

The Modernized
Sicilian
KAN

Adrien Demuth

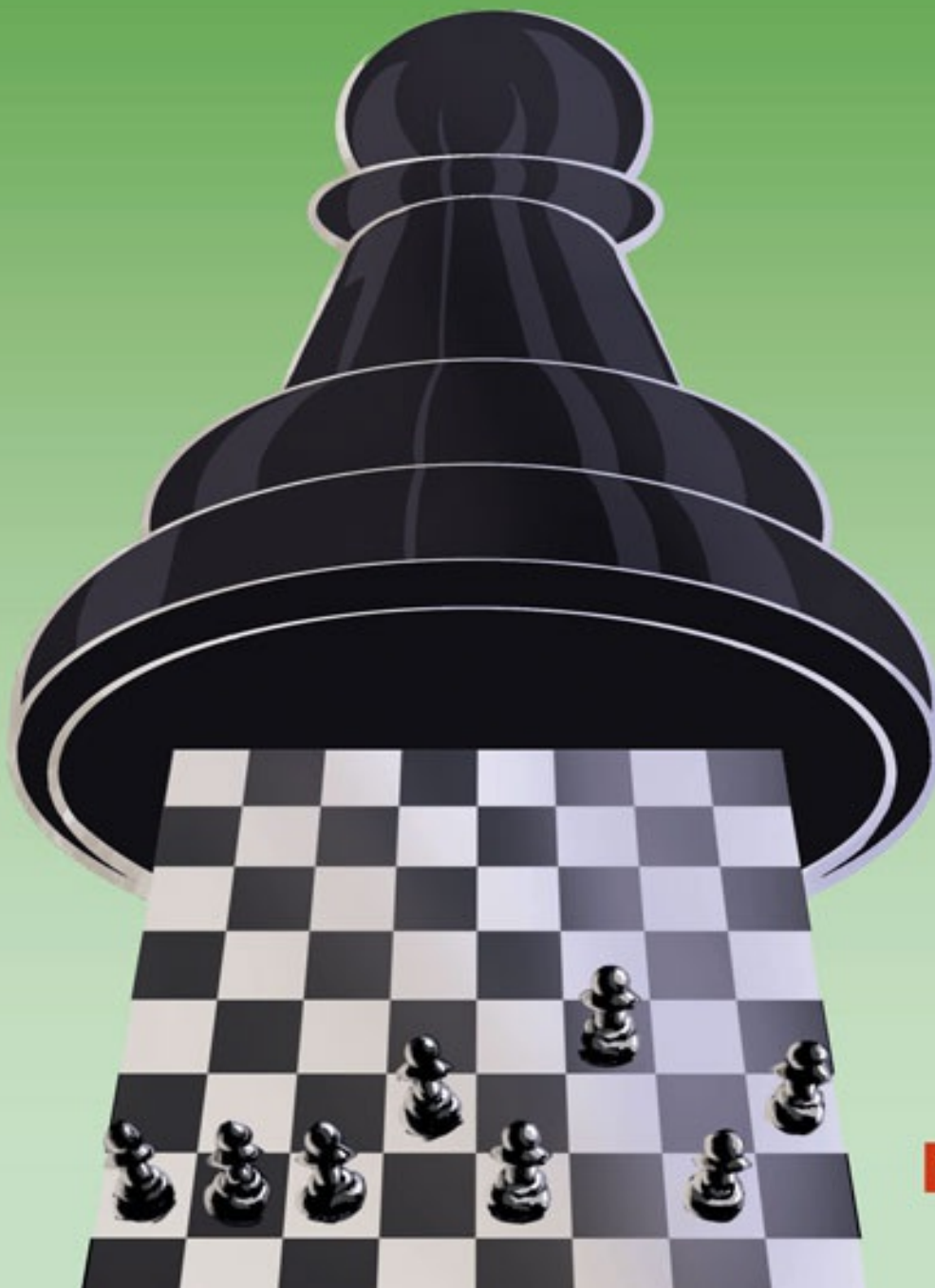


Table of Contents

Title page

Key to Symbols

Bibliography

Preface

Chapter 1 – 5.♙d3

Chapter 2 – 5.c4

Chapter 3 – 5.♘c3

Chapter 4 – 5.♙e2

Chapter 5 – 5.♙e3

Chapter 6 – Various 5th moves

Chapter 7 – The Delayed Alapin Variation

Chapter 8 – Various 3rd moves

The Modernized Sicilian Kan

by

Adrien Demuth

Thinkers Publishing 2022



www.thinkerspublishing.com

First edition 2022 by Thinkers Publishing

Copyright © 2022 Adrien Demuth

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission from the publisher.

All sales or enquiries should be directed to Thinkers Publishing, 9850 Landegem, Belgium.

Email: info@thinkerspublishing.com

Website: www.thinkerspublishing.com

Editorial Director: Adrien Demuth

Assistant Editor: Daniël Vanheirzeele

Proofreading: Bob Holliman

Software: Hub van de Laar

Cover Design: Iwan Kerkhof

Graphic Artist: Philippe Tonnard

Production: BESTinGraphics

ISBN: 9789464201383

D/2021/13731/31

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

Bibliography

Books

Play the Sicilian Kan: a Dynamic and Flexible Repertoire for Black, John Hellsten, Everymanchess, 2008

Sicilian Kan, John Emms, Everyman Chess, 2002

Electronic/Periodical

Megadatabase, Chessbase

Corr. Database, Chessbase

New in Chess Yearbook, Interchess

Preface

When you are building your repertoire you have many choices available against 1.e4. Everyone knows the Sicilian is the most dangerous reply but there are so many choices! Most of them are highly theoretical such as the Najdorf or the Dragon. Some are very difficult to understand from a positional and dynamical point of view. The Kalashnikov and the Sveshnikov are two good examples, without even mentioning the amount of theory.

I have always been interested by less theoretical Sicilians. I have been playing the Classical Sicilian for a long time and right before the covid period, I decided to find a new one. The Sicilian Kan came to me as a very serious option, and I decided to work on it. In the meantime, my friend and editor Daniël Vanheirzeele offered me the chance to author a book about it. This came to me as a complete surprise, as I had no experience with it. In comparison with my work on the Reti and the Dutch (my two previous books), I am a newbie on the subject. But I decided to accept the challenge. I found it extremely interesting, as this gave me a fresh look at the positions. I think I managed to ask myself the questions everyone would have asked. I also work as a second for others and am accustomed to working on openings I do not necessarily play as well as finding the key ideas very quickly. So, after a deep initial work to understand the variations, I was ready to start writing!

I knew that keeping the variations to a reasonable length would be a hard task as the opening is generally considered to be better for White.

In opposition to my prior efforts, I decided to start with the mainlines. I did it both during my work and then in the structure of the book. It seemed better to address the most difficult lines first to prove that Black gets playable positions, and then take care of the less challenging lines. This approach allows you to have an idea of the typical positions and then compare it with the less usual lines so you may understand why the sidelines are not as good.

I take this as an opportunity to share my knowledge of openings and how I analyze them. I started this book with the idea that I wanted it to be useful for all levels of playing strength, from amateurs to even top grandmasters. I really consider the best books to be those where everyone can understand the basics of the variations while also being of use to anyone that aims at going deeper into the theory.

I based many of the lines and conclusions in this book not only on computer evaluation, but also from a practical point of view. While I did a deep dive using strong engines when analyzing the lines I cannot say that they are perfect. The most important thing is that all of the evaluations are based upon my own understanding and knowledge of chess.

After writing this book, I had to take up another challenge: my personal decisions lead me to become an editor at Thinkers Publishing (once again, after the kind offer of Daniël), and I decided to edit the book myself. The bad thing with it, is that any problem with this book, about the layout of the chess content, I can't complain about anybody but myself!

I really hope this book will help you build a strong understanding of the Kan Sicilian and that it will bring you some nice results. I hope you enjoy the material as much as I did writing (and editing) it!

If you have any complains or questions, you can write me directly online at

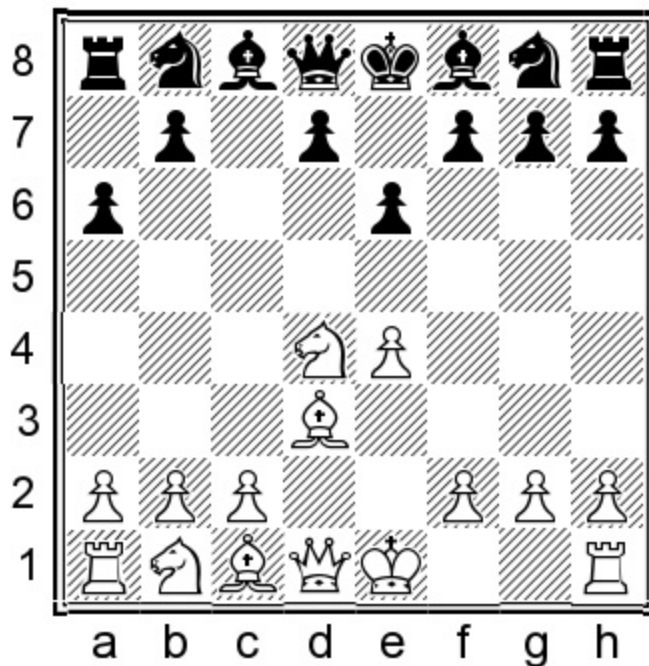
adrien.demuth@gmail.com. I also welcome simple and nice compliments!

Chartres, October 2021

Chapter 1

5.♔d3

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 a6 5.♔d3



Chapter Guide

Chapter 1 – 5.♔d3

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 a6 5.♔d3 ♔c5

a) 6.--

b) 6.c3

c) 6.♗b3 ♔a7 7.♕g4 ♗f6 8.--

d) 6.♗b3 ♔a7 7.♕g4 ♗f6! 8.♕g3

e) 6.♗b3 ♔a7 7.♗c3 ♗c6 8.--

f) 6.♗b3 ♔a7 7.♗c3 ♗c6 8.0-0

g) 6.♗b3 ♔a7 7.♗c3 ♗c6 8.♕e2

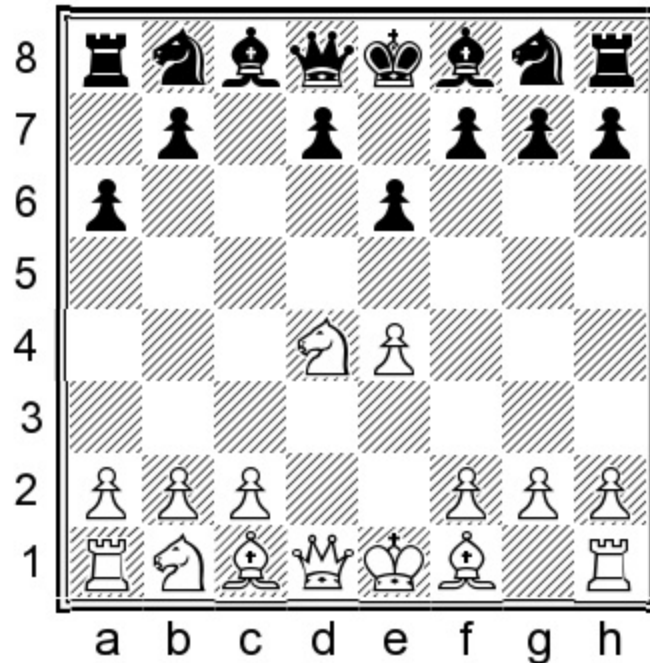
h) 6.♗b3 ♔a7 7.c4

i) 6.♗b3 ♔a7 7.♕e2

j) 6.♗b3 ♔a7 7.0-0 ♗e7

a) 6.--

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 a6



Position after: 4...a6

Here is the start of our work! After 4...a6 we are playing the Sicilian Kan. Some people may call it the Paulsen variation, but that is normally played with a latter ...d6 which is often not the case here.

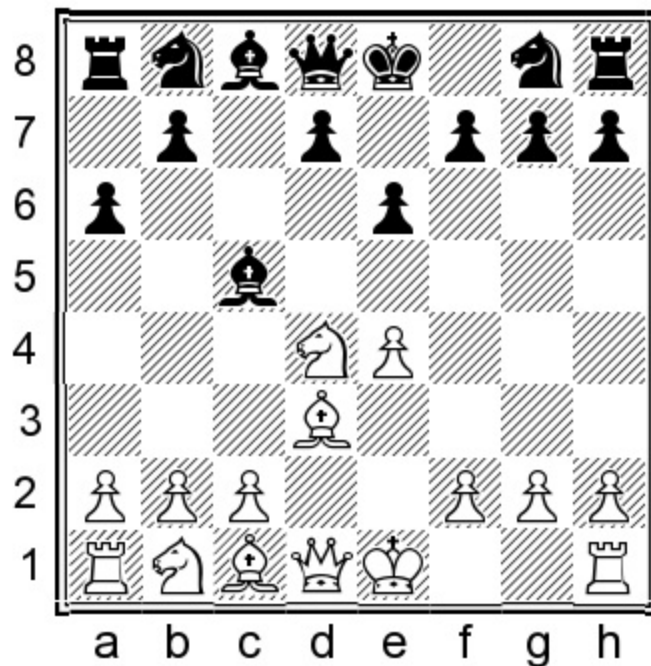
To explain the essence of this opening, Black is only playing flexible pawn moves for now. He allows White to have a wide choice of continuations since there is no immediate reaction in the centre. Thus, there are several systems that he can employ starting from this position. In reality, I am also providing a repertoire on White's earlier sidelines against 2...e6 which you will find in the last chapters of this book.

I consider the following to be the main line or the most dangerous.

5.♙d3

White is also playing flexibly as he protects his centre, keeps the b1 knight's options open and waits before moving his c-pawn.

5...♞c5



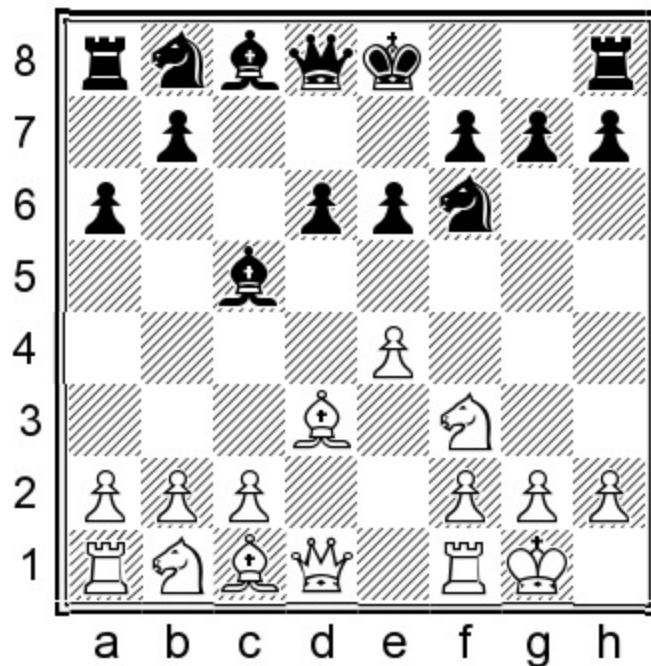
Position after: 5...♙c5

The idea is to chase the knight from the centre and to simply develop the bishop before playing ...d7-d6. Black has a wide choice of moves but I like this approach more than the rest. I will not review the other possibilities here as you may investigate them independently as it is difficult to say which is best. 6.♘b3 is clearly the main move, but for now we will concentrate on sidelines which are not dangerous and from which White does not score well.

6.♙e3

A) 6.c3 will be covered in the next subchapter.

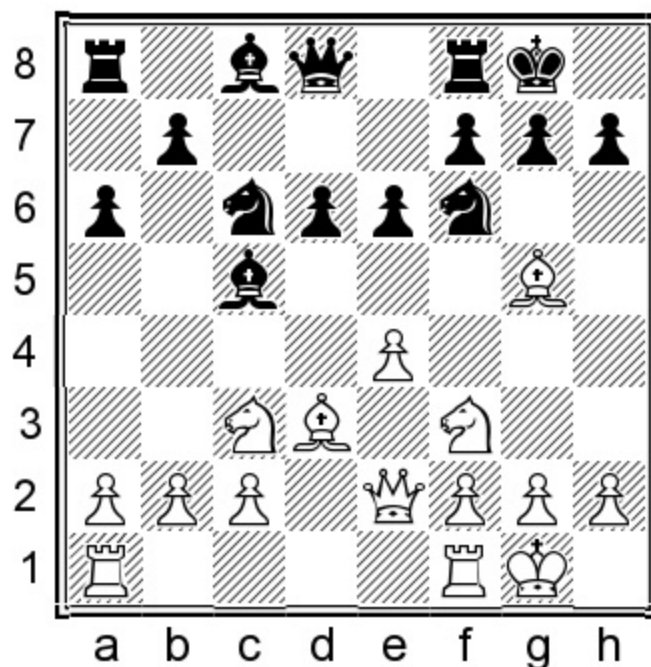
B) 6.♘f3?! Is anti-positional. Gone are the possibilities of ♙d1-g4, no more f2-f4, and no gain of tempo on the bishop after 6...d6. We just need ...d6 before ...♘f6 to prevent e4-e5. 7.0-0 ♘f6



Position after: 7... Nf6

B1) 8.a3 Nc6 9.h3?! Obviously, this is not the most useful move. But the following game is interesting. 9...h6 10.b4 Qa7 11.Qb2 e5! A strong way to change the pawn structure to something more active while simultaneously stopping the action of the bishop on b2. 12.Nbd2 Qe6 13.c4 0-0 14.Nb3 Nh5! 15.b5 axb5 16.cxb5 White is already in trouble, and in the game Gofshtein, L (2507) – Agrest, E (2554) Fuerth 1999, Black could have been more precise with: 16...Ne7! 17.a4 Rxc8 18.a5 Nf4.

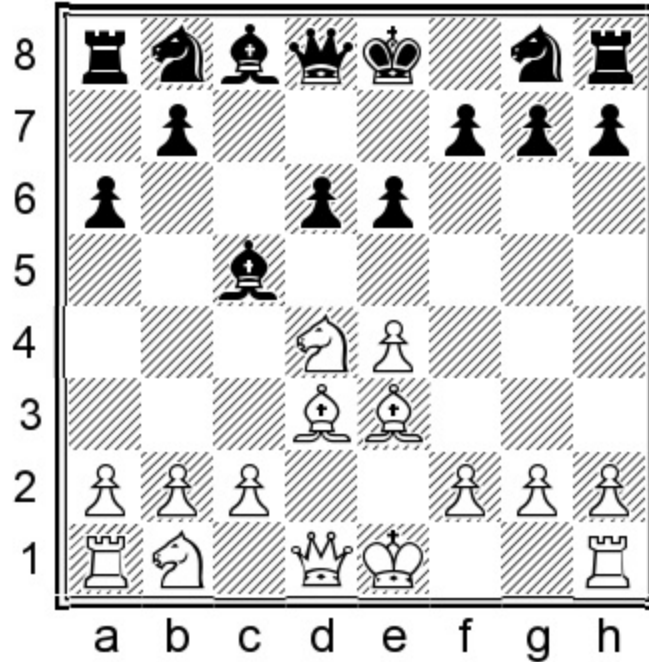
B2) 8.Qe2 0-0 9.Nc3 Nc6 In this kind of set-up White runs out of useful move very soon. 10.Qg5



Position after: 10. ♖g5

[10. ♖d1?! ♗g4! Underlining some problems in White's set-up. 11. ♖f1 b5 12. h3 ♘ge5; 10. h3 b5 11. ♖d1 ♙c7 12. ♕e3 ♕xe3 13. ♗xe3 ♖b7] 10...h6 11. ♕h4 ♕d7 12. ♖ad1 ♗d4 13. ♗xd4 ♕xd4↑
Black is completely fine here as he will play on the c-file.

6...d6!



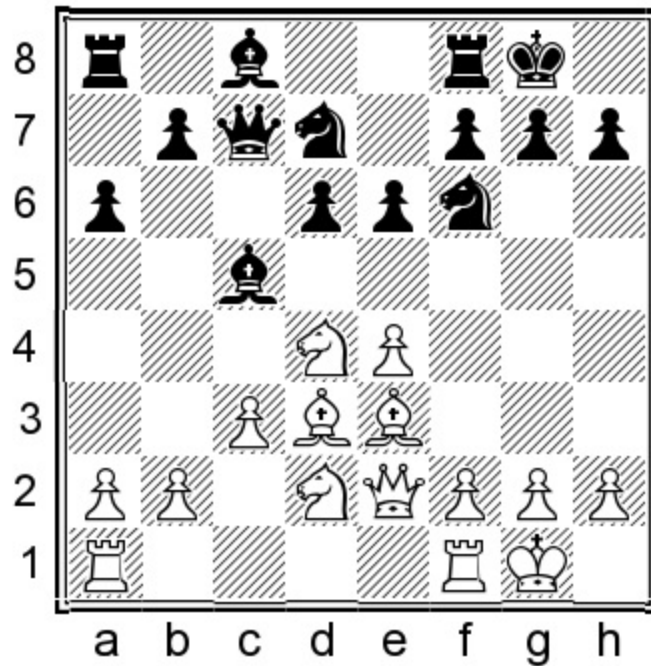
Position after: 6...d6!

There is no need to rush into something concrete. We are happy to develop logically while protecting the bishop against any nasty idea like ♗d4xe6, gaining the bishop on c5 (if you hadn't seen it yet, it was White's threat).

6... ♗b6? This has been tried a few times, but it is over optimistic. 7. c3 ♗xb2 8. ♗d2!± ♗xc3? 9. ♖c1!+– You can check this line by yourself, but Black is already in deep trouble.

7.0-0

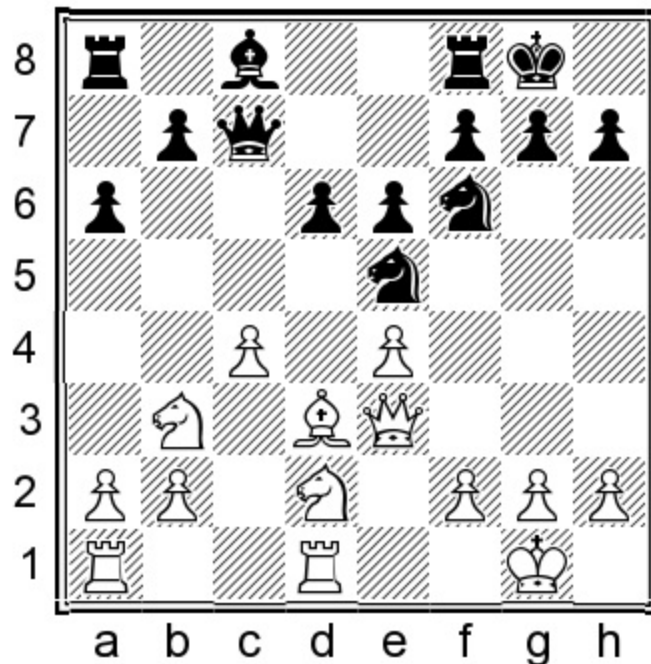
7. ♗d2 ♗f6 8. c3 0-0 9. ♗e2 ♗c7 10. 0-0 ♗bd7



Position after: 10... Nbd7

Black's moves have all been natural. The next step is to find a spot for the light-squared bishop. 11.h3
 In the game Kosteniuk, A (2530) – Van Wely, L (2653) Calvi 2015, Black could have chosen a different path from the game (instead of 11...e5), with: 11... Nde5!N 12. Qc2 Qd7 13. Rfe1 Ng6 14. Rad1 Rac8 15. N2f3 h6=

7... Nf6 8. Qe2 0-0 9. Nb3 Qxe3 10. Qxe3 Qc6 11. Rd1 Qc7 12. c4 Qe5 13. N1d2



Position after: 13. N1d2

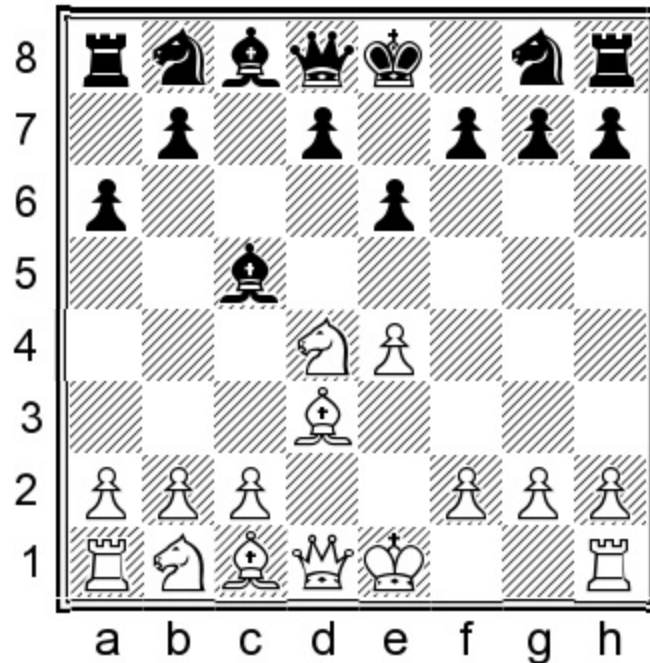
We can differ from the game Jakovenko, D (2644) – Svidler, P (2740) Moscow 2005, with:

13...♙d7!?N 14.♞ac1 ♞fd8 15.♜d4 ♞b6

White is playing a Maroczy set-up, but he traded his good bishop and has the minor pieces misplaced.

b) 6.c3

1.e4 c5 2.♞f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♜xd4 a6 5.♙d3 ♙c5



Position after: 5...♙c5

6.c3

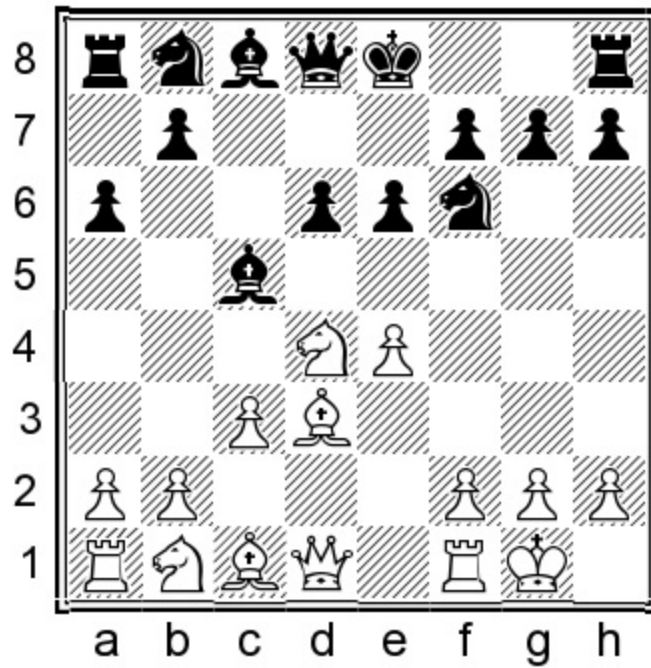
This move is slow, just like the ones in the prior subchapter. But we are hard pressed to say it is a bad move.

6.♞b3! This is the main continuation which we will cover in the following subchapters.

6...d6!

6...♞f6? 7.e5! You must be accurate with your move order. 7...♞d5 8.♞g4± 0-0? 9.♙h6+–

7.0-0 ♞f6

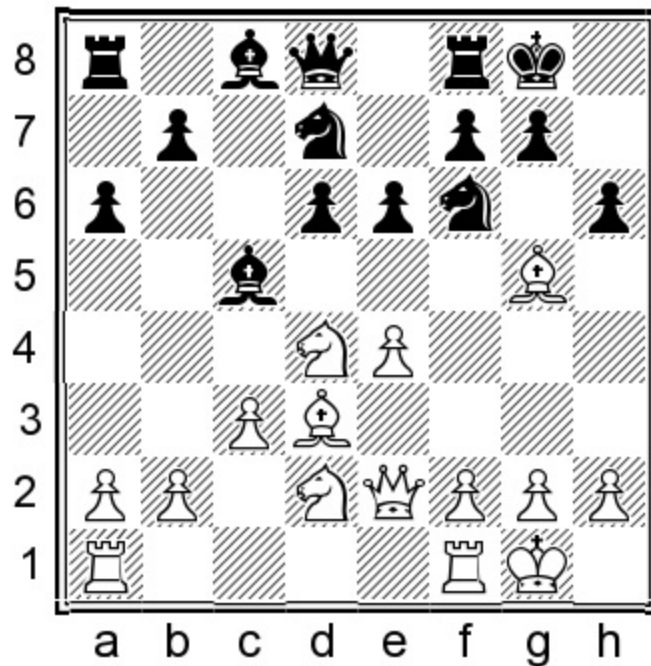


Position after: 7... Nf6

White has many options here and we will examine the most logical ones.

8. Nd2

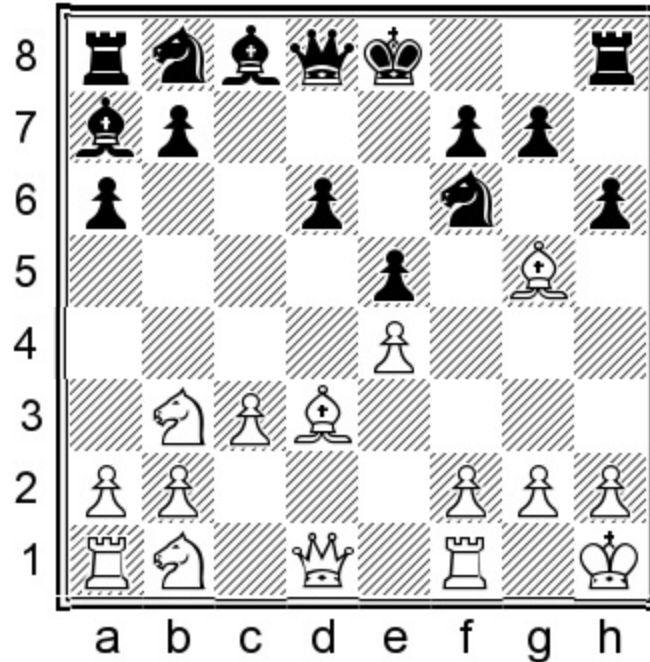
A) 8. $\text{W}e2$ 0-0 9. Gg5 Dbd7 10. Nd2 Occurred in Adams, M (2719) – Hansen, S (2551) playchess.com INT 2003, and now: 10...h6!N



Position after: 10...h6!N

was a simple continuation to challenge the bishop. 11. ♖h4 ♜e5! 12. ♙c2 ♞g6 13. ♙g3 ♚c7 Gaining a tempo with the treat of ...♙xd4, winning a piece. 14. ♖ac1 e5 15. ♜f5 ♜f4↑

B) 8. ♖h1 White would like to follow-up with f2-f4. So, we take the lead with 8...e5! We lost a tempo in the opening with the e-pawn, and we also weakened the d5-square, but White is unable to use it. 9. ♜b3 ♙a7 10. ♙g5 h6

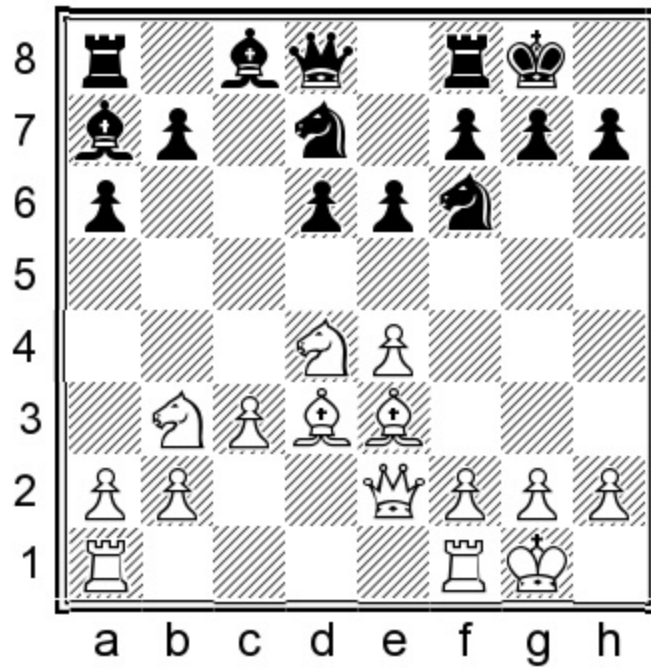


Position after: 10...h6

11. ♙xf6 [11. ♙h4?! g5 12. ♙g3 h5! Very logical with the bishop on g3 and the king standing on h1. 13. f3 h4 14. ♙f2 ♙xf2 15. ♖xf2 g4→ Black has different threats, including ...g3 which weakens the dark squares around the white monarch.] 11... ♚xf6 We are very glad to see this trade. 12. ♜1d2 0-0 13. ♚e2 ♜c6 14. ♜c4 Occurred in Berelowitsch, A (2546) – Svidler, P (2693) Moscow 2003, and now I prefer: 14... ♙e6!N 15. ♜e3 ♜e7.

8...0-0 9.a4

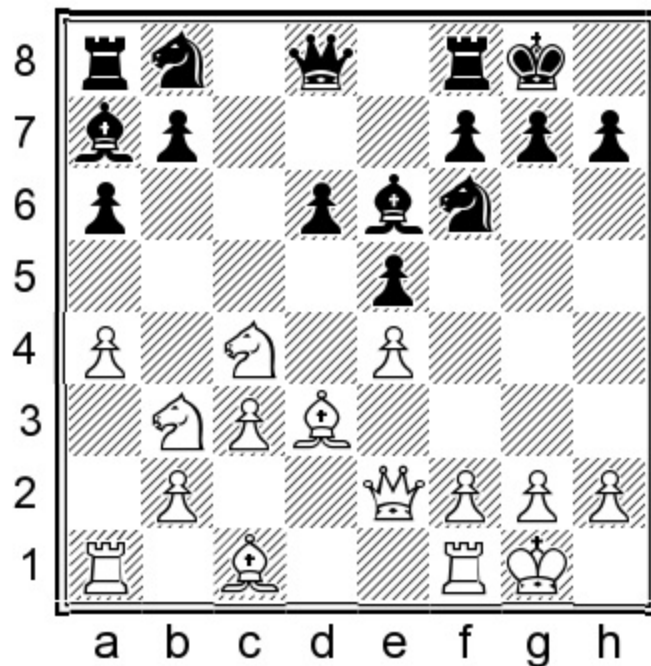
9. ♜2b3 ♙a7 10. ♙e3 ♜bd7 11. ♚e2



Position after: 11. ♖e2

Timman, J (2607) – Bruzon Batista, L (2669) Curaçao 2005 11... ♘e5! 12. ♙c2 h6 This is an important move before playing ... ♗c7. We need to stop ♙e3-g5. 13. ♜ad1 ♗c7 ♜f4? ♘c4 15. ♙c1 e5 16. fxe5 ♙g4+

9...e5 10. ♘4b3 ♙a7 11. ♘c4 ♙e6 12. ♖e2



Position after: 12. ♖e2

This position occurred in the game Carlsen, M (2872) – Caruana, F (2782) Zürich 2014. Caruana managed to win a fine game where he placed his knight on c6, but I prefer keeping more flexibility with:

12...♖bd7!?N 13.♙g5

13.♜d1?? ♙g4+

13...h6 14.♙h4 ♜e8 15.♜fe1

15.♜ad1? Is still tempting but still bad as it is so easy to forget the unusual bishop on a7. 15...g5!

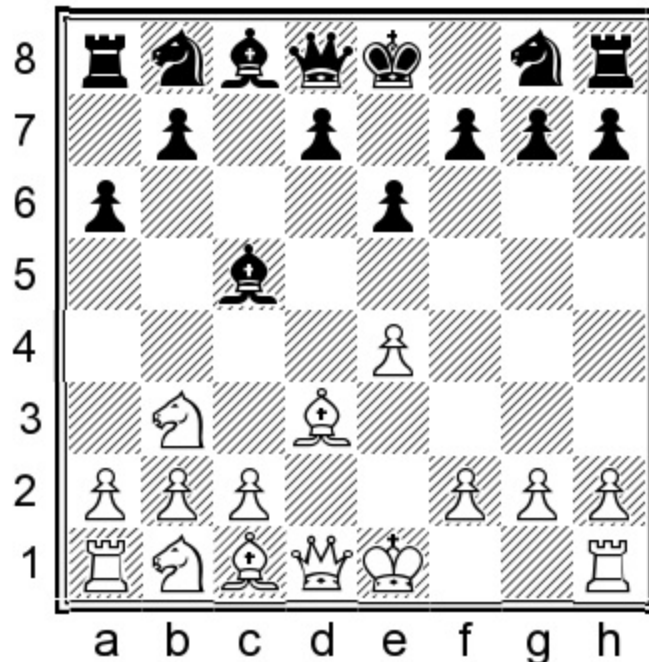
16.♙g3 ♙g4+

15...g5 16.♙g3 ♖f8.

The plan is fairly easy for Black whereas we do not see anything obvious in White's position. In the short term our knight is heading toward g6, and probably f4 at some point.

c) 6.♖b3 ♙a7 7.♜g4 ♖f6 8.--

1.e4 c5 2.♖f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♖xd4 a6 5.♙d3 ♙c5 6.♖b3!



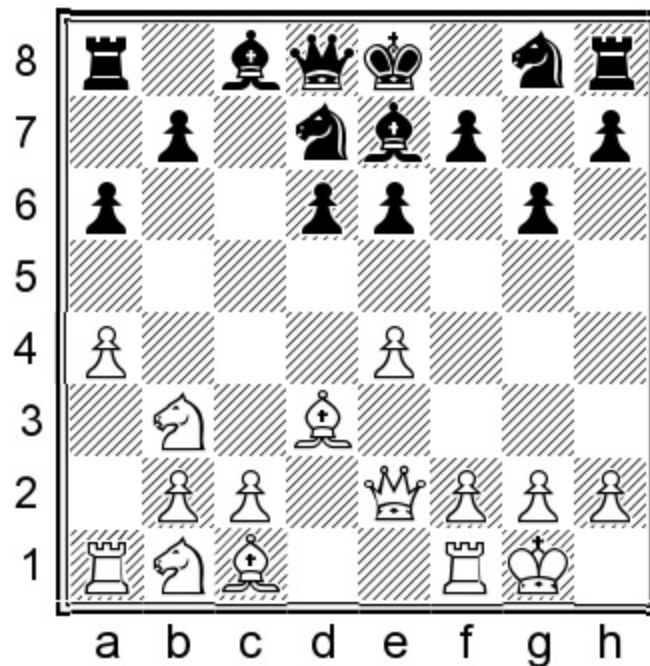
Position after: 6.♖b3!

This is the main move, and it will occupy the remainder of this chapter. White gains a tempo on the bishop while asking Black to pick a diagonal. This is a tough question and theory has not yet determined which is best!

6...♗a7!?

Quite an unusual place for the bishop in the Sicilian, but not a bad one! It directly fights against Whites ♗c1-e3 or f2-f4. Now I can say that White has 3 main plans, and different move orders can lead to each of these plans. The first idea is ♖d1-g4, intending to attack g7 immediately. This is the subject of the current subchapter, and we will see a similar idea in the next one. Following this we will focus on the idea of ♗e2 connected with ♗e3. There are diverse ways to do this (the place of the knight on b1, and the side on which White castles are two of his options). And in the two last subchapters, we will have a look at the 0-0-ideas which are usually connected with c2-c4 to take control over the centre.

6...♗e7 This has been played a bit more often, but I am really not fond of it. Not that the move is bad, but it is not to my liking. The main reason comes after: 7.♖g4!? This is one of the main lines and the threat on g7 more or less forces us to create a weakness. 7...g6 8.♗e2 d6 9.0-0 ♗d7 10.a4



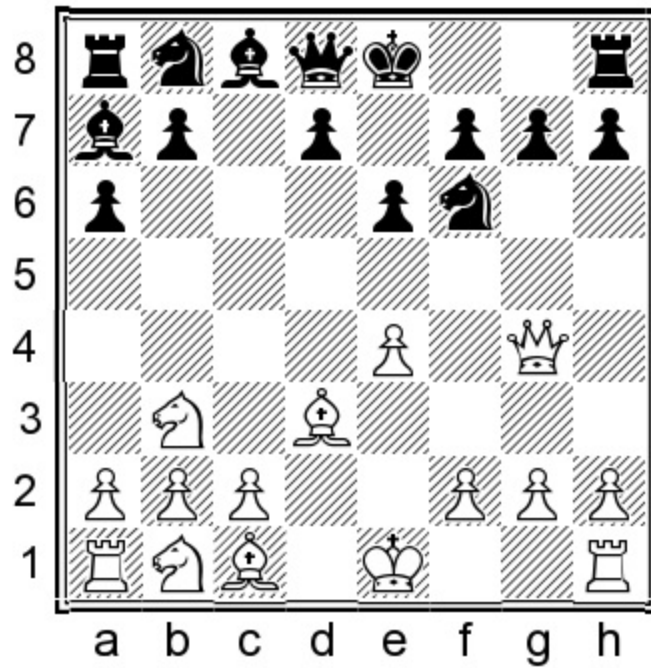
Position after: 10.a4

Black will have to play slowly which I find difficult. The following game went pretty smoothly for White. 10...b6 11.♗a3 ♗b7 12.♗c4 ♖c7 13.a5 b5 14.♗b6 ♖b8 15.c4 bxc4 16.♗xc4 ♗gf6 17.♗e3± Aronian, L (2780) – Jumabayev, R (2605) Batumi 2018.

7.♖g4

Has been played quite often and is less dangerous than after 6...♗e7.

7...♗f6!

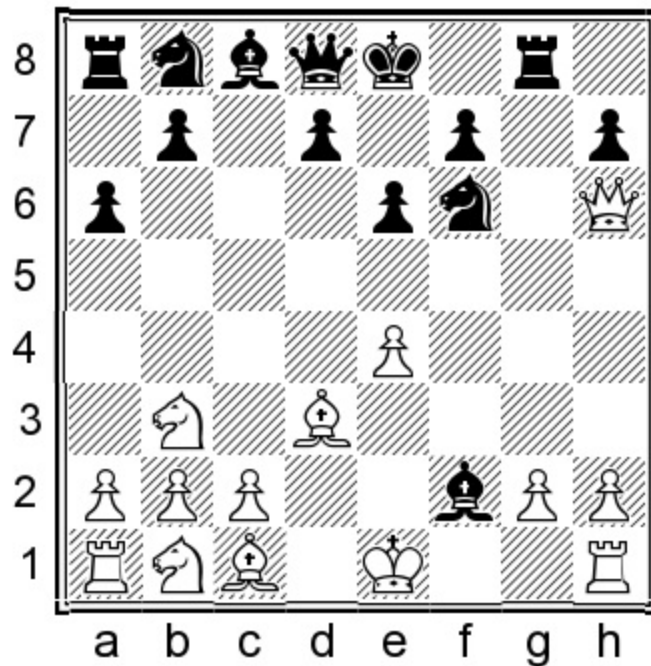


Position after: 7... Nf6!

This time (compared to 6... Qe7), we can confidently offer the g7-pawn because there is a hidden difference.

8. Qg3!

A) 8. Qxg7? Rg8 9. Wh6 Qxf2+!



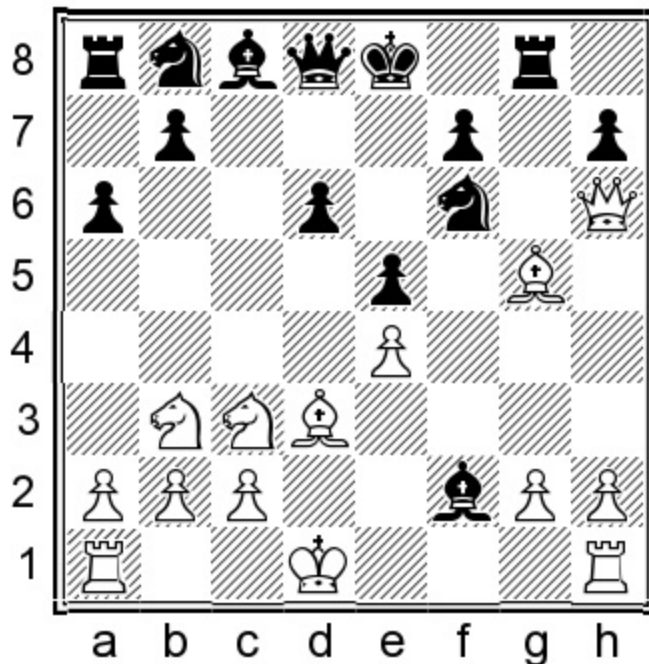
Position after: 9... Qxf2+!

This makes all the difference. The bishop is untouchable, and the king has to move. Quite a bad deal for White.

A1) 10.♔xf2?? ♘g4+-- As obvious as it is, I prefer to show it.

A2) 10.♔e2 e5! Again, an important move to stop e4-e5. 11.♙g5! ♖g6 12.♙xf6 ♜xf6 13.♜h3□ [13.♜xh7?? d6 14.♘1d2 ♖xg2-- The threat of ...♙g4+ is obvious.] 13...♙b6 14.♘c3 ♜f2+ 15.♔d1 ♜xg2+

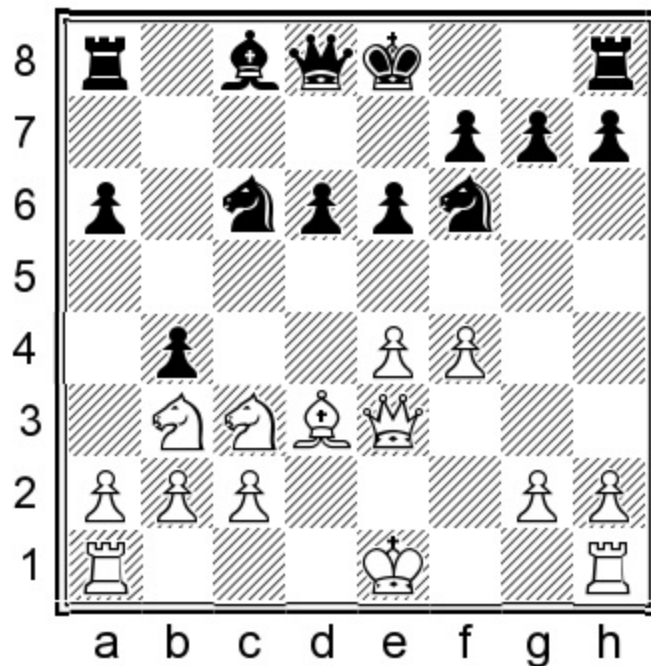
A3) 10.♔d1 e5! 11.♘c3 [11.♖f1 ♖g6 12.♜d2 ♙a7 13.♘c3N 13...d6 14.h3 ♙e6+ White has long term problems with his king...] 11...d6 12.♙g5



Position after: 12. ♙g5

12...♖g6 13.♙xf6 ♜xf6 14.♜xh7 ♜g5!+ Black is really close to winning. In fact, White collapses immediately in the following game: 15.♘d2? ♖h6 16.♘f3 ♙g4 17.♜f5 ♜g7 0-1 (17) Zwanzger, J (2340) – Raupp, T (2350) Germany 2004.

B) 8.♜e2 A few players have retreated but it makes no sense since. 7.♜e2 is a usual continuation after which the knight on f6 is perfectly fine. We now have an extra move. Only one game among grandmasters has seen this retreat: 8...d6 9.♙e3 ♙xe3 10.♜xe3 ♘c6 11.♘c3 b5 12.f4 b4!



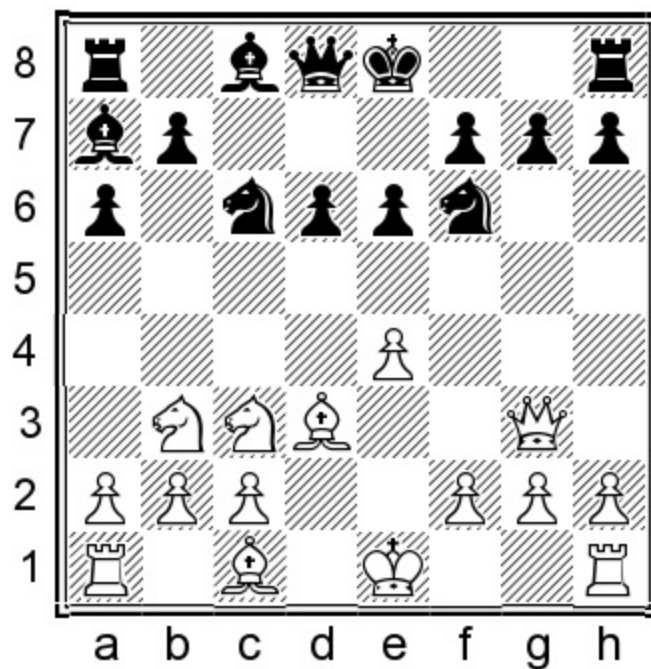
Position after: 12...b4!

13.♘a4 ♜b8 14.0-0-0. Now, instead of castling in the game Mamedov, R (2688) – Andreikin, D (2737) Tallinn 2016, Black could have tried: 14...e5! 15.♞hf1 0-0♣.

8...d6!

Stopping the move e4-e5 is a priority.

9.♘c3 ♘c6



Position after: 9...♖c6

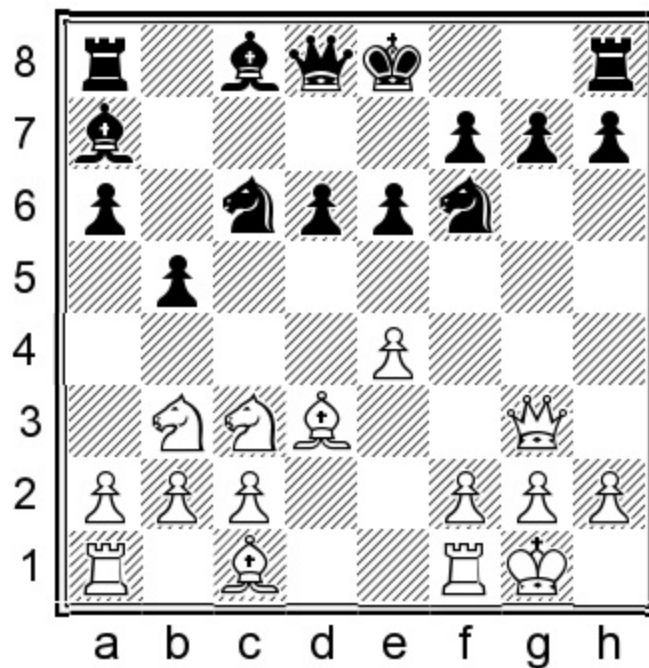
10.0-0

This is one of the most logical moves for White.

A) 10.♗g5 Will be covered in the next subchapter.

B) 10.♗d2 My engine wants to play this move immediately, but it seems cleverer to provoke Black to include ...h6. 10...b5 11.a3 [11.0-0-0 b4 12.♗e2 0-0!= In comparison to the main line this move is possible because there is no pawn hanging on h6.] 11...♗b7 12.0-0-0 ♗e5⇌ It's fully playable!

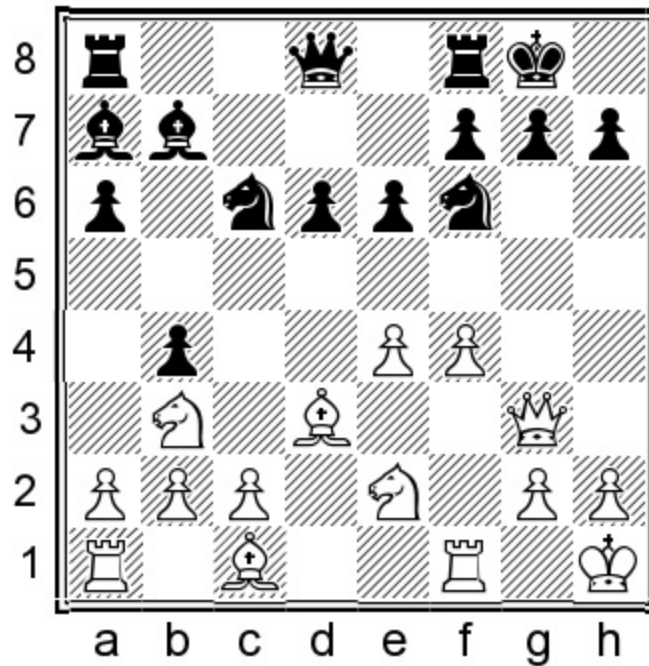
10...b5



Position after: 10...b5

11.♗g5

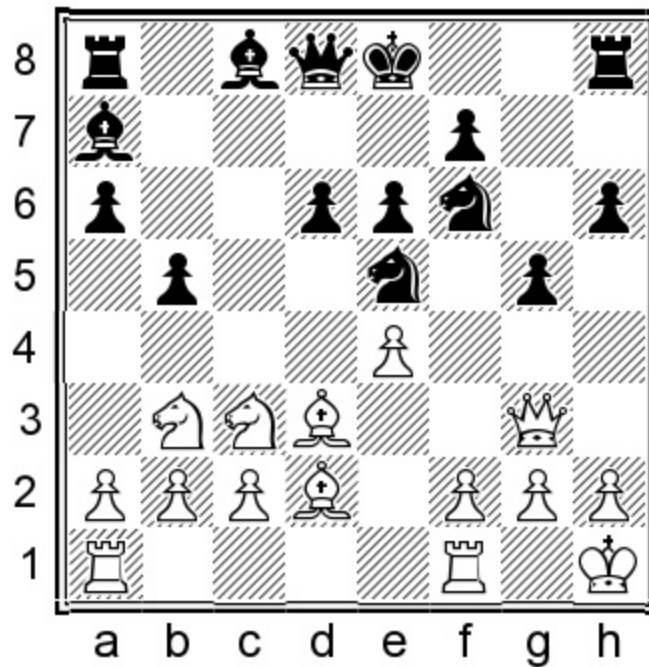
11.♖h1 ♗b7 12.f4 b4 [12...h5!? 13.f5 ♗g4 14.♗f4 e5 15.♗d2 ♗b4 16.a4 ♗xd3 17.cxd3 b4 18.♗d1 d5 19.♗e3 dxe4 20.♗xg4 hxg4⇌ 0-1 (34) Berg, E (2604) – Hillarp Persson, T (2547) Vasteras 2011] 13.♗e2 0-0



Position after: 13...0-0

I like these “small centre” positions for Black with the pawns on d6 and e6 and the two bishops can soon become powerful. 14.f5 ♖e5 15.♗g5 ♜c8 16.♘a5 ♗a8! ♞ [16...♙xa5? 17.♗xf6+–]

11...♘e5! 12.♗h1 h6 13.♗d2 g5!



Position after: 13...g5!

This strange-looking move is very efficient here. The idea is to stop the move f2-f4.

14.♖e2 g4 15.f4 gxf3 16.gxf3 ♕d7 17.♖c3

We have been following the game Acs, P (2606) – Smirin, I (2661) Paks 2011, which ended in a 23-move draw. However, we can try and improve with:

17...♞g8!N 18.♞h4 ♞c8

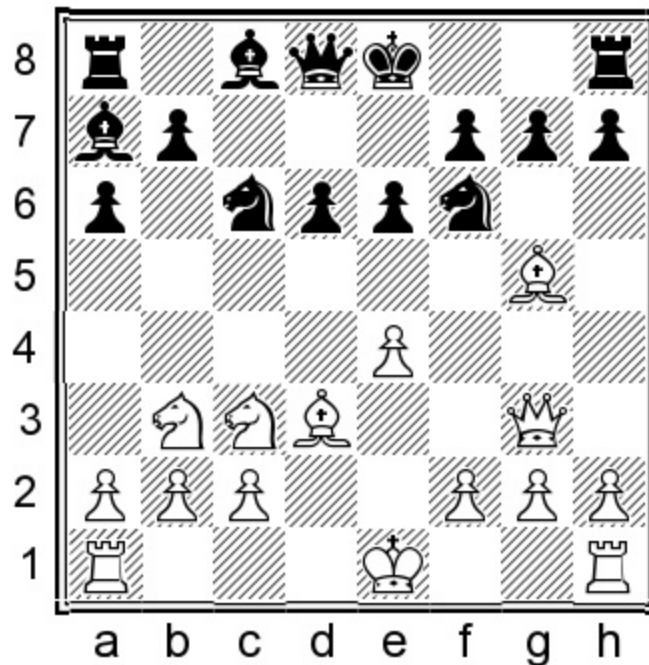
When the black king will remain in the centre. This is probably the safest place in this case thanks to the pawns and the many pieces around him. Black's activity will more than compensate for his odd piece arrangement.

19.♖f4 b4 20.♖xb4 ♖xd3 21.cxd3 e5

...♞c2 and possibly ...♖g4 are coming.

d) 6.♖b3 ♖a7 7.♞g4 ♖f6! 8.♞g3

1.e4 c5 2.♖f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♖xd4 a6 5.♖d3 ♖c5 6.♖b3! ♖a7!? 7.♞g4 ♖f6! 8.♞g3! d6! 9.♖c3 ♖c6 10.♖g5!?



Position after: 10. ♖g5!?

The goal of this move is to provoke ...h6 creating a potential target. Since he can not tolerate the bishop here, he must play ...h6.

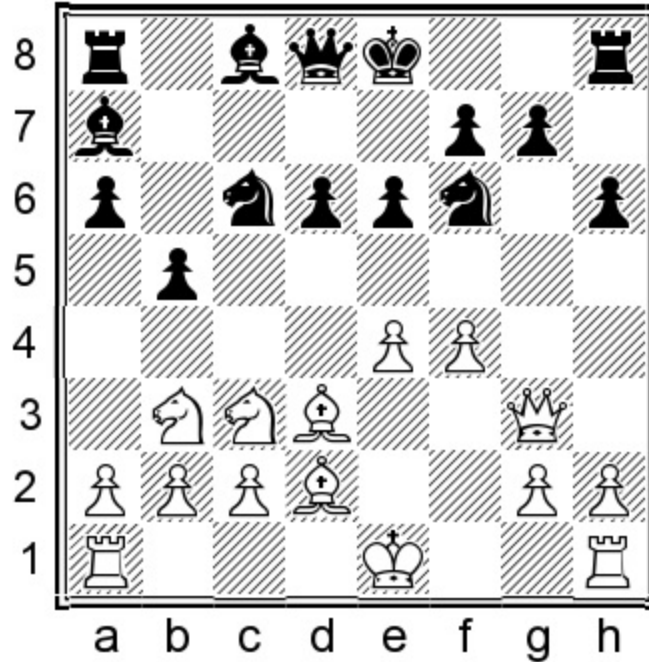
10...h6! 11.♖d2 b5!?

Definitely a sideline. Other interesting moves have been played more often, but this is my preference.

11...e5?! I am not fond of leaving the d5-square in White's hands. 12.♖d5 ♗h5 13.♕f3 ♗f6 14.0-0-0± So, W (2646) – Andreikin, D (2648) Lubbock 2009.

12.0-0-0

12.f4?!

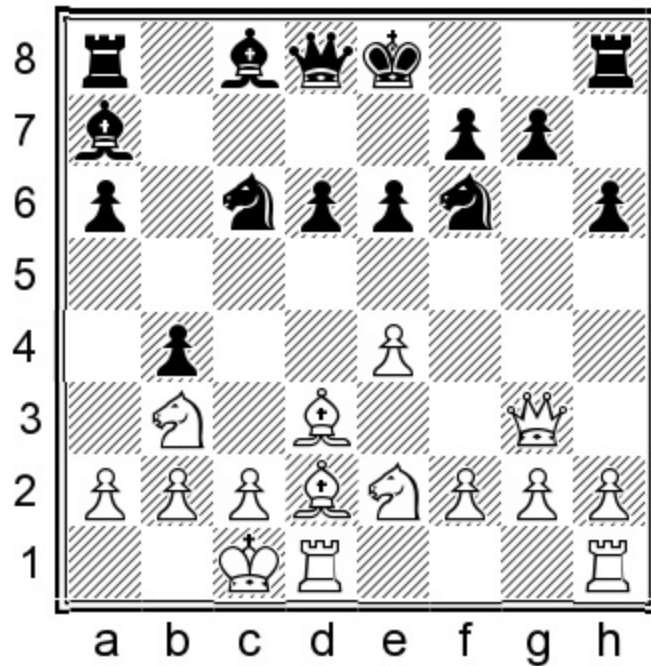


Position after: 12.f4?!

This has been played a couple of times and the difference is that h6 is no longer under attack thus we can castle soon. 12...b4 13.♗e2 0-0!N Black's pieces are great, and the tactics are working for him.

14.f5?! [14.e5 ♗d5 15.♙e4 dxe5 16.0-0-0 a5! 17.fxe5 ♕c7 18.♙xh6 ♕xe5+] 14...exf5 15.exf5 [15.♙xh6? ♗g4+] 15...♗e5+

12...b4 13.♗e2



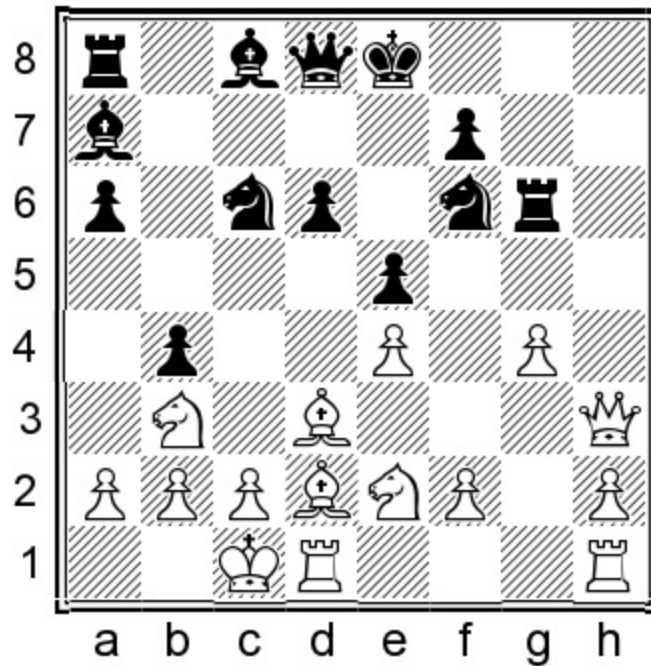
Position after: 13. ♖e2

13. ♖a4?! The knight is quite exposed here, and it is doing nothing. 13... ♘e5!N 14. ♙e2 0-0! 15. ♙xh6 ♘g6 16. ♙e3 ♘xe4 17. ♚f3 d5±

13... ♙f8!N

I like this new move. We simply protect the g7-pawn. The king is obviously not perfect on f8, but otherwise Black is in great shape. He can follow up with a6-a5-a4.

13...e5?!N This variation shows why we need to protect g7. 14. ♚xg7 ♜g8 15. ♚xh6 ♜g6 16. ♚h4 ♜g4 17. ♚h3 ♜g6 18.g4!

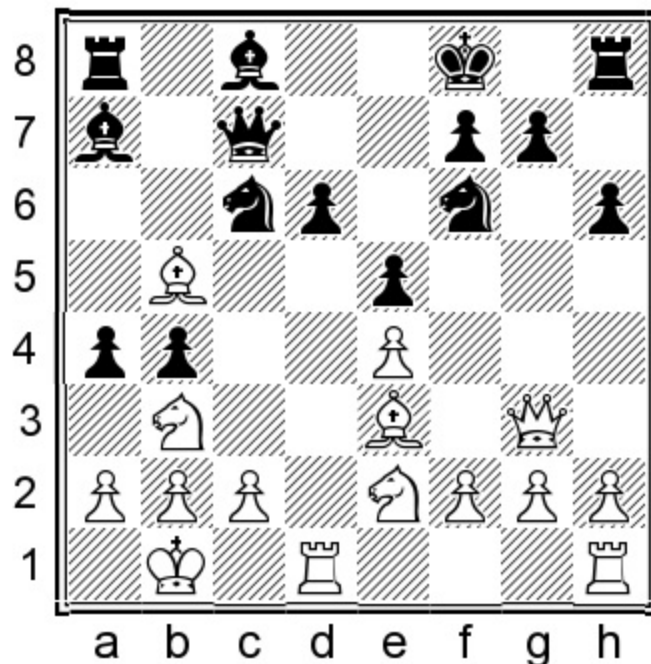


Position after: 18.g4!

[18.♖h4 ♜g4=] 18...♘xg4 19.f4! ♘f2 20.♖h7! Objectively, this continuation is quite impossible to find over the board. [20.♖h8+? ♘d7 21.♖h5 ♘c7 22.f5 ♜g7=] 20...♘xh1 21.♜xh1 ♖f6 22.f5 ♜g7 23.♖h5±

14.e5!?

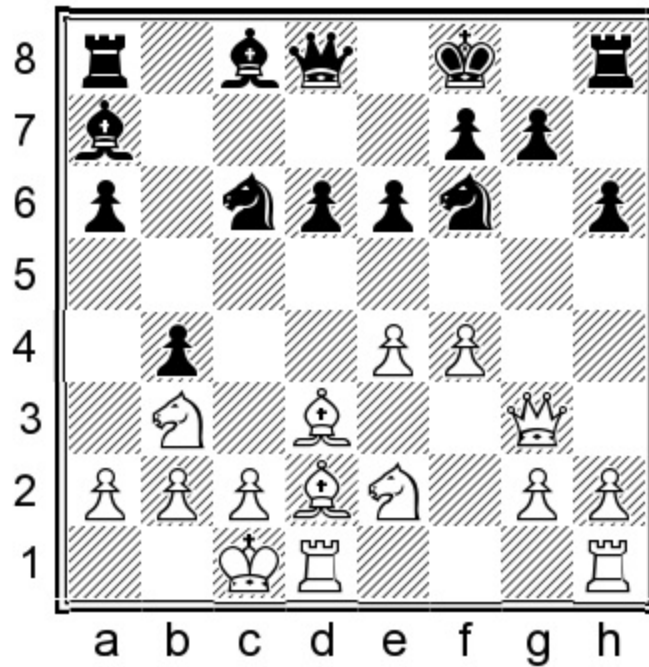
A) 14.♙b1?! a5 [14...e5 15.f4 a5 16.♘bc1 ♙b7] 15.♙b5 ♖c7! White is quite helpless. His pieces are doing nothing and there is a pawn storm coming. [15...♙b7 16.f3 e5→] 16.♙f4 e5 17.♙e3 a4!



Position after: 17...a4!

18.♙xa4 [18.♘d2 a3 19.b3 ♖g4+] 18...♙xe3 19.♙xc6 ♙xf2 20.♚xf2 ♚xc6—+

B) 14.f4!?



Position after: 14.f4!?

After this standard move the play might continue 14...a5! 15.e5 ♘d5! 16.♙b1 a4 17.♘bc1 a3 18.b3 dxe5 19.♙e4 exf4 20.♘xf4 ♙b8↗ ...♚f6 is coming with mating threats, but Black should also be cautious as the position is still pretty complicated. Anything can happen here!

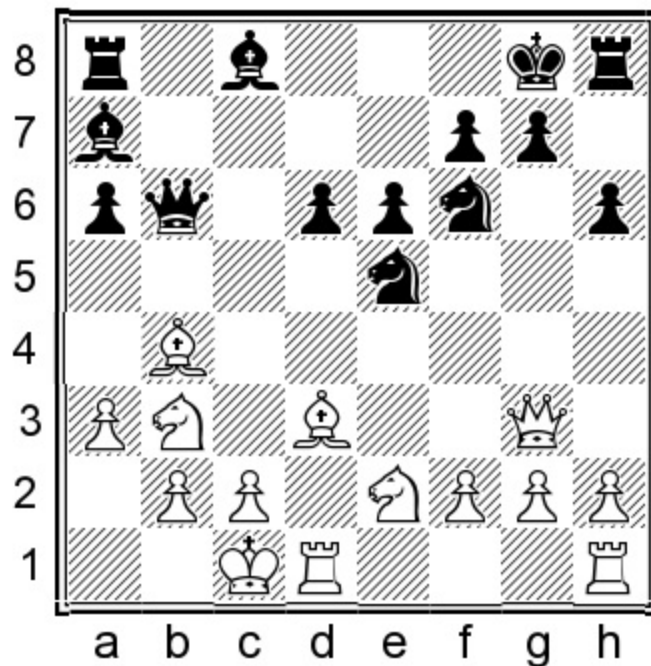
14...♘xe5 15.♙xb4

The trade is strategically fair for Black, but at least White manages to get some initiative.

15...♚b6! 16.a3

16.♚xe5? ♚xb4 17.♚g3 a5+

16...♙g8!



Position after: 16... ♔g8!

Very precise. I could not manage to find full equality for White. For instance:

17. ♙xd6 ♜xd3+ 18. ♚xd3

18. ♞xd3? ♜e4 19. ♚f3 ♙b7-+

18... ♚xf2 19. ♞hf1

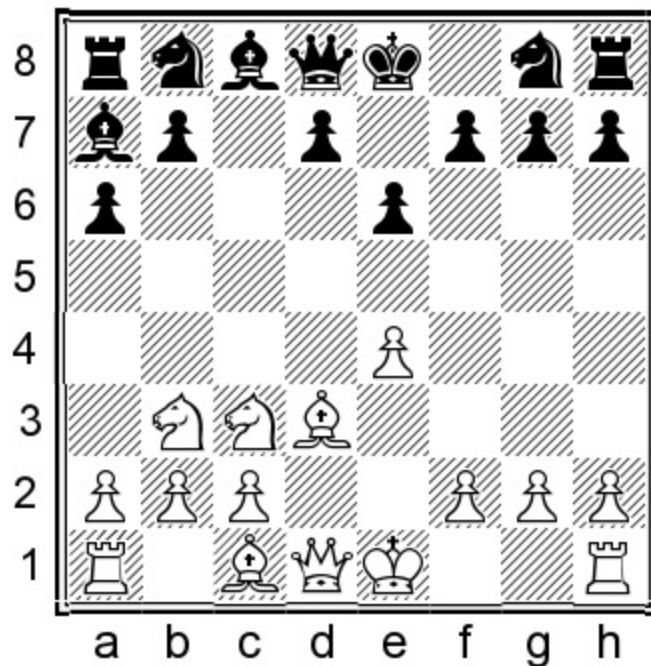
19. ♔b1 ♙b7 20. ♞hf1 ♚xg2+

19... ♚e3+ 20. ♚xe3 ♙xe3+ 21. ♔b1 ♙b7-

In this kind of endgame, the bishop pair enables Black to claim a small advantage.

e) 6. ♜b3 ♙a7 7. ♜c3 ♜c6 8.--

1.e4 c5 2. ♜f3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♜xd4 a6 5. ♙d3 ♙c5 6. ♜b3! ♙a7!? 7. ♜c3



Position after: 7. ♘c3

This logical move is played slightly more often than 7. ♖g4. In general, it is played in connection with the idea of playing ♕d1-e2 and ♙c1-e3, but it is not necessary. Here, we will mainly focus on other minor ideas for White.

7... ♘c6

In most of the examples we will start with this move since the square for this knight is obvious.

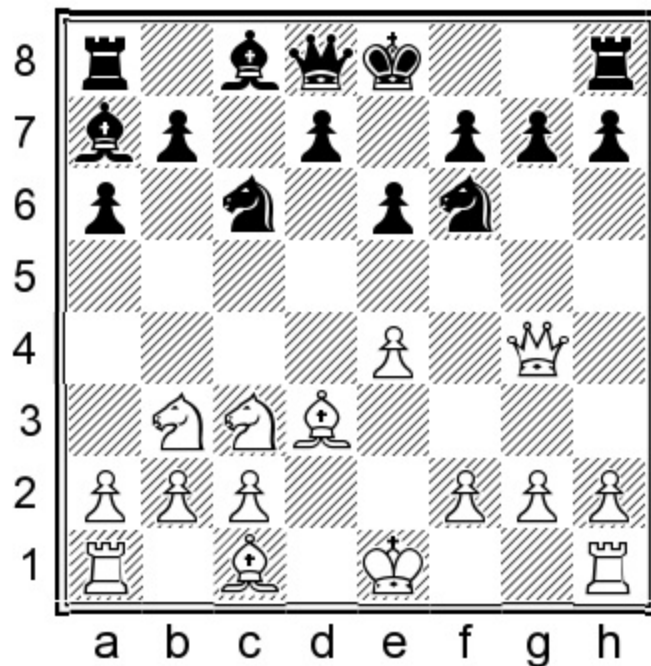
7... ♘e7 I would have chosen this move order as I did against most of White's 7th moves, but here there might be a slight issue with 8. ♖g4!? thus 7... ♘c6 is my personal preference. However, both lines are likely to transpose into each other.

8. ♙f4

From a positional point of view this looks decent. White takes advantage of the deserted dark squares, but Black reacts immediately.

A) 8. ♖e2 as well as 8. 0-0 will be covered in the next subchapters.

B) 8. ♖g4 This is the third main move, but it does not really have an independent value and will merely transpose into the previous subchapter. 8... ♘f6!



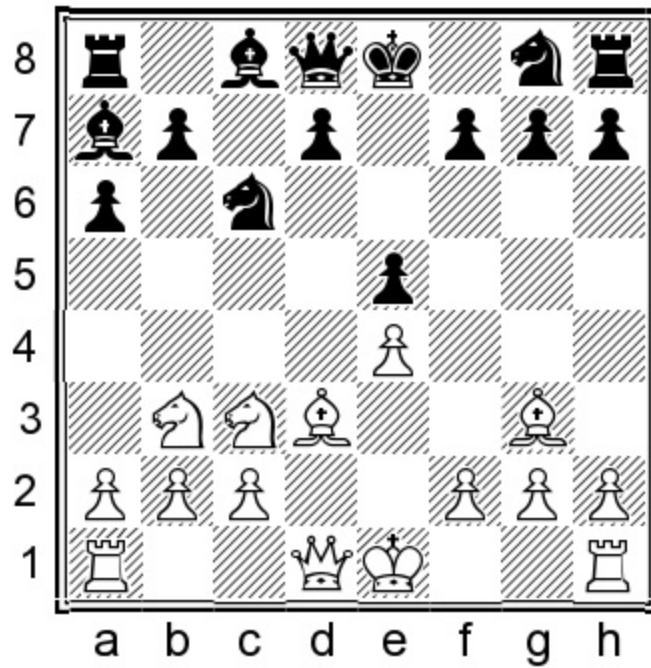
Position after: 8...Nf6!

Once again, we offer a free pawn with strings attached. 9.♖g3 [9.♚xg7? ♜g8 10.♚h6 ♜xf2+! ♠ We previously saw this trick and it is very similar to a line we examined in the 7.♚g4-line.] 9...d6 This is a transposition into the previous subchapter with 7.♚g4.

8...e5!?

This may seem contradictory to what we previously discussed as it weakens the d5-square. But we need to prevent the possibility of ♜d6, and we will take over the initiative so that the d5-square becomes irrelevant.

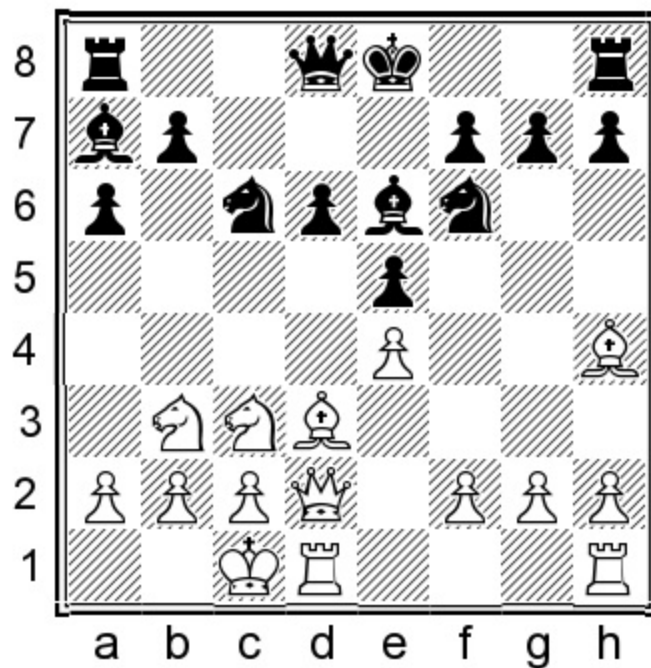
9.♜g3



Position after: 9. g3

9...h5!?N

After the logical 9...d6 White would have an easier position with 10. d2! [10. c4?! h5! 11. f3 e6 12. xe6 fxe6 13. h4 f6 0-1 Berezjuk, S (2403) – Oral, T (2521) Czechia 2000.] 10... f6 11. 0-0 e6 12. h4±



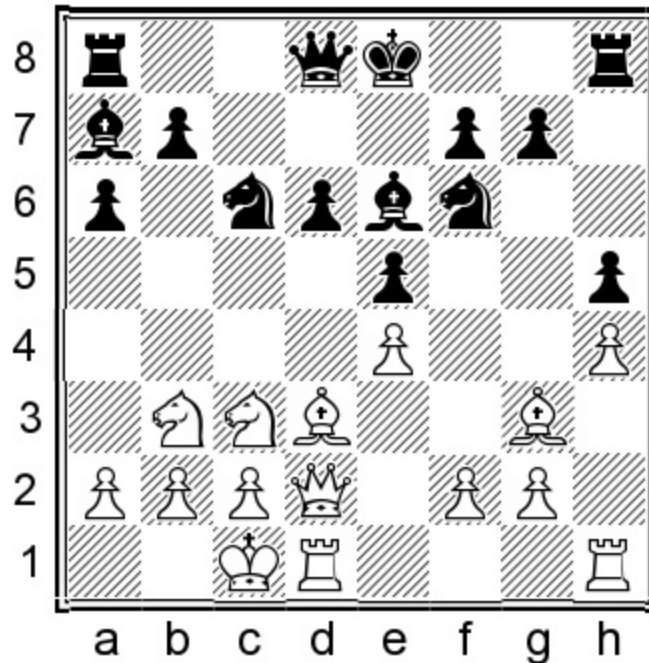
Position after: 12. h4±

This is exactly what we are trying to avoid. By starting with 9...h5 we are going to take away the h4-square from White. At some point in the diagram position White will give up the bishop pair to use the d5-square.

10.h3!

Probably the best thing for White is to let the h-pawn advance as much as possible and to free the g-pawn. However, this is not enough to give White any real edge.

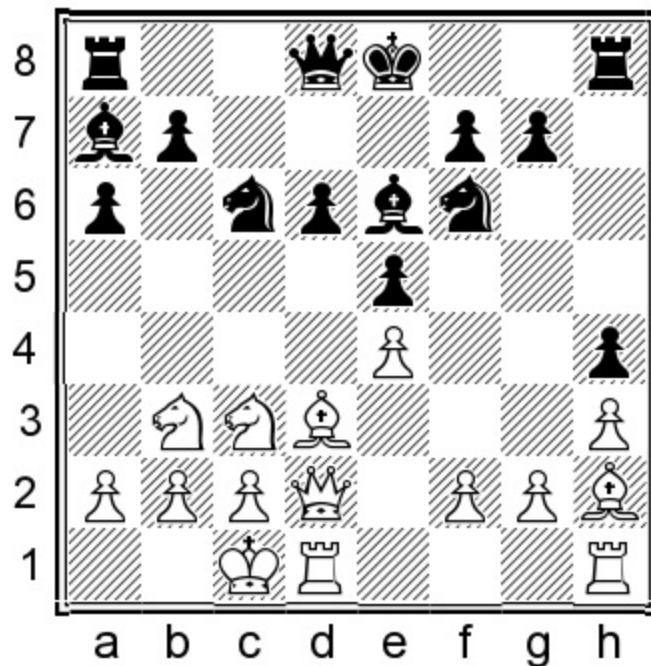
10.h4?! d6 11.♔d2 ♘f6 12.0-0-0 ♙e6



Position after: 12...♙e6

13.♗b1 [13.♙e2?! ♘d4! It is fairly easy for Black to cover the d-file.] 13...0-0↑ With the bishop on g3, White has big problems launching any kind of attack on the kingside.

10...h4 11.♙h2 ♘f6 12.♔d2 d6 13.0-0-0 ♙e6!



Position after: 13...Ke6!

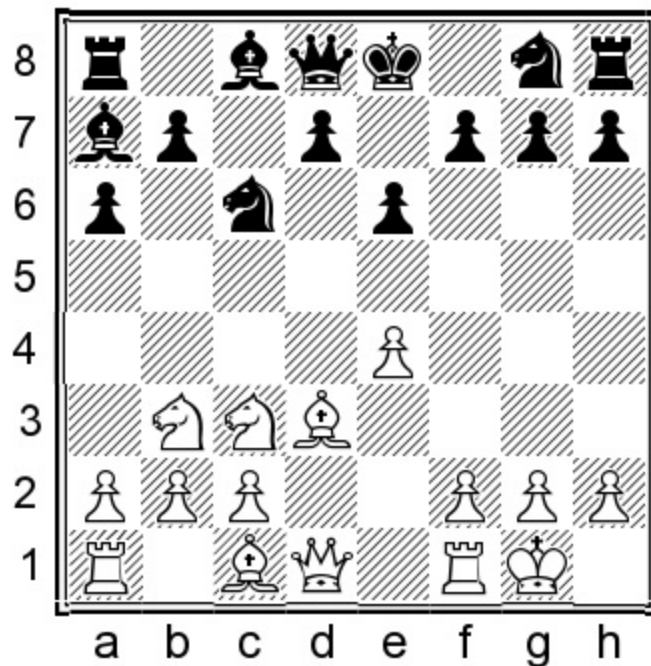
There is no rush to castle as we have another option for the king.

14.f4 Qc7

The position is double-edged, and Black is probably going to castle on the queenside when convenient.

f) 6. Nb3 Qa7 7. Nc3 Nc6 8. 0-0

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 a6 5.Qd3 Qc5 6.Nb3! Qa7!? 7.Nc3 Nc6 8.0-0



Position after: 8.0-0

This position may also arise with the 7.0-0 move-order. I do not feel the moves Nc3 and 0-0 are well connected for White because he is now deprived of the possibility of playing c2-c4 which is the main reason that White then long castles.

8. Wf2 This will be covered in the next subchapter.

8... Nge7

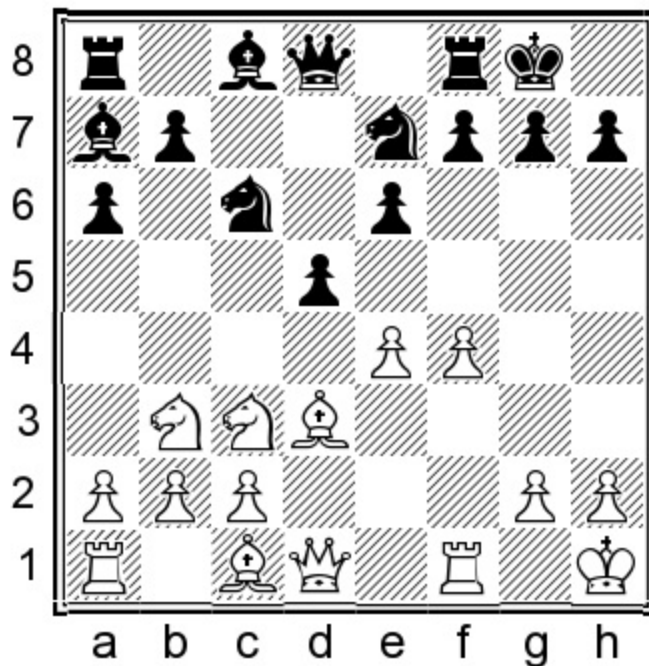
As you have seen I like to place the knight here. The reason is that he cannot be attacked by a pawn on e5 or pinned by the dark-squared bishop as it would be easy to chase it.

8...d6?! 9. Wg4 !→

9. Wf2

White's idea is to continue with 10. Qe3 in order to trade the annoying bishop on a7. While you can allow this, I would like to offer a new move preventing it!

9. Qh1 This looks like another decent idea. White simply unpins his f-pawn to be able to advance it. However, Black has a strong continuation. 9...0-0 10.f4 d5!

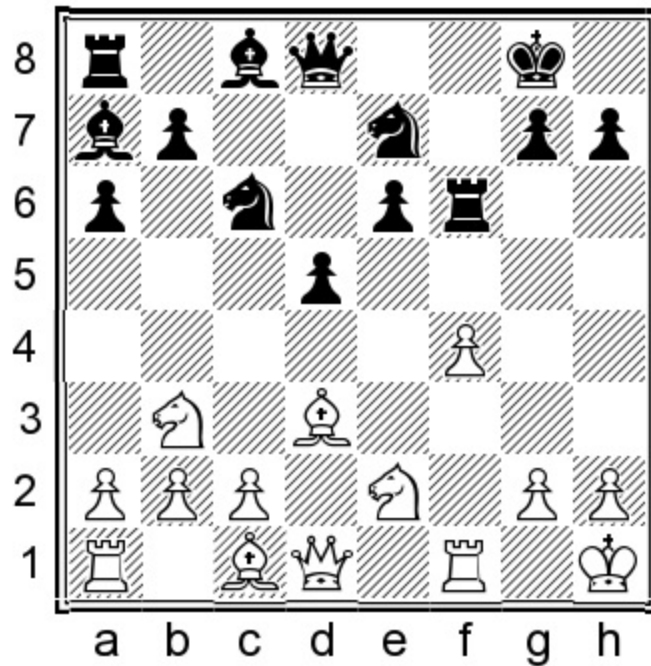


Position after: 10...d5!

Way back in 1996 (this sounds like the Cro – Magnon period for modern chess), Ehlvest had found the way to solve Black’s problem. As he demonstrates White is not prepared to advance like this in the centre.

A) 11. ♖f3 ♘b4! 12. ♙d2 dxе4 13. ♙xe4 [13. ♘xe4?! ♘xd3 14. cxd3 ♙d7⚡] 13...f5 14. ♙d3 Up to this point Black has done great in: Zupancic, U (1921) – Neverov, V (2541) Nova Gorica 2012, but here he should have simply continued with 14...♘xd3! 15. cxd3 ♙d7⚡ with ...♙c6 to come and a great position.

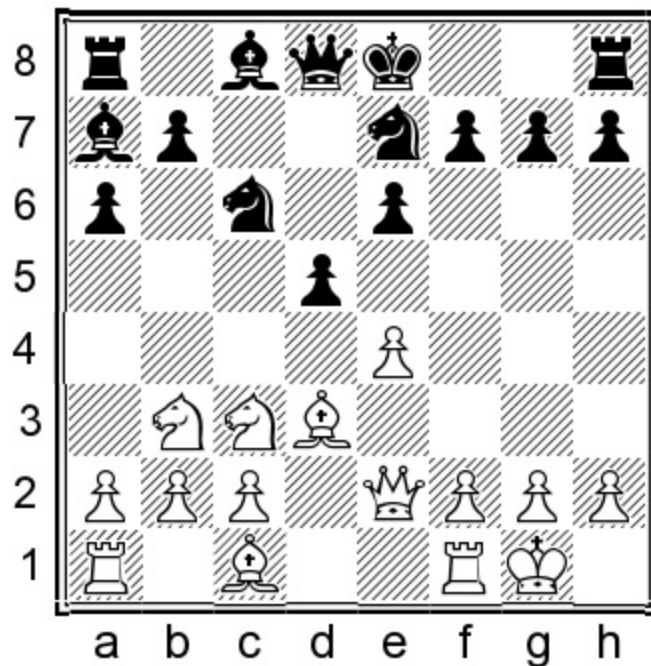
B) 11. e5 f6! 12. exf6 [12. ♖e2? fxе5 13. fxе5 ♖xf1+ 14. ♖xf1 ♘xe5–+; 12. ♖e1?! fxе5 13. fxе5 ♘g6 14. ♖h5 ♖c7 15. ♙xg6 hxg6 16. ♖xg6 ♖xe5!⚡ It is pretty obvious that White’s pieces (especially both knights), are out of the play.] 12...♖xf6 13. ♘e2



Position after: 13. ♖e2

Now in the game Leko, P (2630) – Ehlvest, J (2660) Cap d’Agde 1996, Black played for a draw which he quickly achieved but he could have gone with the active continuation: 13... ♔d6! 14. c3 e5 15. fxe5 ♞xe5 ♞ when Black has more than enough activity in this position with an isolani.

9...d5!?N



Position after: 9...d5!?N

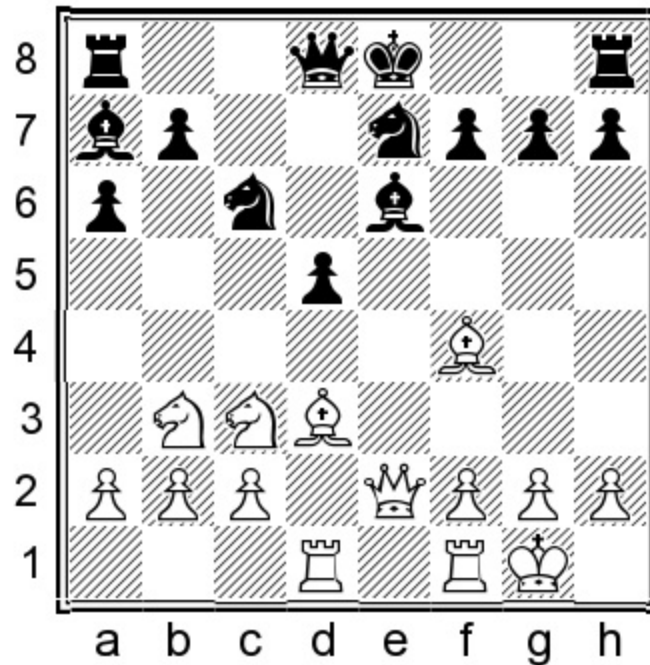
9...0-0 10.♔e3 While this transposes into the last subchapter of the current chapter dealing with 7.0-0 ♘d7 I think the text move is even stronger against this move order.

10.exd5

10.♔e3?? d4+ This is the reason why ♔c1-e3 is prevented.

10...exd5 11.♖e1

11.♔f4 ♔e6! This is playable here. We protect the d5-pawn to gain flexibility with the knight on e7. [11...0-0 12.♚h5→ This could easily go bad for Black because 12...♘g6 would abandon the d5 pawn and 12...h6 looks scary because of some sacrificing ideas. 12...h6 13.♗ad1→ If you have some courage, you can go for it!] 12.♗ad1



Position after: 12.♗ad1

[12.♚h5 ♘b4! First, neutralize the assailant. 13.♗ad1 ♘xd3 14.♗xd3 0-0=] 12...0-0 13.♚h5 ♘g6 14.♔c1 ♚d7=

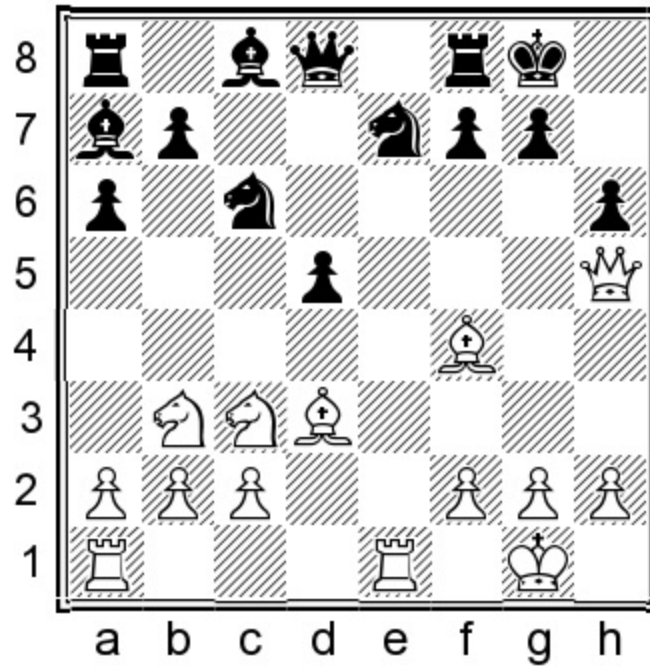
11...0-0!

11...♔e6?! 12.♚h5→ Instead of 11.♔f4, White has now the extra threat of taking on e6 making Black's life harder.

12.♚h5

12.♔f4 ♘g6 13.♔g3? f5! This is basically game over. White is defenceless against the f-pawn. 14.h3 f4 15.♔h2 f3 16.gxf3 ♔xh3+

12...h6 13.♔f4



Position after: 13.♔f4

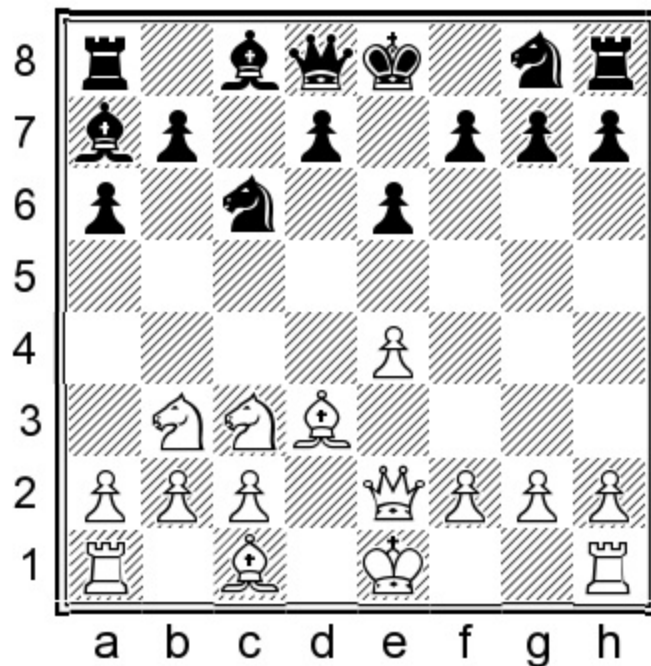
13.♔xh6? Is too early to be strong. 13...gxh6 14.♖xh6 ♕f5±

13...♕e6 14.♖ad1 ♖d7 15.h3 ♖ae8=

The position is balanced, and it is not easy to improve White's position.

g) 6.♘b3 ♕a7 7.♘c3 ♘c6 8.♙e2

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.♕d3 ♕c5 6.♘b3! ♕a7!? 7.♘c3 ♘c6 8.♙e2

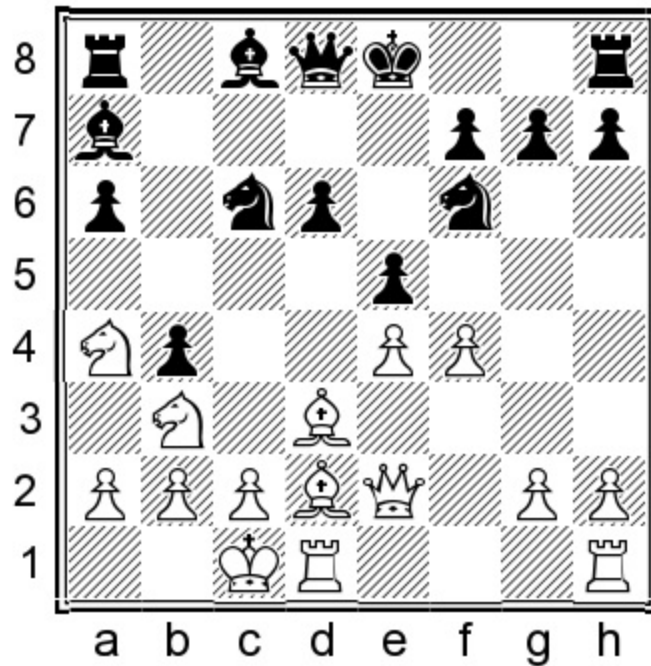


Position after: 8. ♔e2

The main continuation which usually shows that White is willing to castle on the queenside to have an attack on the kingside.

8...d6 9. ♘e3

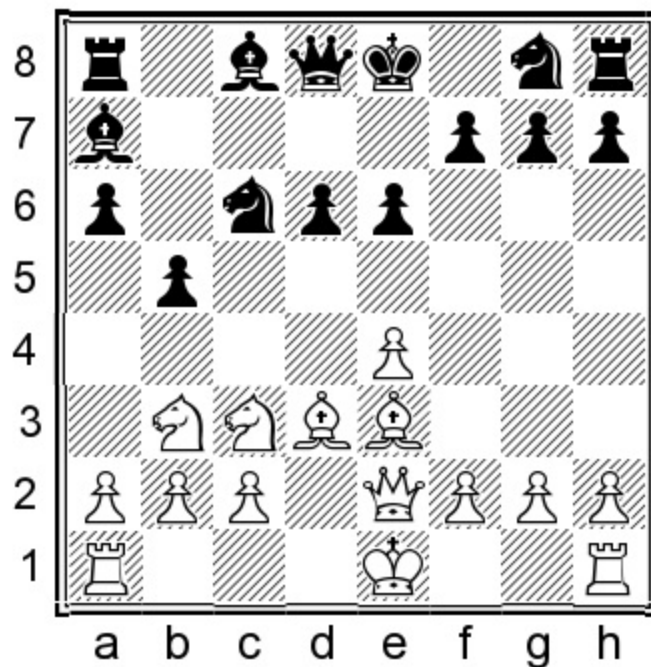
9. ♘d2 Is less played but has the idea of short castling. 9... ♞f6 10. 0-0 b5 11. f4 This position occurred in Leko, P (2460) – Horvath, C (2515) Hungary 1992, but I do not see any reason to refrain from chasing the knight. 11...b4! 12. ♞a4 e5! Now that White's knights cannot reach d5 we can blockade the centre



Position after: 12...e5!

Now that White's knights cannot reach d5 we can blockade the centre. 13.f5 ♔c7 14.g4 h6! A very smart move. We can see the point of it after 15.h4 h5! 16.g5 ♞g4 17.♞hf1 ♕d7. The knight on a4 is in huge danger and White's counterplay is far from obvious.

9...b5



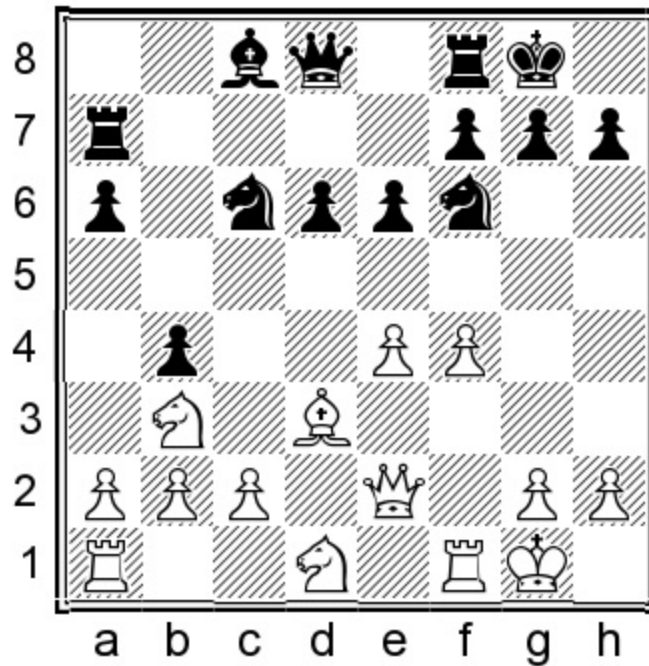
Position after: 9...b5

We have reached the most critical position of this line. Black immediately develops his queenside and waits before developing his kingside knight. White has a lot of options at his disposal.

10.♙xa7

A) 10.a4 Generally speaking it does not really bother Black to play b4, since it gains a tempo on the knight. 10...b4 11.♘d1 instead Naiditsch, A (2574) – Rublevsky, S (2686) Dortmund 2004, went 11...♞f6! 12.♙xa7 ♜xa7 13.♞e3 0-0 14.0-0 d5! 15.exd5 exd5 16.♞fd1 ♞e8=. Our activity compensates for the isolated central pawn.

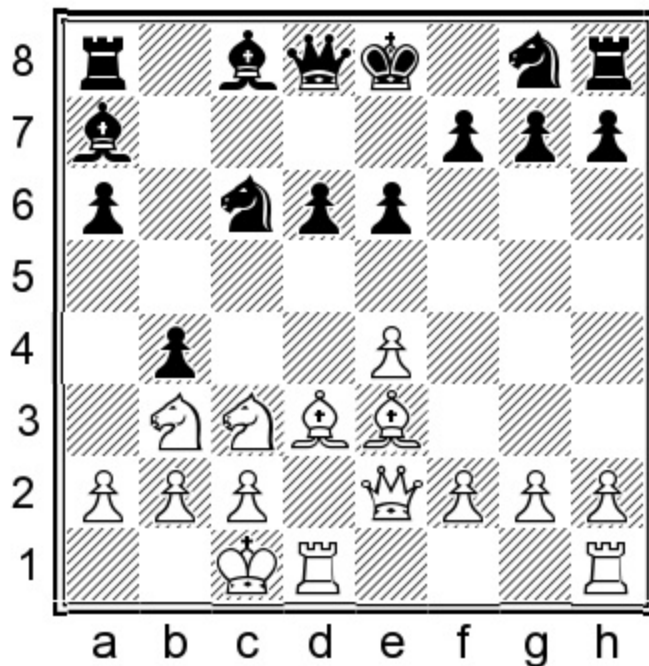
B) 10.f4?! b4! Again, chasing the knight will provide us better control of the centre. 11.♘d1 ♞f6 12.0-0 0-0 13.♙xa7 ♜xa7



Position after: 13...♜xa7

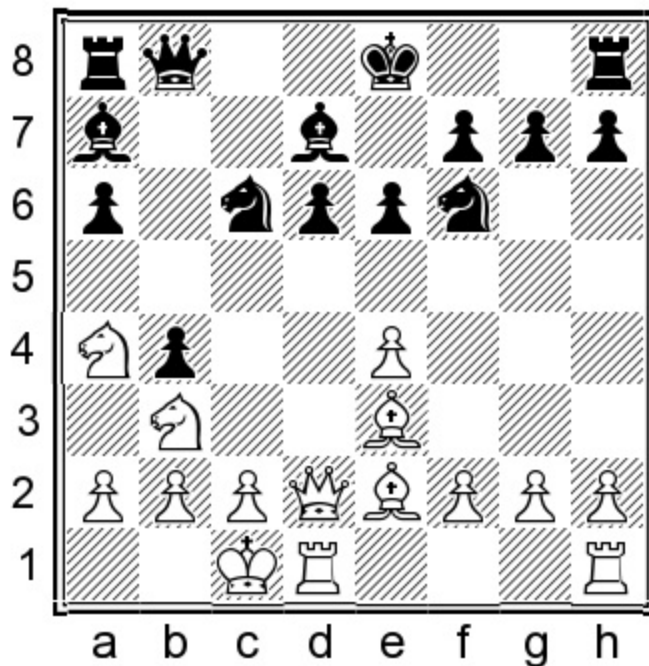
14.♙h1 [14.♞e3 a5↑] 14...e5 15.♞e3 Occurred in the game Hou, Y (2612) – Ding, L (2664) Danzhou 2011, ½ – ½ (46) and it looks good to open the centre by means of: [15.f5 a5 16.♞e3 a4 17.♞d2 ♞d4 18.♞e1 ♙b7↗] 15...exf4 16.♞xf4 a5 17.♞af1 ♞d7 18.♙b5 ♞de5= White has the d5-square but the knight on e5 is also a monster.

C) 10.0-0-0? b4!N



Position after: 10...b4!N

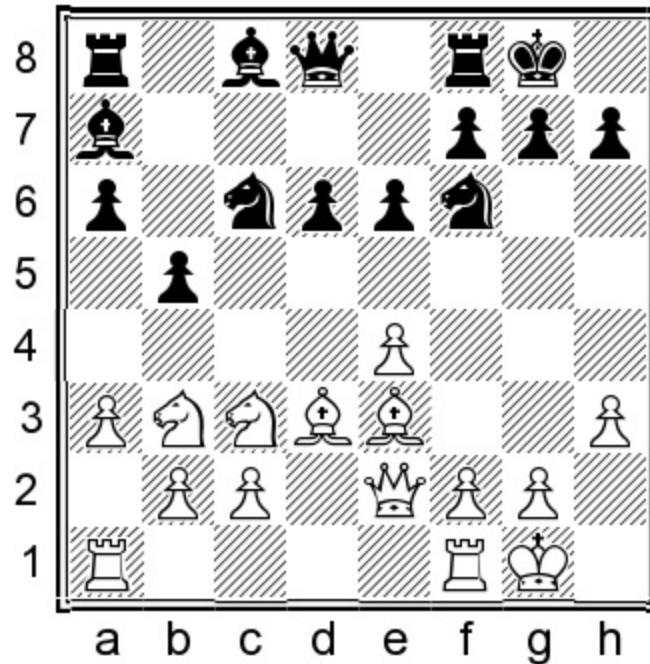
I am surprised that this move is still a novelty as it looks so logical. 11.♘a4 It is probably because of this move that 10...b4 has not been tried yet, but the knight is going to find itself in trouble here. [11.♘b1 ♜f6 12.♙xa7 ♜xa7 13.g4 e5 14.g5 ♞d7 15.h4 0-0♣ Black follows with a6-a5-a4, and a straight-forward plan.] 11...♙d7 12.♚d2□ White needs this move to attack the pawn laying on d6. 12...♚b8 [12...♞f6!/? This is another promising continuation, preventing the light-squares bishop from moving.] 13.♙e2 ♞f6!



Position after: 13...♞f6!

[13...♖ce7?? We cannot move so quickly with the knight as we must first protect the bishop on d7 due to 14.♗ac5!+-.] 14.♙xd6 There is nothing else. [14.f3? ♗e7-+] 14...♙xd6 15.♞xd6 ♗xe4 16.♞xd7 [16.♞dd1 ♗xf2 17.♙xf2 ♙xf2+ White has no compensation.] 16...♔xd7 17.♙f3 f5+ White will probably get a pawn back, but still down the exchange.

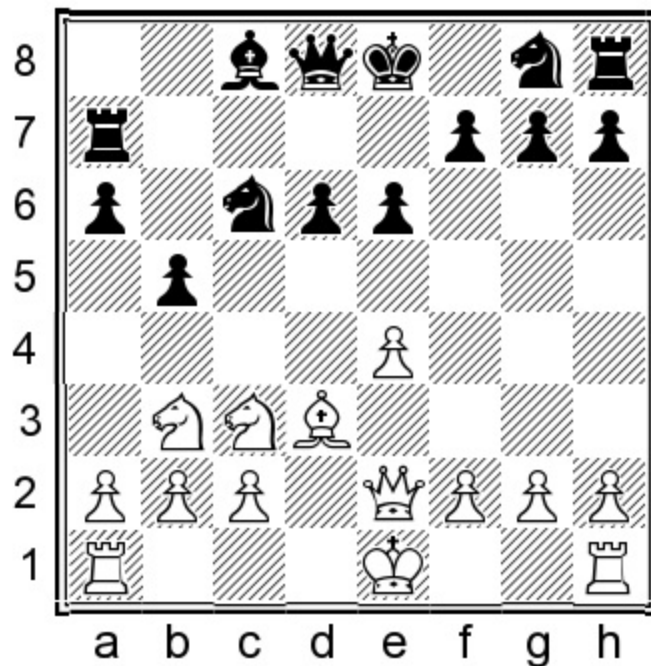
D) 10.0-0 White will not have much if he plays 0-0 without c2-c4. Consider the following game:
10...♗f6 11.h3 0-0 12.a3



Position after: 12.a3

White is playing cautiously but this is not so efficient as Black is well placed. 12...♙c7 13.♙xa7 ♙xa7 14.♔h1 e5 15.f4 Despite Black winning in 35 moves in the game Salih, A (2318) – Oleksienko, M (2568) Abu Dhabi 2013, I would prefer 15...♙e6! covering the d5-square 16.f5 ♙xb3 17.cxb3 ♗d4 18.♙d1 ♞ac8.

10...♞xa7



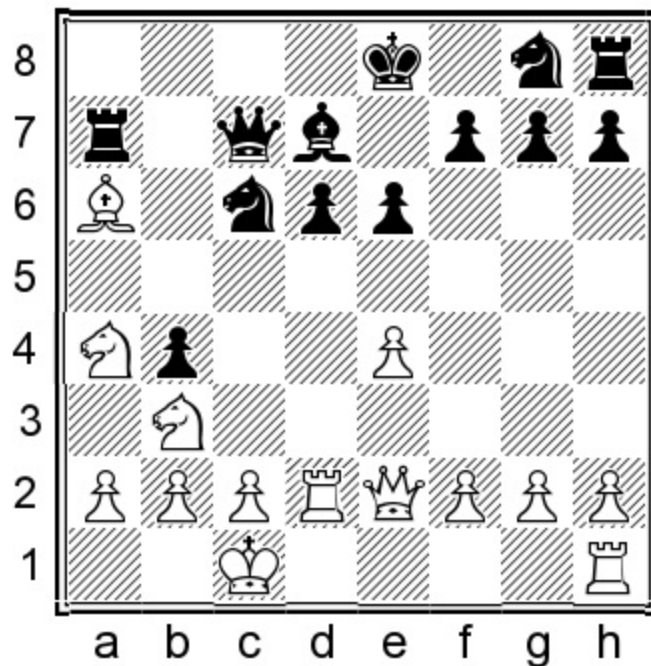
Position after: 10...Rxa7

The rook looks odd on a7 and more so if we play ...Qb7 at some point but it may reach c7 quickly.

11. Qe3

Immediately challenging the rook is the main continuation here. For now, we do not need to do anything about it.

A) 11.0-0-0 b4!N Similar to 10.0-0-0, this move is very powerful. [11...Nge7 12.f4 Qb6 13.Rhf1→ White is ready to follow with f4-f5, and I prefer to avoid this position, even if Black drew in: Perunovic, M (2582) – Miladinovic, I (2555) Vrnjacka Banja 2012.] 12.Na4 Qd7 13.Qxa6 [13.Qe3 Nf6 14.Qe2 Qc7 15.Nb6 0-0 16.Nxd7 Nxd7] The knight escaped, but we gained many tempi and the road for the a-pawn has been opened.] 13...Qc7 14.Rd2!



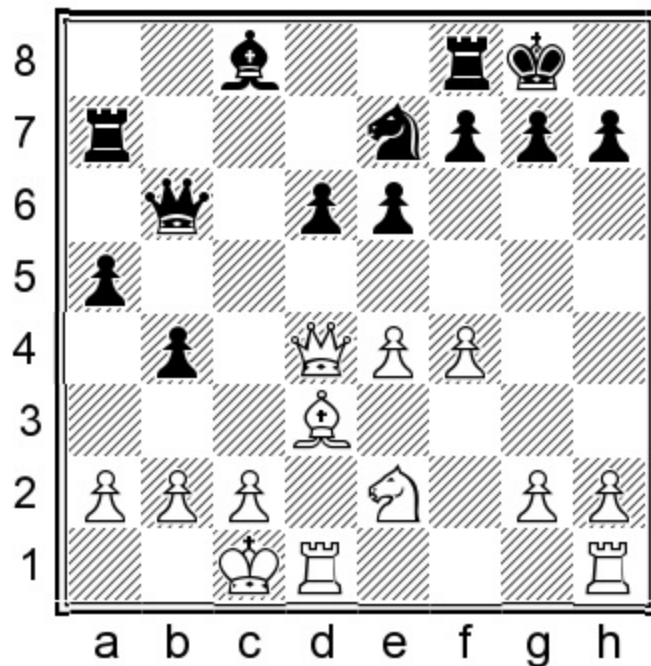
Position after: 14. ♖d2!

[14. ♖b5 ♗f6 The plan is simple ...0-0 and ...♞fa8.] 14... ♗b8 15. ♖b5 ♞xa4 16. ♖xa4 ♖xa4 17. ♞hd1 ♗e7 18. ♞xd6 0-0 The position is really complicated, but I would go for Black in this unbalanced situation.

B) 11.f4 ♗f6 12.0-0-0 b4 13. ♗a4 We saw this position in ½ – ½ (18) Womacka, M (2475) – Gavrikov, V (2575) Germany 1998, but I now think it is necessary to close the centre by stopping White's possibility of playing e4-e5. 13...e5!N 14.fxe5 ♗xe5 15. ♞d2 ♖g4 16. ♖e2 ♖xe2 17. ♞xe2 0-0=

11... ♗f6!

11...b4!? You may prefer this continuation. 12. ♗e2 ♗ge7 13.f4 0-0 14.0-0-0?! This is over-optimistic as we have an easy path. [14.0-0! ♞c7 15.c4] 14...a5 15. ♗bd4 ♞b6 16. ♞g1 ♗xd4 17. ♞xd4



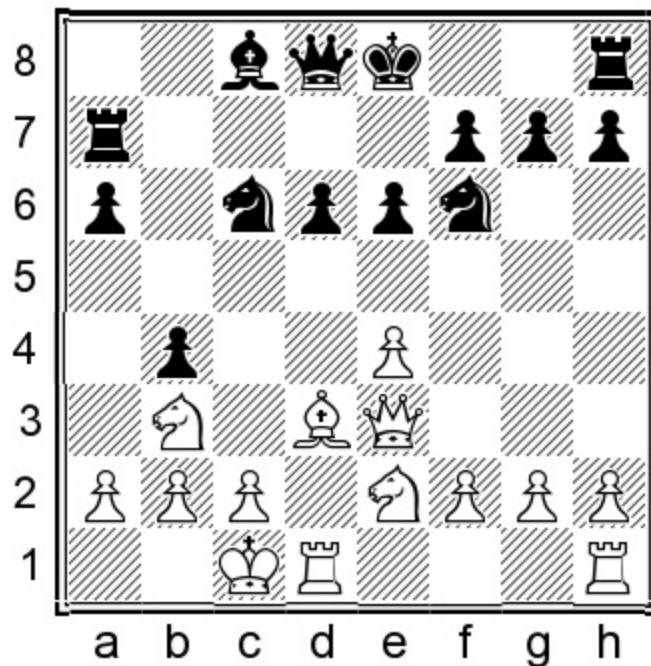
Position after: 17. ♖xd4

Quite unexpectedly, Black traded the queens in Kritz, L (2541) – Rublevsky, S (2686) 0-1 (49), Mainz 2004. Instead, keeping it on the board is stronger. 17... ♖c7!N 18. ♔b1 e5 19. ♖e3 ♕g4 ♖ We have the attack on the queenside, but we are also about to get a position with a good knight against a bad bishop.

12.0-0-0

12.0-0 0-0 13.f4 b4 14. ♖a4 e5! ♖ Stopping most of White's activity and some options such as e4-e5.

12...b4! 13. ♖e2



Position after: 13. ♖e2

13...e5!

White is unable to reach the d5-square with a knight, so we take more space in the centre.

14.h3 0-0 15.g4 ♖c7 16.f4 a5 17.fxe5 ♗xe5 18.♔b1 a4

Things are much simpler for Black.

19.♗bd4 ♖c5 20.g5 ♗fd7

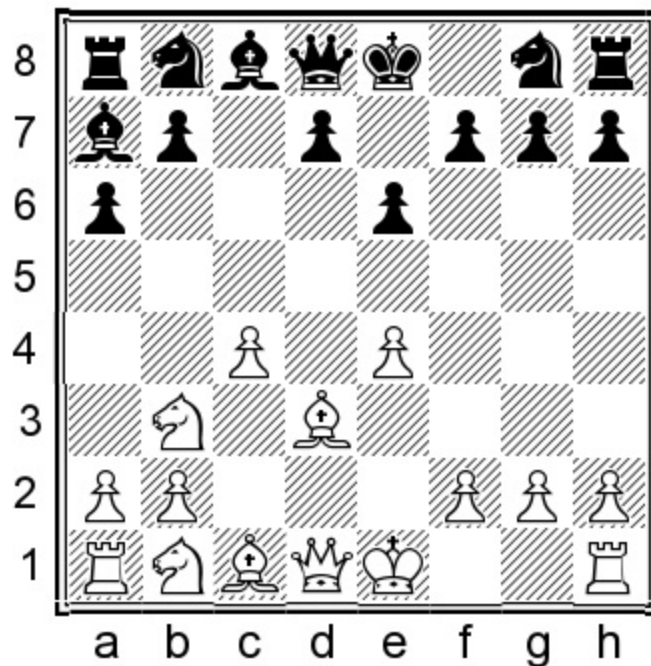
In this old game featuring two players that are now grandmasters, White won despite having a pretty awful position: Almasi, Z (2390) – Schlosser, P (2485) Budapest 1992.

h) 6. ♗b3 ♔a7 7.c4

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 a6 5.♔d3 ♔c5 6.♗b3! ♔a7!?

In the final 3 subchapters we are going to look at the 3 main ideas: 7.c4, 7.♖e2 and 7.0-0. Against these 3 moves, I have chosen the same answer, 7...♗e7. That means there can be a lot of transpositions into different subchapters (and some lines can also transpose into 7.♗c3, even if I did not choose 7...♗e7). To make things clear, I think it is important to start with 7.c4.

7.c4

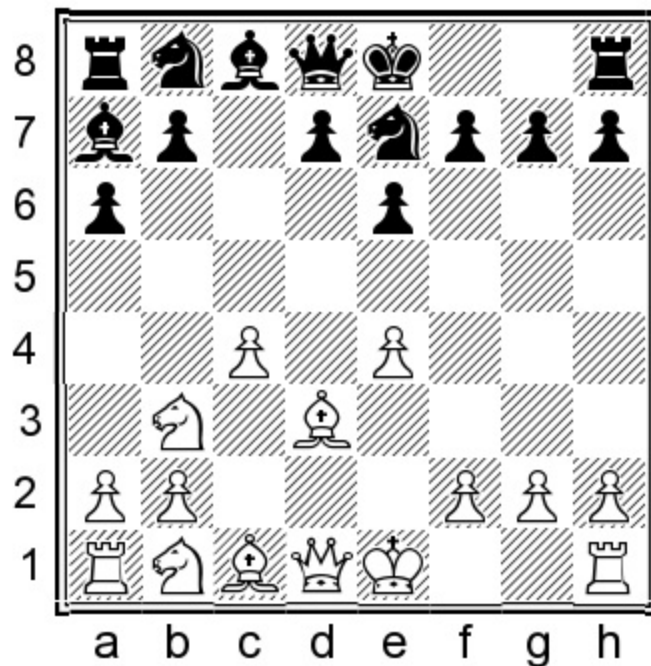


Position after: 7.c4

This is a move that can be seen in many variations, but it is always really specific. The first thing we can say about this is that White will rarely play 0-0-0 because Black replies with ...b5 quickly opening the queenside. But if White goes with 0-0, then the point of 7.c4 is to try to prevent ...d5 or ...b5.

7.♔e2 This line as well as 7.0-0 will be considered in the next subchapters and these subchapters will not talk about c4-ideas as it is analyzed here.

7...♘e7



Position after: 7... Nde7

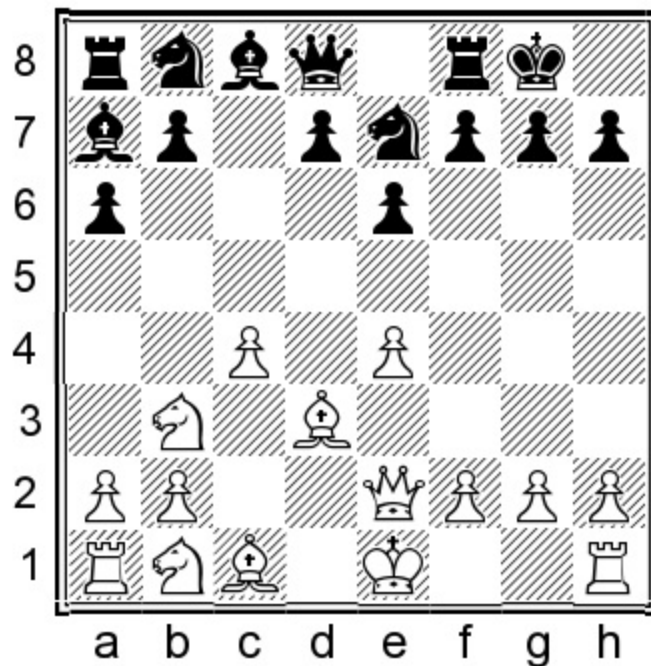
I have chosen this move because I think it is more flexible than 7... Ndc6. As we will see, we sometimes avoid playing it.

8. Ndc3

This is a natural move with this move-order. However, a different move order will likely produce a different variation.

A) 8.0-0 This generally arise from 7.0-0 Nde7 8.c4 but it has no independent value here. 8...0-0 9.Ndc3 See 8.Ndc3 0-0 9.0-0. [9.Qe2 You can look at the next variation with 8.Qe2.]. Once again, a difficulty in this opening is to keep track of the move-orders.

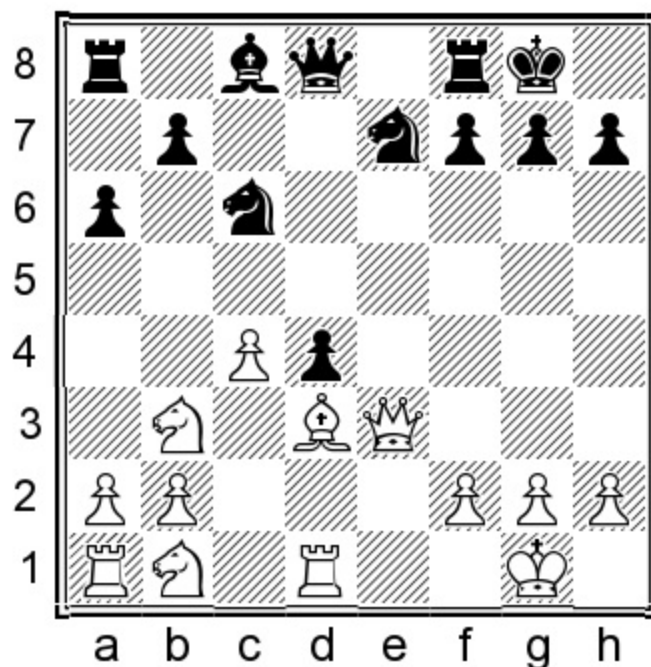
B) 8.Qe2 This line generally arises from 7.Qe2 0-0 8.c4. 8...0-0



Position after: 8...0-0

B1) 9.♘c3 See our main line.

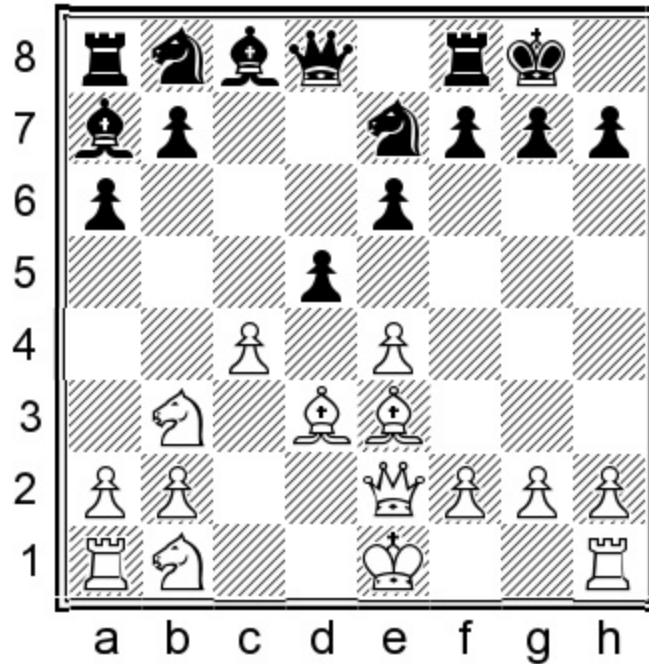
B2) 9.0-0 ♘bc6 10.♙e3 The only alternative that has been played. [10.♘c3 Most of the players transpose into the main line of the subchapter.] 10...♙xe3 11.♚xe3 d5! White is not well placed to react against this central break. The queen is exposed and playing the natural 12.♘c3?? is met with 12...d4. 12.exd5 [12.e5? dxc4 13.♙xc4 ♚c7 14.♖e1 ♘g6+ White is losing a pawn whatever he tries. 15.f4?! ♘cxe5! 16.fxe5 ♚xc4+; 12.cxd5 exd5 13.e5 ♙f5 14.♙xf5 ♘xf5 15.♚f4 ♘h4+] 12...exd5 13.♖d1 d4!?



Position after: 13...d4!?

This enters a forcing line. 14.♖xd4 ♖xd4 15.♙e4 ♗ef5! 16.♙xf5 ♗xf5 17.♞xd8 ♗xe3 18.♞xf8+ ♔xf8 19.fxe3 White is temporarily a pawn up but we have piece activity. 19...♙e6 20.b3 ♞d8 21.♗c3 ♞d3=

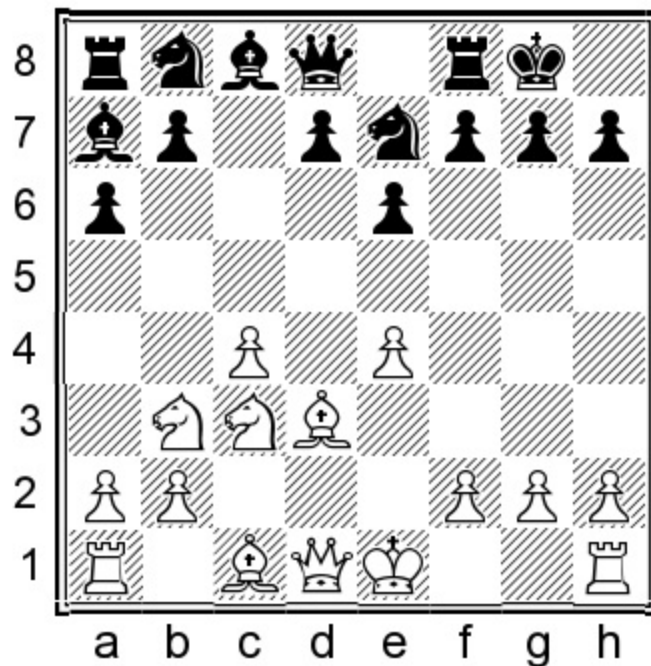
B3) 9.♙e3 d5!



Position after: 9...d5!

This is the kind of line where we prefer not to have played ...♗bc6. [9...♙xe3 This is slightly less accurate. 10.♞xe3 d5 11.♗c3±] 10.♙xa7 [10.♗c3?? is impossible because of 10...d4+; 10.cxd5 ♙xe3 11.♞xe3 exd5 12.0-0 ♗bc6= The centre is going to be liquidated and the chances are about equal.] 10...dxc4! 11.♙xc4 ♞xa7 12.0-0 b5 13.♙d3 ♞d7! The unnatural rook on a7 reaches the d-file quickly. 14.♞d1 ♗g6=

8...0-0



Position after: 8...0-0

Again, I prefer to delay ...♘bc6 even if it does not make much of a difference.

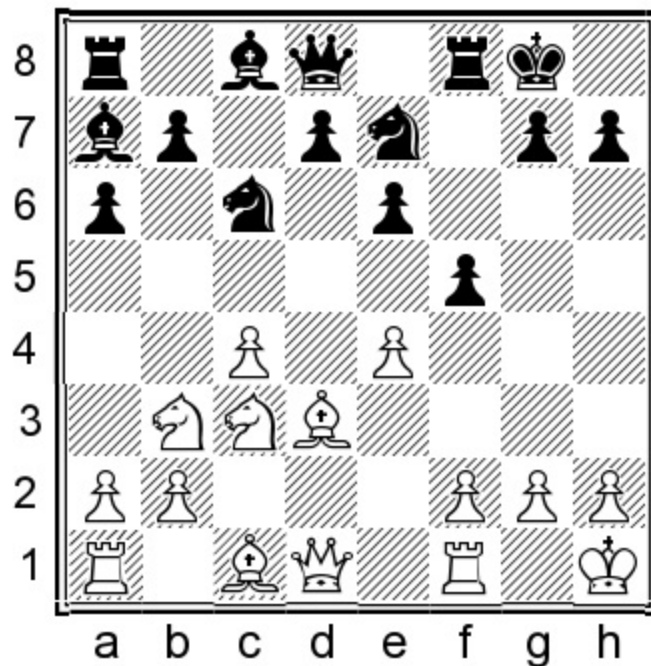
9.♙e2

9.0-0 ♘bc6

A) 10.♙e2 Please refer to the main line.

B) 10.♙f4 This controls the centre, but it allows us to do something very usual in this position while gaining a tempo on the bishop. 10...e5!? 11.♙g5 d6 12.♙d2 ♙e6 13.♙ad1 ♜c8↔ When Black cannot manage to play with ...d5 (the usual plan) this variation with at least an extra-tempo cannot be bad for Black.

C) 10.♙h1 f5!?



Position after: 10...f5!?

A nice move that we will see in the main line too.

C1) 11. ♖e2?! This was played in Magness, T (2105) – Bercys, S (2434) Indianapolis 2009, when Black could have immediately closed the position and started the attack with 11...f4!. Not only does it give Black attacking prospects, but it also prevents White from having normal development as the bishop remains stuck on c1. And we can often take advantage of the e5-square. For instance: 12.f3 ♘g6 13. ♖d1 ♘ge5↑

C2) 11.exf5 ♘xf5

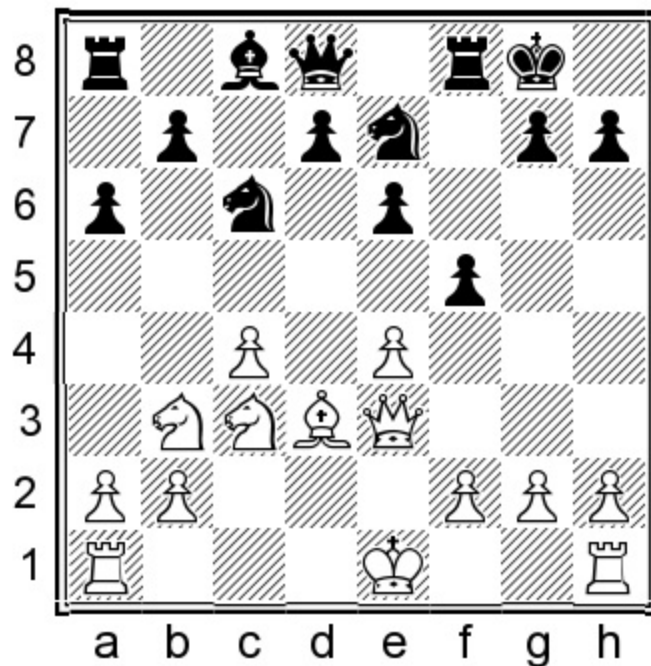
C2.1) 12. ♖h5?! ♘e5 13. ♗e2 d5→ And a draw was agreed in Frolyanov, D (2505) – Shaposhnikov, E (2550) Sochi 2005, but Black is simply better as he has great activity in the centre and possible tactics on the f-file. White clearly needs to be accurate to stay in the game.

C2.2) 12. ♗f4N 12...d5 13.cxd5 exd5 14. ♖d2 ♗e6= White is more solid, but we have enough activity for equality.

9...♘bc6 10.0-0

This is probably the main variation because it may arise from various move-orders.

10. ♗e3 ♗xe3 We want to attract the queen to e3 to make our next move more powerful. 11. ♖xe3 f5!N



Position after: 11...f5!N

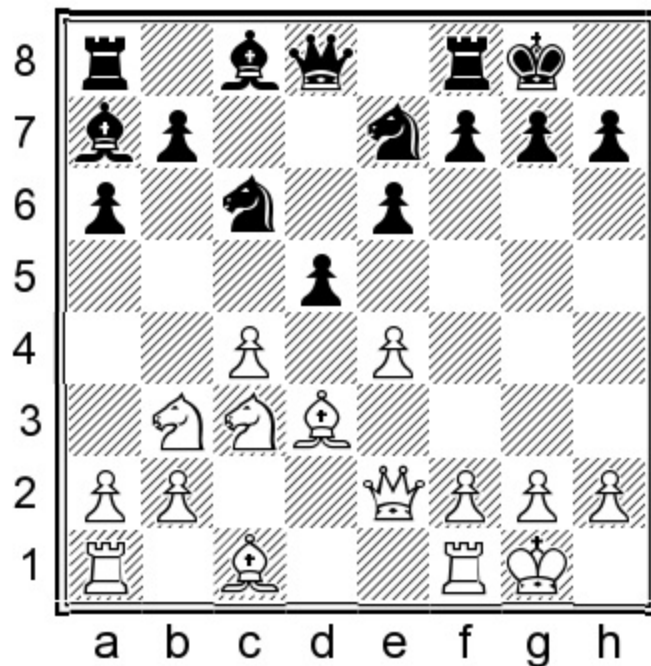
An ambitious move to react in the centre.

A) 12.0-0?! This is probably a bad idea. 12...f4! 13.♖d2 [13.♖e2? f3! 14.gxf3 ♘e5-+] 13...f3 14.g3 ♘g6= It clearly seems unpleasant for White to live with a black pawn on f3.

B) 12.0-0-0 One of Stockfish' suggestion but it looks risky after 12...b5!→ . We just want to open the queenside, and White does not have an easy position.

C) 12.f3 If White wants a chance to castle on the kingside, he should start with this move. 12...♘e5 13.0-0 f4 14.♖d2 b6⇒ Black has an interesting position and a great spot on e5 for the knights.

10...d5!



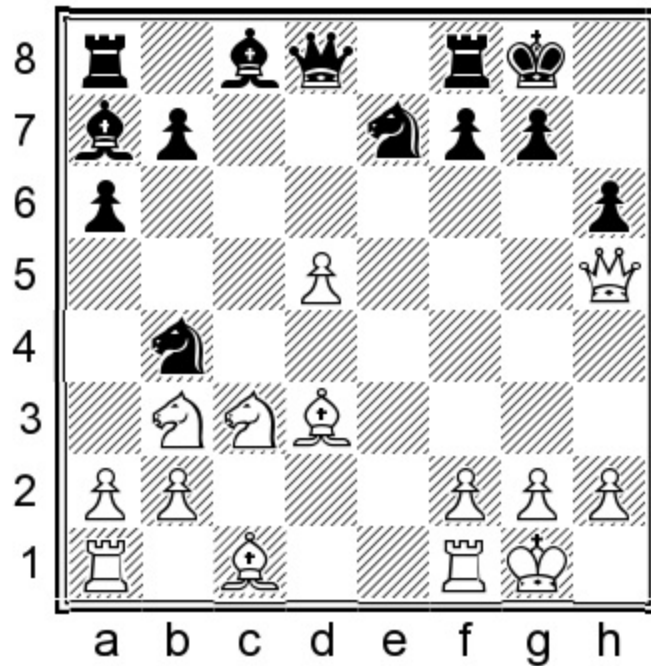
Position after: 10...d5!

This has been played only three times but not with the best ideas for Black. Let us do things right!

11.exd5 exd5 12.cxd5

This is definitely the most logical move from a human point of view and the only move that has been played.

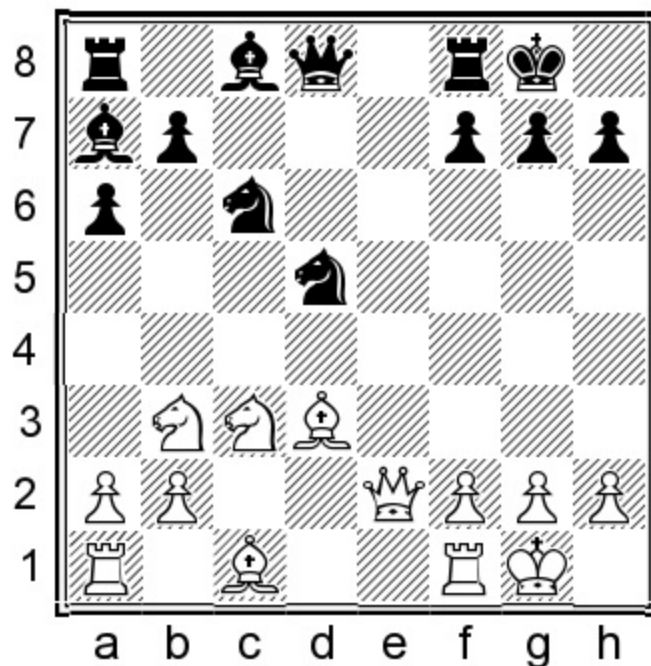
12.♔h5!?N This is an interesting line for White and we need to be careful. 12...h6! We are not afraid of losing the d5-pawn. [12...g6 I think White's aim was to create this weakness. it is not a bad move, but the position becomes dangerous.] 13.cxd5 ♖b4!



Position after: 13... Nxb4!

14. Bb1 [14. Rb1 Nxd3 15. Rxd3 Bf5 Black enjoys a great bishop pair which provides sufficient compensation and a very pleasant position. 16. Rb1 Bc2 17. Re1 b5] 14... Nxd5 15. Bxh6 The position is balanced but this forces a draw. 15... gxh6 16. Bxh6 f5 = And White will need to take the perpetual before we parry it sufficiently.

12... Nxd5



Position after: 12... Nxd5

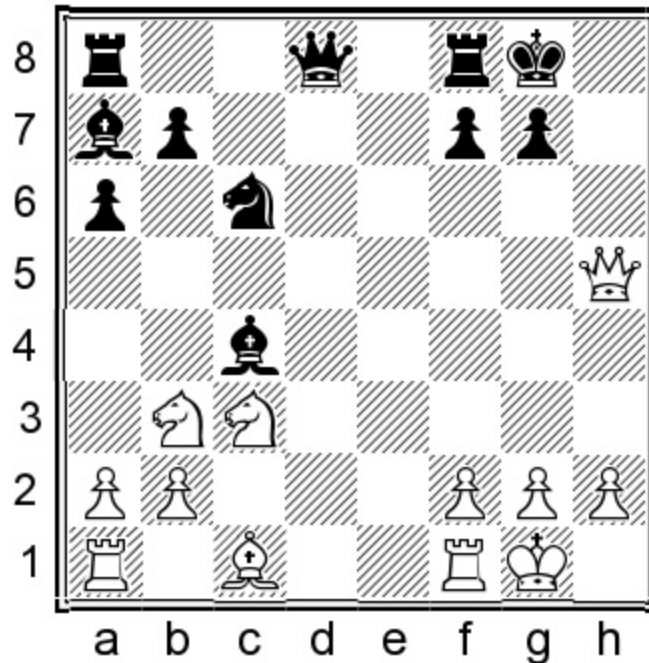
13. ♖xh7+

The only try for White which seems to grab a pawn.

13... ♔xh7 14. ♕h5+ ♔g8 15. ♖xd5?!

It seems so logical, and both players played this move, but it is dubious.

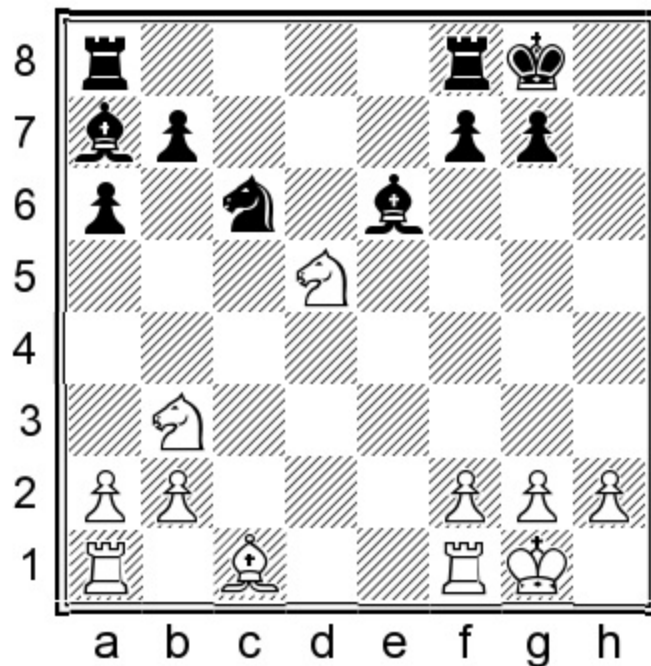
15. ♖xd5! N 15... ♗e6 16. ♘c3 [16. ♖d1 ♗xd5 17. ♖xd5 ♖f6 18. ♖f3 ♖xf3 19. gxf3 ♖fe8= With compensation for the pawn.] 16... ♗c4



Position after: 16... ♗c4

Black has many interesting ways to play, but this one is quite forcing. [16... ♖e8!? 17. ♗e3 ♗xb3 18. axb3 ♖e5 19. ♖f3 ♗xe3 20. fxe3 ♖e8] 17. ♖e1 ♗xb3 18. axb3 ♖e8 19. ♗g5 ♖b6 20. ♗e3 ♖xb3 21. ♗xa7 ♘xa7=

15... ♖xd5 16. ♘xd5 ♗e6



Position after: 16...♙e6

17.♘c7?

So logical and so wrong. White should have settled for something less ambitious because this try backfires with some damage.

17.♞d1 ♞ad8 18.♘c3 ♘b4= Black is going to get his pawn back thanks to ...♘xa2 at some point, and he will keep the bishops. He is the one with winning chances.

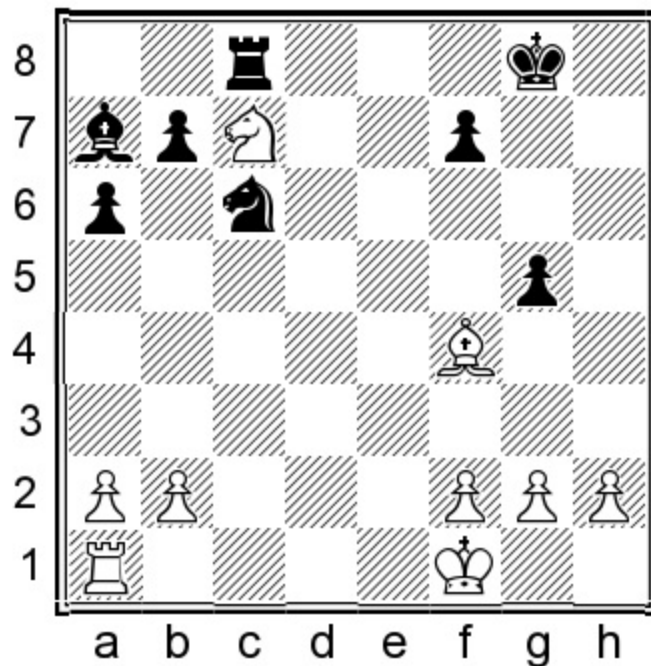
17...♙xb3 18.♘xa8

18.axb3? ♞ad8 19.♙f4 ♘d4+ There are too many threats here, White cannot handle all of them.

18...♙c4 19.♘c7

And now in the game Century, J – Osmond, M Islington 1972 Black missed:

19...♞c8!N 20.♙f4 ♙xf1 21.♙xf1 g5!



Position after: 21...g5!

22.♔g3□

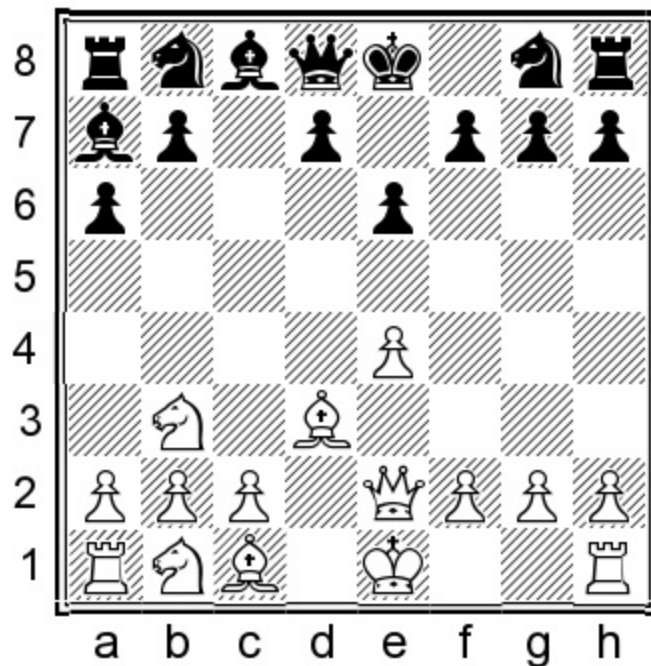
22.♔d6?? ♔b8—+

22...f5 23.♗e6 f4 24.♗xf4 gxf4 25.♔xf4 ♚f8!??

Even if White has 3 passed pawns for a knight, none of these pawns is advanced and we will have a lot of play which should provide us with winning chances.

i) 6.♗b3 ♔a7 7.♚e2

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 a6 5.♔d3 ♔c5 6.♗b3! ♔a7!?! 7.♚e2



Position after: 7. ♖e2

Now let us focus on this move. This is a usual move in this opening, White can prepare different things such as ♕e3, and sometimes 0-0-0 a few moves later. And it is very flexible as it keeps every option available. In the previous subchapter we have seen the ideas with c4, and the next one will be about 0-0, so you can see this subchapter as a transition between these two ideas, and we will see what happens when White does not play these moves early.

7... ♟e7

Again, this move is not the main line. Usually, Black prefers to play 7... ♟c6, but I find it more flexible as we already saw in the previous subchapter.

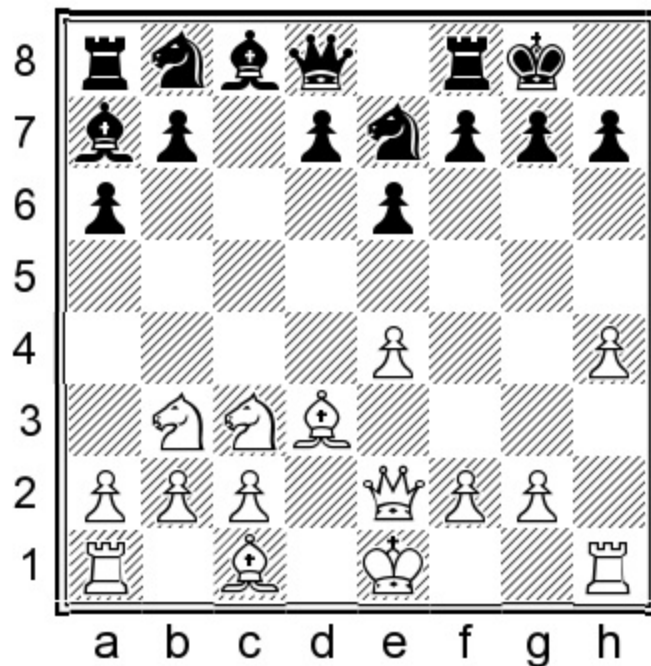
8. ♕e3

This is probably White's main idea in the current position.

A) 8.c4 See the prior subchapter.

B) 8.0-0 This will be covered in the next subchapter.

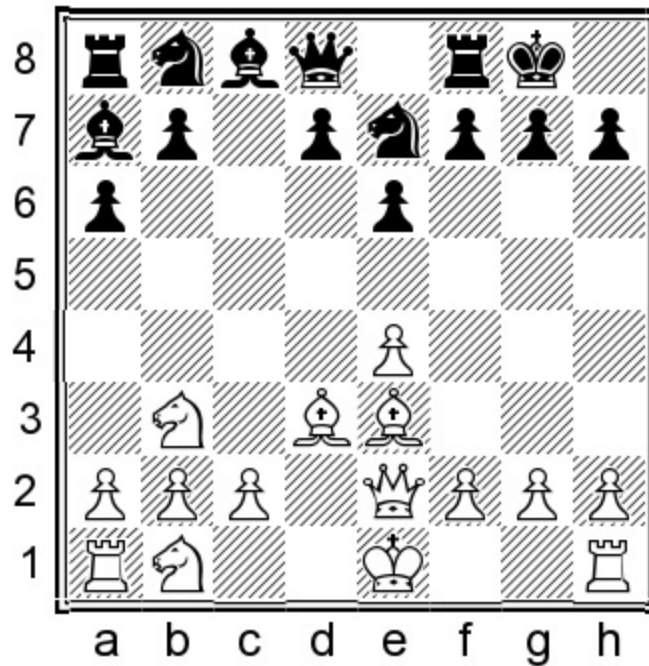
C) 8. ♟c3 0-0 This position has a low independent value. This is because the two moves that have been played here transpose into other lines. I tried another move for White that seems to be interesting. 9.h4!?N



Position after: 9.h4!?N

Modern chess allows this kind of approach. White is clearly showing that he will castle on the queenside, but first he sends an explorer down the h-file. [9.♔e3 This goes back to the main line. 9.0-0 ♖bc6 This has been already covered in the subchapter with 6.♗b3 ♕a7 7.♗c3 ♖c6 8.0-0.] 9...♖bc6 10.h5 d5! You should react in the centre. I think playing 10...h6 is possible, but in a way White would have had succeeded. Because with the pawn already on h6, it will be quite easy for him to open the kingside with g4-g5 yielding a quick attack. 11.h6 g6 12.exd5 ♖xd5 13.♔d2 [13.0-0 This is an admission of helplessness for White to castle here. 13...♕b8!?! Maybe Black is not the one with the best attacking chances but he has some ideas after bringing the queen to h4.] 13...♗db4! 14.0-0-0 Logical but not great for White. 14...♖xd3+ 15.cxd3 a5!→ In the end the pawn on h6 does not look so dangerous, and we manage to launch our attack.

8...0-0



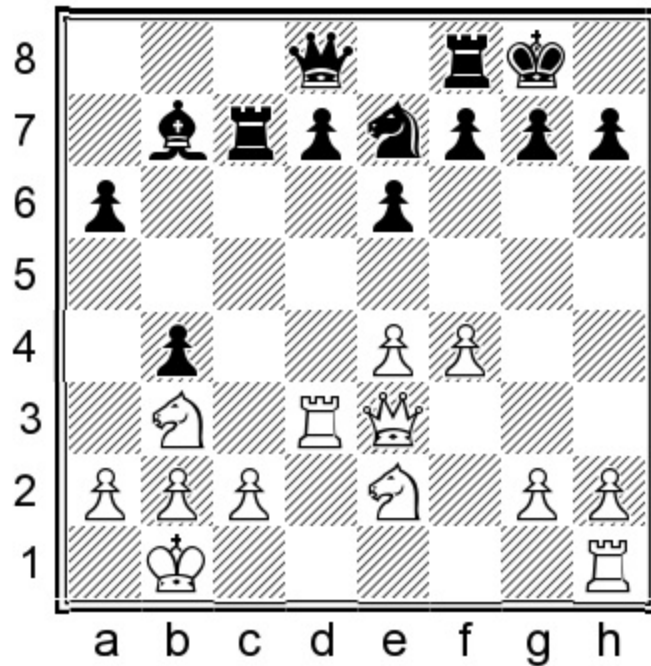
Position after: 8...0-0

This is not the main move but right now I do not believe we need to make a committal decision.

9.♘c3

A) 9.0-0 See next subchapter.

B) 9.♙xa7!?N 9...♞xa7 10.♚e3 ♘bc6! Of course, we do not want to retreat with the rook, we prefer to develop. 11.♘c3 b5! Logical and strong, this move prepares further development or the queenside attack. 12.0-0-0 ♞c7! I like this manoeuvre. The rook was hanging and useless on a7 whereas it is now a dangerous piece in front of the white king. 13.♕b1 ♘e5 14.f4 ♘xd3 15.♞xd3 b4 16.♘e2 ♙b7↔



Position after: 16...♙b7

This is clearly a double-edged position. White has the control over the centre, but we may react soon with 17...♚c8 and 18...f5, for example.

9...b5!N

Once again, this is the kind of position where we are glad to have delayed ...♘bc6.

