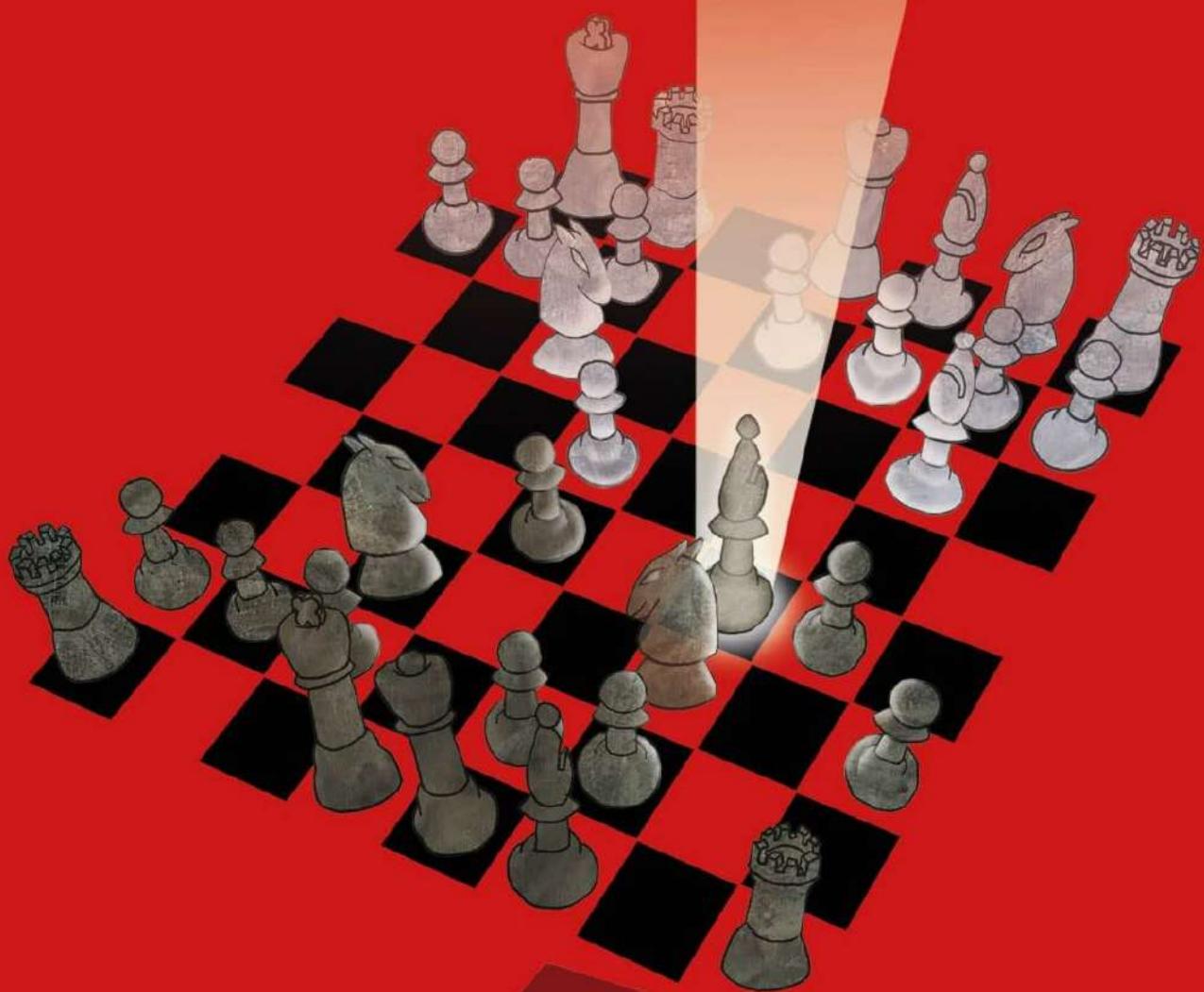


The Modernized Arkhangelsk Variation



Viktor Erdos



Table of Contents

[Title page](#)

[Key to Symbols](#)

[Introduction](#)

PART I – Early Sidelines in the Ruy Lopez

[Chapter 1 – The Exchange Variation](#)

[Chapter 2 – Sidelines on the 5th Move](#)

[Chapter 3 – 5.Nc3](#)

[Chapter 4 – 5.d3](#)

PART II – Early Sidelines against the Arkhangelsk

[Chapter 5 – 7.d3 & 7.Nc3](#)

[Chapter 6 – The Pseudo-Sacrifice 7.Nxe5](#)

[Chapter 7 – The Immediate 7.a4](#)

[Variations a-g](#)

[Variations h-m](#)

PART III – 7.c3 - Main Lines in the Arkhangelsk

[Chapter 8 – Sidelines on 8th and 9th Moves](#)

[Chapter 9 – The Closed Line – 10.a5](#)

[Chapter 10 – Sidelines Starting on the 10th Move](#)

Chapter 11 – Alternatives on Move 13

Chapter 12 – 13.Re1

Chapter 13 – 13.Bc2 – Main Line

The Modernized Arkhangelsk Variation

by

Viktor Erdos

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Key to Symbols

- ! a good move
- ? a weak move
- !! an excellent move
- ?? a blunder
- !? an interesting move
- ?! a dubious move
- TM only move
- N novelty
- % lead in development
- zugzwang
- = equality
- ∞ unclear position
- © with compensation for the sacrificed material
- ² White stands slightly better
- ³ Black stands slightly better
- ± White has a serious advantage
- μ Black has a serious advantage
- +– White has a decisive advantage
- + Black has a decisive advantage
- , with an attack
- f with initiative
- „ with counterplay
- ... with the idea of
- ¹ better is
- ≤ worse is
- + check
- # mate

Introduction

Dear Reader,

You are holding the very first book I have ever written! Thanks for your time and attention, and I hope your journey through these pages is going to be at least as exciting as my writing process has been!

It all started during early pandemic time in 2020, when Thinkers Publishing reached out to me asking if I would be interested in writing a book for them. I have always liked sharing my experiences one way or another, so I couldn't resist and grabbed the opportunity.

My love for good and exciting openings – including building nice, harmonious positions I would enjoy playing – dates back to my early career as a kid, therefore the idea of writing an opening book came to me naturally.

Why the Modern Arkhangelsk Defence (or as we tend to call it for short, “The Ark”)?

My 1.e4 e5 journey began in 2007, when I finally understood that the French Defence was no longer my cup of tea. I really enjoyed analyzing the classical positions with my trainer, GM Peter Lukacs, and despite starting out with lines such as the Chigorin arising from 5...Be7, in other variations such as the Italian or Scotch I used to like putting my bishop on the active c5-square. During those early days, though, The Ark just felt too distant.

Fast-forwarding to 2013, when I had my peak rating of 2661, and I was asked to play on first board for the Hungarian national team for the first time ever! I thought I was in a need of something fresh against the Ruy Lopez, and I finally felt I was ready for the challenge and started preparing The Ark for that very tournament!

This exciting defence, which is characterized by the moves 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5, always amazed me. Quite an aggressive setup, Black is aiming to get very dynamic play (even at the cost of some material in many cases) in order to put a lot of pressure on White players as early as possible! No wonder that great, ambitious players such as

Anand, Shirov, and Caruana, just to name of a few, like to employ it regularly. The variation also gained some attention at the Carlsen-Karjakin world championship match from 2016.

The Ark has always been considered one of the theoretically-heaviest defences in meeting the Ruy Lopez, though also the most exciting and definitely the most beautiful of all. It requires tactical vision, good calculation and memory, but not just from us – from the White side too. Let's not forget that! I also must say that no good lines are absent of theory, so if we've decided to learn something “finally”, I argue that it can very well be an ambitious, double-edged line too! ☺

I should also mention that this book is a complete Black repertoire starting from 3.Bb5 a6, the exchange variation being the first chapter. The publisher and me agreed on offering a full package, one that should prove useful for many years to come!

My aim with the book was to provide you with a lot of insights into this remarkable variation, The Ark, and to entertain the reader with spectacular, resourceful lines to illustrate the ideas. Thus, I must stress that my book should also be interesting for those who just enjoy chess in general, not just for the fans of this line seeking new ideas! Of course, you don't need to memorize everything to be able to play the variation successfully. Longer lines merely tend to be examples of how the game might develop, which help to enhance your understanding.

I hope my book will attract a lot of chess players of all levels and that we will soon see many more new games in this fascinating variation in practice!

Viktor Erdos, 2022

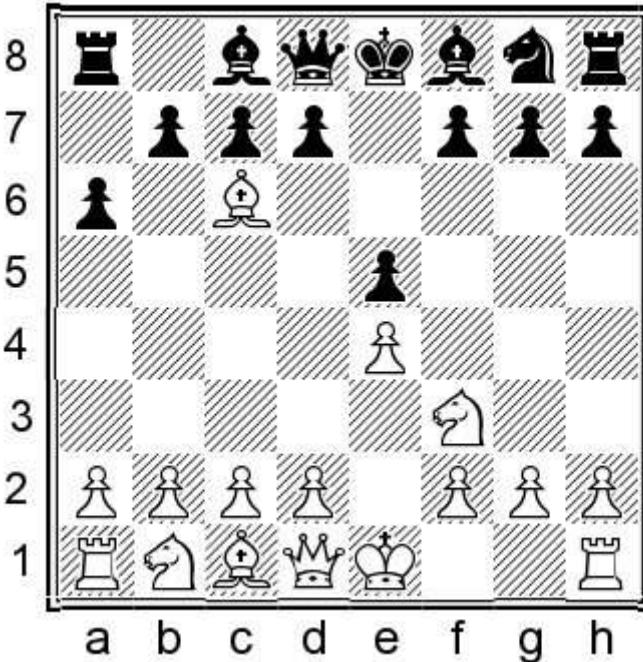
Part I

Early Sidelines In the Ruy Lopez

Chapter 1

The Exchange Variation

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Bxc6



Chapter Guide

Chapter 1 – The Exchange Variation

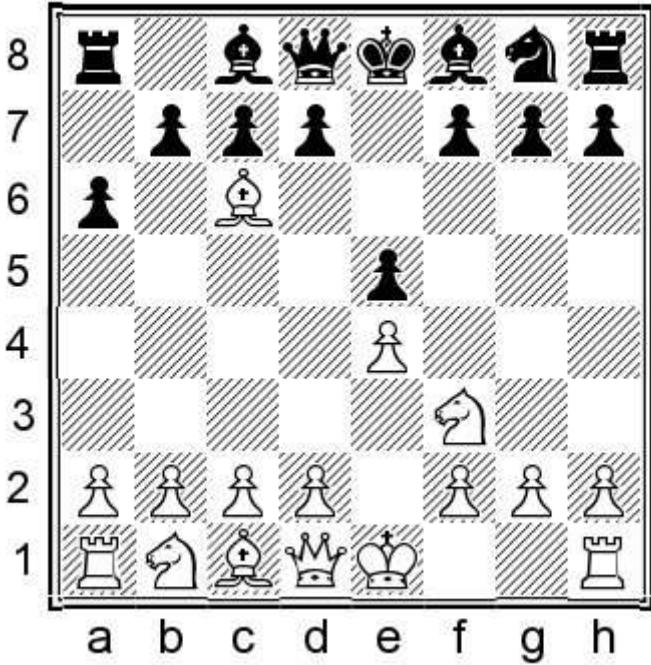
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Bxc6 dxс6

- a) 5.d4
- b) 5.0-0 Qf6 6.h3
- c) 5.0-0 Qf6 6.d3

- d) 5.0-0 Qf6 6.d4 exd4 7.--
- e) 5.0-0 Qf6 6.d4 exd4 7.Qxd4
- f) 5.0-0 Qf6 6.d4 exd4 7.Bg5 Qd6 8.--
- g) 5.0-0 Qf6 6.d4 exd4 7.Bg5 Qd6 8.Nxd4 Be7 9.Be3
- h) 5.0-0 Qf6 6.d4 exd4 7.Bg5 Qd6 8.Nxd4 Be7 9.Bxe7 Nxe7 10.--
- i) 5.0-0 Qf6 6.d4 exd4 7.Bg5 Qd6 8.Nxd4 Be7 9.Bxe7 Nxe7 10.Nc3 Bd7 11.-
- j) 5.0-0 Qf6 6.d4 exd4 7.Bg5 Qd6 8.Nxd4 Be7 9.Bxe7 Nxe7 10.Nc3 Bd7 11Nb3
- k) 5.0-0 Qf6 6.d4 exd4 7.Bg5 Qd6 8.Nxd4 Be7 9.Bxe7 Nxe7 10.Nc3 Bd7 11.Nde2

a) 5.d4

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Bxc6



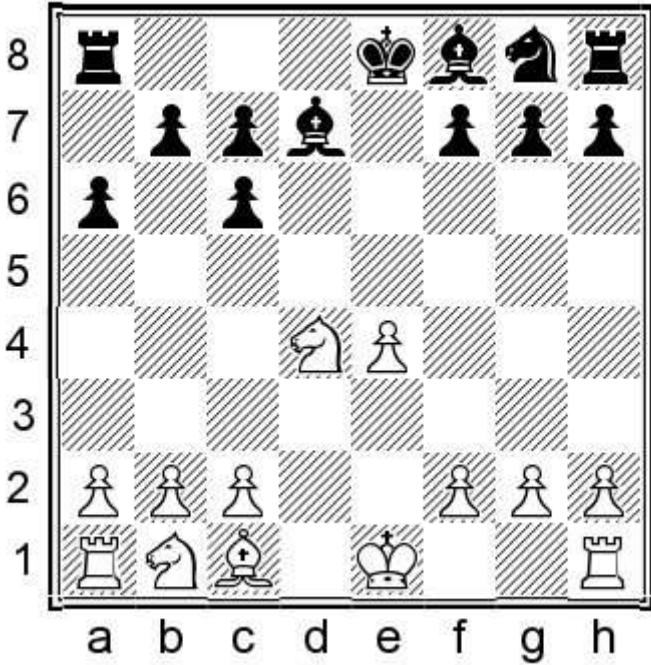
Position after: 4.Bxc6

Our journey begins with the good old exchange variation. It has always been a popular side line in the Ruy Lopez, and there are still plenty of strong players who employ it on a regular basis: Guseinov, Solak, Naiditsch, and Rozentalis to name just a few. It started off as a purely positional idea - White doubles Black's pawns in the hope of getting a kingside majority later on by opening the position with an early d4 (see 5.d4). However, it turns out that the bishop is at least as valuable as the pawn structure in the arising endgame, so attention turned to 5.0-0, which quickly became the main line. The game is more intense there – a nice mix of tactical and strategical elements – so it's no wonder it's still played frequently.

4...dxc6 5.d4

This old mainline is no longer played among strong players.

5...exd4 6.Qxd4 Qxd4 7.Nxd4 Bd7



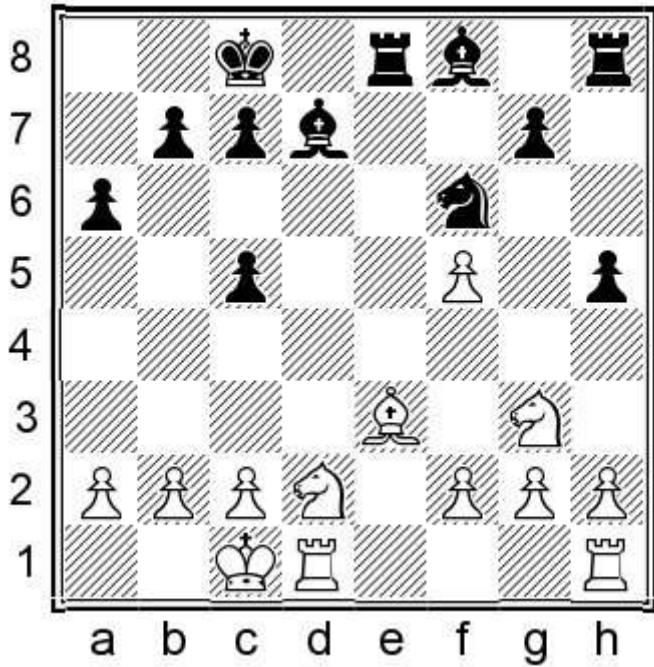
Position after: 7...Bd7

8.Be3

8.Nc3 0-0-0 9.Be3 is the other move order.

8...0-0-0 9.Nc3

9.Nd2 This avoids the pin, but the knight is awkward here. 9...c5!? 10.Ne2 f5!? I am fond of this idea; opening the position should be a sound strategy with the bishop pair on our side. Play might develop in various ways, and I offer you a couple of examples: 11.0-0-0 [11.exf5 Ne7!? 12.Bxc5 Nxf5 13.Bxf8 Rxf8 14.0-0-0 Nh4] 11...Nf6 12.Ng3 Re8!? 13.exf5 [13.Nxf5?! Nxe4³] 13...h5!?



Position after: 13...h5!?

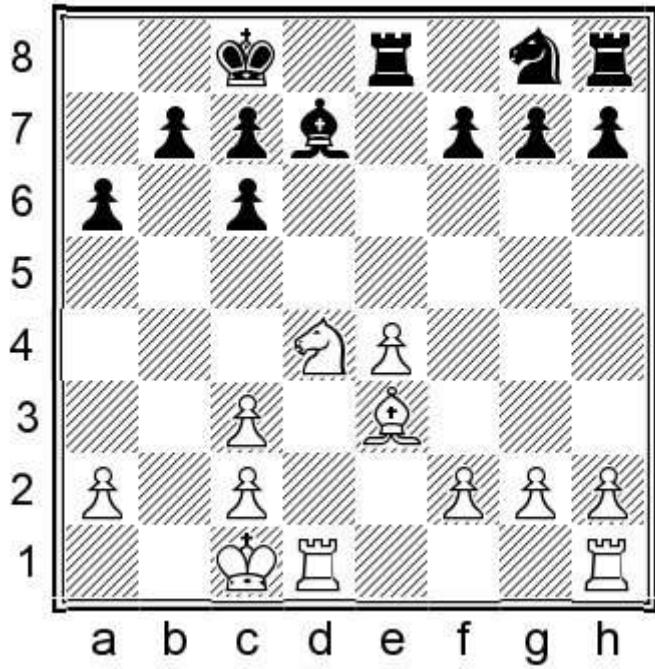
14.Rhe1 [14.h4 Bd6 15.Rde1 b6³] 14...h4 15.Ngf1 Rh5 and Black is at least fine.

9...Bb4

9...Ne7 is good too, of course.

10.Nde2

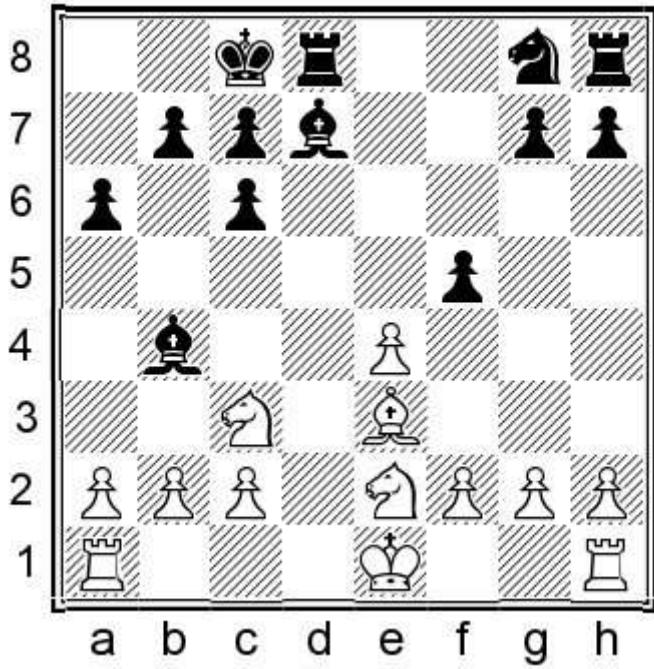
10.0-0-0?! is hardly a serious option: 10...Bxc3 11.bxc3 Re8!



Position after: 11...Re8!

12.f3 [12.Nb3 b6 13.Bd4 f6 14.f3 c5μ] 12...c5 [12...f5 is not so clear after 13.Nxf5! Bxf5 14.Bd4] 13.Ne2 b6³

10...f5!?



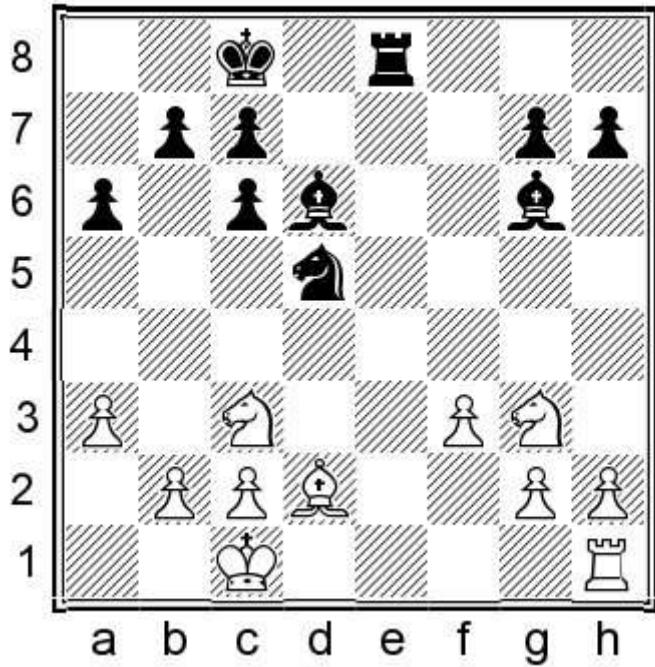
Position after: 10...f5!?

This move was seen in my own practice.

11.e5!

This is best and Black has no more than comfortable equality.

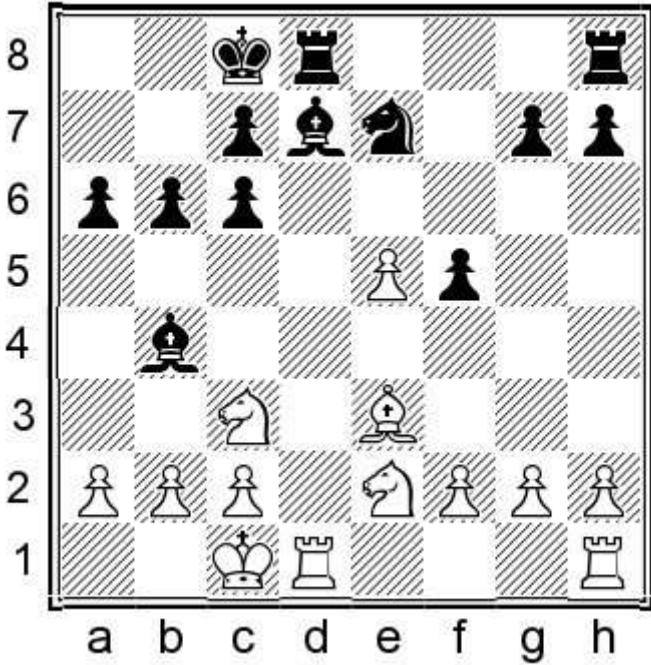
11.0-0-0 Nf6 12.exf5 Bxf5 13.Rxd8+ Rxd8 14.a3 Bd6 A natural idea to keep the bishop pair alive. 15.f3 Re8 16.Bd2 Bg6 (or the immediate 16...Nd5.) 17.Ng3 Nd5



Position after: 17...Nd5

This would have probably been my best bet for an advantage, with ideas such as: 18.Nce4 [18.Nge4 [18.Re1? drops a pawn. 18...Rxe1+ 19.Bxe1 Ne3μ] 18...Nxc3 19.Nxd6+ cxd6 20.bxc3 Re2 21.Rg1 Kd7³] 18...Be5! 19.Re1 Nf4 20.Bxf4 Bxf4+³

11...Ne7 12.0-0-0 b6



Position after: 12...b6

13.h4!?

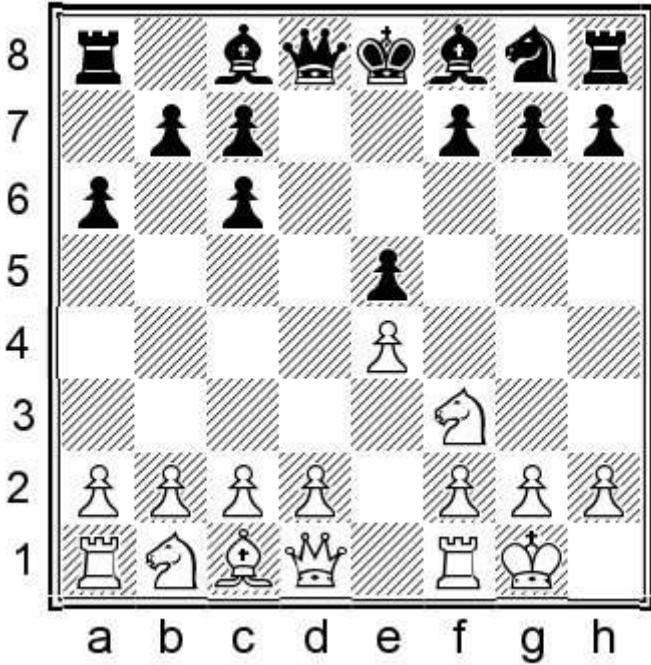
13.a3 Bxc3 14.Nxc3 Ng6 15.f4 [15.Rhe1 c5] 15...c5³

13...Ng6 14.f4 h5!?

I would pick Black here too.

b) 5.0-0 Qf6 6.h3

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Bxc6 dxc6 5.0-0



Position after: 5.0-0

There are an extreme number of possible setups for Black here, a lot of which are very sound. I've decided to offer you a modern line as our main choice.

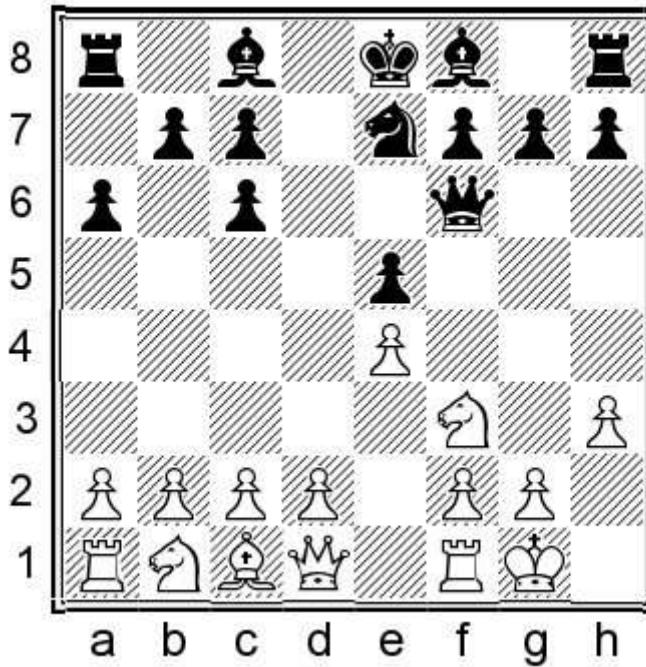
5...Qf6!?

I first learned about this move around 2009. I greatly suffered in a game where I chose 5...Qd6 in the Hungarian Closed Championship and I thought I should instead opt for a line which is easier to understand. I came across the game Solak – Atalik from 2008 and I was impressed, so I started to dig deeper and liked what I found. Since then, over 10 years already, I have been ready to play the line in a normal game, but I only faced it rapid and blitz chess! Interestingly enough, I showed this line to one of friends and he was able to play it the following month! ☺ The line first appeared back in 1887(!), but apart from one game from the 70s (which, of course, was played by the ever-creative Romanishin) its true story started with Morozevich in 1994. In 1997, Adams joined the ‘club’ and he has been actively employing 5...Qf6 ever since. That’s a great sign for us to believe in its correctness. In the mid 2000s’ the young Carlsen also left some remarks and this setup became just as normal as other moves, such as 5...f6.

6.h3!?

This denies ...Bg4, but it's too slow.

6...Ne7

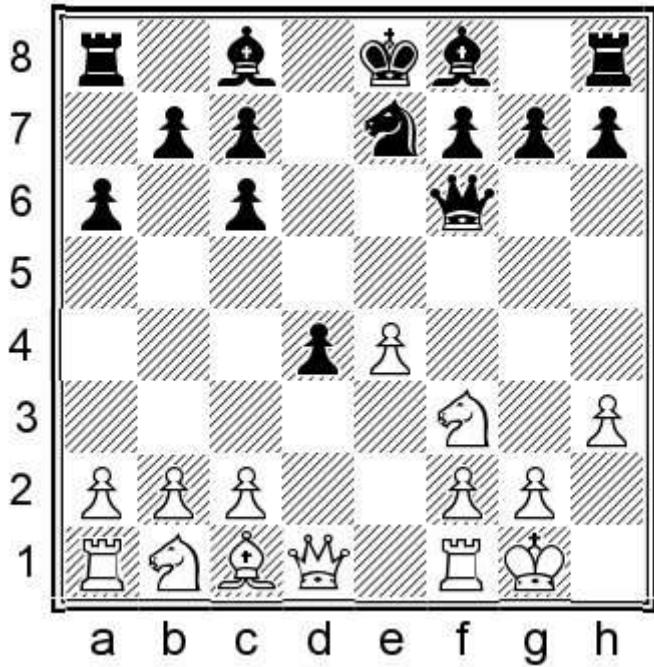


Position after: 6...Ne7

7.c3

The real idea behind 6.h3 – White is building a center.

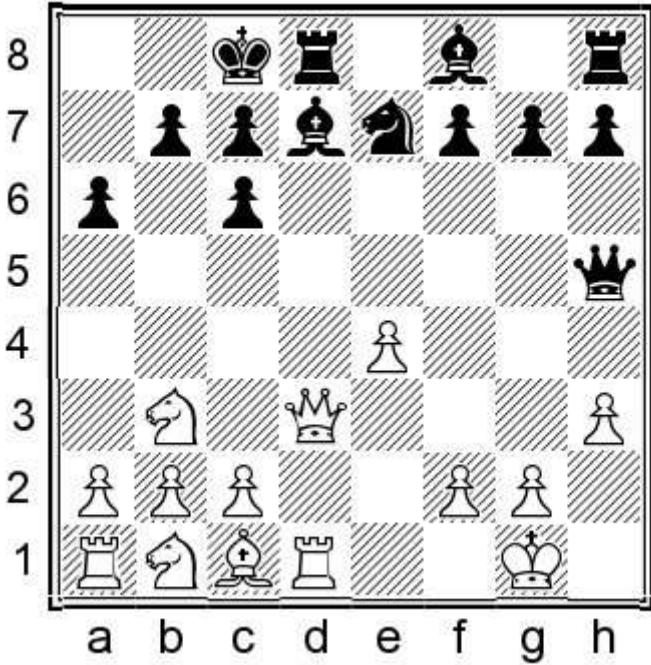
- A) 7.d3 can be found under 6.d3
- B) 7.d4 Not terribly logical in combination with h3. 7...exd4



Position after: 7...exd4

B1) 8.Bg5 Qd6 9.Qxd4 Qxd4 10.Nxd4 Bd7 is just a favourable version of our main line.

B2) 8.Nxd4 Bd7 9.Nb3 [9.Nc3 0-0-0 10.Be3 Ng6 11.f4 Bc5!f] 9...Qg6 10.Qd3!? A rare idea. 10...0-0-0 11.Rd1 Qh5!

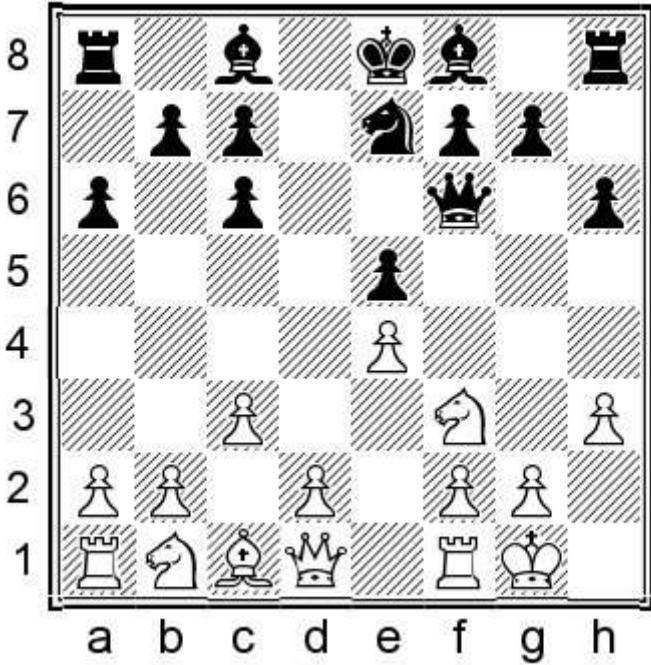


Position after: 11...Qh5!

This stops Nc5 and prepares ... Ng6 with an advantage! 12.g4?! Logical, but it fails to 12...Qh4 13.Nc5 Ng6 14.Nxd7 h5!? when Black gets a much better game. 15.Nb6+ cxb6 16.Qxd8+ Qxd8 17.Rxd8+ Kxd8 18.Be3 Bc5μ

B3) 8.Qxd4 Qxd4 9.Nxd4 Bd7 10.Be3 c5 is a bit simpler. For example: 11.Nf3 b6 12.Rd1 0-0-0 13.Ne5 Be6 14.Rxd8+ Kxd8 15.Nc3 f6 16.Rd1+ Kc8 and Black is slightly better.

7...h6!



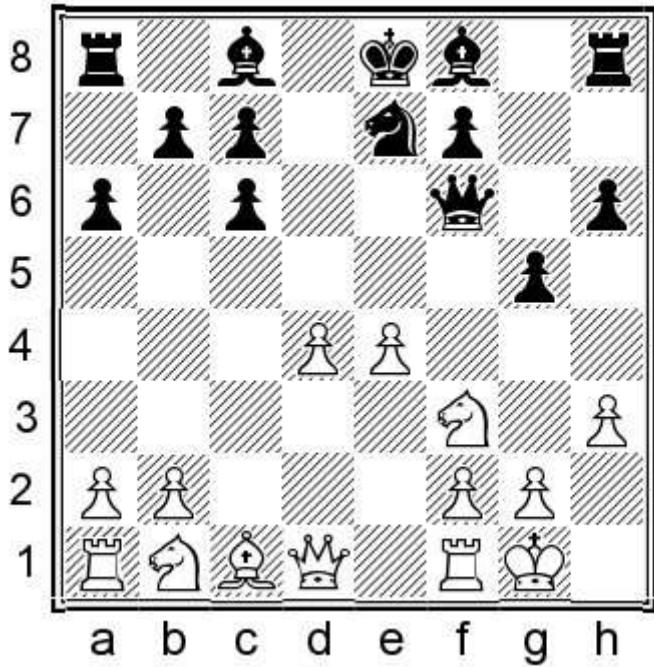
Position after: 7...h6!

A very nice novelty. Black plans to follow with ...g5-g4 so White should act immediately.

8.d4

8.Na3 Be6 9.d4 Ng6 10.Qe2 exd4 11.Nxd4 [11.cxd4 0-0-0] 11...Bxa3
12.bxa3 c5³

8...exd4 9.cxd4 g5!

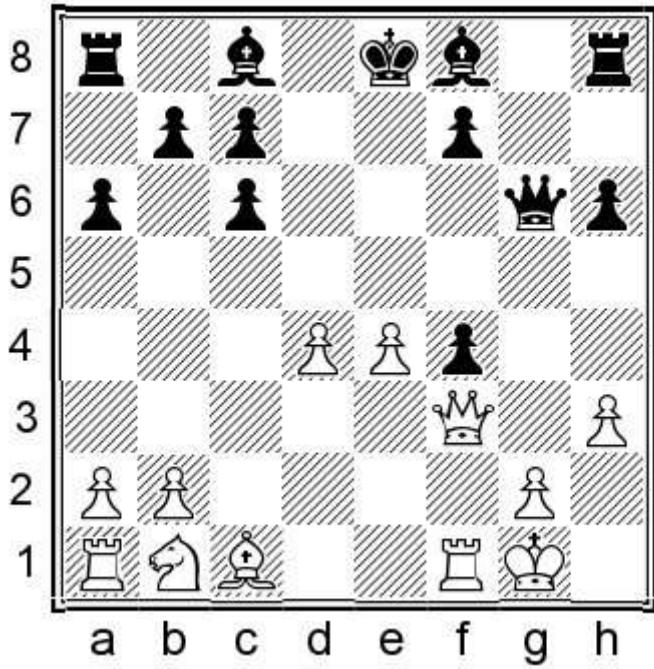


Position after: 9...g5!

10.Qb3!?

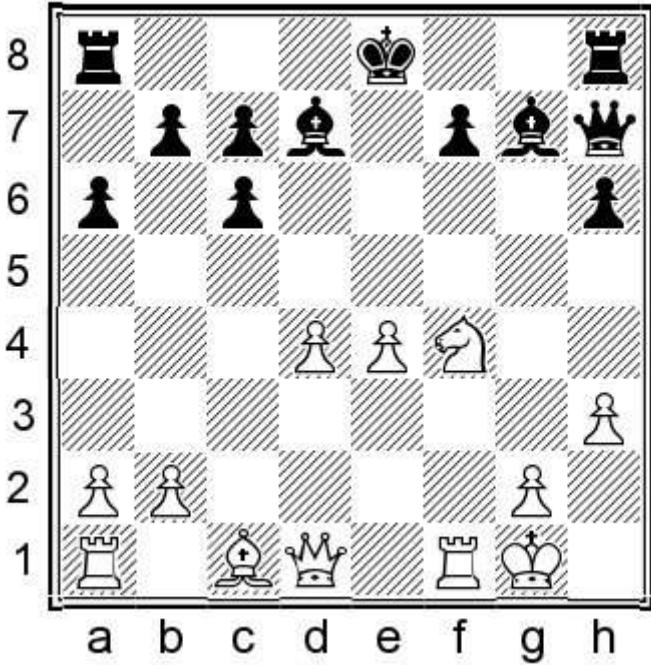
The most testing idea, and Black needs to react properly.

10.Ne5 Ng6 11.Nxg6 [11.Nc4 Be6 12.d5 0-0-0 13.Nc3 g4!? 14.hxg4 Qh4 15.Qf3 h5 16.g5 cxd5 17.exd5 Qxc4 18.dxe6 Qxe6 19.Be3 Bg7³] 11...Qxg6 12.Nc3 [12.f4 might objectively be the best: 12...gxf4 13.Qf3!]



Position after: 13.Qf3!

13...Bg7 14.Rd1 f5!? 15.e5 Be6 16.Bxf4 0-0-0 17.Nc3 Rd7 Black should be fine, but probably not more than that.] 12...Bg7 13.f4 [13.d5 Bd7³] 13...gxf4 14.Ne2! Bd7 [14...Qxe4 is just around equal. 15.Bxf4 Be6 16.Bxc7=] 15.Nxf4 Qh7!



Position after: 15...Qh7!

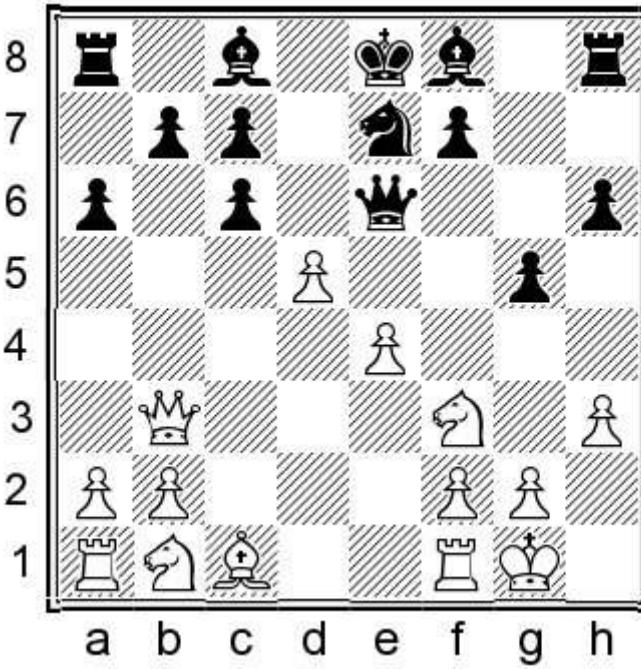
Unusual, but good; White is struggling, e.g. 16.Nh5 [16.e5 0-0-0 17.Be3 c5f] 16...0-0-0f

10...Qe6!

This is what I like the most about this line – Black can count on a small edge in an endgame too.

10...Rg8 is playable of course.

11.d5!?



Position after: 11.d5!?

A human approach.

After 11.Qc2 g4 12.hxg4 Qxg4 13.Ne5 Qg7 14.Nc3 Rg8 15.f3 Bh3 16.Rf2 0-0 Black's initiative is very dangerous.

11...cxd5 12.exd5

12.Qc3? Rg8 13.Qxc7 g4

12...Qxd5 13.Qc3

The idea behind the central break.

13...Rg8 14.Qxc7 Qc6

14...g4!? 15.Nc3 Qd7 16.Qxd7+ Bxd7 17.Ne4 Nd5 is possible too.

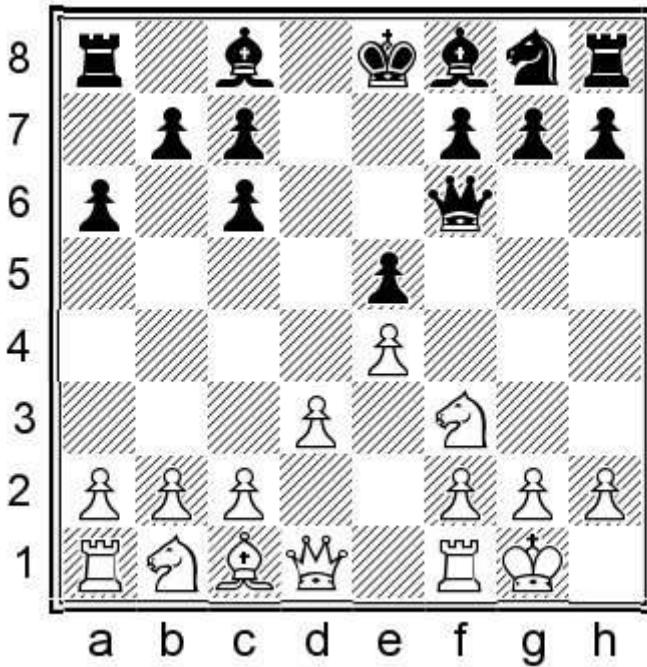
15.Qxc6+ Nxc6 16.Nc3 Be6 17.Rd1 f5 18.Be3 Kf7³

Black is slightly better.

c) 5.0-0 Qf6 6.d3

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Bxc6 dxc6 5.0-0 Qf6!? 6.d3

A very safe reaction.



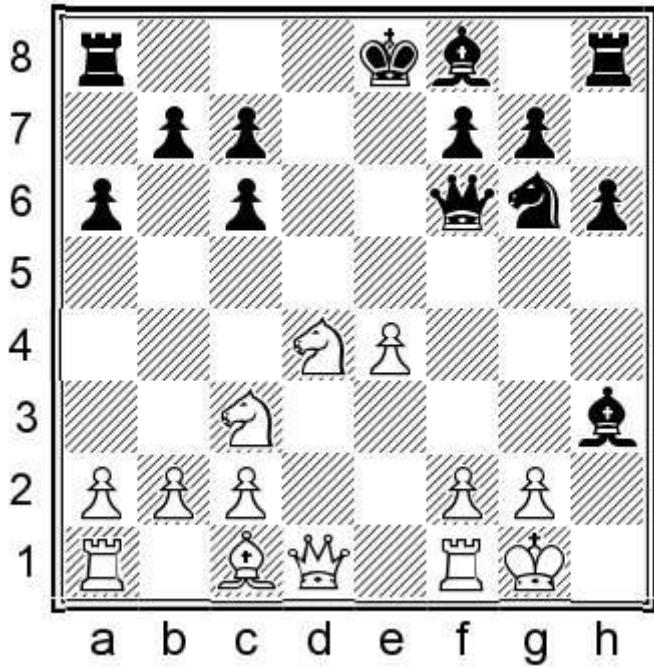
Position after: 6.d3

6...Ne7!

I like this flexible move.

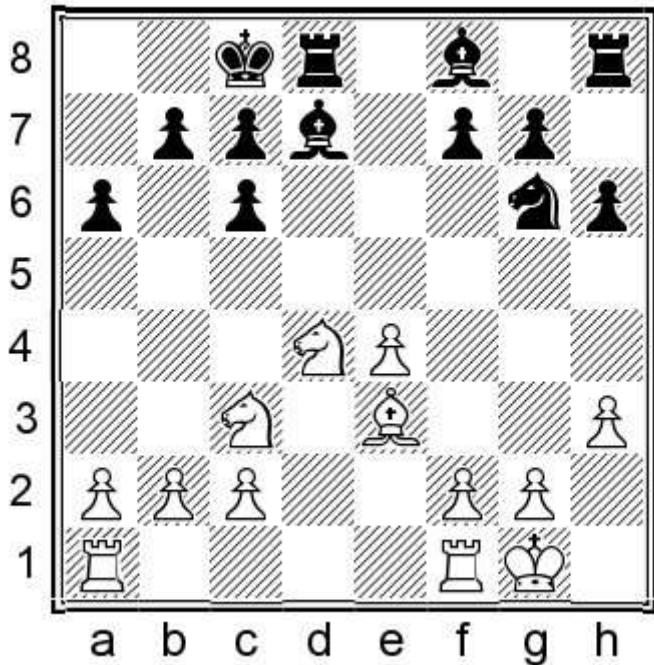
7.Bg5

A) 7.h3 Ng6 8.Nc3 h6! Black wants to keep the queen on her active square. 9.d4 [9.Be3 Be6 and White lacks a direct plan as 10.d4?! is met by 10...0-0-0 11.d5?! Ne7!] 9...exd4 10.Qxd4 [10.Nxd4 allows 10...Bxh3!]



Position after: 10...Bxh3!

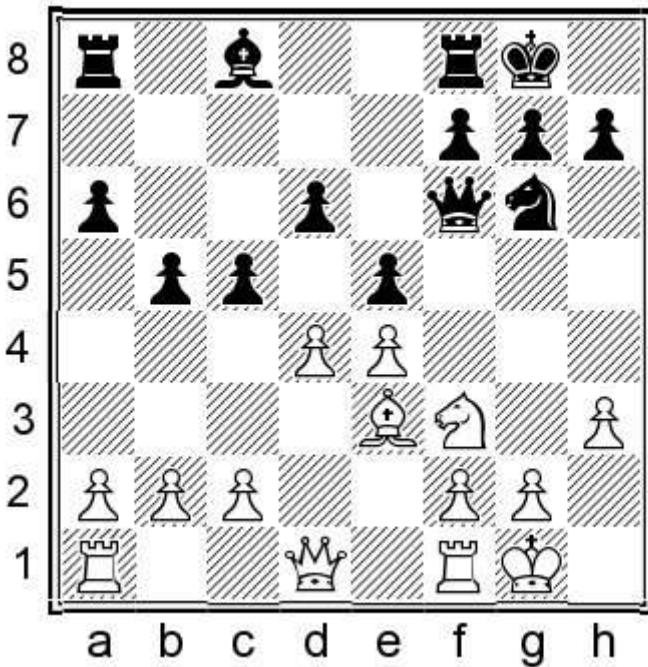
11.gxh3 Rd8 12.e5 Qh4 13.Nce2 c5] 10...Qxd4 11.Nxd4 Bd7 12.Be3 0-0



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

We have a typical Exchange Spanish game, which might continue with 13.Rad1 Bb4 [Or 13...Bd6] 14.Nde2 Ne5 15.b3 f6! and Black is completely fine, e.g. 16.f3 Rhe8.

B) 7.Be3 The very young Carlsen had to face this move. 7...Ng6 8.Nbd2 Bd6 9.h3 0-0 10.Nc4 b5 11.Nxd6 cxd6 We could easily stop here and say that the position should be level, however there are some interesting ideas to discover. 12.d4 c5!?



Position after: 12...c5!?

A bit more ambitious, but it's hard to think concretely in a calm position like this one. Fortunately, the computer is not as biased as humans. 13.dxc5 dxc5 14.Qd5 [14.Bxc5? would be a grave error: 14...Rd8 15.Qc1 Nf4 with a huge attack.] 14...Rb8 Black offers a pawn in the hope of creating a bit of imbalance. 15.Qxc5 Bb7 16.Nd2 Rbc8 17.Qa7!? Qe7 18.Nb3 Rc7!? 19.Bc5 Qg5 20.Be3 Qe7= A repetition is a logical finish.

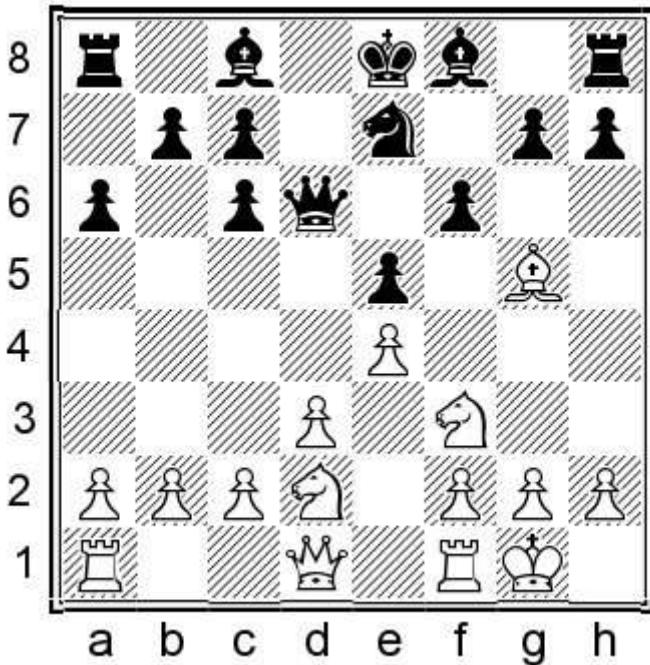
7...Qd6!?

7...Qe6 is an equally legit option.

8.Nbd2

8.Na3 I don't like this move, but it's not bad at all. Black has many options, but I will give just one of them. 8...Ng6 The simplest solution. 9.Nc4 Qe6 10.Be3 Be7 Black is just fine, as it's hard to see what White is playing for. 11.Ng5 [11.Re1 0-0=] 11...Qg4=

8...f6!?



Position after: 8...f6!?

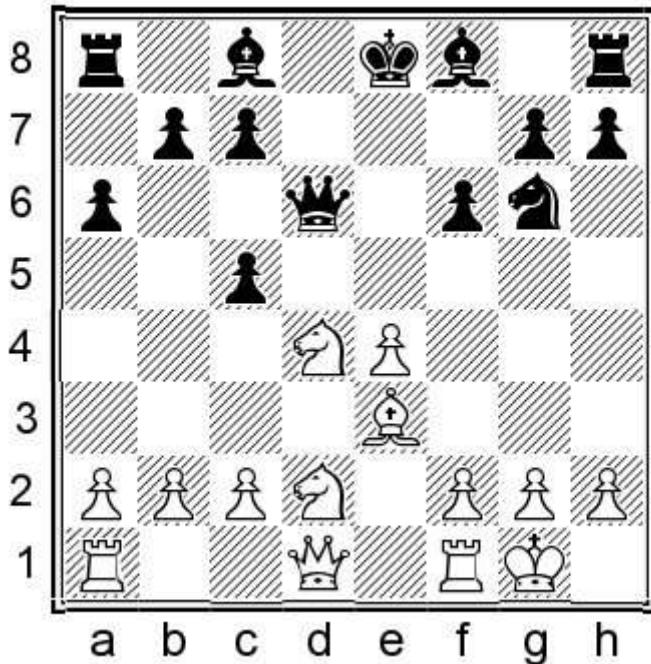
The least popular move, but the most interesting.

9.Nc4

Almost a novelty, though a very natural move.

9.Be3 Ng6 10.d4 exd4!? A novelty. Thanks to the awkward d2-knight, Black

can afford to open the position for the bishops while being underdeveloped.
11.Nxd4 [11.Nc4? is not good. 11...Qc5 12.Qxd4 Qxd4 13.Nxd4 c5 14.Nb3 Be6³] 11...c5



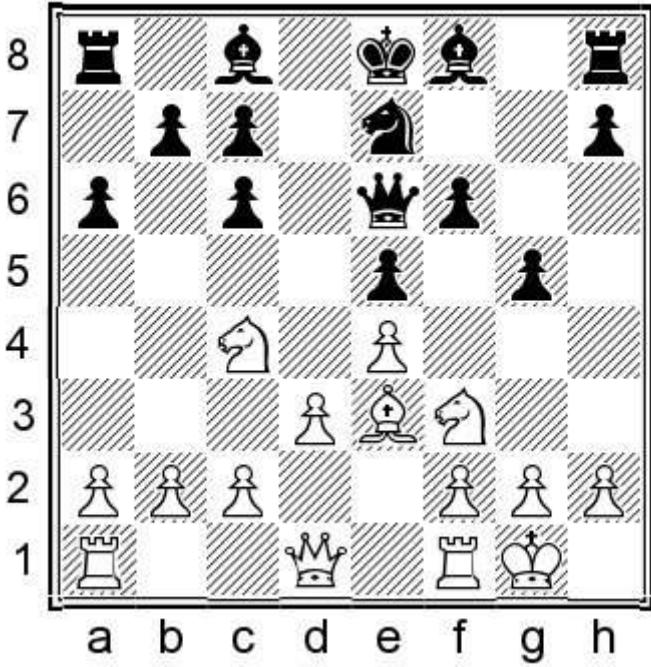
Position after: 11...c5

12.Ne2 [12.Nf5 Qc6 13.Qh5 Be6 14.f4 0-0-0 15.Ng3 Bf7∞] 12...Be6 13.Nc3 [13.f4 Ne7! 14.Nc3 Nc6!=] 13...Ne5! [13...0-0-0 allows 14.f4] 14.Qe2 0-0-0∞ The position is rich in possibilities.

9...Qe6 10.Be3

10.Bd2 has been played, but it's just passive.

10...g5!?



Position after: 10...g5!?

I really like this aggressive approach. This may evolve into some extraordinary complications, which I imagine, a player who opted for the solid 6.d3 wouldn't enjoy too much.

10...Bd7 is perfectly fine here too.

11.b3!?

This move is preparing a strike in the center, which is an old principle to counter wing expansion.

11.Nfd2 Ng6 12.Qh5 Bd7 doesn't really solve anything.

11...Ng6 12.d4 b5

A sign of a hyper-modern attitude: Black plays actively, while the king is still in the center. The bishop pair and space advantage sometimes grant you this luxury.

13.Na5

13.d5 Qf7 14.Na5 cxd5 15.exd5 Bb4!? 16.Nc6 Bc3f

13...g4 14.Ne1 exd4 15.Qxd4 c5

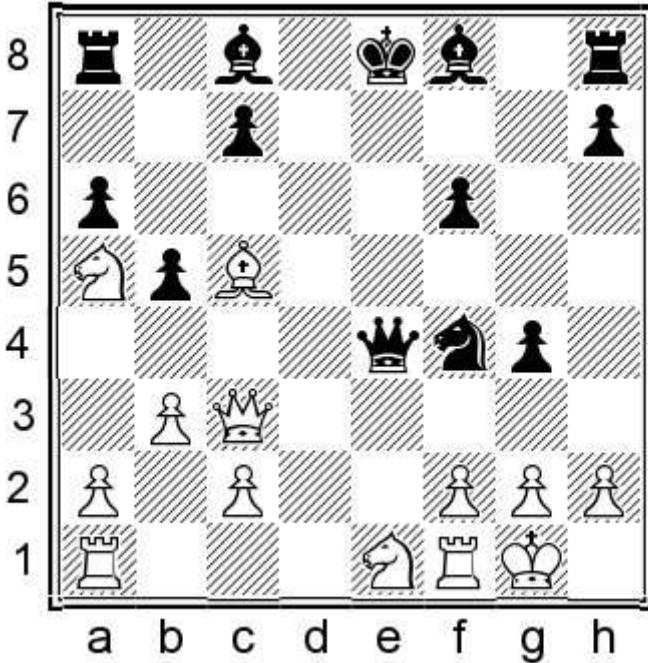
Black has achieved a very exciting position in return for his brave play.

16.Qc3

This feels like the most principled move.

16.Qd2 Bd6∞

16...Qxe4 17.Bxc5 Nf4



Position after: 17...Nf4

Black is attacking like a madman.

18.Qxf6

18.Kh1!? Nd5 19.Qd2 Bxc5 20.Nd3 Be7 21.Rae1 Qf5 22.Nc6 Bb7 23.Nxe7 Nxe7 24.Qb4 0-0-0 25.Rxe7∞ is complicated.

18...Bxc5

Not the only try, but the most entertaining for sure!

19.Qxh8+ Kf7

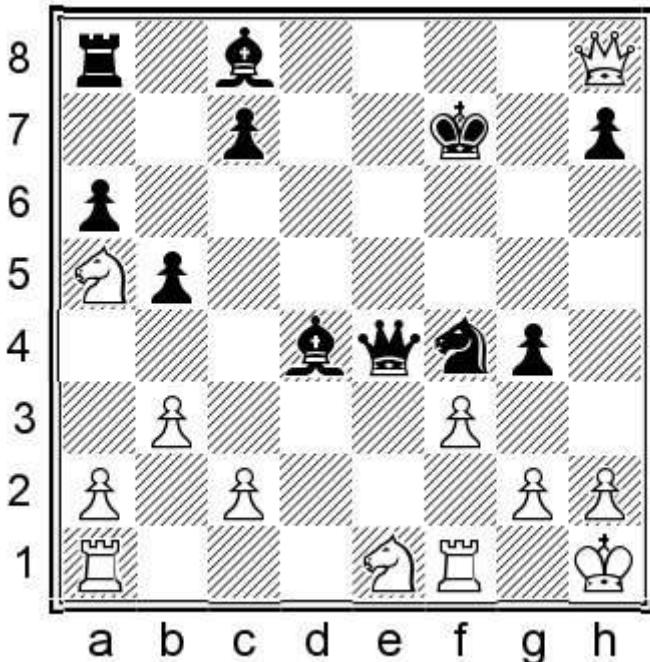
Now White needs to be careful!

20.Kh1

Best. I will show you two spectacular, lesser, lines which end in our favor – feel free to analyze deeper!

20.Nc6?! Bd4! A fun move to make. 21.Nxd4? [21.Nd8 was the only move.] 21...Bb7 22.Qxa8 Bxa8 23.c3 c5 24.Ndc2 Nxg2 25.f3 gxf3–+

20...Bd4 21.f3!!



Position after: 21.f3!!

This resource saves White.

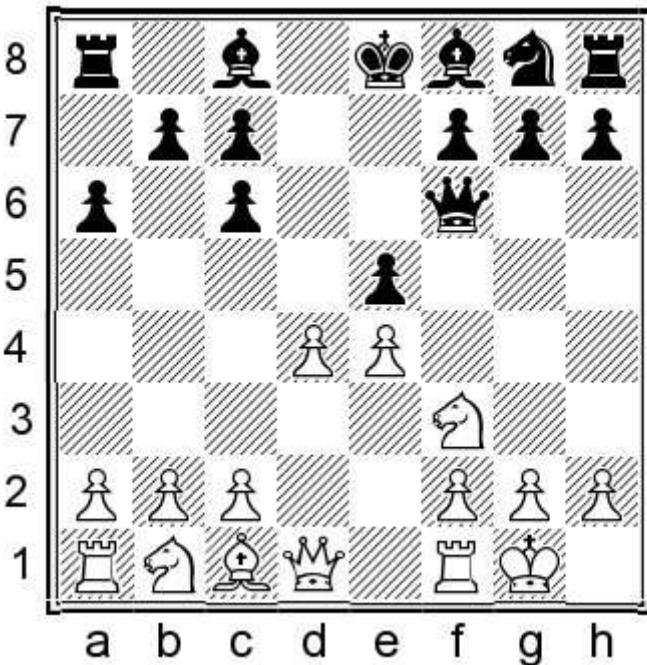
21...gxf3

21...Bxh8!? is also good for Black. 22.fxe4 Bxa1 23.Rxf4+ Ke8 24.Nd3 Bc3 25.Nc6 a5!©

22.Nxf3 Bxh8 23.Ng5+ Kg6 24.Nxe4 Bxa1 25.Rxa1 Bf5=

d) 5.0-0 Qf6 6.d4 exd4 7.--

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Bxc6 dxc6 5.0-0 Qf6!? 6.d4

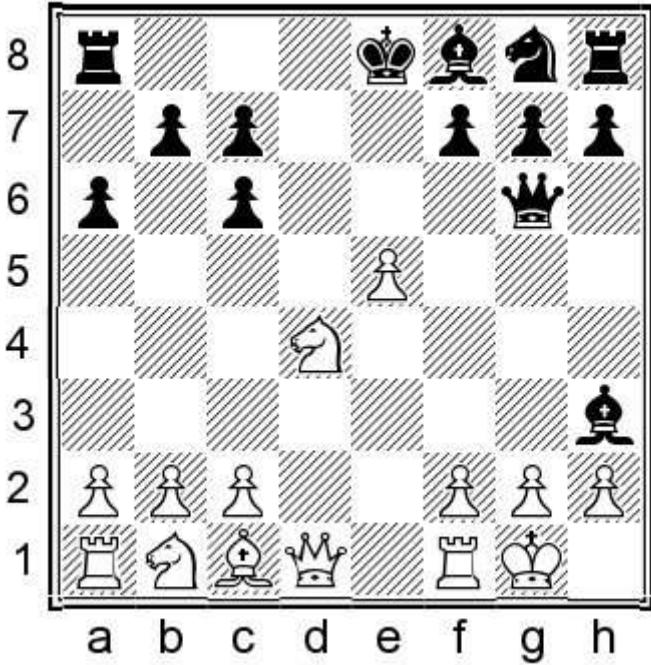


Position after: 6.d4

Undoubtedly the main move: White needs to open the position up while Black is behind in development.

6...exd4 7.Nxd4

7.e5?! might look tempting, but it just weakens the light squares. 7...Qg6 8.Nxd4?! Bh3!

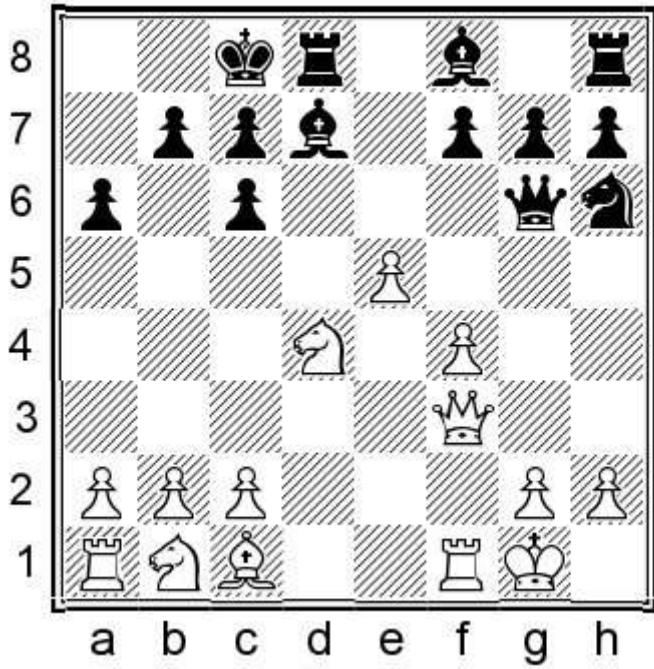


Position after: 8...Bh3!

9.Qf3 Bg4 10.Qg3 0-0-0 11.c3 Ne7!? [11...Bc5 12.Be3 Ne7µ was pretty good too, in the ancient game that I mentioned in the introduction: Schallopp – Harmonist, Frankfurt 1887] 12.f3 [12.h3 c5!? 13.Qxg4+ Qxg4 14.hxg4 cxd4µ] 12...Bd7 13.Qxg6 Nxg6 14.f4 c5 15.Nf3 Bf5 16.Be3 Be7 17.Nbd2 Rd3 18.Kf2 Rhd8µ

7...Bd7 8.Be3

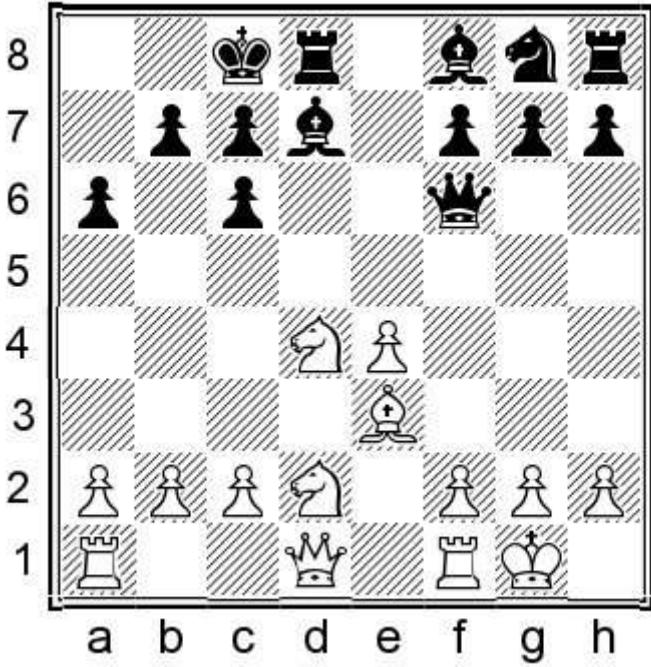
8.e5? Once again, this push is just poor. 8...Qg6 9.f4 Nh6 10.Qf3 0-0-0!?



Position after: 10...0-0-0!?

This is more flexible as 11.f5? fails to the simple 11...Nxf5 12.Nxf5 Bxf5 13.Qxf5+? Qxf5 14.Rxf5 Rd1+--

8...0-0-0 9.Nd2



Position after: 9.Nd2

9...c5

9...Nh6!? 10.f3 c5 11.Ne2 Qxb2 12.Rb1 Qe5 was fine in Reefat – Pavasovic, Calvia (ol) 2004, but taking the pawn involves some risks.

10.N4f3 Qe6!?

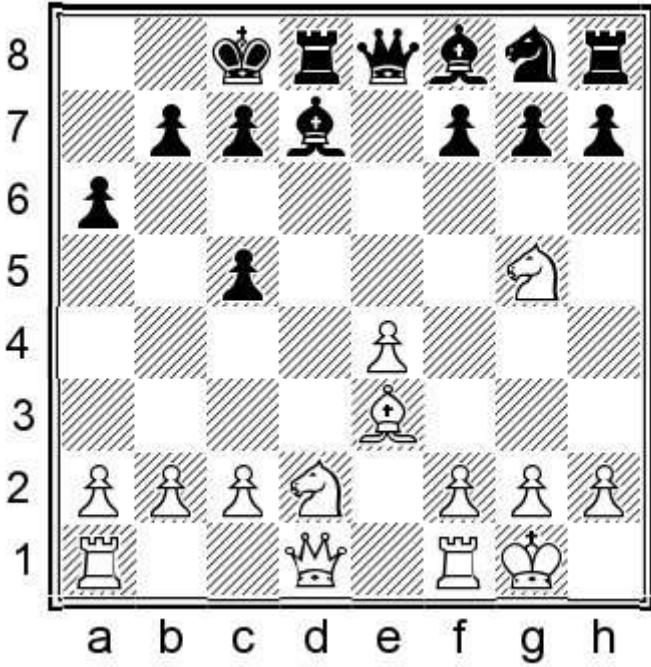
I find this to be a very smart manoeuvre. The queen steps away from the Bg5 threat and vacates f6 for the knight, from where it will exert pressure on e4.

10...Qxb2 is again playable, but a bit greedy. 11.Rb1 Qxa2 12.c4 Qa4 13.Qc1©

11.Ng5

After 11.Re1 h6 12.Qe2 Nf6 Black is very comfortable.

11...Qe8



Position after: 11...Qe8

Black looks passively placed here, but actually White is struggling to find targets. The advantage shifts to us quickly, e.g.

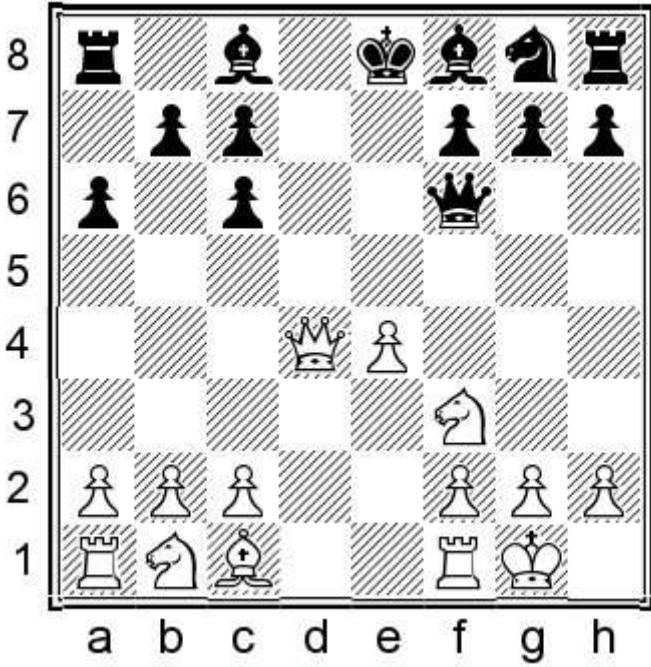
12.Re1 h6 13.Ngf3 Nf6 14.Bf4 Nh5 15.Bg3

15.Be3 g5μ

15...Nxg3 16.hxg3 g5μ

e) 5.0-0 Qf6 6.d4 exd4 7.Qxd4

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Bxc6 dxc6 5.0-0 Qf6!? 6.d4 exd4 7.Qxd4



Position after: 7.Qxd4

7...Bg4!?

I think this move is very interesting, forcing White to calculate lines and make an important decision.

There is nothing wrong with 7...Qxd4 8.Nxd4 Bd7 but White has a simple game here.

8.Qe5+

Possibly the best.

A) 8.Nc3 Bxf3 9.Qxf6 Nxf6 10.gxf3 0-0-0 11.Be3 Nh5 Black is playing against the weakened structure. White has little to do here, so we have all the fun, e.g. 12.Ne2 [12.Rad1 Bd6 13.Ne2 g6 14.Rfe1 Rhe8] 12...g6 13.Ng3 Ng7! 14.f4 f5 15.exf5 Nxf5 16.Nxf5 gxf5³

B) 8.Qxf6 Nxf6 9.Ne5 Be6 10.Nc3 Bb4 11.Re1 Bxc3 12.bxc3 Healey, M (2108) – Howell, D (2639) London 2013 12...0-0-0 13.Bg5 h6!?

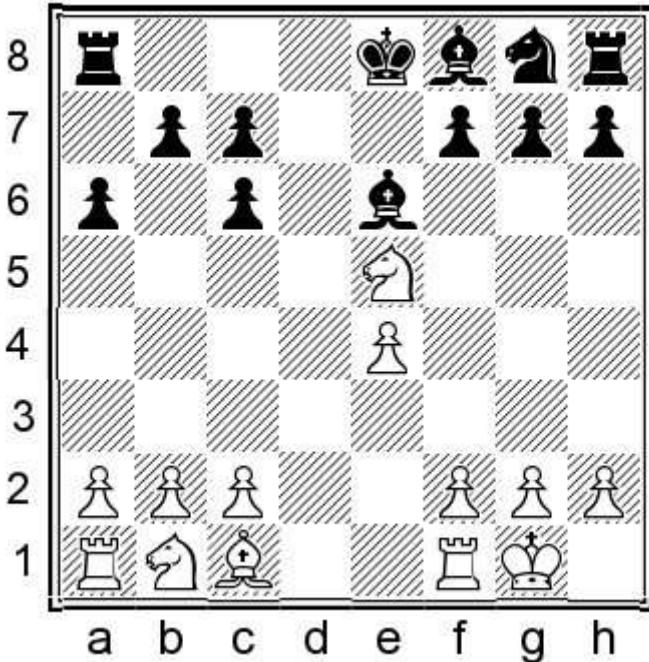
14.Bxf6 gxf6 15.Nd3 f5³

C) 8.Bg5 Qxd4 9.Nxd4 c5 10.Nb3 h6!?

C1) 11.Bh4 g5 12.f3 [12.Bg3 0-0-0] 12...Be6 13.Bf2 b6 14.Rd1 Bd6 15.Bg3 0-0-0 16.Bxd6 cxd6 17.N1d2 Ne7 18.c4 Nc6³

C2) 11.Be3 b6 12.a4 0-0-0 13.a5 Kb7³

8...Qxe5 9.Nxe5 Be6



Position after: 9...Be6

10.Be3

10.Rd1 Nf6 11.Nc3 Nd7 12.Bf4 0-0-0 13.Rxd7 Rxd7 14.Nxd7 Bxd7 15.Rd1 Be7 should also be fine for us.

10...0-0-0 11.Nd2 Nf6! 12.Rad1 Nd7 13.Nd3

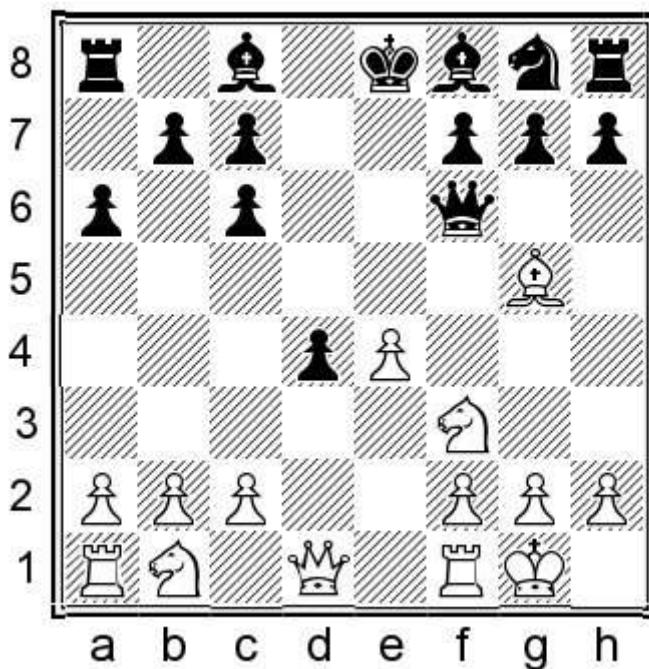
13.Nxd7 Rxd7³

13...f6 14.f3 b6

Black has a comfortable position.

f) 5.0-0 Qf6 6.d4 exd4 7.Bg5 Qd6 8.--

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Bxc6 dxc6 5.0-0 Qf6!? **6.d4 exd4 7.Bg5**



Position after: 7.Bg5

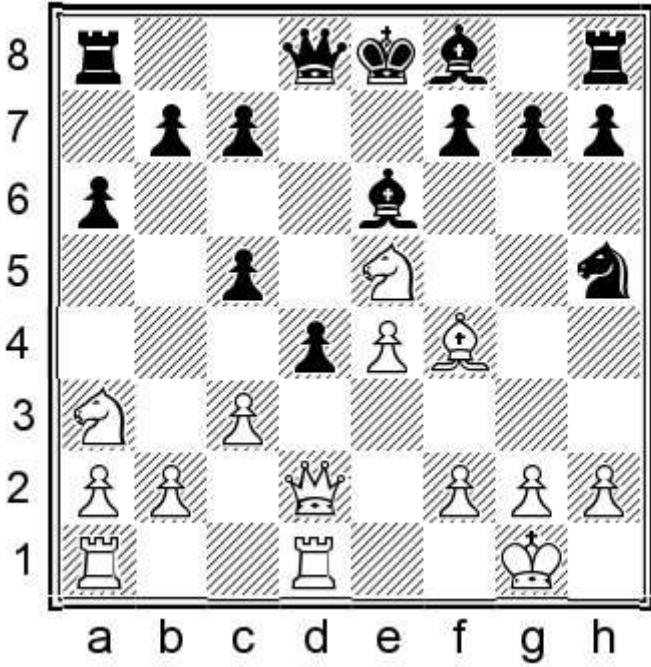
The most ambitious; White wins an additional tempo.

7...Qd6

The reliable move. 7...Qg6 is playing with fire.

8.Qxd4

8.Qd2? This creative move is doomed to fail. From a practical perspective, Black solved his problems very well after: 8...c5 9.Bf4 Qd8 10.c3 Bg4 11.Ne5 Be6 12.Na3 Nf6 13.Rfd1 Nh5!



Position after: 13...Nh5!

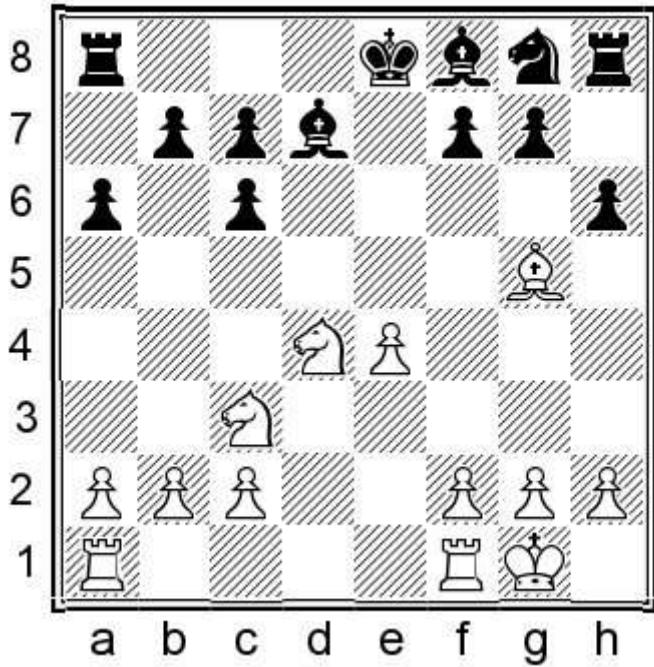
14.Bg5 f6 15.Qe2 g6 16.Bh4 Nf4 17.Qf3 g5 18.Nec4 Bh6 An elegant move.
19.Bg3?! g4+ Larino Nieto – Graf, Sanxenxo 2007.

8...Qxd4 9.Nxd4 Bd7 10.Nc3

10.Nd2?! is less logical. A very nice example of how Black should proceed is: 10...f6 11.Be3 0-0-0 12.f4 Nh6 13.h3 Bb4 14.c3 Bd6 15.Rae1 Rhe8 16.Kh1 c5 17.N4b3 b6 18.Bg1 Bc6 19.Bh2 Nf7 20.Re3 a5+ Black improved slowly but surely and reached a strategically winning position in Denny – Mikhalkishin, Calvia (ol) 2004.

10...h6!?

A new take on this typical position. Twenty years ago 10...f6 or 10...Ne7 would have been autopilot moves.

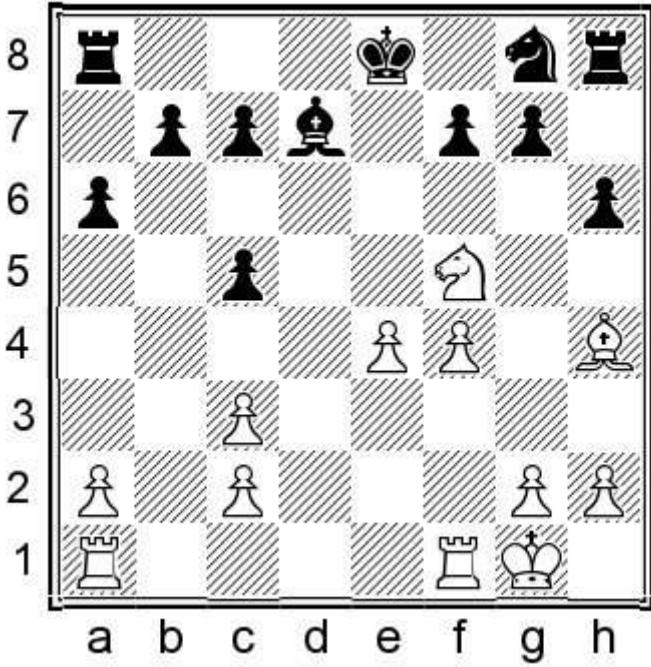


Position after: 10...h6!?

11.Bh4

11.Be3 0-0-0 12.Rad1 Re8!? 13.Rd2?! [13.f3 was equal.] and now in Thilakarathne, G (2213) – Dimakiling, O (2405) Ho Chi Minh City 2017, Black should have played 13...Bb4 14.Nde2 f5³ with some advantage.

11...Bb4!? 12.f4 Bxc3 13.bxc3 c5 14.Nf5?



Position after: 14.Nf5?

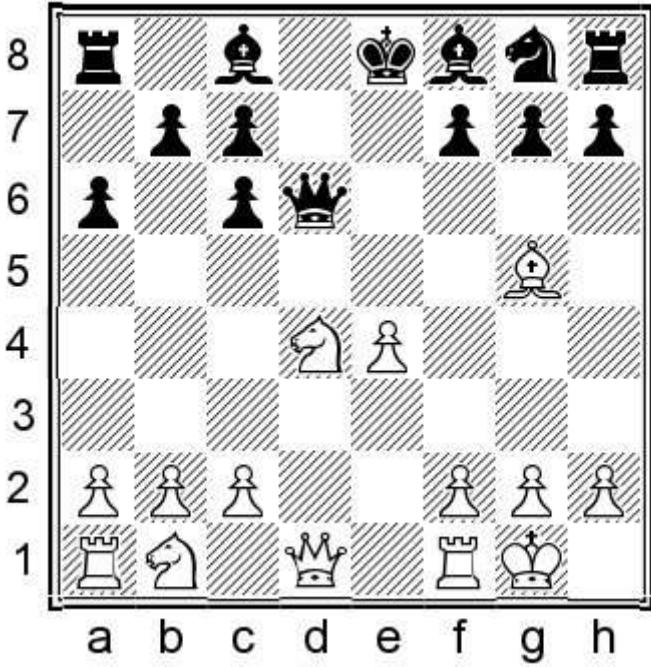
White should have tried 14.Nf3 f6 15.e5 0-0-0 but Black is slightly better already.

14...Bxf5 15.exf5 f6! 16.Bf2 b6

White's bishop is imprisoned and their structure is also in ruins, so Black was much better in Fawzy, A (2470) – Oparin, G (2652) Chess.com INT 2020

g) 5.0-0 Qf6 6.d4 exd4 7.Bg5 Qd6 8.Nxd4 Be7 9.Be3

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Bxc6 dxc6 5.0-0 Qf6!? 6.d4 exd4 7.Bg5 Qd6 8.Nxd4



Position after: 8.Nxd4

8...Be7

A solid developing move and it's very natural to offer an exchange of White's most active piece.

Originally I thought keeping the bishop pair is important and studied 8...Bd7!?, but after witnessing the Turner – Adams game live I understood that Black can play by simpler means in this line, while also keeping chances to outplay the opponent! Nevertheless, if you, dear reader, get bored with my recommendation, you may want to check this move out too!

9.Be3!?

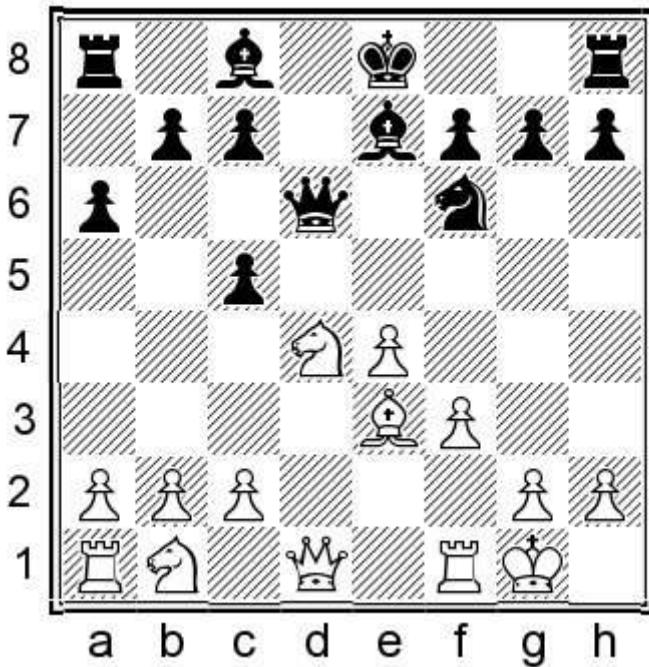
White's most ambitious setup, which leads to complex middlegame positions. Black has a lot of different options to deal with it.

9...Nf6

9...Nh6 10.Qd2 g5!? was played in the well-known game Meier, G (2648) –

Caruana, F (2784) Karlsruhe/ Baden – Baden 2018. [10...c5!? 11.Nb3 Qxd2 12.N1xd2 b6 is also worthy of attention.]

10.f3 c5

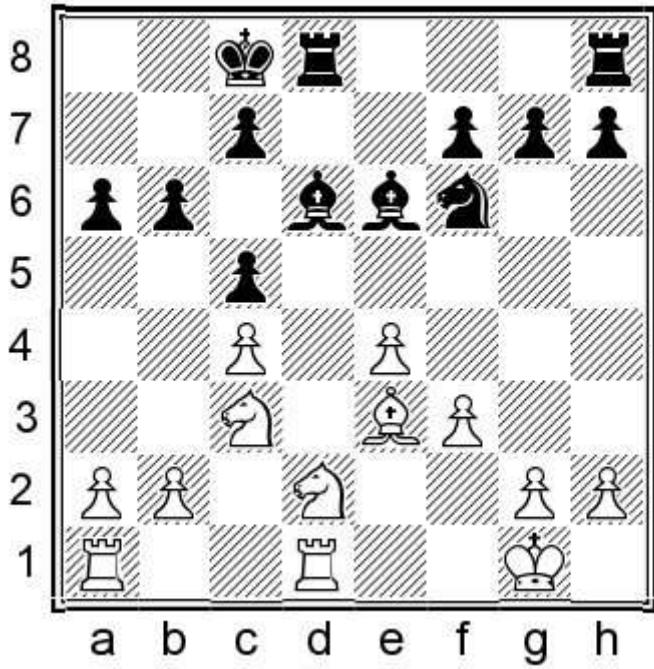


Position after: 10...c5

10...0-0 has also been played, but I prefer my king on the queenside.

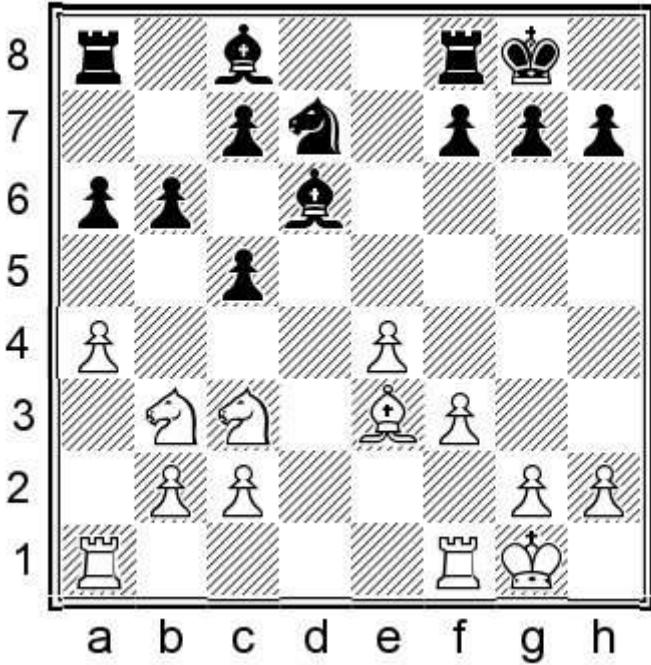
11.Ne2

11.Nb3 b6 12.Nc3 Once again we have plenty of ways to play. [12.c4?! now does play into 12...Qxd1 13.Rxd1 Be6 14.N3d2 0-0-0 15.Nc3 Bd6³



Position after: 15...Bd6³

] 12...0-0 Probably the simplest. 13.Qxd6 [13.Qe2 a5 14.Rad1 Ba6 15.Qf2 Qe6 16.Rfe1 Bd6=] 13...Bxd6 14.a4 [14.f4?! makes little sense to me: 14...Ng4f] 14...Nd7!



Position after: 14...Nd7!

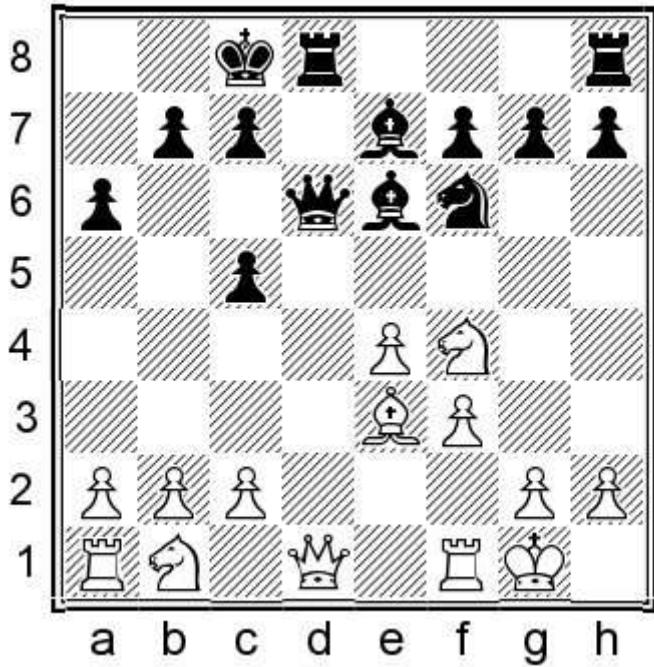
This looks more pleasing to the eye than 14...a5, which allows 15.Nb5. 15.f4 [15.a5 b5 16.Rfd1 f6 17.Bf2 is possible, but I don't see more than a repetition for White. 17...Bb7 18.Bg3 Ne5 19.Bf2 Nd7 20.Bg3 Ne5=] 15...f6 16.Nd2 Re8 17.Rfe1 [17.Nc4 Bb7!? 18.Rad1 Bxe4 19.Nxd6 cxd6 20.Rxd6 Bxc2 and Black is ok.] 17...Bb7 18.Rad1 Rad8 19.Nc4 Bf8 Black looks super-solid here.

11...Be6

11...b6 has been played, but it's a bit slow here. Now, however, we are ready to castle immediately.

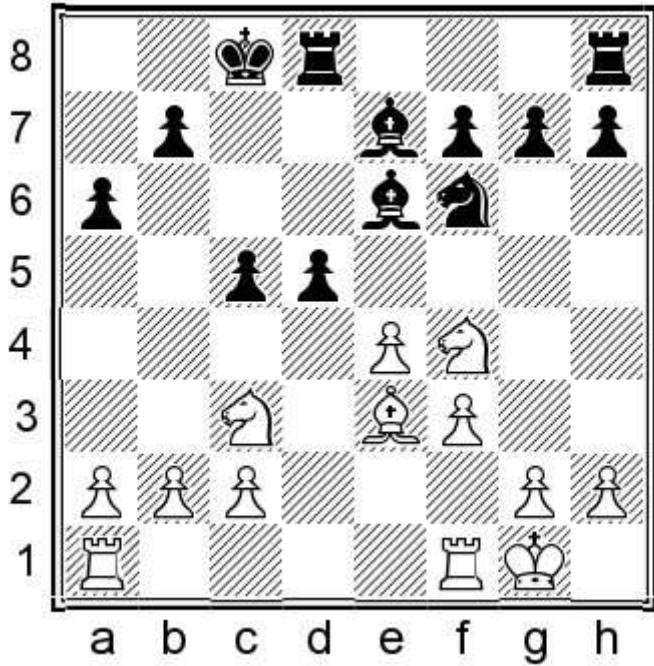
12.Nbc3

12.Nf4 0-0-0



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

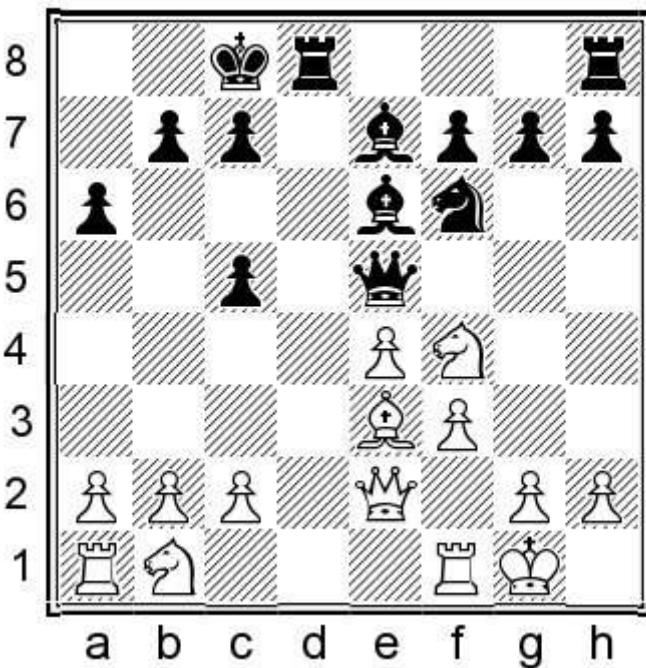
A) 13.Qxd6 The least exciting way in this variation, as the game peters out to a draw: 13...cxd6 14.Nc3 d5!



Position after: 14...d5!

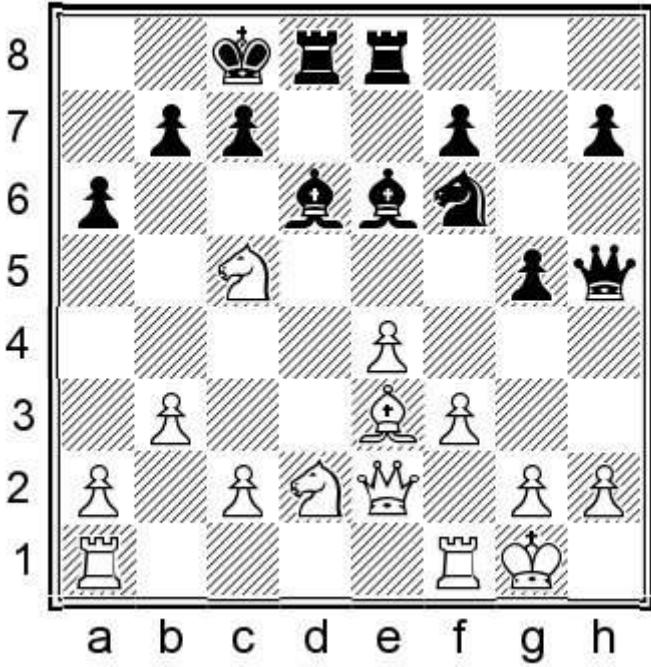
15.exd5 Nxd5 16.Nfxd5 Bxd5 17.Na4 is a bit more challenging. [17.Nxd5 Rxd5= was a dead draw in Naiditsch, Y (2375) – Kosteniuk, A (2551) Germany 2019] 17...Bf6!? 18.Bxc5 b5 19.Nc3 Rhe8© and Black has nice compensation.

B) 13.Qe2 Qe5 I like this active queen move. Now White has the option to repeat moves, but objectively speaking this fact shouldn't scare us. If we are seeking fighting possibilities, there are alternatives to pick from at move nine.



Position after: 13...Qe5

B1) 14.Nd3 Qh5 The only, but decent, square. 15.Nd2 [15.g4?! is suspicious. This is the type of move we would love to see. 15...Qh4 ... 16.Nxc5 Bxc5 17.Bxc5 h5 18.Bf2 Qg5 19.h4 Qe5 20.g5 Qxb2 should favor Black.] 15...Rhe8 16.b3 g5!? with the idea of 17.Nxc5 [17.Bxc5? Rxd3 18.Bxe7 Rxd2] 17...Bd6!



Position after: 17...Bd6!

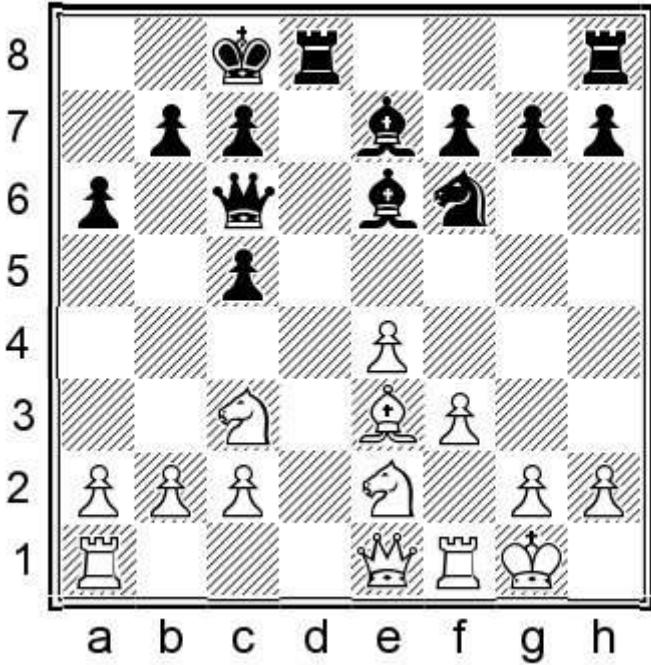
and now 18.h3? would fail to 18...Bxh3! 19.gxh3 Rg8!! 20.Rf2 Only move. 20...Bxc5 21.Bxc5 g4 22.hxg4 Qxc5μ

B2) 14.Nxe6 Qxe6 White has managed to secure the better structure, but it's not enough to claim an advantage. 15.Nd2 [15.Nc3 Bd6 16.Qf2 Nd7 17.f4 f6 18.Rad1 Kb8=] 15...Rhe8 16.b3!? Securing the c4 spot. [16.Qc4? would walk into our dirty trick: 16...Nd5!μ] 16...Nd7 17.Qc4 Qg6 [17...Qxc4 18.Nxc4 Nb8! 19.Rad1 Nc6= is also sound.] 18.Rad1 Ne5 19.Qe2 Nc6 [19...Qe6=] Black is just fine and planning to meet 20.Nc4 with 20...f5!? or 20...Qe6.

12...0-0-0 13.Qe1

13.Nf4 allows 13...Bc4 14.Re1 Qb6!? 15.Qc1 g5 when Black gets a lot of play.

13...Qc6!



Position after: 13...Qc6!

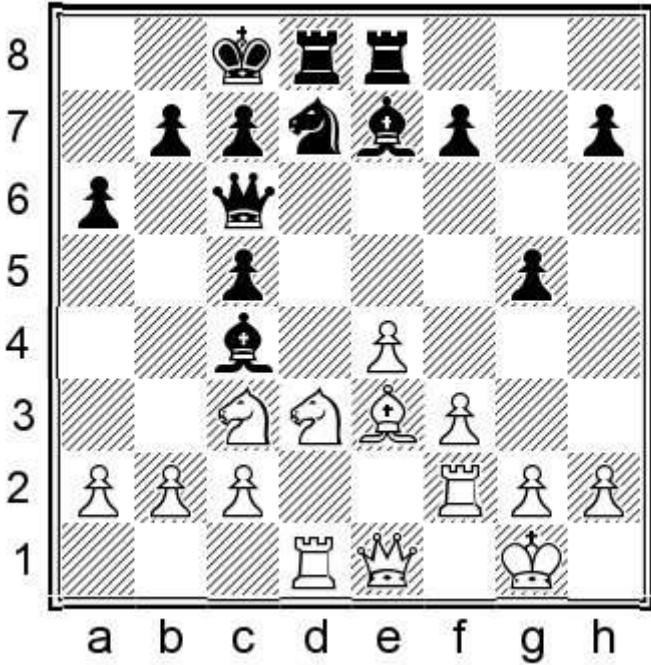
14.Nf4

14.Qf2 is slow. The line 14...Rhg8! 15.Rad1 Rxd1 16.Rxd1 g5 17.Ng3 h5 seems quite concerning for the first player.

14...Bc4 15.Rf2

After 15.Nce2 g5 16.Nd3 Nd7 17.b3 Be6 18.c4 f5 19.Nc3 Rhe8 Black has a comfortable game.

15...g5 16.Nd3 Nd7 17.Rd1 Rhe8



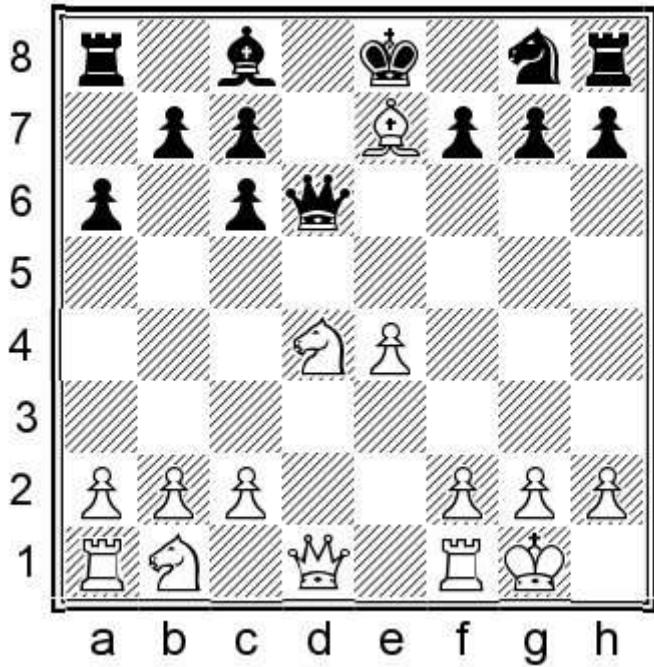
Position after: 17...Rhe8

We have coordinated our pieces correctly and can have optimistic thought about the future. For example:

18.b3 Be6 19.Re2 c4f

**h) 5.0-0 Qf6 6.d4 exd4 7.Bg5 Qd6 8.Nxd4 Be7 9.Bxe7 Nxe7
10.--**

**1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Bxc6 dxc6 5.0-0 Qf6!? 6.d4 exd4 7.Bg5 Qd6
8.Nxd4 Be7 9.Bxe7**



Position after: 9.Bxe7

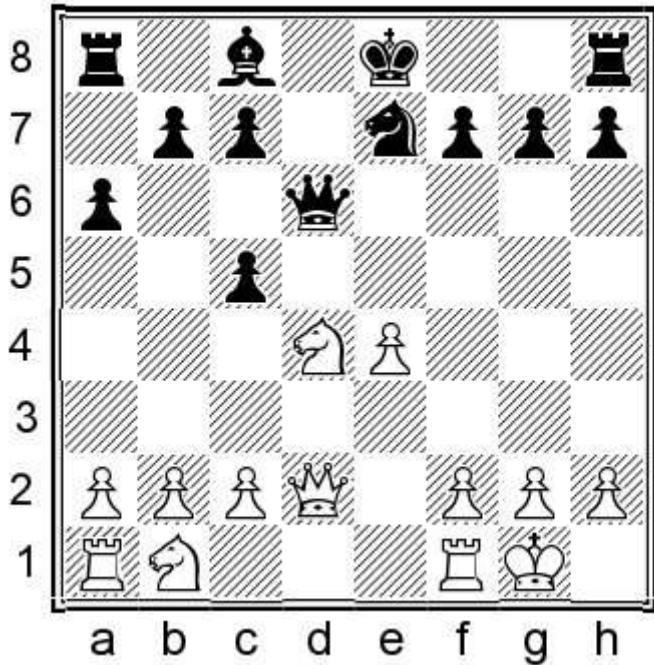
9...Nxe7

The starting position of the main line of the 5...Qf6 universe. Play tends to be slow and strategic with only a few tactical points. I will be concentrating on general ideas and recurring themes through some important games to give you confidence playing this structure.

10.Nb3

This allows Black to develop a bit more actively.

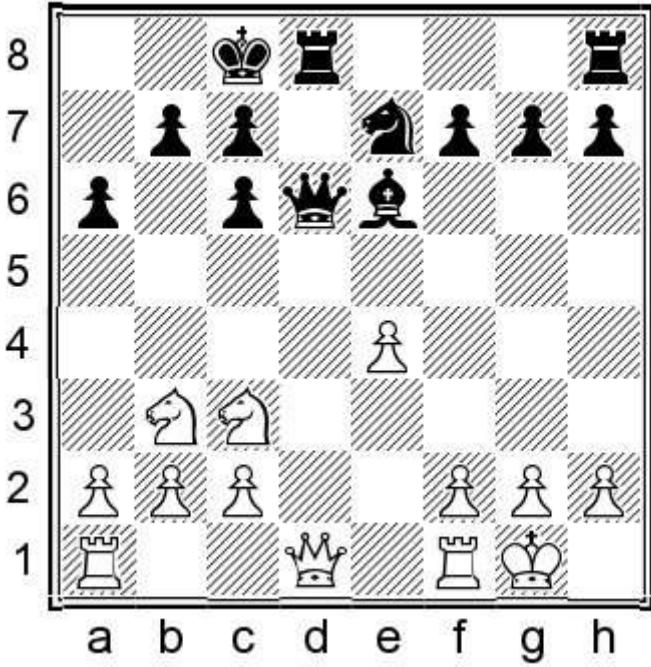
10.Qd2?! This looks weird to me. 10...c5



Position after: 10...c5

11.Nb3 [11.Ne2 is maybe a bit better. 11...Qxd2 12.Nxd2 Be6 13.Nf4 0-0-0 14.Rfd1 Nc6 15.Nxe6 fxe6 16.Nf3 Rdf8!? is just fine for Black.] 11...Qxd2 12.N1xd2 b6 13.Rad1 Be6 14.f4 0-0-0 Black was comfortable in Sulskis, S (2546) – Ovsejevitsch, S (2585) Germany 2015.

10...Be6 11.Nc3 0-0-0



Position after: 11...0-0-0

12.Qe2

12.Qh5 Ng6 13.Rad1 Qe5 seems good for us.

12...Qf4!?

12...Ng6 is normal too.

13.Rad1

13.g3?! Qf6 14.Rad1 Rxd1! 15.Rxd1 h5 16.Qe3 b6 and Black is comfortable.

13...g5

Strengthening control over the f4-square.

14.Nc5

14.Nd4 Ng6 15.Nxc6 bxc6 16.Qxa6+ Kb8 17.Nb5 cxb5 18.Qxb5+ leads to a draw by repetition.

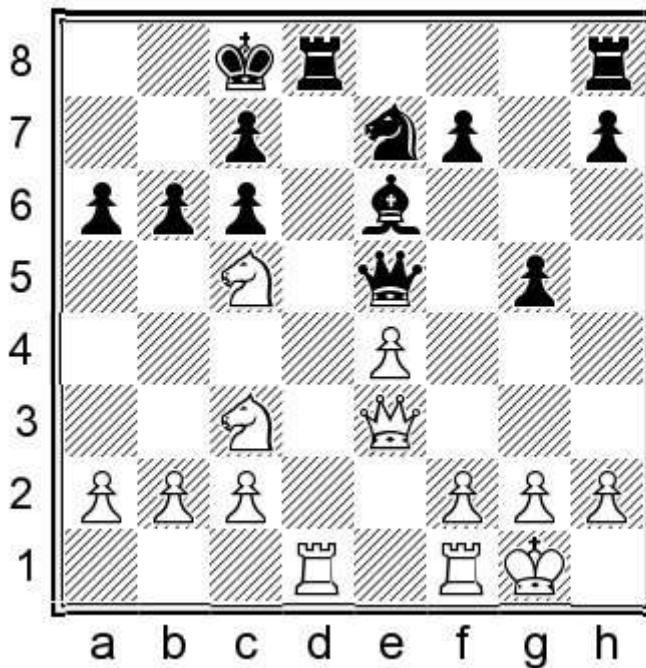
14...Qe5 15.Qe3

Critical.

A) 15.Nd3 Qd4 16.Nf4 Qf6=

B) 15.Rxd8+ Rxd8 16.Nd3 Qd4 17.Rd1 Ng6

15...b6!



Position after: 15...b6!

16.Nd3

A) 16.Nxe6 fxe6 This structure even gives us some advantage.

B) 16.Nxa6? is bad due to 16...Qa5

16...Qg7 17.a4

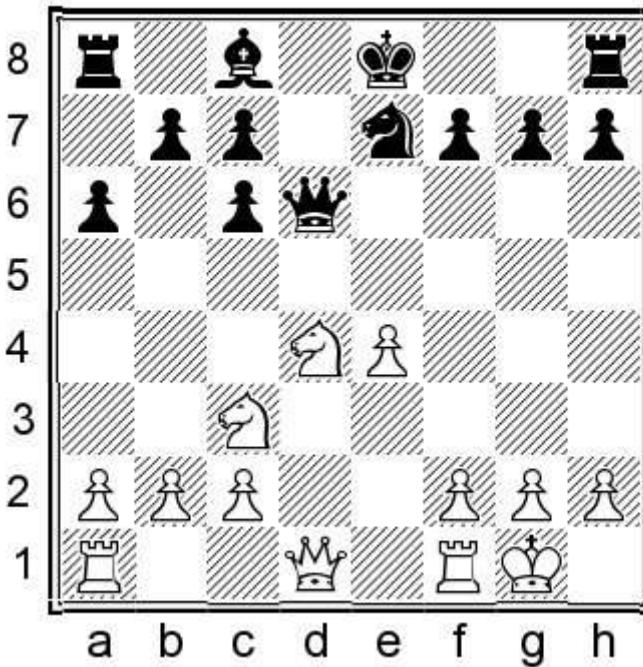
17.e5?! Nf5 18.Qe4 Nd4

17...a5

It looks difficult for White to find real targets in Black's camp.

i) 5.0-0 Qf6 6.d4 exd4 7.Bg5 Qd6 8.Nxd4 Be7 9.Bxe7 Nxe7
10.Nc3 Bd7 11.--

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Bxc6 dxc6 5.0-0 Qf6!? 6.d4 exd4 7.Bg5 Qd6
8.Nxd4 Be7 9.Bxe7 Nxe7 10.Nc3



Position after: 10.Nc3

Almost exclusively played, and no wonder.

10...Bd7!

Our king belongs on the queenside.

11.Re1?!

This happened in the only (but very recent) game of my mine to reach this

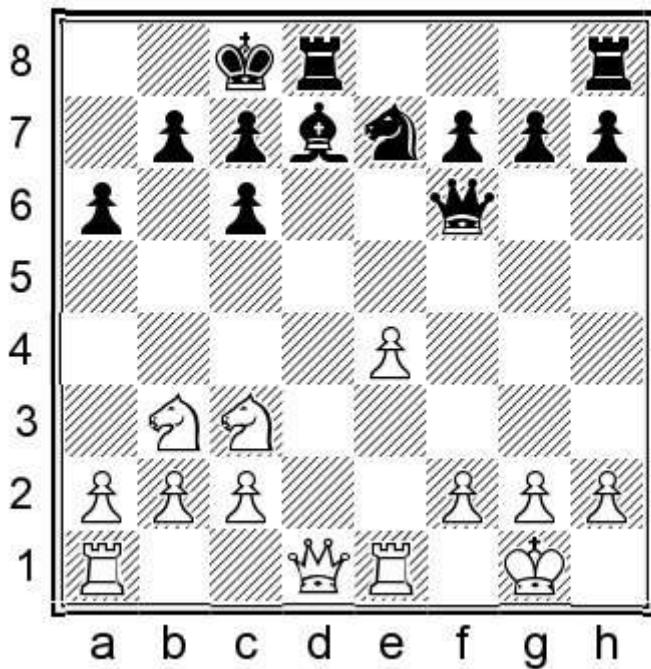
oposition. It does not accomplish much as pushing e5 only helps Black to activate his pieces more easily.

11.Qd2 c5 12.Nb3 Qxd2 13.Nxd2 0-0-0 14.Rfd1 Be6 15.Nf1 Rd4 16.f3 Rhd8 was slightly better for Black in Dann, M (2432) – Lobzhanidze, D (2453) Germany 2013

11...0-0-0 12.Nb3

Not 12.e5? Qg6 13.Qf3 c5 14.Nb3 Bg4! 15.Qe4 Qxe4 16.Nxe4 b6 17.h3 Be6µ when the e5-pawn is too weak.

12...Qf6!



Position after: 12...Qf6!

13.Qe2 Ng6 14.Qe3 Kb8 15.Nc5

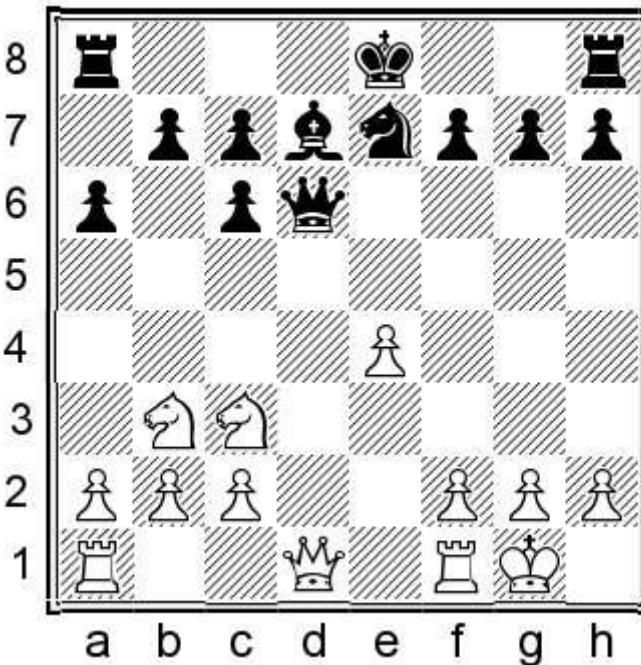
15.Rad1 Bc8 16.Rxd8 Rxd8 17.Rd1 Re8!?

15...Bc8 16.Rad1 b6 17.Nd3 Rhe8

This looks very comfortable for Black.

j) 5.0-0 Qf6 6.d4 exd4 7.Bg5 Qd6 8.Nxd4 Be7 9.Bxe7 Nxe7
10.Nc3 Bd7 11.Nb3

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Bxc6 dxc6 5.0-0 Qf6!? 6.d4 exd4 7.Bg5 Qd6
8.Nxd4 Be7 9.Bxe7 Nxe7 10.Nc3 Bd7! 11.Nb3

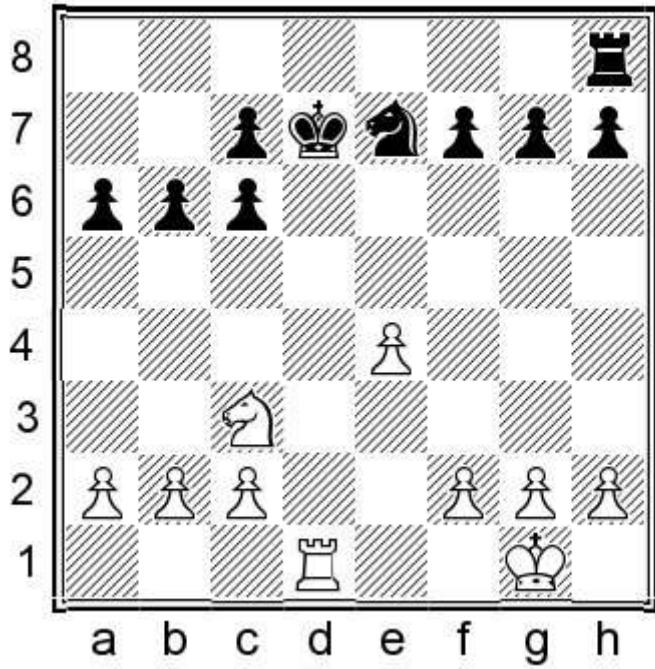


Position after: 11.Nb3

11...Qxd1 12.Raxd1 b6!

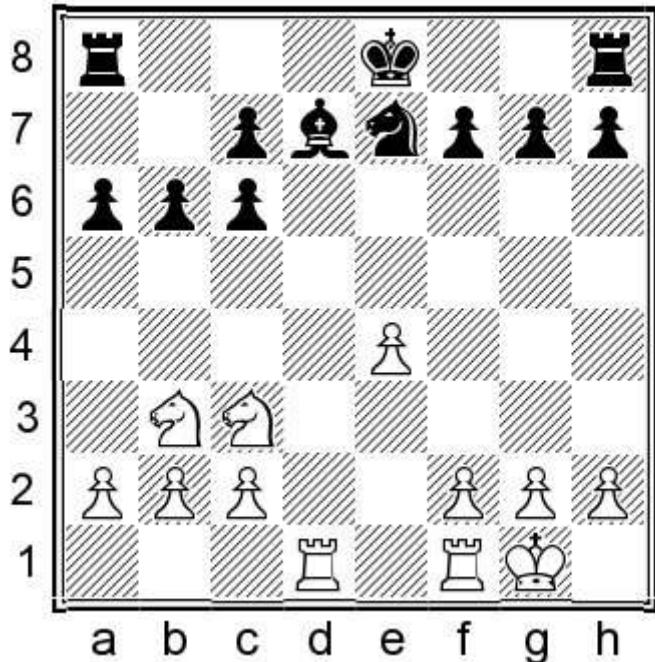
Accurate.

12...0-0-0 allows 13.Nc5 b6 14.Nxd7 Rxd7 15.Rxd7 Kxd7 16.Rd1+²



Position after: 16.Rd1+

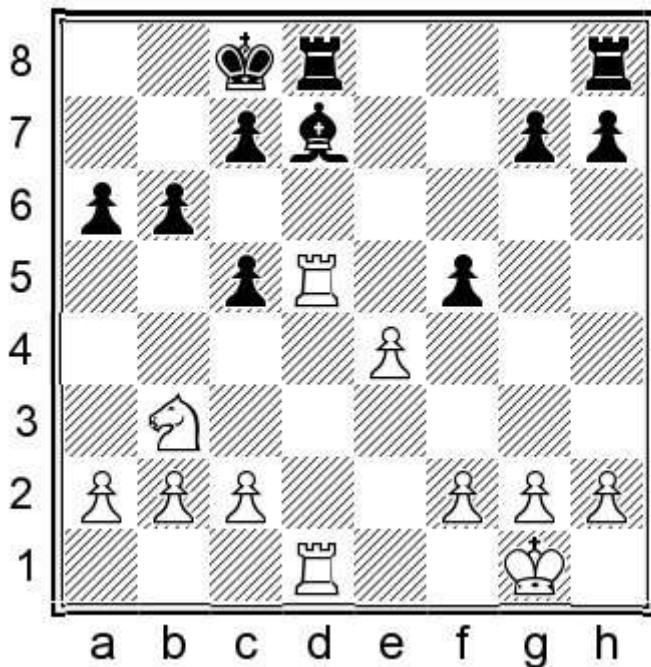
with a small advantage for White.



Position after: 12...b6!

13.f4

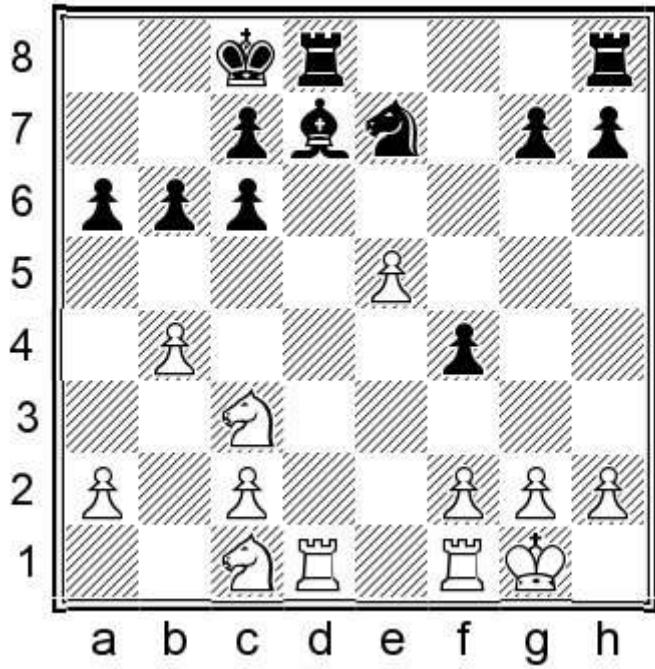
A) 13.Rd2 0-0-0 14.Rfd1 c5!? 15.Nd5 [15.Nc1 f5=] 15...Nxd5 16.Rxd5 f5!?



Position after: 16...f5!?

An elegant move, securing half a point. 17.exf5 Bxf5 18.Rxd8+ Rxd8 19.Rxd8+ Kxd8 20.c3 Be6 and a draw was soon agreed in Leko – Carlsen, Moscow 2007.

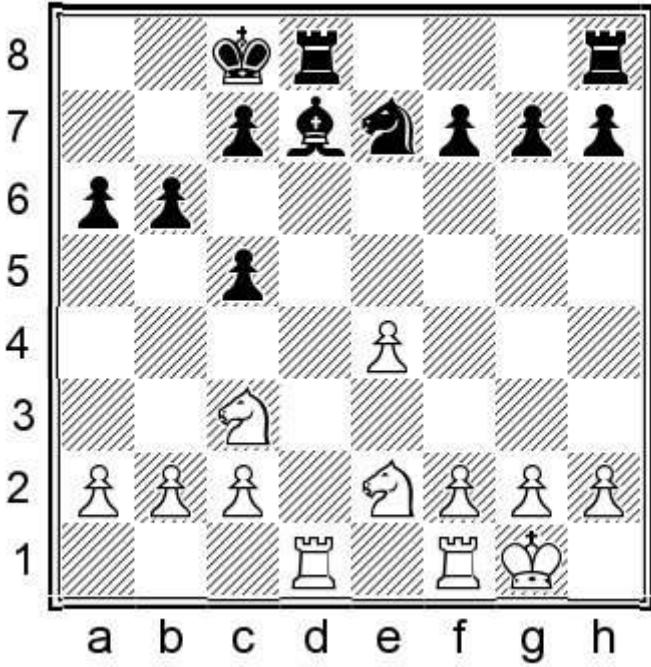
B) 13.Nc1 0-0-0 14.b4 [14.Nd3 c5=] 14...f5!? This is a bit more challenging for White, as Black is very comfortably placed everywhere, e.g. [14...Be6 15.f3 Rd6 16.Kf2 Rhd8= was also good enough in Naiditsch, A (2685) – Grandelius, N (2525) Stockholm 2010] 15.Rfe1 [15.e5 f4!



Position after: 15...f4!

16.Nd3 Ng6 17.f3 Bf5] 15...fxe4 16.Nxe4 Bf5

C) 13.Nd4 c5 14.Nde2 0-0-0



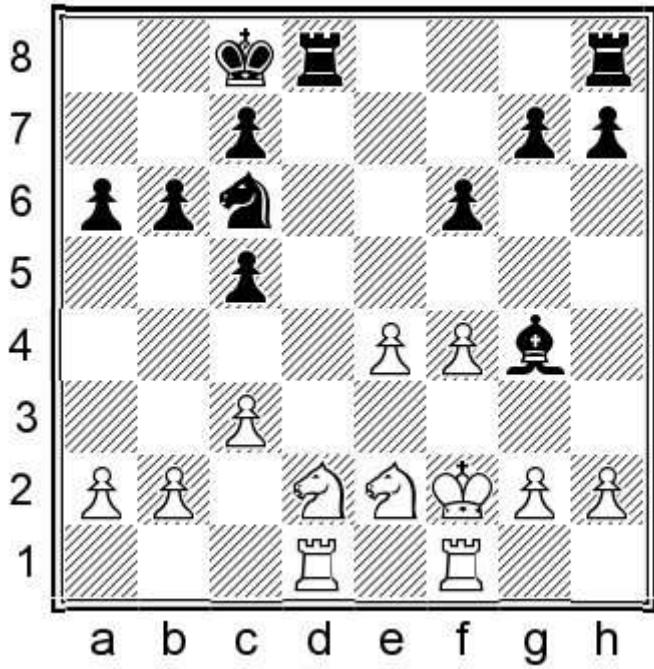
Position after: 14...0-0-0

15.Nf4 [15.Rd2 Bc6 16.Rfd1 f5 17.f3 Rxd2 18.Rxd2 fxe4 19.fxe4 Re8³ 0-1 (48) Socko, M (2445) – Kosteniuk, A (2534) Reykjavik 2015]
15...Nc6 16.Ncd5 f5 17.exf5 Bxf5,, Muse, D (2404) – Stern, R (2533) Berlin 2015.

13...0-0-0 14.f5

Gaining some space, but this also gives up control over the e5-square.

14.Kf2 c5 15.Nd2 Bg4 16.Ne2 Nc6 17.c3 f6,,



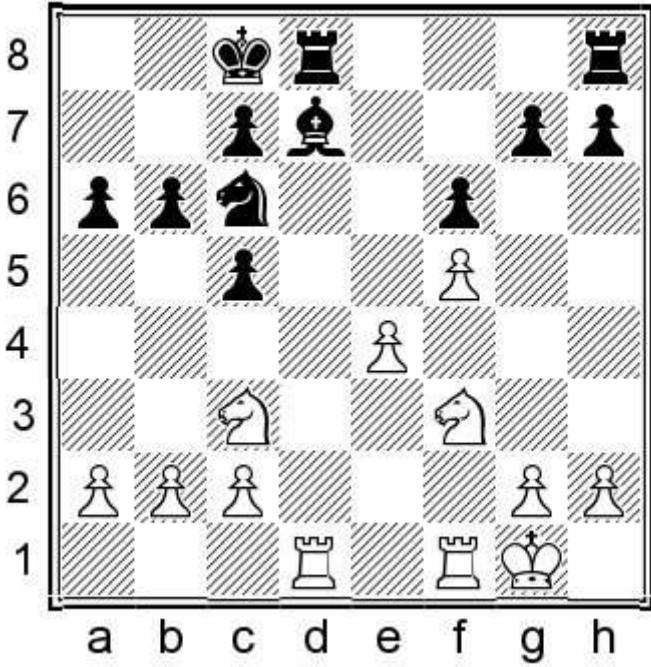
Position after: 17...f6,,

Glud – Schandorff, Silkeborg 2008

14...f6

14...c5 15.f6 gxf6 16.Rxf6 Be6 17.Nd2 Ng6 is a nice alternative.

15.Nd4 c5 16.Nf3 Nc6



Position after: 16...Nc6

17.Kf2

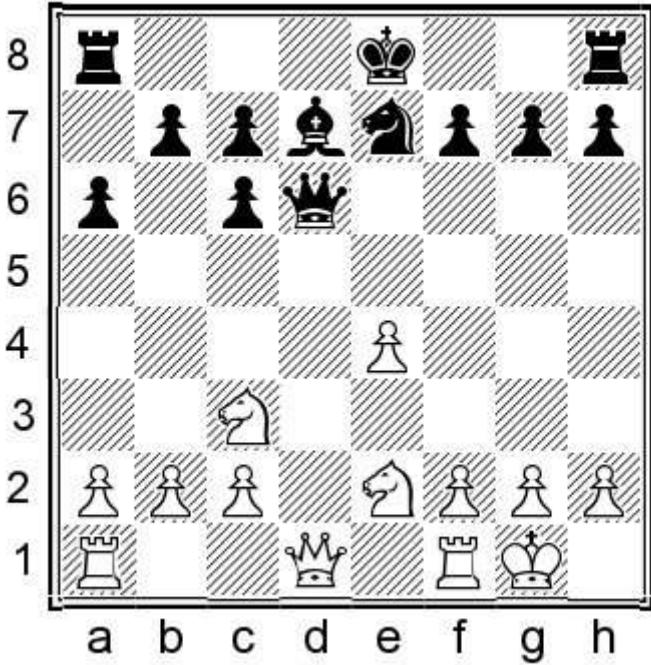
Or 17.Nd5 Rde8.

**17...Rde8! 18.Rfe1 Ne5 19.Nxe5 Rxe5 20.Rd3 Rhe8 21.g4 Bc6 22.Rh3 h6
23.Rhe3 b5 24.Kf3 h5³**

Black has played well and reached a comfortable endgame in L'Ami – De Jong, Hilversum 2008.

**k) 5.0-0 Qf6 6.d4 exd4 7.Bg5 Qd6 8.Nxd4 Be7 9.Bxe7 Nxe7
10.Nc3 Bd7 11.Nde2**

**1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Bxc6 dxc6 5.0-0 Qf6!? 6.d4 exd4 7.Bg5 Qd6
8.Nxd4 Be7 9.Bxe7 Nxe7 10.Nc3 Bd7! 11.Nde2**



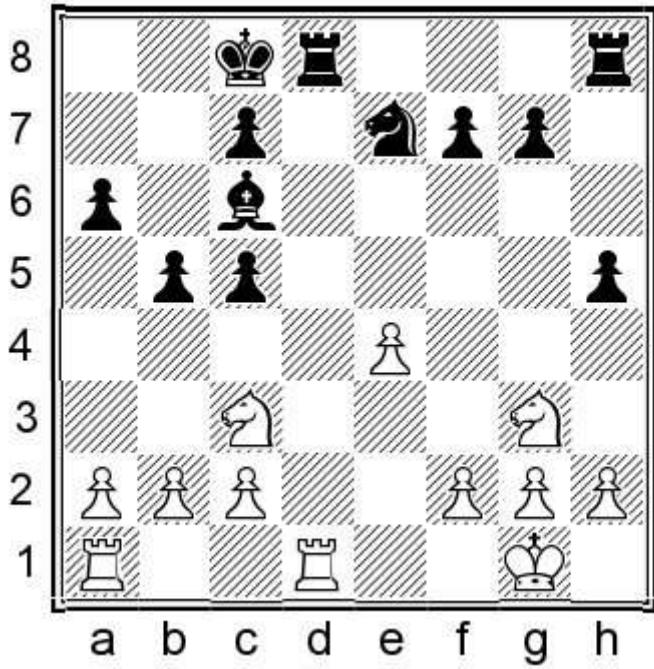
Position after: 11.Nde2

The most active spot for the knight.

11...0-0-0 12.Qc1

The most popular move. The queen is heading for the e3-square, from where she operates best.

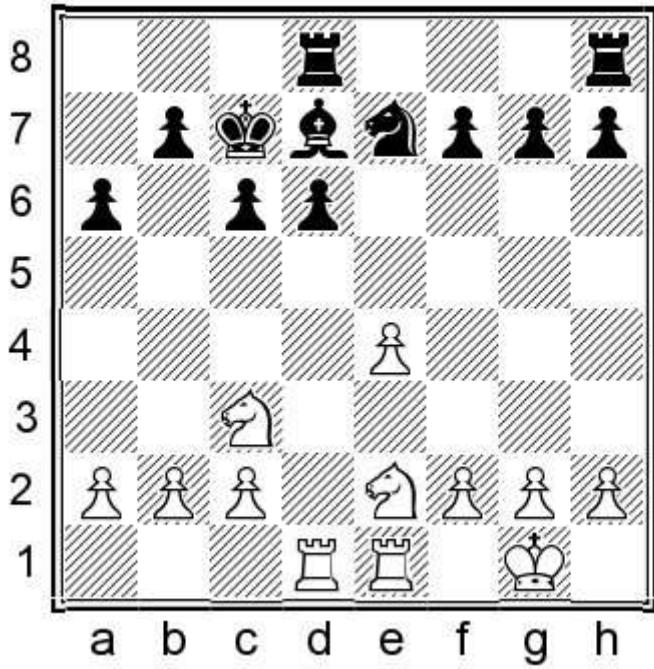
A) 12.Qd4 This loses time. 12...Qxd4 13.Nxd4 c5 14.Nde2 b5!? A very attractive plan: Black does not hesitate but starts an assault immediately. 15.Rfd1 Bc6 16.Ng3 h5!



Position after: 16...h5!

17.f3 h4 18.Nf1 b4 19.Rxd8+ Rxd8 20.Nd1 h3 21.Nf2 hxg2 22.Kxg2 f5
Meier – Ragger, Vienna 2005, was an impressive display of how to seize the initiative in a seemingly calm position.

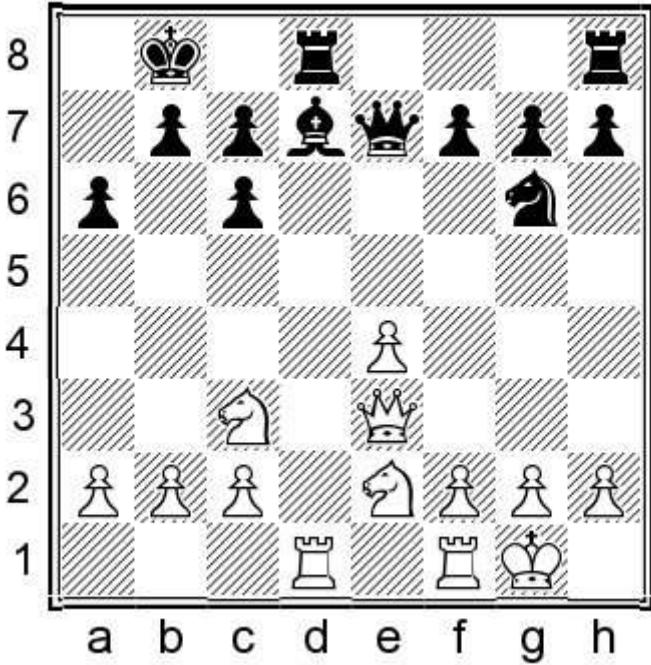
B) 12.Qxd6 A pretty boring continuation, though the equality is clean.
12...cx d6 13.Rad1 Kc7 14.Rfe1



Position after: 14.Rfe1

14...h5 Ambitious play. [14...Rhe8 is simpler. 15.f3 Ng6= was Safarli, E (2593) – Shankland, S (2705) Khanty – Mansiysk 2019 where a draw was soon signed.] 15.f3 h4 16.Rd2 Rh6 17.Nf4 Ng6 18.Nxg6 Rxg6 19.Kf2 Re8 20.Rde2 a5 21.a3 Rge6 and Black was very comfortable in Meier, G (2628) – Eljanov, P (2671) Dortmund 2021.

12...Ng6 13.Qe3 Kb8 14.Rad1 Qe7



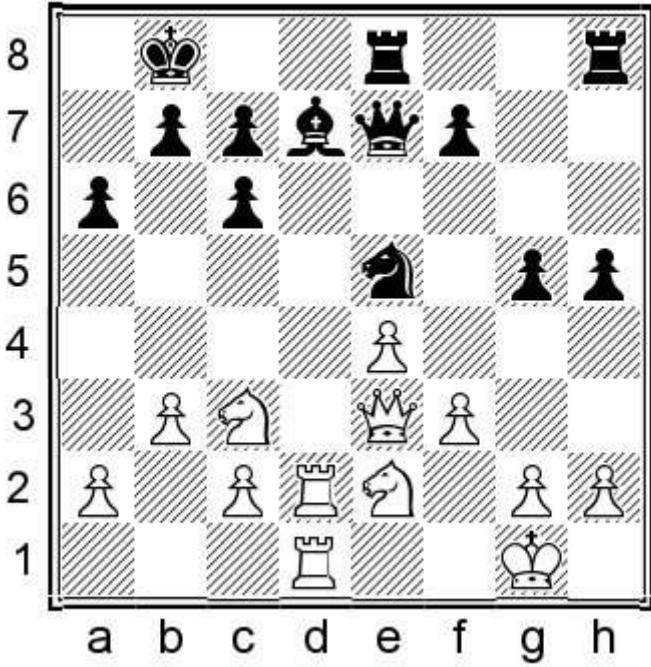
Position after: 14...Qe7

This setup is extremely effective. White lacks targets and Black slowly but surely starts to improve.

15.f4

This move should be played sooner rather than later.

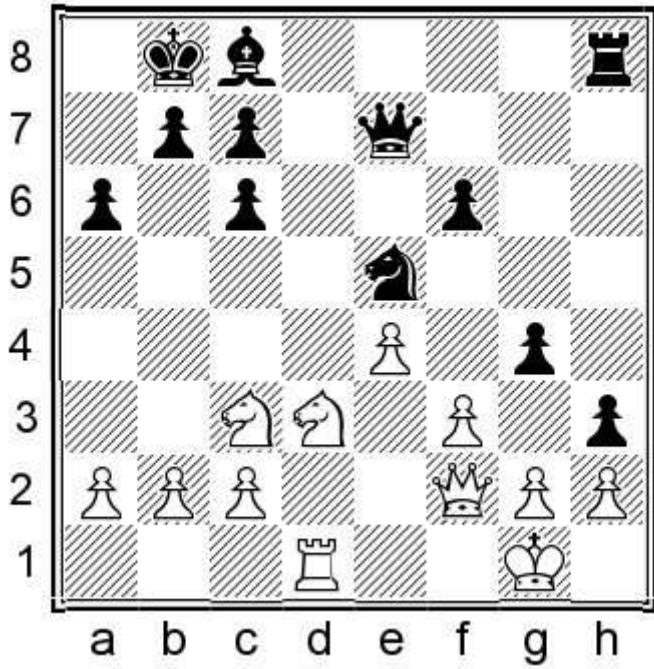
A) 15.Rd2 Ne5 16.b3 h5!? [16...Bc8 17.Rfd1 Rxd2 18.Rxd2 f6 19.f3 h5 20.Rd1 g5 21.Nc1 Re8 22.Nd3 b6 23.Ne2 c5 24.Nc3 Bb7 was already more than comfortable for Black in Radjabov – Adams, Baku 2008] 17.Rfd1 g5 18.f3 Rde8!



Position after: 18...Rde8!

would have been an even more effective way to play, it seems. White is struggling, e.g. 19.Nc1 f5! 20.Nd3 Nxd3 21.Rxd3 Bc8μ

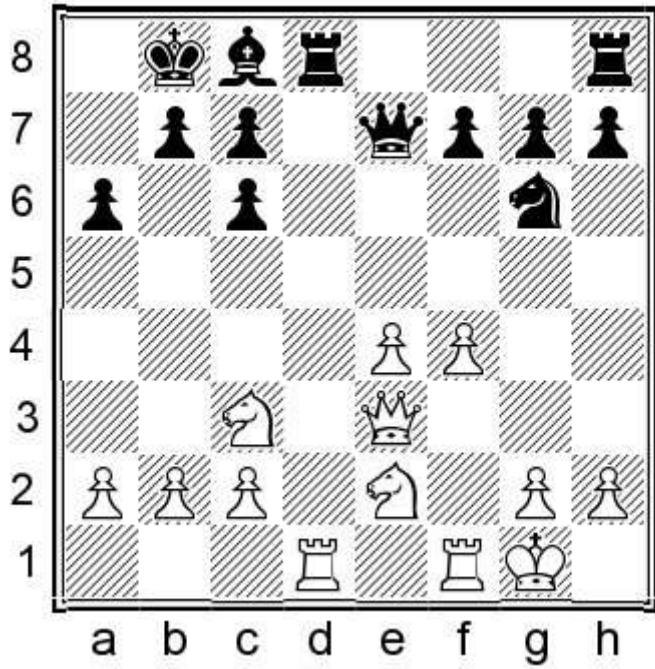
B) 15.Rd4 Bc8 16.Rfd1 [16.f4 Rxd4 17.Nxd4 f6³ would have been the lesser evil.] 16...Rxd4 17.Qxd4 f6 18.f3 White has decided to refrain from pushing f4 altogether, but it turns out to be a faulty idea. Black's play is really instructive! 18...h5 19.Qe3 Ne5 20.Qd4 A clear sign of lacking a plan. 20...g5 21.Nc1 h4 22.Qf2 g4 23.Nd3 h3



Position after: 23...h3

24.f4 Nxd3 25.Rxd3 f5 26.Qd4 fxe4 27.Qxe4 Qf8! A small, passive-looking move and... best, of course. White is helpless. 28.Qe5 hxg2 29.Rd2 Rh7 30.Rxg2 Re7 31.Qd4 Re1+ 32.Kf2 Qe7 33.Rg3 Rh1 White had no chances to save this game 0-1 Turner, M (2521) – Adams, M (2694) Daventry 2020.

15...Bc8!

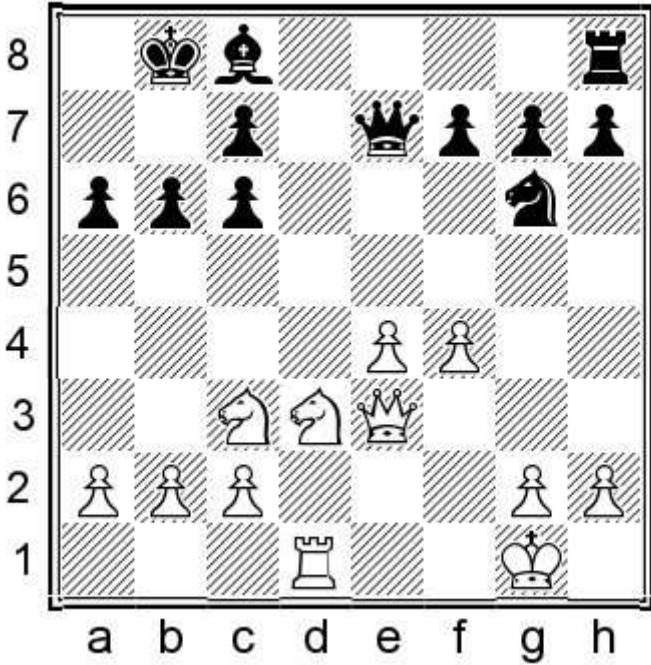


Position after: 15...Bc8!

16.Nc1 Rxd1

16...b6 was maybe a tiny bit better.

17.Rxd1 b6 18.Nd3



Position after: 18.Nd3

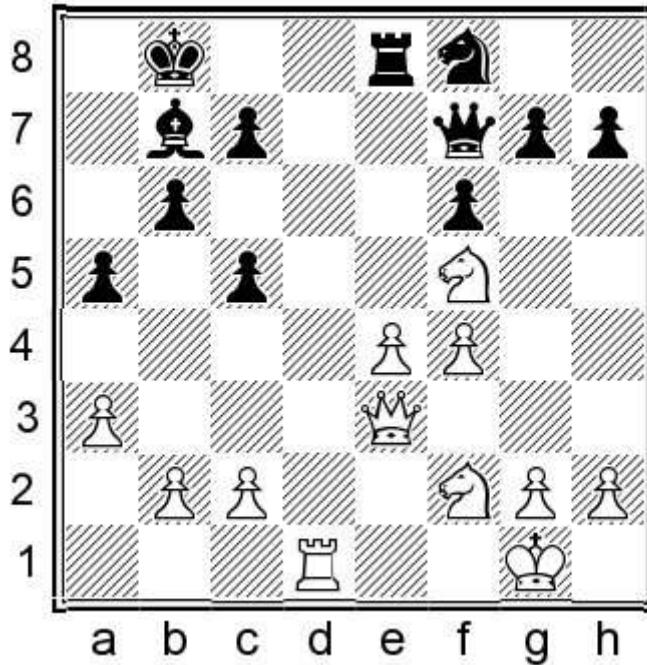
18...a5

18...f5 is an alternative idea, to fix the centre right away. 19.Re1 [If 19.e5 Qe6 planning to push ...c5 and then ...Bb7.] 19...Re8 20.Qf2 Qf7 21.exf5 Rxe1+ 22.Qxe1 Bxf5 23.g3 Kb7 and Black's king is safer.

19.Re1 Ba6 20.Nf2 Re8 21.a3 f6

I find this position hilarious. White still has the better structure, normal coordination, and yet is unable to do anything. Meanwhile, Black has ways to improve.

22.Ne2 Bb7 23.Ng3 c5 24.Nf5 Qf7 25.Rd1 Nf8



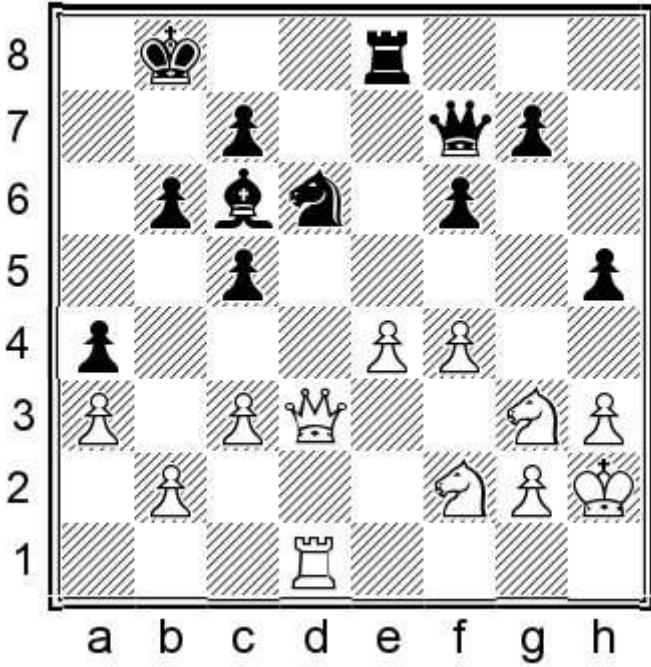
Position after: 25...Nf8

Black's last piece is searching for a more effective spot...

26.c3 a4 27.h3 Ne6 28.Ng3 Bc6 29.Rd2 Nd8!!

...and found one, heading via b7 towards d6-c4 or a5-c4. White is practically lost already, which is just shocking.

30.Qd3 Nb7 31.Kh2 Nd6 32.Rd1 h5!



Position after: 32...h5!

The e4 pawn is chronically ill.

33.Re1 h4 34.Nf1 Qb3

And the b2 pawn too.

35.e5 fxe5 36.fxe5 Qxb2!

Some finesse in the end.

37.Re2 Qb5!

The point.

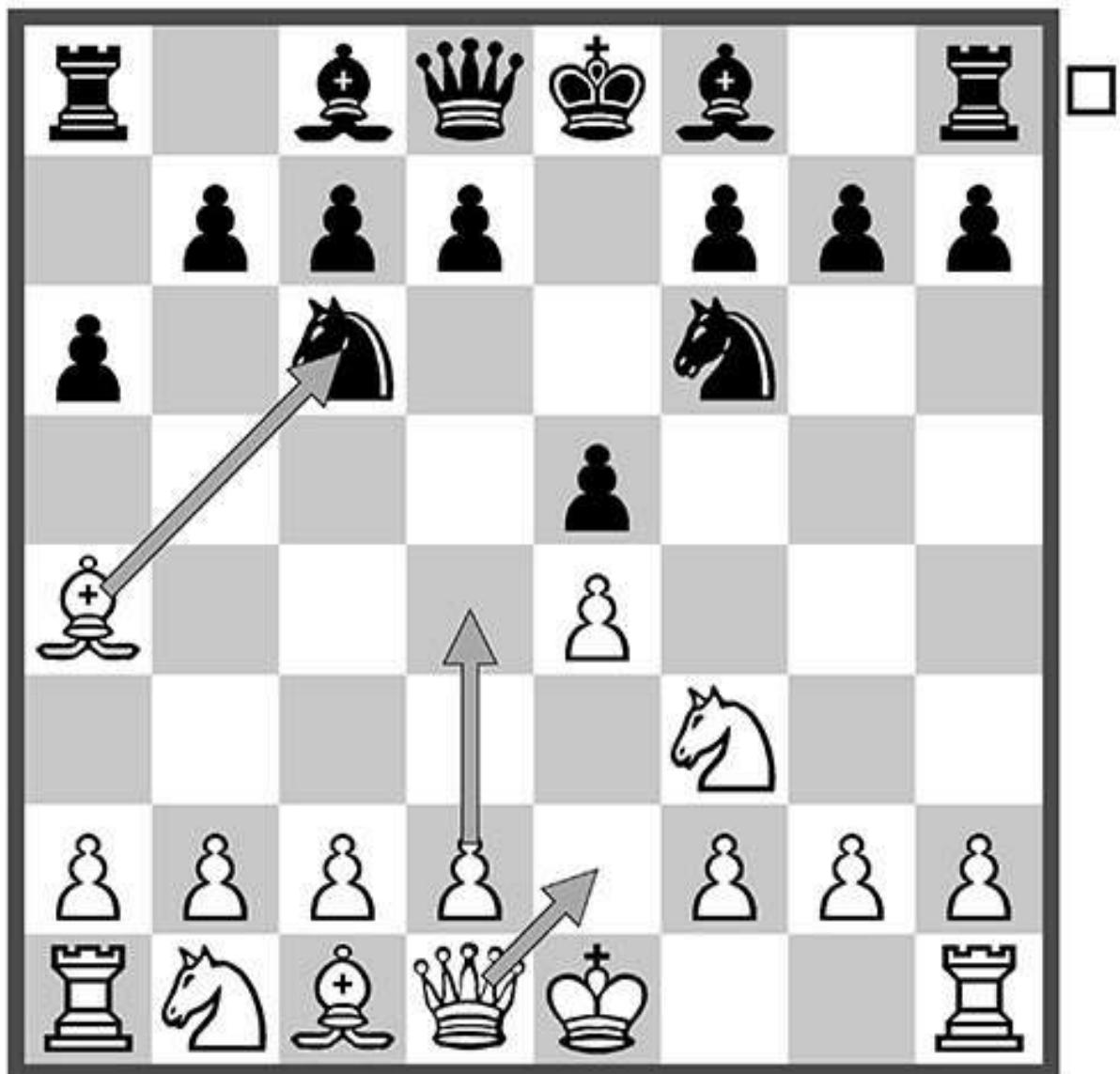
38.Qc2 Nc4 39.e6 Nxa3

White resigned, 0-1 Naiditsch, A (2695) – Svidler, P (2735) Karlsruhe/Baden Baden 2019 This game is one of the best positional achievements I have ever seen in the Ruy Lopez and one more reason for us to feel confident choosing this line!

Chapter 2

Sidelines on the 5th Move

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.--



Chapter Guide

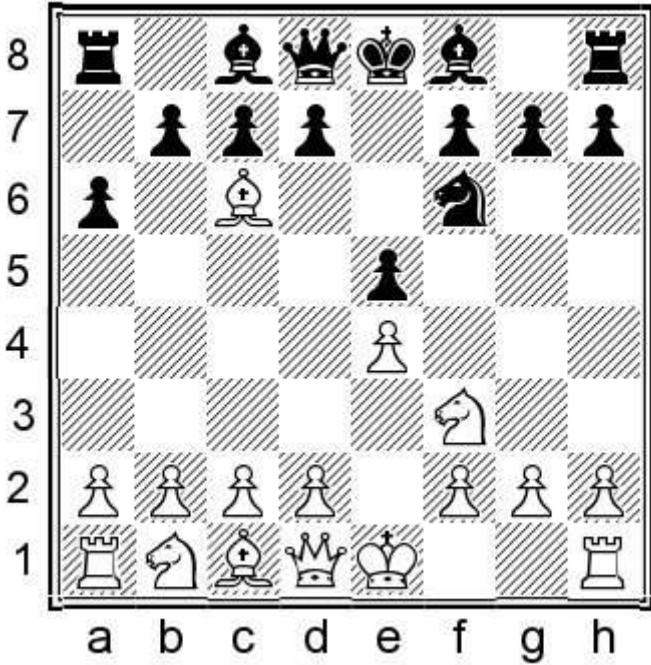
Chapter 2 – Sidelines on the 5th Move

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.--

- a) 5.Bxc6
- b) 5.d4 exd4 6.e5
- c) 5.d4 exd4 6.0-0 Be7 7.Qe2
- d) 5.d4 exd4 6.0-0 Be7 7.Re1
- e) 5.d4 exd4 6.0-0 Be7 7.e5
- f) 5.Qe2 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.0-0
- g) 5.Qe2 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.d3
- h) 5.Qe2 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4
- i) 5.Qe2 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 0-0 8.--
- j) 5.Qe2 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 0-0 8.d3 d5
- k) 5.Qe2 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 0-0 8.d3 Re8

a) 5.Bxc6

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.Bxc6

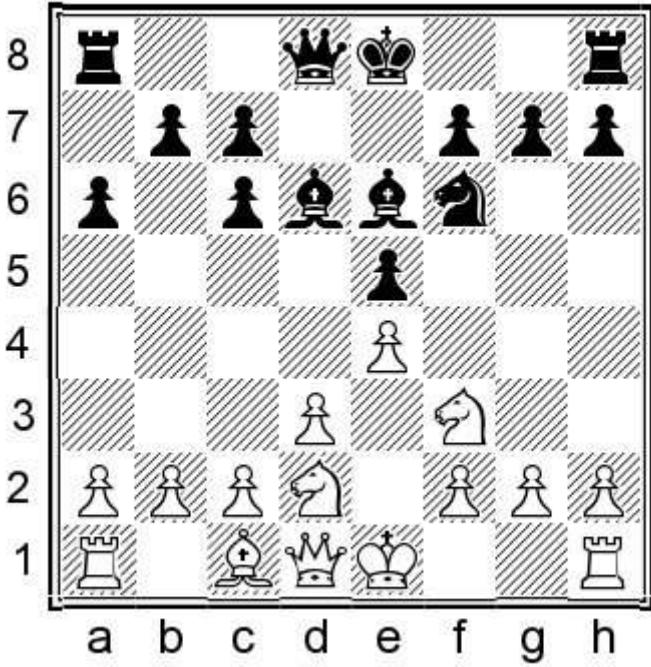


Position after: 5.Bxc6

This exchange makes the ‘honorable mention’ category. It makes little sense (at least to me) to make two moves in a row with the same piece in the very early stage of an opening if it’s not forced. The idea is similar to the line starting with 5.0-0 Be7 6.Bxc6, but at least there Black has committed the bishop too, and protecting e5 is an issue. Nevertheless, that line is also rare and rather harmless, so I believe we should only have a look at how to develop as that’s all this line deserves.

5...dxc6 6.d3 Bd6 7.Nbd2 Be6

7...0-0!? is a nice alternative, as 8.Nc4 can be answered by 8...b5!? 9.Ne3 [9.Nxd6 cxd6 10.h3=; 9.Ncxe5? Qe8! 10.d4 c5 11.0-0 Bb7μ] 9...Ng4! 10.Nxg4 [10.0-0 Nxe3 11.Bxe3 c5] 10...Bxg4 11.h3 Bd7=



Position after: 7...Be6

8.Nf1

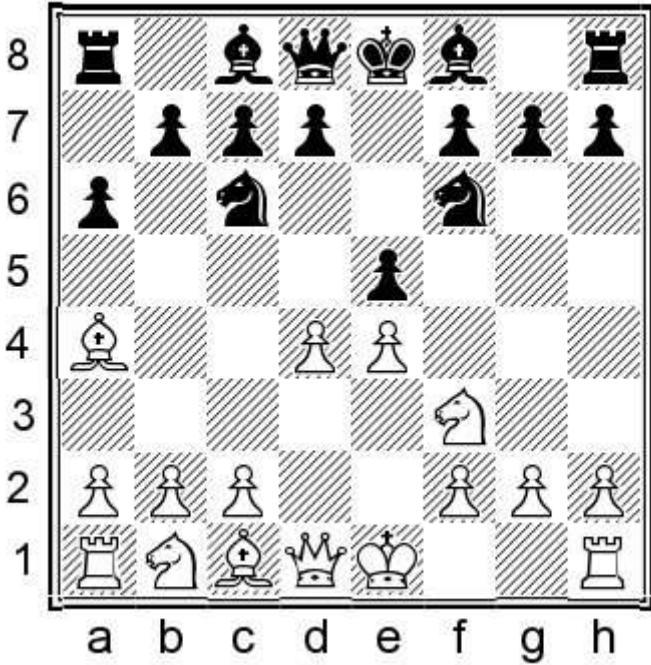
8.0-0 Nd7 9.Re1 Qe7 10.Nf1 f6 11.a3 a5!? [11...g5 was already quite possible too. 12.Ne3 h5] 12.b3?! 0-0 13.Bb2 a4 14.b4 c5³ was better for Black in Acs, P (2588) – Nemeth, M (2494) Hungary 2018.

8...h6 9.Ne3 Nd7 10.Qe2 c5 11.Bd2 g6 12.0-0 Qe7 13.a3 0-0-0 14.b4 f5,,

Pavlovic, M (2531) – Sargissian, G (2693) Valjevo 2012.

b) 5.d4 exd4 6.e5

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.d4

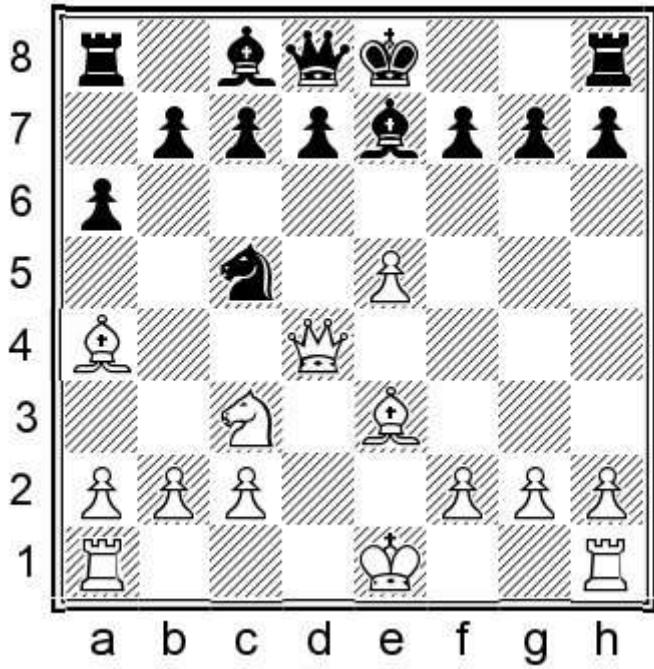


Position after: 5.d4

The starting position of the central variation in the Ruy Lopez. It's probably one of the least interesting side lines as it has very drawish tendencies in almost all variations (7.e5 is the only sound one). It is mostly used by players who tend to avoid serious theoretical discussions and just want to survive the opening, not fearing dry, equal positions. Due to this factor, I've decided to keep our repertoire as simple as possible.

5...exd4

I was experimenting with the slightly surprising 5...Nxd4!? but I didn't like the fact that after 6.Nxd4 exd4 7.e5 Ne4 8.Qxd4 Nc5 9.Nc3 Be7 10.Be3!



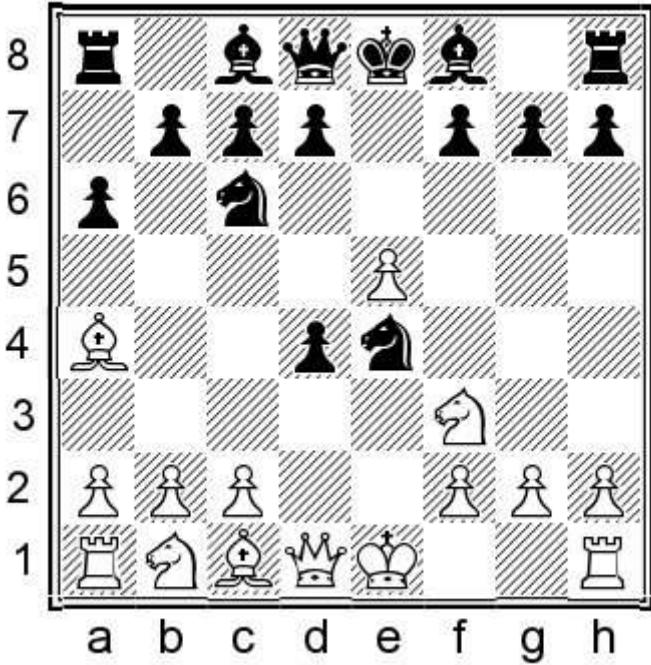
Position after: 10.Be3!

(This is almost a novelty.) 10...0-0 11.0-0-0 Black is yet to equalize fully.

6.e5?!

The wrong move order, giving Black additional possibilities.

6...Ne4



Position after: 6...Ne4

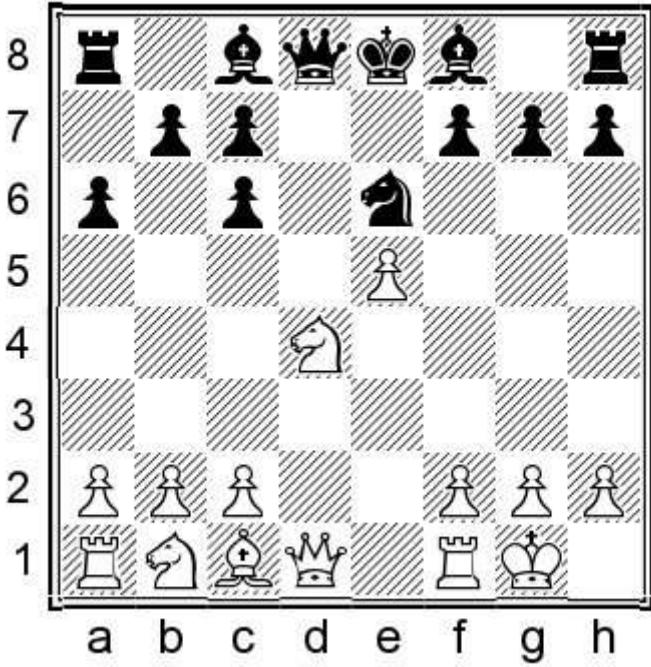
7.0-0

7.Nxd4? is even a mistake, as Black gets a very strong attack after 7...Nxf2! 8.Kxf2 Qh4+ 9.Ke3 b5 10.Bb3 [10.g3 Qe7 11.Bb3 Qxe5+] 10...Bc5 11.c3 0-0 [Or 11...Bb7]

7...Nc5

This move makes use of the inaccuracy, but we can simply play 7...Be7 instead, transposing to 6.0-0 Be7 7.e5 Ne4. The next short example demonstrates how easily things can go wrong here:

8.Bxc6 dxc6 9.Nxd4 Ne6!



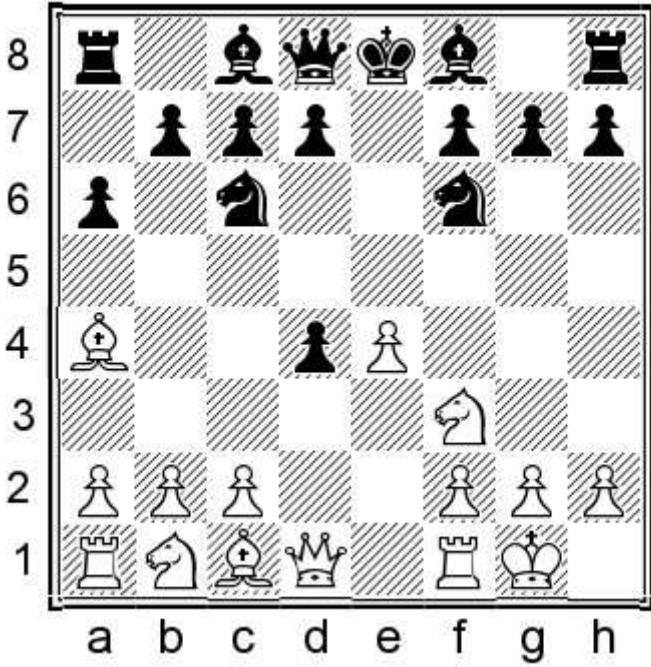
Position after: 9...Ne6!

10.Be3? Nxd4 11.Bxd4 Bf5µ

With an amazing Berlin-type structure, Black had a big advantage in Tomczak, R (2374) – Banusz, T (2595) Germany 2015.

c) 5.d4 exd4 6.0-0 Be7 7.Qe2

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.d4 exd4 6.0-0



Position after: 6.0-0

6...Be7 7.Qe2?!

This move has only been seen in a couple of games, and probably for good reason.

7...0-0

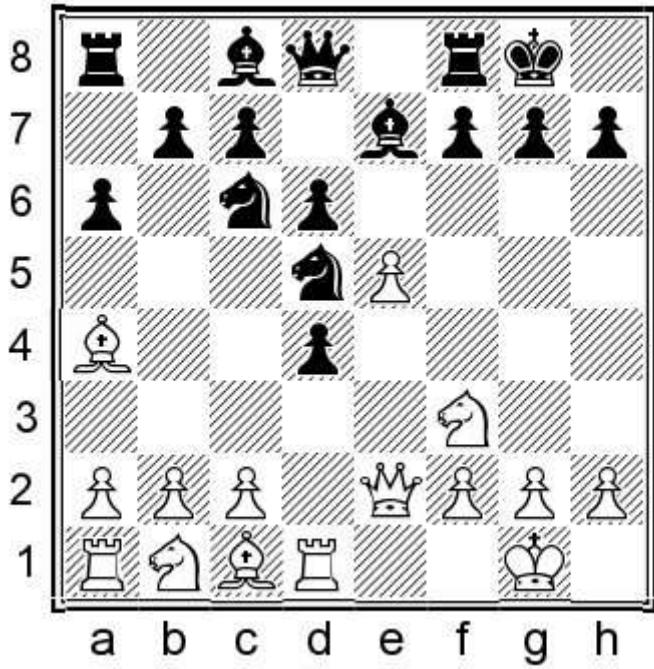
7...b5!? 8.Bb3 d6 also makes sense.

8.e5 Nd5 9.Rd1

9.Bb3 Nb6 10.c3 dxc3 11.Nxc3 d6! doesn't look enough for White.

9...d6!

White achieved an interesting game after some creative play in Gharamian, T (2657) – Fressinet, L (2708) Nimes 2014.

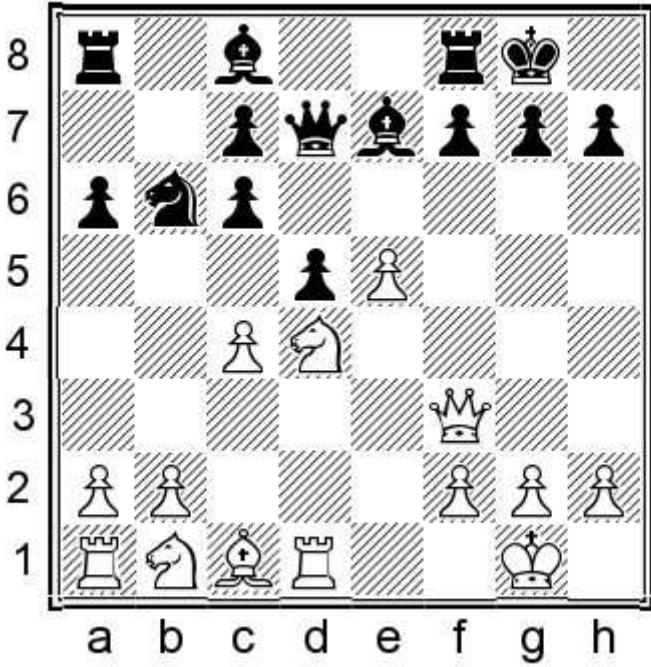


Position after: 9...d6!

10.Bxc6

10.c4 Nb6 11.Bxc6 bxc6 12.Nxd4 Qd7 is the same.

10...bxc6 11.Nxd4 Qd7! 12.c4 Nb6 13.Qf3 d5!

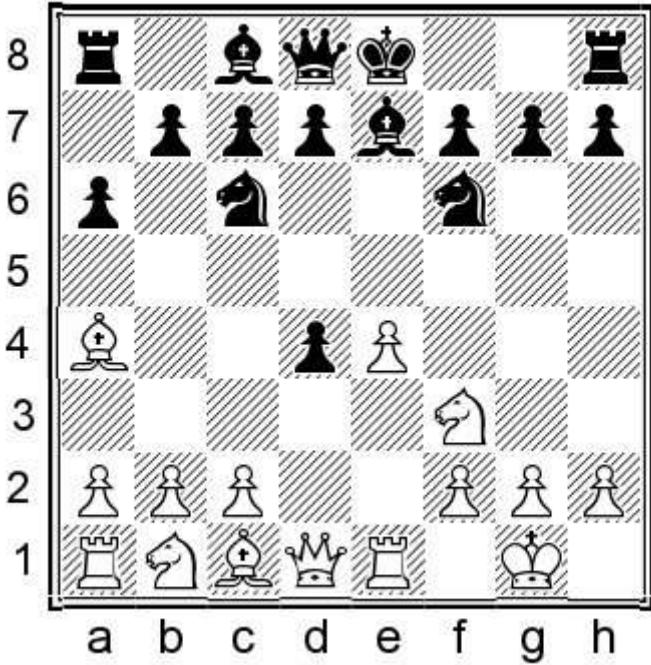


Position after: 13...d5!

This line was given as promising for Black by Mikhalevski.

d) 5.d4 exd4 6.0-0 Be7 7.Re1

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.d4 exd4 6.0-0 Be7 7.Re1?!



Position after: 7.Re1?!

Going by ‘numbers’, this is supposed to be the main line, though objectively-speaking it’s already very questionable. Black players figured out relatively early how to counter it, and White very often ends up struggling. I will concentrate on some of the main ideas and won’t go into too much detail, as it’s not worth it.

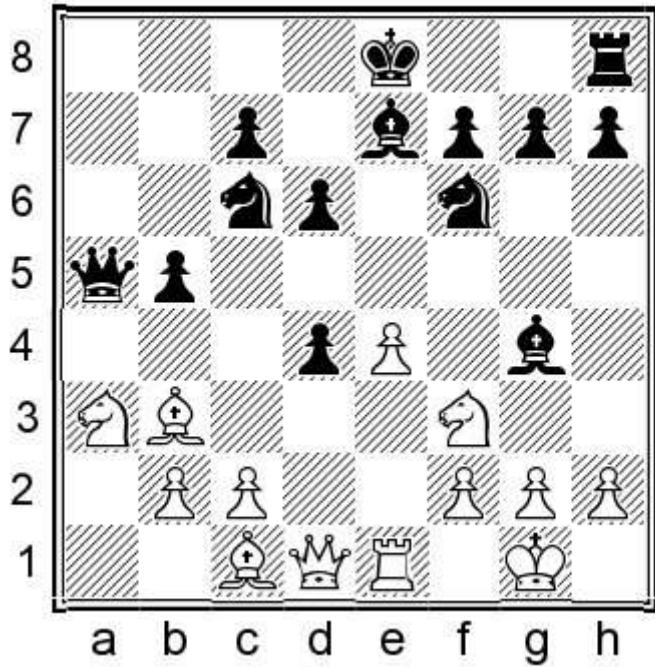
7...b5 8.e5

This push has gone almost completely extinct – only the Czech GM, Vojtech Plat, seems to have sustained his beliefs.

8.Bb3 d6

A) 9.Nxd4?? drops a piece to 9...Nxd4 10.Qxd4 c5–+

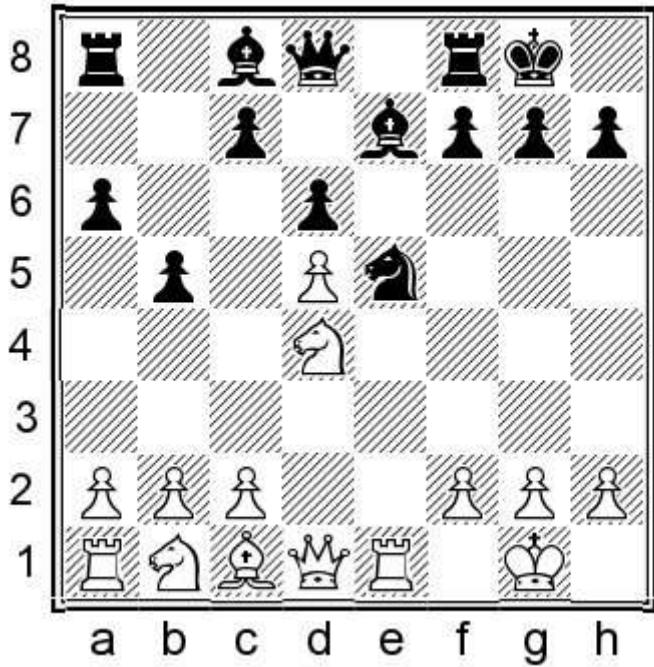
B) 9.a4?! is sometimes played, but it feels super-slow under these circumstances: 9...Bg4! 10.axb5 axb5 11.Rxa8 Qxa8 12.Na3 [12.Qd3!? Bxf3 13.Qxf3 0-0³] 12...Qa5!



Position after: 12...Qa5!

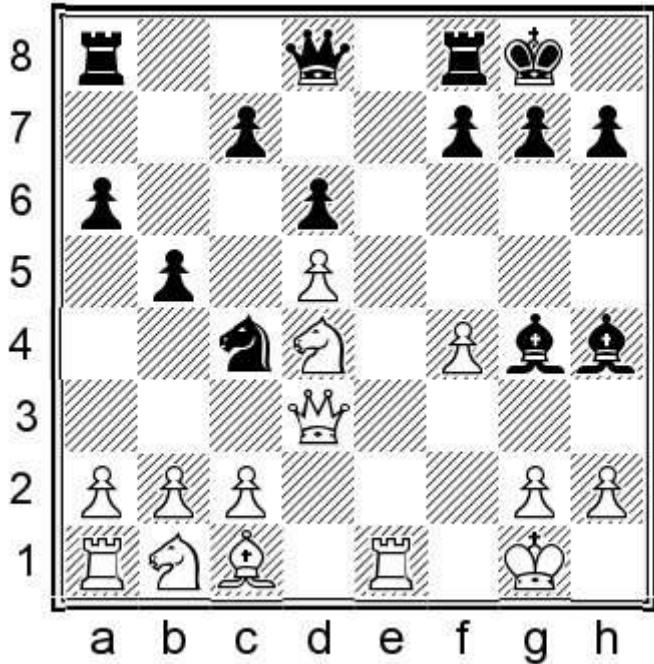
and Black was already considerably better in Volokitin – Dorfman, Bad Wiessee 2001

C) 9.Bd5 The only serious idea here. 9...Nxd5 10.exd5 Ne5 11.Nxd4 [11.Nxe5? dxе5 12.Rxe5 0-0 is just horrible.] 11...0-0



Position after: 11...0-0

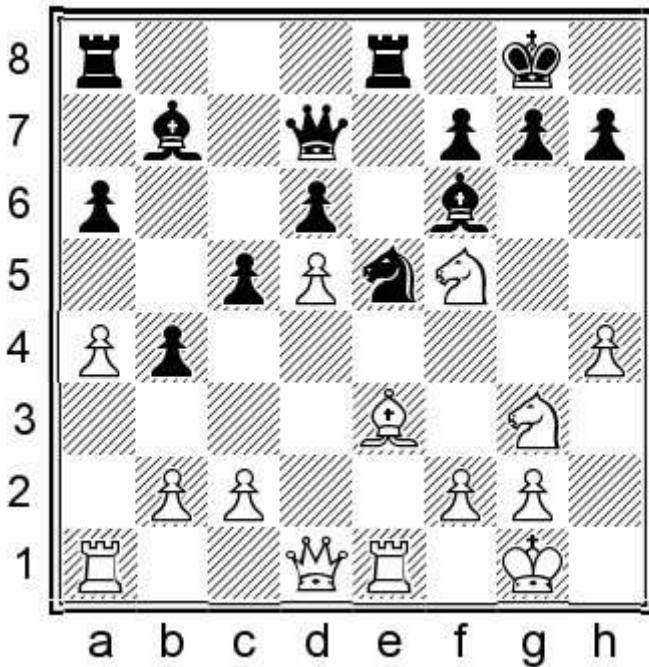
C1) 12.f4?! A very concrete question is asked, but it fails to deliver for White. 12...Bg4 13.Qd2 Nc4 14.Qd3 Bh4!



Position after: 14...Bh4!

15.Rf1 [15.g3 Bf6μ] 15...Bf6 16.Nd2 and now Black is doing great after both 16...Qb8 and 16...c5.

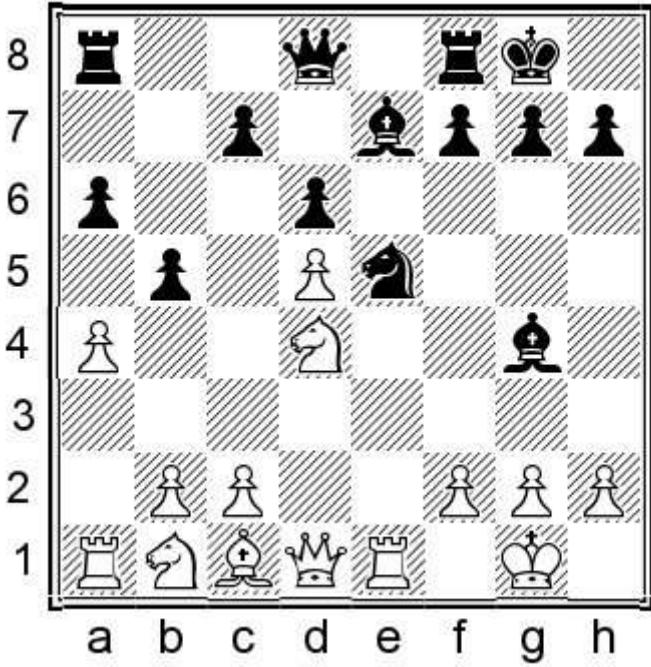
C2) 12.Nc3 Re8! 13.a4 b4 14.Ne4 Bb7 15.Nf5 Qd7! 16.Neg3 [16.Nxe7+?! Accepting the fact that things have gone wrong. 16...Rxe7 17.Bg5 Ree8 18.f3 f5 19.Ng3 Qf7!μ Timman – Spassky, Hilversum 1983] 16...Bf6 17.Be3 would have been a more optimistic try, as 17...c5! 18.h4!?



