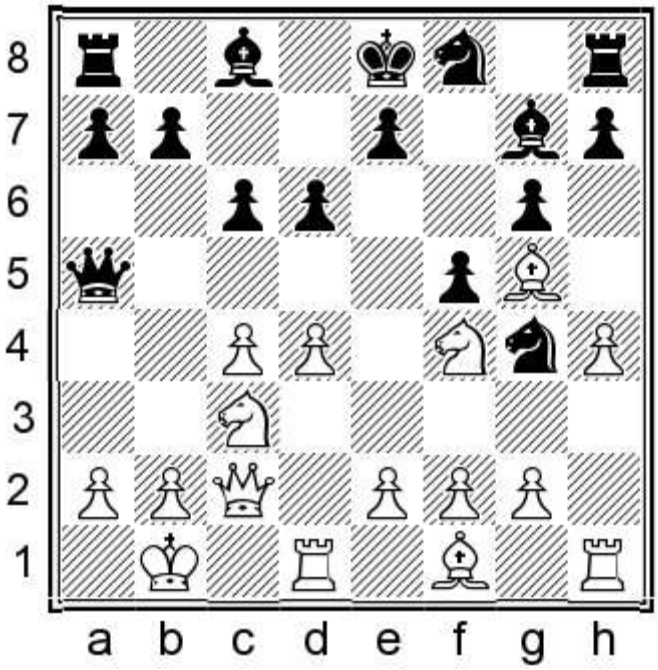


Position after: 9...♘f8

10.h5!?

This is definitely logical, but tactically not so strong.

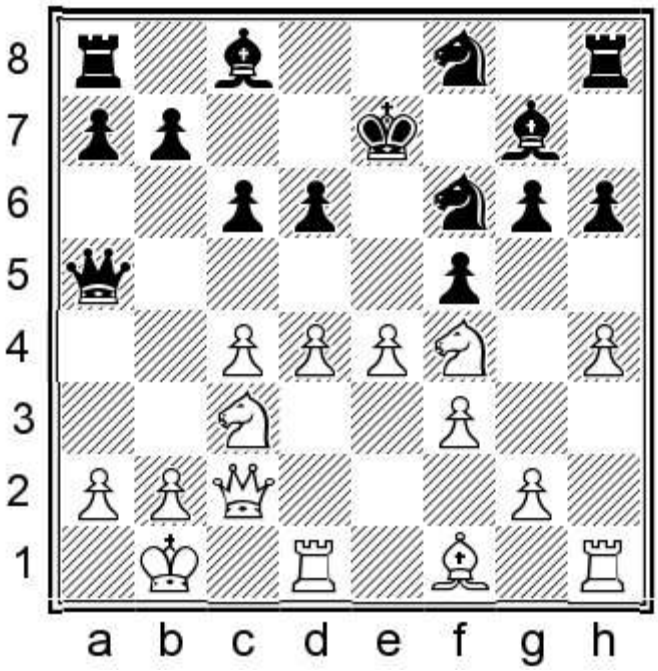
I also checked 10.♔b1N, securing White's king first. 10...♘g4!?



Position after: 10...♘g4!?

This strange-looking move is aimed at trapping the bishop on g5.

A) 11.e4 Bold players may appreciate this move, but it doesn't fully work: 11...h6 12.♗xe7 ♔xe7 13.f3 ♘f6

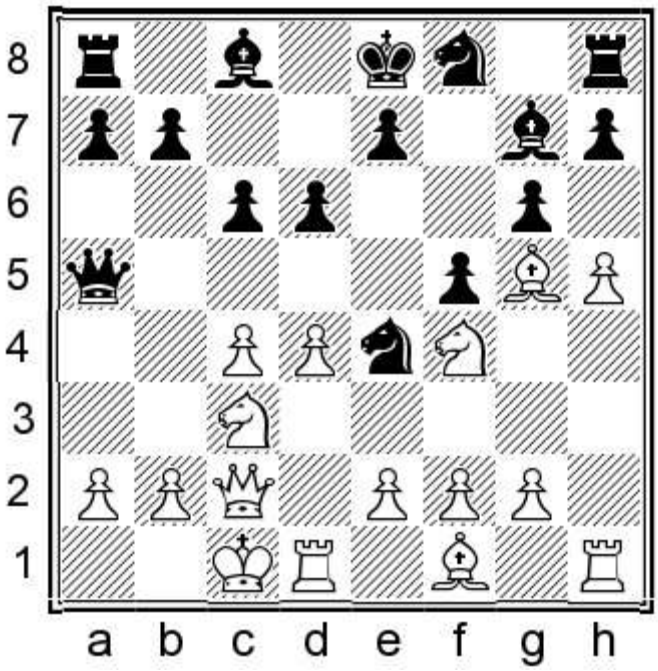


Position after: 13...♘f6

14.♕d2!? [14.c5 dxc5 15.d5 fxe4 16.dxc6 bxc6∓ 17.♘xe4? ♗f5–+] 14...♕d8 15.♗d3 ♔f7 16.exf5 ♗xf5 17.♗xf5 gxf5∞.

B) 11.♘h3! This is the only good way to create some space for the bishop. 11...♘e6 12.e3 ♗d7⇄ Black has given himself the possibility of castling queenside. He just needs to prevent ♗xe7, but there are various ways of doing so. This middlegame is complicated, but very reasonable for Black.

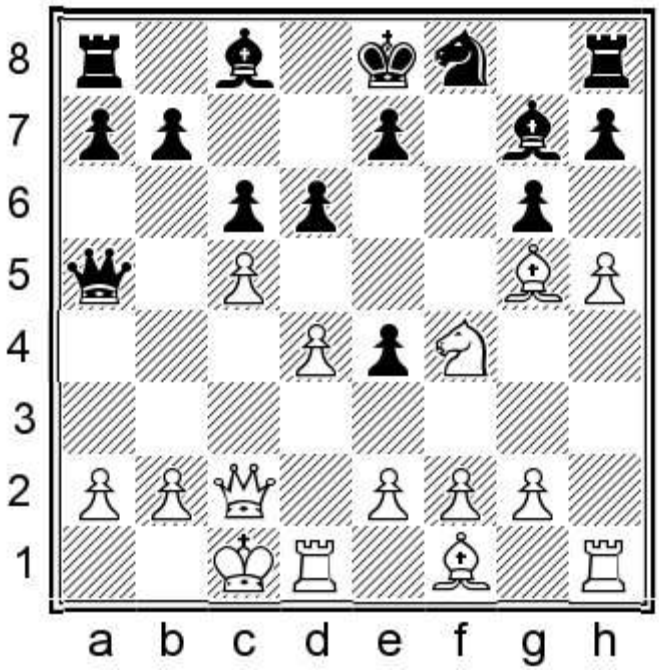
10...♘e4!



Position after: 10...♘e4!

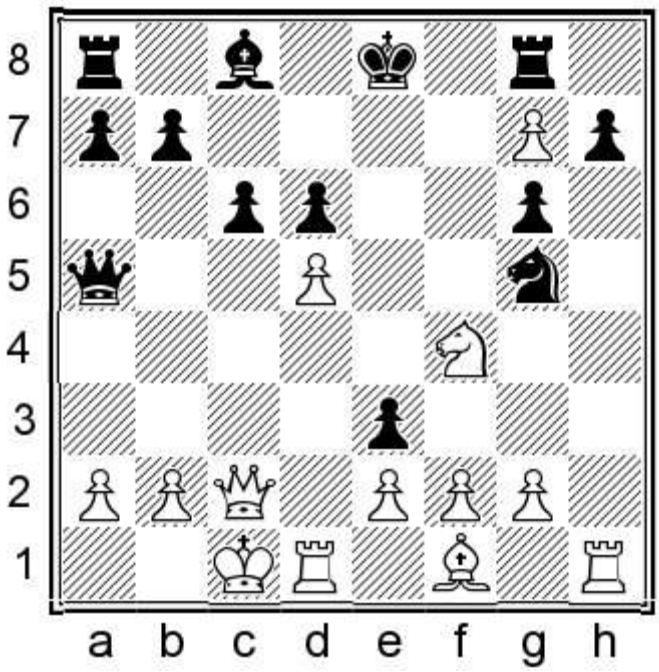
11.h6

11.♘xe4N 11...fxe4 12.c5!?



Position after: 12.c5!?

Again, an interesting piece sacrifice. [12.h6 ♗xd4 transposes to the main line.] 12...♘e6!? I would probably prefer to decline the offer. [12...h6 is playable, but hard to do so over the board. 13.♗xe7! ♔xe7 14.cxd6+ ♔xd6! This looks dangerous, but at least it gets rid of the annoying pawn. 15.hxg6 ♘e6 16.♘h5∞] 13.h6 [13.♘xe6 ♗xe6 14.♕xe4 ♕xa2 15.cxd6 0-0! 16.dxe7 ♖f5→ The threat is ...♖c5; White is in trouble.] 13...♘xg5 14.hxg7 ♖g8 15.cxd6 [15.e3 d5∓] 15...exd6 16.d5 e3!↑



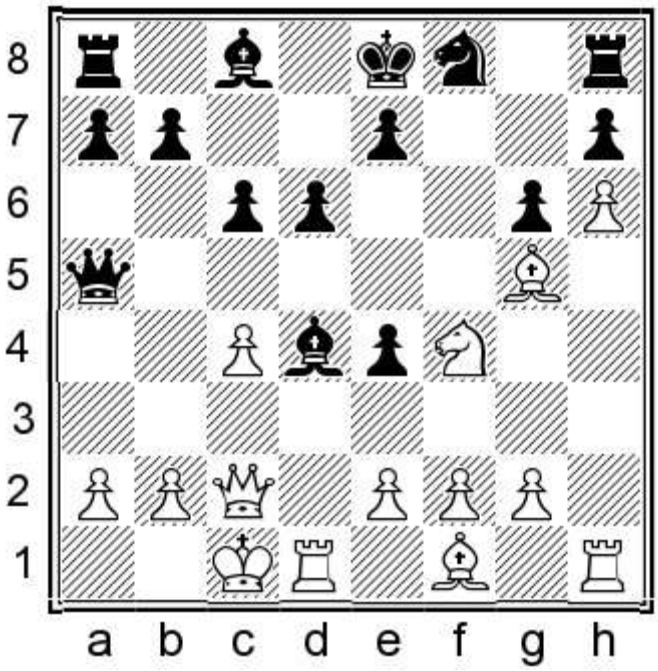
Position after: 16...e3!↑

A very complicated position. Black buries the f1-bishop and gives himself the possibility of playing ...♗f5 with greater effect.

11...♗xd4! 12.♘xe4

12.♖xd4? ♘xg5∓

12...fxe4



Position after: 12...fxe4

13.♗xe7!

13.♖xd4? ♕xg5–+

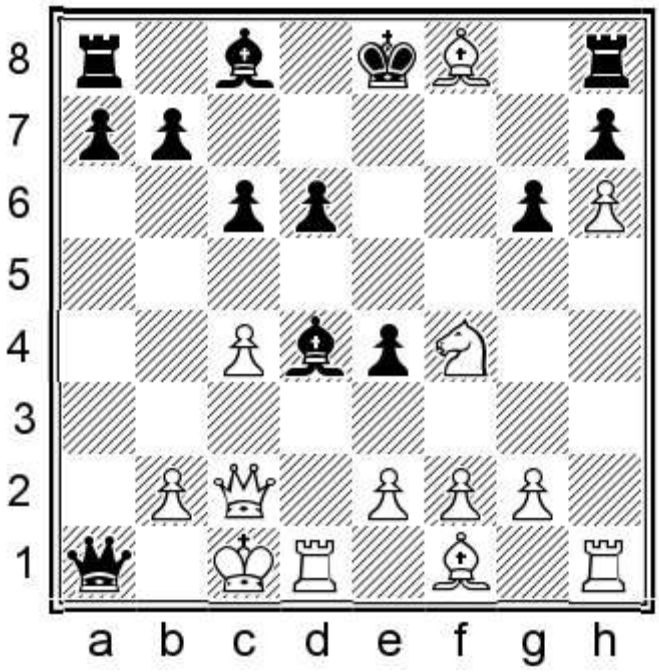
13...♕xa2!

Agreeing to a crazy game!

14.♖xd4!

A) 14.♗xd6?! ♕a1+ 15.♔d2 ♕xb2 16.♕xb2 ♗xb2∓

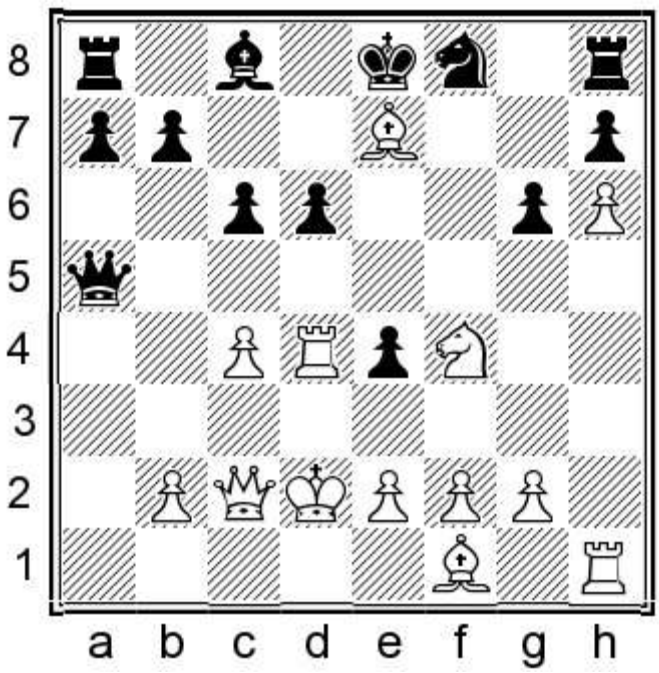
B) 14.♗xf8?! ♕a1+



Position after: 14...♕a1+

15.♔d2 [15.♕b1! is the lesser evil. It is probably a better move in that it reduces Black's advantage, but it allows him easy play: 15...♗xb2+ 16.♔c2 ♕xb1+ 17.♔xb1 ♖xf8! 18.♘xg6 ♖f6! 19.♔xb2 ♖xg6∓.] 15...e3+!! 16.fxe3 [16.♔e1 ♕a5+–+; 16.♔d3 ♕a5!!–+ White is defenseless against 17...♗f5+.] 16...♕a5+ 17.♔c1 ♗xe3+ 18.♔b1 ♗f5 19.♘d3 ♖xf8–+

14...♕a1+ 15.♔d2 ♕a5+

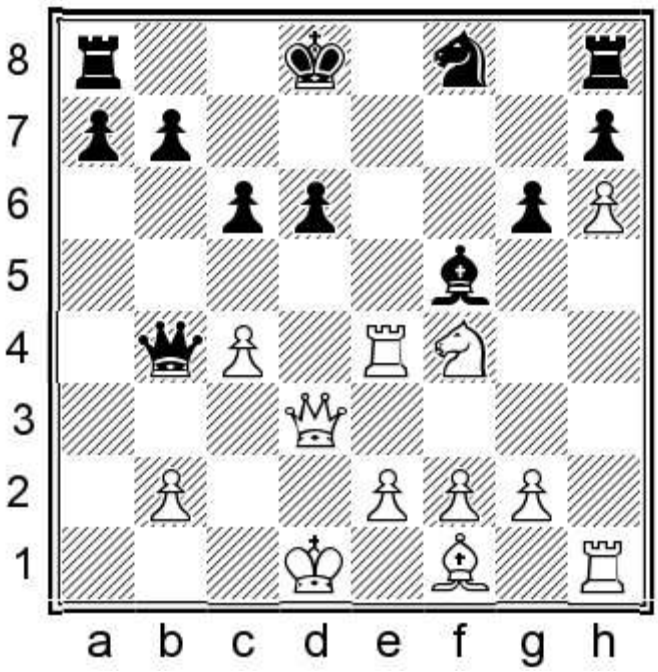


Position after: 15...♕a5+

16.b4

This was White's choice in the only game to reach this position, so I'll keep it as the main line.

A) 16.♔e3?! ♔xe7 17.♖xe4+ [17.♕xe4+?! ♔f7!∓ White's king is definitely the one in more danger.] 17...♔d8 18.♕d3 ♕c5+ 19.♔d2 ♕b4+ 20.♔d1 ♗f5

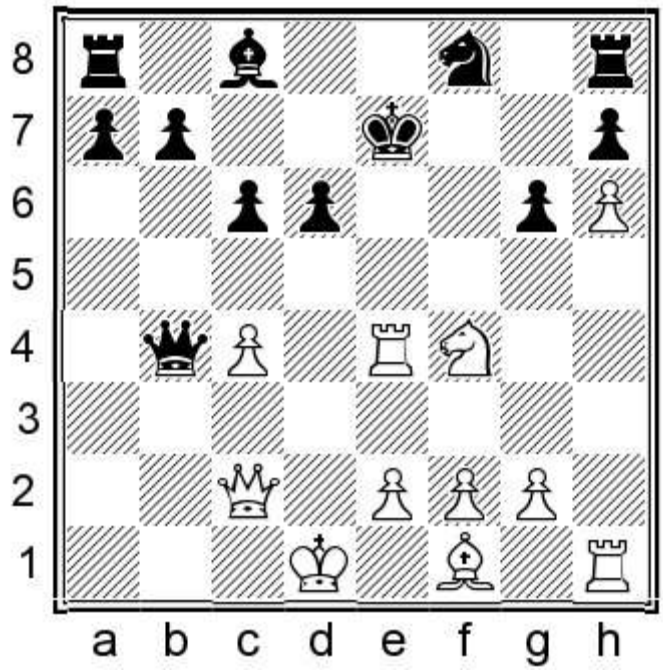


Position after: 20...♗f5

21.♕d4! ♖g8 22.♕f6+ ♔c7 23.♖e7+ ♘d7 24.♘e6+ ♔c8 25.♖xd7! White has nothing better than to force his opponent to take the perpetual check: 25...♕b3+ 26.♔e1 ♕b4+ 27.♔d1 ♕a4+ 28.♔e1 ♕b4+=

B) 16.♔d1 ♕a1+! Of course White can already take the draw, but if he wants to play on his position in the endgame is not better. 17.♕c1 ♕xc1+ 18.♔xc1 ♔xe7 19.♖xe4+ ♔f6! 20.e3 ♘e6=

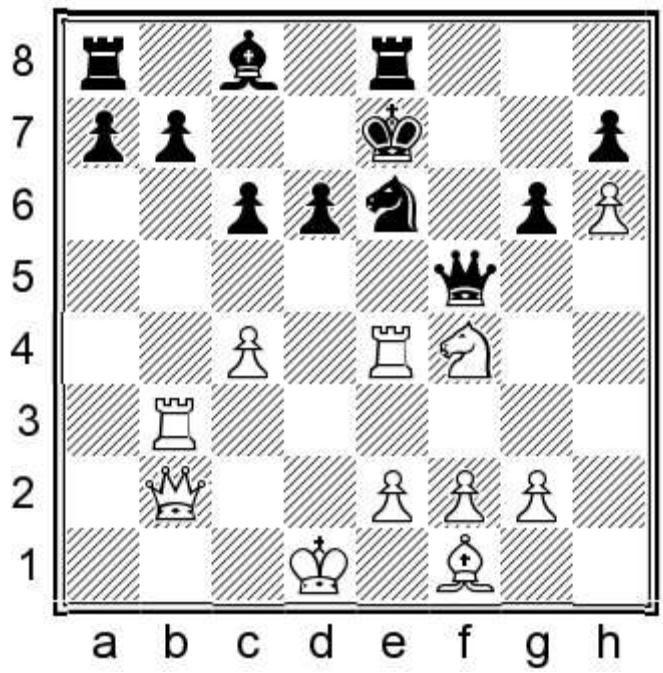
16...♕xb4+ 17.♔d1 ♔xe7 18.♖xe4+



Position after: 18.♖xe4+

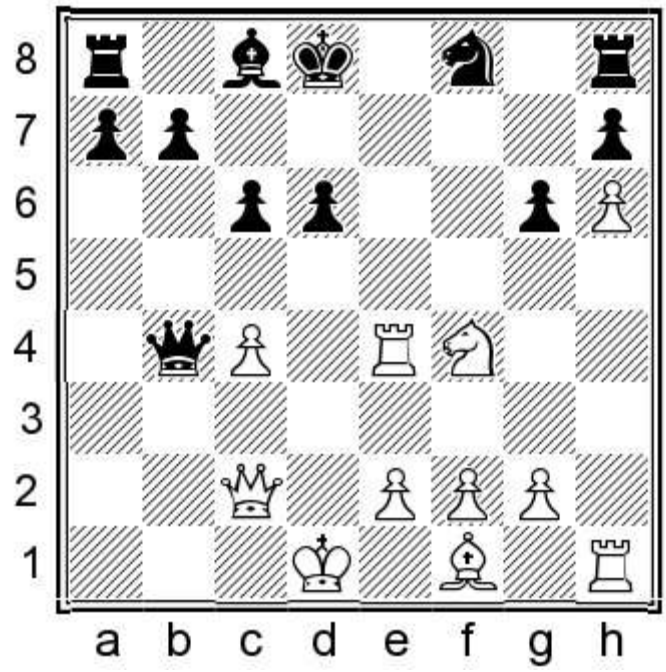
18...♔d8!N

18...♘e6 was the move chosen by Muzychuk, but it's already losing, and the game didn't last long: 19.♖h3 ♖e8 20.♖b3 ♕a5 21.♕b2 ♕f5



Position after: 21...♕f5

22.♕g7+ ♔d8 23.♘xe6+ ♗xe6 24.♖xb7 ♕a5 25.♖xe6 ♕a4+ 26.♔c1 1-0 Laznicka, V (2679) – Muzychuk, M (2483), Legnica 2013.



Position after: 18...♔d8!N

19.c5!?

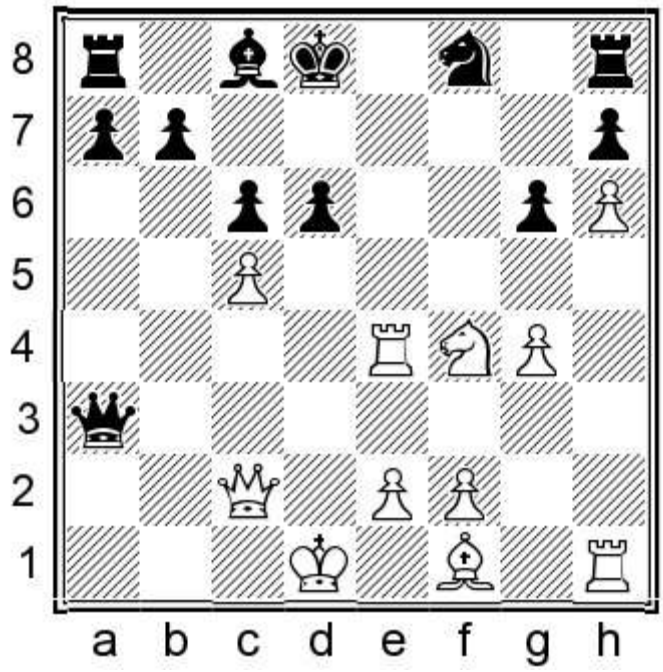
This was maybe the reason for Muzychuk's decision on the previous move, but we should trust our position.

19.g4 g5! 20.♘d3 ♕a3 21.♗g2 ♘e6⇄

19...♕a3□

19...♕xc5? 20.♕b2! ♖g8 21.♕f6+ ♔c7 22.♕f7+ ♗d7 23.♕xg8 d5 24.♘d3! ♕c3 25.♖f4± Granted, despite the rook down, things aren't lost yet, but Black shouldn't have enough.

20.g4!



Position after: 20.g4!

The only effective way to prevent 20...♗f5.

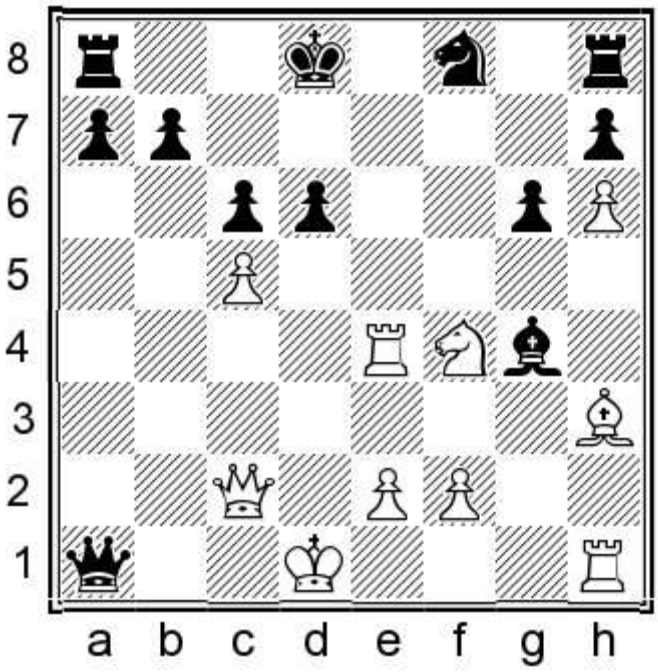
20...♗xg4

20...♕a1+ 21.♔d2 d5 This is one of the ways to keep playing. The game is obviously still complicated, but roughly balanced. 22.♖a4 ♕f6 23.g5! ♕e5! 24.e3 ♔c7=

21.♗h3 ♕a1+ 22.♔d2 ♕a5+

Of course, taking on h1 would be pure gluttony for Black, since his remaining pieces are really badly placed. His king wouldn't survive very long.

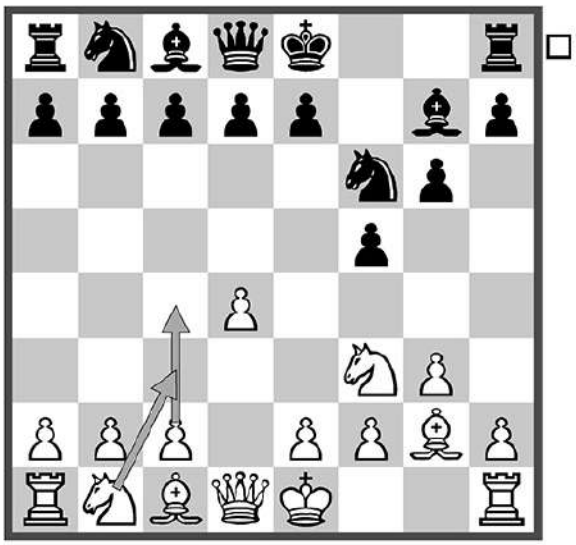
23.♔d1 ♕a1+=



Position after: 23...♕a1+=

Chapter 10
The Classical Leningrad

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7



Chapter Guide

Chapter 10 – The Classical Leningrad

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.c4 0-0 6.0-0 d6 7.♘c3 c6

a) 5.0-0 & 6.♘bd2

b) 6.♘c3

c) 7.-- alternatives

d) 8.-- alternatives

e) 8.♖e1

f) 8.♖b1

g) 8.d5 e5 9.dxe6 ♗xe6 10.--, 10.♕d3 ♖e8 11.--

h) 8.d5 e5 9.dxe6 ♗xe6 10.♕d3 ♖e8 11.♘g5

i) 8. d5 e5 9.dxe6 ♗xe6 10.b3 ♘a6 11.--, 11.♘g5

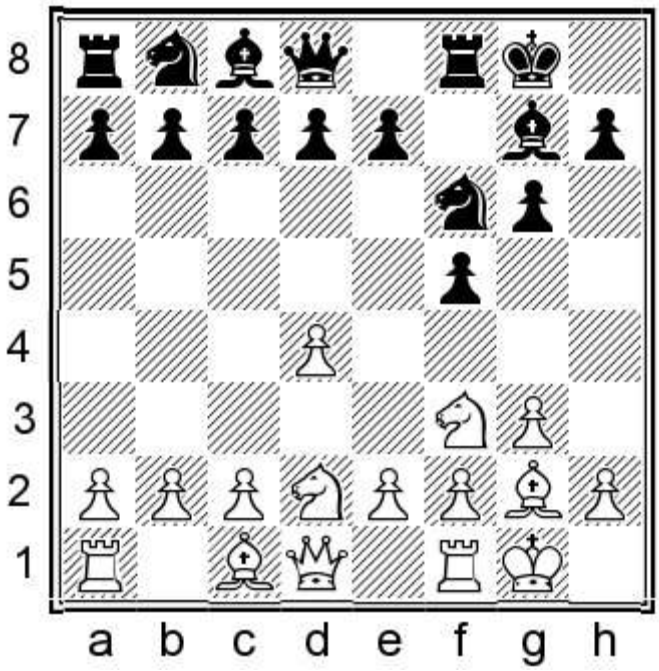
j) 8. d5 e5 9.dxe6 ♗xe6 10.b3 ♘a6 11.♗b2

k) 8.b3 ♘a6 9.♗b2 ♕c7 10.♖e1, 10.d5

l) 8.b3 ♘a6 9.♗b2 ♕c7 10.♖c1

a) 5.0-0 & 6.♘bd2

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.♘bd2

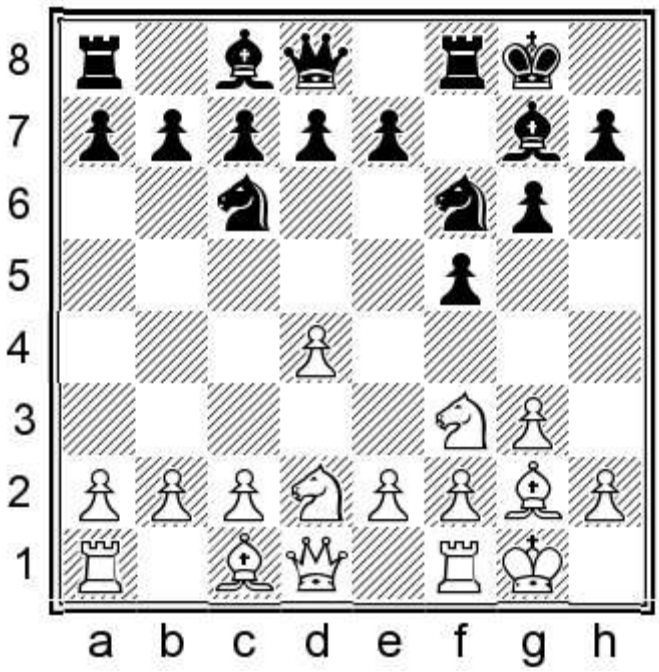


Position after: 6.♘bd2

This is quite an unusual system which I have always thought was a bit underrated. The basic idea is to get in an early e2−e4, which is considered to be an achievement against the Dutch, without having to play c4. Thus White will be able to play c3, keeping a safe center, with good positional play.

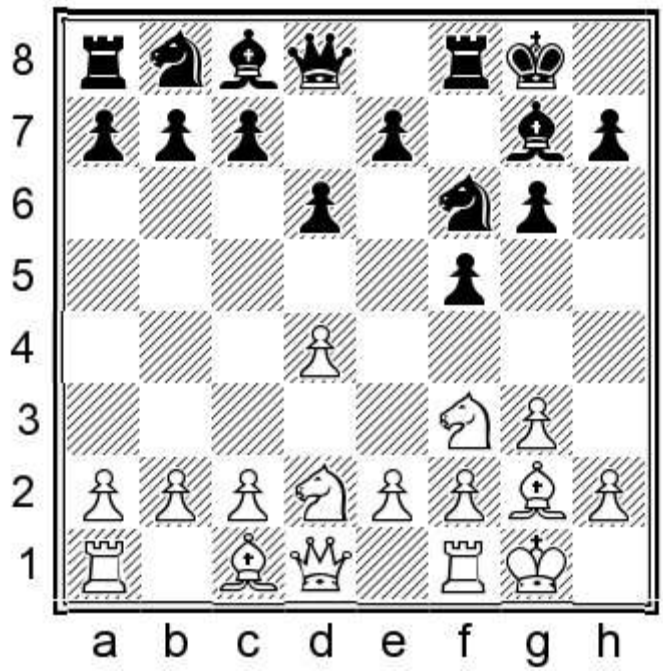
6...d6

6...♘c6!?



Position after: 6...♘c6!?

This is an interesting move order. The idea is to wait for ♖e1 to be played, before shutting down any possibility of White playing e4. 7.♖e1 I don't want to spend much time on this line since this amounts to a loss of time. After 7...d5 we can see that ♖e1 was pointless. The downside is that Black has to play a Stonewall with ...g6 included, which I am not too keen on, although some people may like it.



Position after: 6...d6

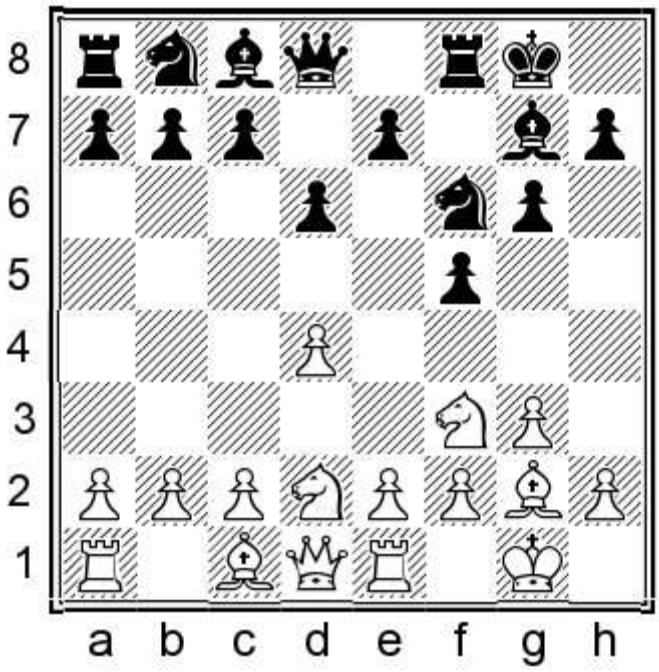
7.♖e1

Black now has various ways to prepare to meet 8.e4. We'll look some of them to try to understand why this line might be quite dangerous if you don't know how to handle it.

A) 7.b3 − see Chapter 7 on b3 ideas, as it will transpose. 7...c6 [7...c5!? This is also a good way to take advantage of White's move order. I'll let you analyze it if you wish.] 8.♗b2 And here we are, back in Chapter 7.

B) 7.c3 This has also been played quite often. I think it's clearly logical to wait before threatening e4. It's actually a transposition to the first subchapter of Chapter 5, but as it's quite hard to see the transposition (and quite short), I'll give you the analysis again. 7...♘c6 8.♖e1 [8.b4 a6 9.♕b3+ e6 10.a4 ♗d7 11.♖e1 ♘e4⇄] 8...e5! Including ...0-0/♖e1 clearly favors Black, as he will get some play on the f-file. 9.dxe5 ♘xe5 10.♘xe5 dxe5 11.e4 f4→

C) 7.e4? Sometimes this kind of pseudo-sac works, but it's simply wrong here. 7...fxe4 8.♘g5 d5 9.f3 ♘c6! 10.c3 h6 11.♘h3 e5!∓

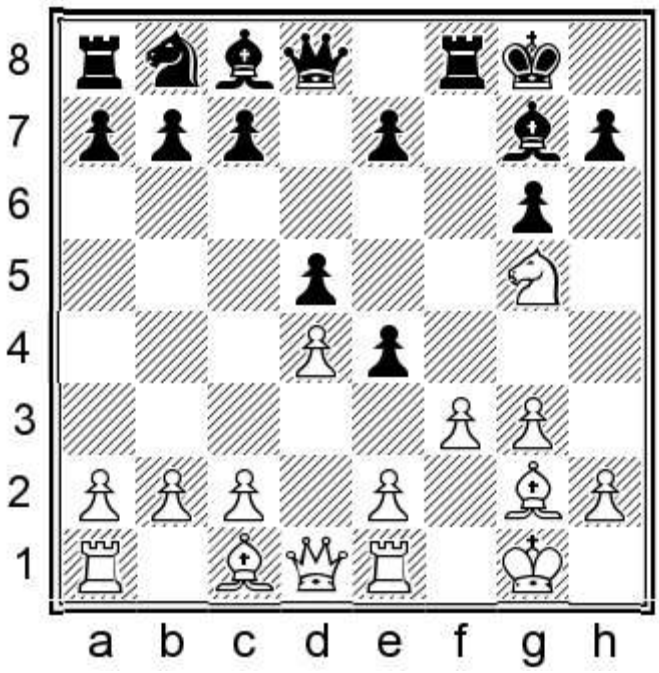


Position after: 7.♖e1

7...♘c6!

In my opinion the best continuation. The threat is ...e5, so White has no choice. Black will be able to strike back in the center, and still be able to develop his light-squared bishop.

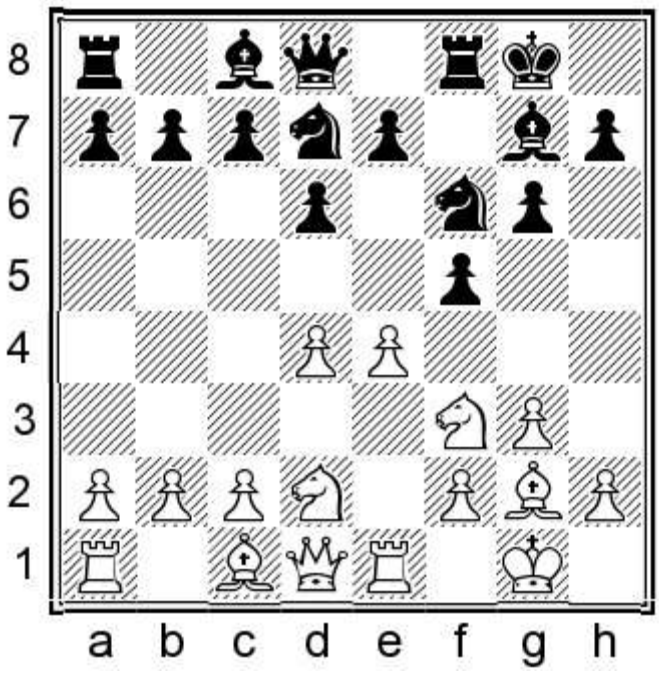
A) 7...♘e4 Probably the second-best option, but I am not fond of it. 8.♘xe4! fxe4 9.♘g5 d5 10.f3!



Position after: 10.f3!

Black has some issues as he will remain worse if he simply trades pawns. 10...h6 11.♘h3 ♘c6 [11...exf3 12.exf3 ♘c6 13.c3 e5 14.dxe5 ♘xe5 15.♗xh6!?±] 12.c3 e5 13.dxe5 ♘xe5 14.fxe4 dxe4 15.♕xd8 ♖xd8 16.♘f2± White is about to grab the e-pawn, and Black has to fight for survival.

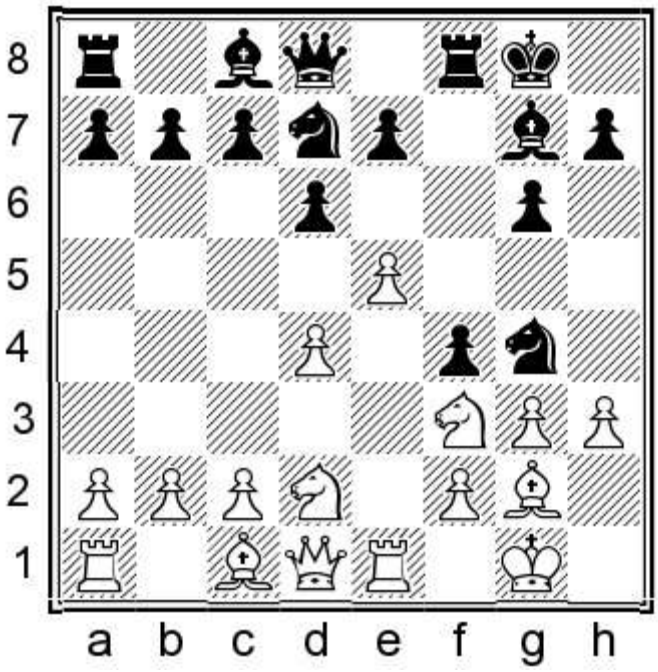
B) 7...♘bd7?! This has similar ideas to 7...♘c6, but is slightly less active and less effective. 8.e4!



Position after: 8.e4!

B1) 8...fxe4 9.♘xe4 ♘xe4 10.♖xe4 e5 11.♖e1! White starts by securing the position of his rook. In contrast to the main line, Black is unable to use his c8-bishop, so has to make a decision which is not simple. 11...exd4 12.♗g5 ♘f6 13.♘xd4±

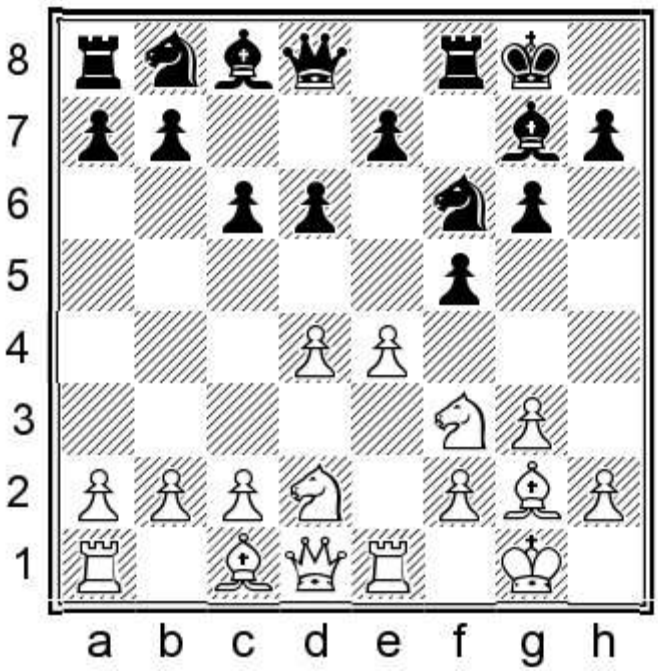
B2) 8...f4 The aggressive approach fails too. 9.e5!? ♘g4 10.h3



Position after: 10.h3

10...fxg3 [10...♘h6 11.♘e4±] 11.hxg4 gxf2+ 12.♔xf2 dxe5 13.♘c4± Needless to say Black does not have enough compensation.

C) 7...c6?! This will not help Black create counterplay with ...e5 as that would weaken the d6-pawn, so he will probably remain passive. 8.e4

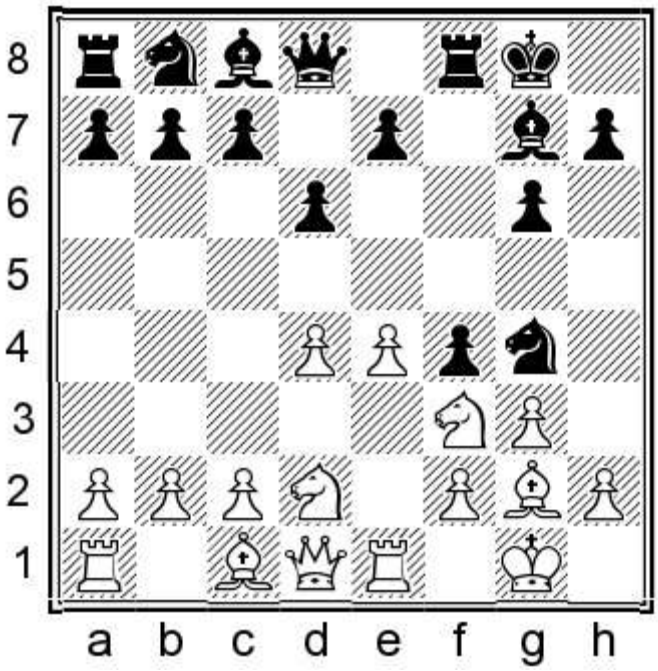


Position after: 8.e4

8...fxe4 [8...f4?! 9.c3 fxg3 10.hxg3 ♘g4 11.♕b3+ ♔h8 12.♘g5± 1-0 (17) Langrock, H (2432) – Welz,

P (2156), Berlin 2005] 9.♘xe4 ♘xe4 10.♖xe4 ♗f5 11.♖e1 ♘d7 12.♘h4!±

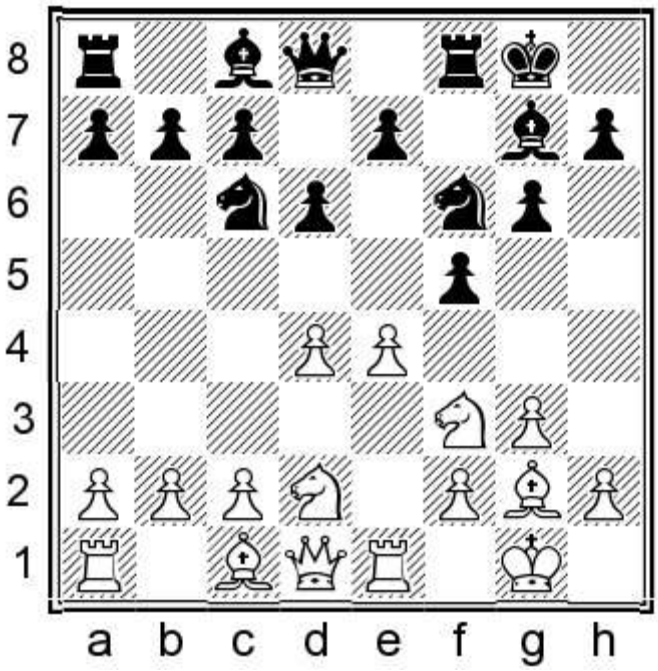
D) 7...♘g4?! 8.e4 f4



Position after: 8...f4

9.gxf4! ♖xf4 10.c3 ♘c6 11.h3 ♘f6 12.♘g5± White has a great center, and Black already has to find a way to parry ♕b3+.

8.e4

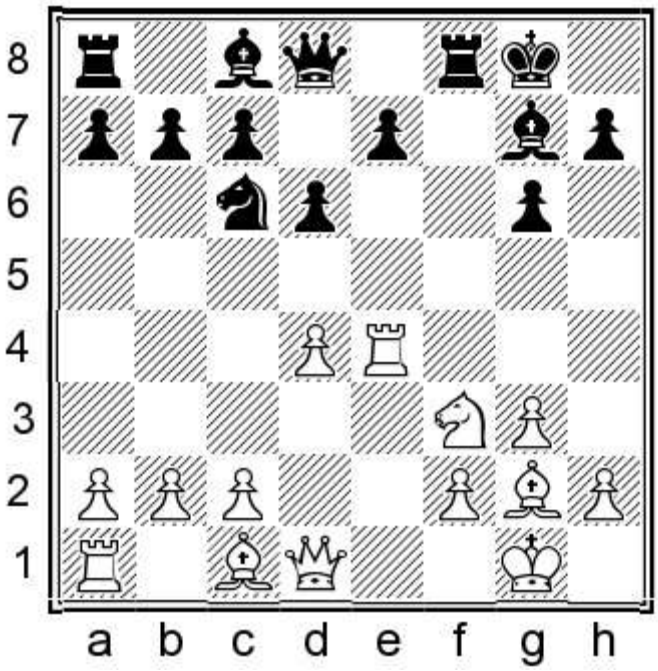


Position after: 8.e4

8...e5!

I like this idea. In general, I prefer to leave my opponent a large range of choices. Obviously he will sometimes have a strong continuation, but he also has more chance of choosing a poor line if he doesn't understand all the possibilities. That's also the case here.

8...♘xe4 9.♘xe4 fxe4 10.♖xe4

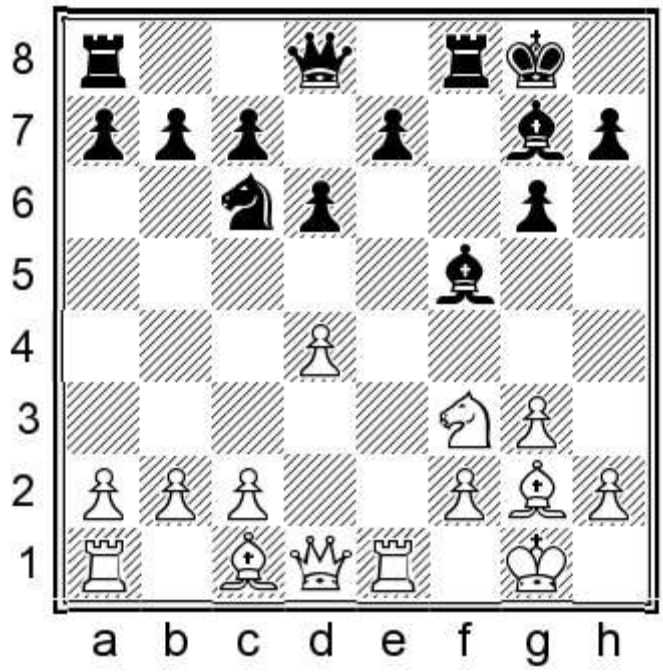


Position after: 10.♖xe4

This position has arisen in most of the games that featured this line, but I don't think it's great for Black.

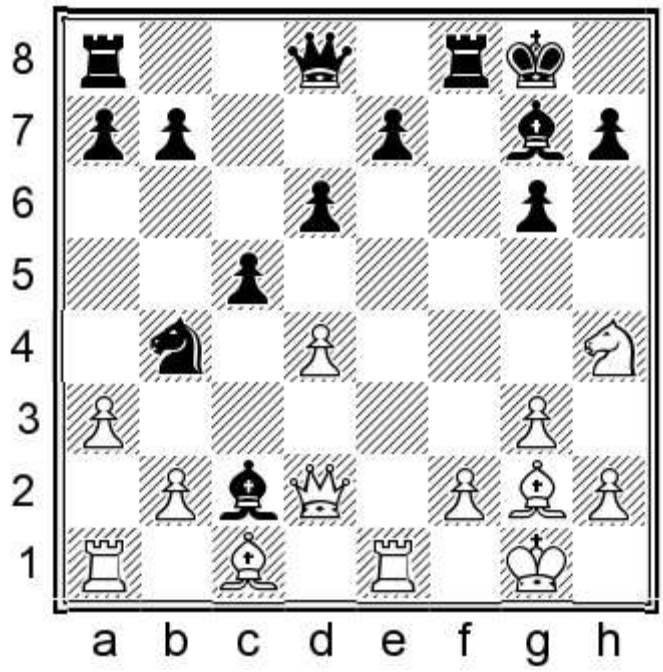
A) 10...e5 11.dxe5 dxe5 [11...♘xe5?! 12.♘xe5 ♗xe5 13.♗h6! ♖e8 14.c3±] 12.♕e2 Once Black's initiative vanishes, he will be left with a very weak isolated pawn. 12...♗f5 13.♕c4+! ♔h8 14.♖e1±

B) 10...♗f5 11.♖e1



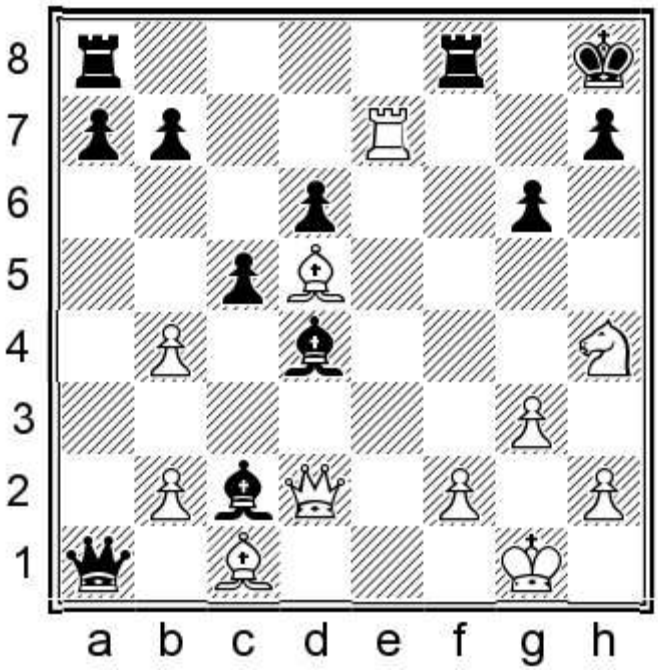
Position after: 11.♖e1

B1) 11...♘b4 This idea fails tactically. 12.♘h4! ♗xc2 13.♕d2 It's clear that Black will struggle not to lose a piece. 13...c5 [13...♘d3 14.♖f1+–] 14.a3!



Position after: 14.a3!

14...♗xd4 [14...♘d3 15.♖f1 ♗xd4 16.♕xc2 and after 16...♘xf2 or 16...♖xf2 17.♖xf2 ♘xf2 White just plays 18.♘f3 and wins.] 15.♗f3!! Cold blood allows White to refute Black's concept. 15...♕a5 16.axb4 ♕xa1 17.♗d5+ ♔h8 18.♖xe7!!+–

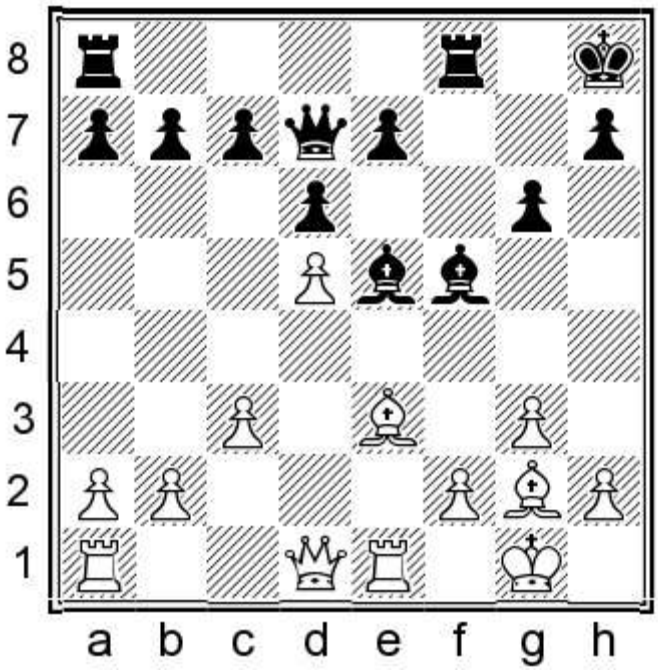


Position after: 18.♖xe7!!+−

The mating threat ♖xh7+ and ♕h6# is very hard to meet.

B2) 11...e5 12.dxe5 dxe5 13.♕e2 ♕d7 14.c3±

B3) 11...♕d7 12.c3 ♔h8 13.d5 ♘e5 14.♘xe5 ♗xe5 15.♗e3±

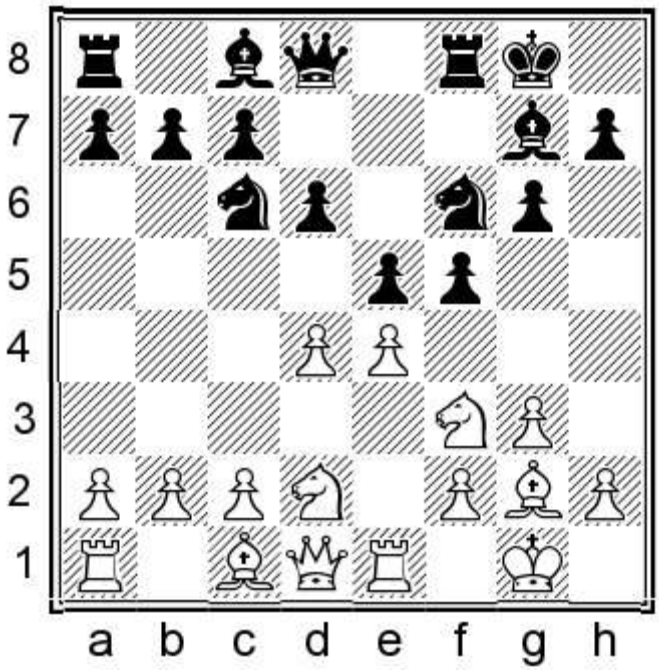


Position after: 15.♗e3±

In this type of middlegame Black often remains with the worse king and less space, so it's very hard to claim equality. I am not surprised that the game Gavrikov, V (2510) – Klawa, P (2306), Germany

2007, 1-0 (41), went smoothly for White.

Back to 8...e5.



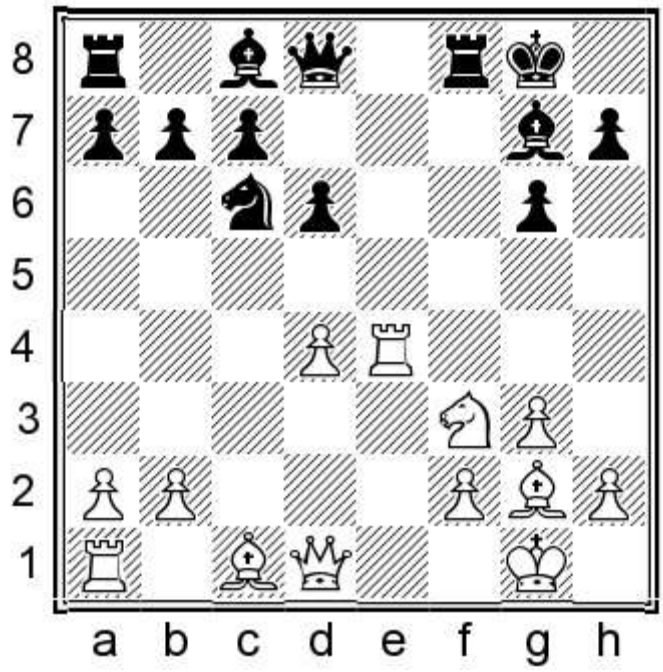
Position after: 8...e5!

9.exf5

Now Black as a choice between developing his bishop or bringing another pawn to the center. It seems that getting two hanging pawns in the center is the better solution.

A) 9.dxe5 dxe5 10.exf5 gxf5 returns to the main line.

B) It's also possible for White to keep the tension with 9.c3!?N, although this has never been tried. 9...exd4! 10.cxd4 fxe4 11.♘xe4 ♘xe4 12.♖xe4



Position after: 12.♖xe4

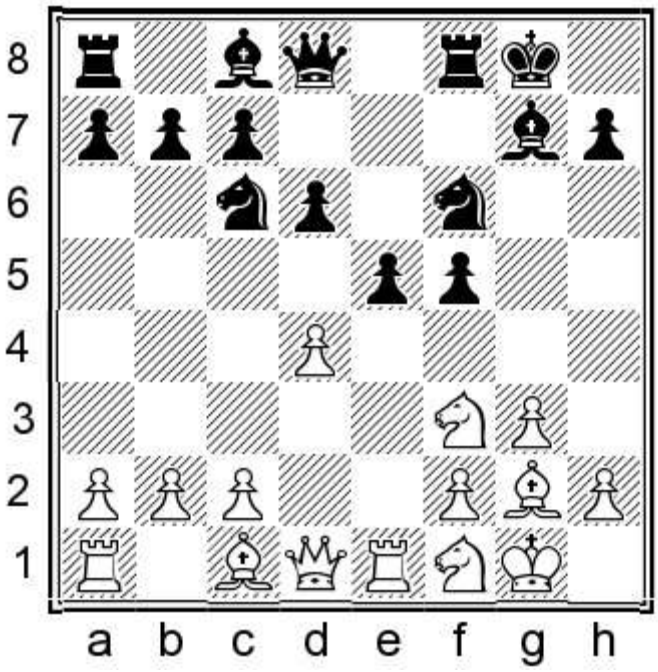
This is clearly a better version than 8...fxe4. The pawn on d4 is weak, and we have already opened the position. 12...d5! 13.♖f4 White needs to neutralize our play on the f-file. [13.♖e1?! ♗g4∓] 13...♗f5 14.♕b3 ♕d7!= Play is probably balanced, as our pawn on d5 is also under pressure.

9...gxf5

9...♗xf5 10.dxe5 dxe5 As often happens when we accept an isolated e-pawn, we might find ourselves slightly worse. 11.c3 ♔h8 12.♘h4 ♗e6 13.♕e2±

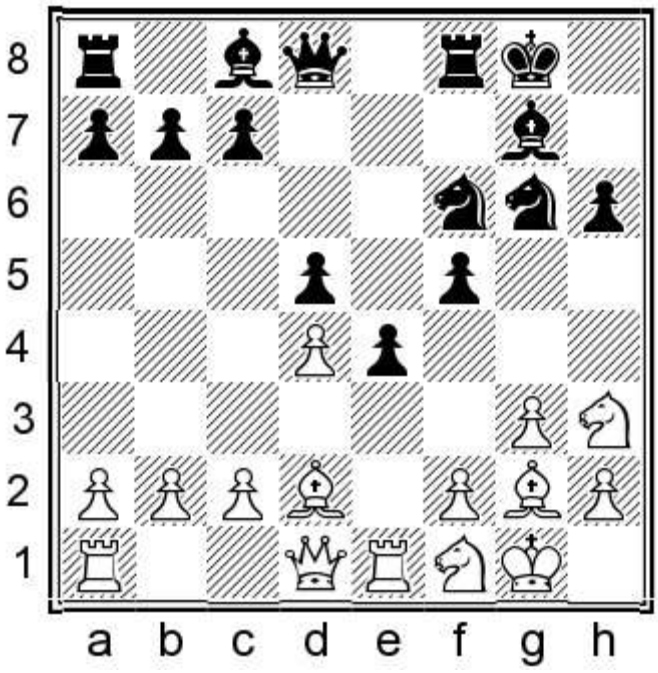
10.dxe5

10.♘f1



Position after: 10.♘f1

This has been played once. 10...e4 [10...♕e8 might be playable too, but gives White a chance to keep the better position: 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.♘xe5! ♘xe5 13.f4 ♘e4 14.fxe5 ♕xe5 15.c3±.] 11.♘g5 d5!? 12.♘h3 ♘e7 13.♗g5 h6 14.♗d2 ♘g6⇄

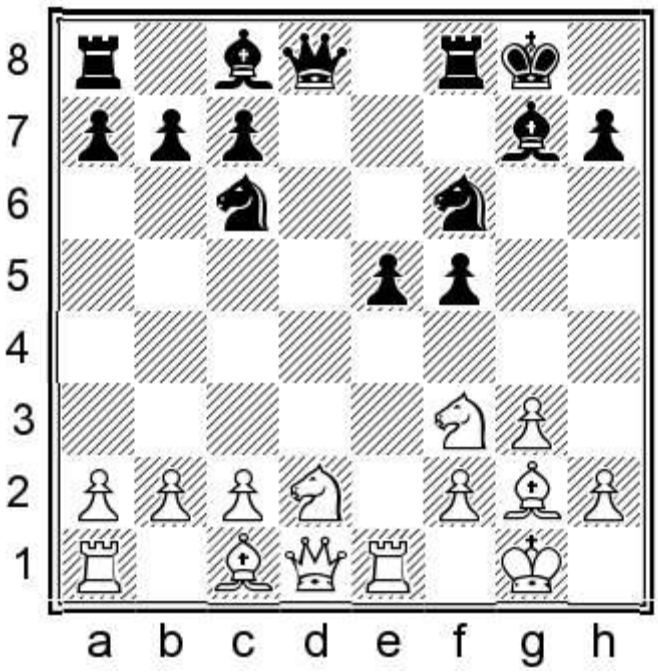


Position after: 14...♘g6⇄

This position was reached in the game Lubbe, N (2515) – Kuznecovs, N (2130), Germany 2017, 1-0 (29). Black has a strong center; the only drawback is that the f4-square is under White's control. Black

should probably place his queen on e8 to give himself the possibility of playing ...♘h5 at some stage, given that ♘f4, trading the knights, looks on the cards.

10...dxe5



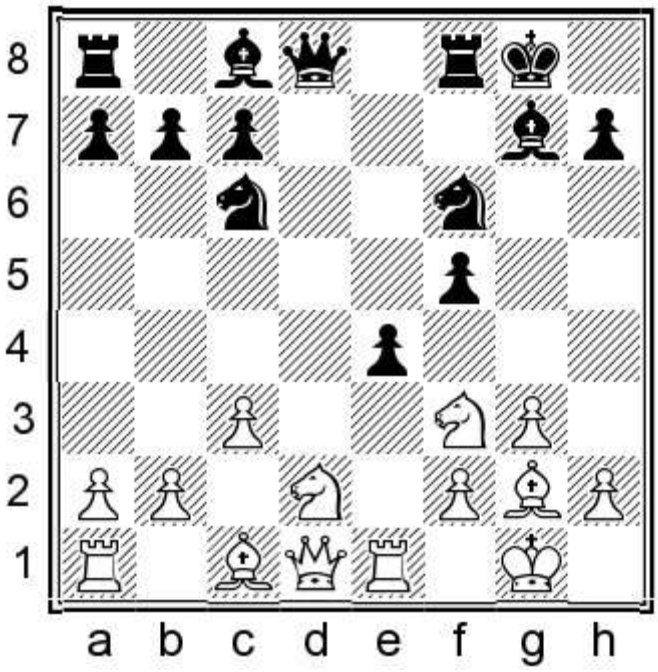
Position after: 10...dxe5

This position has occurred five times. Only once did White decide to enter the principled line, which is to take on e5.

11.♘xe5

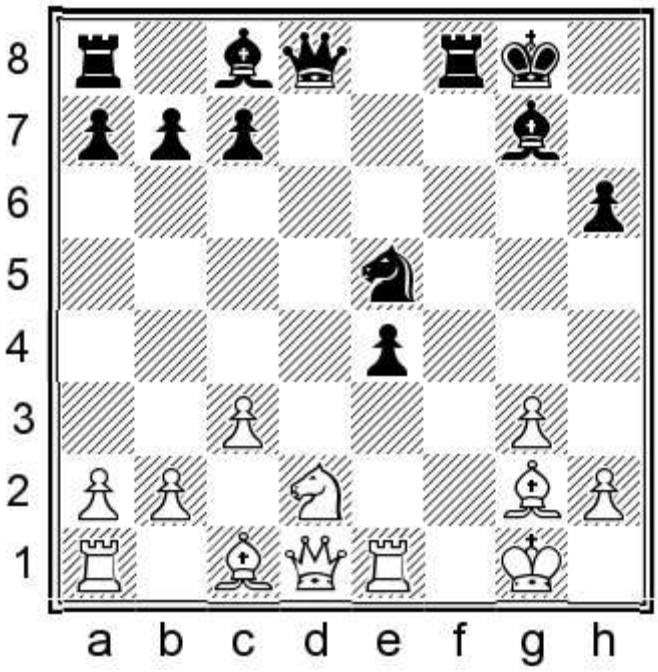
A) 11.♘b3 e4 12.♘fd4 ♘e5 13.f3 c6↑

B) 11.c3 In most cases White has preferred this move, but weakening the d3-square is hardly an achievement. 11...e4



Position after: 11...e4

12.♘g5 [12.♘h4N 12...♘e5! 13.♗f1 ♕e7↑] 12...♘e5 13.♗f1 ♘fg4 14.f4 h6! 15.♘gxe4 fxe4 16.fxe5 ♘xe5 17.♗g2

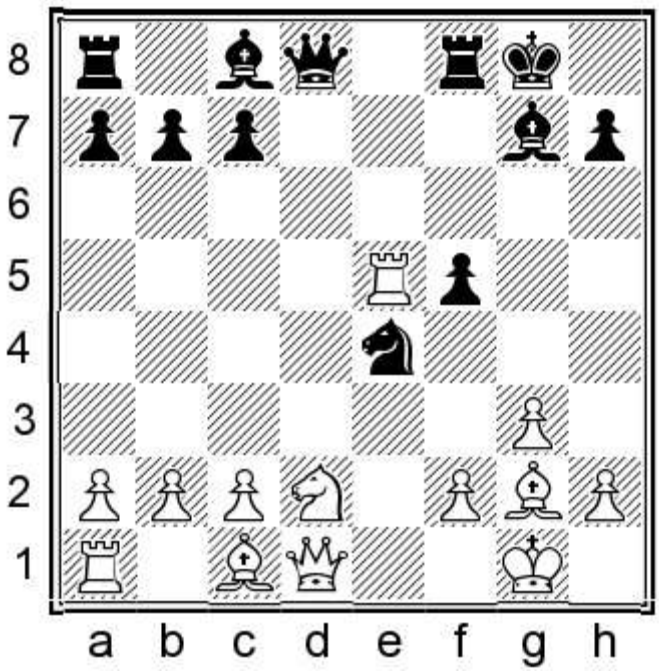


Position after: 17.♗g2

After some good moves by both sides, Black was the first who could have improved his play in Richter, M (2473) – Pruijssers, R (2529), Germany 2014, 0-1 (36), with 17...♘f3+!N 18.♘xf3 ♕xd1 19.♖xd1 exf3 20.♗f1 f2+ 21.♔g2 ♗g4 22.♗c4+ ♔h8 23.♗f4 [23.♖f1? ♗f3+ 24.♔h3 ♖ae8 25.♗f4 ♖f5–

+] 23...♗xd1 24.♖xd1∓.

11...♘xe5 12.♖xe5 ♘e4!

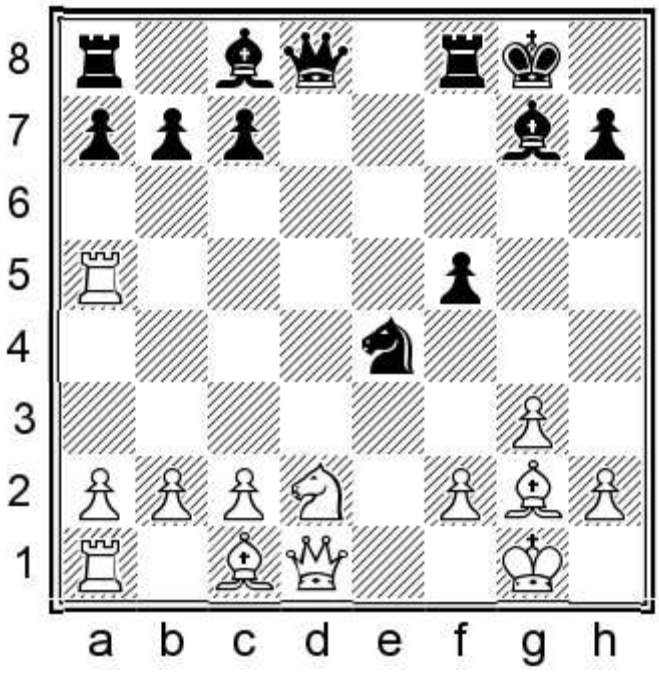


Position after: 12...♘e4!

This is probably the position that put off the players who didn't want to play 11.♘xe5. Now White has to decide whether to sacrifice the exchange or try to preserve the rook.

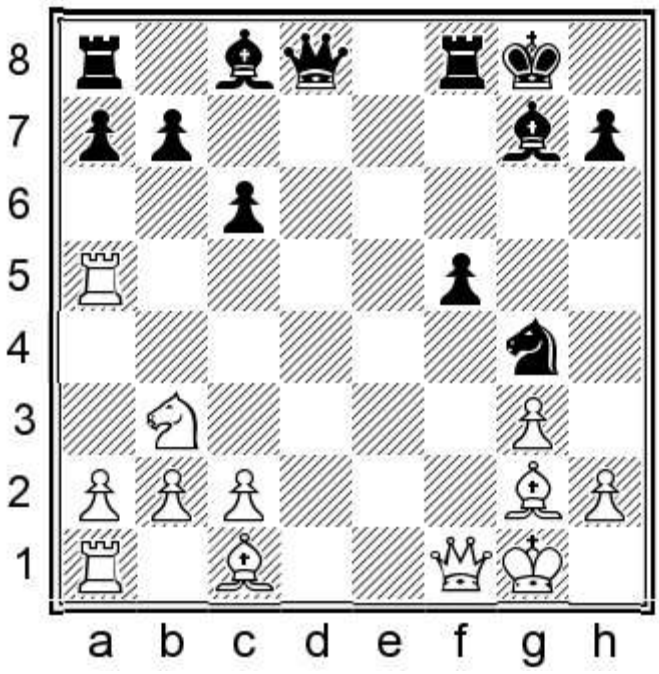
13.♖xe4!

A) 13.♖a5?!



Position after: 13.♖a5?!

13...♘xf2!! A necessary and very strong resource. The knight is untouchable. [13...c6 14.♖a3± Δ♖d3] 14.♕f1 [14.♔xf2? Accepting the sacrifice is definitely worse: 14...♕d4+ 15.♔f1 f4 16.♗d5+□ 16...♔h8 17.♔g2 fxg3 18.hxg3 ♖f2+ 19.♔h1 ♗g4 and White's position is lost according to the computers. 20.♕g1 ♖e8 21.♗g2 ♕f6!–+ White is out of moves.] 14...♘g4 15.♘b3 c6∓



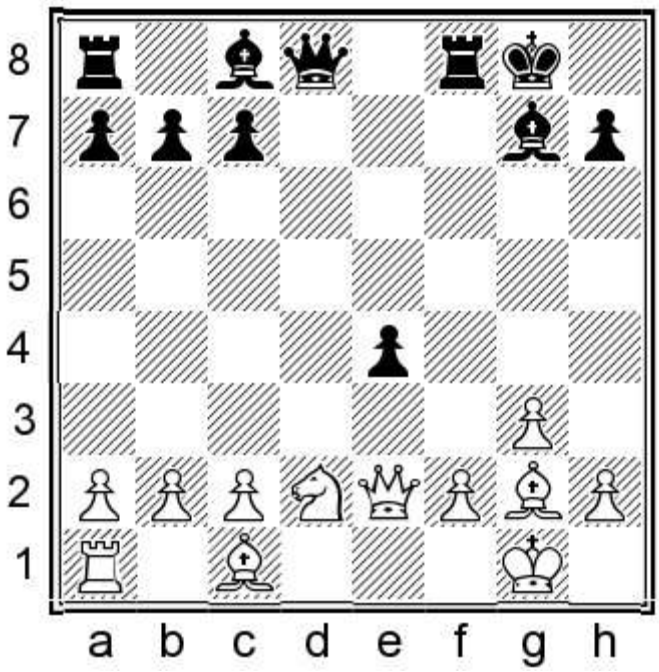
Position after: 15...c6∓

Black has restored the material balance. The white kingside is potentially weak, and the rook is

awkwardly placed on a5. Black's only drawback is the pawn on f5 and resultant weak f4-square.

B) 13.♗xe4!? This might be best as the main line fails to convince me for White who certainly can't dream of being better here. 13...♗xe5 14.♗d3 ♗g7= Quite similar to the main line. Black is only a pawn down, but on the other hand the pawn on f5 is blocking some of his pieces.

13...fxe4 14.♕e2



Position after: 14.♕e2

14...e3!N

A very strong move, disrupting White's harmony.

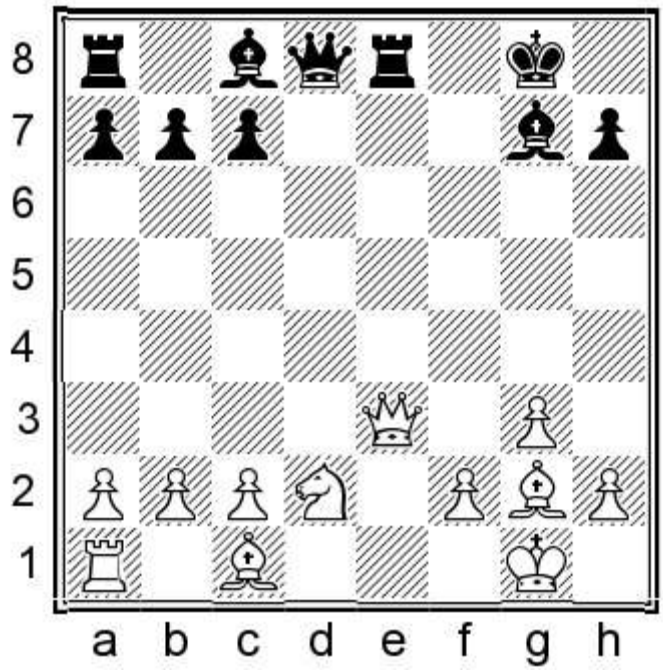
14...♕e7 15.♘xe4 ♗f5 I think this kind of middlegame should be more or less balanced, as for example in Hoffmann, M (2462) – Wiersma, E (2409), Netherlands 2006, ½-½ (20).

15.♕xe3!

It's more logical for White to keep a healthy pawn structure.

15.fxe3 ♕e7 16.♘b3 a5!↑

15...♖e8

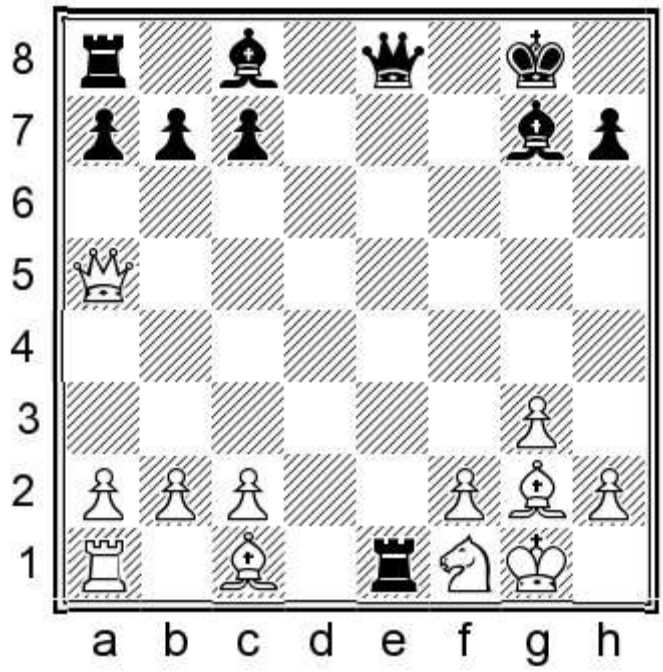


Position after: 15...♖e8

16.♗e4!

A) 16.♘e4?? ♕d1+ 17.♗f1 ♗h3–+

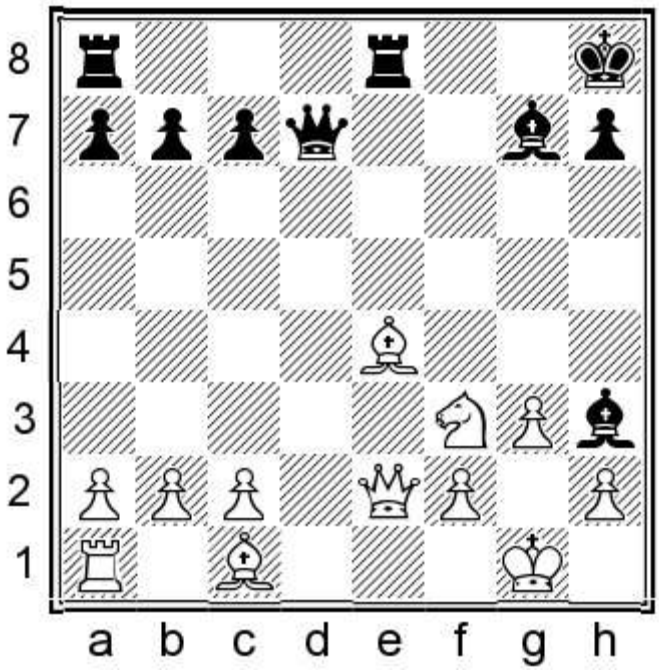
B) 16.♕c5 ♖e1+ 17.♘f1 ♕f8!? 18.♕a5 [18.♕xc7 ♗f5!–+ We will follow with ...♖d8 and ...♖dd1 with tremendous pressure and probably already a winning position.] 18...♕e8!



Position after: 18...♕e8!

19.♕xc7 ♗d7 [19...♗f5 20.♗d5+ ♔h8 21.♗h6! ♖xf1+ 22.♖xf1 ♗xh6 23.♗xb7∞ The bishop pair is strong, but four pawns are a lot for a piece.] 20.♗xb7 ♖d8∓ White is still paralyzed, so we keep the upper hand.

16...♗h3 17.♕e2 ♕d7 18.♘f3 ♔h8

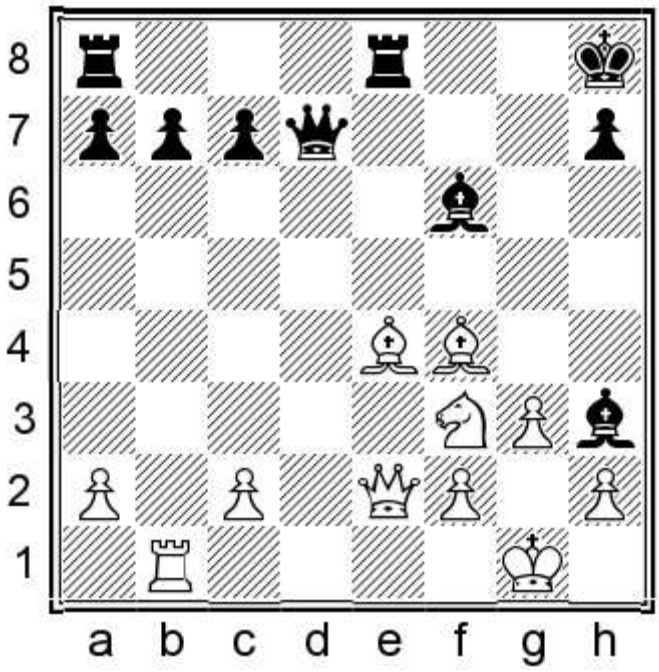


Position after: 18...♔h8

19.♗f4

19.c3?? ♖xe4 20.♕xe4 ♖e8 21.♕c2 ♕d5–+

19...♗xb2 20.♖e1 ♗c3 21.♖b1 ♗f6!∓

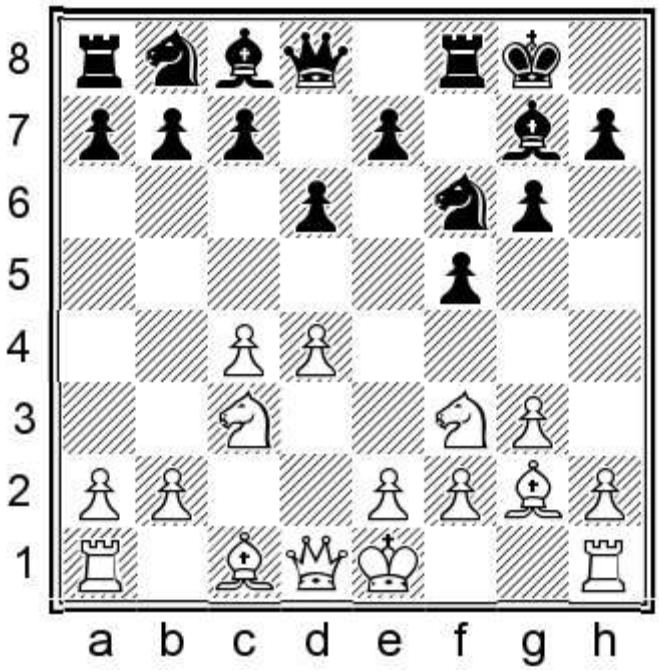


Position after: 21...♗f6!∓

The position is still complicated. Both kings are potentially weak, but Black's extra exchange should count for something, so he should be better here.

b) 6.♘c3

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.c4 0-0 6.♘c3 d6



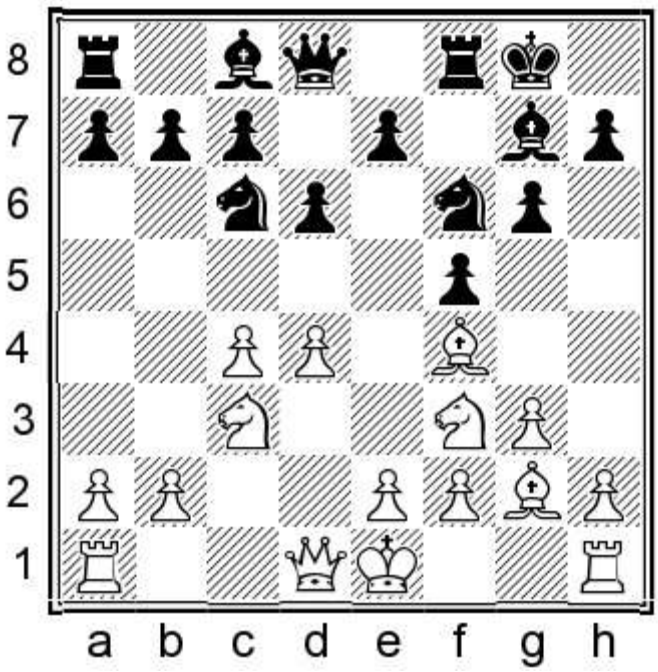
Position after: 6...d6

Little by little, we are getting closer to the main line (which would arise here after 7.0-0). In this subchapter, we will focus on every sideline that White has on move seven, and will do likewise in the next subchapter, where White has played 0-0 instead of ♘c3. Obviously all these sidelines are rarely seen, and we don't need to go too deeply into the variations.

7.d5

White sometimes prefers to start with this move. Of course it's more classical on the next move. There are probably several good choices for Black in order to exploit White's move order, but I think the simplest is to leave White the possibility to transpose.

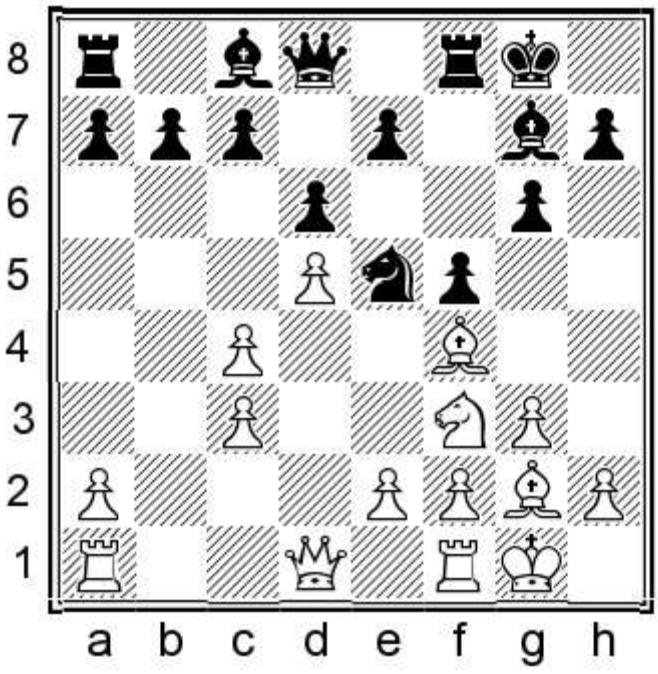
A) 7.♗f4 ♘c6!?



Position after: 7...♘c6!?

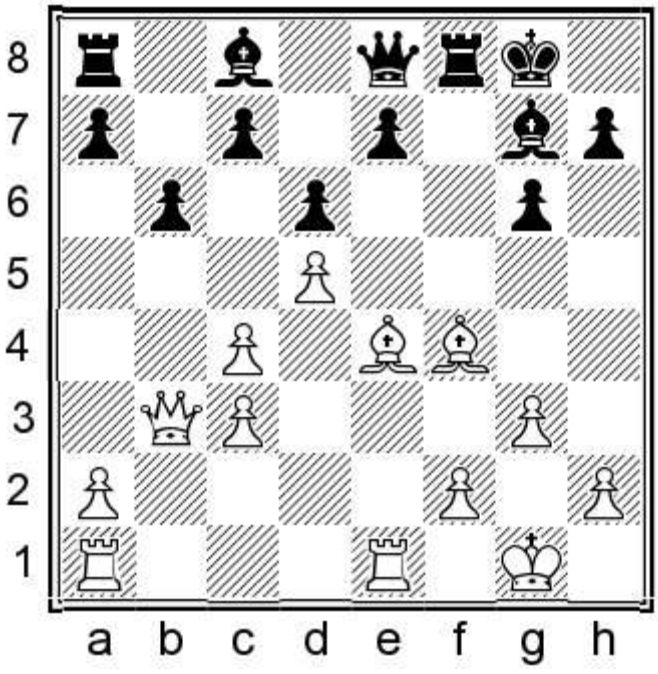
Black is trying to equalize by force. [7...c6!? is possible too, as there are only a few chances that White will try something other than 8.0-0 (a position that can merely happen in other move orders).]

A1) 8.0-0 ♘e4! 9.d5 [9.♘xe4?! fxe4 10.♘g5 ♘xd4 11.♘xe4 c5!?=] 9...♘xc3 10.bxc3 ♘e5



Position after: 10...♘e5

White can't really hope for an edge with this pawn structure. 11.♕b3 [11.♘xe5 dxe5 12.♗e3 b6 13.♖b1 f4↑ The next step is to create a battery with ...♗f5 and ...♕d7, directly targeting White's castled position. We have the initiative here.] 11...♘xf3+ 12.♗xf3 [12.exf3 e5 13.dxe6 ♗xe6∓] 12...b6 13.♖fe1 ♕e8 14.e4 fxe4 15.♗xe4?!

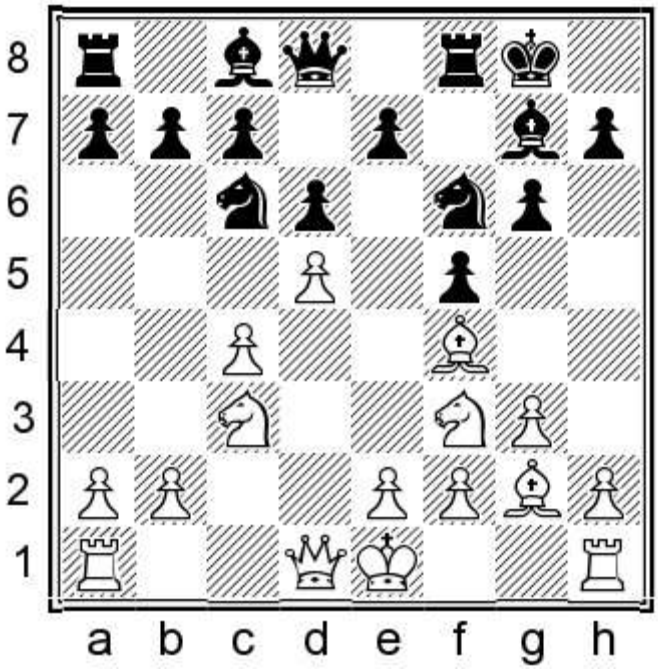


Position after: 15.♗xe4?!

15...♖xf4! This is the sort of thing that shows how things can go bad for White very quickly: his

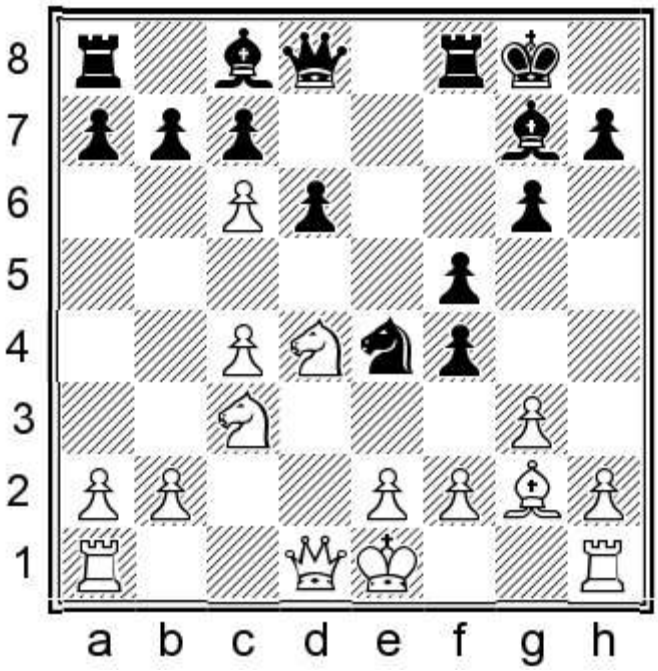
kingside will be really weak and both of Black's bishops will be great. Things are very difficult for him after 16.gxf4 ♕f8∓.

A2) 8.d5



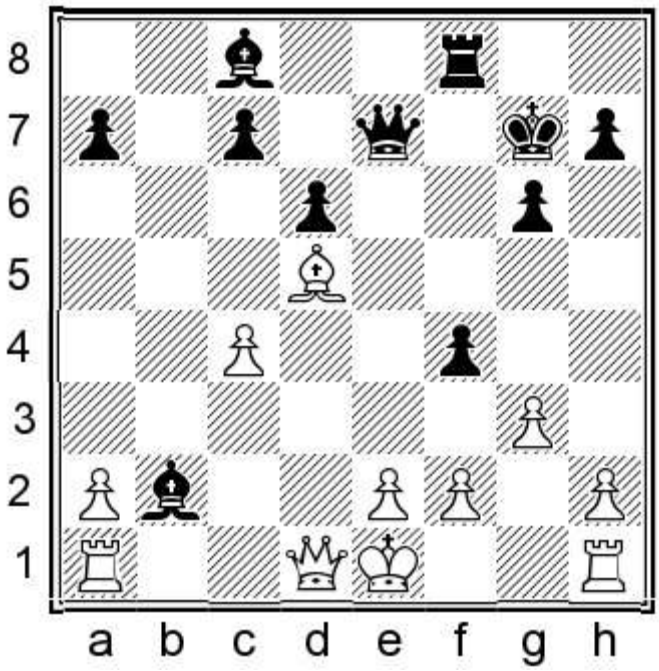
Position after: 8.d5

This is probably the most complicated line. 8...e5!N [Only 8...♘a5 has been tried in previous games, but our novelty has to be preferred.] 9.dxc6 [9.♗g5?! ♘a5 10.b3 h6 11.♗c1 e4 12.♘d4 c5 13.dxc6 ♘xc6 14.♗b2 d5= With such a strong center, it's clear that Black must be fine.] 9...exf4 10.♘d4 ♘e4!



Position after: 10...♘e4!

This knight maneuver is a pawn sacrifice which, if accepted, will open lines for the c8-bishop and f8-rook. 11.♘xe4 fxe4 12.♗xe4 bxc6! 13.♘xc6 ♕e8 14.♘e7+ ♕xe7 15.♗xa8 ♗xb2 16.♗d5+ ♔g7

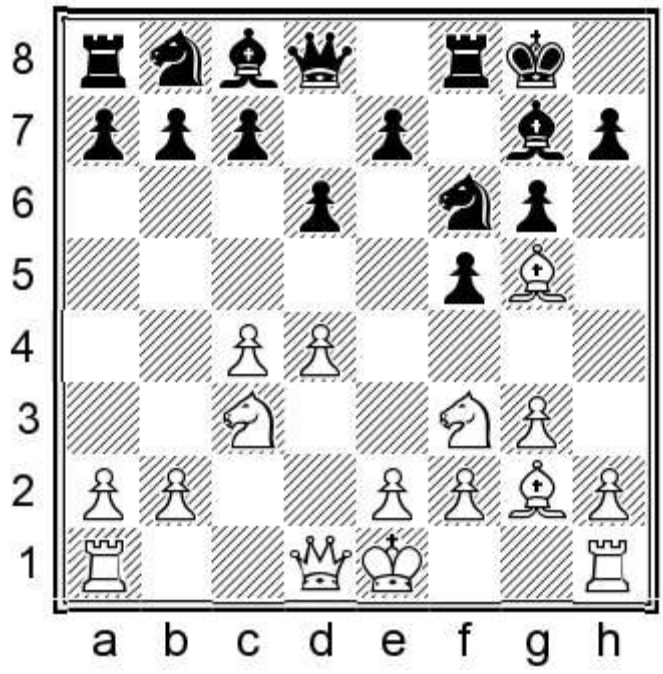


Position after: 16...♔g7

A2.1) 17.♖b1?! White will find himself in trouble if he tries to keep his extra exchange, e.g. 17...♗c3+ 18.♔f1 ♗h3+ 19.♔g1 [19.♗g2? If White is counting on this move, then he has clearly forgotten something. 19...fxg3 20.hxg3 ♕e3! 21.f3 ♗d4–+ A very nice finish! 22.♕e1? ♖xf3+! 23.exf3 ♕xf3+ 24.♕f2 ♕xf2#] 19...♕e5→.

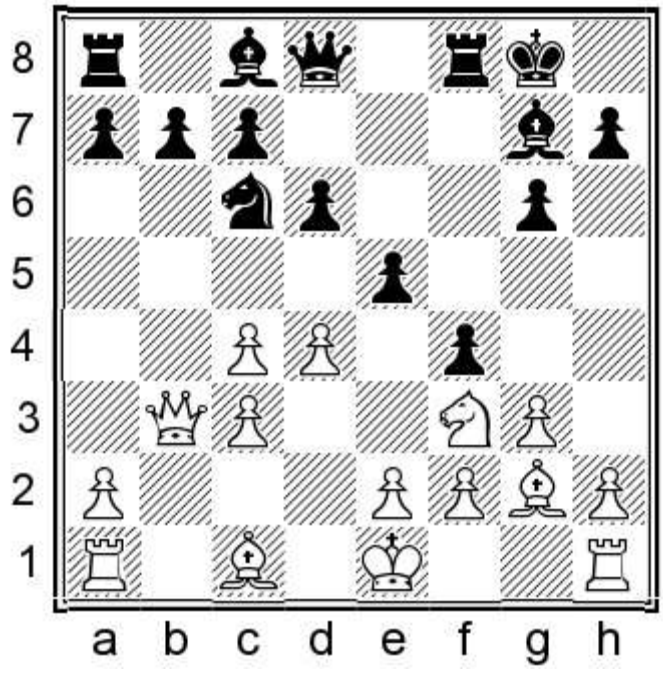
A2.2) 17.0-0 ♗h3 18.♖b1! fxg3 19.hxg3 [19.♖xb2?? ♕f6!! 20.hxg3 ♗xf1–+] 19...♗xf1 20.♔xf1 ♕f6=

B) 7.♗g5?!



Position after: 7.♗g5?!

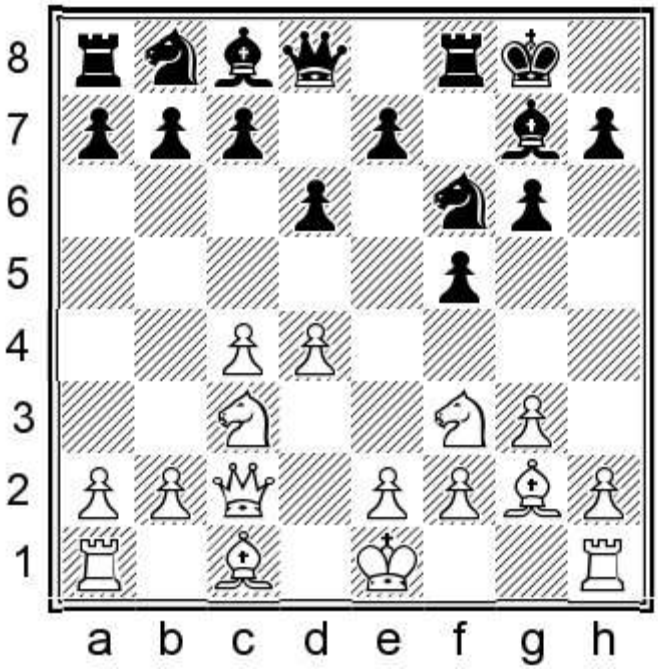
This is too early to be strong. The center is not stable, and it's not clear what the bishop is doing here. 7...♘e4! 8.♗e3 [8.♘xe4 fxe4 9.♘d2 ♗xd4 10.♘xe4 ♗xb2 11.♖b1 ♗g7=] 8...e5! 9.♕b3 [9.h4 ♘xc3 10.bxc3 e4 11.♘d2 ♘d7 12.h5 g5!∓ Now that his h-pawn has advanced so far, it's not clear if White will be able to castle.] 9...♘xc3 10.bxc3 f4 11.♗c1 ♘c6↑



Position after: 11...♘c6↑

It looks like Black has been playing on his own for the last few moves and has even managed to damage White's pawn structure.

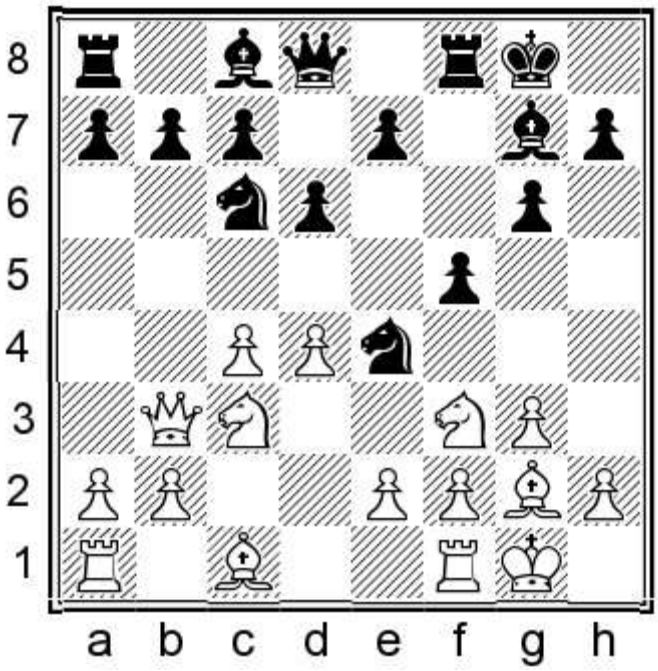
C) 7.♕c2



Position after: 7.♕c2

Again, this kind of move, the sole idea of which is to play e4, is played too early to be good. 7...♘c6 8.d5 [8.e4? ♘b4!∓ White is in trouble. His logical follow-up fails painfully. If he tries to keep protecting e4, we trade everything there and finish the game with ...♗f5 followed by ...♘c2+.] 8...♘b4 9.♕b3 ♘a6 10.♗e3 c5 11.0-0 ♘c7= We will continue with ...a6, ...♖b8 and even ...♗d7 if needed before playing ...b5.