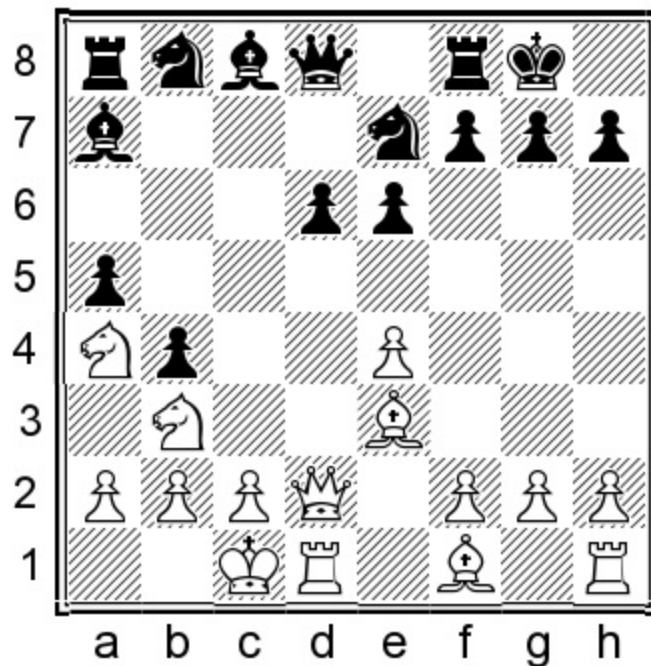
10.0-0-0

10.♙xa7 ♜xa7 11.♚e3 ♘bc6 This was already seen in 9.♙xa7.

10...b4! 11.♘a4 d6!?

Again, let us consider that having delayed ...♘bc6 was an improvement for Black as he develops more ideas to attack the knight on a4.

12.♚d2 a5 13.♙f1



Position after: 13. ♕f1

Stockfish finds strange moves to keep the balance!

13...d5!

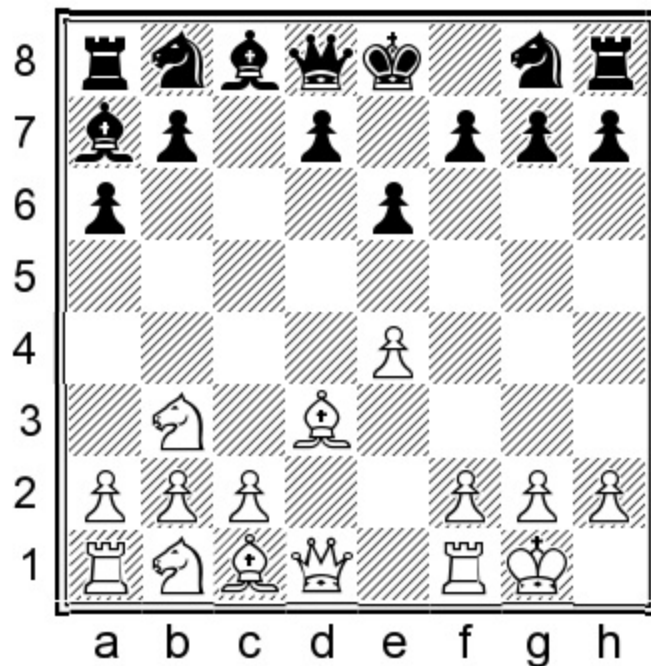
13...♕d7? 14.♕xa7 ♖xa7 15.♚xd6+-

14.exd5 ♚xd5 15.♚xd5 ♜xd5 16.♕c5 ♕xc5 17.♜bxc5 ♜d7 18.♕b5 ♖a7=

The knight on d5 is enough for Black to claim equality. Also, these typical endgames are usually easier to play because the pawns on a5 and b4 are usually good blockers of White's majority while our centre can start rolling down the board.

j) 6.♜b3 ♕a7 7.0-0 ♜e7

1.e4 c5 2.♜f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♜xd4 a6 5.♕d3 ♕c5 6.♜b3! ♕a7!? 7.0-0



Position after: 7.0-0

To conclude this chapter, we will examine every idea White may have after castling!

7...♘e7

As in the two previous subchapters, we can start with this flexible move.

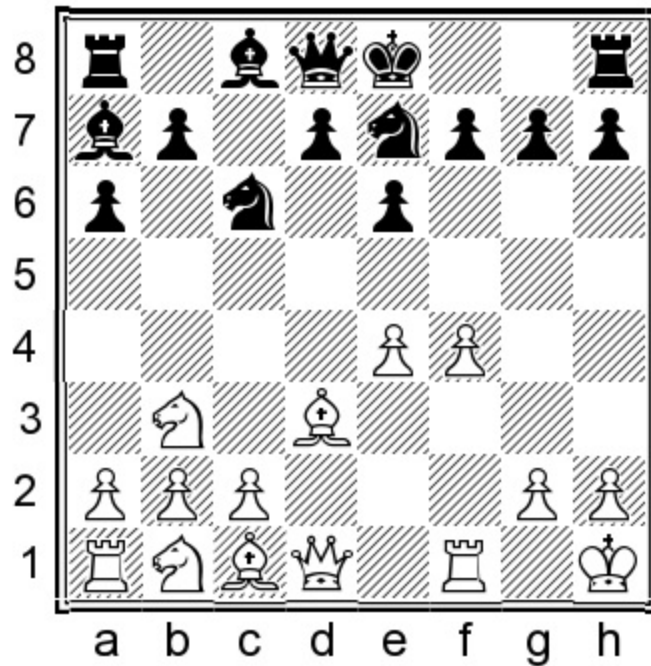
8.♙e2

This is the main move here and it can arise from various move-orders.

A) 8.♘c3 ♘bc6 This position was already analyzed in the subchapter about 6.♘b3 ♙a7 7.♘c3 ♘c6 8.0-0 ♘ge7.

B) 8.c4 This was considered in the subchapter about 7.c4 ♘e7 8.0-0.

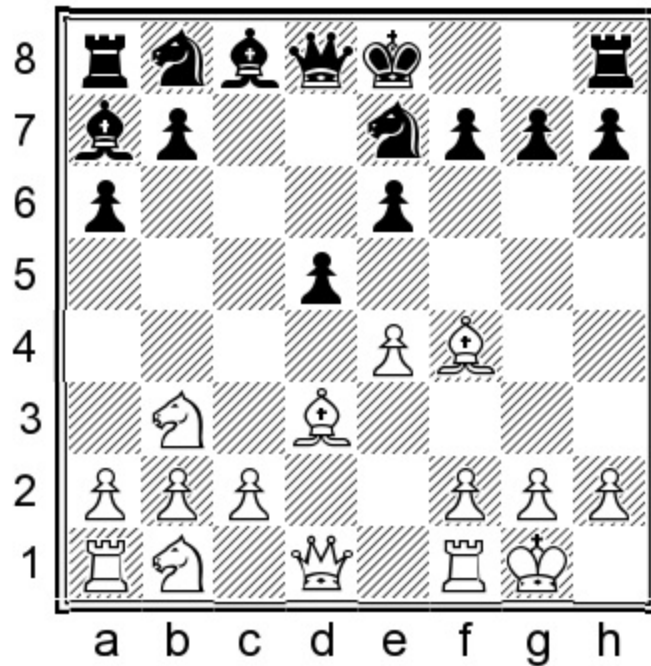
C) 8.♙h1 ♘bc6 9.f4



Position after: 9.f4

This kind of manoeuvre seems to me to be a bit slow, and we will quickly react in the centre. 9...0-0 10.♘c3 d5 11.e5 f6 12.exf6 ♜xf6 ½-½ (16) Leko, P (2630) – Ehlvest, J (2660) Cap d'Agde 1996.

D) 8.♗f4 This looks like a reasonable option for White with the idea of bringing the bishop to d6 paralyzing our centre. But we will not let that happen! 8...d5!

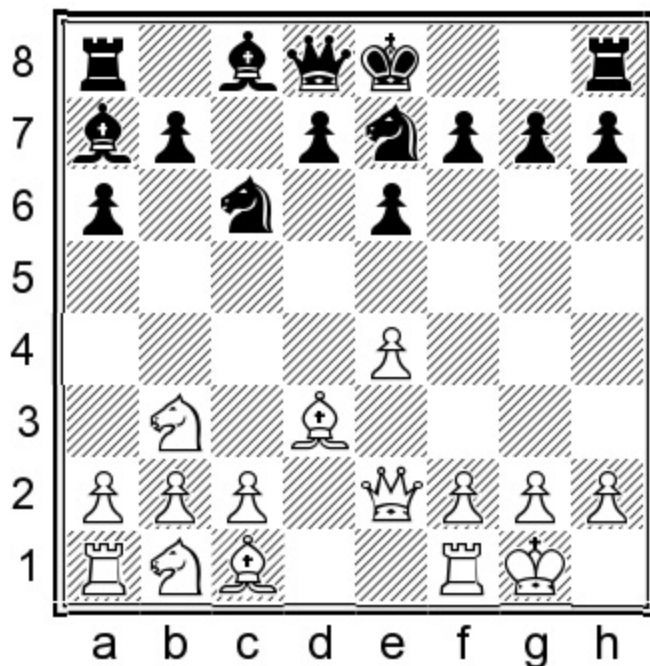


Position after: 8...d5!

9.♘c3 [9.exd5 This is safe for White, but also very easy for us to play. 9...♗xd5 10.♗g3 ♗c6=]

9...d4 10.♘e2 ♘bc6 11.♙g3 e5 12.f4 exf4 13.♗xf4 0-0 14.♚h5 ♘g6!= I do not have much to worry about here even if Black lost in (39) Leko, P (2749) – Rublevsky, S (2677) Odessa 2007.

8...♘bc6



Position after: 8...♘bc6

9.♙e3

The logical follow-up since White has played 8.♚e2.

A) 9.c4 0-0 See the subchapter that deals with 7.c4 ♘e7 8.♚e2 0-0 9.0-0 ♘bc6.

B) 9.♘c3 This line was seen in the subchapter about 7.♘c3 ♘c6 8.0-0.

C) 9.♗h1 This is like 8.♗h1, but the fact that the bishop on d3 has no retreat gives us another option. 9...0-0 10.f4 d5 11.e5 ♘b4≠ Black just takes the bishop pair.

9...0-0

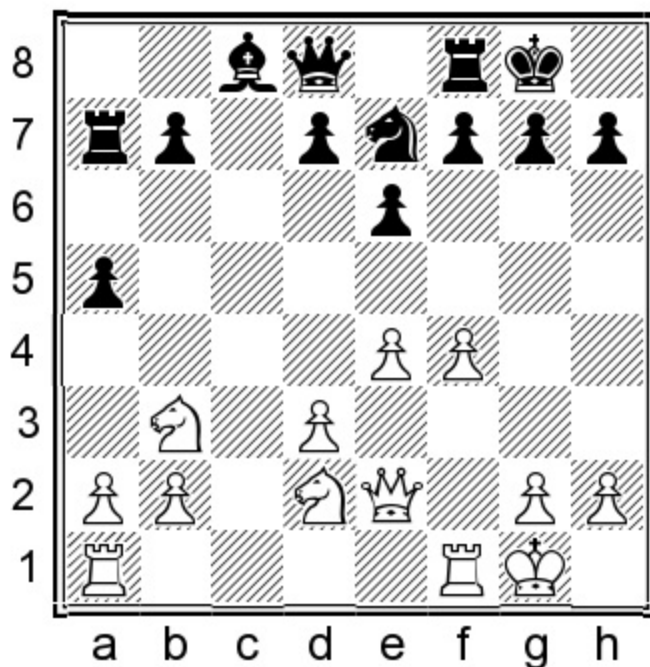
As you probably understand, it is challenging to keep track of the opening thru all the possible transpositions.

10.♙xa7

A) 10.c4 Once again a transposition, this time in the 7.c4 ♘e7 8.0-0 line.

B) 10.♘c3 b5! 11.♞ad1 d6 12.♙xa7 ♞xa7 13.f4 ♞d7↗ It does not look easy for Black to do anything with his centre. We are clearly getting ready to meet e5, and if White plays f5 he gives us the e5-square for the knight.

C) 10.♖1d2!? This position occurred in a rapid game between two of the best players of the world. There are different options for Black but let us see how the game went: 10...♗e5!? 11.♙xa7 ♜xa7 12.f4 ♘xd3 13.cxd3. Of course, White has the centre and more space, but it is absolutely safe for Black on the kingside, and he has a bishop. 13...a5!



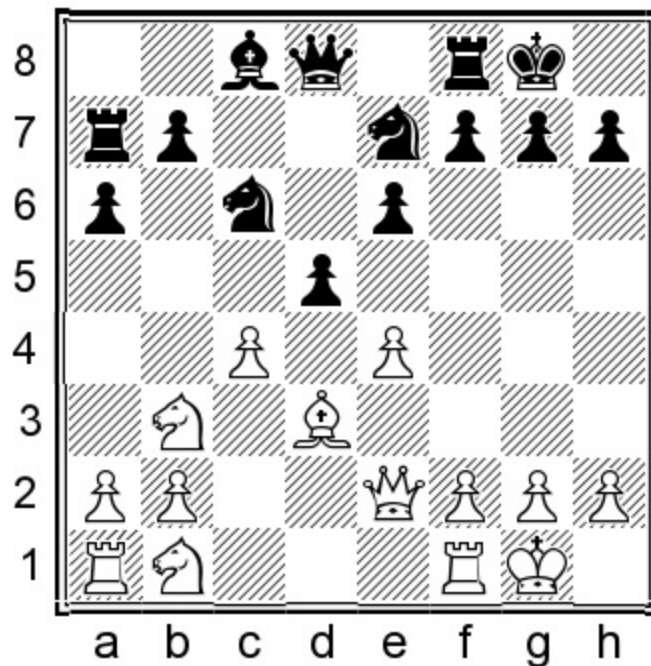
Position after: 13...a5!

Caruana wants to bring his rook into play. 14.♚f2 ♜a6 From there the rook can either come to c6 or defend the kingside through the sixth rank. 15.♗d4 d6 16.♞ac1 [16.f5!? ♗c6! Black has everything under control. 17.♗xc6 ♜xc6 18.fxe6 ♙xe6=] 16...♙d7 17.♗c4 b5 18.♗e3 ♚b6 19.♗f3 ♞aa8= The position soon entered an equal endgame that Caruana eventually lost but his position is fine right now 1-0 (57) Anand, V (2759) – Caruana, F (2816) Leuven 2018.

10...♜xa7 11.c4

11.f4 ♗b4 12.♗c3 ♗xd3 13.cxd3 This is highly similar to Anand – Caruana Leuven 2018 above and analysed in 10.♗1d2. 13...b5! 14.♚e3 ♜c7↗

11...d5!



Position after: 11...d5!

In 2018, this position occurred in two high level games. White scored 1,5/2, but it doesn't mean Black is in trouble.

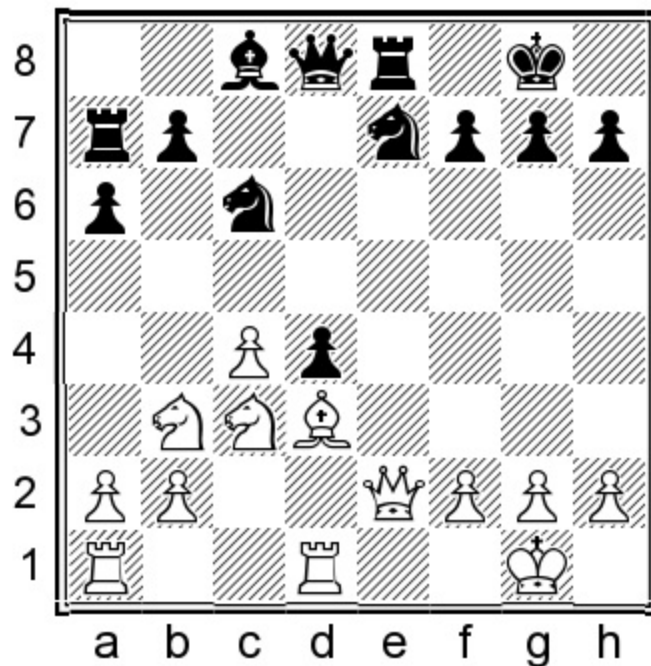
12.exd5 exd5 13.♞d1

Probably the best attempt by White.

13.♞c3 dxc4!?N [13...d4 Contrary to the main line, I am not fond of closing the centre here. 14.♞e4 Also the move 14.♞a4 was a possible improvement for White. 14...♞g6 15.f4!↑ 1-0 (46) Jakovenko, D (2735) – Artemiev, V (2704) Poikovsky 2018.] 14.♞xc4 b5 15.♞fd1 ♞d7 16.♞d3 ♞e8↗ I do not feel that White can create much play as this position is fairly symmetrical.

13...d4!?N

13...♞e8 14.♞c3 d4



Position after: 14...d4

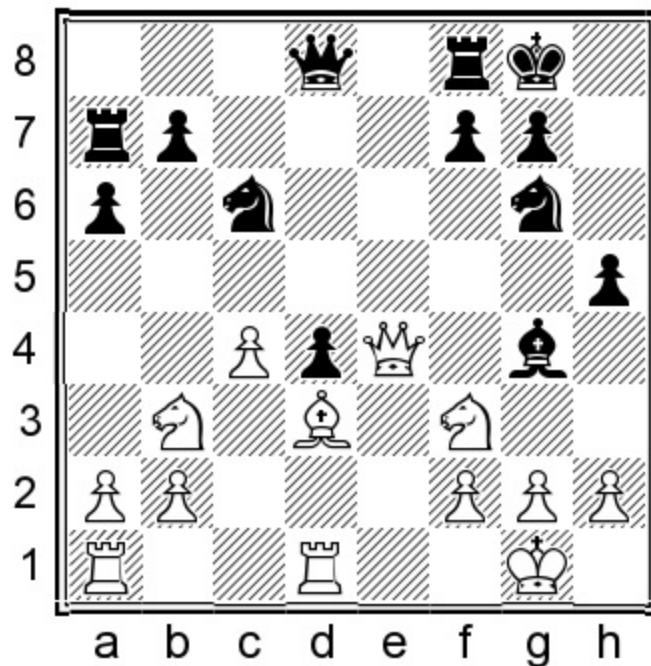
This is what happened in Sethuraman, S (2657) – Yu, Y (2760) ½ – ½ (82) China 2018, but now White has an annoying possibility: 15. ♖c2! h6 16. ♗h7+ ♔h8 17. ♗e4± White will occupy the d5-square and he has chances to grab d4 at some point.

14. ♖1d2 ♗g6 15. ♗f3!

Now we enter a line requiring precision.

15. ♗e4?! f5 16. ♗g3 b6! ♞

15... ♗g4! 16. ♖e4 h5!



Position after: 16...h5!

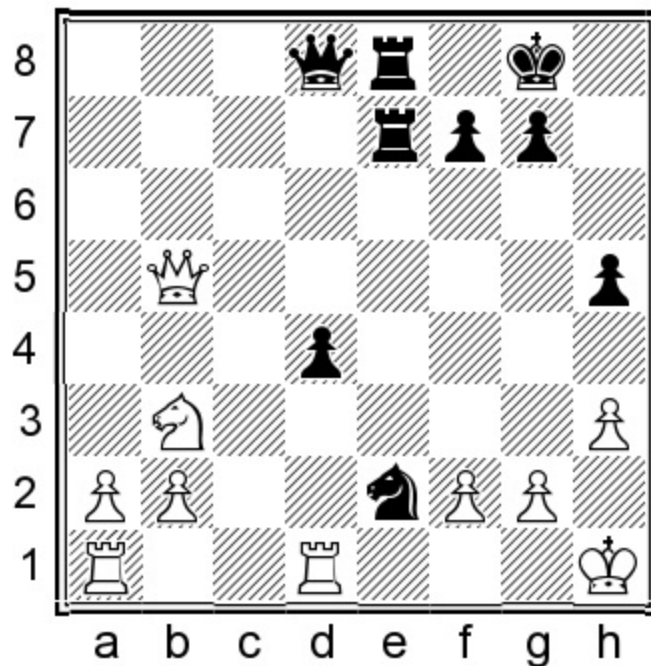
17.h3 ♖e8

This is the point of playing 16...h5, we can gain this important tempo to bring the rook into play.

18.♙d5 ♗xf3 19.♙xf3 ♘ce5 20.♙f5 b5!

An important move to quickly bring the rook into play.

21.cxb5 ♗xd3 22.♙xd3 ♗f4 23.♙f5 ♗e2+ 24.♙h1 axb5 25.♙xb5 ♖ae7



Position after: 25...♖ae7

We have great play with the d-pawn, and on the kingside. I do not think this position will ever occur in a real chess game, but it can give you some ideas for the middlegame!

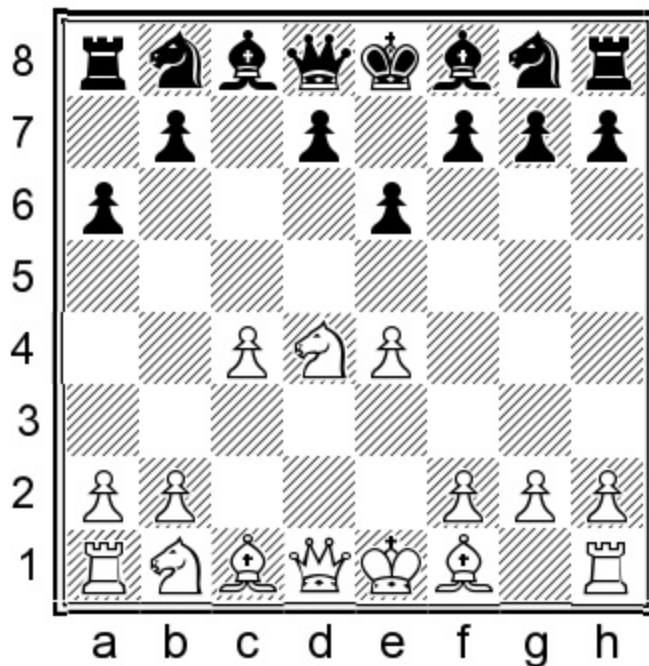
Chapter Conclusion

As you can see this chapter is very demanding for anyone that wants to play the Kan Sicilian. It was the most difficult for me to put together due to the move orders and transpositions and I have tried to be as clear and thorough as possible. If you learn this chapter, then the rest of the book will be easy!

Chapter 2

5.c4

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 a6 5.c4



Chapter Guide

Chapter 2 – 5.c4

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 a6 5.c4 ♗f6

a) 6.--

b) 6.♗c3 ♘b4 7.♙d2, 7.♗c2 & 7.e5

c) 6.♗c3 ♘b4 7.f3, 7.♖c2 & 7.♖f3

d) 6.♗c3 ♘b4 7.♙d3 ♗c6 8.--

e) 6.♗c3 ♘b4 7.♙d3 ♗c6 8.♗xc6 dxc6 9.-- & 9.e5

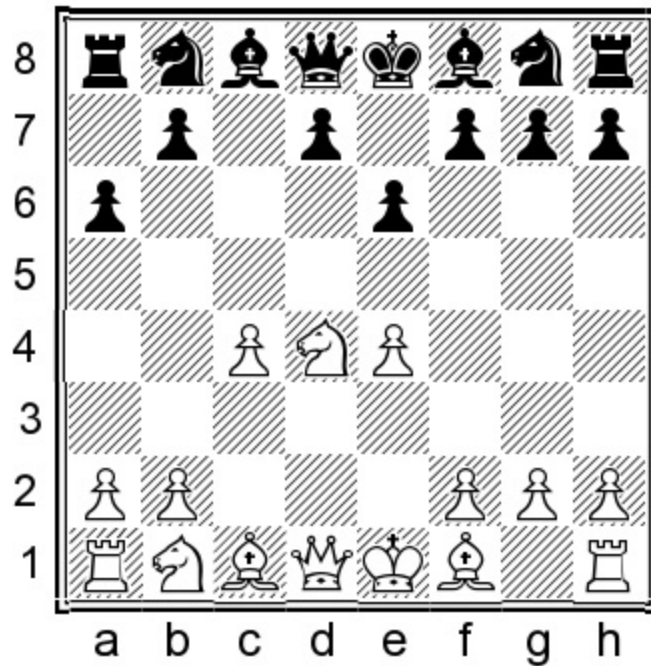
f) 6.♗c3 ♘b4 7.♙d3 ♗c6 8.♗xc6 dxc6 9.0-0

g) 6.♗c3 ♘b4 7.♖d3 0-0 8.♙e2

h) 6.♗c3 ♘b4 7.♖d3 0-0 8.e5

a) 6.--

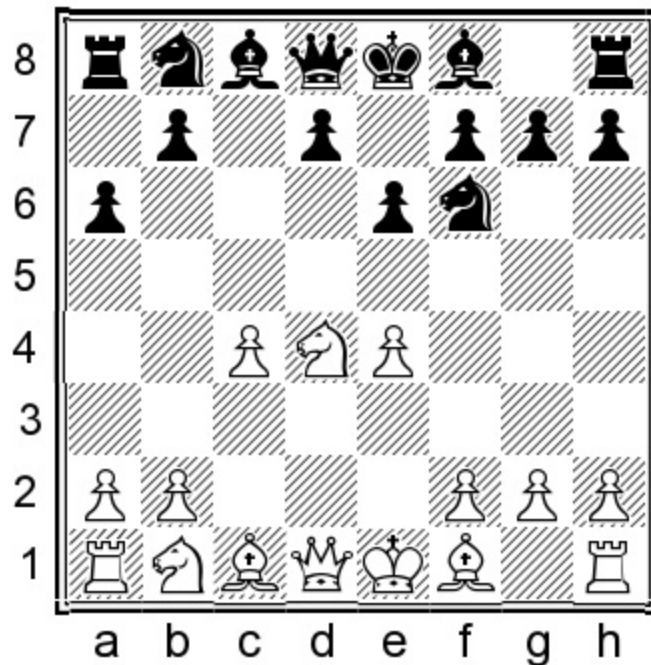
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 a6 5.c4



Position after: 5.c4

I consider this to be one of the main and most important variations against the Kan Sicilian. It is ambitious move aimed at preventing ...b5 while also taking a good grip on the centre. Further, it is a very reliable and solid system against which Black often struggles to breakthrough. In this first subchapter, we will only consider the sidelines on the next move, which usually are quite harmless.

5...♞f6



Position after: 5...♞f6

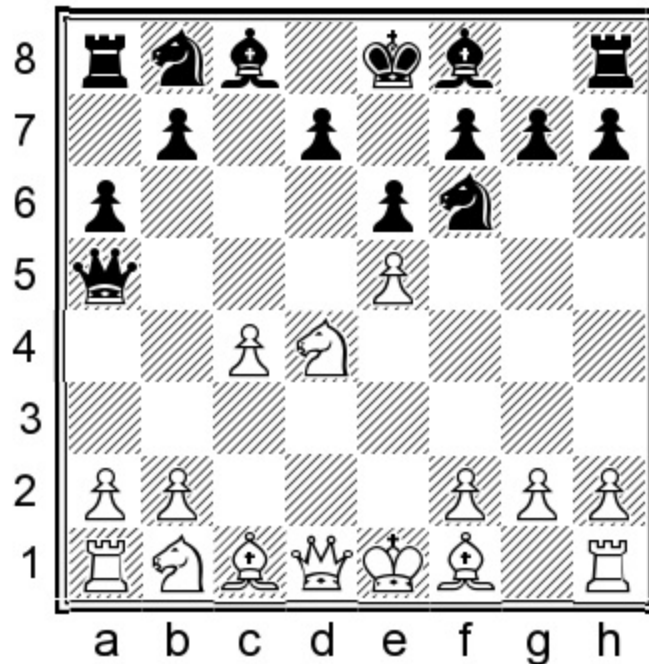
First, we ask White to make an immediate decision about defending his e4-pawn.

6.♙d3

White is trying to avoid the lines where ...♙b4 pins the knight on c3, but he does not protect the knight on d4, and we should play based on this fact.

A) 6.♘c3 This logical move is obviously the main line and will be considered in all of the following subchapters.

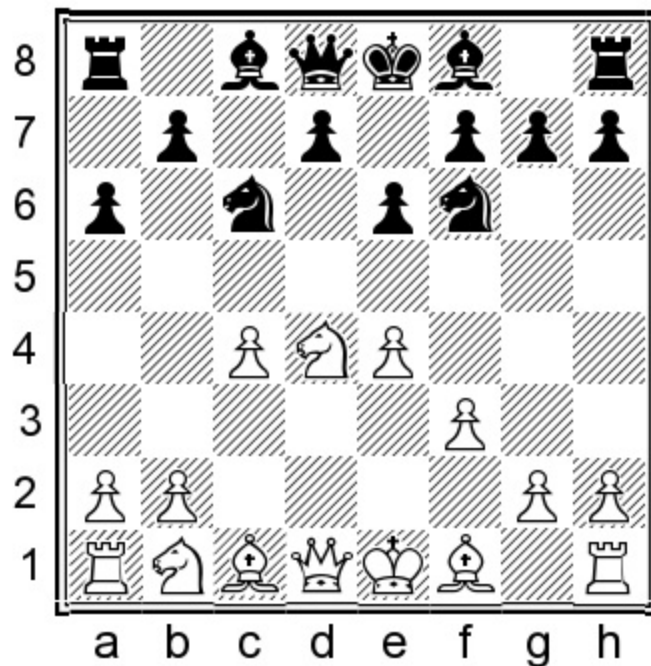
B) 6.e5? It is too soon for this move, but many White players have played it and Black responds with the classical tactic 6...♚a5+! when Black grabs the e5-pawn.



Position after: 6...♚a5+!

7.♘c3 ♚xe5+ 8.♙e2 [8.♙e3 ♙e7 9.♙e2 0-0 10.0-0 ♘c6] 8...♘c6 There are several ways for Black to reach a great position, but I like to challenge the d4-knight immediately while developing a piece. 9.♘f3 ♚c7 10.0-0 ♙e7 11.♙g5 0-0 12.♖c1 h6 13.♙h4 d6 It is like we have reached a typical Scheveningen Sicilian where White is missing his e4-pawn which helps us react in the centre as in Quet, J (1694) – Mirzoev, A (2527) Marseille 2016.

C) 6.f3?! This early move is often a mistake in the Sicilian. The reason is that it weakens the g1-a7 diagonal where the white king is meant to be once, he has castled. The logical reaction is to quickly react in the centre if possible. 6...♘c6

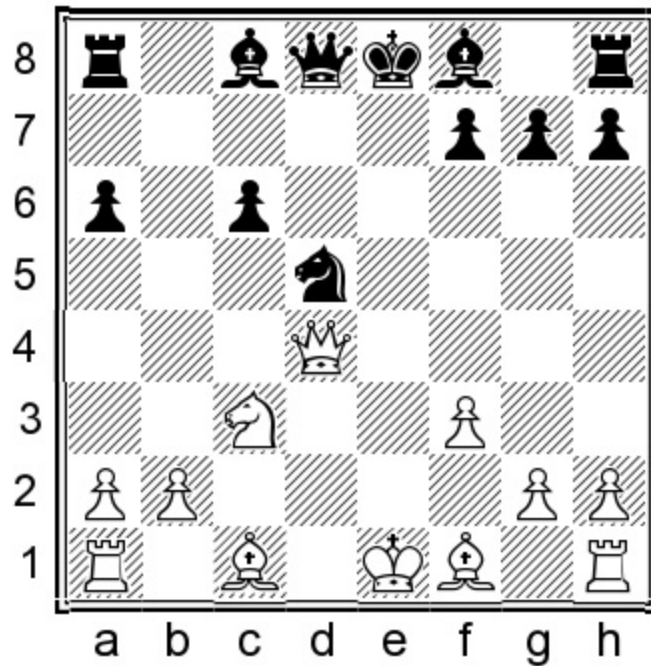


Position after: 6... Nc6

Black intends to follow with ...d5 even if it is already possible to play this move at once.

C1) 7. Qe3 d5! Only rarely has Black gone for ...d5 here but it is quite logical. 8. cxd5 exd5 9. Nc3 [9. exd5? This would already be a catastrophic decision for White. 9... Nxd5 10. Qf2 Qb4+ 11. Nd2 Nxd4 12. Qxd4 0-0-+] 9... Qe7 10. Qe2 Nxd4! 11. Qxd4 dxe4 12. fxe4 0-0 13. 0-0 Qe6 And I already prefer Black's healthy pawn structure while White has an isolated e-pawn and less pawn cover for his king.

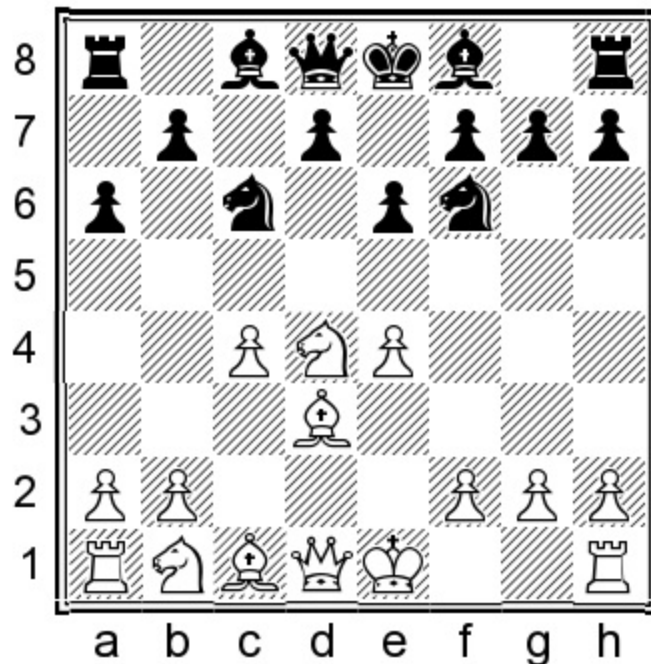
C2) 7. Nc3 d5!N Again, I find it really strange than almost nobody plays this logical move. 8. exd5 exd5 9. cxd5 Nxd5 10. Nxc6 bxc6 11. Qd4!



Position after: 11. ♖d4!

It is vital for White to prevent ...♗c5. 11...♘xc3 12.♙xc3 ♗e7! 13.♗e3 Taking any of the pawns would slow White's development. But just to be sure let us see what happens if he finishes his development. 13...0-0 14.♞d1 ♗h4+ 15.g3 ♗f6 16.♙c5 ♞c7= White has the better pawn structure on the queenside, but he has a long-term kingside problem due to the pawns he already advanced. It always creates weaknesses!

6...♘c6!

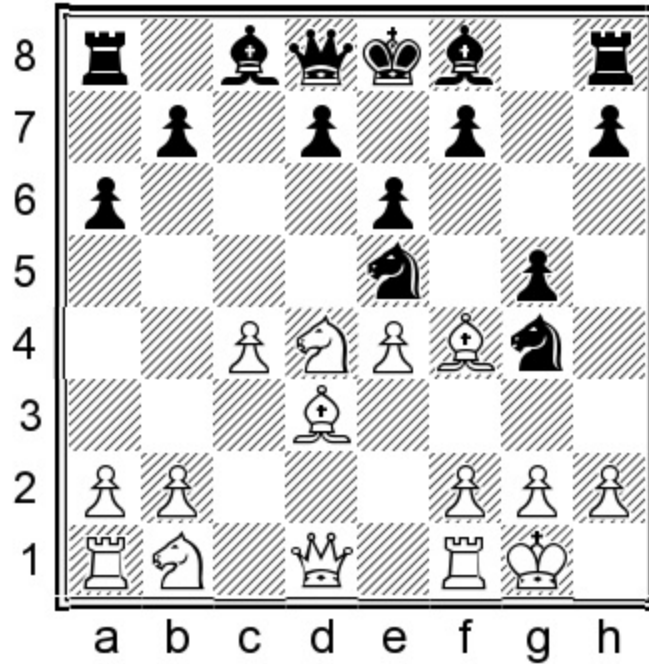


Position after: 6...♞c6!

Black's results with this variation have been impressive.

7.♞xc6

A) 7.♙e3 This is the main alternative, and Black has a strong reply. 7...♞e5! It is a bit slow, but we get the bishop pair. 8.0-0 ♞fg4! 9.♙f4 g5!

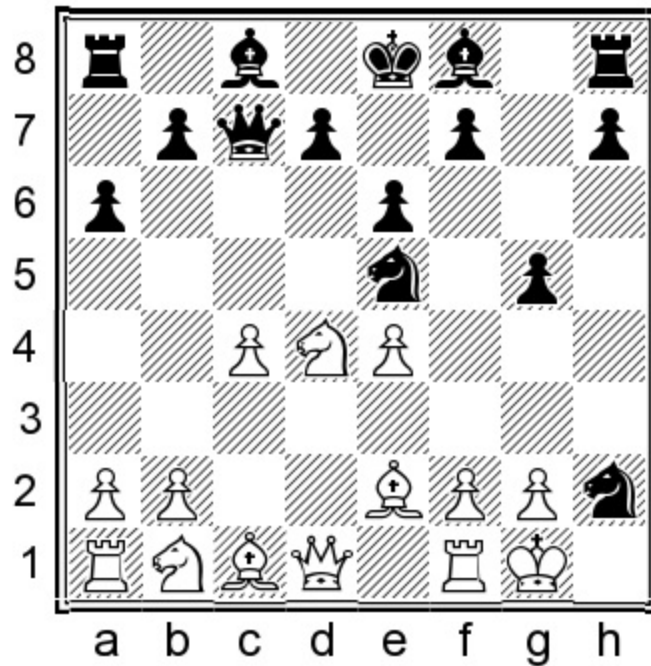


Position after: 9...g5!

A1) 10.♙g3 h5! 11.h3 h4! 12.♙xe5 [12.hxg4 hxg3+] 12...♞xe5 13.♞c3 b6

A2) 10.♙xe5 ♞xe5 11.♞c3 ♙g7 Black has great play on the dark squares.

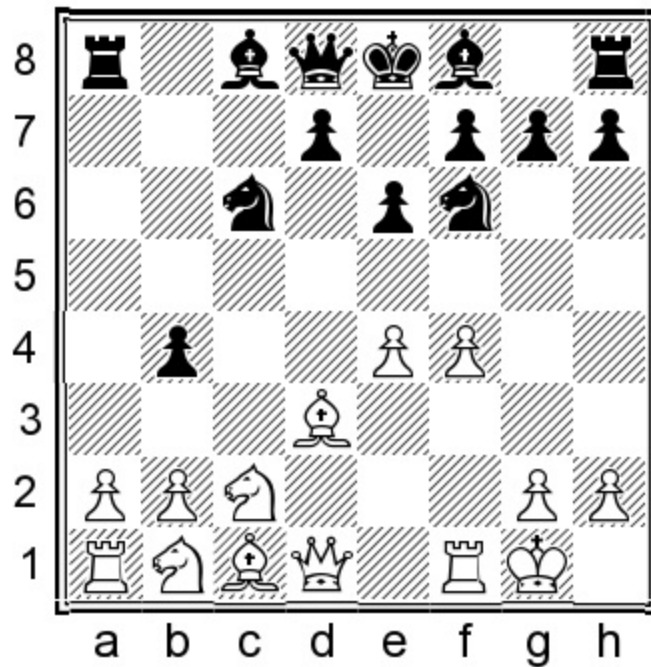
A3) 10.♙c1 ♚c7 11.♙e2 ♞xh2!



Position after: 11... Nc2!

12. Re1 [12. Qxh2?? Nf3+ 13. Qh3 Qh2+ 14. Qg4 Ne5+ 15. Qxg5 Qe7#] 12...h5! 13. Qxg5 Qg8! → Black has great play and won quickly in Perez Bolanos – Maksimenko Lanzarote 2019.

B) 7. Nc2?! b5! 8. cxb5 axb5 9. 0-0 [9. Qxb5? Qa5+ 10. Nc3 Nxe4+] 9...b4 10. f4



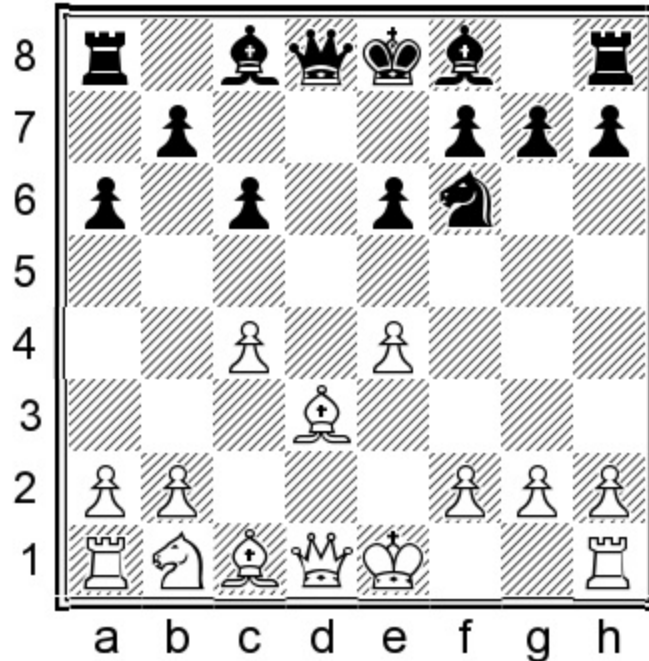
Position after: 10.f4

10... Qc5+ [10...b3!N Even this move was super strong for Black. 11. axb3 Qxa1 12. Nxa1 Qb6+ 13. Qh1 Nb4+ 14. Nc3? A logical way to protect e4 that fails after 14... Nxd3 15. Qxd3 Qa6+]]

11.♔h1 Black played very aggressively with 11...h5 in Lobanov, S (2526) – Damljanovic, B (2495) Skopje 2018, but I prefer the simple 11...d6 12.♘d2 0-0 13.♚e2 ♘b7 Black just has a great position.

C) 7.♘f3 d5! It is quite clear that against this slow play by White, we can react in the centre and open it. Almost nobody tries this, but I simply cannot see any problem. For instance: 8.exd5 exd5 9.0-0 ♘e7 10.cxd5 ♘xd5=

7...dxc6!



Position after: 7...dxc6!

White takes on c6 in the Sicilian we generally take back with the b-pawn, but here it is stronger to take back with the d-pawn to open the d-file.

8.0-0 e5

No strong player has ever played this position as White, and the computer already prefers Black. Let us see why even if we do not examine every possible continuation for White.

9.♘c3

A) 9.♚e2 ♘c5! 10.♘c3 ♘g4 11.♚c2 0-0 This is even worse as we have great control over the d4-square.

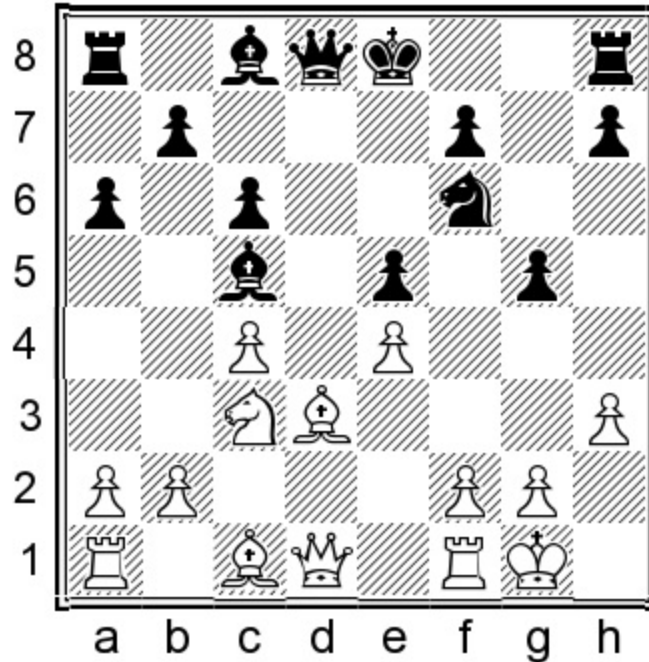
B) 9.♘e3 Preventing ...♘c5 does not work due to 9...♘g4! 10.♘c1 ♘c5 11.h3 ♘f6.

9...♘c5!

We have a strong square on d4 and the bishop on d3 feels really stupid, those are the two main reasons why Black is better.

10.♙g5

10.h3 This is the signal for a strong blow. 10...g5!



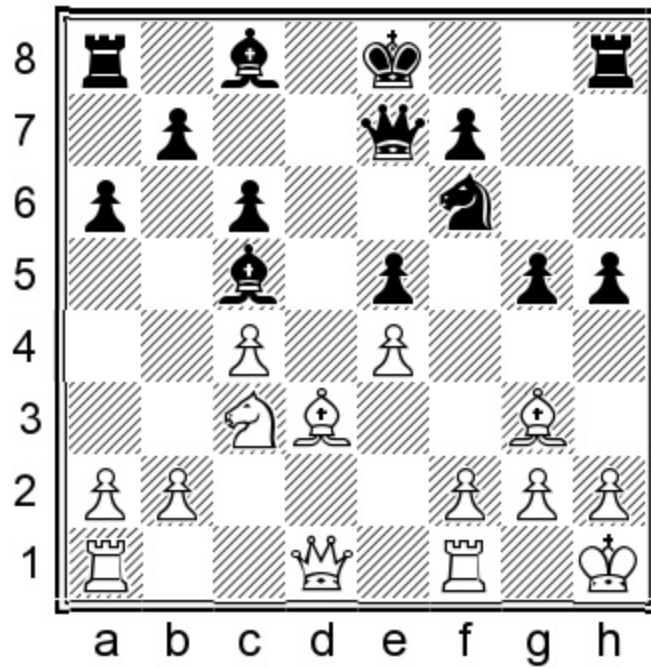
Position after: 10...g5!

11.♙e2 [11.♙xg5? ♖g8 12.♙h4 ♙xh3–+] 11...♚e7 [11...♚xd1!? 12.♖xd1 ♖g8+] 12.♙xg5 ♖g8 13.♙xf6 ♚xf6 14.♙g4 ♚g5 15.♚f3 ♙xg4 16.♚xg4 ♚xg4 17.hxg4 ♖xg4+ Once again the knight on c3 is completely dominated, as in Khakhutashvili, A (1796) – Janjgava, L (2469) Lagodekhi 2016.

10...h6 11.♙h4 g5!?

The centre is stabilized while we have the possibility to launch a kingside attack without fearing any strong reaction by White.

12.♙g3 ♚e7 13.♔h1 h5!



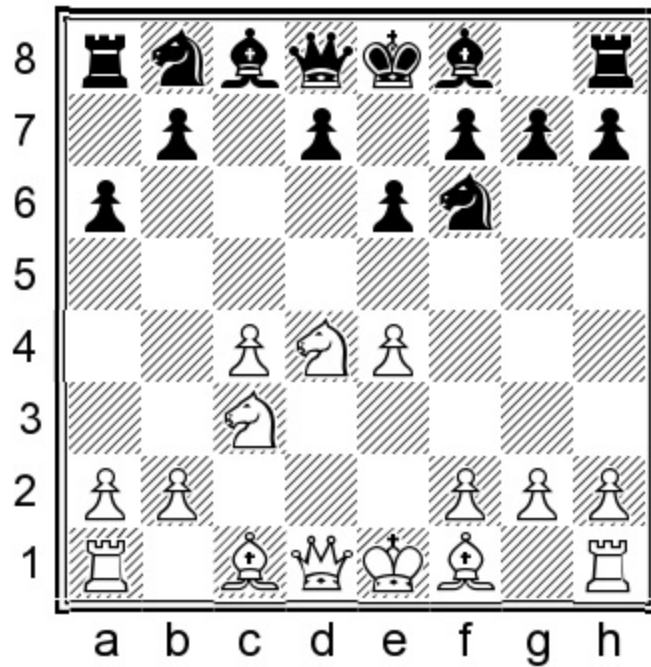
Position after: 13...h5!

14.f3 h4 15.♙f2 ♙xf2 16.♖xf2 g4!±

The threat is ...g3 and Black has great play, with no counterplay for White.

b) 6.♘c3 ♙b4 7.♙d2, 7.♘c2 & 7.e5

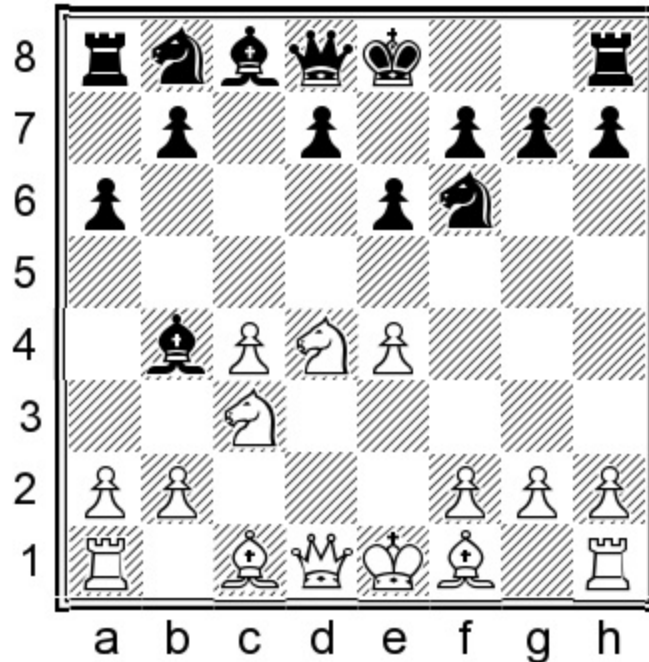
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.c4 ♘f6 6.♘c3



Position after: 6. ♖c3

This is clearly the main move here. White invites his opponent to come to b4 and pin his knight. His idea is basically that if Black takes on c3 at any moment he will have great compensation on the dark squares for the potentially weak pawn structure.

6... ♗b4!?



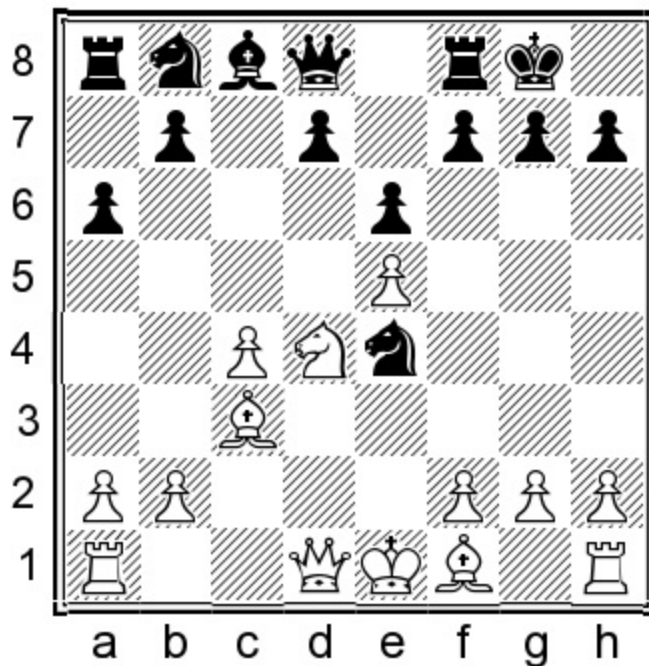
Position after: 6... ♗b4!?

Now White has a wild range of choices. In this subchapter we will consider logical moves that theory does not favour. What do these moves all have in common? They do not defend the pawn on e4.

7.e5?!

With this move it appears that White does not care about the intrusion of the black knight, but he should.

A) 7. ♗d2 This sideline is not really played anymore, but it used to have its adepts. 7...0-0 8.e5 ♗xc3 9. ♗xc3 ♖e4

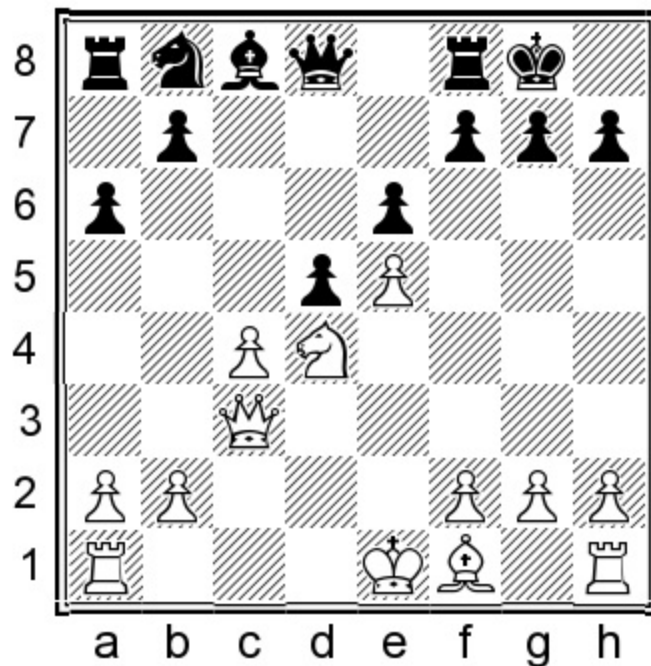


Position after: 9...Nxe4

This is actually funny. This line used to be played 50 years ago, by the greats such as Tal, Korchnoi or Boleslavski. Then it was completely forgotten until Leinier Dominguez brought it back from the dead in 2011, and it has appeared a couple of times after that, and then it went back to the grave once again.

A1) 10. Qb4 d6! Of course, we react in the centre, and the threat is now 11...Nc6. 11. Qe2 Qb6 12. Nc2 Nc6 13. a3 This occurred a while ago in the game Kortschnoj, V – Furman, S Leningrad 1957. The game continuation can be improved with 13...a5!N 14. Qxd6 Nxd6 15. exd6 Qxb2 16. Qd2 Rd8 Black has the healthier pawn structure and should claim a slight edge.

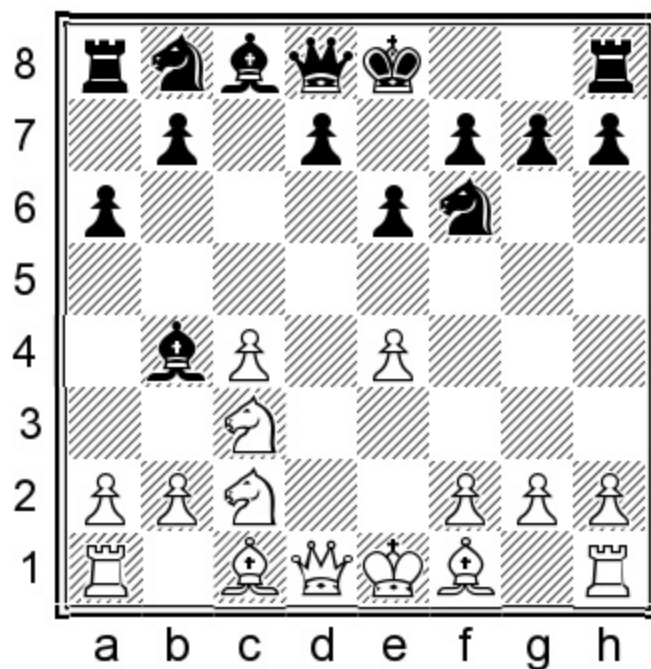
A2) 10. Qc2 Nxc3! [10...d5 Occurred in Tal, M – Jansa, V Prague 1960 but 11. Qb4!N 11...Re8 12. 0-0-0 might place Black in some trouble.] 11. Qxc3 d5



Position after: 11...d5

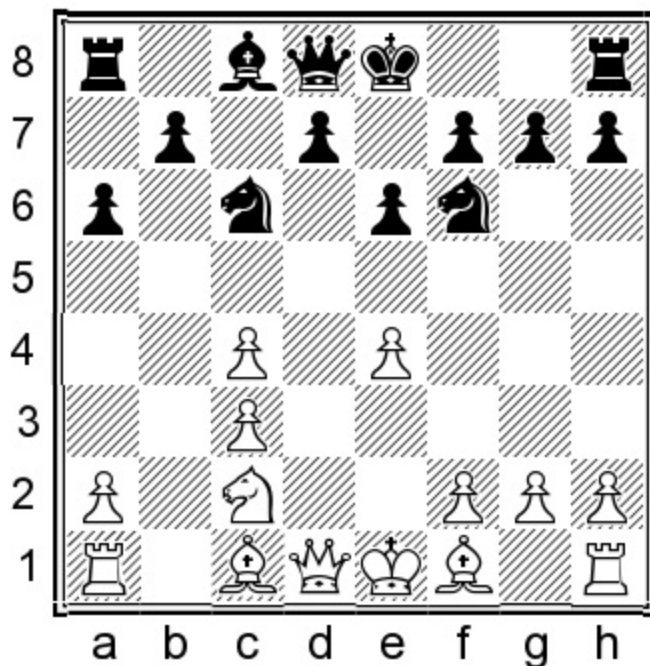
This is the safest way. 12.♖d1 [12.exd6 ♔xd6 13.♙d3 e5 14.♘c2 ♘c6⇒] 12...♘c6 13.cxd5 [13.♘xc6 bxc6 14.♙e2 a5 15.0-0 ♙a6=] 13...exd5 14.♘xc6 bxc6 White tends to have the better pawn structure, but he lacks a few developing moves to be able to claim an advantage. 15.♔xc6 ♔a5+ 16.♔c3 ♔xa2= All this occurred in the game Dominguez Perez, L (2726) – Ivanchuk, V (2776) Havana 2011.

B) 7.♘c2



Position after: 7.♘c2

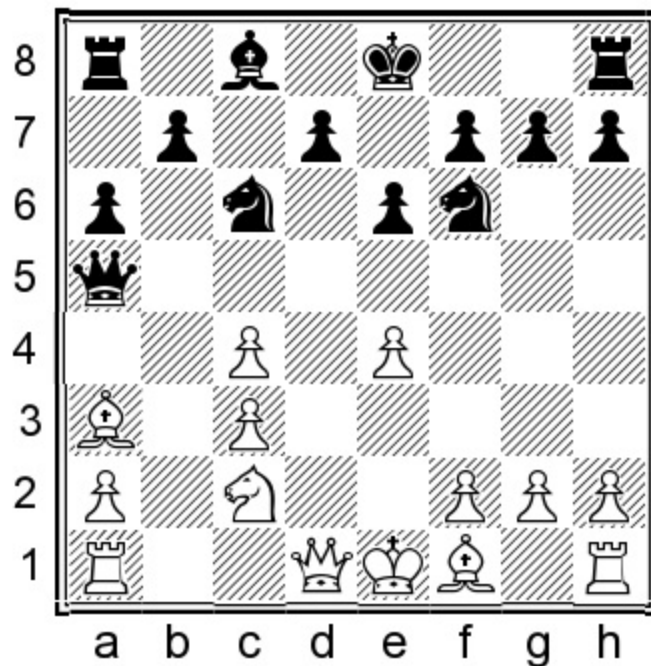
Recently a few strong players have tried this as it forces Black to take and White wants to take advantage of the dark squares. I think we should treat this line with more respect than the other two in this subchapter. 7...♙xc3+ Of course if we are invited to, we have to take the knight. 8.bxc3 ♘c6! [8...♘xe4? This would be far from a good idea because of 9.♚g4! ♘f6 10.♚xg7 ♖g8 11.♚h6± when Black will struggle to find a good spot for his king for the rest of the game.]



Position after: 8...♘c6!

B1) 9.♙d3 This is a transposition into 7.♙d3 ♘c6 8.♘c2 ♙xc3+ 9.bxc3 which will be analysed in the 5th subchapter.

B2) 9.♙a3 ♚a5!N

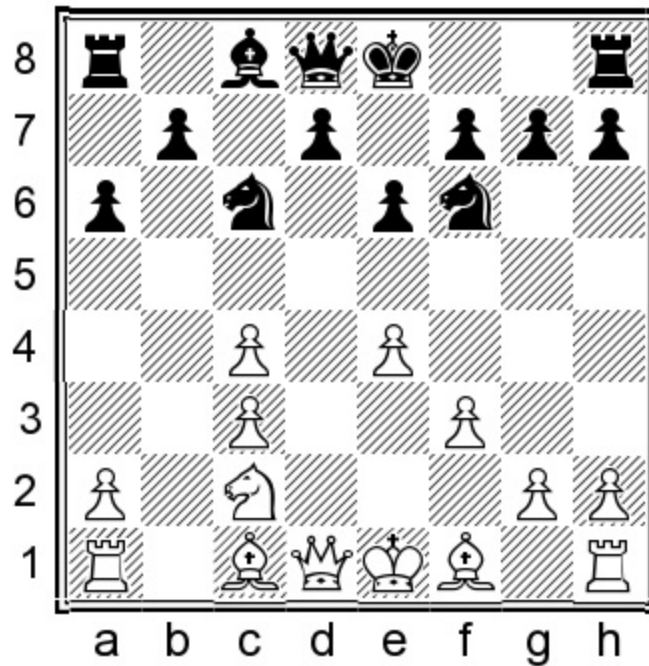


Position after: 9... ♔a5!N

This logical challenging move is a novelty. 10. ♔d3 d5! 11. ♕e2! [11. exd5 exd5 12. cxd5 ♖xd5 13. ♕e2 ♕e6 14. 0-0 ♗f4 15. ♔e3 ♗xe2+ 16. ♔xe2 0-0-0] 11... ♗xe4 12. cxd5 exd5 13. 0-0 ♕e6 14. ♖ab1 b5= White has some compensation, but it is still a pawn for Black.

B3) 9. ♔d3 d5! 10. cxd5 exd5 11. exd5 ♔xd5 I really doubt Black can experience any problem in this endgame with the more favorable pawn structure against the bishop pair. 12. ♕a3 ♕e6 13. ♔xd5 ♗xd5 14. c4 ♗b6 15. 0-0-0 It was all seen in the game Almasi, I (2380) – Horvath, J (2520) Budapest 1994, and now, I prefer: 15... ♖d8 16. ♕e2 ♗xc4.

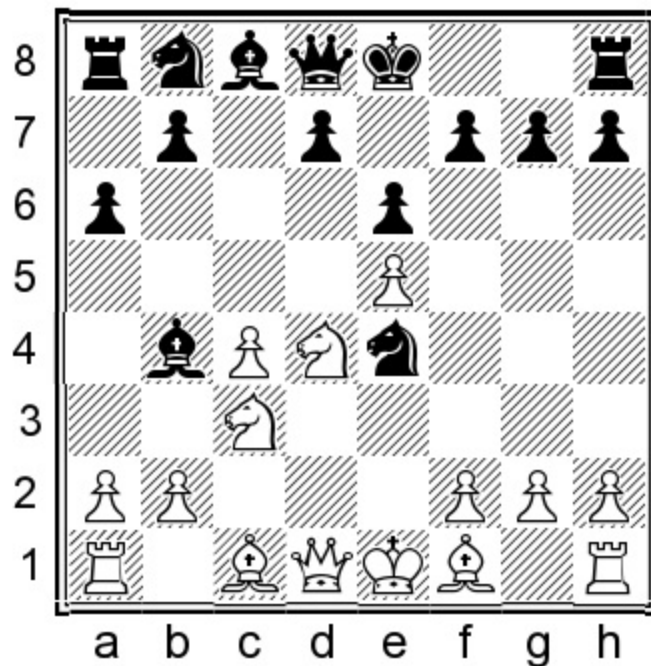
B4) 9. f3



Position after: 9.f3

As I already said, I dislike this kind of approach for White as I find it to be too weakening. 9...d5! And when your opponent weakens the centre you may want to open the centre. 10.exd5 exd5 11.cxd5 ♖xd5 12.c4 ♜e7+ 13.♔f2! [13.♙e2? ♜c3 14.♜d3 ♜xe2+ 15.♜xe2+ ♜xe2 16.♔xe2 ♙e6+] 13...♜c5+ 14.♜e3 ♜xe3 15.♙xe3 ♜e7= It is true the bishop pair in an open position compensates for the weak pawn structure and the exposed king, but it cannot be more than equality for White.

7...♜e4!



Position after: 7... Nxe4!

8. Qg4

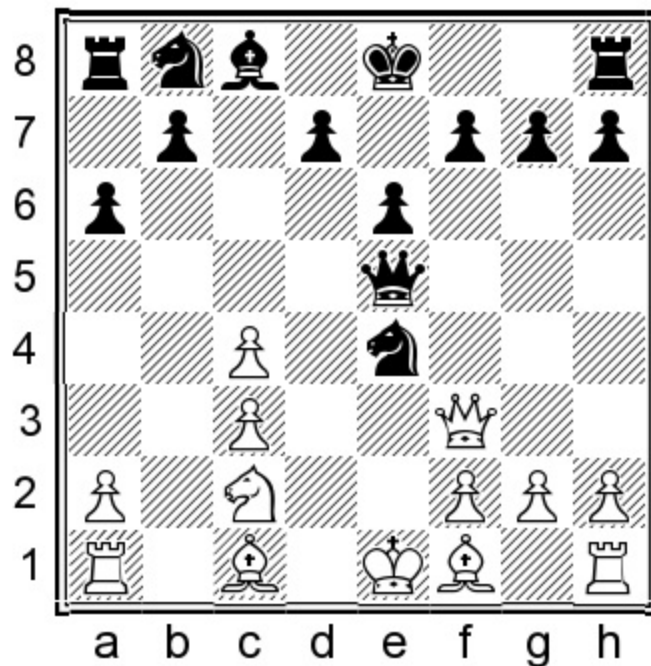
The most critical of White's choices.

A) 8. Qd2 Qxc3 9. bxc3 Nxd2 10. Qxd2 d6! This just cannot be good for White as Black has managed to damage White's pawn structure.

B) 8. Qf3 This was tried once in a high-level game, and even if White won, Black responded with the strong 8... Qa5!

B1) 9. Qxe4 Qxc3+ 10. Qd1 [10. bxc3? Qxc3+ 11. Qd1 Qxa1 12. Qd3 Nc6+] 10... Qxd4 11. Qxd4 Nc6 This simply cannot be good for White.

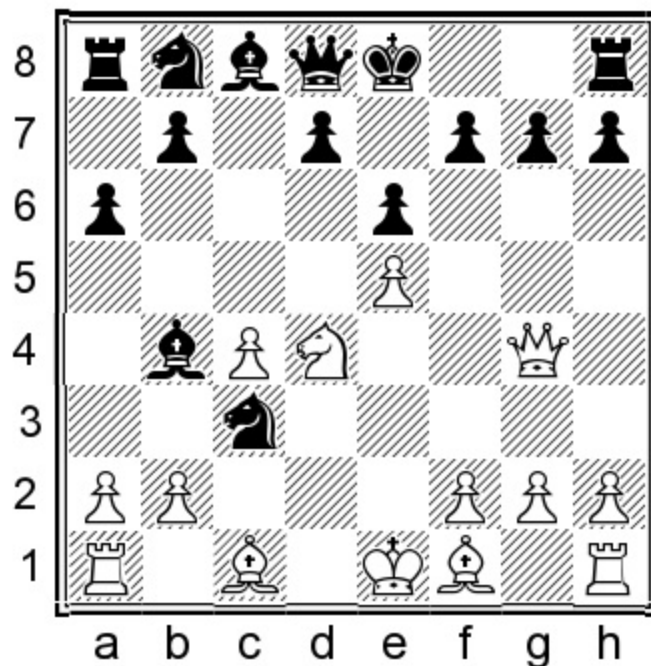
B2) 9. Nc2 Qxc3+ 10. bxc3 Qxe5



Position after: 10... ♕xe5

[10... ♖xc3! This was also strong, with the threat of taking on e5. 11. ♗e3 ♘e4+ 12. ♔e2 d5+] 11. ♗f4 ♕xc3+ 12. ♗xc3 ♘xc3 13. ♗e5 ♘a4 14. ♗xg7 ♖g8 15. ♗h6 d6+ And Black had a healthy extra-pawn, even if he eventually ended up losing in Jumabayev, R (2525) – Ivanchuk, V (2769) Astana 2012, 1-0 (25).

8... ♖xc3!



Position after: 8... ♖xc3!

9.a3

This is the only challenging move.

A) 9. ♖xg7?? ♜a4+ 10. ♔e2 ♜f8 11. ♙h6 ♜c6–+ White has nothing for the piece, the rook on f8 is protected.

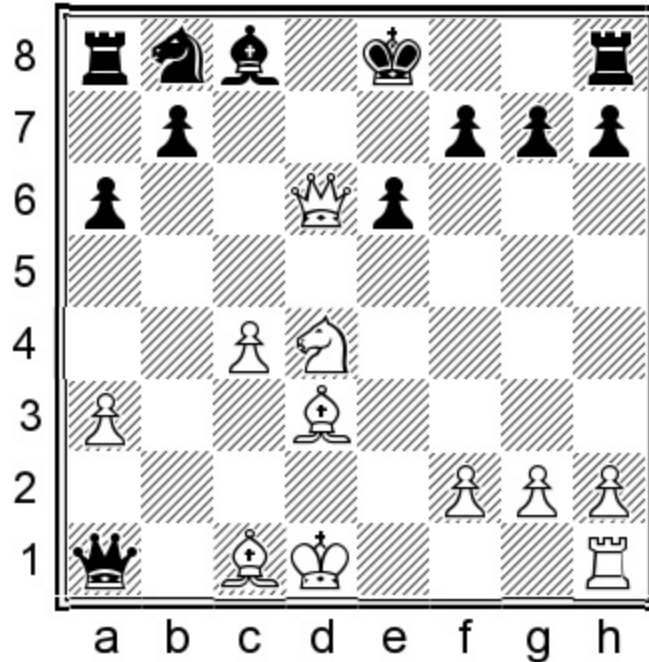
B) 9. ♙d2? ♜xa2 10. ♜xa2 ♙xd2+ 11. ♔xd2 0-0–+

9... ♙f8!

9... ♙a5?? 10. ♖xg7 ♜f8 11. ♙h6+– This time the rook on f8 is not protected.

10.bxc3 d6!

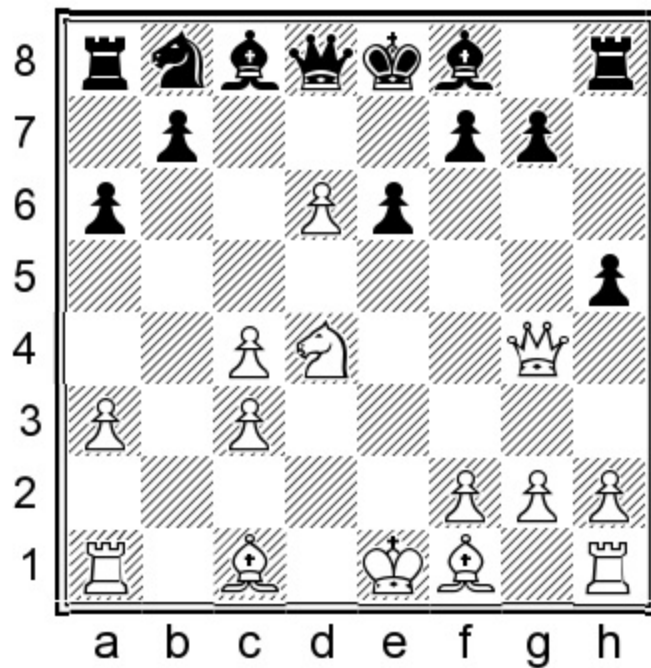
10... ♖a5 This is interesting too, but the following line is clearly more complicated. 11. ♖g3 d6 12. exd6 ♙xd6 13. ♖xd6 ♖xc3+ 14. ♔d1 ♖xa1 15. ♙d3∞



Position after: 15. ♙d3∞

White has decent compensation for the exchange. While the position is extremely complicated the computer just shows equality!

11.exd6 h5!N



Position after: 11...h5!N

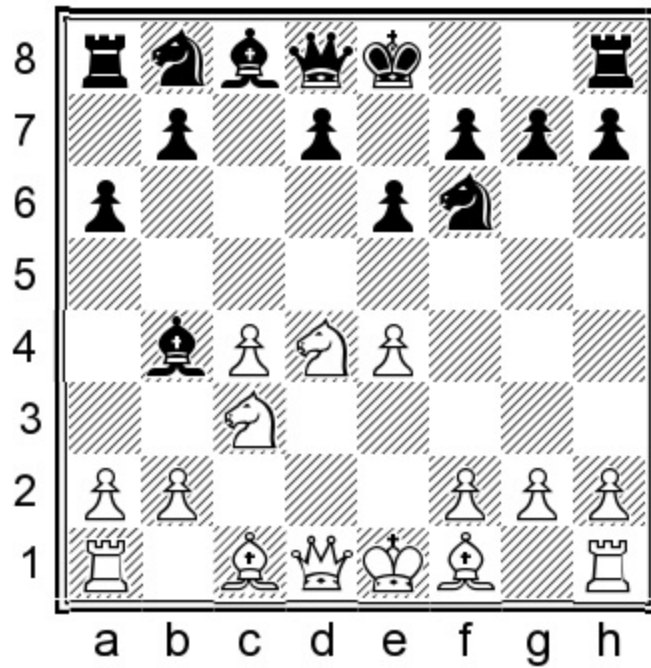
I have previously seen this idea in the Alapin variation, and it looks like an improvement here.

12. ♖g3 h4 13. ♕e3 ♗xd6

I simply like Black's bishop pair here.

c) 6. ♘c3 ♗b4 7. f3, 7. ♕c2 & 7. ♕f3

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 a6 5. c4 ♘f6 6. ♘c3 ♗b4!?



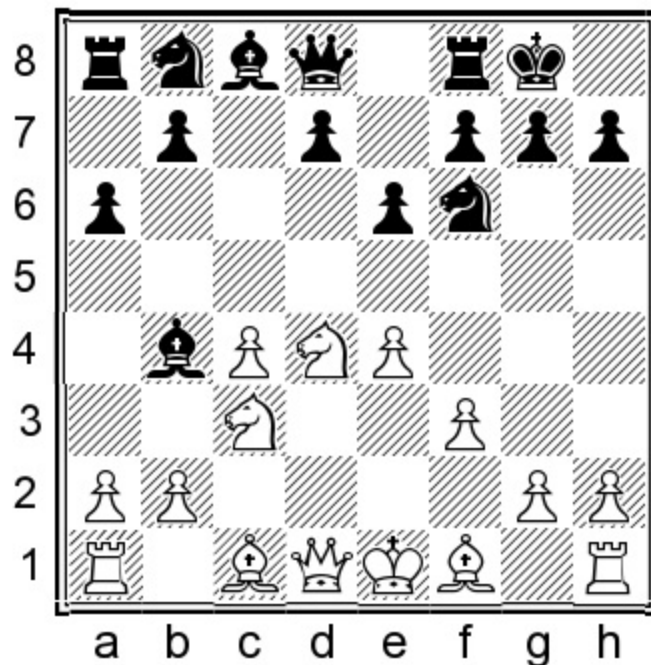
Position after: 6...♔b4!?

Now we will have a look at moves that directly defend the pawn on e4.

7.♔c2

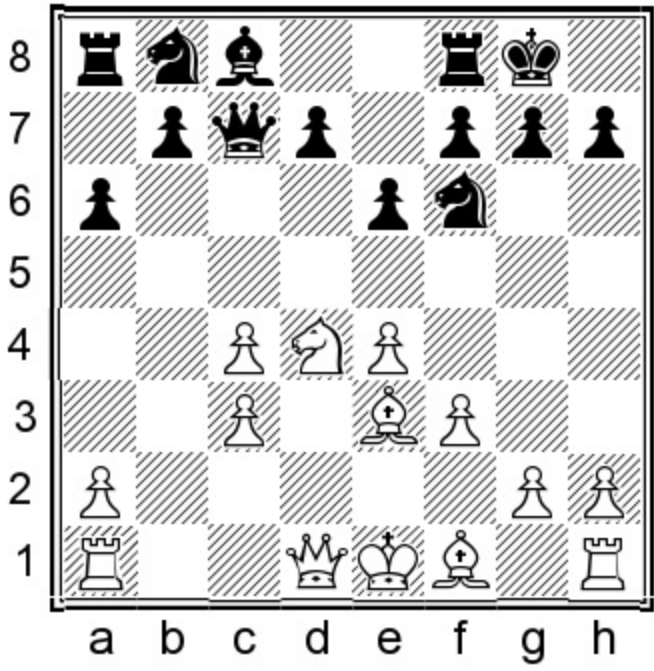
It's more or less in the same spirit as 7.♔f3 as it protects both c3 and e4. Let's see also other option.

A) 7.f3 First of all, what happens after this move? 7...0-0



Position after: 7...0-0

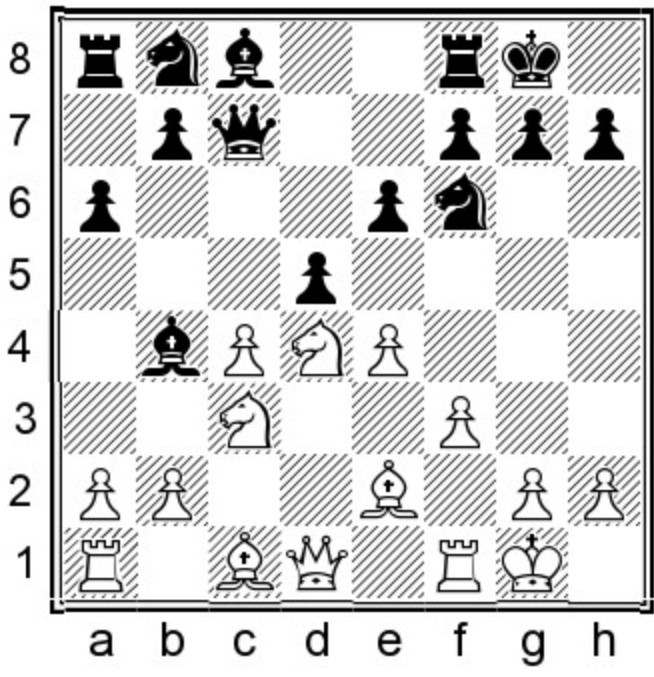
A1) 8. ♘e3 Covering the dark squares makes sense but the computer finds a precise move-order.
 8... ♙xc3+ [8... ♚c7 This would allow moves that defends the knight on c3 like 9. ♖c1±] 9. bxc3
 ♚c7!N



Position after: 9... ♚c7!N

10. ♘e2?! And now this logical move is met with 10... d5 11. cxd5 exd5 12. 0-0 [12. e5 ♚xe5 13. ♚d2 ♖e8 14. ♘f4 ♚e7 15. 0-0 ♘c6±]

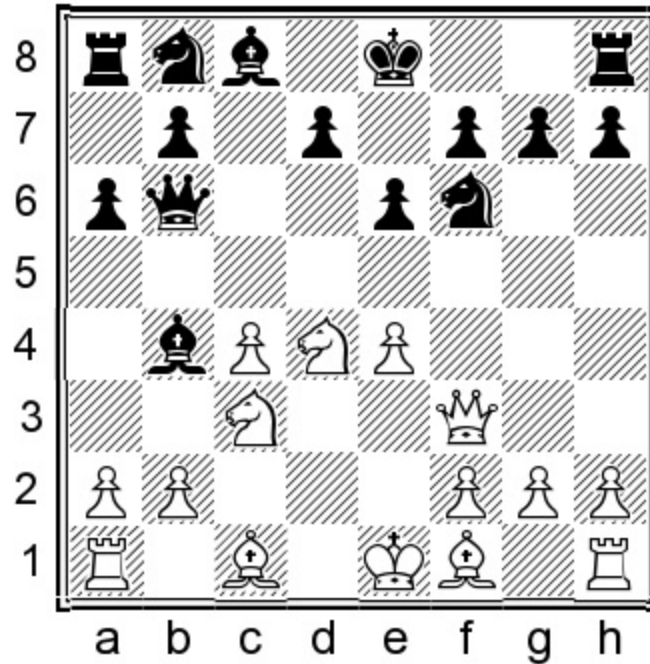
A2) 8. ♘e2 ♚c7 9. 0-0 d5!?



Position after: 9...d5!?

I am trying to show the most forcing lines but there are also calmer continuations as well. 10.cxd5 ♕xc3 11.bxc3 exd5 12.♕g5! ♖bd7 13.♗f5 dxe4 14.♘d4 ♚e5 15.♙xf6 ♗xf6 16.fxe4 ♘e5= White has some activity but Black is fine.

B) 7.♙f3 ♗b6!

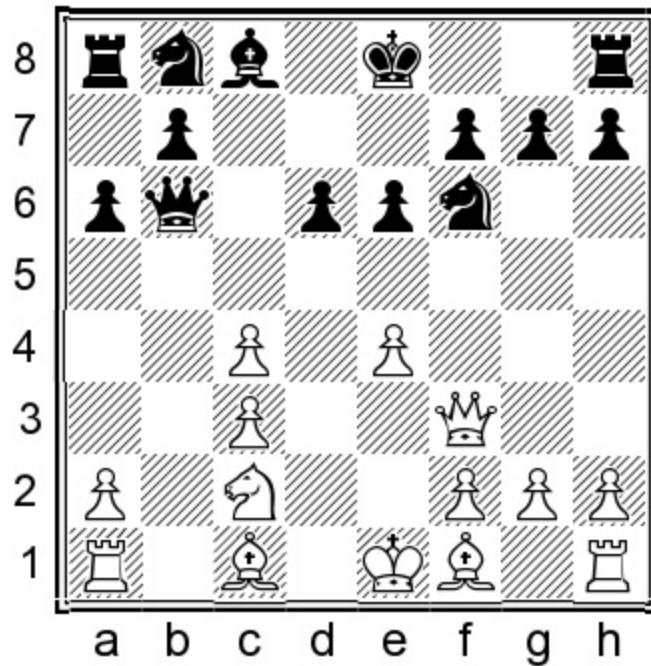


Position after: 7...♗b6!

I must confess that this is a computer move. Since it has rarely been played the idea remains new and deserves to be played!

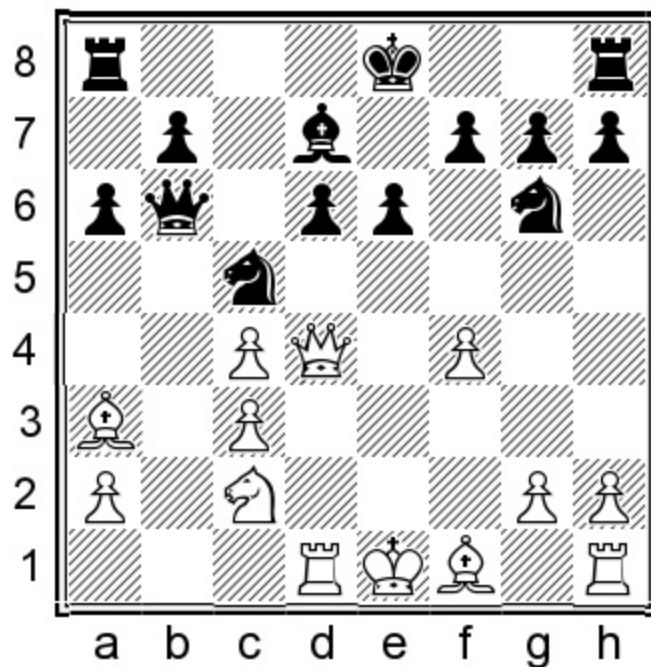
B1) 8.♕e3!?N 8...♕xc3+ 9.bxc3 ♗a5 10.♖c1 d6 11.♕e2 0-0 12.0-0 [12.g4!? It is an interesting try to complicate the game with an early kingside attack. 12...♘bd7 13.g5 ♘e5 14.♗g2 ♘e8 15.f4 ♘g6 16.0-0 e5!↔] 12...♘bd7 13.♖fd1 ♘e5 14.♗f4 ♕d7= I believe Black is fine here.

B2) 8.♘c2 This is a logical move and the only one that has been played to date. 8...♕xc3+ 9.bxc3 [9.♗xc3?! ♘xe4↗ 10.♗xg7?! ♗xf2+ 11.♘d1 ♗f6! 12.♗xf6 ♘xf6↗] 9...d6



Position after: 9...d6

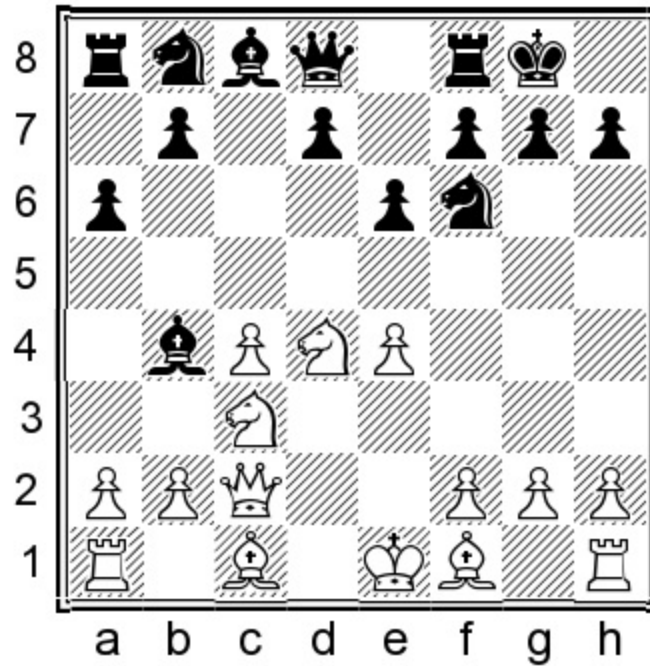
10.♔a3 [10.♔h6!? 0-0 11.♖g3 ♘e8 12.♕g5 f6! It is necessary to prevent 13.♕e7. 13.♕c1 ♘d7=. We had to play a few weird moves as White's plan was really slow.] 10...♘bd7 11.♞d1 was Tanca, T (2089) – Poor, S (2179) Budapest 2019, after 11...♘c5!N 12.♗e3!? ♔d7! looks like the strongest and now Black may continue with: [12...♘fxe4 13.f3 ♘f6 14.♗d4] 13.e5 ♘g4! 14.♗d4 ♘xe5 15.f4 [15.♗xd6?! ♗xd6 16.♞xd6 ♘e4 17.♞d4 ♘xc3] 15...♘g6



Position after: 15...♘g6

16. ♖xd6 ♗xd6 17. ♝xd6 ♞e4 18. ♝d4 f5. Clearly the knight on d4 compensates for the bishop pair, and we have the better pawn structure.

7...0-0!?

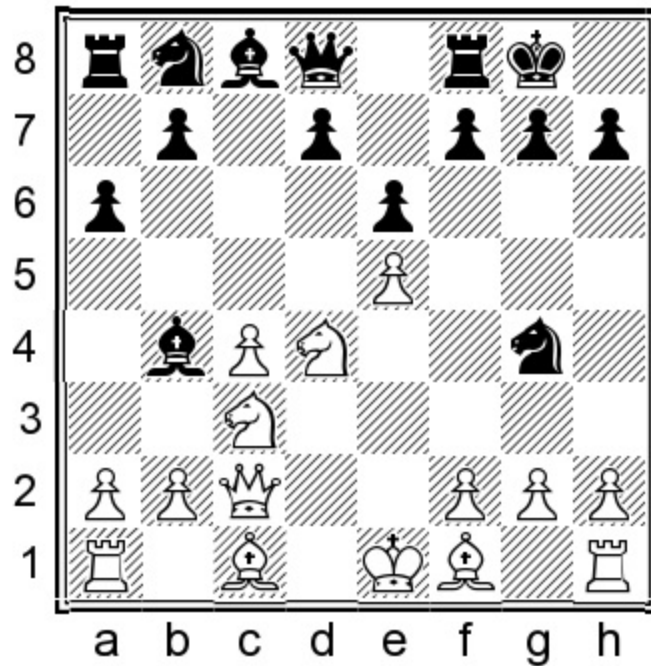


Position after: 7...0-0!?

Among Black's options castling is the most flexible which leaves our options open.

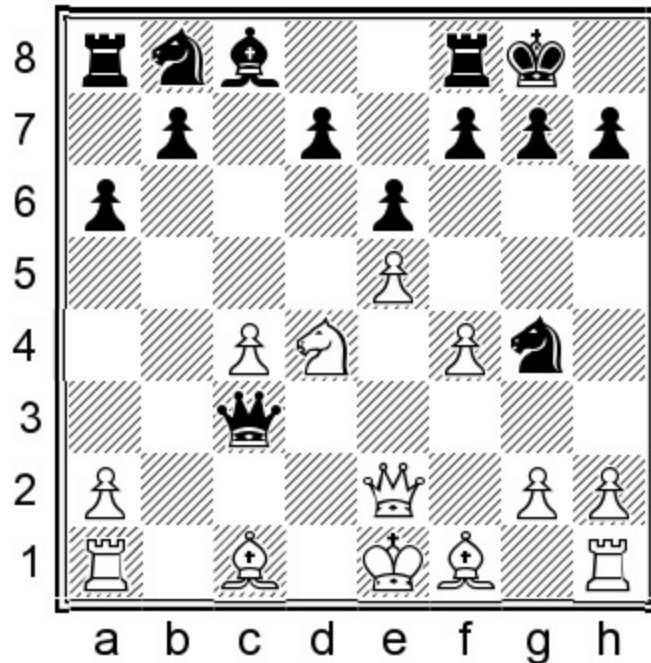
8. ♙d3

A) 8.e5! Concrete and challenging. 8... ♞g4



Position after: 8... Nf4

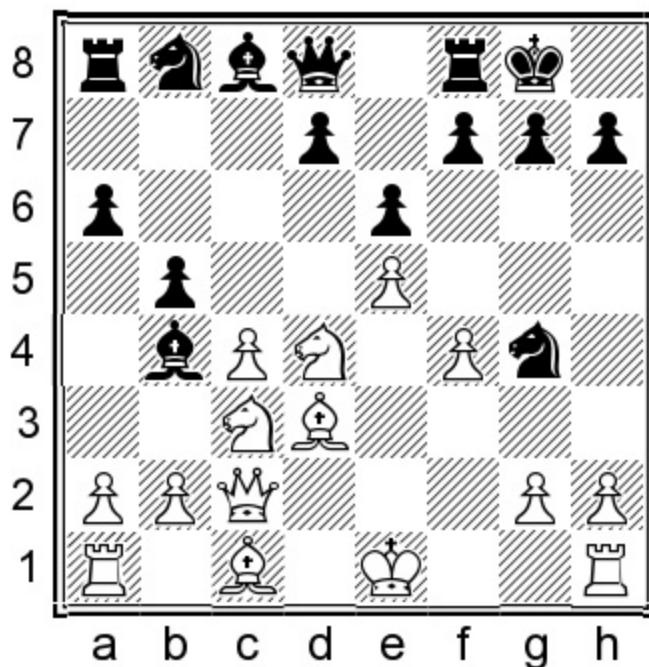
A1) 9. ♖e2!? N This is a computer conception, and you will see a few moves that would be difficult for a human to play. 9... ♗a5! Attacking c3 and e5! 10. f4! ♕xc3+ 11. bxc3 ♖xc3+



Position after: 11... ♖xc3+

12. ♖d2! ♖xd2+ [12... ♖xa1?? 13. ♖b3 ♖b1 14. ♕d3+-] 13. ♕xd2 f6! 14. h3 fxe5 15. hxg4 exd4 16. ♕d3= And White is temporarily two pawns down, but he has great bishops. It should be a balanced endgame, interesting for both sides.

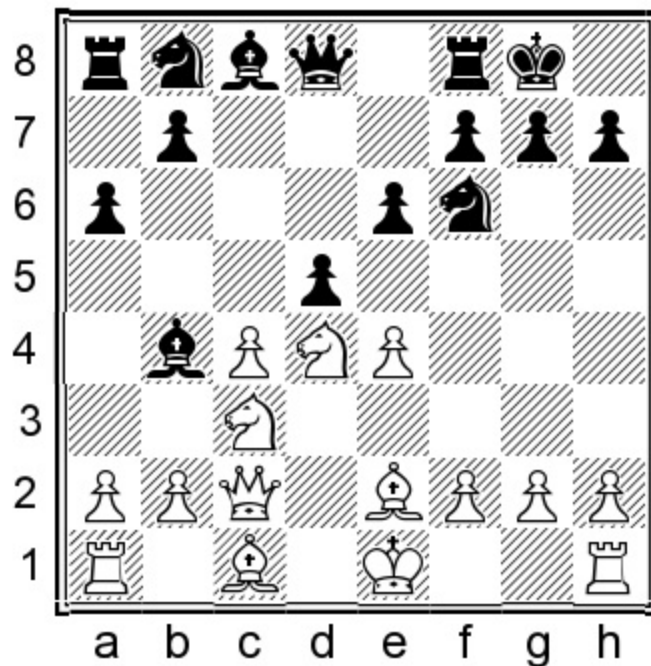
A2) 9.f4?! is compromising! This is the only move that was played here, but there might be another option. 9...b5!N Gives really active play! [9...d6!/? This is the logical move. 10.♘f3 dxe5 11.h3 ♘h6 12.fxe5 ♘f5 13.a3∞ This was played twice by GM Ninov, with decent results for White.] 10.♙d3!



Position after: 10.♙d3!

[10.cxb5? ♙c5 It is incredibly hard for White to hold since it looks too dangerous to move the knight and abandon the f2-square. 11.♚e4 ♜a7♠ Black follows with 12...♙b7 with a great position.] 10...f5! 11.exf6 ♘xf6 12.a3! [12.cxb5 axb5 13.♘dxb5 ♚b6∞ With amazing play for Black.] 12...bxc4 13.♙xh7+! ♘xh7 14.axb4 ♙b7 15.0-0 ♘c6 16.♘xc6 ♙xc6↑ I like Black in this complicated opposite color bishop middlegame. Further, White was challenged to find the right moves to reach this position.

B) 8.♙e2 d5!

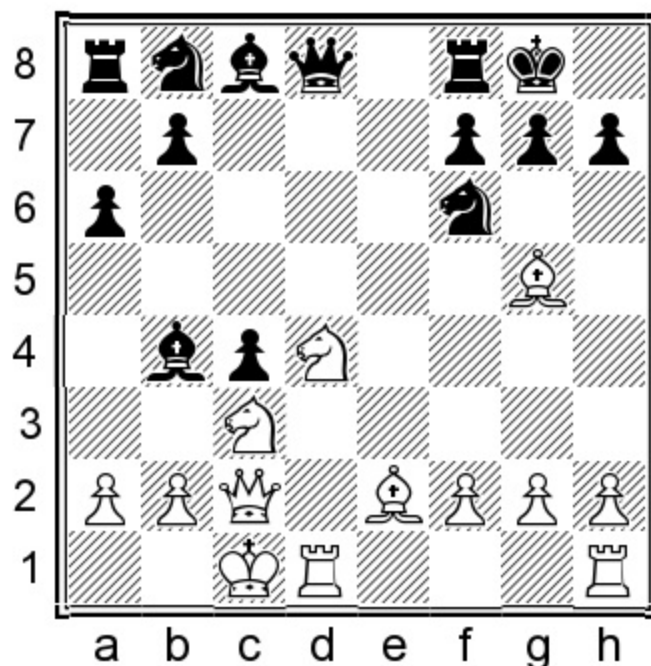


Position after: 8...d5!

Black is strong enough in the centre and he should open it since White has not yet castled. 9.exd5 [9.e5?! dxc4! A smart intermediate move. 10.♘f3 ♘d5 11.♙xc4 ♚c7 12.♙xd5 exd5] 9...exd5

B1) 10.0-0 dxc4 11.♖d1 ♚c7 12.♙g5 Kovacevic, A (2541) – Nestorovic, D (2401) Sozina 2004 [12.♘e4 ♘xe4 13.♚xe4 ♘d7=] 12...♘bd7! =

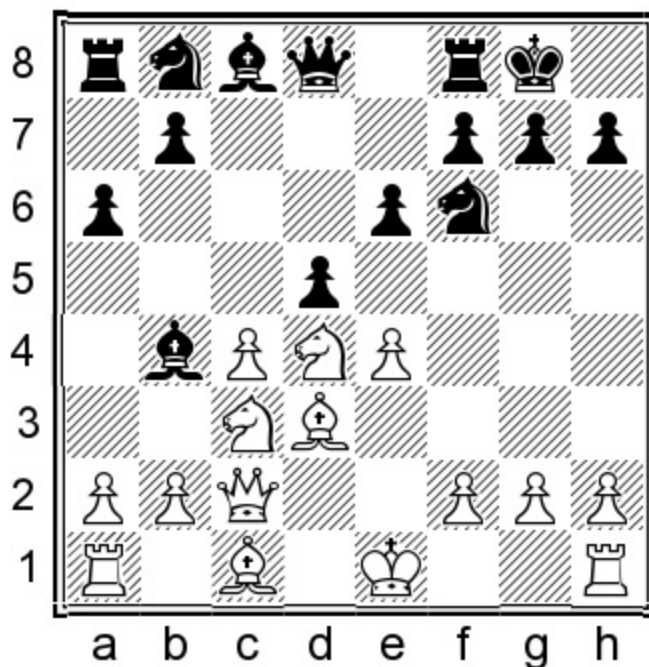
B2) 10.♙g5 dxc4 11.0-0-0



Position after: 11.0-0-0

And now in the game Cafaro, L (2161) – Morello, G (2048) Nicolosi 2015, I prefer: [11.♖d1 ♘bd7 12.0-0 ♔c7 13.♙f3 ♜e8↗] 11...♘bd7! 12.♘d5 ♔a5! 13.♘xf6+ ♘xf6 14.♙xf6 gxf6. It is true that our kingside is quite damaged, but the extra pawn and the bishop pair should give us the better chances.

8...d5!



Position after: 8...d5!

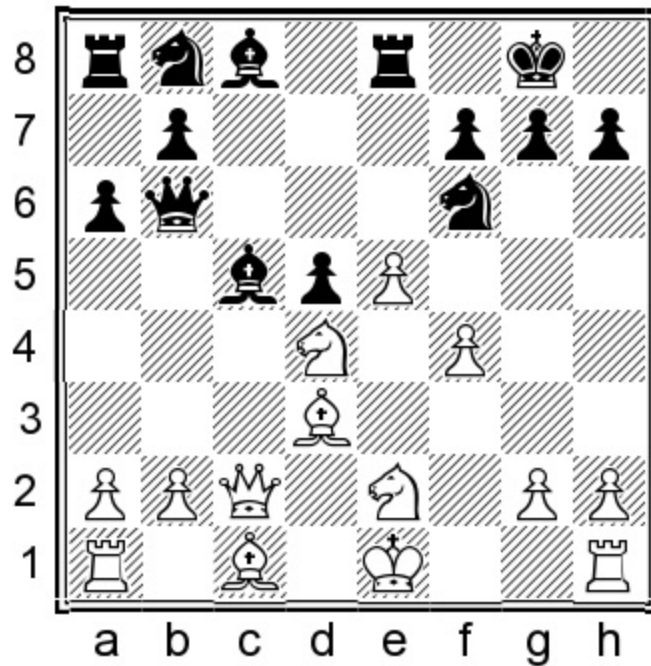
If you really need to win or just prefer positions with 8...d6 you can go for it, but 8...d5 seems to equalize by force.

9.cxd5 exd5 10.e5?!

Obviously, this is what White wants to do from a positional point of view, but he has not yet castled. 10.exd5N This was probably necessary for White to keep the balance, but it cannot really be bad for Black. 10...♔xd5↑

10...♜e8 11.0-0

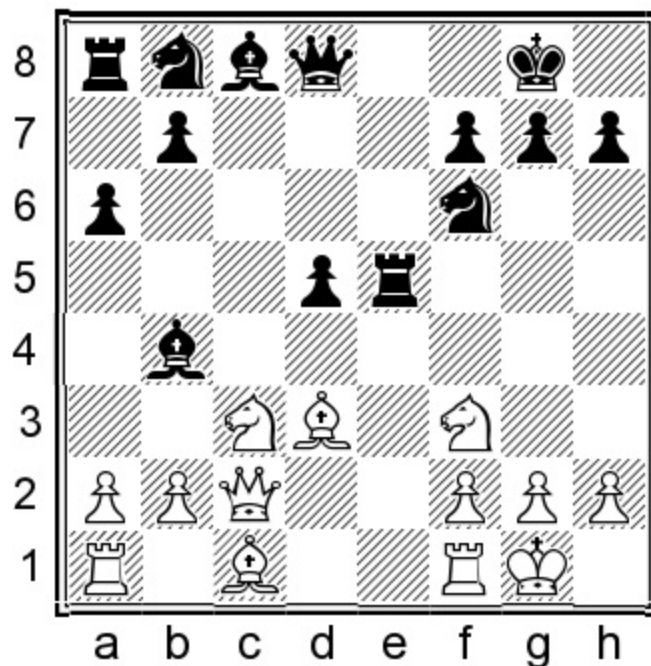
11.f4 ♙c5 12.♘ce2 ♔b6



Position after: 12... ♕b6

We really want to challenge White on the dark squares. 13. ♖b3 [13. ♙e3? ♜c6+] 13... ♙f2+ 14. ♜f1 ♜g4! [14... ♜c6!? 15. exf6 ♜b4 16. ♙xh7+ ♜h8 17. fxg7+ ♜xg7 18. ♖c3+ ♜xh7 19. ♖f3 ♙e3! ♞ Is also interesting for Black but probably more double-edged.] 15. ♙xh7+ ♜h8 16. ♙f5 ♜c6 17. ♙xg4 ♙xg4 18. h3 ♙d7+ White is in trouble.

11... ♞xe5 12. ♜f3?!



Position after: 12. ♜f3?!

This position was seen in Navarro Cia, M (2274) – Ivanov, J (2377) ½ – ½ (20) Pamplona 2005, and now I believe in the following weird move.

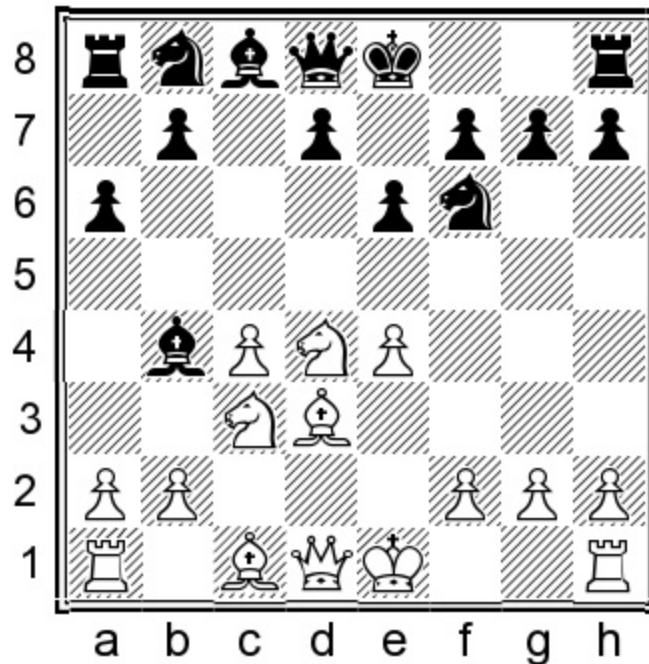
12...♖h5!

A very unusual square for the rook but it is hard for White to chase it and it can provide Black some attacking chances on the kingside.

13.h3 ♗c6 14.♗e2 ♗e5! 15.♗xe5 ♖xe5

d) 6.♗c3 ♘b4 7.♙d3 ♗c6 8.--

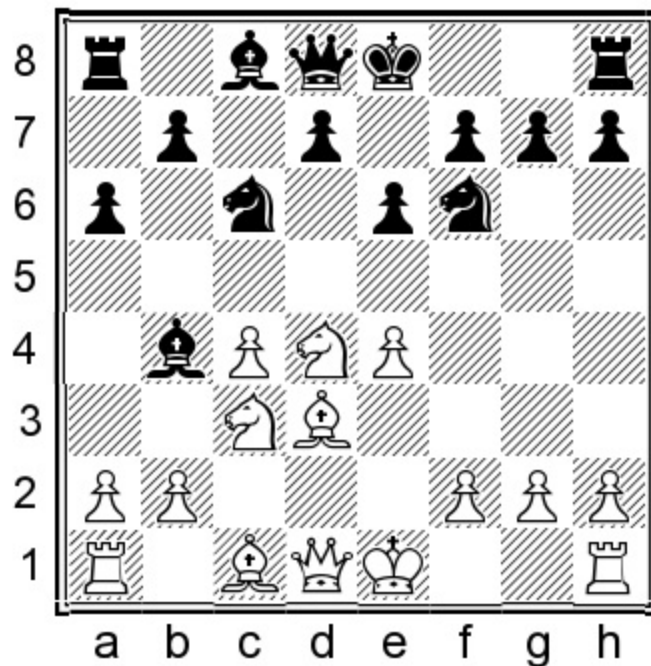
1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 a6 5.c4 ♗f6 6.♗c3 ♘b4!? 7.♙d3



Position after: 7.♙d3

Historically, this move has been considered to be the main line of this variation. I could have considered it later, but recently 7.♙d3 has been chosen in most of the top-level games so I think it should have the status of the new main line.

7...♗c6



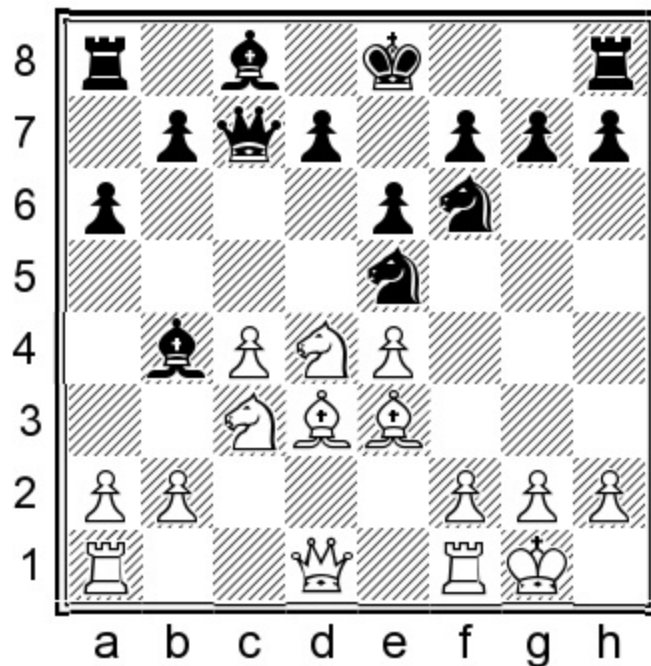
Position after: 7... Nc6

White is no longer defending his knight on d4 therefore it makes a lot of sense to challenge it. In this first subchapter about 7... d3 we will consider only the sidelines.

8. Nc2

A) 8. Nxc6 This is the main move which will be covered in the next two subchapters.

B) 8. e3 This is the most obvious response, but it does not mean it is great. 8... Nc5! We go for our second threat. The bishop is not allowed to move since it would abandon either e4 or c4's protection. 9. 0-0 Qc7!



Position after: 9... ♕c7!

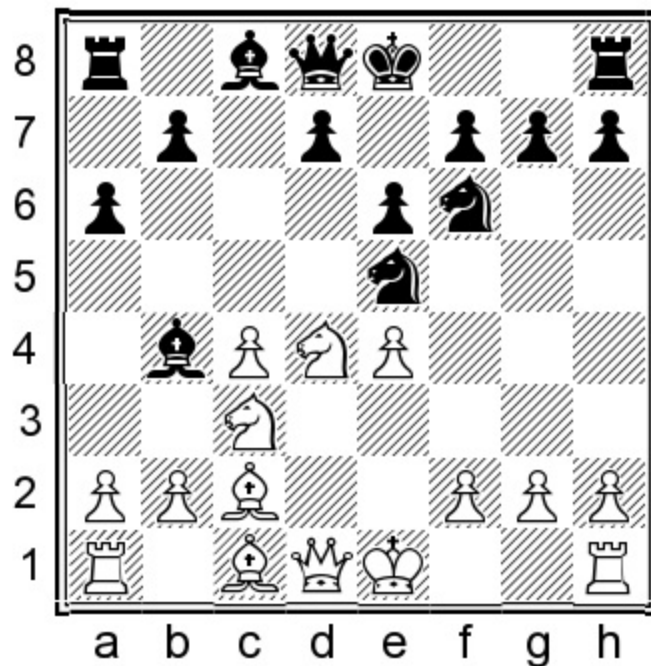
I like this move as it threatens c4 with an attack on h2 after ... ♖eg4.

B1) 10. ♖c1? The most played move which does not consider the prior comment. 10... ♖eg4! 11. g3 ♖xe3 12. fxe3 ♕xc3 This exchange is not necessary, but it is a decent idea to avoid unpleasant surprises. 13. ♖xc3 b6 14. ♕c2 d6 ♖ Ryznar, V (2180) – Tukmakov, V (2581) Pula 1999

B2) 10. h3 ♕xc3! 11. bxc3 b6↑

B3) 10. f3 b5!N 11. cxb5 ♕xc3 12. ♖c1 [12. bxc3 ♕xc3 ♖ With a bishop like problem for White.] 12... ♕xd4! 13. ♖xc7 ♕xe3+ 14. ♔h1 0-0 ♖ Black has 3 pieces for the queen, and amazing play, especially on the dark squares.

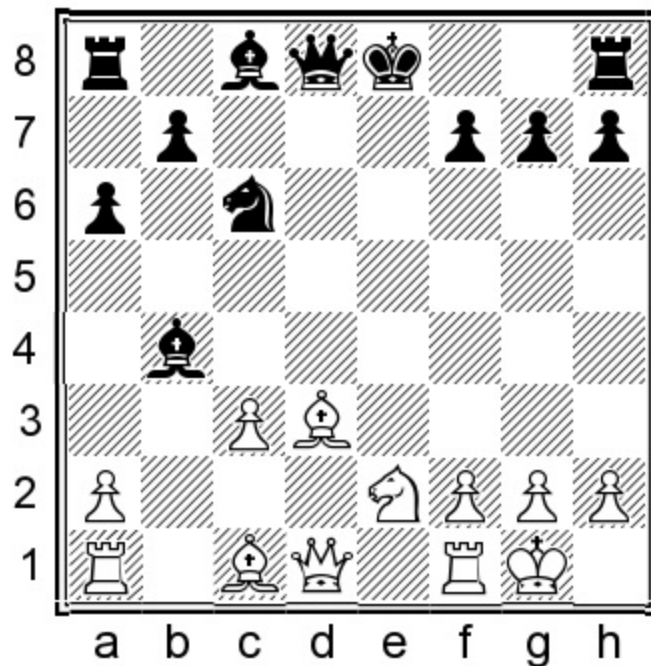
C) 8. ♕c2 ♖e5!



Position after: 8... Nde5!

We can apply the same approach as after 8. Qe3, because it is really hard for White to protect c4. 9.0-0 [9. Qe2?! Qc7 10. Qb3 b5!± This is something you clearly want to avoid with White. You cannot take on b5 due to the pressure on c3.] 9...d6 [9... Nxc4 This has been played most of the time, but it may give White too much activity. 10. Qe2 Qc7 11. Qb3 Ne5 12. Qg5] 10.f4 Nxc4 11. Qh1 Ivanisevic, I (2641) – Horvath, C (2497) Hungary 2017 11... Qxc3! 12.bxc3 0-0± White does not seem to have enough.

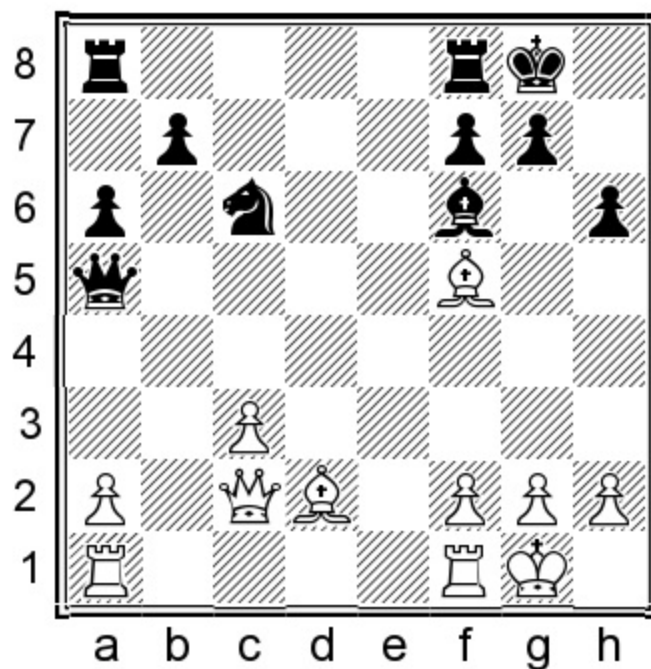
D) 8. Nde2 Is a solid move but we should still be in time to open the centre even if we have other choices. 8...d5!? 9.exd5 exd5 10.cxd5 Nxd5 11.0-0 Nxc3 12.bxc3!



Position after: 12.bxc3!

This has been played by the strongest and most ambitious players as it is more active despite giving White a poor pawn structure. [12.♘xc3 0-0= This should not give you any worry as the pawn structure is completely symmetrical and harmless.] 12...♙d6 13.♚c2 h6 The most logical move before castling. Now, White has a couple of options we need to check.

D1) 14.♘g3 0-0 15.♘e4 ♙e7 16.♙f4 ♙f5! 17.♘f6+ White gets the bishop pair, but Black takes over the initiative. The following game quickly ended in a draw despite White being much stronger. 17...♙xf6 18.♙xf5 ♚a5 19.♙d2



Position after: 19. ♖d2

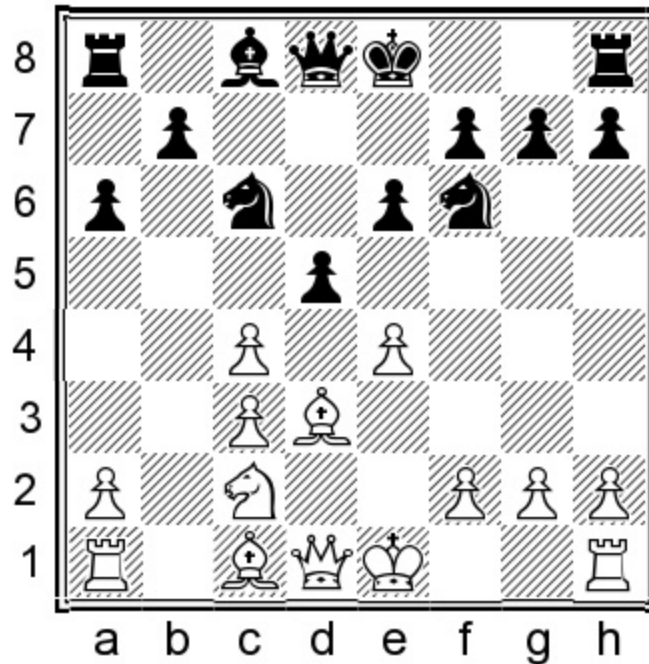
Kazhgaleyev, M (2594) – Akhmetov, A (2311) Almaty 2017

D2) 14. ♖f4 [14. ♖h7 This is one of the computer's suggestions, but it is a bit sick so I will just mention it. 14... ♗c7⇒] 14... ♖xf4 15. ♗xf4 0-0 16. ♖fd1 All this occurred in the game Drinovec, A (2190) – Rusjan, M (2205) Gostovanja 2010. And now, I think 16... ♗g5 is a nice improvement. 17. g3 ♖g4↑

8... ♖xc3+ 9. bxc3

This position could also have occurred via 7. ♗c2 as we saw in one of the previous subchapters.

9...d5!



Position after: 9...d5!

I want to make this idea work when White has more or less abandoned the centre.

10.exd5

10.cxd5 This is less flexible because White does not really have other options on the next move. 10...exd5 11.exd5 transposes into the main line with 11.cxd5.

10...exd5 11. ♖a3

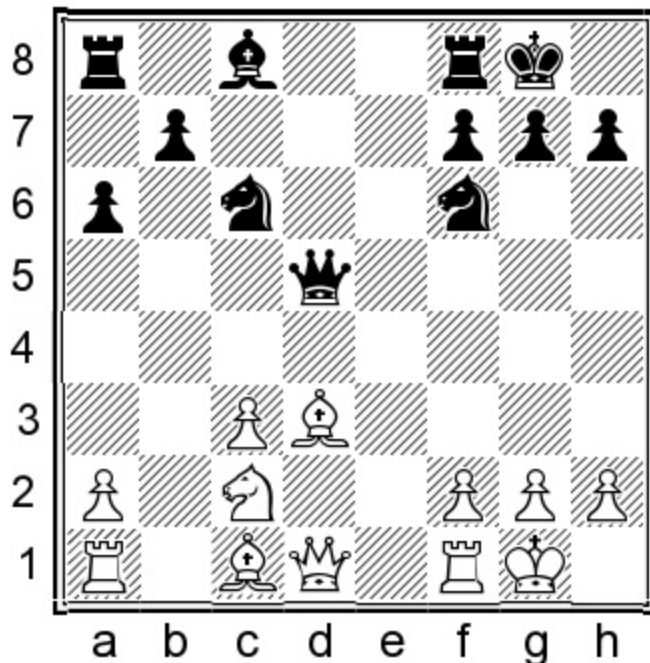
This appears to be the only critical continuation.

A) 11. ♗e2+ ♖e6 12. ♖a3 This is just a worse version than 11. ♖a3 for White since ...♖e6 is clearly

more usual than ♖e2.

B) 11.0-0 Leaving Black the possibility to castle easily just makes his life easier. 11...0-0 12.♘e3 ♕e6 13.cxd5 ♘xd5 14.♚c2 h6= Jianu, V (2397) – Parligras, M (2431) Targoviste 2001.

C) 11.cxd5 ♚xd5! 12.0-0 0-0

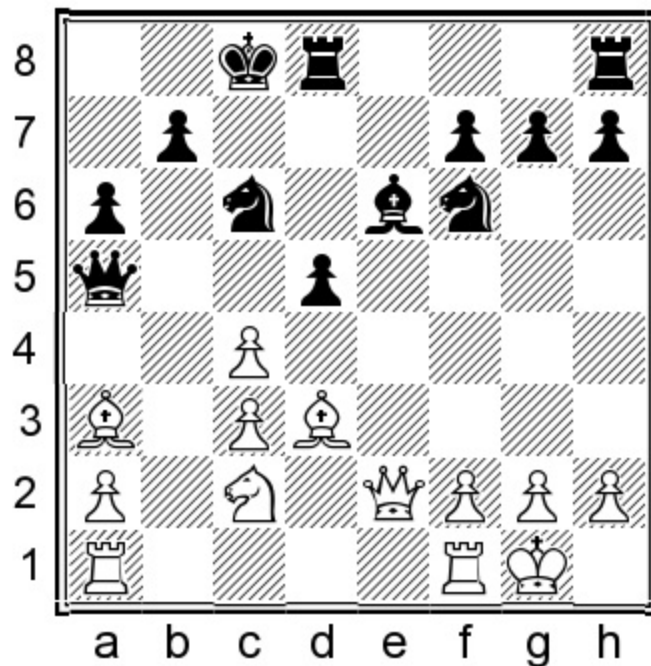


Position after: 12...0-0

In these middlegames White always keeps a slight initiative due to the bishop pair, but if we can manage to balance the initiative, we retain the healthier pawn structure. 13.♘e3 ♚c5 14.♘c4 Gomez Garrido, C (2527) – Gonzalez Zamora, J (2499) Merida 2016. 14...b5! 15.♕a3 ♚a7! And now White does not really have anything better than to take on f8 giving up 2 pieces for a rook. 16.♕xf8 bxc4 17.♕xc4 ♔xf8 18.♚d6+ ♘e7 19.♞fe1 ♚d7=

11...♕e6! 12.♚e2 ♚a5 13.0-0 0-0-0!

Obviously, it looks dangerous for Black, but it is not that easy to organize an attack with White, and the computer actually loves Black.



Position after: 13...0-0-0!

14.c5

A) 14.♙b4 ♚c7 15.cxd5 ♘xd5 16.♙c4 ♜he8

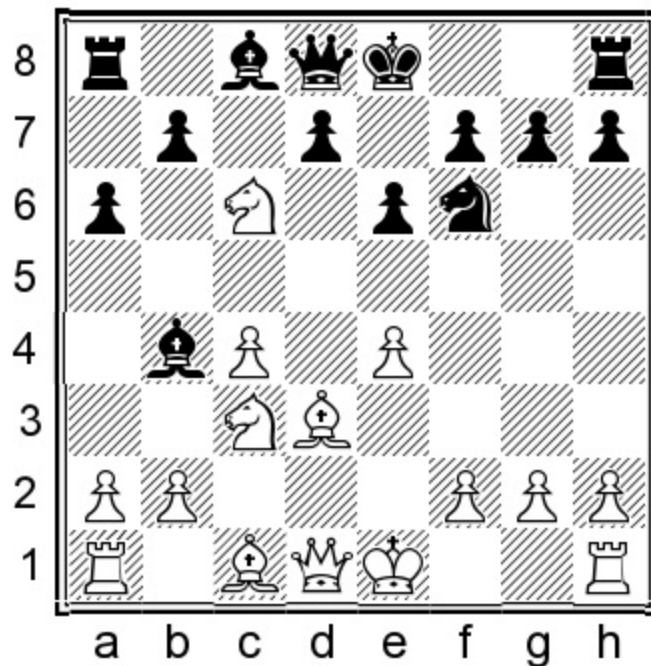
B) 14.♜fb1 dxc4 15.♙xc4 ♜he8 I do not see a real chance for White's attack to succeed while we have great activity in the centre. 16.♙b4 ♚c7 17.♘e3 ♙f5 18.♜d1 ♘g4 19.♜xd8+ ♘xd8! 20.g3 ♘xe3 21.fxe3 ♙e6

14...♜he8 15.♜fb1 ♙d7 16.♚d1 ♘e4! 17.♙b4 ♚c7

Black also enjoys a lot of piece activity.

e) 6.♘c3 ♙b4 7.♙d3 ♘c6 8.♘xc6 dxc6 9.-- & 9.e5

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.c4 ♘f6 6.♘c3 ♙b4!? 7.♙d3 ♘c6 8.♘xc6



Position after: 8. ♖xc6

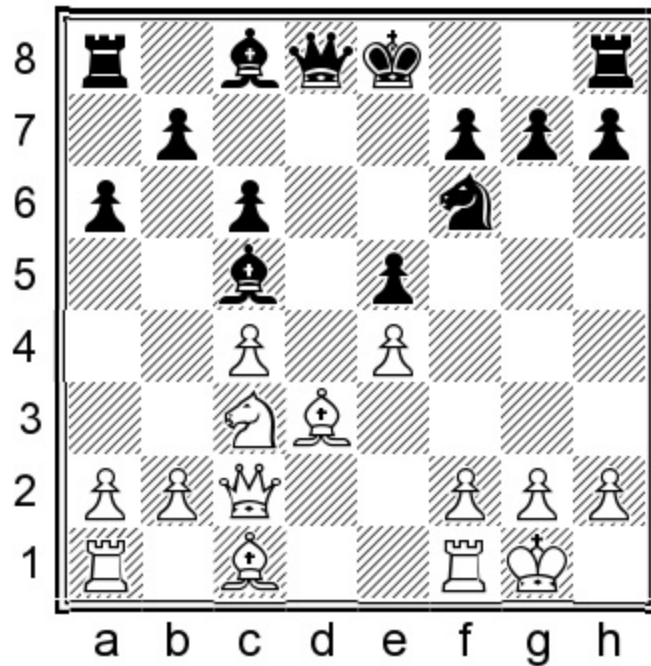
This is probably the strongest continuation. As we saw in the previous subchapter, bringing the knight back into White's camp does not yield much chance of an advantage.

8...dxc6

Again, the decision between which pawn should take is easy, we want to open the d-file and be able to use the weak d4-square. In this subchapter we will consider two sidelines, before considering 9.0-0 in the following subchapter.

9.e5

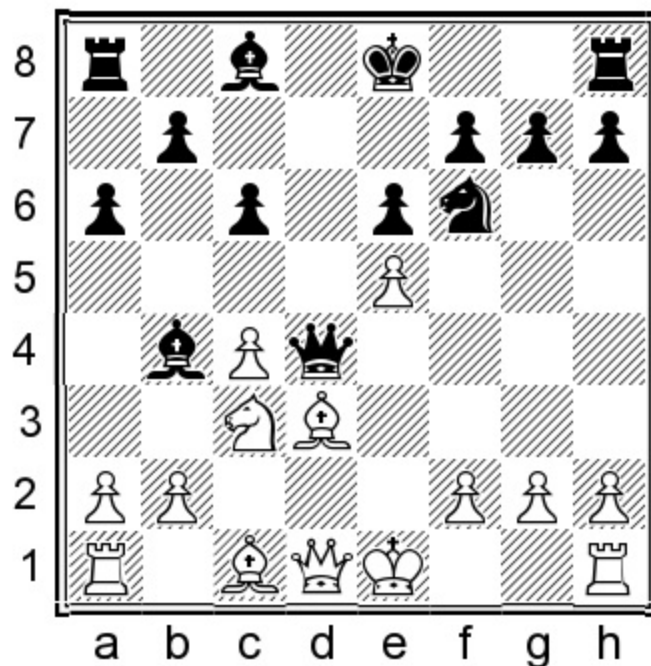
9. ♕c2?! This is a naive move by White, because his opponent's move is quite clear, and the queen is going to be quite useless here. 9...e5! 10.0-0 [10. ♖g5 h6 11. ♖h4 0-0 12.0-0 ♖e6 13. ♗fd1 ♖e7 ♞ Riand, J (2005) – Tukmakov, V (2581) Mendrisio 1999.] 10... ♖c5!



Position after: 10...♙c5!

This immediately takes away any possibility for White to play ♙c1-e3, and Black has full control over d4. 11.♙g5 h6 12.♙xf6? This is exactly what White should not do. After this move, he has no chance to control the d4-square. 12...♙xf6 13.♘a4 ♙d4 14.♞ac1 0-0 15.♚h1 ♙e6 16.b3 ♞ad8 Bilsky, M (1751) – Gruenfeld, Y (2445) Kaunas 2013.

9...♙d4!



Position after: 9...♙d4!

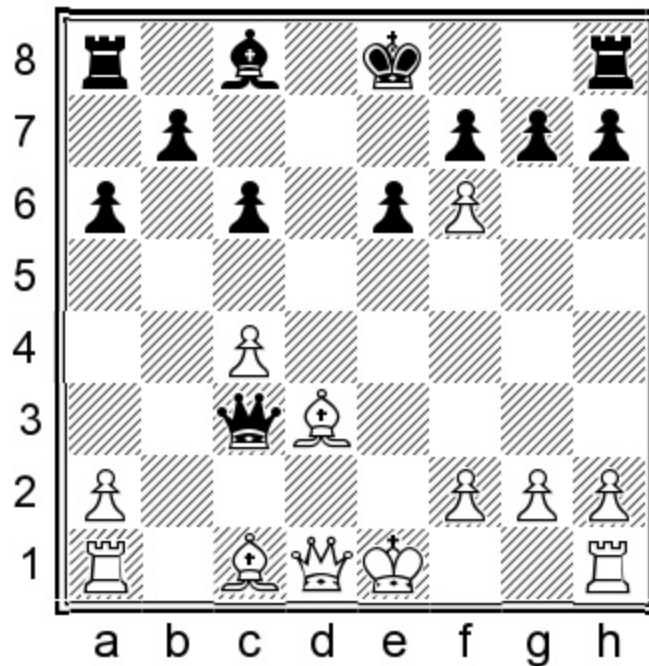
We do not want to move the knight away therefore Black counter attacks as the tactics work. White has given up on this line.

9...♔a5 This is just another option to enter the same variation. 10.exf6 ♕xc3+ 11.bxc3 ♔xc3+

10.exf6

10.0-0 Has been played from time to time, but I do not believe in this move. 10...♔xe5 11.♖e1 ♔c7 It is true White has gained a few tempi, but these cannot be worth a central pawn. 12.♗g5 ♗e7 13.♔f3 h6 14.♗f4 ♗d6 15.♗xd6 ♔xd6 And even if the computer says it is equal, I would definitely take Black' side here.

10...♗xc3+ 11.bxc3 ♔xc3+



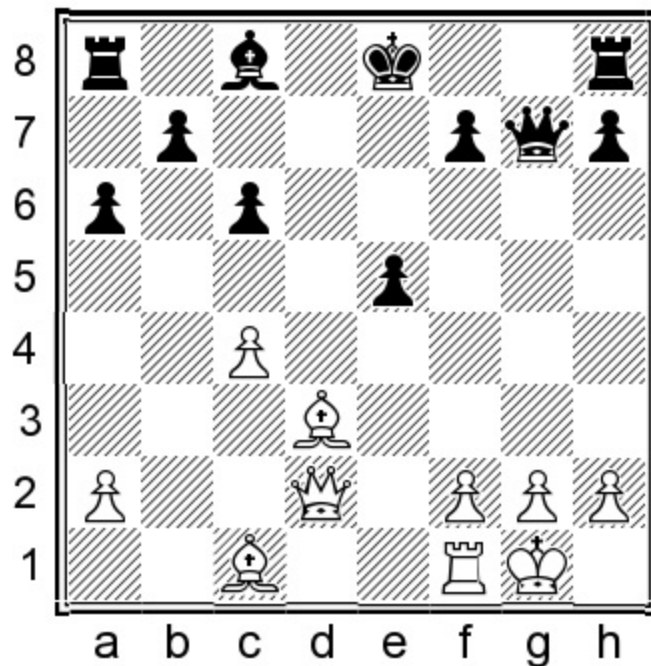
Position after: 11... ♔xc3+

Black will either take the bishop on d3 or the rook on a1.

12.♗d2

12.♔d2?! White tries to complicate things but this is not sound. 12...♔xa1

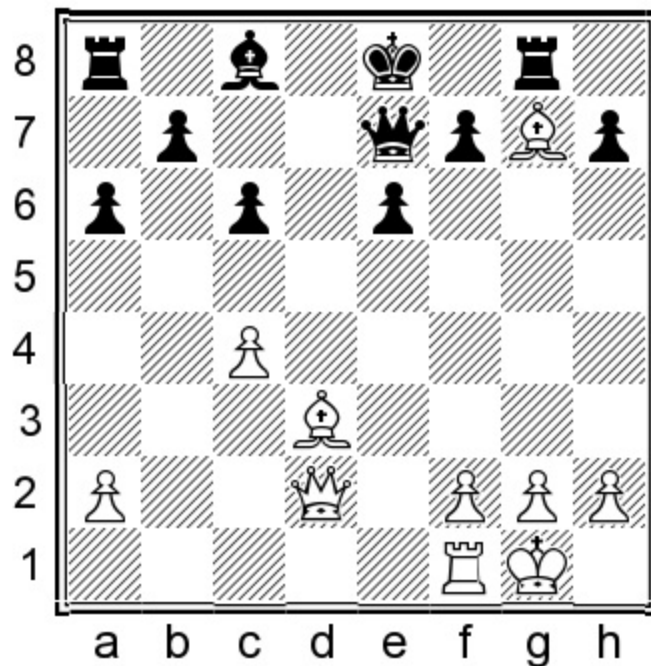
A) 13.fxg7?! ♔xg7 14.0-0 e5!



Position after: 14...e5!

A strong move which brings the bishop into play. Black converted his extra-exchange quite easily in the following game. 15.f4 ♘h3 16.♙e4 f5 17.♙f3 ♘g4 18.♙b2 ♖d8 19.♚e2 ♗g8 20.♙xg4 ♚xg4 21.♚xe5+ ♔d7 22.g3 ♗ge8— 0-1 (33) Moliboga, V (2329) – Perun, S (2347) Kiev 2004.

B) 13.0-0 ♚xf6 14.♙b2 ♚e7! The “threat” is simply to castle. 15.♙xg7 ♗g8



Position after: 15...♗g8

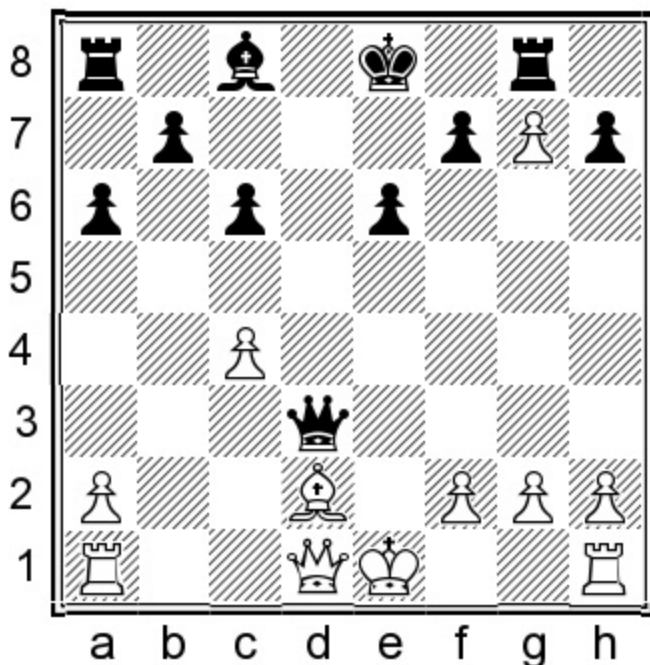
Black has won every game in this position. Here are 3 illustrative games.

B1) 16. ♖b2?? This one was a very short one. 16... ♗g5–+ 0-1 (16) Spaan, T (2284) – Nijboer, F (2529) Amsterdam 2005.

B2) 16. ♕c3 f6! 17. f4 and in the game 0-1 (52) Janssen, H (2285) – Quinteros, M (2525) Baden – Baden 1985, I would now suggest: 17... e5! 18. fxe5 f5– with 19... ♕e6 to follow and a great position.

B3) 16. ♖h6 f5 17. ♕f6 ♖g6! This simply transposes into a great endgame. 18. ♗xg6+ hxg6 19. ♕xe7 ♔xe7 20. c5 e5–+ Libiszewski, F (2458) – Hansen, S (2551) Playchess.com INT 2003

12... ♗xd3 13. fxg7 ♖g8



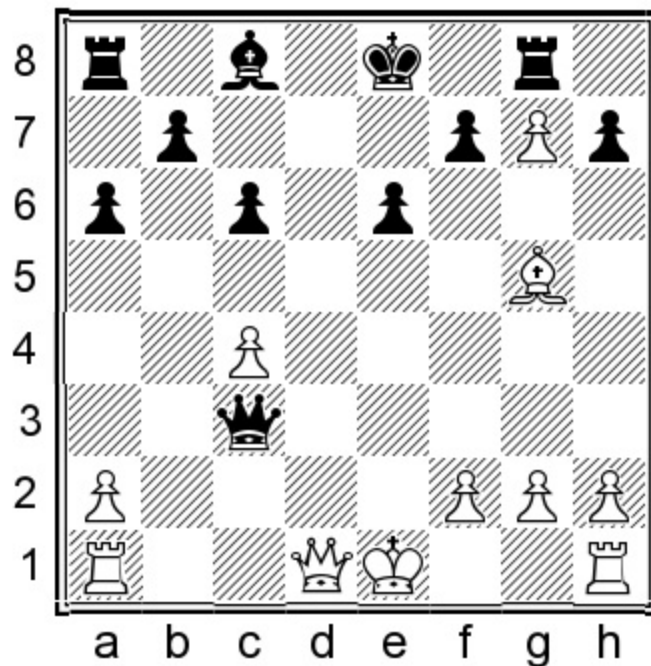
Position after: 13... ♖g8

White has tried several moves here. Following are the 3 main choices.

14. ♕h6!

A) 14. ♗g4 e5! 15. ♗g5 ♕f5! 16. ♗f6 ♖d8! Black wants to castle by hand while White is unable to do so. 17. ♗xe5+ ♔d7! 18. ♖d1 ♔c8 19. ♗e2 Up to here, Black has played a great game in Almasi, I (2370) – Farago, I (2515) Budapest 1994, but here he missed: 19... ♖ge8 20. ♕e3 ♗c3+ 21. ♔f1 ♗xg7–+. White can't hold due to the many threats on the light squares.

B) 14. ♕g5 ♗c3+!



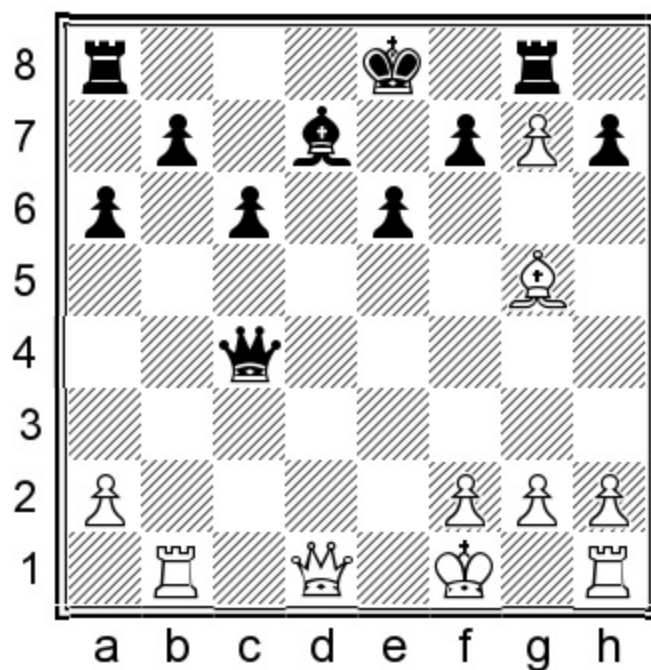
Position after: 14... ♖c3+!

15. ♔f1

B1) 15... ♜xc4+? This intermediate move is simply losing because it abandons the f6-square.

16. ♕g1 ♘d7 [16... ♜d5 17. ♘f6+–] 17. ♜d6+–

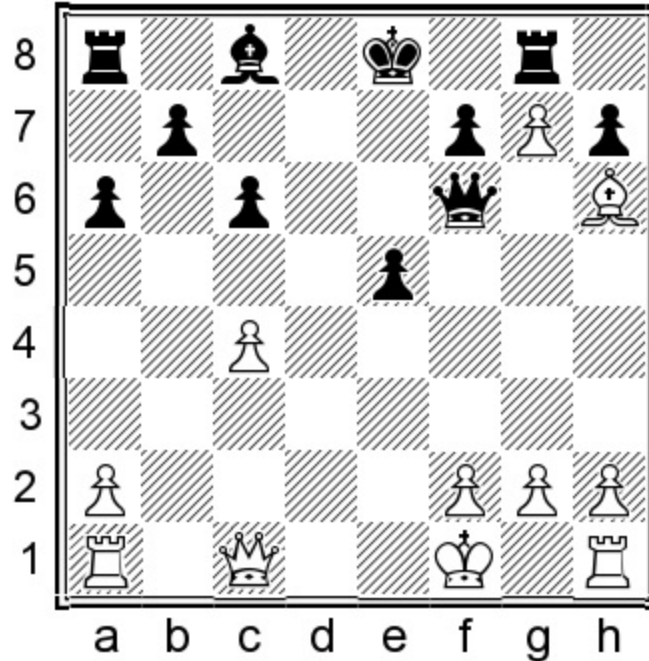
B2) 15... ♘d7! 16. ♝b1 [16.h4?! ♜xg7 17. ♝b1 f6! 18. ♜h5+ ♜g6!N A good improvement over the previous games that reached this position where Black struggled a bit. 19. ♜xg6+ ♝xg6 20. ♘e3 0-0-0+] 16... ♜xc4+



Position after: 16... ♖xc4+

17. ♔g1 ♜xg7 18. ♜xb7 ♞d5 19. ♞xd5 cxd5 20. h4 ♞c8 ♞ when only Black can play for a win.

14... ♞c3+ 15. ♔f1 ♞f6 16. ♞c1! e5



Position after: 16...e5

If Black manages to castle safely, he will have a great position.

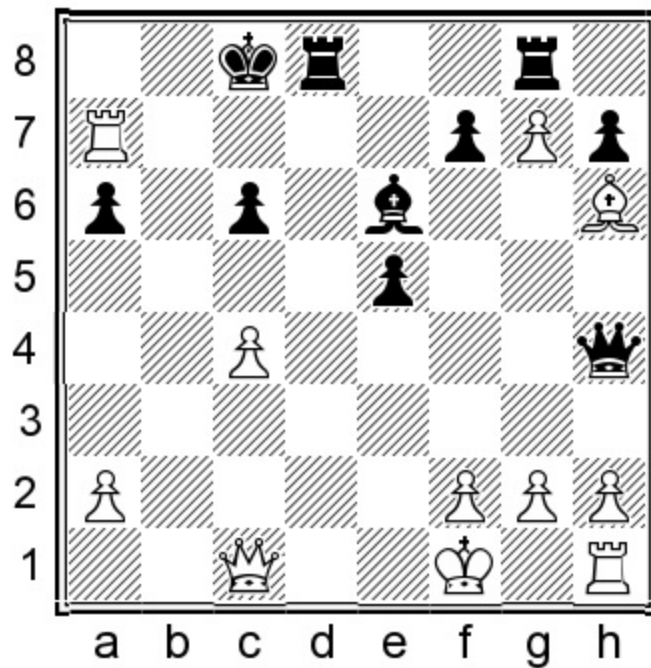
17. ♜b1 ♞e6!

This is the move I like the most, giving away b7, but accelerating development.

18. ♜xb7 ♞ 18...0-0-0! 19. ♜a7

19. ♜b1 The only other choice by White occurred in this game. 19... ♞f5 20. ♜b3 ♞d3+ 21. ♔g1 ♞e2 22. ♞d2 1-0 (55) Solodovnichenko, Y (2461) – Kaszowski, D (2309) Poznan 2003 22... ♜xg7 ♞ And it seems that Black has the better chances, mainly due to the awful rook on h1.

19... ♞h4 ♞



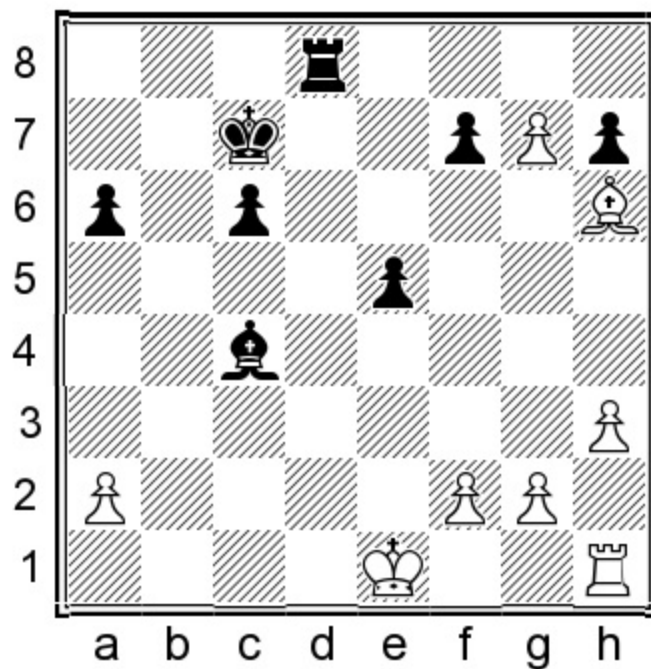
Position after: 19... ♖h4

The idea is simply to take on c4.

20. ♜a8+

20. ♜b1 ♜xc4+ 21. ♔e1 ♜c3+ 22. ♔f1 ♜c4+ 23. ♔e1 ½-½ (23) Petrisor, A (2242) – Kveinys, A (2522) Cappelle la Grande 2009. [23. ♔g1 ♜b5]

20... ♔c7 21. ♜xd8 ♜xd8 22. h3 ♜xc4+ 23. ♜xc4 ♜xc4+ 24. ♔e1



Position after: 24.♔e1

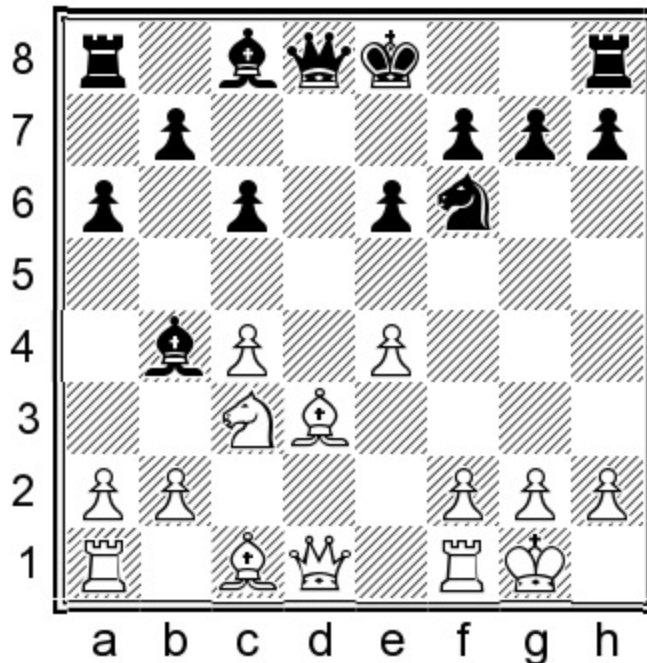
Black has some activity, but the pawn on g7 is simply too strong to hope for more than equality. However, White does not yet have a draw as the following game shows.

24...f5 25.g4 ♕d5 26.f3 ♕xf3 27.♖f1 ♖d1+ 28.♔f2 ♖xf1+ 29.♔xf1 ♕d5 30.gxf5 ♕xa2=

Objectively, it should be a draw, but the many passed pawns makes White's life difficult. Black went on to win in Vandervoort, P (2364) – Kveinys, A (2537) Charleroi 2007.

f) 6.♘c3 ♕b4 7.♕d3 ♘c6 8.♘xc6 dxc6 9.0-0

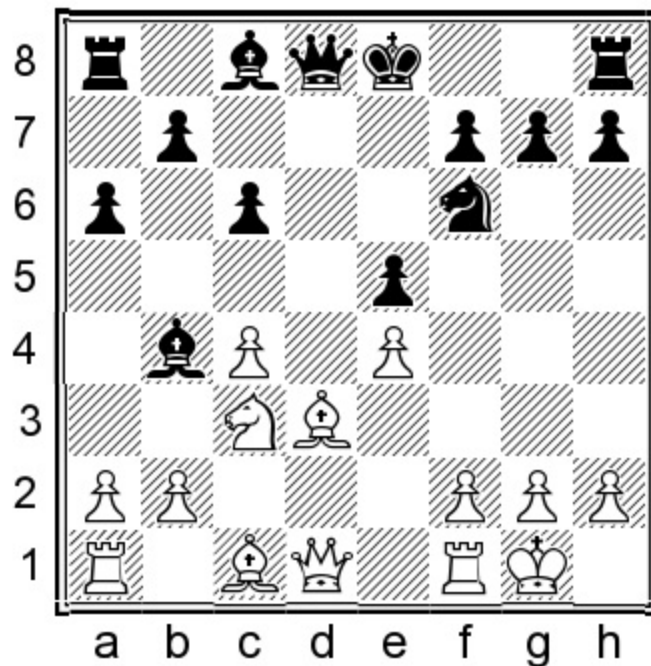
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.c4 ♘f6 6.♘c3 ♕b4!? 7.♕d3 ♘c6 8.♘xc6 dxc6 9.0-0



Position after: 9.0-0

This has scored badly for White, but it is the main line and I think that it is White's best chance compared to the rest.

9...e5!



Position after: 9...e5!

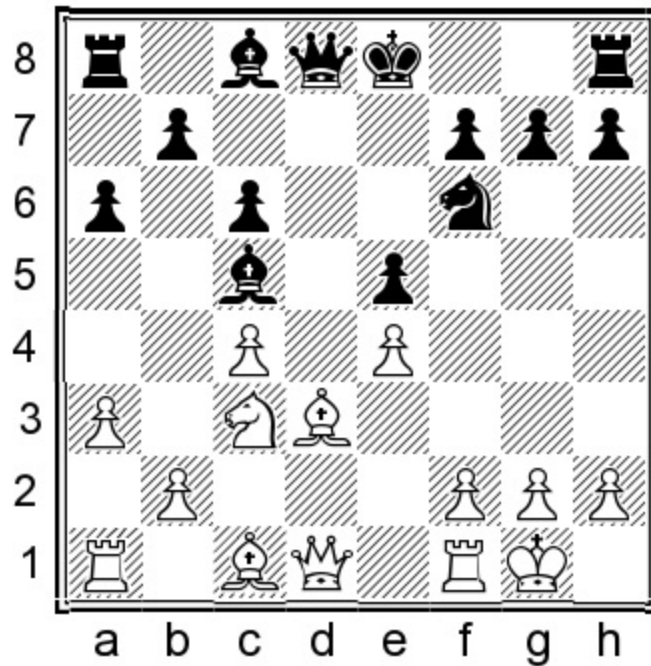
As we will see, the main debate in this variation is control of the d4-square.

10. ♖e2

Not the most played move, but with a recent game featuring Caruana as Black it may become the main one in the future. It is also quite logical as it controls the e3-square. White is ready to meet ...♙c5 with ♙e3.

A) 10. ♖c2 This was already analysed in the subchapter with 9. ♖c2.

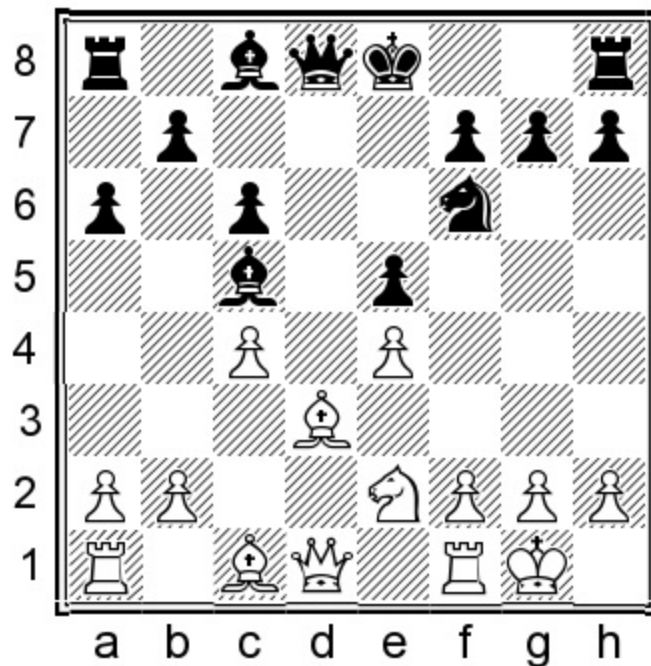
B) 10. a3 ♙c5!



Position after: 10...♙c5!

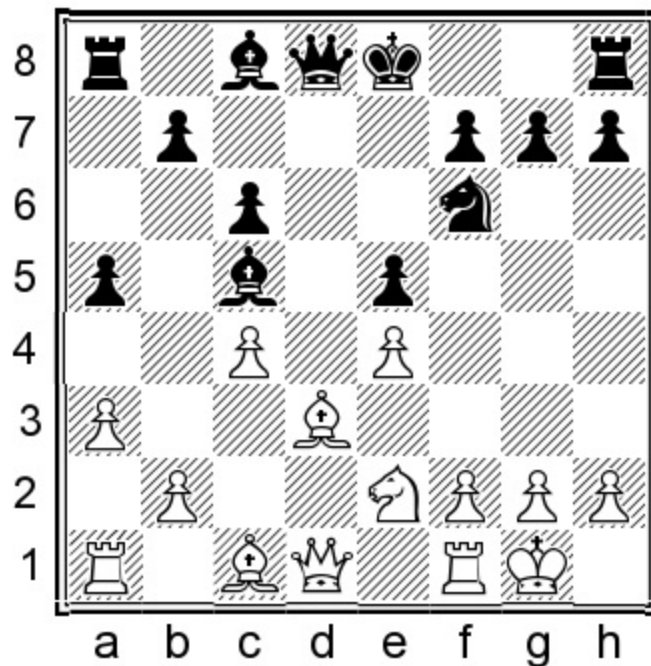
If White wants to encourage us to move to d4 we are happy to comply! We no longer wish to take on c3 as it would enable White to control the d4-square. 11.♙g5 [11.b4 ♘d4 12.♙b2 0-0] 11...h6 12.♙h4 ♚e7

C) 10.♘e2?!. This is simply too slow; the response is simply 10...♙c5.