Position after: 18.h4!?

...is not so easy in a practical game. [18.dxc6?! Qxc6 19.f3 Nc4μ] 18...Ng6 19.Qg4 [19.h5 Ne7μ] 19...Kh8 20.Rad1 is surprisingly not that easy either: 20...Bxb2 21.h5 Ne7 22.Bc1 Bc3 23.Bd2

C3) Black has the bishop pair and good development – the only problem is the weak c6-square. 12.a4 Bg4! Provoking some kind of a concession is always useful.



Position after: 12...Bg4!

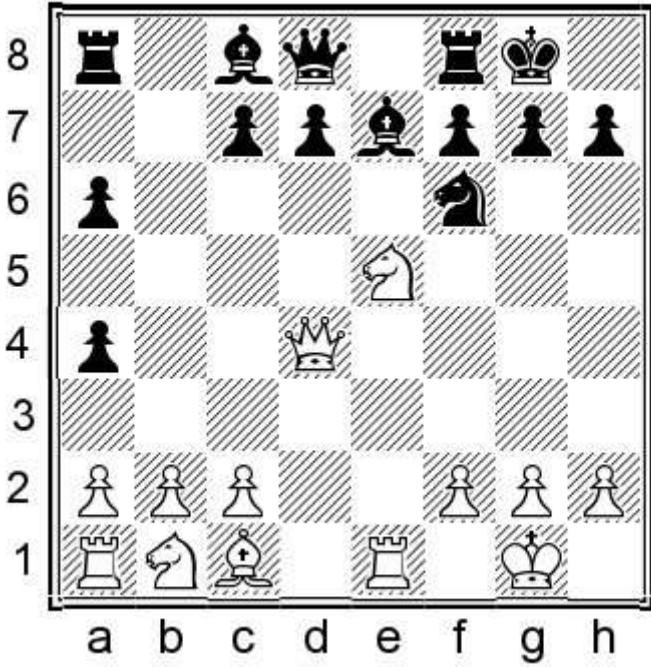
13.f3 Bd7 14.Nc3 b4 15.Ne4 Re8 16.b3 Bh4! A strong move. 17.g3 f5! The point of the previous move! Black is ready to open the kingside. 18.Nf2 [18.gxh4 fxe4 19.Bg5 Qc8 20.fxe4 Bg4 21.Qd2 h6 22.Bf4 Nf3+ 23.Nxf3 Bxf3μ] 18...Bf6 19.Bb2 Qb8! White is under serious pressure. 20.f4 Ng4 21.Rxe8+ Qxe8 22.Nxg4 fxg4 23.Qd3 Qf7! 24.Qc4 Re8+ Black has played perfectly and achieved a winning position in Zapata – Bruzón, Merida 2006.

8...Nxe5!

This eliminates White's greatest hopes. Objectively the whole line proves to be very comfortable for us, and this has been confirmed in practice.

9.Rxe5

9.Nxe5 bxa4 10.Qxd4 0-0

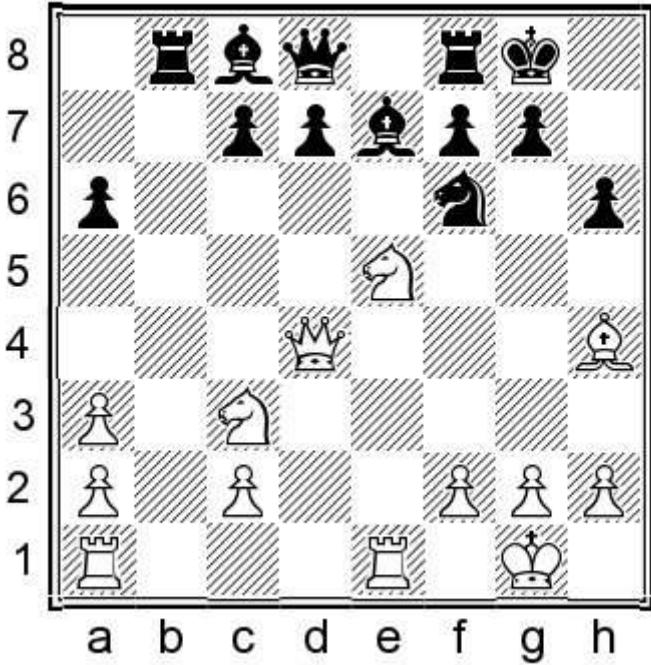


Position after: 10...0-0

A) 11.Nc3 a3!?

A1) 12.b4 Rb8 13.Nd3 [13.Bxa3? a5! 14.Qa7 Bb7μ Plat – Votava, Czech Republic 2008] 13...d6 14.Bxa3 Bf5³ was mentioned by Mikhalevski; Black is simply better, thanks to the bishop pair.

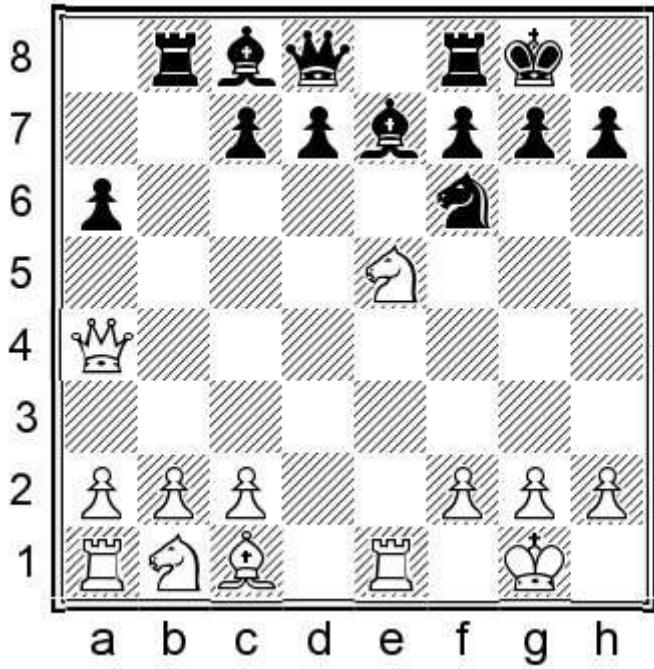
A2) 12.bxa3! Rb8 13.Bg5 h6 14.Bh4



Position after: 14.Bh4

I have faced this line in an online blitz game, and for those games this is a legitimate line, but for normal ones, I doubt it very much. Black should be fine after 14...Rb6! e.g. 15.Rad1 [15.Ng4 Re8 16.Rxe7 Qxe7 17.h3 Bb7 18.Bxf6 Rxf6 19.Nxf6+ Qxf6 20.Qxf6 gxf6 21.Rd1 Bc6³] 15...Re6 16.f4 Bb7 17.Qa7 Qc8! 18.f5 [18.Nxd7 Rxe1+ 19.Rxe1 Qxd7 20.Qxb7 Ng4!] 18...Rd6 19.Ng4 Nxg4 20.Bxe7 Rxd1 21.Nxd1 Re8 22.Qd4 Nf6 23.Qh4 Nd5 24.f6 d6μ

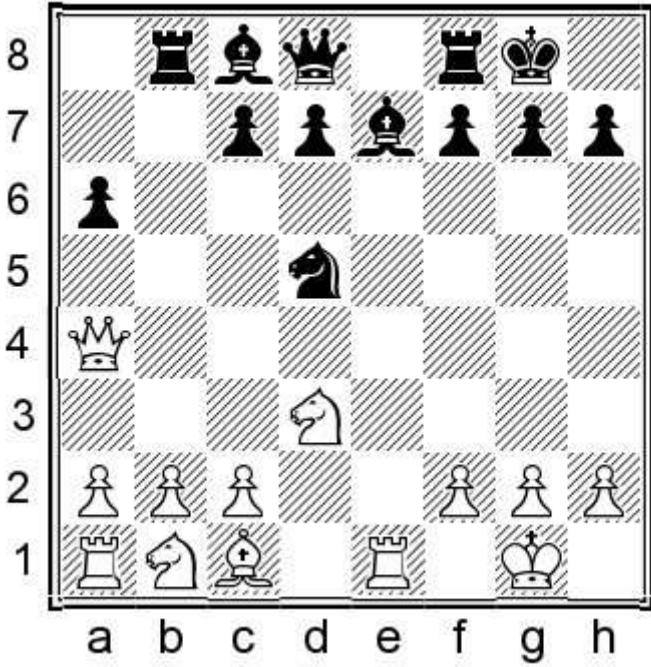
B) 11.Qxa4 Rb8!



Position after: 11...Rb8!

Black is very active, so White needs to play carefully.

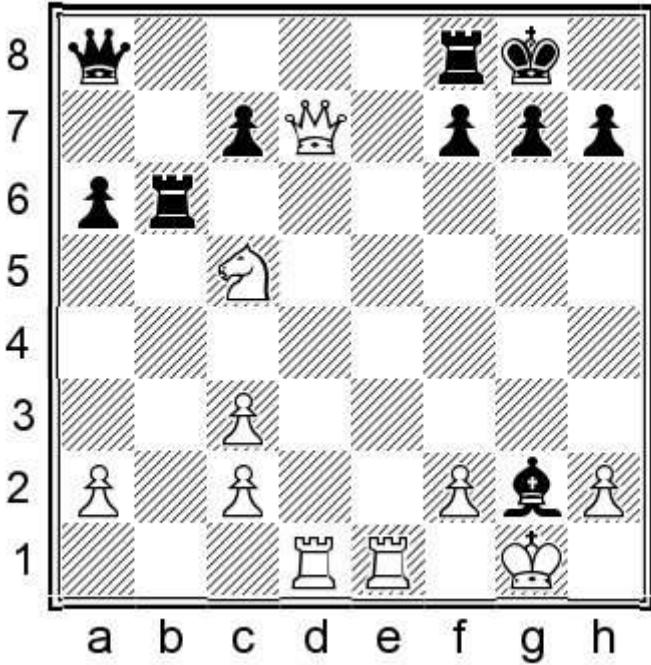
B1) 12.Nd3 Passive, but possibly best. 12...Nd5!? An interesting knight jump. Both 12...Bb7 and 12...d5 are good too.



Position after: 12...Nd5!?

B1.1) 13.Qe4?! Nb4! This is our trick. 14.Nxb4 [14.Qxe7? Qxe7 15.Rxe7 Nxc2 16.Na3 Nxa1 17.Bd2 d6 18.Re1 Bf5 19.Nb4 Nc2 20.Naxc2 Bxc2 21.Nxc2 Rxb2–+] 14...Bxb4 15.Nc3 d5³

B1.2) 13.Bd2 Bf6 14.Nc3 [14.Na3?! happened in a classic game. In Reshevsky – Unzicker, Dubrovnik 1950, Black was better after 14...d6 15.Qa5 Bb7 16.c4 Nb6.] 14...Nxc3 15.Bxc3 Bxc3 16.bxc3 Rb6!? is a typical way to activate the queen's rook in this variation; Black has a neat idea in mind. 17.Rad1 [17.Rab1=] 17...Bb7 18.Nc5? [18.f3 h6= is equal, but once again 19.Nc5? fails, this time to 19...Bxf3!; 18.Qf4 Rf6=] This looks obvious, but we have the beautiful 18...Bxg2! 19.Qxd7 [19.Kxg2 Qg5+ 20.Kf1 Qxc5 is a pawn up, while 19.Nxd7 Rg6 20.Nxf8 Bf3+ 21.Nxg6 Qg5+ mates.] 19...Qa8!

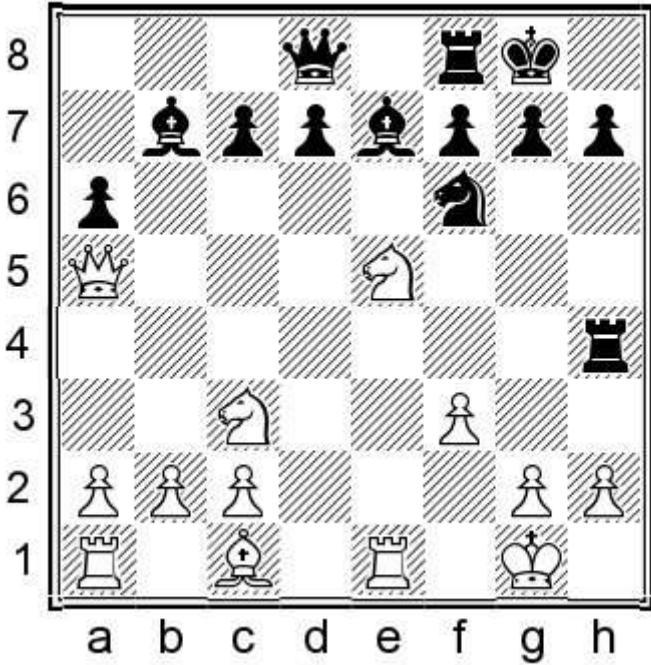


Position after: 19...Qa8!

Black has a decisive advantage.

B2) 12.c3?! This stops ...Rb4, but neglects development. 12...Re8 13.Nd2 Bd6 14.Ndf3 Rb5 15.Bf4 Bb7 16.Bg3 Re6³ was better for Black in Plat, V (2447) – Gonda, L (2538) Pardubice 2013.

B3) 12.Nc3 Rb4! 13.Qa5 Bb7 Black has a very nice initiative already. For example: 14.f3 Rh4!



Position after: 14...Rh4!

15.Nd3 Rh5!

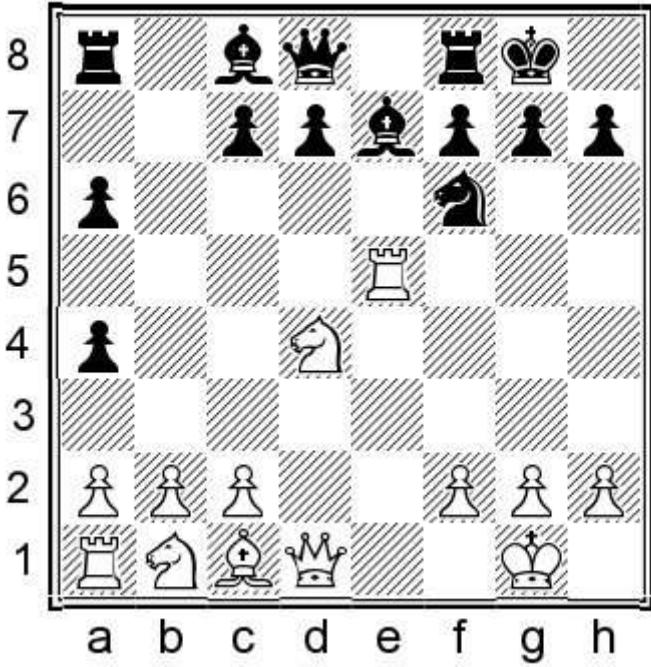
B3.1) 16.Qa4 Bd6! 17.Bf4 Rh4 18.g3 Rxf4! 19.Nxf4 [19.gxf4 Bxf3] 19...Bxf3,

B3.2) 16.Re5 Rxe5 17.Qxe5 Re8 18.Bg5 h6 19.Bh4 d6 20.Qa5 [20.Qe2 g5 21.Bf2 Bf8f] 20...Ng4!? 21.Bxe7 Qxe7 22.fxg4 Qe3+ 23.Kf1 Re6,

9...bxa4

9...d6 is also fine, but the text is a bit simpler.

10.Nxd4 0-0



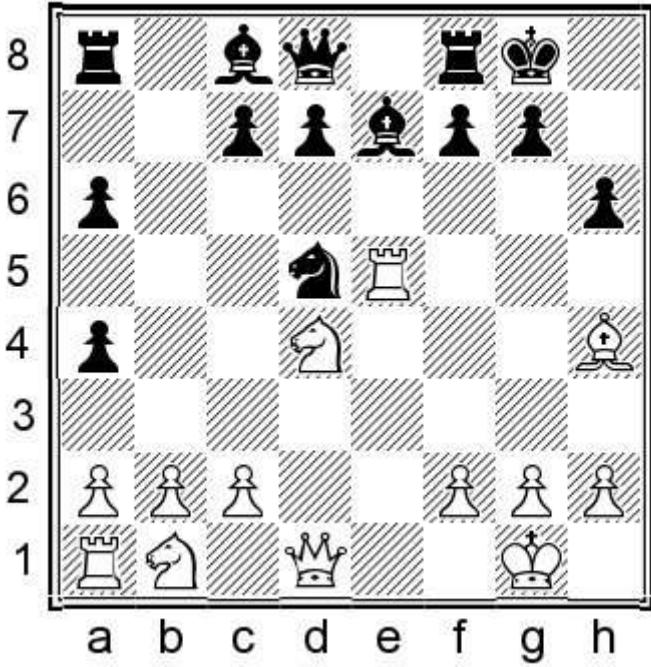
Position after: 10...0-0

11.Nf5

This should be critical.

A) 11.Qf3?! Rb8 12.Nf5 Bd6! 13.Nxd6 cxd6 looks very good for Black.

B) 11.Bg5?! is also pretty good for us, e.g. 11...h6 12.Bh4 [12.Nf5 Bd6! 13.Nxd6 cxd6 14.Bxf6 Qxf6] 12...Nd5!

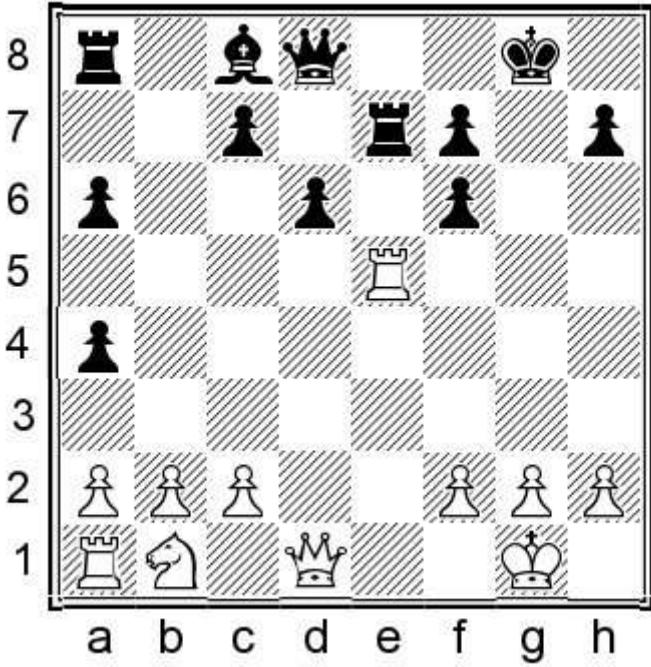


Position after: 12...Nd5!

This idea is worth remembering. 13.Bxe7 [13.Nc3 Bxh4 14.Nxd5 c6] 13...Nxe7 14.Nc3 d6µ

C) 11.Nc3!? Bd6 12.Re2 Re8 13.Bg5 Rxe2 14.Qxe2 h6 15.Bh4 [15.Bxf6 Qxf6 16.Qe8+ Bf8 is no problem.] 15...Bb7 16.Nxa4 [16.Nf5 Bf8] 16...g5 17.Bg3 Bf8 18.c4 d6 19.Nc3 Qd7 20.f3 Re8 Black has the bishop pair, equating to huge potential.

11...Re8 12.Bg5 d6 13.Nxe7+ Rxe7 14.Bxf6 gxf6



Position after: 14...gxsf6

Black's structure is scattered and shattered, but he is a pawn up at the moment and should be very active soon, as seen in practice and in the examples given.

15.Ra5!?

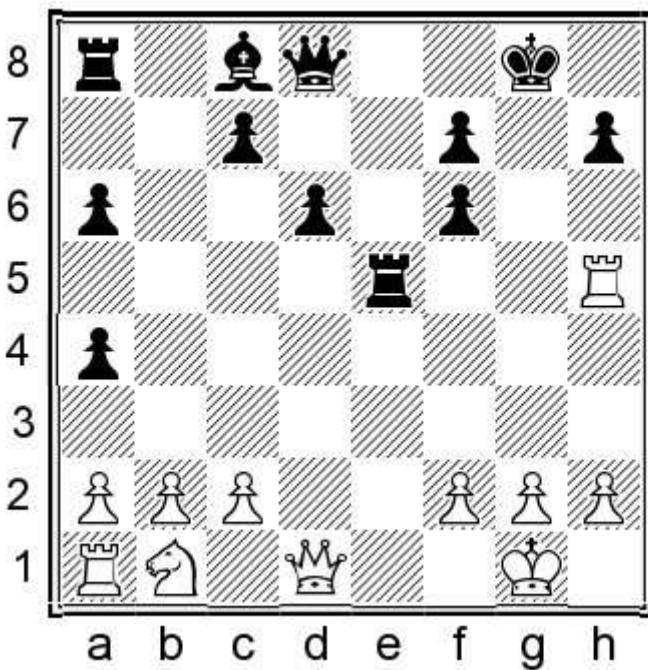
This move has never been tried before, though it may be White's best bet.

A) 15.Rxe7 Qxe7 16.Nc3 Bb7

A1) 17.Qd2 Re8 18.h3 Qe5 19.a3 Qg5! 20.Qxg5+ fxg5 21.Nxa4 Re2µ is a classic game in this line. Black got a serious advantage out of the opening, which he gradually converted into a victory in Rogers, I (2520) – Ninov, K (2495) San Bernardino 1988.

A2) 17.Qg4+ Kh8 18.Qxa4 Rg8 19.g3 was Kotsur, P (2548) – Jumabayev, R (2525) Astana 2012 and here Black could activate his rook and enjoy better prospects with 19...Rg5!³

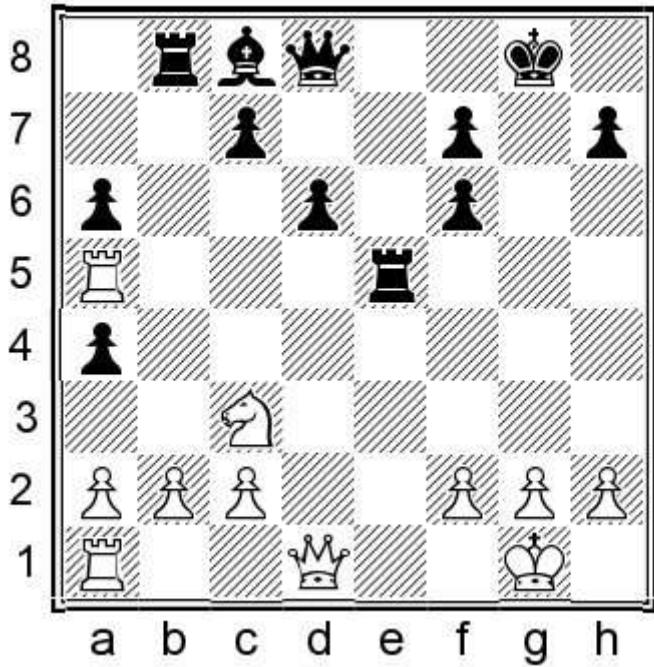
B) 15.Rh5 Re5



Position after: 15...Re5

16.Nd2 Qe7 17.Nc4 Rxh5 18.Qxh5 Rb8 [18...Qe4!?] 19.Qa5 Rb5
20.Qc3 occurred in Malaniuk, V (2615) – Aleksandrov, A (2660) Sochi 1997. Black can now play 20...d5μ at once, securing huge edge.

15...Rb8 16.Nc3 Re5



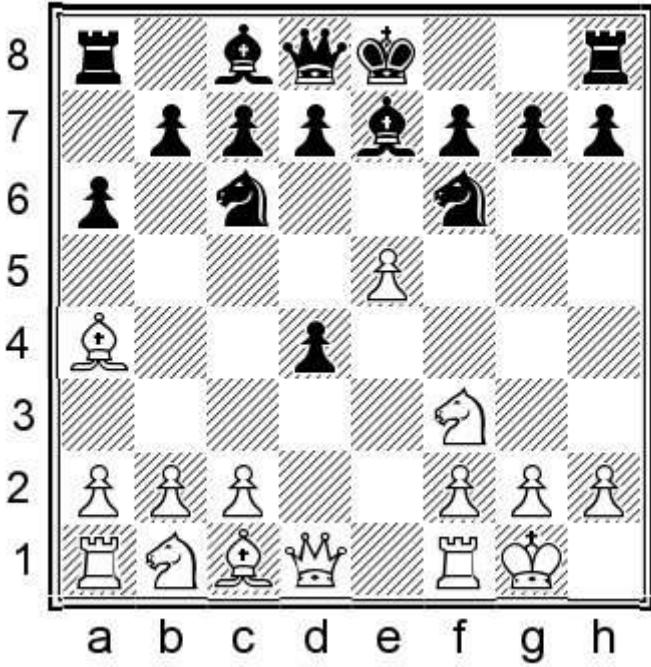
Position after: 16...Re5

17.Rxa4 Rxb2 18.Nd5 Be6 19.Qc1 Rb8 20.Nf4©

White has some compensation, but I doubt this will be a very tempting line for players of the white pieces to go for.

e) 5.d4 exd4 6.0-0 Be7 7.e5

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.d4 exd4 6.0-0 Be7 7.e5



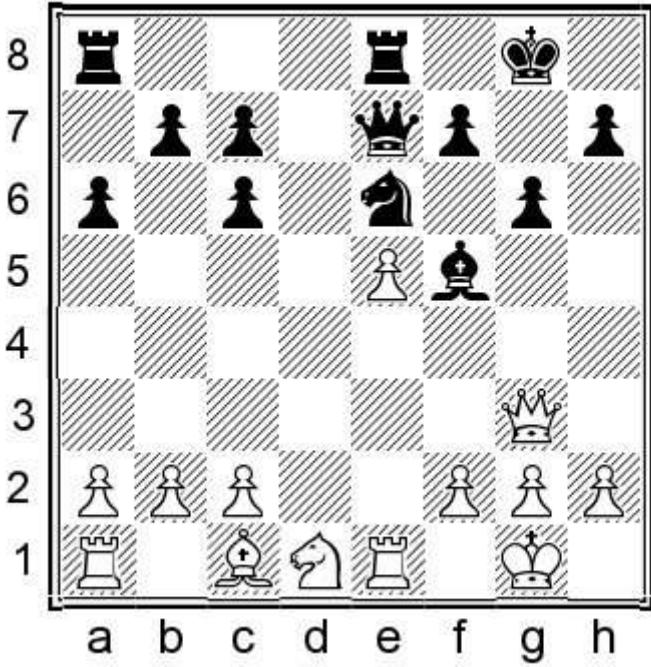
Position after: 7.e5

I feel like this makes the most sense here and has been played almost exclusively recently At least it gives White the illusion that he's playing for a win.

7...Ne4 8.Nxd4 Nxd4

The simplest method.

8...0-0 is the more complicated way: 9.Nf5 Nc5!? 10.Qg4 g6 11.Nxe7+ Qxe7 12.Bxc6 dxc6 13.Qg3 Re8 This is a good try, but I don't like that after 14.Re1 Bf5 15.Nc3 Ne6 White has 16.Nd1!

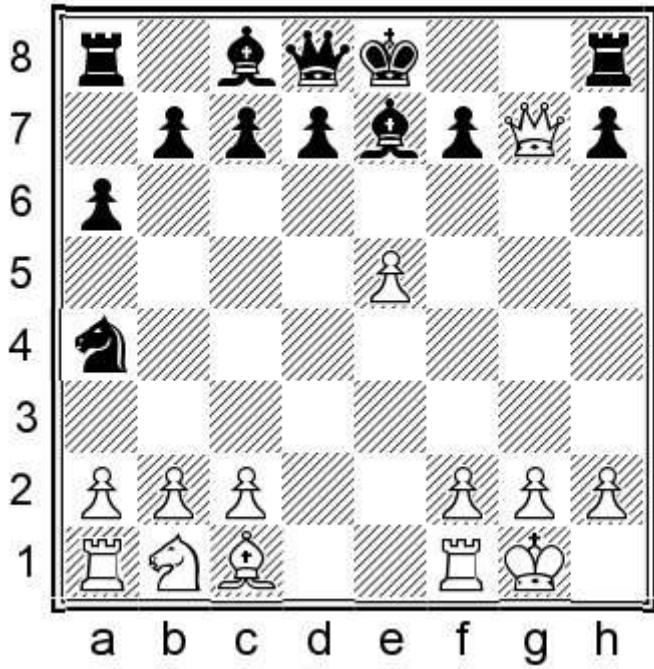


Position after: 16.Nd1!

causing some practical problems and giving us no real hopes of playing for a win.

9.Qxd4 Nc5 10.Nc3

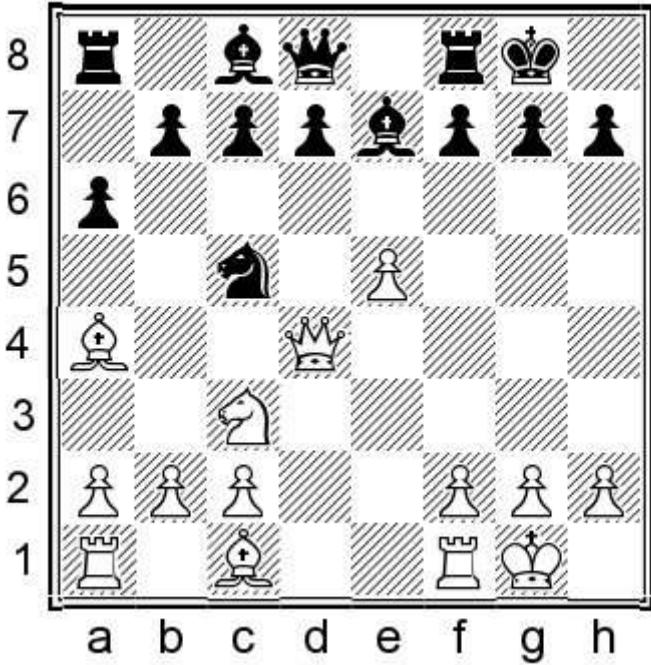
- A)** 10.Bb3 is likely to transpose after 10...0-0 11.Nc3
- B)** 10.Qg4?! makes little sense if White needs to take back the bishop on a4, and it's definitely the case since 10...Nxa4 11.Qxg7?



Position after: 11.Qxg7?

11...Rf8 12.Bh6 d5 13.Qxh7 Be6 14.Bxf8 Bxf8 15.f4 Qe7 16.f5 Bd7–+ led to winning position for Black in Yasin, H (2044) – Koksal, E (2367) Mersin 2018.

10...0-0



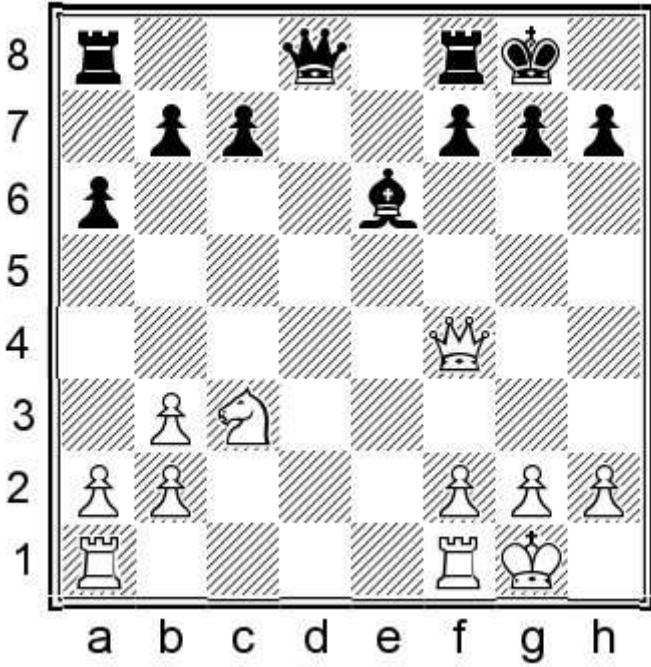
Position after: 10...0-0

The main tabiya in this line. White's superiority in development and space is compensated by the terrible placement of the a4-bishop.

11.Nd5

I consider this move to be the main line. It is advocated by the Hungarian GM, Oliver Mihok, who has great experience here. He is probably the only relatively high-rated player who has consistently played this version of the central variation lately.

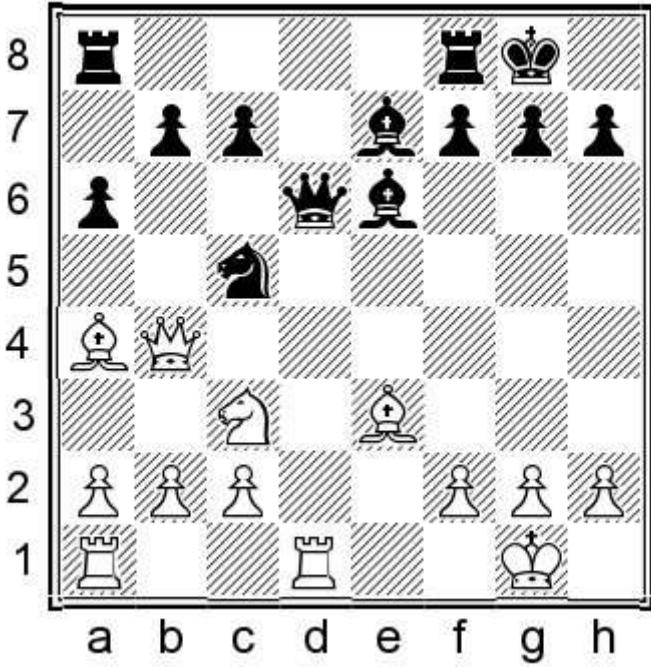
A) 11.Bb3!? has recently seen some action from Tregubov and Kosteniuk. It's a tricky try with faster time controls, since it looks extremely harmless at first sight. 11...d6 12.Bf4 dxе5 13.Qxe5 Nxb3 14.cxb3!? Bd6 15.Qd4 Bxf4 16.Qxf4 Be6



Position after: 16...Be6

The material is very limited, so it's hard to imagine serious problems. The only real threat is that White somehow lands the knight on f6 at an inopportune moment. 17.Rfe1 c6 18.Re3 Qb8!? 19.Qh4 Qd8 20.Qb4 Qc7 21.Ne4 Rad8=

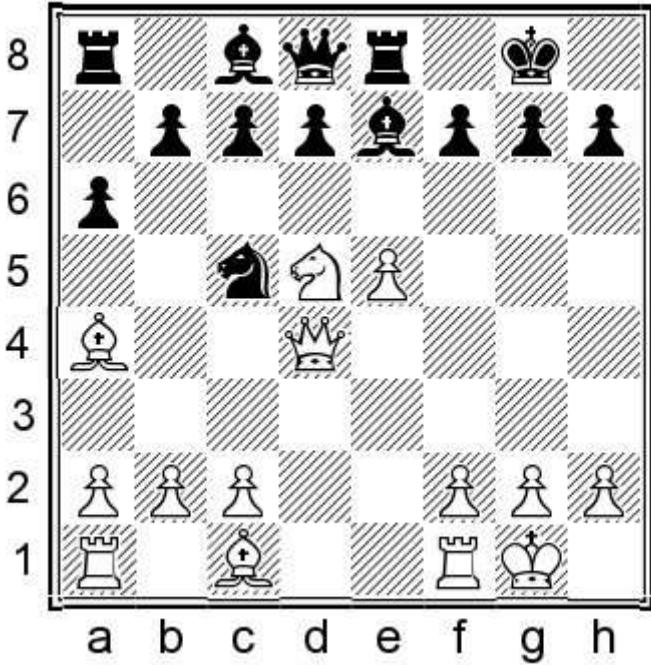
B) 11.Rd1 d6 12.Be3 Be6 13.exd6 Qxd6 14.Qb4?!



Position after: 14.Qb4?!

14...Qe5! 15.Nd5 Bd6 16.Bf4 Nxa4 17.Qxa4 Qxb2 18.Bxd6 [18.Nxc7?! Bxc7 19.Bxc7 b5 was a pawn up for Black in Schmidt, G (2306) – Niedermaier, H (2223) Bayern 2004] 18...cxd6 19.Rab1 b5 was Mnatsakanian, E – Sardarov, E Sochi 1969 and now 20.Rxb2 bxa4 21.Rb6 should eventually lead to a draw.

11...Re8!?

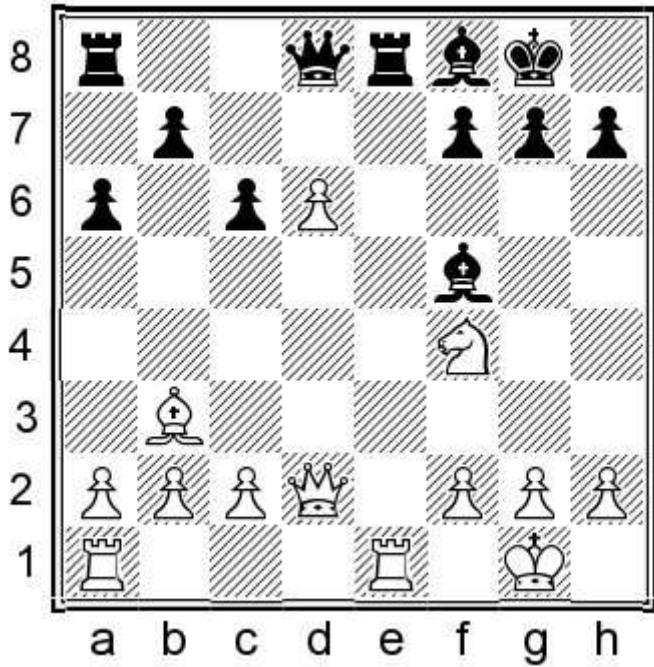


Position after: 11...Re8!?

This is a bit riskier: it's lively and contains some venom in a few cases.

12.Nxe7+

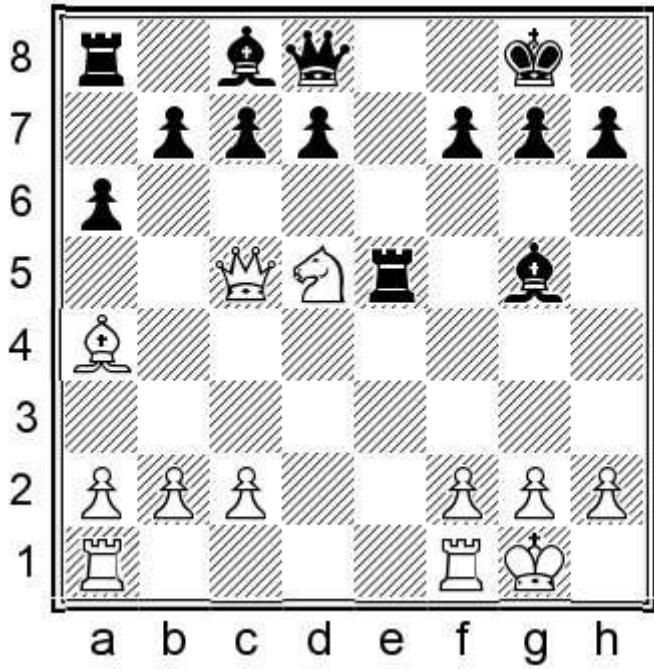
A) 12.Bf4!? A funny move. White offers the other bishop too, to be exchanged. People should respect bishops more, I say! ☺ 12...Ne6 13.Qd2 Nxf4 14.Nxf4 [14.Qxf4 Bg5!,,] 14...Bf8 15.Rfe1 c6 16.Bb3 [16.Rad1 Qg5 17.Nd3 Qxd2 18.Rxd2 b5 19.Bb3 a5=] 16...d5 17.exd6 Bf5!



Position after: 17...Bf5!

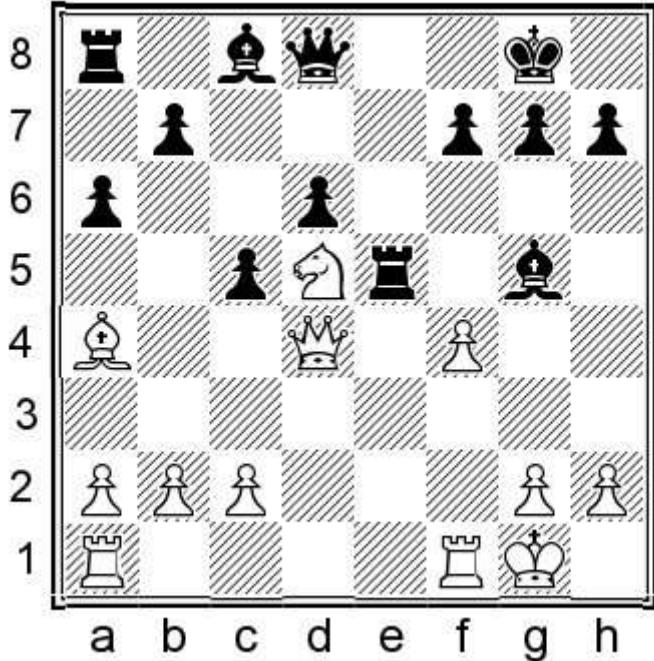
An important move to keep in mind. 18.Rxe8 Qxe8 19.h3 Rd8 20.Re1 Rxd6 21.Rxe8 Rxd2 22.g4 g5! [22...Bxc2?? 23.Ne6+–] 23.gxf5 gxf4=

B) 12.Bg5 looks tempting but we have some cute resources available in our pocket. 12...Bxg5 13.Qxc5 Rxe5!



Position after: 13...Rxe5!

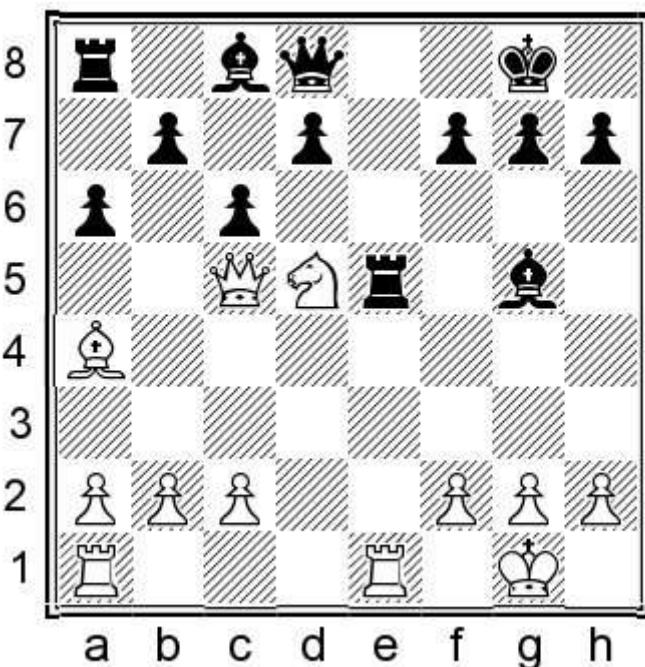
B1) 14.f4?! d6 15.Qa5 would have been much better, when White can save the day after [15.Qd4? A mistake. 15...c5!



Position after: 15...c5!

16.Qd3 Bxf4 17.Nxf4 Bf5 18.Qc3 b5 19.Bb3 c4 20.Bxc4 bxc4 21.Qxc4 Qb6+ 22.Kh1 Rc8+– Liang, A (2064) – Panchanathan, M (2570) Arlington 2013] 15...b6 16.Qd2 Bb7 17.Nb4 Bh6 18.Nc6 Bxc6 19.Bxc6 Rb8 20.Rae1³

B2) 14.Rfe1 c6!!

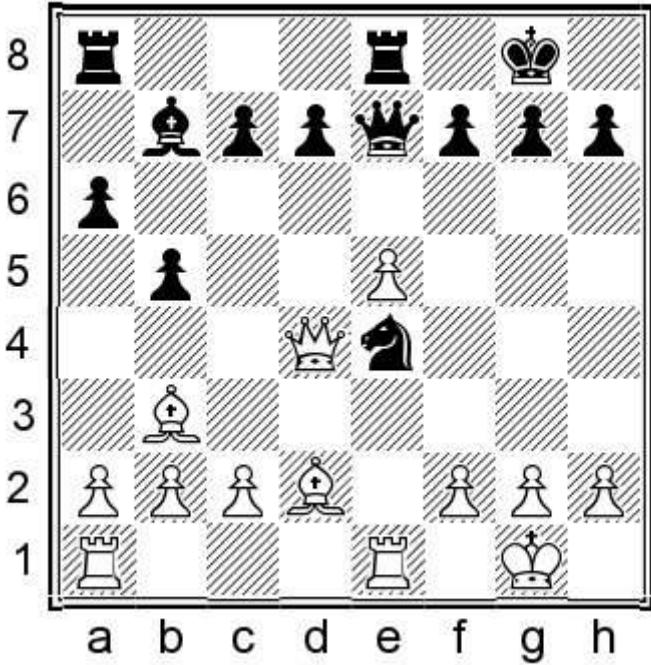


Position after: 14...c6!!

The double exclamation mark is for the elegance of the solution.
15.Rxe5 d6 Three pieces are hanging at the same time on e5, d5, c5. What a picture! 16.Qxd6 [16.Re8+?! Qxe8 17.Qxd6 Qd8³] 16...Qxd6 17.Re8+ Qf8 18.Rxf8+ Kxf8 19.Nb6 Rb8 20.Nxc8 Rxc8= with a dead draw.

C) 12.Re1 Nxa4 13.Qxa4 b5 14.Qd4 Bb7 15.Bf4 Bf8=

12...Qxe7 13.Bd2! b5!? 14.Bb3 Bb7 15.Rfe1 Ne4!?



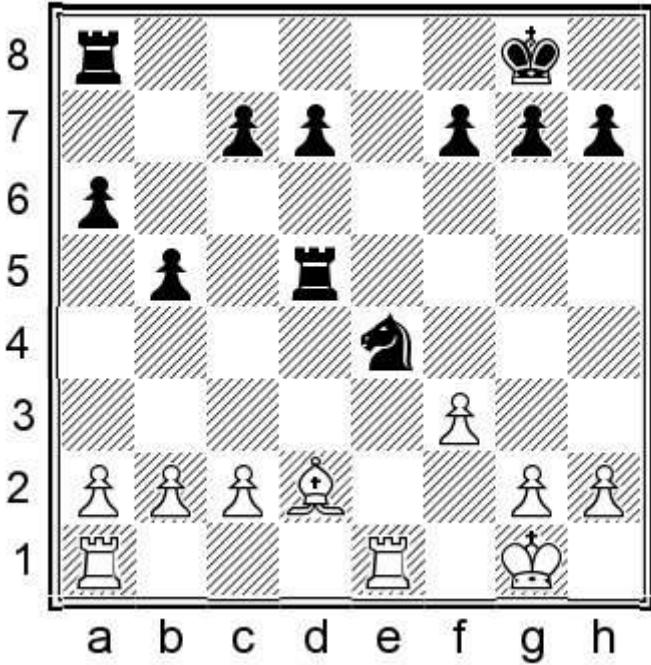
Position after: 15...Ne4!?

This tricky move twice worked successfully in practice.

16.c3!

Accurate. Now we need to make sure not to remain too ambitious and instead take the draw.

A) 16.Bd5? Simply a blunder. 16...Bxd5 17.Qxd5 Qxe5! 18.Qxe5 Rxe5 19.f3 Rd5!



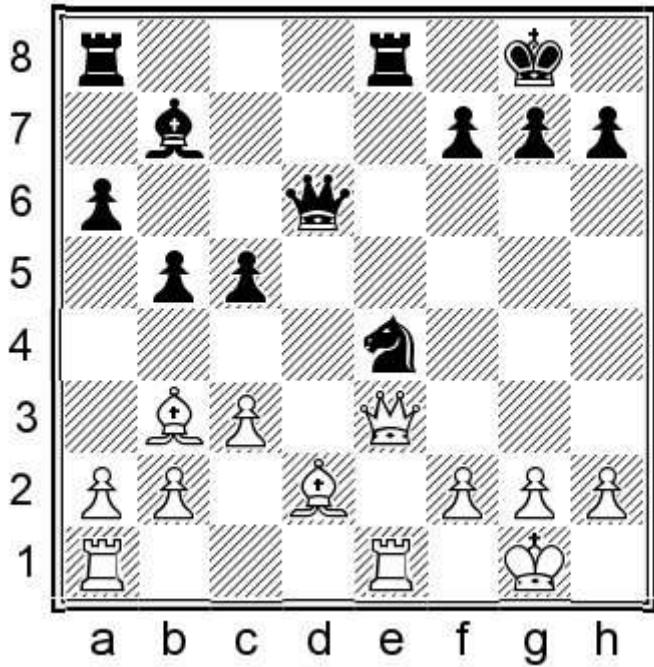
Position after: 19...Rd5!

This was easy to miss. You always need to watch out for hanging pieces! 20.Bf4 Nf6 21.Bxc7 Rc8 22.Be5 Rxc2 and Black was a healthy pawn up in Sidhant, M (2338) – Zanan, E (2493) Sitges 2019.

B) 16.c4?! bxc4 17.Bxc4 Qxe5 18.Qxd7 Re7 19.Qd3 Qxb2 20.Be3 Nd6 21.Bd4 Rxe1+ 22.Rxe1 Qb4³ gave Black some advantage in Rechinsky, A – Ibragimov, I (2575) St Petersburg 1996.

C) 16.Rxe4? is of course met by 16...c5! 17.Qd3 Bxe4 18.Qxe4 c4µ when Black wins material.

16...c5 17.Qe3 d6 18.exd6 Qxd6

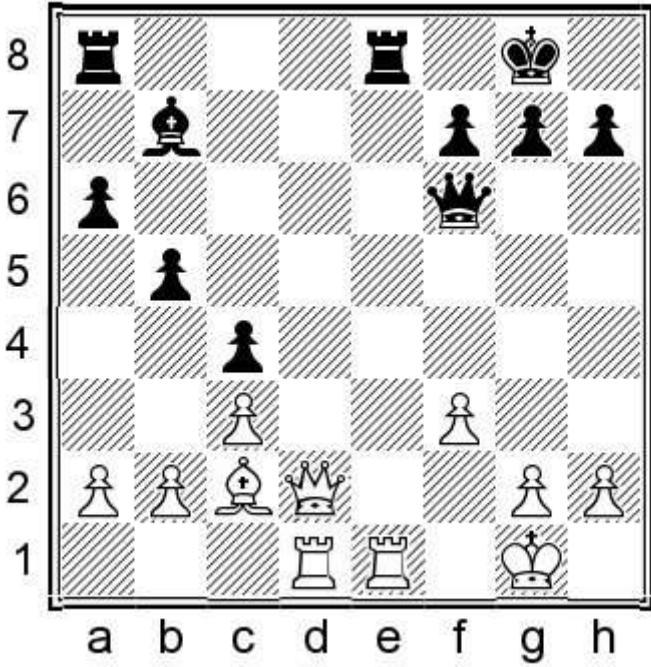


Position after: 18...Qxd6

19.Qf4

A bit more testing.

19.Rad1 Qc6 20.f3 c4 21.Bc2 and now, instead of 21...Nc5 which eventually led to disaster in Pancevski, F (2503) – Amin, B (2661) Baku 2016, Black should have played 21...Nxd2 22.Qxd2 Qf6



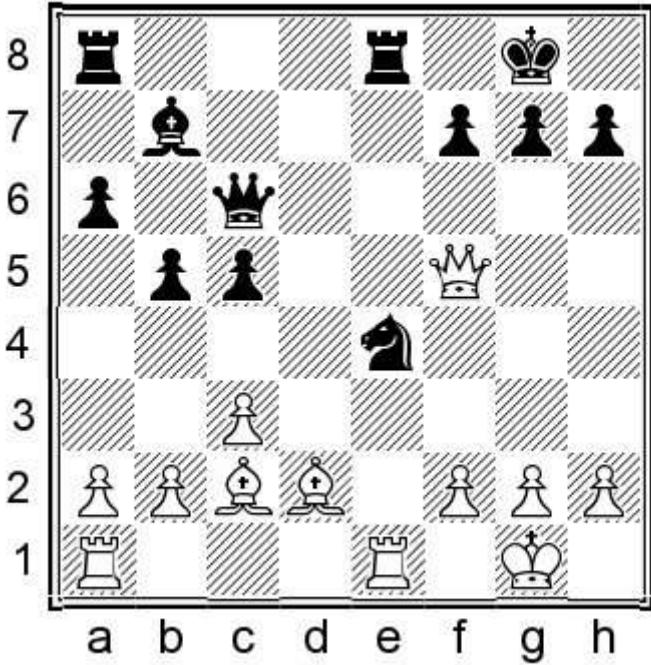
Position after: 22...Qf6

[22...g6 23.h4!? ∞] with an equal game. One line runs: 23.Rxe8+ Rxe8 24.Qd7!? Bc6 25.Qd6 Qg5! 26.Qxc6 Qe3+ 27.Kf1 Qe2+ 28.Kg1 Qe3+ with a perpetual check.

19...Qg6 20.Bc2

20.Be3 Nxc3 21.Bxf7+ Qxf7 22.Qxf7+ Kxf7 23.bxc3=

20...Qc6! 21.Qf5!



Position after: 21.Qf5!

This forces the reply...

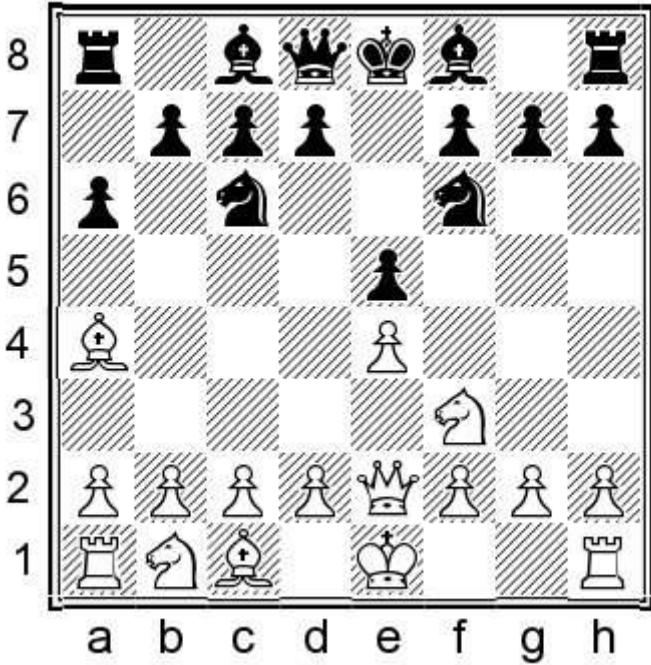
21...g6

...but the endgame should end in a draw after...

22.Bxe4 Rxe4 23.Qxe4 Qxe4 24.Rxe4 Bxe4=

f) 5.Qe2 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.0-0

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.Qe2



Position after: 5.Qe2

This little queen move has long been the favorite line of the well-known Russian-born GM, Sergei Tiviakov. White's plan may involve 0-0, c3, Rd1 and then to push d4 at once, or to omit 0-0 for some time and immediately bring the knight to g3 via d2-f1. It's no longer a fashionable line, but nevertheless from time to time it pops up in tournament practice, especially in rapid chess. For this reason I am not going to delve into too much detail, as extensive knowledge is not necessary. I will, though, give some interesting ideas to keep this chapter fun and exciting. Some of these may even surprise veteran Ruy Lopez players too.

5...b5 6.Bb3 Bc5

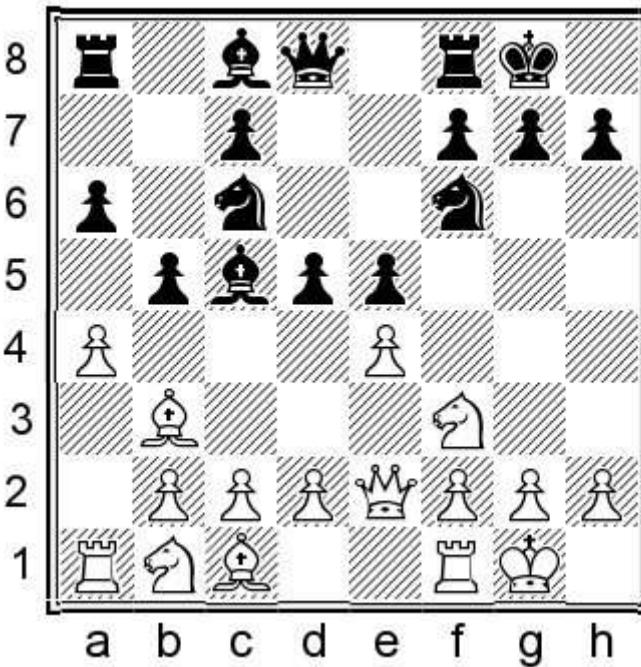
Of course, we remain consistent with the Ark universe.

7.0-0 0-0 8.a4

A) 8.d3 h6 see 7.d3

B) 8.c3 see 7.c3

8...d5!



Position after: 8...d5!

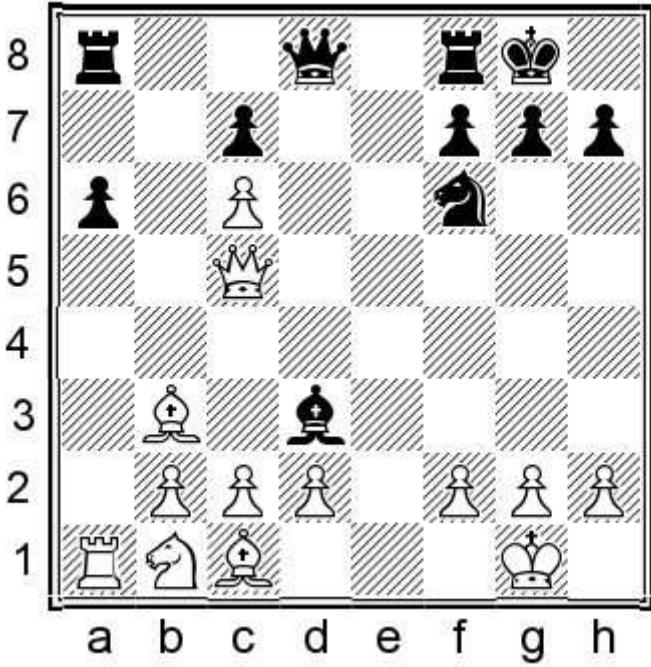
Another novelty? Another pawn sacrifice? This idea is interesting even in the case of the rook standing on e1 instead of the queen on e2, but here it's just very good. Black wants to explode the centre so as to grant full energy to the minor pieces.

9.d3

Cautious.

A) 9.axb5 dxe4 10.bxc6 exf3 11.Qxf3 Bg4 is very dangerous for White.

A1) 12.Qg3? Be2 13.Qxe5 [13.Re1? Ne4+] 13...Bxf1 14.Qxc5 Bd3!!



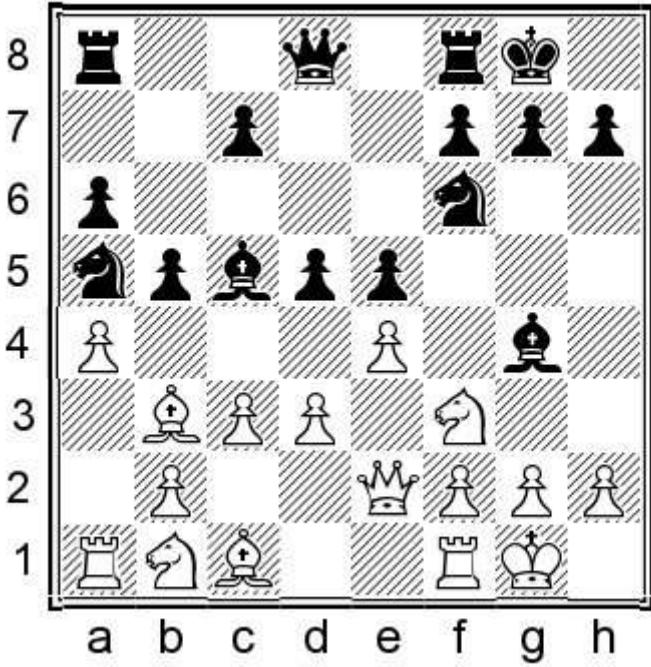
Position after: 14...Bd3!!

Just like this. An amazing resource. 15.Nc3 Re8+ It's very unlikely that White can survive an attack like this.

A2) 12.Qc3 Bd4 13.Qc4 Be6 14.Qe2 [14.Qd3 Bxf2+! 15.Rxf2 Qxd3 16.cxd3 Bxb3μ] 14...Bxb3 15.cxb3 Nd5³

B) 9.exd5 Na5 10.d3 [10.Ba2 e4 11.Ng5 Bg4,] 10...Nxb3 11.cxb3 Nxd5 12.axb5 Re8 13.Nc3 Bb7f

9...Bg4 10.c3 Na5



Position after: 10...Na5

Black's play develops quickly. For example:

11.Bc2 b4 12.h3 Bxf3 13.Qxf3 bxc3 14.bxc3

14.Nxc3 Nc6 15.Qg3 Nd4³

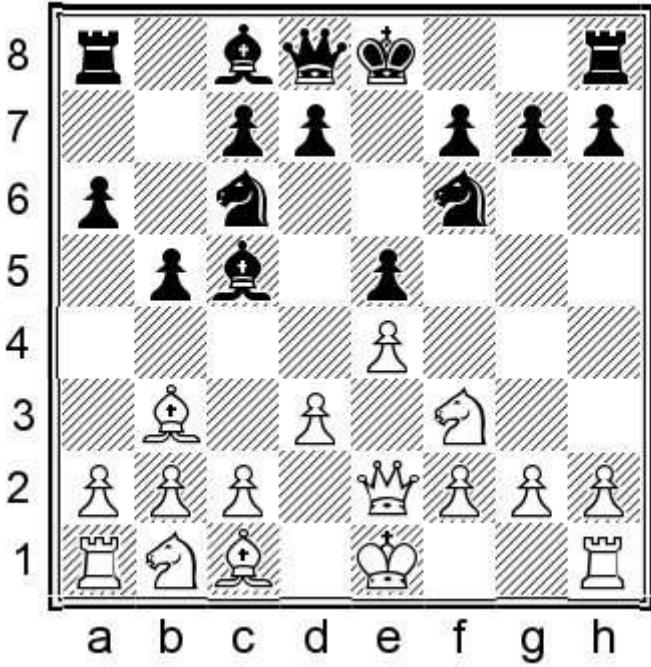
14...d4³

Black has a slight but clear advantage.

g) 5.Qe2 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.d3

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.Qe2 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.d3

A bit timid for my tastes. Black can reply in many ways, so I've chosen a fresh setup as my main line, championed by the rising star, Iran's Alireza Firouzja.



Position after: 7.d3

7...d6 8.c3

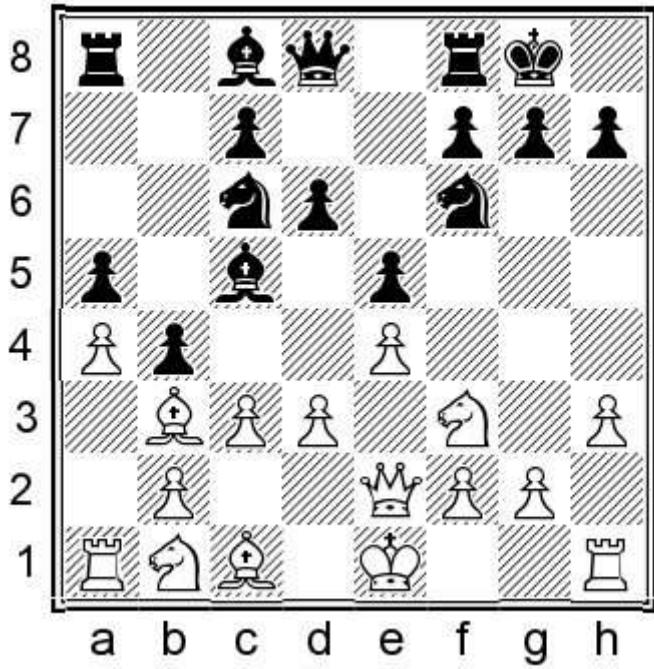
Almost exclusively played, and normally Black replies with 8...h6. However, we can start some action immediately.

8...a5!? **9.a4 b4**

Black gains some space on the queenside, which can't be a bad idea in my opinion.

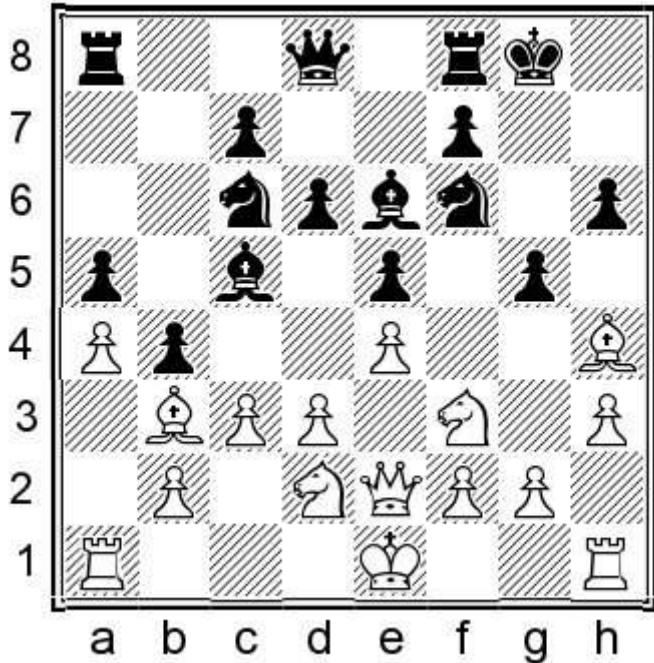
10.Be3

10.h3 0-0



Position after: 10...0-0

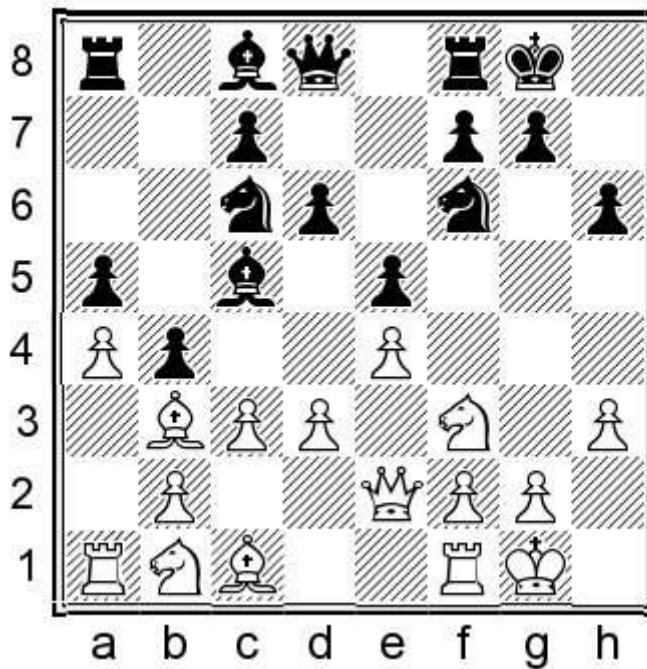
A) 11.Bg5 h6 12.Bh4 Be6 13.Nbd2 [13.Bd5 Bxd5 14.exd5 Nb8 15.0-0 Nbd7 is at least ok.] 13...g5



Position after: 13...g5

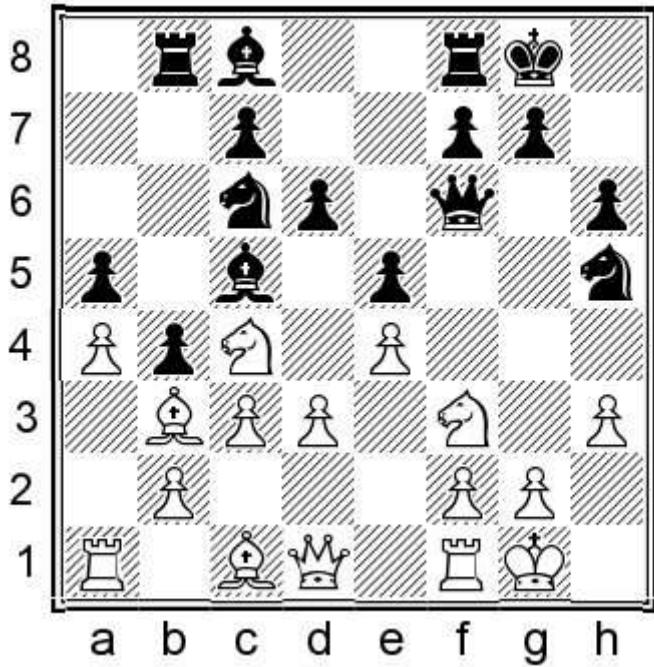
14.Bxe6 fxe6 15.Bg3 Nh5 16.Bh2 and Black has a pleasant choice. For example 16...Nf4 [Or 16...Qe8 17.0-0 Qg6] 17.Bxf4 Rxf4

B) 11.0-0 h6



Position after: 11...h6

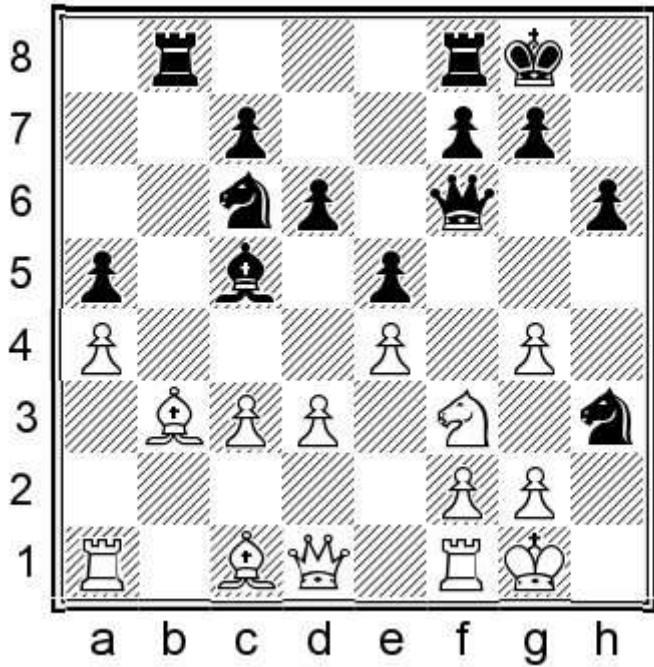
B1) 12.Nbd2?! gives Black some attacking ideas after the obvious 12...Nh5! 13.Qd1 Rb8 14.Nc4 [14.Bc4 Qf6 15.Nb3 Bb6 16.d4 bxc3 17.bxc3 Nf4 is also pretty good.] 14...Qf6



Position after: 14...Qf6

B1.1) 15.Be3 bxc3 16.bxc3 Nf4 17.Bxf4 [17.Bxc5? is naive. 17...dxc5 18.Ne3 Rd8 seems way too dangerous as 19.Nd5? is destroyed by 19...Rxd5! 20.Bxd5 Bxh3!–+] 17...Qxf4f

B1.2) 15.Ne3 Nf4 16.Nd5 [16.Ng4? A mistake. 16...Bxg4 17.hxg4 bxc3 18.bxc3 Nh3+!

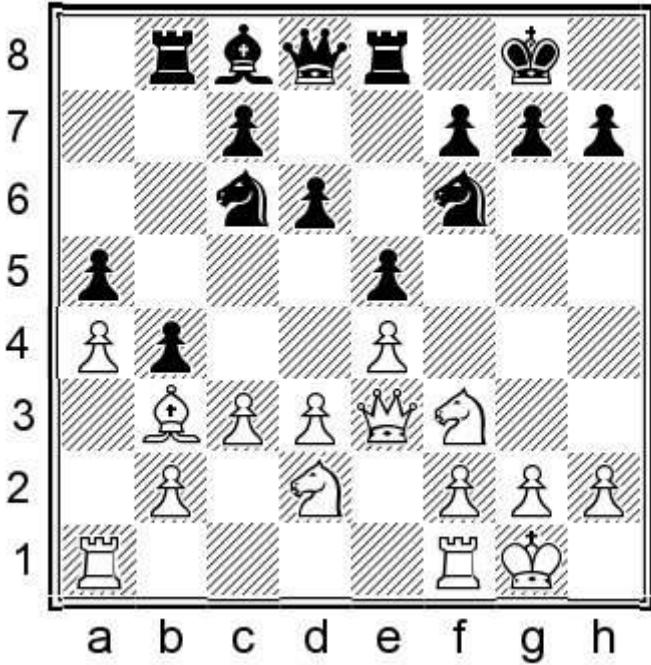


Position after: 18...Nh3+!

19.gxh3 Rxb3 20.Kg2 Rfb8μ] 16...Nxd5 17.Bxd5 Ne7 and Black is comfortable.

B2) 12.Be3 Bxe3 13.Qxe3 bxc3 14.bxc3 The position is balanced. Black can continue in several different ways, one of which is 14...Nh5 15.d4 Nf4 16.Nbd2 Qf6 17.Kh2 Qg6,,

10...Bxe3 11.Qxe3 0-0 12.0-0 Rb8 13.Nbd2 Re8!?



Position after: 13...Re8!?

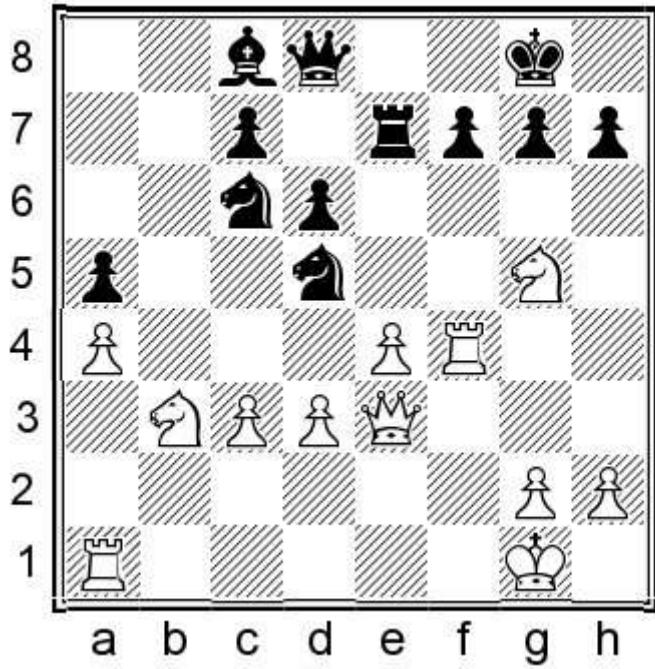
Trying to save time by not playing ...h6 is an option too, as...

14.Ng5

...is double-edged and may backfire.

14...Re7 15.Bc4

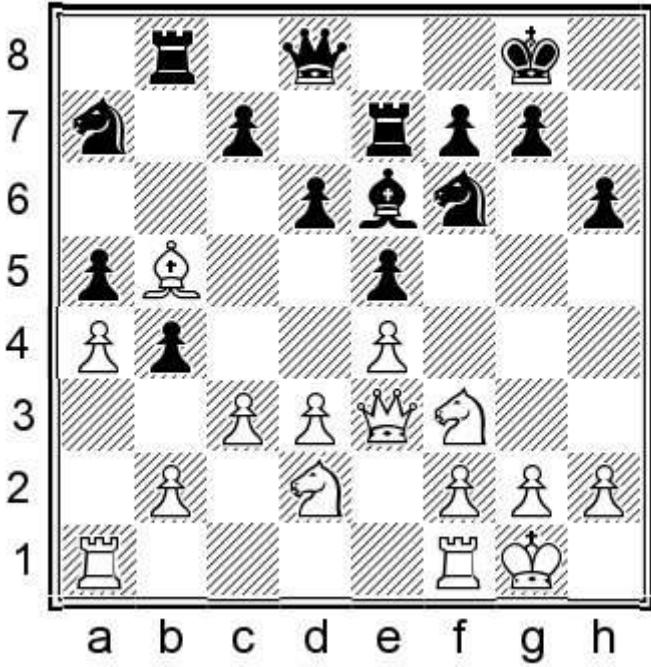
15.f4?! is not particularly attractive in view of: 15...exf4 16.Qxf4 [16.Rxf4 bxc3 17.bxc3 Rxb3! 18.Nxb3 Nd5³



Position after: 18...Nd5³

] 16...h6 17.Ngf3 bxc3 18.bxc3 Ba6 19.Bc4 Bxc4 20.Nxc4 d5³

15...h6 16.Ngf3 Be6 17.Bb5 Na7!?



Position after: 17...Na7!?

A funny, creative move making use of the e7-rook.

18.Bc4

A) 18.Qxa7? c5 traps the queen.

B) 18.d4 Nxb5 19.axb5 bxc3 20.bxc3 Rxb5 21.c4 exd4 22.Nxd4 Rb6 23.Rxa5=

18...Bxc4

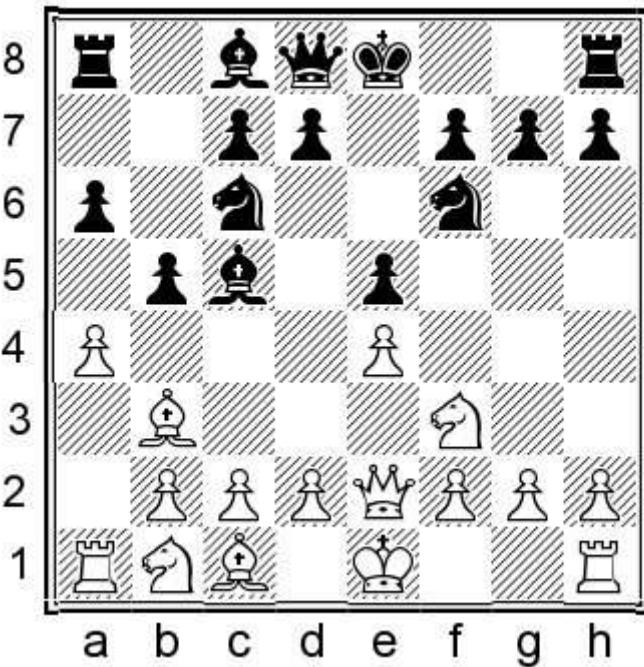
18...Nc6= is a repetition.

19.Nxc4 Nc6=

The position is equal, but we can prepare some expansion in the centre by pushing ...d5.

h) 5.Qe2 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.Qe2 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4



Position after: 7.a4

A logical push since the white queen is pointing towards b5. It also sets up a trap.

7...b4!

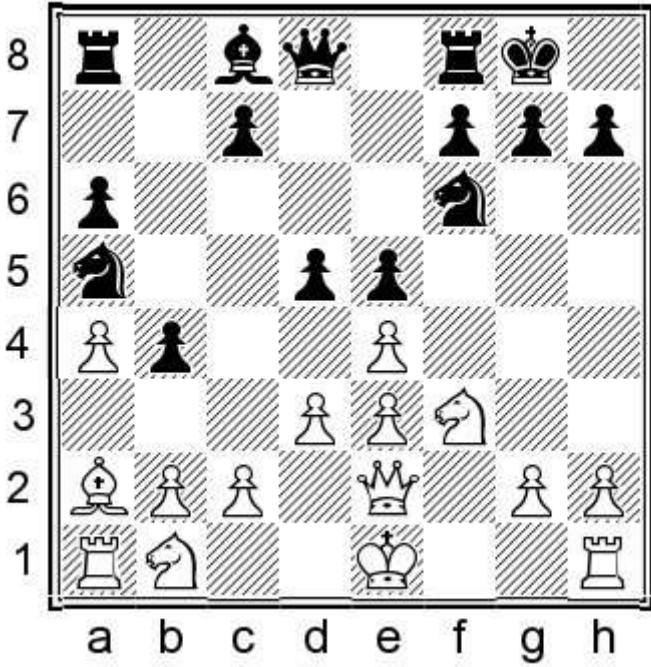
What on Earth? Do we voluntarily fall into White's idea? Why not call it a sacrifice instead!

8.Bxf7+

White can play differently, but almost all games have continued this way in the past.

A) 8.Qc4?! doesn't make sense as we have 8...Qe7.

B) In case of 8.d3 0-0 9.Be3 Bxe3 10.fxe3 we can go for some complications with 10...Na5!? 11.Ba2 d5!?



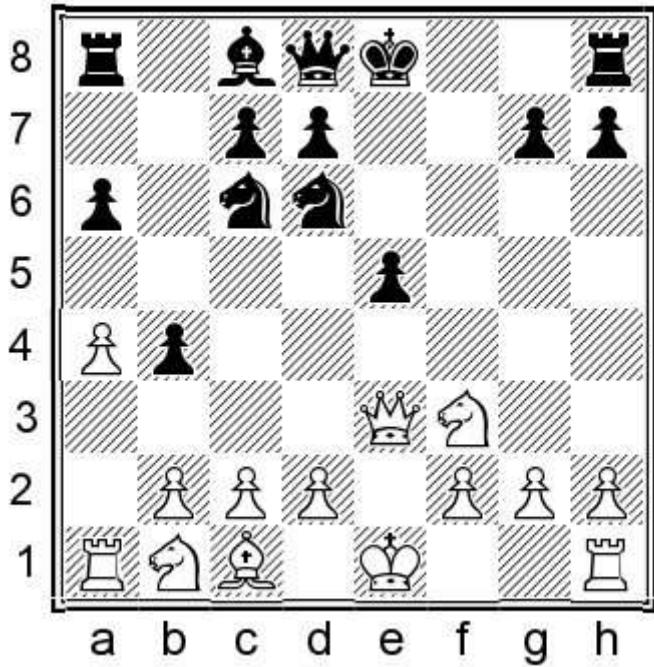
Position after: 11...d5!?

12.exd5 b3,, if we want too.

8...Kxf7 9.Qc4+ Ke8

9...Kg6!? is also possible. I remember being shocked by this play as a teenager when I was checking Informator for fresh ideas back then. 10.d4! [10.Qxc5 Nxe4 11.Qd5 Nd6∞ Delgado Ramirez, N (2526) – Ehlvest, J (2600) Santo Domingo 2003] 10...h6!? 11.Qxc5 Nxe4 12.Qd5 Nf6 13.Nxe5+ Nxe5 14.Qxa8 Nc6 15.0-0 Nxd4∞ This looks chaotic.

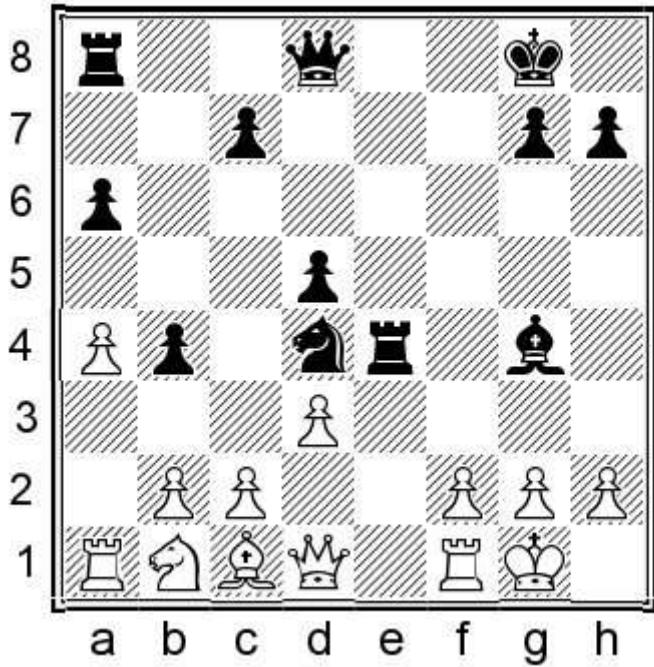
10.Qxc5 Nxe4 11.Qe3 Nd6!



Position after: 11...Nd6!

12.Nxe5

A) 12.0-0 Nf5 13.Qe4?! allows 13...d5 14.Qe2 Kf7! 15.d3 [Taking the pawn is playing with fire: 15.Nxe5+? Nxe5 16.Qxe5 Re8 17.Qf4 Re4 18.Qf3 Kg8 19.d3 Nd4 20.Qd1 Bg4!]

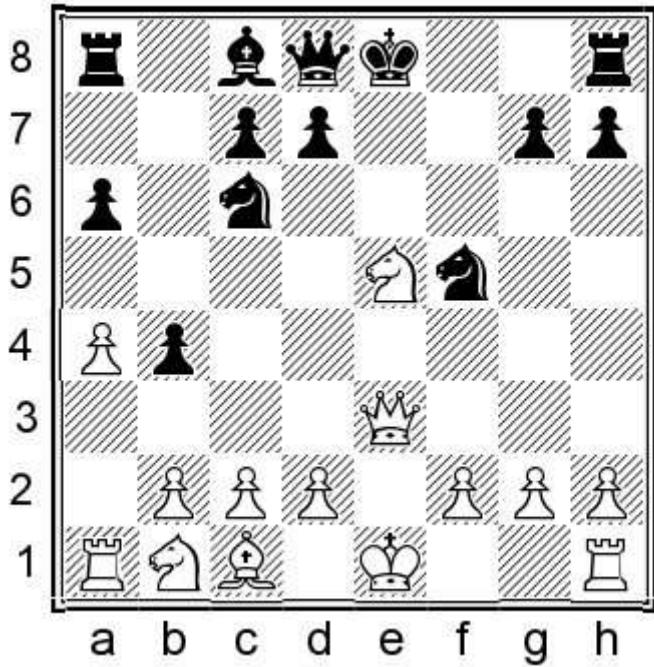


Position after: 20...Bg4!

21.f3 Re2 22.fxg4 Qh4+ is a winning attack.] 15...Re8 and Black is on top.

B) 12.c3 Nf5 13.Qe2 Qe7 14.d3 Rf8 15.0-0 d6

12...Nf5!



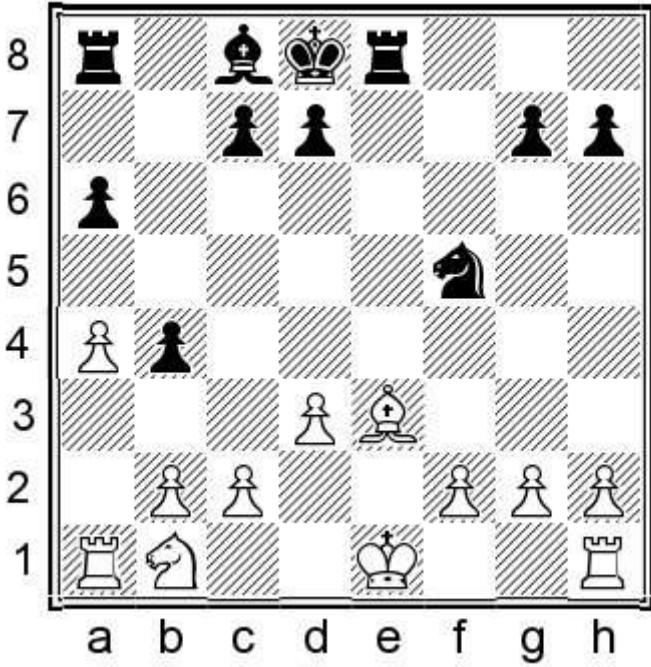
Position after: 12...Nf5!

The key idea.

13.Qf3

Ambitious.

A) 13.Qe2 Nxe5 14.Qxe5+ Qe7 15.Qxe7+ Kxe7 16.d3 Re8! Black gets a lot of play for the pawn. 17.Be3 Kd8!



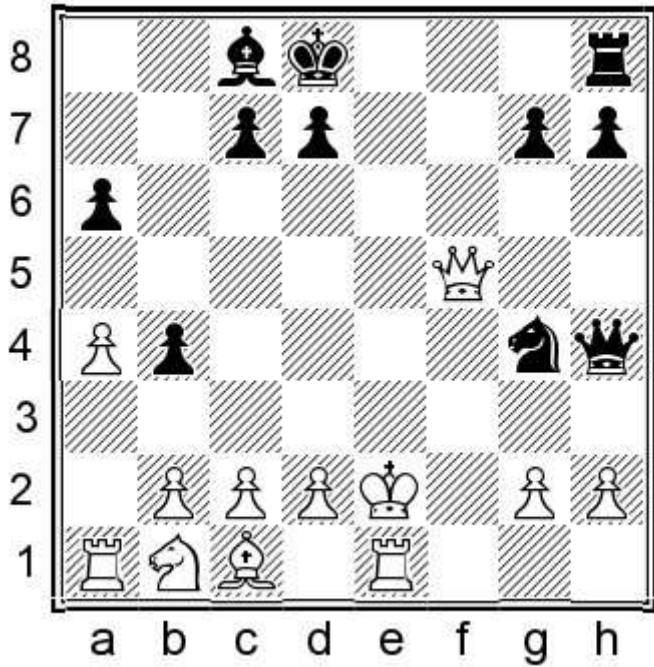
Position after: 17...Kd8!

This wins the pawn back immediately. [17...Kf7 18.0-0!] 18.0-0 [Insisting on keeping the material is clearly wrong. 18.Kd2 Bb7 19.Rg1 a5! with the idea of...Ra6!] 18...Nxe3 19.fxe3 Rxe3 20.Nd2 Bb7 is equal. 21.Nc4 Re2 22.Rf2 Rxf2 23.Kxf2 d6=

B) 13.Qh3 is strongly answered by 13...Qg5!

13...Qe7 14.Qxf5

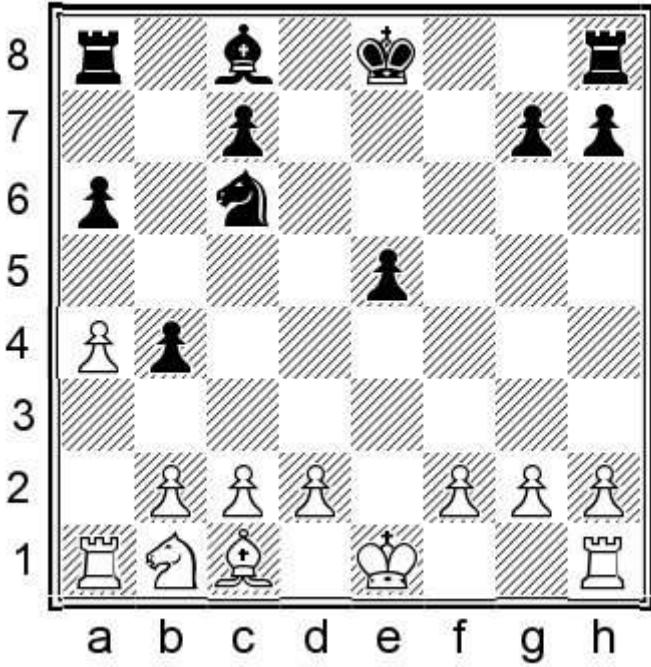
14.Kd1!? This is pushing for victory very hard, but objectively it's just fine. 14...Nxe5 15.Qxa8 Ng4 16.Qf3 The only move. [16.Rf1?? Nd4 is just mate soon. 17.Qxc8+ Kf7] 16...Qh4! 17.Re1+ Kd8 18.Qxf5 [18.d3? Rf8 looks unpleasant.] 18...Nxf2+ 19.Ke2 Black's initiative is only enough for half a point. 19...Ng4



Position after: 19...Ng4

20.d4 Re8+ 21.Kd3 Qxe1 22.Bg5+ Nf6 23.Bxf6+ gxf6 24.Qxf6+ Re7
25.Qf8+ Re8= Repetition is a reasonable outcome.

14...d6! 15.Qe4 Qxe5 16.Qxe5+ dxе5!



Position after: 16...dxe5!

Now ...Nd4 cannot be stopped.

17.d3!

17.c3?! Bf5

17...Nd4 18.Kd1!

18.Kd2? is one way to lose quickly, thanks to a fine rook manoeuvre:
18...Rf8 19.f3 Rf6! 20.Re1 Rg6! 21.Rxe5+ Kf7–+

18...Bg4+

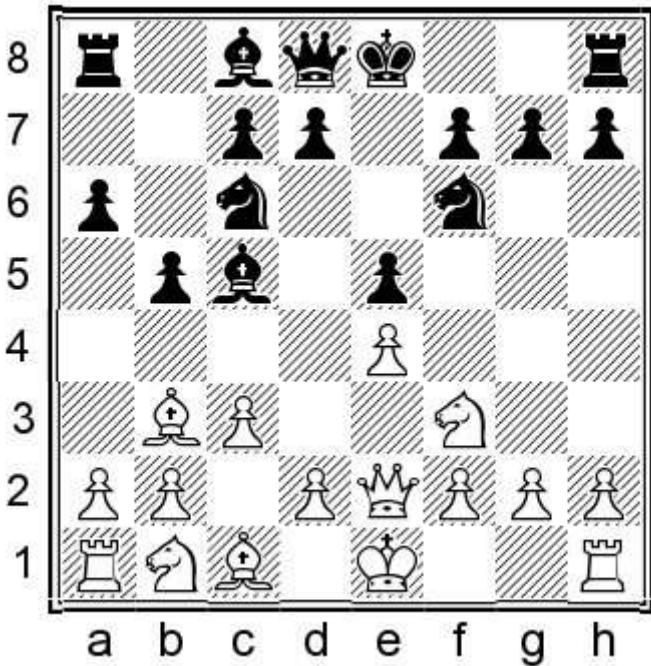
18...b3 19.Na3

19.f3 Nxf3 20.h3 Bh5 21.Be3=

and the position remains balanced.

i) 5.Qe2 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 0-0 8.--

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.Qe2 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3



Position after: 7.c3

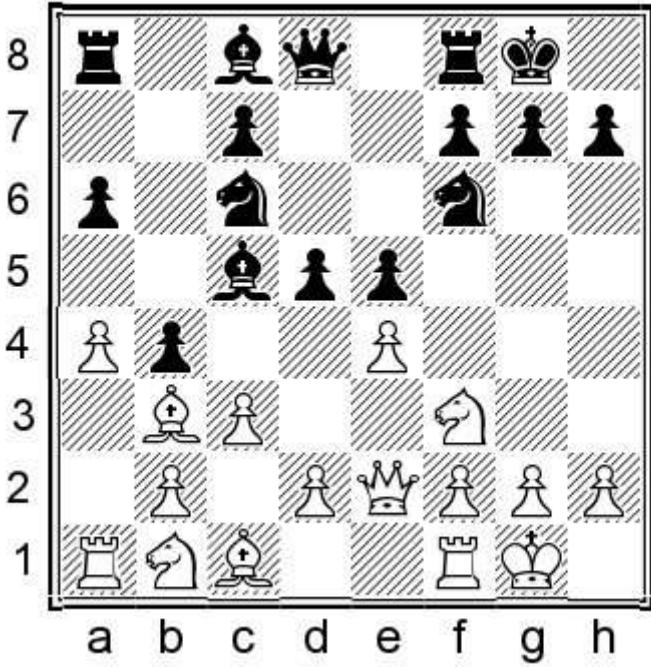
By far the most popular move.

7...0-0!

I think this move should be our most accurate reply. Now ...d5 is in the air, which is a great reminder that white king is still in the center.

8.0-0

8.a4 b4 [8...d5 9.d3 b4 10.0-0 would be the same.] 9.0-0 d5



Position after: 9...d5

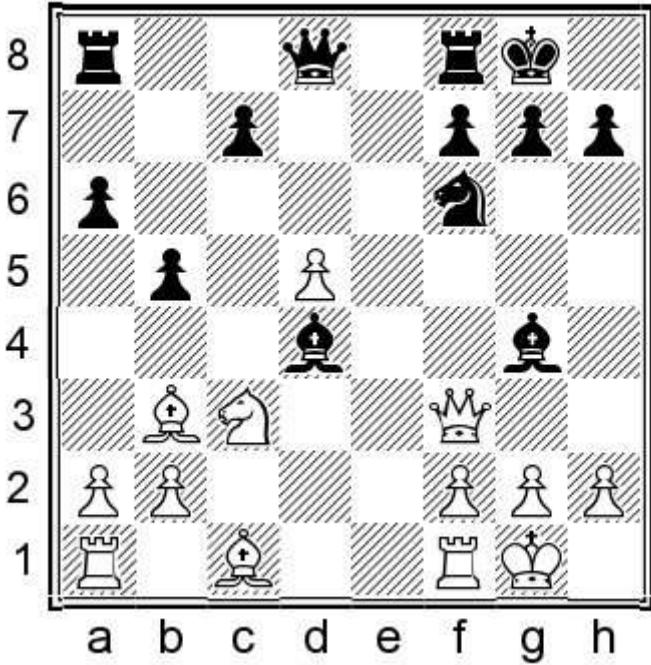
10.d3 [10.exd5 Na5! 11.Bc2 e4!? 12.Bxe4 Nxe4 13.Qxe4 Re8 looks horrible.] 10...bxc3 11.bxc3 Rb8 12.Nbd2 d4³

8...d5

When we have the chance, we should probably play this central break.

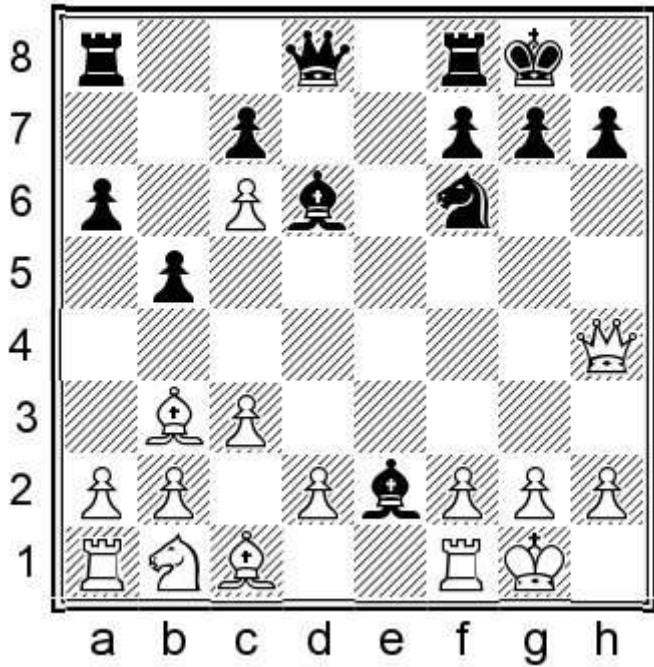
9.d3

9.exd5 A risky, albeit quite interesting, approach. 9...e4 10.dxc6 [10.d4?! exf3 11.Qxf3 Nxd4! 12.cxd4 Bxd4 13.Nc3 Bg4



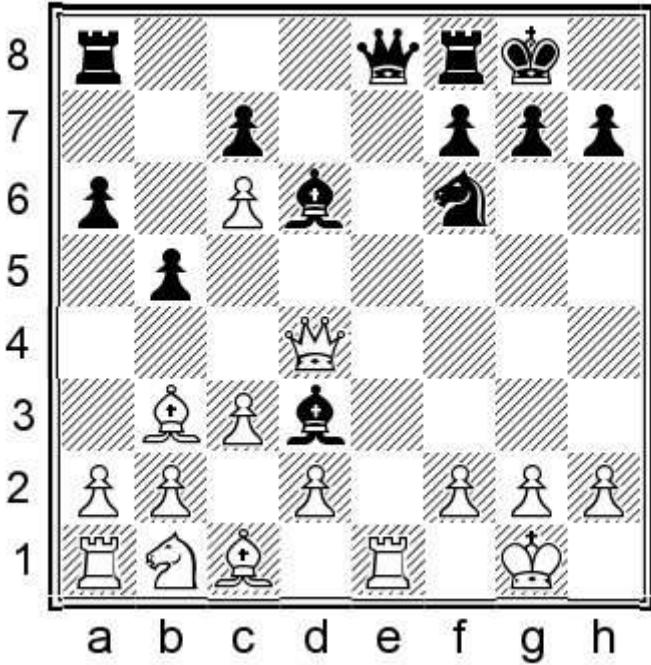
Position after: 13...Bg4

14.Qf4 Bc5 15.Be3 Bd6 16.Qd4 Re8³ Socko – Wahls, Hamburg 1996; 10.Ng5?! looks miserable after both 10...Bg4! 11.Qe1 Ne5!? 12.d4 Nd3 13.Qe3 Bd6 14.Nxe4 Nxc1 15.Rxc1 Nxe4 16.Qxe4 f5!? 17.Qd3 Qh4 18.g3 Qh6 19.Nd2 f4,] 10...exf3 11.Qxf3 Bg4 12.Qg3 [12.Qf4? allows 12...Qd3! and now the queenside is totally locked down. 13.Qg3 Be2 14.Qxd3 Bxd3 15.Re1 Ng4 16.Re3 Rad8!μ] 12...Bd6! This limits White's options a little. 13.Qh4 Be2



Position after: 13...Be2

A) 14.Re1?! This is too greedy. 14...Bd3 15.Qd4 and now we can play the obvious 15...Re8 with obvious compensation, or, even better, 15...Qe8!!



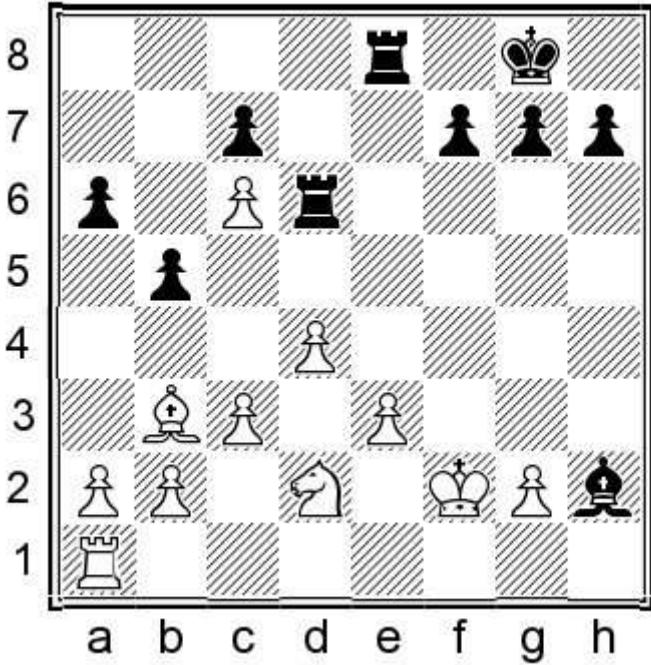
Position after: 15...Qe8!!

An amazing move! White's first rank is really that weak! 16.Re3! [16.Rxe8 Raxe8 17.Qxd3 Re1+ 18.Qf1 Bxh2+ 19.Kxh2 Rxf1 20.Na3 Ng4+ 21.Kg3 Nxf2 22.Bc2 f5 23.d4 g5μ] 16...Bg6! An extremely calm move.

A1) 17.Rxe8? loses to 17...Raxe8 18.Kf1 [18.Qe3 Ng4!; 18.g3 Re1+ 19.Kg2 Rxc1–+] 18...Bc5!μ and Black is an exchange up after the only move 19.Qe3.

A2) 17.Qh4 Qxc6 18.d4 Rae8 and Black has at least very nice compensation for a single pawn.

B) 14.d4 Bxf1 15.Kxf1 Re8 16.Be3 [16.Bg5 Qe7! Forced, but sufficient. 17.Be3 a5!³] 16...Nd5 17.Qxd8 [In case of 17.Bg5?! Be7 18.Bxe7 Rxe7 gives Black the advantage.] 17...Nxe3+ 18.fxe3 Raxd8 19.Kf2 Bxh2 20.Nd2 [20.g3?! Rd6 21.Nd2 Rf6+ 22.Nf3 g5] 20...Rd6!



Position after: 20...Rd6!

21.Nf3 Rf6 This could be somewhat better for us while analyzing with a computer, but in a human game it remains very messy.

9...d4

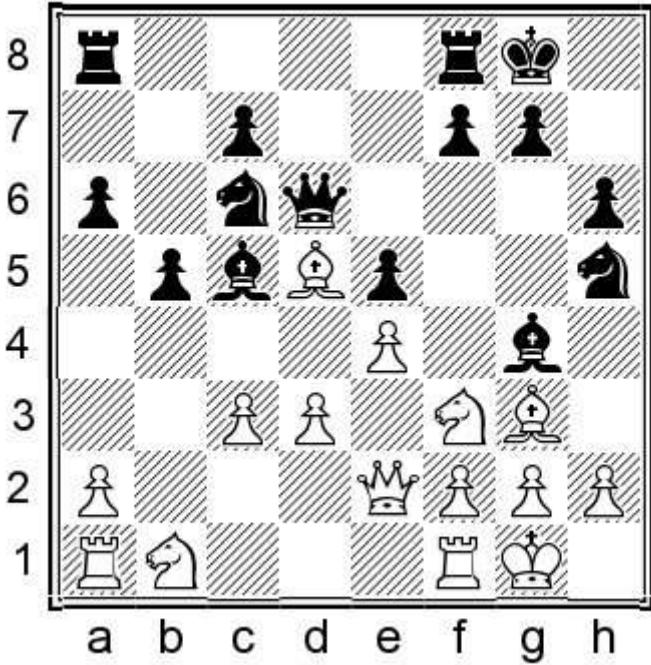
9...dxe4 is our solid alternative: 10.dxe4 Qe7!? [Or simply 10...h6=] 11.Bg5 h6 12.Bh4 g5 13.Bg3 Rd8 14.Nbd2 Rd6!?

10.a4!?

A seldom-played move, but probably best.

10.Bg5?! The most popular here, but I think it's just the first step in the wrong direction. 10...h6

A) 11.Bh4 Qd6! 12.Bg3?! [12.Bxf6 Qxf6 transposes to 11.Bxf6] 12...dxc3 13.bxc3 Nh5 14.Bd5 Bg4!



Position after: 14...Bg4!

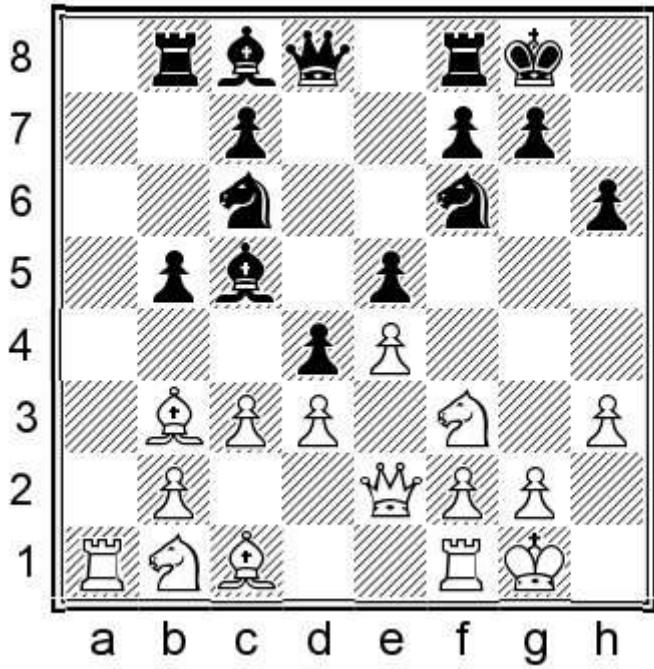
Black dominates by simple means.

B) 11.Bxf6 Qxf6 12.Bd5 dxc3 13.Nxc3 [13.bxc3?! Bd7 14.a4 Rad8 15.Nbd2 Ne7 16.axb5 axb5 17.Rfd1 Ng6µ was much better for Black in Ljubojevic – I.Sokolov, Linares 1995.] 13...Bg4! 14.Bxc6 Bxf3! 15.Qxf3 Qxc6 happened in Baumgardt – Geissler, corr. 1999. Black is comfortable, but I think White should be able to hold somehow.

10...Rb8

Or perhaps 10...Bg4 11.h3 Bxf3 12.Qxf3 dxc3 13.bxc3 b4,,

11.axb5 axb5 12.h3 h6

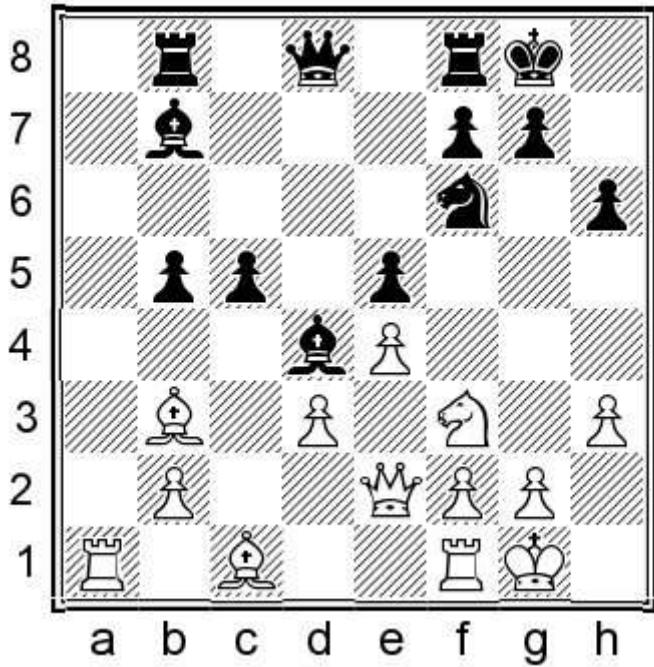


Position after: 12...h6

13.cxd4

13.Na3 Ra8 14.Nc2 Rxa1 15.Nxa1 Re8 16.Nc2 Bb6=

13...Nxd4 14.Nxd4 Bxd4 15.Nd2 c5 16.Nf3 Bb7



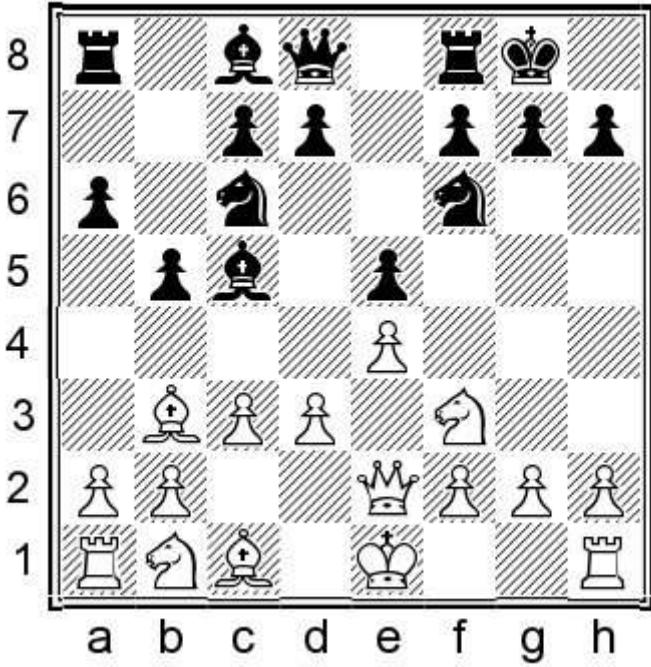
Position after: 16...Bb7

17.Nxd4 exd4 18.Bf4 Rc8 19.Rfc1 Re8=

19...c4!? should also be around equal.

j) 5.Qe2 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 0-0 8.d3 d5

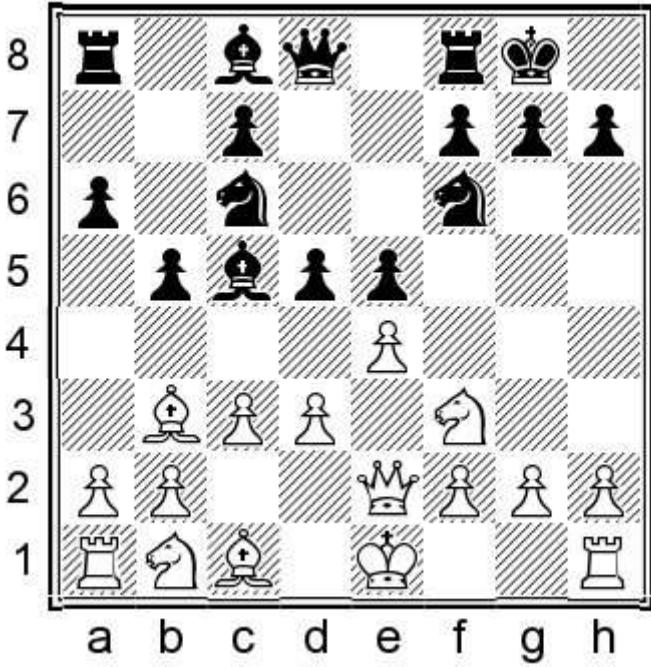
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.Qe2 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 0-0! 8.d3



Position after: 8.d3

Solid. Actually, I have faced this line only once in my tournament practice, and this move appeared on the board. I faced a great dilemma as to whether I should play ...d5 at once, or instead prepare it a little. I will show some ideas for both cases, to ease your job.

8...d5

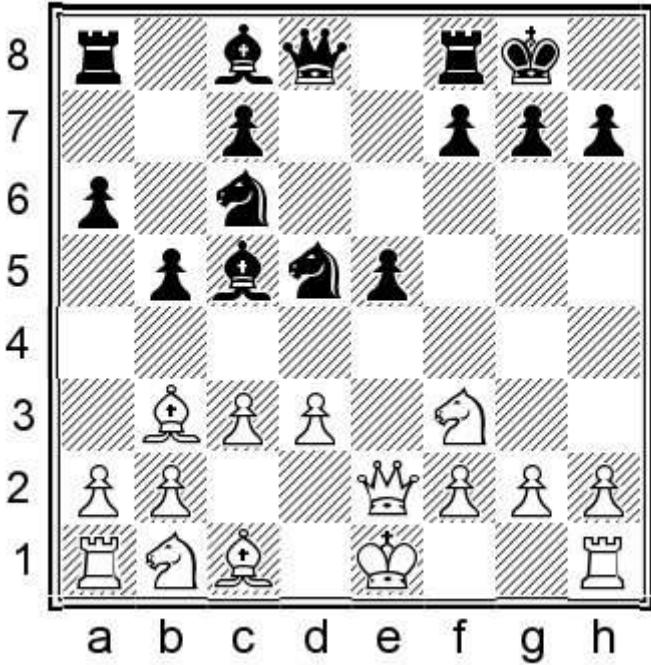


Position after: 8...d5

9.Bg5

A) 9.0-0 is probably the right move and can be found at 8.0-0 d5 9.d3

B) 9.exd5 Nxd5

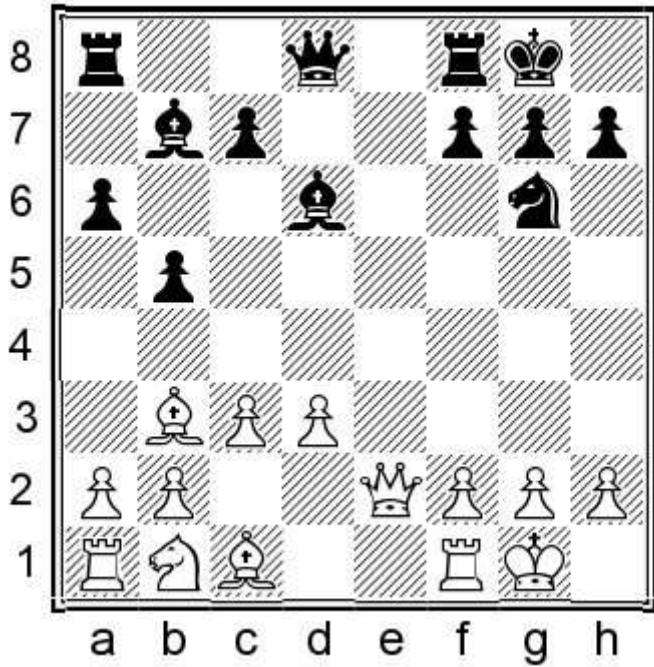


Position after: 9...Nxd5

10.Qe4?! Playing with fire. 10...Nde7!

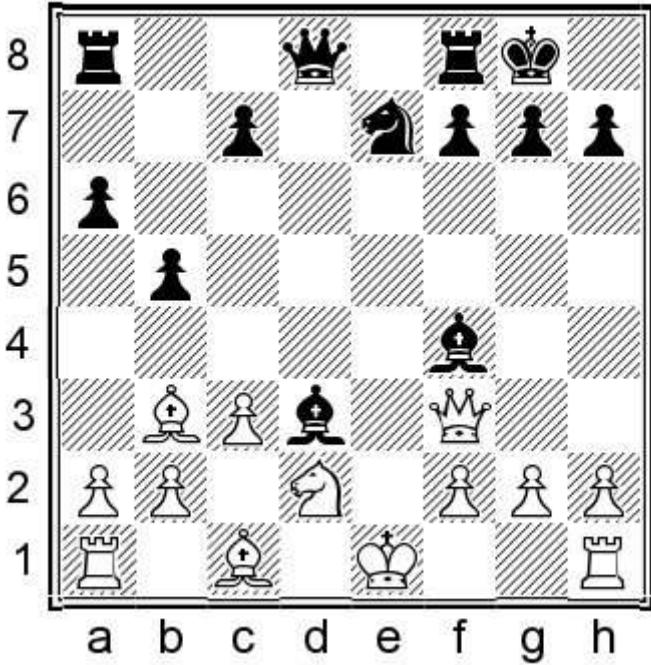
B1) 11.Bg5?! was tested recently and Black went for the simple 11...Bf5 [But actually we have the strong 11...Bb7! 12.0-0 Kh8! and White is struggling to stay in the game.] 12.Qxf5 Nxf5 13.Bxd8 Raxd8 14.Nbd2 in Sulskis, S (2528) – Krykun, Y (2342) Panevezys 2019. The position is equal.

B2) 11.Nxe5 Nxe5 12.Qxe5 Bd6 13.Qh5 Relatively best, but White has to play very carefully – it's already very suspicious... [13.Qe2 Bb7 14.0-0 Ng6



Position after: 14...Ng6

This looked very promising for Black in Hdrara – Bericat, corr. 1995. 15.d4 should have been played but even here the attack is very strong, e.g. 15...Qd7 16.f3 Rae8 17.Qf2 Nf4 18.Bxf4 Bxf4µ] 13...Bf5 14.0-0 [14.Nd2 Bxd3 15.Qf3 and it seems like White is fine, but Black has 15...Bf4!!



Position after: 15...Bf4!!

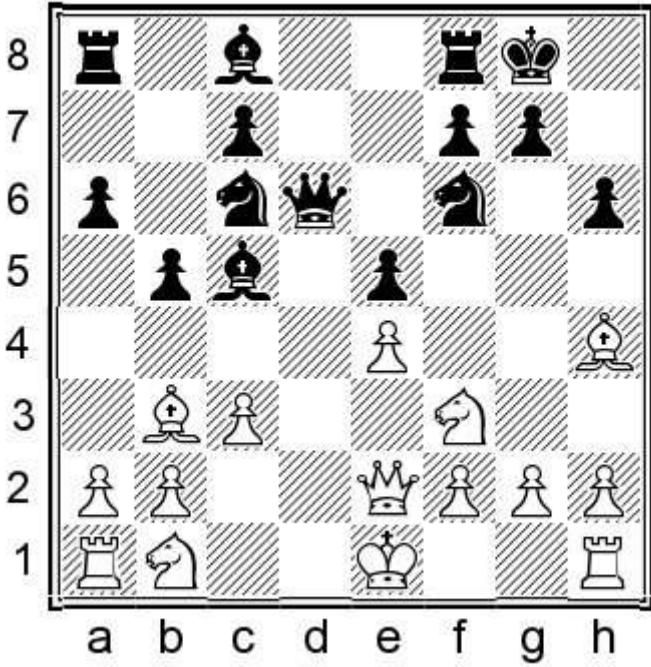
Posing some serious issues for the first player. 16.Qxf4 Ng6 17.Qd4 Re8+ 18.Kd1 Be2+ 19.Kc2 Qg5,] 14...Qd7!? This keeps things more complicated for White. [14...Bxd3 15.Rd1 Bg6 16.Qf3 is equal.] 15.d4 Rae8 16.Qd1 Ng6 We have a pleasant, active position; White has wasted a lot of time grabbing material.

C) 9.Nbd2?! allows 9...d4! 10.0-0 Nh5 when the knight has to return to b1, or else play some weakening move like 11.g3?! [11.Ne1 Nf4 12.Qd1 is also very depressing.] 11...Nf6 [11...Bh3? 12.Bd5 is White's trick.] 12.Kg2 Qd7! 13.Ng1 Rd8 which gives Black the initiative rather easily.

9...dxe4!

Better than 9...d4 10.Bd5 Qd6 11.Bxc6.

10.dxe4 h6 11.Bh4 Qd6!



Position after: 11...Qd6!

This can be considered a typical manoeuvre and it's the best way to unpin the f6-knight in this specific position.

12.Nbd2

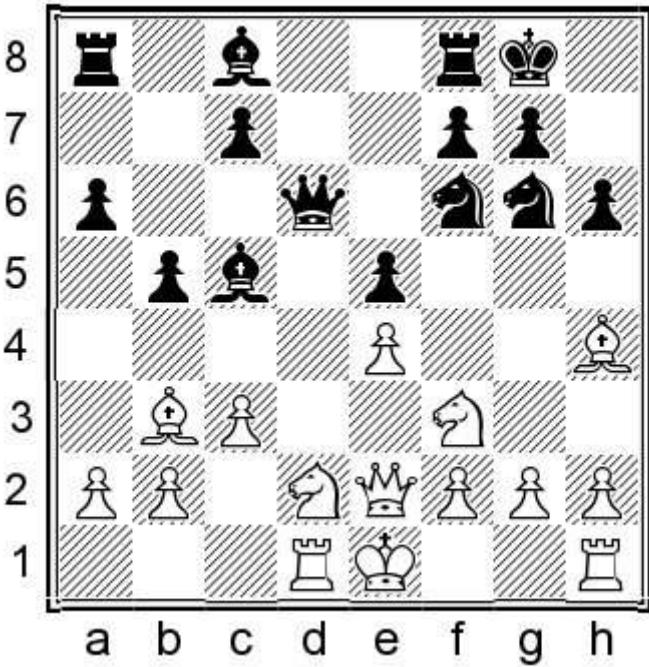
12.Bg3 allowed Black the immediate 12...Nh5³ with advantage in Popovic – Adhiban, Amsterdam 2011

12...Ne7!?

This leads to interesting complications.

12...Nh5 13.Bg3 Bg4! 14.h3 Nxg3 15.fxg3 Bxf3!? 16.Qxf3 [16.Nxf3 Na5 and White can't castle.] 16...Na5 17.0-0-0 Qe7 and Black is comfortable.

13.Rd1 Ng6



Position after: 13...Ng6

14.Nc4

The only move.

If 14.Bg3? Nh5—+

14...Qe7 15.Ne3 Bxe3

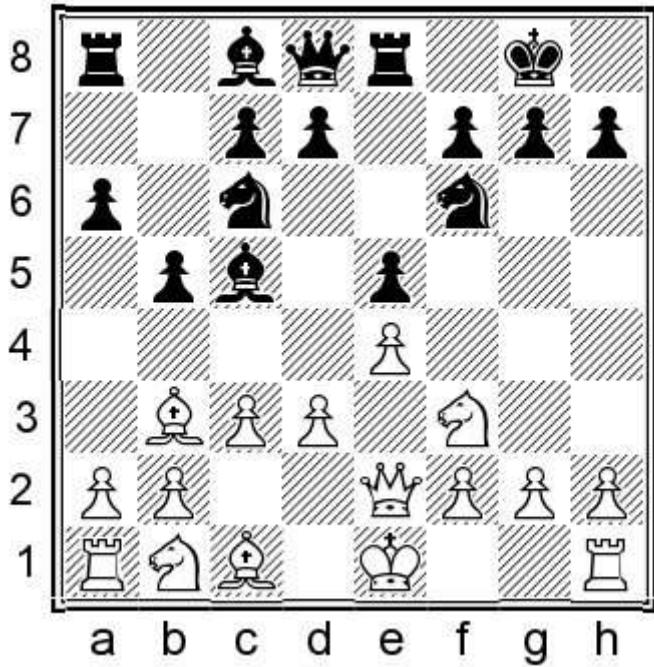
15...Nf4 16.Nd5 N4xd5 17.Rxd5 would not be that bad for White.

16.Qxe3 a5!? 17.0-0 a4 18.Bc2 Bg4³

Black is somewhat better.

k) 5.Qe2 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 0-0 8.d3 Re8

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.Qe2 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 0-0! 8.d3 Re8!?



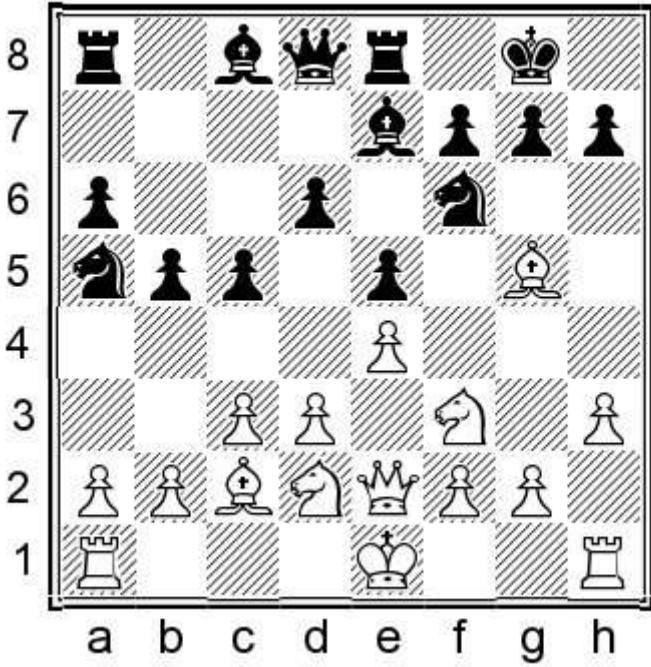
Position after: 8...Re8!?

My choice. It kind of provokes White's next move.

9.Ng5?!

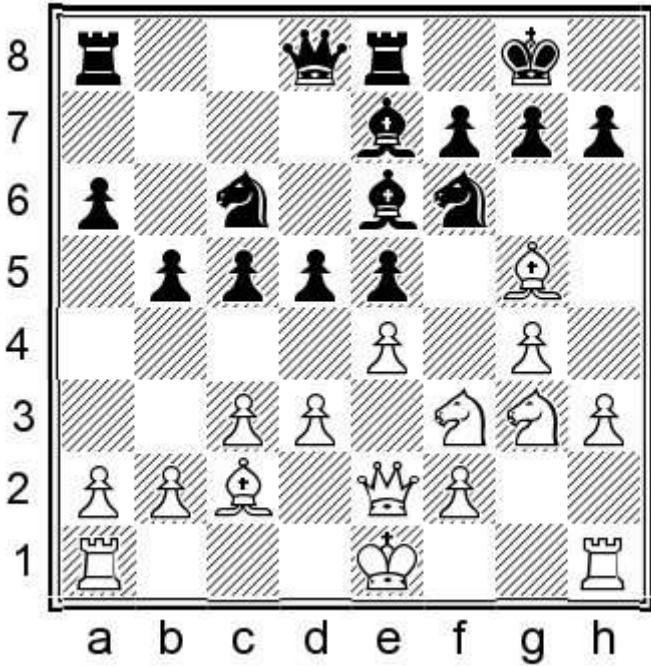
Inaccurate. Black has more than one good way to respond.

A) 9.Bg5 is not too dangerous, and Black can opt for various different setups. 9...Be7 Saving on ...h6 has some merits too. 10.Nbd2 d6 11.h3 Na5 12.Bc2 c5



Position after: 12...c5

13.Nf1!? [13.0-0=] 13...Be6 14.Ne3 would have been more to the point.
[14.g4?! Nc6 15.Ng3 d5f

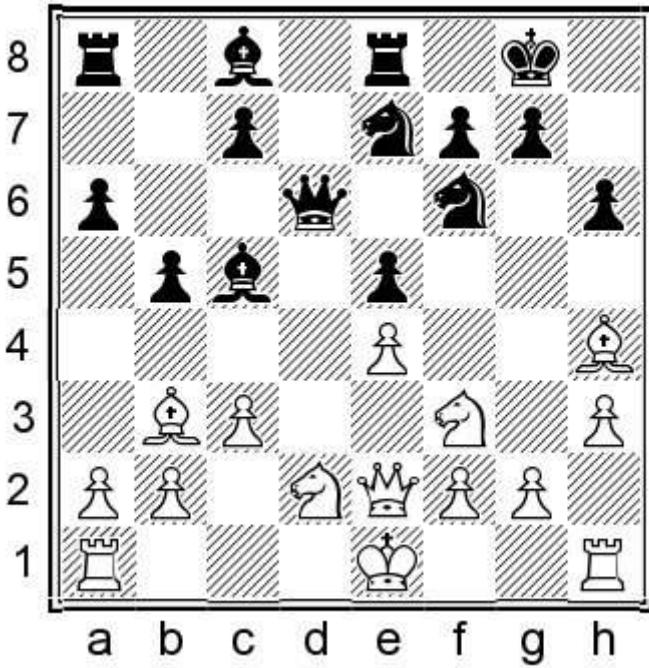


Position after: 15...d5f

Black got nice play in the centre which he converted into victory soon after in Nguyen, T (2128) – Melkumyan, H (2662) Melbourne 2018.] 14...Nh5 15.Bxe7 Qxe7 16.g3 Nf6 is fine for Black anyway.

B) 9.h3 d5

B1) 10.Bg5?! once again doesn't harm us. 10...dxe4 11.dxe4 h6 12.Bh4 [12.Bd5?! makes things worse. 12...Bd7 13.Bxf6 Qxf6 14.Nbd2 Rad8μ] 12...Qd6! 13.Nbd2 Ne7!



Position after: 13...Ne7!

14.Bg3 [14.Rd1 Ng6 15.Bg3 Bb7] 14...Ng6³ Black has an easier game.

B2) 10.0-0 h6 11.Nbd2 Be6= is a comfortably equal position.

C) 9.0-0 can easily be answered by

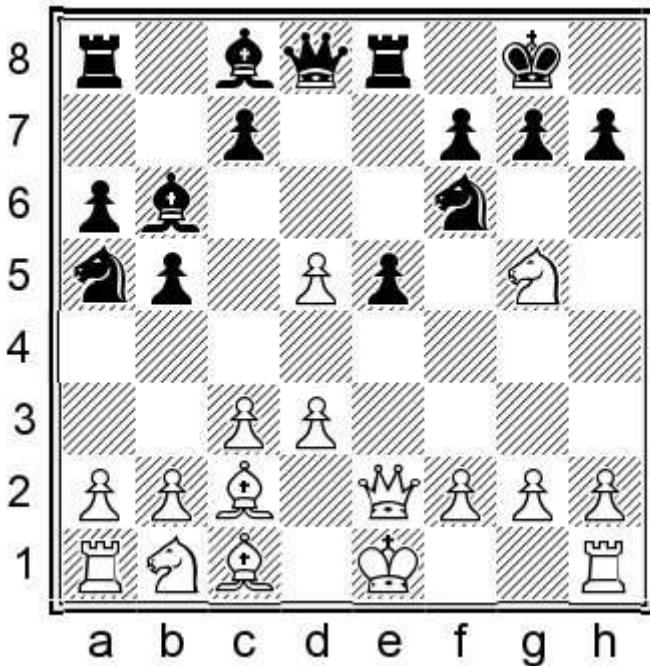
C1) 9...h6 and then ...d6 or ...d5 depending on the circumstances.

C2) Or Black can choose to create a mess with 9...d5!? 10.exd5 e4 [10...Nxd5? 11.Ng5] 11.dxe4 Rxe4 12.Qd1 Ne5

9...Re7

Simple chess.

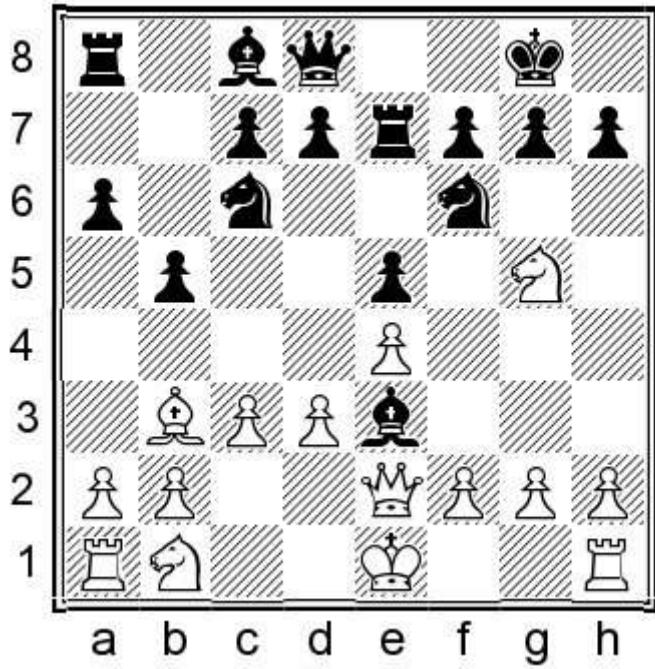
9...d5! would have been even more powerful. 10.exd5 Na5! 11.Bc2 [11.Ne4?! Nxb3 12.axb3 Qxd5!] This is Sadler, M (2646) – Haver, D (2021) Haarlem 2013 and here Black went completely astray with 11...Bg4. Instead the calm 11...Bb6!



Position after: 11...Bb6!

would have secured him a powerful initiative. It's really hard to come up with anything useful for White, e.g. 12.a4 [12.c4? bxc4 13.dxc4 e4! 14.Nc3 Bg4–+ is just winning; 12.b4 Nb7 13.Ne4 Nxd5] 12...Bg4 13.f3 Bh5 14.axb5 [14.b4 Nb7 15.axb5 a5!?\mu] 14...axb5 15.b4 Nb7 16.Rxa8 Qxa8 17.g4 Bg6\mu

10.Be3 Bxe3



Position after: 10...Bxe3

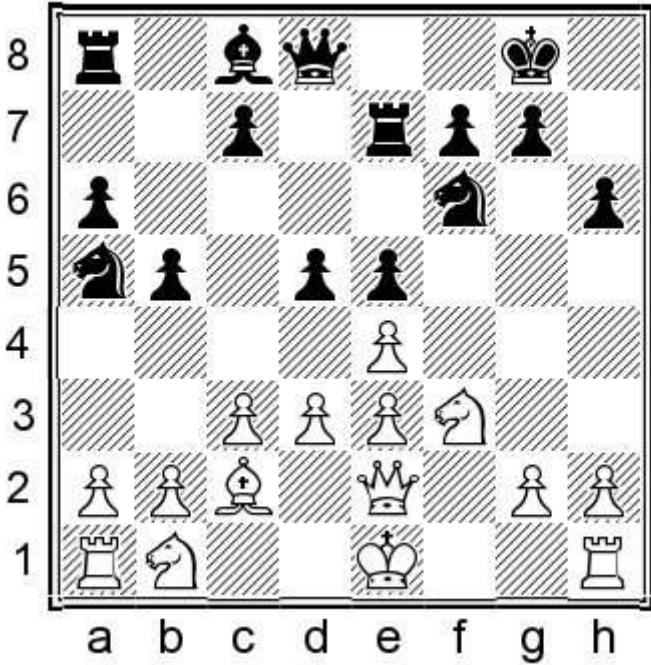
11.fxe3

11.Qxe3 d5 12.exd5 Na5f

11...h6 12.Nf3 Na5 13.Bc2

13.Nbd2 Nxb3 14.axb3 d5 15.exd5 Qxd5 16.e4 Qd6³

13...d5!?



Position after: 13...d5!?

With my aggressive play I managed to put my opponent under some pressure, and he went wrong here.

13...c5 14.0-0 d6 15.Nbd2 Be6 would have been the simplest continuation.

14.exd5

14.Nbd2? Enabling Black to double White's central pawn is a positional mistake. 14...dxe4 15.dxe4 c5 16.0-0 Qb6 17.Rad1 c4 18.Nh4 Nb7 19.h3 Nc5 20.b4 [20.Rf3 Bd7 21.Rdf1 Kh7!? μ] 20...cxb3 21.axb3 a5 μ was Nevednichy – Erdos, HUN-chT 2014 where I got a nearly decisive advantage but had to accept a draw later on in severe time trouble, as usual!

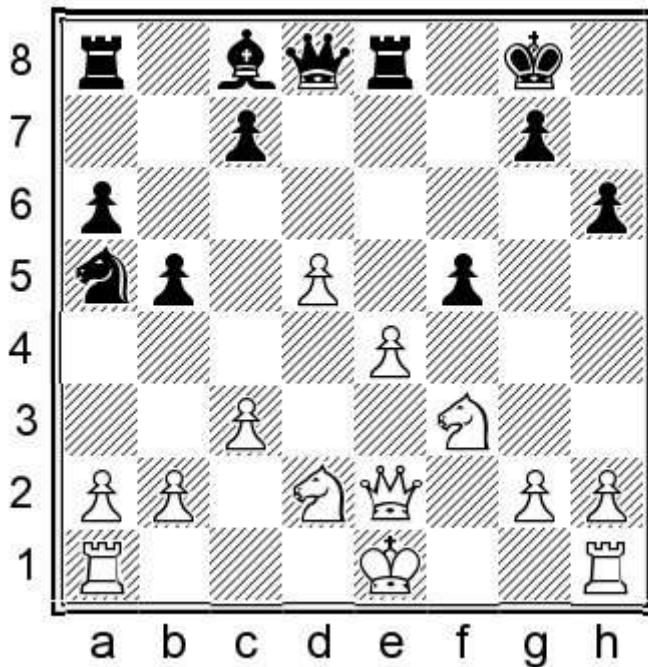
14...e4!?

Also scary, but here White can organize his defence much more easily. Black can also take on d5 to reach an equal game, by the way.

15.dxe4 Nxe4 16.0-0

16.Bxe4 Rxe4 17.Nbd2 Re8

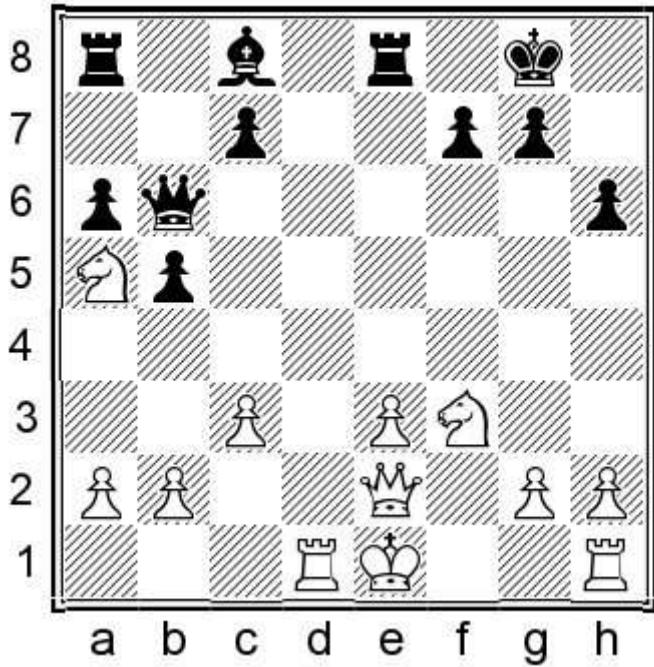
A) 18.e4 f5!



Position after: 18...f5!

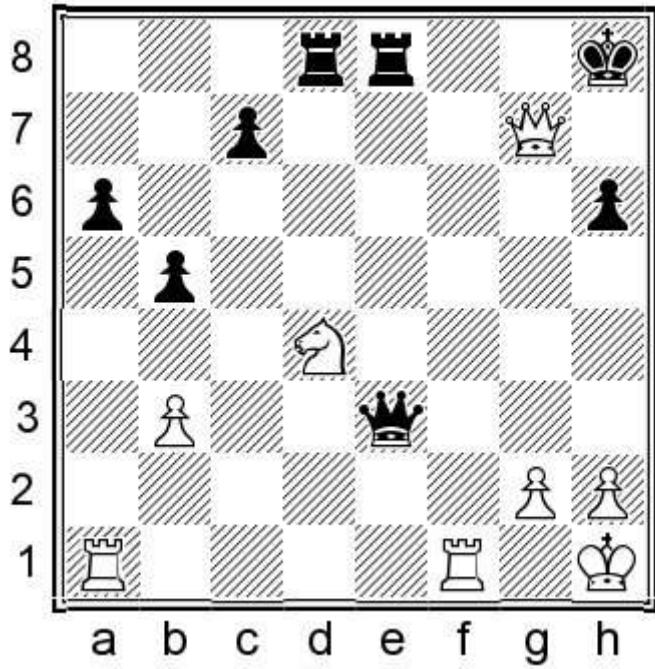
gives Black a lot of play. 19.0-0-0 [19.0-0 fxe4 20.Nxe4 Bf5; 19.e5 Qxd5 20.0-0 Nc6] 19...fxe4 20.Rhe1 Qd6!

B) 18.Rd1!? Qxd5!? Ignoring the threat. 19.Nb3 Qb7!? 20.Nxa5 Qb6



Position after: 20...Qb6

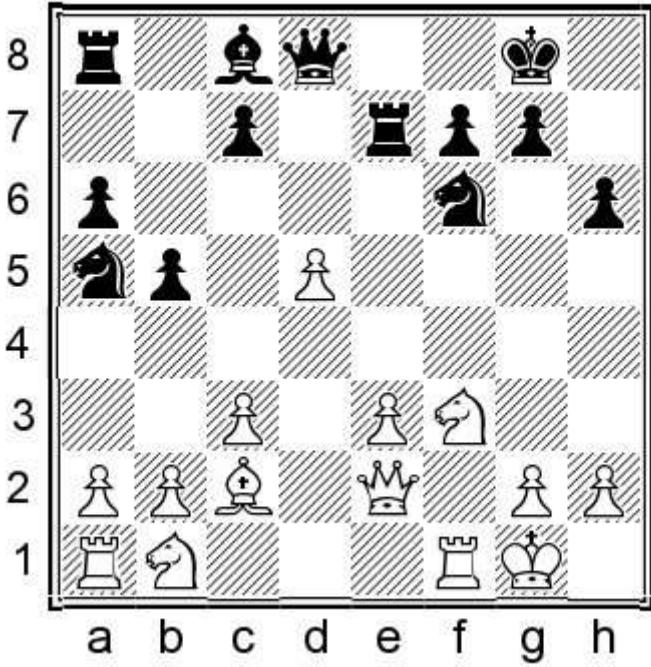
Black gains back the material and his structure is better. 21.Nd4 Qxa5 22.Qf3! After this accurate move the position is balanced. 22...Bd7 23.0-0 Qxa2 24.Ra1! Qc4 25.b3! Qxc3 26.Qxf7+ Kh8 27.Qxd7 Qxe3+ 28.Kh1 Rad8 29.Qxg7+!



Position after: 29.Qxg7+!

29...Kxg7 30.Nf5+ Kg8 31.Nxe3 Rxe3 32.Rxa6= Just in time.

16...Nf6!



Position after: 16...Nf6!

Nevednichy was probably afraid of opening the e-file toward his weak pawn on e3, but his active c2-bishop secures some counterplay in connection with knight jumps to d4/h4 and f5. Black is doing alright, but objectively is not better.

16...Qxd5 17.Rd1 Qe6 18.a4 is less appealing.

17.a4

A) 17.e4 allows 17...Qxd5!

B) 17.Rd1 is dubious after 17...Qe8!

C) 17.Nbd2 Qxd5 18.a4∞

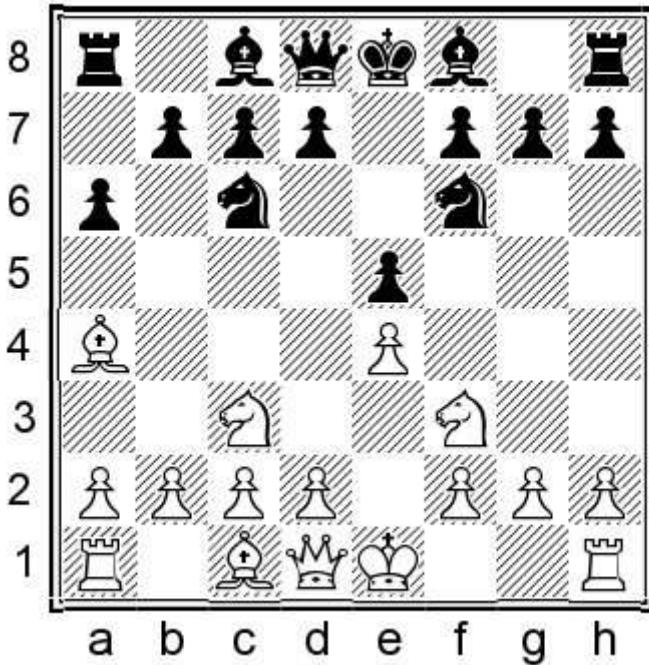
17...Bb7 18.Nd4 Qxd5 19.Nf5 Re6∞

The position is very complicated.

Chapter 3

5.Nc3

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.Nc3



Chapter Guide

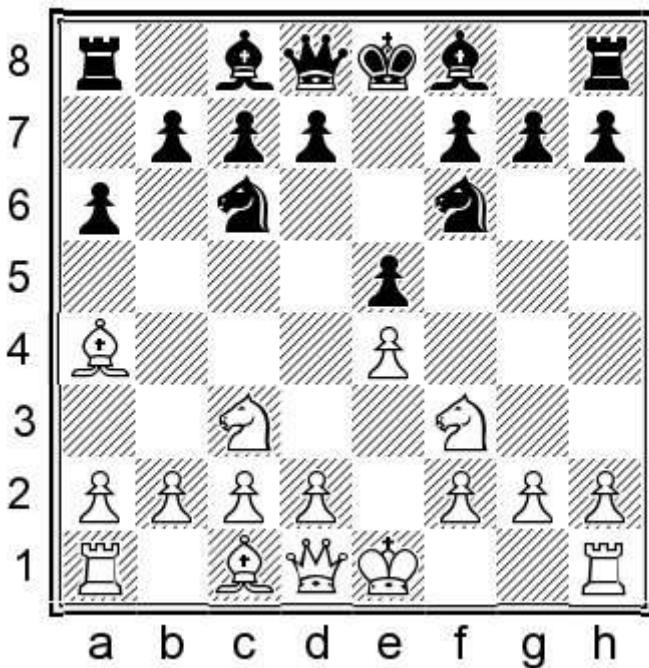
Chapter 3 – 5.Nc3

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.Nc3

- a) 5...Bc5
- b) 5...b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.Nxe5
- c) 5...b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4
- d) 5...b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.Nd5

a) 5...Bc5

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.Nc3!?



Position after: 5.Nc3!?

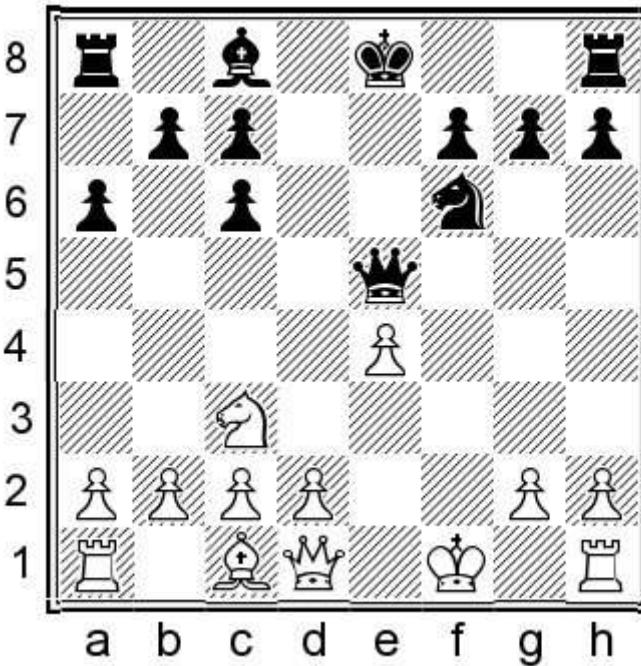
To be honest, up until 2017 I had never analyzed this line seriously. I thought it was just a worse version of the Four knights variation with 5.Bb5, this time with the inclusion of ... a6 and Ba4 which should definitely benefit Black. Things are more complex than that, of course, and we should never fall victim to dogmatism. I had noticed that Adhiban was employing it regularly, and managed to beat Gledura in good style. While working on this book, I realized once again how tricky this system can be, so be mindful dear reader!

5...Bc5

This is the safer approach, but allows White to enter a very complicated structure under better circumstances than on move 6. We, as Ark players, normally want to avoid this. However, I will show you an example where I went for it in the very strong Fide Grand Prix 2019, held in the Isle of Man, where I was honoured to have a chance to participate.

6.Bxc6 dxc6 7.d3

7.Nxe5 Bxf2+ 8.Kxf2 Qd4+ 9.Kf1 Qxe5



Position after: 9...Qxe5

10.d3 Be6 11.Qf3 0-0-0 12.Bf4 Qa5 13.h3 Rhg8 14.Bh2 c5 was complicated in Maze, S (2550) – Adams, M (2694) Caleta 2020.

7...Be6

A more or less typical move.

A) 7...Ng4!? was a move I thought about, when 8.0-0 Qd6 9.h3 h5! would be a funny idea.

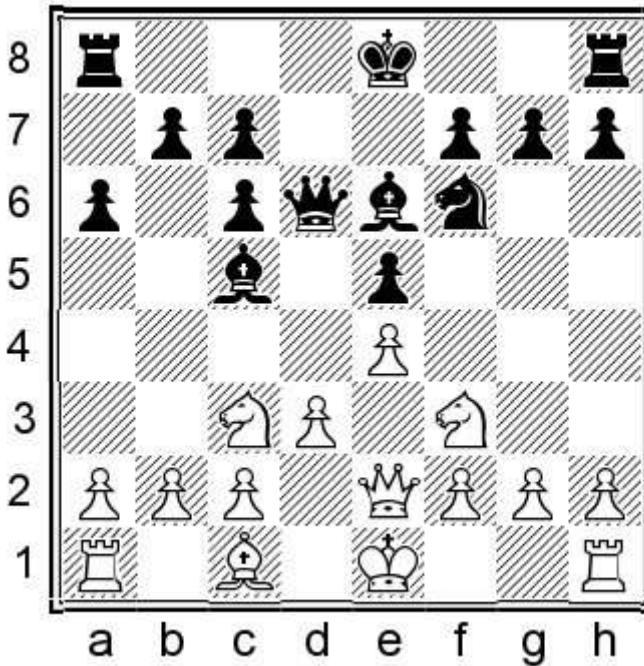
B) 7...Qd6 is aimed against Nxe5.

8.Qe2

8.Nxe5 was maybe a better try anyway, although 8...Bxf2+ [8...Qd4 9.Be3 Qxe5 10.d4 Bxd4 11.Qxd4 Qxd4 12.Bxd4²] 9.Kxf2 Qd4+ 10.Be3 Qxe5 11.h3

Nd7 12.Qf3 c5 doesn't look terrifying.

8...Qd6



Position after: 8...Qd6

9.Ng5

An optimistic move; White is ready to challenge my setup.

9.Be3 Nd7 10.Ng5=

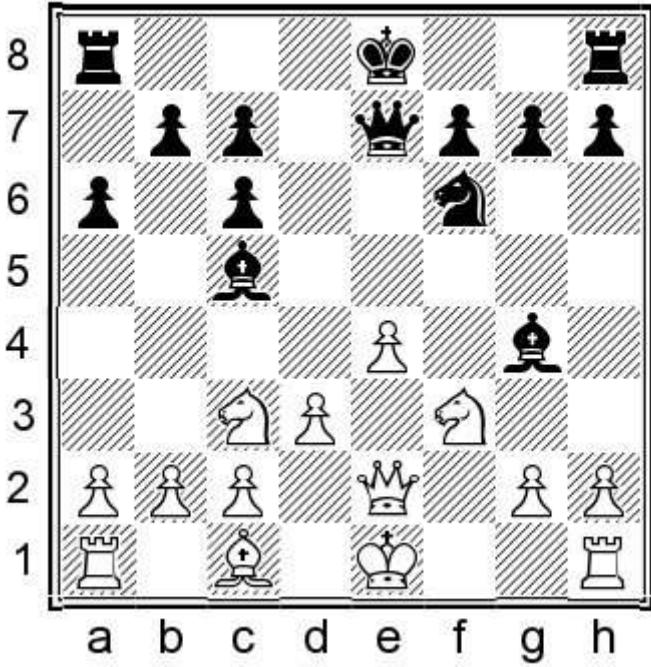
9...Bg4! 10.f3 Bd7 11.f4 Bg4

11...Bd4 12.Nf3 Bg4 13.fxe5 Bxe5 14.Bd2 0-0-0 15.0-0-0∞

12.fxe5

12.Nf3 Nd7=

12...Qxe5 13.Nf3 Qe7



Position after: 13...Qe7

14.Bg5

14.Be3 Bxe3 15.Qxe3 Nd5!= A nice equalizing motif.

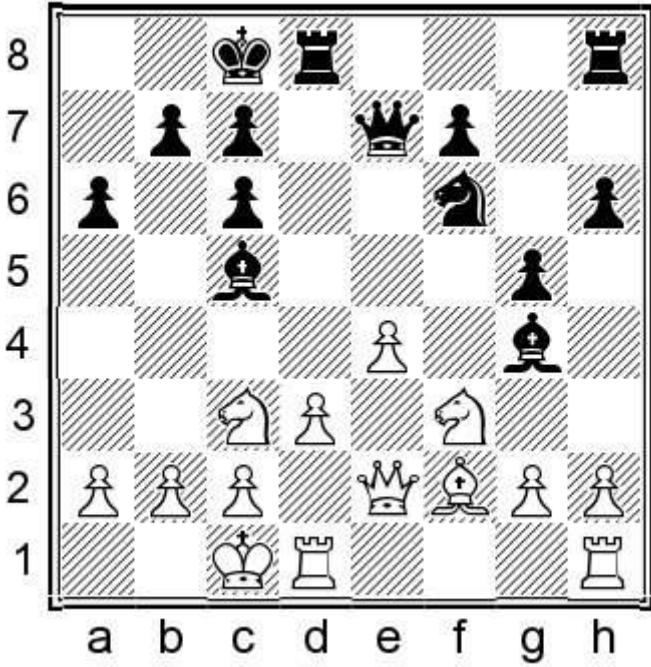
14...h6 15.Bh4 0-0-0

15...Bd4 was better.

16.0-0-0

I underestimated that after 16.h3 Bxf3 17.Qxf3 Bd4 White has 18.0-0-0!

16...g5 17.Bf2



Position after: 17.Bf2

17...Nh5

17...Bb4!?,

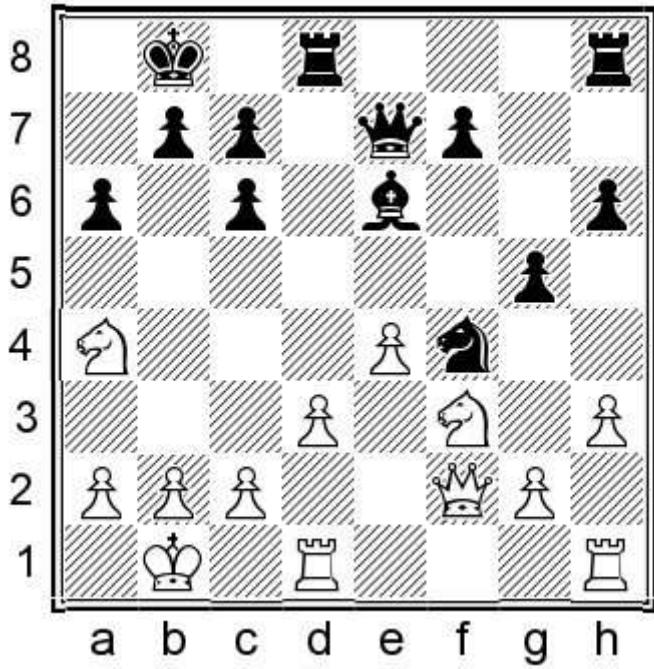
18.h3 Nf4 19.Qf1 Be6

19...Bxf3? 20.Bxc5 Qxc5 21.Qxf3

20.Kb1 Kb8 21.Na4

21.Bxc5 Qxc5 22.d4=

21...Bxf2 22.Qxf2



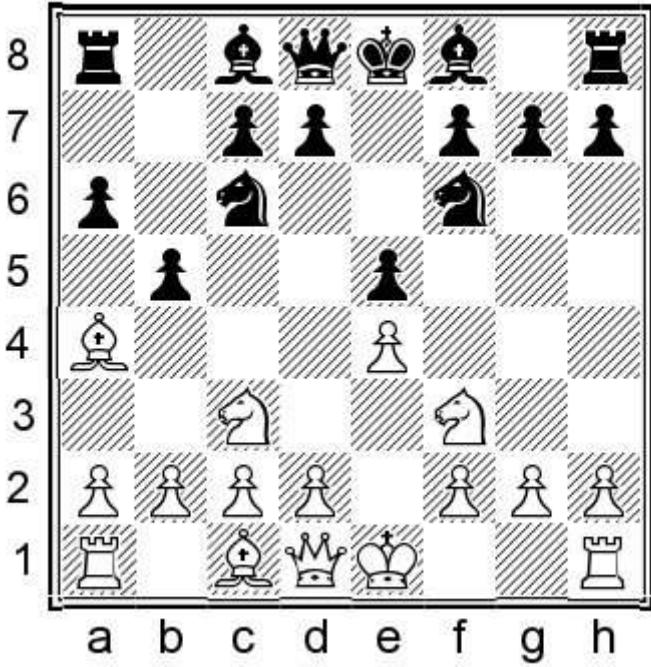
Position after: 22.Qxf2

22...f5 23.Rhe1 fxe4 24.Rxe4 Qf6 25.Nc5 Bc8

I got a very nice position and later drew, (31) Motylev, A (2651) – Erdős, V (2604) FIDE GP Isle of Man 2019.

b) 5...b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.Nxe5

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.Nc3!? b5



Position after: 5...b5

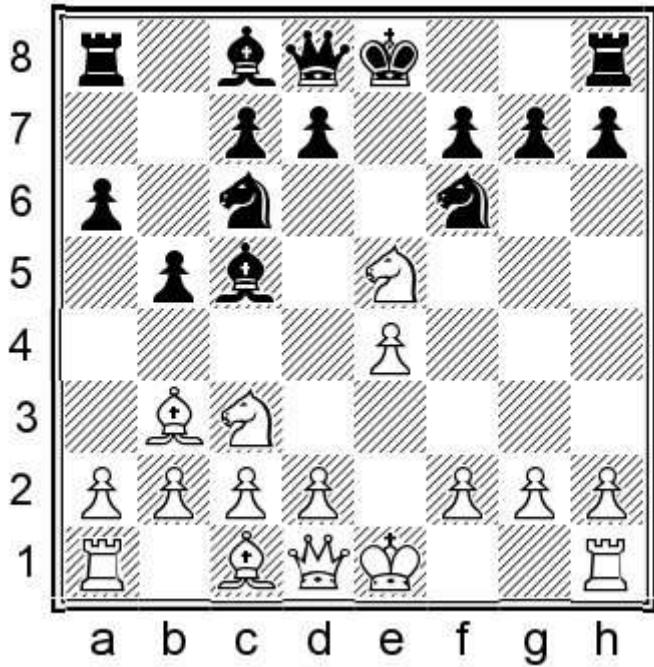
I had a great dilemma as to which move order I should suggest. I felt like for consistency's sake this should be our reply.

6.Bb3 Bc5

It has recently turned out that White has two venomous ways here to test Black. I was really surprised how difficult it was to find complete equality in some cases. 7.d3 and 7.0-0 simply transpose to other chapters.

7.Nxe5

A very rare move, and for a reason I believe. It's similar to the main Ark, but instead of castling, White has already committed the knight to c3. Some would claim castling is a «loss of a tempo», but here it's clear that White would do better with it than without.

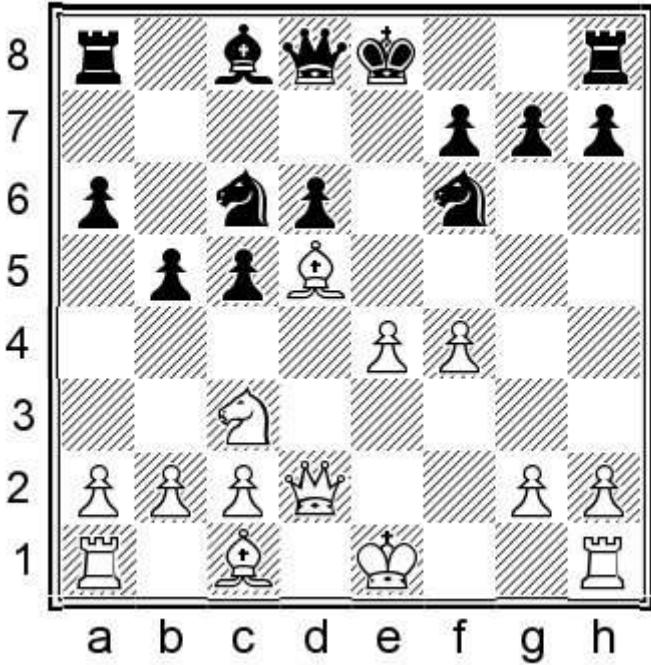


Position after: 7.Nxe5

7...Nxe5 8.d4 Bxd4 9.Qxd4 d6 10.f4

The human way. Our silicon friend gives moves such as 10.a3 and 10.Qe3 but those look too artificial to me.

10...c5 11.Qd2 Nc6 12.Bd5



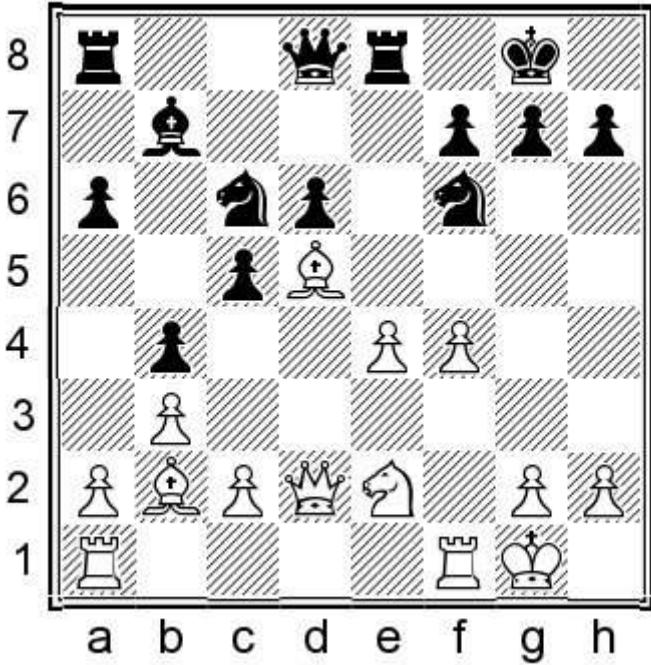
Position after: 12.Bd5

12...Bb7

This keeps the tension for a while, so the awkward position of some White pieces may be felt.

12...Nxd5 13.Nxd5 0-0 14.0-0 Re8 15.f5 Rxe4 16.f6 Be6 17.fxg7 f5 18.Nf4∞ was very interesting in Shishmarev, V – Kuzmin, G Moscow 1966.

13.0-0 0-0 14.b3 Re8 15.Bb2 b4 16.Ne2



Position after: 16.Ne2

16...Nxd5

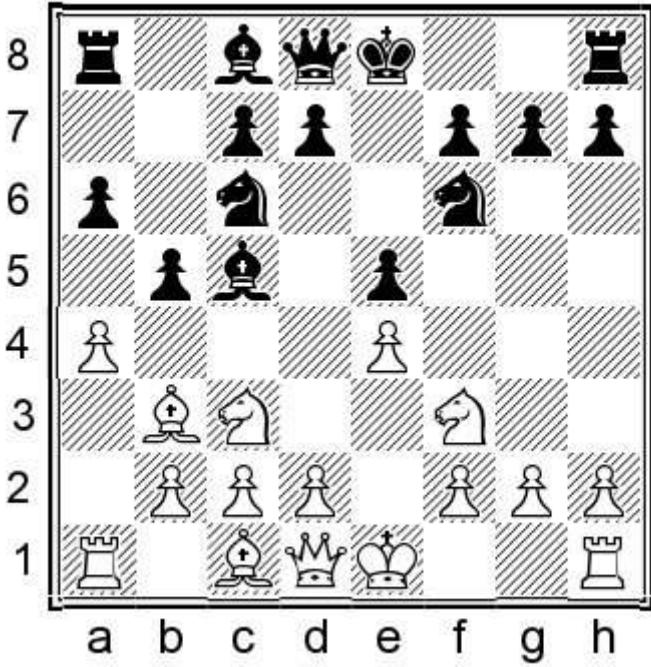
16...Nxe4?! 17.Bxe4 Rxe4 18.Ng3 is too dangerous.

17.exd5 Ne7 18.c4 bxc3 19.Nxc3 Qd7

and Black is at least alright.

c) 5...b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.Nc3!? b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4



Position after: 7.a4

7...Rb8 8.axb5

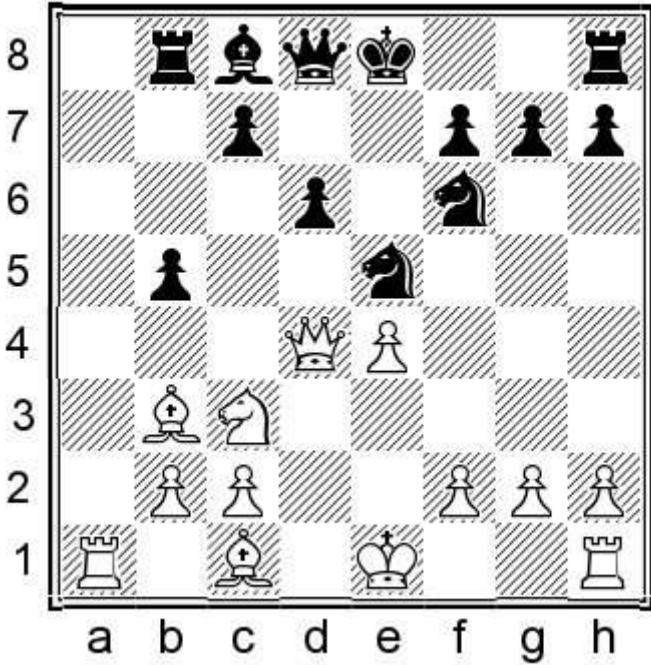
8.0-0 0-0 9.axb5 axb5 can be found via 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.Nc3

8...axb5 9.Nd5!

I have found only one game with this move, but nevertheless this is an important concept to check out.

9.d3 or 9.0-0 is likely to transpose.

9.Nxe5 Surprisingly, this alternative has never seen the day of light in this specific move order. 9...Nxe5 10.d4 Bxd4 is normal and 11.Qxd4 d6



Position after: 11...d6

This is likely to transpose into the main line after, say: 12.f4 [12.0-0 or 12.Bf4 0-0 13.0-0] 12...Nc6 13.Qd3 0-0 14.0-0

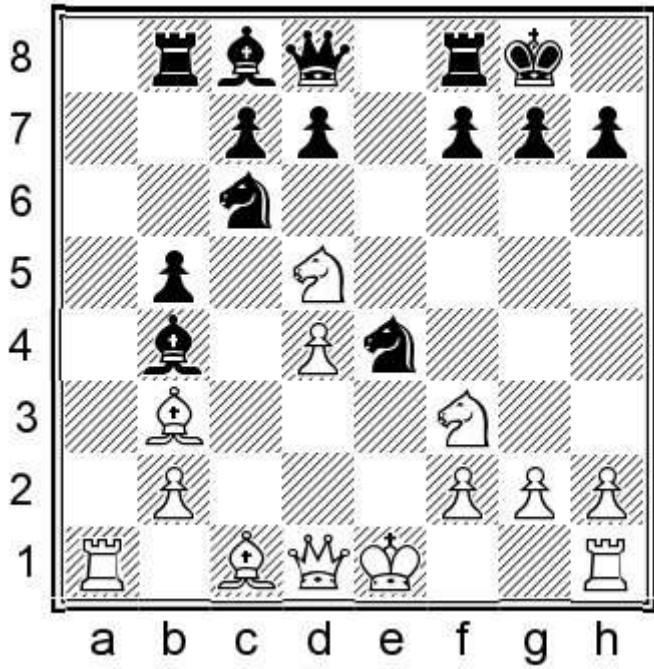
9...0-0

9...Nxe4 is again met by 10.d4! Bxd4 11.Nxd4 Nxd4 12.Qg4

10.0-0!

A) 10.d4? is no good: 10...Nxd4 11.Nxd4 Nxd5!

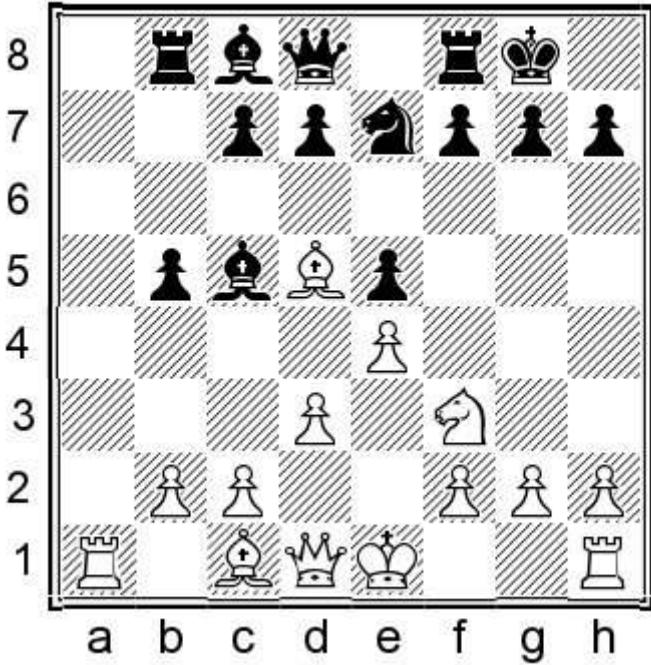
B) 10.c3?! is not too dangerous: 10...Nxe4 11.d4 [11.0-0 Nf6] 11...exd4 12.cxd4 Bb4+!



Position after: 12...Bb4+!

13.Nxb4 [13.Kf1 Be7 14.h4 Nb4!] 13...Nxb4 14.0-0 Bb7 and we are a healthy pawn up.

C) 10.d3 Nxd5 11.Bxd5 Ne7!



Position after: 11...Ne7!

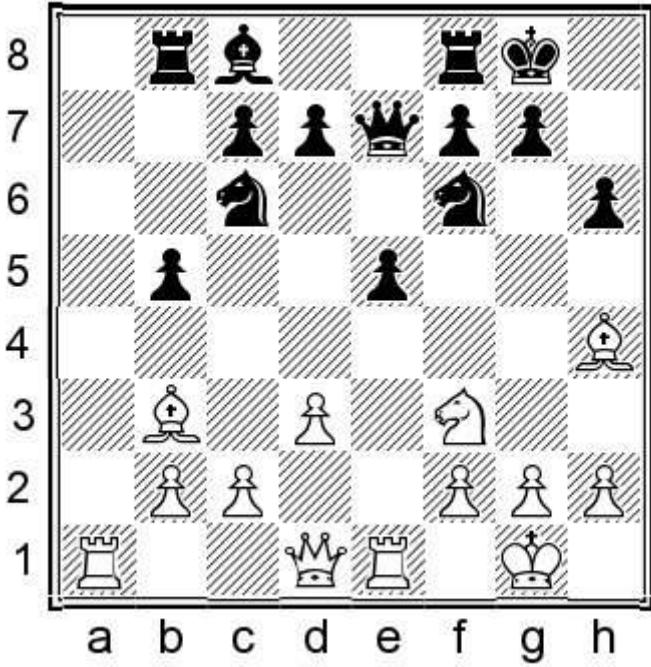
And the game is around equal. 12.Bb3 [12.Nxe5? Nxd5 13.exd5 Bd4! 14.Nf3 Re8+ 15.Kf1 Bf6 Black has huge compensation here.] 12...d6 13.0-0 Ng6 [13...Bb6=] 14.Bg5 Qe8 15.Be3 Qe7 16.h3 h6 17.Qd2 Bb6=

10...Nxe4

We should devour this central pawn and hope to give it back under good circumstances.

10...Nxd5 11.Bxd5 Ne7 looks obvious, but 12.Nxe5 Nxd5 13.exd5 Bb7 14.d4 leads to some problems: 14...Bd6 [14...Bb6 is strongly countered by 15.Ra3!! This rook lift is easy to miss. 15...f6 16.Rh3! and White now has some nasty threats around our naked king.] 15.Qf3 Bxe5 [15...Qh4 16.h3!] 16.dxe5 d6 17.exd6 [17.b3!? dxe5 18.c4?] 17...Qxd6 18.Rd1²

11.d3 Nf6 12.Bg5 Be7 13.Nxe7+ Qxe7 14.Re1 h6 15.Bh4



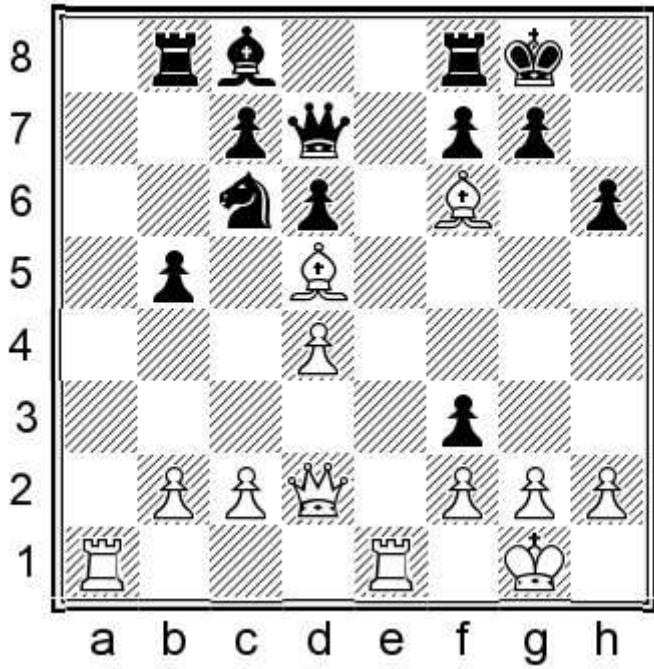
Position after: 15.Bh4

The critical position of the whole line. We are definitely under some pressure here, but it's also not that easy for White to handle the position correctly. Typical modern-age chess!

15...Bb7

This is the move I put my trust in: Black has alternatives, but I like this the most.

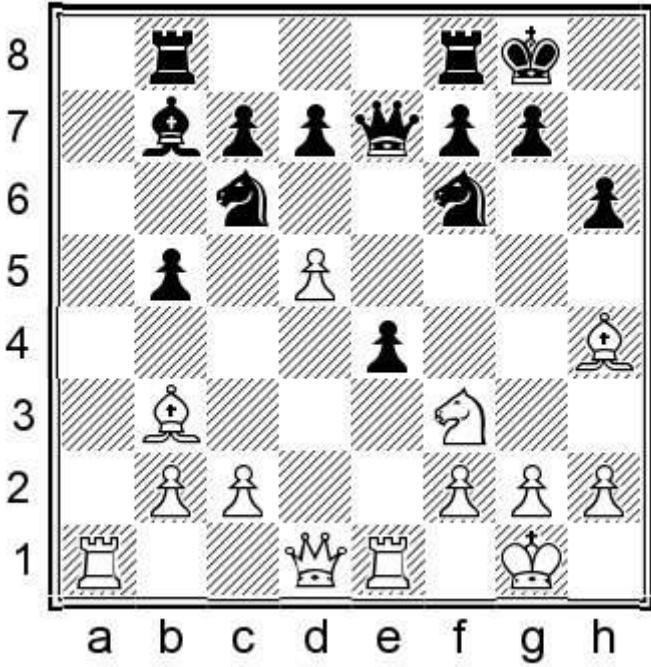
15...d6 16.d4 e4 17.Bd5! turns out to be better for White: [17.c3 Bf5 18.Bd5 Nd8] 17...Qd7 18.Bxf6 exf3 19.Qd2!



Position after: 19.Qd2!

19...Bb7 [19...Qf5 20.Bxg7 Kxg7 21.Bxc6 d5 22.Qd3!?] 20.Bxf3! and White is better, since taking on f6 is too risky.

16.d4 e4 17.d5!



Position after: 17.d5!

This move causes us the most problems.

17...Ne5

Centralizing is logical here.

18.Nd2

The best among the available moves in my opinion.