D) 7.♕b3 ♘c6 8.0-0 [8.c5+ e6 9.cxd6 cxd6 10.0-0 ♘e4!?⇄] 8...♘e4!



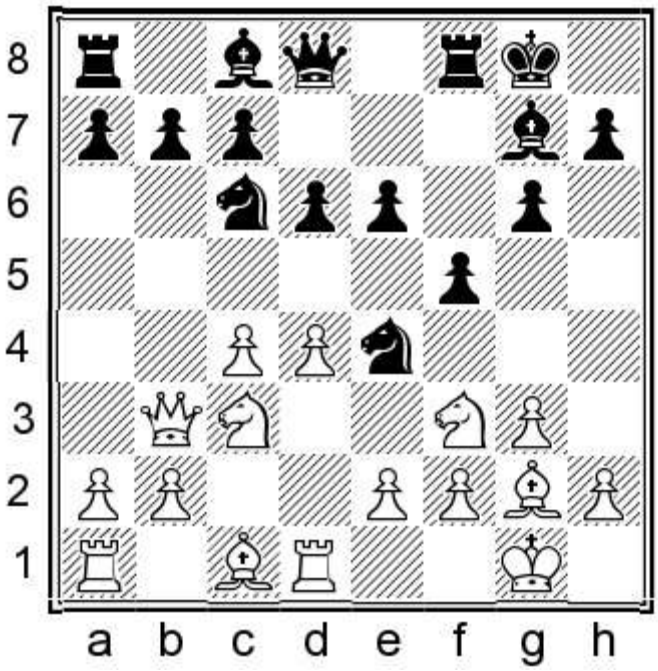
Position after: 8...♘e4!

I like this move. Black prepares ...e5, and White is unable to take the knight. I think he needs to come up with a new move now.

D1) 9.c5+ e6 10.cxd6 cxd6⇄

D2) 9.♗e3 e5!N 10.dxe5 ♘xc3 11.♕xc3 [11.bxc3 dxe5∓] 11...dxe5 12.♖ad1 ♕e7↑

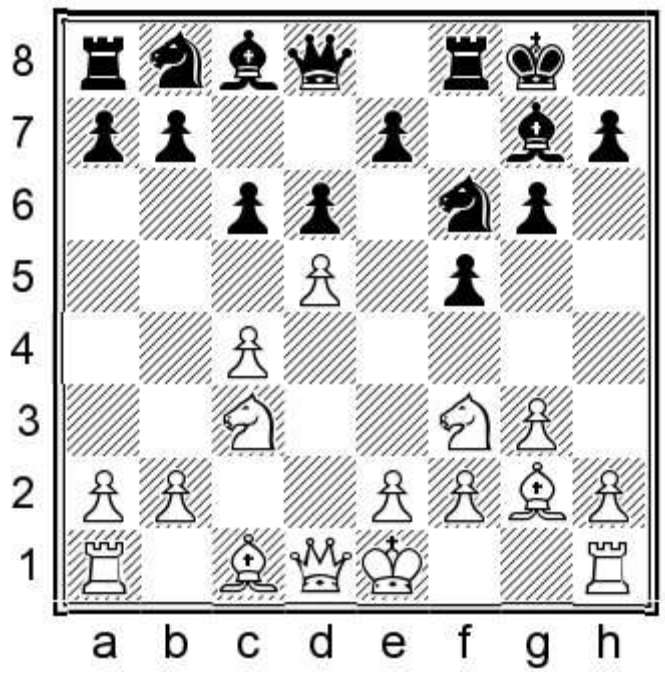
D3) 9.♖d1!?N At least this prevents ...e5. 9...e6



Position after: 9...e6

10.♗e3 [10.♘xe4?! fxe4 11.♘e1 ♘xd4 12.♕e3 e5 13.♗xe4 c6∓] 10...♘a5! 11.♕b4 [11.♕a4?! ♘xc3 12.bxc3 b6 13.c5 ♗d7 14.♕c2 ♕e8∓] 11...b6 12.♘xe4 fxe4 13.♘d2 d5↑ Fighting for the initiative. White's set-up doesn't look so great.

7...c6!



Position after: 7...c6!

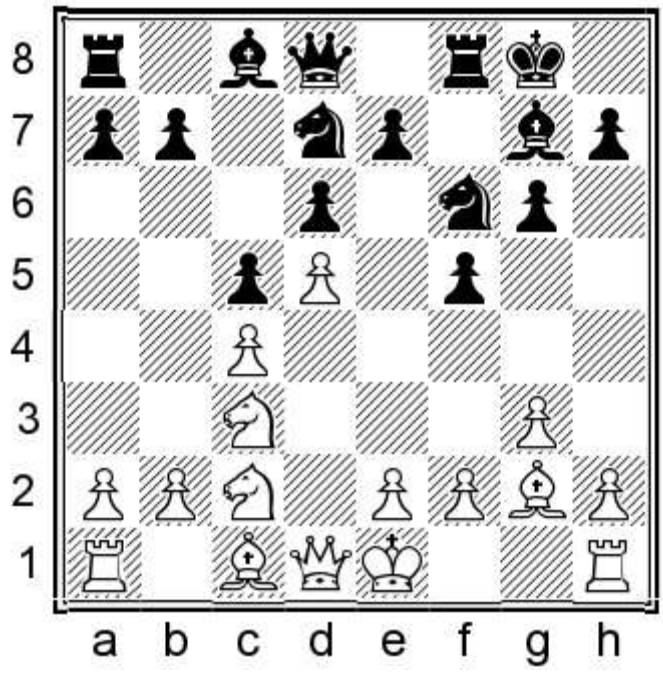
8.♘d4

This is the only independent try. It has not been played so often, but makes sense if White doesn't want to allow ...e5. 8.0-0 will transpose to positions covered later in this chapter.

8...c5 9.♘c2

9.♘f3 This position has arisen lots of times, but with White to move! Black can get easy play on the queenside: 9...♘a6 10.0-0 ♖b8 11.♖e1 ♗d7 12.e4 fxe4 13.♘xe4 [13.♘g5 ♘c7⇄] 13...♘xe4 14.♖xe4 b5↑.

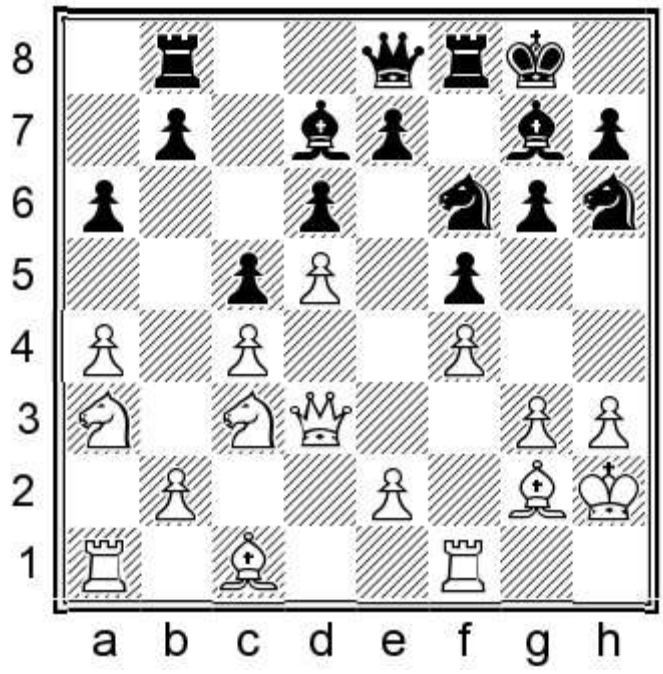
9...♘bd7



Position after: 9...♘bd7

10.0-0

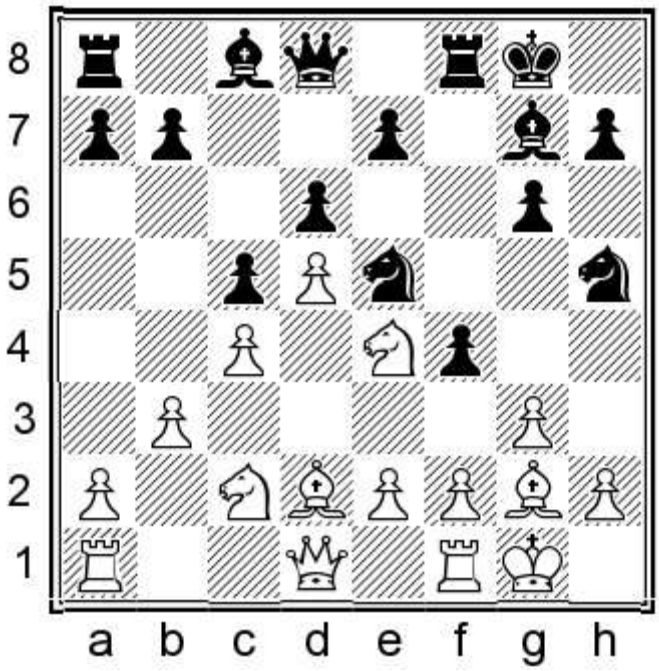
10.a4 ♘e5 11.♘a3 a6 This move highlights that White has placed his pieces in a very strange manner. 12.0-0 ♖b8 13.f4 ♘eg4 14.h3 ♘h6 15.♕d3 ♗d7 16.♔h2 ♕e8↑ Black keeps the more dynamic position.



Position after: 16...♕e8↑

Two possible breakthroughs are ...b5 and ...e5. The game Panno, O (2530) – Rodriguez, A (2260), Potrero de los Funes 1995, eventually ended in a draw.

10...♘e5 11.b3 ♘h5! 12.♗d2 f4 13.♘e4



Position after: 13.♘e4

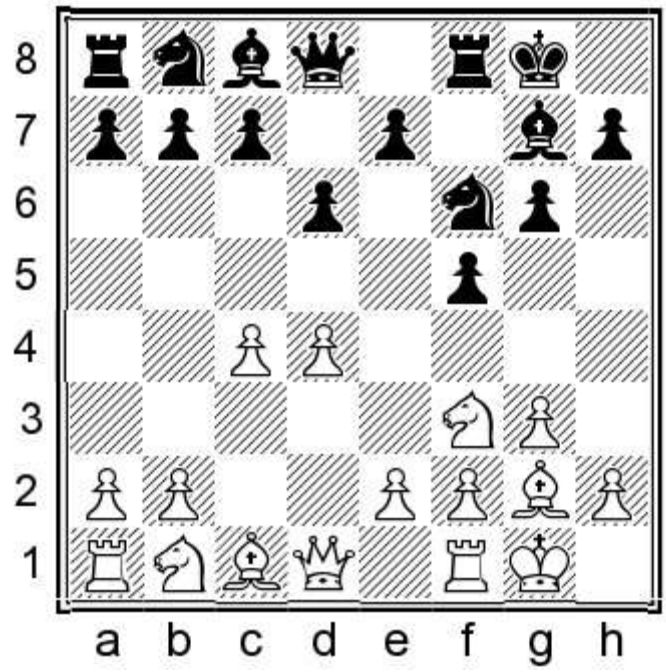
This occurred in the old game Ziembinski, M (2260) – Matkowski, W (2250), Gdynia 1982. It ended in a quick draw, but there is obviously a lot of life in the position. I would probably play

13...h6!N 14.♗c3 g5 15.♘e1 ♕e8→

Our initiative on the kingside is quite promising.

c) 7.-- alternatives

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.c4 0-0 6.0-0 d6

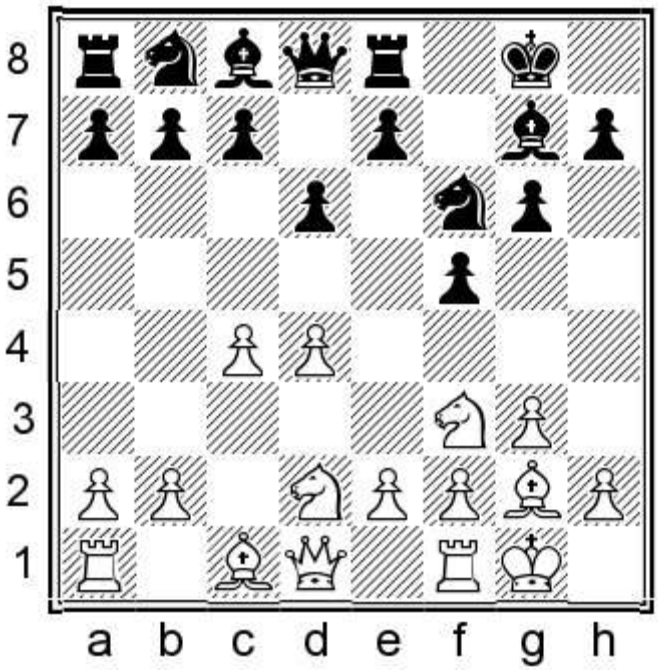


Position after: 6...d6

As in the previous subchapter, we are examining White's possible sidelines on move seven, when he doesn't want to reach the main lines. I remind you that 7.b3 and 7.b4 have already been discussed in the previous chapters, and that 7.♘c3 obviously leads to the main line. We will check the other possible moves, keeping in mind that they might just transpose to the other lines.

7.♕c2

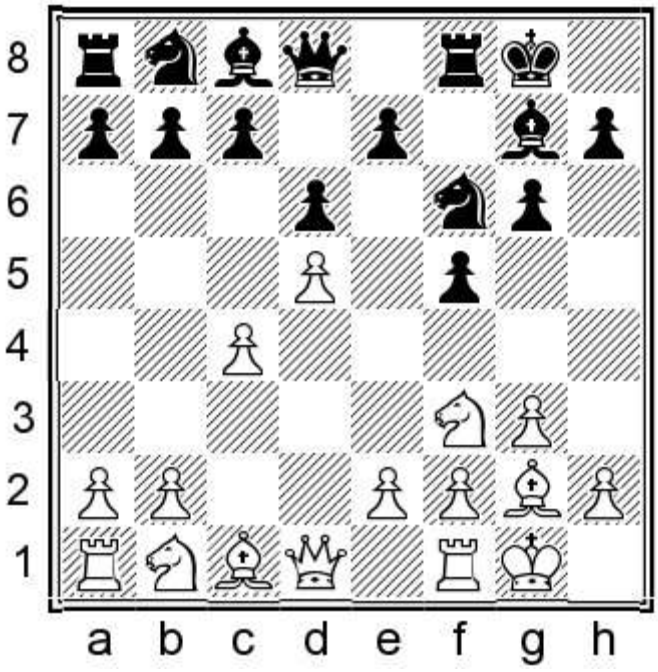
A) 7.♘bd2 I find this move pretty illogical. Still, this position occurs quite often. 7...♖e8!N It's crazy, but this completely logical move is a novelty. Even more surprisingly, computers claim here that the best for White is 8.♘b1. Obviously we won't discuss this line.



Position after: 7...♖e8!N

8.d5 e6 9.dxe6 ♘c6! 10.b3 ♗xe6 11.♗b2 ♘d7↑ Black agrees to trade dark-squared bishops. His idea is to play his queen to f6, then take control of the play with the two knights coming to c5 and e5.

B) 7.d5

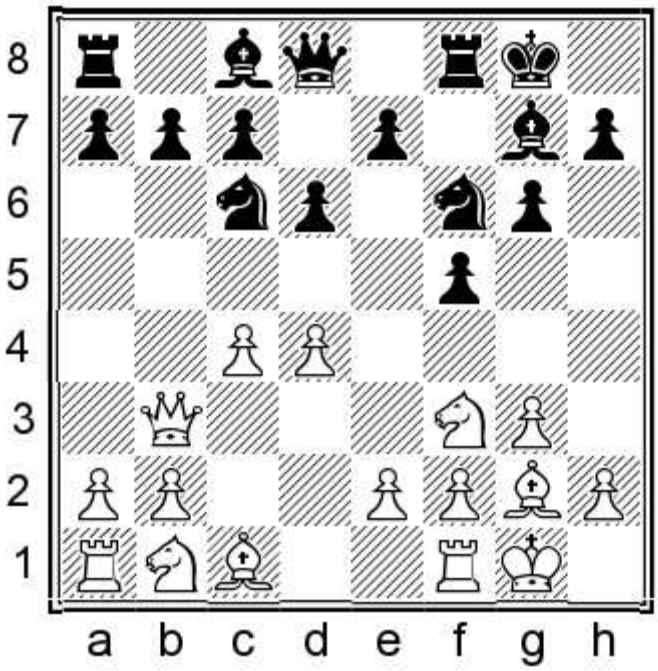


Position after: 7.d5

For some reason this move is sometimes played before ♘c3. It seems a bit premature since we weren't threatening ...e5, but I don't think there is any real way to exploit it. As in the previous

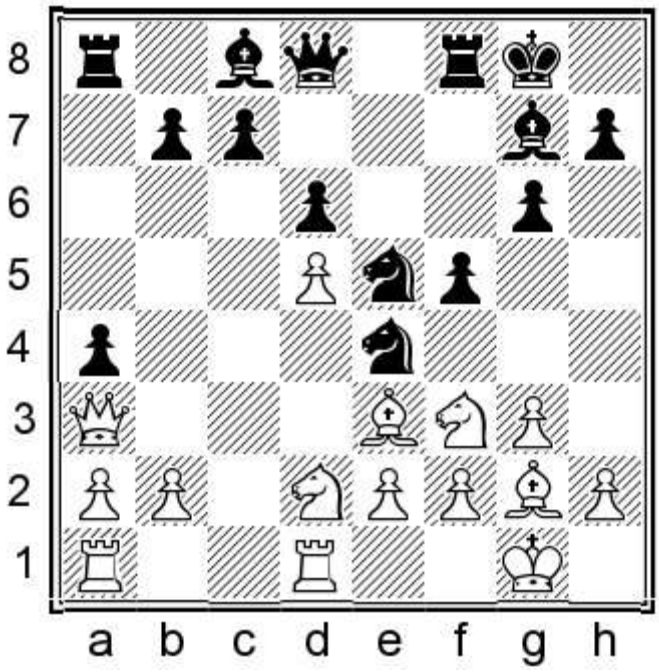
subchapter, I prefer to leave White the possibility of transposing to the main line with 8.d5. 7...c6 8.♘d4 Once again, as in the previous subchapter, this seems the only independent try. [8.♘c3 − see 8.d5 in the following subchapters] 8...c5!? 9.♘c2 [9.♘f3 ♘a6 10.♘c3 – see the previous subchapter] 9...♘bd7 10.♘c3 What else? Once again, see the previous subchapter.

C) 7.♕b3 ♘c6



Position after: 7...♘c6

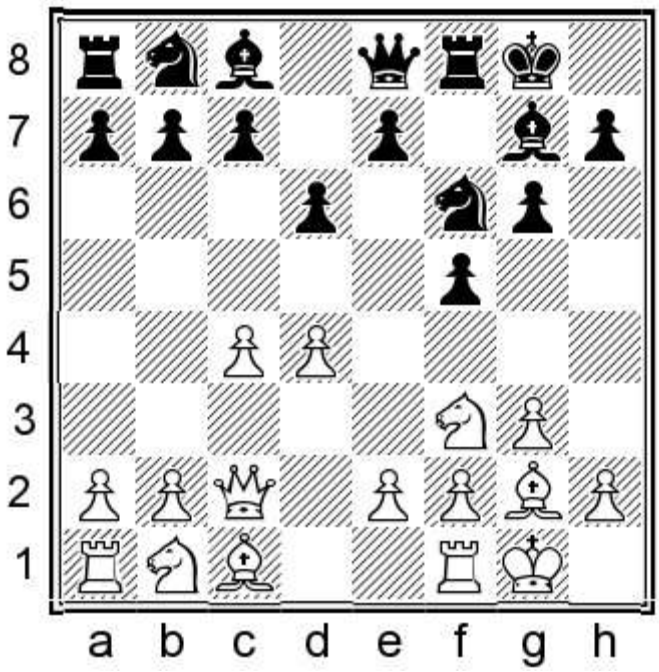
8.♖d1! [8.♘c3 This position has already been analyzed in the previous subchapter with 7.♕b3.] 8...♘e4!? 9.♗e3 [9.♘c3 e6 This also transposes to the previous subchapter.] 9...e6 10.♘bd2 It's probably a slight improvement for White to put the knight on d2, but we are still able to generate enough play to keep the balance. 10...a5!? 11.d5 a4 12.♕a3 exd5 13.cxd5 ♘e5



Position after: 13...♘e5

14.♘xe5 [14.♘xe4? ♘c4 15.♕b4 ♘xe3 16.fxe3 fxe4∓] 14...♘xd2! 15.♖xd2 dxe5⇄

7...♕e8!?

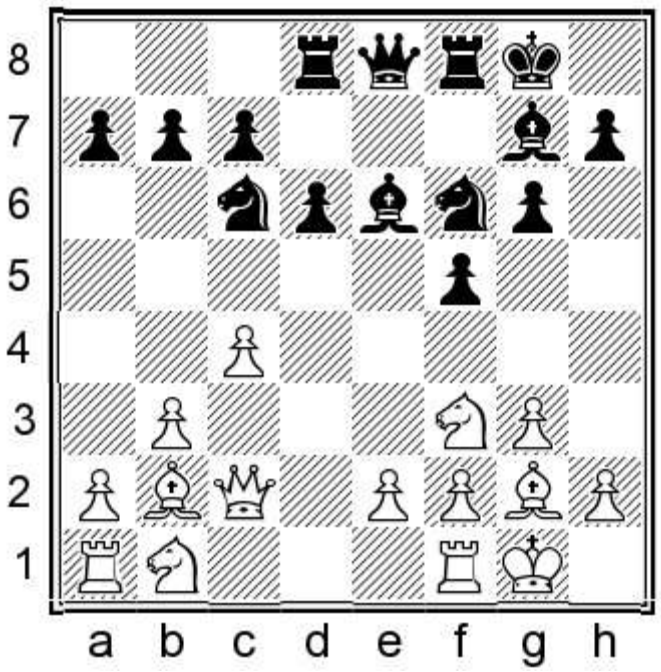


Position after: 7...♕e8!?

This prepares ...e5, but also anticipates that White is planning to play ♖d1, which would prevent it.

8.♘c3

8.d5 e5 9.dxe6 ♗xe6 10.b3 ♘c6 11.♗b2 ♖d8⇄



Position after: 11...♖d8⇄

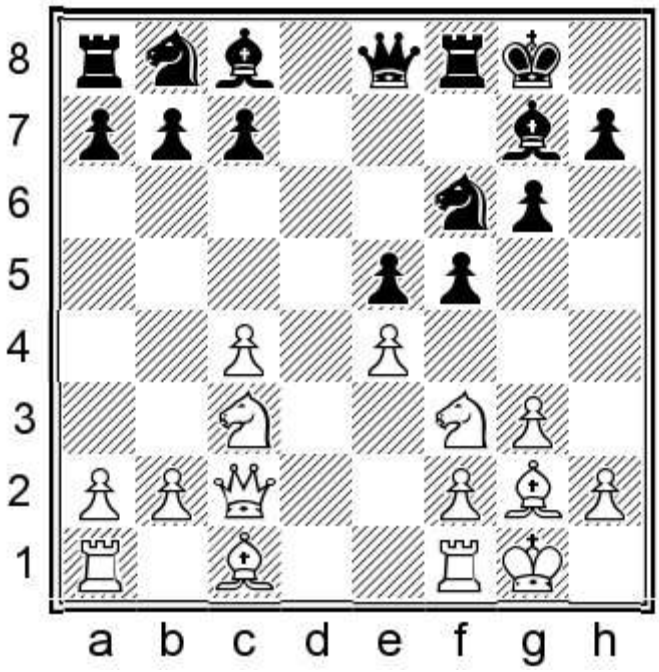
Giving the bishop the possibility of returning to c8 if it comes under attack with ♘g5. This kind of middlegame is very similar to the ones in the 8.d5 line of the main line. We haven't even had to play ...c6 yet, which can be seen as a plus, since the d6-pawn is not weak.

8...e5!

There is no reason to refrain from playing this move.

9.dxe5 dxe5 10.♖d1

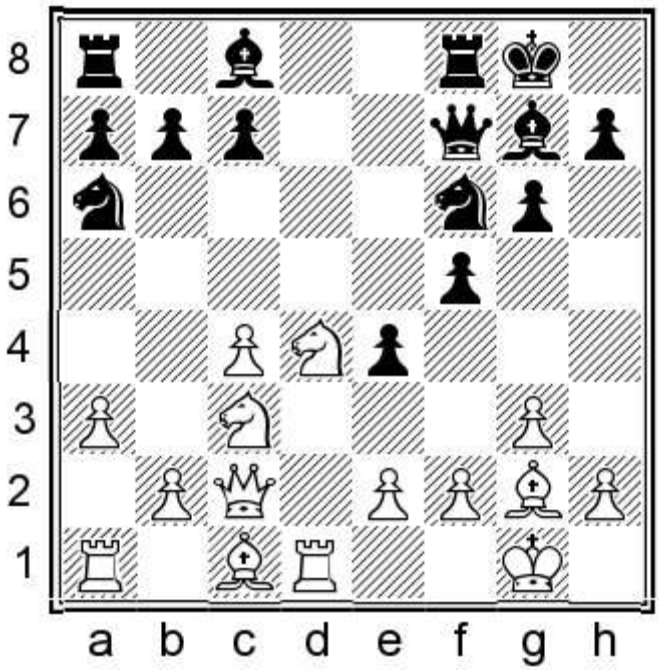
10.e4



Position after: 10.e4

It's always sensible for White to try to stop our pawn advance, but it's pretty unsuccessful here. 10...♘c6 11.♗e3 f4! 12.gxf4 exf4 13.♗xf4 ♗g4→ Black has multiple threats not only on the f-file, but also linked to the d4-square. White is already in trouble.

10...e4 11.♘d4 ♘a6 12.a3 ♕f7↑

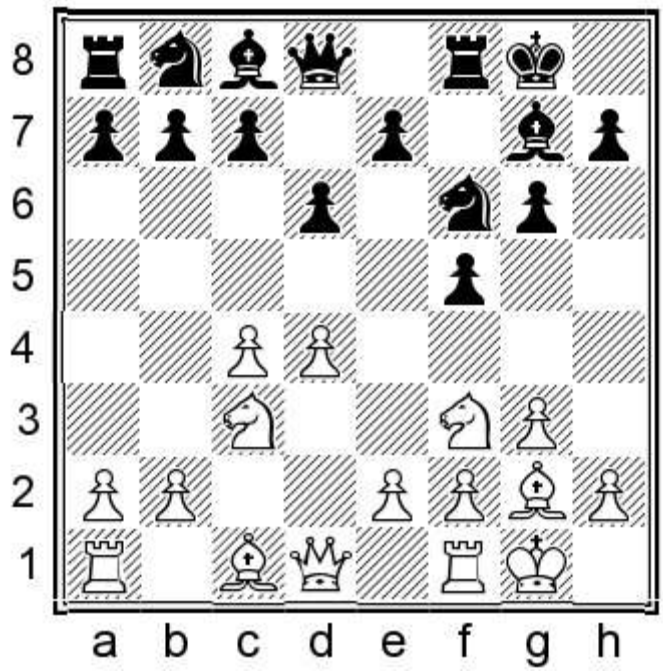


Position after: 12...♕f7↑

Black has got what he wanted, a strong pawn phalanx that restricts the action of the g2-bishop.

d) 8.-- alternatives

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.c4 0-0 6.0-0 d6 7.♘c3



Position after: 7.♘c3

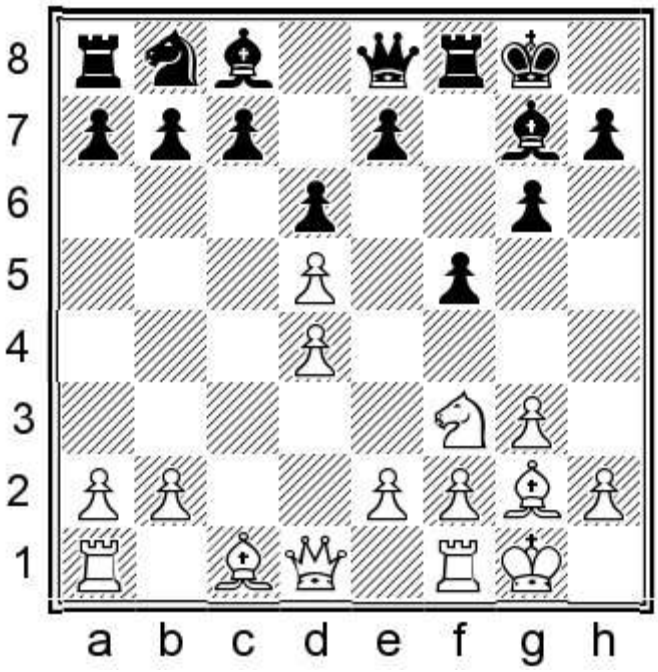
7...c6!?

Finally here we are in what I consider to be the main line. 7...c6 hasn't been the most played move in the current position, but nowadays it seems to enjoy the favor of theory. However I will quickly discuss Black's other two main continuations and why I am not fond of them.

A) 7...♕e8 This is actually the most played move. Black prepares ...e5, but of course White has several ways to prevent it. Three of them seem pretty decent to me:

A1) 8.d5 Obviously the main move is one of the critical attempts. Lots of lines arise from this position, but White is generally doing well.

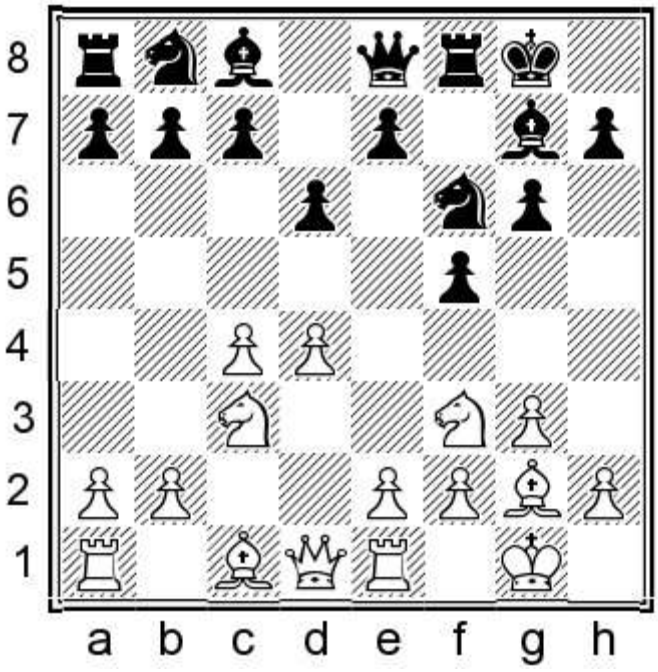
A2) 8.♘d5!? ♘xd5 9.cxd5



Position after: 9.cxd5

Now White has doubled d-pawns, and the one on d5 is potentially weak, but it's also pretty annoying, as it prevents us from moving our c- and e-pawns.

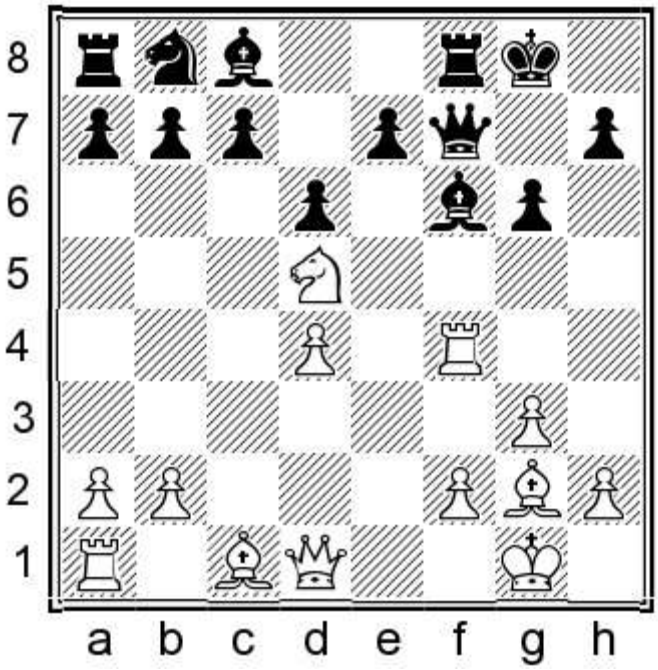
A3) 8.♖e1



Position after: 8.♖e1

This is the last of the moves I am not satisfied with as Black when I play the Leningrad with 7...♕e8. I find the variation too abstract. For instance one of the main continuations is 8...♕f7 9.e4 fxe4

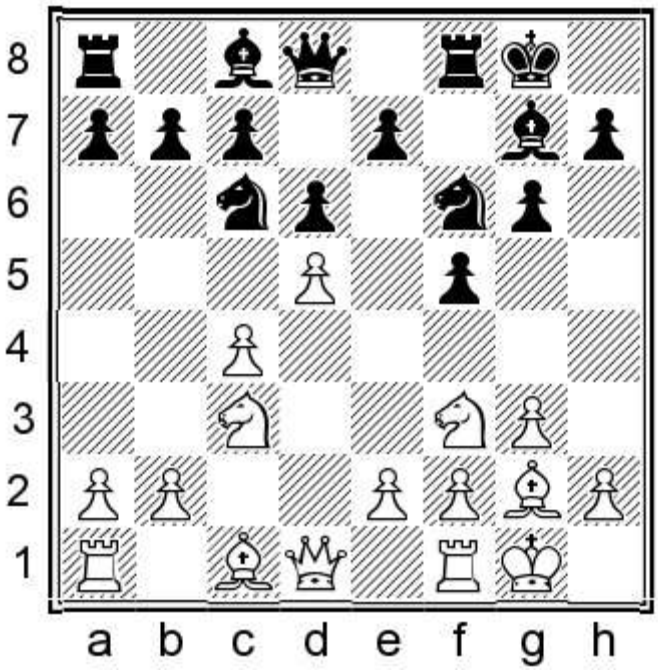
10.♘g5 [10.♘xe4!?] 10...♕xc4 11.♘gxe4 ♘xe4 12.♖xe4 ♕f7 13.♖f4 ♗f6 14.♘d5∞



Position after: 14.♘d5∞

and even here lots of complications may arise.

B) 7...♘c6 I have always thought that this move is slightly dubious, or at least I did until I lost to Rapport against it. Obviously, in practical play, it is interesting, but still it's not to my taste. 8.d5!

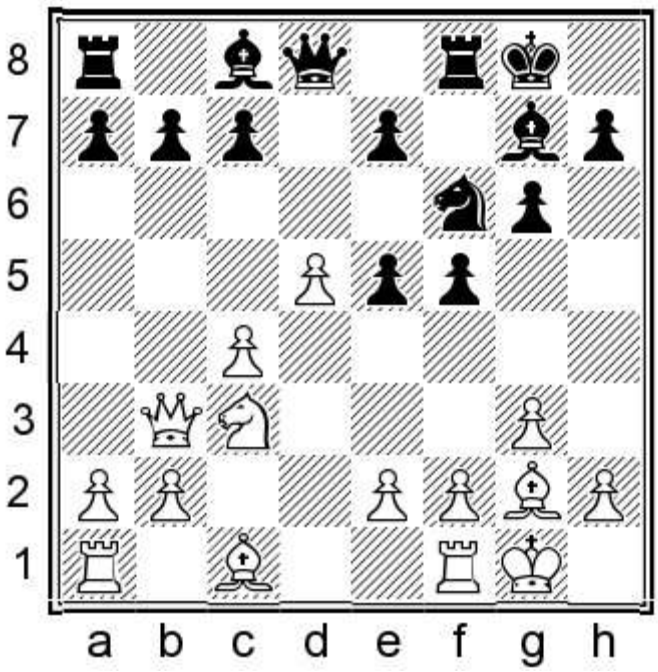


Position after: 8.d5!

B1) 8...♘a5 9.b3! This sideline is now a source of trouble for Black in this variation. If he is greedy,

things may go wrong very quickly. 9...♘e4 10.♘xe4 ♗xa1 11.♘eg5 h6 [11...♗g7 12.♘d4±] 12.♘h3 ♗g7 13.♕d2! c5 14.♘f4 ♔h7 15.♖e1→

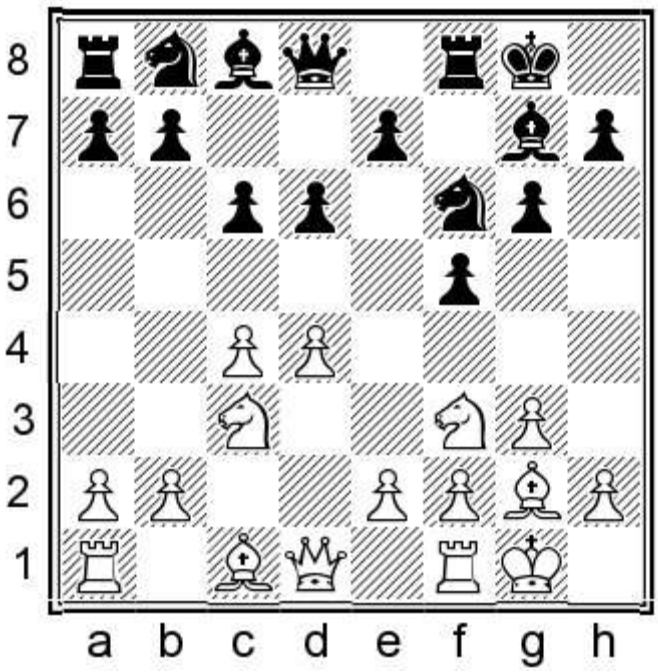
B2) 8...♘e5 9.♘xe5 dxe5 10.♕b3↑ White can follow with c5 and ♖d1, which is normally quite strong.



Position after: 10.♕b3↑

It's true that Black can instigate a pawnstorm on the kingside with ...h6 and ...g5, but he is generally unable to carry out this attack properly.

Back to 7...c6.

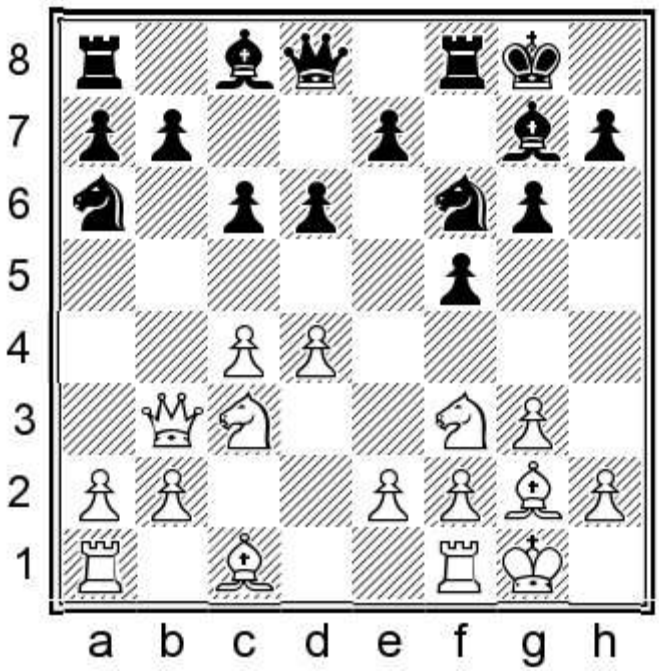


Position after: 7...c6!?

Now, before entering the main continuations, let's discuss the side possibilities that White sometimes prefers.

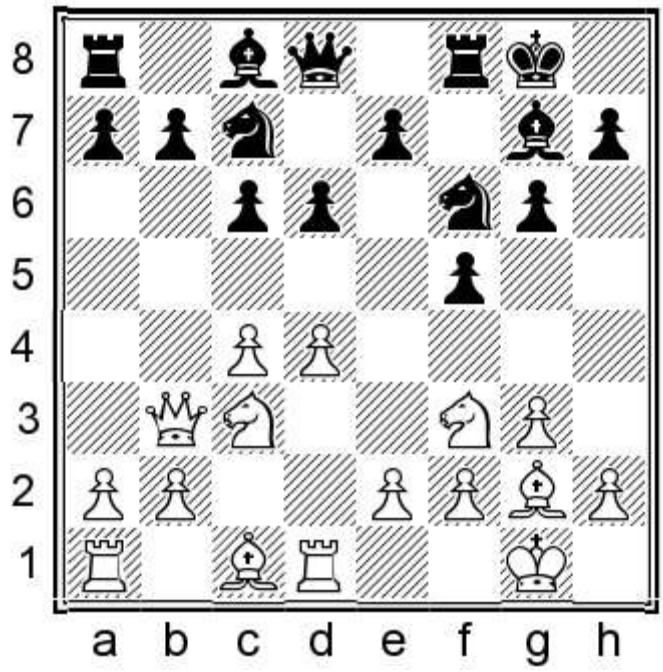
8.♕c2

A) 8.♕b3 With this move, White sometimes intends c4−c5+, changing the nature of the pawn structure. That's probably why Black has continued with 8...♔h8 in most games, but I prefer another approach: 8...♘a6!?



Position after: 8...♘a6!?

9.♖d1! [9.c5+ I don't think this should be seen as a real threat. 9...♔h8 10.cxd6 exd6 11.♗f4 ♘e4!↑ Black has decent play; it's hard to see what White has gained from trading pawns.] 9...♘c7



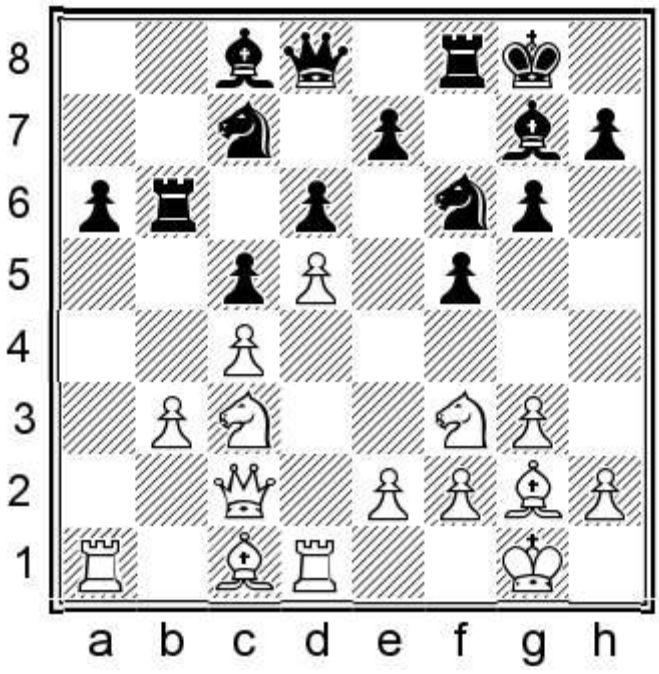
Position after: 9...♘c7

I like this calm approach. The knight can't reach b4, so it takes control of some important central light squares.

A1) 10.♖b1 I don't get the logic in placing the queen on b3 in front of the b-pawn, then the rook on b1. 10...♖b8 11.a4 ♔h8 12.d5 ♗d7 13.♕a3 c5 14.♗d2 ♘a6 15.b3 h6 16.♕c1 ♔h7⇄ 1-0 (56) Berkes, F (2663) – Renner, C (2440), Germany 2010.

A2) 10.c5+ This does nothing specific, nor does the rook on d1 do much in this kind of pawn structure. 10...♔h8 11.cxd6 exd6 12.♗g5 ♕e7=

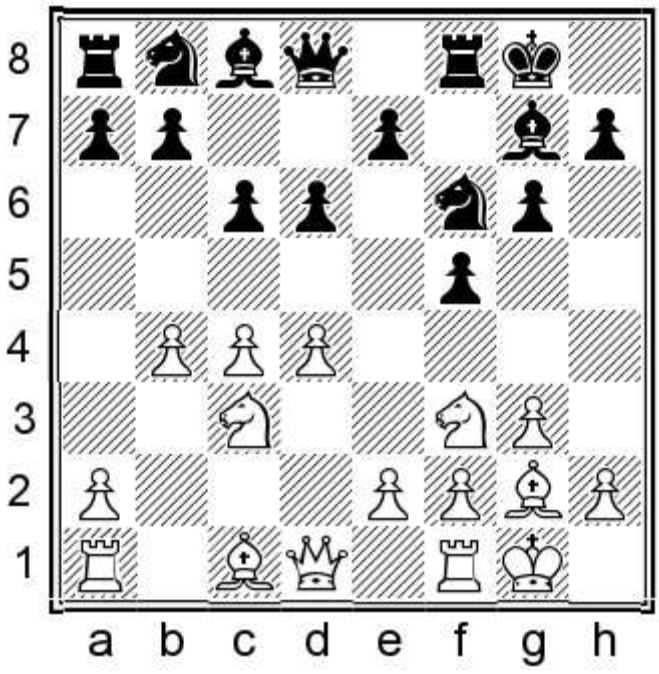
A3) 10.d5 I faced this position once before writing this chapter and was quite satisfied with the position I got out of the opening after 10...c5 11.♕c2 a6 12.a4 ♖b8 13.a5 b5!? 14.axb6 ♖xb6 15.b3.



Position after: 15.b3

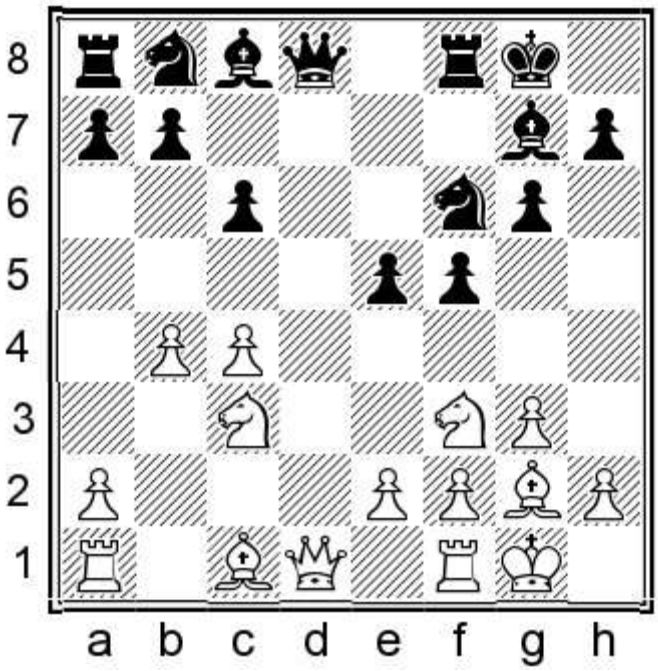
This may look ugly for Black, but it's actually really active. The long-term pressure on the b-pawn is very annoying for White. I could now have opened the center and deviated from my game Bobadilla Viera, J (2318) – Demuth, A (2519), Rochefort 2019, ½-½ (40), with 15...e6!?N 16.dxe6 ♘xe6 17.♗b2 ♗b7⇄.

B) 8.b4



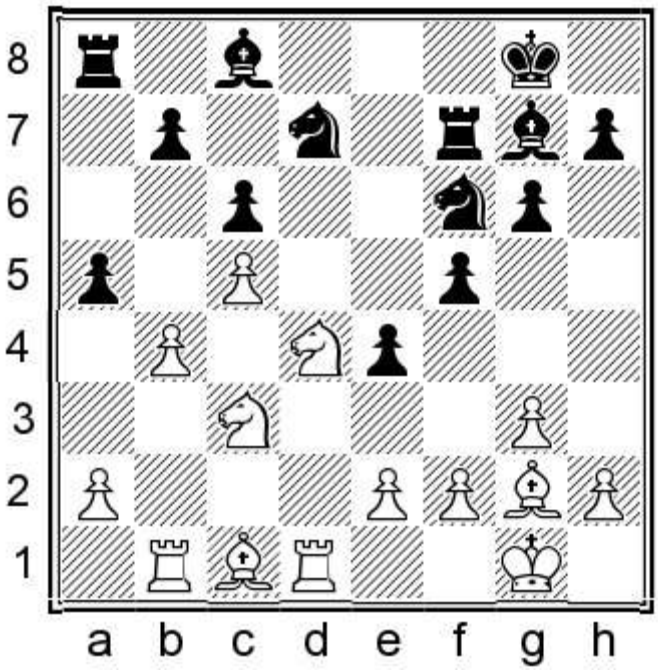
Position after: 8.b4

These kinds of lines were deeply analyzed in Chapter 7 when we looked at various ways for White to play with b4, but we never checked it when it was played so late! 8...e5!? As is often the case once White weakens the long diagonal by moving the b-pawn, this is a logical reaction. 9.dxe5 dxe5



Position after: 9...dxe5

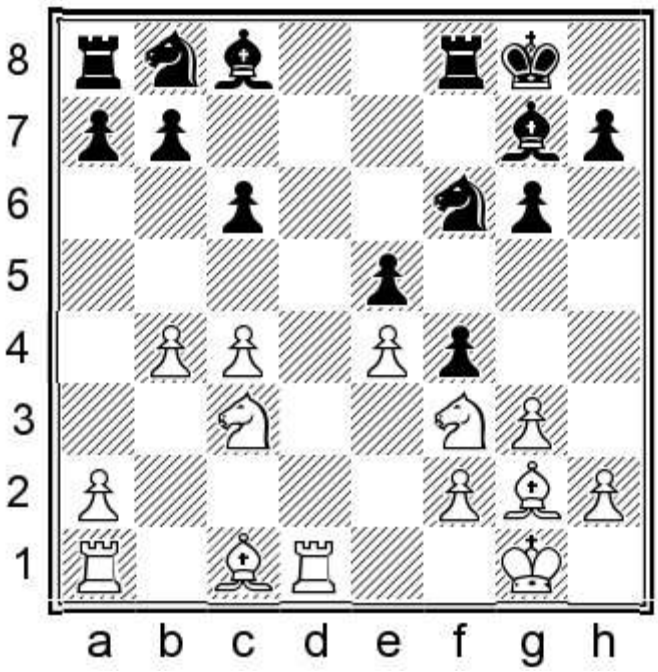
B1) 10.♕b3 e4! 11.♖d1 ♕e7 12.♘d4 ♕f7!N This move has never been tried. It seems logical to me to start putting pressure on the c-pawn. 13.♖b1 ♘bd7 14.c5 a5! An important motif in order to bring the a8-rook into play, but also to weaken White's queenside. 15.♕xf7+ ♖xf7



Position after: 15...♖xf7

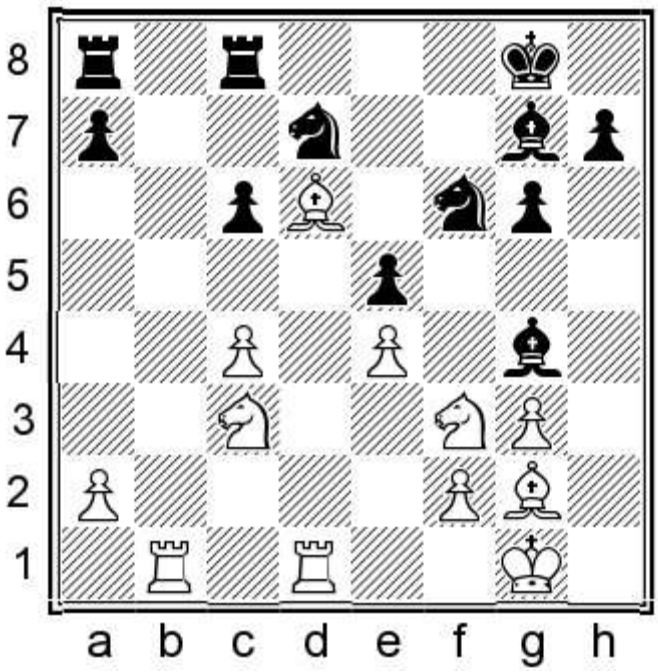
16.a3 [16.♘e6 axb4 17.♖xb4 ♗h8 18.♘d8! ♖e7 19.♘xb7 ♘g4⩱ The c5-pawn can fall at any time and Black is completely fine.] 16...axb4 17.axb4 ♘f8↑

B2) 10.e4! White really should prevent ...e4, and this is the only way. Black seems to have demonstrated in the past that he is fine. 10...♕xd1 11.♖xd1 f4



Position after: 11...f4

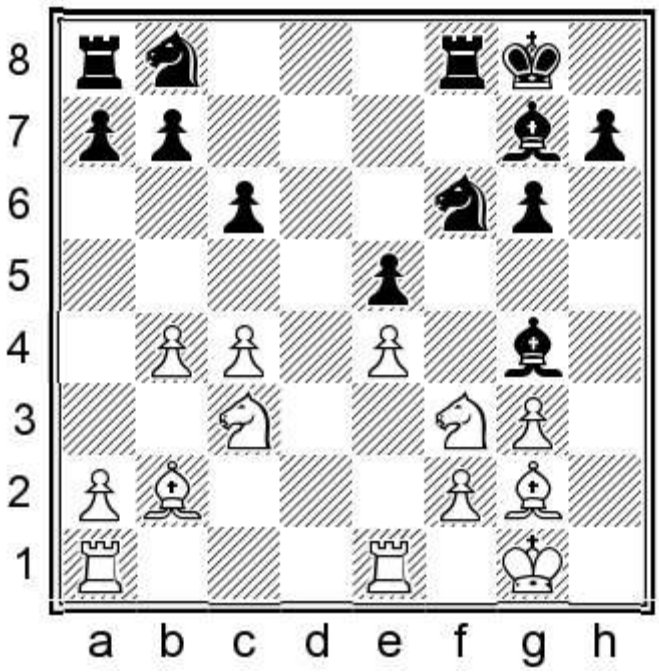
B2.1) White might try to weaken our queenside with 12.b5, but he got nothing in the following game: 12...fxg3 13.hxg3 ♗g4 14.♗a3 ♖c8! 15.♖ab1 ♘bd7 16.bxc6 bxc6 17.♗d6



Position after: 17.♗d6

17...♗f8 [17...♘e8!?= This might even be a way to expel the bishop and keep more pieces on the board.] 18.c5 ♖e8 19.♗xf8 ♖xf8 20.♖d6 ♗xf3 21.♗xf3 ♘xc5 22.♖xc6 ♖ac8= ½-½ (26) Miroshnichenko, E (2602) – Filippov, A (2615), Kocaeli 2014.

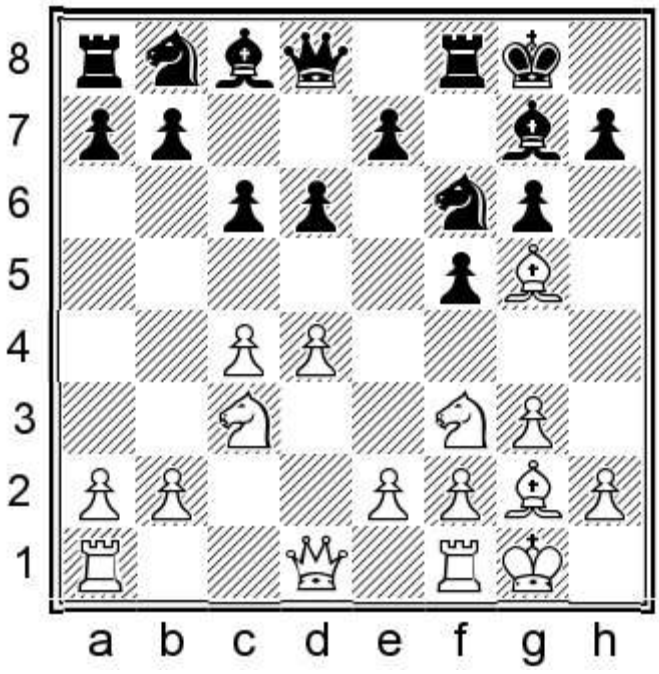
B2.2) 12.♗b2 fxg3 13.hxg3 ♗g4 14.♖e1



Position after: 14.♖e1

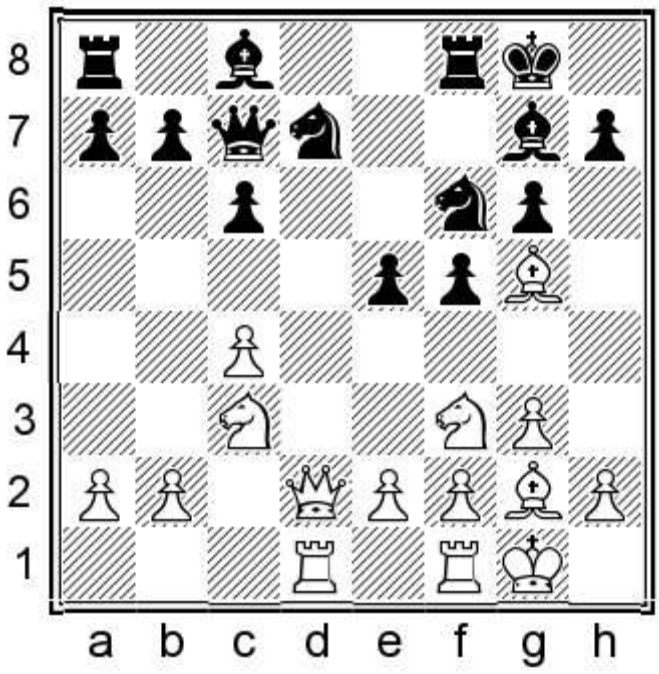
This was reached in the game Leko, P (2737) – Ponomariov, R (2723), Dortmund 2014, ½-½ (43). Now, instead of the game's ...♘bd7, I would move the f6-knight instead, in order to be able to bring the other one to a6: 14...♘fd7 15.♘d2 a5! 16.b5 ♘c5 17.♗a3 ♘bd7↑.

C) 8.♗g5



Position after: 8.♗g5

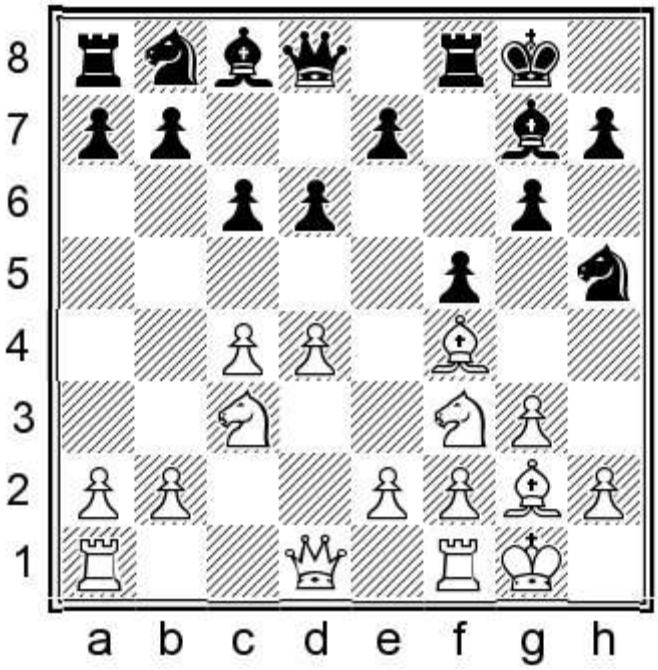
This move doesn't make much sense to me as I am not sure White wants to keep the bishop pair in the event of an early ...h6. But anyway Black has other options, so he doesn't need to answer this question! 8...♘bd7 [8...♘e4 is another idea that I think is equally good. 9.♘xe4 fxe4 10.♘e1 d5⇄] 9.♕d2 e5 10.dxe5 dxe5 11.♖ad1 ♕c7=



Position after: 11...♕c7=

White is able to trade the dark-squared bishop, but it's only a small achievement compared to the pawn coming to e4.

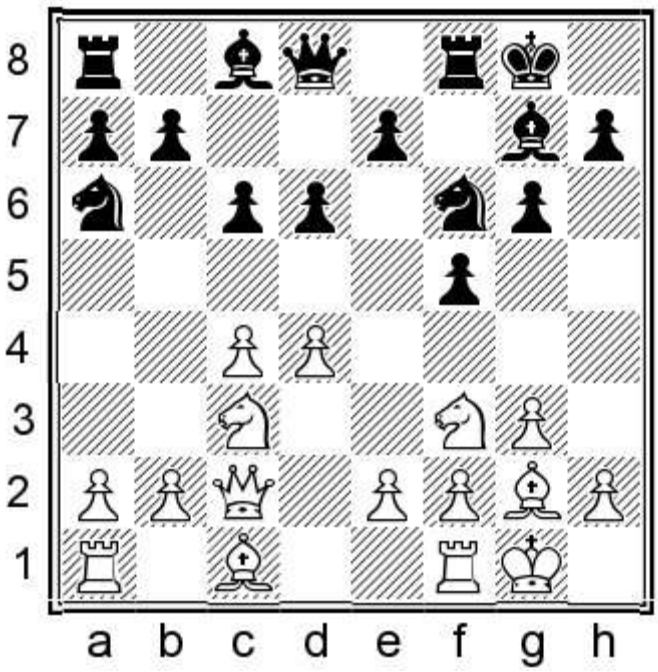
D) 8.♗f4 ♘h5!?



Position after: 8...♘h5!?

It's a good idea to put the question to White's bishop. It can either move, which would allow ...e5, or stay put, when Black would be glad to take it. 9.♗g5 [9.♕d2 ♘xf4 10.gxf4 ♘d7 11.♖ad1 ♘f6=] 9...h6 10.♗c1 e5↑

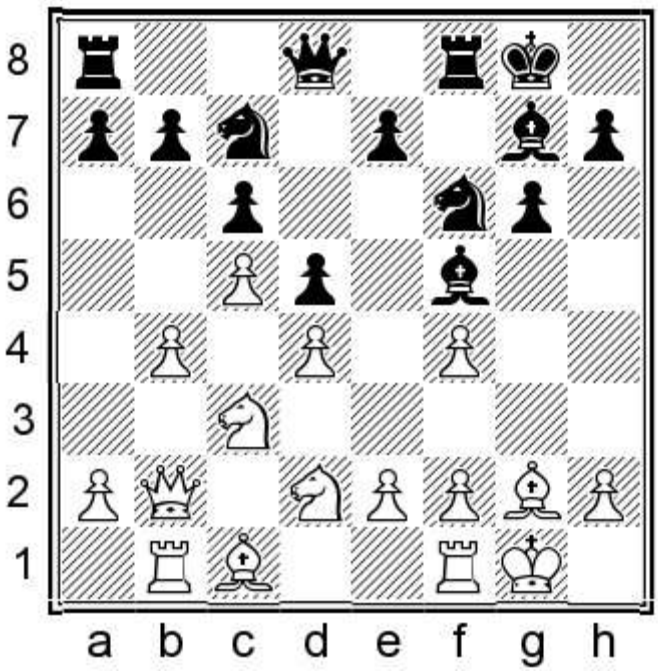
8...♘a6!?



Position after: 8...♘a6!?

9.a3

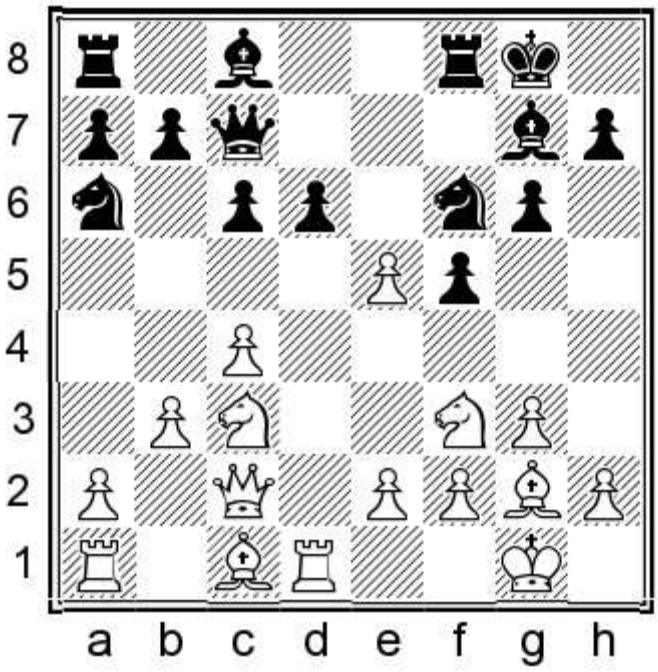
A) 9.♖b1 ♘c7 10.b4 ♗e6! 11.♘d2 d5! 12.c5 f4! 13.gxf4 ♗f5 14.♕b2



Position after: 14.♕b2

White can play e2−e4 if he doesn't want to give up the exchange, but it would be a structural catastrophe. 14...♗xb1 15.♕xb1 ♕c8= This kind of unbalanced middlegame should give each side about equal chances. Black will probably try to open the queenside by means of ...a5.

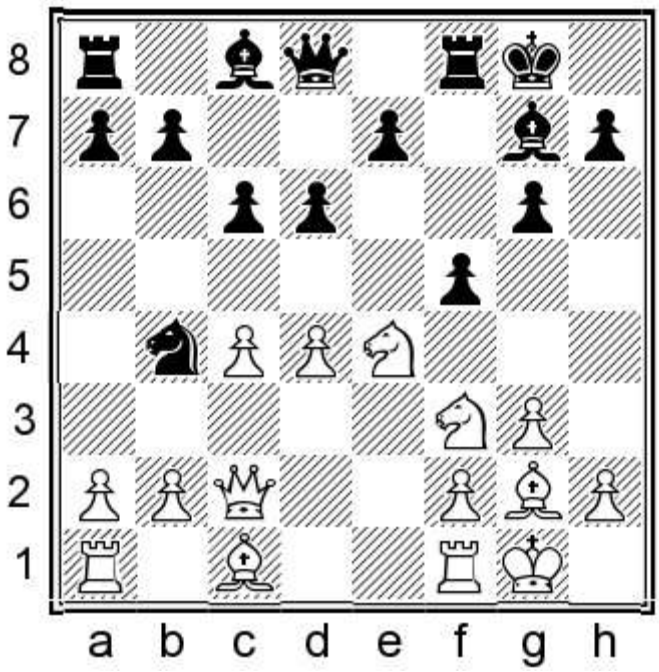
B) 9.b3 ♕c7! 10.♖d1 This looks like the best move order to retain the possibility of playing ♗a3. [10.♗b2 e5 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.♖ad1 e4!↑] 10...e5 11.dxe5



Position after: 11.dxe5

11...♘b4 [11...dxe5 12.♗a3 c5= may be about equal, but I'm not satisfied with playing ...c5 here.] 12.♕d2 dxe5 13.♘a4 a5 14.a3 ♘e4=

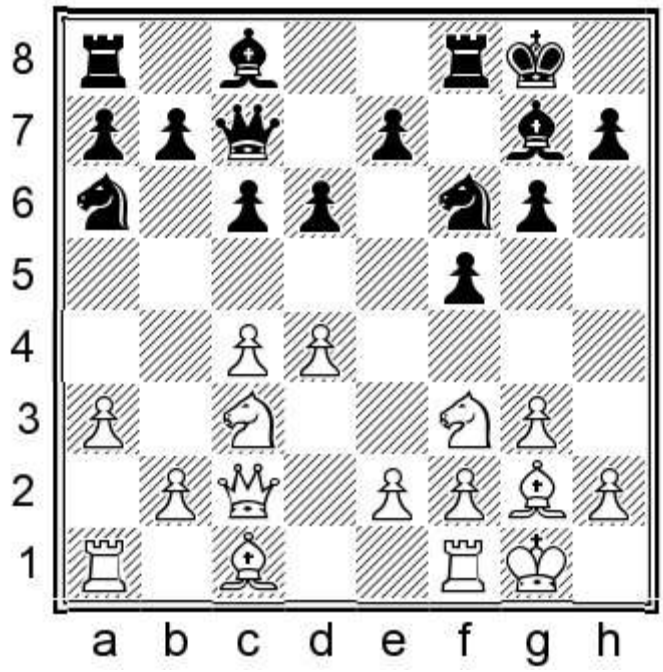
C) 9.e4?! A rare idea which backfires. 9...♘xe4! 10.♘xe4 ♘b4!



Position after: 10...♘b4!

11.♕b3 [11.♕b1? fxe4 12.♕xe4 ♗f5 13.♕h4 ♘c2 14.♖b1 ♕b6∓ White is getting nowhere and needs to deal with the multiple threats.] 11...fxe4 12.♘g5 ♘a6 13.♗e3 ♕b6!↑

9...♕c7



Position after: 9...♕c7

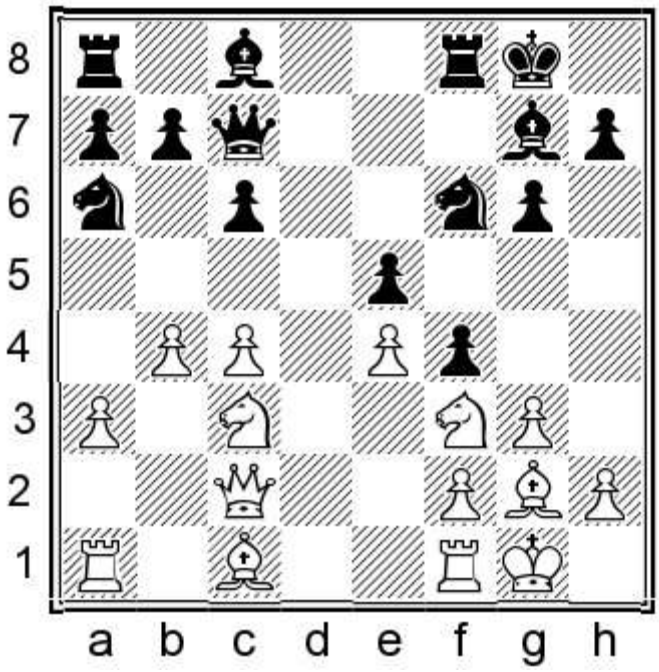
10.b4

10.e4?! fxe4 11.♘xe4 ♗f5 12.♘xf6+ exf6 13.♕b3 ♗e4=

10...e5 11.dxe5

11.b5!?N This might be an improvement for White, but we can't say that it refutes Black's play. 11...♘b8 12.bxc6 bxc6 13.c5 e4!? 14.cxd6 ♕xd6 15.♗f4 ♕e7 16.♘e5 ♗e6⇄

11...dxe5 12.e4 f4↑

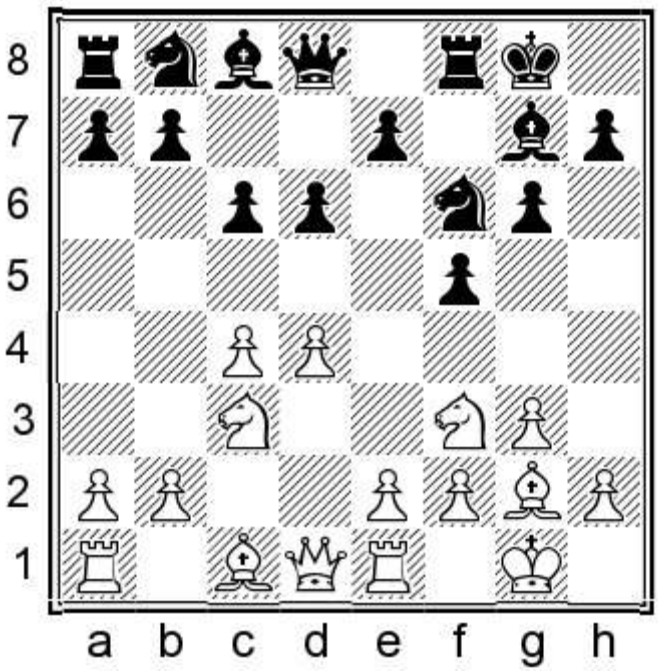


Position after: 12...f4↑

We have already seen this idea several times. It has worked really well for Black in practice, and I won’t go any further into the specifics.

e) 8.♖e1

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.c4 0-0 6.0-0 d6 7.♘c3 c6!? 8.♖e1



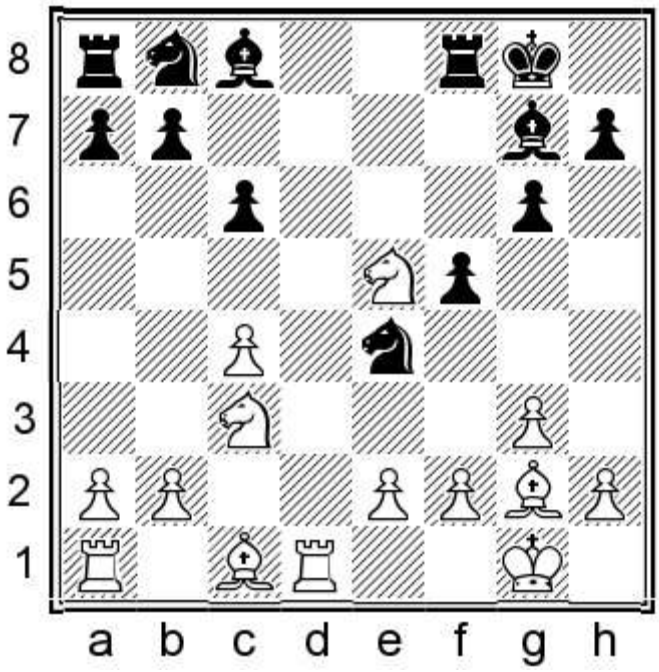
Position after: 8.♖e1

The idea of advancing with e4 has already been discussed lots of times in the previous chapters. In general, I would say that it is less effective when White has already played c4, as the d4-pawn is weaker, but Black has played ...c6, so it's harder to put pressure on the d4-pawn.

8...♘a6!?

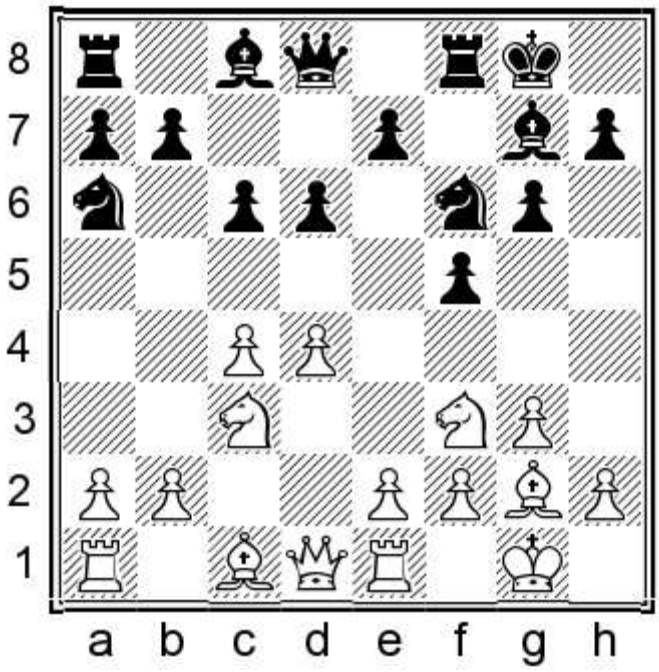
This is definitely the safest continuation. Black anticipates e4, and develops his pieces in order to respond to it quickly.

8...e5!?N Amazingly, this move is a novelty. Obviously I tried to make it work. 9.dxe5 dxe5 10.♘xe5 ♕xd1 11.♖xd1 ♘e4! This is the point of Black's play: if White takes on e4, the knight on e5 is trapped in the center.



Position after: 11...♘e4!

However I don't think it's enough to get an equal position. 12.♘d3 ♘xc3 13.bxc3 ♗xc3 14.♖b1± The material balance has been restored, but White clearly has the more active pieces, and it won't be easy to develop our queenside.

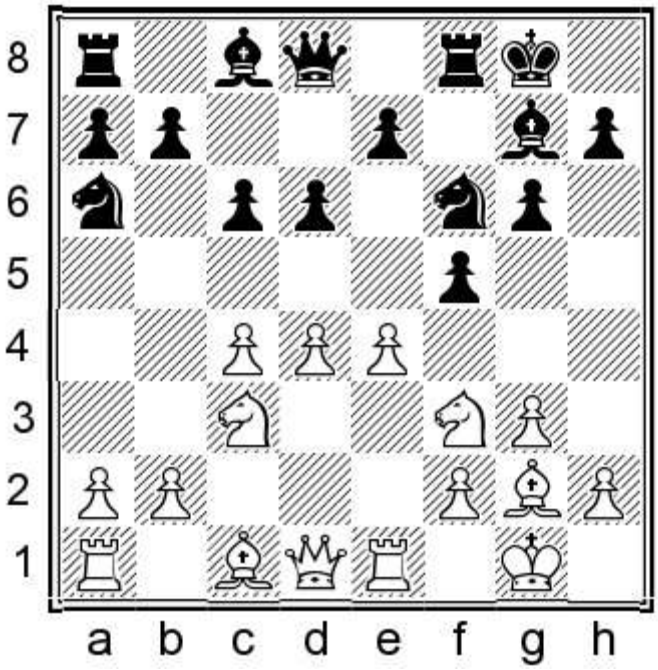


Position after: 8...♘a6!?

9.b3

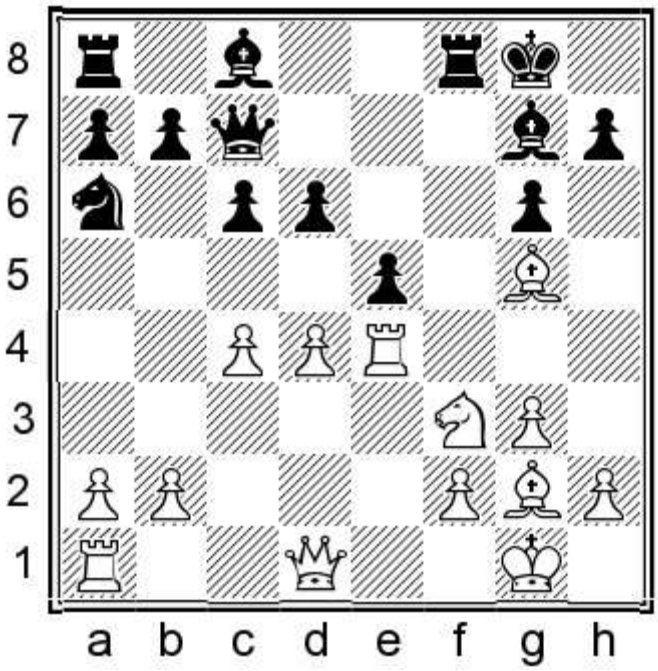
This position might arise via 8.b3 ♘a6 9.♖e1, but it's clearly more logical with the current move order.

A) 9.e4?!



Position after: 9.e4?!

This move is too early. 9...fxe4 10.♘xe4 ♘xe4 11.♖xe4 e5!? Played less often, but it has worked well in practice. [11...♗f5 12.♖h4∞ I think this is the best try for White. It prevents any ...♗g4 ideas and may allow ♗h6 at some point.] 12.♗g5 [12.dxe5 dxe5⇄] 12...♕c7

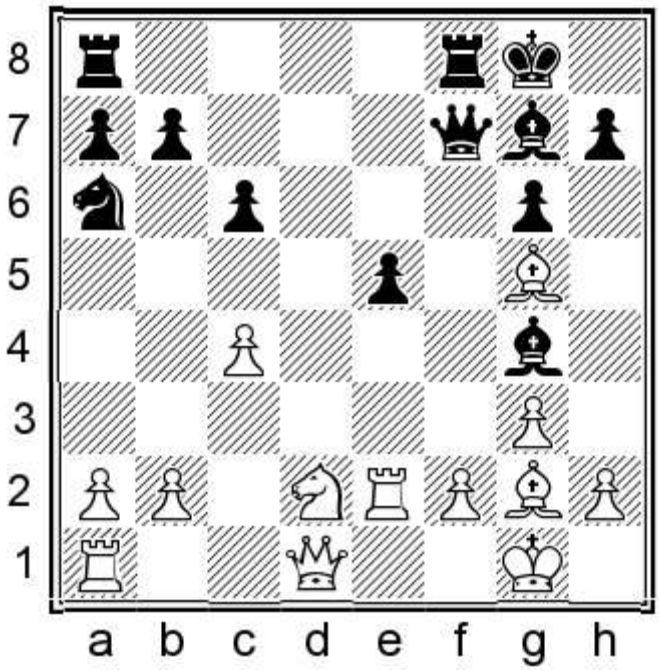


Position after: 12...♕c7

A1) 13.♖e1 ♗g4 14.dxe5 dxe5 15.♕e2 ♖f5! Very strong. Black gains an important tempo in order to

double rooks on the f-file. 16.♕e3 ♖af8 17.♘h4 ♖xf2! 18.♗h6 [18.♕xf2 ♖xf2 19.♔xf2 ♘c5 20.♔g1 ♘d3 21.♖e3 ♕b6–+ Black has too many threats, e.g. ...h6, gaining material, and White's position is collapsing.] 18...♗xh6 19.♕xh6 ♘b4–+ 0-1 (31) Halay, T (2320) – Nijboer, F (2529), Dieren 2005.

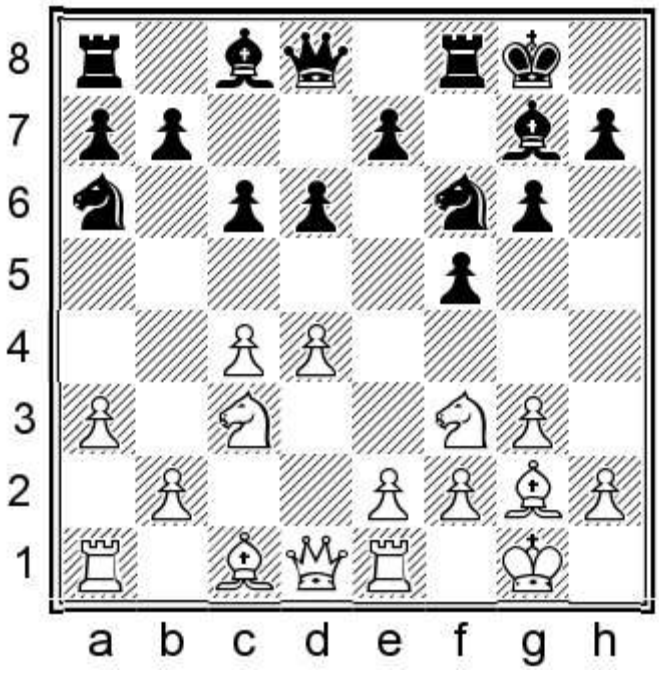
A2) 13.dxe5 dxe5 This kind of position with an isolated e-pawn can be difficult for Black, but in this case it will be easy to follow with ...♗f5 and ...♘b4, with dangerous piece play. 14.♘d2 ♕f7 15.♖e2 ♗g4



Position after: 15...♗g4

The idea is simply to block the g2-bishop. 16.f3 ♗f5 17.♘e4 ♗xe4 18.fxe4 ♕xc4∓

B) 9.a3

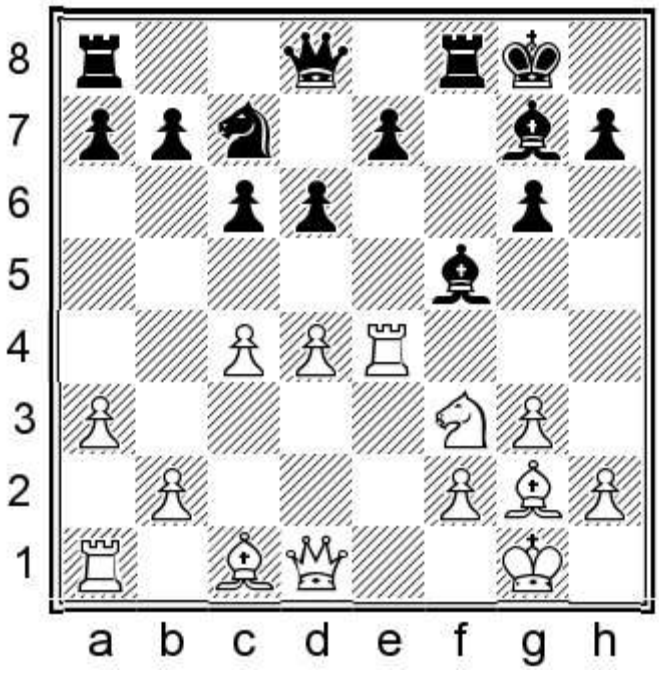


Position after: 9.a3

Some people have also tried this slow move. The point is to prepare ♕c2, without being annoyed by the knight coming to b4. 9...♘c7!?

B1) 10.♕d3 ♘h5! In the same spirit, this works well too. 11.e4 If White waits any longer, Black will be able to play 11...e5 with good play. 11...f4! 12.♘e2 e5 13.dxe5 [13.c5? dxc5!∓ Here the d-pawn is pinned, which is why I consider the queen better placed on c2.] 13...dxe5 14.♕xd8 ♖xd8 15.♗d2 ♗g4 16.♗c3 ♖d3!↑

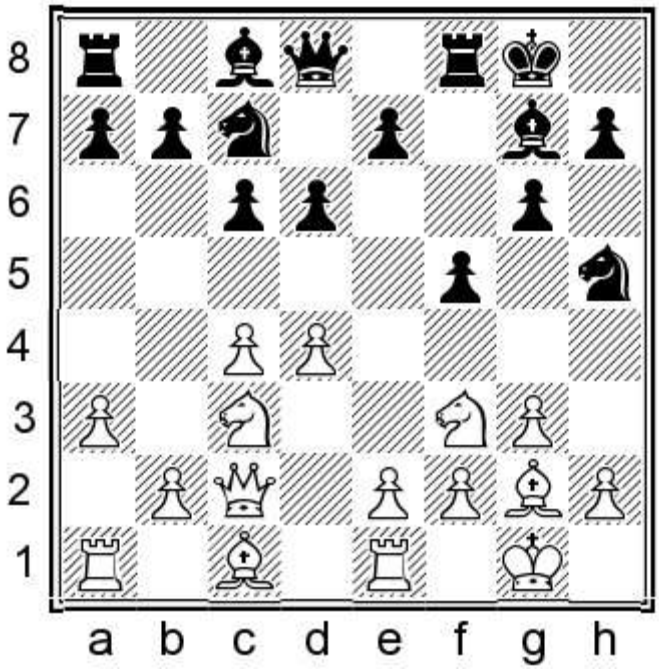
B2) 10.e4 fxe4 11.♘xe4 ♘xe4 12.♖xe4 ♗f5



Position after: 12...♗f5

Again it seems pretty clear that White hasn't gained much by opening the center. 13.♖e1 ♕d7=

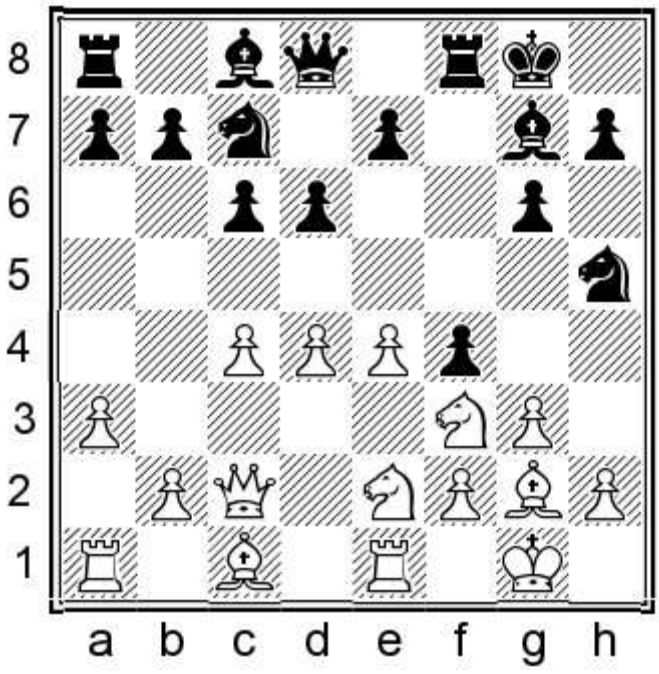
B3) 10.♕c2 ♘h5



Position after: 10...♘h5

B3.1) 11.e3 This prevents ...f4, but not the following line: 11...e5 12.dxe5 dxe5 13.b4 ♗e6 14.♘d2 ♕e7∓. Black is already better, and I am very surprised that the Dutch specialist misplayed this game and lost quite quickly in Van Oosterom, C (2380) – Nijboer, F (2530), Netherlands 2014, 1-0 (36).

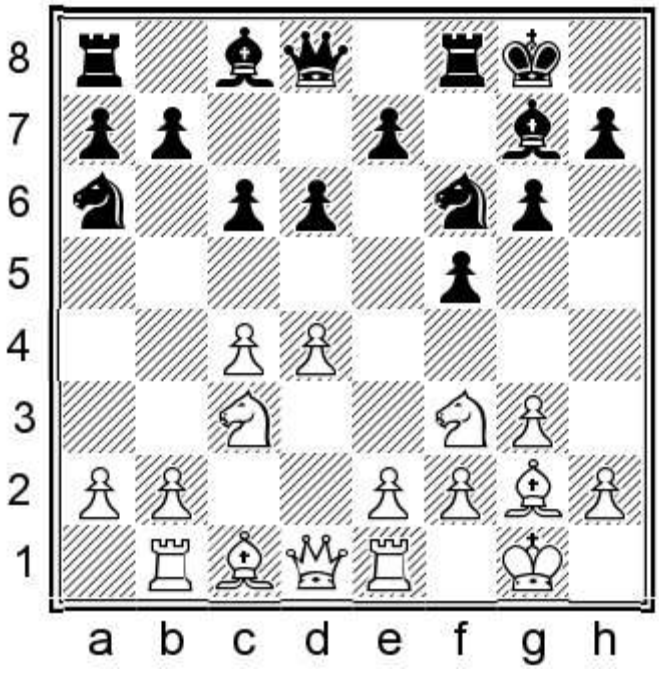
B3.2) 11.e4 f4 12.♘e2



Position after: 12.♘e2

12...♗g4! [12...e5?! 13.c5!± Our pawn chain is going to be destroyed.] 13.gxf4 e5! Really well timed. White is in trouble on the f-file. 14.c5 ♘xf4 15.♘xf4 exf4 16.cxd6 ♕xd6↑

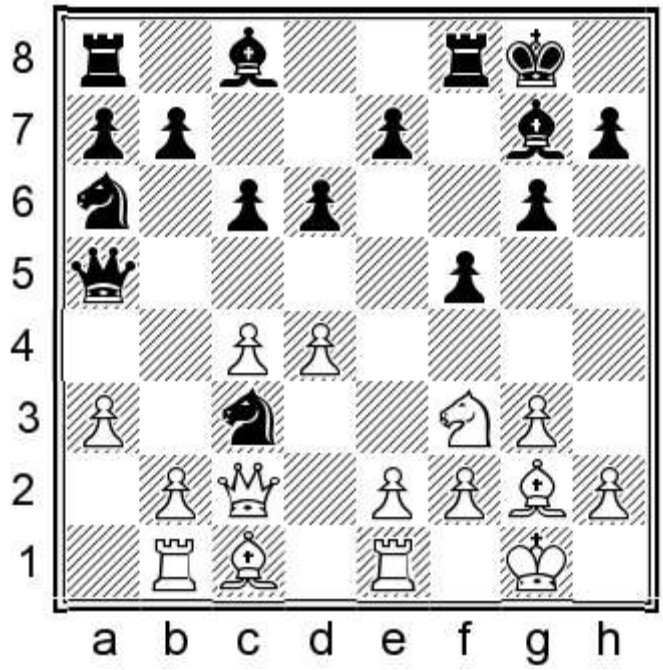
C) 9.♖b1



Position after: 9.♖b1

White mixes ideas, and takes advantage of the fact that ...a5, in order to prevent b4, is no longer possible. 9...♘e4 10.♕c2 ♕a5 Of course the knight is untouchable because of ...♗f5 at the end. 11.a3

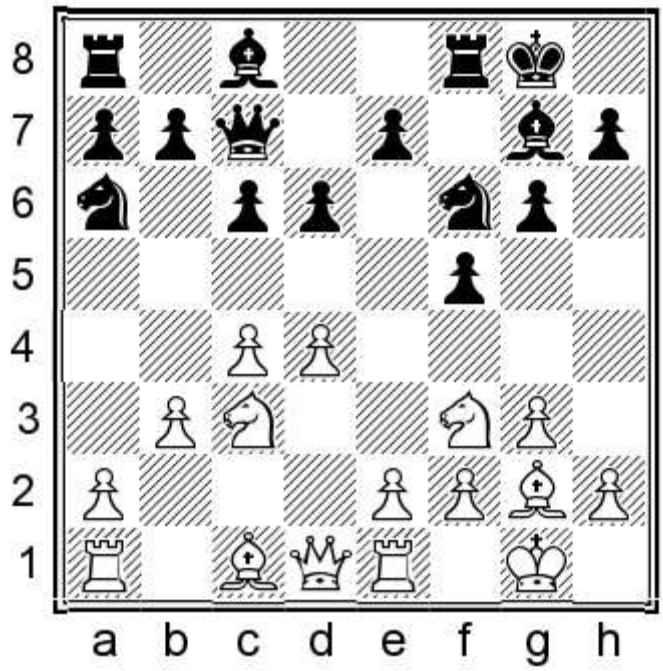
♘xc3



Position after: 11...♘xc3

12.♗d2 [12.b4!? ♕c7 13.♕xc3 e5 14.dxe5 dxe5 15.e4 f4↑] 12...f4 Freeing the f5-square for our bishop. [12...e5!? This seems even simpler than Mamedyarov's choice. 13.♗xc3 ♕c7↑] 13.♕xc3 ♕xc3 14.♗xc3 ♘c7 15.gxf4 ♖xf4↑ 0-1 (69) Stopa, J (2427) – Mamedyarov, S (2804), chess.com 2018.

9...♕c7!?



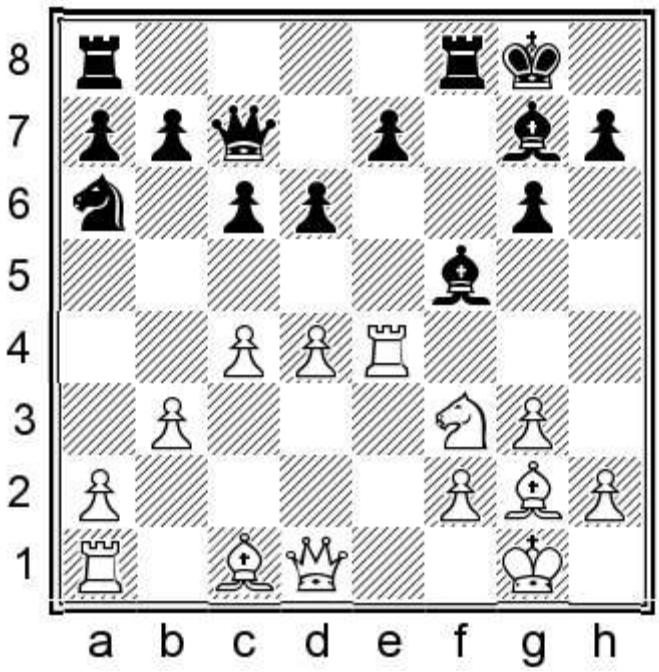
Position after: 9...♕c7!?

Preparing ...e5 is a very reasonable continuation.

10.♗a3

Clearly the best. White prevents both ...e5 and different knight jumps.

10.e4?! Once again, I don't believe in this move. 10...fxe4 11.♘xe4 ♘xe4 12.♖xe4 ♗f5

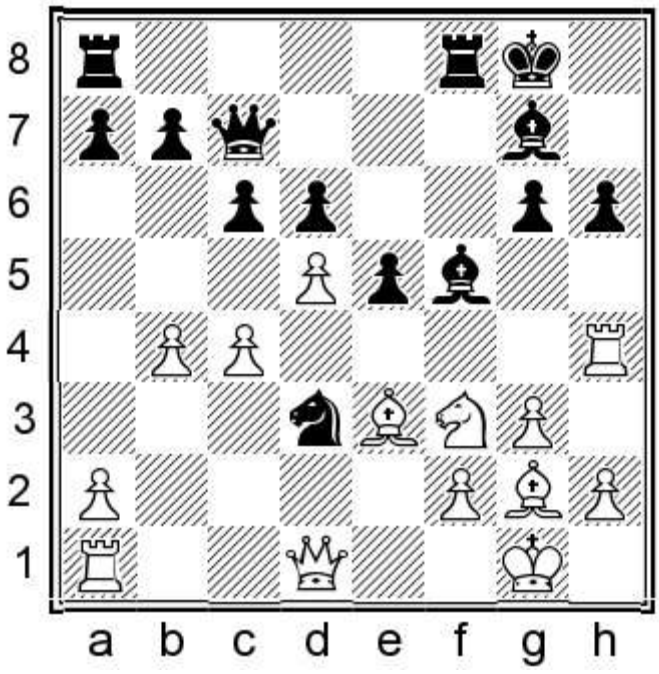


Position after: 12...♗f5

13.♖h4 I am not really afraid of this move now, as White has already weakened the long dark-squared diagonal. [13.♖e1 should be safer for White. 13...♗g4 14.♖e4 ♗f5 15.♖e1 e5!?= Obviously Black can agree to a draw by repetition, but he can also try to keep the game going, despite being objectively equal.] 13...e5!

A) 14.dxe5?! dxe5 15.♗g5 [15.♗h6? ♗xh6 16.♖xh6 ♕g7 17.♖h4 ♖ad8 18.♕c1 ♘c5–+] 15...♘c5∓ It's hard to see where White's pieces are going, and he is very close to losing.

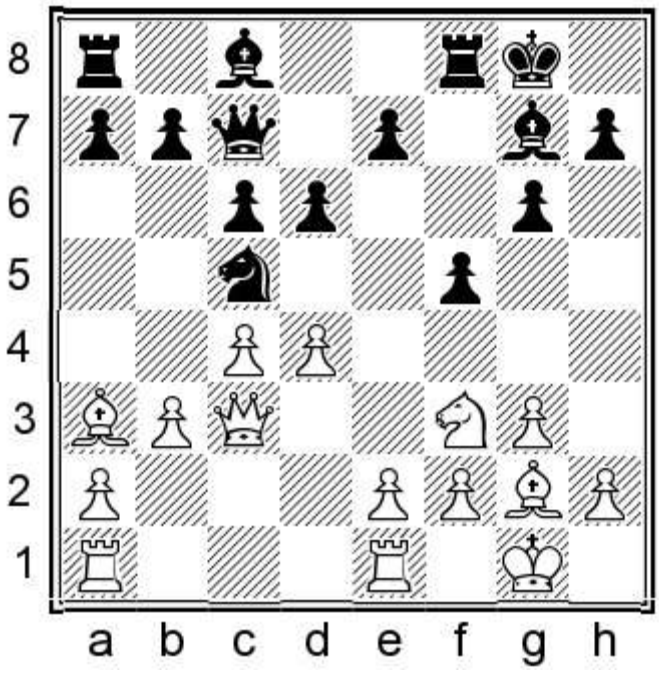
B) 14.d5! ♘c5 15.b4 ♘d3 16.♗e3 h6!↑



Position after: 16...h6!↑

The rook is in trouble on h4. Let's see how things can quickly go bad for White: 17.♗xh6? ♗xh6 18.♖xh6 ♕g7 19.♖h4 e4! 20.♘d2 g5 21.♖h5 ♘xf2–+. Both White's rooks are now in danger, and he will soon have to give up material.

10...♘e4 11.♕c2 ♘xc3 12.♕xc3 ♘c5



Position after: 12...♘c5

A clever way to bring the knight into play.

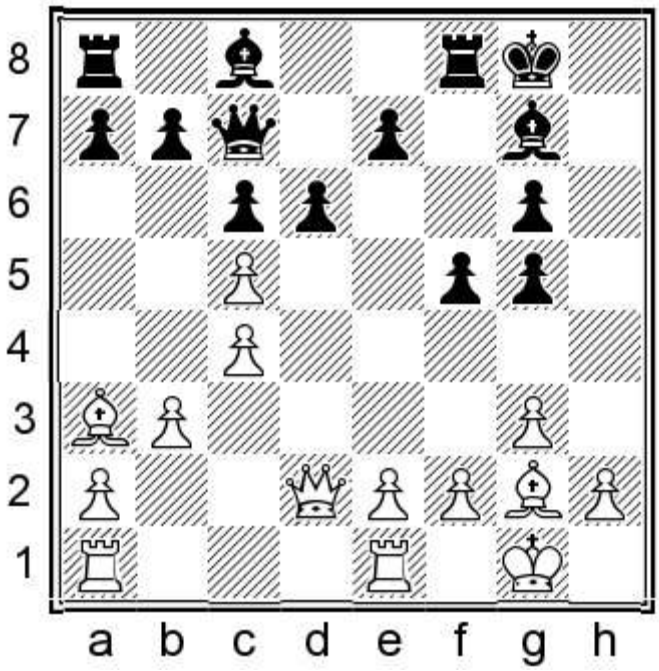
13.♘g5

A) 13.♗xc5 dxc5 14.e3 a5 15.♖ad1 ♕b6 16.♕c2?! a4↑

Of course Black never takes on d4, which would open the e-file for White, and continues with his play on the queenside.