Position after: 10...♙c5

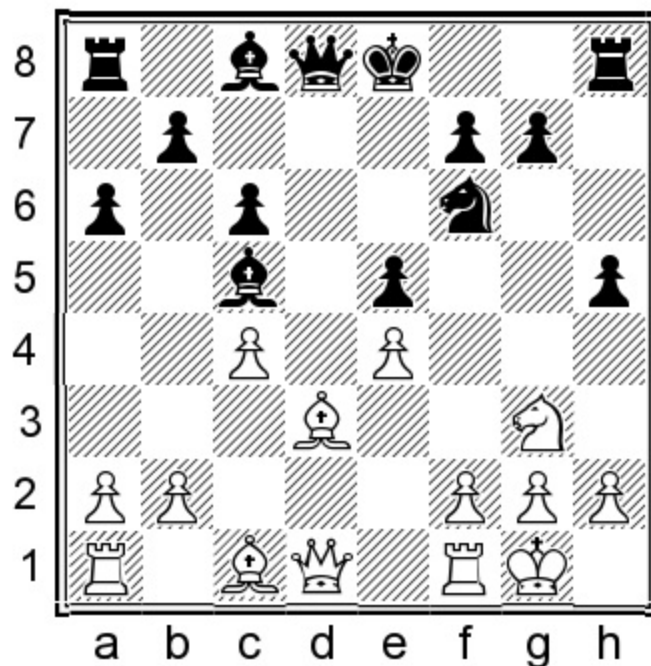
C1) 11.a3 a5!



Position after: 11...a5!

As we do not have the d4-square under full control it is important to secure the bishop on c5. 12.b3 0-0 13.♘b2 ♖e7 14.♘g3 ♜d8 15.♙c2 h5!? A nice idea against a knight moving to g3. 16.♙e2 And now in the game Katai, D (2224) – Nemeth, A (2279) Hungary 2012, I would prefer: 16...h4! 17.♘f5 ♙xf5 18.exf5 ♙d4. We will have a middlegame with a strong knight against a bad bishop and good control over d4.

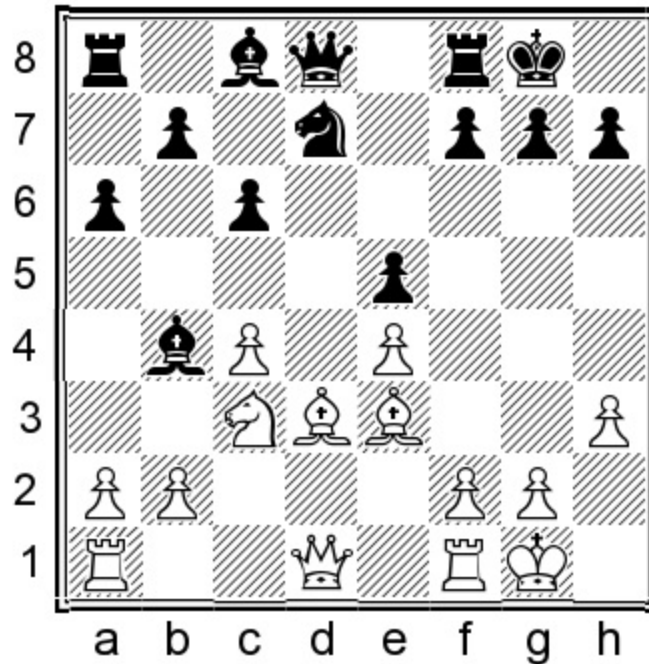
C2) 11.♘g3 h5!N



Position after: 11...h5!N

It is possible to be aggressive with this move this early in the game. 12.♔g5 h4 13.♘f5 ♕xf5 14.exf5 ♖d4! The plan is clear, we will castle long and have good pressure on the centre and the kingside. 15.♗e2 0-0-0 16.♞ad1 e4 17.♙b1 ♗e5

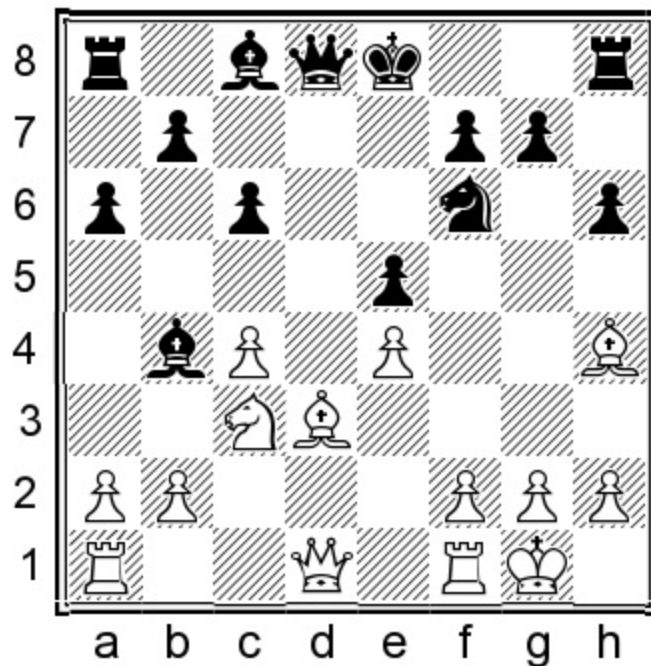
D) 10.h3 At least this move has an idea as it secures the e3 square for the bishop. 10...0-0 11.♙e3 ♘d7!



Position after: 11...♘d7!

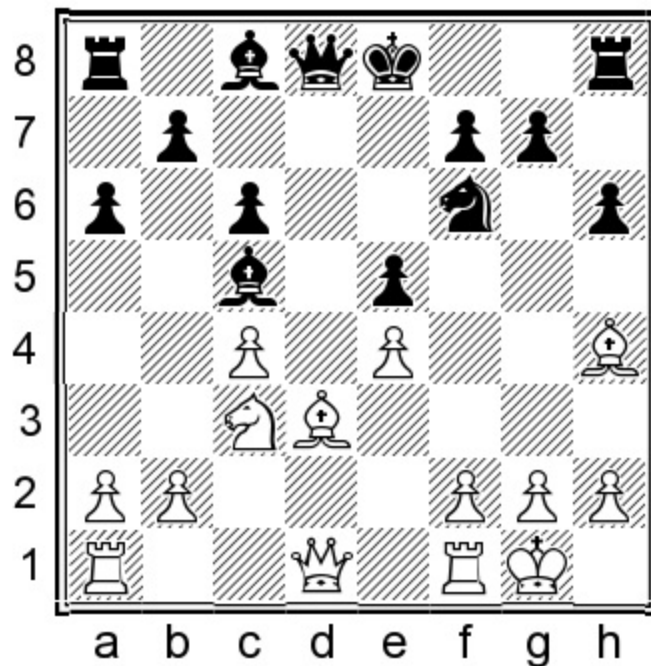
Black is willing to trade the dark-square bishops and in the meantime brings the knight closer to d4. 12.♘e2?! [12.♗f3 ♙c5 13.♞fd1 ♗e7= This is equal according to the engine, but I think that it is much easier to find a plan as Black.] 12...♙c5! 13.♗c1 ♗e7 14.♙d2 ♞d8 Black is better and eventually won in Farago, S (2334) – Gonda, L (2317) Budapest 2003, 0-1 (54).

E) 10.♙g5?! h6 11.♙h4



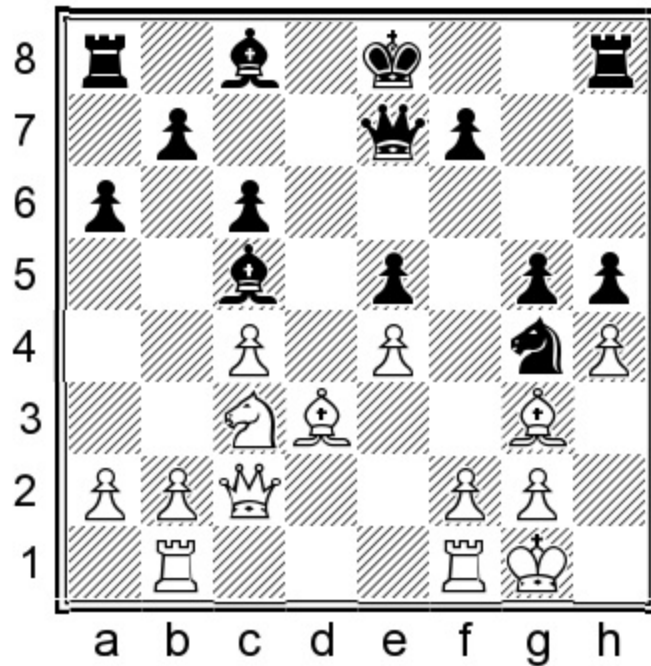
Position after: 11. ♔h4

Generally speaking, I do not like White's last couple of moves. I feel the bishop does not have much to do on h4 and it is now very far from the d4-square therefore let's take control of it! 11...♝c5!



Position after: 11...♝c5!

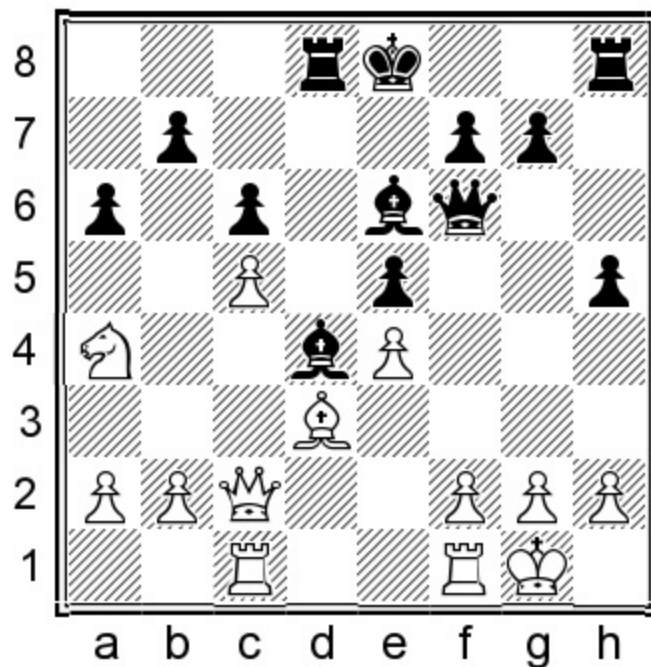
E1) 12. ♖c2 ♕e7 [12...g5!?→ This was also possible.] 13. ♖ab1? A bit mistake not considering Black's ideas. 13...g5 14. ♔g3 h5! 15. h4 ♘g4!



Position after: 15...Bg4!

The attack is too powerful. If Black plays well there is nothing White can do. 16.b4 gxh4 17.♔h2 h3 18.g3 [18.bxc5 hxg2 19.♕xg2 ♖xh2–+ 20.♕xh2 ♗h4+ 21.♕g2 ♗h3+ 22.♕g1 ♖g8#] 18...♗f6 19.♗e2 ♔d4 20.♖d1 h4 21.♕h1 ♖g8–+ It is a devastating attack for Black as in Belyaev, A (2089) – Stukopin, A (2439) Taganrog 2010.

E2) 12.♖a4 Inviting the bishop to d4 cannot be much better. 12...♔d4 13.♔xf6 ♗xf6 14.c5 ♔e6 15.♗c2 ♖d8 16.♖ac1 h5!

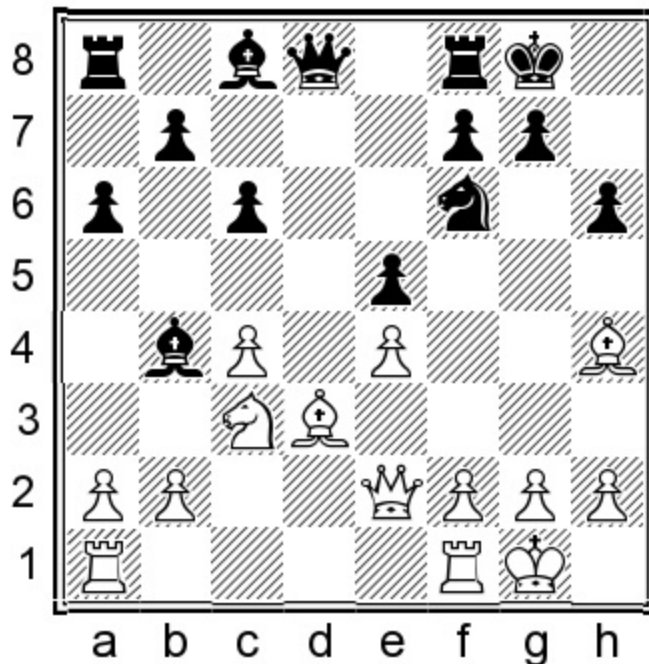


Position after: 16...h5!

Black's attack just flows naturally from the position. 17.♔c4 h4 18.♕xe6 ♖xe6 19.♗b3 ♗xb3!
 Should White survive the ending will be awful for him. 20.axb3 h3 21.g3 0-0+ Baciu, A (2130) –
 Muzychuk, A (2545) Brasov 2011.

10...0-0 11.a3

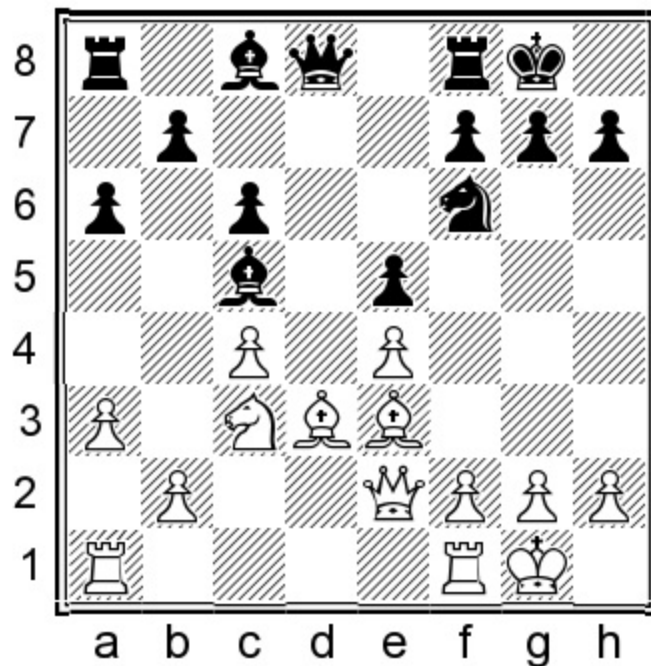
11.♕g5?! h6 12.♕h4



Position after: 12.♕h4

Once again, the bishop goes toward the wrong diagonal. 12...♕c5 13.♖h1 [13.♗ad1?? g5 14.♕g3
 ♕g4+] 13...g5 14.♕g3 ♗e7 15.♗ad1 ♗d8

11...♕c5 12.♕e3!



Position after: 12. ♖e3!

It looks very logical for White to contest the d4-square.

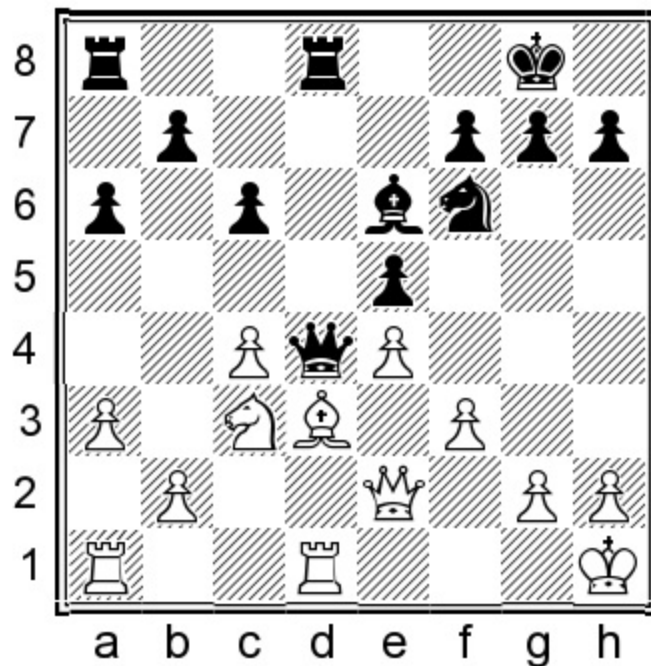
12...♗d4 13.♗xd4

13.h3 ♗e6 14.♖ad1 ♘d7↑ If feel that here also, Black remains on top in this game.

And now, instead of taking back immediately, a possible improvement for Black from the game Corrales Jimenez, F (2559) – Caruana, F (2828) Chess.com INT 2019, would be:

13...♗g4! 14.♚c2

14.f3 ♚xd4+ 15.♔h1 ♗e6 16.♖fd1 ♖fd8



Position after: 16... ♖fd8

It is hard for White to move anything without losing something.

14... ♔xd4

The fact that White does not have access to the d1-square is really annoying for him.

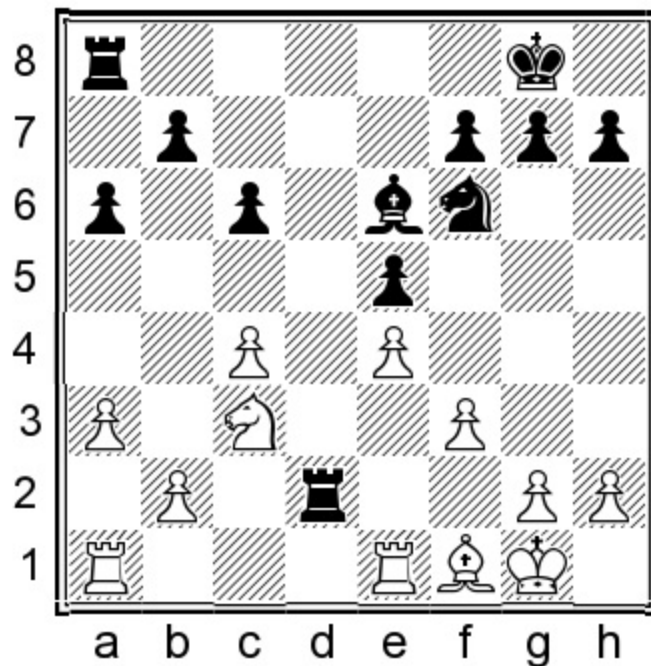
15. ♖fe1 ♖fd8 16. ♕f1 ♔d2!?

16... ♖d7?! 17. h3 ♕h5?? 18. g4 ♕g6 19. g5 ♖h5 20. ♖ad1+-

17. ♔xd2

17. ♖ac1 ♔xc2 18. ♖xc2 ♖d4

17... ♖xd2 18. f3 ♕e6

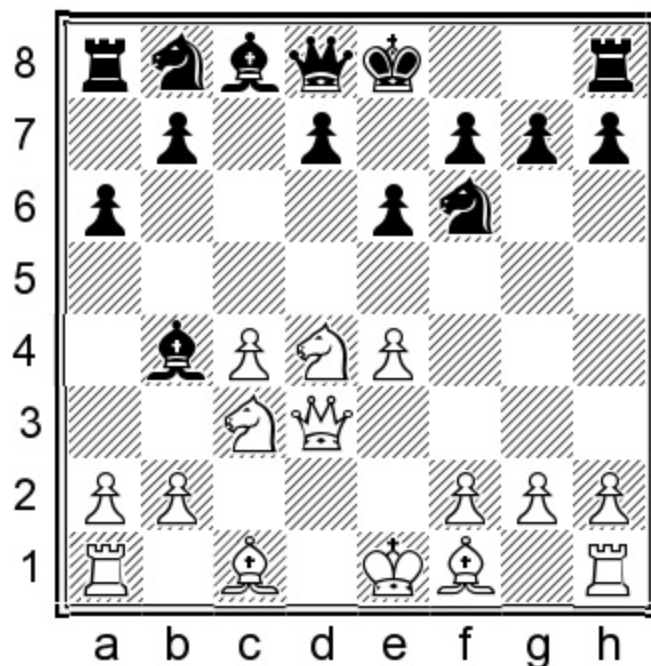


Position after: 18...♙e6

Objectively the position is close to equality but Black is the only one who can hope for a real advantage as his position is easier to play.

g) 6.♘c3 ♗b4 7.♙d3 0-0 8.♙e2

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.c4 ♘f6 6.♘c3 ♗b4!? 7.♙d3!



Position after: 7.♙d3!

As I said earlier this move has not been played as much as 7.♔d3, but nowadays everybody is playing 7.♕d3. Finding the best continuation for Black is not easy therefore I have decided to use the one that has brought Black the most success, although that is not the only reason!

7...0-0!?

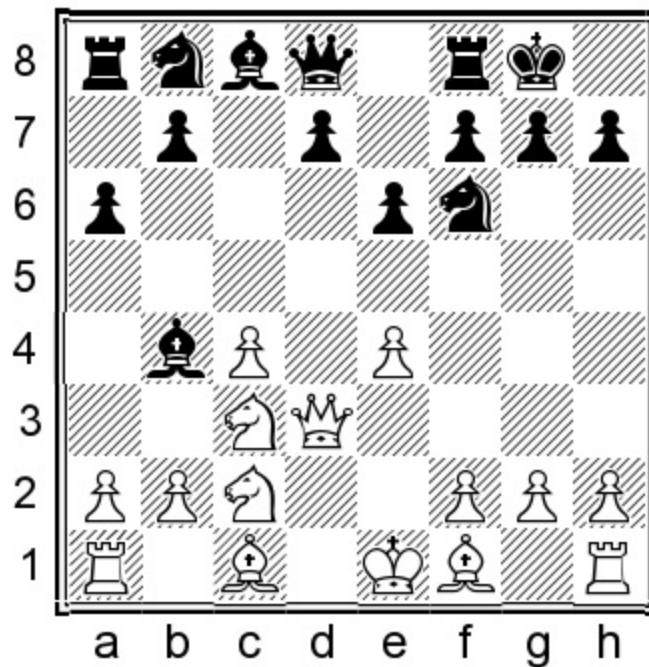
You might think this is the most played, but it is not. There are other interesting options for Black such as 7...d6, 7...d5 or 7...♕c7, but here it is my preference. I like that it is the same answer as after 7.♕c2, which makes the choice very logical. Now White has two options but only one of them is challenging.

8.♕e2?!

This is the other main move. The reason is that it is clearly a logical move, but it does not seem to be precise.

A) 8.e5! It has to be seen as the only dangerous move, and it will be analysed in the next subchapter.

B) 8.♖c2?!



Position after: 8.♖c2?!

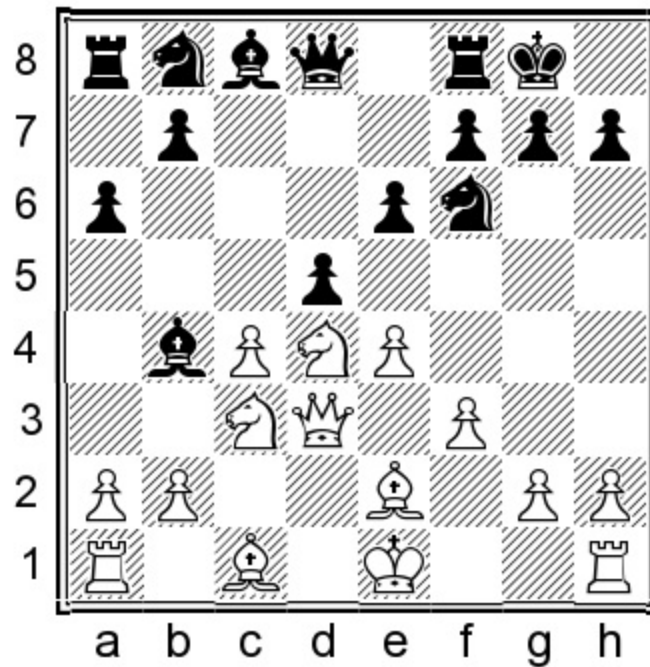
This has only rarely been played, and it is quite harmless as shown in the following game. 8...♔xc3+ 9.bxc3 [9.♕xc3? ♖xe4] 9...d5 10.exd5 exd5 11.♕e2 ♖c6 12.cxd5 ♕xd5 13.♕xd5 ♖xd5 14.♕d2 ♗e8 This occurred in the game Tiglon, B (2392) – Paragua, M (2506) Berkeley 2018.

8...d6!

It stops e4-e5 and prepares ...♖bd7.

9.0-0

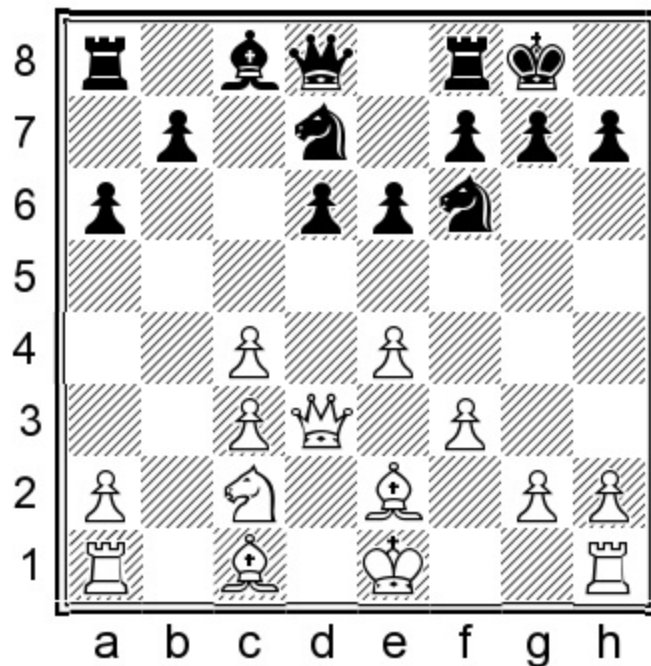
A) 9.f3?! d5!N



Position after: 9...d5!N

There is also 9...♖bd7 which is fine for Black, but this natural move is my preference. 10.cxd5 [10.exd5 exd5 11.0-0 ♜e8 12.cxd5 ♞xd5 13.♞xd5 ♚xd5] 10...exd5 11.exd5 ♞xd5 12.0-0 ♜c5 White clearly regrets his ninth move.

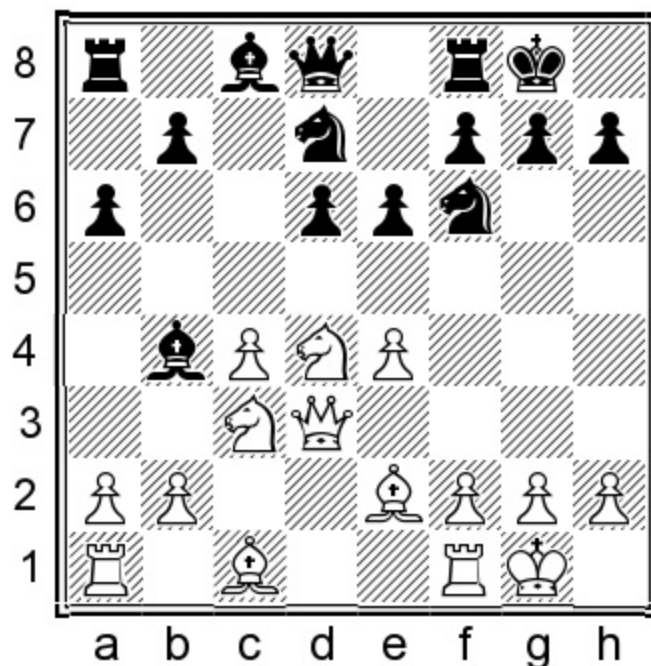
B) 9.♞c2 This is the strongest for White against the variation with 7...d6 for Black instead of 7...0-0. But with Black already castled there is a big difference. 9...♜xc3+ 10.bxc3 [10.♚xc3?! ♞xe4] Here is the difference with 7...d6, here White cannot take on g7.] 10...♞bd7 11.f3



Position after: 11.f3

[11.♘a3 ♘c5 12.♘xc5 dxc5= And a draw was agreed in Vokarev, S (2457) – Zubov, A (2601) Pavlodar 2015. Indeed, White cannot be better.] 11...♘c5 12.♙e3 ♚c7!?N 13.0-0 ♘d7 14.♞b1 ♞fe8↑ Black has ideas such as ...♞ac8, ...♘a4, and ...d5 at some point which ensures him a good position.

9...♘bd7!



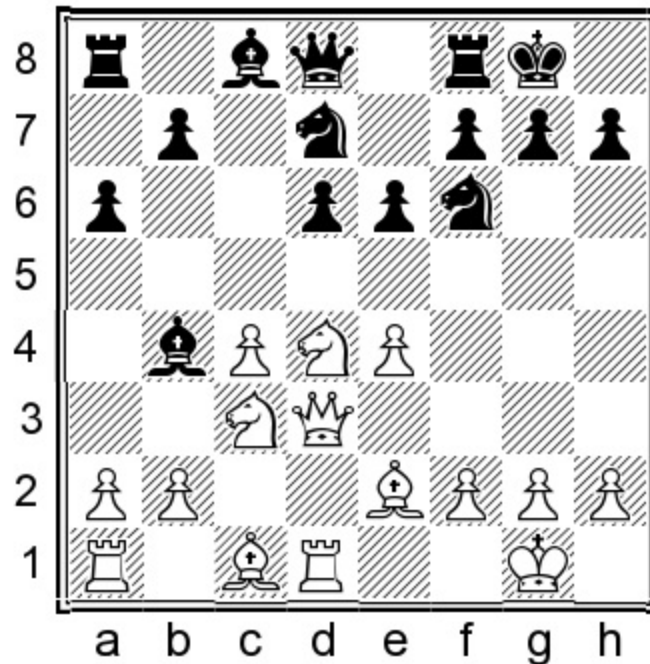
Position after: 9...♘bd7!

This move has the obvious threat of ...♘c5 leaving White with problems on e4. Further, White has no good way to prevent the maneuver.

10.f3

A) 10.♙c2 This was tried in a few games, especially by Jakovenko, but it does not seem to be accurate. 10...♙xc3! 11.bxc3 ♘c5 12.f3 ♙c7 13.♙e3 ♙d7 14.♙d2 e5 15.♘b3 ♙e6 16.♖fd1 ♖fd8 17.♙g5 Jakovenko, D (2710) – Andreikin, D (2708) Sochi 2017 17...♘a4! 18.♙xf6 gxf6 19.♖ac1 ♙xc4

B) 10.♖d1

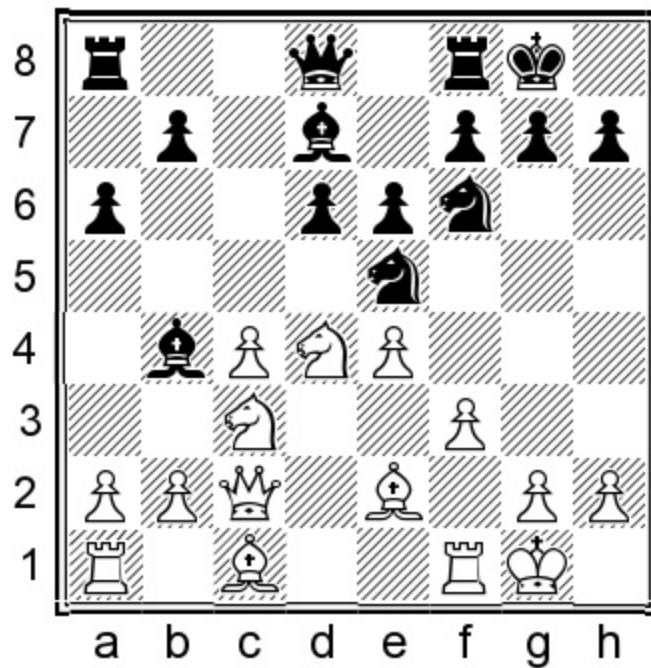


Position after: 10.♖d1

This was played in a recent blitz game, but it does not parry Black's threat. 10...♘c5 11.♙c2 ♙xc3! 12.♙xc3 ♘cxe4 13.♙a3 e5 14.♘b3 Le, Q (2709) – Quparadze, G (2463) Chess.com INT 2020. 14...d5! 15.cxd5 ♘g4! 16.♖f1 ♘gxf2↑ Δ 17.♖xf2?! ♙b6! 18.♘c5 ♙xc5 19.♙xc5 ♘xc5

10...♘e5 11.♙d1

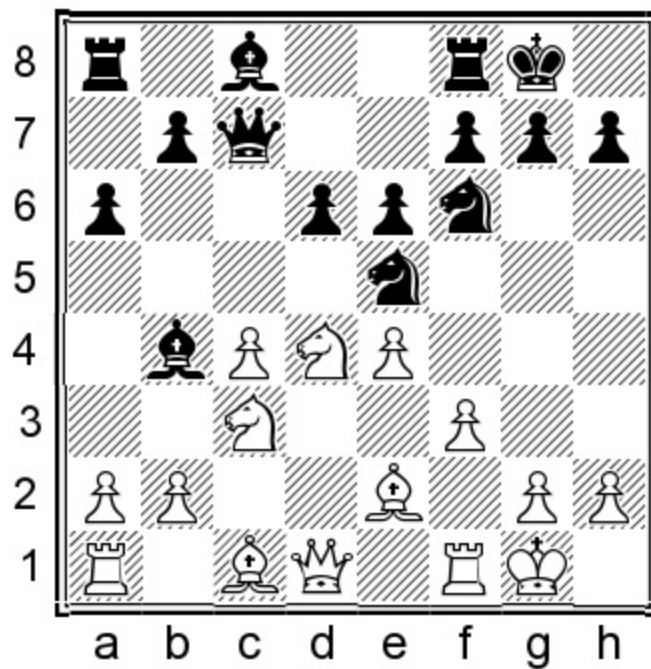
11.♙c2 ♙d7



Position after: 11...♙d7

12.♙e3 [12.♚b3 ♘c5 13.♙e3 ♘c6 14.♞ad1 ♚c7= White is clearly under pressure, and we are close to playing ...b5.] 12...♞c8 13.♚b3 ♙xc3 14.♚xc3 ♘xc4 15.♙xc4 d5 16.e5 ♘e8=

11...♚c7



Position after: 11...♚c7

12.♚b3 ♘c5 13.♙e3 ♘c6 14.♚d1

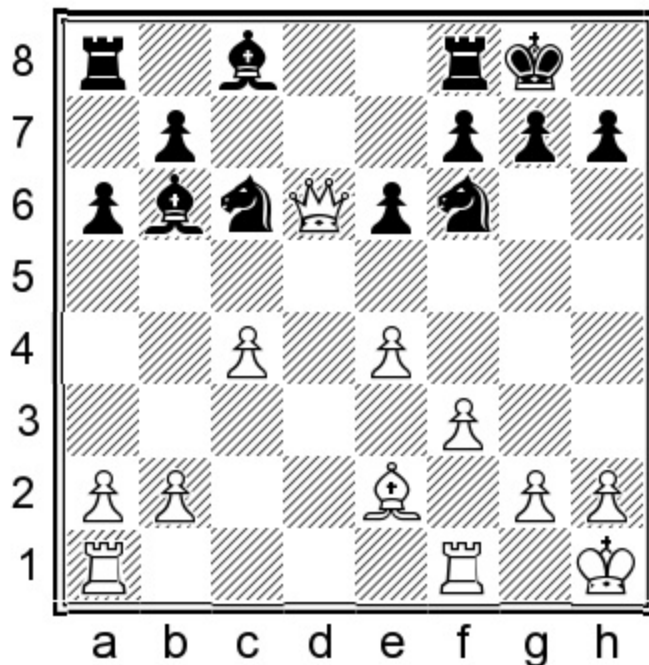
This position has been reached 5 times and the refutation illustrates White's problems.

14.♖ad1 e5! Wins a piece! 15.♗f5 ♖a5 16.♙c2 ♗xf5–+

14...♙b6!

Only played once but clearly the strongest.

15.♗a4 ♘ 15...♗xd4 16.♗xb6 ♗xe3+ 17.♕h1 ♗xb6 18.♙xd6



Position after: 18. ♙xd6

White has a queen and a pawn for 3 pieces, but he will be completely dominated on the dark squares. I do not like his chances.

18...♖d8

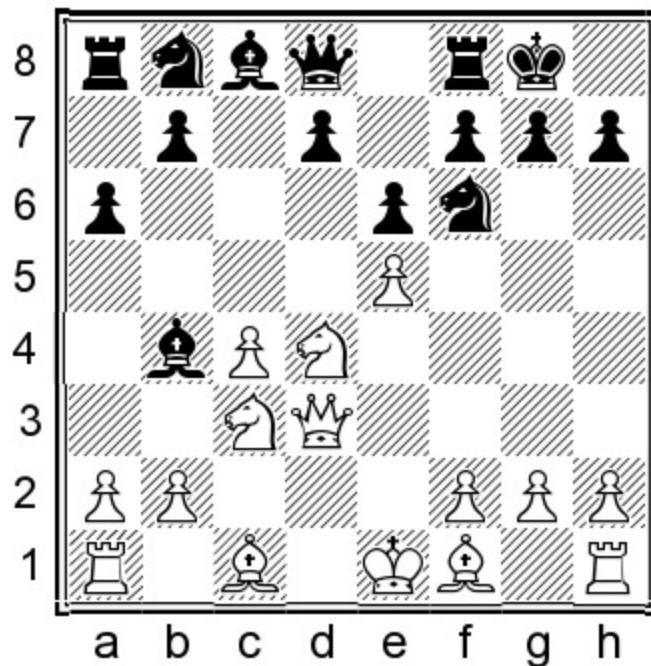
Objectively stronger is 18...e5!.

19.♙f4 e5 20.♙g5 h6 21.♙c1 ♗d4

This was clearly a nightmare for Smirnov to play, in Smirnov, T (2324) – Harutjunyan, G (2407) Moscow 2018.

h) 6.♗c3 ♗b4 7.♙d3 0-0 8.e5

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 a6 5.c4 ♗f6 6.♗c3 ♗b4!? 7.♙d3! 0-0!? 8.e5!



Position after: 8.e5!

As we saw in the previous subchapter, other moves are quite harmless for Black.

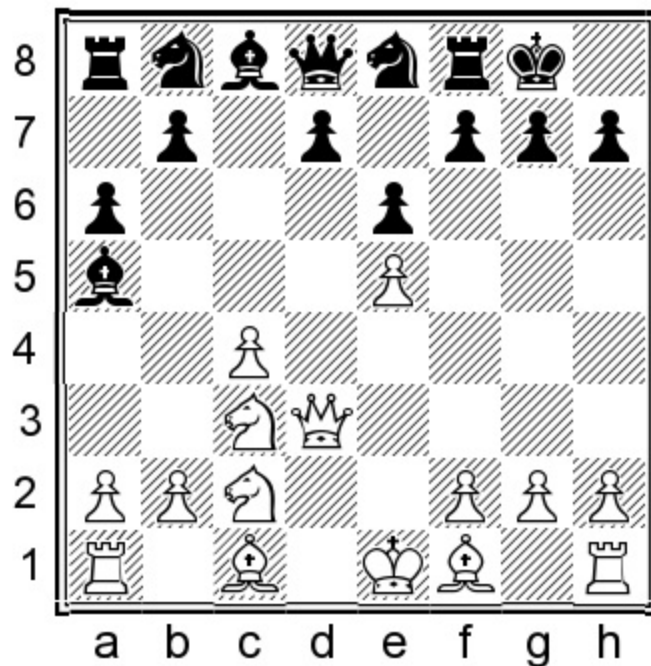
8...♞e8

8...♞g4? Against 7.♚c2, this is the continuation we explored, but there is a major difference: 9.♚g3! ♚a5 10.♙f4+- And the knight is in trouble.

9.♙f4

With this move, White shows his intentions to castle long.

A) 9.♞c2 ♙a5!?N



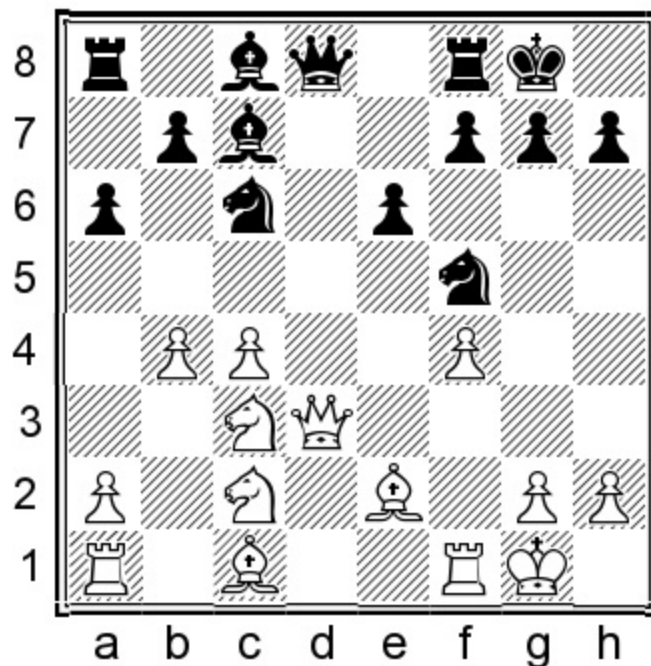
Position after: 9...♙a5!?N

Most players came back to e7, but I would like to suggest this move which keeps the bishop on a more active square. For instance, it still prevents ♘e4 from being playable.

A1) 10.♙f4 ♘c6 11.♙e2 b5! This is one of the reasons why the bishop is strong on e5. Since the knight is pinned to the king Black gets in this excellent counterpunch. 12.cxb5 axb5 13.a3 [13.♚xb5?? ♙a6 14.♚a4 ♙xe2 15.♙xe2 ♙xc3+] 13...♙a6 14.b4 ♙c7 15.♚e3 ♙b6 16.♚d2 f6↑

A2) 10.♚g3 ♘c6 11.♙d3 d6 12.exd6 ♚xd6=

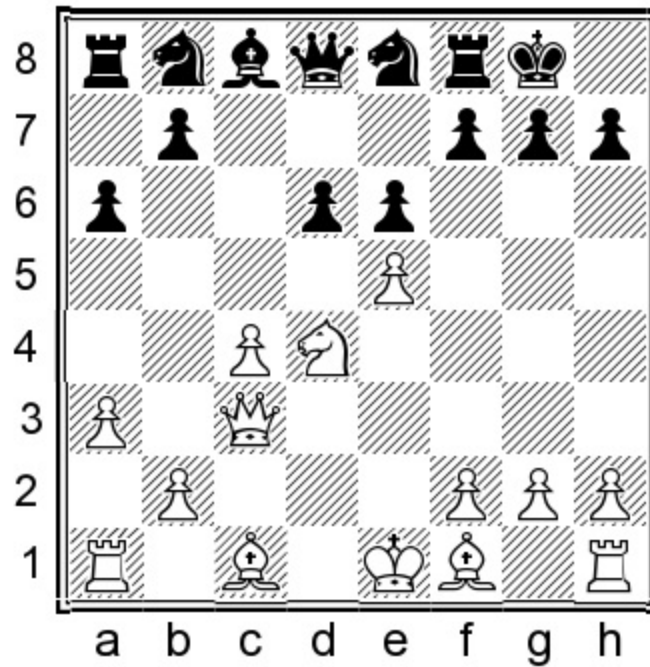
A3) 10.b4 ♙c7 11.f4 ♘c6 12.♙e2 d6 13.exd6 ♘xd6 14.0-0 ♘f5=



Position after: 14... ♖f5

White has probably advanced too many pawns; his position is unstable.

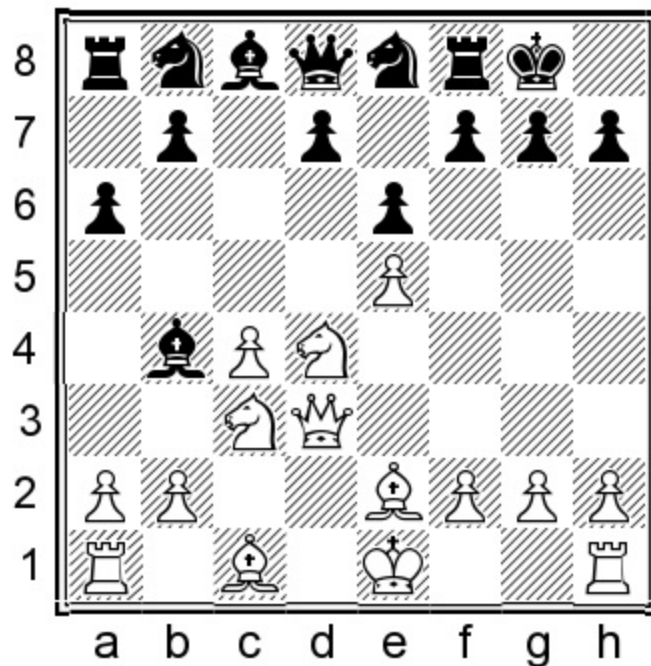
B) 9.a3 ♕xc3+ 10.♗xc3 d6!



Position after: 10...d6!

Black needs to quickly react in the centre. 11.exd6 [11.♖f3 dxe5 12.♖xe5 f6 13.♖d3 ♖d6 14.♕e2 ♖f5! Black is going to have full control over the d4-square. 15.0-0 ♖c6 16.♖d1 ♖cd4 17.♕f1 e5] Zarubitski, V (2415) – Fedorov, A (2557) Orsha 2019.] 11...♖xd6 12.♕e2 e5 13.♖c2 ♖c6 14.0-0 ♕f5= Again, in Favarel, J (2333) – Maze, S (2554) Chartres 2019 Black is trying to get rid of the knight on c2 to reach d4.

C) 9.♕e2



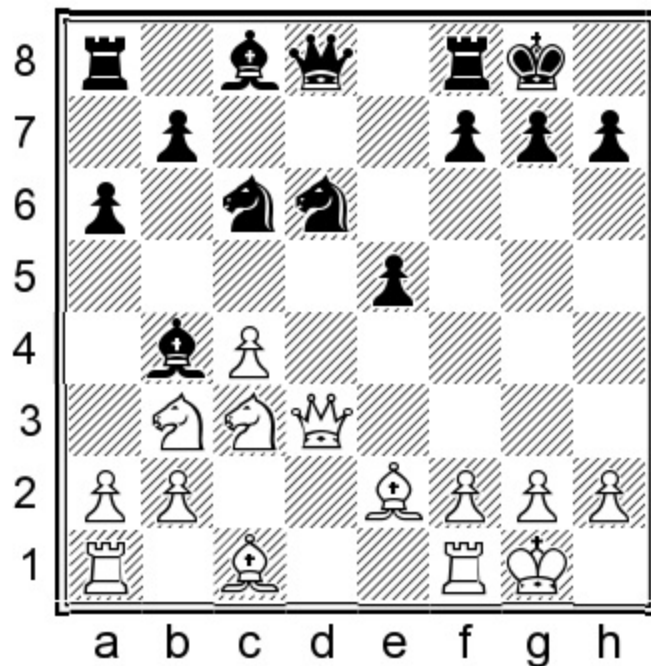
Position after: 9. ♔e2

This is a really natural move. It has been played more often than 9. ♔f4, but I consider it to be less dangerous because White is not going to long castle. 9...d6 Of course we need to react in the centre.

C1) 10. ♘f3 ♖c6 11. a3 ♔a5!?N 12. ♘g5 ♔xc3+ 13. bxc3 f5 14. exf6 ♗xf6 15. 0-0 d5± Objectively there is slight edge for White, but the position is fully playable for Black.

C2) 10. ♘c2 ♔a5 11. exd6 ♔xd6 12. ♔xd6 ♗xd6 This is similar to many positions we will consider, and it worked well for Black in this game. 13. b4 ♔c7 14. ♔f4 ♗c6⇌ It occurred in Balogh, C (2598) – Mieziš, N (2456) Brest 2019.

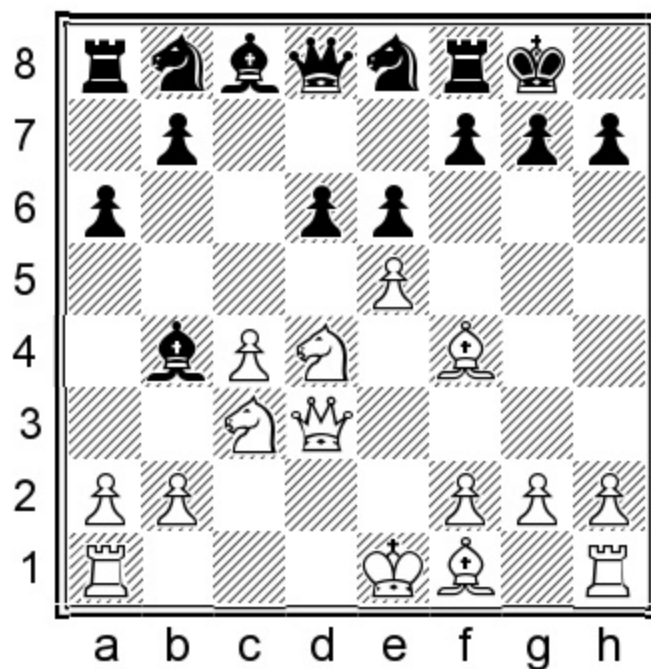
C3) 10. exd6 ♗xd6 11. 0-0 e5 12. ♘b3 ♗c6!?N



Position after: 12... Nc6!?

13. Nbd5 Qe6 14. a3 Qa5 15. Rfd1 Rf8 → The computer always tends to favour White in these positions, but the plan seems much easier for Black, who at some point will advance in the centre with ...e4 and some good prospects.

9...d6

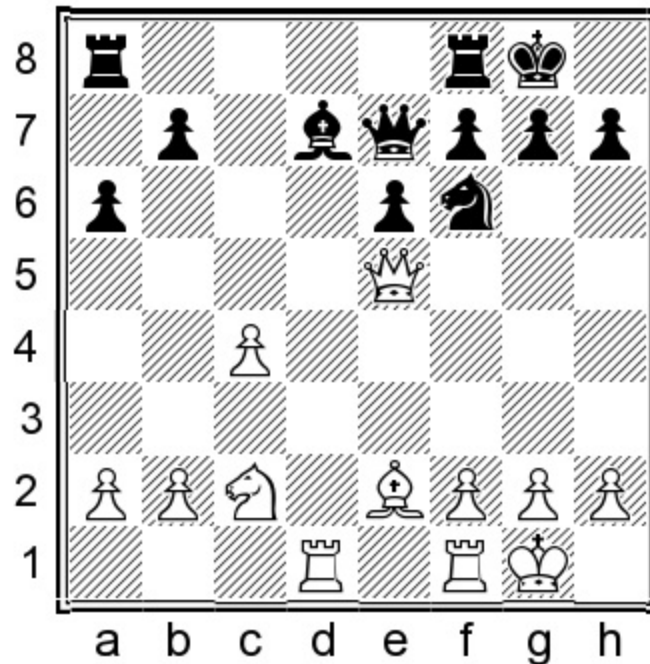


Position after: 9...d6

10.exd6!

It seems that it is a bit harder to meet this move, even if it has been played less often.

10.♘c2 ♕xc3+ 11.♚xc3 dxe5 12.♖d1 [12.♕xe5 ♘c6 13.♖d1 ♚e7 This transposes into 12.♖d1.]
12...♚e7 13.♕xe5 ♘c6 14.♕e2 [14.♕d3 ♘xe5 15.♚xe5 ♘f6 16.0-0 b6 17.♘e3 ♕b7 18.♘f5 ♚c5] 14...♘xe5 15.♚xe5 ♕d7 16.0-0 ♘f6!?N



Position after: 16...♘f6!?N

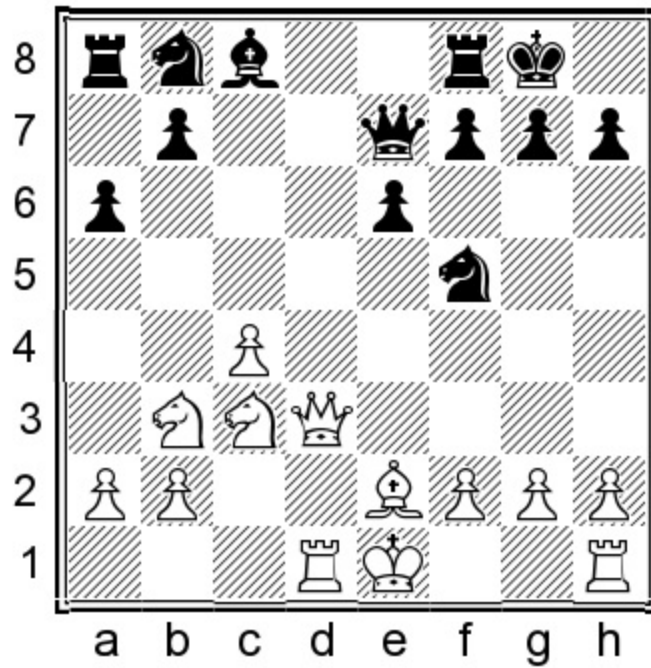
Two games continued with 16...♖ac8, but I would rather develop the knight. If White is still better, it is a tiny advantage. 17.♘e3 ♖fe8!? 18.♕f3 ♕c6 19.♕xc6 bxc6 20.♖d3 a5⇌ Black will have some counterplay on the b-file which should compensate his weaker pawn structure.

10...♕xd6

10...♕xd6? 11.0-0-0± And Black is in a difficult position due to pressure down the d-file.

11.♕xd6

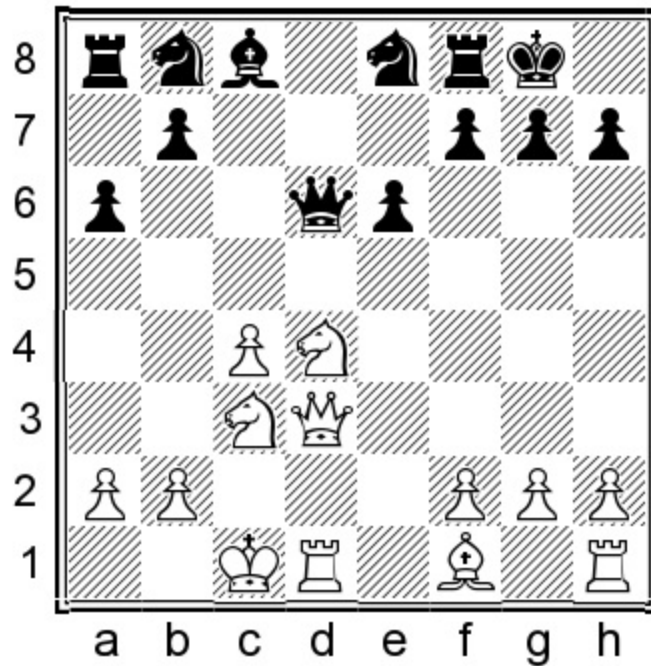
11.♘b3 ♚e7 12.♕xd6 ♘xd6 13.♖d1 [13.0-0-0 ♘f5⇌ It is not clear who has the better prospects in this position with kings on opposite sides; but I think White was not so confident here.] 13...♘f5 14.♕e2



Position after: 14. ♔e2

And now, in Magem Badals, J (2522) – Delchev, A (2554) Barcelona 2019, I would play 14... ♘c6
 15. 0-0 b6 16. ♖fe1 ♗d8 17. ♚h3 ♖xd1 18. ♖xd1 ♔b7=.

11... ♚xd6 12. 0-0-0



Position after: 12. 0-0-0

Maybe White can keep a slight advantage here. But Black is solid, and the position feels really

playable. A couple of games continued with 12...♖d7. Another option for White is 12.♞d1 e5 13.♜f5 Solodovnichenko, Y – Mieziš, N (2516) Baden 2019 13...♞b4!N 14.♞d2 ♟xf5 15.♞xf5 ♜c6 16.♟d3 g6 17.♞g5 ♜c7 18.0-0 ♜e6⇌ I really like routing the knight to d4 here.

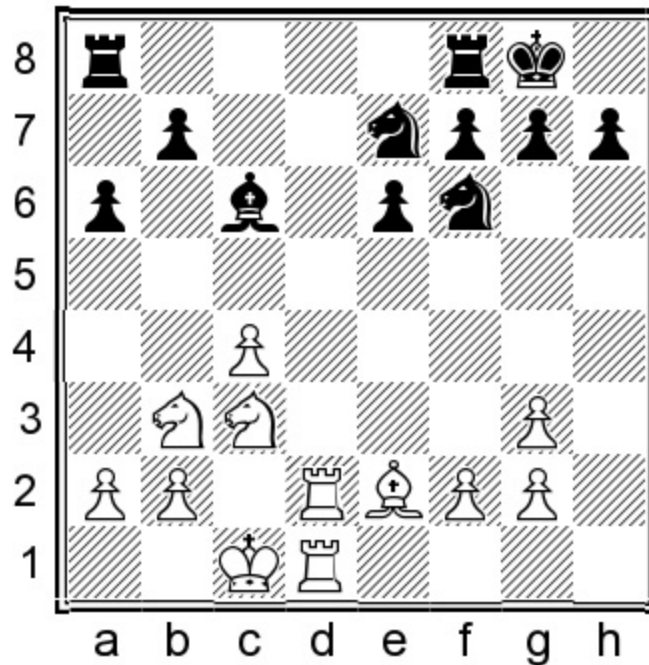
12...♟d7!? 13.♟e2 ♞f4+ 14.♞d2 ♜f6 15.♞g3

15.g3 ♞c7 16.♞hd1 ♜c6 17.♜b3 e5!⇌ White has a small initiative due to the d-file, but it is only temporary.

15...♞xg3 16.hxg3 ♜c6 17.♜b3

17.♞hd1 ♜xd4 18.♞xd4 ♟c6 19.f3 ♞fc8 This is similar as our king is heading toward e7.

17...♜e7 18.♞hd1 ♟c6=



Position after: 18...♟c6=

Even here I do not think White has real possibilities to keep the initiative in the long term.

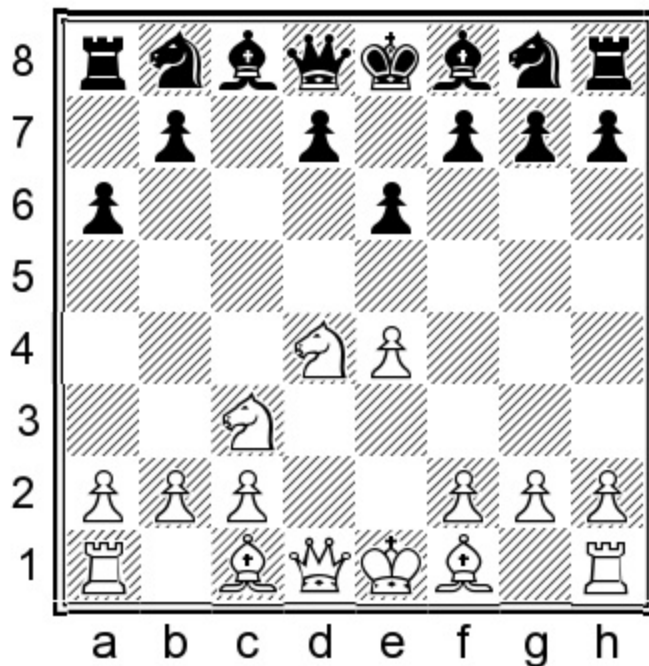
Chapter Conclusion

I think the only system that can be a problem from a theoretical point of view is this line with 7.♞d3 which is what most of the best players are playing nowadays. With my current analysis I sometimes do not maintain full equality with Black, but the results are totally fine for Black. The reason behind this is that it is hard to keep an edge with White. We are slightly worse, but we have an easy plan to follow!

Chapter 3

5. ♘c3

1.e4 c5 2. ♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 a6 5. ♘c3



Chapter Guide

Chapter 3 – 5. ♘c3

1.e4 c5 2. ♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 a6 5. ♘c3 b5

a) 6. ♘e3

b) 6. ♘e2

c) 6.g3 ♘b7 7. ♘g2 ♘f6 8.--

d) 6.g3 ♘b7 7. ♘g2 ♘f6 8.a3

e) 6.g3 ♘b7 7. ♘g2 ♘f6 8.0-0

f) 6.a3 ♘b7 7.-- & 7. ♘e2

g) 6.a3 ♘b7 7. ♘e3

h) 6.a3 ♘b7 7. ♘d3

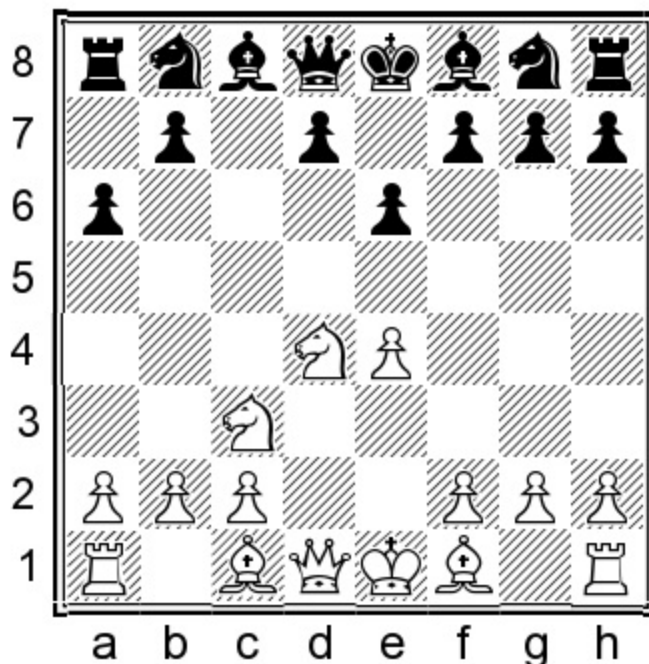
i) 6. ♘d3 ♘b7 7.--, 7..0-0 ♘c6 8.-- - Sidelines

j) 6. ♘d3 ♘b7 7.0-0 ♘c6 8. ♘xc6 ♘xc6 9.--

k) 6. ♘d3 ♘b7 7.0-0 ♘c6 8. ♘xc6 ♘xc6 9. ♖e1

a) 6.♘e3

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.♘c3



Position after: 5.♘c3

During my youth I often heard my coaches tell me “Do not play ♘c3 against the Kan, it will only get you into trouble after ...b5.”. That is probably why I have not been concerned about doing this chapter, and it also explains why, in my mind, it should only come in third position of the most dangerous variations by White although it is played more often by White than 5.c4. Nevertheless, keep in mind that it is a very natural continuation, and it cannot really be bad for White. Also, what is difficult in this chapter is the multiple possible transpositions into different chapters or subchapters.

5...b5!

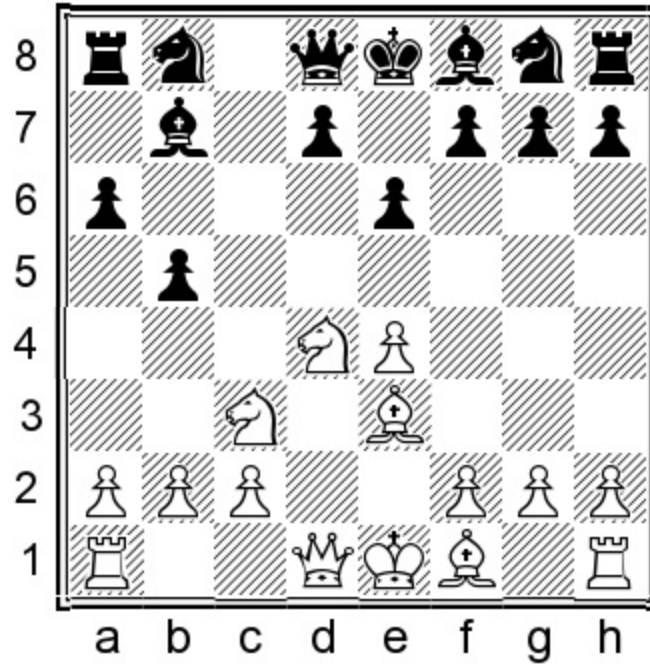
Always trust your coaches! This move aims at quickly counterattacking in the centre, especially targeting the e4-pawn. White has a wide choice of replies, and we will start by examining two bishop moves that are not as common as other replies.

5...♙c7 This is also a main line here, even more so than 5...b5, but it usually transposes either in the Taimanov Sicilian, or the Scheveningen, and those are not the subject of this book.

6.♘e3

Neither 6.♘e3 nor the other move, 6.♘e2 (which will be analyzed in the next subchapter) try to defend e4. And I think that those who play these moves are only looking for logical development, even if it is not the most accurate way.

6...♙b7



Position after: 6...♙b7

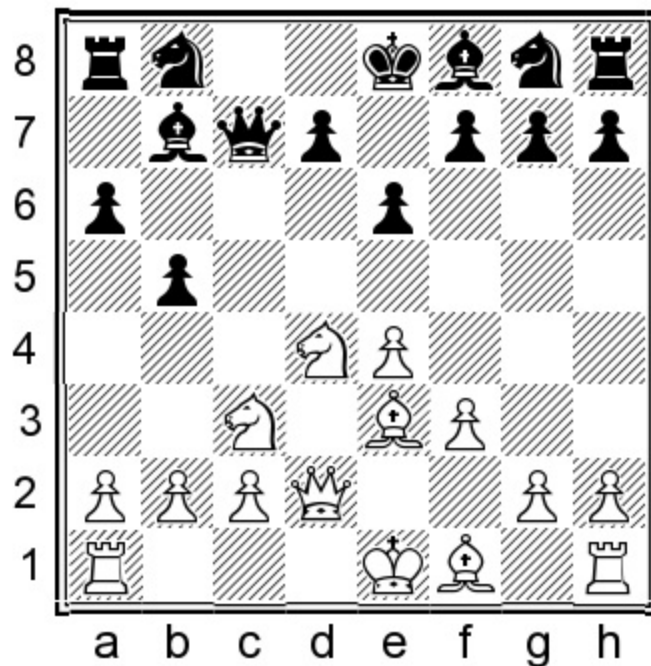
7.♙d3

White develops his bishop while protecting the pawn on e4.

A) 7.a3 A few players tried this move here, but it is just a transposition into the subchapter about 6.a3.

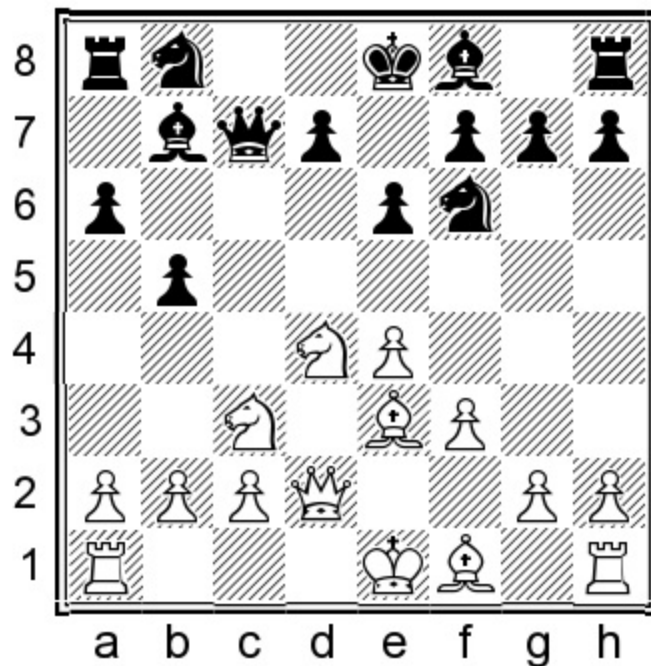
B) 7.♙e2? Careless play leads to a loss of a pawn for White. 7...b4 8.♘a4 ♙xe4

C) 7.f3 ♙c7 8.♙d2



Position after: 8. ♔d2

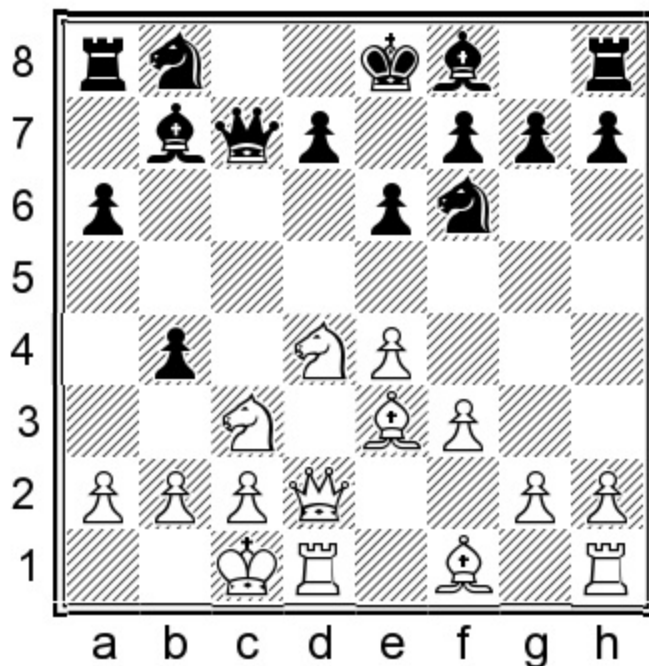
I think this is the only logical plan after 7.f3, White must try to castle on the queenside and launch an attack on the kingside. 8... ♖f6



Position after: 8... ♖f6

C1) 9.a3?! ♖c6 10.0-0-0 I do not see how this could be right for White. [10.♙e2 ♙e7 11.0-0 In general, playing f3 and 0-0 together is not a great idea. The aim of having a pawn on f3 is to play g2-g4 which is pointless when White castles shot. 11... ♖e5] 10...b4! 11.axb4 ♙xb4

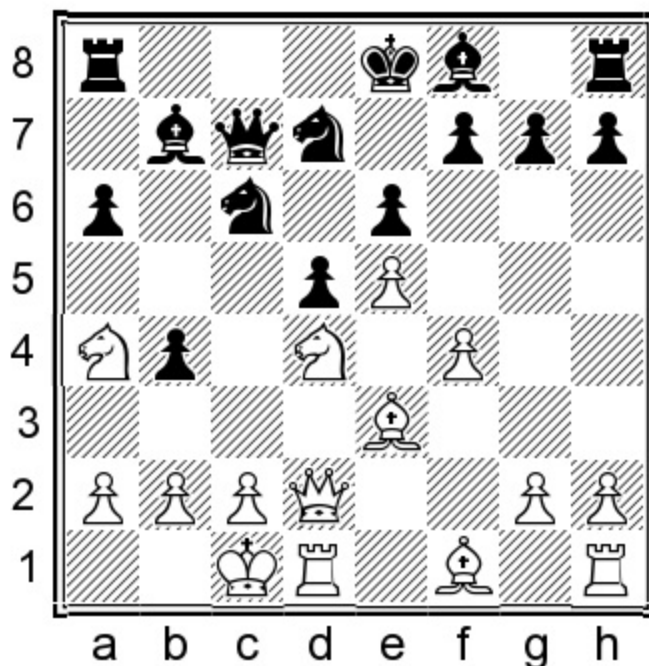
C2) 9.0-0-0 b4!



Position after: 9...b4!

First, White needs to find a spot for his knight.

C2.1) 10.♘a4 d5 [Here 10...e5?? clearly backfires. 11.♘f5 d5 12.♗b6+-] 11.e5 ♘fd7 12.f4 ♘c6=

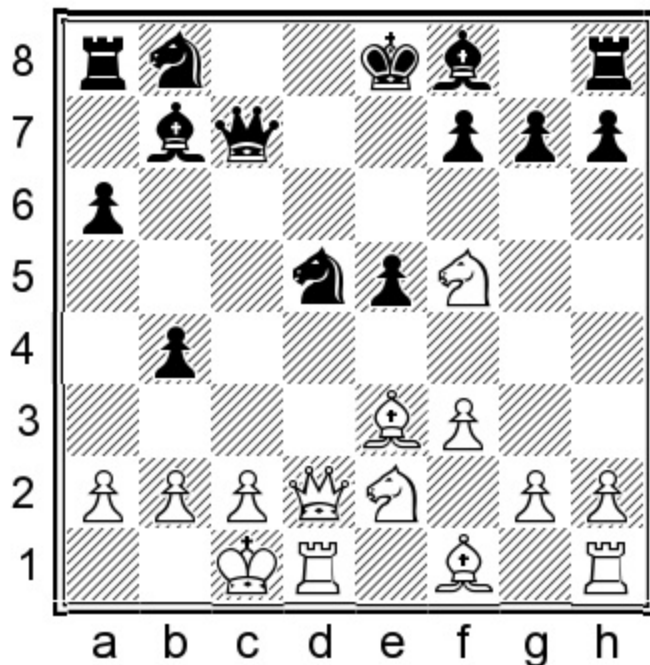


Position after: 12...♘c6=

White has some issues with the knight on a4, but he has managed to close the centre. The game should be objectively balanced. Here White misplayed in the following game. 13.♔b1? ♘xd4

14. ♖xd4 ♜c8 15. ♔d3 ♔c6 16. ♘b6 ♔c5! 17. ♗xc5 ♘xc5 18. ♘xc8 ♘b7 19. ♘a7 ♔a4+ Black was winning although he failed to convert in Lopez Silva, H (2414) – Vasquez Schroder, R (2545) Santiago de Chile 2014.

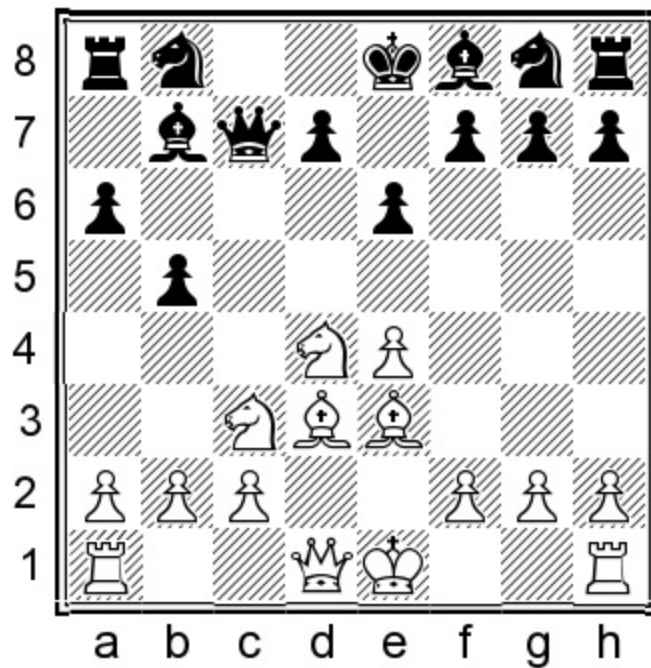
C2.2) 10. ♘ce2 This has occurred in the majority of games. 10...e5! This is very strong and the only way to ensure opening the centre. 11. ♘f5 d5! 12. exd5 ♘xd5



Position after: 12... ♘xd5

13. ♔g5?! [13. ♔f2 ♘d7 14. ♖b1 g6 15. ♘e3 ♘7b6] 13... ♘d7 14. ♖b1 ♘7b6! Black quietly develops his pieces before chasing away his opponent's pieces. 15. ♘c1 h6 16. ♔h4 g6 17. ♘e3 ♔g7 Novgorodskij, V (2370) – Papin, V (2475) Moscow 2008

7... ♗c7



Position after: 7... ♔c7

Among several good continuations for Black, this is the main and possibly the most logical one.

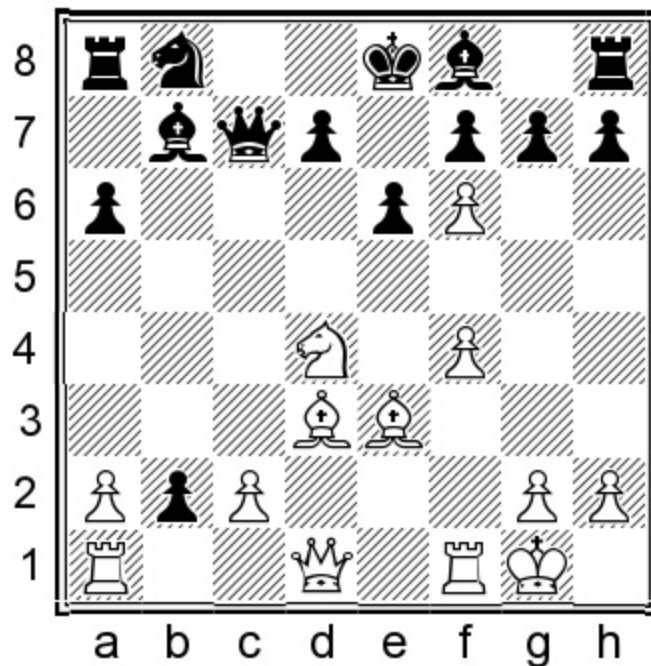
8.f4

Less played, but we are transposing into another (more important) variation.

8.0-0 ♘f6

A) 9.a3 See the next subchapter for variations with a2-a3.

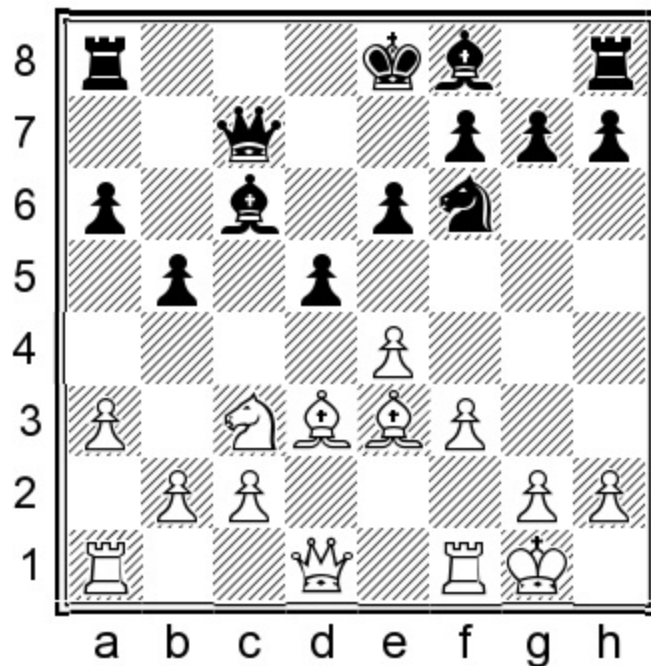
B) 9.f4 b4! 10.e5 bxc3 11.exf6 cxb2



Position after: 11...cxb2

White remains worse in every variation here. 12.♖b1 [12.fxg7 ♕xg7 13.♖b1 ♘c6 14.c3 ♘e7 15.♖xb2 ♘d5↑] 12...gxf6 13.♖xb2 ♘c6 ♖ Kersic, M (2159) – Horvath, J (2551) Feffernitz 2008.

C) 9.f3 Such a move is normally designed for a kingside attack, and White should long castle otherwise it just creates a weakness. 9...♘c6 10.♘xc6 ♕xc6 11.a3 d5 ♖



Position after: 11...d5 ♖

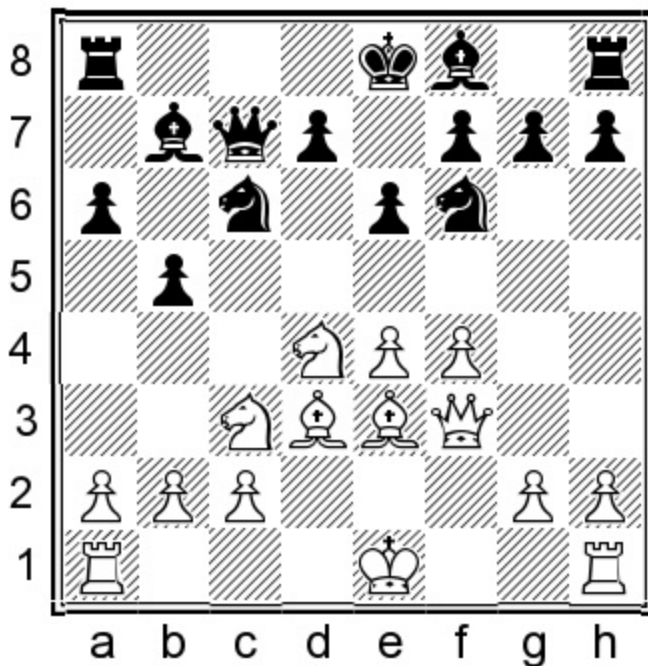
The position is about to open and White will regret such moves as f3 and the exposed position of his

bishops.

8...♘f6 9.♚f3

9.e5 ♕xg2!?N 9...b4 is a decent alternative that has been played, but I do not see any objective reason to avoid this line. 10.♖g1 ♘d5 11.♚d2 ♘xe3 12.♚xe3 ♕b7 13.0-0-0 ♘c6

9...♘c6



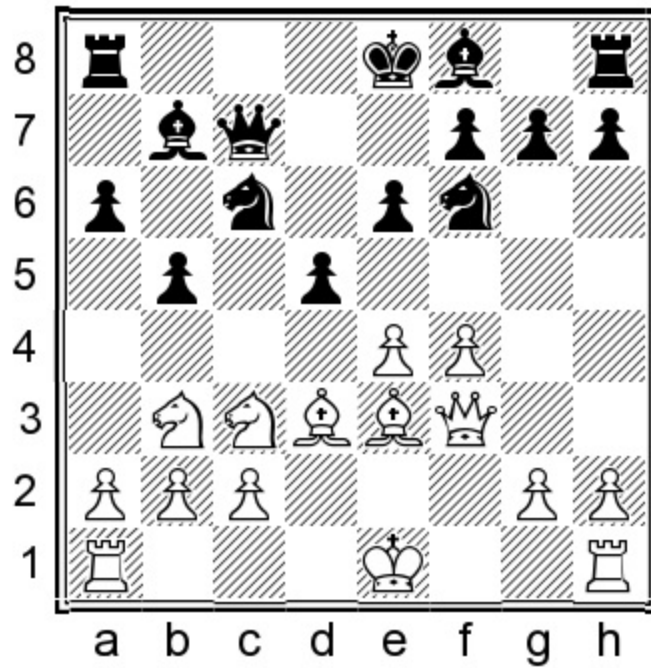
Position after: 9...♘c6

With a strange move order, we have transposed in a position that usually occurs in the Taimanov and is not a great one for White.

10.0-0-0

A) 10.g4?! This move is severely punished by 10...h5! and the following variation is quite forced. 11.g5 ♘g4 12.♕g1 ♘xd4 13.♕xd4 e5 14.fxe5 ♕c5 15.♕xc5 ♚xc5 16.0-0-0 ♘xe5

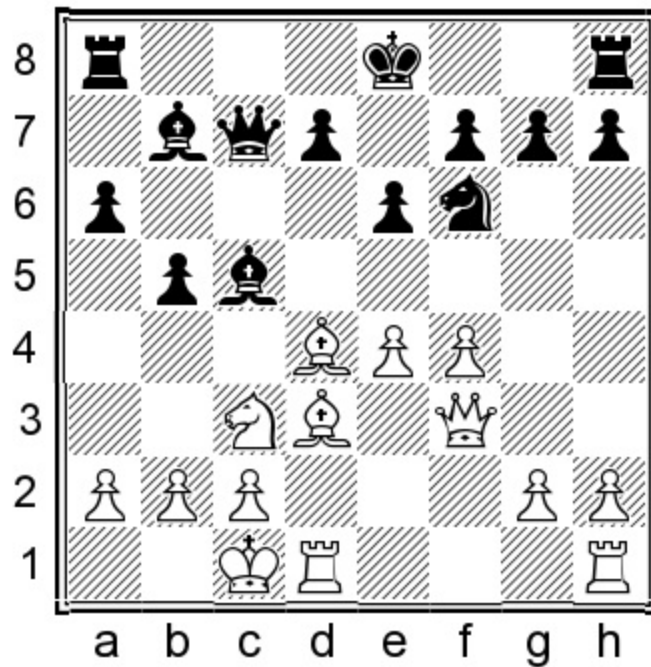
B) 10.♘b3?! d5!



Position after: 10...d5!

A strong reply. 11.exd5 ♖b4! 12.0-0 ♜xd3 13.cxd3 ♜xd5 14.♞e4 ♜xe3 15.♙xe3 ♞e7 ♞ Tesik, C (2340) – Ribli, Z (2588) Hungary 2012.

10...♜xd4 11.♞xd4 ♞c5



Position after: 11...♞c5

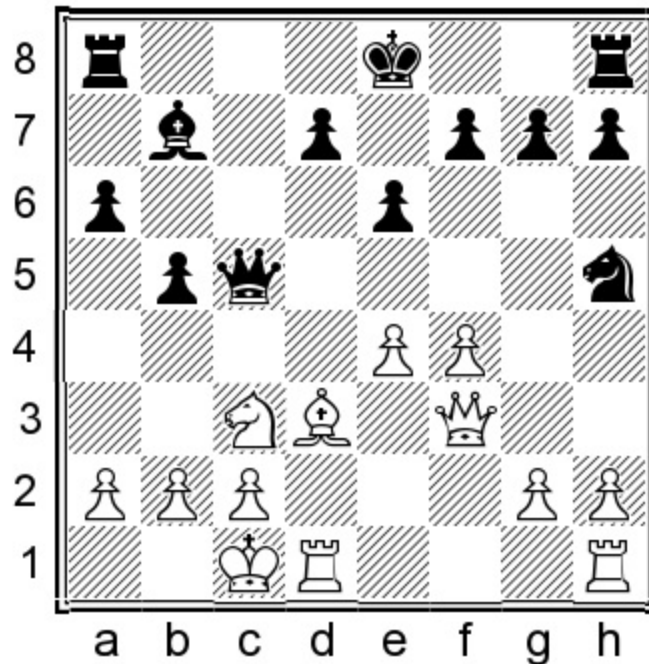
This is the easiest way for Black to complete his development while maintaining the pressure against

e4.

12.♙xc5 ♖xc5 13.♚g3

13.g4 b4 14.♘e2 d5 15.e5 ♘e4↑ Kristensen K (2342) – Himanshu, S (2436) Lund 2018.

13...♘h5 14.♚f3



Position after: 14.♚f3

14.♚g4 g6 15.♖hf1 b4 16.♘b1 0-0 17.♘d2 d5 18.e5 a5⇌

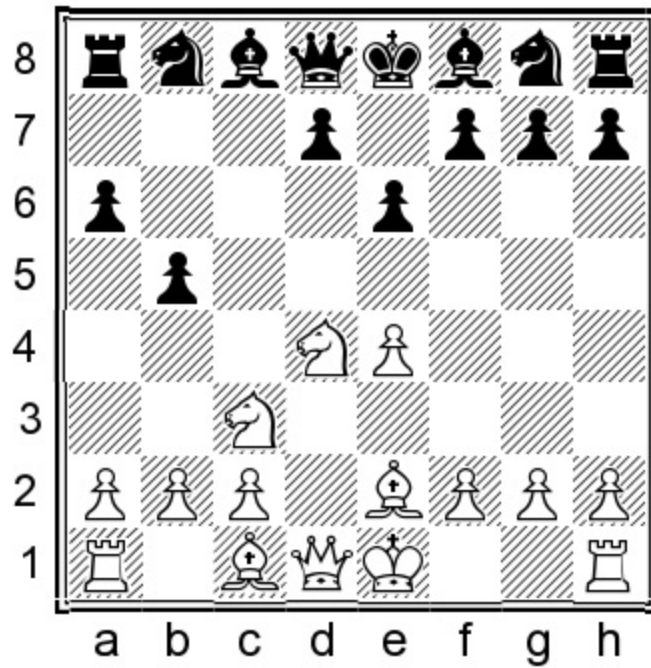
14...♘f6=

A peaceful draw occurred in Yemelin, V (2556) – Antoniewski, R (2531) Czech Republic 2018.

If Black wants to keep playing, then 14...0-0!? is playable. 15.g4 ♘f6 16.g5 ♘e8 17.h4 b4⇌

b) 6.♙e2

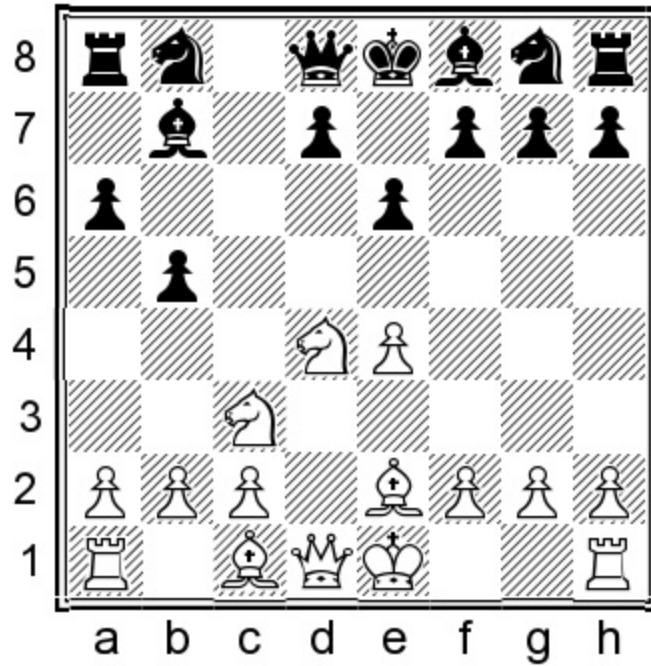
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.♘c3 b5! 6.♙e2



Position after: 6. ♖e2

As I said, it has many similarities with 6. ♖e3 that we just analysed because it is a logical developing move, but it does not aim at protecting the pawn on e4.

6... ♖b7

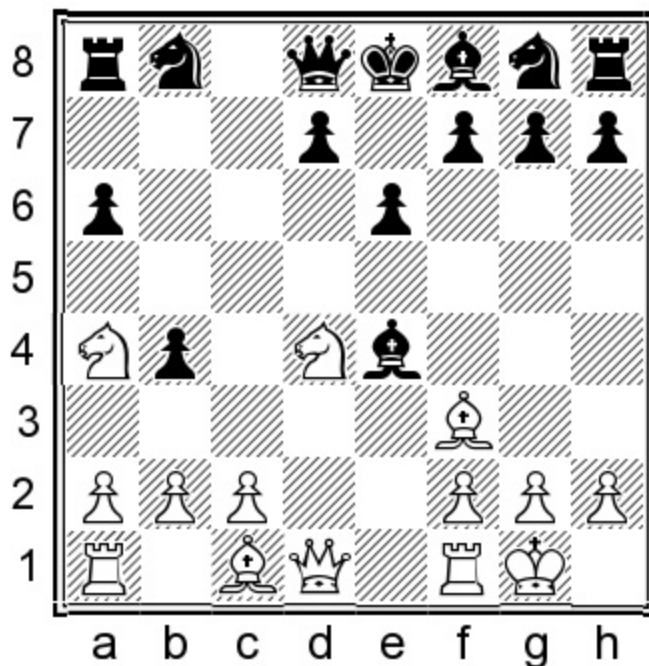


Position after: 6... ♖b7

7. ♖f3

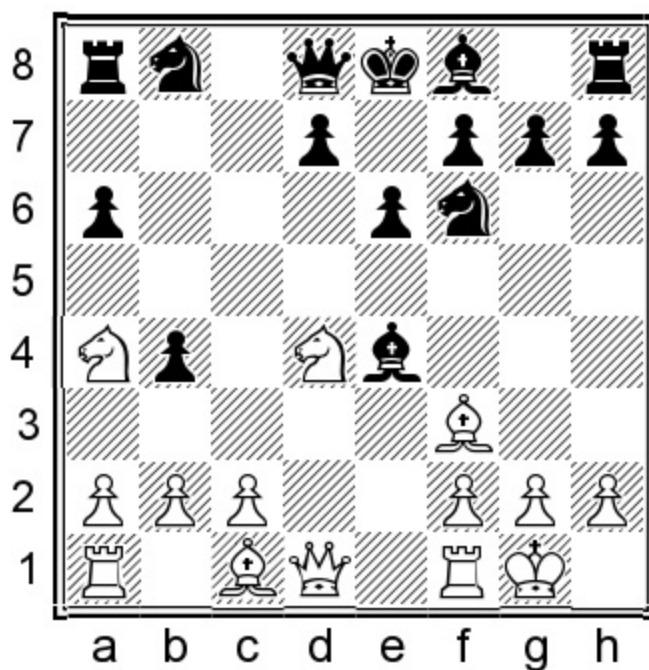
A) 7.a3 For this refer to the subchapter about 6.a3 ♖b7 7.♙e2.

B) 7.0-0 This alternative is not completely harmless. Of course, we should accept the challenge and take the pawn. 7...b4! 8.♘a4 ♗xe4 9.♙f3



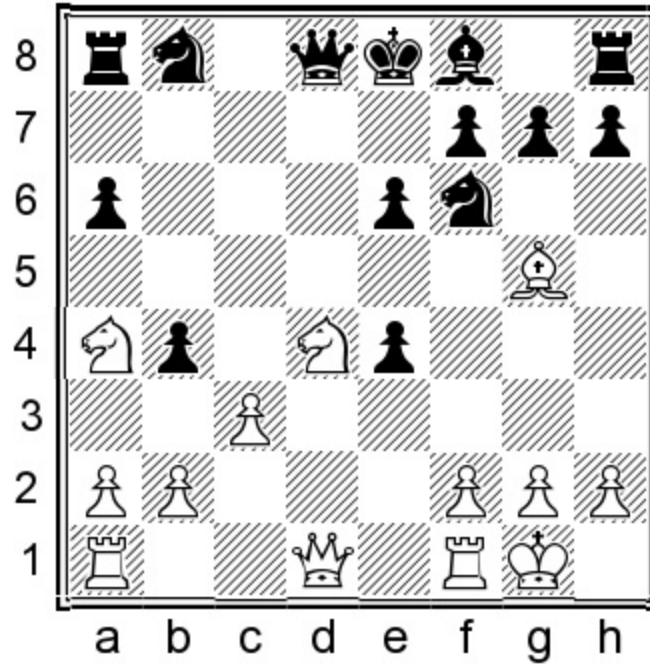
Position after: 9. ♙f3

Challenge the bishop is clearly the most dangerous continuation. [9.♞e1!? Does not really change much, and it is not clear that the rook is useful on e1. Or at least it is not the most important move. 9...♗f6 10.♙f3 d5 is similar to the game.] 9...♗f6



Position after: 9... ♘f6

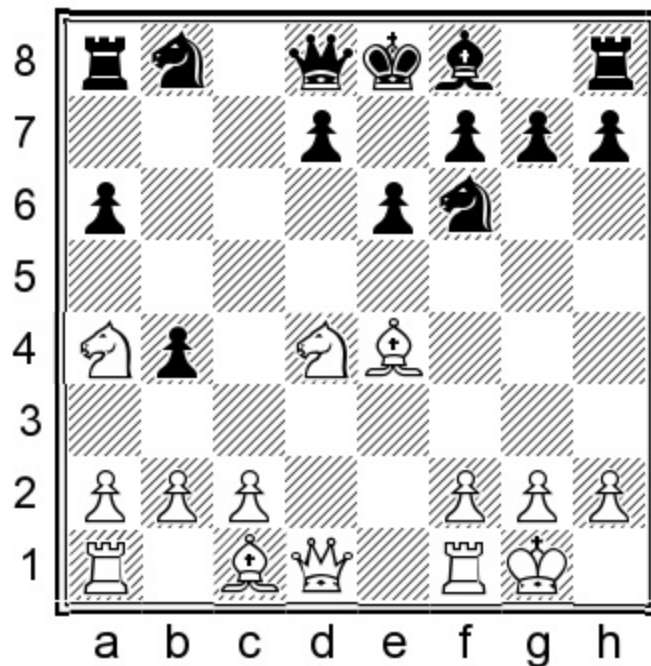
B1) 10. ♔g5 Has been the most frequent move here but it does appear to be the most accurate. For example, we can simply defend the bishop with: 10...d5!? [10... ♕xf3 11. ♖xf3 d5 12. ♗ae1! ♘bd7 13. ♘xe6 fxe6 14. ♗xe6+ ♔f7 15. ♗fe1 ♖] 11. ♕xe4 dxe4 12.c3.



Position after: 12.c3

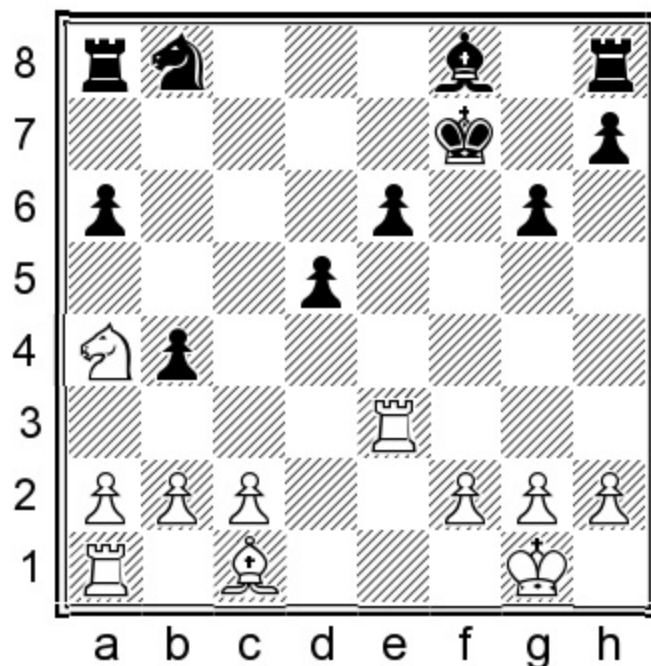
This was played in Espinosa Aranda, A (2385) – Korneev, O (2590) Linares 2014, and I would like to suggest the following for Black: 12...bxc3 13. ♘xc3 ♕e7. Black is about to castle while White does not seem to have enough play.

B2) 10. ♕xe4



Position after: 10. ♕xe4

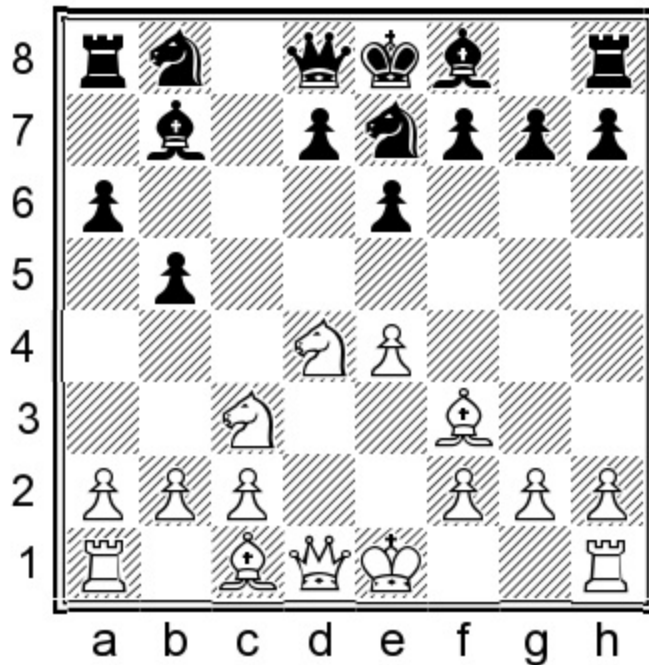
This might be seen as the most critical continuation. 10... ♖xe4 11. ♖e1 [11. ♖f3?! d5 12. c4 This goes nowhere for White: 12... bxc3 13. ♖xc3 ♖xc3 14. bxc3 ♕c5 15. ♕e3 0-0.] 11... d5! 12. ♖xe6 This sacrifice has been tried twice by the same Indian player, earning him two draws against grandmasters. [12. c4 bxc3 13. bxc3 ♕d6!? There is a “perpetual threat” that White should accept if he does not want to end up worse. 14. c4 0-0 15. cxd5 ♕xh2+ 16. ♔xh2 ♖h4+ 17. ♔g1 ♖xf2+=] 12... fxe6 13. ♖h5+ g6 14. ♖e5 ♖f6 15. ♖xe4 ♖xe5 16. ♖xe5 ♔f7 17. ♖e3!



Position after: 17. ♖e3!

More or less forcing a draw. [17.♔g5?! ♖d7 18.♖e3 h6 19.♖f3+ ♔g7= Black has the centre, and he could have tried more in Nitin, S (2449) – Jojua, D (2583) Abu Dhabi 2018.] 17...♖d7 18.♖f3+ ♔e8 19.♖e3 ♔f7=

7...♖e7!?



Position after: 7...♖e7!?

I like this approach. The knight heads toward g6, where it will not be annoyed by means of e4-e5.

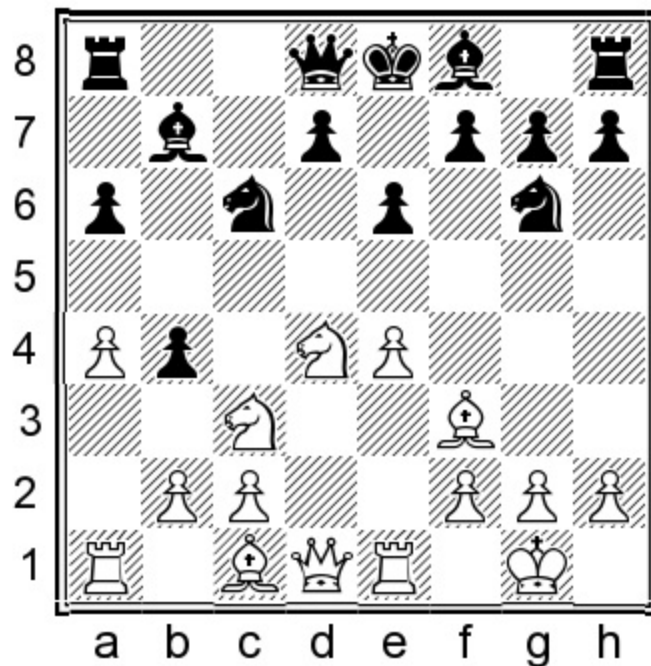
8.0-0

8.♔g5 prevents 8...♖g6, but the bishop does not have any other idea here. 8...h6 9.♔h4 ♖b6! 10.a4 ♖bc6 11.♖xc6 ♖xc6 12.axb5 axb5 13.♖xa8+ ♔xa8 14.0-0 ♔c5= It is clear that the white pieces are misplaced, Black has the better position. [Zaitsev, I (2417) – Ghaem Maghami, E (2446) Moscow 2000.]

8...♖g6 9.e5!?

White is trying to get some play on the h1-a8 diagonal, but we can keep everything under control.

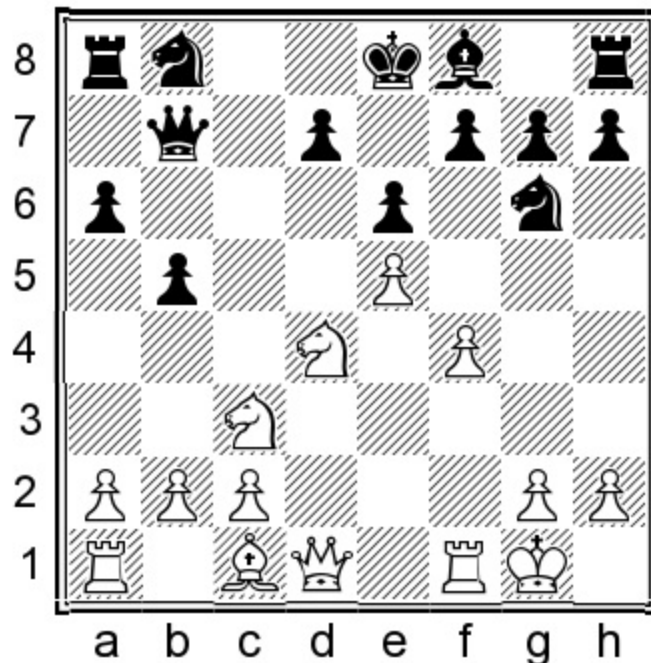
9.♖e1 ♖c6 10.a4 b4



Position after: 10...b4

11. ♖xc6 [11. ♘d5? This is a typical trick by White in this kind of pawn structure, but here there is simply no threat at all. 11... ♖ce5! 12. ♘f4 ♙c5+] 11... ♙xc6 12. ♘d5 ♙c5= Once again, it is not clear that there is anything special for White, he lost in Kalashian, D (2380) – Sjugirov, S (2653) Yerevan 2014.

9... ♙c7! 10. ♙xb7 ♙xb7 11.f4



Position after: 11.f4

Often a weakening move, but White needs to defend his pawn on e5.

11...♞c6 12.♜xc6 ♚xc6 13.♚e2

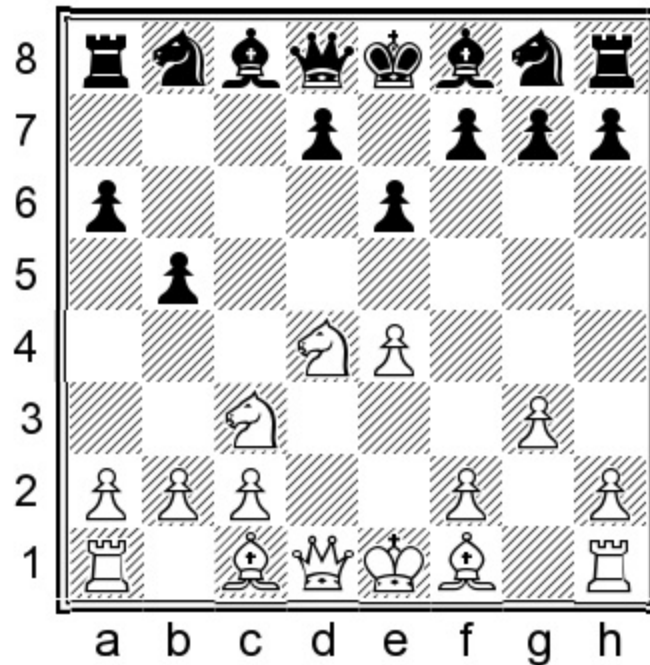
This occurred in Guseinov, G (2609) – Kamsky, G (2702) Baku 2010, and now I like:

13...♞c8!♣

That prevents White from going anywhere with his knight, Black is simply better.

c) 6.g3 ♗b7 7.♗g2 ♜f6 8.--

1.e4 c5 2.♞f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♞xd4 a6 5.♞c3 b5 6.g3



Position after: 6.g3

Even if it is rarely a main line, every Sicilian contains a variation where White can fianchetto on the kingside. The Kan Sicilian is no exception.

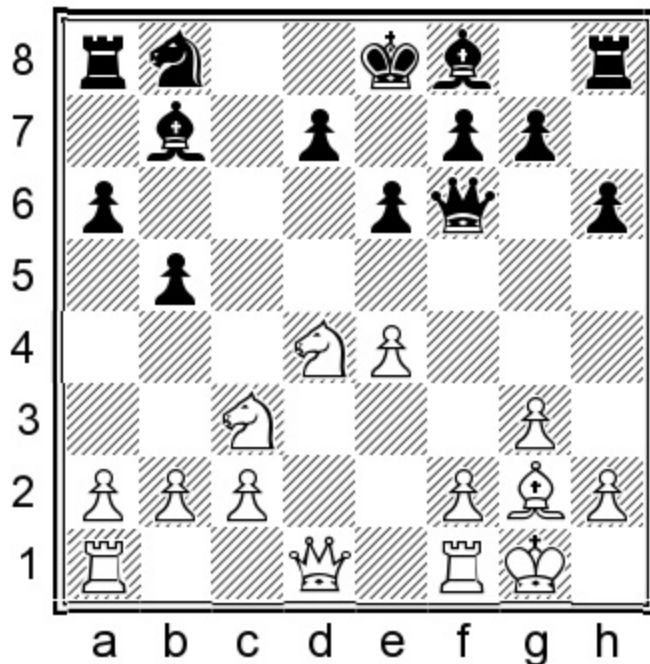
6...♗b7 7.♗g2 ♜f6

The most logical move although Black has other choices. Black will have to keep the possibilities of e4-e5 under control because there are some tactical ideas for White that we need to know. White has tried several moves here. In most of the cases White is defending his e4-pawn, and this is the moves we will consider in this subchapter.

8.♚e2

A) 8.0-0 and 8.a3 will be considered in the next subchapter.

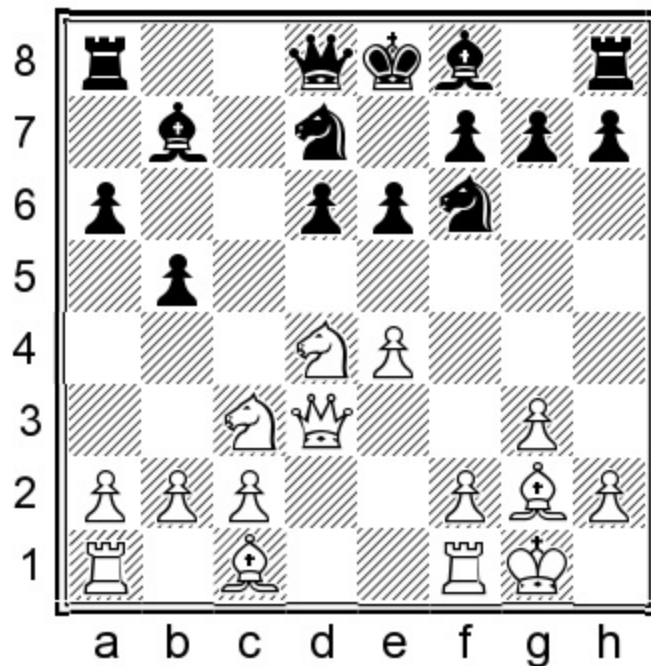
B) 8.♔g5?! This move is a bit tricky, but it cannot be very good for White as he will have no choice but to give up the bishop pair. 8...h6! 9.♔xf6 The rest simply makes no sense. 9...♕xf6 10.0-0



Position after: 10.0-0

If you are not careful, you will miss White's threat. 10...♖c6! [10...d6?? 11.e5! ♕e7 12.exd6 ♕d7 13.♔xb7 ♕xb7 14.♖e1+–] 11.♗b3 [11.♗xc6 ♔xc6!– This is my preference, even if taking back with the pawn was also possible.] 11...♖c8 12.♕e2 ♕d8 Objectively it is hard to find a right plan for White. If he adopts a slow approach with 13.♖ad1?! then 13...♗e5–. The knight will invade c4 whenever it wants.

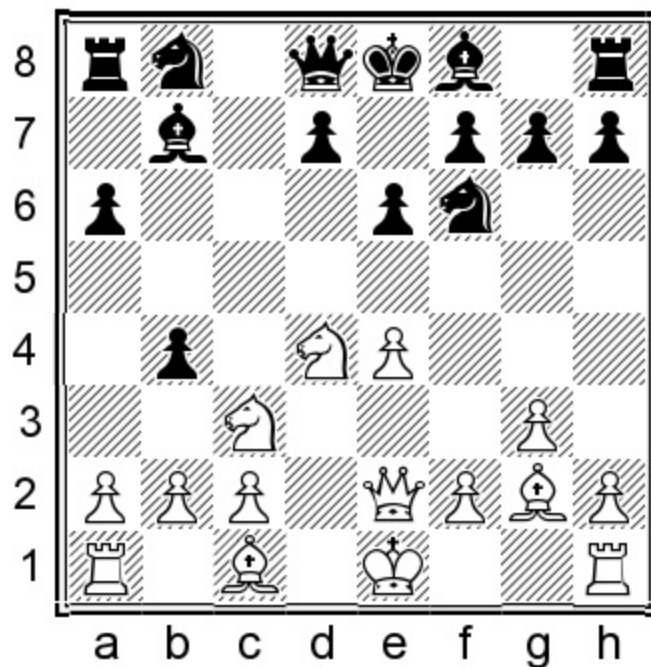
C) 8.♕d3?! Compared to 8.♕e2 this is a worse choice. The main reason is that we will soon have a knight on d7 which will be able to attack the exposed queen. 8...d6 9.0-0 ♗bd7



Position after: 9... Nbd7

10.a3?! [10. Rxe1?! Qe7 11. Qg5 0-0 12. Rad1 h6+ This goes nowhere for White. 10. We2 The computer's move, shows White's conception is wrong. 10... Wc7↑] 10... Qe7 11. We2 Wc7 12. Re1 0-0 13.f4 Rac8 14. Qe3 Black is already better here, but in Pena Duarte, F (2226) – Oratovsky, M (2501) San Sebastian 2017, he could have played even stronger with: 14... Nb6! 15. Qf2 Nc4+. This is a dream position for every Sicilian player.

8...b4!?



Position after: 8...b4!?

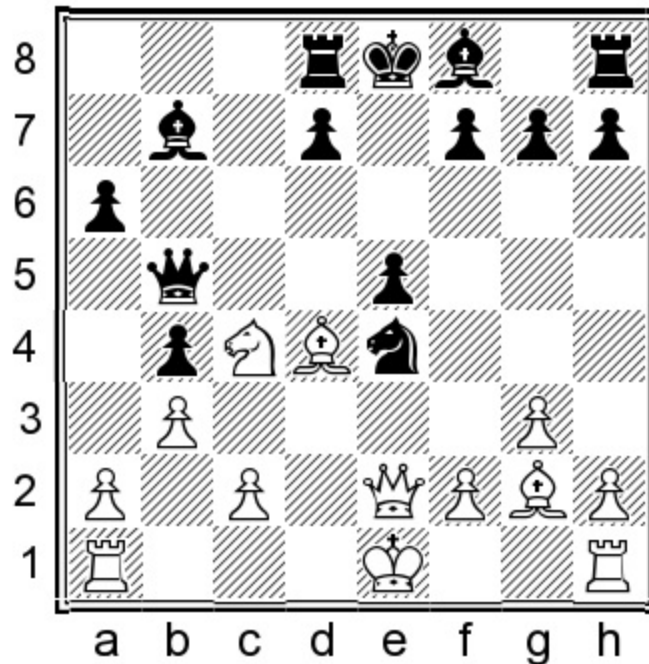
We could also have played similarly to 8.♖d3, but it is a slightly worse version, so let us go for a completely different and quite forcing line.

9.♗a4 ♖a5 10.b3 ♗c6 11.♘b2 ♗xd4 12.♘xd4 e5!

And now White has a choice.

13.♘b6

13.♘e3 [13.♘b2 Probably the less dangerous continuation. 13...♘c6 14.f4 d6↑ It looks OK for Black since White lacks activity.] 13...♗xe4! 14.♗b6 ♖d8 15.♗c4 ♖b5 16.♘d4!

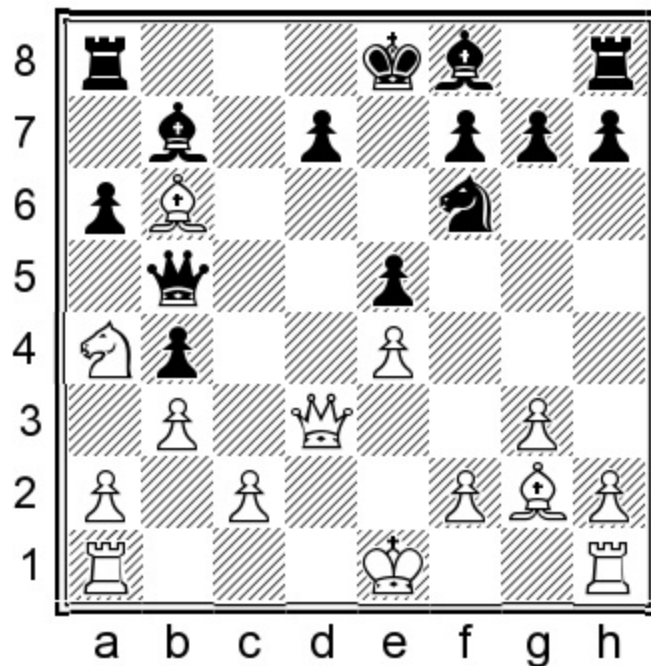


Position after: 16.♘d4!

This strange position occurred in an amateur game, but now things could have gone wild depending on the variation. 16...f6! This is my preference because White's most logical move is wrong.

[16...d5!? 17.♗xe5 ♖xe2+ 18.♗xe2 ♘e7=] 17.♘xe5! [17.♘xe4? ♘xe4 18.♖xe4 d5 19.♖f5 dxc4+] 17...d5 18.♘d4 ♗f7∞ With an extremely complicated position.

13...♖b5 14.♖d3!?



Position after: 14. ♔d3!?

The only try for an advantage 14. ♔xb5?! White cannot hope for an advantage here. 14...axb5 15. ♘c5 ♕c6 16.0-0 And Black can take a draw, or if he wants to play, he can try 16...d6. 16...♖b8 17. ♕a7 ♖a8=

14... ♕e7

And now White tried castling both ways.

15.0-0-0

Perhaps an improvement for White is 15.0-0 ♖c8 16. ♖ac1 0-0= Balashov, Y (2575) – Chuchelov, V (2535) Germany 2001.

And now there should be a way to improve for Black has well, instead of the move 15...♖c8 played in 1-0 (64) Petrosian, T (2539) – Koneru, H (2503) Cochin 2004.

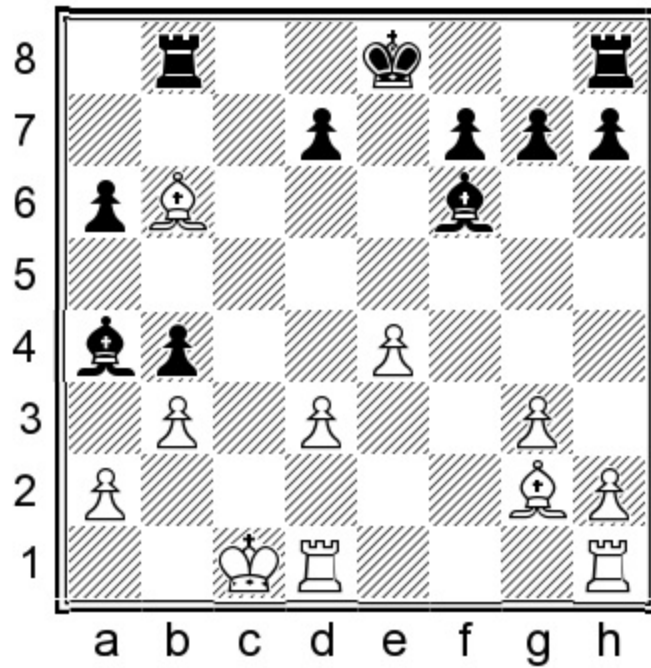
15... ♖b8!?!N

With the following logical continuation.

16.f4 ♖xd3 17.cxd3!

17. ♖xd3?! exf4 18.gxf4 ♕xe4 19. ♕xe4 ♘xe4 20. ♖e1 f5

17... ♕c6 18.fxe5 ♕xa4 19.exf6 ♕xf6



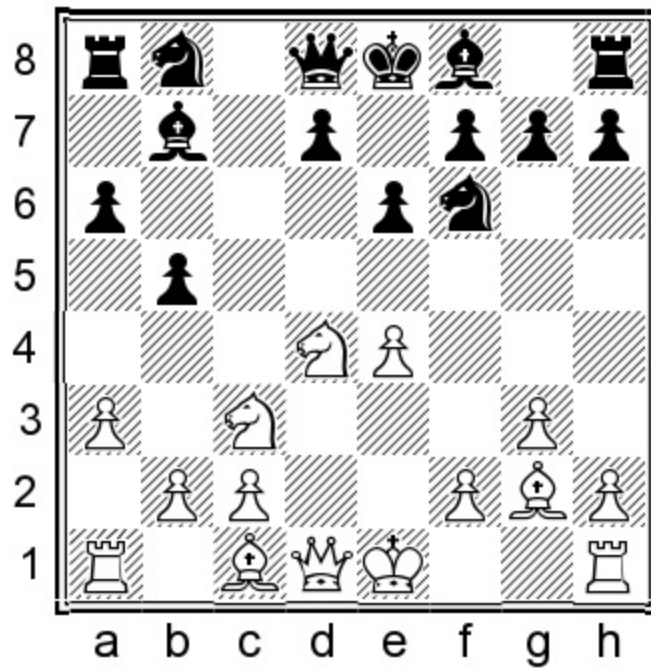
Position after: 19... ♕xf6

White has an easy way to reach an even position.

20. ♖a7 ♜b7 21. ♕e3 ♕c6=

d) 6.g3 ♕b7 7. ♕g2 ♜f6 8.a3

1.e4 c5 2. ♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 a6 5. ♘c3 b5 6.g3 ♕b7 7. ♕g2 ♜f6 8.a3!?



Position after: 8.a3!?

I think it is the main alternative to 8.0-0, and the battle is getting tense.

8.0-0 We will consider this move in the next subchapter.

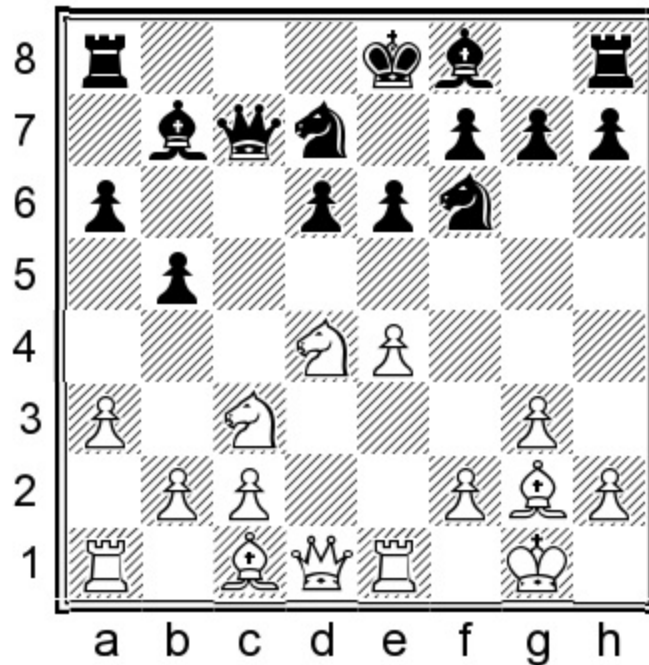
8...d6 9.0-0 ♘bd7 10.♖e1!

Definitely the most logical, in order to consider the idea of ♘d5.

10...♚c7

This is the right square for the queen and the bishop on b7 needs to be protected if Black wants to complete his development.

10...♙e7?? This is a typical trap you need to watch out for. 11.e5!+-

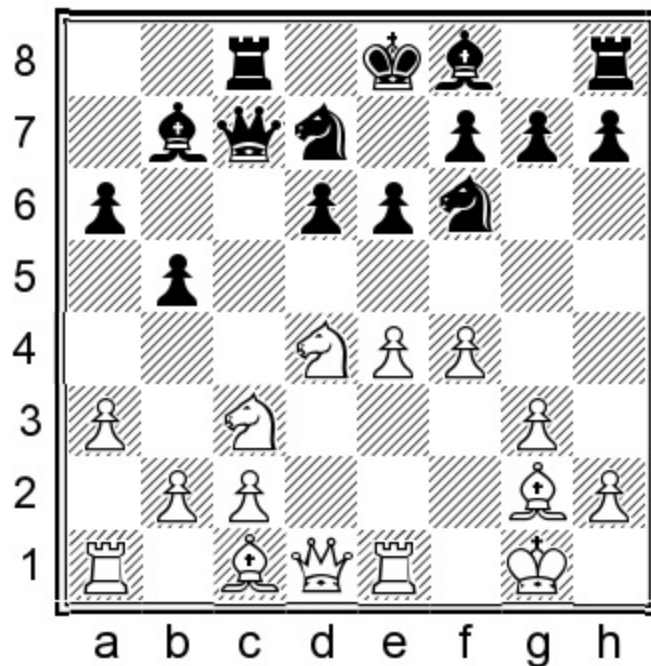


Position after: 10...♚c7

11.a4

Some players have tried this move.

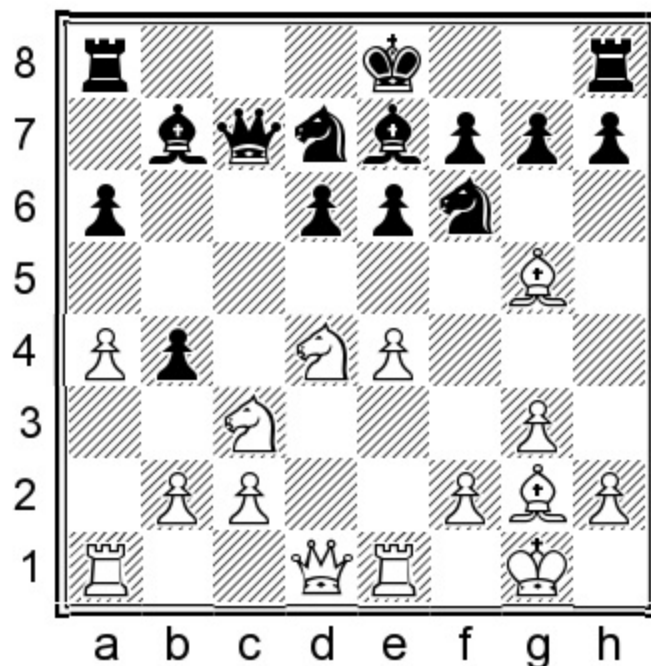
A) 11.f4 I do not think this fits well in White's set-up. 11...♖c8!



Position after: 11...♖c8!

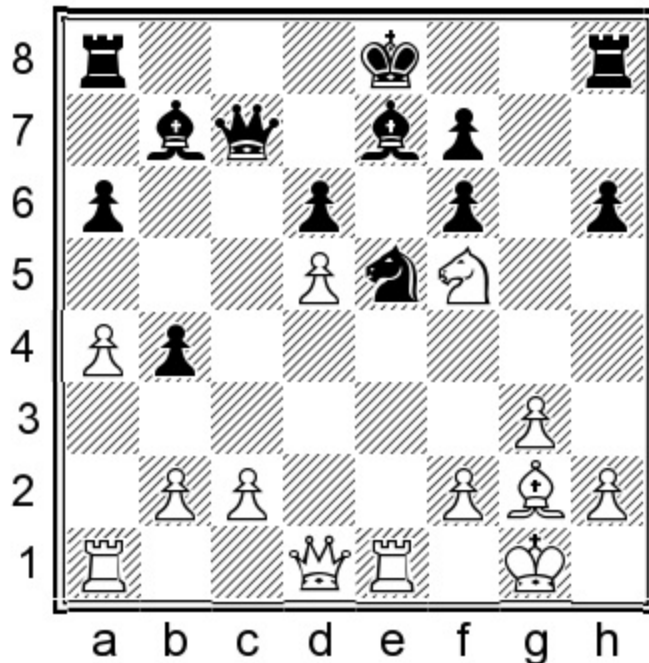
A good way to pin the knight on c3. 12.♗e3 ♗e7 13.♗f2 0-0 14.g4 g6 15.♗f3 e5! ♣ Popova, N (2314) – Dzagnidze, N (2550) Khanty – Mansiysk 2014.

B) 11.♗g5 ♗e7 This is a developing move, but it also obstructs the e-file. [11...h6? It is easy to go wrong here. 12.♗xf6 ♗xf6 13.♗d5! exd5 14.exd5+ ♗d7 15.c4+–] 12.a4 This is often a move that shows White wants to play ♗d5 while first weakening our queenside. 12...b4!N



Position after: 12...b4!N

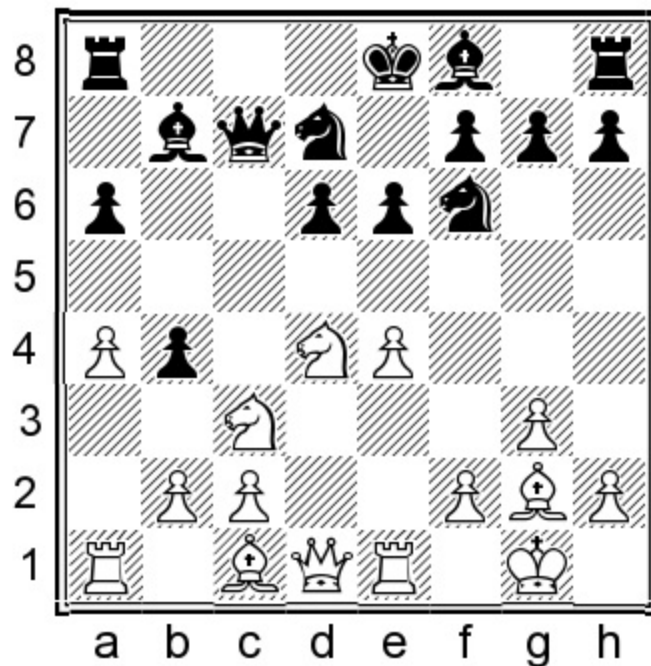
This move looks more natural to me, and it seems to work better while also giving White less possibilities. [$\leq 12...bxa4$ This move gives White more options and if White goes $13.\text{♞d5}$ anyway, I prefer the version with $12...b4$.] $13.\text{♞d5! exd5 14.exd5 h6! [14...♔f8? 15.\text{♞f5! ♞e5 16.♞xe5 dxe5 17.d6\pm] 15.\text{♞xf6 [15.\text{♞f4 g6}$ It is important to prevent $16.\text{♞f5}$. Now it is not clear how White should continue even if he has compensation.] $15...gxf6! [15...♞xf6?! 16.\text{♞f5 ♞g8 17.♞d4\rightarrow] 16.\text{♞f5 ♞e5!$



Position after: 16...♞e5!

This is the right conception for Black who will give back the piece to take over the initiative. $17.\text{♞xe7 ♔xe7! 18.f4 ♞c5+ 19.♔h1 h5 20.fxe5 fxe5\uparrow$ And I like Black a lot, even if the position remains complicated.

11...b4



Position after: 11...b4

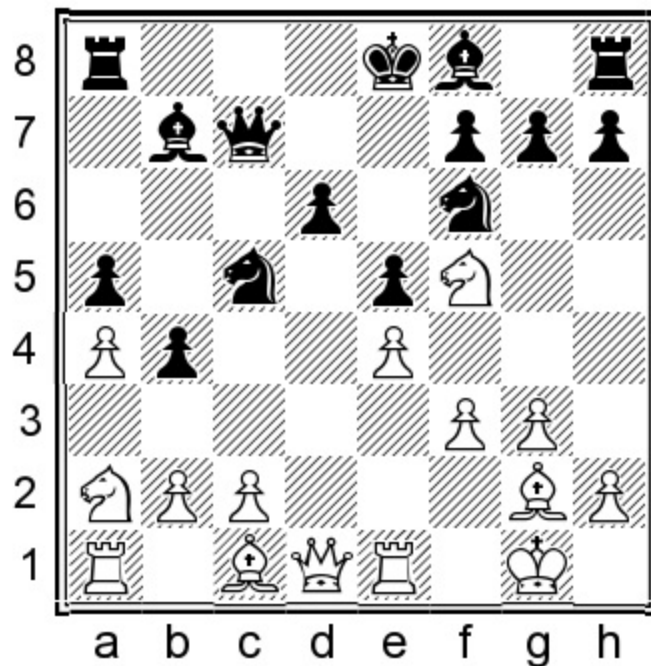
12. ♖a2

White's major idea of 12. ♖d5? Is not so good due to 12...exd5 13.exd5+ ♗e5!. When you face this ♖d5-sacrifice your priority is to give back the piece while taking over the initiative. 14.f4 0-0-0 15.fxe5 dxe5 16. ♖b3 ♗xd5 ♞ Black has a powerful position.

12... ♗c5! 13. ♗xb4

As this line is more critical, we will look a bit deeper into the variations.

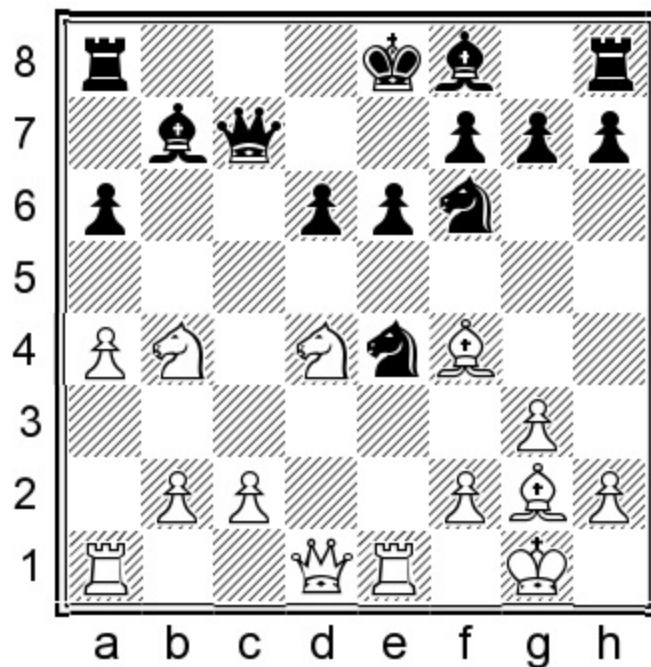
13.f3?! Most of the players went for this move, but it really is too slow. 13...e5! 14. ♗f5 a5 ♞



Position after: 14...a5

15.c4?! Simonian, H (2445) – Korneev, O (2598) Sareyn 2017. 15...h5! 16.b3 g6 17.♘e3 h4+ White has many misplaced pieces.

13...♘cxe4 14.♙f4



Position after: 14.♙f4

And now in the game Danielyan, V (2303) – Pantsulaia, L (2591) Tbilisi 2017, I like:

14...e5!?N

We are not forced to enter this crazy line, but it is very tempting.

15.♖xe4!

White has options as well.

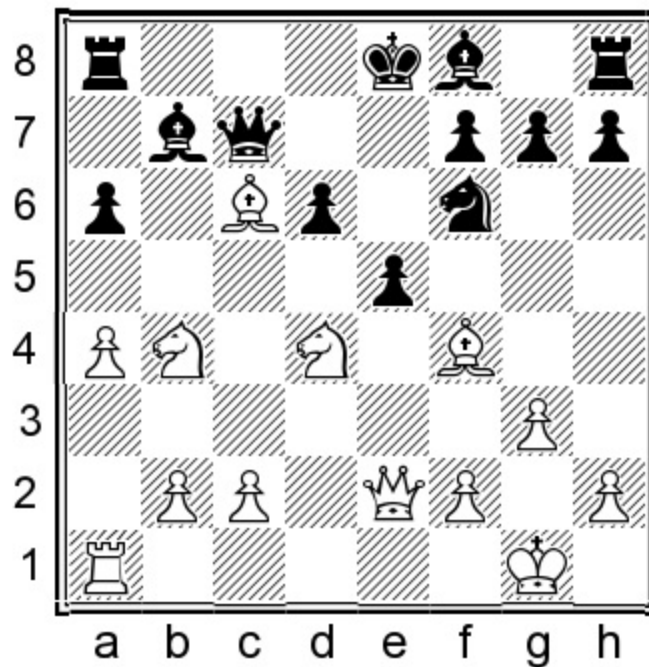
15.♖d3 ♘c5 16.♖f1 0-0-0∞

15...♗xe4 16.♖e2 d5!?

Probably the “safest” if we can speak of something being safe.

16...♘f6!? This is also interesting, and it is challenging for White to find the right move here.

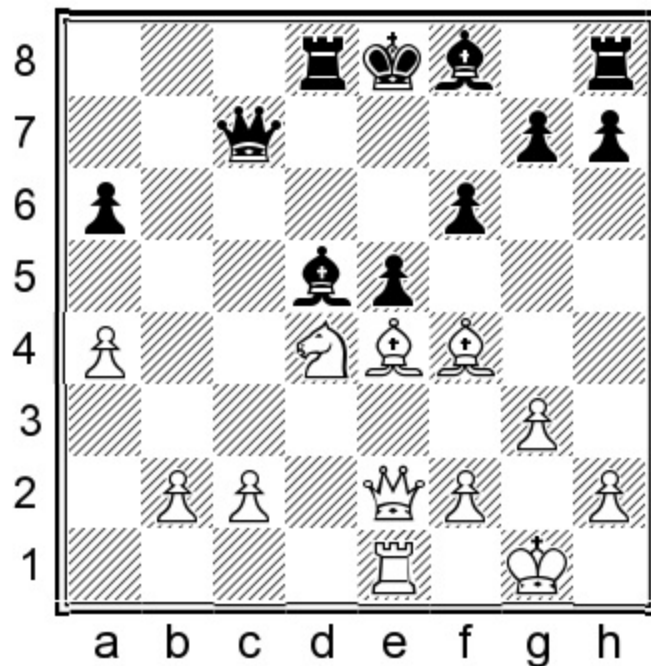
17.♙c6+!



Position after: 17.♙c6+!

Unfortunately, this seems quite strong for White. [17.♙xb7 ♖xb7 18.♗bc6 ♔d7!!∞ A crazy move that seems to hold in every variation. But let us say there is no need to go any deeper.] 17...♙xc6 18.♗bxc6 ♜c8 [18...♗d7 19.♖a3↑] 19.b4!! ♙e7 20.b5↑ The knight on c6 is a monster and I am not sure we are able to take either hanging piece.

17.♗xd5 ♙xd5 18.♙xe4 ♜d8 19.♖e1 f6



Position after: 19...f6

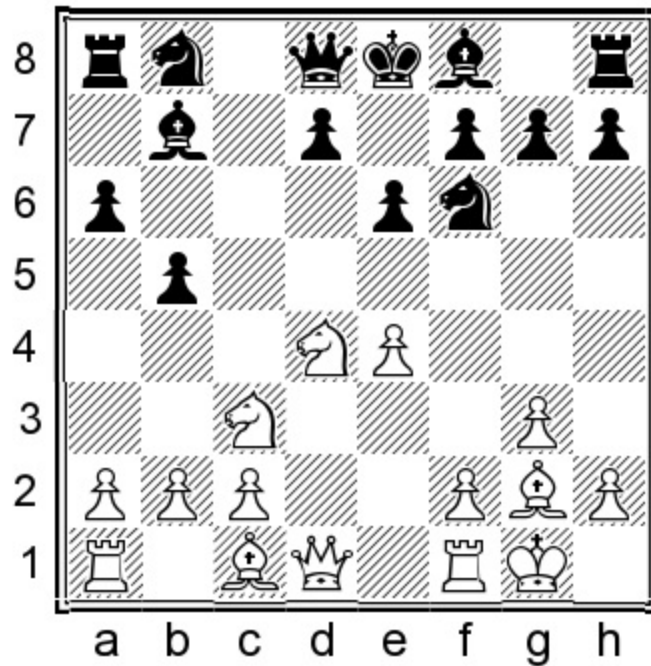
If Black is able to castle, he will stand better.

20. ♖xa6 ♗xe4 21. ♖xe4 ♗e7 ∞

The computer quietly says that it is equal, but White needs to sacrifice more material. You are free to continue this position, but I doubt it will ever happen due to the many possibilities for both sides earlier.

e) 6.g3 ♗b7 7. ♗g2 ♖f6 8.0-0

1.e4 c5 2. ♖f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. ♖xd4 a6 5. ♖c3 b5 6.g3 ♗b7 7. ♗g2 ♖f6 8.0-0!?



Position after: 8.0-0!?

Sacrificing the e4-pawn is the most dangerous continuation for White.

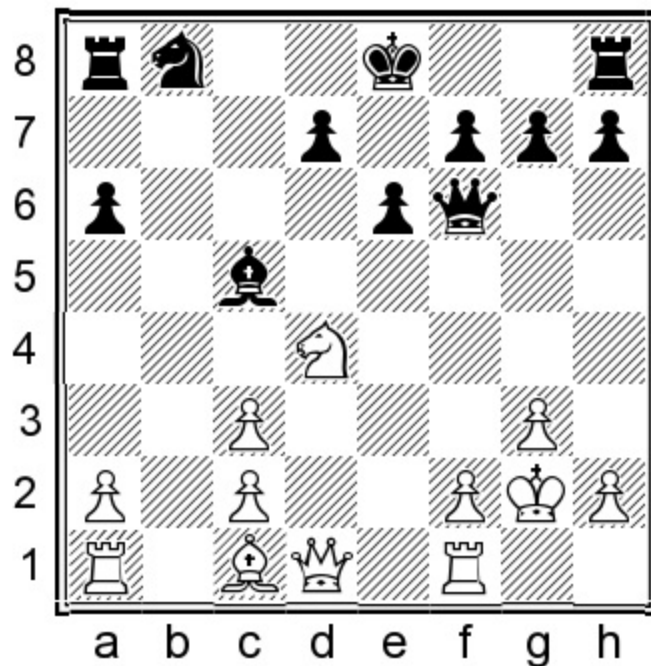
8...b4!

Black should definitely go for this move, entering some forcing lines and gaining at least temporarily a pawn.

9.♘a4

The most dangerous move

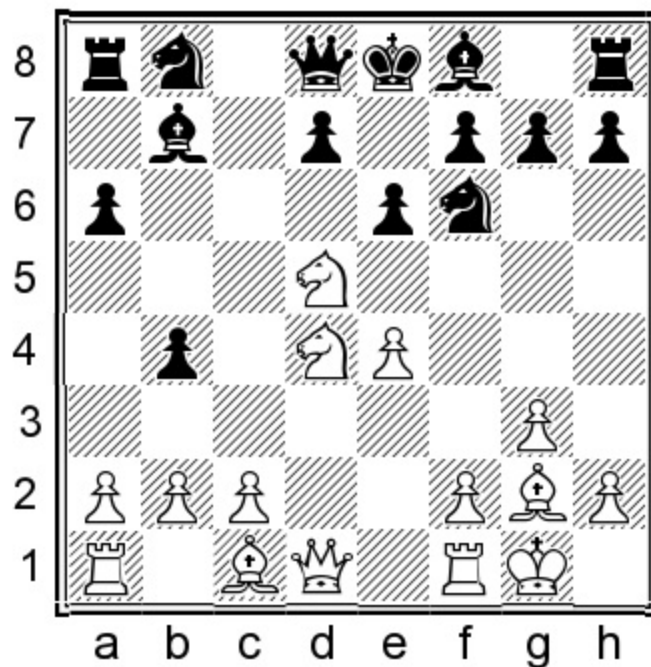
A) 9.e5?! Starting a secondary line of threats is rarely a great idea. 9...♙xg2 10.♚xg2 bxc3 11.exf6 ♖xf6 12.bxc3 ♙c5



Position after: 12...♔c5

Black easily completes his development, and he has the better pawn structure. 13.♔f4 0-0 Navara, D (2491) – Ni, H (2568) Athens 2001.

B) 9.♘d5?!



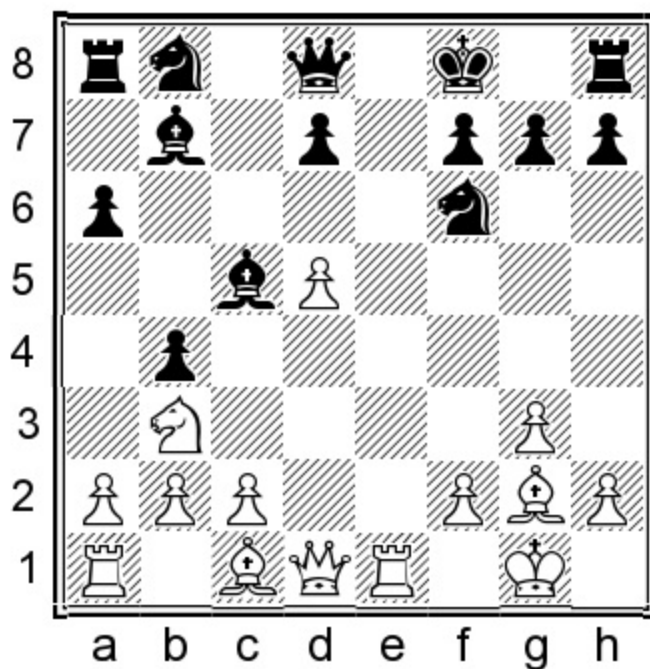
Position after: 9...♘d5?!

Normally, if White wants this move to work, he needs to take back with a check or a threat to a knight on c6, but this is not the case here. 9...exd5 10.exd5 ♔c5! I do not see real possibilities for

White to compensate for the missing piece. 11.♖e1+ ♔f8

B1) 12.c4 d6 13.♙f4 ♘bd7 14.♘c6 ♚b6 ♞ Rozentalis, E (2618) – Plischki, S (2422) Teplice 2014.

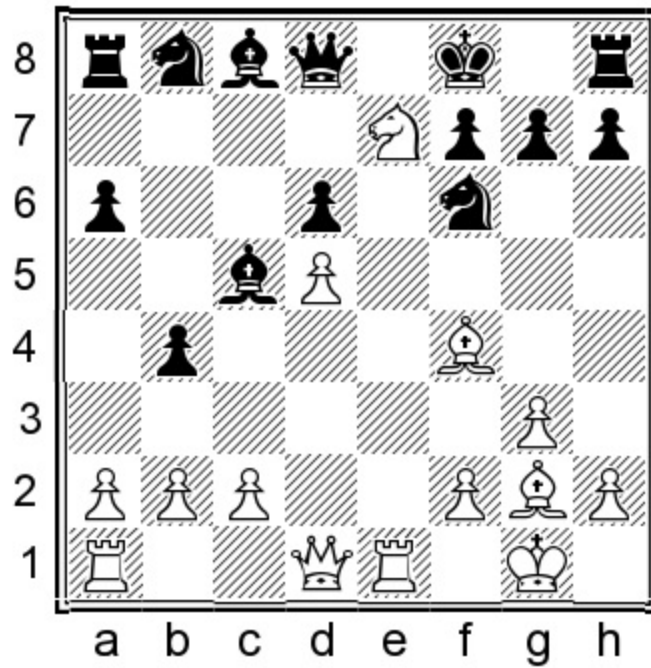
B2) 12.♘b3!



Position after: 12.♘b3!

This is probably an improvement for White over “theory”. 12...♙b6 13.a3 a5 14.axb4 axb4 15.♖xa8 ♙xa8 16.♙d2 This is the point of White’s play, he will take another pawn and have two pawns against a piece while Black still has his king on f8. Objectively Black is fine. 16...d6 17.♙xb4 ♘a6 18.♙a3 h5 ♞

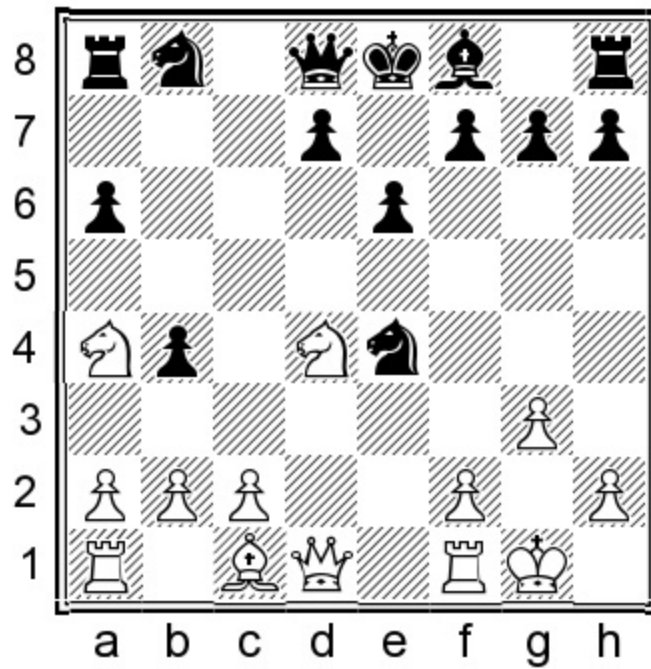
B3) 12.♘f5 Almost everybody played this move, but it is not so great, and Black can easily stabilize his position. 12...d6 13.♙f4 ♙c8 14.♘e7



Position after: 14. Nde7

This is going nowhere for White. For example, in the game Lodici, L (2623) – Budisavljevic, L (2565) Chess.com INT 2020, Black could have played 14... Ra7 15. Nxc8 Qxc8+.

9... Qxe4 10. Qxe4 Nxe4

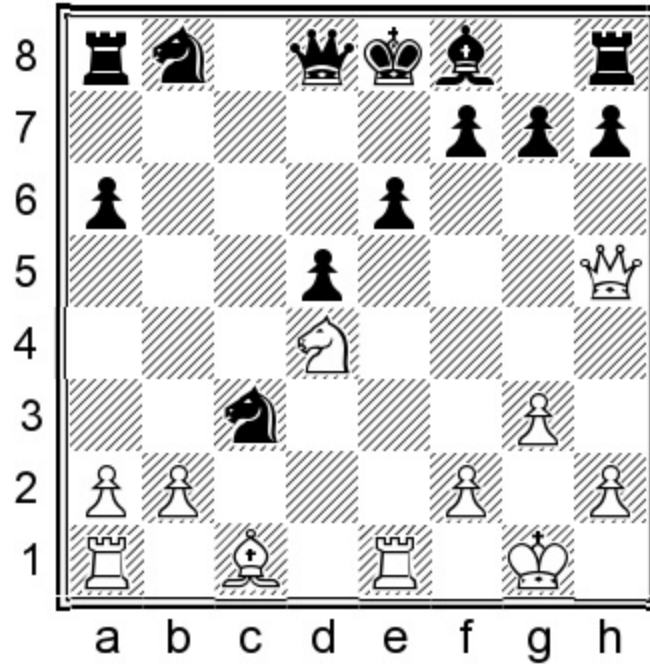


Position after: 10... Nxe4

11. Re1

11.c4!? A few games continued with this move. 11...bxc3 12.♖e1

A) 12...d5? It is easy to fall for this mistake. 13.♗xc3! ♗xc3 14.♕h5!



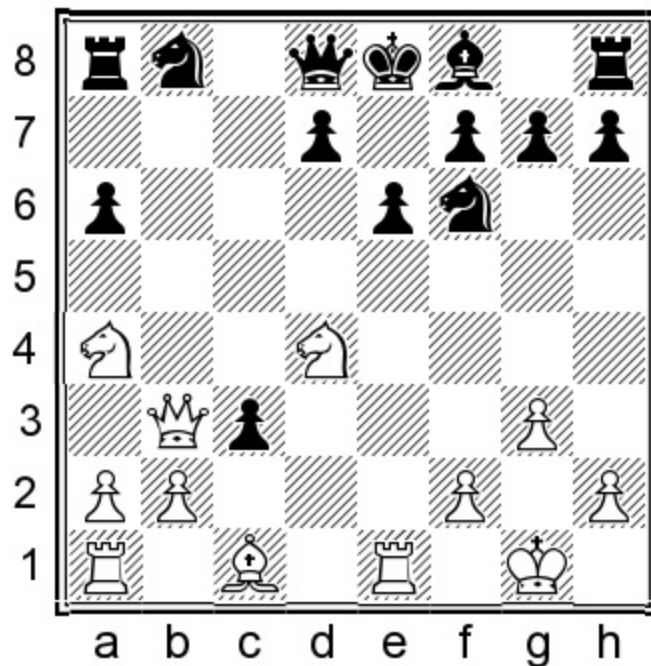
Position after: 14.♕h5!

This is quite well-known and has been played in quite a number of games, with crushing results for White. 14...♗e4 15.♗xe6 ♕d7 16.♗c7+ ♕xc7 17.♕xd5+- White is temporarily two pieces down, but he will soon regain them.

B) 12...♗f6!

B1) 13.♕f3 d5 14.bxc3 ♗bd7!N This move is important as it covers b6 and prepares Black's next move. 15.♕e2 ♖c8 16.♕xa6 ♖a8 17.♕b5 ♕c7 18.♖b1 ♗d6+ Black is clearly the one with the better pawn structure, and he also has very stable minor pieces.