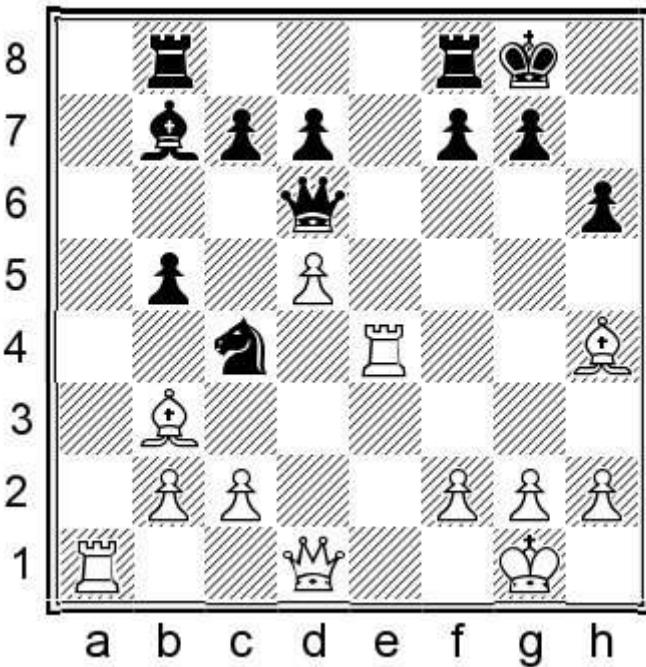
A) 18.Nd4 Ng6 19.Bxf6 Qxf6 20.Rxe4 Nf4 21.Nxb5 Qg5 22.g3 Nxd5,,

B) 18.Nxe5 Qxe5 19.Bg3 Qf5 20.Bxc7 Ra8 is interesting, but we can create counterplay: 21.Qe2 Bxd5 22.Qxb5 e3 23.fxe3 Rxa1 24.Rxa1 Qe4 25.Bxd5 Nxd5,,

18...Qd6

The simplest solution here.

19.Nxe4 Nxe4 20.Rxe4 Nc4!



Position after: 20...Nc4!

Not very threatening: 21.Bxc4 bxc4 22.Rxc4 Qxd5 23.Qxd5 Bxd5 24.Rxc7 Rxb2 25.Rxd7 Bc6 This endgame is an easy draw. 26.Rd2 [26.Rc7 Rxc2=] 26...Be4 27.Rc1 Rc8=

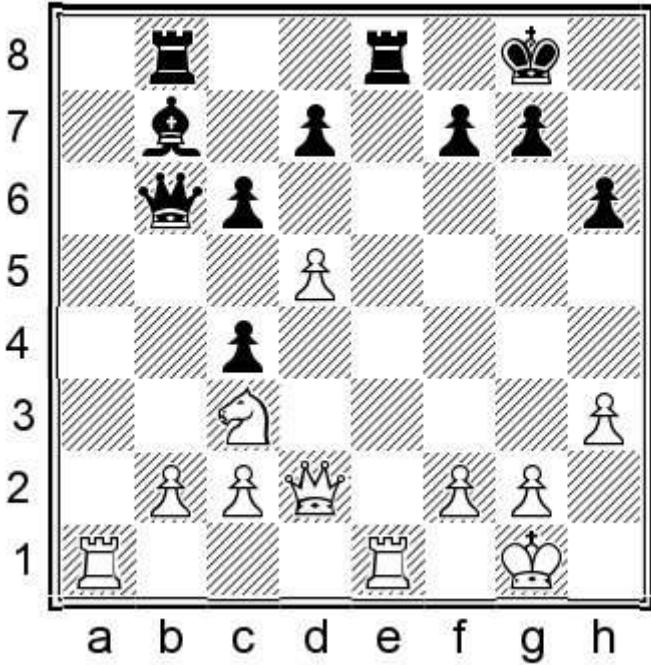
19.Bxf6 Qxf6 20.Nxe4 Qb6

We have reached a relatively calm position. The game should be balanced with normal play, for example:

21.Qd2 Rfe8 22.h3 Nc4!?

Very direct play, although alternatives are available.

23.Bxc4 bxc4 24.Nc3 c6!?



Position after: 24...c6!?

25.d6 Re6!

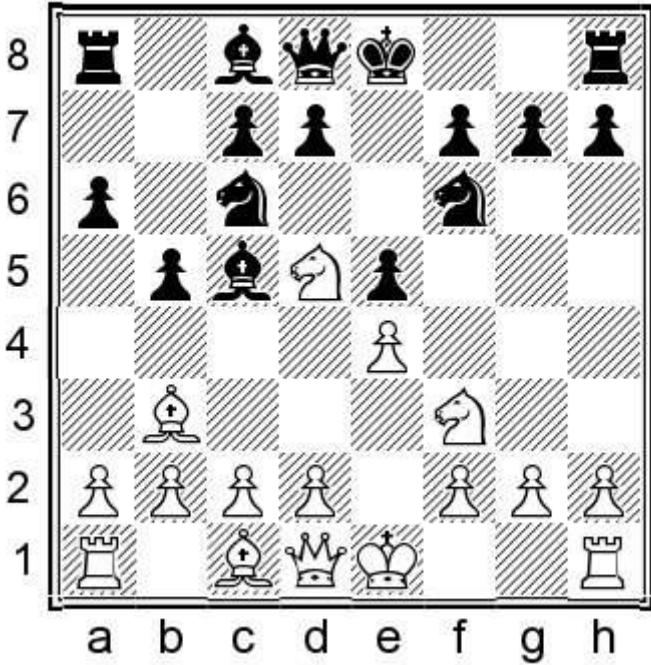
The computer is never dogmatic, thus enabling it to come up with seemingly anti-positional – but very effective – ways to play certain positions. This is a nice one, and I was very impressed while figuring it out.

26.Rxe6 fxe6=

Black is pushing ...c5 next and becomes active enough to claim comfortable equality.

d) 5...b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.Nd5

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.Nc3!? b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.Nd5



Position after: 7.Nd5

This variation is relatively new; only around 10 games have gone this way. There are a lot of tricky ideas, so we have to be cautious. I thought we should go into some detail, because this might easily become a new trend.

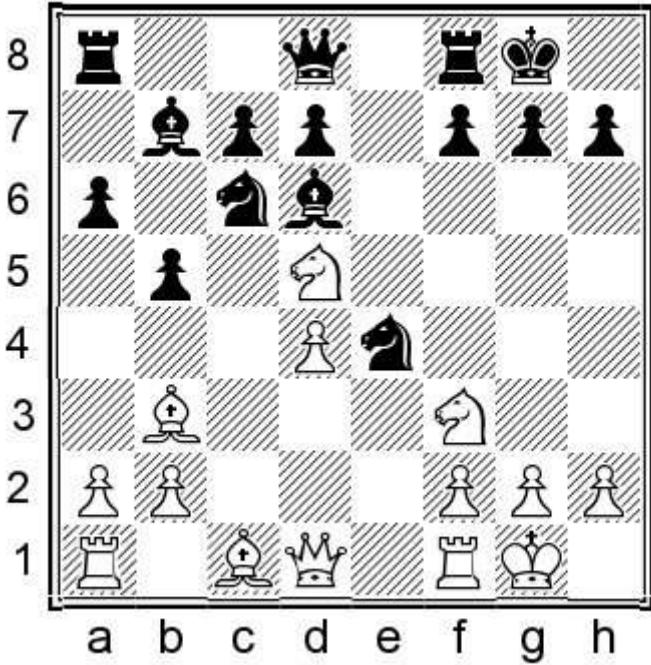
7...0-0!

I believe this to be the precise move.

In case of 7...Nxe4?!, White is planning to play 8.d4! Bxd4 9.Nxd4 Nxd4 10.Qg4 with a dangerous initiative.

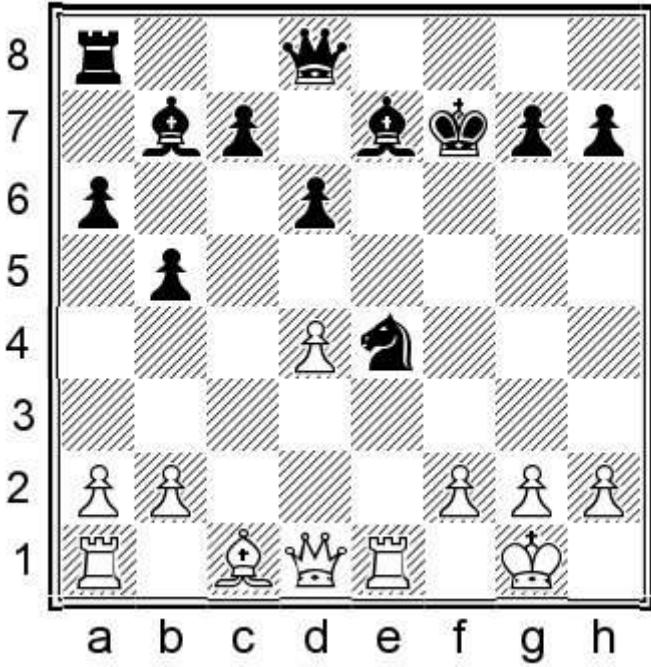
8.d3

A) 8.c3?! is now less of a problem: 8...Nxe4 9.d4 exd4 10.cxd4 Bd6!? [10...Bb4+ can be considered too.] 11.0-0 Bb7!



Position after: 11...Bb7!

This requires some calculation, but it's worth it because Black is playing for the advantage already. 12.Re1 [12.Qd3 Re8 13.Re1 Nb4! 14.Nxb4 Bxb4 15.Bxf7+ Kxf7 16.Qb3+ Kf8 17.Qxb4+ d6³ Black's advantage is small but clear.] 12...Ne7 13.Nxe7+ Bxe7 We are a pawn up, so White needs to act quickly. Straightforward play doesn't bring relief, though, e.g. 14.Ne5 d6 15.Nxf7 Rxf7 16.Bxf7+ Kxf7



Position after: 16...Kxf7

17.Qf3+ Bf6 18.Rxe4 Bxe4 19.Qxe4 Qe7 20.Qd5+ Qe6 21.Qh5+ Kg8
 22.Be3 Rc8! and Black is better.

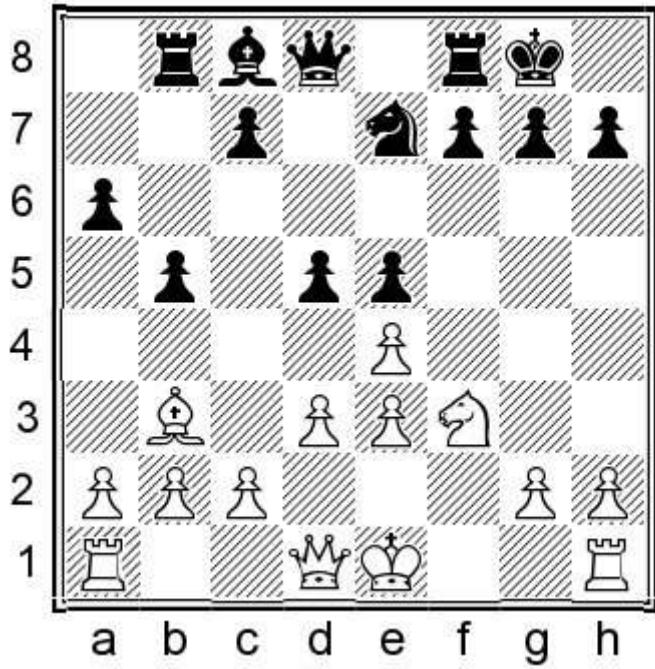
B) 8.0-0 Nxe4 9.d3 Nf6 10.Bg5 will be discussed in the main Ark, at
 7.Nc3

8...Nxd5

A very solid option.

9.Bxd5 Rb8 10.0-0

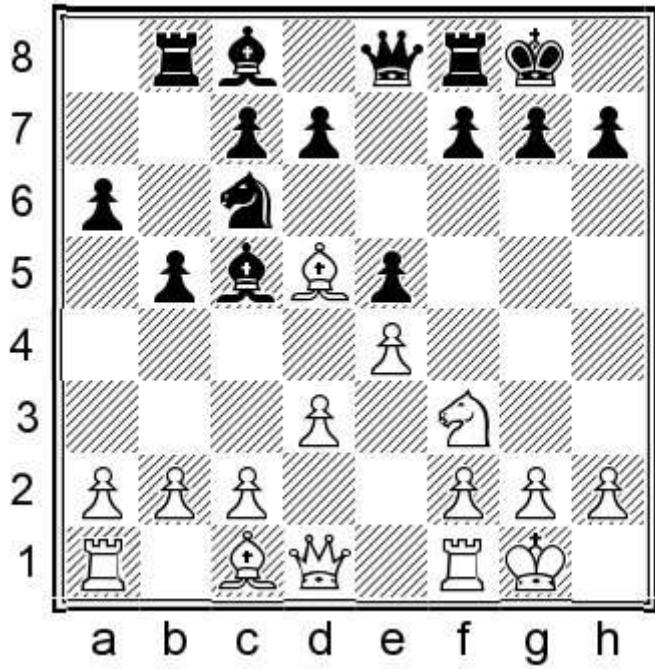
10.Be3 Bxe3 11.fxe3 Ne7! 12.Bb3 and now instead of 12...d6, which happened in Haddouche, M (2487) – Ding, L (2777) Tbilisi 2017, Black has 12...d5!



Position after: 12...d5!

This fine for us, thanks to the quick counterplay toward e3.

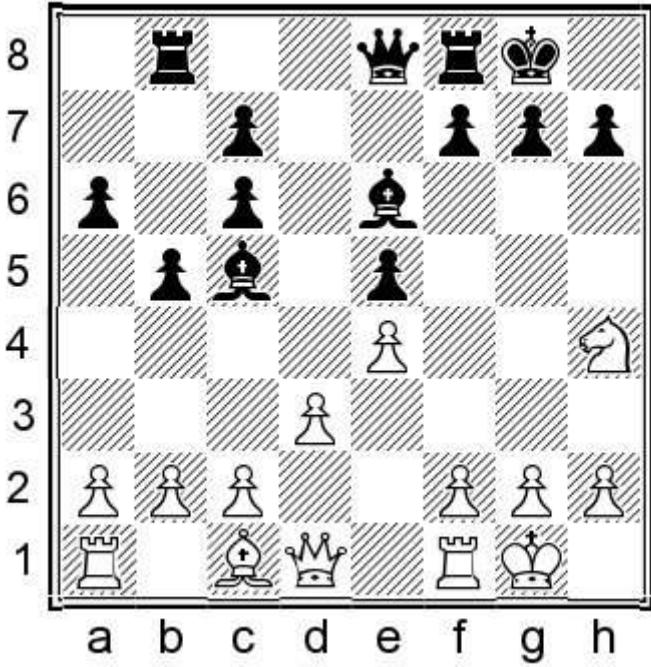
10...Qe8!



Position after: 10...Qe8!

11.Be3

A) 11.Bxc6!? dxс6 12.Nh4 Be6



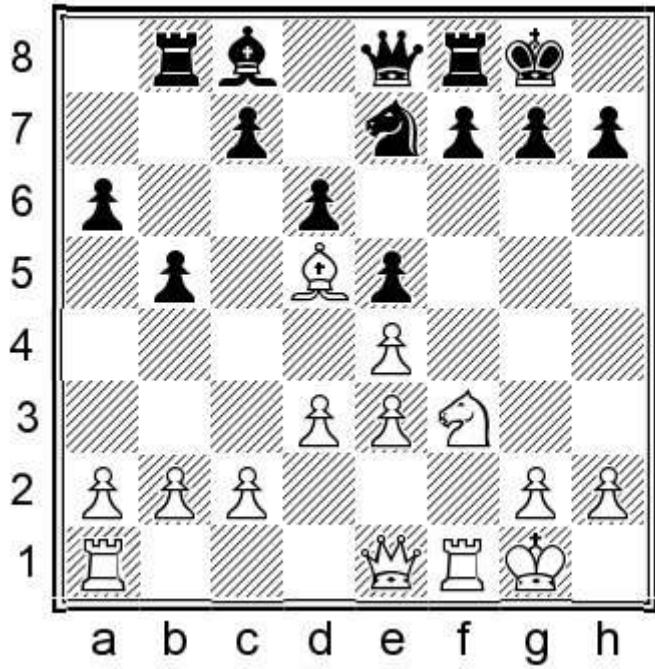
Position after: 12...Be6

13.Qf3 Qd7 14.Be3 Bd4! 15.c3 [15.Bxd4 Qxd4 16.b3 c5=] 15...Bxe3 16.Qxe3 Rfd8 17.Rfd1 Qe7 18.Nf3 Bg4 19.d4 Bxf3 20.Qxf3 Rd6 21.dxe5 Qxe5 22.Rxd6 cxd6 23.Rd1 Re8=

B) 11.c3 d6 12.b4 Bb6 13.a4 Ne7 14.Bb3 h6 15.h3 Ng6 16.Bd2 Kh8 17.Nh2 f5 18.Qh5 Be6 19.Bxe6 Qxe6³ ½ (37) Babulova, M (2166) – Zhak, O (2353) ICCF email 2017.

11...Bxe3 12.fxe3 d6 13.Qe1 Ne7

From here, the knight chases the bishop and covers the f5-square. For instance, the game could continue with:



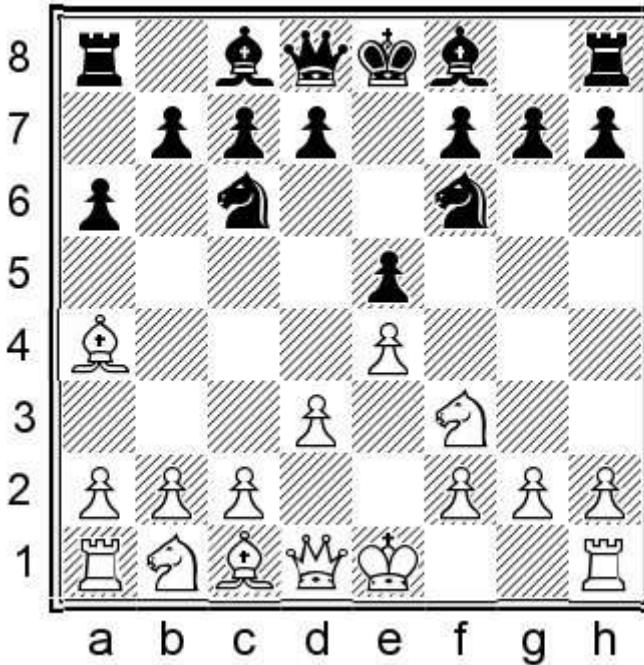
Position after: 13...Ne7

**14.Bb3 h6 15.a4 Bd7 16.axb5 axb5 17.Nh4 Ra8 18.Nf5 Rxa1 19.Qxa1
Be6=**

Chapter 4

5.d3

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.d3



Chapter Guide

Chapter 4 – 5.d3

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.d3 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5

- a) 7.--
- b) 7.Bg5
- c) 7.a4
- d) 7.c3
- e) 7.Nc3 d6 8.--

f) 7.Nc3 d6 8.Nd5 h6 9.--

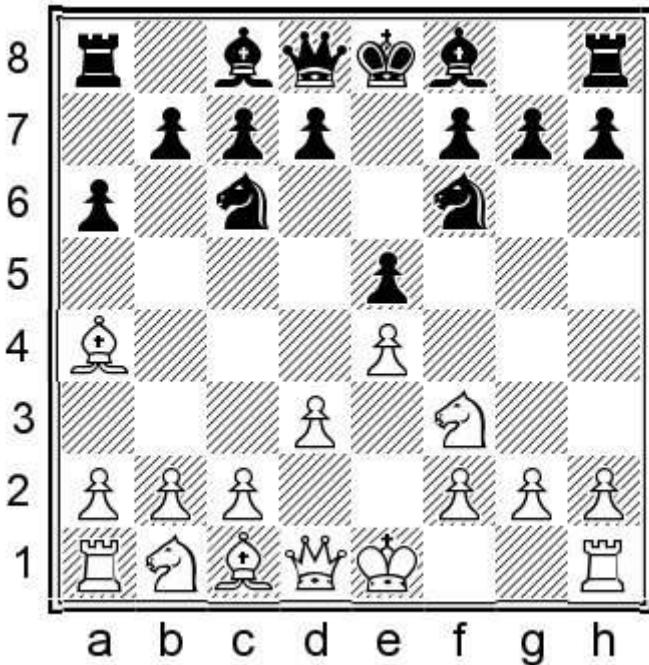
g) 7.Nc3 d6 8.Nd5 h6 9.c3 Be6 10.--

h) 7.Nc3 d6 8.Nd5 h6 9.c3 Be6 10.0-0 Bxd5 11.exd5 Ne7 12.d4 exd4 13.Nxd4 Qd7 14.--

i) 7.Nc3 d6 8.Nd5 h6 9.c3 Be6 10.0-0 Bxd5 11.exd5 Ne7 12.d4 exd4 13.Nxd4 Qd7 14.a4

a) 7.--

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.d3

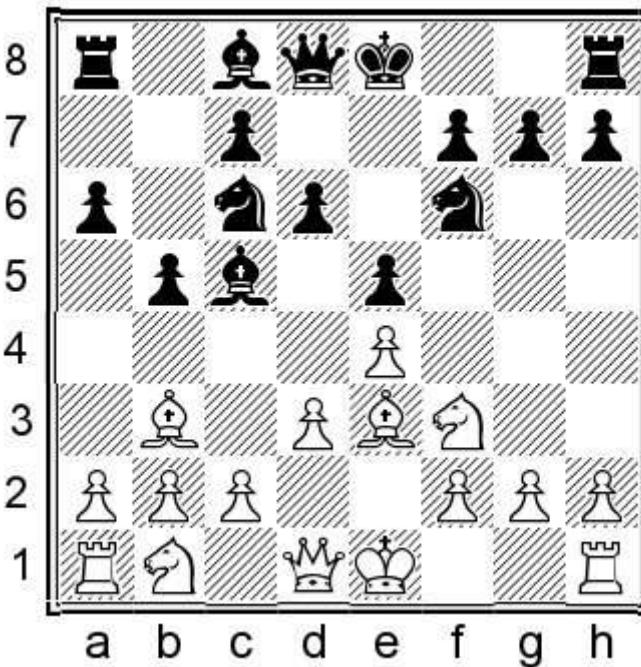


Position after: 5.d3

This move order is mainly designed to avoid the Open Ruy Lopez, which arises after 5.0-0 Nxe4 and is irrelevant from our point of view. Also, sometimes White may use the fact that the king is still uncastled in comparison with the 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.d3 form of this solid system.

5...b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.Nbd2

A) 7.Be3 d6

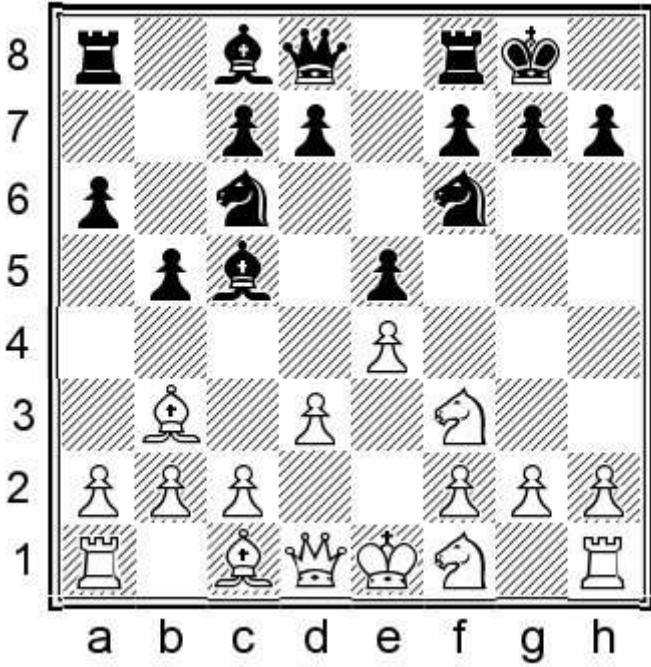


Position after: 7...d6

8.a4 [8.Bxc5 dxc5 9.c3 0-0 10.Qe2 Qd6= Del Rio Angelis – Jedryczka, Castelldefels 2006; 8.c3 0-0 9.0-0 Bxe3 10.fxe3 Ne7 11.Nbd2 Ng6=] 8...Bxe3 9.fxe3 was Handke, F (2546) – Inarkiev, E (2672) Germany 2014, and here I would prefer to play 9...Bd7. For example: 10.0-0 0-0 11.axb5 axb5 12.Rxa8 Qxa8 13.Nc3 Ne7=

B) 7.0-0 simply transposes to the Main Ark with 7.d3

7...0-0 8.Nf1?!



Position after: 8.Nf1?!

A bad move.

8.c3 d6 transposes to 7.c3.

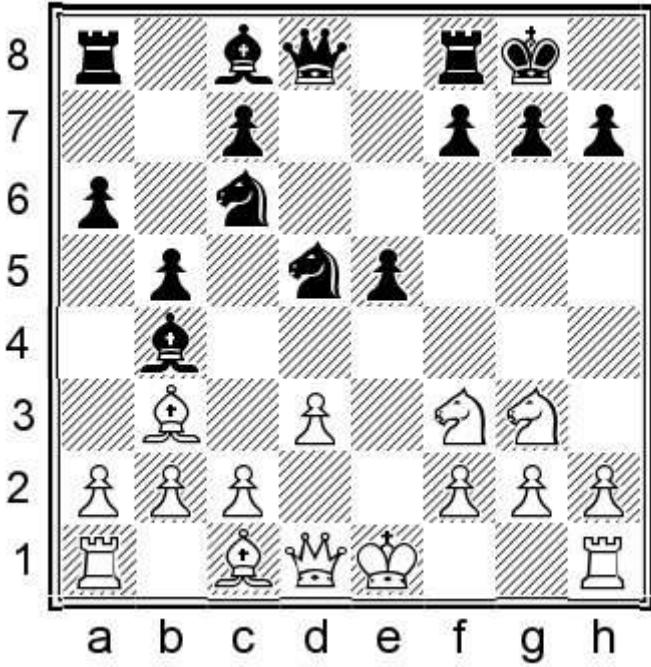
8...d5! 9.exd5 Nxd5

9...Nd4!? is also pleasant.

10.Ng3

10.Bg5 f6! 11.Ne3 [11.Bd2 Nd4³] 11...Be6 12.Nxd5 Bxd5³ was mentioned by Mikhalevski.

10...Bb4+!



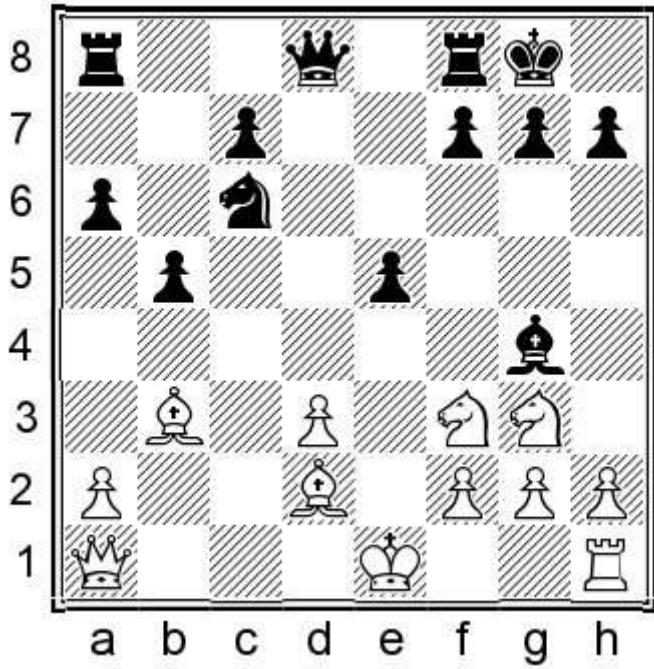
Position after: 10...Bb4+!

An unexpected blow.

11.c3

11.Bd2 Bxd2+ 12.Qxd2 Bg4! and White is suffering: 13.Bxd5 Qxd5 14.Nh4 Be6 15.0-0 f5 16.Rfe1 Rae8μ

11...Nxc3 12.bxc3 Bxc3+ 13.Bd2 Bxa1 14.Qxa1 Bg4!?



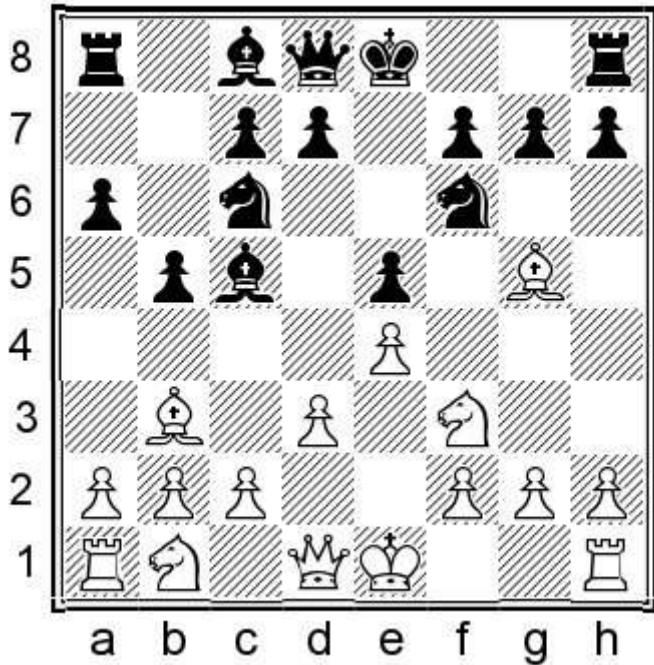
Position after: 14...Bg4!?

15.Qc3 Bxf3 16.gxf3 Qd7³

Black has the better game.

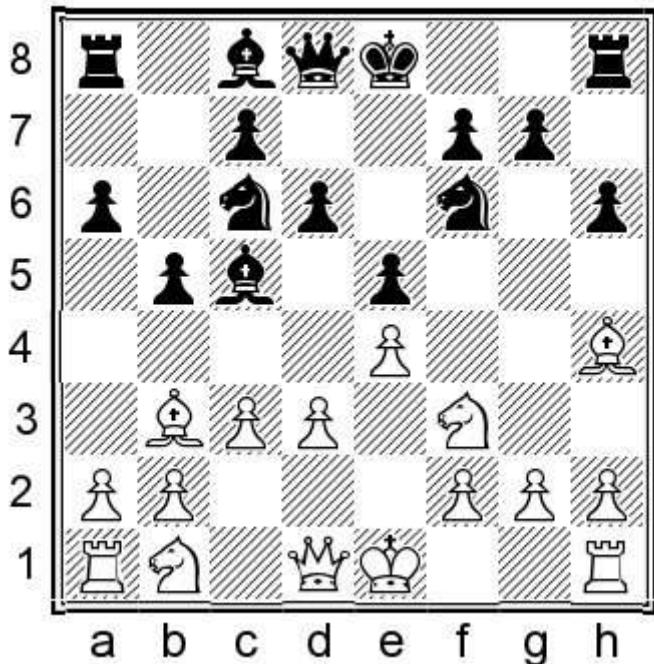
b) 7.Bg5

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.d3 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.Bg5



Position after: 7.Bg5

7...h6 8.Bh4 d6 9.c3

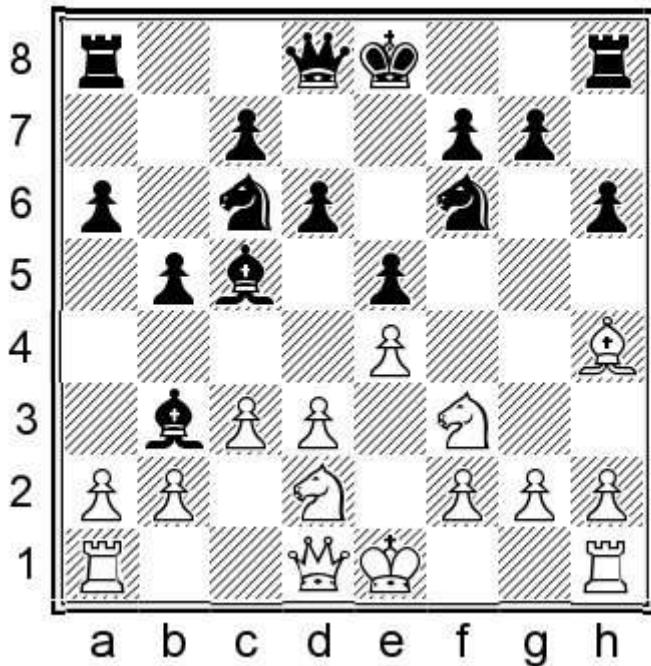


Position after: 9.c3

This setup has seen some top-level games in the past few years. It's pretty interesting that direct action starts before castling.

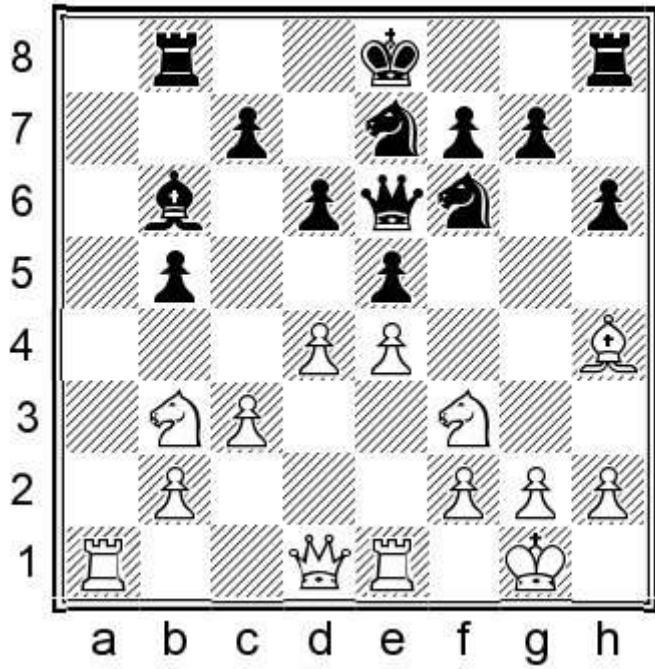
9...g5!

When I first encountered the variation I wasn't ready to play the ambitious line I now recommend, and instead came up with an idea which was unlikely to be part of my opponents prep: 9...Be6!? 10.Nbd2 [10.Bxe6 fxe6 11.b4 Bb6 12.a4 0-0=] 10...Bxb3



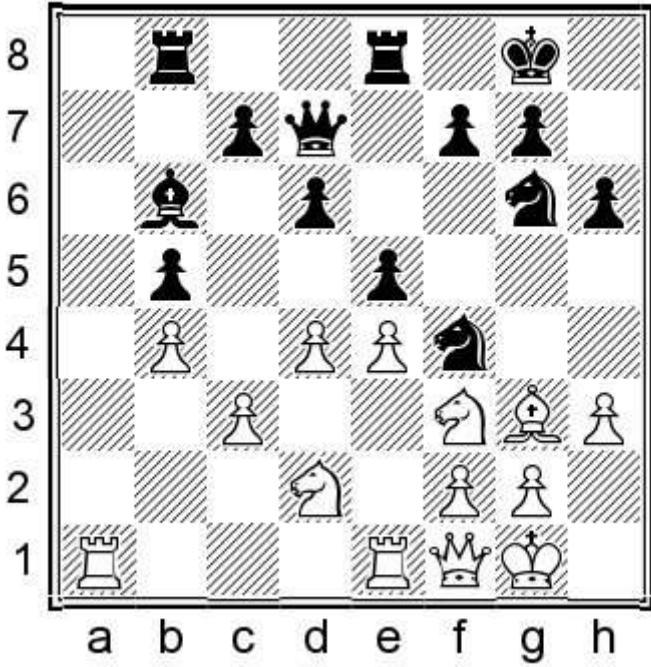
Position after: 10...Bxb3

11.Nxb3 [11.Qxb3 0-0 12.0-0 Qe7 13.Rfe1 Qe6 14.Qd1 Bb6 15.Nf1 Ne7 16.d4 Ng6 17.Bxf6 Qxf6 18.Ne3 c6 19.a4] 11...Bb6 12.a4 Rb8 13.axb5 axb5 14.0-0 Qe7 15.Re1 Qe6 16.d4 Ne7!



Position after: 16...Ne7!

17.Bg3 [17.d5?! Qg4 18.Bxf6 gxf6 19.g3 f5³] 17...Nd7 18.Nbd2 [18.Na5 0-0 19.Qe2 Kh8!?] 18...0-0 19.Nf1 Ng6 20.Qd3 Rfe8 21.b4 Nf6 22.N1d2 Nh5 23.Qf1 Nhf4 24.h3 Qd7!?



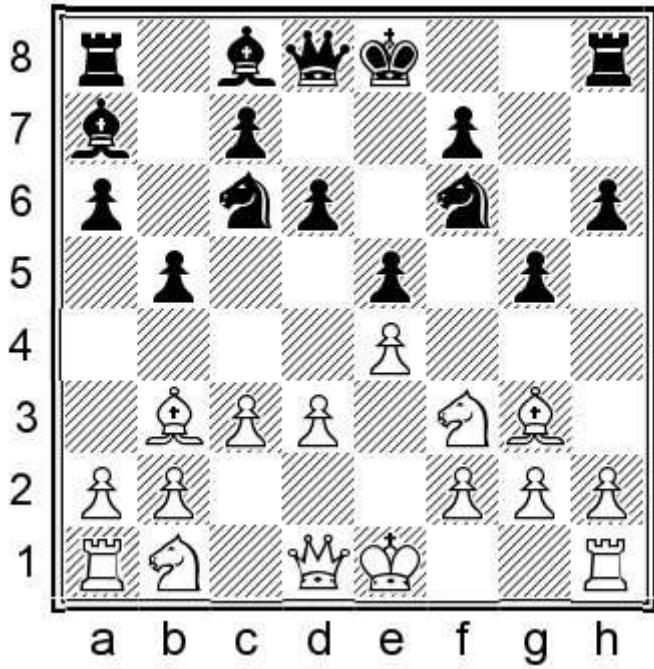
Position after: 24...Qd7!?

25.Kh2 c5³

10.Bg3 Ba7!?

I really like this aggressive approach, first seen from Matlakov, who is well-known for his deep preparation.

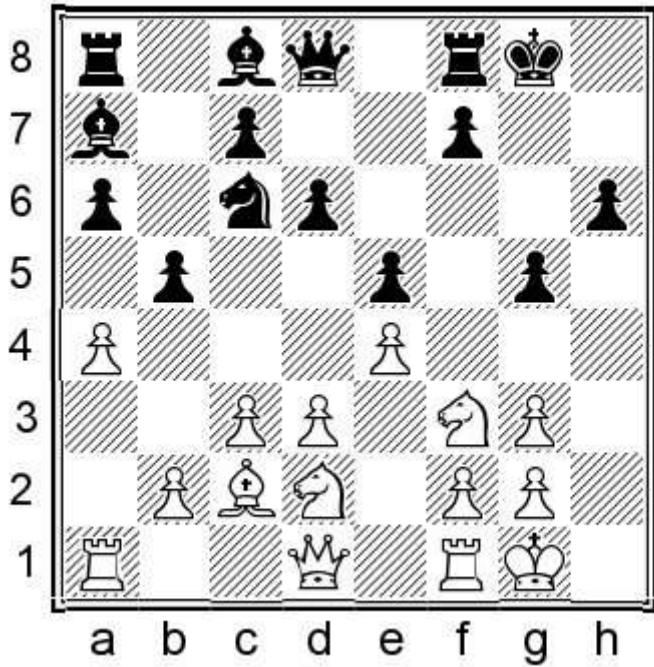
10...0-0 11.0-0 Bg4 12.Nbd2 Re8 13.Re1 Bb6 is a decent alternative.



Position after: 10...Ba7!?

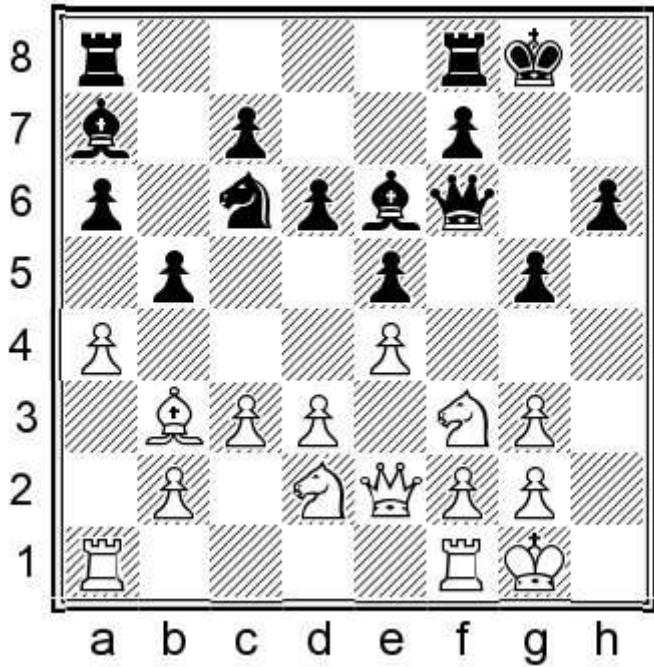
11.Nbd2

A) 11.0-0 0-0 12.Nbd2 Na5! A necessary inclusion. [12...Nh5?? walks into: 13.Nxe5+–] 13.Bc2 Nh5! 14.a4 [14.b4 Nxg3 15.hxg3 Nc6 16.a4 Bd7 17.Bb3 Ne7= Black has a solid position and the long-term advantage of the bishop pair.] 14...Nxg3 15.hxg3 Nc6



Position after: 15...Nc6

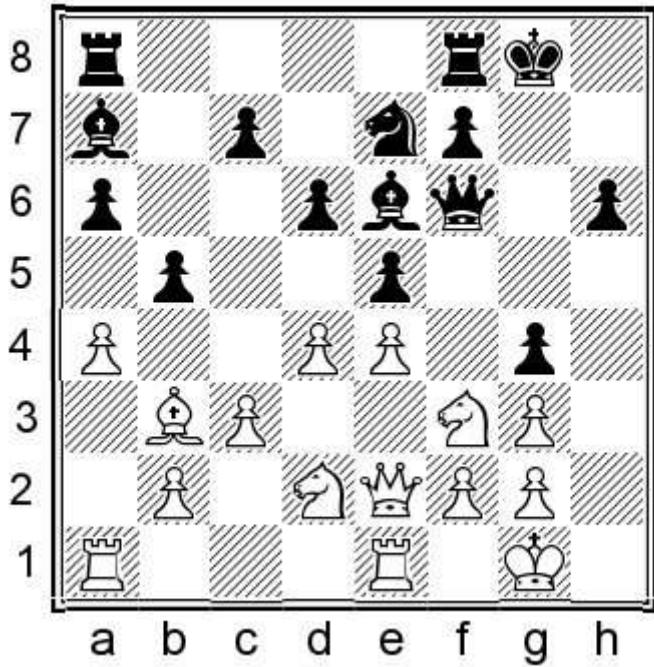
16.Bb3 [16.b4 see 14.b4] 16...Be6!? An unusual idea. Black is ready to spoil his structure in order to neutralize White's strong bishop and open the f-file, eyeing the f2-pawn! 17.Qe2 [17.Bxe6 fxe6 18.Qb3 is a double attack, but does no harm as 18...Qd7 19.axb5 axb5 20.Qxb5?? drops masses of material. 20...Rfb8 21.Qc4 d5–+] 17...Qf6



Position after: 17...Qf6

A1) 18.Bd5 Bxd5 19.exd5 Ne7 20.Rfe1 Nxd5 21.axb5 axb5 22.d4 c6! ∞
[22...exd4 23.Qxb5]

A2) 18.Rfe1 Ne7 19.d4 g4

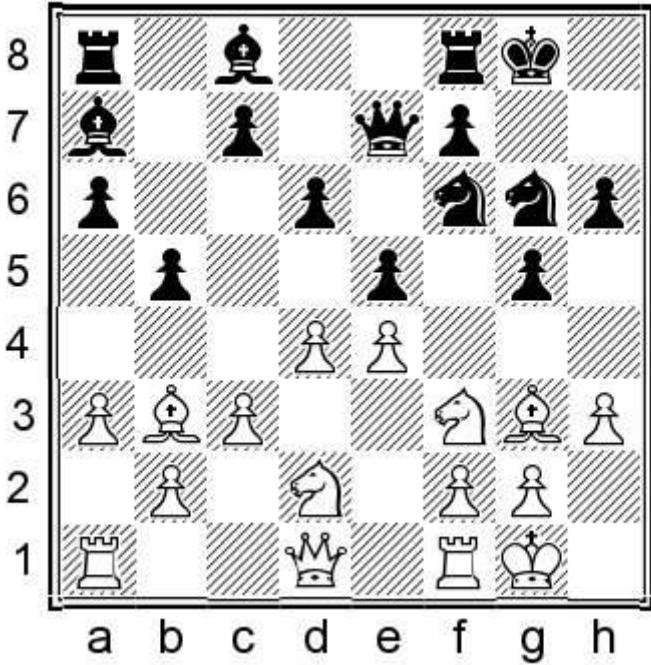


Position after: 19...g4

Black creates enough play. 20.dxe5 dxe5 21.Nh2 [21.Nh4 h5∞] 21...h5
22.Nhf1 Bb6 23.Ne3 Rad8∞

B) 11.a3!? A surprising, slow move. White is intending to keep the bishop on the a2-g8 diagonal. 11...Ne7 12.Nbd2 Ng6

B1) 13.d4 Qe7 14.0-0 0-0 15.h3!

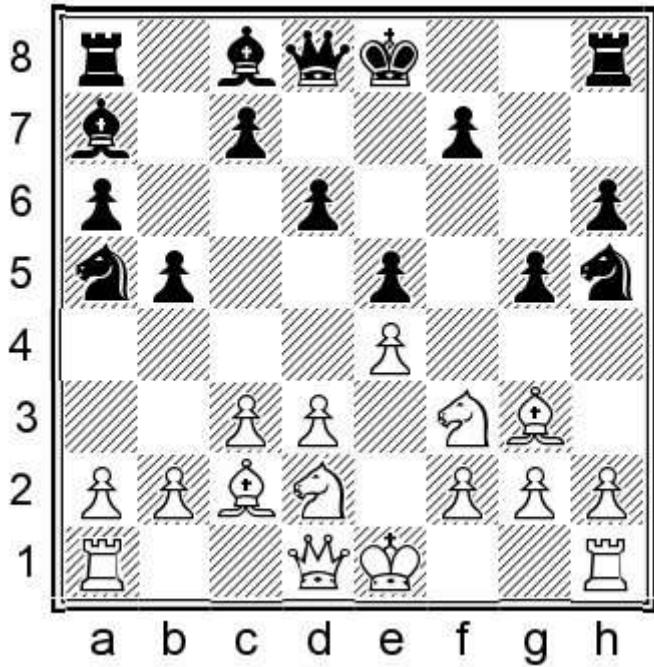


Position after: 15.h3!

[15.Re1 would allow: 15...h5 16.h3 h4 17.Bh2 g4] 15...c5 16.Re1 cxd4 17.cxd4 Bb7∞

B2) 13.Nf1 Nf4 14.Bxf4 gxf4 15.g3 Up to this point we have been following Adams, M (2727) – Wagner, D (2564) Germany 2018, but here I suggest a refinement: 15...Ng4!? 16.d4 exd4 17.cxd4 [17.Nxd4 Qf6 18.Qd2 Ne5 19.Bd5 Bxd4 20.0-0-0∞ is also interesting.; 17.h3?! Nf6 18.Nxd4 Bb7] 17...Bb7 18.gxf4 Qd7 [18...Bxe4 19.Ng3 Bb7 20.0-0∞] 19.Ng3 0-0-0© Black has sacrificed a pawn, but got a lot of play in return.

11...Na5 12.Bc2 Nh5

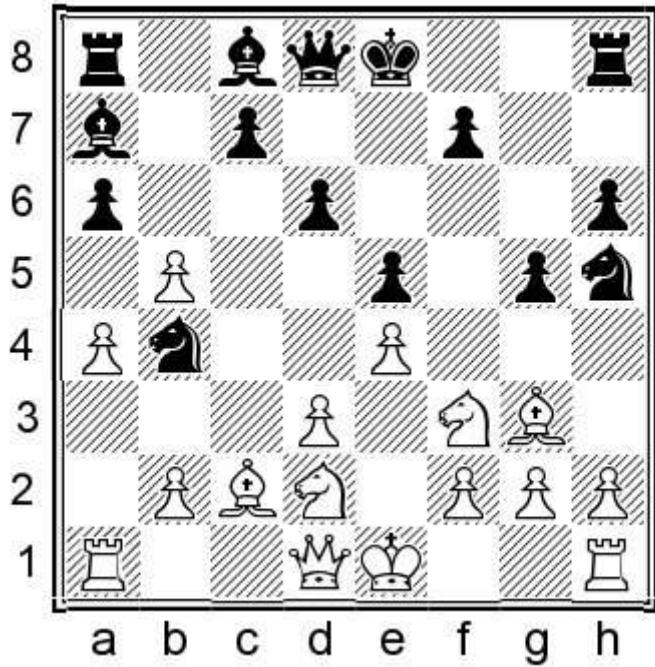


Position after: 12...Nh5

This idea is really fascinating: both black knights are on the edge of the board, yet our position is still sound.

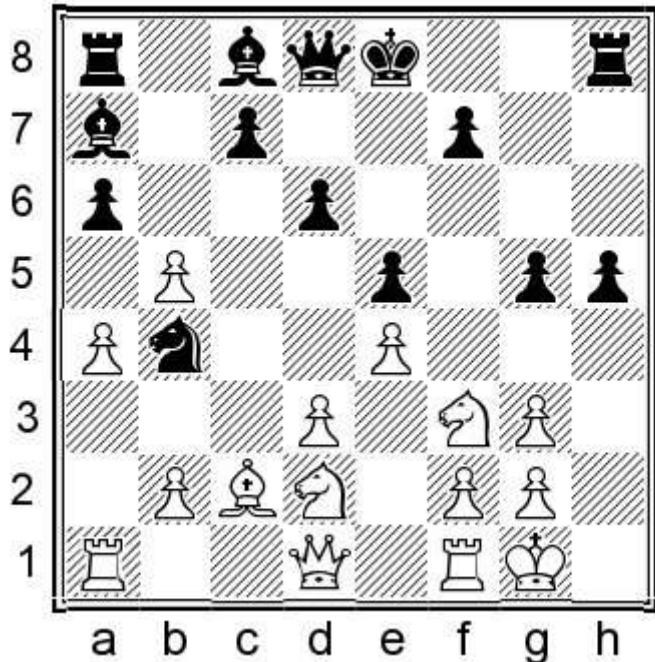
13.b4

A) 13.a4 b4! 14.cxb4 Nc6 15.b5 Nb4 Very active play; I like how the game develops here.



Position after: 15...Nb4

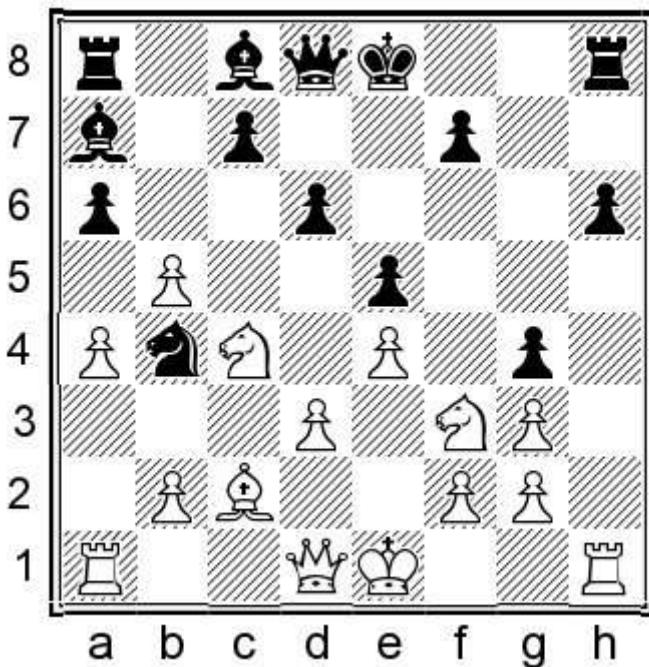
A1) 16.0-0? allows 16...Nxd3 17.hxg3 h5!



Position after: 17...h5!

and Black's attack is way too dangerous. For example: 18.Bb3 h4 19.gxh4 g4 20.Ng5 Rxh4 21.Bxf7+ [21.Nxf7 Qf6–+] 21...Ke7–+

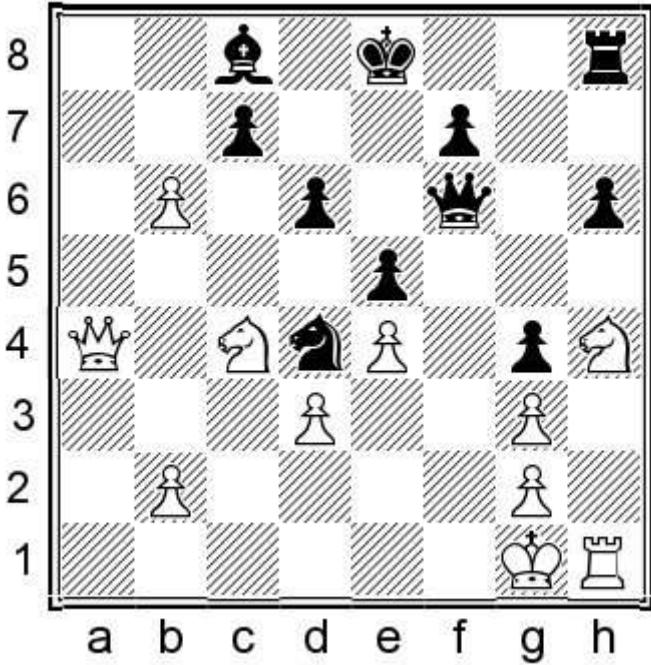
A2) 16.Nc4 Nxg3 17.hxg3 g4



Position after: 17...g4

A2.1) 18.Nfd2 Bc5 This doesn't allow White to close the diagonal with b6. 19.Nb3 axb5 20.axb5 Rx a1 21.Nxa1 d5 22.exd5 Qxd5 23.Qe2 h5 24.Qxe5+ Qxe5+ 25.Nxe5 Rh6,, is complicated.

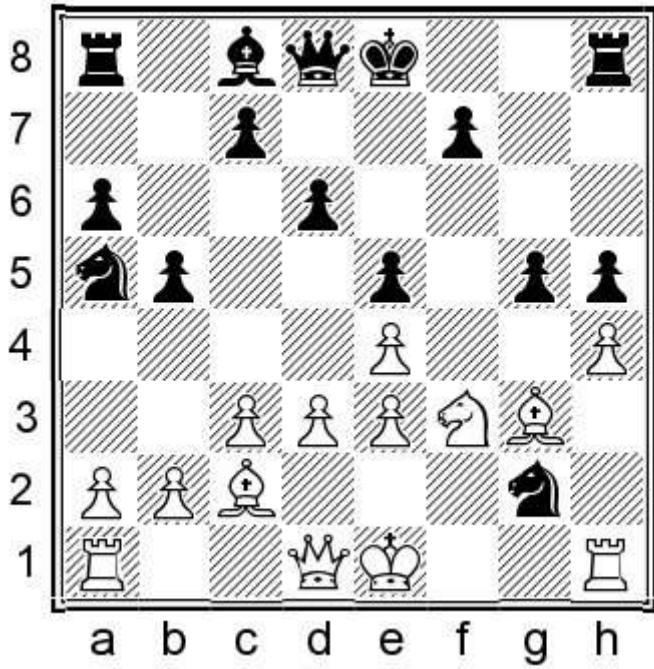
A2.2) 18.Nh4 axb5 19.axb5 Bxf2+ 20.Kxf2 Rx a1 21.Qxa1 Nxc2 22.Qa4 [22.Qc1 Nd4 23.Ne3 and Black is doing fine, after say 23...Kf8.] 22...Qf6+ 23.Kg1 Nd4 24.b6+



Position after: 24.b6+

We are still following a very high-level game, Anand, V (2767) – Matlakov, M (2718) Wijk aan Zee 2018. Here I find the text a bit more logical, though the game continuation was also fine. 24...Kf8 25.Qd1 Only this move. [25.Kh2? Ne2! and White loses immediately, while 25.bxc7?? allows an amazing mate: 25...Ne2+ 26.Kh2 Qxh4+ 27.gxh4 g3#] 25...cxb6 26.Kh2 Qd8 27.Rf1 Kg7 28.Ne3= White is currently a pawn down but his king is safer, so the game should be around equal.

B) 13.Nf1!? is the only real alternative to the moves that were already played. 13...Nf4 14.Ne3 This is the idea: White is ready to play immensely complicated positions here in order to confuse us. Play might continue: 14...h5 15.h4 Bxe3 16.fxe3 Nxg2+



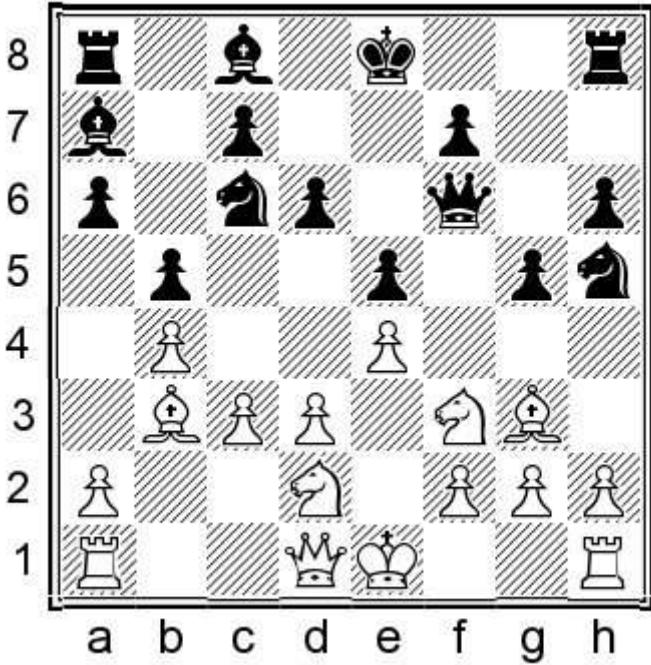
Position after: 16...Nyg2+

17.Kd2 Bg4 18.hxg5 f5 19.exf5 e4 20.dxe4 Nc4+ Quite a surreal situation, and evaluating it accurately is almost impossible. 21.Kc1 Ngxe3 22.Qe2 Bxf3 23.Qxf3 Qxg5 24.Bf4 Qg2 25.Qxg2 Nxg2 26.Bg5∞

13...Nc6 14.Bb3

14.a4 Qf6 15.0-0 Nxg3 16.hxg3 h5 would grant Black nice play.

14...Qf6!



Position after: 14...Qf6!

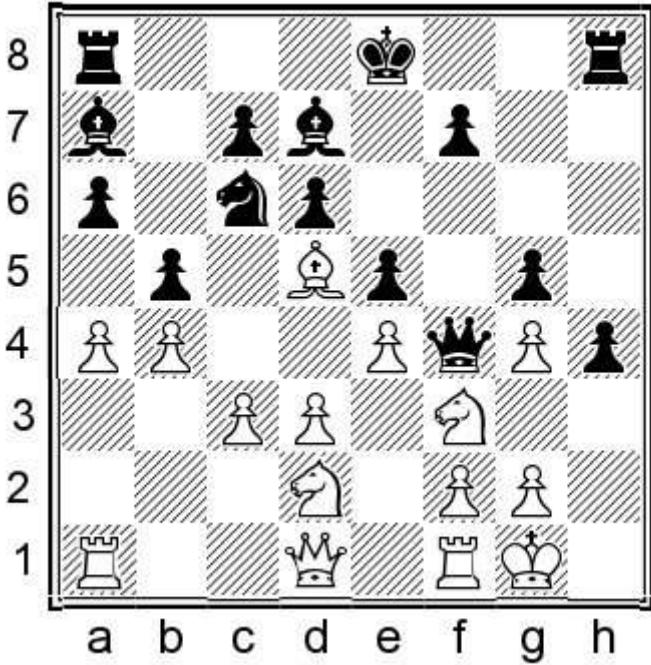
Black doesn't need to rush with the exchange on g3.

14...N_xg3 was played previously. 15.hxg3 Be6? A mistake here. [15...Qf6] 16.Bd5! White gets tremendous play. 16...Bxd5 17.exd5 Ne7 18.Nxg5 Nxd5 19.Nge4± Nisipeanu, L (2670) – Sanal, V (2511) Skopje 2019.

15.Bd5 Bd7 16.0-0

16.h3?! Rb8 17.a4 Bb6 Black has solved the problem along the a-file, and is ready to bring the c6-knight to g6.

16...N_xg3 17.hxg3 h5 18.a4 h4 19.g4 Qf4



Position after: 19...Qf4

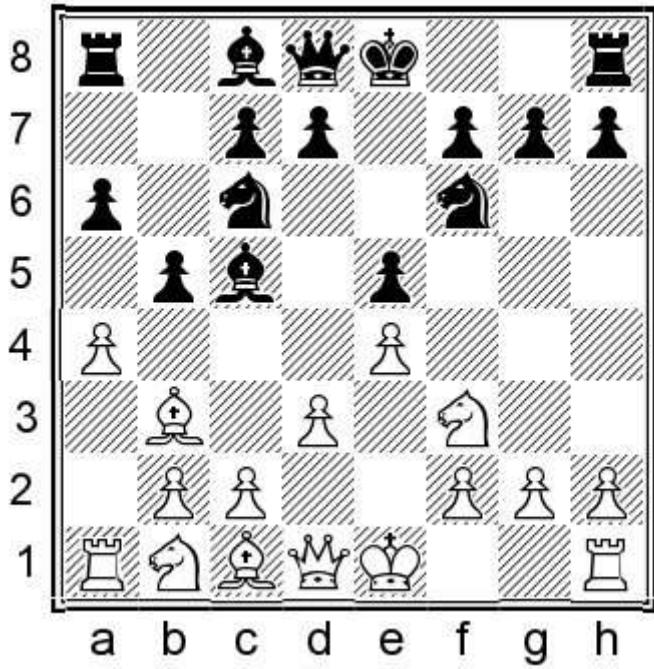
20.d4

20.Kh1 Ke7∞

20...exd4 21.cxd4 Rc8 22.axb5 Nxd4 23.Rxa6 Bxb5 24.Rxa7 Ne2+ 25.Kh1 Ng3+ 26.Kg1 Ne2+=

c) 7.a4

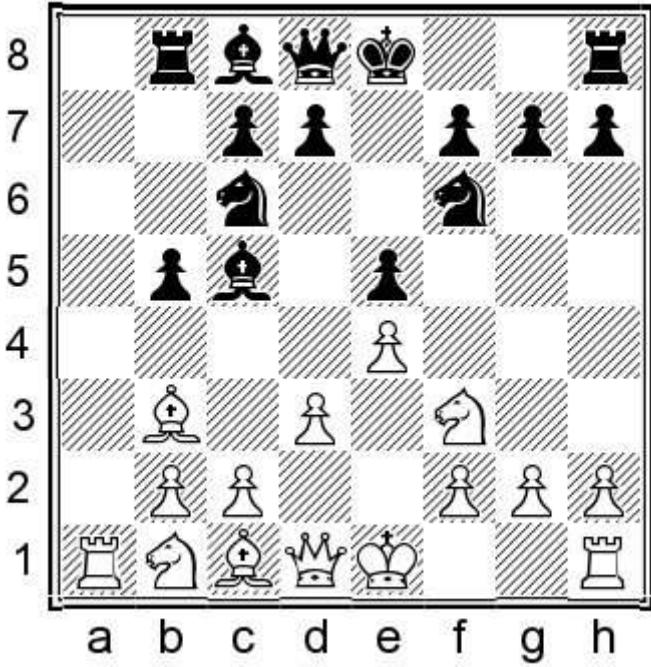
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.d3 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4



Position after: 7.a4

This is seldom chosen by top players, even at faster time controls.

7...Rb8 8.axb5 axb5



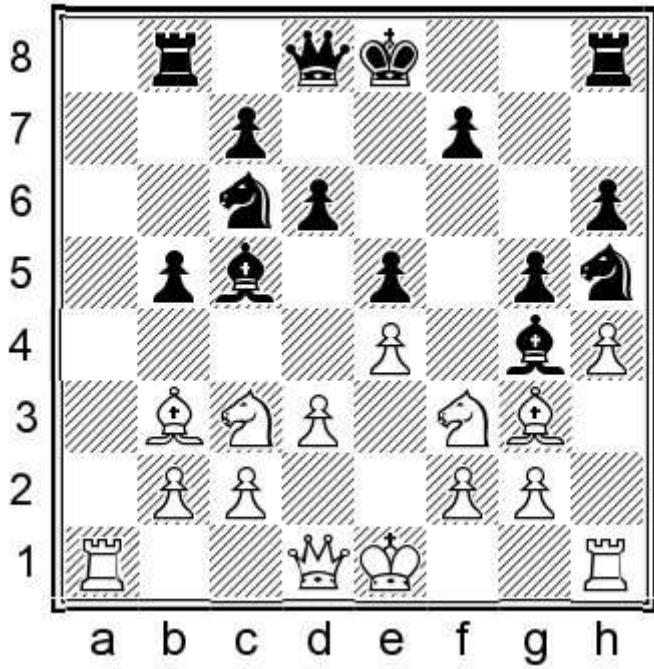
Position after: 8...axb5

9.Nc3

This is the main move here. White controls the a-file and intends to install the knight on d5 yet again. 9.c3 and 9.0-0 can be found in the Ark 7.d3 chapter.

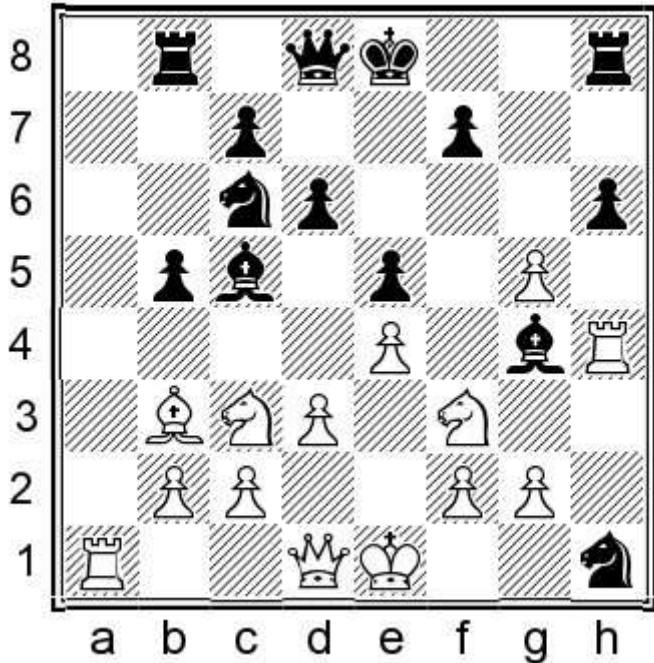
A) 9.Bg5 is very rare here. 9...h6 10.Bh4 d6

A1) 11.Nc3?! g5 12.Bg3 Bg4 13.h4?! (Arakhamia, Ketevan – Motwani, Paul, Edinburgh 1999) 13...Nh5!



Position after: 13...Nh5!

would have been much better. 14.hxg5 Nxg3 15.fxg3 [15.Rh4!? Creative. We have many options here, the funniest being: 15...Nh1!!

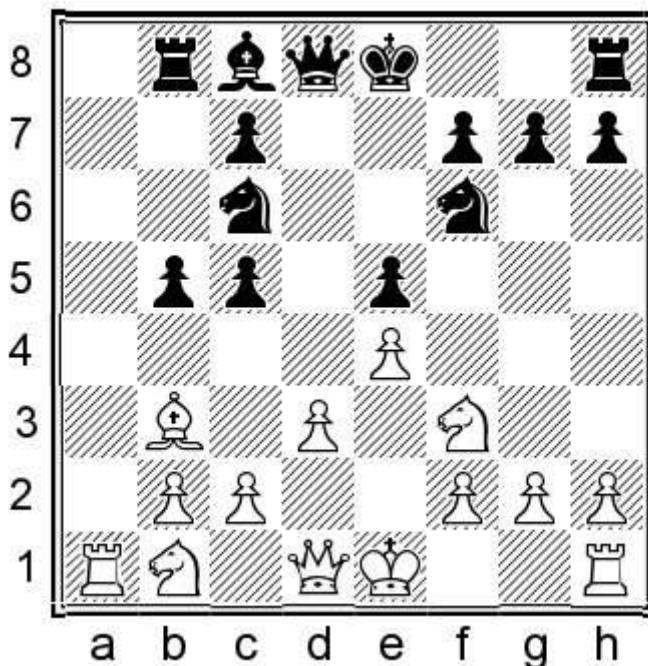


Position after: 15...Nh1!!

16.Rxh1 Nd4μ] 15...Nd4 16.Qc1 Bxf3 17.gxf3 Nxf3+μ

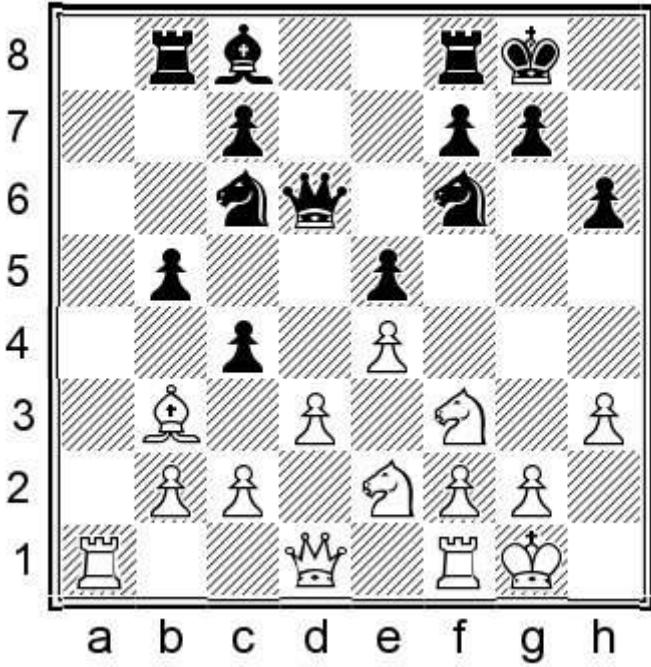
A2) 11.Nbd2 g5 12.Bg3 Bg4 13.c3 Nh5 14.h3! Nxg3 15.fxg3 Bh5 16.g4 Bg6 17.h4 Qd7 18.hxg5 Qxg4 is complicated.

B) 9.Be3 d6!? 10.Bxc5 [10.Nbd2 0-0 11.0-0 h6=] 10...dxc5



Position after: 10...dxc5

I really like this pawn formation, it guarantees us some space and play down the d-file. 11.h3 [11.c3 was the move I faced in the Hungarian league: 11...0-0 12.0-0 Qd6 The best idea, immediately pressuring the d3-pawn. 13.Qe2 h6 14.Nbd2 Rd8 15.Bc2 Be6 16.Rfd1 Ra8= Sedlak – Erdos, HUN-chT 2009 The position was super-balanced.] 11...0-0 12.0-0 Qd6 13.Nc3 h6 14.Ne2 c4!?

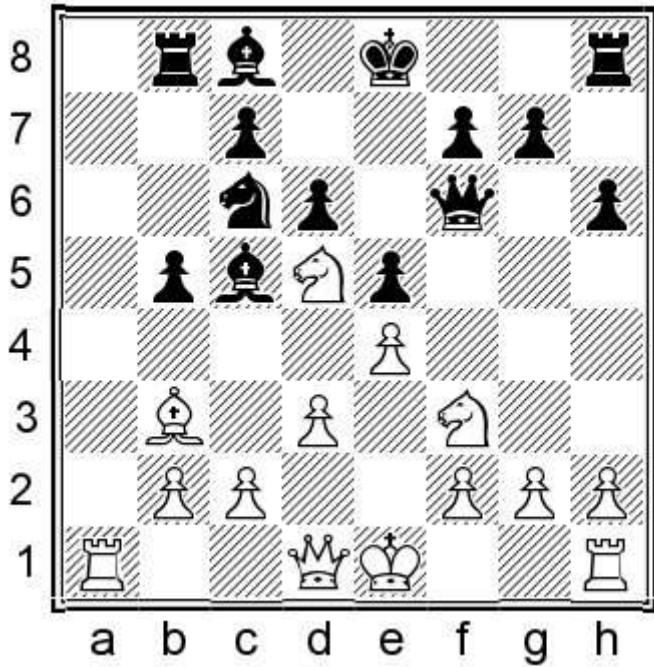


Position after: 14...c4!?

This interesting move leads to some action. [14...Rd8= was fine too in Vachier – Lagrave – Fontaine, France 2008.] 15.dxc4 Nxe4 16.cxb5 Rxb5 17.Qxd6 cxd6 18.Rfd1 [18.Ba4?! Rb6 19.Rfd1 Ne7³] 18...Be6 19.Bxe6 fxe6= and the position is roughly equal, but at least not totally symmetrical.

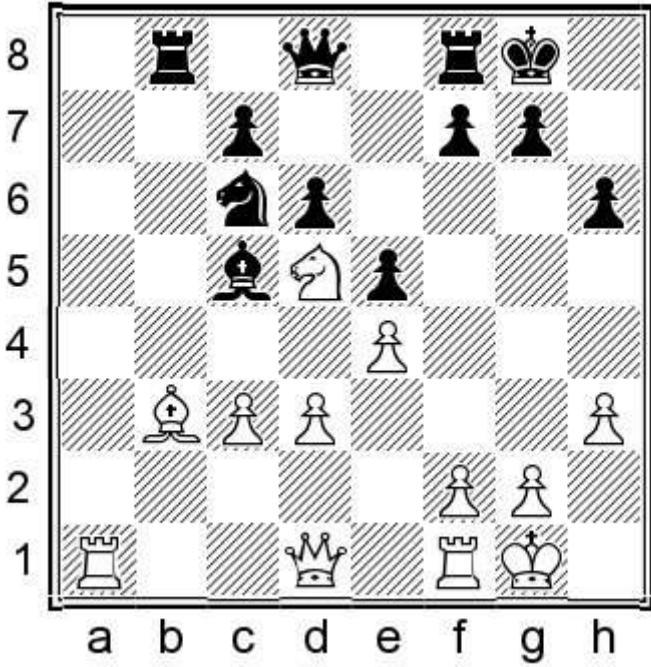
9...d6 10.Nd5

A) 10.Bg5 h6 11.Bxf6 Qxf6 12.Nd5



Position after: 12.Nd5

12...Qd8 [12...Qg6 can be played, but I don't think it's necessary – just in case you are playing for a win at all cost.] 13.c3 0-0 14.0-0 Bg4 The simplest way. It's a bit boring too, but secures half a point quickly. 15.h3 Bxf3 16.Qxf3 b4! This gives purpose to the rook on b8. 17.Qd1 [17.Bc4 bxc3 18.bxc3 Ne7=] 17...bxc3 18.bxc3



Position after: 18.bxc3

We are following Glek, I (2551) – Prusikin, M (2533) Switzerland 2007, and now I would go for 18...Ne7, challenging the d5-knight immediately. 19.Nxe7+ Qxe7 20.Bd5 Here Black can choose between 20...Qf6 and 20...Qd7 with equality.

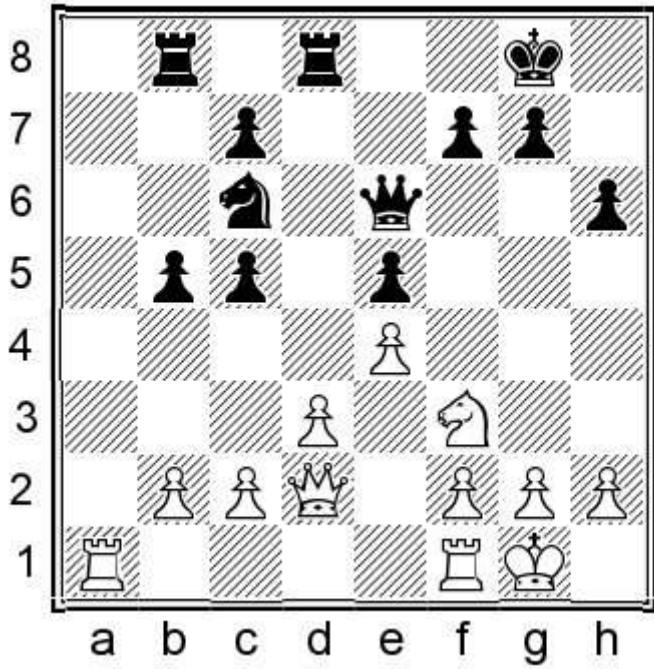
B) 10.0-0 0-0 see 7.Nc3 chapter!

10...h6 11.0-0

A) 11.Be3 0-0 12.0-0 Be6

A1) 13.c3 Bxd5 14.exd5 Bxe3 15.fxe3 [15.dxc6?! Bb6 16.d4 Qe8!³ Shabalov – Friedel, Las Vegas 2003.] 15...Ne7 16.e4 b4 17.Bc4 [17.c4 Nd7 can be unpleasant for White in the long run.] 17...bxc3 18.bxc3 Rb2= Black is at least equal.

A2) 13.Bxc5 dxc5 14.Nxf6+ Qxf6 15.Bxe6 Qxe6 16.Qd2 This was Kir. Georgiev – Kasimdzhanov, Khanty – Mansiysk 2007, and here I prefer 16...Rfd8!

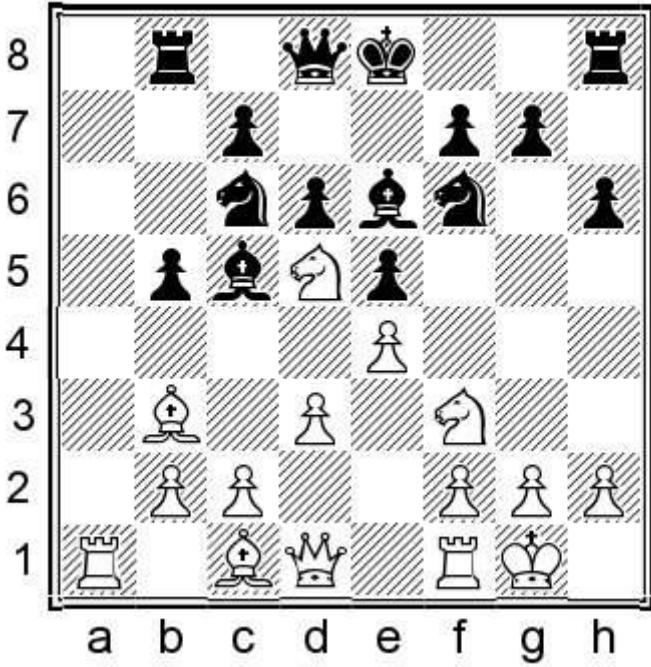


Position after: 16...Rfd8!

with the idea of 17.Ra6 [17.Qc3 c4] 17...c4.

B) After 11.c3 Be6 all lines will eventually transpose to 11.0-0 12.Nxf6+ [12.0-0; 12.Be3 0-0 13.0-0] 12...Qxf6 13.Bxe6 Qxe6 14.0-0 Bb6

11...Be6!?



Position after: 11...Be6!?

11...0-0 12.c3 [12.Be3 leads to 11.Be3.] 12...Nxd5 13.exd5 Ne7 14.d4 exd4 15.Nxd4 Bb7 [15...Re8!? is perhaps a smarter move, with the idea of metting 16.Bc2 with 16...Bxd4! 17.Qxd4 Bf5=] 16.Qd3 was a line I didn't like too much, despite it being fully playable.

12.c3

A) 12.Nxf6+ Qxf6 13.c3 Bb6 14.Bxe6 Qxe6 15.d4 Ne7 16.Qd3 0-0=

B) 12.Be3 0-0 can be found at 11.Be3.

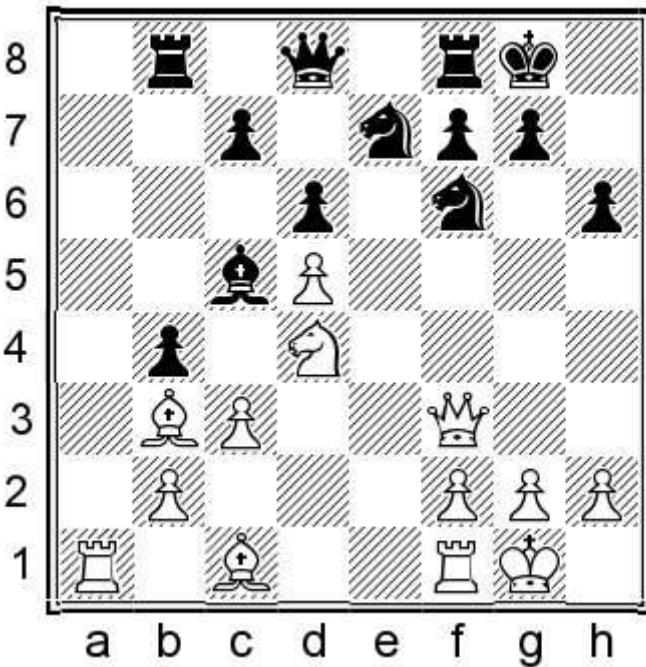
12...Bxd5 13.exd5 Ne7 14.d4 exd4 15.Nxd4

Almost identical to our main line.

15...0-0

15...Qd7 allows 16.Nxb5! although Black is still in the game after 16...0-0 17.Ba4 Nxd5 18.Nd4 Qg4.

16.Qf3 b4!



Position after: 16...b4!

Just in time to create enough play.

17.Re1

A) 17.Bxh6? bxc3–+

B) 17.Bd2 Qd7 18.Rfe1 [18.Nc6 Nxc6 19.dxc6 Qg4=] 18...Ng6 is complicated. A crazy line would be 19.Nc6 bxc3! 20.Nxb8 Rxb8 21.Qxc3 Bb4 22.Ra8! Rxa8 23.Qxb4 Ne5,,

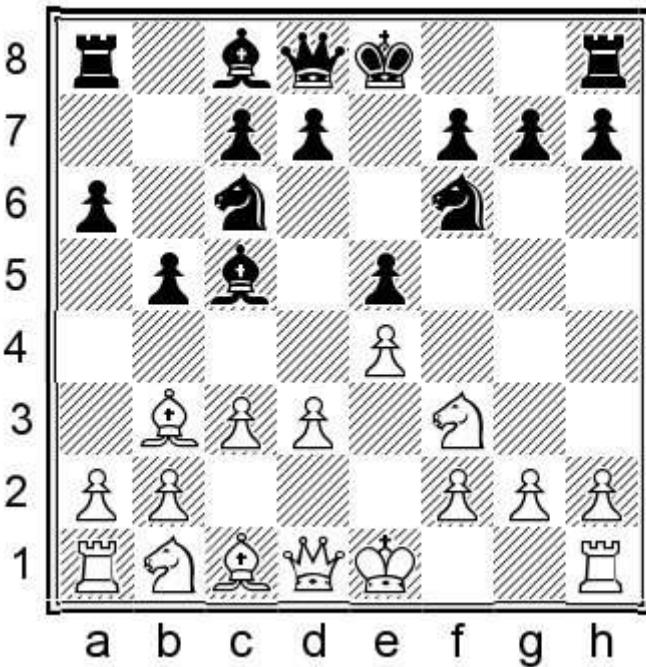
17...bxc3 18.bxc3 Bxd4 19.cxd4 Nf5! 20.Ba4 Nh4

20...Nxd4?? 21.Qd3

21.Qg3 Nf5 22.Qf3 Nh4=

d) 7.c3

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.d3 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3



Position after: 7.c3

7...d6

White can go for 0-0 at any time, leading to the Ark move-order 7.d3. We are instead going to examine those lines where White wants to utilize the fact that the king is still on e1.

7...0-0 allows the pin, but can also be considered: 8.Bg5 h6 9.Bh4 Be7 10.Nbd2 d6 is a viable line.

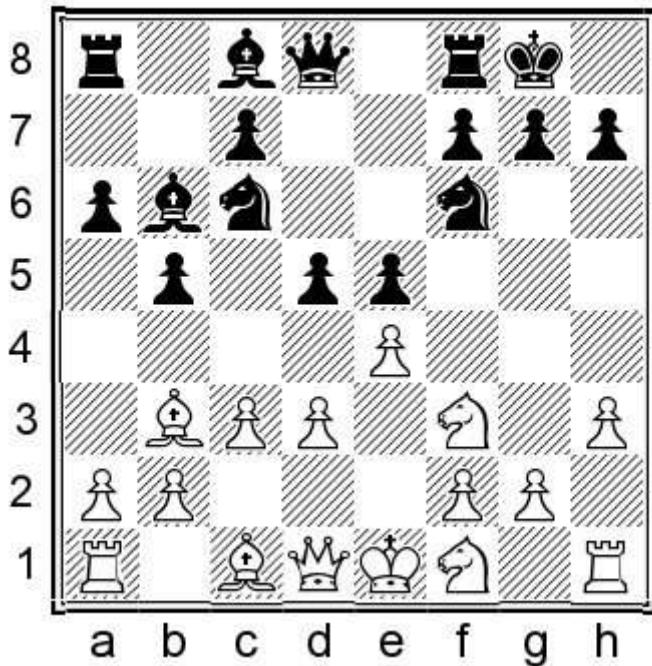
8.Nbd2

8.Bg5 h6 9.Bh4 see 7.Bg5.

8...0-0 9.Nf1

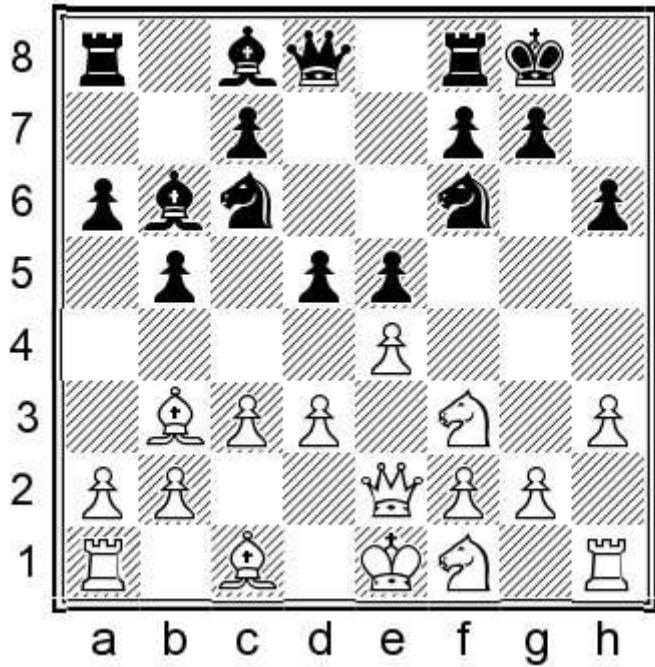
9.h3 Bb6 After some consideration I've decided to offer the text. Since Bg5 is not in the air, Black shouldn't rush with...h6, which in some cases allows White to start direct play with a possible g4-g5. 10.Nf1!? Of course, this

should be the question. [10.0-0] 10...d5! I highly recommend starting direct play while White's position is not ready for the opening of the centre.



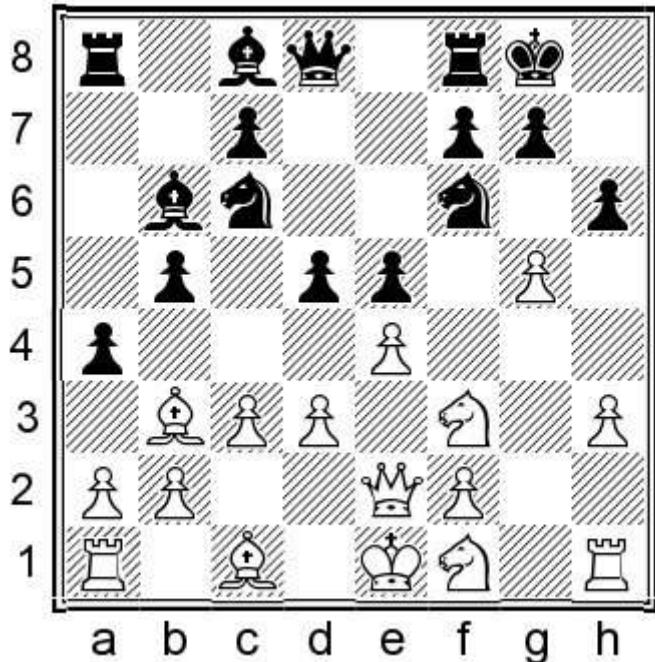
Position after: 10...d5!

A) 11.Qe2 A typical response. White keeps the queen on and wants to play Ng3 and next 0-0, or first g4 and then Ng3. Here Black has several exciting ways to treat the position. 11...h6 A provocative move, but according to my computer Black is ready to meet any kind of direct attack.



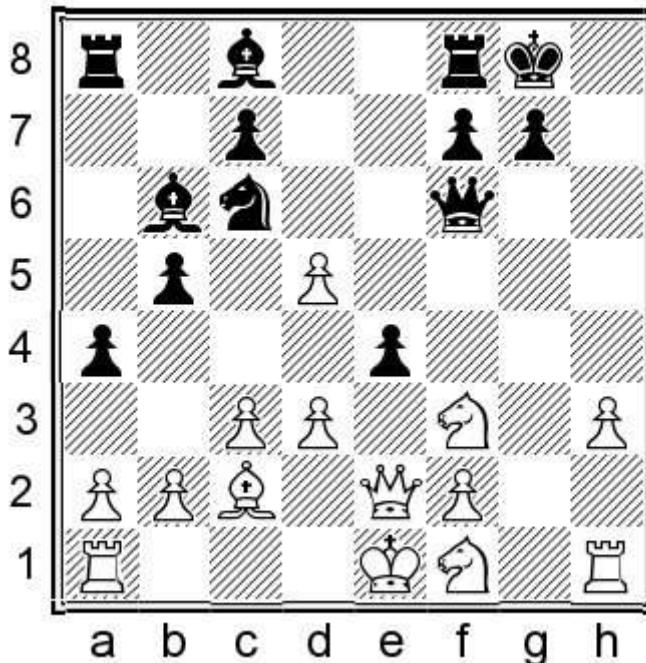
Position after: 11...h6

A1) 12.g4 a5! 13.g5 [13.a4 Ba6!?] 13...a4!



Position after: 13...a4!

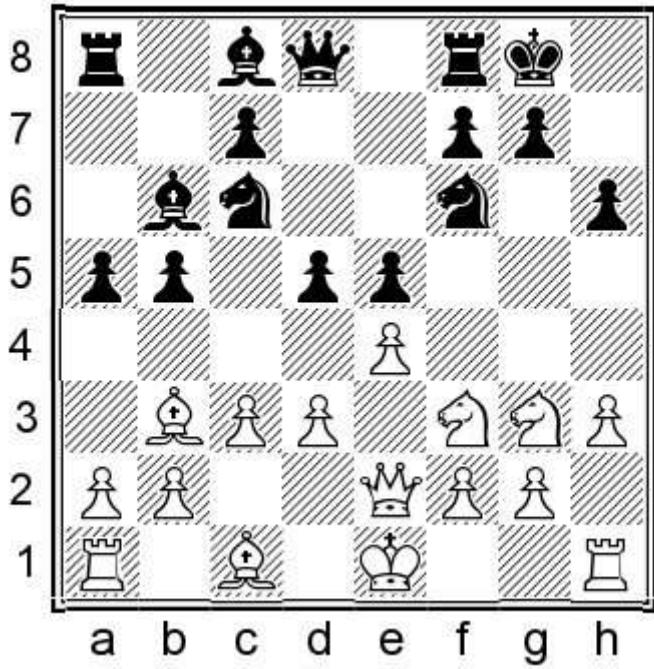
A shocking idea! 14.Bc2 hxg5 15.Bxg5 Qd6 16.Bxf6 Trying to refute Black's idea but it fails miserably. 16...Qxf6 17.exd5 e4!



Position after: 17...e4!

18.dxe4 a3! Black's initiative is possibly winning already, e.g. 19.dxc6?! axb2 20.Rb1 Qxc3+ 21.Kd1 Rd8+ 22.N3d2 Be6—+

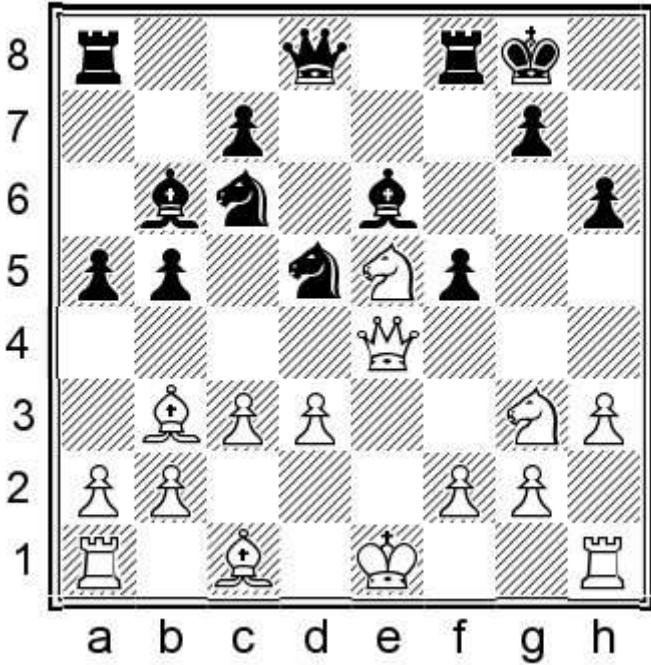
A2) 12.Ng3 a5!



Position after: 12...a5!

This idea promises Black great activity.

A2.1) 13.exd5 Nxd5 14.Qe4?! leads nowhere: 14...Be6 Elegant.
[14...Nf6 is possible too.] 15.Nxe5 f5!!



Position after: 15...f5!!

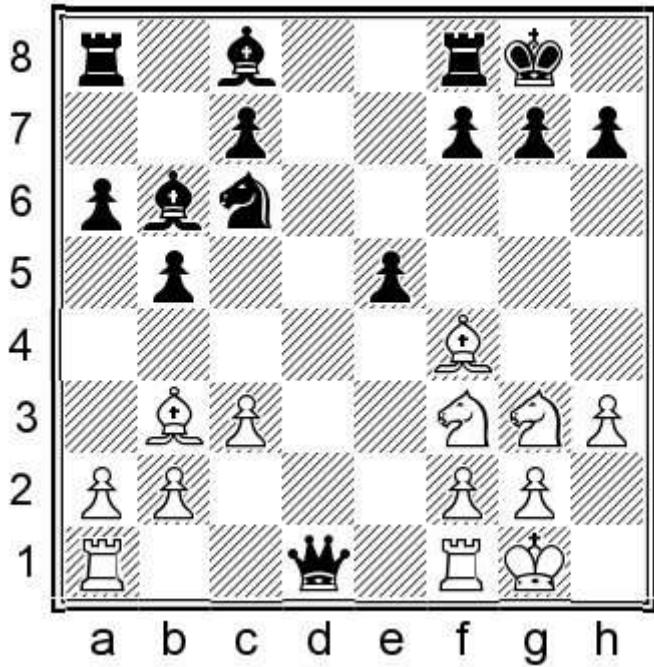
16.Nxc6 [16.Qe2 Nxe5 17.Qxe5 Qd7 18.0-0 Rae8 Any Marshall Attack player would be extremely satisfied here.] 16...fxe4 17.Nxd8 Bxf2+ 18.Kd1 Raxd8 19.Nxe4 a4, White is struggling.

A2.2) 13.a4 b4

A2.3) 13.0-0 a4 14.Bc2 [14.Bxd5 Nxd5 15.exd5 Qxd5³] 14...d4³

B) 11.Ng3 allowing the queen exchange is not very optimistic. Black can respond: 11...Na5 12.Bc2 dxe4 13.dxe4 Qxd1+ 14.Bxd1 Bb7 15.Bc2 Nc4 16.0-0 Nd7=

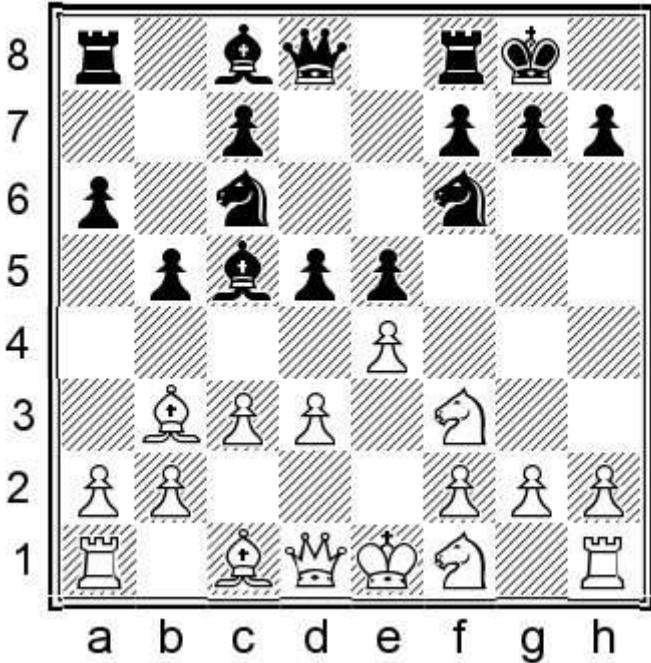
C) 11.exd5 Nxd5 12.Ng3 Nf4 13.0-0 [13.Bxf4 exf4 14.Ne4 Na5 15.0-0 Nxb3 16.axb3 f5] 13...Qxd3 14.Bxf4 Qxd1



Position after: 14...Qxd1

15.Raxd1 exf4 16.Ne2 [16.Nh5 transposes after the capture on f4.]
16...Na5 17.Nxf4 Bb7=

9...d5!

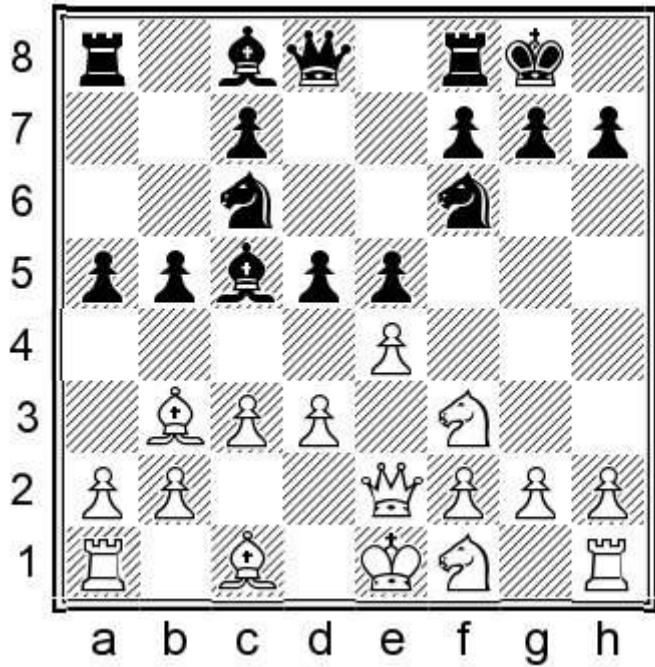


Position after: 9...d5!

I like this push a lot, whenever it's possible. 9...h6 is playable too, of course.

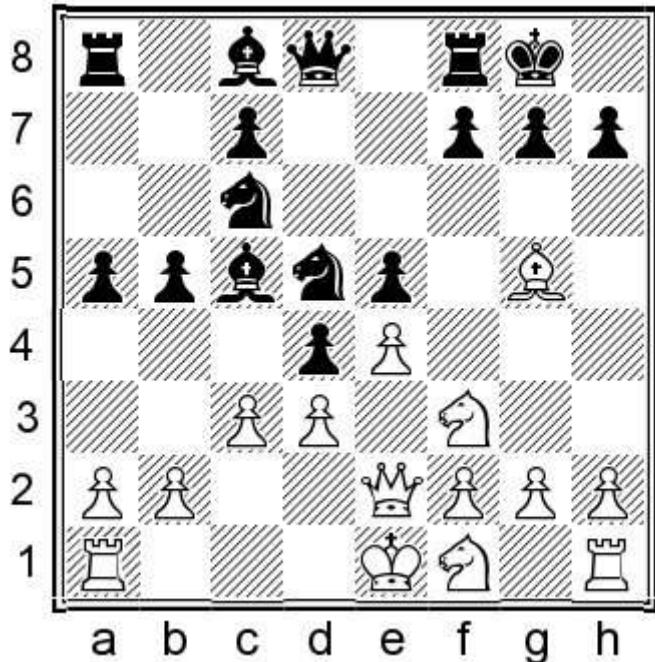
10.exd5

A) 10.Qe2 Ambitious, but it's even slower than in the sub-line 9.h3 Bb6. 10...a5! Of course. A very nice idea that should always be reckoned with.



Position after: 10...a5!

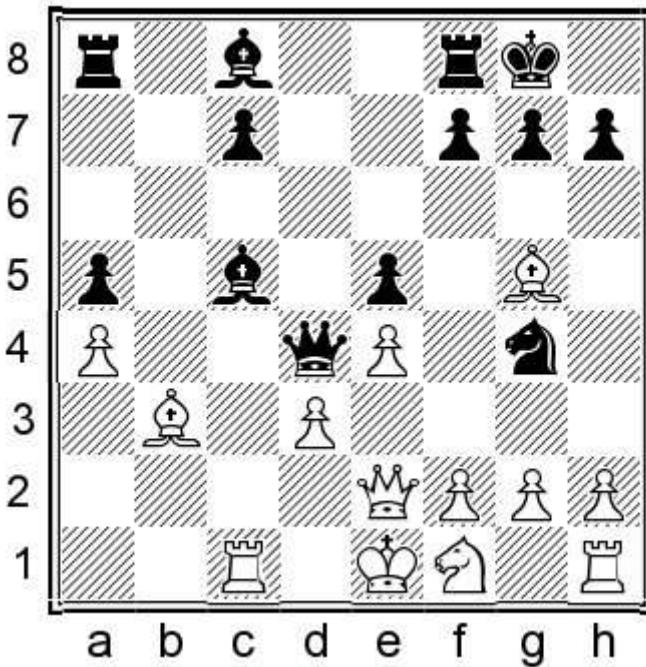
A1) 11.Bg5 d4! 12.Bd5 Nxd5!!



Position after: 12...Nxd5!!

This beautiful queen sac is my favourite idea of this system. 13.Bxd8 Nf4 14.Qc2 Nxg2+ 15.Kd1 Rxd8 16.a3 [16.cxd4?! Bg4 17.Qxc5 Nxd4 18.N1d2 Nf4μ] 16...Nf4 17.c4 Bg4 18.N1d2 b4μ White's position is extremely passive.

A2) 11.a4 b4 12.Bg5 This idea is not improved by the inclusion of a4 and ...b4. 12...bxc3 13.bxc3 d4 14.cxd4 [14.Bd5 Nxd5! 15.Bxd8 Nf4–+] 14...Nxd4 15.Nxd4 Qxd4 16.Rc1 Ng4!–+



Position after: 16...Ng4!–+

This wins immediately as 17.Bh4 is met by 17...Bb4+ 18.Nd2 Qb2.

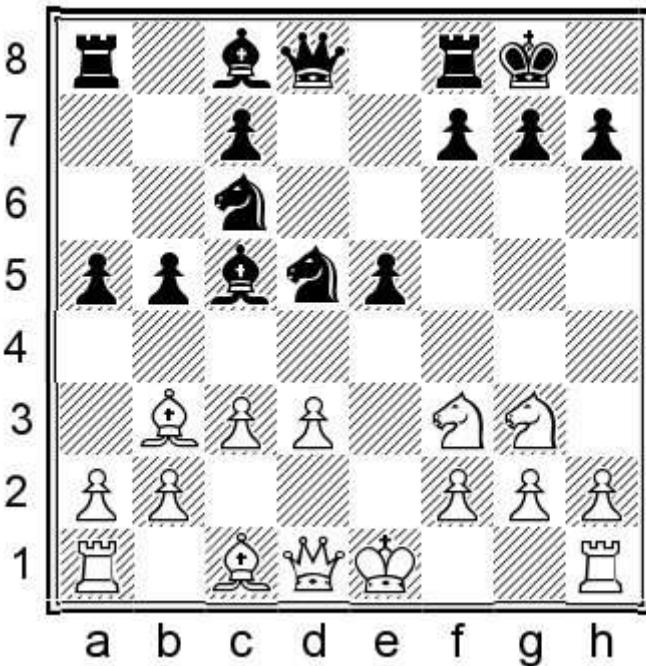
A3) 11.a3 a4 12.Ba2 d4 13.Ng3 Be6 or 13...Qd6 first. 14.Bxe6 [14.0-0 Qd6 15.Bg5 Bxa2 16.Nf5 Qe6 17.Rxa2 g6 18.Nh6+ Kg7 19.Raa1 Nd7³] 14...fxe6 15.0-0 Qd6 and Black has a space advantage, whereas White lacks a constructive plan. For example: 16.cxd4 Nxd4 17.Nxd4 Bxd4 18.Be3 Nd7³

B) 10.Ng3 is never a problem. 10...dxe4 11.dxe4 [11.Nxe4 Nxe4 12.dxe4 Na5=] 11...Qxd1+ 12.Bxd1 h6=

10...Nxd5 11.Ng3

White has seemingly reached a solid setup, but Black is once again ready to create interesting complications.

11...a5!?

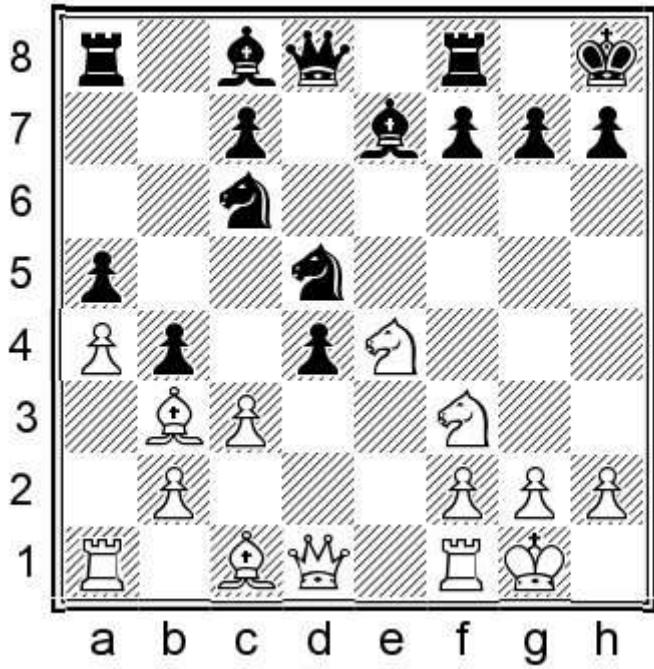


Position after: 11...a5!?

12.Ne4

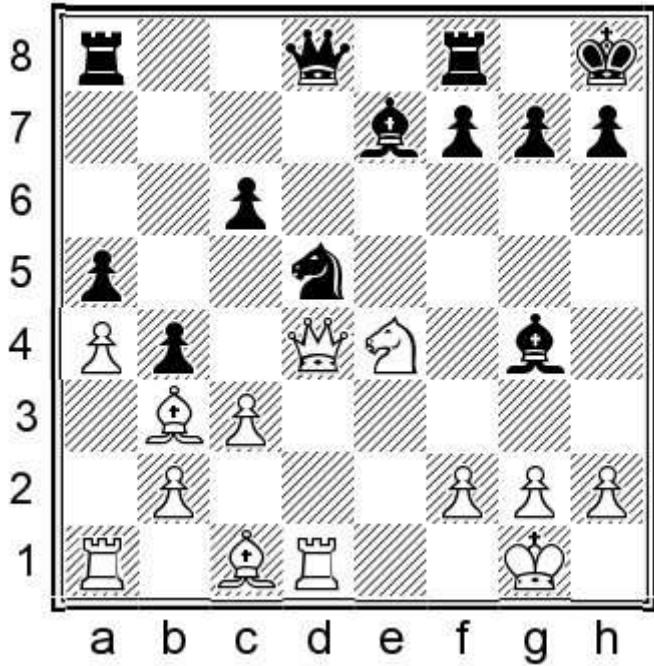
This position was already mentioned by Mikhalevski, but he recommends something different than me.

12.a4 b4 13.Ne4 Be7 Here I feel like this is the right square: Black covers g5, which is pretty useful in many lines. 14.0-0 Kh8 Black is threatening ...f5, so the next move is kind of forced. 15.d4 exd4



Position after: 15...exd4

16.Nxd4 [16.cxd4 Bg4] 16...Nxd4 17.Qxd4 c6 This should be solid for us, as
18.Rd1 [18.cxb4 f5!? 19.Nc5 Nxb4=] 18...Bg4!?



Position after: 18...Bg4!?

19.f3 [19.Bh6 Rg8 20.f3 Be6 21.c4 Nf6 22.Qe3 Qe8,,] 19...Be6= is around equal.

12...a4!

Once again a pawn sacrifice! It must probably be very boring for the reader already. Always striving for activity, that's just gross!

13.Nxc5

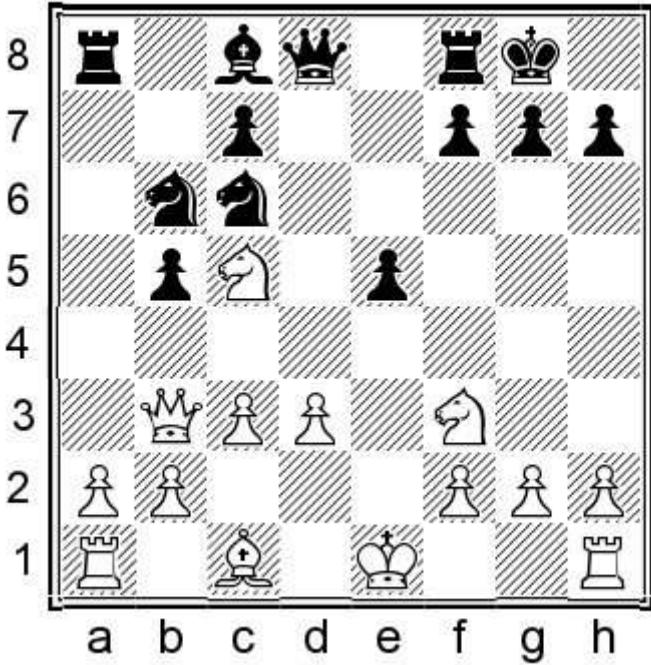
13.Bc2?! is passive and Black is better after 13...Bb6 with ...f5 in the air.

13...axb3 14.Qxb3

The critical position. Black has a lot of ways to play, and it was really hard to pick just one. I've chosen the 'safest', theoretically-speaking.

14.Nxb3?! Unnecessarily allowing an unpleasant pin. 14...Bg4 15.h3 Bh5 16.0-0 f5,

14...Nb6!?



Position after: 14...Nb6!?

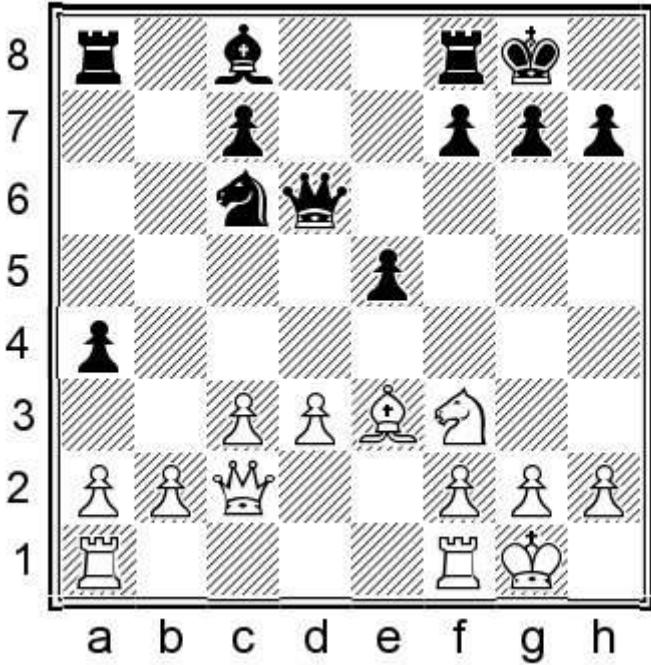
15.Qxb5

Collecting a second pawn, but White remains with poor coordination.

A) 15.0-0 Qd6 16.Be3 Na4 Black's compensation has more of a positional nature.

A1) 17.Qxb5 Ra5 18.Qc4 Nxb2 [18...Nxc5? would be an epic fail due to: 19.b4!+–] 19.Qb3 Nxd3 20.Rad1 Rxc5 21.Bxc5 Qxc5 22.Rxd3 Be6 23.Qa4 Bc4 Black has the slightly more comfortable game.

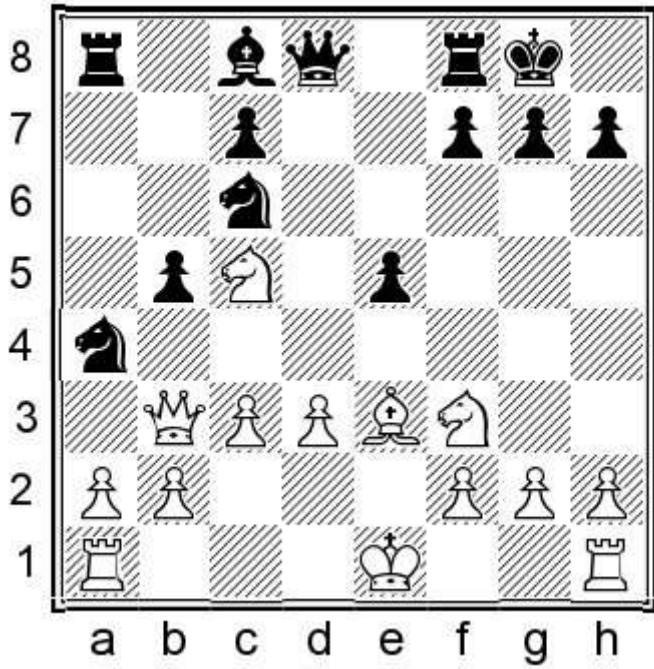
A2) 17.Nxa4 bxa4 18.Qc2



Position after: 18.Qc2

At first sight it doesn't look like much, but Black has nice pressure on the light squares for just one pawn, e.g. 18...Bf5 19.Rfd1 Rfd8 20.Ne1 Ne7 21.b4 White was passive, so this push is understandable. 21...axb3 22.axb3 Rxa1 23.Rxa1 and now Black is ok after both 23...f6 24.Rd1 c5© and 23...h6 24.Rd1 Nd5©

B) 15.Be3 Na4

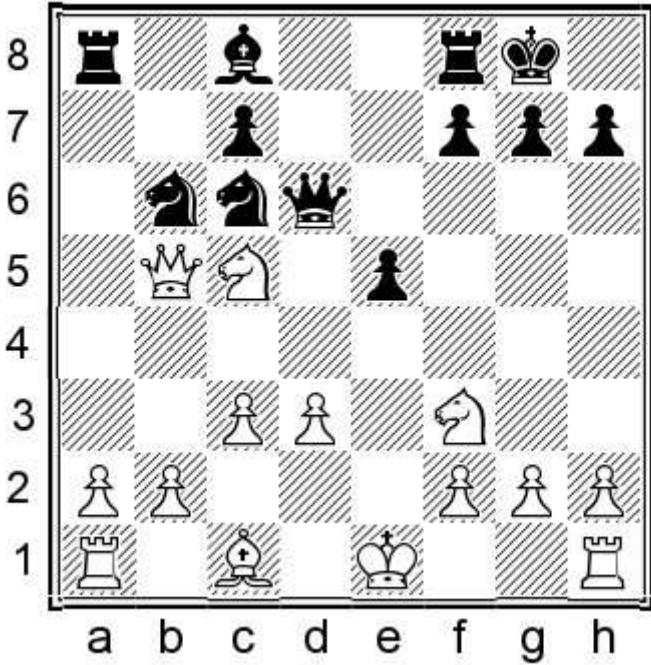


Position after: 15...Na4

B1) 16.Qxb5?! Nxc5 17.Qxc5 Qxd3! Unpleasant. 18.Rd1 [18.Qxc6?? Ba6–+] 18...Qg6 Black's activity is very annoying.

B2) 16.0-0 Qd6 leads to 15.0-0.

15...Qd6



Position after: 15...Qd6

16.b4

and now Black has several ways to continue, but generally speaking we should be satisfied with the fact that White already can't avoid repetition...

A) 16.0-0?? blunders a piece: 16...Ra5

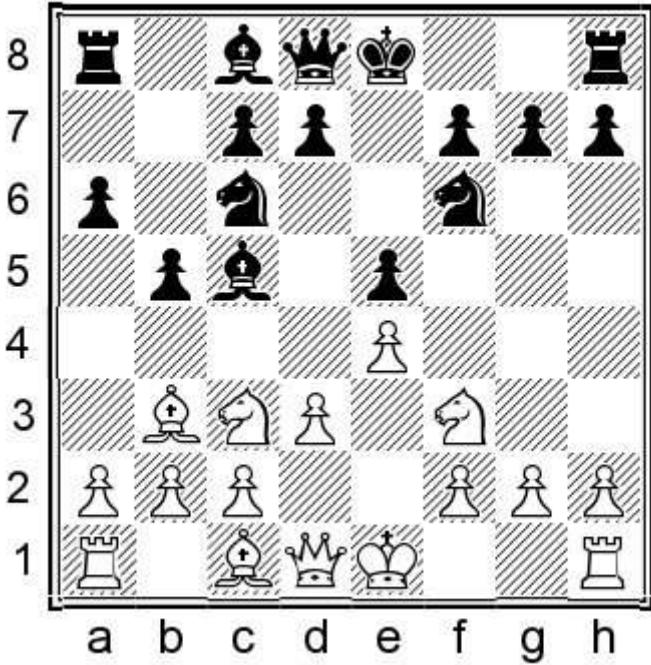
B) 16.Ne4 Qg6 17.Nh4! Forced. [17.0-0? Ba6] 17...Qe6 Now ...Ba6 is too strong a threat so White is forced to repeat moves. 18.Nc5 Qf6 19.Ne4 Qe6=

16...Na7 17.Qa5 Nc6 18.Qb5 Na7=

Feel free to dig for more in case the tournament situation requires.

e) 7.Nc3 d6 8.--

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.d3 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.Nc3

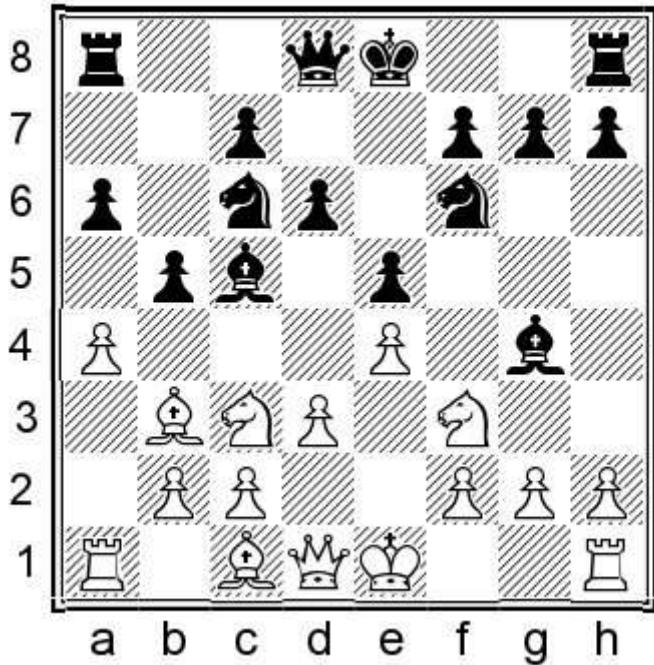


Position after: 7.Nc3

This is a fairly common idea in this move order too; White wants to put his knight on d5 before preparing c3-d4. However, this is a bit slower here since White has already committed with d3, so he won't be able to push d4 in one go.

7...d6 8.Bg5

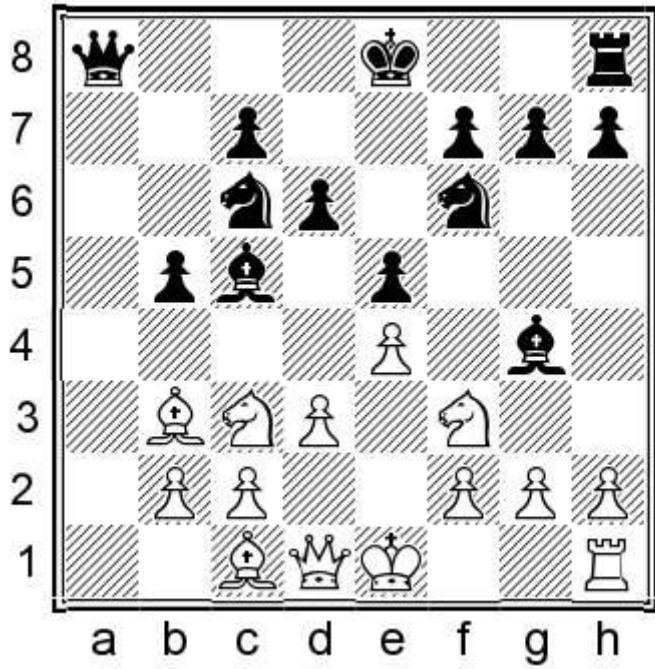
A) 8.a4 Bg4!? An ambitious pawn sacrifice.



Position after: 8...Bg4!?

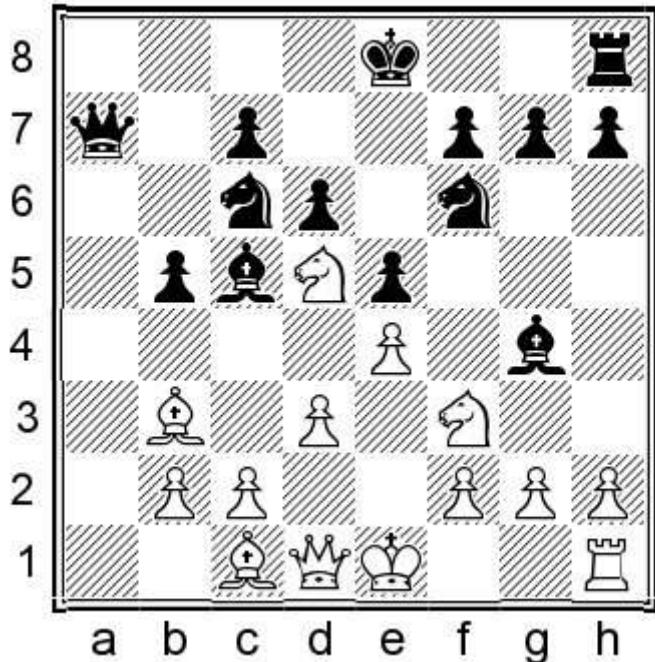
A1) 9.Ne2 b4!? The simplest way to continue. For example: 10.Be3 [10.a5 0-0=] 10...Bxe3 11.fxe3 Na5 12.Ba2 c5 13.0-0 0-0 14.Ng3 Rb8 15.h3 Be6=

A2) 9.axb5 axb5 10.Rxa8 Qxa8



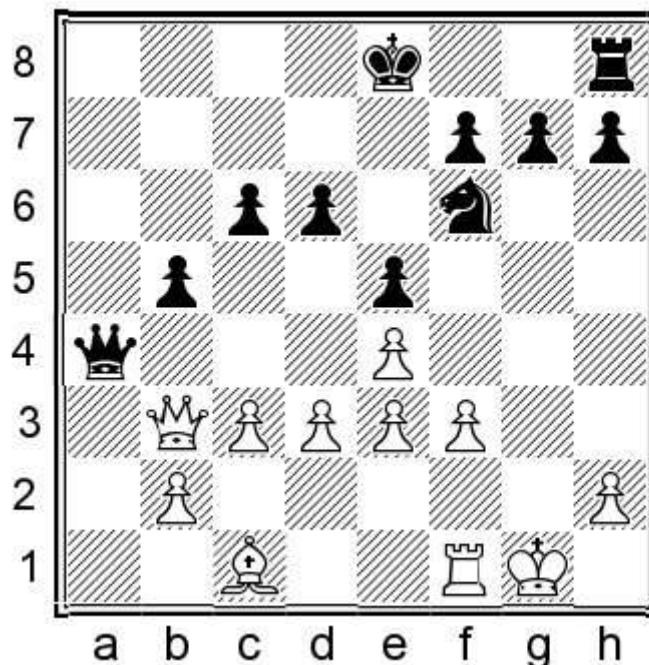
Position after: 10...Qxa8

A2.1) 11.Nd5 Qa7!



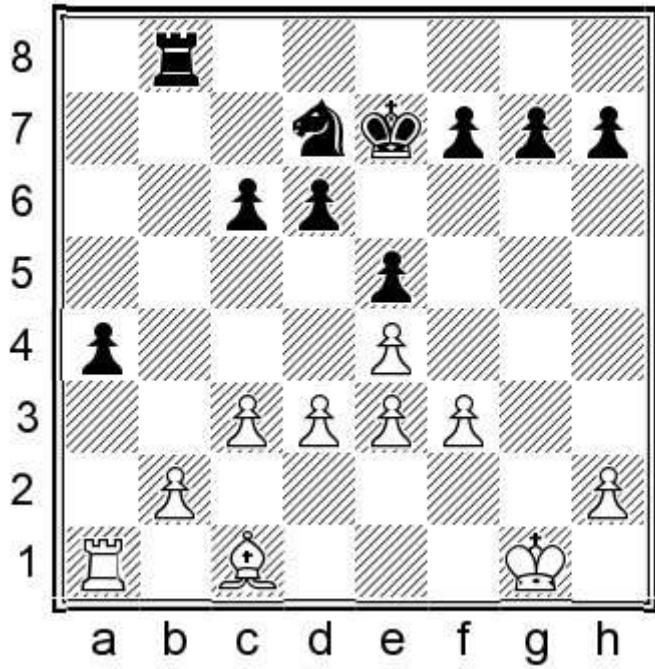
Position after: 11...Qa7!

An important detail; White is facing problems. 12.Ne3 Bxf3 13.gxf3 [13.Qxf3 Nd4 14.Qd1 0-0³] and now 13...Ne7 happened in Nyzhnyk – Karpatchev, Bad Woerishofen 2010, but 13...Nd4 would have been more to the point. 14.c3!? Nxb3 15.Qxb3 Bxe3 16.fxe3 c6 17.0-0 Qa4!?



Position after: 17...Qa4!?

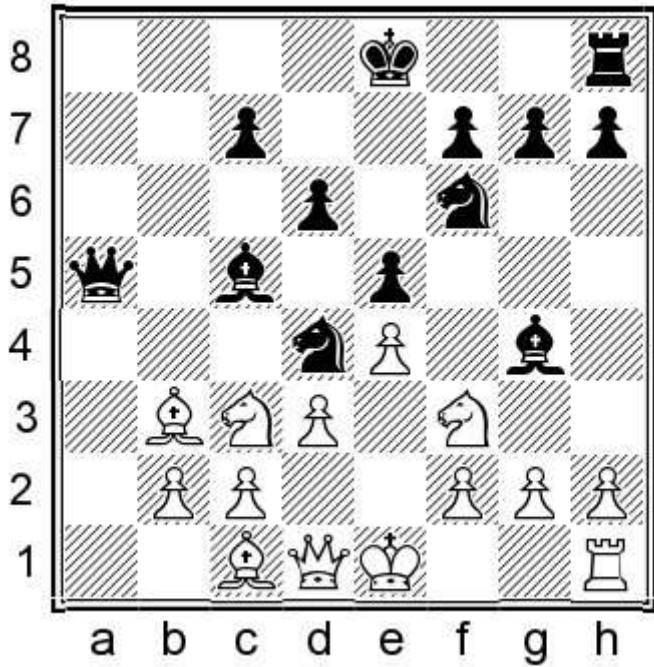
leads to a slight edge, e.g. 18.Qxa4 bxa4 19.Bd2 Ke7 ... 20.Ra1 Rb8! 21.Bc1 Nd7!



Position after: 21...Nd7!

22.Rxa4 Nc5 23.Ra7+ Ke6 24.b4 [24.d4?? Nb3+ traps the bishop.] 24...Nxd3 25.Bd2 c5μ

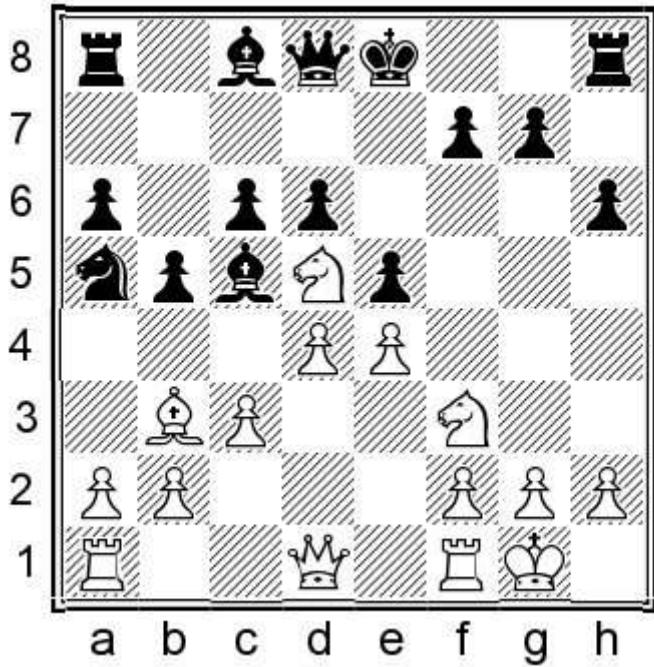
A2.2) 11.Nxb5 Qa5+ 12.Nc3 Nd4



Position after: 12...Nd4

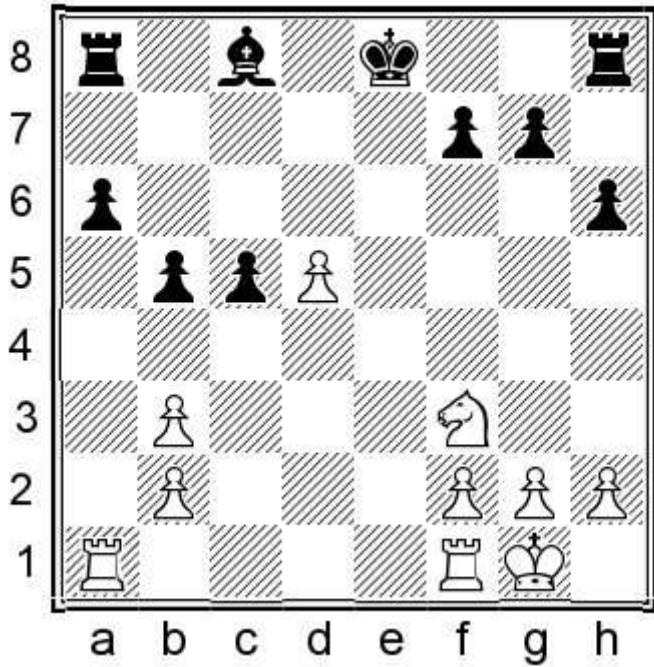
13.Bd2 Qa7 is unpleasant for White [13...Bb4 was also good in Short, N (2682) – Hansen, E (2577) Edmonton 2013.] Play might continue: 14.Ba4+ c6 15.0-0 [15.Nxd4? Bxd1 16.Nxc6 Qa8 17.Na5+ Kf8 18.Nxd1 Bb6 19.Bc6 Qa6 20.Nc4 Ke7μ] 15...0-0 16.Be3 Nh5,

B) 8.0-0 allows 8...Na5!? 9.Bg5 The only concrete operation here: 9...h6 10.Bxf6 Qxf6 11.Nd5 Qd8 12.c3 c6 13.d4!



Position after: 13.d4!

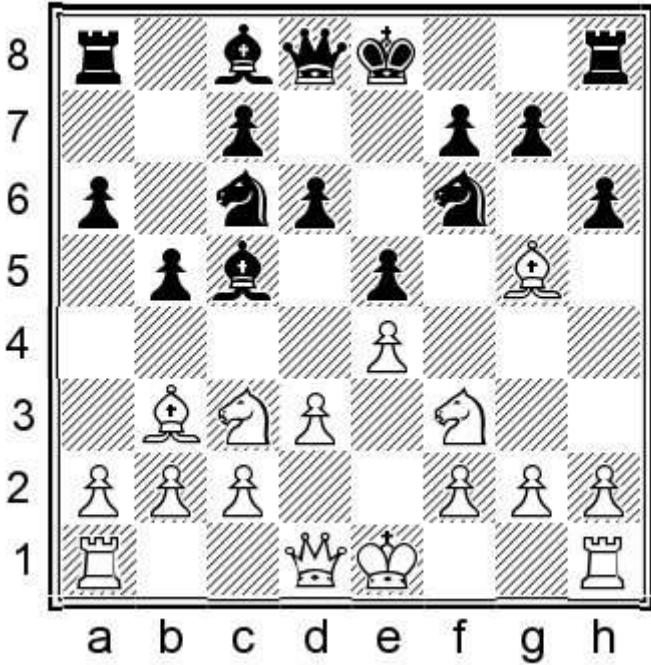
13...exd4 14.cxd4 Nxb3 15.axb3 cxd5 16.dxc5 A funny position.
16...dxc5 [16...dxe4? would be a mistake due to 17.Qd5!] 17.Qxd5
[17.exd5 0-0 18.d6 Bb7=] 17...Qxd5 18.exd5



Position after: 18.exd5

This endgame should end in an easy draw. 18...Ke7 [18...0-0 19.Rfc1 Rd8 20.Rxc5 Bb7 21.Rd1 Rd6=] 19.Ne5 Rf8!? 20.Nd3 [20.Rfc1 Bf5 21.g4! Kd6!? 22.gxf5 Kxe5 23.Rxc5 Rfc8=] 20...Rd8 21.Rfe1+ Kf8 22.Nxc5 Rxd5=

8...h6

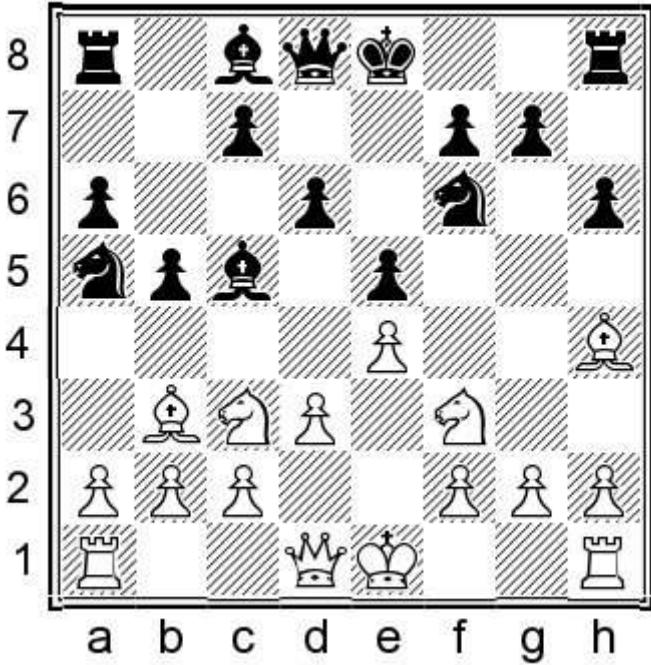


Position after: 8...h6

9.Bh4

9.Bxf6 is more restrained, and probably rightly so. 9...Qxf6 10.Nd5 Qd8 11.c3 0-0 12.d4 It's abit early for this action. [12.0-0 is discussed in the Ark move order, under 7.Nc3.] 12...Ba7 13.h3 [13.a4 allows ...Bg4.] 13...exd4 14.cxd4 Bb7 15.0-0 Ne7= [15....Na5=]

9...Na5!



Position after: 9...Na5!

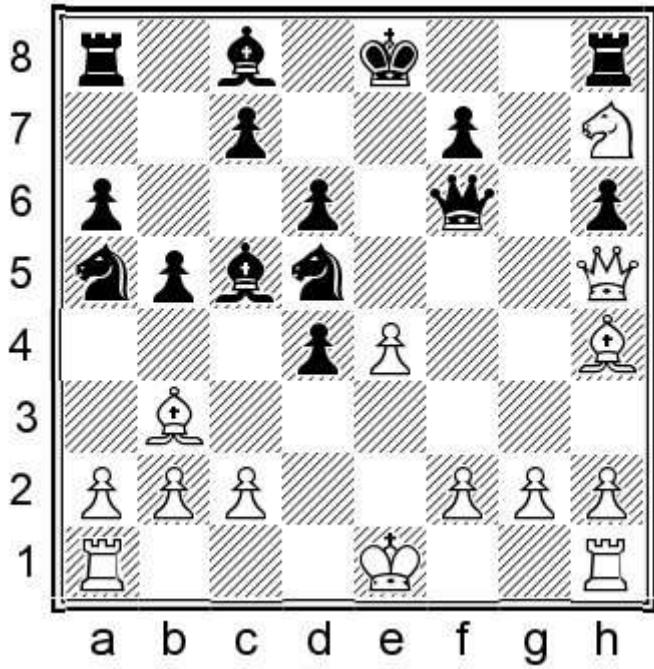
True to our basic Ark approach, we examine a very concrete idea. White is struggling to find a healthy way to play here:

10.d4!?

10.Nd5 g5 11.Nxg5 [11.Bg3? Nxb3 12.Nxf6+ Qxf6 13.axb3 Bg4 white will end up practically a piece down after the eventual exchanges on f3.] 11...Nxd5 12.Qh5 Qf6 13.Nxf7 Qxf7 14.Qxf7+ Kxf7 15.Bxd5+ Be6 16.Bxa8 Rxa8³ Black is ahead in material.

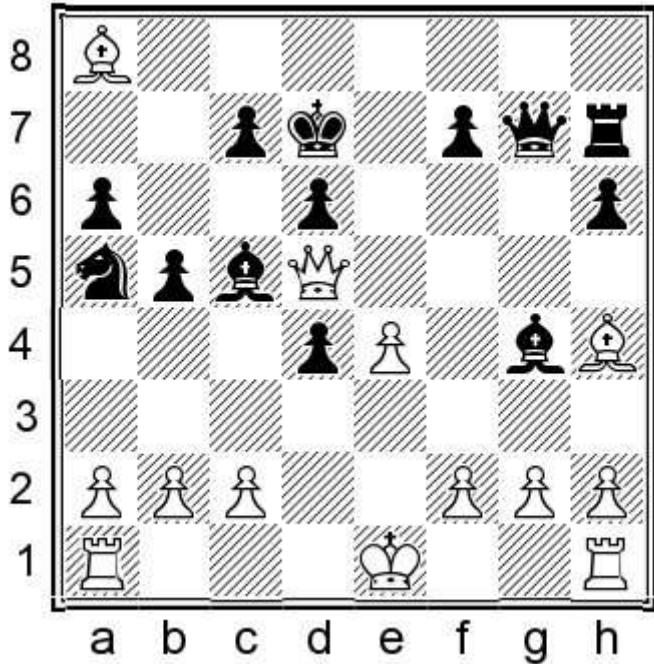
10...exd4 11.Nxd4

11.Nd5 This move was already explored in Mikhalevski's book! Black is in full control as was revealed back then. 11...g5 12.Nxg5 Nxd5 13.Qh5 Qf6 14.Nh7



Position after: 14.Nh7

This weird tactical idea allows White to continue fighting. 14...Qg7 15.Bxd5 [15.Qxd5? Qxh7 16.Qxa8 0-0-+] 15...Rxh7 16.Bxa8 Bg4! 17.Qd5 Kd7!

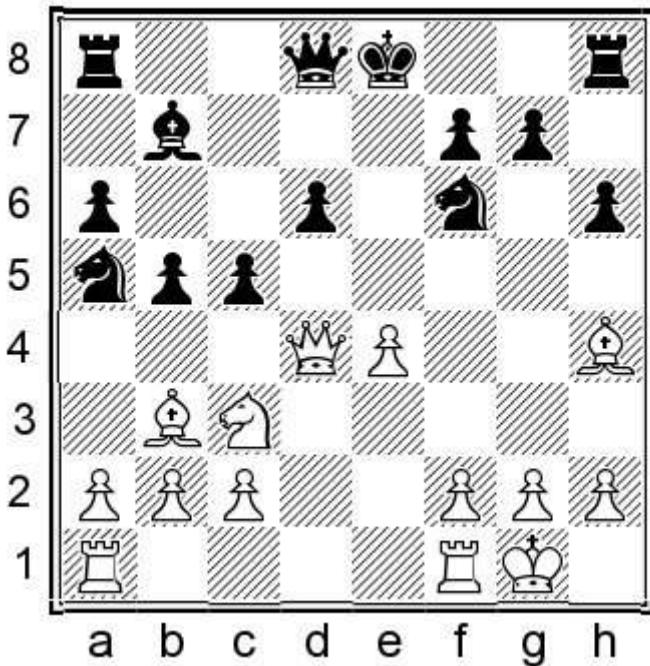


Position after: 17...Kd7!

The key defensive move. [17...Be6 would force a repetition by the way.]
18.h3 [18.e5 c6 19.Qe4 Qxe5 20.Qxe5 dxe5 21.Bf6 Ke6 22.Bd8 Nc4–+]
18...Be6 19.Qh5 Qxg2 20.0-0-0 c6! Trapping the bishop. 21.Rhg1 Qxe4
22.Rg8 Nc4μ There is still some fight ahead, but Black is close to winning.

11...Bb7! 12.0-0 Bxd4 13.Qxd4 c5

Black wins a piece. White has some sort of compensation, but I doubt this sacrifice would ever take place on purpose.



Position after: 13...c5

14.Qe3

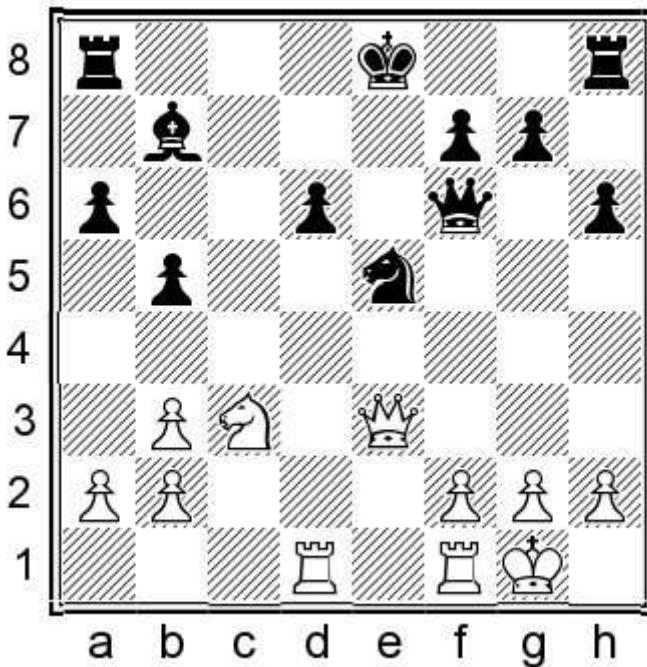
14.Bxf6 gxf6 15.Qe3 c4 could well be objectively better, but fewer pieces = fewer problems for us.

14...c4 15.Rad1

15.e5? dxe5 16.Qxe5+ Qe7 17.Bxf6 gxf6 18.Qf5 0-0 19.Rfe1 Qd6 20.Rad1

[20.Ne4 Bxe4 21.Rxe4 Rfe8] 20...Rfe8!

15...cxb3 16.cxb3 Nc6 17.e5 Nxe5 18.Bxf6 Qxf6

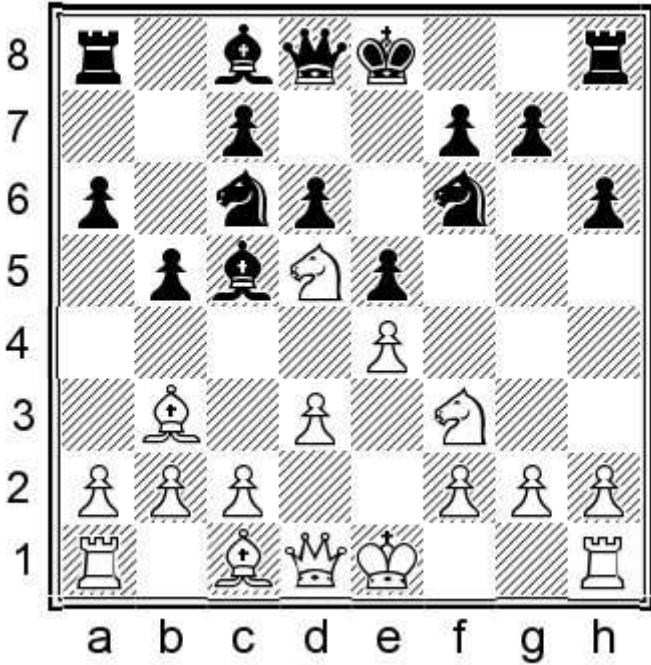


Position after: 18...Qxf6

19.f4 Qe7 20.fxe5 dxe5 21.Nd5 Bxd5 22.Rxd5 f6 23.Rfd1 0-0 24.Rd7 Qe6μ

f) 7.Nc3 d6 8.Nd5 h6 9.--

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.d3 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.Nc3 d6 8.Nd5 h6!



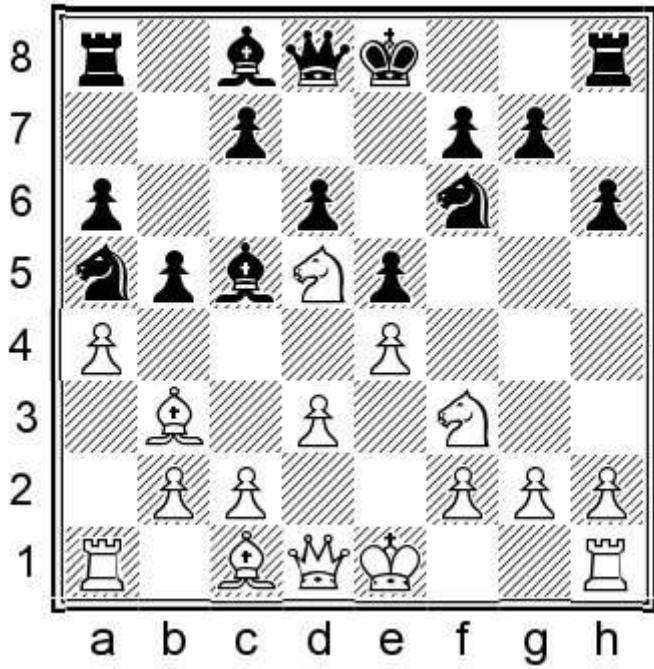
Position after: 8...h6!

It's extremely important to prevent any any including Bg5.

9.Nxf6+

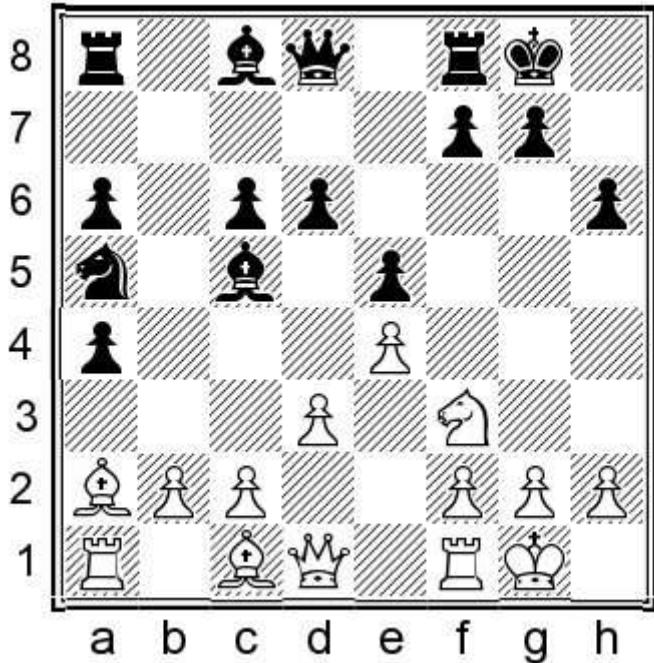
A) 9.0-0?! is met by 9...Na5 as discussed earlier.

B) 9.a4 Once again this typical push is possible, and White has the luxury to include it any time he wants. Black can react directly (and differently in all cases) or in a standard manner. 9...Na5!? A new, active move, though hardly a surprise to anyone switching on an engine.



Position after: 9...Na5!?

B1) 10.Ba2 Nxd5 11.Bxd5 [11.exd5?! bxa4! 12.Bd2 Bb6 13.c4 Nb3 14.Bxb3 axb3 15.Qxb3 0-0³] 11...c6 12.Ba2 bxa4!? 13.0-0 0-0



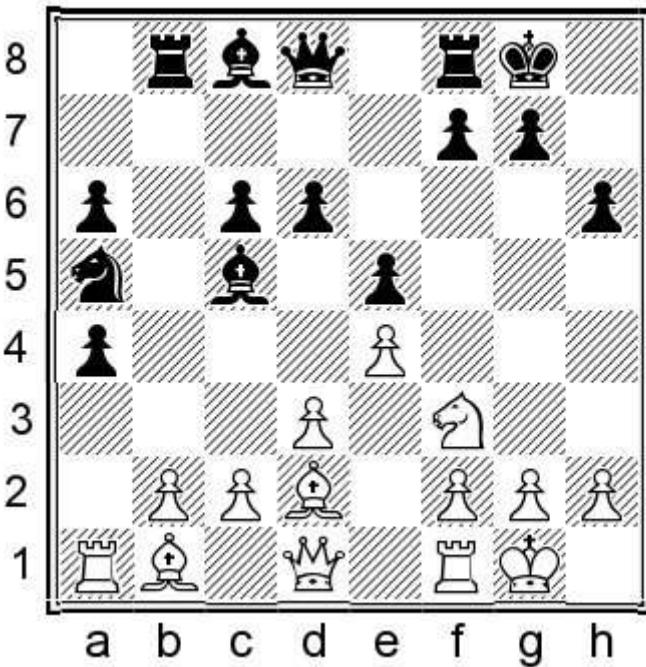
Position after: 13...0-0

An original position: both sides have plenty of options.

B1.1) 14.c3?! Nb3 15.Bxb3 axb3 16.d4 exd4 17.cxd4 Bb4 18.Qxb3 a5 19.Bd2 Rb8 cannot be a problem for us.

B1.2) 14.Bb1 a3 15.Bd2! [15.bxa3 Be6=] 15...Nb7! 16.b4 Bb6 17.Rxa3 a5=

B1.3) 14.Bd2 Rb8 15.Bb1!

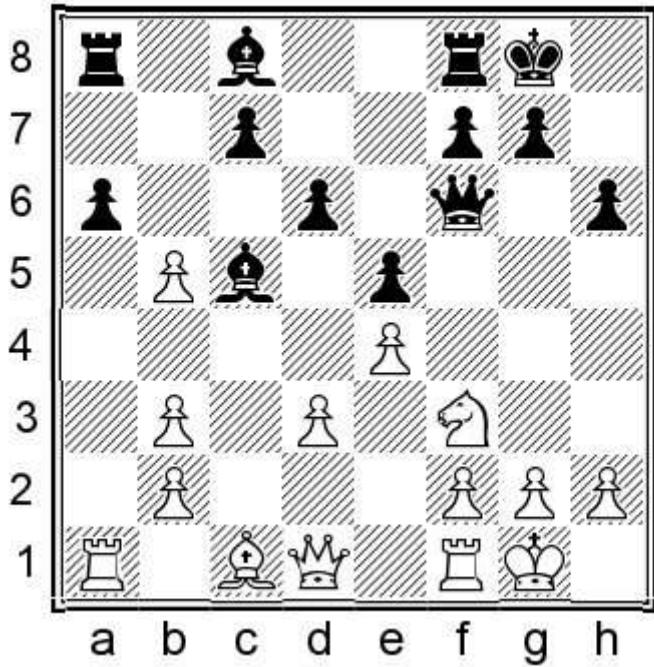


Position after: 15.Bb1!

A weird move, with a neat idea behind it. 15...Rxb2 16.Rxa4 Nb7 17.Rxa6 should be around equal. A curious line is: 17...Qc7 18.Bc3 Nd8!? 19.Rxc6?! [19.Bxb2 Bxa6=] 19...Nxc6 20.Bxb2 Qb6 21.Bc3 Be6© The b1-bishop is now a miserable sight.

B2) 10.axb5 Nxb3 11.Nxf6+ Qxf6 transposes.

B3) 10.Nxf6+ Qxf6 11.axb5 Nxb3 12.cxb3 0-0 13.0-0

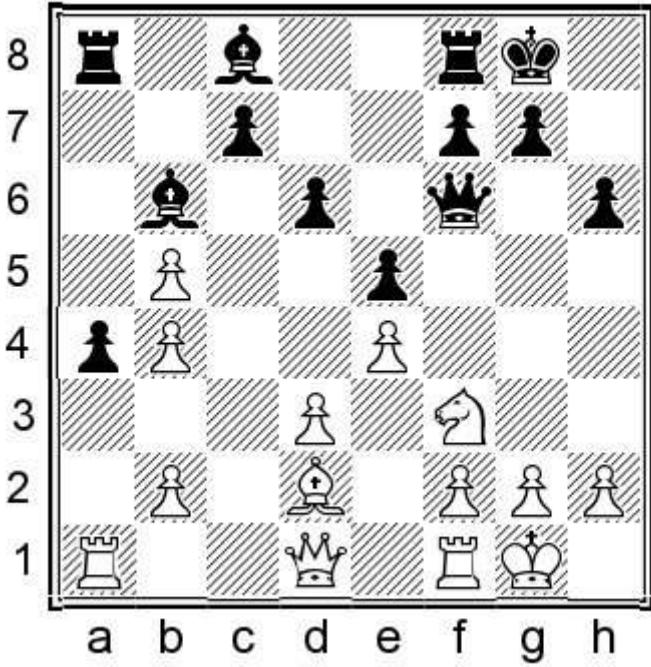


Position after: 13.0-0

The critical position to assess the viability of 9...Na5. 13...a5!? Possibly the simplest, though 13...d5 and 13...Bb7 come to mind as well.

B3.1) 14.Be3 Bxe3 15.fxe3 Bd7 16.Qc2 [16.Nd4?! Qg5] 16...Qe6=

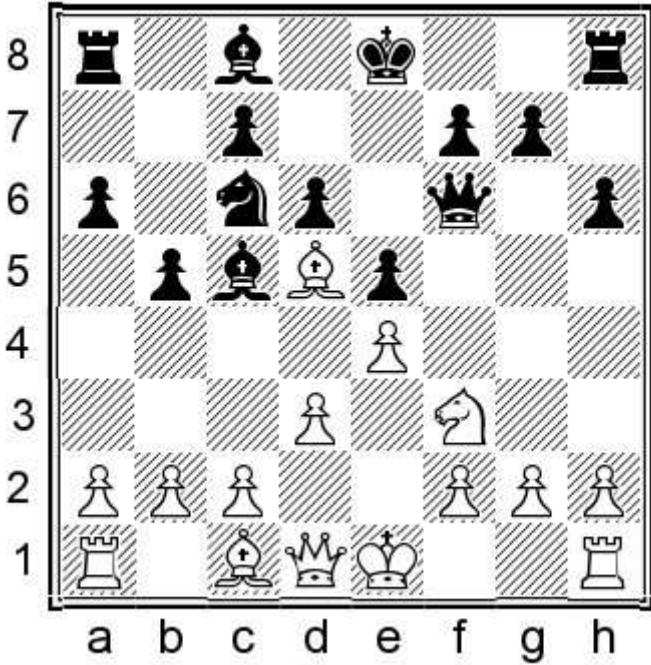
B3.2) 14.Bd2 Bb6 15.b4 [15.Be3 Bd7=] 15...a4!



Position after: 15...a4!

16.Rxa4 [16.Be3 Bg4 17.Bxb6 cxb6 18.h3 Bd7 19.Rxa4 Rxa4 20.Qxa4 Bxh3,,] 16...Rxa4 17.Qxa4 Bg4 18.Qd1 Qg6© Black gets decent play for a mere pawn.

9...Qxf6 10.Bd5



Position after: 10.Bd5

This has seen some amount of play, but it's harmless.

10...Bd7 11.Be3

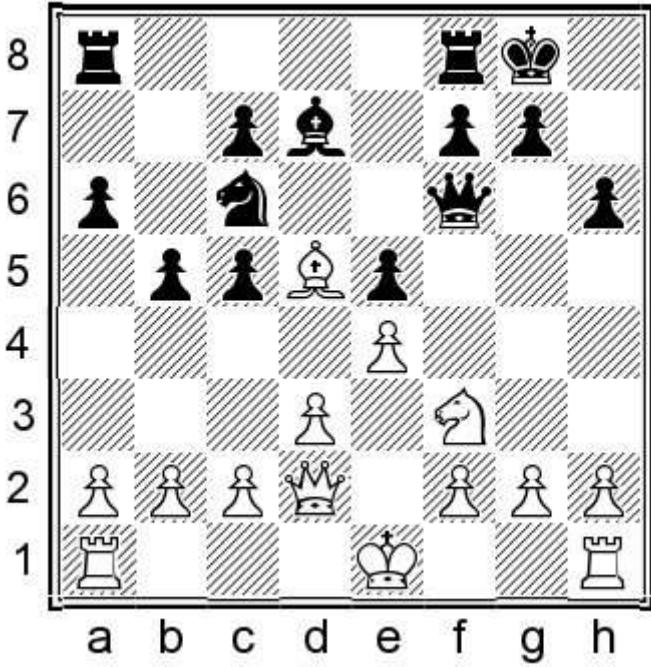
Here Black has plenty of ways to reach equality. I like the approach chosen by Carlsen in a rapid game.

11.c3 Rb8 12.b4 Bb6 is fine for Black as 13.a4 is answered by the typical 13...bxa4!? 14.Rxa4 Ne7!f

11...0-0 12.Bxc5

12.0-0 Rad8 13.Bxc5 [13.a4 Ne7 14.Bb3 Ng6=] 13...dxc5 14.Bxc6 Bxc6 15.Qe1 c4 [15...Qd6 16.Qc3 f6=] 16.Qc3 is a direct transposition.

12...dxc5 13.Qd2



Position after: 13.Qd2

13...Rae8!?

13...Rad8 14.Bxc6 Bxc6 15.Qc3 c4 16.0-0 Rfe8 17.Rfe1 cxd3 18.cxd3 Bd7 19.b4 Bg4 20.Nd2 Qd6 21.Re3 Be6,, Black was comfortable and slightly better in Predojevic, B (2616) – Carlsen, M (2864) Lillehammer 2013.

Though instructive, the text is even more ambitious.

14.Bxc6

A) 14.c3? Ne7

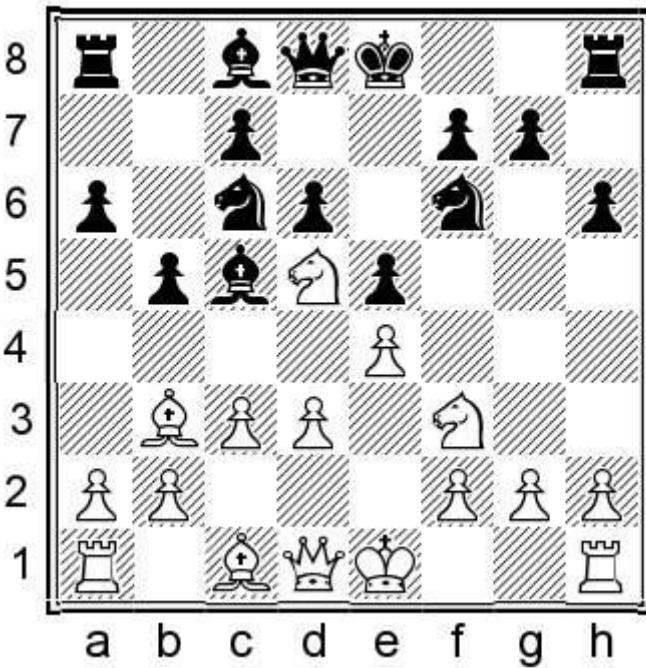
B) 14.Qc3 Nd4!? with the idea: 15.Nxd4 cxd4 16.Qxc7 Be6 17.Qd6 Qg5f

14...Qxc6 15.Qe2 f5

Black has the upper hand.

g) 7.Nc3 d6 8.Nd5 h6 9.c3 Be6 10.--

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.d3 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.Nc3 d6 8.Nd5 h6! 9.c3



Position after: 9.c3

This tricky position has been tested many times by strong players, and no wonder. Black's most natural move is a mistake!

9...Be6!?

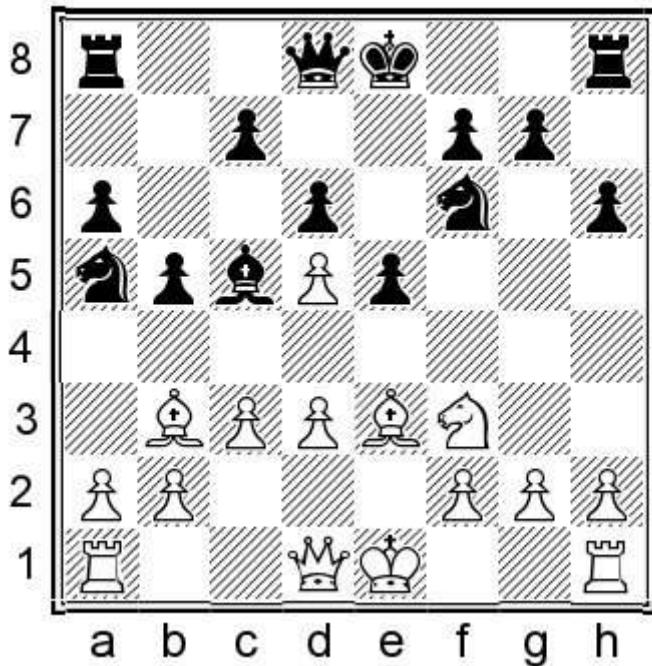
A very direct way to treat this particular line. I have successfully employed it against two strong grandmasters, namely Nisipeanu and Balogh.

10.Nxf6+!?

This was tried twice by Nisipeanu, once against yours truly. It looks pretty innocent, but things might not be that obvious.

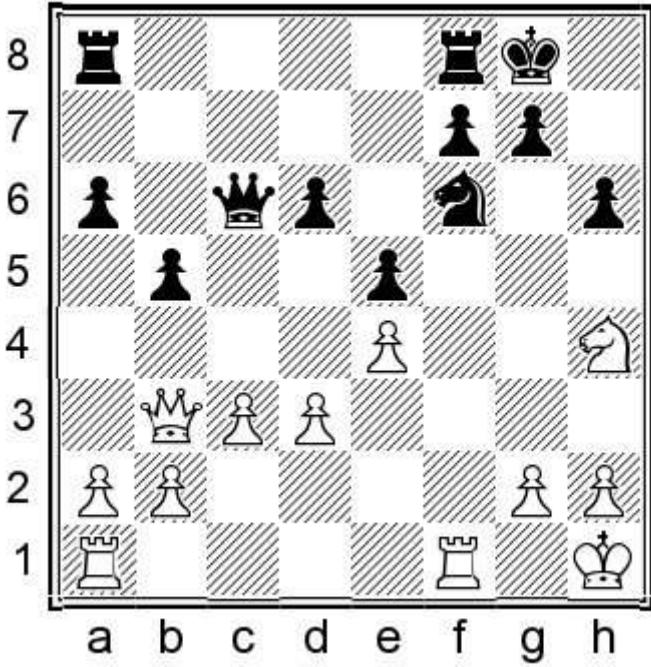
A) 10.Be3 is not a particularly dangerous line. 10...Bxd5!? 11.exd5

[11.Bxd5 After 11...Nxd5 12.exd5 Ne7 Black is more than fine.]
11...Na5!



Position after: 11...Na5!

A1) 12.0-0 Nxb3 13.Qxb3 Bxe3 14.fxe3 0-0 15.e4 c6 16.dxc6 Qb6+ 17.Kh1 Qxc6 is equal as 18.Nh4?!

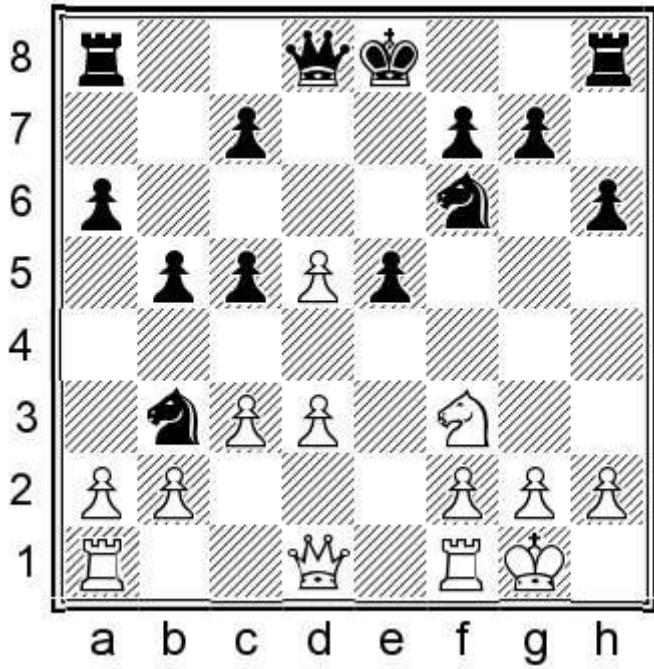


Position after: 18.Nh4?!

...can be answered powerfully by 18...d5³

A2) 12.d4 exd4 13.Nxd4 [13.Bxd4 Qe7+] 13...0-0 14.Nf5 Qe8 15.0-0 Nxb3 16.axb3 Qe4 17.Ng3 Qxd5 18.Qxd5 Nxd5 19.Bxc5 dxc5 20.Ne4=

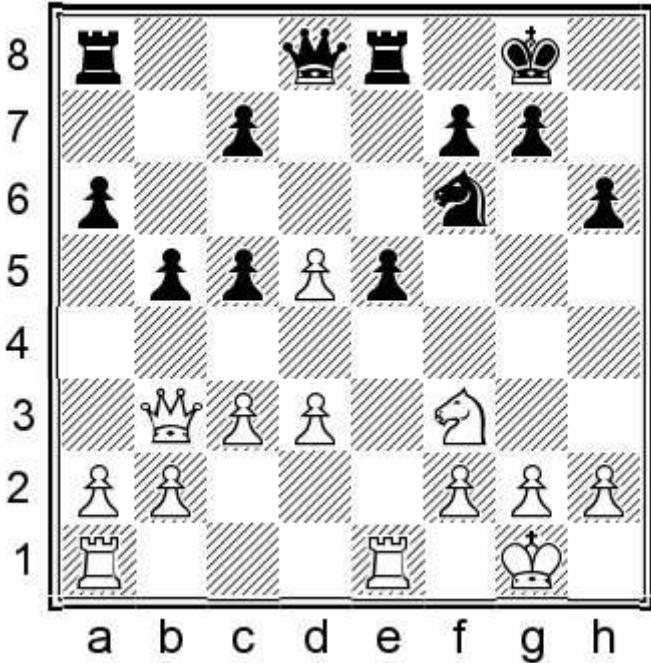
A3) 12.Bxc5 dxc5 13.0-0 Nxb3



Position after: 13...Nxb3

A3.1) 14.axb3 Qxd5 15.Re1 Nd7 16.c4 bxc4 17.Nxe5 Nxe5 18.dxc4 Qd6 19.Qh5 [19.f4 0-0-0!] 19...0-0 20.Qxe5=

A3.2) 14.Qxb3 0-0 15.Rfe1 Re8

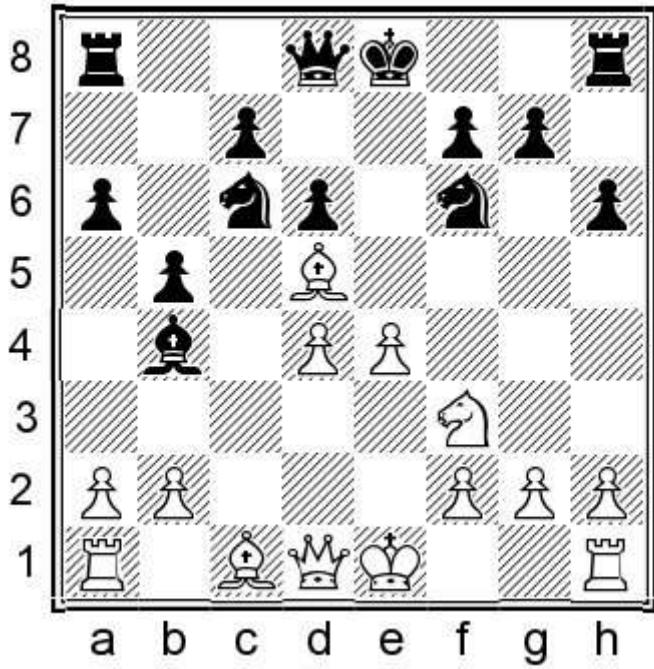


Position after: 15...Re8

A3.2a) 16.c4 Qd6 17.Nd2 c6 18.Ne4 [18.dxc6 Qxc6=] 18...Nxe4 19.dxe4 bxc4 20.Qxc4 cxd5 21.Qxd5 [21.exd5 Rab8=] 21...Qb6=

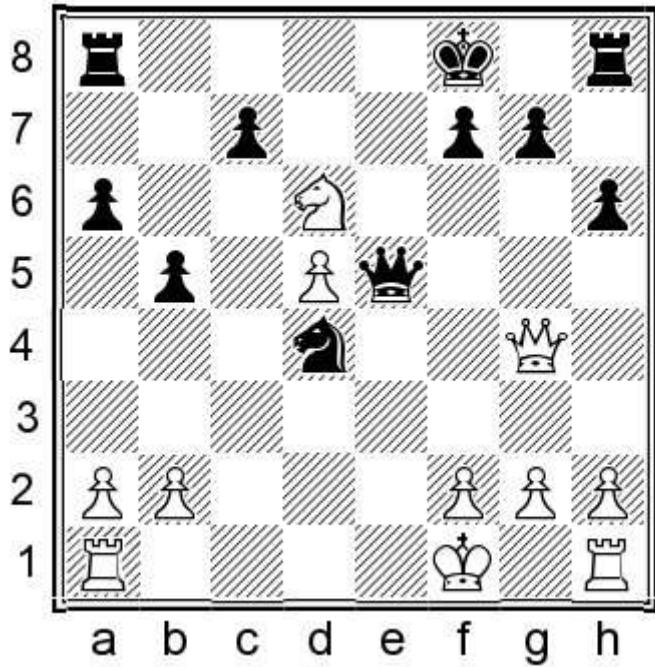
A3.2b) 16.Nxe5 Qd6 17.d4 c4 18.Qc2 Qxd5 19.Rad1 Re6= is around equal.

B) 10.d4? would be a mistake, because of 10...exd4 11.cxd4 Bxd5! Forced, but already securing an edge for Black. 12.Bxd5 [12.exd5?! Bb4+ 13.Kf1 Ne7μ] 12...Bb4+



Position after: 12...Bb4+

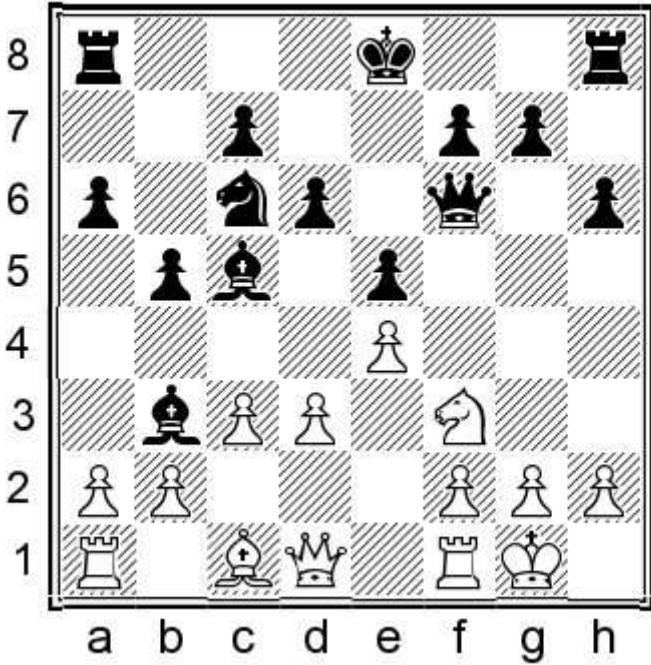
13.Bd2 [13.Kf1?! Nxd5 14.exd5 Ne7 15.Qb3 Ba5μ] 13...Nxd5 14.exd5 Bxd2+ 15.Nxd2 [15.Qxd2 Ne7μ] 15...Qe7+ 16.Kf1 Nxd4 17.Qg4 Qf6 18.Ne4 Qe5 19.Nxd6+ Kf8!



Position after: 19...Kf8!

20.Rd1 [20.Re1?! Qxd5] 20...cxd6 21.Qxd4 Rc8³

10...Qxf6 11.0-0 Bxb3



Position after: 11...Bxb3

12.axb3 0-0 13.b4 Bb6

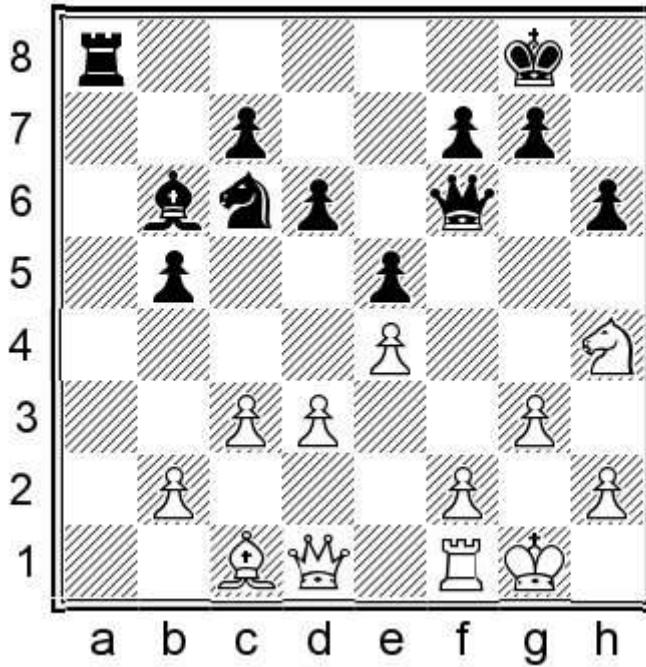
I felt that the pressure on the a-file is much easier to handle than in cases where Black allows b4 and then a4.

14.g3

Once again, a smart positional idea, preparing Nh4 and possibly Qg4 next.

14.Be3 Qe6!=

14...a5 15.bxa5 Nxa5 16.Nh4 Nc6 17.Rxa8 Rxa8



Position after: 17...Rxa8

18.Qg4

A) 18.Kg2 Qe6=

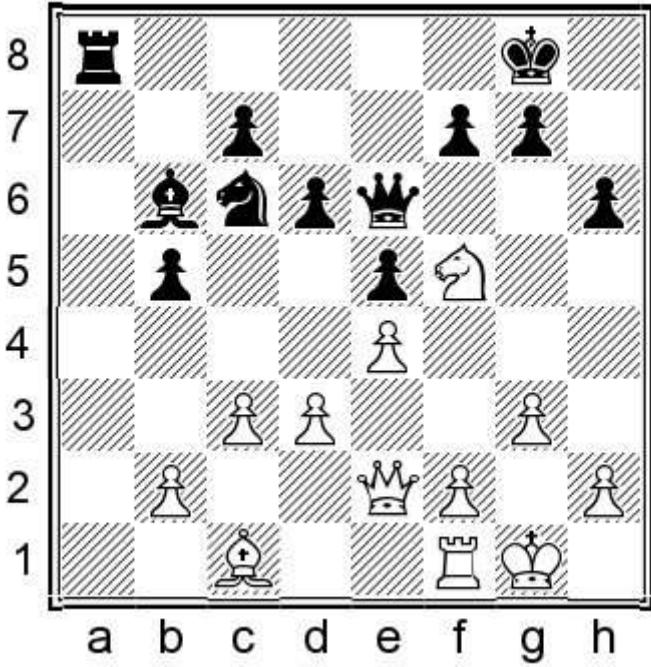
B) 18.Nf5 Ne7=

18...Qe6

A nice manoeuvre.

18...Ne7!? 19.Qd7 b4 20.cxb4 Qe6©

19.Nf5 Qg6! 20.Qe2 Qe6



Position after: 20...Qe6

and ... Ne7 is coming.

21.Kg2

A) 21.Qg4 Qg6=

B) 21.Be3 Bxe3 22.fxe3 Ne7

21...Ne7

Now it's not easy to make progress for White. Black can parry the aggressive tries in style, e.g.

22.g4!?