B) 13.♘d2 a5 14.e3 ♘d7⇄

13...h6 14.♕d2 hxg5 15.dxc5



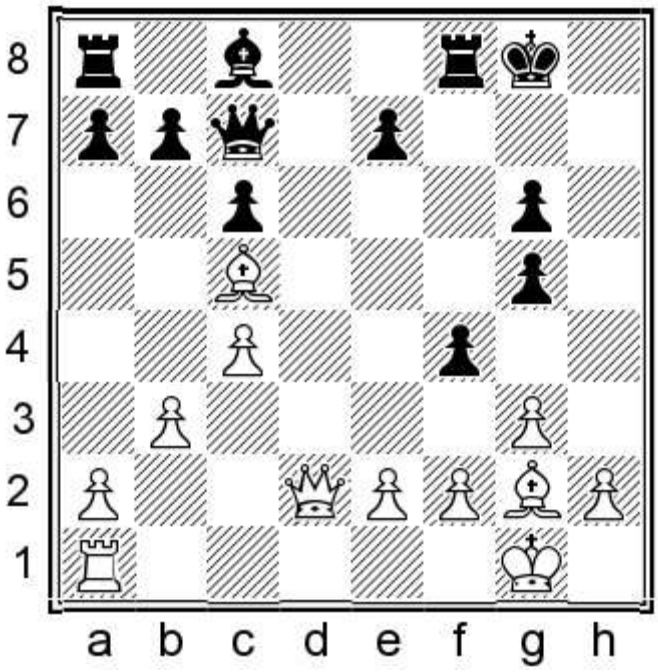
Position after: 15.dxc5

15...dxc5!

15...♗xa1 16.cxd6! This intermediate move makes Black's life harder. 16...exd6 17.♖xa1 f4 18.♗xd6 ♕g7 19.♖d1± Black won in Pashikian, A (2615) – Anton Guijarro, D (2627), Martuni 2016, 0-1 (46), but it seems that White has full compensation for the exchange, and this looks rather dangerous and unpleasant to play.

16.♖ad1!

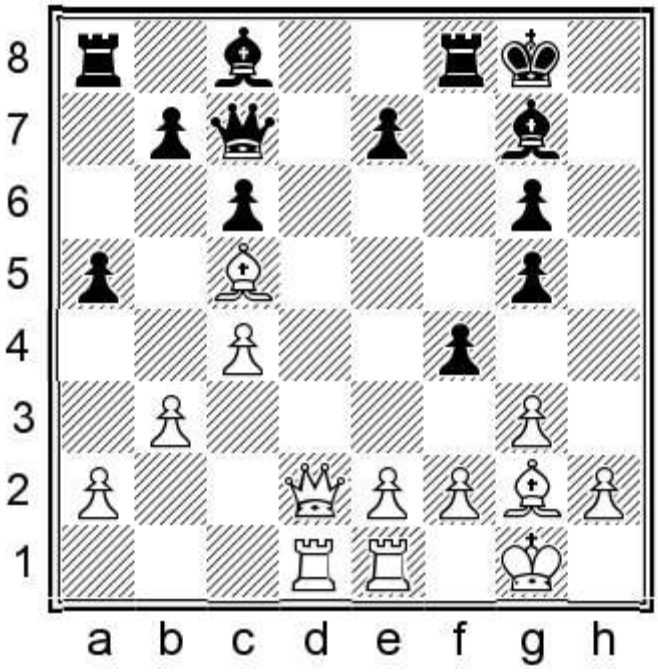
16.♗xc5?! Now Black can safely take the exchange: 16...♗xa1 17.♖xa1 f4∓.



Position after: 17...f4∓

White is not getting a pawn back, and the pawn on e7 controls some important dark squares.

16...f4! 17.♗xc5 a5=

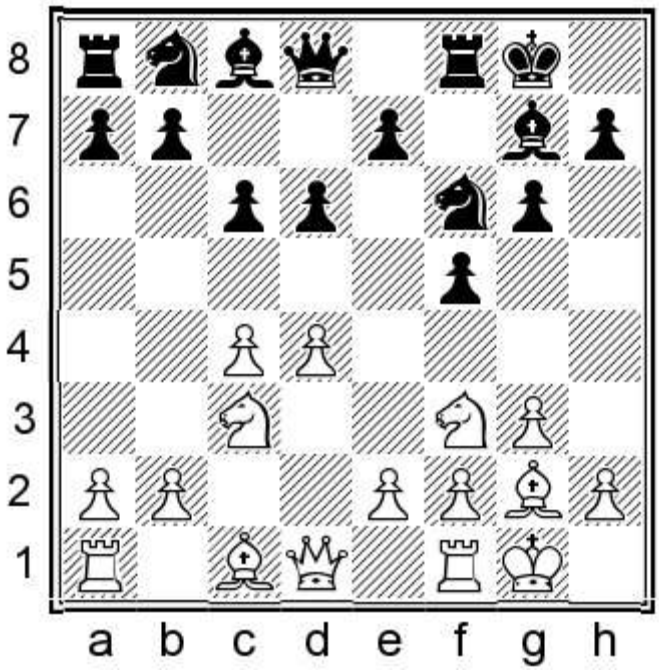


Position after: 17...a5=

White is unable to make use of the d-file, and Black has a number of pawn breaks at his disposal.

f) 8.♖b1

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.c4 0-0 6.0-0 d6 7.♘c3 c6!?



Position after: 7...c6!?

Now let's focus on what I consider to be the three main choices for White: 8.♖b1, 8.d5 and 8.b3. These three lines aim at different kinds of position, so we can't generalize about White's ideas. Nor can I say which is the best, and I've been working on all three as White too.

8.♖b1!?

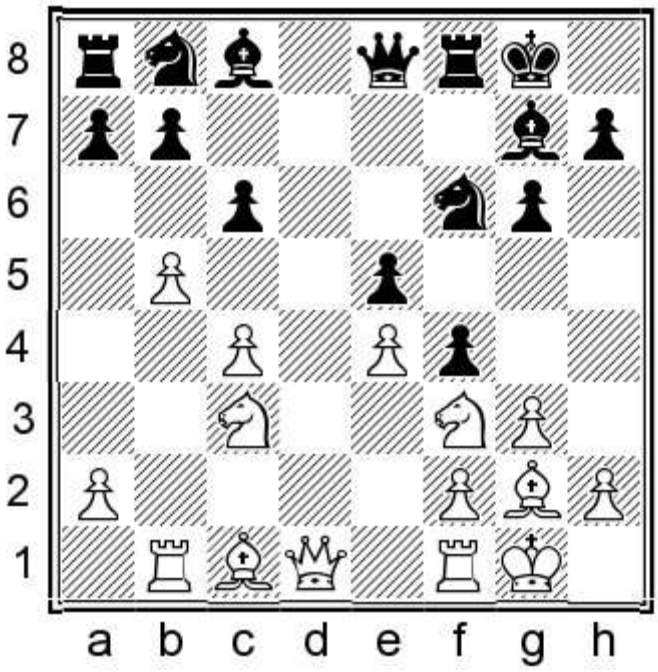
We start with the least played of the three moves. I believe that 8.♕c2, which we covered earlier, and is played more often nowadays, is stronger. The basic idea of ♖b1 is obviously to push b4. In addition, the rook leaves the long diagonal, so is not a potential target for our g7-bishop. However it can become one for our c8-bishop, for instance if there is a major trade on e4.

8...a5!?

This looks like the most logical move. I prefer to stop White's plan straight away. Black has other options, but I will quickly show why I don't really like them.

A) 8...♘a6 9.b4 ♘c7!? 10.♕b3 ♔h8 11.♖d1 ♗e6 12.d5!↑

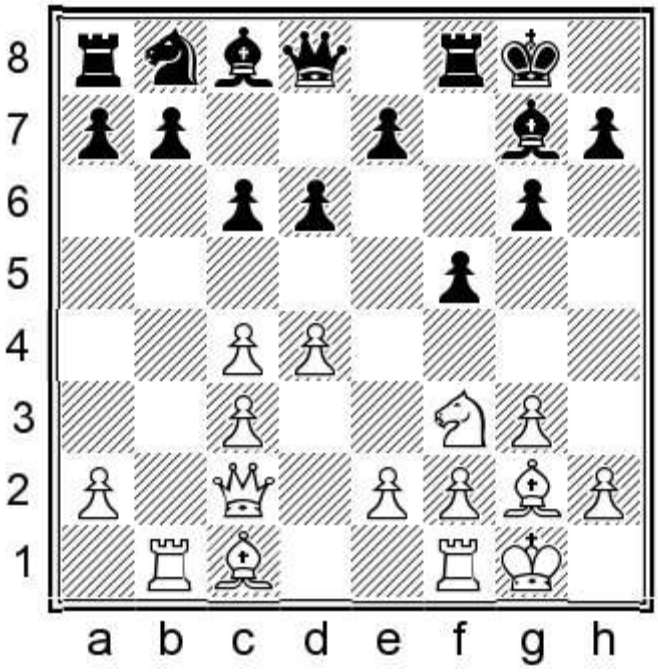
B) 8...♕e8 9.b4 e5 10.dxe5 dxe5 11.e4 f4 12.b5→



Position after: 12.b5→

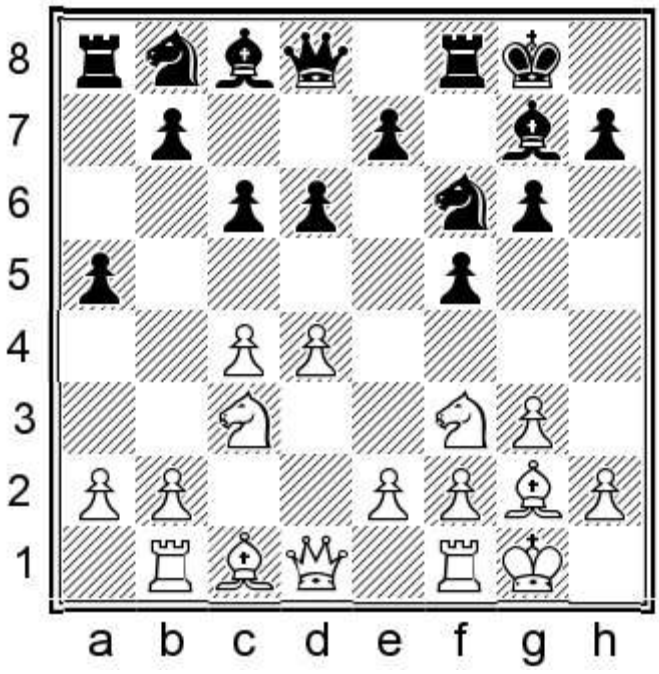
White's play is clearly further advanced, and he will continue with ♗a3 on the next move.

C) 8...♘e4 9.♕c2 ♘xc3 10.bxc3!



Position after: 10.bxc3!

Strangely enough, after this move, Black has trouble developing his plan. 10...e5 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.♗a3 ♖e8 13.♖fd1 ♘d7 14.e4± Black can fight, but the logical move backfires: 14...f4?! 15.♗h3+–.

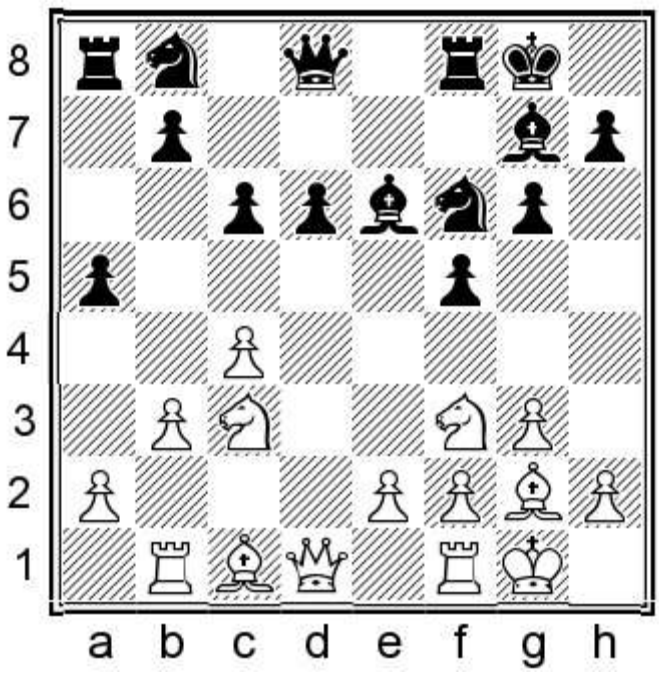


Position after: 8...a5!?

9.♕b3

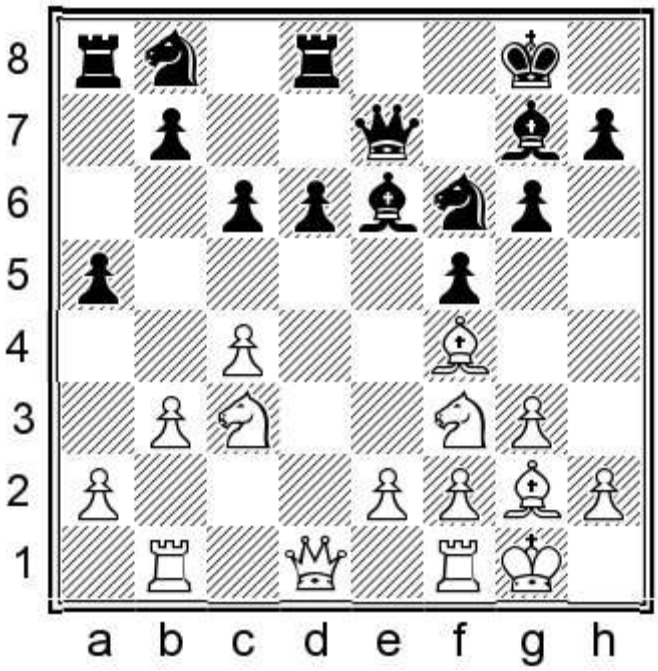
This has been the most played move in the current position. Compared to 8.♕b3 in the previous subchapter, the main difference is that ...a5 has already been played, so the b6-square can sometimes be a bit weak, and we should take this into account.

A) 9.d5 This is the main alternative. A position very similar to the 8.d5 line in the next subchapter can arise. 9...e5! 10.dxe6 Not taking this pawn would make no sense at all. 10...♗xe6 11.b3



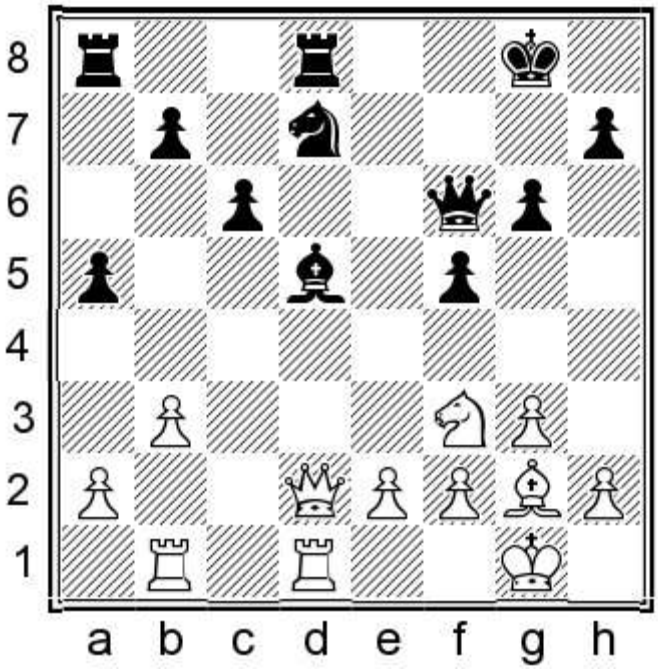
Position after: 11.b3

A1) 11...♕e7 Mamedyarov played this move recently, probably because he wanted to be able to protect the d6-pawn with his rook, but it's actually not that useful, as we have another clever way to do it: 12.♗f4 ♖d8



Position after: 12...♖d8

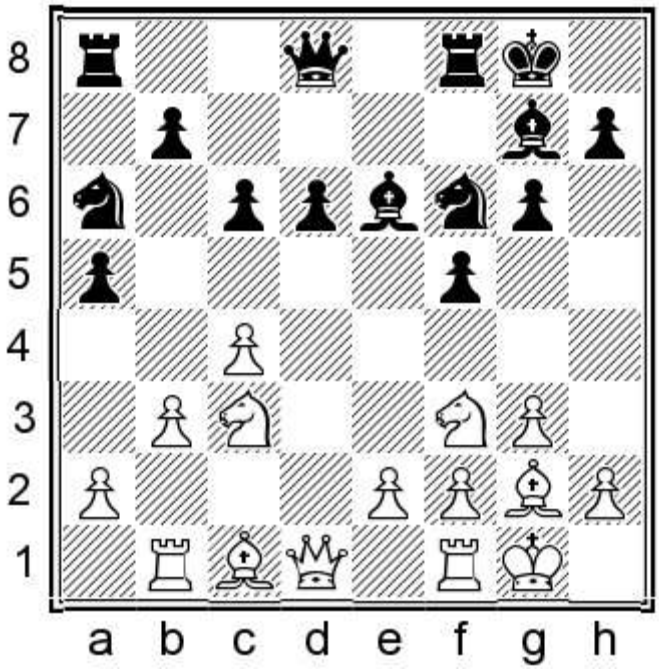
13.♕d2 [13.♘g5!? If White wants to prevent ...d5, he should probably play this move to chase the bishop.] 13...d5! This equalizes by force. 14.cxd5 ♘xd5 15.♘xd5 ♗xd5 16.♗g5 ♗f6 17.♗xf6 ♕xf6 18.♖fd1 ♘d7=



Position after: 18...♘d7=

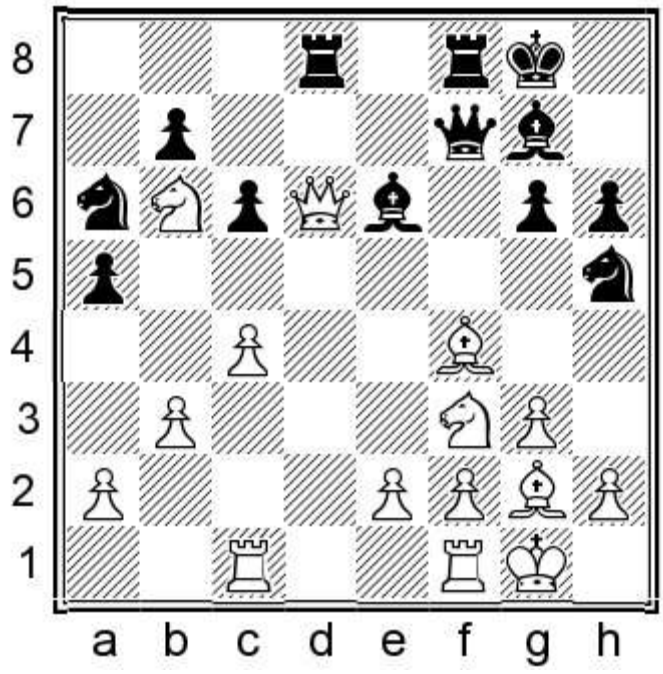
The stronger player has managed to impose himself, but the position was about equal in Sarana, A (2543) – Mamedyarov, S (2791), Sochi 2017, 0-1 (70).

A2) 11...♘a6!?



Position after: 11...♘a6!?

A2.1) 12.♗f4?! ♘h5! With exactly the same solution if we hadn't played ♖b1/...a5. 13.♗g5 ♕d7!? 14.♘a4 [14.♕d2 f4!? Not necessary, but pretty strong. 15.♗xf4 ♘xf4 16.gxf4 This was reached in two different games, including Jumabayev, R (2584) – Kazhgaleyev, M (2584), Dushanbe 2015, ½-½ (77), but Black didn't manage to find the best move: 16...♗h3! 17.♘e1 ♘c5 18.e3 ♖ae8⩲ With the magnificent bishop on g7 and the open files, Black enjoys full compensation for the pawn.] 14...♖ae8! 15.♖c1 f4! 16.♘b6 ♕f7! 17.♕xd6 h6 18.♗xf4 ♖d8!



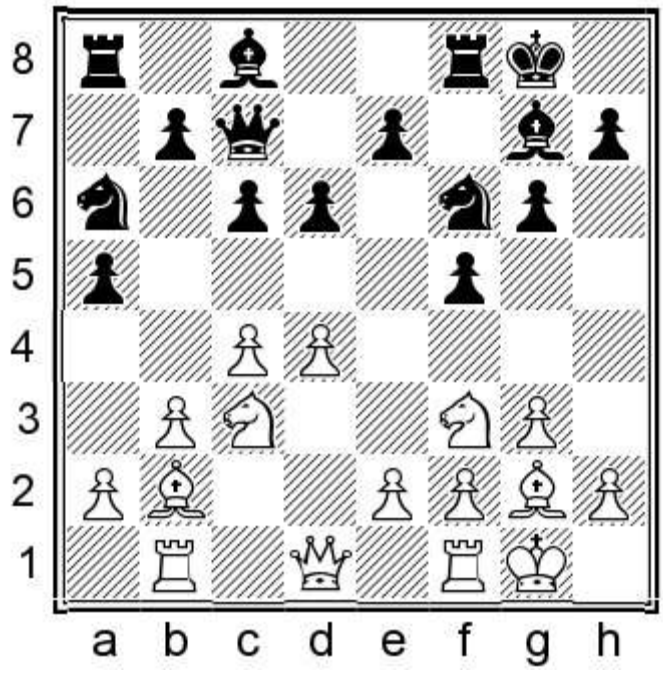
Position after: 18...♖d8!

19.♕a3 ♘xf4 20.gxf4 ♕xf4∓ Black has the mating plan of ...♗g4 followed by ... ♗xf3 and ...♗e5.

A2.2) 12.♗b2 ♘c5 13.♕d2 ♕e7 14.♖bd1 ♖ad8= Black has reached an ideal set-up.

A2.3) 12.♘g5 White puts the question to the bishop. Black can either retreat it, with the idea of returning later, or protect it. 12...♗c8!? In general I prefer to keep the bishop, but both 12...♖e8 and 12...♕e7 are very decent alternatives. 13.♗b2 ♘c5 14.♕d2 h6 15.♘f3 ♕e7 16.♖bd1 ♖d8⇄

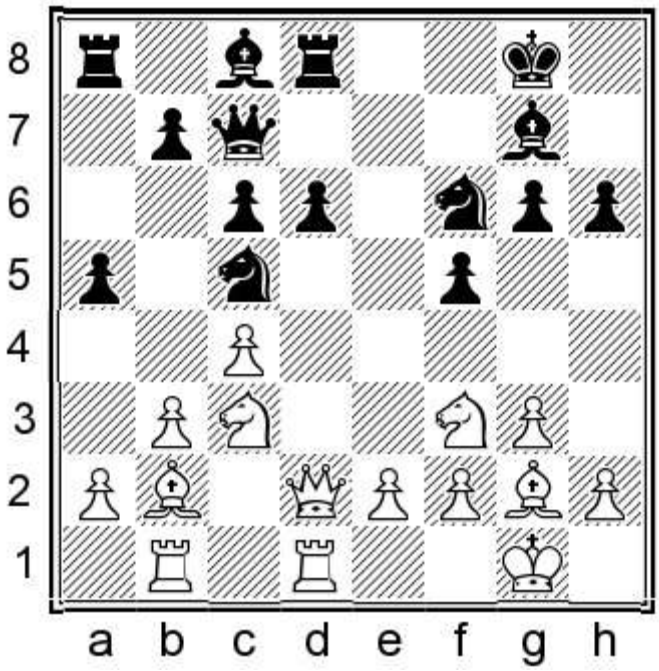
B) 9.b3 ♘a6 10.♗b2 ♕c7



Position after: 10...♕c7

B1) 11.♖e1 e5 12.dxe5 dxe5 13.e4?! This was played in the game Wang, H (2735) – Ponomariov, R (2731), Beijing 2013, 0-1 (29). I think Black can simply grab the pawn now, and claim an edge: 13...fxe4 14.♘g5 ♗g4! 15.♕c1 ♘b4∓. White has allowed his opponent too much activity and has to find a way not to lose more material.

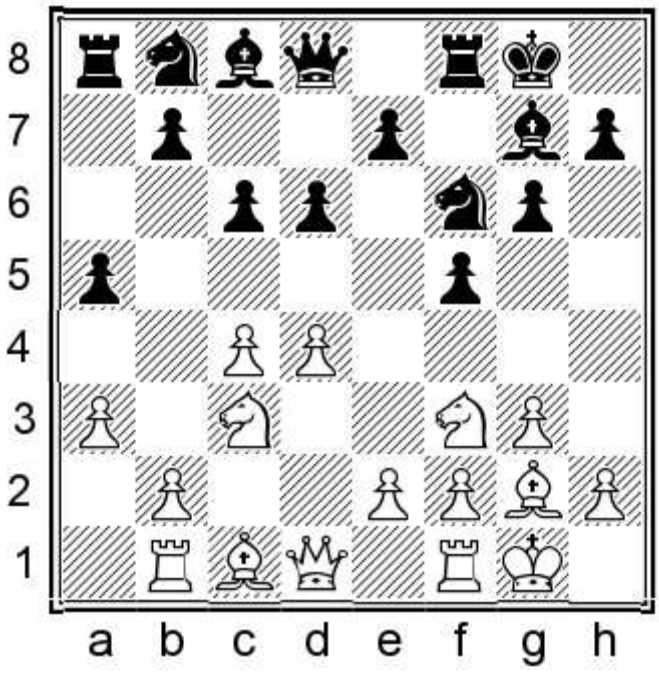
B2) 11.d5 e5 12.dxe6 ♗xe6 13.♘g5 ♗c8 14.♕d2 h6 15.♘f3 ♘c5 16.♖fd1 ♖d8⇄



Position after: 16...♖d8⇄

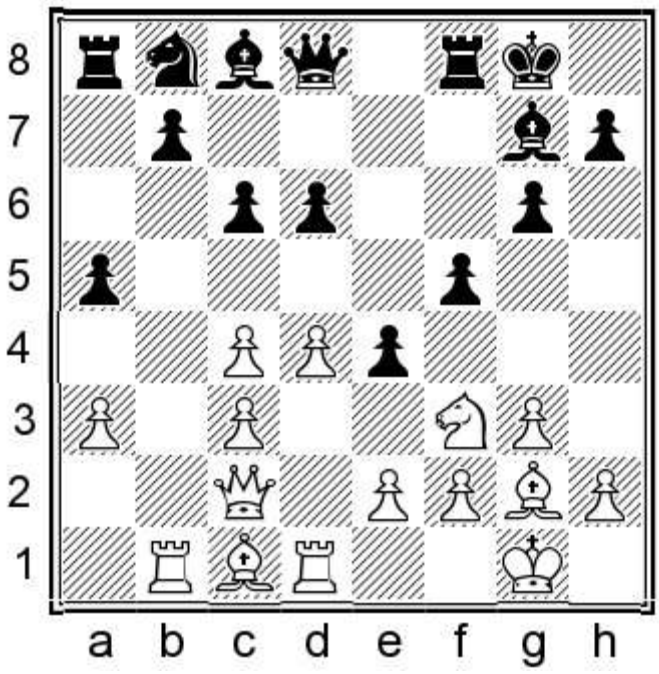
This is similar to the 9.d5 line of the current subchapter, but is also very close to the line we will discuss in the next subchapter on 8.d5. This pawn structure is really solid for Black, who will continue with ...♕e7 and ...♗e6, and at some point bring the other rook into play.

C) 9.a3?!



Position after: 9.a3?!

This has been played many times, but I think it's bad. As the a3-square is taken, we can transpose to lines we discussed on the eighth move with a3/...a5 included, where White won't be able to play ♗a3. For instance 9...♘e4! This is now pretty strong. 10.♕c2 e5! [10...♘xc3?! is less precise. After 11.bxc3 e5 12.c5! e4 13.♕a2+!± White either gets the e5-square or plays ♘g5 with the threat of ♘f7+.] 11.♖d1 [11.dxe5 ♘xc3! 12.♕xc3 dxe5∓] 11...♘xc3 12.bxc3 e4↑



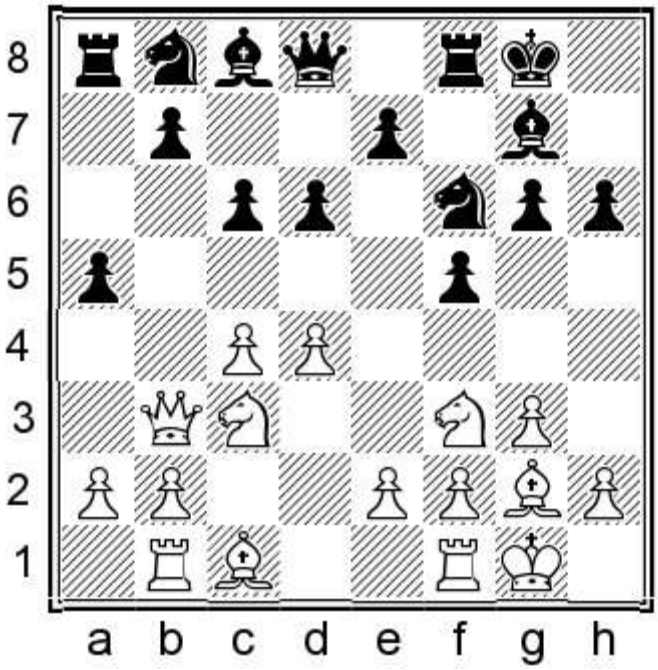
Position after: 12...e4↑

I already prefer Black here.

9...h6!

An important waiting move, allowing Black to play ...♗e6 without fearing ♘g5.

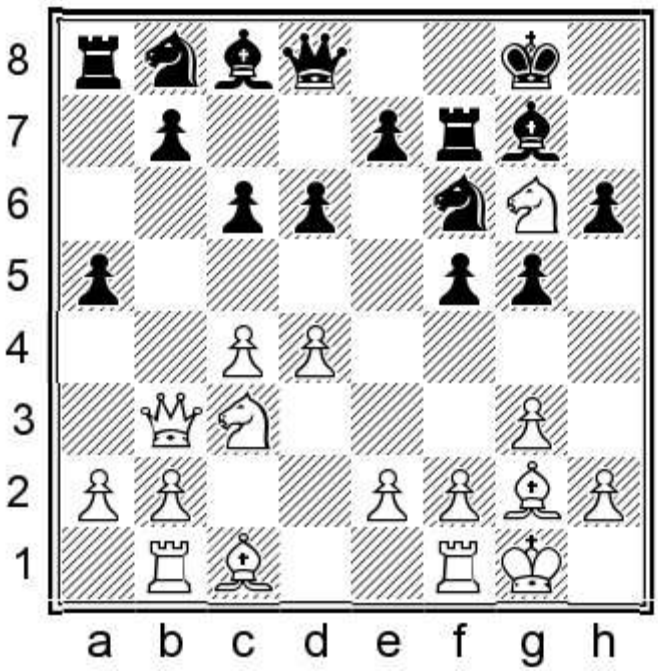
9...♘a6 would now be met with 10.♘a4!±. The knight is heading for b6, which is quite a nuisance.



Position after: 9...h6!

10.♖d1

A) 10.♘h4?! g5! 11.♘g6 The only logical follow-up, but it's clear that the knight is in danger here. 11...♖f7⇄

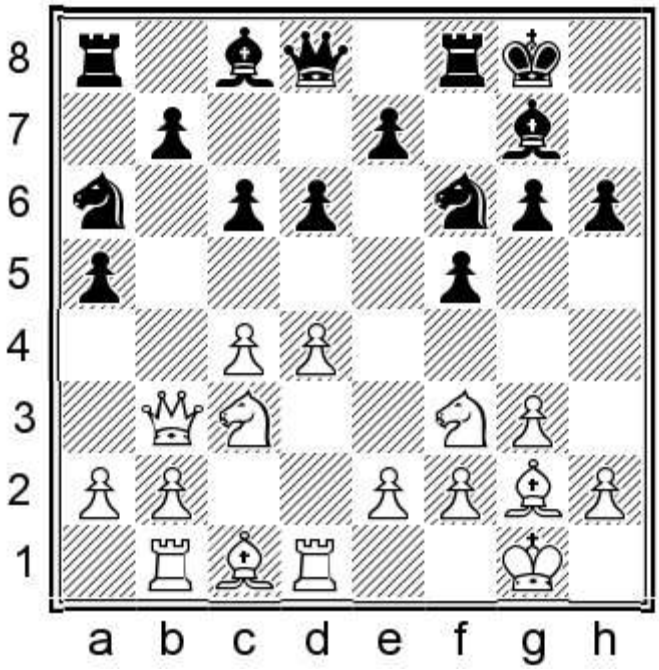


Position after: 11...♖f7⇄

12.e4? fxe4 13.♘xe4 ♗f5–+

B) 10.c5+ ♔h7 11.cxd6 exd6 12.d5 a4! 13.♕a3 ♖a6!= Here the rook is protected, so the a4-pawn is not pinned, and it can protect the d6-pawn.

10...♘a6



Position after: 10...♘a6

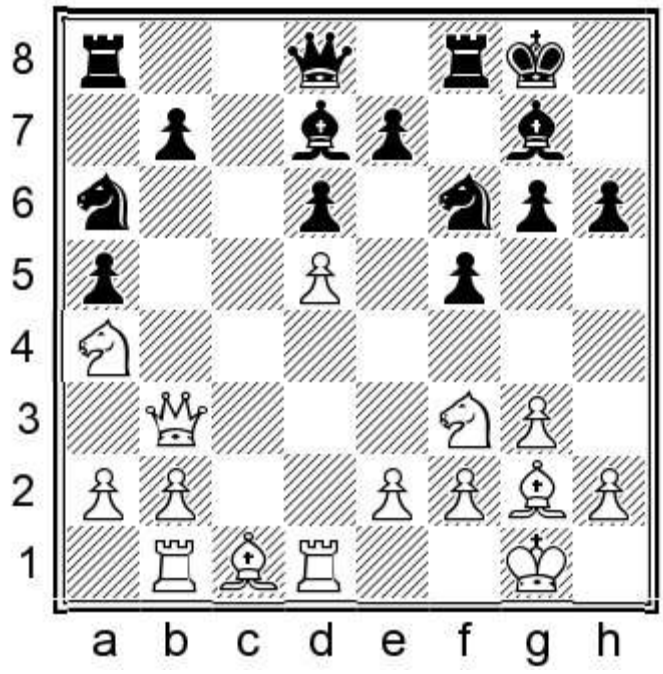
11.♘a4?!

11.♗e3 ♖b8⇄ Of course the position is complicated, but now Black is ready to move the bishop to e6 if he wants to, and White still needs to find a constructive plan.

11...♗e6! 12.d5

12.♕xb7?! ♗xc4 13.♕xc6 ♗xa2 14.♖a1 ♘b4∓

12...cxd5 13.cxd5 ♗d7



Position after: 13...♗d7

14.♗e3

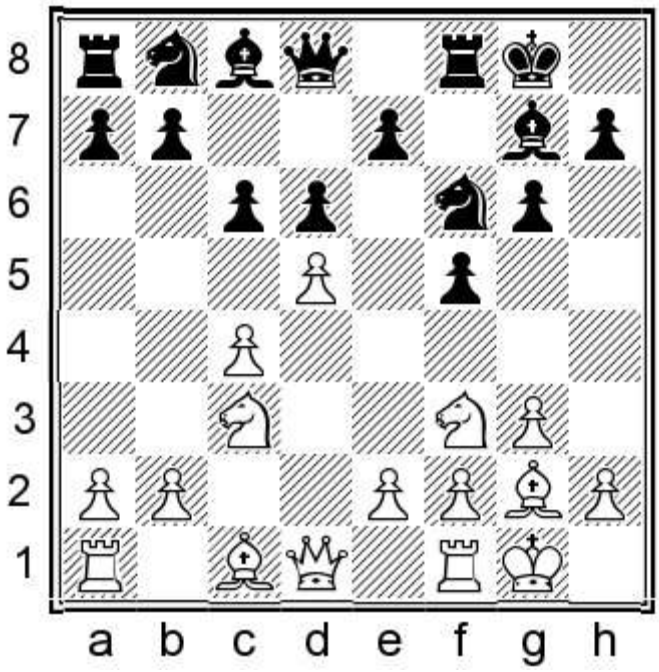
14.♘b6?? ♘c5–+

14...♘e4!↑

Black is very active and plans to continue with ...b5 on the next move.

g) 8.d5 e5 9.dxe6 ♗xe6 10.--, 10.♕d3 ♖e8 11.--

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.c4 0-0 6.0-0 d6 7.♘c3 c6 8.d5



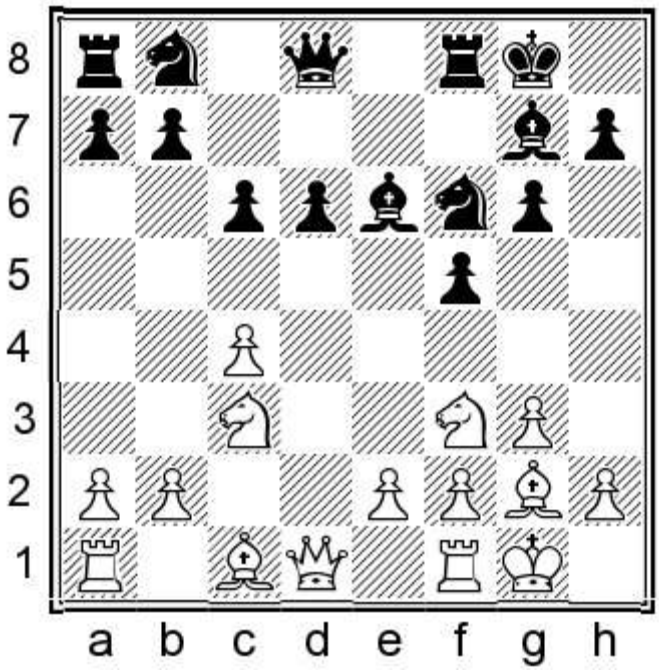
Position after: 8.d5

This is the old main line. 8.d5 is still the most played move, but the top players now favour 8.b3, which we will cover later. The basic idea is to prevent Black from keeping a pawn on e5, as after ...e5 the d-pawn won't be able to take it.

8...e5!

Obviously best. Theory indicates that Black is fine in these positions. White has no choice but to take.

9.dxe6 ♗xe6

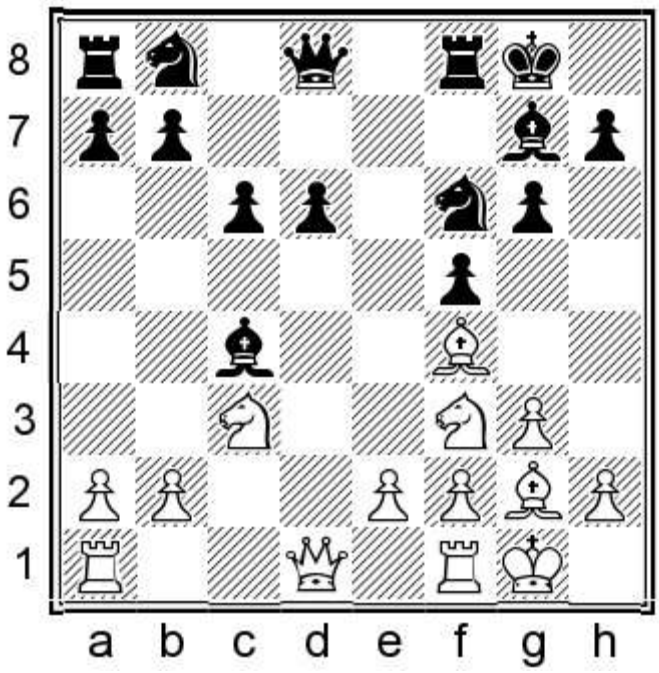


Position after: 9...♗xe6

10.♕d3

In my opinion, this move is not dangerous at all. The queen is exposed on d3. It's true that it accelerates possible threats against the d6-pawn, but that's the only achievement.

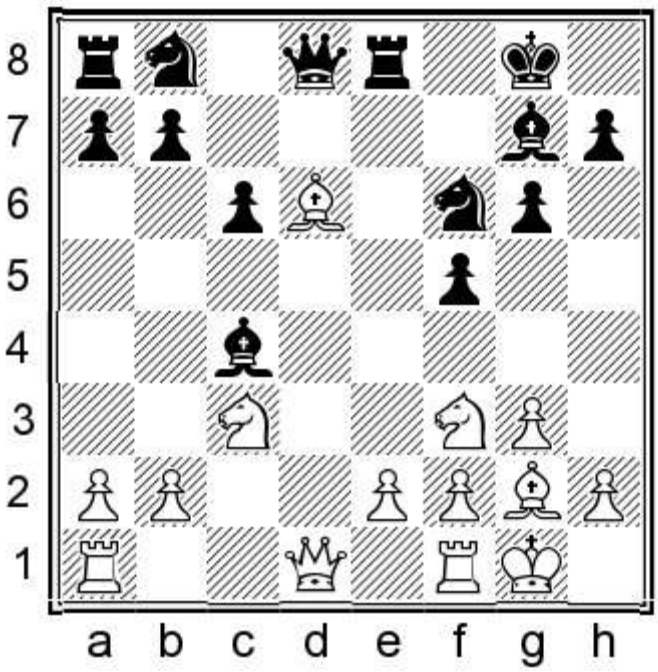
A) 10.♗f4?! This pawn trade leads to a very easy game for Black. 10...♗xc4



Position after: 10...♗xc4

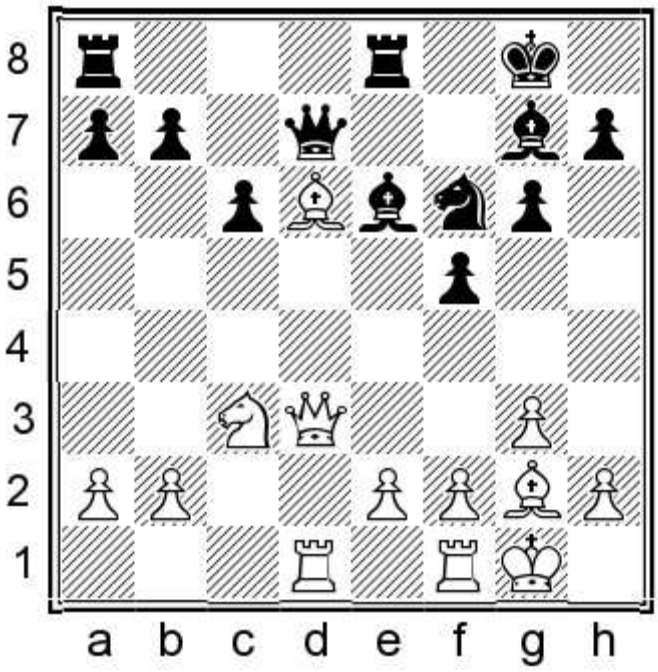
A1) 11.♕xd6 ♕xd6 12.♗xd6 ♖d8 13.♖fd1 ♘bd7∓ These endgames are always slightly better for Black as his bishop on g7 has better prospects than its counterpart on g2, and the possibility of creating a passed pawn is simpler for Black with his c-pawn than for White with the e-pawn.

A2) 11.♗xd6 ♖e8



Position after: 11...♖e8

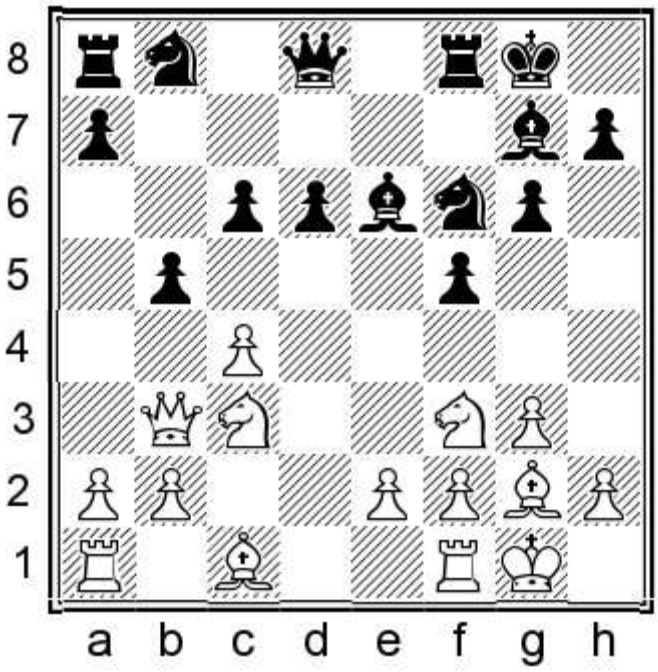
12.♘e5 [12.♗f4?! The game Sargsyan, A (2340) – Vidit, S (2711), chess.com 2019, 0-1 (42), saw 12...♕xd1. Although Black won, why not keep the queens on? 12...♘bd7!?N 13.♕c2 ♘d5 14.♘xd5 ♗xd5↑; 12.♕d4 ♗a6! 13.♕b4 ♕b6!∓ Black still has the better pawn structure. The c6-pawn blocks both the c3-knight and the g2-bishop while the e-pawn is potentially a target.] 12...♗e6 13.♕d3 ♘bd7 14.♘xd7 ♕xd7 15.♖ad1



Position after: 15.♖ad1

I reached this position last year in the game Sulypa, A (2487) – Demuth, A (2529), Porto Carras 2018, ½-½ (35). I went for simplifications with 15...♘e4, but it's also possible to keep more pieces on the board: 15...♕f7!?N 16.b3 ♖ad8 17.♕c2 ♗d5 18.♘xd5 cxd5 19.♗f4 ♘e4↑.

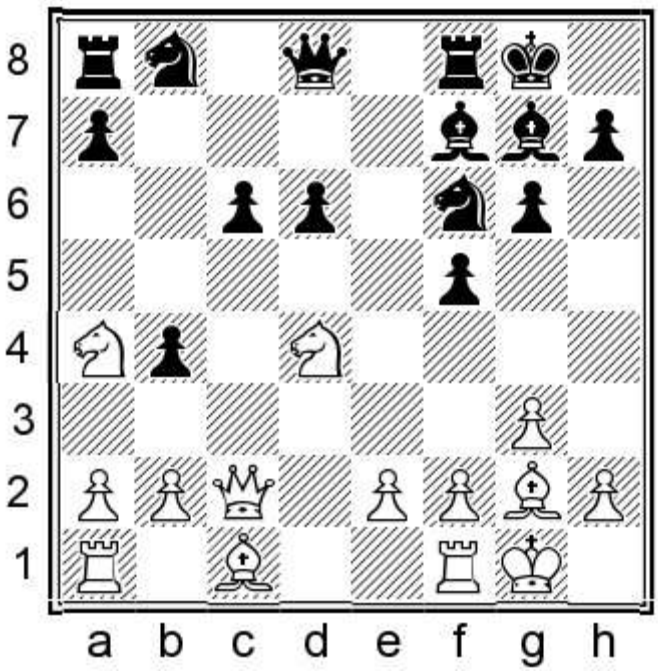
B) 10.♕b3?! A very naive move, trying to counterattack b7 while defending the c4-pawn. 10...b5!



Position after: 10...b5!

11.♘d4 Maybe the lesser evil, in order to get some counterplay against the c6-pawn. [11.♘d2 a6!

12.♖d1 ♕e7∓ White is unable to unpin the c-pawn without losing it. A very unpleasant situation.] 11...♗xc4 12.♕c2 b4 13.♘a4 ♗f7

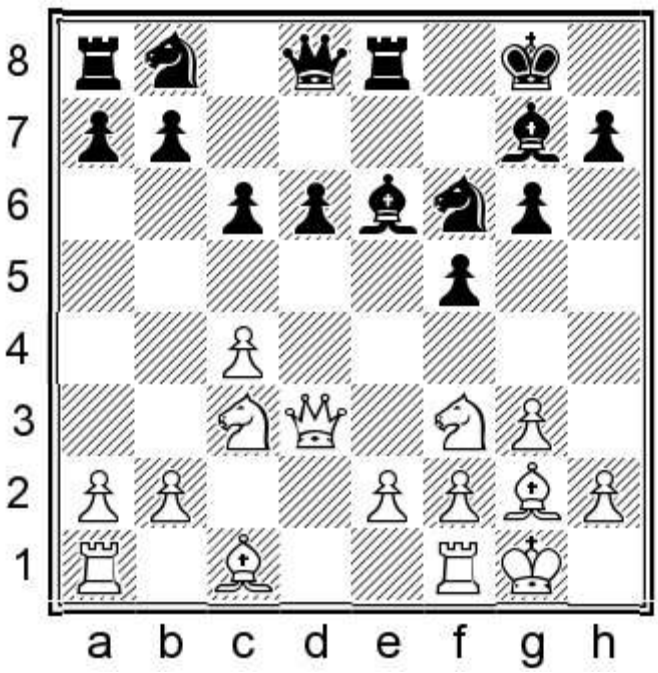


Position after: 13...♗f7

14.♗g5! [14.♘xc6? ♘xc6 15.♕xc6 ♖c8 16.♕a6 ♘e4∓] 14...♕c7 15.♖fd1 ♘e4!=

White seems to keep some compensation, but still needs to be precise if he doesn't want to end up worse.

10...♖e8!



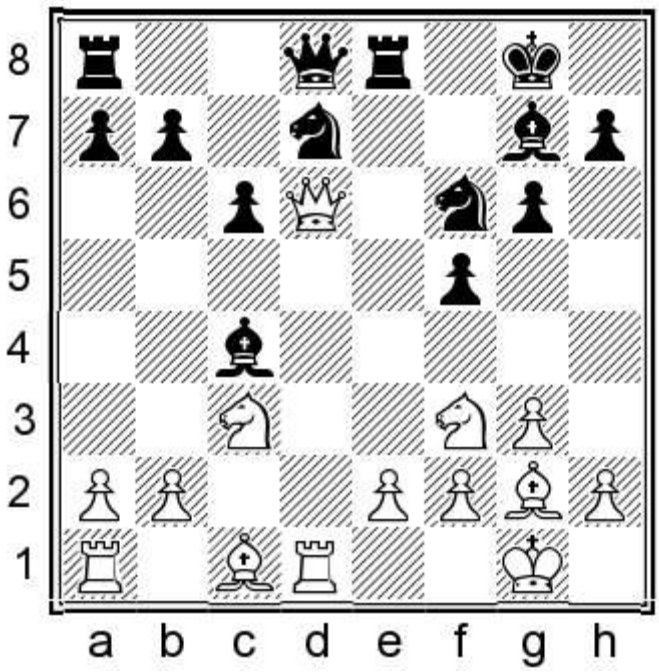
Position after: 10...♖e8!

This move is only the sixth most played in the position. Of course there are other ways to equalize with Black, but I like this move, setting a far from obvious trap.

11.♗f4?!

The most logical way to attack the pawn, since it looks difficult to defend it. Also, the threat is to take it with the bishop, so that Black is unable to take back the pawn on c4. But this was the trap we were waiting for when we played 10...♖e8.

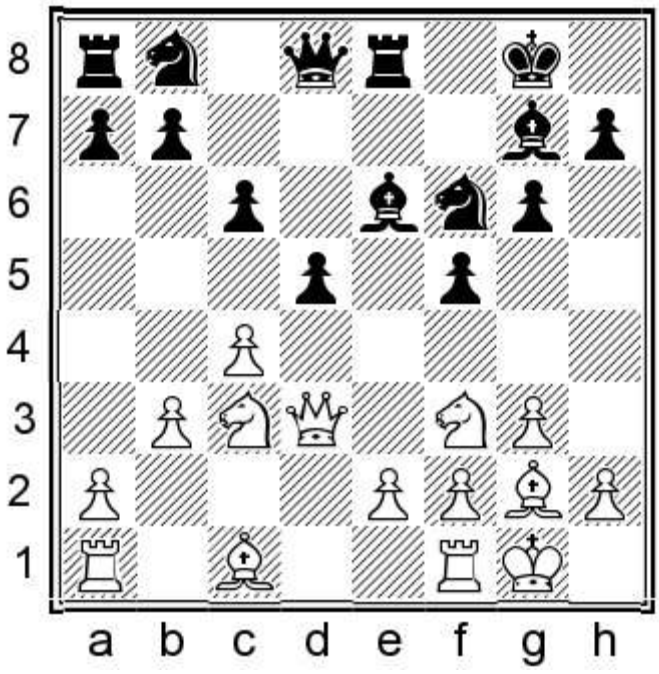
A) 11.♖d1 ♘bd7 12.♕xd6 [12.b3 d5! 13.cxd5 ♘xd5 14.♗b2 ♘c5 15.♕c2 ♘b4 16.♕c1 ♕e7↑] 12...♗xc4↑



Position after: 12...♗xc4↑

The structure is similar to the 10.♗f4 line, and we have already discussed why it's pretty easy to play as Black. The fact that White seems to have some pressure on the d-file is an illusion; it will soon disappear.

B) 11.b3 d5!?N

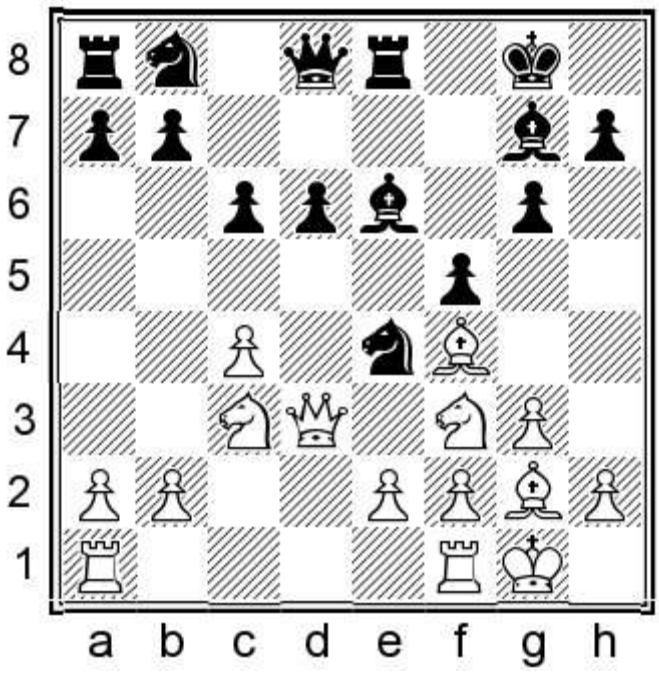


Position after: 11...d5!?N

Since the long diagonal is weakened, this move seems pretty obvious. 12.♘g5! [12.♗b2?! dxc4 13.bxc4 ♘a6∓ The c4-pawn is now a long-term weakness.] 12...♘a6! 13.♘xe6 ♖xe6 14.cxd5 ♘xd5 15.♗xd5 cxd5 16.♗b2 ♘c5 17.♕f3 ♘e4↑

11...♘e4!

A strong move. The knight is untouch-able.



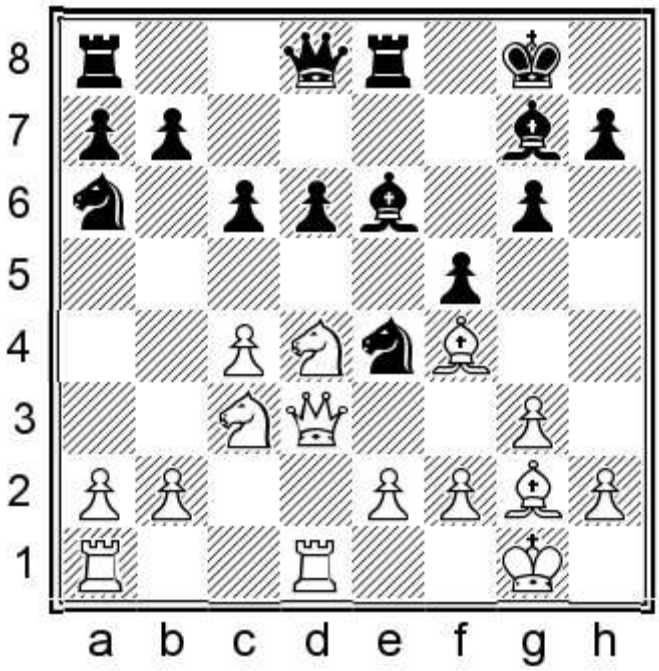
Position after: 11...♘e4!

White has different ways to respond, but none of them seems to equalize.

12.♘d4

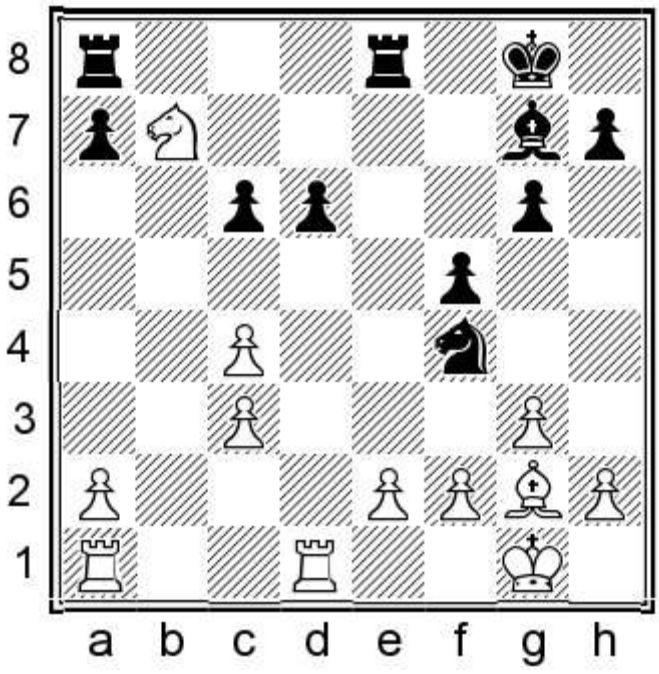
A) 12.♘xe4?? fxe4 13.♕xe4 ♗f5–+ Oops! The queen is trapped in the center. This is something White can easily miss while considering 11.♗f4.

B) 12.♖fd1 ♘a6 [12...♘d7!? 13.♗xd6 ♘xd6 14.♕xd6 ♘b6∓ Black is about to regain his pawn, which also seems slightly better for him, but I prefer the other version.] 13.♘d4!



Position after: 13.♘d4!

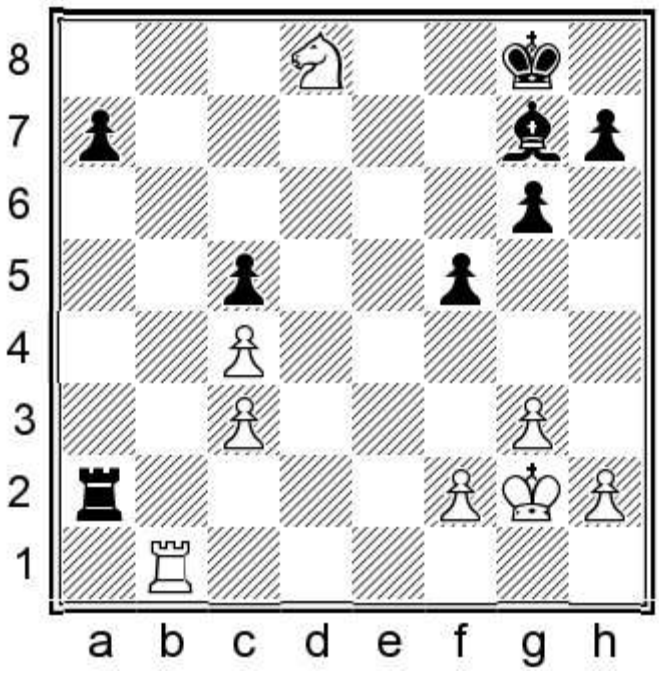
13...♘b4! 14.♘xe6 [14.♕b1?! ♗xc4∓] 14...♘xd3 [14...♖xe6 15.♕b1 ♘xc3 16.bxc3 ♗xc3 17.♕b3 ♗xa1 18.♖xa1 a5] 15.♘xd8 ♘xc3 16.bxc3 [16.♖xd3?! ♘xe2+ 17.♔f1 ♘xf4 18.gxf4 ♖axd8∓] 16...♘xf4 17.♘xb7



Position after: 17.♘xb7

B1) 17...♘xe2+ 18.♔f1 ♘xc3 19.♖xd6! It's easy to see that White is giving up an exchange, but the resulting position is still complicated. 19...♘e4 20.♗xe4 ♗xa1 21.♗xc6 ♖e7 22.♗d5+ ♔g7 23.♘d8! ♖b8 24.c5⩲ The c-pawn is dangerous, and I am not sure I would pick Black anymore if I could choose.

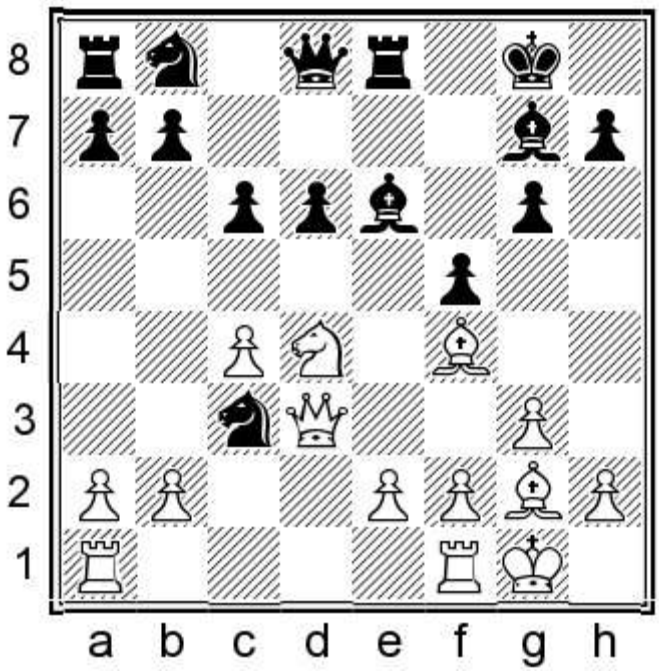
B2) 17...♘xg2! 18.♔xg2 ♖ab8 19.♖ab1 [19.♘xd6?! ♖xe2! 20.♖e1 ♖d2 21.♖ed1 ♖bb2 22.♖xd2 ♖xd2 23.♘c8 ♗xc3 24.♖b1 ♗d4∓] 19...♖xe2 20.♖xd6 ♖xa2 21.♖d8+ ♖xd8 22.♘xd8 c5∓



Position after: 22...c5∓

This endgame is still good for Black. He will combine threats against the f2-pawn with the advance of the dangerous a-pawn, which is difficult to stop because the bishop already controls the promotion square.

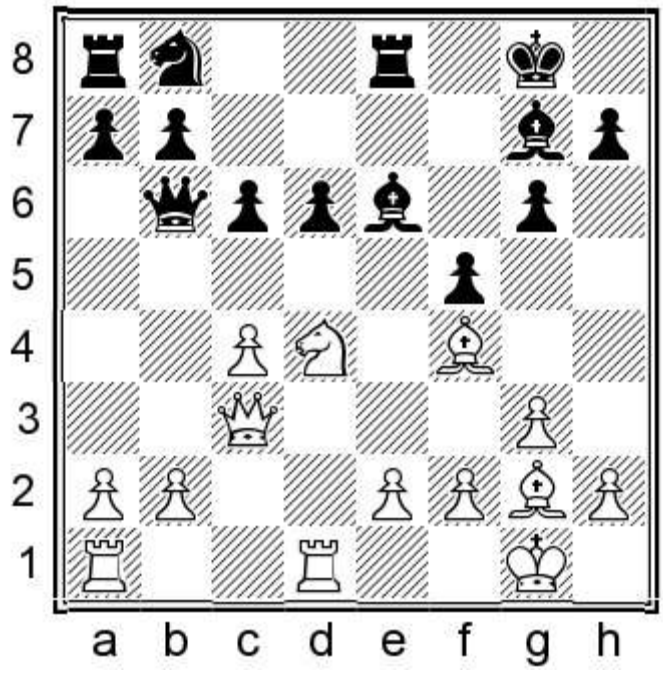
12...♘xc3



Position after: 12...♘xc3

13.bxc3

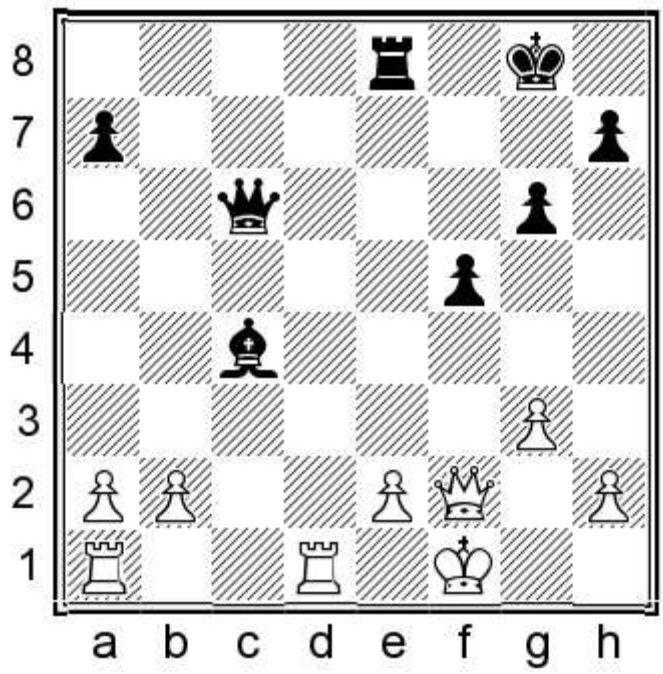
13.♕xc3N Maybe best, but it looks pretty dubious to voluntarily pin the knight while ...c5 is always a possibility. 13...♕b6 14.♖fd1



Position after: 14.♖fd1

A) 14...c5?! 15.♘xe6 ♗xc3 16.bxc3∞ I don't like this position, as White seems to have enormous compensation for the queen.

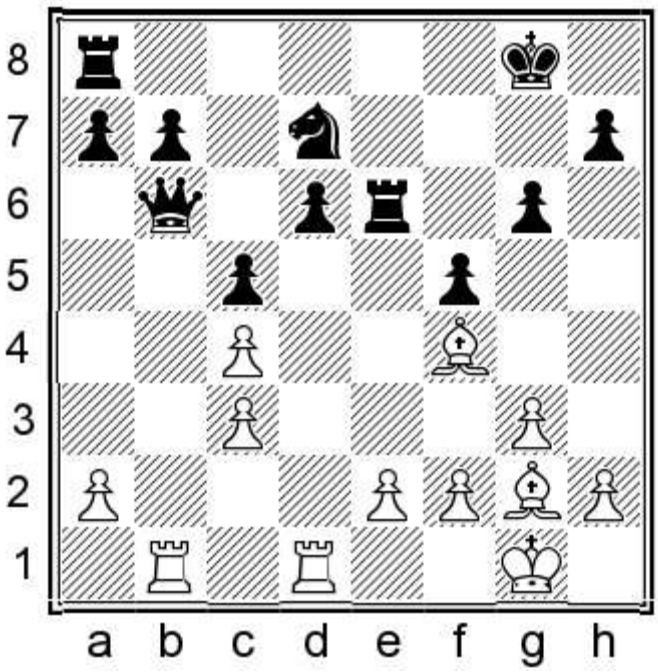
B) 14...♗f7!? 15.♗xd6 c5 16.♗xc5 ♕xc5 17.♗xb7 ♘c6! 18.♗xc6 ♗xd4□ 19.♕f3 ♗xf2+ 20.♔f1 ♗xc4 21.♗xe8 ♖xe8 22.♕xf2 ♕c6



Position after: 22...♕c6

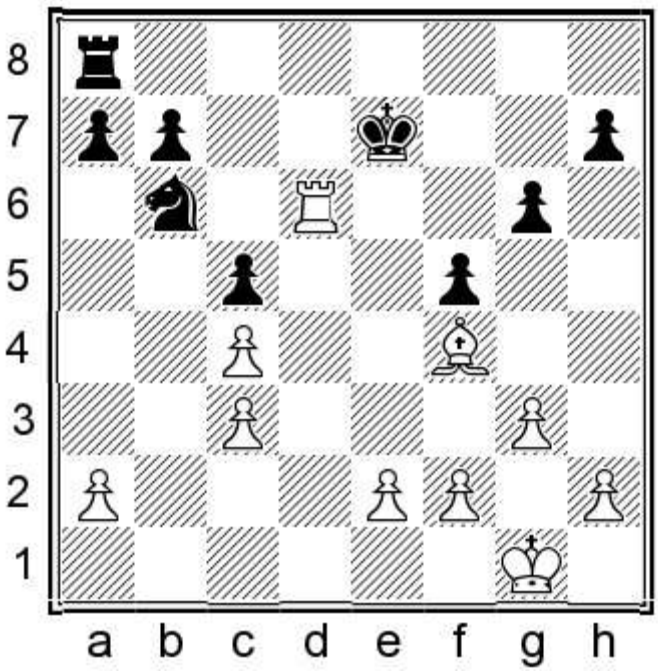
White has had to find several only moves, and is still under pressure.

C) 14...♘d7 I prefer to keep the tension and bring the last forces into the battle. 15.♖ab1! [15.♗xd6? c5 16.♘xe6 ♗xc3 17.bxc3 ♖xe6 18.♗d5 ♕xd6–+] 15...c5 16.♘xe6 ♗xc3 17.bxc3 ♖xe6



Position after: 17...♖xe6

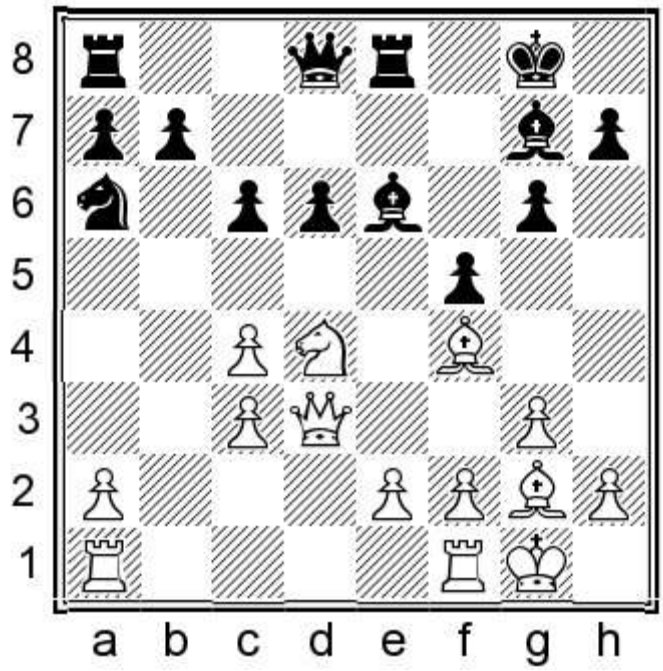
18.♗d5! [18.♖xb6 ♘xb6!] 18...♔f7 19.♖xb6 ♘xb6 20.♗xe6+ ♔xe6 21.♖xd6+ ♔e7↑



Position after: 21...♔e7↑

Even this is still slightly easier to play for Black, who will take the c4-pawn on the next move.

13...♘a6!



Position after: 13...♘a6!

14.♘xe6

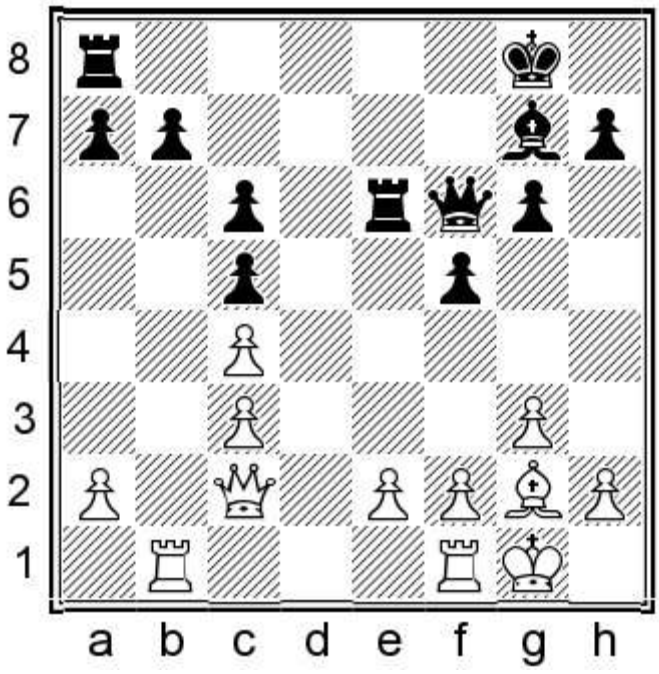
14.♖ab1 ♘c5 15.♘xe6 ♖xe6 16.♕d2 ♕a5∓ White has many weaknesses, and the knight on c5 is wonderful, but even if White manages to trade it with his dark-squared bishop, he will stand worse.

14...♖xe6 15.♗e3 ♘c5 16.♗xc5 dxc5 17.♕c2

17.♕xd8+ ♖xd8 18.♖ab1 ♖d7∓

Even with opposite-colored bishops, it will be difficult for White to achieve a draw. He will need to trade both rooks and try to lose only one pawn.

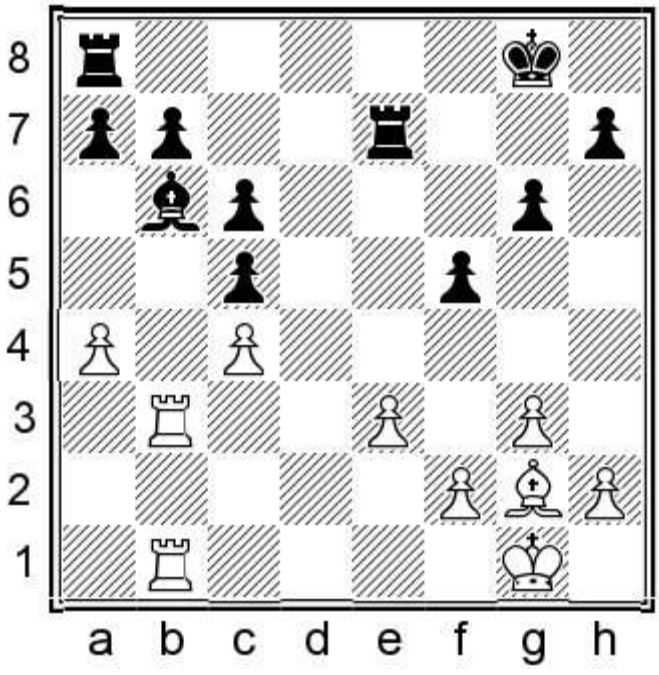
17...♕f6 18.♖ab1



Position after: 18.♖ab1

This position was reached in the game Dubov, D (2666) – Potapov, P (2479), St. Petersburg 2017, ½-½ (81). I guess Black was satisfied with a draw, which explains why he decided to trade some pieces on c3, but he could have kept the upper hand with

18...♖e7! 19.e3 ♕xc3 20.♕xc3 ♗xc3 21.♖b3 ♗a5 22.♖fb1 ♗b6 23.a4



Position after: 23.a4

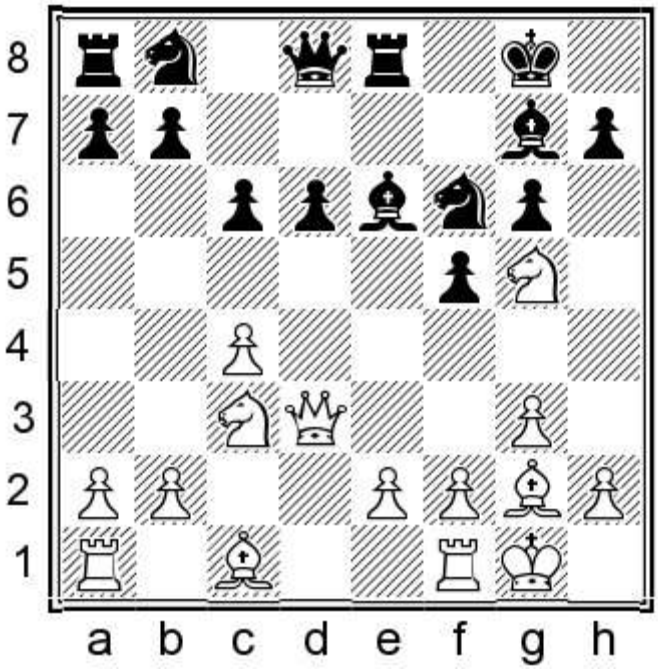
White has some pressure against our queenside, but it seems that with precise play we can keep the better position.

23...♖b8 24.♖a1 ♔f7 25.a5 ♗c7 26.a6 b5 27.♗xc6 b4∓

A draw still looks the logical result, but it's possible to misplay this as White.

h) 8.d5 e5 9.dxe6 ♗xe6 10.♕d3 ♖e8 11.♘g5

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.c4 0-0 6.0-0 d6 7.♘c3 c6 8.d5 e5! 9.dxe6 ♗xe6 10.♕d3 ♖e8! 11.♘g5!



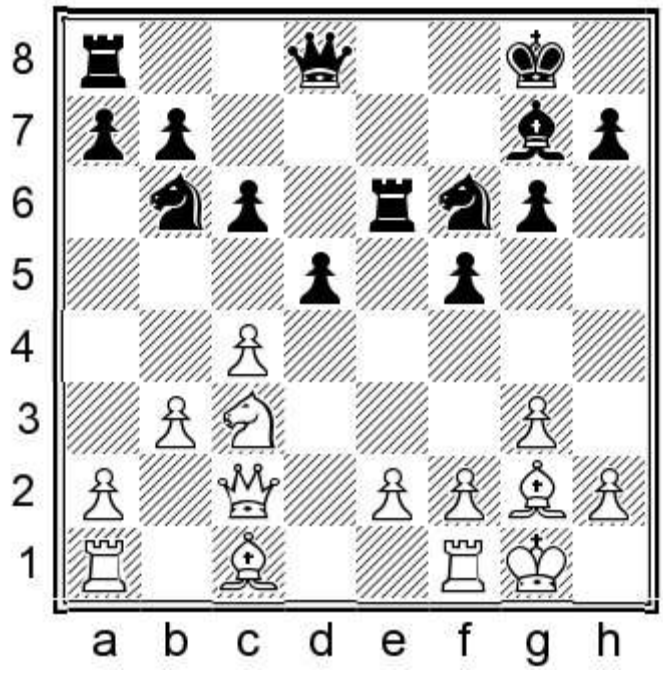
Position after: 11.♘g5!

White's best option. Black's bishop is not really able to return to c8, so we need to agree to give up the bishop pair in the best possible circumstances.

11...♘bd7 12.♘xe6 ♖xe6 13.♕c2!

White needed to anticipate ...♘e5.

13...♘b6 14.b3 d5



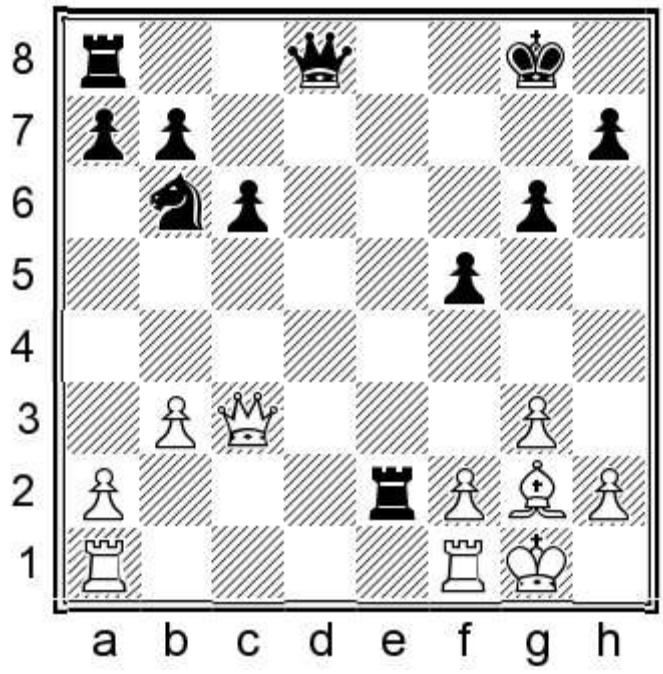
Position after: 14...d5

Black is freeing himself. White has a strong move at his disposal, but quite difficult to grasp for a human.

15.a4!N

White says he isn't afraid to lose the c-pawn, and will even force it with a5 if he has to.

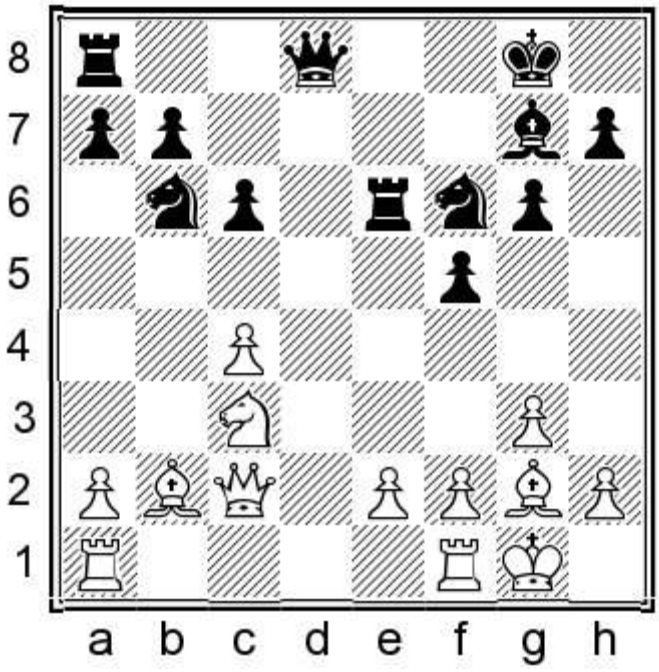
A) 15.cxd5N 15...♘fxd5 16.♗b2 ♘xc3 17.♗xc3 ♗xc3 18.♕xc3 ♖xe2



Position after: 18...♖xe2

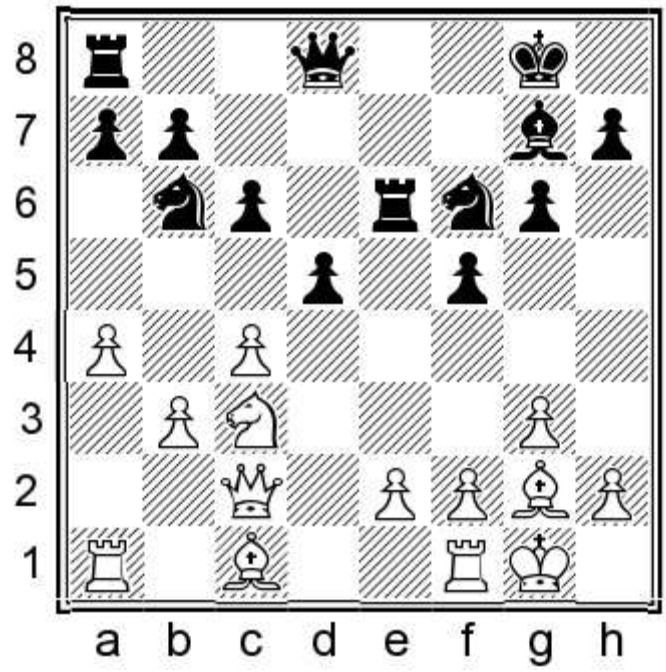
If you glance at this position it seems that Black has an extra pawn for no compensation, but things are not so simple, and it seems that White can still equalize. 19.♖ad1! [19.♖fe1? Not at all precise. 19...♕d2 20.♕xd2 ♖xd2 21.♖e7 ♖d7∓] 19...♕e7 20.a4! This is the way to keep the balance. White doesn't just want to chase the knight; the real idea is to push the pawn to a6 in order to destroy our queenside. 20...♖d8 [20...a6?! 21.♕d4!± The knight is in trouble.] 21.♖xd8+ ♕xd8 22.a5 ♘d5 23.♕c5 a6 24.♖d1= The game should end in a draw.

B) 15.♗b2 dxc4 16.bxc4



Position after: 16.bxc4

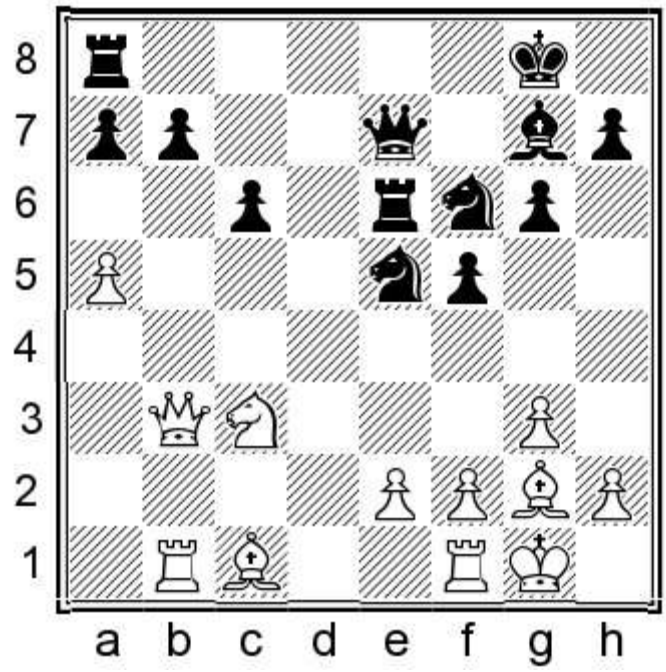
This was played in Vasilev, M (2465) – Reinderman, D (2510), Netherlands 2007, 0-1 (69). [Taking the pawn was a mistake. He should just have improved his position with 16.♘a4 cxb3 17.♕xb3 ♘fd5 18.e4 fxe4 19.♘c5 ♖e7∓.] 16...♕e7!N 17.♕b3 ♘fd7!∓ Black's knight will soon dominate the game.



Position after: 15.a4!N

15...♘e4!

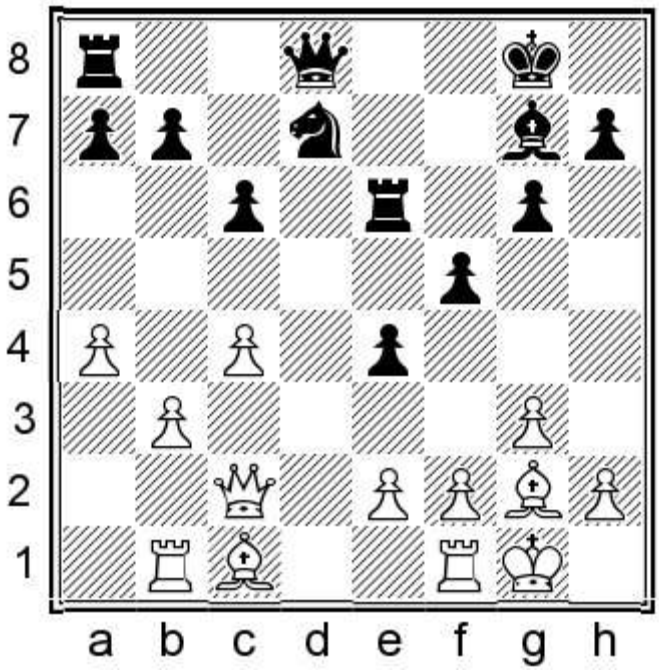
15...dxc4 16.bxc4 ♕e7 17.a5 ♘xc4 18.♕b3 ♘e5 19.♖b1±



Position after: 19.♖b1±

White is going to regain his pawn under favorable circumstances.

16.♘xe4 dxe4 17.♖b1 ♘d7=

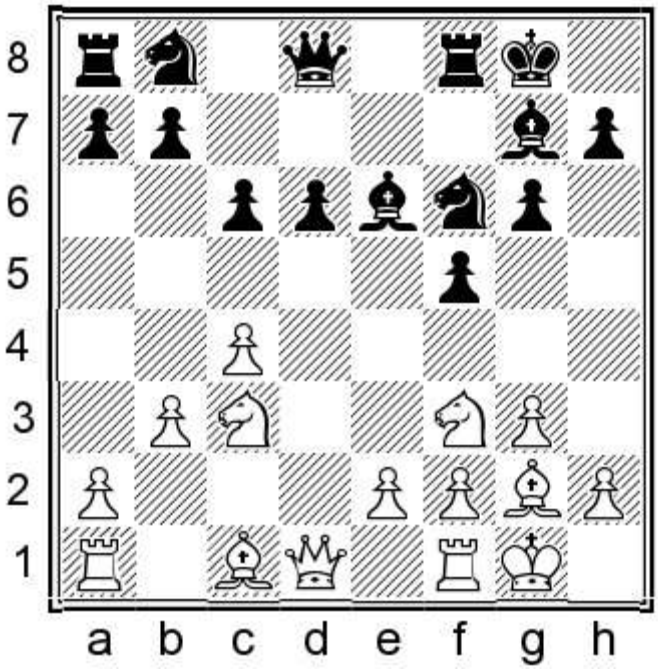


Position after: 17...♘d7=

I consider this kind of middlegame to be level. Black's strong pawn structure compensates for the bishop pair.

i) 8. d5 e5 9.dxe6 ♗xe6 10.b3 ♘a6 11.--, 11.♘g5

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.c4 0-0 6.0-0 d6 7.♘c3 c6 8.d5 e5! 9.dxe6 ♗xe6 10.b3!

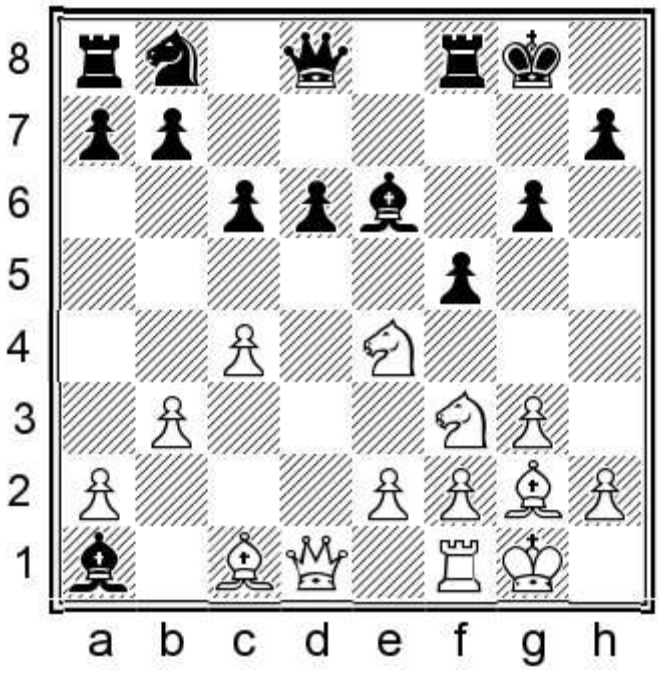


Position after: 10.b3!

I think this is the best way to defend the c-pawn as it doesn't expose the queen. Once White understands that the danger on the long diagonal is not real, the choice seems pretty obvious.

10...♘a6!?

We are not in a rush to defend the d6-pawn. White is not well enough organized to be able to attack the weakness. 10...♘e4?! 11.♘xe4 ♗xa1?!



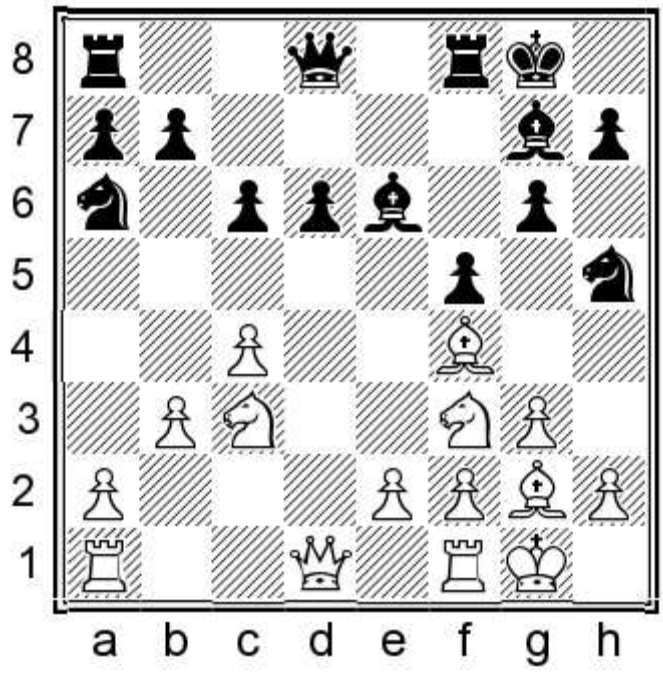
Position after: 11...♗xa1?!

It's quite rare for Black to be able to take this rook without being punished, and here it fails quite straightforwardly: 12.♘xd6 ♕e7 13.♗a3 ♗f6 14.♕c1+–.

11.♘g5

This has been played less than 11.♗b2, but in a way it's perhaps the most precise move as the bishop can't go to d7 after 12.♘g5 (which we will check later), and it's slower to bring it into play from c8. However it doesn't change the general evaluation of the position.

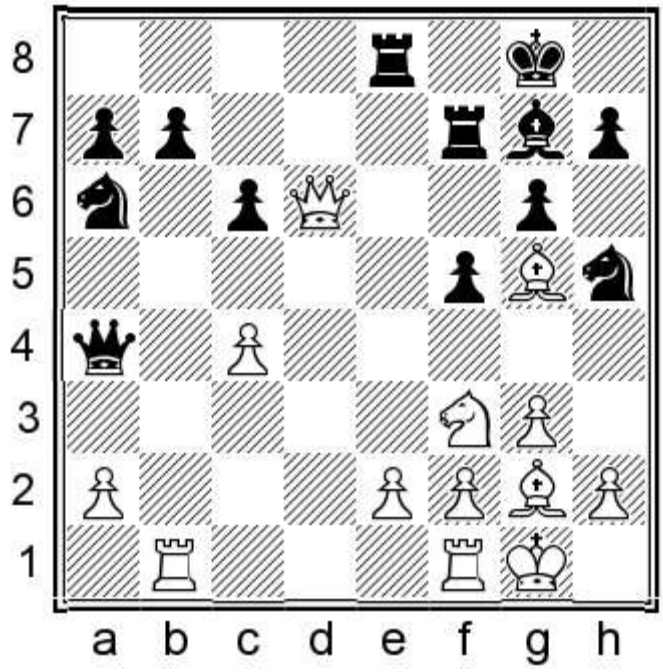
A) 11.♗f4?! This approach fails. Why play b3 and not fianchetto the bishop? 11...♘h5!



Position after: 11...♘h5!

A1) 12.♗d2 f4! Black takes advantage of the situation to start his attack. 13.♖c1 ♕e7 14.♘a4 d5! 15.cxd5 ♗xd5 16.♗c3 fxg3 17.hxg3 ♘f6∓ Black is already better thanks to his play in the center, and eventually won convincingly in Ahlander, B (2424) – Gavrikov, V (2539), Gothenburg 2001.

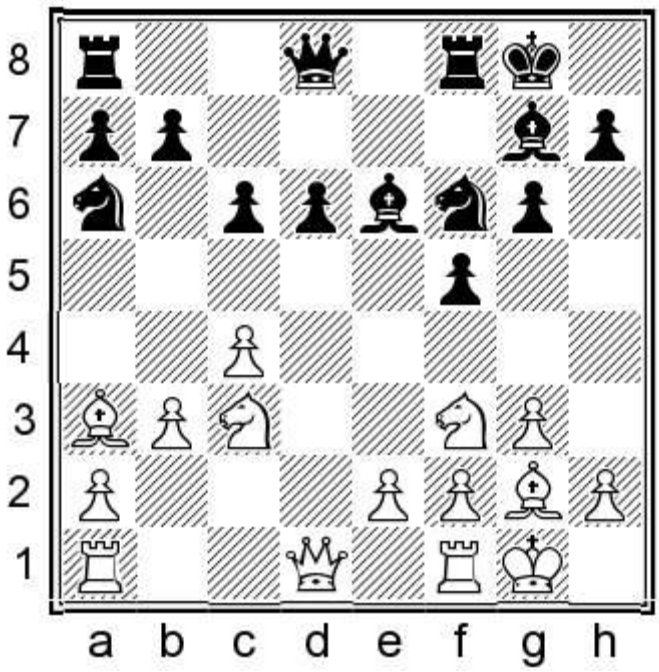
A2) 12.♗g5 ♕a5 13.♕xd6 [13.♘a4 ♖ae8! 14.♗d2 ♕c7 15.♖c1 f4↑] 13...♖ae8! 14.♘a4 ♗xc4 15.bxc4 ♕xa4 [15...♗xa1 I consider this inferior. White will enjoy full compensation. 16.♖xa1 ♕xa4 17.♖b1 ♕xc4 18.♖xb7∞] 16.♖ab1 ♖f7∓



Position after: 16...♖f7∓

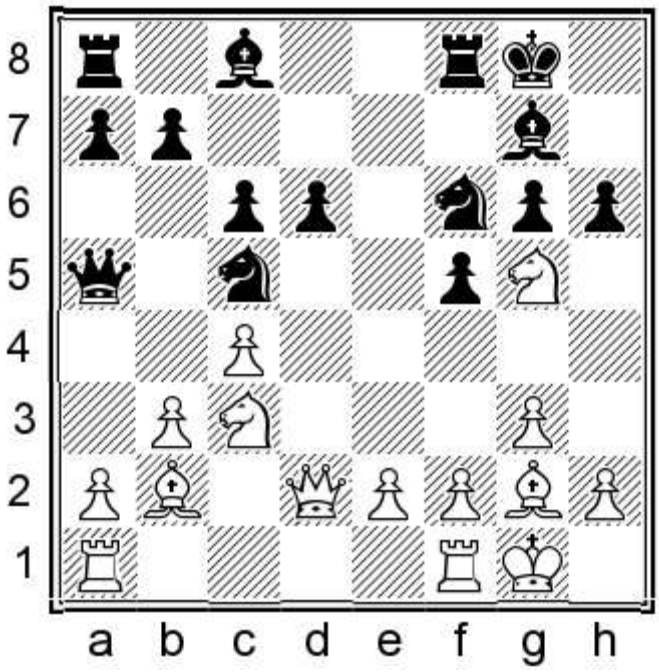
It's still very complicated, but Black's better pawn structure and active pieces give him the easier position.

B) 11.♗a3?!



Position after: 11.♗a3?!