B2) 13.♕b3

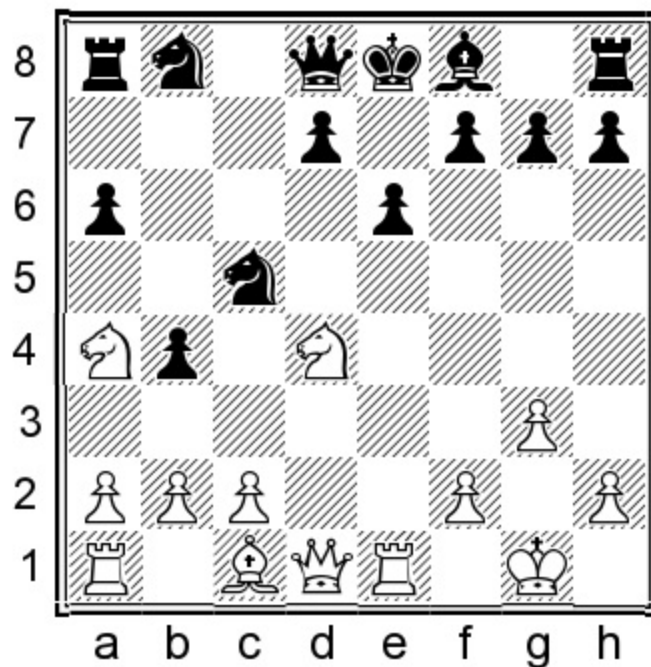


Position after: 13. ♖b3

13... ♘c6 14. ♘xc6 dxc6 15. ♚xc3 ♜c8 16. ♙e3 ♞d5

All this was seen in the game Gurevich, D (2326) – Drozdowski, K (2464) Richardson 2014.

11... ♞c5!



Position after: 11... ♞c5!

I think this is the most solid move for Black. Now White has tried several options.

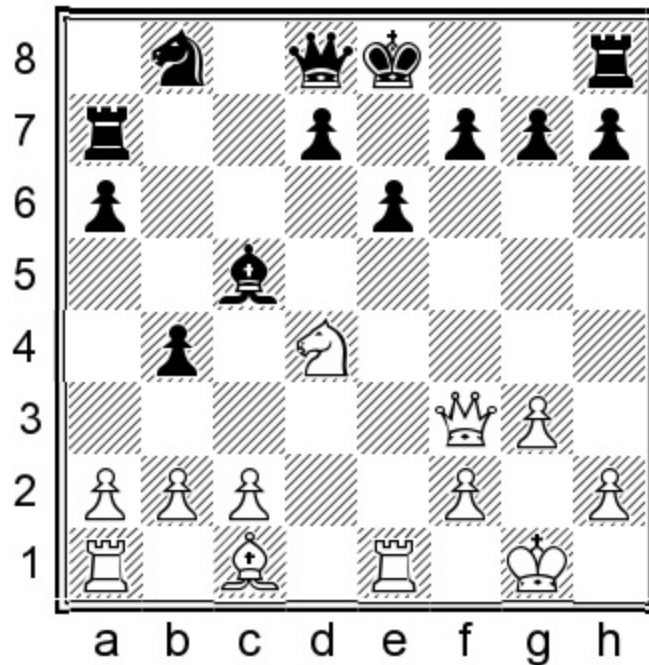
11...d5 12.c4! gives white a strong initiative. 12...bxc3 13.♞xc3→ This is the same dangerous line we met in 11.c4.

12.c3!?

The most dangerous, in my opinion. Let us see the alternatives

A) 12.c4 This move is less effective because we will not have the pawn tension. 12...♞xa4 13.♞xa4 and now Black can try 13...♞b6! 14.♞e3 ♞c5 when he completes his development with a great position. 15.♞ad1 0-0 ♞ Rouffignac, T (2280) – Loiseau, Q (2430) Chalons en Champagne 2015.

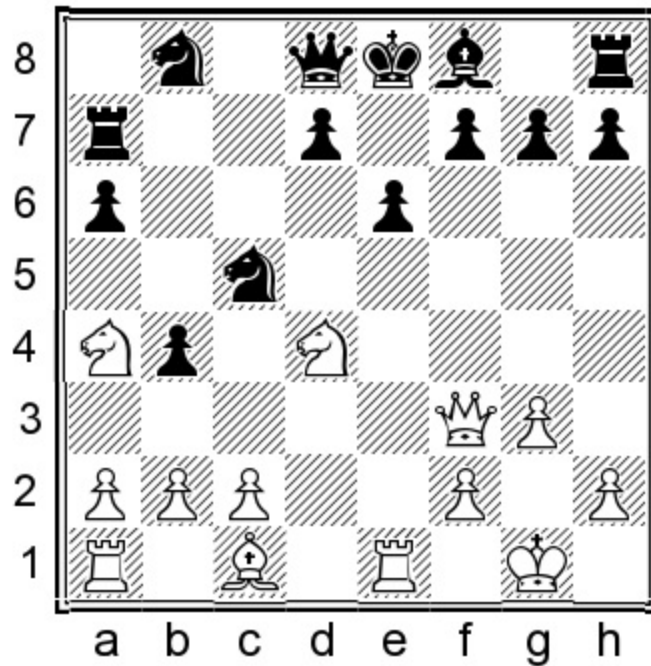
B) 12.♞xc5 ♞xc5 13.♞f3 ♞a7!



Position after: 13...♞a7!

A very important and cold-blooded move. 14.♞b3 [14.♞e3 ♞b6! 15.♞g4 0-0 16.♞ad1 d5 ♞] 14...♞b6 15.♞f4 ♞f6! [15...0-0 This would allow White to get his pawn back even if he remains worse. 16.♞d6 ♞e8 17.♞xb4 ♞c7 ♞] 16.♞d2 0-0 17.♞e4 White is trying to disrupt White's harmony, but it is not really working. 17...♞f5 18.g4 ♞g6 19.♞g3 ♞c6 ♞ Gongora Montes, B (2251) – Soto Paez, O (2388) San Jose 2009.

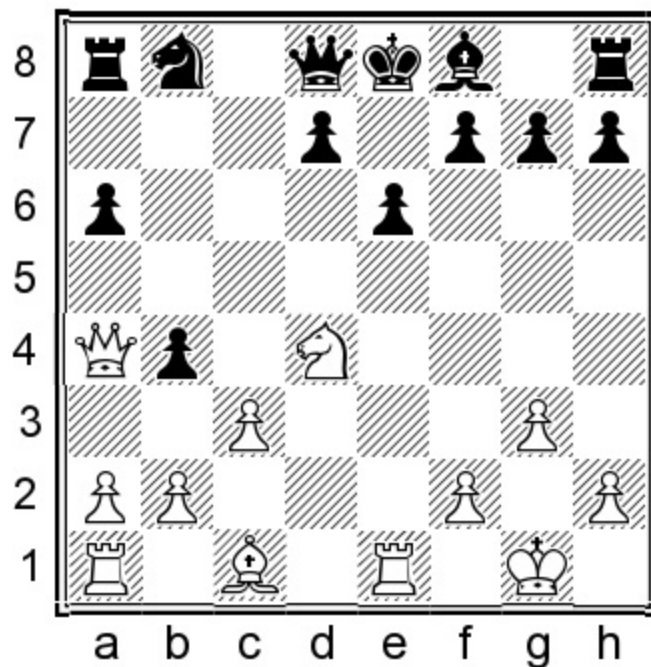
C) 12.♞f3 This is the move that has been played more often. 12...♞a7!



Position after: 12...Rxa7!

[12...d5?? it is quite clear that this move is impossible. 13. Nxc5 Bxc5 14. Nxe6 fxe6 15. Rxe6+ Kd7 16. Qxd5+-] 13. Be3? This is the only independent try here, but it is not a great one. [13. Nxc5 This transposes into 12. Nxc5.] 13... Nxa4 14. Nxe6 fxe6 15. Bxa7 Nc6 It is quite clear that White does not have enough, and he can only hope that Black does not keep things under control. 16. Rxe6+ [16. Rad1 Qc8+-] 16... dxe6 17. Qxc6+ Qd7+-

12...Nxa4! 13. Qxa4



Position after: 13. ♖xa4

13... ♜b6!

It is important for Black to avoid any tactical shot such as 13... ♙c5? 14. ♘xe6 fxe6 15. ♖xe6+ ♕f8 16. ♗e4→ when White has some good play.

14. ♙e3?!

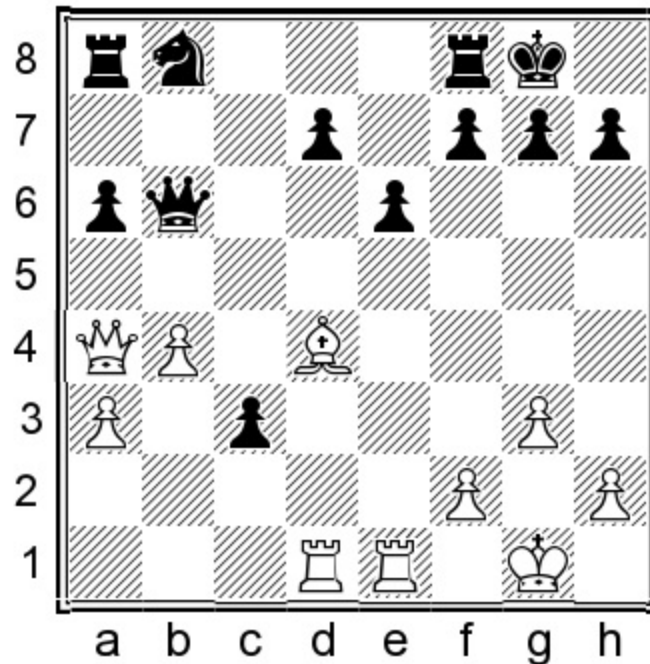
Everybody went for this move.

14. ♖d1!N A really hard novelty to find if White is not familiar with the position. Black keeps an even position with 14... bxc3 15. bxc3 ♘c6 16. ♙f4 ♙e7 17. ♖b1 ♕c5 18. ♖b7☞.

14... ♙c5 15. ♖ad1

Black is soon about to complete his development and has secured his extra-pawn.

15... 0-0 16. a3 bxc3 17. b4 ♙xd4 18. ♙xd4



Position after: 18. ♙xd4

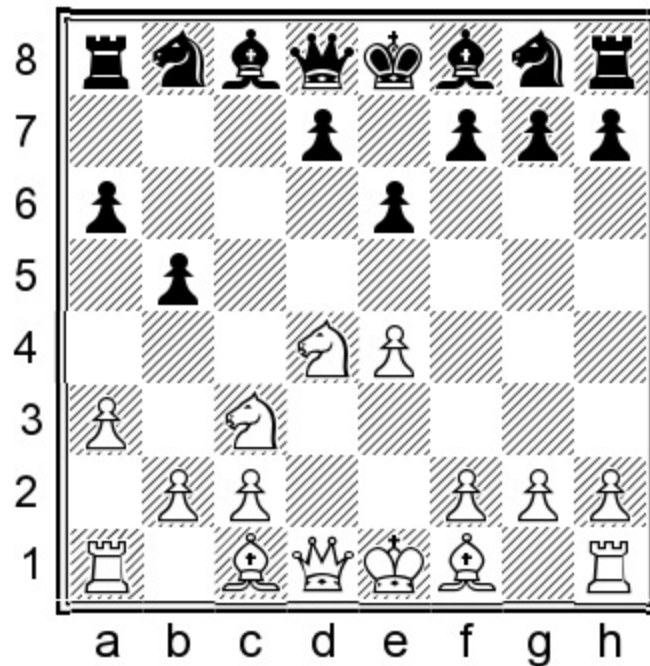
We are following Shchukin, D (2344) – Kalegin, E (2471) Voronezh 2011, but here, instead of the game continuation, I would suggest the following.

18... ♖b5 19. ♖b3 ♘c6 20. ♙xc3 ♘e7☞

Black still is a pawn up and the knight is headed to d5.

f) 6.a3 ♖b7 7.-- & 7.♗e2

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 a6 5.♗c3 b5 6.a3



Position after: 6.a3

We have previously discussed the merits of this move in prior subchapters. It is a logical and natural guest in some variations. It efficiently stops ...b4, but of course the drawback is that it is absolutely not a developing move.

6...♗b7

Of course, we continue our development in the most logical way

7.♗e2

The idea is generally to castle short with the idea of playing f2-f4 and ♗f3.

A) 7.♗d3 This will be the subject of the next subchapter.

B) 7.f3?! ♕c7 8.♗e3 ♘f6 9.♖d2 We have already analyzed this position in the first subchapter about 6.♗e3 in the 7.f3-variation.

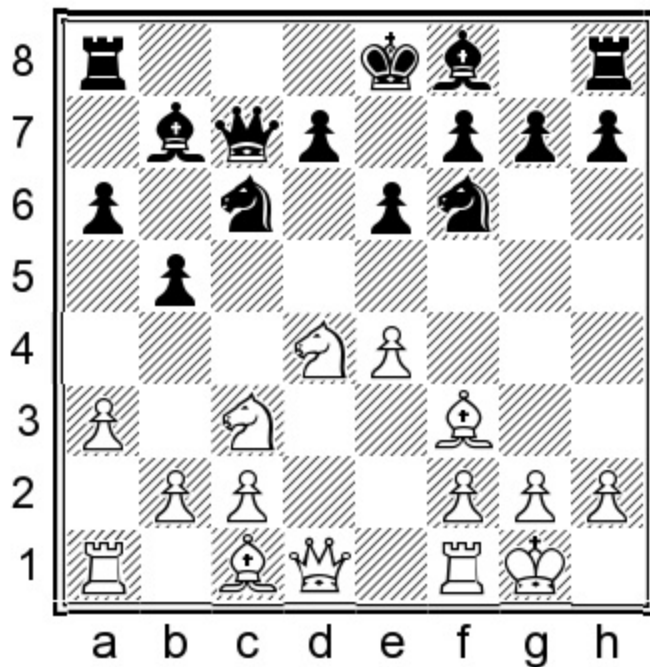
C) 7.g3 ♘f6 8.♗g2 This has already been seen in the first subchapter about 6.g3.

7...♕c7 8.f4!

I think it is the only way to justify White's last move.

8.0-0?! This is clearly the most played move, but no strong player ever used this variation. The reason

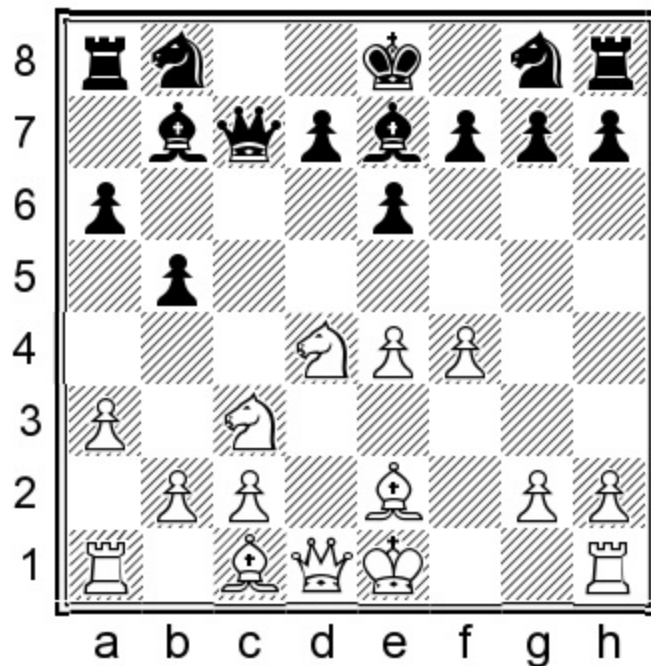
is that after 8...♞f6! White is unable to push e5 and playing f3 is clearly a concession for White who should play f3 only if he wants to launch a kingside attack with g4-h4. But this is not playable when he has castled on the kingside. 9.♙f3 ♞c6



Position after: 9...♞c6

10.♖e1 [10.♞xc6 dxc6! 11.♚e2 ♙d6 12.g3 0-0 13.♙g2 c5 14.f4 e5!⚡] 10...♞e5 11.♙f4 d6 There appears to be nothing White can do as he has no pawn breaks. 12.♙g3 ♙e7 13.♚d2 h5 14.♙xe5 dxe5 15.♞de2 ♖c8⚡ Uildriks, M (2032) – Mieziš, N (2579) Utrecht 2009.

8...♙e7!?



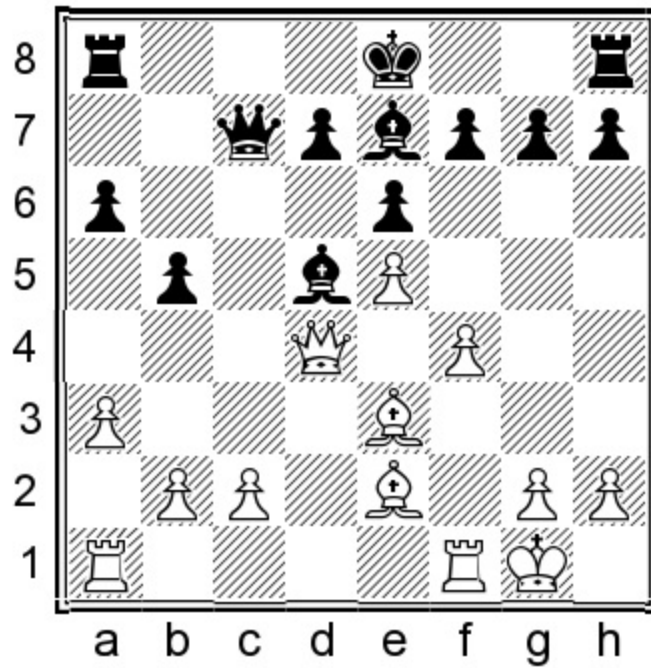
Position after: 8... ♖e7!?

You can play another move, but I would like to suggest this interesting move, which is actually a novelty suggested by the computer. The idea is basically to wait for White to choose a set-up, and to adapt to it.

9.0-0

A) 9. ♖f3 ♘c6 10. ♗b3 d6 11. ♖e3 ♗f6 12. 0-0 0-0 This transposes into the main line of this variation.

B) 9. ♖e3 ♘c6 10. 0-0 ♗f6 11. e5 ♗xd4 12. ♙xd4 ♗d5 13. ♗xd5 ♖xd5= This is also nothing special for White.



Position after: 13...♙xd5=

White has more space, but we are solid, and we can use the c-file to trade bishops if we want to.

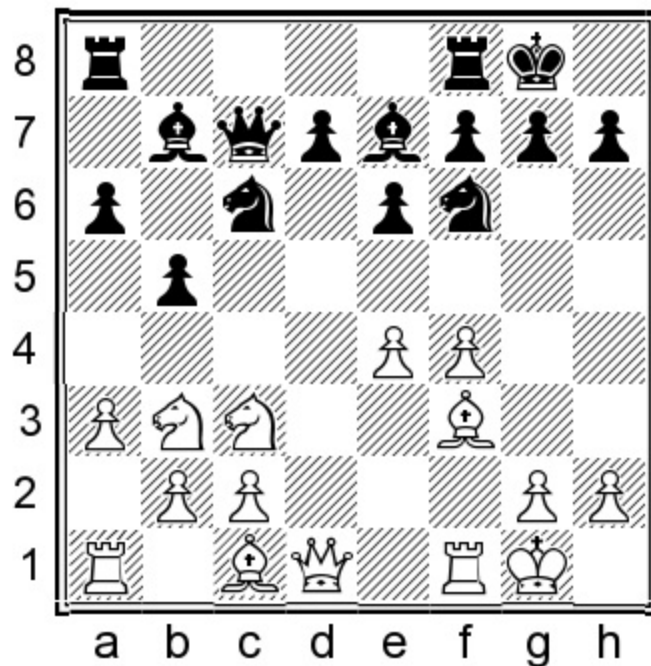
9...♘f6 10.♙f3

10.e5 ♘e4 11.♘xe4 ♙xe4 12.♙f3 ♙xf3 13.♚xf3 ♘c6 14.♘xc6 dxc6=

10...♘c6 11.♘b3

11.e5? ♘xd4! 12.♙xb7 [12.♚xd4?? ♙c5-+] 12...♚xb7 13.♚xd4 ♘g4 14.h3 ♜c8 15.♙h1 ♘h6+

11...0-0



Position after: 11...0-0

12.♙e3

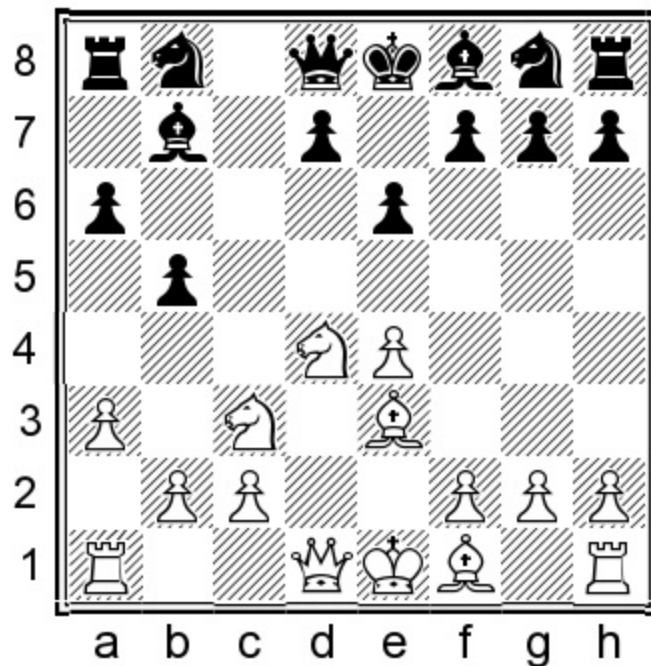
12.e5?! ♖e8 13.♙e3 d6̄ The centre will open favouring Black.

12...d6 13.♚e1 ♗d7 14.♚g3 ♙f6↔

The position is really complicated, but objectively not better for White in opposition to the main line of this subchapter, the bishop on f3 instead of d3 is quite misplaced as it does not target h7 and it blocks the rook-lift ♖f3-g3.

g) 6.a3 ♗b7 7.♙e3

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 a6 5.♗c3 b5 6.a3 ♗b7 7.♙e3



Position after: 7. ♔e3

This is the other line that we will consider but the idea is less obvious.

7. ♔d3 This will be the subject of the next subchapter.

7... ♚c7 8. ♔d3

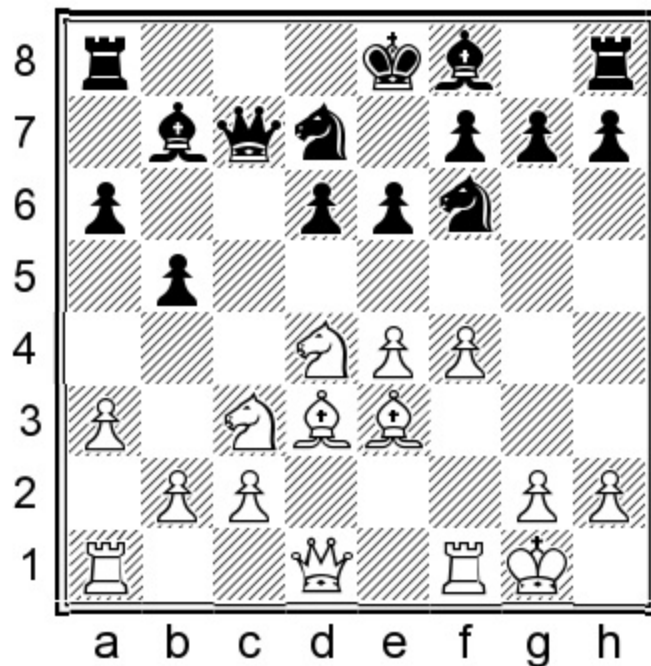
A) 8.f3 ♘f6 was discussed in the 7.f3 subchapter.

B) 8. ♚d2 ♘f6 9.f3 A necessary move that also transposes into 7.f3.

8... ♘f6 9.0-0 d6

The difficult thing is that there are a lot of different move orders. We will only focus on the most played moves.

10.f4!? ♘bd7



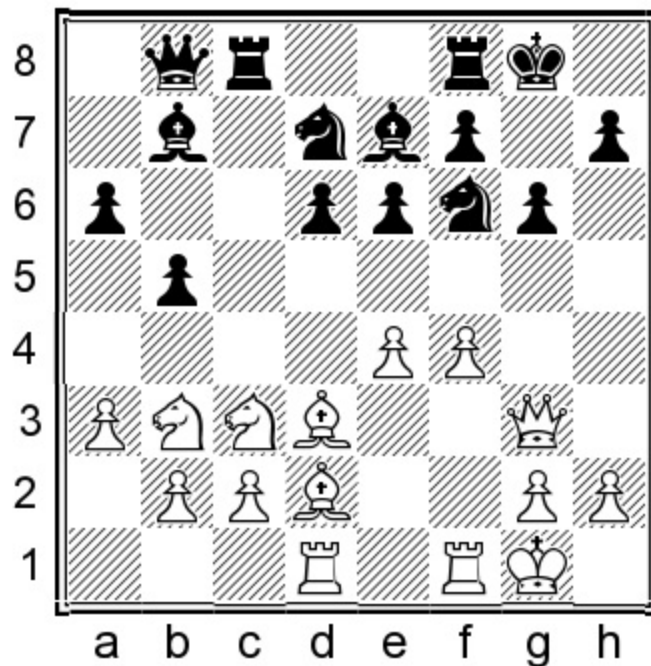
Position after: 10... Nbd7

If we compared this to the next subchapter (where White has not yet played Qe3), I think it is slightly worse for White because the bishop is often a source of problems here, or it often interferes with other pieces such as the rook coming to e1. And now, White has 3 different approaches.

11. Qf3

It is hard to analyze such a position. There are a lot of possibilities for each side at every move. But we can try to organize a logical plan for Black.

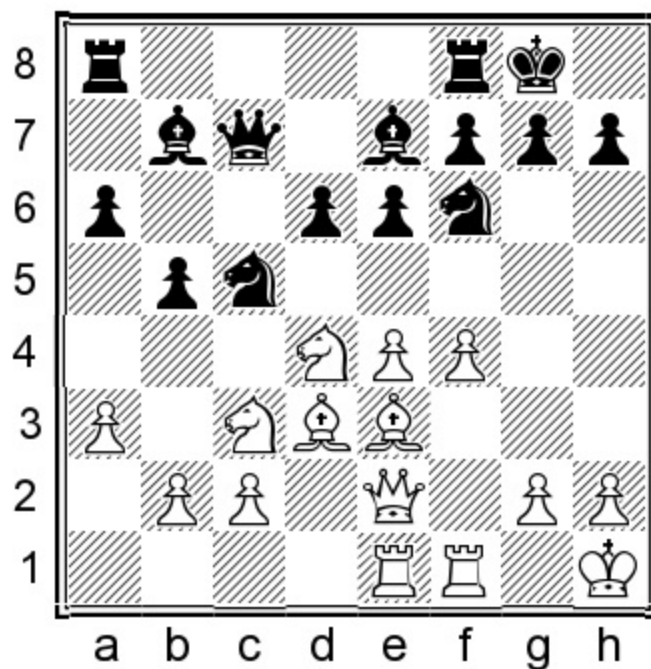
A) 11. Nc3 I am never really found of this as I find it too slow. It seems important to mention that this position sometimes arises with White to move after Black has lost a tempo playing ... Qb6 at some point before coming back to c7. 11... Qe7 12. Qe1 0-0 13. Rd1 Now, I find the following game really instructive even if everything is not perfect as it was a blitz game. 13... Rac8 14. Qg3 Qb8 15. Qd2 $\text{g6}?!$



Position after: 15...g6?!

This is a thematic idea, but it was not great, and I would have preferred 15...♖fe8 with a good position for Black. 16.♞de1 ♘a8 17.e5? [17.f5!±] 17...♞h5 18.♙h3 dxe5 19.fxe5 ♙b8 20.♞h6 ♞xe5! Black is giving up the exchange for a pawn and great play on the dark squares. 21.♞xf8 ♞xf8+ Black lost in the end in Anton Guijarro, D (2674) – Gordievsky, D (2579) chess24.com INT 2020, but has a great position so far.

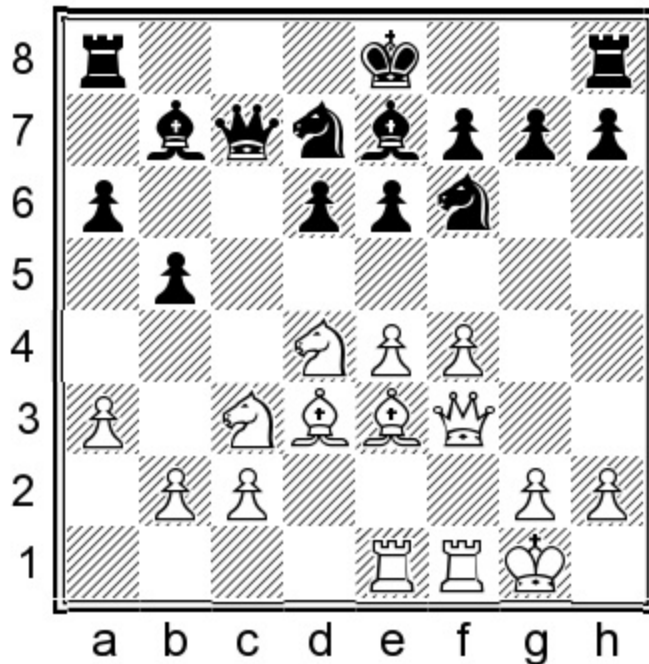
B) 11.♙e2 ♞e7 12.♔h1 0-0 13.♞ae1 ♞c5



Position after: 13...♞c5

14.♔g1 [14.♔d2 ♖ac8 15.♗f3 g6 16.♗g3 ♗fe8] It seems that Black is fully in control.] 14...♗fe8!?N
 Black has a lot of possibilities, but I like this one which anticipates the opening of the centre. 15.e5
 [15.♘f3 ♗ad8] 15...♘xd3 16.cxd3 ♘d7

11...♔e7 12.♗ae1



Position after: 12.♗ae1

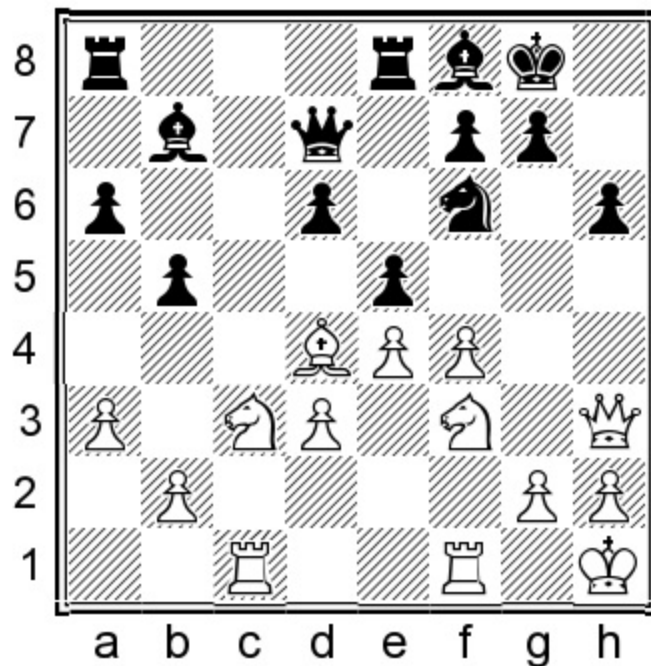
12...♘c5!?

12...0-0?! I am not sure that I want to castle immediately because of 13.♗h3→ [13.g4 This is also interesting for White.]

13.g4!?

This is a principled move but not played that often.

A) 13.♔h1 Always logical in a way, but is White certain that the king is better here since we have a bishop on b7? 13...0-0 14.♔g1 ♗fe8 15.♗h3 ♔f8 16.♘f3 ♘xd3 17.cxd3 h6 18.♖c1 ♗d7 19.♔d4 e5!

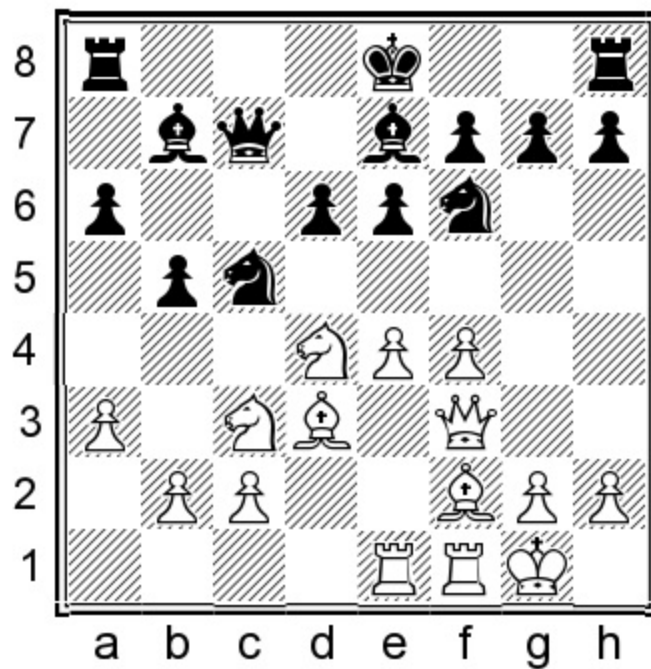


Position after: 19...e5!

Kramnik confidently reacts in the centre with strength 20.fxe5 dxe5 21.♙xe5 ♖xh3 22.gxh3 ♘d7

And Black was much better in the game Ponomarev, R (2718) – Kramnik, V (2777) Cap d'Agde 2003.

B) 13.♙f2

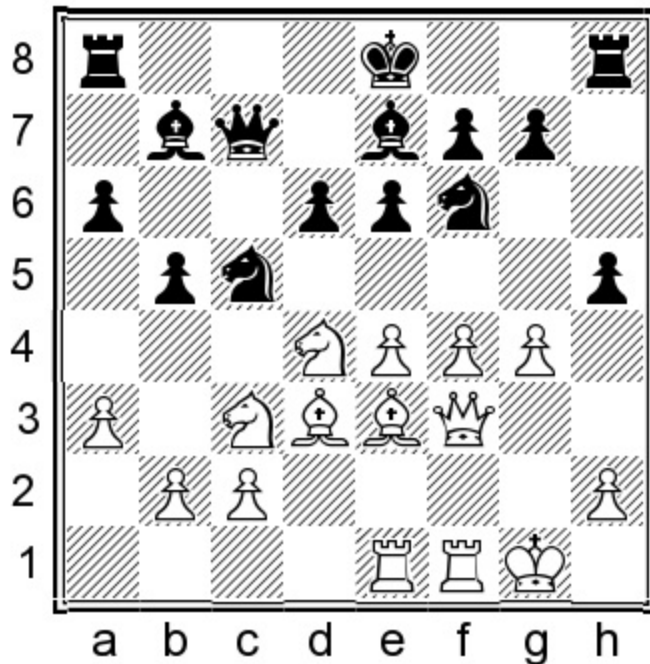


Position after: 13.♙f2

Here the bishop helps the rook that is on e1, but not the other one. 13...0-0 14.♚h3 ♜fe8 15.♙h1

♖ad8! Black keeps everything protected, and he waits for White to do something. 16.♙h4 h6 17.♞e3 ♕h8⇝ The hardest thing for Black is to remain calm. Here he simply wants to anticipate ♞g3-ideas and be able to play a move like ...♘h7 at some point.

13...h5!



Position after: 13...h5!

Only one game continues with this move, but it looks extremely interesting for Black even if the idea is a bit hard to understand.

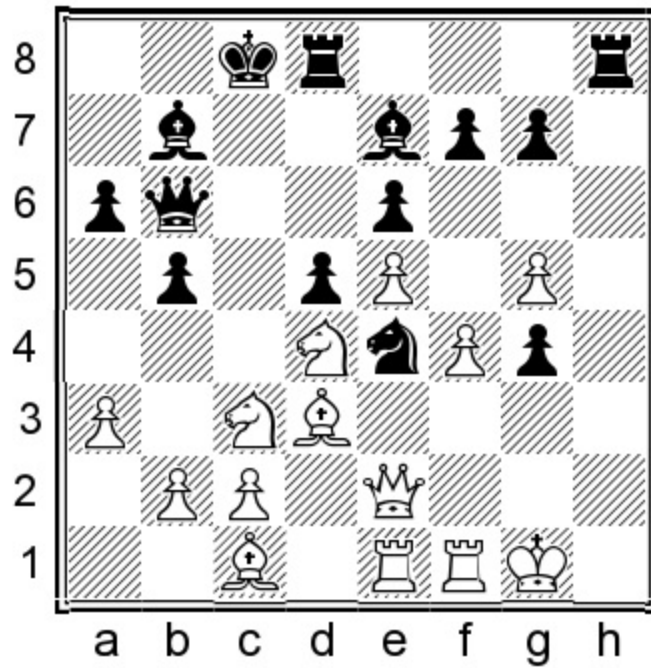
14.g5 ♘g4 15.♙c1 0-0-0 16.h3 ♖b6!

White will experience some problems on d4.

17.hxg4?!

17.♙g2 ♘xd3 18.♞xd3 ♘e5 19.fxe5 dxe5 and the knight on d4 is lost. 20.♞xf7 ♙c5 21.♘ce2 exd4⇝

17...hxg4 18.♞e2 d5! 19.e5! ♘e4=



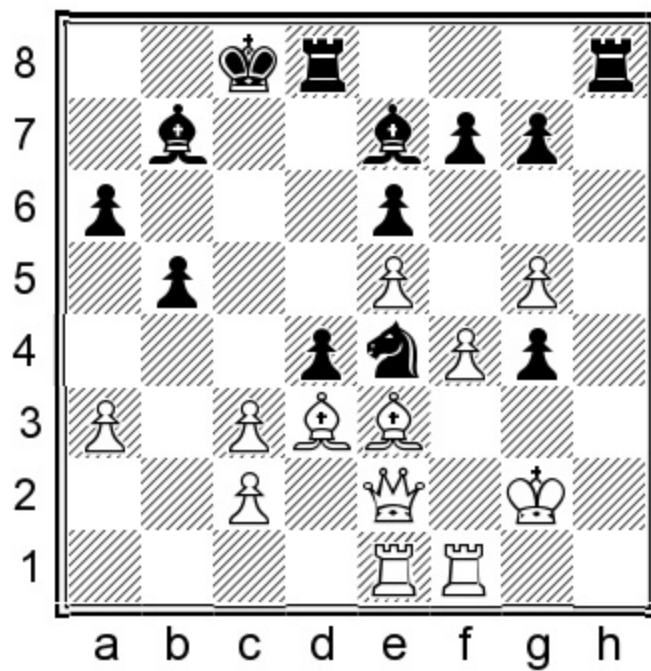
Position after: 19... ♖e4=

There are a lot of threats, and it is easy for White to go wrong.

20. ♔g2

20. ♕xe4 dxe4 21. ♕e3 ♖xd4

20... ♖xd4 21. ♕e3?? ♖xc3 22. bxc3 d4+



Position after: 22...d4-+

White is a queen up against a piece, but he is defenceless against the numerous threats

23. ♖xe4?

Accelerating his defeat.

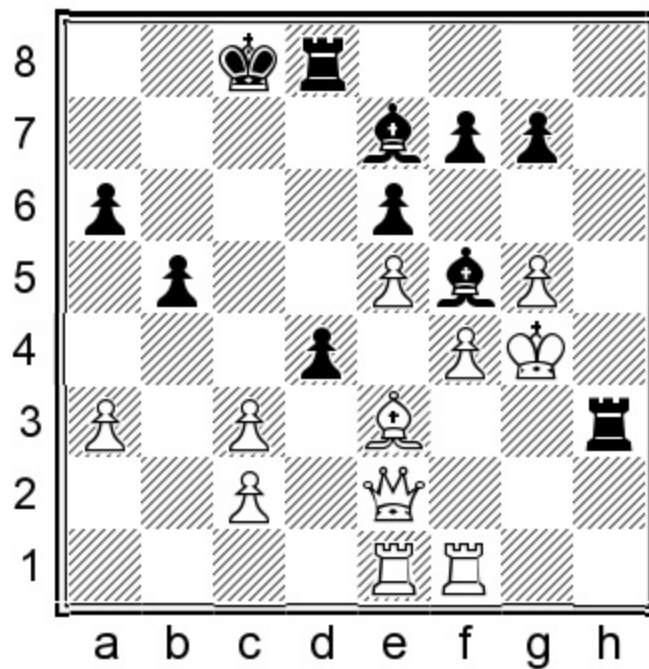
23... ♖xe4+ 24. ♔f2 ♜h2+ 25. ♔g3

25. ♔g1 ♜xe2 26. ♜xe2 dxe3-+

25... ♜h3+ 26. ♔xg4

26. ♔f2 g3+ 27. ♔g1 ♜h1#

26... ♖f5#

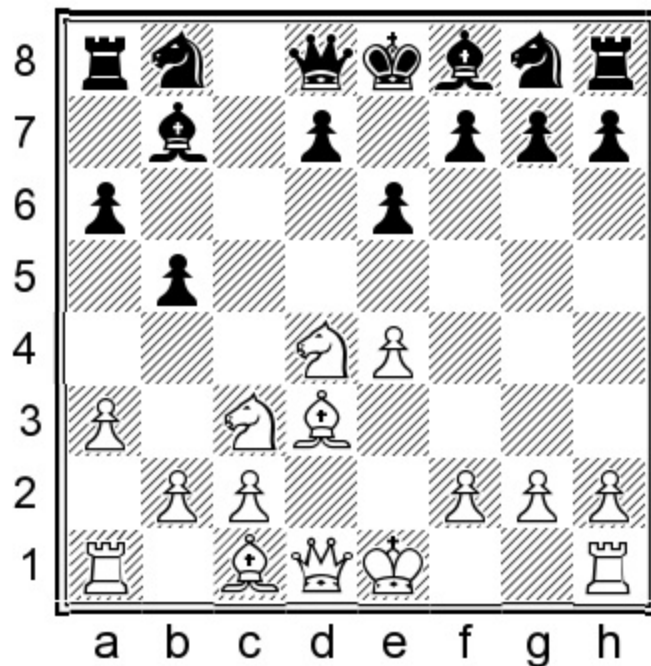


Position after: 26... ♖f5#

A nice way to finish but I doubt it will ever happen in a game, I just wanted to include it to have a mate at least one if my book!

h) 6.a3 ♖b7 7. ♖d3

1.e4 c5 2. ♖f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. ♖xd4 a6 5. ♖c3 b5 6.a3 ♖b7 7. ♖d3



Position after: 7. ♔d3

This subchapter is like a transition between the other lines with 6.a3 that we just saw, and the ones with 6.♔d3 that will be covered in the next subchapters.

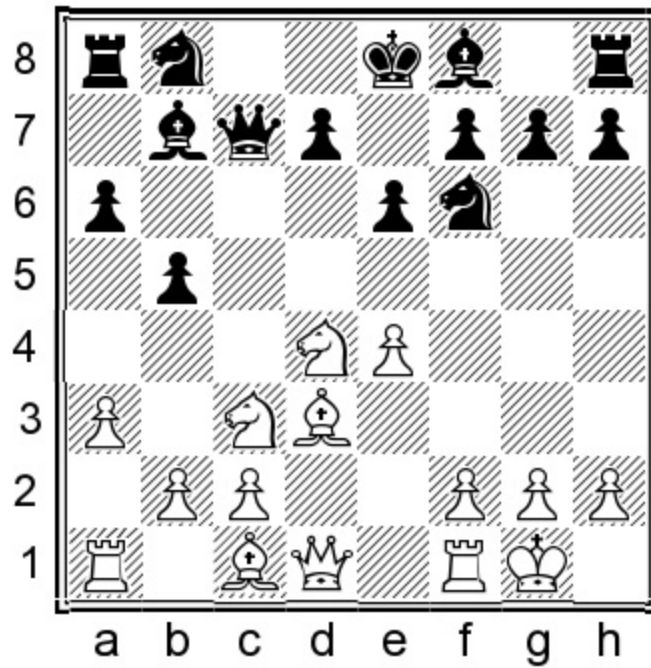
7... ♚c7

Of course, there are several possible moves but if we want a chance to remember something about these lines, we have to keep the same system, if possible, White already has several options.

8.0-0

8.♔e3 It was analysed in the previous subchapter.

8... ♘f6

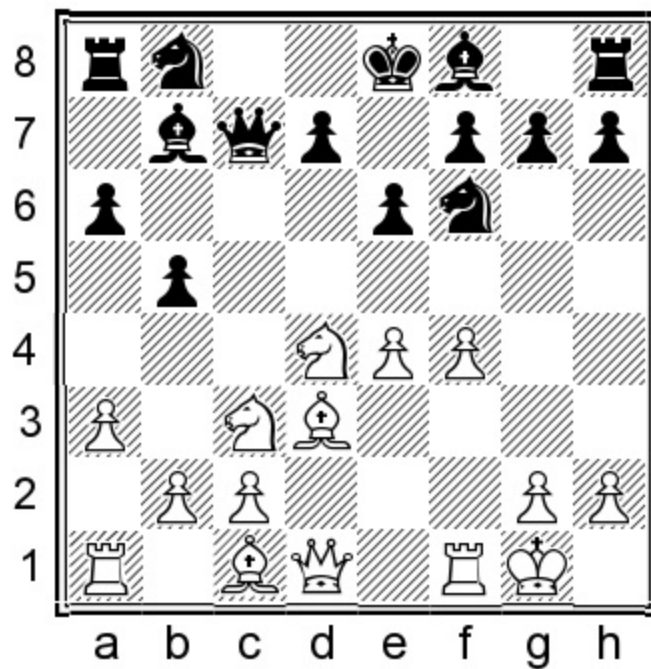


Position after: 8... Nf6

9. ♖e2!?

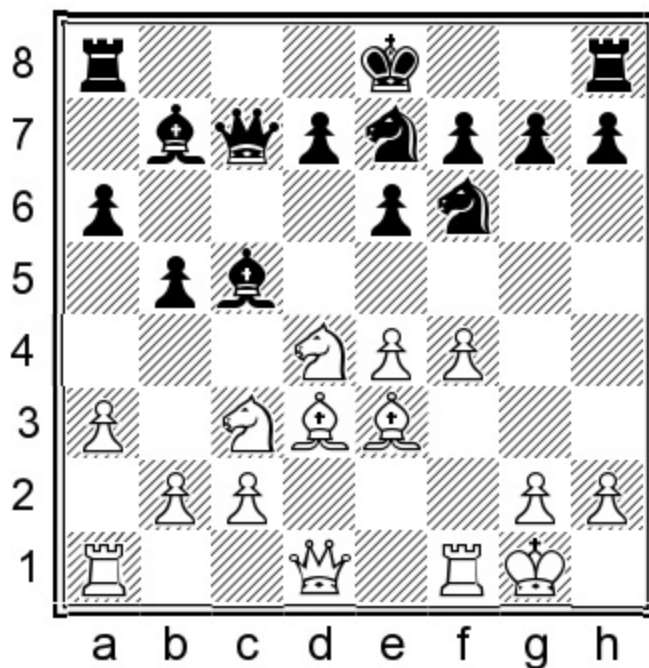
A) 9. ♖e3 Was seen in the previous subchapter and when White plays this move, I think the bishop is slightly misplaced on this square.

B) 9. f4??



Position after: 9. f4??

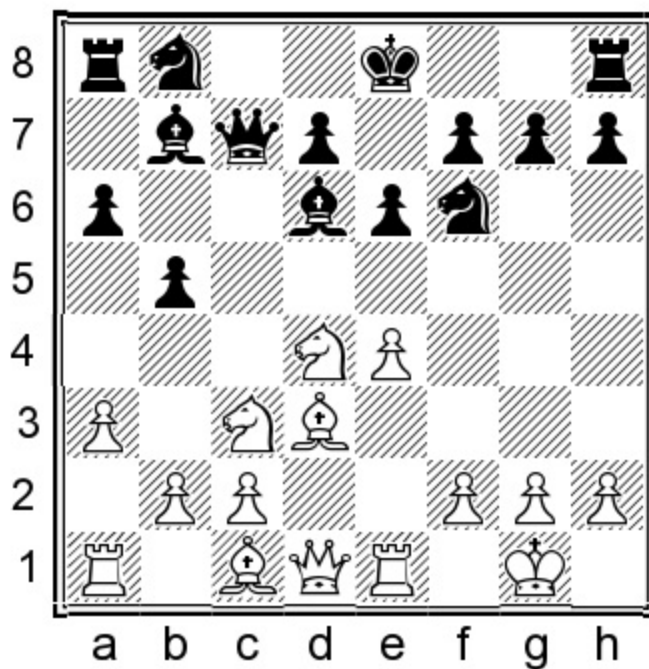
It seems pretty clear that White is not ready for this move because of the weakness of the dark diagonal in front of the king. 9...♙c5 10.♙e3 ♘c6 11.♗f5 [11.♙e2? ♚b6-+] 11...♗e7! 12.♗d4□



Position after: 12.♗d4□

Otherwise, White loses a piece. 12...♚b6 13.♗ce2 ♗xe4⚡

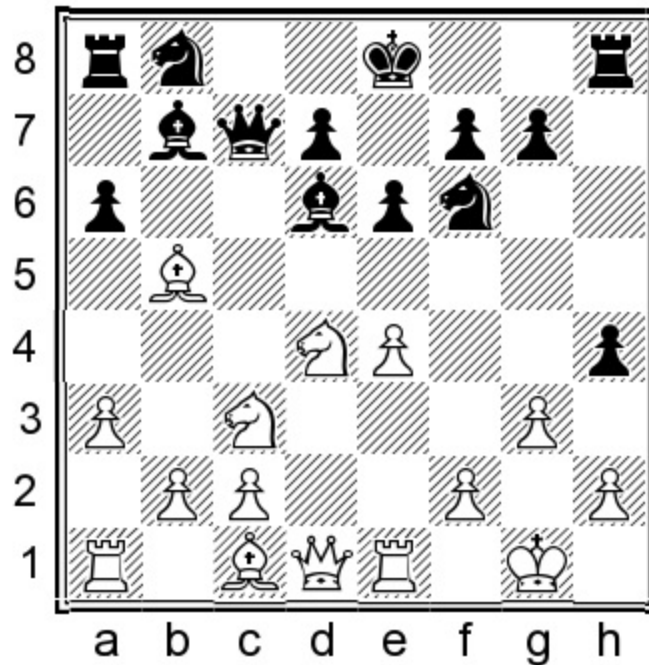
C) 9.♙e1 ♙d6!



Position after: 9...♙d6!

This has rarely been played, but the computer claims it is clearly the best, so let us give it a try.

C1) 10.g3 In some lines of the Sicilians with ...e6 this is the way to answer for White. It allows him to keep ideas such as f4 and e5. 10...h5!?N This move was called for by 10.g3. 11.♙xb5 Clearly this is the move we need to check because it is never possible to take it back. [11.♙f1 ♙e5! Black needs this in order to prevent 12.♘dxb5.12.f4 ♙xd4+ 13.♚xd4 ♘c6 14.♚d3 h4] 11...h4!

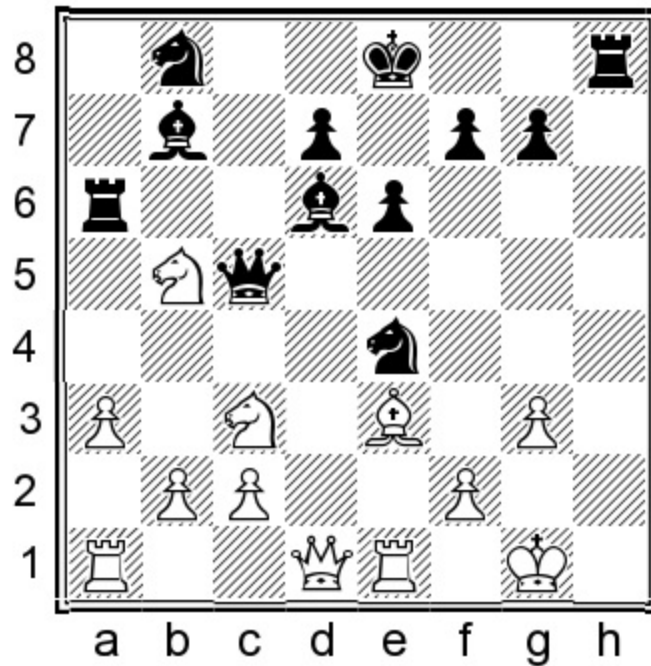


Position after: 11...h4!

[11...axb5?? 12.♘dxb5+–] 12.♙xa6! hxg3! [12...♙xa6?? 13.♘db5+–; 12...♞xa6? 13.♘db5 ♚c5 14.♙e3±]

C1.1) 13.♘cb5! The only move. 13...gxf2+!? Less strong but very interesting. [13...gxh2+! 14.♙h1 ♘xa6 15.♘xc7+ ♙xc7] The pawn on e4 is in danger and so is the king, it is just an amazing position for Black.] 14.♙xf2 ♞xh2+ 15.♙g1 ♞xa6! 16.♘xc7+ ♙xc7 And this position just needs to be played. The computer is very close from assessing this position as better for Black despite only having 2 minor pieces for the queen, that kind of prove the compensation we have!

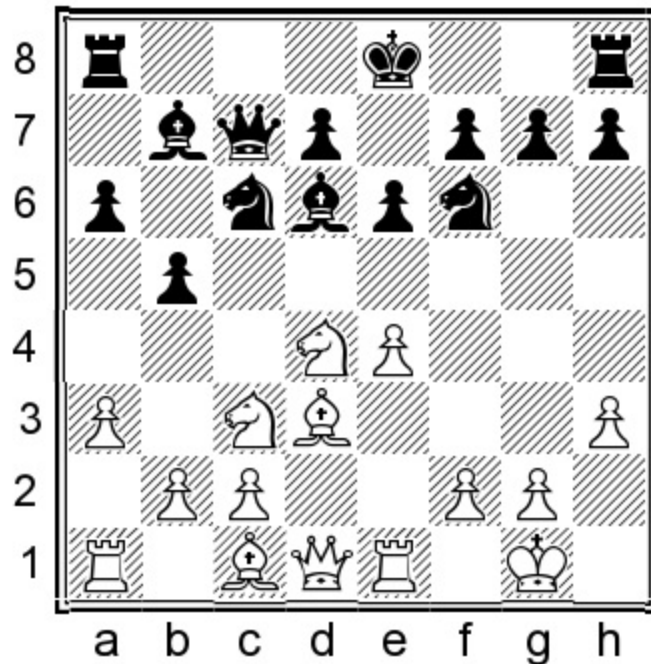
C1.2) 13.hxg3? The most logical move but wrong! 13...♞xa6 14.♘db5 ♚c5 15.♙e3 [15.b4 ♚h5 16.♘xd6+ ♞xd6 17.♚xh5 ♞xh5–+] 15...♘xe4!!



Position after: 15... Nxe4!!

This is the major difference with 12... Rxa6, the a-file is already opened. 16. Qxc5 Nxc3 and White is losing some heavy material. 17. Nxd6+ [17.f3 Qxc5+-+] 17... Rxd6 18.f3 Rxd1+-

C2) 10.h3 Nc6!

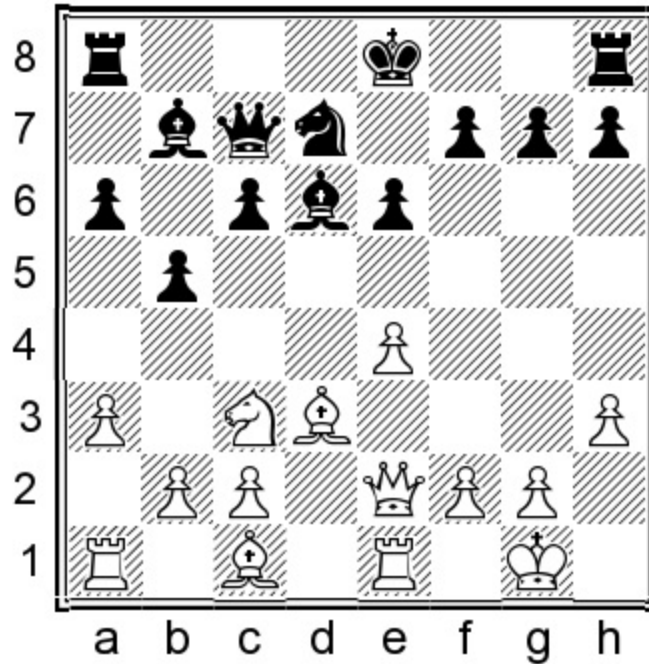


Position after: 10... Nc6!

C2.1) 11. Nd5? This is just a mistake for White. 11... exd5 12. exd5+ Ne7 13. Qf5 Qf8+-

C2.2) 11.♔e3 0-0↑ I think the point of 9...♔d6 is seen here, White is unable to do anything in the centre. 12.♔xb5? This never works because of 12...axb5 13.♖dxb5 ♔h2+! 14.♕h1 ♚b8 15.g3 ♔xg3 16.fxg3 ♚xg3—+.

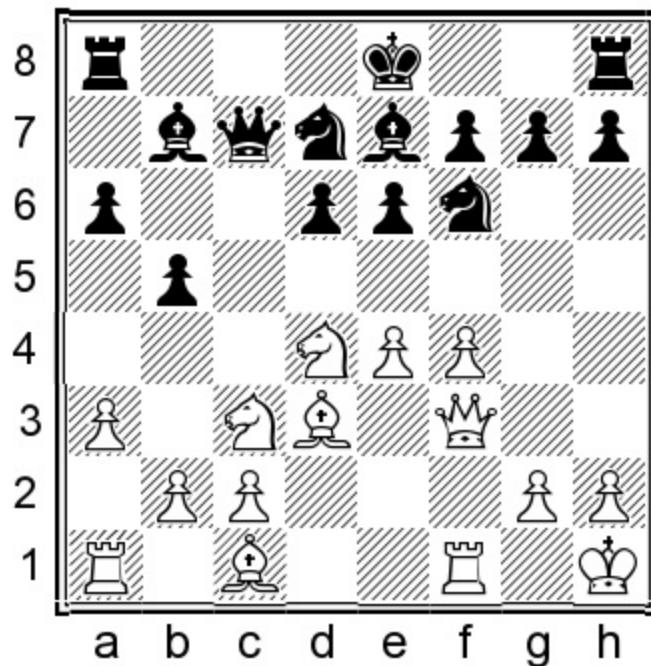
C2.3) 11.♖xc6 dxc6 12.♚e2 ♘d7!N



Position after: 12...♘d7!N

13.a4! It is important to play this move to prevent 13...c5. 13...0-0 14.♚d1 ♚fd8 15.♔g5 f6 16.♔e3 ♖e5— Black is going to have the advantage of the bishop pair; he has a great position.

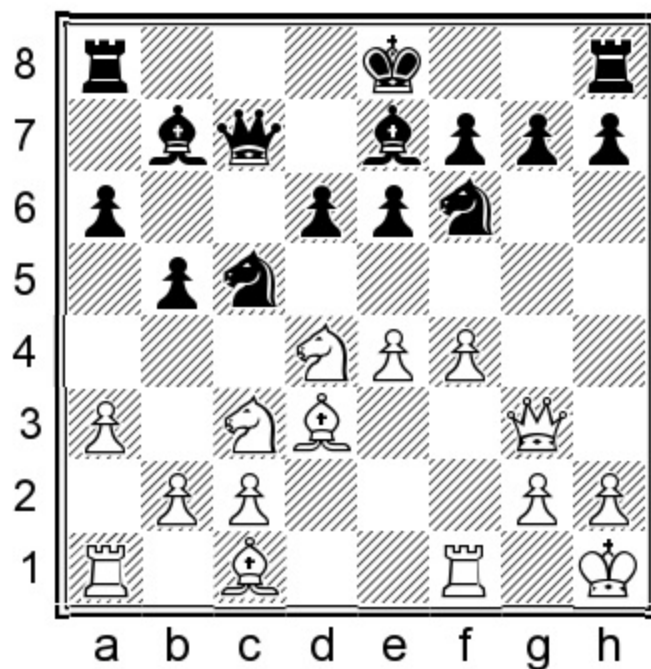
D) 9.♕h1 In this line White can bring the queen to f3 instead of e2 as in the main line, but it is not necessarily better. 9...d6 10.f4 ♘bd7 11.♚f3 ♔e7



Position after: 11...Ke7

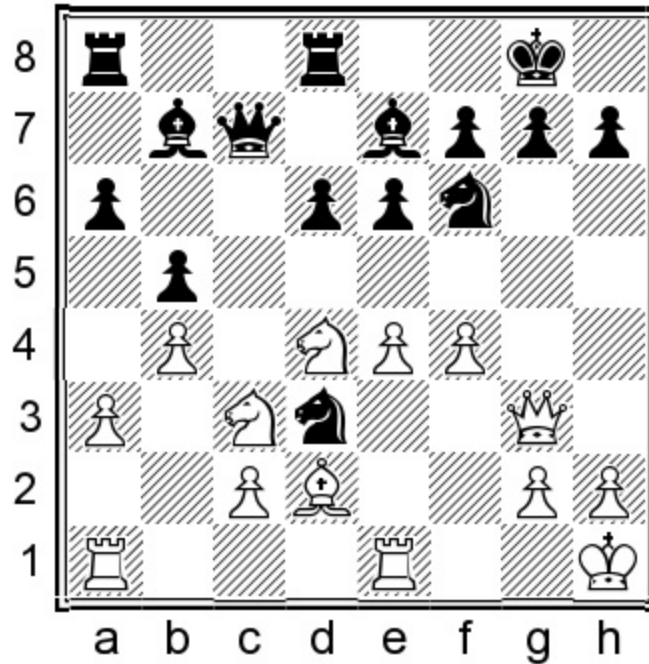
D1) 12.f5 e5 13.♞de2 h5!? Even if not forced, the inventive way Ivanchuk treated this position is worth remembering. 14.♙g5 ♞g4 15.♙d2 ♞df6 16.h3 d5 Leaving a knight on g4 is often done in positions where White has played an early ♙h1, that is another reason I do not like this move. 17.♙e1 ♞d8↑ Of course it is complicated, but Black had a great position in Areshchenko, A (2660) – Ivanchuk, V (2731) Foros 2006.

D2) 12.♞g3 ♞c5!



Position after: 12...Nc5!

13.♞e1 [13.♝xg7 ♞g8 14.♞h6 ♜cxe4 ♞ Black will long castle and have the initiative.] 13...0-0
 14.♙d2 ♞fd8 15.b4 ♜xd3



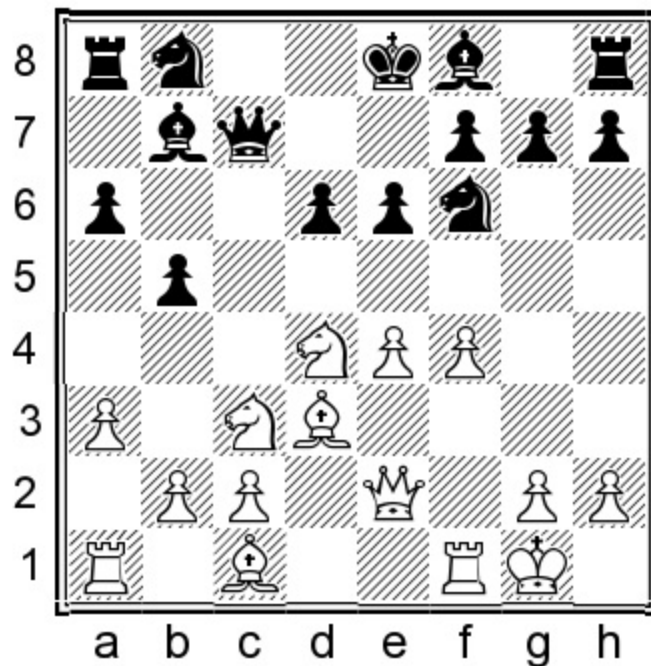
Position after: 15...♜xd3

Without this bishop the defence is often much easier. Black was fine in the following game.
 16.cxd3 ♞ac8 17.♞ac1 ♞d7 18.h3 ♞c7 19.♜ce2 ♞dc8 ♞ Tondivar, B (2315) – Lutz, C (2580)
 Leeuwarden 1994.

9...d6

9...♙d6!? I have not chosen this move, but it is a possibility worth mentioning for Black, if you want to explore this sideline. 10.♞h1 [10.h3 ♜c6 11.♙e3 0-0 12.f4 ♜xd4 13.♙xd4 e5 14.fxe5 ♙xe5 15.♙xe5 ♞xe5 16.♞f5 ♞d4+ ♞] 10...♙f4!?N 11.♙xf4 ♞xf4 ♞

10.f4



Position after: 10.f4

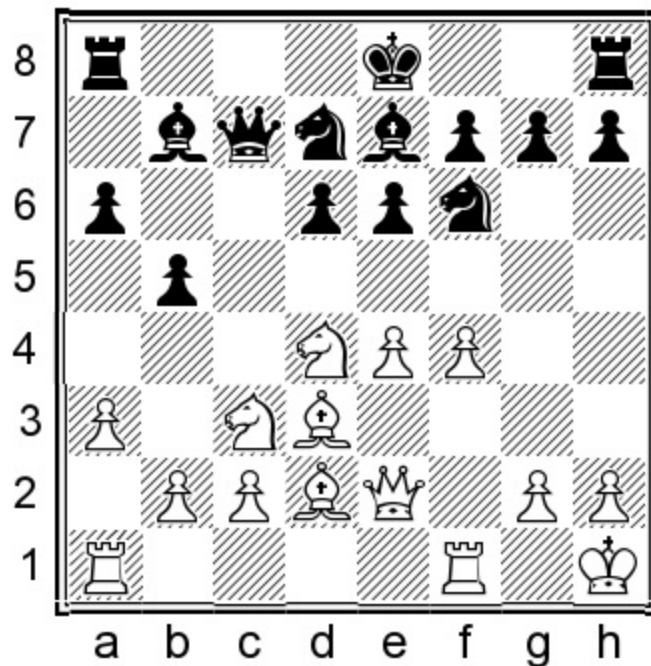
Eventually, White will have to play this move if he wants to do something in this position.

10.♔d2 ♖bd7 11.♕h1 ♙e7 12.f4 This always goes back to the main line once White plays f2-f4.

10...♖bd7 11.♕h1

11.♖f3?! It does not look really useful, and Karjakin is going to experience the uselessness of this approach. [11.♔d2 ♙e7 12.♖ae1 This is clearly another very logical approach which we have seen. 12...0-0 13.♕h1 ♖c5 Transposing into the main line.] 11...♙e7 12.♔d2 0-0 13.♖ae1 ♖ac8 14.♕h1 ♖c5 15.b4 ♖xd3 16.cxd3 ♙d7! Always logical, the queen makes space for the rooks. 17.♖d4 And the knight eventually came back to d4. 17...♖c7 Karjakin, S (2754) – Korobov, A (2670) Bucharest 2019.

11...♙e7 12.♔d2



Position after: 12. ♔d2

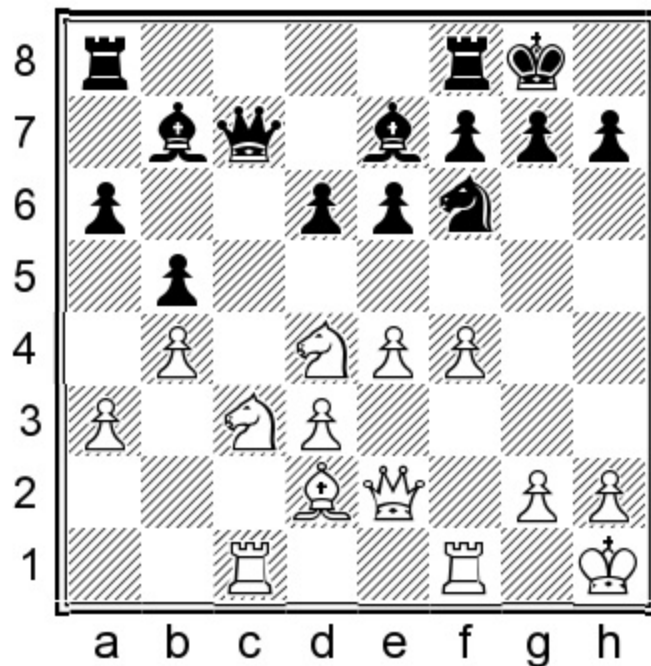
12...♘c5!?

We can start with this move even if it is less common.

12...0-0 13.b4 Usually players just transpose with 13.♖ae1, but it is an interesting possibility to prevent ...♘c5.

13.♖ae1

13.b4 ♘xd3 14.cxd3 0-0 15.♖ac1



Position after: 15. ♖ac1

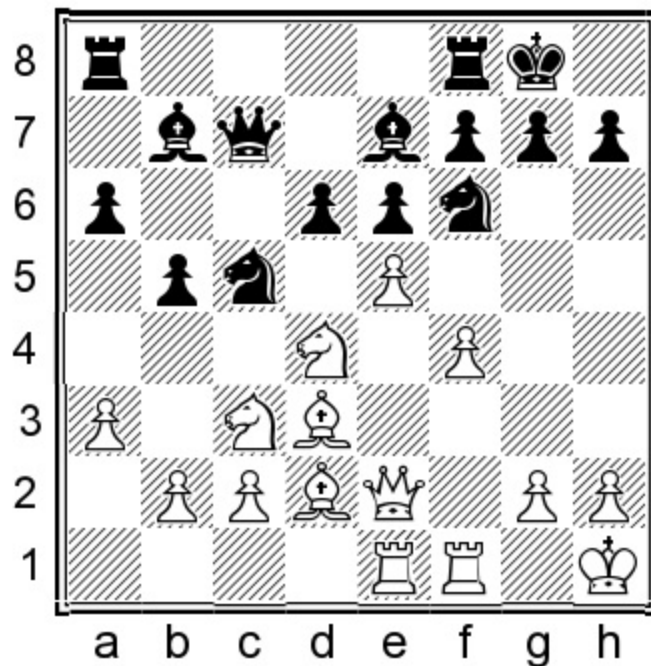
The rook can come here instead of ♖ae1, but it is not dangerous for Black. 15... ♔d7 16.g4 This is Alonso, S (2434) – Hellsten, J (2592) Santiago de Chile 2006, and now, I think Black should anticipate 17.g5 with: 16... ♘e8! It seems that White does not have much in either of the following lines. 17.g5 [17.f5 ♙f6 18.♙e3 h6] 17...f5! 18.gxf6 ♙xf6 19.♙e3 ♖c8

13...0-0 14.♖f3!?

This kind of move might seem very frightening, but we can hold.

A) 14.b4 ♘xd3 15.cxd3 ♖ac8 16.♖c1 ♔d7 We have seen the same position with a tempo down for Black, and it was already fine.

B) 14.e5?



Position after: 14.e5?

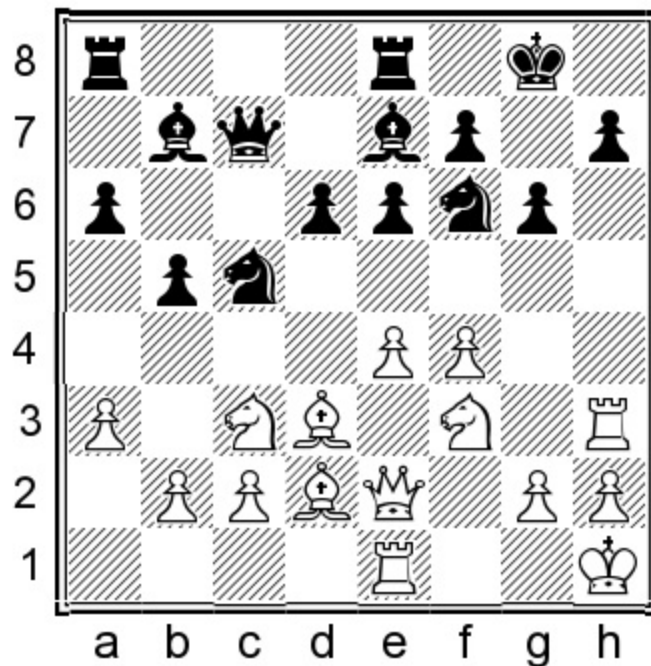
Opening the long diagonal for the bishop clearly shows a lack of understanding by White.

14...♖fd7! There is nothing for White since his light-squares bishop can be traded whenever Black wants. [14...dxe5!? 15.fxe5 ♘fd7 16.♙f4 ♘xd3 17.♚xd3 ♜fd8⚡ This is also really fine for Black as in Piorun, K (2651) – Castellanos Rodriguez, R (2501) Katowice 2017.] 15.♘f3 dxe5 16.fxe5 ♘xd3 17.cxd3 ♘c5⚡ Black follows with 18...♞ad8 and he has an amazing bishop on b7.

14...♞fe8 15.♞h3 g6!

Prevents any ♚h5 or tactics on h7.

16.♘f3



Position after: 16. ♖f3

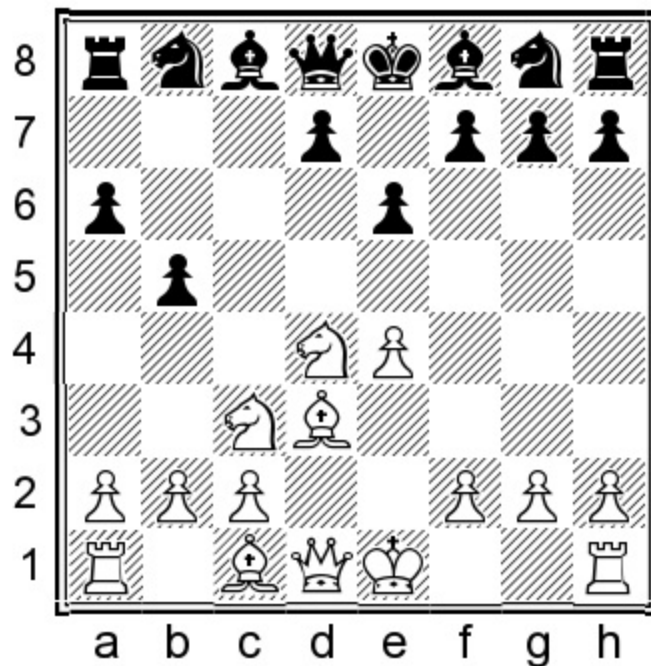
This position has occurred in a few amateur games but here I would suggest the strong:

16... ♖g4! N 17. ♖g3 f5! 18. exf5 exf5 ♣.

This simply opens every line in Black's favor. Once Black has the rook on e8 protected he will be more than fine.

i) 6. ♕d3 ♕b7 7.--, 7..0-0 ♖c6 8.-- - Sidelines

1.e4 c5 2. ♖f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. ♖xd4 a6 5. ♖c3 b5 6. ♕d3



Position after: 6. ♔d3

We have now reached the main line of the 5. ♘c3 b5 variation. As seen in the previous lines White should try to avoid playing 6.a3 and I see this line as the right way for White to play if he wants to challenge Black.

6... ♕b7!?

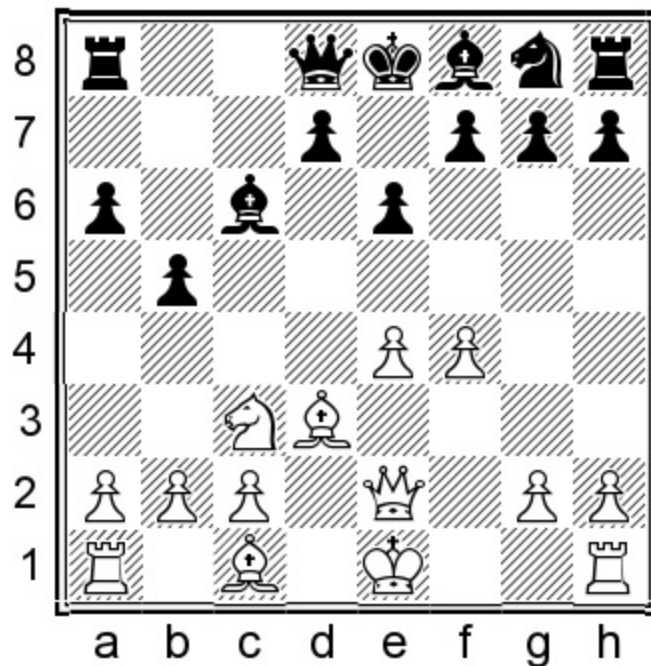
I have decided to keep the same move in every variation for consistency and convenience. This line is sound for Black, and it is not worse than the alternatives.

6... ♖b6 This is another interesting idea that I investigated. While we might call it the main line, I prefer the text as it is more in the spirit of this chapter as we want to play 6... ♕b7. The other problem I see with 6... ♖b6 is illustrated in the following: 7. ♘b3 ♖c7 8.0-0 ♕b7 9.f4. This is very similar to what we analyzed in the previous subchapter, but with the knight on b3 instead of d4, and it might be harder to remember the lines.

7.0-0

Most of the players continue with this move as it is the most natural continuation.

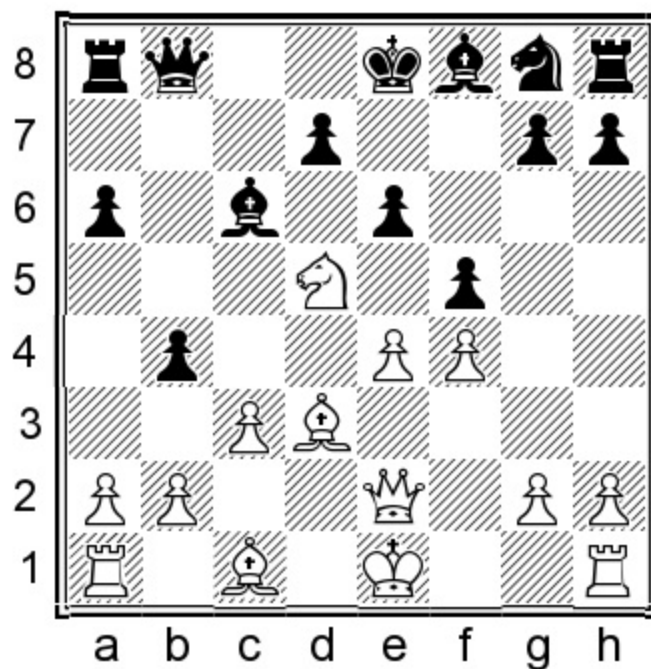
- A) 7. ♕e3 This has already been seen in the first subchapter about 6. ♕e3 ♕b7 7. ♕d3.
- B) 7.a3 This has also been analyzed in the previous subchapter.
- C) 7. ♖e2 ♘c6 8. ♘xc6 ♕xc6 9.f4



Position after: 9.f4

The only independent try. [9.0-0 Is the most logical which transposes into the 9.♔e2 line that will be covered later.] 9...b4 10.♘d5?! This has been tried once, but Black has a surprisingly strong reply. Perpinya Rofes, L (2395) – Vega Gutierrez, S (2285) Sabadell 2011 [10.♘d1 ♘f6 11.0-0 ♙c5+ 12.♔h1 0-0 13.♘f2 ♔c7↗ This position is clearly double-edged, but Black is by no means worse.] 10...f5!!N The knight is now “trapped” on d5, because if it goes back to e4, the pawn on e4 is lost.

C1) 11.c3 ♗b8!

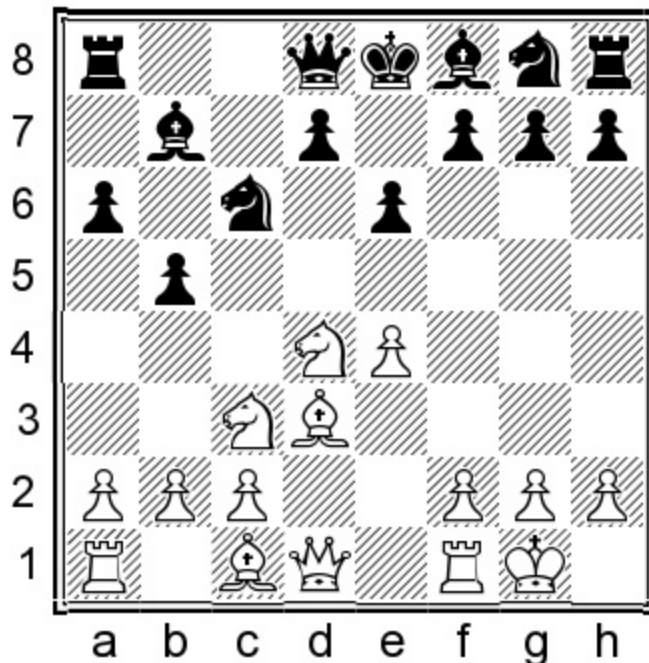


Position after: 11...♗b8!

Protecting the pawn on b4 but also giving the d8 square to the king as we will see in the following line. 12.♔d2 [12.♘xb4 ♕xb4 13.cxb4 fxe4!-+ White cannot take back and Black will have a healthy extra pawn after 14...♚xb4+.] 12...fxe4 13.♕xe4 exd5 14.♕xd5+ ♔d8-+

C2) 11.0-0 ♕b7!? According to the computer there are stronger moves including 11...♚b8 or 11...♚a5 but this one is more human. The bishop simply retreats to threaten 12...exd5. 12.♘e3 fxe4 13.f5 ♘f6! 14.♕c4 d5 15.♕b3 e5 16.♕a4+ ♔f7.

7...♘c6



Position after: 7...♘c6

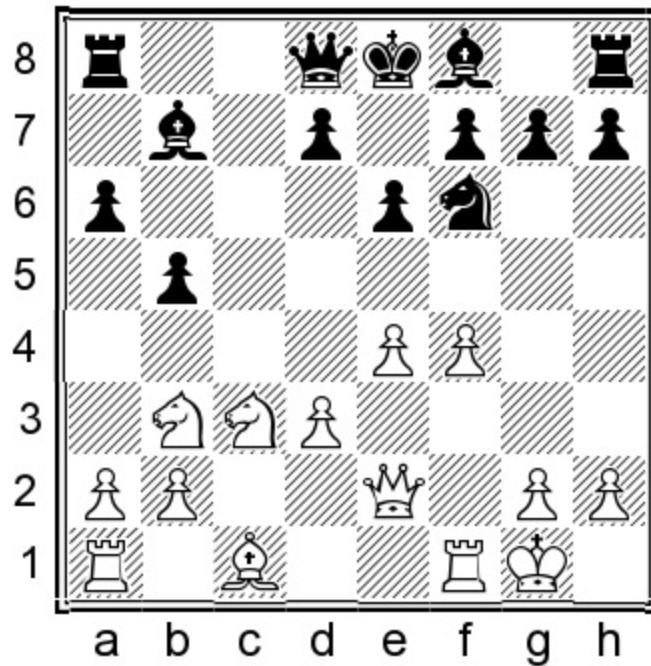
8.♕e3

It is not clear at all that the bishop is on its best square here.

A) 8.♘xc6! This is going to be analysed in the next subchapters.

B) 8.♘b3 I believe that this has to be too slow to be strong. 8...♘f6

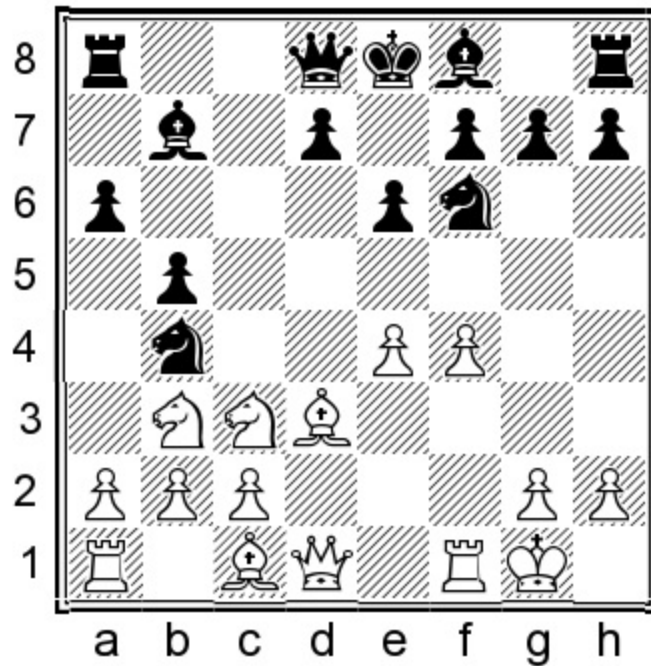
B1) 9.♚e2 ♘e5!? 10.f4?! [10.♕f4N 10...♘xd3 11.cxd3 ♕e7 12.a4 b4 13.♘d1 a5=] 10...♘xd3 11.cxd3



Position after: 11.cxd3

11...b4!N This is an improvement over the games that reached this position. White's knight will be passive while the bishop on b7 might soon become a monster. This should be enough to prevent White from playing e4-e5 at any moment. 12.♖d1 a5! 13.♙e3 ♙e7 14.♗f2 0-0

B2) 9.f4 ♗b4!?N



Position after: 9...♗b4!?N

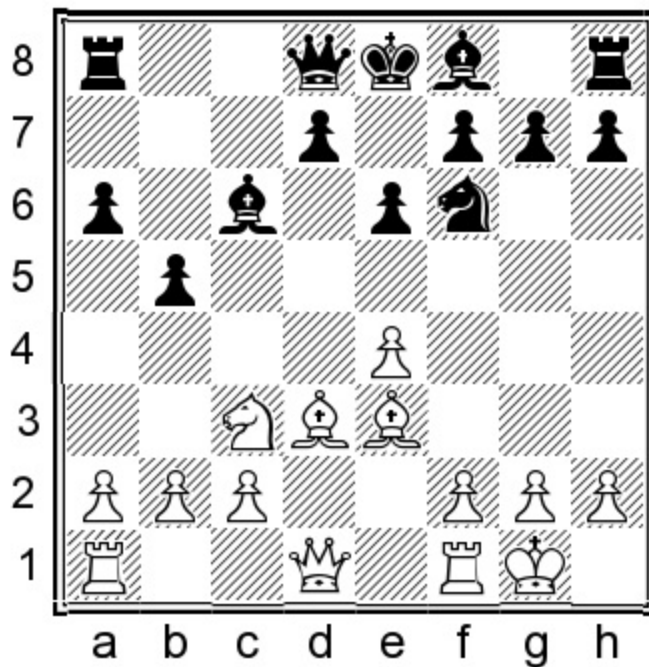
In the same spirit it is possible to take the bishop pair. 10.♙e3 [10.♙e2? Clearly a mistake.

10...♞xe4 11.♙f3 ♞xc3 12.bxc3 ♚b6+ 13.♚h1 ♞d5--+] 10...♞xd3 11.cxd3 ♙e7= And we have a similar position to 9.♚e2 ♞e5, except that the white knights are better here.

8...♞e5

This is also interesting, trying to get the bishop pair.

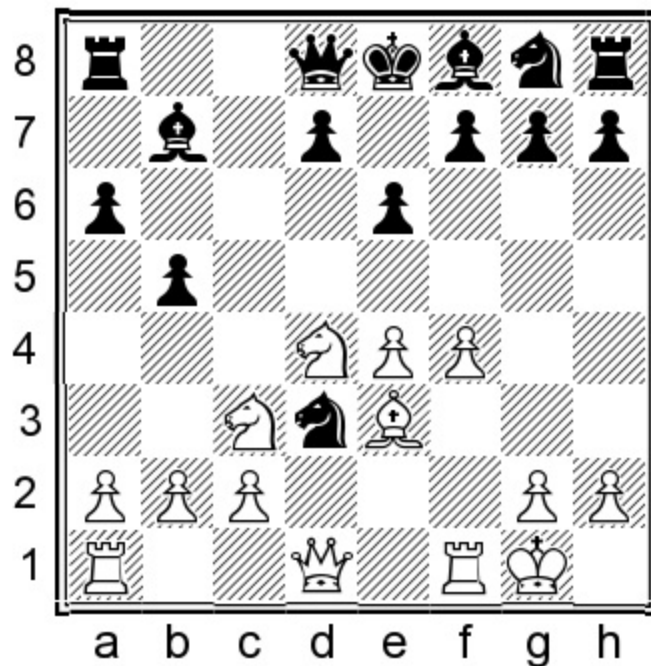
8...♞f6!? This is the main continuation. 9.♞xc6 [9.♚e2 ♞e5!? 10.f4 ♞xd3 11.cxd3 ♙e7= It is similar to 8...♞e5.] 9...♙xc6



Position after: 9...♙xc6

10.e5!? [10.a3 ♚c7 11.f4 ♙e7⇌] 10...b4! 11.exf6 bxc3 12.fxg7 ♙xg7 13.♚g4!? ♙e5!?N 14.bxc3 h5 15.♚h3 ♙xc3 16.♖ab1 ♜g8 17.f3 h4= Clearly, anything can happen in this position. Black should be fine because he is active enough but having the king in the centre in the long term might be a technical problem.

9.f4 ♞xd3



Position after: 9... Nxd3

10.cxd3

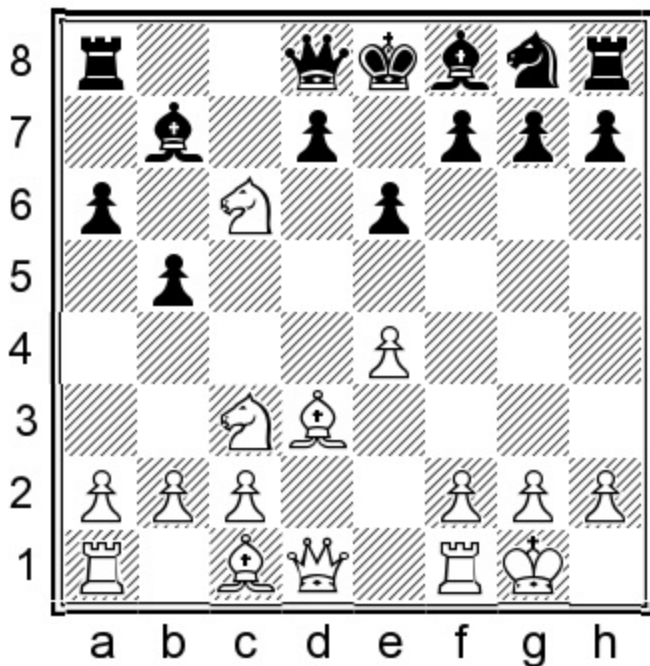
10. ♖xd3?! b4 11. ♘ce2 ♙c5 12. ♘g3 ♘f6

10... ♘f6 11. ♖f3 ♙e7 12. ♖g3 0-0N 13. ♖ac1 ♖c8=

Black's main task is to activate his bishops when he may be able to prove that he is better.

j) 6. ♙d3 ♙b7 7. 0-0 ♘c6 8. ♘xc6 ♙xc6 9.--

1.e4 c5 2. ♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 a6 5. ♘c3 b5 6. ♙d3 ♙b7!? 7. 0-0 ♘c6 8. ♘xc6!



Position after: 8. ♖xc6!

This is the only continuation that can get Black into trouble, and it is also the only one that prevents Black from getting the bishop pair advantage.

8... ♙xc6

White has a wide choice of moves. It would be quite counterproductive to analyze all of them, so I have selected the most interesting ones.

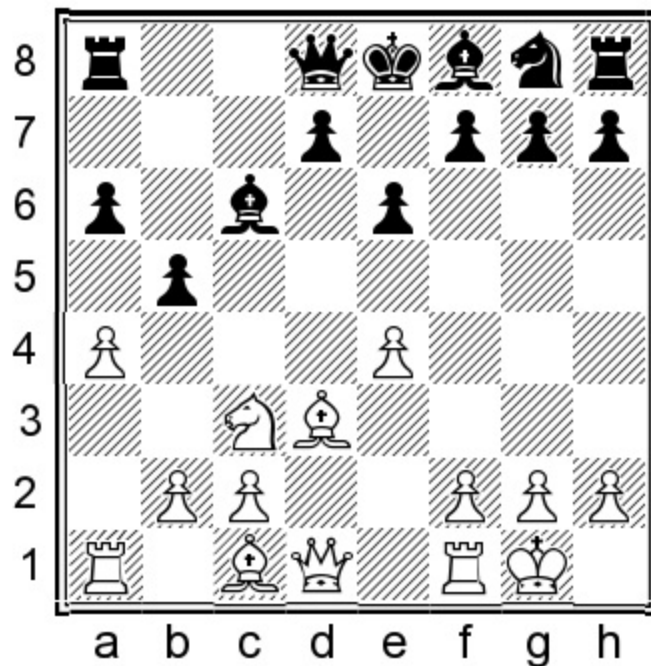
8... dxc6? This time this move would be a mistake, because of 9. e5± and White has the possibility of using the e4-square with strength. The knight will soon be coming there in order to reach d6 later.

9. ♚e2

This is clearly the main alternative to 9. ♖e1. Other moves are only rarely seen in practice.

A) 9. ♖e1 This is going to be the subject of our last subchapter!

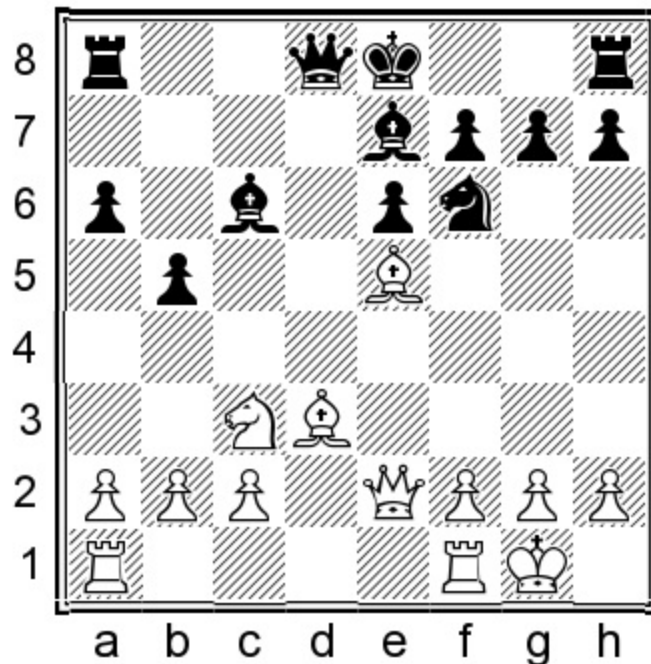
B) 9. a4



Position after: 9.a4

This move occurred in a few games, but we will gain a tempo on the knight, and it seems too slow to be good for White. 9...b4 10.♘b1 ♙c5 11.♚e2 ♞e7 12.♙e3 ♜b6 13.♙xc5 ♚xc5 14.♞d2 ♞g6= Black is going to finish his development and the position is roughly balanced as in the game Fedorchuk, S (2673) – Balogh, C (2660) Bastia 2014.

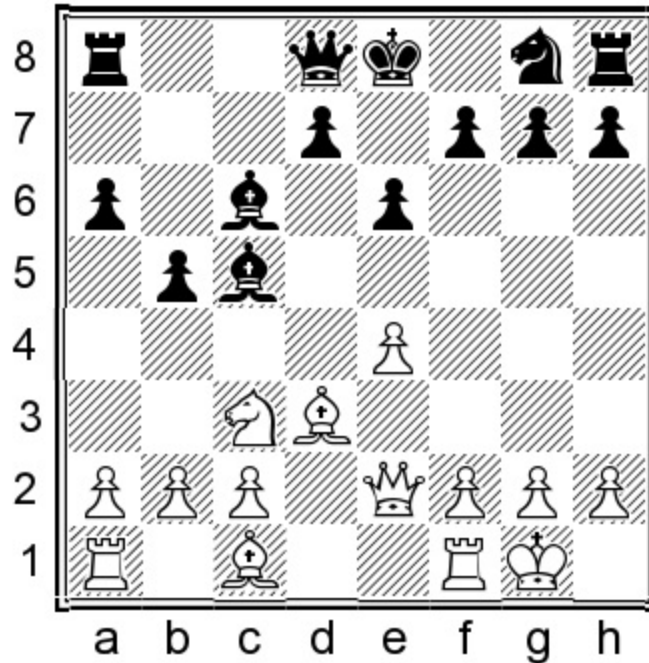
C) 9.e5?! This move is nothing special, but it has some ideas. The first is the same as against 8...dxc6, White wants to be able to bring the knight toward e4. It also prevents our own knight from reaching its natural f6 square. 9...d6 10.♙f4 dxe5 11.♙xe5 ♞f6 12.♚e2 ♙e7=



Position after: 12...♙e7=

This position is objectively equal, but here White misplayed with: 13.♘e4? And after 13...♚d5! White is forced to give up the bishop pair and Black has a great initiative. 14.♙xf6 gxf6 15.f3 f5 16.♘f2 ♜g8= Although White won after an amazing game she was objectively in trouble here in De Seroux, C (2095) – Kaenel, H (2297) Graechen 2017.

9...♙c5!?

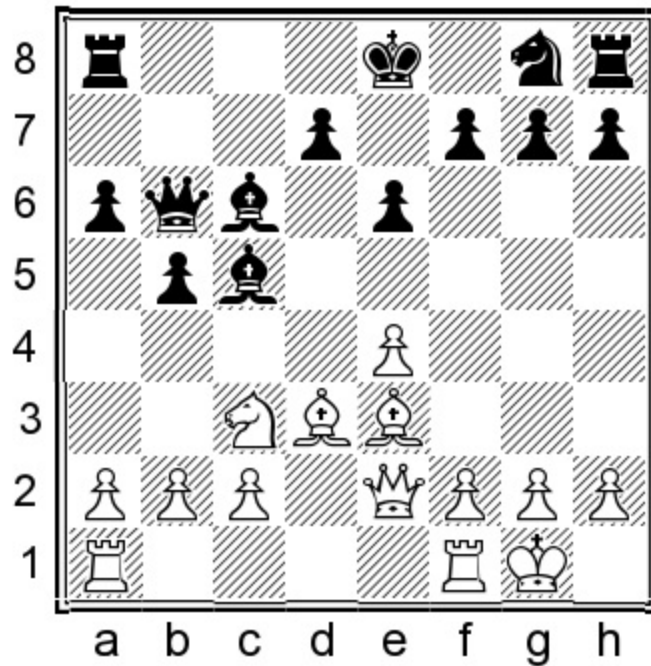


Position after: 9...♙c5!?

Among all of Black's options, this is considered to be the main move. It is also by far the one that brought Black the best results.

10.a4

A) 10.♙e3 ♚b6!

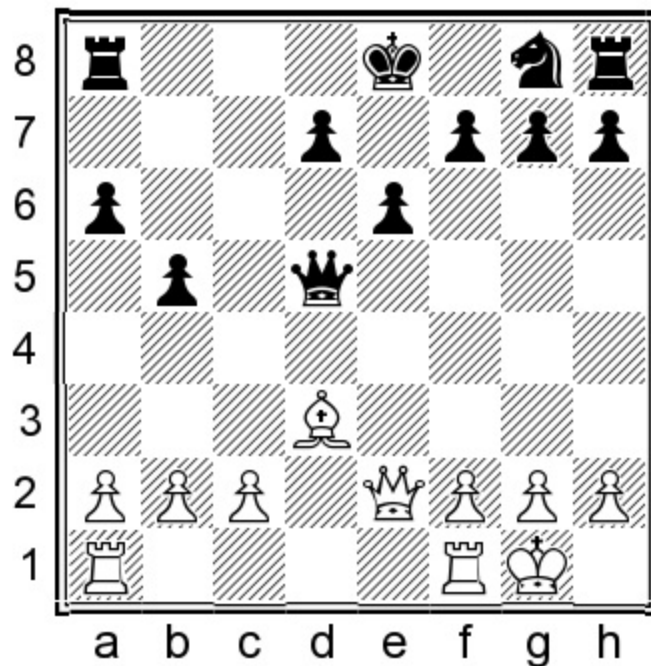


Position after: 10... ♕b6!

I prefer to bring the queen into play instead of taking immediately on e3.

A1) 11. ♕g4?! Not easy to refute, but objectively wrong. 11... ♖xe3 12. ♕xg7 ♖d4 13. e5 0-0-0! 14. ♕xh8 f5!! 15. ♖ae1 [15. ♕xh7 ♖xe5 16. ♖ae1 ♖f6 17. ♕h3 ♖d4] Black will follow with ... ♖g8. 15. exf6 ♖xf6 16. ♕g7 ♖g8-+] 15... ♖h6 16. ♕xh7 ♖g4 17. ♖e2 ♖xe5+ The white monarch is in huge trouble due to the many pieces that are directed against him!

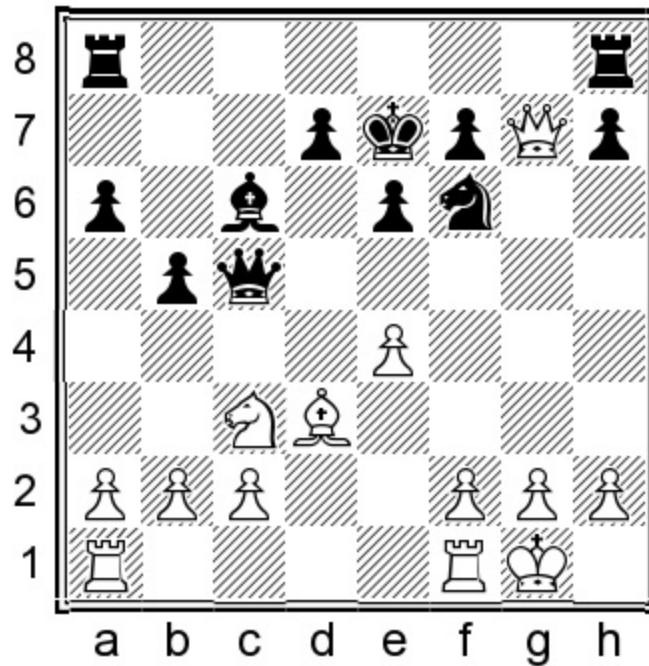
A2) 11. ♖d5 ♖xd5 12. ♖xc5 ♕xc5 13. exd5 ♕xd5



Position after: 13... ♖xd5

As always, White might have enough for a pawn in this position, but he really needs to be super accurate which he was not in the following game. 14.c4?! bxc4 15.♙e4 ♖e5 16.♖xc4 ♜b8 17.♜fe1 ♖b5 18.♖c7 ♘f6 And Black is now safe, he has a great position in Kis, J (2122) – Ionescu, C (2456) Eger 2004.

A3) 11.♙xc5 ♖xc5 12.♖g4 [12.♜ae1 ♘e7 13.♖e3 ♖xe3 14.♜xe3, I see no reason Black should be worse in this endgame. 14...0-0 15.♘e2 ♜fc8 16.♘d4 ♙b7 17.f4 d6= Trent, L (2399) – Mekhitarian, K (2554) Chess.com INT 2020] 12...♘f6!? 13.♖xg7 ♙e7

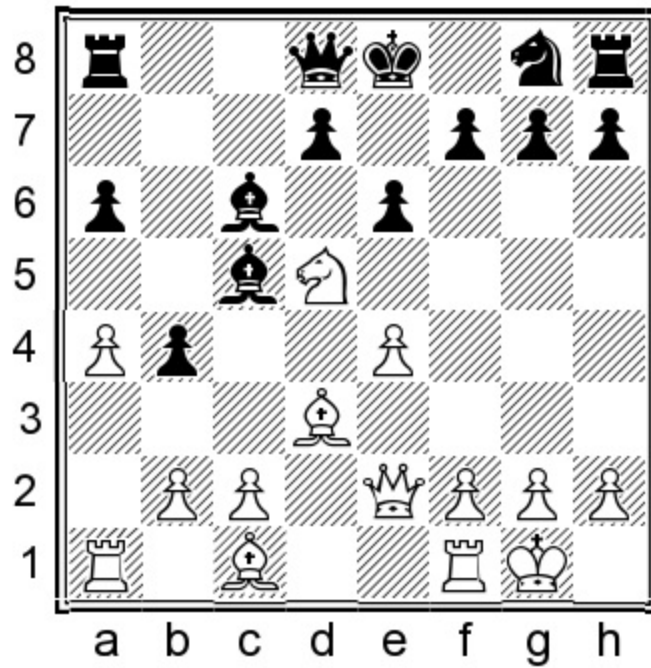


Position after: 13... ♙e7

A nice conception by Black, it seems horrible to play for White even if his position should objectively be fine. 14.♖g3?! ♜hg8 15.♖e3 ♖xe3 16.fxe3 b4 17.♘e2 ♘xe4 And Black quickly ended up on top of the complications in Felgaer, R (2597) – Kamsky, G (2705) Khanty – Mansiysk 2010.

B) 10.e5 ♙d4 11.♜d1 ♖b6 12.a4 b4 13.a5 ♖c7 14.♘a2 ♖xa5 And Black quickly ended up on top of the complications in Felgaer, R (2597) – Kamsky, G (2705) Khanty – Mansiysk 2010.

10...b4 11.♘d5



Position after: 11. ♘d5

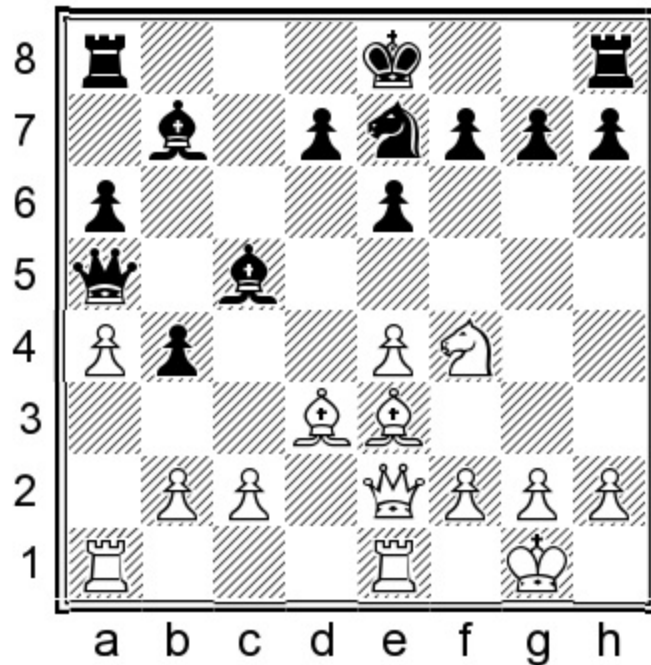
11... ♖b7!?

Of course, this needs more practical tests, but I like this move.

11... ♞e7 This main line failed to convince me, so I opted for a move that has been played only once.

12. ♕e3

12. ♘f4N 12... ♞e7 13. ♕e3 ♔a5! 14. ♖fe1



Position after: 14. ♖fe1

14...♞c8 [14...0-0!? There is also nothing bad with this move. 15.♞ad1 ♞ac8 16.b3 ♟xe3 17.♞xe3 ♞fd8=] 15.♟xc5 ♞xc5 16.c4!? ♜g6! [16...bxc3?? 17.b4! A nice trick. 17...♞xb4 18.♞ab1+–] 17.♜xg6 hxg6=

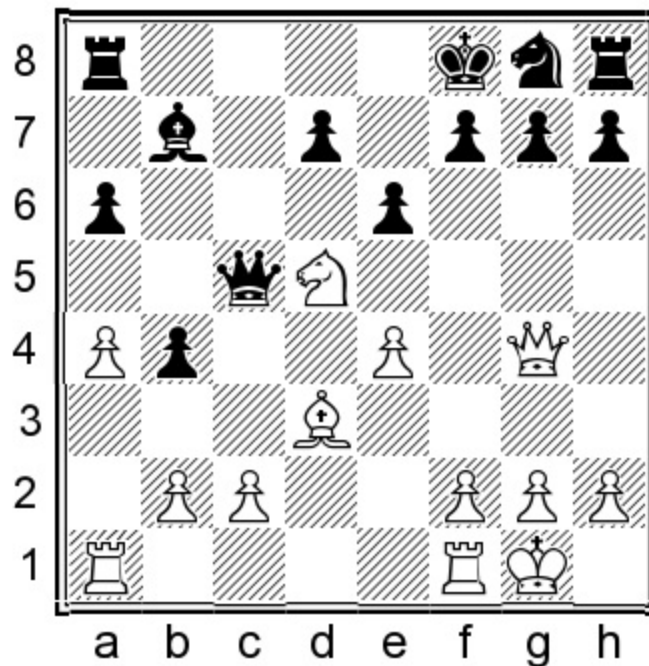
12...♞a5! 13.♟xc5 ♞xc5

White needs to be accurate if he wants to try something.

14.♞g4!

14.♜e3 ♜f6 15.♜c4 d5! It looks safer to start with this move. [15...0-0?! 16.e5 ♜d5 17.♞e4→] 16.exd5 ♞xd5 17.f3 ♞c5+ 18.♞f2 ♞xf2+ 19.♚xf2 ♚e7=

14...♚f8!



Position after: 14... ♚f8!

It does not appear to be too dangerous to have the king in the centre a little bit longer and we gain a few tempi on the white queen.

15.♜e3

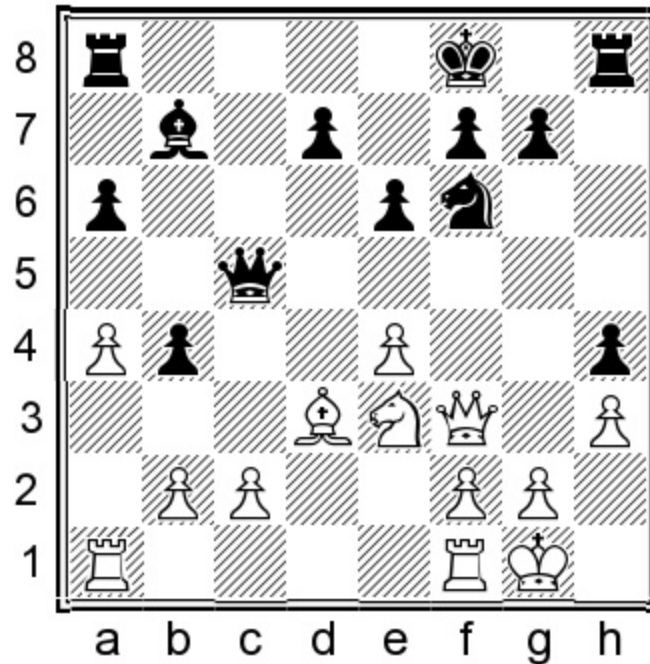
15.♜f4? ♜f6 16.♞f3 ♚e7= The knight on f4 is really misplaced.

15...h5N

Not necessarily stronger but interesting.

The only game to reach this position saw 15...♘f6 but quickly ended in a draw. 16.♙f4 d6 17.c3
Maninang, R – Olafsson, F Manila 1979. 17...♔e7

16.♙f3 h4 17.h3 ♘f6

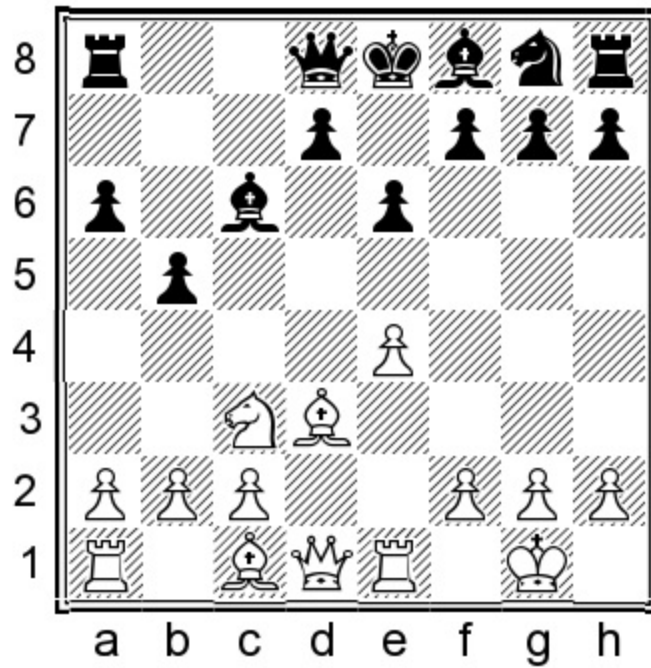


Position after: 17...♘f6

Having the pawn already on h4 also allows Black to continue with ...♙h5, probably on the next move, with an interesting position which is fine according to the engine!

k) 6.♙d3 ♙b7 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.♘xc6 ♙xc6 9.♙e1

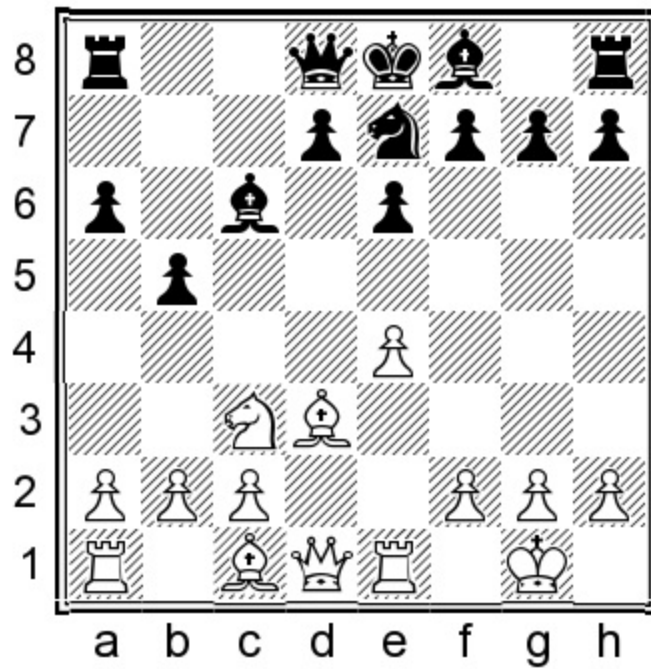
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.♘c3 b5 6.♙d3 ♙b7!? 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.♘xc6! ♙xc6 9.♙e1



Position after: 9.♞e1

With this move White is trying to play ♘d5 at some point which explains the move I choose.

9...♞e7!?



Position after: 9...♞e7!?

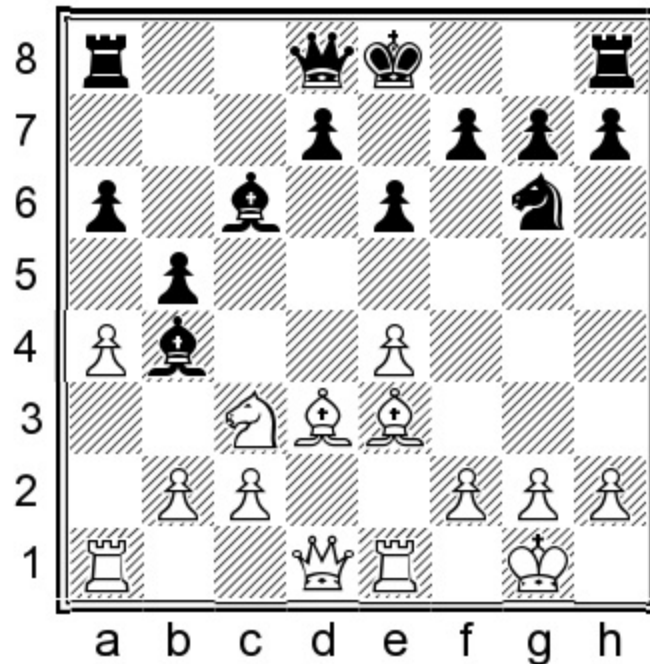
In comparison to 9...♞c5 or 9...♞b8 it is clearly a main line. I feel it is Black's best option and White cannot prove a clear advantage in this line. White has tried a lot of moves here and it is hard to

determine which should be the main move.

10.♙d2

This is not the most played move at the time I am writing but it has scored 100% for White thus it must be considered as dangerous and a tempting line for a player who has worked on it.

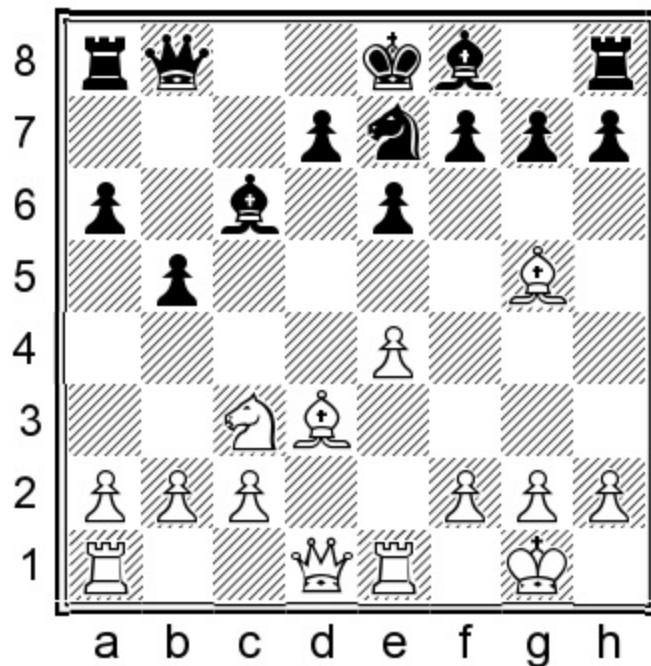
A) 10.♙e3 Placing the bishop here is somehow less intuitive because it interferes with rook that just came to e1. We have no problem continuing our development. 10...♘g6 11.a4 ♙b4!



Position after: 11...♙b4!

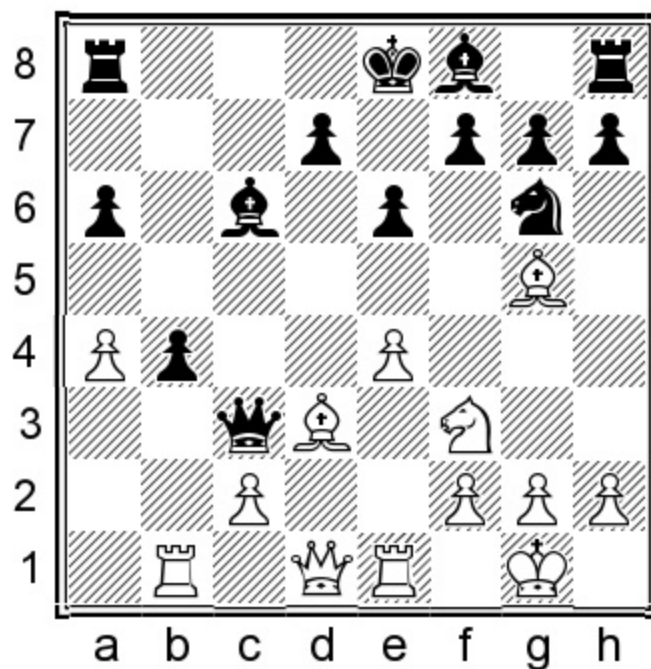
[11...b4? This is always what White wants in order to play ♘d5 with more strength (b4 and a6 are potentially weaker) 12.♘d5! ♙d6 13.a5± and the knight will reach b6.] 12.axb5 ♙xc3 13.bxc3 axb5 14.♖xa8 ♜xa8 15.♙c5 And now in the game Caspi, I (2427) – Tunik, G (2498) Israel 2010, Black secures his king with 15...f6! 16.♞h5 ♔f7 17.f4 ♖e8!= while effectively preventing 18.f5. Our next move will probably be 18...♔g8.

B) 10.♙g5?! This is the last logical square for the bishop, but it is not particularly annoying. 10...♞b8!



Position after: 10... ♕b8!

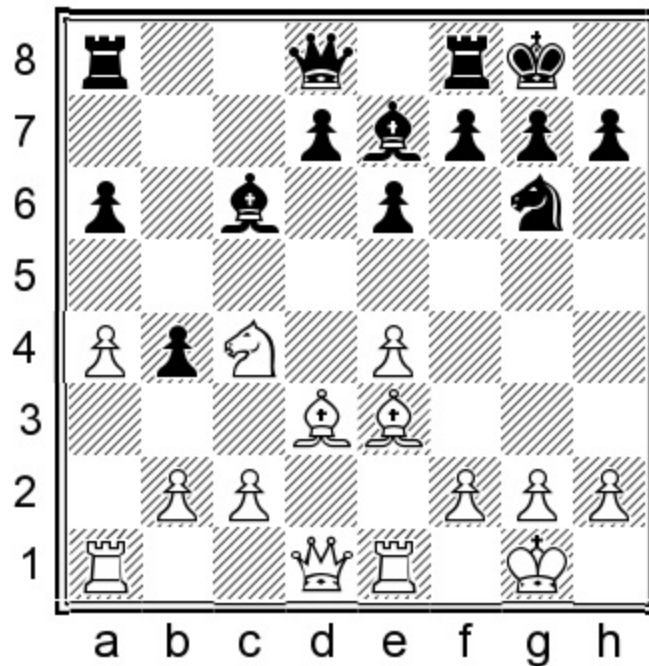
The queen is often better here than on c7 or b6 where it can come under attack from White's ♘d5 ideas. 11.a4 [11.e5 It is really hard for me to understand this move. Now in the game Panarin, M (2558) – Kamsky, G (2673) Sochi 2015, I would prefer: 11...b4 12.♘e4 ♘g6 as the pawn on e4 seems condemned. 13.c4 h6 14.♙c1 ♕xe5 15.♘g3 ♕c7] 11...b4 12.♘e2 ♘g6 13.♘d4 ♕e5 14.♘f3 ♕xb2 15.♙b1 ♕c3



Position after: 15... ♕c3

Black does not really have a choice but to take the repetition. 16.♔d2 ♖f6 17.♙g5 [17.♙xb4?! ♙xb4 18.♞xb4 a5= Now the a4 pawn becomes a target and it may fall.] 17...♞c3 18.♔d2 ♖f6 19.♙g5 Felgaer, R (2570) – Bachmann, A (2551) Asuncion 2011.

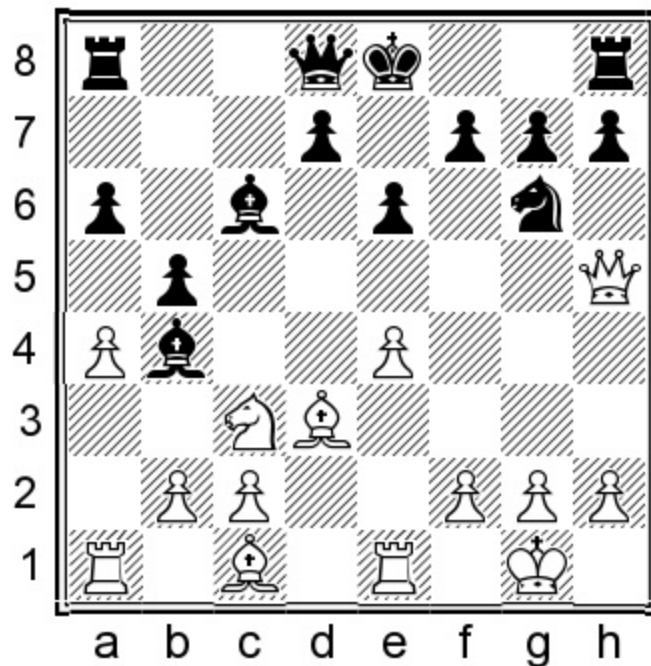
C) 10.a4 This is slightly similar to 9.a4 which we considered in the previous subchapter. 10...b4 11.♘b1 [11.♘e2 ♘g6 12.♘d4 ♙b7 13.♞h5 ♞c7 14.e5 ♙c5! Black will enjoy amazing bishops in this middlegame. 15.♘b3 ♙a7 16.a5 0-0= 1-0 (45) Krejci, J (2489) – Zueger, B (2426) Merlimont 2011.] 11...♘g6 12.♘d2 ♙e7 13.♘c4 0-0 14.♙e3



Position after: 14. ♙e3

Here in the game Xu, X (2576) – Bu, X (2721) Khanty Mansiysk 2019, Black could have reacted in the centre with 14...d5! 15.exd5 exd5 16.♙b6! This is the only move to keep the balance more or less. 16...♞b8 17.♙xg6 dxc4! 18.♞xe7 ♞xb6 19.♙e4 ♞ae8= Only Black can be better here.

D) 10.♞h5 This is what White played in 5 out of 24 games. The queen is quite fine here as it cannot really be attacked, and it may have some use here as it is controlling a lot of squares. Nevertheless, it should not be seen as a big problem. 10...♘g6 11.a4 ♙b4!

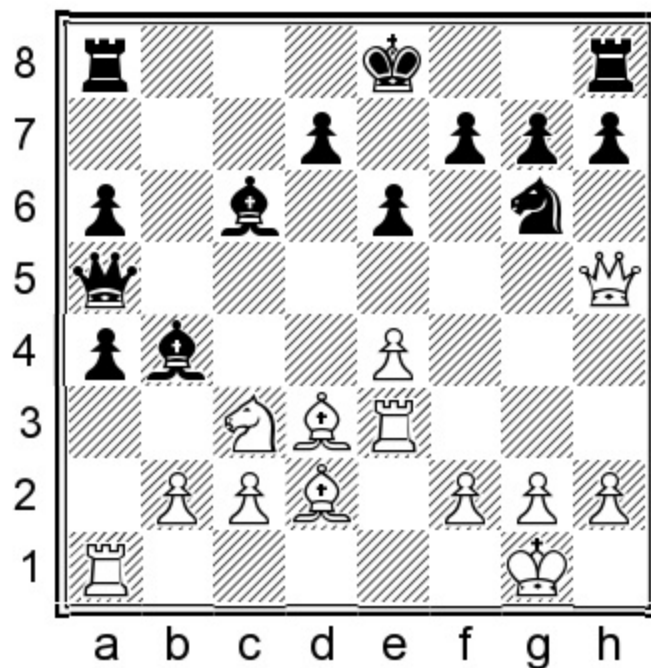


Position after: 11...♙b4!

Pinning the knight is the best reaction. [11...b4 allows White to play 12.♘d5↑ Ponomariov, R (2630) – Dao, T (2555) New Delhi/Teheran 2000.]

D1) 12.axb5! This is probably stronger but with no more than equality for White. 12...axb5 13.♙d2 [13.♖xa8 ♜xa8 14.♙xb5? ♜a5! This places White in an uncomfortable situation. 15.♙e2 ♙xc3 16.bxc3 ♜xc3+] 13...0-0=

D2) 12.♙d2 bxa4! White will have to disorganize his pieces to get the pawn back. 13.♖e3 ♜a5!



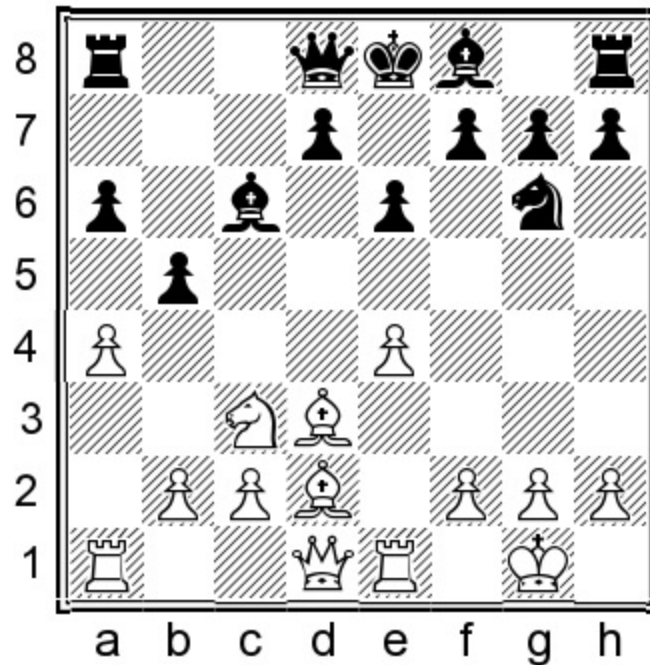
Position after: 13... ♖a5!

A nice way to prevent White's attack. 14. ♗xa5 ♕xa5 15. ♘c1 ♘xc3 16. bxc3 0-0 And White won in Benderac, S (2310) – Miladinovic, I (2550) Montenegro 2016, but it was not due to the opening.

10... ♖g6!

Strangely enough, this natural move has only been tried once out of 4 games.

11.a4



Position after: 11.a4

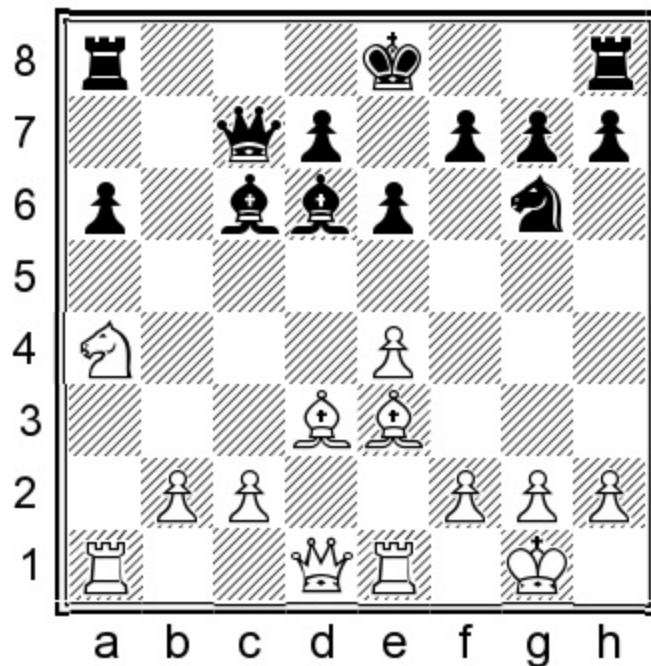
11...bxa4!N

11...b4?! Again, this is what White wants. 12. ♖d5 White fully justifies his 10. ♘d2 by gaining a tempo against the pawn on b4. And, as usual, the knight is untouchable here. 12...a5 13.c3! White has time to open the position under good circumstances. 13...bxc3 14. ♘xc3 ♜f6 15. ♗h5± Riff, J (2477) – Zueger, B (2433) Switzerland 2012.

12. ♖xa4 ♘d6!?

This is not the only move, but this is what brings Black the most active development. For example, White can try to control the b6-square and the game might continue with:

13. ♘e3 ♗c7



Position after: 13... ♖c7

14.g3

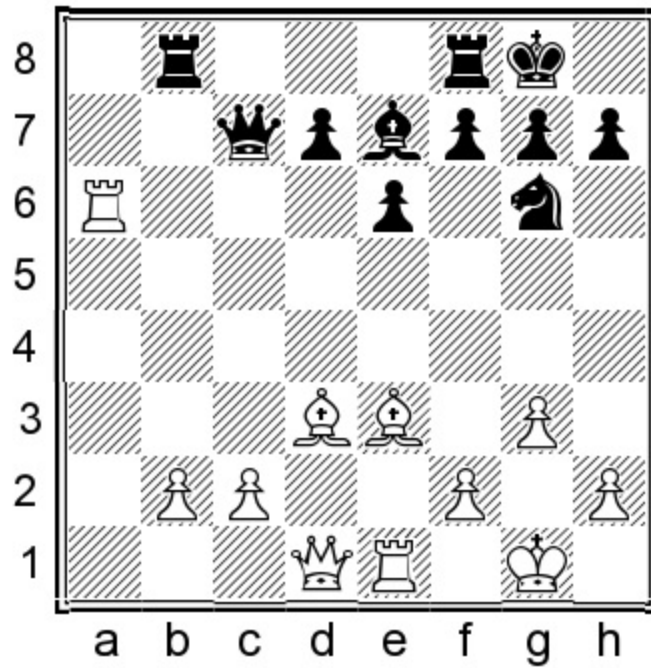
14.h3 is clearly safer for White, but not as challenging. 14...0-0 15. ♖b6 ♗b8 16. ♘d4 ♙h2+ 17. ♔h1 ♘e5= Once again, Black is starting to have ideas like ...f5, especially if the bishop on d3 moves in order to defend the bishop on d4.

14...0-0 15. ♘b6

15.f4?! This is a risky approach. 15...♗fb8 16.e5 ♘f8 17.♗d2 a5= The white king is weak in the long term and Black also has good prospects on the queenside.

15...♗ab8 16.♗xa6

16. ♘c4 ♙e7 17. ♗xa6 ♙xe4 18. ♙xe4 ♗xc4 19. ♙d3 ♗c7=



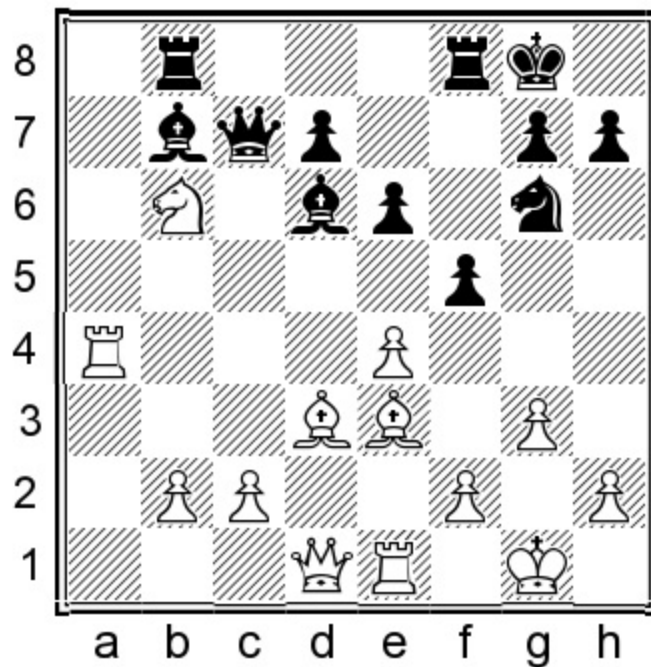
Position after: 19...♙c7

White has the bishop pair, but we have a great centre. The chances are probably balanced.

16...♙b7 17.♖a4

17.♖a1?! f5! This is what will bring Black great compensation. 18.♗c4 [18.exf5? ♗e5! 19.♙e2 ♜c6+ White is defenseless.] 18...fxe4 19.♙e2 ♙c5

17...f5



Position after: 17...f5

If White wants to keep the game alive this looks like a strong possibility for him, but he could also have taken the repetition.

17...♙c6 18.♖a6=

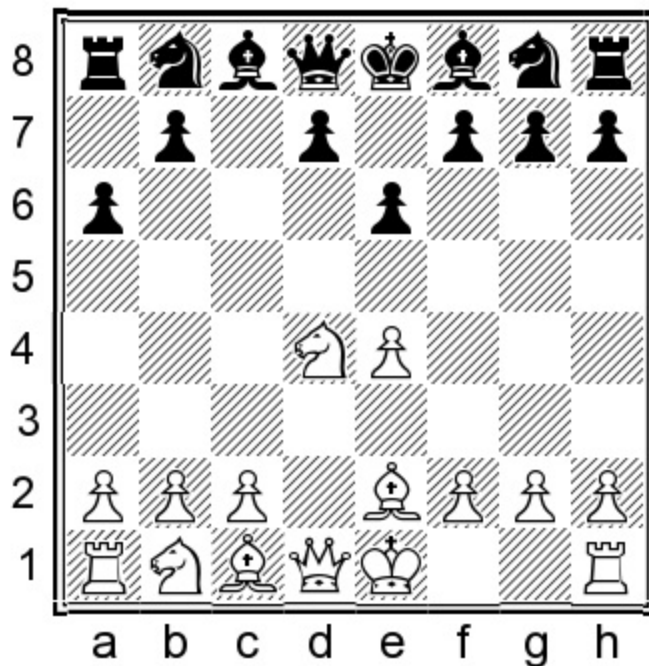
Chapter Conclusion

I am still doubtful about 5.♘c3. Of course, it is a very logical move, but it is more or less what we want to see, and it often provides us with a clear and easy plan. I am not surprised that Black enjoys a positive score in most of the variations!

Chapter 4

5.♔e2

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 a6 5.♔e2



Chapter Guide

Chapter 4 – 5.♔e2

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 a6 5.♔e2

a) 5...-- , 5...♗f6 6.--

b) 6.♕d3, 6.♗d2 & 6.♔f3

c) 6.♗c3 ♘b4 7.-- & 7.0-0

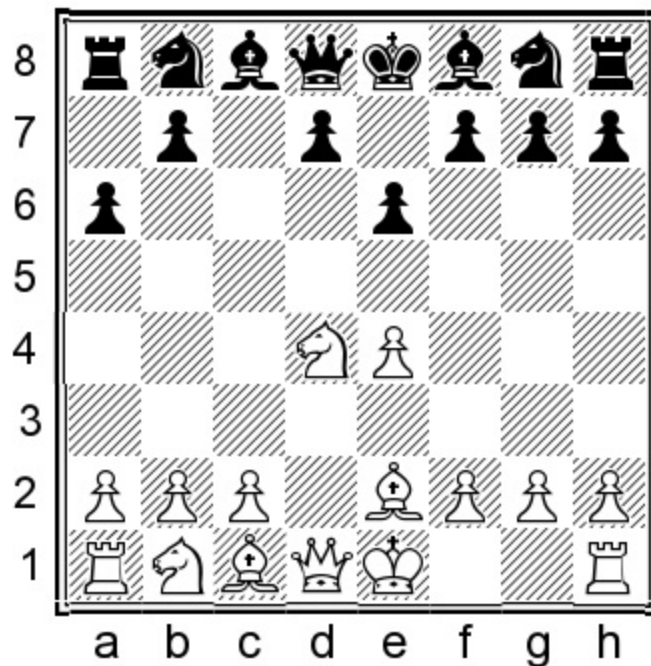
d) 6.♗c3 ♘b4 7.♕d3

e) 6.♗c3 ♘b4 7.e5 ♗e4 8.♕d3

f) 6.♗c3 ♘b4 7.e5 ♗e4 8.0-0

a) 5...-- , 5...♗f6 6.--

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 a6 5.♔e2



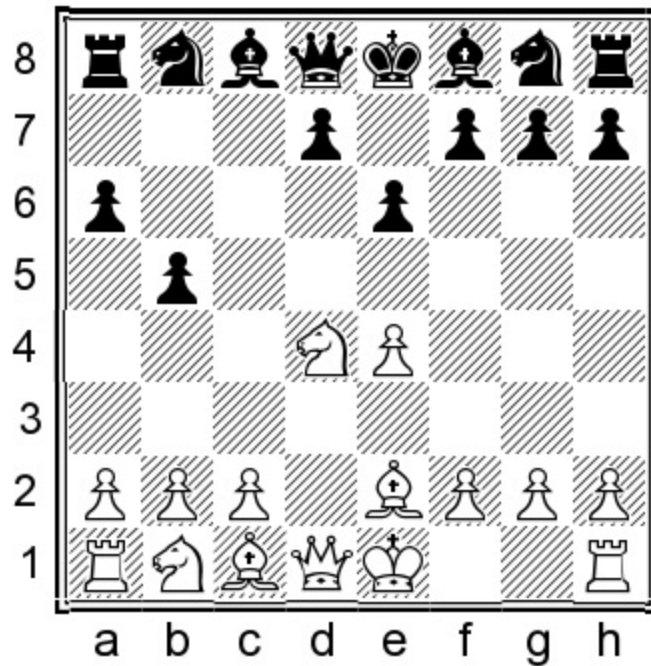
Position after: 5. ♕e2

I have been quite surprised that this move is actually quite tricky. That is the reason I dedicated a full chapter to it. Not that the move in itself is not particularly strong, but it is a bit annoying if Black does not want to transpose into the Taimanov or the Scheveningen Sicilians. To White's credit he can still play c4 based on the circumstances, the knight is protected whereas after 5. ♕d3 it is not and, now 5... ♕c5 does not make much sense. I have chosen the line with 5... ♖f6 intending to provoke 6. ♘c3, but I will also shortly explain why I did not choose other variations.

5... ♖f6

I want this move to be fully playable in order not to enter a completely different opening. And I think it works! In this subchapter we will consider 3 of the minor lines that are not great for White.

A) 5...b5 This is the first option I considered. It has brought Black good results, but I think that was because White was not prepared enough in most of the games. Nevertheless, you can try it as a surprise weapon. Black's goal is to follow with ... ♕b7, and 6. ♘c3 would transpose into the previous chapter. But White has other options.

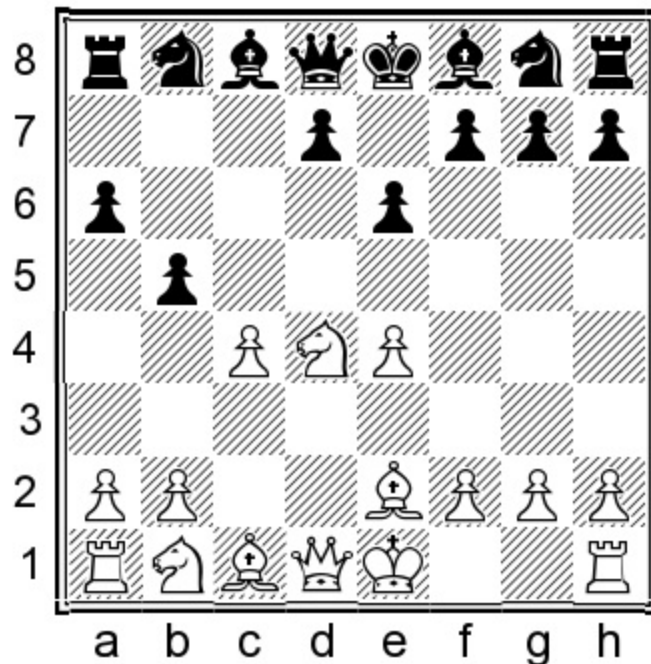


Position after: 5...b5

A1) 6.0-0!? ♖b7 7.c4 bxc4 8.♘d2!± This transposes into 6.c4 that you can find below in A3.

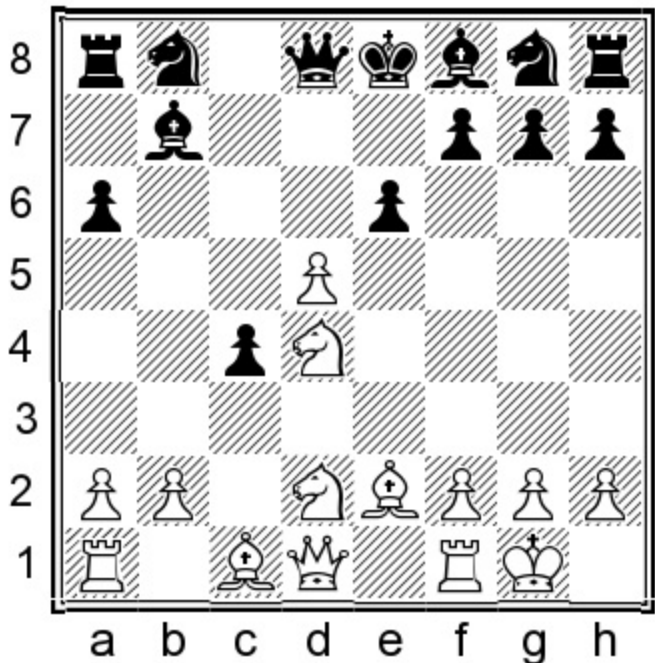
A2) 6.a4!? This is also a logical choice. Here White does not have a knight on c3 as opposed to several prior variations therefore 6...b4 does not attack anything. White is fine after 7.♙d3 ♖b7 8.♘d2±.

A3) White has another option 6.c4! This was one of the first moves I inspected.



Position after: 6.c4!

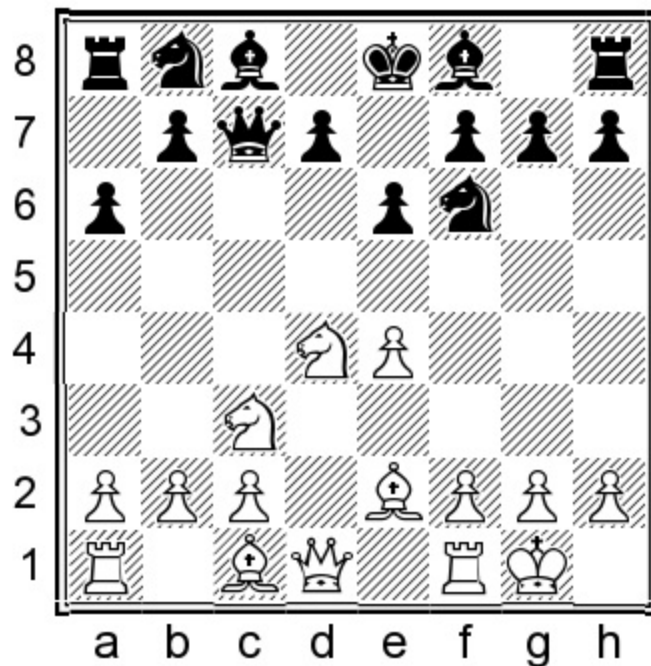
A very strong approach and Black is practically forced to take. 6...bxc4 [6...b4 7.♙e3 ♜b7 8.♞d2±; 6...♙b7?! 7.cxb5 ♙xe4 8.0-0 ♞f6 9.♞c3 ♙b7 10.♙f4± White has a big lead in development.] 7.0-0 [7.♙xc4?! ♙b7 8.♞c3 ♞c7±] 7...♙b7 8.♞d2! White wants to be able to take back with the knight to invade the d6-square. 8...d5 [8...♞c6 9.♞xc6 ♙xc6 10.♞xc4 ♙xe4 11.♞d4 ♞f6 12.♙f4±; 8...♞c7 9.♞xc4 ♙xe4 10.♙e3 Followed by 11.♞c1 with great compensation.] 9.exd5



Position after: 9.exd5

9...♙xd5 [9...exd5 10.♞e1 ♙e7 11.♙f3+- Black is unable to finish his development due to the threat of 12.♞f5.] 10.♞xc4 ♞d7 11.♙f4+- And it is a nightmare for Black as in Cornette, D (2293) – Greeff, M (2080) Dubai 2011. My advice is that you go over these lines with a computer to convince yourself that the whole line is crushing for White.

B) 5...♞c7 6.0-0 ♞f6 7.♞c3



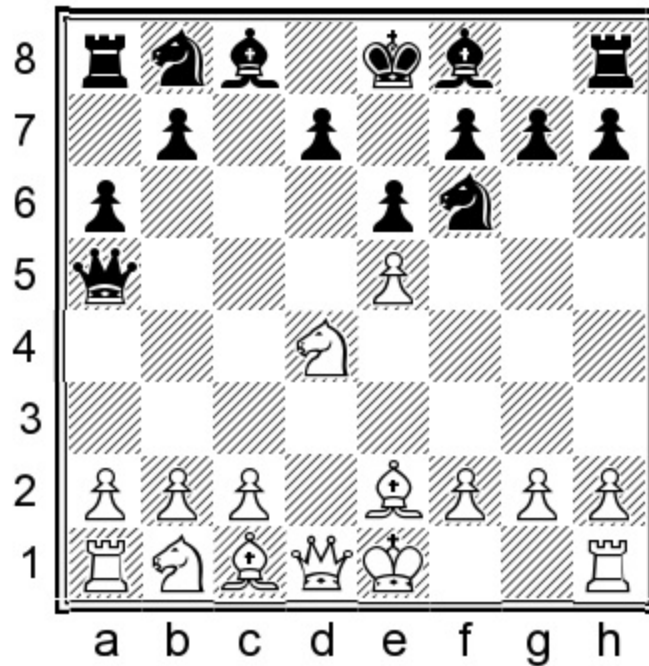
Position after: 7. ♘c3

And now it appears Black should choose between two moves that lead to completely different openings which contain a lot of theory. This does not mean you should not play this, but it is a bit frustrating to play a Kan Sicilian and to end up in a different system against a sideline like 5. ♕e2. 7...d6 This is already a Scheveningen Sicilian. [7... ♘c6 8. ♕e3 This is one of the main lines of the Taimanov Sicilian, and depending upon what Black plays, it can also be a Scheveningen Sicilian.]

6.f3?!

We have already talked about this idea many times. First of all, White seems to be willing to castle kingside which does fit the idea of f3 & g4 with a kingside attack when the white king has castled to the kingside. With the dark diagonal (g1-a7) weakened Black should aim at opening the centre. For example:

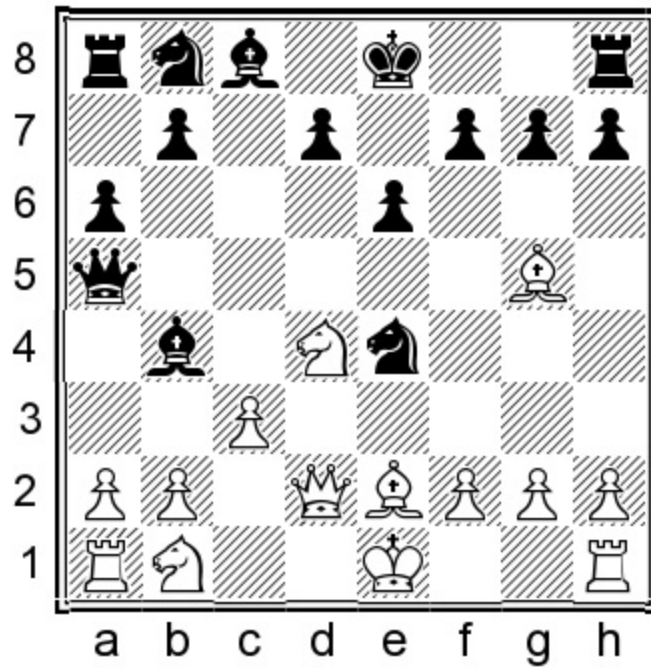
- A) 6. ♘c3 This move and other more important variations will be covered in the next subchapters.
- B) 6.e5? This is probably the worst way to reply as it loses a pawn. It is crazy to see that more than 70 people managed to blunder like this. 6... ♙a5+!



Position after: 6... ♔a5+!

Of course, we can easily grab the pawn. 7. ♖c3 ♔xe5 8. 0-0 ♖c6 9. ♗f3 ♔c7. There are many games that have been played from this position but none of them is worth examining. The queen retreats to a natural square and Black has gained an important central pawn for which White has no compensation. It is easy to guess that Black will be able to take advantage of this by playing ...d5 soon.

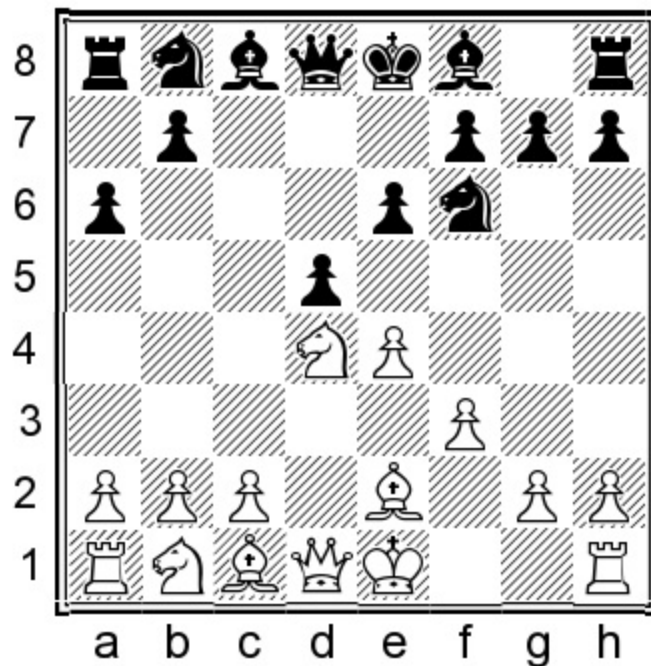
C) 6. ♗g5? This is another bad way to try to be smart while taking care of the attacked e4-pawn. We apply the same medicine: 6... ♔a5+! 7. ♔d2 [7. ♗d2 ♔b6! White cannot parry every threat. 8. ♖b3 ♖xe4 9. ♗e3 ♔c7 10. 0-0 ♖c6+] 7... ♗b4! Apparently White overlooked the follow up. 8. c3 ♖xe4!