22.Qf3 c6 23.g4 [23.h4 Nxf5 24.exf5 Qd5] 23...Ng6!? Threatening 24...Qxf5!? in some cases. 24.Be3 Bd8

22...c6 23.f4 exf4 24.Bxf4 Ra2 25.Qc2

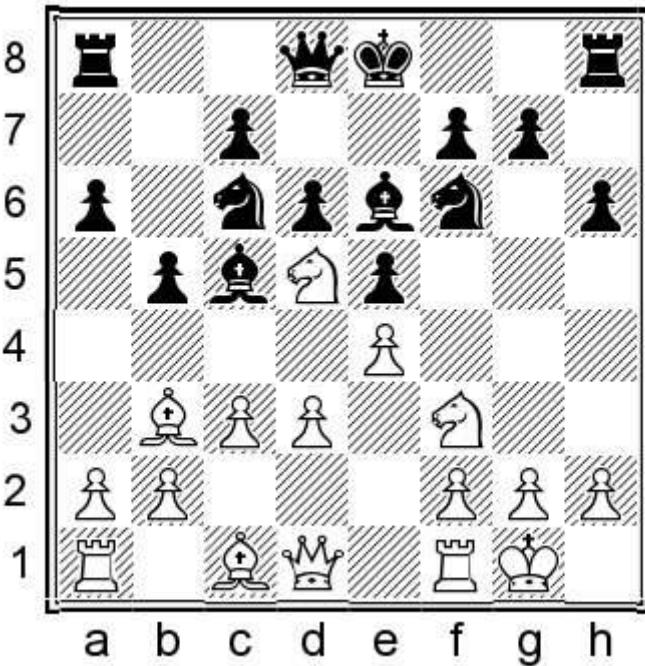
25.Nxd6? Nd5

25...d5,,

Black's counterplay is getting pretty annoying.

h) 7.Nc3 d6 8.Nd5 h6 9.c3 Be6 10.0-0 Bxd5 11.exd5 Ne7
12.d4 exd4 13.Nxd4 Qd7 14.--

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.d3 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.Nc3 d6 8.Nd5
h6! 9.c3 Be6!? 10.0-0



Position after: 10.0-0

10...Bxd5!

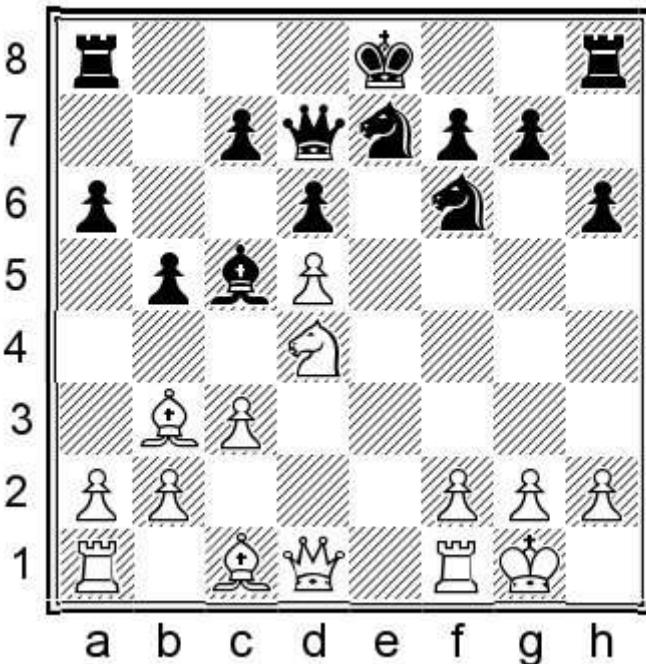
The main idea of the previous move: Black gets rid of the annoying knight and closes the diagonal of White's light-squared bishop. Furthermore, the pawn appearing on d5 is a constant target for Black's counterplay.

10...0-0?? would be a huge mistake: 11.d4 Ba7 12.Nxf6+ Qxf6 13.d5 wins a piece.

11.exd5

11.Bxd5?! lacks ambition. 11...Nxd5 12.exd5 Ne7 13.d4 exd4 14.Nxd4 0-0 15.Nc2 Qd7= ½:½ Jakovenko – Kobalia, Sochi 2006

11...Ne7 12.d4 exd4 13.Nxd4 Qd7!

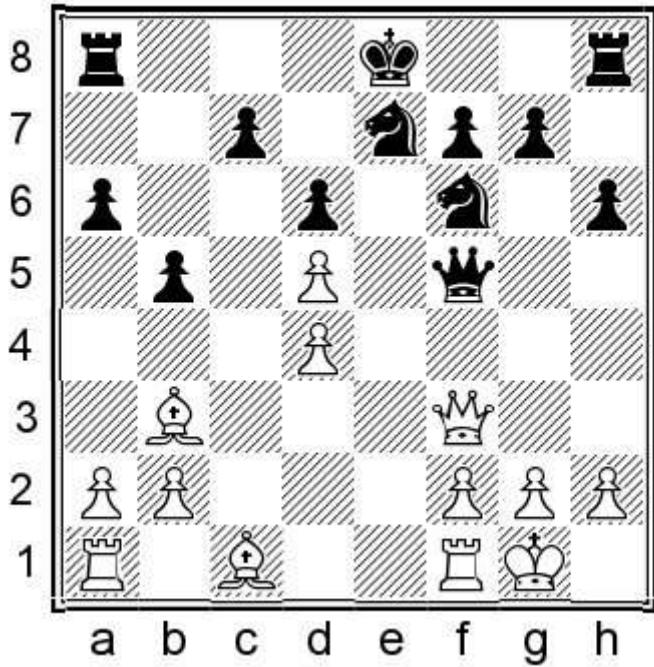


Position after: 13...Qd7!

An important move, as we have arrived at the main tabiya in this line. White has a lot of different ways to test Black's preparation and understanding.

14.Re1

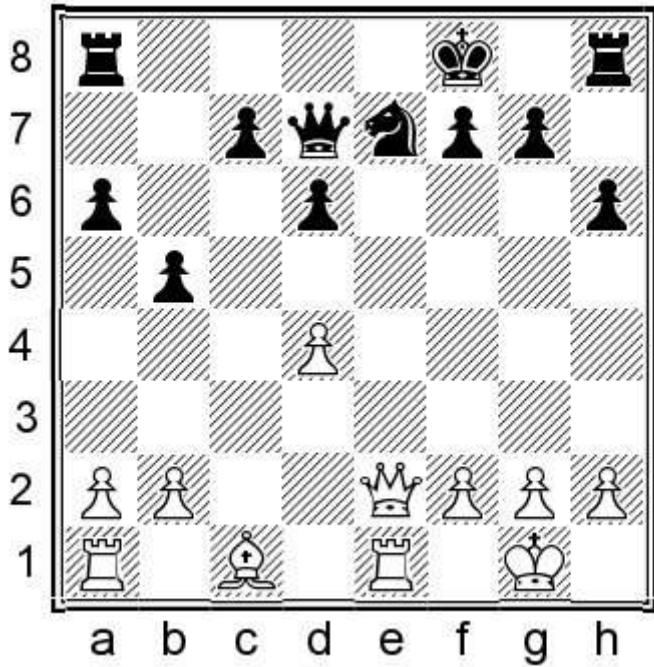
A) 14.Qf3?! Bxd4 15.cxd4 Qf5 [15...Qg4 is similar.]



Position after: 15...Qf5

A1) 16.Qc3 Nfxd5! 17.Bxd5 Qxd5 18.Qxc7 [18.Re1 Kd7!] 18...Rc8
19.Qa7 Qa8 20.Qb6 Qc6 21.Qa7 Ra8 22.d5 Rxa7 23.dxc6 Rc7³

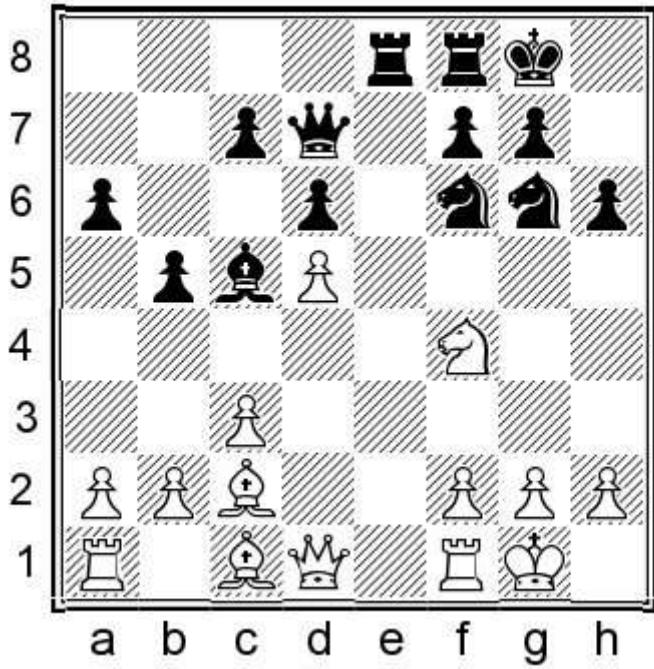
A2) 16.Qe2?! Nfxd5! ... 17.Bxd5 Qxd5 18.Re1 Qe6 19.Qd1 Qd7
20.Qe2 Kf8



Position after: 20...Kf8

A3) 16.Qg3!? Qg6!? possibly the simplest. [16...Kf8; 16...g6 are also options.] 17.Qc3 0-0 18.Qxc7 Nf5 is pleasant for black.

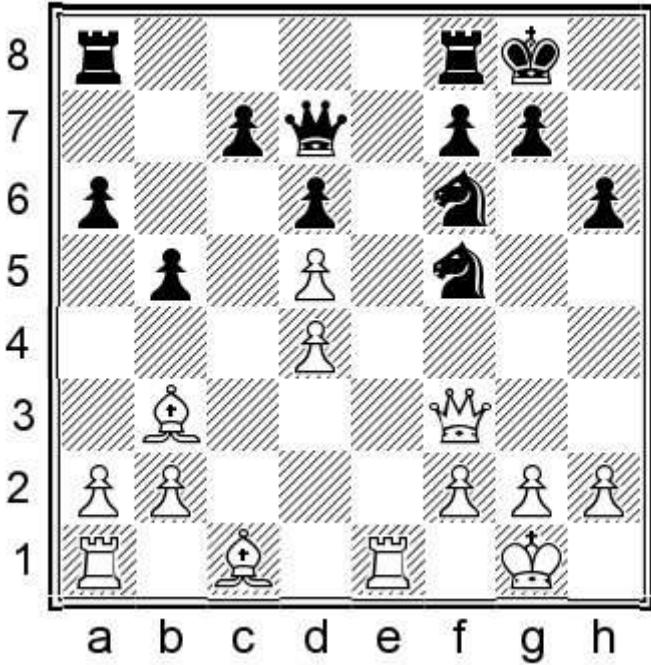
B) 14.Ne2 0-0 15.Nf4 [For 15.a4 see 14.a4] 15...Ng6 [15...Rfe8 was seen in Aroshidze, L (2520) – Campos Moreno, J (2412) Castell de Sant Ferran 2016] 16.Bc2 [16.Nh5 Nxh5 17.Qxh5 Rae8 18.Bc2 Re5 19.Qf3 Rfe8,,] 16...Rae8!?



Position after: 16...Rae8!?

17.Nxg6 fxg6 18.Bxg6 Ng4! 19.Be3 [19.Bxe8? Nxf2 20.Rxf2 Qxe8+–] 19...Bxe3 20.fxe3 Nxe3 21.Rxf8+ Rxf8 22.Qd4 Nc4³

14...0-0 15.Qf3 Bxd4 16.cxd4 Nf5



Position after: 16...Nf5

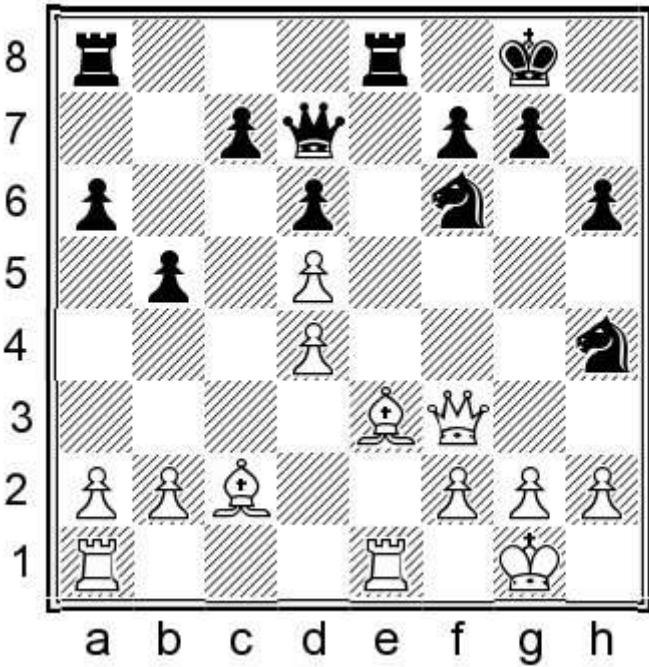
17.Be3

17.Rd1? is a mistake and was seen in an online game: 17...Rfe8 18.h3 Re4 19.Be3 Rae8+ Munguntuul, B (2428) – Koneru, H (2586) Chess.com INT 2020 when Black was already winning.

17...Rfe8 18.Bc2

This position is around equal and Black can repeat if he wants to.

18...Nh4



Position after: 18...Nh4

18...Nxe3 19.fxe3 Re7∞

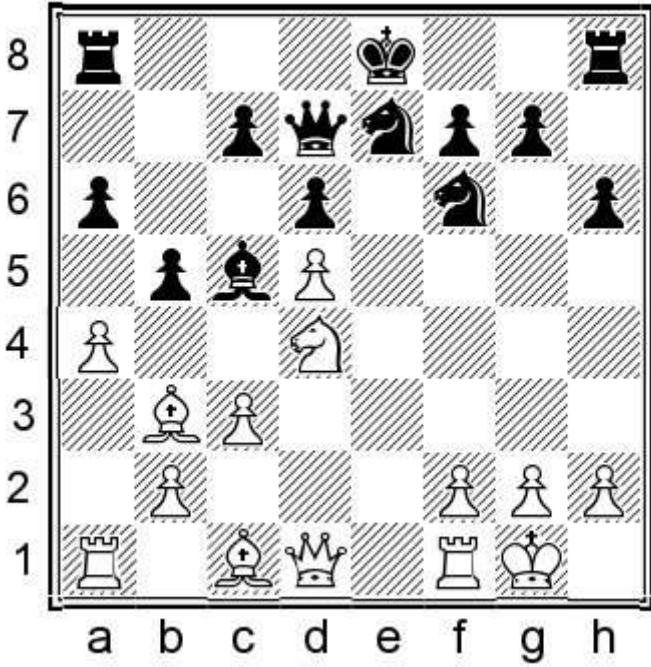
19.Qg3 Nf5 20.Qf3

20.Bxf5 Qxf5 21.Bxh6 Qh7, or 21...g6 and take the d5-pawn next.

20...Nh4=

i) 7.Nc3 d6 8.Nd5 h6 9.c3 Be6 10.0-0 Bxd5 11.exd5 Ne7
12.d4 exd4 13.Nxd4 Qd7 14.a4

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.d3 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.Nc3 d6 8.Nd5 h6! 9.c3 Be6!? 10.0-0 Bxd5! 11.exd5 Ne7 12.d4 exd4 13.Nxd4 Qd7! 14.a4

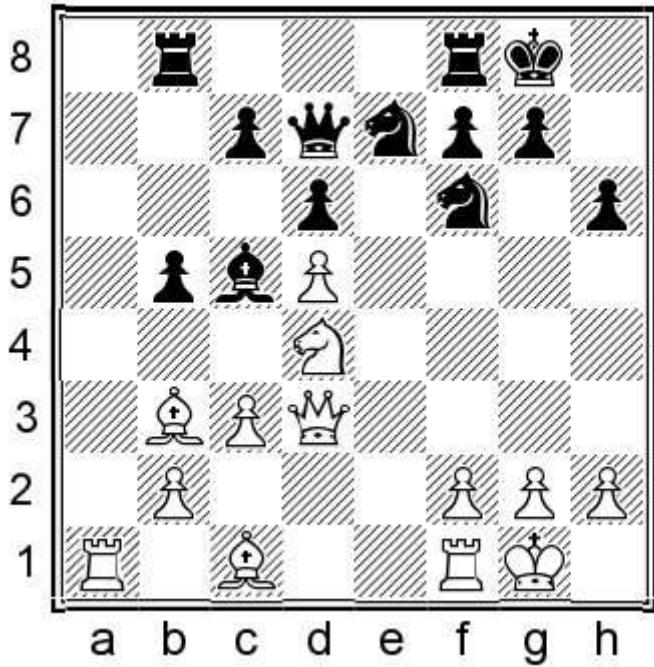


Position after: 14.a4

14...0-0 15.Ne2!?

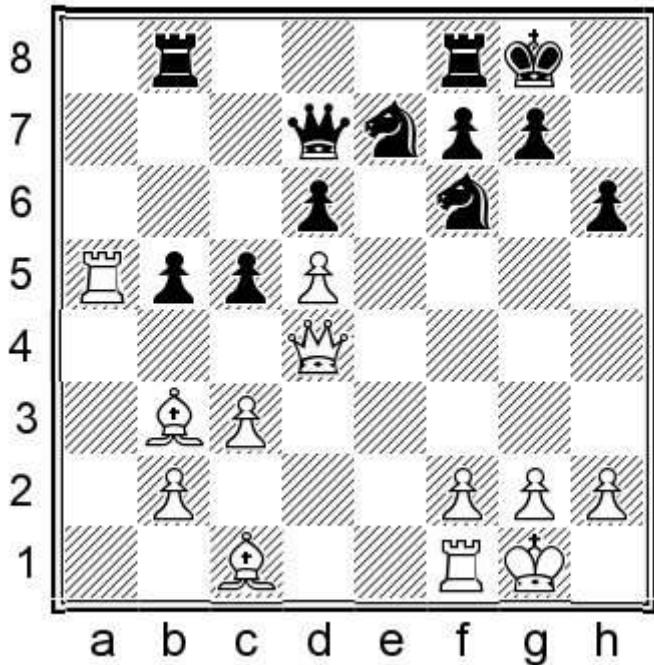
The move I faced in my first encounter in this variation; I wasn't anticipating this, so I had to come up with something over the board. White's knight is seeking some activity around black's king.

15.Qd3 used to be the main choice here. 15...Rab8 [15...Rfe8 has also been tested with success.] 16.axb5 axb5



Position after: 16...axb5

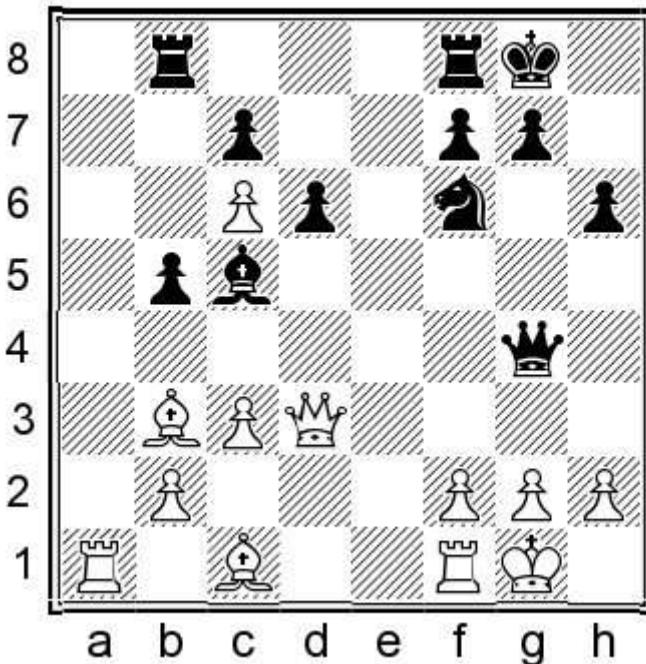
A) 17.Ra5? This one falls for Black's main trick. 17...Bxd4! 18.Qxd4 c5!



Position after: 18...c5!

This idea heavily impacted my choice of this line back then. 19.Qh4 [19.dxc6? Nxc6 would lead to a nice fork.] 19...Ra8! A subtle move, before collecting material. [19...Nexd5 is also good of course. Oparin, G (2504) – Kuljasevic, D (2577) Trieste 2013] 20.Rxa8 Rxa8 21.Qg3 [21.Bxh6? Nf5–+] 21...Kf8µ Black is much better.

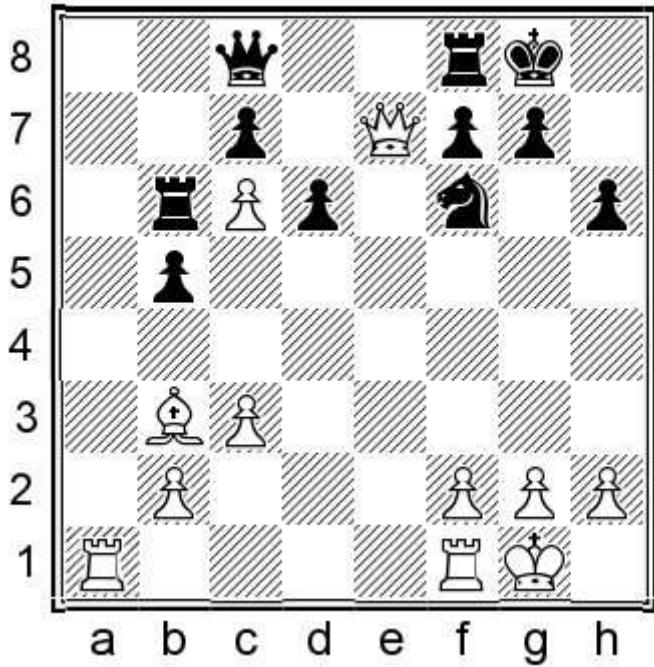
B) 17.Nc6!? Nxc6 [17...Rbe8!? might be even better.] 18.dxc6 Qg4 was played in practice. White failed to play the position correctly and ended up losing quickly.



Position after: 18...Qg4

B1) 19.Be3 Bxe3 [19...Rfe8!?] 20.Qxe3 [After 20.fxe3! the computer holds comfortably, a difficult task for a human.] 20...Rb6

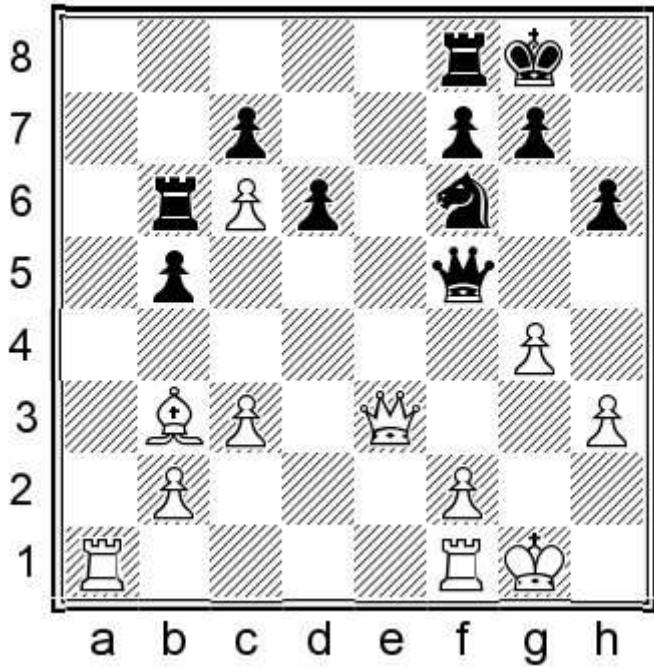
B1.1) 21.Qe7?! One mistake will lead to another very soon.
21...Qc8!



Position after: 21...Qc8!

It's easy to underestimate passive-looking but powerful moves like this. 22.Ra7?! Rxc6 23.Rfa1 d5! 24.h3 Re8 25.Qb4 Rce6µ 26.Qxb5? Re1+ 27.Rxe1 Rxe1+ 28.Kh2 Qf5–+ Mi.Bartel – Gustafsson, Pattaya 2015

B1.2) 21.h3 Qf5 22.g4!

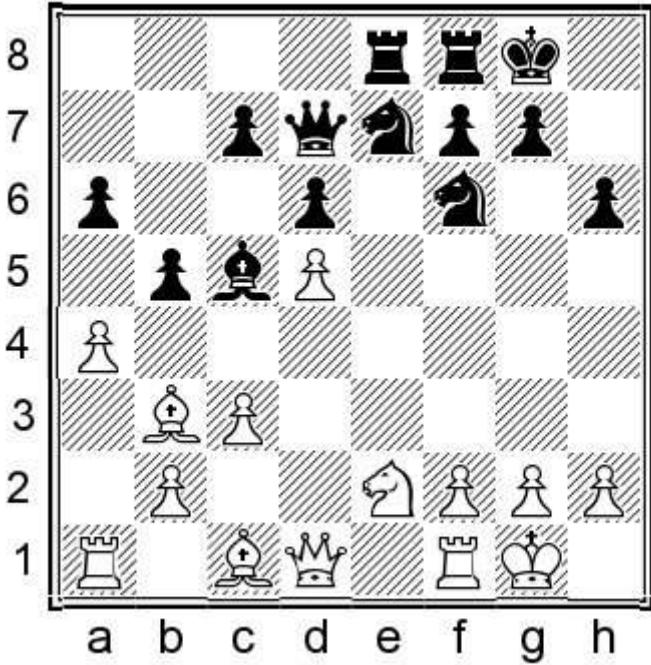


Position after: 22.g4!

22...Qc8 23.Ra5 [23.f4 b4! 24.g5 bxc3 25.gxf6 Rxb3] 23...d5 24.Rd1 Rd8 25.Qf4 Rxc6 26.Rxb5 Re6 is pleasant for Black, but nothing special.

B2) 19.h3 Best. 19...Qe4 20.Qxe4 Nxe4 21.Bd5 Rfe8 22.Be3! Nf6 23.Bf3 Bxe3 24.fxe3 Ra8!=

15...Rae8!



Position after: 15...Rae8!

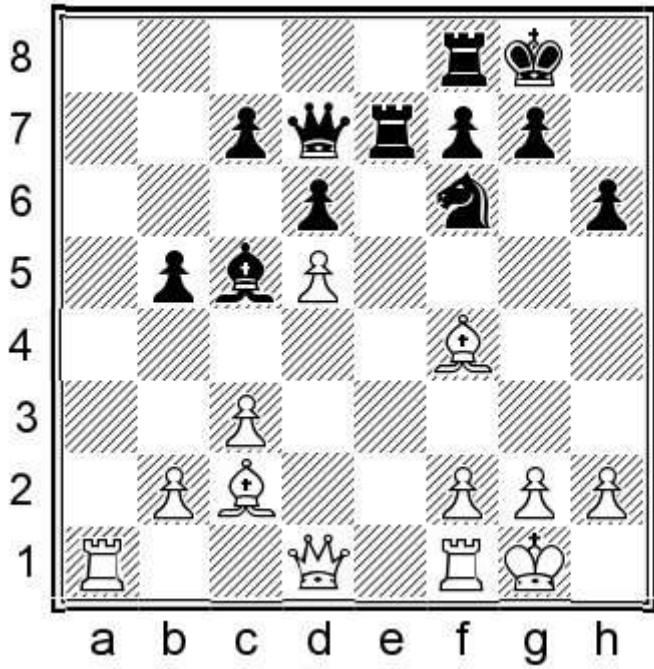
I was really proud of this move, both during and after the game. Surprisingly the f8-rook may prove useful in some lines, while Black also avoids exchanges along the a-file – White's rook may easily end up out of the game.

16.axb5

16.Nf4 Ng6 17.Bc2 can be treated similarly as after the exchanges on b5.

16...axb5 17.Ng3

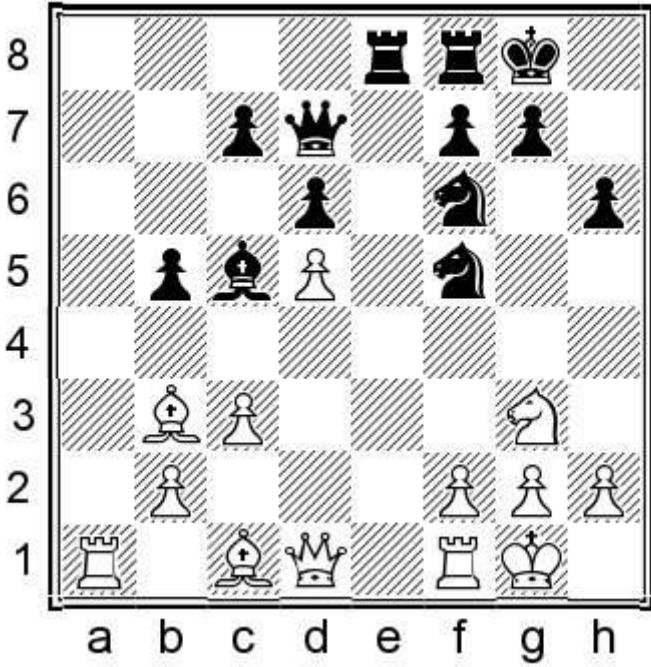
17.Nf4 This move was tried 4 years after my game and I am glad that I inspired strong players 17...Ng6! 18.Bc2 Nxf4 19.Bxf4 Re7



Position after: 19...Re7

Simple chess. 20.h3 Rfe8 21.Qf3 Ne4 22.Bd3 [22.b4 Bb6 23.c4?! Bd4 and Black was better in Kasimdzhanov, R (2676) – Fressinet, L (2657) Douglas 2017] 22...Bb6 23.Rad1 f5,,

17...Nf5



Position after: 17...Nf5

18.Nh5!

Practically the only move. In this critical position I went wrong.

A) 18.Nxf5?! Qxf5 f

B) 18.Qf3?! Nxg3 19.hxg3 [19.Qxg3? Ne4 20.Qf3 Nxf2!] 19...Ng4 20.Bd2 f5!, would have been another instance where my rook is perfectly-placed on f8.

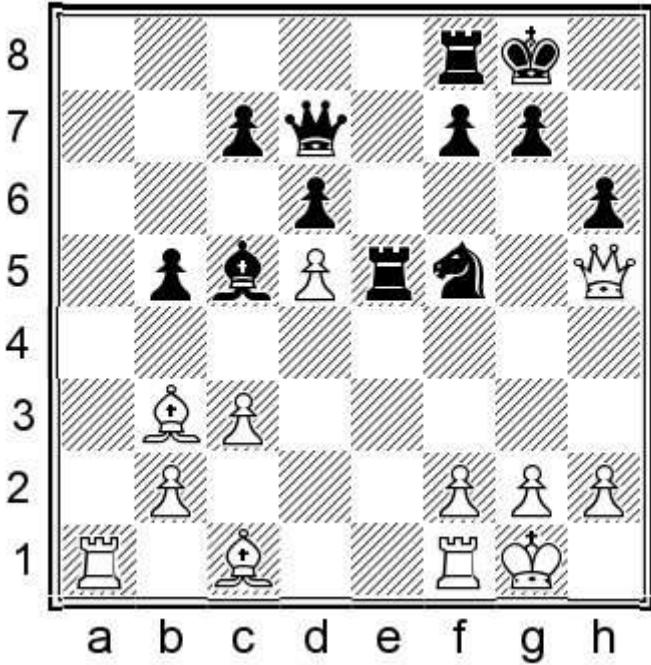
C) 18.Bc2 Nxg3 19.hxg3 Ng4!μ

18...Ne4!

Of course, this active move is the right way. I saw the beautiful repetition, but failed to understand the sub-line 19.Bc2!

18...Nxh5?! 19.Qxh5

A) 19...Re5?



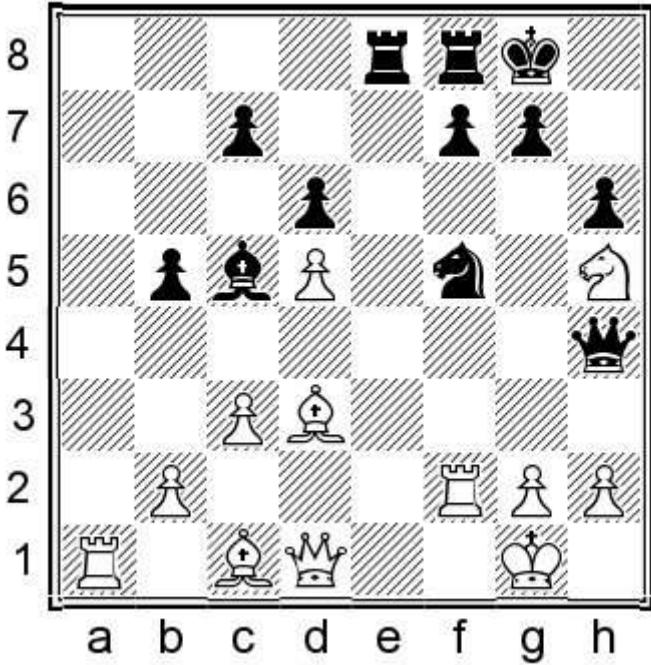
Position after: 19...Re5?

Way too bold. 20.Qh3! Rfe8 21.Bc2!f I totally missed this resource and ended up in a painful pin. Now the pawn is taboo as 22.Bf4 would trap my rook after the eventual return of the bishop to b3... Still, I managed to complicate things and saved the game in time-trouble in Cs. Balogh – Erdos, HUN-chT 2013.

B) 19...Ne7! didn't occur to me as a viable option (I became way too optimistic.) 20.Bc2 Ng6 Black is still more or less fine.

19.Qg4

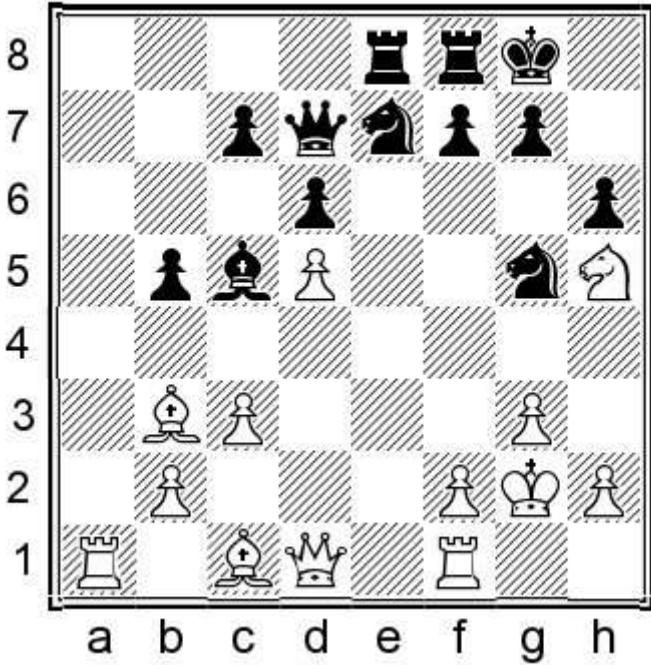
A) 19.Bc2?! Tricky, but objectively a questionable move. 19...Nxf2! 20.Rxf2 Qe7! I wasn't able to figure out this move during the game, though it looked obvious in the post-mortem. 21.Bd3 Qh4



Position after: 21...Qh4

22.g3 [22.Qf3? loses to 22...Re1+ 23.Bf1 Rfe8] 22...Qh3 Forced. [22...Bxf2+? 23.Kg2!+–] 23.Bf1! Bxf2+ 24.Kh1 Qxf1+! [24...Nyg3+ 25.Nyg3 Qh4 26.Qf3 Bxg3 27.Qxg3 Qh5 28.Bf4 Qxd5+ 29.Bg2© The bishops are too active.] 25.Qxf1 Re1 26.Qxe1 Bxe1 27.Kg1 Re8 28.Kf1 b4,, could have been a really nice continuation.

B) 19.g3!? is a curious move here, though Black should be fine. One interesting line is: 19...Ne7?!? 20.Kg2! [20.Bc2 Nxf2 21.Rxf2 Qh3 22.Nf4 Bxf2+ 23.Kxf2 Qxh2+ 24.Ng2 Ng6 25.Bd2 Re5 26.Qh1 Qxh1 27.Rxh1 Rxd5³] 20...Ng5



Position after: 20...Ng5

21.Bxg5 [21.Nf4 Ng6!] 21...hxg5 22.Bc2 Ng6 23.f4 gxf4 24.Bxg6 fxg6 25.Nxf4 Qf5 After this accurate move White is the one who should be more worried. 26.Ne6 Qe4+ 27.Rf3 Rf5! 28.Qd3 Qxd5 29.Qxd5 Rxd5 30.Nxc7 Re2+= Objectively this position should still end peacefully.

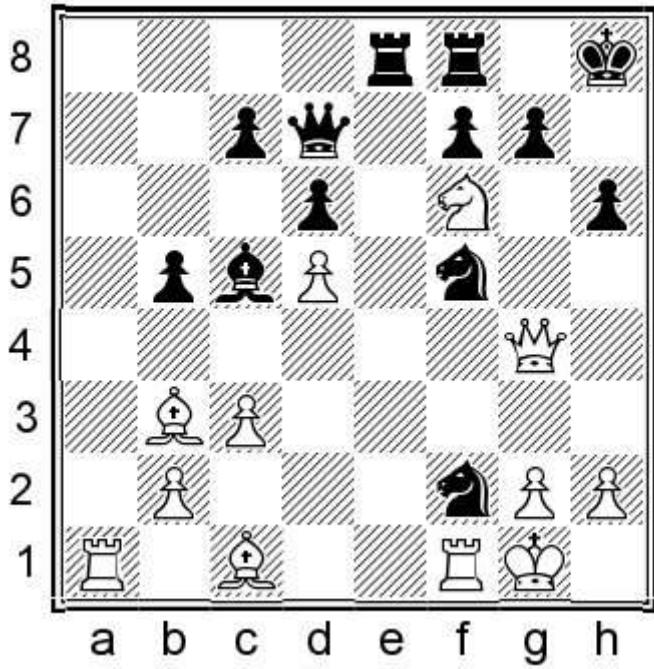
19...Nxf2

19...Kh8!? 20.Nxg7 Nxf2 21.Qxf5=

20.Nf6+

20.Qxg7+ Nxg7 21.Nf6+ Kh8 22.Nxd7 Nh3+=

20...Kh8



Position after: 20...Kh8

A spectacular picture.

21.Nxd7 Nh3+™

21...Nxc5+?? 22.Nxc5+-

22.Kh1 Nf2+=

The repetition is inevitable.

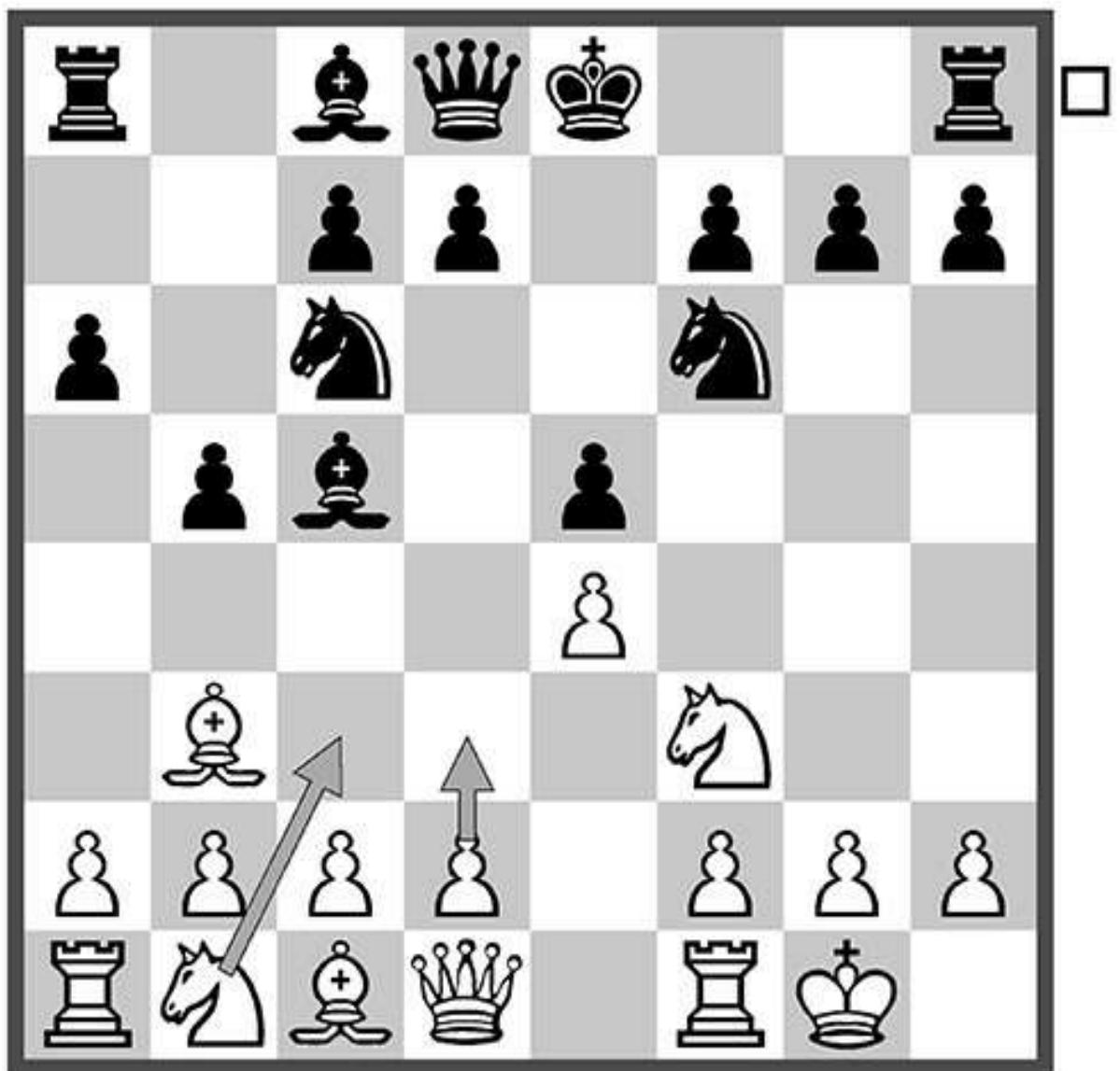
Part II

Early Sidelines Against the Arkhangelsk

Chapter 5

7.d3 & 7.Nc3

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5



Chapter Guide

Chapter 5 – 7.d3 & 7.Nc3

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5

a) 7.d3 d6 8.--

b) 7.d3 d6 8.c3 h6 9.--

c) 7.d3 d6 8.c3 h6 9.h3 0-0 10.Nbd2 Bb6 11.Re1 Ne7 12.Nf1 Ng6 13.Ng3 Re8 14.--

d) 7.d3 d6 8.c3 h6 9.h3 0-0 10.Nbd2 Bb6 11.Re1 Ne7 12.Nf1 Ng6 13.Ng3 Re8 14.d4

e) 7.d3 d6 8.c3 h6 9.h3 0-0 10.Nbd2 Bb6 11.Re1 Ne7 12.Nf1 Ng6 13.Ng3 Re8 14.a4

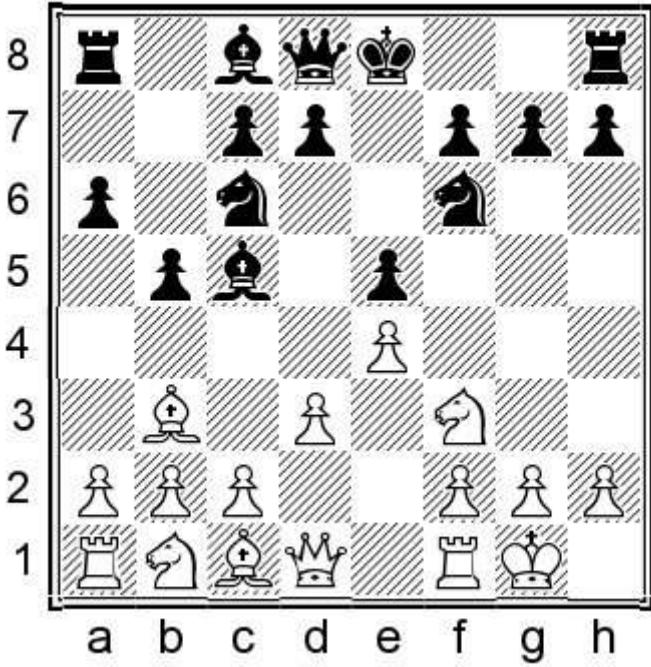
f) 7.Nc3 0-0 8.--

g) 7.Nc3 0-0 8.d3 d6 9.Bg5

h) 7.Nc3 0-0 8.d3 d6 9.Nd5

a) 7.d3 d6 8.--

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.d3



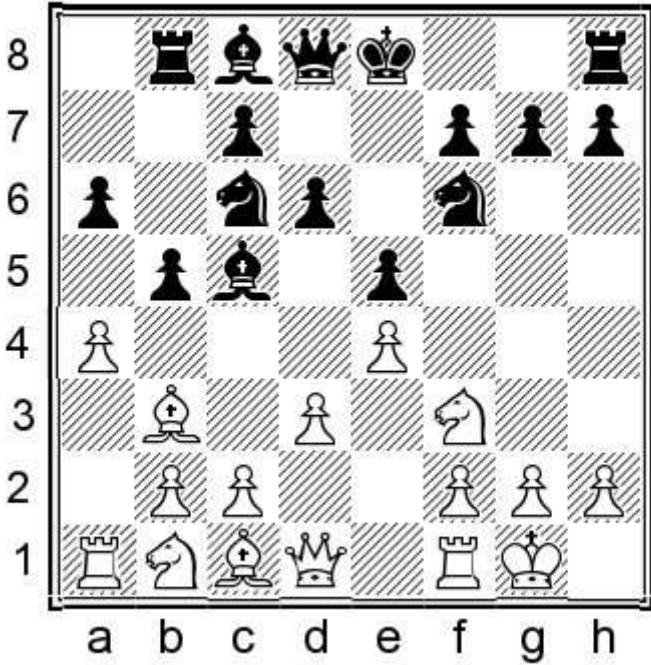
Position after: 7.d3

This slow approach is aiming for quieter play in comparison with the wild main lines. It's mostly chosen by practical players, or in situations where the first player was not expecting the Ark and wants to avoid a theoretical discussion. Despite its harmless appearance, Black needs to be familiar with general positional ideas to fully equalize the chances as in the lines with 5.d3.

7...d6 8.a4

- A)** 8.Be3 Bxe3 9.fxe3 Na5! 10.Nc3 0-0= is not a serious try.
- B)** 8.h3 allows 8...Na5 9.Nc3 h6 10.Ne2 0-0 11.Ng3 Re8 12.Bd2 Bb6= and Black was very comfortable in Movsesian – Adams, Hastings 1996.

8...Rb8



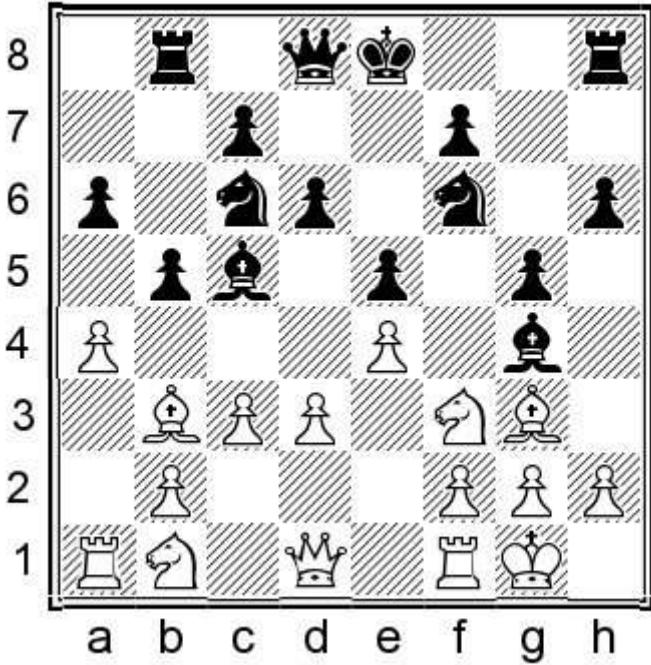
Position after: 8...Rb8

9.axb5

A) 9.c3 h6 - see 8.c3

B) 9.Be3 Bxe3 10.fxe3 0-0 11.axb5 axb5 transposes to 9.axb5

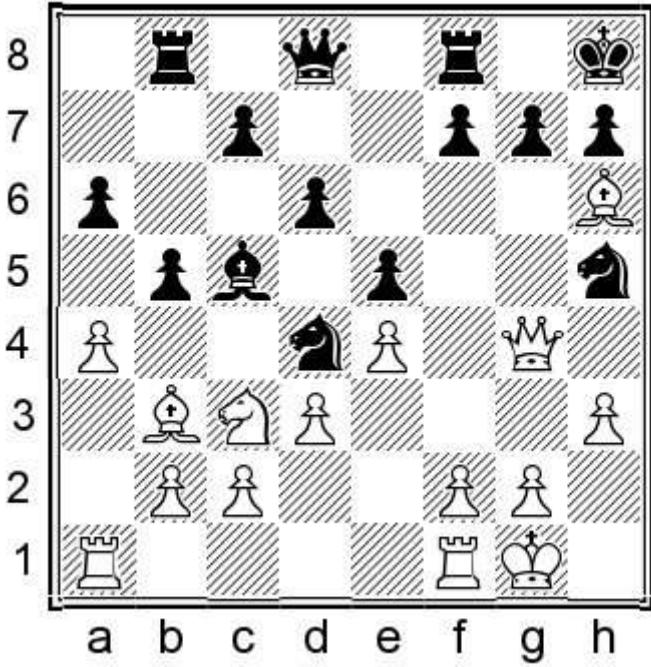
C) 9.Bg5 h6 10.Bh4 g5 11.Bg3 [11.Nxg5? makes little sense while the black king is in the center. 11...hxg5 12.Bxg5 Rg8 13.h4 Bg4 14.Qd2 Nd4 15.Nc3 Qd7–+ Evans – Adams, Ebbw Vale 1998.] 11...Bg4 12.c3



Position after: 12.c3

We are following Panchanathan, M (2500) – Friedel, J (2480) Oakland 2006, but here Black should have played the principled 12...Nh5 13.Kh1 [13.Bd5 Ne7 14.d4 exd4 15.cxd4 Bb6 16.Bb3 Nxg3 17.fxg3 0-0 and Black is very active.] 13...Qf6 14.Nbd2 0-0 15.h3 Bd7 with an equal game.

D) 9.Nc3 Bg4 10.h3 Bxf3 11.Qxf3 Nd4 12.Qg3 was played in Ju. Polgár – Anand, Moscow blitz 2009: 12...0-0!? Black ignores the obvious threat. 13.Bh6 [13.Bg5 b4 14.Bxf6 Qxf6 15.Nd5 Qh6!?] 13...Nh5!? 14.Qg4 Kh8!



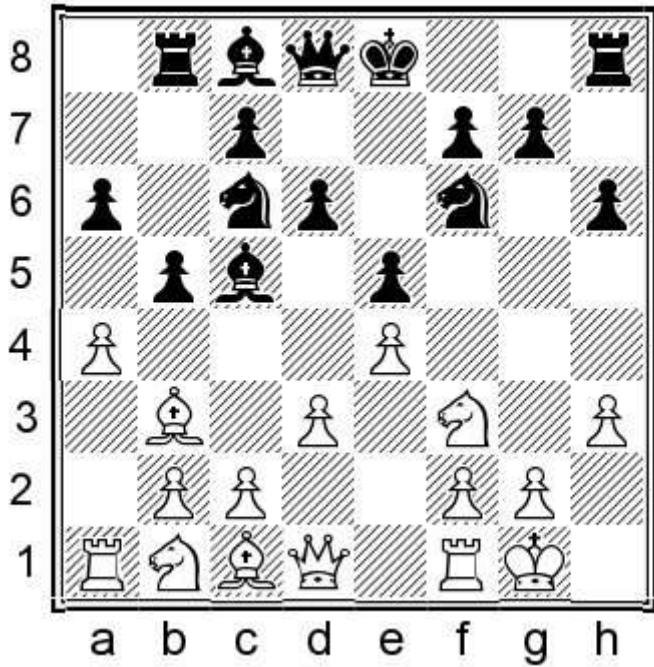
Position after: 14...Kh8!

A very active and original way to counter White's setup.

D1) 15.Qxh5 gxh6 16.Kh1 [16.Qxh6 f5© gives Black plenty of play.] 16...Qg5 17.Qxg5 hxg5 18.axb5 axb5 19.Nd5 c6= and Black is at least fine.

D2) 15.Bg5 f6 16.Be3 Nxb3 17.cxb3 b4 18.Nd5 g6 19.Bxc5 dxc5 20.Qe6 Surprisingly the only move in order to maintain the balance. [20.Rac1?! Qd6] 20...Qd6 21.Qxd6 cxd6 22.g4=

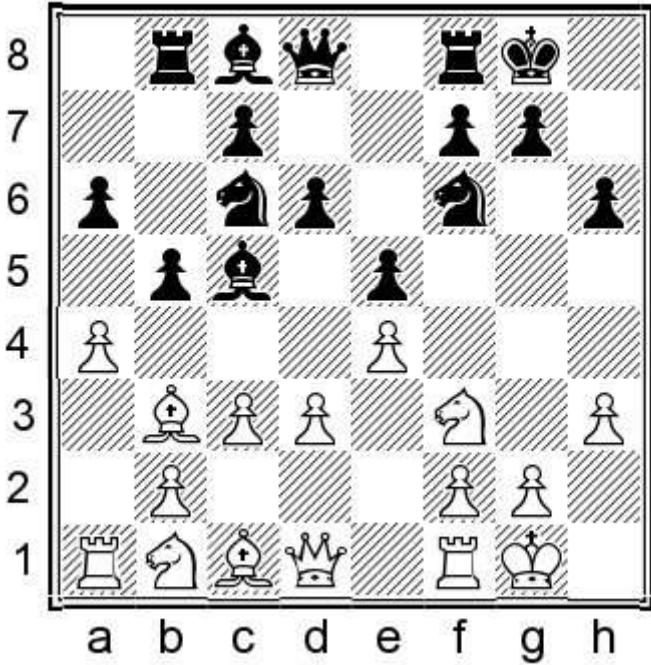
E) 9.h3 h6



Position after: 9...h6

E1) 10.Nc3 b4! 11.Nd5 Na5 12.Be3 Bxe3 13.Nxe3 [13.Nxf6+ Qxf6 14.fxe3 Nxb3 15.cxb3 0-0³ 16.Nd4? Qg5] 13...Nxb3 14.cxb3 0-0=

E2) 10.c3 0-0

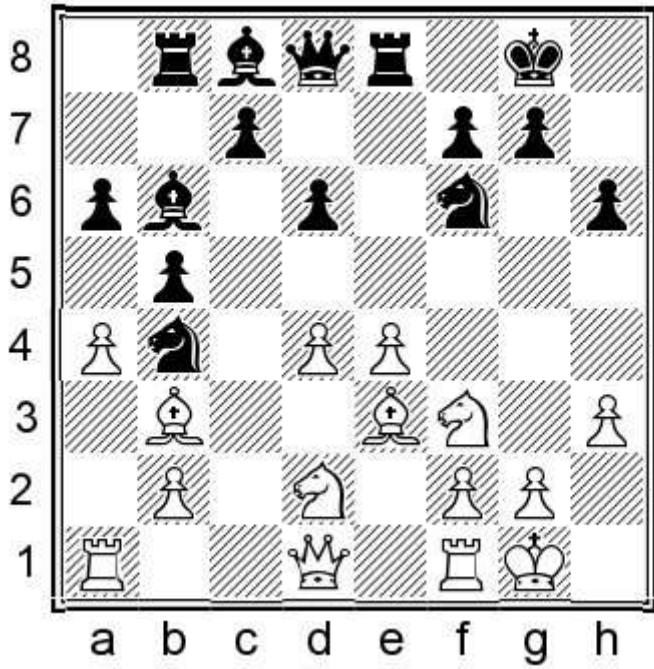


Position after: 10...0-0

E2.1) Alternatives lead to our main lines with 8.c3 11.Nbd2 Bb6 [11...Re8] 12.Re1 Re8

E2.2) And 11.Re1 Re8 [11...b4!?] is also worthy of attention, as in Frolyanov, D (2517) – Shirov, A (2643) Roquetas de Mar 2019.] 12.Nbd2 Bb6 13.Nf1 [13.Nh4? drops a pawn: 13...Ng4! 14.hxg4 Qxh4+ Jakovenko – De Vreugt, Yerevan 2000.] 13...Ne7 14.Ng3 Ng6

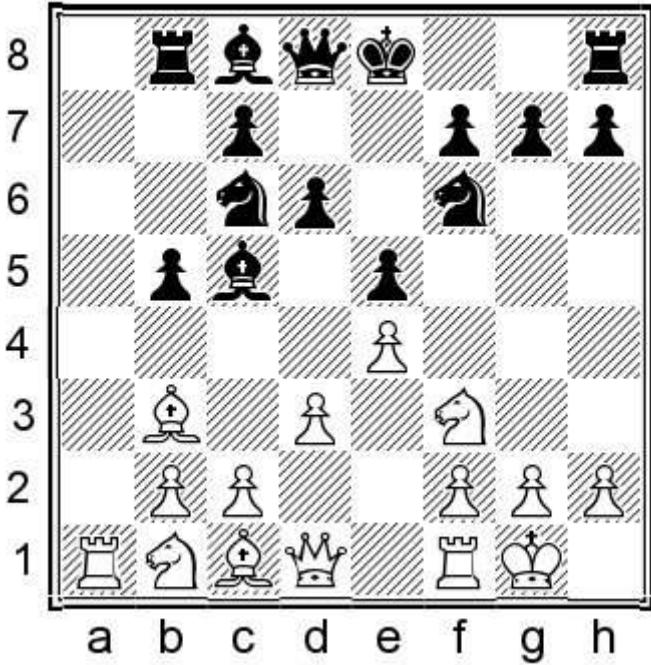
E2.3) 11.d4 Bb6 12.Be3 Re8 [12...b4!?] 13.Nbd2 exd4 14.cxd4 Nb4!



Position after: 14...Nb4!

15.axb5 axb5 16.Bxf7+ Kxf7 17.Qb3+ Nbd5! 18.exd5 Qd7!© and Black gained excellent play for the material in Onoprienko, V (2372) – Todorovic, G (2471) Budva 2009.

9...axb5

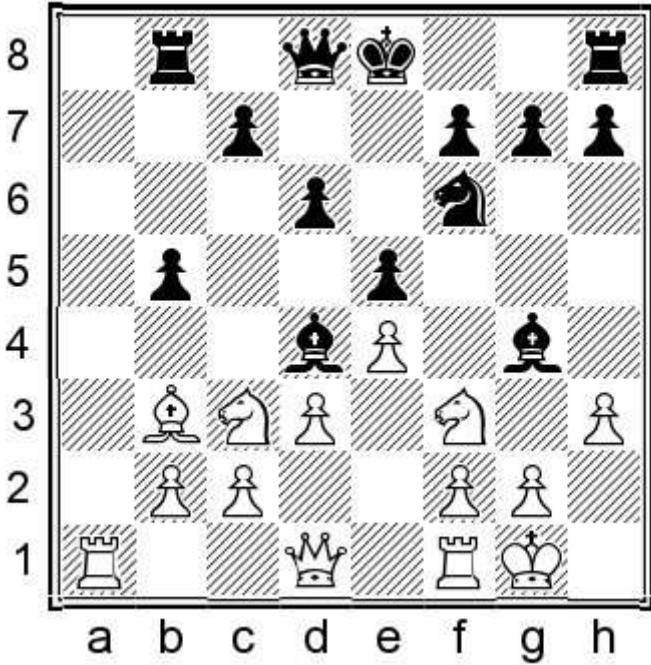


Position after: 9...axb5

10.h3

A) 10.Bg5 h6 11.Bh4 [11.Be3=] 11...g5 12.Bg3 Bg4 13.c3 Nh5 is a line we have seen at 9.Bg5, except that the a-pawns are gone.

B) 10.Nc3 Bg4 11.Be3 [11.h3 Bxf3 12.Qxf3 Nd4 13.Qg3 is like the 9.Nc3 line, but here White already has exchanged on b5.] 11...Nd4 12.Bxd4 Bxd4 13.h3



Position after: 13.h3

13...Bxf3 14.Qxf3 0-0= is hardly a problem, as in Iordachescu – Looshnikov, Moscow 2008.

C) 10.Be3 Bxe3 11.fxe3 0-0 is a harmless line.

D) 10.c3 h6 - see 8.c3

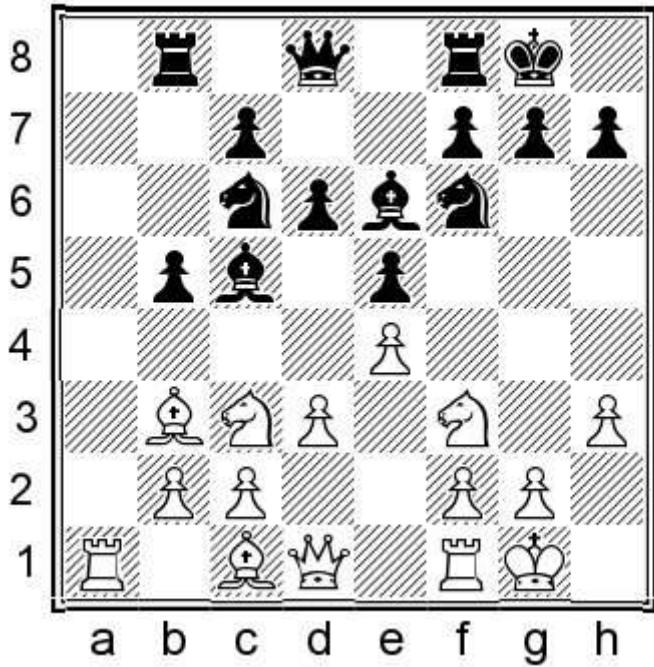
10...0-0

10...h6 is again more typical, but Black can try something different here.

11.Nc3

11.Bg5 is not a problem, as White is not prepared for sacrifices on g5. 11...h6 12.Bh4 g5 13.Bg3 Kg7 14.Nc3 Nd4 15.Nxd4 Bxd4 16.Ne2 Bb6=

11...Be6!?

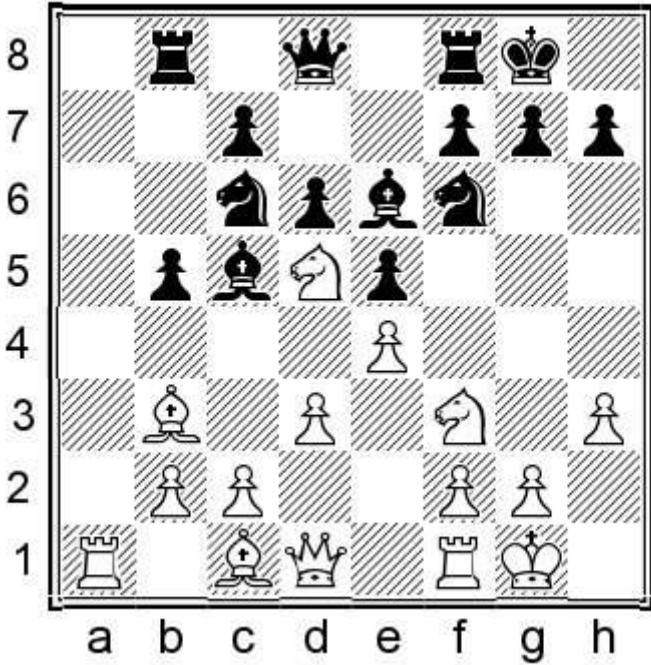


Position after: 11...Be6!?

Shirov's method here is very practical.

12.Bxe6

12.Nd5 is a bit more ambitious.



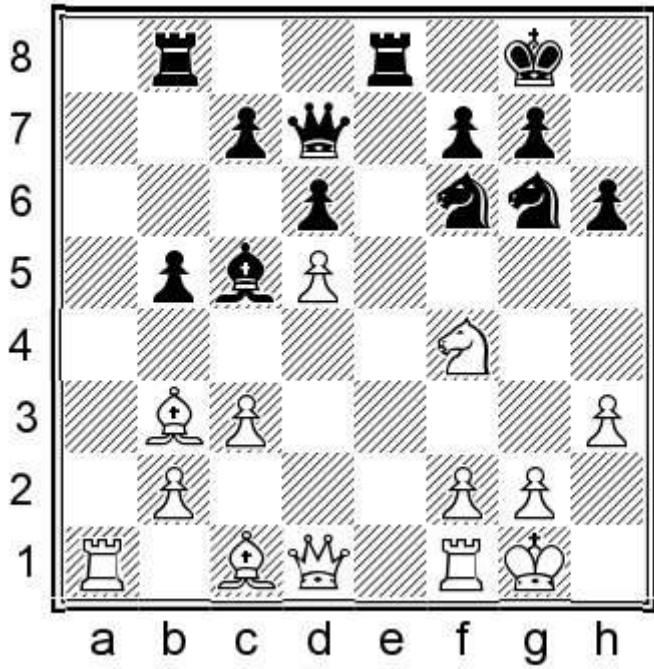
Position after: 12.Nd5

A) 12...Bxd5!? 13.exd5 Nd4 [13...Ne7 is now answered by 14.Bg5.] 14.Nxd4 Bxd4 15.c3 Bb6 looks good too.

B) 12...h6

B1) 13.Nxf6+ Qxf6 14.c3 Bxb3 15.Qxb3 Qe6 [15...b4=] 16.Qxe6 fxe6 17.Ra6 Rb6 18.Ra2 b4 19.Bd2 bxc3 20.bxc3 Rfb8= was drawish in Yu, Y (2734) – Wei, Y (2737) Taizhou 2015.

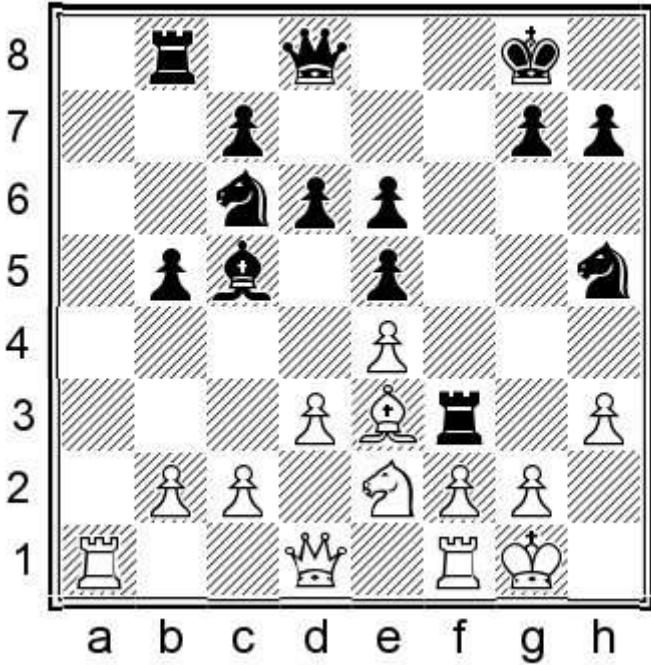
B2) 13.c3 Bxd5 14.exd5 Ne7 15.d4 exd4 16.Nxd4 Qd7 17.Ne2 Rfe8 18.Nf4 is similar to our lines against 5.d3 and 6.Nc3. Here, in Melia, S (2473) – Batsiashvili, N (2450) Tbilisi 2015, Black should have played the simple 18...Ng6



Position after: 18...Ng6

and Black is doing fine, e.g. 19.Nxg6 [19.Bc2 Nxf4 20.Bxf4 Qe7! threatening ...Qe2.] 19...fxg6 20.Bc2 Qf7 21.Qd3 g5 22.b4 Bb6=

12...fxe6 13.Ne2 Nh5 14.Be3 Rxf3!



Position after: 14...Rxf3!

An effective sacrifice.

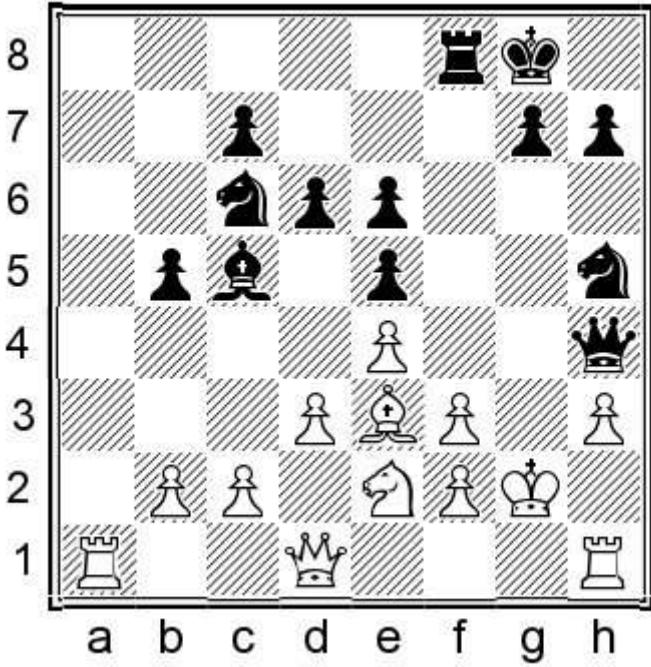
15.gxf3 Qh4

15...Bxe3 16.fxe3 Qg5+ 17.Kf2 [17.Kh2 Qxe3 18.Qe1 Nd4 19.Nxd4 Qf4+ doesn't look very pleasant for White.] 17...Qh4+ 18.Kg2 Qg5+= is a repetition, as in the game.

16.Kg2

16.Kh2 Nd4 17.Ng1 is too passive to be good: 17...b4!? or 17...Nf4 guarantees compensation.

16...Rf8 17.Rh1



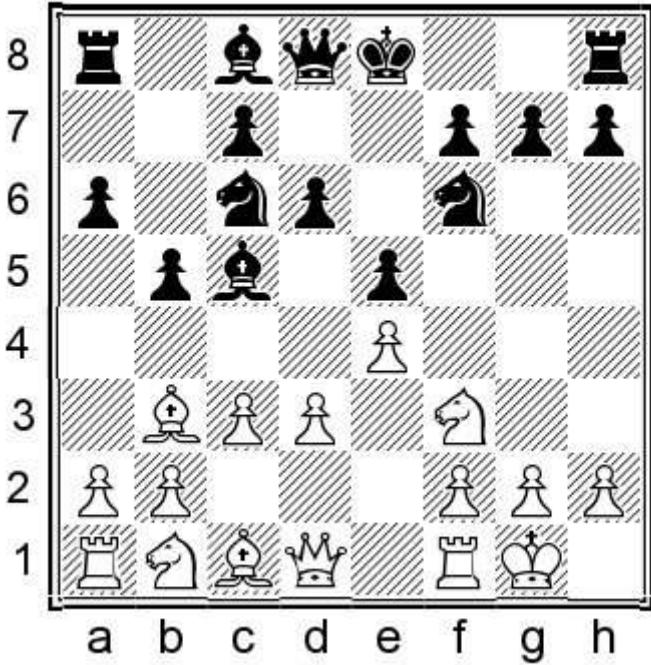
Position after: 17.Rh1

17...Bxe3 18.fxe3 Qg5+ 19.Kf2 Qh4+

led to a repetition of moves in Almasi, Z (2721) – Shirov, A (2735)/ Warsaw rapid 2010.

b) 7.d3 d6 8.c3 h6 9.--

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.d3 d6 8.c3



Position after: 8.c3

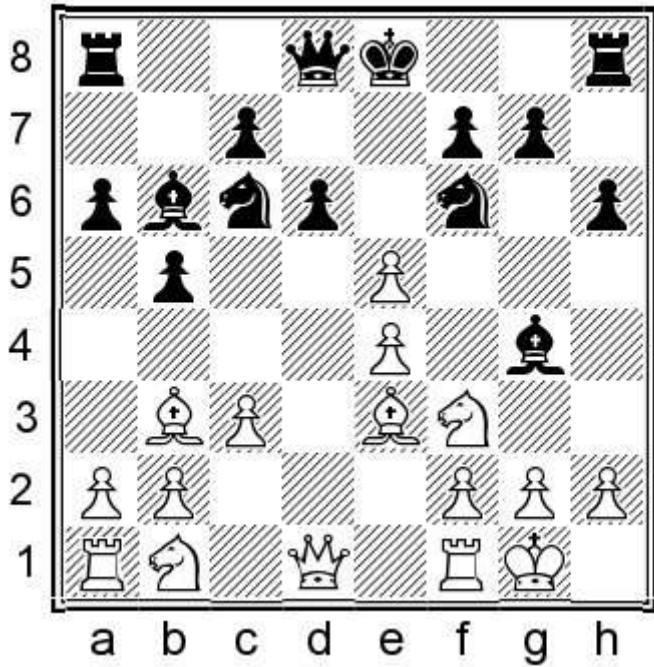
8...h6

8...0-0 allows 9.Bg5, which is not ideal in this move order.

9.a4

A) 9.Nbd2 0-0 10.Re1 is another move order – see 9.Re1

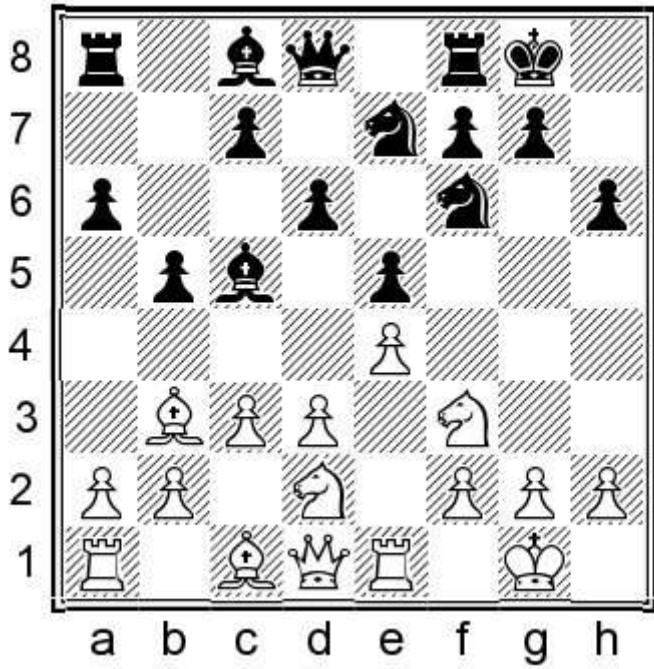
B) 9.d4 Bb6 10.Be3 [10.dxe5 Nxe5 11.Nxe5 dxe5 12.Qxd8+ Kxd8=] 10...Bg4 11.dxe5



Position after: 11.dxe5

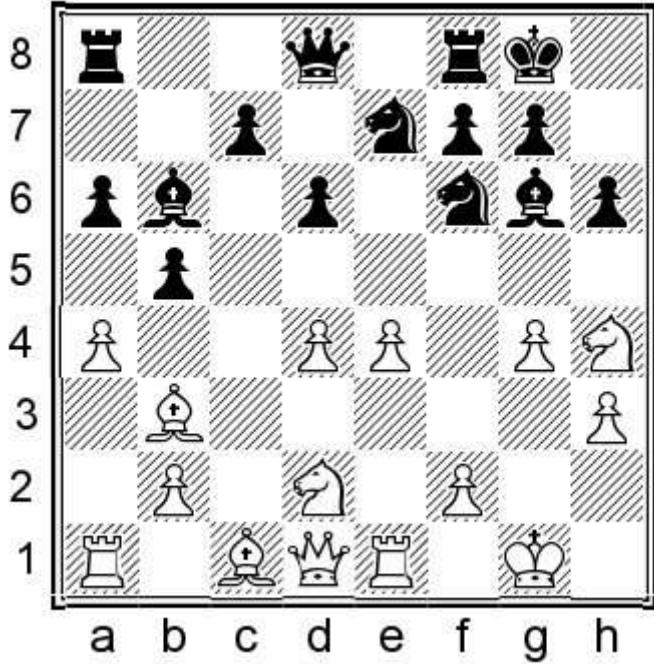
11...Bxf3!? 12.Qxf3 Nxe5 13.Qe2 Bxe3 14.Qxe3 0-0=

C) 9.Re1 0-0 10.Nbd2 Ne7



Position after: 10...Ne7

C1) 11.d4 Bb6 12.a4 [12.dxe5 Ng4] 12...Bb7!? [12...exd4 13.cxd4 Bg4 14.h3 Bh5 15.g4 Bg6 16.Nh4!?



Position after: 16.Nh4!?

16...Bxd4 17.Ndf3@] 13.dxe5 Ng4 14.Rf1 Nxe5 15.Nxe5 dxe5 16.Qh5 Qd6 17.axb5 axb5 18.Rxa8 Bxa8 19.Rd1 Qc5!? 20.Qe2 Rd8=

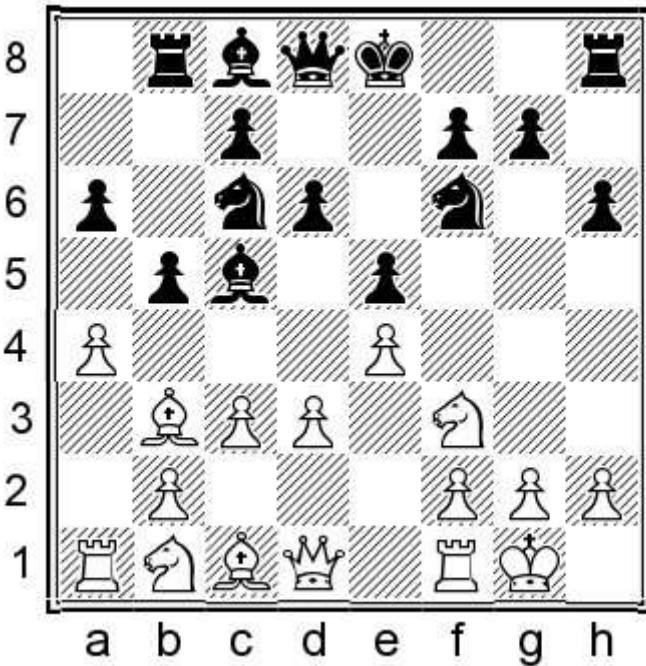
C2) 11.a4

C2.1) 11...b4 12.d4 bxc3 13.bxc3 exd4 14.cxd4 Bb4 15.Ba3!² [15.Re3 Ng6,, Zhigalko, S (2638) – Giri, A (2762) Heraklion 2017.]

C2.2) 11...Rb8 12.Nf1 Ng6 13.Ng3 Re8 14.h3 Bb6 again leads to the main line.

D) 9.Be3 Bxe3 10.fxe3 Na5 11.Bc2 c5 12.Qe1 0-0=

9...Rb8



Position after: 9...Rb8

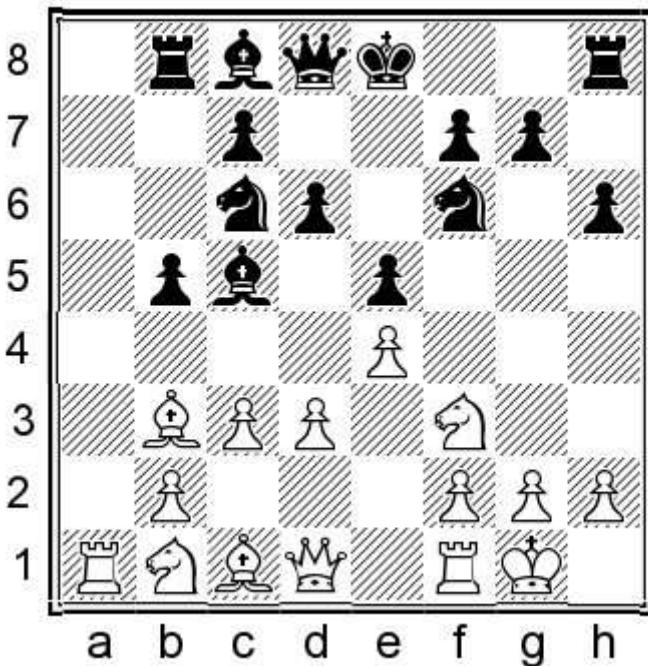
Here Mikhalevski has covered all the rare lines in his book properly, so I've decided to concentrate on recent tries and the very main options.

10.axb5

A) 10.Bc2 0-0 and it's hard to see what the idea of this early retreat is. [10...b4!? 11.d4 Ba7 worked well in Azarov, S (2589) – Mikhalevski, V (2578) Sturbridge 2019, but I prefer the text.] 11.b4 [11.d4 Bb6] 11...Bb6 12.Na3 [12.Nbd2 d5=] 12...Bd7!= and next comes ...Ne7-g6.

B) 10.h3 can be found at 8.a4.

10...axb5



Position after: 10...axb5

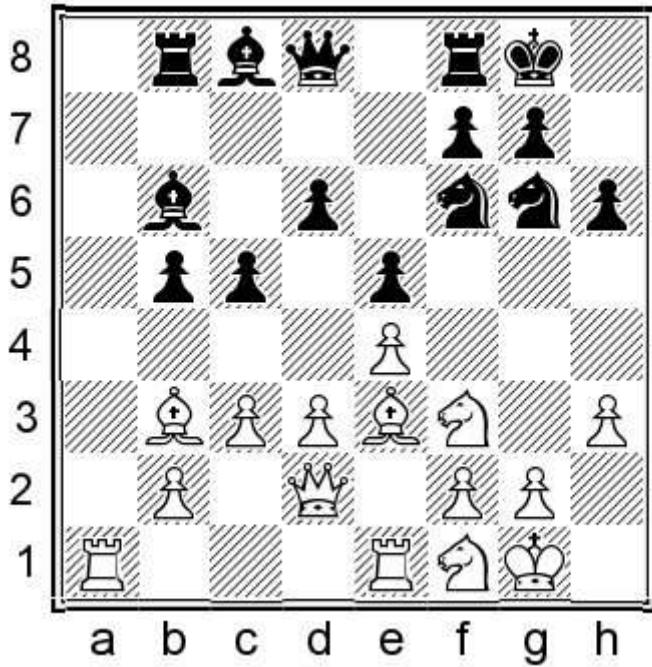
11.Na3

The specialty of this move-order. I also faced this one once. The knight is heading for e3 via c2.

A) 11.d4 Bb6 12.Na3 0-0 13.Nxb5 Bg4© leads to our main line with an extra ...h6. This fact hardly benefits White.

B) 11.Nbd2 0-0 12.Re1 Bb6 13.Nf1 Ne7 14.Be3 c5! 15.h3 Ng6

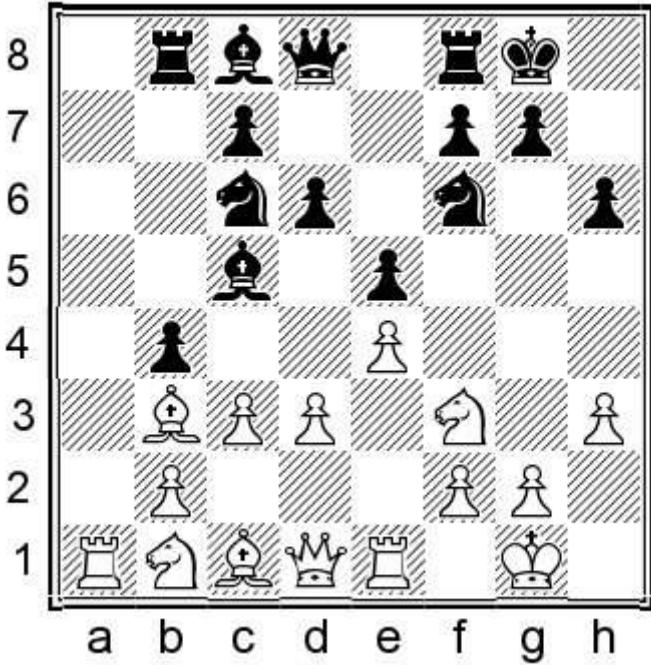
16.Qd2!?



Position after: 16.Qd2!?

[16.Ng3 c4! 17.Bxb6 Rxb6 was very good for Black in Akopian – Adams, Yerevan 2008.] 16...c4 17.Bxb6 Qxb6 18.dxc4 Be6 19.c5 dxc5 20.Bxe6 Qxe6 21.Ng3= is approximately equal.

C) 11.Re1 0-0 12.h3 b4!?



Position after: 12...b4!?

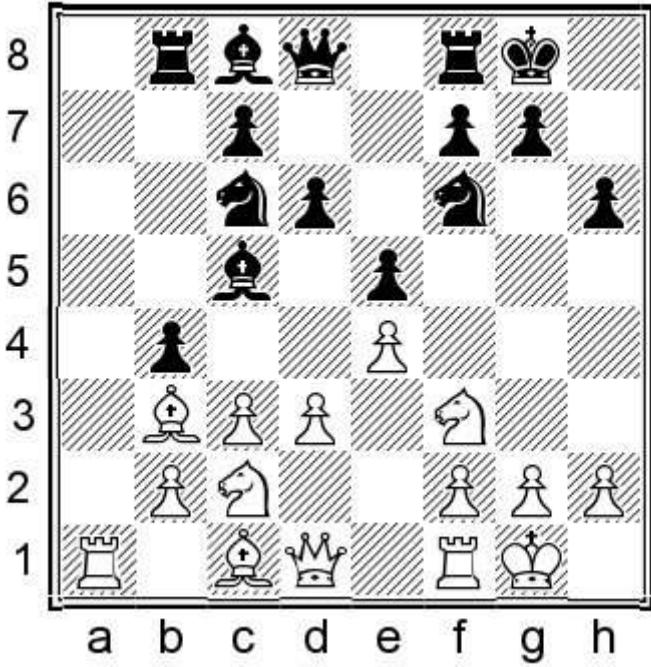
C1) 13.d4 Bb6 14.Ba4 [14.d5?! Na5 15.cxb4 Nxb3 16.Qxb3 Nh5!f] 14...Bd7 15.d5 Ne7 16.cxb4 Nh7© and ...f5 is coming.

C2) 13.Nbd2 bxc3 14.bxc3 Bd7 15.Nf1 Bb6 16.Be3 [16.Ne3 Re8 17.Nc4 Bc5 18.Qc2 Qc8 19.Be3 Bxe3 20.Nxe3 Be6 21.Ba4 Bd7=] 16...Ne7 17.Qc2 Ng6= Lékó – Anand, Moscow (blitz) 2009.

11...0-0 12.Nc2

Now Black has to choose from a variety of natural moves.

12...b4



Position after: 12...b4

Black intends to open the b-file for his rook.

13.Ne3!

The only sensible move.

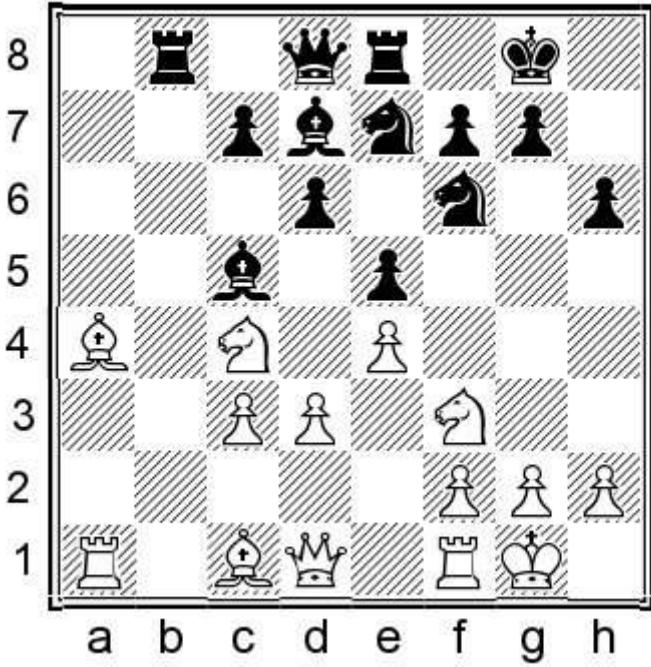
13.Ba4 bxc3 14.bxc3 Ne7 15.Re1 [15.d4 Bb6] 15...Ng6=

13...bxc3 14.bxc3 Re8

Possibly the most human move. Black is trying to make the d4-push impossible and at the same time preparing ...Be6 in some cases – a common theme in the Italian game, which this line really resembles.

15.Qc2

A) 15.Ba4 White could wait for ...Be6 and then reply with this. 15...Bd7
16.Nc4 Ne7



Position after: 16...Ne7

17.d4?! exd4 18.cxd4 Bb4 19.e5 Nfd5 was comfortable for Black in Hracek – Kurnosov, Rijeka 2010.

B) 15.h3 Ne7!? 16.d4 [16.Re1 Ng6 17.Qc2 Be6=] 16...Bb6 17.Ba4 Bd7 18.dxe5 Nxe4 19.Qc2=

C) 15.Re1 Ng4!? 16.h3 Nxe3 17.Bxe3 Bxe3 18.Rxe3 Be6 19.Ba4 Bd7=

15...Be6 16.Ba4

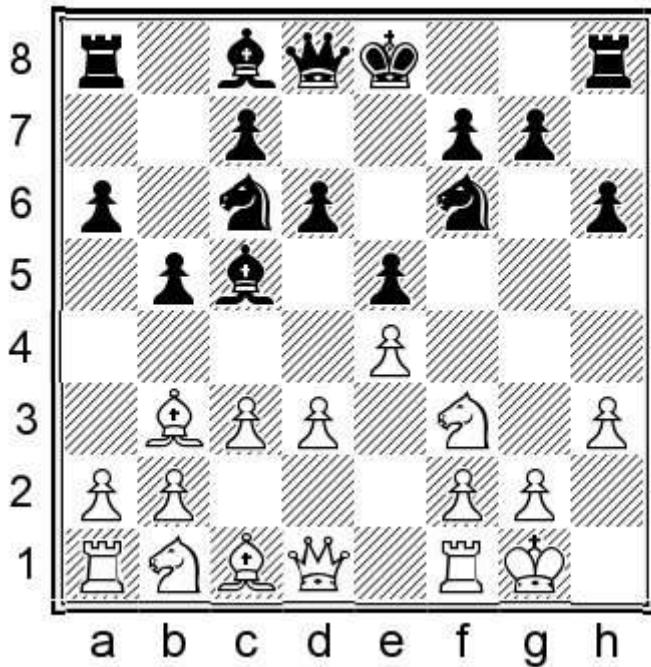
16.Bxe6 Rxe6 17.Nf5 d5=

16...Bd7 17.h3 Ra8 18.Bd2 Ne7 19.Bb3 Ng6=

c) 7.d3 d6 8.c3 h6 9.h3 0-0 10.Nbd2 Bb6 11.Re1 Ne7 12.Nf1 Ng6 13.Ng3 Re8 14.--

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.d3 d6 8.c3 h6

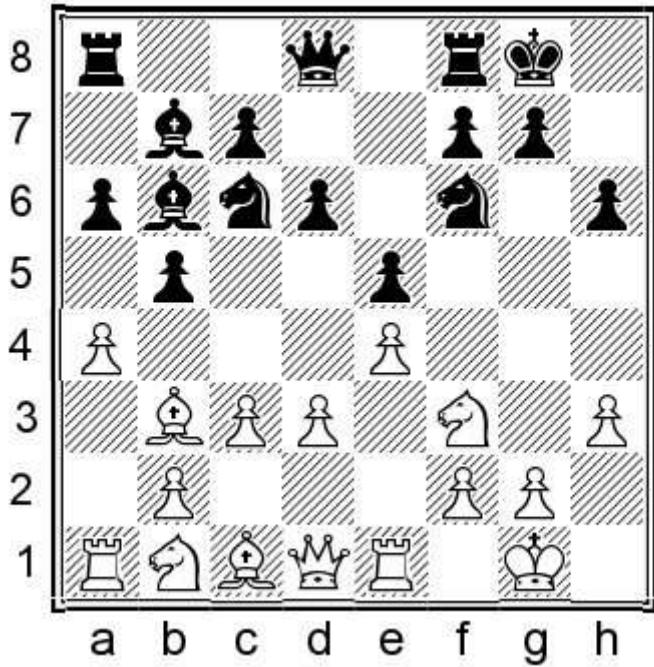
9.h3



Position after: 9.h3

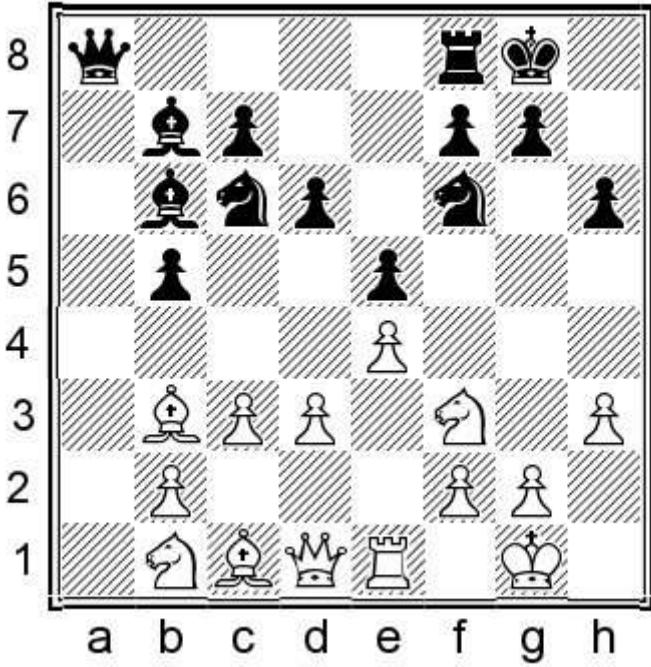
9...0-0 10.Nbd2

A) 10.Re1 Bb6 11.a4 A tricky move-order. Now our typical response 11...Rb8 fails to 12.axb5 axb5 13.Na3 and the protection of the b5-pawn is problematic. [For 11.Nbd2 see 10.Nbd2] 11...Bb7



Position after: 11...Bb7

12.axb5 [12.Nbd2 Ne7 13.Nf1 Ng6 14.Ng3 Re8 leads once again to 10.Nbd2, though in that case I would normally recommend playing... Rb8 instead of ... Bb7, so this curious move-order can outsmart us.]
12...axb5 13.Rxa8 Qxa8!



Position after: 13...Qxa8!

[13...Bxa8 14.Na3! Na7 15.Nc2² gave White some advantage in Vallejo Pons, F (2691) – Li, Y (2206) Bangkok 2016.] 14.Nh4 [14.Na3 Qa7! 15.Qe2 b4 16.Nc4 Na5!? 17.Nxa5 Qxa5=] 14...Bc8 15.Qf3 Kh7 [15...Qa1!?] 16.Nf5 Be6= Black should be ok.

B) 10.a4 Rb8 is to be found at 8.a4

C) 10.d4 This doesn't make sense as after 10...Bb6 we have a normal line with the useful extra move ...h6.

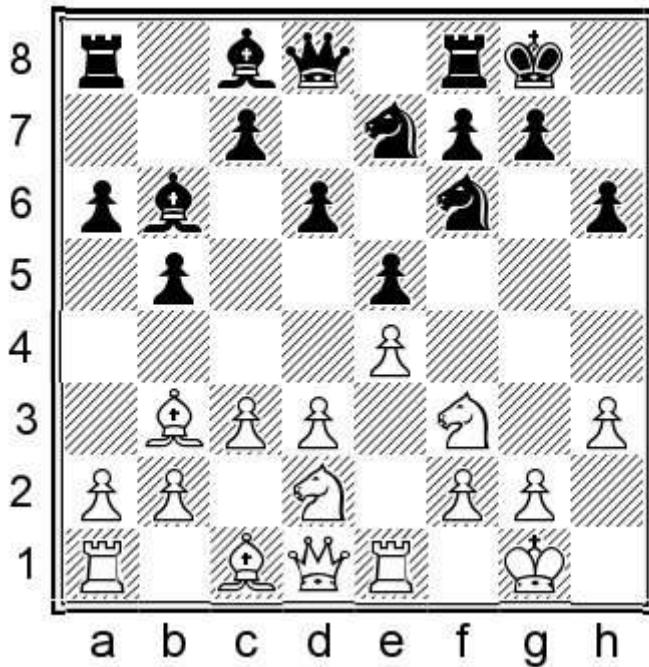
10...Bb6

10...Re8 11.Re1 Be6 is the other reasonable setup.

11.Re1

11.a4 is just toying with move-orders and changes nothing. 11...Rb8 [Or 11...Bb7!?] 12.Re1 Ne7 13.Nf1 Ng6 14.axb5 axb5 15.Ng3 Re8 and we have arrived at another transposition.

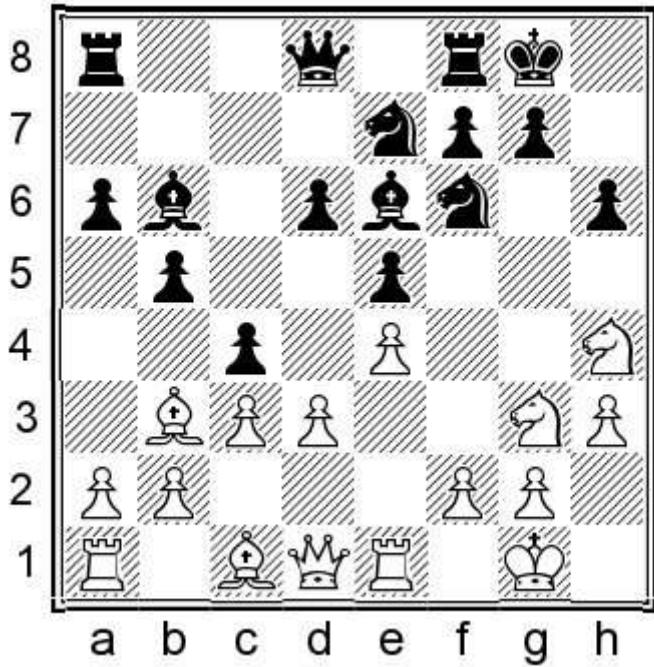
11...Ne7



Position after: 11...Ne7

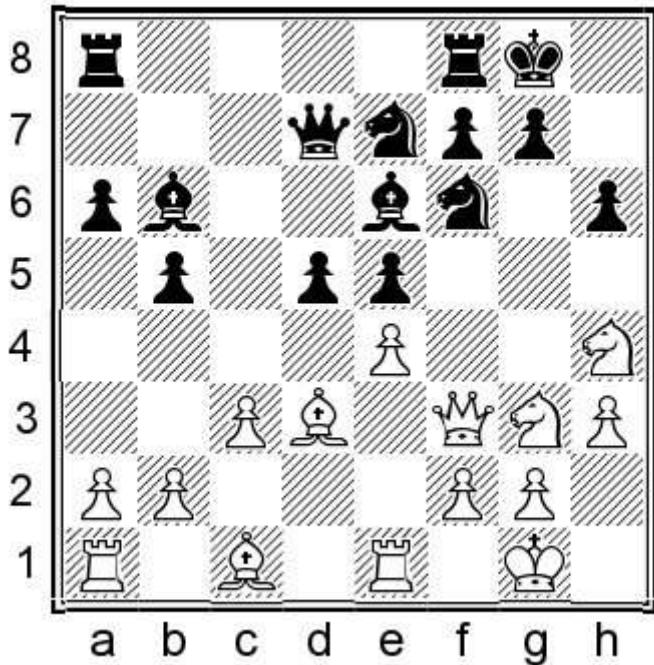
12.Nf1

In case of 12.Nh4, I like 12...Be6 13.Nf1 c5 14.Ng3 c4!? This push results in a very intense battle; Black has enough counterplay but accurate play is required here.



Position after: 14...c4!?

- A) 15.Bc2 Qd7!? 16.Qf3 [16.d4 exd4 17.cxd4 d5 18.e5 Ne4 19.Nh5 f5∞] 16...cxd3 17.Bxd3 d5,,



Position after: 17...d5,,

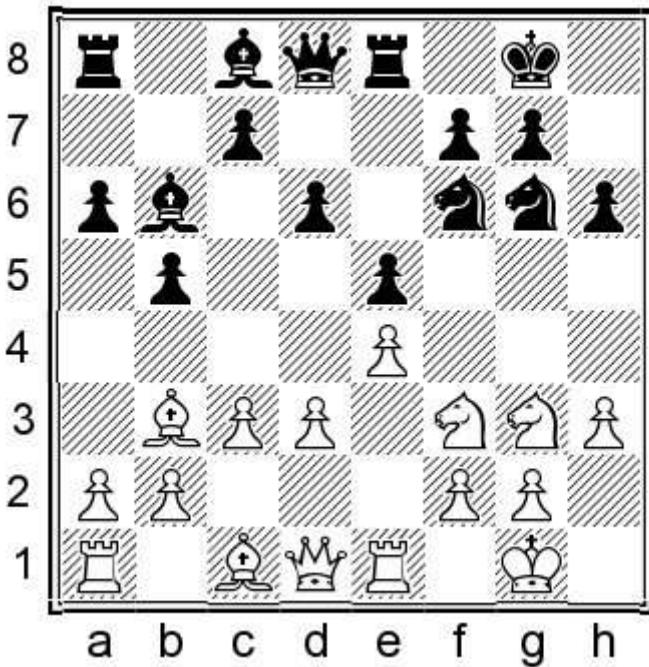
18.Bxh6 [18.a4 Ng4!] 18...Ng6!

B) 15.dxc4 bxc4 16.Bc2 Qc7 17.Qf3 d5!

B1) 18.Bxh6 Ng6! This is our little trick. 19.Nh5!? [19.Bxg7 Kxg7 20.Nhf5+ Kh8 21.Nh5 Qd8!μ; 19.Bg5 Nh7 20.Qh5 d4!f] 19...Nxh5 20.Qxh5 Nxh4 21.Qxh4 [21.exd5!? Complicating matters, but Black is fine: 21...gxh6 22.Qxh4 Bxd5 23.Qxh6 f5 24.Rad1 Rad8 25.Rxd5 Bxf2+ 26.Kxf2 Rxd5] 21...d4!?[©]

B2) 18.exd5 Bxd5 19.Qe2 Rfe8∞ and Black is ok.

12...Ng6 13.Ng3 Re8



Position after: 13...Re8

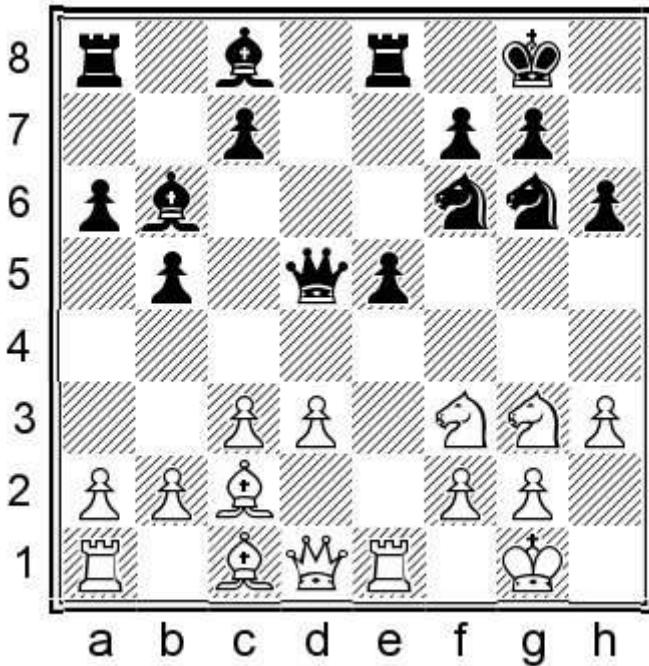
The main tabiya in this whole 7.d3 universe. White has various options now but the game is very nuanced and it's really hard to come up with exact lines. I will cover a lot of ideas from both sides to help you navigate and give you

some understanding. Yours truly has faced 3 different moves in practice and I scored 2 points out of 3, which I was more or less happy about.

14.Nh2

A) 14.Be3 Bxe3 15.fxe3 Be6= is hardly impressive; the game is balanced. Arakhamia – Emms, England 2011.

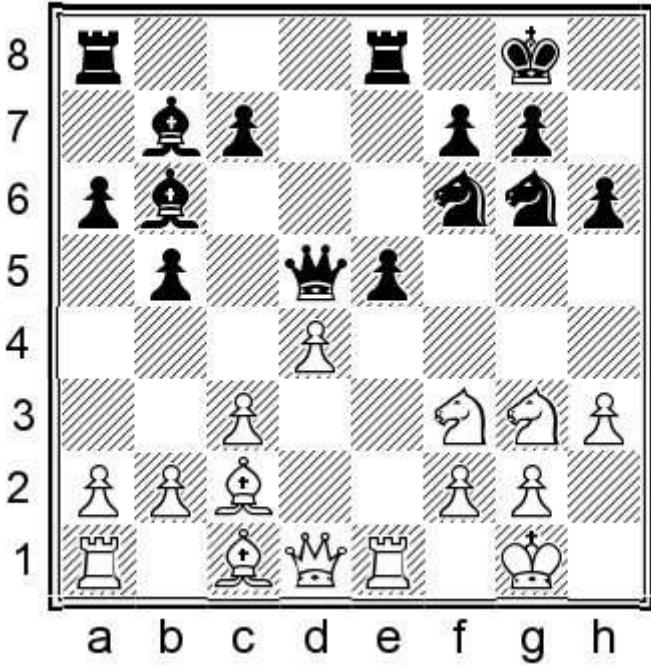
B) 14.Bc2!? I am the only player to have faced this move ever. I felt that after this retreat (which also supports a future d4) is best countered by developing the bishop to the long diagonal, but it turned that the immediate central break is at least as good. 14...d5 15.exd5 Qxd5!?



Position after: 15...Qxd5!?

B1) 16.Bb3 Qd7 17.Ne4 Nxe4 18.dxe4 Qe7 19.Qe2 Rb8 ... 20.Be3 a5³

B2) 16.d4 Bb7!

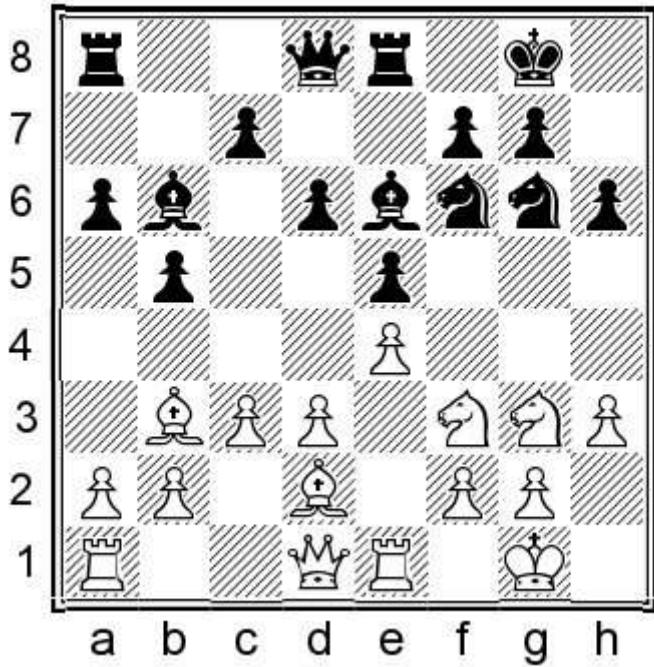


Position after: 16...Bb7!

Black has a dangerous initiative: 17.Ne4 [17.dxe5? Nxe5; 17.Bxg6 fxg6 18.dxe5 Qxd1 19.Rxd1 Bxf3 20.gxf3 Rxe5³; 17.Bb3 Qc6 18.Be3 Rad8f] 17...Qc6! 18.Nxf6+ [18.dxe5 Nxe5 19.Nd4 Bxd4 20.cxd4 Rad8 21.Bf4 Ng6 22.Nxf6+ Qxf6 23.Rxe8+ Rxe8 24.Bg3 Nf4μ] 18...Qxf6 19.Bxg6 Qxg6 20.Rxe5 Rxe5 21.dxe5 Qg3³ [21...Qe4 22.Kf1 Bd5³]

B3) 16.Be3 Probably best, but we have nothing to worry about: 16...Bb7 17.a4 Bxe3 18.fxe3 Rad8 19.axb5 [19.Qe2 b4!?] 19...axb5 20.Qe2 Qd6= Black stands fine.

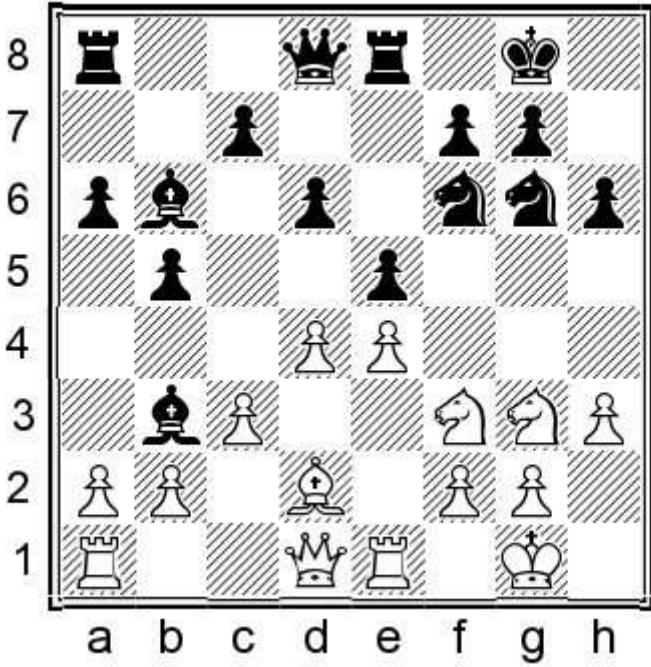
C) 14.Bd2 This move is extremely rare: the idea is to play Qc1 and then sacrifice on h6 at an appropriate moment. It also blocks the d-file so in case of ...d5, exchanging on e4 doesn't mean a queen trade too. In both cases Black replied with 14...Be6 neutralizing white's active bishop and thus weakening the attacking potential came to me naturally.



Position after: 14...Be6

C1) Black is too active after 15.Bc2 d5 16.Qe2 c5,,

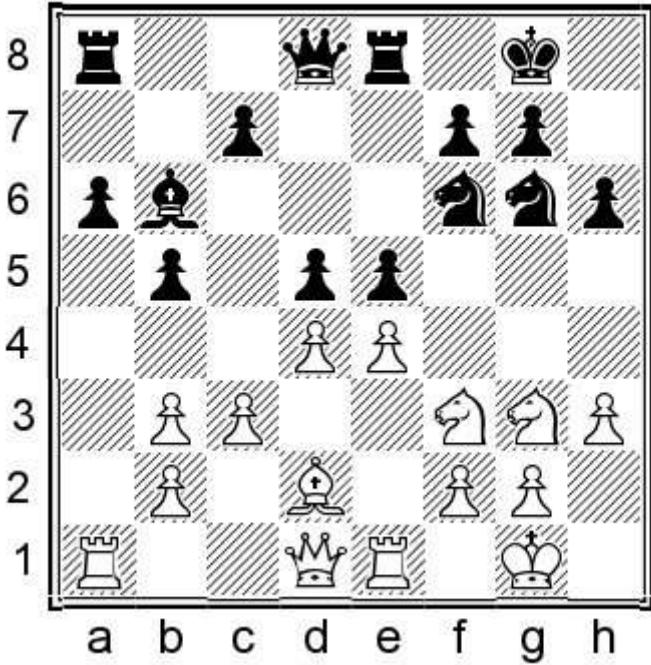
C2) 15.d4!? Bxb3



Position after: 15...Bxb3

C2.1) 16.Qxb3 d5 [16...c5!? is also good.] 17.exd5 exd4 18.Rxe8+ Qxe8 19.cxd4 Rd8 20.Qa3 Nxd5 21.Re1 Qc6 22.h4!∞ is complicated.

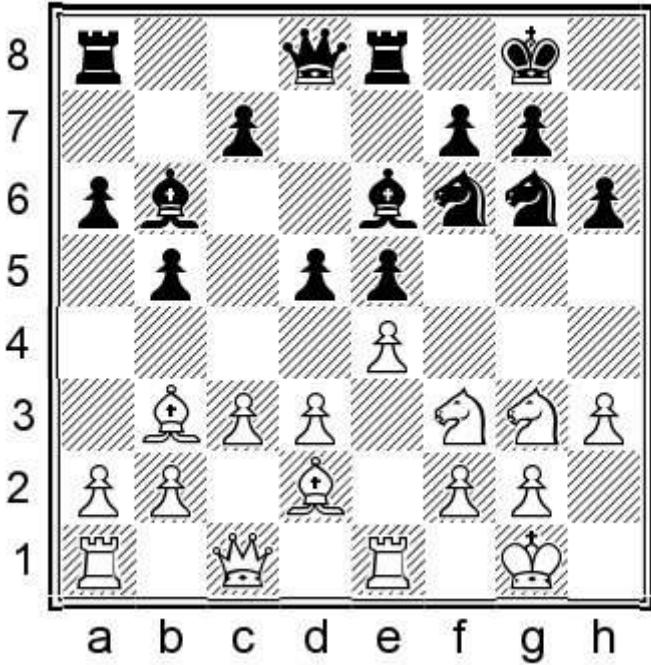
C2.2) 16.axb3 d5!



Position after: 16...d5!

A typical counter-strike in the center. When executed properly, Black's problems are solved immediately. 17.dxe5 Nxe4 18.Nxe4 dxe4 19.Rxe4 Qd5 20.Re1 [20.Qe2? f5!!µ is a well-known idea.; 20.Qe1 Qxb3] 20...Rad8 21.Be3 Qb7 22.Qc2 Nxe5 23.Nxe5 Rxe5 24.Bxb6 Rxe1+ 25.Rxe1 cxb6= is just totally equal.

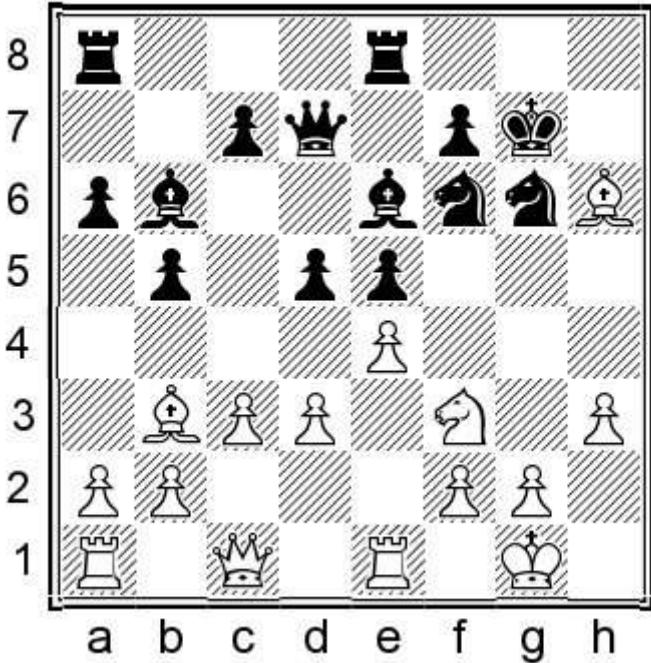
C3) 15.Qc1?! d5



Position after: 15...d5

C3.1) 16.Bxh6 gxh6 17.Qxh6 Bc5! An important resource. 18.exd5 [18.Nf5 Bf8 19.Qg5 Nd7 20.Qg4 c6μ] 18...Bxd5 19.Nf5 [19.Bxd5 Qxd5 20.Nf5 Bf8 21.Qg5 Re6] 19...Bf8 20.Qg5 Bxb3 21.axb3 e4 22.dxe4 Nxe4 23.Qg4 Nf6 24.Qg5 Nh7 25.Qg4 Qf6μ Black is much better.

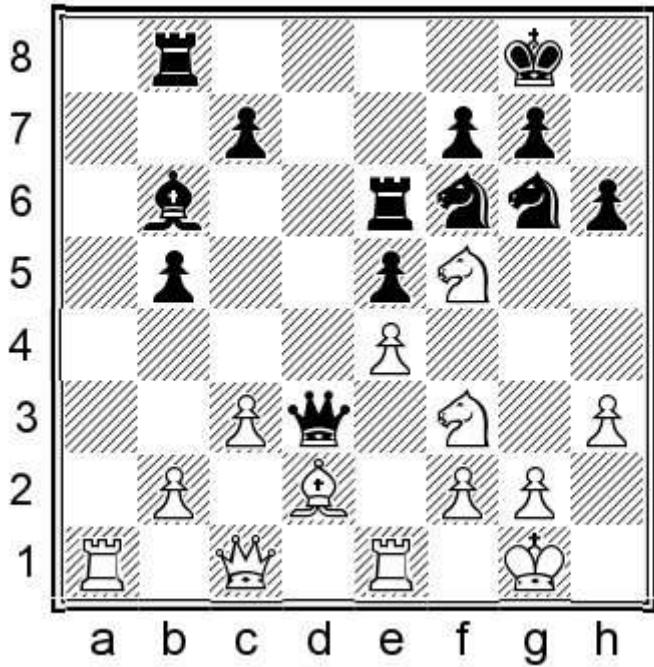
C3.2) 16.Nf5 Qd7 17.Nxg7 [17.Bxh6 Bxf5!? A practical solution. 18.exf5 Qxf5 19.Qg5 Qe6 20.Rxe5 Qxe5 21.Nxe5 Rxe5 22.Qd2 gxh6 23.Qxh6 Rae8 It's hard to imagine that White can survive this.] 17...Kxg7 18.Bxh6+



Position after: 18.Bxh6+

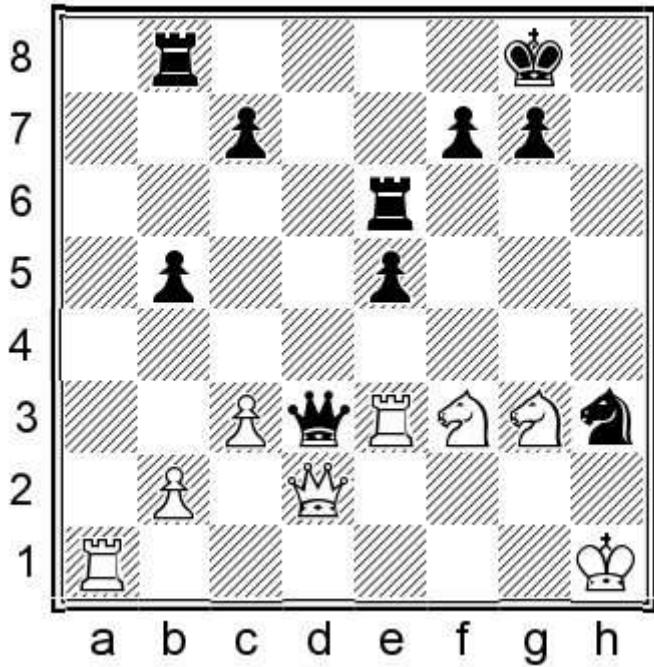
18...Kh7 19.Qg5 [19.Ng5+ looks scary but doesn't work. 19...Kxh6 20.Nxe6+ Kh7] 19...Qd8! 20.exd5 Nxd5 21.Nxe5 Qxg5 22.Bxg5 Nxc3! 23.Bxe6 [23.bxc3 Bxb3 24.Nxg6 Kxg6–+ wins a piece.] 23...Rxe6 24.Nxf7 Re2 25.Rxe2 Nxe2+ 26.Kf1 Nef4–+ Black is winning.

C4) 15.Bxe6 was the move I had to deal with over the board. 15...Rxe6 16.a4 [16.d4 d5,,] 16...d5 17.Qc1 Rb8! No more tricks along the a-file. 18.axb5 axb5 19.Nf5 Principled, but 19.Be3 would have been more cautious. 19...dxe4 20.dxe4 Qd3! This tactical idea is the key defense here.



Position after: 20...Qd3!

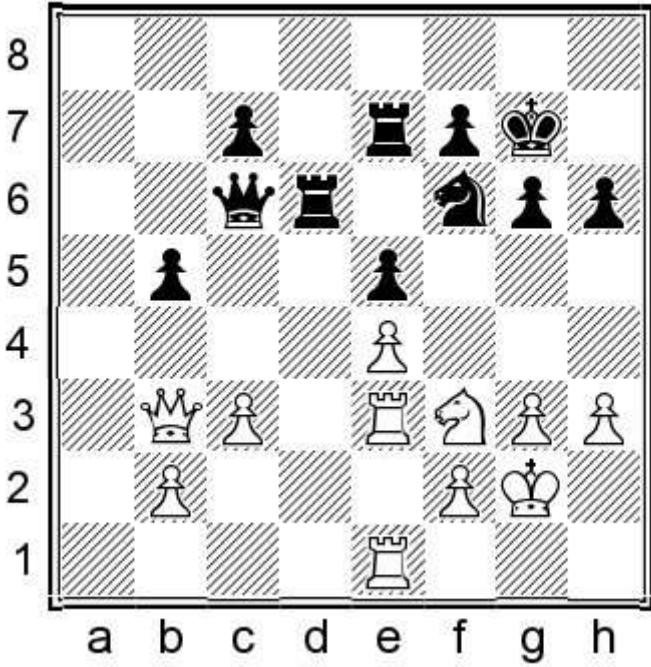
C4.1) 21.Bxh6!? Nxe4! This was the move I had put my faith in! Black has some dangerous threats but with accurate play White holds his own. 22.Be3 The only move. 22...Nxf2! 23.Ng3! I must admit, I didn't see this one during the game. White is ok now. 23...Nxh3+ 24.gxh3 Nf4 25.Qd2 Bxe3+ 26.Rxe3 Nxh3+ 27.Kh1!



Position after: 27.Kh1!

[27.Kh2? Qh7] 27...Qh7 28.Re2 Ng5+ 29.Nh2=

C4.2) 21.Qb1 My opponent changed his mind and went for this calm move. The position was very drawish, but later on in time-trouble I managed to win a pawn and later still the game. 21...Qc4 [21...Qxb1 22.Raxb1=] 22.g3 Rd8 23.Kg2 Ne7 24.Be3 Bxe3 25.Nxe7+ Rxe7 26.Rxe3 Qc6 27.Qc2 g6 28.Rae1 Kg7 29.Qb3 Rd6!



Position after: 29...Rd6!

30.Qc2 Nd7! 31.Rd1 Nc5 This was the point he went down.
 32.Rxd6?!† 32...cxsd6 33.b4?! Na4 34.Ng1?! Nb6 [34...Rc7 35.Ne2 Nb6 would have been even better.] 35.Kh2 d5μ Mi.Savic – Erdős, BIH-chT 2013.

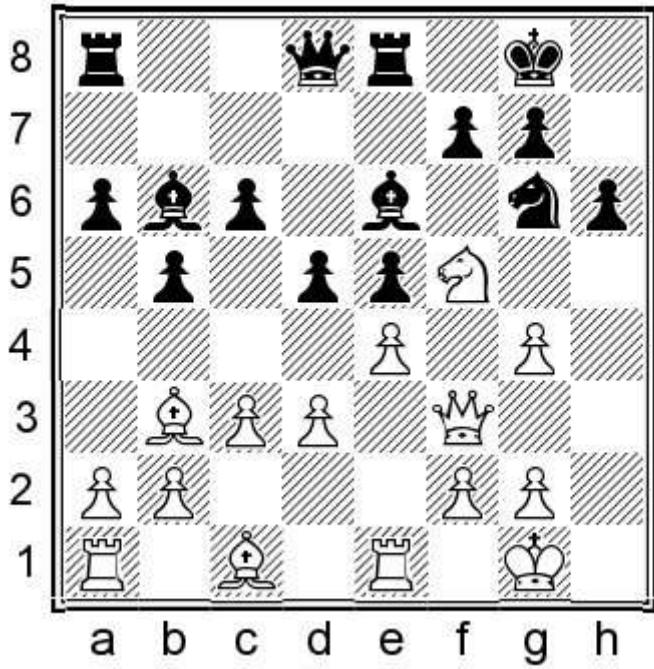
14...d5 15.Qf3

This line doesn't impress my computer at first, but it has some venom.

15.exd5 is not dangerous because Black is just fine after 15...Nxd5 16.d4 Nf6=

15...Nh4

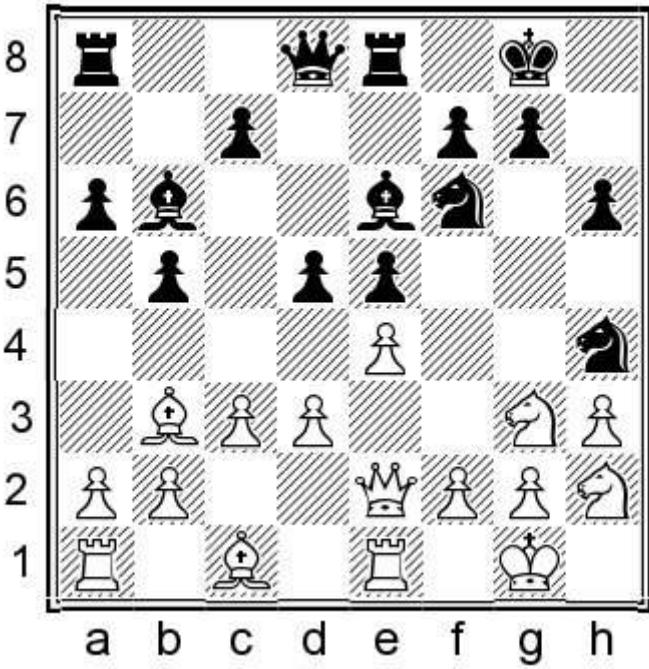
15...c6 16.Ng4 [16.Nf5?? loses immediately to 16...Bxf5 17.exf5 Nh4–+] 16...Nxg4 17.hxg4 Be6 18.Nf5



Position after: 18.Nf5

This is how a human would play. 18...a5! 19.g3! a4 20.Bc2 Nf8 21.Kg2 Nh7 22.d4!? [22.Rh1 Ng5∞] 22...exd4 23.e5! gave me headache as the logical 23...Ng5 is met by 24.Bxg5 Qxg5 25.cxd4 a3 26.b4! Bxf5 27.gxf5 and now 27...Bxd4 fails to 28.Qd3! Bxa1 29.f4! Qd8 30.f6, and Black is under attack.

16.Qe2 Be6



Position after: 16...Be6

Mentioned by Mikhalevski in his book, this is probably a safer way.

17.Ng4 c6!

This move is really smart: Black keeps the tension for the moment, thus denying the creation of the f5-outpost. The e5-pawn is hanging, so taking that should be our critical line:

17...N_xg4 18.hxg4 Qd7 19.Nf5 Ng6 20.g3! I've never been a fan of these types of positions.

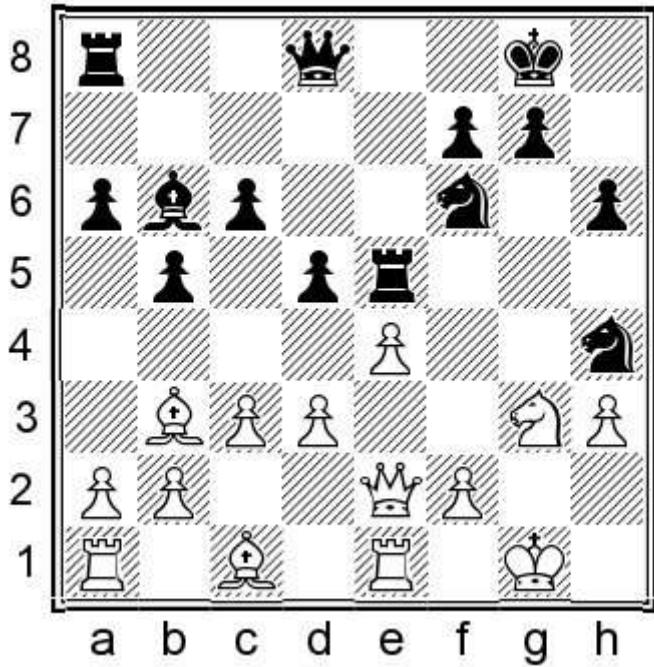
18.Nxe5

18.Nxf6+ Qxf6 19.Be3 Bxe3 20.Qxe3 Ng6=

18...dxe4

Best.

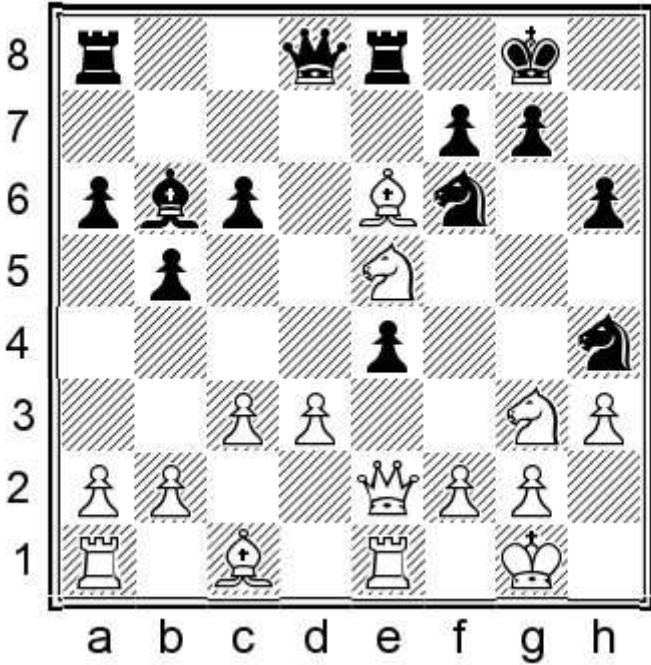
We may get tempted by 18...Bxh3!? 19.gxh3 Rxe5



Position after: 19...Rxe5

After 20.d4?? [But 20.Kh2! is much stronger and now it's up to Black to prove his concept after 20...dxe4 21.dxe4 Qe7 and so on – the game is very complicated.] 20...Qd7! Black wins in style: 21.Kh2 Rxe4! 22.Nxe4 dxe4 23.Bf4 Qf5–+

19.Bxe6



Position after: 19.Bxe6

19.d4 c5 20.Bxe6 Rxe6 is the same.

19...Rxe6 20.d4 c5 21.Be3 cxd4 22.cxd4 Qe8!?

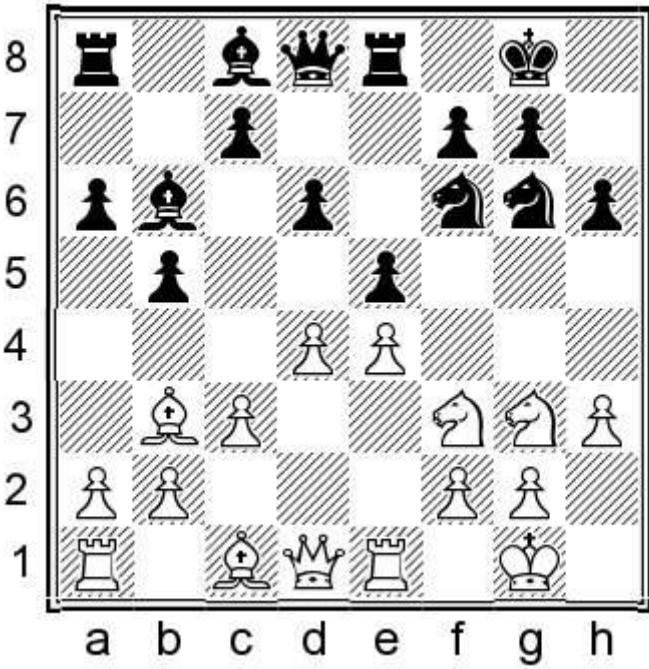
I like this manœuvre; Black fully mobilizes.

23.a4 Rd8 24.axb5 axb5

Black is doing pretty well.

d) 7.d3 d6 8.c3 h6 9.h3 0-0 10.Nbd2 Bb6 11.Re1 Ne7 12.Nf1 Ng6 13.Ng3 Re8 14.d4

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.d3 d6 8.c3 h6 9.h3 0-0 10.Nbd2 Bb6 11.Re1 Ne7 12.Nf1 Ng6 13.Ng3 Re8 14.d4



Position after: 14.d4

This is definitely the most logical move

14...Bb7 15.Bc2

A) 15.dxe5 dx_e5=

B) 15.d5 c6 16.dxc6 Bxc6

15...d5!

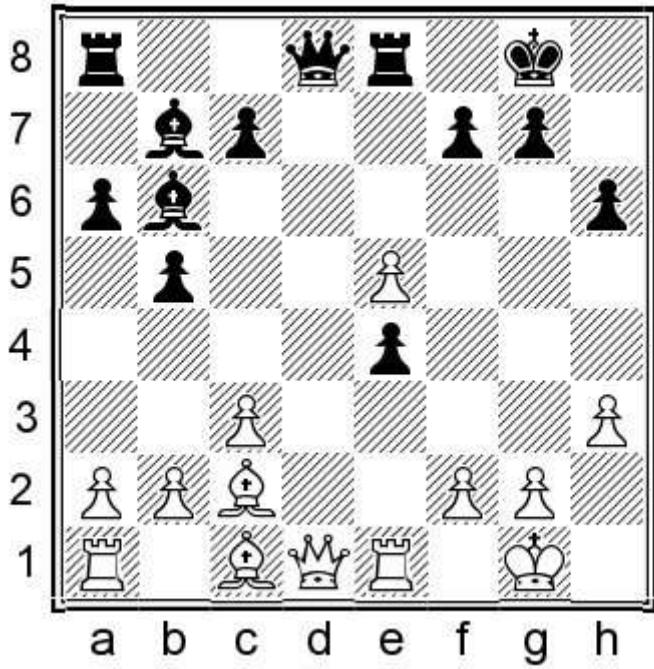
The best way to keep the balance and fight actively.

15...c5 16.d5 [16.Be3 cxd4 17.cxd4 exd4 18.Bxd4 Rc8] 16...c4 17.a4 Rb8 18.Nh2 Bc8,,

16.Nxe5

16.exd5 Qxd5 transposes.

16...Nxe5 17.dxe5 Nxe4 18.Nxe4 dx_e4

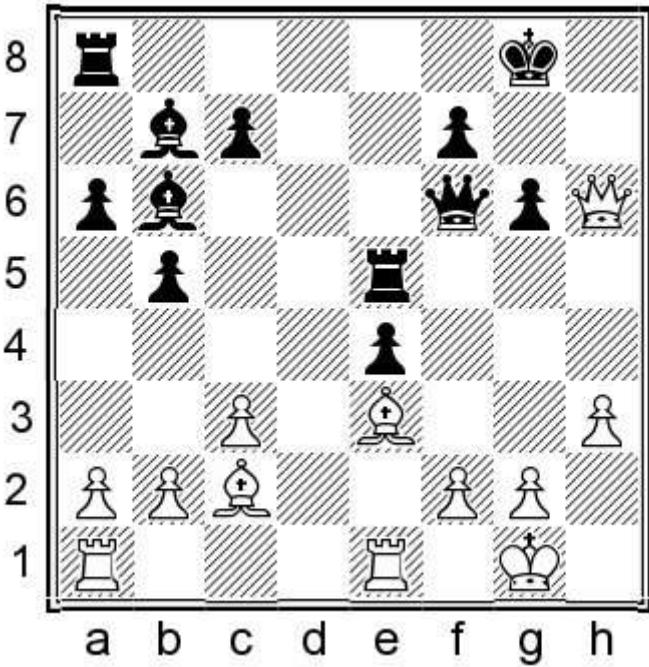


Position after: 18...dxe4

19.Qh5

19.Qg4 Rxe5 20.Bxh6 Qf6 21.Be3 Bxe3 22.Rxe3 Rd8=

19...g6 20.Qxh6 Rxe5 21.Be3 Qf6



Position after: 21...Qf6

22.Rad1

A) 22.a4 Rae8 23.axb5 axb5 24.Bxb6 Qxb6 25.Rad1 e3=

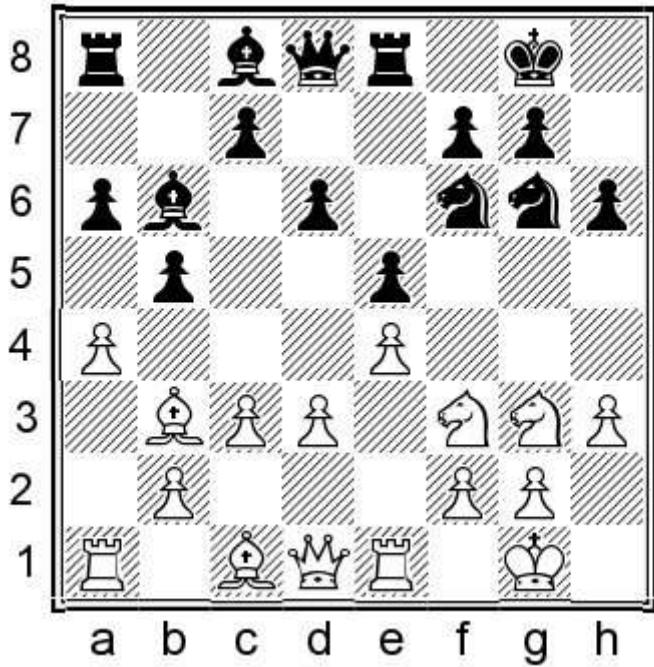
B) 22.Bxb6 Qxb6 23.Rad1 Bd5 24.Re3 Rae8 25.Rg3 Rf5 26.Rd2 Qf6=

22...Rh5 23.Qf4 Qxf4 24.Bxf4 Re8 25.Bb3 Bc6=

The pawn on e4 isn't a weakness, and Black has reached a comfortable endgame.

e) 7.d3 d6 8.c3 h6 9.h3 0-0 10.Nbd2 Bb6 11.Re1 Ne7 12.Nf1 Ng6 13.Ng3 Re8 14.a4

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.d3 d6 8.c3 h6 9.h3 0-0 10.Nbd2 Bb6 11.Re1 Ne7 12.Nf1 Ng6 13.Ng3 Re8 14.a4

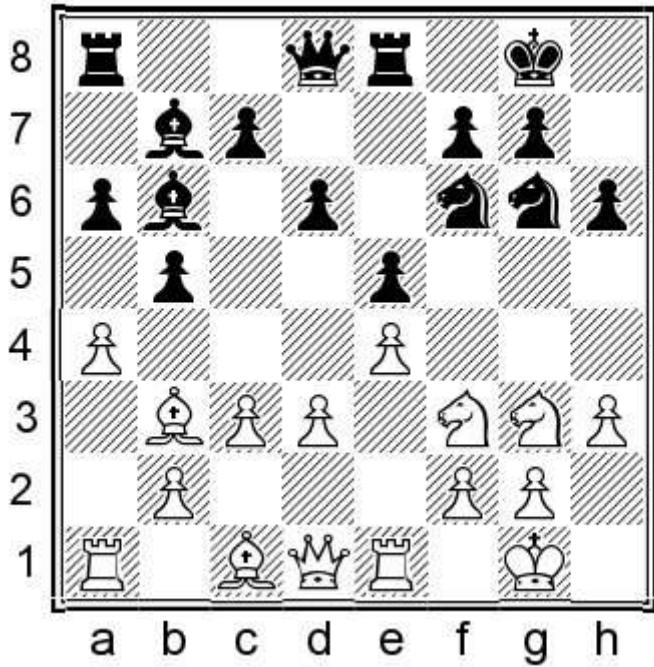


Position after: 14.a4

14...Rb8

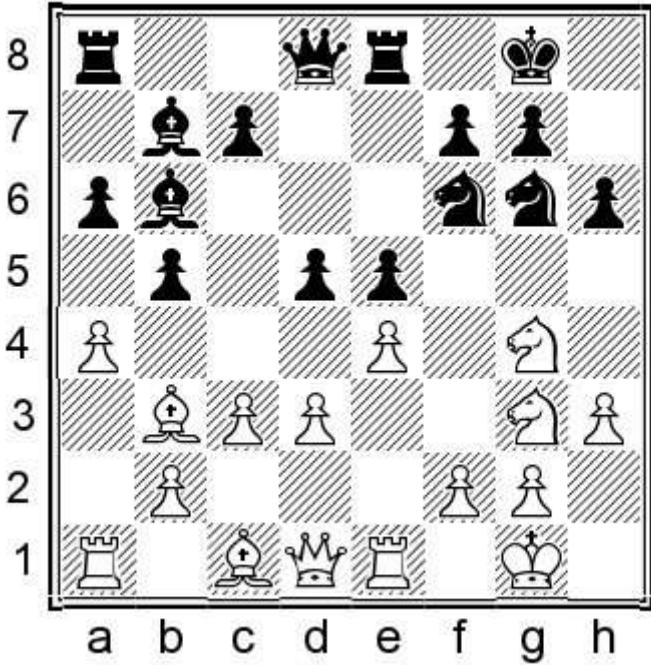
I believe it's better to keep the bishop on its initial square, so as to control the f5-square and occasionally play ...Be6; it's a bit more flexible this way.

14...Bb7 is also playable, as discussed in detail in the afore-mentioned Mikhalevski book.



Position after: 14...Bb7

- A)** 15.Nf5 d5 16.Bxh6 gxh6 17.Qd2 Nf4!
- B)** 15.Be3 Bxe3 16.fxe3 [16.Rxe3 d5f] 16...d5 17.exd5 Bxd5 18.Bxd5 Qxd5=
- C)** 15.Nh2! The best plan here. 15...d5 16.Ng4

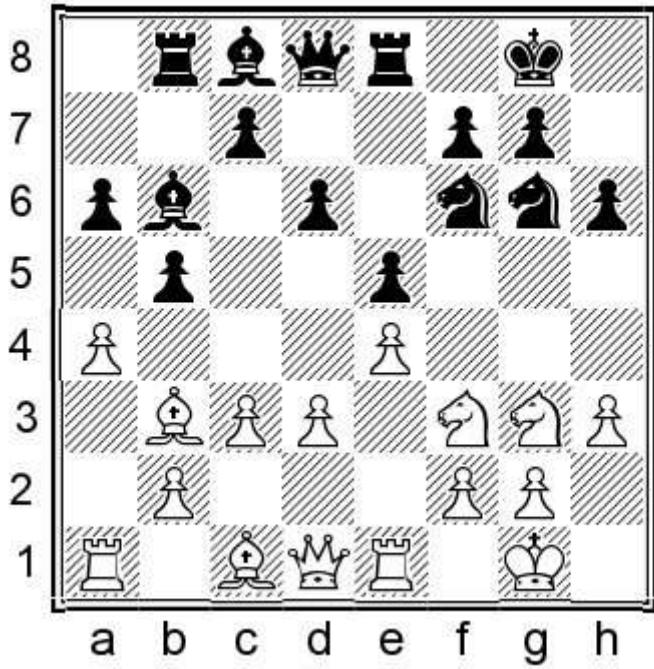


Position after: 16.Ng4

16...dxe4!? [16...Nxg4 17.Qxg4 Qf6 18.Be3 Rad8 was recommended.]
17.dxe4 Nxg4 18.Qxg4

C1) 18...Qf6 is the move I naively played in a rapid game. Now 19.Be3! would have been strong [19.Nf5 Rad8 allowed me to equalize in Schaerer – Erdos, Biel rapid 2016.] as after 19...Bxe3 White can play 20.fxe3! Bc8 21.Qe2! gaining some pressure on b5 and f7. Black is worse, e.g. 21...Qg5 22.Kh2²

C2) 18...bxa4! A computer-ish solution. It might hold, but Black needs to be precise. 19.Bxa4 Qf6 20.Nf5 Red8 21.h4 Kf8 22.h5 Ne7 23.Ne3 Bc8 24.Qe2 Be6 was very close to equal in Sochor, F (2484) – Krzyzanowski, W (2461) ICCF email 2016.

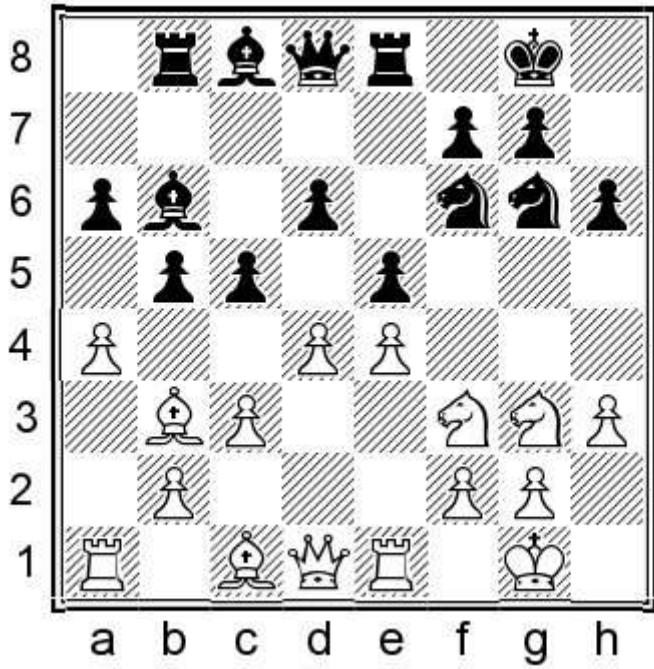


Position after: 14...Rb8

15.Bd2!?

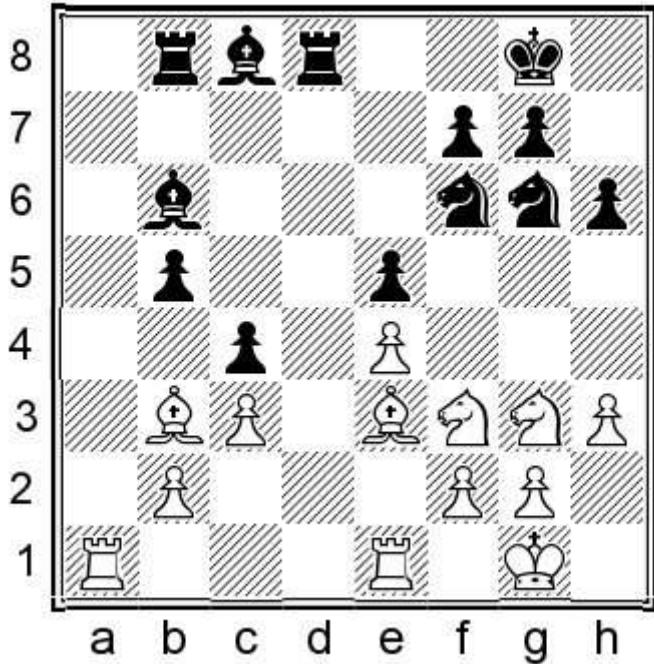
A subtle move, and one that we should take seriously.

A) 15.d4 can be answered by 15...c5



Position after: 15...c5

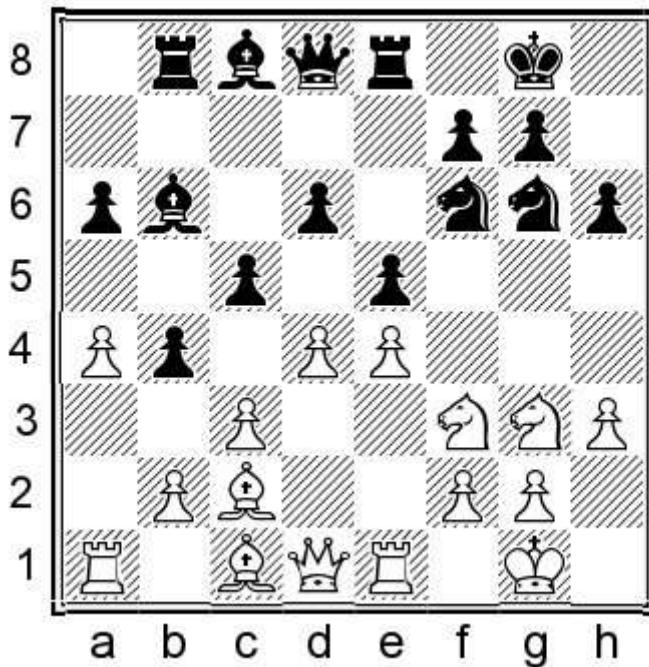
A1) 16.dxe5 dx_e5 17.Qxd8 Rx_d8 18.axb5 ax_b5 19.Be3 [19.c4 Be6]
19...c4



Position after: 19...c4

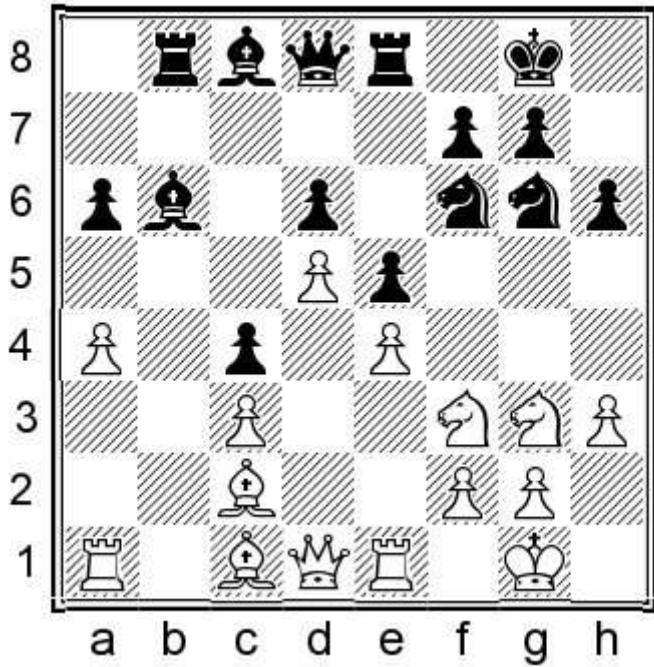
20.Bxb6 Rxb6 21.Bc2=

A2) 16.Bc2 b4!?



Position after: 16...b4!?

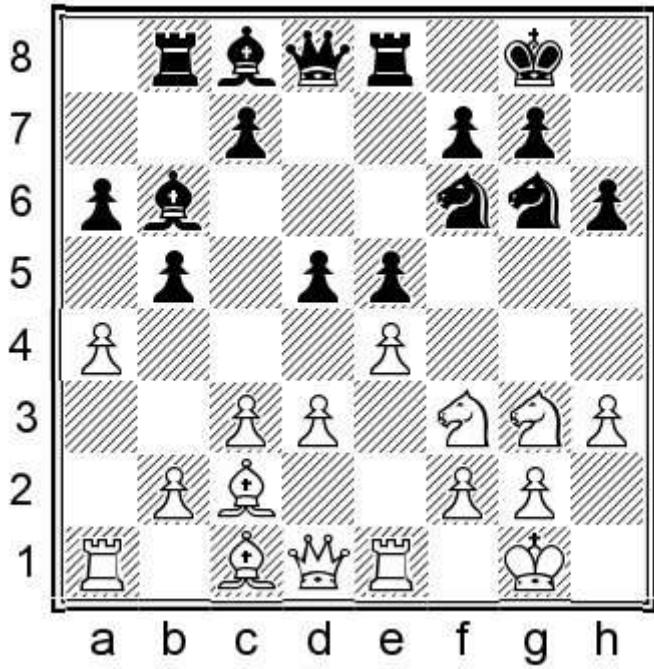
I wanted to mention this unique and ambitious idea: Black creates targets on the queenside. 17.d5 [17.dxe5 dxe5 18.Qxd8 Rxd8 19.a5 Bc7 20.Be3 c4 21.Nd2 Be6 22.Ra4 Nf4 Black should be fine as 23.Rxb4 Rxb4 24.cxb4 Rb8 wins back the material.] 17...bxc3 18.bxc3 c4!



Position after: 18...c4!

This looks somewhat weakening here, but Black is in time to develop threats. For example: 19.Nd2 Qc7 20.a5 [20.Qe2? walks into 20...Nf4 21.Qxc4 Bxf2+! 22.Kxf2 Qa7+ 23.Re3 Bxh3! 24.gxh3 Rec8 This looks too dangerous for White.] 20...Bxa5 21.Qf3 Nh4 22.Qe3 Bb6 23.Qe2 Ng6 24.Nxc4 Nf4 25.Qf1 Bc5,, Black is very active here too.

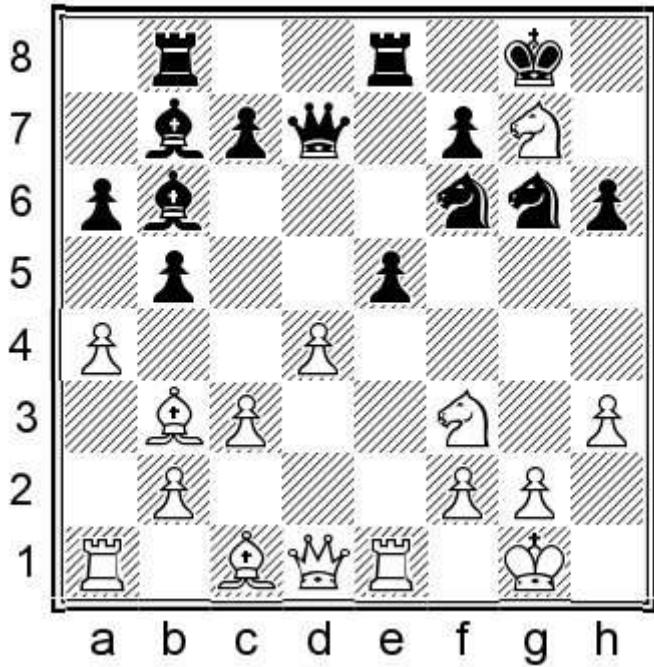
B) 15.Bc2 d5!? Just as against 14.Bc2, I think the straightforward central push is good here too.



Position after: 15...d5!?

B1) 16.exd5 Qxd5 17.d4 Bb7

B1.1) 18.Bb3 Qd6= and the tactics don't work for White: 19.Nf5 [19.Bxh6 gxh6 20.Nf5 Qf8 21.a5 Ba7 22.Nxe5 Nxe5 23.dxe5 Qc5] 19...Qd7 20.Nxg7

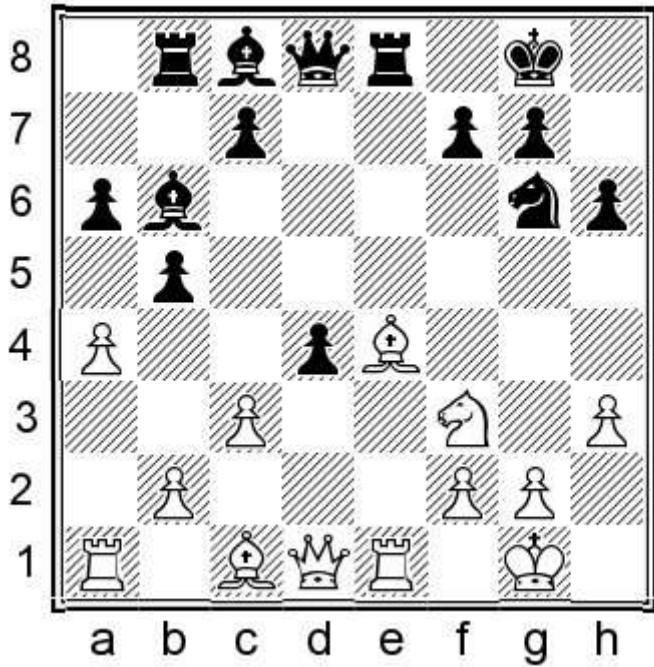


Position after: 20.Nxg7

20...Kxg7 21.dxe5 Nd5 22.Qd2 Rh8

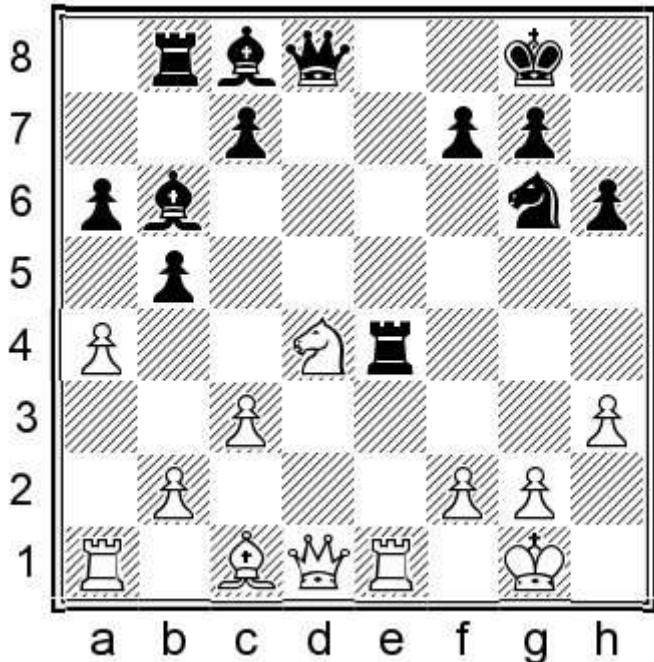
B1.2) 18.a5 Ba7 19.Bxg6 fxg6 20.dxe5 Qxd1 21.Rxd1 Bxf3 22.gxf3 Rxe5 23.Bf4 Re7 24.Re1 Rbe8= is balanced.

B2) 16.d4 Nxe4 17.Nxe4 dxe4 18.Bxe4 exd4



Position after: 18...exd4

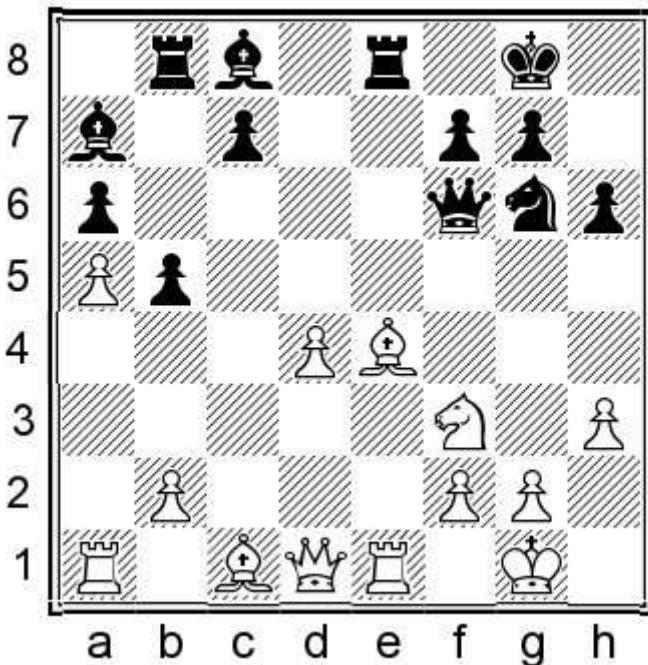
B2.1) 19.Nxd4?! allows 19...Rxe4!



Position after: 19...Rxe4!

20.Rxe4 c5 21.Qe1! Bb7 22.Nf3 [22.Nf5?? would be a grave error.
22...Qd5 23.Ng3 f5+ wins the rook and the game.] 22...Bxe4
23.Qxe4 Qd1+ 24.Qe1=

B2.2) 19.a5 Ba7 20.cxd4 Qf6

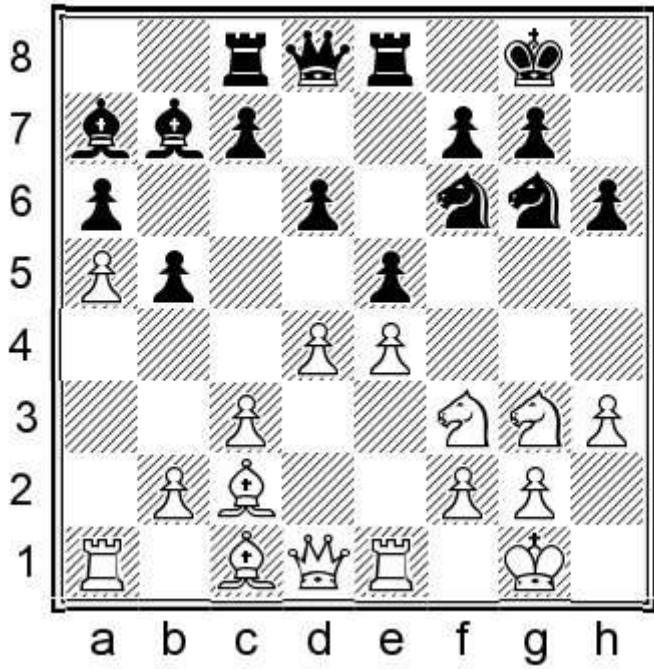


Position after: 20...Qf6

21.Qd3 [21.Bxg6 Rxe1+ 22.Qxe1 Qxg6 23.Qe8+ Kh7 is not serious as 24.Ne5?? loses to 24...Bb7 25.Nxg6 Rxe8+] 21...Bb7
22.Bd2 Bxe4 23.Rxe4 Rbd8= Black has even chances.

C) 15.axb5 axb5 changes little, and White can do this at almost any point.

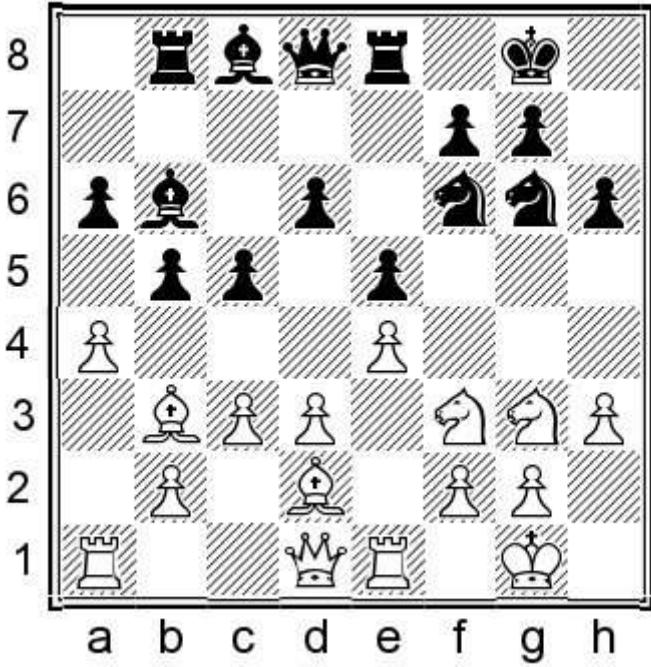
D) 15.a5!? The latest word in tournament practice. 15...Ba7 16.d4 Bb7 [16...c5 17.Be3 Qc7 18.Bc2 Bd7 19.Qd2 Kh7 20.b4² Sahidi, S (2432) – Hansen, S (2543) Terme Catez 2021] 17.Bc2 Rc8!?



Position after: 17...Rc8!?

18.Be3 [18.h4!? c5 19.h5 Nf8 20.d5 c4 21.Nf5 Rc7 22.N3h4 Bc8∞]
18...exd4 19.cxd4 Nxe4 20.Nxe4 Bxe4 21.Bxe4 Rxe4 22.Qc2 d5
23.Qc6©

15...c5!



Position after: 15...c5!

The best move, worth remembering!

16.axb5 axb5 17.c4!?

A strange plan, and I doubt many players would come up with this idea over the board.

17.Qc1 c4! This counter-blow is the essence of our play. 18.dxc4 Be6 19.c5! Otherwise White is worse. 19...Bxc5 20.Bxe6 Rxe6 [20...fxe6 21.Be3 Qb6=] 21.b4 [21.Be3 Qc7=] 21...Bb6 22.Be3 Rc8 23.Ra6 Bxe3 24.Qxe3 Qc7=

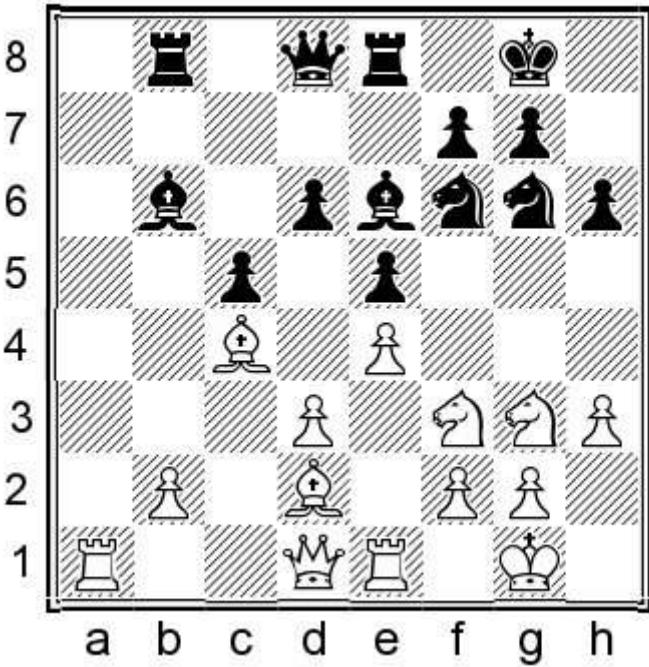
17...bxc4

17...Bd7 is playable, but what's next after 18.Qc2?

18.Bxc4

18.dxc4!? is probably way too much already. No human would play like this and Black is ok after any normal move.

18...Be6



Position after: 18...Be6

I like neutralizing White's best piece.

18...d5 19.exd5 Nxd5 20.Ne4 is also complicated. [20.Qc1!?]

19.Qc1 Re7!?

A subtle plan: Black activates the rook on the 7th rank.

20.Nf5

The logical follow-up and Black has two options to deal with this direct attack.

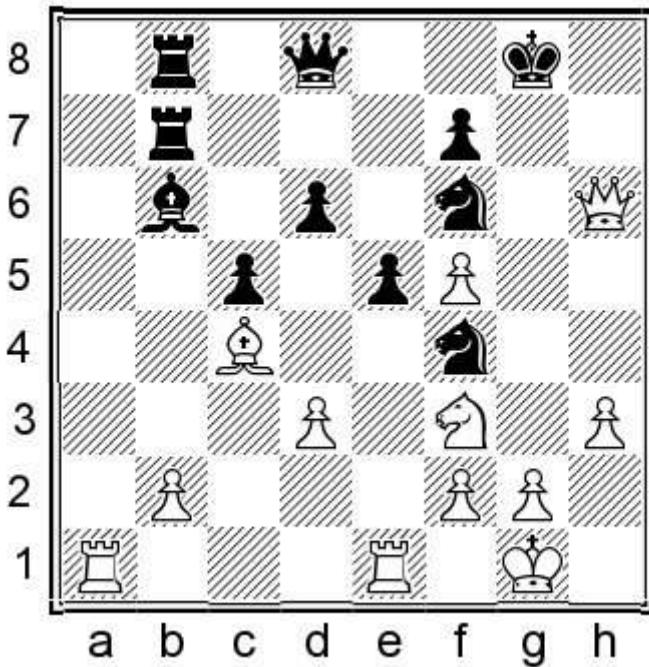
20...Reb7

Very provocative.

20...Bxf5 21.exf5 Nf4! 22.Bxf4 exf4 23.Rxe7 Qxe7 24.Qxf4 and Black

prepares to push ...d5 and should be fine. 24...Qd8!? 25.g4 d5 26.Bb5 Bc7 27.Qa4∞ is complicated, but this b5-bishop is a sorry sight.

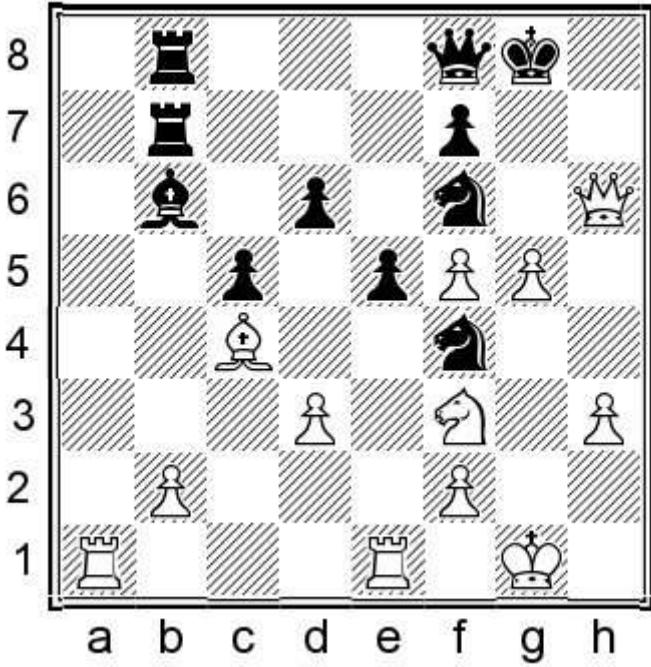
21.Bxh6 gxh6 22.Qxh6 Bxf5 23.exf5 Nf4



Position after: 23...Nf4

Black wants to cut off the bishop with ...d5, so White needs to play aggressively. The next sample line is very exciting.

24.g3 N4h5 25.g4 Nf4 26.g5 Qf8!?



Position after: 26...Qf8!?

Practical.

27.Qxf8+

27.Qxf6? Bd8

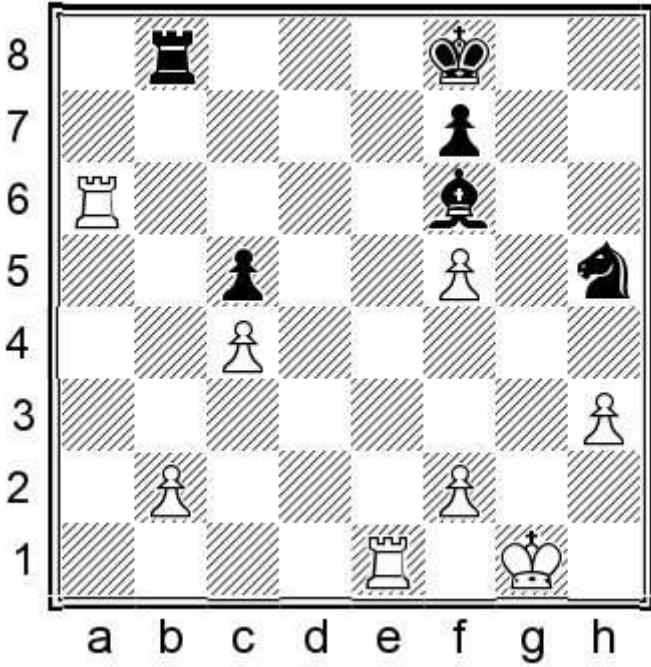
27...Kxf8 28.gxf6 Bd8

28...Bc7!? is maybe even better.

29.Ra6 d5 30.Nxe5! dxc4 31.dxc4 Nh5 32.Nc6 Bxf6

32...Rc8? is a huge mistake as White wins material: 33.Nxd8 Rxd8 34.Re4!+– Rh4 is coming next, winning the misplaced knight.

33.Nxb8 Rxb8



Position after: 33...Rxb8

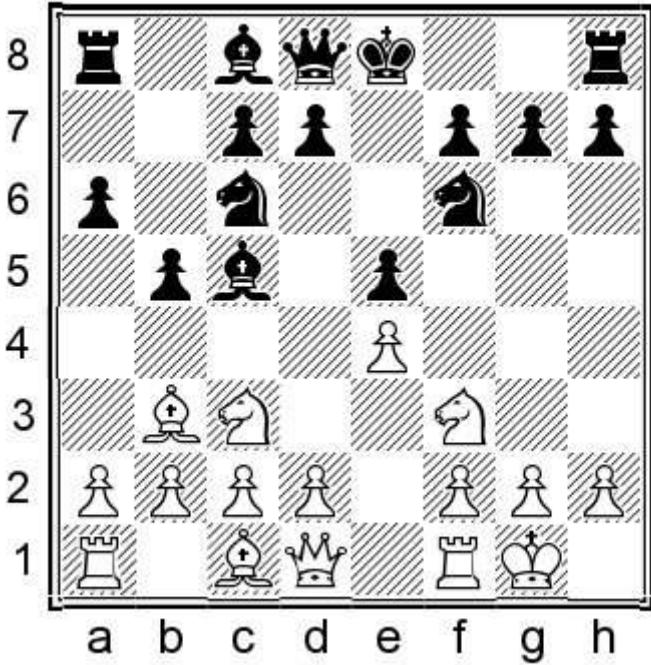
34.Re4 Rxb2 35.Ra8+ Kg7 36.Rg4+ Kh6=

The position is balanced.

f) 7.Nc3 0-0 8.--

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.Nc3

This move-order has become a factor in the Ark after the well-known game between Grischuk and Lenic at the 2011 European Team Championship. White is intending to play Nd5 and then c3 and d4 at once, if Black allows it.



Position after: 7.Nc3

7...0-0!

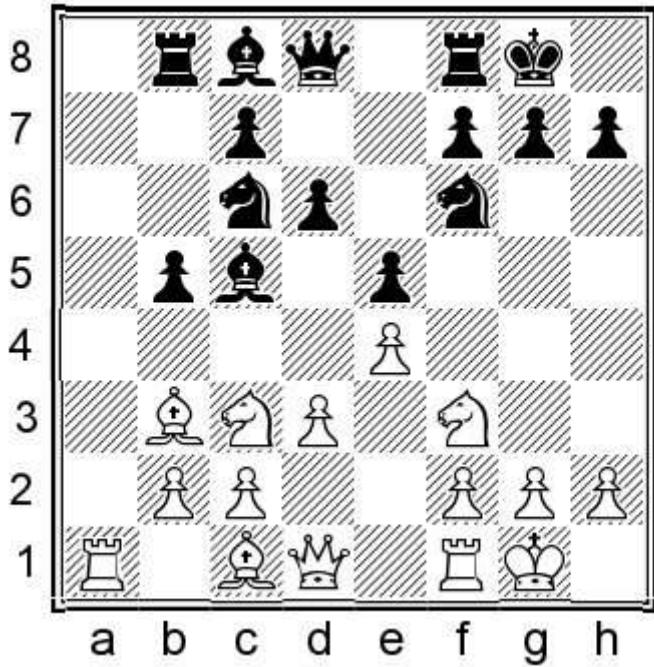
The accurate response.

7...d6 allows 8.Nd5! Rb8 9.c3! Nxd5 10.Bxd5 Ne7 11.Bb3 0-0 12.d4 [12.a4²] 12...exd4 13.cxd4 Bb6 14.h3 h6 [14...c5∞] 15.Re1 c5 wasn't too bad for Black, but later White went on to win an exciting, fierce battle in Grischuk, A (2752) – Lenic, L (2634) Porto Carras 2011.

8.Nd5!?

This pawn sacrifice is playable, but I doubt it's very dangerous for us. It hasn't found many followers, which supports my theory.

8.a4 Rb8 9.axb5 axb5 10.d3 [10.Nd5 see 5.Nc3] 10...d6

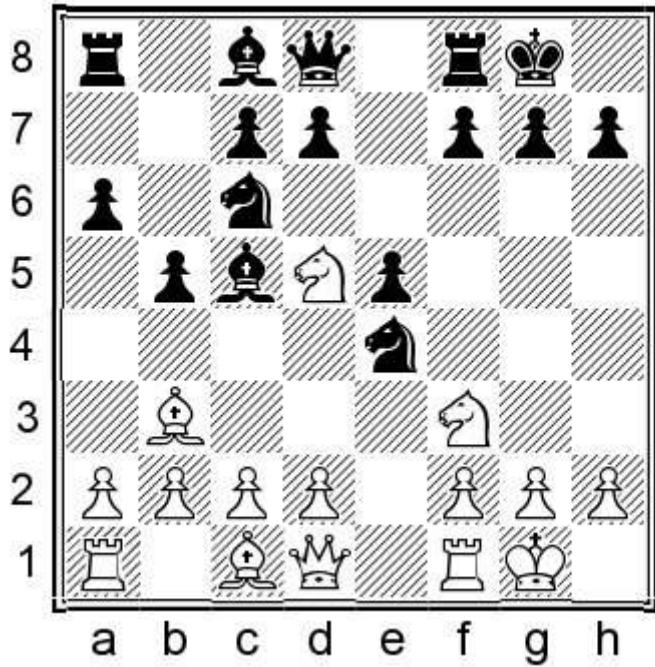


Position after: 10...d6

A) 11.Bg5 h6 12.Bxf6 [12.Bh4 Bg4] 12...Qxf6 13.Nd5 Qd8 14.c3 see 5.d3 chapter.

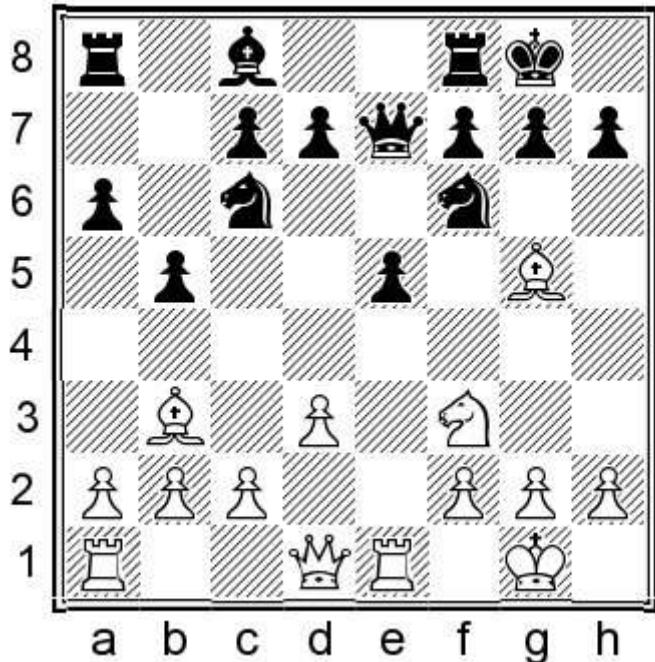
B) 11.h3 Nd4!? [For 11...h6 see Anand – Erdos!] 12.Nxd4 Bxd4 13.Ne2 Bb6 14.Ng3 Be6 15.Qf3 Bxb3!? 16.Bg5! Bxc2 17.Nh5 Nxh5 18.Bxd8 Rfxd8 19.Rfc1 Bxd3 20.Qxd3 Nf4©

8...Nxe4!