Saying that this is dubious is a bit of an exaggeration, but the fact is that the bishop isn't really doing anything here. 11...♘c5! 12.♘g5 ♗c8 13.♕d2 This might look dangerous as White is trying to attack d6, and ...♖d8 won't be playable since the d6-pawn would be pinned and unable to take back on c5. 13...♕a5 14.♗b2 h6

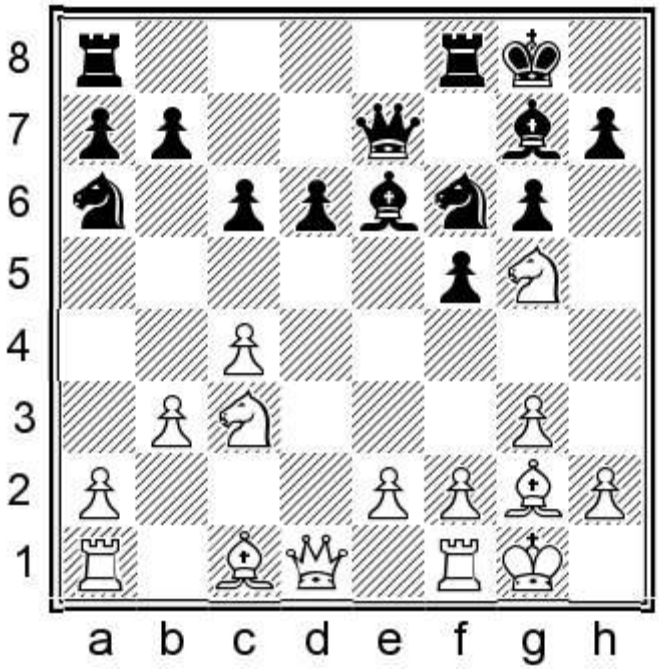


Position after: 14...h6

15.♘d5! White has to find this clever idea to reach a draw by repetition. [15.♘f3 ♘fe4! 16.♘xe4 ♕xd2 17.♘exd2 ♗xb2∓] 15...♕xd2 16.♘e7+ ♔h8 17.♘xg6+ ♔g8 18.♘e7+=

11...♗c8

11...♕e7

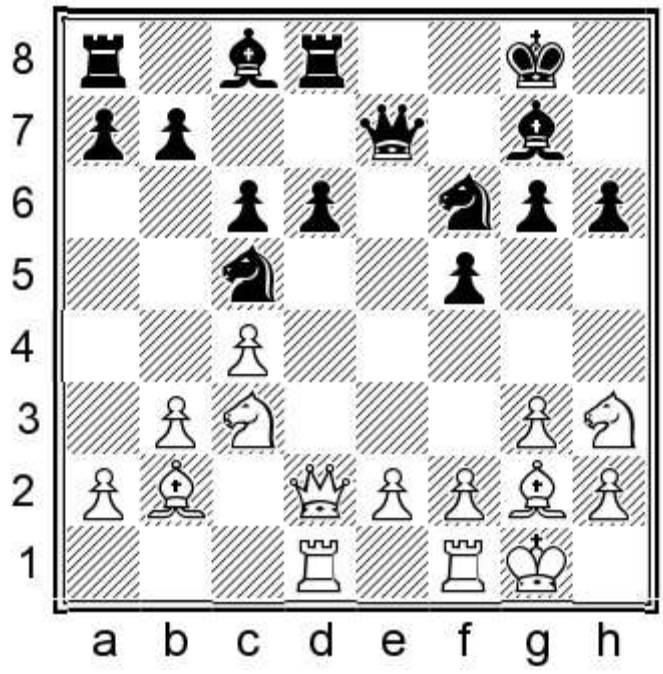


Position after: 11...♕e7

Agreeing to give up the bishop pair is another possible approach. In general, Black keeps a very solid position and doesn't lose tempi retreating it and reorganizing his pieces. 12.♘xe6 ♕xe6 13.♗b2 ♖ad8 14.♕c2 ♖fe8 15.♖fd1 ♘c5=

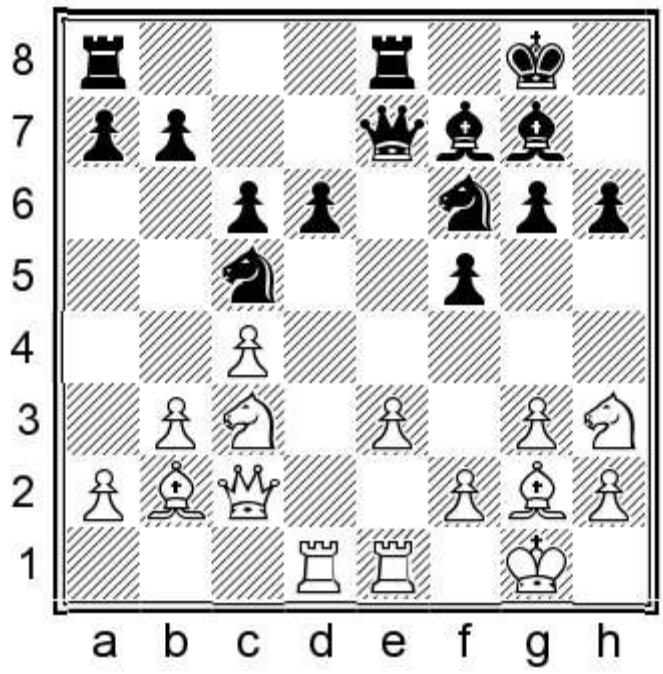
12.♗b2

12.♕d2 ♘c5 13.♗b2 ♕e7 14.♖ad1 h6 15.♘h3 ♖d8



Position after: 15...♖d8

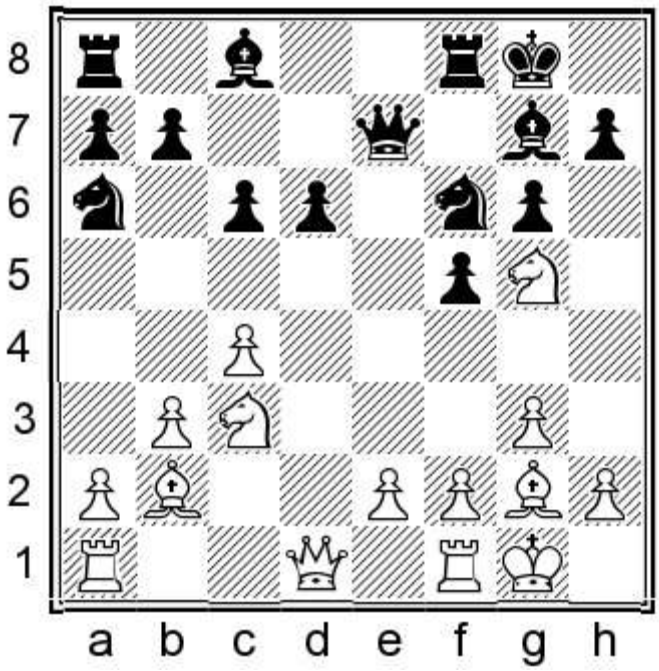
White generally finds it difficult to achieve anything. It is really hard to open the position with e2−e4, as it would simply lead to lots of trades and expose the h3-knight to the c8-bishop. 16.♕c2 [16.♖fe1 g5!? 17.e4 ♘fxe4 18.♕c2 ♗e6 19.♘xe4 ♘xe4 20.♗xg7 ♔xg7 21.♗xe4 fxe4 22.♕xe4 ♖e8=] 16...♗e6 17.e3 ♗f7 18.♖fe1 ♖e8⇄



Position after: 18...♖e8⇄

Voilà! Black has reorganized his forces and reached a normal middlegame.

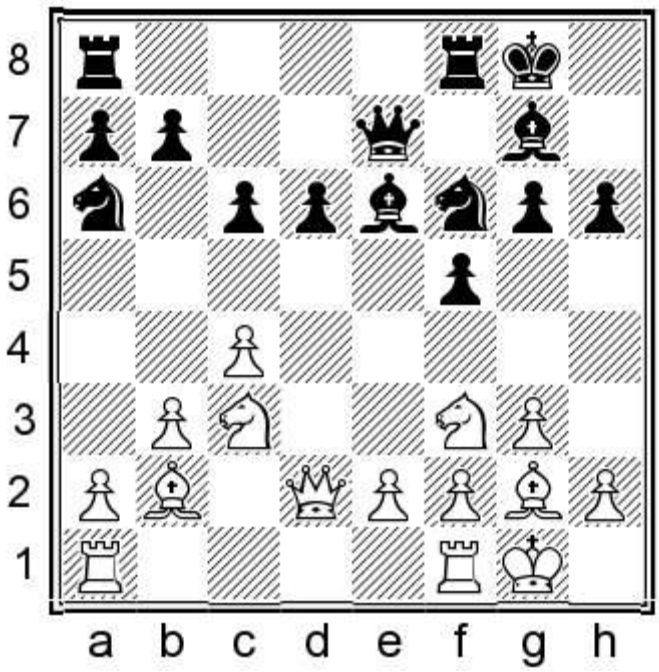
12...♕e7



Position after: 12...♕e7

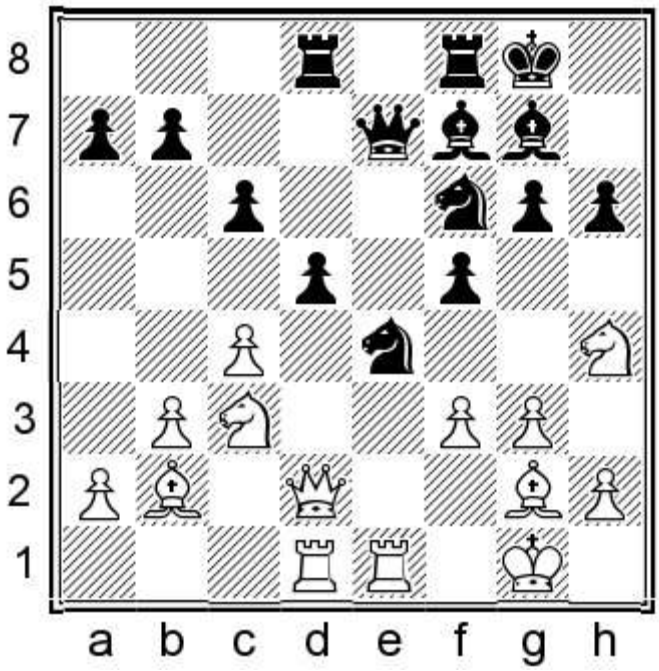
13.♕c2

13.♕d2 h6 14.♘f3 [For 14.♘h3 ♗e6 15.♖fe1 see 15.♖fe1 in the main line. It's just a transposition since the only difference is that the bishop spent a few moves on c8 instead of d7.] 14...♗e6



Position after: 14...♗e6

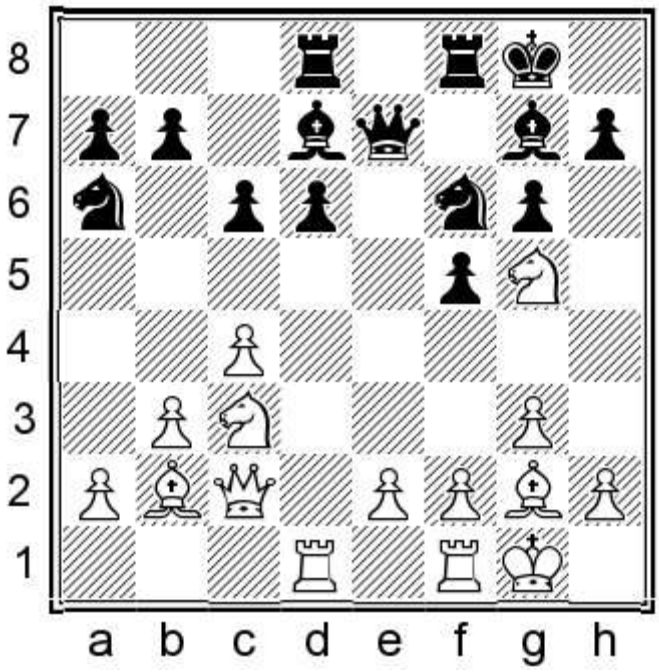
15.♘h4 This kind of attack leads nowhere for White. 15...♗f7 16.♖ad1 ♖ad8 17.♖fe1 ♘c5! This doesn't completely prevent e4, but it's good enough. 18.e4!? [18.♕c2 ♖fe8=] 18...♘cxe4 19.f3 [19.♘xe4 fxe4 20.♗xf6 ♕xf6 21.♗xe4 d5! 22.cxd5 ♗xd5 23.♗xd5+ ♖xd5 24.♕c2 ♖xd1 25.♖xd1 g5=] 19...d5!!



Position after: 19...d5!!

A strong resource that Black had to see in advance. [19...♘xd2? 20.♖xe7+–] 20.fxe4 dxe4 Black has enough compensation, e.g. 21.♕e2 b5! 22.cxb5 ♘g4!→. Black has multiple threats, the main one being ...♕c5+, both endangering the king and attacking the c3-knight (the reason why we just played ...b5).

13...♗d7 14.♖ad1 ♖ad8

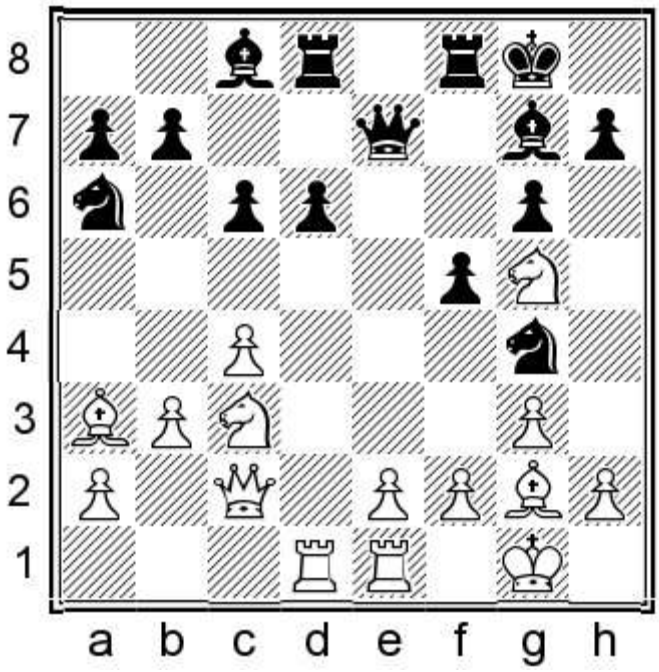


Position after: 14...♖ad8

15.e3

In general, Black is satisfied when White plays e3. If he now plays ...♘e4 at some stage, and White trades it, then ...fxe4 would underline White's weaknesses on the light squares.

A) 15.♖fe1 ♗c8 [15...♘c5 This looks even simpler, in order to prevent any e4-ideas.] I give the following game to show how things can go badly for White if he is not focused: 16.♗a3 ♘g4

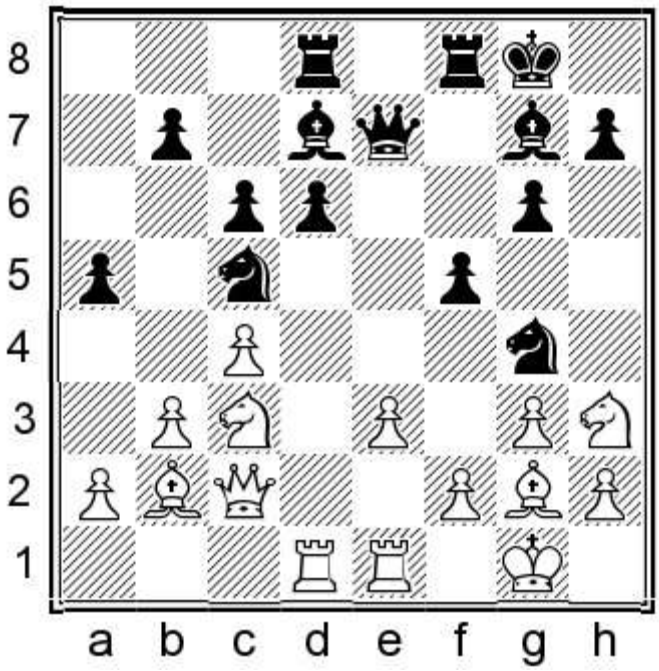


Position after: 16...♘g4

17.♗c1? ♘b4! 18.♕d2 ♗xc3 19.♕xc3 ♘xa2 20.♕d2 ♘xc1 21.♕xc1 f4∓ 0-1 (30) Richter, C (2435) – Nijboer, F (2545), Netherlands 2005.

B) 15.e4?! h6 16.♘f3 ♘xe4 17.♘xe4 fxe4 18.♗xg7 ♔xg7 19.♖fe1 ♗f5∓

15...♘c5 16.♖fe1 ♘g4! 17.♘h3 a5



Position after: 17...a5

Black has a stable position. White's attempts to cause disorganization in his camp are not succeeding.

18.♘f4

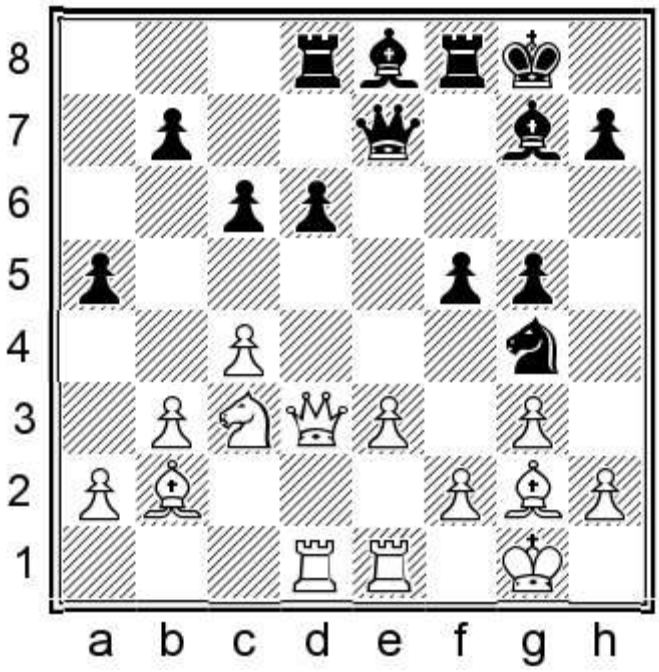
18.e4 fxe4 19.♘xe4 ♗f5=

18...g5! 19.♘d3

19.♘h5 ♗h8

19...♘xd3 20.♕xd3 ♗e8↑

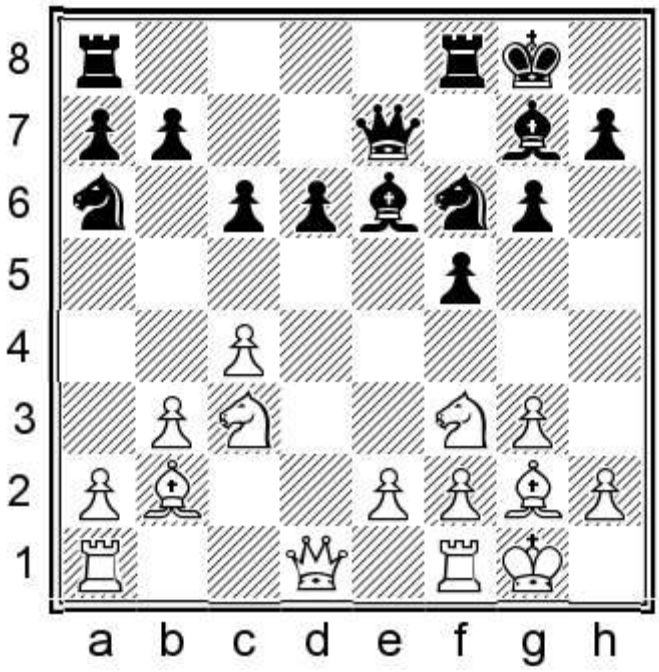
The bishop heads towards g6 or h5, and the possibility of playing ...f4 at some point is very interesting.



Position after: 20...♗e8↑

j) 8. d5 e5 9.dxe6 ♗xe6 10.b3 ♘a6 11.♗b2

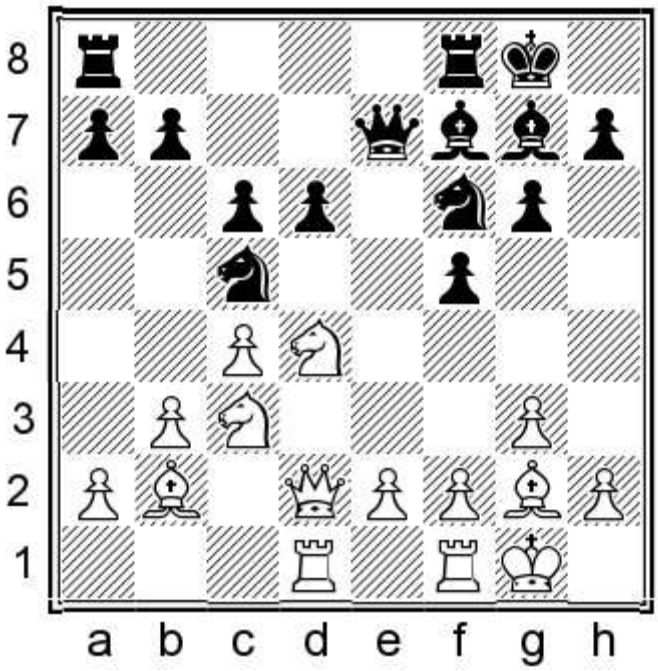
1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.c4 0-0 6.0-0 d6 7.♘c3 c6 8.d5 e5! 9.dxe6 ♗xe6 10.b3! ♘a6!? 11.♗b2 ♕e7



Position after: 11...♕e7

12.♘g5!?

A) 12.♘d4 I had to face this move last year. It's slightly less troublesome, since the bishop can easily escape to f7, but it sometimes gives White additional ideas of sacrificing on c6. 12...♗f7 13.♕d2 ♘c5 14.♖ad1

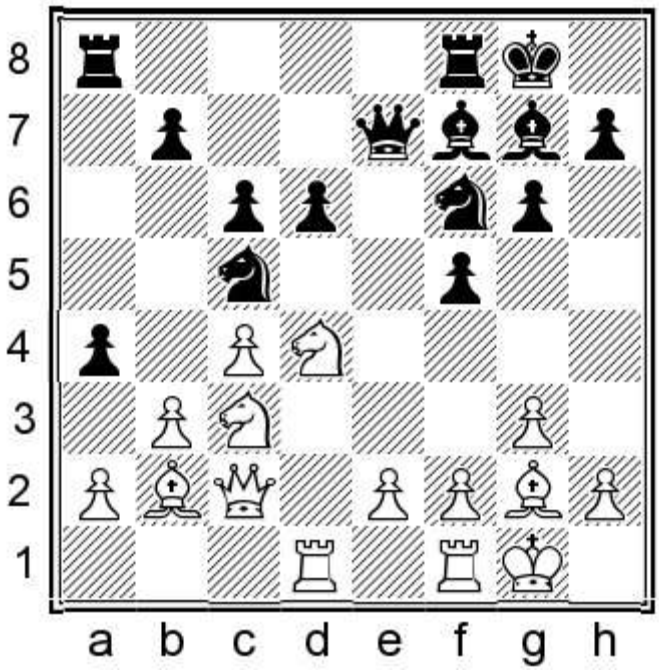


Position after: 14.♖ad1

A1) 14...♖ad8 15.♗xc6!? This is the kind of sac I didn't want to allow. Two pawns, a rook, and some weaknesses in the center seemed to me to be worth two pieces. 15...bxc6 16.♘xc6 ♕b7 17.♘xd8 ♖xd8 18.♘b5 ♘ce4 19.♕a5 ♖d7 20.f3!± 0-1 (48) Bilobrk, F (2360) – Galyas, M (2512), Biograd na Moru 2018.

A2) 14...♖ac8!? This preventive move was my choice. It can also be useful if Black wants to play ...d5 once the queen has gone to c2. 15.♕c2 ♖fe8 16.e3 ♘fe4= This is balanced, and my game quite logically ended in a draw, ½-½ (30) Gaehwiler, G (2429) – Demuth, A (2547), Bad Ragaz 2018.

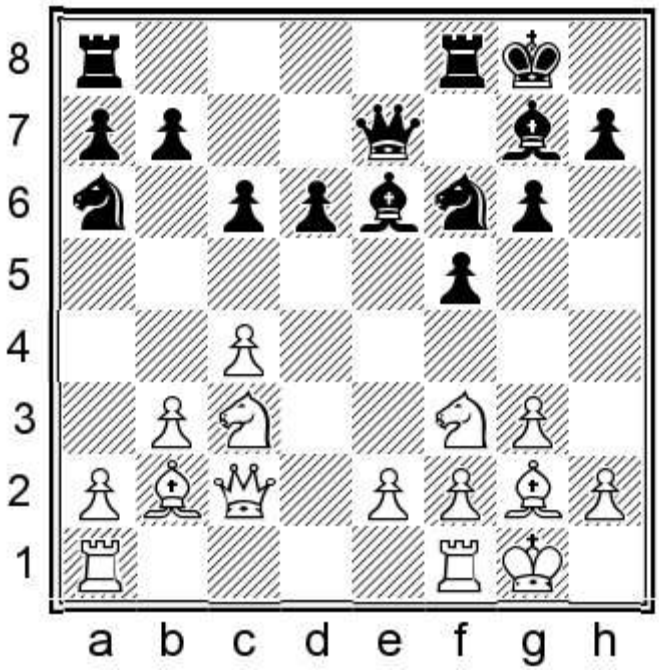
A3) 14...a5! This might be my choice now. There is no rush in moving the rooks, so it seems sensible to try to create some weaknesses on the queenside. 15.♕c2 a4



Position after: 15...a4

16.e3 [16.b4 ♘cd7 17.♘xa4 ♘e5↑ Black gains enough counterplay against the c4-pawn.] 16...axb3 17.axb3 ♖fe8= Black has a fine game. 18.♘xc6?! This is not really possible anymore. 18...bxc6 19.♗xc6 ♖ab8 20.♗xe8 ♗xe8∓ Thanks to the light-squared weaknesses, Black should be able to keep the upper hand.

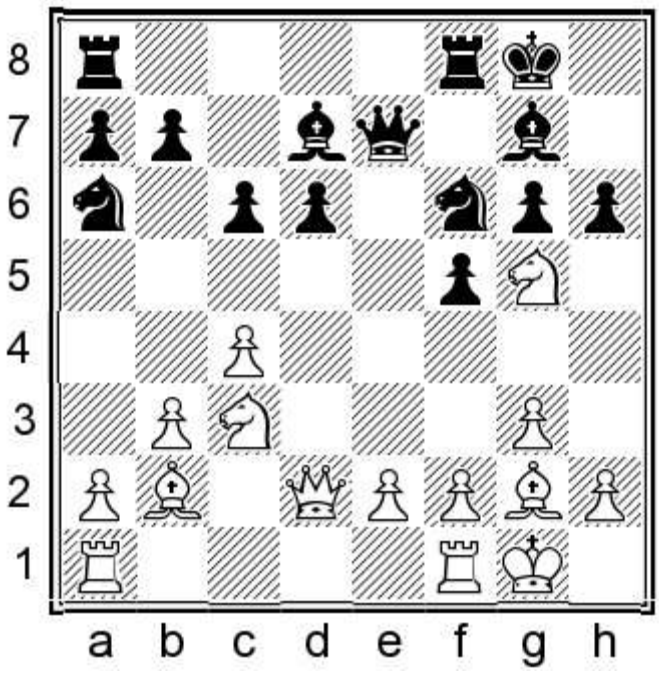
B) 12.♕c2



Position after: 12.♕c2

Against this kind of careless move Black can already free himself and get an equal position. 12...d5!? 13.cxd5 ♘xd5 14.♘xd5 ♗xd5 15.♗xg7 ♔xg7= I still think that this structure is easier for Black, but objectively the position is equal.

12...♗d7 13.♕d2 h6!?



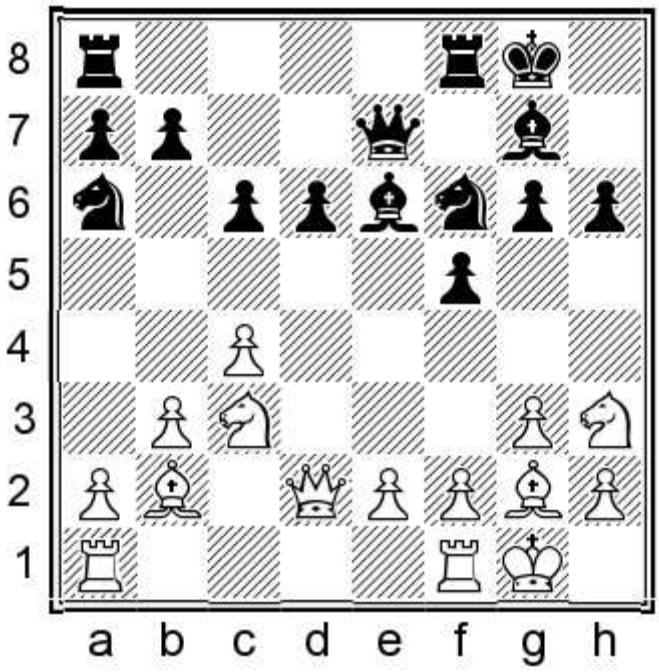
Position after: 13...h6!?

It's more usual to start with 13...♖ad8. It probably doesn't change the evaluation of the position, but I would prefer to chase the knight first.

14.♘h3

14.♘f3 has never been tried, probably because White knows his knight doesn't have many prospects from here. 14...♗e8 [14...♗e6 is probably less precise since it gives White the idea to play the sacrifice we have already discussed. 15.♖ad1 ♖ad8 16.♘d4 ♗f7 17.♗xc6!±] 15.♖ad1 ♖d8 16.♘d4 ♘c5 17.e3 ♘fe4=

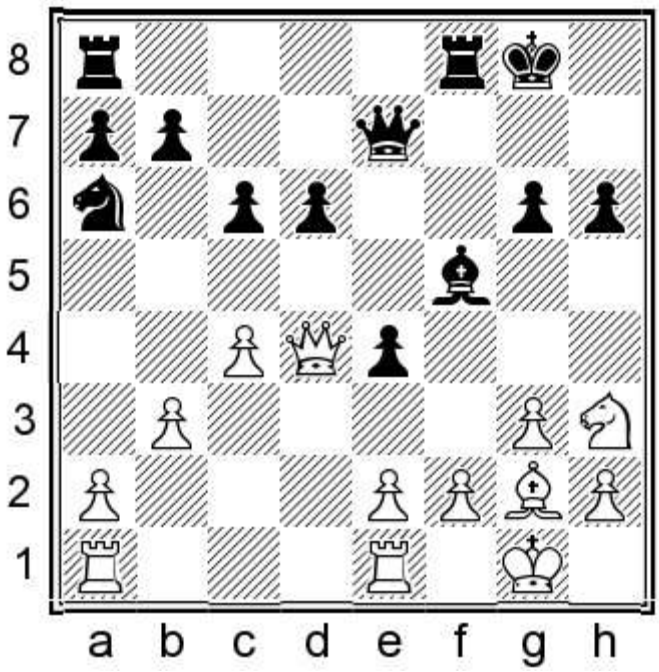
14...♗e6!?



Position after: 14...♗e6!?

15.♖ad1

15.♖fe1 has been tried once, but it probably makes less sense to start by moving this rook. 15...♘e4!? And this is a clever way to play, taking advantage of the misplaced knight on h3. 16.♘xe4 ♗xb2 17.♕xb2 fxe4 18.♕d4 ♗f5=

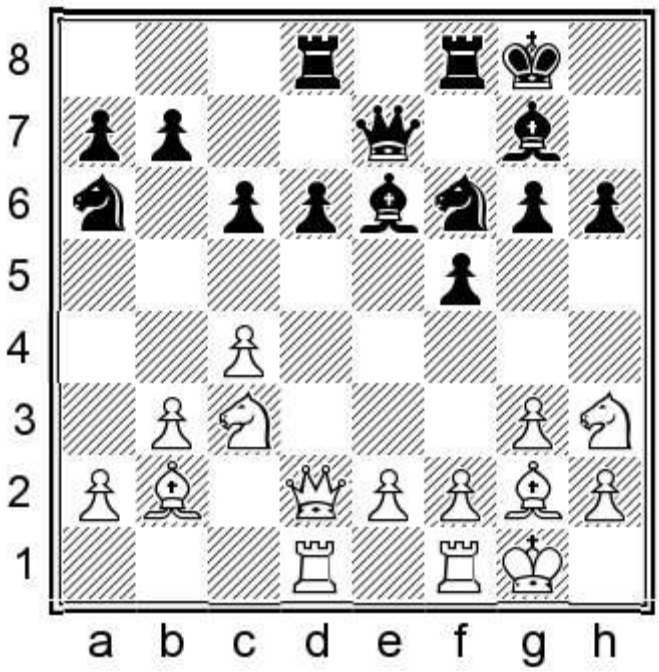


Position after: 18...♗f5=

The position is balanced. In the only game that reached this position, White collapsed very quickly:

19.f4? e3! 20.♔h1? ♘b4! 21.♖ac1 ♘c2 22.♖xc2 ♗xc2 23.♘g1 ♖ae8∓ 0-1 (33) Riemersma, L (2420) – Nijboer, F (2525), Hoogeveen 2012.

15...♖ad8



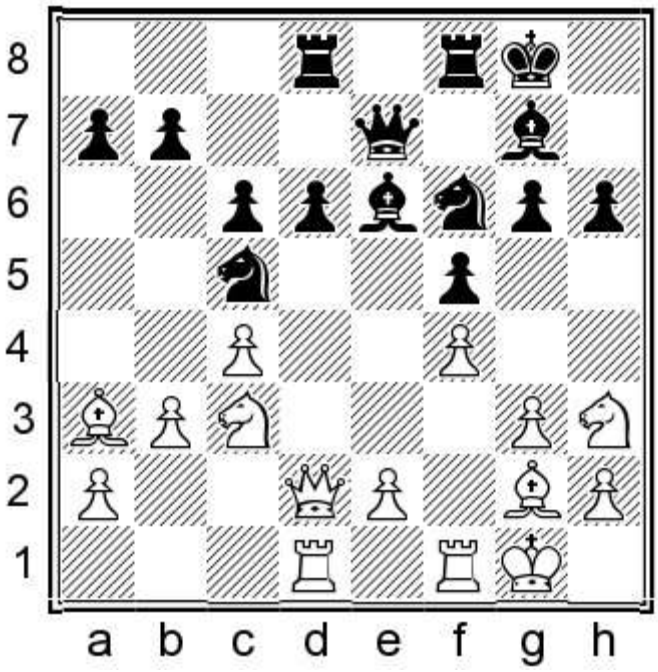
Position after: 15...♖ad8

16.♗a3

This move has been played twice. It shows that White is pretty much out of ideas, because it seems clear that the bishop won't achieve much here.

16.♘f4 ♗f7 17.♘d3 White's knight prevents ours from coming into play, but it has cost a few tempi, and we are able to develop our initiative on the kingside: 17...g5!?N 18.♖fe1 ♗g6!⇄.

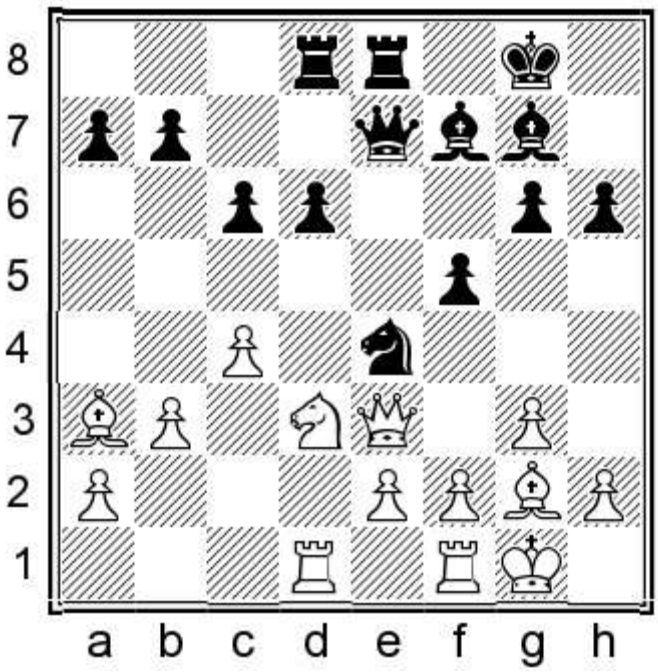
16...♘c5 17.f4?!



Position after: 17.f4?!

This move makes sense only if White manages to play e4 at some point, otherwise he will just remain with some weak spots in his position. In the following well-known game, he didn't manage to do so.

17.♘f4 ♗f7 18.♘d3 ♘ce4! 19.♘xe4 ♘xe4 20.♕e3 ♖fe8

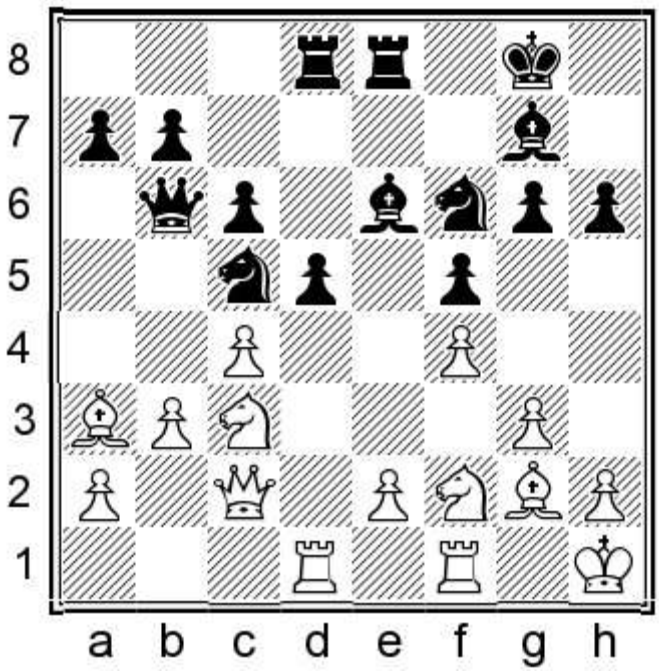


Position after: 20...♖fe8

Now the obvious threat is ...♘c3, against which White doesn't really have an answer. It's impressive to see how things go badly for White when he plays without a clear plan. 21.♗b2 ♗xb2 22.♘xb2 ♕f6

23.♕d4 ♕xd4 24.♖xd4 ♘c3∓ 0-1 (41) Thorhallsson, S (2059) – Stefansson, V (2294), Runavik 2017.

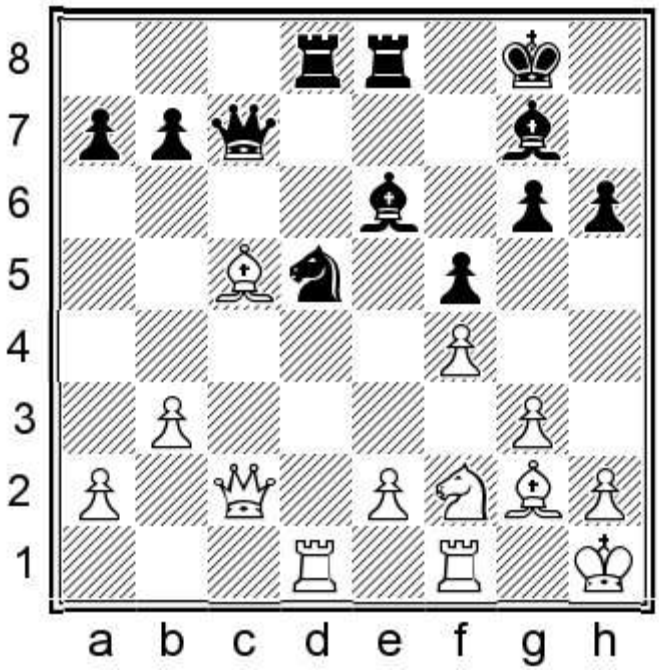
17...♕c7 18.♘f2 ♖fe8 19.♔h1 ♕b6∓ 20.♕c2?! d5!



Position after: 20...d5!

Perfectly timed! This sacrifices a pawn, but since Black's position is so powerful, it is completely justified.

21.cxd5 cxd5 22.♘xd5 ♘xd5 23.♗xc5 ♕c7

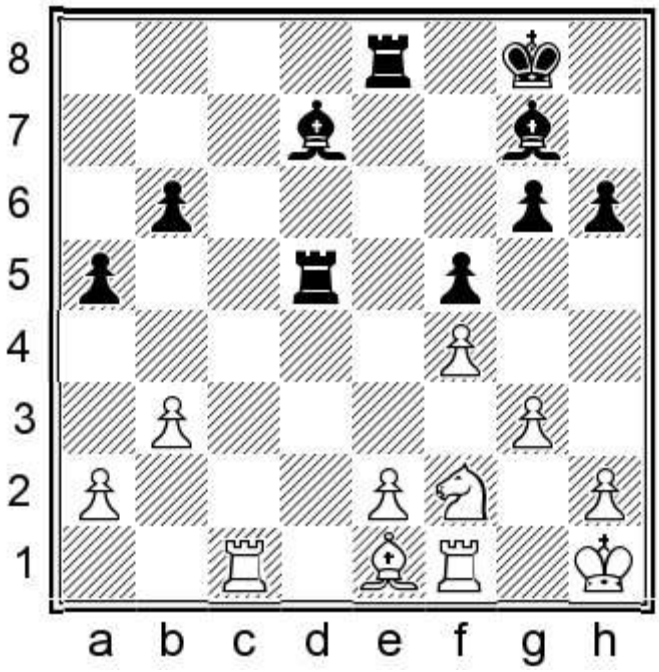


Position after: 23...♕c7

There is no way for White to solve all his problems as his pieces are so badly placed.

24.♖d2

24.♕c1 b6 25.♗xd5 ♖xd5 26.♗b4 ♕xc1 27.♖xc1 a5 28.♗e1 ♗d7∓

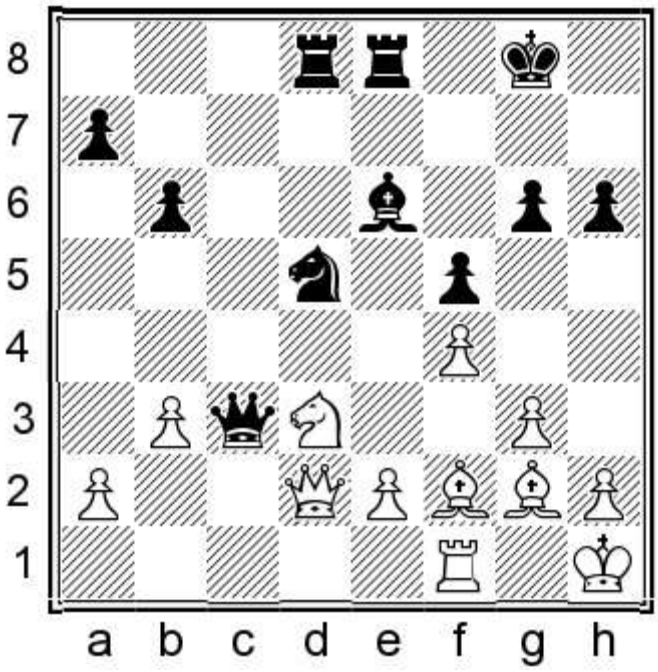


Position after: 28...♗d7∓

Black will soon restore the material balance with a great position.

24...♗c3 25.♘d3 b6 26.♗f2 ♗xd2 27.♕xd2 ♕c3–+

Kamsky managed to convert this winning position easily in Gelfand, B (2751) – Kamsky, G (2762), Tashkent 2012, 0-1.



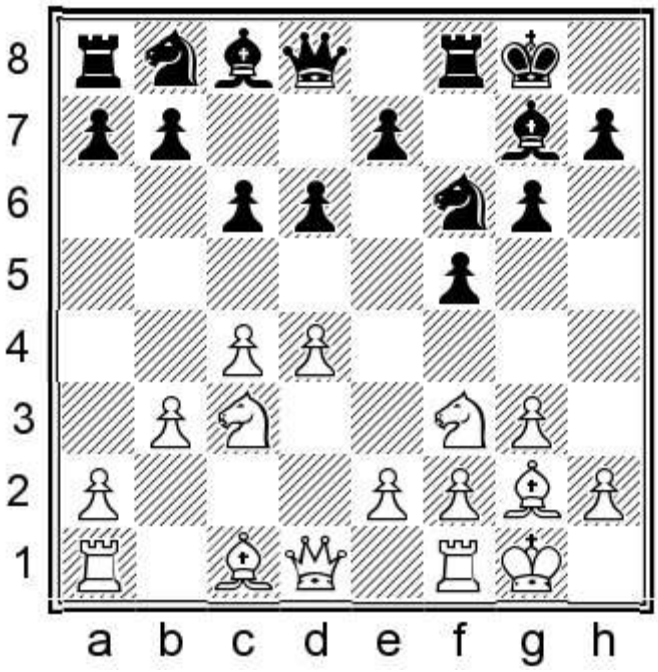
Position after: 27...♕c3−+

Even if this is a slightly older game, I still think it's very important to know it, as it illustrates White's problems in this line.

Incidentally, since this game, Gelfand has been playing the 8.b3 line which we analyze in the following pages!

k) 8.b3 ♘a6 9.♗b2 ♕c7 10.♖e1, 10.d5

1.d4 f5 2.c4 ♘f6 3.♘f3 g6 4.g3 ♗g7 5.♗g2 0-0 6.0-0 d6 7.♘c3 c6 8.b3



Position after: 8.b3

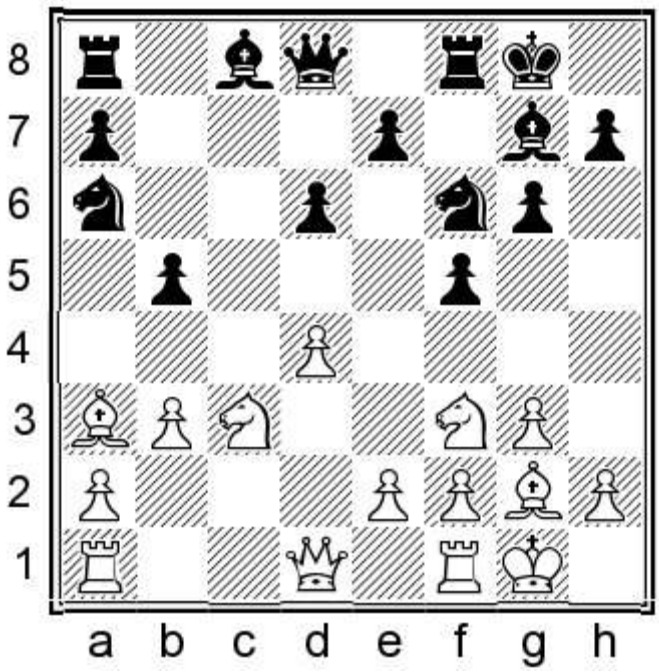
This is what I will call the ‘new main line’. It has surpassed 8.d5 in popularity, mainly because it has become clear that 8.d5 was not fully satisfactory for White.

White simply prepares a fianchetto directed against our own on g7. Black has tried a lot of different moves, but I like to maintain a standard approach. First, we develop our other knight, then try to play for ...e5.

8...♘a6!? 9.♗b2

As we already mentioned in Chapter 8, this position may arise with a different move order, and starting with 6.b3 is a very common one.

9.♗a3 A few players have tried this move, but it doesn’t make much sense right now, since the bishop is not threatening anything. 9...b5!? Of course there are other possibilities, but I like surprising moves, and this is a pretty good one. Of course Black needs to deal with a few things (such as the problems on the long light-squared diagonal), but it seems that he is doing well. 10.cxb5 cxb5

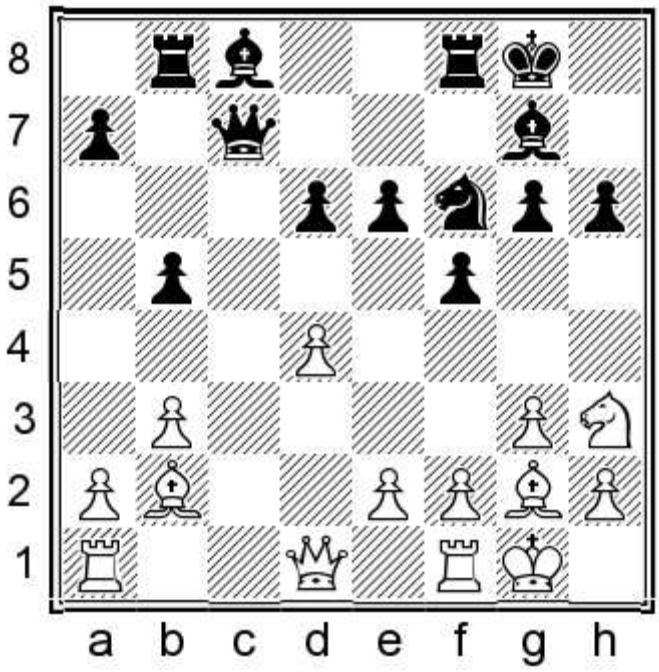


Position after: 10...cxb5

A) 11.♗b2?! b4 12.♘a4 ♗b7∓ This easily gives Black a good game, e.g. he has the idea of bringing a knight to c3, a particularly weak and accessible square.

B) 11.♘xb5? Such greed is severely punished: 11...♕a5 12.♕d3 ♗d7 13.♘xd6! ♕xa3! 14.♘c4 ♕b4∓.

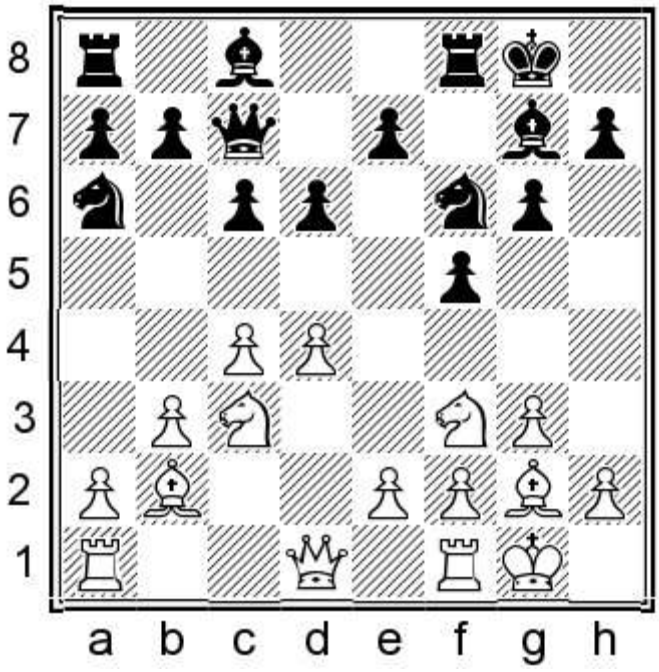
C) 11.♘g5! ♖b8 12.♘d5 Probably the best continuation, but it’s not enough to claim an edge. 12...♘c7!? 13.♘xc7 ♕xc7 14.♗b2 h6 15.♘h3 e6⇄



Position after: 15...e6⇄

I like Black, who is very flexible. He will probably follow with ...g5 soon.

9...♕c7



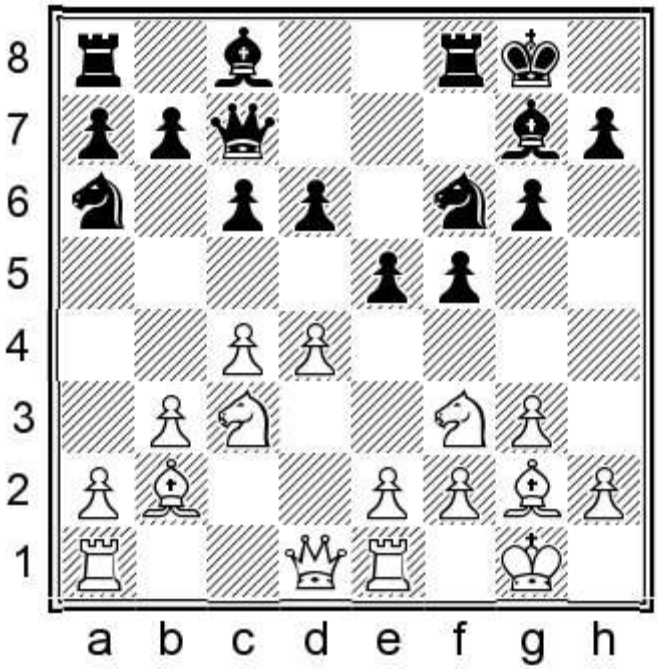
Position after: 9...♕c7

Now the threat is 10...e5. White has two main ways to meet this move. He can either push 10.d5, which will be very similar to the previous subchapters with 8.d5, or he can try to take advantage of the

'exposure' of the queen on the c-file, even if this exposure is not completely clear right now.

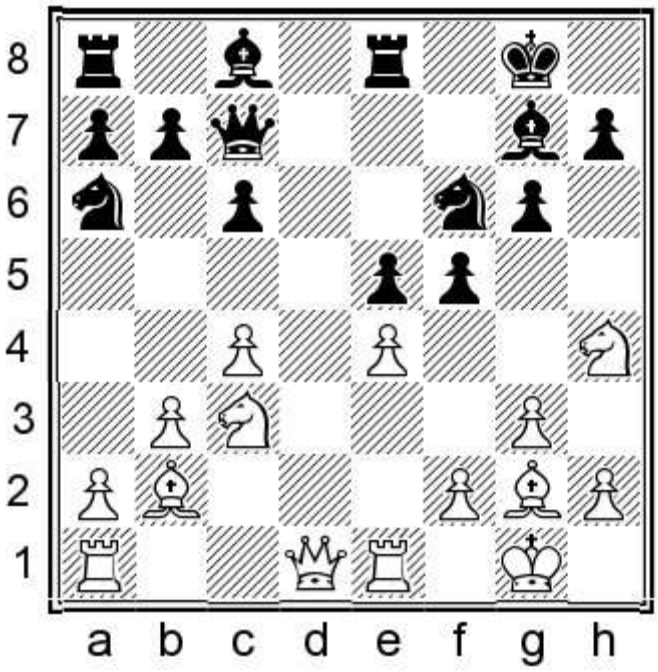
10.d5

This has been played more often than 10.♖c1, (next subchapter), but is probably less critical for the evaluation of our variation. And it's really similar to the previous subchapters. 10.♖e1 has been tried a few times, but only rarely followed up with the best idea. 10...e5



Position after: 10...e5

A) ≤ 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.e4 ♖e8!?N [12...♖d8 This is equally good, but the rook will go to e8 anyway, so I think it's simpler to go there straight away. 13.♕b1 ♖e8 14.♖d1 ♘c5 15.♘h4 f4 16.♗a3 ♗f8∓ 0-1 (33) Nguyen, A (2412) – Laznicka, V (2666), Ho Chi Minh City 2016] 13.♘h4

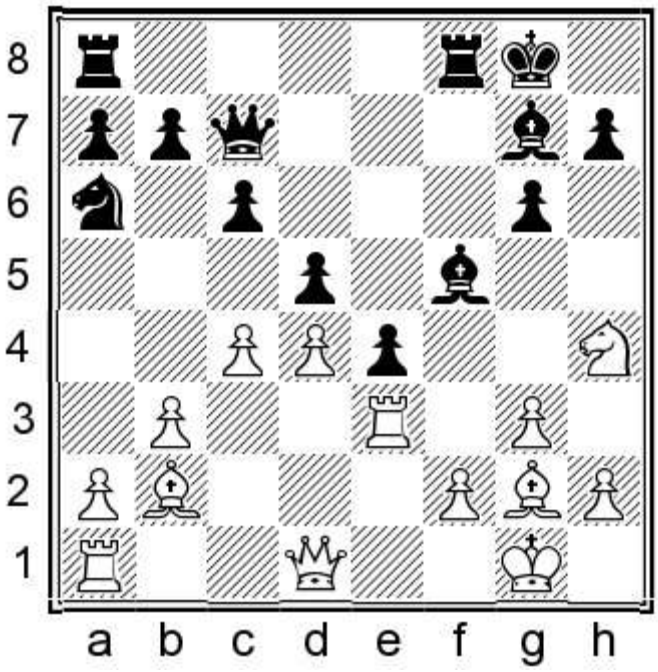


Position after: 13.♘h4

Trying to force matters is one way to find a plan. 13...f4! 14.♘f3 ♗g4 15.♕c2 ♖ad8∓

B) 11.e4! fxe4

B1) 12.♘xe4 ♘xe4 13.♖xe4 ♗f5 14.♖e3 e4 15.♘h4 d5

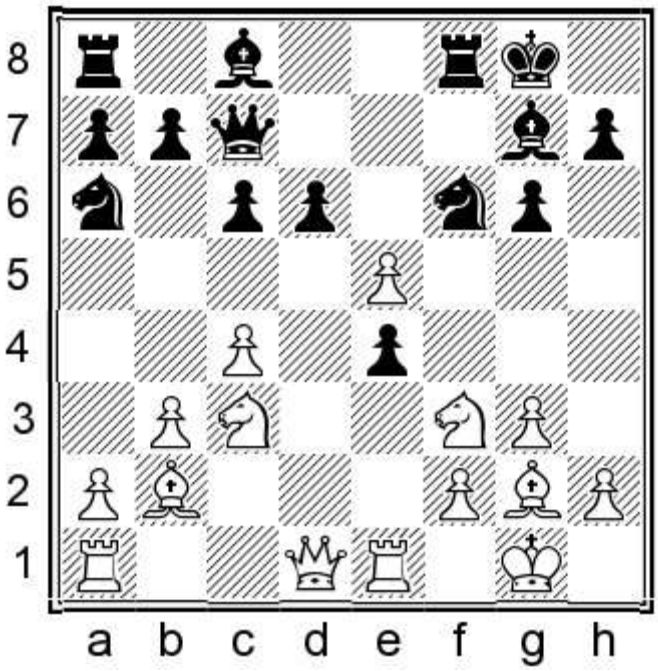


Position after: 15...d5

16.f3! White should probably try to trade this dangerous central pawn. [16.♘xf5 gxf5 17.cxd5 cxd5 18.♖c1 ♕b6∓ If Black manages to bring the knight to c6 or e6, the d4-pawn will be lost.] 16...♘b4!?

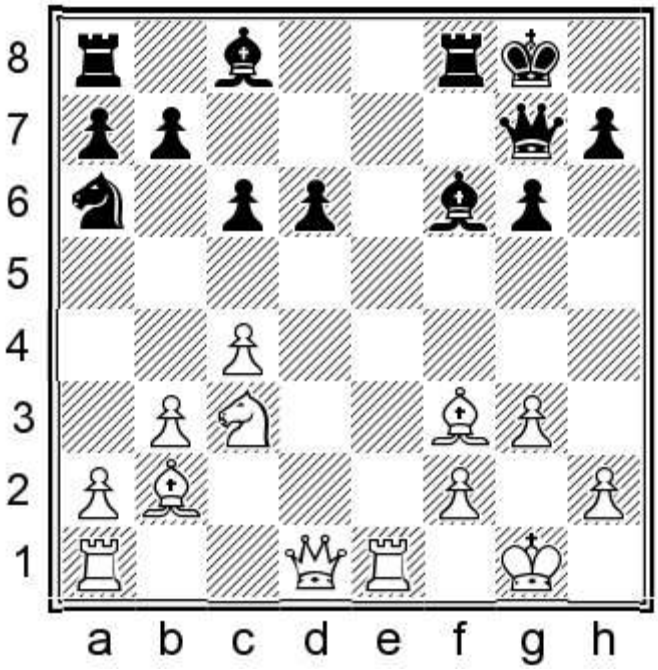
17.fxe4 dxe4! 18.♗xe4 ♖ae8! 19.♕e2 ♗xe4 20.♖xe4 ♖xe4 21.♕xe4 ♕d7 22.♖d1 ♖e8 23.♕f4 c5∓

B2) 12.dxe5



Position after: 12.dxe5

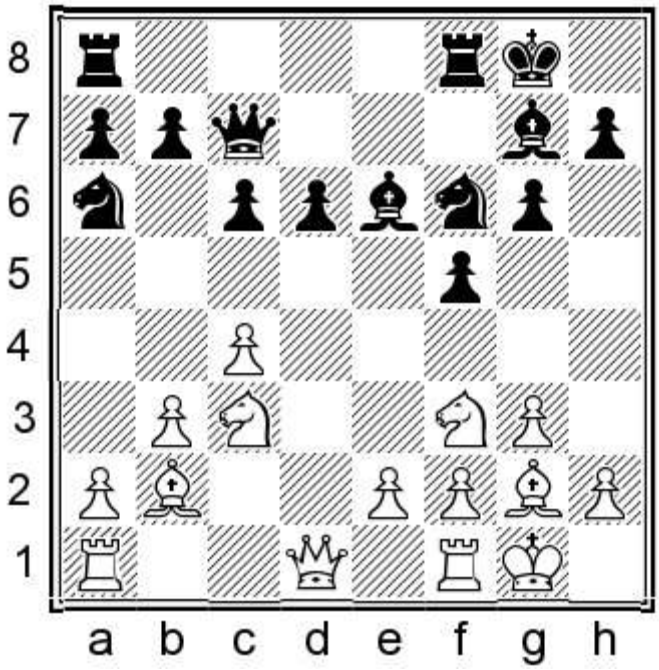
12...exf3!N [12...dxe5?! 13.♘xe4 ♗g4 Now in the game Cvitan, O (2499) – Kovacevic, B (2480), Porec 2016, 1-0 (29), White could have kept the better game with 14.♘xf6+ ♗xf6 15.♖e3! ♖ad8 16.♕e1±.] 13.exf6 ♗xf6 14.♗xf3 ♕g7=



Position after: 14...♕g7=

The position is about equal. The weak d6-pawn is compensated by Black's activity.

10...e5 11.dxe6 ♗xe6

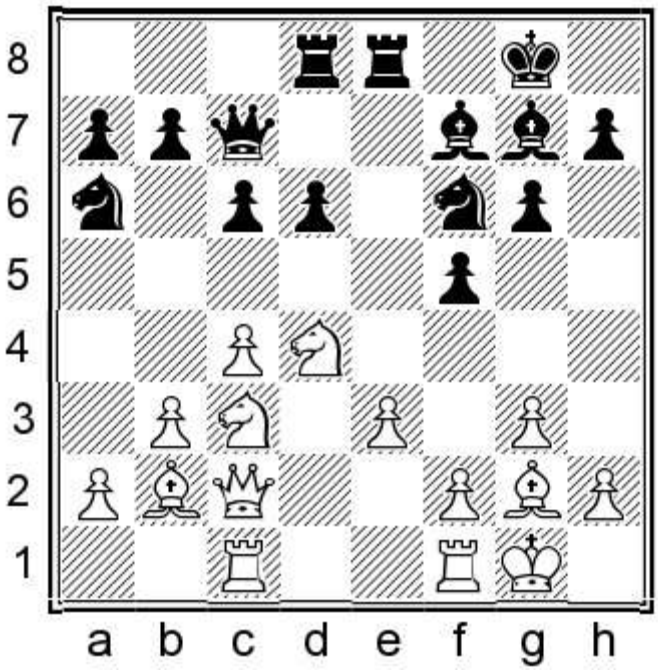


Position after: 11...♗xe6

We considered this position in the previous subchapter, but with the queen on e7, which we preferred to c7. Obviously therefore this could be regarded as a slightly worse version, but it's not enough to change the general evaluation of the position.

12.♘g5

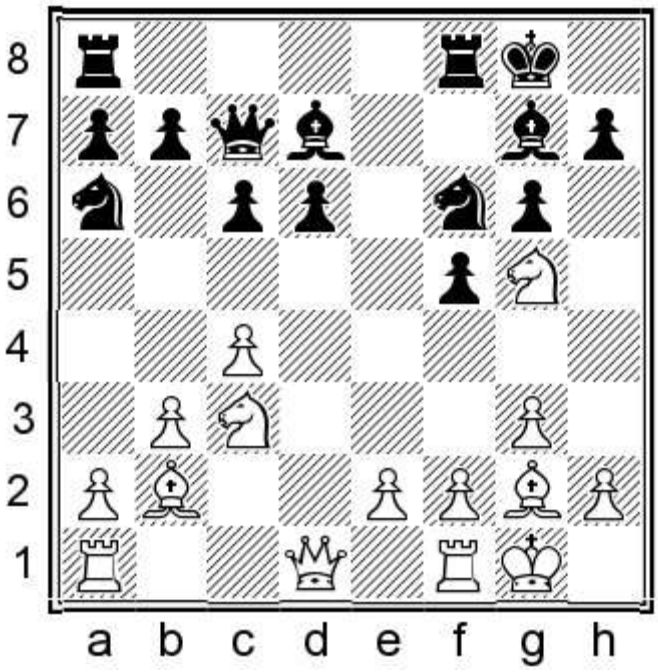
12.♘d4 ♗f7 13.e3 ♖fe8 14.♕d2 [14.♖c1 ♖ad8 15.♕c2



Position after: 15.♕c2

I faced this position in Sermier, G (2368) – Demuth, A (2548), Asnières-sur-Seine 2017, ½-½ (46), and should probably have stuck to my idea of pushing ...d5: 15...d5! 16.cxd5 ♘xd5 17.♘xd5 ♗xd5↑.] 14...♖ad8 15.♖ad1 d5!↑

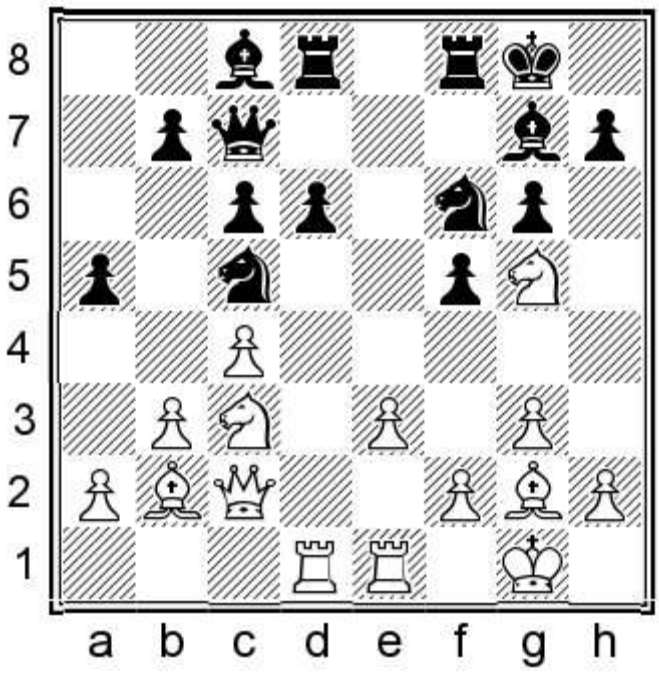
12...♗d7



Position after: 12...♗d7

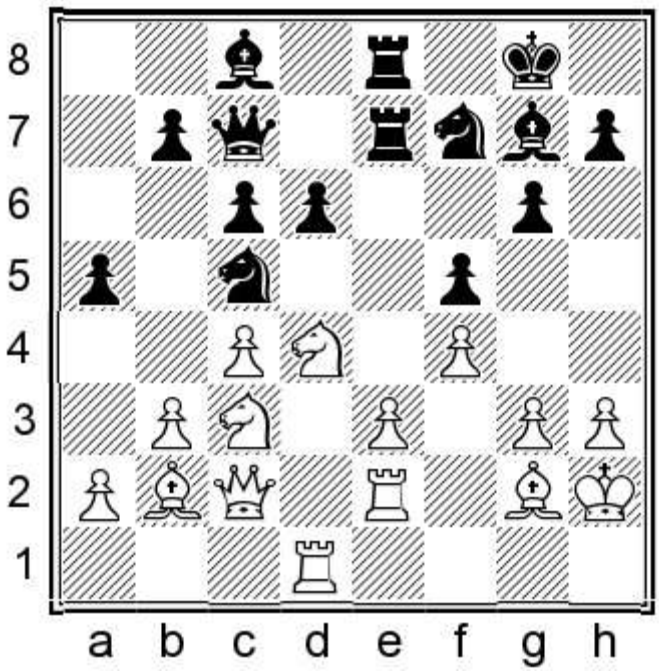
13.♕d2

13.♕c2 ♖ad8 14.♖ad1 ♘c5 15.e3 a5 16.♖fe1 ♗c8



Position after: 16...♗c8

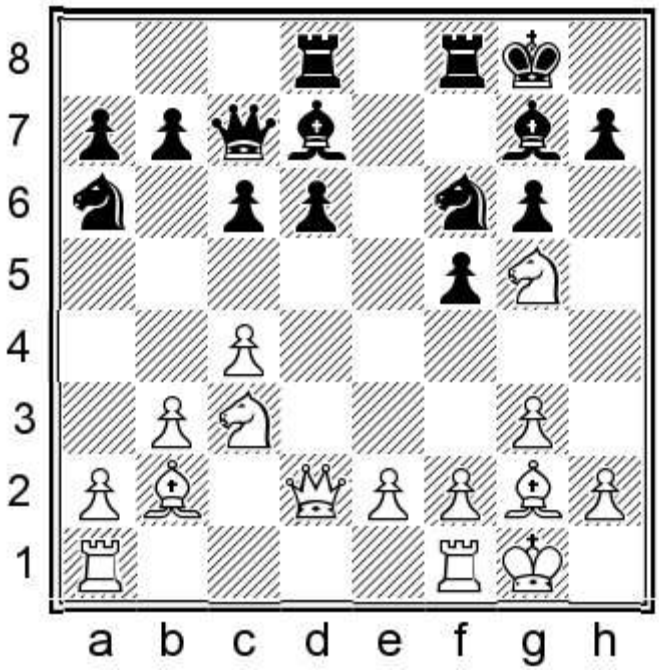
White has centralized all his pieces, but now finds himself almost out of moves. In the next ten moves, not much will change, but it's interesting to see how Black gradually takes over the initiative. 17.♕b1 ♖fe8 18.♕c2 ♕e7 19.♘f3 ♘g4 20.h3 ♘e5 21.♘d4 ♘f7 First Black brings his knight to a square from where it protects d6, can jump to many interesting squares quickly, and doesn't get in the way of the g7-bishop. 22.f4 ♕c7 23.♔h2 ♖e7 24.♖e2 ♖de8



Position after: 24...♖de8

Now he pressurizes White's weakness with both rooks. 25.♖de1 ♕b6 26.♕d1 a4!↑ And finally he creates more weaknesses on the other side of the board, Giri, A (2734) – Ponomariov, R (2731), Beijing 2013, 0-1 (53).

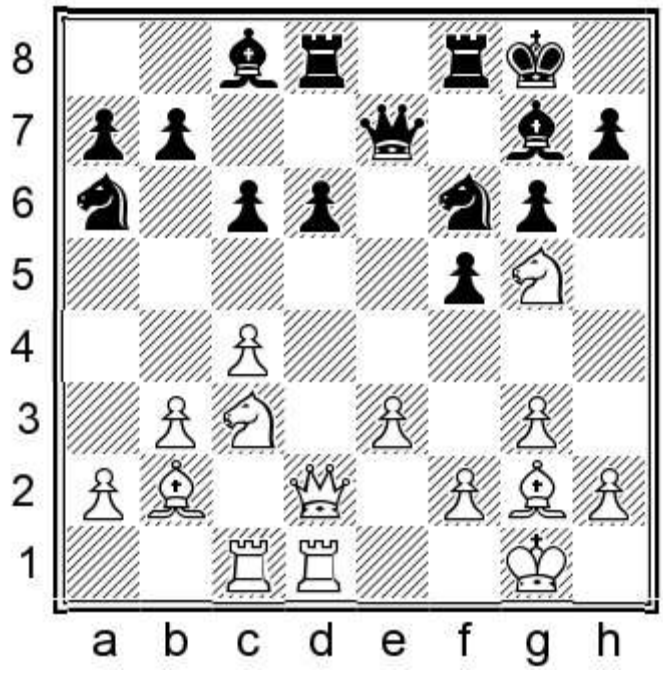
13...♖ad8



Position after: 13...♖ad8

14.♖ad1

14.♖fd1 ♗c8 15.♖ac1 ♕e7 16.e3

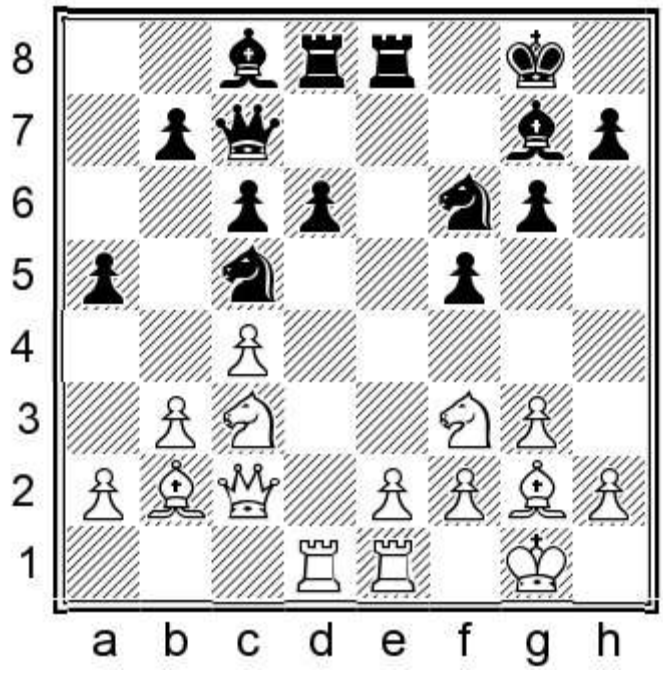


Position after: 16.e3

A) 16...♘c5!? is also very playable. Black simply wants to put a knight on e4. As we've already said, it's a common idea once White has pushed e3, weakening the light squares. 17.b4 h6 18.♘h3 ♘ce4 19.♘xe4 fxe4 20.♘f4 ♗f5 21.h3 g5 22.♘e2 h5 23.b5 ♕d7 24.bxc6 bxc6 25.♔h2 ♖f7 26.♗c3 ♕c8 27.♗a5 ♖df8↑ with a dangerous attack on the kingside. Black won quickly in Yilmaz, M (2557) – Motylev, A (2656), Yerevan 2014, 0-1 (35).

B) 16...♘g4 17.♘f3 ♘c5=

14...♗c8 15.♖fe1 ♘c5 16.♕c2 a5 17.♘f3 ♖fe8=

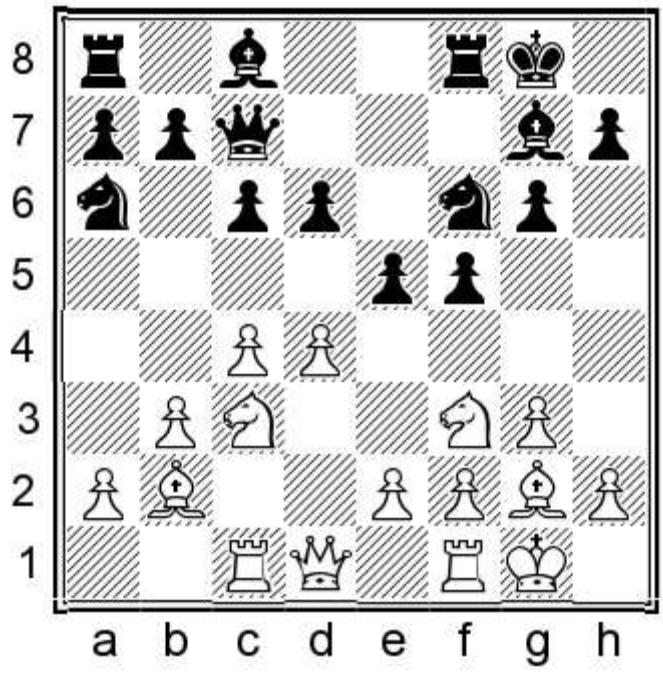


Position after: 17...♖fe8=

This was played in the game Gelfand, B (2764) – Ponomariov, R (2756), Elancourt 2013, ½-½ (24). Play is completely normal and similar to the previous subchapter.

l) 8.b3 ♘a6 9.♗b2 ♕c7 10.♖c1

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.c4 0-0 6.0-0 d6 7.♘c3 c6 8.b3 ♘a6!? 9.♗b2 ♕c7 10.♖c1 e5

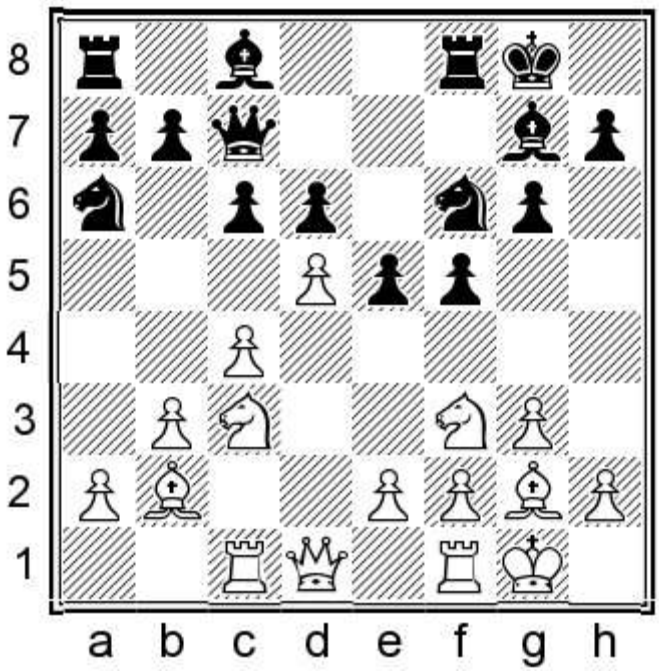


Position after: 10...e5

11.♘b5!?

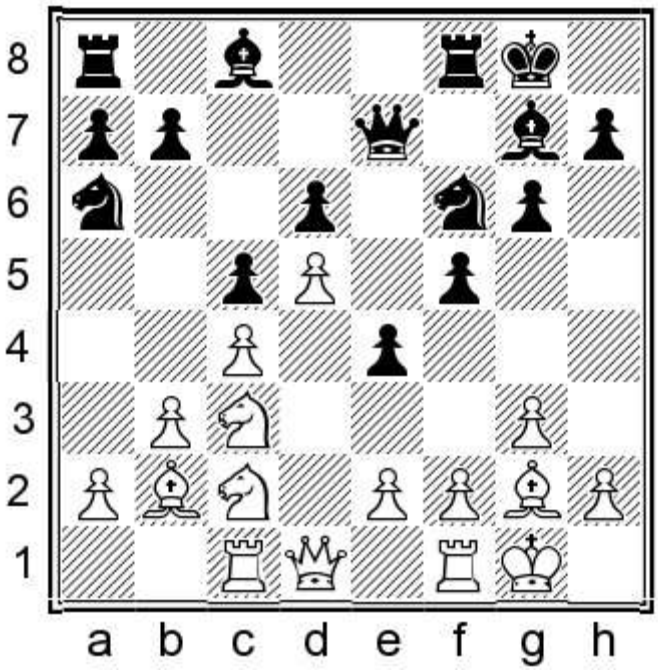
White has decided to go for this pseudo-sacrifice in most games. It made a great impression on me the first time I saw this position (in a game next to mine!).

A) 11.d5



Position after: 11.d5

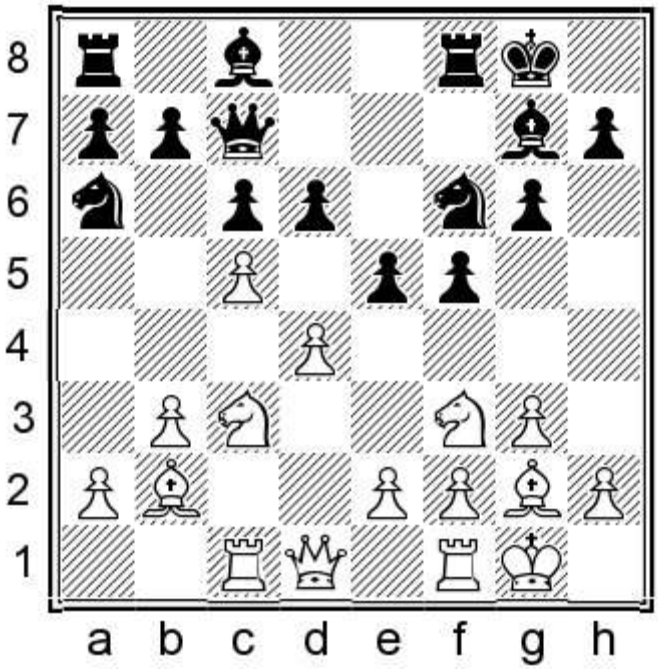
This move seems very strange to me. In general White pushes d5 earlier, in order to be able to take the e-pawn en passant. I don't think it makes much sense here, but it has been played by a well-known theoretician... 11...e4!?N [11...c5 12.e4 fxe4 13.♘g5± White's play was quite justified here in Marin, M (2556) – Alvarado Diaz, A (2402), Benasque 2018, 1-0 (78).] 12.♘d4 c5 13.♘c2 [13.♘db5 ♕e7 14.f3 ♗d7↑] 13...♕e7⇄



Position after: 13...♕e7⇄

Black will follow with ...♗d7, ...♘c7, ...a6 and maybe ...b5 if he is allowed to. On the other hand, White should try to open the center with f3, but it's not clear that it's really going to work.

B) 11.c5?!

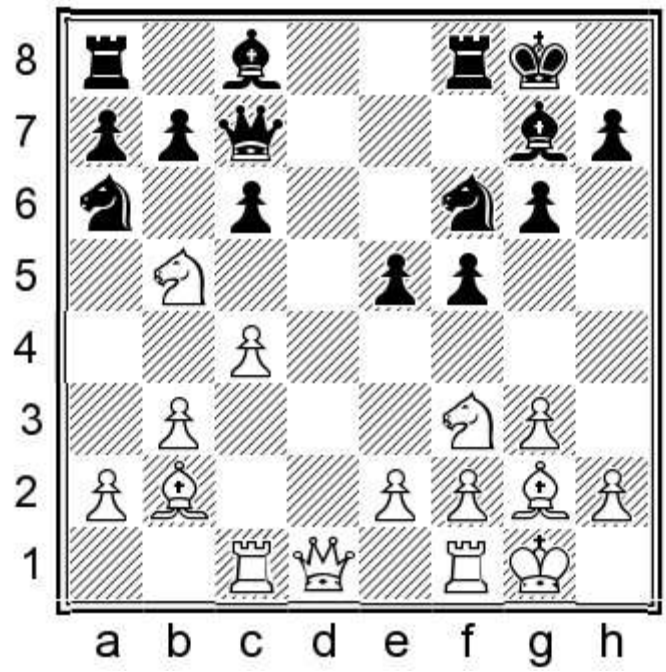


Position after: 11.c5?!

This is not a great idea, but Black should immediately deviate from the only game to have seen this position, Shishkin, V (2512) – Gumularz, S (2258), Krakow 2015, ½-½ (54), by playing 11...e4!

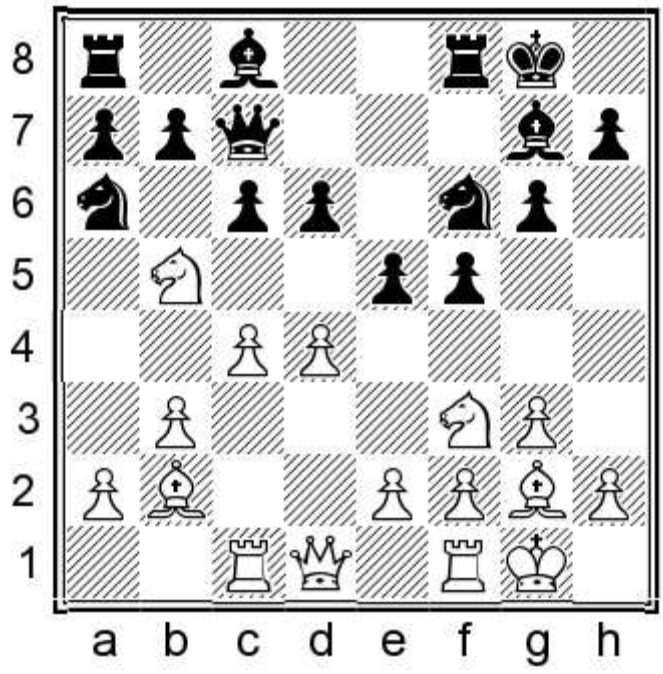
12.cxd6 ♕xd6 13.♘e5 ♗e6 14.e3 ♘b4∓. Black has the stronger center and an obvious square on d5 for his knights.

C) ≤ 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.♘b5



Position after: 12.♘b5

This is the same idea, and Black can transpose either with 12...♕e7 or 12...♕d8, but here he has an additional idea which might be even stronger: 12...♕b6!?. This move was not possible in the other move order, since the queen had to keep defending the d6-pawn. 13.♘d6 e4 14.♘g5 ♕c7 15.♘xc8 ♕xc8= Black has a strong pawn chain, but is missing his light-squared bishop. It should be about equal.

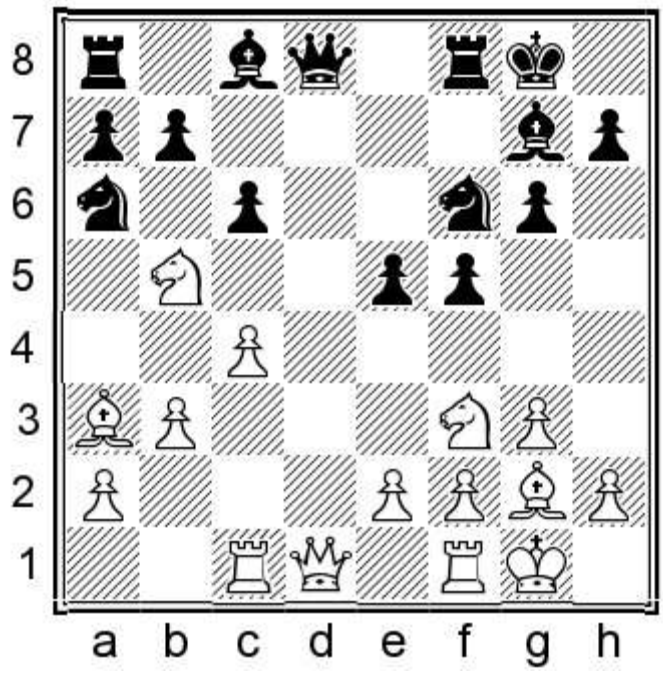


Position after: 11.♘b5!?

11...♕e7!

This has been played less often, but seems stronger to me.

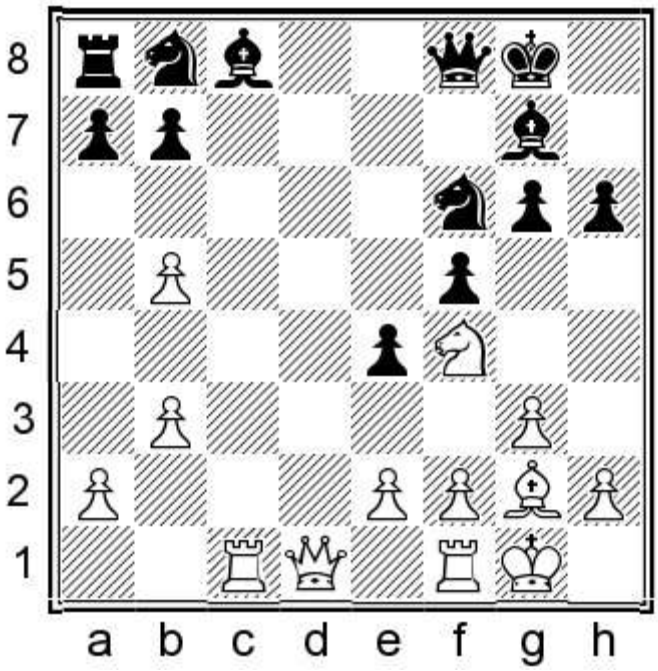
A) 11...♕d8 This is Black's other option. 12.dxe5 dxe5 13.♗a3



Position after: 13.♗a3

13...e4! [13...♘e4 14.♗xf8 ♕xf8 15.♘c3 ♘xc3 16.♖xc3 e4 17.♘d4± Black doesn't seem to generate

enough counterplay in this line. 17...c5?! 18.♘b5 ♗xc3 19.♘xc3±] 14.♘g5 h6 We are in the middle of a forcing sequence, at the end of which I slightly prefer White. 15.♘h3 cxb5 16.cxb5 ♘b8 17.♗xf8 ♕xf8 18.♘f4



Position after: 18.♘f4

A1) 18...♕e8?! This was played in the game next to me the first time I saw this 11.♘b5 idea. Black was severely crushed. After 19.♘xg6 ♗d7, in Hera, I (2622) – Vuilleumier, A (2370), Bad Ragaz 2016, 1-0 (33), the Hungarian grandmaster could even have improved his play with 20.♘f4 ♕e5 21.♗h3± when it's very difficult for Black to develop his queenside.

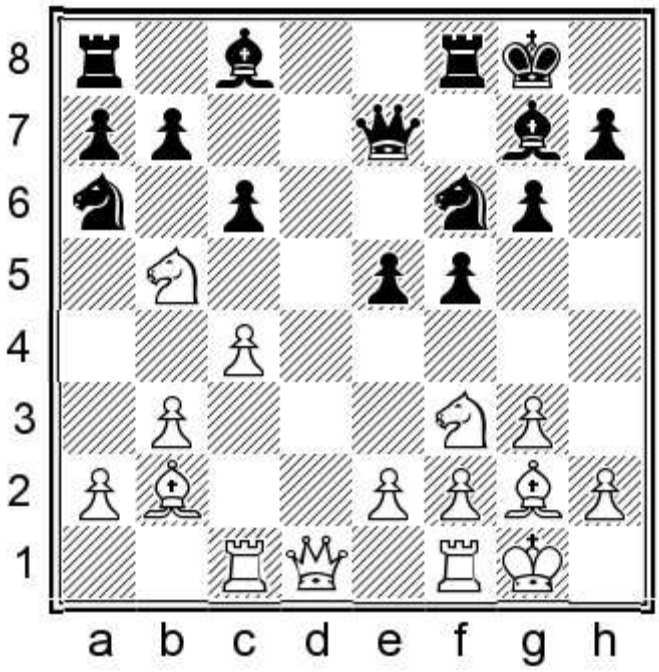
A2) 18...♔h7! 19.f3 exf3 20.♗xf3⩲ White's game definitely seems easier to play. He will try to invade the seventh rank, and combine attacks on b7 and against Black's king.

B) 11...cxb5? 12.cxb5 ♕b6 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.bxa6± White obviously stands much better if we accept the Trojan horse.

12.dxe5

12.♘xd6? This is an obvious blunder. 12...♕xd6 13.dxe5 ♕xd1∓

12...dxe5

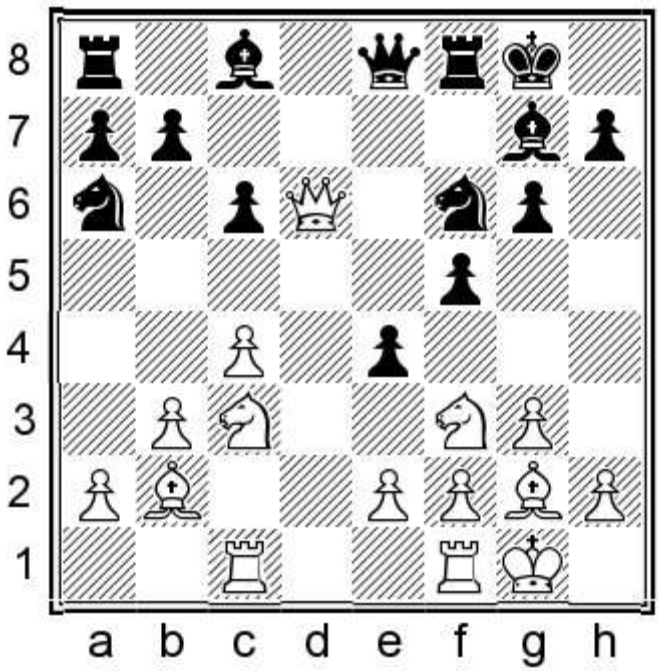


Position after: 12...dxe5

13.♗a3□

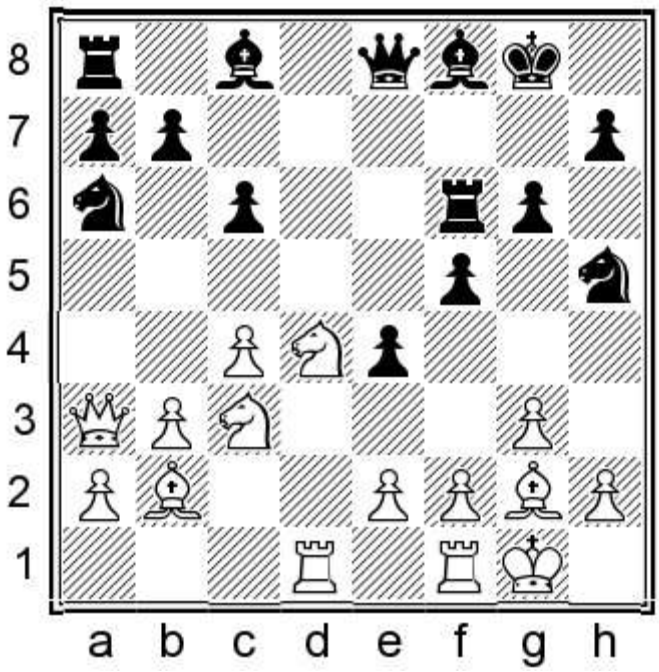
Any other move would already be better for Black.

A) 13.♕d6?! ♕e8! This is an improvement over Cheparinov's game that I've already played once. [≤ 13...♕xd6 14.♘xd6 e4 Now in the game Huzman, A (2557) – Cheparinov, I (2689), Gibraltar 2017, ½-½ (34), White could have kept a good position with 15.♘g5!N 15...h6 16.♘xc8 ♖fxc8 17.♘e6±.] 14.♘c3 Playing this move is tantamount to admitting that White's concept has failed, but there is nothing really better. [14.♘xe5 cxb5 15.cxb5 ♕xb5 16.♖fd1 ♕e8⇄] 14...e4



Position after: 14...e4

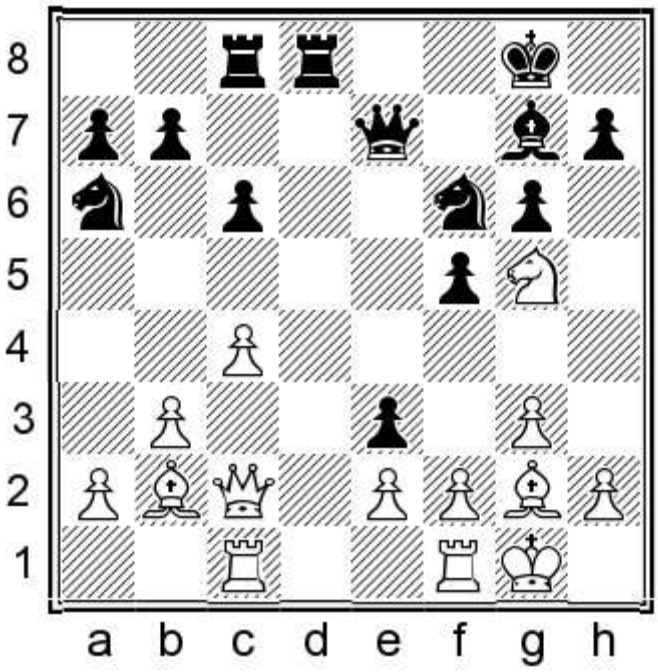
15.♘d4 [15.♘e1 might be best, but is quite depressing, e.g. 15...♗e6 16.♘c2 ♖d8 17.♕a3 ♖f7↑] This was my game Rios, C (2482) – Demuth, A (2519), Rochefort 2019, ½-½ (20). Black could now have kept a great position with 15...♘h5! 16.♖cd1 [16.♘c2 f4! 17.♖cd1 e3 18.fxe3 ♗e5 19.♕a3 ♗f5 20.exf4! ♗xc3 21.e4! ♗xb2 22.♕xb2 ♗g4∓] 16...♖f6! This is the point. Black has taken the f4-square away from the queen. 17.♕a3 ♗f8



Position after: 17...♗f8

18.♕a4 [18.b4 ♘xb4∓] 18...♘c5 19.♕a5 b6∓ The queen is in trouble, and White is about to lose material. He just has a choice of evils.

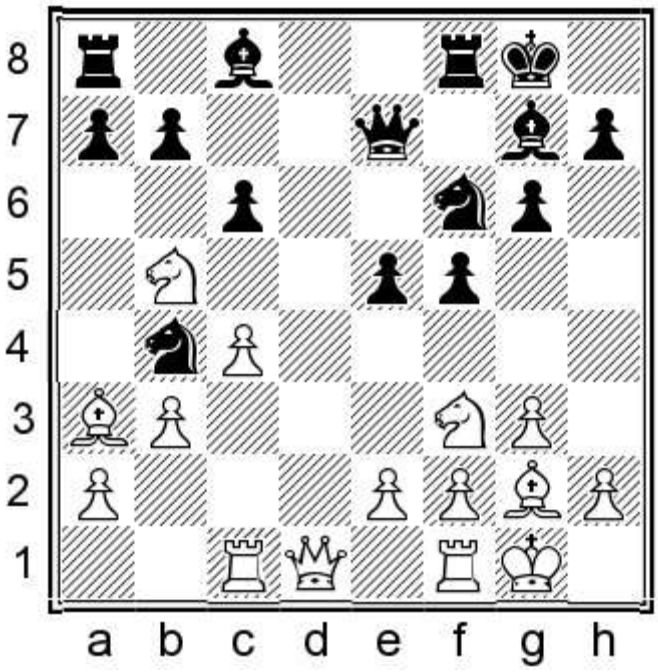
B) 13.♘d6? e4 14.♘g5 ♖d8 15.♘xc8 ♖axc8 16.♕c2 e3!∓



Position after: 16...e3!∓

Black's threat is 17...♘g4, and his opponent is almost defenseless against it. I actually reached this position once in a rapid game in Catalonia and White collapsed quickly: 17.♘f3? ♘g4 18.♗xg7 ♕xg7 19.c5 exf2+ 20.♖xf2 ♘xf2 21.♔xf2 0-1 Cervello (2250) – Demuth (2542), Sabadell rapid 2017.

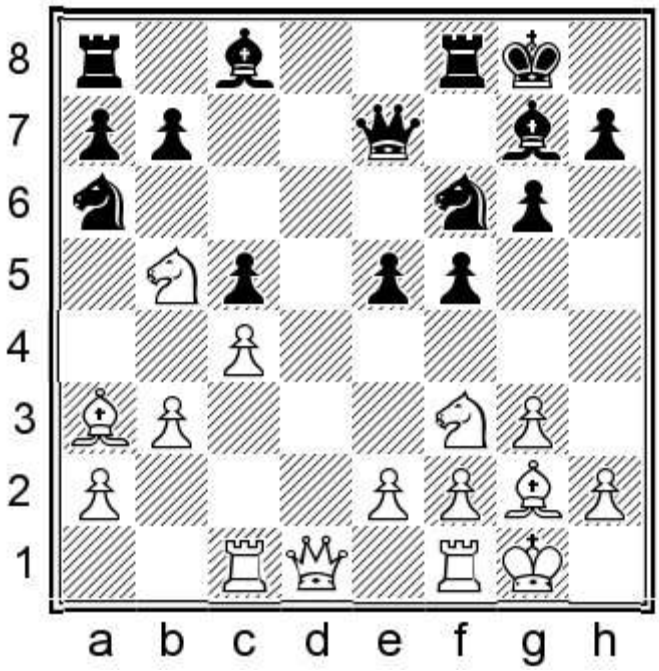
13...♘b4!?N



Position after: 13...♘b4!?N

A new move that I prepared some time ago, but which hasn't been played yet. It leads to a forcing line.

13...c5



Position after: 13...c5

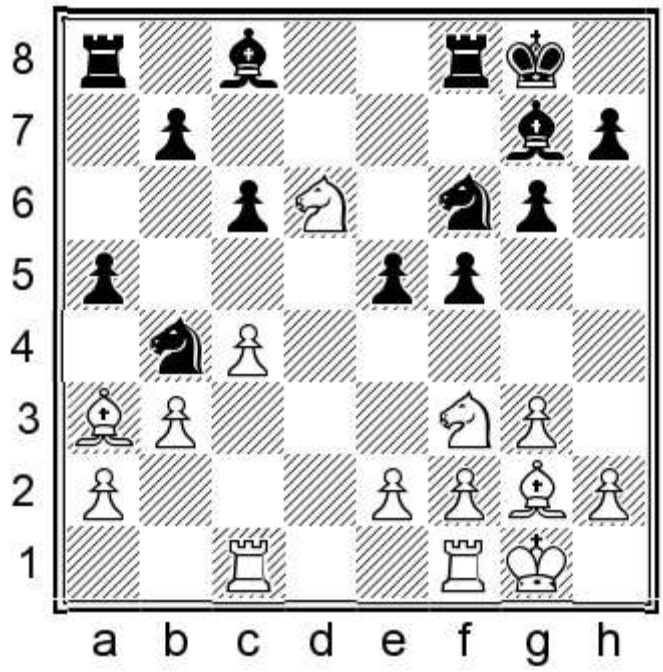
I feel it's inferior to weaken the light squares like this. If Black has another option, he should play it. 14.♕d6 ♕xd6 15.♘xd6 e4 16.♘g5± This occurred in Yilmaz, M (2633) – Nepomniachtchi, I (2733), Heraklio 2017, ½-½ (35). I think it's quite decent for White.

14.♕d6!

A) 14.♘c3? e4 15.♘d4 a5∓

B) 14.♘d6? a5 15.♘xc8 ♖fxc8∓

14...♕xd6 15.♘xd6 a5!



Position after: 15...a5!

First we stabilize the knight. White is unlikely to be willing to take it now, since it would effortlessly bring our rook into play.

16.♘xe5!