Position after: 8... Nxe4!

The bishop on g5 is also attacked, so there is not any intermediate move for White. 9.cxb4 Qxg5 10. Qxg5 Nxe4 11. Nc3 f5+ We open the f7-square for the knight and have an extra central pawn in this endgame. The temporary lack of development should not count much.

6...d5!?



Position after: 6...d5!?

Only one game has been played with this move, but it is the first move I consider when my opponent plays an early f3.

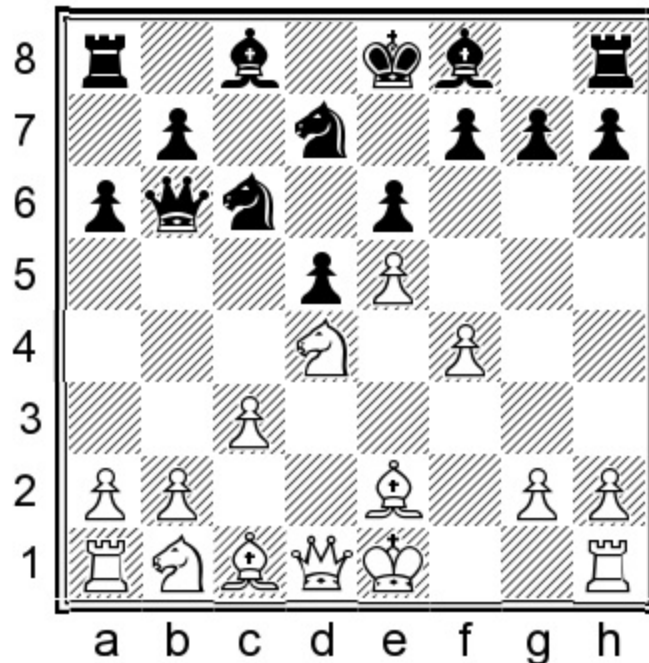
6...♙c5!? I also like this natural move a lot. 7.♘b3 [7.♘c3 d5 8.e5 ♞fd7 9.f4 ♚b6↑] 7...♙a7 8.♘c3 [8.♚d6! This seems necessary just to hold the balance. 8...♞c6 9.♘c3 b5 10.♙d2 ♙b8 11.♚c5 ♙a7=] 8...d5 9.♙g5 ♚b6→ Even now we have some mating ideas.

7.e5

Clearly a necessity.

7.exd5 ♞xd5 8.0-0 ♙d6= The pawn on f3 looks pointless and weakening.

7...♞fd7 8.f4 ♞c6 9.c3 ♚b6↑

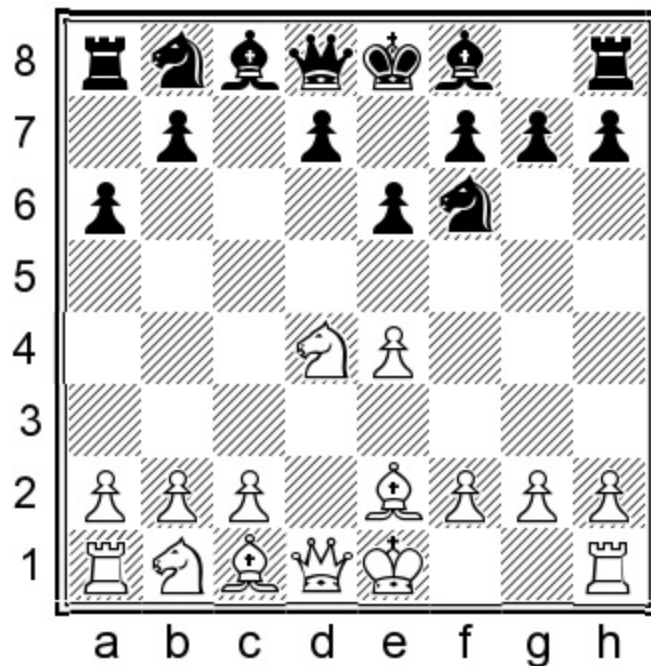


Position after: 9...♚b6↑

It is very difficult for White to keep control over the dark squares. It looks like a very good version of the Advance Variation in the French Defence for Black.

b) 6.♚d3, 6.♞d2 & 6.♙f3

1.e4 c5 2.♞f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♞xd4 a6 5.♙e2 ♞f6



Position after: 5... Nf6

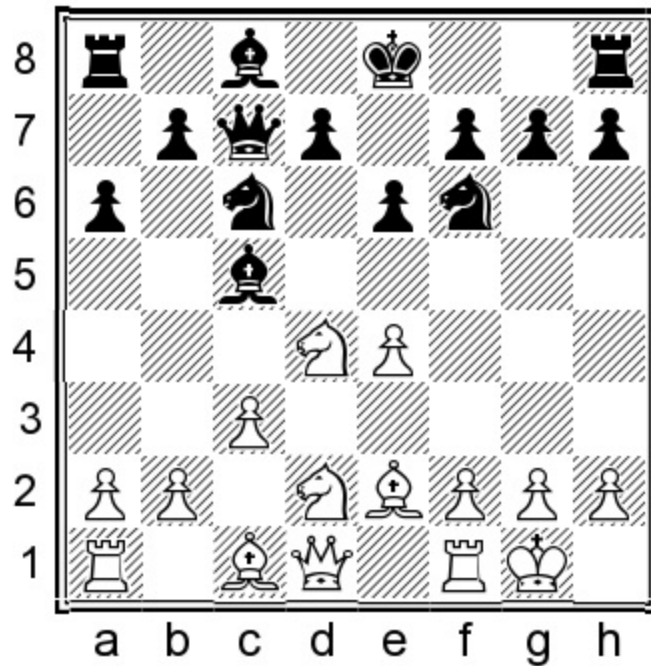
Now, let us have a look at 3 moves that are more interesting sidelines for White than in the last subchapter, but still not dangerous.

6. Qd3

At least a few strong players have tried this move, while the other two moves has been tried in amateur's games and have obvious drawbacks as we will see.

A) 6. Nd2 ?! I think that the knight is always misplaced here, it is not his natural square, and it blocks the bishop on c1. 6... Qc7 7. 0-0 Bc5 !?

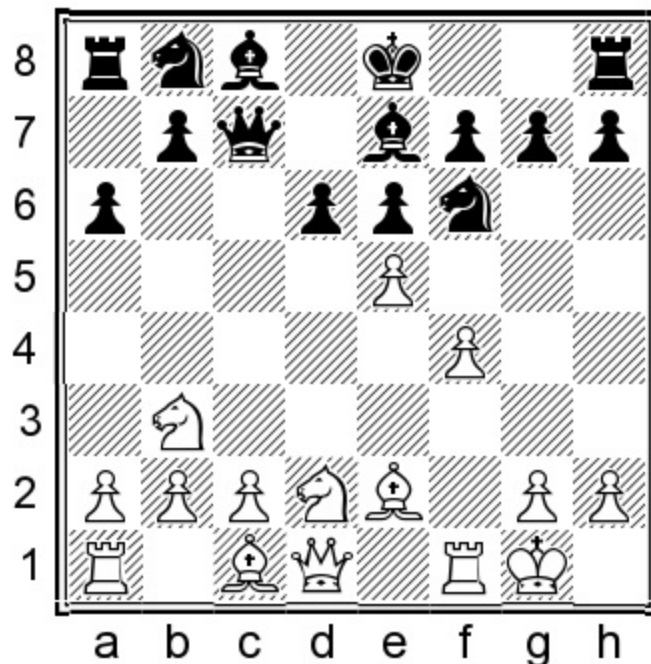
A1) 8. c3 Nc6



Position after: 8... Nc6

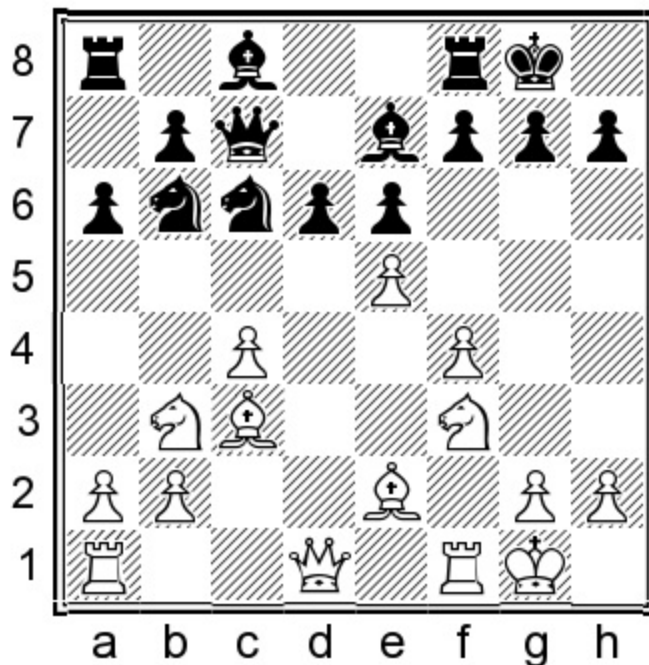
9. N4b3 [9. b4 Qe7 10. a3 0-0 11. Qb2 d5!↑] 9... Qe7 Coming back to a7 is possible but I prefer to play in the same way as after 8. N4c3. 10. f4 d6 11. Qf3 0-0 12. Wwe2 b5. White's development makes absolutely no sense to me, it is like White has no plan, as in Tate, W (1784) – Hansen, E (2472) Victoria 2009.

A2) 8. N4b3 Qe7 9. f4 d6 10. e5!?



Position after: 10. e5!?

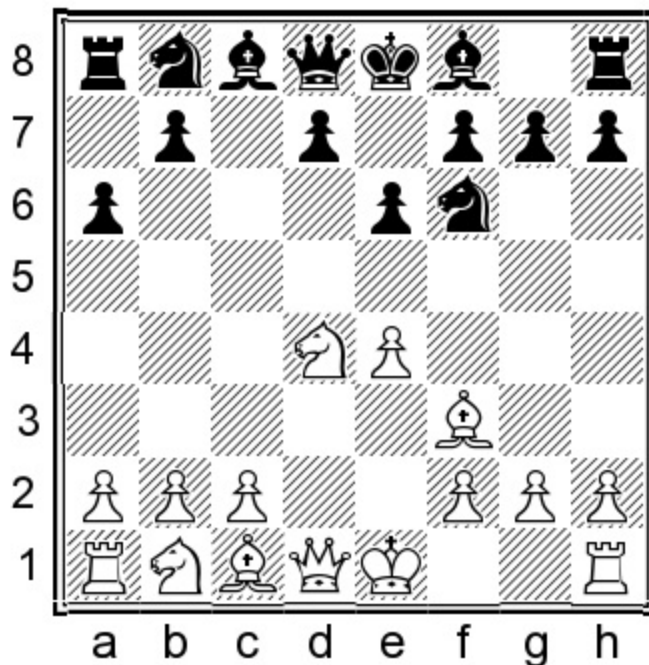
At least here White is trying to take over the initiative. 10...♖d5 [10...dxe5 11.fxe5 ♜fd7 12.♗c4 0-0 13.♙f4 ♜c6↑ I feel like White's position is really close to collapsing.] 11.♗f3 [11.exd6 ♙xd6 12.♗e4 ♙e7=] 11...0-0 12.c4 ♜b6= 13.♙d2? This is way too slow to defend the centre. 13...♗c6 14.♙c3



Position after: 14. ♙c3

And now in the game Gulde, J (1880) – Chuchelov, V (2550) Berlin 1995 that surprisingly ended into a draw, Black could have simply played 14...♗a4!± gaining the bishop pair, or a pawn.

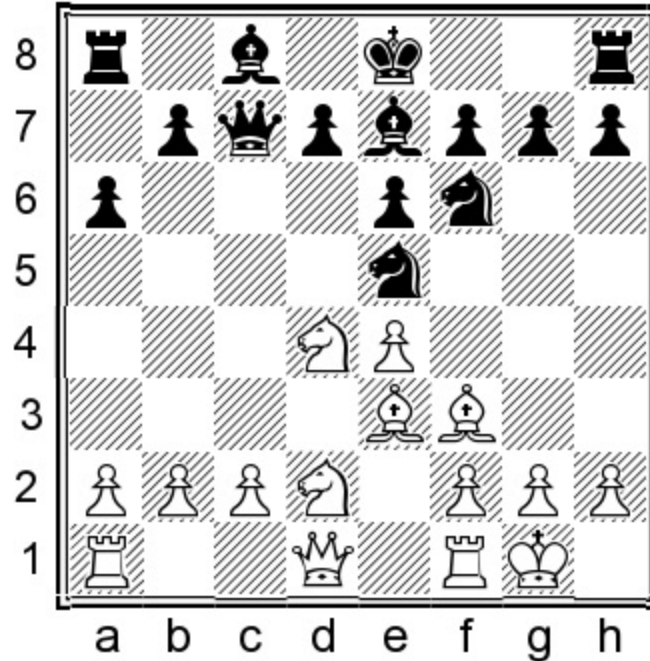
B) 6. ♙f3?!



Position after: 6. ♖f3?!

This is played more than 6. ♖d3, but I really feel that the bishop is misplaced here as it blocks the f-pawn which is needed to launch any kind of attack. Also, the bishop can be a target of a future knight on e5. 6... ♜c7!? Among the different possibilities for Black, let us use the same move against the other moves of this subchapter.

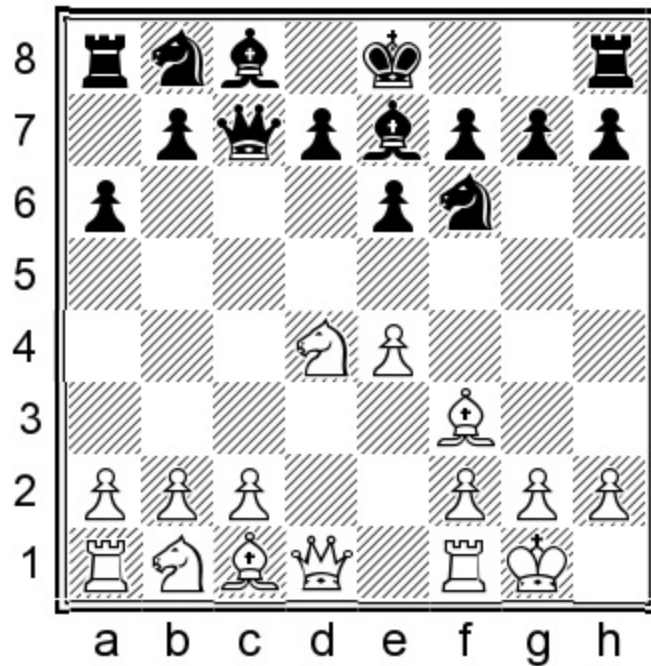
B1) 7. ♗e3 ♗e7 8. ♘d2 ♘c6 9. 0-0 [9. ♘xc6 dxc6 10. 0-0 0-0 11. c3 e5↑ The bishop on f3 looks awkward.] 9... ♘e5!



Position after: 9... ♘e5!

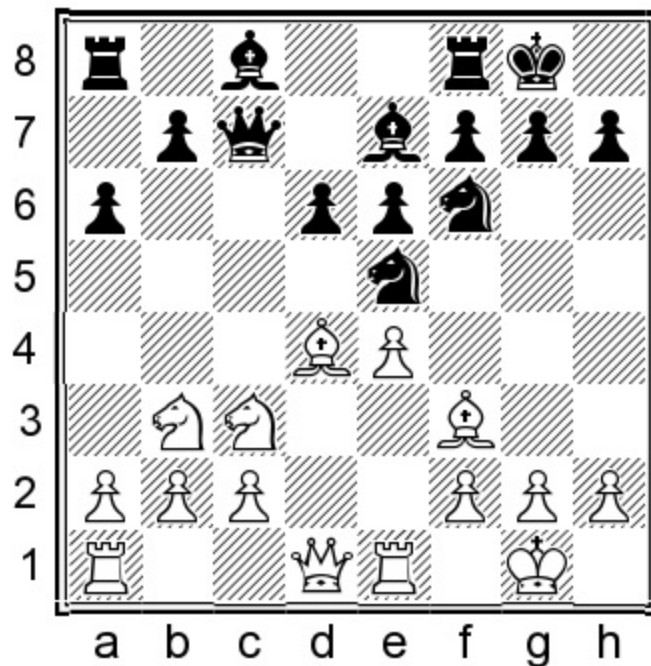
If we are allowed to move here, we should do it even if the bishop can escape! 10. ♗e2 0-0 11. f4 ♘g6 The knight is perfect here, it keeps an eye on f4, and it means 12. ♗f3 is impossible right now. 12. c3 d6 13. ♗f3 e5⚡ White has different misplaced pieces, and he has already lost a few tempi with the light-squared bishop, that's enough for us to be better.

B2) 7. 0-0 ♗e7



Position after: 7...♙e7

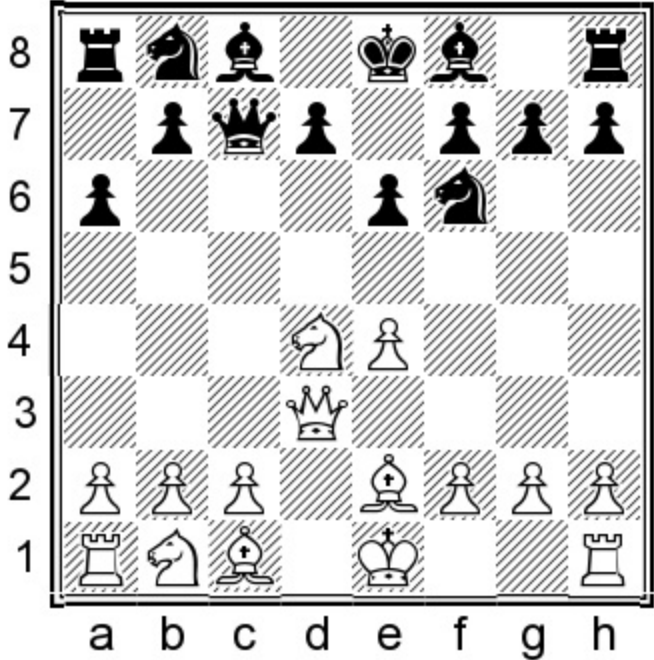
We just want to castle and decide our optimal development a bit later, waiting for White to show how he is going to develop the rest of his pieces. 8.♘c3 0-0 9.♞e1 d6 It is a completely normal position, with a weird bishop on f3. 10.♙e3 [10.g3 ♘bd7 11.♙g2 ♞b8 12.a4 b6↗ Black is clearly fine due to the many tempi lost by White, and the fact that his overall system is quite harmless in this kind of Hedgehog position as he does not have a full control over the centre, especially the d5-square. This is where Black should try to breakthrough soon.] 10...♘bd7 11.♘b3 ♘e5 12.♙d4



Position after: 12.♙d4

And now Black is better as in Vodopivec, V (2145) – Golubovic, B (2381) Postojna 2009, and he could have simply played: 12...b5! 13..♙e2 ♙b7 14.f3 [14.♙f1 b4+] 14...b4 15.♘a4 ♘fd7 White has a pointless position.

6...♙c7



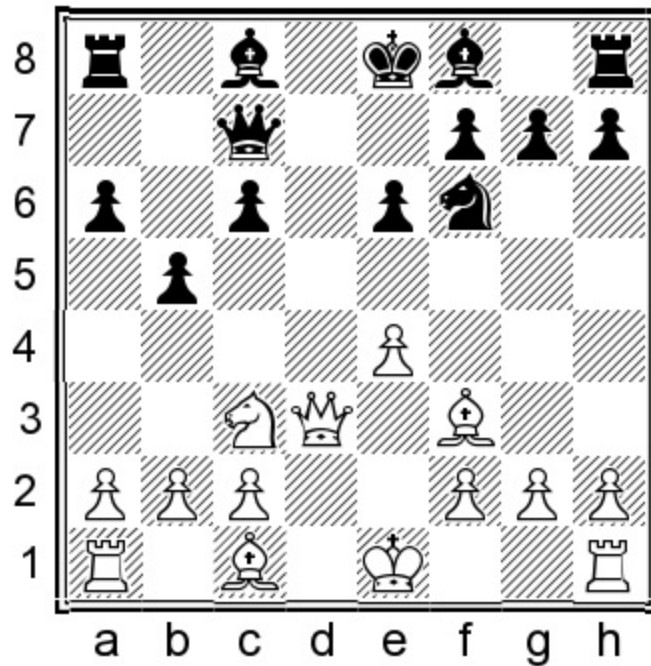
Position after: 6...♙c7

Consistency! Everybody knows it is the logical square for the queen in the Sicilian, so we can go there right now.

7.0-0

7.♘c3?! This seems worse because White does not have any idea of playing c4 anymore. 7...b5!

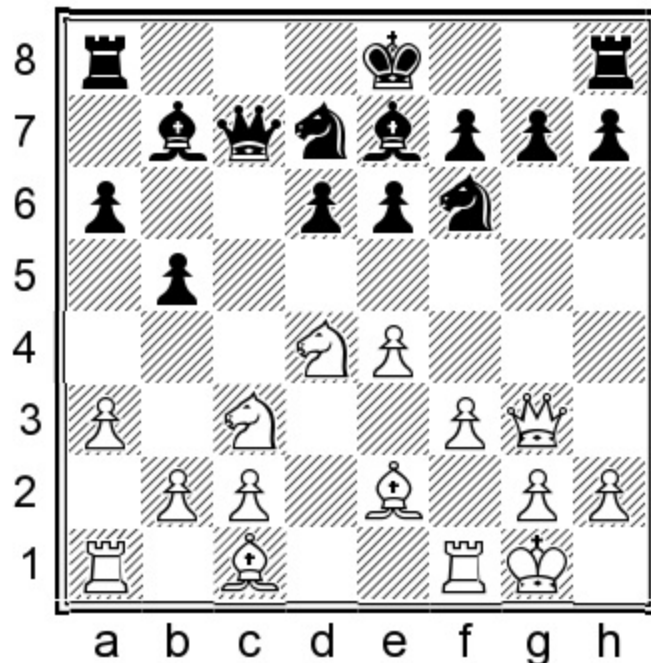
A) 8.♙f3?! ♘c6! 9.♘xc6 dxc6



Position after: 9...dxc6

Compared to the main line it seems clear that the knight has nothing to do on c3. 10.0-0 [10.♔g5 ♕e7 11.♖e3 e5] 10...♕d6 11.g3 [11.h3 0-0 12.♖d1 ♕e5] 11...0-0 12.♖d1 ♕e5 13.♕e3 c5

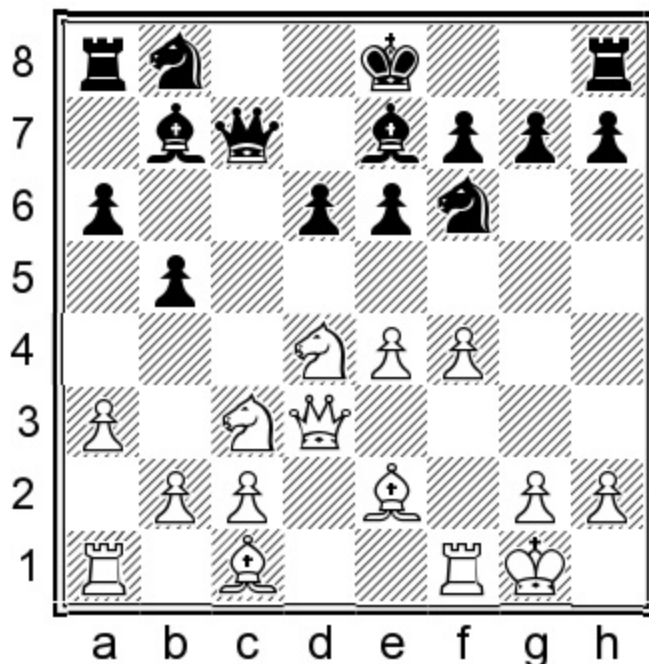
B) 8.♗g3!?N Apparently a good novelty but I doubt it can be really strong. 8...d6 9.a3 [9.b4∞ My computer wants this move, but it seems impossible to consider such a move...] 9...♕b7 10.f3 ♖bd7 11.0-0 ♕e7!



Position after: 11...♕e7!

This is the way to show the drawback of White's conception, it is scary to take on g7, but it is necessary to keep some logic in White's play. 12. ♖xg7 ♜g8 13. ♖h6 d5! ♞ I would not like to be White here.

C) 8.a3 ♗b7 9.0-0 ♗e7 10.f4 d6



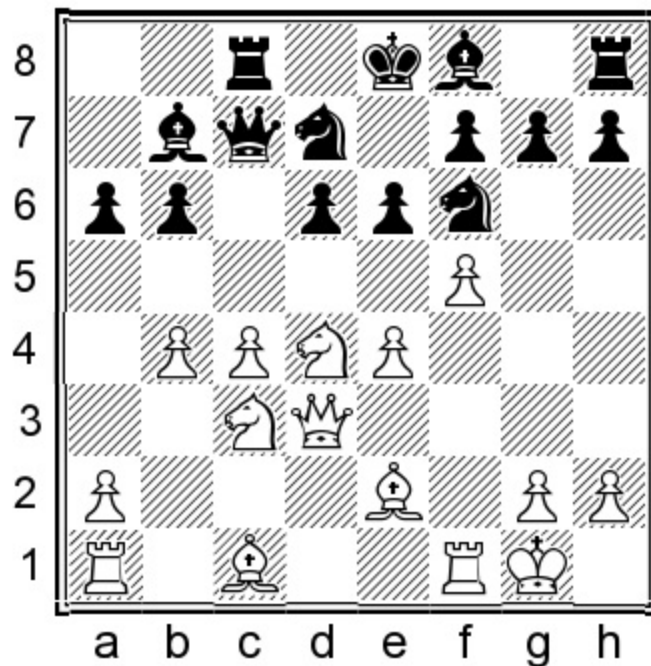
Position after: 10...d6

And I will stop here, it is extremely similar to what we analysed in the chapter about 5. ♘c3 b5 6.a3, but with the queen on d3 which is exposed for no apparent reason. Black will follow with ... ♗bd7 with some ideas against the queen and the centre.

7...b5!?

I would still like to prevent c4 and develop the queenside.

7...d6?! We should avoid playing this move because of 8.c4! ♗bd7 9. ♘c3 b6 10.f4 ♗b7 11.b4 ♜c8 12.f5!



Position after: 12.f5!

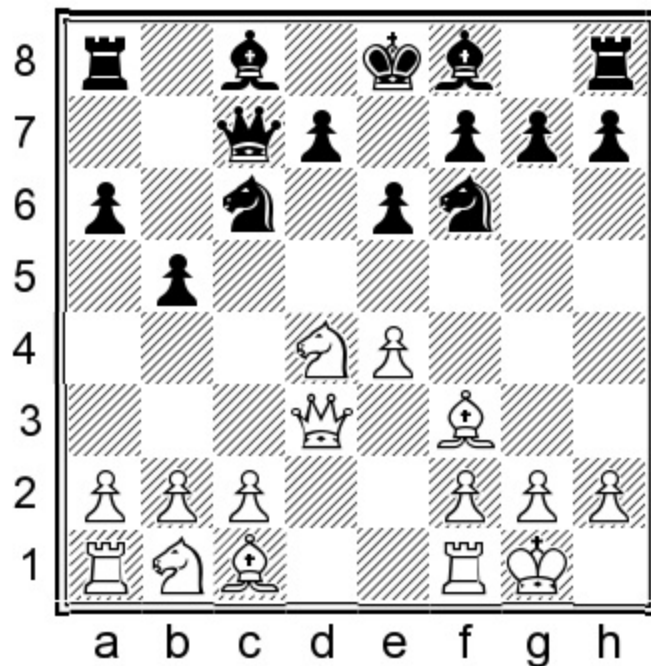
The queen is actually well placed on d3 to quickly reach the kingside. 12...♞e5 13.♙h3+– And White was already winning and converted quickly in Shankland, S (2725) – Sheng, J (2451) Chess.com INT 2019.

8.♙f3!?

Probably the critical test.

8.♙g5 There is no real threat in this move because I doubt that White is happy to take on f6 which gives up the bishop pair, opens the g-file and only slightly weakens our pawn structure. 8...♙b7 9.♙xf6 gxf6 10.♞d2 ♞c6 Black easily activates every piece, and he will probably castle on the queenside. 11.♞2f3 ♞g8

8...♞c6!N



Position after: 8... ♖c6!N

8... ♖b7 9.e5 ♘d5 10.a4± This important move seems to somehow bring White an advantage.

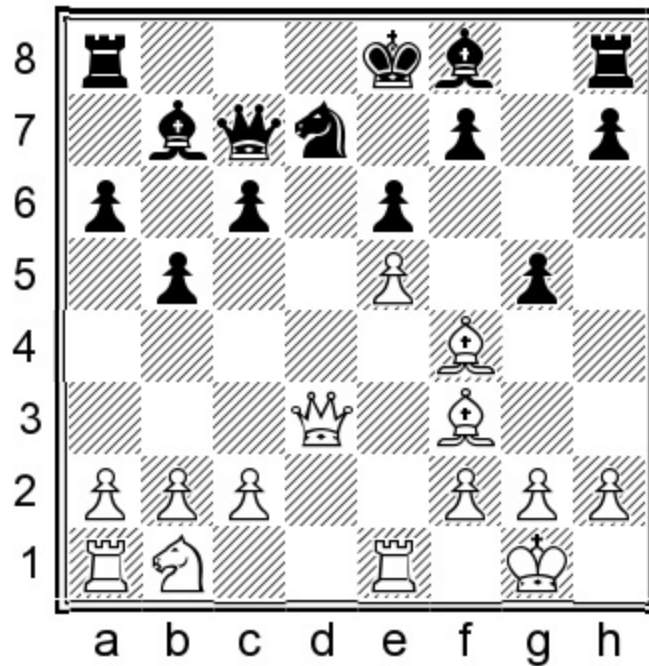
9. ♘xc6 dxc6 10.e5

This is the precise time to play this move.

10... ♘d7

10... ♘d5 11.c4 bxc4 12. ♙xc4 a5 13. ♖e1 ♙a6 14. ♙g4 h5 15. ♙e4 ♖b8∞ Black is active, but he will have issues finding the right place for his king.

11. ♖e1 ♙b7 12. ♙f4 g5!?



Position after: 12...g5!?

I find this approach really interesting.

13. ♖g3!

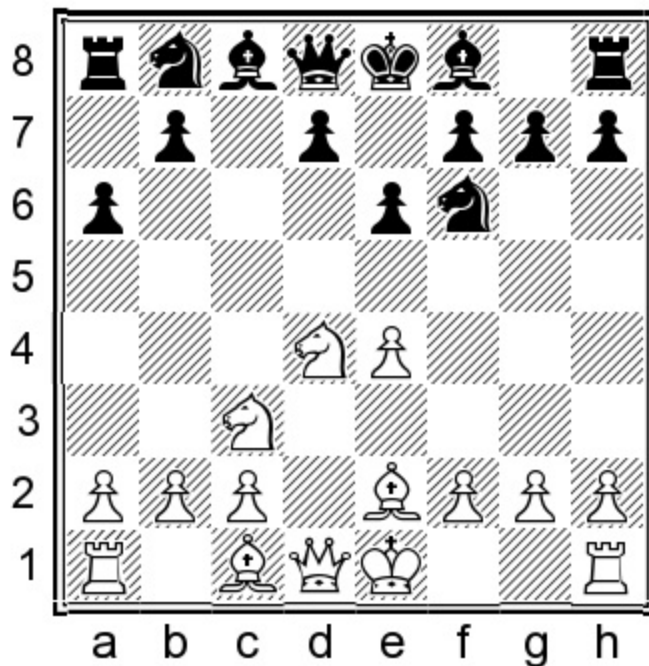
13. ♖xg5?! ♜xe5 14. ♚c3 ♜xf3+ 15. ♚xf3 c5 Black just needs to find a way to long castle. 16. ♚h3 ♜e7 17. ♜xe7 ♚xe7

13...h5 14.h3 0-0-0!⇒

White might be better according to a computer, but it is clearly a double-edged game with a kingside attack already underway.

c) 6. ♜c3 ♜b4 7.-- & 7.0-0

1.e4 c5 2. ♜f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. ♜xd4 a6 5. ♜e2 ♜f6 6. ♜c3



Position after: 6. Nc3

This move resembles Chapter 3 with 5. Nc3, but we cannot react the same way. Black has many choices but some transpose to other Sicilians and we are examining the Kan which explains my choice!

6... Qb4!?

This is also a very logical approach; we just pin the knight that protects e4. However, Black needs to understand that while he can weaken White's pawn structure by taking on c3 he will give White compensation on the dark squares especially by means of Qa3, as we will see in some variations in this and the next two subchapters. In this first subchapter, we will consider the sidelines and less dangerous lines for White.

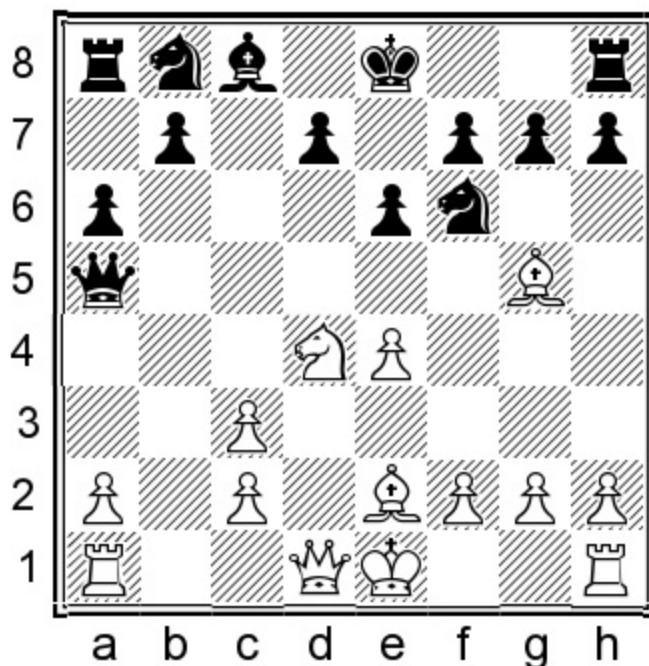
- A) 6... b5? Playing this move in the same spirit as in the previous chapter is impossible because of 7. e5!± and we must retreat the knight back to g8.
- B) 6... Qc7 7. 0-0 Nc6 8. Qe3 We have already discussed this position in the first subchapter of this chapter, and it is one of the main lines of the Taimanov, or later Scheveningen variations.
- C) 6... d6 This is now a Scheveningen.

7.0-0

This is played more often than 7. e5, but I really feel it is easier to meet this move, and the variations are less deep, so it does not deserve a full subchapter.

- A) 7. e5 This interesting attempt, as well as 7. Qd3 which is the main move here, will be analysed in the next subchapters.

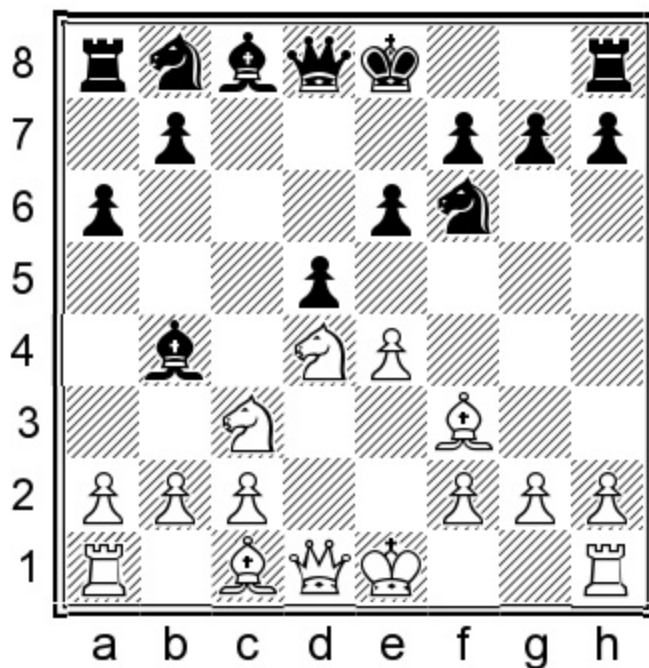
B) 7.♙g5? As on move 6, this is not a great try by White. 7...♞xc3+! [7...♚a5? This seems smart too, but it does not work so well due to 8.♞d2!=] 8.bxc3 ♚a5!



Position after: 8...♚a5!

Once again, this is a strong reply. Black attacks c3 and g5, but also e4 since his knight is no longer pinned. 9.♞xf6 [9.♞d2? No longer works due to 9...♞xe4+] 9...♚xc3+ 10.♚f1 gxf6+ Several games reached this position, but there is no way White has enough compensation.

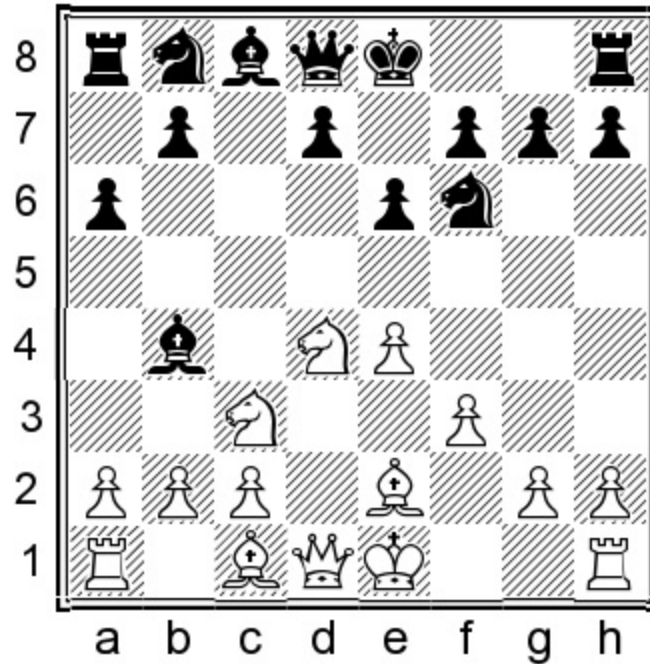
C) 7.♞f3?! As previously noted, blocking the f-pawn is a concession. 7...d5



Position after: 7...d5

With the c3 knight pinned this central break is fine for Black. 8.exd5 ♖xd5 9.♗de2 0-0 10.0-0 ♗xc3 11.♗xc3 ♕c7= Black has no problems and may even try to claim a slight advantage thanks to his central pawn majority.

D) 7.f3?!

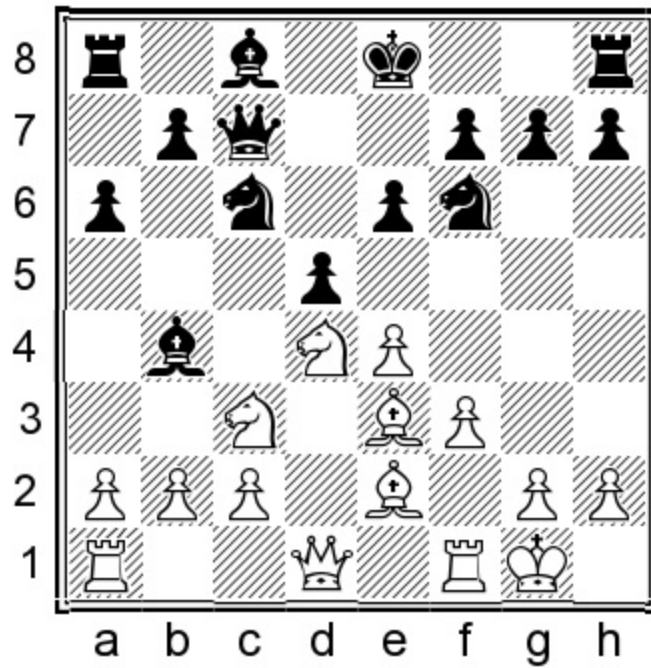


Position after: 7.f3?!

Another move that has been discussed many times which does not work well with kingside castling.

D1) 7...d5!? I want to make this work whenever I can. 8.e5 ♗fd7 9.f4 ♗c6 10.♗e3 0-0 11.0-0 ♗c5= This is more common in the French Defence, but it is also a pretty good version for Black. This choice merely depends on your general chess knowledge.

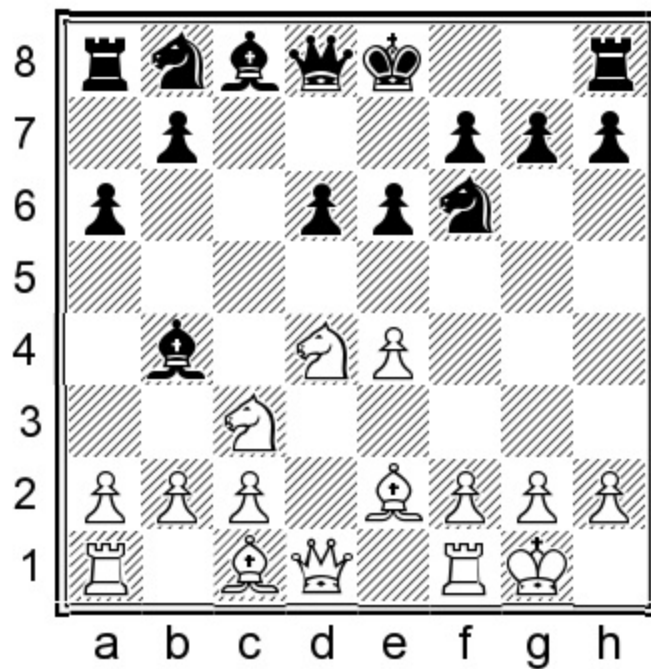
D2) 7...♕c7 8.0-0! [8.♗d2?! In most of the games White was worried about losing a pawn, but he should not, Black can only waste time taking twice on c3. 8...0-0 9.0-0? ♗c5 10.♗e3 d5+ 11.exd5? e5-+] 8...♗c6 9.♗e3 d5!



Position after: 9...d5!

Finally, we can play this central reaction when 10.e5 is impossible. 10.exd5 exd5 11.♔d2 0-0↑
 Black has an isolated queenside pawn, but he has a lot of activity and White still has this stupid pawn on f3, weakening the e3-square.

7...d6



Position after: 7...d6

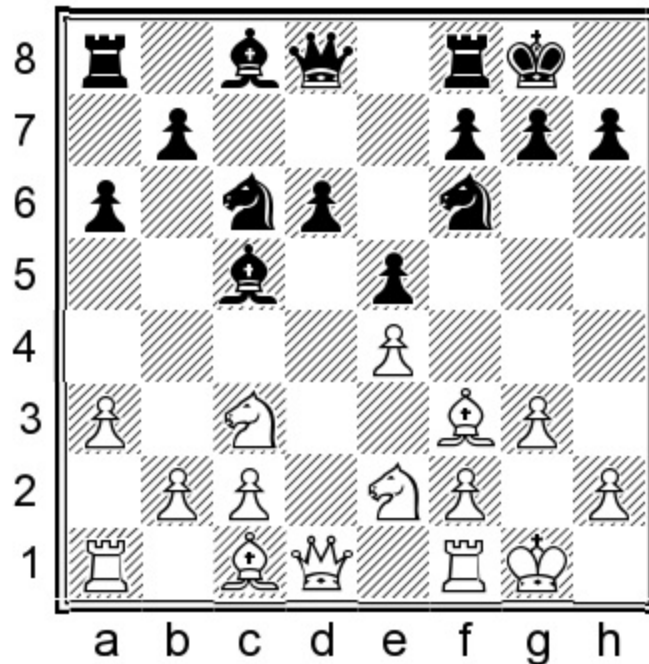
Having control over the dark squares is really important, and that is why I would start with this move.

7...♔xc3 I would not go for this, because White will get clear compensation. 8.bxc3 ♖xe4 9.♕a3! ♗xc3 10.♚d3 ♗xe2+ 11.♗xe2♞ And it is clear we may never castle.

8.♕g5

A) 8.♚d3 The main move here, but it is just a transposition into the last subchapter about 7.♚d3.

B) 8.♕f3 0-0 9.♗de2 These plans are so slow for White. It has only been played once, and it cannot be good. 9...♗c6 10.a3 ♕c5 11.g3 e5!?



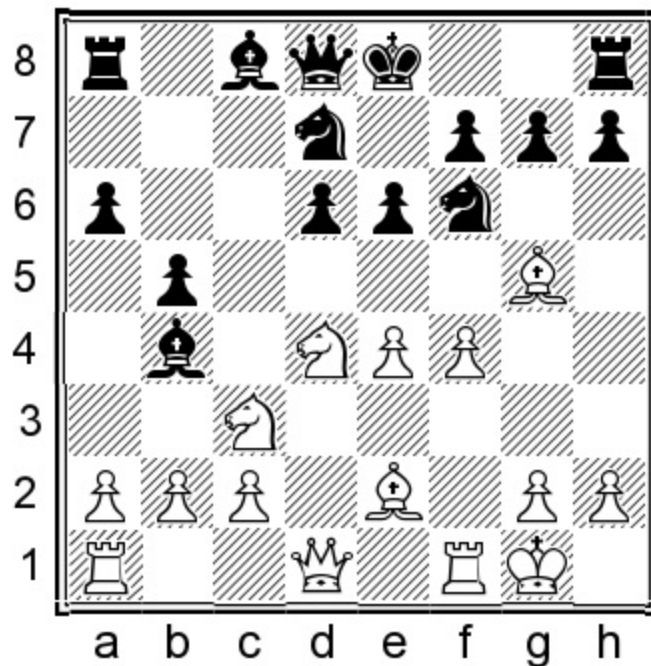
Position after: 11...e5!?

Black gets a lot of central squares, and he allows his light-square bishop to develop naturally (since playing ...b5 is hard with a white bishop on f3). 12.♕g2 h6 13.♚d3 ♕e6♞ I am not surprised that Black went on to win in Kravtsiv, M (2672) – Quparadze, G (2506) Riyadh 2017, he has great prospects on the queenside, while White's plan is not clear at all.

8...♗bd7 9.f4

9.♗b1 Someone tried this move and actually won with it, anything can happen! I would understand if the bishop were in danger, but here that is not the case. 9...♚c7 10.♕d3 h6 11.♕h4 ♕c5 12.♗b3 ♕a7♞ This is very similar to the first chapter we covered, but it is an incredibly good version for Black in Balogh, C (2449) – Anka, E (2432) Budapest 2003.

9...b5!?!N



Position after: 9...b5!?N

This position is pretty much in the spirit of the Najdorf Sicilian, but with the bishop on b4 instead of e7 or f8. And it seems really active for Black. Also, I think White's set-up with ♕g5 and f4 is more appealing when he castles queenside.

9...h6 10.♕h4 ♖f8? Black won in the following game, but his play is just too strange to be good.
11.e5 dxe5 12.fxe5 ♗g6 13.exf6 ♖xh4 14.♗e4± Ricardi, P (2519) – Hellsten, J (2534) Santiago de Chile 2007.

10.♕f3 ♕b7

I cannot find anything worrying for White to do.

11.a4!?

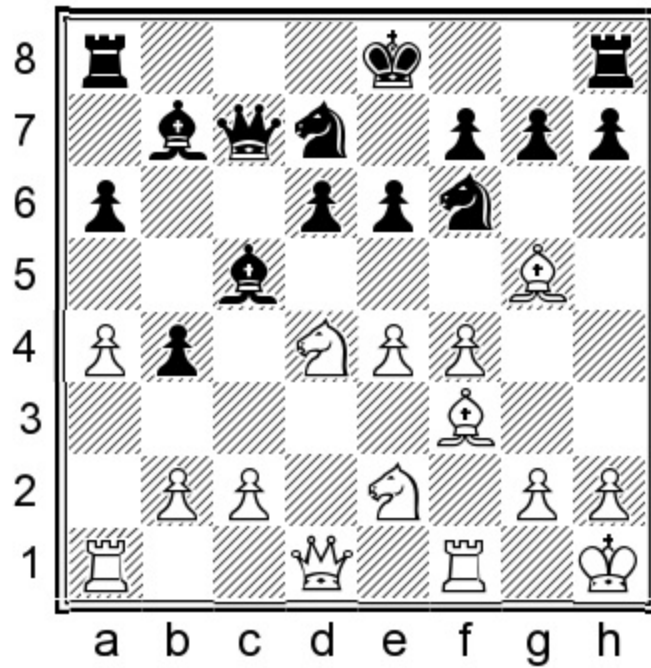
This move is natural when the b5-pawn is unable to advance, but here we have:

11.e5? ♕xf3 12.exf6 ♕xd1 13.fxg7 ♖g8! 14.♕xd8 ♕xc2 15.♗xc2 ♕c5+ 16.♖h1 ♖xd8± Black will take back on g7 and end up with a healthy extra-pawn.

11...♕c5 12.♖h1

12.axb5? e5–+ And White eventually loses his knight.

12...b4 13.♗ce2 ♖c7±

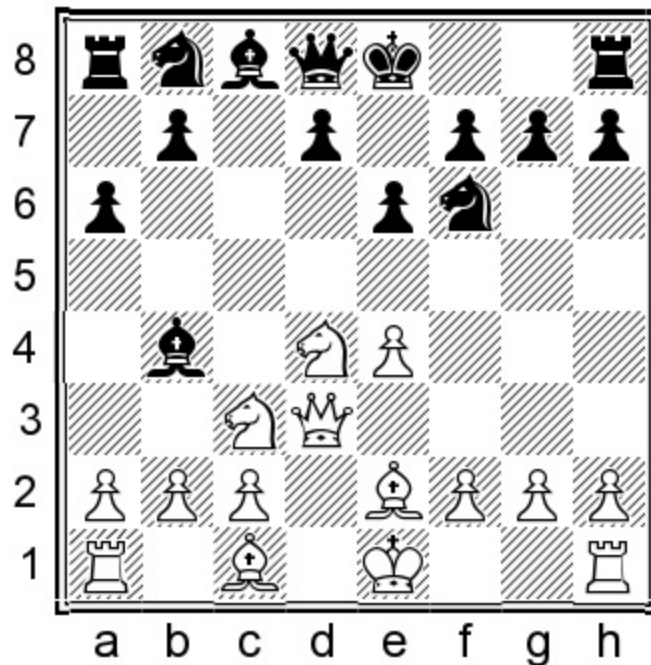


Position after: 13... ♕c7

Black looks more than fine. White should play for an attack, but his centre is already under pressure, and the white queen is far from the kingside.

d) 6. ♖c3 ♗b4 7. ♕d3

1.e4 c5 2. ♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 a6 5. ♗e2 ♘f6 6. ♖c3 ♗b4 7. ♕d3



Position after: 7. ♕d3

This is the most played move in the position. This is a very reasonable choice for White as it is clearly less complicated than what we just analysed in the previous subchapter with 7.e5. Black has a few options and I have chosen the most flexible one (and in accordance with the choice we made against 7.0-0, because of the possible transpositions).

7.e5 This is less played, but I think it should be considered as the main line here. See the next subchapters for this move.

7...d6!?

Less played than 7...♖c7 or 7...d5, but totally an option for Black.

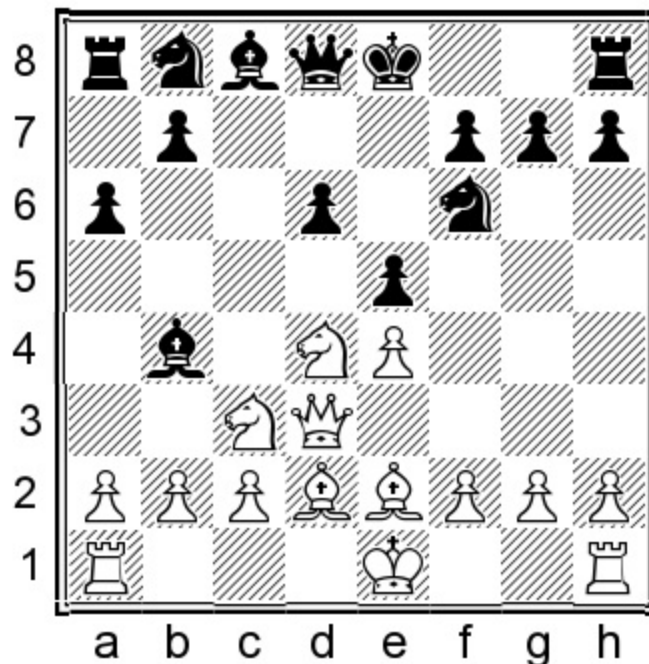
8.0-0

Less ambitious than 8.♙d2 but not necessarily worse.

8.♙d2 This is the other option for White. The main goal of this move is not really to unpin the knight but for White to consider queenside castling.

A) 8...♘bd7 Most of the games followed this move. It is logical to challenge the exposed queen on d3, but it looks like White has a good continuation. 9.♘b3! Not only does this put more pressure on d6, it also deprives the b4-bishop of any retreat square. 9...0-0 10.a3 ♘c5! 11.♘xc5 ♙xc5 and now in the game Slingerland, F (2389) – Nijboer, F (2562) Hilversum 2009, 0-1 (17), Black won easily but White should have played 12.♙e3 b5 13.♙xc5 dxc5 14.0-0-0↑ with slight pressure for White.

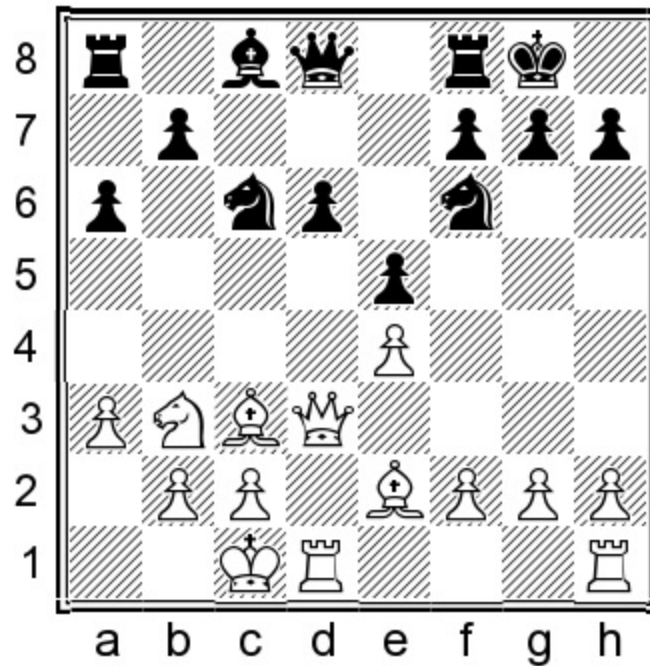
B) 8...e5!?



Position after: 8...e5!?

9.♘b3 0-0 10.a3 ♙xc3 [10...♘c6!/? Even this is playable but in the event of 11.axb4 ♘xb4 12.♖g3

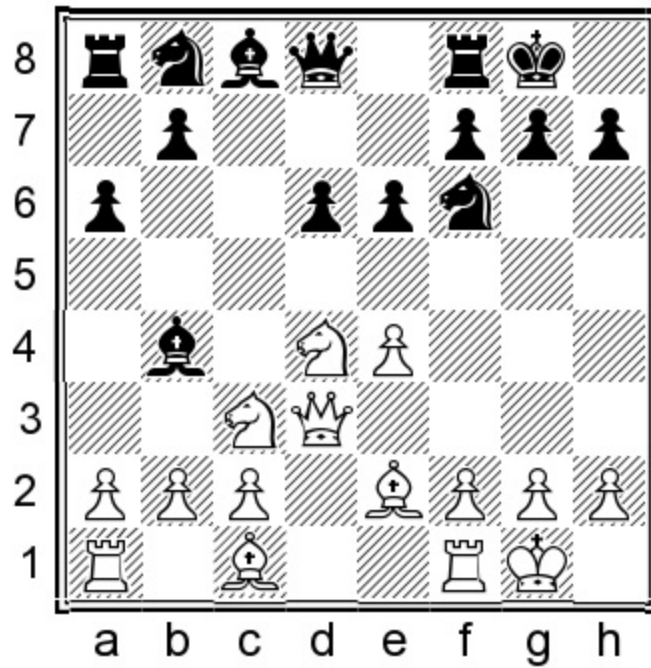
♖xc2+ 13.♙d1 ♖xa1 14.♖xa1 d5!?! I am not sur I would like to be White here.] 11.♙xc3 ♖c6
 12.0-0-0



Position after: 12.0-0-0

White has some pressure on d6 but it is unlikely that he will have time to take because of the threats against e4. 12...♙c7! 13.f4 [13.f3?! This would be too slow 13...♙d8! 14.h4 d5+] 13...♙d8↗ Black follows with 14...♙e6. The white minor pieces are not in active positions, and I feel the attack comes more easily for Black.

8...0-0

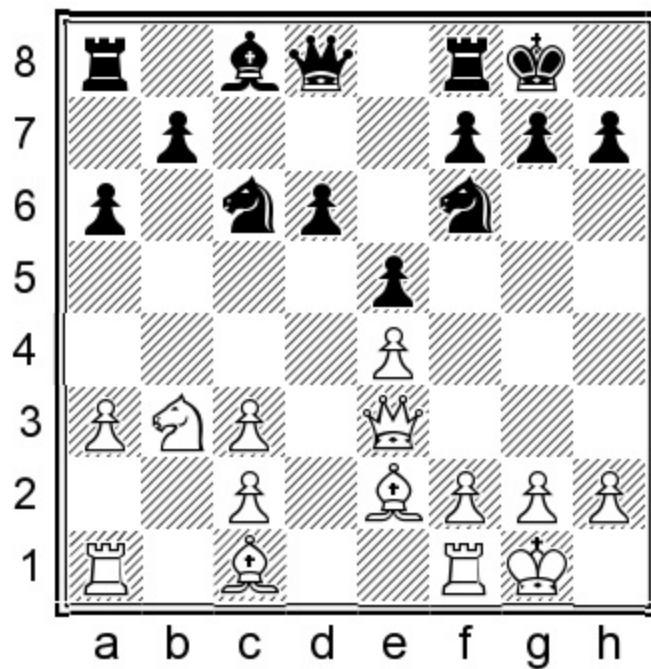


Position after: 8...0-0

9.♔g5

White selected this move in most games. While it may be logical it is not particularly dangerous.

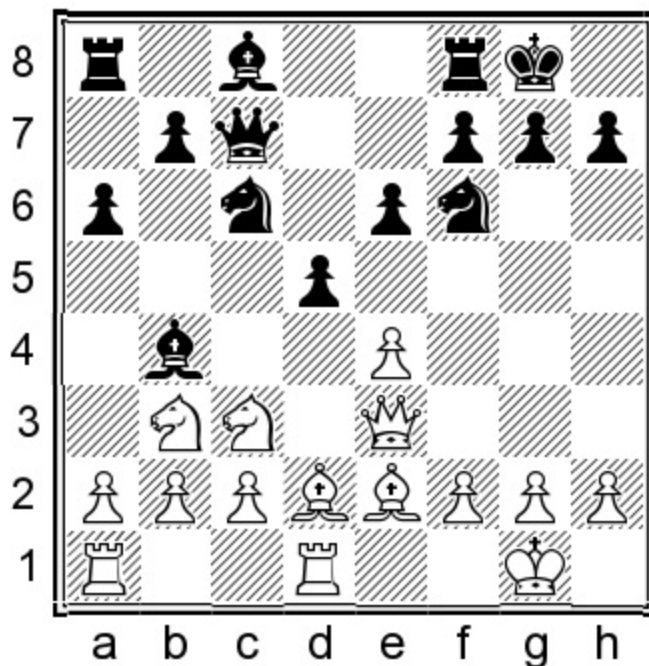
A) 9.a3 Looks to slow and simply provokes... 9...♙xc3 10.bxc3 ♘bd7 11.♞b3 ♞e5 12.♙d4 ♞c6 13.♙e3 e5!



Position after: 13...e5!

Black will easily finish his development. 14.♖d1 ♔c7 15.♕d3 h6 Often useful to prevent ♕g5 and have a stabilized knight on f6. 16.h3 ♗e6 As in the game Plenkovic, Z (2278) – Kovacevic, B (2468) Pula 2006.

B) 9.♘b3 ♘bd7 10.♞d1 [10.a3 ♘e5 11.♗d4 ♗xc3 12.bxc3 This position was previously examined after 9.a3.] 10...♘e5 11.♗d4 ♘c6 12.♗e3 ♗c7 I am not sure the queen is great on e3 but after 13.♕d2 d5!

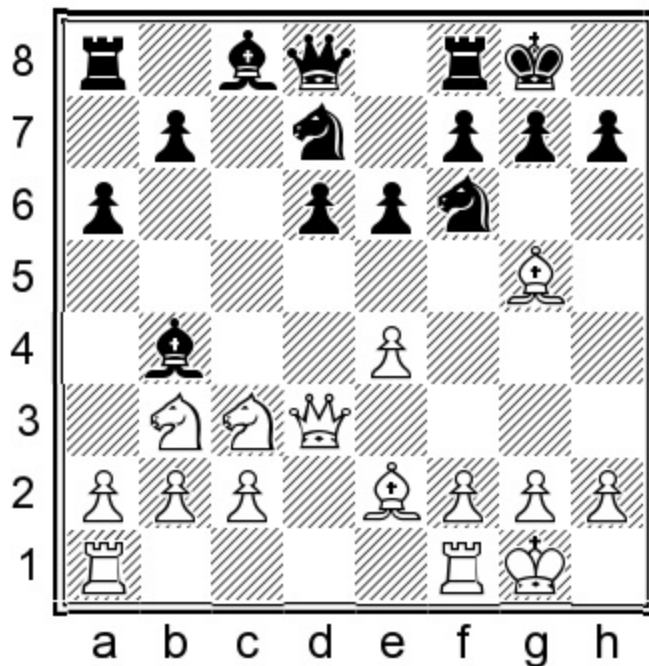


Position after: 13...d5!

A draw was agreed in Fedorchuk, S (2633) – Hillarp Persson, T (2586) Budva 2009.

Black seems to have a great position. For example: 14.exd5 exd5 15.♗g3 ♗d6 16.♗h4 ♘e7 With many of White's pieces on the queenside they are unable to do anything about Black's kingside activity.

9...♘bd7 10.♘b3



Position after: 10. ♖b3

Now out of all of Black's different options I like the following.

10...b6!?

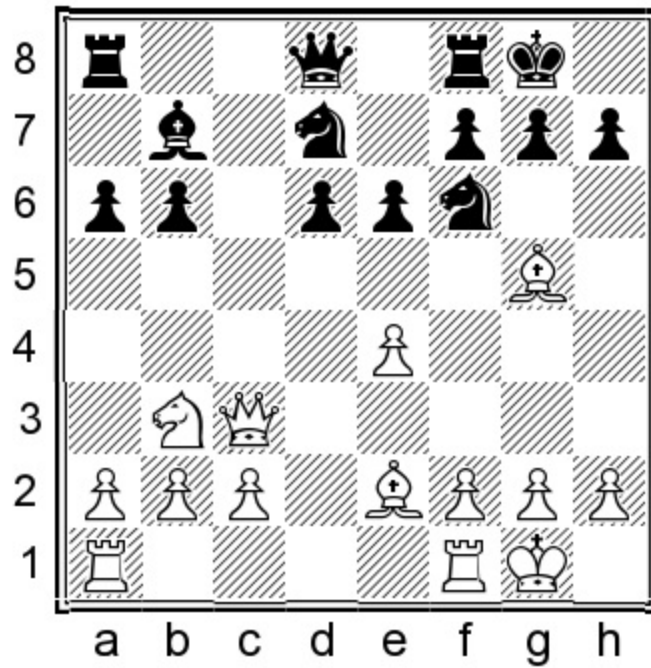
10...b5?! This has similar ideas, but White has: 11.a4!± with no good solution for Black.

11. ♕d4

The queen moves away from possible threats of the d7-knight, and it forces our bishop to make a decision.

11...♗xc3 12.bxc3

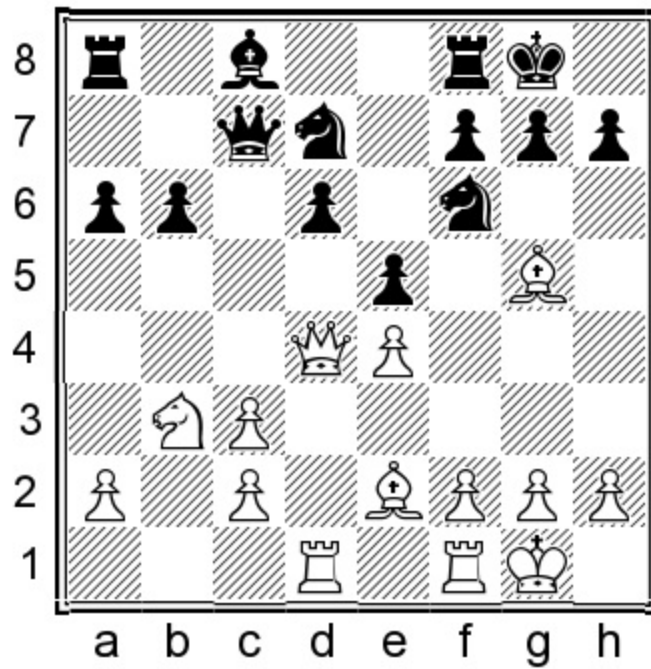
12. ♕xc3?! ♗b7!±



Position after: 12...♙b7!

The pawn on e4 is under pressure. 13.f3?? ♜xe4 14.♙xd8 ♜xc3 15.bxc3 ♜fxd8+

12...♙c7 13.♜ad1 e5!N



Position after: 13...e5!N

This is often the way to stabilize the centre.

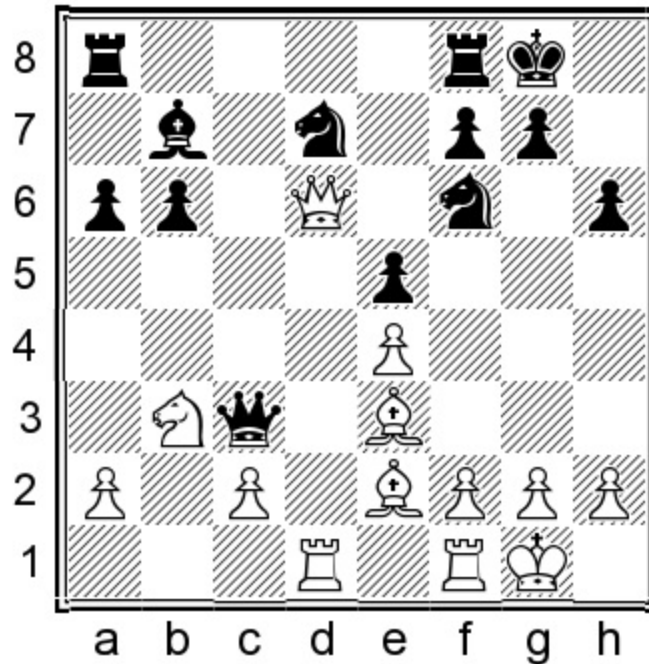
13...♙b7?! This was tactically easier for White. 14.♙xd6 This move is impossible in our variation.

14...♖xc3 [14...♖xd6 15.♖xd6 ♘xe4 16.♖fd1±] 15.f3 ♖ac8 16.♙xf6 ♞xf6 17.♗xb6 ♗xc2 18.♖d2±
 Harika, D (2492) – Krush, I (2477) Sochi 2015.

14.♗d3

14.♗xd6?! This is clearly less appealing here for White. 14...♖xd6 15.♖xd6 ♞xe4 16.♙f3□
 16...♞xd6 17.♙xa8 ♞f6⌘ I would pick Black's side because of the better pawn structure.

14...h6 15.♙e3 ♙b7! 16.♗xd6 ♗xc3=

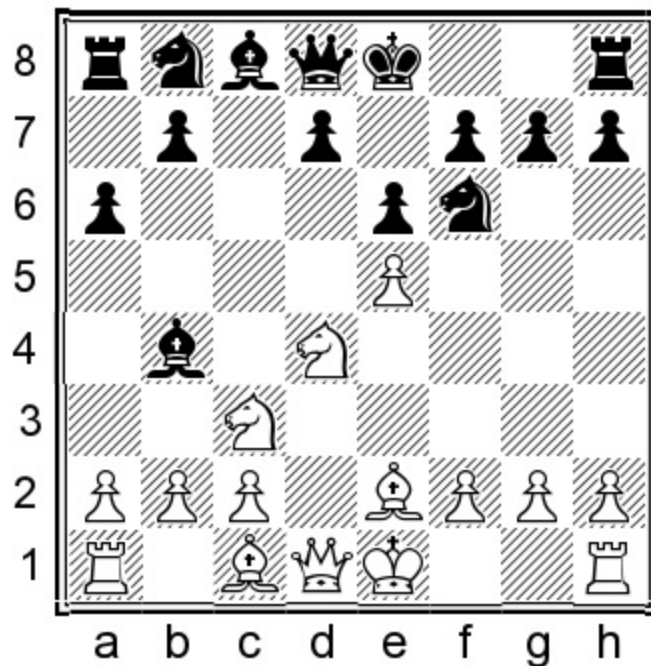


Position after: 16...♗xc3=

White's bishops do not look strong in this case, and the chances are roughly balanced. Black has a clear plan on the queenside while noting is clear for White.

e) 6.♞c3 ♙b4 7.e5 ♞e4 8.♗d3

1.e4 c5 2.♞f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♞xd4 a6 5.♙e2 ♞f6 6.♞c3 ♙b4 7.e5!?



Position after: 7.e5!?

Objectively, this may be the most dangerous line in this position. A few years ago, a notable game, Giri – Vitiugov, which eventually ended up in White’s favour, probably was just bad publicity for Black in this variation.

7...♘e4

In this particular position, White only has two choices, and both have been tried.

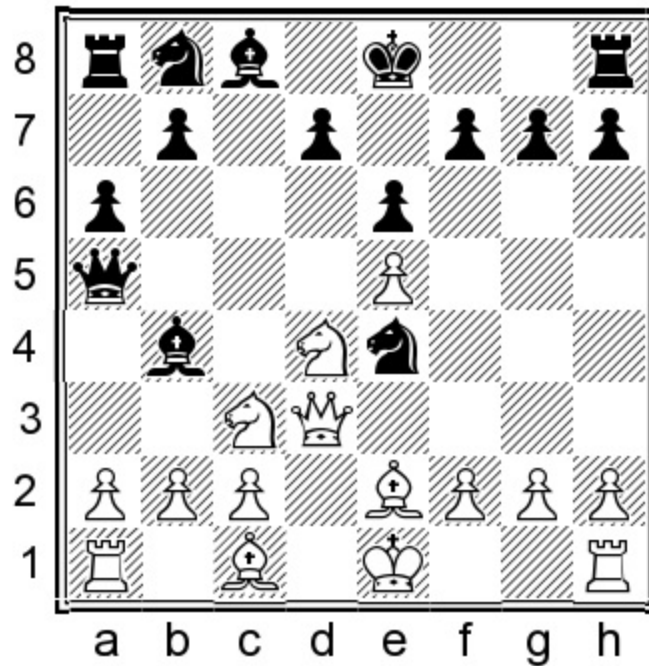
7...♘d5 This is also a possibility that leads to slight differences, but the main problem is that it gives White another interesting possibility in 8.♙d2↑.

8.♙d3

It’s not the most dangerous attempt, but we still need to play with great precision.

8.0-0!? See the next subchapter.

8...♙a5!



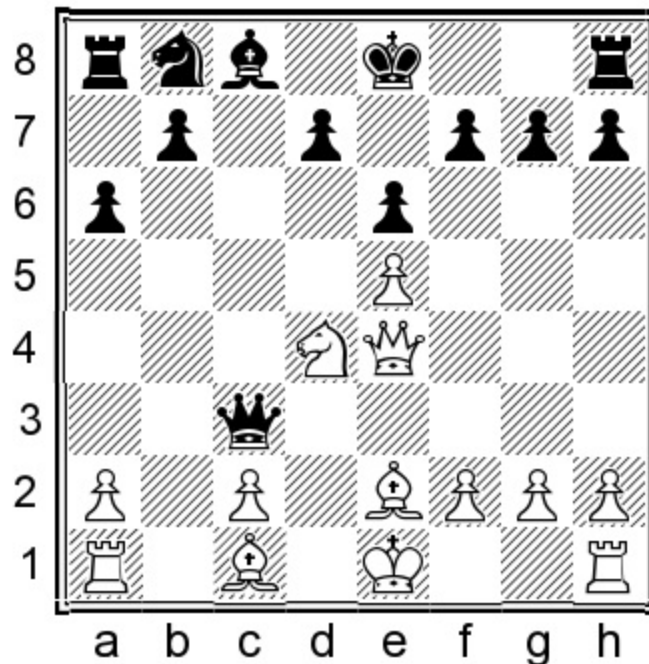
Position after: 8... ♕a5!

We counterattack against the knight on c3.

9.0-0!

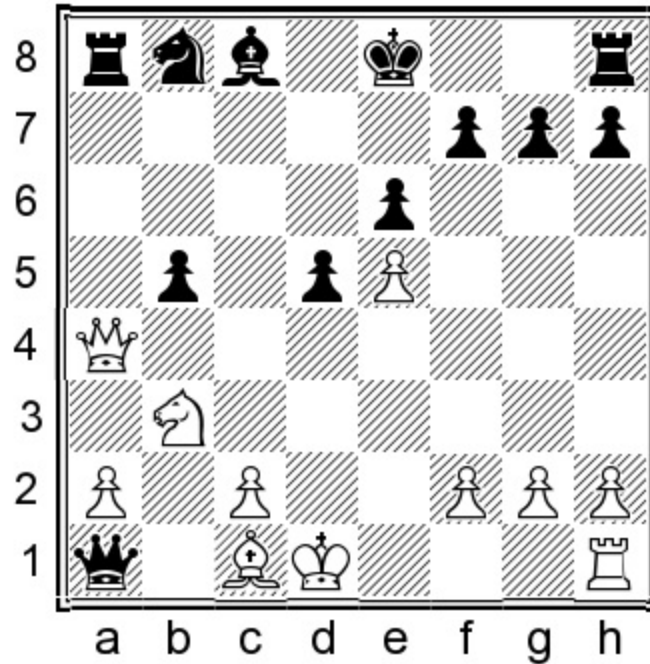
This sacrifices a pawn, but under better circumstances than 9. ♖xe4.

9. ♖xe4?! ♗xc3+ 10. bxc3 [10. ♖f1 ♗xd4! 11. ♖xd4 ♘c6 Black is winning a pawn, and White can only get compensation, but it will not be completely fine for him. 12. ♗d2! ♖xe5 13. ♖xe5 ♘xe5 14. f4 ♘c6 15. ♖f2 d5] I would take Black's side without any hesitation.] 10... ♖xc3+



Position after: 10... ♖xc3+

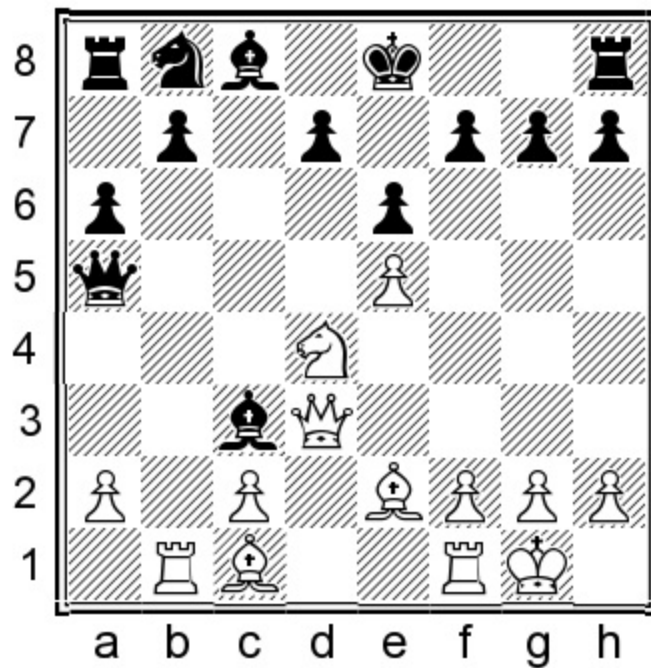
11. ♔d1! [11. ♕d2? ♖xa1+ 12. ♕d1 This is too slow for White to be good. 12... ♗c6 13. ♗xc6 bxc6 14. 0-0 ♜b8—+ White did not have enough in Jolly, J (2369) – Genov, P (2437) Guingamp 2011. 0-1 (34)] 11... ♖xa1 Sebastian, D – Fuhrmann, D (2300) Hamburg 1993 12. ♗b3! By far the best try by White. He wants to chase our queen from a1 12...d5! A hard move, and maybe the only one to keep an edge. [12... ♖xa2 13. ♖g4!∞; 12... ♖c3 13. ♕a3∞] 13. ♖a4+ b5! 14. ♕xb5+ axb5



Position after: 14... axb5

15. ♖xa8 [15. ♖xb5+?? ♕d7 16. ♖xb8+ ♜xb8 17. ♗xa1 0-0—+] 15... ♖xe5 16. ♜e1 ♖c7 17. ♖a3 ♗c6 18. ♖c5 ♖d7∞ Black will continue with 19...f6 to bring the king to f7. He should still be better due to his extra pawn and the white king in an unsecure place, but it is definitely the most complicated variation.

9... ♗xc3 10. bxc3 ♕xc3 11. ♜b1



Position after: 11. ♖b1

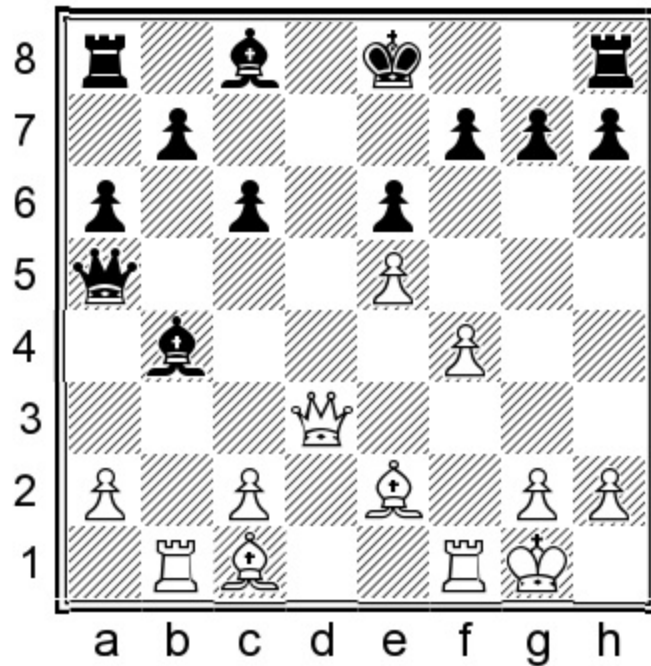
11...♘c6!

11...♙xd4 12.♚xd4 ♘c6 13.♚g4 0-0 This has been tried a couple of times by Black, but I checked 14.♖b3= And White has great compensation.

12.♘xc6 dxc6 13.f4

This occurred in Heuer, V – Poutiainen, P Tallinn 1977, and now I prefer

13...♙b4=

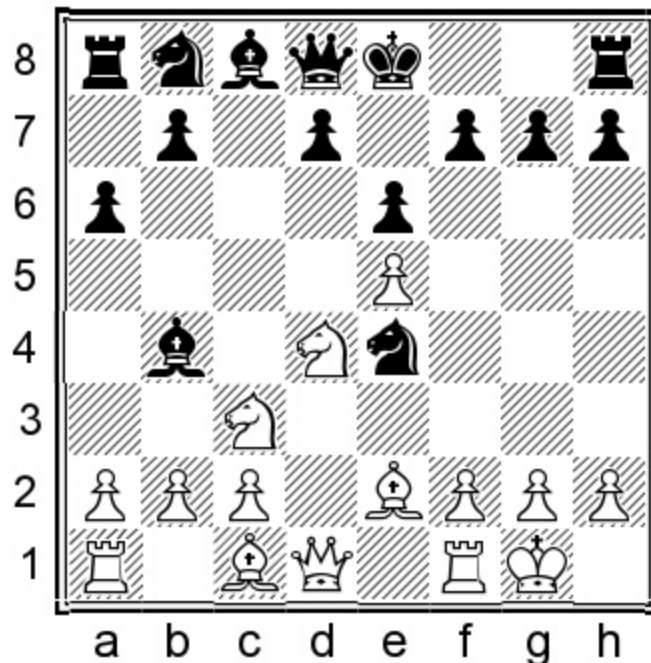


Position after: 13...♙b4=

This is probably Black's safest continuation. White still needs to prove why he invested a pawn here. For the moment White only has enough compensation to claim equality.

f) 6.♘c3 ♗b4 7.e5 ♘e4 8.0-0

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.♙e2 ♘f6 6.♘c3 ♗b4 7.e5!? ♘e4 8.0-0!?



Position after: 8.0-0!?

This is an interesting pawn sacrifice that needs to be checked with great carefulness.

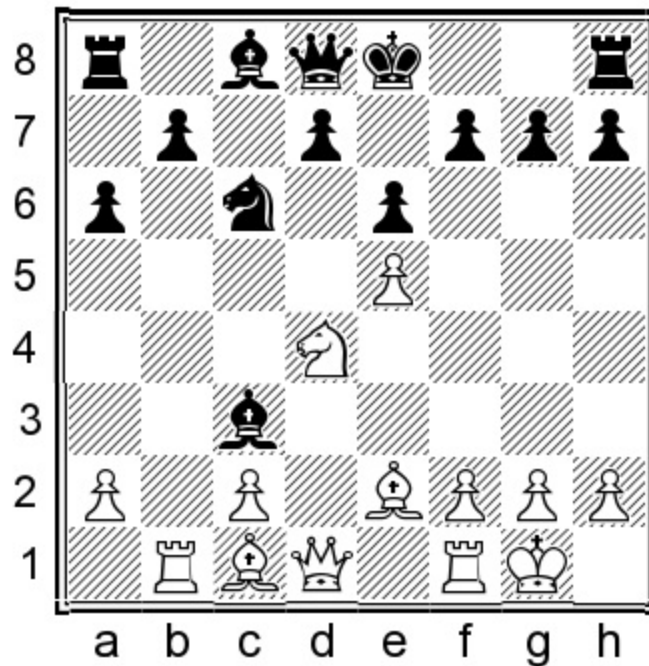
8...♞xc3!

Here, we transpose also in the main line of 7...♞d5. Black has other choices including 8...♞xc3? 9.bxc3 ♞xc3 10.♞e1 ♞xe2+ 11.♞xe2 0-0 12.♞a3 ♞e8 13.♞ab1 b5 14.♞b3±. Our king is extremely lonely, and the attack is going to be dangerous.

9.bxc3 ♞xc3 10.♞a3!

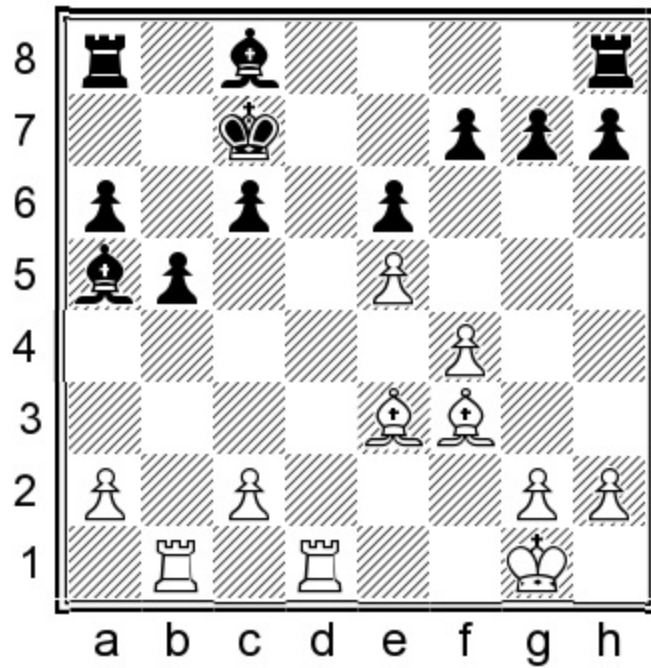
This is the point, White also sacrifices the exchange, but Black will not have time to castle.

10.♞b1?! ♞c6!



Position after: 10...♞c6!

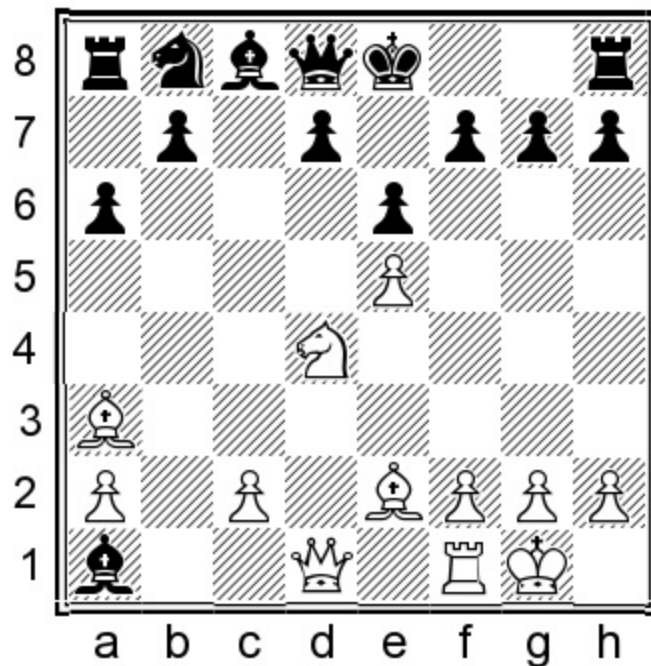
We have time for this move, intending to trade the knights, and to be able to attack the pawn on e5 with the bishop. 11.♞xc6 dxc6 12.♞xd8+ ♔xd8 13.♞d1+ ♔c7 14.♞e3 b5! [14...♞xe5 15.♞b6+ ♔b8 16.♞f3 Black would clearly be paralyzed, even if it is playable.] 15.f4 ♞a5 16.♞f3



Position after: 16. ♔f3

Black still is a pawn up, and I would improve on the game Rodshtein, T (2263) – Petrenko, S (2182) Mamaia 2016, with 16...♗b7! 17.♗c5 ♗b6 18.♗xb6+ ♔xb6 19.♖d7 ♗hf8 20.♖bd1 ♗ac8. It looks easier for Black to play and White must prove his compensation.

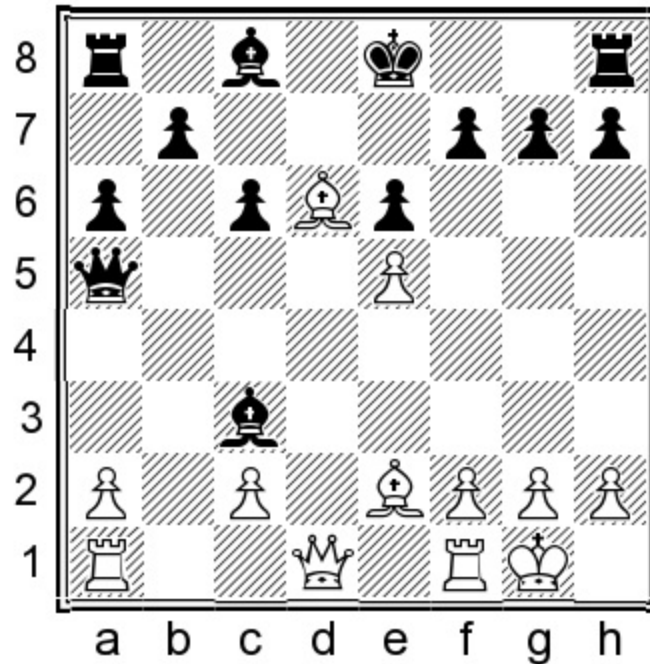
10...♗xa1!



Position after: 10...♗xa1!

It feels like we should take the rook and hope for the best later. Strangely enough, only one game continued this way.

10...♔a5?! The main move here. 11.♕d6 ♖c6 12.♗xc6 dxc6



Position after: 12...dxc6

A) 13.f4 The “big game” of this variation continued like this. White won but 13.f4 may not be the most accurate continuation. 13...♕xa1 14.♔xa1 ♔d2 15.♕d3 ♔e3+ 16.♖h1♖ And it is clearly hard for Black. Giri, A (2714) – Vitiugov, N (2729) Reggio Emilia 2012.

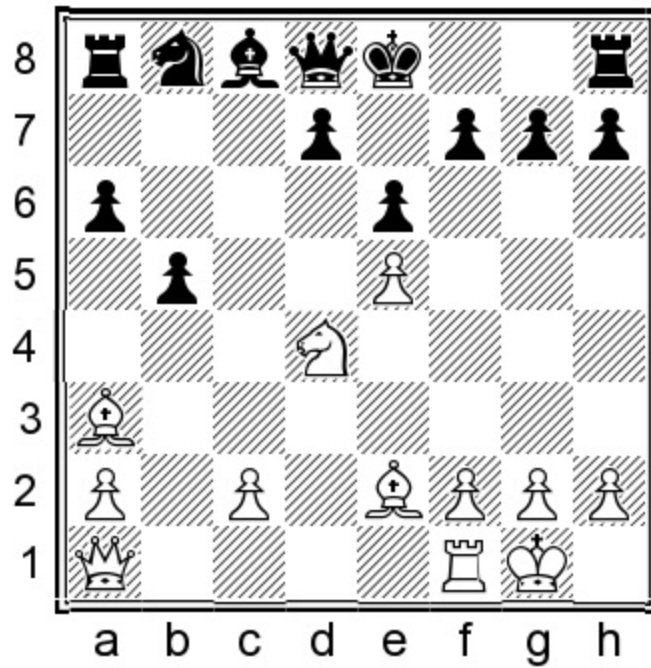
B) 13.♔d3!N I believe this is a strong novelty yet everyone has played as Giri. It seems that taking on a1 is just hopeless for Black. 13...♕xe5! 14.♖ad1± With an overwhelming position for White.

11.♔xa1 b5!N

I see this as a strong novelty. People who love computer analysis will argue that there are still ways to find an edge for White.

But it is clearly a computer line, and there are plenty of ways for White (and of course for Black) to misplay, and if you are well prepared, it feels interesting. Anyway, Black is willing to develop his pieces, and it forces White to have an effective plan.

11...♔a5? 12.♕d6 ♖c6 13.♗xc6 dxc6 14.♔d4 Black is left with no play in these middlegames. 14...♕d7 15.♖d1 ♔d8 16.♔g4 g6 17.♔f4+- This was the game Espinosa Aranda, A (2399) – Schlittermann, W (1751) Las Palmas 2012

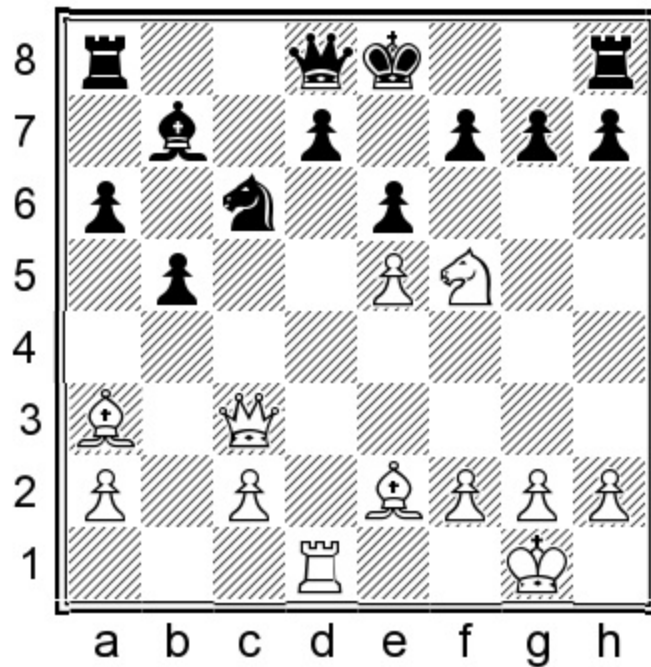


Position after: 11...b5!

12.♙f3!?

It is hard to say which move should be the main line, but it looks like the most logical to me.

A) 12.♞d1?! ♗b7 13.♚c3 ♘c6 14.♞f5!



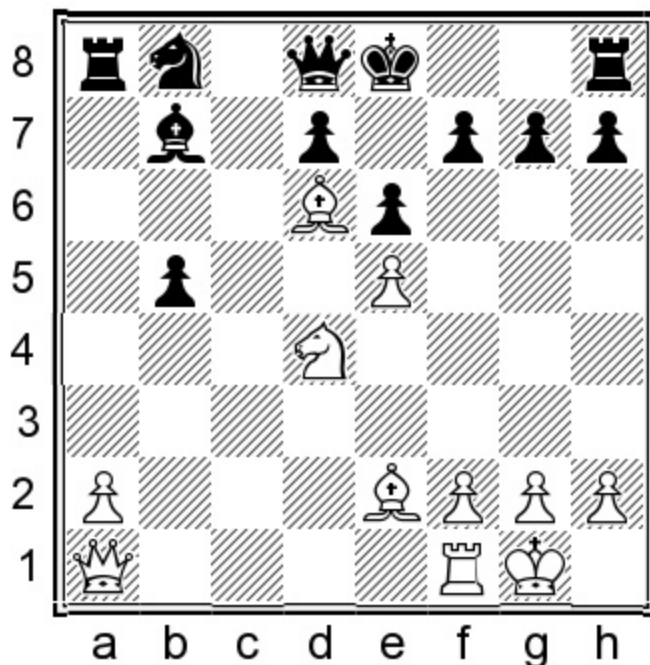
Position after: 14.♞f5!

White must settle for this move, which normally leads to passive trades. 14...exf5 15.e6 ♚f6□

16.exf7+ ♔d8 17.♚xf6+ gxf6 18.f8=♚+ ♖xf8 19.♙xf8 ♘e5= We have a weird pawn structure, but still an extra pawn.

B) 12.♙d6?! This is not so useful for White. The bishop is strong, but the move gives us time. 12...♙b7 13.♖d1 ♘c6↗

C) 12.c4!? This is the other strong move according to the computer, but I doubt anyone will ever find the right moves over the board. 12...♙b7! 13.cxb5 axb5 14.♙d6



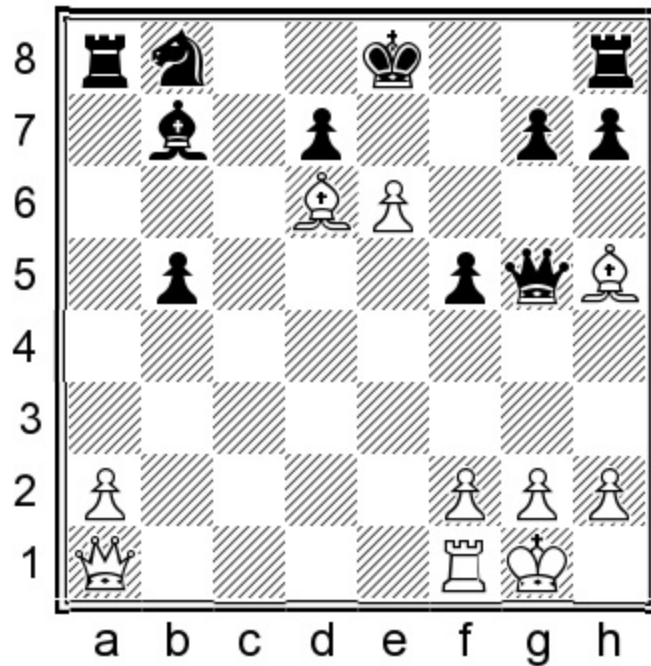
Position after: 14. ♙d6

[14.♘xb5?! ♖xa3! 15.♘xa3 ♚g5 16.g3 0-0↗ Black has a totally fine position, and 16...♚d2 may also be strong.] 14...f5! Now in this position Black has some choices and my preference is for this move which leads to a crazy line. [14...♚g5 15.g3 f5 16.h4 ♚d2 17.a3 b4 18.♙xb4 ♚xb4 19.axb4 ♖xa1 20.♖xa1±]

C1) 15.exf6?! ♚xf6 16.♚d1 ♔f7! Black is willing to continue with ...♖c8 and ...♔g8, and he seems to have time for it. 17.f4!? Now 18.f5 is a threat and we need to stop it. 17...♘c6! 18.♘xb5 ♖hc8 19.♙e5 ♚d8 20.♘d6+ ♔g8= Black does not lose a piece due to 21...♚b6+, so White can get his exchange back, but then the position is just complicated.

C2) 15.♘xf5! exf5

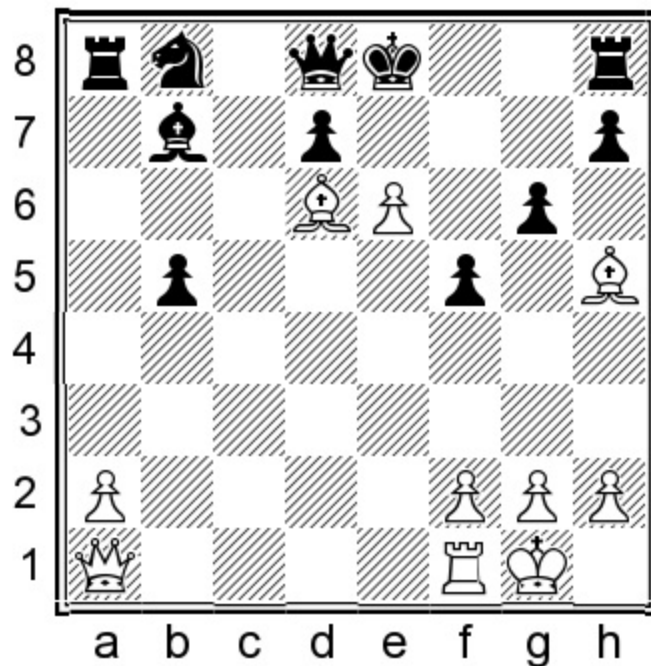
C2.1) 16.e6?! ♚g5 17.♙h5+!!



Position after: 17. ♕h5+!!

17... ♖d8 □ 18. e7+ ♗c8 19. ♛c1+! White is getting mated if he promotes on e8. 19... ♛xc1 20. ♖xc1+ ♕c6 21. ♕e5! ♗b7 22. ♕xg7 ♖g8 23. e8=♛ ♖xe8 24. ♕xe8 ♖xa2= And anything can happen here, the bishop pair is strong, but we have an extra passed pawn on b5.

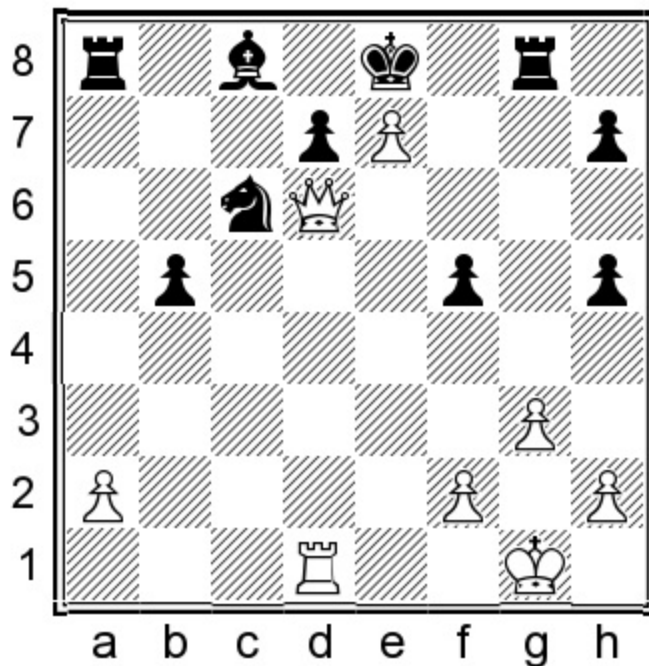
C2.2) 16. ♕h5+ g6 17. e6



Position after: 17. e6

17... ♖g8 □ 18. e7! A crazy variation! 18... ♛b6 19. ♛f6 And eventually, 20. ♛f8 is a deadly threat,

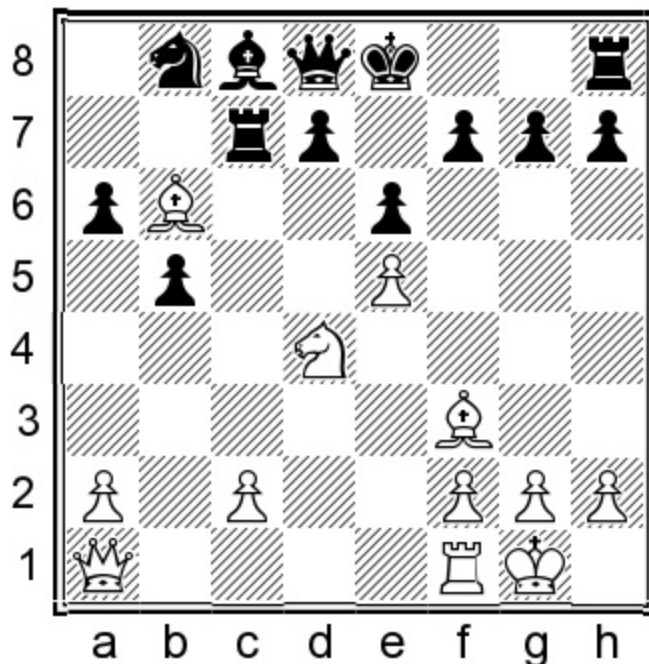
so we have no choice but to play 19...♙xd6! 20.♙xd6 gxh5 Now g2 is under attack. 21.g3 ♘c6
 22.♖d1 ♕c8∞



Position after: 22...♕c8∞

My computer claims there is still a small edge for White, but we have more than enough material for the queen. This is the kind of position where the exact evaluation does not really matter as the stronger player will eventually win.

12...♖a7 13.♕c5! ♖c7 14.♕b6



Position after: 14. ♖b6

White regains the exchange but gives up the dark-square bishop.

14...d5!

Black needs to organize his counterplay, and this is more or less needed.

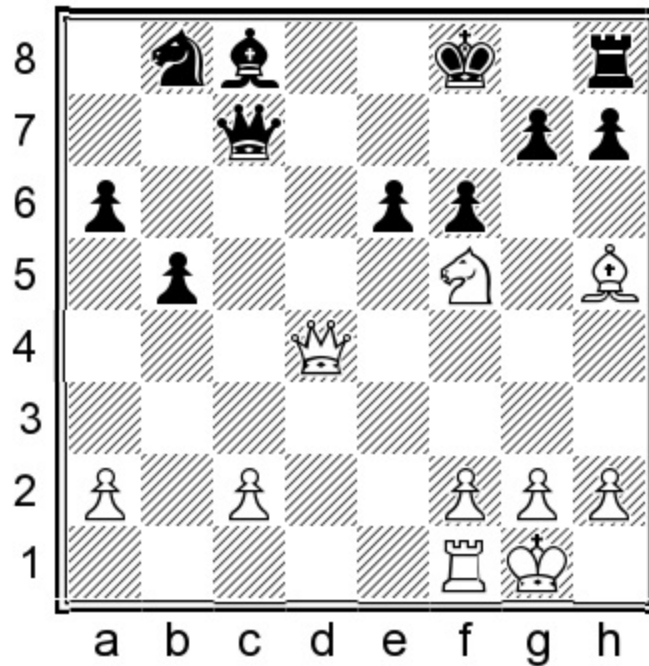
15.exd6 ♜xd6 16.♗xc7 ♜xc7 17.♘f5!!

And as in the 12.c4 variation, White only remains better thanks to amazing moves! Clearly there are chances for White to misplay.

17...f6!

17...exf5?? 18.♞xg7 ♜f8 19.♞e1+ And we are defenceless. 19...♗e6 20.♞xe6+-

18.♗h5+ ♔f8 19.♞d4!!



Position after: 19. ♞d4!!

19...♘d7!

We can still fight back!

19...exf5?? 20.♞e1 ♗d7 21.♞e3+- And now for example: 21...♞d8 22.♞c5+ ♔g8 23.♞d5+ ♔f8 24.♞f7#

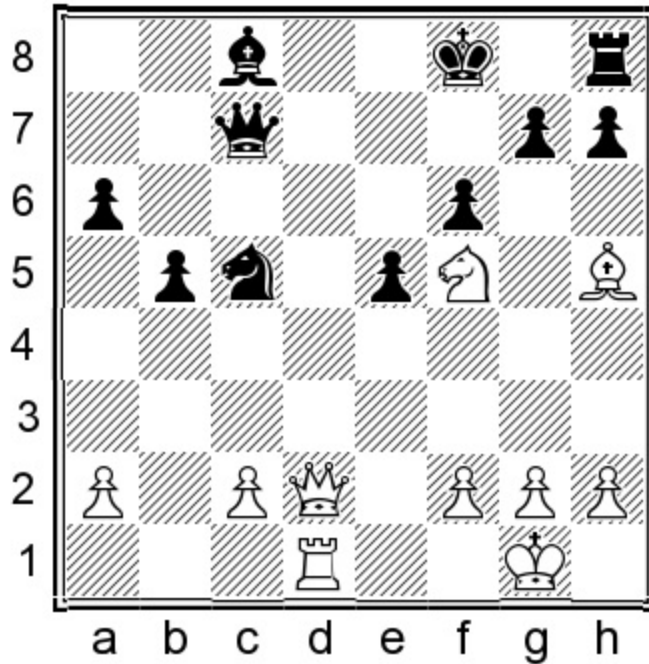
20.♞e1 e5 21.♞d2

21. ♖d5?! ♜b6! And Black escapes. 22. ♚e4 ♙xf5 23. ♗xf5 ♔e7=

21... ♜c5!N

One of the threats was ♖b4+

22. ♖d1!



Position after: 22. ♖d1!

The only move to avoid ending up worse.

22... ♙xf5

And this time we have no choice but to give up another exchange.

23. ♗d8+ ♗xd8 24. ♖xd8+ ♔e7 25. ♖xh8 ♙xc2±

As in the 12.c4 line, the engine gives an evaluation around +0.50 for White, but with 2 pawns and a better king against the exchange I do not think that White is the only one that can be playing for a win. And again, what are the chances that anyone ever finds the best moves here. Even if White does find the best moves you should be prepared.

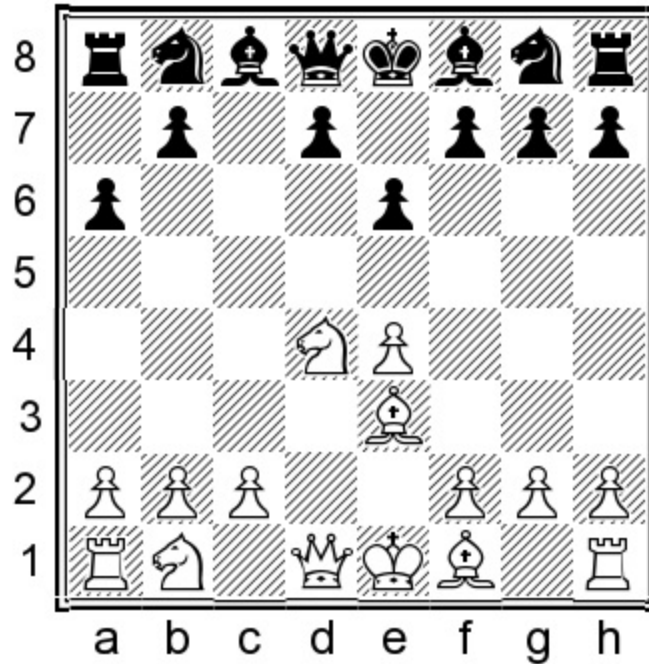
Chapter Conclusion

I think the variation that we analysed in this subchapter is a critical and dangerous test, but fully playable with the right ideas! Some theory might be required, but only if you are playing against players who have an ELO above 2300. In other cases, I think remembering the move orders and the main ideas is sufficient.

Chapter 5

5.♞e3

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 a6 5.♞e3



Chapter Guide

Chapter 5 – 5.♞e3

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 a6 5.♞e3 ♘f6

a) 6.--

b) 6.♗d2

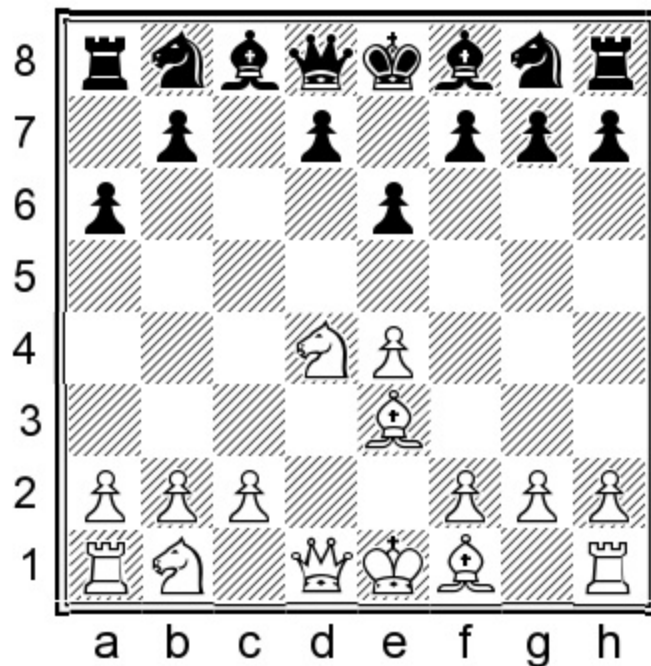
c) 6.♗c3

d) 6.♞d3 ♕c7 7.--

e) 6.♞d3 ♕c7 7.0-0

a) 6.--

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 a6 5.♞e3



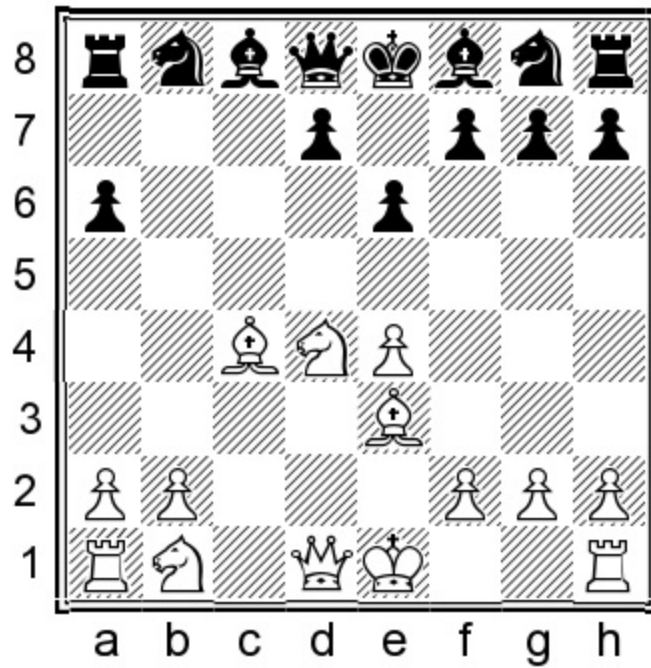
Position after: 5. ♕e3

This is the 5th most played move in the position thus it makes sense to have it in the 5th chapter of the book. Even if it is a rare guest in high-level games (it has only been played twice by players with ELO ratings over 2600, it is important to understand the different move orders and transpositions, what is playable or not. First off, let us see why I choose 5... ♖f6 as our main line, as in the previous chapter about 5. ♕e2.

5... ♖f6!

I think that challenging the e4-pawn and seeing how White protects it is the right thing to start with. In this section we will focus on two of the side lines for White which are less natural ways to defend it!

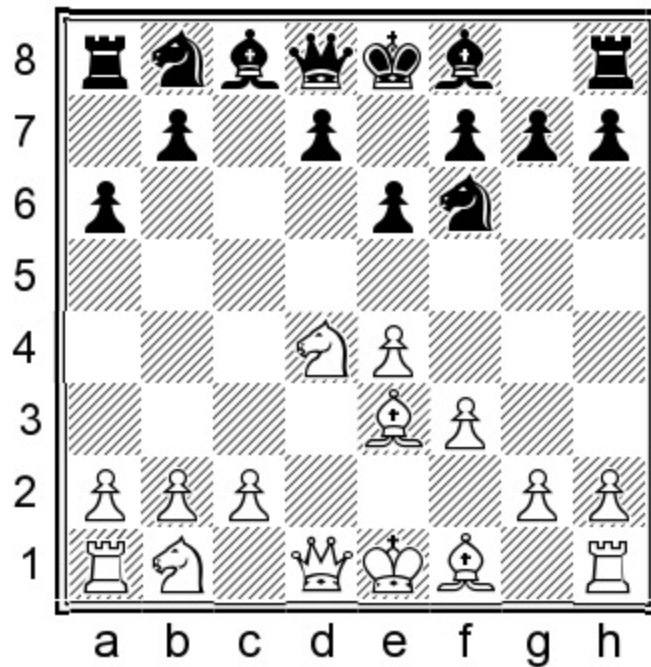
5...b5?! Once again, playing this move while White has not played ♖c3 looks a little bit premature. Among White's options is the interesting 6.c4! [6.a4 This move also makes a lot of sense to me, forcing Black to take a decision with his b-pawn.] 6...bxc4 7. ♕xc4±



Position after: 7. ♔xc4±

We can argue that Black has a central pawn majority, but White's central play is going to be very easy, and he is clearly ahead in development.

6.f3?!



Position after: 6.f3?!

Black can take over the initiative.

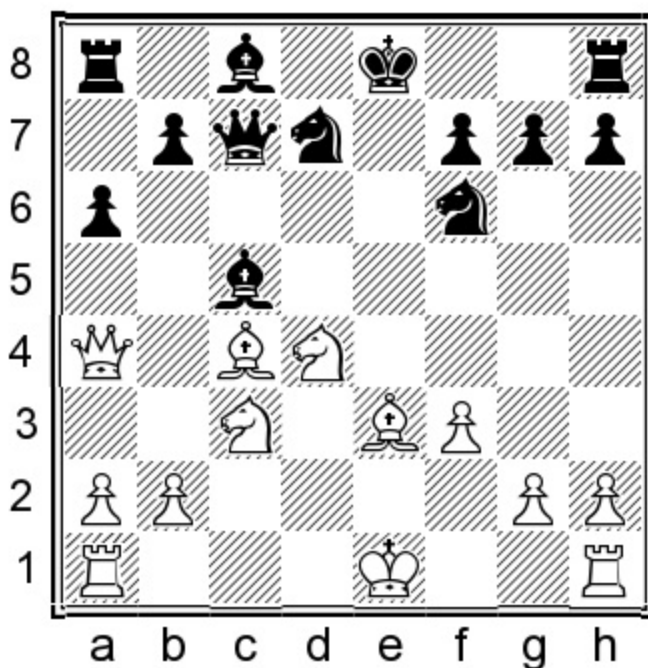
A) 6.♖c3 This move, as well as 6.♖d2 and 6.♙d3, are the subjects of the next subchapters.

B) 6.e5? Is a mistake just like 5.♙e2 which we previously covered. Not many have played 6.e5 since 6...♖d5 is a good answer for Black as well as 6...♙a5+ 7.♖c3 ♙xe5.

6...e5!?

Very forcing and not played very often. While not in the spirit of the 2...e6 Sicilians when a move is strong you should play it.

6...♙c7 This is more in the spirit of our opening, but it is also less forcing as White has plenty of moves. But I would say that he will often follow with ...d5 with a great position. The point of having played 6...♙c7 is that White cannot close the position by e4-e5. And it works even if White tries to avoid it! For example: 7.c4 d5! 8.exd5 exd5 9.♖c3 dxc4 10.♙a4+ ♖bd7 11.♙xc4 ♙c5



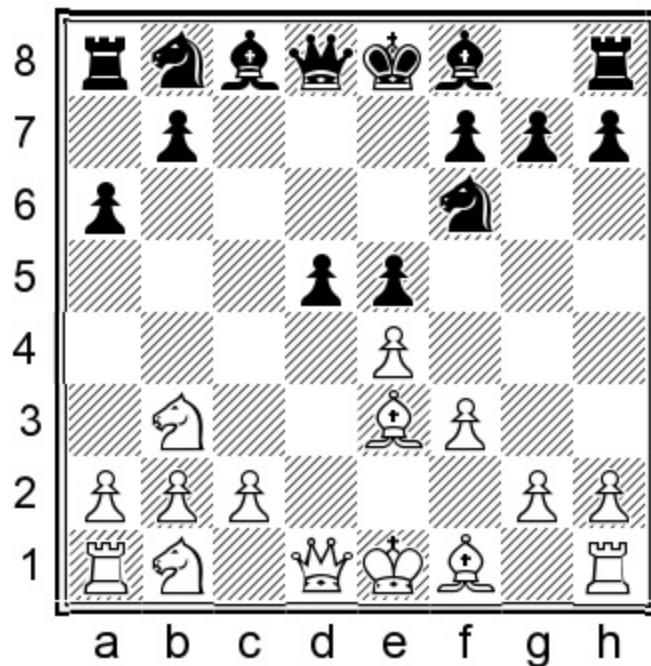
Position after: 11...♙c5

Heading into a complicated middlegame. Once again, White regrets having played f3. 12.0-0-0 0-0 13.♙c2 b5 14.♙b3 ♙e8↑ The white king does not look safe on this side of the board.

7.♖b3

7.♖f5?! d5 8.♙d3 ♙xf5!N 9.exf5 ♖bd7 10.0-0 ♙c5 11.♙xc5 ♖xc5 Black has a great centre, and he might be able to grab the f5-pawn at some point.

7...d5!



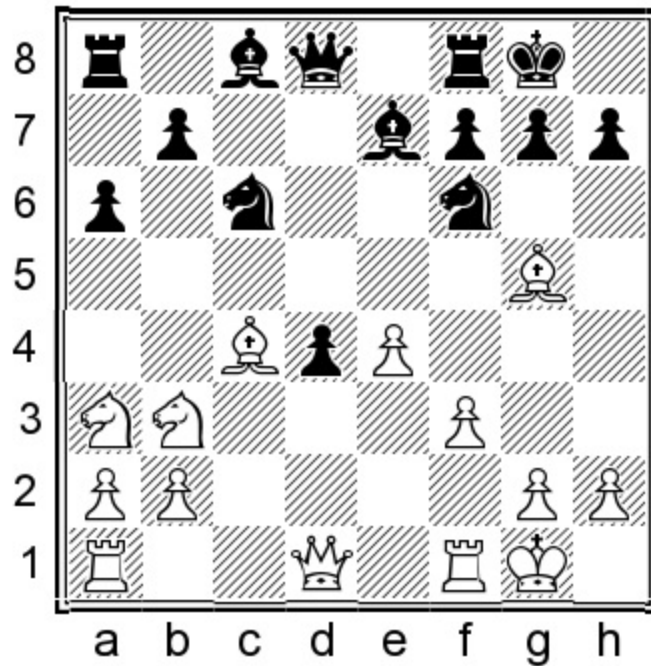
Position after: 7...d5!

The point of 6...e5! White cannot play 8.e5 closing the centre.

8.exd5

Most players decided to take, but it is pretty clear the bishop on e3 is misplaced.

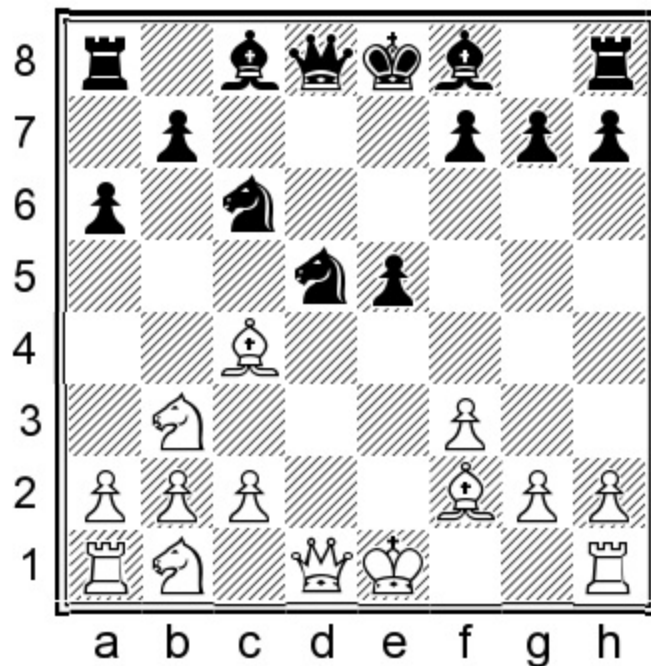
8.♔g5 And the rest of the players went for this variation. There is a theoretical line that exist and is better than this one. Consider the Sicilian with 1.e4 c5 2.♖f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.f3 e5 6.♗b3 d5 7.♔g5. This is the exact same position, except that here the pawn is already on a6. And it makes a huge difference in Black's favour, because the possibilities of ♗b5 (with check or pinning a future knight coming to c6) are very important for White! Here we can go 8...d4! 9.c3 ♗c6 10.♔c4 [10.cxd4 exd4 11.♔d3 ♔d6 White will have a lot of problems on the dark squares, due to his pawn chain on the light-squares. 12.0-0 h6 13.♔h4 ♚c7+] 10...♔e7 11.0-0 0-0 12.cxd4 exd4 13.♗a3



Position after: 13. ♖a3

All this occurred in Firouzja, A (2456) – Vitiugov, N (2726) Doha 2016, and even if Black won convincingly, there is a possible improvement here with: 13...b5!N 14. ♕d3 ♕e6 15. ♖c1 ♖c8♣. I think the potential weakness of the d4-pawn is clearly compensated for by Black's active pieces.

8... ♗xd5 9. ♕f2 ♗c6 10. ♕c4!



Position after: 10. ♕c4!

Apparently, the only way to keep the balance.

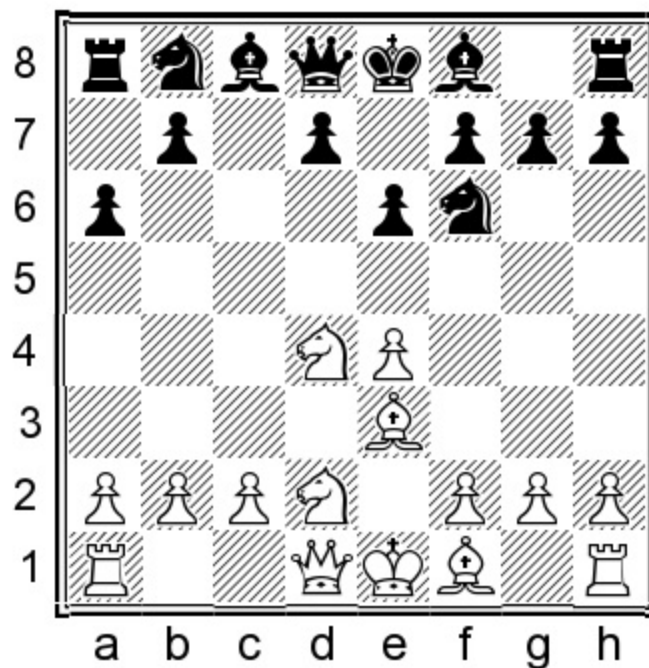
10.♖e2?! ♕e6 11.0-0 ♜f4

10...♕e6! 11.0-0 ♜e3! 12.♖xe3 ♕xc4 13.♞e1 f6!?!=

It is clear that Black cannot be worse. He has the luxury of securing the e5-pawn, and the apparent weakening of the light squares is ok because Black is the only side with a light-square bishop.

b) 6.♜d2

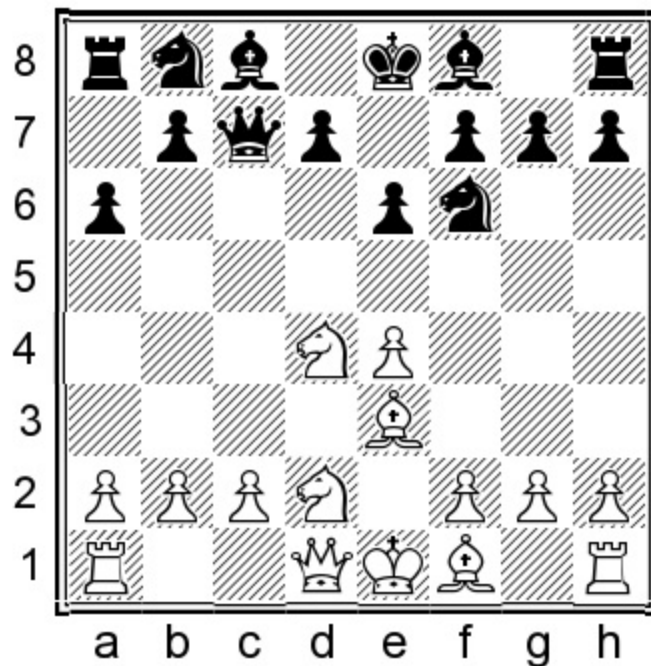
1.e4 c5 2.♜f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♜xd4 a6 5.♕e3 ♜f6! 6.♜d2



Position after: 6.♜d2

We have also considered this move in the 5.♕e2 chapter, but here at least it does not prevent the dark-square bishop from developing. While it is not natural development, I would not say it is a bad move.

6...♞c7!



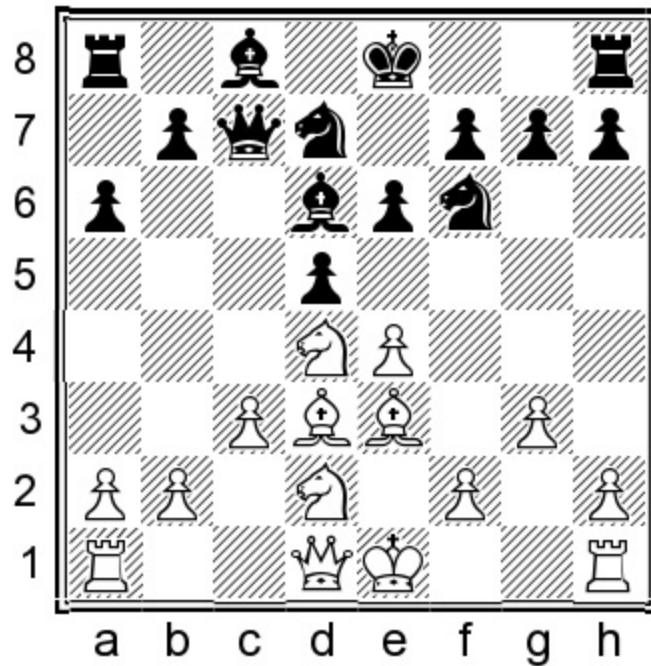
Position after: 6...♙c7!

As often, the most logical continuation. The idea is to control the e5-square, and to push 7...d5 with the reaction 8.e5 being impossible. We cannot go deep in every variation, but I will still briefly check White's five most important variations.

7.♙d3

This also does not prevent ...d5, but at least the bishop is defending the e4-pawn.

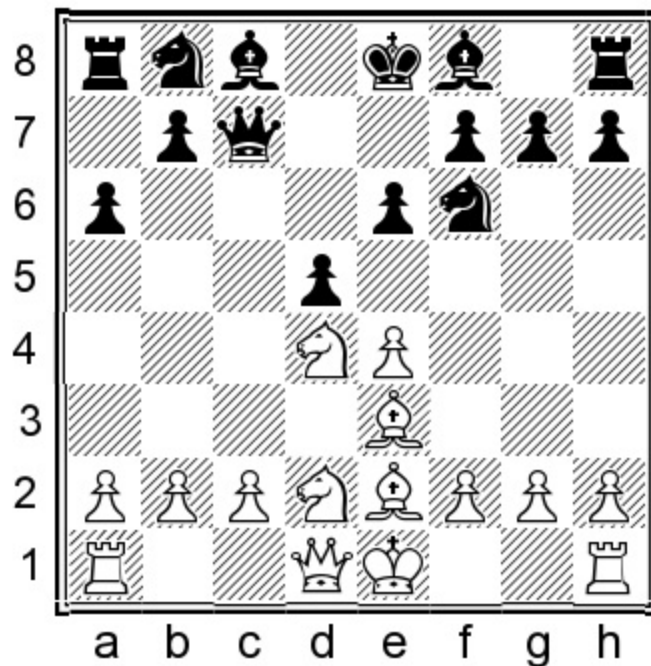
A) 7.c3?! d5! There is no strong way to react for White, his bishop on e3 is too exposed to take on d5. 8.♙d3 ♙d6 9.g3 ♘bd7!



Position after: 9... Nbd7!

Keeping the tension and bringing the knight into play is simple and great. 10.exd5 Nxd5 Black has active pieces and no weakness at all. White does not have the same! 11.Ne4 Nxe3 12.fxe3 Qe7+ James, D (2199) – Plaskett, H (2490) West Bromwich 2004.

B) 7.Qe2?! This move does nothing to prevent 7...d5!.



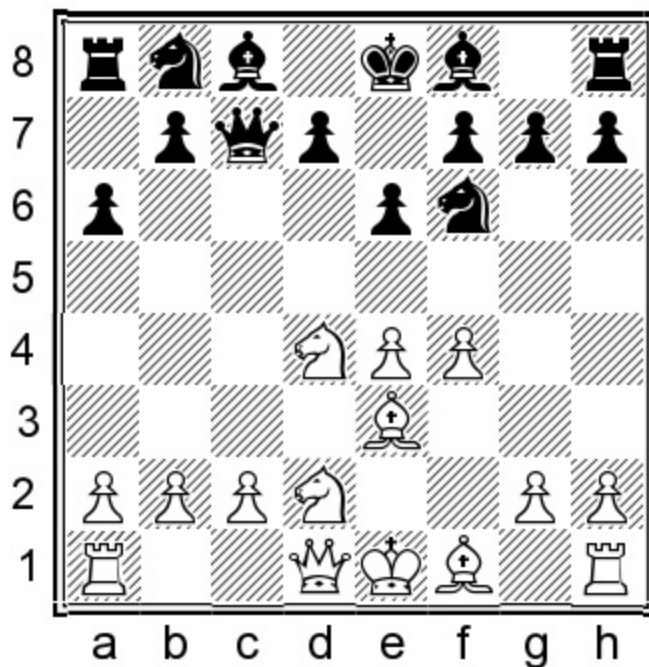
Position after: 7...d5!

B1) 8.exd5?! Nxd5 9.Qg5! The best in a position that is already bad for White. 9...h6 10.Qh4 Nf4!

With this move the knight is remarkably strong. It can either remain here or take the bishop. The fact that White is better developed would be relevant if he had good development. 11.0-0 ♖c5 12.♗4b3 ♕a7 13.♕f3 0-0 14.♕g3 e5

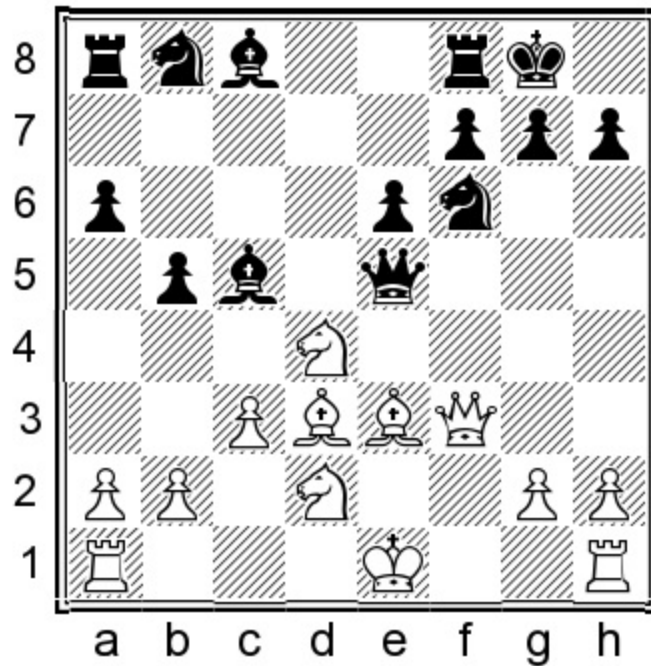
B2) 8.♕f3 e5! 9.♗4b3 d4 10.♕g5 ♕e7 11.0-0 ♗c6 We can only “congratulate” White for the nice development of the bishop on f3.

C) 7.f4



Position after: 7.f4

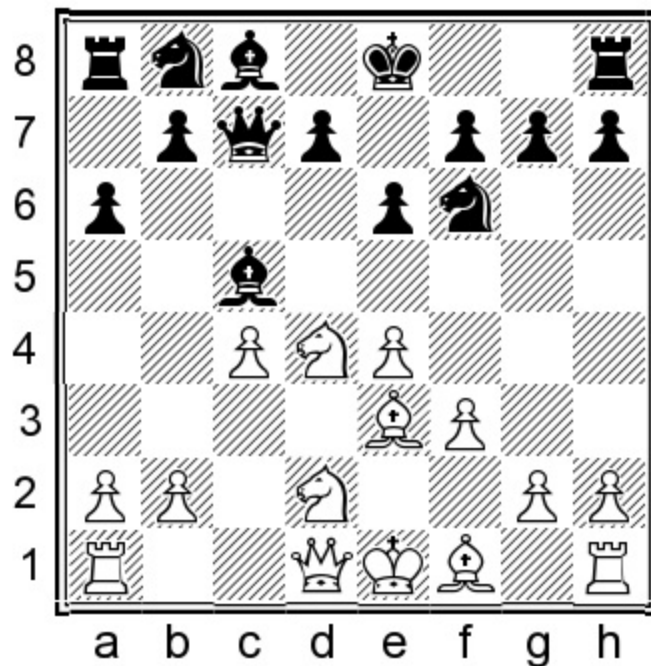
This move prevents ...d5 because White would push e5. However, it weakens the dark diagonal. 7...♕c5 8.c3 d6 9.♖f3 0-0 10.♕d3 And now, to improve the game Benson, C (1924) – Ly, M (2376) Queenstown 2012, there is the strong continuation: 10...b5! 11.e5 [11.0-0 e5! This breaks White’s harmony in the centre. 12.♗f5 ♕xf5 13.exf5 ♕xe3+ 14.♖xe3 ♜e8] 11...dxe5 12.fxe5 [12.♖xa8?? The rook is obviously untouchable. 12...exd4 13.cxd4 ♕b7+] 12...♖xe5



Position after: 12... ♔xe5

Getting rid of the pawn looks strongest. 13. ♖e4 ♘d5 14. ♖c6 ♘xc6 15. ♙xc5 ♜d8 I doubt White has enough for a pawn.

D) 7.c4 ♙c5!? I like this move the most. We try to challenge the knight on d4, which is less defended since White played 6. ♘d2. 8.f3

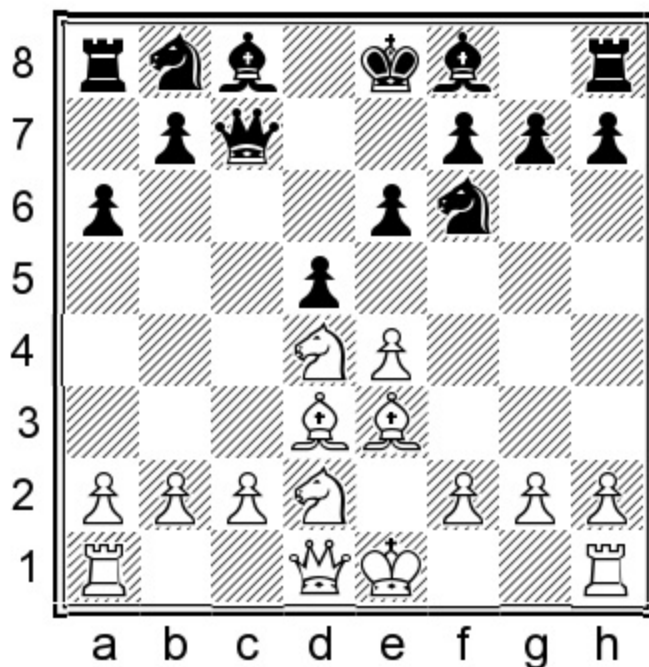


Position after: 8.f3

Eventually this move will be necessary if White wants to be able to move his knight away from d2

with b3 being his most natural square. [8.♙e2 d6 9.0-0 0-0 10.♖c1 White is getting nowhere if he keeps avoiding the move f3. 10...♗c6 11.♘xc6 ♙xe3 12.fxe3 ♚xc6↑] 8...0-0 9.♙e2 b6!? Bringing the bishop to b7 will give Black more possibilities to play for ...d5 at some point. 10.0-0 ♗c6 11.♘2b3 e5 12.♗c2 d6! 13.♘xc5 It is hard to never take on c5 for White. 13...bxc5= Once it is done Black has great control over the d4-square, and he will be able to bring the knight there.

7...d5!

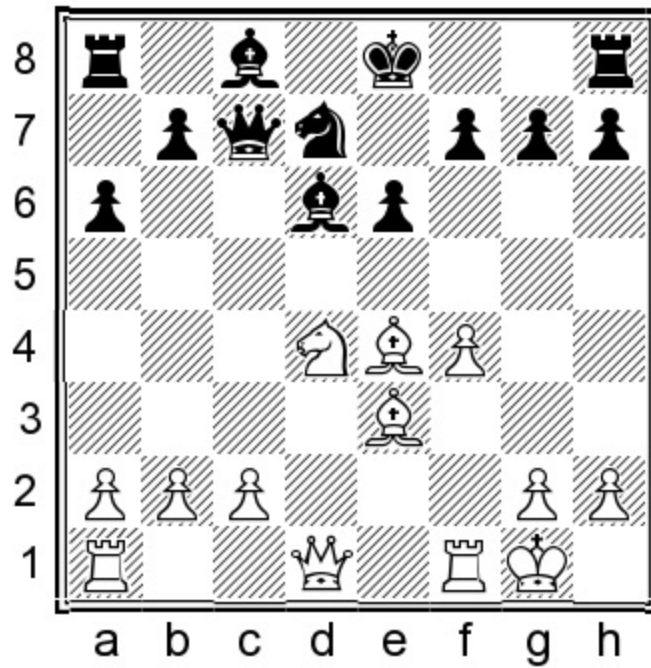


Position after: 7...d5!

8.f4!?

Strangely enough, White is ready to play such a move. Now we need to take on e4 if we want to prevent 9.e5.

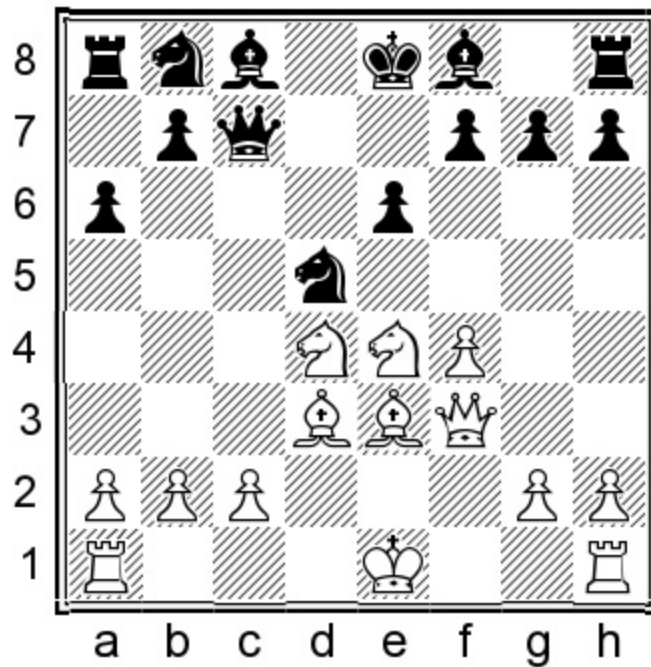
8.0-0 ♙d6 9.f4 [9.h3 ♗bd7↗] 9...dxe4 10.♘xe4 ♗xe4 11.♙xe4 ♗d7! =



Position after: 11... ♞d7!=

Bringing the knight to f6 before castling is safe for Black. It is not clear that White is happy to have played f4 in this middlegame because it is weakening, and not so useful.

8...dxe4 9. ♘xe4 ♞d5 10. ♚f3



Position after: 10. ♚f3

10... ♞d7!

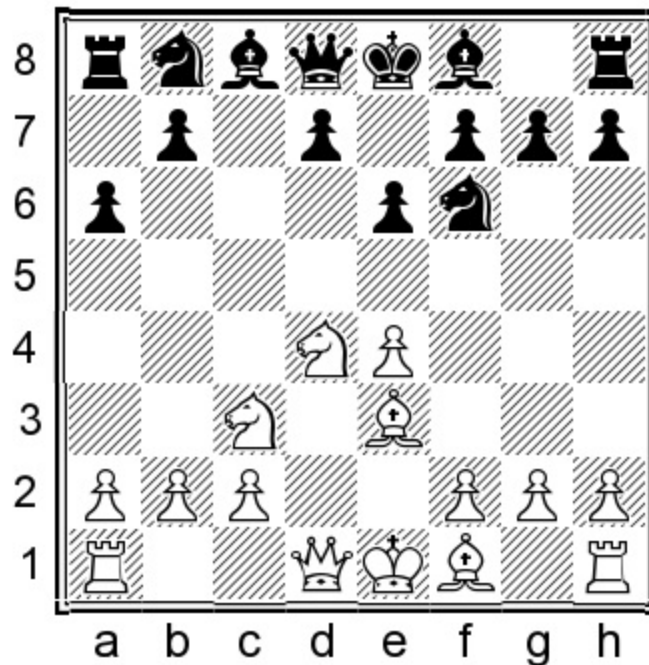
10...♖xe3 11.♔xe3 Black enjoys the advantage of the bishop pair, but it cost him some important moves, and I would say that White's position is interesting. 11...♘c6 12.♗xc6 ♔xc6 13.0-0-0 ♕d7 ↗
 Teske, H (2538) – Drabke, L (2433) Germany 2004.

11.0-0-0 ♗c6↑

Black's threat is to take on d4 and then f4. The position is complicated, but Black looks safe, the knight on d5 is a monster.

c) 6.♗c3

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 a6 5.♕e3 ♗f6 6.♗c3



Position after: 6.♗c3

This is the most natural way for White to defend the e4-pawn even if it is not the most played move.

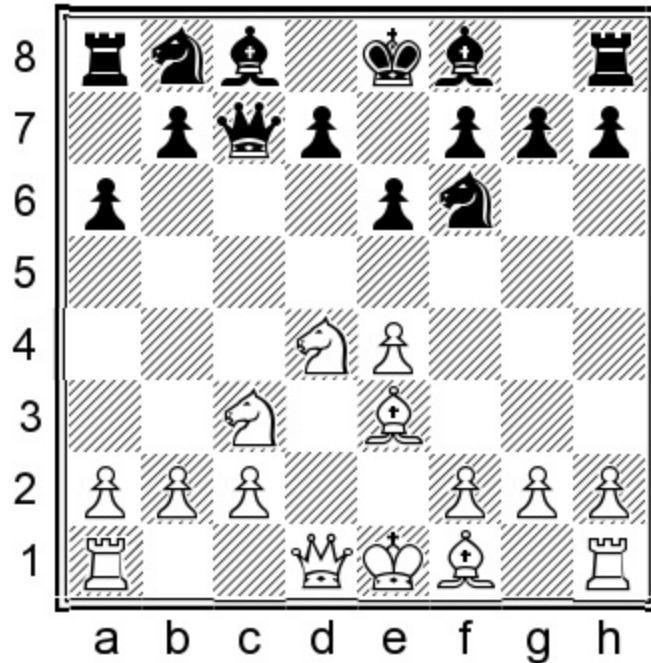
6.♕d3 This will be covered in the next two subchapters.

6...♔c7!?

I have chosen this line because it is very useful to understand the kind of transposition that may arise with other chapters. One of the first ideas of this move is to prevent the move e4-e5 thereby securing the f6-square for our knight. Black usually follows with 7...b5 or 7...♕b4 depending on what White plays.

A) 6...♕b4 This is another line that I could have suggested but there is no transposition with the variations previously covered.

B) 6...b5 This is not good immediately because of: 7.e5!±.



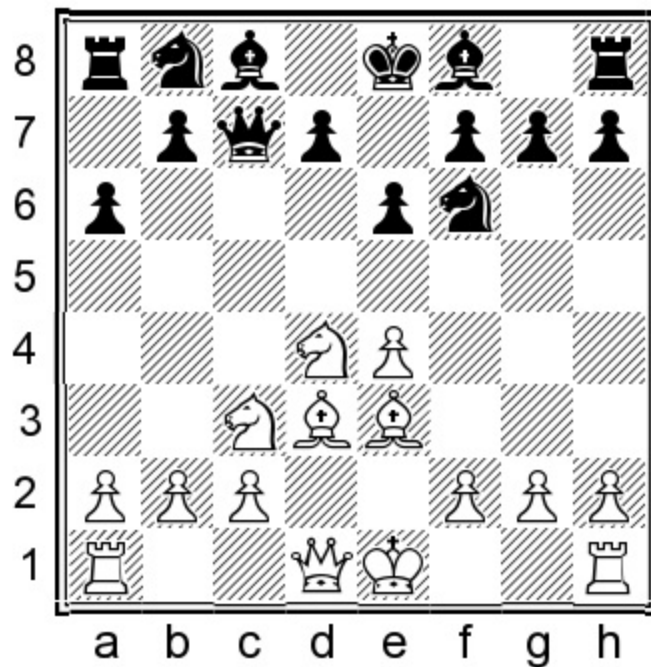
Position after: 6...♔c7!?

7.♙e2

Let us call this the main line. Not because it is the best, but it is one of the only decent moves that we have not already seen elsewhere in this book, especially in the Chapter 3 about 5.♘c3.

A) 7.f3?! ♞b4 8.♚d2 This will be covered in 7.♚d2, which is the next line!

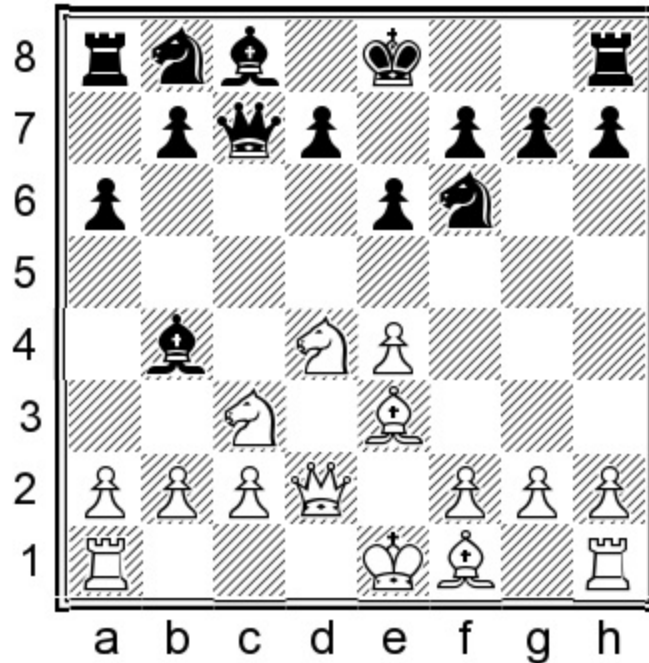
B) 7.♙d3



Position after: 7. ♖d3

This is the most played move, but it has no independent value. 7...b5 8.0-0 This move, as well as 8.f4, are both a transposition into chapter 3 about 5. ♘c3 b5, in the first subchapter with 6. ♙e3. [8.a3 ♙b7 And this one is covered in chapter 3 too, in the subchapter about 6.a3 ♙b7 7. ♙e3.]

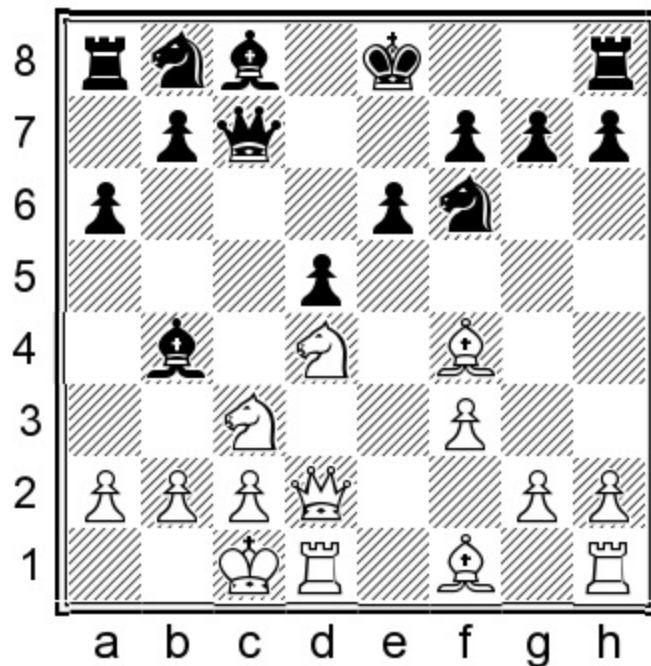
C) 7. ♙d2?! This kind of move is already a big mistake. It does not prevent any of Black's threats ...♙b4 and ...d5 7...♙b4!



Position after: 7... ♙b4!

White has two different ways to protect e4, but none of them is great.

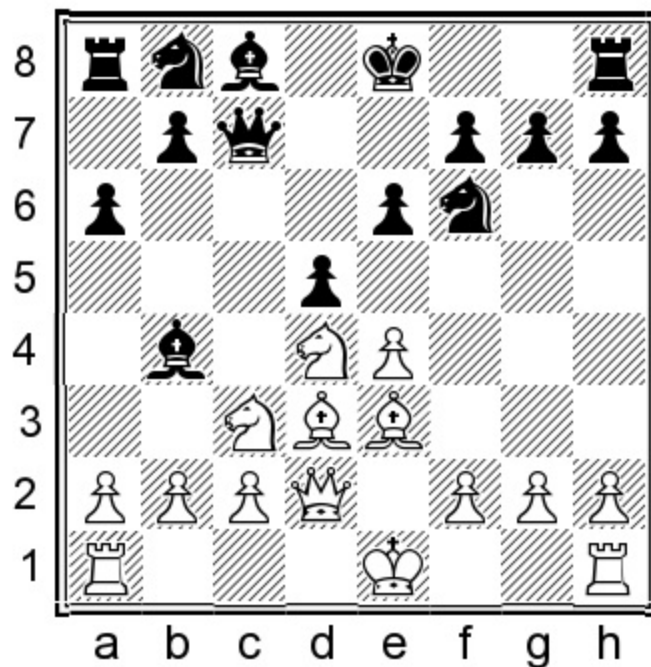
C1) 8.f3?! This is probably even worse for White. 8...d5! It is not necessary to hope for a solution for White, Black is already much better. 9. ♙d3? This is White's main reaction, but it is already losing. [9.exd5 ♘xd5 10.a3 ♙xc3 11.bxc3 0-0♣ Black's position looks good.; 9.e5 ♙xe5 10.0-0-0 ♙c7 11. ♙f4



Position after: 11. ♔f4

11...♙d6!N 12.♙xd6 ♚xd6+; 9.a3 ♙xc3 10.♚xc3 ♚xc3+ 11.bxc3 dxe4+] 9...e5!-+ Black follows with ...d4, just winning a piece.

C2) 8.♙d3 d5!



Position after: 8...d5!