Position after: 8...Nxe4!

9.d3 Nf6 10.Bg5 Be7™ 11.Nxe7+ Qxe7 12.Re1



Position after: 12.Re1

These moves were the most logical ones and now we have reached a critical position.

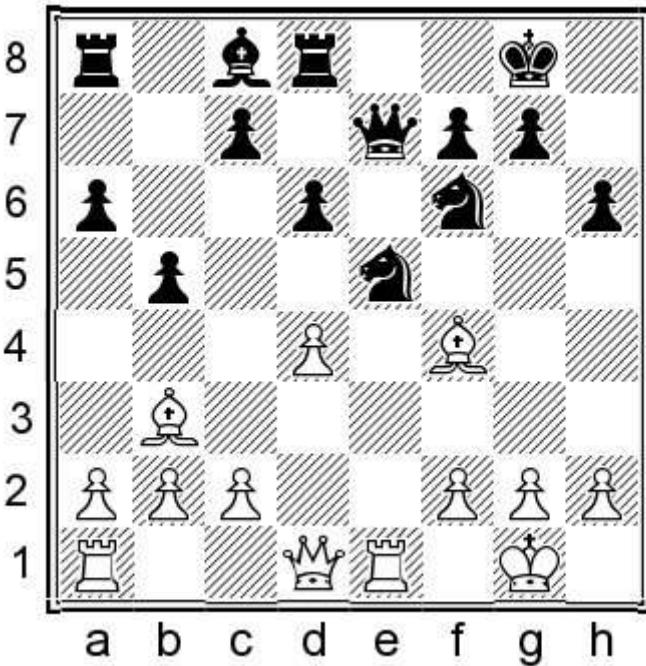
12...h6

Questioning the bishop is just way too tempting.

13.Bh4

A) 13.Bxf6?! Qxf6 14.Bd5 poses problems only for White. Now Black can continue with 14...Bb7! 15.Nxe5 [15.Bxc6? Qxc6 16.Rxe5 Rae8f] 15...Nxe5 16.Bxb7 Rae8f

B) 13.Nxe5!? Nxe5 14.Bf4 d6 15.d4 looks interesting at first, but we have 15...Rd8!



Position after: 15...Rd8!

at our disposal and Black should at least be fine, e.g. 16.Qc1 [16.dxe5 dxe5 17.Qe2 e4³] 16...Nf3+ [16...Nfd7 is more modest.] 17.gxf3 Qd7!?

Very ambitious. [17...Qf8=] 18.Bxh6! gxh6 19.Qxh6 Qf5 20.Re7 Rf8 21.h3 Nh7 22.Kh2 Kh8 23.Rg1 Qf6 24.Qxf6+ Nxf6 25.Bxf7 Bf5³

13...Bb7 14.c3 Qd6!?

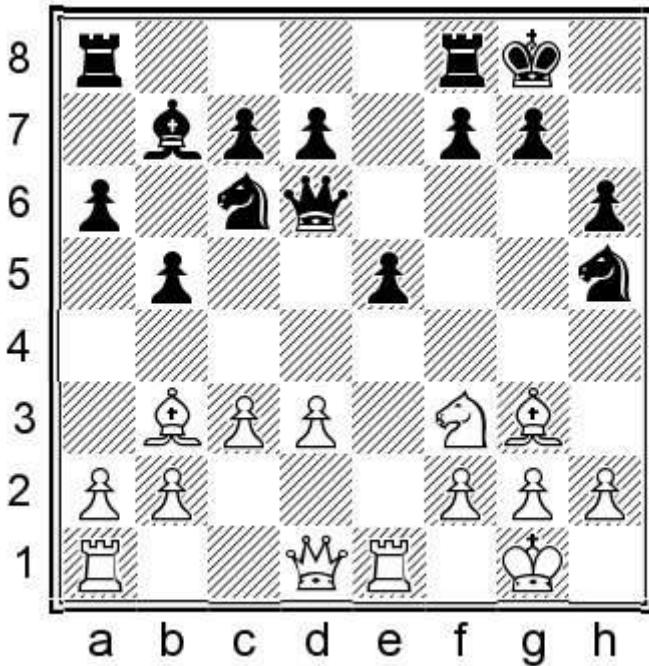
Leaving the double-pin makes sense; this is a clear-cut solution involving some entertaining tactics.

14...Rfe8 was perfectly fine too. 15.d4 e4 16.Nd2 Na5 17.Bc2 g5 18.Bg3 led to a very exciting middlegame in Anand, V (2786) – Kramnik, V (2808) Stavanger 2017.

15.Bg3

15.a4 Rae8!? 16.axb5 axb5 17.Bg3 Qc5³

15...Nh5!



Position after: 15...Nh5!

Returning the pawn is often the best defensive method we have in order to decrease pressure.

16.Bxe5 Nxe5 17.Nxe5 Nf4

This is what Black was aiming for.

18.Qg4!

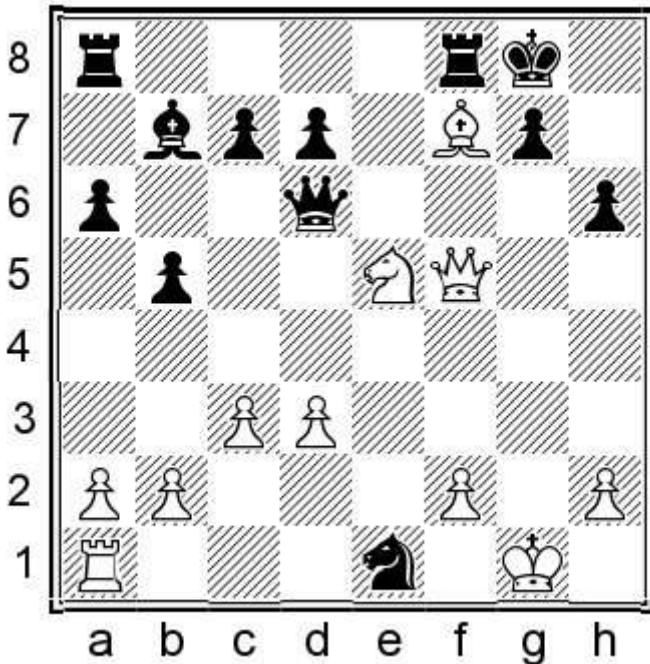
The real question.

18.f3 Qf6! 19.Nxd7 hands Black the option of making a draw or pushing for more: 19...Qg5 20.g3 Nh3+ 21.Kg2 Rfe8!? [21...Nf4+=]

18...Nxg2 19.Qf5

19.Re2!? g5! 20.Qf5 Nf4 21.Rae1!? [21.Re3 Bd5] 21...Kg7 can't be bad for us.

19...Nxe1 20.Bxf7+



Position after: 20.Bxf7+

20...Kh8 21.Rxe1

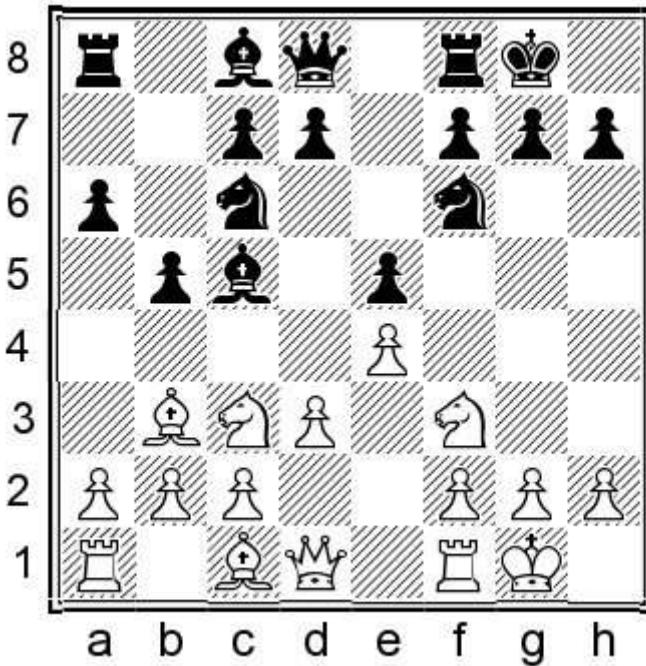
21.Ng6+?? Qxg6+ 22.Qxg6 Nf3+–+

21...Rae8! 22.Re3 Rxe5 23.Rxe5 g5!?

Threatening ...Kg7 next. Black is alright.

g) 7.Nc3 0-0 8.d3 d6 9.Bg5

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.Nc3 0-0! 8.d3



Position after: 8.d3

8...d6

8...h6 is the alternative.

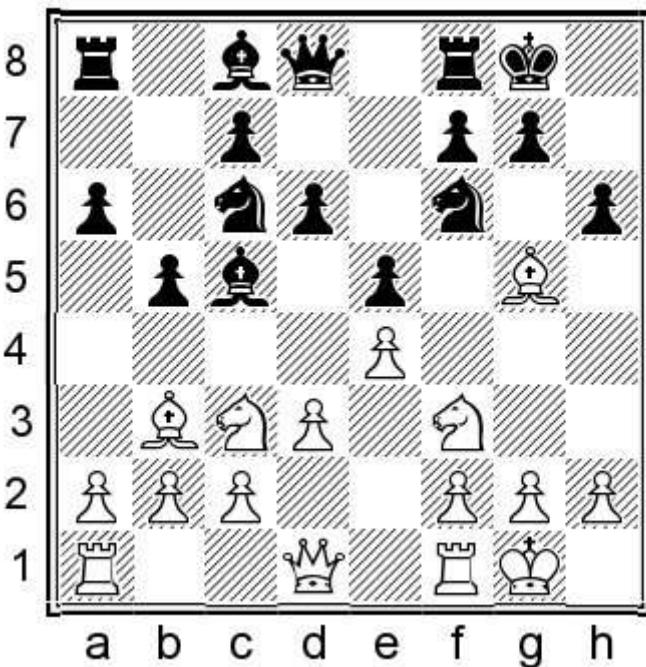
9.Bg5

An obvious try, though not very threatening.

9.a4 Bg4!? I like this move, but 9...b4 and 9...Rb8 are options, too. 10.axb5

Nd4 11.bxa6 Qc8! 12.Be3 Forced, and now Black can choose between 12...Bxf3 [12...Nxb3 13.cxb3 Bxe3 14.fxe3 Rxa6©] 13.gxf3 Nxb3 14.cxb3 Bxe3 15.fxe3 Rxa6© in both cases with nice compensation, thanks to White's compromised structure.

9...h6



Position after: 9...h6

10.Bh4

10.Bxf6 Qxf6 11.Nd5 Qd8 12.c3 was Papp, G (2595) – Wei, Y (2732) chess.com INT 2020 and here 12...Ba7 was unconvincing after 13.a4, so Black should have played 12...Na5 13.d4 [13.Bc2 c6=] 13...exd4 14.cxd4 Ba7 15.Bc2 [15.Rc1?! c6] 15...c6 16.Ne3 Nc4 17.Nxc4 bxc4 18.Ba4 [18.h3 d5=] 18...Rb8=

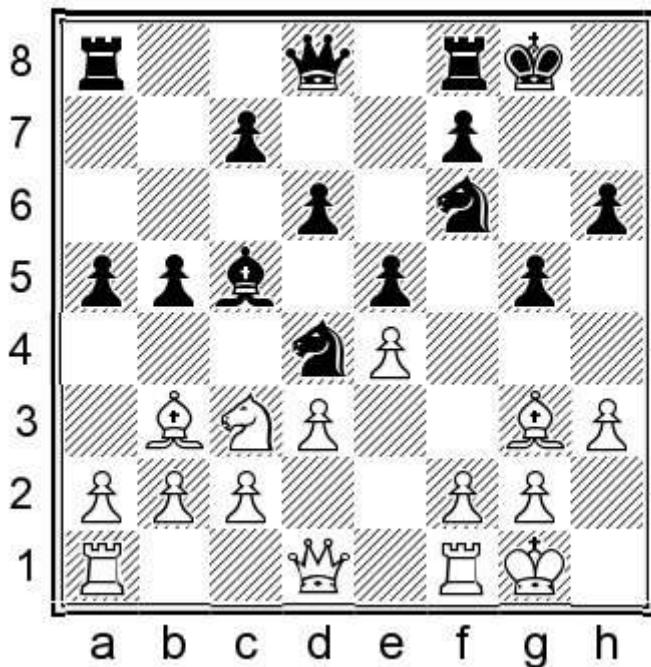
10...Bg4!

Now White is also suffering from an annoying pin.

11.Nd5

A) 11.Bd5?! allows 11...Nd4! 12.Bxa8 g5! 13.Bg3 Qxa8 and Black has tremendous play for the exchange.

B) 11.h3 Bxf3 12.Qxf3 Nd4 13.Qd1 g5 14.Bg3 a5!



Position after: 14...a5!

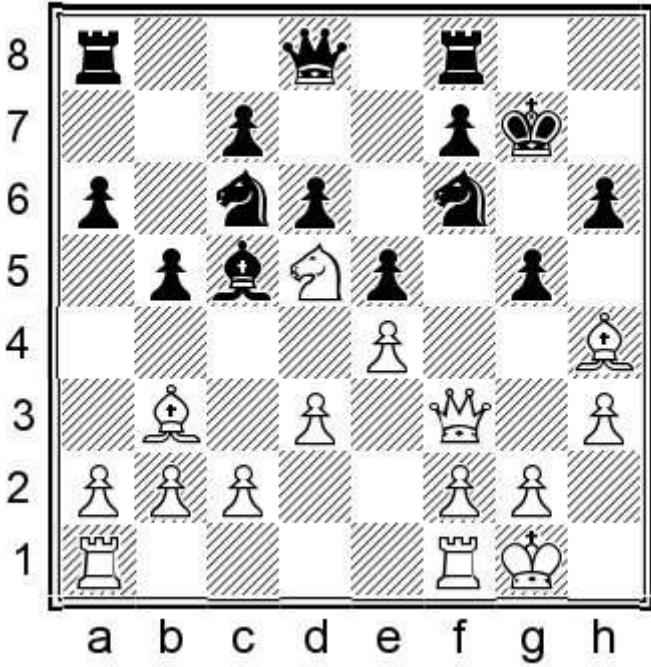
15.a4 [15.a3 Nxb3 16.cxb3 b4³] 15...b4 16.Ne2 Nxb3 17.cxb3 Qe7³ and Black is better.

C) 11.Bxf6 is safest, but it's a harmless move. 11...Qxf6 12.Nd5 Qd8 13.c3 Na5 14.Bc2 c6 15.Ne3 Bxe3 16.fxe3 c5=

11...g5 12.h3!

12.Bg3 Nd4 13.Nxd4 Bxd1 14.Nc6 looks tricky, but after 14...Nxd5! 15.Nxd8 Bxc2! the only question remaining is how big Black's advantage is.

12...Bxf3 13.Qxf3 Kg7!



Position after: 13...Kg7!

An elegant move.

14.Nxf6 Qxf6 15.Qxf6+ Kxf6 16.Bd5

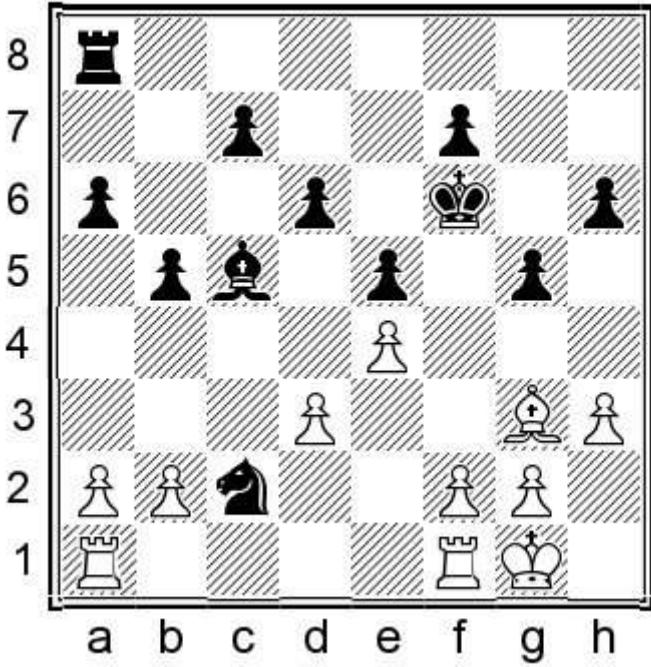
16.Bg3 Nd4 17.c3 Nxb3 18.axb3 a5³ Black is better due to the difference between the two bishops.

16...Nd4!?

The ambitious option.

16...gxh4 17.Bxc6 Rab8= is equal.

17.Bxa8 Rxa8 18.Bg3 Nxc2



Position after: 18...Nxc2

Once again an exchange sacrifice... and a sound one!

19.Rad1 a5!?

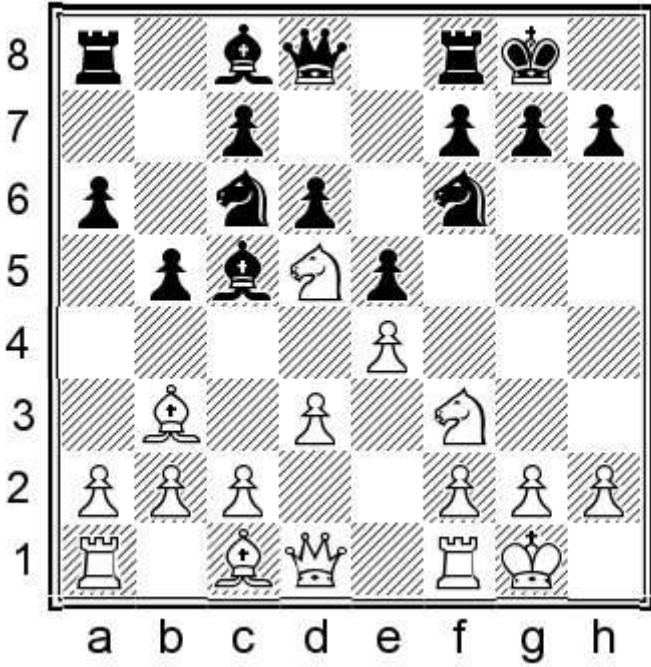
19...Ke6 20.Kh2 f5 was also fine in Tabatabaei, M (2605) – Jones, G (2675) Sharjah 2018.

20.Kh2 a4 21.Rd2 Nd4 22.f3 Bb4 23.Rdd1 a3 24.b3 Bc3

This would have been an interesting plan (one idea could be a sacrifice on b3), though with accurate play White should probably hold.

h) 7.Nc3 0-0 8.d3 d6 9.Nd5

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.Nc3 0-0! 8.d3 d6 9.Nd5



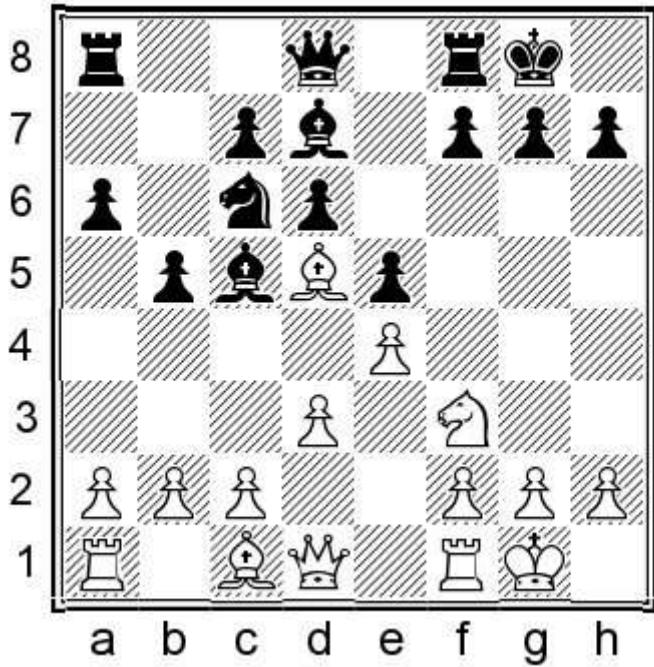
Position after: 9.Nd5

9...Nxd5!?

A direct approach.

9...h6 used to be the standard move.

10.Bxd5 Bd7

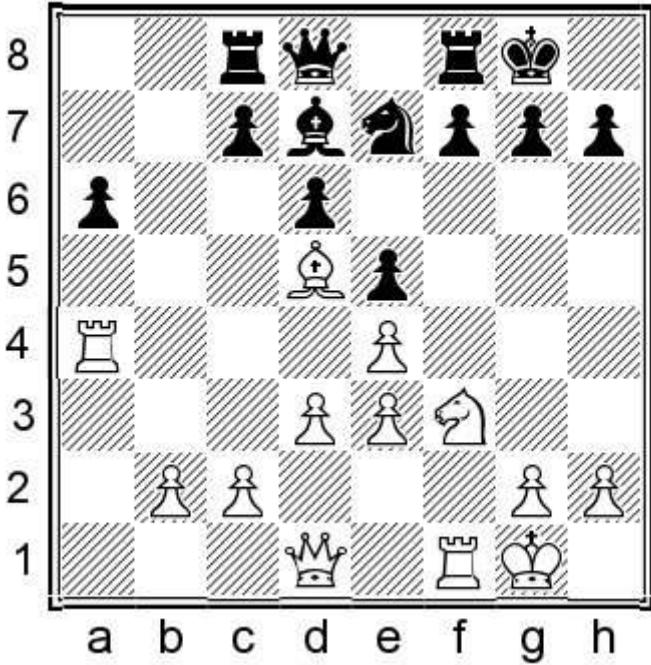


Position after: 10...Bd7

11.c3

A) 11.Be3 Bxe3 12.fxe3 Rc8!? [12...Rb8 is more common, but the rook on c8 has also some merits.]

A1) 13.a4 bxa4!? 14.Rxa4 Ne7!



Position after: 14...Ne7!

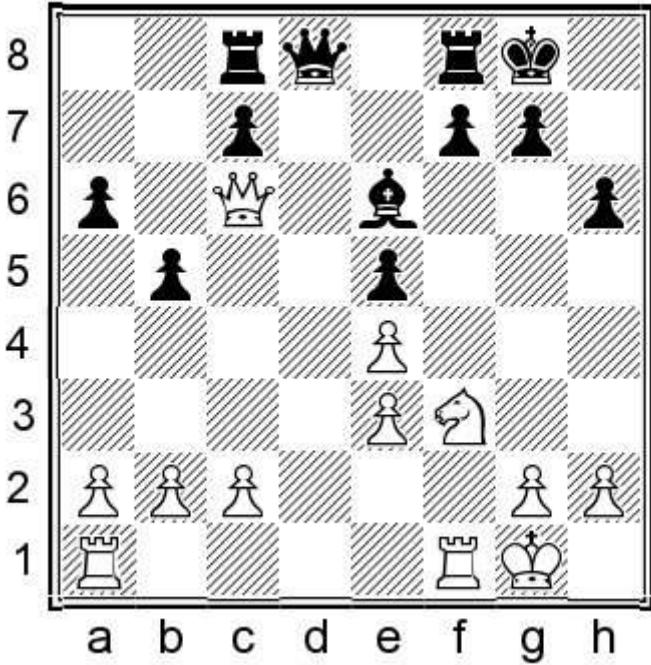
15.Rxa6 Nxd5 16.exd5 e4

A1.1) 17.Nd4 Qg5 18.Rf4 Qxd5 19.dxe4 [19.Rxe4 Qb7 20.Ra2 c5©] 19...Qb7 20.Ra2 Ra8©

A1.2) 17.dxe4? drops an exchange: 17...Bb5

A1.3) 17.Ne1 Qg5 18.Rf4 Qxd5 19.Rxe4 f5!? 20.Rf4 [20.Re7 f4! ... 21.Rxd7 Qe6] 20...Rce8 21.Qd2 Qb7 22.Ra2 Qb6©

A2) 13.d4 h6 14.Qd2 Ne7! 15.dxe5 [15.Bb3 Bc6!? 16.Qd3 Ng6=] 15...Nxd5 16.Qxd5 [16.exd5 Re8 17.exd6 cxd6© Black has gained some interesting play, thanks to the active rooks!] 16...Be6 17.Qc6 [17.Qd4 c5!? 18.Qxd6 Qa5©] 17...dxe5



Position after: 17...dxe5

and now White can win a pawn several ways, but none of them looks convincing enough, since Black has a nice bishop and the superior pawn structure. 18.Qxa6 [18.Nxe5 Qd6©] 18...Rb8

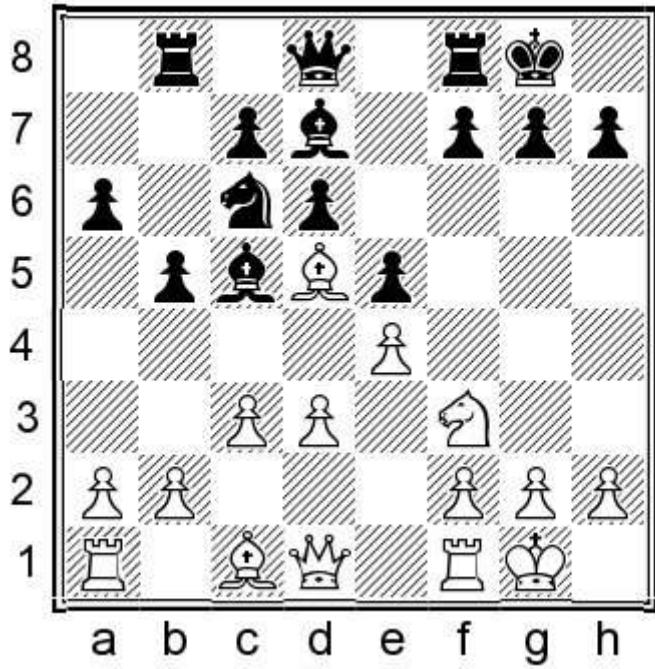
A2.1) 19.Rfd1?! Qe7!

A2.2) 19.Nxe5 Qd2,, [19...Qg5]

A2.3) 19.Qc6 Rb6 20.Qc3 f6©

B) 11.Bg5 Qe8 12.c3 Rb8 transposes to 11.c3.

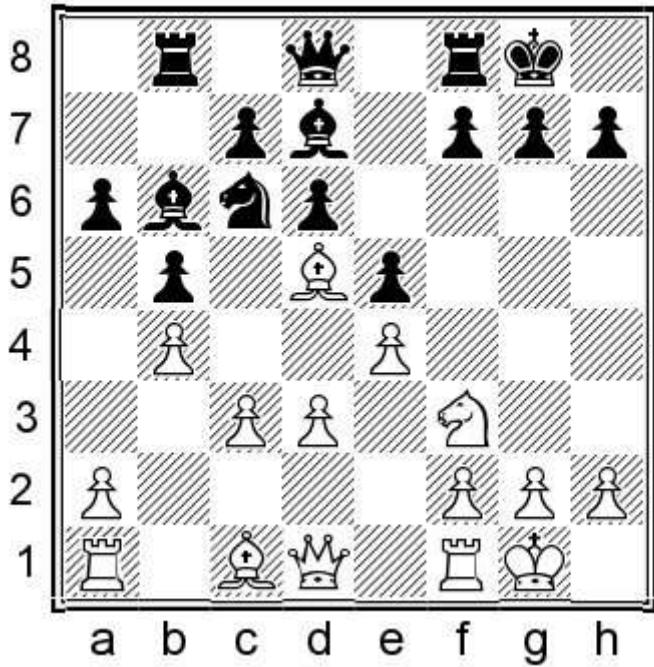
11...Rb8



Position after: 11...Rb8

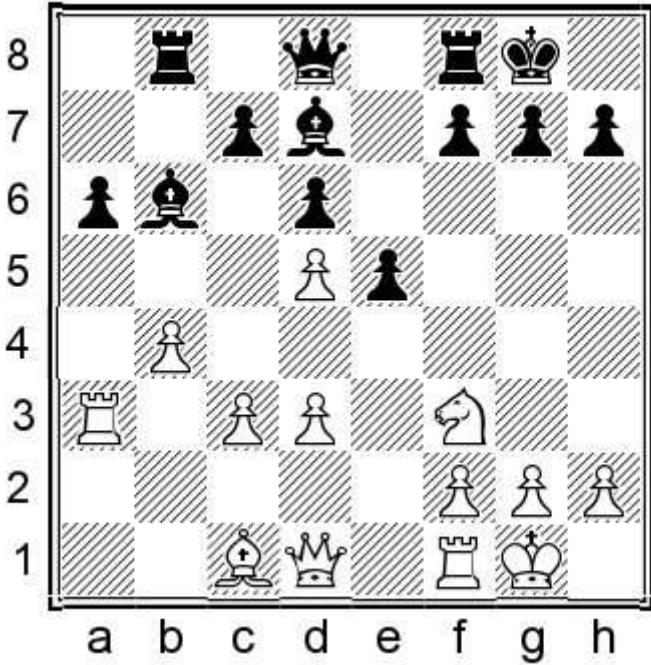
12.d4

A) 12.b4 Bb6



Position after: 12...Bb6

A1) 13.a4 was seen in Baklan, V (2587) – Durarbayli, V (2606) Tornelo INT 2021 where we should reply with the typical 13...bxa4! and White has to be careful. 14.Rxa4 Ne7 15.Ra3 [15.Rxa6 Nxd5 16.exd5 Bb5 17.Ra2 e4 is unpleasant.] 15...Nxd5 16.exd5

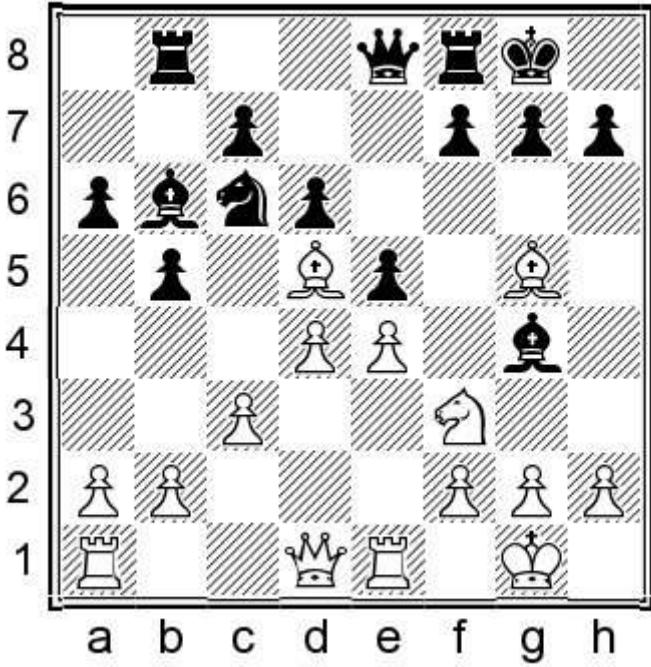


Position after: 16.exd5

16...c6 [Or 16...Bg4 17.Be3 f5,,] 17.dxc6 Bxc6 18.Be3 Bb7 19.Bxb6 Qxb6,,

A2) 13.Be3 Ne7 14.Bb3 Ng6 15.d4 a5 16.a3 h6 17.Qd3 Re8 and Black was doing well in Steinberg, N (2476) – Soffer, R (2488) Tiberias 2016.

B) 12.Bg5 Qe8 13.d4 [13.Qd2 Bb6 14.d4 Ne7 15.Bb3 Ng6=; 13.b4 didn't work well for White. 13...Bb6 14.a4?! bxa4! 15.Rxa4 Ne7! A recurring motif here. 16.Rxa6 Nxd5 17.exd5 Bb5 18.Ra2 e4 White was struggling in Steinberg, N (2542) – Wei, Y (2732) chess. com INT 2020.] 13...Bb6 14.Re1 Bg4 [14...exd4!?]



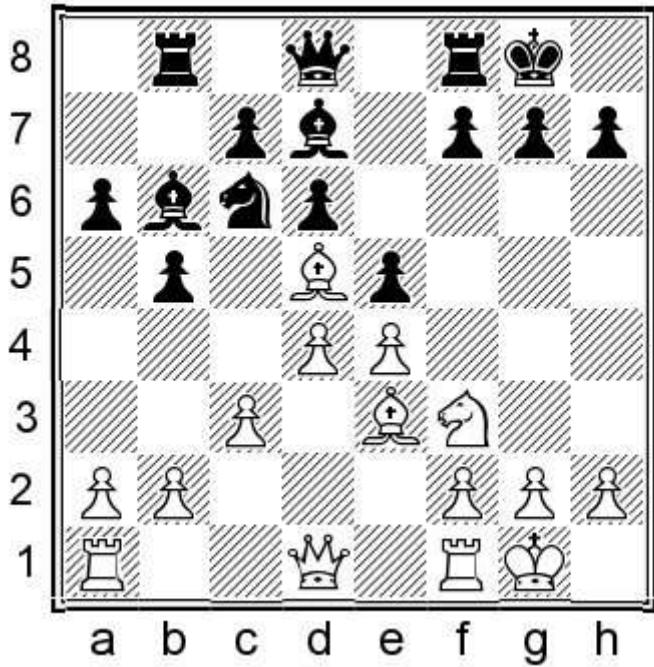
Position after: 14...Bg4

This works tactically.

B1) 15.h3 This is an aggressive option, and a good practical try. 15...Bxf3 16.Qxf3 exd4 17.Rad1 Optically, White has a lot of activity for a mere pawn, but it's hard to prove whether it's enough in reality. [17.Qg3 Kh8 18.Rad1 dxc3 19.Qxc3 Ne5³] 17...Ne5 18.Qg3 dxc3 19.Bf6 [19.Qxc3 Ng6] 19...Ng6 20.Bxc3 b4! 21.Bd2 Qe5³

B2) 15.Bxc6 Qxc6 16.Nxe5 [16.dxe5 Bxf3 17.Qxf3 dxe5=] 16...dxe5 17.Qxg4 exd4 18.cxd4 Qg6!= and Black is fine.

12...Bb6 13.Be3

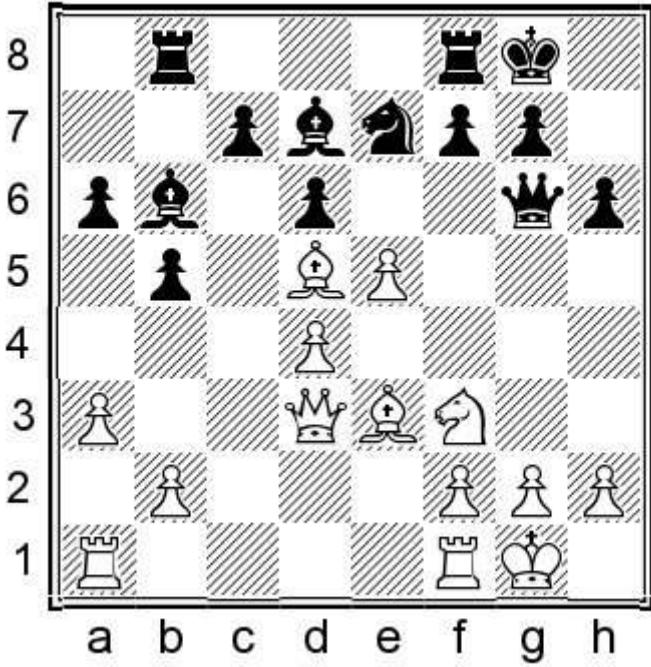


Position after: 13.Be3

A critical position for this line. I like how English GM Gawain Jones organized his forces.

13...Qf6 14.a4

A) 14.a3 h6 15.Qd3 exd4 16.cxd4 Ne7 17.e5 [17.Ba2?! Bg4 18.Nd2 c5³] 17...Qg6



Position after: 17...Qg6

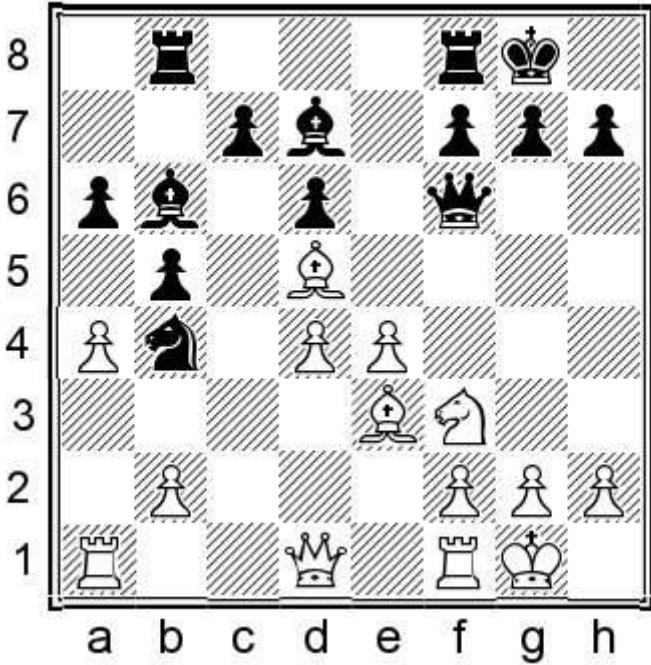
18.Qxg6 [18.Be4 Bf5 19.Nh4 Bxe4 20.Nxg6 Bxd3 21.Nxe7+ Kh7 can't be bad for us.] 18...Nxg6=

B) In case of 14.Re1 Black replies in a similar way to our main line: 14...exd4!? 15.cxd4 Nb4 16.e5 [16.Bb3 Bg4] 16...Qg6 17.Nh4 Qg4 18.Qxg4 Bxg4 19.Be4 dxe5 20.dxe5 Rfd8 and Black is very active!

14...exd4! 15.cxd4

15.Nxd4 Nxd4 16.a5! Nf3+ 17.Qxf3 Qxf3 18.gxf3 Bxe3 19.fxe3 This endgame is drawish, especially after Black brings his king to e7.

15...Nb4!



Position after: 15...Nb4!

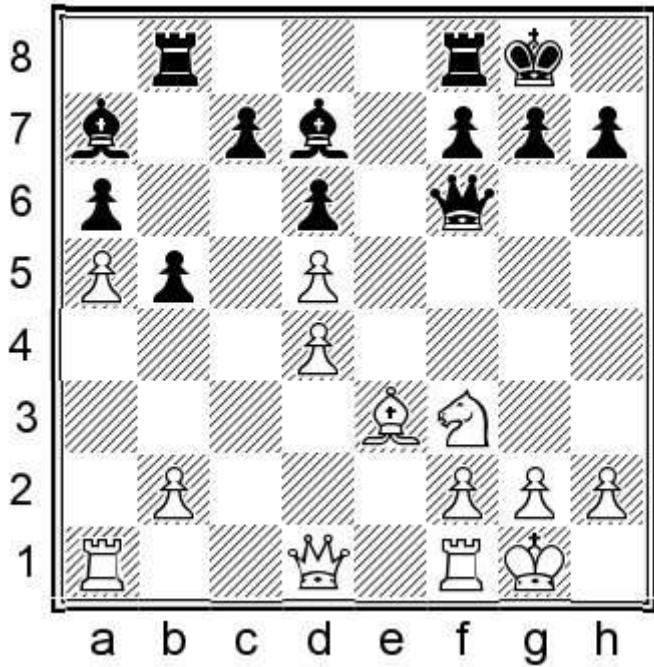
This concrete operation is the essence of Black's play.

16.a5

This would have been the safe choice.

16.Bb3 is already risky. 16...Bg4 17.a5 Ba7 White's center is under pressure now. 18.Rc1 [18.e5 dxe5! 19.dxe5 Bxf3 20.exf6 Bxd1 21.Raxd1 Bxe3 22.fxe3 c5 and Black has a comfortable endgame, to say the least.] 18...c5 19.dxc5 dxc5 20.Bxc5 [20.e5 Qg6 21.h3 Bxh3 22.Nh4 Qg4 23.Qxg4 Bxg4 24.Bxc5 Bxc5 25.Rxc5 Nd3 and Black was on top in Steinberg, N (2532) – Jones, G (2654) Minsk 2017.] 20...Bxc5 21.Rxc5 Rbd8=

16...Nxd5 17.exd5 Ba7



Position after: 17...Ba7

18.Ne5!

This secures equality.

If 18.Rc1 Rbc8.

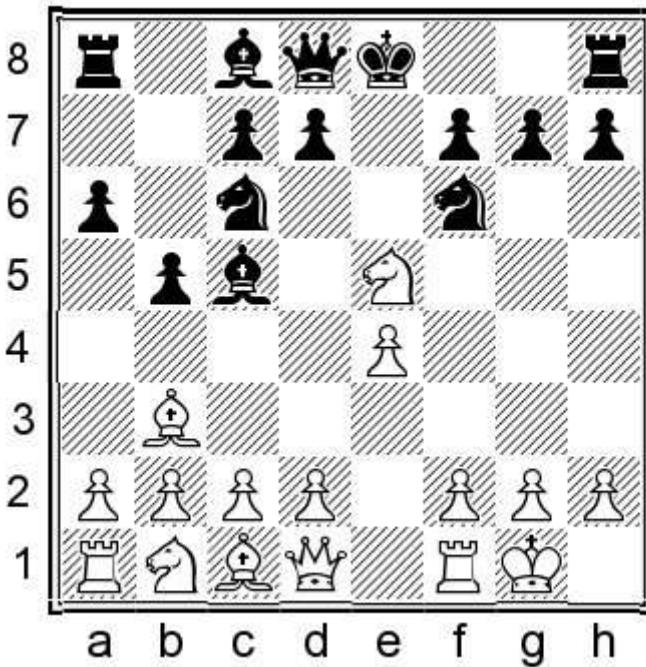
18...dxe5 19.dxe5 Qxe5 20.Bxa7 Rbd8=

And the position is balanced.

Chapter 6

The Pseudo-Sacrifice 7.Nxe5

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.Nxe5



Chapter Guide

Chapter 6 – The Pseudo-Sacrifice 7.Nxe5

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.Nxe5 Nxe5
8.d4 Bxd4 9.Qxd4 d6

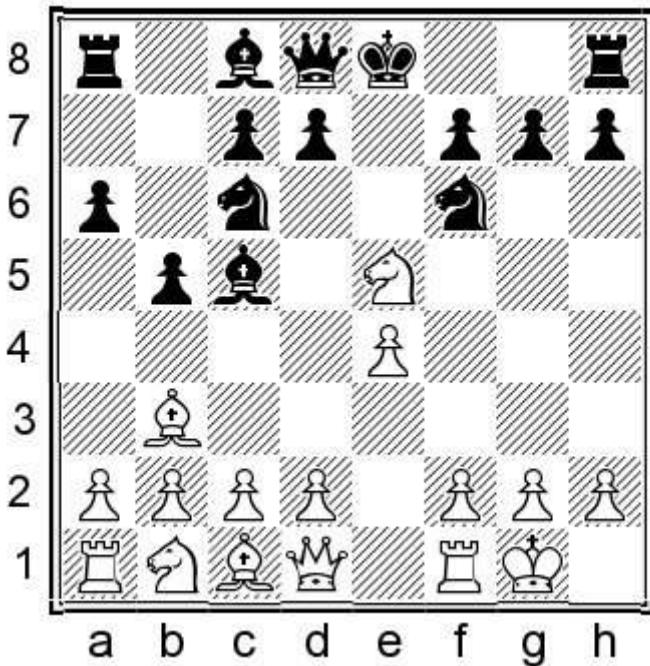
- a) 10.--
- b) 10.c3
- c) 10.f4 c5 11.Qc3
- d) 10.f4 c5 11.Qd1
- e) 10.f4 c5 11.Qd2

a) 10.--

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5

When facing the Ark for the first time one question might immediately pop up in an experienced player's mind: what happens in case of taking the central pawn with 7.Nxe5 and then forking the two pieces? A logical one, indeed, and a recurring theme in the 1.e4 e5 universe (sometimes with reversed colours too, for example the Vienna game: 1.e4 e5 2.Nc3 Nf6 3.Bc4 Nxe4). This idea and its refined version (7.a4 Rb8 8.Nxe5) has always been among White's most popular choices.

7.Nxe5

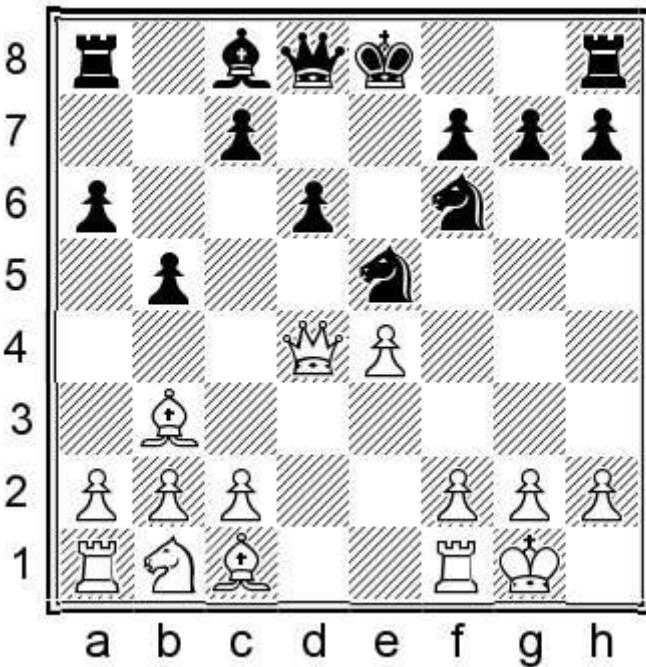


Position after: 7.Nxe5

7...Nxe5 8.d4 Bxd4 9.Qxd4

White has just gained the bishop pair and is planning to open the position further with f4-e5.

9...d6



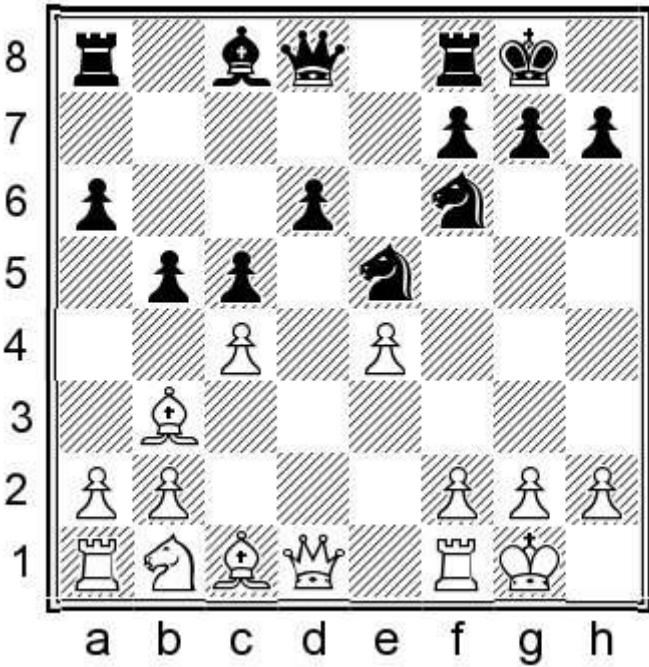
Position after: 9...d6

Black stabilizes the knight and is planning to attack the queen on d4 by playing ...c5, followed by ...c4 to trap the bishop. This is the one reason why most well-prepared players prefer to play this position with the inclusion of 7.a4 Rb8, which secures the a2-square for the bishop and enables White to choose from a wider range of options. In general, the principled lines (mostly starting with f4) tend to become very concrete and stormy.

10.Qd1

Prophylaxis against ...c5 but it doesn't look too impressive.

A) 10.c4?! Probably the only extra possibility in comparison with 7.a4 Rb8, albeit a poor one. 10...c5! The alternative 10...bxc4 is ok, but after 11.Ba4 White is alright. With the main move, Black is playing for the advantage already. 11.Qd1 0-0 [11...bxc4? is bad. 12.Ba4+! is an annoying little check.]



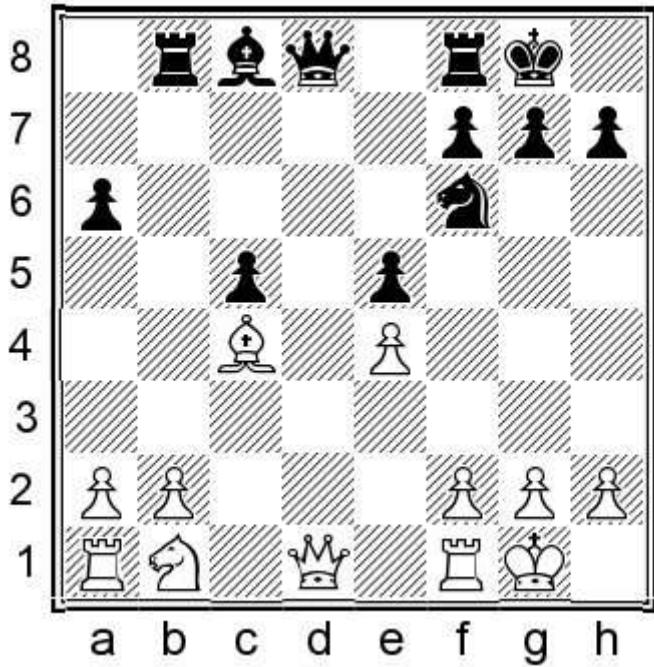
Position after: 11...0-0

A1) 12.cxb5?! Practice has almost exclusively seen this move. 12...axb5

A1.1) 13.Be3?! This is uninspired. 13...b4! Taking away the c3-square and threatening ...Ba6 next. A pretty depressing sight for White, e.g. 13...Bb7= happened in Madl, I (2380) – Skripchenko, A (2400) Kishinev 1998.

A1.2) 13.Bg5 c4 [13...Bb7 is a simpler course of action: 14.Nc3 c4 15.Bc2 b4 16.Nd5 Bxd5 17.exd5 h6.] 14.Bc2 b4 Ambitious: Black seizes a lot of space. 15.Nd2 In Kruppa, Y (2555) – Onischuk, A (2590)/Nikolaev 1995, Black continued with 15...Ba6 but he had better. Instead, 15...h6 16.Bh4 and here Black has 16...Be6 with an advantage, but even more interesting ideas like 16...Qb6!? work surprisingly well too.

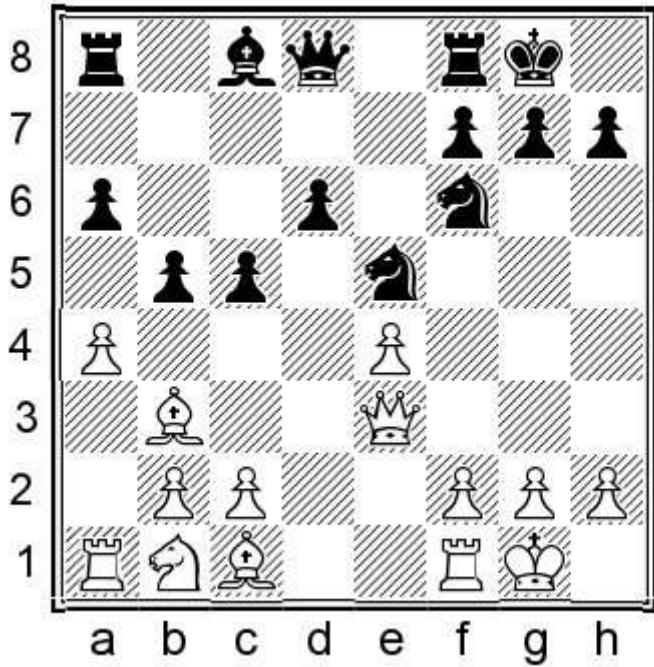
A2) 12.Bf4?! is maybe the best try for the equality. Black has many ways to continue: 12...bxc4 This is just some very simple chess. 12...Be6 or even 12...Nxe4 are tempting alternatives. 13.Bxe5 dxe5 14.Bxc4 Rb8



Position after: 14...Rb8

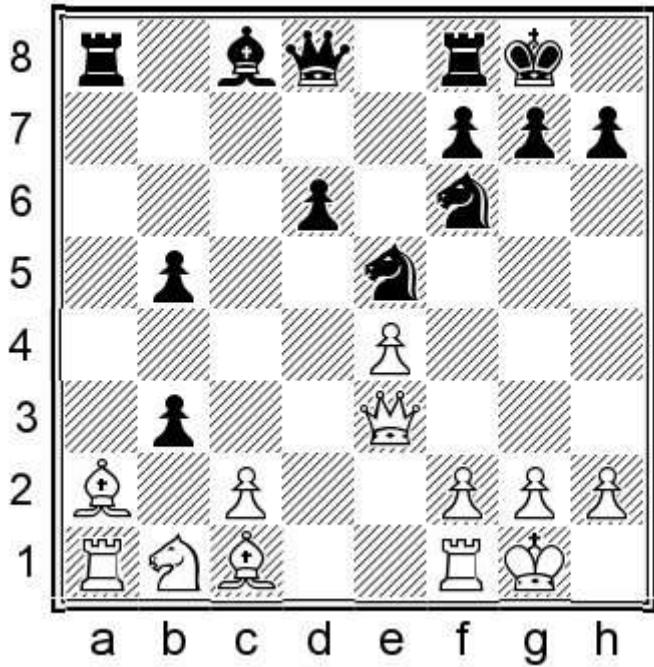
A double attack 15.b3 [15.Qc2 Qd4] 15...Nxe4 16.Re1 Bb7 17.Qxd8 Rbx d8 18.f3 Nd6 19.Bd3 Rfe8 20.Nc3 White is a pawn down but has enough compensation for survival according to the engines. Surprising, isn't it?

B) 10.a4?! Weirdly enough, played by many strong players. Black won't allow transposition this time, that's for sure! 10...c5! 11.Qe3 0-0



Position after: 11...0-0

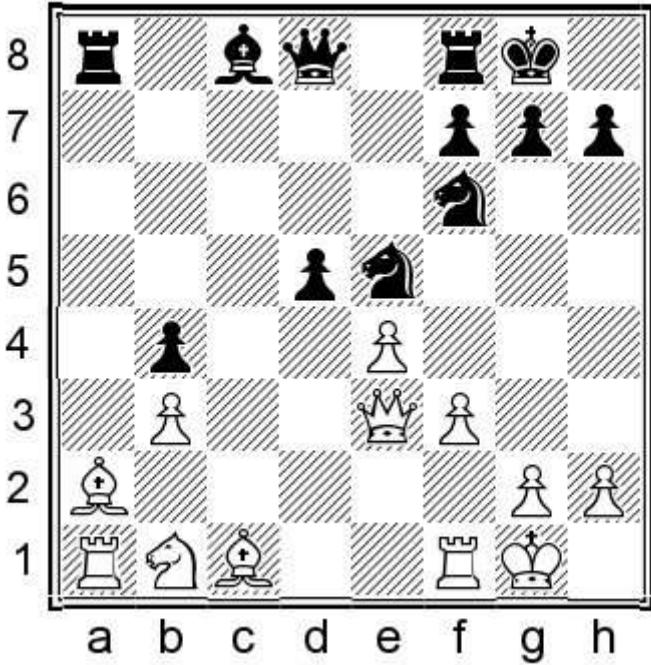
B1) 12.axb5? falls for our little trick. 12...c4! 13.Ba2 axb5 14.b3 as occurred in Dutreeuw, M (2410) – Motwani, P (2520)/Moscow 1994 and now 14...cxb3 would have been an easy solution.



Position after: 14...cxb3

B1.1) 15.Qxb3 drops a pawn to 15...Nxe4 and 16.Qd5?! makes things even worse: 16...Ra4! 17.Qxb5 [17.Bb2 Be6] 17...Nc5.

B1.2) 15.cxb3 b4! 16.f3 d5–+

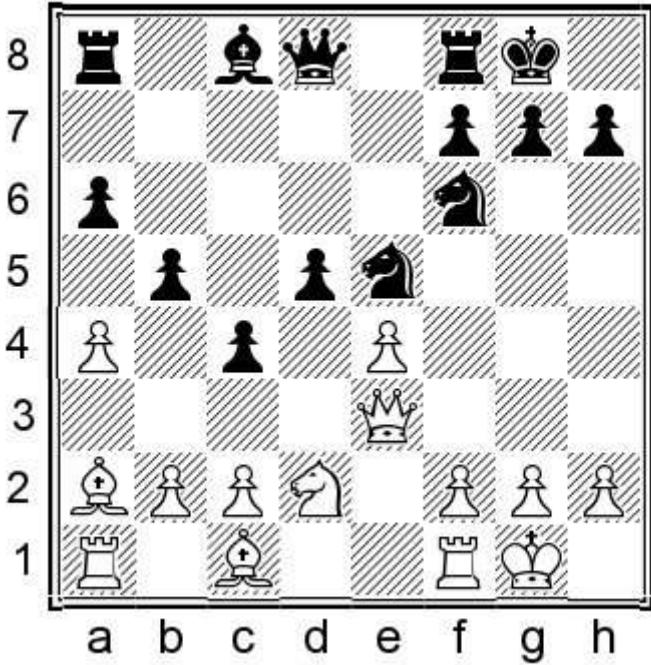


Position after: 16...d5-+

White is already lost. Look at that dumb a2-bishop! ☺

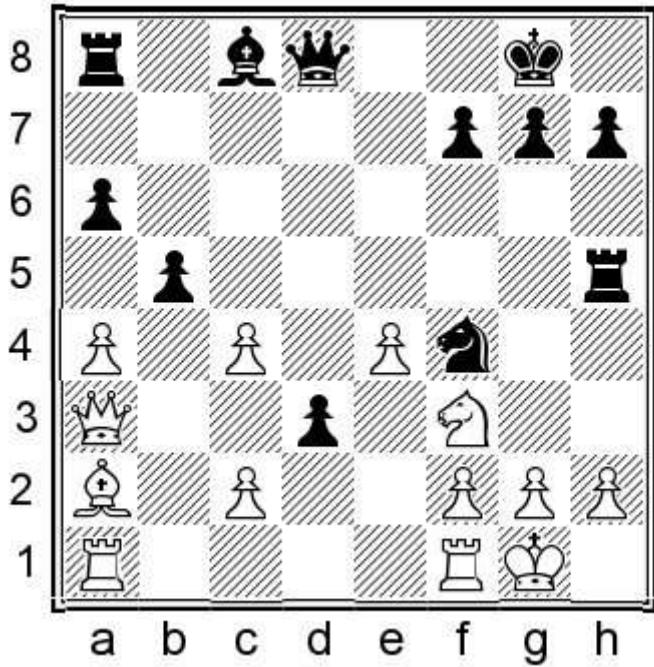
B2) 12.Nc3 can simply be met by 12...Bb7 as 13.axb5? fails to 13...axb5 14.Rxa8 Qxa8 ... 15.Nxb5 c4.

B3) 12.Nd2?! was played in Dvoiry, S (2562) – Fedorchuk, S (2408) St Petersburg 2000 but looks utterly strange here. Black has an obvious improvement over the game continuation: 12...c4 13.Ba2 d5



Position after: 13...d5

and now White is struggling to find a proper way to finish development. 14.b3 provokes some action, but not the kind that bothers us: 14...d4 15.Qg3 Re8 16.bxc4 Nh5! 17.Qa3 d3!? [Or 17...Nf4] and the attack looks dangerous, e.g. 18.Bb2 [18.cxd3? b4 19.Qxb4 Nf4] 18...Nf4 19.Bxe5 [19.Kh1] 19...Rxe5 20.Nf3 Rh5!

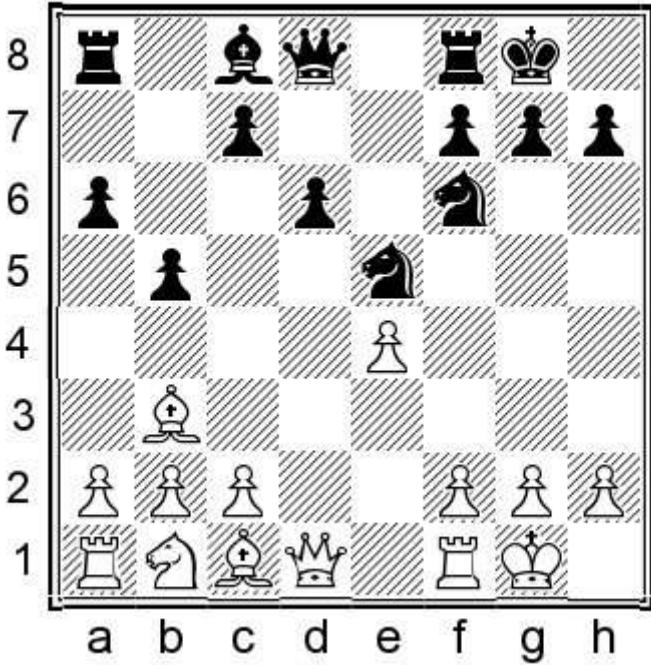


Position after: 20...Rh5!

21.Rad1 Bg4 22.Rxd3 Nxd3 23.Qxd3 bxa4—+

B4) 12.c3 Bb7 13.f3 [13.Nd2 Rc8!? avoiding the rook trade-off; 13.axb5?! Bxe4] 13...c4 14.Bc2 d5 15.exd5 [15.Qd4?! Nc6 16.Qc5 dxe4 17.fxe4 Nd7f and Black seized the initiative in Kazakos, E (2137) – Nabaty, T (2567) Kavala 2013.] 15...Re8 16.Qd4 Nxd5 17.axb5 axb5 18.Rxa8 Qxa8 19.Nd2 Nf6 20.Re1 Qa1!? [20...Qb8 is normal.] 21.Qf2 h6= The position is balanced.

10...0-0



Position after: 10...0-0

The simplest, just to avoid any kind of quick f4-e5 while our king is still in the middle.

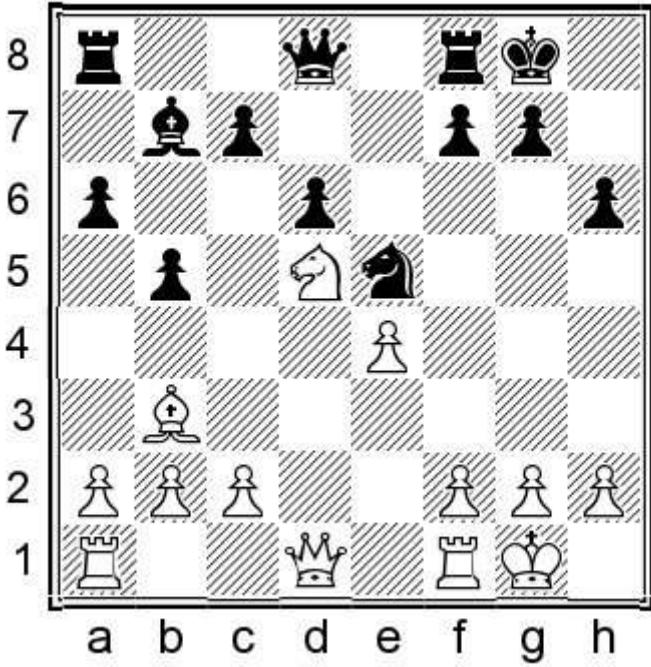
11.Bg5

Played by the English super-GM Adams, the strongest player to have ever reached this position. Black found an interesting setup, and White barely survived.

A) 11.Nc3 Bb7 [Or 11...c5 12.Bd5 Rb8] 12.Bg5 h6 13.Bxf6 Qxf6

A1) 14.f4 Nd7 15.Nd5 [15.e5 Qe7 16.exd6 Qe3+ 17.Kh1 Nf6! may soon prove to be unpleasant for White. 18.dxc7 Qc5³ Thanks to the horrible, weakening f4-move, Black can afford to play on with great confidence despite being a pawn down!] 15...Qd8 is the same.

A2) 14.Nd5 Qd8



Position after: 14...Qd8

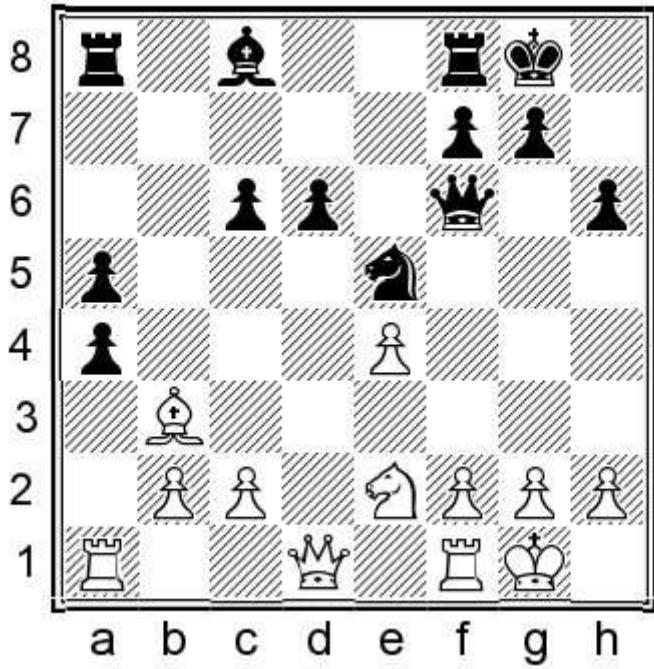
Here the position should be balanced after, say, 15.a4, but if White starts to play ambitiously he can find himself in trouble surprisingly easily. For example: 15.f4?! creates targets for Black. 15...Nd7 16.Qf3 [16.c4?! Re8f] and now Black missed a golden opportunity in Chomet, P (2400) – Slobodjan, R (2530) Cappelle-la – Grande 1998 to play the active 16...c5! 17.c3 c4! 18.Bc2 Bxd5 19.exd5 This structure is definitely better for Black, thanks to his more flexible minor piece and the weak d5-pawn. For example: 19...Qb6+ 20.Qf2 Rfe8f

B) 11.a4 Bb7 12.f3 c5 and here the best move is 13.c3 transposing into the 10.c3 line.

11...h6 12.Bxf6 Qxf6 13.Nc3 c6!?

13...Bb7 would be more typical and transposes to 11.Nc3.

14.Ne2 a5 15.a4 bxa4!?

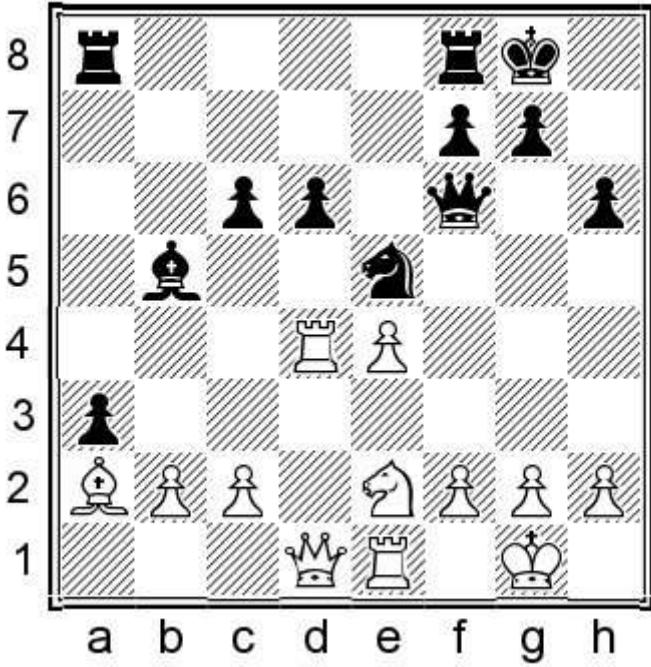


Position after: 15...bxa4!?

16.Rxa4 Ba6 17.Re1 Bb5 18.Rd4 a4! 19.Ba2

19.c4 is a bit weird, but objectively a better move.

19...a3!



Position after: 19...a3!

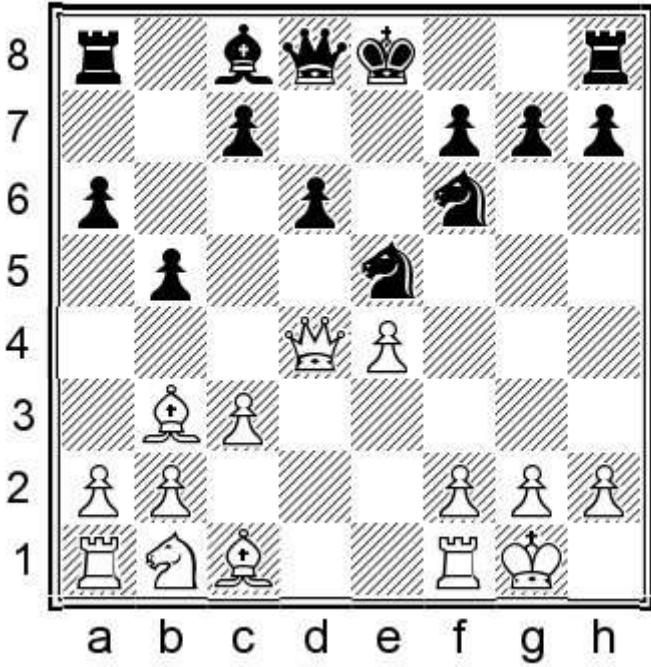
20.b4 Ng4 21.f3 Ne3 22.Qd2 Nxc2 23.Qxc2 Bxe2 24.Qd2 Bb5 25.Rxd6 Qb2

Black was in control in Adams, M (2640) – Tkachiev, V (2535)/ Wijk aan Zee 1995.

b) 10.c3

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.Nxe5 Nxe5 8.d4 Bxd4 9.Qxd4 d6 10.c3

This move doesn't contribute much to White's development.

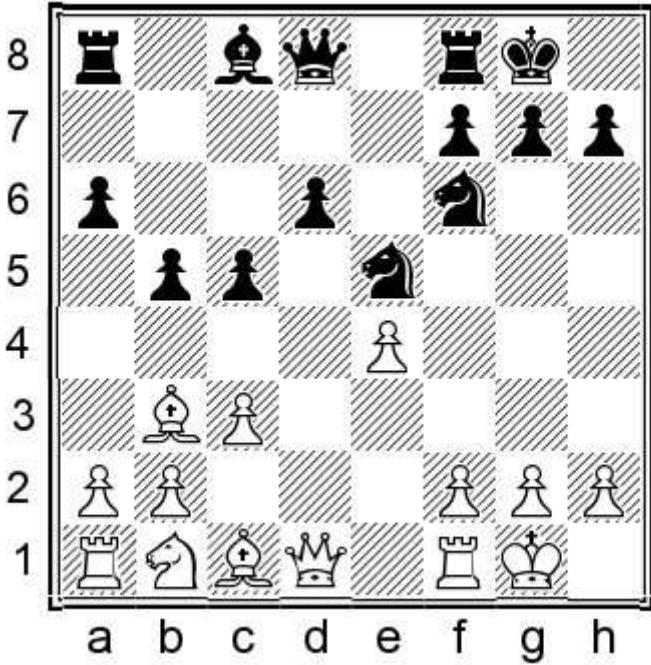


Position after: 10.c3

10...c5 11.Qd1

11.Qe3 0-0 12.Nd2 Re8 13.f3 Bb7 14.a4 c4 [14...Qc7 was played in Kholmov, R (2465) – Lomineishvili, M (2385)/Moscow 1997.] 15.Bc2 d5! looks very good for Black.

11...0-0

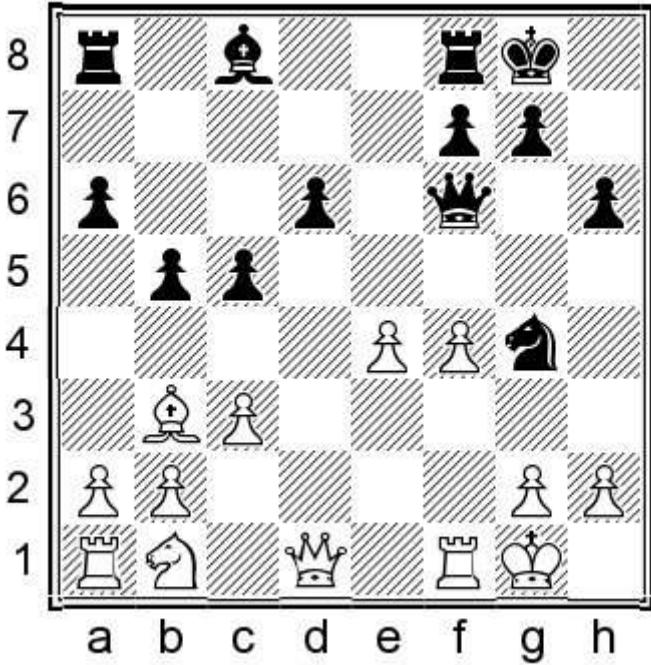


Position after: 11...0-0

12.a4

Probably the best option of all.

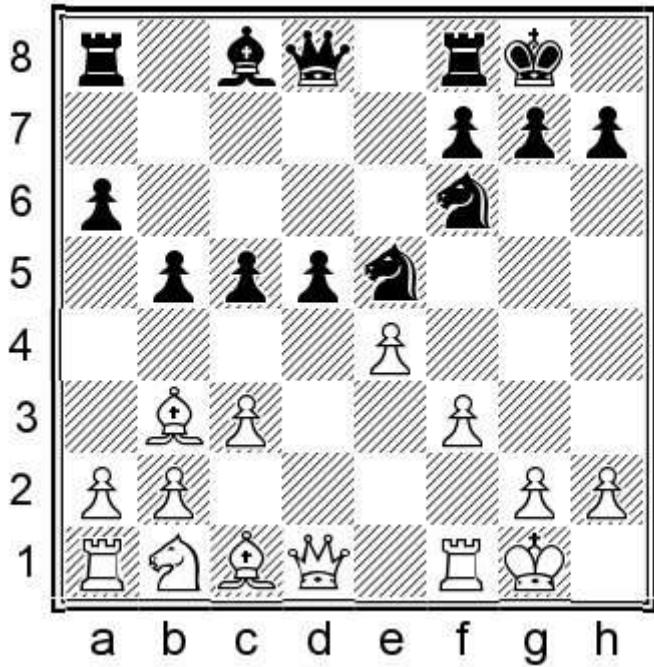
A) 12.Bg5 h6 13.Bxf6 [13.Bh4 Ng6 14.Bxf6 Qxf6 15.Nd2 Nf4f] 13...Qxf6 14.f4 [14.Bd5 Rb8 15.Na3 b4] 14...Ng4!?



Position after: 14...Ng4!?

A tricky jump. 15.Qe2 [15.Qf3?! c4 16.Bc2 d5! is very dangerous for White.] Here 15...Qe7 is a good move and in case of 15...c4 White has to find 16.Bxc4! [16.Bc2 d5 is again very strong.] 16...bxc4 17.h3! to stay in the game.

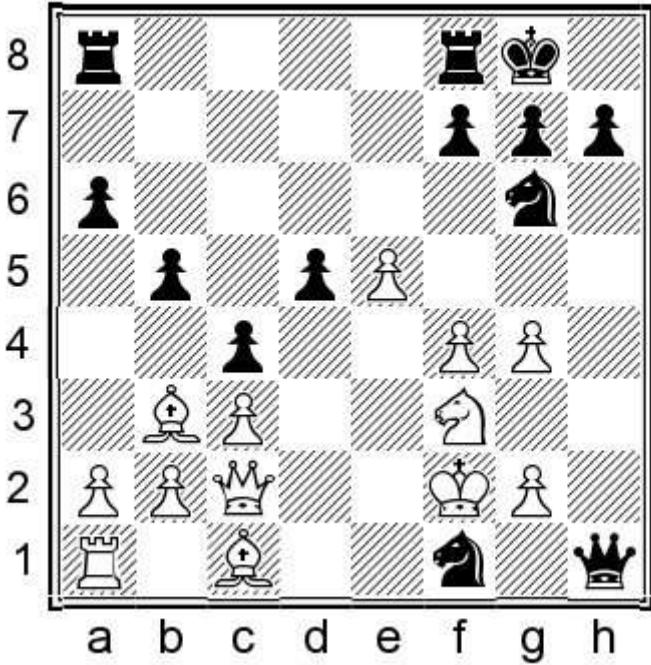
B) 12.f3 is a bit too passive already. Black has numerous possibilities, but I like the text most of all. 12...d5!?



Position after: 12...d5!?

B1) 13.f4? is bad on account of 13...Bg4

B1.1) 14.Qc2 is terrible in view of 14...Ng6 15.e5 [15.Bxd5 Nxd5 16.exd5 Re8! 17.Nd2 Qxd5+] 15...Ne4 16.h3 c4 17.hxg4 Qh4 18.Nd2 Ng3 19.Nf3 Qh1+ 20.Kf2 Nxf1

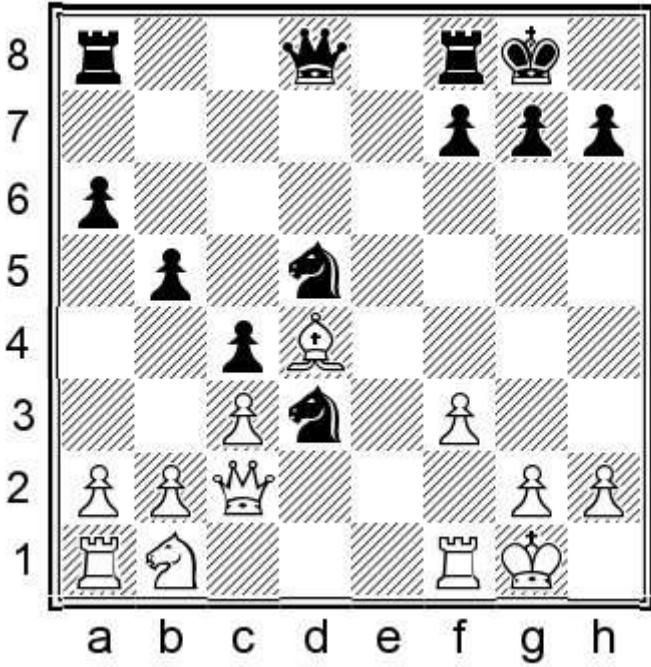


Position after: 20...Nxf1

21.Be3 [21.Qd1 cxb3--+] 21...Qxg2+! A cute finish. 22.Kxg2 Nxe3++ and Black wins.

B1.2) 14.Qd2 Nc4! 15.Bxc4 bxc4 16.e5 Ne4 17.Qe1 Bf5 looks very good for Black.

B2) 13.exd5? is also bad. 13...Bf5! I bet White was only counting on 13...c4. 14.Bc2 Bxc2 15.Qxc2 c4 16.Be3 Nxd5 17.Bd4 Nd3--

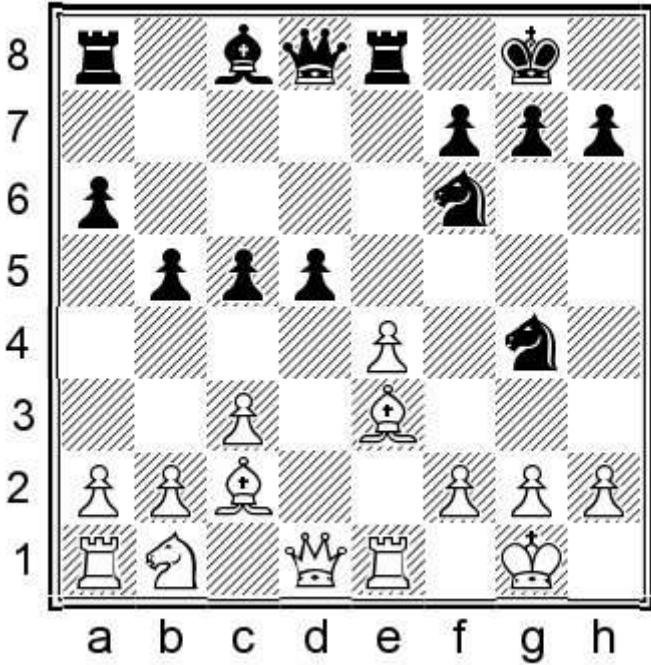


Position after: 17...Nd3–+

White was lost already in Bersamina, P (2417) – Gustafsson, J (2626) Bangkok 2017.

B3) 13.Bxd5TM Practically speaking, the only move. 13...Nxd5 14.Qxd5 [14.exd5? Bf5] 14...Qxd5 15.exd5 Bf5© or 15...Rd8 first. Black gets very nice play for the pawn, thanks to better development and the extremely weak d3-square.

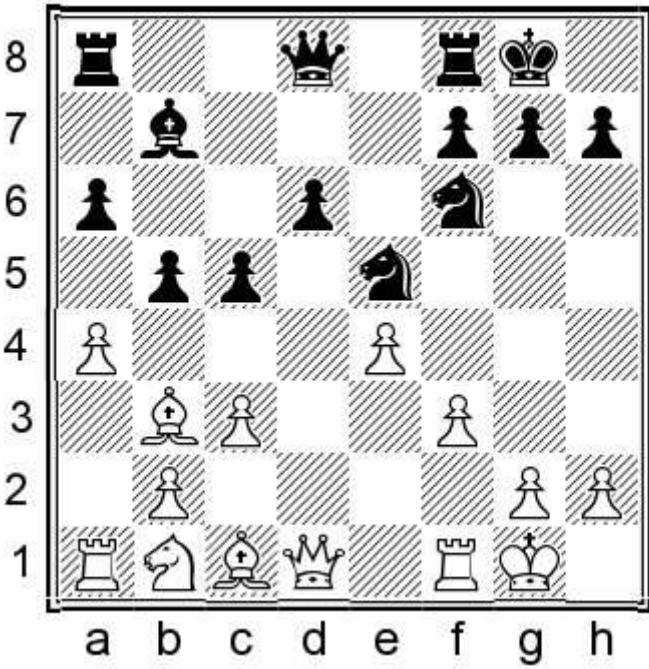
C) 12.Re1 Re8 13.Bc2 13...Bb7 is healthy too, but let's follow Shirov's game! 13...d5!? I am so fascinated by these central breaks. 14.Be3?! Naive. [14.exd5? Bg4 15.f3 Bxf3!] 14...Neg4!



Position after: 14...Neg4!

15.Bf4 [15.Bxc5? drops a piece to 15...Qc7.] 15...Nh5! These knight jumps are devastating; White has found himself in a lost position very quickly. 16.Qf3 dxе4 17.Bxе4 Ngf6! 18.Bg5 [18.Nd2 Bg4–+] 18...h6 [18...Qd6] 19.Bxf6? [19.Nd2 would have been more stubborn, e.g.] 19...Nxf6 20.Nd2 Qxd2 21.Re2 Qxe2 22.Qxe2 Rxе4 0-1 Plaskett, H (2485) – Shirov, A (2709) Birmingham 2006.

12...Bb7 13.f3



Position after: 13.f3

Here Black can continue calmly with...

13...Qb6

A) 13...Bc6 was De Firmian, N (2590) – Tkachiev, V (2575) Newark 1995.

B) Or push 13...c4 14.Bc2

B1) Or the more complicated 14...b4!? 15.cxb4 [15.Qd4 b3] 15...d5

B2) 14...d5=

14.axb5

White needs to exchange his passive rook.

A) 14.Be3 d5 15.exd5 Rad8f

B) 14.Bg5 d5! [14...c4+ 15.Qd4] 15.Bxf6 c4+ 16.Qd4 Qxf6 17.f4 cxb3

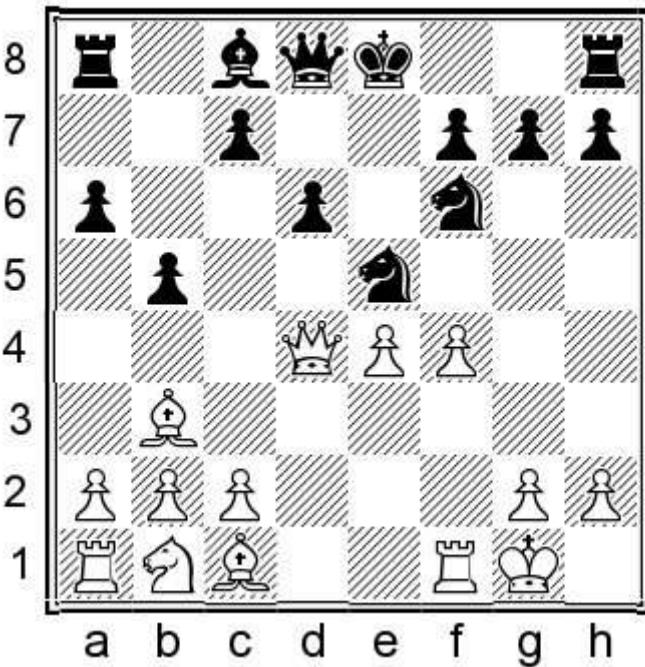
18.fxe5 Qe6³

14...axb5 15.Rxa8 Rxa8 16.Be3 h6

With equal chances.

c) 10.f4 c5 11.Qc3

**1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.Nxe5 Nxe5
8.d4 Bxd4 9.Qxd4 d6 10.f4**



Position after: 10.f4

In this move order this is the only serious move – the rest are mostly played to avoid theory. I've decided to give you some nice examples so as to give you a general feel of these types of positions. In practice that might come in handy, especially for shorter time-control games.

10...c5!

A difference in comparison with the main line (7.a4 Rb8) where I suggest

playing ...Nc6 in reply to f4: here I think this is the proper reaction. The Italian expert on the Ark, GM Michele Godena, has faced this line frequently and his preferred choice was 10...c5 in almost all cases – a fact that gives us some additional confidence.

11.Qc3

This has been the most popular move by far, but it's the least reliable.

11...Neg4 12.e5

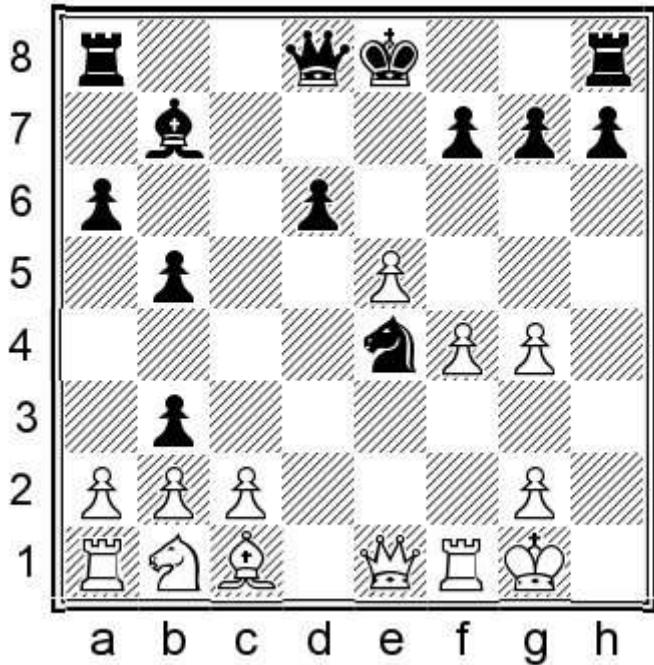
Now Black has two options. I've decided to put the simpler option as the main line, but I would encourage the reader to delve into the other one a bit as well.

12...Ne4

12...c4 is the more complex option, objectively leading to a draw, too. I will offer a line or two as examples: 13.exf6 0-0 14.Qd4 If White has just randomly found himself in this line, this is a totally understandable decision. 14...Qxf6 15.Qxf6 Nxf6 16.Nd2 cxb3 17.Nxb3 Bb7 18.Bd2 Rac8 19.c3 Rfe8= Black was comfortable in Tseitlin, M (2545) – Godena, M (2485)/Ischia 1996.

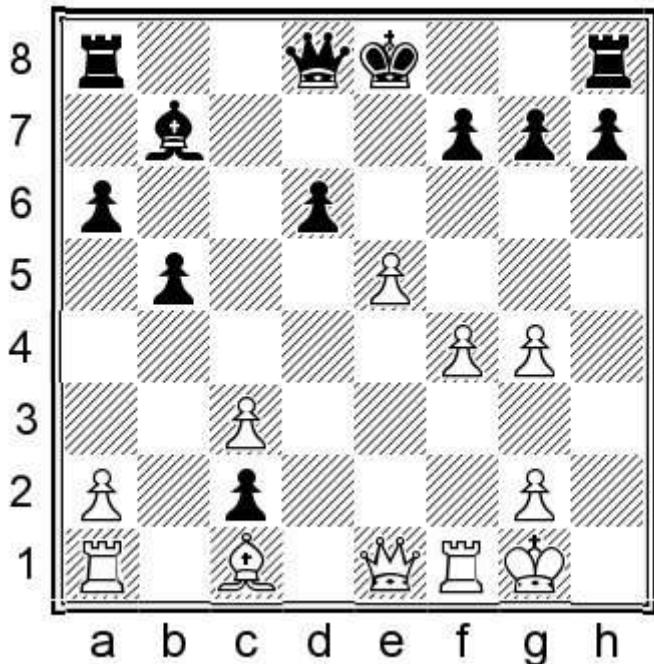
13.Qf3

13.Qe1 is the alternative, leading to a drawish-looking position. 13...Bb7 14.h3 c4 15.hxg4 cxb3



Position after: 15...cxb3

A) 16.Nc3 Nxc3 17.bxc3 bxc2!?



Position after: 17...bxc2!?

This is a bit crazy, but good nevertheless. [17...Qb6+ 18.Rf2 0-0 19.cxb3 dxe5 20.fxe5 Rfe8= is just simply ok.] 18.exd6+ Kd7∞

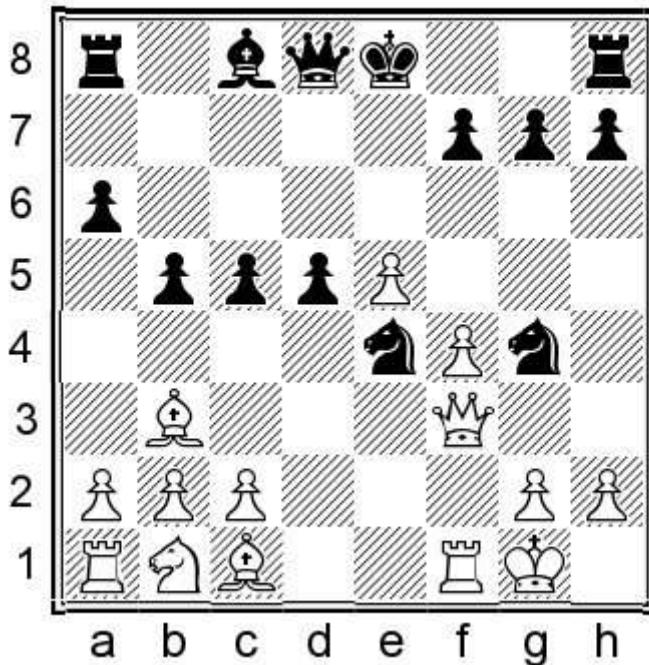
B) 16.Nd2 Nxd2 17.Bxd2 0-0=

C) 16.cxb3 dxe5 or 16...0-0 17.Nc3 Qb6+

C1) 18.Be3 Qg6 19.Nxe4 Qxe4 20.Qg3 [20.Qf2 0-0 21.Rae1 Rac8=] 20...0-0 21.fxe5 Rad8©

C2) 18.Qe3 Qxe3+ 19.Bxe3 Nxc3 20.bxc3 Rc8= is just equal.

13...d5



Position after: 13...d5

14.c4!

A spectacular way to stop Black from playing ...c4 himself.

14.h3 is not so good. 14...c4 15.hxg4 h5! 16.g5 [16.gxh5? is bad, of course due to 16...Qh4–+] 16...Bg4 17.Qe3 h4f Securing the g3-square for the knight and ...h3 can also be a threat. Black has a nice initiative.

14...Nxh2!

This is probably necessary, forcing the next couple of moves.

14...bxc4? 15.Ba4+ Kf8 16.Bc6± happened in Sion Castro, M (2390) – Adams, M (2655) Leon 1995, where Black eventually won, but objectively this was wrong. [16.h3!?±]

15.Kxh2 Qh4+ 16.Kg1 Bg4 17.Qe3 Ng3 18.Re1 Nf5

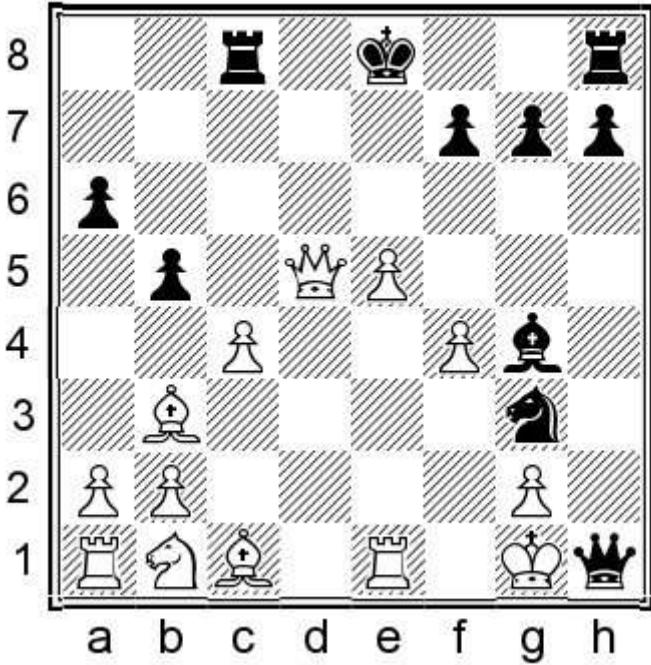
18...d4?! 19.Qd3 Bf5 20.Qf3 0-0 21.Nd2 is not good.

19.Qf2 Ng3 20.Qxc5

White can push, but is playing with fire.

20.Qe3 Nf5= is a repetition.

20...Rc8 21.Qxd5 Qh1+



Position after: 21...Qh1+

Black can continue with the sharp 21...0-0-0!?

22.Kf2 Qh4 23.Re3

23.Kg1 Qh1+=

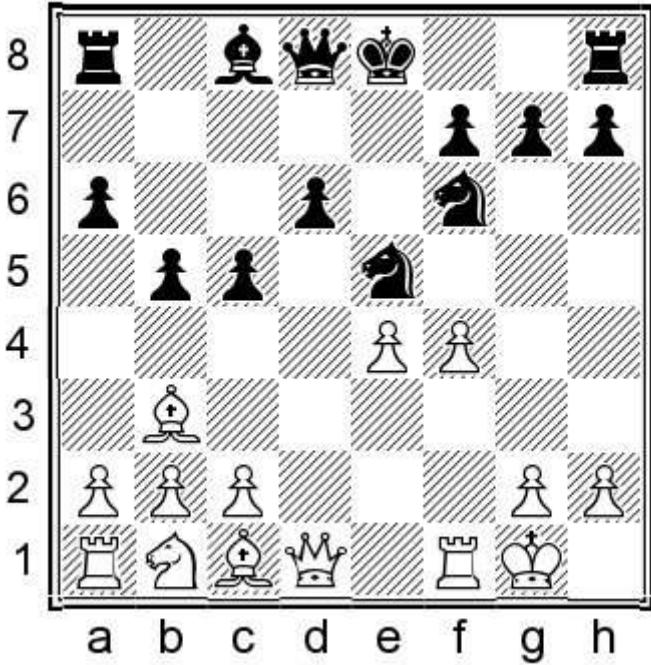
23...Ne4+ 24.Kg1

and Black has no more than a draw.

24...Qf2+ 25.Kh2 Qxf4+ 26.Kg1 Qf2+=

d) 10.f4 c5 11.Qd1

**1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.Nxe5 Nxe5
8.d4 Bxd4 9.Qxd4 d6 10.f4 c5 11.Qd1**



Position after: 11.Qd1

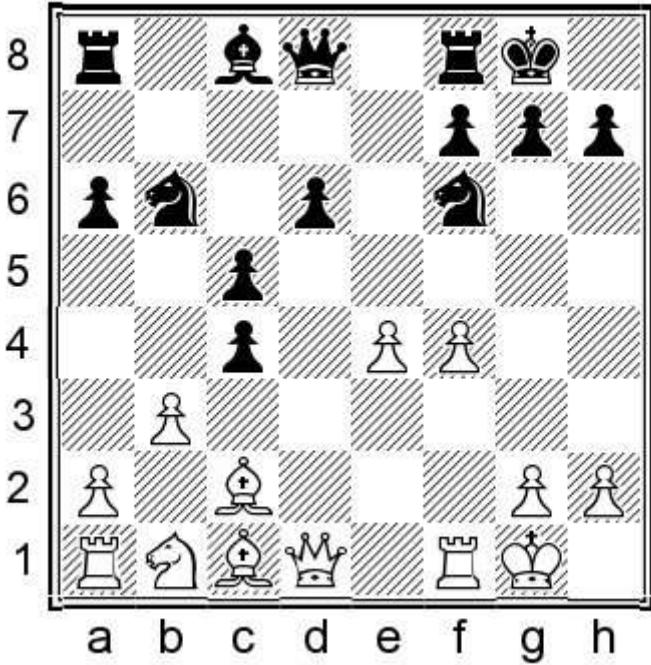
11...Ned7!

As far as I can tell you, this is the best reaction to both queen retreats.

12.Bd5

A) 12.e5 dxe5 13.fxe5 Nxe5 can be found at 11.Qd2.

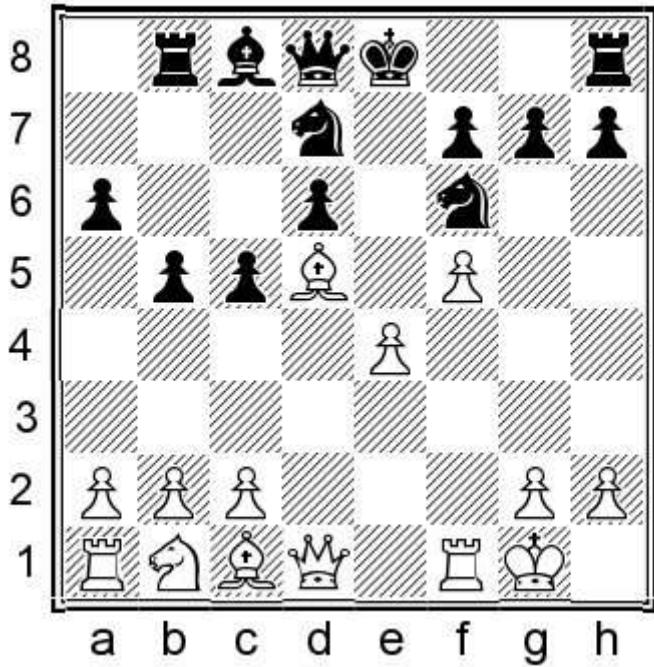
B) 12.c4!? This idea is also important after 11.Qd2. 12...0-0 13.Bc2! [13.cxb5? axb5 14.Qxd6 Nxe4 15.Qd5 Ndf6 16.Qxd8 Rxd8 17.Bd1 b4 18.Bf3 Bg4–+ 0-1 (35) Winsnes, R (2364) – Antonsen, M (2409) Lund 2021.] 13...Nb6 14.b3!? White sacrifices a pawn in order to develop his dark-squared bishop to the long diagonal. 14...bxc4



Position after: 14...bxc4

15.bxc4!? [15.Nd2 Bg4 16.Qe1 c3 17.Nb1 d5 18.e5 d4! Black gets nice counterplay; 15.Nc3 cxb3 16.axb3 Bb7 17.Bb2 Re8 18.Re1© Chances are equal, thanks to the potentially-dangerous bishop pair.] 15...Be6 16.Nc3 Bxc4 17.Rf3 This position is very complex, but I don't think we should shy away from entering the complications. 17...d5!? is a typical direct approach in Ark style. [17...Re8∞] 18.e5 Ne4∞ and Black gets counterplay.

12...Rb8 13.f5!



Position after: 13.f5!

An independent idea.

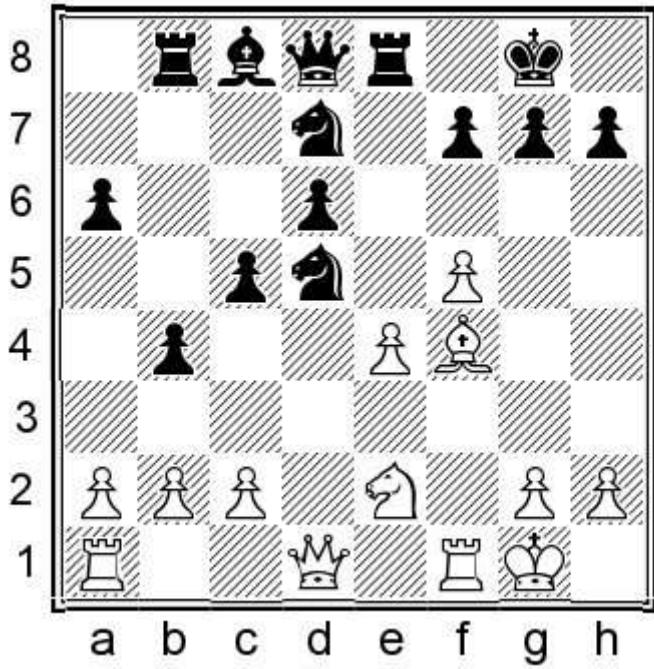
13...0-0

13...Nxd5 is also an option but I would rather avoid 14.Qxd5 Nf6 15.Qd3 0-0 16.Bg5 This pin is never pleasant.

14.Bf4 Re8 15.Bxd6

This leads to some simplifications.

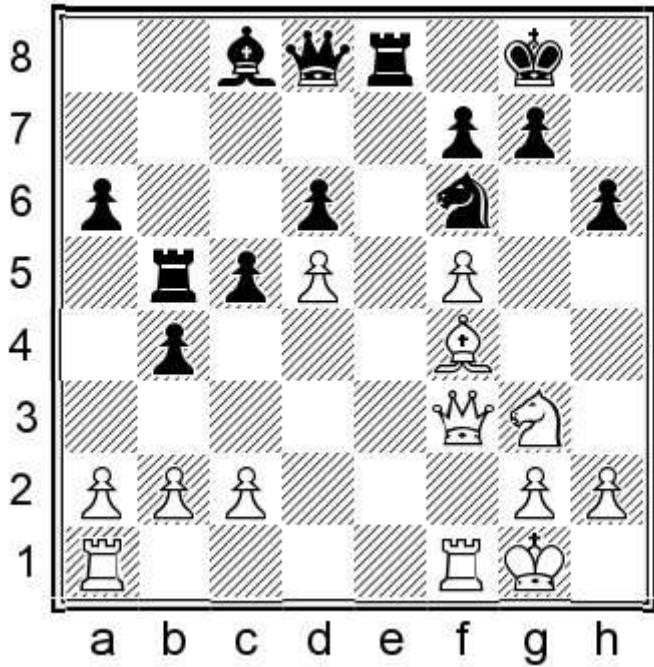
15.Nc3 b4 16.Ne2 Nxd5



Position after: 16...Nxd5

A) 17.exd5 Nf6 18.Ng3 [Black doesn't need to fear 18.Bg5? this time, as 18...h6 19.Bh4 Re4 works well.] 18...h6 Black is solid and can dream about getting advantage, e.g.

A1) 19.Qf3 Rb5!?

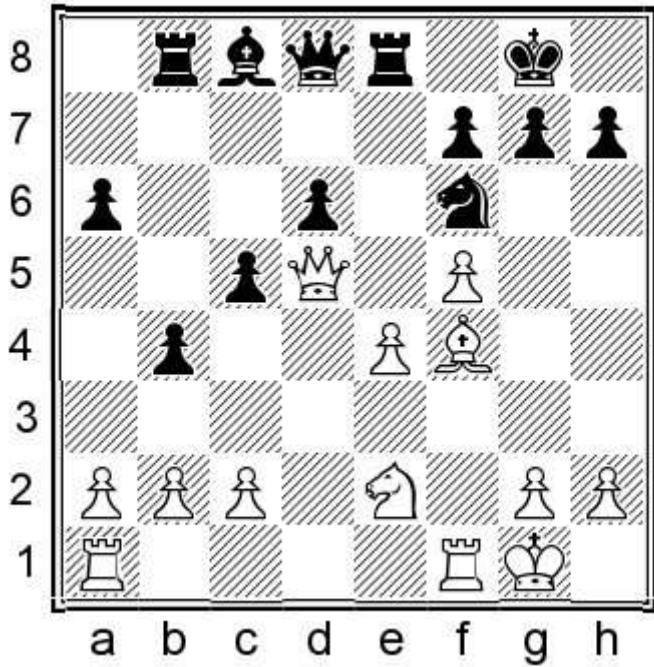


Position after: 19...Rb5!?

20.Rae1 [20.b3 c4! 21.bxc4 Rc5] 20...Rxe1 21.Rxe1 c4

A2) 19.Qd2 Kh7 20.Rfe1 Rxe1+ 21.Rxe1 Bb7 22.Ne4 Nxe4 23.Rxe4 Qf6³

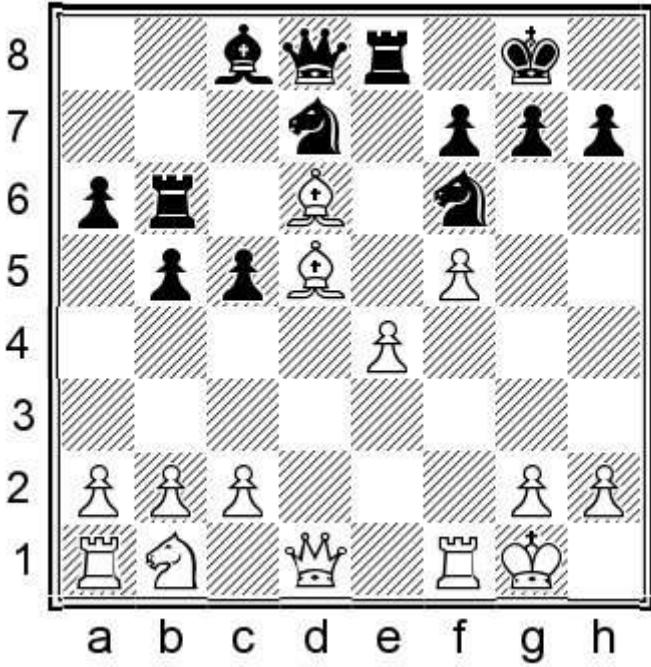
B) 17.Qxd5 Nf6



Position after: 17...Nf6

Black gives up two pawns, but gains a lot of activity for them. 18.Qxd6 Qxd6 19.Bxd6 Rb6! 20.Bxc5 Rc6 21.Be3 [21.Bxb4?? drops a piece. 21...Rxe4+] 21...Rxc2 22.Nd4 Rc5 23.Rac1 Rce5= Black wins back the second pawn, and maintains the balance.

15...Rb6



Position after: 15...Rb6

16.Bf4

A) 16.Bg3 Nxe4 17.Bxe4 Rxe4 18.Nd2 [18.Nc3 Rd4 19.Qe1 Bb7=] 18...Rd4 19.Qe2 Nf6 20.Nb3 Rd5 21.Rad1 h6 22.Nxc5 Bxf5=

B) 16.Ba8 is also equal, but I wonder who would ever seriously consider it.

16...Nxd5 17.exd5

17.Qxd5 Bb7

17...Ne5

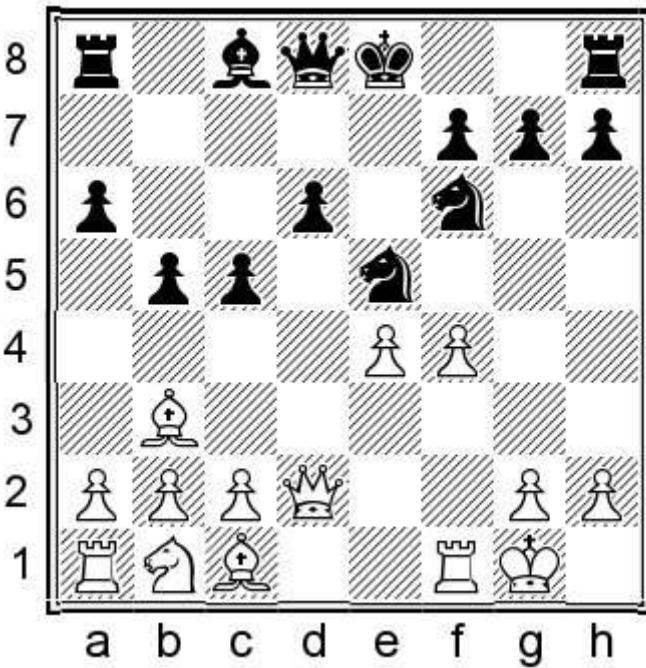
17...Nf6 18.d6

18.Re1 f6=

The position is roughly equal.

e) 10.f4 c5 11.Qd2

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.Nxe5 Nxe5
8.d4 Bxd4 9.Qxd4 d6 10.f4 c5! 11.Qd2!?

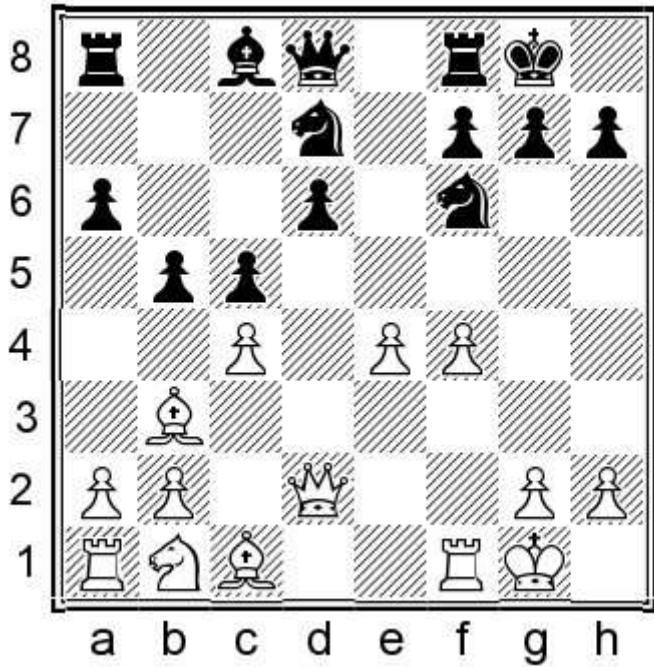


Position after: 11.Qd2!?

11...Ned7! 12.e5

A straightforward line. Black is advised to be well-aware of what he's doing now. It can arise via 11.Qd1 Ned7 12.e5 too.

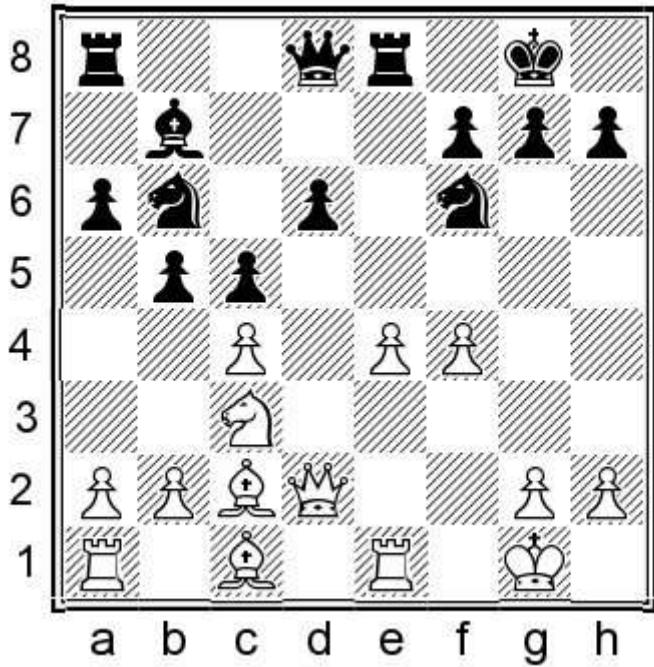
12.c4!? is the other important line. 12...0-0



Position after: 12...0-0

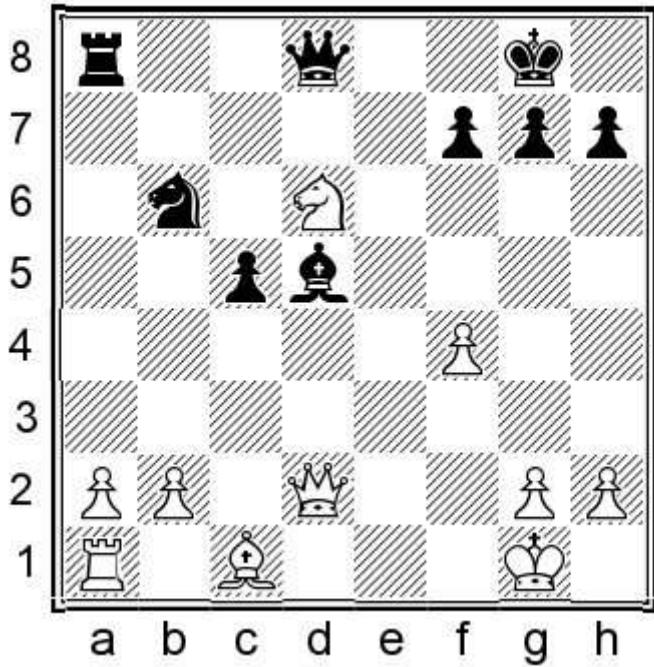
A) 13.Re1 Re8 14.Bc2 [14.Nc3 b4!] 14...Bb7 15.Nc3 Nb6 transposes to 13.Bc2.

B) 13.Bc2 Bb7 14.Nc3 Re8 15.Re1 Nb6



Position after: 15...Nb6

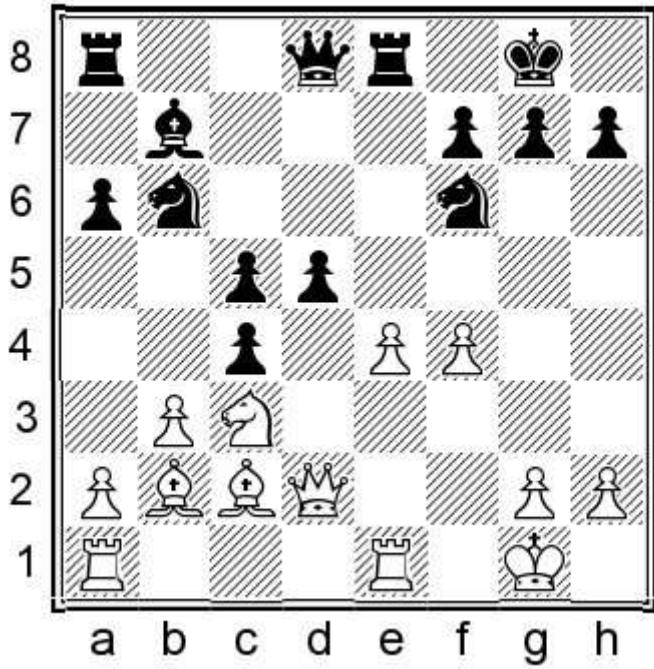
B1) White can try to win material with 16.cxb5 axb5 17.Nxb5 Nxe4 18.Bxe4 Rxe4 19.Rxe4 Bxe4 20.Nxd6 but may end up facing problems in the near future, thanks to his weaker king and lesser piece coordination. [20.Qxd6? Qh4–+] 20...Bd5



Position after: 20...Bd5

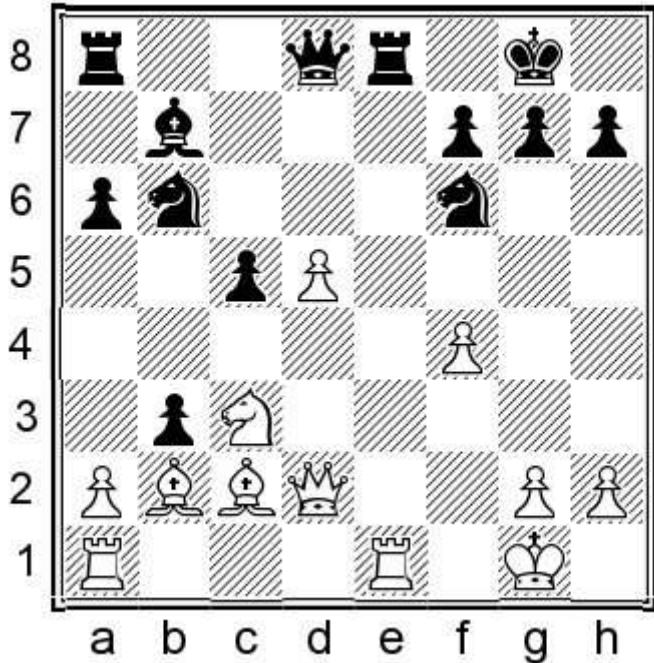
21.Nb5 Qf6 22.Nc3 [22.Nc7 Rd8 23.Nxd5 Nxd5©] 22...Bc6 23.Qf2 Nc4 24.Qxc5 Qg6 25.Qf2 Re8 Threatening ...Re1 and mate. 26.Bd2 Nxb2 27.f5 Qd6© and Black's compensation is significant.

B2) 16.b3! This type of pawn sacrifice requires a lot of understanding.
16...bxc4 17.Bb2 d5



Position after: 17...d5

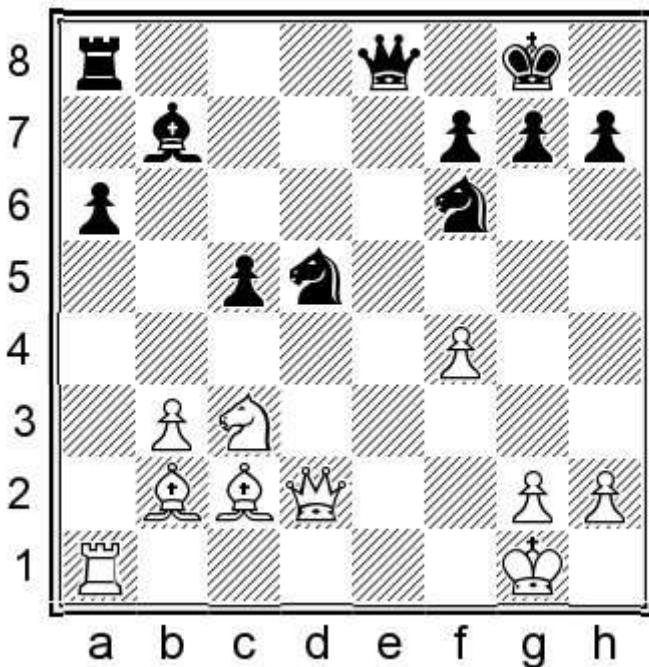
I would rather clarify the situation sooner than later. [17...Qc7 18.Rad1 Rad8 19.Qf2 cxb3 20.axb3 Nbd7 21.h3©] 18.exd5 cxb3



Position after: 18...cxb3

B2.1) 19.Rxe8+ Qxe8 20.Re1 [20.axb3 Nbxd5 transposes to 19.axb3.] 20...Qd7 21.axb3 Re8!? 22.Rxe8+ Qxe8 23.d6 c4=

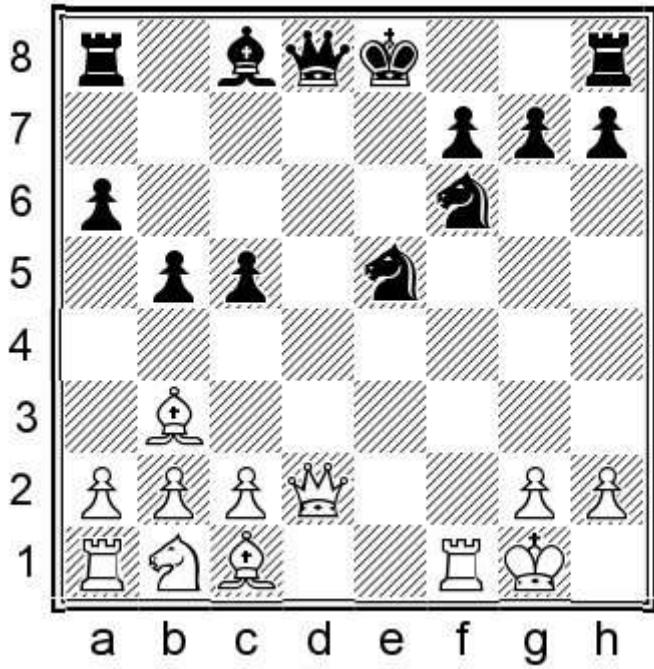
B2.2) 19.axb3 Nbxd5 20.Rxe8+ Qxe8



Position after: 20...Qxe8

21.Re1 Qc6 [21...Qd8!?] 22.Nxd5 Qxd5 23.Qe2 White has compensation, but it's only enough for an equal game, e.g. 23...h6 24.h3 [24.Bxf6 gxf6 25.Qg4+ Kh8 26.Rd1 Rg8 27.Rxd5 Rxg4 28.Rd8+ Rg8] 24...Qc6 with the idea 25...Re8 25.Bxf6 gxf6 26.Qg4+ Kh8 27.Re2 [27.Be4 Qe8 28.Qf5 Bxe4 29.Rxe4 Qc6 30.Kh2 Rg8=] 27...Rg8 28.Qh5 Rxg2+ 29.Kf1 Kg7!? 30.Be4 Qxe4 31.Rxe4 Bxe4= This endgame is a draw.

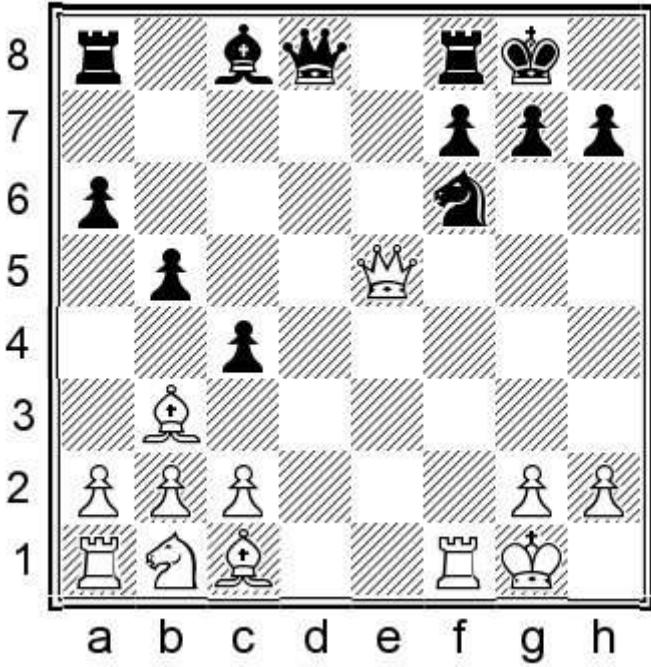
12...dxe5 13.fxe5 Nxe5



Position after: 13...Nxe5

14.Re1

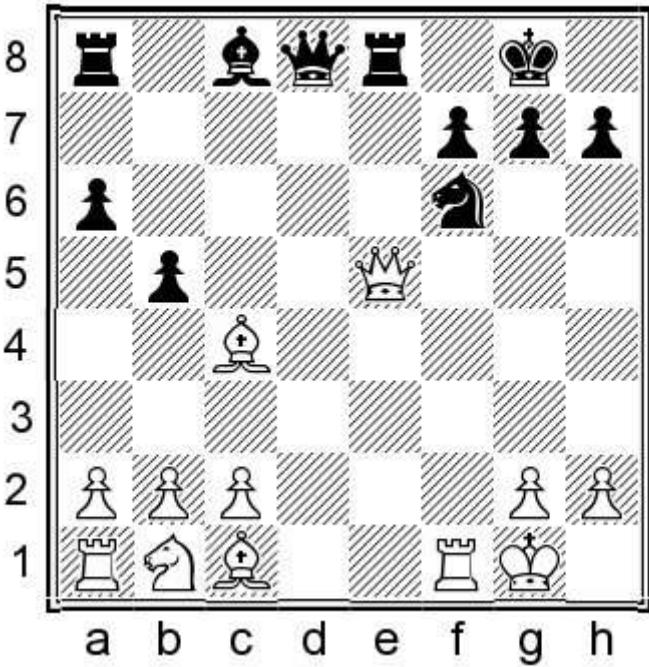
14.Qg5!? All other queen moves are answered the same way. 14...0-0!
15.Qxe5 c4



Position after: 15...c4

A) 16.Bg5 is hardly a problem: 16...cx_b3 17.ax_b3 Qb6+ [Or 17...Ng4 18.Bxd8 Nxe5 19.Bc7=] 18.Qe3=

B) Black wins back the piece, of course. 16.Bxc4 Re8! The alternative 16...bxc4 is perfectly playable, but I really like the text.



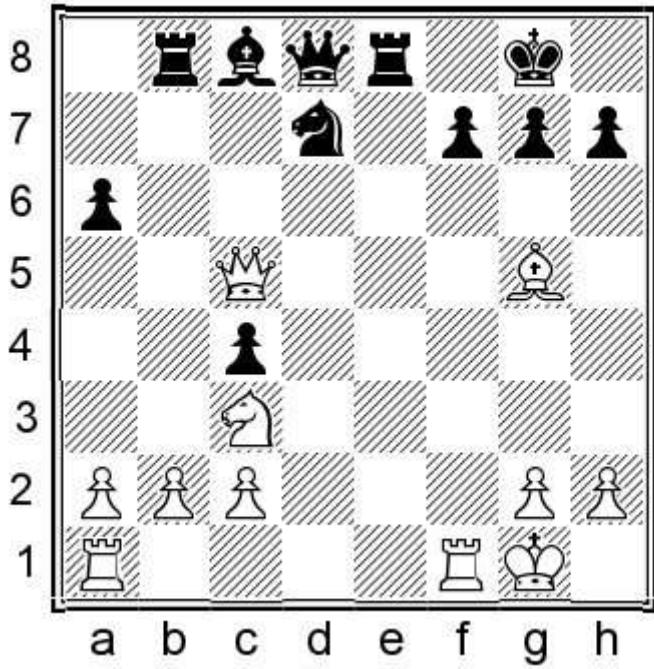
Position after: 16...Re8!

B1) 17.Bxf7+?! is tempting, but White loses some time and has more problems to solve. 17...Kxf7

B1.1) 18.Qf4 Qb6+ 19.Qf2 [19.Kh1? Bb7+–] 19...Qxf2+ 20.Rxf2 Re1+ 21.Rf1 Rxf1+ 22.Kxf1 Bf5 Black wins the pawn back, or else White allows: 23.c3 Bd3+ 24.Kg1 Re8©

B1.2) 18.Qg3 Bb7 19.Nc3 [19.Bg5? loses to 19...Re2 20.Rf2 Re1+ 21.Rf1 Rxf1+ 22.Kxf1 Qd1+ 23.Qe1 Bxg2+–+] 19...b4 Black gets some activity. That's why it's wise to enter complications with 20.Bh6! gxh6 [20...Qb6+ 21.Rf2 gxh6 22.Na4©] 21.Rxf6+ Qxf6 22.Rf1 Qxf1+ 23.Kxf1 bxc3 24.Qf2+= and Black can't escape the checks.

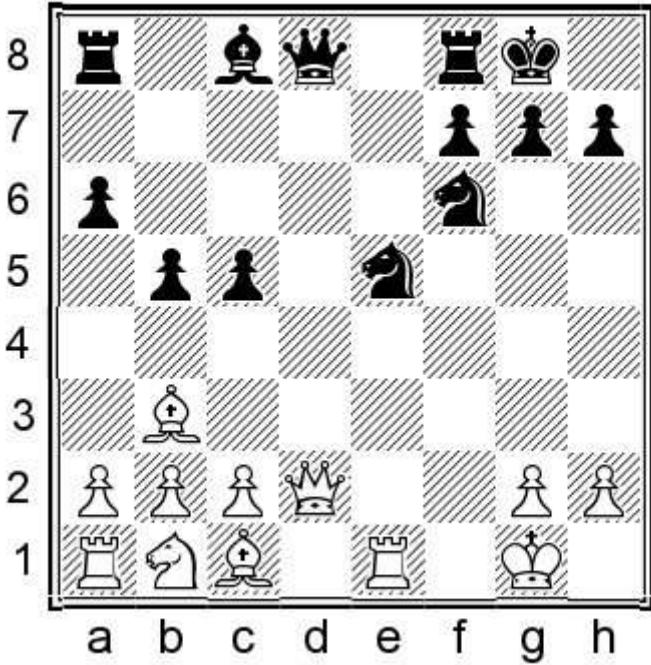
B2) 17.Qc5 bxc4 18.Nc3 [18.Bg5 Qd5!; 18.Qxc4? Bb7 19.Nc3 Rc8 20.Qb4 Rxc3 21.Qxb7 Rxc2 22.Bg5 Ree2 23.Bxf6? Qb6+! is a very cute line.] 18...Rb8 [18...Bb7 19.Bg5 Nd7! is ok too.] 19.Bg5 Nd7!



Position after: 19...Nd7!

20.Qxc4 [20.Qf2 f6] 20...Ne5 21.Bxd8 [21.Qh4 f6 22.Bc1 Bb7©] 21...Nxc4 22.b3 Rxd8 23.bxc4 Be6 24.Nd5= This endgame has drawish tendencies.

14...0-0



Position after: 14...0-0

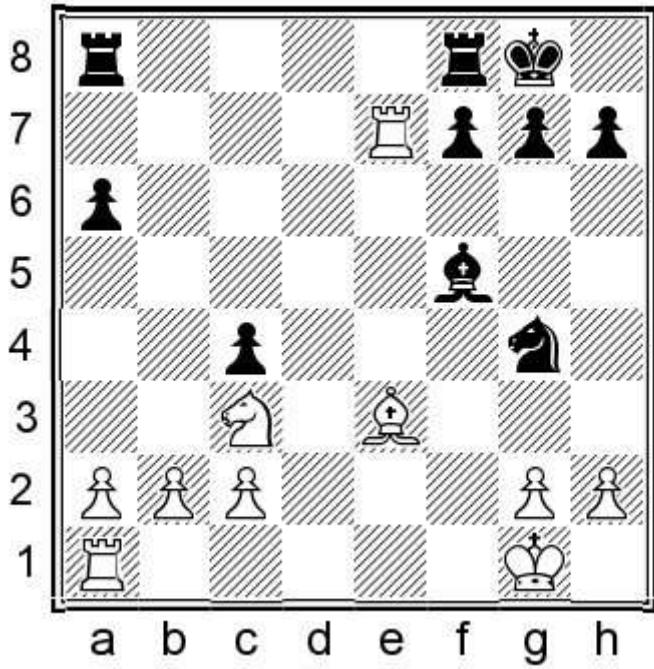
15.Rxe5 c4 16.Bxc4 Qc7!

This idea is fun; Black sets a small trap.

17.Qd4

A) 17.Bxf7+? Once again this proves to be greedy. 17...Qxf7 18.Qf4 Bb7 [Or 18...Qg6; 18...Qd7] 19.Nc3 Rae8 20.Be3 Rxe5 21.Qxe5 Ng4 22.Qg5 Nxe3 23.Qxe3 Qg6 24.Qg3 Qb6+ 25.Kh1 Qf2 26.Rg1 Qxg3 27.hxg3 Rf2+ looks like a terrible endgame for White.

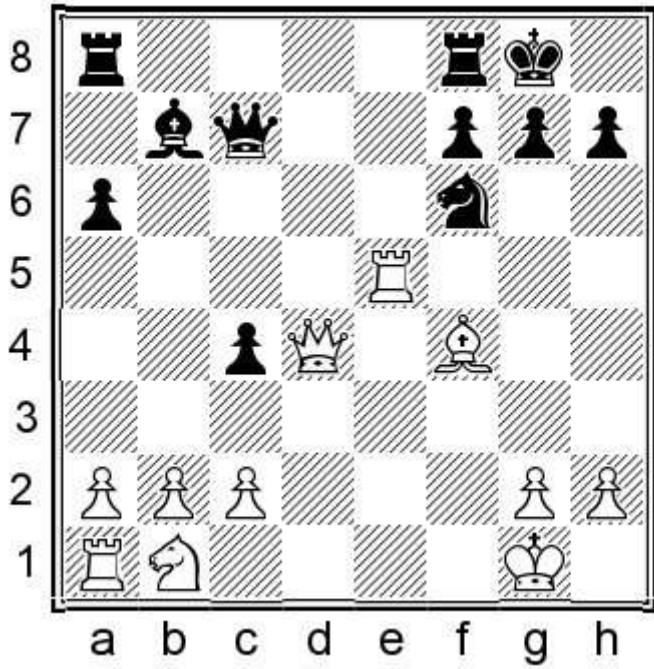
B) 17.Qf4 bxc4 18.Nc3 Qb6+ [18...Ng4!?] 19.Qe3 Qxe3+ 20.Bxe3 Ng4 21.Re7 Bf5



Position after: 21...Bf5

22.Bc5 [22.Rc1=] 22...Bxc2 23.Nd5=

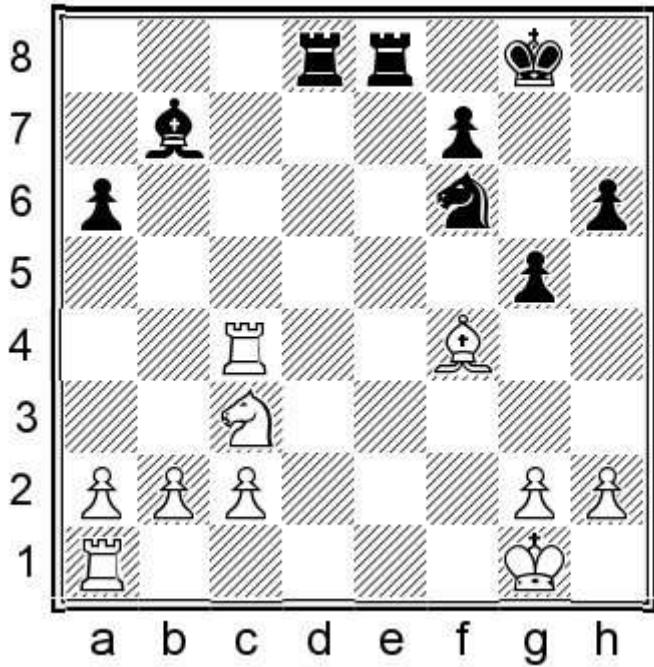
17...bxc4 18.Bf4 Bb7



Position after: 18...Bb7

19.Re2

19.Rg5 Qd8 20.Qxd8 Raxd8 21.Nc3 h6! 22.Rc5 Rfe8 23.Rc7 [23.Rxc4? g5!



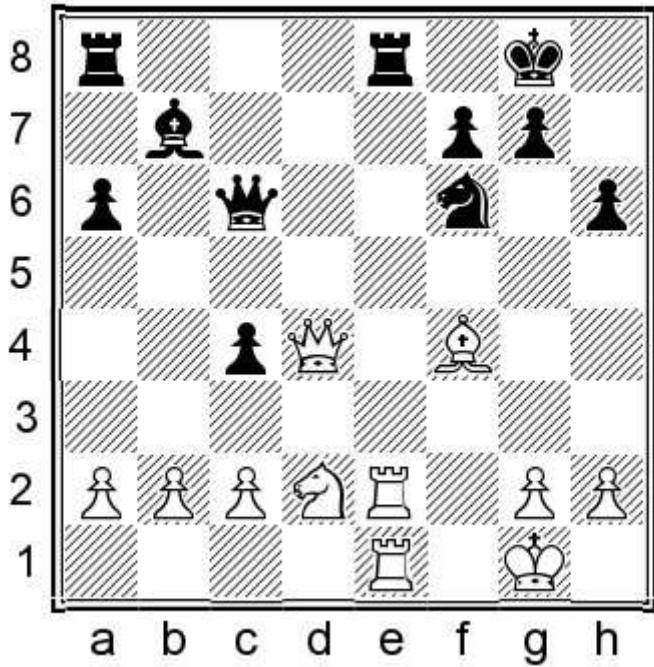
Position after: 23...g5!

24.Bg3 Rd2μ is dangerous.] 23...Ba8= Black controls both open lines and can feel optimistic here.

19...Qc6

19...Rad8!? 20.Bxc7 [20.Qxf6? can't be good after 20...Rd1+] 20...Rxd4 21.Nd2 Ne4= is a simpler way to reach equality.

20.Nd2 Rfe8 21.Rae1 h6



Position after: 21...h6

The position is equal and in case of

22.Qxc4

...Black answers with...

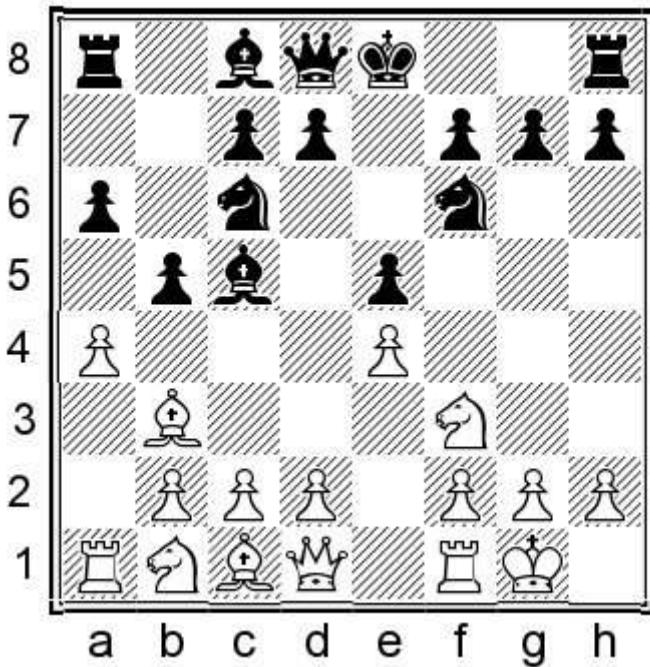
22...Rxe2 23.Rxe2 Qb6+ 24.Be3 Qxb2 25.Bd4 Qc1+ 26.Nf1 Qg5,,

Black has comfortable game.

Chapter 7

The Immediate 7.a4

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4



Chapter Guide

Chapter 7 – The Immediate 7.a4

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4 Rb8

a) 8.Nxe5 Nxe5 9.d4 Bxd4 10.Qxd4 d6 11.Bf4 c5 12.--

b) 8.Nxe5 Nxe5 9.d4 Bxd4 10.Qxd4 d6 11.Bf4 c5 12.Qd2 c4 13.Ba2 0-0
14.f3 Be6 15.axb5

c) 8.Nxe5 Nxe5 9.d4 Bxd4 10.Qxd4 d6 11.Bf4 c5 12.Qd2 c4 13.Ba2 0-0
14.f3 Be6 15.Nc3

d) 8.Nxe5 Nxe5 9.d4 Bxd4 10.Qxd4 d6 11.f4 Nc6 12.Qd3

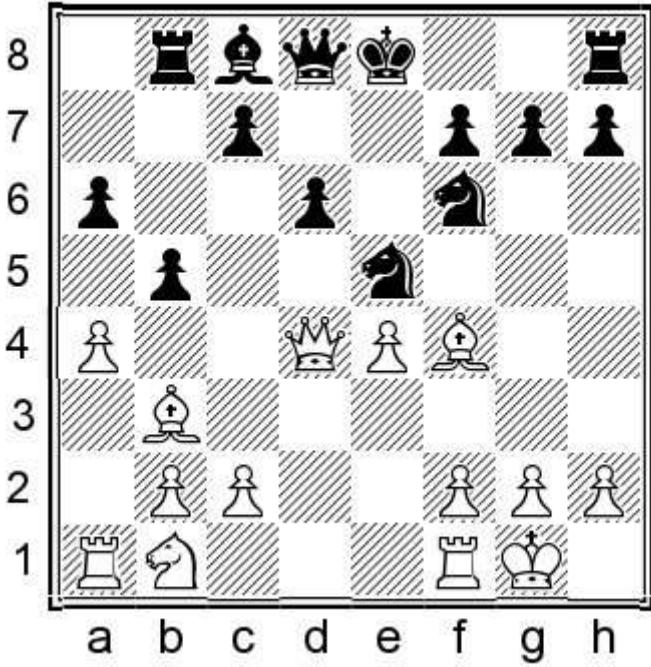
- e) 8.Nxe5 Nxe5 9.d4 Bxd4 10.Qxd4 d6 11.f4 Nc6 12.Qc3 Ne7 13.--
- f) 8.Nxe5 Nxe5 9.d4 Bxd4 10.Qxd4 d6 11.f4 Nc6 12.Qc3 Ne7 13.Qd3 0-0
14.Nc3 c5 15.axb5 axb5 16.Nxb5 Nxe4 17.Qxe4 Rxb5 18.--
- g) 8.Nxe5 Nxe5 9.d4 Bxd4 10.Qxd4 d6 11.f4 Nc6 12.Qc3 Ne7 13.Qd3 0-0
14.Nc3 c5 15.axb5 axb5 16.Nxb5 Nxe4 17.Qxe4 Rxb5 18.Ra7
- h) 8.axb5 axb5 9.Nxe5 Nxe5 10.d4 Bxd4 11.Qxd4 d6 12.--
- i) 8.axb5 axb5 9.Nxe5 Nxe5 10.d4 Bxd4 11.Qxd4 d6 12.f4
- j) 8.axb5 axb5 9.Nxe5 Nxe5 10.d4 Bxd4 11.Qxd4 d6 12.f4 Nc6 13.Qc3 Ne7
14.--
- k) 8.axb5 axb5 9.Nxe5 Nxe5 10.d4 Bxd4 11.Qxd4 d6 12.f4 Nc6 13.Qc3 Ne7
14.Ra7
- l) 8.axb5 axb5 9.Nxe5 Nxe5 10.d4 Bxd4 11.Qxd4 d6 12.f4 Nc6 13.Qc3 Ne7
14.e5 Ne4 15.--
- m) 8.axb5 axb5 9.Nxe5 Nxe5 10.d4 Bxd4 11.Qxd4 d6 12.f4 Nc6 13.Qc3 Ne7
14.e5 Ne4 15.Qe1

a) 8.Nxe5 Nxe5 9.d4 Bxd4 10.Qxd4 d6 11.Bf4 c5 12.--

**1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4 Rb8
8.Nxe5**

8.axb5 axb5 9.Nxe5 Nxe5 10.d4 Bxd4 11.Qxd4 d6 12.Bf4!? c5 13.Qd2 [13.Qc3 Qe7] 13...0-0 14.f3 c4 15.Ba2 Be6 is a direct transposition to the 8.Nxe5 move order.

8...Nxe5 9.d4 Bxd4 10.Qxd4 d6 11.Bf4!?



Position after: 11.Bf4!?

This bishop sortie is a relatively new, practical conception: White develops naturally, while putting some pressure on the e5 knight. The first player's setup relies on the long-term advantage of the bishop pair and solid center. Black gets the option to close out the b3-bishop with tempo, but as a result it also leads to some weakening on the dark squares (d4 in particular). The game is complex, as usual with a lot of possibilities and plans for both sides. It started to gain close attention after the game Topalov – Nakamura, Stavanger 2015, where White had excellent chances to win. This line is mostly embraced by strong, well-prepared players.

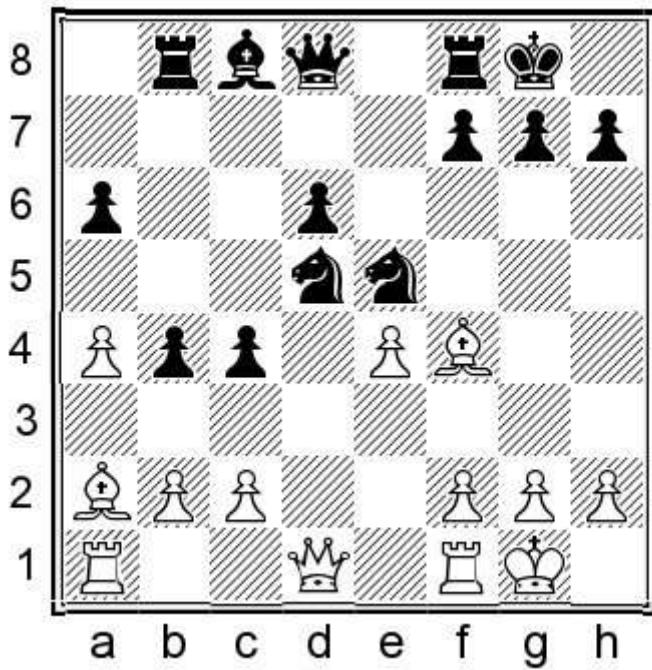
11...c5

11...0-0 is the other move-order. I prefer the text since it forces White to clarify the queen's retreat square immediately.

12.Qe3

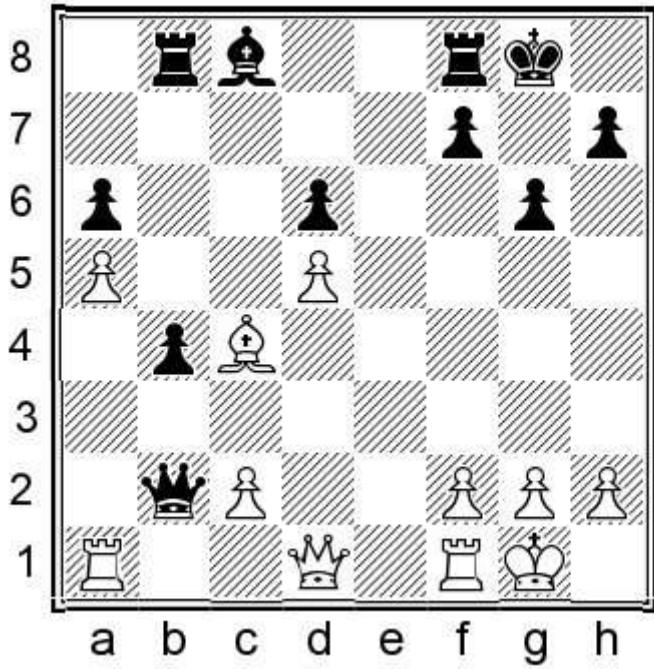
12.Qd1 0-0 13.Nc3 c4 14.Ba2 b4!? is probably a simpler equalizer. 15.Nd5 [15.Ne2?! Nxe4 16.Qd4 b3 17.cxb3 cxb3 18.Bb1 Nf6 can only be good for

Black.] 15...Nxd5



Position after: 15...Nxd5

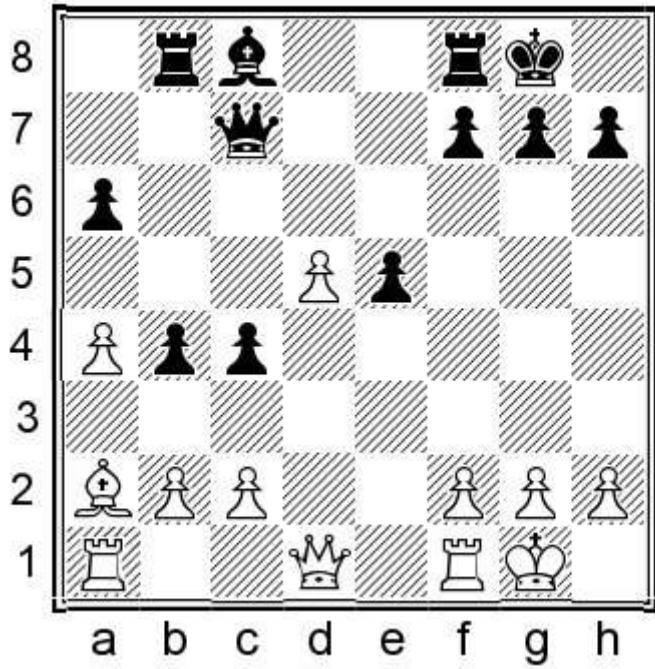
A) 16.exd5 Qf6 17.Bxe5 [17.Bg3 a5 18.Re1 Ba6∞] 17...Qxe5 18.Bxc4 Qxb2 19.a5 g6!?



Position after: 19...g6!?

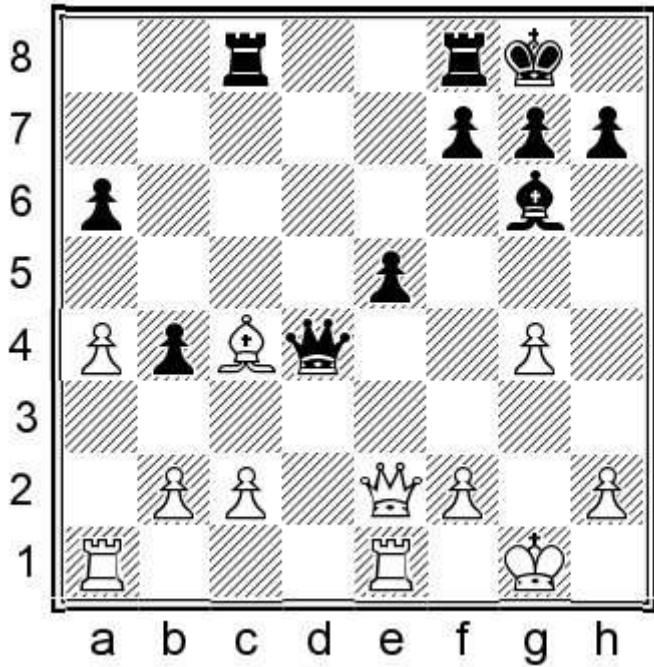
The previous move secured the f5-square for the bishop as 20.Qd3 was coming.

B) 16.Bxe5 dxe5 17.exd5 [17.Qxd5? Qxd5 18.exd5 b3 looks awful.]
17...Qc7!



Position after: 17...Qc7!

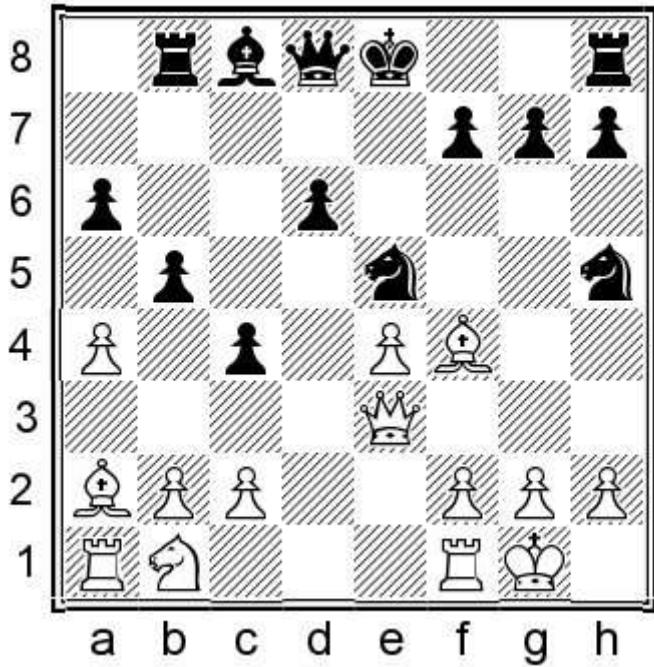
18.Re1 [18.Qe2 b3 19.cxb3 cxb3 20.Rac1 Qd6 21.Bb1 Bd7,,] 18...Bf5
19.Qe2 Rbc8 is around equal, e.g. 20.g4!? Bg6 21.d6 Qxd6 22.Bxc4
Qd4!?



Position after: 22...Qd4!?

Here is just one possible continuation: 23.b3 Bxc2! 24.Qxc2 Qxg4+ 25.Kf1 Qh3+ 26.Ke2 Qg4+ It's either a perpetual, or White can take a risk with 27.f3 Qg2+ 28.Kd1 Rcd8+ 29.Kc1 Qg5+ 30.Kb1 Rd2©

12...c4 13.Ba2 Nh5!?



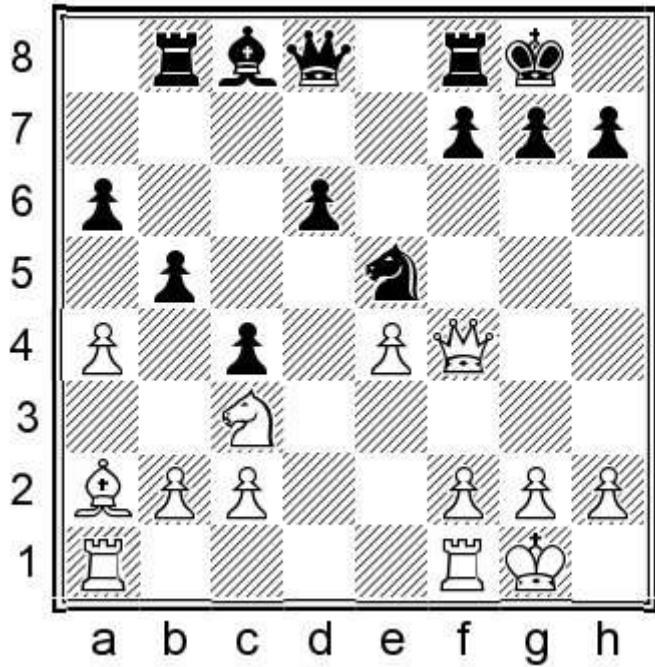
Position after: 13...Nh5!?

I like this direct approach.

14.Bxe5

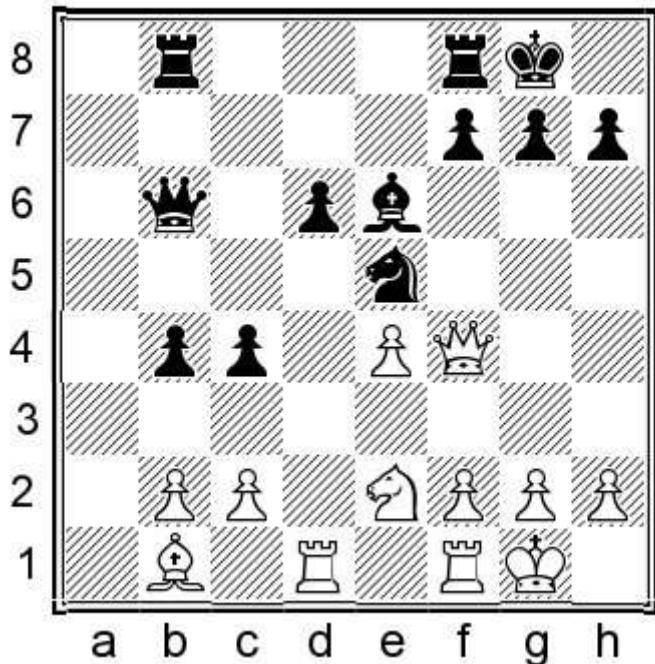
A) 14.Rd1 Nxf4 15.Qxf4 0-0 16.Nc3 leads to 14.Nc3

B) 14.Nc3 Nxf4 15.Qxf4 0-0



Position after: 15...0-0

16.axb5 axb5 17.Rad1 Be6 18.Bb1?! b4 19.Ne2 Qb6



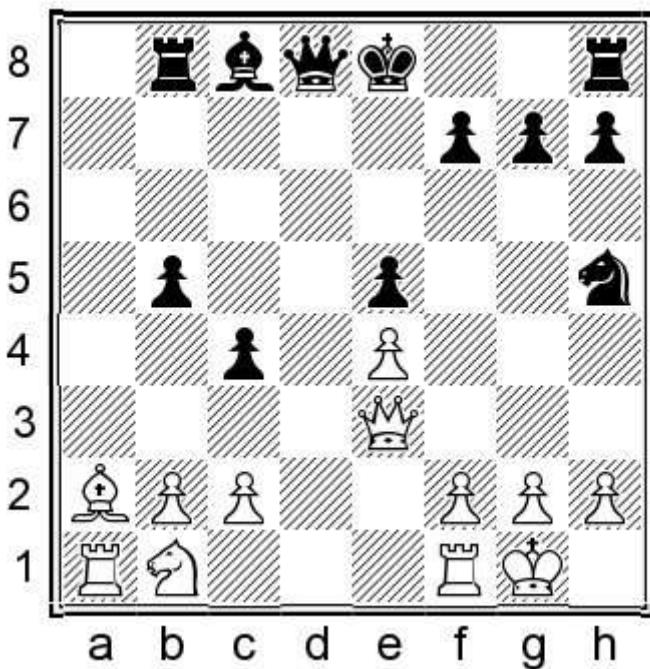
Position after: 19...Qb6

B1) 20.h3? c3! 21.bxc3 Bc4! 22.Rfe1 Bxe2 23.Rxe2 bxc3 24.Ree1 [24.Ba2?? Qa6–+] 24...Ra8 25.Qg3 Rfc8–+ 0-1 (38) Durarbayli, V (2625) – Vidit, S (2726) Krasnaya Polyana 2021.

B2) 20.Rfe1 Bg4³

C) 14.Bg5 f6! 15.Bh4 g5 16.Bg3 [16.f3!? is creative: 16...gxh4 17.Qh6 Nf4!? 18.Qxf4 h3f I prefer Black.] 16...Nxg3 [16...0-0 17.Bxe5] 17.Qxg3 h5 18.axb5 h4 19.Qe3 h3 20.g3 axb5 is a pretty sight, e.g. 21.f4 [21.Nc3 g4 22.Rad1 Be6³] 21...gxf4 22.Qxf4 b4!? 23.Nd2 Be6 24.Qxf6 Qxf6 25.Rxf6 Ke7 26.Rxe6+ Kxe6 27.Nxc4 Nxc4 28.Bxc4+ Ke5 Black is pressuring in this endgame.

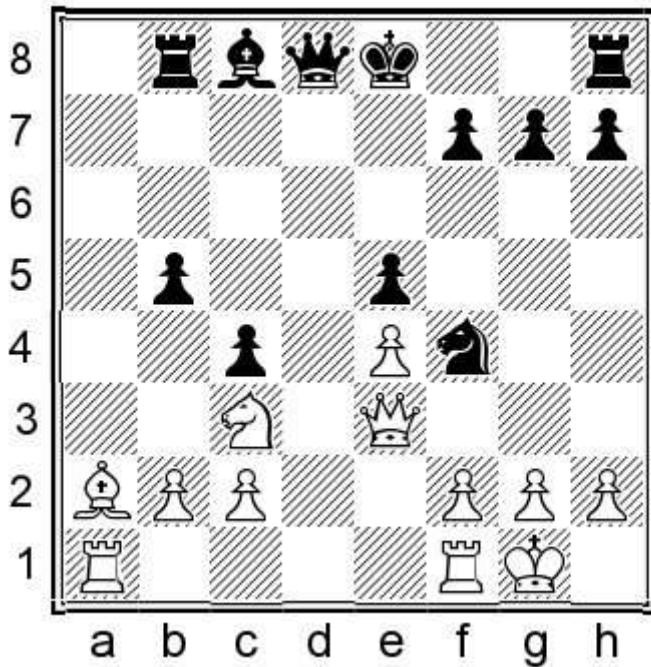
14...dxe5 15.axb5 axb5



Position after: 15...axb5

16.b3

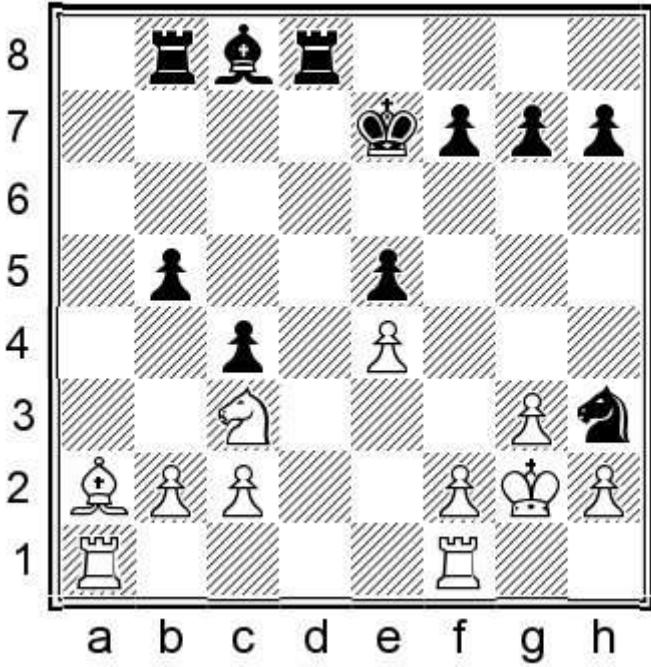
16.Nc3 Nf4



Position after: 16...Nf4

A) 17.g3 Nh3+ 18.Kh1 0-0 19.Rad1 Qg5 20.Qxg5 [20.f4 Qh6] 20...Nxg5 is pleasant for Black, as: 21.f4? fails to 21...exf4 22.gxf4 Nxе4! 23.Nxe4 Bb7–+

B) 17.Qc5 Qe7 18.Qxe7+ Kxe7 19.g3 Nh3+ 20.Kg2 Rd8



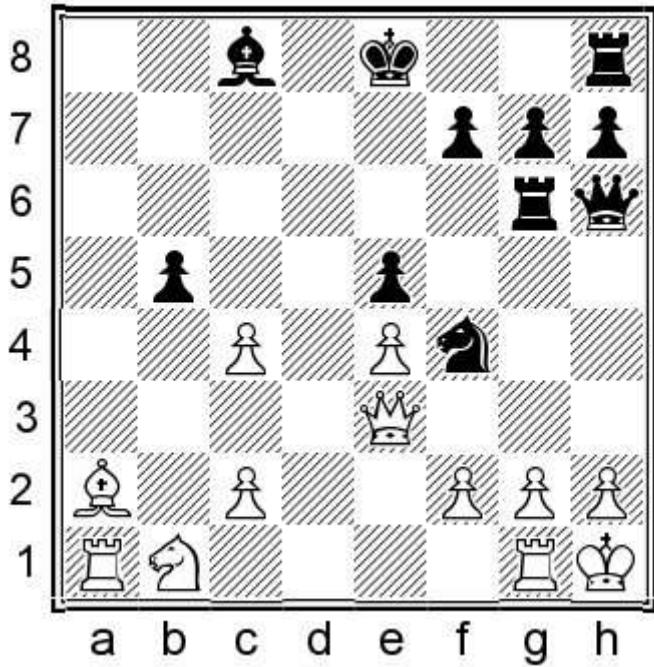
Position after: 20...Rd8

21.Rfd1 [21.Nd5+ Kf8 22.f3 Ng5 23.Rfd1 Ra8] 21...Ng5 22.f3 Rxd1 23.Rxd1 Bb7 24.Nxb5 Ba6 [24...Bxe4 25.fxe4 Rxb5 26.Bxc4 Rxb2 27.Bd3 Rb4 28.Re1=] 25.Na3 [25.Nc3 Rxb2] 25...Rxb2 26.Bxc4 Bxc4 27.Nxc4 Rxc2+ 28.Nd2 Ne6³ Black is more comfortable, but a draw is most likely.

16...Nf4 17.bxc4

A) 17.g3 allows 17...Bh3 18.gxf4 Bxf1 19.Kxf1 exf4 when 20.Qd2? is bad due to 20...Qxd2 21.Nxd2 c3 22.Nf3 b4 Black is practically an exchange up.

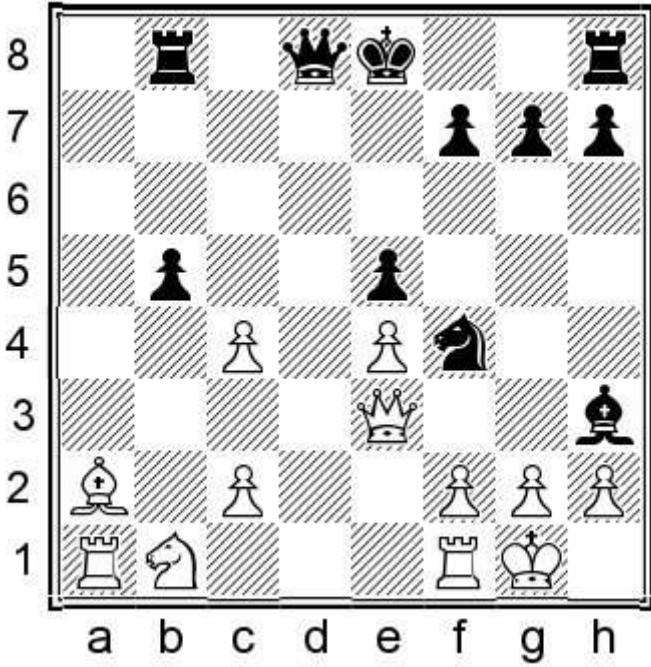
B) 17.Kh1 Qg5 18.Qg3 Qh6! 19.bxc4 Rb6! 20.Rg1 Rg6 21.Qe3



Position after: 21.Qe3

An interesting position. Black can, at least, make a nice draw with a queen sacrifice: 21...Qxh2+!? 22.Kxh2 Rh6+ 23.Kg3 Rg6+ 24.Kf3 [24.Kh2 Rh6+=] 24...Bg4+ 25.Kg3 Be6+=

17...Bh3!



Position after: 17...Bh3!

This is a great idea.

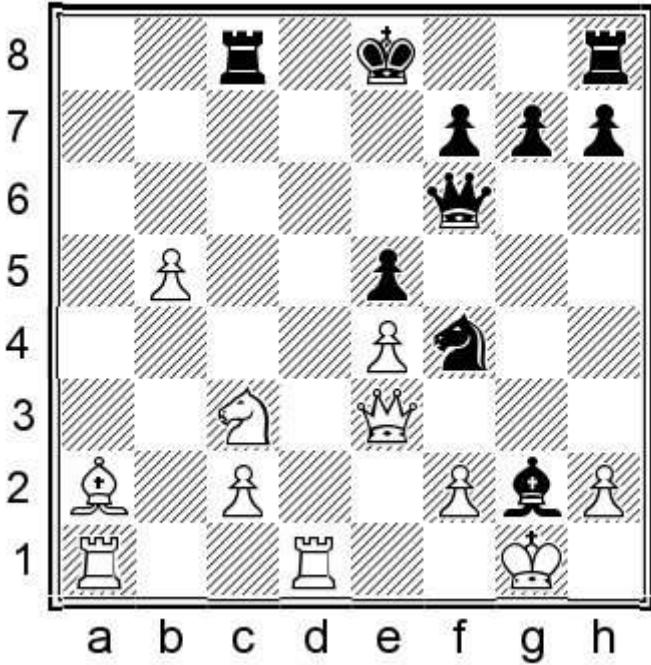
18.Nc3! Bxg2 19.Rfd1

White definitely gets his own play.

19...Qf6 20.cxb5

20.c5 0-0 21.Rd6 Qe7 can lead to some really crazy positions: 22.Re1 [22.Nd5? Qg5!] 22...Bh3 23.Kh1 Ng2!? [23...Bg2+ 24.Kg1 Bh3=] 24.Qxh3 Nxe1∞

20...Rc8!



Position after: 20...Rc8!

21.Bd5

21.Bc4 Bh3! 22.Ra6 Rxc4 23.Rxf6 gxf6©

21...0-0 22.Bc6

22.Ra6 Qe7 23.Ra7 Qf6 24.Ra6 Qe7=

22...h5!? 23.Rd2

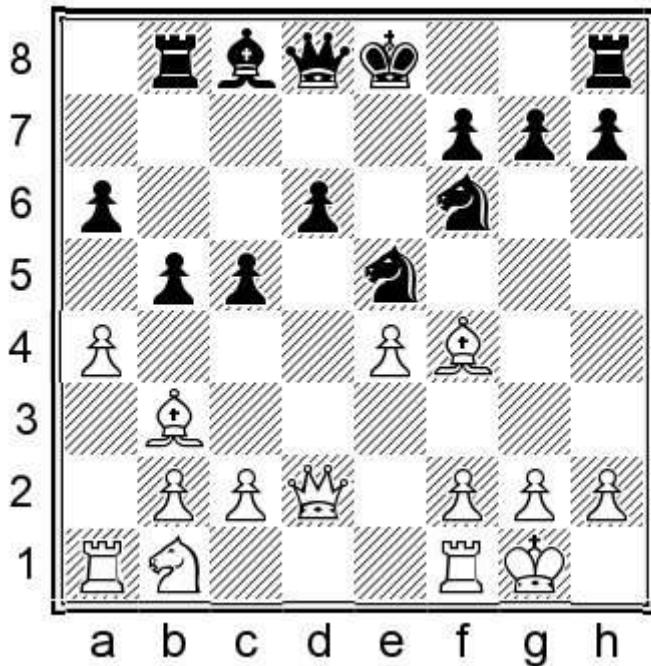
23.Nd5? Qg5–+

23...h4©

Black gets some exciting compensation around White's king.

**b) 8.Nxe5 Nxe5 9.d4 Bxd4 10.Qxd4 d6 11.Bf4 c5 12.Qd2 c4
13.Ba2 0-0 14.f3 Be6 15.axb5**

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4 Rb8 8.Nxe5 Nxe5 9.d4 Bxd4 10.Qxd4 d6 11.Bf4!? c5 12.Qd2



Position after: 12.Qd2

This is where the queen lands in the majority of the cases.

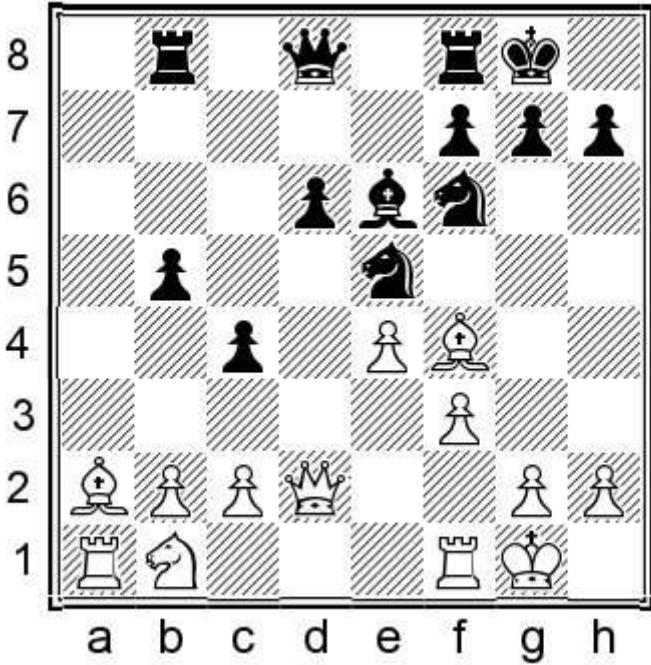
12...c4 13.Ba2 0-0 14.f3

This is practically the main tabiya of the whole line.

14...Be6

14...b4?! would be ideal, if the c4-pawn wasn't hanging: 15.Bxe5 dxe5 16.Qxd8 Rxd8 17.Bxc4

15.axb5 axb5



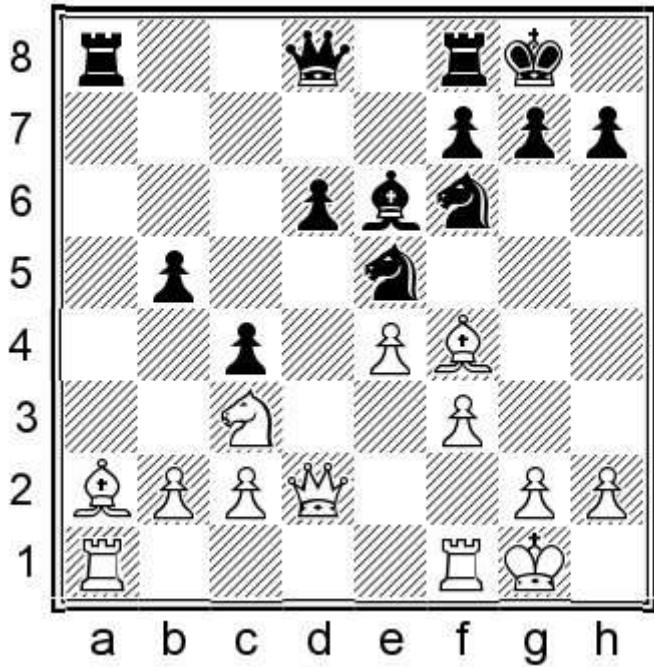
Position after: 15...axb5

This position is sometimes reached via the immediate 8.axb5.

16.b4

The latest fashion. Wang Hao used the line with success, so it's just a matter of time before it gets the attention it deserves. Your author has also faced the setup recently in online rapid and blitz games. White's idea is to play Nc3, Rad1, Bb1, Ne2 and then activate the bishop with c3. Black will obviously do his best to prevent that ideal piece formation.

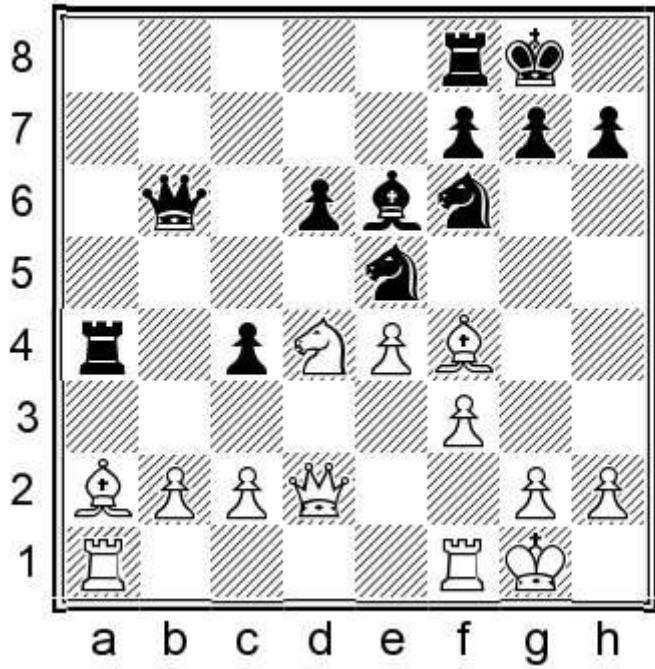
16.Nc3!? allows ...b4 but actually things are far from being crystal clear. Black has a lot of ideas, but if White plays precisely things can be unpleasant. 16...Ra8!? This is one of the trickiest tries.



Position after: 16...Ra8!?

A) 17.Bxe5?! dx5 18.Qxd8 Rfxd8 19.Nxb5 is also not very challenging, since the a2-bishop is still horrible. 19...Rdb8 [19...Kf8!? \square] 20.Na3 [20.Nc3 Kf8 \square] 20...Ra4 \square

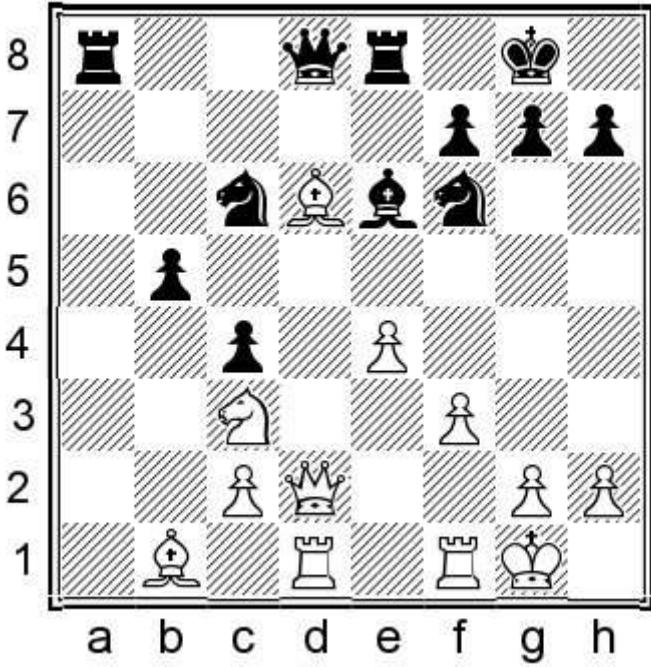
B) 17.Nxb5? is naive, as 17...Qb6+ 18.Nd4 Ra4



Position after: 18...Ra4

19.Be3 Qa6 looks good for us.

C) 17.b4! This recurring idea is the best move. 17...Nc6 18.Rad1 Nxb4 19.Bb1 Nc6 20.Bxd6 Re8



Position after: 20...Re8

C1) 21.Na2 c3! 22.Qxc3 [22.Nxc3 b4 23.Ne2 Qb6+ 24.Kh1 Bc4©] 22...Bc4 23.Nb4!∞ is complex.