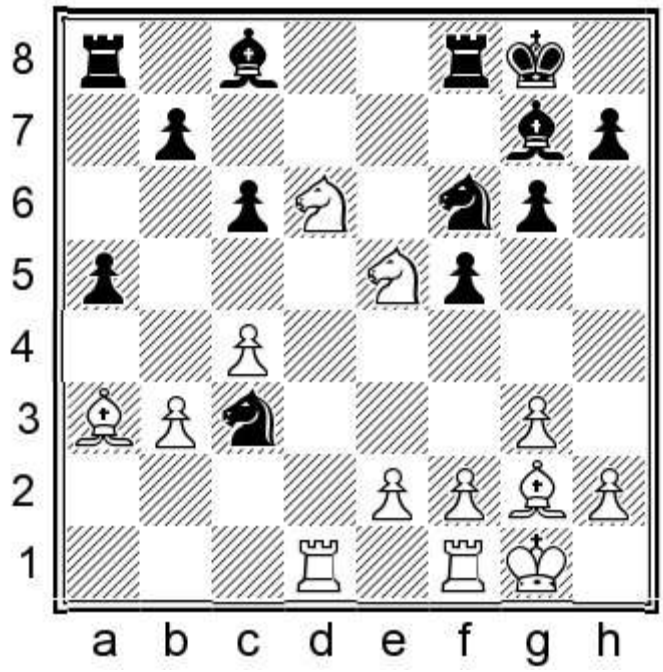
A) 16.♘xc8?! ♖axc8 17.♘xe5 ♖fe8 18.♗xb4 axb4 19.f4 ♘h5! 20.e4 ♗xe5 21.fxe5 fxe4 22.♗xe4 ♖xe5=

B) 16.♗b2?! e4! 17.♘g5 ♘xa2 18.♖a1 ♘b4 19.♗c3 ♖a6!∓ White has achieved nothing but to let the e-pawn live, blocking his g2-bishop.

16...♘xa2 17.♖c2!

The right square, not necessarily an obvious one, since it stays on the knight's route.

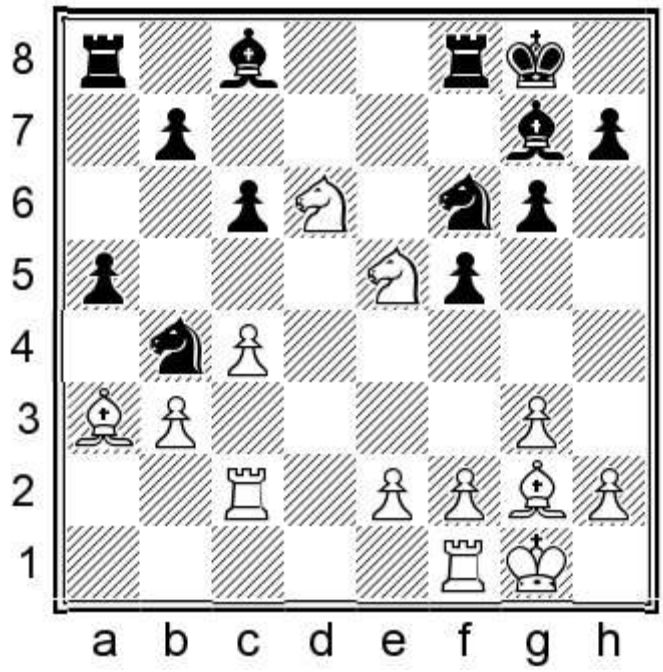
17.♖cd1 ♘c3



Position after: 17...♘c3

18.♖d3 [18.♖d2 ♖d8 19.♘ef7 ♖d7 20.♖c2 ♘ce4↑ Once again, White should be careful not to lose material.] 18...♘xe2+ 19.♔h1 a4! 20.bxa4 [20.b4? ♘e4!∓ Many pieces are hanging in White's camp and the rook on f8 is no longer a target for the a3-bishop.] 20...♖xa4 21.♖e1 ♘d4!=

17...♘b4

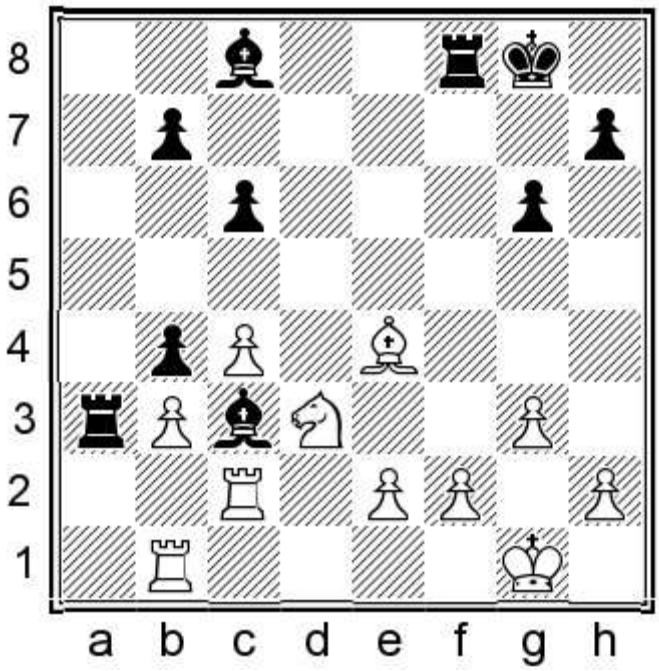


Position after: 17...♘b4

White faces his first real choice. He has two ways to try to get the better middlegame.

18.♖d2

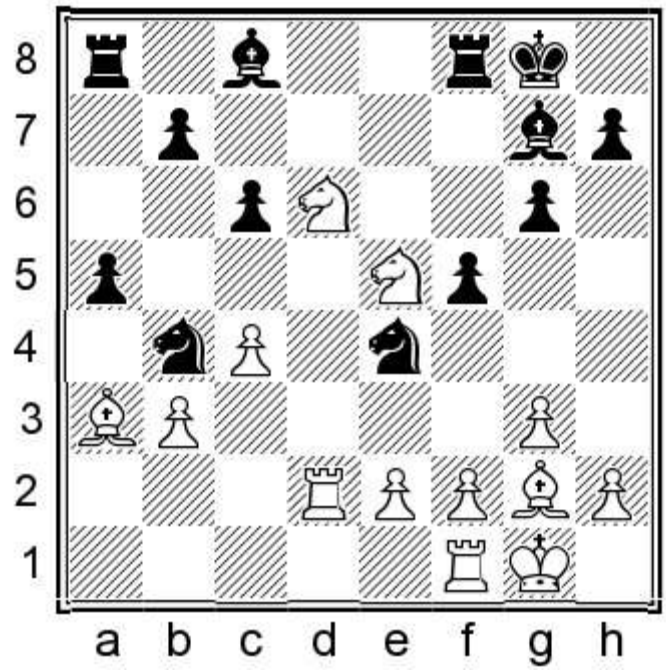
18.♗xb4 Not the most logical to me, as it allows our rook to come into play straight away, but White wants to target our b4-pawn. 18...axb4 19.♘d3! ♖a3 20.♖b1! ♘e4 21.♘xe4 fxe4 22.♗xe4 ♗c3⩱



Position after: 22...♗c3⩱

It seems to me that Black enjoys enough compensation. He will bring his king to the center, probably e7 to begin with. Then a possible plan is to play ...♗e6 followed by ...b5.

18...♘e4!



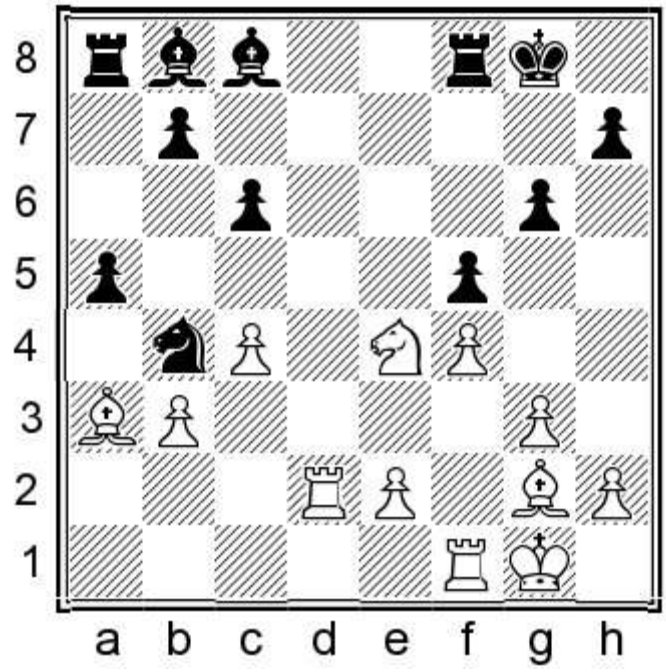
Position after: 18...♘e4!

19.♘xe4

19.♗xe4 ♗xe5 20.♘xc8 ♖axc8 21.♗g2 ♖cd8 22.♖fd1 ♖xd2 23.♖xd2 ♗c3=

19...♗xe5 20.♘c5

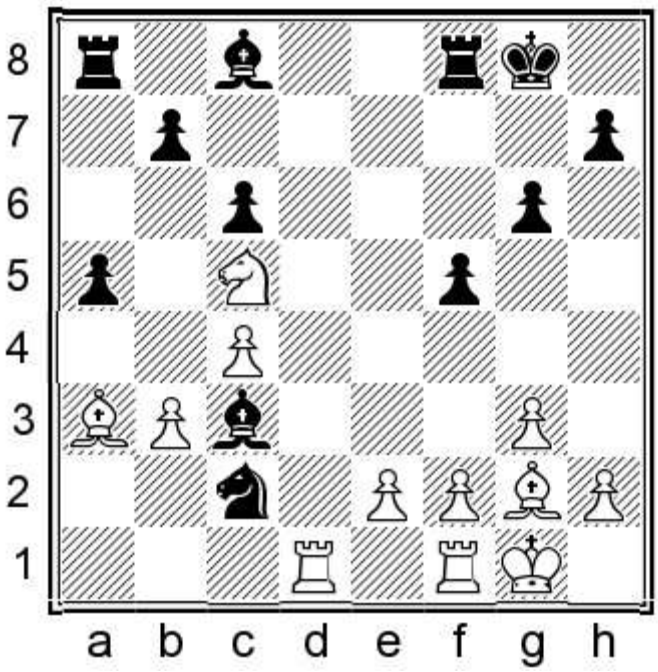
20.f4?! ♗b8



Position after: 20...♗b8

21.♖a1 fxe4 22.♗xb4 ♗a7+ 23.♔f1 axb4 24.♖da2 g5 25.e3 ♗xe3 26.♖xa8 gxf4 27.gxf4 ♗xf4= I think this is even simpler to play as Black.

20...♗c3 21.♖dd1 ♘c2!



Position after: 21...♘c2!

I think this is the easiest way to play. I won't go deeply into the variation, as we are already quite far from the latest games, but the general assessment is that it's fine for Black.

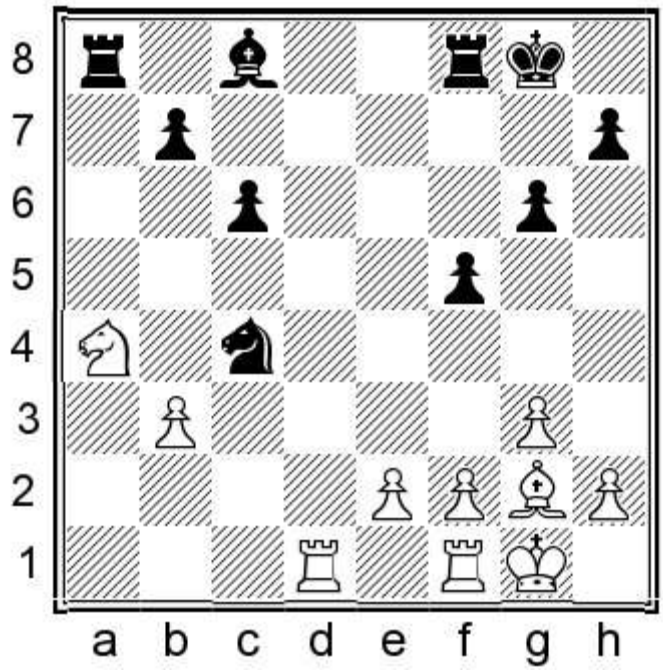
22.♘a4

A) 22.♗c1?! ♘d4 23.e3 ♘e2+ 24.♔h1 ♘xc1 25.♖xc1 ♗b4∓

B) 22.♖c1 ♘d4 23.♔h1 ♗b4 24.♗xb4 axb4 25.e3 ♘e6 26.♘d3 ♖a3↑

C) 22.♖d3 ♗f6 23.♗c1 ♘b4 24.♖d2 ♘a6=

22...♘xa3 23.♘xc3 a4! 24.♘xa4 ♘xc4=



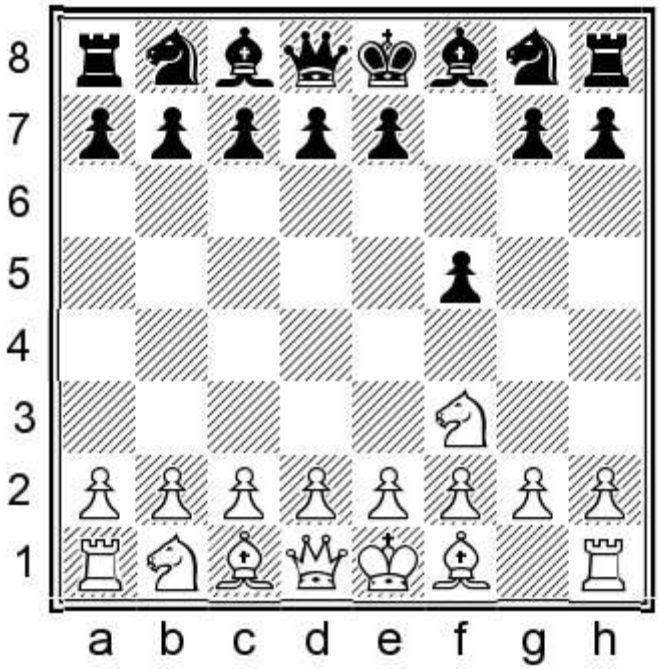
Position after: 24...♘xc4=

Clearly the most likely result now is a draw.

Part III
Reti and English Move Orders

Chapter 11
The Leningrad Dutch versus the Reti

1.♘f3 f5



Chapter Guide

Chapter 11 – The Leningrad Dutch versus the Reti

1.♘f3 f5

a) 2.b3

b) 2.e4

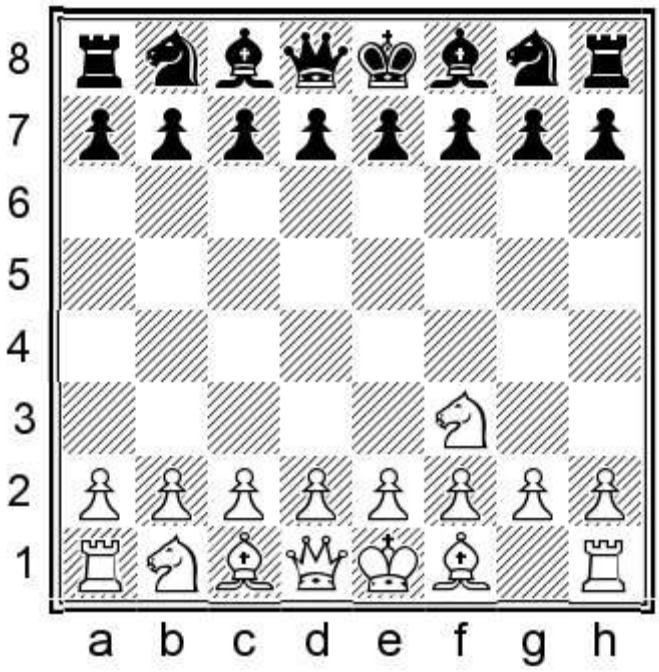
c) 2.g3

d) 2.d3 ♘c6 3.--, 3.e4

e) 2.d3 ♘c6 3.d4

a) 2.b3

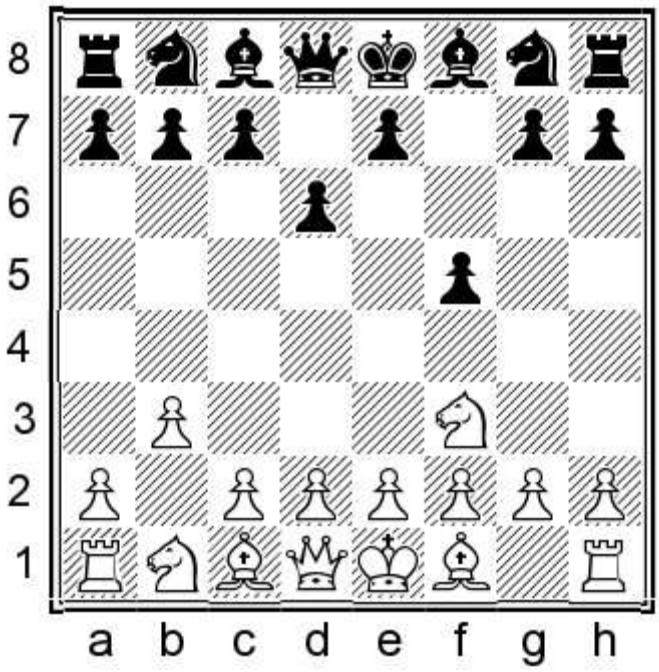
1.♘f3



Position after: 1.♘f3

If you're aiming to play the Dutch against 1.d4, you also have to be ready for 1.♘f3 and 1.c4. It would be illogical to prepare another reply, as White might play d4 later, transposing to a totally different opening from the Dutch. I don't think that Black has any reason to refrain from playing 1...f5 in either case.

1...f5 2.b3 d6!

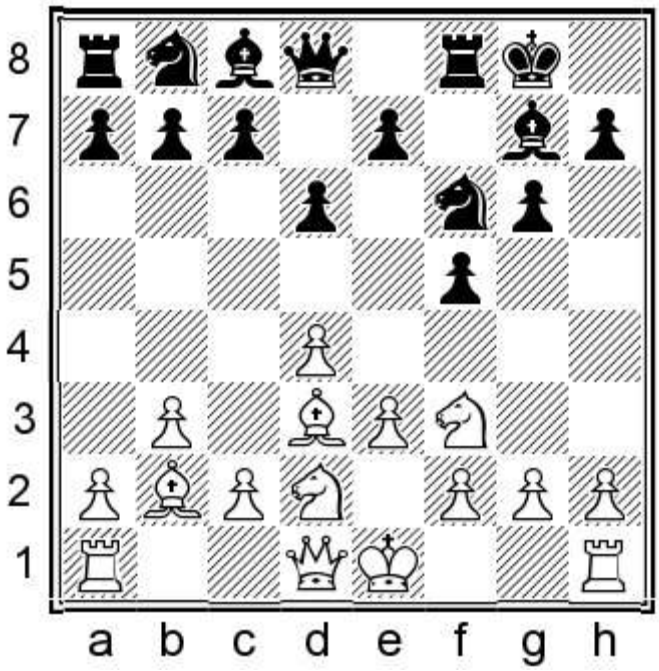


Position after: 2...d6!

I think this is the best move order. After 2...♘f6 3.♗b2, Black finds himself with a difficult choice, whether to allow 4.♗xf6, damaging his kingside pawn structure, or not. I prefer to avoid this and threaten 3...e5. Now it's White's choice to allow it or not.

3.♗b2

3.d4 This has been the most played move, but has little independent value, indeed, in Chapter 8, we discussed many possibilities for White to play with b3. Black was going to play ...d6 sooner or later anyway, so it should merely transpose. 3...♘f6 4.♗b2 g6 5.e3 ♗g7 6.♗d3 0-0 7.♘bd2

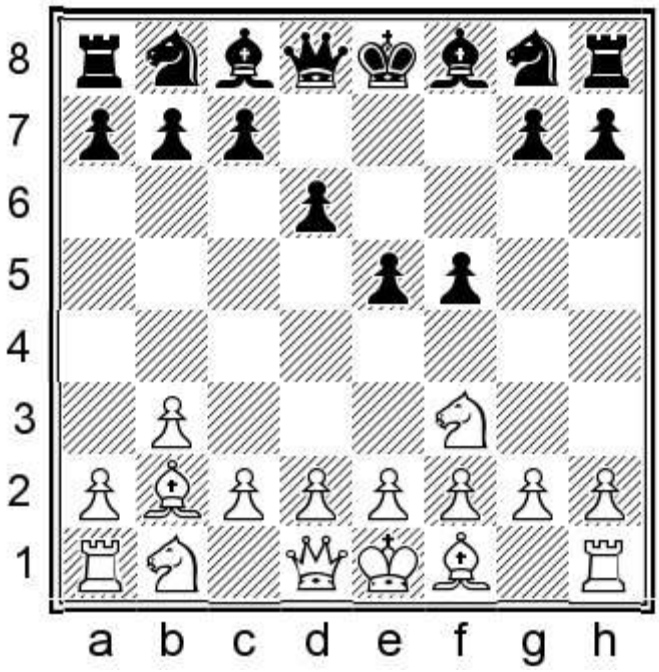


Position after: 7.♘bd2

For instance this is actually a transposition to the first subchapter of Chapter 8.

3...e5

This kind of opening can hardly cause Black any problems.

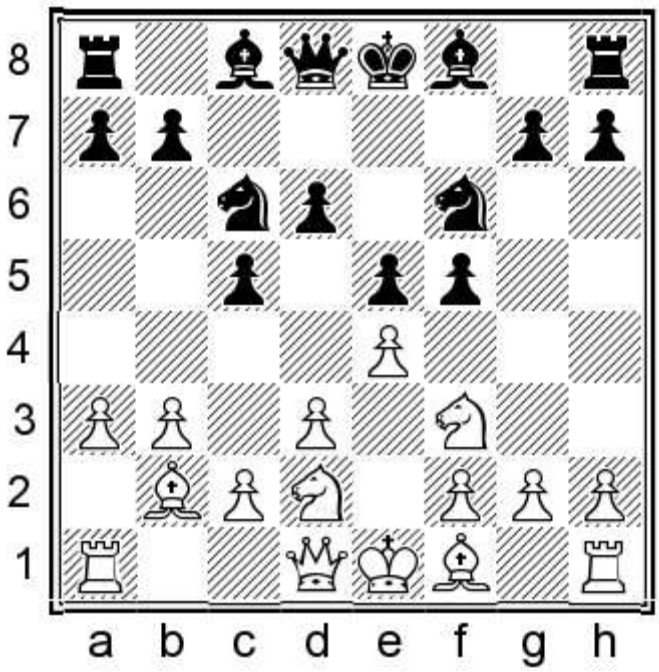


Position after: 3...e5

I'll quickly go over the main ideas, some akin to previous games.

4.c4

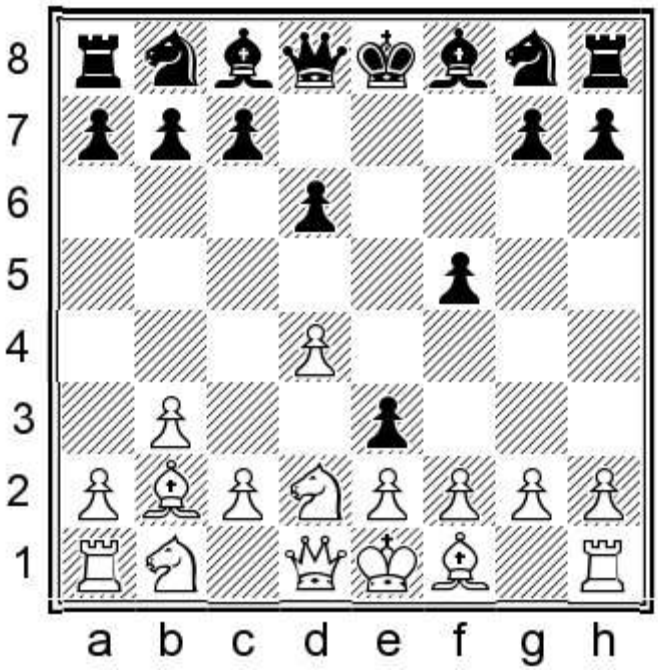
A) 4.d3 ♘f6 5.e4 This kind of Lisitsyn Gambit deferred doesn't seem dangerous at all. The bishop on b2 doesn't create much of an impression. 5...c5!? [5...fxe4?! 6.dxe4 ♘xe4 7.♘xe5! dxe5? 8.♕h5+± is White's idea. Avoiding this trap shows how limited his concept is.] 6.♘bd2 ♘c6 7.a3



Position after: 7.a3

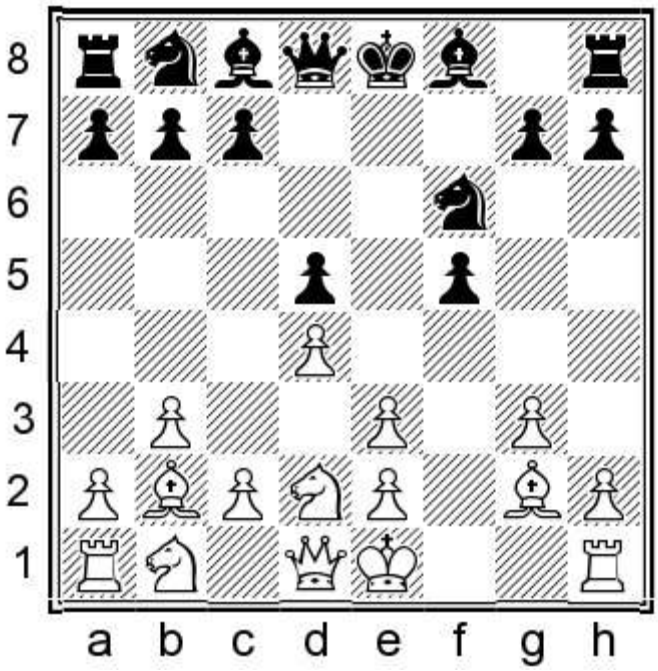
In the following game, White realized that he wasn't doing much, so tried do bring new forces into the game, starting with his queenside pawns. 7...♗e7 8.c3 Now, instead of 8...a5 as played in Tripoteau, N (2363) – Nijboer, F (2528), Rhodes 2013, 0-1 (26), it's possible to play something simpler like 8...0-0 9.b4 ♔h8 10.♗e2 fxe4 11.dxe4 ♘h5!↑ with a nice initiative on the f-file.

B) 4.d4 e4! 5.♘fd2 e3!?



Position after: 5...e3!?

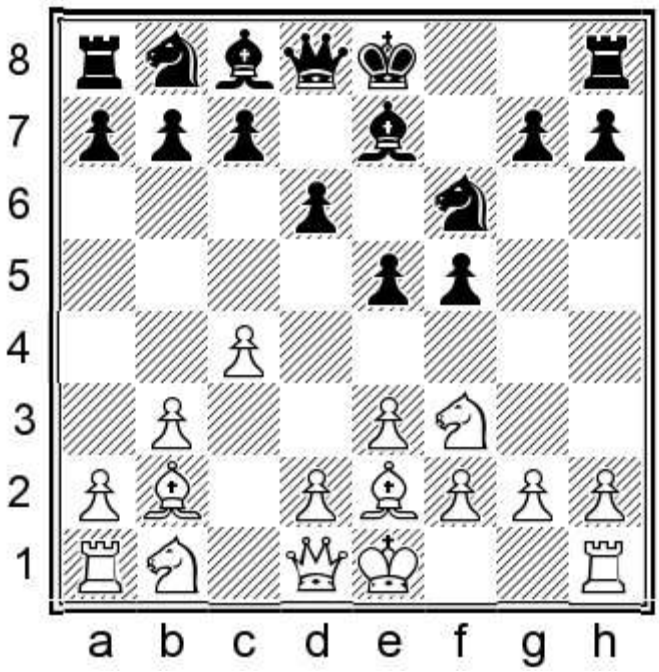
Not forced at all. Black can also play for a quick ...d5 and claim that he is already better, thanks to his space advantage, but the text move is interesting too. 6.fxe3 d5 7.g3 ♘f6 8.♗g2



Position after: 8.♗g2

I would now vary from the game Noe, C (2332) – Weidemann, J (2294), Baden 2014, 1-0 (26), with 8...♘g4 9.♘f1 c6 10.c4 ♗e6 11.♘c3 ♗e7⩲, with good long-term compensation for Black.

C) 4.e3 ♘f6 5.♗e2 ♗e7 6.c4

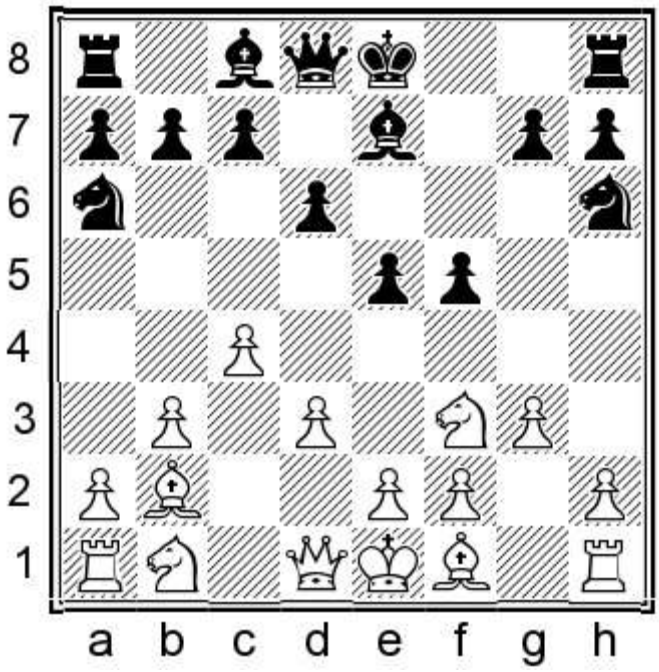


Position after: 6.c4

This kind of position may sometimes arise from an English Opening move order. There was nothing special about the moves, but Black enjoys the healthier development and can be satisfied to have taken control of the center. 6...0-0 7.♘c3 a5 8.0-0 ♘a6 9.d4 e4 10.♘d2 c6↑ Marton, J (2159) – Zsirai, P (2269), Hungary 2014, 0-1 (28). Black will soon play ...d5 with a nice space advantage, and possibly follow up with ...f4 in order to start an attack on the kingside.

4...♘f6

4...♗e7!? 5.d3 ♘a6 6.g3 ♘h6!?

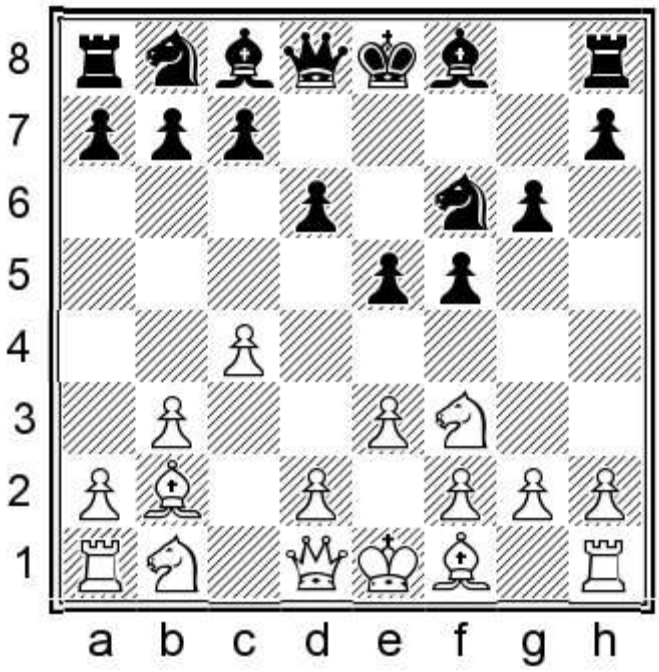


Position after: 6...♘h6!?

This is a bit too original for my taste, but it's actually quite reasonable, as neither of the knights gets in the way of the bishops. It's a way of saying that Black can try lots of things in this opening, which is a nice feeling. 7.♗g2 0-0 8.0-0 ♕e8 9.e3 c6 10.♘c3 ♗f6 11.♖c1 ♗e6 Black won a nice game in Ali Marandi, C (2495) – Gorovets, A (2533), Saint Louis 2017, 0-1 (41). He was soon able to start his attack with ...f4.

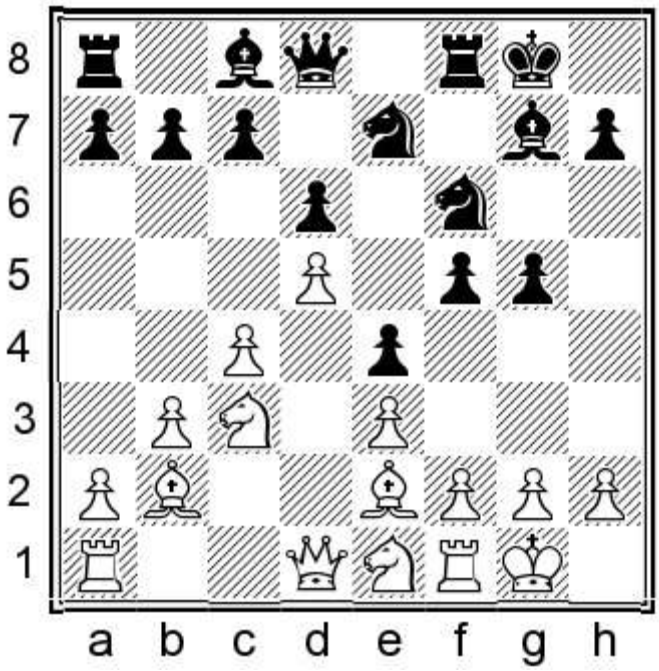
5.g3

5.e3 g6



Position after: 5...g6

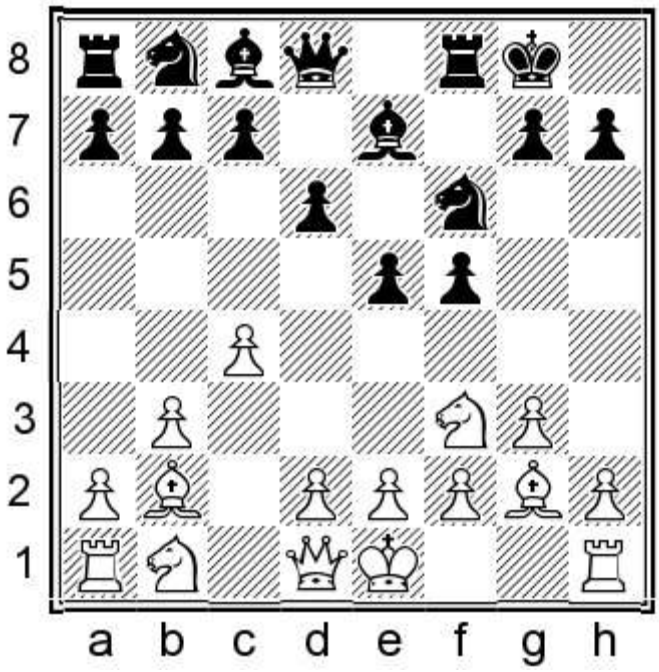
You've probably noticed that in general in this subchapter, I'm not offering variations including a kingside fianchetto for Black, but it's also very reliable, as shown by Carlsen in an internet game: 6.♗e2 ♗g7 7.0-0 0-0 8.♘c3 ♘c6 9.d4 e4 10.♘e1 ♘e7 11.d5 g5!→.



Position after: 11...g5!→

Magnus continued with ...♘g6 and ...f4, and his opponent's position barely lasted another ten moves. So, W (2815) – Carlsen, M (2832), chess.com 2017, 0-1 (21).

5...♗e7 6.♗g2 0-0

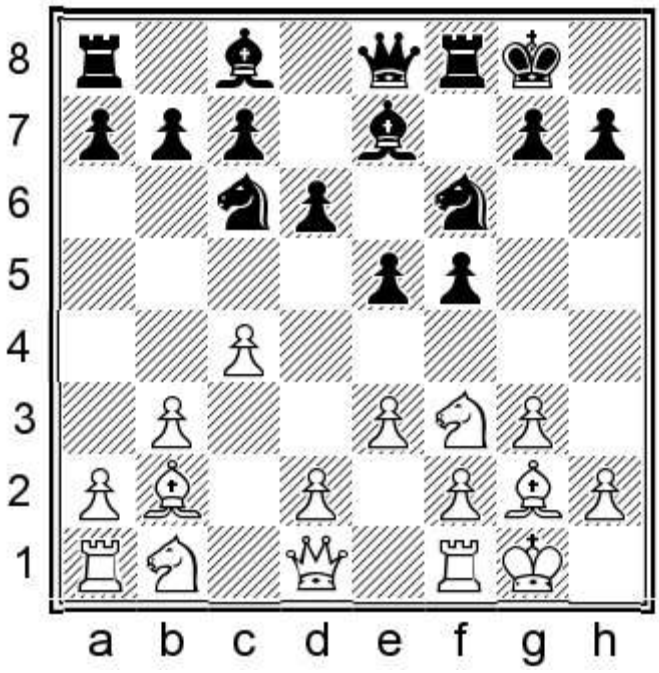


Position after: 6...0-0

At some point White will have to decide how to react in the center. We just need to be ready for that moment when it arrives.

7.0-0 ♕e8 8.e3 c6

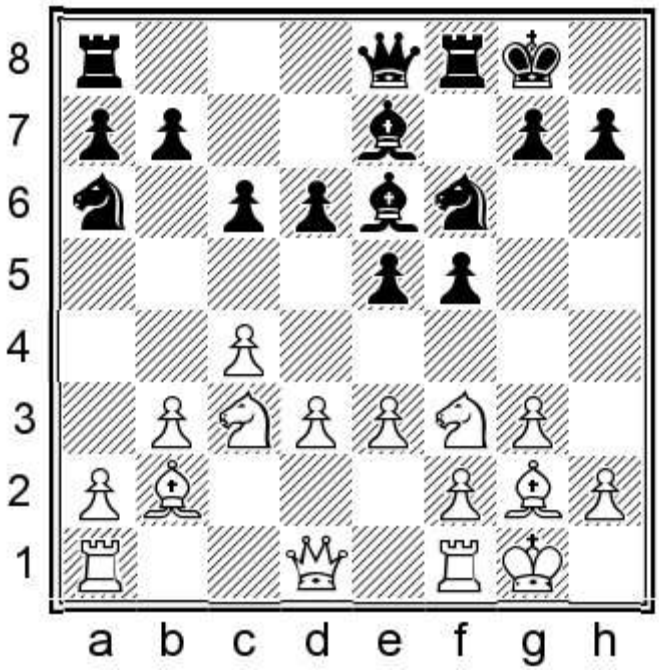
8...♘c6



Position after: 8...♘c6

Maybe it's too early to put the knight here, where it's exposed to the potential advance of White's pawns. 9.♘c3 [9.d4 e4! 10.♘e1 d5! 11.♘c2 ♗e6 12.cxd5 ♘xd5 13.♘c3 ♘cb4∓ White will have to accept having to fight against a strong knight, either on d3 or d5. Black won nicely in Paster, A (2046) – Ivanov, O (2441), Moscow 2019, 0-1 (55).] 9...♘b4!? 10.d3 c6 11.a3 ♘a6⇄

9.♘c3 ♗e6 10.d3 ♘a6↑

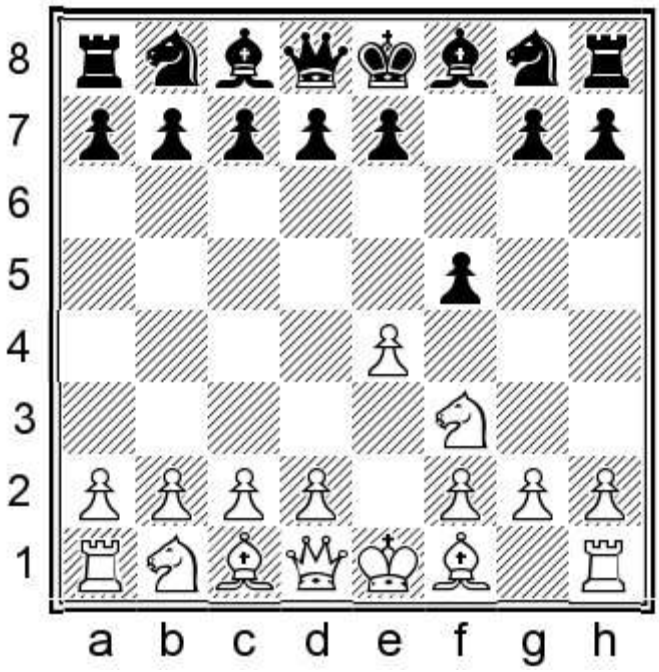


Position after: 10...♘a6↑

Black is ready to play ...d5 at some point, but can also push ...e4 if White goes d4. His game is definitely the more straightforward.

b) 2.e4

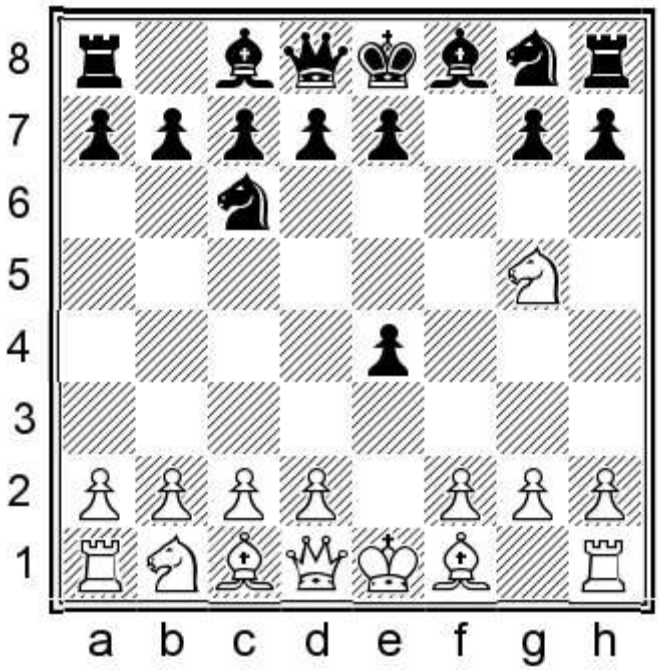
1.♘f3 f5 2.e4



Position after: 2.e4

Our study of Reti systems against the Dutch leads us to an interesting sacrifice, the Lisitsyn Gambit. Objectively, it's not particularly strong, but some players have been outplayed after facing it unprepared. My solution is to quickly give the pawn back! You'll also notice that it's similar to From's Gambit (1.f4 e5!?).

2...fxe4 3.♘g5 ♘c6!



Position after: 3...♘c6!

Some other lines have proven to be satisfactory for Black, but this is my preference. White is free to take his pawn back, but at the cost of some tempi.

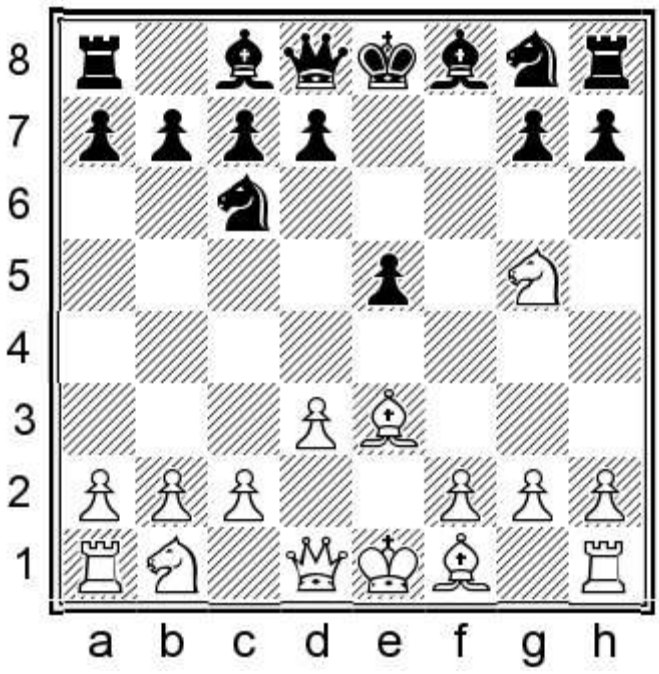
4.d3

4.♘xe4?! d5 5.♘g3 e5 6.♗e2 ♘f6∓ obviously can't be good for White.

4...e3!

This is the idea. Black returns the pawn, after which the white pawn on d3 will deprive the light-squared bishop of its natural developing square.

5.♗xe3 e5



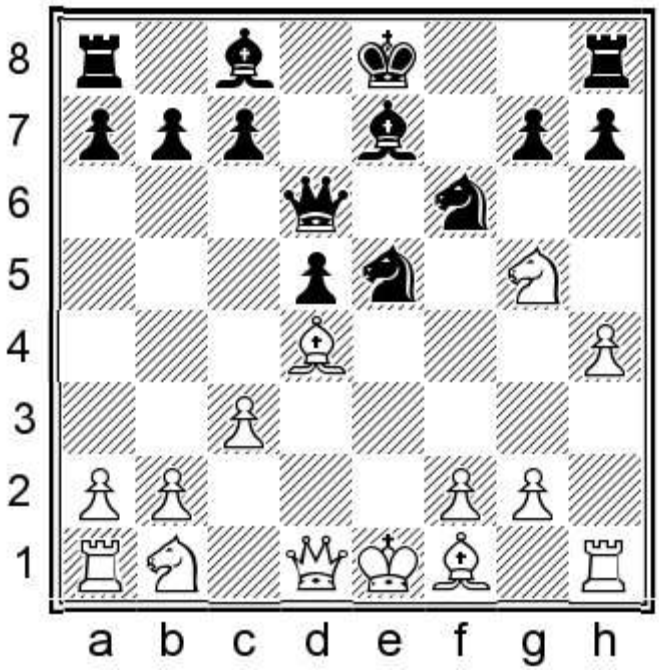
Position after: 5...e5

Now White has a range of options. Most of them are quite weak, but we will try to be exhaustive.

6.♗e2

This is the most played move in the position, but I don't feel it's particularly precise. Now we can really threaten the knight without fearing ♕h5+.

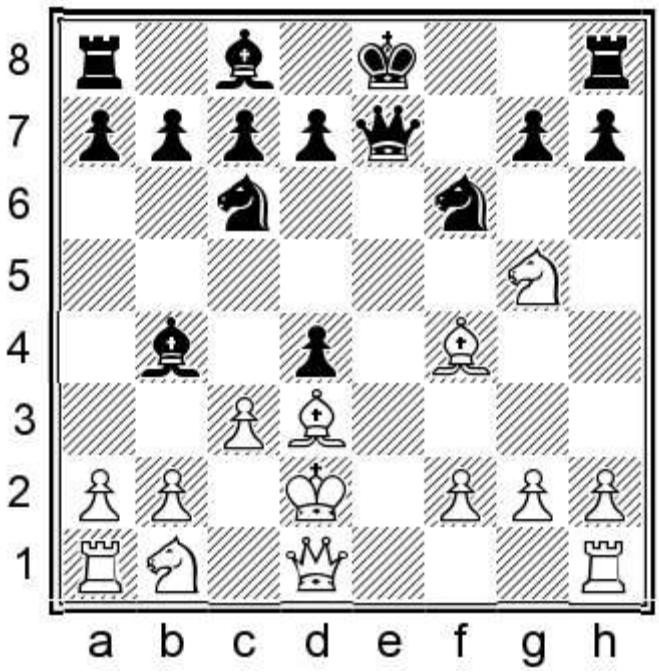
A) 6.c3?! Trying to play with d4 is just too slow. 6...♗e7 7.h4 ♘f6 8.d4 d5 9.dxe5 ♘xe5 10.♗d4 ♕d6∓



Position after: 10...♕d6∓

Black already has a nice lead in development, and nothing to worry about.

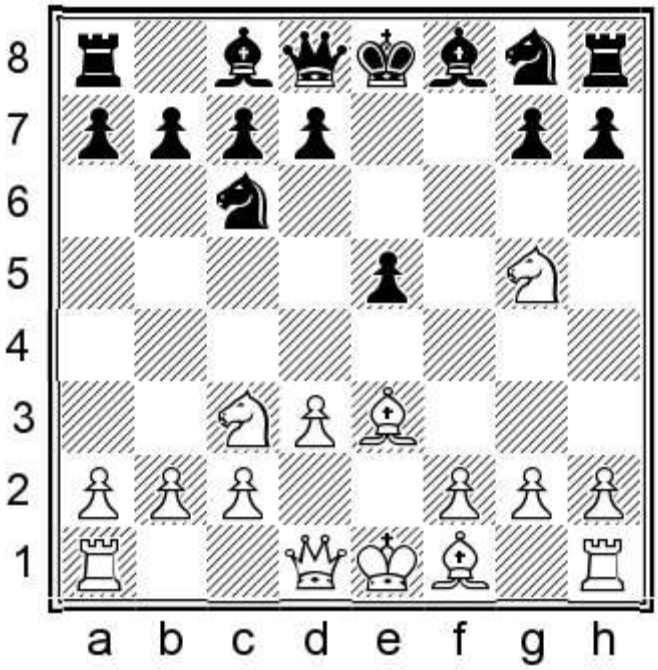
B) 6.d4? exd4 7.♗d3 Of course this is White's idea, otherwise his last move makes no sense at all. 7...♘f6 8.♗f4 ♗b4+ 9.c3 ♕e7+ 10.♔d2!



Position after: 10.♔d2!

White tries to mix things up. 10...dxc3+ 11.bxc3 ♗d6! 12.♗g3 ♘d8!∓ Black simply brings the knight to e6, covering the e-file.

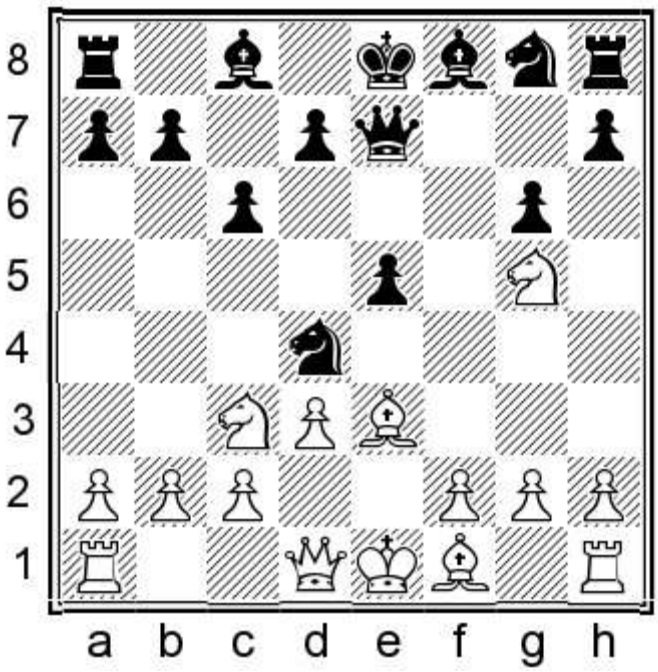
C) 6.♘c3



Position after: 6.♘c3

6...♗b4 [6...♗e7 7.h4 d5 8.d4 exd4 9.♗xd4 ♘xd4 10.♕xd4 ♘f6∓ was also good for Black in Dragun, K (2425) – Malaniuk, V (2509), Gorzow Wielkopolski 2012, ½-½ (20).] 7.a3 ♗xc3+ 8.bxc3 ♘f6 9.♗e2 0-0 10.0-0 d5↑

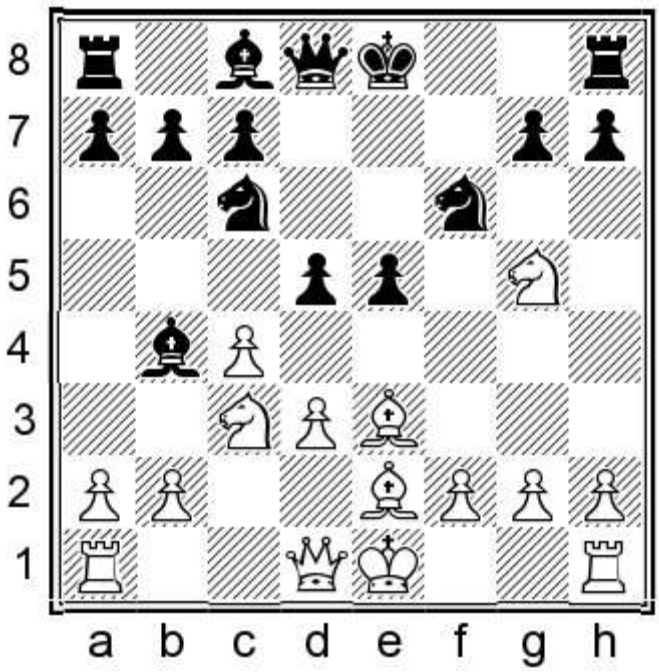
D) 6.♕h5+ g6 7.♕f3 ♕e7 8.♘c3 ♘d4 9.♕d1 c6∓



Position after: 9...c6∓

Black has parried all the threats. Once he has developed his kingside he will stand much better.

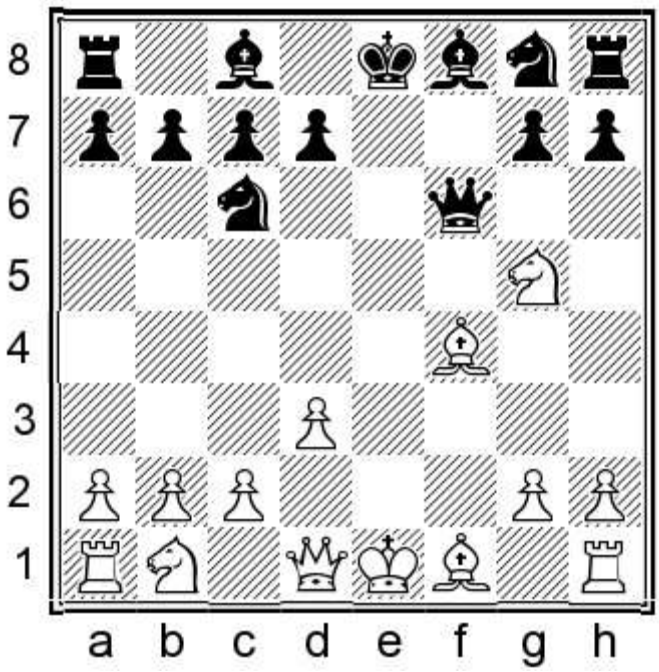
E) 6.c4 The main idea of this move is to prevent Black from completely occupying the center with ...d5. 6...♘f6 7.♘c3 ♗b4 8.♗e2 d5!



Position after: 8...d5!

9.a3 [9.cxd5 ♘xd5 10.♘ge4 0-0 11.0-0 ♘f4!↑] 9...♗xc3+ 10.bxc3 dxc4 11.0-0 ♗f5 12.dxc4 ♕xd1 13.♖fxd1 h6 14.♘f3 ♔f7= Black has the better pawn structure, but objectively the position should still be about equal because of White's bishop pair.

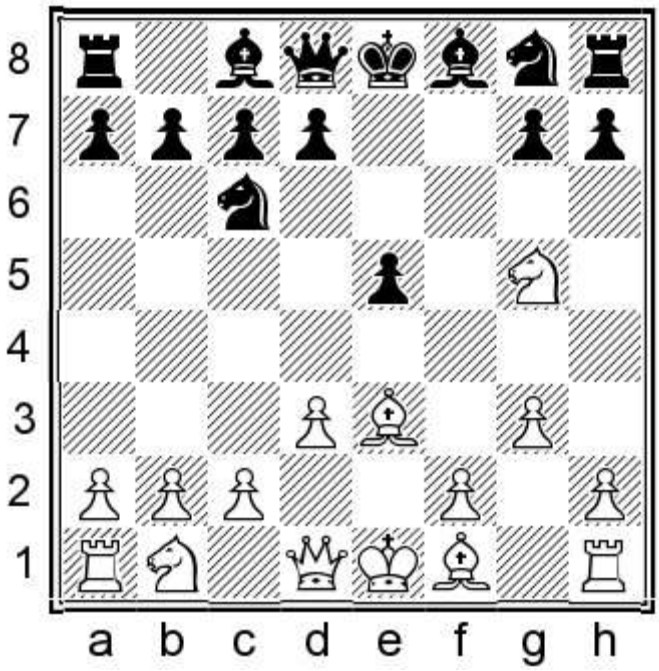
F) 6.f4 exf4 7.♗xf4 ♕f6!



Position after: 7...♕f6!

This move allows Black to assume the initiative. 8.♕c1 d5 9.♗e2 [9.♘c3? ♗b4 10.♗d2 ♗g4! 11.♘xd5? ♕xg5 12.♘xb4 ♕e7+ 13.♔f2 ♘xb4–+] 9...♗c5 10.c3 ♘ge7 11.d4 ♗b6 12.0-0 h6 13.♘f3 0-0∓

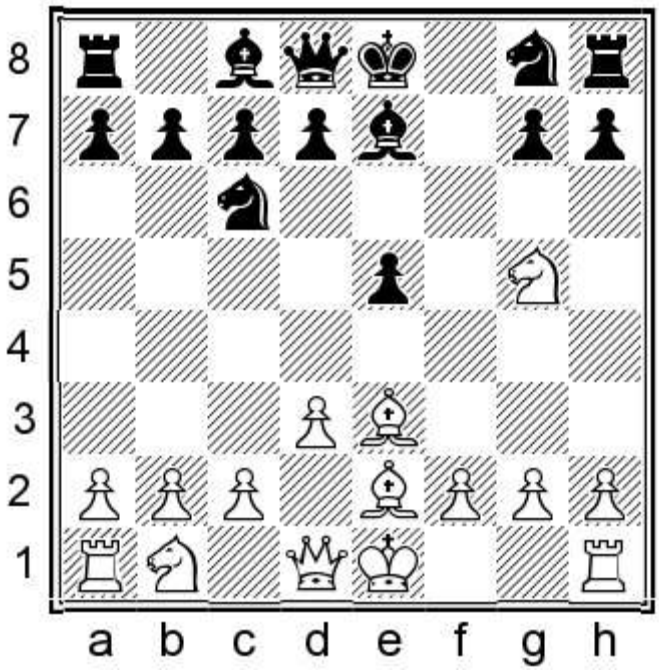
G) 6.g3



Position after: 6.g3

6...♗e7 [You could also consider 6...♘f6 , but 6...♗e7 looks more precise.] 7.♗g2! White doesn't need to protect the knight on g5, so he should get on with his development. [7.h4?! ♘f6 8.♗g2 d5 9.d4 ♗g4∓] 7...d5 [7...♗xg5? 8.♕h5+±] 8.0-0 ♗f5!= Black hasn't decided which side to castle yet, but he is fine anyway.

6...♗e7!

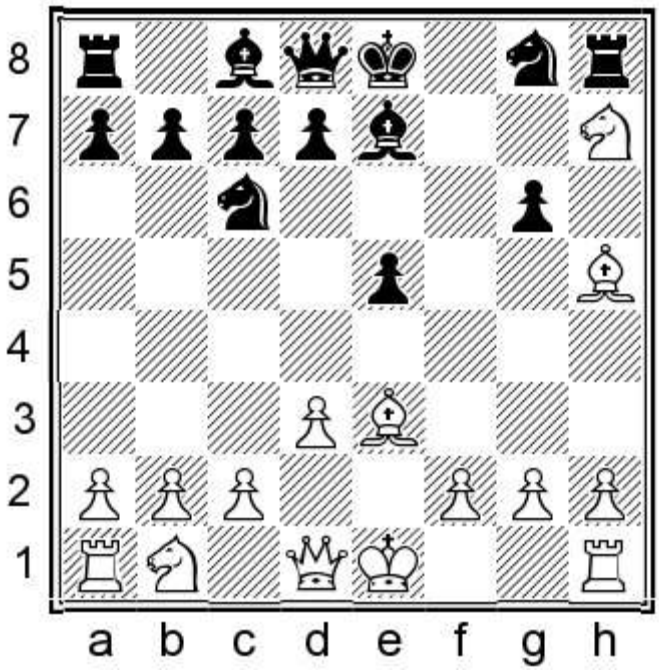


Position after: 6...♗e7!

7.♘f3

A) 7.h4 ♘f6 8.♗h5+ is an attempt to weaken our kingside, but it's too slow, e.g. 8...g6 9.♗f3 h6 10.♘e4 d5∓ and Black's control of the center gives him the advantage.

B) 7.♗h5+? White might fall for this trap. 7...g6 8.♘xh7?

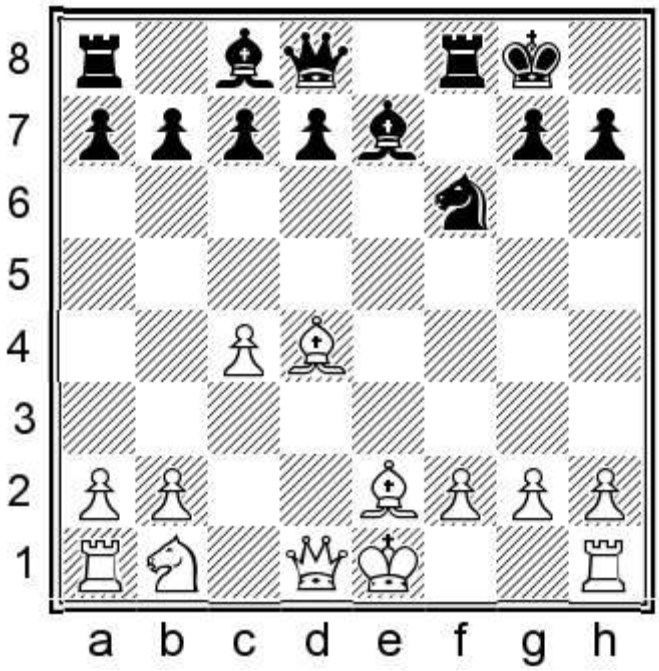


Position after: 8.♘xh7?

8...♔f7! A very important resource, otherwise Black is lost. The king is safe here and the knight is trapped, so Black is just winning. 9.♕f3+ ♔g7–+

7...♘f6 8.0-0

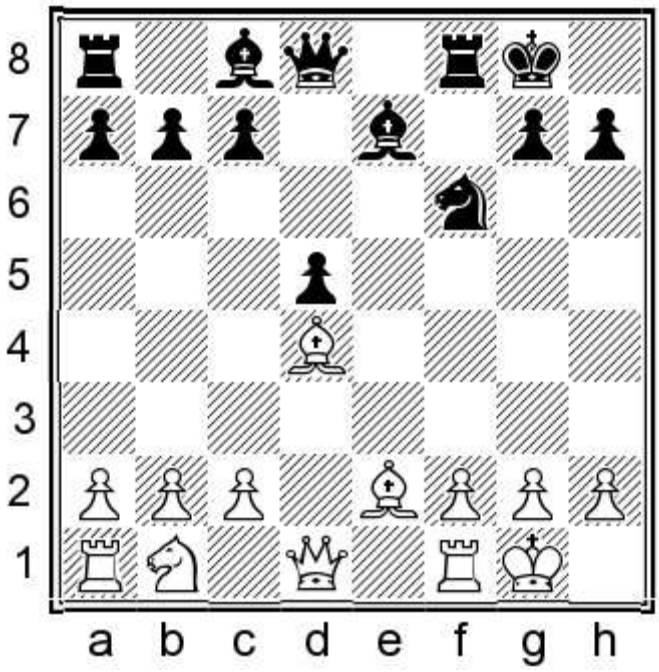
8.d4 exd4 9.♘xd4 ♘xd4 10.♗xd4 0-0 11.c4



Position after: 11.c4

It's true that Black can no longer plant a strong pawn on d5, but he can still take over the initiative in the center with 11...c5 12.♗c3 d5 13.cxd5 ♘xd5 14.0-0 ♗e6= Prasannaa, S (2218) – Sandipan, C (2555), Jammu 2018, ½-½ (32).

8...0-0 9.d4 exd4 10.♘xd4 ♘xd4 11.♗xd4 d5=

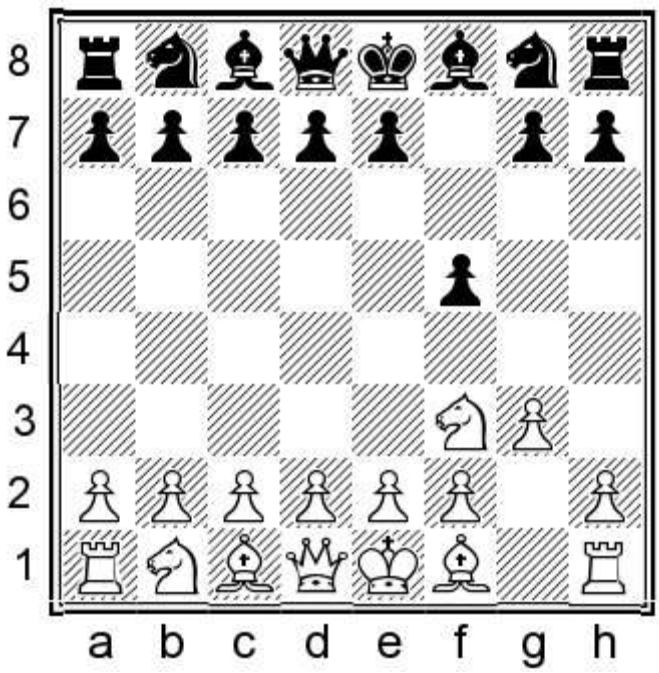


Position after: 11...d5=

White has managed to react in the center, but Black is still stronger there as his d-pawn controls some important squares and is easy to protect. White will probably have to trade it with c2−c4 in order to maintain equality. Anyway, Black won in Zude, E (2365) – Lutz, C (2590), Gladenbach 1997, 0-1 (62).

c) 2.g3

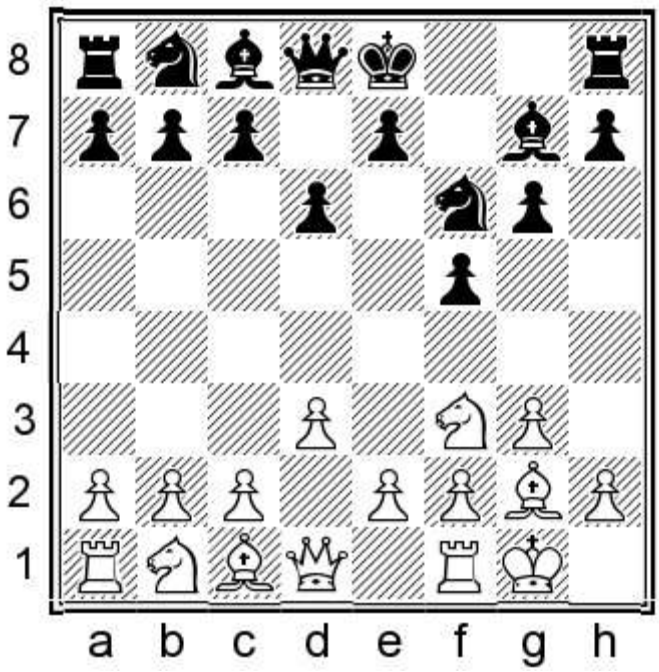
1.♘f3 f5 2.g3



Position after: 2.g3

In most cases White will transpose into another system, either the main lines if he plays d4, or the English if he plays c4. Other lines are quite rare, and we can just have a quick word about them.

2...♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.d3 d6



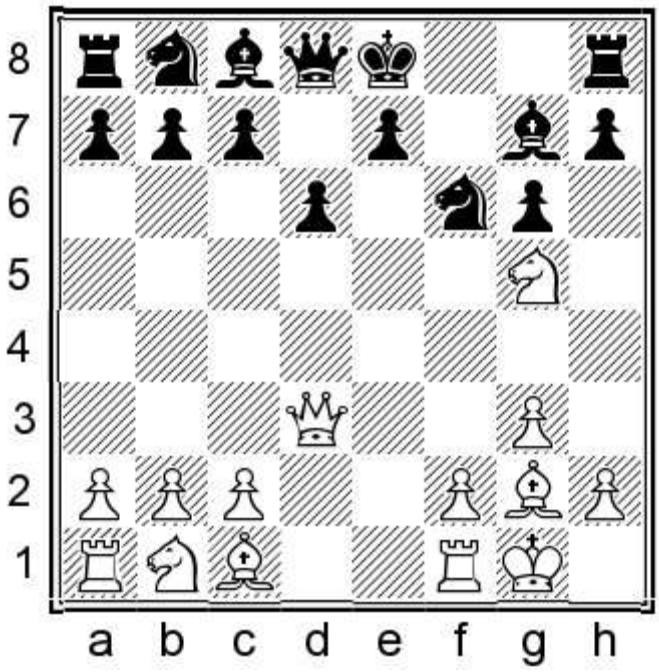
Position after: 5...d6

As 6.c4 would transpose to the next chapter, we will explore the different ways for White to play for e2−e4, the other logical advance in the center.

6.♘c3

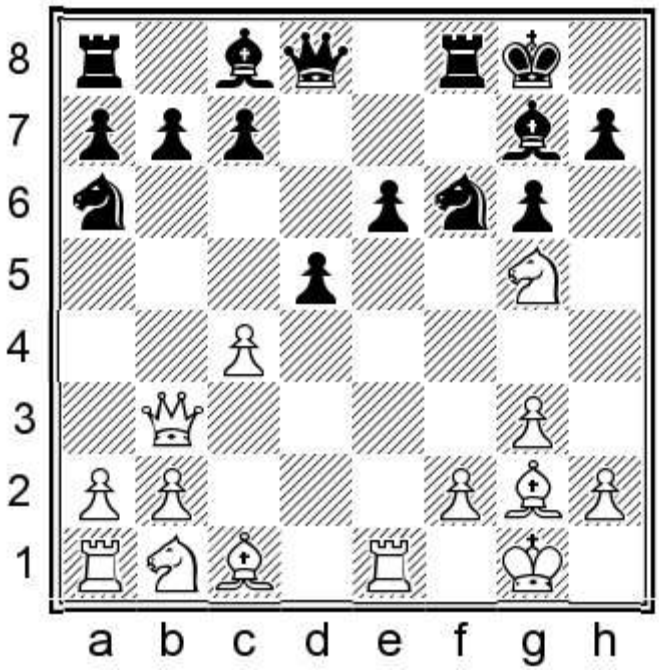
A) 6.e4?! This gambit has been tried only three times, probably because it's not so great! 6...fxe4

A1) 7.♘g5 exd3 8.♕xd3



Position after: 8.♕xd3

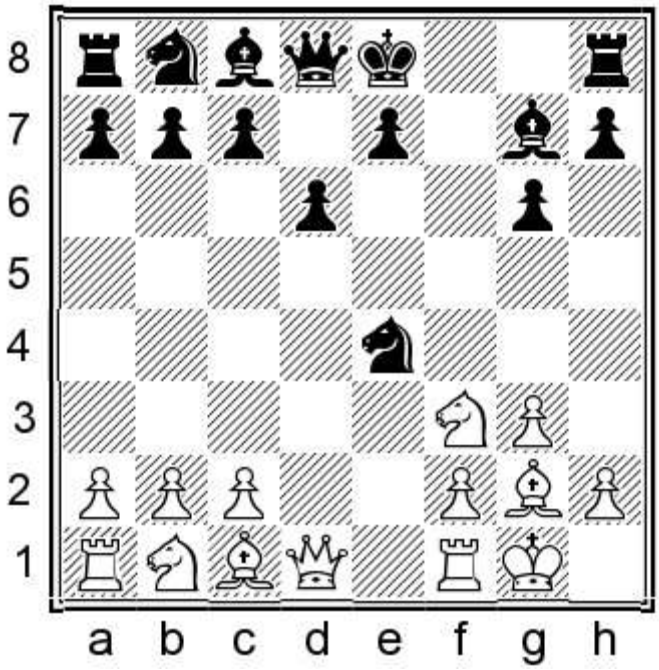
This occurred in the game Ricardi, P (2544) – Claverie, R (2273), Buenos Aires 2002, 1-0 (49), where Black didn't choose the simplest path. He should have played 8...0-0 9.♕b3+ d5 10.c4 e6! 11.♖e1 ♘a6!∓



Position after: 11...♘a6!∓

followed by consolidating his center with ...c6 and eventually chasing the annoying knight (which by the way, is unable to create real pressure on the e6-pawn, as we can see).

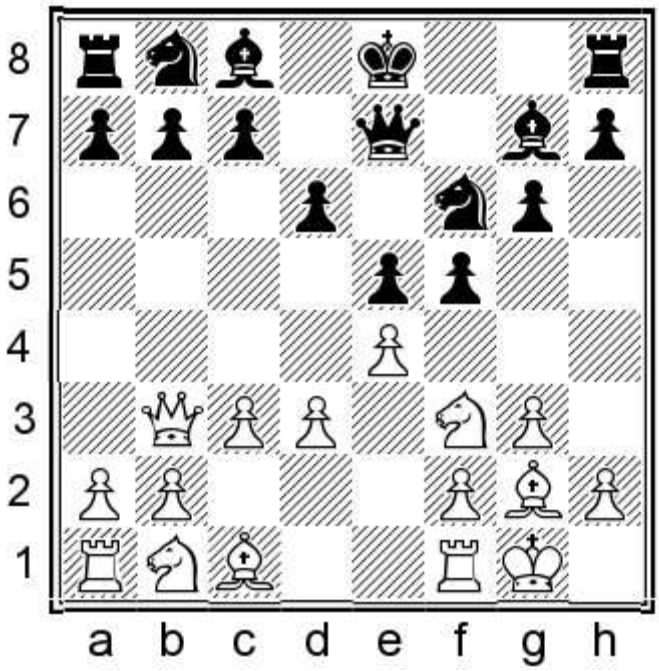
A2) 7.dxe4 ♘xe4!



Position after: 7...♘xe4!

Best to take it. White's calm play so far has not really prepared him for such a gambit, so there is little chance of it being strong. 8.♖e1 ♘f6! 9.♘c3 0-0 10.♕e2 e5∓

B) 6.c3 e5! 7.♕b3 ♕e7! 8.e4

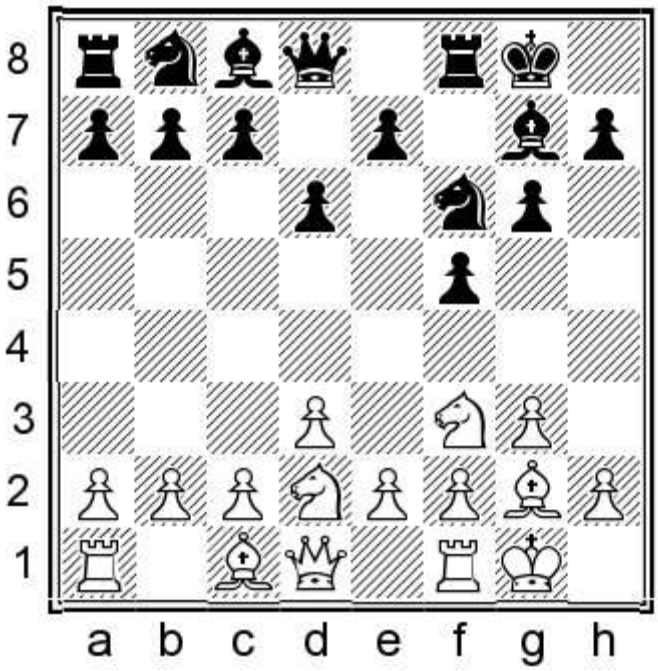


Position after: 8.e4

If White doesn't play something direct like this, Black will just play ...c6 and ...♗e6 in order to chase

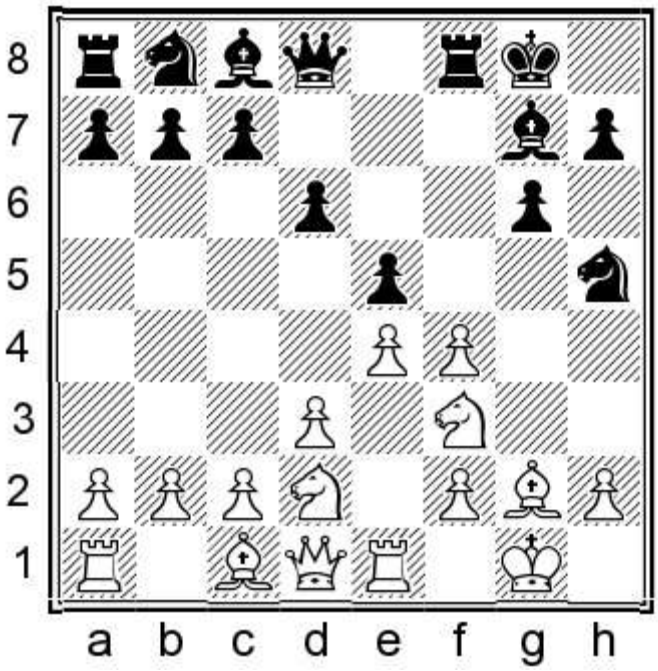
the queen. 8...fxe4 9.dxe4 ♘a6 White needs to parry 10...♘c5, otherwise his opening makes no sense. 10.♗e3 ♘g4! 11.♗g5 ♘c5! 12.♕c2 [12.♗xe7 ♘xb3 13.axb3 ♔xe7 14.c4 ♘f6 15.♘c3 c6= is obviously very comfortable for Black.] 12...♕f7↑

C) 6.♘bd2 Played slightly more often than 6.♘c3, but I find the knight less active here, so I would probably prefer to have it on c3 if I was White. 6...0-0



Position after: 6...0-0

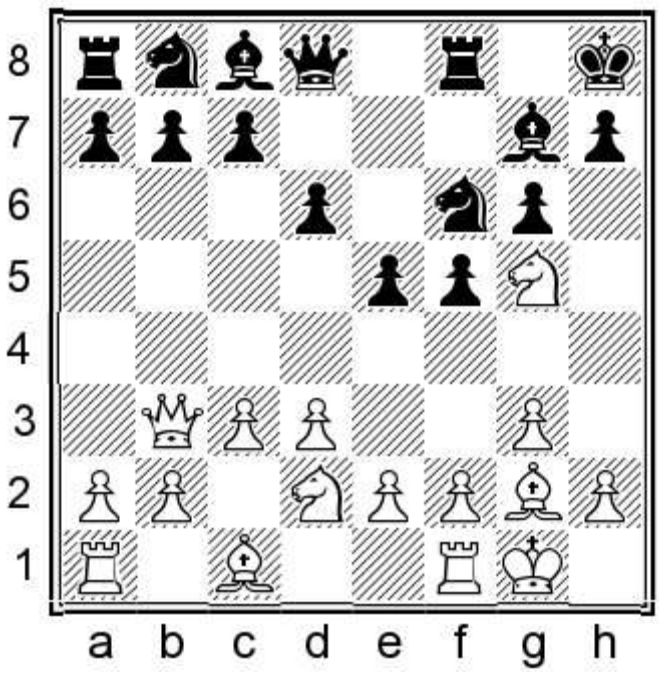
C1) 7.♖e1 e5 8.e4 f4!? A very classical motif. This move more or less implies a pawn sacrifice. 9.gxf4 [9.d4 fxg3 10.hxg3 ♘g4 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.♕e2 ♕f6↑] 9...♘h5!



Position after: 9...♘h5!

Of course we don't want to take back on f4, as it would block our f-file. Even if it's sometimes possible to follow with ...g5−g4, I prefer the text move. 10.fxe5 dxe5 11.♘f1 ♘c6 12.c3 ♗g4 13.h3 [13.♘g3 ♘f4 14.♗xf4 ♖xf4 15.h3 ♗e6!→ Black will follow with ...♕d7 and ...♖af8, with great counterplay.] 13...♗xf3 14.♗xf3 ♕h4!→ The bishop on f3 is pinned and Black easily develops his initiative.

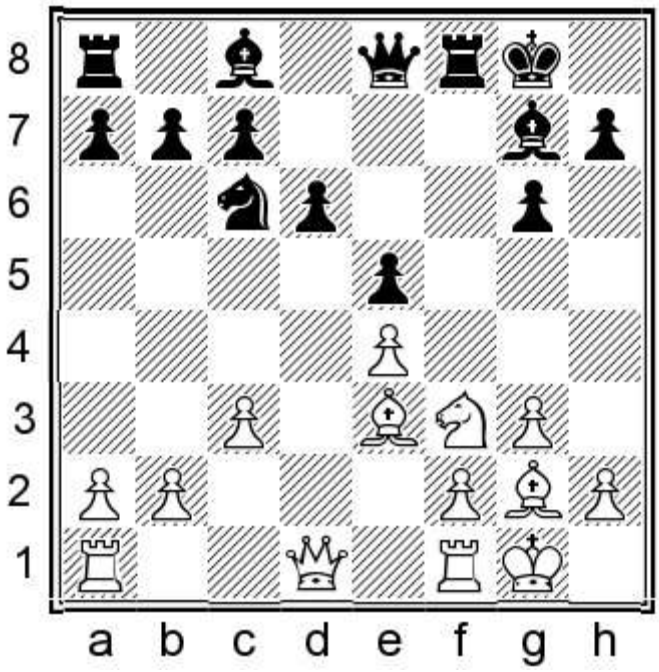
C2) 7.c3 e5 This could help White develop his play. 8.♕b3+ ♔h8 9.♘g5



Position after: 9.♘g5

9...♕d7! [9...d5?! 10.e4 ♘h5?! 11.♘df3 h6 12.♘h4! A very strong blow which shows that Black is not well enough coordinated. 12...hxg5 13.♘xg6+ ♔h7 14.♘xf8+ ♕xf8 15.exf5±] 10.♗xb7 ♗xb7 11.♕xb7 ♘c6 12.♕a6 Black has some compensation, but you need to accept being a pawn down.

C3) 7.e4 fxe4 8.♘xe4 ♘xe4 9.dxe4 e5 10.c3 ♕e8 11.♗e3 ♘c6=



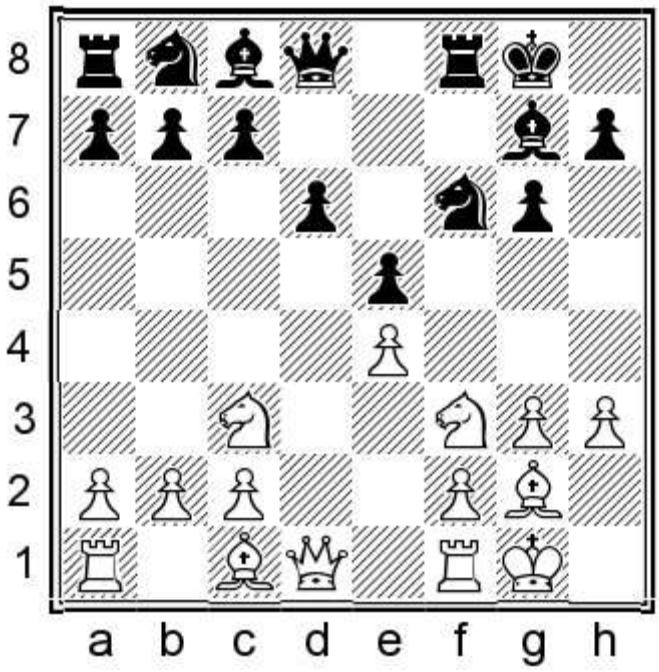
Position after: 11...♘c6=

Black wants to develop his attack on the kingside with ...h6, ...g5 and probably ...♕h5. Meanwhile, White will push his own pawns on the queenside.

6...e5 7.e4 fxe4 8.dxe4

8.♘xe4 ♘xe4 9.dxe4 0-0 transposes to the main line with 6.♘bd2.

8...0-0 9.h3

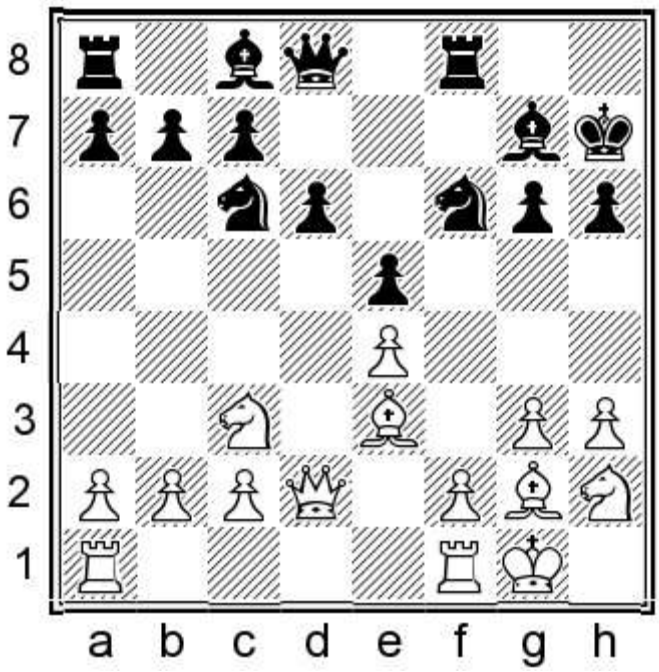


Position after: 9.h3

9.♗e3 ♘c6 10.♕d2 ♔h8=

9...♘bd7

9...♘c6!? One of my young students played this in his decisive game in the French Youth Championships in 2018. He also managed to get a very nice position out of the opening, and eventually won the game. 10.♗e3 h6 11.♕d2 ♔h7 12.♘h2 White is struggling to find a plan, but I don't like this one, as I think the resulting hanging pawns are quite weak.



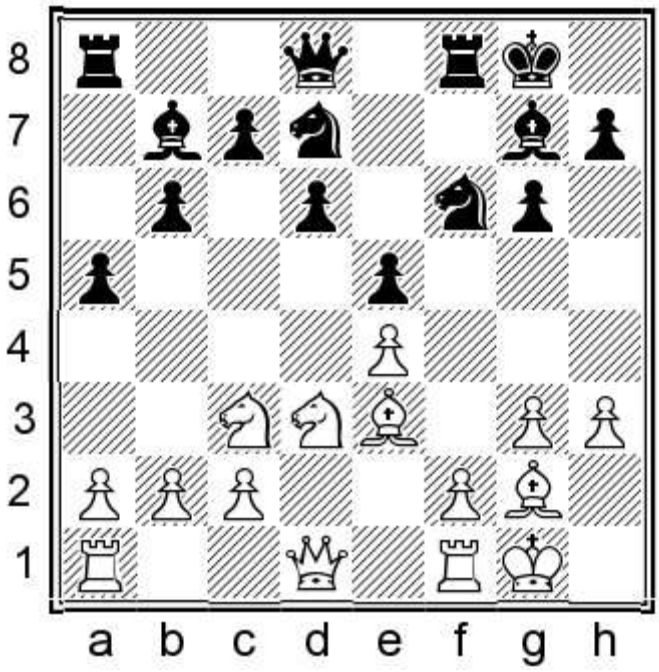
Position after: 12.♘h2

12...♗e6 13.f4 exf4 14.gxf4 ♕d7 15.♖f2 ♘e7 16.h4 ♖ad8∓ Black is now ready to strike in the center with ...d5, and was already better in Vlachos, A (2346) – Travadon, L (2344), Agen 2018, 0-1 (31).

10.♗e3 b6!?

I also like this plan, finding a decent spot for our bishop and potentially restraining White's play on the queenside. Play may continue:

11.♘e1 ♗b7 12.♘d3 a5=

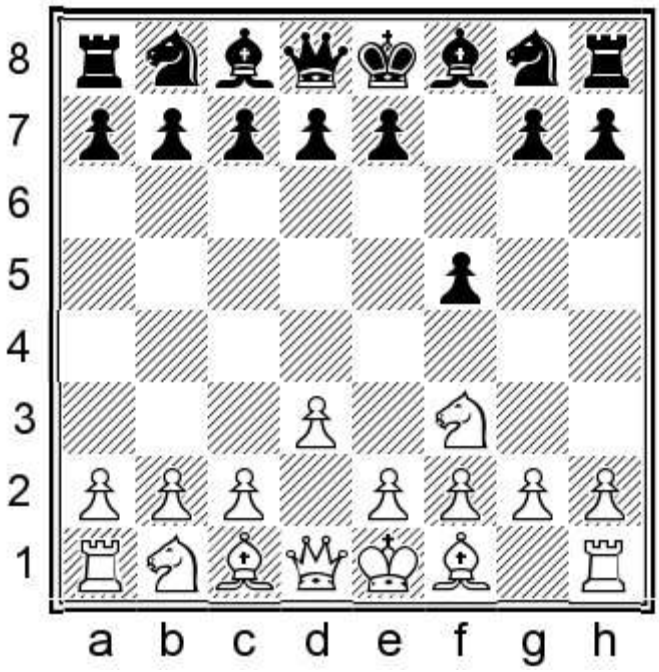


Position after: 12...a5=

Black has various plans, such as developing an initiative on the kingside by means of ...h6, ...g5 and maybe ...♖f7, allowing the d7-knight to go to g6.

d) 2.d3 ♘c6 3.--, 3.e4

1.♘f3 f5 2.d3!?



Position after: 2.d3!?

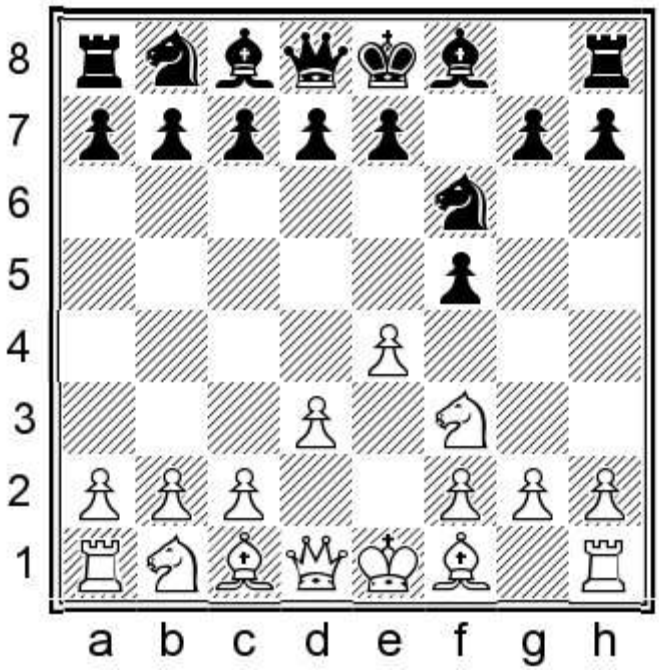
When an author writes about two repertoires, one with each color, there comes a moment when he needs to fight (in total objectivity!) against his own recommendations. Here comes this moment for me!

Indeed, in my first book, *The Modernized Reti*, I recommended 2.d3 against the Dutch. Of course every player knows this feeling, as there has to be an opening that you play with both sides, and you have to handle it without suffering from schizophrenia or being totally dishonest. I will try to do the same here. Actually the makings of a solution for Black already appeared in my Reti book, so we'll go deeper into it.

2...♘c6!

I still think this is the best for Black. It's quite similar to 2...d6, but slightly more accurate in case of 3.e4, as we will sometimes be allowed to play ...d5 in one move. On the other hand, White can play 3.d4, taking advantage of the knight being slightly misplaced on c6.

2...♘f6?! It's important to understand that it is not a great idea (useless, in fact) to try to prevent e2−e4. 3.e4!



Position after: 3.e4!

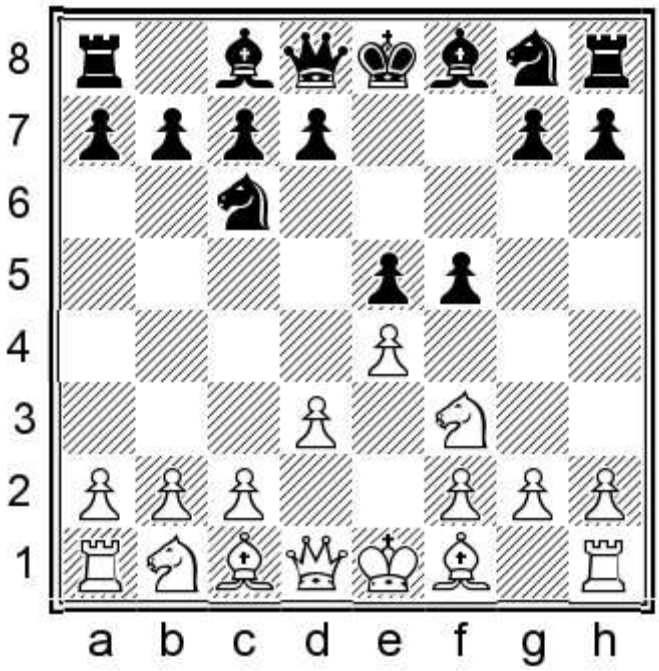
This works well anyway. 3...fxe4 4.dxe4 ♘xe4 5.♗d3 ♘f6 6.♘g5!→ with a dangerous initiative for White, who is threatening ideas starting with ♘xh7.

3.e4

Let's see what happens if White follows the same plan as against 2...d6.

We will consider 3.d4 in the next subchapter. Apart from these two moves, we can just mention that after almost any move, Black will be able to play 3...e5, reaching a comfortable position.

3...e5!



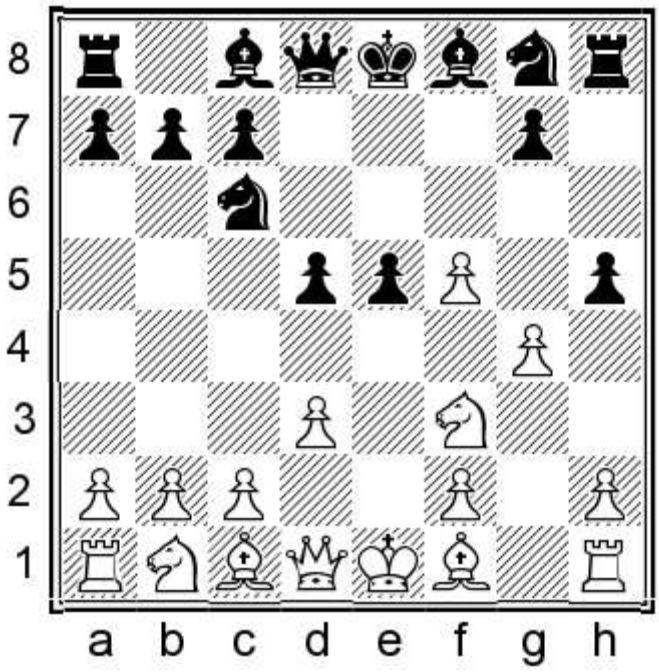
Position after: 3...e5!

As already said, this is the point behind 2...♘c6. Now, White has at least three main options.

4.♘c3

A) 4.d4 I won't analyze this position. I don't think your opponent is likely to play it, reason being that we have now transposed to a Vienna Game with colors reversed and the same tempo − check the moves 1.e4 e5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.f4 d5. I doubt if many players would play a 'black system' as White. You can find some theory in the books, or just look at some games. It's quite easy to develop an initiative with this opening, and the positions are generally equal, which is very satisfying since we are playing Black.

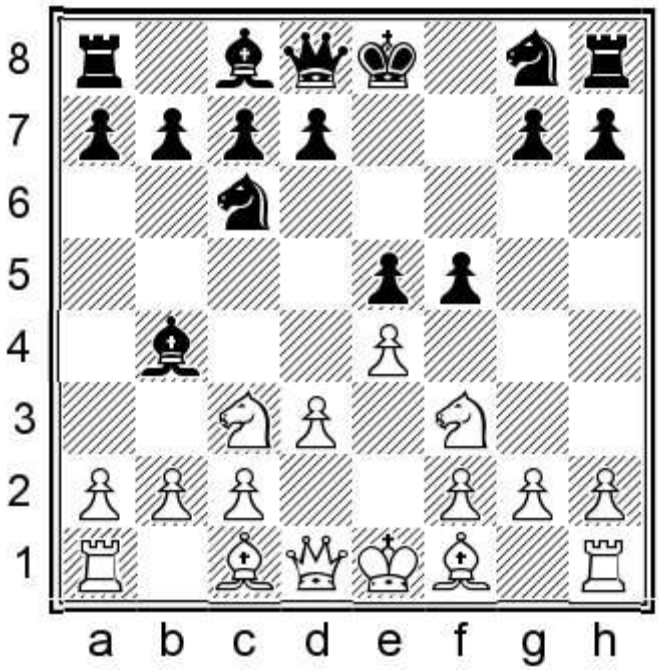
B) 4.exf5?! Giving away the center like this hardly seems good, and should be met with 4...d5! 5.g4 [5.♗g5?! ♗e7 6.♗xe7 ♘gxe7 7.g4 h5∓] 5...h5! White is unable to hold his kingside and Black will remain better without any trouble.



Position after: 5...h5!

6.gxh5 [6.♗h3?! hxg4 7.♗xg4 ♘f6 8.♗g5 ♕d6 9.♗xf6 ♕xf6 10.♘c3 ♗b4∓ 0-1 (31) Wantola, I (2330) – Reinderman, D (2590), Netherlands 2014] 6...♗xf5 7.♗g5 ♗e7 8.♘h4 ♗h7 9.♗xe7 ♕xe7 10.♘g6 ♗xg6 11.hxg6 ♘f6∓ Black is still a pawn down, but White's development is miserable and the pawn on g6 is almost lost anyway. 0-1 (26) Laurent, J (2342) – Gorovets, A (2471), Lille 2013.

4...♗b4!?



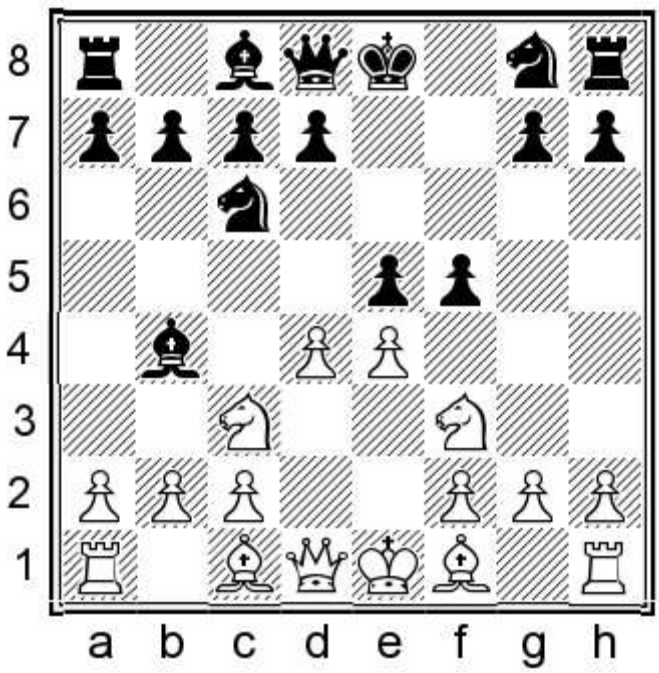
Position after: 4...♗b4!?

This has been played much less than 4...♘f6, but it has proven its strenght. I would play it without any hesitation. 4...♘f6!? also leads to an equal game, but White is generally better prepared, and can develop his ideas. I prefer the other continuation which is simpler and less known.

5.♗d2

Most players choose this move, but it hardly seems possible to create difficulties for Black with such a move.

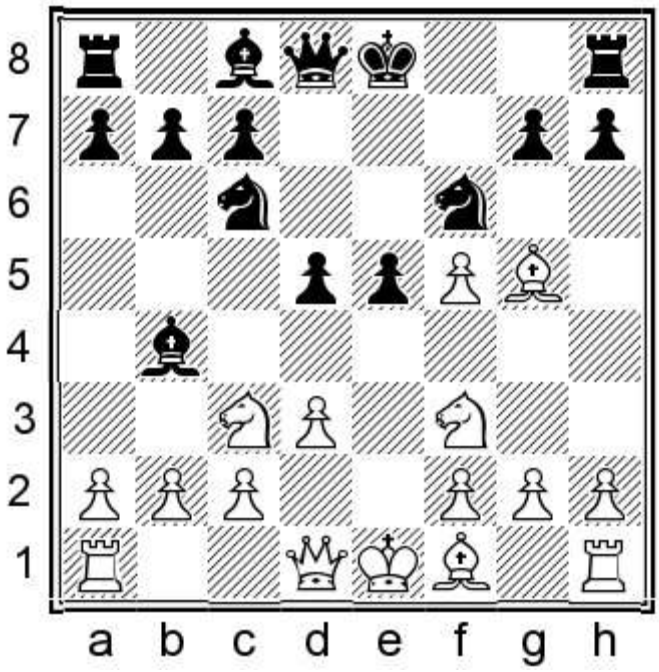
A) 5.d4



Position after: 5.d4

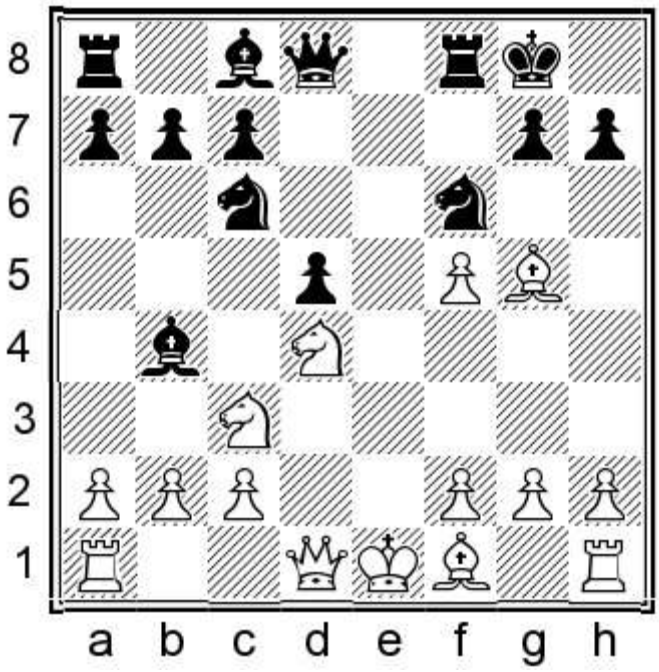
This is very similar to the Vienna Game, which we discussed after 4.d4, except that it is an even better version for Black as he is usually unable to pin the knight on c3. The game might continue 5...fxe4 6.♘xe5 ♘f6 7.♗e2 ♕e7 8.♘xc6 dxc6 9.0-0 0-0↑.