9.exd5 [9.f3? still loses a piece after 9...e5-+ Just like 8.f3?!.] 9...♘xd5 10.♗de2□ 10...♗xe3 11.♚xe3 ♗d7 12.0-0 ♗f6 13.♚g3 White is trying to escape with a draw in the endgame, but he

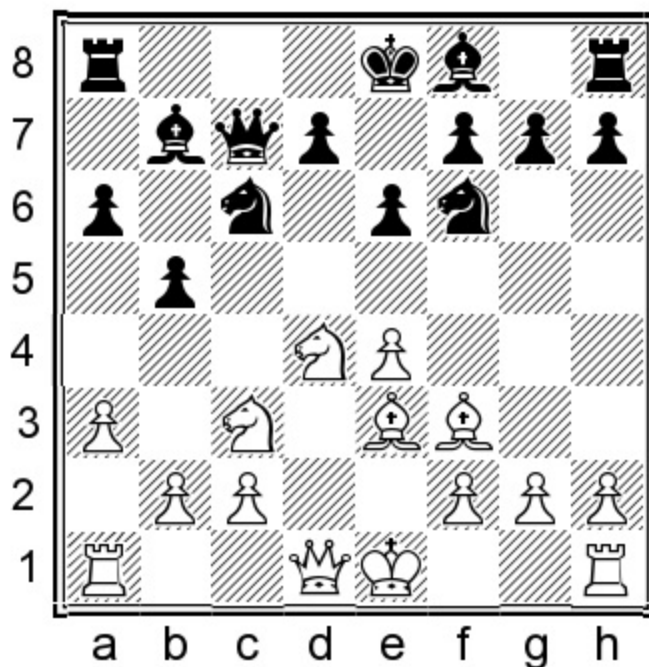
will have to suffer. 13...♙xg3 14.♘xg3 ♕xc3 15.bxc3 ♕d7⚡ In the end, it was not enough for White to hold in Studer, N (2341) – Grigoryan, K (2563) Budva 2013.

D) 7.a3 b5

D1) 8.f3 ♕b7 We have already analysed this position in the first subchapter of chapter 3 dealing with 6.♕e3 in the 7.f3-variation.

D2) 8.♕d3 ♕b7 This is also a transposition into chapter 3, in the subchapter about 6.a3 ♕b7 7.♕e3.

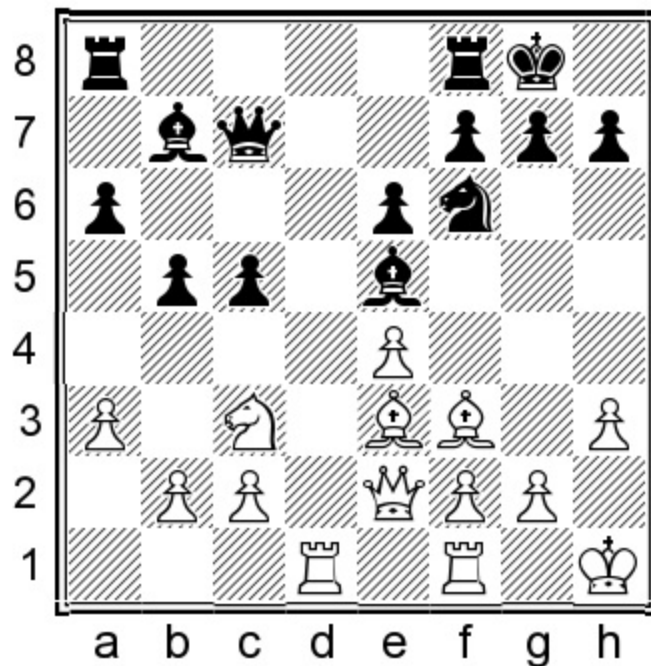
D3) 8.♕e2 ♕b7 9.♕f3?! This quite illogical variation is the only one that has an independent value. 9...♘c6!



Position after: 9...♘c6!

D3.1) 10.0-0 ♘e5 11.♕f4 [11.♖e1 ♕d6 12.h3 0-0⚡ It is like White is unable to move anything!] 11...♕c5 12.♘b3 ♕a7 White's development really makes little sense; Black has a great position in every variation. 13.♕e2 [13.♖e1 d6⚡] 13...0-0 14.♕d3 ♖ac8 15.h3 d6⚡

D3.2) 10.♘xc6 dxc6! 11.0-0 ♕d6 With this awful bishop on f3, White is unable to do anything in the centre. 12.h3 [12.g3 0-0 13.♙e2 c5 14.♖fd1 ♕e5⚡] 12...0-0 13.♙e2 c5 14.♖ad1 ♕h2+ 15.♔h1 ♕e5⚡



Position after: 15...♙e5

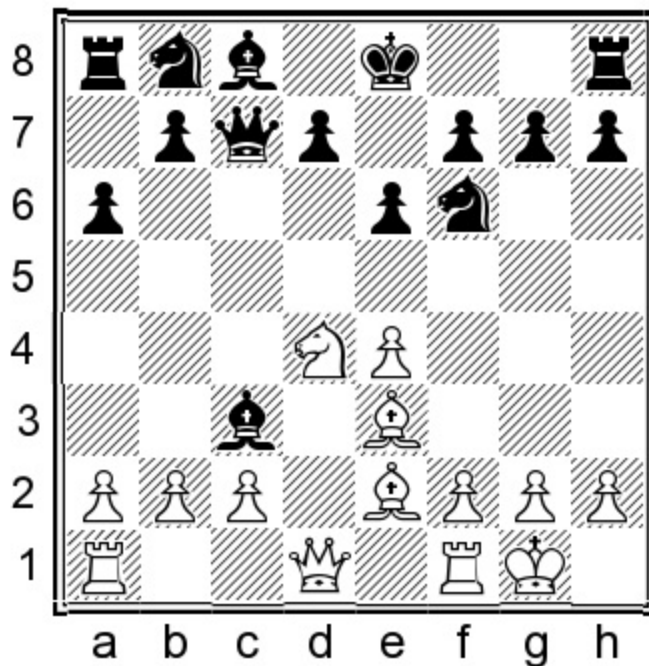
This is so boring to play with White, there is no plan at all except trying to trade some pieces and hope for drawing chances.

7...♙b4 8.0-0!

This is the best for White, but if we compare it to chapter 4 with 5.♙e2 ♘f6 6.♘c3 ♙b4 7.0-0, it looks like a worse version because the bishop is not great on e3. It would probably be more active on g5, or on a3 if Black takes on c3 at some point.

8.♚d3? This has been played in most of the games. But it is just a mistake that we can refute with 8...♘xe4! not a hard tactic 9.♚xe4 ♙xc3+-- White is unable to take back due to the hanging rook on a1, so White is already lost.

8...♙xc3!



Position after: 8...♔xc3!

We can take advantage of the impossibility for White to play ♔a3 at some point placing the bishop on the weak diagonal for Black.

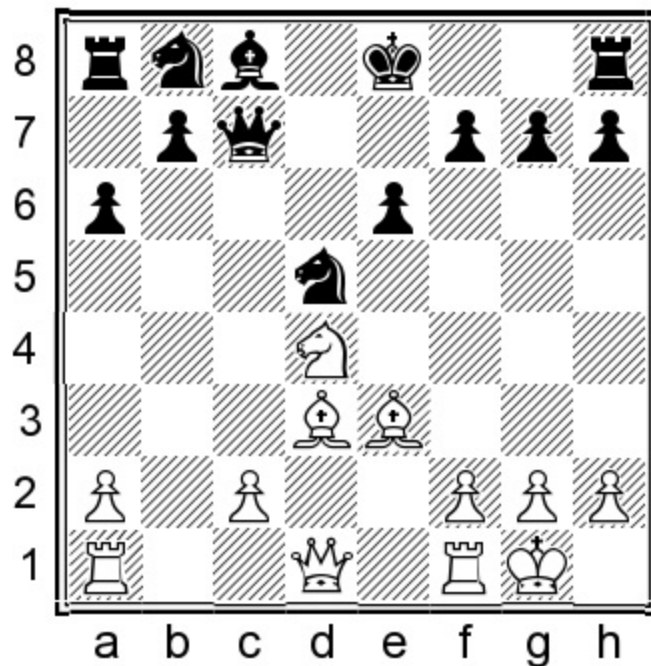
9.bxc3 ♖xe4!?

9...d5!?! This is another less explored option, more based on piece activity.

10.♔d3

10.c4 ♖c3 11.♚d3 ♖xe2+ 12.♗xe2! ♖c6= In might be around equal, but I would choose Black's side for sure.

10...d5 11.c4!?! ♖f6 12.cxd5 ♖xd5=

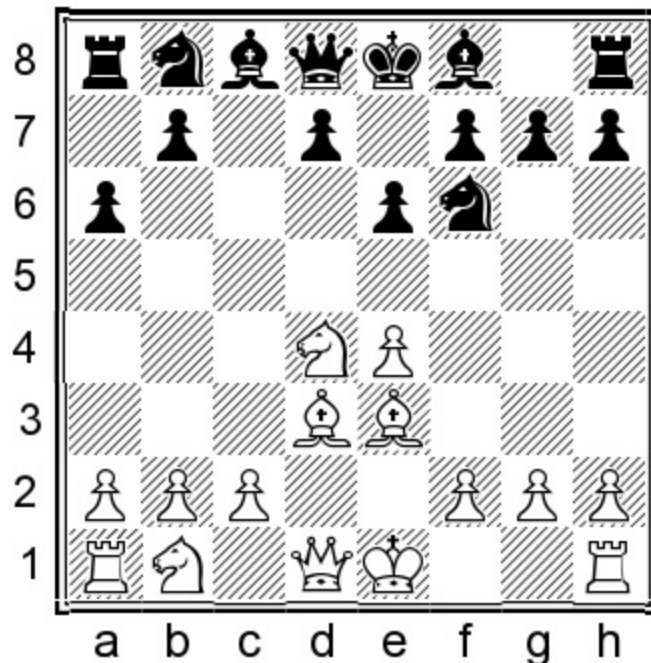


Position after: 12... Nxd5

As shown in the game Zawadzki, S (2428) – Stohl, I (2561) Czech Republic 2004, White has some compensation, but it is not enough for an advantage.

d) 6. Qd3 Kc7 7.--

1.e4 c5 2. Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 a6 5. Qe3 Nf6 6. Qd3



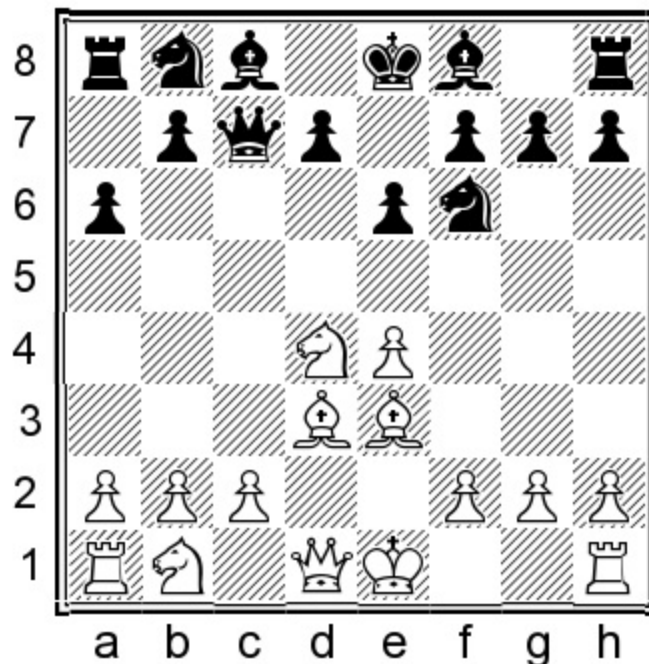
Position after: 6. Qd3

This move does not appear to be as logical as 6.♘c3, but at least there are less possibilities like ...♙b4 for Black. This is probably the reason why it is the main line here. If we compare this position with the one dealing with 5.♙d3 we see that 6...♙c5 is not possible here due to 7.♘xe6.

6...♙c7

This is the main move, and it is in the same spirit as the rest of this chapter. It prevents any e4-e5 ideas and develops the queen on its natural square. In this first subchapter, we will consider every sideline apart from 7.0-0. However, we do need to keep in mind that there might be some transpositions.

6...e5 7.♘b3 d5!/? This is another interesting variation which is less played but appears promising. If you want something less mainstream, then you may want to investigate this idea.



Position after: 6...♙c7

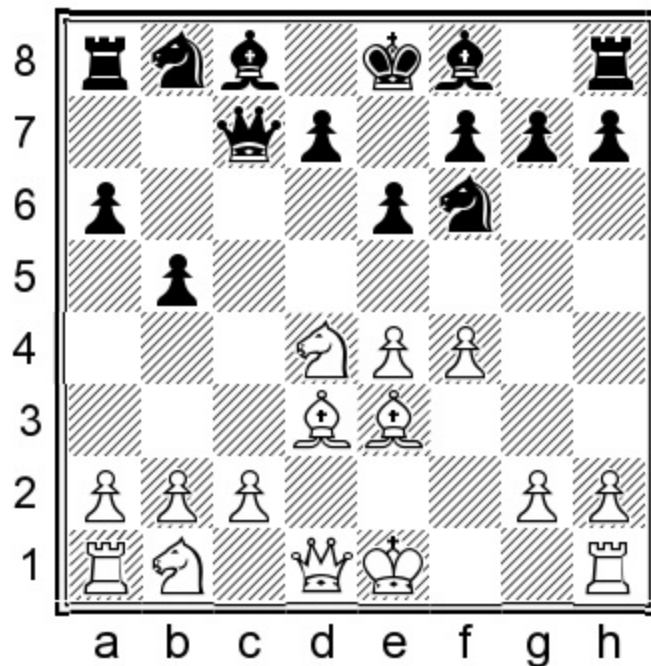
7.♘d2

This is going to be our main line. The knight avoids the c3 square where it can be pinned or chased.

A) 7.0-0 See the next subchapter.

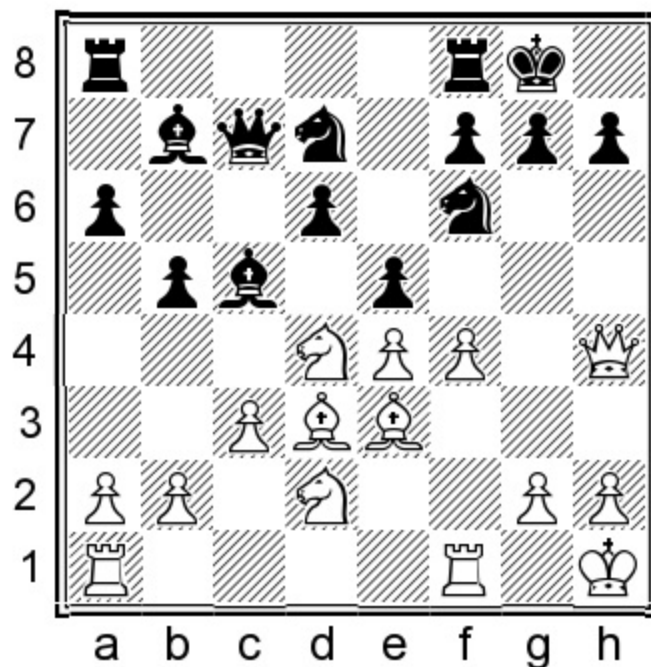
B) 7.♘c3 This move has not been played a lot in this exact position, but we already covered it in the previous subchapter.

C) 7.f4 This is a direct approach, but it does not seem that White is threatening anything as we would easily meet 8.e5 with 8...♘d5. But the idea it probably to meet ...d5 with e5! 7...b5.



Position after: 7...b5

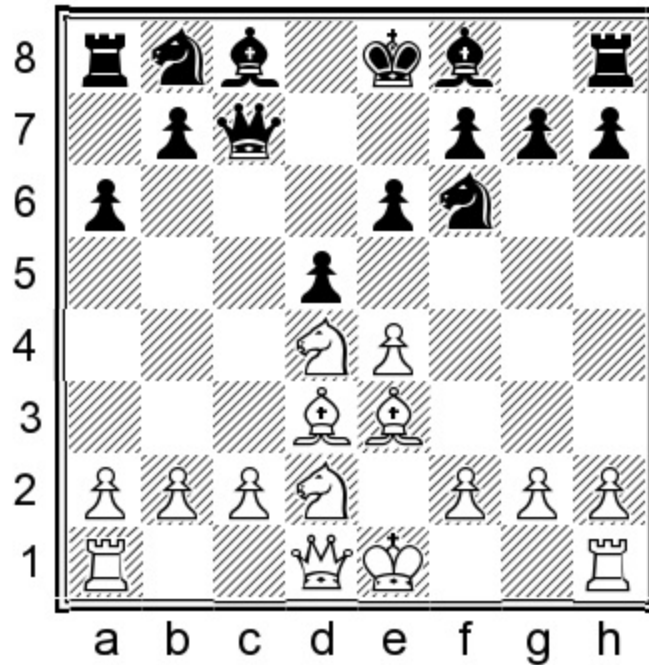
This is what seems the most logical to me. White has weakened the e4 square with his last move, so we want the bishop on the long diagonal. 8.0-0 ♖b7 9.♘d2 ♙c5 10.♙h1 [10.c3 0-0 11.♙h1 See the main line.] 10...d6 11.c3 [11.♙e1 ♘bd7 12.♙h4 0-0 13.♙f3 In this case we can also find a way to play for ...e5. 13...♙b6! 14.c3 e5 15.♘f5 ♙xe3 16.♙xe3 exf4 17.♙xf4 ♘e5 The knight has a dominant square here and it can also come back to defend. 18.♙g5 ♘g6] 11...♘bd7 12.♙e1 There have not been any games from this position so a possible continuation might be the following. 12...0-0 13.♙h4 e5!



Position after: 13...e5!

This might appear frightening as it leaves the f5 square to the white knight, but it stops any e4-e5 ideas and may be a way for us to eventually get the e5 square for a knight. 14.♘f5 ♙xe3 15.♘xe3 ♜ae8 16.♘f5 [16.f5?! The knight wanted this square and now we can react in the centre. 16...d5] 16...g6 17.fxe5 dxe5 and now it seems that White should be the one to try to force a draw with 18.♘h6+ ♔g7 19.♞xf6 ♘xf6 20.♘f5+ gxf5 21.♞g5+ ♔h8 22.♞xf6+ ♔g8 23.♞g5+ ♔h8=. White has no other choice but to take the draw.

7...d5!?



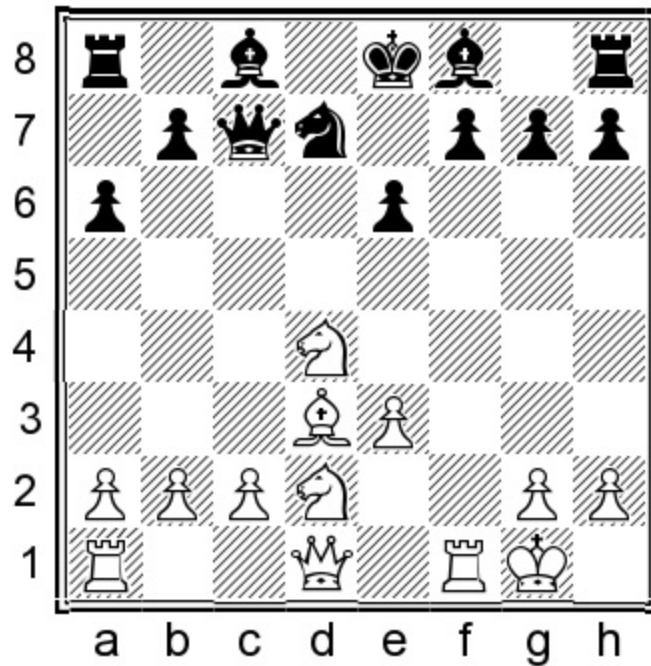
Position after: 7...d5!?

In the same spirit as the next subchapter, we can immediately react in the centre.

8.f4

A) 8.0-0 This will be covered in the next subchapter with 8.♘d2.

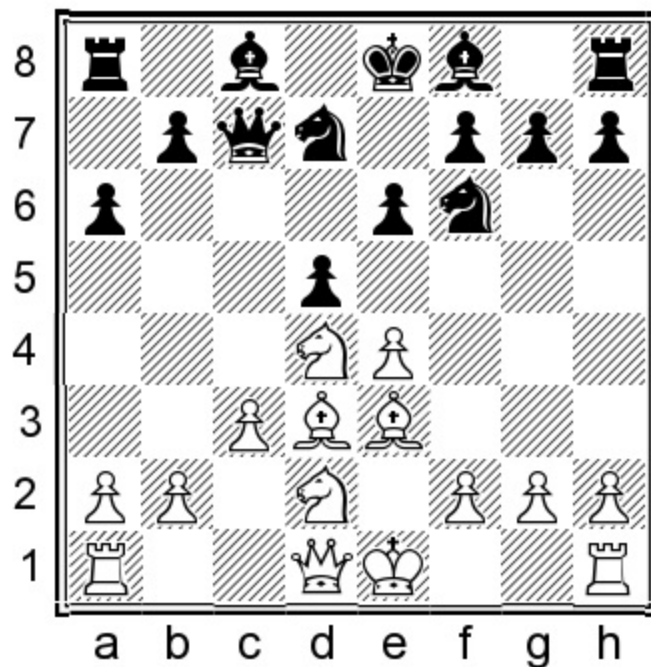
B) 8.exd5?! ♘xd5 Looks good for Black with the possibility of taking on e3 whenever we want. 9.0-0 ♘xe3 10.fxe3 ♘d7!N



Position after: 10... Nxd7!

A really precise move giving us the possibility of bringing the knight to d6 for defense or to the strong e5 square. [10... Qd6?! This gives White an annoying possibility. 11. Qh5 g6 12. Qh6∞] 11. Ne4 [11. Qf3 Nf6! 12. Ne4 Nxe4 13. Qxe4 Qd6 14. h3 0-0+] 11... Ne5! 12. Qh5 Qe7 13. Rad1 Qd7 There is no rush at all, we can just develop the remaining pieces. [13... 0-0?? Of course, you cannot go for this blunder. 14. Nf6+ Qxf6 15. Qxh7#] 14. Ng5 Qxg5 15. Qxg5 0-0+ White's activity is just visual. Black has the better pawn structure which should prevail to get an advantage.

C) 8.c3?! Nbd7!



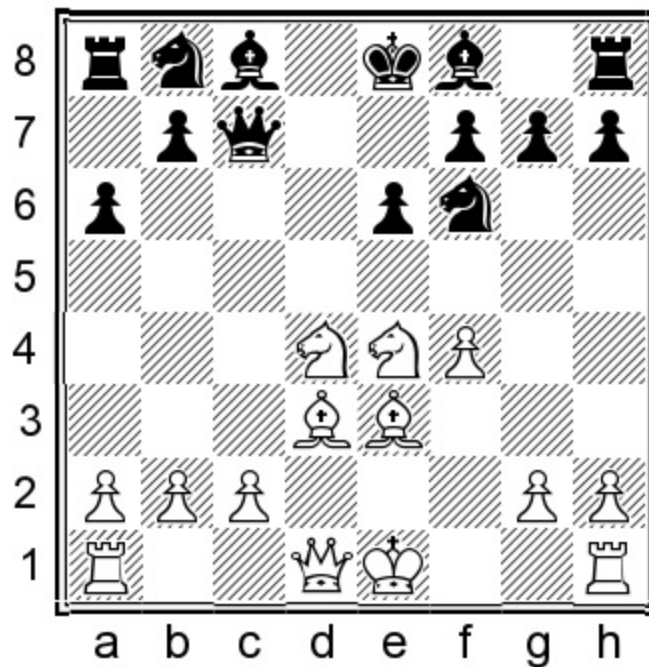
Position after: 8...♖bd7!

Black has time for this move. 9.♙c2 [9.0-0?! White seems well developed, but he cannot really do much in the centre, we are totally in control. Let us make some threats: 9...♗c5 10.♚c2 ♗g4! 11.♗2f3 ♗xe3 12.fxe3 dxe4 13.♙xe4 g6.] 9...b5! Finishing our development in the most active way, we are ready to attack on e4. 10.0-0 ♙b7 11.exd5 ♗xd5 12.♗e4 ♙e7 It is impossible not to like Black, just look at that healthy development!

8...dxe4!

We should take, otherwise White closes the centre with 9.e5, and he already has full control over the important d4 square.

9.♗xe4



Position after: 9.♗xe4

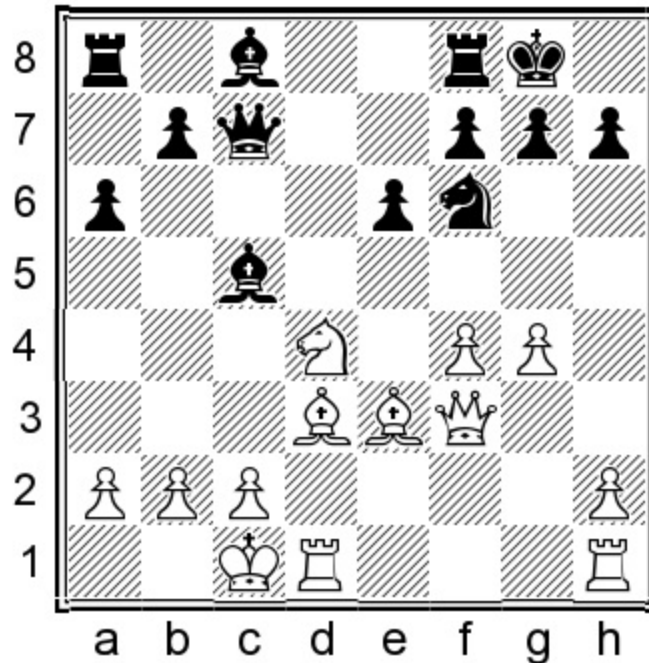
9...♗bd7

9...♗d5 I am not fond of this move, I feel it is too slow, we are clearly under-developed. 10.♚f3 ♗xe3 11.♚xe3 ♗c6 12.♗xc6 ♚xc6 13.0-0-0 ♙d7 Teske, H (2538) – Drabke, L (2433) Germany 2004.

10.♚f3 ♙e7 11.0-0-0

This is the way for White to get a double-edged position.

11...0-0 12.g4 ♖xe4 13.♙xe4 ♗f6 14.♚f3 ♘c5⇝

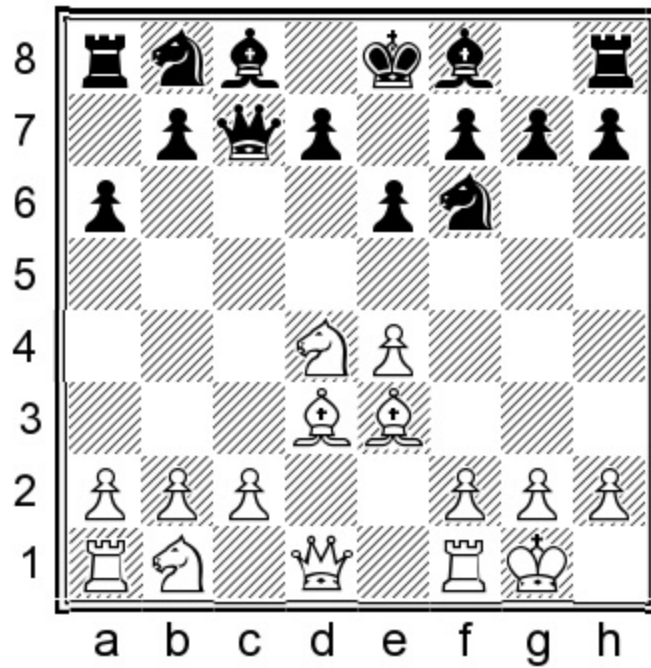


Position after: 14...♘c5⇝

I would say that the chances are approximately equal. White looks ready to advance his attack, but it is rather difficult to create anything with his pawns, and our counterplay in the centre is quick. We will probably continue with ...♗d5 and ...♞d8, with a complicated position.

e) 6.♘d3 ♚c7 7.0-0

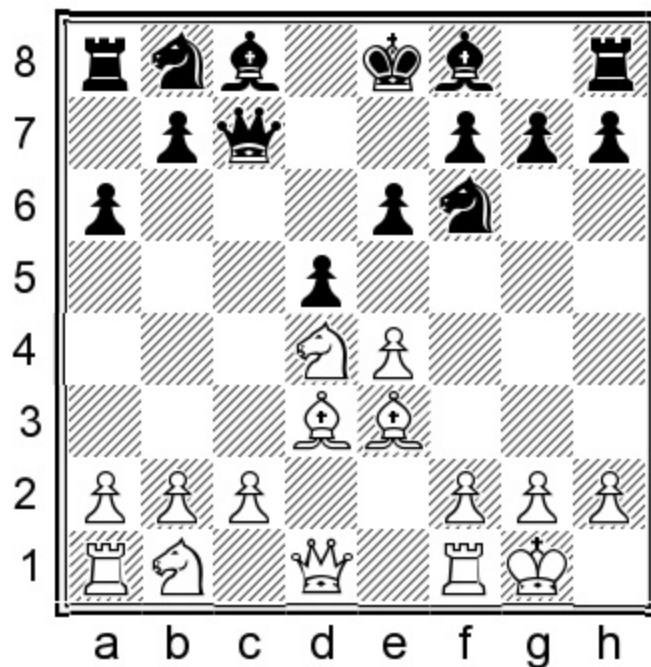
1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 a6 5.♘e3 ♗f6 6.♘d3 ♚c7 7.0-0



Position after: 7.0-0

This is by far the main move, and it is logical as White is waiting for us to show our cards before committing with either ♞c3 , ♞d2 , f4 and even c4 . It does make a difference, in these variations if the king is already safely placed. That is why I believe we should make the first committal decision.

7...d5!



Position after: 7...d5!

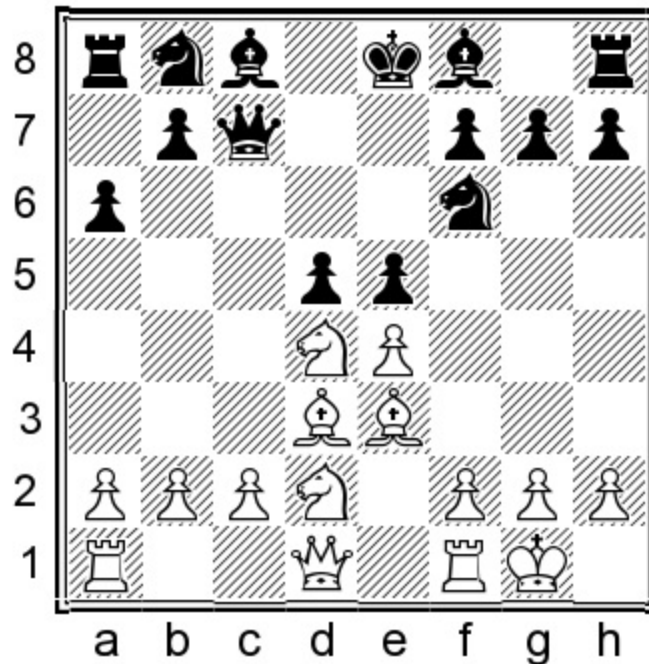
Just like we did against 7.♘d2 we immediately react in the centre. If White takes then we take back and attack the bishop on e3.

White has 3 options.

8.♘c3!

I believe this is the only dangerous attempt, and it was played by the strongest players that reached this position.

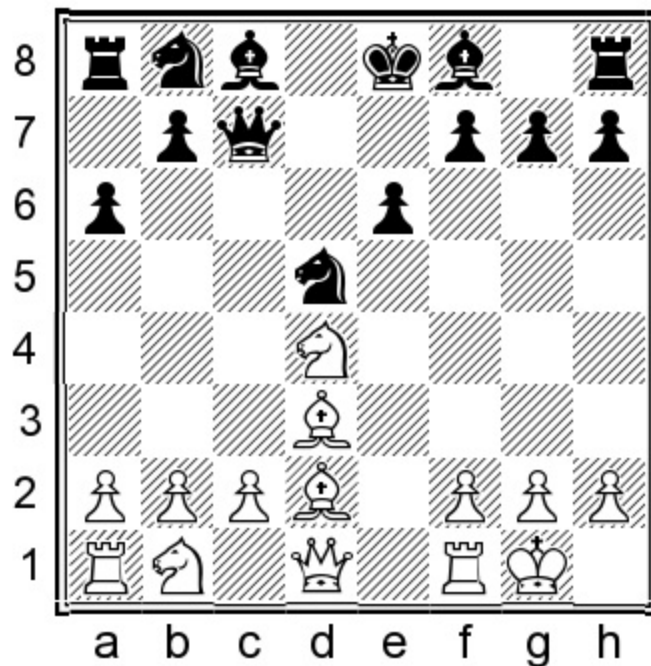
A) ≤ 8.♘d2 This is weaker than 8.♘c3. 8...e5!



Position after: 8...e5!

Instead of transposing, this is also an interesting possibility. [8...dxe4!? If you want, you can also get back to the main line like this. 9.♘xe4 And you can review the variation 8.♘c3 dxe4.] 9.♘4b3 [9.♘e2 ♕e6 10.exd5 ♖xd5 11.♘c3! A computer-move, but it clearly shows White's problems. 11...♘xe3 12.fxe3 ♗d7=] 9...♕e6! 10.♕g5 ♗bd7 11.♖e1 ♕e7= White cannot really do much in the centre, we are fine with him taking on d5, and it is an unpleasant situation for White.

B) 8.exd5?! ♗xd5 9.♕d2



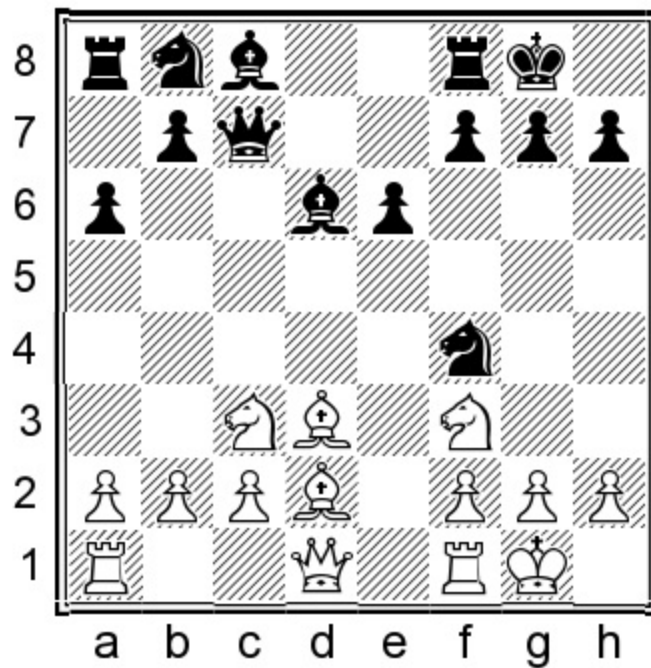
Position after: 9. ♔d2

This is the most logical for White, but it is really slow. We can easily continue our development.
9... ♙d6

B1) 10. h3 0-0 11. ♘c3 ♘f4! Again, this idea is strong. 12. ♙e3 ♜d8

B2) 10. g3 It is not great for the king, but at least it prevents the idea of ... ♘f4 when Black often obtains the bishop pair. 10... 0-0 11. ♘c3 ♘xc3 12. ♙xc3 ♘d7 13. ♚h5 h6! If Black is careful, he will not be in danger on the kingside. we do not want to play 13... ♘f6 here as it is stronger to place the knight on c5. 14. ♜fe1 ♘c5 15. ♙f1 b5 16. ♙g2 ♙b7 17. ♙xb7 ♚xb7=

B3) 10. ♘f3 0-0 11. ♘c3 ♘f4!



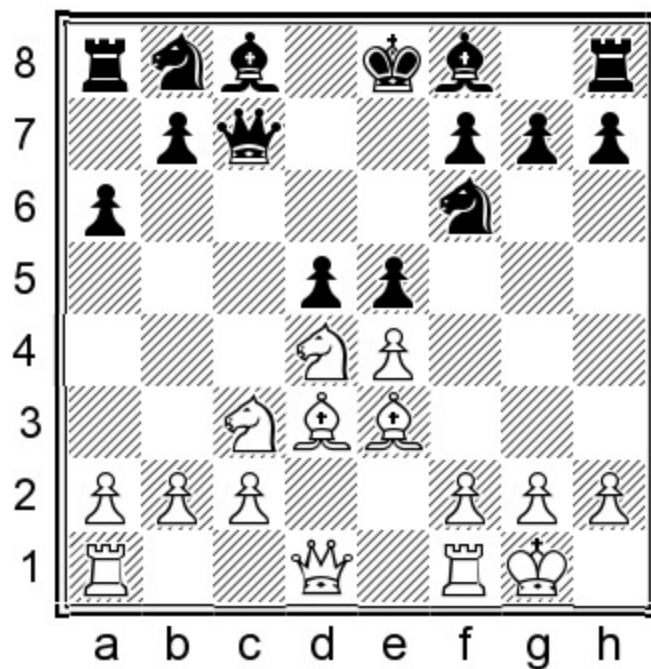
Position after: 11... Nf4!

12. Qxf4 Qxf4 13. Ke2 Nd7 14. Rad1 Nc5 Black has the bishops and the easier position as in Setkauskas, V (2216) – Burstein, R (2308) Vilnius 2013.

8...dxe4!

This is the only good reaction for Black.

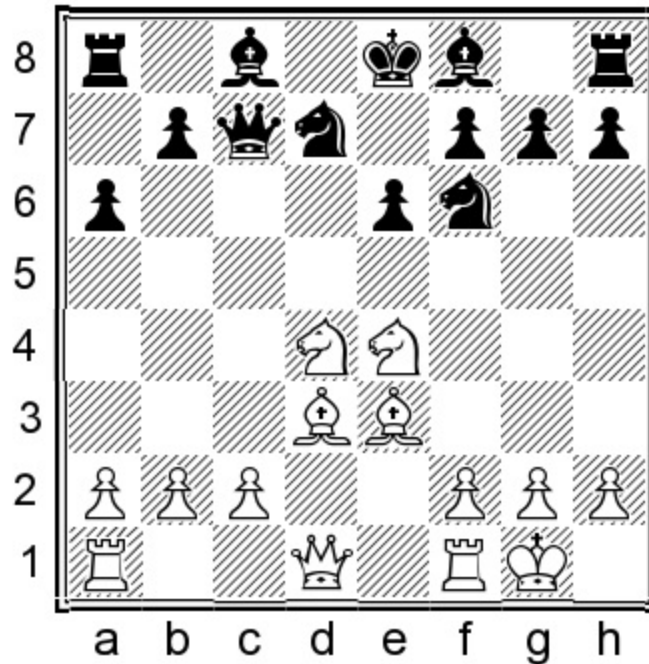
8...e5?



Position after: 8...e5?

Black can be tempted by this move (as against 8.♘d2), as it seems to win a piece. A few players followed the temptation but White has a strong idea in response. 9.♘xd5! ♖xd5 10.exd5 exd4 11.♙xd4 White has two pawns for the piece but also two amazing bishops, and it is not clear that we can find a safe place our king. 11...♙e7 12.♙xg7 ♜g8 13.♙d4 ♙h3 14.♙e4± Black gets a bit of activity, but it is now 3 pawns and obvious compensation for the piece.

9.♘xe4 ♖bd7



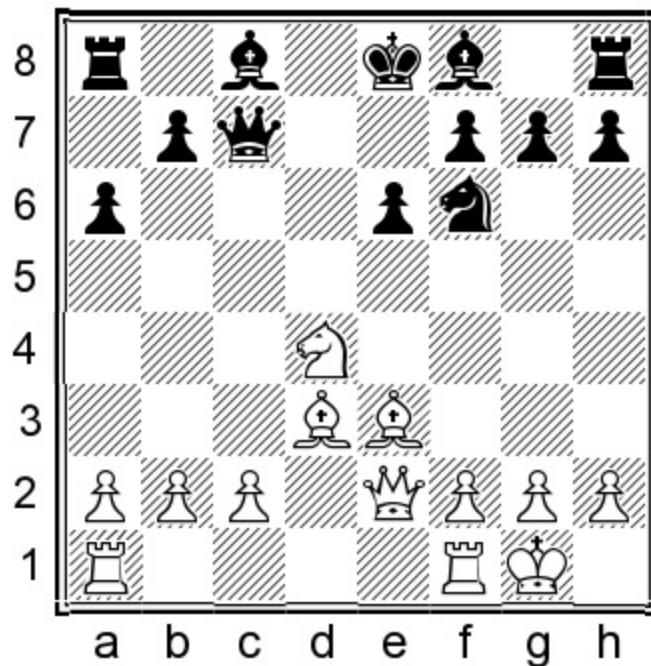
Position after: 9...♖bd7

Once again, White is clearly better developed than we are. But as we have already seen several times the fact that we managed to trade the e4 pawn enables us to have a safe position, and a good pawn structure. We should be careful, but we are able to level the game if we can finish our development safely.

10.♘xf6+

Most of the players chose this continuation and White's results were decent.

10.♙e2 ♖xe4 11.♙xe4 ♖f6 12.♙d3



Position after: 12. ♔d3

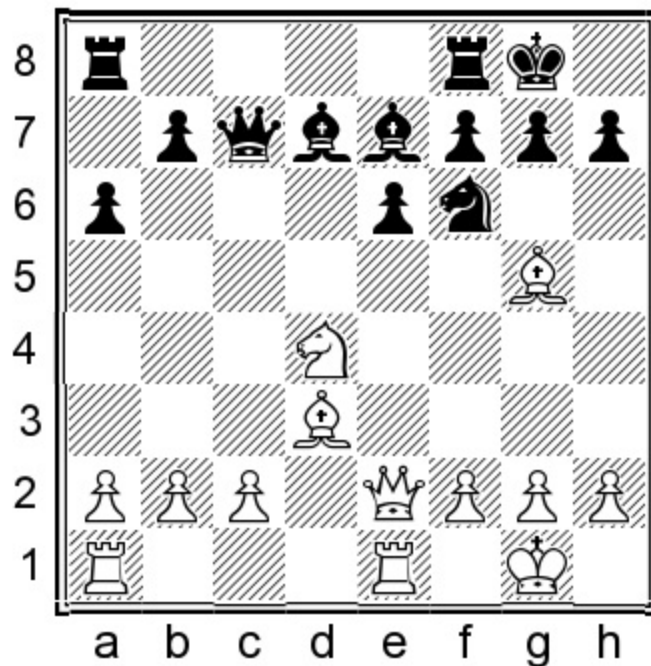
This is the same as if White goes 11. ♕e2 in the main line and it is nothing special. 12... ♔d6 13. h3 ♘d5↑

10... ♘xf6

The position is clearly fine for Black, and there are several possibilities for both sides to enter equal middlegames. For example:

11. ♘f3

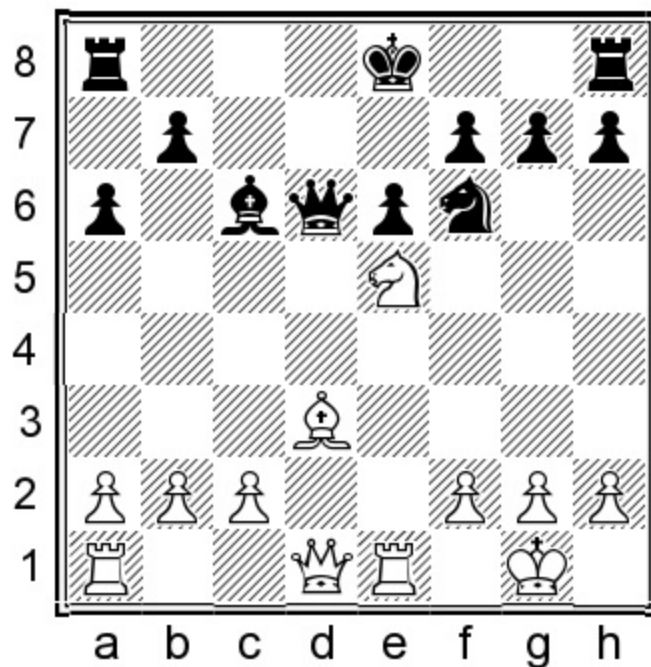
11. ♔g5 ♔e7 12. ♖e1 0-0 13. ♕e2 ♔d7



Position after: 13...♙d7

Black has the time he wants to develop his last pieces. 14.c3 ♜fe8 15.♘f3 h6 16.♙h4 ♘h5 17.♙xe7
 Stripunsky, A (2495) – Kharitonov, A (2550) Kazan 1995.

11...♙d7 12.♙d4 ♙c5 13.♙e5 ♙d6 14.♜e1 ♙c6 15.♙xd6 ♜xd6 16.♘e5



Position after: 16.♘e5

Here at least White manages to get a bishop against a knight in an open position.

16...♖d8 17.♗e2 ♗d5 18.♘xc6 ♗xc6=

Black is well centralized, and he also has an extra pawn in the centre. White cannot claim any edge here. The game we have followed ended up drawn. Nguyen, A (2537) – Wang, L (2306) Singapore 2007.

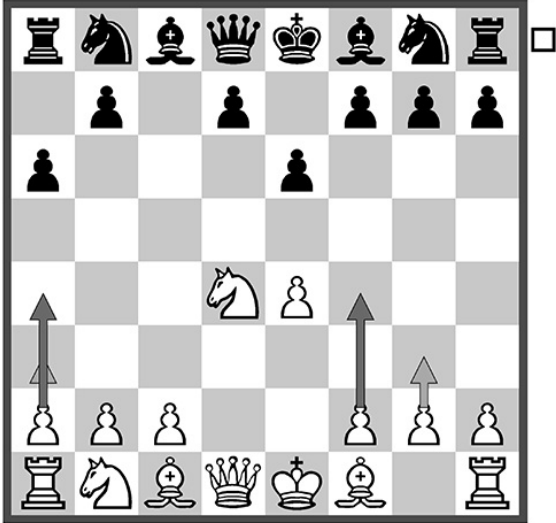
Chapter Conclusion

The line with 5.♗e3 is a bit odd at first sight but White at least keeps some flexibility. Objectively the line is fine for White, do not underestimate it!

Chapter 6

Various 5th moves

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.--



Chapter Guide

Chapter 6 – Various 5th moves

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6

a) Odds and Others

b) 5.a4

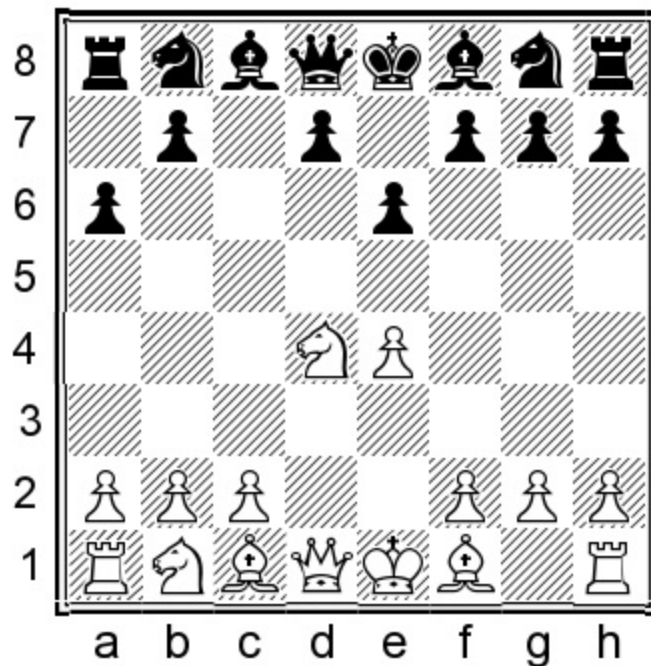
c) 5.a3!?

d) 5.g3 d5 6.--

e) 5.g3 d5 6.e5

a) Odds and Others

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6



Position after: 4...a6

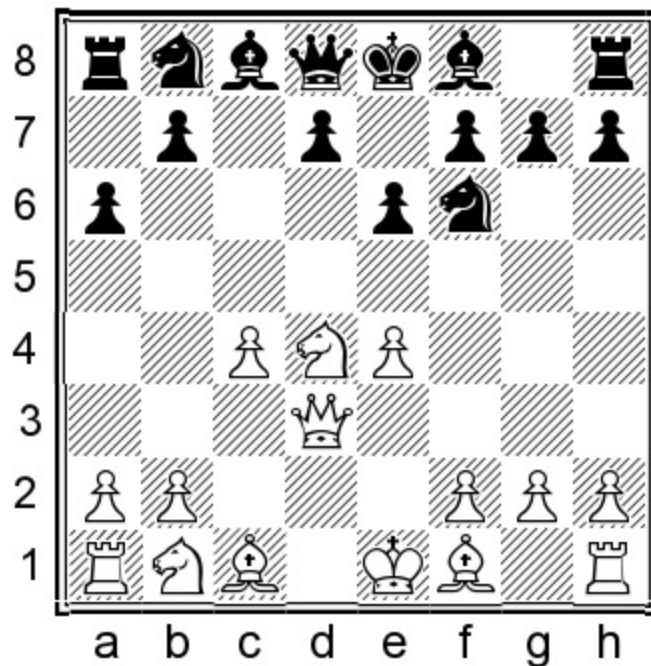
In this chapter we will deal with several of White's sidelines starting as early as move 5. As these are often moves that we considered later in other variations, it may contain some transpositions, and of course I will tell you in which subchapter it transposes. We will not look at every move but at those which I found interesting or that were played by strong players. In this first subchapter we will look at minor sidelines.

5.f4

It looks a bit strange to play this move this early, but it is not necessarily a mistake.

A) 5.g3 This move, as well as 5.a4 and 5.a3, will be considered in the next subchapters.

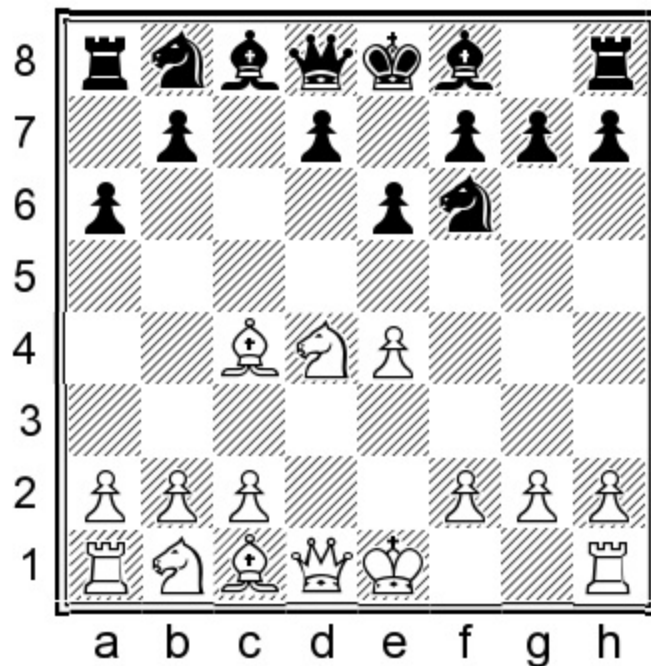
B) 5.♔d3 This has only been played in a dozen of games and by quite strong players. But it does not have any great independent value. 5...♘f6 6.c4



Position after: 6.c4

A few players tried this move, but we cannot say it is great. It could also happen from 5.c4 ♖f6 6.♕d3, as we did not consider this line at that time, we will do it here. [6.♙e2 Transposing into chapter 4 about 5.♙e2 ♖f6 6.♕d3, which is analysed in the second subchapter.] 6...d5!? by now I think you have noticed that I like to act in the centre whenever it is allowed because White did something strange. [6...♙b4+!? Is playable as well but I doubt White has anything stronger than 7.♖c3, and it transposes into chapter 2 with 7.♕d3, which is the main line nowadays.] 7.cxd5 exd5 8.exd5 ♖xd5 9.♙e2 ♙e7 10.0-0 0-0= Of course there is no problem at all for Black in this symmetrical position.

C) 5.♙c4?! I am not sure an analysis of this move is needed. It has been played quite a lot, but it makes little sense to me to place the bishop here helping Black play ...b5 at some point. 5...♖f6!



Position after: 5... Nf6!

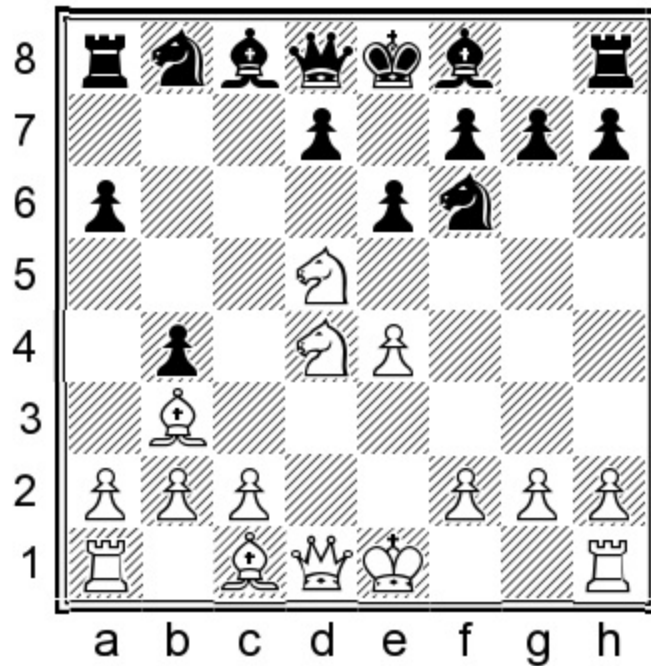
First, let us see how White defends his e-pawn.

C1) 6.e5? Is simply a familiar blunder. 6... Qa5+! 7.Nc3 Qxe5+-+

C2) 6.f3?! d5! Of course, against such a weakening move, we open the position. 7.exd5 b5! 8.Qb3 Nxd5 9.0-0 Qb7= The pawn on f3 created a weakness and is also a loss of time.

C3) 6.Nc3 b5 7.Qb3 The only logical way to continue. [7.Qd3 Qc7 Compared to various lines we analysed in 5.Nc3, Black is just a tempo up, and he can easily claim a good position.] 7...b4!

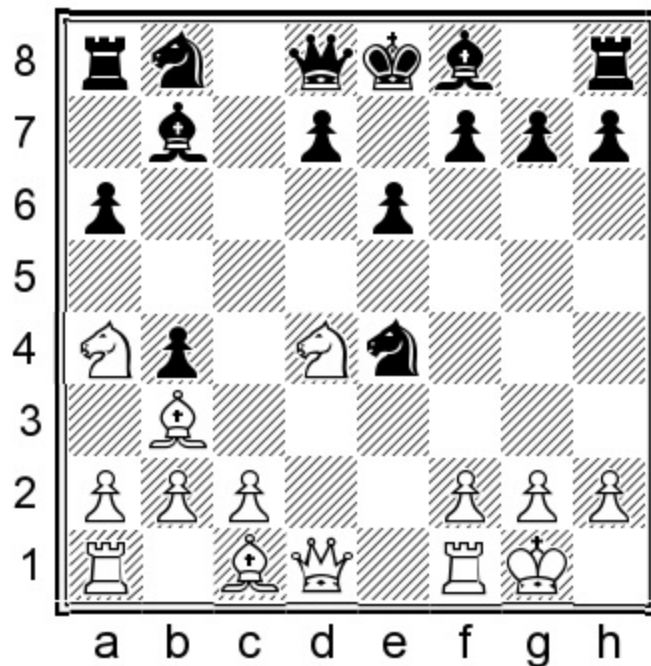
C3.1) 8.Nd5!N



Position after: 8...Nxd5!N

Nobody found this sacrifice, which is the best attempt according to the computer. 8...♙c5!
 [8...exd5?! 9.e5! ♞g8 10.♙xd5] 9.0-0 0-0 10.♞xf6+ ♚xf6 11.c3 ♙b7↑ And even with the best
 play, Black is more than fine.

C3.2) 8.♞a4? ♞xe4 9.0-0 ♙b7!N

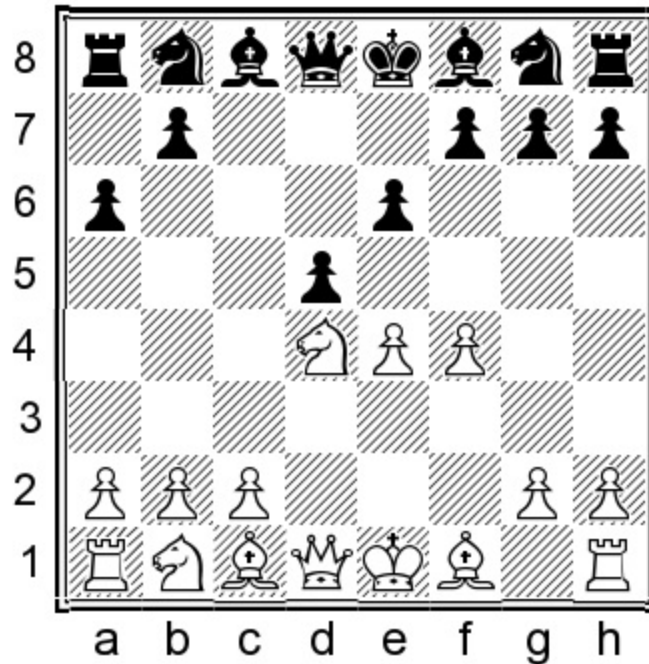


Position after: 9...♙b7!N

10.♙e3 ♙e7+ White has no compensation for the pawn.

C3.3) 8.e5?! bxc3 9.exf6 ♖xf6 10.bxc3 ♙b7 11.0-0 ♗g6 12.f3 ♕c5⚡ And it is clear that Black has the better position.

5...d5!?



Position after: 5...d5!?

In most of the cases in this book I refused to play ...d5 when f4 was already played. The reason is positional. When e5 is possible against ...d5, White transposes into somewhat of an advanced French Defence where White has control of the d4 square. But here, we can be active and play against this.

6.e5

Almost everybody played this logical move.

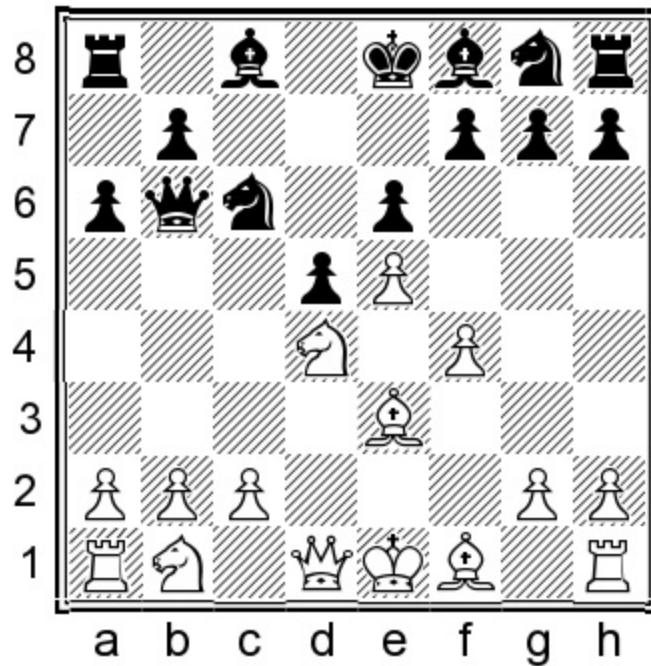
6.♘c3 dxe4 7.♘xe4 ♘d7= This is the kind of position where the pawn on f4 would like to come back to f2. Black follows with ...♘gf6.

6...♘c6!

We will immediately challenge the knight on d4.

7.c3

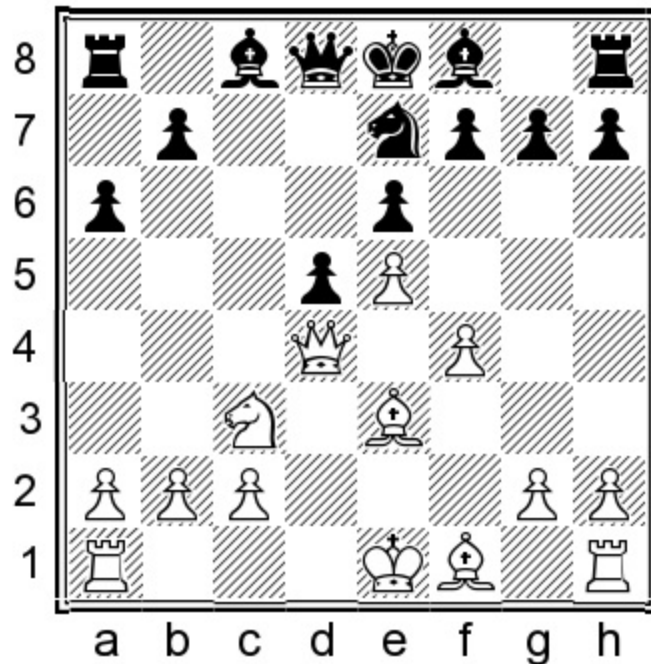
A) 7.♙e3? This logical move is quite a serious mistake because of 7...♗b6!N



Position after: 7... ♕b6!N

8.b3 ♖c5 9.c3 ♗ge7+ White is in trouble as finishing his development will give him headaches.

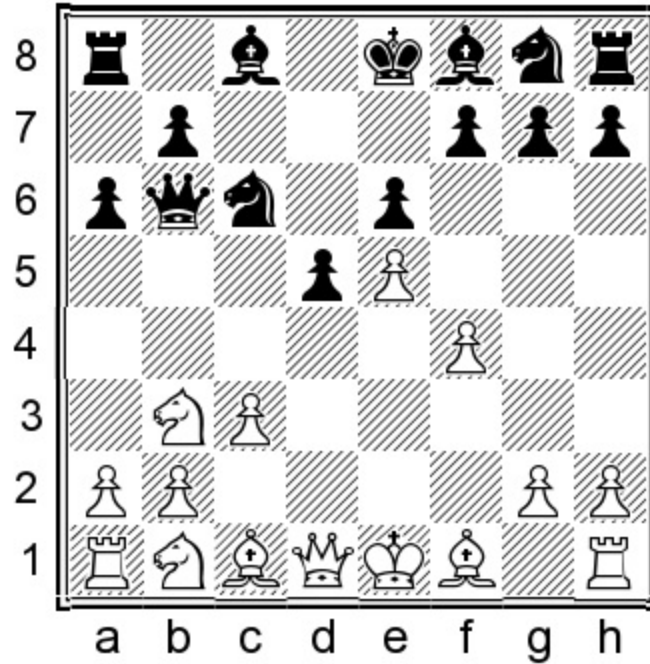
B) 7.♗c3 Normally, White prefers to hold the d4-square, so this move does not really enter this plan. But it does not mean it is a bad move. 7...♗ge7!? 8.♖e3 ♗xd4 9.♖xd4 [9.♕xd4??



Position after: 9. ♖xd4??

9...♗f5 10.♕d2 ♗xe3 11.♕xe3 d4+] 9...♗c6 10.♖f2 ♖d7 11.♕d2 ♕a5⇒ Black has good prospects on the queenside.

7...♚b6 8.♞b3



Position after: 8.♞b3

If White does not want to transpose into positions like 7.♞e3, he should move the knight immediately.

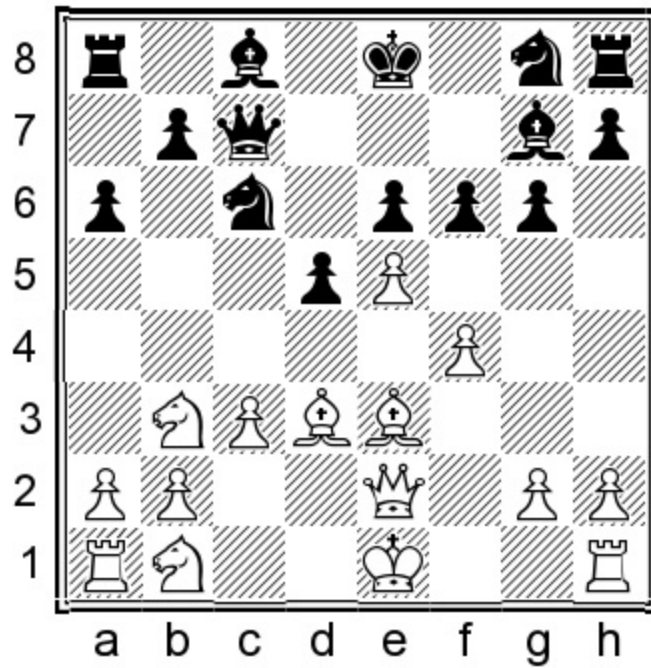
8...f6! 9.♞d3

9.exf6 ♞xf6 10.♞d3 ♞d6—+ White is unable to complete his development.

9...g6

9...fxe5? 10.♚h5±± This is a nasty intermediate move.

10.♚e2 ♞g7 11.♞e3 ♚c7↑

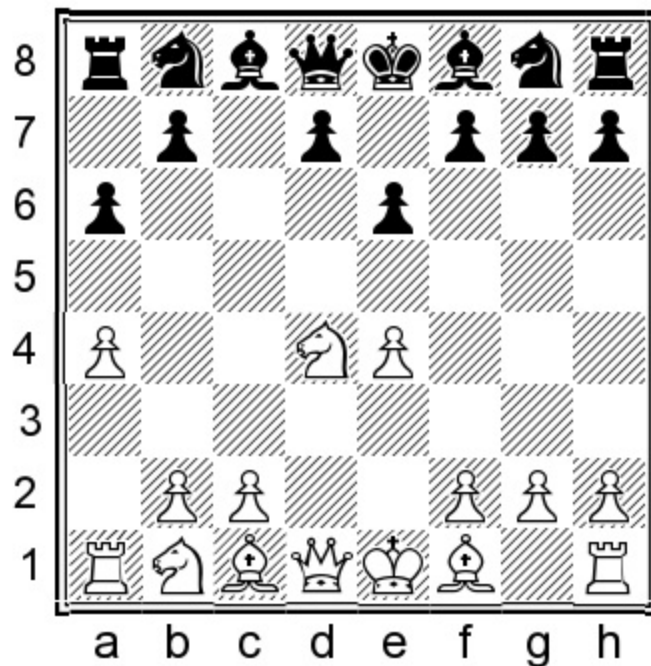


Position after: 11... ♕c7↑

White faces unpleasant pressure in the centre, it does not feel like it is as stable as it would be in the advanced French Defence.

b) 5.a4

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.a4



Position after: 5.a4

This is not something you should be afraid to meet. Against every Sicilian you will always find players who just want to prevent your plan of playing ...b5, maybe because they find it strong, or maybe just because they want to get you “out of book”, and out of your usual plans. But this state of mind has some drawbacks. The main one is the weakening of the b4 square, and this is important, especially in an opening where Black can still play ...♗b4 at some point.

5...♘f6

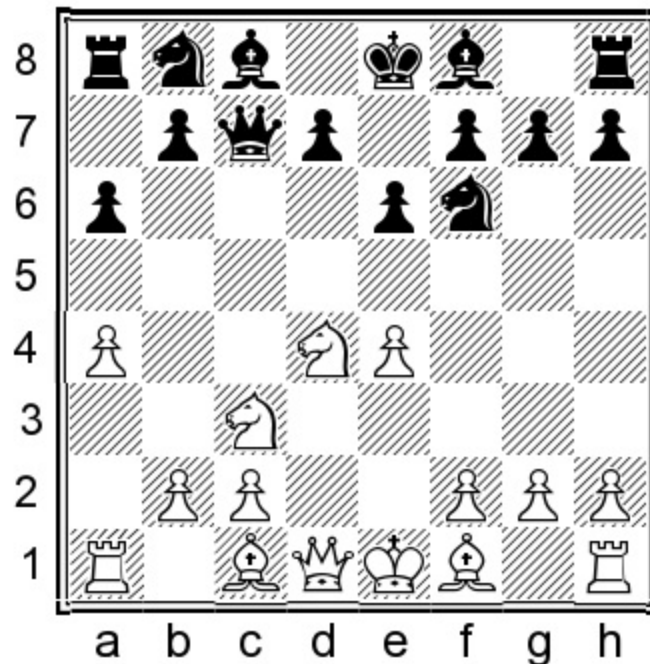
5...d5!? As in the previous subchapter against 5.f4, I think this move is interesting, and you should investigate this line if you want. Keep in mind that the types of positions often resemble the French Defence.

6.♗d3

With this move White wants to keep some possibilities of playing c3 to control the b4 square.

A) 6.e5? As seen many times this is a mistake. After 6...♙a5+-+ the e5-pawn falls.

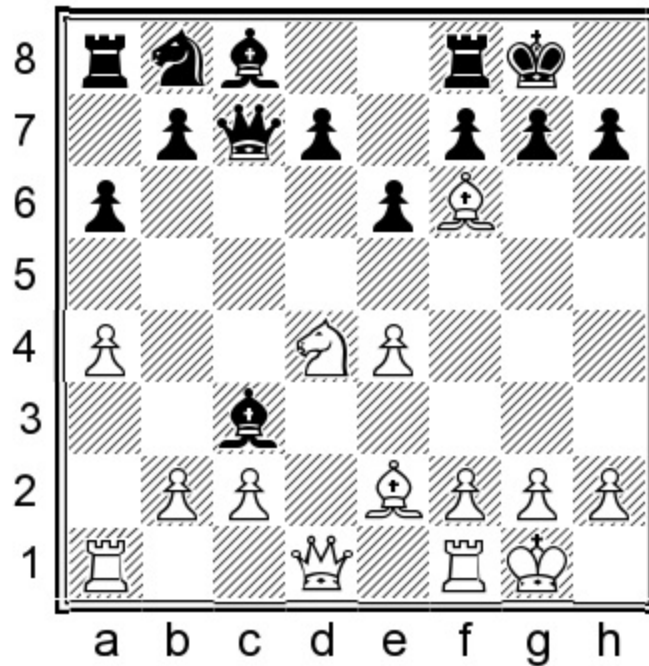
B) 6.♘c3 This is the most played move, but I really feel it cannot be right for White from a practical point of view, even if the computer does not condemn this move. 6...♙c7!



Position after: 6...♙c7!

[6...♗b4 I find it less strong to immediately pin the knight. 7.♗d3 ♙c7 8.0-0↑ Black should not take on c3 due to the weak dark squares, and that means his concept was not necessarily great.]

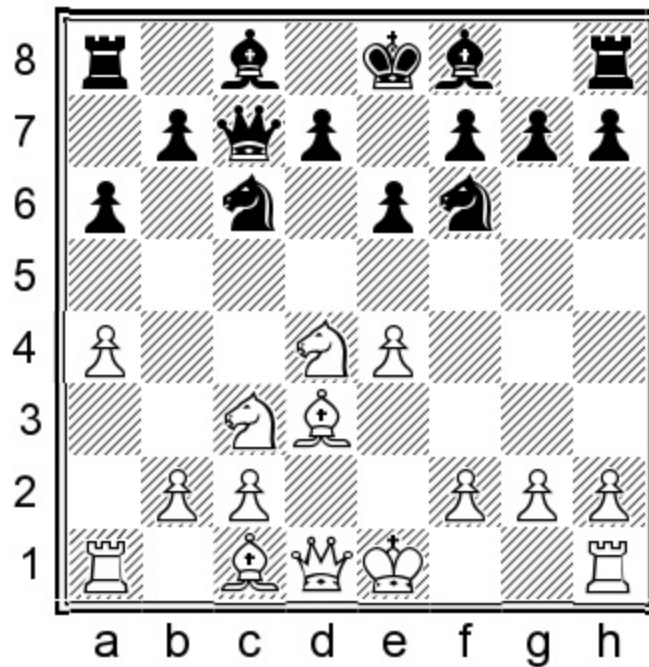
B1) 7.♗e2 ♗b4! 8.0-0 [8.♙d3? Played most of the time, but it is just a mistake. 8...♘xe4!± White is in deep trouble because he is unable to take back on e4.] 8...0-0 9.♗g5 ♗xc3 10.♗xf6!



Position after: 10. ♖xf6!

10...♖xb2 11.♘xe6! dxe6 12.♖xb2 e5! = It is important to immediately close the dark diagonal and to be able to develop our bishop quickly.

B2) 7.♖d3 ♘c6!

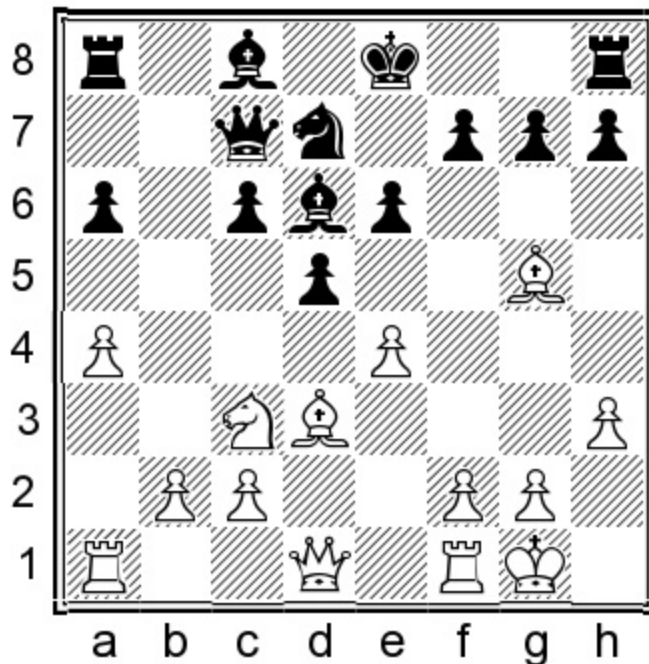


Position after: 7...♘c6!

Here, challenging the d4-knight is more logical, and 7...♖b4 would transpose to 6...♖b4 which we just discussed.

B2.1) 8.♔e3 ♖b4!? 9.0-0 [9.♔e2 d5!♣ We are more than ready for this move, and we can see that the bishop is misplaced on e3 once we take back on d5.] 9...b6! = I think the position is balanced if White leaves the bishop on d3. Otherwise, if he tries to save his bishop pair, he may soon be worse. 10.♔e2 ♔b7 11.f3 d5♣

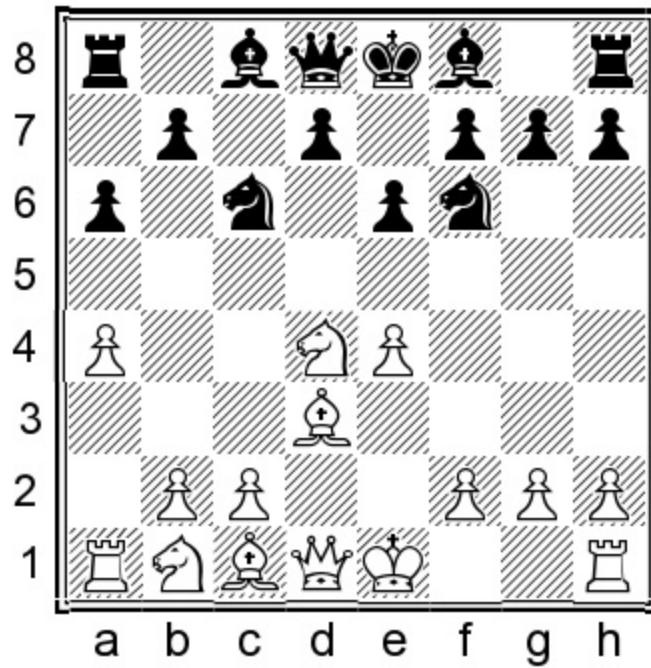
B2.2) 8.♗xc6 bxc6 Recapturing with the pawn is the most logical. The idea is to follow with ...e5 when the position will be similar to the main line. 9.0-0 d5 10.♔g5 ♔d6 11.h3 ♗d7♣



Position after: 11...♗d7♣

It is easy for Black to play.

6...♗c6

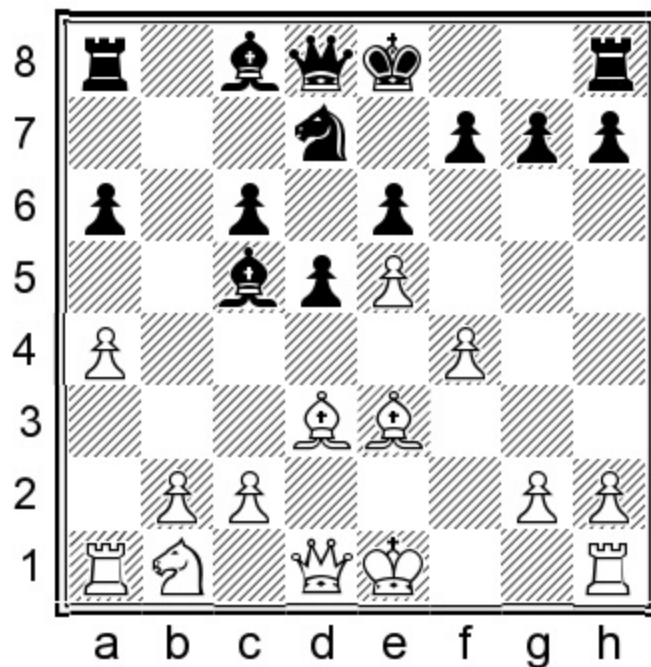


Position after: 6... Nc6

7. Nxc6

A) 7. c3?! d5! After this move White cannot push e5, and after 8. Nxc6 bxc6 9. e5 Nd7 White clearly regrets having played c3.

B) 7. Qe3 d5! This is also possible for Black. 8. Nxc6 bxc6 9. e5 Nd7 10. f4 Qc5!N



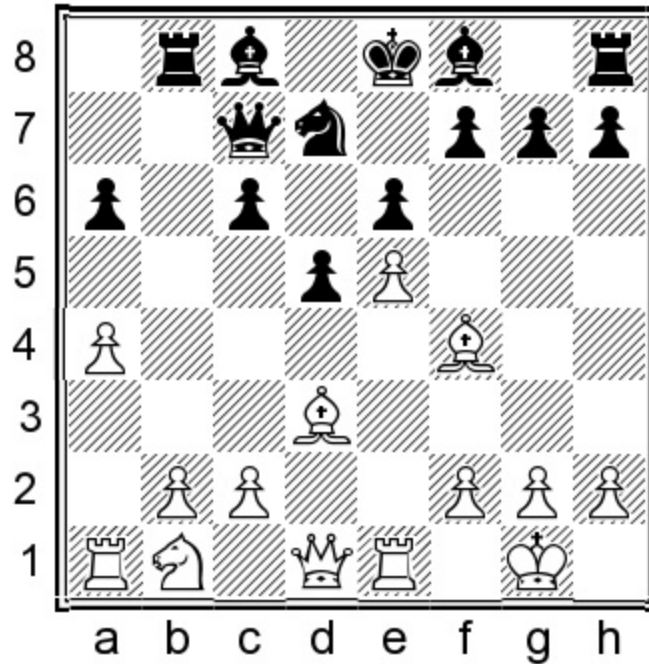
Position after: 10... Qc5!N

11. ♖e2 ♜b6 12. ♙xc5 ♘xc5 ♞ White's dark squares are extremely weak.

7...bxc6 8.0-0 d5 9.e5

9.exd5?! This move only helps Black, and it gives White less options. 9...cxd5 10. ♖e2 ♙d6 ♞

9...♘d7 10. ♝e1 ♜c7 11. ♙f4 ♞b8



Position after: 11... ♞b8

This is one of the advantages for Black when recapturing on c6 with the b-pawn. The rook can easily come into play.

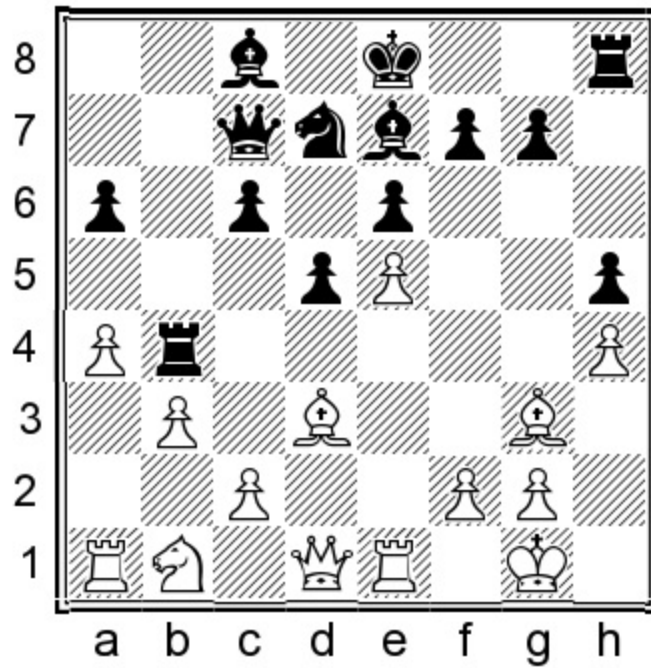
12.b3 ♞b4!?

12...♘c5!?! ⇒ Objectively this looks like a safer approach, but clearly it is less inventive by Black.

13. ♙g3?!

13.c4!?! This weakens the b3 pawn and thereby the b4-square, but it does keep the rook out of play.

13...h5 14.h4 ♙e7 ♞

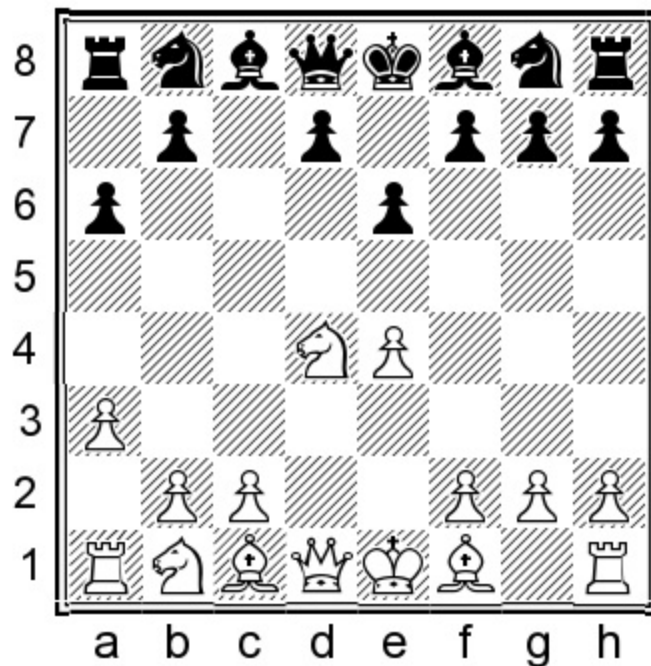


Position after: 14...♙e7

Black takes over the initiative and the pawn on h4 is in huge trouble. He won convincingly in Schuls, O (2224) – Ehlvest, J (2524) Puhajarve 2015.

c) 5.a3!?

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.a3!?



Position after: 5.a3!?

In this subchapter, and the next one about 5.g3, one of the main difficulties is to keep in mind that there are some transpositions, especially in the third chapter about 5.♘c3 b5 6.a3. Here I find 5.a3 more interesting, because it is quite flexible. White can choose to play with 5.♘c3, but he can also place the knight on d2, or even often stronger play c4 first. That explains my choice, but I will try to explain the drawbacks for Black in the other variations, to give you a full understanding of the variation.

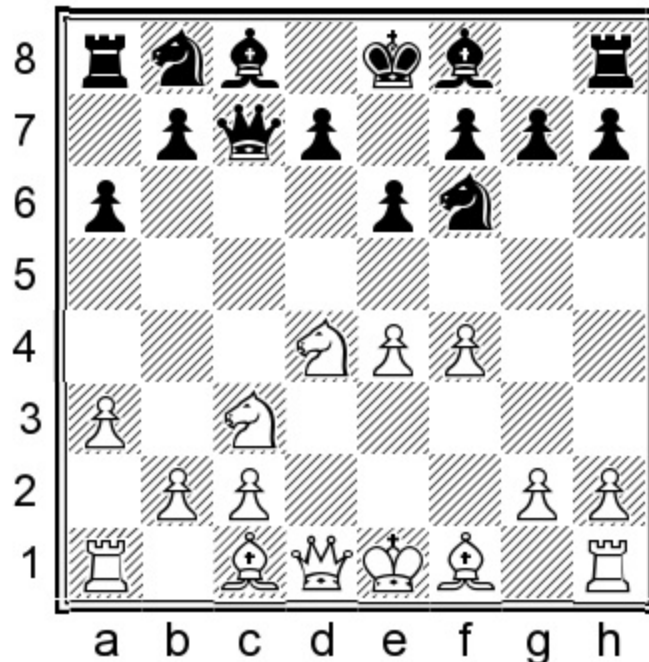
5...b5!?

Let us play this at once before we cannot!

A) 5...♘f6 This move was my initial idea. 6.♘c3 And now I thought it would be possible to transpose into the third chapter, but it is actually not easy. First of all, in case of 6...b5, then 7.e5 is annoying.

A1) 6...d6 7.g4!?! This is a dangerous line in the Scheveningen (with a3/a6), and it might be dangerous here, even if I think the inclusion of a3/a6 must favour Black. But it is really not in the spirit of this book, and there are other interesting possibilities for Black. 7.g4 is not the only White option.

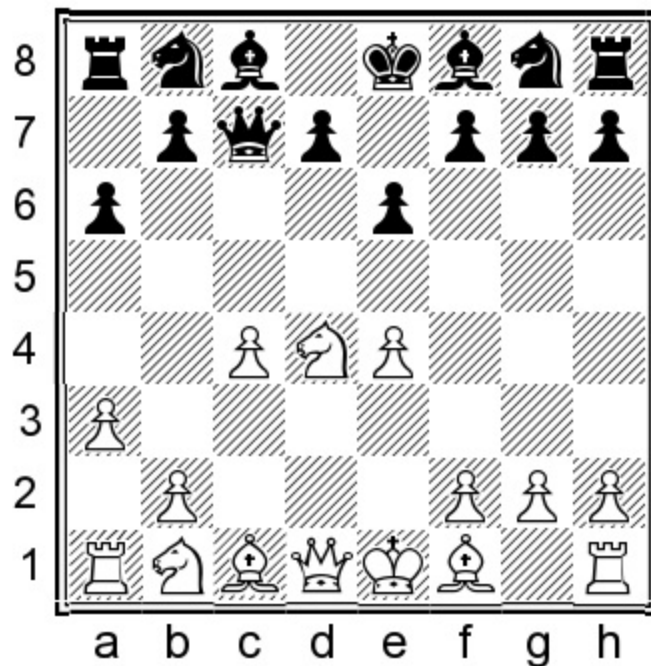
A2) 6...♙c7 7.f4!



Position after: 7.f4!

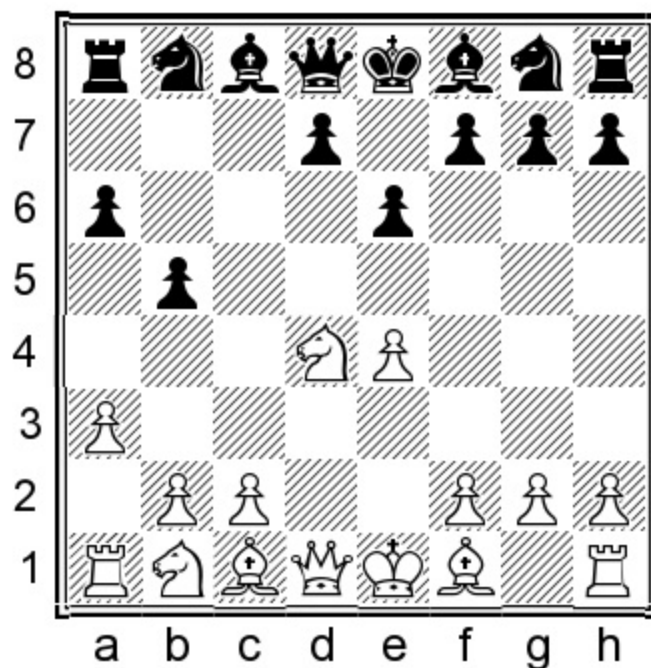
This a dangerous line for Black as 8.e5 is a threat. 7...d6 8.♙f3!?! This looks like more of a Najdorf position, and it might not be to everyone's taste.

B) 5...♙c7 6.c4!

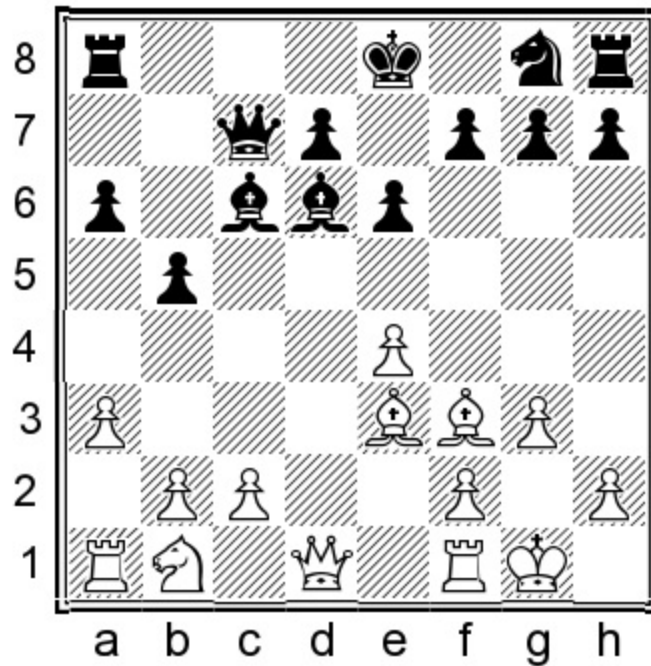


Position after: 6.c4!

This time, this move is a problem as we have not forced ♞c3 . And now that White has already played a3, we cannot transpose into the lines of the second chapter with $\dots\text{♙b4}$. [6. ♞c3 b5 7. ♙d3 ♙b7 8. 0-0 ♞f6 This transposes into the second subchapter about 5. ♞c3 b5 6. a3.] 6... ♞f6 7. ♞c3 b6 and we have reached another theoretical line (a Hedgehog structure) which I dislike as White is generally able to pressure Black with an advantage.



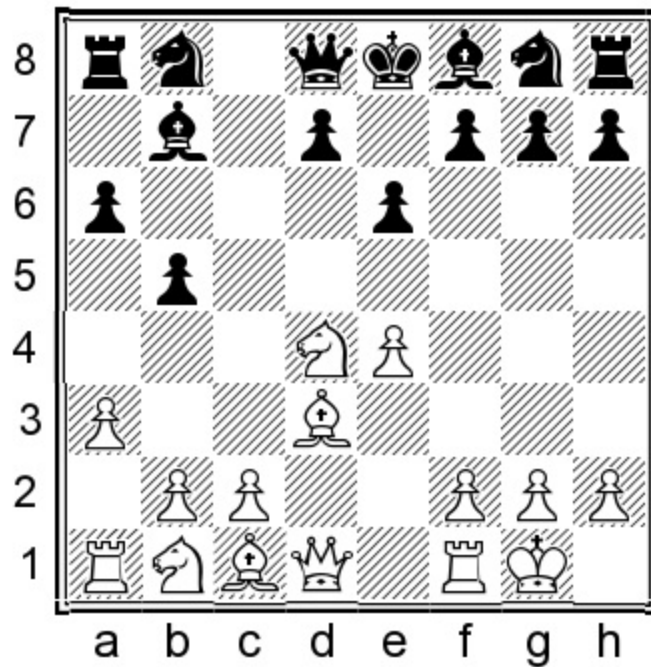
Position after: 5...b5!?



Position after: 11.g3

White eventually reorganizes his kingside, but it takes a lot of time. 11...♞e7 12.♞g2 0-0 13.f4 ♞b7= Black intends ...♞c5 with a solid position.

D) 6.♞d3!? ♞b7 7.0-0

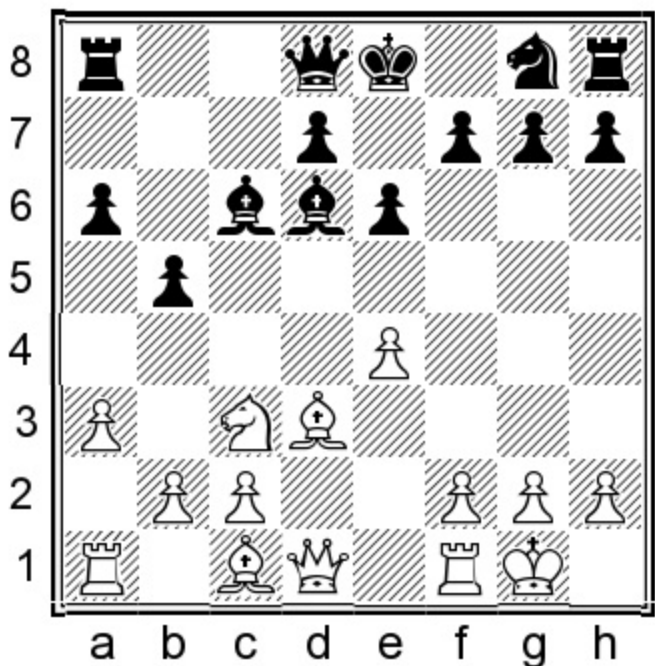


Position after: 7.0-0

Be careful here. Black cannot play 7...♞f6 due to the possibility of 8.e5 and you may be tempted by 7...d6, but it is a mistake. [7.♞c3 ♞c7 see chapter 3 with 5.♞c3 b5 6.a3.]

D1) 7...d6? 8.c4!N This forcing move is great for White. 8...bxc4 9.♙xc4 And this may not seem dangerous, but there are a lot of sacrifices for White on e6 since we played ...♙b7. The following variations are plausible. 9...♘f6 [9...♙xe4? 10.♘c3 ♙b7 11.♙xe6 fxe6 12.♘xe6 ♔d7 13.♖e1+- Black is hopeless.] 10.♘c3 ♙e7?! 11.♙xe6! fxe6 12.♘xe6 ♔d7 13.♘xg7+ ♕f7 14.♘f5+- Again, a terrible position for Black.

D2) 7...♘c6! We should trade in the centre and finish development later. 8.♘xc6 ♙xc6 9.♘c3 ♙d6!?!N

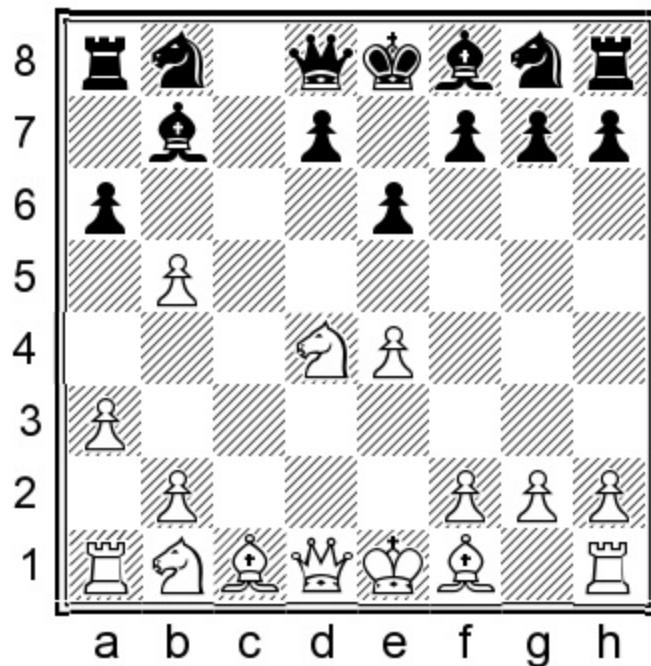


Position after: 9...♙d6!?!N

I like this developing move which gives the e7 square to the knight so that White does not have e5 with tempo. The bishop will return to c7. 10.♙e3 [Let's mention that 10.♙xb5 is well met with 10...♙xh2+, so Black isn't losing a pawn.] 10...♘e7 11.f4 ♙c7 12.♗e2 0-0 13.♖ad1 f5!↑ This is Black's idea. He wants to open the long diagonal for the light-squared bishop, and he has an active position, easy to play.

6...bxc4!

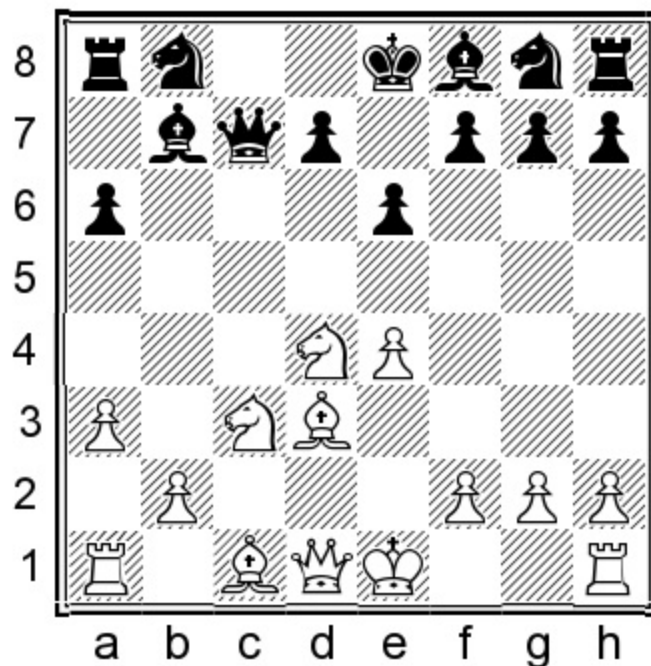
6...♙b7 Unfortunately, this is far from being great for Black if he simply takes. 7.cxb5!N



Position after: 7.cxb5!N

7...♙xe4 [7...axb5? 8.♘xb5 ♙xe4 9.♙f4 ♘a6 10.♘1c3 ♙c6 11.b4+- We have failed at having safe development.] 8.♘c3 When you see this kind of move, gaining tempos, there is something wrong with your opening. 8...♙b7 9.♙e2 ♙xg2 Well, at least Black gets a pawn. 10.♞g1 ♙b7 11.♙f4± There is no guarantee that Black survives this middlegame.

7.♙xc4 ♙b7 8.♘c3 ♞c7 9.♙d3



Position after: 9.♙d3

The good thing for Black is that he has a majority of pawns in the centre, but he has no easy way to take further central space for now.

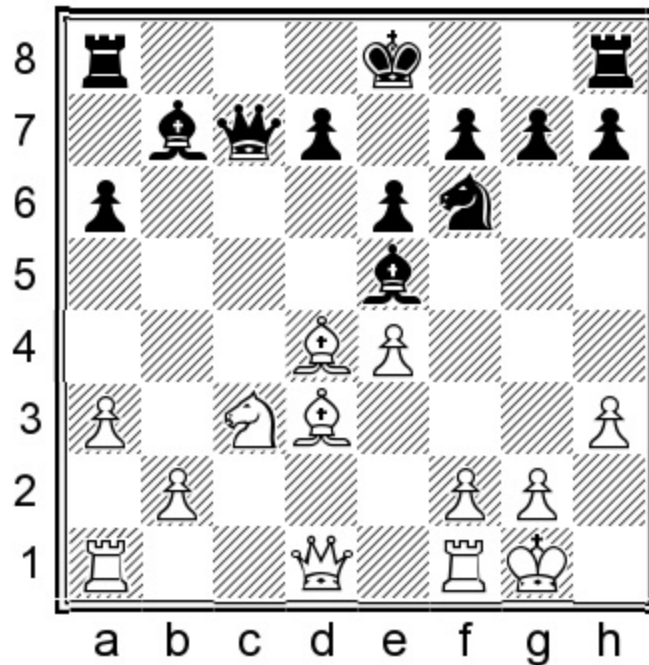
9...♖c6 10.♙e3

10.♖xc6 ♗xc6 11.0-0 ♘d6 12.f4 ♚b6+ 13.♔h1 ♜e7↔ This appears similar to the main line, White has more space, but it does not ensure him the better position. I would not mind being Black here as there is interesting play on both sides of the board. Black has the bishop for the kingside and the rooks on the queenside.

10...♜f6 11.0-0 ♜xd4 12.♙xd4 ♘d6 13.h3!

13.g3?! This is probably not a great option for White because playing f4 and e5 will clearly weaken the long light square diagonal when our bishop on b7 will be a monster. 13...♙e5 14.♙xe5 ♚xe5↑ And White does not have a real plan.

13...♙e5



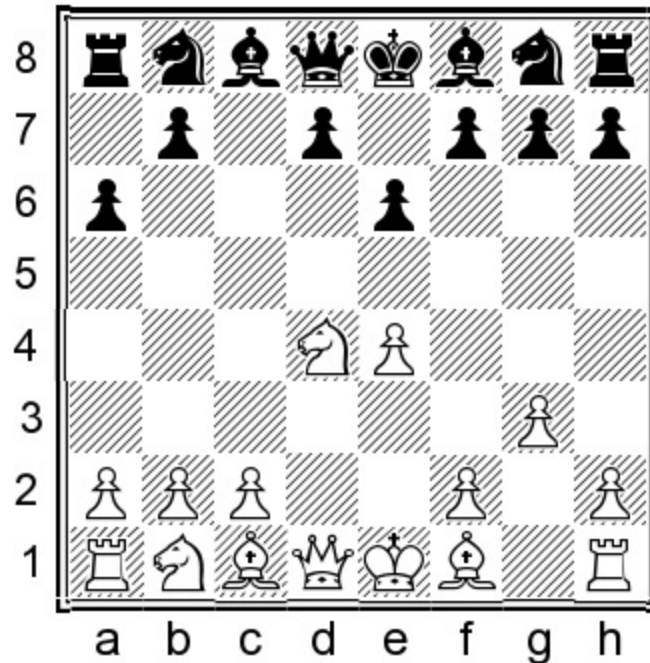
Position after: 13...♙e5

14.♙xe5 ♚xe5 15.f4 ♚c7↔

This is a better version for White than 13.g3. White may be slightly better, but Black has no weakness and he will easily bring his rooks to the open files with an interesting position.

d) 5.g3 d5 6.--

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 a6 5.g3!?



Position after: 5.g3!?

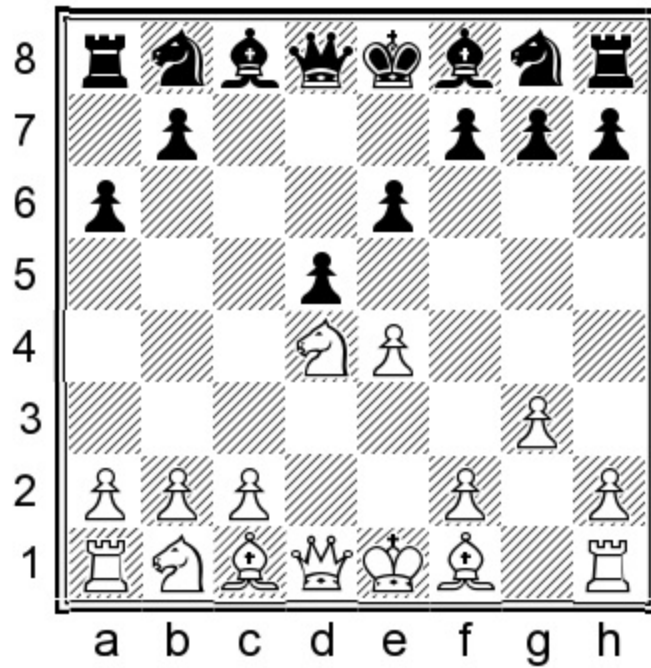
As in the previous subchapter, White is trying to achieve a better version of from chapter 3, where ♗c3/...b5 is included. This time, my advice is to go for something different.

5...d5!?

Striking in the centre as before and taking advantage of the fact that if White captures the opening of the light diagonal, is a weakness. While taking has obvious drawbacks for White he does have some options.

A) 5...b5?! I am not fond of this approach now that White does not have the knight on c3. 6.♗g2 ♗b7 7.0-0 ♗f6 8.♖e1↑ Black should already be careful about the possibility of e5.

B) 5...♗f6 6.♗g2 ♕c7 7.0-0 ♗c6 8.♗c3 This is a transposition into the Taimanov Sicilian with h3, so you can find many games with this position. While it is fine for Black you will need to know additional theory.

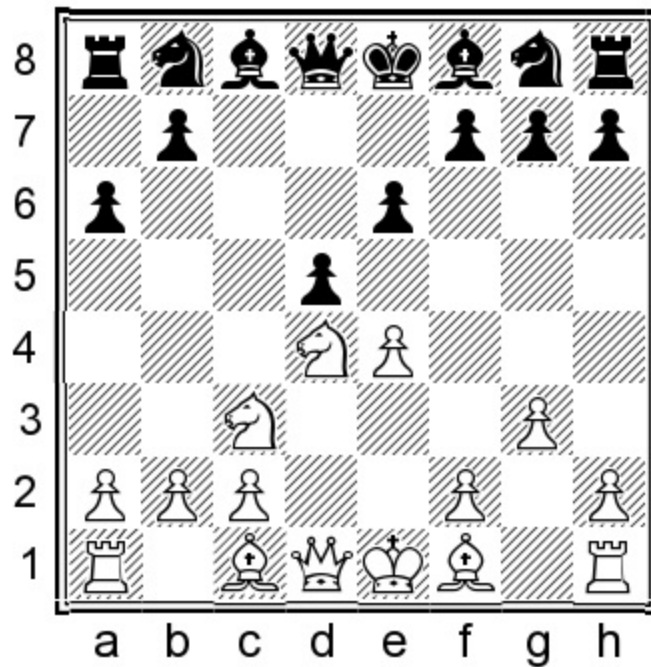


Position after: 5...d5!?

6.♔g2?

It is amazing to see how many times this mistake has been played.

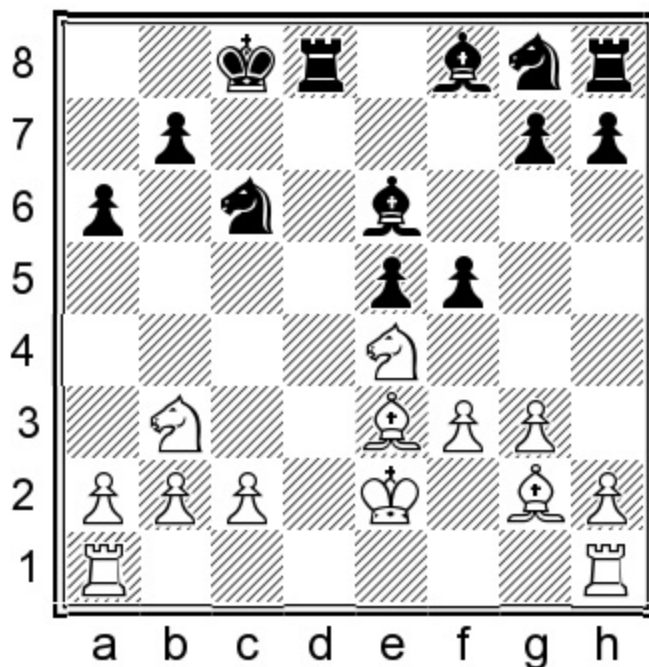
A) 6.♘c3



Position after: 6.♘c3

This has some similarities with 6.♔g2, but it is slightly stronger for White. 6...dxe4 7.♘xe4 e5!

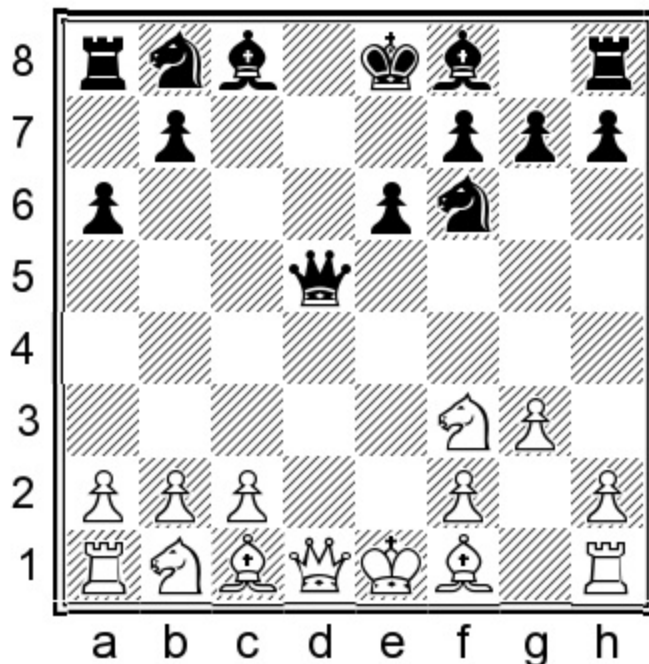
8. ♖b3 ♜xd1+ 9. ♔xd1 Here Black cannot gain a tempo on the piece on e4 as he did with 9... ♗f6 in the 6. ♖g2-variation. 9... ♗c6 10. ♖g2 [10. ♖e3 ♖g4+ 11. ♖e2 0-0-0+ 12. ♔e1 ♖f5= Black has good development here, and it is important to remember that White cannot castle anymore.] 10... ♖g4+ 11. f3 0-0-0+ 12. ♔e2 ♖e6 13. ♖e3 f5!?



Position after: 13...f5!?

Black is willing to take over the initiative. 14. ♖h3 ♔b8 15. ♗ec5 ♖c8↑ Ivanov, A (2545) – Zapata, A (2530) Linares 1992.

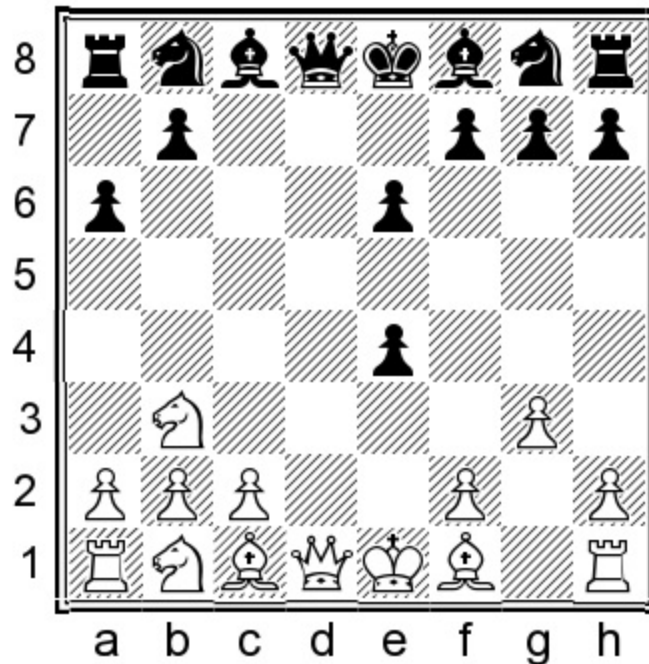
B) 6. ♗f3 ♗f6 7. exd5 ♜xd5!



Position after: 7... ♖xd5!

A safe option. I do not mind trading queens and I prefer to avoid an isolani. 8. ♖xd5 [8. ♗bd2 b5!?N The point of this move is to immediately challenge the light-squared bishop in the fianchetto. 9. ♕g2 ♕b7 10.0-0 ♕e7=] 8... ♗xd5 9. ♕g2 ♕c5 10.0-0 0-0 11. ♗bd2 White is trying to get some play, but it is far from easy. He eventually won in the following game due to playing better. Anand was young, but already extremely dangerous. 11... ♗c6 12. ♗c4 b5 13. ♗ce5 ♗xe5 14. ♗xe5 ♖d8 15. ♗d3 ♕b6= And the central majority should enable Black to have objectively equal chances in the game Anand, V (2715) – Lobron, E (2570) Munich 1994.

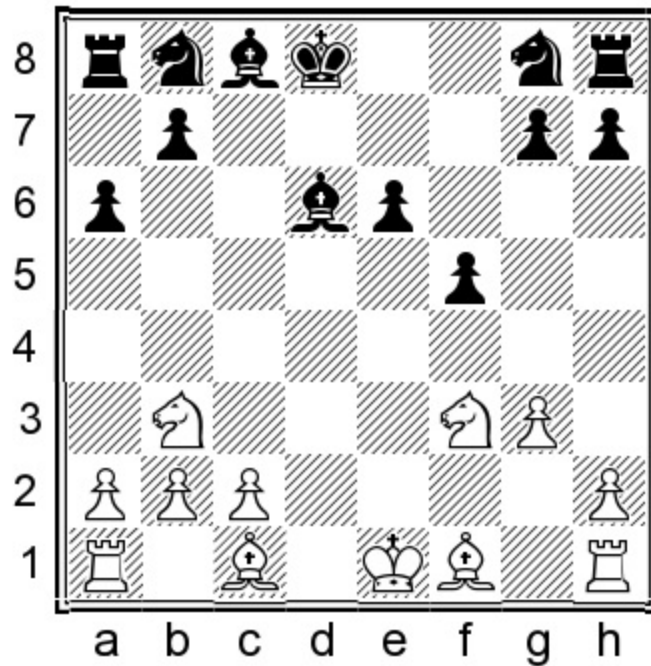
C) 6. ♗b3 dxe4!?



Position after: 6... dxe4!?

This is my preference. Black has an extra pawn for some development challenges.

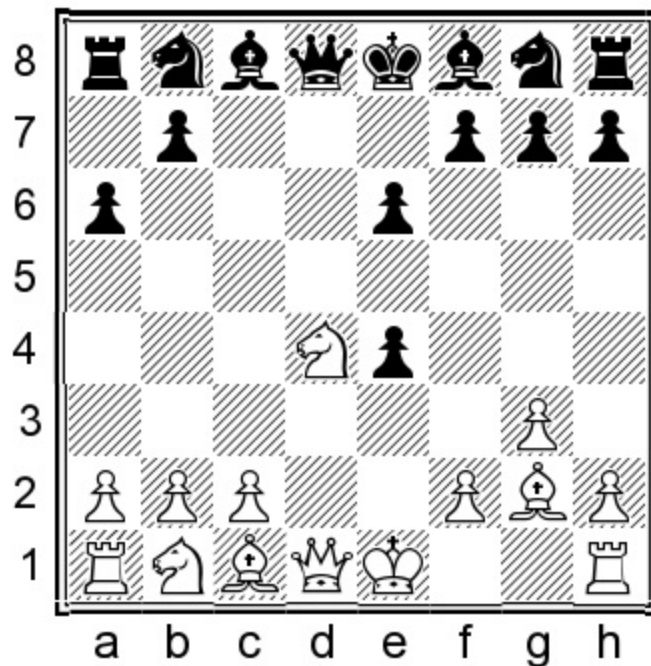
With careful play he should be able to develop and maintain the material. [6... ♗f6 7. exd5 ♖xd5 8. ♖xd5 ♗xd5 9. ♕g2± This looks similar to 6. ♗f3, but the knight is just better on b3, it does not bother the bishop and he is looking for active squares on the queenside.] 7. ♖xd8+ ♗xd8 8. ♗1d2 f5 9. f3! If you look at the database, you will see that Smirin faced this line with Black. He probably thought it was promising for White as he played it later from White's side. The position is very logical because we are underdeveloped. 9... exf3 10. ♗xf3 Schroeder, J (2539) – Smirin, I (2634) Riga 2017, ½-½ (28). I would rather play: 10... ♕d6!?.



Position after: 10...♙d6!?

This move prevents ♙f4 and that allows the possibility of bringing the king to c7. 11.♙g2 ♘c6
 12.♙e3 ♘f6 13.0-0-0 ♙c7 ♗ White has obvious compensation, but we still have a pawn, and I am not sure we have the more demanding position.

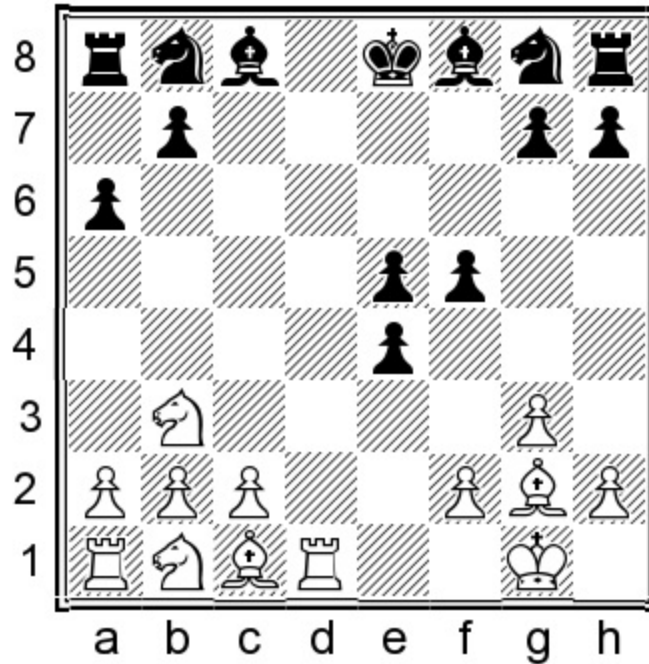
6...dxe4!



Position after: 6...dxe4!

7.♙xe4

7.0-0 This is no better for White. 7...e5 8.♘b3 ♚xd1 9.♖xd1 f5!



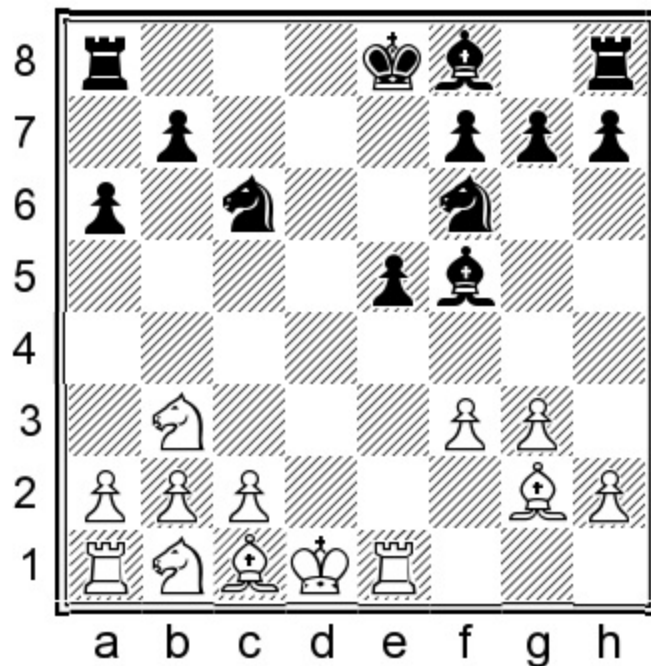
Position after: 9...f5!

White will not regain his pawn in this opening. 10.♘c3 ♙e6 11.♙e3 ♘f6!N The pawn centre is impressive and it prevents White from having any kind of compensation. 12.♘a5 b5 13.a4 b4 14.♘a2 ♘d5

7...e5! 8.♘b3 ♚xd1+ 9.♙xd1 ♘f6 10.♙g2

It seems clear that White's opening is a failure.

10...♙g4+ 11.f3 ♙f5 12.♖e1 ♘c6



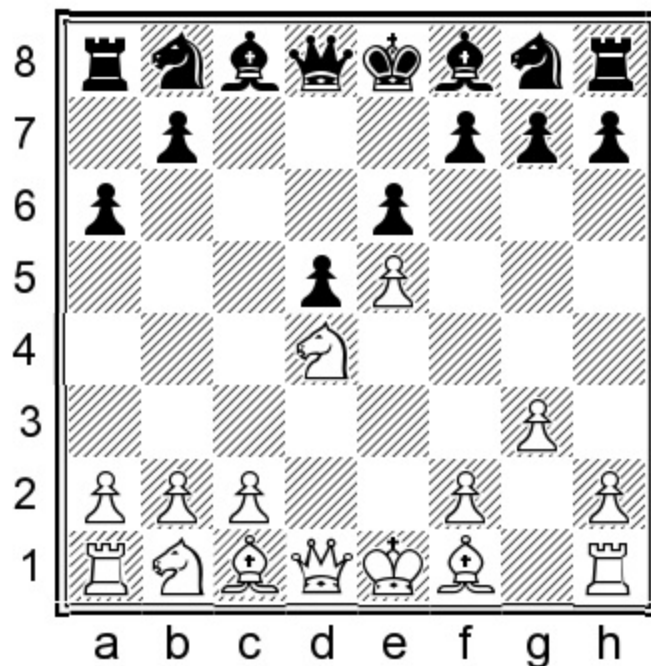
Position after: 12... Nc6

Black's development is too easy! He won convincingly in Martinez, J (2251) – Granda Zuniga, J (2621) Cali 2007.

13. Qd2 0-0-0 14. Qc1 Nd5

e) 5.g3 d5 6.e5

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 a6 5.g3!? d5!? 6.e5



Position after: 6.e5

I deemed that this should be seen as the main line. It is not great, but it is the most played move after 6.♔g2. Advancing the pawn is a mistake and the position looks like a variation of the French Defence which requires extra care.

6...♘c6

My preference. The attack on e5 gives White little choice.

6...♘e7!? This is another option for Black. 7.♔g2 ♘bc6 8.♘xc6 ♘xc6=

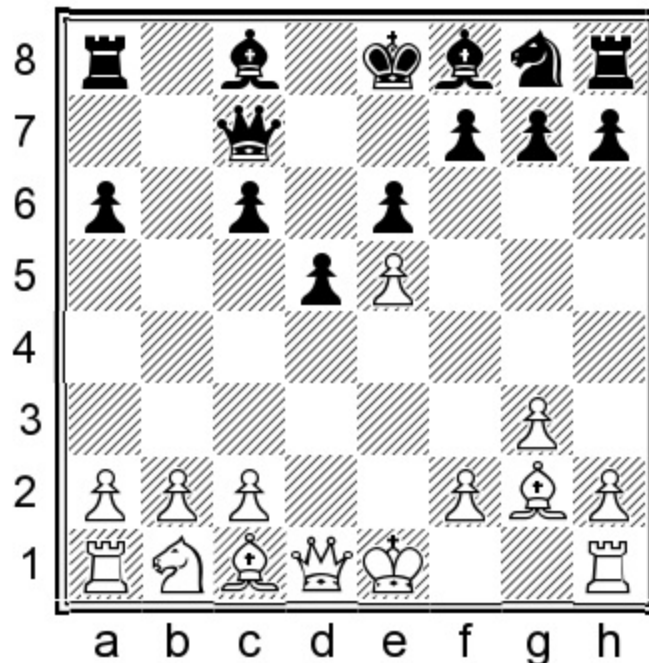
7.♘xc6

7.f4?! ♔c5 8.♔e3?? ♚b6-+ This is the kind of lines that goes pretty badly for White.

7...bxc6 8.♔g2

8.♔d3 This is the computer's move, but it is quite unlikely to happen. While it is not a novelty for a human to play g3 and then not play ♔g2 looks very awkward.

8...♚c7



Position after: 8...♚c7

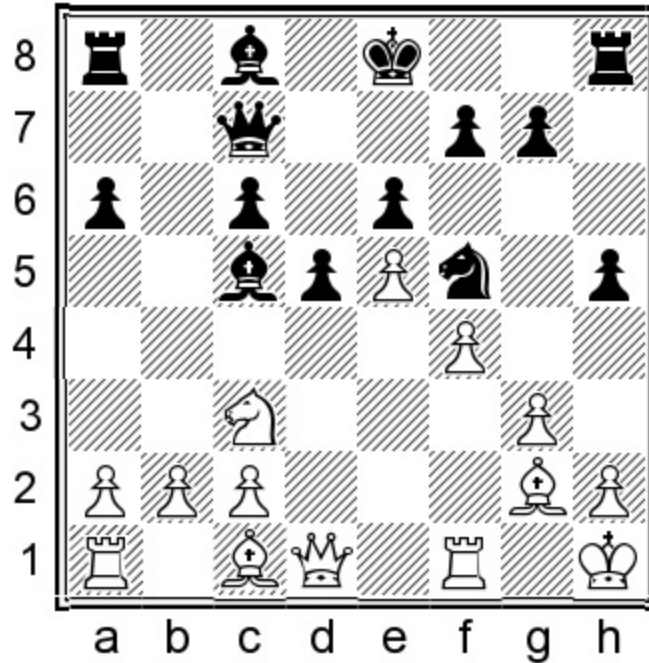
Asking White to make a decision.

9.0-0!?

Probably White's best chance.

A) 9. ♔e2?! The queen is not in the right place, and we will prove this point. 9...a5! 10.c4 ♕a6 11. ♖d2 ♗b4 12.b3 ♞e7 13.0-0 0-0♣ White is clearly under pressure.

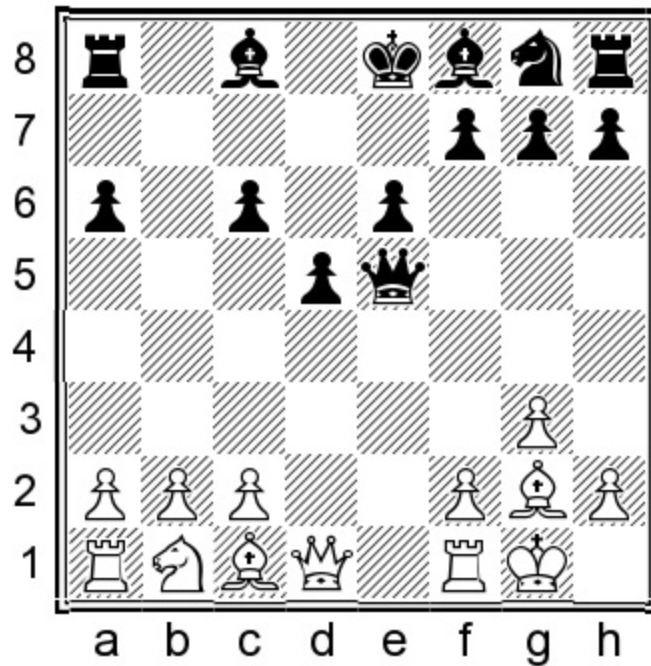
B) 9.f4?! This defends e5, but it is so weakening. 9...♞h6!N We want to bring the knight to f5 from where it controls a lot of important dark squares. 10.0-0 ♕c5+ 11.♔h1 ♞f5 12.♞c3 h5!



Position after: 12...h5!

There are many ways for Black to treat this position, but this is the one that gives White the least possibilities. 13. ♔f3 [13.a3? This is just to illustrate Black's classical threat. 13...h4 14.g4 ♞g3+ 15.hxg3 hxg3+ 16. ♕h3 ♖xh3+ 17.♔g2 ♖h8] 13...a5♣ Black has full control of the board.

9... ♔xe5



Position after: 9... ♕xe5

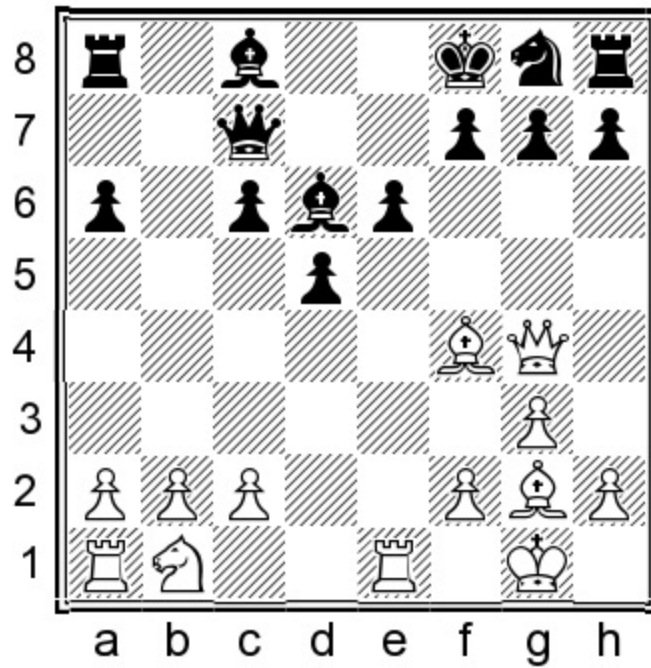
If you cannot see why it is bad, it probably means you should take the pawn. Well, that's the king of advice that can lead you to short and painful defeats.

But that is not the case here, so just take it!

10.c4!?

White tries to open the centre so Black simply finishes his development.

10. ♖e1 ♜c7 11. ♙f4 ♙d6 If you do not want to allow the following line, be aware that 11... ♜d8 is also fine. 12. ♜g4! ♔f8!



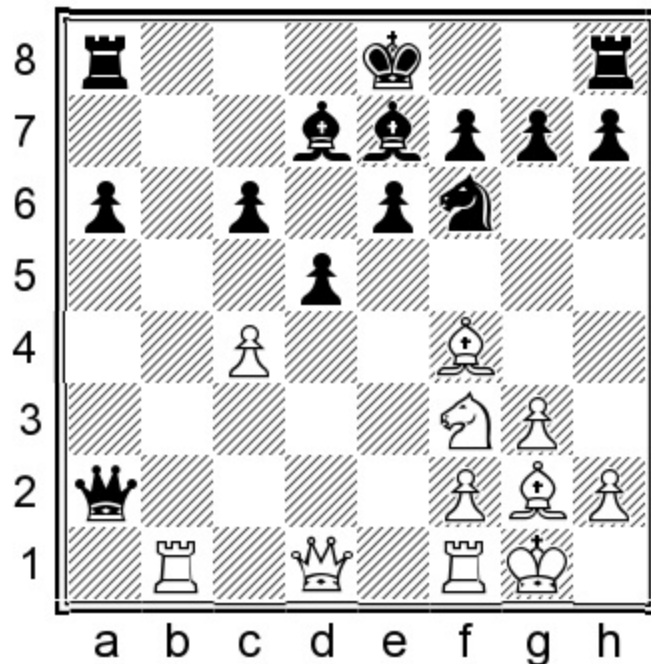
Position after: 12... ♔f8!

It is not a big deal to play this move, the centre is stable. 13. ♖xd6+ ♜xd6 14. ♘d2 h5 15. ♚f3 ♞e7

10... ♞f6! 11. ♞c3

11. ♞f4!?N The computer claims this is White's best chance. We should keep taking pawns.

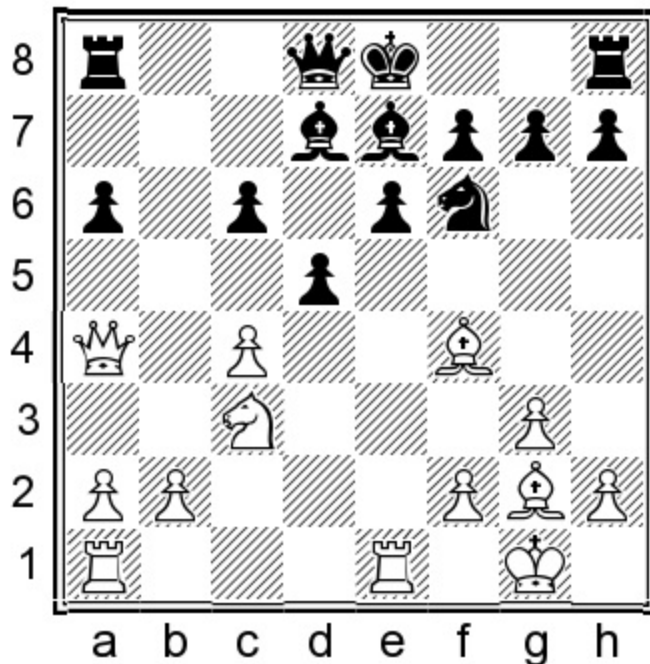
11... ♚xb2 12. ♘d2 ♞d7 13. ♞f3 ♞e7 14. ♖b1 ♚xa2



Position after: 14... ♚xa2

That seems too much, but sometimes strange things work. 15.♘e5 ♜d8 Black probably has the better position.

11...♚c7! 12.♞e1 ♔e7 13.♙f4 ♚d8 14.♚a4 ♙d7



Position after: 14...♙d7

That's basically it, White cannot improve his position and we are ready to castle.

15.♞ad1 0-0 16.♚c2 ♞e8

We are ready to bring our last forces into play, and I do not see any dangerous plan for White. Dovliatov, S (2318) – Macieja, B (2584) Batumi 2002.

Chapter conclusion

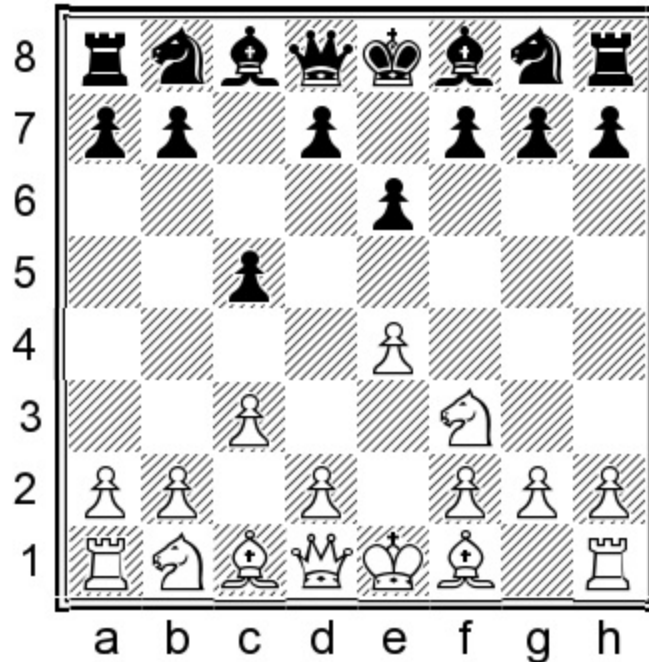
As we saw in this chapter, there are a lot of possible transpositions into other variations. That is why you must have a clear understanding of every variation, and you should be able to recognize whenever a variation transposes into another one.

I think Black is fine with all the variations we met in here! And remember to open the centre when you can do it with strength.

Chapter 7

The Delayed Alapin Sicilian

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.c3



Chapter Guide

Chapter 7 – The Delayed Alapin Sicilian

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.c3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘d5

a) Sidelines & 5.♙c4

b) 5.d4 cxd4 6.♚xd4

c) 5.d4 cxd4 6.cxd4 d6 7.a3

d) 5.d4 cxd4 6.cxd4 d6 7.♘c3

e) 5.d4 cxd4 6.cxd4 d6 7.♙c4 ♙e7 8.0-0 0-0 9.--

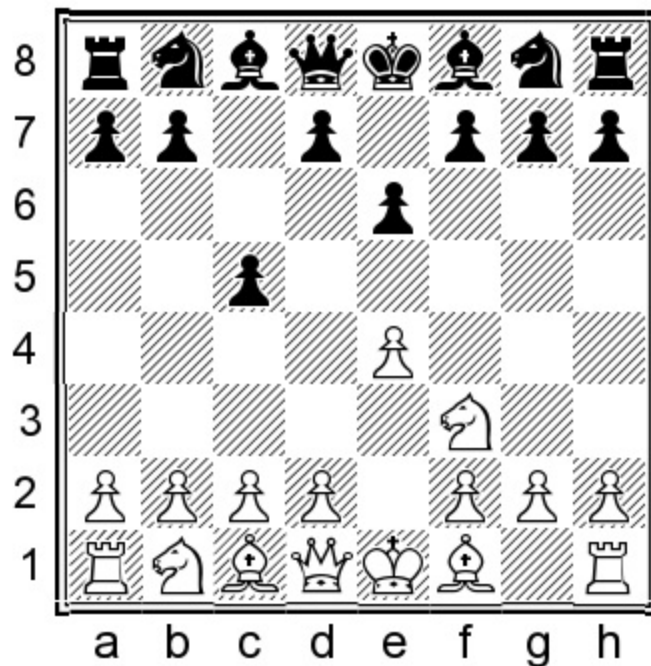
f) 5.d4 cxd4 6.cxd4 d6 7.♙c4 ♙e7 8.0-0 0-0 9.♘c3

g) 5.d4 cxd4 6.cxd4 d6 7.♙c4 ♙e7 8.0-0 0-0 9.♚e2 ♙d7 10.--

h) 5.d4 cxd4 6.cxd4 d6 7.♙c4 ♙e7 8.0-0 0-0 9.♚e2 ♙d7 ♘c3!

a) Sidelines & 5.♙c4

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6

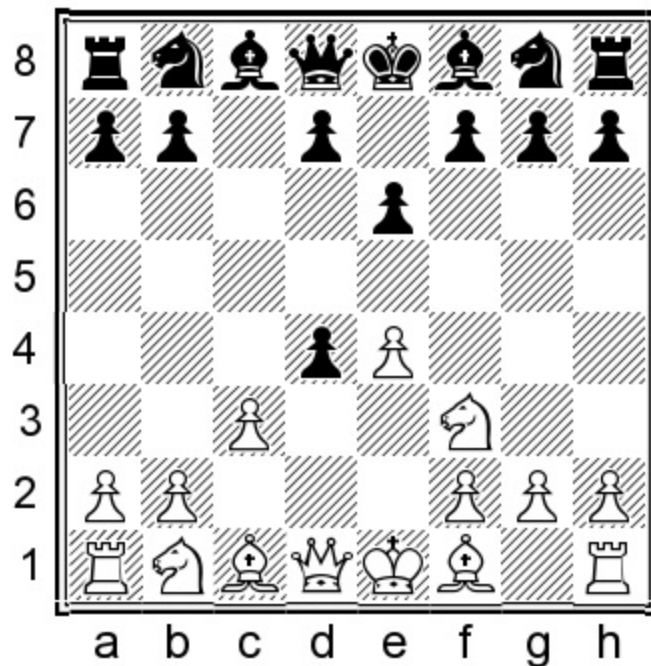


Position after: 2...e6

Now that we are done analysing the Open Kan we need to examine several sidelines. We will start with one of the most important ones, the Alapin Sicilian. Here it is called the Delayed Alapin Sicilian, but in general it will just transpose. Due to transpositional factors, we will only examine this move order. I have chosen to provide you with a repertoire against the anti – Sicilians, only after 2.♘f3 e6. If White does anything else than 2.♘f3, you do not need to play ...e6, while here it is already played, and there are a few typical sidelines. If you want to specifically play a Kan Sicilian you must know these lines, while against other and earlier sidelines, you can choose between a lot of different set ups. In this chapter we will deal with the Alapin Sicilian, and you will probably need to add a few variations to cover the lines with 2.c3 that would not feature ♘f3 (it is extremely rare), or you can choose to play a completely different line!

3.c3

3.d4 cxd4 4.c3

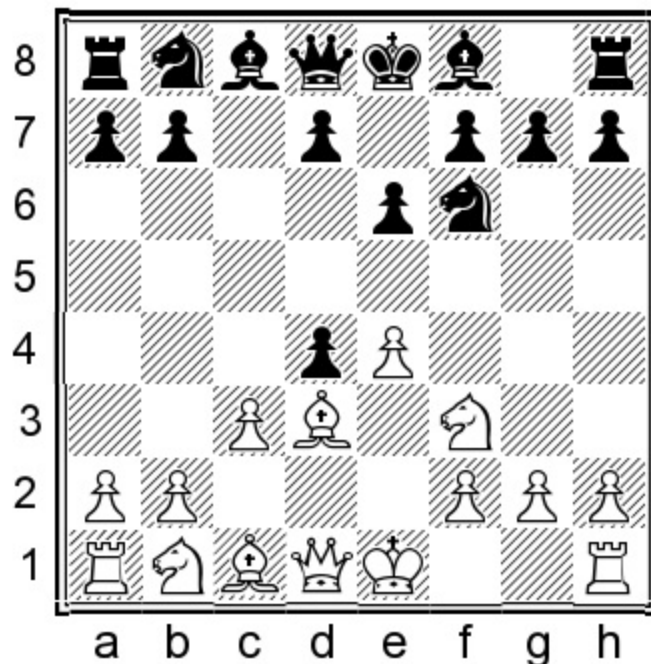


Position after: 4.c3

The Morra-Gambit deserves a mention here. With this repertoire, it only has a low independent value because it is easy for Black to transpose into the Alapin Variation. Because of this transposition some players do not want to play the Morra-Gambit while playing an Alapin is less appealing to them.

A) 4...dxc3!? It is also very plausible to accept the Morra-Gambit while having played ...e6. 5.♘xc3 ♘c6 6.♙c4 a6 This is actually one of the main systems for Black to face the Morra, but it looks like more work for you.

B) 4...♞f6 5.e5 [5.♙d3



Position after: 5. ♖d3

If White really wants to play a Morra then he can play something like this, but he will have a poor version 5...dxc3 6. ♗xc3 d6 ♞ The bishop should be placed on c4, it makes little sense on d3.] 5... ♗d5 Reverts to the Alapin Variation.

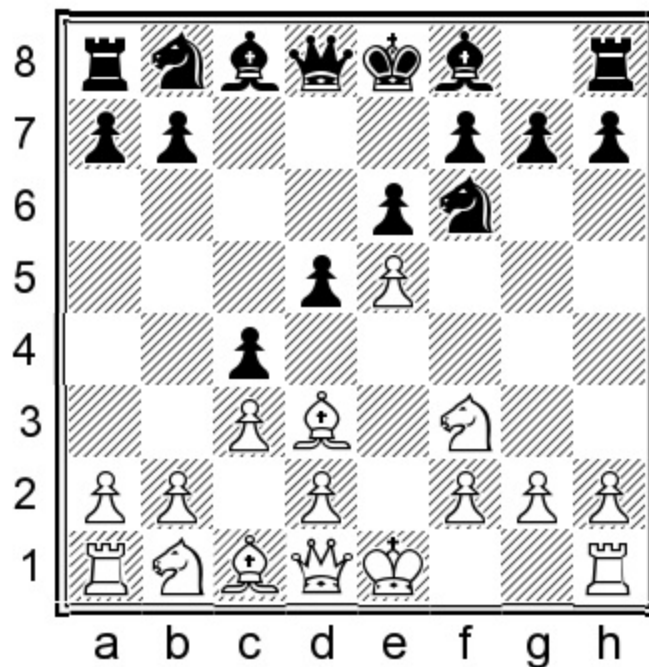
3... ♗f6

This has always been the classical way to meet the Alapin Variation. When White plays c3, he intends d4, but he must find a good way to protect the pawn on e4 which is not so easy to do without making some concessions.

3...d5 This is also a move you can investigate, but it will probably not transpose into the Alapin via 2.c3.

4.e5

4. ♖d3 Some players have tried this approach to follow with ♖c2 and d4, but we are fully capable of reacting in the centre. 4...d5 5.e5 c4!?



Position after: 5...c4!?

A nice intermediate move. 6. ♖c2 ♗fd7 White is unable to get a pawn to d4, so Black should have a nice position. 7.d4 [7. ♖a4?! ♗c6 ♞] 7...cxd3 8. ♖xd3 ♗c6 9. ♖f4 ♖e7 ♞ You can find a few games with this position, but it is not usual for Alapin players to play like this, so I will not go any deeper. I like the position a lot already!

4... ♗d5

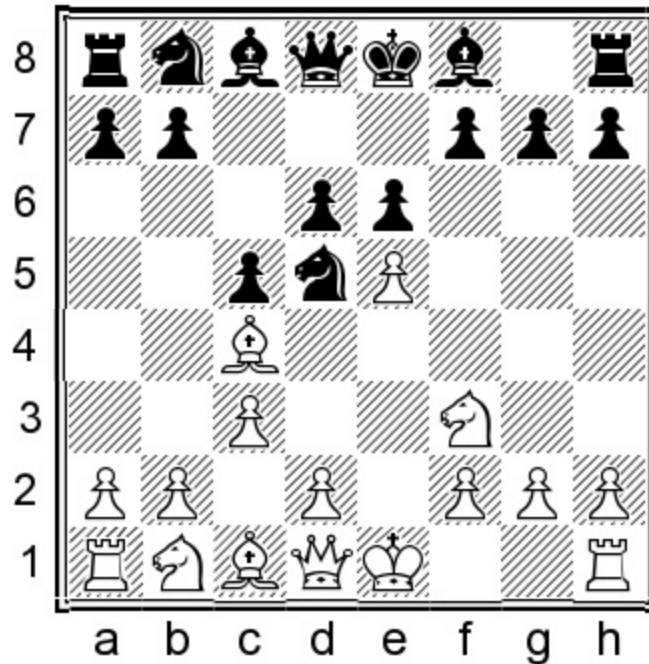
As we will see, one of the difficulties is to keep a clear head concerning the move orders and transpositions that may occur in the variations.

5.♙c4

In general, this will come back to the main line, but there are a few alternatives.

5.d4 Will be covered in the next subchapters.

5...d6

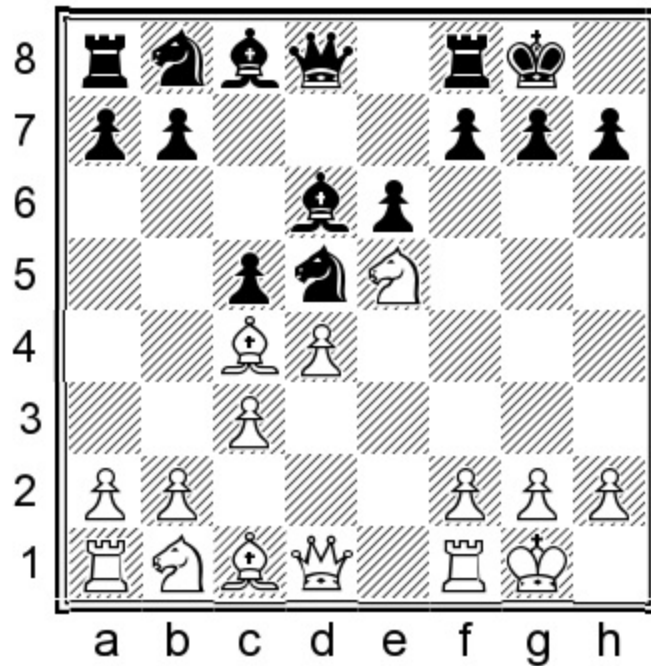


Position after: 5...d6

We are not afraid of White taking on d5 as our d6 pawn will soon be exchanged thereby eliminating the doubled pawn.

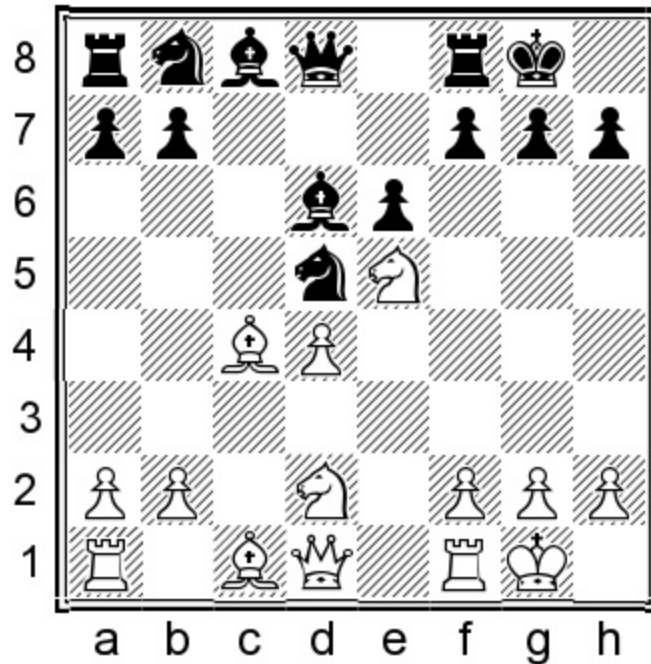
6.d4

A) 6.0-0 dxe5 7.♘xe5 ♙d6 8.d4 0-0 A few high-level games have reached this position. And now White players mainly went in two different directions.



Position after: 8...0-0

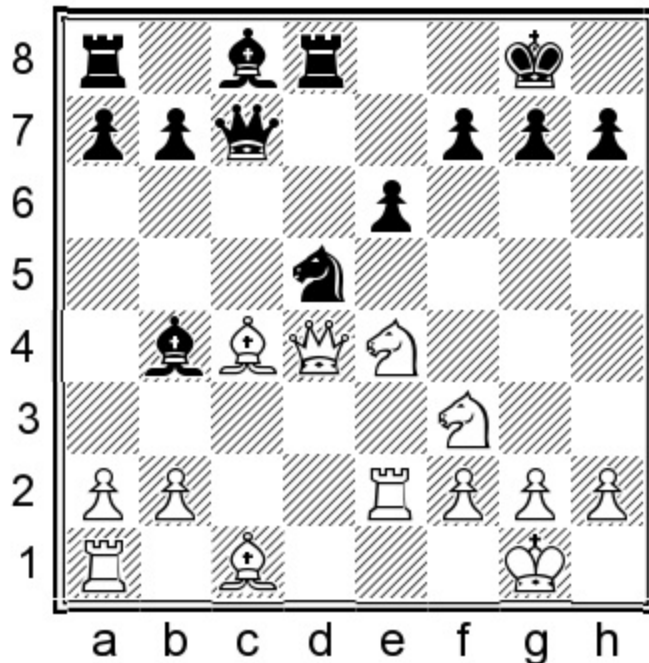
9.♘d2 [9.♞e1 cxd4 10.cxd4 ♘c6! White needs to take and we obtain an isolated pawn in exchange for a stable knight on d5. Black's position is easy to play. 11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.♘d2 ♚b6 13.♘e4 ♙e7 14.b3 a5= The chances are balanced and Black eventually won in Schneider, V (2266) – Kislik, E (2368) Budapest 2013.] 9...cxd4 10.cxd4



Position after: 10.cxd4

We have reached a middlegame with an isolani for White. The knight on d2 is headed to f3 or e4

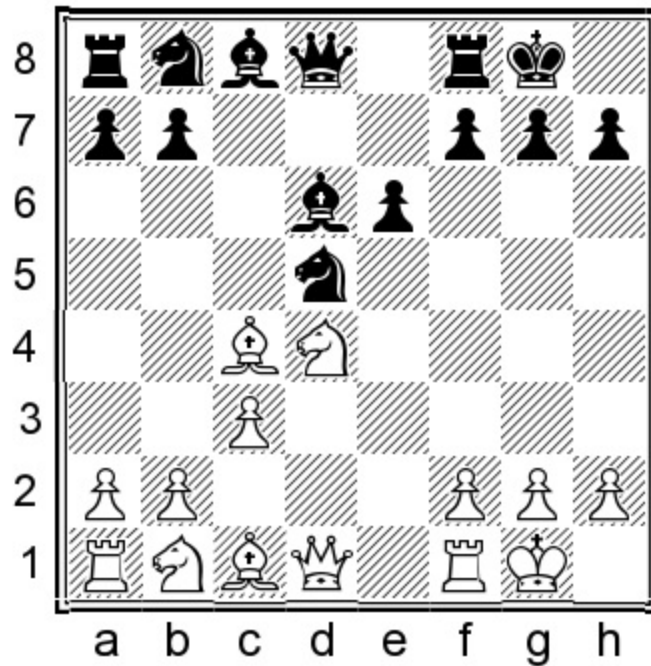
soon. 10...♙c7 11.♖e1 ♘c6! This is clearly the most principled way to challenge White's centre.
 12.♗ef3 Everyone came back here. It is logical in an isolani and to have chances for an attack White avoids trading pieces. But it is really slow. [12.♘df3N There are tactical problems with this move:
 12...♗xe5! As we can see, the bishop on c4 is hanging. 13.dxe5 ♙xc4 14.exd6 ♖d8] 12...♖d8
 13.♗e4 ♙b4! 14.♖e2?! ♗xd4 15.♙xd4



Position after: 15. ♙xd4

And here in the game Rozentalis, E (2588) – Rublevsky, S (2639) Panormo 2001, Black blundered, he should have played: 15...♗e7! 16.♗f6+ gxf6 17.♙g4+ ♗g6+ with a great position.