C2) 21.e5 Nd7

C2.1) 22.Qe3 Qa5 23.Ne4 c3 24.Qxc3 [24.f4 is risky as after 24...b4 it's unclear what White will do with his b1 bishop; 24.Nxc3 Ndxе5 25.Bxe5 Bc4 26.f4 b4] 24...Qxc3 25.Nxc3 Bc4 26.Rfe1 Ndxе5=

C2.2) 22.f4 b4 23.Nd5 [23.Ne4 c3] 23...c3 24.Qd3 [24.Qe2 Bxd5 25.Rxd5 Qb6+ 26.Kh1 Qa6,,] 24...Bxd5 25.Qxd5 Qb6+ 26.Kh1 Ra5! 27.Qf3 [27.Qc4 Qa6 28.Qxa6 Rxa6 29.Bxb4 Nxb4 30.Rxd7 Rb8©] 27...Nc5 28.Rfe1 Nb7∞ I admit that these lines are a bit difficult to understand (not to mention play over the board, and for both sides!!), but in the search for the truth you will almost always encounter complicated situations. In the Ark, we should be happy to play double-edged positions with mutual chances.

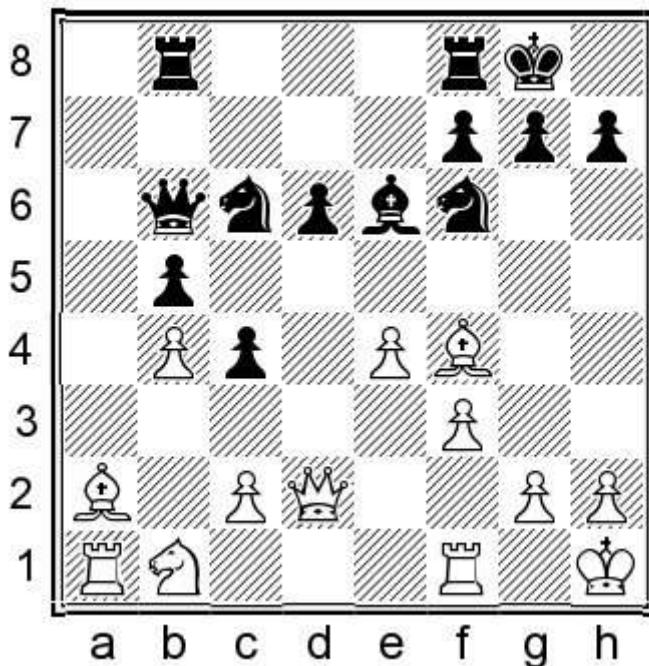
16...Qb6+

A direct approach.

17.Be3

This looks obvious, but the alternative contains poison too.

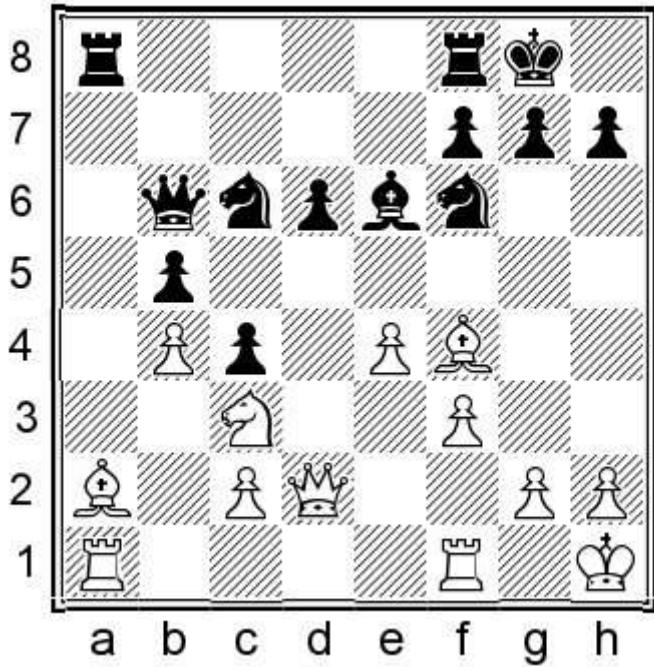
17.Kh1!? A move I faced in online blitz. 17...Nc6!?



Position after: 17...Nc6!?

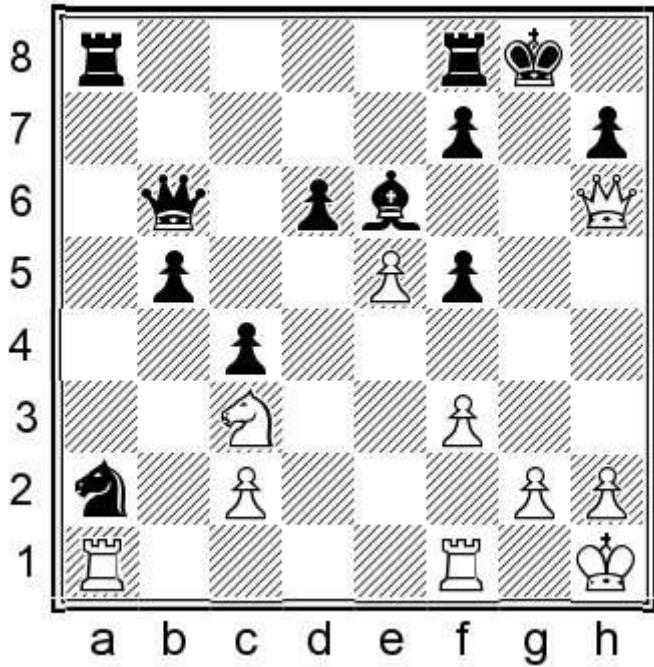
A) 18.Qxd6? is awful. 18...Rbd8 19.Qc5 Qxc5 20.bxc5 Nd4 21.Nc3 b4µ

B) 18.Nc3 Ra8!



Position after: 18...Ra8!

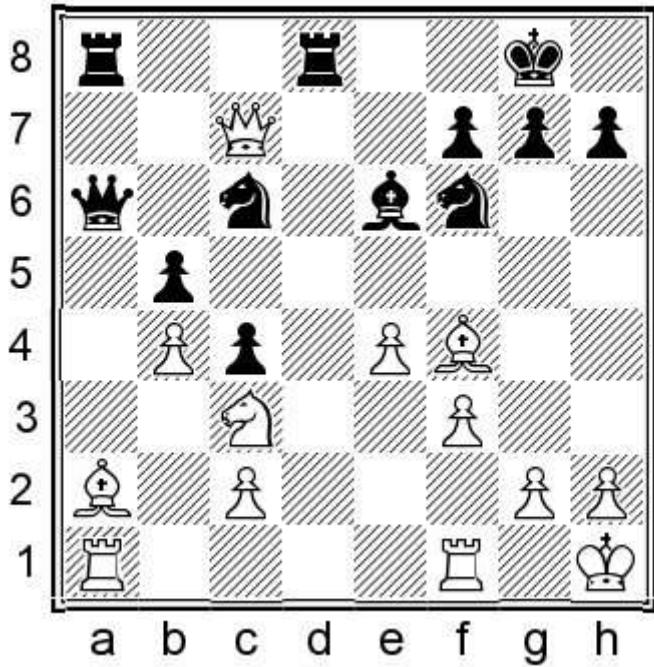
B1) 19.Bg5 Nxb4!? [19...Ne8 is possible, but a bit passive.] 20.Bxf6 gxf6 21.Qh6! This is likely to end in some kind of perpetual check. For example: 21...Nxa2 22.e5 [22.Nxa2 Qd4 23.Rad1 Qb2 24.f4 Rxa2 25.Rf3 Ra3 26.c3 Rxc3 27.Qxf6 Qe2=] 22...f5!?



Position after: 22...f5!?

[22...fxe5 23.Ne4 f6 24.Nxf6+ Rxf6 25.Qxf6∞] 23.g4 Nxc3 24.Qg5+ Kh8 25.Qf6+ Kg8 26.gxf5 Rxa1 27.Qg5+ [27.Rxa1?? Bxf5 28.Qxf5 Qd8–+] 27...Kh8 28.Qf6+ Kg8=

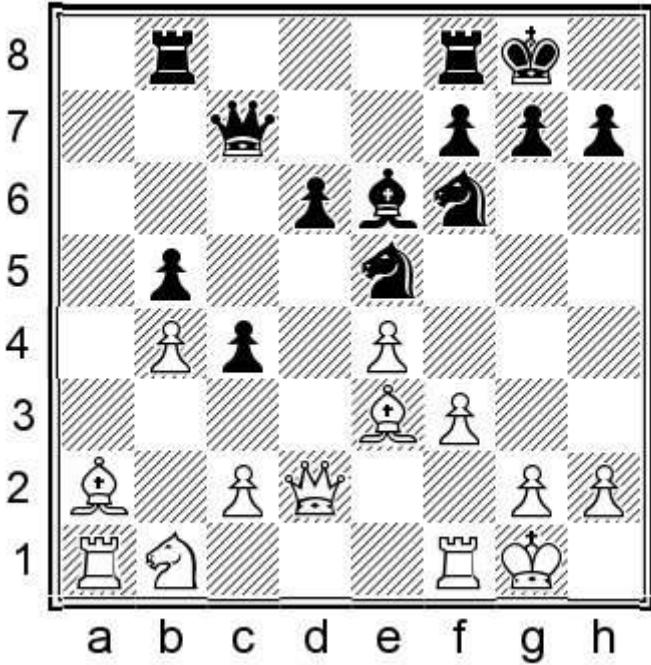
B2) 19.Qxd6 Rfd8 20.Qc7 Qa6!?



Position after: 20...Qa6!?

21.Bg5 [21.Be3? Nxb4 22.Bxc4 Bxc4! 23.Rxa6 Nxa6 24.Qg3 Bxf1 25.Bg5 Ne8 26.Bxd8 Rxd8 27.Nd5 Bc4μ] 21...Rd7!? 22.Qg3 Ne8 is also an option. 23.Rae1 [23.f4 f6∞; 23.Rab1 Nd4∞] 23...f6 24.Bh4 Nxb4 25.Bb1∞

17...Qc7!



Position after: 17...Qc7!

An important novelty: Black needs the c6-square vacated for the knight!

After 17...Qc6? Black quickly found herself in serious trouble: 18.Nc3 Ra8 19.Rad1± Ni, S (2445) – Zhou, Z (2147) China 2019.

18.Nc3

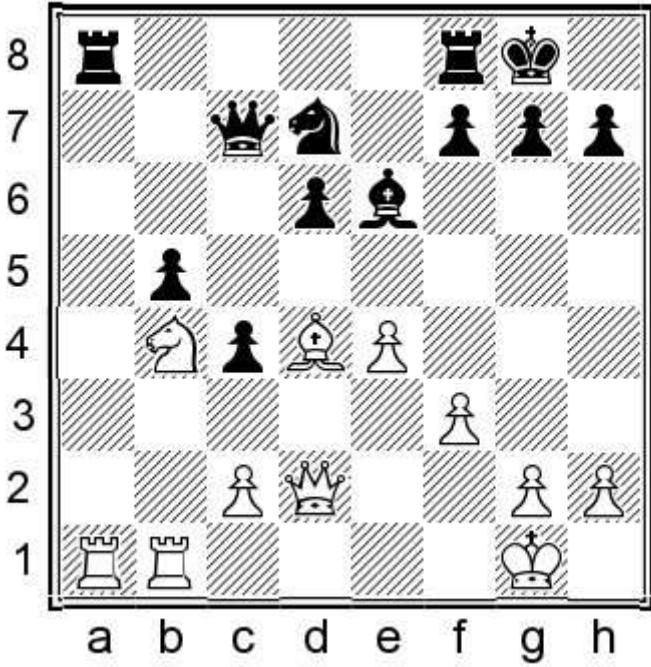
18.Bd4 Nc6 19.Nc3 transposes.

18...Nc6!

This is the source of our counterplay.

19.Ne2

A) 19.Bd4 Nxb4 20.Rfb1! [20.Bxf6 doesn't harm Black. 20...gxf6; 20.Qg5? A double attack, but we can easily parry it. 20...Qd8!μ] 20...Nxa2 21.Nxa2 Nd7 22.Nb4 Ra8



Position after: 22...Ra8

A1) 23.Qg5?! happened in my rapid practice game. I soon achieved a nice position: 23...Ne5! 24.f4?! f6 25.Qg3 Nd7 26.Qf3 Ra4! 27.Qh5?! Rx a1 [27...Qb7? 28.Nd5! Rx a1 29.Ne7+ Kh8 30.Ng6+= was my opponent's idea.] 28.Rxa1 Qb7 29.Re1 [29.Nd5 Nc5!] 29...Bf7 30.Qf5 Re8μ

A2) 23.Ra6! Rx a6 24.Nxa6 Qb7 25.Nb4© White has some compensation for the pawn, but I doubt he can be better.

B) 19.Rab1 is possible, but it's slow and passive. 19...Rfd8=

19...d5

The principled central break finally arrives.

20.e5!?

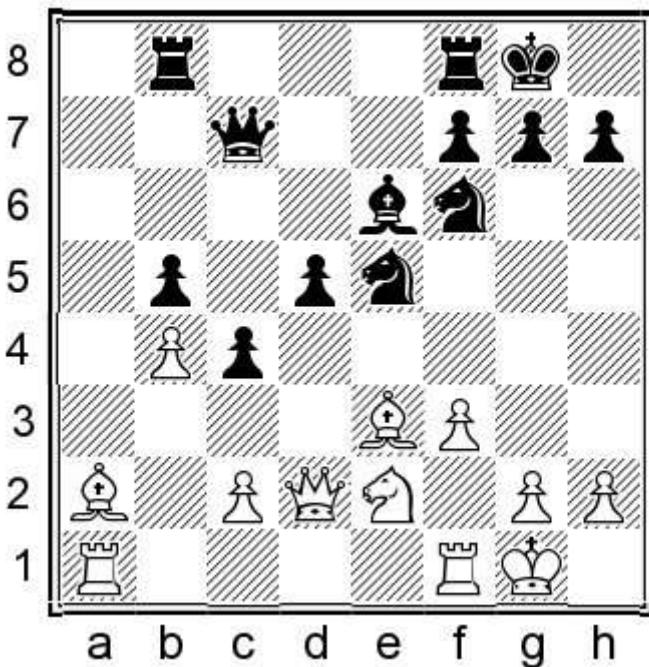
20.Bf4 Qb6+

A) 21.Kh1 is more complex, albeit risky. Black can choose between:

21...Rbd8 [Or 21...dxe4!? 22.Bxb8 exf3] 22.e5 Nh5 23.Be3 d4 24.Bf2 h6.

B) 21.Be3 Qc7= is just a repetition.

20...Nxe5



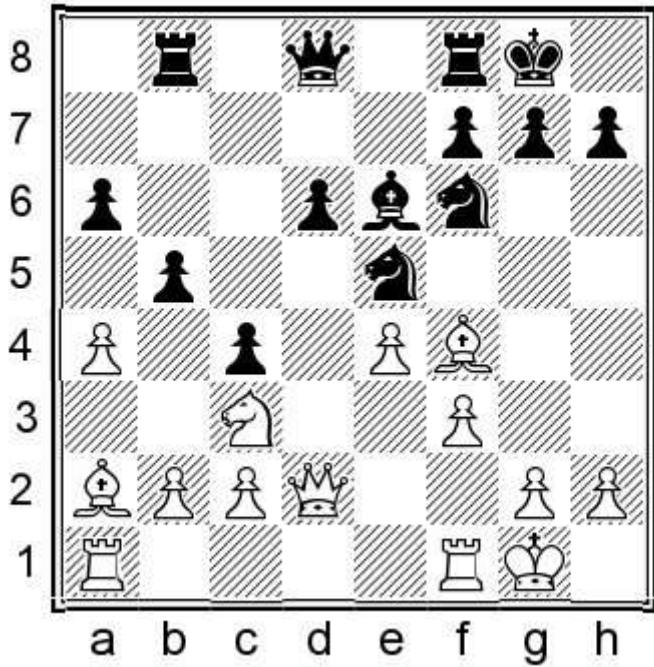
Position after: 20...Nxe5

21.Nd4 Ra8 22.c3 Bd7 23.Rad1 Nd3 24.Bb1 Rfc8=

and the position is approximately equal. It seems hard for White to develop any kind of play while the d3-knight is around.

**c) 8.Nxe5 Nxe5 9.d4 Bxd4 10.Qxd4 d6 11.Bf4 c5 12.Qd2 c4
13.Ba2 0-0 14.f3 Be6 15.Nc3**

**1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4 Rb8
8.Nxe5 Nxe5 9.d4 Bxd4 10.Qxd4 d6 11.Bf4!? c5 12.Qd2 c4 13.Ba2 0-0
14.f3 Be6 15.Nc3**

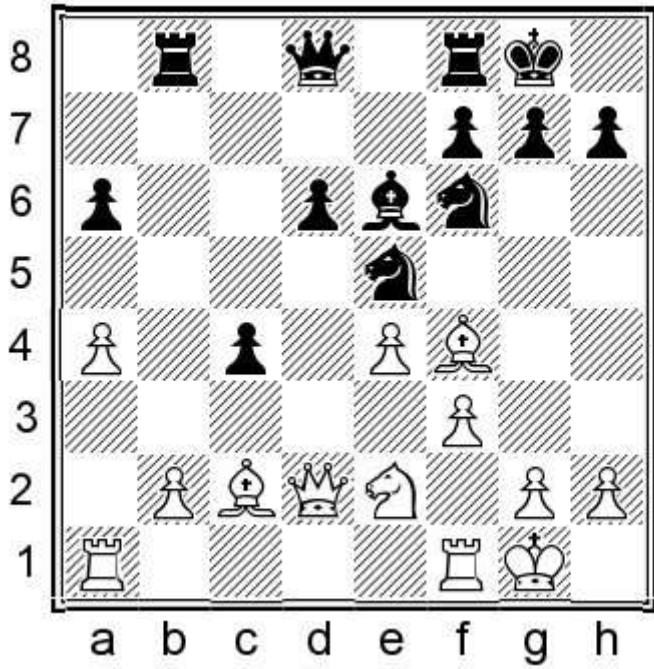


Position after: 15.Nc3

15...b4 16.Ne2 h6!?

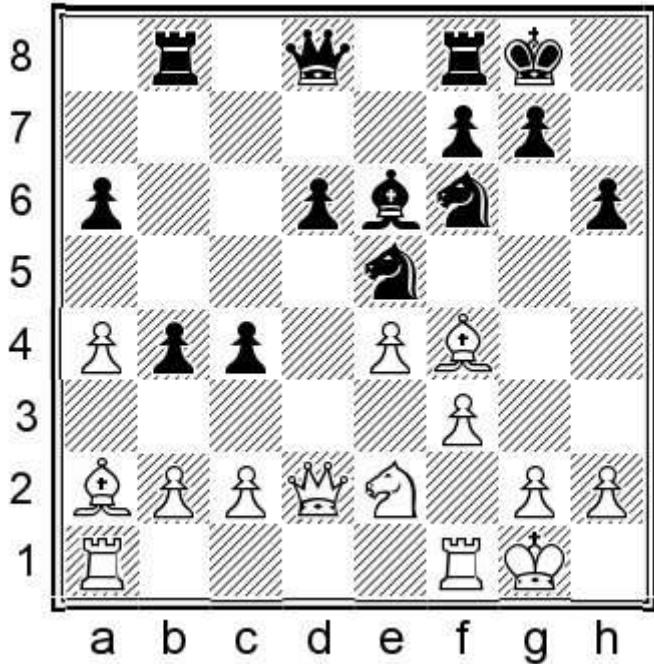
Nice prophylaxis. Black takes control over the g5-square and wonders how White is planning to continue, since his a2-bishop is still awkwardly placed and is hanging in some lines thanks to the ...c3 push.

16...b3?! To my great surprise almost all games that reached this position continued like this. But I don't think we should rush with it. 17.Bb1! bxc2 18.Bxc2



Position after: 18.Bxc2

18...Rxb2 19.Rfb1 Rxb1+ 20.Rxb1 Qc7 21.Rd1² happened in the Topalov – Nakamura game. Despite being a pawn down, White had full control.

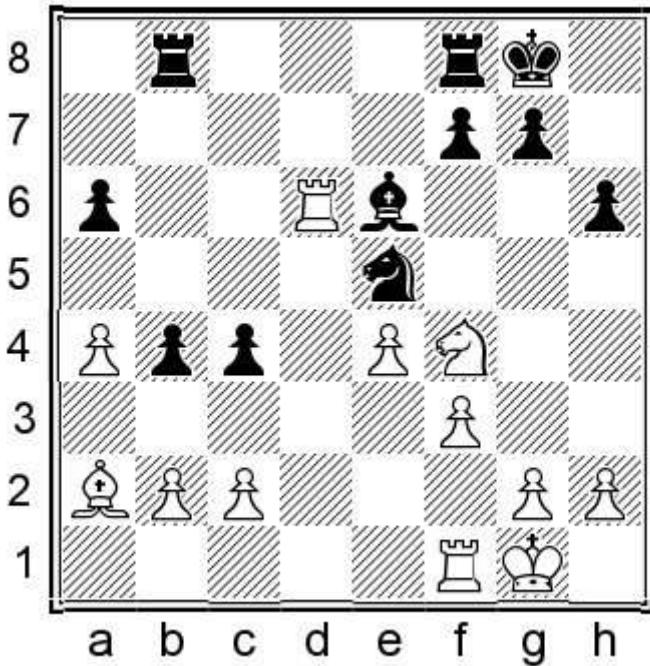


Position after: 16...h6!?

17.Nd4

White forces the bishop back, thus eliminating the threat of ...c3.

A) 17.Rad1!? Nh5! An important detail. 17...c3 was not possible due to 18.Qxd6 18.Qxd6! The only reasonable continuation. [18.Be3? c3; 18.b3 is offered by some engines, but I doubt a human would ever play such a move. 18...c3!? 19.Qxd6 Nxf4 20.Nxf4 Qb6+ 21.Qxb6 Rxb6 Look at that stupid bishop! No-one likes playing a piece down.] 18...Qxd6 19.Rxd6 Nxf4 20.Nxf4

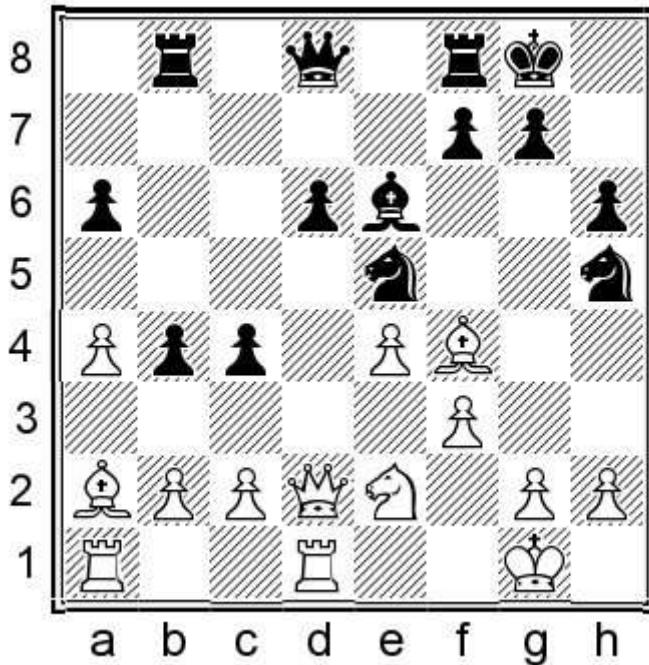


Position after: 20.Nxf4

20...b3! Black is in time to create counterplay. 21.cxb3 [21.Nxe6?! is playing with fire: 21...bxa2 22.Nxf8 Rxb2 23.Rd8 Nc6! 24.Rc8 g5! 25.Nd7+ Kg7 26.Rxc6 Rb1 and Black promotes.] 21...cxb3 22.Bb1 Rfd8 23.Rfd1 Rxd6 24.Rxd6 Nc4 25.Rxa6 Rd8! [25...Nxb2 26.Nxe6 fxe6 27.e5! Nc4 28.a5! b2 29.Kf2 is not that simple.] 26.Nd5 [26.Kf2 Rd2+ 27.Kg3 Rxb2@] 26...g6! Securing the 8th rank; the endgame turns

out to be a draw. 27.Rc6 [27.Bd3 Nxb2 28.Bf1 Bxd5 29.exd5 Rxd5 30.Rb6 Nxa4 31.Rxb3=] 27...Nxb2 28.a5 Bxd5 29.exd5 Rxd5 30.a6 Ra5 31.Kf2 Kg7= The passed pawns are going to be exchanged soon.

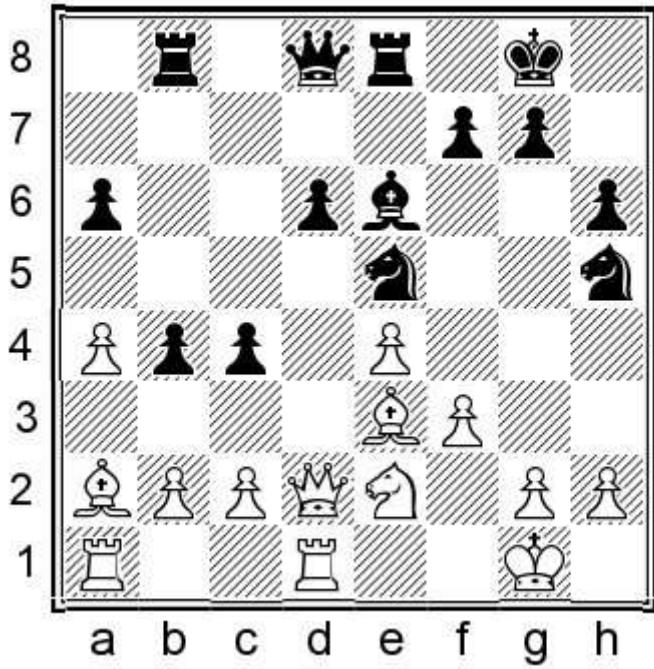
B) 17.Rfd1 Nh5!



Position after: 17...Nh5!

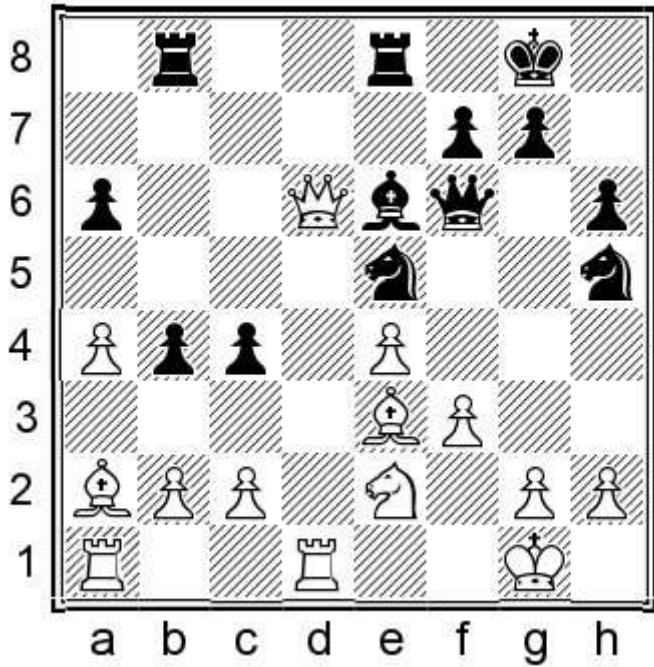
B1) 18.Qxd6? is a mistake in this version. 18...Nxf4 19.Nxf4 Qxd6 20.Rxd6 b3! Black is much better, e.g. 21.Nxe6 fxe6 22.Rxe6 [22.cxb3 cxb3 23.Bb1 Rfd8] 22...bxa2 23.Rxa2 Rfe8 24.Rxa6 Rbd8µ

B2) Once again, this is our reply. The f4-bishop can no longer be tolerated. 18.Be3 Re8! A strong waiting move. White somehow lacks constructive ideas and can easily go astray if his optimism is still there.



Position after: 18...Re8!

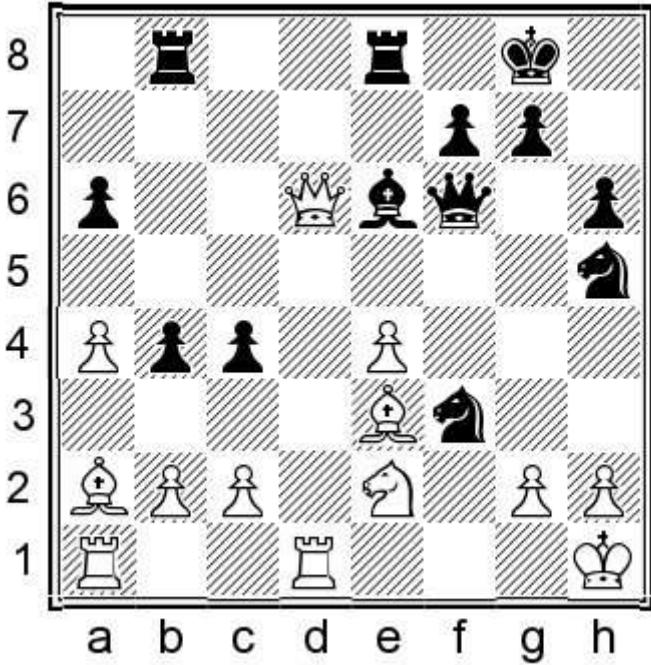
B2.1) 19.Qxd6? This is too greedy. 19...Qf6! Of course! White's queen feels unsafe on d6 and now Black is threatening a lot of things - you can find the main ideas in the sample lines.



Position after: 19...Qf6!

B2.1a) 20.Qd2 c3! 21.bxc3 Bxa2 22.Rxa2 Rbd8 23.Bd4 Nxf3+ 24.gxf3 Qxf3 25.Rf1 Qg4+ 26.Ng3 Nxg3 27.hxg3 bxc3 28.Qf2 [28.Qxc3 Rxd4 29.Qxd4 Qxg3+ 30.Kh1 Qh4+ 31.Kg1 Rxe4–+] 28...Rxd4 29.Qxf7+ Kh7–+

B2.1b) 20.Kh1 Nxf3!



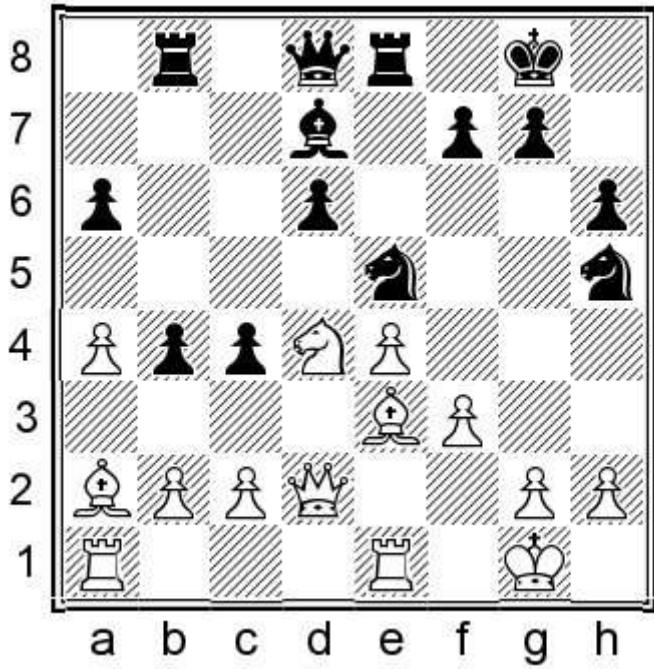
Position after: 20...Nxf3!

21.Nf4 [21.Rf1 now after both 21...Qe5 or 21...Qxb2 Black is much better.] 21...Nxf4 22.Qxf4 Ne5 23.Qxf6 gxf6µ The a2-bishop seals White's sadly misplaced faith.

B2.2) 19.Kh1 Qf6 20.Nd4 Bd7 [20...b3!?] 21.Bb1 g5 White is running out of meaningful moves.

B2.3) 19.Ba7 Ra8 20.Bd4 a5 21.Bb1 g5! In this structure it proves to be very useful to take control over the f4-square, even at the cost of weakening the kingside. 22.c3 This move is also given sometimes by engines, but actually it just imprisons the bishop and the rook forever. Black only needs to block the e4-pawn... [22.Bf2 Qf6!; 22.f4?! gxf4 23.Nxf4 Qg5 doesn't help.] 22...b3 23.Qe3 Qf6 Black wants to instal his knight on f4. White is facing a difficult time, since he lacks an active plan.

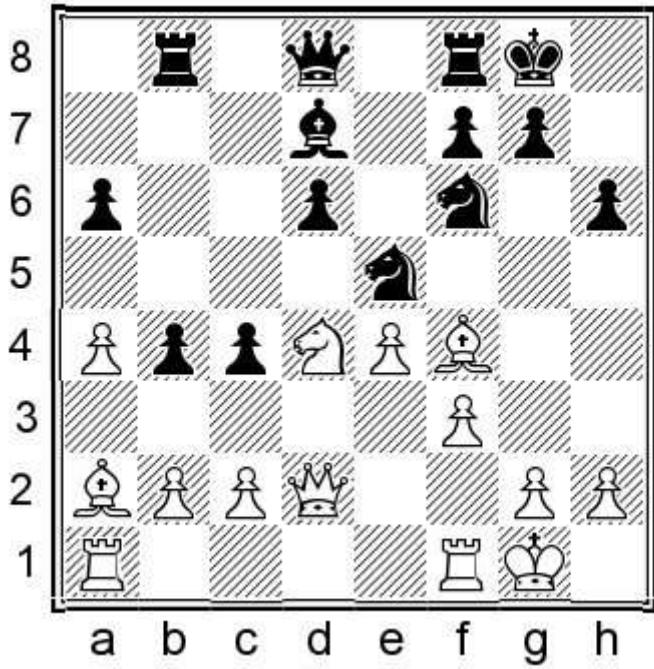
B2.4) 19.Nd4 Bd7 20.Re1!



Position after: 20.Re1!

This refinement of the rooks is necessary. The position is more or less balanced after, say: 20...Qf6 21.a5 [21.Rad1 Rec8∞] 21...Rec8!? 22.Rad1 g5 23.Rf1 Rc5 24.Ne2 [24.c3 Rxa5 25.Bb1 bxc3 26.Qxc3 Ra4] 24...Rxa5 25.Bb1 c3 26.bxc3 Nc4,,

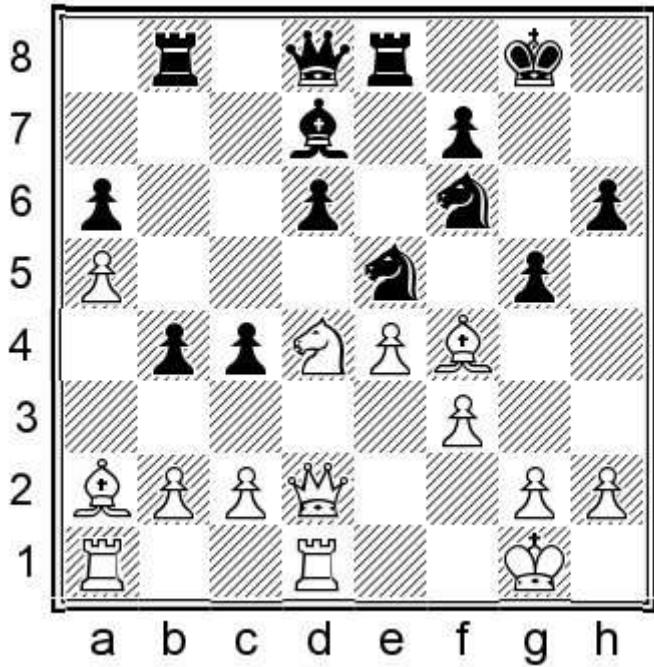
17...Bd7



Position after: 17...Bd7

18.Rad1

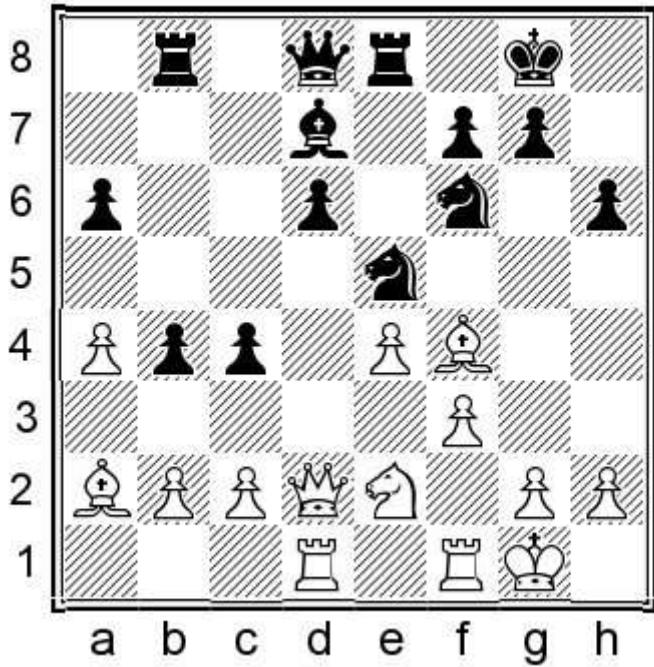
18.a5!? Re8! [18...Qxa5? would be bad: 19.Bxc4 Nxc4 20.Rxa5 Nxd2 21.Bxd2+–] 19.Rfd1 g5!?



Position after: 19...g5!?

20.Be3 [20.Bg3 Nh5 21.Bf2 Qf6,,; 20.Bxe5 dxe5 21.Nf5 Bxf5 22.Qxd8 Rxd8 23.exf5 Rxd1+ 24.Rxd1 b3?] 20...d5! 21.h4! g4 [21...dxe4 22.hxg5 Nd5 23.g6!?∞] 22.Bxh6 gxf3 23.Qg5+ [23.gxf3?! Nh5!] 23...Ng6 24.Nxf3 Rxe4 25.Rd4 Rg4 26.Rxg4 Nxg4,, Black is at least not worse.

18...Re8 19.Ne2!

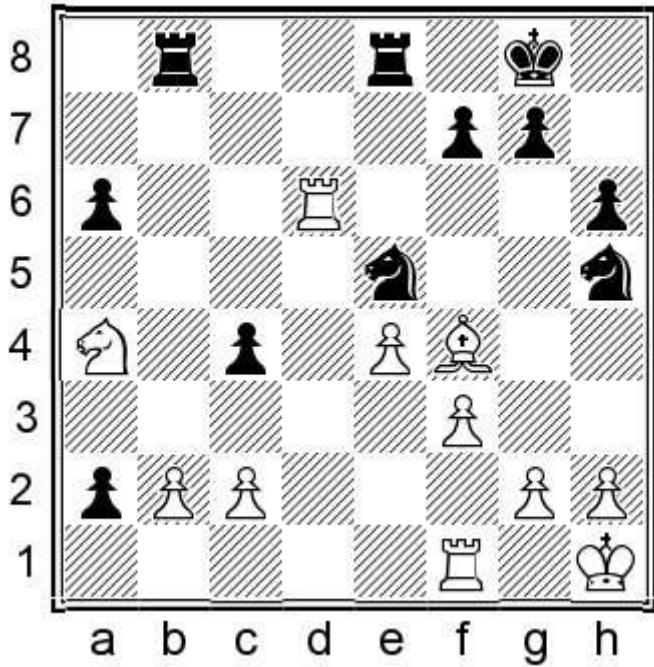


Position after: 19.Ne2!

A well-timed return and now Black has to deal with the d6-weakness. I've found two ways acceptable ways to continue, the main one being:

19...Qb6+ 20.Be3

20.Kh1 Bxa4 21.Qxd6 Qxd6 22.Rxd6 b3 leads to some complexity too, e.g. 23.Nc3!? [23.cxb3 cxb3 24.Bb1 Bb5 25.Re1 Bxe2 26.Bxe5 Rxe5 27.Rxe2 Rc5 28.Re1 a5] 23...bxa2 24.Nxa4 Nh5!



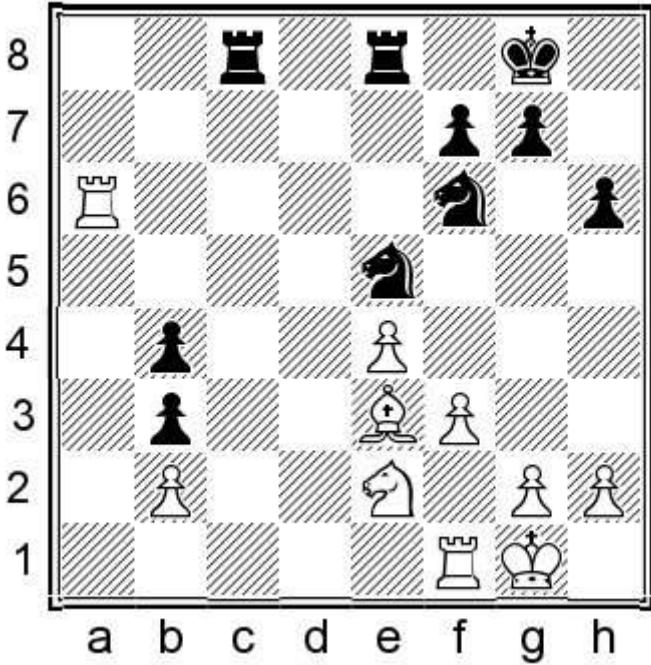
Position after: 24...Nh5!

25.Bxe5 [25.Bd2 c3! 26.Bxc3 Nc4 27.Rxa6 Ne3 28.Ra1 Red8 29.g4 Nxc2 30.Rxa2 Nf4©] 25...Rxe5 26.Rxa6 f5 27.exf5 Nf4©

20...Qa5 21.Qxd6 Bxa4 22.Qd2 Bxc2

22...Bb5!? 23.Ra1 Qd8

23.Qxc2 Qxa2 24.Ra1 Qb3 25.Qxb3 cxb3 26.Rxa6 Rbc8



Position after: 26...Rbc8

and Black has nice play against the b2-pawn, e.g.

27.Nd4

27.Bd4 Rc2 28.Nc1 Nh5 29.Bxe5 [29.Nxb3 Nf4] 29...Rxe5 30.Nd3 Re8©

27...Red8 28.Nxb3 Nc4 29.Bc1

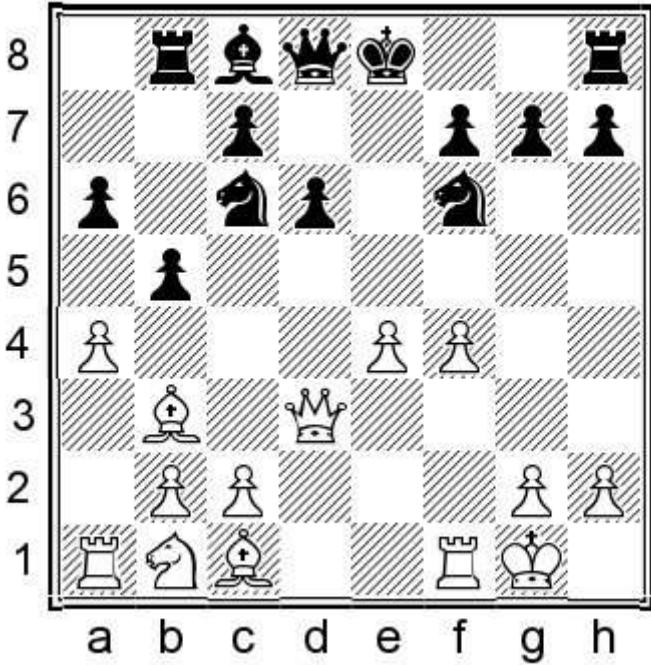
29.Bd4 Nd2 30.Bxf6 gxf6 31.Nxd2 Rxd2=

29...Rd3 30.Na5 Nxa5 31.Rxa5 Rc2 32.Rb5 b3©

Black is way too active to experience any problems here.

d) 8.Nxe5 Nxe5 9.d4 Bxd4 10.Qxd4 d6 11.f4 Nc6 12.Qd3

**1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4 Rb8
8.Nxe5!? Nxe5 9.d4 Bxd4 10.Qxd4 d6 11.f4 Nc6 12.Qd3**



Position after: 12.Qd3

12...0-0 13.Nc3

13.axb5 axb5 see 8.axb5

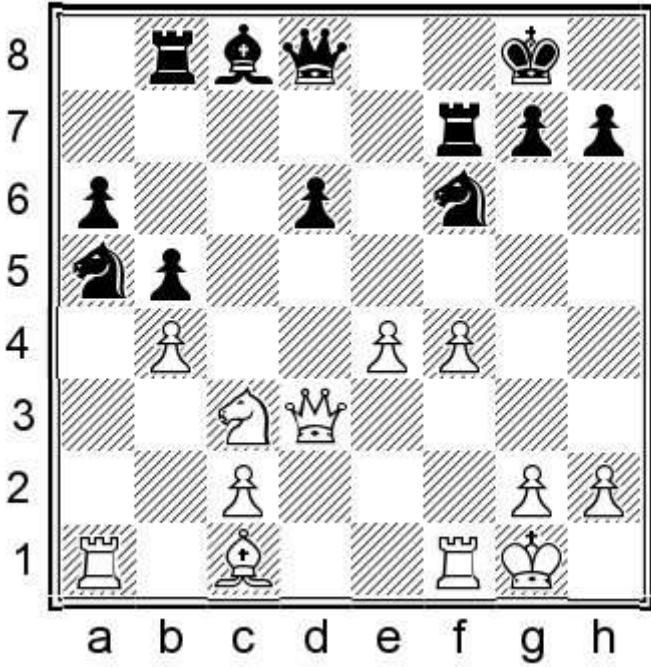
13...Na5!

An important nuance.

13...Nb4 would be our basic reply, but then comes 14.Qd2! Be6 15.Bxe6 fxe6 16.Nxb5! White has this subtlety! 16...Nxc2 17.Qxc2 axb5 18.a5! c5 19.e5² and White maintained the initiative in Balogh, C (2665) – Gustafsson, J (2643) Austria 2012 and went on to win an instructive game.

14.Ba2

14.Bxf7+!? is an unexpected blow. 14...Rxf7 15.axb5 c6!? Black gives back the piece to reach a normal game. 16.b4! cxb5

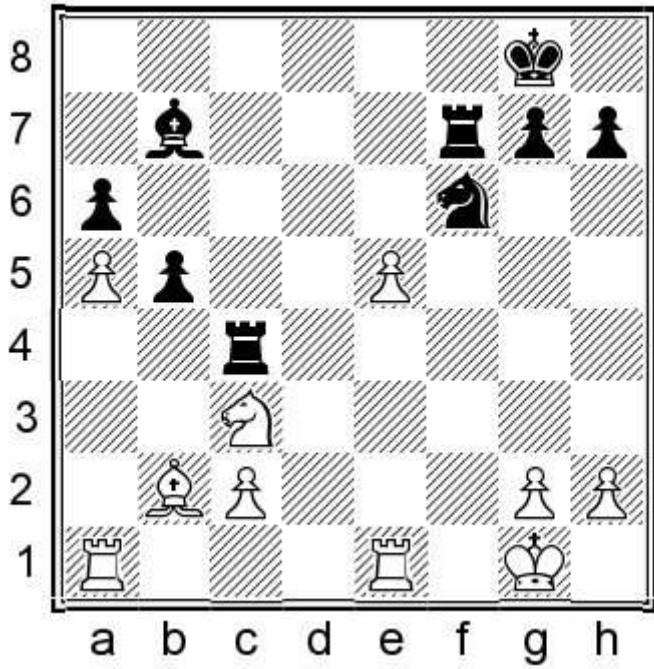


Position after: 16...cxb5

17.bxa5 [17.Rxa5 Bb7 18.Be3 Rc8 19.Bd4 Rc4=] 17...Bb7 18.Re1 Rc8 19.Bb2 Qc7 White's pawn structure is not solid enough to keep the material advantage. 20.Qd4 Qc4

A) 21.Qxd6?! is playing with fire. 21...Rd7 22.Qb6 Qb4 23.Qe6+ Kh8 24.Qb3 [24.e5? Rd2] 24...Qc5+ 25.Kh1 Rd2f

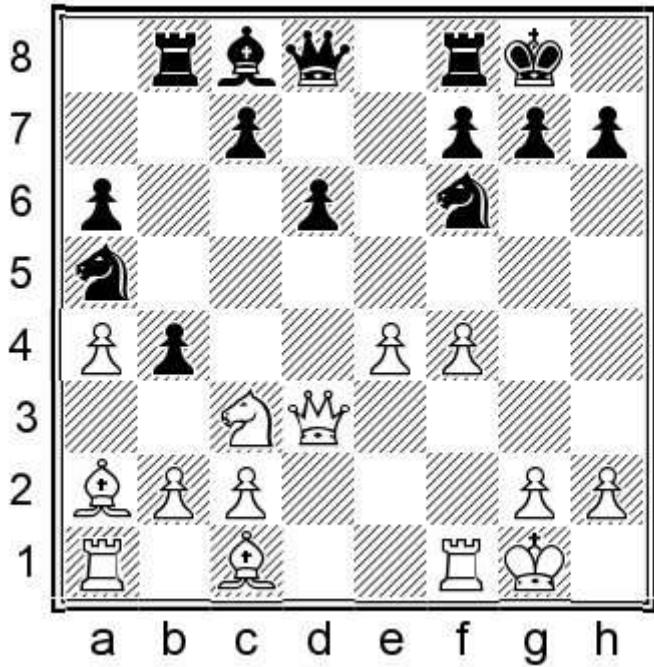
B) 21.Qxc4 Rxc4 22.e5 dxe5 23.fxe5



Position after: 23.fxe5

23...b4!? 24.exf6 bxc3 25.Re8+ Rf8 26.Rxf8+ Kxf8 27.Ba3+ Kf7 28.fxg7 Kxg7 The c2-pawn is just too weak. 29.Rb1 Be4 30.Rb4 Rxb4 31.Bxb4 Bxc2 32.Bxc3+= White is a pawn up, but it's an easy draw of course.

14...b4!?

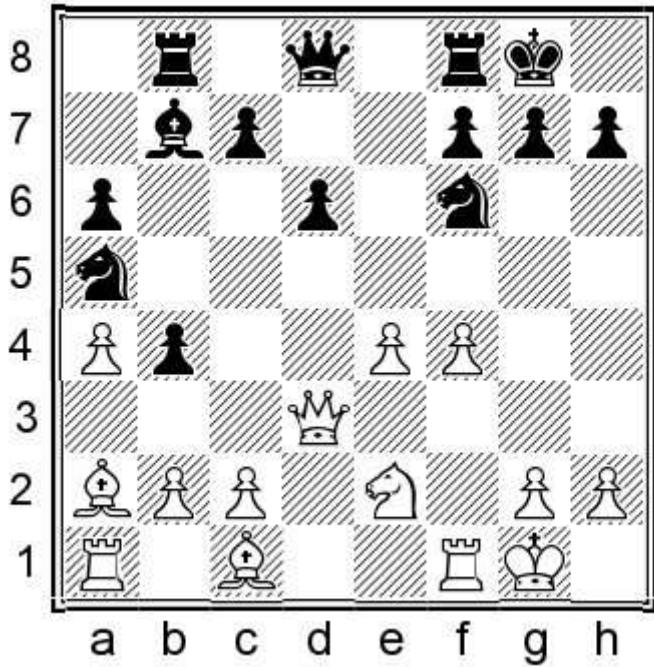


Position after: 14...b4!?

14...Nc6 is the alternative, which Svidler has analyzed in detail. I think the text is a bit simpler and a more direct solution.

15.Nd5

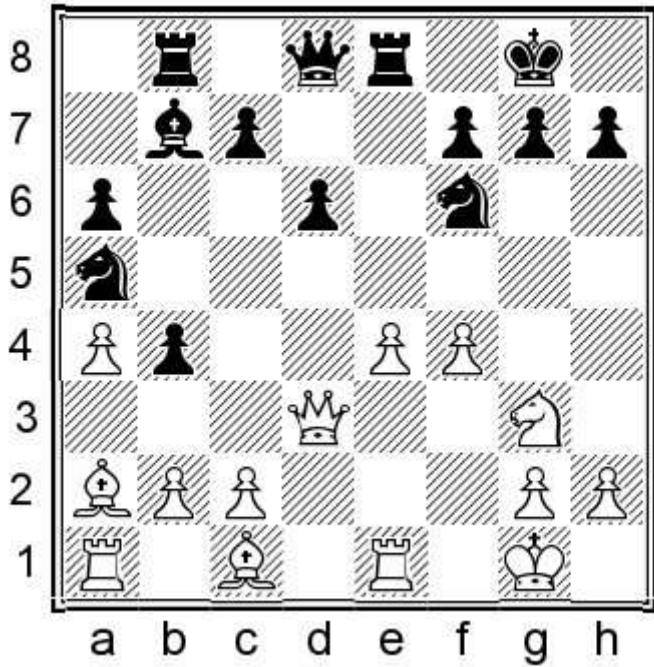
15.Ne2 This keeps more pieces on the board. 15...Bb7



Position after: 15...Bb7

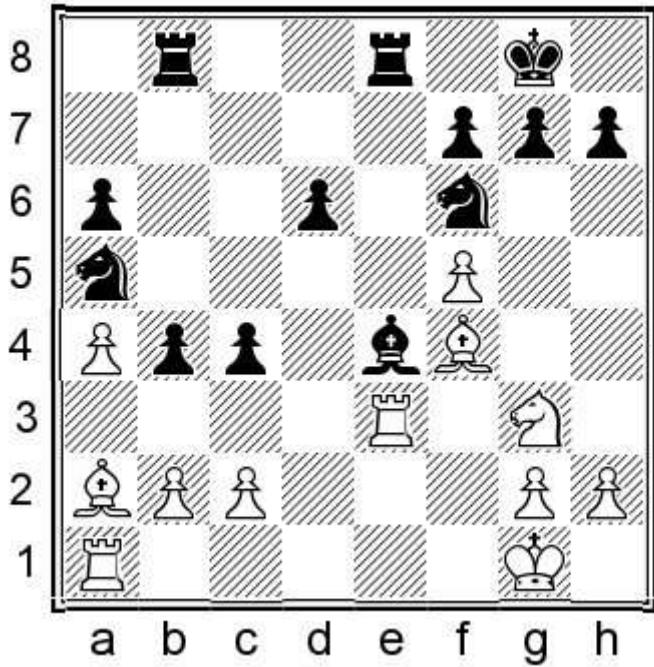
A) 16.e5 dx_e5 17.fx_e5 Qxd3 18.cxd3 Rfe8 This endgame is hardly dangerous, e.g. 19.Nd4 c5! 20.exf6 cxd4 21.Bd2 [21.Bf4 Rbc8] 21...b3 22.Bxa5 bxa2 23.Rxa2 Re2 24.Rf2 Rxf2 25.Kxf2 Bd5 26.b3 Rxb3 and Black is doing very well.

B) 16.Ng3 Re8 17.Re1



Position after: 17.Re1

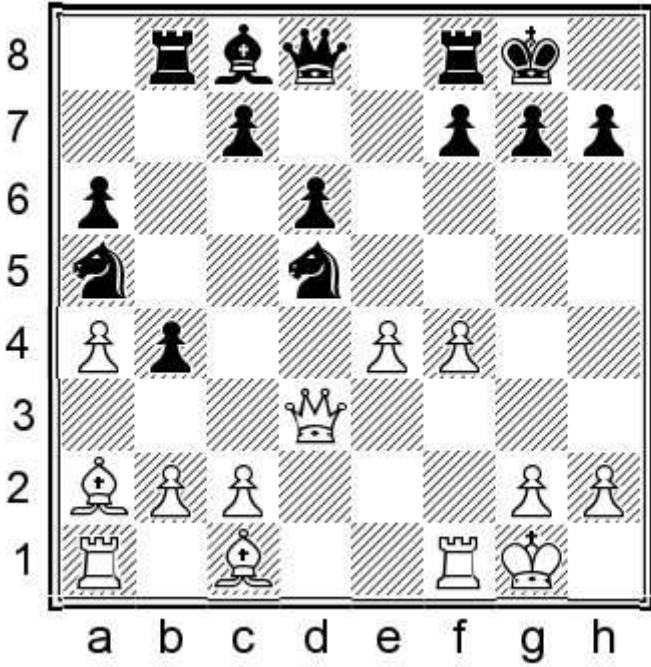
17...c5 Black's game has developed naturally, so there is no reason to think that we can be worse. [17...Qd7!? 18.Bd2 Qc6 is the alternative.]
18.f5 Qb6 19.Bf4 c4+ 20.Qe3 Qxe3+ 21.Rxe3 Bxe4



Position after: 21...Bxe4

22.Nxe4 [22.Bxd6?! Bxc2! A key idea. 23.Rxe8+ Rxe8 24.Bxb4 Nb3 25.Re1 Rxe1+ 26.Bxe1 Ng4³] 22...Rxe4 23.Rxe4 Nxe4 24.Rd1 Re8= This endgame is balanced.

15...Nxd5



Position after: 15...Nxd5

16.Qxd5

16.Bxd5 c6 17.Ba2 b3 18.cxb3 Nxb3 19.Bxb3 Qb6+ 20.Kh1 Qxb3 21.Qxd6 Qc4! 22.Re1 Qb4 23.Qxb4 Rxb4 24.Ra3 Re8 25.e5 Be6 26.h3 h5©

16...b3!? 17.Qxa5

A) 17.Bb1 c6 18.Qd4 c5 19.Qd3 Be6=

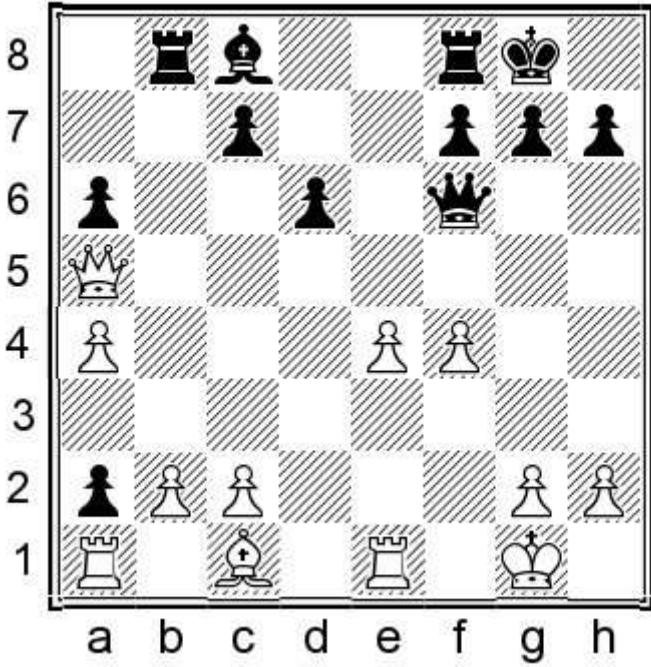
B) 17.Bxb3?! Nxb3 18.cxb3 Rb4!? 19.Re1 Bb7 is pleasant for Black.

17...bxa2

Black has sacrificed a pawn. In return we get nice play on the light squares, in particular against the e4-pawn.

18.Rxa2

In case of the immediate 18.Re1 we can continue with the usual 18...Re8, followed by ...Bb7, or instead play the energetic 18...Qf6!?



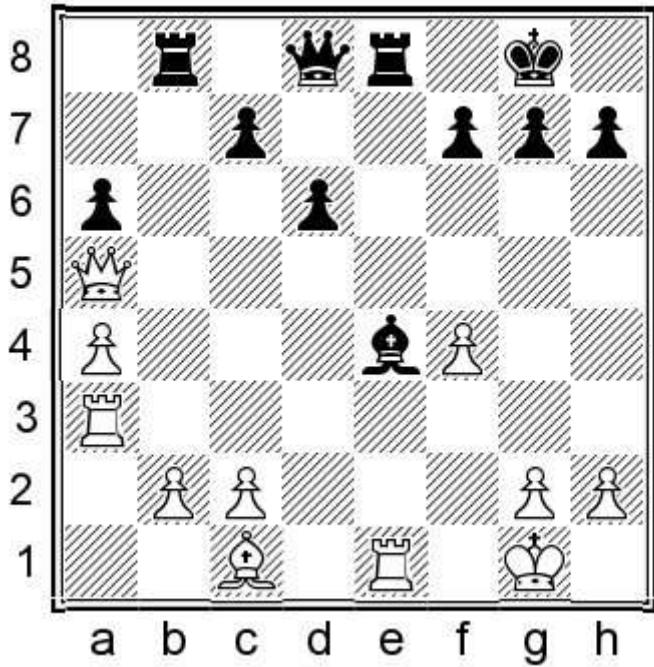
Position after: 18...Qf6!?

19.Rxa2 [19.Qxc7 Qd4+ 20.Be3TM 20...Qxb2 21.Rxa2! Qxa2 22.Qxb8 Qxc2 23.Qxd6 Bb7=] 19...Qd4+ 20.Kh1 Re8 21.Be3 Qxe4 22.Bf2 Qc6 23.Rxe8+ Qxe8 24.Qxc7 Bf5= Black has good counterplay whereas White lacks coordination.

18...Re8 19.Re1 Bb7 20.Ra3

20.b3 Qc8!=

20...Bxe4



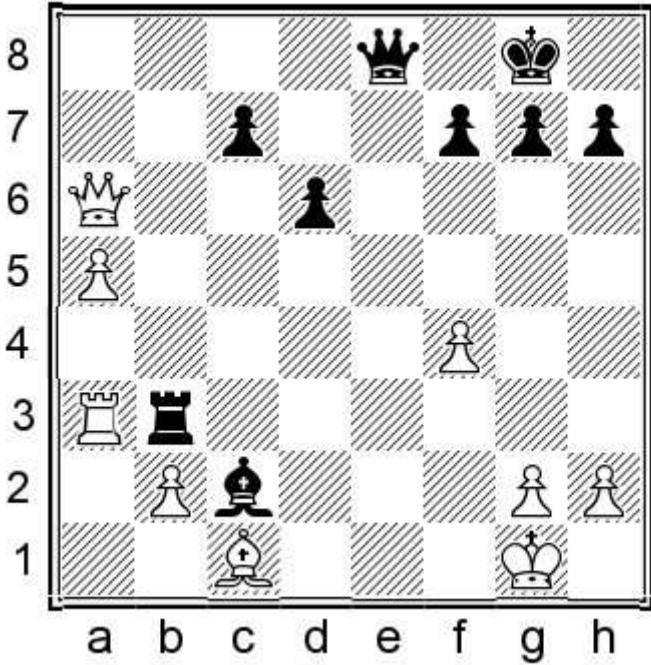
Position after: 20...Bxe4

21.Qxa6

A) 21.Rae3 d5 22.Qxa6 Qd7 23.c4 Ra8 24.Qb5 c6 25.Qb4 Reb8©
White is a pawn up, but his position is a bit depressing.

B) 21.Rc3?! c5! 22.Qxa6 Ra8 and Black wins back the pawn after
23.Qb5 [Or 23.Qc4 Bd5] 23...Bc6

21...Bxc2 22.Rxe8+ Qxe8 23.a5 Rb3!?



Position after: 23...Rb3!?

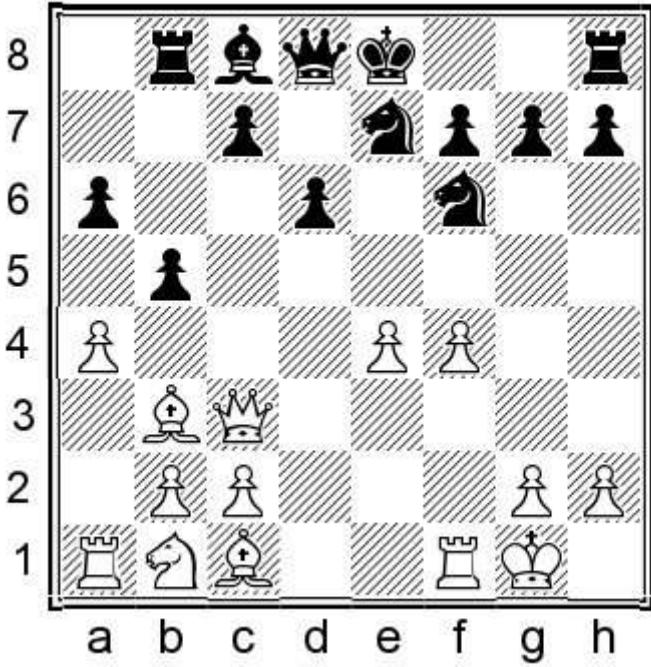
Black has other moves, but this looks clear-cut.

24.Rxb3 Qe1+ 25.Qf1 Qxf1+ 26.Kxf1 Bxb3 27.Ke2 Bc4+ 28.Ke3 Kf8=

White's outside passed pawn is not dangerous, of course

e) 8.Nxe5 Nxe5 9.d4 Bxd4 10.Qxd4 d6 11.f4 Nc6 12.Qc3 Ne7 13.--

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4 Rb8
8.Nxe5!? Nxe5 9.d4 Bxd4 10.Qxd4 d6 11.f4 Nc6 12.Qc3 Ne7

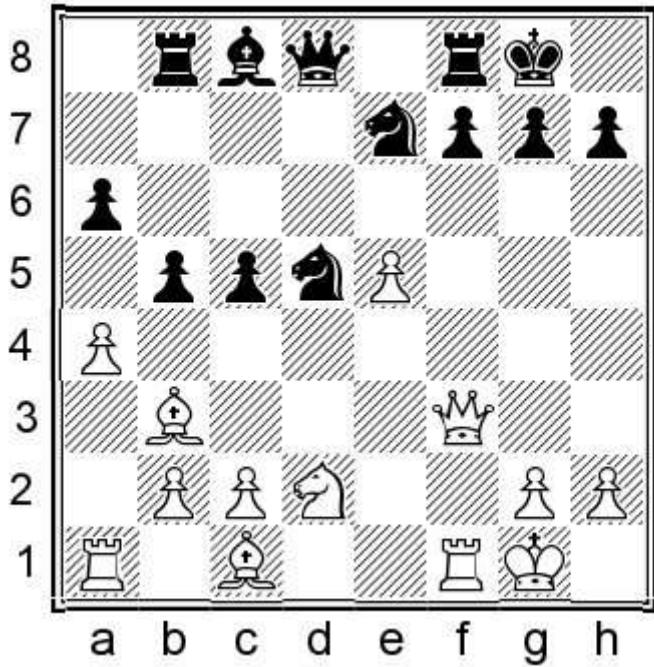


Position after: 12...Ne7

13.Qe1!?

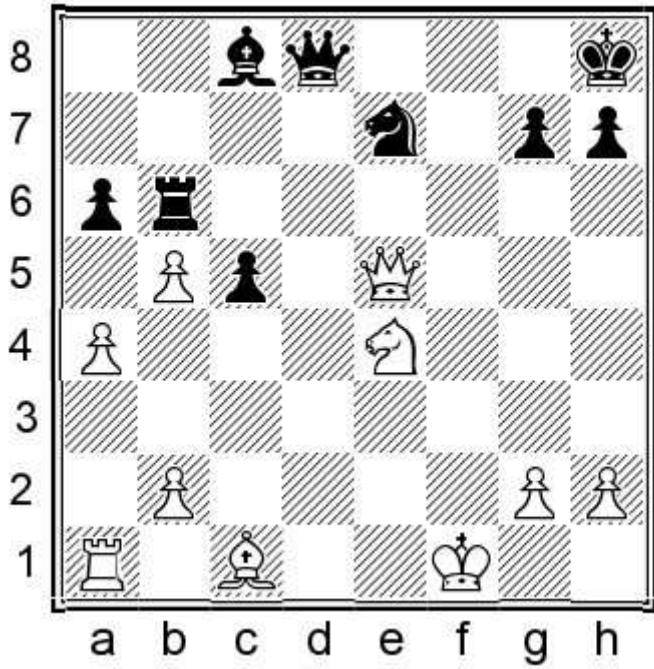
This is probably one of the most direct lines of all if Black plays as a partner. No wonder that Sutovsky himself also gave it a try. Yours truly also faced this variation in 2017 and I remember that during the game I recalled the well-known game, Salgado Lopez – Kasimdzhanov from 2012, and in that game the move order was 13.f5. The logical question was why did he start with the queen move? It made me wonder and thus I came up with 13...Be6. Though it's objectively not best, I came out of the opening pretty well.

- A) 13.f5 0-0 14.Qe1 This move order excludes 13.Qe1 Be6!?.
- B) 13.axb5 axb5 is always a transposition to lines with 8.axb5
- C) 13.Nd2 It's unusual to play this one without the exchange on b5, but there are some differences here and there. 13...0-0 14.e5 Nfd5 15.Qf3 dx5 16.fxe5 c5!



Position after: 16...c5!

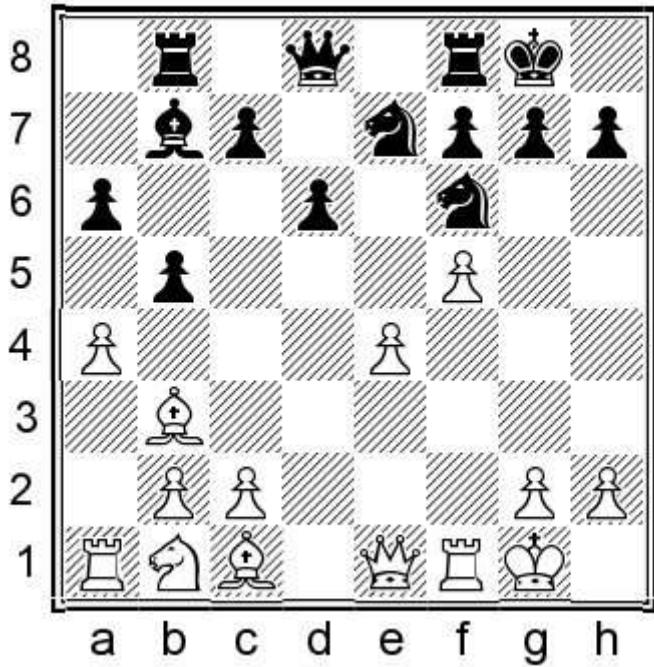
17.Bxd5 [17.axb5 axb5 see 13.Qc3 game!; 17.c4 Nb4!? Just as with the inclusion of axb5, we are ready to invest some material for activity.
18.cxb5 Nd3 19.Bxf7+ Kh8 20.Ne4 Nxe5 21.Qf4 Rxf7 22.Qxe5 Rxf1+
23.Kxf1 Rb6!



Position after: 23...Rb6!

24.Nf2! axb5 25.axb5 Qd7 26.Ra8 h6=] 17...Qxd5 18.Ne4 bxa4!? This possibility is an interesting nuance. 19.Bg5 Qd4+ 20.Be3 [20.Kh1 Ng6] 20...Qxe5 21.Rae1 Bf5 22.Nxc5 Rxb2∞ The game is complex.

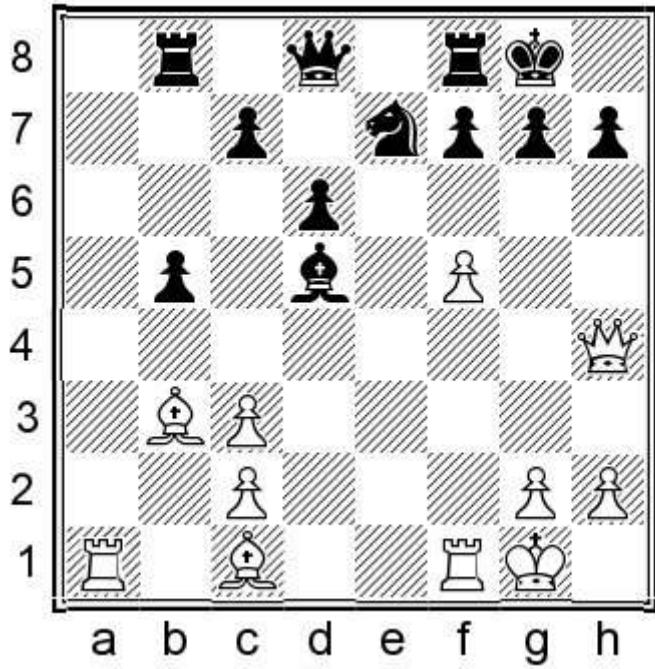
13...0-0 14.f5 Bb7



Position after: 14...Bb7

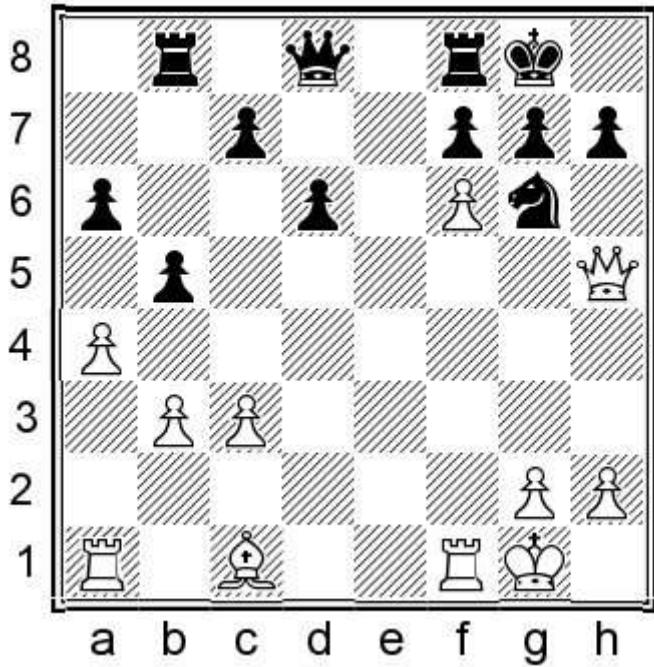
15.Nc3

15.Qh4 Now the a-file is not opened so we don't have ...Ra8, therefore I had to come up with something else. 15...Nxe4! [15...Bxe4 finally failed to convince me as a valid alternative.] 16.Nc3 [16.axb5 axb5 17.Nc3 Nxc3 18.bxc3 Bd5!]



Position after: 18...Bd5!

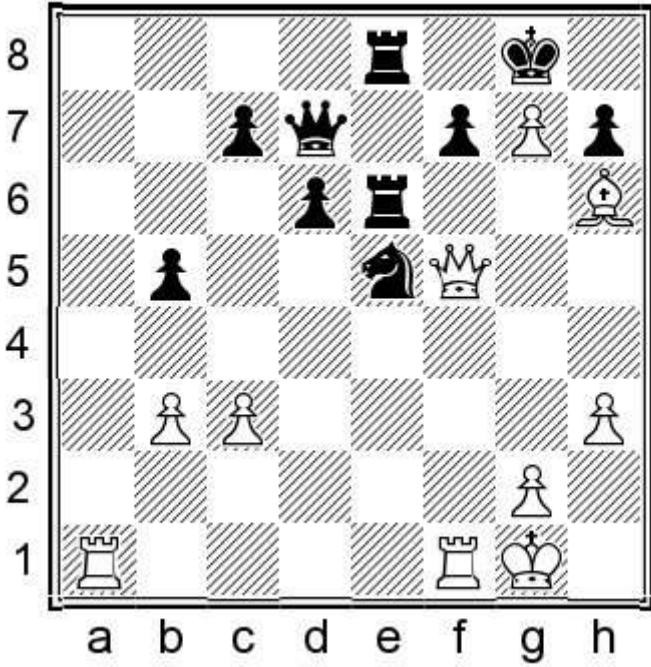
19.f6 Ng6 20.Qh5 Bxb3 21.cxb3 Re8 22.fxg7 Re5 23.Qf3 Qd7 is a direct transposition to 16.Nc3.] 16...Nxc3 17.bxc3 Bd5! 18.f6 Ng6 19.Qh5 Bxb3 20.cxb3



Position after: 20.cxb3

20...Re8 [20...gxf6 is playable too, but I like how the former KO world champion treated the position.] 21.fxg7 Re5 [21...Qd7] 22.Qf3 [22.Qg4 Qc8=] 22...Qd7 23.axb5 axb5

A) It's just pretty logical to protect the pawn with 24.Bh6 Rbe8 25.h3 R5e6 26.Qf5 Ne5



Position after: 26...Ne5

A1) In case of 27.Bf4 Black has the fascinating 27...Nf3+!? 28.Kh1 only. 28...Nh4 29.Qg4 Ng6 and Black has no real problems. 30.Bd2 [30.Bg5 Ne5] 30...Qc6 31.Rf2 Ne5 32.Qf5 Rg6

A2) 27.Bg5 Rg6 28.Bf6 Black is alright in many ways, the simplest being: 28...Qxf5 [28...Rg3!?] 29.Rxf5 Nd7 30.Bd4 c5=

B) 24.Bd2 Qe6 25.Rf2 Kxg7 The right moment to take this pesky pawn. 26.Raf1 f5! Black was fine, and later he even managed to win the game! Salgado Lopez, I (2621) – Kasimdzhanov, R (2675) Melilla 2011.

15...b4!

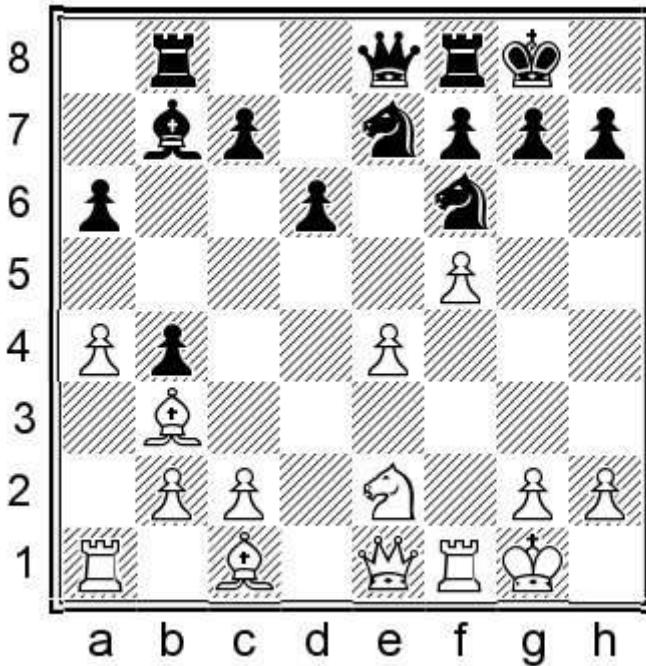
Now this makes a lot of sense, since the a-file is not open, meaning White's rook can't join the fight so easily.

16.Ne2

Now Black has a lot of different moves, and all come with great complexity.

I've chosen a logical one, which makes it easier to remember too.

16...Qe8!?



Position after: 16...Qe8!?

Black intends to activate the queen instead of going for material immediately.

17.Ng3

17.Qh4 Nxe4 18.Bh6!? [18.Ng3 Qc6 19.Nxe4 Qxe4 20.Qxe4 Bxe4 21.Re1 d5 22.Bxd5 Bxd5 23.Rxe7 Rfe8 Black is comfortable.] 18...gxh6 19.f6 Ng6 20.Qxh6 Nxf6 21.Rxf6 Qxe2 22.Rxg6+ hxg6 23.Qxg6+ Kh8= is just a perpetual.

17...Nc6!

Vacating the route to the e5-square for the queen.

18.Bg5

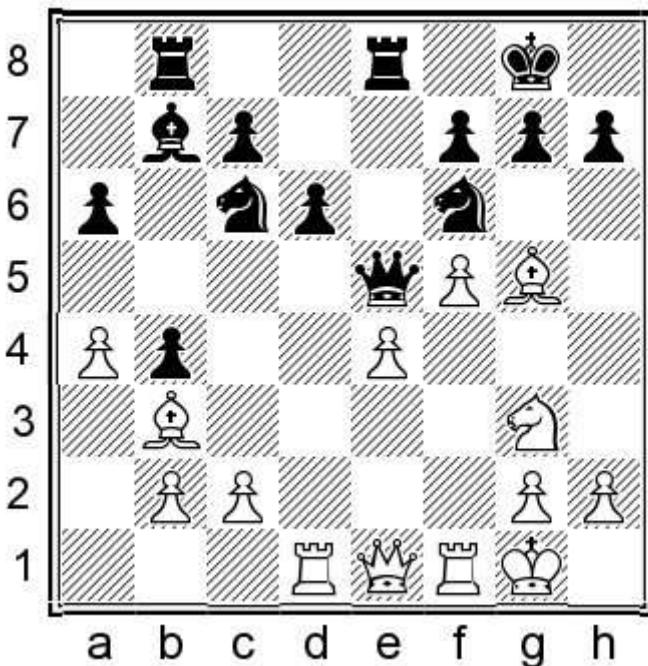
18.Bf4 stops ...Qe5, but allows 18...Nd4 19.Qxb4 [19.Qd2 Nxb3 20.cxb3

Nxe4 21.Nxe4 Qxe4 22.Rae1 Qd5,,] 19...Nxb3 20.cxb3 Bxe4 21.Qc3 Qc6= and this should be equal.

18...Qe5 19.Rd1

These were White's most natural moves: he is fully mobilized, though Black seems to be doing alright.

19...Rfe8



Position after: 19...Rfe8

I've tried to refute Black's setup, but I failed, e.g.

20.Qf2!?

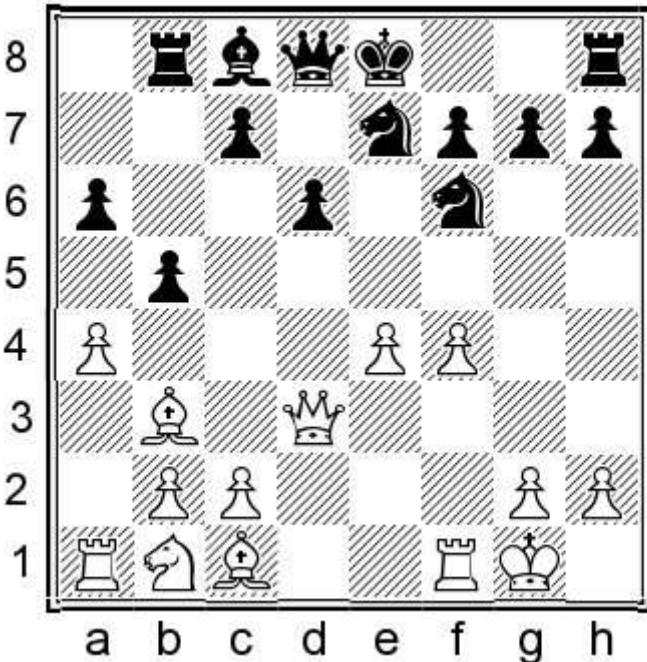
20.Bxf6 Qxf6 21.Nh5 Qg5 22.Qe2 Ne5 23.f6 g6 24.Nf4∞

20...Na5 21.Bxf6 Qxf6 22.Bd5 Bxd5 23.Rxd5 Nc4,,

Black has created his own play in time.

**f) 8.Nxe5 Nxe5 9.d4 Bxd4 10.Qxd4 d6 11.f4 Nc6 12.Qc3 Ne7
13.Qd3 0-0 14.Nc3 c5 15.axb5 axb5 16.Nxb5 Nxe4 17.Qxe4
Rxb5 18.--**

**1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4 Rb8
8.Nxe5!? Nxe5 9.d4 Bxd4 10.Qxd4 d6 11.f4 Nc6 12.Qc3 Ne7 13.Qd3**



Position after: 13.Qd3

13...0-0

13...c5 is possible, but thorough analysis convinced me that we should probably avoid it. 14.c4 [Or 14.axb5 axb5 15.c4 bxc4 16.Ba4+!]

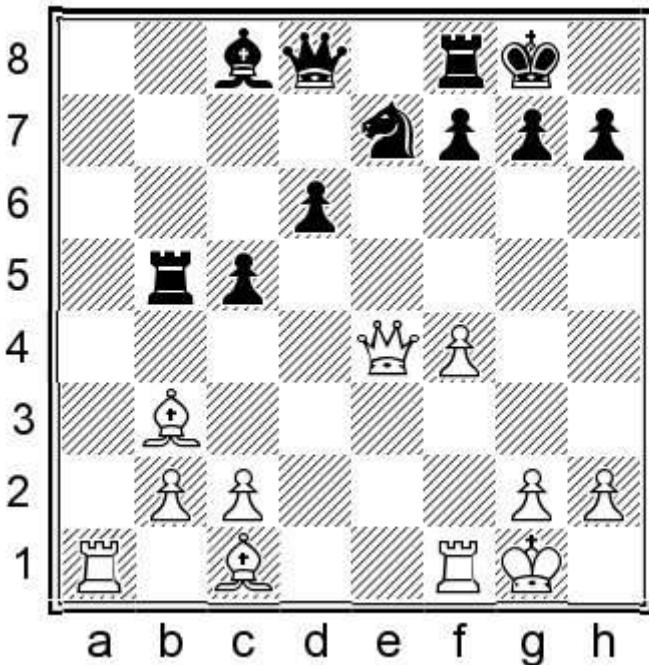
14.Nc3 c5!

Now White no longer had the move c4 at his disposal, so has to take the pawn.

15.axb5 axb5 16.Nxb5 Nxe4!

Of course, this was the move we were counting on. Black maintains a material balance.

17.Qxe4 Rxb5



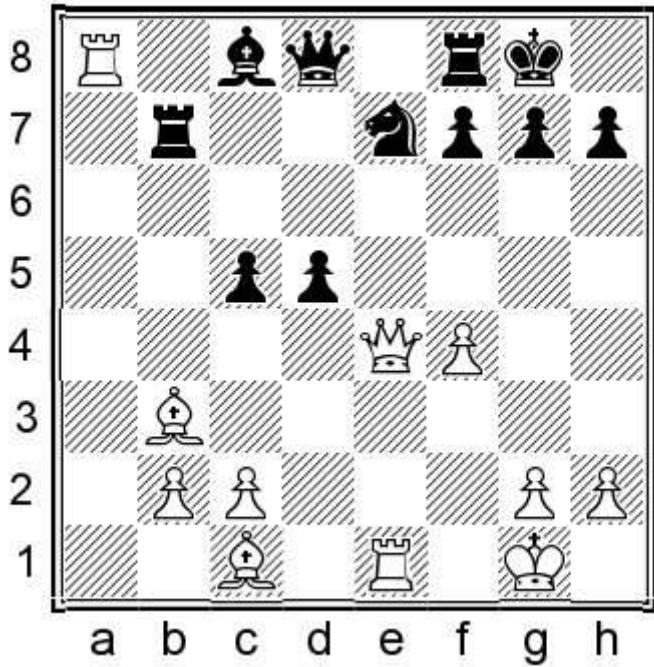
Position after: 17...Rxb5

Another main tabiya in the Nxe5 universe. I believe Black should be able to neutralize White's bishop pair. The fact that White's pawn is totally misplaced on f4 (albeit we should be aware of ideas connected with f5) helps us to realize it. There are a lot of options for White and we will go through all of them one by one:

18.f5!?

A) 18.Qe2 Rb8 is not a problem.

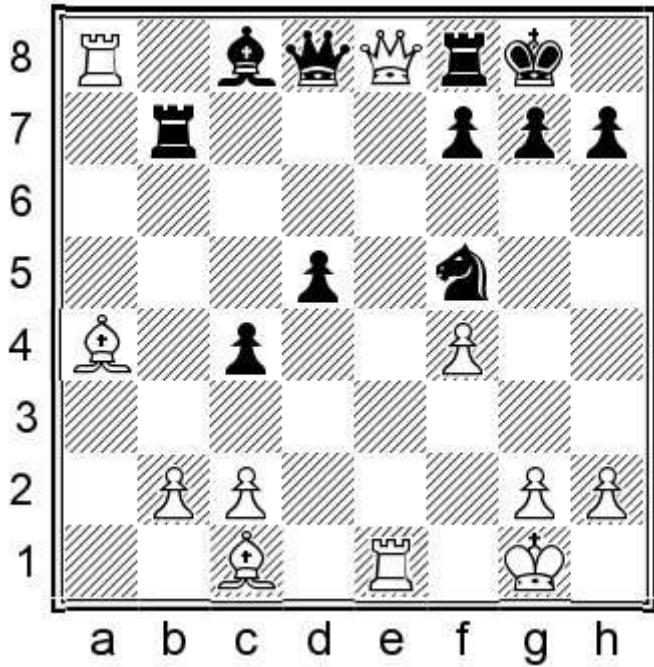
B) 18.Re1 Rb7 Covering the seventh rank. 19.Ra8 [19.Bd2 d5 20.Qe5 Bf5=] 19...d5



Position after: 19...d5

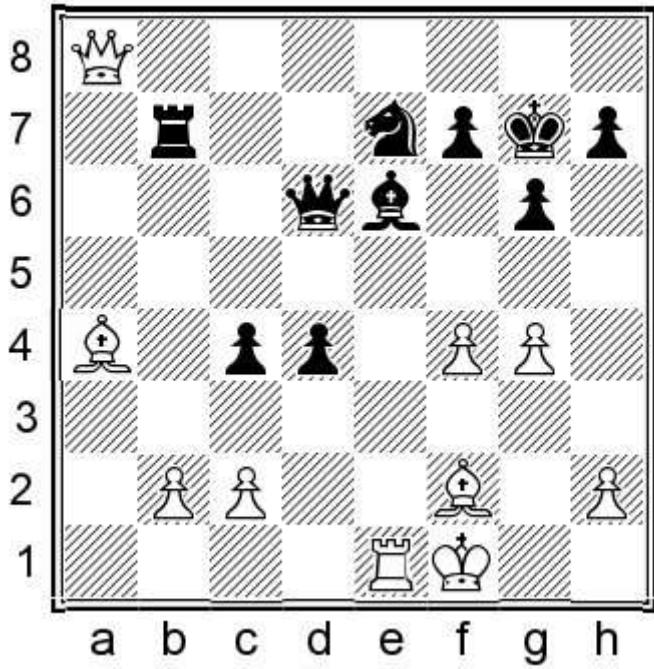
B1) 20.Qf3 c4!? 21.Ba4 Nf5 Black has counterplay. 22.Qf2 [22.g4 Qh4∞] 22...Re7=

B2) 20.Qe5 c4 21.Ba4 Nf5 22.Qe8!?



Position after: 22.Qe8!?

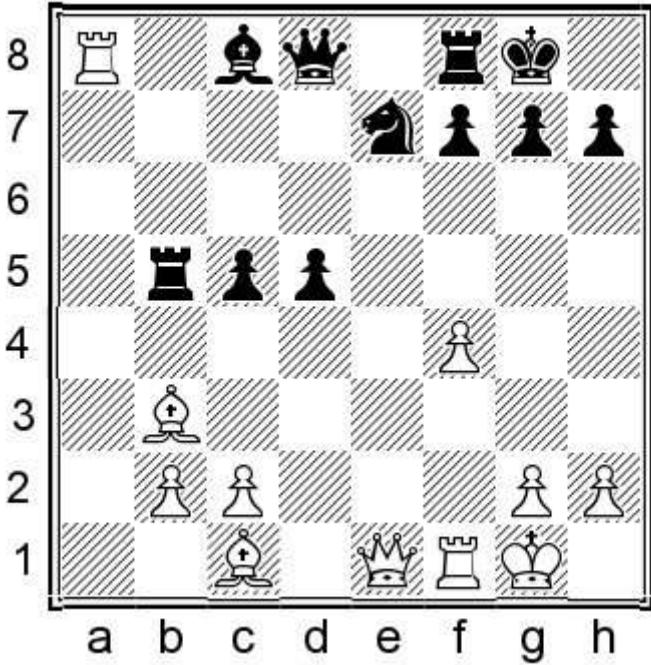
is a fun try, but Black is ok. 22...Qb6+ 23.Kf1! g6! 24.Qc6 Be6 25.Rxf8+ Kxf8 26.g4!? Some would definitely go for the maximum tension. 26...Ne7 27.Qe8+ [27.Qxb6 Rxb6=] 27...Kg7 28.Be3 d4 29.Bf2 Qd6 30.Qa8!



Position after: 30.Qa8!

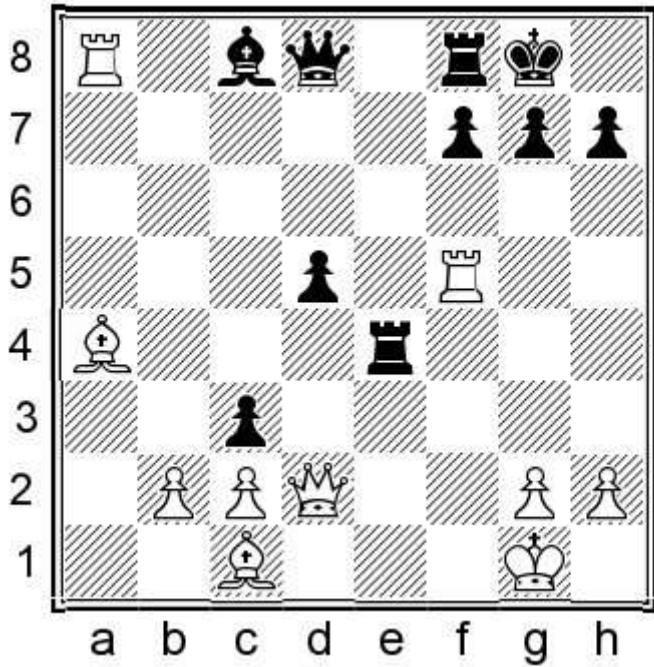
is crazy, but leads to some equal endgame. [30.Re4 Bxg4] 30...Qd5 31.Kg1 d3 32.cxd3 cxd3 33.Re5 Rxb2! 34.Rxd5 Rb1+ 35.Be1™ 35...Rxe1+ 36.Kf2 Re2+=

C) 18.Ra8 d5 19.Qe1!



Position after: 19.Qe1!

Covering the a5-square, so the rook can stick to its active position.
 [Otherwise: 19.Qe2 c4 20.Ba4 Ra5!=] 19...Rb4!? The most direct solution, as mentioned by Svidler. We must note that both 19...Qd6 and 19...Qc7 are perfectly playable moves too. 20.f5 Nxf5! 21.Rxf5 Re4! 22.Qd2 [22.Be3 c4 23.Bxc4 dxc4 24.Rc5 Qd7= doesn't bother Black.] 22...c4 23.Ba4 [23.Qxd5 Qb6+ 24.Qc5 Qe6 25.Rf1 cxb3 can't be a problem.] 23...c3!



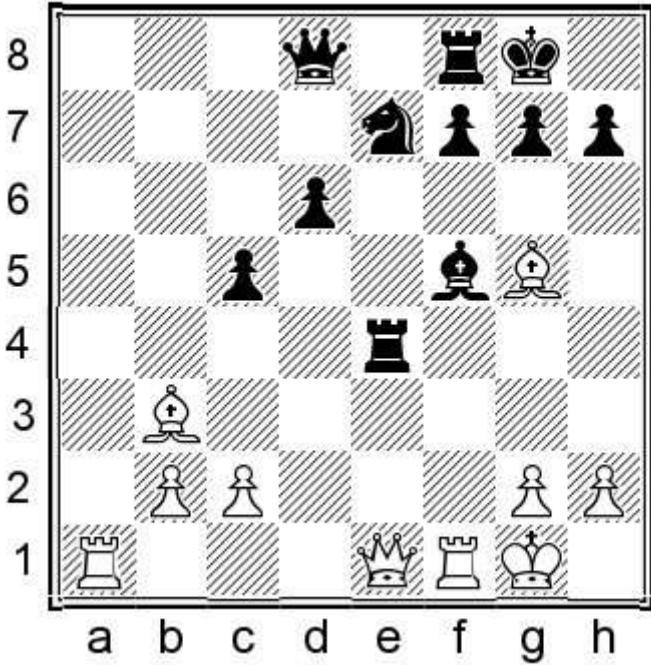
Position after: 23...c3!

The essence of the previous play. 24.Qxd5 [24.Qxc3 Qb6+ 25.Rf2 Re2 26.Be3 Rxe3 27.Qd2 Re4³] 24...Rxa4!? 25.Qxd8 [25.Rxa4 Bxf5 26.Qxd8 Rxd8 27.bxc3 h6=] 25...Rxa8 26.Rd5 [26.Qd3 Bxf5 27.Qxf5 Ra1 is problematic.] 26...Be6! 27.Qxa8 Rxa8=

18...Rb4 19.Qe1

In case of 19.Qd3, Black can continue in various ways. A clear-cut solution would be: 19...Bxf5 20.Rxf5 Nxf5 21.Qxf5 c4 22.Ba4 [22.Bd2?! cxb3 23.Bxb4 Qb6+ is an extra pawn.] 22...Qb6+ 23.Qf2! Qxf2+ 24.Kxf2 Ra8 25.b3 cxb3 26.cxb3 Rxb3 27.Bxb3 Rxa1= This endgame is a draw.

19...Bxf5 20.Bg5 Re4



Position after: 20...Re4

Defends everything.

21.Qf2

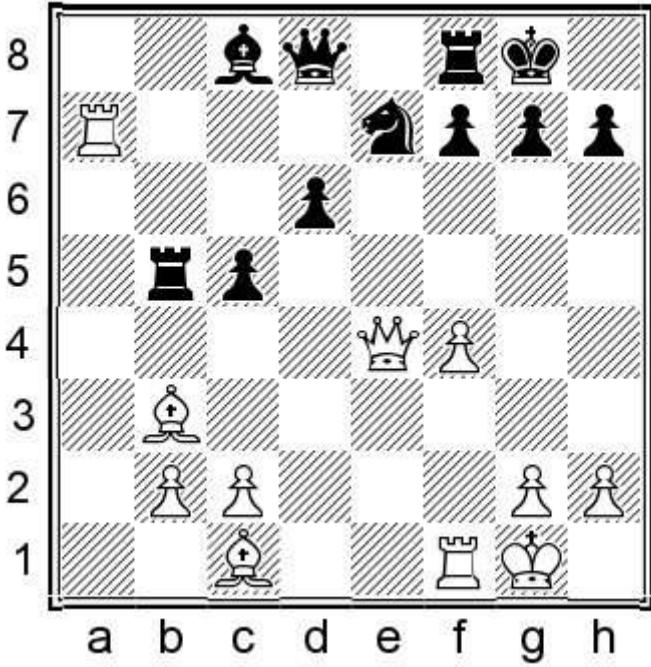
21.Qg3?! Qd7 22.Ba4 Rxa4 23.Rxa4 Qxa4 [23...f6!?] 24.Bxe7 Re8 25.Bxd6 Qxc2³

21...Be6 22.Qf3 d5 23.Rad1=

White wins back the material.

g) 8.Nxe5 Nxe5 9.d4 Bxd4 10.Qxd4 d6 11.f4 Nc6 12.Qc3 Ne7 13.Qd3 0-0 14.Nc3 c5 15.axb5 axb5 16.Nxb5 Nxe4 17.Qxe4 Rxb5 18.Ra7

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4 Rb8 8.Nxe5!? Nxe5 9.d4 Bxd4 10.Qxd4 d6 11.f4 Nc6 12.Qc3 Ne7 13.Qd3 0-0 14.Nc3 c5! 15.axb5 axb5 16.Nxb5 Nxe4! 17.Qxe4 Rxb5 18.Ra7



Position after: 18.Ra7

It's shocking to me that in all 10 games I've found White continued this way.

18...Bd7

The seventh should be closed for the moment.

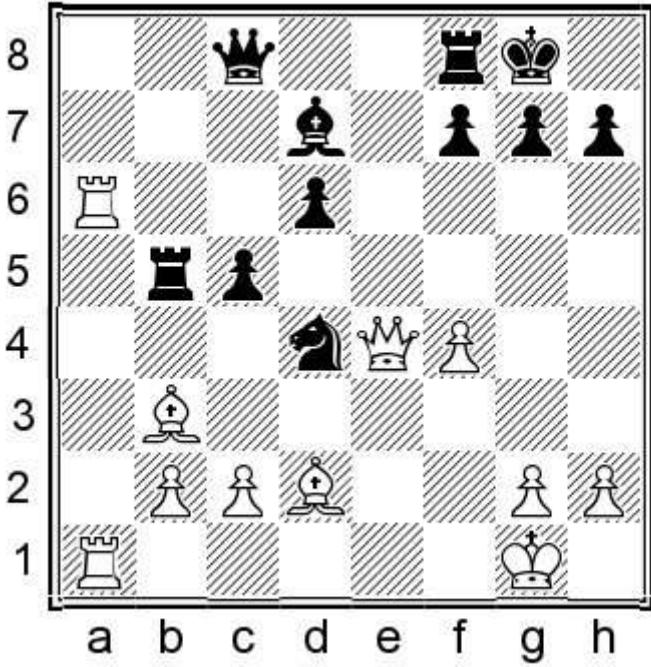
19.Qd3

The best try. Now it's really important to remember the right idea! In my very first Ark game I wasn't anticipating this line, and here I kind of automatically played the wrong move, realizing immediately what I had done!

A) 19.Rd1?! is hardly a good idea, as 19...Rb4 20.Qe1 Nc6 21.Ra6 Qc8 22.Ra3 Re8 leads to problems for White.

B) 19.Ba4?? drops a piece to 19...Rb4--

C) 19.Bd2 Nc6! 20.Ra6 Qc8 21.Rfa1 Nd4



Position after: 21...Nd4

This is critical; Black is in control.

C1) 22.Rxd6 Bc6 23.Qe7 [23.Bd5 Bxd5 24.Rxd5 Rxb2 25.Bc3 Rxc2 26.Bxd4 cxd4=] 23...h6 24.Bc3 Rxb3!? 25.cxb3 Re8 26.Qh4 Qc7=

C2) 22.Ra8 Bc6 is a bit riskier, but interesting. 23.Bxf7+! Kxf7 24.R1a7+ Kg8 25.Rxg7+ [25.Qe7 Nf5 26.Qf7+!? Rxf7 27.Rxc8+ Rf8 28.Rxc6 Rxb2 29.g4 Rxc2 30.gxf5 Rxd2 31.Rcc7 Rb8=] 25...Kxg7 26.Qe7+ Kg8 27.Rxc8 Rxc8 28.c3 Rxb2 29.cxd4 Re8 30.Qg5+ Kh8 31.f5 Re2=

19...Nf5

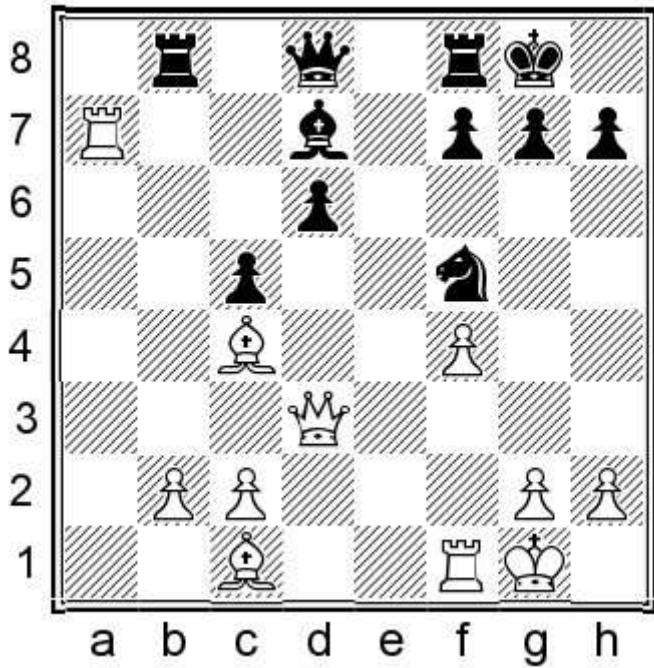
This is the proper time to block the f-pawn!

20.Bc4

20.Bd5 Ra5! 21.Rxa5 [21.Rb7 Qc8 22.c4 Bc6] 21...Qxa5 The position is balanced. 22.g4 [22.Be4 c4=] 22...Nd4 23.c3 Bb5! 24.c4 Bc6 25.Bxc6 Nxc6

26.Bd2 [26.Qxd6 Nd4] 26...Qd8=

20...Rb8!

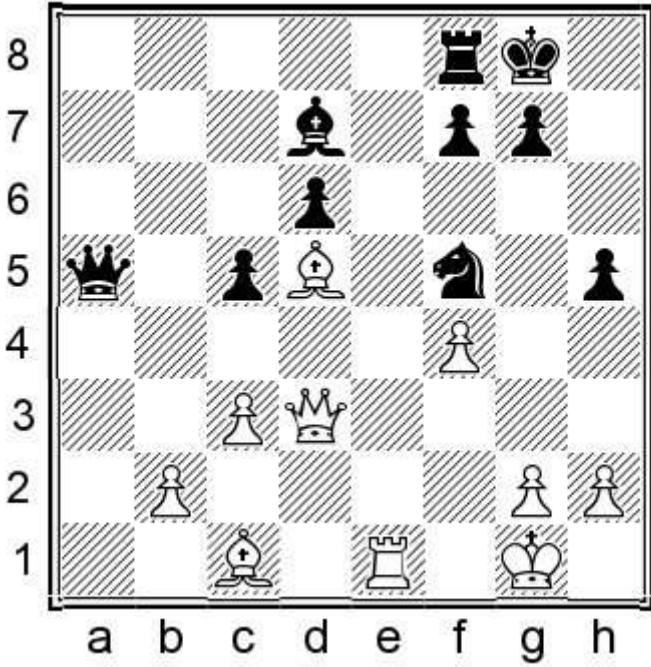


Position after: 20...Rb8!

21.Bd2

Once again the best move; Black needs to be careful here.

21.Re1 Ra8 I like neutralizing the pressure along the 7th rank. 22.Rxa8 Qxa8
23.Bd5 [23.Bd2 g6 24.Bc3 Re8 25.Rxe8+ Qxe8 26.Kf2 h5=] 23...Qa5 24.c3
[24.Bd2 Qb6 25.Qb3 Qxb3 26.cxb3 Rb8=] 24...h5



Position after: 24...h5

Finally stopping g4 possibilites. 25.h3 [25.Be4 Re8 26.Bd2 c4 27.Qxc4 Qb6+ 28.Kh1 Qxb2=] 25...h4 26.Bd2 [26.Be3 Re8=] 26...Qb6 27.c4 Qxb2!? A concrete approach, but we are fine anyway. 28.Bc3 Qb3 29.Rb1 Qa3 It's hard to see how White can make any progress. 30.Be4 [30.Kh2 Ne7 31.Be4 Bf5=] 30...Be6!=

21...Qc8!? 22.Re1

An ambitious test of the whole line. The Cuban GM, Lenier Dominguez, is well-known for his very solid preparation.

22.Bc3 Be6

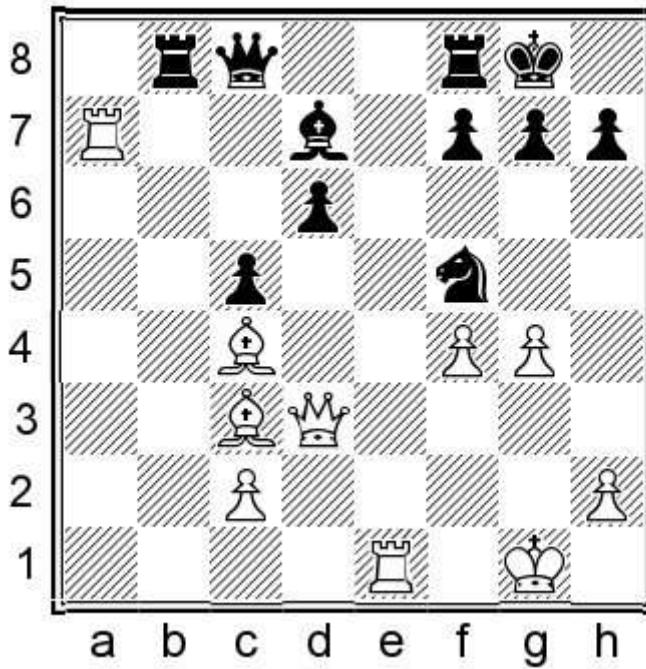
A) 23.Rfa1? is simply bad, as 23...d5 24.Ba6 [24.Bxd5 c4] 24...Qc6

B) 23.Bxe6 Qxe6 24.g4!? [24.Re1 Qg6 25.Qf3 h5! 26.h3 Rfe8 and Bck reached a very comfortable position in Gallagher, J (2434) – Kurmann, O (2451) Lenzerheide 2018.] 24...Qe3+ [24...Nd4 25.f5] 25.Rf2 Qxd3 [25...Qc1+ 26.Rf1 Qe3+=] 26.cxd3 Ne3 27.Re2 Nd5=

22...Rxb2

22...Nd4? allows 23.Re7 Bf5 24.Qf1! and the complications favor White eventually.

23.Bc3 Rb8 24.g4



Position after: 24.g4

The most testing.

24.Bd5 Be6 25.Bxe6 fxe6 26.Qxd6!? looks nice, but we have our tricks too. 26...Rf7! 27.Qa6TM 27...Qxa6 28.Rxa6 Nd4= The material is reduced and a draw is likely.

24...Nd4 25.Bxd4 cxd4 26.Re7 Rb7 27.Rxb7

27.Ba6? is naive. 27...Qd8! 28.Bxb7 Qxe7 29.Be4 Re8 is pleasant for us.

27...Qxb7 28.f5

28.Bb3 Stopping the penetration of the black queen to b1, but losing valuable

time to create threats. 28...Qc8 29.f5 Qd8 30.f6! [30.Qe2? d3!; 30.Re4 Bc6 31.Rxd4 Qe7!μ is very good for Black as 32.Rxd6? drops an exchange: 32...Qe1+ 33.Qf1 Qe4 34.Rxc6 Qxc6–+] 30...gxf6 31.Bxf7+ Rxf7 32.Rxf7 Kxf7 33.Qxh7+ Ke6 34.Qe4+ Kf7= and a draw by perpetual check.

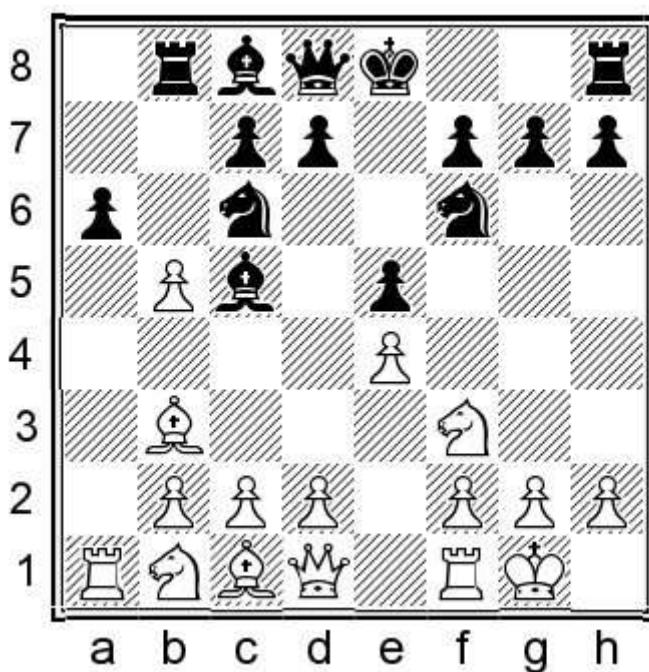
28...Qb1+ 29.Kf2 Ba4! 30.Qxd4 Qxc2+ 31.Re2 Qd1!=

Despite all the effort from White, Black managed to equalize with precise play in Dominguez Perez, L (2732) – Perez Ponsa, F (2563) Baku 2015, though later he blundered and lost. This is a tough line for Black, but the play is dynamic and there are plenty of traps for White to fall into as well.

h) 8.axb5 axb5 9.Nxe5 Nxe5 10.d4 Bxd4 11.Qxd4 d6 12.--

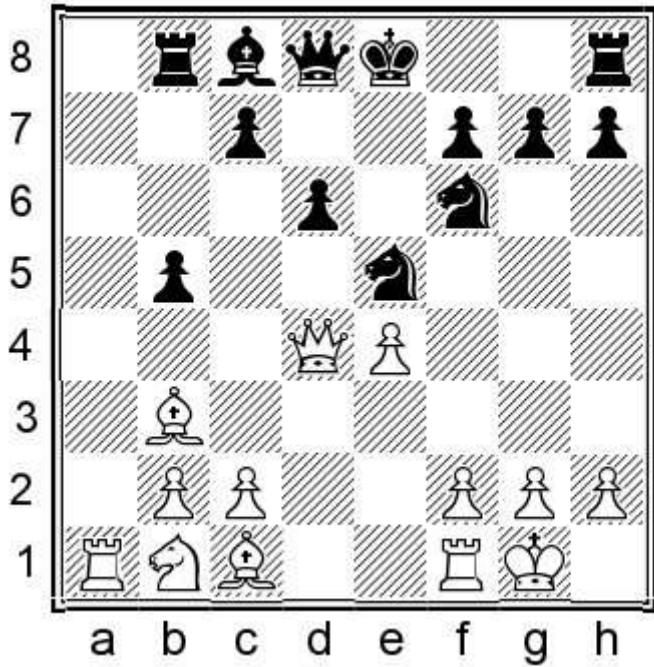
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4 Rb8 8.axb5

Exchanging these pawns is just the normal human way. White's rook joins the game from its starting place.



Position after: 8.axb5

8...axb5 9.Nxe5 Nxe5 10.d4 Bxd4 11.Qxd4 d6 12.--

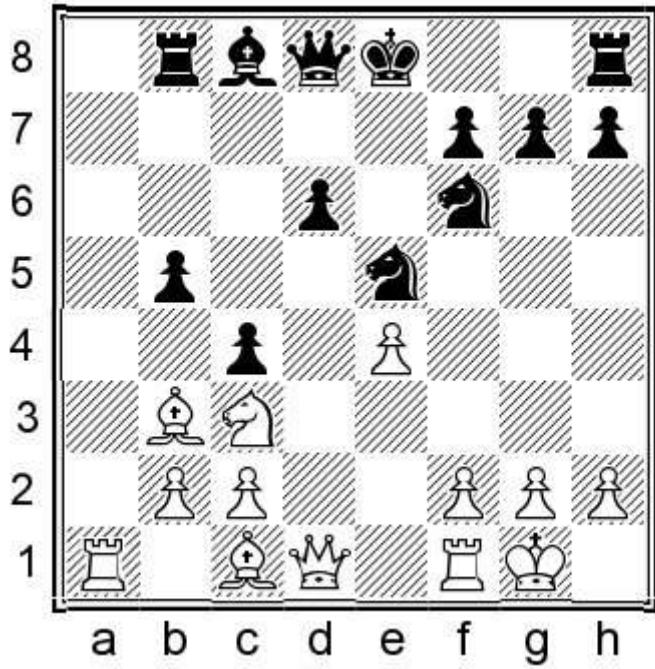


Position after: 11...d6

White only seldomly opts for moves other than 12.f4.

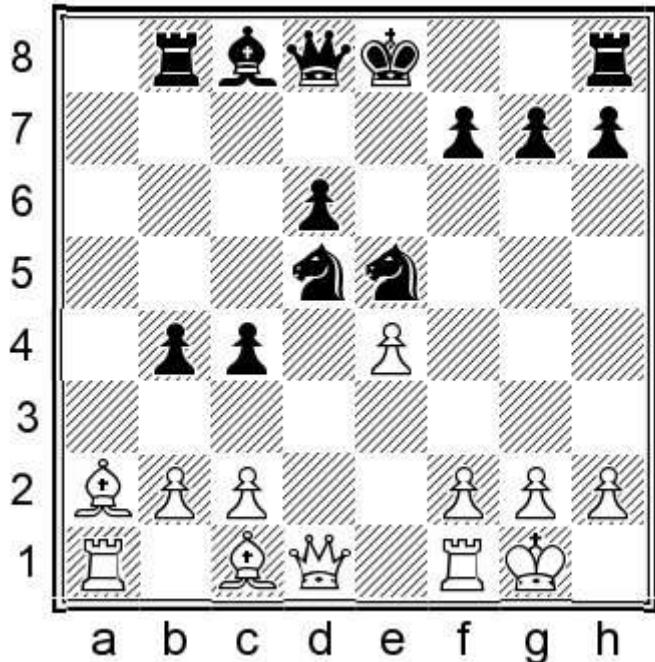
12.c3

A) 12.Nc3 A pet line of A.Kovacevic; There are some interesting ideas in this less-explored variation. 12...c5 13.Qd1 c4!? This leads to complications. 13...0-0 is also good.



Position after: 13...c4!?

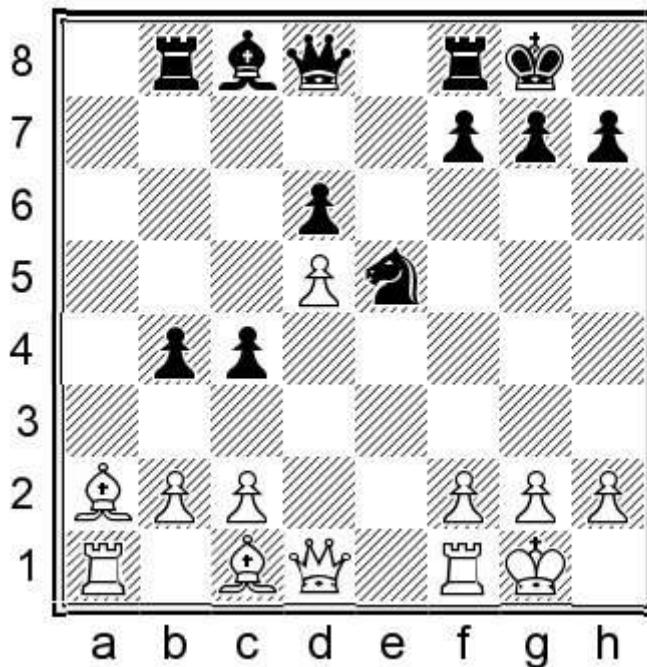
A1) 14.Ba2 b4 I like this direct approach. 15.Nd5 Nxd5



Position after: 15...Nxd5

A1.1) 16.Qxd5 Be6 17.Qd4 0-0 18.Bb1 Nc6 [18...c3!? 19.bxc3 bxc3 ... 20.Qxc3 Qf6] 19.Qd2 Qf6=

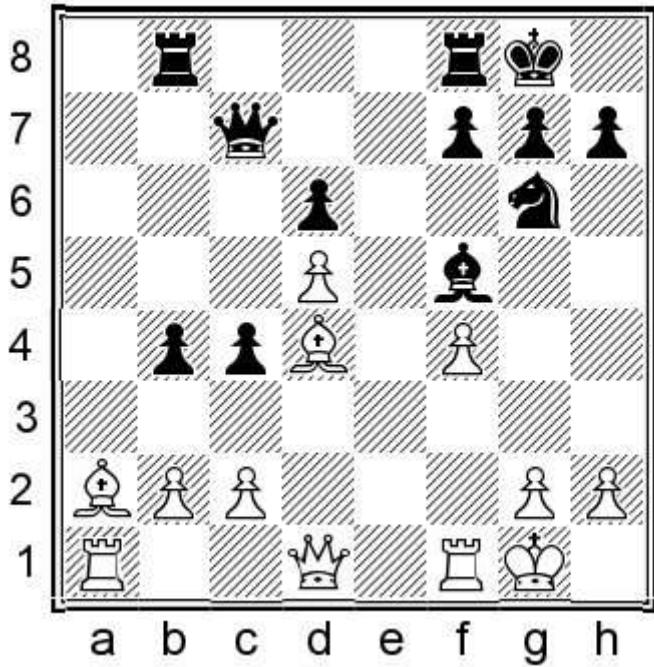
A1.2) 16.exd5 0-0



Position after: 16...0-0

A1.2a) 17.Qd4 Qf6 18.Be3 Qg6 19.f4 [19.Kh1 Bf5 20.Bxc4 Nxc4 21.Qxc4 Rfc8 is also fine for us.] 19...Bh3! 20.Qd2 c3 21.bxc3 bxc3 22.Qe2 Nd7 and Black was at least ok in Kovacevic, A (2574) – Gustafsson, J (2646)/Rijeka 2010.

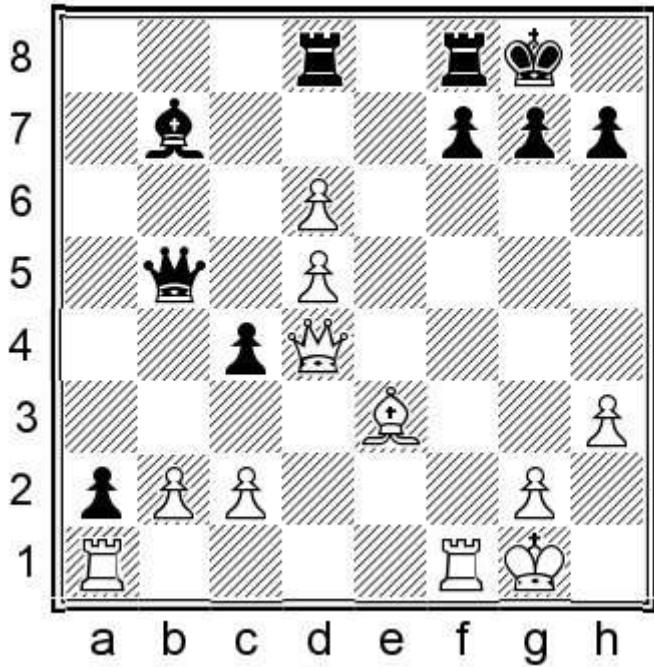
A1.2b) 17.Be3 Bf5 18.Bd4 Qc7 Black is alright and, should White play the optimistic: 19.f4 Ng6



Position after: 19...Ng6

20.g4? we have 20...Be4! 21.Bxg7 f6! 22.Qd4 Qxg7 23.Qxe4 f5! 24.Qxc4 [24.Qe6+ Kh8 25.Qxd6 Qxb2--] 24...Rbc8 25.Qxb4 Rxc2-- and White ends up in a lost position.

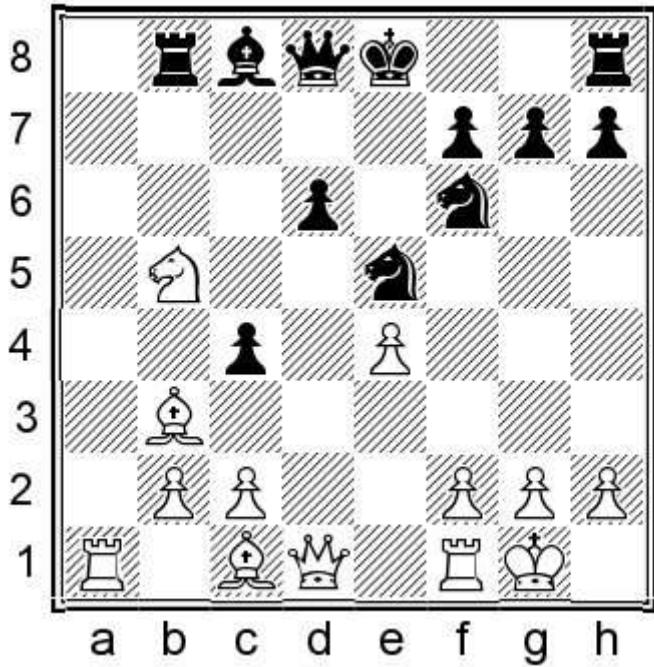
A1.2c) 17.h3!? A solid move, securing squares around the king. 17...Qb6 18.Be3 Qb5 Black puts the d5-pawn under pressure. 19.Qd4 Bb7 20.f4 b3! 21.fxe5 bxa2 22.exd6 Rbd8!



Position after: 22...Rbd8!

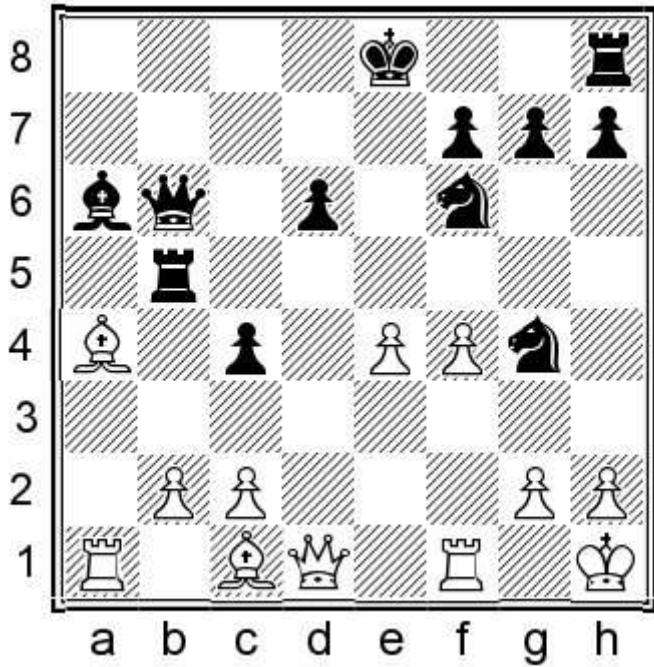
The position is balanced. 23.Rxa2 [23.Bf4 Ra8; 23.Rf4 Rxd6 24.Qxc4 Qxb2 25.Rxa2 Qb1+ 26.Rf1 Bxd5 27.Rxb1 Bxc4 28.Ra4 Rc6=] 23...Rxd6 24.Rf5 Rxd5= [24...Qd7=]

A2) 14.Nxb5!?



Position after: 14.Nxb5!?

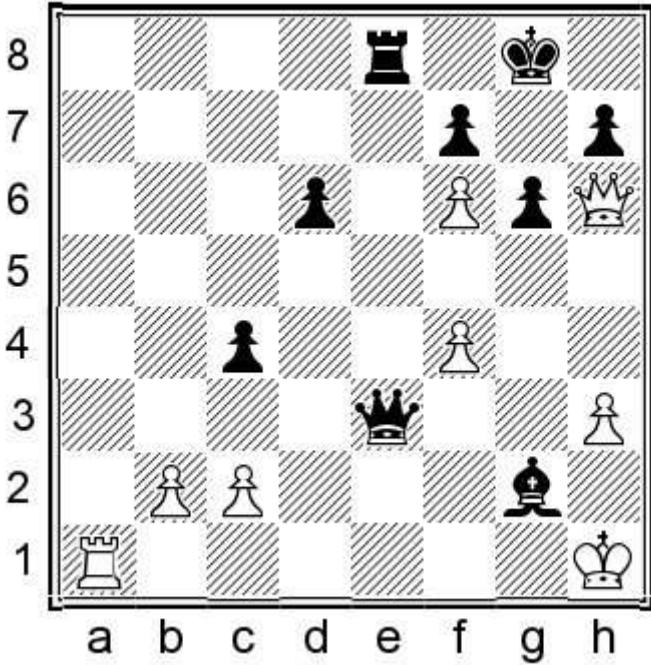
This is slightly unexpected. 14...Rxb5 15.Ba4 Ba6!? This leads to some fascinating tactics. [15...Bd7 is the other option.] 16.f4 The real question. [16.Qd4 is the calm positional way: 16...0-0 17.Bxb5 Bxb5 18.Rd1 Re8 19.f3 Re6 20.Bf4 Nfd7= and the position is roughly equal.] 16...Qb6+ 17.Kh1 Neg4



Position after: 17...Neg4

A2.1) 18.Bxb5+ Bxb5 19.Ra8+ Kd7! 20.Rxh8 c3! 21.h3 [21.e5 Bxf1 22.Qxd6+ Qxd6 23.exd6=; 21.bxc3 Bxf1 22.Qd4 Qa6] 21...Bxf1 22.hxg4 Qf2 23.Qf3 Bxg2+ [23...Qe1 24.Qxc3!=] 24.Qxg2 Qe1+ 25.Qg1 Qh4+ 26.Kg2 Qxg4+= is a draw.

A2.2) 18.e5 also peters out to a draw: 18...0-0 19.exf6 Nf2+ 20.Rxf2 Qxf2 21.Bxb5 Bxb5 22.Be3! Qxe3 23.Qg4 g6 24.Qg5! Re8 25.h3 Bc6 26.Qh6 Bxg2+

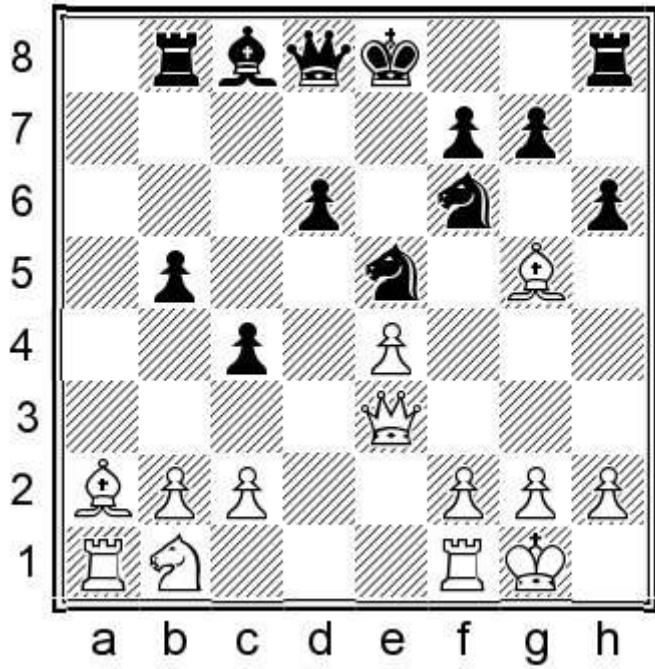


Position after: 26...Bxg2+

27.Kxg2 Qe2+ 28.Kg1 Qe3+=

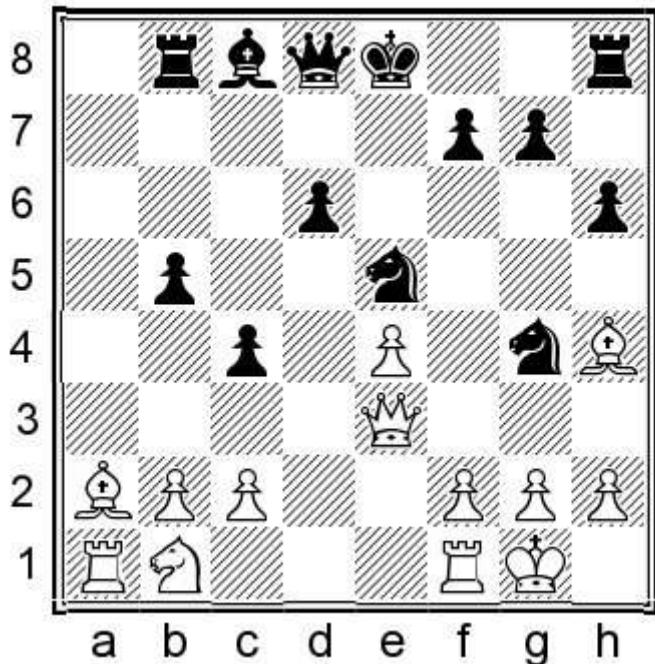
A2.3) 18.h3 Nf2+ 19.Rxf2 Qxf2 20.Bxb5+ [20.Qxd6 Qe1+ 21.Kh2 Ng4+ 22.hxg4 Qh4+ 23.Kg1 Qe1+=] 20...Bxb5 21.Ra8+ Ke7! 22.Rxh8 Nxе4= Ng3-f1 secures the draw, but in any case, Black is in no danger.

B) 12.Bg5 c5 13.Qe3 c4 Once again a direct way to play. These moves of course are not obligatory to memorize, but instead give you valuable ideas to be successful in practice. 14.Ba2 h6



Position after: 14...h6

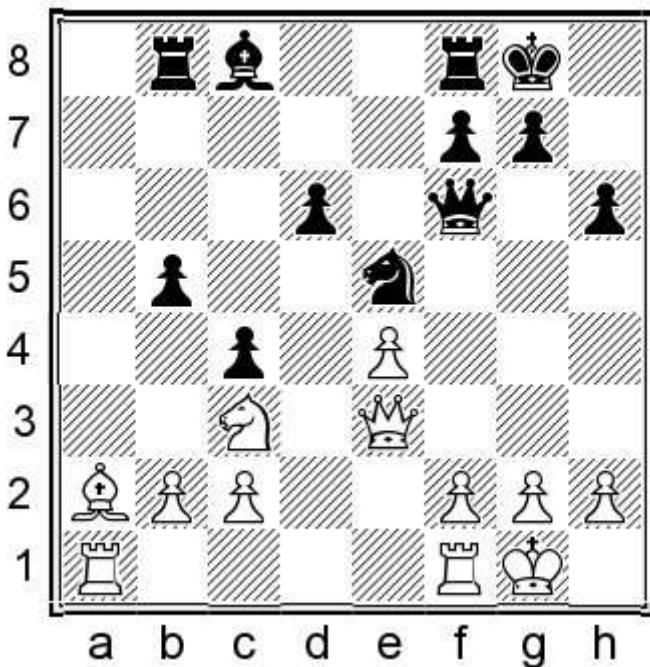
B1) 15.Bh4? walks into 15...Nfg4!



Position after: 15...Nfg4!

16.Bxd8 Nxe3 17.Bc7 Rb7 18.fxe3 [18.Bxd6 Nxc2 19.Bxe5 f6–+] 18...Rxc7 19.Nc3 b4 20.Nd5 [20.Nb5 Rc6] 20...Rb7μ

B2) 15.Bxf6 Qxf6 16.Nc3 0-0



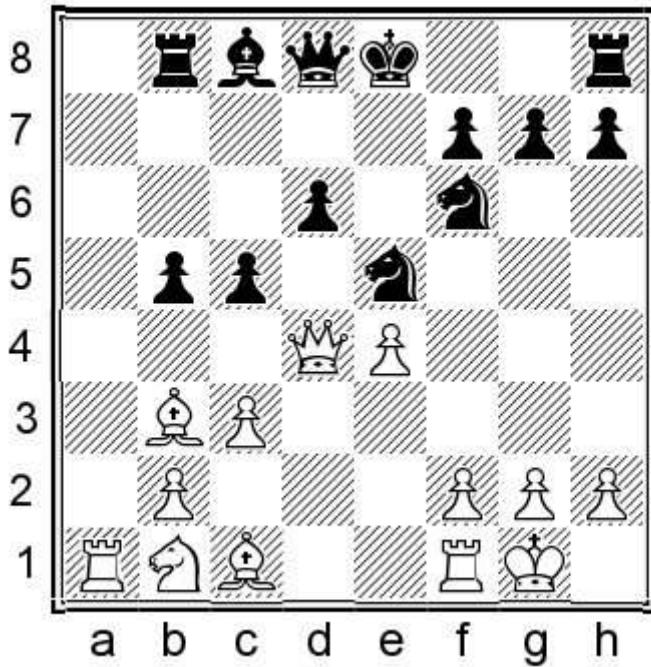
Position after: 16...0-0

B2.1) 17.Nd5 happened in the only available, but very instructive, game. 17...Qh4 This move puts White under some psychological pressure, as soon he found himself in a lost position. 18.b3 Bb7 19.bxc4 bxc4 20.Nc3™ The knight should be retained. 20...f5 This was White's worry but 21.Qd4 frees the a2-bishop in time. 21...fxe4 [21...Qf6 22.Rad1 fxe4=] 22.Bxc4+ Kh8 23.Bd5=

B2.2) 17.Rad1 would have been somewhat better than the game. 17...Qg5!? The engine's favourite, and I'll give you a couple of examples why. 18.f4 [18.Qxg5 hxg5 19.Rxd6 b4 20.Nd5 b3 21.cxb3 cxb3 22.Bb1 Nc4 23.Rc6 Nxb2 24.f4 g4=; 18.Nd5 Qxe3 19.Nxe3 Rd8 20.Rd4 Nc6 21.Rd2 Ra8 22.Bb1 c3!? 23.bxc3 Be6

24.Rfd1 Ne5©] 18...Ng4 19.Qd4 Qh4 20.h3 Nf6 21.e5 dxe5 22.fxe5 Qxd4+ 23.Rxd4 Nd7 24.Re1 Re8 25.Rd5 b4 26.Nb5 Nf6 27.Rc5 b3! 28.cxb3 Nd7 29.Rd5 Nf6= is repetition.

12...c5



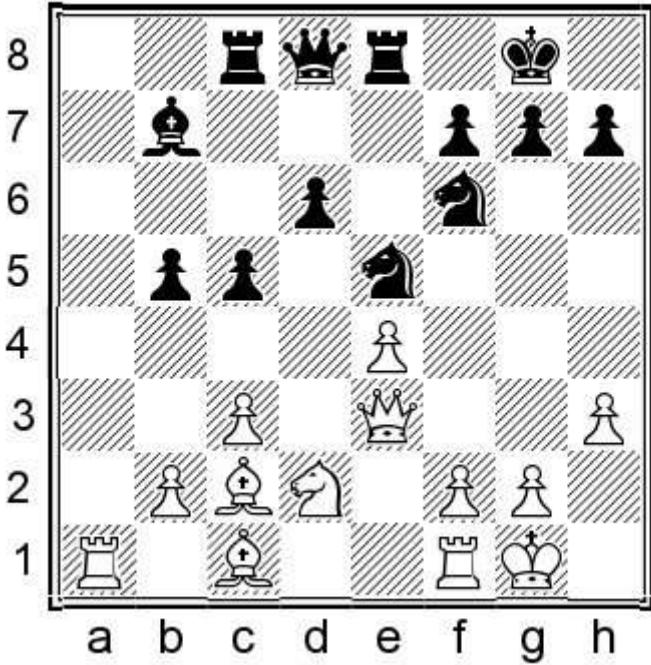
Position after: 12...c5

12...0-0 has been the popular move but, just as against the 12.Bf4 line, I prefer to know well in advance where the white queen will retreat.

13.Qd1

13.Qe3 0-0 14.Nd2 Re8 15.Bc2 Bb7

A) 16.h3 Rc8!?



Position after: 16...Rc8!?

Black wants to push ...d5 and support a future ...d4 at the same. 17.Rd1 [17.f4?! can't be good: 17...Nc4] 17...d5 18.Nf3 This leads to an equal game, e.g. 18...Nxf3+ 19.Qxf3 Nxe4 20.Bxe4 Rxe4 21.Qxe4 dxe4 22.Rxd8+ Rxd8 23.Be3=

B) 16.f3 was the choice of the Russian GM, Semen Dvoirys, in two of his games, both of which he won. Objectively speaking, Black is fine with proper play. 16...c4 [16...Qc7 17.Nb3]

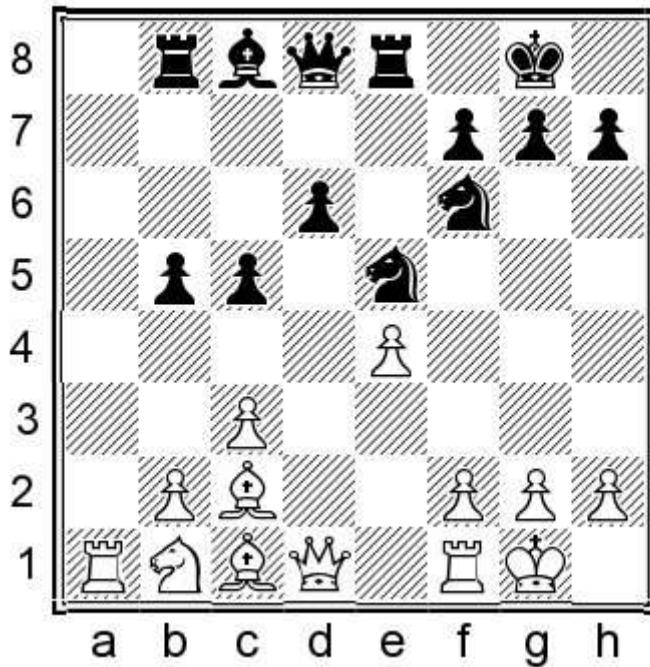
B1) 17.Qf2 d5 18.exd5 Qxd5 can't be a problem for black: 19.Ne4 Nxe4 20.fxe4 [20.Bxe4 Qd6 21.Bf4 Bxe4 22.fxe4 Rb7] 20...Qe6 21.Bf4 f6=

B2) 17.Rd1 d5 18.Qf2 Qc7 19.exd5 Nxd5 20.Ne4 b4= The position is balanced.

13...0-0 14.Bc2

14.Nd2 Nd3 15.Bc2 Nxc1 16.Qxc1 Re8 17.Re1 Bb7 18.f3 Qc7=

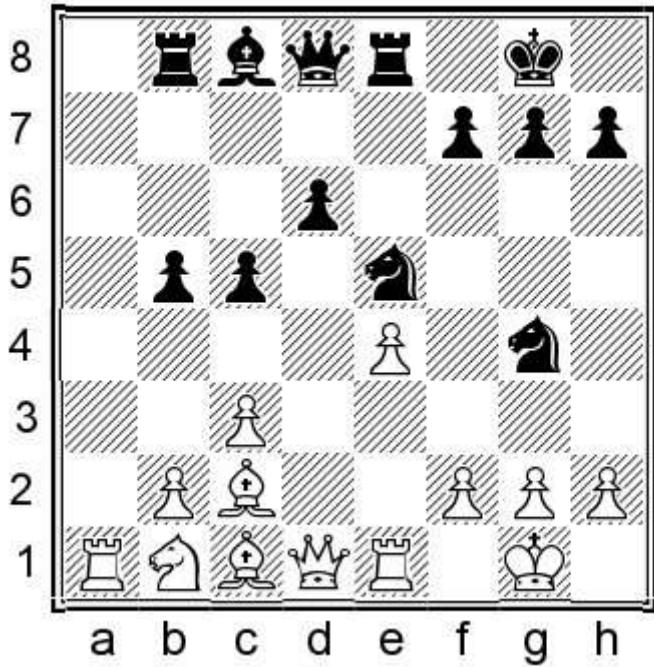
14...Re8



Position after: 14...Re8

The game is typically very drawish in these structures, but I want to present you with an interesting idea, after the natural-looking...

15.Re1 Nfg4!?

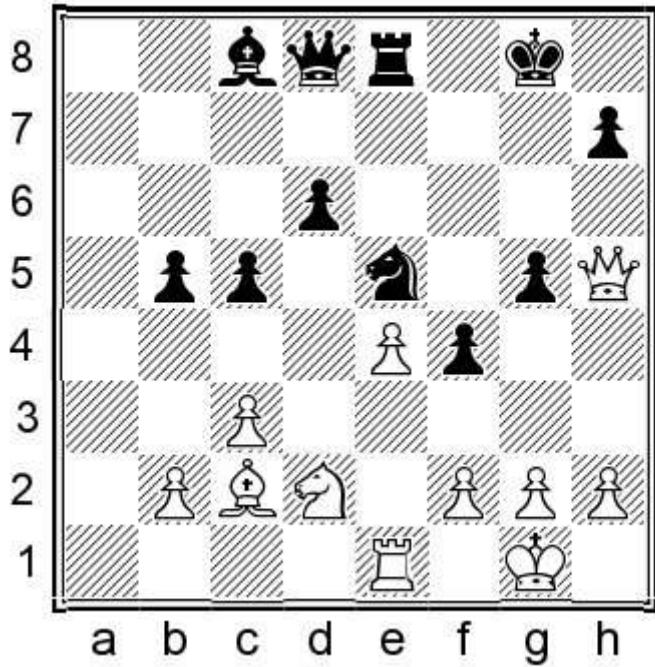


Position after: 15...Nfg4!?

This may seem a bit crazy, but it works well, and Black has some tactical chances.

16.h3

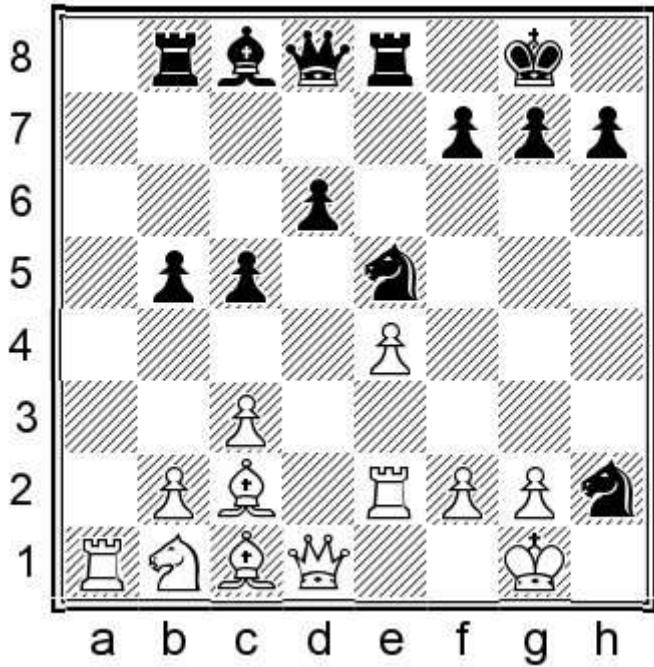
A) 16.Qe2 f5!? A smart attacking move. 17.Bf4 [17.h3 Nf6 18.Nd2 Ng6∞] 17...g5!? [17...Ng6∞ 18.Qd2∞] 18.Bxe5 [18.Bc1? f4μ] 18...Nxe5 19.Qh5 f4 20.Ra7 Rb7 21.Rxb7 Bxb7 22.Nd2 Bc8,,



Position after: 22...Bc8,,

and I like Black. 23.Nf3? loses to 23...Bg4! 24.Qxg5+ Qxg5 25.Nxg5 h6 26.h3 Bh5–+

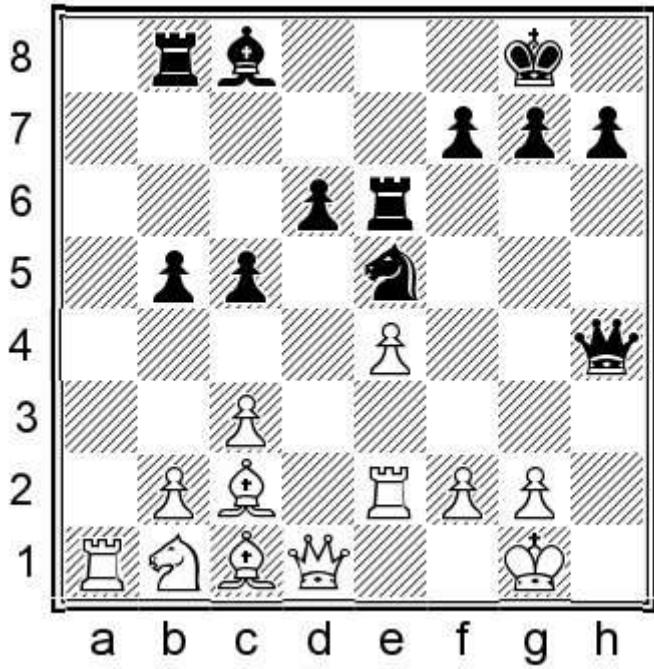
B) 16.Re2 Nxh2 It's always fun to make a move like this. [16...Re6!?]



Position after: 16...Nhx2

B1) 17.f4 Nef3+ 18.gxf3 Nxf3+ 19.Kf2 [19.Kg2 Bg4 20.Qh1 Nh4+ doesn't look great for White.] 19...Qh4+ 20.Kxf3 Bg4+ 21.Ke3 [21.Kg2 Qh5! 22.Kf2 f5 Black has a dangerous attack.] 21...Qg3+ 22.Kd2 Qxf4+ 23.Ke1 Qg3+ 24.Kd2 and here Black has at the very least a draw by repetition with 24...Qf4, or instead may continue the game with 24...d5 25.Qe1 Qh3©

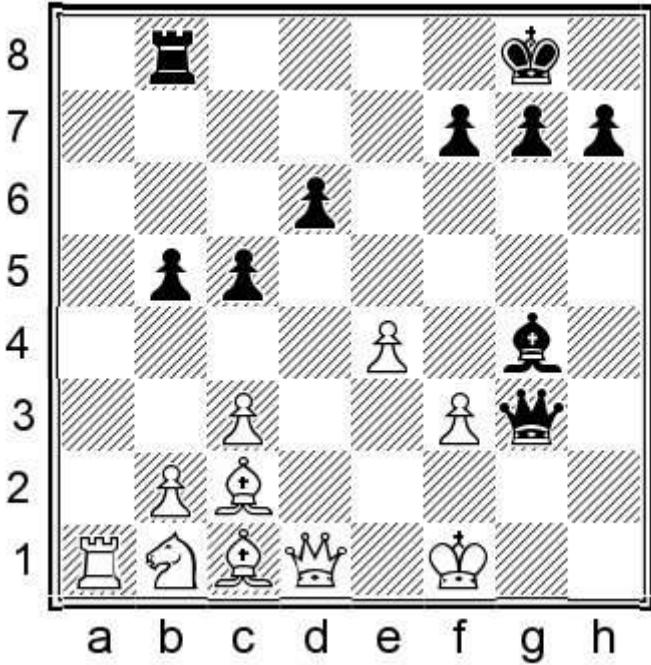
B2) 17.Kxh2 Qh4+ 18.Kg1 Re6!



Position after: 18...Re6!

This rook lift is the essence of our previous play.

B2.1) 19.f3 Nxf3+ [19...f5!?!] 20.gxf3 Rg6+ 21.Rg2 Rxg2+
22.Kxg2 Bh3+ 23.Kh2 Bg4+ 24.Kg1 Qg3+ 25.Kf1



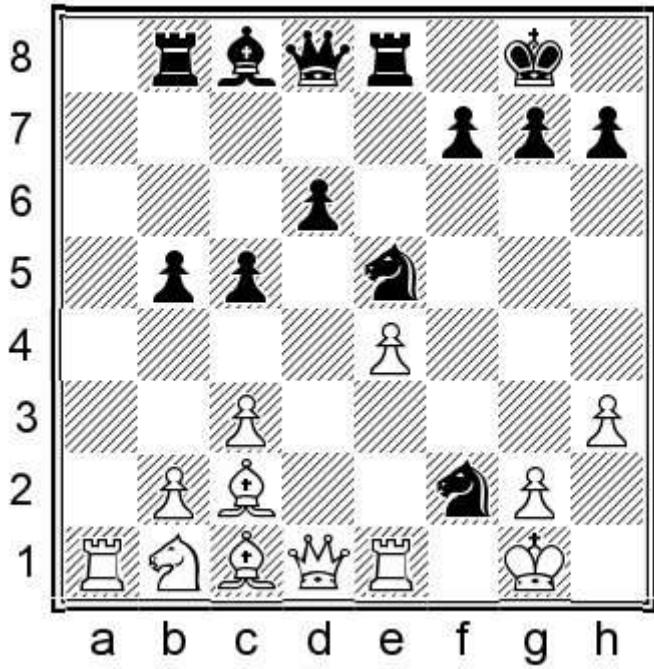
Position after: 25.Kf1

and objectively there is no more than a draw, but it's hardly a pleasure for White to play a position like this. 25...Bxf3 [25...Bh3+ 26.Ke2 Qg2+ 27.Ke3 Qg5+ 28.f4 Qg3+ 29.Qf3 Qe1+ 30.Qe2 Qxc1+ 31.Qd2 Qg1+ 32.Qf2 Qc1+=] 26.Qd2 Re8 27.Qf2 Qh3+ 28.Ke1 Qh1+ 29.Qf1 Qh4+ 30.Qf2 Qh1+=

B2.2) 19.Nd2 Rh6 20.f3 Qh2+ [20...f5!?] 21.Kf2 Qh4+ 22.Kg1 Qh2+=

B2.3) 19.f4 Rh6 [19...Nf3+ 20.gxf3 Rg6+ 21.Rg2 Rxg2+ 22.Kxg2 Bh3+=] 20.fxe5 Qh1+ 21.Kf2 Qh4+ Unfortunately there is no more than repetition. 22.Kg1 [22.g3?? Qh2+ 23.Ke3 Qxg3+ 24.Kd2 Qf4+ 25.Re3 Rh2+-+] 22...Qh1+=

16...Nxf2!

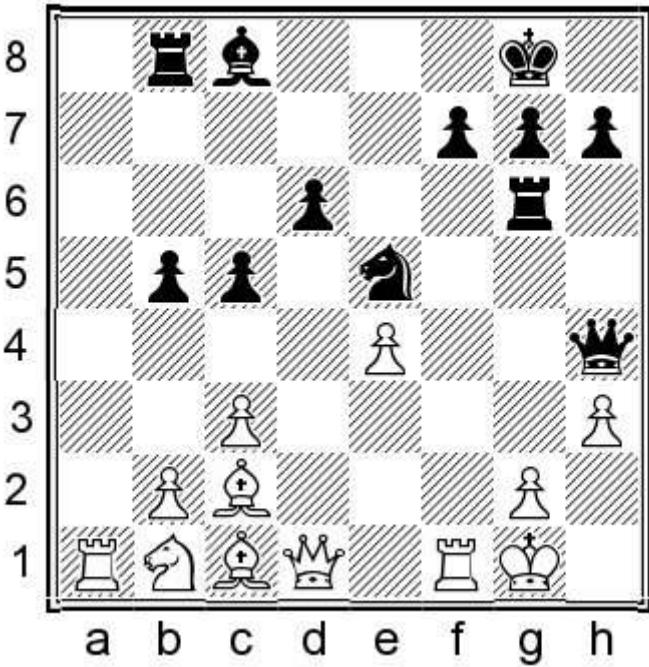


Position after: 16...Nxf2!

17.Kxf2 Qh4+ 18.Kg1 Re6! 19.Rf1

19.Qe2 Rg6 20.Rf1 transposes to 19.Rf1. [20.Qf2?? Rxg2+ 21.Kxg2 Qxh3+ 22.Kg1 Nf3+ wins the queen.]

19...Rg6



Position after: 19...Rg6

20.Rf2

20.Rf5!? Qg3 21.Qe2 Bxf5 22.exf5 Nf3+ 23.Kf1 Nh2+ 24.Kg1 Nf3+=

20...Bxh3 21.Qe2 Bg4

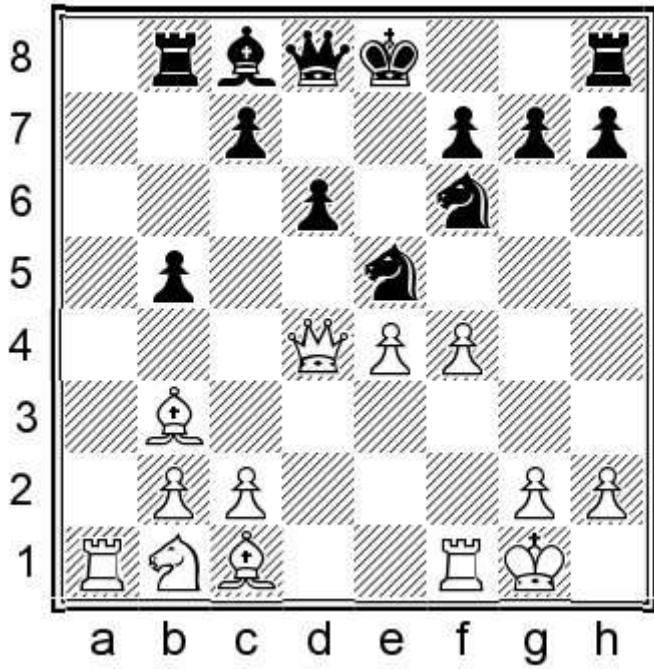
21...Ng4? 22.e5

22.Qxb5 Rf8 23.Qf1 Qh5 24.Bf4 Nf3+ 25.Rxf3 Bxf3 26.g3=

After this series of only moves it seems like White has managed to maintain the balance.

i) 8.axb5 axb5 9.Nxe5 Nxe5 10.d4 Bxd4 11.Qxd4 d6 12.f4

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4 Rb8 8.axb5 axb5 9.Nxe5 Nxe5 10.d4 Bxd4 11.Qxd4 d6 12.f4

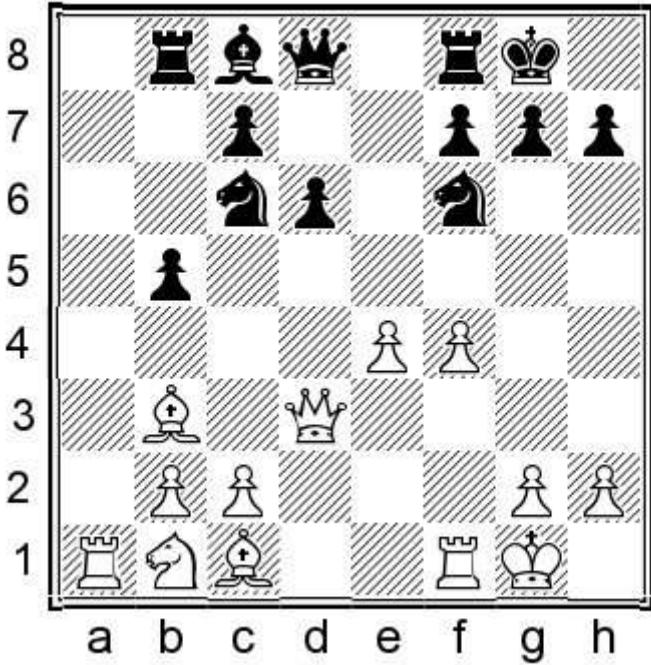


Position after: 12.f4

12...Nc6 13.Qd3

A very practical line: White has no intention of forcing matters.

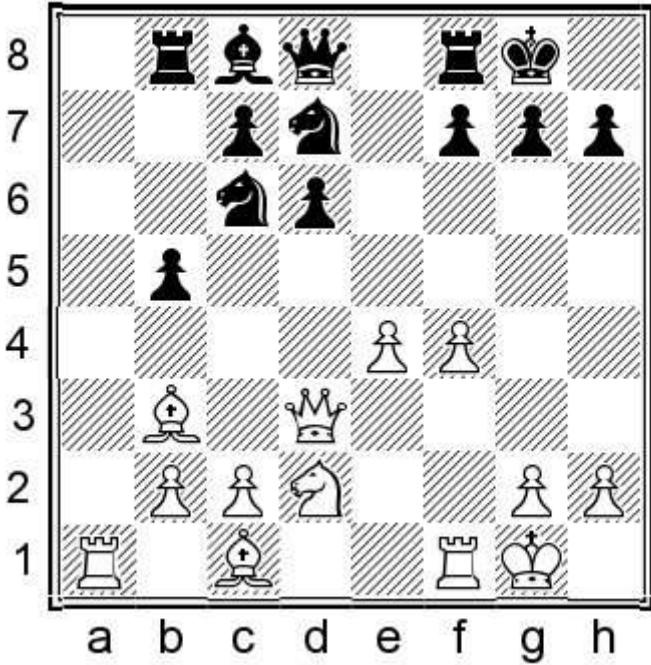
13...0-0



Position after: 13...0-0

14.Nc3

A) 14.Nd2!? has been played only once, in Di Berardino, D (2471) – Gullaksen, E (2387)/Barcelona 2008, which continued with 14...Qe7. Instead, 14...Nd7! I really like this manoeuvre. Black is hunting for the most active white piece, the b3-bishop.

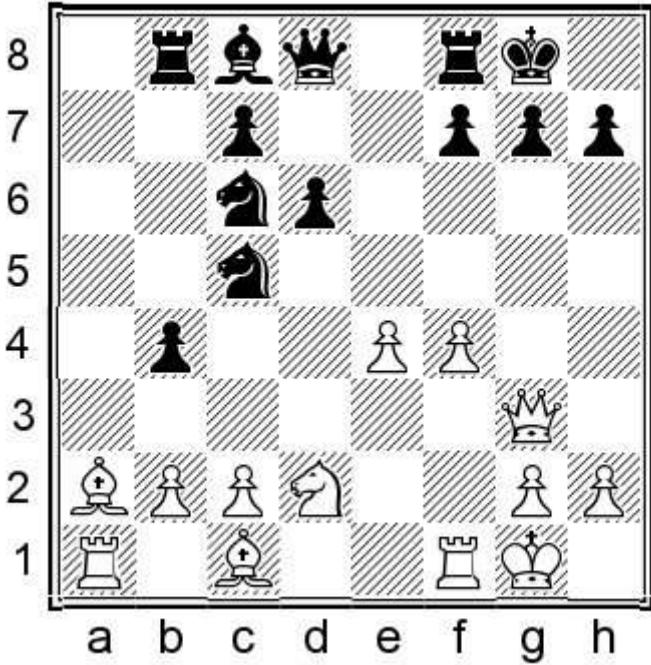


Position after: 14...Nd7!

A1) 15.c3 This move allows the exchange which should secure Black easy equality. 15...Nc5 16.Qg3 Nxb3 17.Nxb3 Re8 18.Re1 Qd7!? 19.Nd2 [19.h3 Bb7,,] 19...Qg4 20.Qxg4 Bxg4 21.Kf2 Bd7 22.Nf3 f6=

A2) 15.Re1 Nc5 16.Qc3 [16.Qg3?! Nd4 17.Qf2 Ncxb3 18.Nxb3 Nxb3 19.cxb3 Bb7 20.Bd2 Re8³] 16...b4 transposes to 15.Qc3.

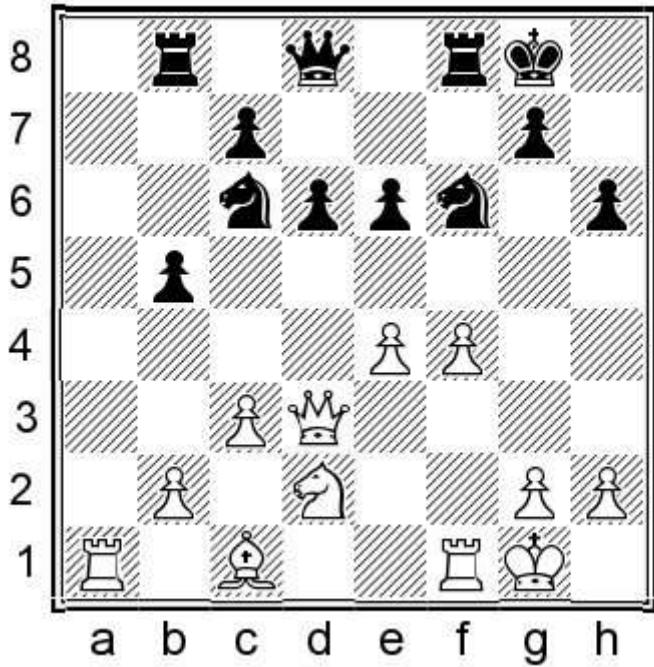
A3) 15.Qc3 The only move that enables White to hang on to the bishop, for a while. 15...Nc5 16.Bd5 Ne7 17.Ba2 b4 18.Qg3 Nc6!



Position after: 18...Nc6!

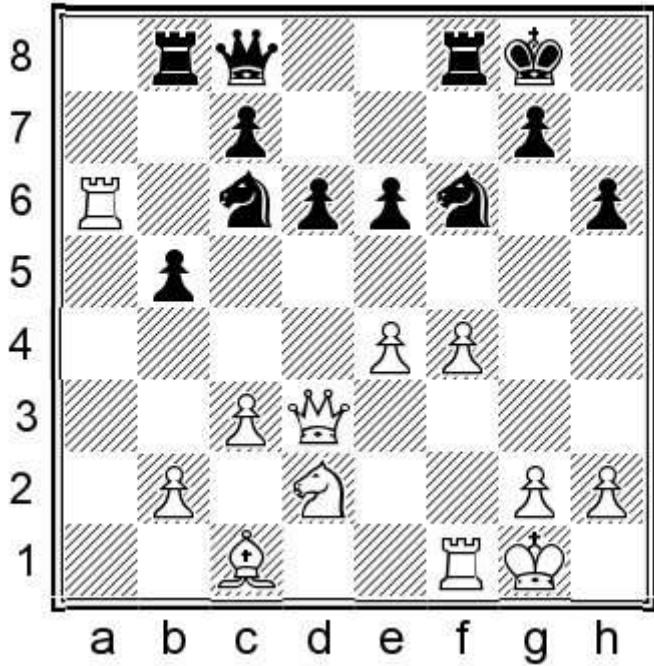
The position is still around equal, but White already has some practical problems to solve, e.g. 19.Re1 [19.c3 Ba6 20.Re1 Bd3] 19...Nd4 20.Bb1 Re8 21.Qf2 Nde6!?, ... 22.f5 Nf8 23.e5 Bb7 24.Nc4 Nfd7 25.exd6 Ne4, Black has a dangerous initiative.

B) 14.c3!? is a move I faced in my own practice, though I hadn't analyzed this move seriously before the game. 14...Be6 The simplest solution, but 14...Bb7 can also be considered. 15.Bxe6 fxe6 16.Nd2 h6!? Covering g5 is generally useful here, but 16...e5 was of course perfectly playable too.



Position after: 16...h6!?

B1) 17.Ra6 doesn't achieve anything, as Black can simply play 17...Qc8!

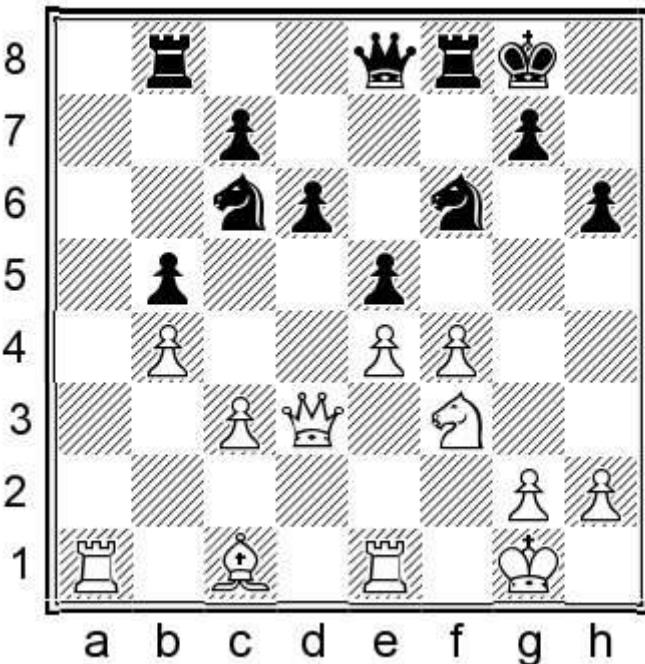


Position after: 17...Qc8!

18.Rxc6?! [18.Ra1 e5 19.Nf3=] 18...Qb7 Trapping the rook! 19.Rxd6 cxd6 20.Qxd6 Qa7+ 21.Kh1 Qd7μ

B2) 17.Nf3 e5 18.Ra6 Qe8 19.Re1 exf4 20.Bxf4 Ne5 21.Bxe5 dxe5=

B3) 17.b4 e5 18.Nf3 [18.f5 Ne7 19.Nb3 Qe8= ... 20.Ra7 Qc6! 21.Re1 d5] 18...Qe8 19.Re1

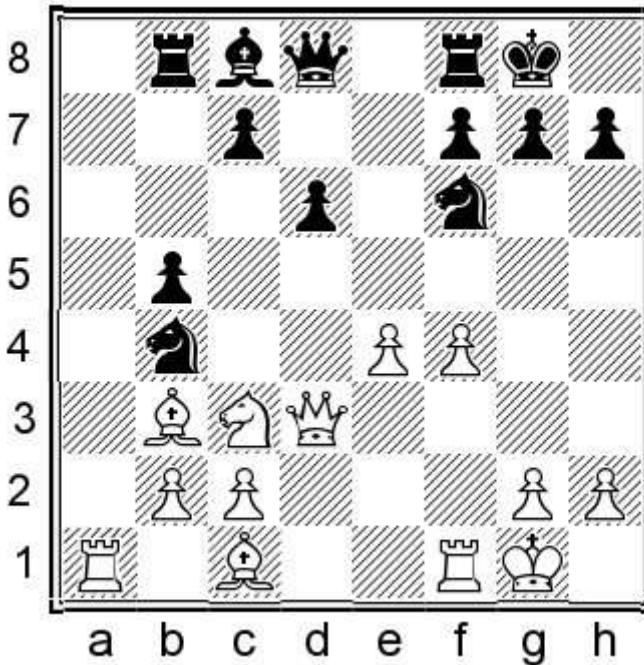


Position after: 19.Re1

A critical position. I could have gone for some simplifications, but instead chose to keep the material on the board. [19.f5 d5f] 19...Kh8 20.f5 Finally White pushes this pawn. From now on he always needs to count on the ...d5 central break. 20...Ne7 21.Nh4?! A step in the wrong direction. [21.Ra5∞] 21...Qh5! Forcing some weakening. 22.g3 Kh7 Again prophylaxis. 23.Ra5 Qe8 The queen returns, as her job was done there. [After 23...d5 24.exd5 e4 25.Qf1 Nxd5 26.Rxb5 Rxb5 27.Qxb5 I wasn't sure how to continue.; 23...Qg4!?³ is interesting.] 24.h3 d5!?f I seized the initiative, which later evaporated in time-trouble. Baklan –

Erdos, ROM-chT Mamaia 2015

14...Nb4

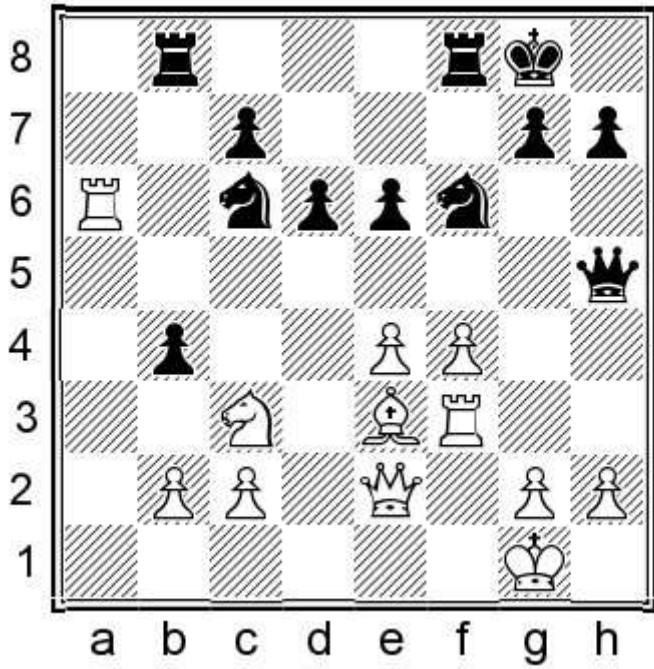


Position after: 14...Nb4

An important move.

15.Qg3

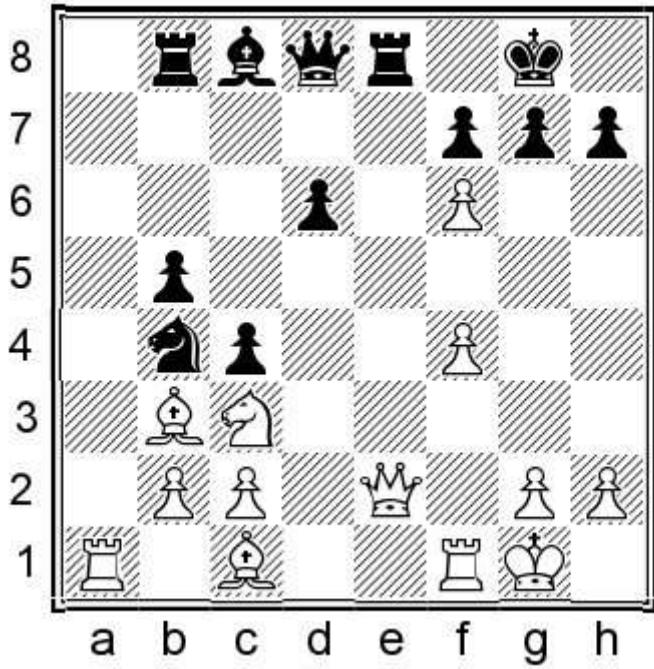
A) 15.Qd2 This weird-looking move has some merits but has a little more point to it with the a-pawn pair on the board, as the reader will see later. 15...Be6 Now this is a safe reply. 16.Bxe6 fxe6 17.Qe2 Qe8! A nice plan. 18.Be3 Qh5 19.Rf3! [19.Qxh5 Nxh5 20.Rf2 Nf6 21.h3 Ra8=] 19...Nc6 20.Ra6 b4!



Position after: 20...b4!

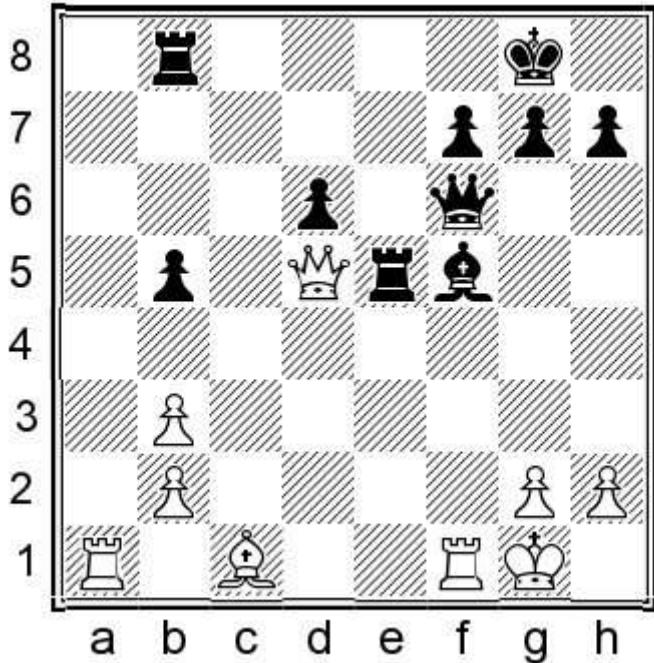
21.Nd1 [21.Rxc6 bxc3 22.b3 Nxe4 23.Rxc7 Ra8= gives Black enough counterplay.] 21...Ne7 22.Nf2 Qb5 23.Qxb5 Rxb5 24.Bd4 Nh5!= After all these excellent moves from both sides the game was balanced in Naiditsch, A (2684) – Leko, P (2734) /Dortmund 2010.

B) 15.Qe2 c5 15...Re8 is also ok, but the text was played in practice successfully, so why not follow suit? 16.e5 c4! 17.exf6 Re8



Position after: 17...Re8

B1) 18.Qd1? A mistake. 18...cxb3 19.cxb3 Qxf6 20.f5 Bxf5! Black is not afraid of the pin. 21.Nd5 Nxd5 22.Qxd5 Re5!

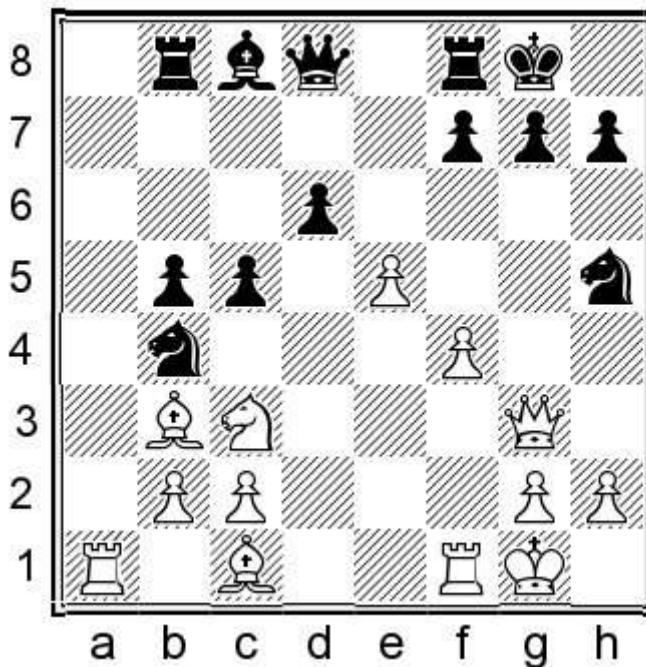


Position after: 22...Re5!

This is even better than the game, which also favoured Black. [22...Be4 23.Rxf6 Bxd5 24.Rxd6 Bxb3³ was a pawn up in Piorun, K (2591) – Valsecchi, A (2457) Pardubice 2015.] 23.Ra8 [23.Qf3 Qe6 24.Ra8 Qc8 25.Rxb8 Qxb8 26.Bd2 f6 27.Bc3 Be4 28.Qe3 Re6μ; 23.Qb7 Qd8!μ] 23...Qd8 24.Rxb8 Qxb8 25.Qd4 Qa8!? 26.Bd2 [26.Qxd6?? Re2 27.Rf2 Re1+ 28.Rf1 Qa7+-+] 26...h6 27.Re1 Qe8μ

B2) 18.Be3 According to the engines this should be played, but it looks strange to pin yourself voluntarily. 18...cx b3 19.cxb3 Qxf6 [19...Bf5 20.Qd2 Nc2 21.Bd4 Nxa1 22.Rxa1©] 20.Qd2 Bf5= The position is more or less balanced.

15...c5 16.e5 Nh5!



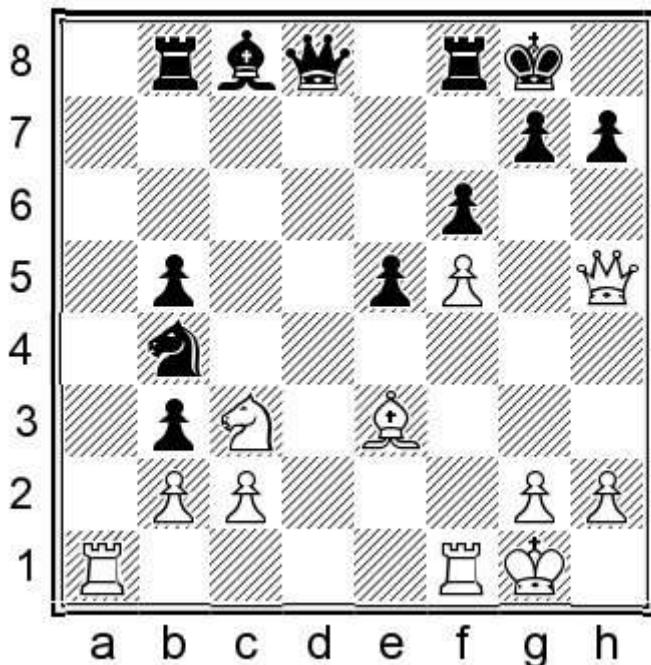
Position after: 16...Nh5!