B) 5.♗g5 ♘f6 6.exf5 d5



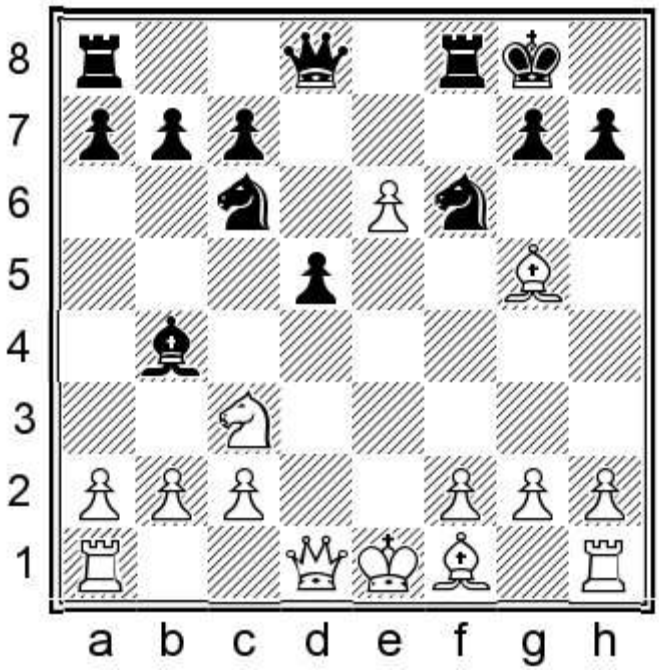
Position after: 6...d5

7.d4 [7.a3 ♗xc3+ 8.bxc3 ♗xf5 9.♗e2 0-0∓ This kind of middlegame is obviously good for Black. His control of the center is much more important than the bishop pair − and look at that bishop on e2...] 7...exd4 8.♘xd4 0-0



Position after: 8...0-0

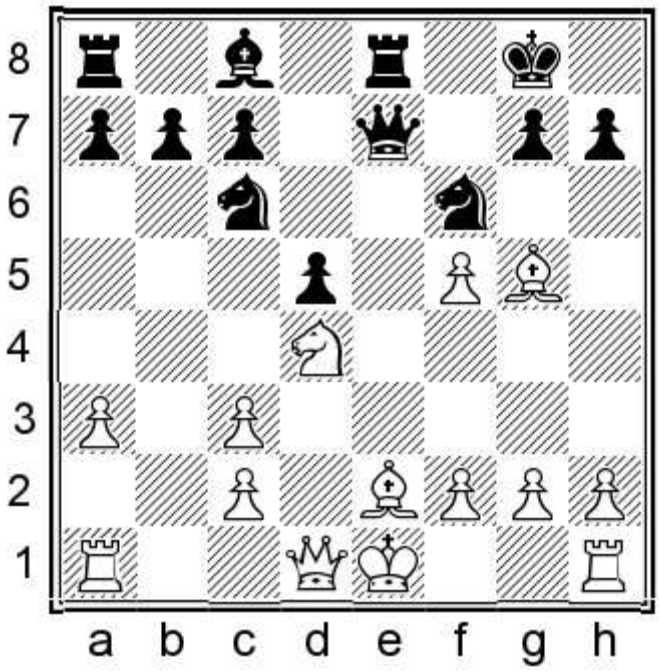
B1) 9.♘e6? Quite a serious mistake. Black can quickly claim a winning advantage. 9...♗xe6 10.fxe6



Position after: 10.fxe6

Now I would vary from Kanep, M (2510) – Neiksans, A (2454), Liepaja 2006, 0-1 (44), with 10...d4! 11.a3 [11.♗c4 ♕e7 12.a3 dxc3 13.axb4 cxb2 14.♖b1 ♕xb4+–+] 11...dxc3 12.axb4 cxb2 13.♖b1 ♕xd1+ 14.♖xd1 ♘e4–+.

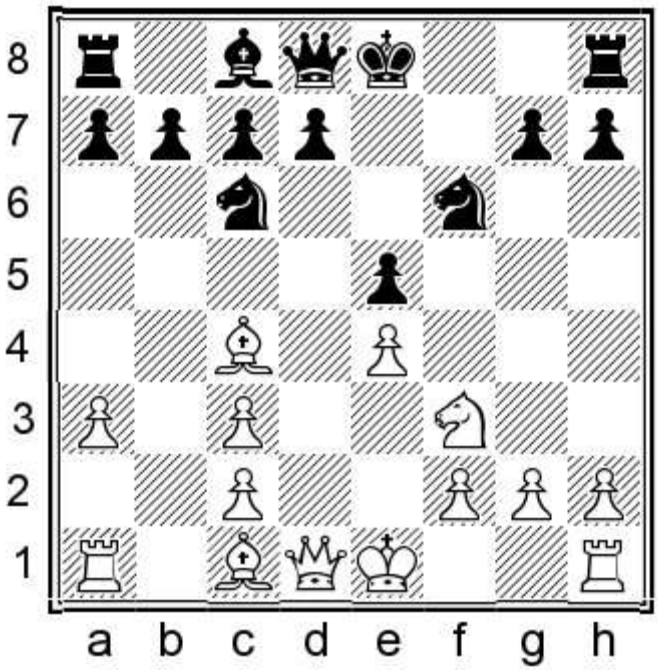
B2) 9.♗e2!N At least White can now castle quickly and reach a decent middlegame. 9...♕e7 10.a3 ♗xc3+ 11.bxc3 ♖e8



Position after: 11...♖e8

12.♗xf6 ♕xf6 13.0-0 ♘xd4 14.cxd4 ♗xf5∓

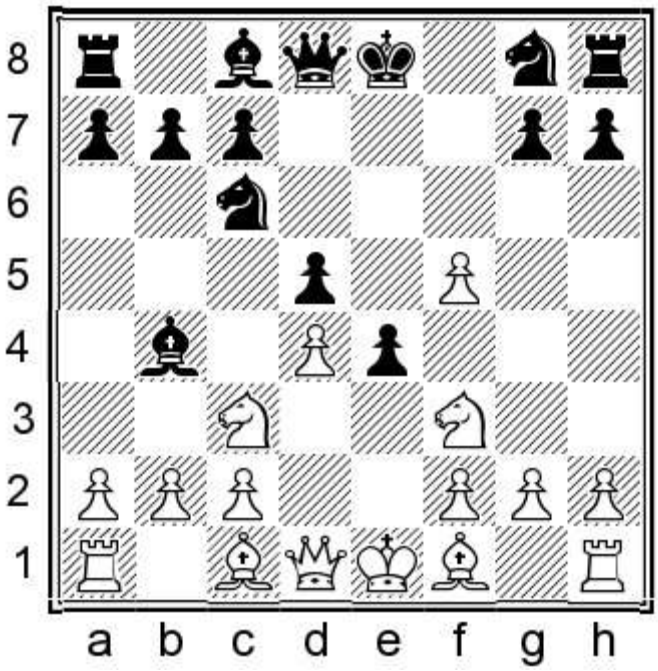
C) 5.a3?! Going along with Black's idea. 5...♗xc3+ 6.bxc3 fxe4 7.dxe4 ♘f6 8.♗c4



Position after: 8.♗c4

White's structure is severely damaged, so he should try to prevent Black from castling. 8...♘a5 9.♗a2 ♕e7 10.0-0 b6!∓ It's clear that the king will be safe on the queenside, so Black prepares ... 0-0-0 and finds a spot for the bishop to attack the e-pawn. He is simply better.

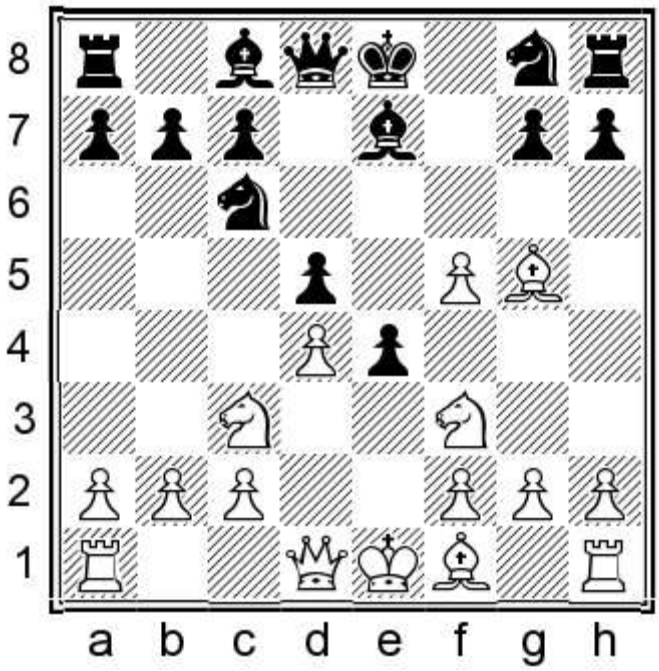
D) 5.exf5 d5 6.d4 [6.♗g5 ♘f6 See 5.♗g5.] 6...e4



Position after: 6...e4

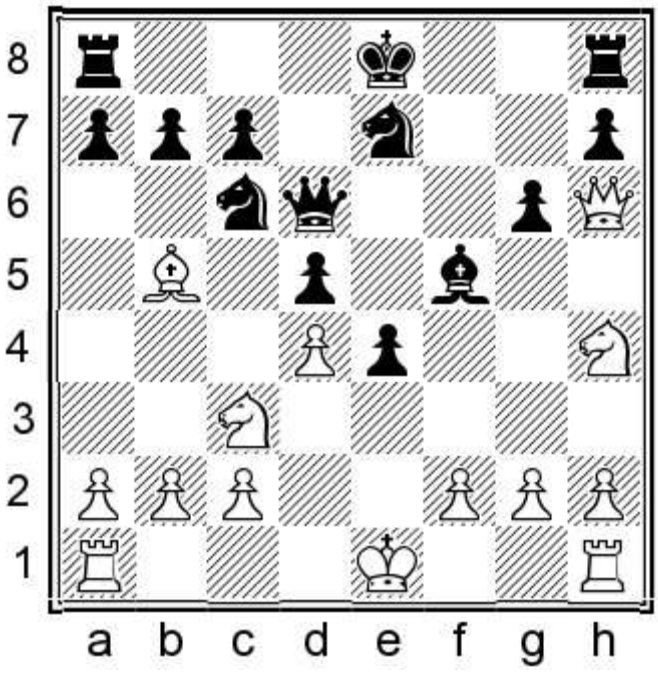
D1) 7.♘e5 ♘xe5 8.dxe5 ♗xf5 9.♗d2 We need to do something about the threat of 10.♘xe4. I propose a radical solution! 9...♗xc3! 10.♗xc3 ♘e7∓ Black has the better prospects. He has good chances of grabbing the e5-pawn at some point and can also try to advance his central pawns with ...c5 and ...d4.

D2) 7.♗g5 ♗e7!



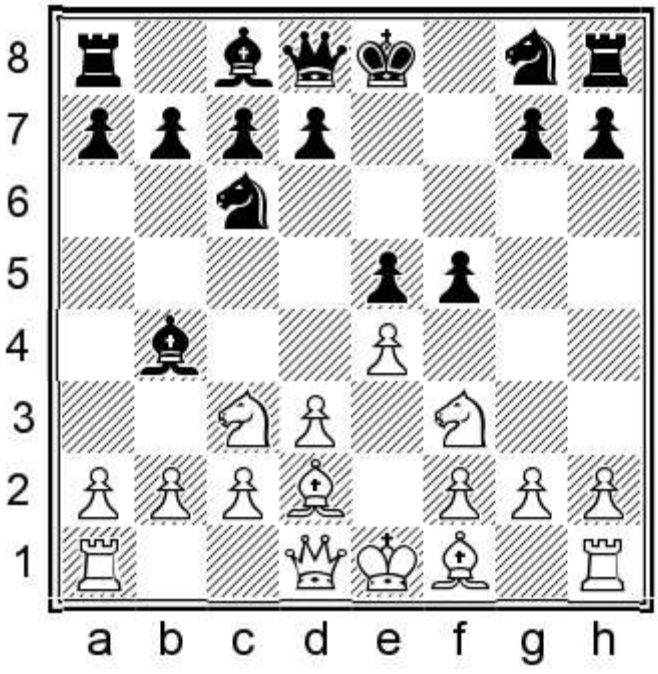
Position after: 7...♗e7!

Very precisely played by Ivanchuk – bringing the bishop back in order to trade it is indeed best. 8.♗xe7 ♘gxe7 9.♘h4 ♗xf5 [9...♘xf5? 10.♕h5+±] 10.♕h5+ g6 11.♕h6 ♕d6 12.♗b5



Position after: 12.♗b5

This was played in Malakhov, V (2654) – Ivanchuk, V (2714), Zagreb 2018, ½-½ (30). Even if he castled long a few moves later, I don't see any reason to delay it: 12...0-0-0! 13.0-0-0 ♗g4 14.f3 exf3 15.gxf3 ♗h5∓. Black has the better pawn structure and very well coordinated pieces. His advantage is not in any doubt.



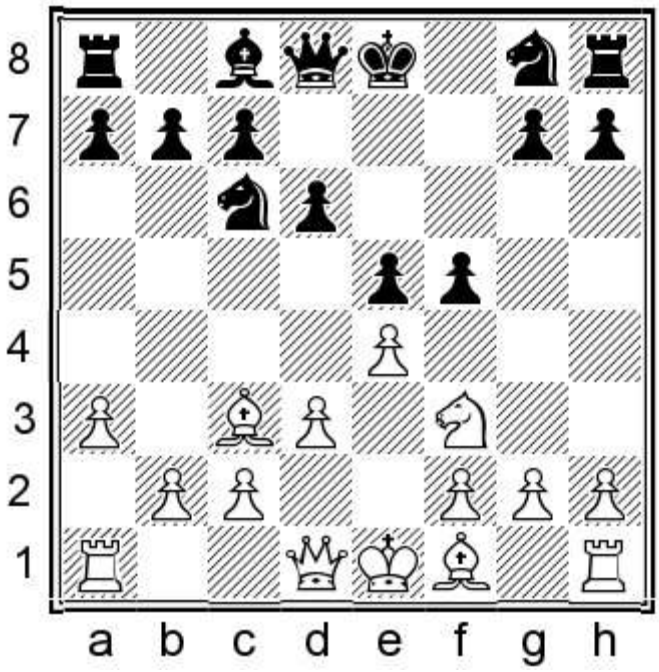
Position after: 5.♗d2

5...d6!

The most accurate in my opinion, dealing with any of White's ideas to take on f5.

5...♘f6 6.exf5 d5 7.♘h4!∞

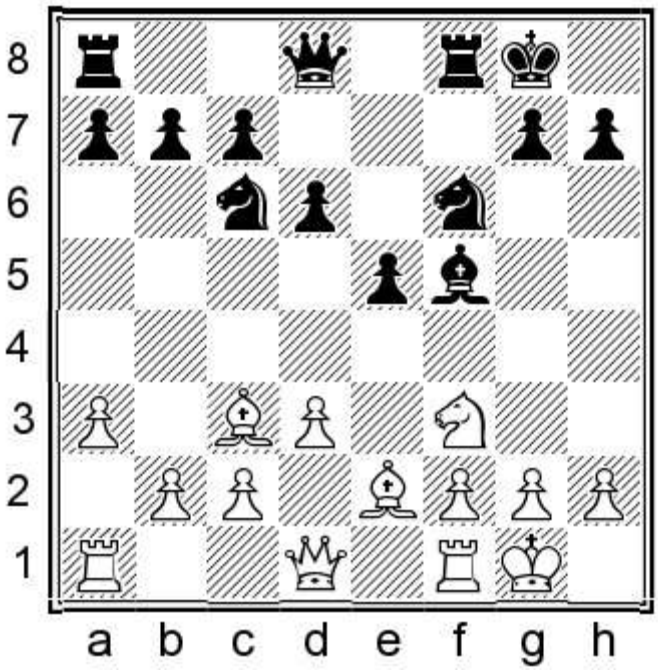
6.a3 ♗xc3 7.♗xc3



Position after: 7.♗xc3

In the game Oliva Castaneda, K (2427) – Narciso Dublan, M (2538), Montcada 2014, 0-1 (43), Black took on e4, but I don't see why we should help our opponent develop his light-squared bishop.

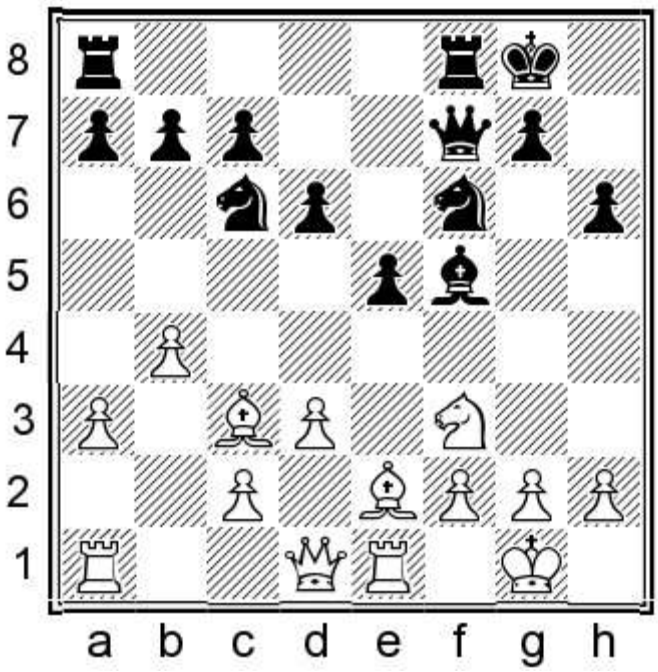
7...♘f6 8.exf5 ♗xf5 9.♗e2 0-0 10.0-0



Position after: 10.0-0

Thus far Grigorian, M (2181) – Shaydullina, S (2203), Sochi 2017, 0-1 (21). Now, instead of 10...♘d5, I prefer the following:

10...♕d7 11.♖e1 ♕f7 12.b4 h6∓



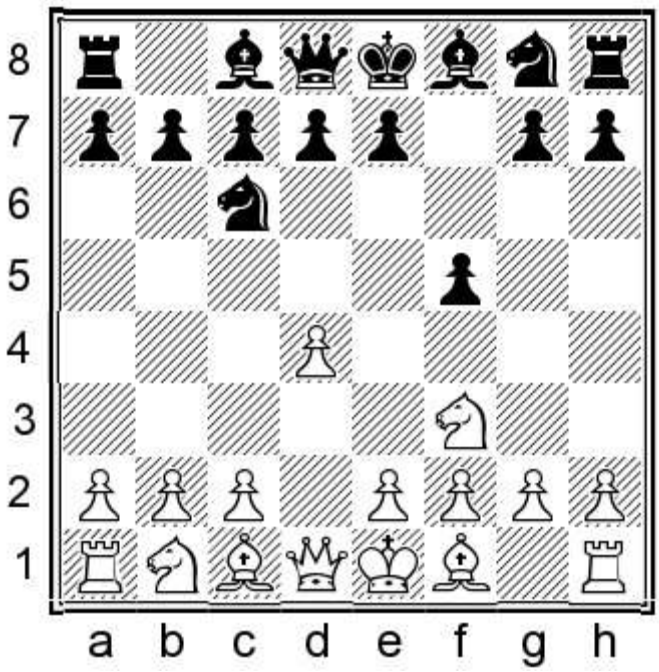
Position after: 12...h6∓

White is still looking for a plan, while things are pretty simple for Black. He will organize his forces in

order to be able to advance in the center at some point.

e) 2.d3 ♘c6 3.d4

1.♘f3 f5 2.d3 ♘c6 3.d4!?



Position after: 3.d4!?

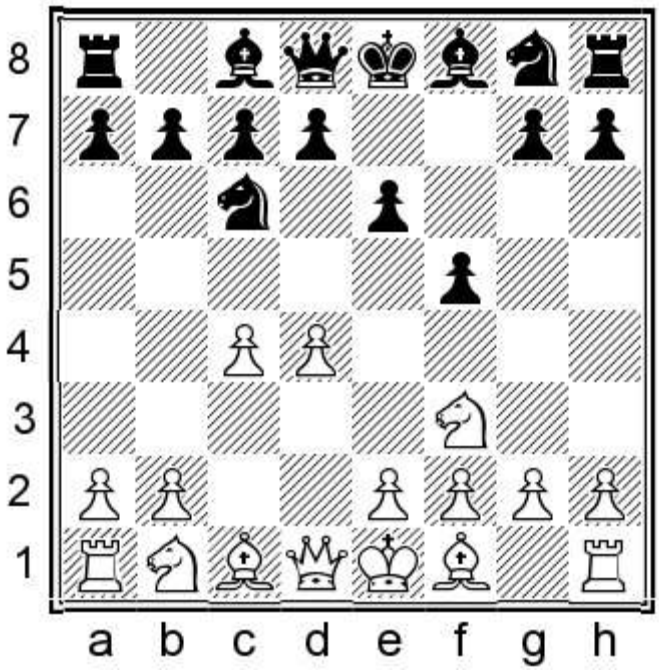
This is an interesting way to try to exploit the Black knight being on c6. Obviously White loses a tempo, but if it helps chase the knight it's probably worth it. Black has different ways to meet this move. My preference is for the Classical Dutch, where we will try to prove that the extra move ...♘c6 is useful.

3...e6

I prefer this way of playing, keeping the position dynamic.

4.g3

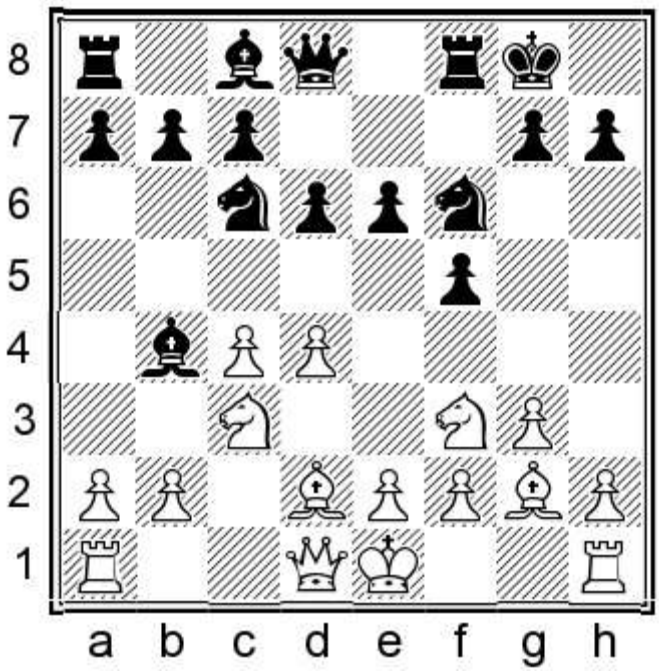
4.c4



Position after: 4.c4

In general, I don't think White can get anything with this move since Black will be able to play ...♗b4 at some point. 4...♘f6

A) 5.♘c3 ♗b4 6.♗d2 0-0 7.g3 d6 8.♗g2

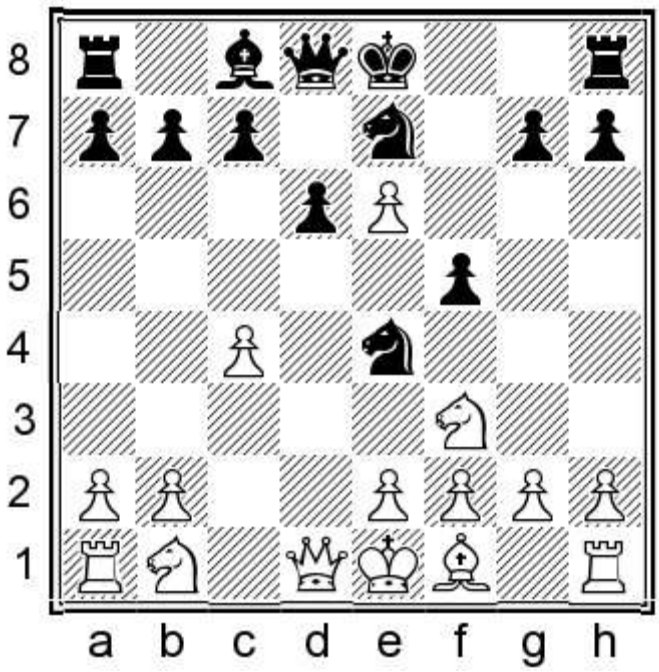


Position after: 8.♗g2

In the game Spoelman, W (2583) – Nijboer, F (2559), Amstelveen 2015, 0-1 (42), Black traded on c3 in order to bring the knight to e4, but I prefer a completely different way of playing: 8...e5!N 9.d5

[9.a3 ♗xc3 10.♗xc3 ♘e4 11.♕c2 ♕f6↑ with a better version of the game, since a3 was useless.] 9...♘e7 10.0-0 c6!∓ It's hard for White to maintain the pawn on d5.

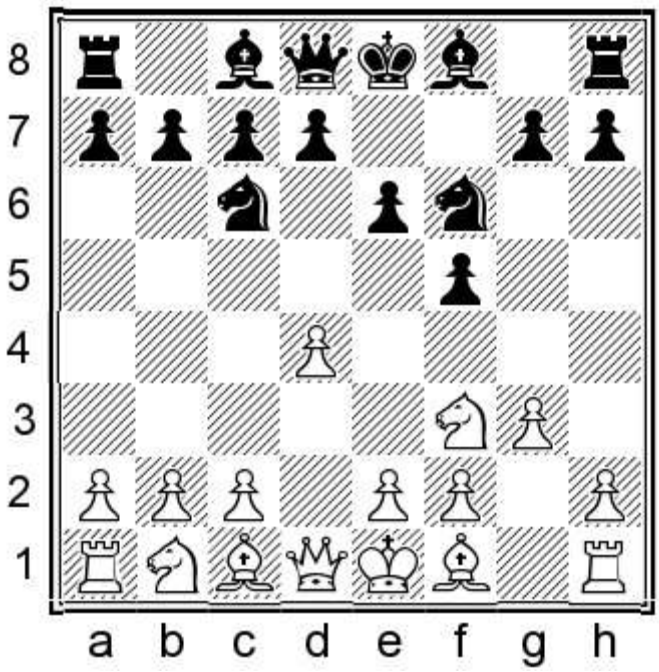
B) 5.d5 ♗b4+! 6.♗d2 ♗xd2+ 7.♕xd2 ♘e4 8.♕d1 ♘e7 9.dxe6 d6



Position after: 9...d6

It's more effective and more active to take back on e6 with the bishop. 10.e3 ♘c6 11.♗e2 0-0 12.0-0 ♗xe6=

4...♘f6

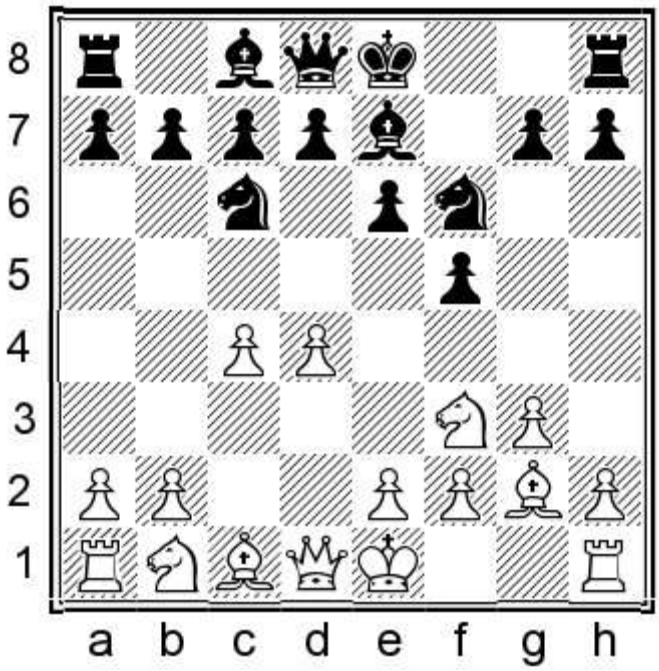


Position after: 4...♘f6

5.♗g2 ♗e7

5...d5!? I don't really want to play a Stonewall, but it's an acceptable option. The extra move ...♘c6 prevents Black from playing the usual ...c6 for now, but it can soon reach another square.

6.c4!

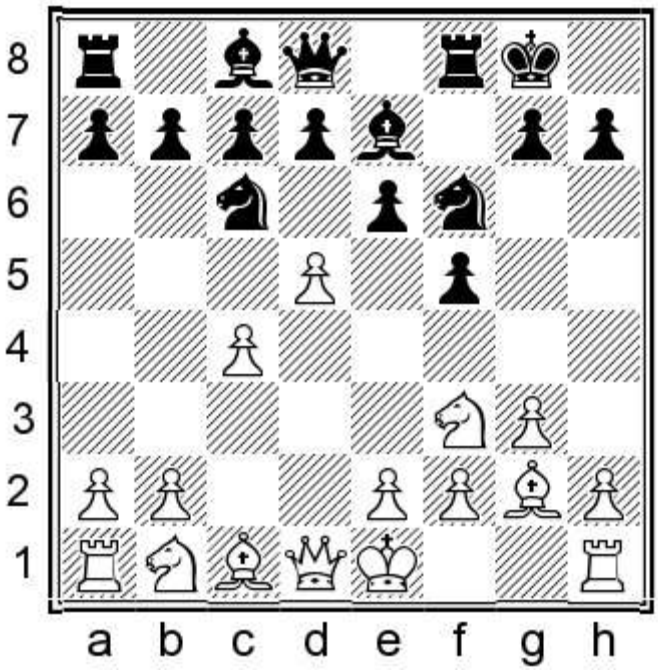


Position after: 6.c4!

Playing this now that our bishop has already moved to e7 looks the most logical to me. Of course it can be played later, but it gives White additional options.

6...0-0 7.0-0

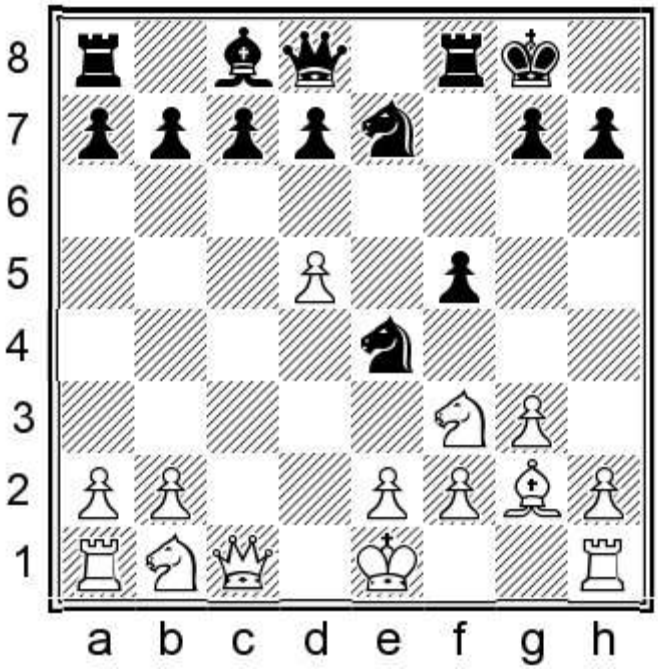
7.d5



Position after: 7.d5

I actually faced this position once with Black! My opponent didn't want to enter the classical lines, being the ♘c6-tempo down, so he tried this move, but I doubt if it can bring White an edge.

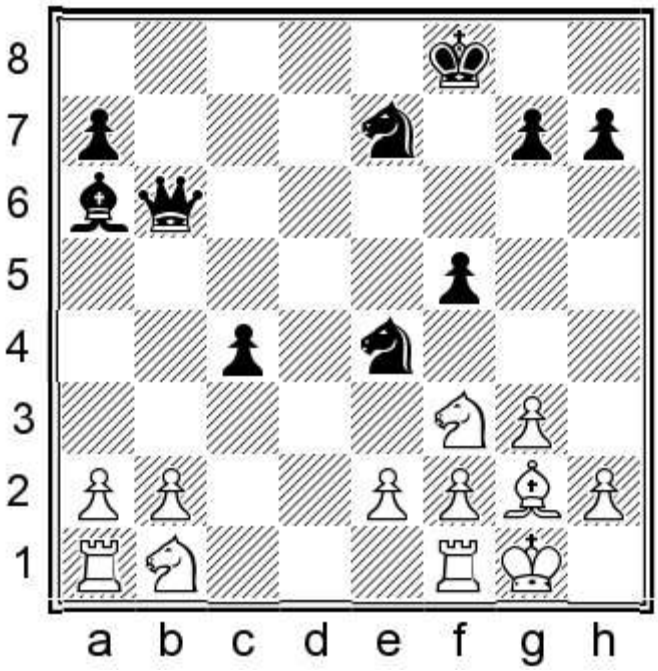
A) 7...♗b4+ 8.♗d2 ♗xd2+ 9.♕xd2 ♘e4 10.♕c1 exd5 11.cxd5 ♘e7



Position after: 11...♘e7

A1) 12.♕c4 This was my opponent's choice, but I reacted well here by sacrificing a pawn: 12...c6! 13.dxc6+ d5 14.cxb7 [My opponent declined the offer with 14.c7 dxc4 15.cxd8=♗ ♖xd8 16.♘bd2=

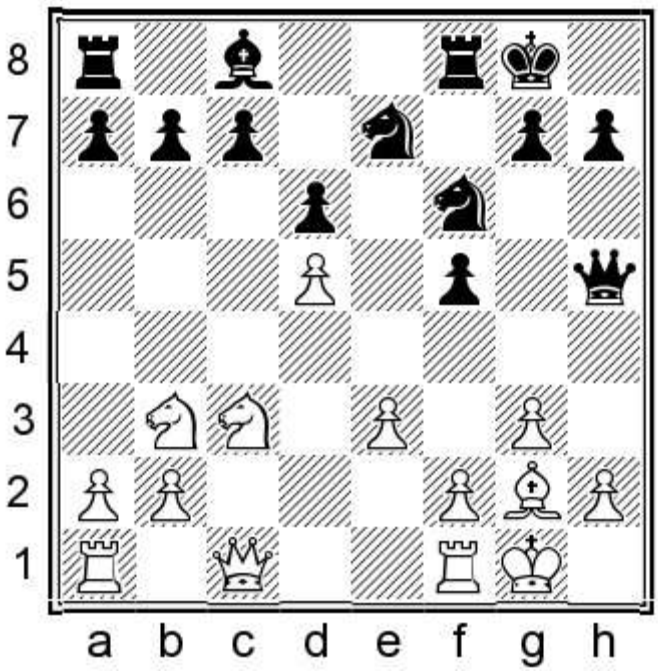
and the game ended quite quickly in a draw, Petrov, N (2573) – Demuth, A (2547), Bad Ragaz 2018.] 14...dxc4! [I wasn't sure about this move, and would probably have played 14...♗xb7 15.♕b4 ♖b8♾] 15.bxa8=♕ ♕b6 16.0-0 ♗a6 17.♕xf8+ ♔xf8♾



Position after: 17...♔xf8♾

With plenty of play for Black, which might give him the better chances.

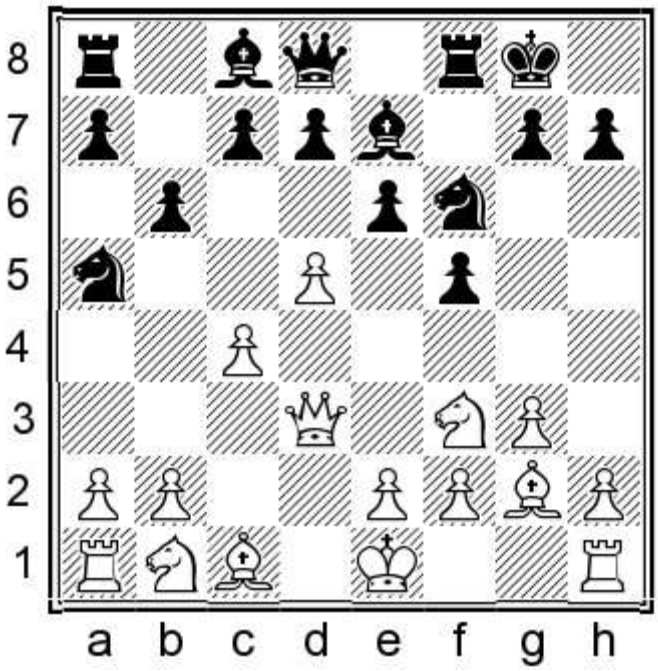
A2) 12.♘fd2!N The computer wants to play this move, but it doesn't look particularly annoying. 12...♘f6 13.♘c3 d6 14.0-0 ♕e8 15.♘b3 ♕h5 16.e3±



Position after: 16.e3±

It's not so simple to keep the attack going, so I'd say that it's probably slightly better for White.

B) 7...♘a5!? I think I'd now go for this move. 8.♕d3 b6



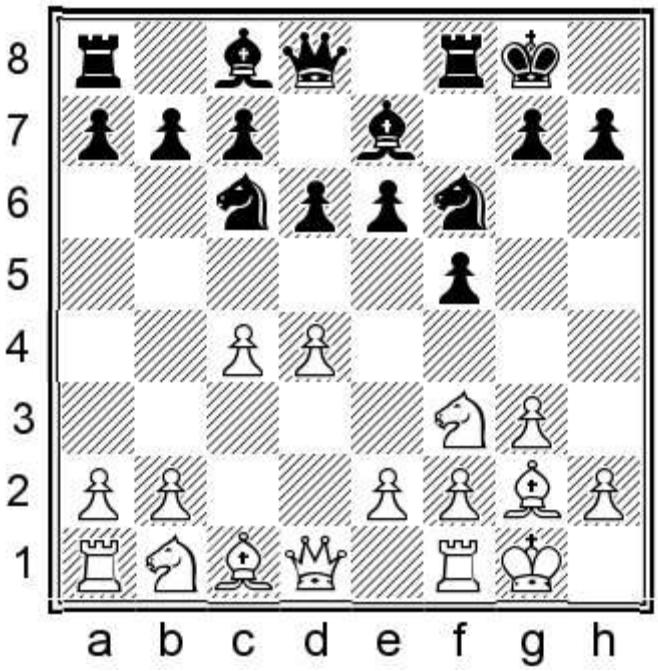
Position after: 8...b6

This seems very healthy for Black, who will aim to put pressure on the white center.

B1) 9.0-0?! ♗a6! 10.dxe6 [10.b3? ♘xd5∓] 10...dxe6 11.b3 ♕e8 12.♘c3 ♖d8↑

B2) 9.♘c3 ♗b4 10.0-0 ♗b7 11.♗d2 c6 12.dxe6 dxe6⇄

7...d6



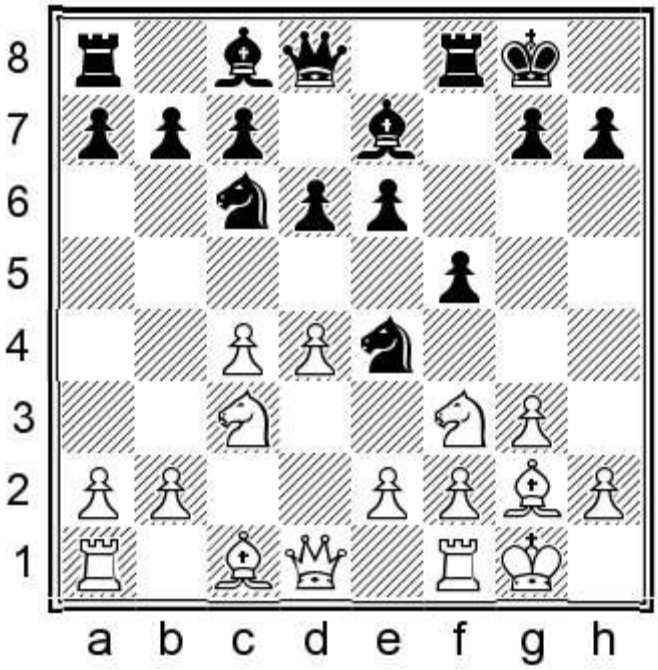
Position after: 7...d6

Black has transposed to the Classical Variation with the extra move ...♘c6. This is testing for White, as the line with 7...♘c6 exists in the Classical Dutch.

8.d5!

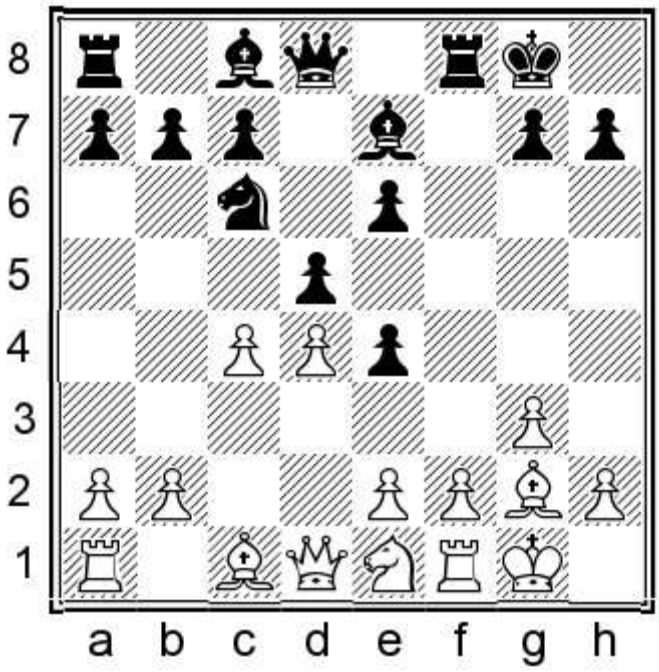
This was my suggestion in my Modernized Reti book, and I still think it's the only way for White to try to achieve something.

8.♘c3 This quiet move is probably too slow and allows Black to continue with his idea, always with an extra tempo compared to the usual main lines of the Classical Dutch. 8...♘e4!



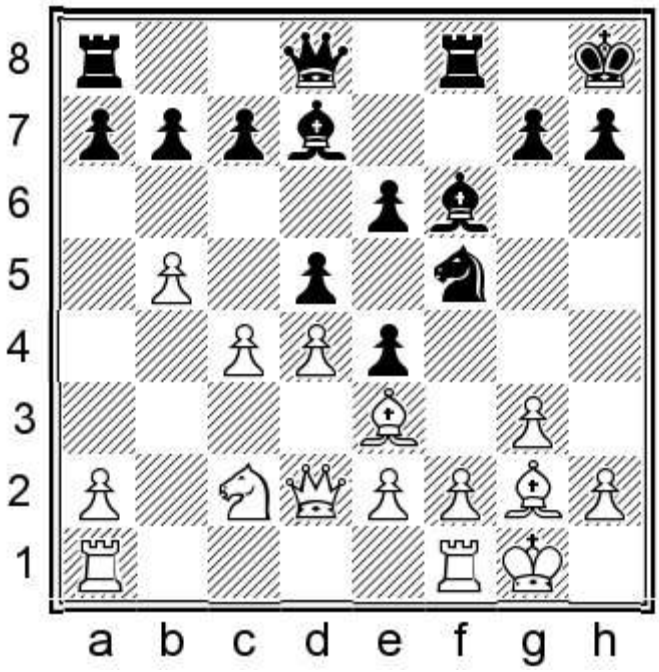
Position after: 8...♘e4!

9.♘xe4 This is White's usual solution, but here it's not great. 9...fxe4 10.♘e1 [10.♘d2 d5! 11.e3 a5!? Black has time to develop his play on the queenside. 12.f3 exf3 13.♘xf3 b6=] 10...d5!



Position after: 10...d5!

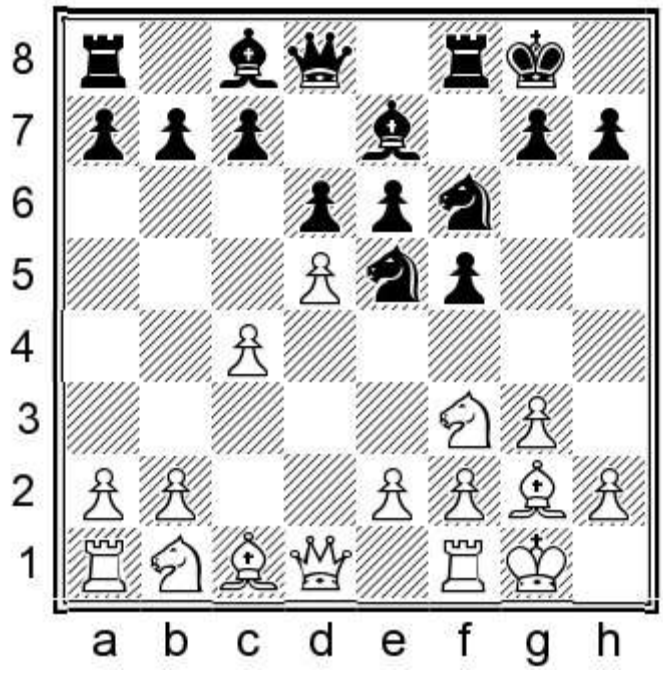
In general White experiences some difficulties in fighting against our center, and sooner or later will have to play f3 in order not to end up worse, as in the following game: 11.♗e3 [11.♘c2 a5 12.b3 b6 13.f3 dxc4 14.bxc4 ♗a6⇄] 11...♗f6 12.♘c2 ♗d7 13.♕d2 ♔h8 14.b4 ♘e7 15.b5 ♘f5∓



Position after: 15...♘f5∓

½-½ (82) Danielian, E (2426) – Hoang Thanh Trang (2448), Khanty-Mansiysk 2018.

8...♘e5!

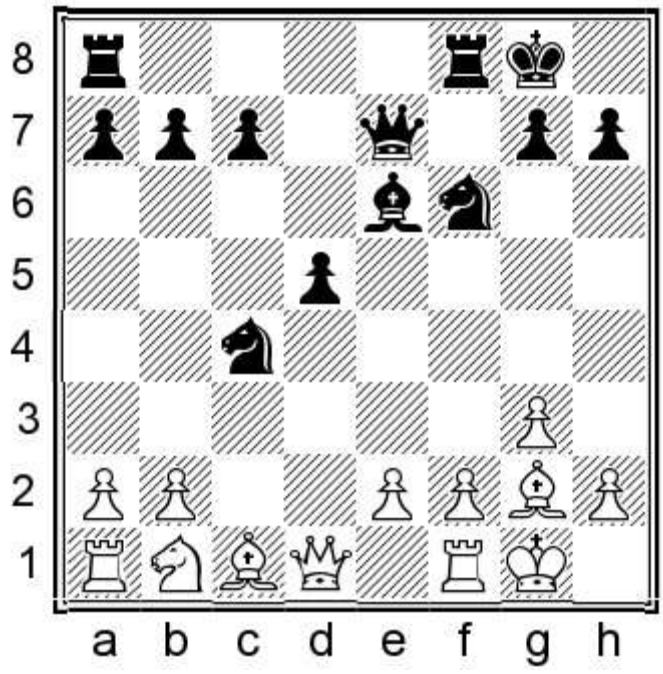


Position after: 8...♘e5!

9.♕b3!?

Defending c4 and keeping an eye on the b7-pawn, which can be useful.

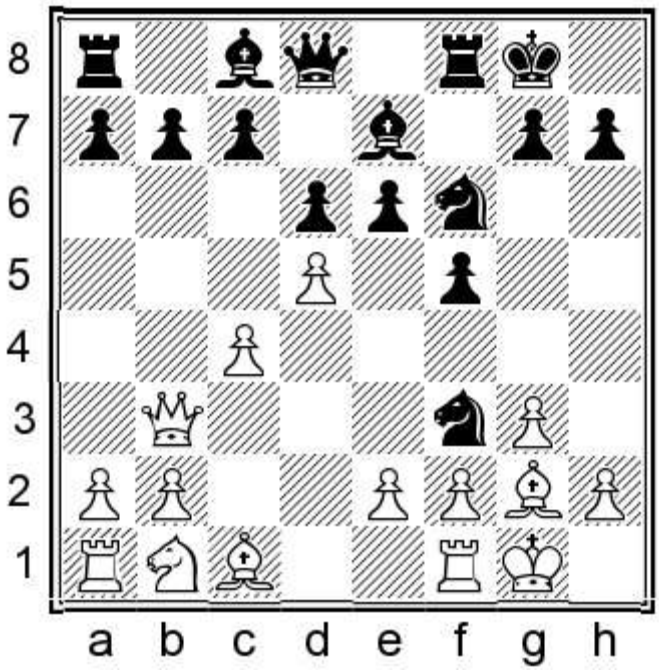
9.♘d4 This is a thematic pattern, but in the Classical line, White has already played ♘c3. This is an important dif- ference of course, and we can claim an equal game. 9...♘xc4! 10.dxe6 d5! 11.♘xf5 ♗xe6 12.♘xe7+ ♕xe7⇄



Position after: 12...♕xe7⇄

White has the bishop pair, but he has to fight against a strong center. Black's play is pretty simple. Normally these kinds of lines are not playable for Black, since with the inclusion of ♘c3 the d5-pawn would be hanging. Black lost in the game Moranda, W (2588) – Piorun, K (2586), Poland 2015, 1-0 (44), but he had no problems at all from the opening.

9...♘xf3+

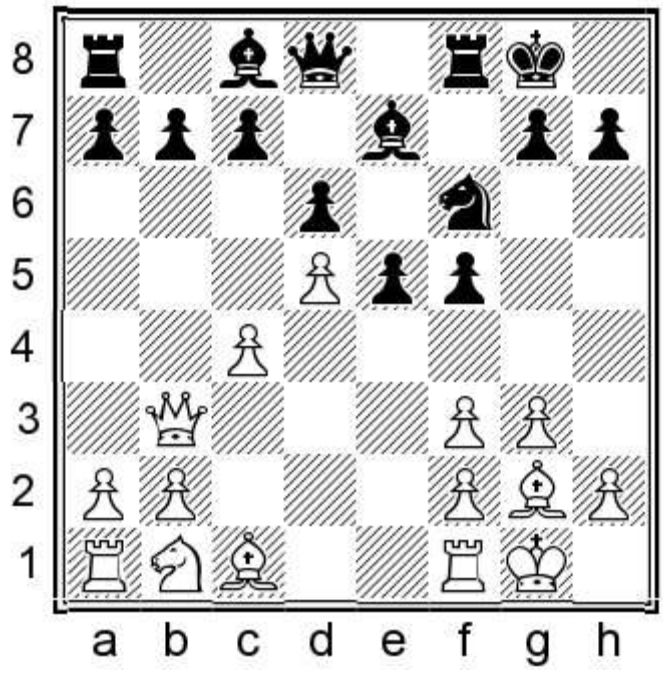


Position after: 9...♘xf3+

10.exf3!

10.♗xf3?! e5 11.♘c3 ♘d7 12.♕c2 a5! White has a difficult game, and can't even react in the center. 13.e4 f4!↑

10...e5N



Position after: 10...e5N

This move was a novelty at the time of my book on the Reti, but has been played twice since. The idea is to follow with 11...f4, burying the bishop on g2, and it is evident that White needs to prevent it.

11.f4!

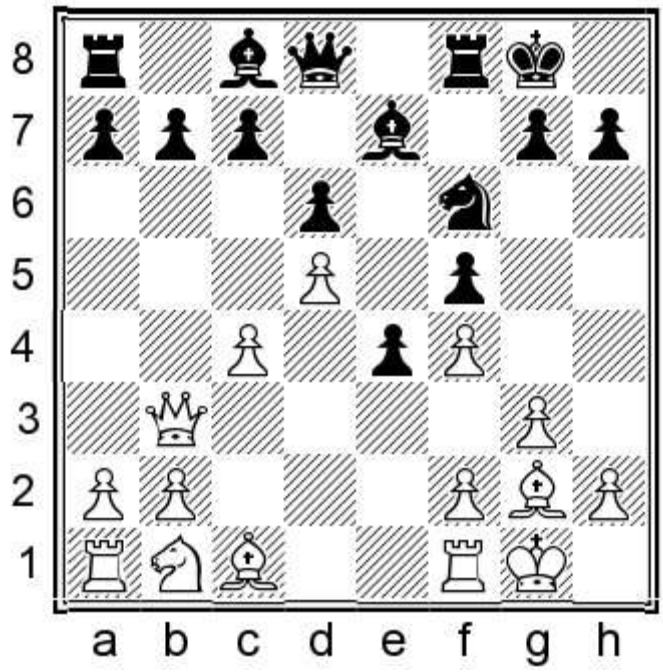
It's essential to prevent Black from playing ...f5−f4, and this is the only way. White is trying to suffocate Black, starting with his c8-bishop, which no longer seems to have any great prospects.

11.♘c3 f4! 12.gxf4 exf4 13.♗xf4 ♘h5 14.♗g3 ♘f4 15.♗xf4 ♖xf4⩱ We will always enjoy enough compensation for a pawn in this kind of middlegame.

11...♘d7!

This would be my choice now. I didn't analyze this move in my book; I only discovered the possibility later, and it was eventually played by the Indian grandmaster Sandipan last year.

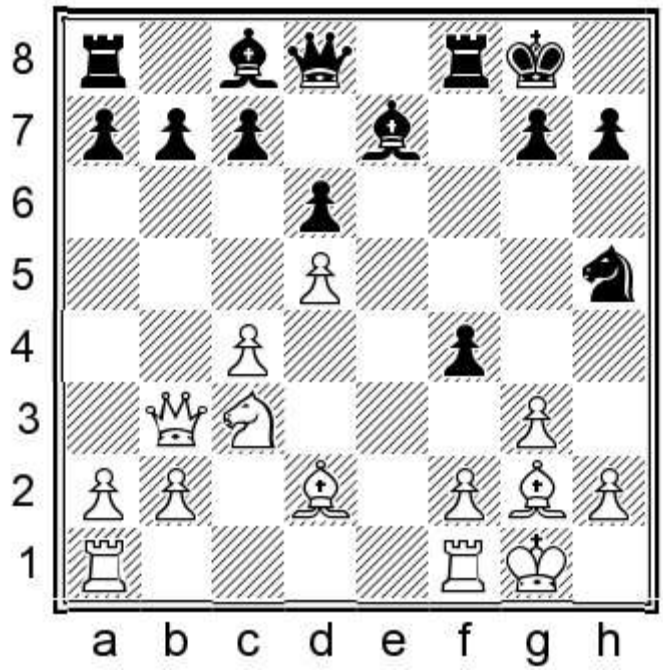
A) 11...e4



Position after: 11...e4

12.f3! [12.♘c3 leaves Black the possibility of playing 12...c5!? 13.♗d2 ♖b8 14.f3 exf3 15.♗xf3 ♖e8 16.♖ae1 ♗d7⇄.] 12...exf3 13.♗xf3 ♖e8 14.♘c3 ♗f8 15.♗d2± White has more space and keeps the upper hand.

B) 11...exf4 12.♗xf4 ♘h5 13.♗d2 f4 14.♘c3

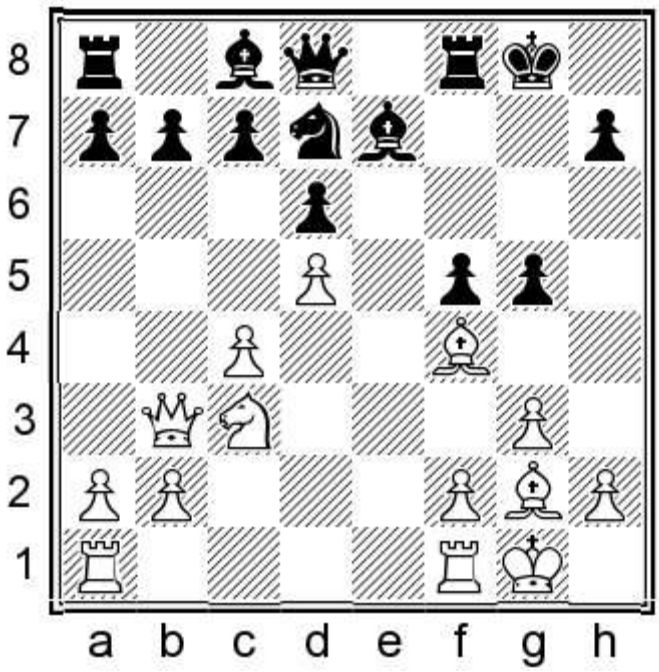


Position after: 14.♘c3

Black has gained some space and some activity for his pieces, but is still worse, mainly because of his

awkward knight on h5. 14...♗g5!? 15.♕d1!±

12.♘c3 exf4 13.♗xf4 g5!?



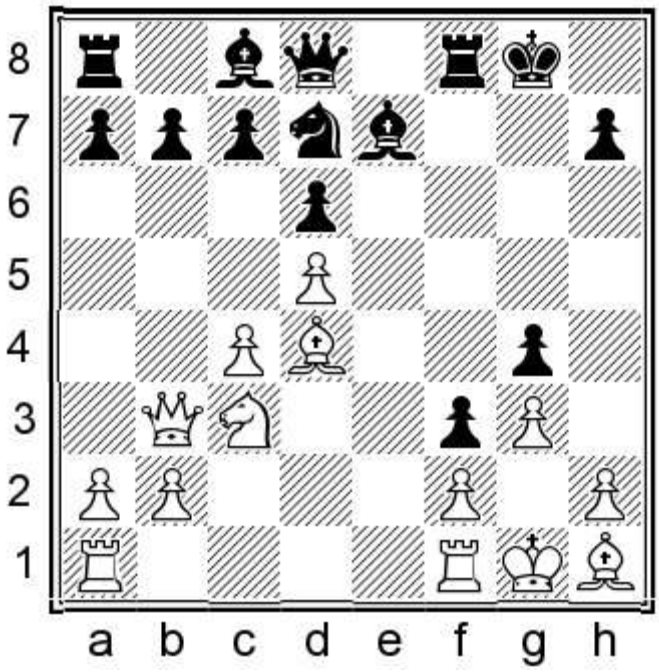
Position after: 13...g5!?

A clever idea, and an ambitious one. Black chases the bishop in order to better develop his pieces.

14.♗d2!

Definitely the right square.

14.♗e3?! f4 15.♗d4 f3 16.♗h1 g4∓



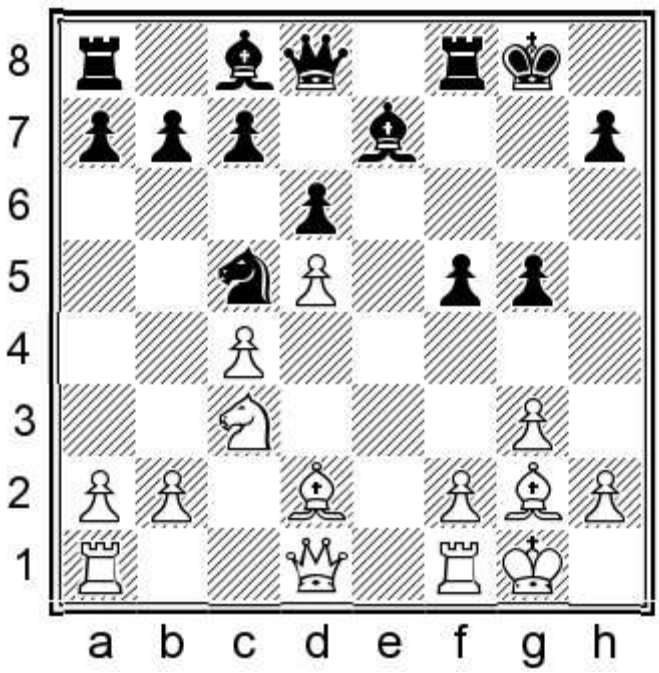
Position after: 16...g4∓

Now White is in effect playing a piece down. His king can also be in danger in such lines.

14...♘c5

14...f4 is also a very interesting try, but maybe a bit too direct. 15.gxf4 gxf4 16.♘e2 ♘c5 17.♕f3 ♗f6⇄

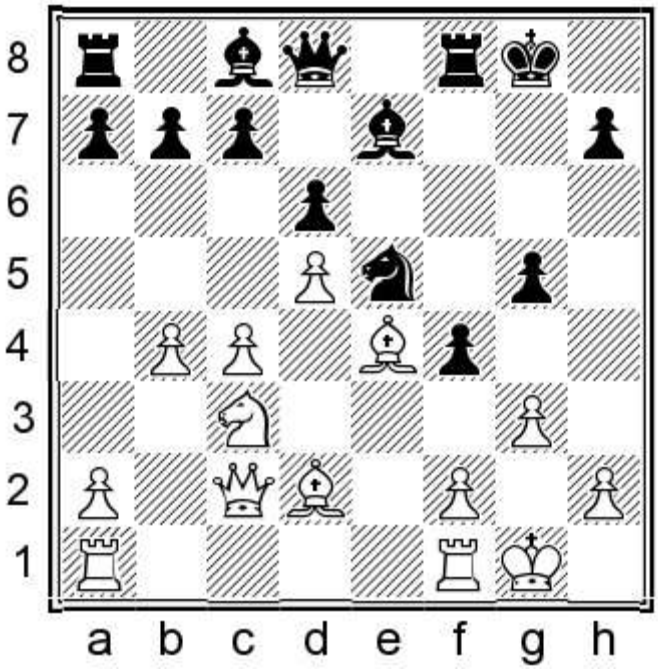
15.♕d1



Position after: 15.♕d1

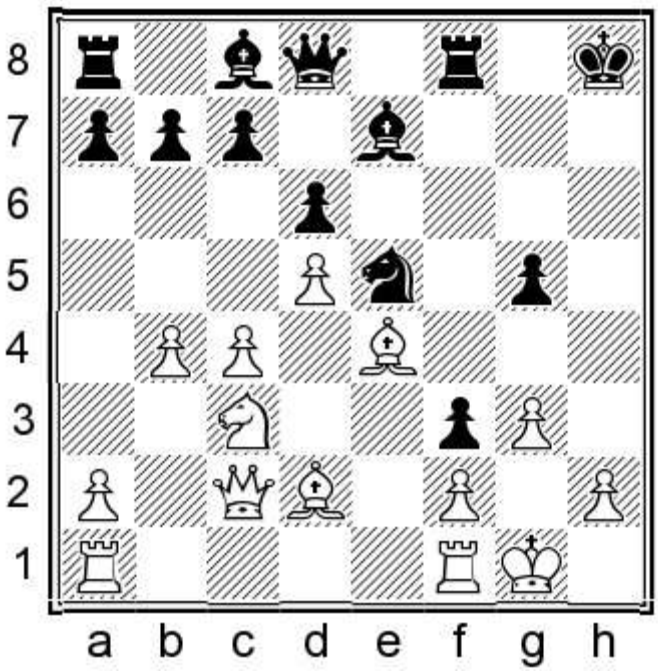
The most human move, controlling the important f3-square. In the only game that saw this position, Black had no trouble equalizing.

15.♕c2!?N 15...f4! 16.b4 ♘d7 17.♗e4 ♘e5!



Position after: 17...♘e5!

A) 18.♗xh7+ ♔h8 19.♗e4 [19.♗d3? is too early. After 19...♕d7 White is busted, as both ...♘f3+ and ...♕h3 are threatened.] 19...f3→

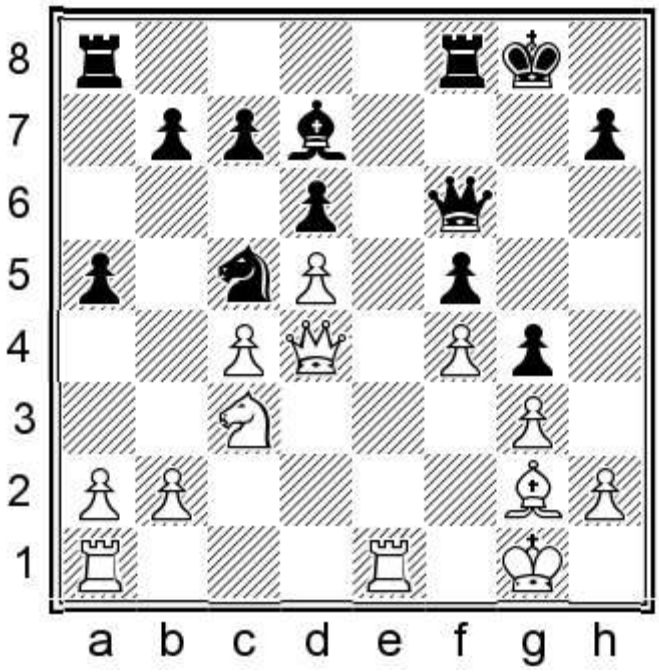


Position after: 19...f3→

Black aims to follow with ...♕d7 and ...♕h3. A basic idea, but hard to meet! 20.♗d3! ♕d7 21.♖fe1 ♔g7! 22.♗f1 ♕g4∓ Black intends ...♖h8 and ...♕h5 with dangerous mating threats.

B) 18.♘b5! Necessary, according to the computer, but a difficult move to find! The knight makes some space for the bishop, and returns to d4, from where it will control the f3-square. 18...♗f6! 19.♗c3 ♔h8 20.♖fe1 ♗h3→ Stockfish keeps preferring White in this situation, but it seems fully playable in practice!

15...♗f6 16.f4 g4 17.♗e3 a5!? 18.♗d4 ♗d7 19.♖e1 ♗xd4+ 20.♕xd4 ♕f6=

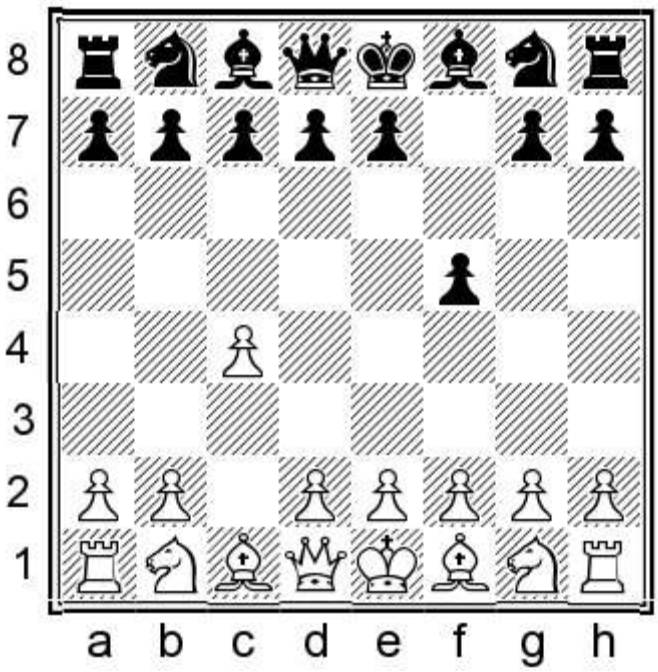


Position after: 20...♕f6=

White is unable to do anything on the e-file, so Black was fine in Rahman, Z (2495) – Sandipan, C (2573), Kolkata 2018, ½-½ (30).

Chapter 12
The Leningrad Dutch versus the English

1.c4 f5



Chapter Guide

Chapter 12 – The Leningrad Dutch versus the English

1.c4 f5

a) 2.--

b) 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.e4, 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.e4

c) 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.d3 d6 6.e4 (Botvinnik System)

d) 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.e3

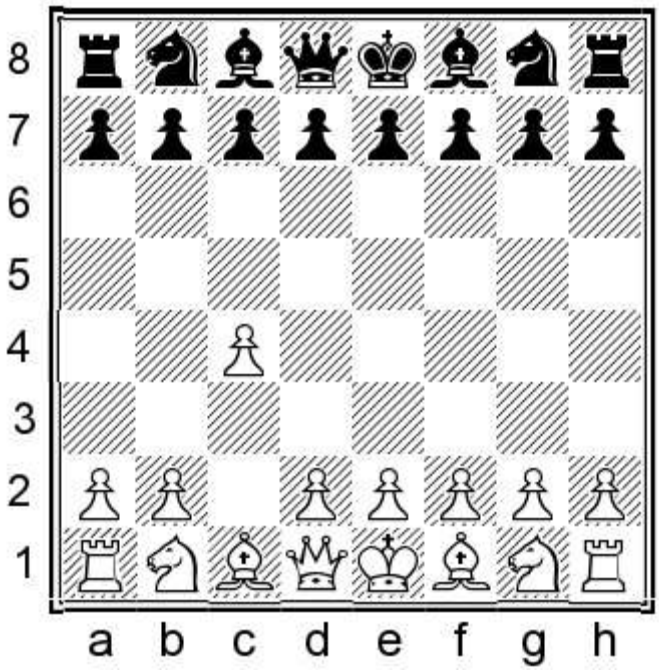
e) 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♘c3 d6!?

f) 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.♘c3 d6 7.d3 e5 8.--, 8.♗d2

g) 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.♘c3 d6 7.d3 e5 8.♖b1

a) 2.--

1.c4

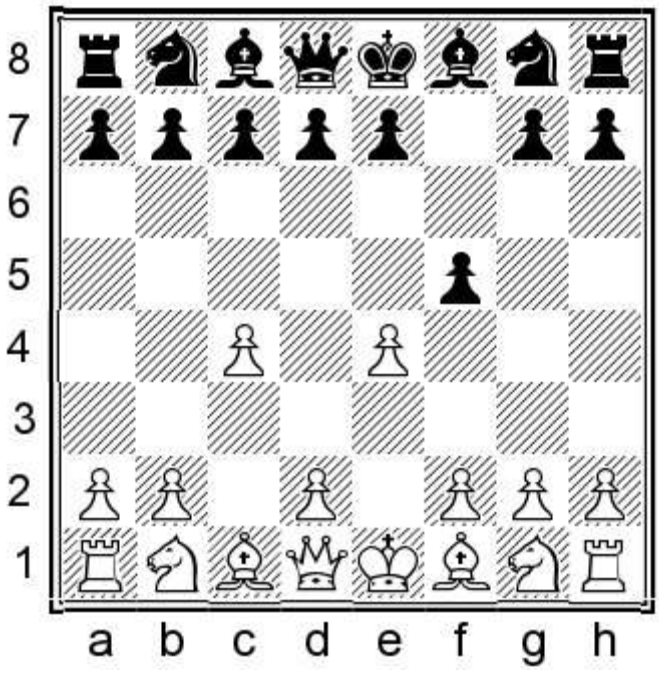


Position after: 1.c4

Having considered the 1.♘f3 move order, intending to play Reti variations against the Dutch, it's logical to look at the English. Treating this large opening complex in only one chapter may seem ambitious, but, when you think about it, it makes sense. As soon as White plays d4, you can refer to the previous chapters, and possibilities for White that do not include d4 are quite limited. There are three main categories: (i) White plays for e4, taking advantage of his d-pawn being able to help from d3, and the g1-knight generally remains on its initial square until e4 has been played. (ii) White plays slowly with e3 and ♘ge2, trying to reach a flexible middlegame. (iii) White places his knight on f3 (it can often arise via the 1.♘f3 move order), and tries to expand on the queenside with ♖b1 and b4−b5. As you can see, the plan White chooses depends mainly on the placing of his g1-knight. The subchapters will follow this order, so let's start with the possibilities for White to play e4.

1...f5 2.g3

2.e4

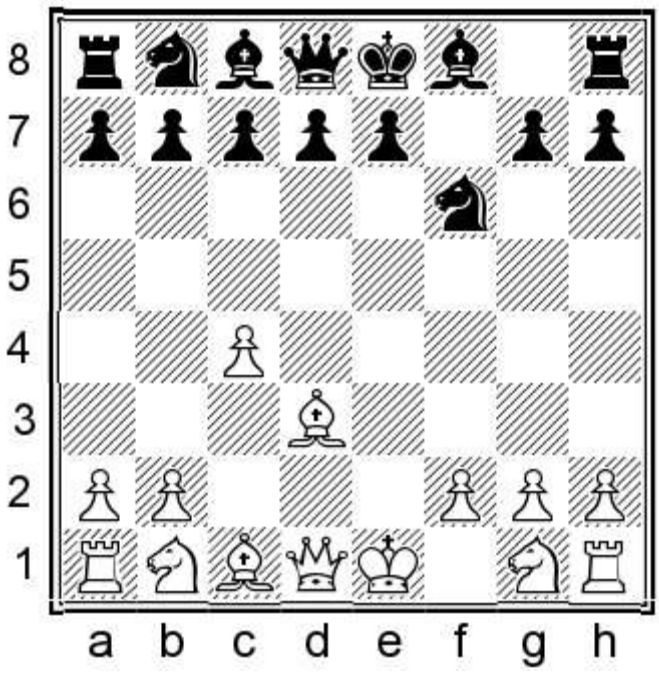


Position after: 2.e4

A kind of mix of Staunton Gambit (1.d4 f5 2.e4), and Lisitsyn Gambit (1.♘f3 f5 2.e4), which have both already been covered. It's not exactly a bad sacrifice, but it's not so dangerous either. 2...fxe4 3.d3

A) 3...♘f6 Presumably it's also possible to start with this move, as it should transpose to the same position after 4.dxe4 ♘xe4 5.♗d3 ♘f6. The only difference is that we are already on move five, instead of move four! So if you're likely to end up in time trouble, think about it. ☺

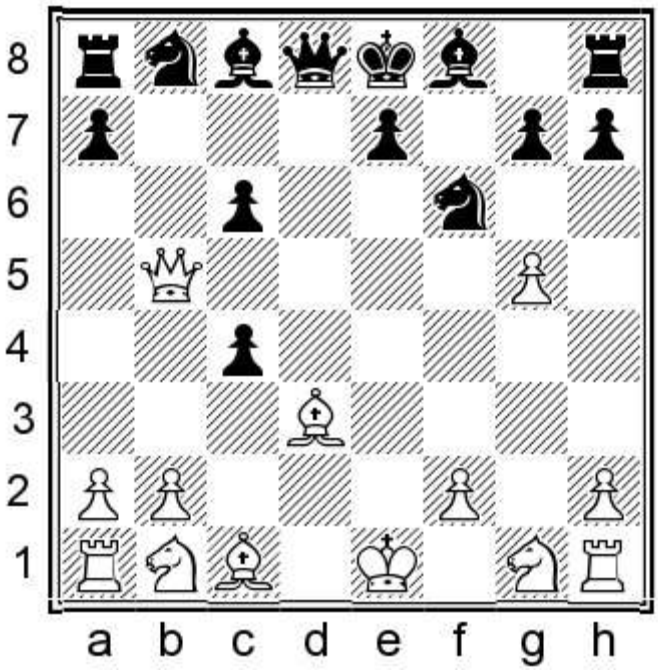
B) 3...exd3!? 4.♗xd3 ♘f6



Position after: 4...♘f6

This opening is also reminiscent of From's Gambit with colors reversed (1.f4 e5 2.fxe5 d6 3.exd6 ♗xd6 4.♘f3), except that c4 has already been played, which is not necessarily an improvement. Indeed it might prove to have weakened the center, especially the d4-square.

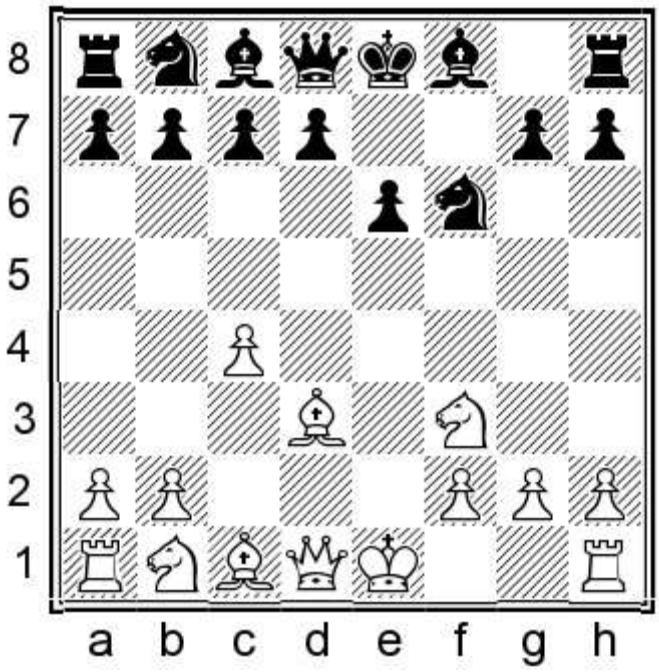
B1) 5.g4? Here we can see a big difference compared to From's Gambit (where 4...g5 is the main line), as this move fails: 5...d5! 6.g5? dxc4! 7.♕a4+. Of course White doesn't want to trade queens, but we have a strong reply: 7...b5 8.♕xb5+ c6!



Position after: 8...c6!

Keeping the queen under attack. 9.♕xc4 ♗a6 The material balance is going to be restored, but White will remain with a disastrous position. 10.♕b3 ♕xd3 11.♕xd3 ♗xd3 12.gxf6 exf6–+

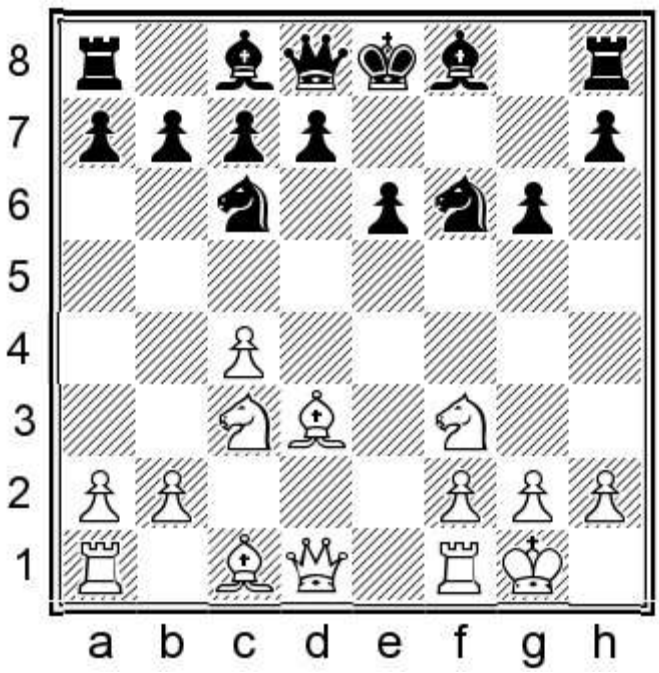
B2) 5.♘f3 e6



Position after: 5...e6

B2.1) 6.♘g5 This maneuver is similar to the one in the line 1.♘f3 f5 2.d3 ♘f6?! 3.e4 that we have discussed already and that is good for White, but here White has spent a move playing c4, which is enough to see his initiative vanish. 6...♗b4+! And since c3 is not available, Black will have time to castle. 7.♗d2 ♗xd2+ 8.♘xd2 0-0∓

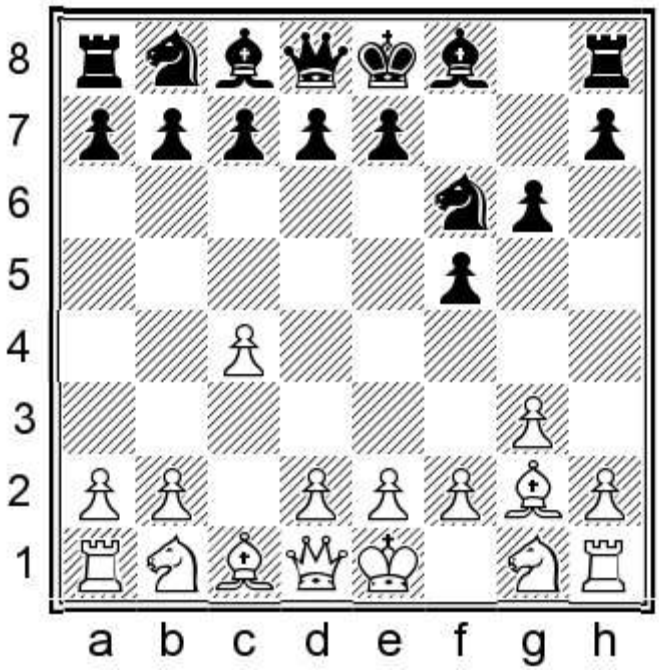
B2.2) 6.0-0! White shouldn't look for a quick win. He is a pawn down, but still has a playable position. 6...♘c6 7.♘c3 g6!



Position after: 7...g6!

Now that White has castled, we no longer need to fear h4−h5, so can decide to play a fianchetto. The move also curtails the action of the d3-bishop against our kingside. 8.♗g5 ♗g7 9.♖e1 0-0 10.♕d2 d6∓ I think Black's position is simpler to play. White still needs to show why one of his pawns is missing.

2...♘f6 3.♗g2 g6

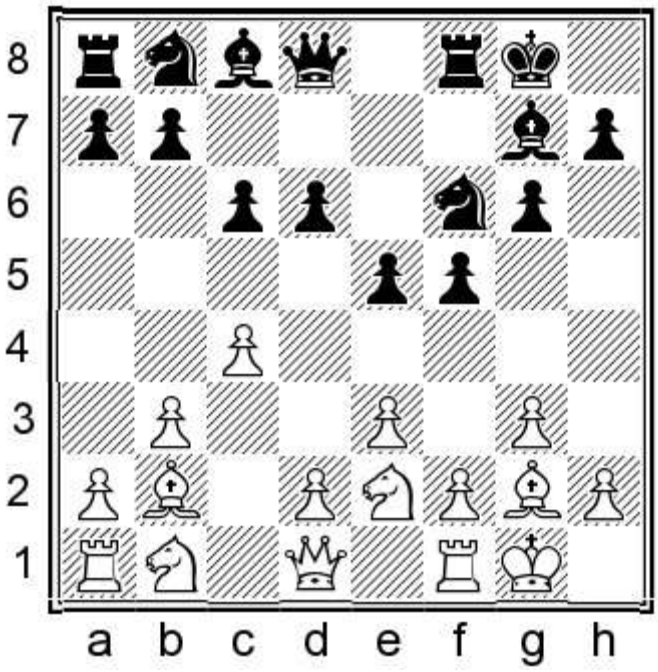


Position after: 3...g6

4.d3

White prepares e2−e4 as quickly as possible.

4.b3 Usually when White plays a double fianchetto (as in Chapter 8), the issue is to prevent Black from playing ...e5. Here White simply allows it! 4...e5 5.♗b2 d6 6.e3 [6.♘f3 We have already considered this kind of position after 1.♘f3 f5 2.b3.] 6...♗g7 7.♘e2 0-0 8.0-0 c6



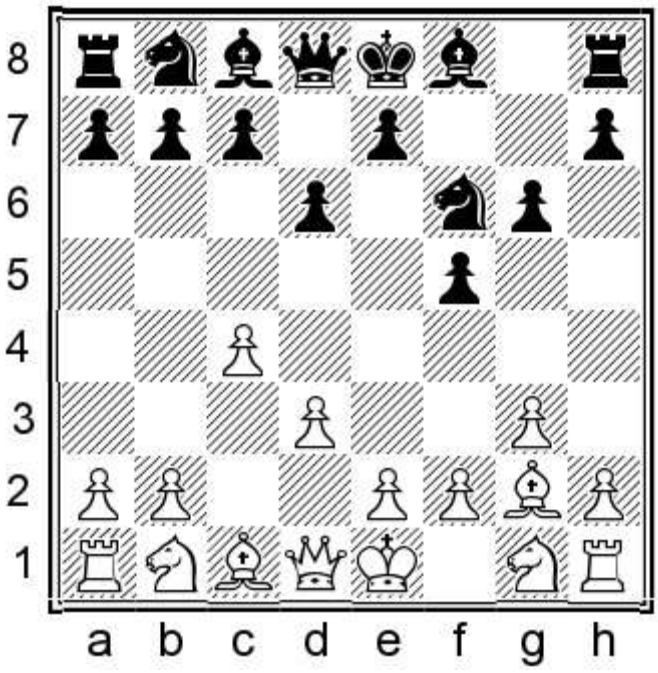
Position after: 8...c6

A) 9.d4 This kind of reaction in the center will always be met with the same reply: 9...e4 10.♘bc3 ♘a6!? 11.♕d2 ♘c7= Black intends ...d5, and to follow with a slow attack on the kingside, where White's pieces have difficulty defending because of the strong e4-pawn.

B) 9.♘bc3 ♘a6 10.d3 ♕e7=

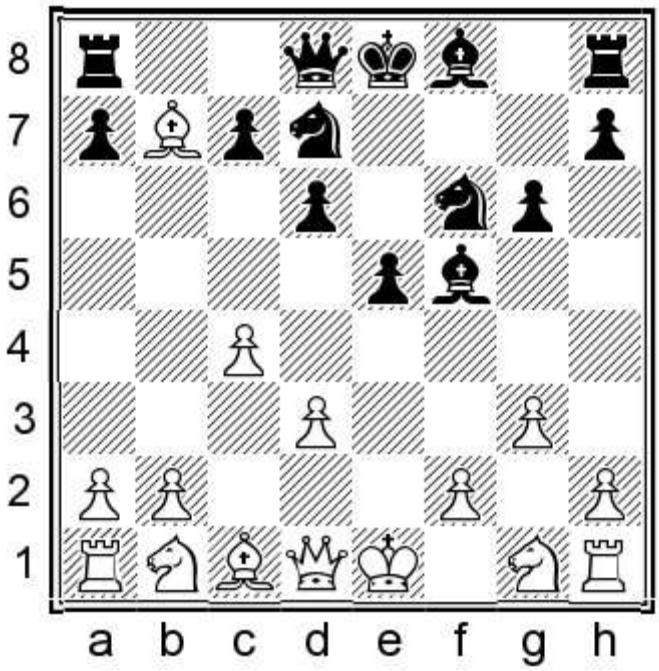
4...♗g7!

4...d6



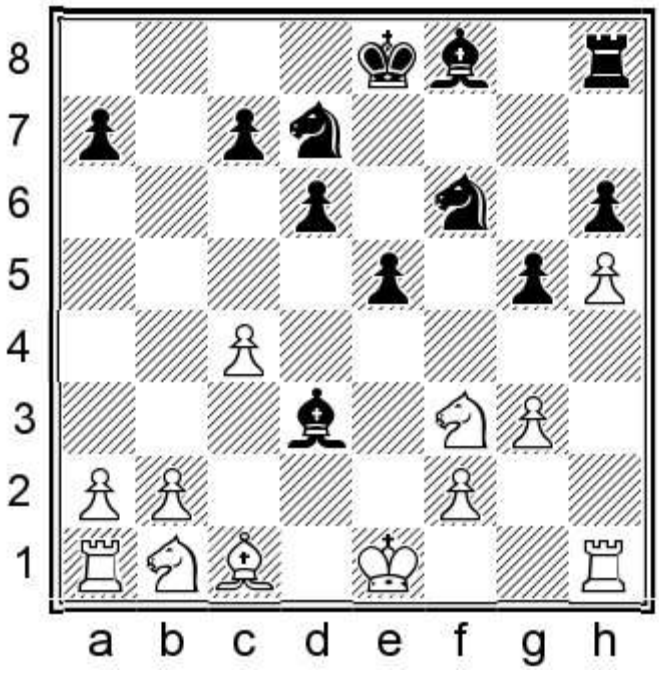
Position after: 4...d6

I had actually played the same idea, but in a different way. I preferred to have the pawn on e5, instead of the bishop on g7, but it's actually not as strong, and I will show why. 5.e4 e5 6.h4?! [6.exf5! was the right way to go. 6...♗xf5 7.♗xb7 ♘bd7



Position after: 7...♘bd7

Of course if White takes on a8, it's very similar to our line, but White can sim-ply develop his pieces. 8.♘c3! ♖b8 9.♗e4!±] 6...h6 7.h5 g5 8.exf5 ♗xf5 This was just a slightly better version for me. The pawn on h5 is doing nothing and is potentially weak. 9.♗xb7 ♘bd7 10.♗xa8 ♕xa8 11.♕f3 ♕xf3 12.♘xf3 ♗xd3



Position after: 12...♗xd3

Black can be happy with his compensation, and the position is much easier to play for him. 13.♘bd2?! ♗g7 14.a4 0-0 15.♘h2 e4 16.♖a2?! ♘e5 17.b3 ♘fg4!–+ There are too many threats for White to handle. I won quickly in Jolly, J (2345) – Demuth, A (2531), La Massana 2015, 0-1 (23).

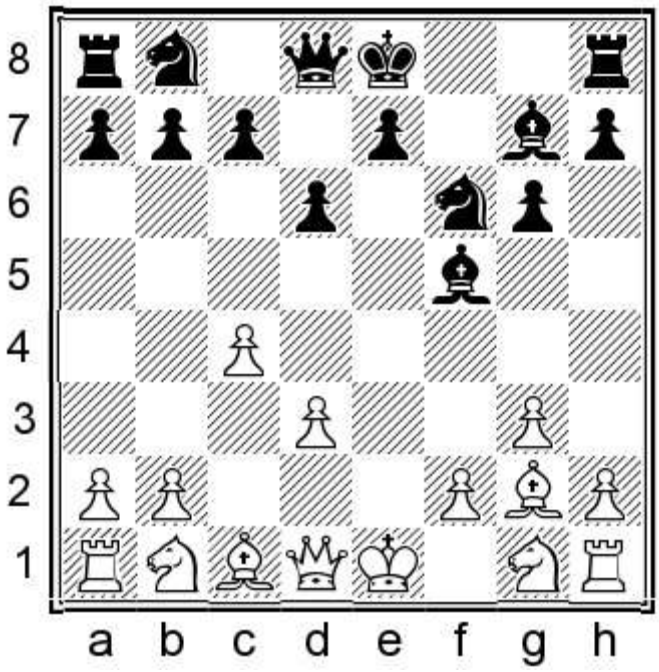
5.e4

White can also develop his knights, but it will just transpose to other variations.

5...d6 6.exf5

6.♘c3 transposes to the main line of the next subchapter.

6...♗xf5!



Position after: 6...♗xf5!

This pawn sacrifice is quite strong. White doesn't have to accept it, but Black will be fine anyway.

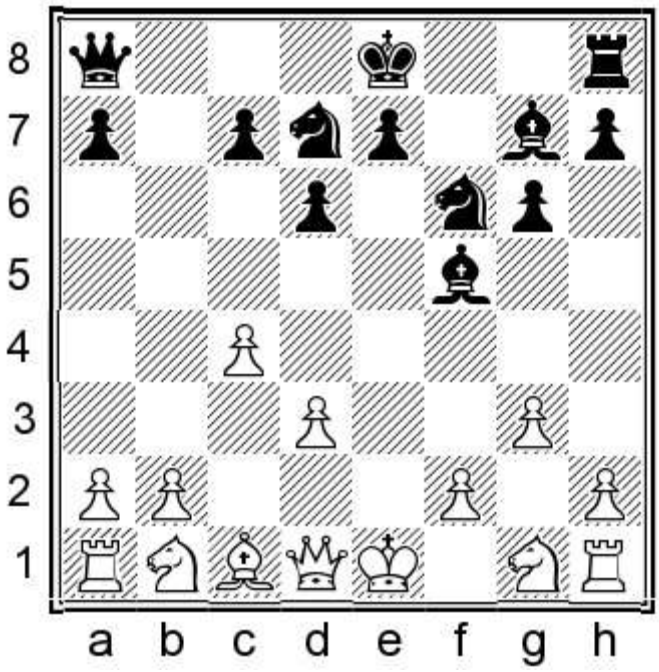
7.♗xb7

7.♘c3 0-0 8.h3 ♘c6 9.♘ge2 e5∓

7...♘bd7 8.d4!

Probably best, in order to prevent the knight intrusion.

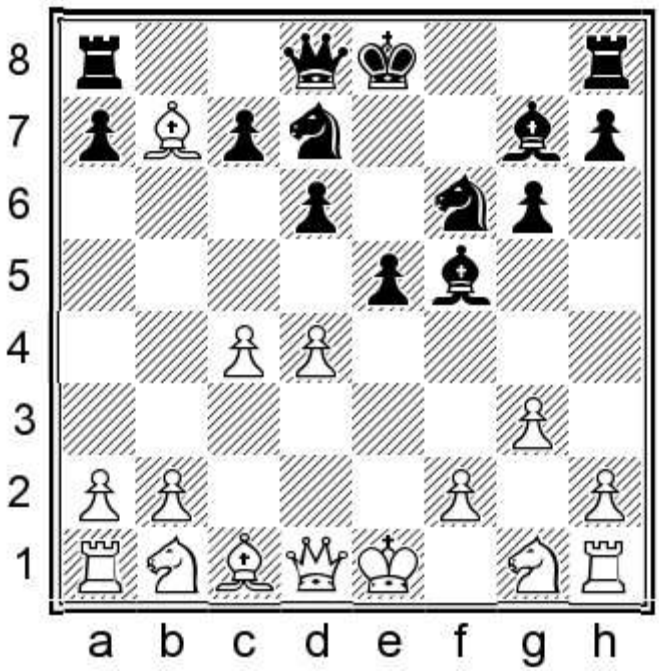
8.♗xa8? is actually even worse as Black's play is way too strong: 8...♕xa8



Position after: 8...♕xa8

9.f3 [9.♕f3 ♕b8! 10.♘c3 ♘e5 11.♕d1 ♘xd3+ 12.♔f1 ♘g4–+] 9...♘c5 10.♘c3 ♘xd3+ 11.♔f1 0-0–+. The king has nowhere to find a safe spot.

8...e5!

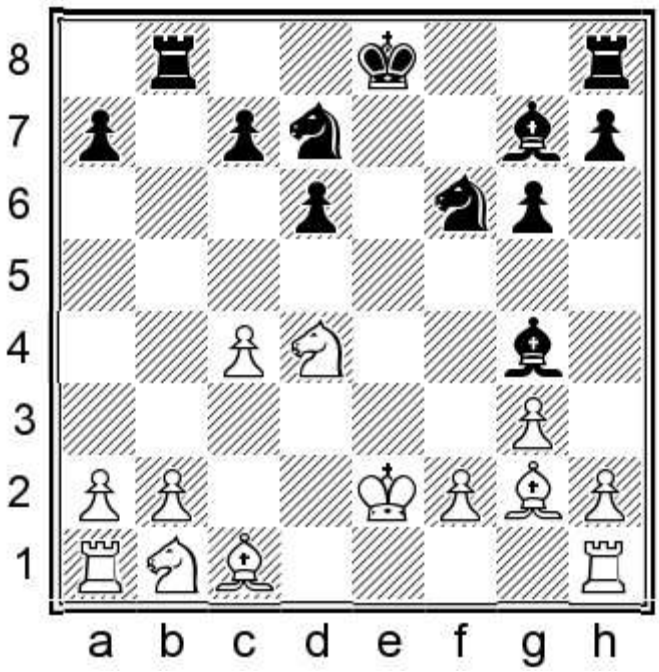


Position after: 8...e5!

Black can try to free the e5-square anyway!

9.♘e2! ♖b8 10.♗g2 exd4 11.♘xd4 ♕e7+ 12.♕e2 ♕xe2+ 13.♔xe2 ♗g4+

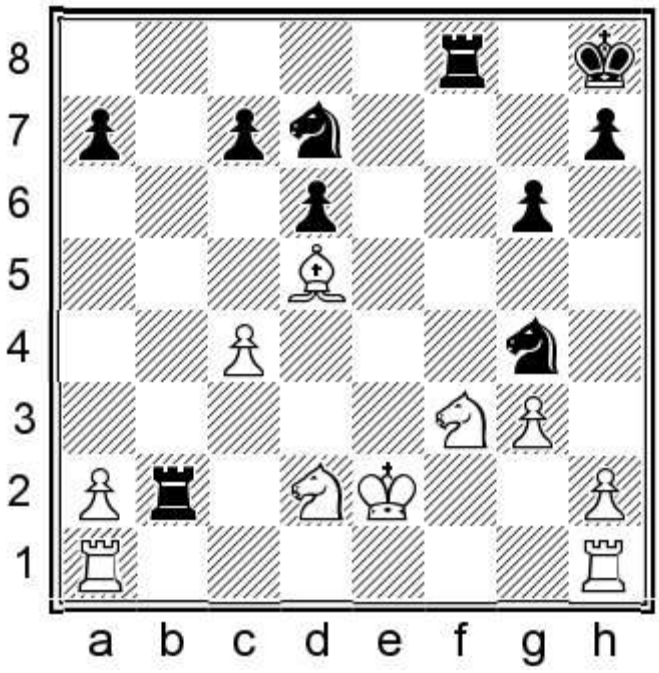
By no means forced, but Black intends a strong piece sacrifice. A real computer continuation!



Position after: 13...♗g4+

Of course you have more human choices, but this is objectively strong.

14.f3 0-0!! 15.fxg4 ♘xg4 16.♗d5+ ♔h8 17.♘f3 ♗xb2 18.♗xb2+ ♖xb2+ 19.♘bd2



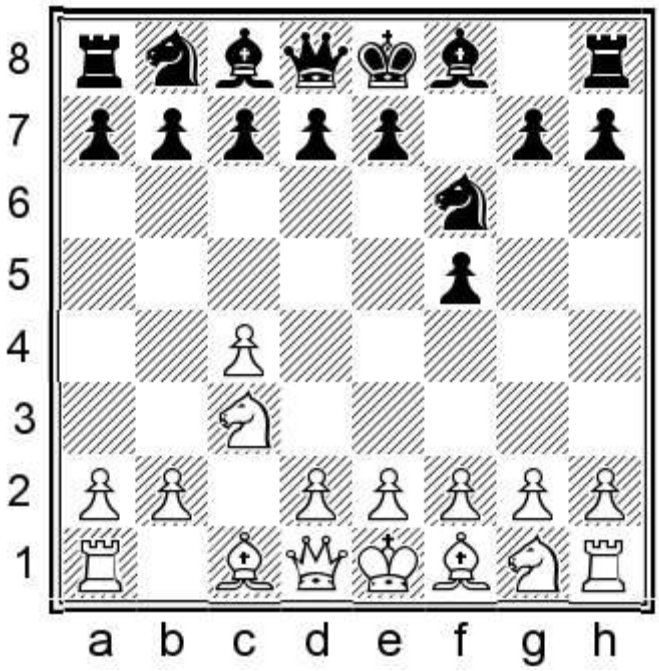
Position after: 19.♘bd2

19...♖e8+ 20.♔f1 ♘de5 21.♖e1 ♖f8 22.♔g1 c6 23.♗e4 ♘xf3+ 24.♘xf3 ♘f2∓

White is paralyzed and doesn't even have a real material advantage.

b) 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.e4, 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.e4

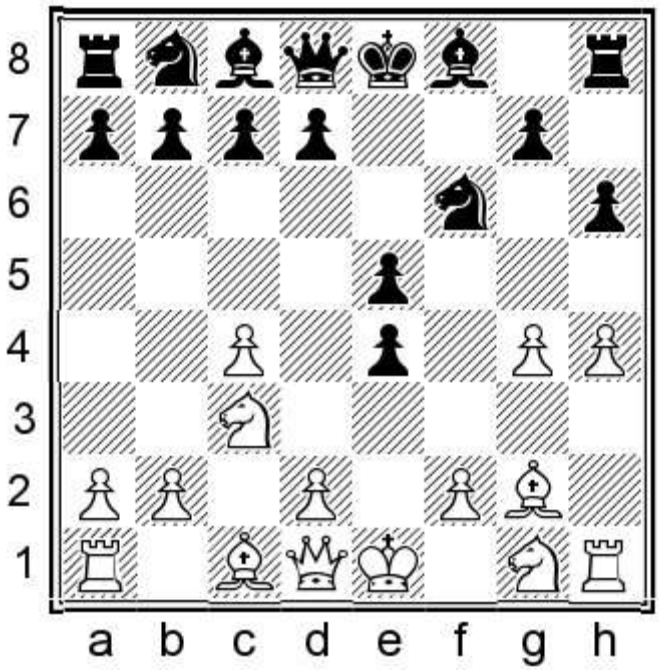
1.c4 f5 2.♘c3 ♘f6



Position after: 2...♘f6

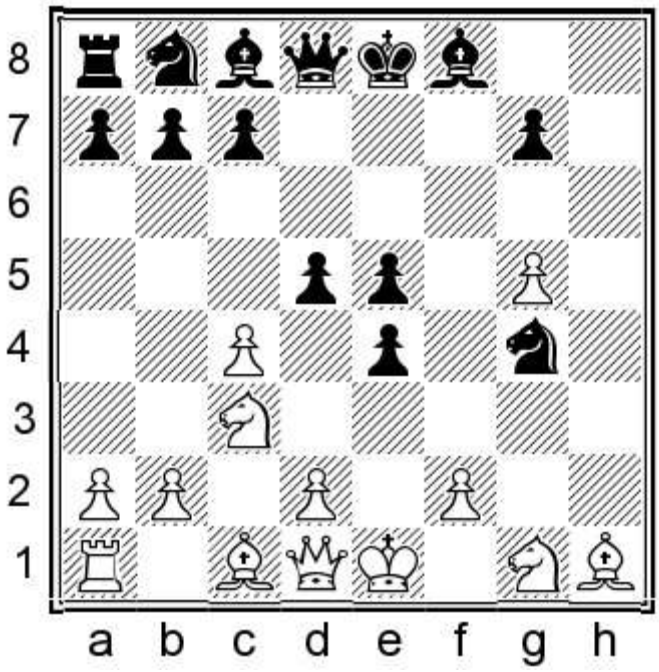
3.g3

3.e4 fxe4 4.g4?! This has been tried a few times, actually even more often than 4.d3, but it's not great. [4.d3 exd3 5.♗xd3 e6 Once White plays ♘f3, we will have transposed to 2.e4 in the previous subchapter.] 4...h6! This looks like an ugly weakening of the light squares, but White is unable to reach them for now. 5.♗g2 e5! 6.h4



Position after: 6.h4

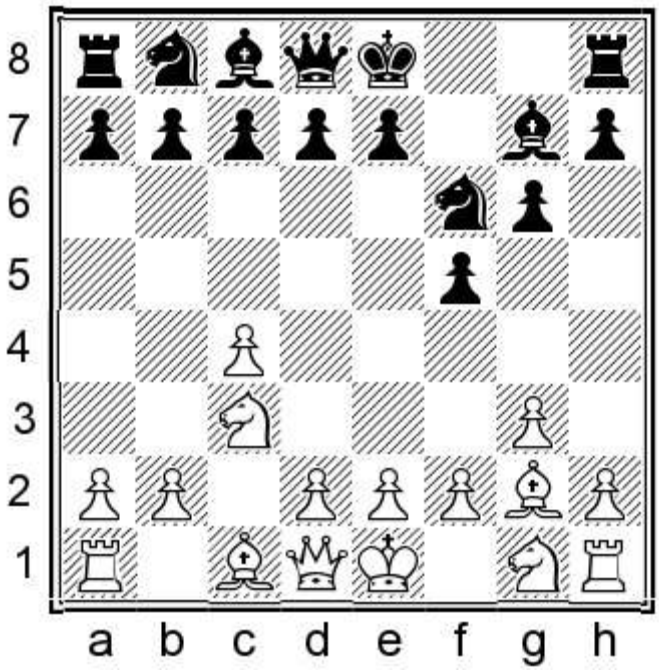
Here the young Vallejo Pons lost in only twelve moves in the game Mellado Trivino, J (2455) – Vallejo Pons, F (2420), Oropesa del Mar 1996. Instead of the losing move 6...♗e7, he could have played 6...d5! 7.g5 hxg5 8.hxg5 ♖xh1 9.♗xh1 ♘g4!