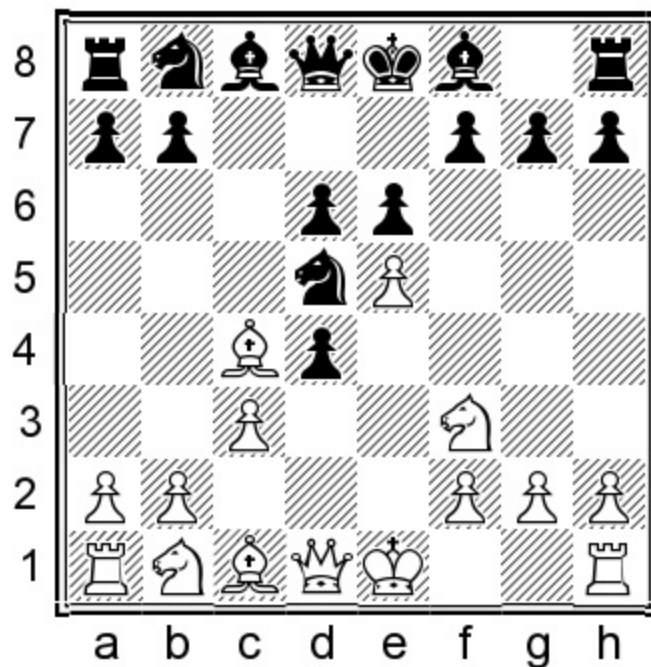
B) 6.exd6 Compared to 6.0-0 gives Black quick development. 6...♙xd6 7.0-0 0-0 8.d4 cxd4 9.♗xd4



Position after: 9. ♖xd4

And now, Black has two solutions and I recommend the safest one. [9...cxd4 b6 ♞ White is clearly not playing a good version of an isolani, he is not developed as well as he should be.] 9...♞c6 [9...♙xh2+ Black grabs a pawn, but White will get some activity. 10.♙xh2 ♞c7+ 11.♙g1 ♞xc4 12.b3 ♞c7 13.c4 ♞e7 14.♞b5] 10.♞xc6 bxc6 11.♞d2 ♙b7↑ We are willing to play with ...♞c7 and ...c5 with good play with both bishops eyeing towards the white king.

6...cxd4



Position after: 6...cxd4

7.♙xd5

7.cxd4 This position will be covered in detail later, from another move order, this is one of the many move orders that leads to this position. That's one of the difficulties of the Alapin Variation from Black's perspective.

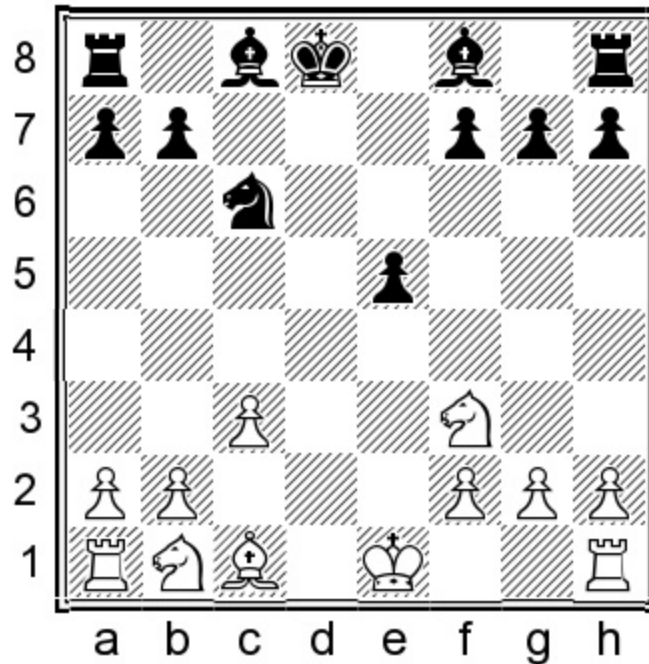
7...exd5 8.♚xd4

It looks optically good for White, but it is not working really well for him, and Black will keep the bishop pair in an open position.

8...♘c6!

This is a strong temporary pawn sacrifice. White needs to take it, otherwise his positions make no sense.

9.♚xd5 dxe5 10.♚xd8+ ♔xd8

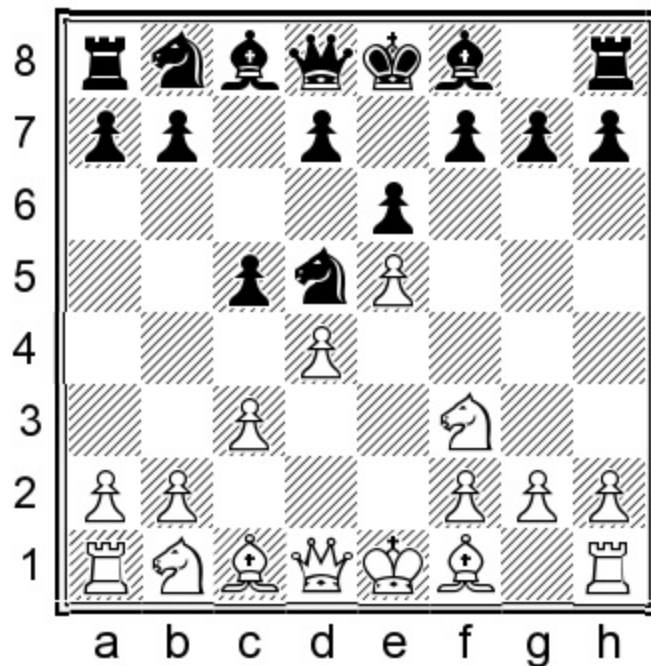


Position after: 10...♔xd8

This happened in many games, such as Sekandar, K (1922) – Van Kampen, R (2529) Hoogeveen 2011, the black king is going to c7, we have the centre and the bishop pair, this is simply much better.

b) 5.d4 cxd4 6.♚xd4

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.c3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘d5 5.d4



Position after: 5.d4

In the Alapin with ...e6, it is rare that White never plays this move, and it is clearly the main continuation.

5...cxd4

Here we take it as we do not want to allow ideas like c4 followed by d5.

6.♔xd4

This is a well-known sideline for White in the Alapin. White is trying to centralize his pieces, and to prevent our logical development.

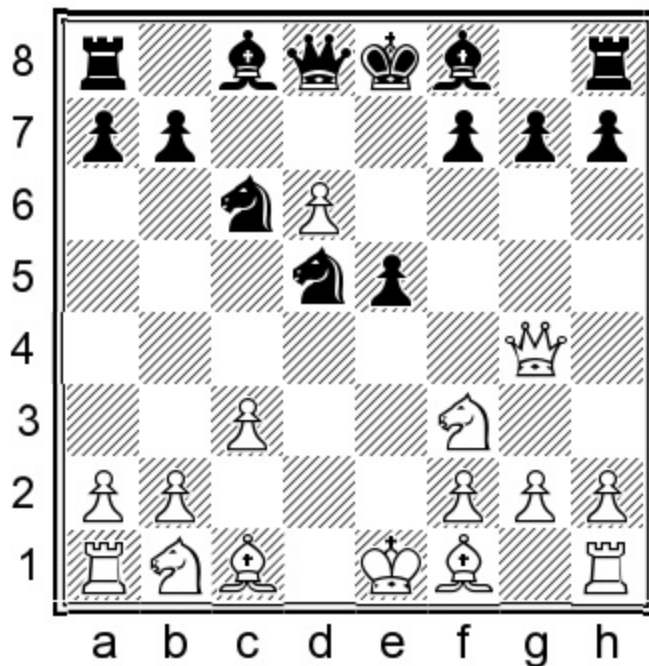
A) 6.cxd4 This is obviously the main line and will be covered in the next subchapters.

B) 6.♙c4 d6 This was already seen in 5.♙c4.

C) 6.♘xd4 ♔c7 7.f4 a6 8.♙d3 d6 $\bar{}$ White must trade the strength of his position and he will only remain with weaknesses.

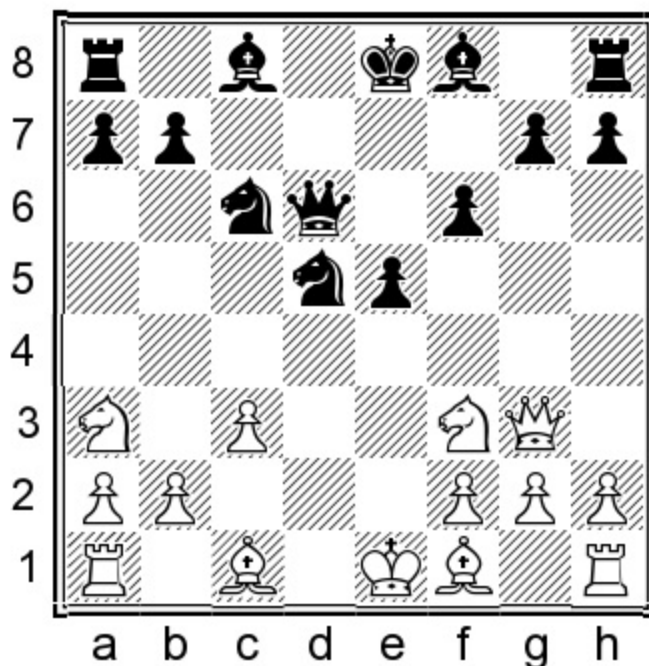
6...♘c6 7.♔e4

7.♔g4 Recently a few players tried this move, but it is clearly a sideline. 7...d6! 8.exd6 [8.♙b5 dxe5 9.♘xe5 ♔c7 10.♘xc6 bxc6 It is clear that Black is solving his development problems. 11.♙e2 e5 $\bar{}$] 8...e5!



Position after: 8...e5!

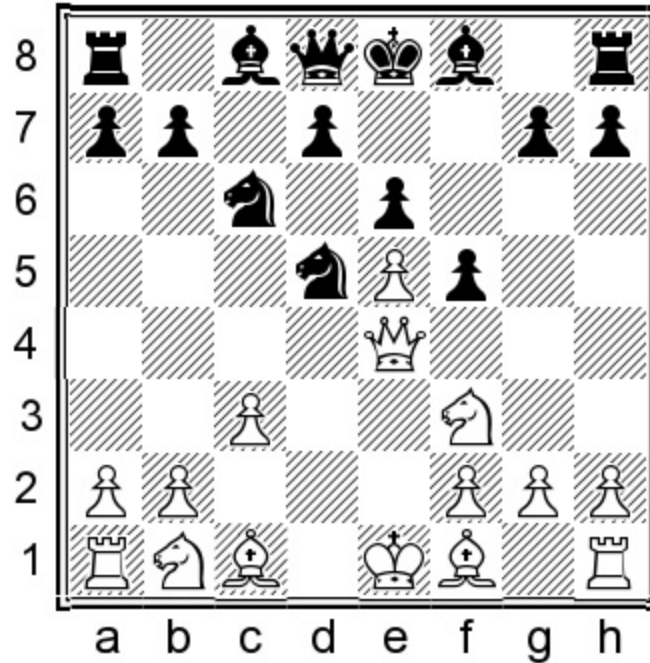
A nice intermediate move. We want to recapture with the bishop without dropping the g7 pawn.
 9. ♖e4 [9. ♖g3 ♜xd6 10. ♘a3 f6!



Position after: 10...f6!

A safe defending move. 11. ♘c4 ♘e6 12. 0-0 ♜d7! 13. ♞d1 ♜f7 ♠ And we are close to finishing our development.] 9... ♘f6 10. ♖c2 ♘xd6 ♠ Black has the centre and better development; it seems clear that White's opening is a failure.

7...f5!



Position after: 7...f5!

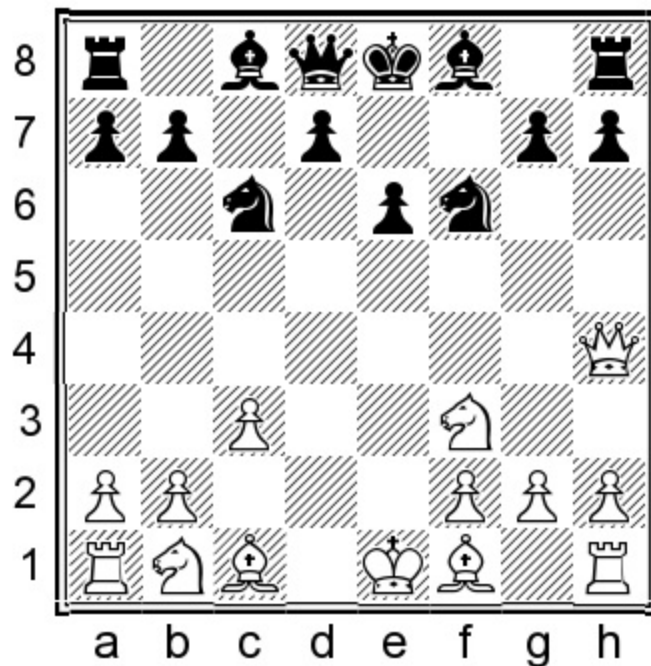
An important move. White has forced Black to decide. Among the many games that reached this position, two main ways to play have emerged.

8. ♖e2

The main move. It blocks the bishop on f1, but the point is that opening the centre with ...d6 is difficult, because White would simply take thereby creating a weak pawn on e6.

8. exf6 To my eyes this has to be a strategic mistake as it loses some time and abandons the centre.

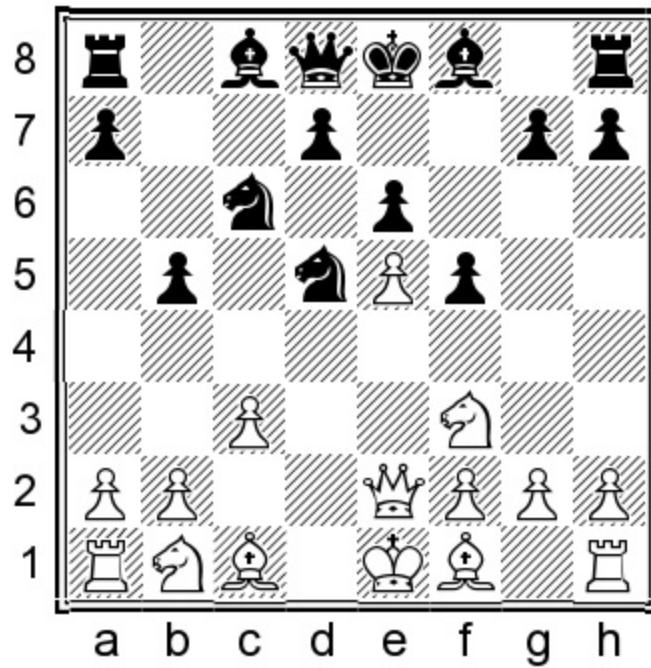
8... ♞xf6 9. ♖h4



Position after: 9. ♔h4

White has some pressure on the kingside in the short term, but Black has a strong centre in the long-term. [9. ♖c2 e5! 10. ♗b5 ♘c5 11. 0-0 0-0♣ With a very nice position for Black. 12. ♗xc6?! bxc6 13. ♘xe5 d5 14. ♘d2 ♗d6 15. ♘df3 ♖c7 16. ♗e1 ♘g4–+ White is always in deep trouble in such open positions, the extra-pawn is irrelevant.] 9...e5! [9...d5 is played more often, but less accurate. 10. ♗d3! ♞ White has ideas of ♗g6+.] 10. ♗e2 [10. ♗d3? is a blunder 10...e4! 11. ♗xe4 ♖e7 12. ♘bd2 d5–+] 10...d5 11. 0-0 ♗e7♣ With a great position and a good advantage for Black.

8...b5!



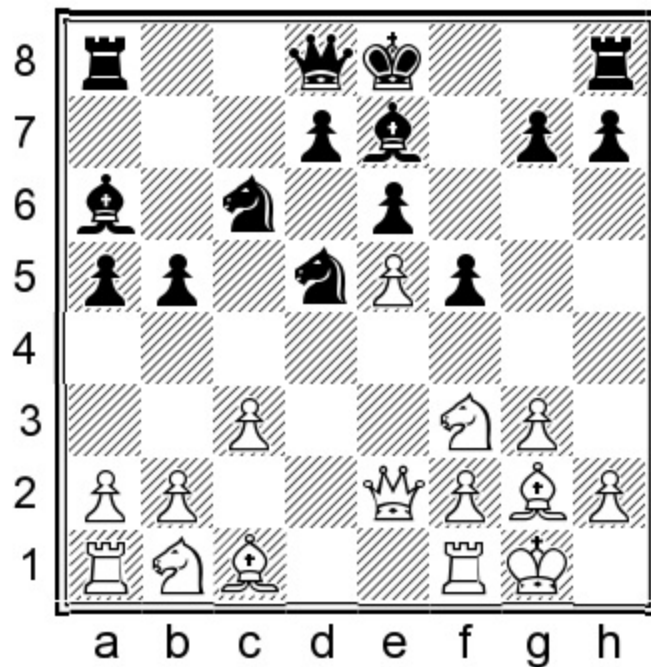
Position after: 8...b5!

A strong reaction that Black recently discovered.

9.g3

9.♙xb5 This is a risky choice which few have dared to take. 9...♚c7 10.♙e2 a5 11.c4 ♘a6⚡ White is under pressure and still far from castling.

9...a5! 10.♘g2 ♘e7 11.0-0 ♘a6↑

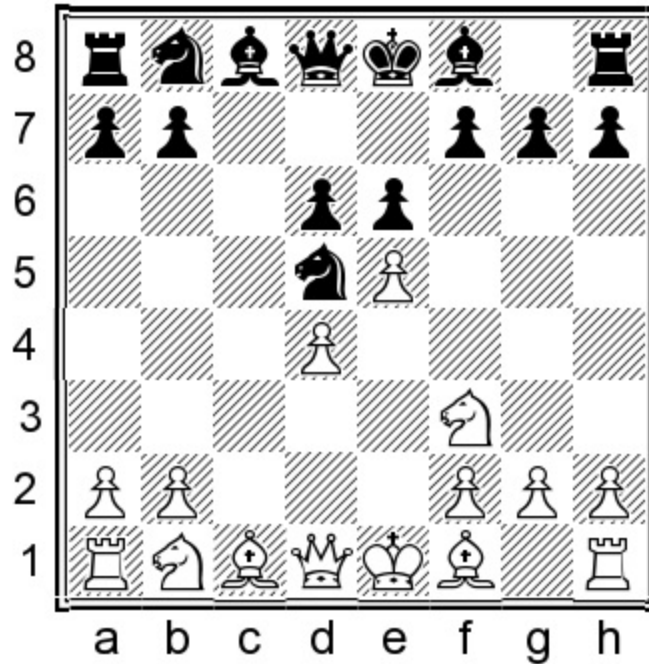


Position after: 11...♙a6↑

Black has a great position. Please see the game Demin, V (2430) – Bachmann, A (2599) Chess.com INT 2020.

c) 5.d4 cxd4 6.cxd4 d6 7.a3

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.c3 ♗f6 4.e5 ♗d5 5.d4 cxd4 6.cxd4 d6



Position after: 6...d6

We will begin addressing this important position with White's sidelines and then 7.♙c4 will be covered in the next subchapters.

7.a3

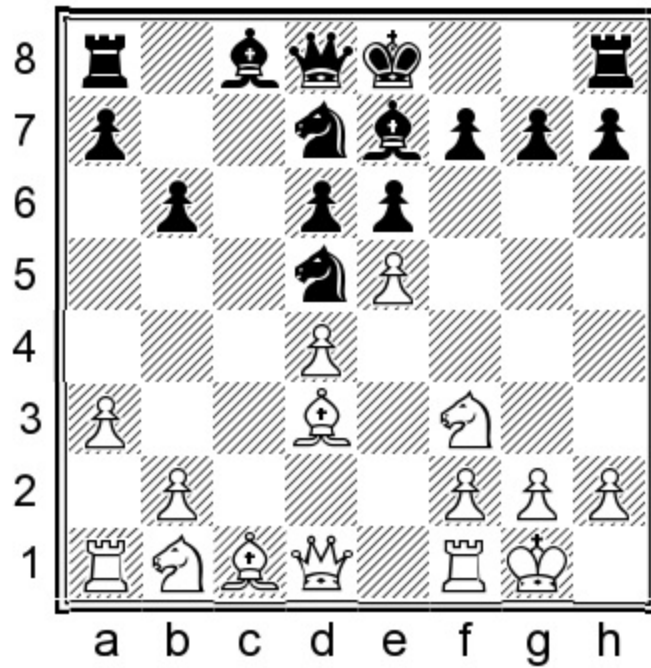
This is the third choice here. White prepares to place the bishop on d3.

7.♙d3 This line is here to illustrate why White wants to play with a3 when he wants to place the bishop on d3. 7...dxe5 8.dxe5 ♗b4! 9.♙b5+ ♙d7=

7...♙e7!?

7...♙d7 Is the main line here but I found no reason not to go for the same system as after 7.♙c4. 8.♙d3 ♙c6 9.0-0 ♗d7 And the line continues with a lot of different moves for White.

8.♙d3 b6 9.0-0 ♗d7

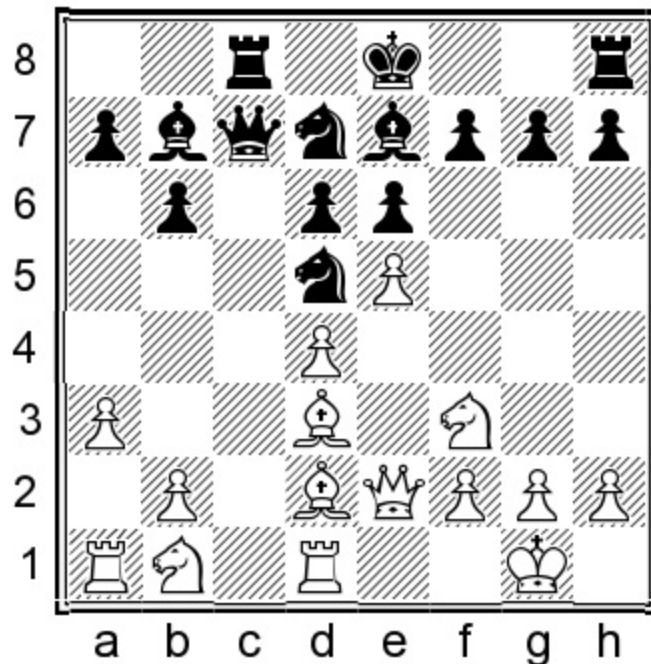


Position after: 9... Nxd7

White clearly wants to organize something on the kingside therefore you should take your time before castling and develop the queenside first.

10. Re1

10. Re2 Bb7 11. Rd1 Rc8 12. Bd2 Qc7



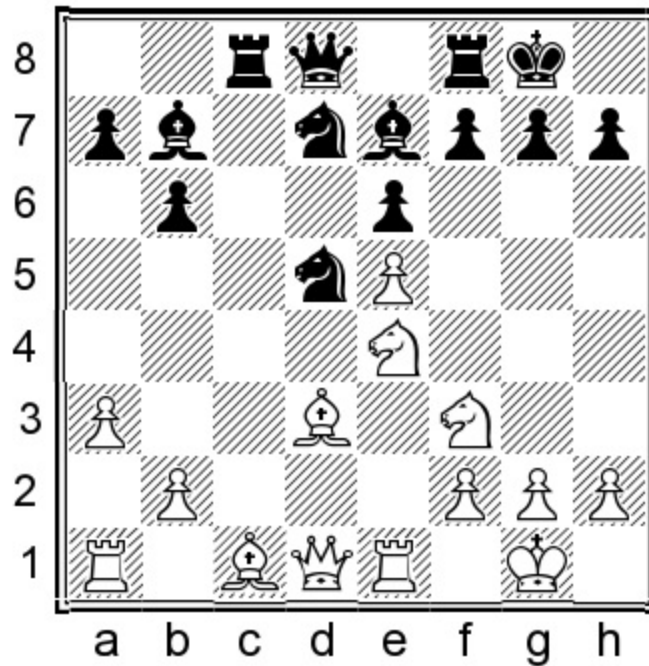
Position after: 12... Qc7

Black does not need to rush in castling. [12...0-0 13.♙e4 g6⇒] 13.♘c3 ♘xc3 14.♙xc3 0-0= Now castling is completely safe because ♙e4 is prohibited.

10...♙b7 11.♘bd2

White wants to bring a knight to e4, so I prefer to prevent any ideas of exd6.

11...dxe5 12.dxe5 0-0 13.♘e4 ♜c8



Position after: 13...♜c8

14.♙d2

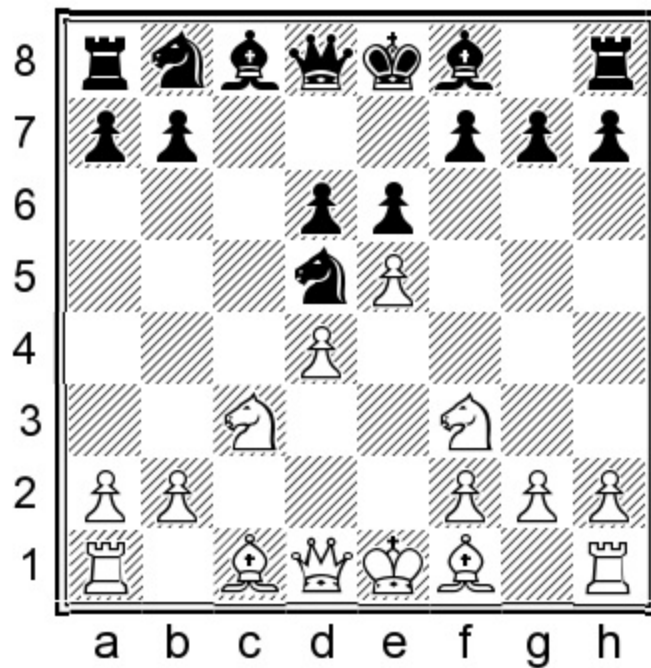
14.h4 ♙c7 15.♙d2 ♙b8 16.♘g3 ♜fd8!⇒ We need to be careful about White's attack but this is fully playable for Black as his position has no weaknesses.

14...♙c7 15.♜c1 ♙b8⇒

Trading a pair of rooks helps White organizing his pieces as in Nisipeanu, L (2693) – Mamedyarov, S (2757) Sofia 2007.

d) 5.d4 cxd4 6.cxd4 d6 7.♘c3

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.c3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘d5 5.d4 cxd4 6.cxd4 d6 7.♘c3



Position after: 7. ♘c3

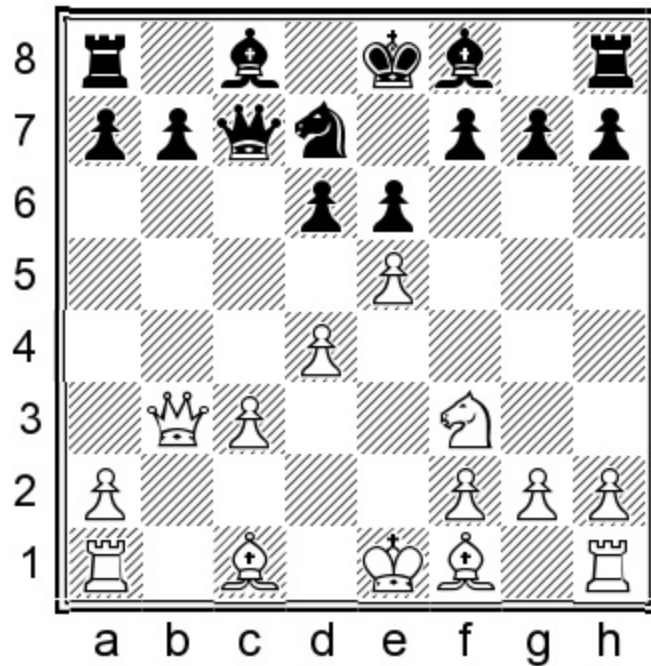
This is the main alternative to 7. ♙c4 and simply reinforces White's centre.

7... ♞xc3! 8. bxc3 ♚c7!

First, we force White to decide about defending c3.

9. ♙d2

9. ♚b3 ♞d7!

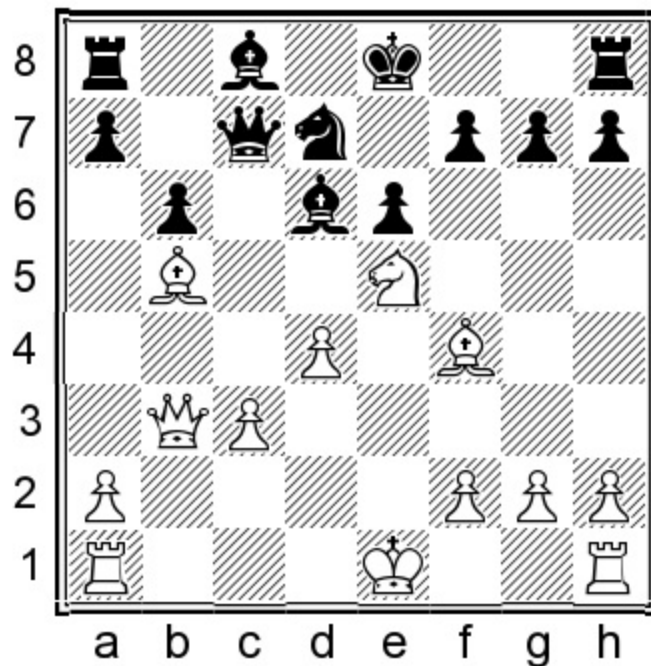


Position after: 9...♞d7!

We want to challenge White's centre. 10.♞f4 dxe5 11.♞xe5 [11.♞xe5 ♞xe5 12.♞xe5 ♞d6! 13.♞b5+ ♞f8 14.0-0 g6↑ The king is going to be safe on g7 and Black keeps the bishop pair.] 11...♞d6 12.♞b5

A) 12...0-0?! This leaves White with an interesting, forced variation. 13.♞xd7 ♞xd7 14.♞xd7 ♞xd7 15.♞xd6 ♞xd6 16.♞xb7 [16.0-0 b6≠ Only Black can be better, the pawns on c3 and d4 are two weaknesses.] 16...♞a3 17.0-0 ♞xc3 18.d5=

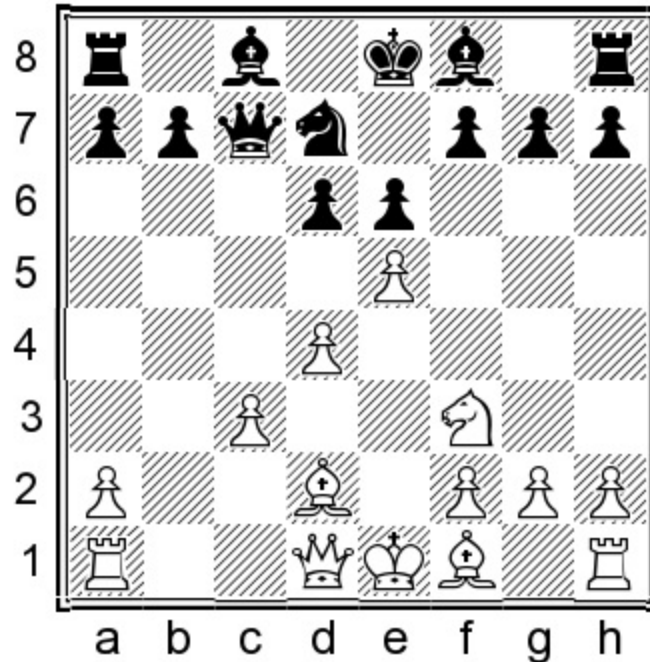
B) 12...b6!?N



Position after: 12...b6!?N

With this precise move it looks like Black keeps winning chances. 13.0-0 0-0 14.♘xd7 ♙xd7
15.♙xd6 ♚xd6↑ And, in comparison with 12...0-0, White cannot take on b7. So, it looks stronger for Black.

9...♘d7



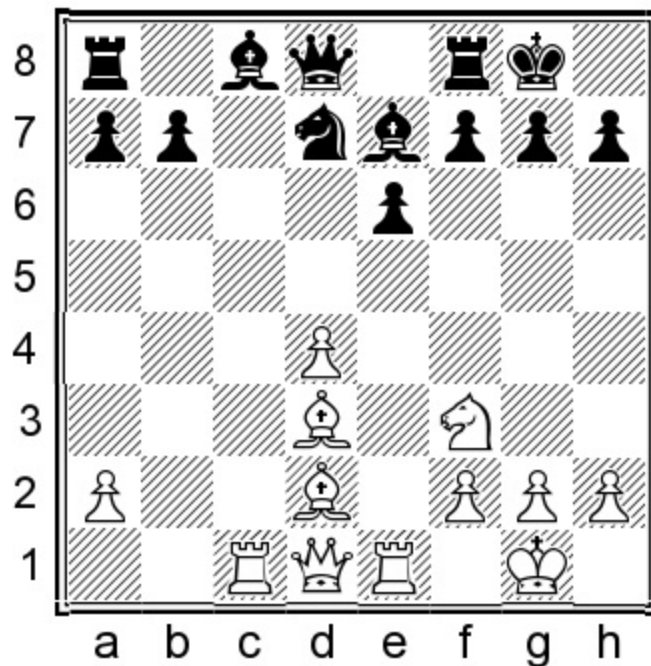
Position after: 9...♘d7

Here White has tried several moves. I guess he was not satisfied by taking on d6 which looks like the natural move.

10.exd6?!

The main move but I really think it only helps Black. White should look for something else, otherwise that means the variation with 7.♘c3 is dubious.

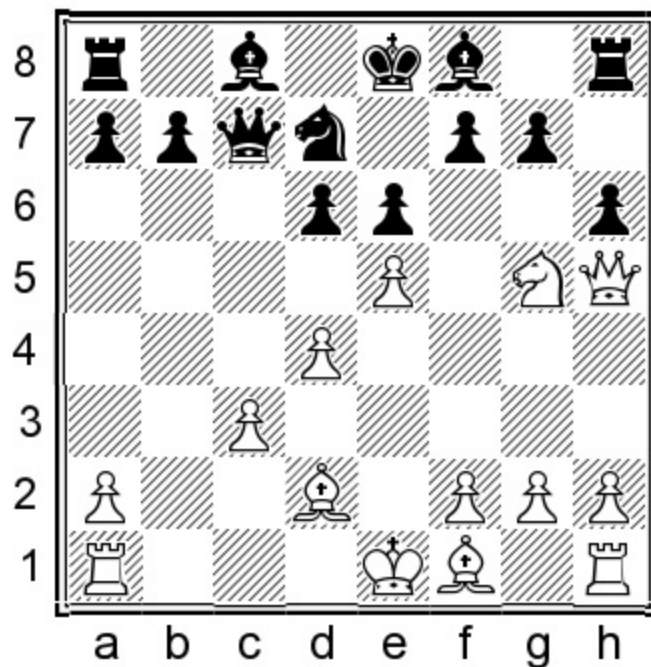
A) 10.♙d3 dxe5 11.0-0! At least this line is quite dangerous for Black. 11...♙e7 12.♞e1 exd4!? It is also possible to let White take back on e5, but it would justify his move order. 13.cxd4 0-0 14.♞c1 ♙d8



Position after: 14... ♕d8

While the position is complicated White needs to prove he was right to sacrifice a pawn. 15. ♖e4 a6 16. ♗e2 ♘f6 17. ♗h4 ♙d7= Flores, D (2358) – Karpov, A (2699) Buenos Aires 2000.

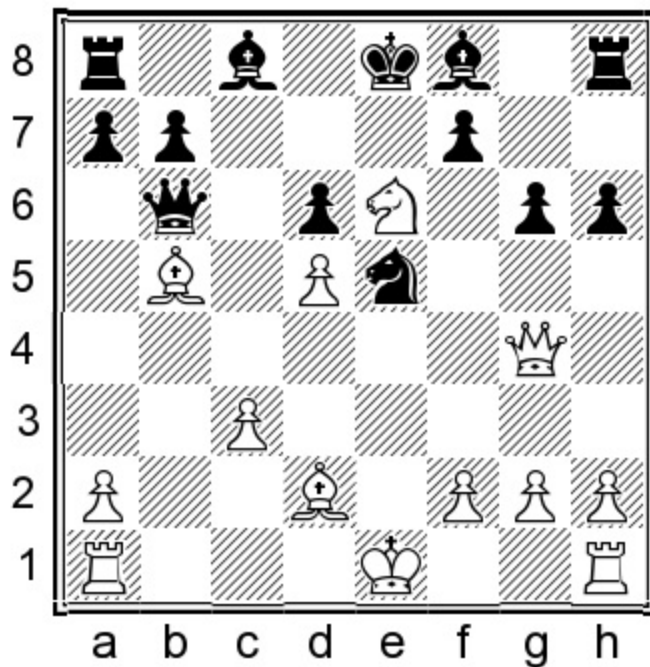
B) 10. ♖g5 h6! 11. ♗h5?!



Position after: 11. ♗h5?!

This move threatens ♗xe6, but it is simply refuted. [11. exd6 ♙xd6 12. ♖e4 0-0 13. ♗xd6 ♗xd6 14. ♙e2 b6 15. 0-0 ♙b7= White has the bishop pair, but he also has weak pawns in the centre.]

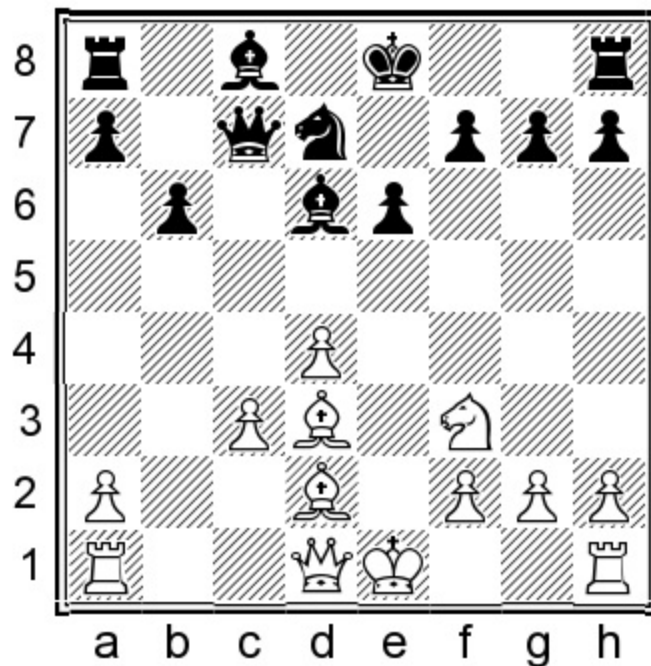
11...g6! 12.♘xe6 ♚c6! An accurate move! 13.d5 [13.♚h3 ♚e4+ 14.♔d1 fxe6 15.♚xe6+ ♔d8–+ White has nothing to play for.; 13.♚g4 ♘xe5! 14.dxe5 ♙xe6+] 13...♚b6 [13...♚a4!?N This appears to be quite strong.] 14.♚g4 ♘xe5 15.♙b5+?!



Position after: 15. ♙b5+?!

Tempting, but not really strong. 15...♚xb5 16.♘c7+ ♔d8 17.♚xc8+ ♜xc8 18.♘xb5 ♖a6 19.♘d4 ♜c5+ Things are clear now, Black was just better in Shkapenko, P (2424) – Rasulov, V (2478) Chess.com INT 2020.

10...♙xd6 11.♙d3 ♖b6!



Position after: 11...b6!

The most accurate move so that Black may quickly place the bishop on b7.

11...0-0?! 12.♔e2 We do not want to allow this possibility for White. 12...b6 13.♔e4↗

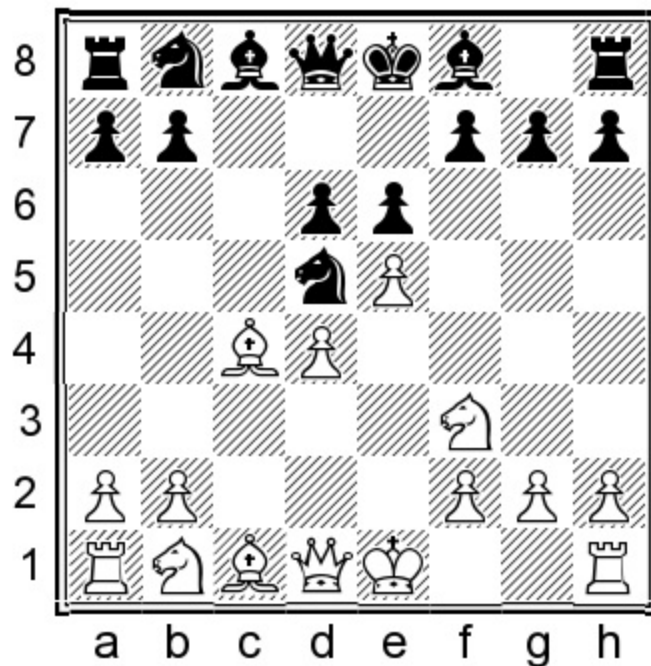
12.0-0 ♖b7 13.♗e1 0-0 14.h3 ♖f4

I will not go deeper into this line. Black is playing against weak hanging pawns, and he wants to trade to attack these pawns more easily.

This line has a poor score for White and it has been known to be bad for him since the game Timman, J (2635) – Piket, J (2670), The Hague 1995. We can mention that starting with 14...♗ac8 or 14...♗fd8 is also good for Black.

e) 5.d4 cxd4 6.cxd4 d6 7.♘c4 ♘e7 8.0-0 0-0 9.--

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.c3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘d5 5.d4 cxd4 6.cxd4 d6 7.♘c4



Position after: 7. ♘c4

Clearly the main move. It does not really mean that the bishop wants to take on d5 (as we saw in 5. ♘c4), but it might.

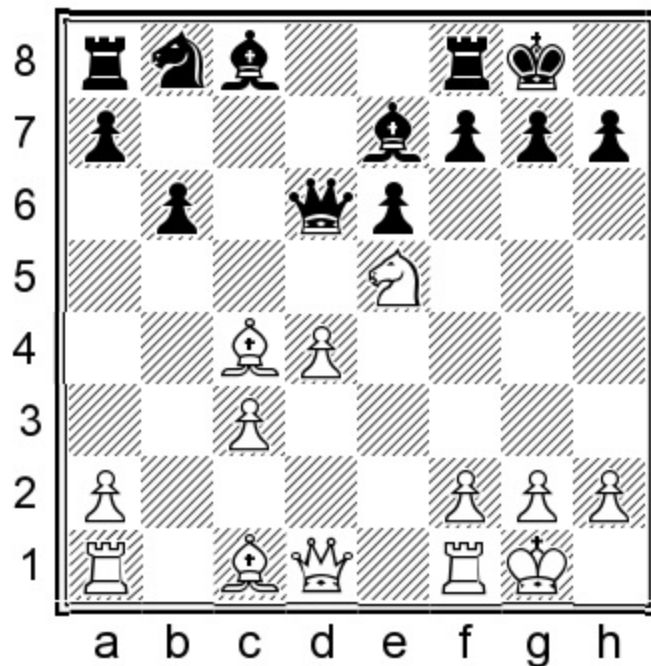
7... ♗e7 8.0-0 0-0

This is probably the main line in the Alapin Variation when Black plays with ...e6. There is clearly a main move, which is 9. ♖e2, but first let us look at the side lines 9. ♖e1 and 9. exd6 here, and then 9. ♘d2 and 9. ♗c3.

9. ♖e1

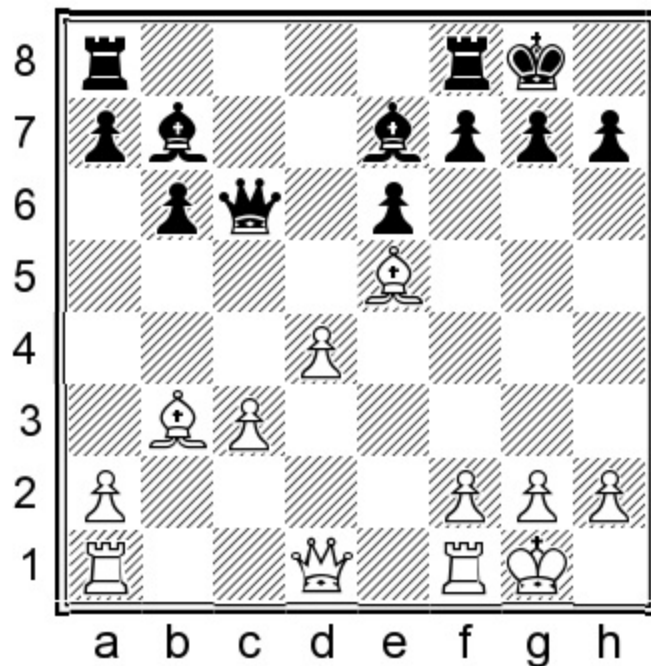
Here, I have chosen an interesting sideline, and you will see why in the variations.

9. exd6?! It may seem a bit harsh to mark this as dubious, but I think it only helps Black to develop. If he plays precisely, he should not experience difficulties. 9... ♖xd6 10. ♗c3 ♗xc3 11. bxc3 b6 12. ♗e5



Position after: 12. ♘e5

A) 12... ♖c6 Has been played in a few games but White somehow justifies his last move with the following variation. 13. ♕f4! ♜xe5 14. ♕xe5 ♝c6 15. ♕b3 ♕b7

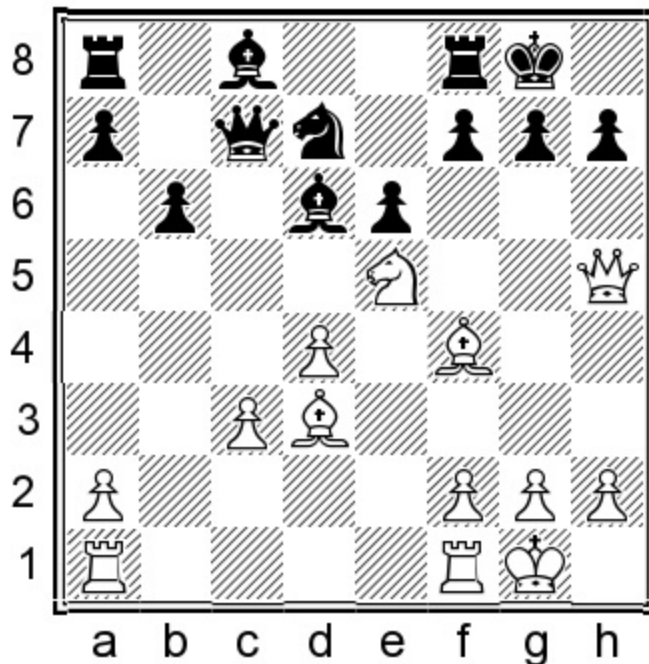


Position after: 15... ♕b7

Black seems to take over the initiative, but White defends g2 and attacks at the same time. 16. ♝g4! g6 17. ♖fe1↑ Black won in Jones, G (2709) – Swiercz, D (2667) Saint Louis 2019, but White seems to have the most promising position.

Instead of this, Black has a novelty.

B) 12...♔c7!N 13.♙f4 ♘d6! This is the point. White needs to be careful with his bishop on c4, but also his knight on e5 which is pinned. 14.♙d3 [14.♙b3?? f6-+] 14...♞d7 15.♔h5

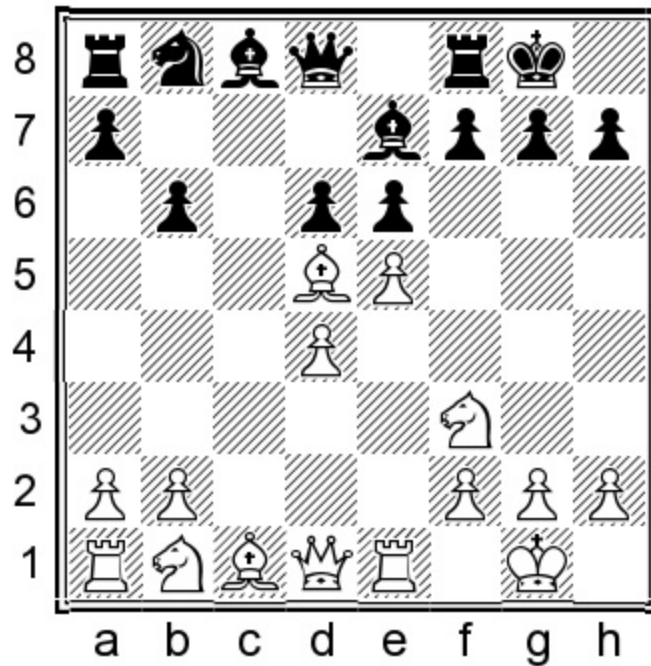


Position after: 15.♔h5

This looks like the only idea that can scare Black, but he can simply reply with 15...g6! 16.♔f3 [16.♞xg6?? This does not force perpetual. 16...hxg6 17.♙xg6 ♞f6 18.♔h6 ♙xf4-+; 16.♙xg6?? Does not work either. 16...fxg6 17.♞xg6 ♙xf4-+] 16...♙b7 17.♔g3 ♞xe5 18.dxe5 ♙e7 19.h4 ♞fd8↯. Black's immediate threat is to take on c3. White has a possible attack, but the centre is fully open and it should provide Black enough counterplay.

9...dxe5!?

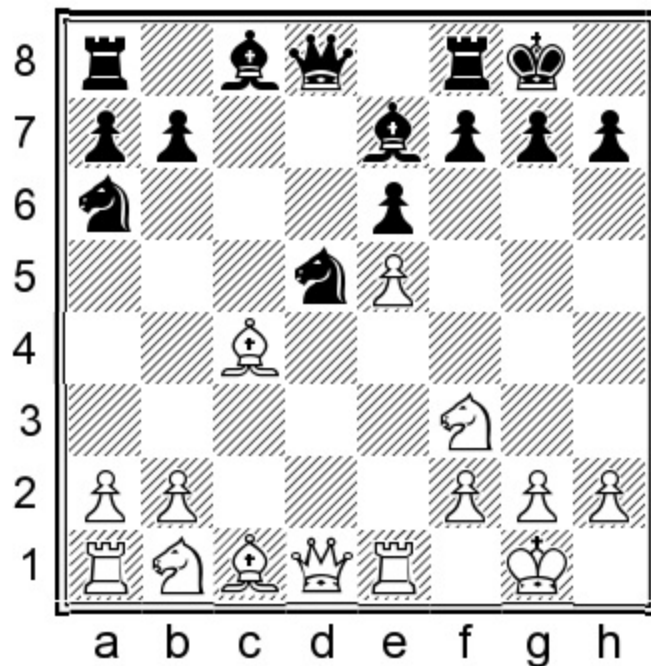
9...b6 This leads to a solid but passive position. [9...♞c6 This leads back to other lines where Black has played ...♞c6 earlier. Obviously, it is playable for Black, but I prefer something less usual.] 9...b6 10.♙xd5!



Position after: 10. ♕xd5!

This is sometimes the problem of an early ...b6. White can take and block the a8-h1 diagonal. This means putting our bishop on b7 would be pointless and now we have created a weakness by playing ...b6. 10...exd5 11. ♖c3 ♕e6 12. ♕f4↑ Is always slightly unpleasant for Black.

10.dxe5 ♘a6!?



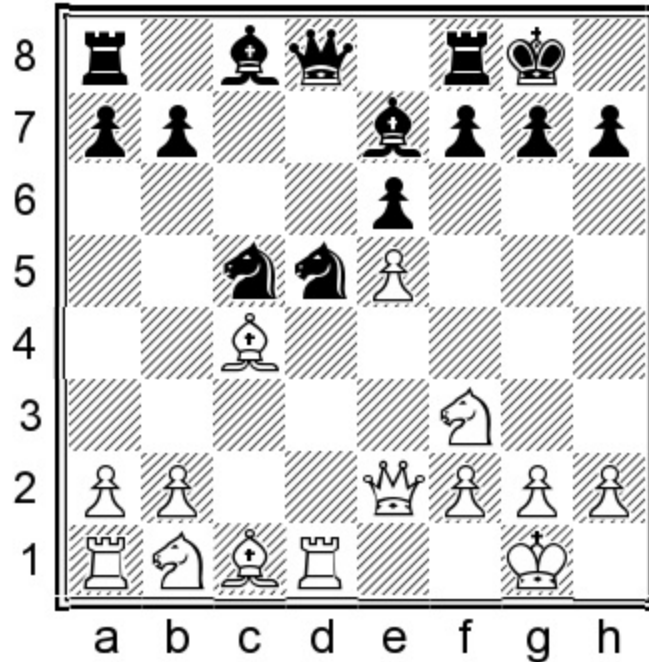
Position after: 10... ♘a6!?

I like this move and it has only been tried once. The knight heads toward c5 from which it will control important squares such as e4 and d3, and it will not bother our light-squared bishop.

11. ♖bd2

A) 11. ♖d4 I am not sure why, but Stockfish likes this move, at least at first. 11... ♙c5! 12. ♖c3 ♜b6! This forces the matter as White has two hanging pieces. 13. ♙xa6 bxa6 14. ♙e3 ♜c4!↑ We have an ugly pawn structure, but we definitely have the initiative.

B) 11. ♚e2 ♜c5 12. ♜d1



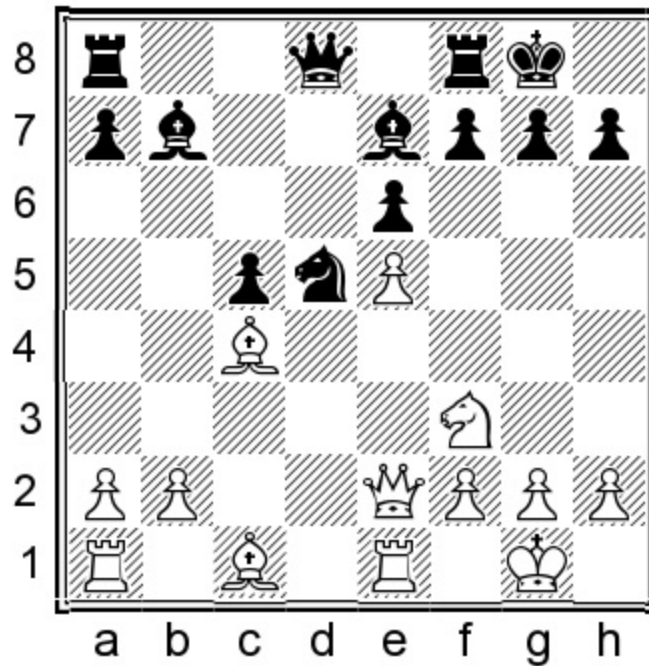
Position after: 12. ♜d1

It makes sense for White to reorganize his pieces, and in particular this rook, which became pointless on e1. 12...b6 13. ♙xd5 exd5 14. ♖c3 ♙b7 15. ♖d4 ♚d7⇌ White seems stable right now, but he is only trying to contain our play. If we manage to open the position, we will end up much better. Right now, I would say that the position is balanced.

11... ♖c5 12. ♖e4 b6 13. ♚e2

13. ♖fg5 ♜xe4 14. ♖xe4 ♙b7 15. ♚g4 ♜h8! =

13... ♙b7 14. ♖xc5 bxc5!



Position after: 14...bxc5!

The point of this move is seen after White's next move.

15. ♖e4 ♜b6!

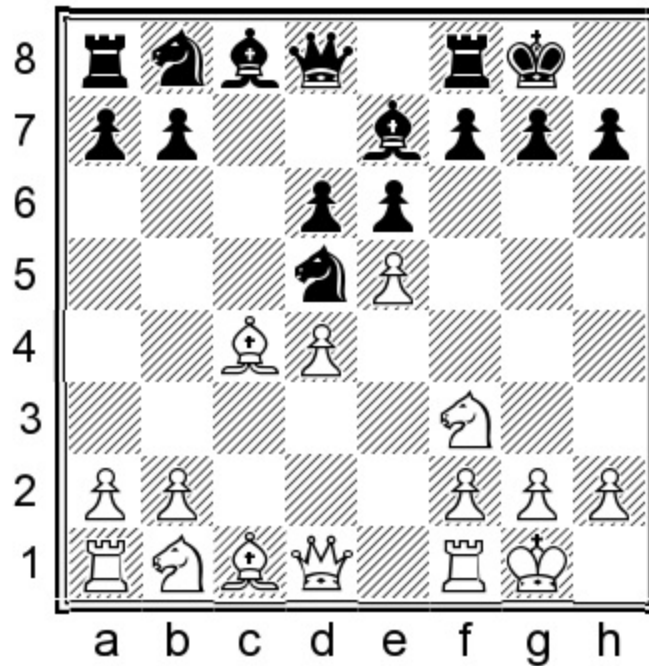
This square is available for the knight.

16. ♙xb7 ♞xc4 17. ♙e4 ♜b6=

We will have an amazing knight on d5 that compensates for our weaker pawn structure. I do not believe that White has an attack here because 2 sets of minor pieces have been exchanged including White's light-squared bishop which supports attacks against our king.

f) 5.d4 cxd4 6.cxd4 d6 7.♙c4 ♙e7 8.0-0 0-0 9.♞c3

1.e4 c5 2.♞f3 e6 3.c3 ♞f6 4.e5 ♞d5 5.d4 cxd4 6.cxd4 d6 7.♙c4 ♙e7 8.0-0 0-0



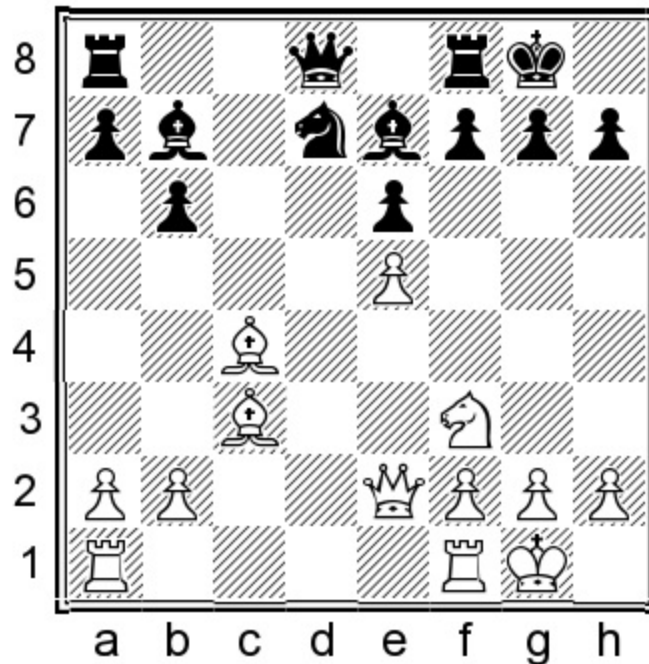
Position after: 8...0-0

9.♘c3

This is another interesting sideline for White. Once again, I have selected a lesser played option.

A) 9.♞e2 This will be analysed in the next subchapters.

B) 9.♞d2 This is one of the most played sidelines, but it does not look really scary. 9...dxe5 10.dxe5 [10.♘xe5? ♘c6≠ The bishop has no clear point on d2 in case of an isolani.] 10...b6 11.♞e2 ♞b7 12.♘c3 ♘xc3 13.♞xc3 ♘d7



Position after: 13... ♖d7

With a rather easy middlegame for Black. For example, 14. ♖fd1 ♔c7 15. ♕d3 ♖fd8 16. ♖ac1 ♖ac8. Black is completely fine. Huerga Leache, M (2436) – Aroshidze, L (2535), Figueres 2015. White has no attacking ideas right now and the position is tense in the centre.

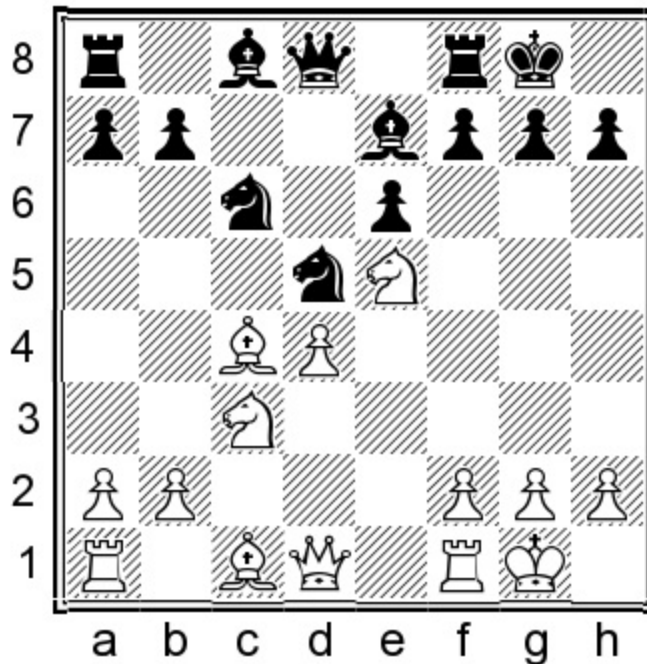
9...dxe5!?

The usual move is 9... ♖xc3, but I find this try very promising.

10. ♖xe5

10.dxe5?! ♖xc3 11.bxc3 ♔xd1 Of course we trade everything, we have a great endgame with no weakness. 12. ♖xd1 b6

10... ♖c6



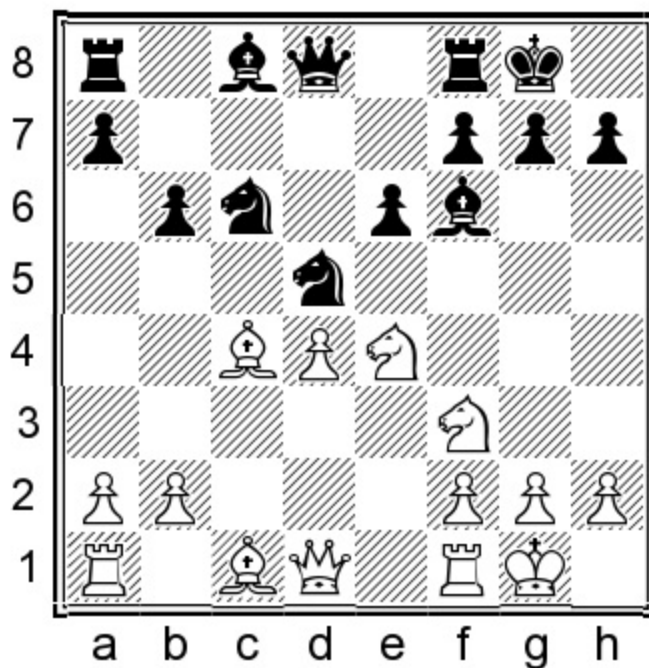
Position after: 10... ♖c6

We have reached a typical isolani position for White. But the knight is already on e5, and I am not sure it is great there as White isn't the one that wants to trade, because of the isolani. In the highest-level games I saw, White just retreated the knight back to f3.

11. ♖xc6

A) 11. ♖xd5 This only leads to an equal position for White. 11...exd5 12. ♕b3 ♕e6 13. ♖xc6 bxc6 14. ♕f4 ♕f6 15. ♖c1 ♔b6. Black will continue with ...a5, with some activity on the queenside.

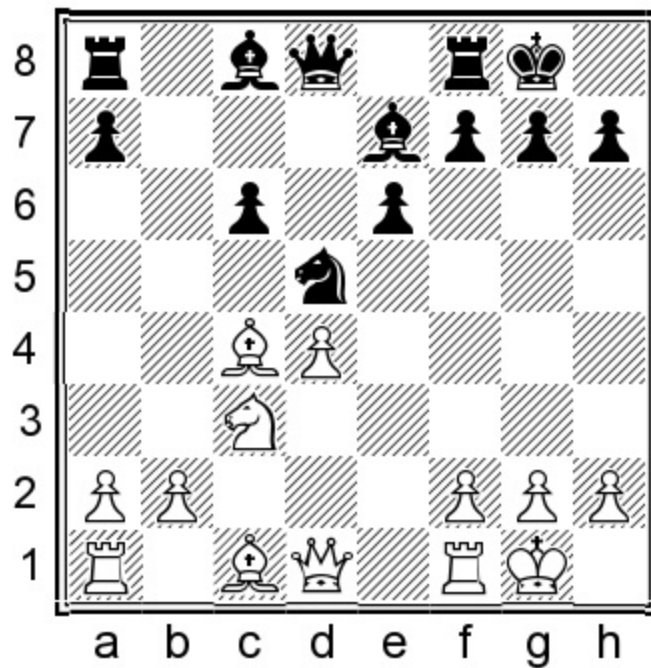
B) 11.♘f3?! This position has occurred many times... with White to play! It can arise from many openings (English, Semi – Tarrasch etc). With the extra tempo, it should be safe for Black. 11...♙f6! The bishop is great here. It controls the centre, and it gives Black the possibility of playing ...♞cd7 which is a good manoeuvre in these positions. 12.♞e4 This occurred in Kovalenko, I (2639) – Markowski, T (2558) Bialystok 2017. Black came back passively to e7 with the bishop, but he should have continued developing with 12...b6!N.



Position after: 12...b6!N

And now for example: 13.♞e1 ♙b7 14.♞xf6+ ♞xf6 15.♙g5 h6 16.♙h4 ♞e7!±. White probably needs to take on f6, but objectively he has nothing at all. Black will have great pieces once he manages ...♞f5, with many threats against White's centre.

11...bxc6

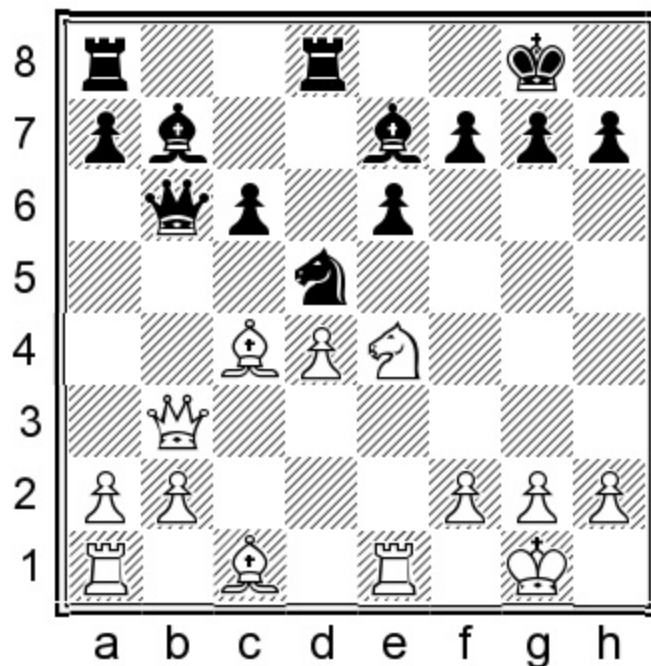


Position after: 11...bxc6

White has reinforced our knight on d5. He has to play for the weakness of a few squares such as c5, but we should be able to keep enough activity.

12. ♖e2

12. ♖e1 ♜b7 13. ♞e4 ♚b6 14. ♛b3 ♞fd8



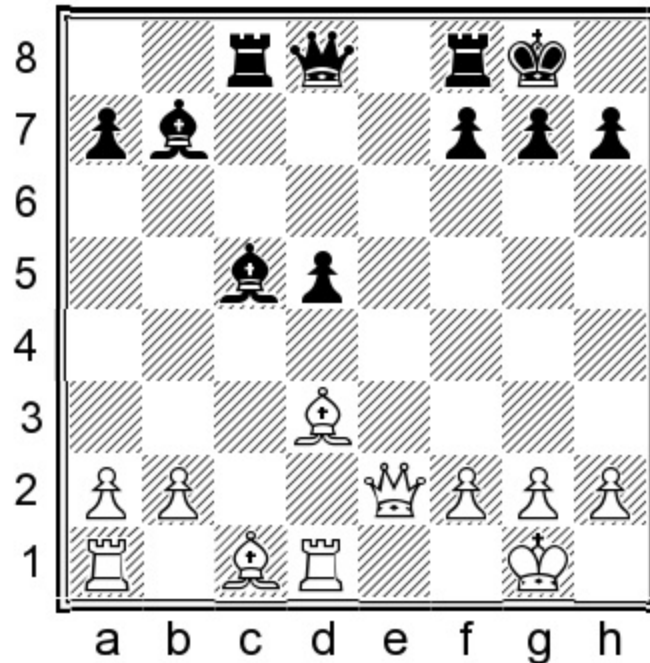
Position after: 14...♞fd8

It is not easy to find an active plan for White. 15.♙g5 ♖xg5 16.♜xg5 h6 17.♙xd5 ♜xd5 18.♚xb6 axb6 19.♞f3 g5 ♞ Abdulov, O (2414) – Demchenko, A (2664) Konya 2018.

12...♙b7 13.♞d1

And ½ – ½ (47) Pourramezani, A (2510) – Idani, P (2576) Teheran 2017, Black could have reacted immediately.

13...c5! 14.♜xd5 exd5 15.dxc5 ♙xc5 16.♙d3 ♜c8↑

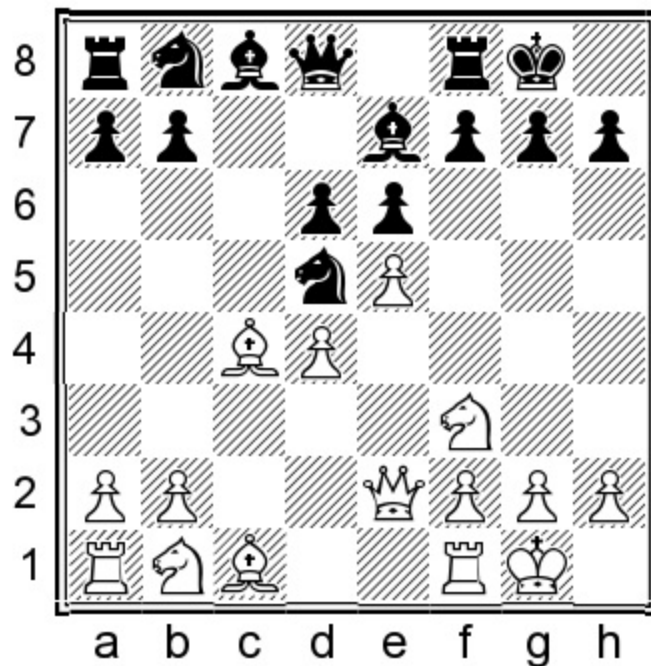


Position after: 16...♜c8↑

I doubt White has any hope of being better. Of course, we have an isolated pawn that may be weak, but there is more than enough activity to compensate for it.

g) 5.d4 cxd4 6.cxd4 d6 7.♙c4 ♙e7 8.0-0 0-0 9.♚e2 ♙d7 10.--

1.e4 c5 2.♞f3 e6 3.c3 ♞f6 4.e5 ♞d5 5.d4 cxd4 6.cxd4 d6 7.♙c4 ♙e7 8.0-0 0-0 9.♚e2



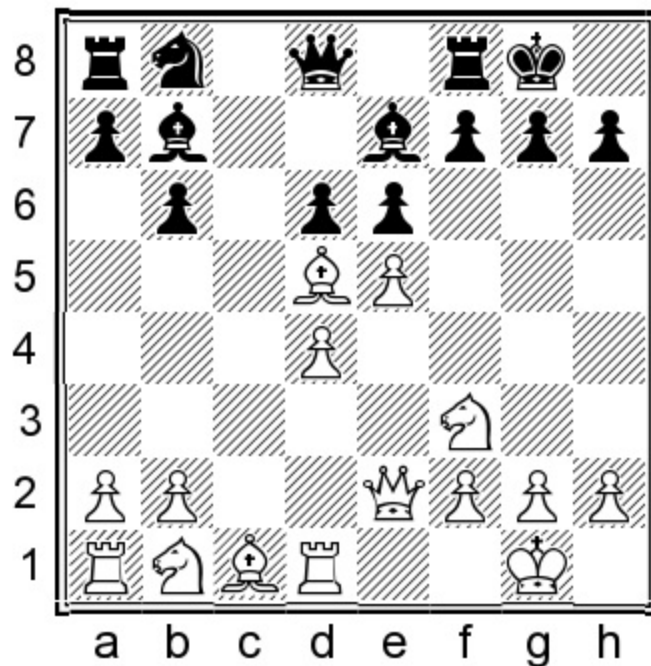
Position after: 9. ♔e2

This is a very logical approach, and it has to be the main line for a reason. The queen leaves the d1-square for the rook, may go to e4 attacking h7 and transfer to the kingside.

9...♘d7!?

A sideline that quickly got my attention. It has similar ideas with 9...b5 but it looks less compromising.

9...b6 This is the main line, but there is a possibility for White that looks annoying. 10.♖d1! ♘b7 11.♘xd5!



Position after: 11. ♔xd5!

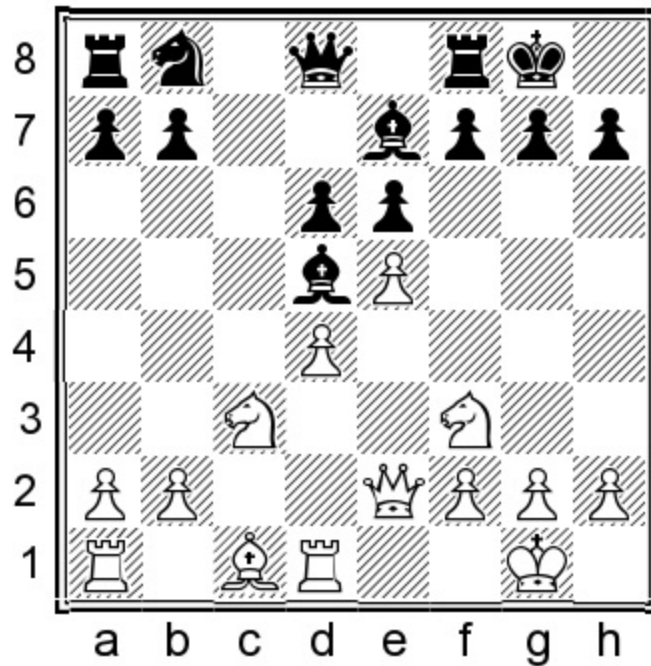
11...♔xd5 [11...exd5 12.♖c3 ♗a6 13.♕f4±] 12.♗c3 And White takes over the initiative. We have to leave, and White has gained several tempi along with the possibility of playing d4-d5. 12...♔b7 [12...♔xf3?! 13.♕xf3 d5 14.♕g4→ White has an interesting attack coming with ♖d3, ♕h6 while it is hard for Black to switch to defence.] 13.d5↑ White stands better according to Stockfish and available games.

10.♗bd2

A pure attacking move. White does not want to trade the knights preferring instead to move it to e4.

A) 10.♗c3 This must be seen as the main move, and it deserves a full subchapter.

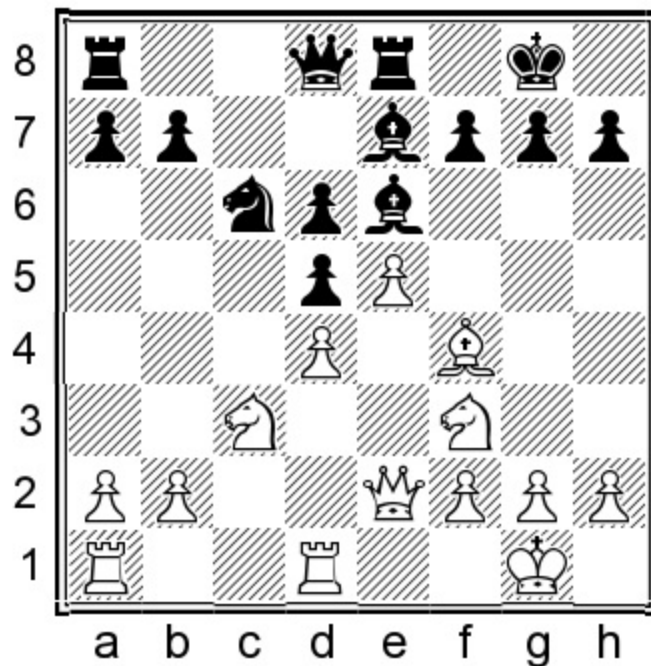
B) 10.♖d1 First of all, let us see that there is a major difference with 9...b6 if White tries the same line that was annoying. 10...♔c6 11.♔xd5 ♔xd5 12.♗c3



Position after: 12. ♘c3

12...dxe5! 13.dxe5 ♙xf3! 14.♚xf3 With the pawn on b6 the a8 rook would be attacked and Black could basically resign. But here there is no problem after 14...♗b6! =.

C) 10.♙xd5 A few strong players (such as Aronian) have tried this move but in the end, it looks fine for Black. 10...exd5 11.♘c3 ♙e6 12.♙f4 ♘c6 13.♖fd1 ♜e8!?

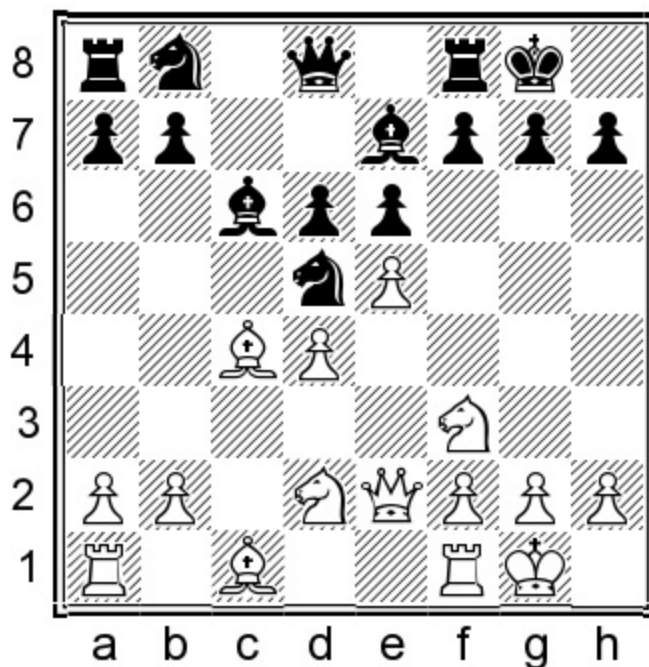


Position after: 13... ♜e8!?

Black continues to improve his pieces. While Black is under slight pressure, he has the bishop pair

and looks quite safe. 14.h3 h6 15.♘b5 ♕f5! Black activates the bishop and actively defends the d6-pawn thanks to the rook on e8. 16.♚f1?! dxe5 17.dxe5 And now, in Aronian, L (2781) – Dominguez Perez, L (2758) chess24.com INT 2021, Black could have disorganized White's pieces after: 17...♗c2! 18.♝d2 ♗e4 19.♞e2 ♗b4 20.♞dd1 ♞b6 and we have totally managed to activate our pieces.

10...♗c6



Position after: 10...♗c6

11.♘e4 dxe5 12.dxe5

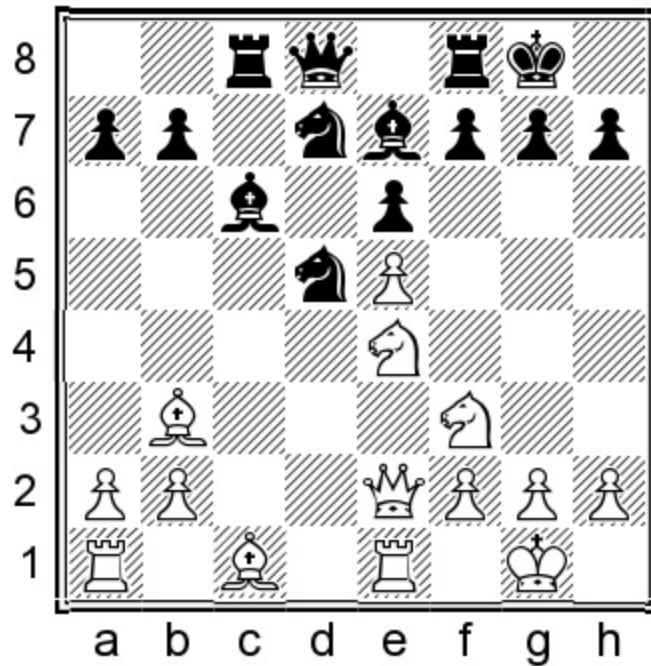
12.♘xe5?! ♘b6! The pawn on d4 is not protected, and that leads to trouble for White.

12...♘d7

Black looks too stable to suffer from an attack. For example, White has tried a couple of moves.

13.♝d1

13.♝e1 ♝c8 14.♗b3



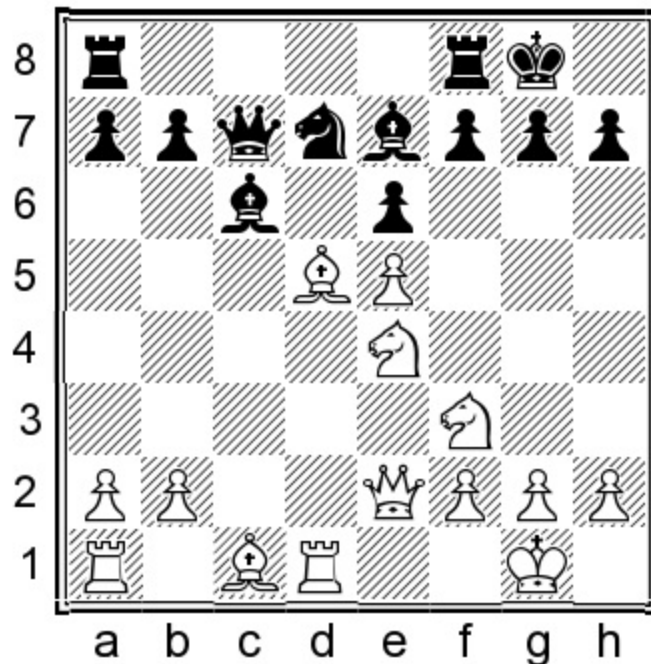
Position after: 14. ♔b3

Kislinsky, A (2452) – Tabatabaei, M (2629) chess.com INT 2020. 14... ♕c7! 15. ♘g3 ♖fd8 ♣ Black will follow with ... ♗f8 with a safe and active position.

13... ♕c7 14. ♔g5?

This does not work for White. He is trying to get access to dark squares such as d6, or to weaken our kingside, but the centre is not stabilized.

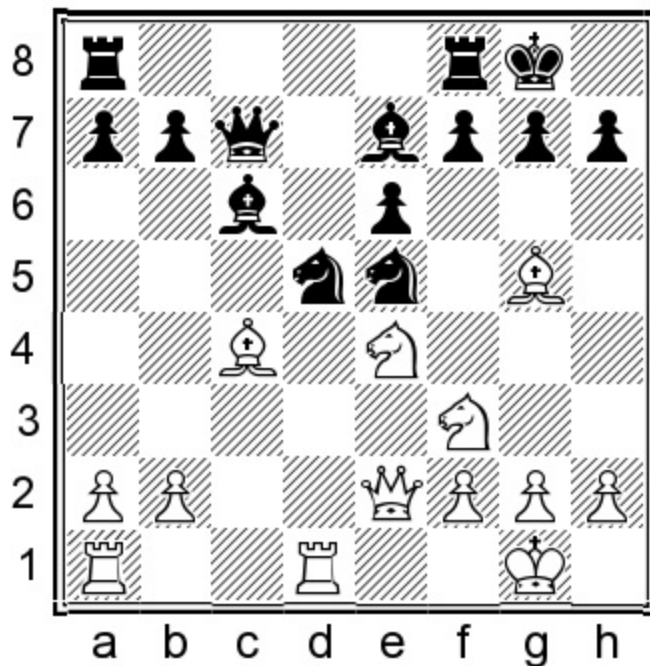
14. ♔xd5!



Position after: 14. ♖xd5!

White must get rid of the knight but now he will stand worse. 14...♙xd5 15.♙f4 ♜fd8 16.♝ac1 ♞b6
The bishop on d6 is just a monster.

14...♞xe5!?



Position after: 14...♞xe5!?

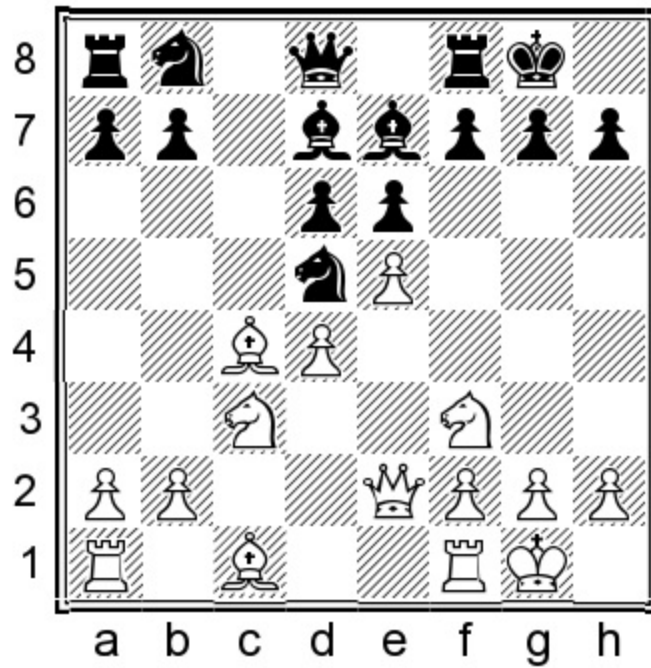
14...♙xg5 was also good.

15.♞xe5 ♜xe5 16.♙xe7 ♞xe7–+

Black was a solid pawn up in in Khamrakulov, I (2444) – Garcia Cuenca, V (2344) Madrid 2019.

h) 5.d4 cxd4 6.cxd4 d6 7.♙c4 ♙e7 8.0-0 0-0 9.♞e2 ♙d7 ♞c3!

1.e4 c5 2.♞f3 e6 3.c3 ♞f6 4.e5 ♞d5 5.d4 cxd4 6.cxd4 d6 7.♙c4 ♙e7 8.0-0 0-0 9.♞e2 ♙d7!?
10.♞c3!



Position after: 10. ♖c3!

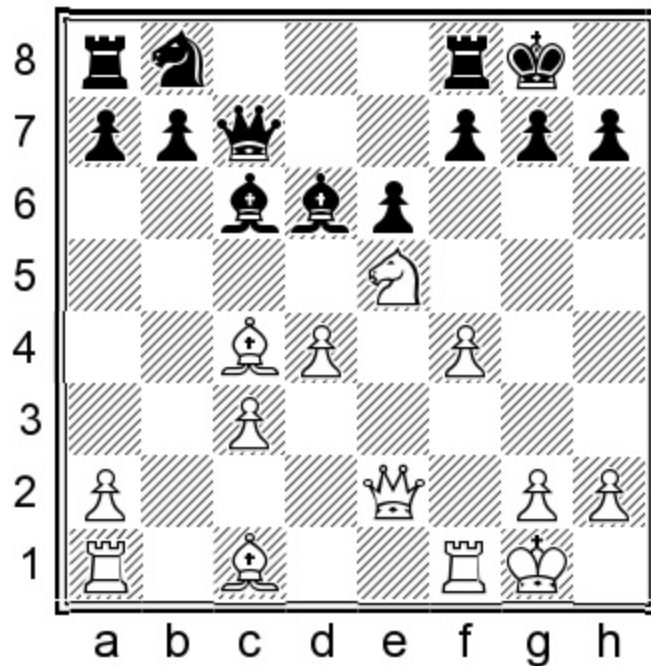
Clearly the main attempt, our knight is challenged, and we need to take immediately.

10... ♘xc3 11. bxc3 ♙c6

White has tried two ideas here.

12. ♙f4

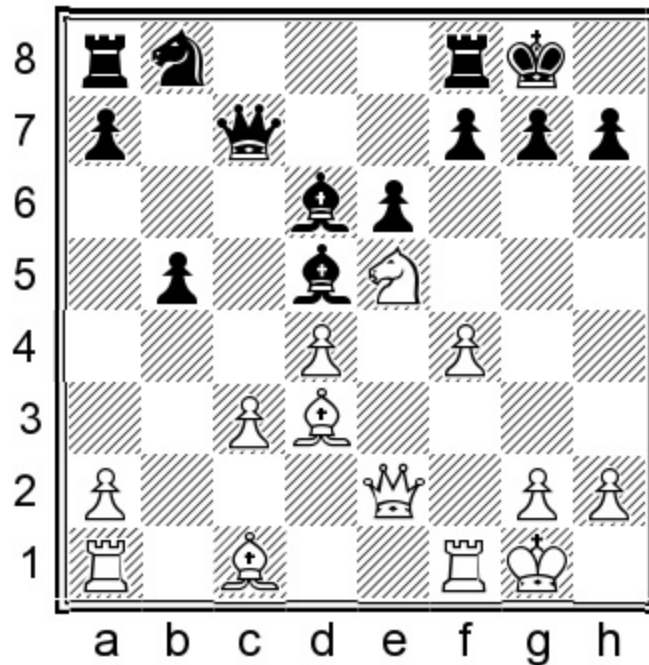
12. exd6!? This was less played, but it looks more dangerous. 12... ♙xd6 13. ♖e5 ♚c7! 14. f4



Position after: 14.f4

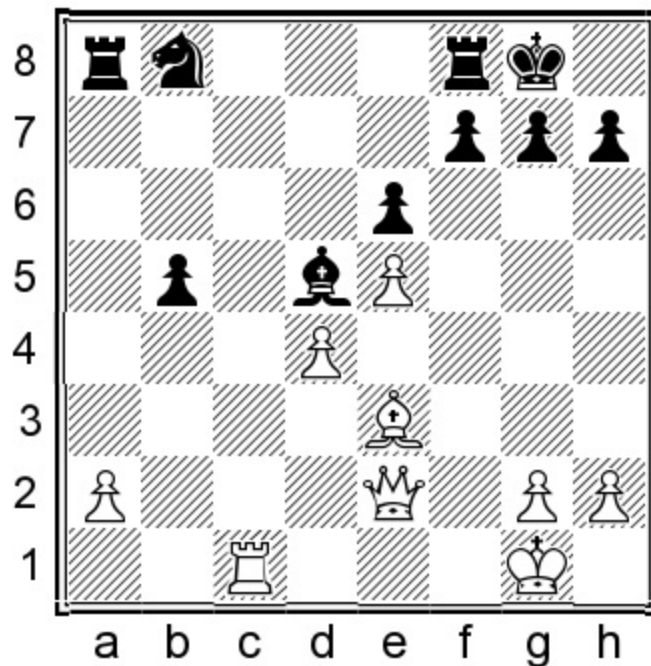
This is the most natural approach for White when he wants to stabilize a knight on e5.

Also, we should be careful that the pawn does not try to go any further because it would open every line to the f7-pawn for White. 14...b5!?N [14...♘d7 This was played in Rublevsky, S (2692) – Movsesian, S (2660) Cheliabinsk 2016, 0-1 (33). Although Black won White could have continued with 15.♙d3!N 15...♞ac8 16.c4↑] 15.♙d3 [15.♙b3 ♘d7 16.♙d2 ♘f6↔; 15.♙xb5 This only helps Black obtain counterplay. 15...♙xb5 16.♞xb5 ♞xc3 17.♙b2 ♞b4=] 15...♙d5!



Position after: 15...♙d5!

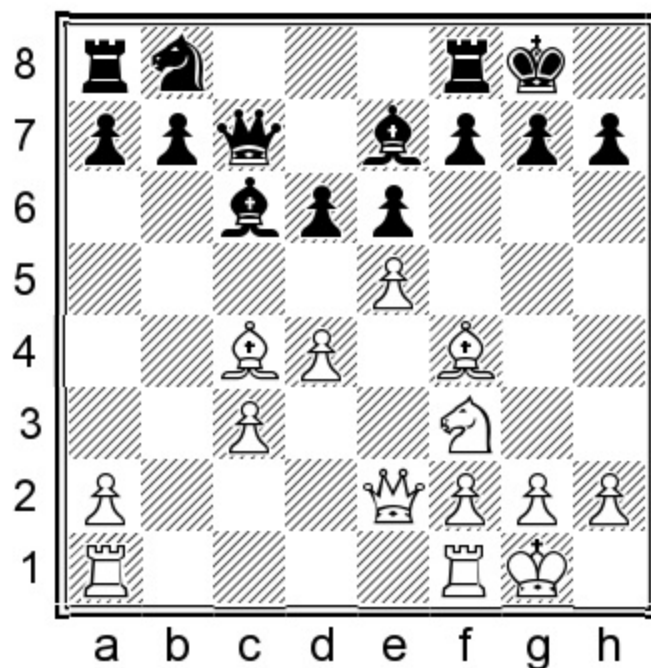
Black improves the position of his bishop, and he plans to follow with 16...♘c6. 16.♙xb5 [16.f5 ♙xe5! This seems to solve Black's problems. 17.dxe5 exf5 18.♞xf5 ♘c6 19.♙xb5 ♙e6 20.♞f2 ♘xe5=] 16...♙xe5! 17.fxe5 [17.dxe5 a6 18.♙d3 ♞xc3 19.♙e3 ♘c6= Black has a solid position.] 17...♞xc3 18.♙e3 a6 19.♞ac1 ♞xc1! A very nice conception. 20.♞xc1 axb5☞



Position after: 20...axb5

You can convince yourself by looking at the position independently or with a computer, but the engine does not prefer White. We are about to invade the second rank via a2 while the bishop on d5 dominates the position. It is difficult for White to do anything with the dark-square bishop. In case of an attack by White on the dark squares with the queen and the bishop, ...♘c6-e7-f5 will probably be the way to proceed with Black.

12...♙c7!?



Position after: 12... ♖c7!?

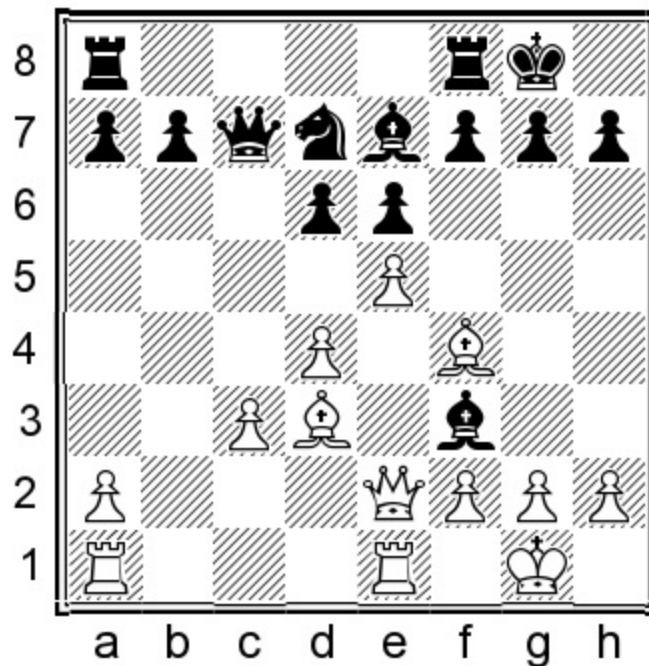
Let us develop and put more pressure on e5, c4 and c3 with the queen. White has tried 3 different moves.

12... ♕xf3 13. ♖xf3 ♘c6⇀ This is another playable line. White eventually won in Sermek, D (2547) – Polajzer, D (2382) Celje 2004.

13. ♘g5!?

With this move White is trying to organize tactical ideas against e6. We have no choice but to take the knight.

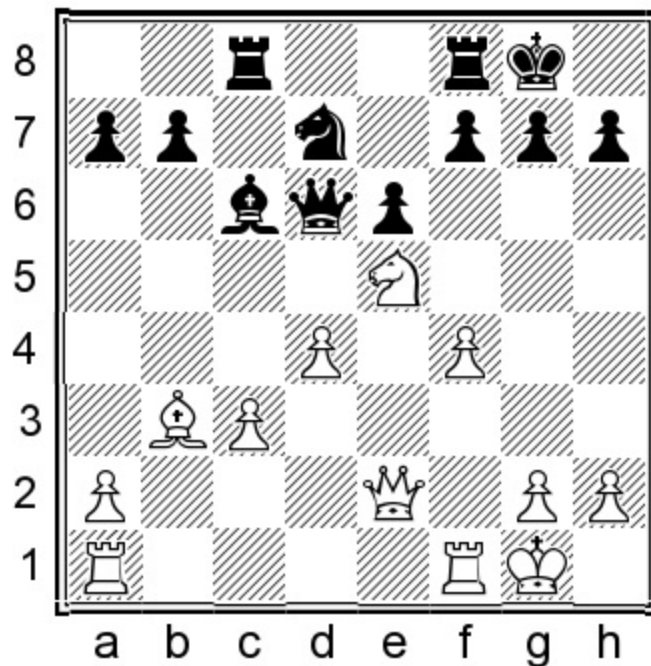
A) 13. ♕d3 ♘d7 14. ♖fe1 ♕xf3!N



Position after: 14... ♕xf3!N

This move solves Black's problems, and it will define the centre. 15. ♖xf3 dxe5 16. dxe5 ♖fd8 17. ♖ab1 ♘c5 18. ♕c2 ♖d5↑ Black centralizes his rooks, and he has a strong knight on c5.

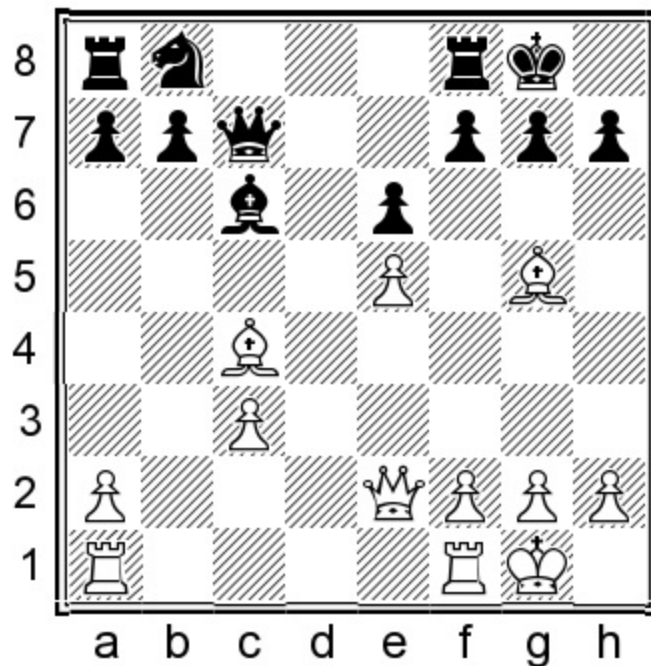
B) 13. exd6 ♕xd6 14. ♕xd6 ♖xd6 15. ♘e5 ♘d7 16. f4 ♖ac8 17. ♕b3



Position after: 17. ♖b3

After a few natural moves we have reached this position. 17...b5!? We have seen similar ideas in 12...exd6. One of the main points of the move is to prevent anything with c4 by White so that the pawn is stuck on c3. 18. ♖ad1 And now in Strikovic, A (2550) – Nedobora, M (2465) La Coruna 1996, I would go for the preventive 18...g6! which stops f5 ideas by White. That means he needs to find a way to get rid of the e6-pawn. 19. ♘xc6 ♙xc6 20.d5 exd5 21. ♖xd5 ♘c5= White does not have enough for an attack. The pawn on c3 is a clear target and the pawn on f4 is more of a weakness than a threat.

13... ♖xg5! 14. ♖xg5 dxe5 15.dxe5



Position after: 15.dxe5

This occurred in the game Kun, G (2354) – Horvath, C (2210) Hungary 2004. It's true that White has the bishop pair in an open position, but we have the better pawn structure.

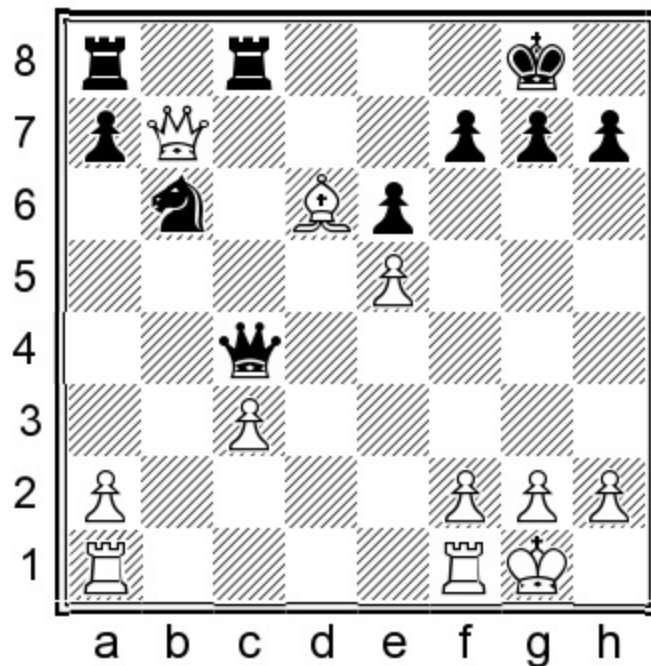
15...♘d7 16.♙e7

16.♖fe1 ♜fc8 17.♘b3 h6 18.♘d2 ♜d8 19.♗ad1 ♜ac8= We are totally in control along with having a better pawn structure.

16...♜fc8 17.♘d6 ♘f3!

Black trades the bishops and frees himself.

18.♙xf3 ♜xc4 19.♙xb7 ♘b6↑



Position after: 19... $\text{Nxb6}\uparrow$

White is temporarily a pawn up but his c3 pawn is in danger while we will have a strong knight on d5. The bishop on d6 looks strong, but it is not so impressive, and it is unable to go back to the kingside if needed.

Chapter Conclusion

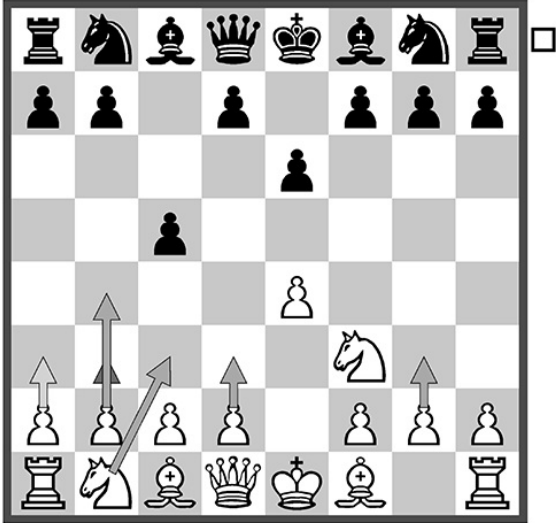
As we saw in this chapter, you should not ignore the Alapin Variation. White often gets attacking chances against your kingside and it requires a lot of attention and precise play by Black.

But in the end, I think I have managed to provide you with more than enough ideas to have interesting and sometimes new positions to fight for a win!

Chapter 8

Various 3rd moves

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.--



Chapter Guide

Chapter 8 – Various 3rd moves

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6

a) 3.♙d3 & 3.♙e2

b) 3.b4 & 3.a3

c) 3.♚e2

d) 3.g3

e) 3.d3

f) 3.b3 a6 4.♙b2 ♘c6 5.--

g) 3.b3 a6 4.♙b2 ♘c6 5.c4

h) 3.d4 ♘c6 4.d4

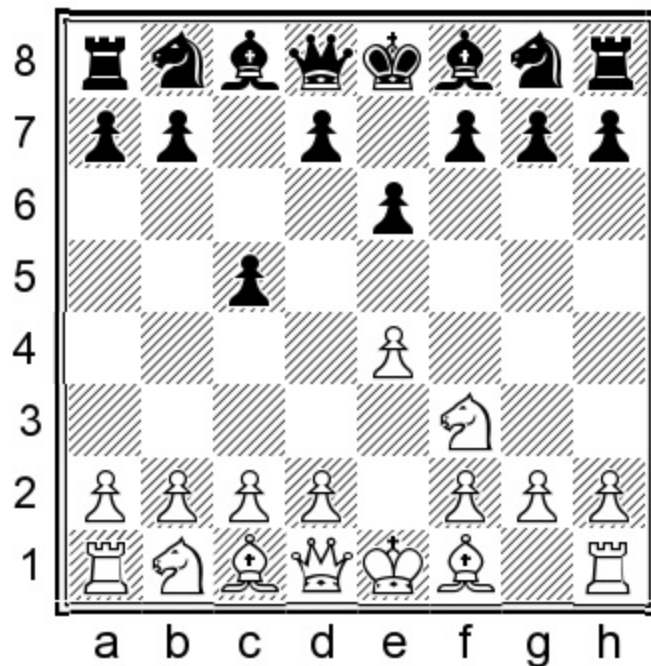
i) 3.c4 ♘c6 4.♘c3 e5 5.d3 d6 6.--

j) 3.c4 ♘c6 4.♘c3 e5 3.d3 d6 6.♙e2

k) 3.♘c3

a) 3.♙d3 & 3.♙e2

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6



Position after: 2...e6

As I explained in the previous chapter about the Delayed Alapin Variation, when I was doing this repertoire for Black about the Sicilian Kan, I was thinking I could not let you go without talking about the anti – Sicilians. If you want to play the Sicilian Kan, that means that after 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3, you have no choice but to play 2...e6. White has a lot of options apart from playing 3.d4 and in this subchapter we will deal with many of these options. I could have left you on your own, but it is quite rare to find material about this in other books which often discuss lines other than 2...e6 (like 2...♘c6 or 2...d6). The sidelines after 2...e6 are really specific. We will try to keep in mind that any moment White wants to play d4, it probably transposes into the Kan, so we need to be careful with our move orders. Also, we will not deal with the sidelines on the second move, as you do not necessarily need to play with ...e6, and you can find a lot of material elsewhere. As no book can be exhaustive, I will try to guide you through the variations while giving you some interesting ideas. In the first two subchapters we will deal with variations that you might never meet in your entire life (some of them are more likely to be played one move earlier such as the Wing Gambit), but there are also sidelines you need to know.

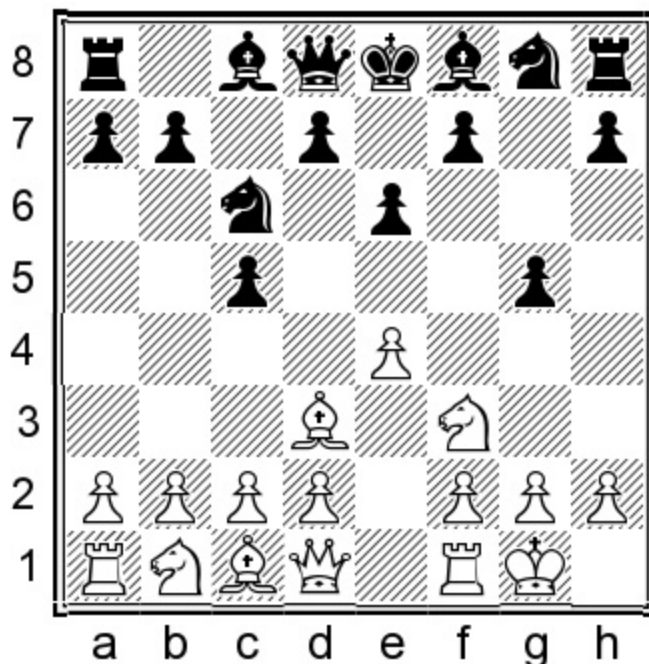
3.♙e2

In the same spirit as 3.♙d3, this move has its own follower. Even if it does not look ambitious, it cannot be a really bad move. Keep in mind that White may still want to come back to an open Sicilian with a later d4.

3.♙d3 A few players recently tried this weird move. The idea is to castle on the next move and then choose a plan between c3-♙c2-d4, or ♙b5-d4 if Black has played ...d5 at some point. Top Grandmaster Sasha Grischuk has played this line a few times in rapid games. 3...♘c6 4.0-0

A) 4...d5 5.exd5 exd5 6.♙b5 This is basically what White is looking for. 6...♘f6 7.d4± And Black will have to play with an isolani, which might not be to everyone's taste. Grischuk, A (2777) – Jobava, B (2603) chess.com INT 2020, 1-0, (31).

B) 4...g5!



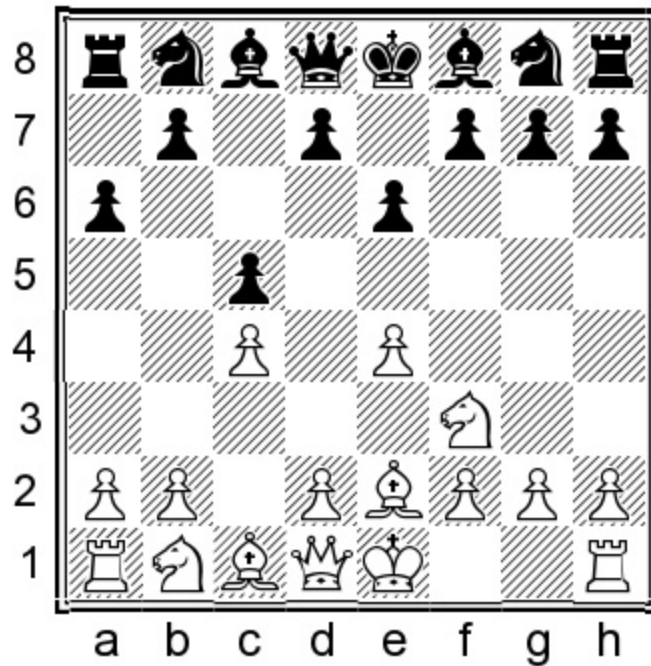
Position after: 4...g5!

A really interesting line which has only been played once but is my computer's choice! This idea often works when White is unable to immediately react in the centre. If you want a fun game, you can go for it! The one game continued: 5.c3 g4 6.♘e1 h5 7.♙b5 ♙g7 8.d3 ♘ge7±. In the long-term Black probably wants to castle on the queenside but it all depends upon what White does. Black won in Paravyan, D (2528) – Grachev, B (2628) Moscow 2016, 0-1 (34).

3...♘c6!?

3...a6 Would be the way to play in the style of the Kan but there is a problem: 4.c4!?, and we can't proceed with ...b5.

I am not fond of this line for Black as it is going to be better for White than 3.c4 as we will see in a later subchapter.

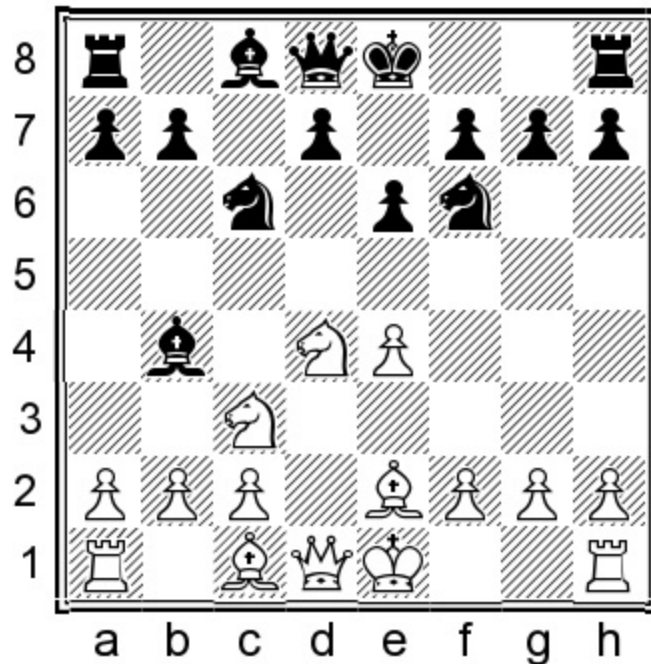


Position after: 4.c4!?

The reason is the odd placement of the pawn on a6 which does not do much when White plays c4. If White plays d4 later, we will not have a transposition into the second chapter as we probably will not be able to play ... ♖b4 pinning the knight on c3.

4.0-0

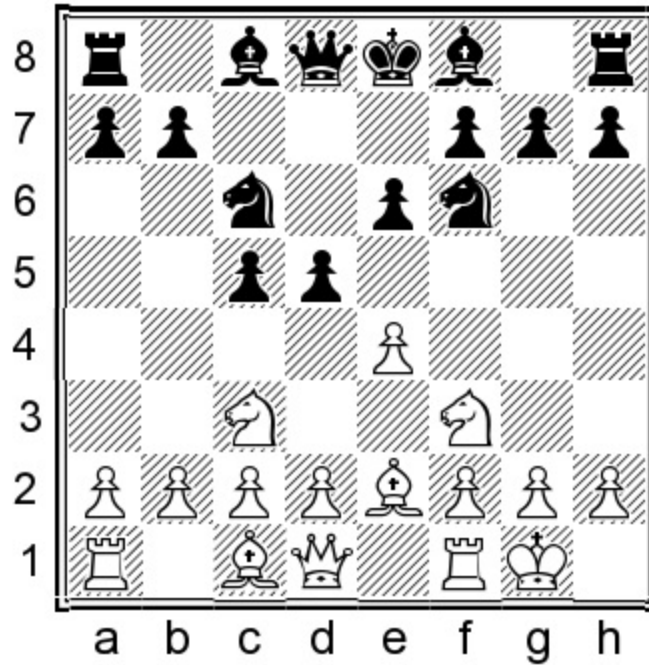
A) 4.d4 cxd4 5.♘xd4 Sometimes, you cannot reach positions fully in accordance with your repertoire. Nevertheless, it is very close to it. 5...♗f6 6.♗c3 ♖b4



Position after: 6...♔b4

This is a transposition into 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♙e2 ♔b4. This line with 6.♙e2 (6.♘xc6 or 6.♘db5 are the main lines) does not have a great reputation for White. Remember we already discussed this type of position in another chapter. In addition, with White first playing 3.♙e2 it is doubtful he will transpose into an open Sicilian.

B) 4.♘c3 ♘f6 5.0-0 d5!?



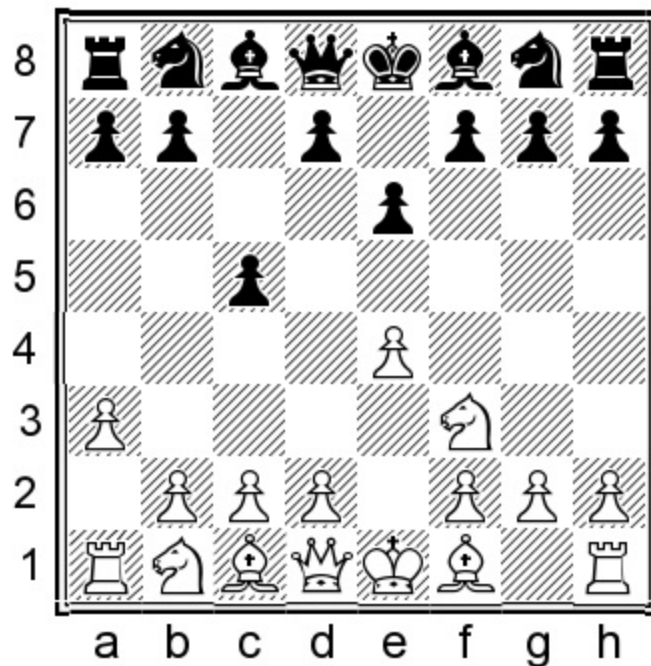
Position after: 5...d5!?

If you do not do this, White can push 6.d4 with an open Sicilian. 6.exd5 ♘xd5 7.d4 ♘xc3 8.bxc3 ♙e7↗ White will have the initiative in the centre but we have the better structure. It does not look hard to play as in Cornette, D (2365) – Cmilyte, V (2525) Germany 2015.

4...♘f6 5.d3

5.e5?! [5.♘c3 See 4.♘c3.] 5...♘g4 6.d4 cxd4 7.♙f4 d6̄ White is not even sure he will regain his pawn.

5...d5!

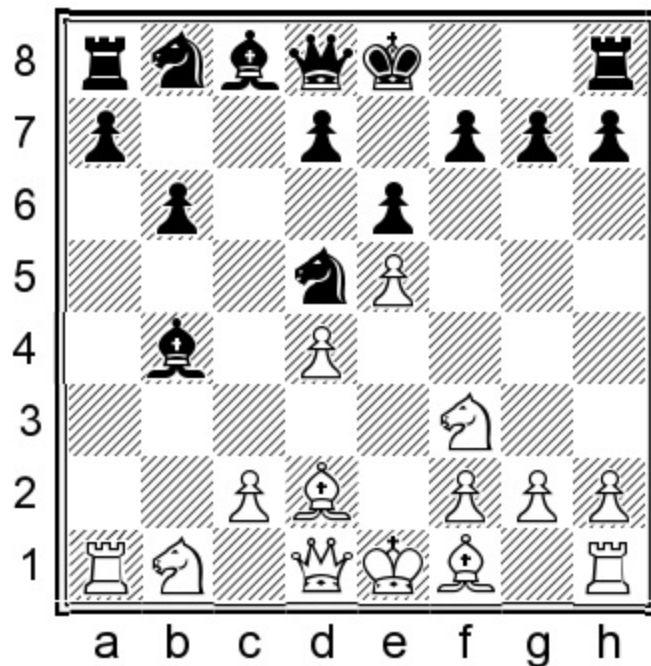


Position after: 3.a3!?

I find this move quite interesting as it contains different ideas. First of all, White can push b4 later (more or less the Wing Gambit deferred), or it could transpose into open Sicilians with a3 already played which is not necessarily a bad idea. However, I think the first idea is more likely to happen.

3.b4 This line also exists, and it is more likely to happen on move 2, after 1.e4 c5 2.b4. This is known as the Wing Gambit. Here things are similar but slightly different. 3...cxb4! Do not be fooled and just take it.

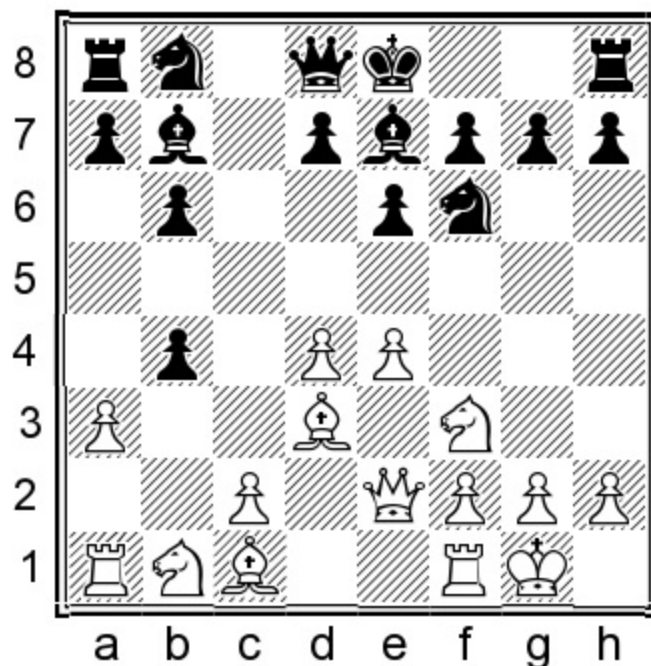
A) 4.a3 b6!? I like this approach; Black will immediately challenge White's centre. 5.d4 [5.axb4 ♟b7 6.e5 ♟xb4+] 5...♞f6 6.e5 ♞d5 7.axb4 ♟xb4+ 8.♟d2



Position after: 8. ♔d2

And now in the game Bernadskiy, V (2593) – Moiseenko, A (2623) Lutsk 2019, my advice is to go with: 8... ♙b7 9. c3 ♙e7 10. c4 ♘b4 11. ♔e2 d5! ♣. There is no rush to castle, we can immediately react in the centre.

B) 4.d4 b6!? There are lots of ways to play for Black, while many are fine, I like this one in the same spirit as after 4.a3. 5. ♔d3 ♙b7 6. 0-0 ♘f6 7. ♚e2 ♙e7 8. a3.



Position after: 8.a3

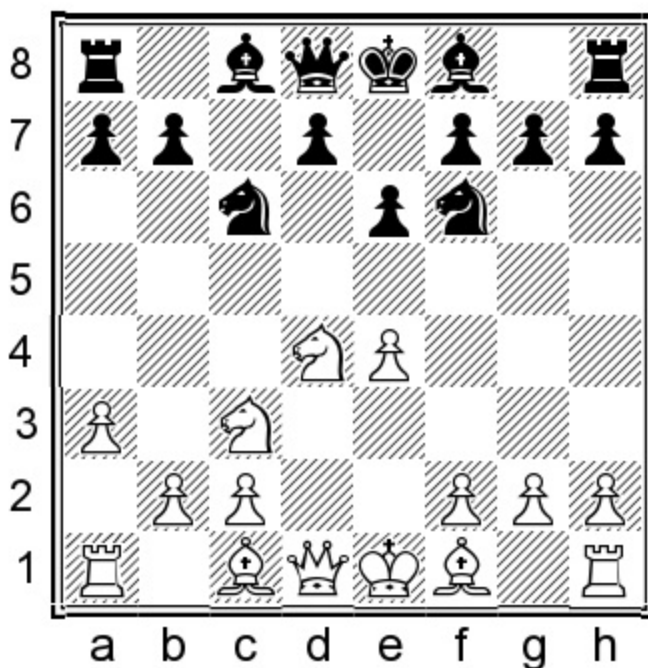
Eventually, White will play this move. He needs to open the a-file and try to trade the dark-squared bishop. If he does so, then he will have ideas like e5 and bringing a knight to d6. 8...♘c6 9.e5 ♘d5 10.axb4 ♘dxb4 Black lost this game, but it is more than fine for him in Bernadskiy, V (2629) – Moiseenko, A (2620) Chess.com INT 2020. Of course, you will mostly find blitz games with this variation.

3...♘c6

The move 3...a6 is also possible if you wish to stick to Kan types of positions.

4.b4

A) 4.d4 cxd4 5.♘xd4 ♘f6 6.♘c3

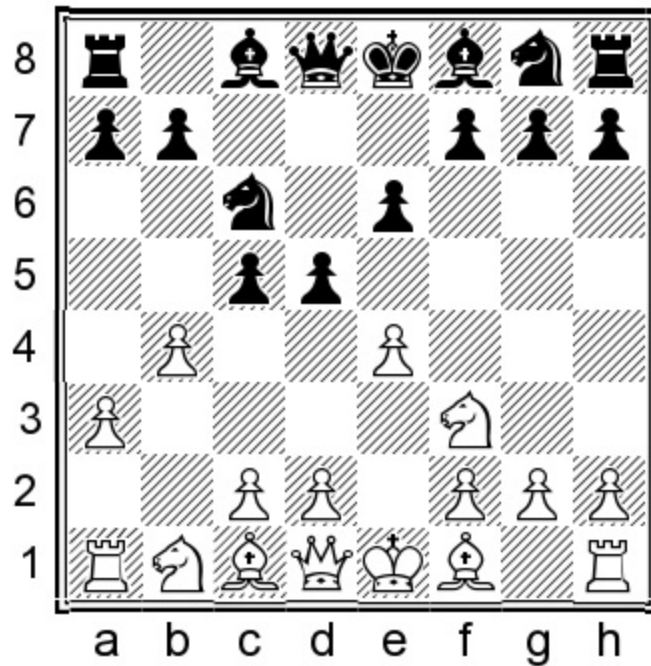


Position after: 6.♘c3

This transposes into 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.a3 which is a main line here (as we discussed in a similar variation of 3.♗e2). It is a good idea to study this variation as well, but it would be a surprise if it happened with this move order.

B) 4.♘c3 ♘f6 5.d4 d5!? Now we also have this other possibility. [5...cxd4 6.♘xd4 See 4.d4.] 6.exd5 ♘xd5

4...d5!?



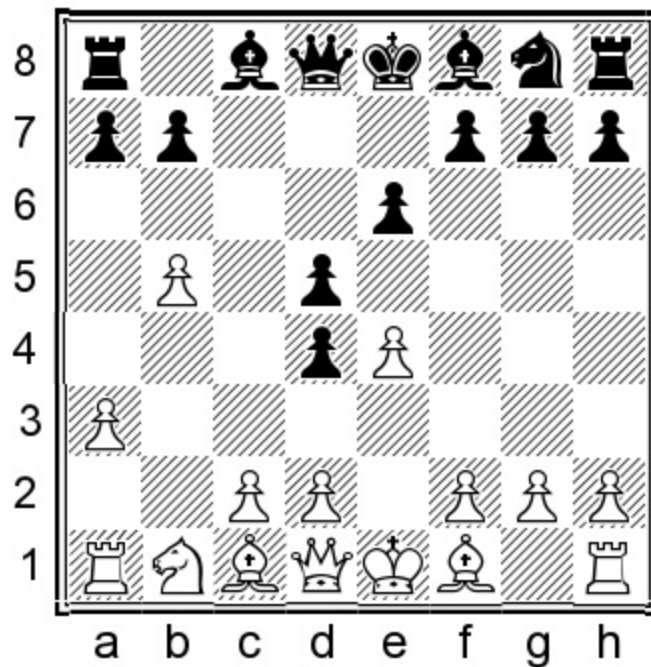
Position after: 4...d5!?

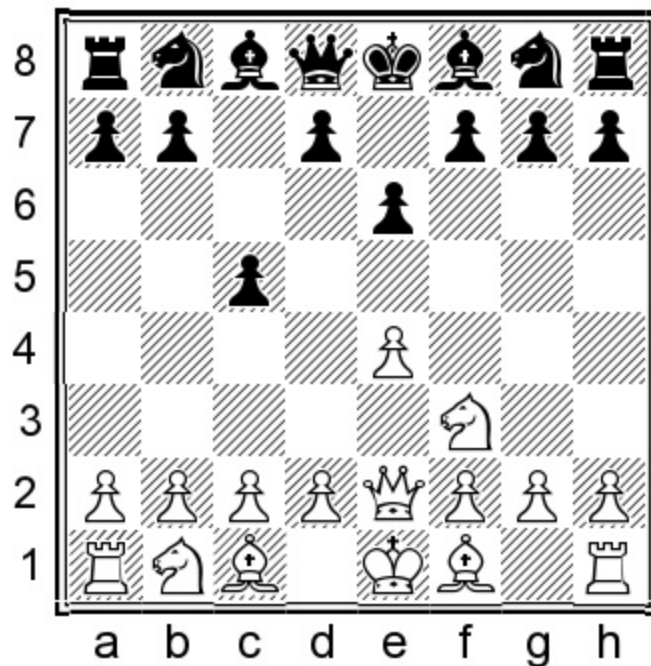
Now that White has already played a3 (which is quite useless), I prefer not to take on b4 as opposed to the variation after 3.b4. Here we have immediate counterplay in the centre. This position occurred only once.

4...cxb4!?! of course this is the main move, and you can have a look at it too.

5.exd5

5.b5 ♖d4 6.♘xd4 cxd4





Position after: 3. ♕e2

In the coming subchapters, we will see moves that have some similar ideas to this (often connected with a kingside fianchetto, and what is called a “King’s Indian Attack”. This one with 3. ♕e2 is the most committing for White. In the next one, we will look at 3.g3 while 3.d3 will be treated in the one after. These 3 subchapters may sometimes transpose into each other, but each of the 3 moves does not necessarily imply the same things. As I said, this is the most committal move. White will never be able to play d4, and he will clearly go for a fianchetto, otherwise he cannot develop his bishop on f1.

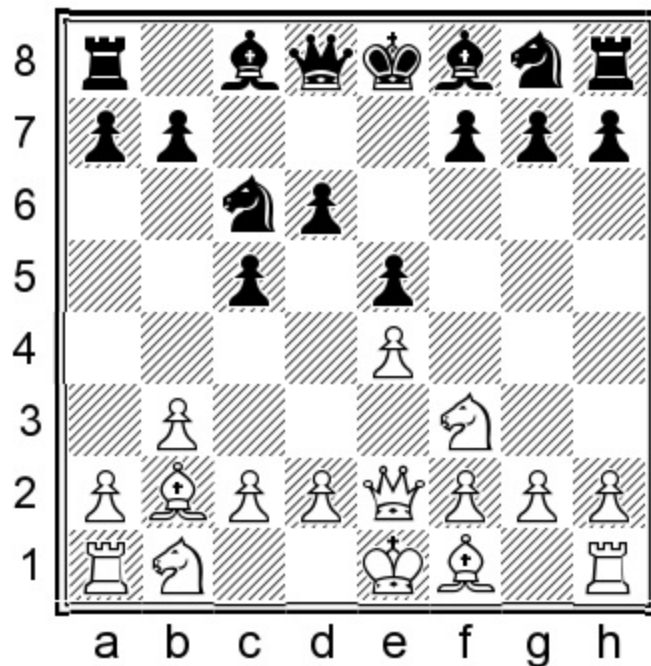
3... ♞c6

We are not afraid of any transposition into the open Sicilian so we can easily develop the knight.

4.g3

This should really be seen as the main line here. The queen on e2 is here to make ...d5 less easy for Black while White develops his King’s Indian Attack.

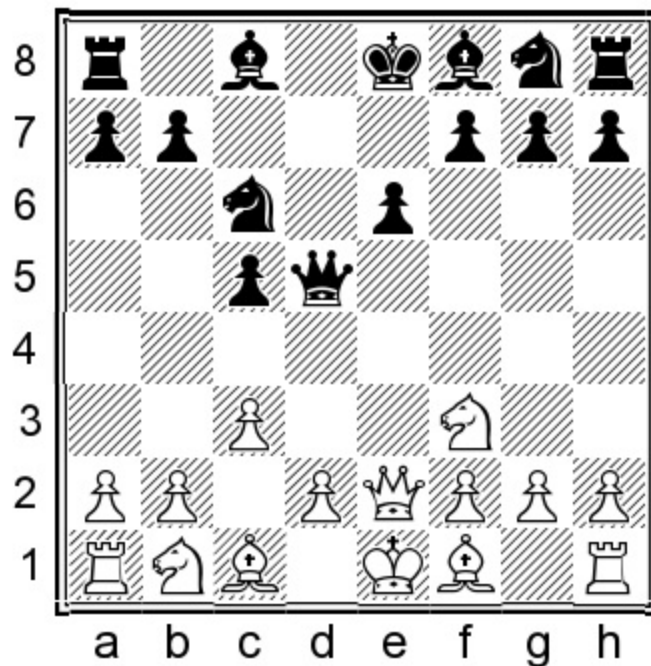
A) 4.b3 This move is not so usual when connected with 3. ♕e2. Here we can have a quick look at 4...d6 5. ♖b2 e5!?.



Position after: 5...e5!?

I like this approach. As in some lines where White has already played c4 (that we will discuss later), it is hard for White to react with d4. We quietly block the centre and in the end it will be easier to push ...f5 (the only breakthrough in the position), as shown in the following game. 6.g3 g6 7.♔g2 ♔g7 8.0-0 ♖ge7 9.d3 0-0 10.♗bd2 h6 Here, 10...f5 was playable, but Meier wants to improve his position first. 11.a3 ♕e6̄ And Black has great control over the position in Salgado Lopez, I (2622) – Meier, G (2632) Dubai 2014.

B) 4.c3 A kind of weird Alapin Variation. Black probably has a lot of options but after the direct 4...d5 5.exd5 ♔xd5 it is hard to say how White justifies his queen on e2 while ours is fine on d5 as ♖c3 is not playable.

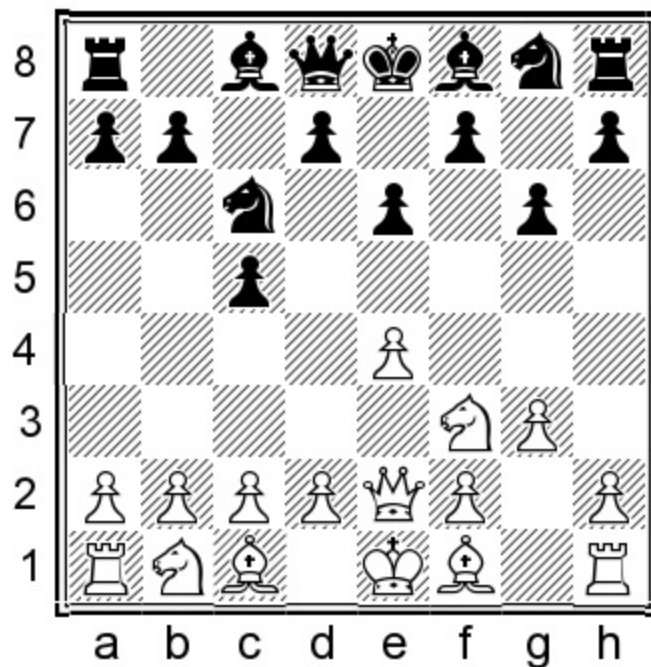


Position after: 5... ♙xd5

6.g3 e5! Let us take possession of the centre and develop the pieces on the most active squares.

7. ♘g2 ♘g4↑

4...g6



Position after: 4...g6

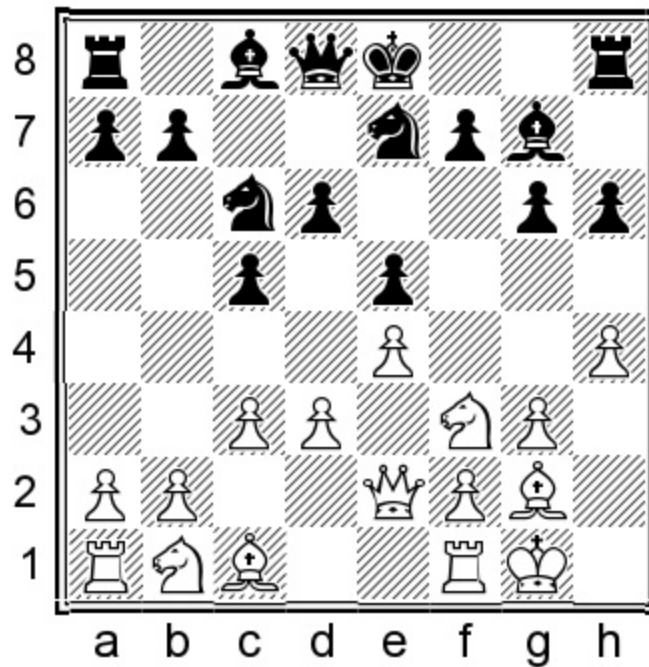
This is the main line. It is less easy to play after 3.g3 because White keeps the options of d4 opening

the centre, but here, there is no drawback for Black.

4...d6 This is also an interesting approach. 5.♔g2 e5 6.0-0 g6 7.c3 ♔g7↗ This leads to a very positional type of middlegame where I believe Black's plan is easier due to the possibility of playing ...f5 at some point.

5.♔g2

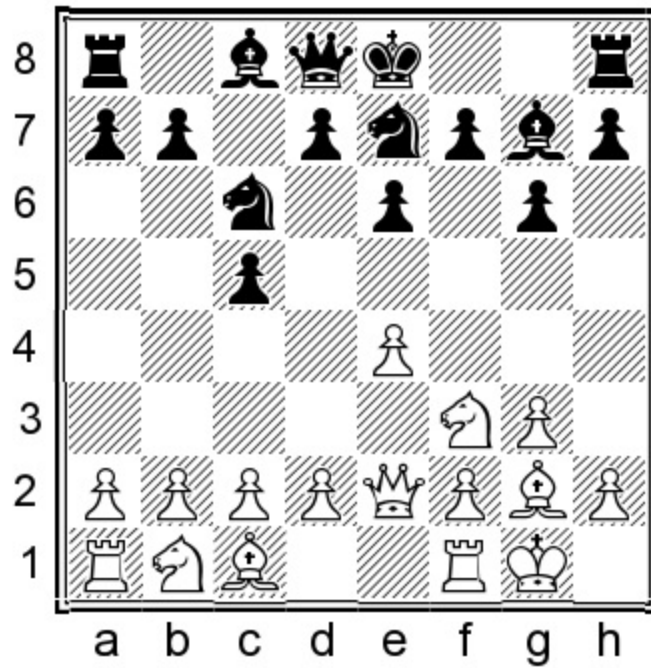
5.h4 A modern approach, but it will not go far for White. 5...h6! We prevent any ideas White may have on the kingside. If White goes for h5 at any moment, we will push ...g5 and the pawn on h5 will be a weakness and a possible target. 6.♔g2 ♔g7 7.0-0 ♖ge7 8.d3 d6 9.c3 e5↗



Position after: 9...e5↗

It seems quite clear that the inclusion of the moves h4/...h6 only helped Black who can now bring the bishop to g4 without fearing h3, or to e6 not fearing ♖g5 ideas. Black has had great results here. An example is Naiditsch A (2701) – Rublevsky, S (2663) Germany 2018.

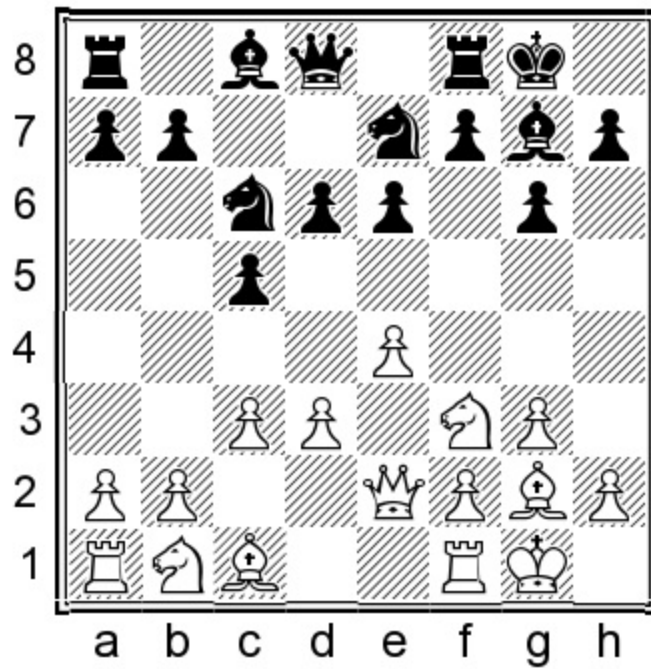
5...♔g7 6.0-0 ♖ge7



Position after: 6...Nge7

I like this set up for Black as it is solid and dynamic at the same time, with several possible plans.

7.c3 0-0 8.d3 d6



Position after: 8...d6

I think this is the main position of this system. Here White has tried a lot of moves. We will not consider all of them, but we can look at a few.

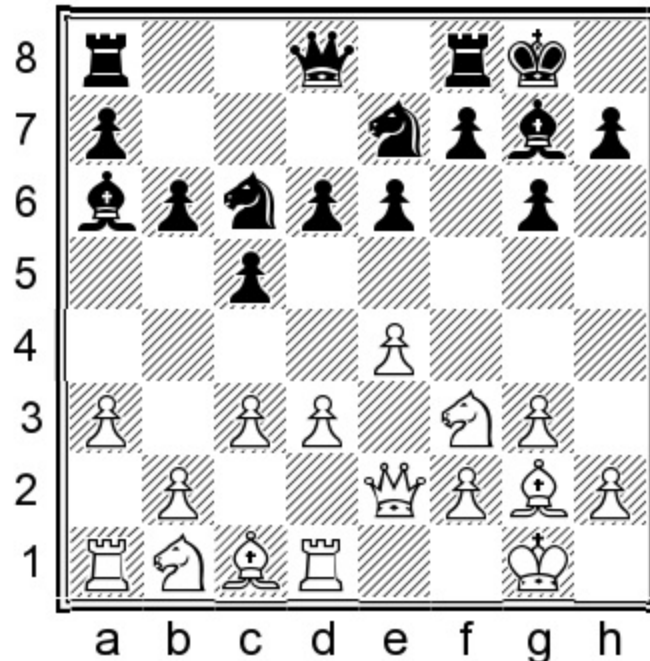
9.♘a3

A) 9.♙e3 e5! 10.♘a3 h6 11.♗h4?! And now in the game, Kotepalli, S (2214) – Mihok, O (2497) Chess.com INT 2017, Black has a powerful option. 11...g5! 12.♗f3 f5 13.exf5 ♕xf5+ With a big initiative for Black.

B) 9.a3 This is another usual idea, as White may want to play b4 at some point in the middlegame. We can start by reinforcing our position while finishing our development. 9...b6!? And now White has tried a couple of ideas connected with the move d3-d4.

B1) 10.♘bd2 ♕b7 11.♖d1 ♔d7 12.♗f1 White has been really slow, so let us take control at once. Sanduleac, V (2466) – Jianu, V (2522) Eforie Nord 2008. 12...f5!↑ Black takes over the initiative and indirectly prevents d4 due to the pressure on e4.

B2) 10.♖d1 ♕a6!?



Position after: 10...♕a6!?

An effective way to prevent d4, even if it gives White a new possibility. 11.b4! ♔c7 [11...cxb4? This is clearly a bad idea. In general, you should never take a pawn on b4 like this, it is unnatural to help White obtain the better, more centralized pawn structure. 12.axb4 ♗xb4 13.cxb4 ♕xa1 14.♔a2+–] 12.♕b2 And now in the game Littlewood, J (2308) – Cech, P (2403) West Bromwich 2004, let us go for the central break 12...d5! 13.exd5 exd5 14.c4! ♗d4. A necessary move due to the White's many threats. 15.♗xd4 cxd4= Black has an active position, and some play coming on the e-file.

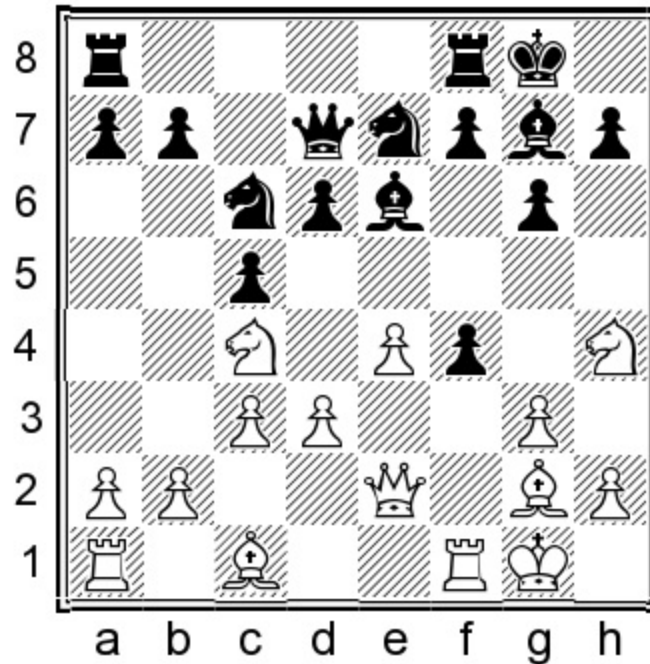
9...e5

This move will ease our development, and with 9.♘a3, White has shown that he does not want to play

b4 in the short term, so we will not regret closing the long dark diagonal.

10. ♖c4

10. ♖h4 White is not the one with the better prospects on the kingside, and it already takes him more time to push his f-pawn. 10... ♙e6 11. f4 ♚d7 12. ♖c4 exf4



Position after: 12...exf4

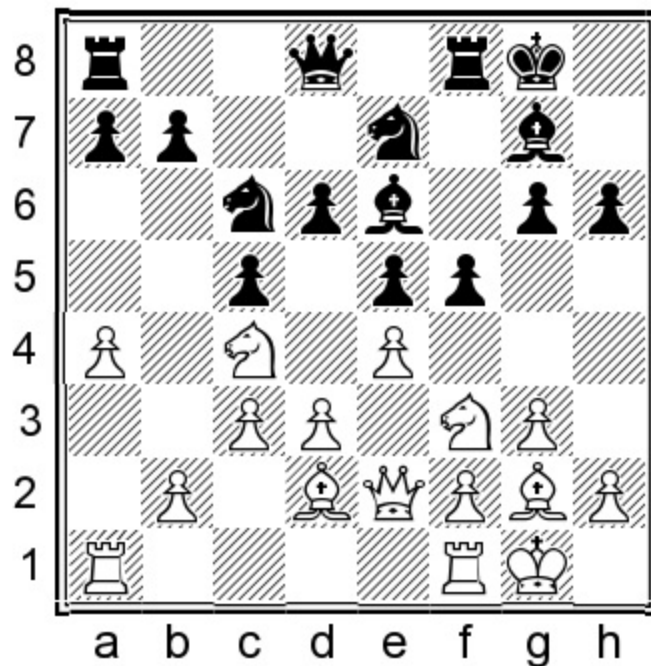
13. ♙xf4 [13. gxf4 Every King's Indian player knows he should take back with the pawn, but here the position is not stabilized at all. 13...d5! 14. ♖d2 ♜ad8 15. e5 f6⌘ And the initiative is in Black's hands.] 13...d5 14. ♖d2 d4⌘ Roy Chowdhury, S (2414) – Saric, A (2528) Seville 2012

10...h6

Black concentrates on the kingside by preparing ... ♙e6 because he does not want to be bothered with ♖g5-ideas.

10...b5!? This is another interesting option for Black.

11.a4 ♙e6 12. ♙d2 f5⌘



Position after: 12...f5

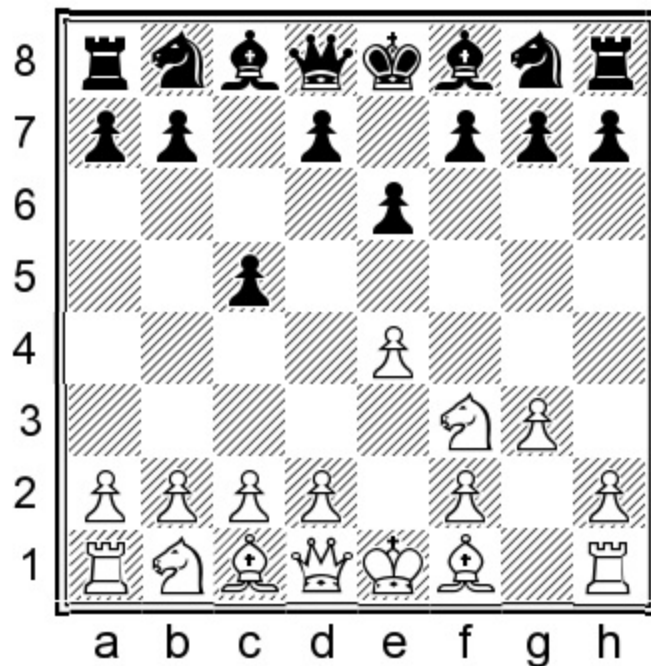
Black enjoys the better position. He intends to continue with 13...d7 and some play on the kingside. But he may change his plans if White is careless.

13.b4?! cxb4 14.cxb4?? fxe4 15.dxe4 Rxf3! 16.Qxf3 Nd4 17.Qd3 Nxf3+ 18.Qxf3 Qxc4+

With a totally winning position as in Rodriguez Vila, A (2521) – Mareco, S (2526) Campinas 2010.

d) 3.g3

1.e4 c5 2.f3 e6 3.g3



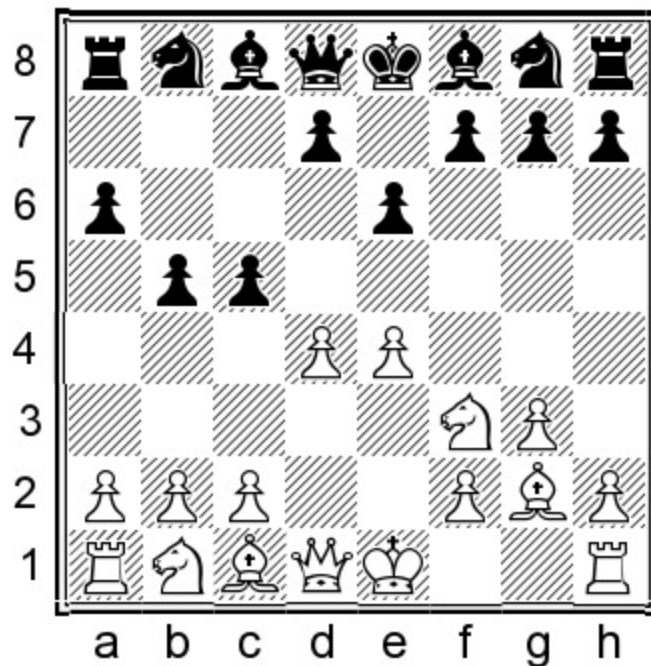
Position after: 3.g3

When I think about specific sidelines to play against Sicilians with 2...e6, I immediately think about this one with 3.g3, and the one with 3.b3 that we will consider later. This is an important subchapter as White has some similar ideas with the previous and the next subchapter as he generally wants to start a King's Indian Attack. Here I will discuss 3 variations for Black and try to explain the advantages and drawbacks of each.

3...d5!?

I am looking for something specific that takes White away from his usual plans. This idea will often reach positions with an isolani for Black, so we need to be comfortable with this fact.

A) 3...a6?! I am clearly not fond of this idea although it is in the spirit of the Sicilian Kan spirit. But I eventually think that it is quite pointless to play ...b5 so early when White has not yet played ♘c3.
4.♙g2 b5 5.d4



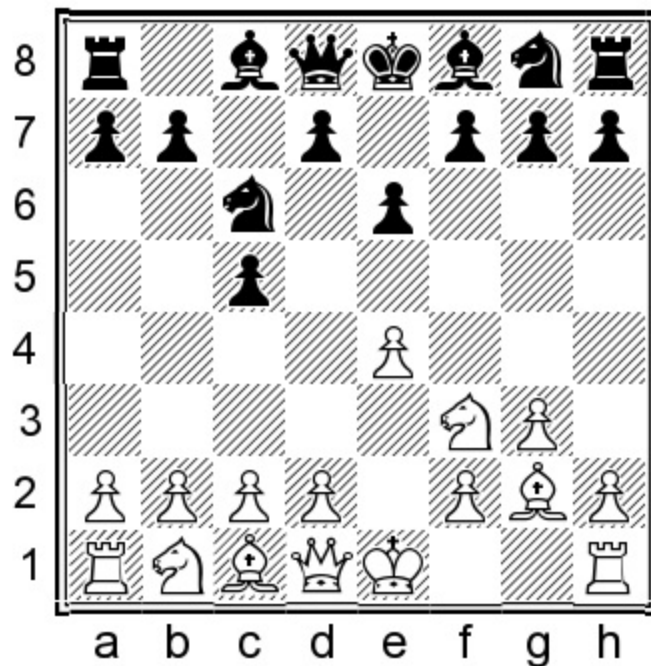
Position after: 5.d4

There are other possibilities for White, but this one is a theoretical problem for us. 5...cxd4 6.♘xd4± In Chapter 6 with 5.g3 we discussed this position and explained why we should not enter this line.

B) 3...♞c6 This is clearly the mainstream continuation. But there are a few practical problems concerning our repertoire.

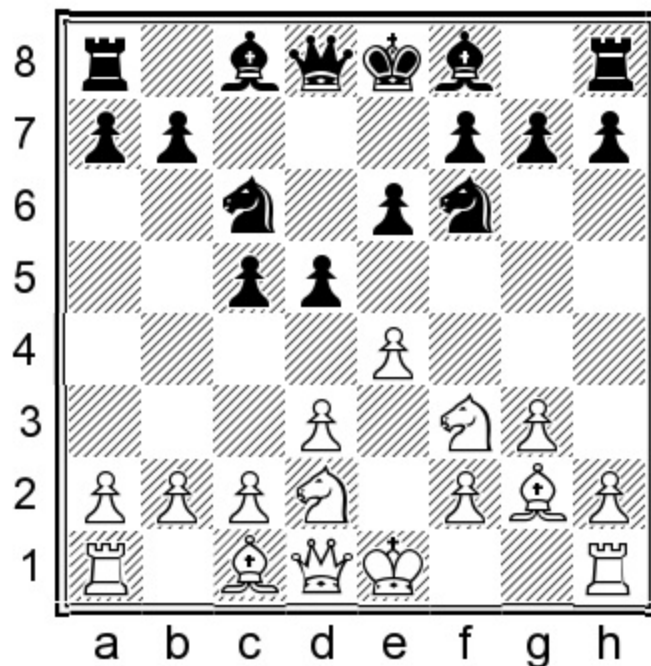
B1) 4.d4!? Trying to enter a variation which is not a Kan Sicilian. We can exchange as White has committed himself with g3, but we can also try an independent line: 4...cxd4 5.♘xd4 d5!? But it seems that White is able to keep the better position. For example: 6.♙g2 dxe4 7.♘xc6 ♚xd1+ 8.♔xd1 bxc6 9.♙xe4±. The fact that White is unable to castle is irrelevant, the main thing here is that White has the better pawn structure.