It might appear surprising that these ideas work for Black, but it was already proved back in 1997 – engines merely confirm it.

17.Qf2

This new move is the best try for White. Actually it's not that easy to navigate through some of the lines. I analyzed a lot of different ideas, and I believe I came up with the clearest path to equality, with the most logical move-order.

17.Qf3 c4 18.Qxh5 cxb3 We are following Leko, P (2635) – Shirov, A (2685) Tilburg 1997, and here White should have continued with the active 19.f5! [Instead Leko went for the solid-looking 19.cxb3 dxe5 20.Qxe5 Bb7 21.Rd1 Qc8 22.Qe2 Re8 but it turned out there are only two possible results in this position.] 19...dxe5 20.Be3 Now 21.f6 would be unpleasant, so... [20.f6?! Qd4+ 21.Kh1 Qg4 22.Qxg4 Bxg4³] 20...f6!



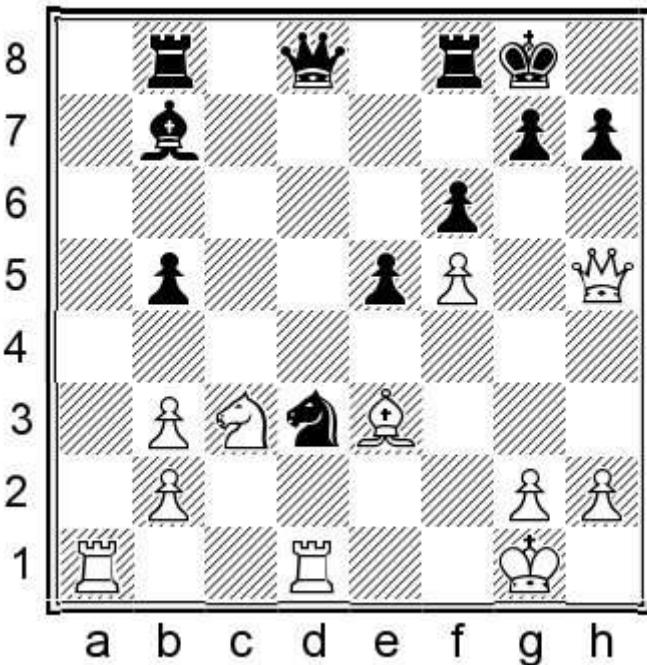
Position after: 20...f6!

Black stops it. 21.cxb3 [21.Rf3? Qe8] 21...Bb7

A) In case of 22.Bc5? Nd3! would be our trick: 23.Rad1 [23.Bxf8 Qd4+ 24.Kh1 Nf2+ 25.Rxf2 Qxf2 26.Rg1 Rxf8+] 23...Qc7! 24.Bxf8 [24.Rxd3 Qxc5+μ] 24...Qb6+ 25.Kh1 Nf2+ 26.Rxf2 Qxf2 27.Qg4

Kxf8μ

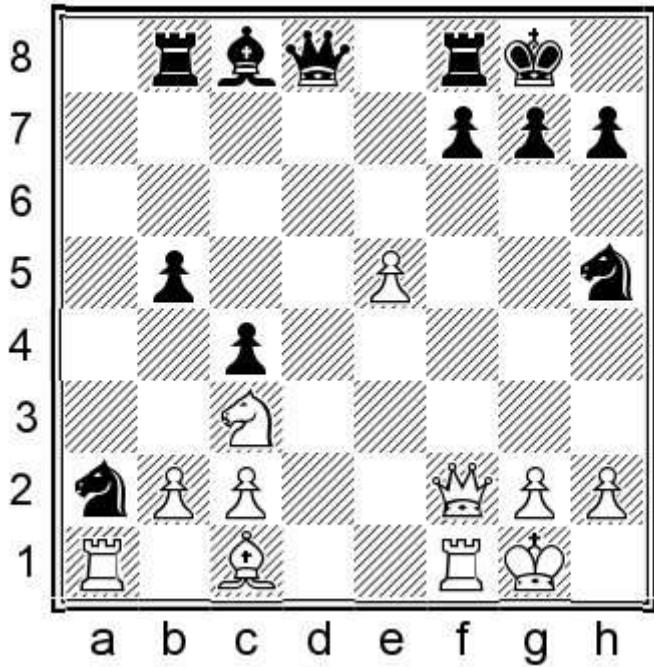
B) 22.Rfd1! After this precise move the position remains around equal, e.g. 22...Nd3



Position after: 22...Nd3

This is best, but I feel like other moves would work well too in practice.
23.Qg4 [23.Qe2 e4 24.Nxb5 Bd5 25.Nd4 Bxb3 26.Nc6 Qd6 27.Nxb8 Bxd1 28.Qxd1 Rxb8 29.Qg4=] 23...Rf7 This looks more human, though
23...Qd7 is also fine. 24.Rd2 [24.Nxb5 Rd7 25.Rd2 e4=] 24...Rd7
25.Rad1 Bc6 26.h3=

17...c4 18.Ba2 dxe5 19.fxe5 Nxa2

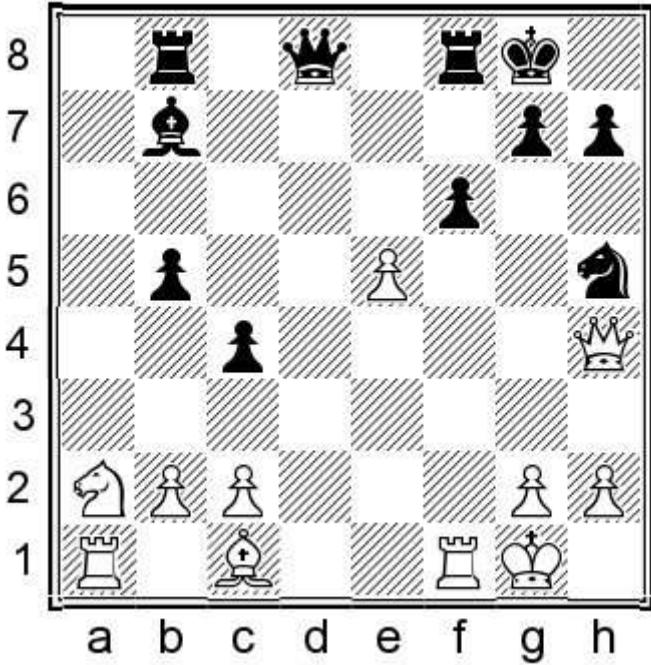


Position after: 19...Nxa2

Simple moves. Our only real problem is the ‘hanging’ knight on h5.

20.Rxa2

20.Nxa2 Even this move is not to be underestimated. 20...f6 The simplest way to get rid of the annoying e5-pawn. 21.Qh4 The most challenging. [21.Be3 fxe5 22.Qxf8+ Qxf8 23.Rxf8+ Kxf8 24.Bc5+ Kf7 25.Re1 Nf6 26.Rxe5 Be6=] 21...Bb7!



Position after: 21...Bb7!

This insolent move ignores White's obvious threat. 22.Qxh5 Qd4+ 23.Kh1 fxe5 24.Bg5™ 24...Qxb2 25.Qg4! The only move. 25...h5!? 26.Qd7 [26.Qe6+ Kh7©] 26...Qxa2 27.Bh6! This is some weird tactics. 27...Rxf1+ 28.Rxf1 Bxg2+ 29.Kg1! [29.Kxg2 Qxc2+] 29...Rb7! 30.Qe8+ Kh7= The game ends in perpetual in one way or another.

20...f6

20...b4?! meets 21.Rd1! Qe8 22.Nd5

21.Be3

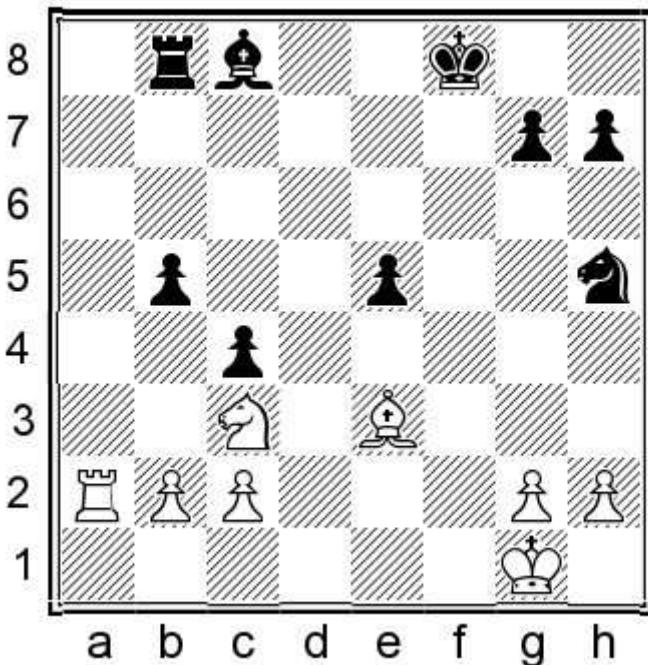
Probably the best try. At a cost of a pawn, White gets nice piece play in the endgame, which is enough for an equal game. Some sample lines:

A) 21.Qc5 fxe5 22.Rxf8+ Qxf8 23.Qxe5 [23.Qd5+ Kh8 24.Qxe5 Bf5=] 23...Bg4 24.Ra7 Re8 25.Qd5+ Kh8 26.Rf7 Qg8 27.Rf1 b4 28.Qxg8+ Kxg8 29.Nd5 b3=

B) Against 21.Qh4 Qb6+ is strong as 22.Kh1 is not good: 22...Bb7! 23.Qxh5 fxe5 24.Rg1 Rf2f and Black has a serious initiative.

C) 21.Ra7 fxe5 22.Rf7 makes a huge impression at first, but Black has many ways to hold his own, such as: 22...Bb7, 22...Nf4.

21...fxe5 22.Qxf8+ Qxf8 23.Rxf8+ Kxf8



Position after: 23...Kxf8

24.Ba7

24.Bc5+ Kf7

A) 25.Ra5 Bd7 26.Bd6 [26.Ra7 Nf6 27.Nd5 Ke6] 26...Rd8 27.Bxe5 Re8 28.Bd4 Re1+ 29.Kf2 Rc1=

B) 25.Bd6 Rb7 26.Bxe5 Bf5 27.Ra5 Re7! 28.Rxb5 Bxc2 29.g4 [29.Kf2 Bd3=] 29...Nf6 30.Bxf6 gxf6 31.Kf2 Rd7 32.Nd5 Ba4 33.Rc5 Rb7=

24...Rb7 25.Ra5

25.Ne4 Nf6 26.Bc5+ [26.Nd6 Rc7 27.Nxb5 Rc6=] 26...Kg8 27.Nd6 Rc7 28.Bb4 Nd5=

25...Nf6! 26.Nxb5 Ne4=

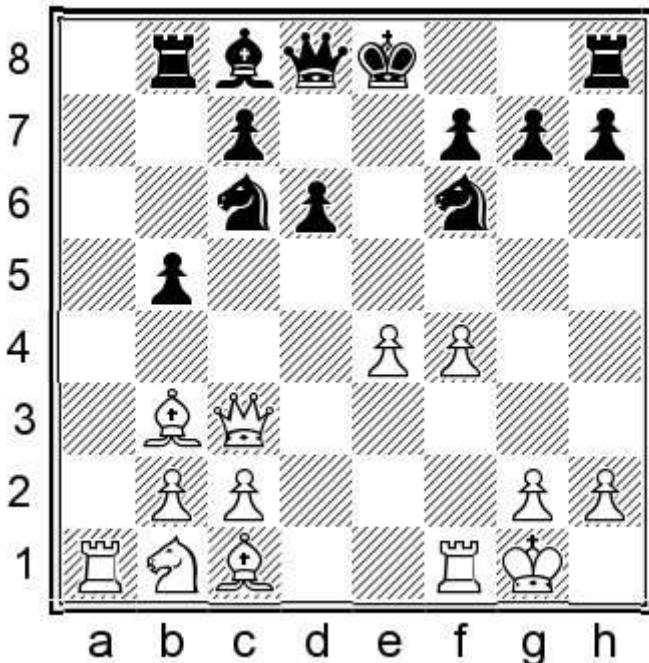
Black is ok.

j) 8.axb5 axb5 9.Nxe5 Nxe5 10.d4 Bxd4 11.Qxd4 d6 12.f4 Nc6 13.Qc3 Ne7 14.--

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4 Rb8 8.axb5 axb5 9.Nxe5 Nxe5 10.d4 Bxd4 11.Qxd4 d6

White only seldomly opts for moves other than 12.f4.

12.f4 Nc6 13.Qc3!?



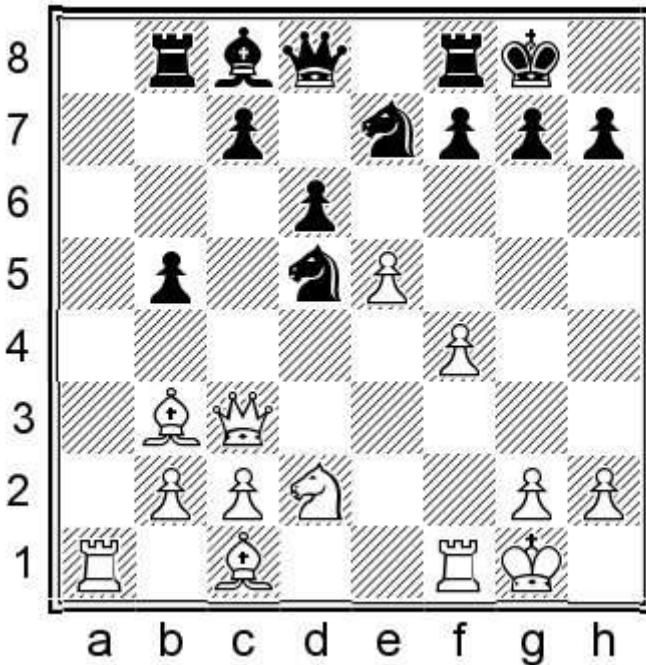
Position after: 13.Qc3!?

13...Ne7

13...Bb7 is worse. This is one of the main tabiyas in the Nxe5 universe.

14.Qd3

A) 14.Nd2 0-0 15.e5 Nfd5



Position after: 15...Nfd5

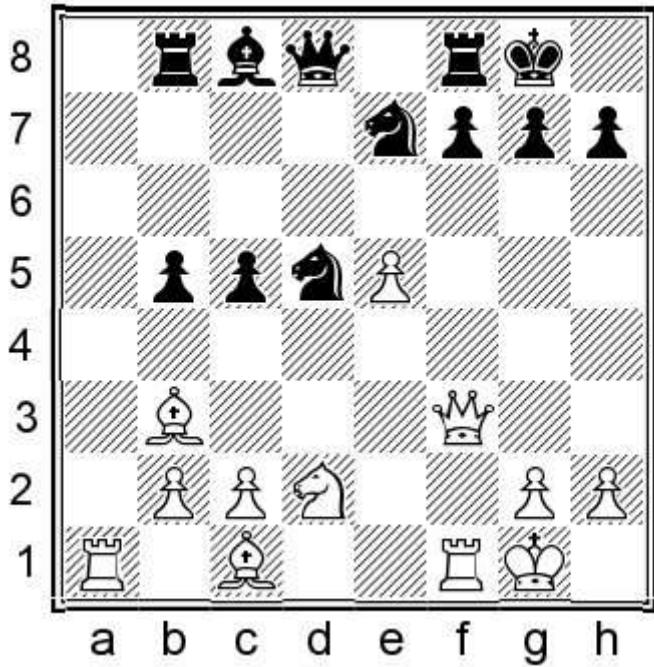
A1) ≤ 16.Bxd5 This is not an impressive exchange. Black is at least fine, e.g. 16...Nxd5 17.Qd4 Bb7 18.Ne4 Re8 19.exd6 [19.Bd2?? dxе5 20.fxe5 Nb6!–+] 19...cxе6

A1.1) 20.b3 Nb4 [Or 20...Ne3] 21.Bb2 f6 22.Qxb4 Bxe4

A1.2) 20.Bd2 Rc8 21.c3 Rc4 22.Qa7 Bc6 23.Ng3 h6=

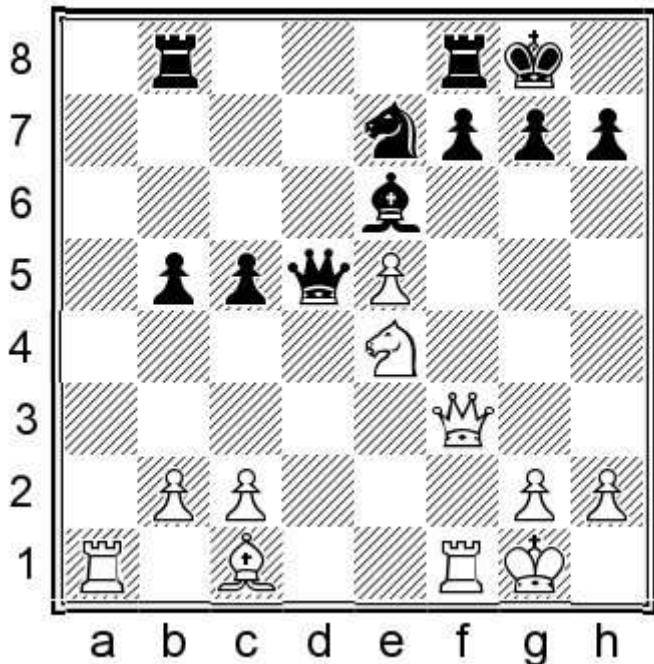
A2) 16.Qd3!? dxе5 17.fxe5 Be6 18.Ne4 Nb4 19.Qxd8 Rfxd8 20.Bxe6 fxе6 21.Bg5 Re8 22.c3 Nd3=

A3) 16.Qf3 dxе5 17.fxe5 c5



Position after: 17...c5

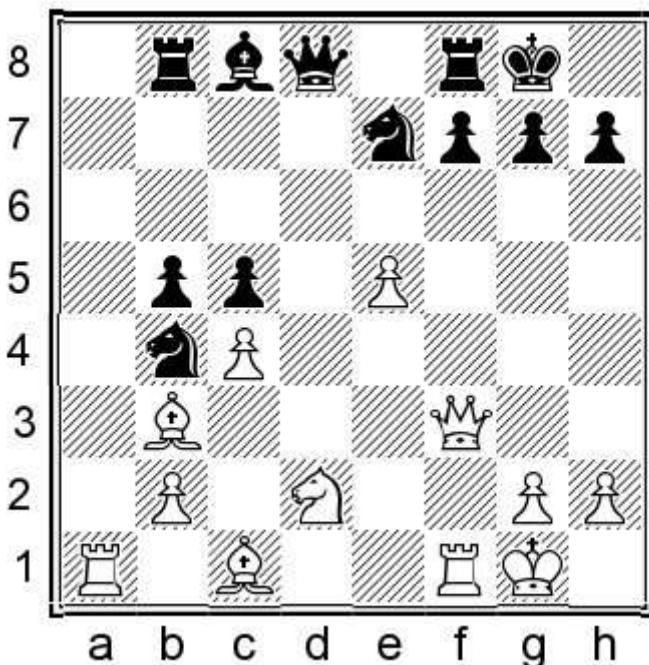
A3.1) 18.Bxd5 is trickier than it looks. 18...Qxd5 19.Ne4 Be6



Position after: 19...Be6

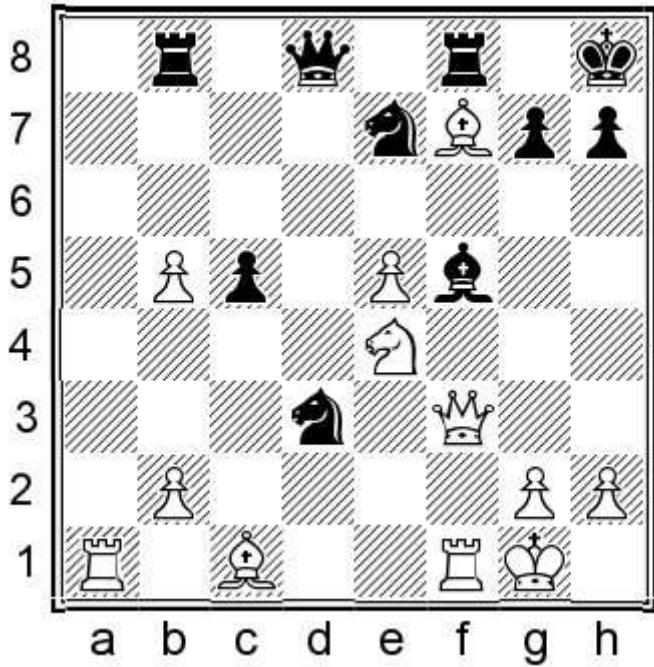
20.Bg5 [20.Rd1 Qc4 21.Bg5 Bd5 22.Bxe7 Bxe4 23.Qe3 Rfe8 24.b3 Qxc2!? 25.Rd2 Qxd2 26.Qxd2 Rxe7 27.Qd6 Rbe8 28.Ra5=; 20.Be3 is boring. 20...Qxe5 21.Bxc5 Bd5 22.Rae1 Bxe4 23.Bxe7 Qxe7 24.Rxe4=] 20...Ng6 21.Rad1 Qxe5 22.Nf6+ Kh8 23.h4 [23.Qh5 h6 24.h4 c4 25.Rde1 Qc5+ 26.Kh1∞] 23...h6∞

A3.2) 18.c4 Nb4!



Position after: 18...Nb4!

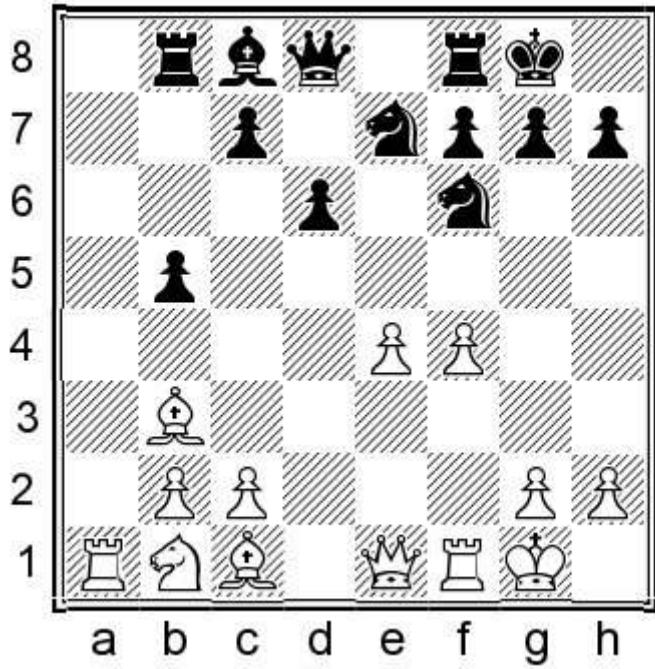
This is the right move; alternatives are worse. 19.cxb5 Nd3 This knight jump provokes simplifications. 20.Bxf7+ Taking the pawn is critical of course. 20...Kh8 21.Ne4 [21.Qe2 Be6! 22.Bxe6 Qd4+ 23.Kh1 Rxf1+ 24.Qxf1 Nf2+ 25.Kg1 Nh3+=] 21...Bf5!



Position after: 21...Bf5!

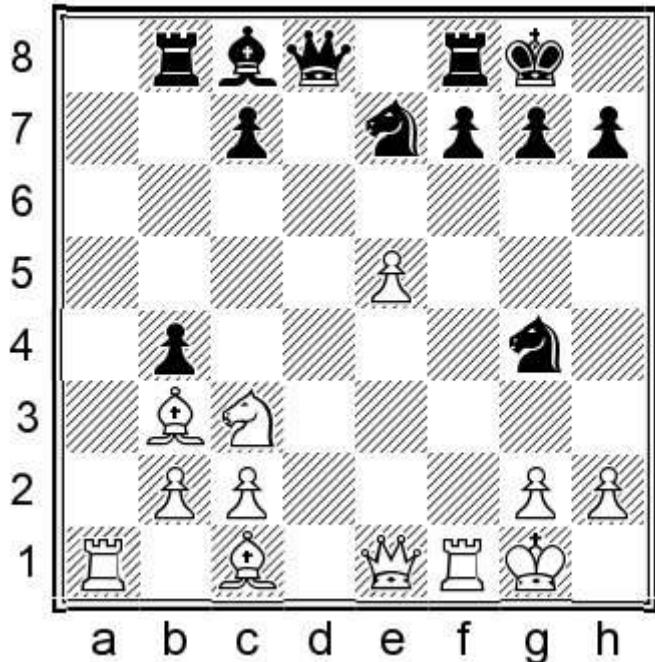
The key move; Black holds confidently. 22.Nd6 [22.Ng5 Nxe5 23.Qb3 h6 24.Bf4 Qd4+ 25.Be3 Qd3=] 22...Nxe5 23.Qd1 Nxf7 24.Nxf7+ Rxf7 25.Qxd8+ Rxd8 26.Bg5 h6! 27.Bxe7 Rxe7 28.Rxf5 Re2= This rook penetration to the 7th rank secures an easy draw.

B) 14.Qe1!? This move is a bit more popular without the exchange on b5, since Black sometimes can create ideas with ...Ra8. 14...0-0



Position after: 14...0-0

B1) 15.Nc3 b4 16.e5 dxe5 17.fxe5 Ng4

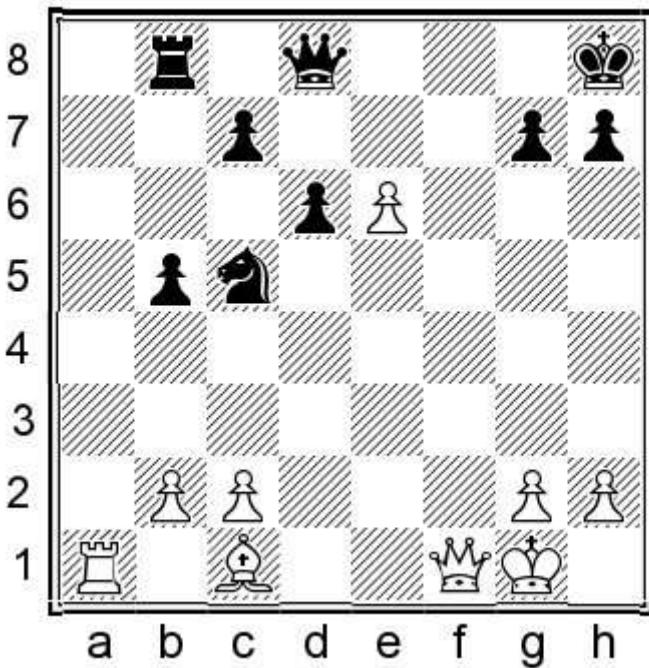


Position after: 17...Ng4

B1.1) 18.Ne2!? Nxе5 19.Nf4 [19.Bg5 Qd6 ... 20.Rd1?! Qc5+ 21.Kh1 Ba6] 19...Qd6 [19...Ng4!? ∞] 20.Be3 c5 21.Ra5 c4 22.Ba4=

B1.2) 18.Ne4 Be6 with the idea of 19.Bxe6 Qd4+! is good for Black!

B2) Against 15.e5 Nd7!? 16.Be3 [16.exd6 Nf5! 17.dxc7? Qxc7 18.Nc3 Bb7 ∞ can only be dangerous for White; 16.e6 fxe6 17.Bxe6+ Kh8 18.Nc3 Nf5 19.Bxf5 Rxf5 20.Ne2 Bb7 21.Nd4 Rf7 22.f5 Bd5 23.Ne6 Bxe6 24.fxe6 Rxf1+ 25.Qxf1 Nc5

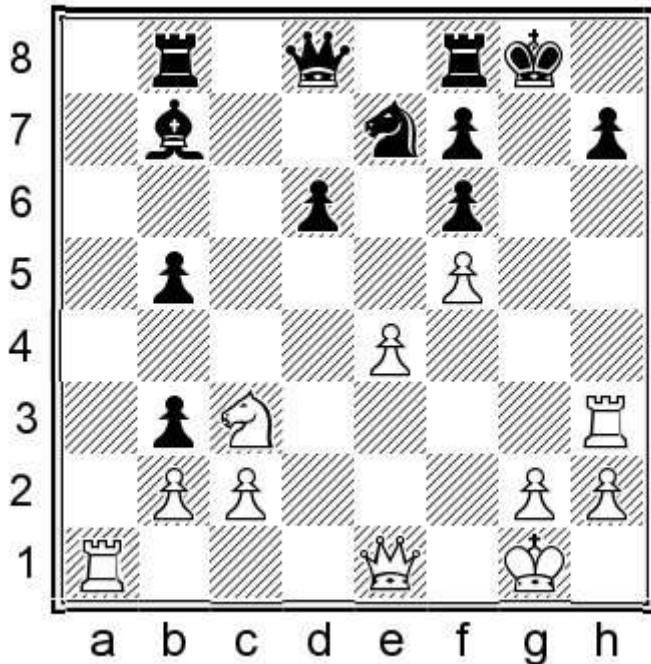


Position after: 25...Nc5

26.Qe2 Qf6 27.e7 Qe6 28.Qxb5 Qe1+ 29.Qf1 Qxe7=] 16...Nc5 17.Ba2 [17.Bxc5 dxc5 18.c3 Bf5 19.Nd2 c4 20.Bd1 Nd5 ∞ is ok for black.] 17...Nf5 We have reached an uncommon transposition to 14.e5 Ne4 15.Qe1 Nc5 16.Ba2 0-0 17.Be3 Nf5.

B3) 15.f5!? Bb7 16.Nc3 c5! 17.Bg5 c4 This complex position is

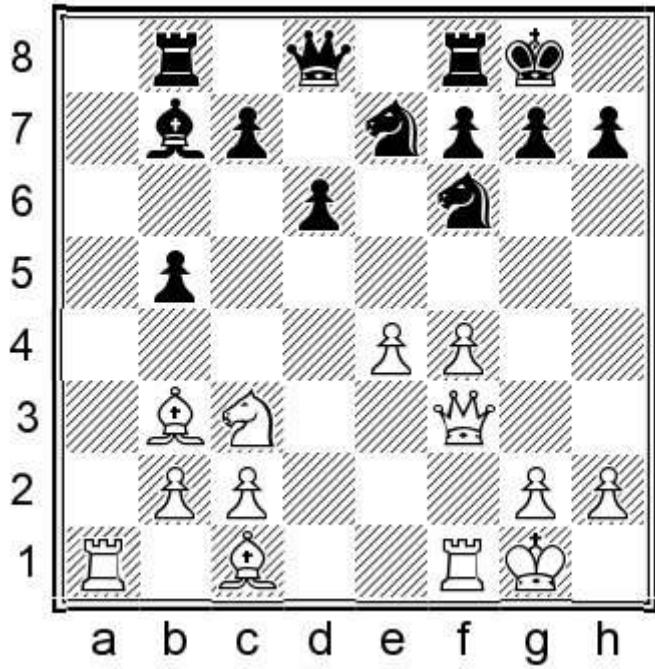
definitely critical: it seems like the game peters out to a draw in most cases. 18.Bxf6 gxf6 19.Rf3! The typical rook lift here. 19...cxb3 20.Qh4 [20.Rh3?



Position after: 20.Rh3?

20...Qb6+ 21.Kh1 bxc2 22.Qh4 Rfc8] 20...bxc2 21.Qh6 Re8 22.Rh3 Qb6+ 23.Kh1 Rec8 Black does not get mated. 24.Rg3+ Ng6 25.fxg6 fxg6 26.Rxg6+ hxg6 27.Qxg6+ Kh8 28.Qxf6+ Kg8=

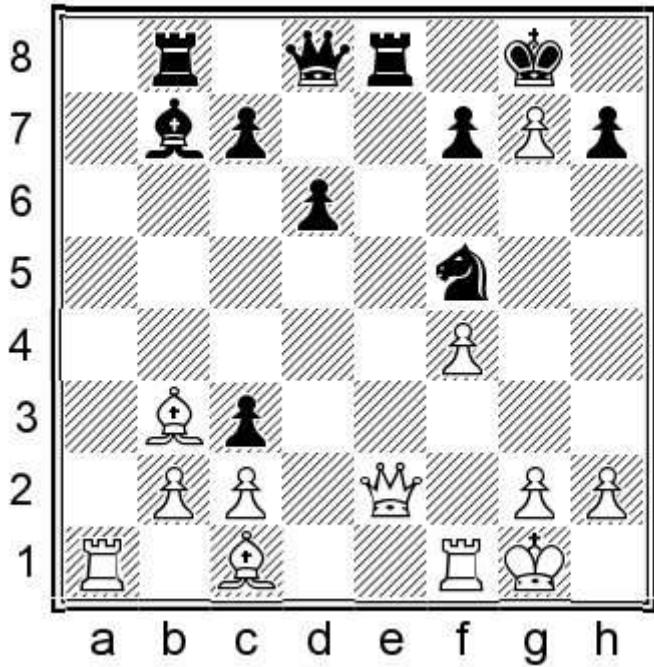
C) 14.Qf3 is almost unplayed because White just steps into a pin after 14...Bb7 15.Nc3 0-0



Position after: 15...0-0

C1) 16.f5!? b4 17.Nd5 Nxd5 18.exd5 Qe8 Black creates counterplay:
19.Bf4 [19.Bg5 Qe5,,] 19...Qb5,,

C2) 16.Qe2 b4 17.e5 bxc3! 18.exf6 Nf5! 19.fxg7 Re8

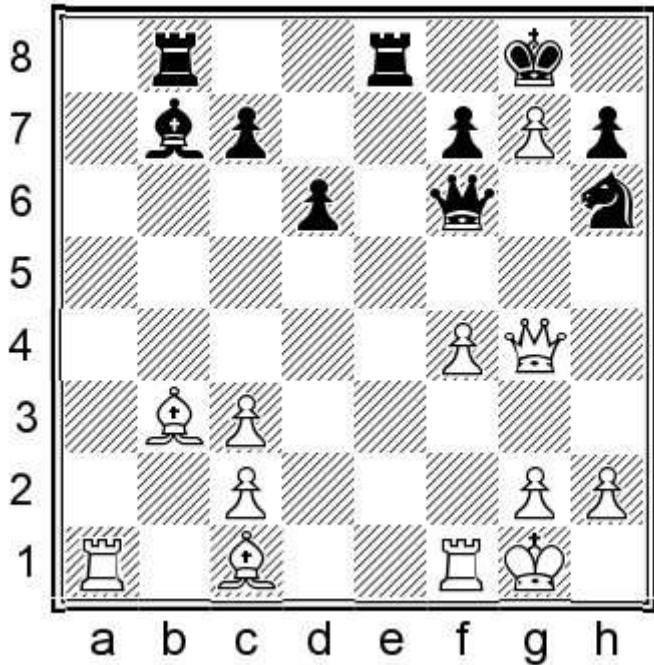


Position after: 19...Re8

This is a line suggested by Svidler. I like Black here as we have an active position in return for a pawn. The game might continue:

C2.1) 20.Qc4 Qf6 21.Qxc3 [21.bxc3?? Qxg7] 21...Re2 22.Rf2 Qxc3 23.bxc3 Re1+ 24.Rf1 Re2= is a repetition.

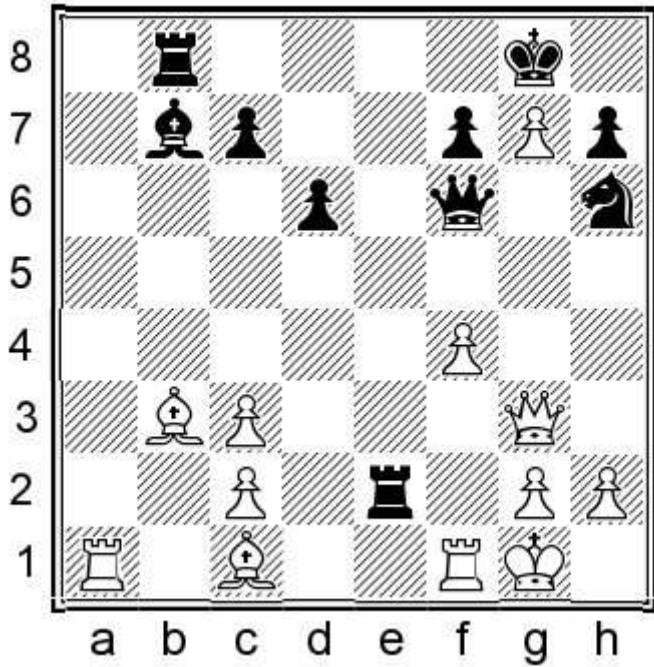
C2.2) 20.Qg4 Qf6 21.bxc3 Nh6



Position after: 21...Nh6

C2.2a) 22.Qd1 Qxc3 It is a bit strange, but maybe White's king is the weaker here. 23.Ra3 Qc5+ 24.Kh1 Nf5 25.Ba2 Be4 26.Rh3 d5 27.Qh5 h6–+

C2.2b) 22.Qg3 This is safe. 22...Re2

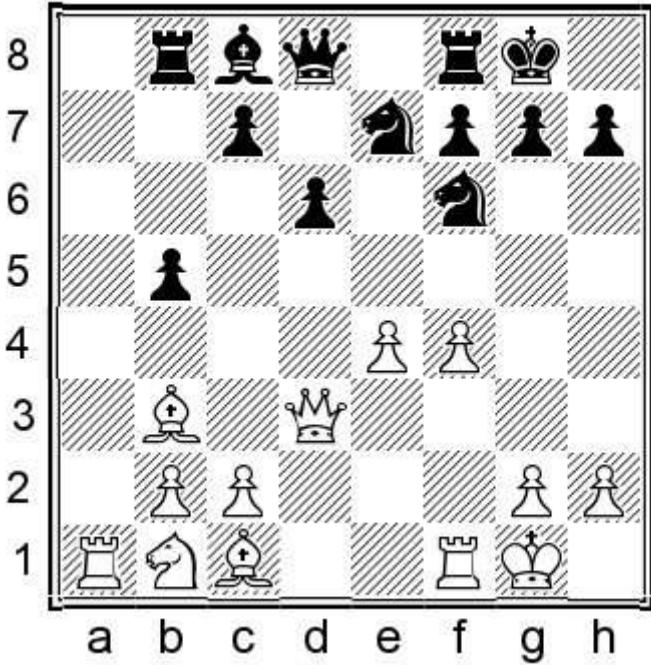


Position after: 22...Re2

23.Rf2 Re1+ [23...Rbe8 24.Bd2; 23...Nf5 24.Qg5 Re1+ 25.Rf1 Re2=] 24.Rf1 Re2= The repetition is kind of a logical outcome of this line.

D) In case of 14.f5 0-0 White players normally transpose to 14.Qe1 with 15.Qe1 [15.Qf3 Bb7 16.Nc3 would transpose into 14.Qf3.]

14...0-0



Position after: 14...0-0

I suggest you to transpose to our very main line in 8.Nxe5.

15.Nc3

15.e5 Nd7 16.exd6 cxd6 17.Rd1 [17.Qxd6?! is only dangerous for White:
17...Nf5 18.Qd2 Bb7,] 17...Nc5 [17...Bb7 18.Nc3] 18.Qxd6 Qxd6 19.Rxd6
Nf5 20.Rd1 Nxb3 21.cxb3 Be6= [21...h5=]

15...c5

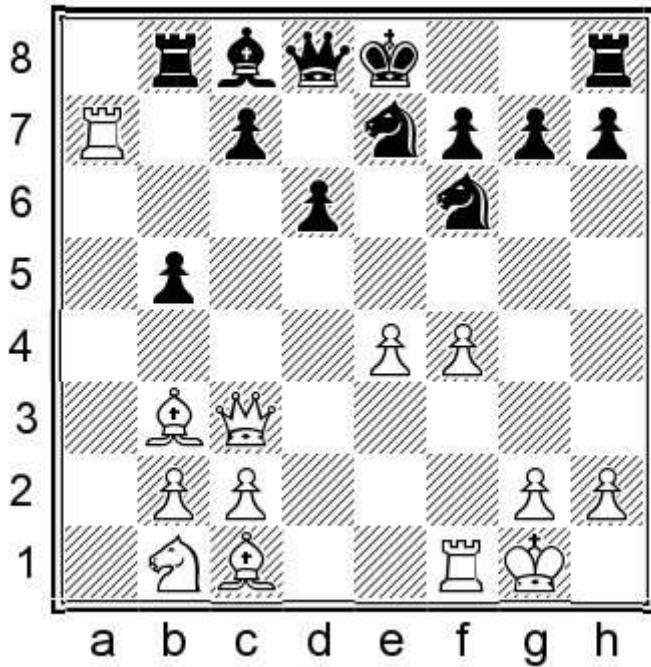
And here is the transposition into the 8.Nxd5 Chapter.

15...b4 is a good alternative, but the theory of the Ark is a bit heavy to have to learn different lines for every different move order.

**k) 8.axb5 axb5 9.Nxe5 Nxe5 10.d4 Bxd4 11.Qxd4 d6 12.f4
Nc6 13.Qc3 Ne7 14.Ra7**

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4 Rb8 8.axb5 axb5 9.Nxe5 Nxe5 10.d4 Bxd4 11.Qxd4 d6 12.f4 Nc6 13.Qc3!? Ne7 14.Ra7

This obvious try needs to be addressed precisely.

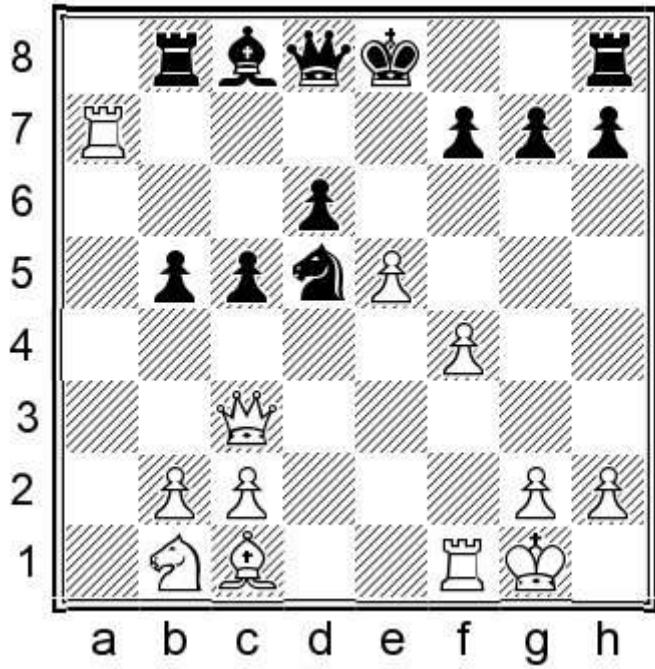


Position after: 14.Ra7

14...c5! 15.e5 Nfd5 16.Bxd5

16.Qa5 Qxa5 17.Rxa5 Nc6! should work well for Black, e.g. 18.Rxb5! Rxb5 19.Bxd5 Rb6 20.exd6 [20.Na3 Ne7] 20...Nd4 21.Re1+ Kd8 22.Bxf7 Rf8 23.Bc4 Ba6 24.Bxa6 Rxa6 25.Na3 Re8³

16...Nxd5

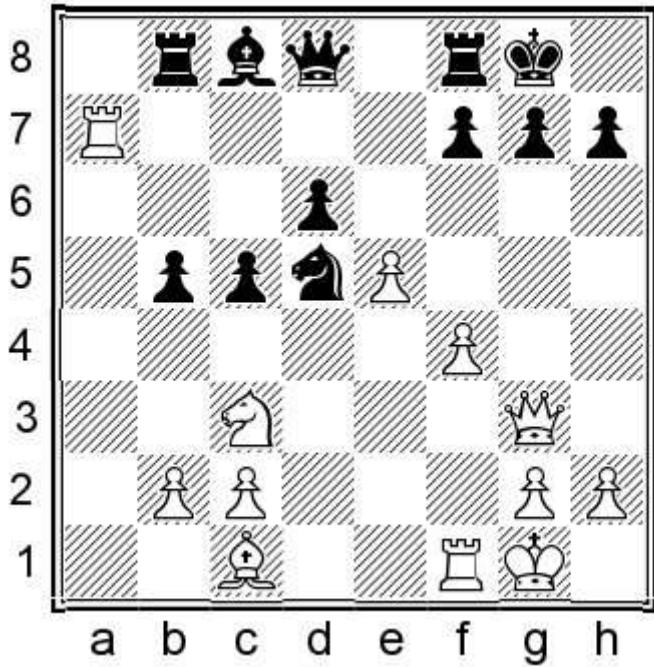


Position after: 16...Nxd5

17.Qf3

This is how an old line goes in the Ark.

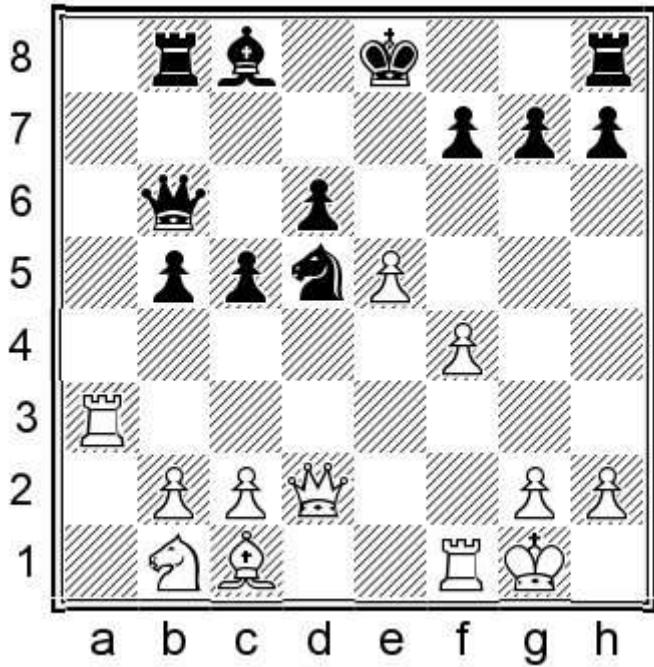
A) 17.Qg3 0-0 18.Nc3



Position after: 18.Nc3

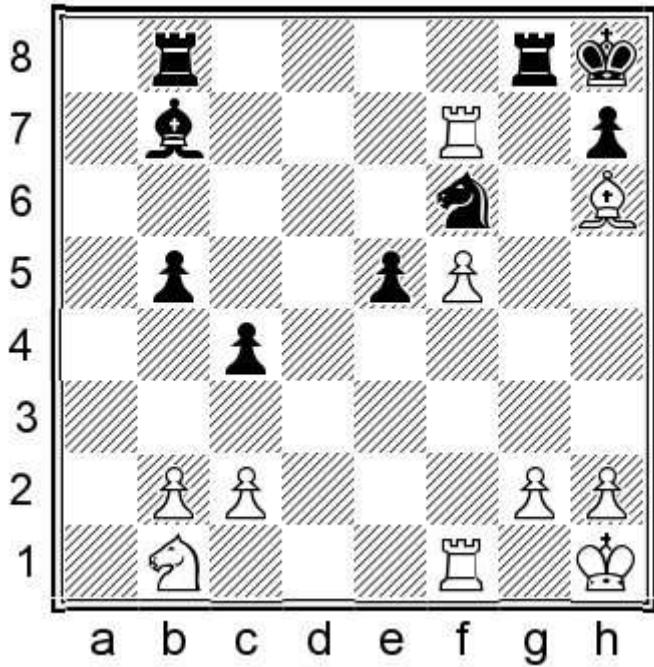
Polgar, J (2670) – Shirov, A (2700)/Tilburg 1997 continued with 18...Ne7, though the text is much simpler. 18...Nxc3 19.bxc3 [19.Qxc3 Bb7³] 19...Bf5 20.Be3 [20.Rd1 d5 21.Qf2 Qb6 22.Ra1 Qc6 23.Be3 Rfc8=] 20...Re8= The position is equal.

B) 17.Qd2!? Qb6 18.Ra3!?



Position after: 18.Ra3!?

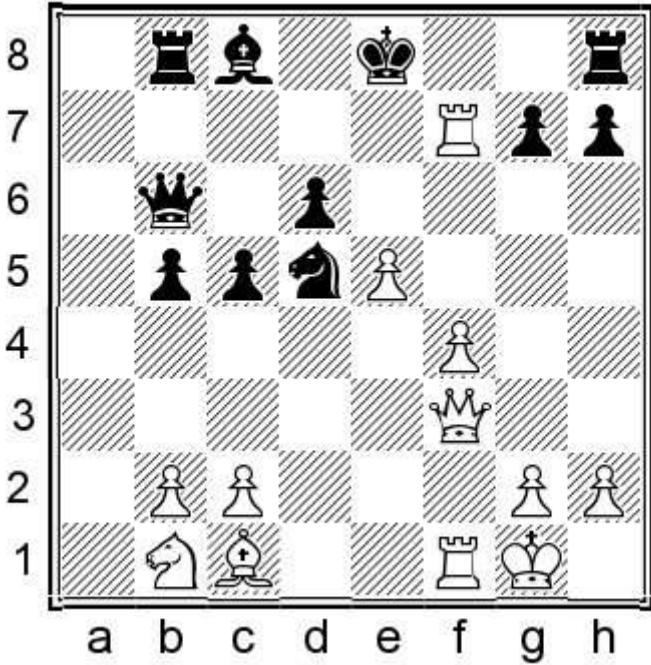
An independent idea. [18.Rxf7 Kxf7 19.Qxd5+ is the same as our main line.] 18...c4+ 19.Kh1 Bb7 20.Rg3 0-0 21.f5! dxе5 22.Qh6! Qxh6 23.Bxh6 Nf6! A super-strong move. 24.Rg5! [24.Rxg7+? would be a mistake! 24...Kh8 25...Ng8 is a threat now. 25.Rg5 Rg8 26.Nc3 Ng4 27.Rxg8+ Rxg8 28.Bc1 Ne3 29.Bxe3 Rxg2 30.Rd1 Bf3 31.Rf1 Bc6–+] 24...Rfd8 25.Rxg7+ Kh8!? This forces events. 26.Rxf7 Rg8!



Position after: 26...Rg8!

27.Rxf6 Rxg2 28.Rb6 Be4! A beautiful position. 29.Nc3 Forced.
[29.Rxb8+?? Rg8+ counters the check and mates next move.] 29...Rf2+
30.Kg1 [30.Nxe4?? Rxf1+ 31.Kg2 Rxb6 32.Kxf1 Rxh6+–] 30...Rg2+
31.Kh1 Rf2+= A draw by repetition.

17...Qb6™ 18.Rxf7!



Position after: 18.Rxf7!

The key motif in this line. White hopes to create some dangerous threats with the help of small material investment. Thanks to White's passive minor pieces, however, I don't think he has reason to claim an advantage.

18.Ra3 is less exciting here as after 18...c4+ White has to play 19.Be3 [19.Kh1 b4 20.Qxd5 bxa3 21.Nxa3 Bb7+] 19...Nxe3 20.Qxe3 which is dully equal now.

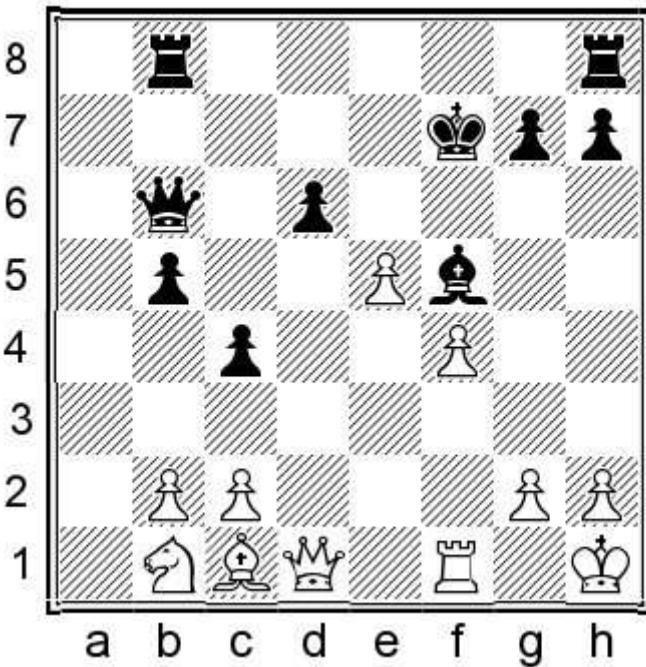
18...Kxf7

At first I thought including 18...c4 in this spot should be fine (as in the stem game, Anand, V (2765) – Shirov, A (2700) Belgrade 1997), but after going through all the lines once more I felt Black should do it at a more suitable moment.

19.Qxd5+ Be6 20.Qd1 c4+!

This move-order avoids the Rf2 lines.

21.Kh1 Bf5



Position after: 21...Bf5

22.Nc3

A) 22.Qh5+ g6 23.Qh4 Qd8 24.Qh6 [24.Qf2 Re8] 24...Qf8 25.Qh4 Qe7=

B) 22.Qd5+ Be6 23.Qd1 and a draw was agreed here in the aforementioned Anand – Shirov game.

22...Rhe8!

I believe this logical move to be simplest solution, but White can still create problems ...

23.Qd5+

A) 23.Nd5? Qc6

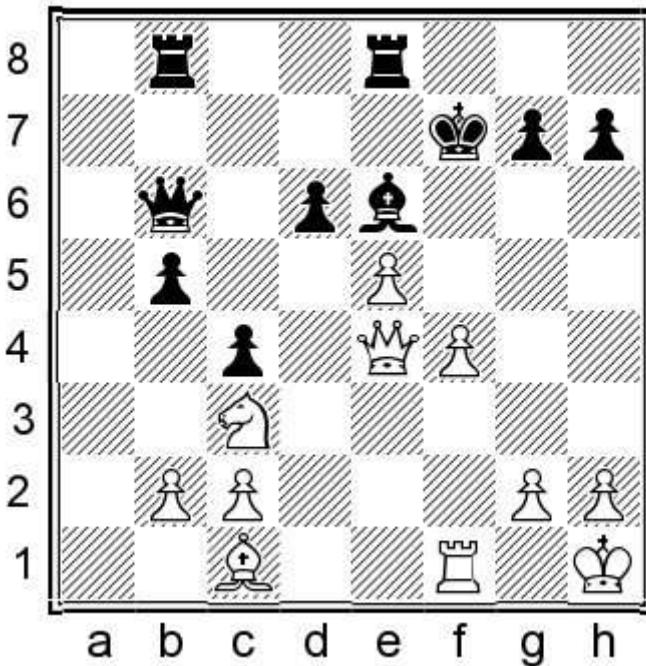
B) 23.Qh5+ Bg6

B1) 24.e6+? Kg8! 25.Qg4 Qc5! 26.f5 Rf8–+

B2) 24.Qe2? Kg8! 25.Be3 Threatening f5 and e6 next, but Black has a fine reply and he's doing better already: 25...Bh5! 26.Qf2 [26.Qxh5 Qxe3] 26...Qc6

B3) 24.Qd1 Bf5! 25.Qh5+ Bg6= is repetition.

23...Be6 24.Qe4!



Position after: 24.Qe4!

This is tricky.

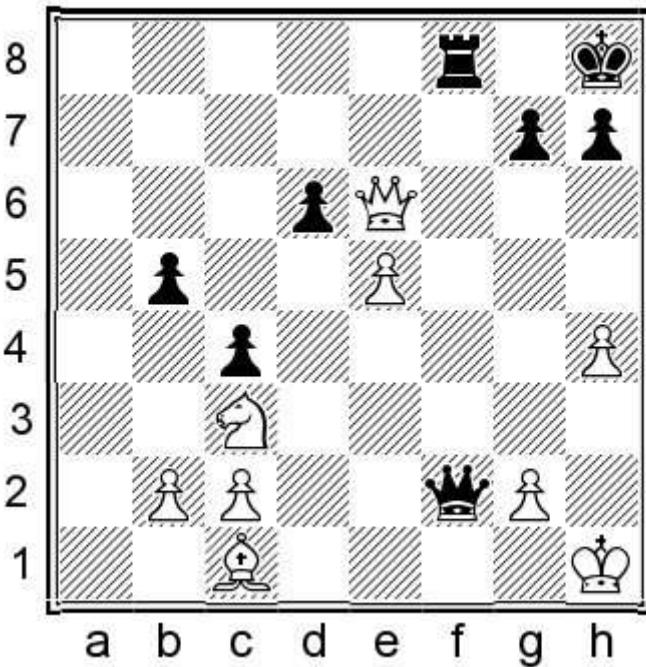
24.Qd1 Bf5 [24...dxe5? 25.f5 is unpleasant.] 25.Qd5+ Be6=

24...Kg8

Or 24...b4 25.Ne2 Qb7 26.Qxb7+ Rxb7 27.f5 Bd5 [27...dxe5 28.fxe6+ Kxe6?] 28.e6+ Kf6!?=

25.f5 Rf8 26.Rf3 Rxf5 27.Rxf5 Bxf5 28.Qxf5 Rf8 29.Qe6+ Kh8 30.h4!

Qf2!



Position after: 30...Qf2!

31.exd6

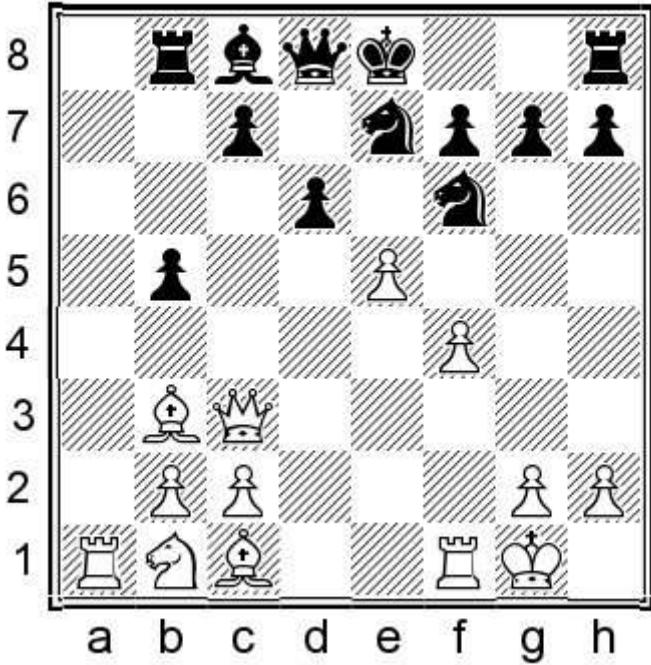
31.Qe7 Rf7=

31...Qf1+ 32.Kh2 Qxc1 33.Nd5 Qh6! 34.Qe7 g5!=

Black holds.

**I) 8.axb5 axb5 9.Nxe5 Nxe5 10.d4 Bxd4 11.Qxd4 d6 12.f4
Nc6 13.Qc3 Ne7 14.e5 Ne4 15.--**

**1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4 Rb8 8.axb5
axb5 9.Nxe5 Nxe5 10.d4 Bxd4 11.Qxd4 d6 12.f4 Nc6 13.Qc3!? Ne7 14.e5**



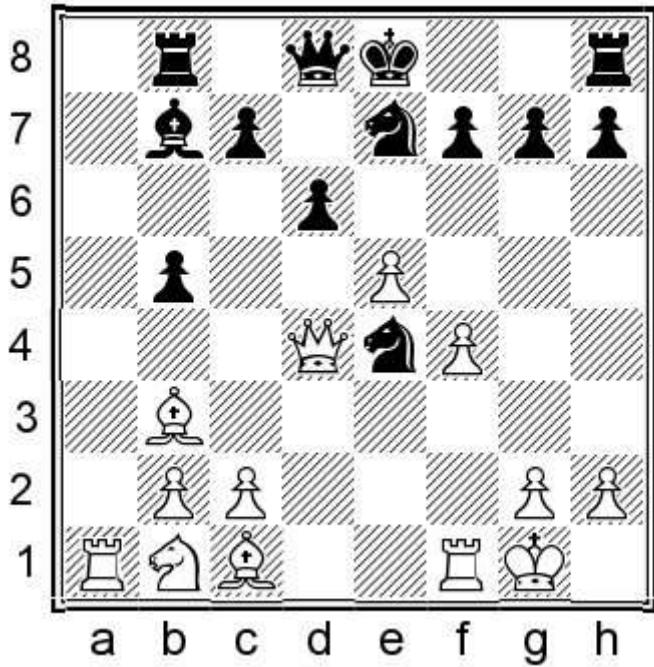
Position after: 14.e5

The most popular and logical follow-up for White.

14...Ne4 15.Qf3

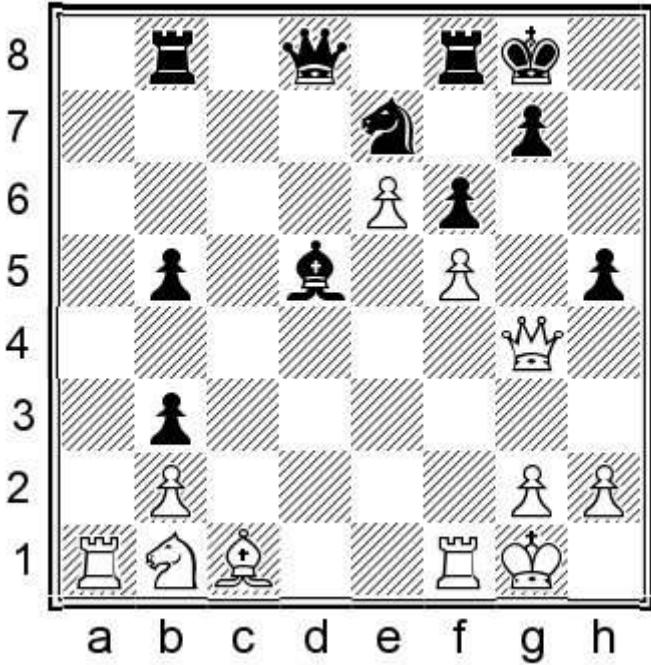
A) 15.Qe3 Nc5 16.exd6 Qxd6 17.Re1 Nxb3 18.cxb3 Be6= was comfortable for Black in Illescas Cordoba, M (2635) – Shirov, A (2690)/Madrid 1997.

B) 15.Qd4 Bb7!



Position after: 15...Bb7!

Black is very active and the d4-queen is a permanent target. 16.e6 [16.exd6?! can be answered powerfully, e.g. 16...0-0! 17.f5 c5! 18.Qd3 Nxf5 19.Rxf5 c4 20.Bxc4 bxc4 21.Qd4 Nxd6³ when Black is more comfortable.] 16...f6 17.Qd1!? [17.f5 c5 18.Qe3 c4 can't be good for White.] 17...c5 18.c4 0-0 19.f5 d5 20.cxd5 c4 21.Qd4! cxb3 22.Qxe4 Bxd5 23.Qg4 h5!?

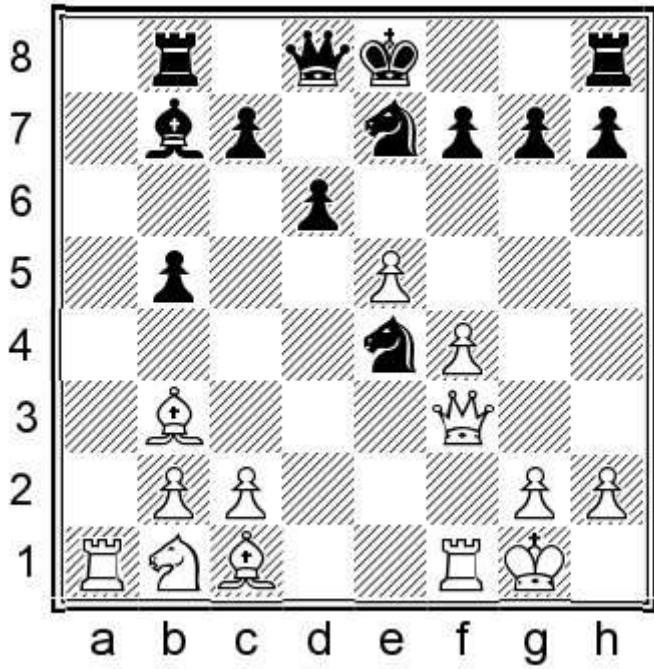


Position after: 23...h5!?

24.Qxh5 Qb6+ 25.Rf2 Black has good counterplay after, say, 25...Be4
26.Nc3 Bxf5 27.Nd5 Nxd5 28.Qxf5 Rbd8=

C) 15.Qb4 Nc5 16.Ba2 0-0 17.Be3 Bf5! 18.Nd2 [18.Bxc5?! Misses the intermediate move 18...Nc6! 19.Qc3 dxc5 20.Qxc5 Qd4+ 21.Qxd4 Nxd4 is pleasant for us.] 18...Ne6 19.exd6 Qxd6 20.Qxd6 cxd6=

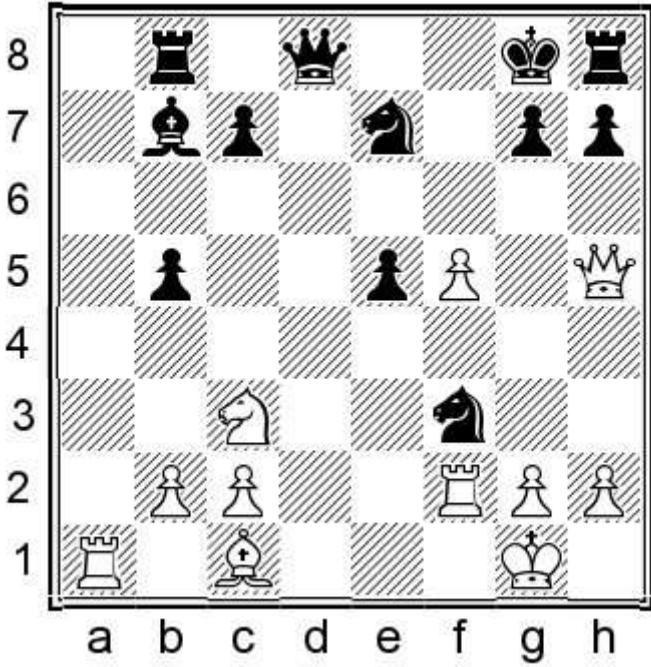
15...Bb7!



Position after: 15...Bb7!

16.Qg4

A) 16.f5 dx_e5 17.Nc3 Nd2!? 18.Bxf7+! Kxf7 19.Qh5+ Kg8 20.Rf2! Nf3+!?



Position after: 20...Nf3+!?

21.gxf3 Qd7 This looks practical to me. 22.f6 Qf5! 23.Qxf5 Nxf5 24.Nxb5 gxf6 25.Nxc7 Kf7 26.Ra7 Rhg8+ 27.Rg2 Rgd8 28.Na6 Rd1+ 29.Kf2 Rxc1 30.Nxb8 Rxc2+ 31.Kg1 Rc1+ 32.Kf2 Rc2+=

B) 16.e6!? fxe6 17.Qh5+ Kd7 18.Qxb5+ Bc6 19.Qe2 Ra8 20.Rxa8 Qxa8 21.Re1 Nf5 and despite the strange placement of our king, Black is fine thanks to the active minor pieces.

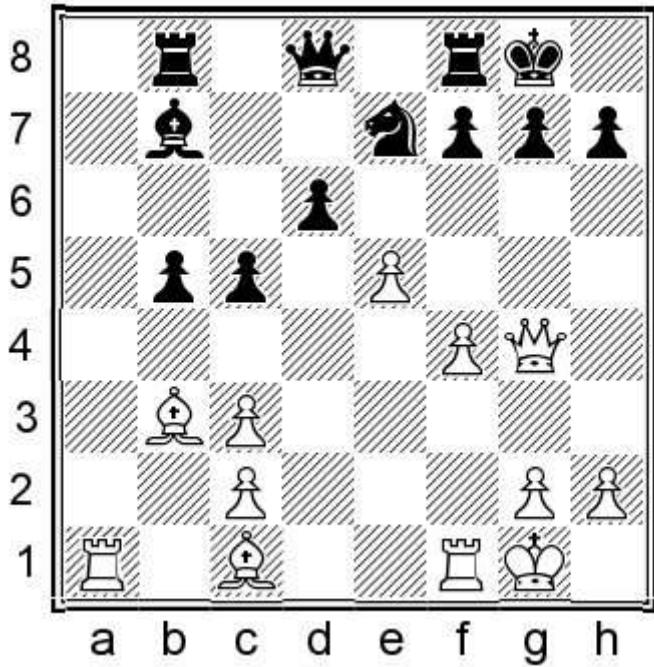
16...0-0

16...c5!? is Svidler's suggestion.

17.Nc3 Nxc3

Once again 17...c5 was possible, but I prefer the simpler solution.

18.bxc3 c5



Position after: 18...c5

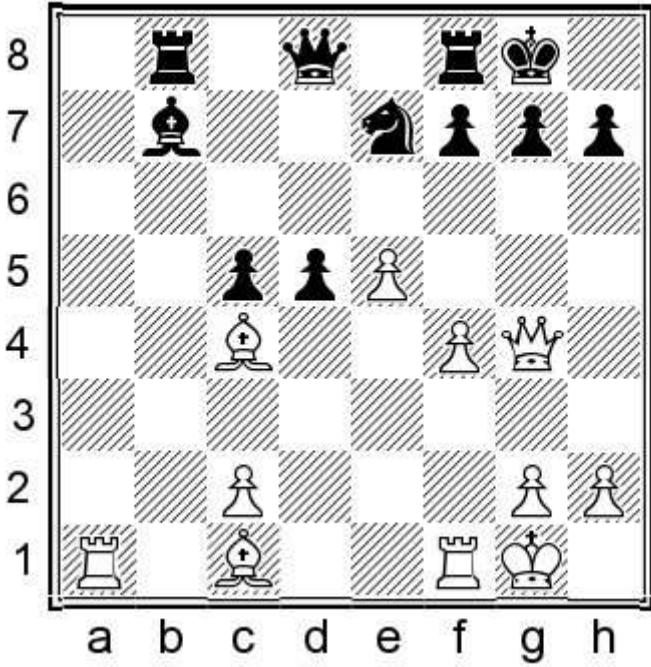
19.c4

19.f5?! doesn't work well this time: 19...c4 20.Bh6 Qb6+ 21.Kh1 Ng6! 22.fxg6 hxg6 23.Bxc4 [23.Bg5 dxe5! 24.Ba2 Ra8 and the bishop is dead.] 23...bxc4 24.Bf4 dxe5 25.Bxe5 Rbe8 26.Bd4 Qc6³

19...bxc4

19...Bc8 20.Qe2 Nf5!? is also good.

20.Bxc4 d5



Position after: 20...d5

21.Be2

21.Bd3 c4 22.Bxh7+ Kxh7 23.f5 Bc8 24.e6 Bxe6 25.fxe6 Qb6+ 26.Kh1 Qxe6 27.Qh5+ Kg8 28.Ra3 Qg6 can only be good for us.

21...Bc8 22.Qg3

22.f5 Nxf5!

22...Bf5

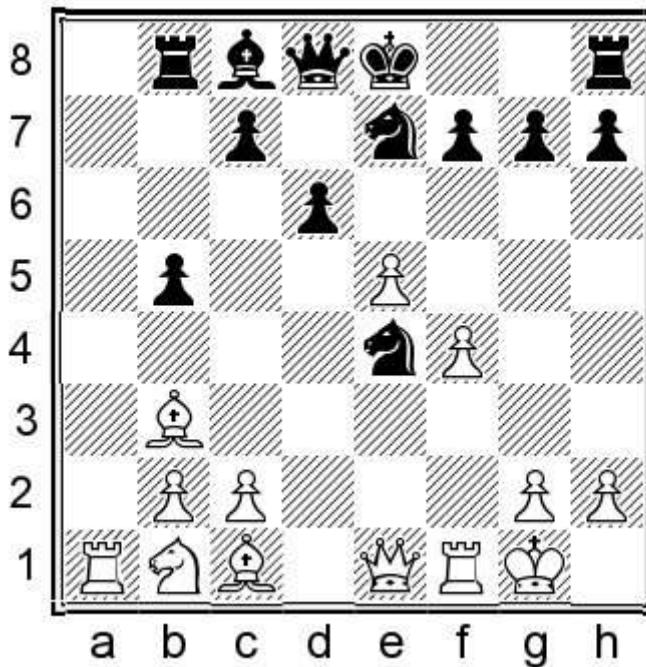
Black should be fine.

m) 8.axb5 axb5 9.Nxe5 Nxe5 10.d4 Bxd4 11.Qxd4 d6 12.f4 Nc6 13.Qc3 Ne7 14.e5 Ne4 15.Qe1

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4 Rb8 8.axb5 axb5 9.Nxe5 Nxe5 10.d4 Bxd4 11.Qxd4 d6 12.f4 Nc6 13.Qc3!? Ne7 14.e5

Ne4 15.Qe1

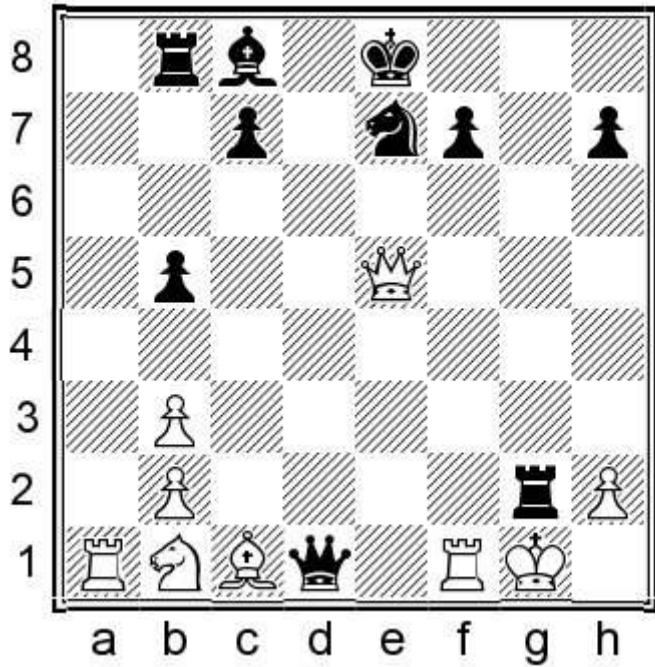
This is the square where the queen is the least vulnerable.



Position after: 15.Qe1

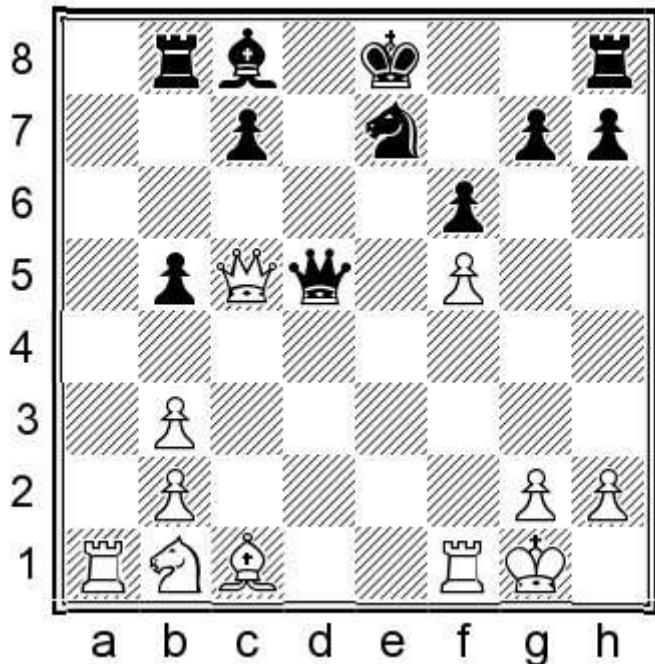
15...Nc5 16.Ba2

16.f5?! This plan is premature here. 16...Nxb3 17.cxb3 dxe5 18.Qxe5 [18.f6 gxf6 19.Rxf6 Rg8 and it's hard for White to make use of the opponent's king. What's more, his king can't always find shelter, for example: 20.Qxe5? Qd1+ 21.Rf1 Rxg2+!



Position after: 21...Rg2+!

22.Kxg2 Bh3+! 23.Kxh3 Qxf1+-- Black wins.] 18...f6 19.Qc5 Qd5

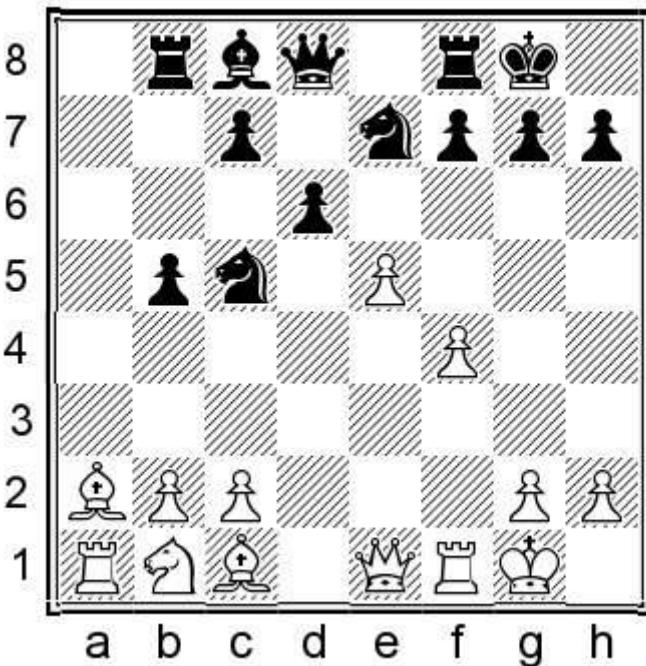


Position after: 19...Qd5

A) 20.Qa7? It's hard to explain what was Hou Yifan's idea. 20...Bb7 [20...0-0 21.Qxc7 Rb7μ] 21.Qf2 0-0 22.Nc3 Qxb3 23.Qc5 Rfe8μ Hou, Y (2488) – Lahno, K (2449)/ Krasnoturinsk 2006.

B) 20.Qxd5 is forced and Black has comfortable equality after 20...Nxd5 21.Nc3 Ne7!?= [Or 21...Nxc3]

16...0-0



Position after: 16...0-0

16...Bf5 has been played recently in a couple of games. Svidler's suggestion 16...b4 also deserves attention, but after some serious consideration I've decided to offer you a third alternative.

A) 16...Bf5!? 17.Be3 b4 18.Bxc5 dxc5 19.Qf2² was better for White in the recent game Lu, S (2615) – Wei, Y (2732) Xinghua 2021.

B) 16...b4!? (Svidler's choice.) 17.f5 b3 18.Bxb3 Nxb3 19.cxb3 dxe5

20.f6 This is quite unclear.

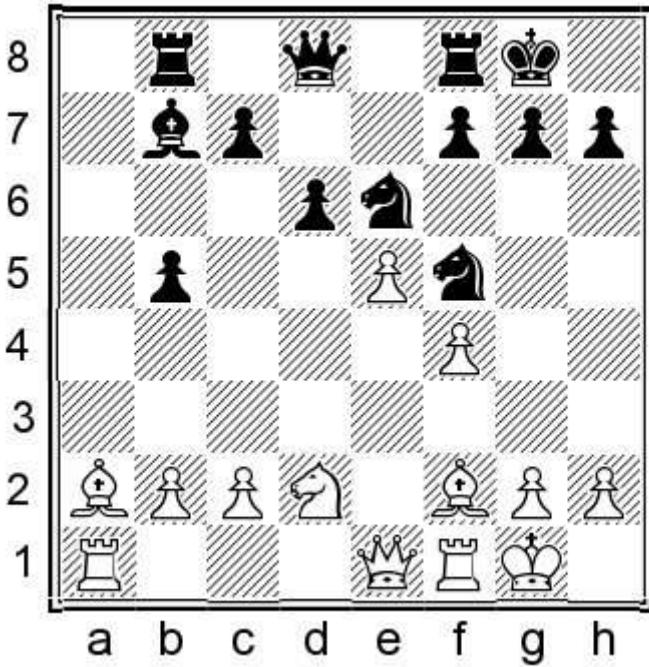
17.b4

17.Be3 Despite Kamsky's success in this line, the move has barely been repeated.

A) 17...Bf5 18.b4 Ne6 19.Qf2!? [19.Nc3²] 19...d5 20.c3 f6 21.exf6 Rxf6 22.Nd2² was better for White in Kamsky, G (2741) – Kasimdzhanov, R (2669)/Khanty – Mansiysk 2011.

B) 17...Nf5! This active move is my preference. Black keeps his options open for the c8-bishop.

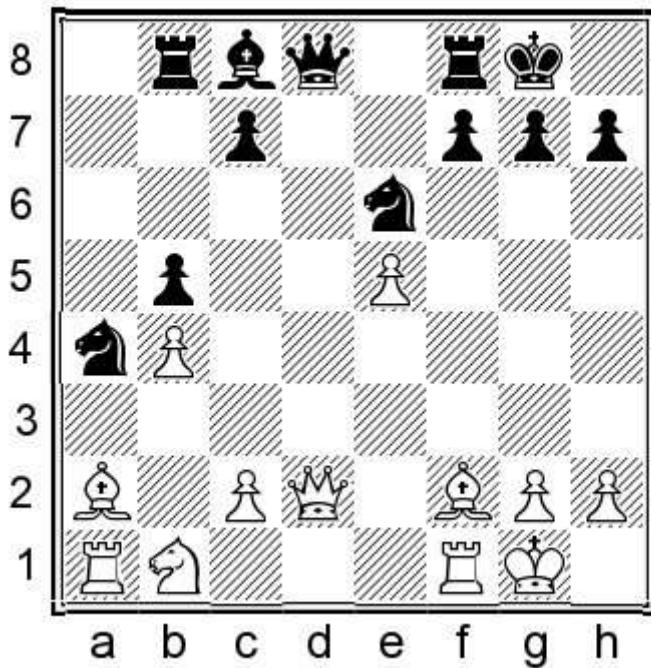
B1) 18.Bf2 Bb7 19.Nd2 Ne6!



Position after: 19...Ne6!

20.Bxe6 fxe6 Black is doing pretty well already and White lost control of the position quickly: 21.Rd1 Qe8! 22.Ne4? Qc6 23.exd6 cxd6 0-1 Kosteniuk, A (2471) – Lagno, K (2546) chess. com INT 2020.

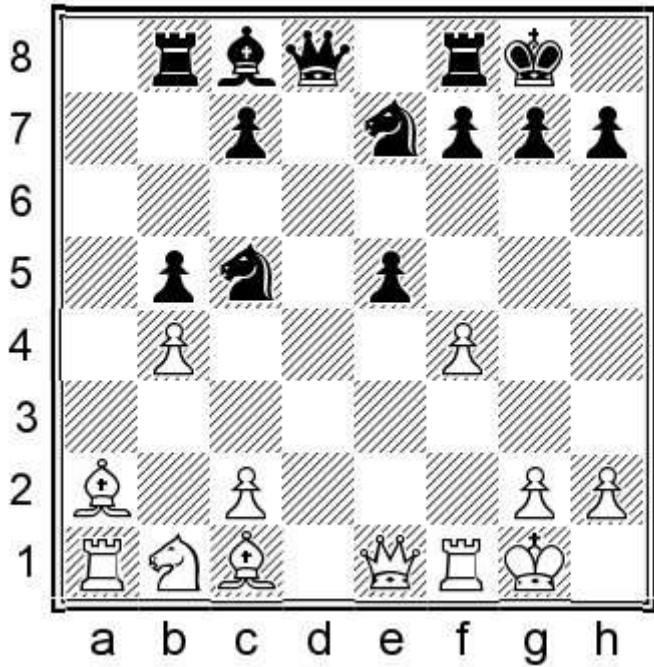
B2) 18.b4 Na4 19.Bf2!? dxe5 20.fxe5 Nd4! 21.Qd2 Ne6



Position after: 21...Ne6

After this manoeuvre, White still needs to waste time to develop the b1-knight. 22.Bb3 Bb7 23.Qxd8 Rfxd8 24.c4 Nb6 25.cxb5 Bd5 26.Bc2 Bc4= Black equalizes.

17...dxe5!

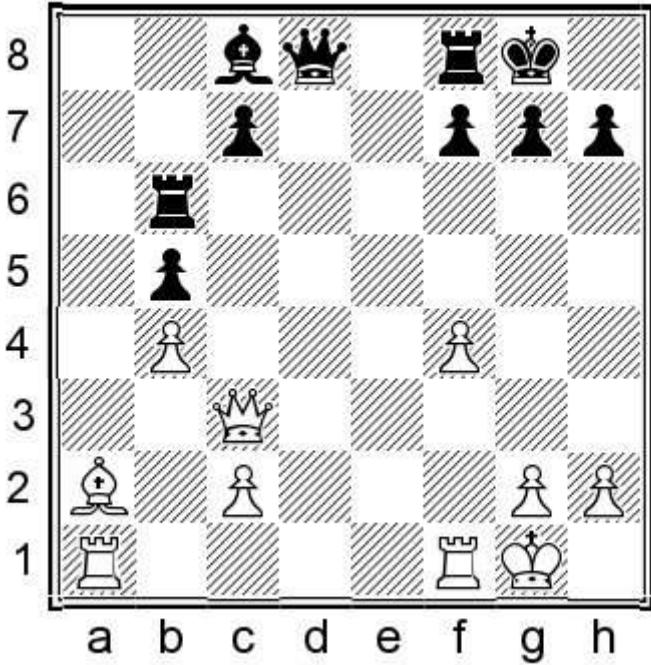


Position after: 17...dxe5!

This motif is really important to remember! Now ...Qd4 check is a threat so White needs to react accordingly.

18.Nc3!

18.Bb2 Na4 19.Bxe5 Nc6 20.Nc3 Nxe5 21.Qxe5 Nxc3 22.Qxc3 Rb6!



Position after: 22...Rb6!

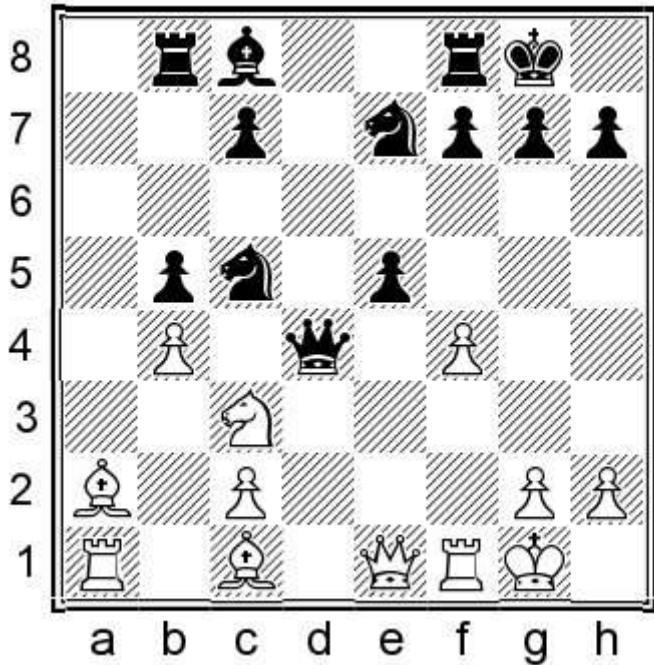
Black should be able to hold the balance, e.g.

A) 23.Rad1 Rd6=

B) 23.Qc5 Rd6!? [Or 23...Be6] 24.Qxb5 Rd2 25.Qc5 Bb7 26.Rf2 Rd1+ 27.Rxd1 Qxd1+ 28.Rf1 Qd2 29.Qf2 Qxb4=

C) 23.Rae1 Bb7!? [23...Be6 is probably ok too.] 24.Re2 [24.f5? allows 24...Bxg2.] 24...Rd6 [24...Rg6 25.Bb3!] 25.f5 Bd5 26.Bxd5 Rxd5 27.f6 gxf6 [27...g6=] 28.Rxf6 Rd1+ 29.Rf1 Qd4+=

18...Qd4+



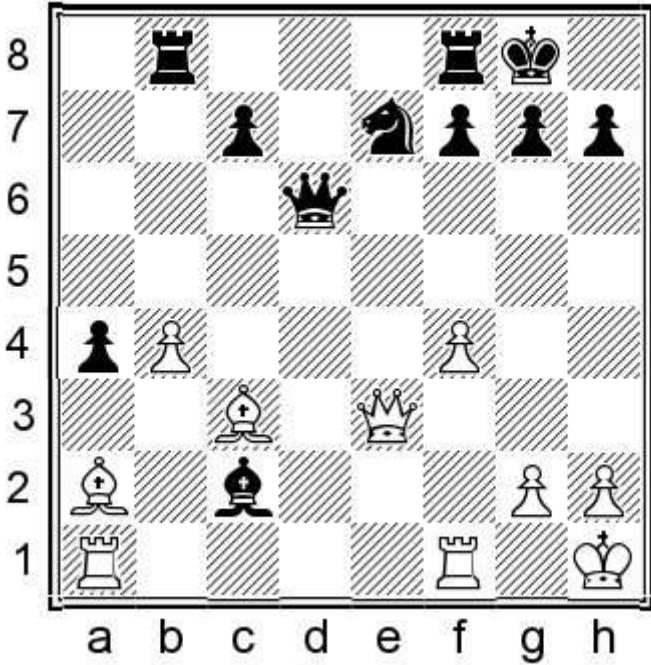
Position after: 18...Qd4+

I like this option since it forces White to play sharply and precisely.

18...Na6!? is also playable.

19.Be3

19.Kh1 Na4 20.Bd2 is interesting, but Black has a nice way to counter it.
20...e4! 20...Be6 is safer, but less energetic. 21.Nxa4 bxa4 22.Bc3 Qd6
23.Qxe4 Bf5 24.Qe3 Bxc2!?



Position after: 24...Bxc2!?

This concrete idea works well. 25.Bxg7 This is the question, of course. 25...Kxg7 26.Qc3+ Qf6 27.Qxc2 Rxb4 28.Bb1 Ra8!? 29.Qxh7+ Kf8³ offers Black chances to play for the win.

19...Qxb4 20.Rb1

20.Nd5 leads to equality. 20...Nxd5 21.Qxb4 Nxb4 22.Bxc5 Nxa2 23.Bxf8 Nc3 [23...Kxf8 24.Rxa2 exf4 25.Rxf4 Be6 26.Ra7 c5=] 24.Bc5 Ne2+ 25.Kf2 Nxf4 26.Ba7 Rb7 27.Be3 Rb8=

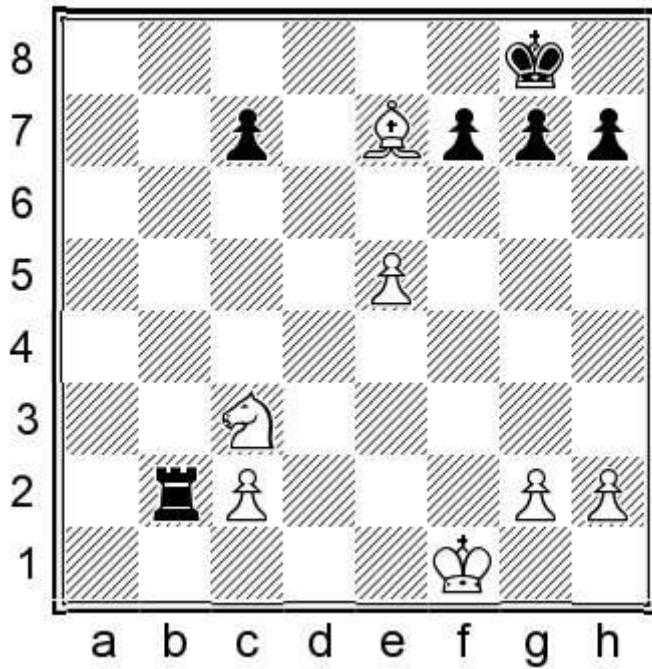
20...Qa3

The only available square, but why not? Black has taken two pawns, and the price is that White can force a draw if he so wishes.

21.Nxb5

21.Rxb5 Rxb5 22.Nxb5 Qxa2 23.Bxc5 Ba6! A recurring motif in this line, as you will see. 24.Bxe7 [24.Qxe5? Ng6 is unpleasant: 25.Qxc7? Rc8 26.Re1

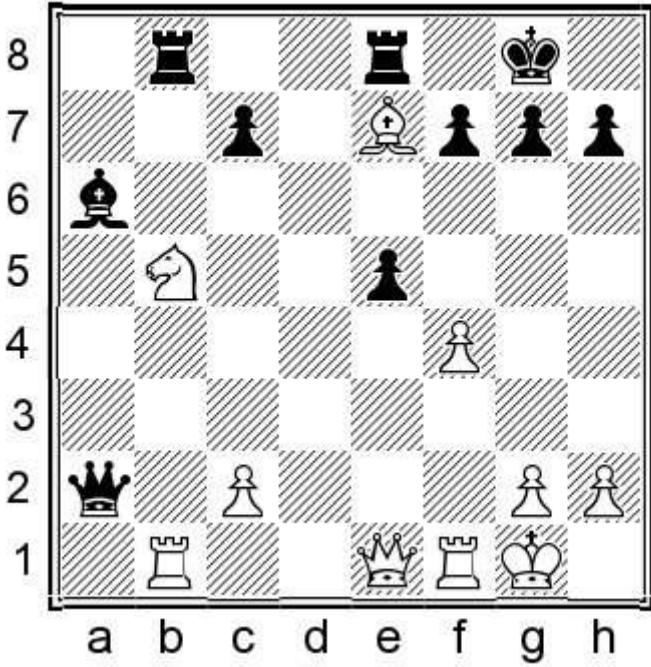
h6+] 24...Rb8 25.Nc3 Qe6 26.Qxe5 Qxe5 27.fxe5 Bxf1 28.Kxf1 Rb2=



Position after: 28...Rb2=

This endgame should be a draw.

21...Qxa2 22.Bxc5 Ba6! 23.Bxe7 Rfe8



Position after: 23...Rfe8

This is critical. It seems as though White can't hang on to his extra material for long.

24.Qxe5

A) 24.Nc3 Rxb1 25.Nxa2 [25.Qxb1 Qe6 or 25...Qc4.] 25...Rxe1 26.Rxe1 Rxe7 27.Rxe5 Rxe5 28.fxe5=

B) 24.Ra1 Qe6 25.Nxc7 Qb6+ 26.Qf2 Qxc7 27.Rxa6 Rxe7=

24...f6!

This move was missed by Tisdall in an old Chessbase magazine analysis. Black opens the back rank with tempo, which secures equal chances after some complications.

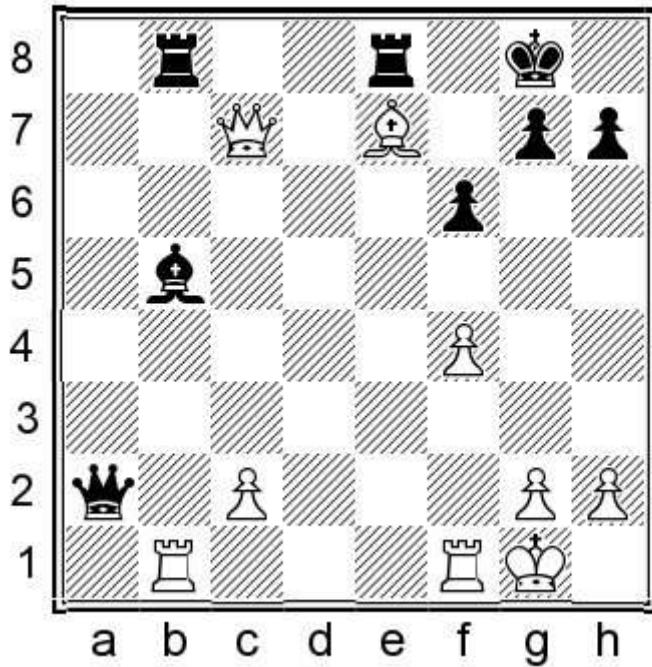
Instead he gave 24...Bxb5 25.Rxb5 Qa7+ 26.Rc5 c6 27.Re1 Rb7 28.Ra1! Qb6 29.Qd6+- winning for White.

25.Qxc7

A) 25.Qh5 Qf7!? 26.Qxf7+ Kxf7=

B) 25.Qc5 Rxb5 26.Rxb5 Bxb5 27.Qxb5 Rxe7=

25...Bxb5

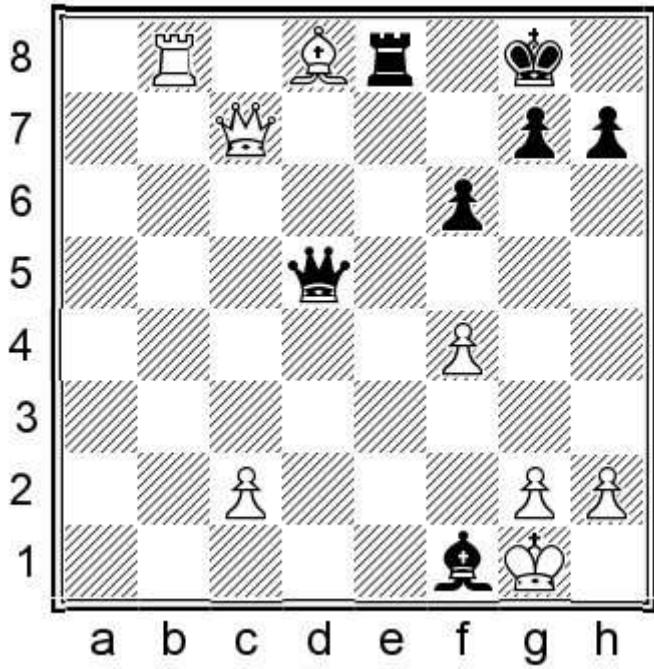


Position after: 25...Bxb5

26.Bxf6!

A creative try, but Black holds his own.

26.Bd8? doesn't work: 26...Bxf1 27.Qxb8 [27.Rxb8 Qd5!



Position after: 27...Qd5!

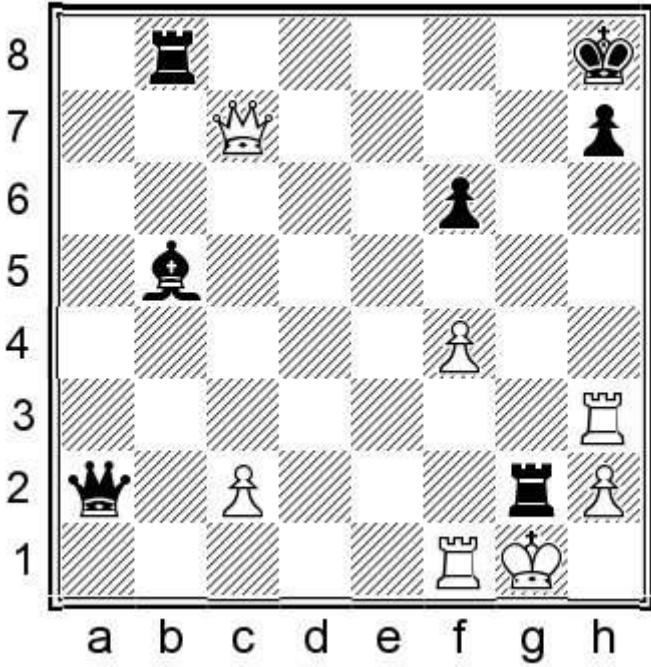
This resource turns the tables! 28.Kxf1 Qd1+ 29.Kf2 Qe2+ 30.Kg3 Re3+ 31.Kh4 g5+ 32.fxg5 Re4+-- and mate follows.] 27...Bc4! 28.h3 Qxc2--

26...gxf6 27.Rb3 Kh8 28.Rg3!

Provoking 28...Rg8. Otherwise 28.Rh3 is easily parried by 28...Qg8!

28...Rg8 29.Rh3 Rxg2+!

We have our own tricks!



Position after: 29...Rg2+!

30.Kxg2 Qd5+!

And perpetual check is inevitable.

31.Kg1

31.Rff3 Qd2+ 32.Rf2 Qd5+ 33.Kg1 Qd1+ 34.Kg2 Qd5+=

31...Qd4+

31...Rg8+ 32.Rg3=

32.Rf2

32.Kh1 Qd5+ 33.Rff3 Qd1+ 34.Kg2 Qd2+ 35.Rf2 Qd5+=

32...Qd1+ 33.Rf1 Qd4+=

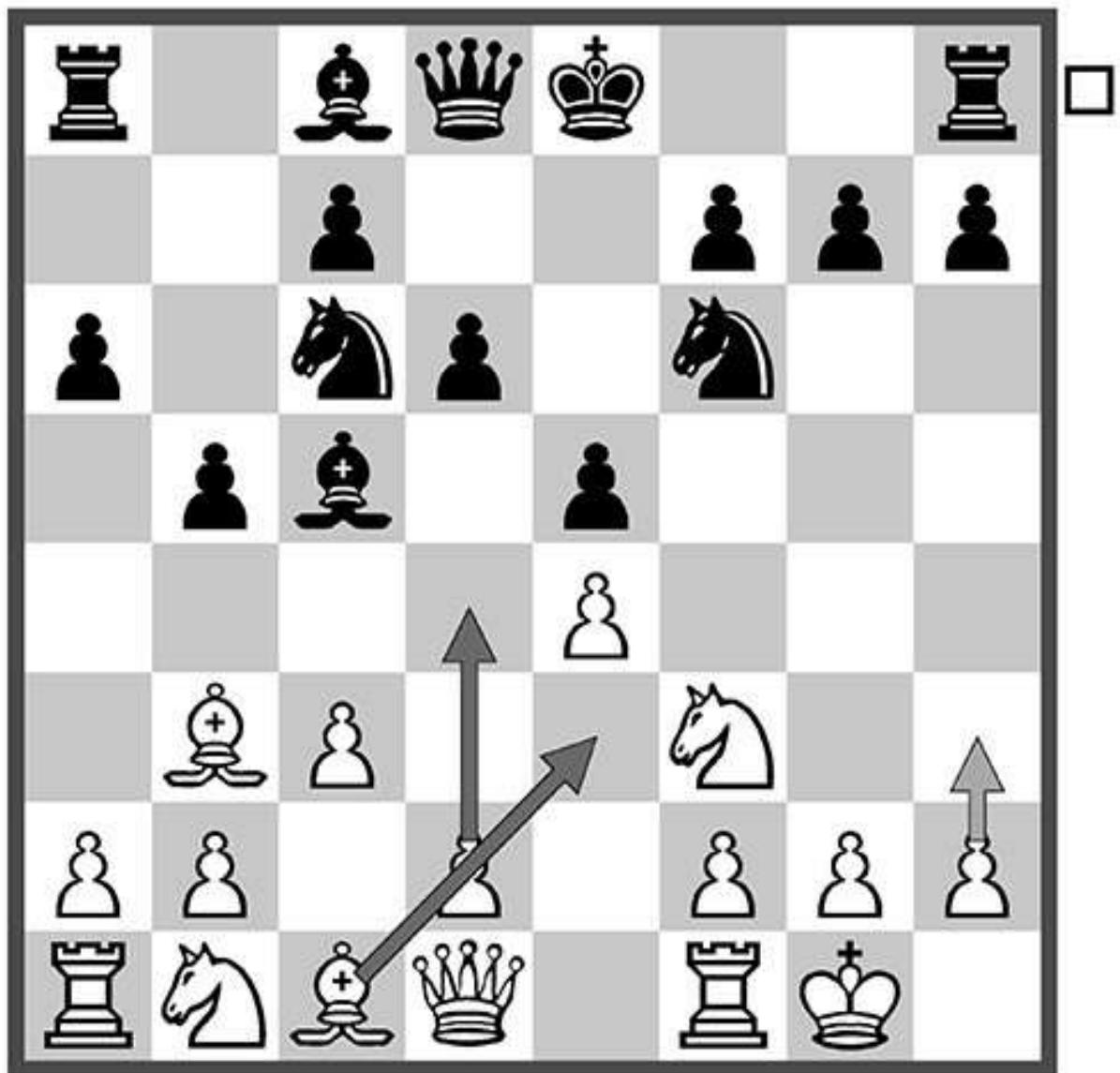
Part III

7.c3 – Main Lines in the Arkhangelsk

Chapter 8

Sidelines on 8th and 9th Moves

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6



Chapter Guide

Chapter 8 – Sidelines on 8th and 9th Moves

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6

a) 8.h3

b) 8.d4 Bb6 9.--

c) 8.d4 Bb6 9.h3

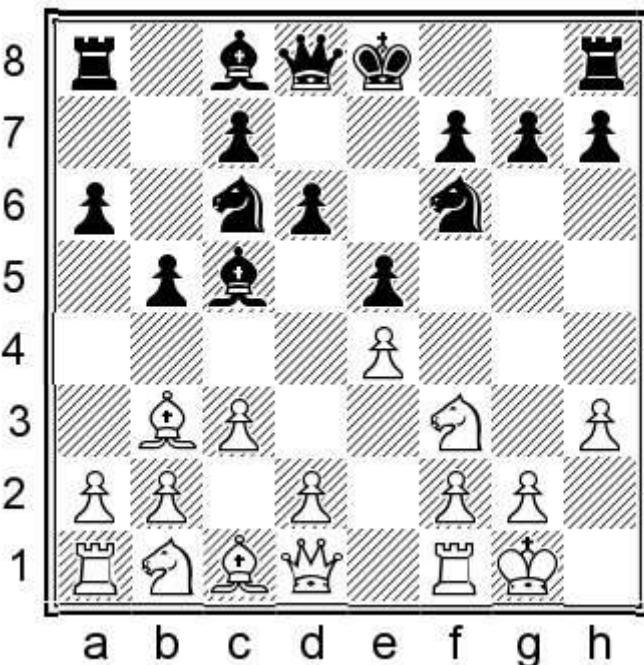
d) 8.d4 Bb6 9.Be3 0-0 10.Nbd2 Re8 11.--

e) 8.d4 Bb6 9.Be3 0-0 10.Nbd2 Re8 11.Re1 Na5 12.Bc2 c5 13.--

f) 8.d4 Bb6 9.Be3 0-0 10.Nbd2 Re8 11.Re1 Na5 12.Bc2 c5 13.dxe5

a) 8.h3

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.h3!?



Position after: 8.h3!?

A curious move order.

8...Bb7

I prefer this to 8...0-0.

9.Re1!?

9.d4 Bb6 10.Re1 transposes to 8.d4 Bb7 9.h3

9...Ne7!

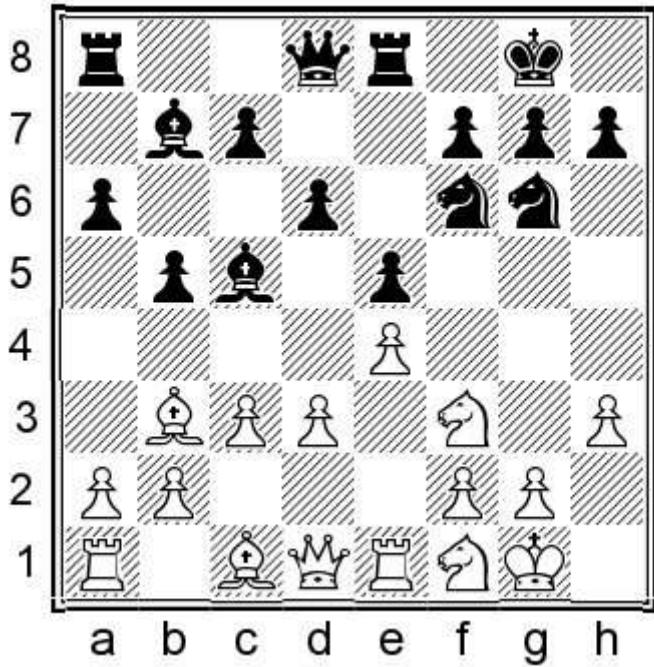
Black can postpone this manoeuvre, but I actually think it's smarter to play it directly. 9...0-0 10.d4 [10.d3 Ne7! is another good line.] 10...Bb6 11.Bg5 is a bit annoying to me.

10.d3

A solid move and almost identical to some 7.d3 lines.

10.d4 This looks tempting. What else is there? 10...Bb6 transposes once again to 8.d4 Bb7 9.h3

10...Ng6 11.Nbd2 0-0 12.Nf1 Re8

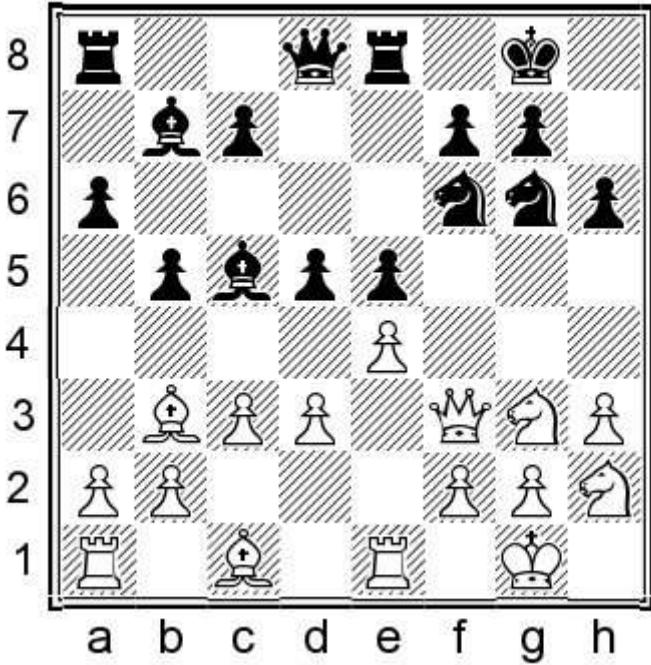


Position after: 12...Re8

A reccuring theme: Black wants to save on playing ...h6 if he can.

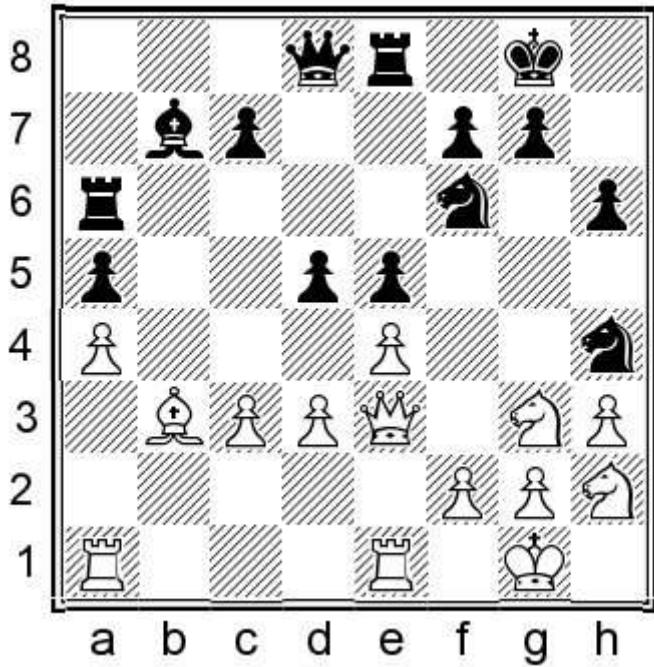
13.Ng5

A) 13.Ng3 h6 14.Nh2 d5 15.Qf3



Position after: 15.Qf3

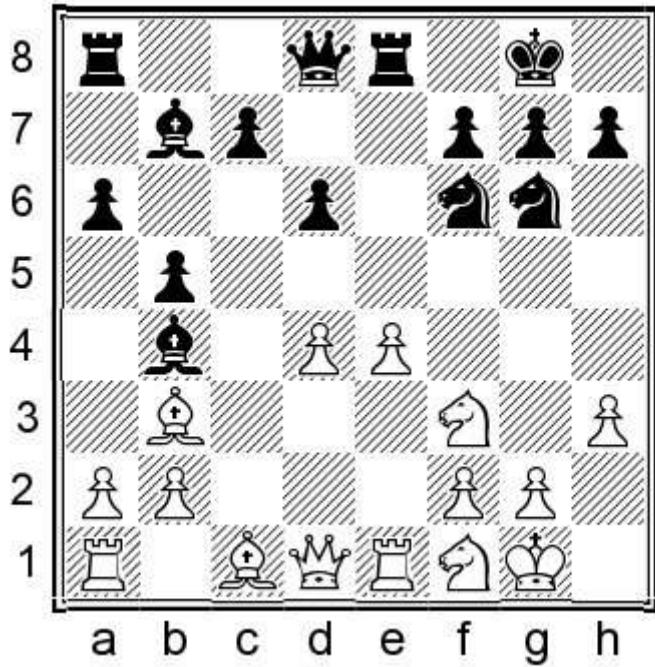
15...Nh4 [15...a5!?] 16.Qe2 and here Black played 16...Ng6 in McShane, L (2664) – Tkachiev, V (2636) Wijk aan Zee 2011, but instead could have gone for a more active plan with 16...a5! 17.a4 b4! This gains a lot of space on the queenside and Black can include his a-rook via a6 sometimes. 18.Be3 Bxe3 19.Qxe3 bxc3 20.bxc3 Ra6!



Position after: 20...Ra6!

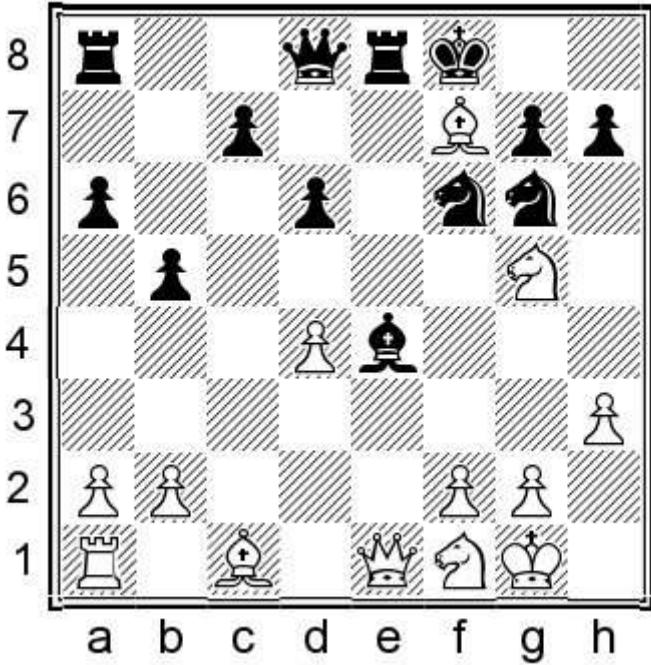
21.Ng4 Nxg4 22.hxg4 Rb6 23.Rab1 Ng6=

B) 13.d4!? exd4!? A direct reaction. 14.cxd4 Bb4



Position after: 14...Bb4

15.Ng5! is the only way to create some purpose to the 13.d4 push.
[15.Bxf7+ is hardly a good idea: 15...Kxf7 16.Qb3+ Kf8 17.Qxb4 Nxe4³] 15...Bxe1 16.Nxf7 [16.Bxf7+ Kf8 17.Qxe1 Bxe4!]



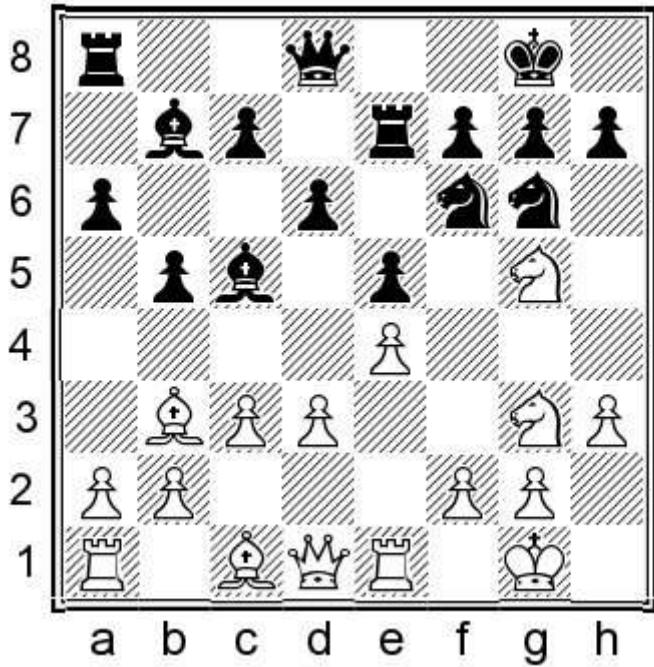
Position after: 17...Bxe4!

This should be fine for Black. 18.Ne6+ Rxe6 19.Bxe6 Qe7 20.Bb3 Bd5=] 16...Bxf2+! Probably the simplest, and Black is ok. 17.Kxf2 Nxe4+ 18.Kg1 Qf6 19.Nxd6+ Kh8 20.Nf7+ [20.Nxb7?? Qf2+ 21.Kh2 Nh4 22.Qg4 Nf6!–+] 20...Kg8= Repetition of moves.

13...Re7

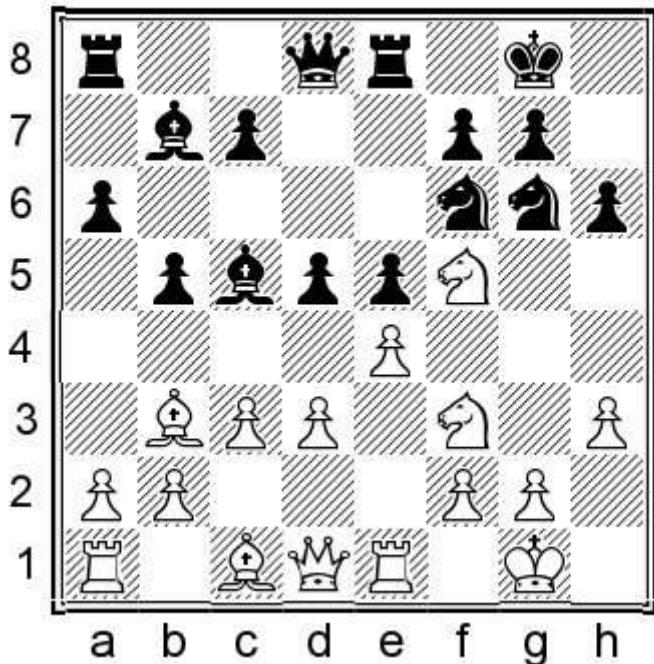
13...d5 14.exd5 Bxd5 15.Ng3 a5= is good too.

14.Ng3



Position after: 14.Ng3

14...h6 15.Nf3 d5 16.Nf5 Re8



Position after: 16...Re8

Black gets nice play in the center. The presence of the bishop on c5 is a plus as ...Bf8 can be a good defensive move in some cases.

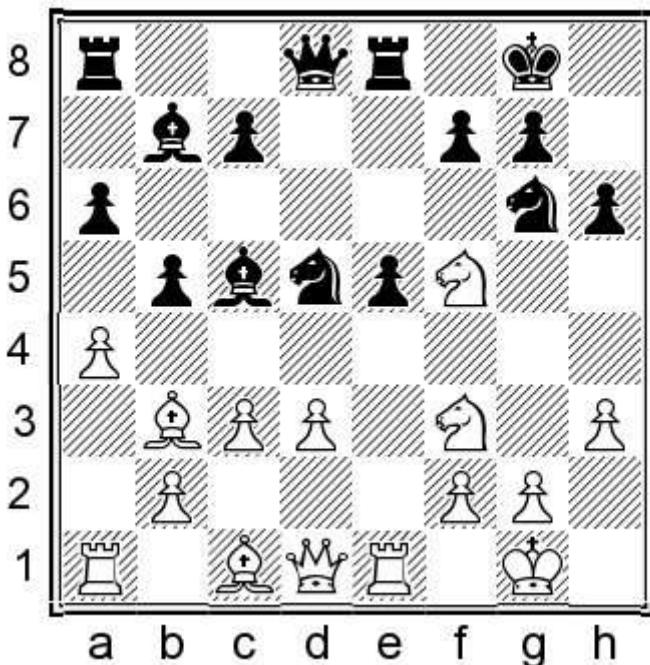
17.exd5

17.Bxh6 gxh6 18.Nxh6+ Kg7 19.Nf5+ Kf8 20.Qd2 Nf4 21.g3 N6h5!³
Spectacular. The best defense is offense!

17...Nxd5

17...Qd7!? comes to mind too.

18.a4



Position after: 18.a4

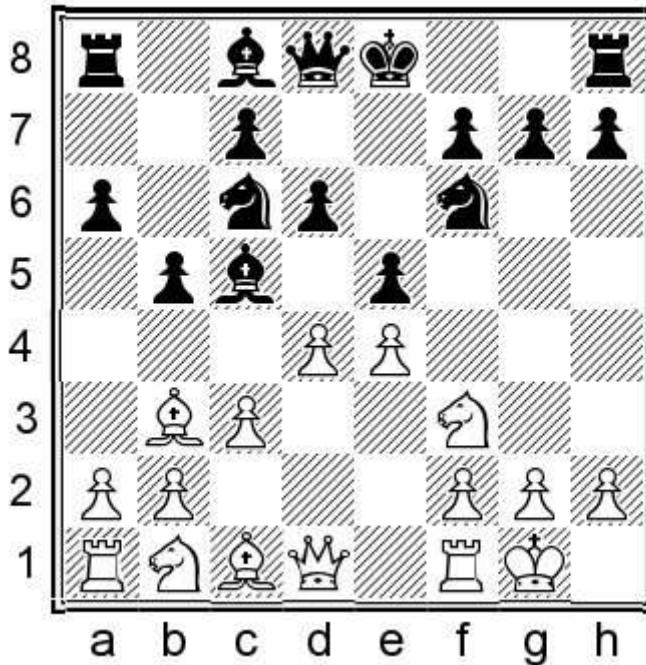
18...Qf6 19.Ng3 Ndf4 20.Ne4 Bxe4 21.Rxe4 Rad8 22.Bc2 Bb6=

The position is more or less balanced.

b) 8.d4 Bb6 9.--

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.d4

White develops and immediately gains a tempo on the bishop.

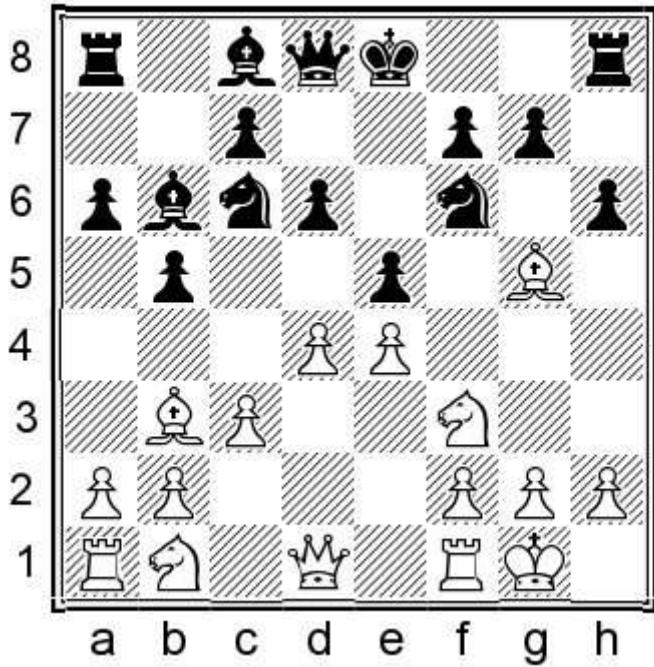


Position after: 8.d4

8...Bb6 9.dxe5

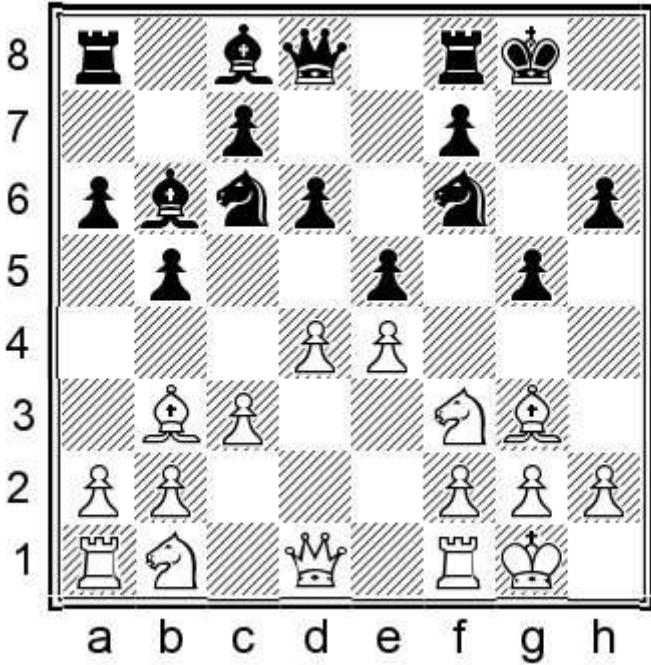
No matter which line you choose with Black, you can hardly avoid drawish variations like this one.

9.Bg5 This bishop sortie is not very common thanks to the fact that Black hasn't castled yet, thus the typical sacrifice on g5 has no validity. **9...h6**



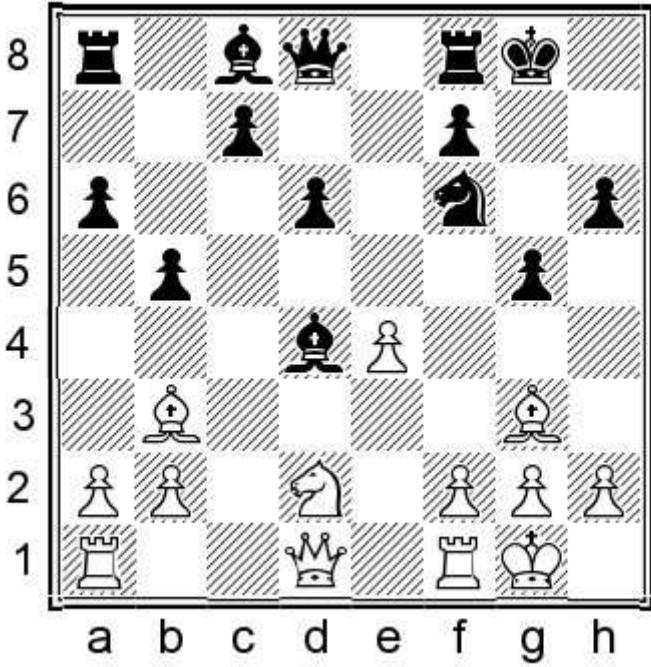
Position after: 9...h6

10.Bh4 [10.Bd5?! is far from ideal: 10...Bd7 11.Bxf6 Qxf6 12.Na3 Rd8 13.Nc2 0-0 14.Qd3 Ne7 μ] 10...g5! 11.Bg3 [After 11.dxe5?! gxh4 12.exf6 Qxf6 13.Bd5 Bd7 14.Nd4 doesn't work due to 14...Nxd4! 15.Bxa8 and now Black can choose between 15...Ne6 and 15...Nf3 with a huge initiative for the exchange.] 11...0-0



Position after: 11...0-0

This position is rarely seen, despite Black's logical moves. 12.Nbd2!? This is a bit unexpected. White is ready to give his central pawn away in order to open the position up, thus getting more chances to reach the slightly weakened black king. [12.Re1 Bg4 13.Nbd2 exd4 14.Qc2 Na5 15.cxd4 Nxb3 16.Qxb3 Re8 is complicated; 12.a4 Rb8 13.Re1 Bg4 14.Nbd2 exd4 15.Qc2!? © can be tried with White, although I am not a big fan of these ideas.] 12...exd4 Black can also refuse the gift by playing 12...Bg4. 13.cxd4 Nxd4 14.Nxd4 Bxd4

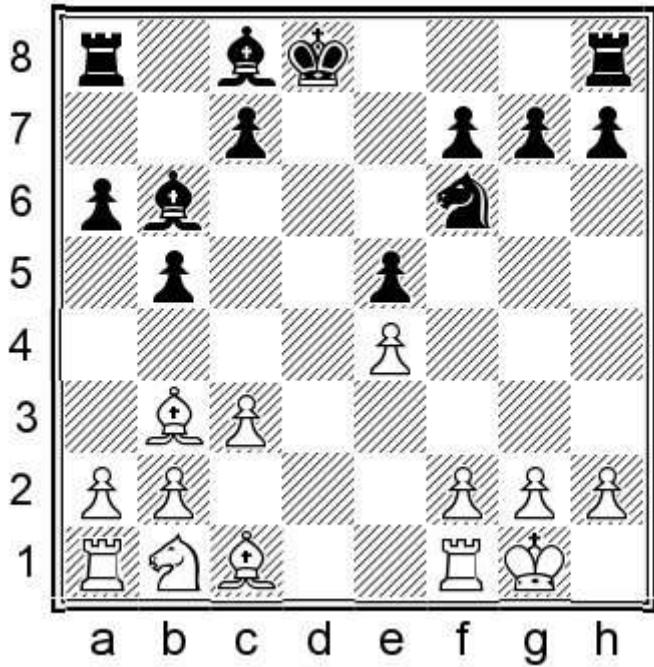


Position after: 14...Bxd4

A) 15.Qc2 Bb7! A relaxed reaction. 16.Rad1 Nh5 17.e5 Kg7 18.Nf3 Nxe3 19.hxg3 dx5 20.Nxd4 exd4 21.f4 [21.Qc5 Qd6] 21...Qd6 22.fxg5 hxg5 23.Qf5 [23.Rf5 f6] 23...Rae8! 24.Qxg5+ Qg6 and Black should be ok.

B) 15.Nf3 Bb6 16.Qc2 Nh5 17.e5 Kg7 18.Rad1 Nxe3 19.hxg3 should give Black an equal game after both 19...Bg4 and 19...Be6.

9...Nxe5 10.Nxe5 dx5 11.Qxd8+ Kxd8



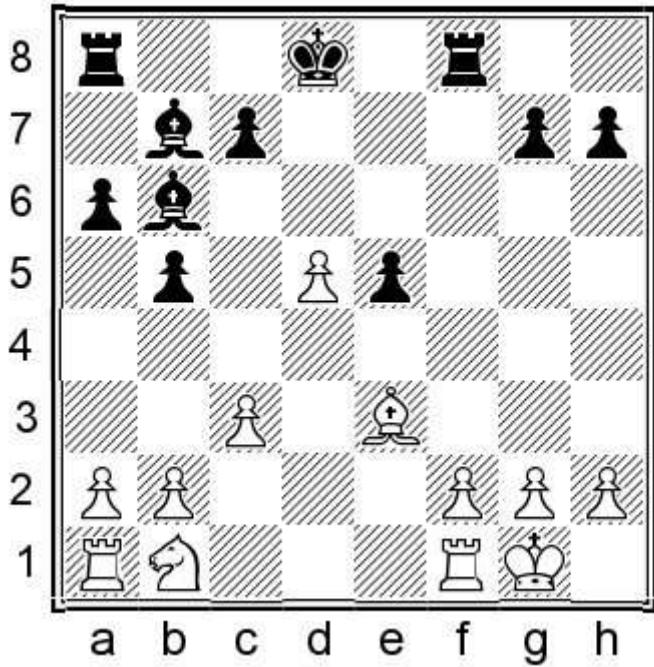
Position after: 11...Kxd8

12.Nd2!

The only relatively interesting attempt.

A) 12.a4 Bb7 13.Nd2 Ke7 14.Re1 Rhd8 15.Bc2=

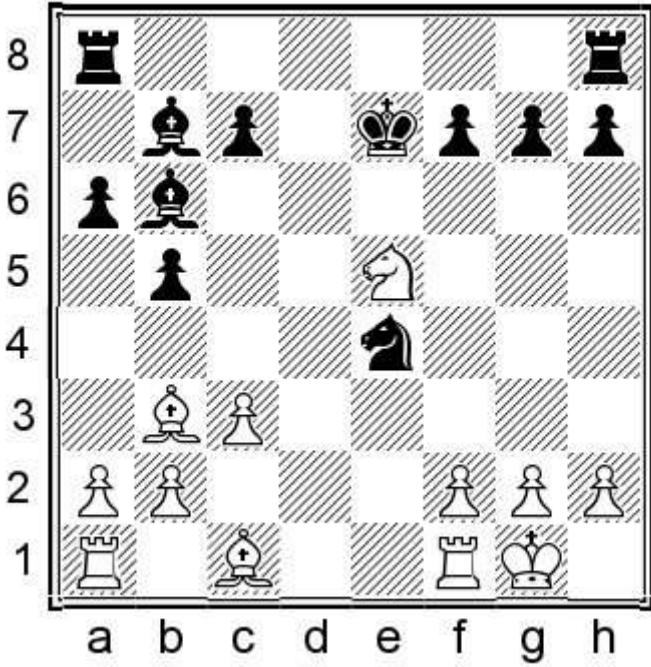
B) 12.Bxf7 Rf8 13.Bd5 Nxd5 14.exd5 Bb7 15.Be3



Position after: 15.Be3

Exchanging even more pieces. 15...Bxe3 16.fxe3 Rxf1+ 17.Kxf1 Bxd5 18.Nd2 Ke7= This endgame is pretty boring. The latest example is Solak, D (2601) – Nasuta, G (2517) Skopje 2019, where surprisingly a draw was agreed soon.

12...Ke7 13.Nf3 Bb7 14.Nxe5 Nxe4



Position after: 14...Nxe4

15.Bc2!

This position is not that obvious.

15.Nxf7?! doesn't work: 15...Rhf8 16.Ng5 [16.Bg5+ Ke8!] 16...Rxf2 17.Nxe4 Rxf1+ 18.Kxf1 Bxe4 19.Bf4 Kf6³

15...Rhe8

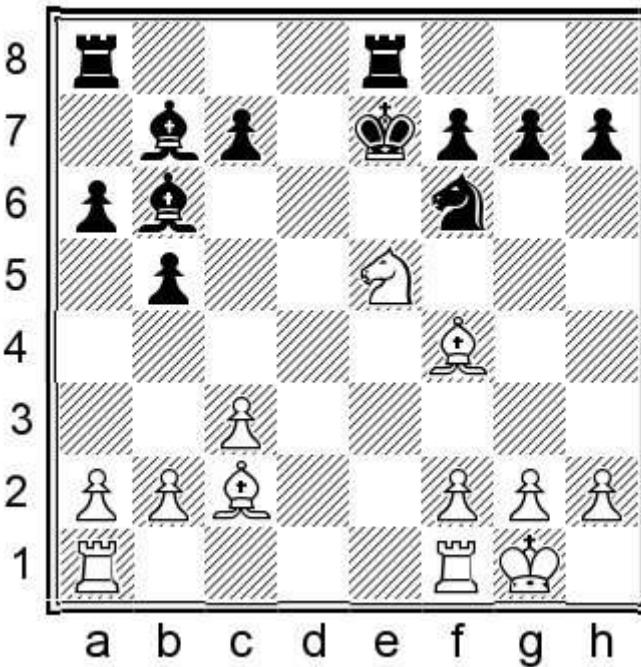
Probably the simplest.

Engines tend to like 15...f6 but after 16.Bxe4 Bxe4 17.Re1 fxe5 18.Rxe4 Kf6 19.Kf1! e.g. 19...Rad8 20.Ke2 Rd5 21.Bd2 Rhd8 22.Be1 White can hope for a minimal advantage.

16.Bf4

16.Bxe4?! Bxe4 17.Re1 Ke6!? Not necessary, but a fun move. 18.Rxe4 Kd5 19.Re2 Rxe5=

16...Nf6



Position after: 16...Nf6

16...Nc5 is a bit more exciting.

17.a4

17.Rfe1 Kf8 18.a4 transposes to 17.a4

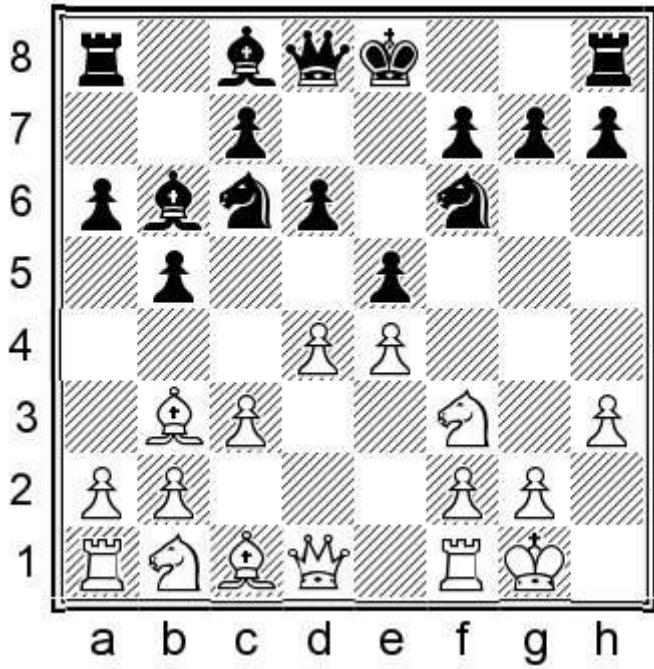
17...Kf8

17...Nh5 18.Bg5+! f6 19.g4

18.Rfe1 Rad8 19.a5 Ba7 20.Rad1=

c) 8.d4 Bb6 9.h3

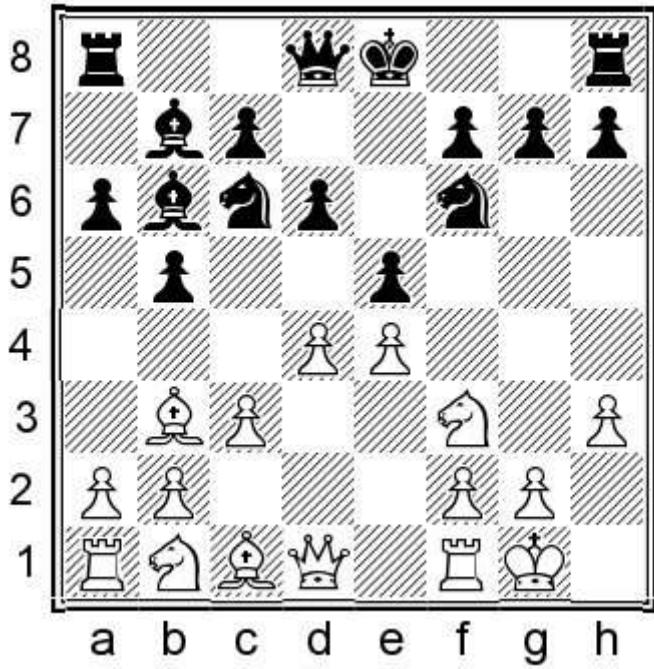
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.d4 Bb6 9.h3



Position after: 9.h3

Stopping the potential pin for good.

9...Bb7!



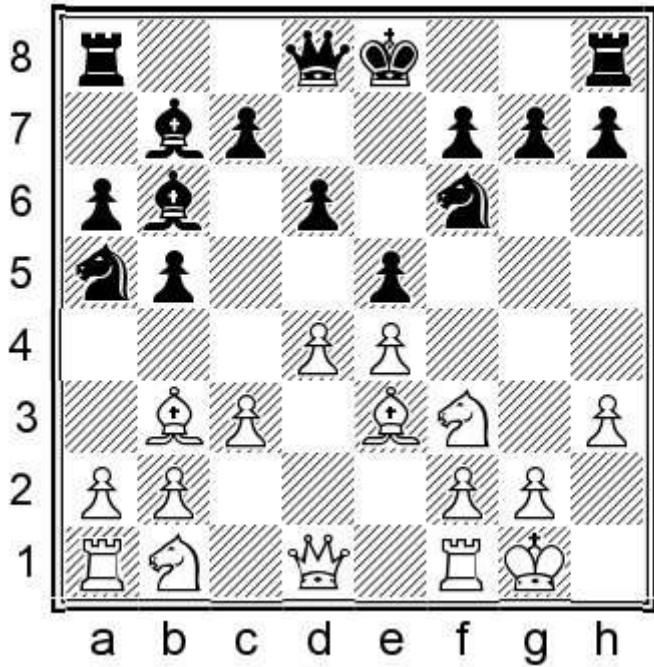
Position after: 9...Bb7!

I like this move a lot. Black's light-squared bishop had no job on the other diagonal, so developing it to the longest one was begging to be played. Black doesn't waste a tempo on castling at this point.

10.Re1

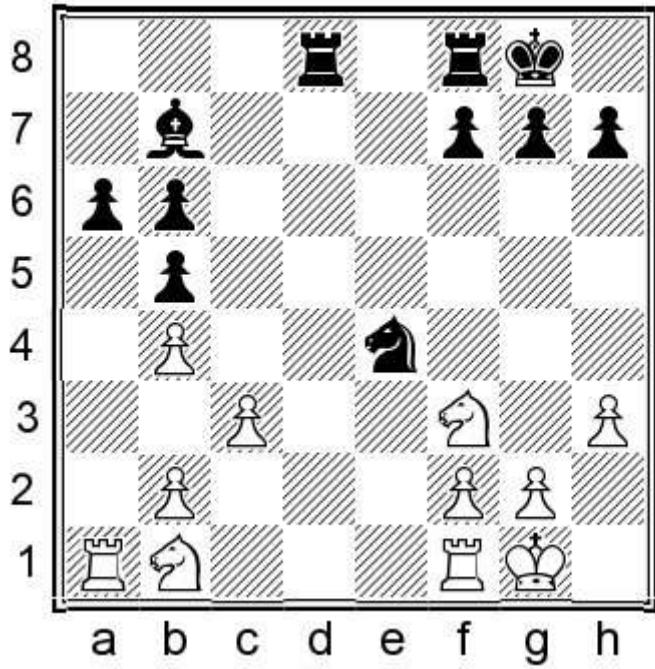
Almost exclusively played.

A) 10.Be3 Na5!



Position after: 10...Na5!

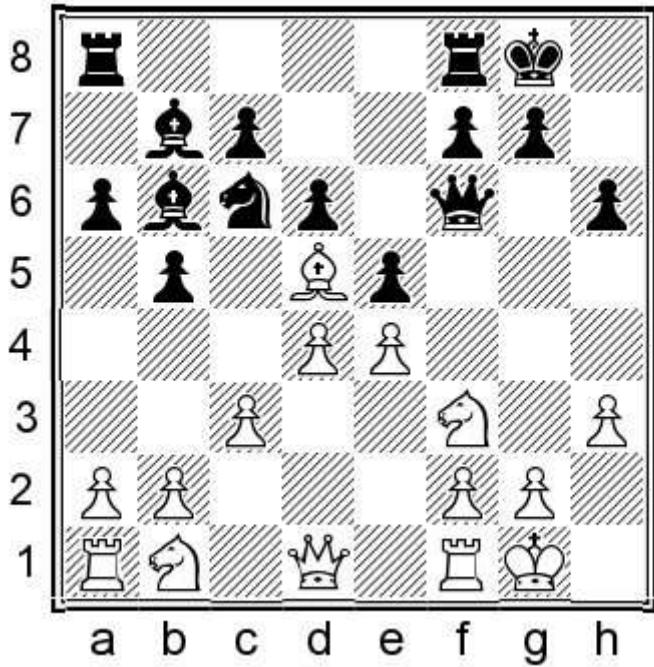
A logical novelty; Black gets rid of the Ruy Lopez bishop. 11.dxe5 [11.Bc2 Nc4 12.Bc1 Nxe4] 11...Nxb3 12.axb3 [12.exf6?! doesn't work: 12...Nxa1 13.fxg7 Rg8 14.Bxb6 cxb6 15.Qd3 Rxg7 16.Nbd2 and here after both 16...d5 and 16...Qd7 Black has the upper hand.] 12...dxe5 13.Bxb6 cxb6 14.Nxe5 Nxe4 15.Qxd8+ Rxd8 16.b4 0-0 17.Nf3!=



Position after: 17.Nf3!=

This is equal.

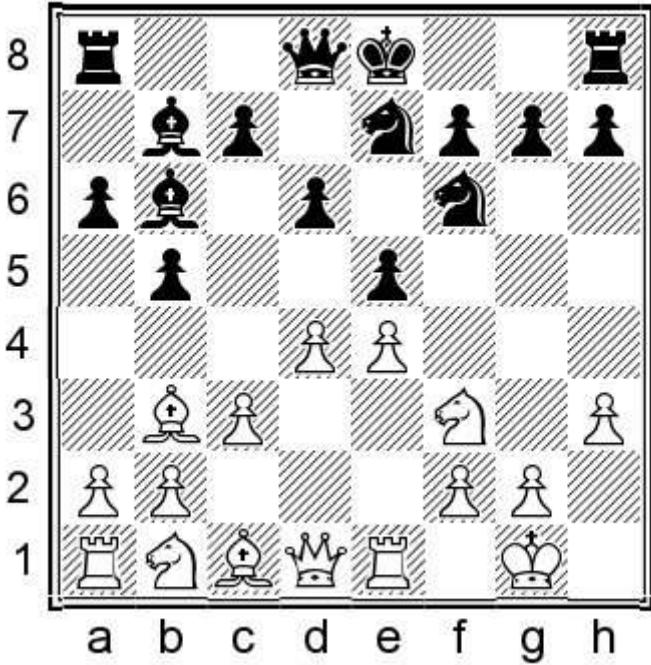
B) 10.Bg5 h6 11.Bxf6 Qxf6 12.Bd5 0-0



Position after: 12...0-0

13.Na3 [13.a4?! Rab8 14.axb5 axb5 15.Na3 exd4 16.Nxb5 dxc3 17.Nxc3 Nd4 18.Nxd4 Bxd4 19.Bxb7 Rxb7 $\frac{1}{2}$ (54) Hou, Y– Giri, A chess24.com 2021.] 13...Rab8 14.Nc2 exd4 15.cxd4 Ne7 16.Bxb7 Rxb7 17.a4 c5,,

10...Ne7!?



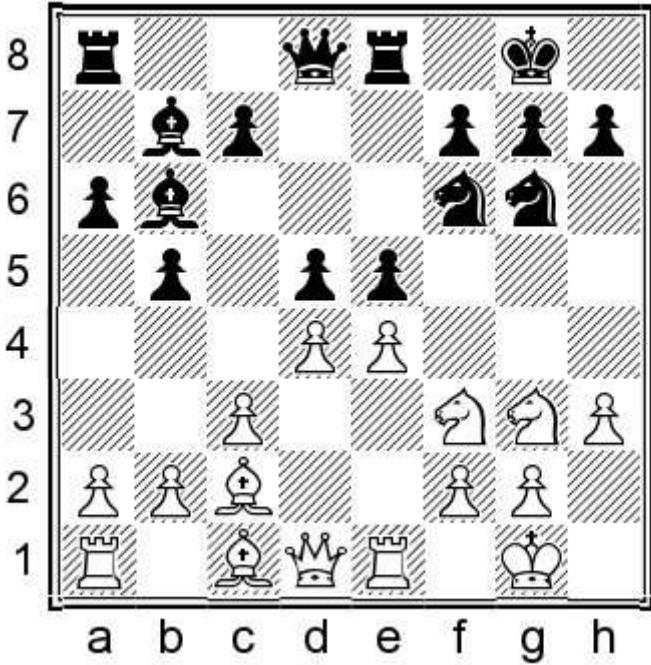
Position after: 10...Ne7!?

A pet move of the Italian GM, Michele Godena. Black seeks a direct answer to his opening problems.

11.Qc2!?

This, though definitely an uncommon move, is the best try here. I doubt anyone would come up with this over the board without serious preparation.

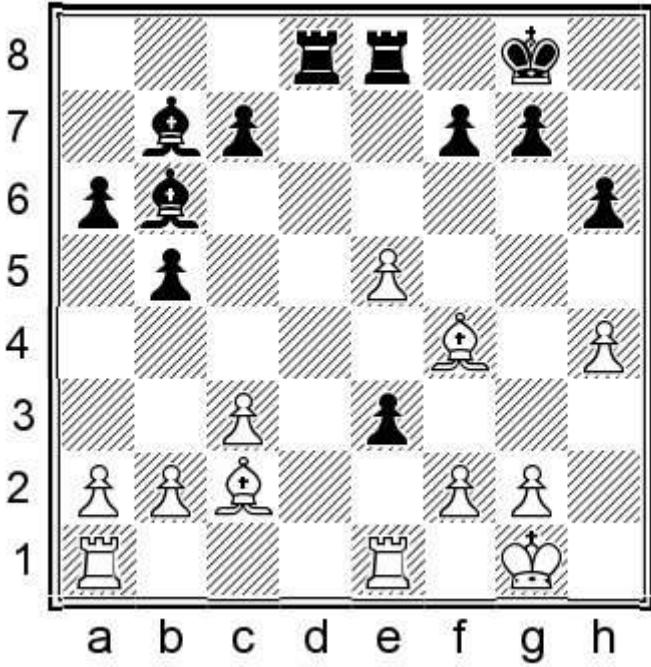
A) 11.Nbd2 Ng6 12.Bc2 0-0 13.Nf1 Re8 14.Ng3 d5!



Position after: 14...d5!

A1) 15.Bg5?! A mistake. 15...h6 16.Bxf6 Qxf6 17.exd5 exd4 18.Ne4 and now in Dervishi, E (2495) – Godena, M (2490) Genova 1999 Black had the opportunity to play: 18...Qf4! 19.g3 Qf5™ 20.Nd6 This move must have bothered Godena, but Black has an adequate answer. 20...Rxe1+ 21.Nxe1 Qxd5 22.Nxb7 Qxb7 23.cxd4 Rd8 24.Nf3 Nf8! 25.Qd3 Bxd4, and Black is a healthy pawn up.

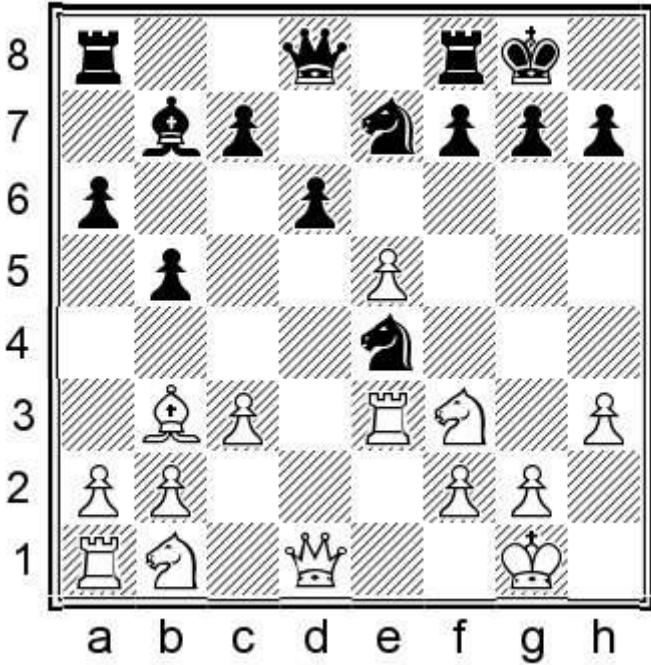
A2) 15.Nxe5 This leads to mass exchanges and a probable draw. 15...Nxe5 16.dxe5 Nxe4 17.Nxe4 dxe4 18.Qxd8 Raxd8 19.Bf4 h6 20.h4 e3!



Position after: 20...e3!

The simplest. After 21.Bxe3 in Landenbergue, C (2420) – Godena, M (2552) Switzerland 1999 a draw was agreed. 21...Rxe5 22.Bxb6 Rxe1+ 23.Rxe1 cxb6 24.Re7 The last hope - a rook on the 7th rank is almost always a good sight. Black easily held this equal position. 24...Bc6 25.Rc7 Be8 26.Rb7 Rd2 27.Be4 Rxb2 28.Rb8 Kf8 29.Bc6 Rb1+ 30.Kh2 Re1= A draw was soon signed in Ulybin, M (2562) – Godena, M (2490) Padova 1999.

B) 11.dxe5 This was the choice of Godena's fellow (ex-)countryman, Fabiano Caruana. Opening the game looks logical while the king is in the center. 11...Nxe4 12.Be3 [There is nothing to be worried about after 12.Bxf7+? Kxf7 13.Rxe4 Bxe4 14.Ng5+ Kg8 15.Nxe4 dxe5μ] 12...Bxe3 13.Rxe3 0-0!



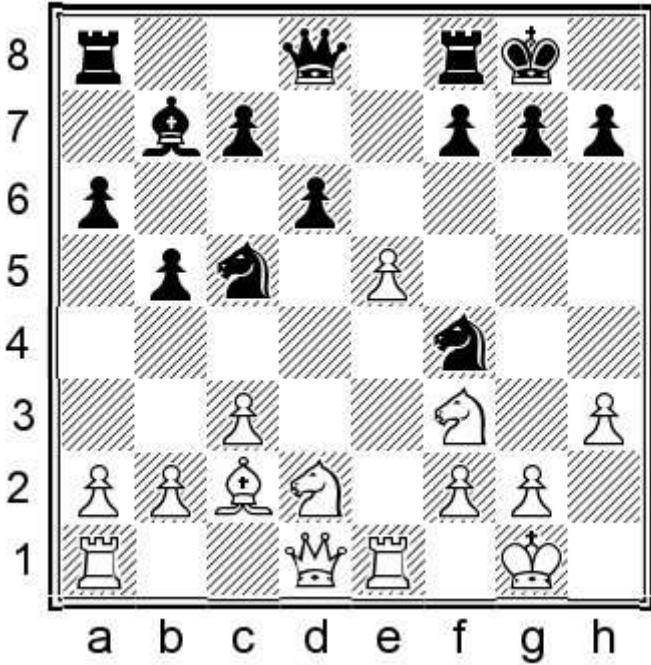
Position after: 13...0-0!

There was no longer any reason to delay castling.

B1) 14.Qe2? This move might bother Black if surprised during the game, though there is a good reply which even leads to Black's advantage: 14...Nc5 15.exd6 Nf5! 16.Re5 Nxb3 17.axb3 Qf6! 18.dxc7 Bxf3 19.gxf3 Nh4 20.Re4 Qg5+ 21.Kf1 This looks terrible for White, but it's maybe not too bad objectively speaking. 21...Qg2+ 22.Ke1 Nxf3+ 23.Kd1 Ng5,

B2) 14.Nbd2 Nc5 15.Nd4 [15.Bc2 transposes to 14.Bc2] 15...Nxb3 16.N2xb3 Nd5 17.Rg3 dxe5 18.Na5 exd4 19.Qxd4 Nf6 20.Nxb7 Qxd4 21.cxd4= is equal.

B3) 14.Bc2 Nc5 15.Nbd2 Nd5 16.Re1 Nf4!



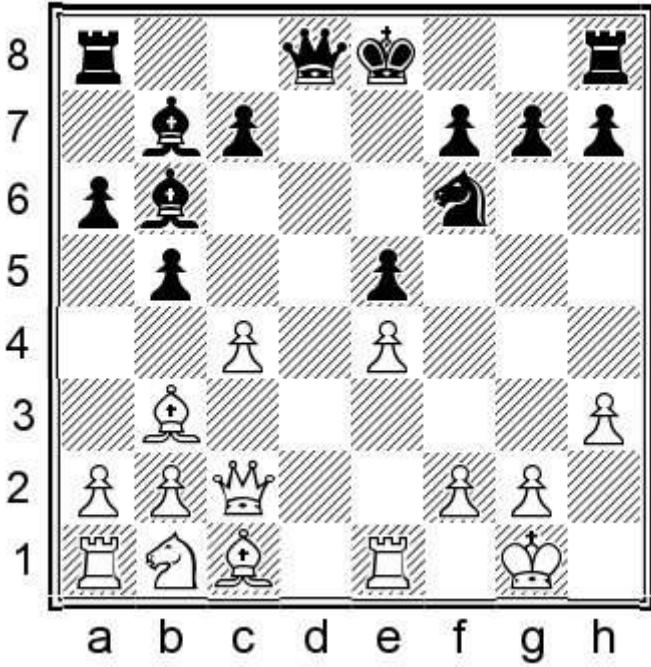
Position after: 16...Nf4!

17.exd6 Qxd6 18.Ne4 is drawish, no matter what Black does. An entertaining line is: 18...Qg6!? 19.Nh4! Nxh3+ 20.Kh2 Qh6 21.Kxh3 Nxe4 22.Bxe4 g5 23.g3 [23.Qg4?? This ‘winning’ try would just lose the game immediately ☺ 23...Bc8–+] 23...Rad8 24.Qc1 Bxe4 25.Rxe4 f5 26.Rd4 f4= is a fanciful variation to reach equal chances.

11...Ng6

11...c5 12.dxe5 dxe5 13.c4 Nc6 14.Nc3 Nd4 15.Nxd4 cxd4 16.Nd5 This is the idea. 16...Ba5 17.Bd2 Bxd2 18.Qxd2 0-0 19.cxb5 axb5 and now 20.Qd3! is somehow not so simple to meet.

12.dxe5 Nxe5 13.Nxe5 dxe5 14.c4!



Position after: 14.c4!

14...Qe7

14...0-0 allows 15.c5 Ba5 16.Rd1 Qe8 17.f3²

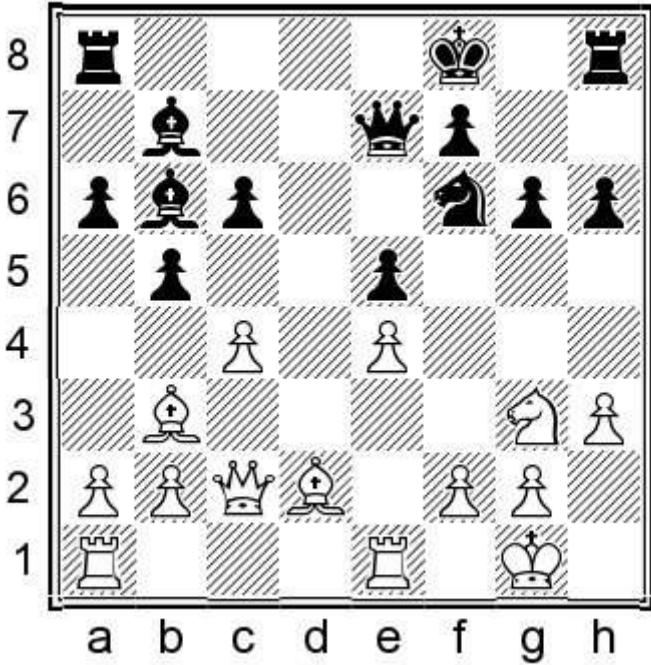
15.Nc3 c6 16.Ne2!

A strong manoeuvre.

16...h6!?

16...0-0 17.Ng3 Bc8 may not be that bad.

17.Ng3 g6! 18.Bd2 Kf8!



Position after: 18...Kf8!

and Black solves his problems with artificial castling.

19.Rac1 Rd8 20.Red1

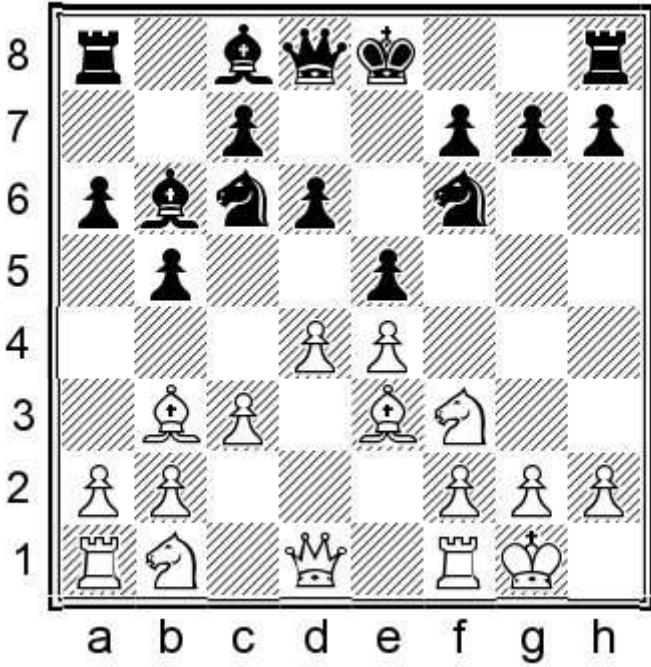
20.c5!? Bxc5 21.Ba5 Bd4 [21...Ba7©] 22.Ne2 Ba7 23.Bxd8 Qxd8©

20...a5! 21.a4 b4 22.c5 Bc7

This is approximately equal.

d) 8.d4 Bb6 9.Be3 0-0 10.Nbd2 Re8 11.--

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.d4 Bb6 9.Be3



Position after: 9.Be3

A solid approach to meet the Ark: White intends to develop naturally, while he keeps an eye on options like d5 or a4. Sometimes he can even change plans and go for the pin with Bg5, despite wasting a tempo.

9...0-0 10.Nbd2

Here Black has a huge number of reasonable setups. I have decided to present a relatively recent, and at the same time rare one.

White sometimes start with 10.h3 when we should reply with 10...Re8 11.Nbd2 reaching our main line immediately.

10...Re8!?

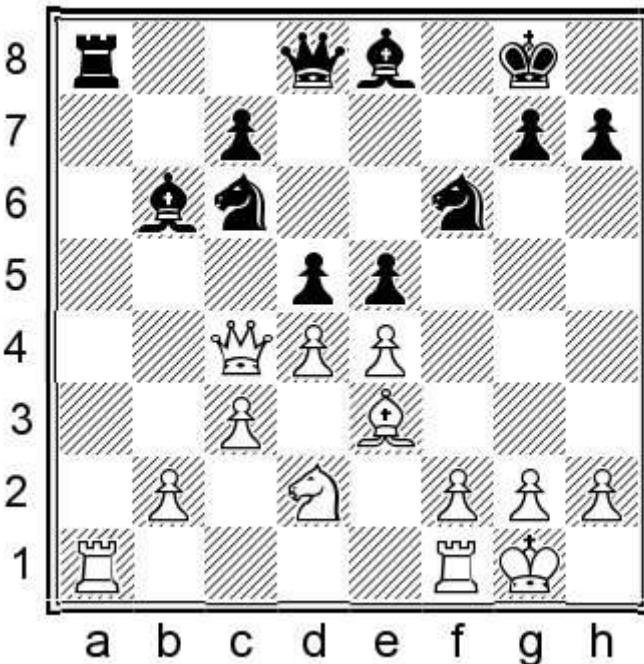
This variation was the choice of Nakamura to defeat Anand with the black pieces in 2013. That made quite an impression on me, of course. I always wondered why it has never became as popular as the rest of the lines after such an impactful game. Only in the last year has it again seen some tries from none other than Anand himself – from the black side this time (and

that's a good sign!), Matlakov and Gajewski.

11.h3!?

It's useful to cover the g4-square.

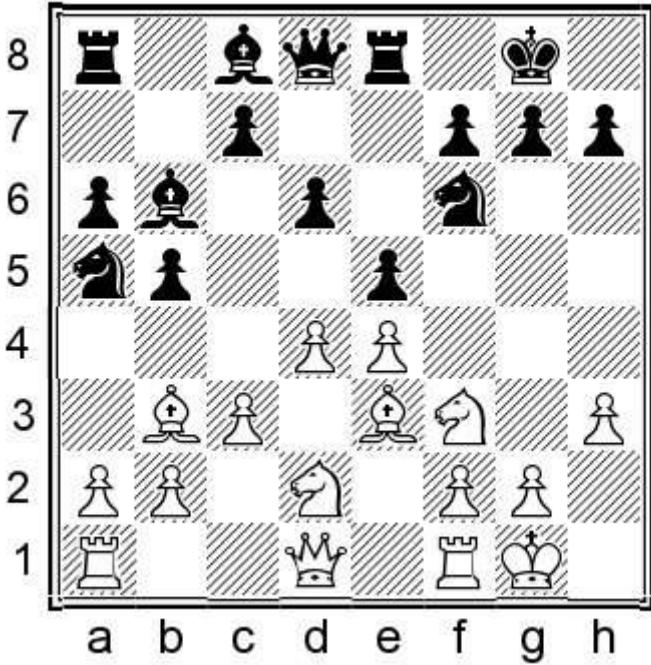
11.a4 is an interesting move, and a recent development in this line. 11...Bd7 A solid move. 12.Ng5! Rf8 13.dxe5 [13.axb5 axb5 14.Bxf7+ Rxf7 15.Qb3 Be8 16.Nxf7 Bxf7 17.Qxb5 Be8 18.Qc4+ d5



Position after: 18...d5

19.exd5 Na5 20.Qa2 exd4 21.Bxd4 Bxd4 22.cxd4 Bf7 23.Qa3 Bxd5 24.Qg3²] 13...Bxe3 14.Nxf7 Rxf7 15.exf6 Bxd2 16.Qxd2 Ne5 17.Bxf7+ Nxf7 18.fxg7 bxa4 19.f4 Bb5 20.Rf3∞ is very complicated.

11...Na5



Position after: 11...Na5

I initially wanted to offer you 11...Bb7, but I am no longer convinced by the variation. 11...Na5 is our method against the main line too, but we need to pay attention to the small nuances and not to blindly follow the exact same recipe.

12.Bc2 Bb7

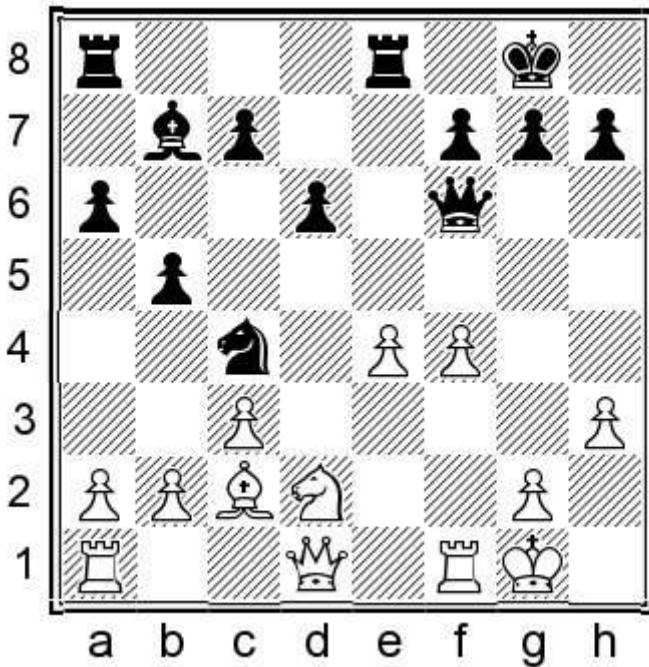
In this critical position, White has quite a few possibilities.

13.Bg5

This one particular move always worries me the most, especially now that our knight is awkwardly placed on a5. Black needs to know what he's doing. As a side note, I feel it's not very likely that you would ever face this move over the board, since most players opting for this 9.Be3 line tend to strive for simpler positions.

A) 13.dxe5 looks a bit too simple to be really dangerous. 13...Bxe3 [13...dxe5 14.Qe2²] 14.exf6 Bxd2 15.Nxd2 Qxf6 16.f4 Here Black has

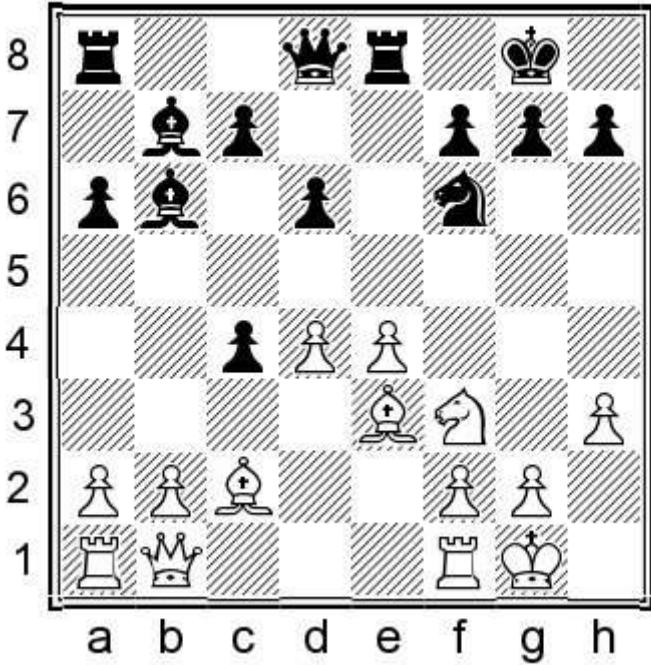
many ways to play, such as 16...b4 or 16...Rad8 etc. 16...Nc4!?



Position after: 16...Nc4!?

The radical solution, leading to mass exchanges. 17.Nxc4 bxc4 18.Qe2! Bxe4! 19.Bxe4 d5 20.Bxh7+ Forced. 20...Kxh7 21.Qh5+ Kg8 22.Qxd5 Qb6+ Also forced. 23.Kh2 Qxb2 and now Black should be able to hold, e.g. 24.Qxc4 Re2 25.Rg1 Rae8 and Black is very active. 26.Qxc7 Rxe2+! 27.Rxe2 Qxa1= A ‘typical’ 0.00 position – White’s king is too weak.

B) 13.Qb1 This move was the choice of the former World Cup champion, the Ukrainian GM Ruslan Ponomariov. It’s very solid, albeit slightly passive. 13...exd4 14.cxd4 Nc4 15.Nxc4 bxc4



Position after: 15...bxc4

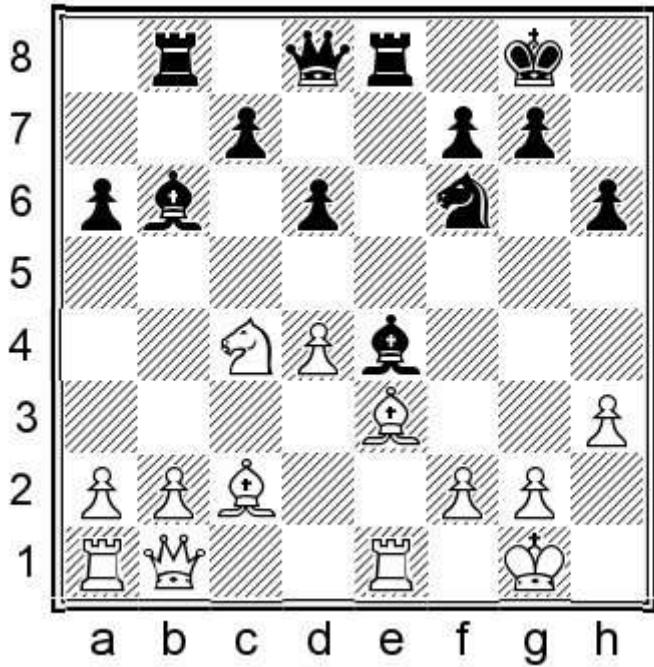
B1) 16.e5 leads to a draw. 16...dxe5 17.dxe5 Bxf3 18.exf6 Bxg2! This works perfectly. 19.Kxg2 Qd5+ 20.Kg1 Bxe3 21.fxe3 Qg5+ [21...Rxe3!?] 22.Kh1 Qd5+! 23.e4 [23.Kh2 Qd2+ 24.Kh1 Qd5+=] 23...Qh5! leads to a repetition, e.g. 24.Rf2 Qxh3+ 25.Rh2 Qf3+ 26.Kg1 Qg3+ 27.Rg2 Qe3+=

B2) 16.Nd2! h6 A small nuance. 17.Re1 [17.Nxc4 Bxe4 18.Bxe4 Rxe4 19.Qd3 Qe7 20.d5 Bxe3 21.Nxe3 Qe5!=; 17.a4 Qe7 18.a5 Ba7=] 17...Rb8

B2.1) 18.d5 c3! This is one reason why the rook is placed well on b8! 19.bxc3 Bxd5,,

B2.2) 18.Ba4?! Bxe4 [18...Re7!?] 19.Qd1 Re6 20.Nxc4 Nd5 looks nice for Black.

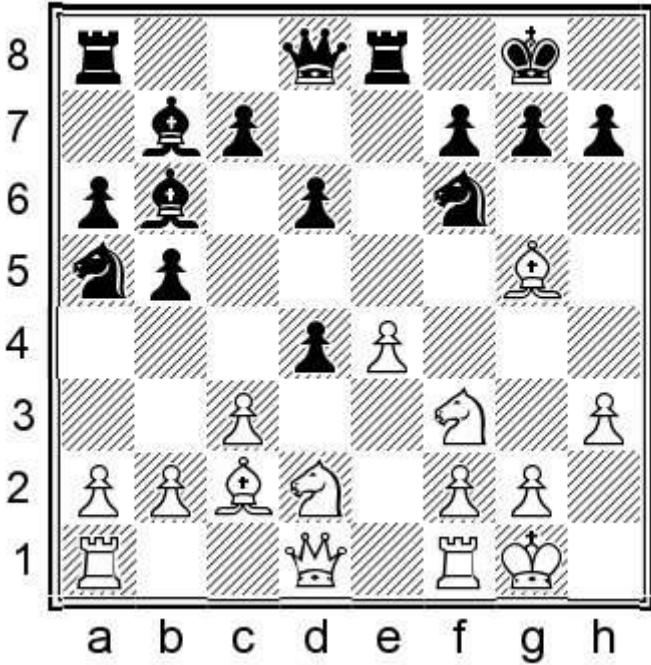
B2.3) 18.Nxc4 Bxe4



Position after: 18...Bxe4

19.Bxe4 [19.Nxb6 cxb6 20.Bxe4 Rxe4 21.Qd3 b5 22.Rac1 Qd7=] 19...Rxe4 20.Qd3 Qe8 was proven to be pretty solid in two high-level encounters. 21.f3 [21.Nxb6 Rxb6 22.b3 Qb5! 23.Qd1 Rb8 24.Qc2 Re7 25.Bd2 Rbe8= ½ (25) Smirin, I (2652) – Bu, X (2681) Tsaghkadzor 2015.] 21...Re6 22.Bf2 Nd5= Svidler 23.Rxe6 Qxe6 24.Re1 Nf4 25.Qc2 Qd5 26.Re4 Ne6= Vachier Lagrave, M (2768) – Nakamura, H (2787)/Saint Louis 2014.

¹ 13...exd4

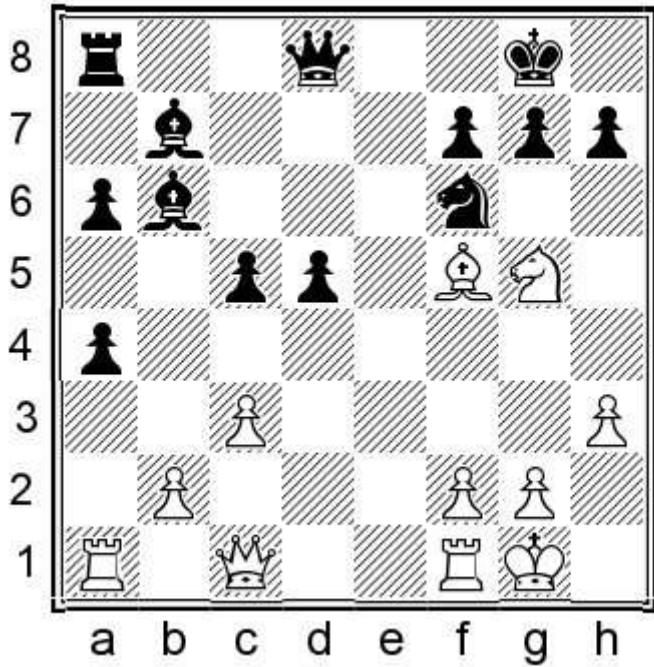


Position after: ¹ 13...exd4

13...h6 Unnecessarily giving an extra option: 14.Bxf6!? Qxf6 15.d5! c6 16.b4 Nc4 17.Nxc4 bxc4 18.dxc6 [18.Ba4 cxd5! 19.Bxe8 dxe4! 20.Nd2 Rxe8 21.Nxc4 d5@] 18...Bxc6 19.Qe2²

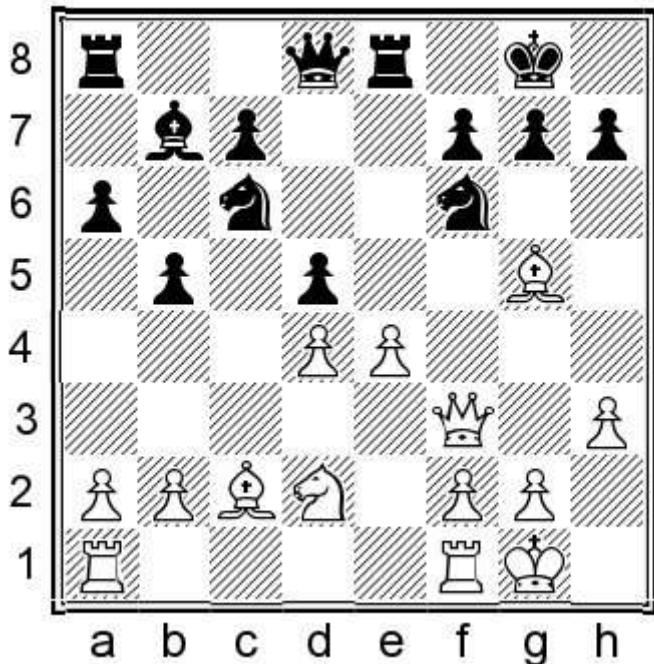
14.cxd4

14.Nxd4 d5!? A slightly unusual move that requires good calculation, but it's worth the effort. 15.Qf3 [15.e5!? Rxe5 16.N2f3 is answered by 16...Rxg5! 17.Nxg5 Nc4 and Black has nice play for the exchange, e.g. 18.Qc1 Nd6!? 19.a4 c5 20.Nf5 Nxf5 21.Bxf5 bxa4!]