Position after: 9...♘g4!

This is why we needed to move our d-pawn, otherwise ♕h5+ would have been killing. 10.cxd5 ♕xg5 11.♘xe4 ♕g6∓ Black has managed to stabilize his position. He just needs to castle and will stand very well.

3...g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7



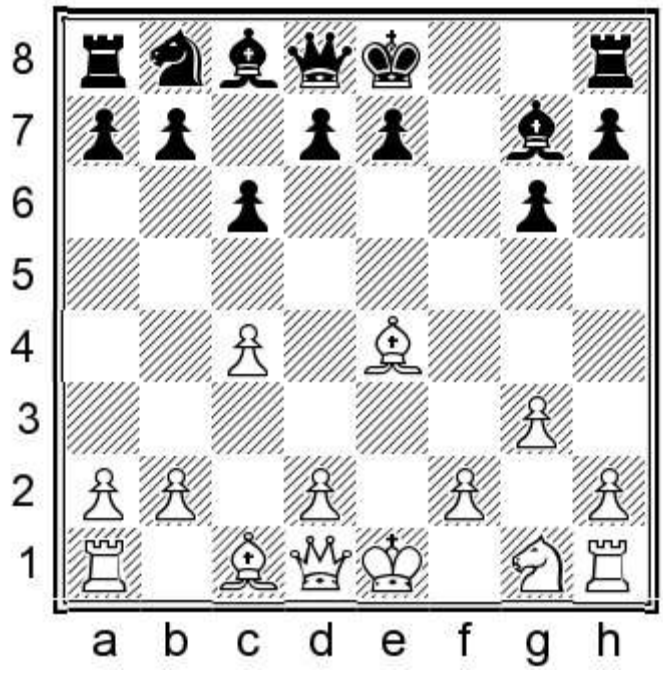
Position after: 4...♗g7

We have reached a standard position where White has several ways to play. He can still play 5.d4, of course, and transpose to the classical systems, or can also play 5.♘f3, which will be covered in the last subchapters of this book. This means we only need to check moves such as 5.d3, 5.e3 and 5.e4.

5.e4?!

You'll probably know already (I've said it loads of times in the book!) that White often tries to open the position with e2−e4, so this looks like a sensible approach. However the important thing to understand is whether it's under favorable conditions or not − and here it doesn't seem so great.

5...fxe4 6.♘xe4 ♘xe4 7.♗xe4 c6!



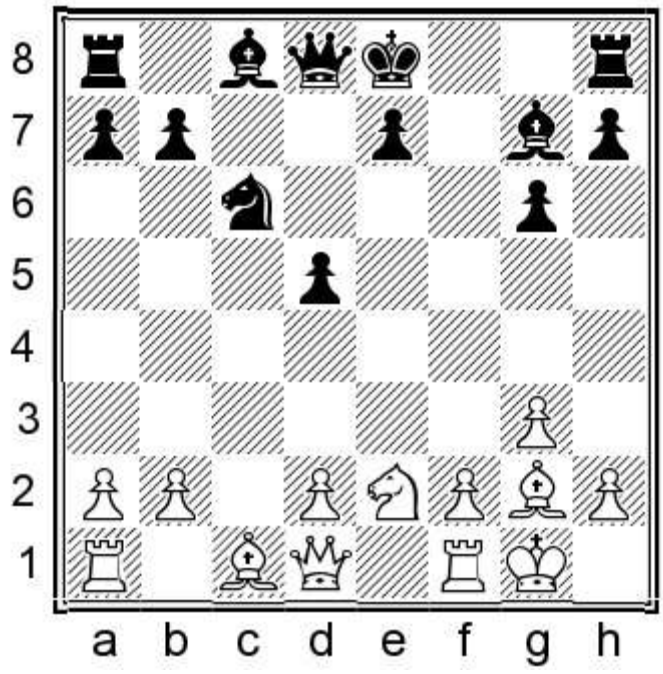
Position after: 7...c6!

A very concrete approach. Black reacts in the center immediately.

8.♘e2

8.d4?! ♕b6!? 9.♗e3 ♕b4+ 10.♕d2 ♕xc4∓

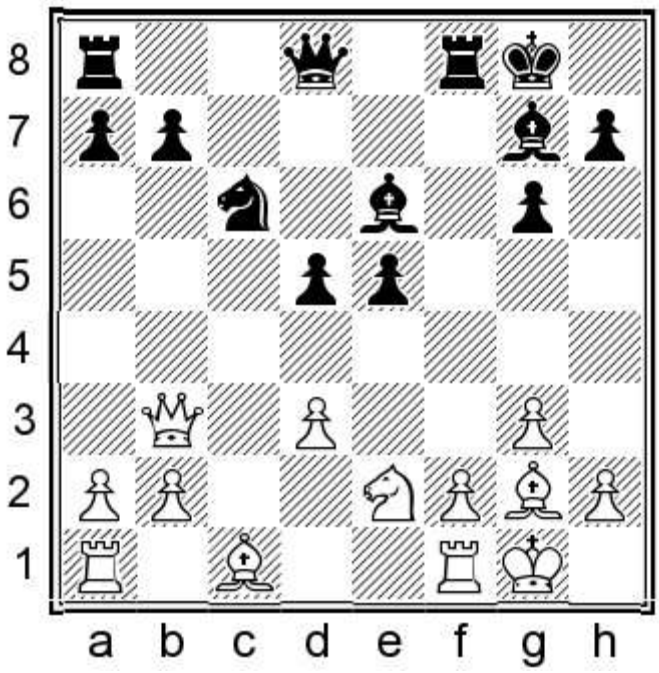
8...d5 9.cxd5 cxd5 10.♗g2 ♘c6! 11.0-0



Position after: 11.0-0

11...♗g4!

11...0-0 12.d3 e5 13.♕b3 ♗e6



Position after: 13...♗e6

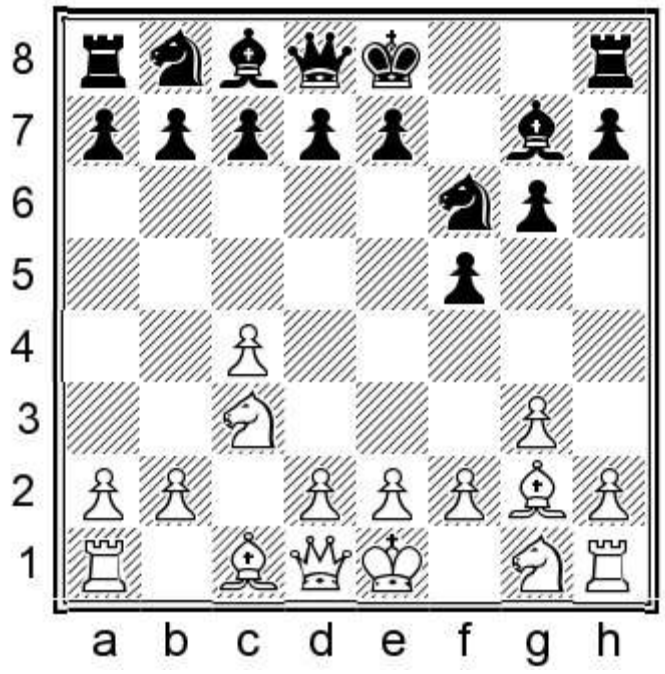
Black gives up a pawn in exchange for some tempi and the opening of the b-file. 14.♕xb7 ♕d6 15.♕a6 ♕d7 16.♗d2 ♖ab8⩲ 1-0 (35) Grivas, E (2509) – Ruijgrok, D (2329), Wijk aan Zee 2008.

12.h3 ♗xe2 13.♕xe2 ♘d4 14.♕g4 ♕d6∓

The knight is doing a fantastic job on d4, and is clearly worth one of White's bishops.

c) 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.d3 d6 6.e4 (Botvinnik System)

1.c4 f5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7

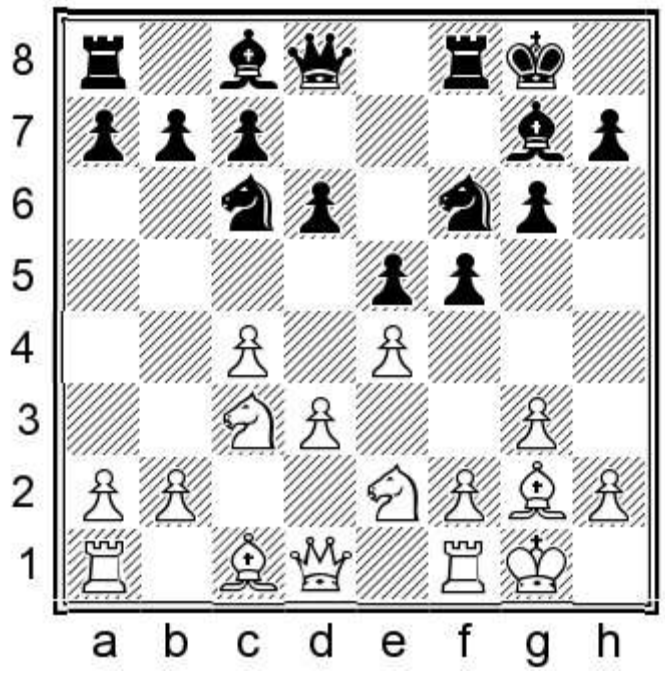


Position after: 4...♗g7

5.d3 d6 6.e4

Other moves would just transpose to other systems.

6...♘c6 7.♘ge2 0-0 8.0-0 e5



Position after: 8...e5

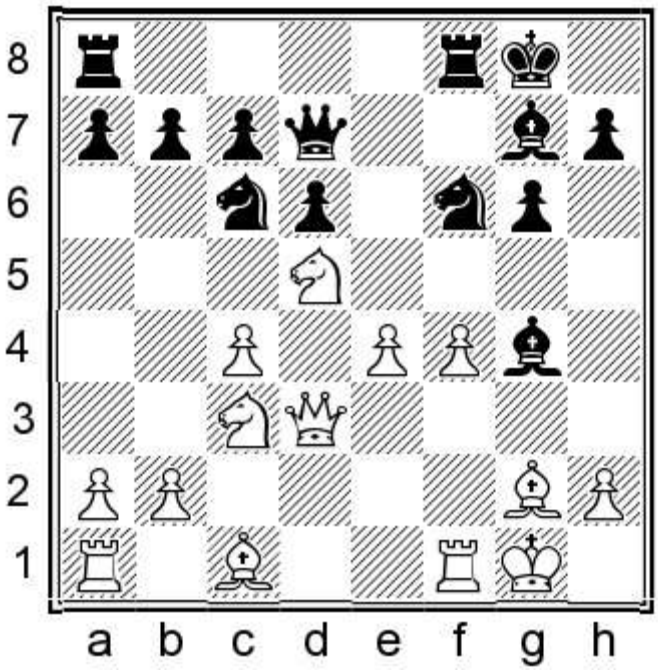
Reaching the important Botvinnik System with the thematic c4-d3-e4 pawn structure.

There are several ways to play with White.

9.♘d5

This is definitely White's main move, attacking the c7-pawn. Black must keep this in mind.

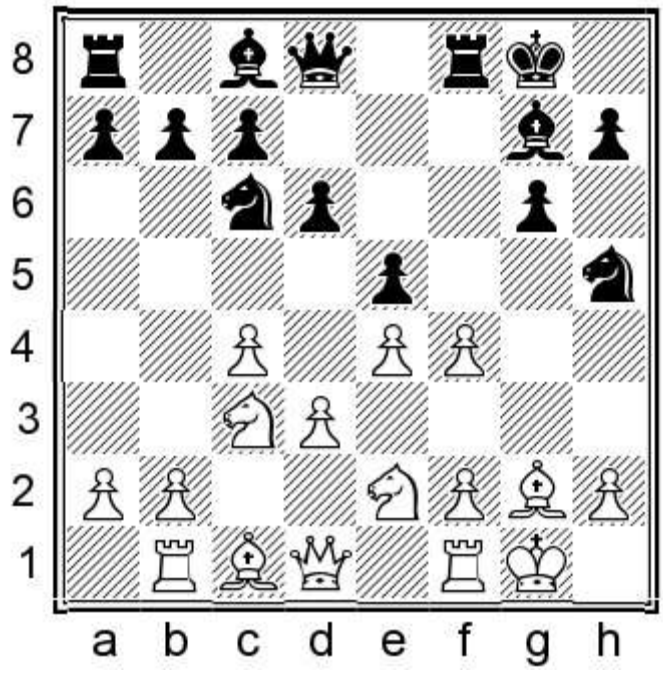
A) 9.f4 Some players feel that they are ready to open the center, but it's Black who can decide which pawn structure he wants. 9...fxe4 10.dxe4 [10.♘xe4?! ♘xe4 11.♗xe4 ♗g4!∓] 10...exf4 11.gxf4 ♗e6 12.♘d5 ♕d7 13.♕d3 ♗g4 14.♘ec3



Position after: 14.♘ec3

Now in the game Suslova, A (2196) – Matlakov, M (2663), St. Petersburg 2012, 0-1 (47), I think Black should have focused on the f4-pawn with 14...♘h5!? 15.♗d2 ♖f7 16.♖ae1 ♖af8∓.

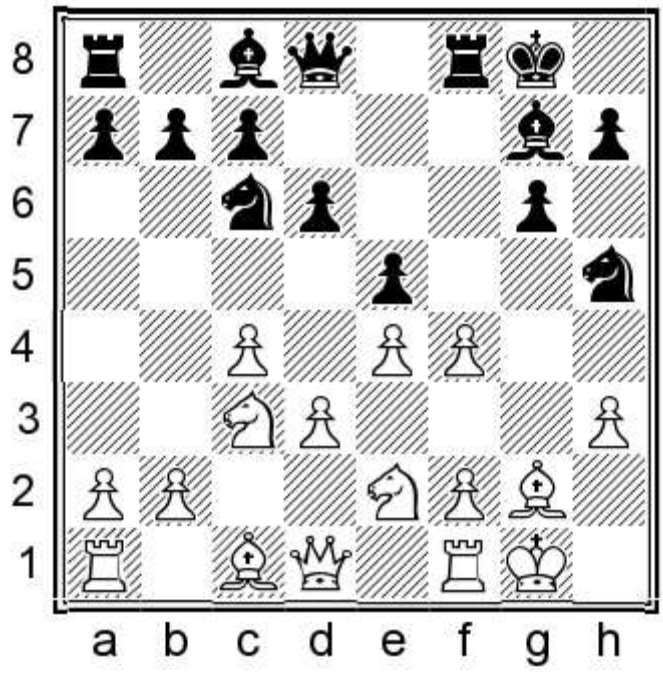
B) 9.♖b1?! Now that there is a pawn on e4, it's less logical to advance the b-pawn, as it wouldn't weaken the long light-squared diagonal. 9...f4!? is a typical pawn sacrifice, an idea we will meet again in the following variations. 10.gxf4 ♘h5!



Position after: 10...♘h5!

11.fxe5 [11.f5 ♕h4! 12.♘d5 ♖f7 13.fxg6 hxg6 14.f3 ♘f4!∓ Black has very good play on the dark squares and is actually much better.] 11...dxe5 12.f3 ♗e6 13.♗e3 ♘d4 14.♕d2 ♖f7!∓

C) 9.h3?! I think this move is already a serious mistake. We are perfectly placed to try to refute White's opening. 9...f4! 10.gxf4 ♘h5

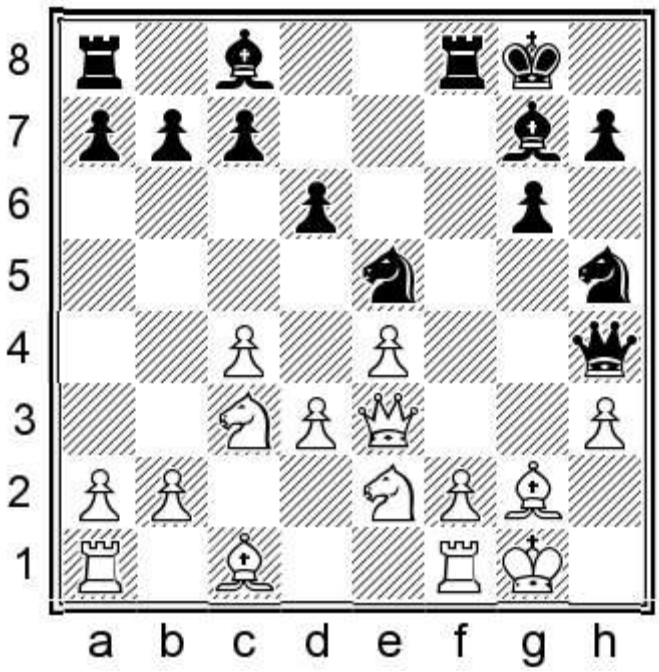


Position after: 10...♘h5

This is an even better version than in the 9.♖b1 line, as the h3-pawn will be hanging in many lines and

it will be dangerous for White once our queen arrives on h4.

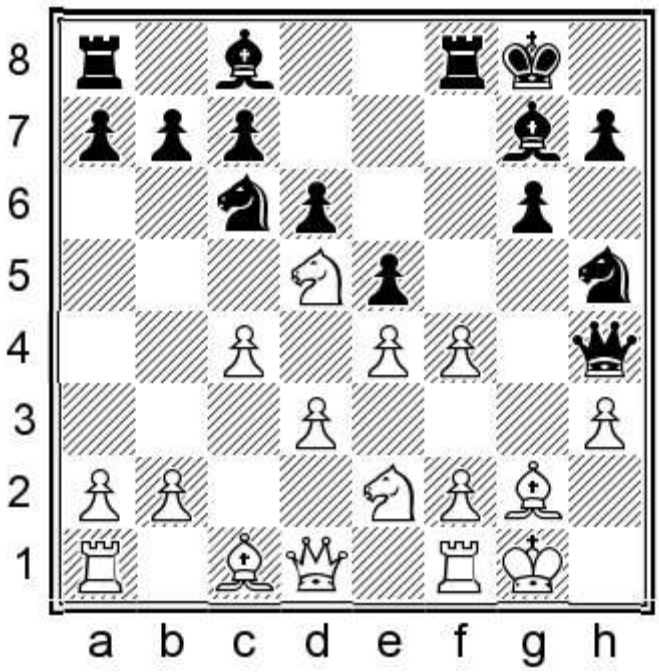
C1) 11.fxe5? ♕h4! 12.♕d2 [12.exd6?? ♗xh3 13.f4 ♗xg2 14.♔xg2 ♘e5!! The white queen is in great danger. Black is already winning and just needs to be accurate. The game could continue 15.fxe5 ♕g4+ 16.♔h1 ♘g3+ 17.♘xg3 ♕h3+ 18.♔g1 ♕xg3+ 19.♔h1 ♗xe5–+.] 12...♘xe5 13.♕e3



Position after: 13.♕e3

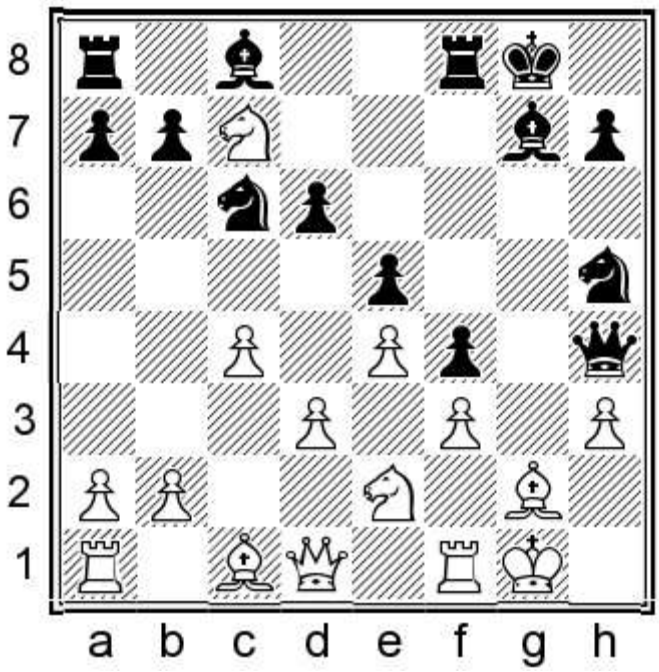
The queen tries to protect the h3-pawn, but we have a great solution: 13...♖f3! 14.♕g5□ [14.♗xf3? ♗h6–+] 14...♕xg5 15.♗xg5 ♖xd3∓.

C2) 11.♘d5 ♕h4!



Position after: 11...♕h4!

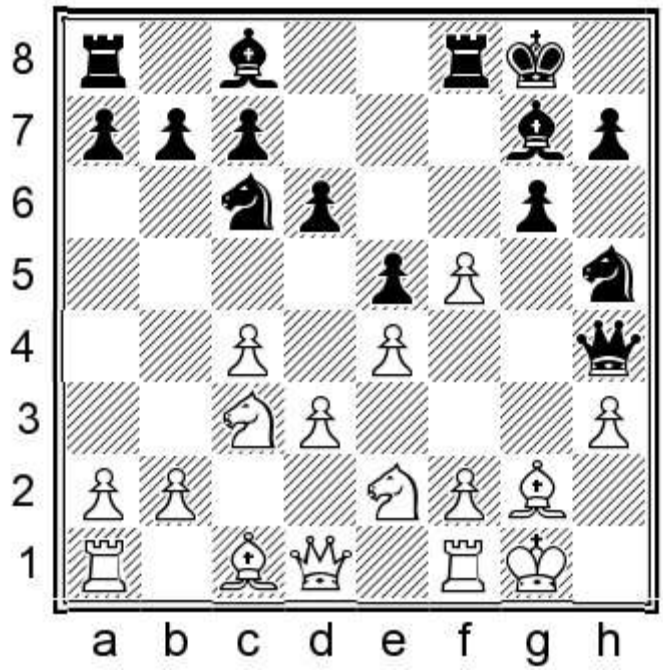
Black doesn't care about the c7-pawn. 12.f5 [12.♘xc7 exf4! 13.♘xa8 f3! 14.♗xf3 ♖xf3–+ The computers already say that it's forced mate.] 12...gxf5 13.♘xc7 [13.♘g3 ♘xg3 14.fxg3 ♕xg3 15.♘xc7 ♖b8 16.♕f3 Now, instead of agreeing to a short draw in Balashov, Y (2578) – Dubinsky, R (2269), Moscow 1999, ½-½ (17), Black could have kept a great position with 16...♕g6! 17.♗e3 f4 18.♗f2 ♕h6!∓.] 13...f4 14.f3



Position after: 14.f3

While this stops ...f3, it also creates a huge hole on g3. 14...♖b8 15.♕e1 ♘g3 16.♘xg3 fxg3 17.♗e3 ♗xh3∓

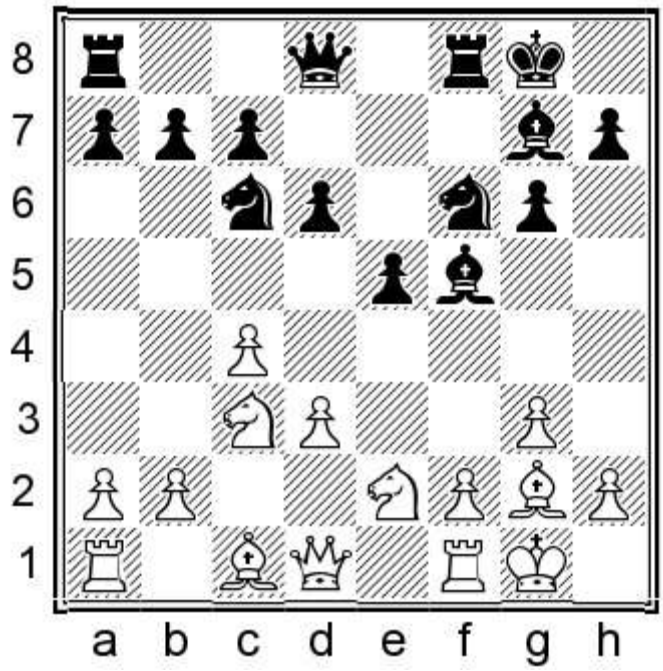
C3) 11.f5 ♕h4



Position after: 11...♕h4

12.♕d2 [12.♘g3 ♘xg3 13.fxg3 ♕xg3 14.♖f3 ♕h4 15.fxg6 ♗e6 16.gxh7+ ♔xh7→] 12...h6! A precise move. Black doesn't want to allow a queen trade in these circumstances. 13.f3 gxf5 14.♕e1 ♕xe1 15.♖xe1 fxe4 16.fxe4 ♘b4 17.♖d1 ♘f4∓

D) 9.exf5 ♗xf5

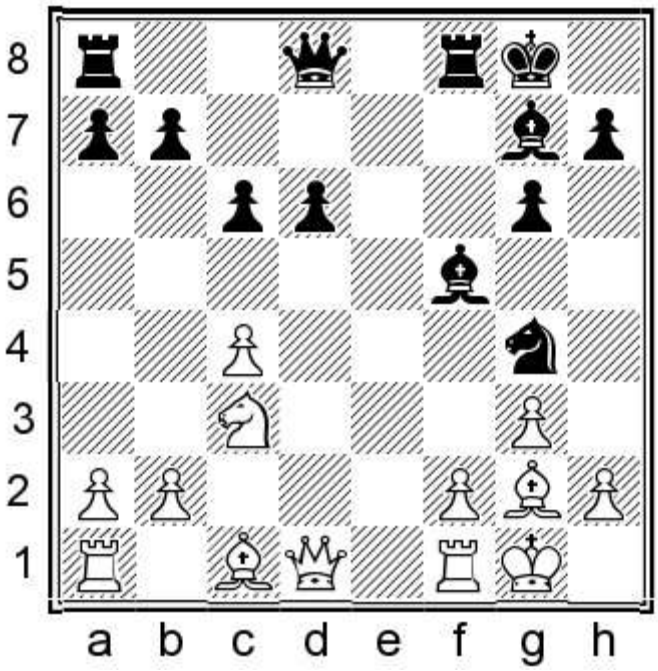


Position after: 9...♗xf5

This line can't really be considered dangerous either. Black develops his bishop without losing time.

It's now easy to prepare ...♗h3.

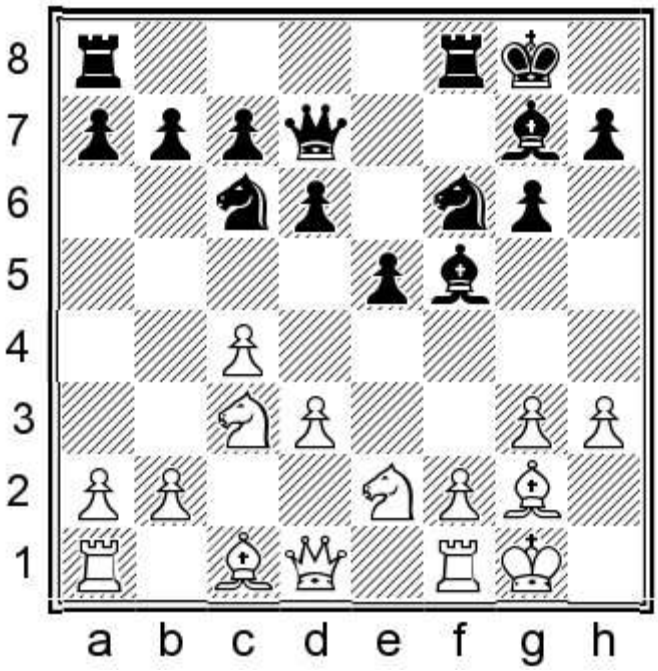
D1) 10.d4 ♘xd4 11.♘xd4 exd4 12.♕xd4 c6! 13.♕d1 ♘g4!?



Position after: 13...♘g4!?

White quickly went wrong in Kantans, T (2496) – Milos, G (2583), Tromso 2014, 0-1 (20). He should have developed his dark-squared bishop: 14.♗f4 ♘e5 15.♕b3 ♕b6!⇄. Black has centralized his pieces and I would take his side without any hesitation.

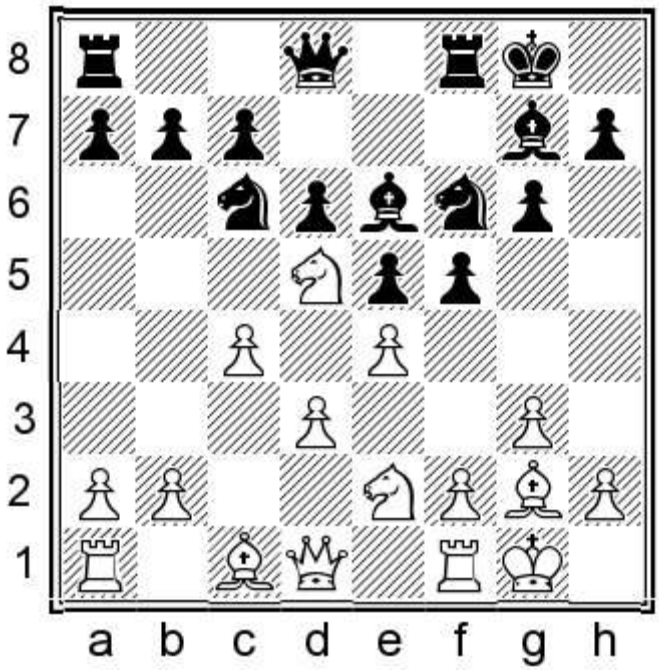
D2) 10.h3 ♕d7



Position after: 10...♕d7

11.g4 [11.♔h2 ♖ae8 12.♗e3 ♗e6 13.♘d5 ♘d4 14.♘xd4 exd4 15.♗g5 c6=] 11...♗e6 12.♘g3 [12.b3 h5! We disrupt White's kingside, mainly in order to get the f5-square. 13.g5 ♘h7 14.♔h2 ♘e7∓ 0-1 (24) Reiss, T (2403) – Bacrot, E (2716), Germany 2011] 12...h5 13.gxh5 ♗xh3! 14.hxg6 ♗xg2 15.♔xg2 ♕e8!∓

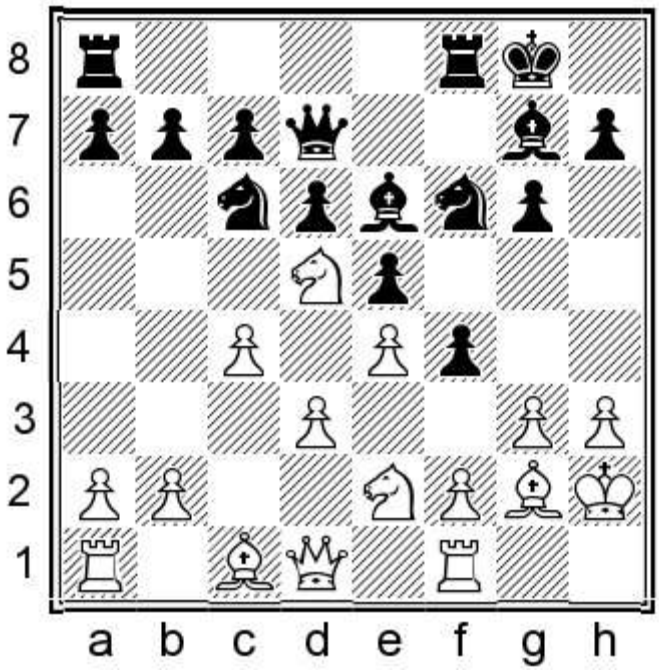
9...♗e6



Position after: 9...♗e6

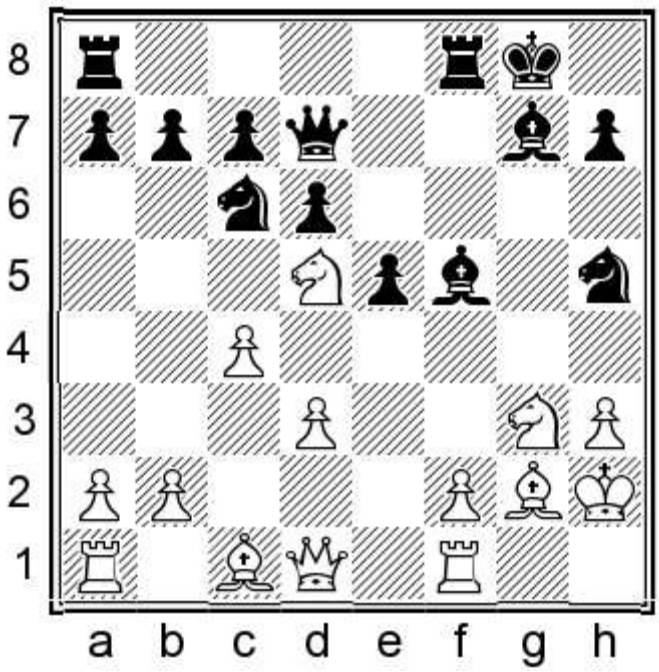
10.♗g5

White likewise brings a bishop into play. 10.h3 ♕d7 11.♔h2 f4!



Position after: 11...f4!

The thematic motif once again, in this case with the white king on h2. As the dark squares may soon open up, this might play an important role. 12.gxf4 ♘h5! 13.f5!? [13.fxe5? This obviously falls in with Black's play, and he won quickly in the following game: 13...dxe5 14.f3 ♘d4 15.♘dc3 ♘xe2 16.♘xe2 ♖ad8∓ 0-1 (29) Glud, J (2514) – Gurevich, M (2581), Cappelle-la-Grande 2013.] 13...gxf5 14.exf5 ♗xf5 15.♘g3!

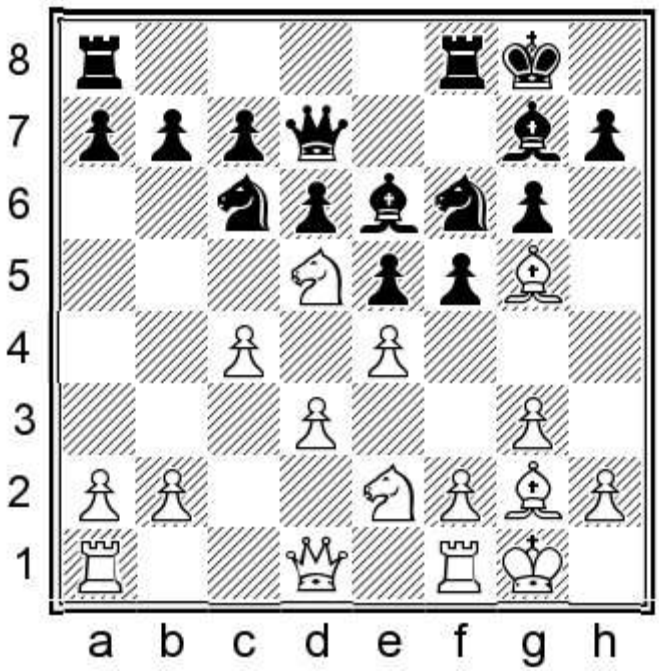


Position after: 15.♘g3!

An important move for White, helping to straighten out his kingside pawns. I think the game is more or

less balanced; Black has strong pieces, but the knight on d5 is important too. 15...♘xg3 16.fxg3 ♘d4=

10...♕d7

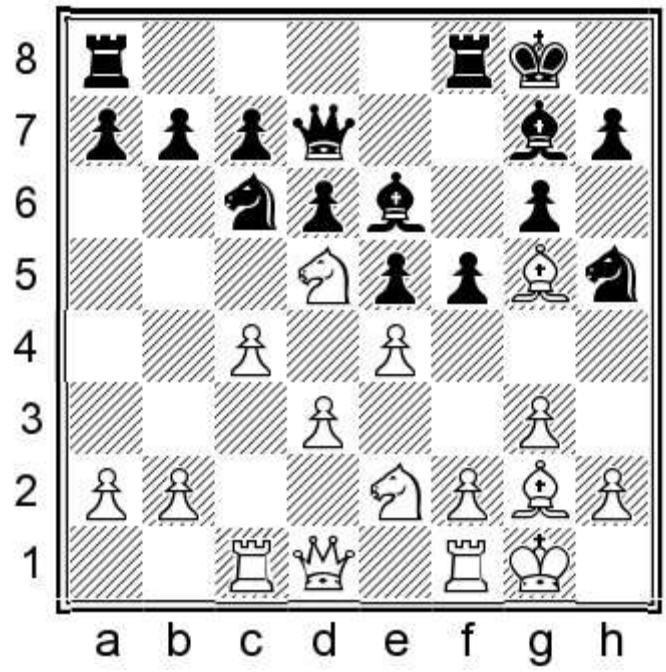


Position after: 10...♕d7

11.♕d2!

I consider this the best set-up for White. He activates all his pieces without loss of tempo, and effectively prevents ...f4.

11.♖c1 White is hoping for Black to take on d5 at some point in order to open the c-file, but obviously we are not going to do so. However that means that we will have to tolerate the knight on d5. 11...♘h5

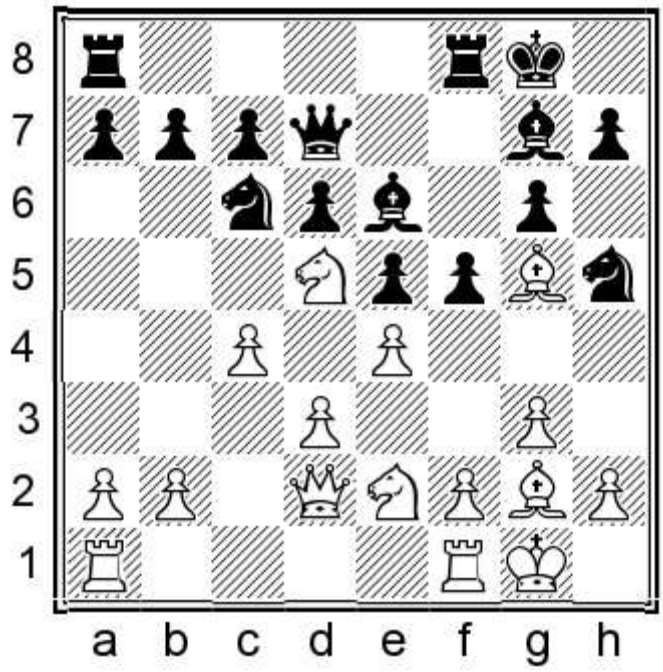


Position after: 11...♘h5

A) 12.exf5 ♖xf5 13.♗e3 Now in the game, Baghdasaryan, V (2354) – Triapishko, A (2508), Moscow 2019, ½-½ (88), Black brought the rook back to f8, but I think the possibility of doubling rooks is stronger: 13...♖f7! 14.♘ec3 ♖af8 15.♘e4 h6!= and, of course, we prevent White from bringing the knight to g5!

B) 12.♕d2 ♖f7!? 13.b4 f4! 14.gxf4 ♗h3 In this version of the pawn sacrifice, the queen is unable to come to h4, but we can start by trading the light-squared bishops. We have a good initiative on the kingside. 15.f3 ♗xg2 16.♔xg2 ♖af8∓

11...♘h5

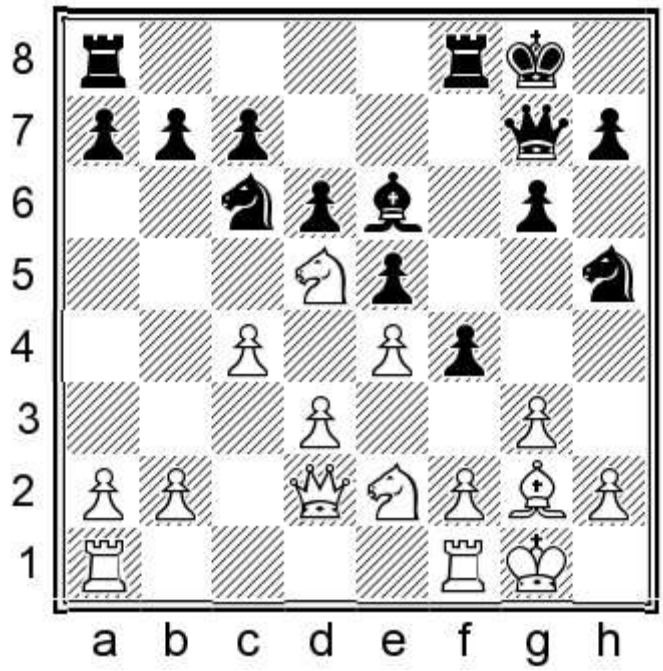


Position after: 11...♘h5

Stubborn, trying to play it anyway!

12.exf5

12.♗h6?! f4! 13.♗xg7 ♕xg7



Position after: 13...♕xg7

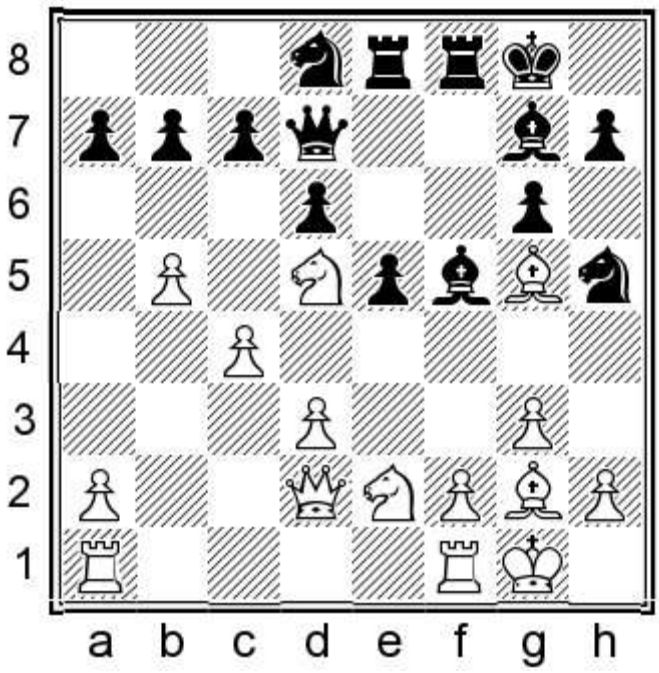
14.f3!? Maybe the lesser evil. [14.gxf4 ♘xf4 15.♘exf4 exf4∓ Black is able to use the dark squares, and

White can’t even take on f4 because of ...♕h6, winning the knight.] 14...fxg3 15.hxg3 g5!∓

12...♗xf5

12...gxf5?! would make little sense as White would stop ...f4 forever with 13.f4!±.

13.b4 ♖ae8 14.b5 ♘d8



Position after: 14...♘d8

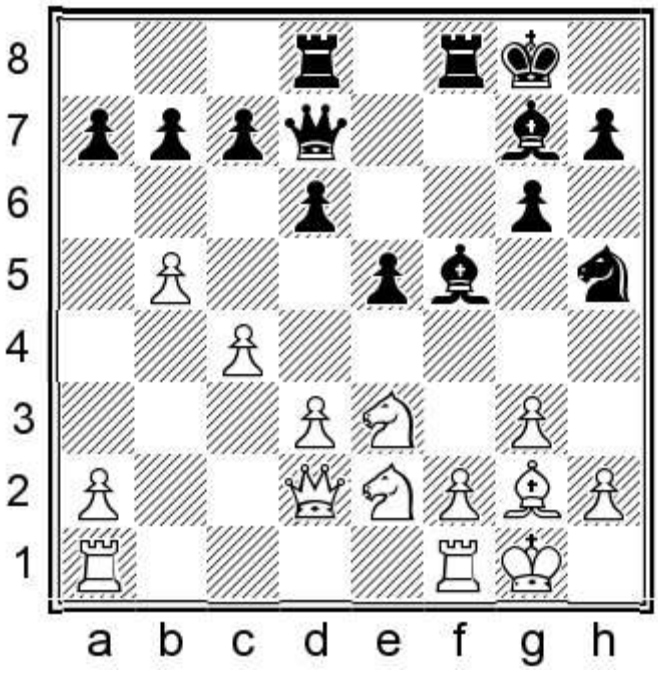
15.♗xd8!

It’s rare to see someone trading a bishop for a knight on the eighth rank for no obvious reason, but here it is motivated by the fact that the knight was the sole protector of the b7-pawn and other important light squares such as c6.

15.♘ec3 c6 16.♘b4 cxb5 17.♘xb5 ♘f7 Finally White has to lose time with his bishop, so he should have traded it when he could. 18.♗e3 e4!⇄

15...♖xd8 16.♘b4

16.♘e3!?

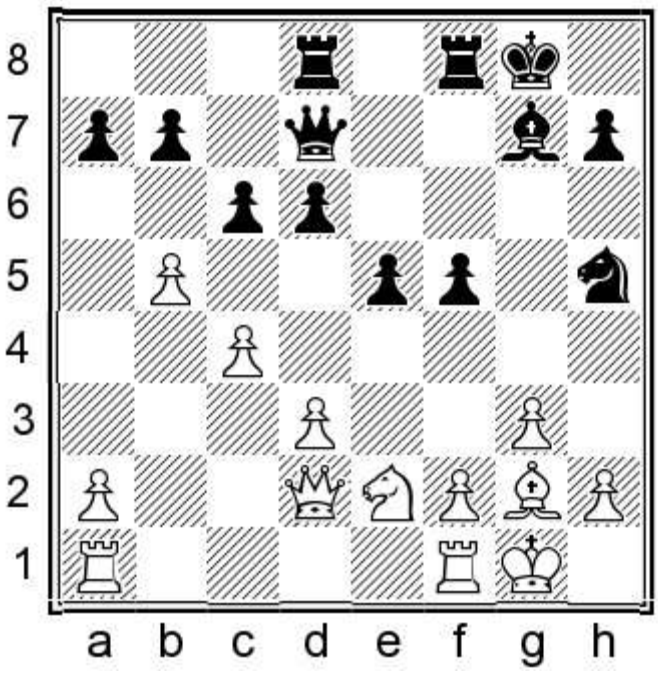


Position after: 16.♘e3!?

Even if it has been played only once, I find this move very interesting.

A) 16...♗h3 17.♗xb7! A very interesting exchange sacrifice, especially since White is trying to get the upper hand on the light squares. The following game shows why it seems easier to play for White: 17...♗xf1 18.♖xf1 ♗h6 19.♘c3 ♘g7 20.♕e2± Nguyen, P (2408) – Martinovic, S (2583), Zadar 2017, 1-0 (37).

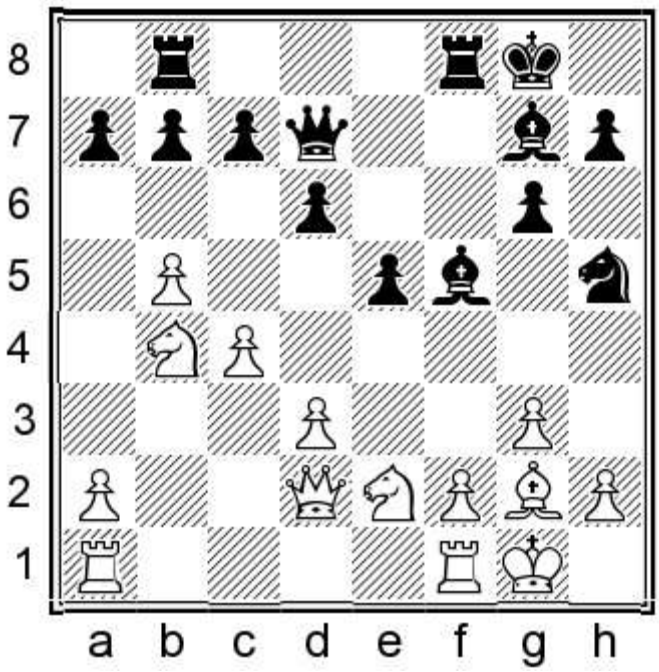
B) 16...c6!?N 17.♘xf5 gxf5



Position after: 17...gxf5

Here Black should be able to get decent counterplay in the center, for instance 18.bxc6 [18.♕g5 ♘f6 19.♖ab1 d5⇄] 18...bxc6 19.♘c3 ♘f6↑ when he will continue with ...d5 if he can.

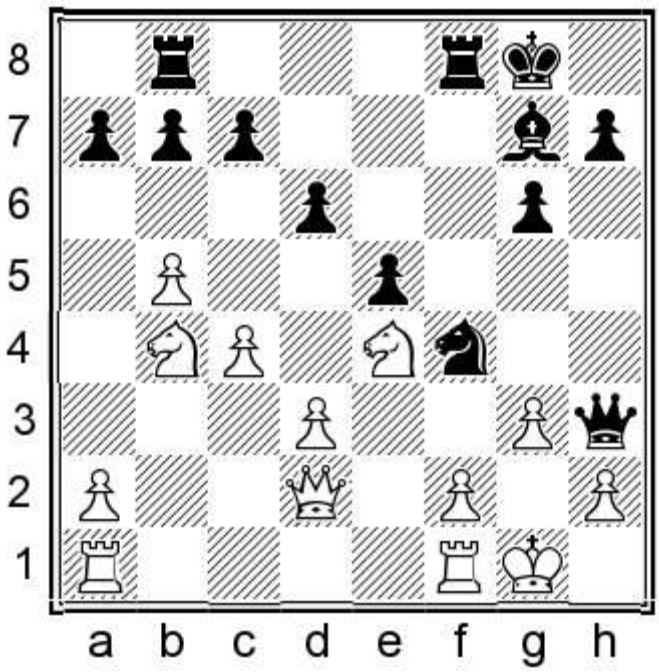
16...♖b8!



Position after: 16...♖b8!

17.♕e3

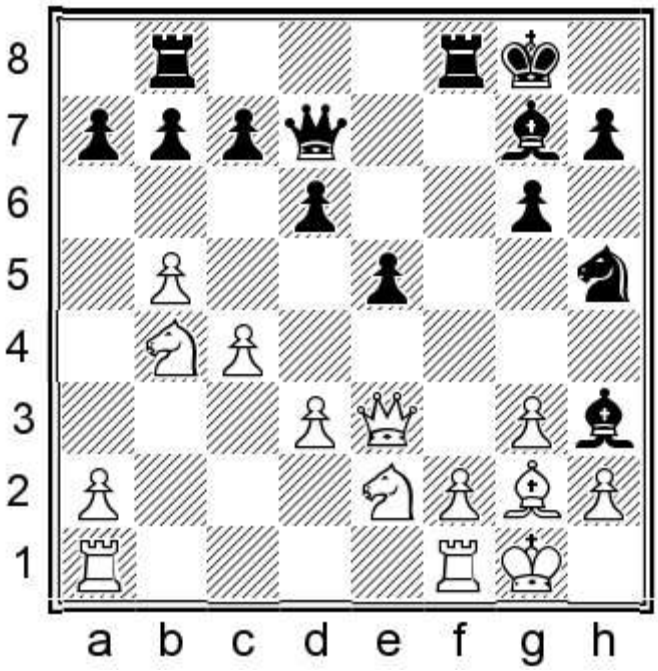
17.♘c3 ♗h3 18.♗xh3 ♕xh3 19.♘e4 ♘f4!?



Position after: 19...♘f4!?

This temporary piece sacrifice seems to bring Black either a draw by perpetual or an equal position. [19...♘f6 is also playable, with a roughly balanced middlegame. 20.♕e2 ♗h6 21.f3 ♕d7⇄] 20.gxf4! ♕g4+ 21.♘g3 exf4 22.f3 ♕g5 23.♖ae1 [23.♔h1?? ♗xa1 24.♖xa1 ♕f6–+] 23...♗h6=

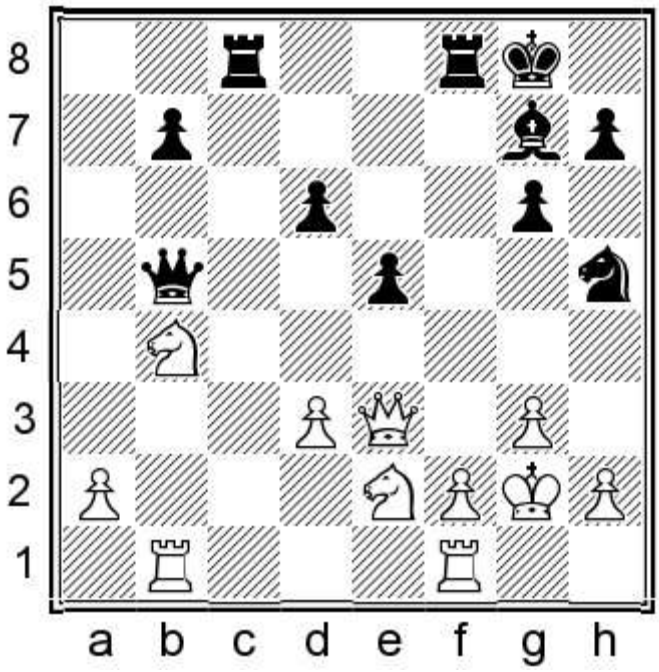
17...♗h3



Position after: 17...♗h3

Trading the light-squared bishops ensures that Black will have no problems on the long diagonal. The next step will be to advance in the center.

18.♖ab1 ♗xg2 19.♔xg2 c6 20.♕xa7 cxb5 21.cxb5 ♕xb5 22.♕e3 ♖bc8=

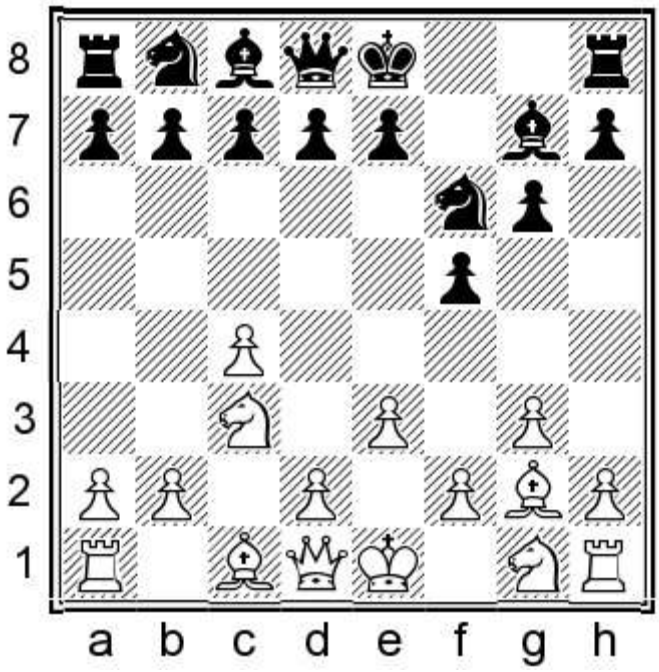


Position after: 22...♖bc8=

This position occurred in the game McShane, L (2615) – Rowson, J (2579), England 2010, ½-½ (64); it seems fully equal.

d) 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.e3

1.c4 f5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.e3

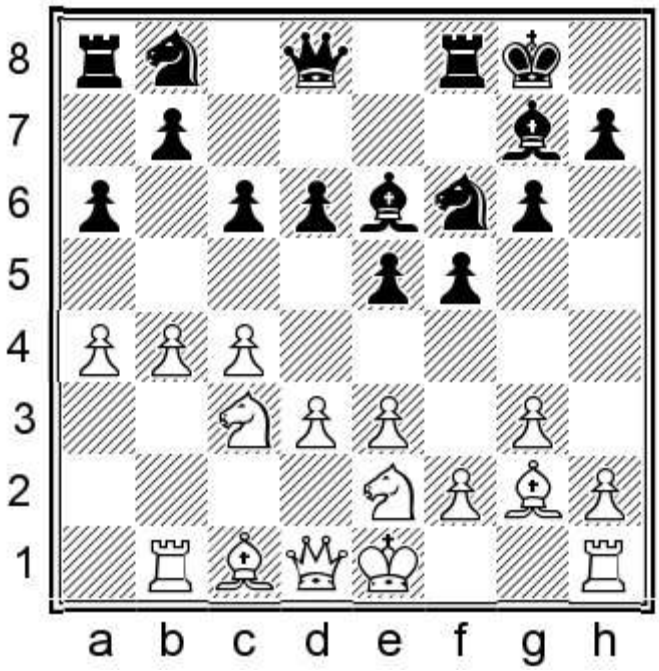


Position after: 5.e3

In the introduction to this chapter, I mentioned that it's quite a common plan to play the opening slowly like this. White is not in any hurry to define the center, and remains very flexible.

5...0-0 6.♘ge2 d6 7.0-0

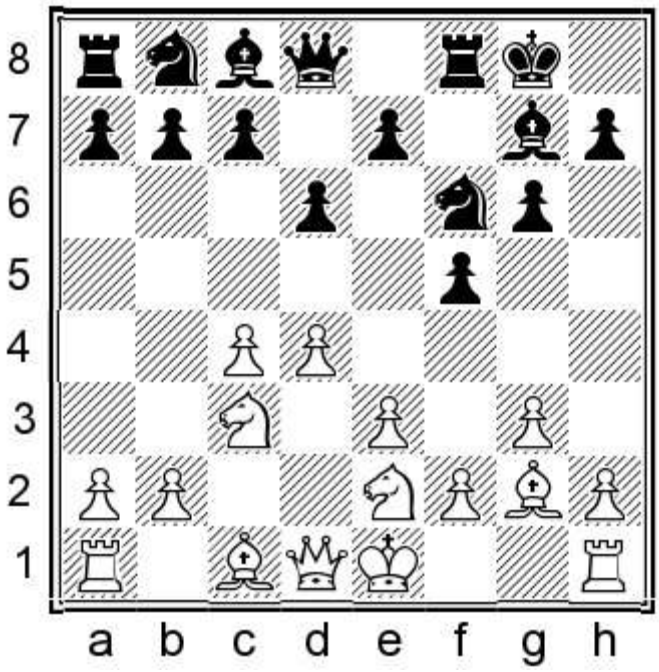
A) 7.d3 e5 8.♖b1 [8.0-0 − see 7.0-0 0-0 8.d3] 8...c6! 9.b4 a6 10.a4 ♗e6



Position after: 10...♗e6

Black can build a solid position on the queenside which will allow him to be able to strike back in the center. 11.b5 axb5 12.axb5 ♕c7 13.0-0 ♘bd7∓

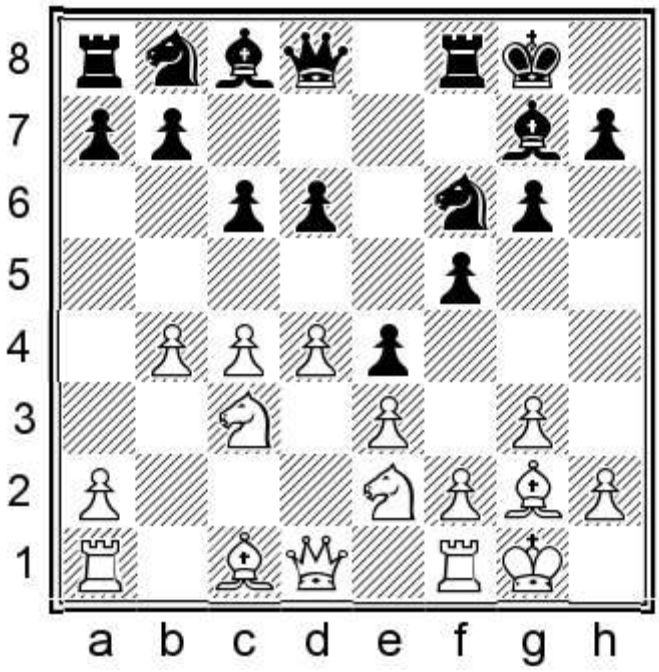
B) 7.d4



Position after: 7.d4

This position could have occurred with a 1.d4 move order, even if we didn't consider it. 7...e5 Of course, the main problem with this system is that Black can easily play ... e5, one of his main aims in the Leningrad.

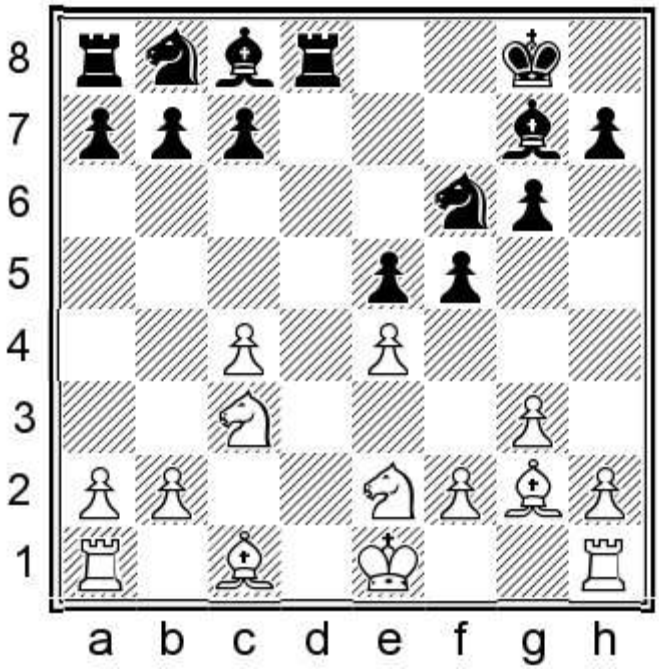
B1) 8.b4 White can try to advance all his queenside pawns, but it gives Black time to develop his initiative. 8...c6 9.0-0 e4



Position after: 9...e4

10.f3 [10.♘f4?! This move only helps Black develop his attack on the kingside. 10...g5 11.♘fe2 ♗e6] 10...exf3 11.♗xf3 ♗e6 12.d5 ♗f7 13.♖b1 cxd5 14.♘xd5 ♘bd7∓

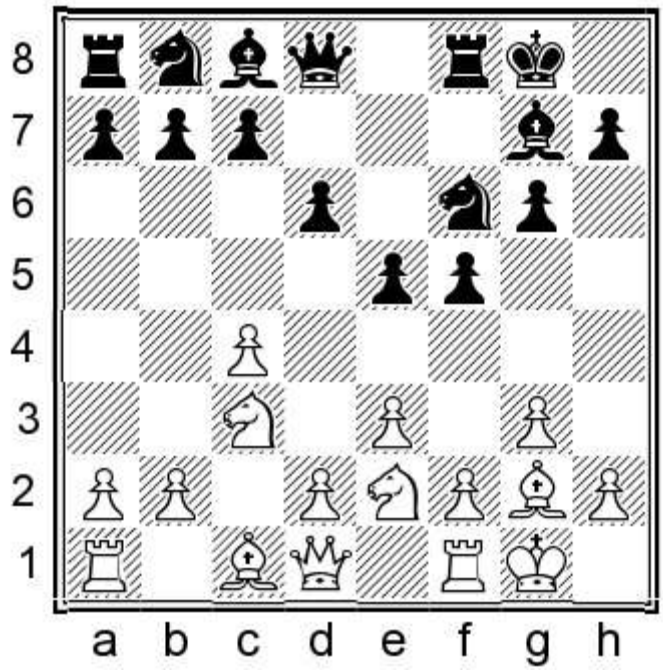
B2) 8.dxe5 dxe5 9.♕xd8 ♖xd8 10.e4



Position after: 10.e4

Otherwise White has a hard time developing his c1-bishop properly. 10...c6 11.0-0 ♘a6 12.♗e3 [12.♗g5 h6!∓] 12...♘g4 13.♗g5 ♗f6 14.♗xf6 ♘xf6∓ Black can take control of the d4-square, which gives him the better chances.

7...e5



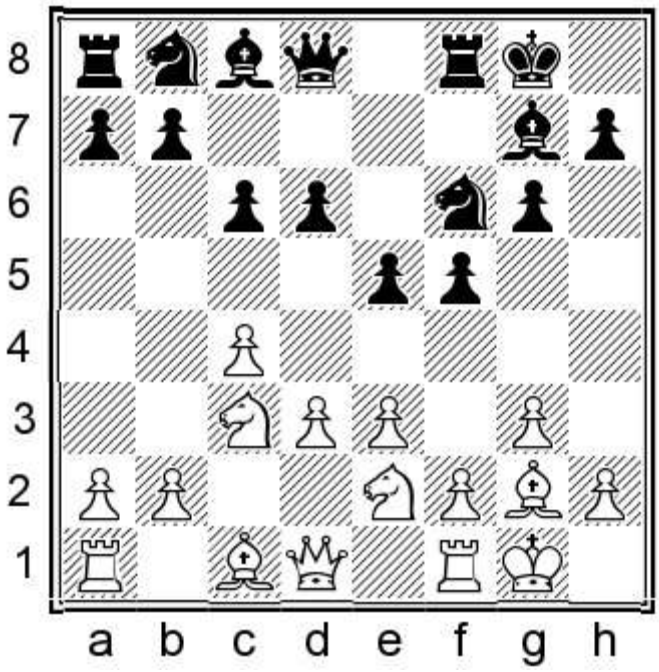
Position after: 7...e5

8.d3

A) 8.b3 c6 9.♗a3 [9.♗b2 ♘a6 10.d3 ♕e7 11.♕d2 ♗d7 12.♖ad1 ♘c7= If White doesn't do anything specific, we can quietly regroup our forces before the storm.] 9...♖e8! It's important to be able to move the d-pawn. 10.d4 e4 11.♘f4 ♘a6→

B) 8.♖b1 c6 9.d4 e4 10.b4 ♗e6! 11.d5 cxd5 12.cxd5 ♗f7∓ Black will soon bring his b8-knight to e5 with a great position.

8...c6

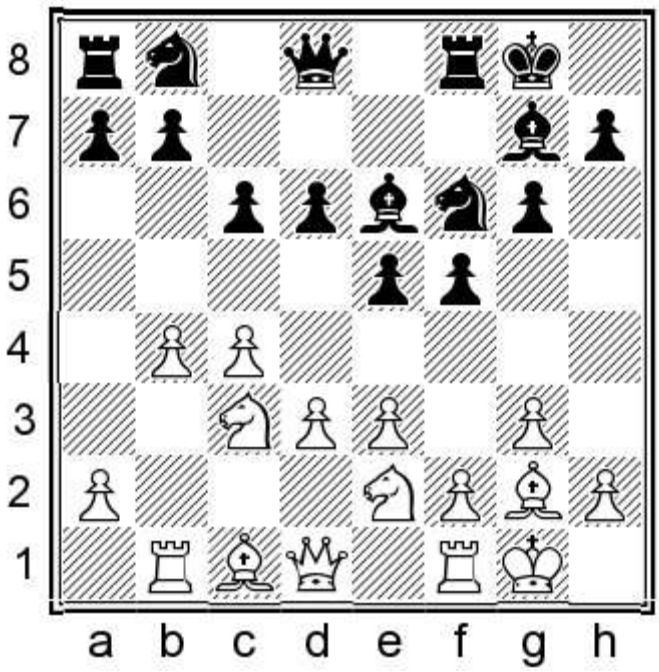


Position after: 8...c6

This the main position of the system with e3. White has tried various ways of playing this opening, and even if we have met some of the ideas already, we will have a more detailed look starting from this position.

9.b4

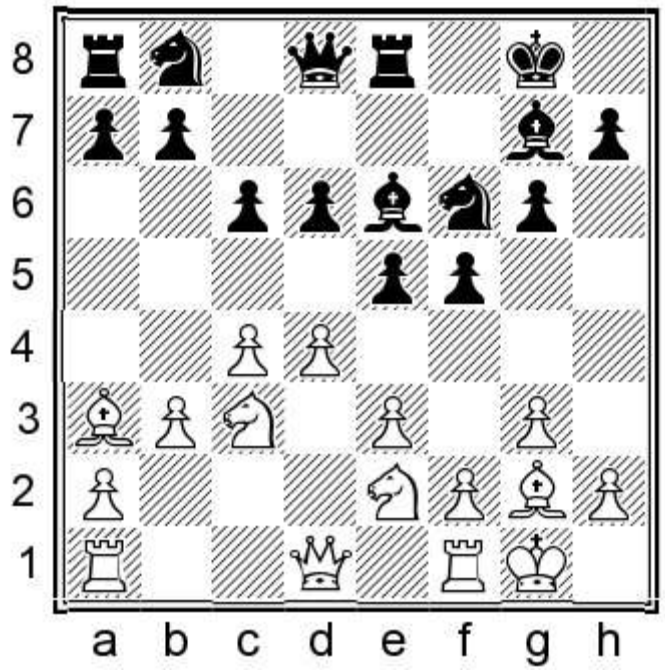
A) 9.♖b1 ♗e6 10.b4



Position after: 10.b4

As White has played slowly, we can start play in the center immediately. 10...d5! 11.cxd5 [11.d4 e4 12.c5 a6 13.a4 ♘bd7=] 11...cxd5 12.d4 e4! 13.♘a4 ♘c6 14.♘c5 ♗c8 15.♕a4 g5→ Black has managed to stabilize his position and can develop his own initiative. He won convincingly in Iskandarov, M (2376) – Guseinov, G (2616), Konya 2015, 0-1 (34).

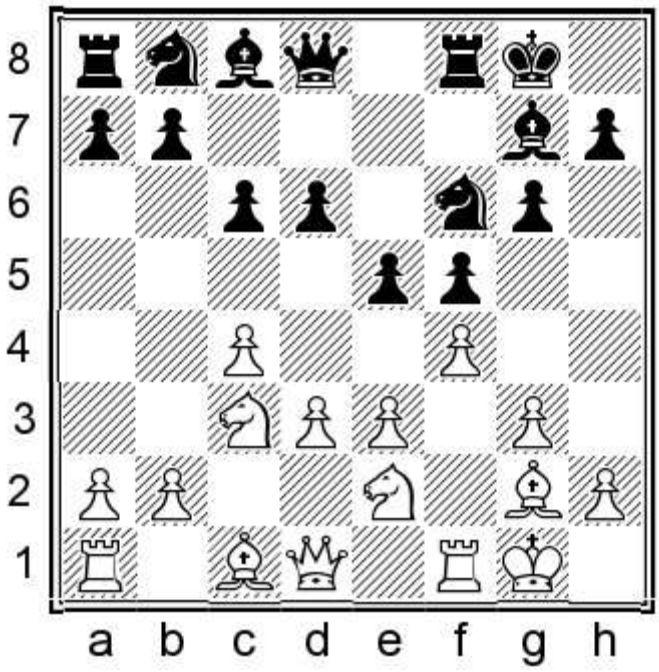
B) 9.b3 This is clearly less dangerous for Black than b2−b4, since there are no longer any ideas with b4−b5, White's main way to develop his initiative. 9...♗e6 10.♗a3 ♖e8 11.d4



Position after: 11.d4

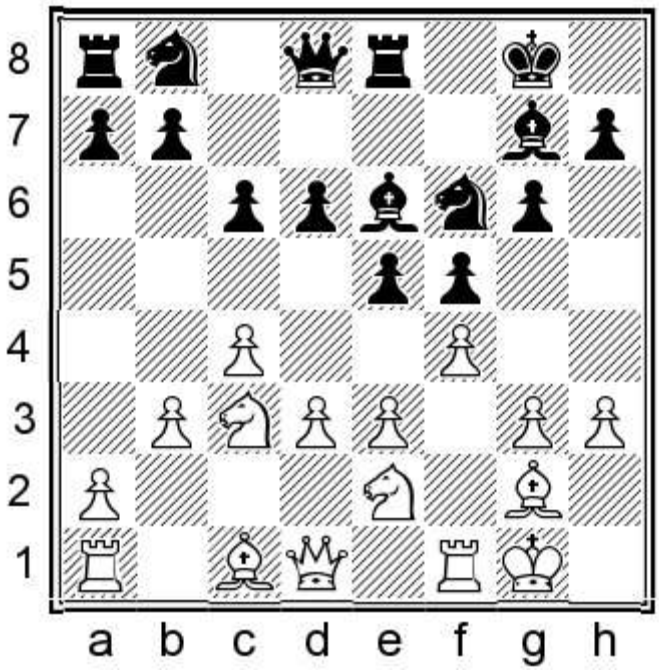
This occurred in the game Indjic, A (2575) – Cheparinov, I (2703), Warsaw 2017, 0-1 (49). Black is doing perfectly well, but should have closed the center: 11...e4! 12.d5 cxd5 13.cxd5 ♗f7 14.♖c1 ♘a6! ∓. The d5-pawn is finally a weakness. White will have some trouble defending it!

C) 9.f4



Position after: 9.f4

If White doesn't want to expand on the queenside, this reaction is quite logical too. It prevents Black from trying to attack on the kingside. Now we need to centralize our forces. 9...♖e8 10.h3 [10.♖b1 ♗e6 11.b4 ♘bd7 12.b5 ♖c8∓] 10...♗e6 11.b3



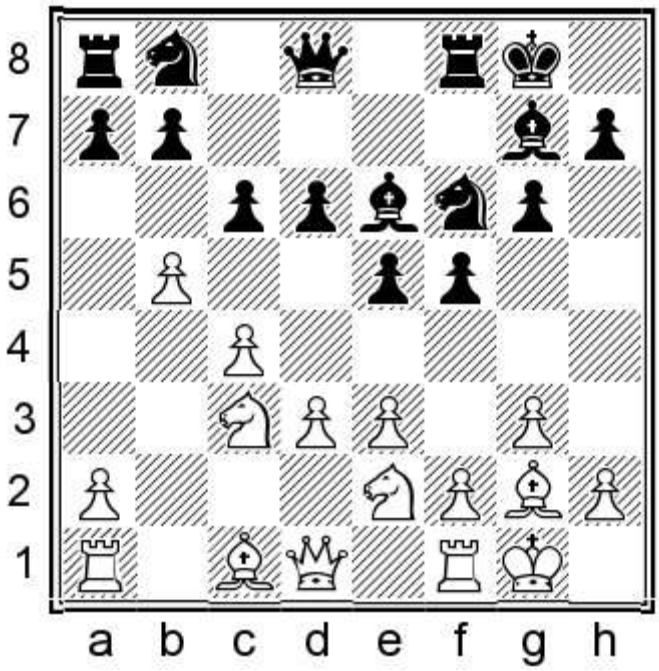
Position after: 11.b3

Kollars, D (2422) – Piorun, K (2546), Stroebeck 2015, 0-1 (45). Now Black is ready to open the center. 11...exf4!

C1) 12.♘xf4?! ♘h5! Black takes advantage of the hanging knight on c3. 13.d4 [13.♕e1 ♘xf4 14.gxf4 ♘d7∓] 13...♘xg3 14.♖f3 ♘e4∓

C2) 12.gxf4 d5! 13.♘d4 ♗f7∓

9...♗e6 10.b5

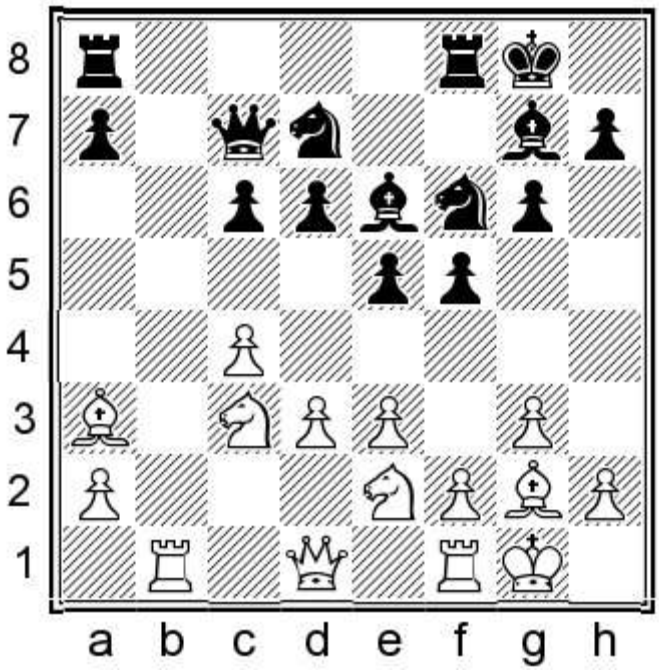


Position after: 10.b5

Of course White can push b4−b5 at once. It is important to remember that we never take on b5; we always keep the pawn on c6. It's super-important to keep control of the d5-square.

10...♕c7 11.♕a4

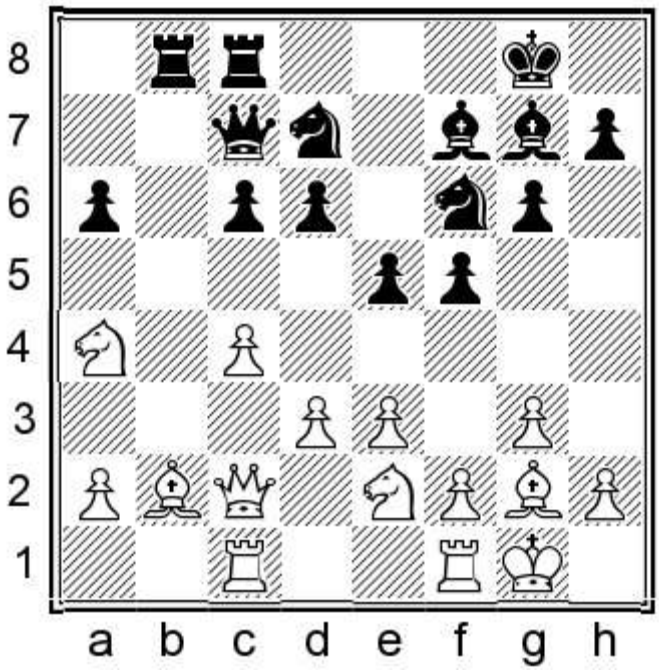
11.♖b1 ♘bd7 12.bxc6 bxc6 13.♗a3



Position after: 13.♗a3

This was played in the game Kulon, K (2370) – Ju, W (2567), Riyadh 2017, 0-1 (46). Now Black should prepare the defense of the c6-pawn: 13...♖fc8!N 14.♕a4 ♗f8 15.♖fd1 ♘b6 16.♕a5 e4! 17.c5 d5! The knight obviously cannot be taken and Black is doing great.

11...♖c8 12.♗b2 ♘bd7 13.♖ac1 ♗f7 14.♕b3 a6 15.bxc6 bxc6 16.♘a4 ♖ab8 17.♕c2



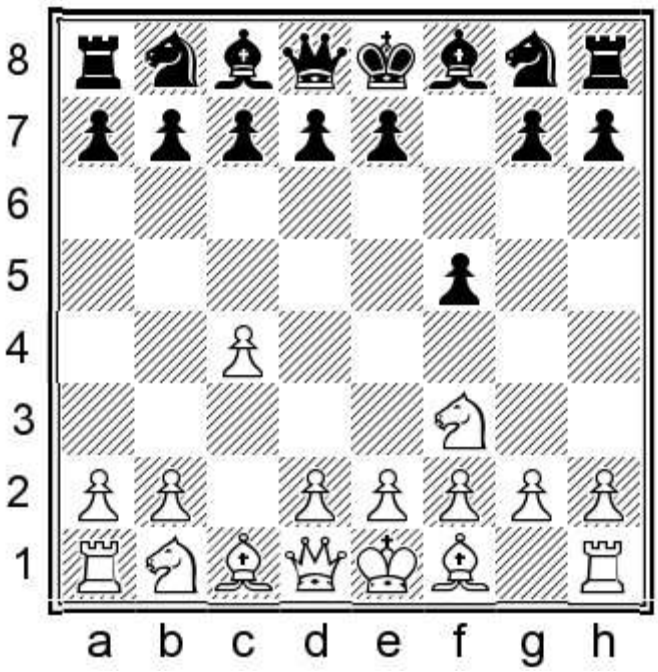
Position after: 17.♕c2

Now, in the game Gomez, J (2481) – Cheparinov, I (2698), Ho Chi Minh City 2017, ½-½ (50), Black could have played

17...d5!N 18.cxd5 ♘xd5∓

e) 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♘c3 d6!?

1.c4 f5 2.♘f3



Position after: 2.♘f3

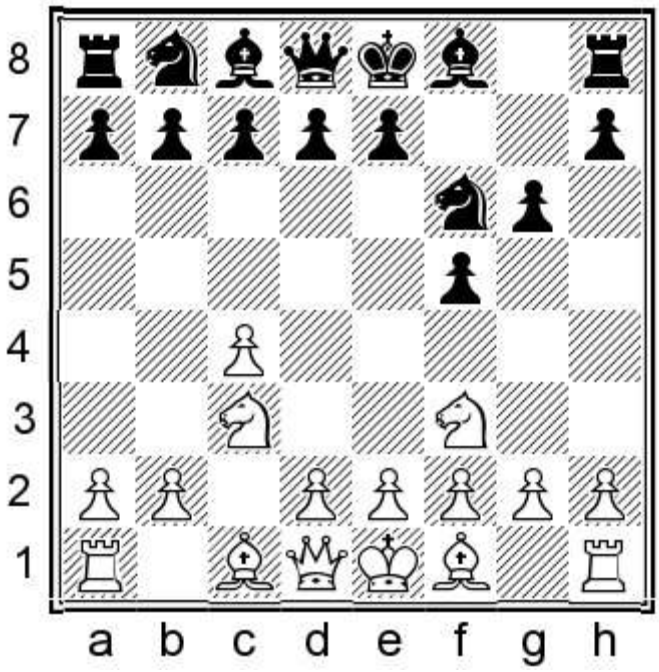
In the previous subchapters, we discussed all the systems where White was in no rush to develop the knight to f3. Now we have to do exactly the opposite! This is the most usual way to play when using the English opening, and there are of course various transpositions to the 1.♘f3 move order.

2...♘f6 3.♘c3

This move is very flexible. It gives away no information, as White doesn't indicate whether he is going to play d3 or d4, or play a kingside fianchetto or not! That's why I think that on this particular occasion, we can also make a flexible move that tries to restrain White's possibilities.

3...d6!?

3...g6

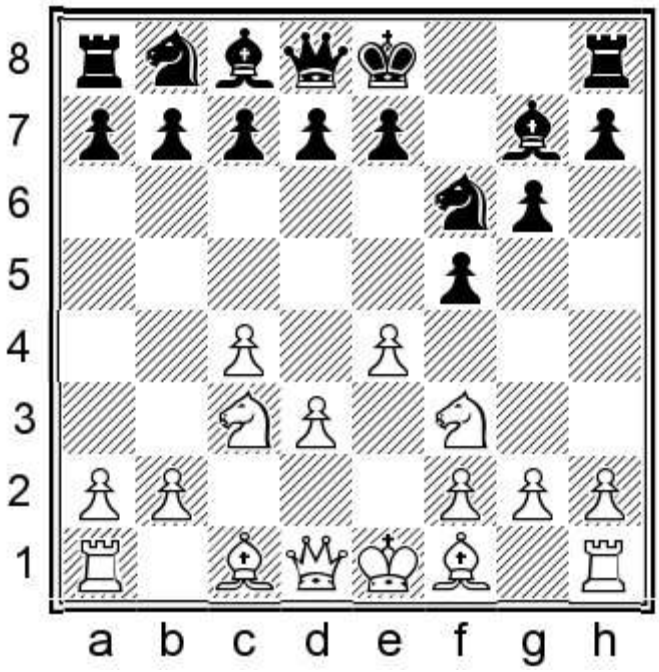


Position after: 3...g6

White generally has more choices after this move, a couple of which I have never really liked for Black.

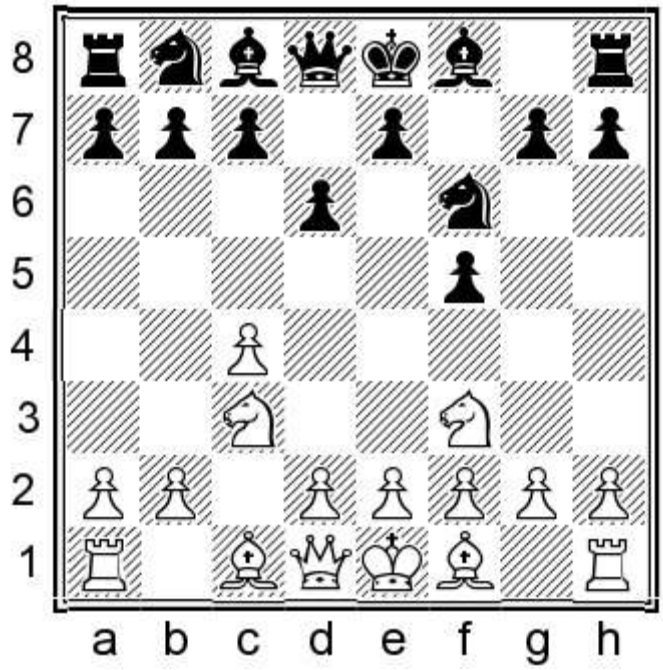
A) 4.b4 First, this move becomes very acceptable for White. He will keep his light-squared bishop on e2 in order to support his pawn, which is not in the same spirit as in Chapter 7. For example play might continue 4...♗g7 5.♗b2 [5.♕b3 d6 6.d4⇄] 5...d6 6.d4 0-0 7.e3↑ and I am not so fond of this position.

B) 4.d3!? ♗g7 5.e4!



Position after: 5.e4!

Nor have I ever liked this system. 5...d6 6.exf5 ♗xf5 [6...gxf5?! 7.d4± This is generally quite weak for Black, since it's now rather difficult to push ...e5 under satisfactory conditions.] 7.d4± The point. White prevents ...e5 and will trade the light-squared bishops with ♗d3 as soon as possible, highlighting our weaknesses on the light squares, especially e6.



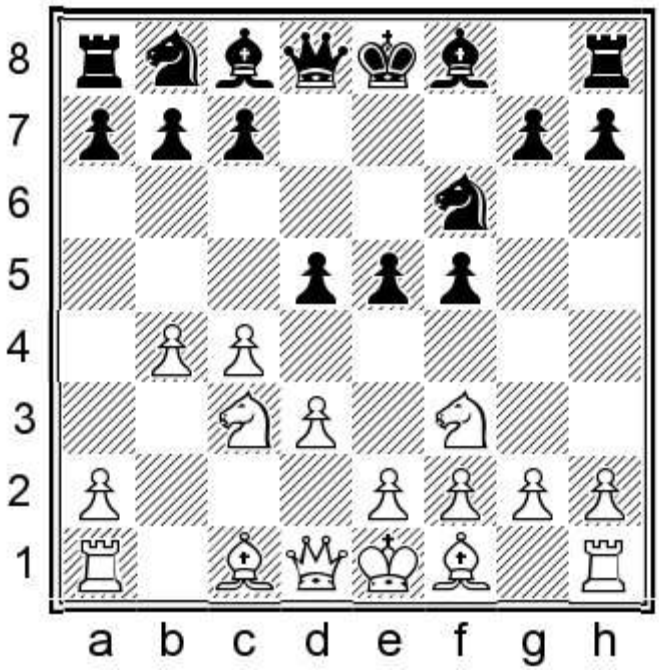
Position after: 3...d6!?

4.d3

White may also want to retain the idea of playing for e4, but now we don't need to fear d2−d4 anymore as it would be an important loss of time, and can improve our center.

A) 4.g3 Once this move is played, it's pretty clear that White is not going to play for e4, and I prefer to return to our Leningrad formation. 4...g6 [4...e5 5.d4 I don't really want to enter this specific variation.] 5.♗g2 ♗g7 6.0-0 0-0 This position will be examined in the next subchapters.

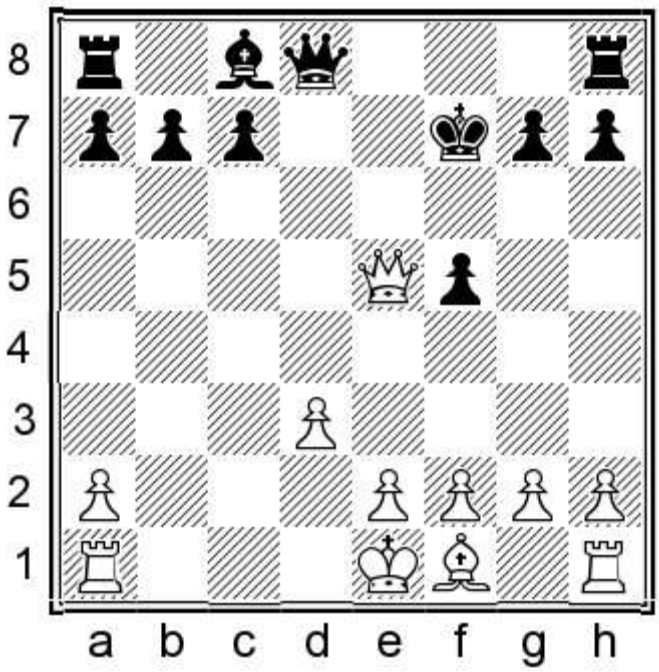
B) 4.b4 I don't think this move makes much sense here, indeed we can take advantage of the fact that we haven't planned to fianchetto our dark-squared bishop yet. 4...e5 5.d3 [5.♗b2 e4! 6.♘d4 c5 7.♘c2 ♘c6 8.b5 ♘e5↑] 5...d5!?



Position after: 5...d5!?

The pawn on b4 is also under attack.

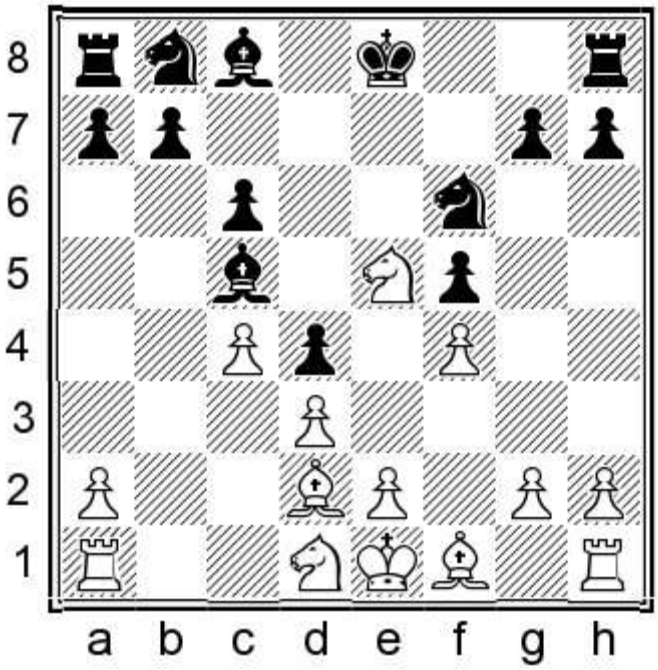
B1) 6.cxd5 ♗xb4 7.♗d2 ♘xd5 8.♕b3 This leads to major trades. [8.♘xd5? ♗xd2+ 9.♕xd2 ♕xd5∓] 8...♗xc3 9.♗xc3 ♘xc3 10.♕xc3 ♘c6 11.♘xe5 ♘xe5 12.♕xe5+ ♔f7!↑



Position after: 12...♔f7!↑

In this unusual middlegame, Black's king seems fine. We will continue with 13...♖e8 and try to make White's development as difficult as possible, e.g. with 14...♕d5. Black looks fine.

B2) 6.♘xe5 d4 7.♕a4+ c6 8.♘d1 ♕d6 9.f4 ♕xb4+ 10.♕xb4 ♗xb4+ 11.♗d2 ♗c5!=

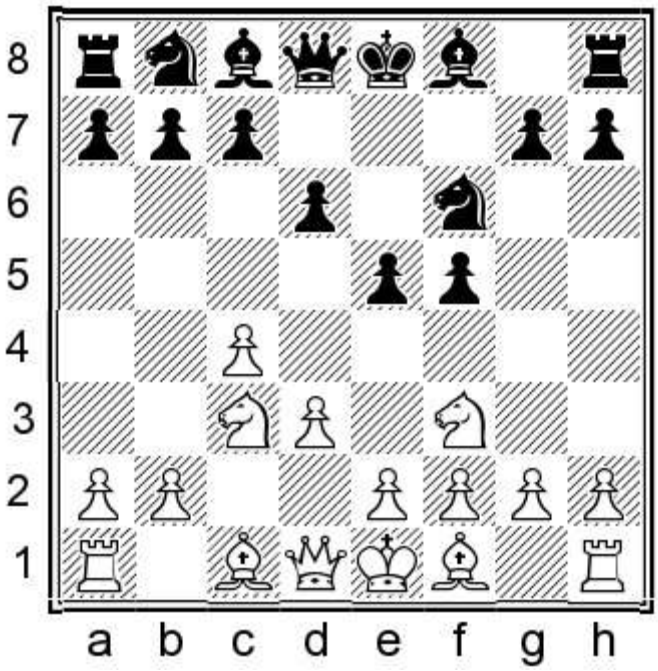


Position after: 11...♗c5!=

White has traded a flank pawn for a central pawn, which is a good deal for him, but our pawn on d4 is very annoying as it prevents easy development.

C) If White doesn't want to allow ...e5, he might like to play 4.d4. This move order has already been discussed in Chapter 9.

4...e5!



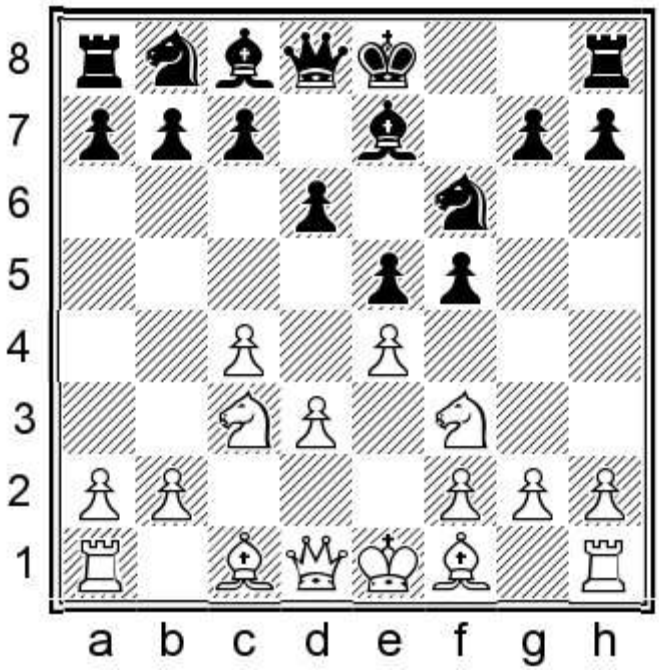
Position after: 4...e5!

This position generally occurs from the move order 1.c4 e5 2.♘c3 d6 3.d3 f5 4.♘f3 ♘f6, and has proven to be satisfactory for Black.

5.e4

5.g3 is the most common move, but it has little independent value. 5...g6 [5...♗e7 is also possible, but would be a totally different system.] 6.♗g2 ♗g7 We usually reach this position with the pawn on e7 and ...0-0 already played, which are only small differences. 7.0-0 [7.♗g5 h6! We don't wait for White to play ♘d5. 8.♗xf6 ♕xf6 9.♘d5 ♕f7∓ This makes little sense for White, because Black is even able to play ...c6 soon.] 7...0-0 This finally transposes to the next subchapters.

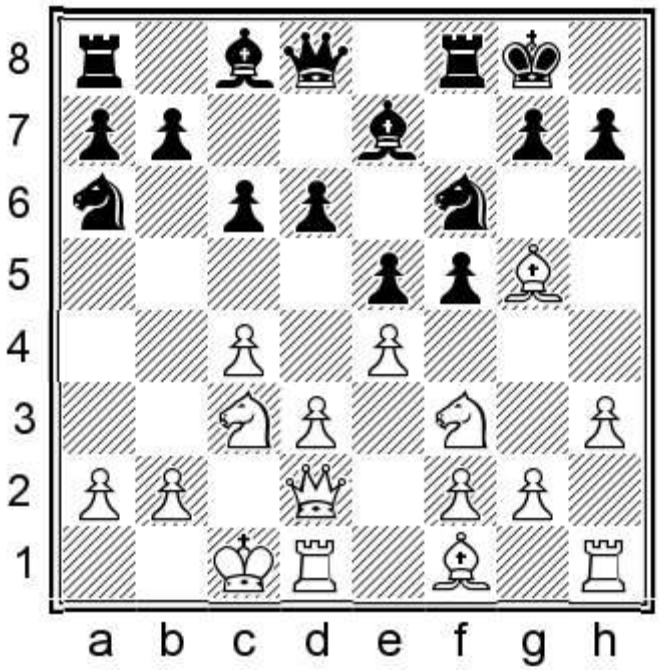
5...♗e7



Position after: 5...♗e7

6.exf5

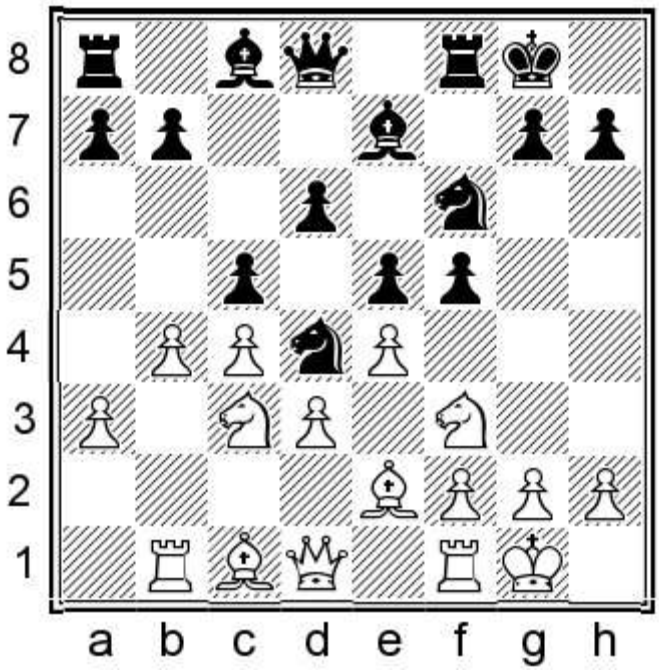
A) 6.♗g5 This kind of move doesn't get White very far. 6...0-0 7.♕d2?! ♘a6 8.0-0-0 c6 9.h3



Position after: 9.h3

This opposite side castling middlegame occurred in Hansen, V (2125) – Jones, G (2578), Fagernes 2011, 0-1 (67). Black could now have started his attack quickly, e.g. 9...♘c7!? 10.♔b1 b5! 11.cxb5 ♘xb5 12.♘xb5 cxb5→. On the other hand, it's not really clear how White will start his own attack.