B2) 4.♙g2



Position after: 4. ♔g2

Unfortunately, we cannot play as we did against 3. ♖e2 with ...g6 or ...♘ge7, now both moves are dubious. 4...♘f6 [4...g6 5.d4!± With many pawns on the light squares, Black is going to suffer on the dark squares. 4...♘ge7 5.0-0 g6 6.d4! cxd4 7.♘xd4± Again, this is clearly not the type of open Sicilian you want to reach.] 5.d3 d5 6.♘bd2



Position after: 6. ♘bd2

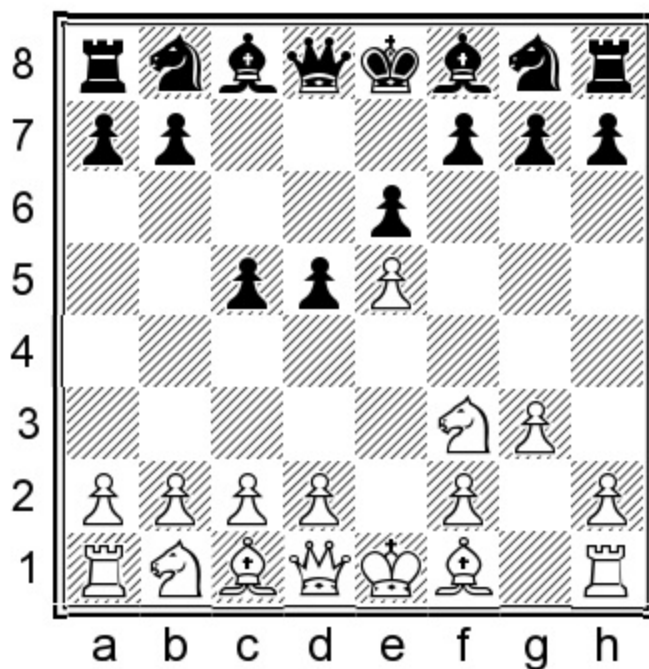
Another option for White is 6. ♖e2. And in both cases, we have reached a position that often comes

from the French Defence with 2.d3. In general White will close the centre by means of e5, and then attack on the kingside, while Black generally counter attacks on the queenside. But I do not want to let White follow his usual attacking plan which White players generally know well. But if you want to, you can play this line, and 3.♞e2, 3.g3 and often 3.d3 will come back to this type of position.

4.exd5

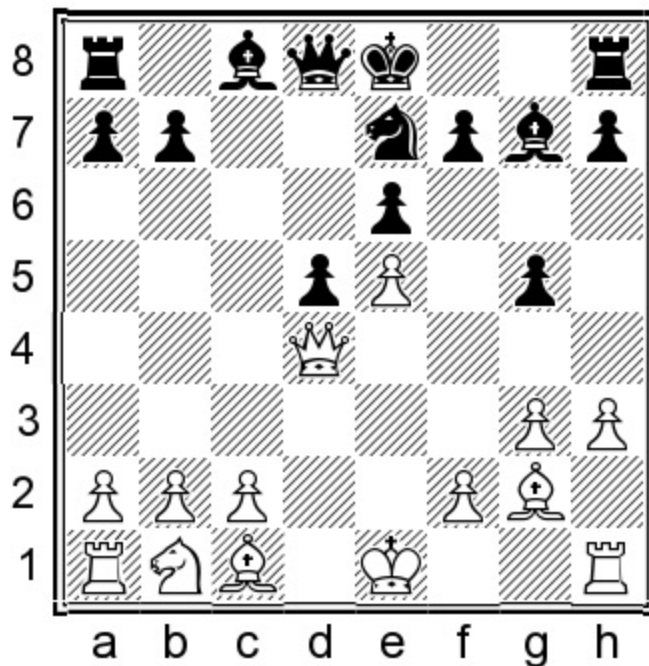
A) 4.d3?! Black has different ways to reply but the simplest is 4...dxe4 5.dxe4 ♞xd1+ 6.♔xd1 ♞c6=. And there is no objective reason for Black to be worse.

B) 4.e5?!



Position after: 4.e5?!

4...♞c6 5.♔g2 This looks a lot like a good French Defence for Black. 5...g5! I like this for Black, but 5...f6 or 5...♞c7 are also pretty decent continuations. 6.h3 ♔g7 7.d4 ♞xd4! 8.♞xd4 cxd4 9.♞xd4 ♞e7!N



Position after: 9... Nf7!

This leads to a forcing line where Black is fine in the end. 10. Qxg5 Nf5 11. Wa4+ Qd7 12. Qxd8 Qxa4 13. Qf6 Qxf6 14. exf6 Qxc2

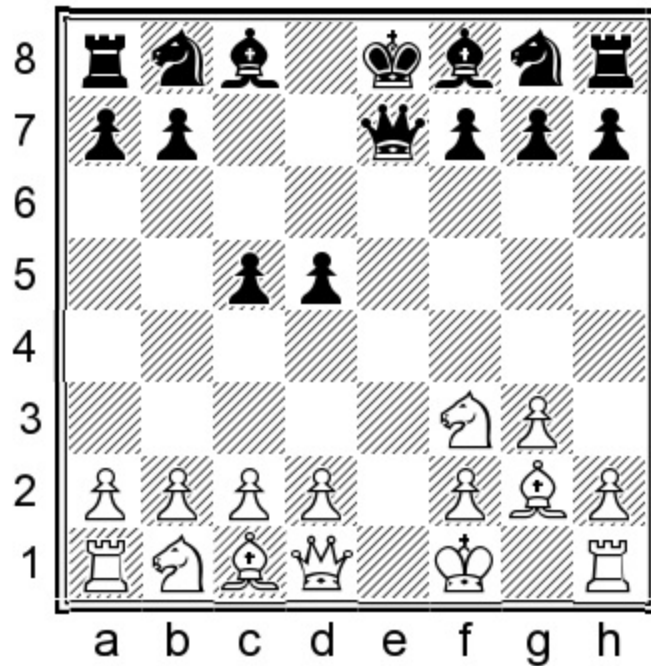
4...exd5 5.d4

This is how I would play as White to ensure getting an isolani.

5. Qg2?! This has been played many times, but it seems slightly inaccurate because of 5... We7+! And White has an unpleasant choice.

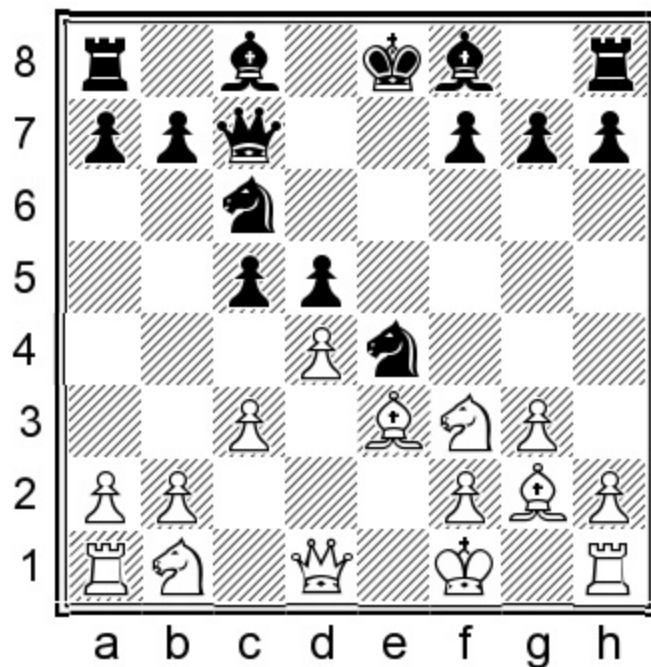
A) 6. We2 Qxe2+ 7. Qxe2 Nc6 8. Re1 h6!? A nice way to quietly finish development. Black wants to play ... Qe6, but he also wants to prevent Ng5. Play may continue with 9. Qf1+ Qe6 10. Nc3 Nf6 11. d4 0-0-0=. All this occurred in the game Praggnanandhaa, R (2608) – Pridorozhni, A (2590) Chess.com INT 2020.

B) 6. Qf1



Position after: 6. ♔f1

This is probably the most ambitious as it keeps the queens on the board and tries to say that the queen on e7 is poorly placed as it blocks the bishop. 6... ♖c6 7.d4 ♘f6 8.c3?! This is objectively not a great move; White's development will be too slow. [8. ♘c3 ♙e6 9. ♔g1 ♚d7 10. ♙e3 cxd4 11. ♘xd4 ♙b4= In the end, Black has enough play with the isolani due to the king still on g1.] 8... ♚c7 9. ♙g5 ♘e4 10. ♙e3



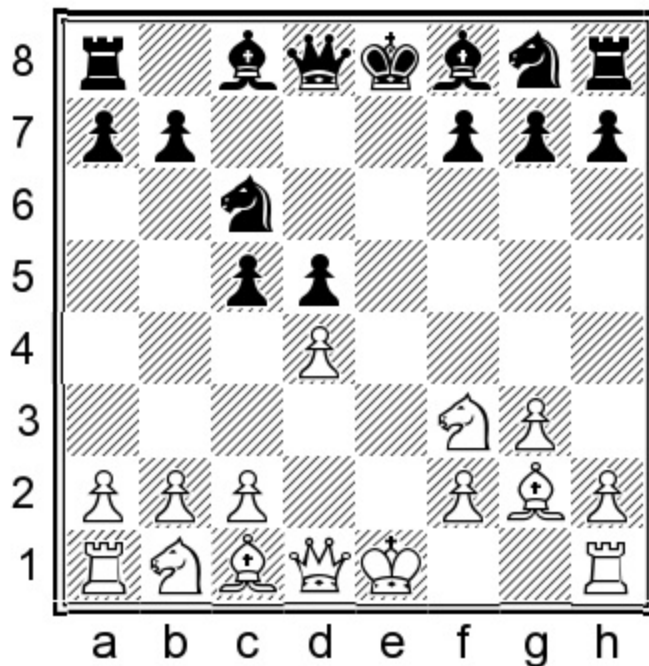
Position after: 10. ♙e3

All this occurred in Gomez Garrido, C (2479) – Smirin, I (2612) Chess.com INT 2020, and now, I prefer: 10...♔e7!?N 11.♘bd2 0-0↑

5...cxd4!?

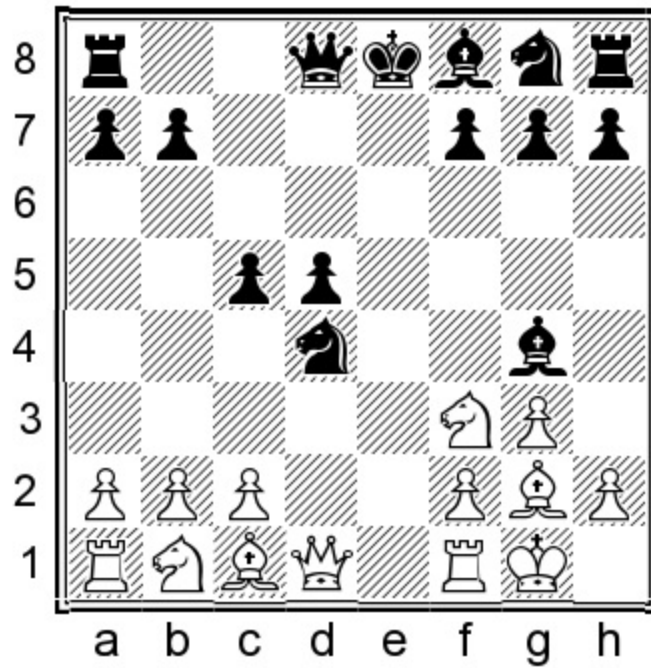
An interesting line that has only rarely been tried.

5...♘c6 The main move, but if you plan to take later on d4, then this is less accurate. 6.♔g2



Position after: 6.♔g2

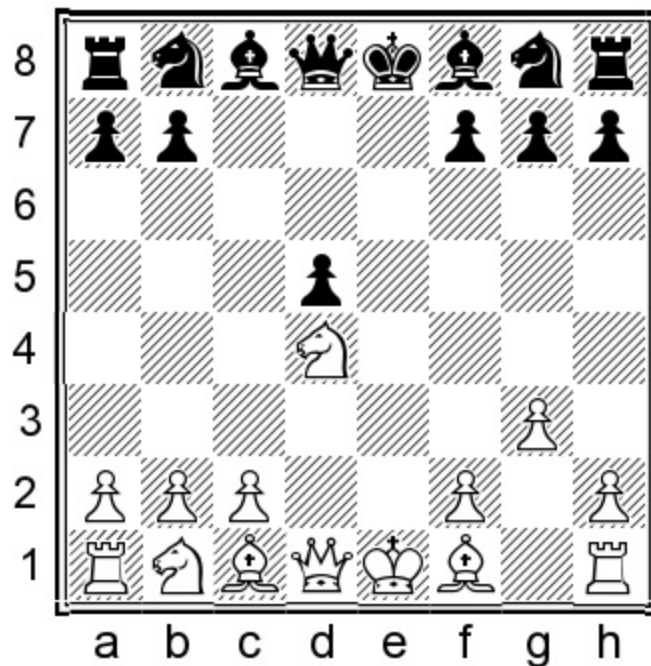
- A) 6...cxd4 7.0-0!±N White has time to castle before taking back. [7.♘xd4 ♔c5 This goes back to the main line.]
- B) 6...♘f6 7.0-0 ♔e7 8.dxc5!± In general, White also keeps a slight edge in these lines.
- C) 6...♔g4 7.0-0 cxd4 [7...♘xd4?!



Position after: 7... ♖xd4?!

This is a dubious continuation: 8. ♔e1+!± And it places Black in hot water.] 8. h3 ♕xf3 9. ♔xf3 ♘f6 10. ♕g5± White will eventually get the d5-pawn back and keep slight pressure with almost no losing chances. However, it is very holdable for Black.

6. ♖xd4



Position after: 6. ♖xd4

6. ♖g2?! N Delaying ♗xd4 is not great as Black replies with 6... ♖b4+! 7. ♖d2 ♜e7+ 8. ♜e2 ♖c5. I am not certain that White will get his pawn back soon or under good circumstances.

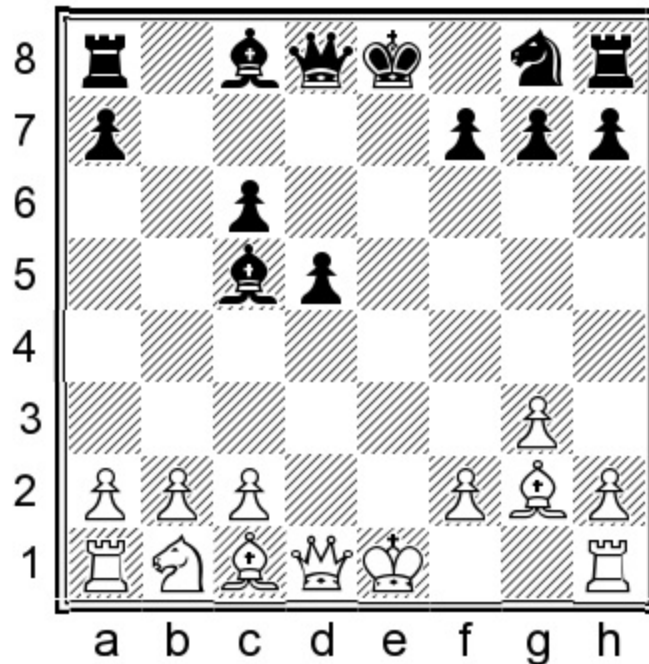
6... ♗c6 7. ♖g2 ♖c5!

Black forces White to take a decision.

8. ♗b3

A) 8. ♖e3?! This has been tried twice, but it is probably a mistake. 8... ♗xd4! 9. ♖xd4 ♜e7+ 10. ♔f1 ♗f6 11. ♗c3 0-0. It is not horrible for White to have the king on f1, the position is quite stable, but nevertheless White is just fighting for equality.

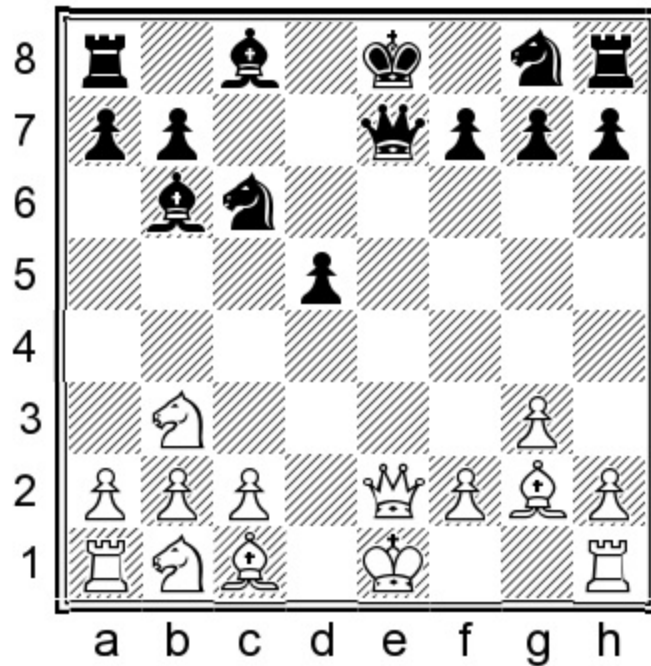
B) 8. ♗xc6 bxc6



Position after: 8... bxc6

We now have a hanging pawn structure instead of a isolani. 9. 0-0 ♗f6 10. ♜e1+ ♖e6= The position also seems completely fine. With have easy development and potentially counterplay against f2.

8... ♜e7+! 9. ♜e2 ♖b6! N

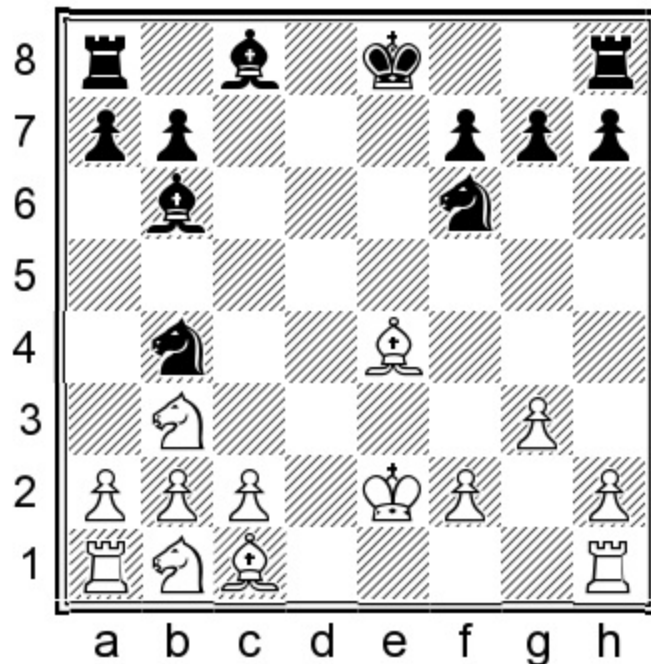


Position after: 9...♙b6!N

This is the most active square for the bishop. I like this novelty more than 9...♙e6 which has been played most of the time. We want to keep the bishop pair, and we do not need to protect the d5-pawn.

10.♙e3!?

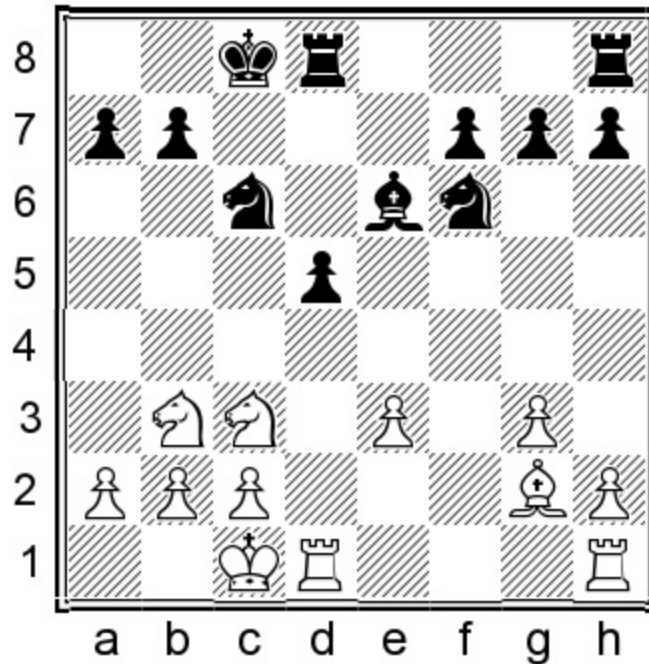
10.♙xd5? This may be the reason no one has played 9...♙b6. 10...♚xe2+ 11.♙xe2 ♘b4! 12.♙e4 ♘f6



Position after: 12...♘f6

It is clear that Black is having great compensation for the pawn. 13.♙d3 0-0 14.♙e3 ♙g4+ 15.♚d2 ♜ad8 16.♙xb6 axb6 17.♞c3 ♙f5 Black can enjoy his position.

10...♙xe3 11.♜xe3 ♜xe3+ 12.fxe3 ♙e6 13.♞c3 ♞f6 14.0-0-0 0-0-0=

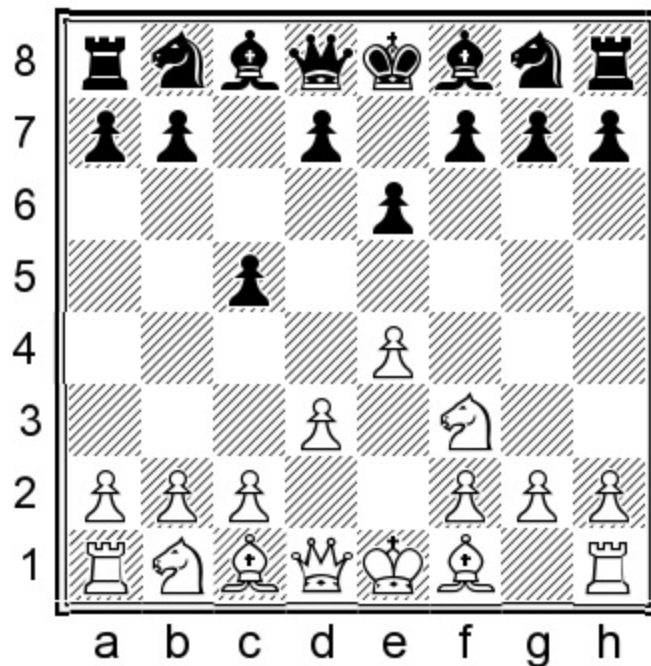


Position after: 14...0-0-0=

I really think Black must be fine here as he has good chances against e3 which compensates for the isolated pawn on d5. My overall conclusion about this line is that it is definitely interesting, but Black has to come up with the right ideas if he does not want to end up in a slightly worse and a bit boring position.

e) 3.d3

1.e4 c5 2.♞f3 e6 3.d3



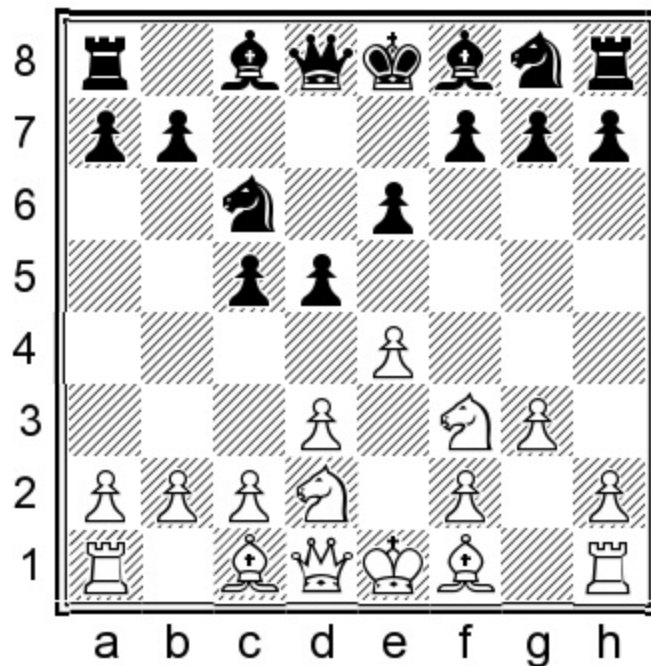
Position after: 3.d3

To continue with the same idea as in the previous subchapters, I would like to try a new idea for my Black that has rarely been seen in practice. And I have another idea to discuss that you may or may not like.

3...b5!?

Black anticipates that White is willing to play g3 and he immediately places a bishop on that diagonal. Also, he does not need to play ...a6 first as that can be a loss of time in many cases. In my research almost all games continued with 4.g3.

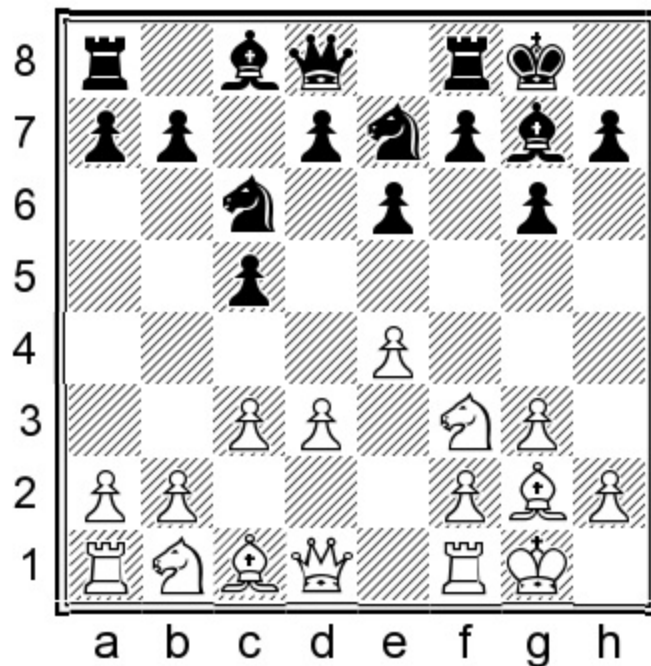
A) 3...d5 Slightly in the same spirit as against 3.g3, but this time White has two ways to hold the centre and continue later with a kingside fianchetto. 4.♘bd2 We can mention that 4.♙e2 is also popular nowadays. 4...♞c6 5.g3



Position after: 5.g3

5...♘f6 [5...g6 6.♗g2 ♗g7 7.0-0 ♘ge7 This is an interesting system for Black, but White also has his King's Indian Attack.] 6.♗g2 ♗e7 7.0-0 0-0 This position also arises from the French Defence with 2.d3.

B) 3...♘c6 4.g3 ♘ge7 5.♗g2 g6 6.0-0 ♗g7 7.c3 0-0

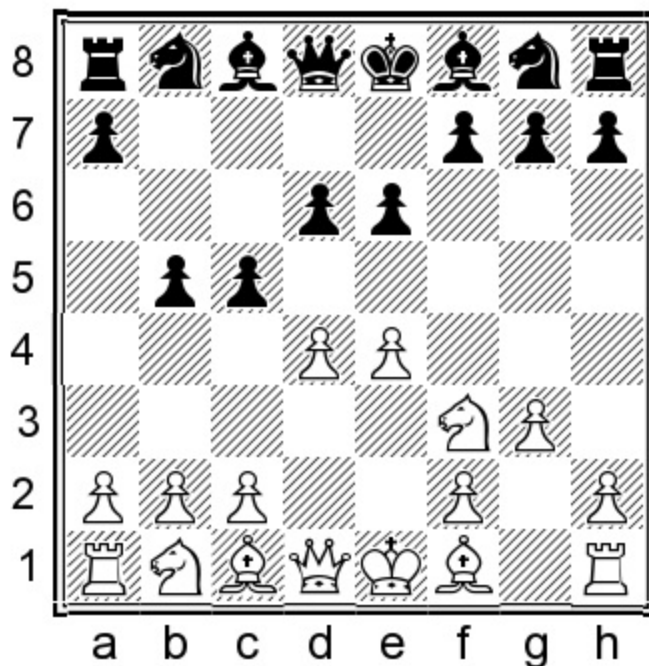


Position after: 7...0-0

This is quite similar to the lines we saw in 3.♙e2, but White did not have to play with ♙e2. Even if

you can consider it as a detail, and that Black has a fully playable position, it makes some differences such as the possibility of immediately playing 8.d4.

C) 3...d6 Last, this move-order with a similar idea to my choice does not work well here. 4.g3 b5? 5.d4!



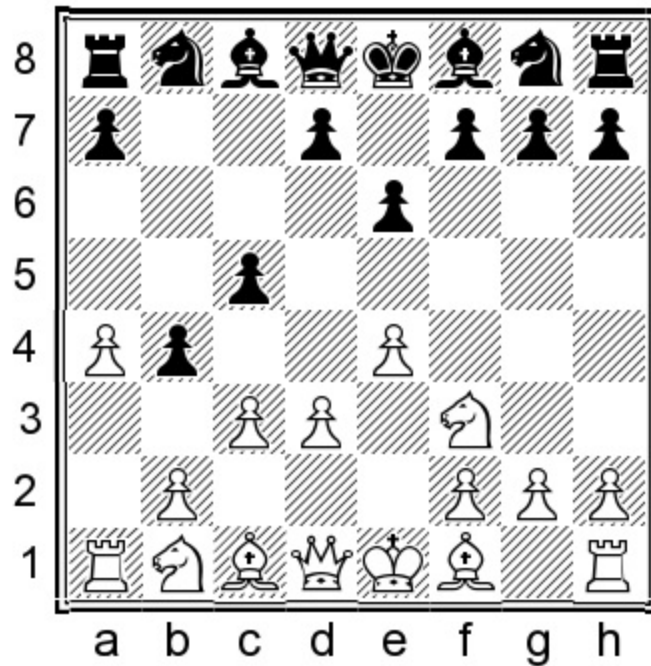
Position after: 5.d4!

And now this move is strong because the threat is to take on b5 with an important check! 5...cxd4 6.♙xb5+ ♘d7 7.♞xd4±

4.g3

As said before, this is the main continuation. The next moves are quite logical.

A) 4.a4 b4 5.c3!N

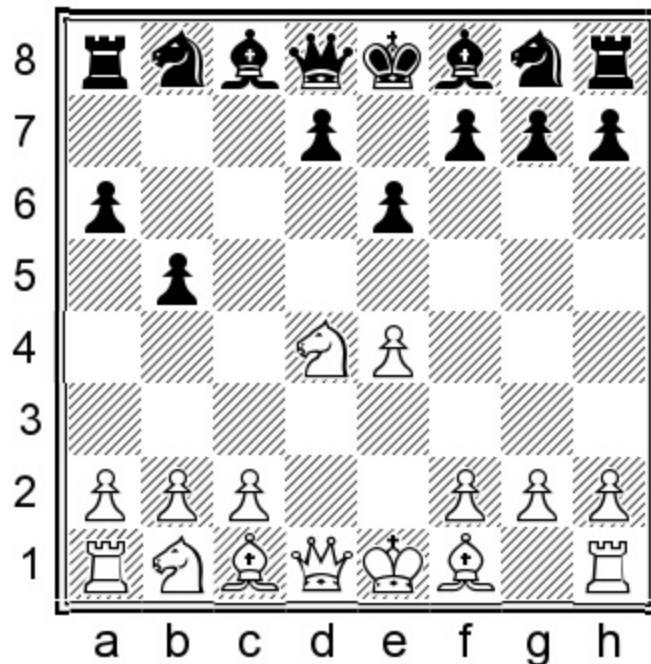


Position after: 5.c3!?N

Already a novelty and the most challenging response.

5...♘f6 This move prevents White's idea of playing d4 soon. 6.cxb4 cxb4 7.♘bd2 ♘c6 8.♙e2 ♙e7 9.0-0 0-0 10.♘b3 a5⇌ White has more space in the centre, but it is probably a minimal advantage.

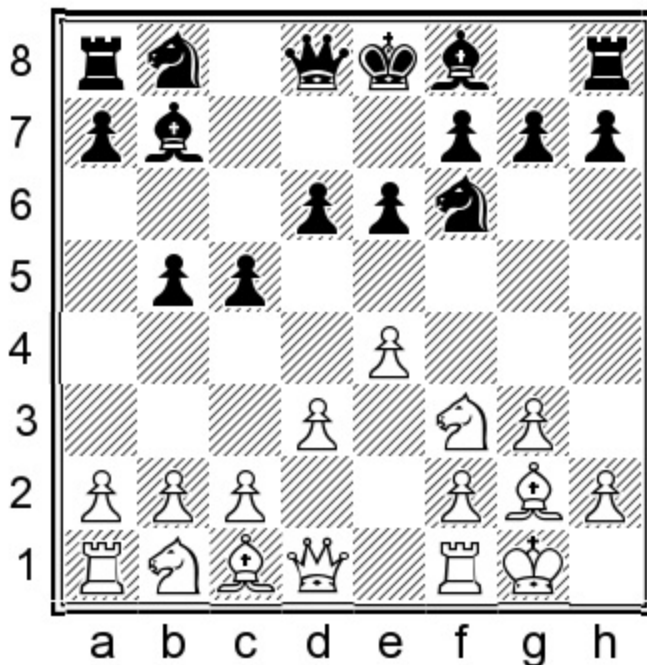
B) 4.d4 A very principle move that has only been played once. But something is not working for White. 4...cxd4! 5.♘xd4 [5.♙xb5?? Unfortunately, this is impossible. 5...♚a5+-+] 5...a6⇌



Position after: 5...a6⇌

We have reached a normal Kan position but with b5 already played. Some players may argue that you do not necessarily want to have played this move this early when White has not played Nc3 because there might be some ideas with a4 for White, but I objectively doubt it can be a problem and that any White player will not want to enter this position seemingly down a tempo since when they played 3.d3 they indicated that they did not want to play an open Sicilian.

4... Bb7 5. Bg2 d6 6.0-0 Nf6



Position after: 6... Nf6

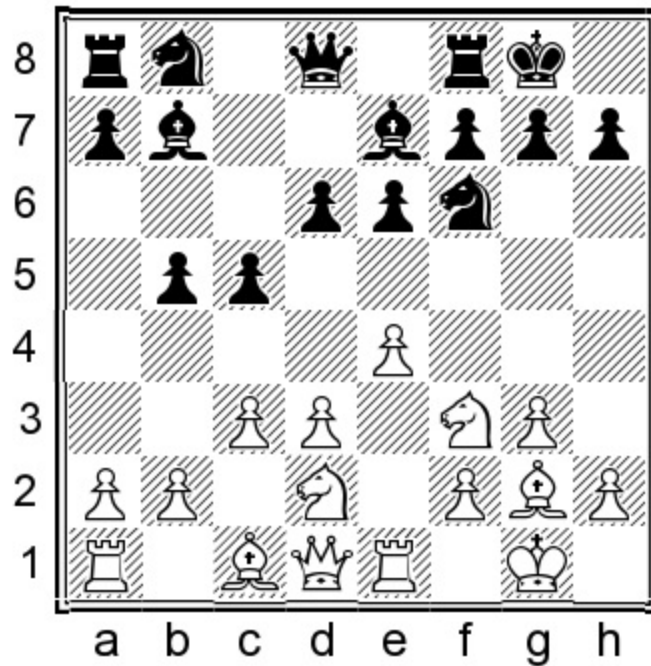
White has tried a lot of different moves so we will review the best of them.

7.a4

This is the most played move here, or it can be played at many other moments. The idea is to fix the queenside and obtain the c4 square for a knight.

A) 7.e5 This cannot be a problem for Black. 7... dxe5 8. Nxe5 Bxg2 9. Qxg2 Nbd7 10. Nxd7 Qxd7 =
Mikhalevski, V (2434) – Chadaev, N (2559) Chess.com INT 2015.

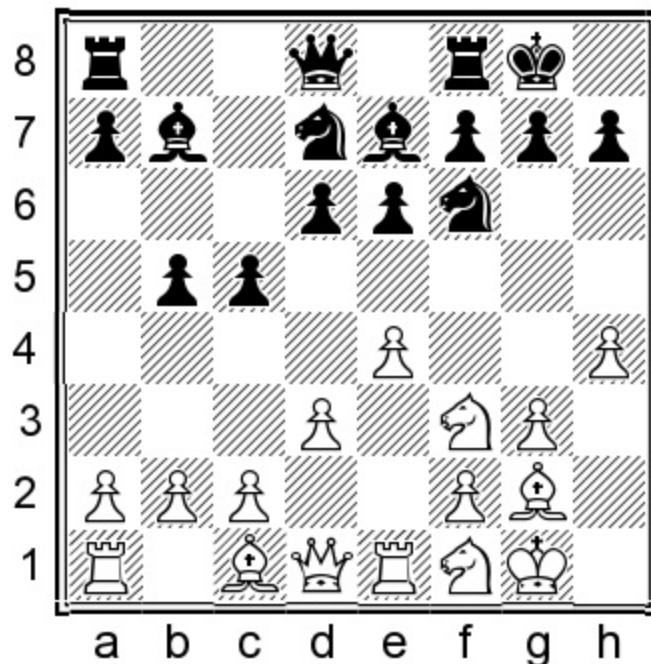
B) 7. Nbd2 Bb7 8.c3 0-0 9. Re1



Position after: 9. ♖e1

White is preparing the move d4 to take possession of the centre. 9... ♟bd7 10.d4 ♚c7 The key is to not do anything in the centre. White manages to advance but then he is a bit stuck with the defence of his central pawns. 11. ♙e2 a6 ♞ I like Black's flexibility. He will probably take on d4 at the right time to open the c-file.

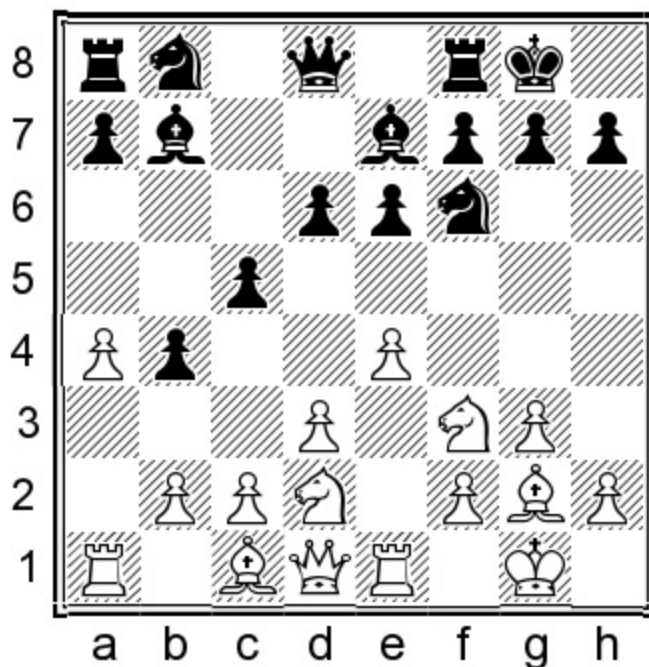
C) 7. ♖e1 ♟bd7 8. ♘bd2 ♙e7 9. ♘f1 0-0 10.h4



Position after: 10.h4

This is what White would do if he just wants to start his kingside attack. 10...♔c7 11.♘1h2 a5 But I do not see any immediate threats and we can also do our pawn storm to open the queenside. Normally White plays like this when the centre is closed (normally when Black has played ...d5 earlier and white has managed to push e5), but his play is far less obvious here.

7...b4 8.♘bd2 ♕e7 9.♖e1 0-0



Position after: 9...0-0

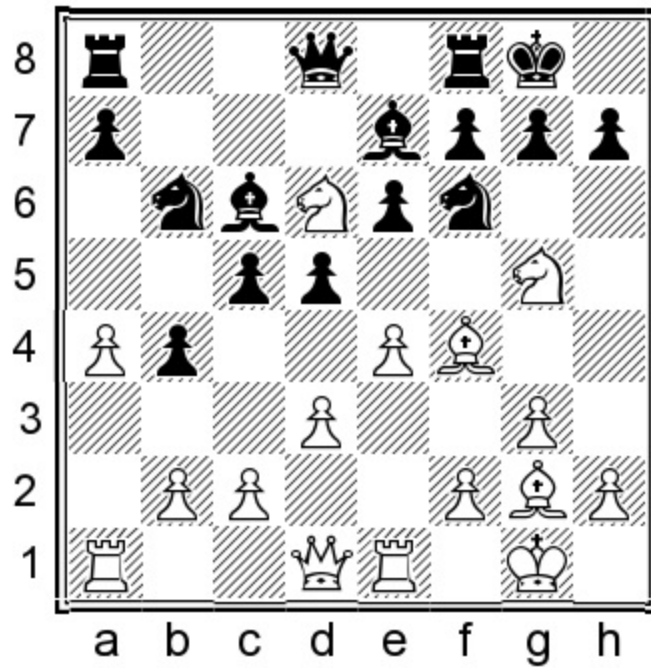
This position may arise from various move orders, both camps having played a lot of logical moves.

10.♘c4

10.e5 Once again, there is no problem after this move. 10...dxe5 11.♘xe5 ♕xg2 12.♔xg2 ♔c7 13.♘dc4 Of course this is the point of White's play, he has some squares and stable knights, but we have more space, and we will be able to chase or trade the knights later. But first, prevent ♕f4. 13...♘d5= Probably ...♘d7 or ...♕f6 will follow.

10...♘c6!?

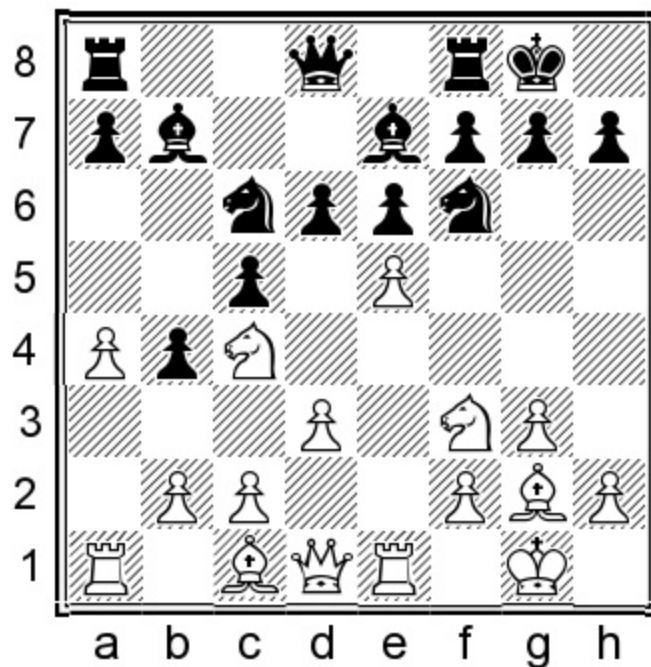
10...♘bd7 A top level blitz game occurred with this move, but the knight does not feel like it is on the best square here. 11.♕f4 d5 12.♘d6 ♕c6 13.♘g5 ♘b6?



Position after: 13... Nxb6?

And the bunder came. 14. Ndx7 Bxf7 15. Qh3± The World Champion was much better even if he eventually lost against the Frenchman in Carlsen, M (2876) – Vachier Lagrave, M (2723) Stavanger 2015.

11.e5



Position after: 11.e5

In most of the games White eventually went for this move. I believe that if he wants to achieve something he will have to do it eventually. And if he waits too long, we may have ...d5.

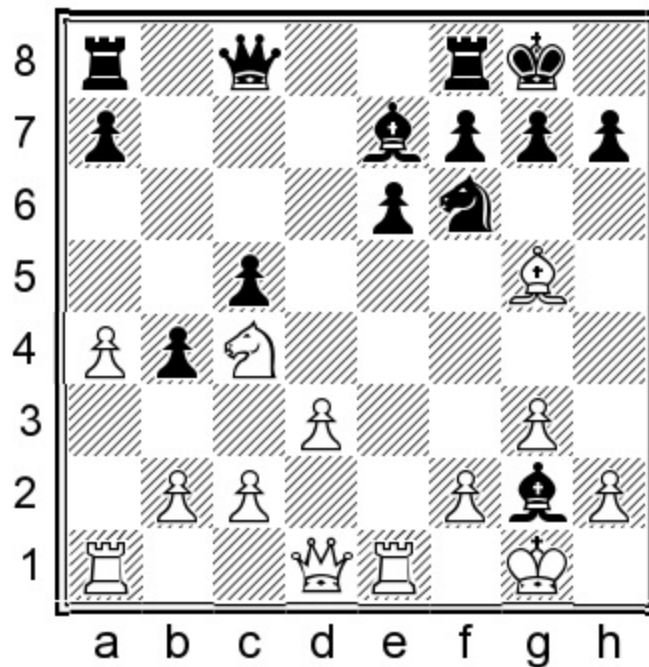
11.a5 a6 This also comes back to the same point, the b6-square is quite irrelevant here. 12.e5 ♖xe5 13.♗fxe5 ♙xg2 14.♔xg2 dxe5 15.♞xe5 ♘d5= There is no problem for Black in Movsesian, S (2635) – Geller, J (2518) Pardubice 2018.

11...dxe5 12.♗fxe5 ♞c8 13.♗xc6 ♙xc6 14.♙g5?!

While there were several “equal” variations, the computer does not like this natural continuation.

14.♙xc6 ♞xc6 15.b3 ♘d5 16.♙b2 ♙f6 17.♙xf6 ♗xf6 18.♞e5= Probably equal, but I still think that Black has the easier side.

14...♙xg2



Position after: 14...♙xg2

15.♙xf6

This must be White’s idea, saying that the bishop is not doing much while the knight may look strong on c4. But it is objectively a mirage.

15.♔xg2 ♘d5 16.♙xe7 ♗xe7= White has a few squares, but it is quite sterile. While we can take advantage of the d4 square with the knight. White’s kingside is a bit weak and he probably will not be able to play c3 due do the weakening of d3. So d4 looks like a weak spot.

15...♙xf6 16.♔xg2

And now, leaving the game Chigaev, M (2644) – Lenderman, A (2648) chess24.com INT 2020, I would go for the following plan.

16...♙a6!?

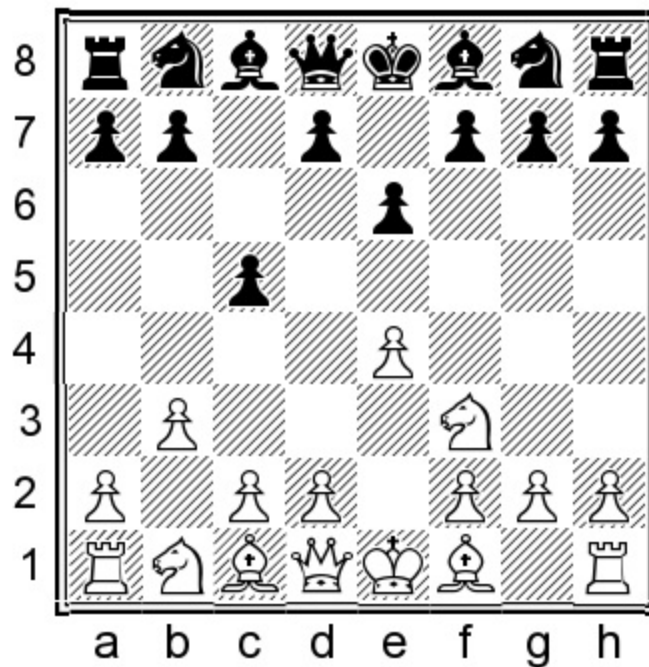
The pressure against a4 paralyzes the rook on a1, and then Black follows with the placement on his rooks in the centre.

17.♙f3 ♜ad8 18.♞e4 ♞d5

The next move will be 19...♞ad8 and only Black can be better. This original idea looks promising for Black if played with the right ideas!

f) 3.b3 a6 4.♙b2 ♘c6 5.--

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.b3



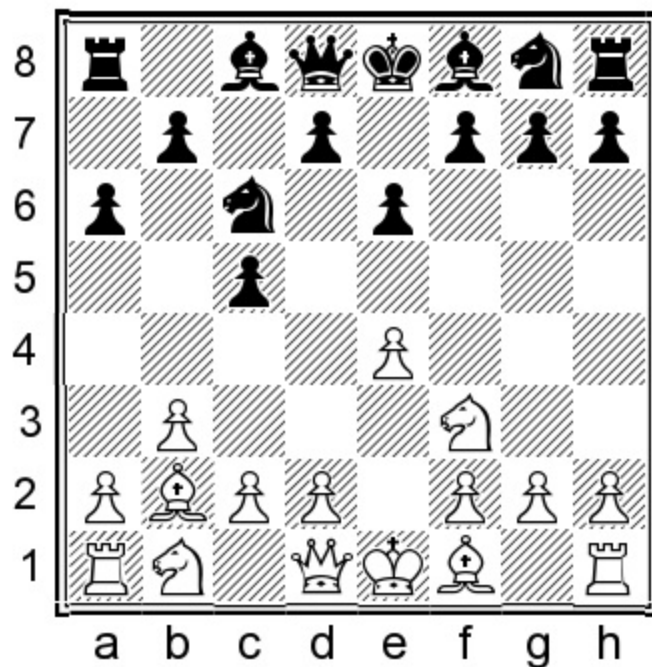
Position after: 3.b3

With this system White generally tries to get a better version than the 2.b3 line against the Sicilian as 2...e6 is not known to be the best against it. There are a lot of different variations for Black, and I choose one of the most flexible one.

3...a6!?

3...♘c6 This may transpose but it also gives White the option of transposing into the Rossolimo with 4.♙b5. There is no need to let that happen.

4.♙b2 ♖c6



Position after: 4...♖c6

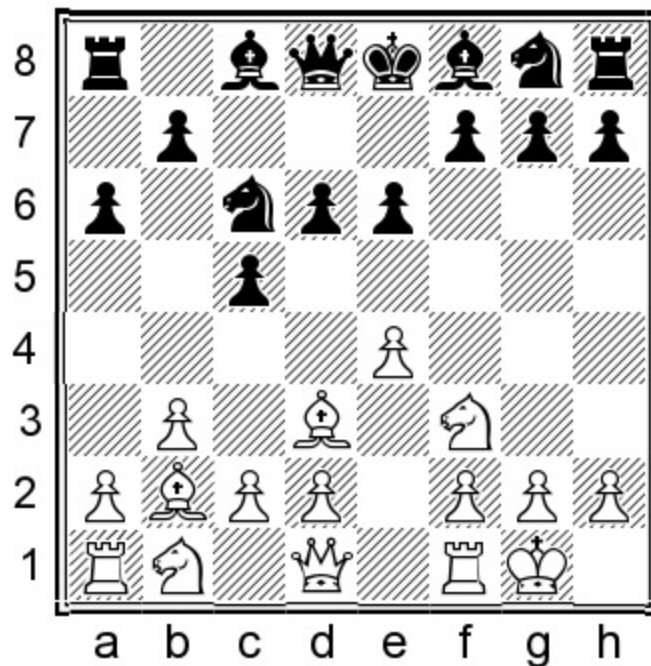
And now let us examine White's best tries from this position.

5.g3

If 5.♙e2, Black can immediately react in the centre.

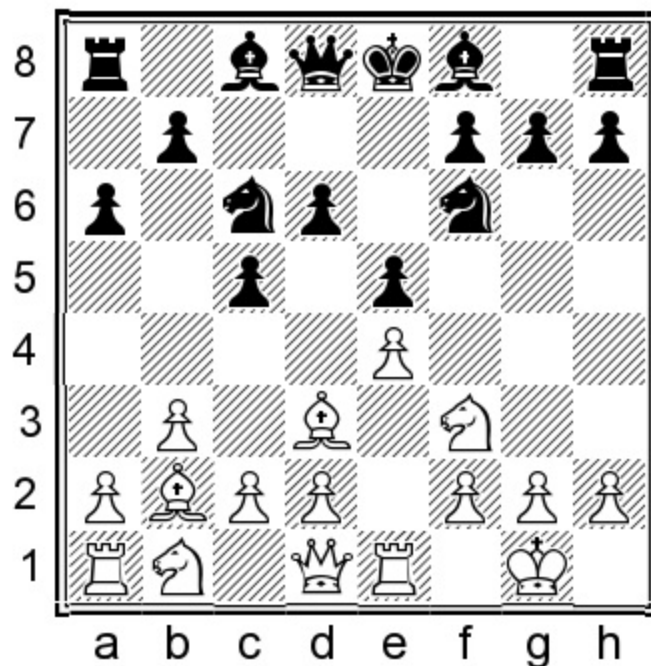
A) 5.c4 See the next subchapter.

B) 5.♙d3?! I think this is too awkward to be good. 5...d6 6.0-0



Position after: 6.0-0

6...♘f6 [6...e5!? This is already a possibility for Black.] 7.♞e1 [7.e5 This just leads to a dry and equal position. 7...dxe5 8.♘xe5 ♘xe5 9.♙xe5 ♙d6 10.♙xd6 ♚xd6 11.♘c3 ♙d7= ½-½ (14) Solak, D (2583) – Perunovic, M (2572) Kragujevac 2009.] 7...e5!? When it is difficult for White to react in the centre with d4 you usually want to play ...e5 even if it requires two moves.

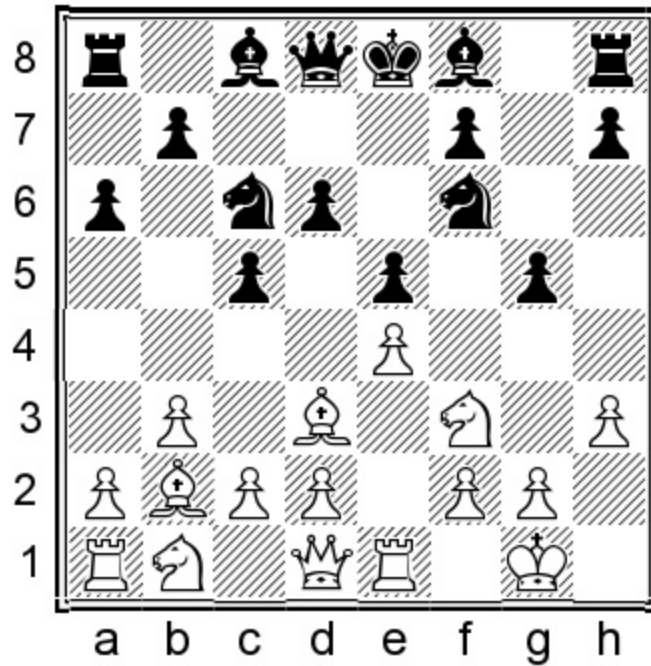


Position after: 7...e5!?

B1) 8.c3 ♙e7 9.h3 [9.♙c2 ♙g4! It is hard to get rid of the pin, that is why White generally prevents

it. 10.h3 ♖h5 11.d3 0-0] 9...g5! 10.♗c4 g4 11.hxg4 ♗xg4

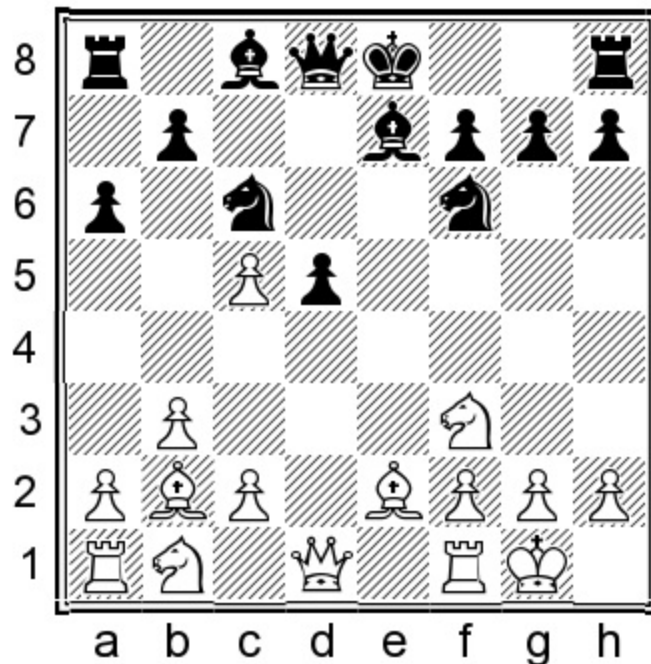
B2) 8.h3?! The most played move, but a very bad idea according to the computer. 8...g5!N



Position after: 8...g5!N

With this move Black will easily develop his initiative. 9.♘c3 [9.♘xg5? is well met with 9...♖g8 and ...♗xh3 will follow] 9...♖g8 10.♘d5 g4 11.hxg4 ♗xg4→ And White is in an unpleasant situation, it is hard for him to find a plan.

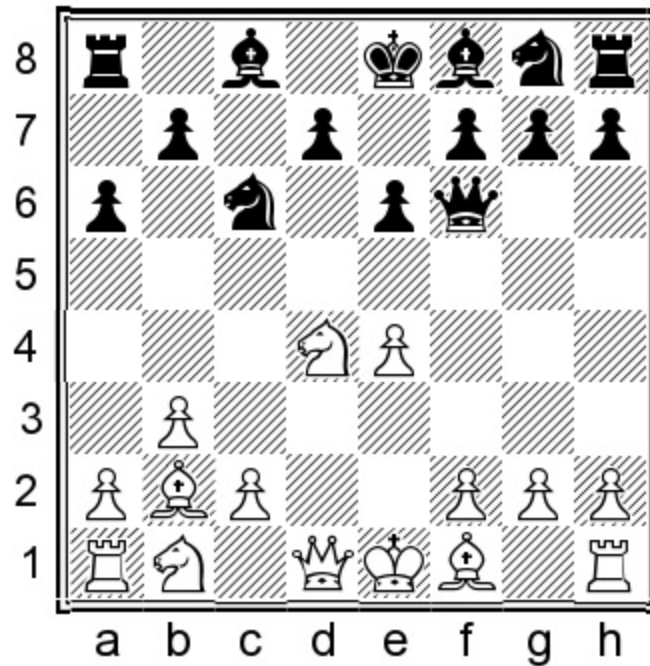
C) 5.♗e2 d5! We are not afraid to play the isolated pawn position as the bishop on b2 is strangely placed in this type of position. 6.exd5 exd5 7.d4 ♘f6 8.0-0 ♗e7 9.dxc5



Position after: 9.dxc5

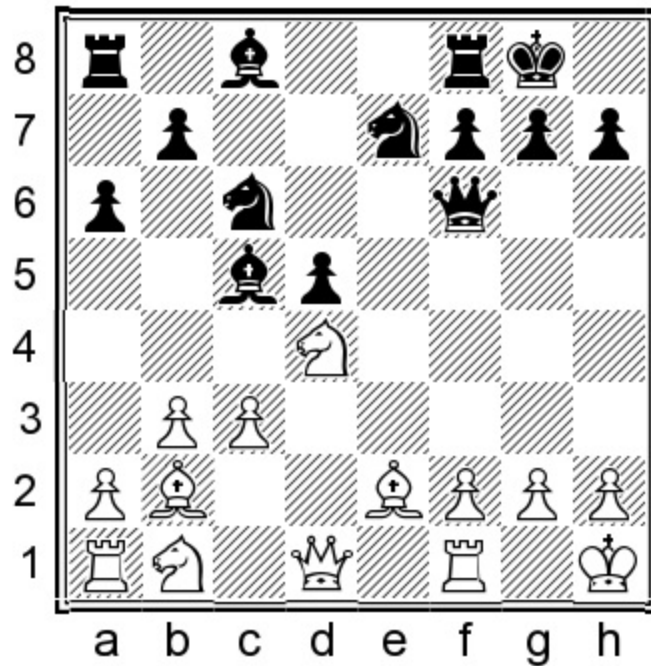
9...♙xc5 [9...0-0 This is also interesting, and it resulted in a symmetrical and equal position in the following blitz game. 10.c4 ♙xc5 11.♘c3 dxc4 12.♙xc4 ♙g4= Vachier Lagrave, M (2795) – Grischuk, A (2750) Chess.com INT 2017.] 10.♘d4 0-0 11.♘xc6 [11.♙e1?? This line shows how quickly things can go bad for White. 11...♘e4! 12.♙f3 ♘xf2 13.♙xf2 ♙h4+-+ Black recovers his piece on d4.] 11...bxc6 12.♘d2 ♙e8↑ White enjoys some initiative.

D) 5.d4?! This is among White's main continuations, but it is a dubious move, and we can play concretely here. 5...cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♙f6!



Position after: 6...♙f6!

This is the point. White is going to struggle on the dark squares. 7.c3 [7.♙e2 ♙c5 8.c3 ♘ge7 This just transposes.] 7...♙c5 8.♙e2 ♘ge7 9.0-0 0-0 10.♙h1?! [10.♘xc6 bxc6 11.♘d2 ♘g6↑ Even here Black's play looks easier.] 10...d5 11.exd5 exd5

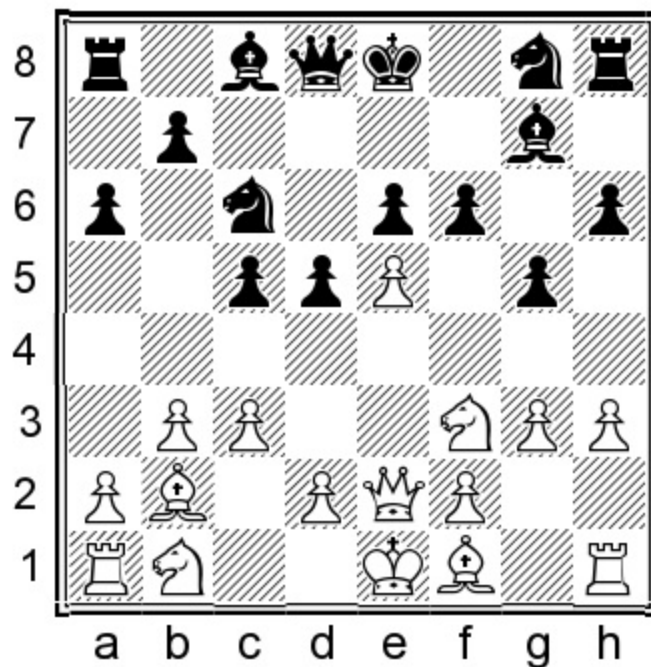


Position after: 11...exd5

Black's activity clearly goes along with the isolani. White should have been glad that a draw with soon agreed in Bauer, C (2562) – Tregubov, P (2620) Saint Vincent 2000.

5...d5 6.exd5

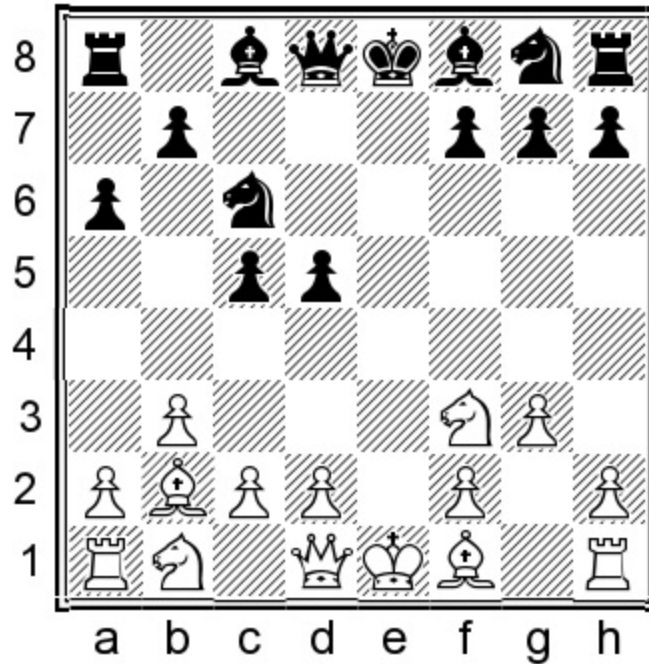
6.e5 g5!? Once again Black can take advantage of how hard it is for Black to find a safe place for his knight. 7.h3 ♔g7 8.♚e2 h6 9.c3 f6!?



Position after: 9...f6!?

Black opens the position and takes over the initiative. 10.exf6 ♖xf6 11.♗g2 ♘ge7 12.0-0 And now in the game Mamedov, R (2651) – Svidler, P (2747) Moscow 2013, instead of castling Svidler could have played: 12...h5! 13.♘a3 g4 14.♘h4 ♗d7+ With nice attacking prospects on the kingside.

6...exd5



Position after: 6...exd5

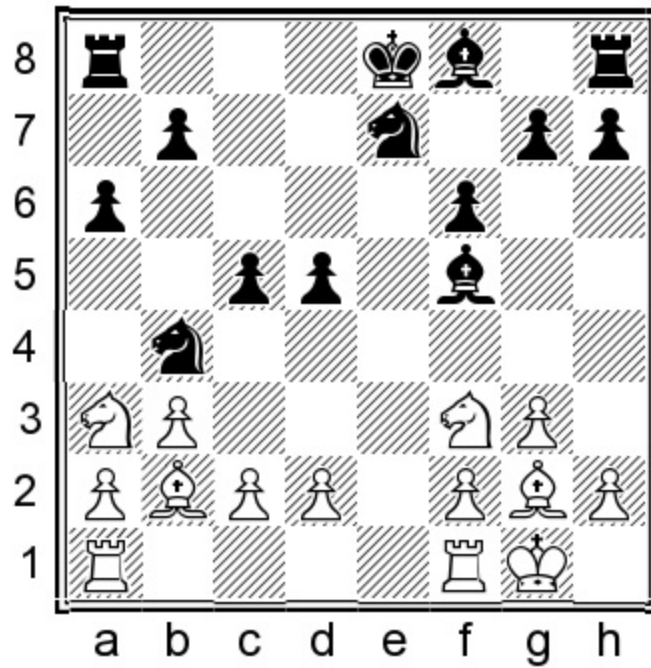
7.♕e2+

7.♗g2 ♖e7+! 8.♕e2 ♘b4! 9.♖xe7+ ♘xe7 10.♘a3 ♗f5↑

7...♖e7 8.♖xe7+!

It is important for White to exchange at once as Black is unable to take back with the bishop since his g7 pawn would be hanging.

8...♘gxe7 9.♗g2 ♘b4! 10.♘a3 ♗f5 11.0-0 f6=

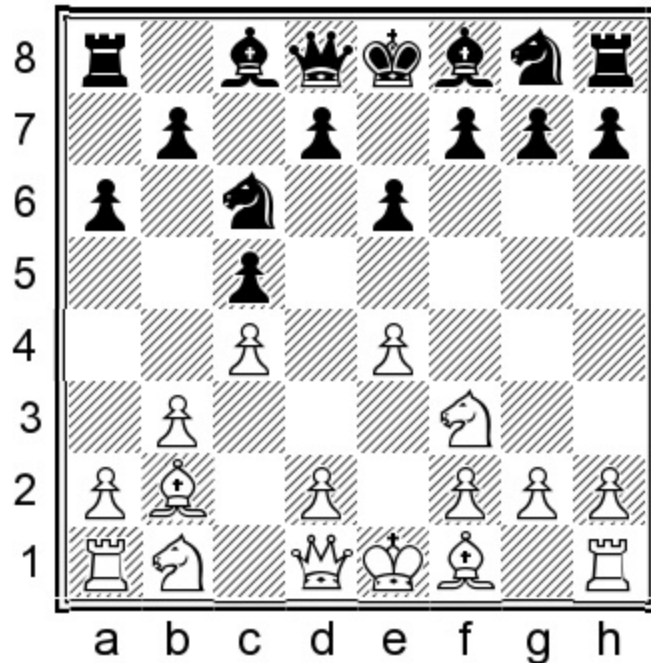


Position after: 11...f6=

Black could not really take on c2 due to the c5 pawn falling in the end. Black has interesting prospects, you can review the game 0-1 (28) Bissieres, M (2344) – Guichard, P (2320) Condom 2010.

g) 3.b3 a6 4.♙b2 ♘c6 5.c4

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.b3 a6!? 4.♙b2 ♘c6 5.c4



Position after: 5.c4

This is the main continuation. White prevents a lot of continuations featuring the moves ...b5 or ...d5 and he wants to play d4 at the right time. But it is not clear that he will be able to do it.

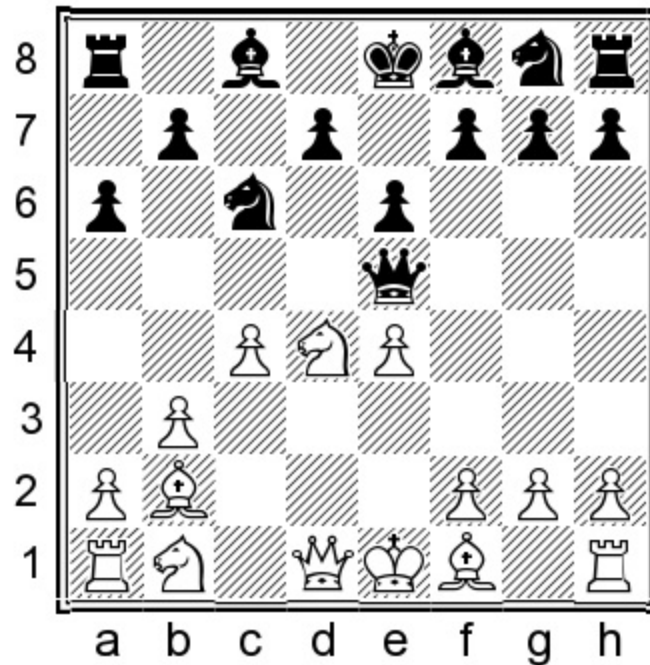
5...♙c7

We play this move to be able to follow with ...♘f6 in anticipation of White's possible e5. The fact that the queen controls e5 once more, will enable us to play ...♘g4, gaining a tempo against the e5-pawn.

6.g3

To me this is clearly White's main option.

A) 6.d4? This is bad, similarly (and even worse) to 5.d4 that we considered in the previous subchapter. 6...cxd4 7.♘xd4 ♙e5!

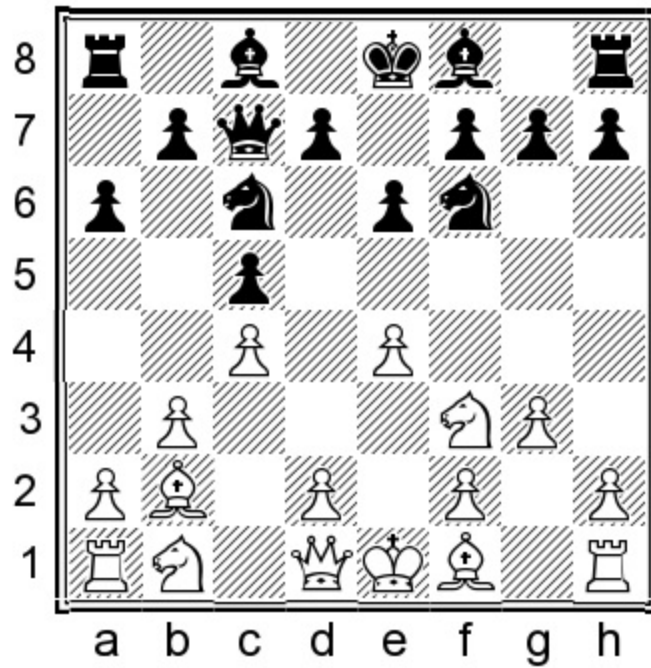


Position after: 7...♙e5!

White has no good way to defend e4 nor to prepare against ...♙b4+ or ...♙c5 when Black has many threats. 8.♙c3 ♙b4 9.♙xb4 ♘xb4+

B) 6.♘c3 ♘f6 7.♙e2 I do not really like the bishop here. Black can easily go for active development. 7...♙d6 8.0-0 ♘d4 9.g3 0-0♗ Black will probably follow with ...b6 and ...♙b7 with a fine position. It is difficult for White to find a plan.

6...♘f6!

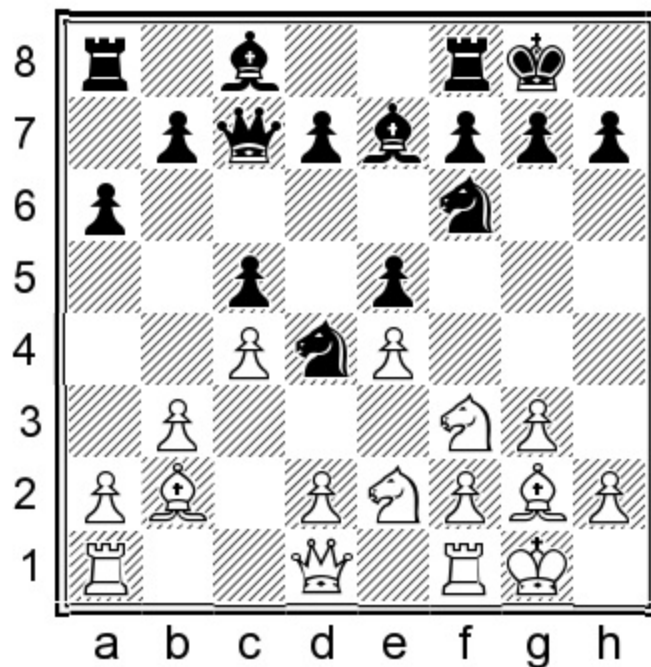


Position after: 6... Nf6!

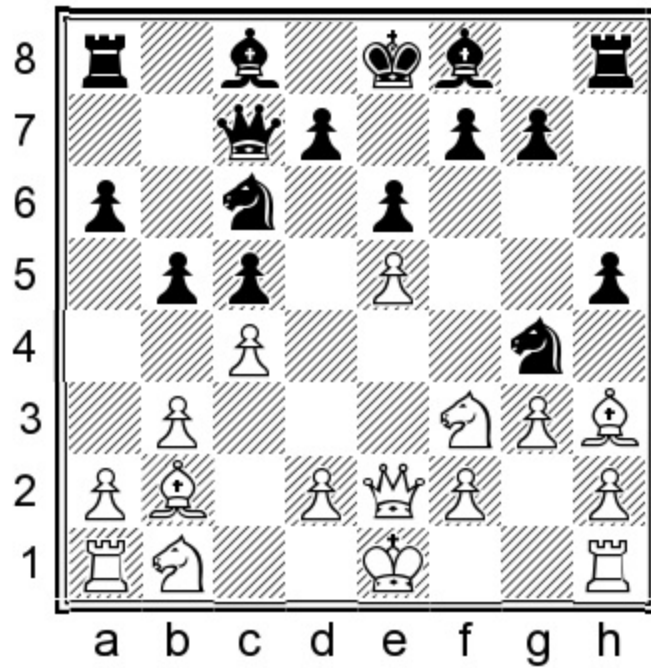
7.e5

Most of the players continued with this move.

7. Nc3 Nd4!? Was played only once but I like this move because it is the only one which really prevents 8.d4. 8. Qg2 Qe7 9.0-0 0-0 10. Ne2 e5! =



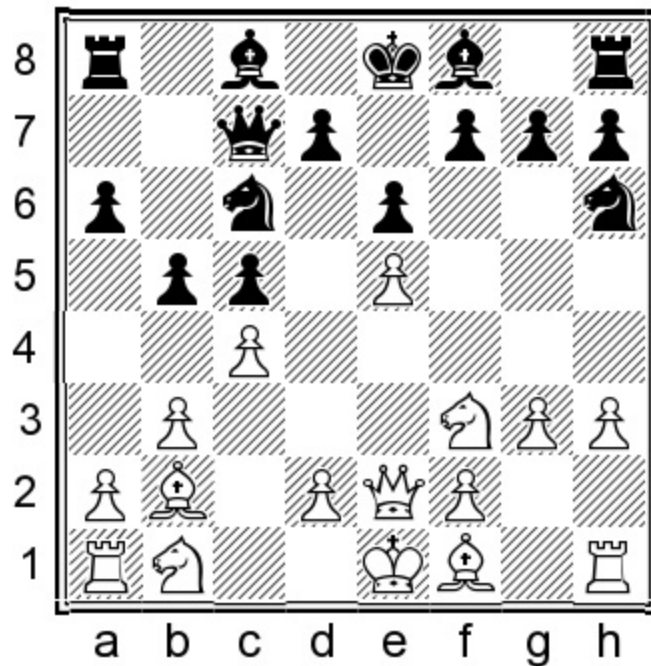
Position after: 10... e5! =



Position after: 9...h5!

If we can keep the knight here. 10.♘a3?! [10.0-0N 10...bxc4 11.bxc4 ♖b8 12.♙c3 ♘b7 13.♙g2 ♙e7↑] 10...♙b7 11.0-0 ♘d4! 12.♘xd4 cxd4 The knight on a3 is misplaced and e5 is also under attack. 13.♙g2 ♙xg2 14.♙xg2 ♙xa3 15.♙xa3 ♘xe5+ Black is just a pawn up in Jain, N (2029) – Tsolakidou, S (2431) New Delhi 2019.

9...♘h6



Position after: 9...♘h6

10.♖a3!

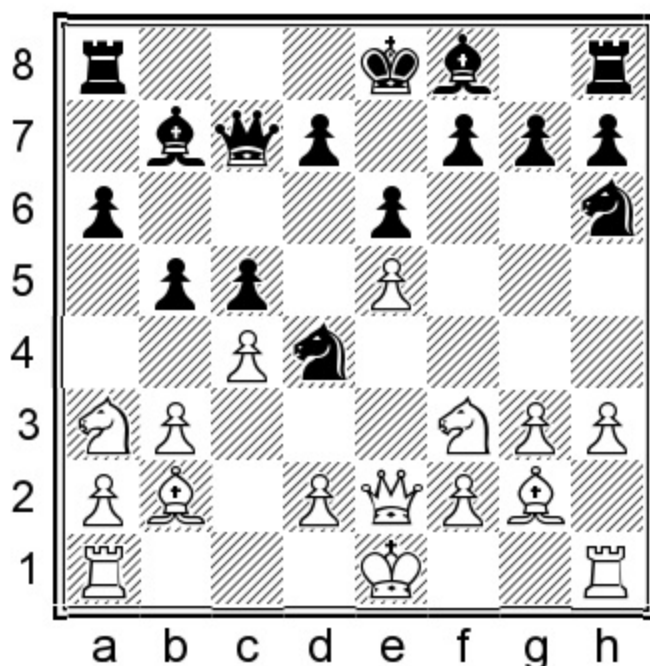
The engine validates this move.

10.♙g2?! bxc4 11.♚xc4 In the internet game Beerdsen, T (2461) – Perunovic, M (2545) Chess.com INT 2017, Black could have improved his play with: 11...a5! 12.♖a3 ♙a6 13.♖b5 ♚b6 14.a4 ♜b8 Black will gain a pawn on the queenside, and White really needs to prove his compensation.

10...♙e7!N

Objectively, this may be seen as an improvement, but let us check the game as well.

10...♙b7?! 11.♙g2?! [11.cxb5! White should have accepted the pawn, even if it is not an obvious choice. 11...♖d4 12.♙xd4 cxd4 13.bxa6 ♙xa6 14.♖c4 ♙c5] 11...♖d4!



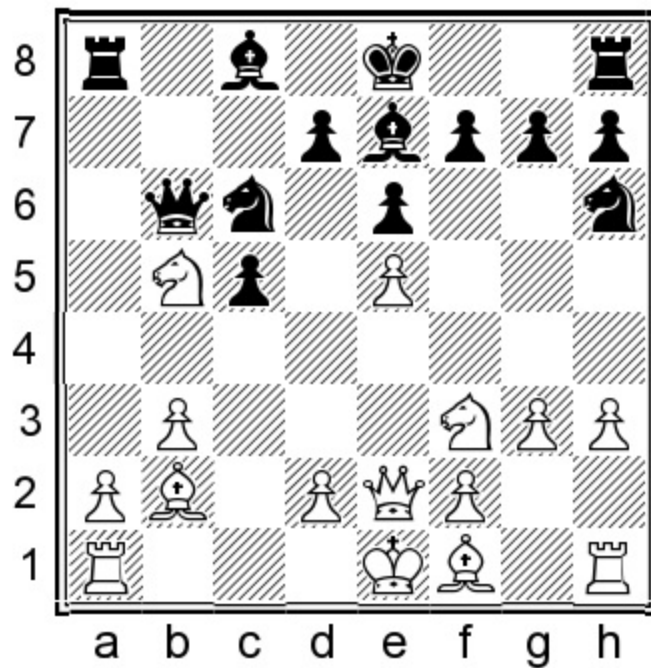
Position after: 11...♖d4!

12.♙xd4 cxd4 13.♖c2 bxc4 14.♚xc4 ♚xc4 15.bxc4 ♙c5 The position is just double-edged, and Black played better and won in Vaibhav, S (2558) – Perunovic, M (2606) Biel 2017.

11.cxb5

11.♙g2 0-0 12.0-0 ♜b8=

11...axb5 12.♖xb5 ♚b6



Position after: 12... ♔b6

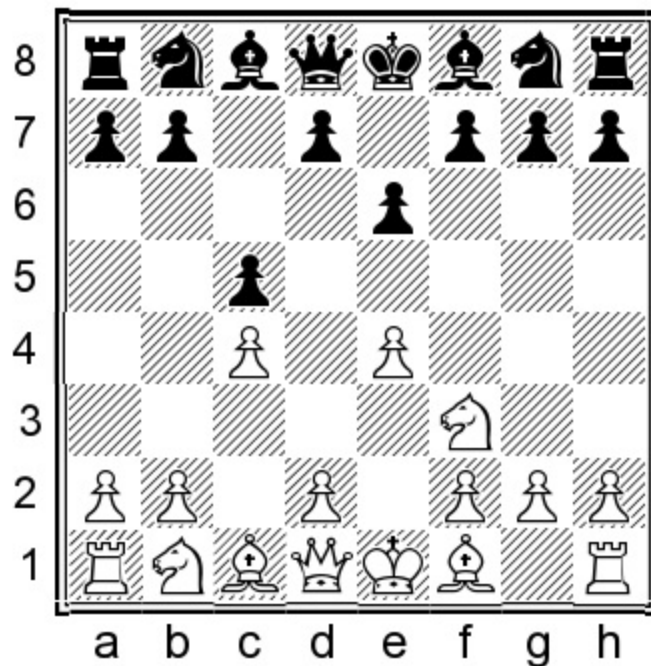
White has temporarily won a pawn, but he should castle next.

13. ♖g2 0-0 14. 0-0 ♕a6 15. a4 ♘a7=

Black gets his pawn back. He would probably be better if the knight on h6 was stronger.

h) 3.d4 ♘c6 4.d4

1.e4 c5 2. ♘f3 e6 3.c4



Position after: 3.c4

In the previous chapter, about the Delayed Alapin Variation, we considered the move 3.c3. Now the pawn goes one step further. This position and some of the variations that we will consider here, often arise from the English Opening as well as the Sicilian with 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3.

3...♗c6

After this logical move White has a tough decision to make. He has only one chance if he wants to open the position, otherwise we will have the possibility to play 4...e5. It may look strange to you to consider that 4...e5 is a threat since we have already moved the e-pawn but as we will see this is quite a strong variation.

4.d4!?

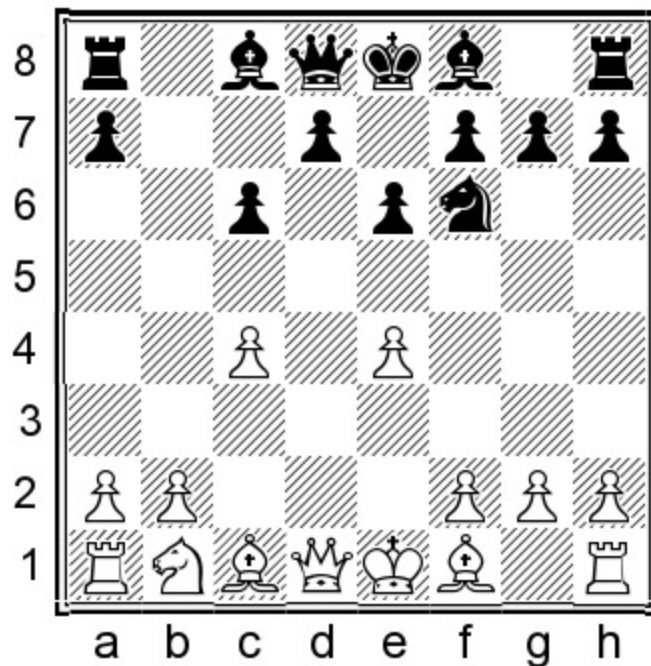
4.♘c3 This will be analysed in the next subchapter.

4...cxd4 5.♗xd4 ♗f6

5...♕c5!?! This is also interesting, and it occurred in the final game of the tiebreaks between Carlsen and Caruana in the 2018 World Cup. 6.♗c2!?! Carlsen, M (2835) – Caruana, F (2832) London 2018.

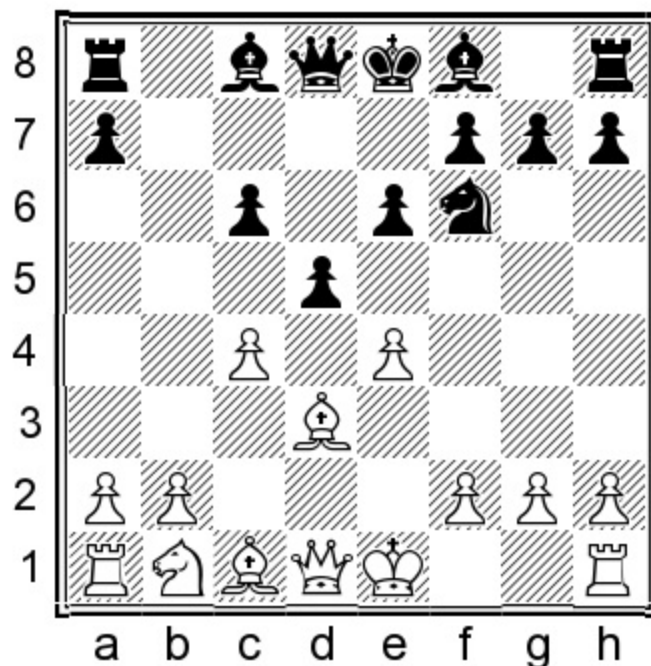
6.♗c3

6.♗xc6 bxc6



Position after: 6...bxc6

7.♙d3 [7.♘c3 ♜b4 8.♙d3 This comes back to 6.♘c3.] 7...d5! Here, we can immediately go for this move (with ♘c3/...♜b4 included the bishop would be in trouble because of ♙a4+ ideas).



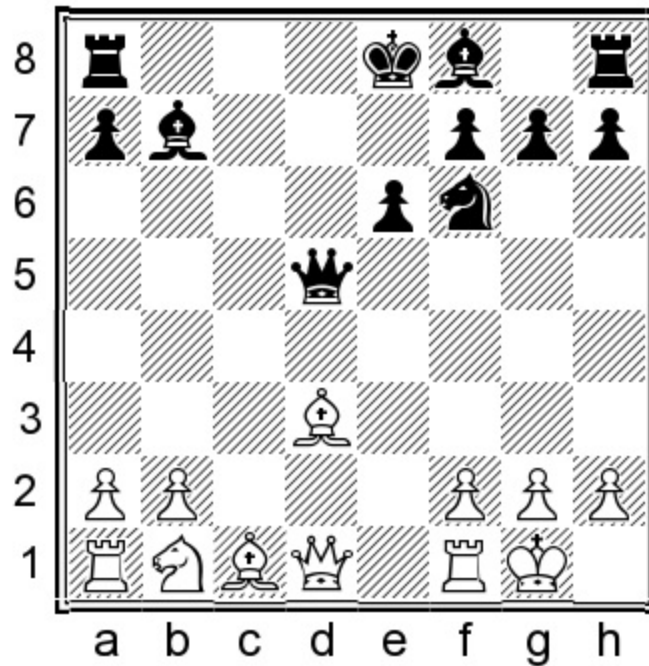
Position after: 7...d5!

A) 8.♘d2 This should be safer for White. 8...♙e7 9.0-0 0-0 10.♙c2 h6 11.b3 ♜b7 12.♙b2 a5= The position seems roughly balanced, and it brought Black a nice result in: Guliev, L (2415) – Potkin, V (2599) Baku 2015.

B) 8.exd5 cxd5 9.0-0 dxc4 10.♔xc4 ♕d6=

C) 8.cxd5?! The main move, but already not a great choice. 8...cxd5

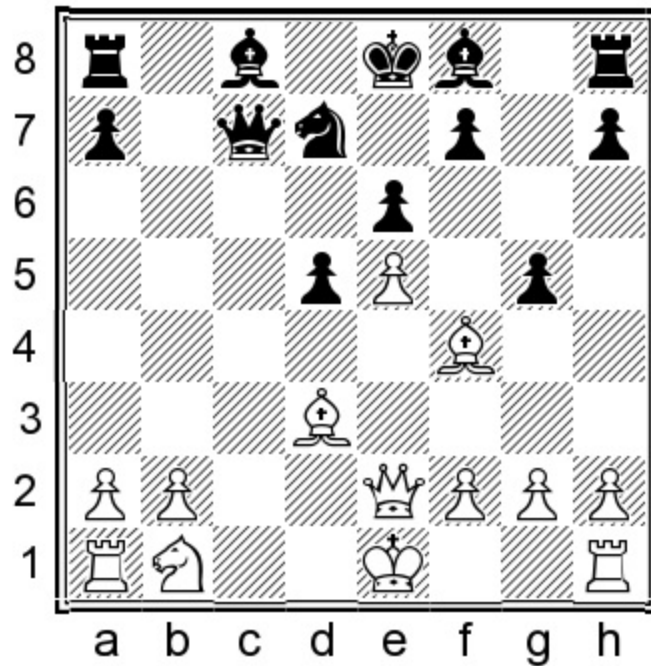
C1) 9.exd5 ♖xd5 10.0-0?! [10.♔e2 ♖xd1+ 11.♔xd1 ♕b7] 10...♕b7



Position after: 10...♕b7

11.♖f3 [11.f3?? ♜d8+ And White loses material.] 11...♖xf3 12.gxf3 ♕xf3

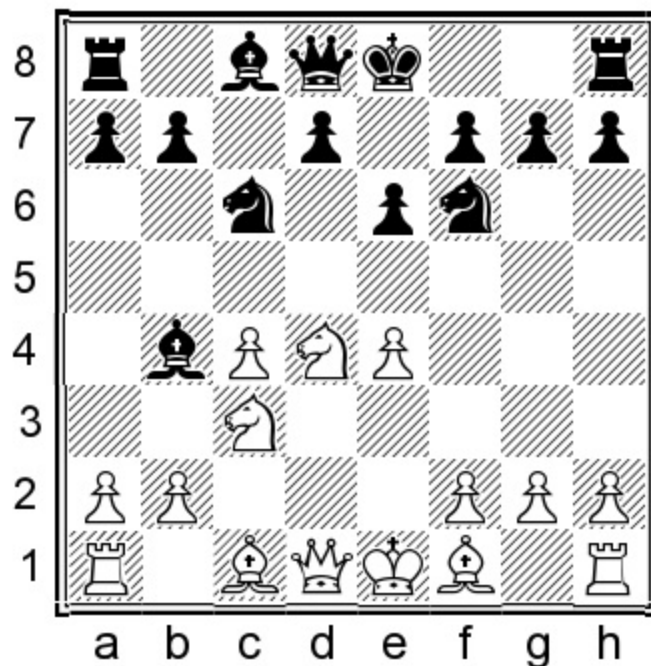
C2) 9.e5?! ♘d7 10.♖e2 [10.♔f4 g5! Very ambitious. There are other good continuations as well. 11.♔g3 ♕g7 Black is probably going to take the e-pawn and I do not see many ideas for White to take advantage of the pawn on g5.] 10...♖c7 11.♔f4 g5!N



Position after: 11...g5!N

A strong novelty that no one has managed to find over the board. 12.♙xg5 [12.♙g3?? ♚c1+ 13.♚d1 ♙b4+ 14.♜e2 ♚xb2+ 15.♞d2 ♞c5!-+ Black is easily winning.; 12.♙e3 ♙g7 13.0-0 ♚xe5+] 12...♚xe5 13.♚xe5 ♞xe5 14.♙b5+ ♙d7 15.♙xd7+ ♞xd7+ Black has a great centre and play coming against b2 with ...♙g7 and ...♞b8 to come.

6...♙b4



Position after: 6...♙b4

This position usually arises from the English Opening with various move orders. It is interesting to mention that in chapter 2 of this book about 5.c4 we considered the same position with ...a6 played instead of ...♘c6. I think that this version is slightly improved because of the more active development and immediate action in the centre.

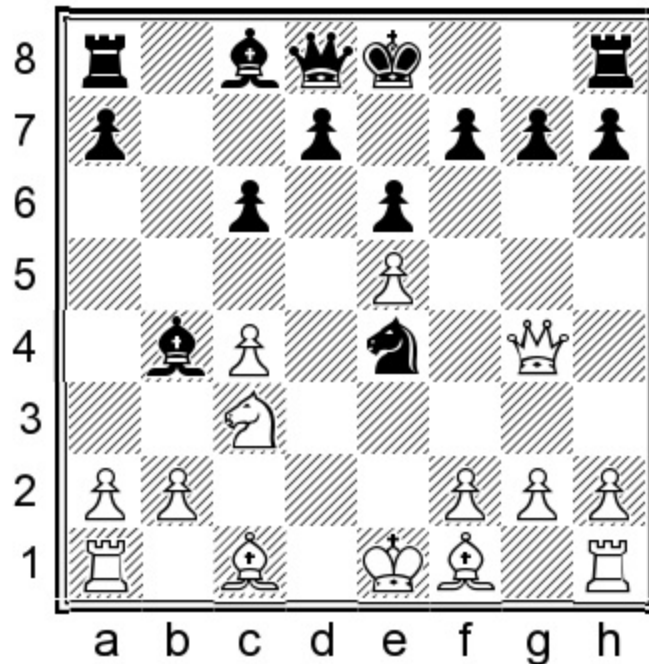
7.♘xc6

A) 7.f3?! d5⚡ Needless so say that White is in trouble in the centre, especially on the dark squares.

B) 7.♚d3?! Now this move is not great, and Black can quickly react in the centre. 7...0-0 8.♙e2 d5⚡

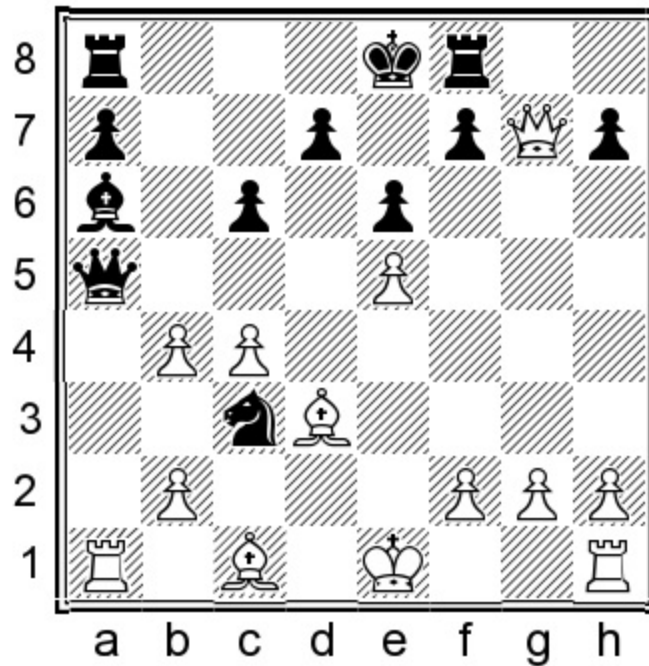
7...bxc6 8.♙d3

8.e5?! Objectively this is bad, and I only see one idea for White. 8...♘e4 9.♚g4



Position after: 9.♚g4

Other moves are not as good, but this does not work well either. 9...♘xc3 10.a3! [10.♙d2? ♘d5! 11.cxd5 ♙xd2+ 12.♙xd2 ♚a5+-+] 10...♚a5 11.♚xg7 ♜f8 12.♙d3 ♙a6! 13.axb4!



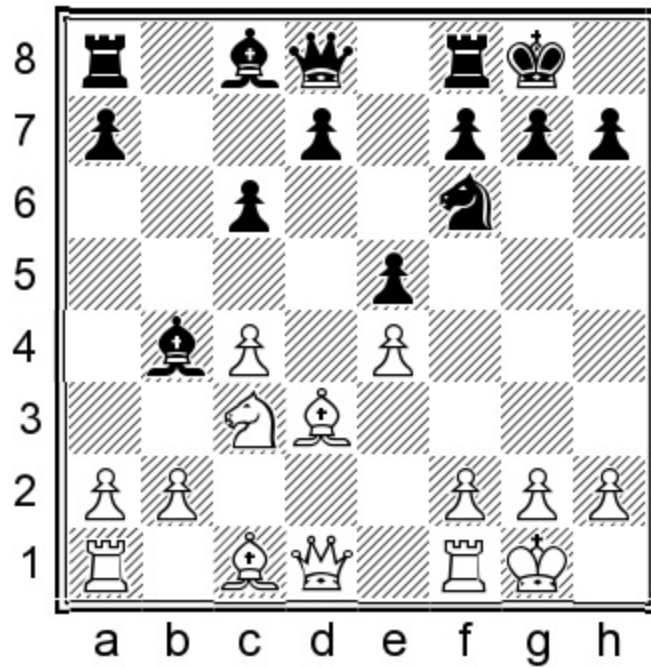
Position after: 13.axb4!

Clearly the best move. [13.0-0? ♕e7!± The key! Now ♕d2 is not strong anymore because of ...♘e2+ trading the knight for the bishop on d2.] 13...♙xa1 14.0-0 0-0-0! 15.bxc3 ♖xc3 16.♗g3 ♕xc4 17.♕xc4 ♗xc4 18.♗a3☞ We have a few practical problems, but Black should still be better.

8...e5!

I like this pawn structure more than the ones with ...d5 (although they are also playable), but it gives White some possibilities of having an isolated pawn in the centre at the right time.

9.0-0 0-0

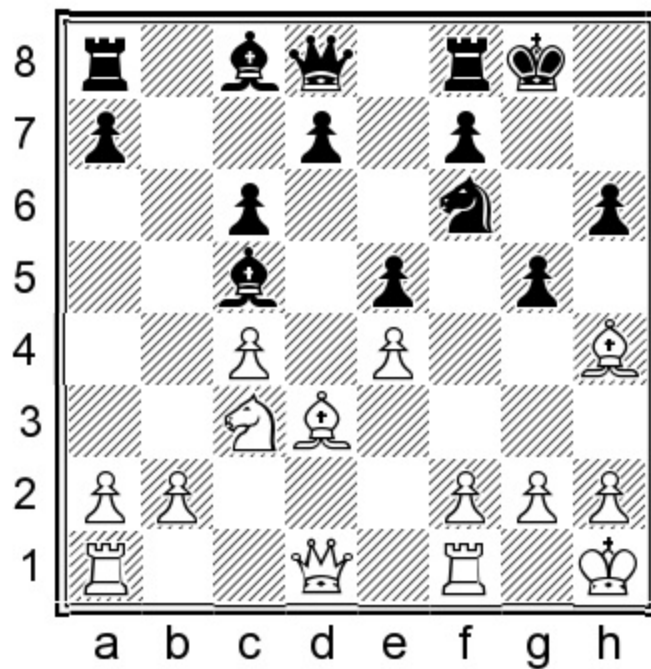


Position after: 9...0-0

White has played so many things here it is really hard to analyse such a position where everything is playable. I will simply check two of the main moves and give you some tips.

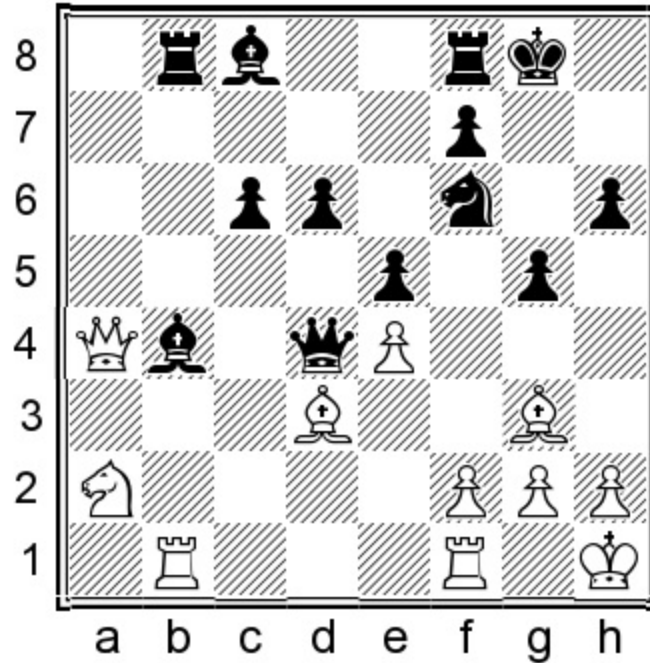
10.♘e3

10.♘g5 h6 11.♘h4 I am not fond of this for White as the bishop is not fighting for the d4-square.
 11...♘c5 12.♙h1 g5!?



Position after: 12...g5!?

An enterprising move that I like a lot. [12...d6 This has been played more often. One high-level game continued with 13.f3 ♕e6 14.♖c2 ♜b8 15.♞ad1 ♘d4= Nakamura, H (2789) – Gelfand, B (2777) Wijk aan Zee 2014.] 13.♙g3 d6 14.♞b1 ♜b8 15.a3 a5 16.♚a4 ♛b6! White is unable to react, so he tries forcing moves that do not fully work. 17.b4 axb4 18.axb4 ♙xb4 19.c5 ♛xc5! 20.♞a2 ♛d4



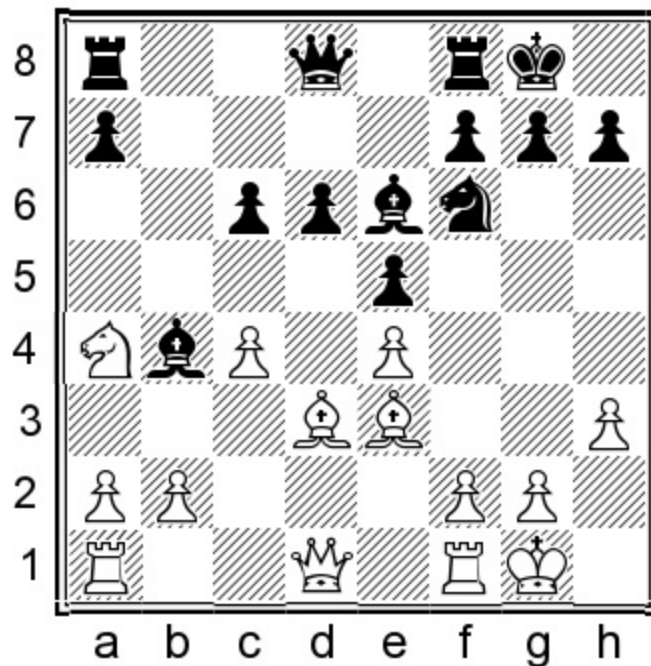
Position after: 20...♛d4

And as in Borgo, G (2397) – Tarlev, K (2552) Ortisei 2018, White will struggle to find compensation for the two pawns.

10...d6

10...♙xc3 11.bxc3 d6 12.h3↑ It is not easy to find a plan for Black here because he does not want to play ...d5 anymore as this would open the position for White's bishop pair and it would trade one of the double c-pawns.

11.h3 ♕e6 12.♞a4



Position after: 12. ♖a4

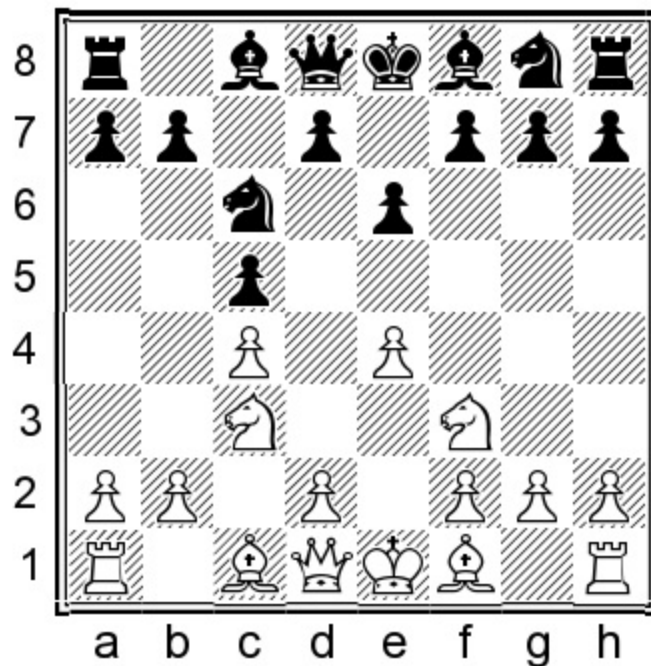
A thematic move preparing a3 and b4. But we can react immediately on the centre.

12...d5! =

We open the centre, and the dark-square bishop gains new squares, especially the safe point e7.

i) 3.c4 ♜c6 4.♜c3 e5 5.d3 d6 6.--

1.e4 c5 2.♜f3 e6 3.c4 ♜c6 4.♜c3



Position after: 4. ♘c3

A logical move. White develops and waits for Black to show what he wants do before he decides to play d4. In many cases he can get a better game than with 4.d4. However, Black has a move that has been underestimated.

4. ♕e2 e5!? Sooner or later, White will play ♘c3, and it will transpose to the same positions as in the main line.

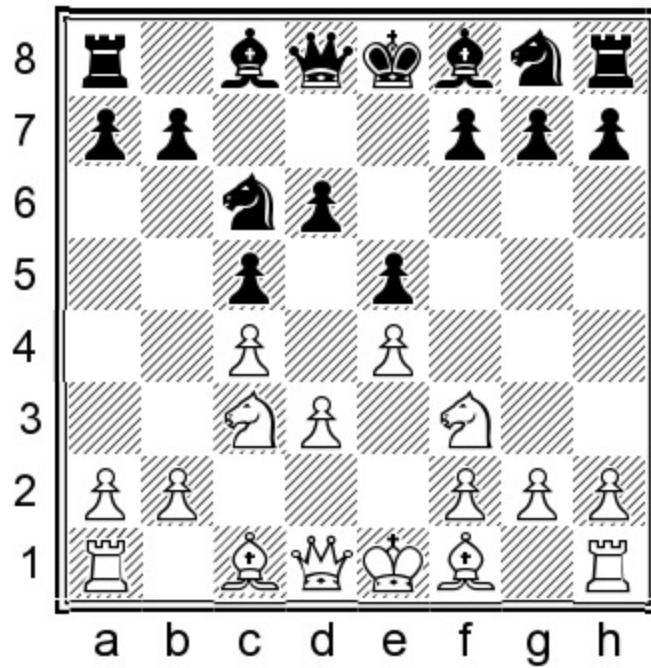
4...e5!?

I am close to thinking that this move deserves an exclamation mark but there are other interesting lines for Black. This is concrete. Black blocks the centre even if it means that he moves his e-pawn for the second time. It is weird to consider that Black can be fine, White has the extra move (♘f3) in a symmetrical position. But it is just a drawback, the knight is misplaced here, and it allows us to spend a second move with the e-pawn. When you look at the position from a dynamical point of view it is clear that there is no pawn break on the d-file. When one side wants to break open the position it will be either on the b-file or the f-file which is probably stronger. Black will prepare himself by placing his knight on e7 while White will have to move his knight again, probably to a less active square. That is why Black is really fine. As you will see his plan is very simple.

5.d3

White can start with many other moves but in the end, everything can arise from this move order as d3 is the only “pretty sure” move.

5...d6



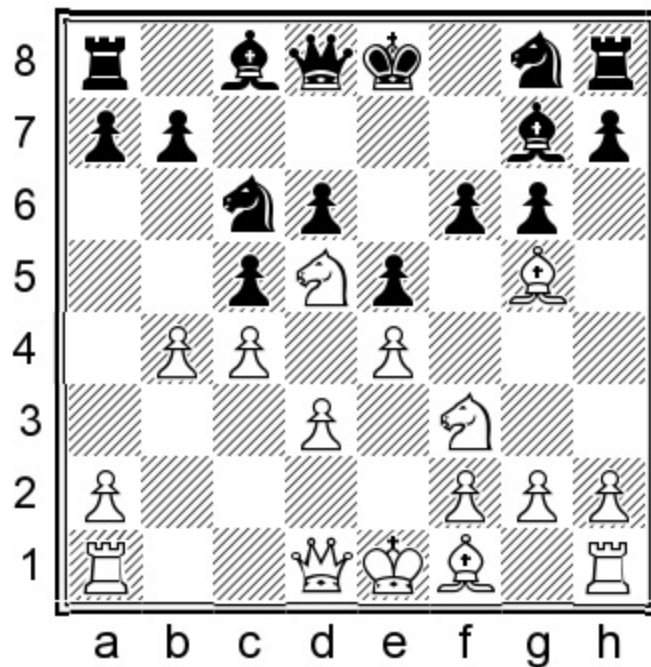
Position after: 5...d6

And now, let us discuss a lot of sidelines for White. The next subchapter will cover 6.♕e2.

6.g3

This generally leads to further symmetry in the position.

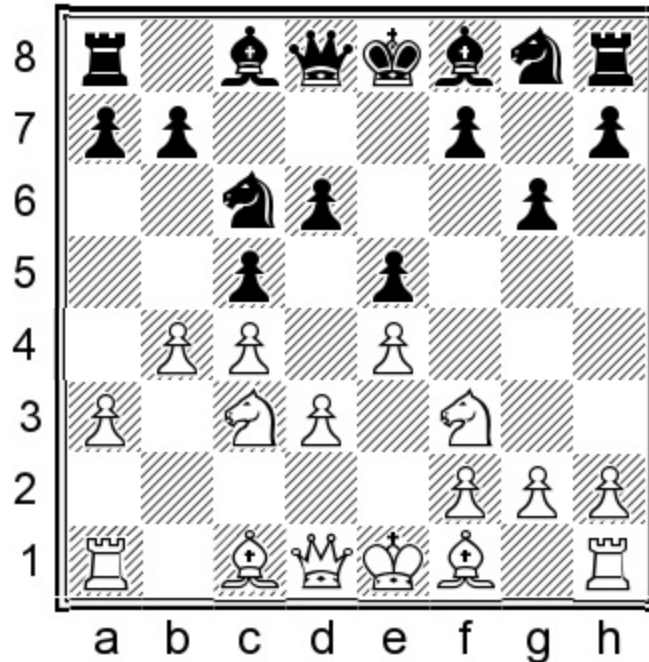
A) 6.♘d5 This has similar ideas than 6.a3 and it looks threatening but there is nothing to be concerned about. 6...g6 7.b4 ♕g7 8.♕g5 f6



Position after: 8...f6

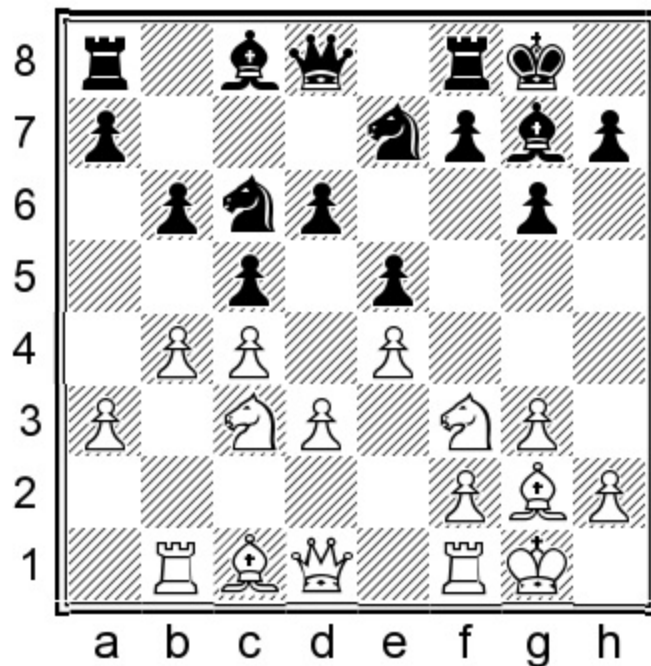
There is no problem playing this move as ...f5 is the idea in the end. 9.♙e3 b6 10.h4 h6⇒ We will see this idea at other moments. We just want to be able to meet h5 with ...g5 which keeps the kingside closed and under control.

B) 6.a3!? This cannot be a bad move as White prepares his b4-break. We do not need to do anything about it, just let it happen. 6...g6 7.b4



Position after: 7.b4

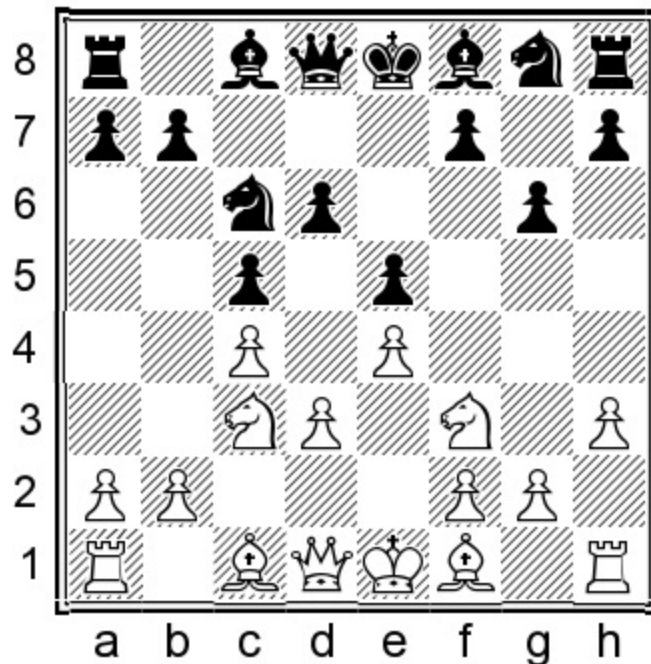
7...♙g7 I think the only rule is never take on b4. Even if you think you are winning a pawn, it will only help White get the better position on the queenside. [7...cxb4? 8.axb4 ♞xb4 9.d4! Even without this move White will be fine as he has ♙a3 for example. 9...exd4 10.♞xd4 ♙g7 11.♞db5±] 8.♞b1 ♞ge7 We will see similar ideas later. White can do anything here and I believe his best idea is to go for a fianchetto. 9.g3 0-0 10.♙g2 b6 11.0-0



Position after: 11.0-0

Now we cannot play 11...f5 because we are not ready to open the diagonal of the bishop on g2, but we can prepare it. 11...♙d7 12.♘e1 ♘d4 13.♘c2 ♘xc2 14.♚xc2 ♘c6 15.♙e3 ♘d4 16.♚d1 ♜b8⇌ At some point ...f5 will come.

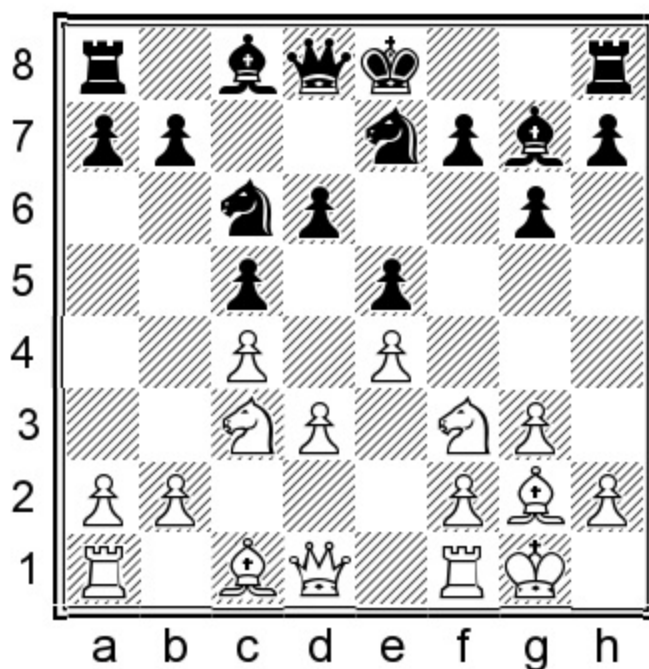
C) 6.h3 White played this in several games but it does not seem right. First, it does not really parry any of our ideas because ♙g4 is not in our plan. And White is giving up on playing h4 which challenges our fianchetto. 6...g6!



Position after: 6...g6!

I prefer to take some time and start with the obvious moves. [6...f5?! Has worked well in practice, but it looks like White can justify his last move. 7.exf5 ♙xf5 8.g4 ♙g6 9.♙g2±] 7.♙e2 ♙g7 8.0-0 ♘ge7 9.a3 This move contains more ideas than 6.h3. White is willing to push b4 at some point and we will meet this idea several times in this subchapter. 9...0-0 10.♖b1 f5! 11.b4 b6↗ We will see similar ideas later but not necessarily with White's pawn already on h3.

6...g6 7.♙g2 ♙g7 8.0-0 ♘ge7



Position after: 8...♘ge7

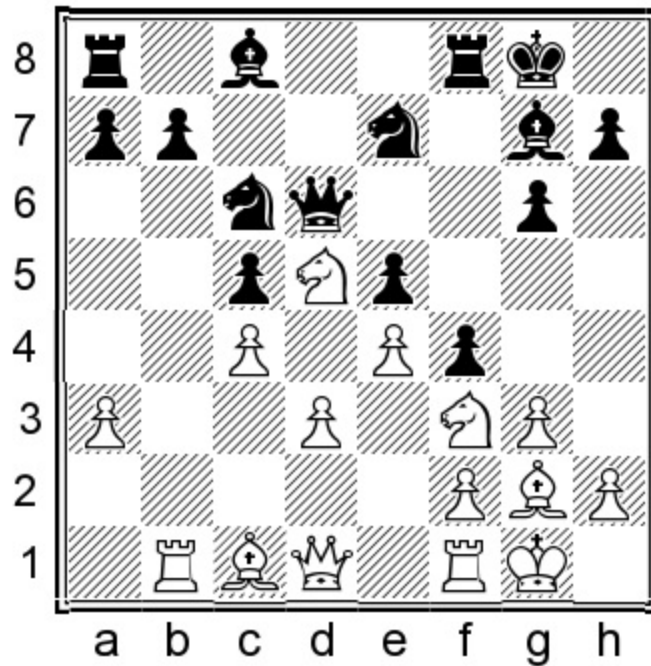
9.a3

9.♘e1 Bringing the knight towards c2 and eventually e3 is another idea. 9...0-0 10.♘c2 a6 11.a3 ♖b8 12.b4 b5= And a draw was quickly agreed in Sax, G (2492) – Hracek, Z (2624) Sibenik 2011, but the position is still full of life.

9...0-0 10.♖b1 f5!?

There are a lot of other preparatory moves, and it may not be the best, but it is straightforward.

11.b4 f4 12.bxc5 dxc5 13.♘d5 ♙d6



Position after: 13... ♔d6

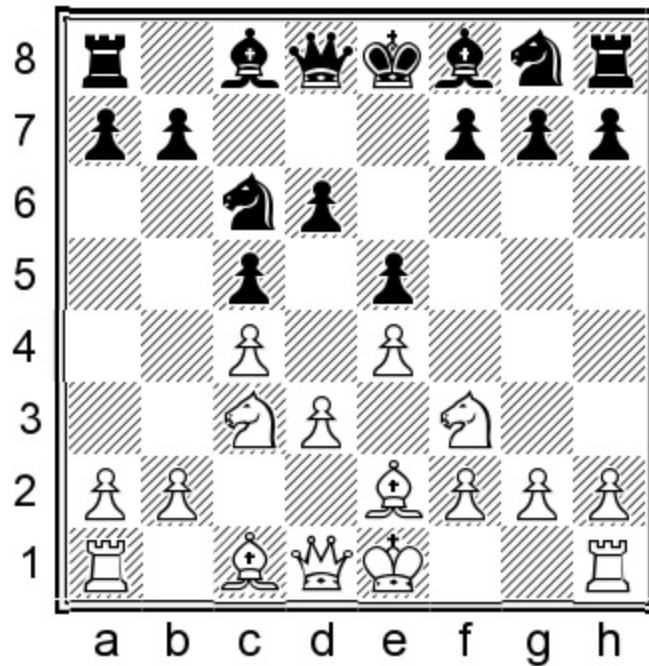
MVL stabilized the centre before moving forward on the kingside.

14. ♖b2 b6 15. ♖c3 h6→

Black prepares ...g5 and his plan is obvious. Please examine the blitz game Topalov, V (2761) – Vachier Lagrave, M (2789) Leuven 2016.

j) 3.c4 ♘c6 4. ♘c3 e5 3.d3 d6 6. ♙e2

1.e4 c5 2. ♘f3 e6 3.c4 ♘c6 4. ♘c3 e5!? 5.d3 d6 6. ♙e2



Position after: 6. ♖e2

This is what happened in most of the games. This is the natural square for the bishop, and it leaves White with every possibility for his remaining pieces while waiting for Black to show his development.

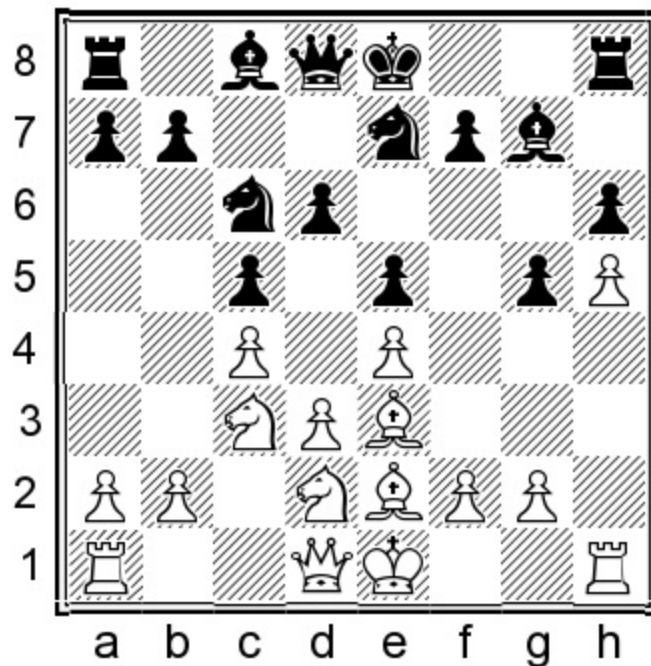
6...g6

We can play a fianchetto and prepare ...f5.

7.0-0

A) 7. ♘d5 ♗g7 8. ♗g5 f6 9. ♗d2 ♖ge7 10. a3 0-0 11. b4 b6 We have already seen similar positions after 6. ♘d5. Black is solid, and he wants to push ...f5 at some point to start his kingside initiative.

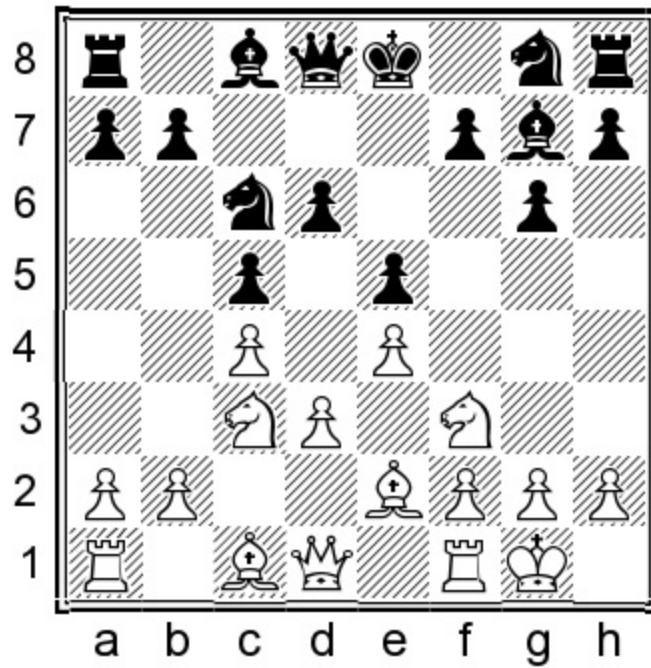
B) 7. h4 h6! 8. h5 g5 This is not so convincing for White because Black is safe and the pawn on h5 may be in trouble in the middlegame. The justification is seen in the following game. 9. ♗e3 ♗g7 10. ♘d2 ♖ge7



Position after: 10... Nge7

11.g4?! Stockfish dislikes this concept but at least it stops Black's plan to push ...f5. Also, a knight may come to f5 after Nf1-g3. 11...0-0 12.a3 Nd4 13.b4 a6 14.Rb1 b5! Black's idea is correct. If he manages to get rid of the pawn on c4 he will be able to push ...d5 and open the centre. White does not want this as he played g4 and did not plan on castling soon. 15.cxb5 cxb4 16.Rxb4 axb5 17.Qxd4 exd4 18.Nxb5 d5! The above plan occurred in the game Jablonicky, M (2296) – Czebe, A (2475) Senica 2017, which Black won convincingly. Despite being a pawn down he is already much better.

7... Qg7

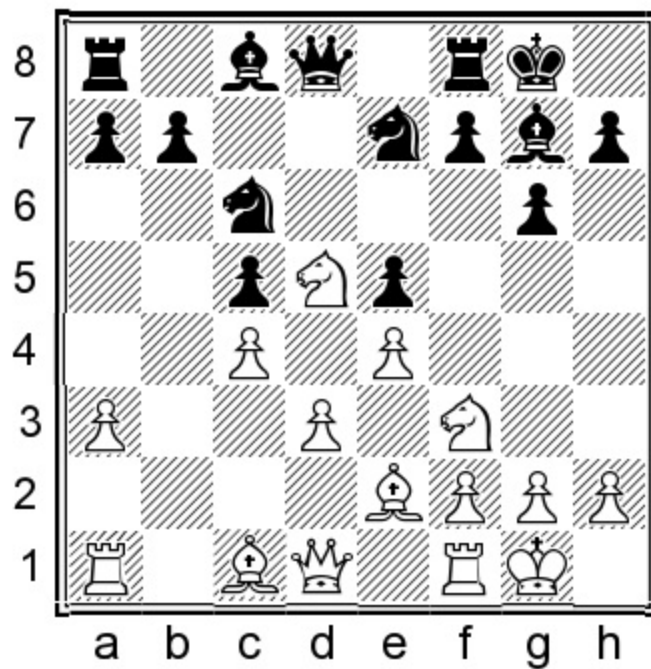


Position after: 7... Kg7

8. Ne1

With this move White can choose between two different plans: playing f4 or bringing the knight to better squares, via c2.

8.a3 Ne7 9.b4 0-0 10.bxc5 dxc5 11. Nd5

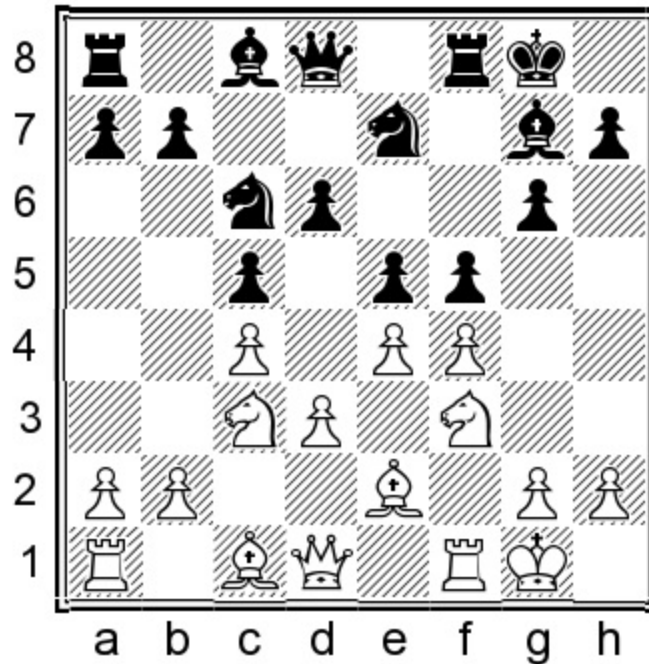


Position after: 11. Nd5

Of course, a knight on d5 is always strong. We cannot really take it with certainty because it would create a protected passed pawn, but we can live with it as long as everything is under control because White does not want to take on e7. 11...h6 12.♙e3 b6 13.♘d2 ♙e6 14.♘b3 f5↑ This is always Black's plan, and it was seen in Pugachov, A (2499) – Shaposhnikov, E (2554) chessassistantclub.com INT 2004.

8...♘ge7 9.♘c2

9.f4 The drawback of this plan is that it shows the whole problem with White's opening. He must spend two moves with the knight to achieve something we will do without any loss of time. 9...0-0 10.♘f3 f5!



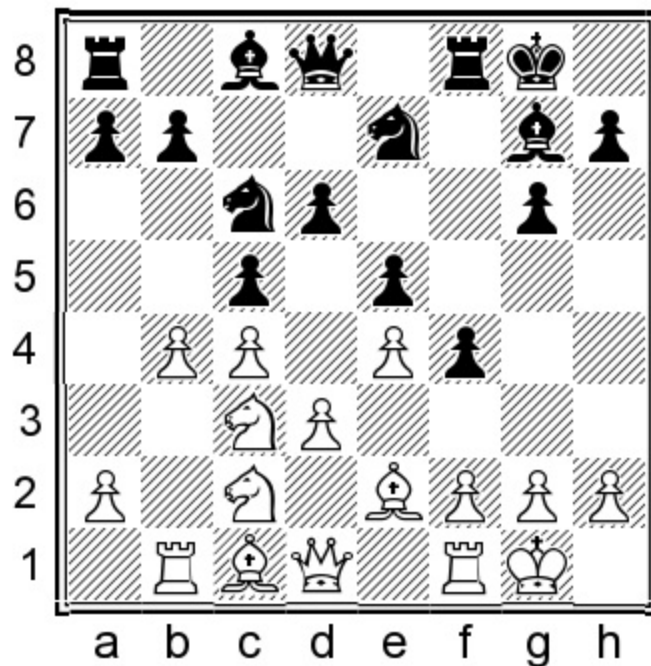
Position after: 10...f5!

The bishop on g7 is objectively more active than the one on e2 if the position becomes more open. 11.fxe5 dxe5 12.♙e3 ♘d4 13.♘d5

A) 13...f4? You should be careful with this move as it fixes a pawn on a dark square which is something your g7 bishop does not like. White then has 14.♙xd4 cxd4 15.♘d2±. White is willing to continue with ♙g4, and he somehow looks better from a positional point of view.

B) 13...♘ec6 14.♙d2 ♙e6= The position is objectively balanced, but Black's prospects are interesting and clearer than White's plans.

9...0-0 10.♙b1 f5 11.b4 f4!?



Position after: 11...f4!?

This move aims at taking away the e3 square from the knight, but it gives White the chance to trade his bad light-squares bishop. Well, we cannot have everything!

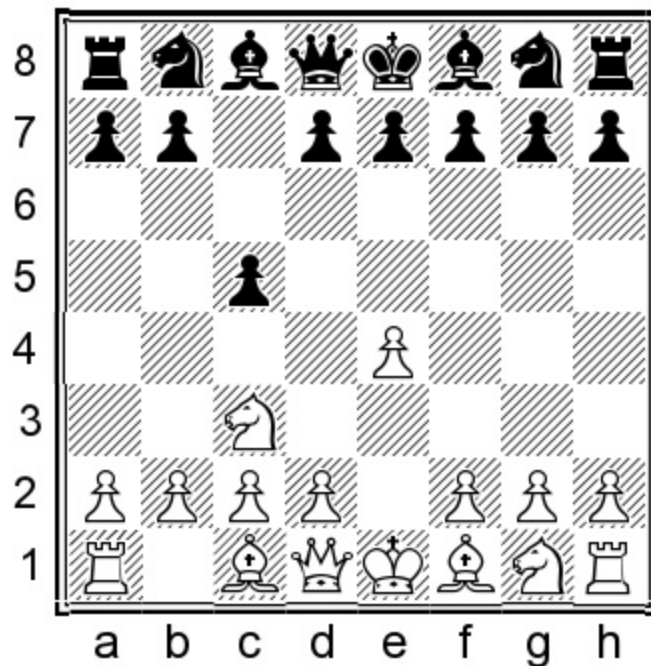
12. ♖g4 b6=

Our goal is to hold on the queenside and to try something on the kingside. The chances are equal from an objective point of view but being the one that attacks the king is always easier from a psychological point of view.

k) 3. ♘c3

1.e4 c5 2. ♘f3

2. ♘c3



Position after: 2. ♘c3

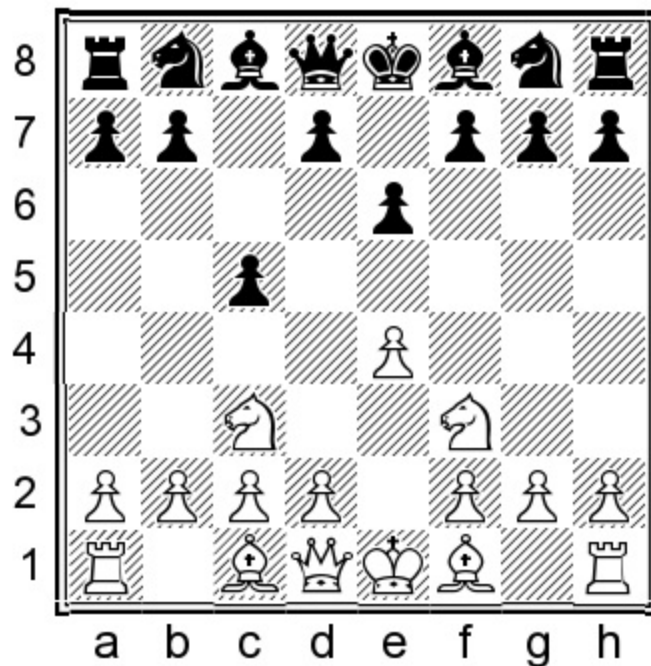
I did hesitate before writing about this move as I thought it was not in the spirit of the rest of the book. Also (and contrary to 2. ♘f3), Black has different options here that we will examine now.

A) 2...a6!/? This is another usual choice by Black which may transpose into open lines of the Kan. Black has other independent variations against the Grand Prix Attack and the Closed Sicilian, by playing 3...b5

B) 2...♘c6 Even this move is fully playable. White has a lot of lines but if he wants to come back to an Open Sicilian where you cannot play the Kan variation (because the knight on c6 does not fit in this opening), you also have a solution: 3. ♘f3 e5!/? This is more usual in the Sicilian Kalashnikov, but it is also very reasonable and a fully independent variation.

C) 2...e6 Of course this is the main idea. The transpositions will be obvious in case of ♘f3 followed by d4. While against the Grand Prix Attack (3.f4) or the Closed Sicilian (3.g3), you can generally push 3...d5 to immediately react in the centre.

2...e6 3. ♘c3



Position after: 3. c3

In this last subchapter we must check this possibility for White which may also arise from the move order 2. c3 e6 3. f3. White's goal is to keep some flexibility and see what move you play before deciding on his 4th move.

3...a6

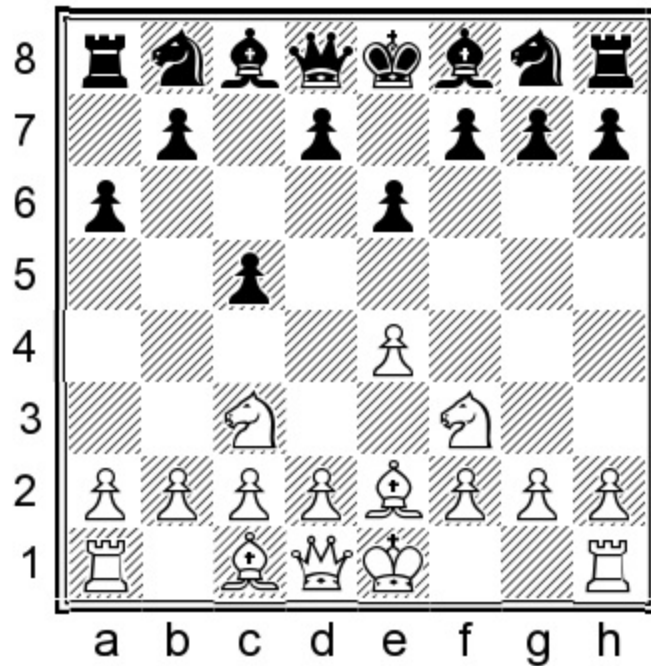
This move is necessary to retain the possibility of transposing into the Open Sicilian. This is clearly White's main option here, but he can also opt for other sidelines.

4.g3

The most logical move compared to 4. e2 as White keeps the option of bringing the knight back to e2 instead of f3.

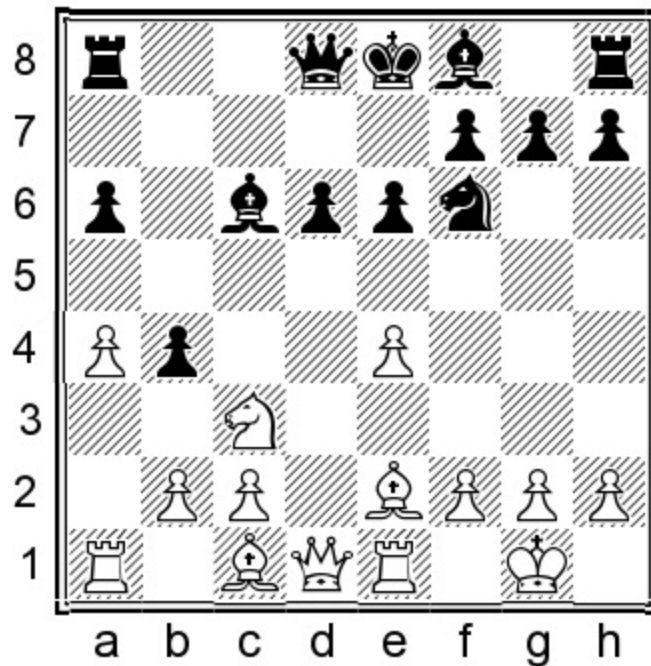
A) 4.d4 This will transpose into the Open Sicilian which is covered in the chapter about 5. c3.

B) 4. e2?!



Position after: 4. ♔e2?!

This kind of set up is too passive for White. He needs to play d4, sooner or later, as he does not have any other pawn break. But if he does not, he will just end up worse. 4...b5 5.0-0 ♔b7 6.d3 ♖c6 7.♞e1 d6 8.d4 At some point White eventually realized that his plan gets him nowhere, and he will end up worse. 8...cxd4 9.♗xd4 ♗f6 10.a4 b4 11.♗xc6 ♕xc6

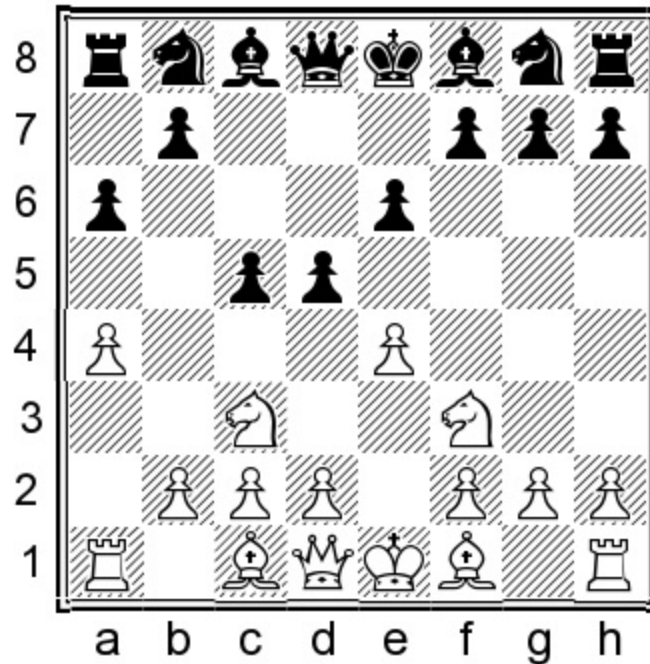


Position after: 11... ♕xc6

White is already worse, and he is going to risk it all. 12.♗d5? exd5 13.exd5 ♕d7 14.♕c4+ ♕e7-+

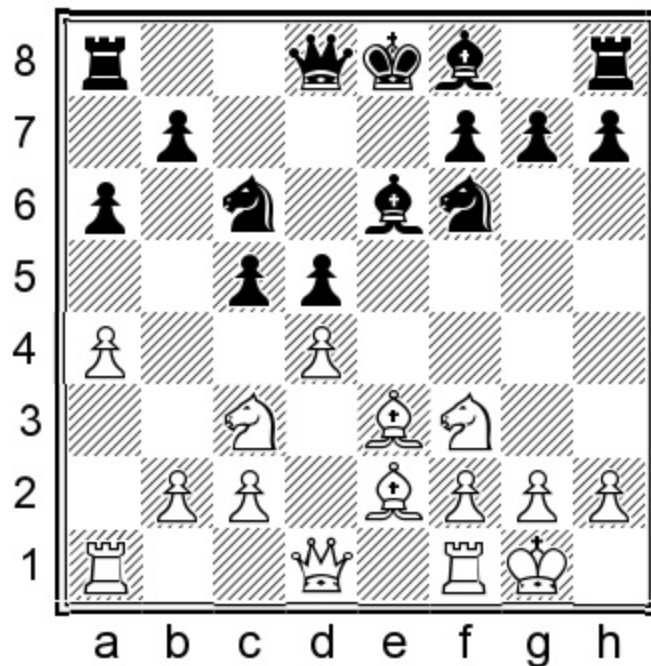
Leveille, F – Spraggett, K (2445) Montreal 1980.

C) 4.a4 At least it prevents Black from playing ...b5. 4...d5!?



Position after: 4...d5!?

But now this move becomes stronger than one move earlier. [4...♞c6 Of course this is also a completely playable option. It is questionable if White can risk entering the Open Sicilian while having played a4.] 5.exd5 exd5 6.d4! The only logical move for White. But if we compare it with the position without the inclusion of a4/...a6, we can see that White is unable to play the logical ♙b5. Now Black may be able to use the b4 square that has been weakened by 4.a4. 6...♞f6 7.♙e2 ♞c6 8.0-0 ♙e6 9.♙e3



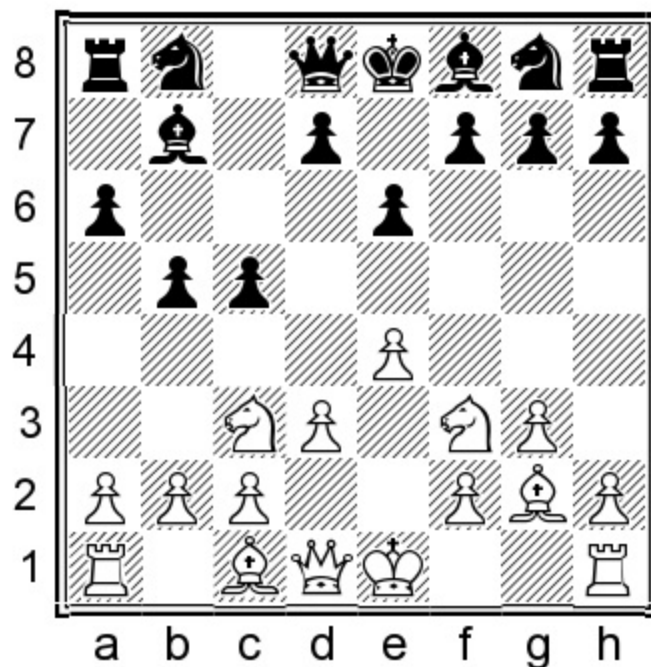
Position after: 9. e3

Now, a top game continued 9...cxd4 10. dxd4 b4 11. e3 0-0 12. ce2 e5 Black seems to have enough play for the isolated pawn in Ponomariov, R (2703) – Dreev, A (2655) Lugo 2006.

4...b5 5. g2

5.d4 cxd4 6. dxd4 b7 This is a transposition into Chapter 3 where we discussed 5. c3 b5 6. g3 b7.

5...b7 6.d3



Position after: 6.d3

This is the only move with an independent value. But it does not mean it is great for White!

6...d6 7.0-0 ♖e7!?

A smart move-order. You will see what we are trying to avoid in the next variation.

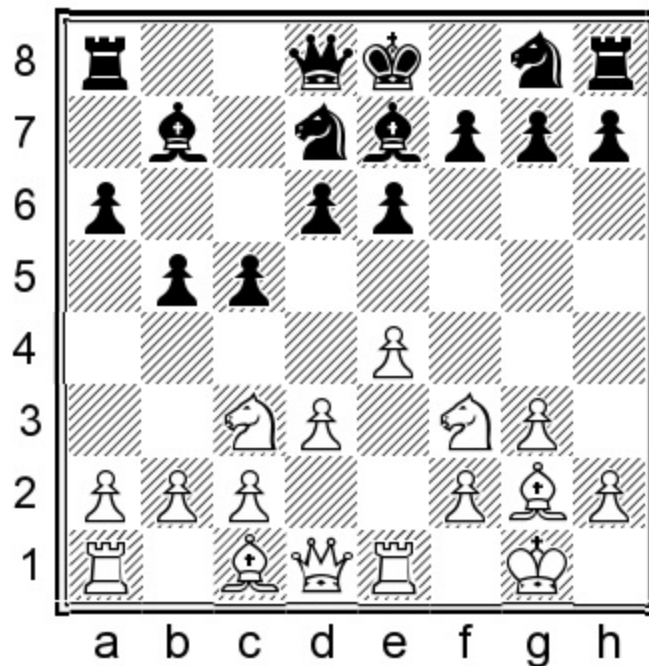
7...♗f6 8.♗g5 h6 9.♗h3↯ For some reason, a significant number of games have reached this position. It is probably not great for White, but at least he has the plan of pushing his f-pawn.

8.♗e1

This is in the same spirit as 7...♖e7 8.♗g5, White wants to advance his f-pawn.

A) 8.a4 b4 9.♗e2 ♗f6↯ This position has also occurred in many games, but I cannot see any trace of a useful plan for White.

B) 8.♞e1 ♗d7

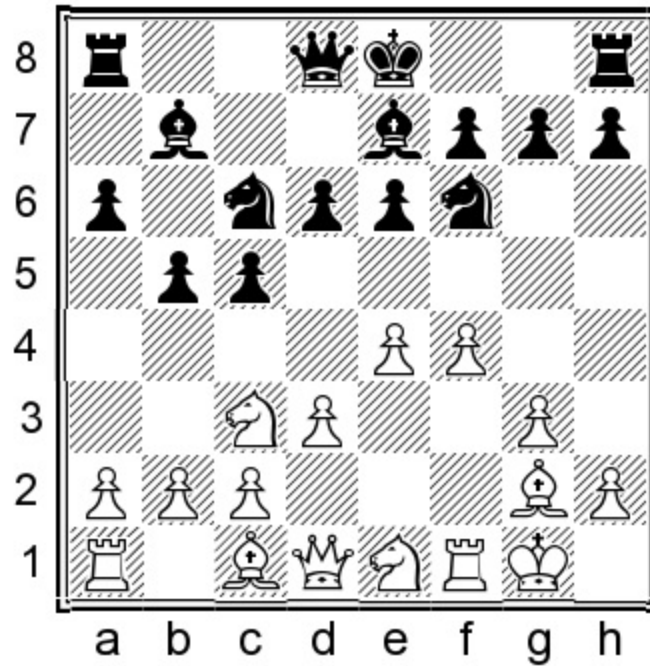


Position after: 8...♗d7

At this point most White players have found themselves out of moves so they played: 9.d4 cxd4 10.♗xd4=. This transposes into the Open Sicilian with a loss of tempo for having played d4 in two moves. This should provide Black with easy equality.

C) 8.e5 This leads nowhere for White. 8...dxe5 9.♗xe5 ♖xg2 10.♗xg2 ♗d7 11.♗c6 He gains our bishop, but it helps us develop efficiently. 11...♞b6 12.♗xe7 ♗xe7 And Black won convincingly in Nuber, K (2258) – Weiss, C (2401) Bayern 2013.

8...♖c6 9.f4 ♘f6



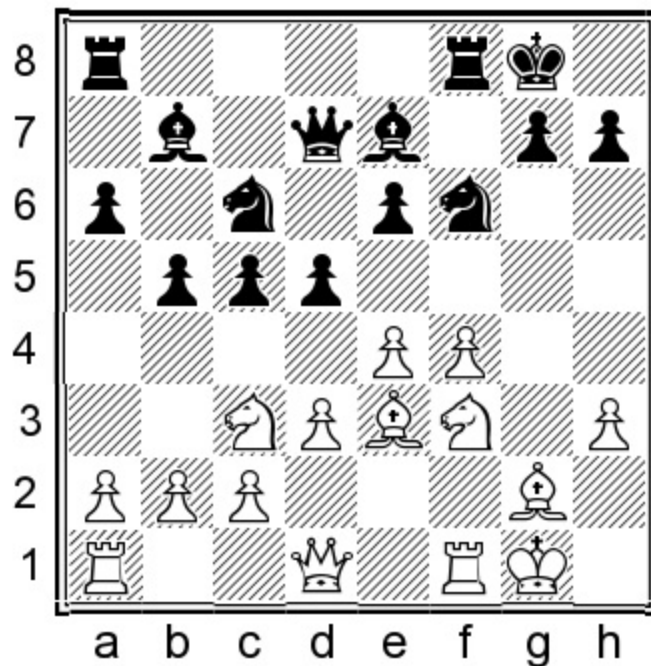
Position after: 9...♖c6

Now White can play the following line.

10.h3 0-0 11.g4 ♘d7 12.g5

In the game Galego, L (2485) – Santos Latasa, J (2575) Penafiel 2020, Black's play could have been improved with an immediate opening of the kingside.

12...f6! 13.gxf6 ♘xf6 14.♘f3 ♔d7 15.♙e3 d5!♠



Position after: 15...d5!+

Black is clearly in control, and he has a strong initiative in the centre. As we saw, there are not so many interesting systems for White if he wants to play with 2.♘f3 e6 3.♘c3 without a latter d4.

This is a transposition into 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♖f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♙e2 ♙b4. This line with 6.♙e2 (6.♘xc6 or 6.♘db5 are the main lines) does not have a great reputation for White. Remember we already discussed this type of position in another chapter. In addition, with White first playing 3.♙e2 it is doubtful he will transpose into an open Sicilian.

This transposes into 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♖f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.a3 which is a main line here (as we discussed in a similar variation of 3.♙e2). It is a good idea to study this variation as well, but it would be a surprise if it happened with this move order.

Chapter Conclusion

A lot of players are quite unsatisfied with the Open Sicilian against 2...e6 and they often turn themselves toward one of these sidelines. I do not think that there is much to worry about, but you must understand the subtleties of the move orders and learn completely different plans if you compare the Open Sicilian with the Kan.

This concludes our work on the Kan Variation of the Sicilian Defence. I hope I have given you a reasonable survey of this interesting opening and that you are ready to experience it!

Table of Contents

Title page	3
Key to Symbols	4
Bibliography	5
Preface	6
Chapter 1 – 5.Bd3	8
Chapter 2 – 5.c4	75
Chapter 3 – 5.Nc3	146
Chapter 4 – 5.Be2	234
Chapter 5 – 5.Be3	281
Chapter 6 – Various 5th moves	316
Chapter 7 – The Delayed Alapin Variation	350
Chapter 8 – Various 3rd moves	397