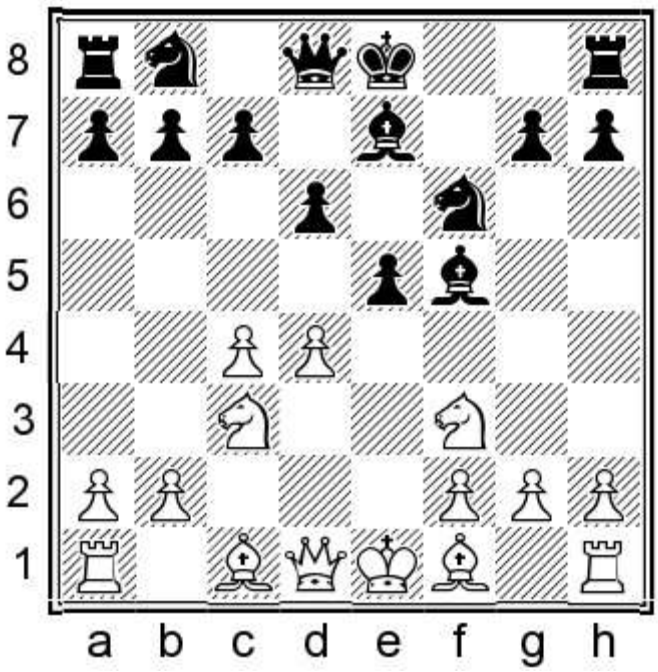
B) 6.♗e2 0-0 7.0-0 c5!? Black now has good control of the center, so White needs to find counterplay on the flanks, e.g. 8.a3 ♘c6 9.♖b1 ♘d4! 10.b4



Position after: 10.b4

And now in the game Buliga Contras, M – Mozes, E (2358), Bavaria 2001, 0-1 (32), Black could have kept the tension with 10...b6! 11.exf5 ♗xf5 12.♗g5 ♕d7↑ and I still prefer Black.

6...♗xf5 7.d4!



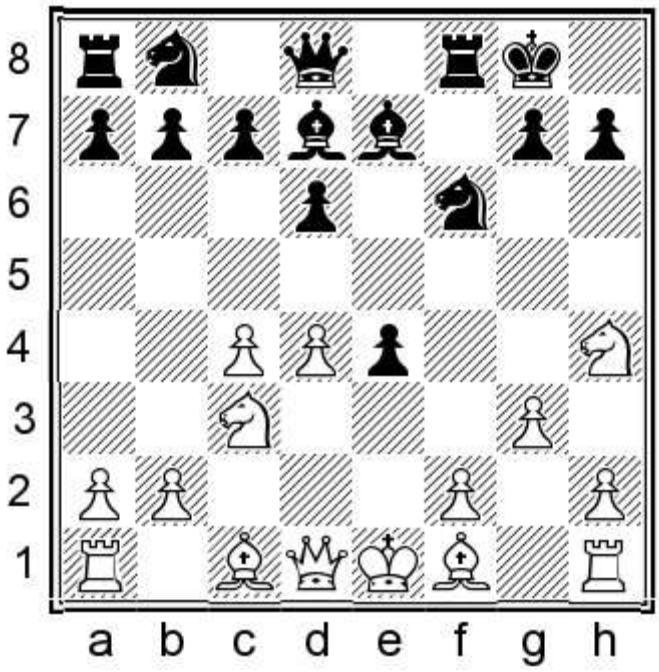
Position after: 7.d4!

This might be the most critical line, and Black has to display some accuracy.

7...e4 8.♘h4!

8.♘g5?! ♕d7! 9.f3 exf3 10.♘xf3 0-0=

8...♗d7N 9.g3 0-0

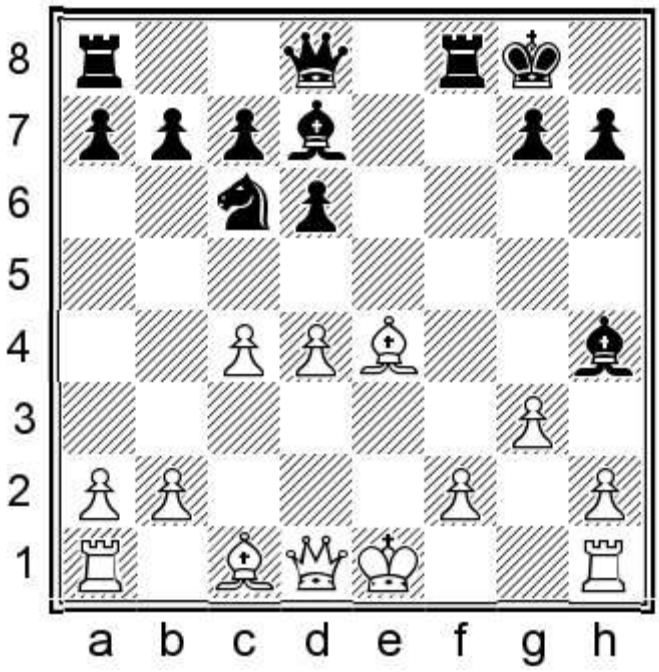


Position after: 9...0-0

10.♘g2!

According to the computer, this is the only line that can trouble Black. It doesn't look so scary, but the idea is that White will have good control of the dark squares.

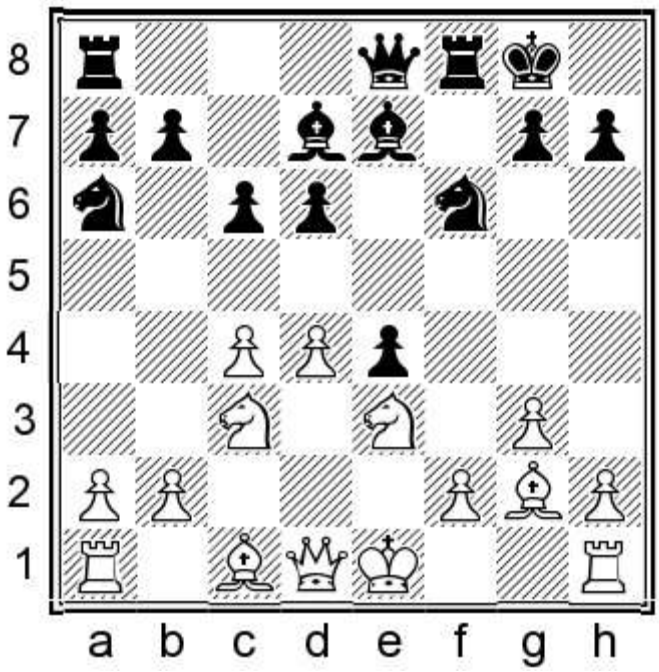
10.♗g2?! ♘c6!= Of course the knight on h4 is pretty misplaced, so we don't risk much with our e4-pawn. 11.♘xe4? ♘xe4 12.♗xe4 ♗xh4



Position after: 12...♗xh4

13.♕h5! [13.gxh4 ♕xh4–+] 13...h6 14.♕xh4 ♕xh4 15.♗d5+ ♔h8 16.gxh4 ♘xd4∓

10...♘a6!? 11.♘e3 ♕e8 12.♗g2 c6∞

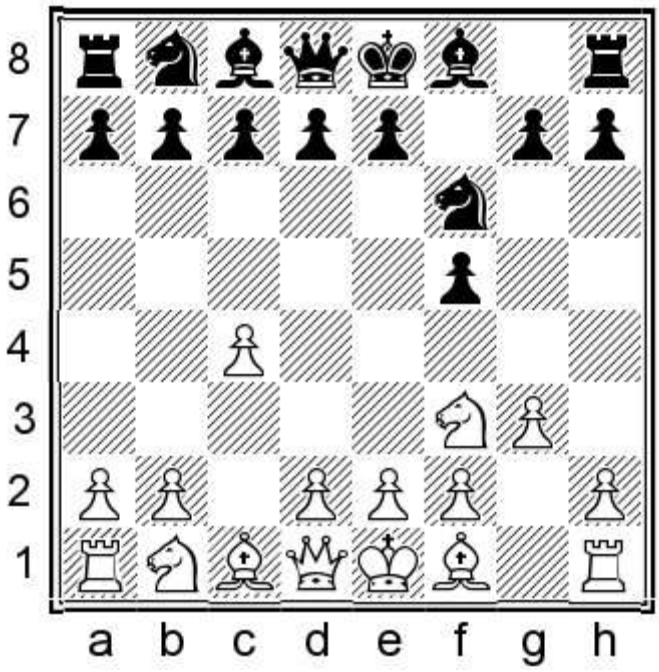


Position after: 12...c6∞

The position may objectively be a little better for White, but it's fully playable for Black, and besides, the chances that it will ever appear are quite low.

f) 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.♘c3 d6 7.d3 e5 8.--, 8.♗d2

1.c4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3



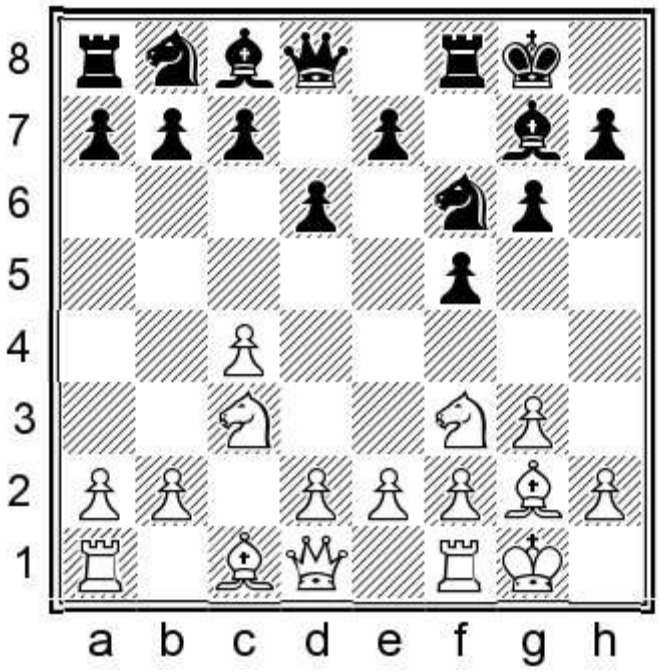
Position after: 3.g3

In most cases White doesn't develop his b1-knight yet, and goes directly for a kingside fianchetto. This will be the subject of the last two subchapters of this book.

3...g6

By comparison with the previous subchapter, Black doesn't gain anything by starting with ...d6, because White is not planning to play e4 anyway, and after ...e5, we would always have to check for d2−d4, which might be difficult to meet. So I prefer to develop my pieces in a more usual way.

4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.♘c3 d6



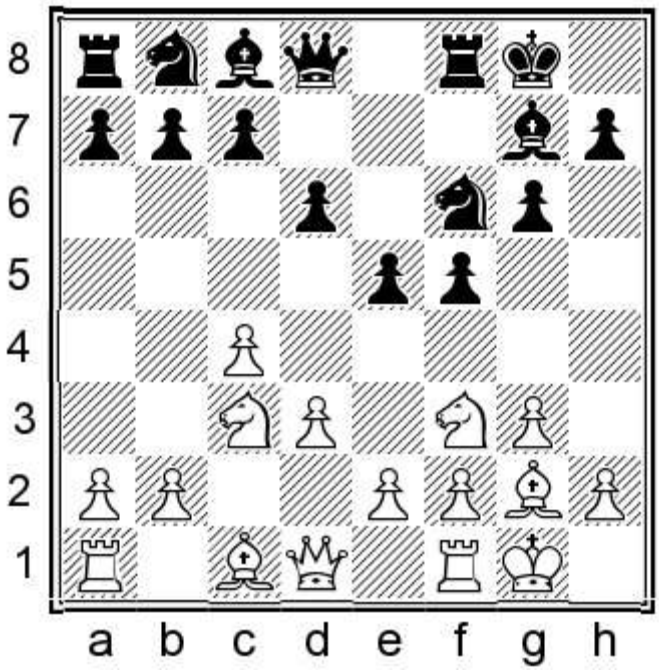
Position after: 6...d6

This is the last occasion for White to play d4 in order to transpose into the classical lines.

7.d3

Delaying d2−d3 doesn't make much sense. For instance after 7.♖b1 e5 The threat is to play ...e4, so White should simply transpose to the main line if he doesn't want to get a worse position already.

7...e5



Position after: 7...e5

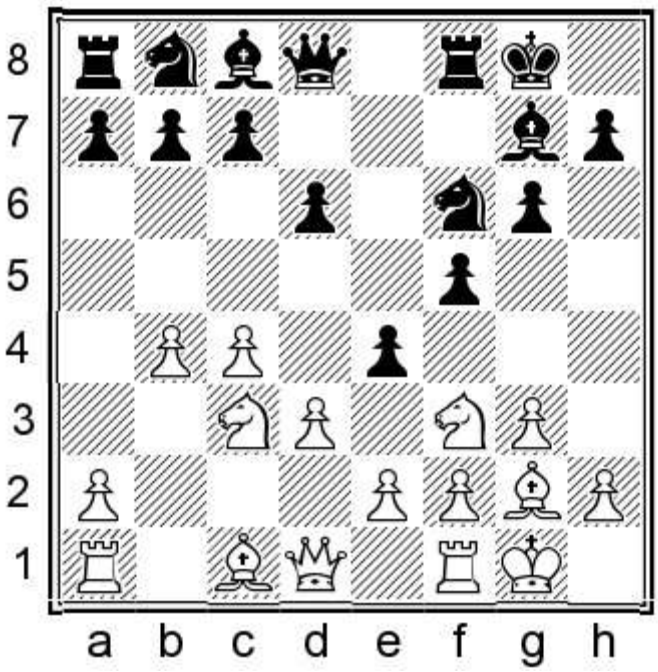
We have reached the starting position of our last two subchapters.

It is important to note that it is actually a typical Closed Sicilian position with colors reversed! Black hasn't developed his knight to c6 yet, which can be advantageous in terms of being able to play ...c6, chasing a knight or helping with ...d5. In the next subchapter, we will focus on 8.♖b1, which is theory's main line, a logical move preparing to expand on the queenside in order to strengthen the g2-bishop. Besides, it's not so appealing to move the b-pawn immediately as White could experience some trouble on the long dark-squared diagonal. In this subchapter we will have a look at the various alternatives at White's disposal.

8.♗d2

This is a flexible move, perhaps preparing ♕c1, but the main idea is simply to protect the knight in order to move the b-pawn. The drawback is that ♗a3, to support the pawn expansion on the queenside and attack the d6-pawn which can be weak after the trade of c-pawns, is no longer possible.

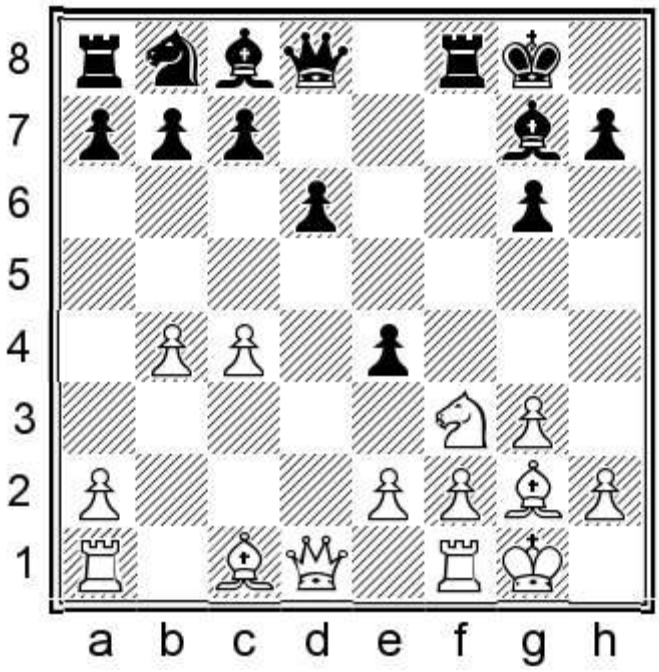
A) 8.b4 We've already mentioned the drawback to this move, and that it makes sense for White to avoid possible problems on the long diagonal, but we still need to have a look at how things could continue. 8...e4!? If we want to try to refute this line, we have to play this move. Of course there are other fully playable alternatives.



Position after: 8...e4!?

A1) 9.♘e1?! d5 10.cxd5 ♘xd5 11.♘xd5 ♕xd5! 12.♖b1 ♕xa2 13.♗f4 ♘c6↑

A2) 9.dxe4!?N Not so bad according to the computer, but it has never been tried. The reason is quite obvious: White doesn't want to open the long diagonal even more! 9...♘xe4 10.♘xe4 fxe4

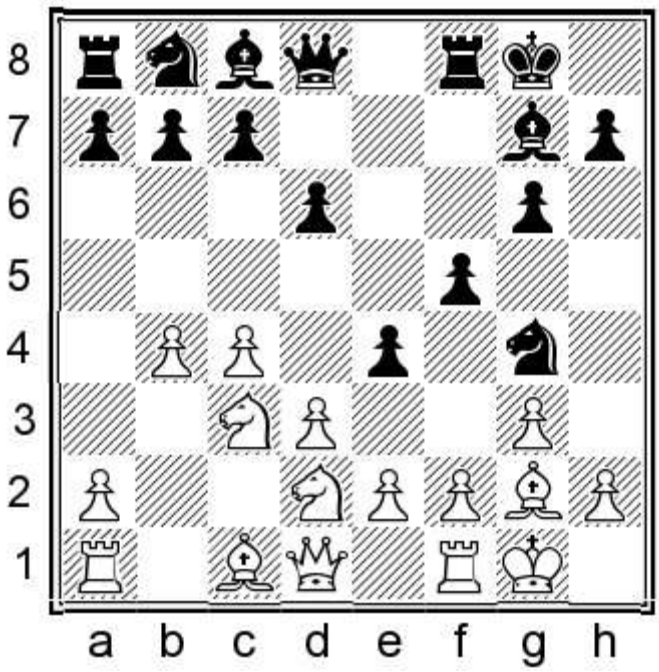


Position after: 10...fxe4

A2.1) 11.♗g5!? ♕e8 12.♘d2! Here, Black probably shouldn't take the rook on a1 if he doesn't want to suffer an attack on his king. 12...♗f5 13.♖c1 a5 14.b5 ♘d7⇄ White might be symbolically better, but we have a very reasonable position.

A2.2) 11.♕d5+ ♔h8 12.♘d4 ♘c6 13.♗b2 ♕f6 14.e3 ♘xb4 15.♕xe4 ♕f7=

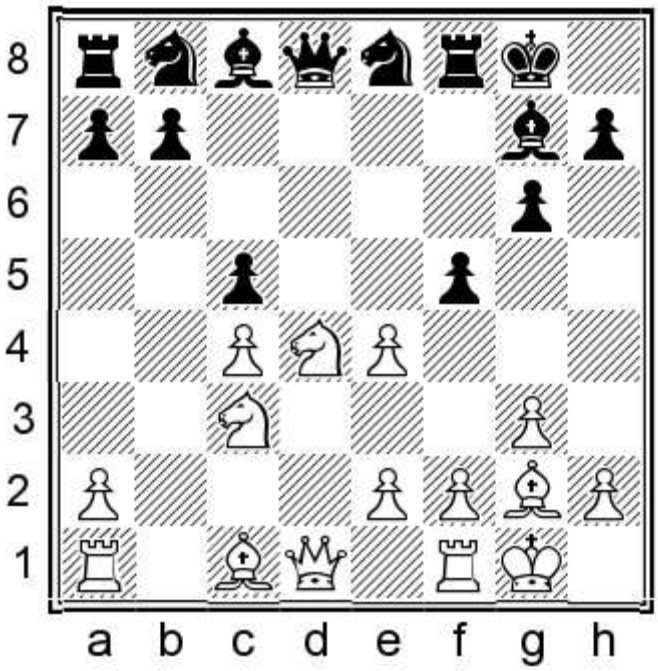
A3) 9.♘d2?! ♘g4!



Position after: 9...♘g4!

Now White needs to protect both the knight on c3 and the e3-square in order to prevent ...e3. 10.♘db1! ♘c6 11.b5 ♘a5 12.dxe4 fxe4 13.h3 ♘f6∓ White's development can hardly be called a success.

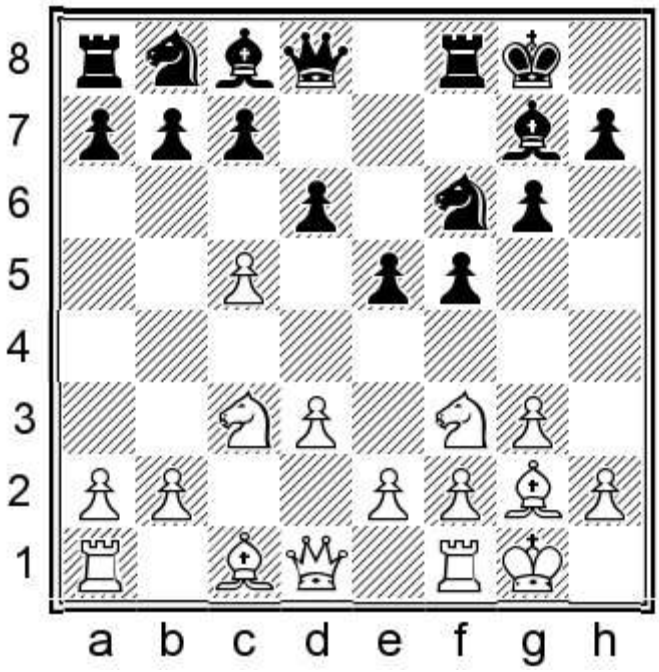
A4) 9.♘d4!? White has won all his games with this move, so we need to find an effective solution. 9...♘e8!N 10.dxe4 c5! 11.bxc5 dxc5



Position after: 11...dxc5

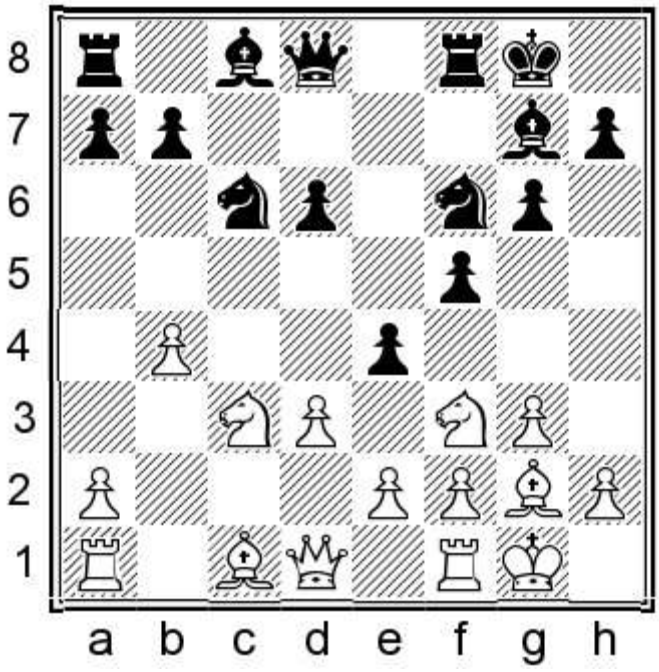
White is unable to avoid the loss of the exchange. Thereafter it will all depend on his ability to keep enough compensation. 12.♘c2 [12.♘db5? ♕xd1 13.♖xd1 a6∓] 12...♕xd1 13.♘xd1 ♗xa1 14.♘xa1 fxe4 15.♗xe4 ♘f6 16.♗g2 ♘c6∓ Obviously this is playable for White, and I think it's quite balanced.

B) 8.c5?!



Position after: 8.c5?!

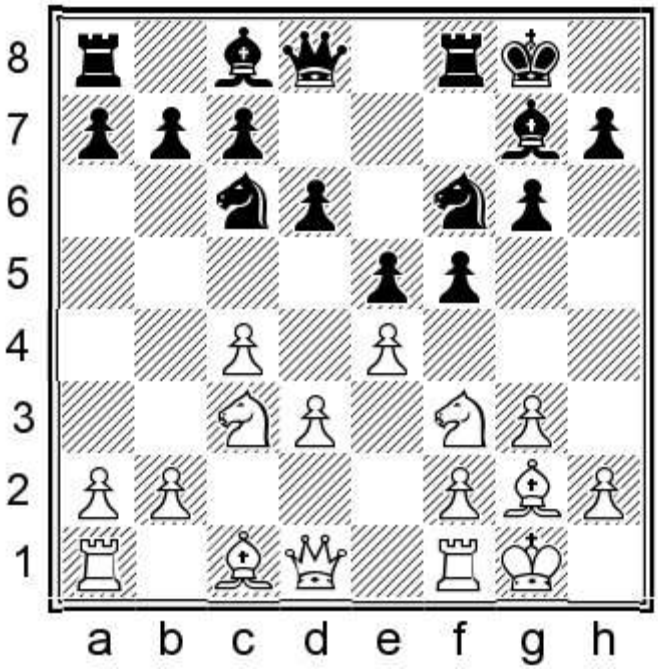
I'm not fond of this move. I feel that after trading the c-pawns, it will just help Black to advance his center. 8...♘c6 9.cxd6 [9.♕b3+ ♔h8 10.♘g5? d5∓] 9...cxd6 10.b4 [10.♗g5?! h6 After this move, retreating simply helps Black, and taking on f6 doesn't look like a great achievement. 11.♗xf6 ♕xf6 12.♕b3+ ♔h7 13.e3 ♕e6=] 10...e4!



Position after: 10...e4!

The same reaction as after 8.b4. The long diagonal has been weakened, so we take advantage of it. 11.dxe4 fxe4 12.♘d4! [12.♘g5 d5 13.b5 ♘a5∓] 12...d5!? 13.♗g5 ♕e8 14.♖c1 ♘xd4 15.♕xd4 ♗e6=

C) 8.e4?! ♘c6



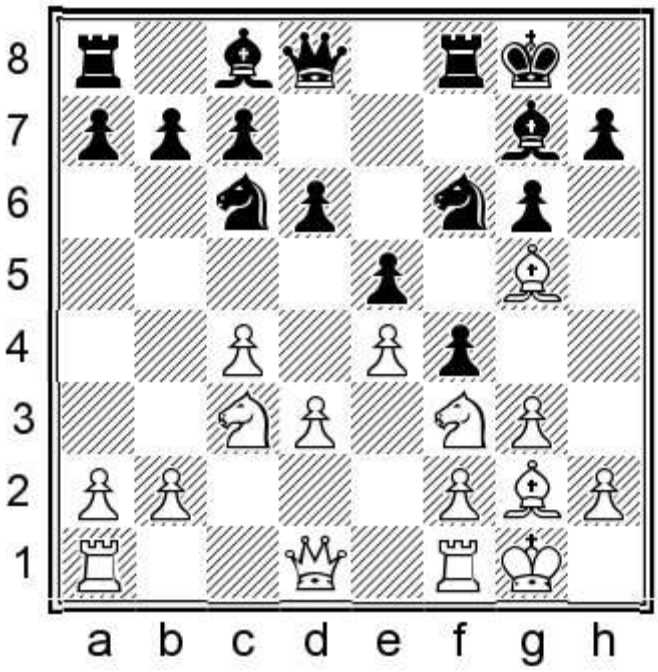
Position after: 8...♘c6

We have transposed to the Botvinnik System, which we have already covered, but with the knight on f3 instead of e2. The difference doesn't help White as the knight can't go to c3 once the other one has gone on d5, and it also blocks both the g2-bishop and the f-pawn. The only thing in its favour is the possibility of playing ♘g5 if Black goes ...♗e6 too early.

C1) 9.h3?! f4! The same motif as in the Botvinnik System works really well here too. 10.gxf4 ♘h5! 11.fxe5 ♘xe5 12.♘xe5 dxe5∓ Black follows with ...♕h4 with a huge attack.

C2) 9.exf5 ♗xf5 10.h3 ♕d7 11.♔h2 ♖ae8∓ White should stop ...e4, and we have already developed all our pieces.

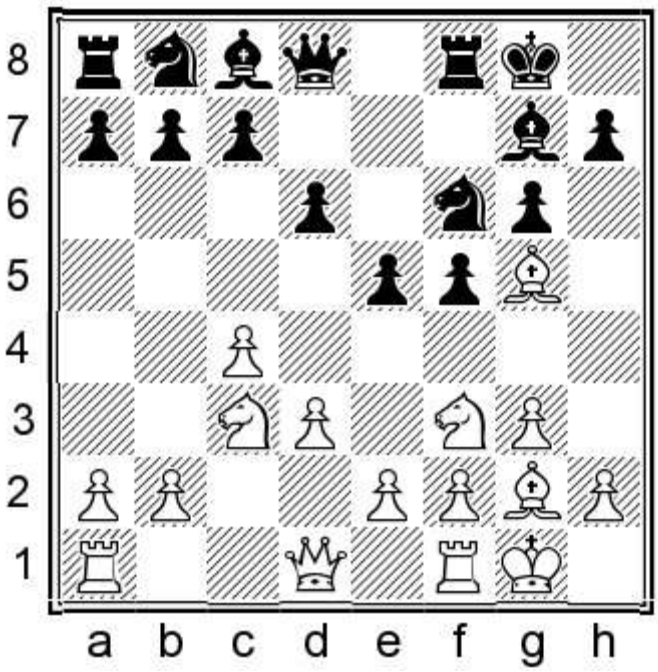
C3) 9.♗g5 f4!N



Position after: 9...f4!N

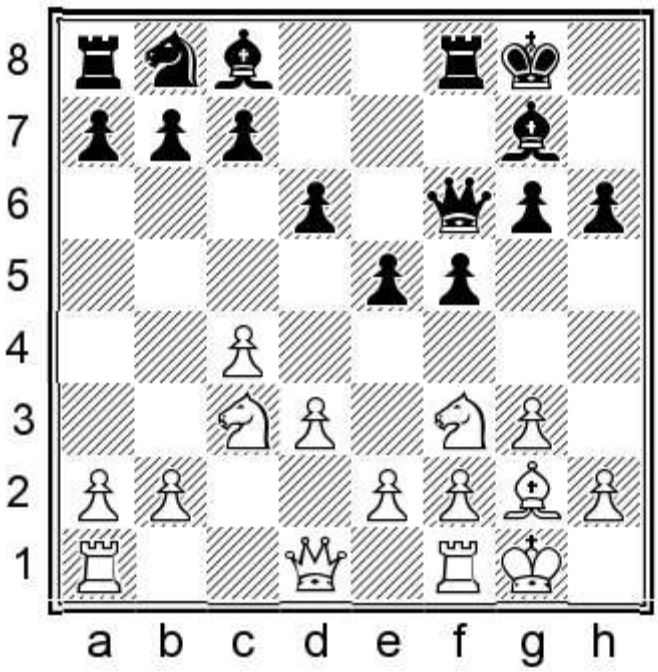
A very strong reply. 10.gxf4 [10.♘d5 ♗g4! An important idea, in order to get permanent access to the d4-square for our knight. 11.h3 ♗xf3 12.♗xf3 ♘d4 13.♗g2 c6∓] 10...h6! 11.♗xf6 [11.fxe5 hxg5! 12.exf6 ♕xf6 13.♘d5 ♕d8∓ Black plays ...g4 on the next move and gets fabulous play on the dark squares.] 11...♕xf6 12.♘d5 ♕d8! 13.fxe5 dxe5 14.h3 Necessary in order to prevent ...♗g4. 14...♘d4! 15.♘xd4 exd4 16.f4 c6 17.♘b4 ♕h4∓ White's pawns are too weak.

D) 8.♗g5?!



Position after: 8.♗g5?!

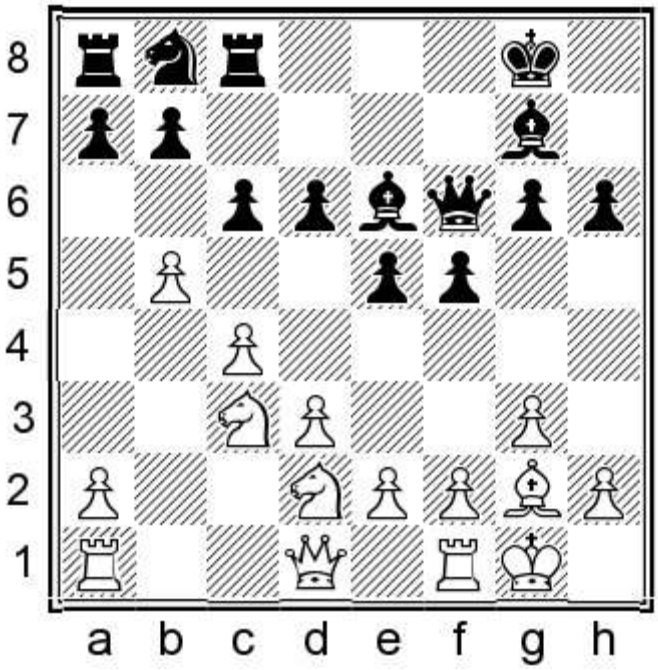
This idea is justified only if Black has already played ...♘c6. While it allows the c3-knight to reach the d5-square, in this situation it would be easy to chase the knight with ...c6. 8...h6 9.♗xf6 ♕xf6



Position after: 9...♕xf6

D1) 10.♘d5?! ♕f7 11.♕a4 ♗e6 [11...c6? 12.♘b6±] 12.♘d2 ♖c8!∓ Black intends ...♘bd7 and ...c6. White's play is clearly too artificial.

D2) 10.♘d2 c6 11.b4 ♗e6 12.b5 ♖c8!

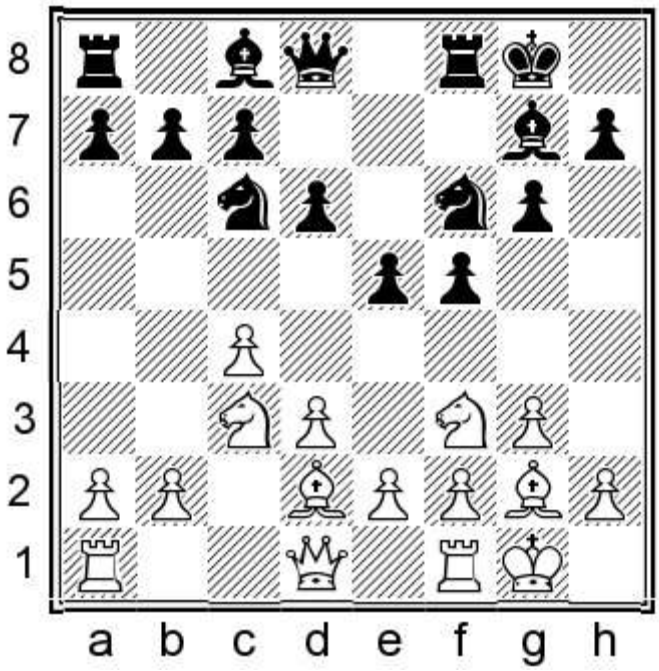


Position after: 12...♖c8!

13.♘b3 ♕d8! [13...♘d7 14.♘a5!± Attacking both b7 and c6.] 14.♕c2 ♘d7∓

D3) 10.♖b1 c6 11.♘d2 ♗e6 12.♕c2 ♘d7 13.a3 a5= Black will soon be able to play ...d5 with good prospects in the center.

8...♘c6

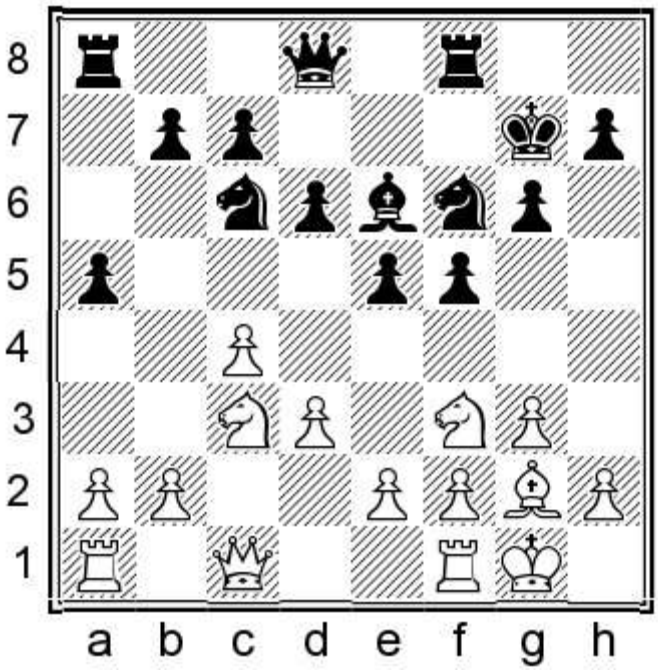


Position after: 8...♘c6

9.♖b1

In general I believe that White should play this on the previous move. It's not clear that playing 8.♗d2 really improves White's position, as he is now unable to play ♘d2 or bring the bishop to a3 in order to put pressure on the d6-pawn.

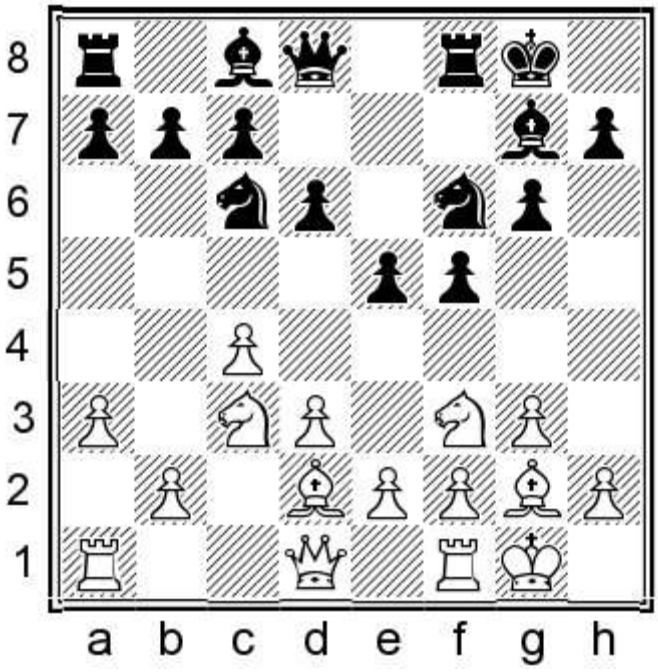
A) 9.♕c1 a5 [9...♖e8!? If Black wants to keep his bishop, and eventually prepare ...e4, this is the move! I just prefer the text move, because I think it's rather slow for White to play for ♗h6.] 10.♗h6 ♗e6 11.♗xg7 ♔xg7



Position after: 11...♔xg7

The bishop can retreat to g8, which is why ♘g5 was nothing to worry about. 12.♖d1 ♗g8!= Black anticipates the possible d4−d5 advance.

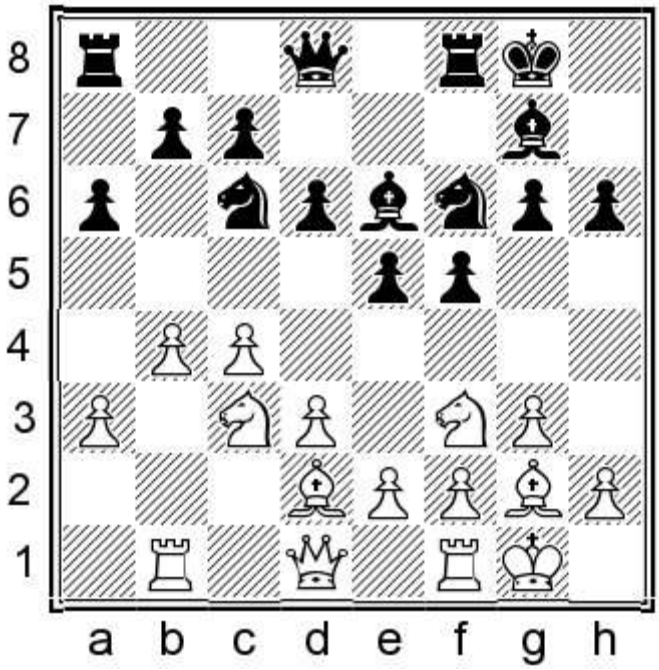
B) 9.a3?!



Position after: 9.a3?!

This is a loss of time. Black might want to trade the a-pawn, which will be easy if White advances his b-pawn, so Black can leave the pawn on a6 for the time being, and White will have to spend another

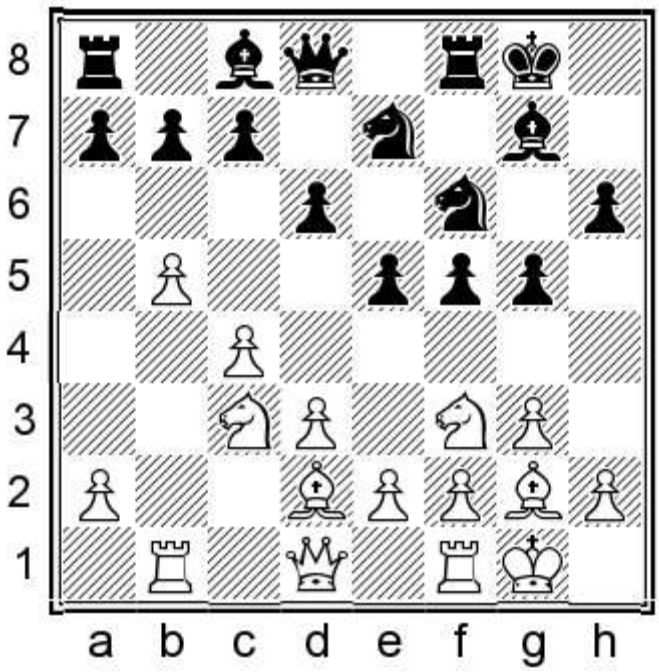
move on a4 in order to take back with the a-pawn. 9...h6! 10.b4 a6! 11.♖b1 ♗e6



Position after: 11...♗e6

12.a4 There it is, the lost tempo with the a-pawn. [12.b5?! is a bad way for White to open the queenside. After 12...axb5 13.cxb5 ♘a5∓ he has many weaknesses.] 12...g5 13.b5 axb5 14.axb5 ♘e7↑

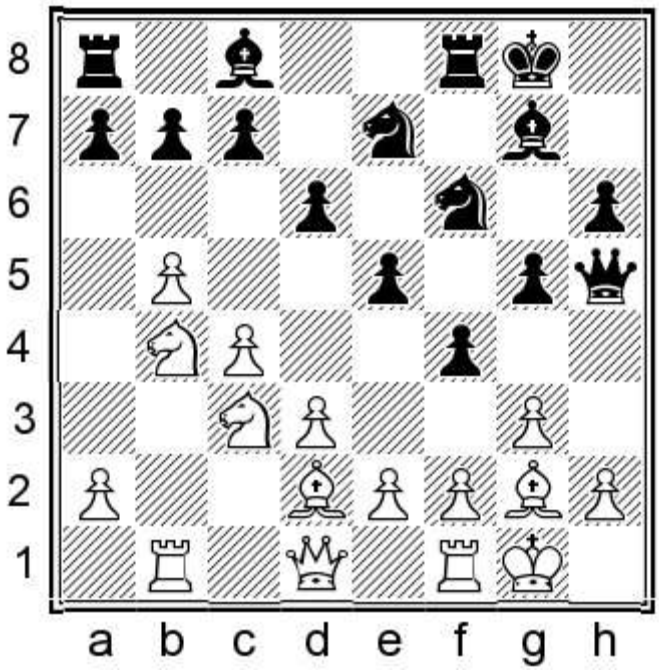
9...h6 10.b4 g5 11.b5 ♘e7



Position after: 11...♘e7

12.a4

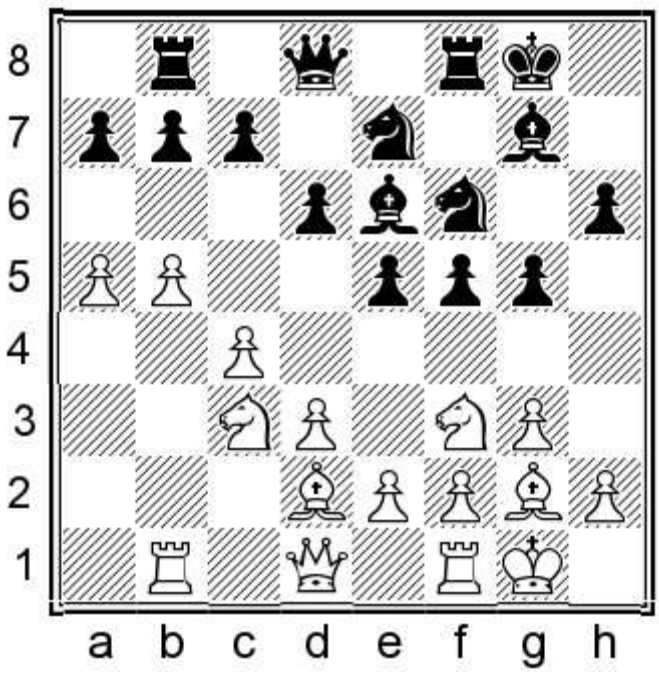
12.♘e1 White wants to prevent our light-squared bishop from moving, but we can find another way to develop our initiative. 12...♕e8 13.♘c2 f4! 14.♘b4 ♕h5



Position after: 14...♕h5

Black wants to play ...♗h3 and probably ...♘g4. 15.e3? [15.♘bd5 ♘exd5 16.♘xd5 ♖f7⇄] 15...f3! White probably missed this strong idea. Of course the bishop can't go to h1, so he has to accept the gift. 16.♗xf3 ♘g4 17.♗xg4 ♗xg4 18.f3 ♖xf3 19.♖xf3 ♗xf3 20.♕e1 ♖f8∓ 0-1 (29) Pham, L (2341) – Koneru, H (2600), Mardin 2011.

12...♗e6 13.a5 ♖b8



Position after: 13...♖b8

This is a usual way to protect the b7-pawn, but keep in mind that we can't play it if White is able to play ♕a4, attacking the a7-pawn.

14.♘e1 ♕d7 15.e3 f4

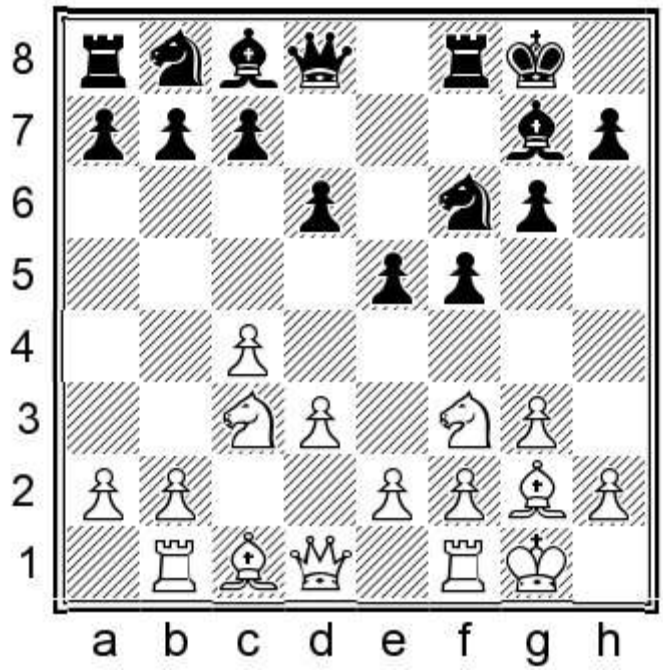
Black finally opens the position, even if it costs him a pawn. He has a great position to play, and his mating threats look far more dangerous than White's possibilities of merely opening the queenside.

16.exf4 gxf4 17.♘c2 ♗h3→

Black eventually won in Komljenovic, D (2454) – Kazhgaleyev, M (2596), Cergy Pontoise 2004, 0-1 (67).

g) 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.♘c3 d6 7.d3 e5 8.♖b1

1.c4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.♘c3 d6 7.d3 e5 8.♖b1



Position after: 8.♖b1

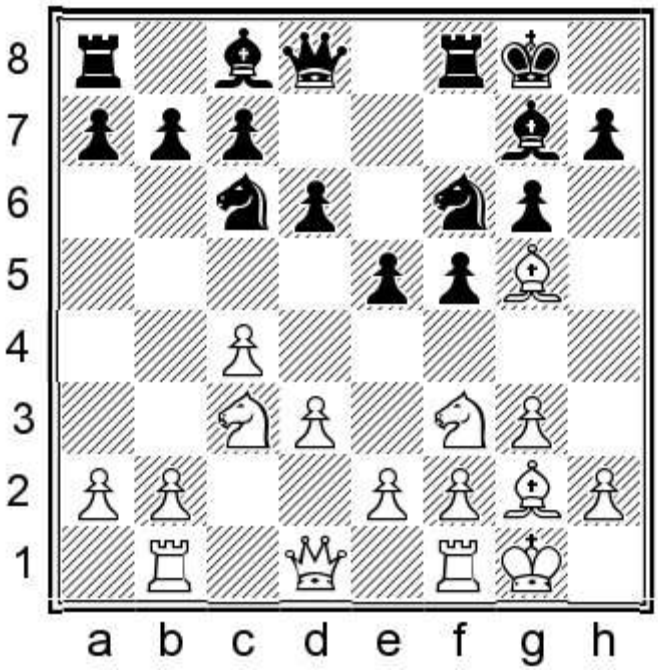
Definitely the main move. White doesn't give any indication of his other piece placements, and follows the straightforward plan of advancing on the queenside.

8...♘c6!

8...a5 For a long time I thought it was useful to include this move, which aims to open the a-file for our rook, but now I think it only helps White. First, because it's not at all clear how we want to make use of the a-file, since our play is based more on an attack on the kingside, and second, it weakens the b6-square, which sometimes helps White achieve his plan of playing b5−b6 to weaken the d6-pawn.

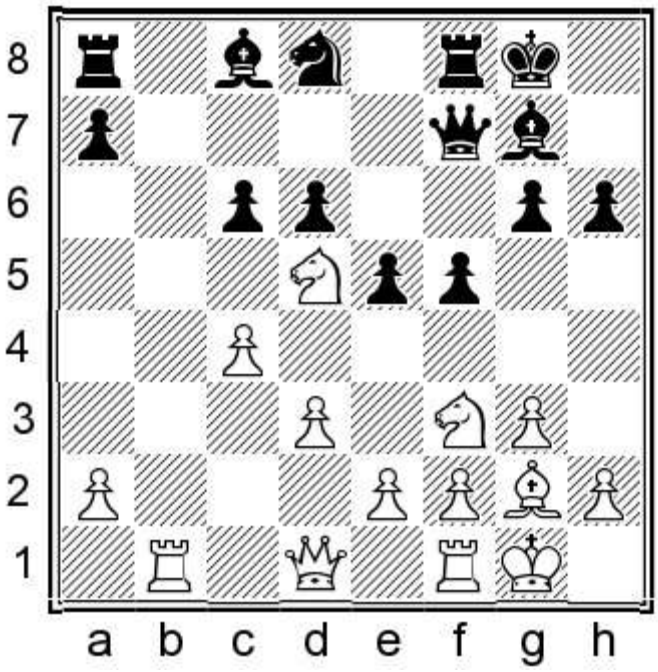
9.b4

9.♗g5?!



Position after: 9.♗g5?!

This leads nowhere. 9...h6 10.♗xf6 ♕xf6 11.♘d5 ♕f7 12.b4 ♘d8! Immediately getting rid of the annoying d5-knight, after which we will be able to advance in the center. 13.b5 c6 14.bxc6 bxc6



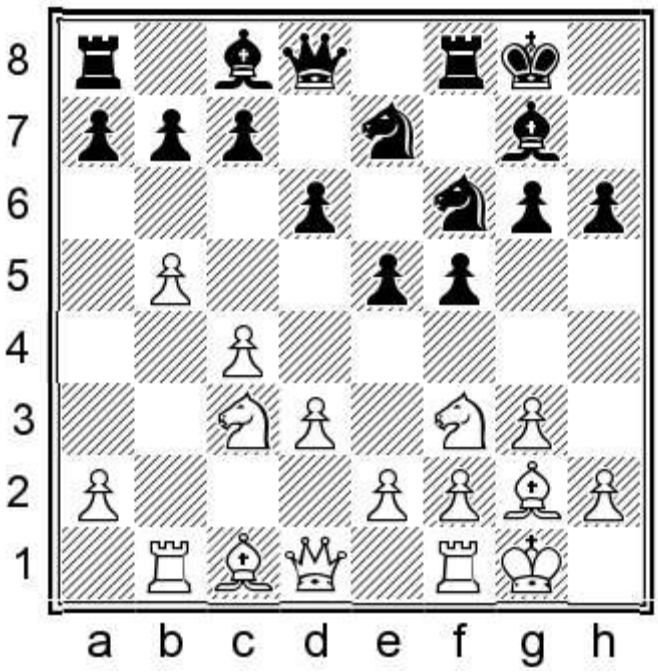
Position after: 14...bxc6

15.♘b4 [15.♘d2 e4! 16.♘e3 exd3 17.exd3 f4∓ We have managed to open some diagonals for our bishops and definitely have the upper hand.] 15...a5 16.♘c2 ♘e6∓

9...h6 10.b5

White has other moves, but he gains little by delaying this move, and the others will generally transpose.

10...♘e7

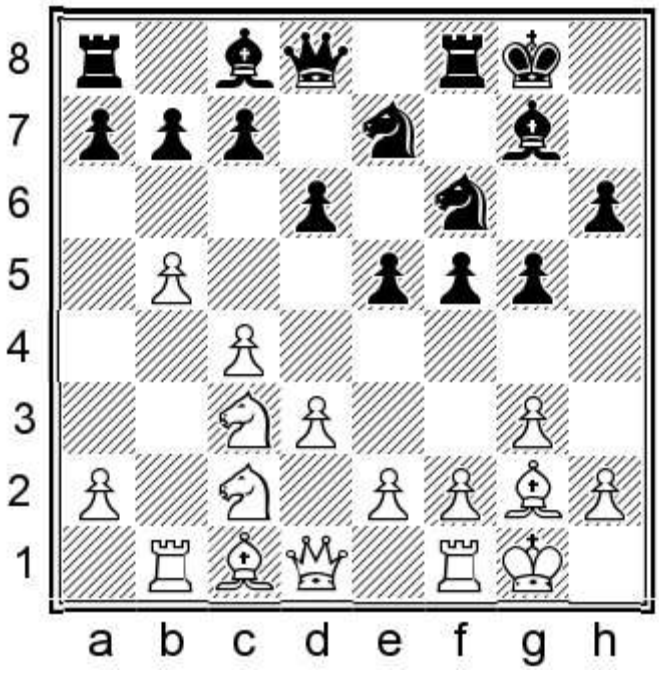


Position after: 10...♘e7

This is the real crossroads of this line. White's main idea is to continue his expansion on the queenside, but he has also tried many other possibilities.

11.a4

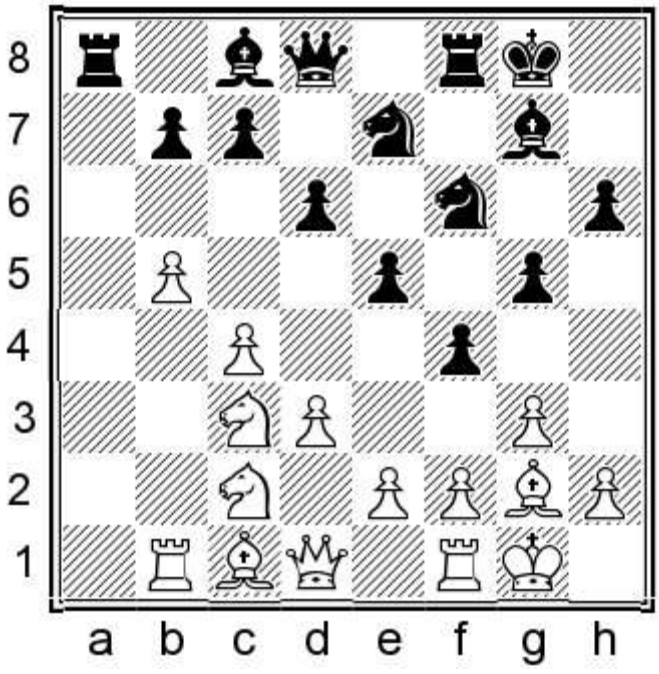
A) 11.♘e1 g5 12.♘c2



Position after: 12.♘c2

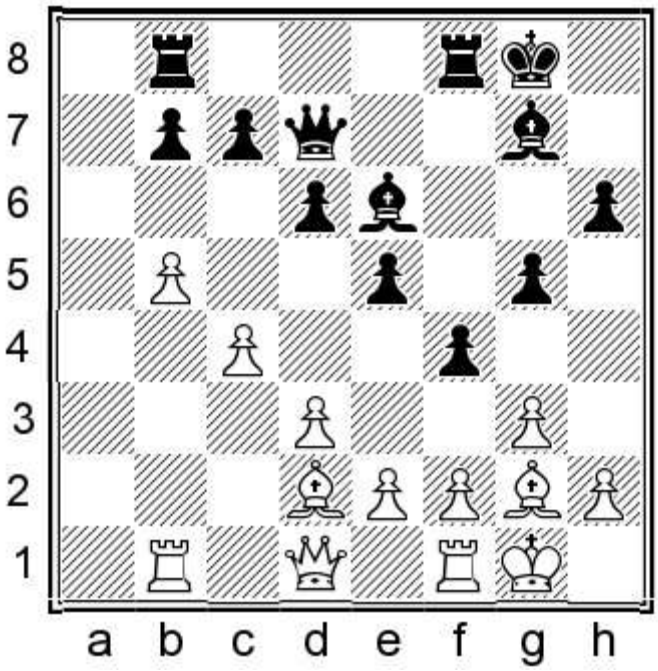
A1) 12...f4 13.♘b4 A potentially annoying move to meet if you want to keep playing for a win. The reason is that Black can't move the c8-bishop, leaving the b7-pawn unprotected, and if the the rook goes to b8, then we have a problem on a7 after ♕a4. Finally, if we bring the queen to the kingside with 13...♕e8, then 14.♘a6!± and Black has nothing better than to bring the queen back to d8.

A2) 12...a6!? 13.a4 [13.b6?! This can't be good as it releases the tension on the queenside. 13...c6 14.e3 f4! 15.exf4 exf4 16.gxf4 ♘h7! 17.♘e4 gxf4↑] 13...axb5 14.axb5 f4!



Position after: 14...f4!

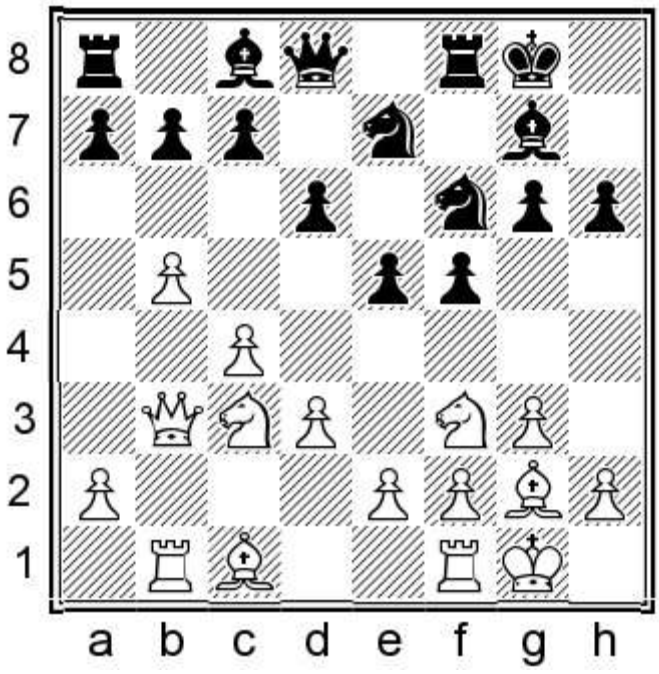
Now that we have opened the a-file, it's easier to develop the play on the kingside, as we no longer have to worry about our a-pawn, in comparison to the previous lines. 15.♘b4 ♖b8 16.♗d2 [16.♕a4 ♗e6 17.♕a7 ♕c8∓ Both protecting the b7-pawn and intending ...♗e6−h3.] 16...♕e8 17.♘bd5 Probably the best idea for White is to trade knights in order to release the tension. 17...♘exd5 18.♘xd5 ♘xd5 19.♗xd5+ [19.cxd5 b6! It's very important to prevent b6 by White. 20.♕c2 ♖b7 21.♕c6 ♖a7 22.♕xe8 ♖xe8 23.♖a1 ♖xa1 24.♖xa1 ♗d7 25.♖a7 ♖c8 26.gxf4 exf4 27.h4= White keeps the balance since Black is not really able to take on b5 because of ♗h3.] 19...♗e6 20.♗g2 ♕d7↑



Position after: 20...♕d7↑

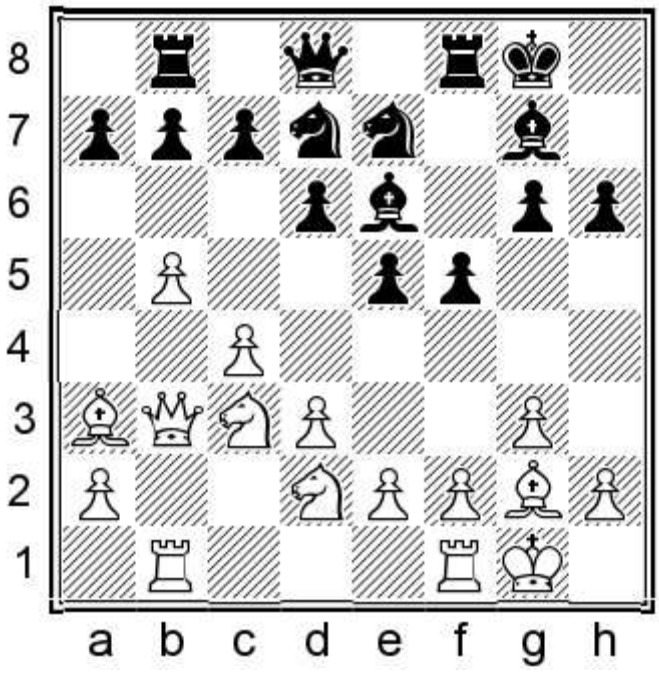
I still think that Black has the easier position. We are going to trade the light-squared bishops, plus the pressure on the kingside is unpleasant, even if White should objectively be able to keep the balance.

B) 11.♕b3



Position after: 11.♕b3

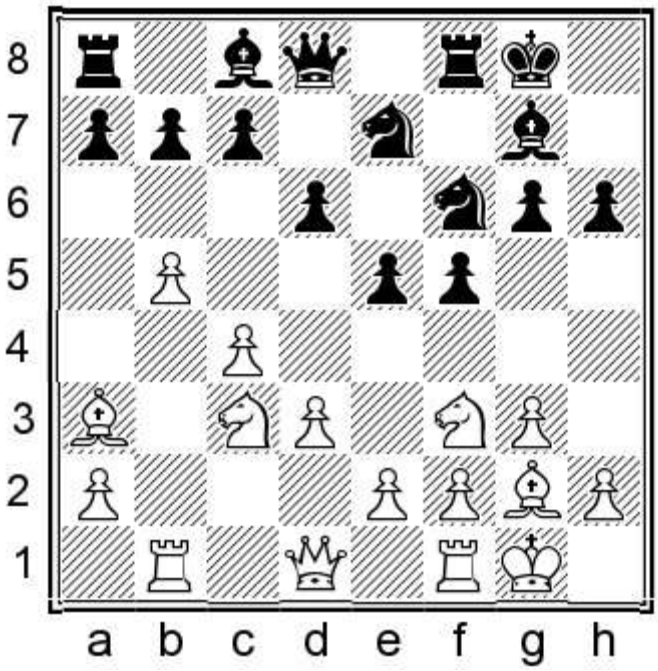
With this move, White generally intends to continue with c4−c5. As we don't want to choose a square for our king (which can sometimes be weaker on h7, sometimes on h8, and it's hard to tell right now), I prefer to develop the bishop. 11...♗e6 12.♘d2 The logical follow-up, threatening the b7-pawn. 12...♘d7!? [12...♖b8 13.♕a4↑ Attacking the a7-pawn is obviously White's idea.] After ...♘d7 it's quite difficult to find a logical continuation for White, for example 13.♗a3 [13.♕c2 c6 14.e3 ♕c7⇄] 13...♖b8!



Position after: 13...♖b8!

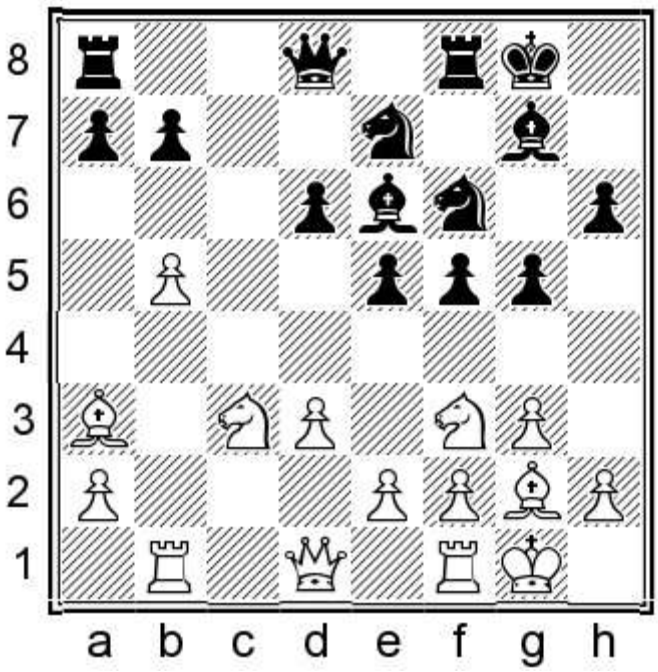
14.♕a4 ♕c8. Obviously White is un-able to take on a7 this time. 15.♗b2 ♖a8=

C) 11.♗a3?!



Position after: 11.♗a3?!

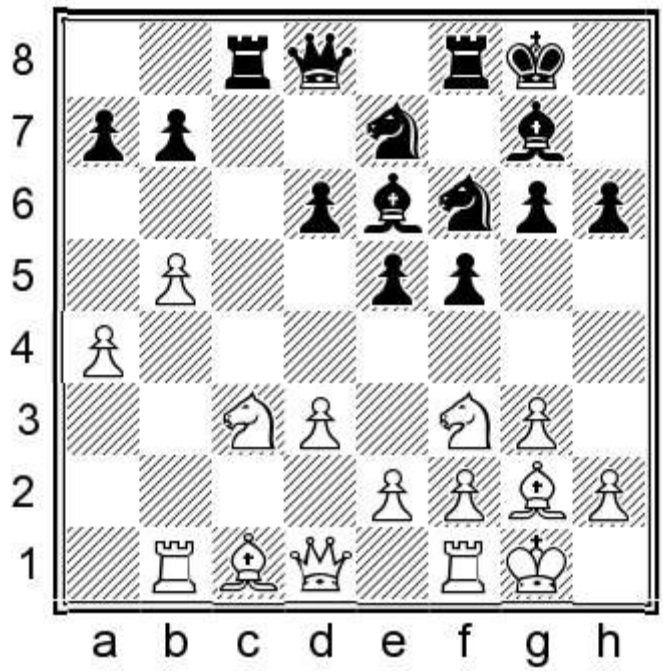
I think this is too committal, both for the bishop and the a2-pawn, which can no longer advance. We can start our counterplay: 11...g5 12.c5 ♗e6! Stopping any ideas on the light-squared diagonal, and intending a quick ...d6−d5 if possible. 13.cxd6 [13.c6?! b6 14.♗b2 f4 15.♘e1 d5 16.a4 ♘g6∓ 0-1 (24) Tokarev, I (2295) – Matinian, N (2478), Kazan 2014] 13...cxd6



Position after: 13...cxd6

14.♘d2 [14.♕d2 Even if White keeps an eye on the e5-pawn, he won't be able to prevent ...d6−d5 for long. 14...♘g6 15.♖fc1 ♖f7∓] 14...d5 15.♕b3 ♖e8! 16.♖fc1 ♕d7∓.

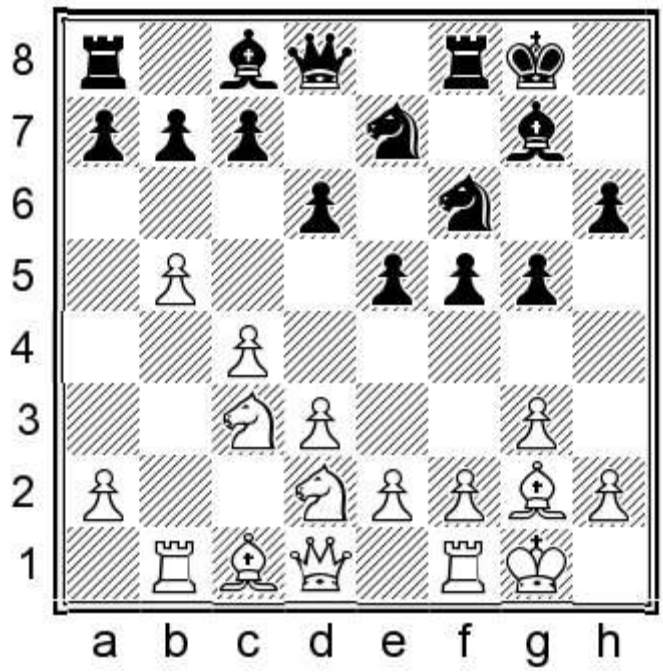
D) 11.c5?! ♗e6 12.cxd6 [12.♗a3 g5 See 11.♗a3.] 12...cxd6 13.a4 ♖c8



Position after: 13...♖c8

14.♗b2 This happened in the game Hansen, T (2473) – Smirin, I (2642), Stockholm 2014, 0-1 (35). I think Black should now do something on the kingside, e.g. 14...g5!?N 15.♖c1 ♘g6 16.e3 ♕d7∓ with ...f5−f4 to follow very soon in order to play ...♗e6−h3.

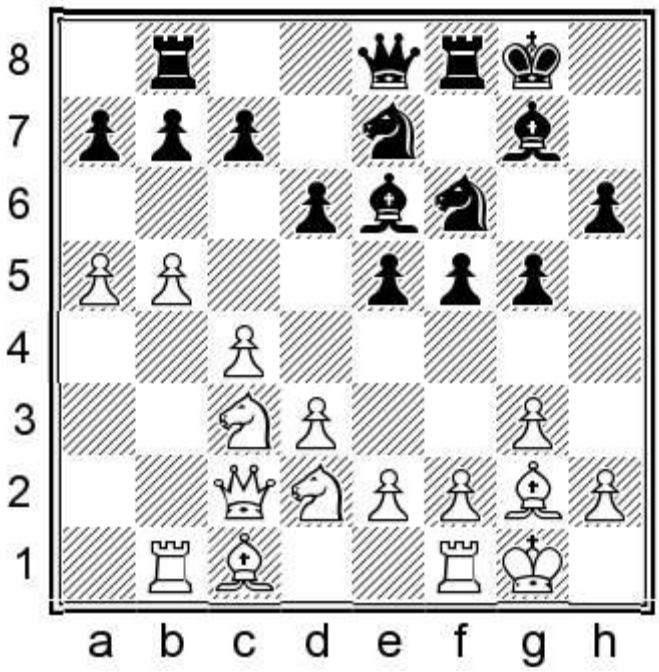
E) 11.♘d2!? g5



Position after: 11...g5

E1) 12.♗a3 a6! White would definitely like to play a4! 13.♕b3 axb5 14.cxb5+ ♔h8 15.♘c4 f4↑

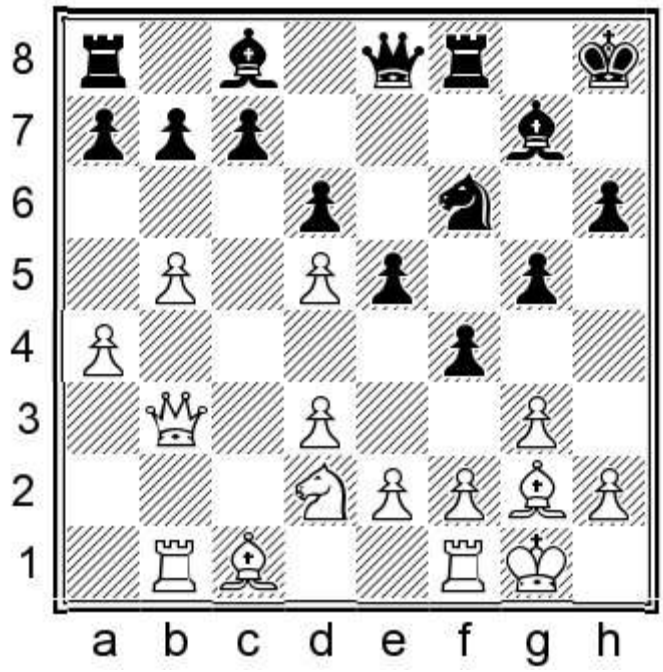
E2) 12.a4 ♖b8 Compared to 12.♘d2 in the main line, we have played ...g5 instead of ...♗e6, but the character of the position remains the same. 13.a5 ♗e6 14.♕c2 ♕e8



Position after: 14...♕e8

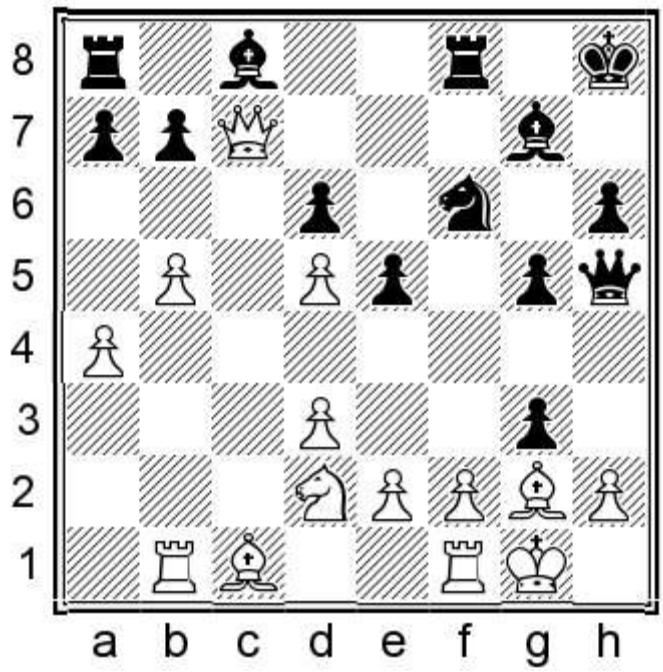
15.b6?! [15.a6!? b6 16.e3 f4 17.♗b2⇄] 15...axb6 16.axb6 c6 17.♗a3 ♕d7 18.e3 f4∓ 0-1 (29) Movsziszian, K (2513) – Cvitan, O (2496), Bled 2018.

E3) 12.♕b3 Obviously, in comparison to 11.♕b3, we are no longer able to play ...♗c8−e6. On the other hand, the knight is no longer on f3, so we can more easily put our king on h8, without having to fear any ♘h4-ideas. 12...♔h8 13.♘d5 [13.a4 ♖b8 14.♗a3 ♗e6 15.♘d5 f4=] 13...♘exd5 14.cxd5 f4 15.a4 ♕e8



Position after: 15...♕e8

16.♕c4?! [16.♘e4! was probably needed in order to trade knights, but this is still good for Black. 16...♕h5 17.♘xf6 ♗xf6 18.♕c2 ♖f7↑] This was seen in the game Dimitrov, R (2424) – Zherebukh, Y (2629), Athens 2012, 0-1 (48). Now Black has a very dangerous move at his disposal: 16...♕h5!N 17.♕xc7 [17.♗f3 ♘g4! 18.♗xg4 ♗xg4 19.f3 ♗h3 20.♖f2 ♖f7∓ The attack continues.] 17...fxg3

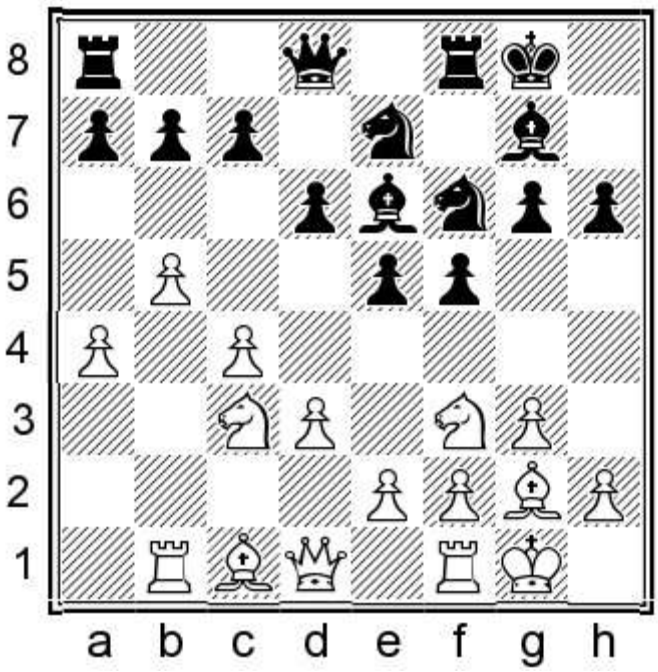


Position after: 17...fxg3

18.fxg3! [18.hxg3?? ♘g4 19.♖d1 ♕h2+ 20.♔f1 ♘e3+ 21.♔e1 ♘xg2+ 22.♔f1 ♕h1#] 18...♗h3→

Black wants to trade the bishops quickly and follow with ...♘g4. The position is already of concern for White.

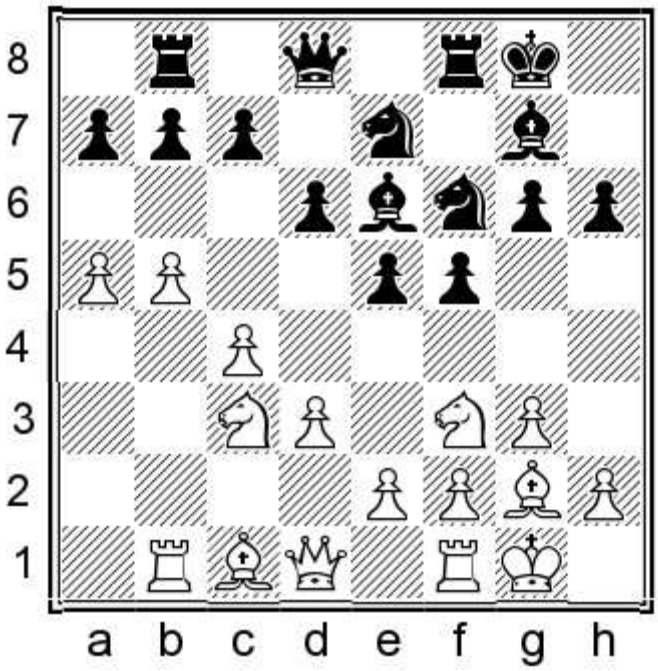
11...♗e6



Position after: 11...♗e6

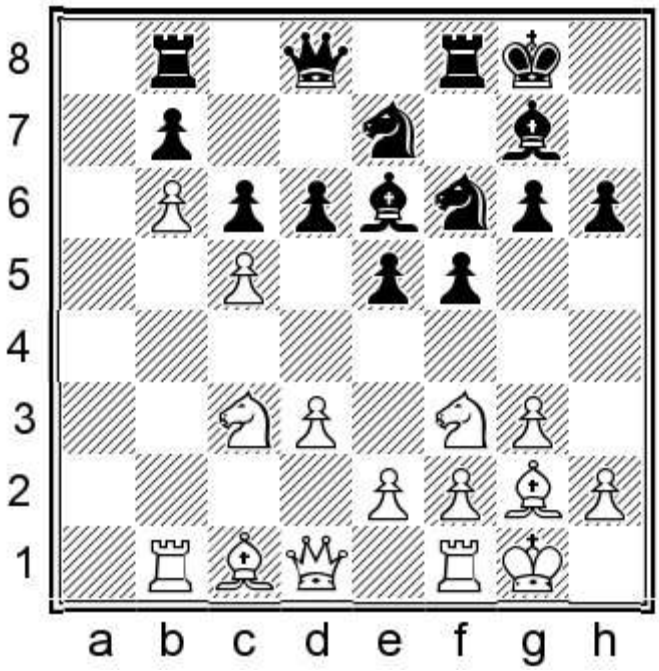
12.♗a3

A) 12.a5 Black also has many options. Anticipating problems on the long diagonal seems best. 12...♖b8!?



Position after: 12...♖b8!?

A1) 13.b6?! This was played in the game between the highest rated players to reach this position, but I think that White is going in the wrong direction as it is easy to react in the center. 13...axb6 14.axb6 c6 15.c5

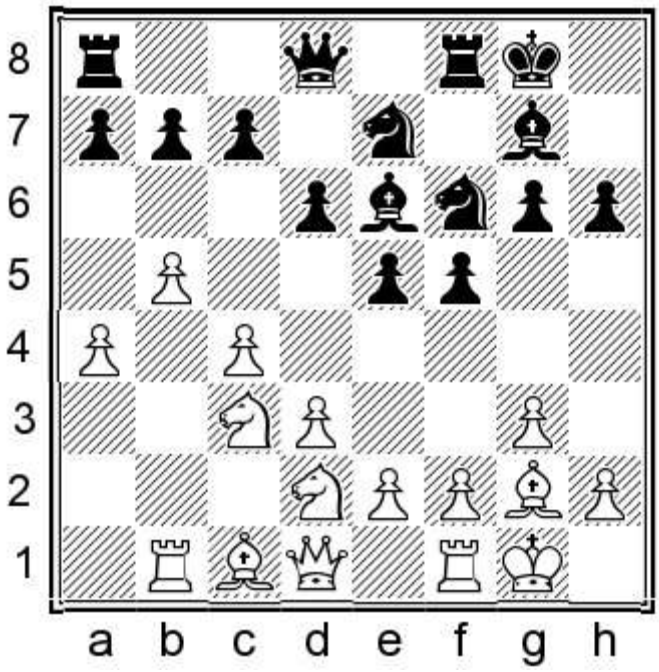


Position after: 15.c5

As in the game Michalik, P (2557) – Vojta, T (2350), Prague 2017, 0-1 (53). Now it's probably best to simply take the pawn: 15...dxc5! 16.♘a4 ♘d7 17.♗a3 e4! 18.dxe4 fxe4 19.♘d2 e3 20.fxe3 ♘d5∓.

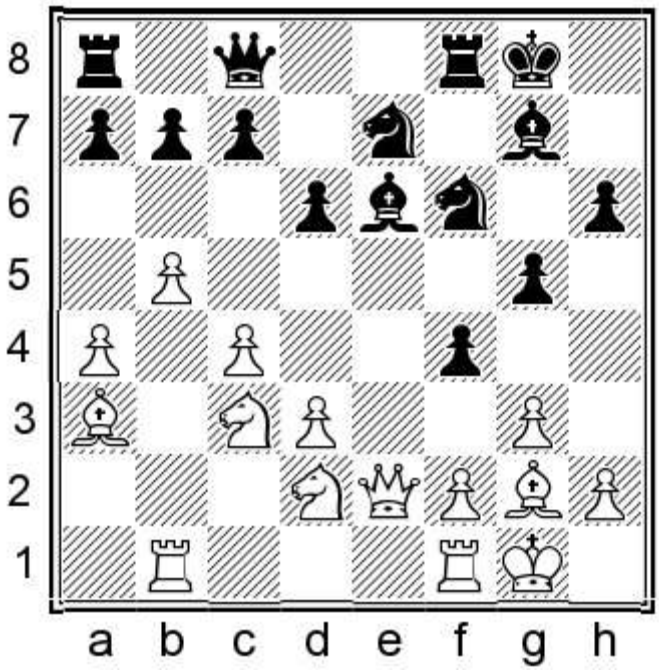
A2) 13.♗a3 g5 14.c5 [14.♘d2 f4 15.a6 b6⇄] 14...b6! Immediately restricting White's possibilities in this area. 15.axb6 axb6 16.cxd6 cxd6 17.e4 [17.♘a4?! f4 18.♘d2 d5 19.♕b3 ♖e8∓ 0-1 (38) Andreasson, I (2355) – Furhoff, J (2305), Sweden 1996] 17...g4 18.♘h4 f4! 19.f3 ♕d7↑

B) 12.♘d2



Position after: 12.♘d2

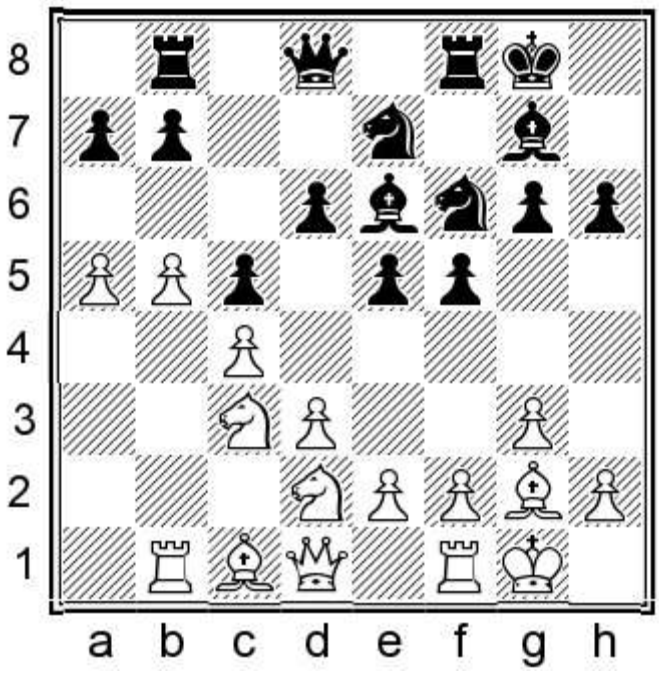
B1) 12...♕c8!? This is always interesting in order to protect b7 and prepare ...♗h3, trading the light-squared bishops. 13.e3 g5 14.♗a3 f4 15.exf4 exf4 16.♕e2!?



Position after: 16.♕e2!?

It seems that Black is in trouble with a number of hanging pieces, but he has a strong reply. 16...♘f5! 17.♗xb7 ♘d4 18.♗xc8 ♘xe2+ 19.♘xe2 ♗xc8♖ Black's bishops should provide him with enough compensation.

B2) 12...♖b8 13.a5 [13.♗a3 I think this move is too slow, as Black develops his initiative very quickly. 13...f4 14.e3 ♕d7→] 13...c5!?N

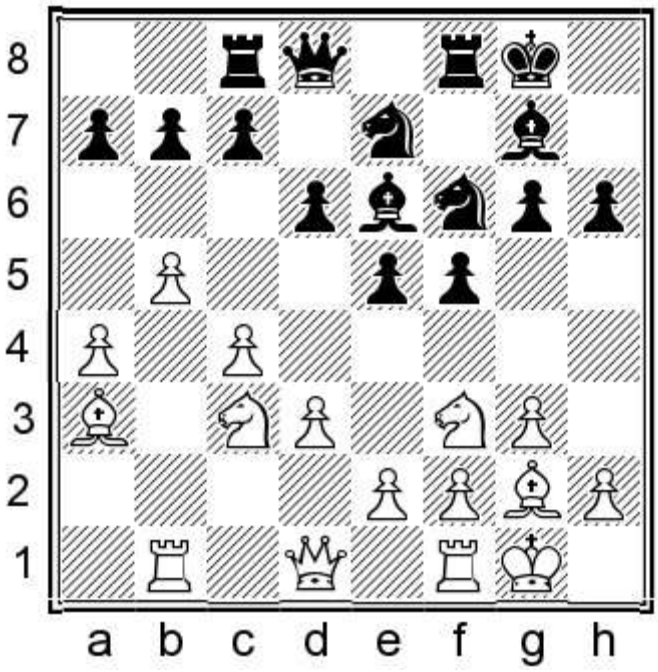


Position after: 13...c5!?N

There are other possible moves such as ...g5 or an immediate ...f4, but this move seems effective in stopping White's activity on the queenside. If he wants to do anything there, he needs to take, otherwise he won't be able to open the position. 14.bxc6 bxc6 15.♖xb8 ♕xb8 16.♗a3 ♕c7 17.♕a4 ♖b8 18.♖b1= Obviously the position is quite likely to end in a draw.

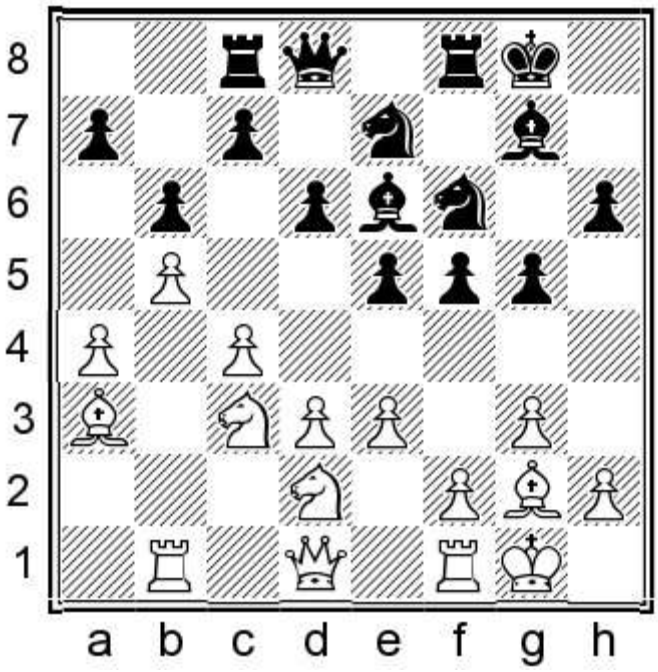
12...g5

12...♖c8



Position after: 12...♖c8

This was played by the great Kasparov, and has been the most played move ever since, but I don't necessarily consider it to be the strongest. I'll give you a few moves of the game, but I prefer another approach. 13.♘d2 b6 14.e3 [14.a5 g5 15.axb6 axb6 16.e3 ♕d7 17.♕e2 f4=] 14...g5



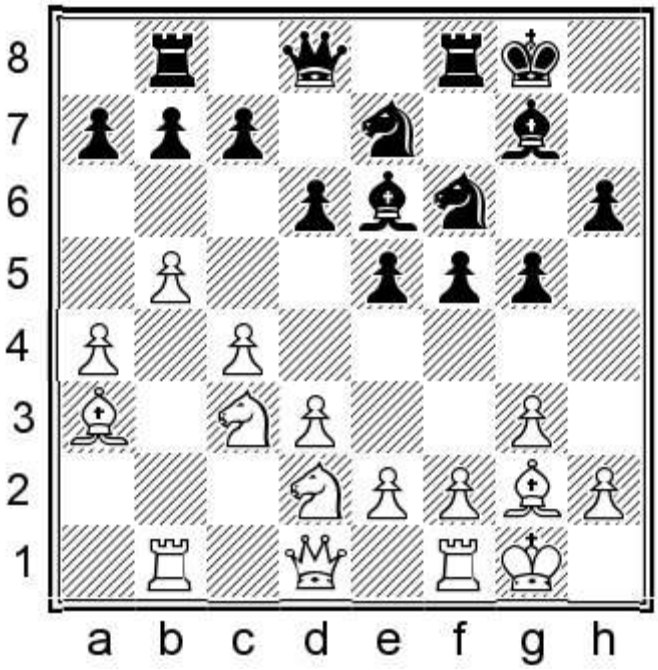
Position after: 14...g5

15.d4?! Probably too direct. White should have started with a preparatory move such as ♖e1. 15...exd4 16.exd4 f4 17.♖e1 ♗g4! 18.♘f3 ♕d7→ 0-1 (30) Psakhis, L (2575) – Kasparov, G (2800), Murcia 1990.

13.c5

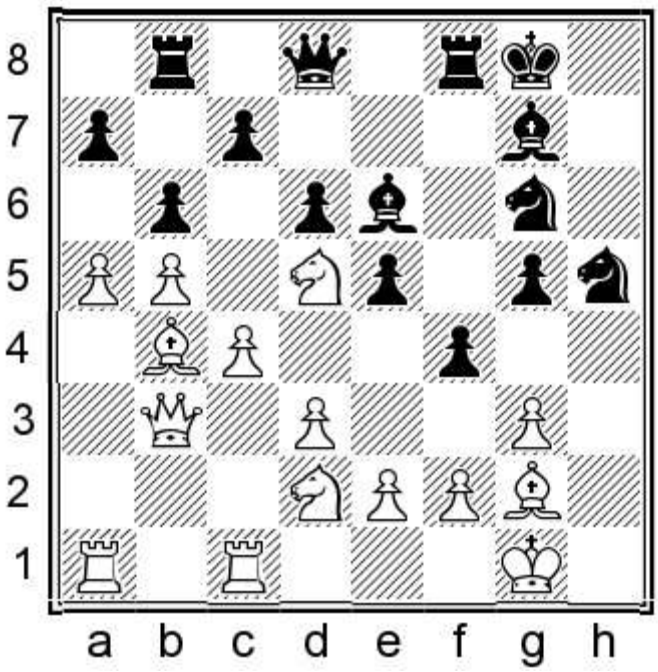
A) 13.a5 ♖b8 See 12.a5.

B) 13.♘d2 ♖b8



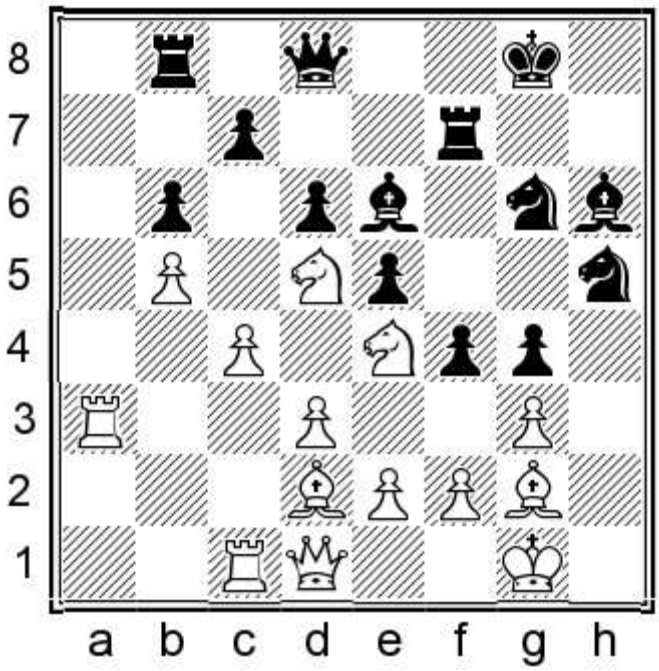
Position after: 13...♖b8

Ding Liren reached this position in his youth. The game is far from perfect, but I'll give it in order to show you some attacking ideas. 14.♕b3 ♘g6 15.♘d5 h5 16.♖fc1 b6?! Probably too weakening. Black should have kept advancing his kingside pawns. 17.a5 h4 18.♗b4 hxg3 19.hxg3 ♘h5 20.♖a1 f4



Position after: 20...f4

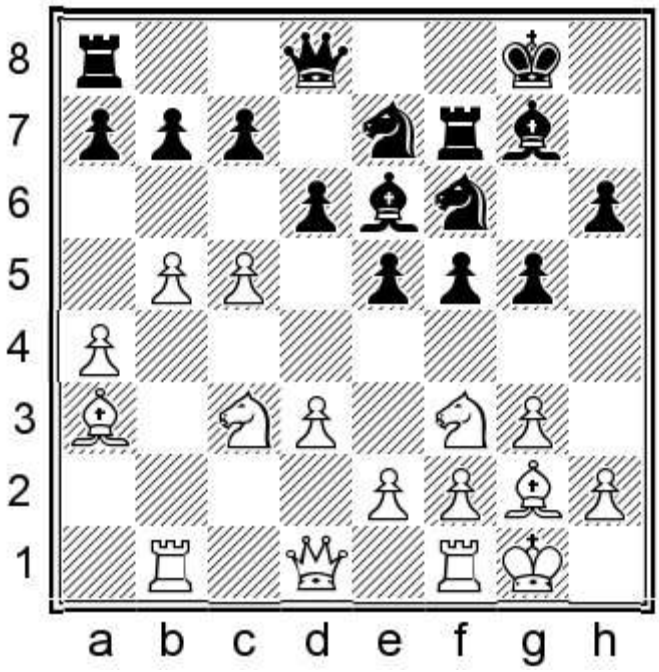
This kind of attack is really easy to play for Black. 21.♘e4 g4 22.axb6 axb6 23.♕d1?! The position is difficult to play for White, but this move is too slow. 23...♗h6 24.♗d2 ♖f7 25.♖a3



Position after: 25.♖a3

Now in Li, S (2512) – Ding, L (2395), Beijing 2008, 0-1 (43), the future star could have played the superstrong move 25...♘h4!! 26.gxh4? [26.d4 ♗xd5 27.cxd5 ♘xg2 28.♔xg2 exd4∓] 26...♕xh4–+ White will collapse very quickly after ...g4−g3.

13...♖f7!



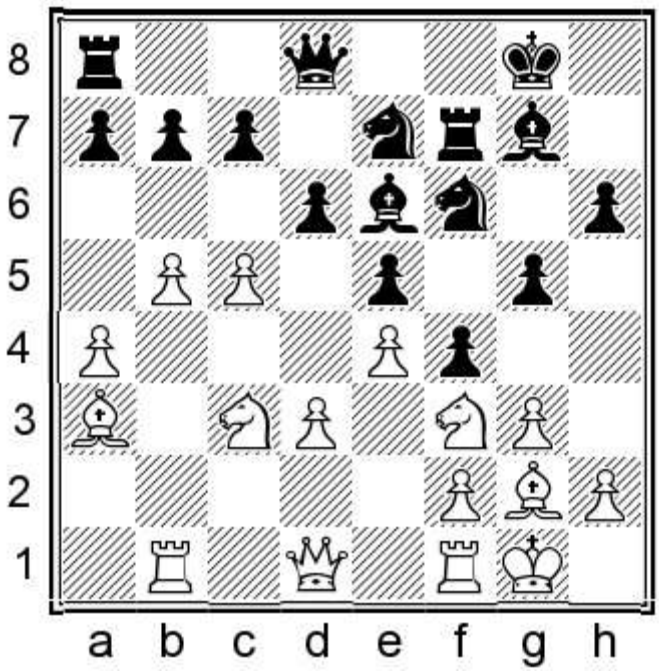
Position after: 13...♖f7!

14.e4

Trying to stop Black's advance in the center.

14.♕d2 ♘g6 15.cxd6 cxd6 16.♖fc1 g4 Life is so easy for Black in this kind of middlegame. 17.♘e1 h5∓ 0-1 (43) Mgeladze, T (2400) – Olcum, A (2274), Kesan 2018.

14...f4



Position after: 14...f4

Black takes over the initiative on the kingside and White needs to react quickly.

15.gxf4

15.d4?! g4! 16.d5 ♗d7 17.♘d2 dxc5 18.♗xc5 f3 19.♗h1 ♘h7→ Black is going to be threatening mate soon.

15...gxf4 16.d4 ♘g6 17.cxd6 cxd6 18.♖c1 ♗g4 19.♕b3 ♕d7=

The game is very tense and should be about equal.

Conclusion

And so the time to conclude this book has come. I think I have fulfilled my goal of providing you with a complete repertoire for Black with the Dutch Defense against 1.d4, 1.c4 and 1.♘f3! Of course, not all the variations are of the same nature. I am very satisfied with the positional variations I offer against White's sidelines such as (1...f5) 2.♗g5 and 2.♘c3, and in Chapter 6 on 2.♘f3 g6 3.♗f4/g5. In these chapters Black should focus not only on the main ideas, but also the move orders, which can sometimes be very tricky for both sides.

In general I have been unwilling to let White call the shots, for instance in the Staunton Gambit, where I offer the sideline 4...g6. Black should dictate the play! This is also the case in Chapter 5 on the c3 and ♘h3 ideas. It is often important to understand White's ideas in order to counter them effectively.

But this book is not only about strategic play. In the main lines you will find many very sharp variations, especially in the lines with 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3, where the play can become crazy very quickly - it's one of the rare occasions in the book where we talk about attacks with opposite side castling. Of course, not only this variation, but also the ones in Chapters 8 and 10 dealing with White's main weapons, require thorough memorization of the lines. Accurate play is needed, and the ice under your feet is sometimes very thin.

The positions arising from the English and Reti move orders are very diverse. It's particularly important to understand the different move orders in these openings, since they can sometimes transpose to 1.d4 systems.

My aim throughout has been to give variations where Black can play for a win, not just defend passively, as can be the case in other openings. You need to bear in mind that you are playing a very ambitious system, aimed at winning with the black pieces. However I have also chosen lines where Black doesn't go all-in, and where the positional play is generally sound.

I hope this repertoire will suit you, and that you will enjoy it, and employ it, with a lot of success!

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