Position after: 21...bxa4!

... 22.Rxa4 d4] 15...Bxd4 16.cxd4 Nc6



Position after: 16...Nc6

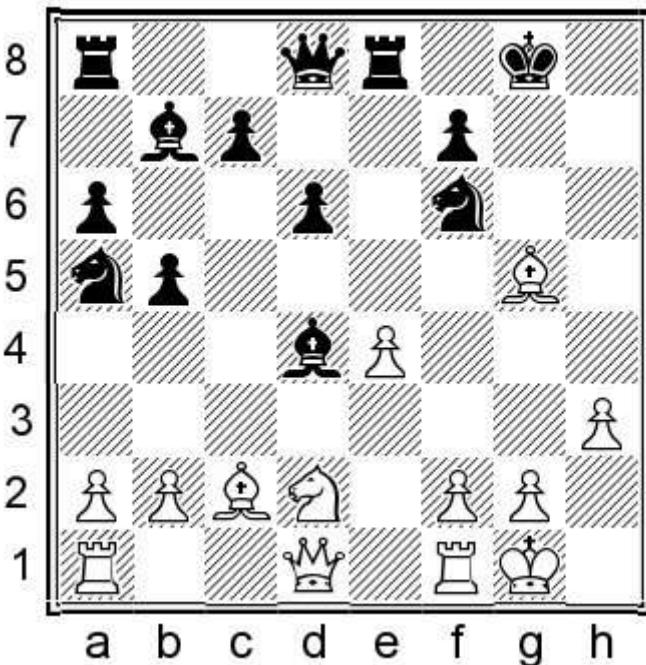
This tactical operation is the key. 17.Qc3 dxe4 18.Nb3 [18.Nxe4?! Nxd4 19.Bxf6 Ne2+ 20.Kh2 Nxc3 21.Bxd8 Bxe4 22.Bxc7 Bxc2 23.bxc3 is comfortable of course.] 18...h6 The clear-cut solution.

A) 19.Bh4?! allows 19...Nd5 20.Bxd8 [20.Qg3 Qd6] 20...Nxc3 21.bxc3 Nxd8 and Black is a pawn up.

B) 19.Bxf6 Qxf6 20.Rfe1 [20.Nc5? Nxd4] 20...Ne7 21.Bxe4 Bxe4 22.Rxe4 Nd5 23.Qe1!= After this accurate move, absolute balance is maintained.

14...h6 15.Bh4 g5 16.Nxg5 hxg5 17.Bxg5 Bxd4

This was the hardest part to understand of this chapter.



Position after: 17...Bxd4

18.Qf3

18.Nf3 Bxb2 19.Rb1 Bc3! ... 20.Qd3 b4!—+

18...Kf8!?

This optimistic move certainly contains a very deep idea.

19.Rad1

Definitely the most devious try.

19.Bh6+? only helps Black: 19...Ke7

19...Bxb2

19...c5 20.b4!?

20.Nb3 Nc4 21.Nc5

Best.

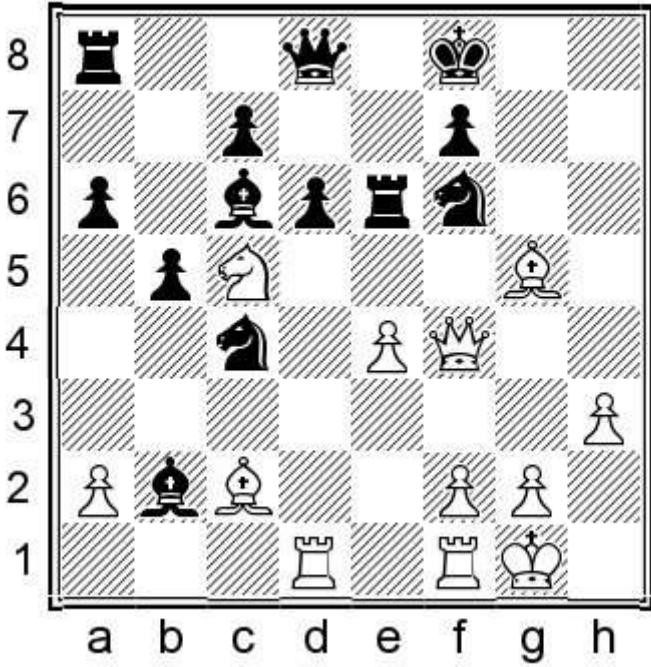
A) 21.Qf4 Re6 22.Nc5 Qc8!

B) 21.Nd4?! Bxd4 22.Rxd4 Re6 23.Qf4 c5

21...Bc6 22.Qf4!

These sneaky engine moves have created a lot of pressure. The solution is at least as surprising as the white attack itself.

22...Re6!



Position after: 22...Re6!

Effective.

23.Nxe6+ fxe6 24.Rfe1

24.Bb3 Kf7 25.Rfe1 is the same.

24...Kf7 25.Bb3

25.e5? Bxe5 26.Rxe5 Nxe5 and White has nothing.

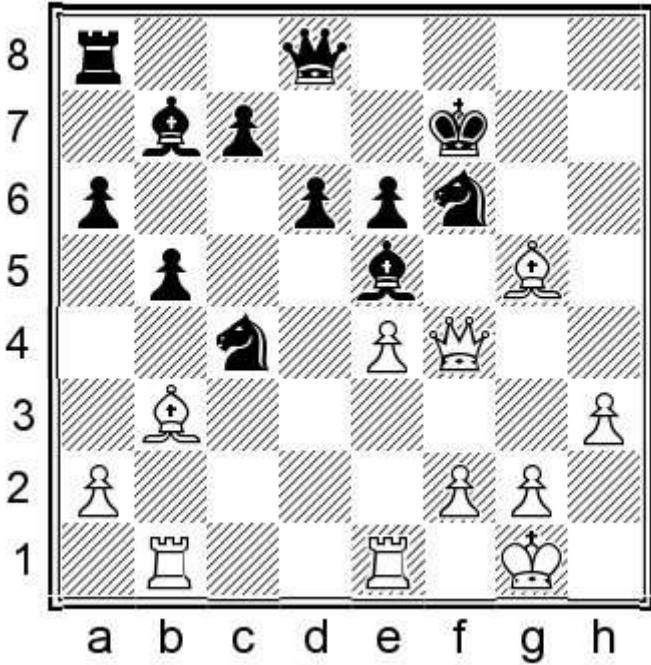
25...Bb7!

Giving way to the c-pawn, so Black can push ...c5 at the proper time.

25...Be5 26.Qc1!

26.Re2!

A) 26.Rb1 Be5

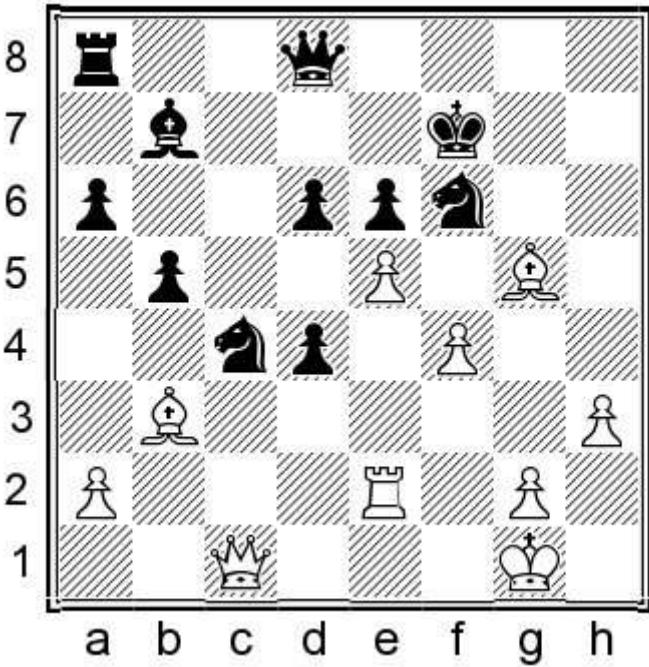


Position after: 26...Be5

27.Bxf6TM [27.Qc1? Na5 28.Bc2 c5+] 27...Bxf4 28.Bxd8 Nd2!
29.Bxc7 [29.Rbc1 c5] 29...Nxb1 30.Rxb1 Rc8 31.Ba5 Bxe4³ is better
for Black.

B) 26.Bxc4 bxc4 27.Rb1 c3 28.e5 dxе5 29.Qxe5 Bd5

26...Be5 27.Qc1 c5 28.f4 Bd4+ 29.Rxd4 cxd4 30.e5



Position after: 30.e5

The position is still very complicated. Black can continue with...

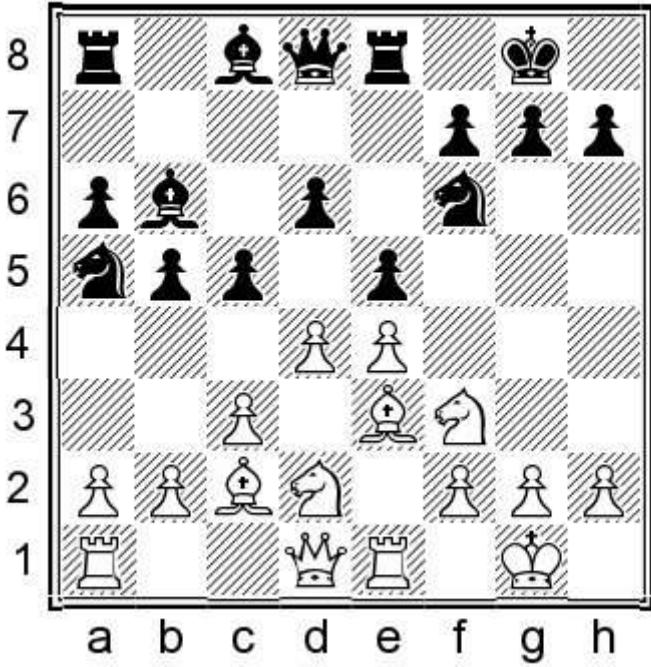
30...Qb6 31.Bxf6 d3+ 32.Rf2 Rg8 33.Bg5 Qd4 34.Qd1 Rh8 35.Qg4 Bd5=

And it's dynamically balanced.

**e) 8.d4 Bb6 9.Be3 0-0 10.Nbd2 Re8 11.Re1 Na5 12.Bc2 c5
13.--**

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.d4 Bb6 9.Be3 0-0 10.Nbd2 Re8!? **11.Re1 Na5 12.Bc2 c5**

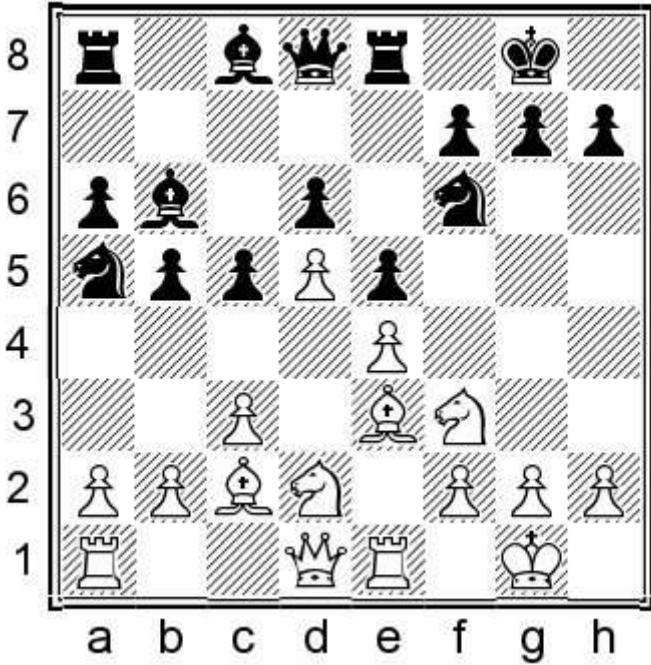
This is the concept I like very much. Black has saved the ...h6 tempo which enables him to attack White's center immediately.



Position after: 12...c5

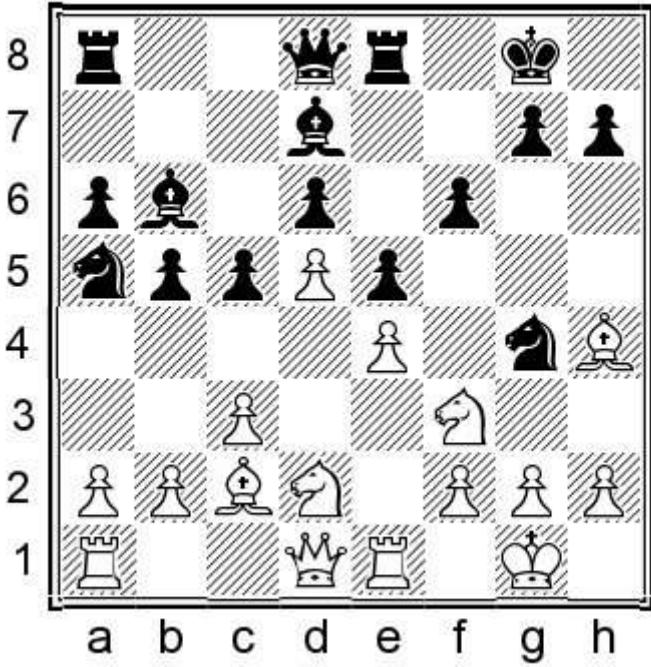
13.h3

13.d5!? This ambitious, strategic push has only been played once. Black is happier to see this closing move while his bishop is still on c8, which means he has just saved two tempi. Of course, things are never too clear in modern chess.



Position after: 13.d5!?

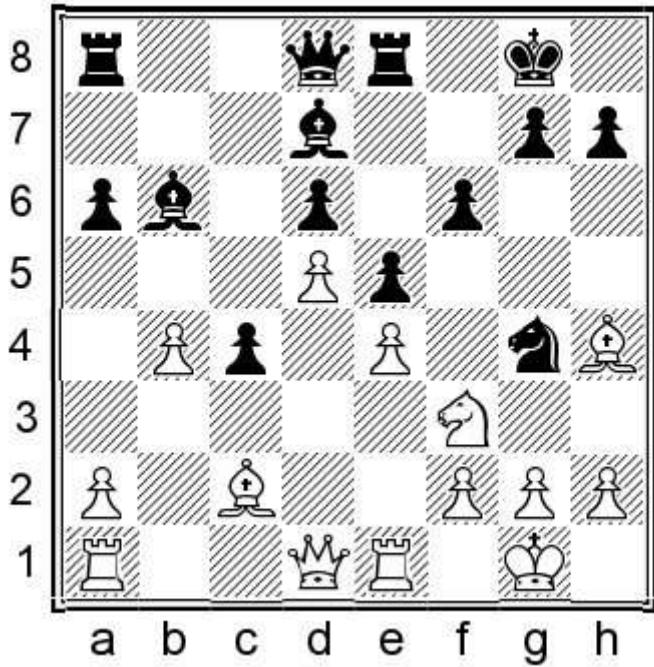
13...Ng4! Just like this. White's bishop gets exchanged or lands on a very sub-optimal diagonal. 14.Bg5 [I doubt 14.Nf1 is serious. It's hard to imagine a successful attack without a dark-squared bishop. 14...Nxe3 15.Nxe3 c4 16.Qd2 Bd7=] 14...f6! 15.Bh4 Bd7 This solid move is my preference. Some engines give 15...Nh6, but I would rather wait for h3 first and then return with that knight. In general, our silicon friends are really satisfied with White's position and give an edge, however for a human it is really hard to play with that misplaced bishop on h4. In these closed types of positions it is extremely difficult to give a final conclusion. Instead, I will present you with some sample lines as to how the game might continue. In this manoeuvring phase we should be more patient than usual.



Position after: 15...Bd7

A) 16.b3 stops ...c4 but weakens the e1-a5 diagonal. 16...Nb7 17.Bd3 c4!? 18.bxc4 Nc5 19.Bf1 Ba5 An interesting pawn sacrifice, e.g. 20.Rc1 Na4 [20...b4!?] 21.cxb5 axb5 22.c4 bxc4 23.Bxc4 Nb2 24.Qb3 Nxc4 25.Rxc4 h5 26.h3 g5 27.Bg3 Nh6©

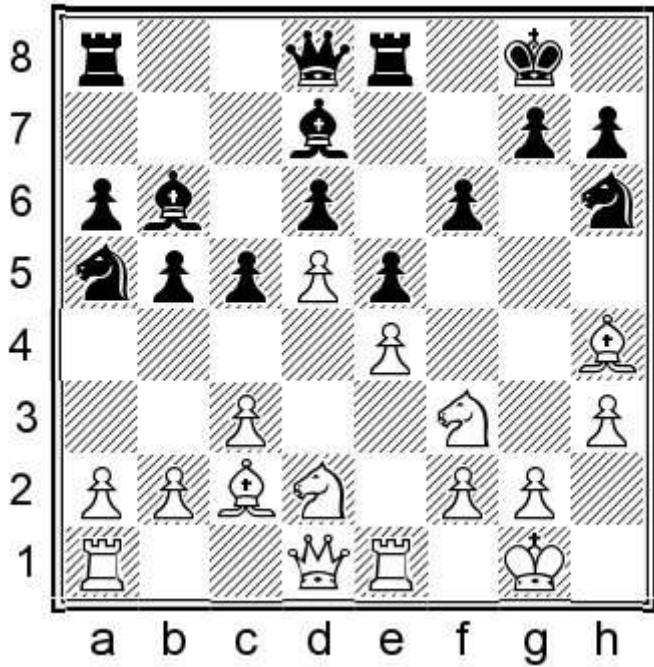
B) 16.b4 cxb4 17.cxb4 Nc4 18.Nxc4 bxc4



Position after: 18...bxc4

This is good for Black. 19.a4 [19.Qd2 a5] 19...a5 20.b5 Rc8,,

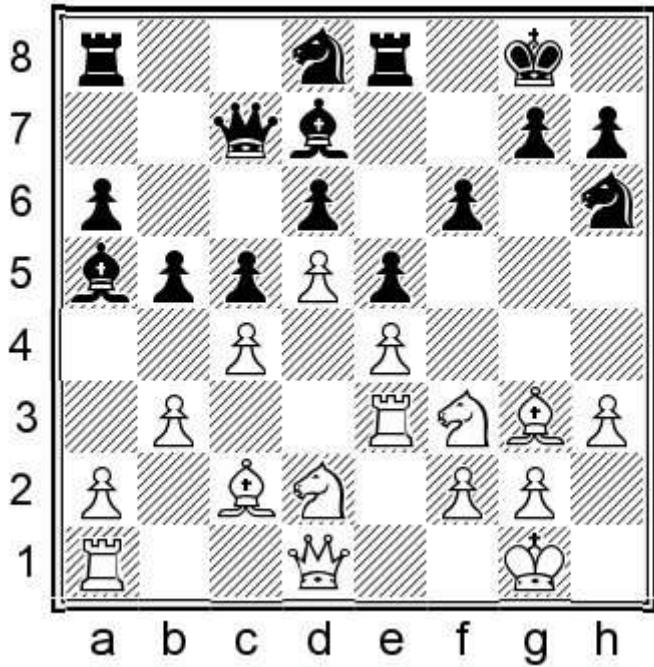
C) 16.h3 Nh6



Position after: 16...Nh6

C2) 17.g4?! A human move. Otherwise, White would always need to calculate ...f5. 17...c4 18.Nf1 [18.g5 fxg5 19.Bxg5 Qc8 20.Bxh6 gxh6 21.Nh4 Bxh3] 18...Nf7 19.Ne3 g6 Black has covered all the squares around his king and the Ark bishop remains unchallenged, so that fact might give us optimism.

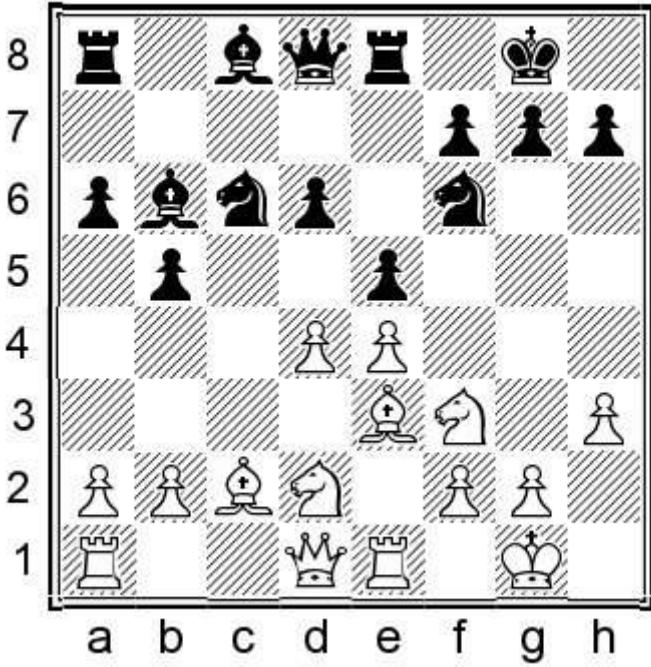
C3) 17.b3 Nb7 18.c4 Ba5 19.Re3 Qc7 20.Bg3 Nd8!?



Position after: 20...Nd8!?

[20...f5? is no good now, so Black needs to be patient. 21.exf5 Nxf5 22.Bxf5 Bxf5 23.Nh4!f] 21.a3 Ndf7∞ is a complicated middle-game with all the pieces on the board!

13...cxd4 14.cxd4 Nc6!?



Position after: 14...Nc6!?

Anand's preference is my main suggestion here.

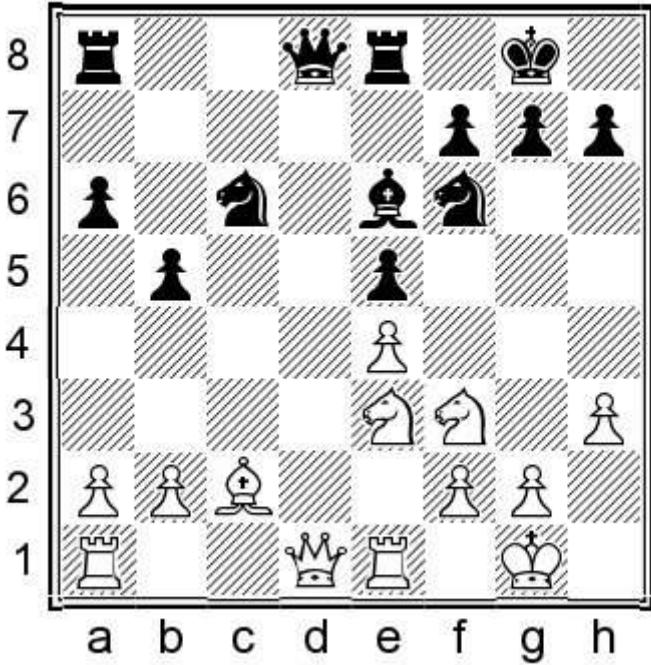
14...exd4 15.Nxd4 Bb7 16.Nf5 [16.a4 b4] 16...Bxe3 17.Rxe3 [17.Nxe3=] 17...g6 was seen in Smirin, I (2607) – Matlakov, M (2699) Moscow 2019 and is the other logical way to proceed.

15.Nf1

A) 15.Nb3 doesn't harm Black. 15...exd4 16.Nbxd4 Nxd4 17.Bxd4 [17.Nxd4 Bb7] 17...Bb7∞

B) 15.d5 Nb4 16.a4 [16.Bb1 a5 17.a3 Na6 18.b4 Bd7 19.Qb3 Bxe3 20.Rxe3 Qb6 21.Qb2 Rec8 is around equal.] 16...Nxc2 17.Qxc2 Bd7 18.axb5 Rc8 19.Qb3 Bxb5=

C) 15.dxe5 dxe5 16.Nf1 [16.Qe2!?=] 16...Bxe3 17.Nxe3 Be6

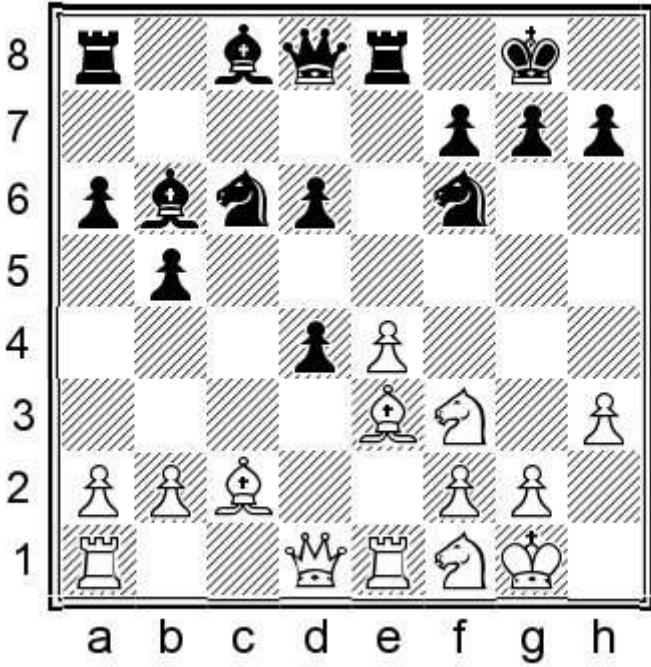


Position after: 17...Be6

C1) 18.a3? Qb6! Giri, realizing that he had gone wrong, starts unjustified activity and loses quickly. In a rapid game that happens from time to time, even with elite players. 19.Nd5?! Bxd5 20.exd5 Rad8 21.Bb3?! e4 22.Nd2 e3 23.fxe3 Nxd5µ Black is much better. 24.Qf3? The final mistake. 24...Ne5 25.Qe4 Nf6 Practical, though 25...Nxe3 was more brutal. 26.Qc2 Nd3 White resigned in Giri, A (2779) – Anand, V (2764) Paris 2019.

C2) 18.a4= would have been equal.

15...exd4



Position after: 15...exd4

Black was waiting for White to play Nf1 and now – with the knight away from the center – opens it at once.

16.Nxd4 Ne5 17.b3

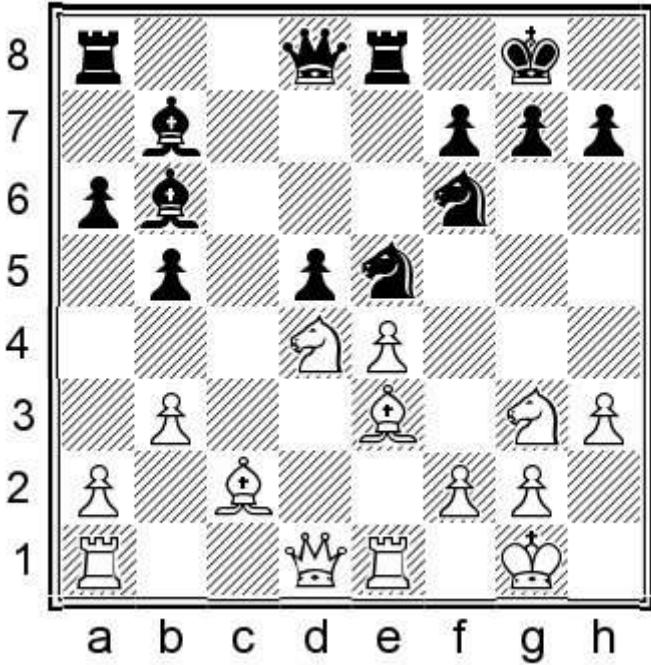
A) 17.Ng3 Nc4

B) 17.a4 Bd7 18.Ng3 d5 [18...Nc4=] 19.axb5 axb5 20.Rxa8 Qxa8=

17...Bb7 18.Ng3

18.Nf5 d5!

18...d5!



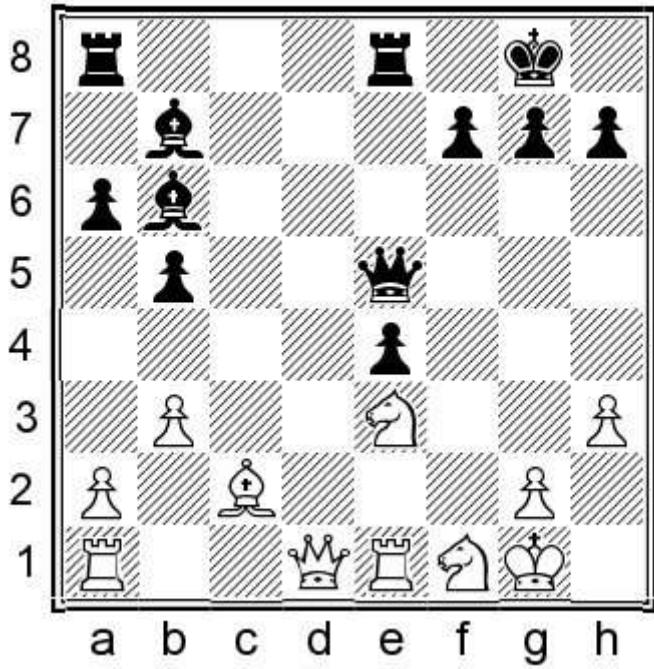
Position after: 18...d5!

Black is ready for this strike.

19.Ndf5

Here both 19...g6 and 19...Bxe3 are good.

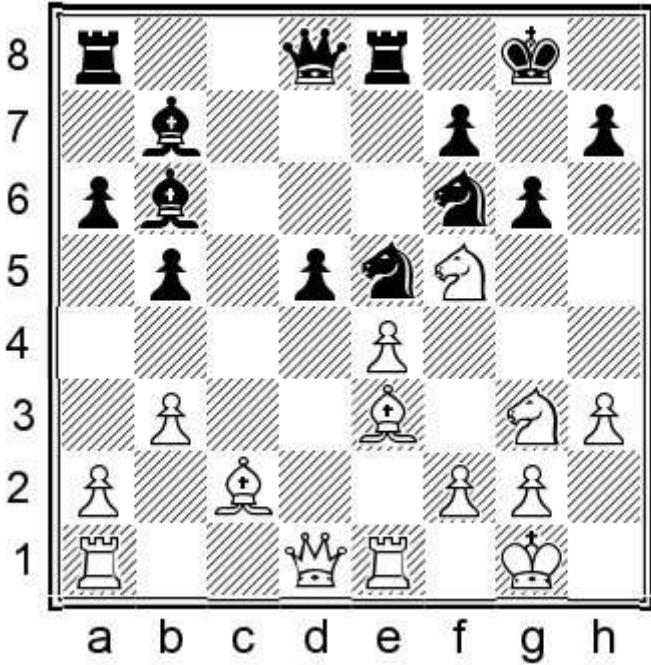
19.f4 dxе4! 20.fxе5 Nd5 is our main idea. 21.Ndf5 [21.Ngf5? Nxе3 22.Rxе3 g6+] 21...Nxе3 22.Nxе3 Qg5 23.Ngf1 Qxе5



Position after: 23...Qxe5

24.Kh1 Forced. [24.b4 Rad8 25.Qe2 f5+] 24...Ba5 wins back some material with the better position, or after 25.Re2 Rad8 26.Qc1 f5 White is doomed to suffer even harder.

19...g6



Position after: 19...g6

20.Bxb6

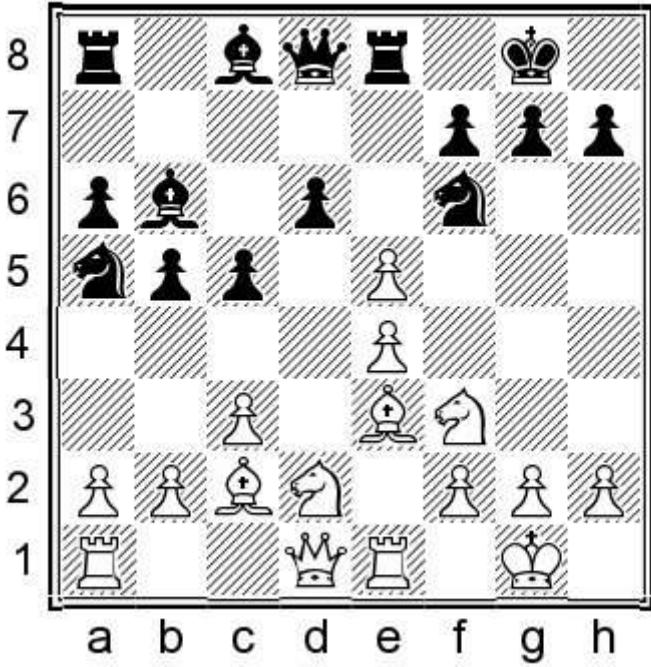
20.f4?! Nc6!? 21.e5 gxf5 22.Nxf5 d4 23.Bf2 Nb4 is complicated but Black is in the driving seat. Now 24.Nd6 d3! 25.Bxd3 Bxf2+ 26.Kxf2 Nxd3+ 27.Qxd3 Ne4+ is problematic for White.

20...Qxb6 21.Qd4 Qxd4 22.Nxd4 Rad8

This is comfortable for Black.

**f) 8.d4 Bb6 9.Be3 0-0 10.Nbd2 Re8 11.Re1 Na5 12.Bc2 c5
13.dxe5**

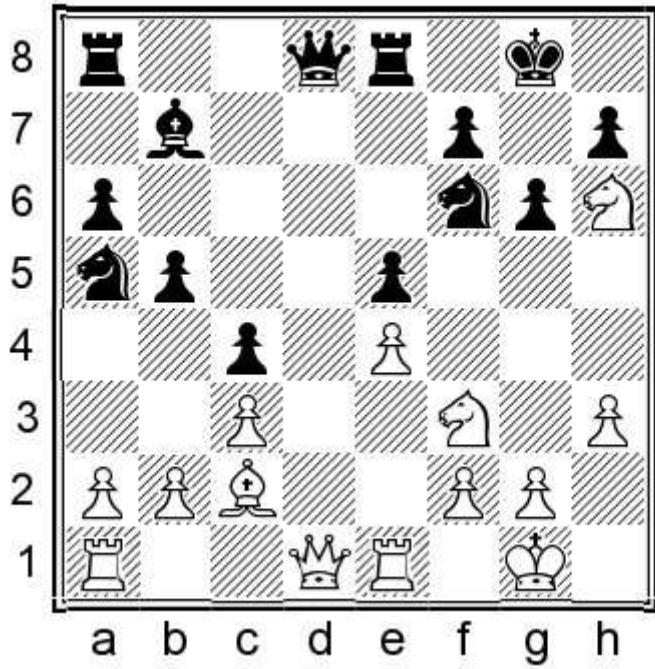
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.d4 Bb6 9.Be3 0-0 10.Nbd2 Re8!? 11.Re1 Na5 12.Bc2 c5 13.dxe5



Position after: 13.dxe5

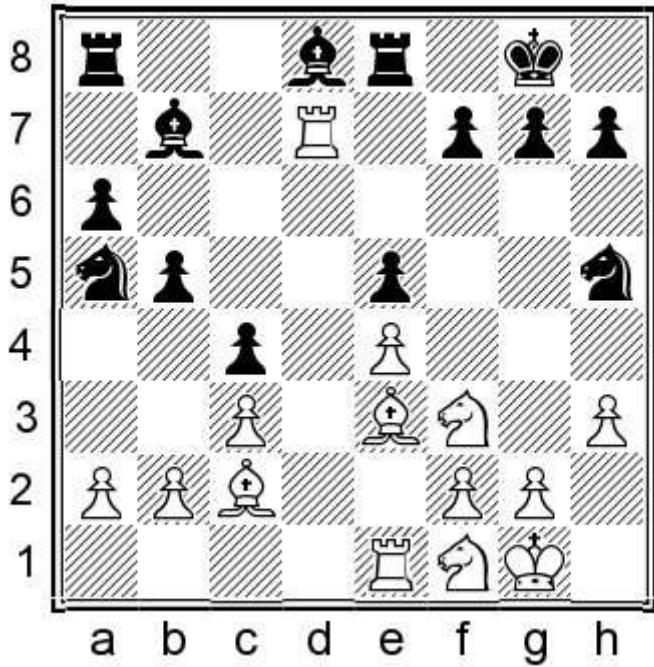
13...dxe5 14.Qe2

14.h3!? c4 15.Nf1 The best move. With some creative and precise play, White can create threats in this seemingly dull, symmetrical position. [15.Qe2 is similar to the main line.] 15...Bb7 [15...Bxe3 16.Nxe3 Bb7 17.Nf5 g6!? 18.Nh6+!]



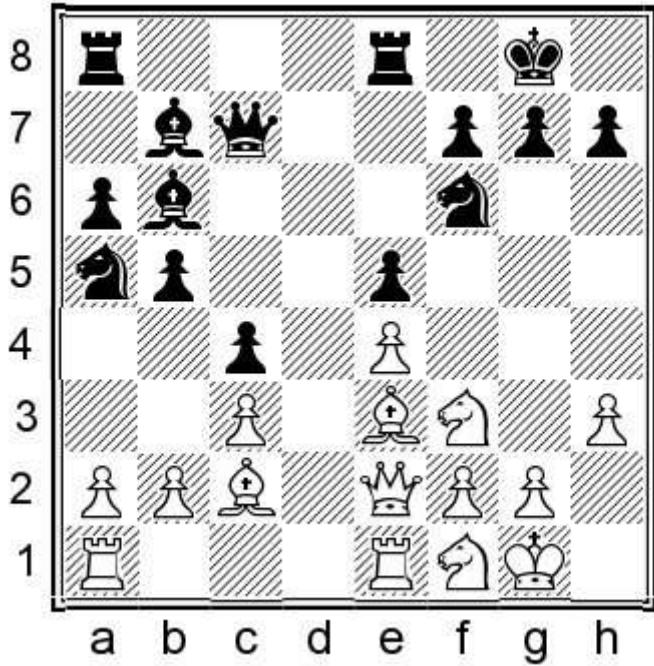
Position after: 18.Nh6+!

18...Kg7 19.Qc1 Bc8 is another critical line, and White can create some problems here according to the engines.] 16.Qe2 [16.Bg5 Qxd1 17.Raxd1 Nh5 18.Be3 Bc7! 19.Rd7 Bd8!=



Position after: 19...Bd8!=

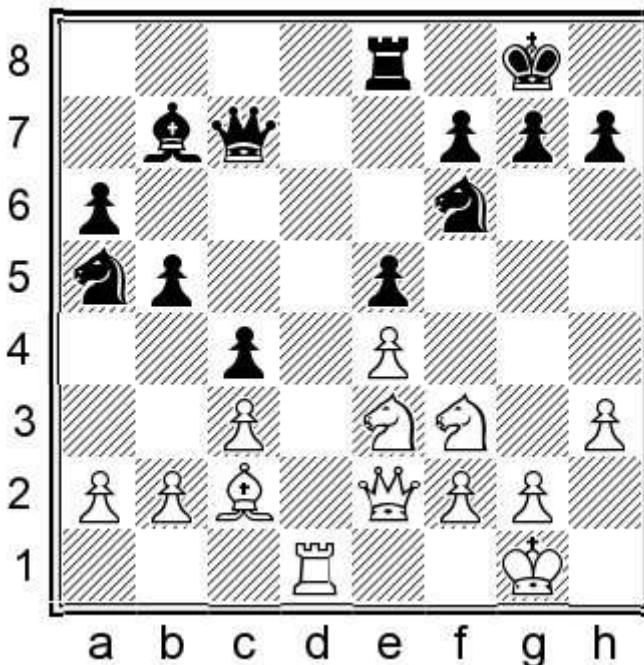
A weird line, but next Black kicks the rook out and enjoys an equal game.]
16...Qc7



Position after: 16...Qc7

A) 17.Bg5 Nh5! 18.Nh4!? Nf4 19.Qg4 f6! A nice resource. 20.Bxf4 [20.Bxf6? Qf7 21.Bg5 Nd3] 20...exf4 21.Rad1 Rad8 22.Rxd8 Rxd8 23.e5 Bxf2+ 24.Kxf2 Qc5+ 25.Ke2 Qxe5+ 26.Kf2 Qc5+= is a repetition of moves.

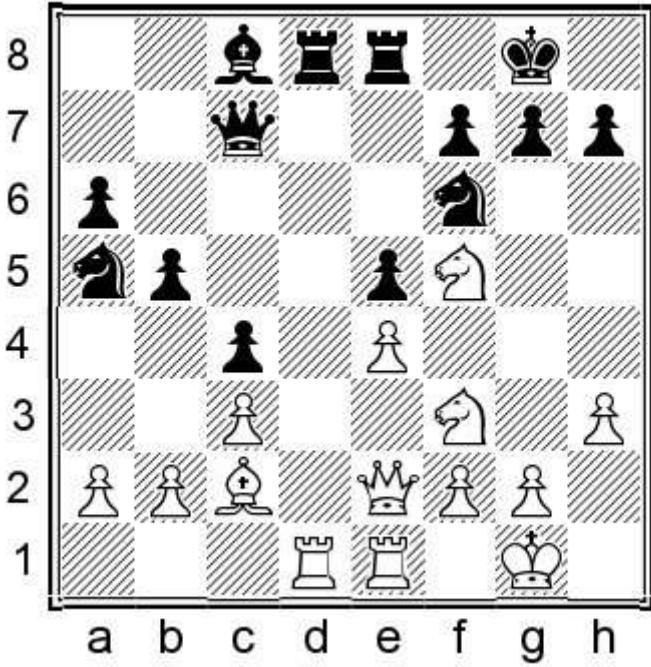
B) 17.Bxb6 Qxb6 18.Rad1 Rad8 19.Rxd8 Qxd8 20.Rd1 Qc7 21.Ne3!?



Position after: 21.Ne3!?

21...Nxe4!? 22.Nd5 [22.Nf5 Nf6 23.Qe3 Bxf3] 22...Bxd5 23.Rxd5 Nf6 24.Rxe5 Rxe5 25.Nxe5 [25.Qxe5 Qxe5 26.Nxe5 Kf8=] 25...g6=

C) 17.Rad1 Bxe3 18.Nxe3 Rad8 19.Nf5 Bc8



Position after: 19...Bc8

The typical regrouping. [19...g6?! 20.Qe3] 20.Qe3 h6 Now Black is very solid. White can try 21.Nxh6+!? e.g. 21...gxh6 22.Qxh6 Nh7 23.Ng5 Nxg5 24.Qxg5+ Kh7 25.Re3!? or repeat instead. 25...Rxd1+ 26.Bxd1 Qd8 27.Qh5+ Kg7 28.Rg3+ Kf8 29.Be2 Qd6 30.Rf3 Be6 31.Qg5∞

14...Ng4!?

Nakamura's ambitions prevailed against Anand, so we also shouldn't shy away from this fighting possibility.

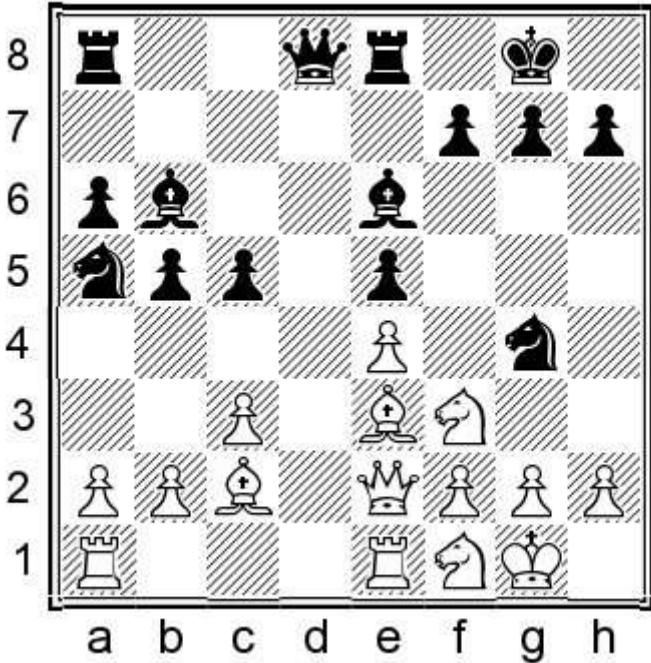
A) 14...c4 is the alternative.

B) Or 14...Qc7

15.Nf1!

15.Bg5 f6 16.Bh4 Be6= As we discussed earlier, the bishop doesn't feel right on the h4-d8 diagonal.

15...Be6!

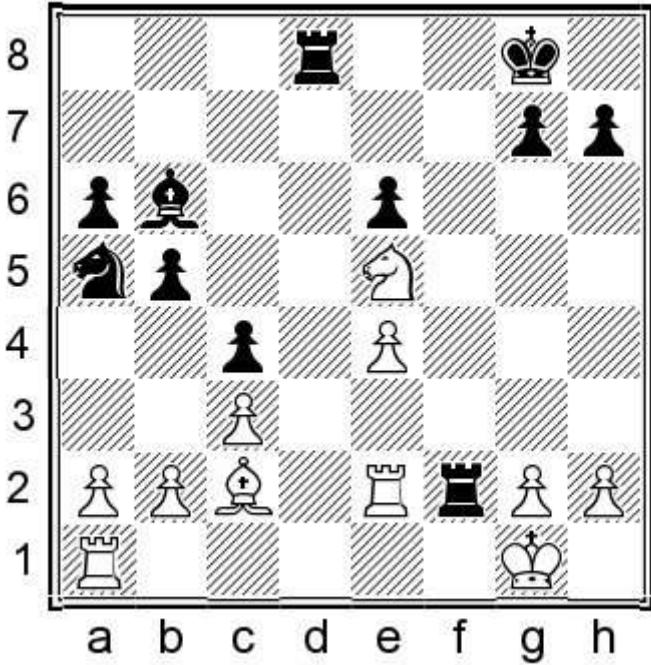


Position after: 15...Be6!

A logical follow-up. Black is not in a hurry to take the bishop: the threat is stronger than the execution in this case.

16.Rad1

16.Ng5!? Anand's choice was also ambitious. 16...Nxe3 17.Nxe6 [17.Qxe3 Bg4!? with the idea 18...c4!] 17...fxe6! Of course! Black needed to cover the vital d5 and f5 squares. The open f-file can also be utilized sometimes, since the f2-square is vulnerable. 18.Nxe3 c4 The Ark bishop is just beautiful. 19.Qh5 Qc7 20.Ng4 Rf8 21.Re2 Rad8 22.Rd1 [22.Qxe5? blunders to simple tactics. 22...Qxe5 23.Nxe5 Rxf2!



Position after: 23...Rxf2!

24.Rxf2 Rd2 25.Raf1 Rxc2f] 22...Rxd1+ 23.Bxd1 Rd8 24.Bc2 [24.Rd2!? was a cute little move. The rook is obviously untouchable thanks to the mating threat e8. 24...Nc6 25.g3 g6 26.Qg5 Rxd2 27.Qxd2 Qd8 28.Qxd8+ Bxd8=] We have been following our stem game Anand, V (2783) – Nakamura, H (2775), Sandnes NOR 2013. Here Black became overly optimistic and went for the practical 24...b4, which could have been punished by accurate play. Instead, 24...Nc6 would have been best, e.g. 25.g3 [25.Qg5 Bc5=] 25...Qf7 [25...Nd4!? can sometimes be an idea to reckon with. 26.cxd4 exd4 27.Rd2 d3] 26.Qxf7+ Kxf7= when Black is comfortably placed.

16...Qe7!

The only occasion when this is the proper place for the queen.

16...Qc7 17.Ng5!

17.b3

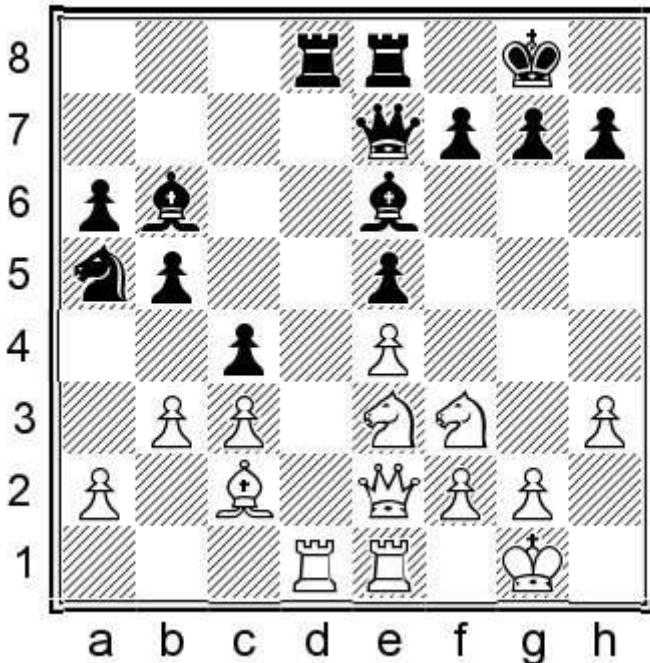
Our previous move was directed against 17.Ng5? Nxe3 18.Qxe3 Nc4μ

17...Rad8

This is the natural move.

17...Nc6!? 18.h3 Nxe3 19.Nxe3 b4!? ∞ is a decent alternative though.

18.h3 Nxe3 19.Nxe3 c4



Position after: 19...c4

Black is in time to create his own threats. The bishop pair should compensate for the relatively weak d5-square.

20.Nd5

Not the best idea, but it's worth noting how to counter this dangerous.

A) 20.b4 Nb7!? ... 21.Nxe5 Qf6 22.Nc6 Rxd1 23.Nxd1 Bc8 24.Nd4 Bxd4 25.cxd4 Qxd4 26.Qe3=

B) 20.Rxd8 Rxd8 21.b4 Nc6 22.Nd5 Qb7 23.a4 [23.Ng5 Ba7 24.a4 h6 25.Nxe6 fxe6 26.Ne3=] 23...f6 24.Rd1 Kf8 25.Nh4 Ne7 26.Qh5 Bg8 ∞

C) 20.Nxe5? cxb3

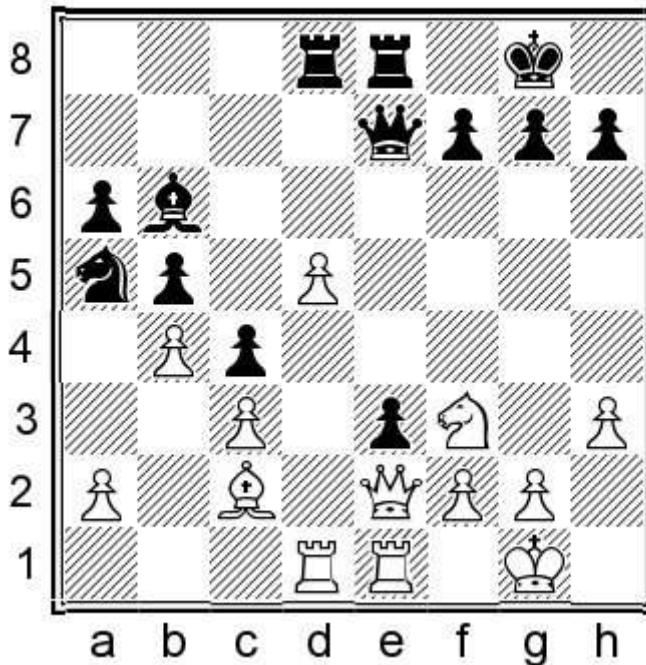
20...Bxd5 21.exd5 e4!

A well-calculated counterstrike.

22.b4

22.Qxe4 Qxe4 23.Rxe4 Rxe4 24.Bxe4 cxb3 25.axb3 Nxb3 26.d6 Nc5

22...e3!



Position after: 22...e3!

The other point.

23.Nd4

23.fxe3 Qxe3+ 24.Qxe3 Rxe3 [Or 24...Bxe3+ 25.Rxe3 Rxe3 26.bxa5 Rxc3]
25.Rxe3 Bxe3+ 26.Kf1 Nb7 27.Re1 Bf4 28.Re7 Nd6 29.Ra7 Ne8 30.Nd4
Be3 31.Rxa6 Bxd4 32.cxd4 Nc7 33.Ra5 Nxd5=

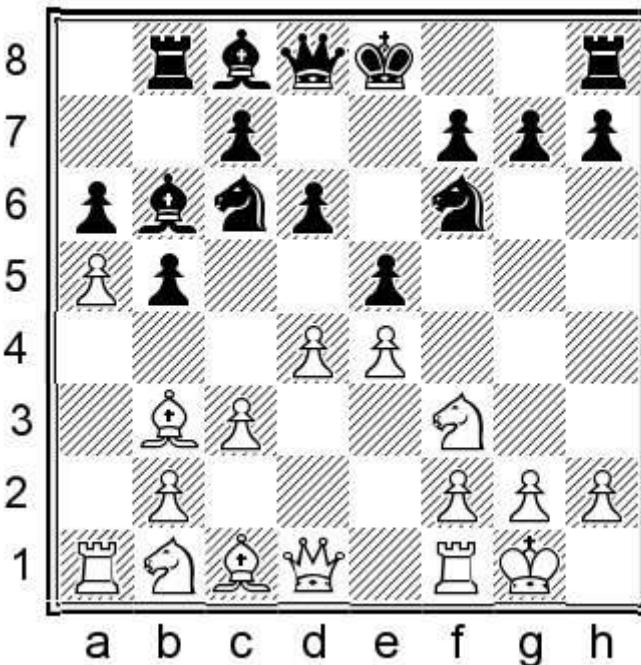
**23...Bxd4 24.Rxd4 exf2+ 25.Kxf2 Qf6+ 26.Qf3 Qxf3+ 27.gxf3 Rxe1
28.Kxe1 Nb7 29.Kf2 Nd6=**

Black is totally fine.

Chapter 9

The Closed Line 10.a5

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.a5



Chapter Guide

Chapter 9 – The Closed Line – 10.a5

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.a5 Ba7

- a) 11.Be3 Bg4 12.dxe5
- b) 11.Be3 Bg4 12.Nbd2 exd4 13.cxd4 0-0 14.Qc2
- c) 11.Be3 Bg4 12.Nbd2 exd4 13.cxd4 0-0 14.h3 Bh5 15.Qc1
- d) 11.Be3 Bg4 12.Nbd2 exd4 13.cxd4 0-0 14.h3 Bh5 15.Re1

e) 11.h3 0-0

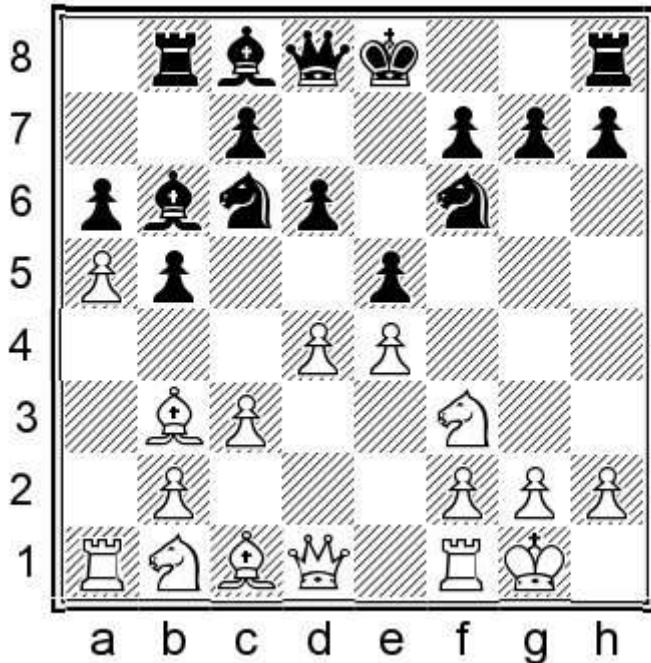
f) 11.h3 Bb7 12.Re1

g) 11.h3 Bb7 12.Be3 Nxe4 13.--

h) 11.h3 Bb7 12.Be3 Nxe4 13.Re1

a) 11.Be3 Bg4 12.dxe5

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.a5



Position after: 10.a5

One of the most challenging lines. It has been extremely popular recently, and no wonder, but it requires a lot of deep preparation, so it's mostly played by strong, titled players. It took me a huge amount of time to decide which line to recommend here, since there are a lot of tricks and subtleties in all of them. According to my database, this interesting move was introduced by

Dolmatov in 2000. It practically forces our Ark bishop back to a vulnerable square, so as to win an important tempo after an eventual Be3.

10...Ba7

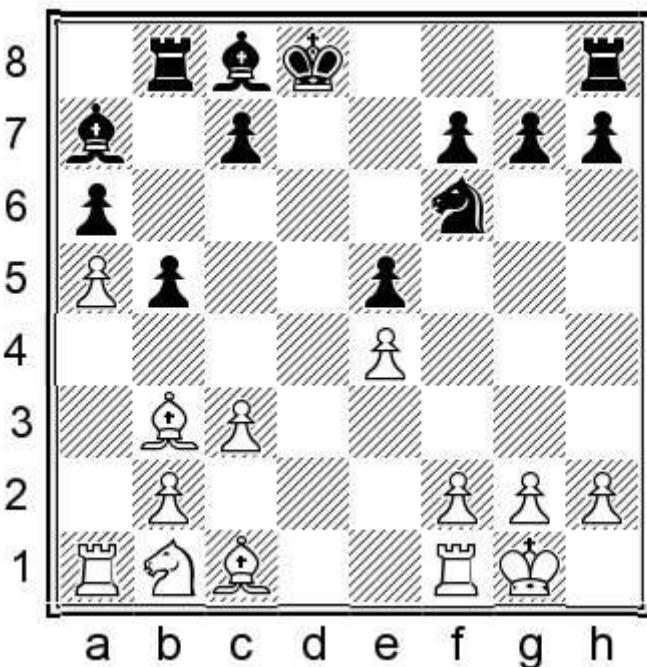
Accepting the sacrifice is out of the question. 10...Nxa5? 11.Rxa5! Bxa5 12.dxe5 Ng4 [Alternatives like 12...Nxe4 13.Qd5 Be6 14.Qxe4 Bxb3 15.Nd4, or 12...dxe5 13.Qxd8+ Kxd8 14.Nxe5± don't help either.] 13.Bg5! f6 [13...Qd7? 14.e6 fxe6 15.Nd4+-] 14.exf6 gxf6 15.Bh4 c5 16.h3± was pretty good in Dolmatov – Sivokho, St Petersburg 2000, but 16.Bd5+- is even stronger.

11.Be3!?

This allows 11...Bg4 but things are far less clear than they might appear. Recent developments made it clear to me that careful study is required here.

A) 11.h3 is the main move, covered in the next chapter.

B) 11.dxe5?! is a harmless idea: 11...Nxe5 12.Nxe5 dxe5 13.Qxd8+ Kxd8



Position after: 13...Kxd8

B1) 14.Bxf7?! Rf8 15.Bd5 c6! 16.Bb3 [16.Bxc6 Kc7 17.Bd5 Ng4μ] 16...Nxe4 17.Be3 Bxe3 18.fxe3 Rxf1+ 19.Kxf1 Bf5³

B2) 14.Nd2?! Ke7 15.Nf3 Be6! 16.Bxe6 Kxe6 17.Ng5+ Ke7 18.Nf3 Nd7³

B3) 14.Bg5 avoids trouble: 14...Ke7 15.Na3=

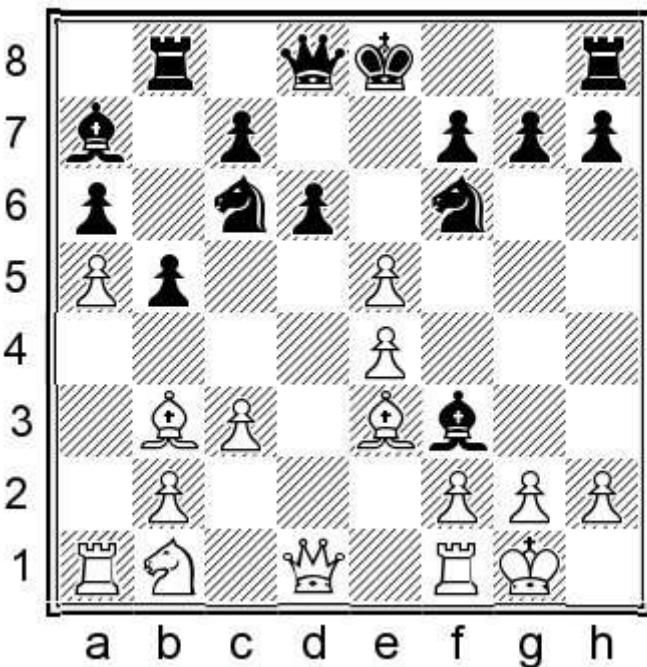
11...Bg4!

An important detail here.

12.dxe5

12.d5?! doesn't impress much e.g. 12...Bxe3 13.fxe3 Ne7 14.Nbd2 0-0³, Zeberski – Shirov, Warsaw 2010.

12...Bxf3!

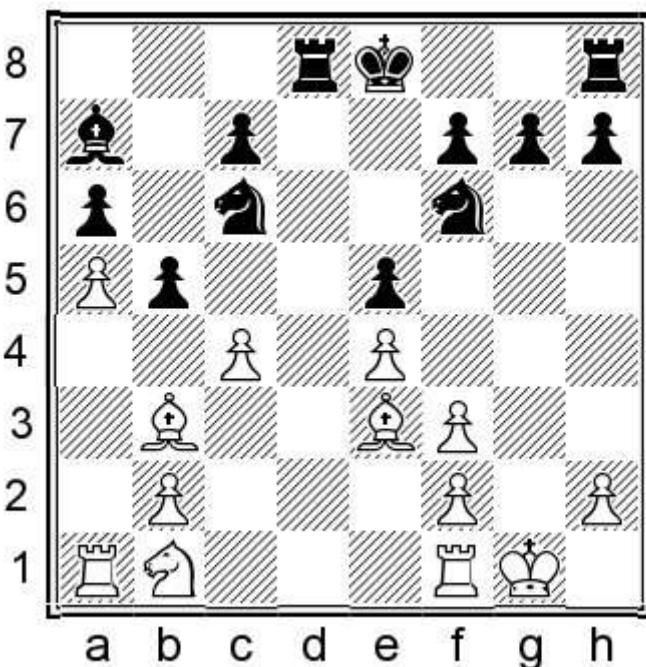


Position after: 12...Bxf3!

The main idea of the previous move.

13.Qxf3

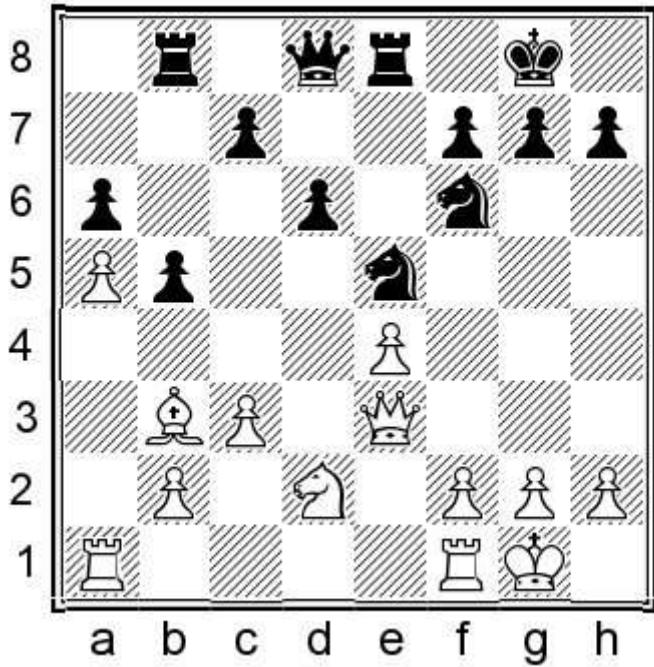
13.gxf3?! This can't be good. 13...dxe5 14.Qxd8+ [14.Qe2 0-0 15.Nd2 Nh5 16.Kh1 Qh4 17.Rg1 Nf4 18.Bxf4 exf4 19.e5 Qxf2 20.Qxf2 Bxf2 21.Rg2 Be3µ Black got a serious edge by simple means in Milos – Ganguly, Bursa 2010.] 14...Rxd8 and now 15.c4!?



Position after: 15.c4!?

can be tried, but it looks suspicious: 15...Nd4 16.Bxd4 Bxd4 17.cxb5 axb5 18.Nc3 c6 19.Rac1 Ke7³

13...Nxe5 14.Qe2 Bxe3 15.Qxe3 0-0 16.Nd2 Re8



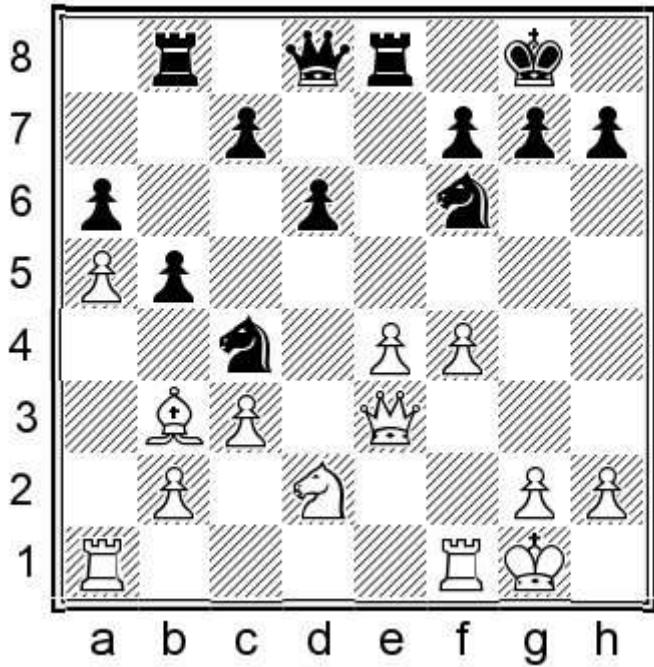
Position after: 16...Re8

To be honest, I didn't want to deal with this line in detail, but it has been played many times recently in rapid games and your author also faced this one over the board. White hopes to get a central break with f4-e5 at an optimal moment, while Black hopes to target the weak a5-pawn in the near future.

17.Rfe1

A necessary prophylactic move.

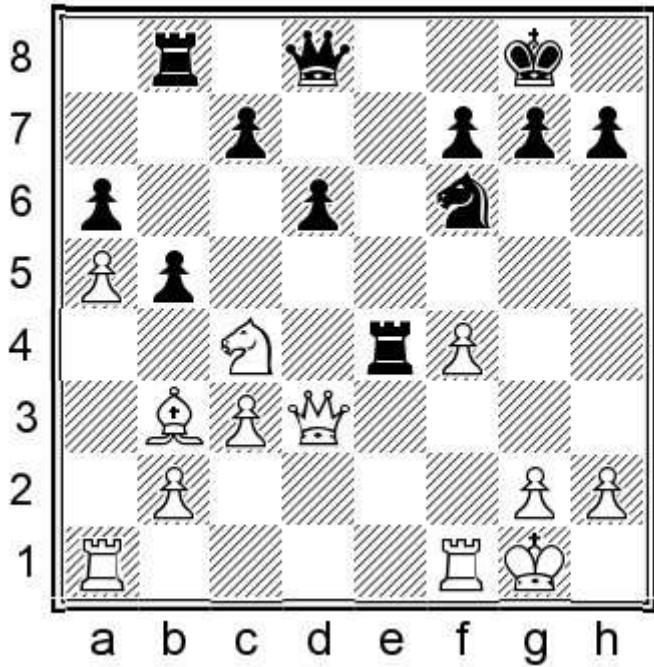
A) 17.f4?! is too early. 17...Nc4!



Position after: 17...Nc4!

A1) 18.Bxc4 bxc4 19.e5 [19.Nxc4 Rxe4 20.Qd3 Qe8! 21.b4 Qb5 22.Nb2 Qxd3 23.Nxd3 Rc4 24.Ra3 Nd5μ] 19...dxe5 20.fxe5 Qd5 21.Nf3 Ng4 22.Qd4 Qxd4+ 23.cxd4 Rxb2³

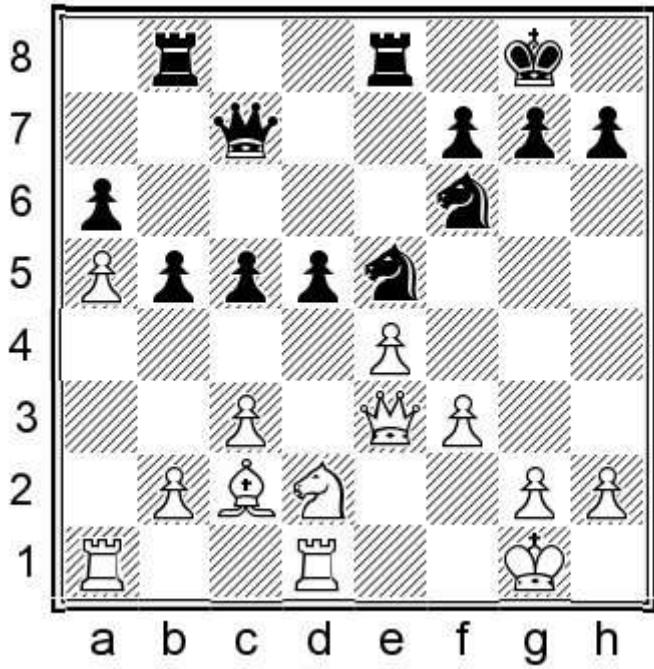
A2) 18.Nxc4 Rxe4 19.Qd3



Position after: 19.Qd3

19...bxc4 20.Bxc4 Rxb2 21.Bd5 [21.Bxa6?? Qa8–+] 21...Re7 resulted in a pawn up for Black in two games.

B) 17.f3 This is timid and Black has many ways to continue: let's follow Shirov's game! 17...c5 17...c6 or 17...d5 are good too. 18.Bc2 Qc7 19.Rfd1 d5

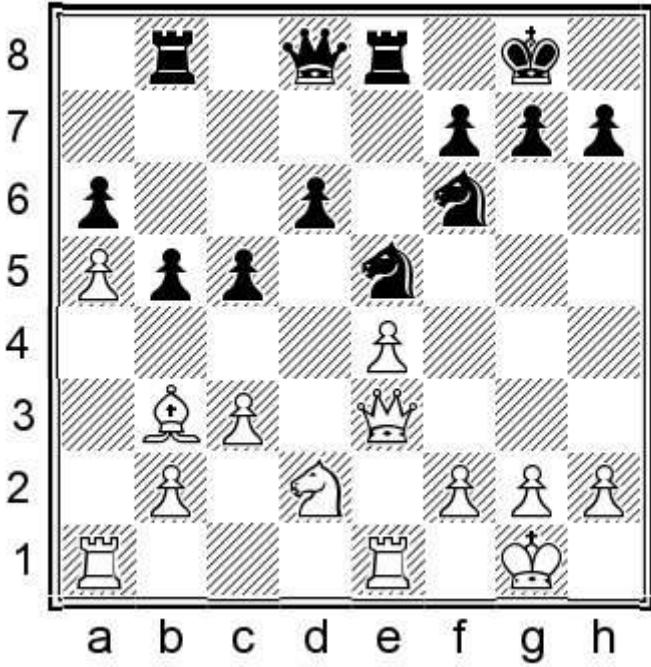


Position after: 19...d5

20.Qf2 c4 21.exd5 Nxd5 22.Ne4 Nf4 23.Qc5 Qb7 and Black had a nice initiative in Najer – Shirov, Bundesliga 2010.

C) 17.Rfd1 c5 18.Bc2 Qc7= Abdusattorov, N (2635) – Najer, E (2661) Moscow 2019.

17...c5



Position after: 17...c5

18.f4

The most ambitious try.

A) 18.Bc2 The young, rising Iranian star Firouzja faced this move twice. 18...Qc7 18...Nc6 was his choice against Wei Yi. 19.Qg3 c4 20.f4 Ng6 21.Qf3 b4,,

B) 18.h3 c4 19.Bc2 Qc7 20.Nf3 [20.f4 Ng6∞] 20...Nxf3+ 21.Qxf3 was Nepomniachtchi, I (2767) – Grigoriants, S (2542) Moscow 2019 and here Black can simply double rooks: 21...Re6 22.Red1 Rbe8 Black's game is easier.

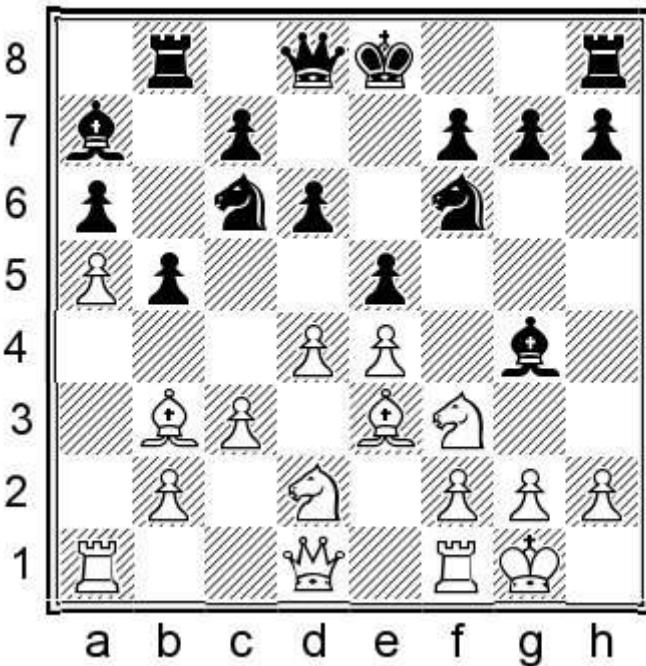
18...Nc6

18...Ng6 19.Qf3 Qc7 20.Bc2 c4= is also ok.

19.Bc2 c4 20.Nf3 Qc7=

b) 11.Be3 Bg4 12.Nbd2 exd4 13.cxd4 0-0 14.Qc2

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.a5 Ba7 11.Be3!? Bg4! 12.Nbd2!



Position after: 12.Nbd2!

A rare though ambitious line.

12...exd4!

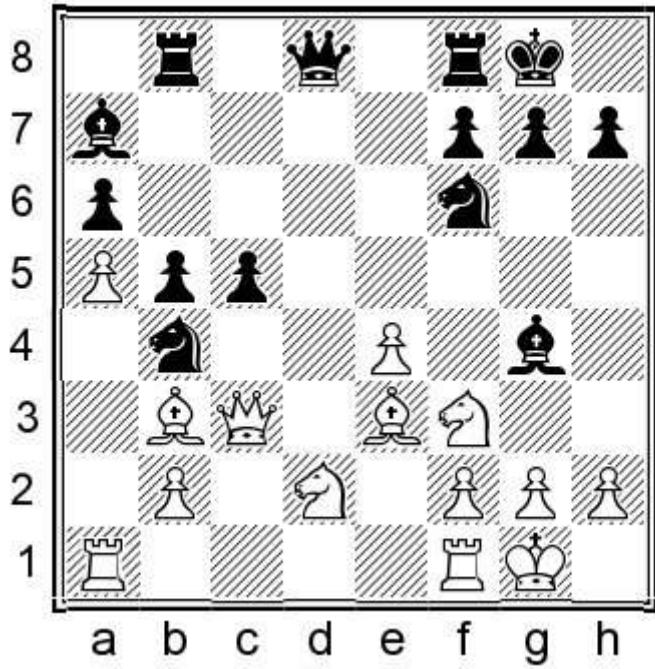
12...0-0 13.dxe5!? [Or 13.h3 Bh5 14.Qe1! Hovhannisyan, R (2622) – Sjugirov, S (2663) Riga 2021] 13...dxe5 14.Qe1! is not that simple.

13.cxd4 0-0

Now d4 is hanging.

13...Nxd4? 14.Bxd4 Bxd4 15.Bxf7+ Kxf7 16.Qb3++–

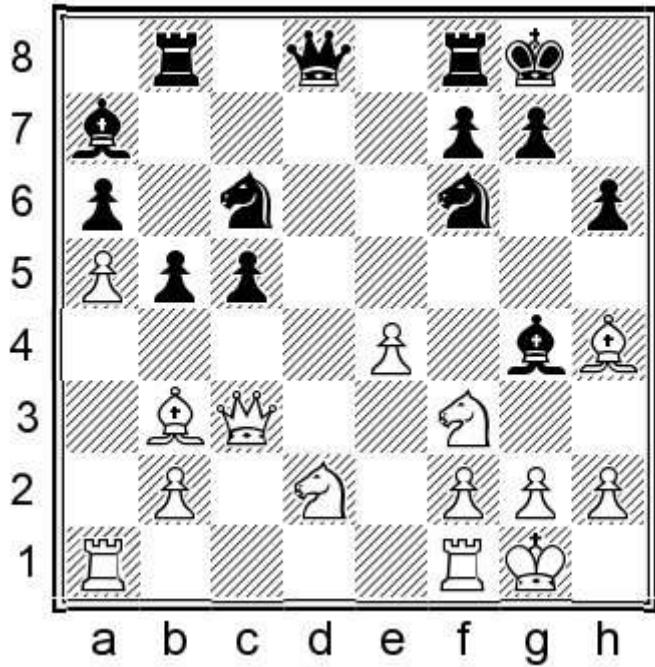
14.Qc2 Nb4 15.Qc3 c5! 16.dxc5 dxc5



Position after: 16...dxc5

17.Rad1

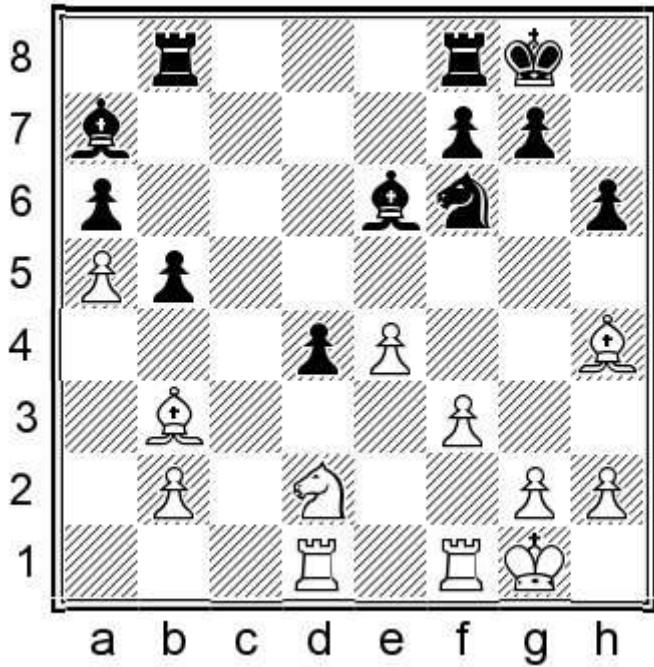
A) 17.Bg5 h6 18.Bh4 In Hunt – Trent, Bunratty 2015 18...g5 occurred, which was not ideal. [18.Bxf6? Qxf6 19.Qxf6 gxf6μ] 18...Nc6!



Position after: 18...Nc6!

A1) 19.e5? doesn't work in view of: 19...Nd5! 20.Qd3 Nde7 21.Qe4 Bf5 22.Qxf5 [22.Qf4 c4–+] 22...Nxf5 23.Bxd8 Rbxd8μ

A2) 19.Rad1 Nd4 20.Nxd4 Qxd4 21.Qxd4 cxd4 22.f3 Be6

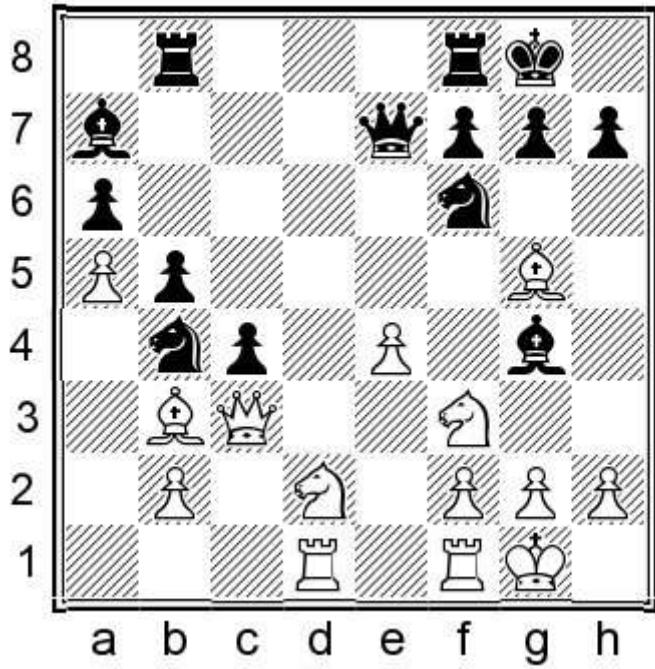


Position after: 22...Be6

This is equal, e.g. 23.Bf2 [23.Bxe6 fxe6 24.Nb3=] 23...Rbc8 24.Bxe6 fxe6 25.Nb3 e5 26.Rc1 Nh5!? [26...Nd7=] 27.Rxc8 Rxc8 28.Rc1 Rxc1+ 29.Nxc1 Nf4 30.Kf1 d3 31.Nb3 Bxf2 32.Kxf2 d2 33.Nxd2 Nd3+ 34.Ke3 Nxb2=

B) The c5-pawn is poisoned, of course: 17.Bxc5? Rc8! 18.Bxb4 Rxc3 19.bxc3 Re8μ

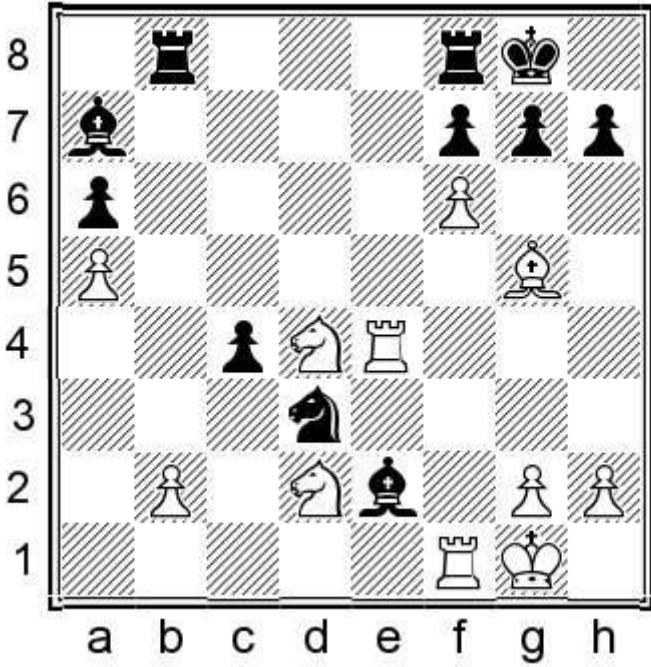
17...Qe7 18.Bg5 c4!



Position after: 18...c4!

19.e5

19.Bxc4 bxc4 20.e5 Nd3 21.exf6 Qe2! An important resource! 22.Nd4 Nxf2!
23.Rde1 Qd3 24.Qxd3 Nxd3 25.Re4 Be2!



Position after: 25...Be2!

Very tricky. 26.Rxe2 Bxd4+ 27.Be3 Rfe8 28.Nxc4 Bxf6 29.Rd1 Nxb2 30.Nxb2 Bxb2³

19...Nb_d5 20.Qc1™

20.exf6? gxf6! 21.Bxf6 Qxf6 22.Qxf6 Nxf6μ

20...cx_b3 21.ex_f6 Nxf6

21...gxf6 is also an option. 22.Bh6 Rfc8 23.Qb1 f5 24.h3 Qe6 25.hxg4 fxg4 26.Ne4 Qxh6 27.Rxd5 gxf3 28.Rh5 Qe6 29.Qd3∞

22.Rfe1 Qb7!

22...Qc5? 23.Qxc5 Bxc5 24.Bxf6 gxf6 25.Nxb3

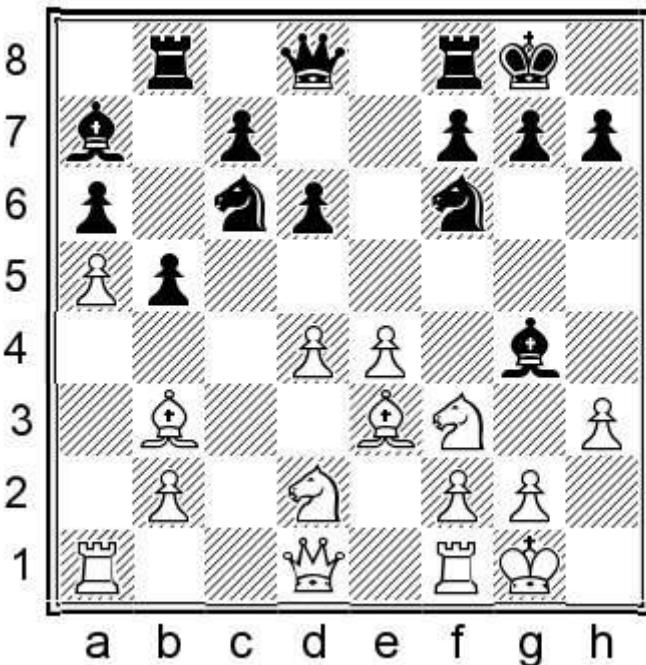
23.Bxf6 Rbc8 24.Qb1 gxf6 25.Ne4 Rc6

25...f5? 26.Rd7

26.Nd6 Qc7 27.Qe4!=

c) **11.Be3 Bg4 12.Nbd2 exd4 13.cxd4 0-0 14.h3 Bh5 15.Qc1**

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.a5 Ba7 11.Be3!? Bg4! 12.Nbd2! exd4! 13.cxd4 0-0 14.h3!



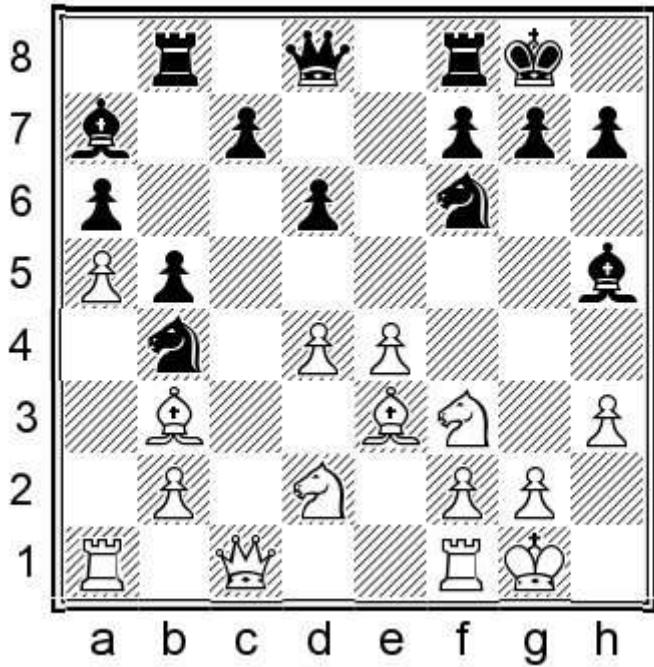
Position after: 14.h3!

14...Bh5 15.Qc1

More precise than 15.Qc2.

15.Qc2 Nb4 16.Qc3 transposes

15...Nb4

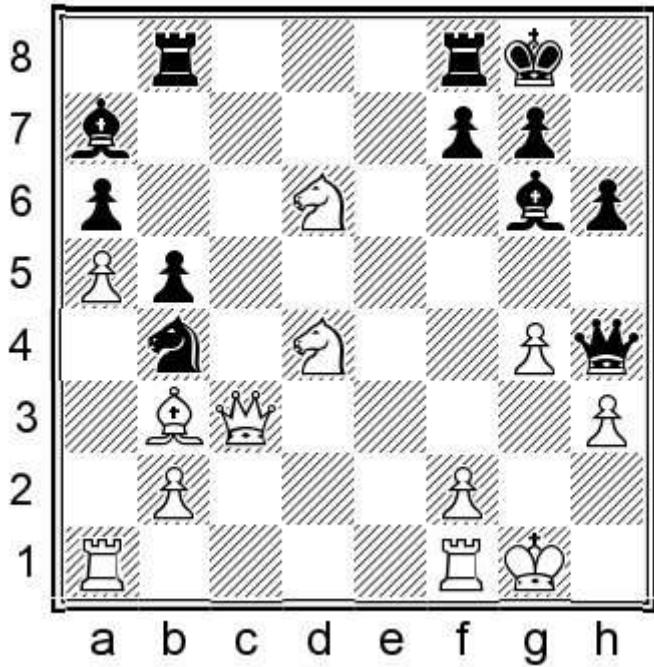


Position after: 15...Nb4

16.Bg5

The latest word in GM practice. It's a super-complicated variation, so no wonder it's gaining in popularity.

- A) 16.g4!? Bg6 17.Bg5 h6 18.Bh4 c5 19.Qc3 cxd4 20.Nxd4 Nxe4 21.Nxe4 Qxh4 22.Nxd6

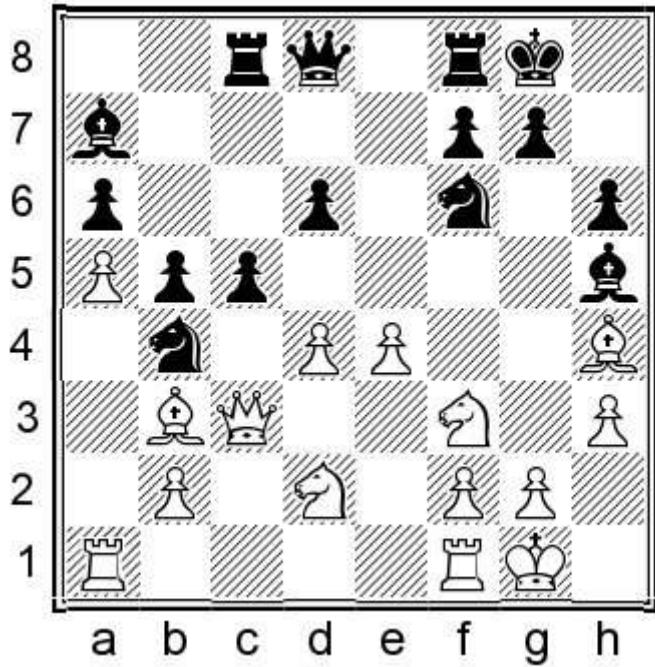


Position after: 22.Nxd6

In Wei, Y (2721) – Santos Ruiz, M (2560) Khanty – Mansiysk 2019
Black now blundered. He should have played: 22...Qf6 23.N4f5 Qxc3
24.Ne7+ Kh7 25.bxc3 Nd3 26.Rad1 Nf4 27.Nc6 Ra8 White has
beautiful minor pieces, but that's not enough for an advantage.

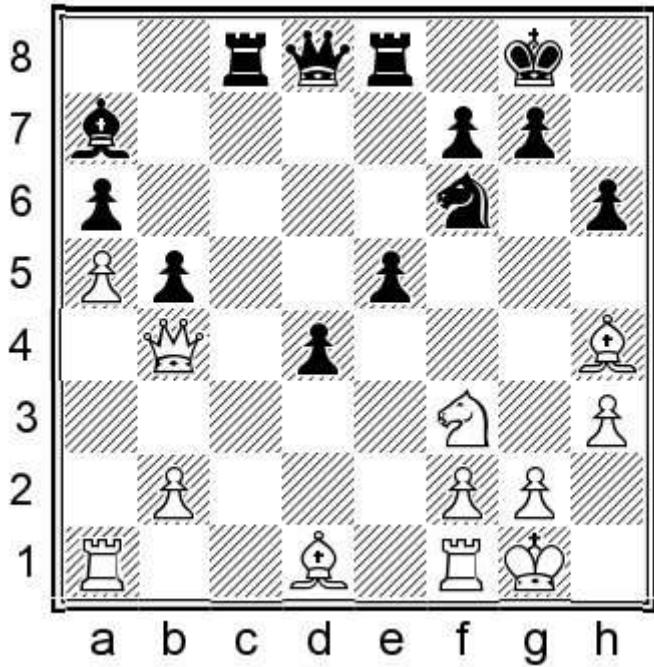
B) 16.Qc3 c5!

B1) 17.Bg5 h6 18.Bh4 Rc8



Position after: 18...Rc8

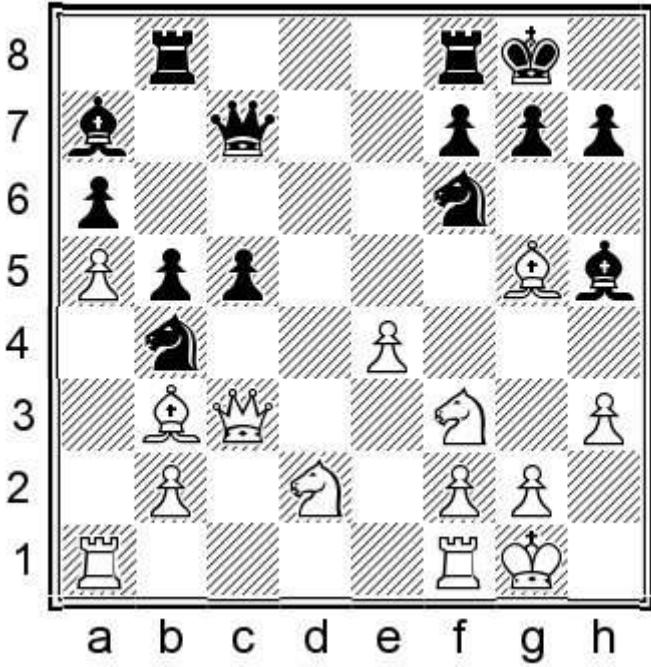
19.Bd1 It is hard to believe that such a move can secure the advantage in a sharp position like this. [... 19.e5? cxd4! 20.Qxb4 Bc5–+ is our typical resource in this line. 21.exf6 g5 22.Qxc5 dxc5 23.Bg3 c4–+] 19...Bxf3 20.Nxf3 [20.Bxf3 Nc6!=] 20...Re8 21.e5 cxd4!? 22.Qxb4 dxe5



Position after: 22...dxe5

Black has interesting compensation, e.g. 23.Bg3 [23.Bb3 e4 24.Nh2 g5 25.Bg3 d3@; 23.Nh2 e4 24.Ng4 Nd5 25.Bxd8 Nxb4 26.Bb6 Bxb6 27.axb6 Rb8=] 23...e4 24.Ne5 Bb8!? 25.Ng4 Nxg4! 26.Bxg4 Bxg3 27.Bxc8 [27.fxg3 Rc4 28.Qd2 d3@] 27...Bd6! 28.Qd2 e3! 29.fxe3 dxe3 30.Qc2 e2 31.Rfe1 Qe7! 32.Qc6 Qe5=

B2) 17.dxc5 dxc5! The only recapture. 18.Bg5 Here Black has a lot of possibilities and I've chosen the most interesting one. 18...Qc7!?



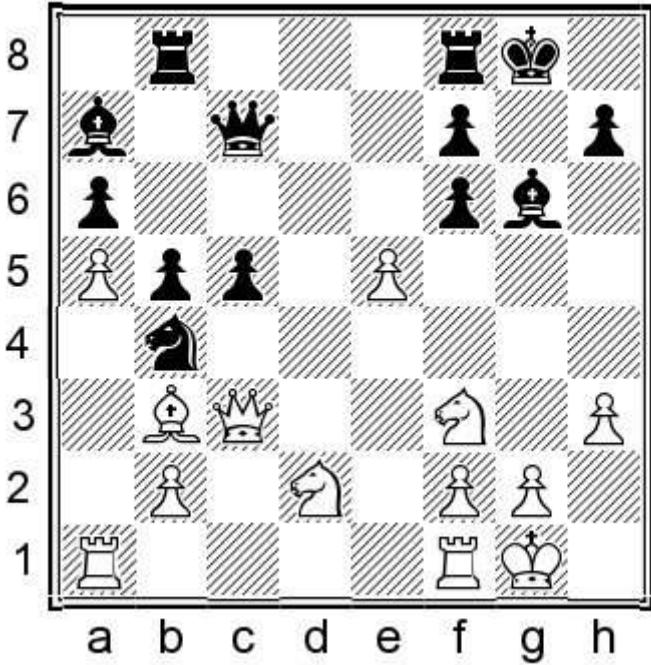
Position after: 18...Qc7!?

A slightly shocking move, but it works.

B2.1) 19.Rac1 Rbc8! 20.Nh4 Bg6 21.Bxf6 gxf6 22.Nxg6 hxg6 23.Qxf6 c4 [23...Qc6 24.Qc3 Rcd8!? 25.Qxb4 Qf6 looks a bit too clever.] 24.Nxc4 bxc4 25.Rxc4 Qxc4 26.Bxc4 Rxc4 27.e5 [27.Rd1 Rxe4] 27...Re8∞ is complicated.

B2.2) 19.Nd4 Bg6 20.Nf5 Bxf5 21.Bxf6 gxf6 22.exf5 Qf4 23.Rad1 Rbd8 24.Ne4! [24.Qxf6 c4] 24...Qxe4 25.Qxf6 Rxd1 26.Rxd1 c4= and repetition follows.

B2.3) 19.Bxf6 gxf6 20.e5! [20.Qxf6?! is too greedy: 20...c4 21.e5 Bg6!μ; 20.Rac1 Qe7 21.Nh4 Qe5μ] 20...Bg6!



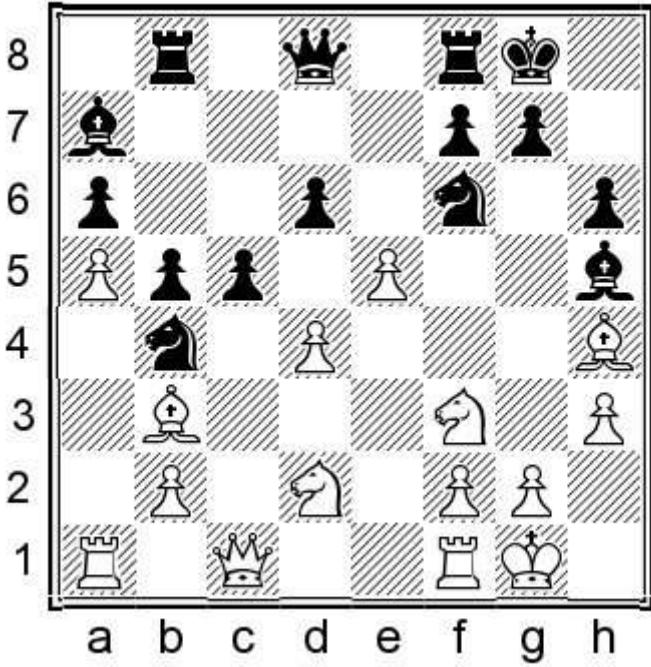
Position after: 20...Bg6!

21.Rae1! The only way to continue the attack; after this accurate move Black needs to be careful. [21.exf6 Nd3 22.Bc2 Rbd8μ] 21...fxe5

B2.3a) 22.Nxe5 Nc6 23.Ne4 [23.Nxg6 hxg6 24.Re4! c4 25.Bxc4 Bd4 26.Rxd4 Nxd4 27.Qxd4 bxc4 28.Ne4 Rfd8=] 23...Nxe5 24.Nf6+ Kg7 transposes to the main line. [24...Kh8!?]

B2.3b) 22.Ne4 Nc6! Forced, but good. 23.Nf6+ Kg7 [23...Kh8 24.Bd5] 24.Nxe5 Nxe5 25.Rxe5 [25.Nd5 Qd6 26.Rxe5 b4 27.Qe1∞] 25...b4 26.Qg3 c4! and Black holds. 27.Nd5 Qc6 28.Ne7 [28.Bc2 Bd4] 28...Qc7 29.Nd5 Qc6=

16...h6 17.Bh4 c5 18.e5



Position after: 18.e5

The only real question.

18...dxe5 19.dxe5 Nd3 20.Qc3 Bxf3!

A very strong intermediate reply, and the essence of our play.

21.Nxf3

21.exf6 Be2 22.Rae1 Bxf1 A draw was agreed here in Domanov, D (2564) – Giese, G (2494) LSS email 2015, probably thanks to the forcing line: 23.fxg7 Qxh4 24.Ne4 Bxg2! 25.Nf6+ [25.gxf8=Q+? Rxf8 26.Nf6+ Kh8–+] 25...Kxg7 26.Nh5+ Kg6 27.Qg7+ Kf5 28.Qh7+ Kg5 29.Qg7+ Kf5=

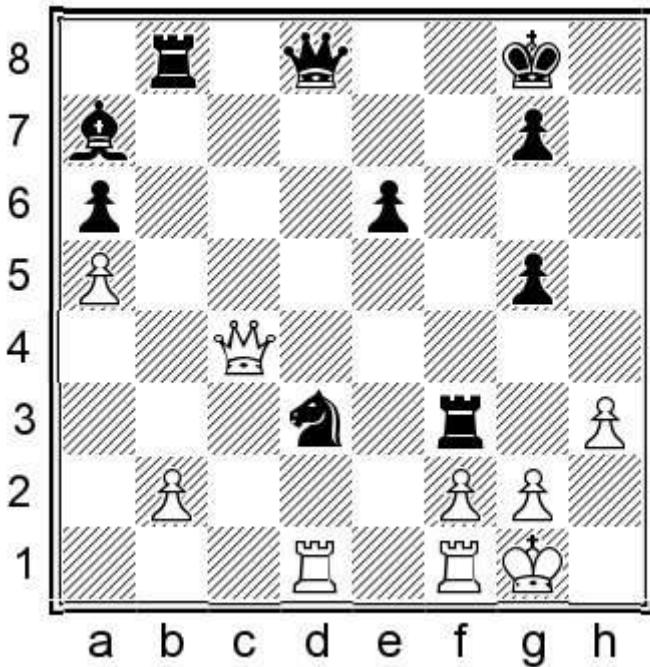
21...Ne4 22.Qc2 Ng5

22...Qd7 23.Qe2 c4 24.Qxe4 Nc5 25.Qf4 Ne6 26.Qg3 cxb3 27.Rad1∞

23.Bxg5 hxg5 24.Rad1 c4 25.e6!?

25.Rd2 Rb7 26.Rfd1 Rd7,,

25...fxe6 26.Bxc4 bxc4 27.Qxc4 Rxf3!

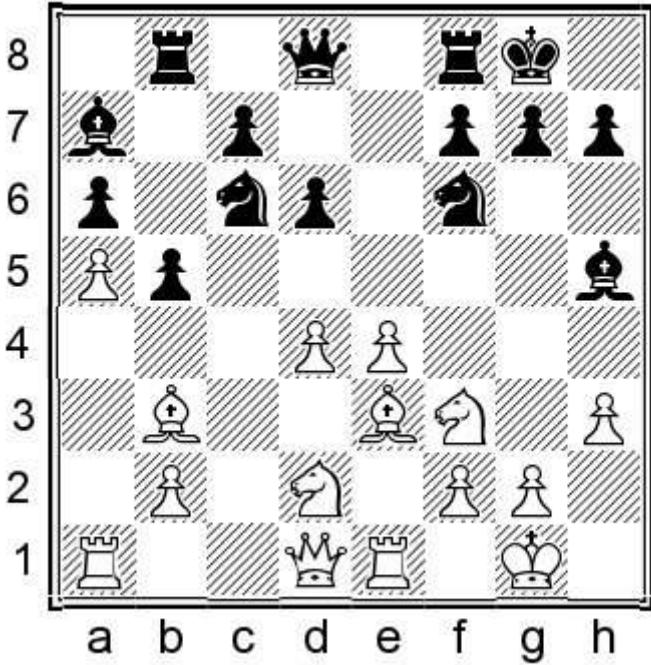


Position after: 27...Rxf3!

28.gxf3 Qd6! 29.Rxd3 Qg3+ 30.Kh1 Qxh3+=

d) 11.Be3 Bg4 12.Nbd2 exd4 13.cxd4 0-0 14.h3 Bh5 15.Re1

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.a5 Ba7 11.Be3!? Bg4! 12.Nbd2! exd4! 13.cxd4 0-0 14.h3! Bh5 15.Re1!?



Position after: 15.Re1!?

A new discovery and one that requires careful play from us.

15...Nb4!

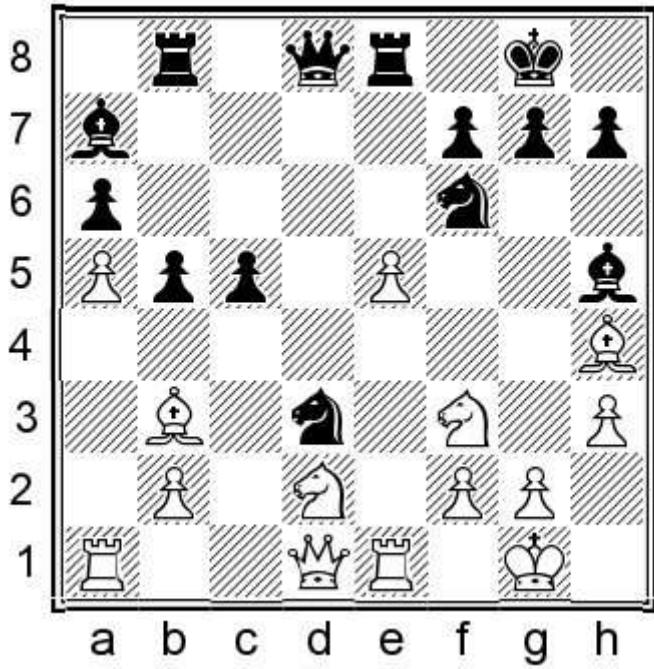
Only this way! We should resist the temptation to win the pawn on d4.

15...Bxd4 is no good: 16.Nxd4 Nxd4 17.g4 Nxb3 18.Qxb3 Bg6 19.Bg5! h6 20.Bh4 Bh7 21.f4 g5 22.fxg5 Nd7 23.Nf3 Ne5 24.Nxe5 dxe5 25.Qe3 hxg5 26.Bxg5± ½ (55) Esipenko, A (2720) – Shirov, A (2659) Riga 2021.

16.Rc1!?

A creative idea: White is ready to give up an exchange so as to maintain solid positional pressure.

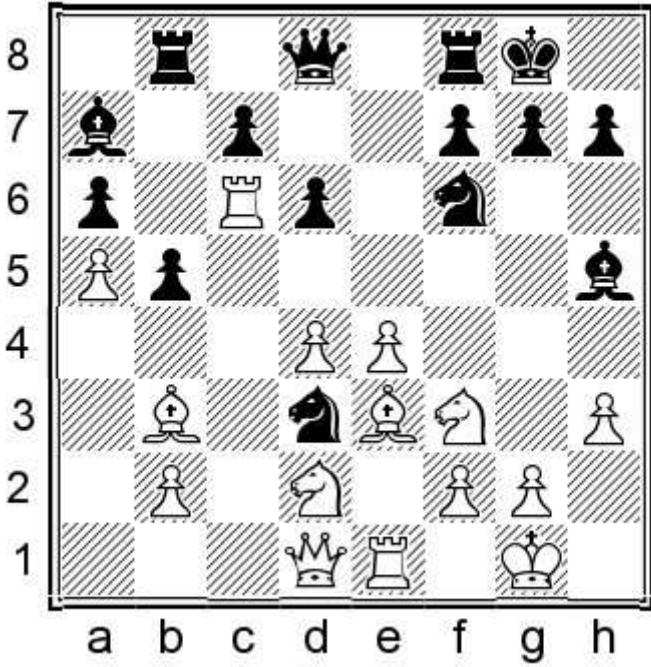
16.Bg5 Re8 17.Bh4 [17.e5? dxe5 18.dxe5 Nd3 19.Re2 Rxe5!? 20.Nxe5 Nxf2 21.Bxf7+ Bxf7 22.Rxf2 Bxf2+μ] 17...c5 18.e5 dxe5 19.dxe5 Nd3



Position after: 19...Nd3

This looks totally unclear. 20.Re2 [20.Bc2 Nxe5 21.g4 Nxf3+ 22.Nxf3 Bg6 23.Rxe8+ Qxe8 24.Bxg6 hxg6 25.Qd6 Qd7 26.Qxd7 Nxd7 27.Rd1 Rb7 28.Rd6=] 20...c4!? [20...Nf4 21.Re1 Nd3=] 21.exf6 cxb3 22.Re7 Rxe7 23.fxe7 Qd5 24.Qxb3 Bxf3 25.gxf3 Bxf2+ 26.Bxf2 Qg5+ 27.Kf1=

16...Nd3 17.Rc6



Position after: 17.Rc6

17...Nb4

17...Nxe1?! is not good at all, e.g. 18.Qxe1 Re8 [18...Bxf3? 19.Nxf3 Nxe4 20.Rxa6+–; 18...Ra8 19.Qc1!] 19.Bg5 Qd7 20.Qc1f

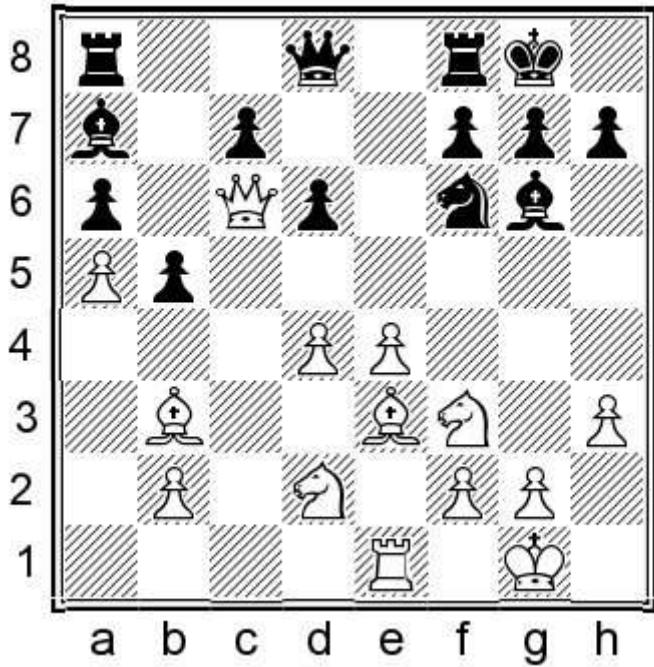
18.Qc1!

18.Rc1 Nd3= is a repetition.

18...Ra8 19.Qc3

19.Rc3 c5!

19...Nxc6 20.Qxc6 Bg6



Position after: 20...Bg6

After this Black should be able to hold.

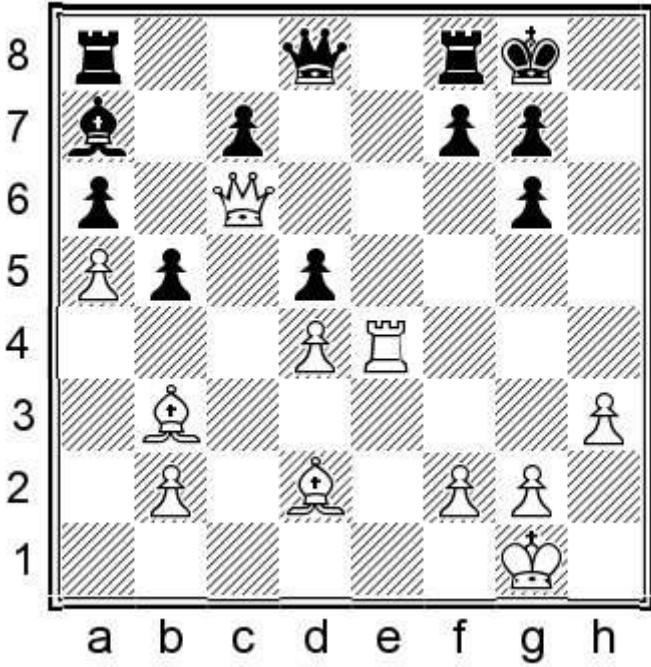
21.Nh4 Nxe4 22.Nxg6

22.Nxe4 Qxh4

22...Nxd2 23.Bxd2

23.Nxf8 is no good. 23...Nxb3 24.Nxh7 Nxd4

23...hxg6 24.Re4! d5!



Position after: 24...d5!

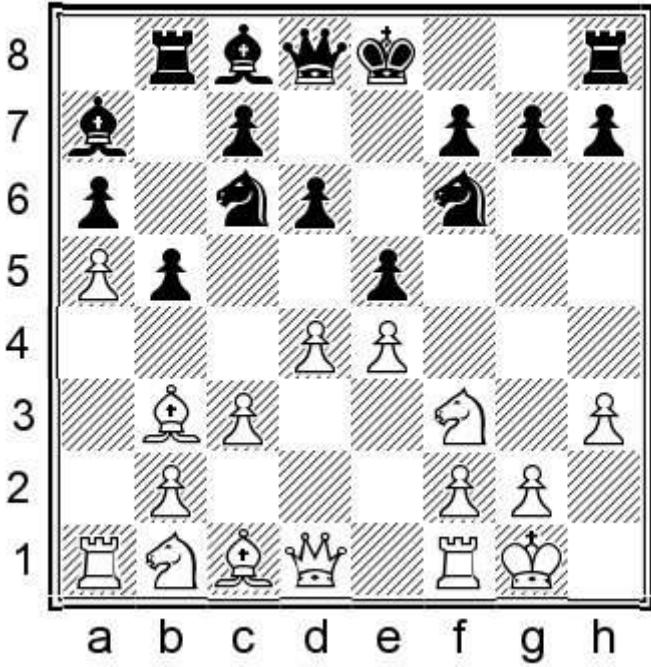
Black needed some air to breathe.

25.Bxd5 Qf6 26.Qxf6 gxf6 27.Bxa8 Rxa8=

The endgame is about equal.

e) 11.h3 0-0

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.a5 Ba7 11.h3



Position after: 11.h3

Originally I wanted promote the line...

11...0-0

...but despite my successful opening outcomes here, in practice I can't recommend it wholeheartedly since I discovered some problems. Recent developments also made me rework this chapter. Nevertheless, I will offer you some ideas here too, if you want to investigate it – the line is still pretty unknown and full of excitement.

See 11...Bb7 in the next subchapter.

12.Be3

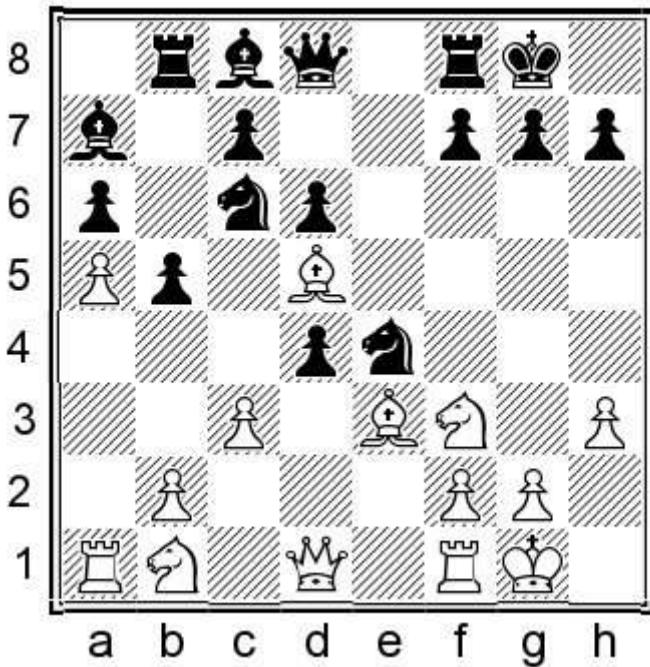
The starting position of the most critical line.

12...Nxe4!?

This slightly surprising move is how my pet line starts. It has only been played a few times before (though by really strong players), and I found

fewer than 10 games altogether, which is a really small number in a fashionable line such as 10.a5.

13.Bd5 exd4!

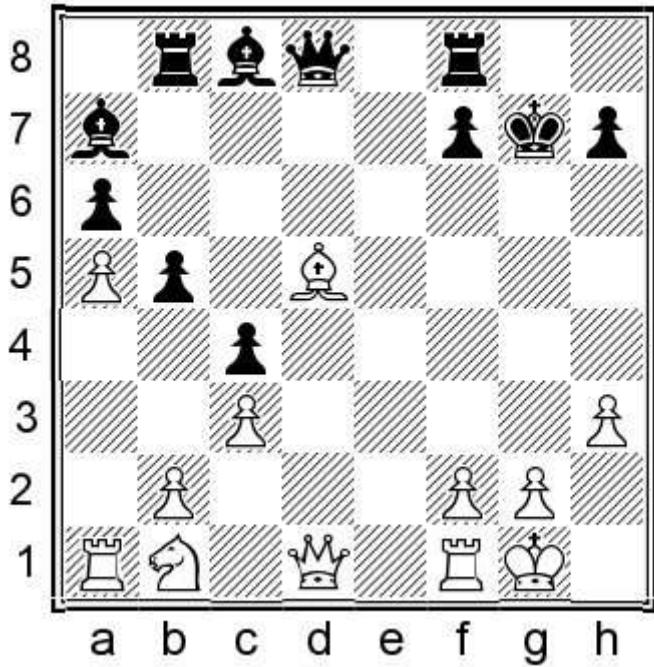


Position after: 13...exd4!

The point.

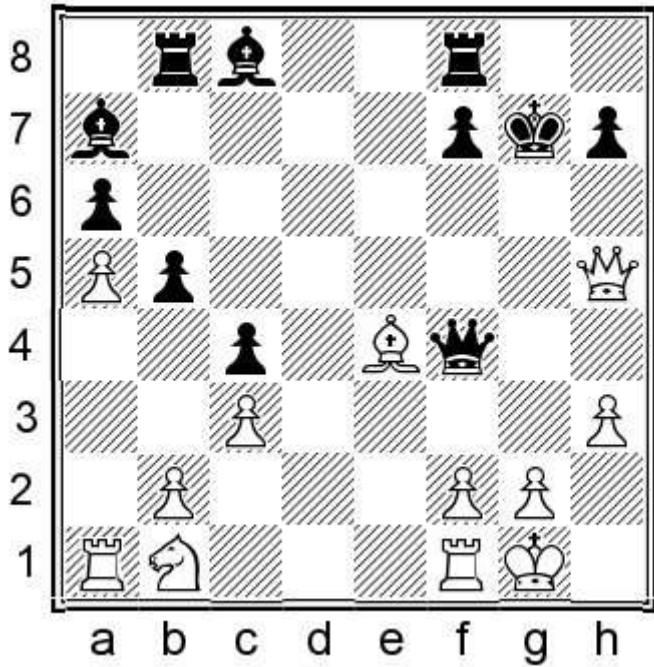
14.Bxe4

A) 14.Nxd4 Nxd4 15.Bxe4 d5 16.Bxd4 This position has been reached 3 times. 16...c5! A remarkable moment: White's bishops are under attack simultaneously in the center. 17.Bxg7! Best. White gains a pawn and destroy the kingside in exchange for losing the bishop pair. 17...Kxg7 18.Bxd5 c4!



Position after: 18...c4!

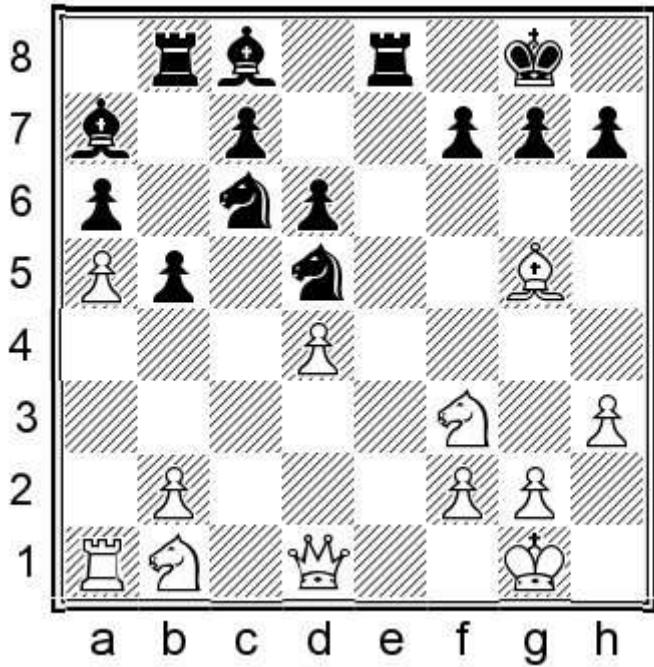
This natural move is a novelty: Black opens the diagonal for his bishop, not allowing White to close it by means of 19.c4, as happened in Zhigalko – Grischuk, Kemer 2007. 19.Qh5 Definitely the most challenging-looking move. 19...Qf6! 20.Be4 [20.Nd2 Qf5! also leads to interesting play. For example: 21.Qf3! Rd8 22.Qg3+ Qg6 23.Qe5+ Qf6 24.Qxf6+ Kxf6 25.Ne4+ Ke5!?,] 20...Qf4!!



Position after: 20...Qf4!!

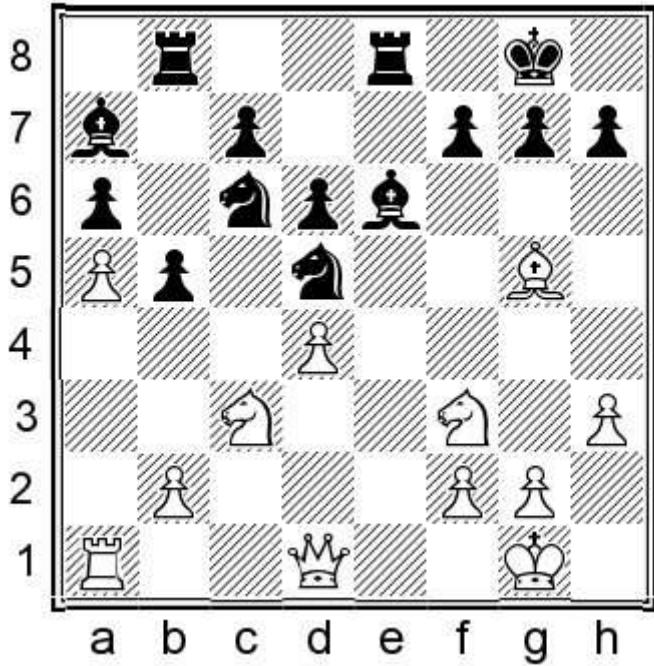
A super-strong move. It turns out that Black can ignore the “lethal” threat. White should be careful here already, as it’s not only Black’s king in danger any more... 21.Qxh7+ Kf6 22.g4!!=

B) 14.cxd4 Qe8! 15.Re1 [And now the tempting 15.Qc2? is well-met by 15...Nb4! 16.Qxe4 Qxe4 17.Bxe4 f5µ gaining back the material with dividends.] 15...Nf6 16.Bg5 Nxd5™ 17.Rxe8 Rxe8



Position after: 17...Rxe8

Black gives away the queen in return for a fantastic blockade on d5 and nice piece coordination. 18.Nc3 Be6 [18...Ncb4!?]

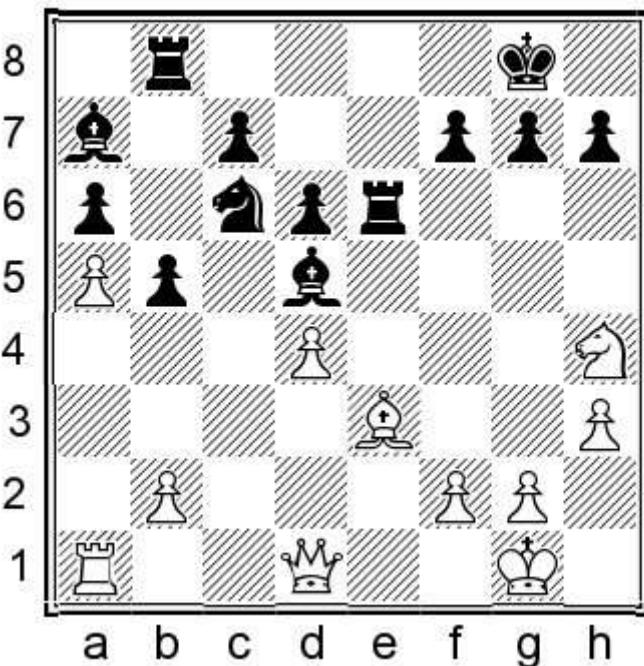


Position after: 18...Be6

B1) 19.Qb3!? Ncb4! 20.Nxd5 [20.Re1 Ne3! is a nice move.] 20...Nxd5 21.Bd2 h6 22.Re1 c5!∞

B2) 19.Qd2 was Shashikant – Puranik, Pune 2016. Now instead of 19...f6, Black could have tried 19...b4!∞

B3) 19.Nxd5 Bxd5 20.Be3 Re6!? 21.Nh4

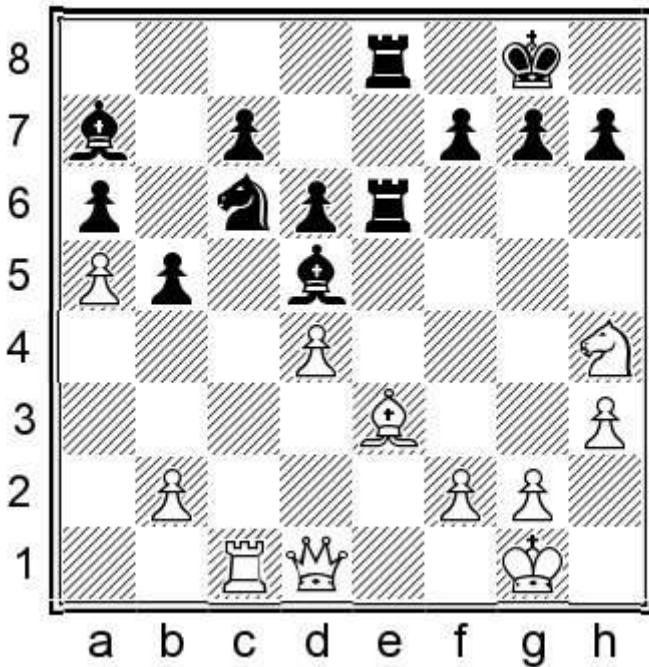


Position after: 21.Nh4

A novelty according to what I had prepared for the book originally. I faced this in the World Rapid Championship but I was on a 4-game losing streak already, so my play was pretty questionable. [21.Qd2 h6 22.Ne1 Rbe8 23.Rc1 Rg6©; 21.Rc1 Nxa5 22.Rxc7 Bb6 23.Rd7 Nc4 24.Bf4 Rf6 25.Bg3 Nxb2 26.Qb1 Nc4 27.Ng5 g6∞]

B3.1) I saw that 21...Ne7 would have been solid, but I wanted to break the streak, so I stupidly pushed. 22.Bg5 [22.Rc1 c6©] 22...Re8 23.Bxe7 R8xe7 24.Nf5 Re8 25.Ne3 Bb7,,

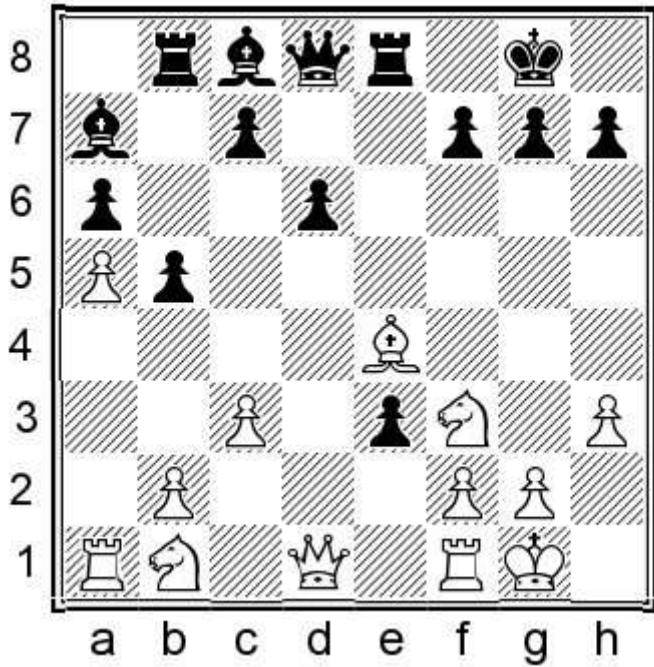
B3.2) 21...Rbe8?! 22.Rc1



Position after: 22.Rc1

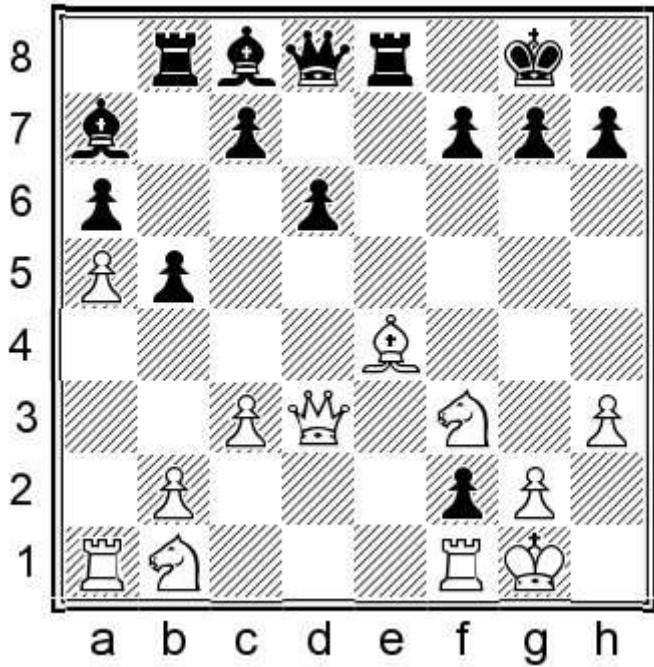
22...g6! was still more or less fine, so as to cover the h5-square and open the back rank. 23.Nf3 Bxf3 24.Qxf3 Nxd4 25.Qd1 [25.Bxd4? Bxd4 26.Rxc7? Rf6–+] 25...c5 26.Bxd4 cxd4 27.b4∞

C) 14.Bxc6?! Taking the piece for ‘free’? Why not? I encountered the move last summer in a decisive last round game at the Biel MTO. 14...dxe3 15.Bxe4 Re8!



Position after: 15...Re8!

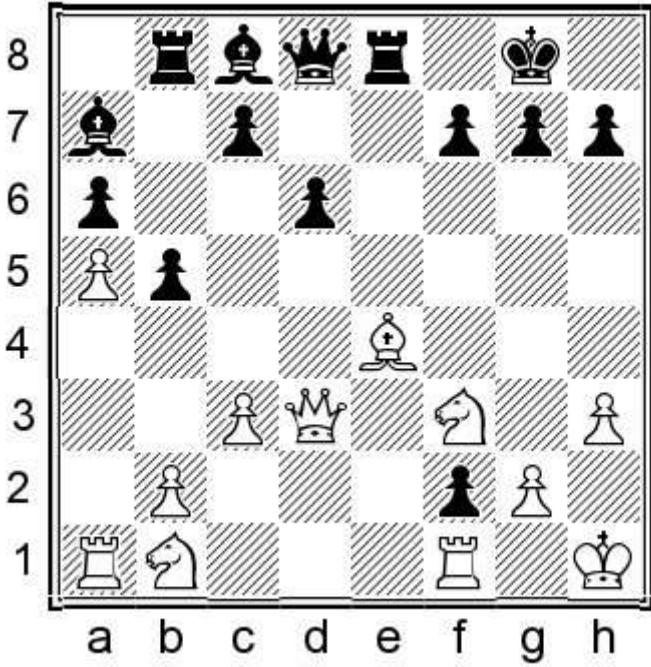
My novelty over the game Ismagambetov, A (2528) – Shirov, A (2684) Moscow 2019, where 15...d5 was played. 16.Qd3?! Logical, but wrong. The main problem is that the queen occupies a possible retreat square for White's bishop. [16.Qc2 Best. 16...exf2+ 17.Kh1 Qf6 Black has three pawns for his knight, and the one on f2 is especially nasty to deal with. 18.Nbd2 and now Black gets nice play after both 18...Be3 and 18...d5.] 16...exf2+



Position after: 16...exf2+

C1) 17.Rxf2 d5 18.Bxh7+ Kh8 19.Qc2 [19.Bf5? leads to disaster after 19...Qf6 20.Bxc8 Re1+ 21.Kh2 Bxf2 22.Nxe1 Qe5!+-+] 19...g6 20.Bxg6 fxg6 21.Qxg6 Bxf2+ 22.Kxf2 Re6 The position already favours Black a little, according to the engines.

C2) 17.Kh1?! Obvious, but inaccurate.



Position after: 17.Kh1?!

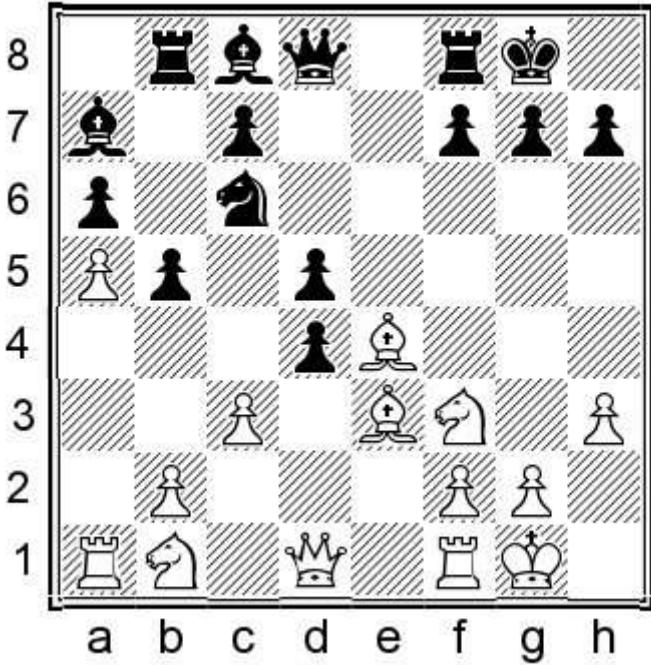
17...d5! I missed this very strong move. Instead, as in Sethuraman – Erdos, Biel MTO 2021, I played 17...Qf6?!, which is not ideal. The main idea of the text move is that after

C2.1) 18.Bxh7+ Kh8 19.Bf5? White loses to: 19...Re3! 20.Qc2 Rxf3! 21.gxf3 Qf6!–+

C2.2) 18.Bxd5 Be6 19.c4 [19.Be4 Bc4–+] 19...c6 is hardly convincing.

C2.3) 18.Qxd5 we have 18...Qe7! and White is struggling in all lines. 19.Nbd2 [19.Bc2 Bb7 20.Qf5 g6 21.Qg4 Rbd8! 22.Nbd2 Qe2 23.Bd1 Qe3–+] 19...Bb7 20.Qxb7! Rxb7 21.Bxb7 Rb8μ

14...d5



Position after: 14...d5

15.Bxh7+!

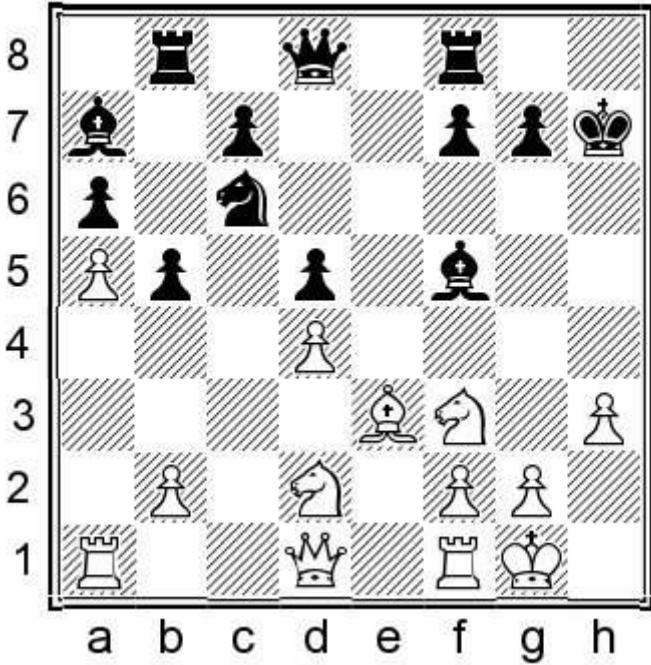
A) 15.Nxd4 Nxd4 16.Bxd4 is a transposition to 14.Nxd4

B) 15.Bg5 f6 16.Qb3 Kh8 17.Bxd5 Ne7 18.Be4 fxg5 19.Nxg5 Qe8! is another exciting line.

15...Kxh7 16.cxd4!

A very positional approach and still unplayed, probably the reason why it hasn't gained too much popularity. White locks in our Ark bishop and we are doomed to a passive situation. I normally don't mind defending slightly inferior positions, but I don't feel it's proper to have this as the main recommendation for our book.

16...Bf5 17.Nbd2!



Position after: 17.Nbd2!

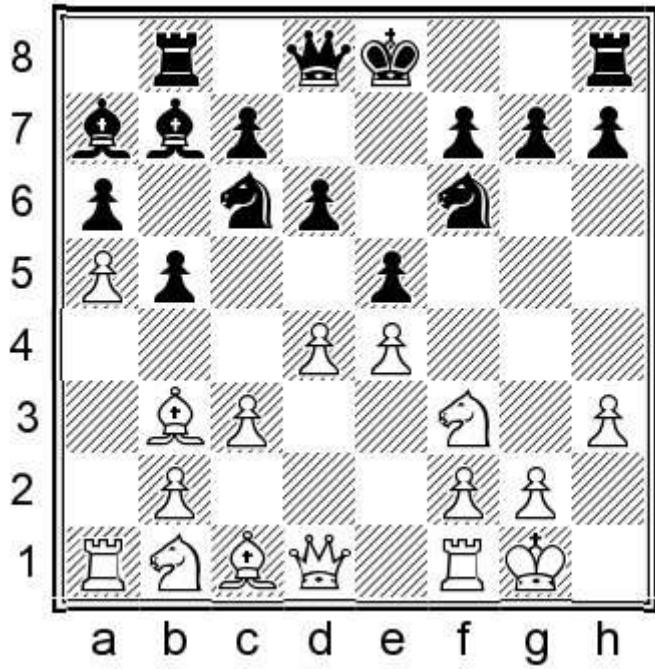
17...Kg8 18.Nb3 Re8 19.Rc1

and White has a small but lasting edge, if played accurately.

f) 11.h3 Bb7 12.Re1

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.a5 Ba7 11.h3 Bb7!?

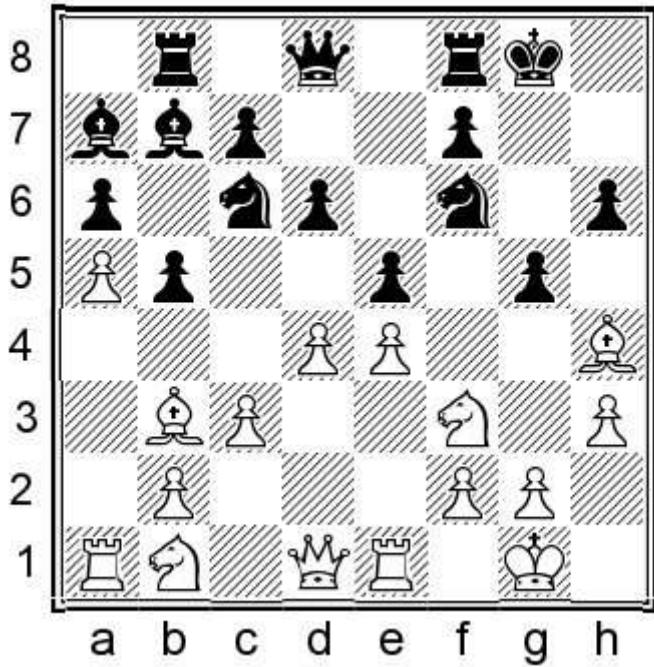
This has become the most topical move recently. At first I was skeptical, but it has proved to be a good, trusted weapon for Black in practice too.



Position after: 11...Bb7!?

12.Re1 0-0 13.Be3

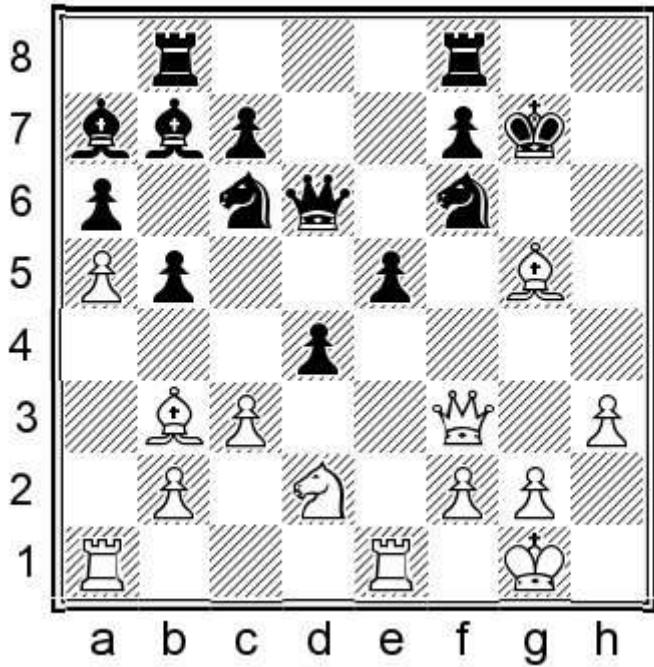
13.Bg5 h6 14.Bh4 g5



Position after: 14...g5

A) After the typical sacrifice, Black seems to be fine: 15.Nxg5 hxg5 16.Bxg5 exd4 17.e5 dxe5 18.Qf3 Kg7

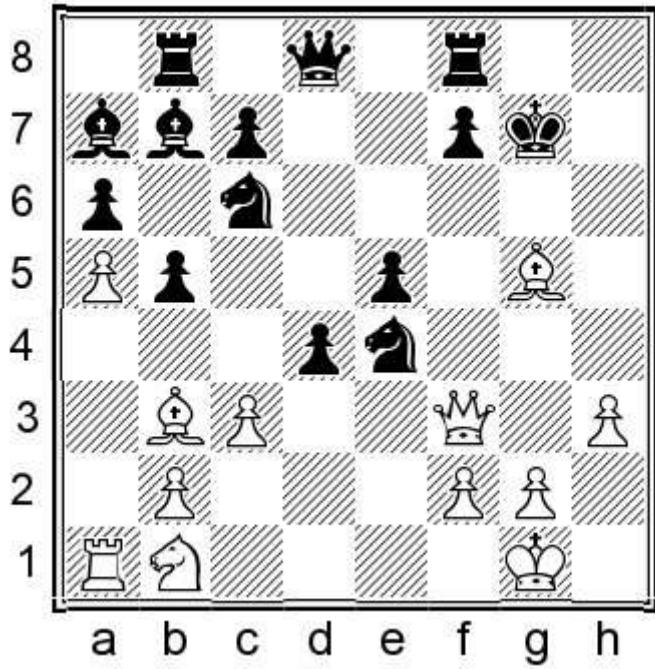
A1) 19.Nd2 Qd6!



Position after: 19...Qd6!

20.Qg3 [20.Ne4 Nxe4 21.Rxe4 f5 22.Rh4 Qg6 23.Bh6+ Kf6 24.Bd5 Ke7 25.Bxf8+ Rxf8–+] 20...Nh5 21.Bf6+ Kxf6 22.Ne4+ Ke7 23.Qh4+ Nf6 24.Nxd6 cxd6µ Black's king is safe and now it's his turn to attack with ...Rh8 followed by ...Rbg8.

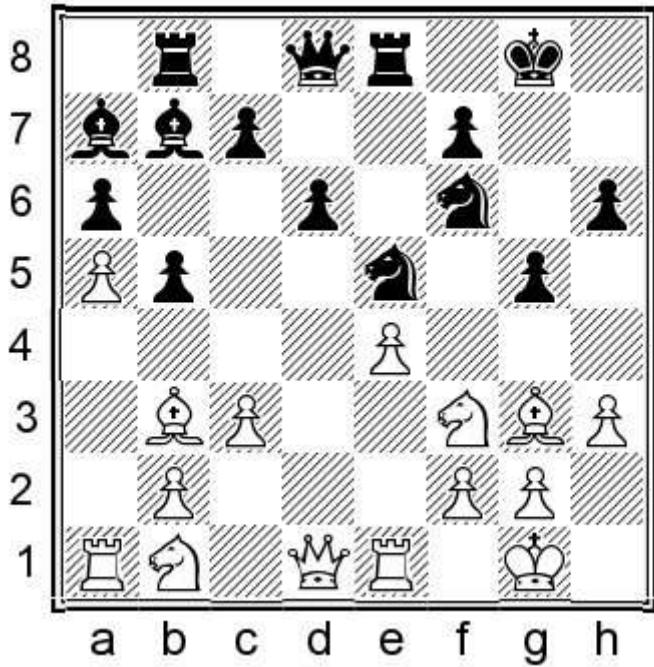
A2) 19.Re4! Nxe4



Position after: 19...Nxe4

20.Bxd8 Nxd8 21.Qg4+ Kf6 22.Qh4+ Kg6 23.Qg4+=

B) 15.Bg3 Re8 16.dxe5 Nxe5

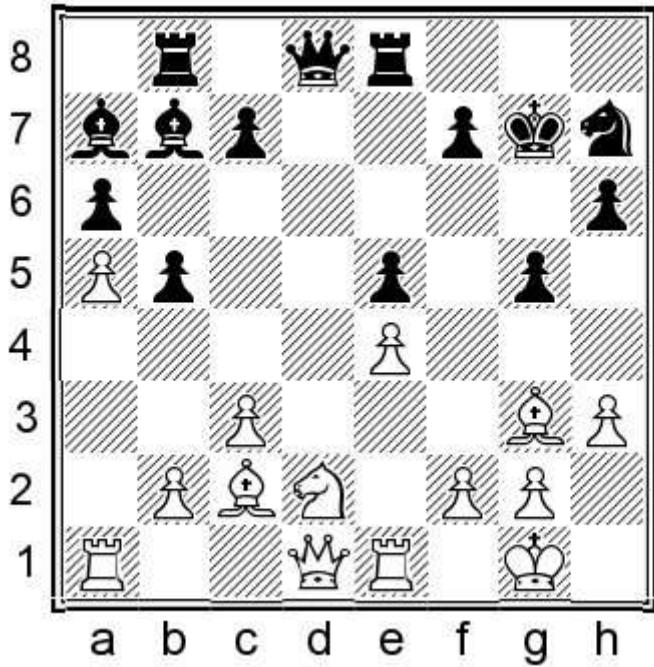


Position after: 16...Nxe5

B1) 17.Bc2!? Nh5!? [17...Nc4 was seen in Fedoseev, V (2704) – Pichot, A (2628) Riga 2021.] 18.Nxe5 The only fearful line. 18...Nxg3 19.Ng4 Nxe4 20.Qf3 Kg7 21.Rxe4 [21.Bxe4? d5–+] 21...Bxe4 22.Bxe4 d5 23.Nd2 dxе4 24.Nxe4 White has compensation but Black can defend. 24...Re6 25.Rd1 Qf8 26.Ng3 Rd8,,

B2) 17.Nxe5 dxе5 18.Nd2 Kg7 It seems like Black is safe here, e.g.

B2.1) 19.Bc2 Nh7!?

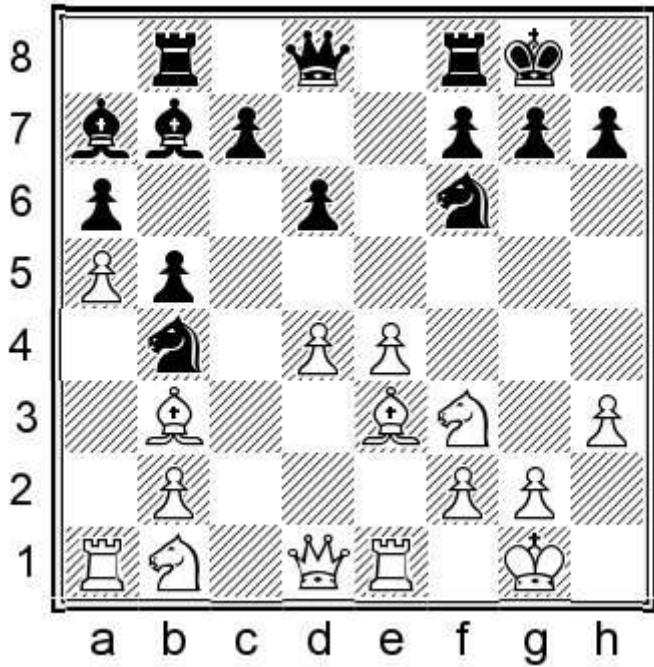


Position after: 19...Nh7!?

This looks a bit slow, but works just fine. [19...Qe7 20.Qe2 would just transpose to 19.Qe2.] 20.Qe2 Nf8 21.Rad1 Ng6 22.Nc4 [22.Nf1 Qe7 23.Bh2 Nf4] 22...Qe7 23.Ne3 Bxe3 24.Qxe3 Rbd8 25.f3 Nf4 26.Qa7 [26.Bf2 Bc8=] 26...Bc8=

B2.2) 19.Qe2 Qe7 20.Bc2 Rbd8 21.Rad1 Bc8 22.Nf1 c6 23.Ne3 Bb8=

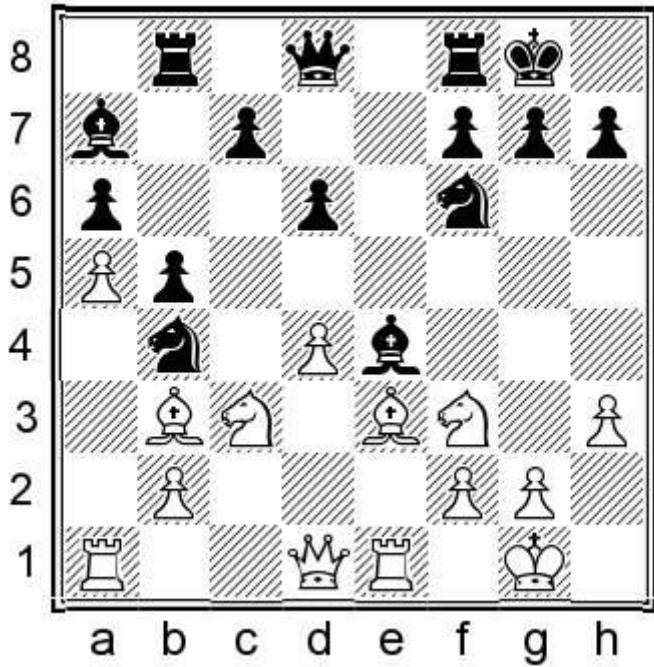
13...exd4 14.cxd4 Nb4



Position after: 14...Nb4

15.d5

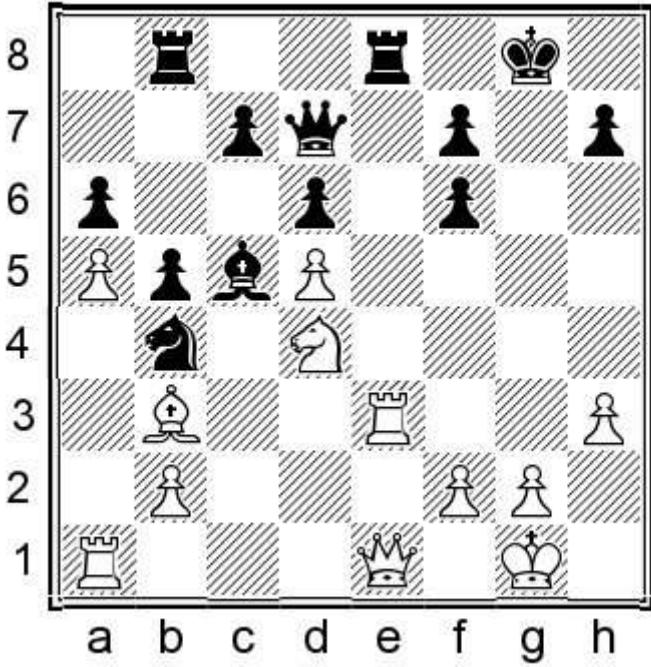
A) 15.Nc3 Bxe4! The proof of the pudding is in the eating.



Position after: 15...Bxe4!

A1) 16.Nxe4 Nxe4

A1.1) 17.d5? was played in the only available game in tournament practice. This proved to be a mistake after the elegant: 17...Bc5! 18.Bd4 Re8 19.Re3 Qd7 20.Qe1 Nf6! Now Whiite tried 21.Qd2 Rxe3 22.Bxe3 Ne4 23.Qd1 Bxe3 24.fxe3 Nc5--+ in Kevlishvili, R (2451) – Firouzja, A (2669) Reykjavik 2019. But 21.Bxf6 would have caused a few more problems: 21...gxf6 22.Nd4!

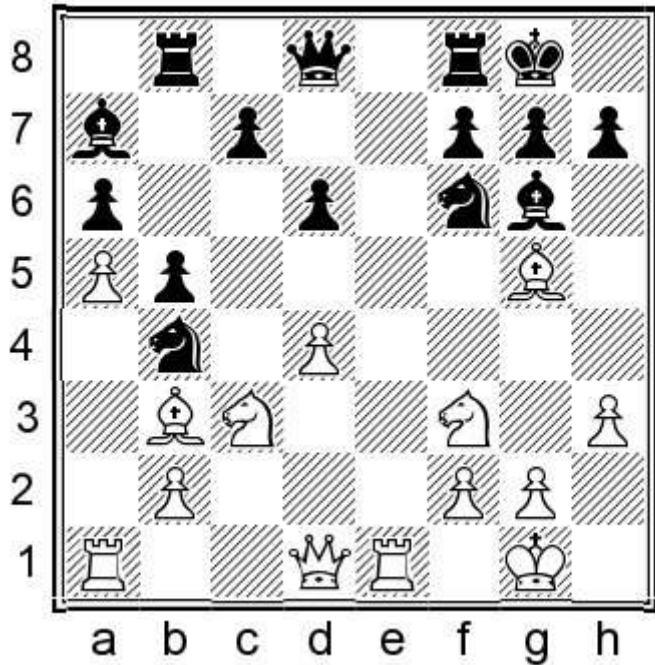


Position after: 22.Nd4!

[22.Rxe8+ Rxe8 23.Qd2 Qf5μ] 22...Bxd4 23.Rg3+ Kh8 24.Qxb4 Re4μ

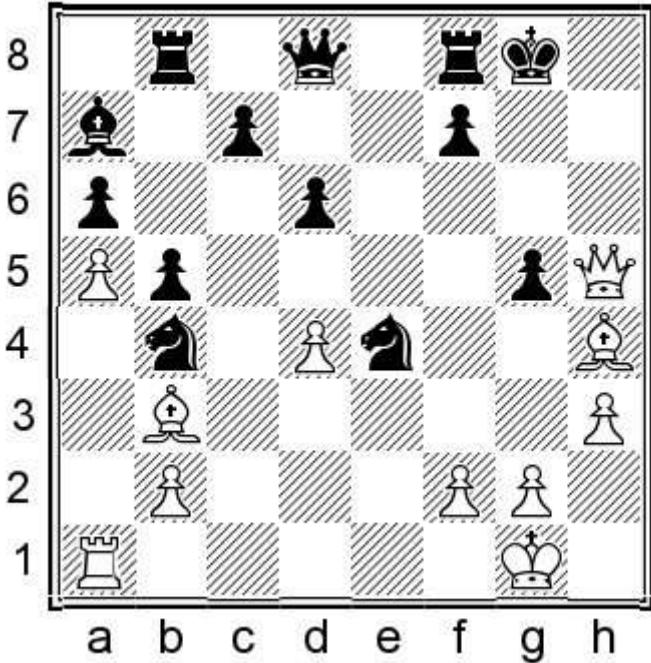
A1.2) 17.Rc1 Rc8! 18.Bc2! d5 19.Ne5 c6 20.Bb1 and White has some compensation due to the vulnerable b4-knight and the slightly passive a7-bishop. e.g. 20...f6 21.Nf3 f5 22.Bd2 Qd6 23.g3!?

A2) 16.Bg5!? Bg6



Position after: 16...Bg6

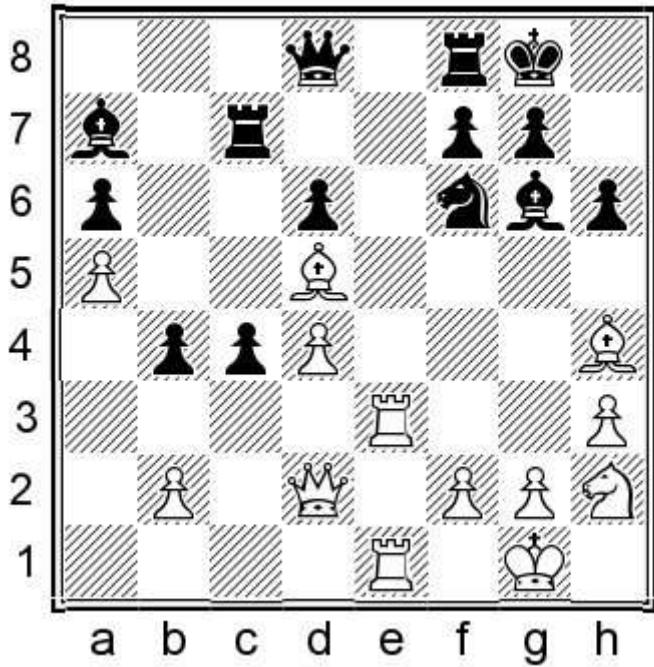
A2.1) 17.Ne4 may lead to a quick draw. 17...Bxe4 18.Rxe4 h6 19.Bh4 [19.Bxf6 Qxf6 20.Qd2 d5! 21.Rg4 Nc6 22.Bxd5 Ne7=] 19...g5 20.Nxg5 Nxe4 21.Qh5 hxg5



Position after: 21...hxg5

22.Re1 [22.Qg6+ Kh8 23.Qh6+ Kg8 24.Qg6+ Kh8=] 22...d5
 23.Rxe4 dxe4 24.Qg6+ Kh8 25.Qh6+ Kg8 26.Qg6+ [26.Bxg5?? doesn't work. 26...Qxd4 27.Bf6 Qxf2+ 28.Kh2 Qg1+ 29.Kg3 Bf2+ 30.Kg4 Qxg2+-+] 26...Kh8= is repetition.

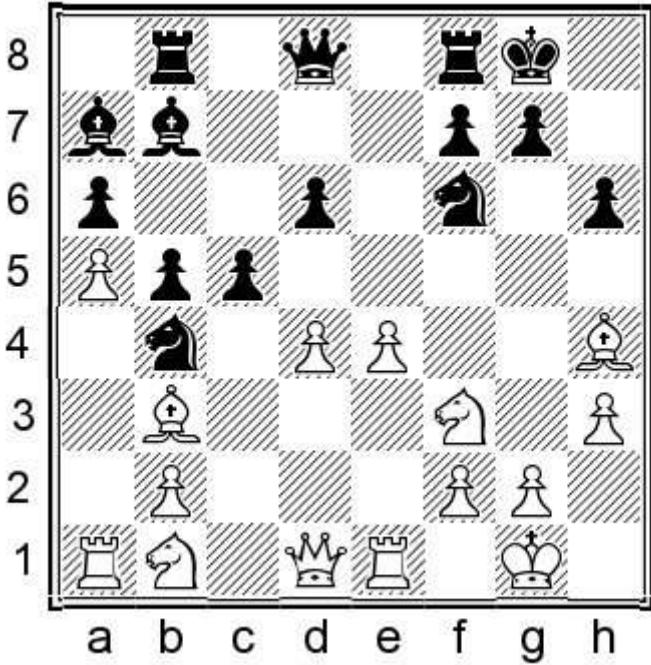
A2.2) 17.Nd5 Nbx d5 18.Bxd5 c5 19.Qd2 [19.Nh4 c4 secures the d3-square for the bishop, thus forcing White to take on g6. 20.Nxg6 hxg6 21.h4 Qd7 22.Bxf6 Qf5!∞; Black is in time to meet 19.Nh2? with 19...cxd4 20.Ng4 d3 21.Qf3 Bd4!] 19...c4 20.Re3 Rc8 21.Rae1 [21.Bb7 Rb8=] 21...h6 22.Bh4 [22.Bxf6 Qxf6 23.Re7 Bb8∞] 22...Rc7 23.Nh2 b4!



Position after: 23...b4!

A sophisticated way to find counterplay. 24.Ng4 Nxd5! This queen sacrifice was prepared far in advance. 25.Bxd8 Rxd8 26.Rg3 [26.Re8+? Rxe8 27.Rxe8+ Kh7 28.Ne3 c3μ] 26...Kh7© Black's compensation is very real with the bishop pair and the potential passer.

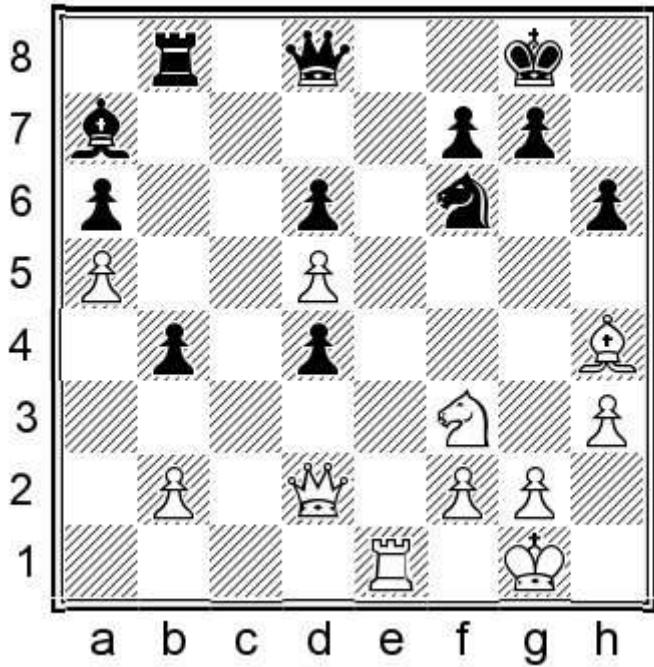
B) 15.Bg5 h6 16.Bh4 c5



Position after: 16...c5

B1) 17.Qd2?! is not good, but it's tricky. 17...Re8 18.Nc3 c4 19.Bc2 Nxc2 20.Qxc2 g5 21.Nxg5 hxg5 22.Bxg5 b4 23.e5? Instead, 23.Nd5 was the only move. 23...dxe5 24.dxe5 Qd3 Here 24...bxc3 is probably more convincing. 25.Qxd3 cxd3 26.Bxf6 bxc3 27.Ra4 was creative in Balakrishnan, P (2507) – Hong, A (2474) Saint Louis 2021 but after the spectacular 27...d2! 28.Rd1 Rxe5! 29.Rh4 [29.Bxe5 c2–+] 29...Bxf2+! 30.Kxf2 Rf5+–+ it would have failed immediately.

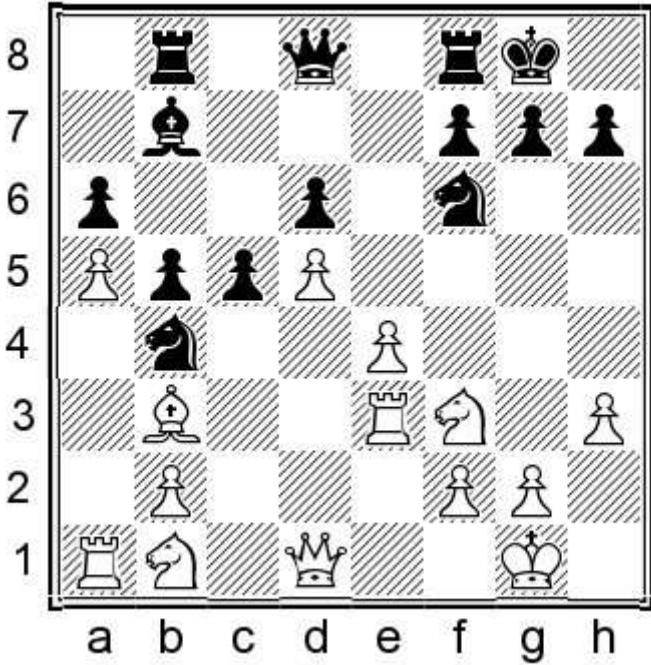
B2) 17.Nc3 Re8 18.Nd5 Nbxd5 An attempt to improve over Jakovenko, D (2720) – Inarkiev, E (2681) Odessa 2008. 19.Bxd5 Bxd5 20.exd5 Rxe1+ 21.Qxe1 cxd4 22.Qd2 b4!? 23.Re1!



Position after: 23.Re1!

This leads to some exciting complications. 23...Rb5 24.Bxf6 Qxf6 25.Re8+ Kh7 26.Ra8 Rb7 27.Qc2+ [27.Qd3+ g6 28.Qxa6 Rc7 29.Qd3 Qf4] 27...d3! 28.Qxd3+ g6 29.Qc2 Re7 30.Qc8 Re1+ 31.Kh2 Qf4+ 32.g3 Rh1+! 33.Kg2 Rg1+! 34.Kh2 Rh1+ with a draw by repetition.

15...Bxe3 16.Rxe3 c5!



Position after: 16...c5!

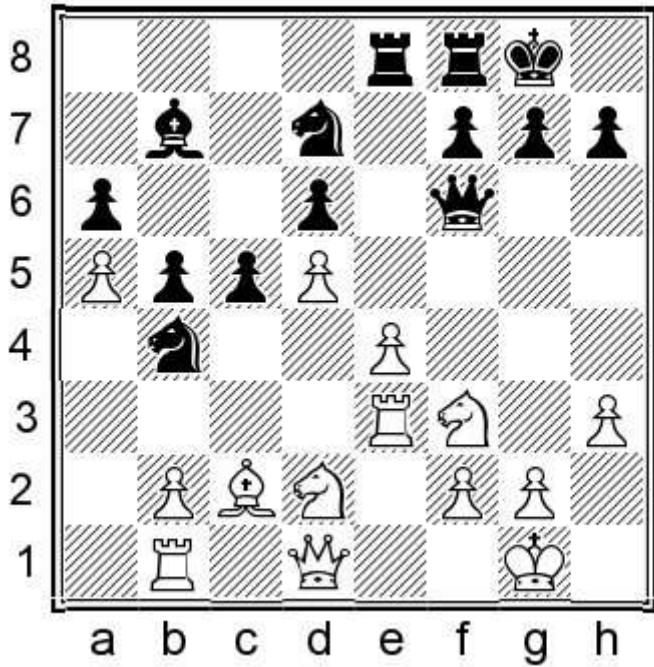
This position is hard to assess, but as the example lines suggest, Black should be able to organize his counterplay in time.

17.Na3!

This appears to be the best continuation: White intends to trade his passive knight via c2.

A) 17.Nc3 Nd7 18.Ne2 Re8 19.Qd2 Qf6 20.Ng3 g6 21.Rae1 Qg7 would have been more cautious. 22.R3e2 [22.Qc3 Rbc8!∞ ... 23.Nh2 Ne5 24.f4 Ned3] 22...Rbd8∞

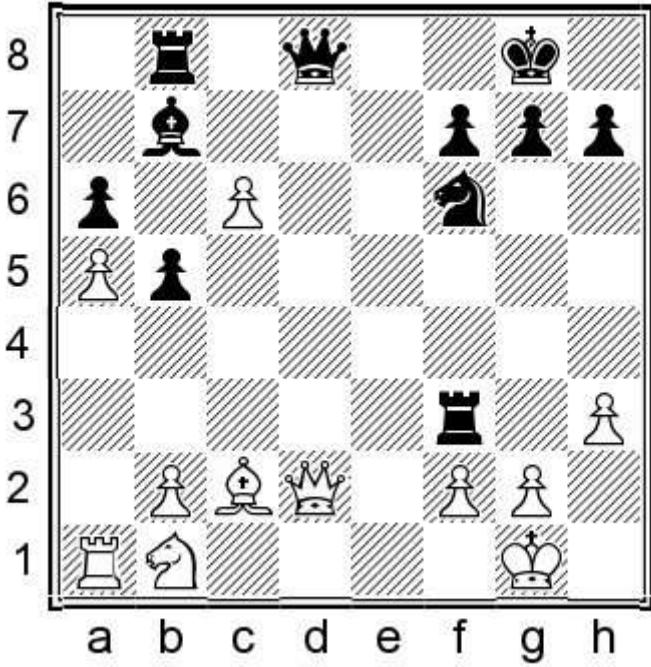
B) 17.Nbd2?! is met by 17...Nd7 18.Bc2 Qf6 19.Rb1 Rbe8



Position after: 19...Rbe8

and Black gets an optimal set-up. 20.Nf1 Ne5 21.N3d2 g6 22.Ng3 Re7 23.Rc3 Rfe8 24.Qf1 c4µ Black went on to win an instructive game in Antoniewski – Pavasovic, Austria 2007.

C) 17.dxc6?! En passant doesn ‘t bring the desired result. 17...Nxc6 The a5-pawn remains weak. 18.Qd2 Re8 19.Bc2 [19.Nc3 Nxa5] 19...d5 20.exd5 Rxe3 Now 21.Qxe3 [21.dxc6 Rxf3!]



Position after: 21...Rxf3!

was my idea, e.g. 22.Qxd8+ Rxd8 23.cxb7 Rf4] 21...Nxd5 22.Qd2 Ndb4 is the way according according to the engine. 23.Be4 h6 24.Nc3 Qxd2 25.Nxd2 Ne5μ

17...Re8

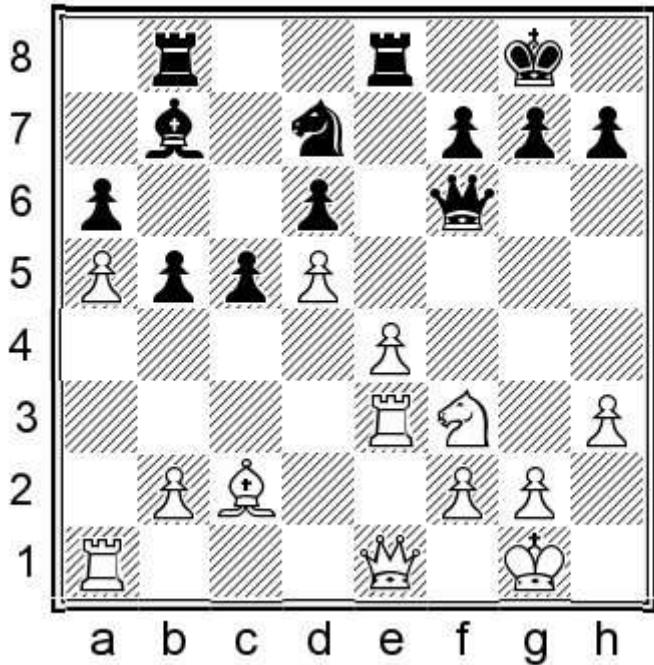
The safer way to treat black's position.

Taking the pawn is also possible: 17...Qxa5 18.Nc2 Qb6 19.Nxb4 cxb4 20.Qd2 [20.Qd4!?] 20...a5 21.Nd4© The position remains complicated, but I would rather avoid it as White has dangerous compensation.

18.Qe1 Nd7

18...Nh5 19.Nc2 Nxc2 20.Bxc2 Qf6 21.Rb1 Nf4 22.h4!? [22.Qd2 is also complicated.] 22...Re7 23.g3 Ng6 24.Qd2 Rbe8,,

19.Nc2 Nxc2 20.Bxc2 Qf6



Position after: 20...Qf6

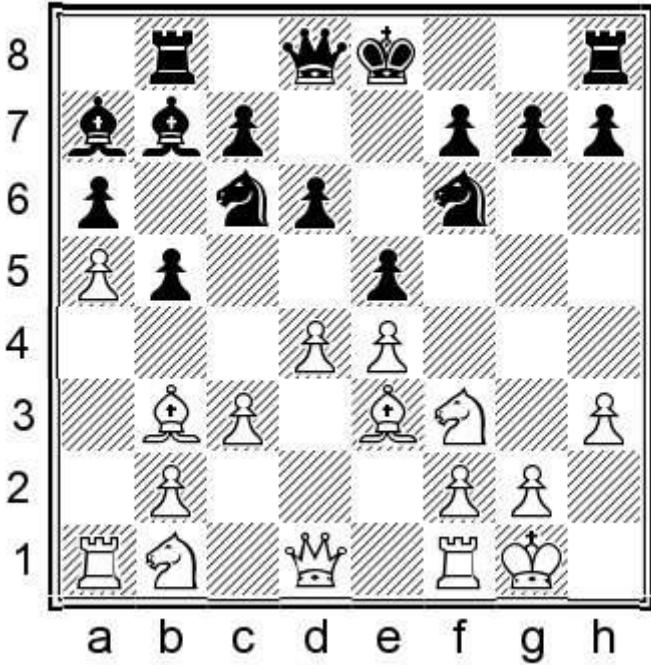
A typical way to develop as the black queen is very active here.

21.b3 Re7 22.Rd1 Rbe8

Black is fully mobilised, so we should be more or less ok.

g) 11.h3 Bb7 12.Be3 Nxe4 13.--

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.a5 Ba7 11.h3 Bb7!? 12.Be3



Position after: 12.Be3

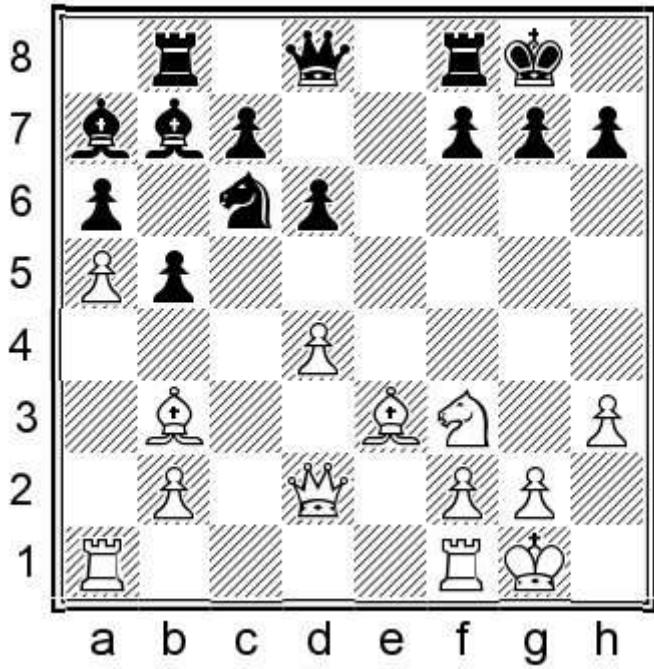
12...Nxe4!

This is the idea and it works tactically.

13.d5

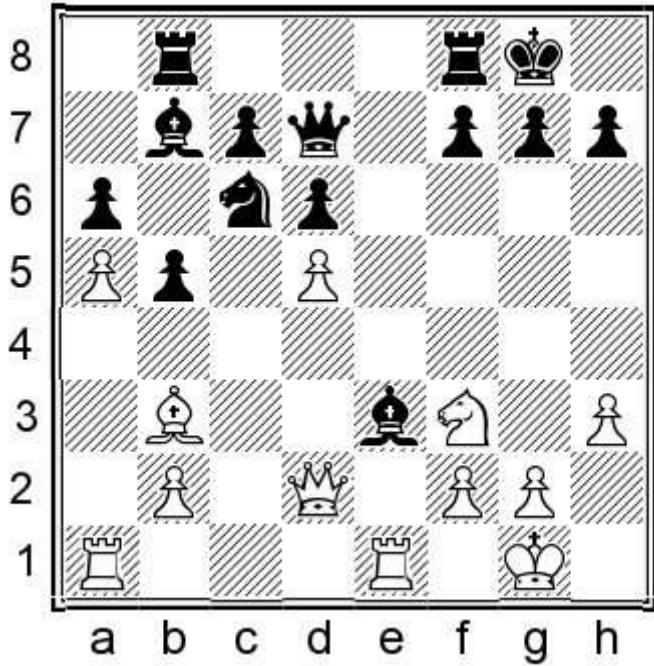
The most logical try: White wins a piece.

13.Nbd2 exd4 [13...Nxd2 14.Qxd2 0-0 15.dxe5 dxe5 16.Qxd8 Rbxd8 17.Bxa7 Nxa7 18.Nxe5 is a bit more pleasant for White. The world champion managed to squeeze out a victory after a long fight in Carlsen, M (2855) – Firouzja, A (2754) Stavanger 2021.] 14.cxd4 Nxd2 15.Qxd2 0-0



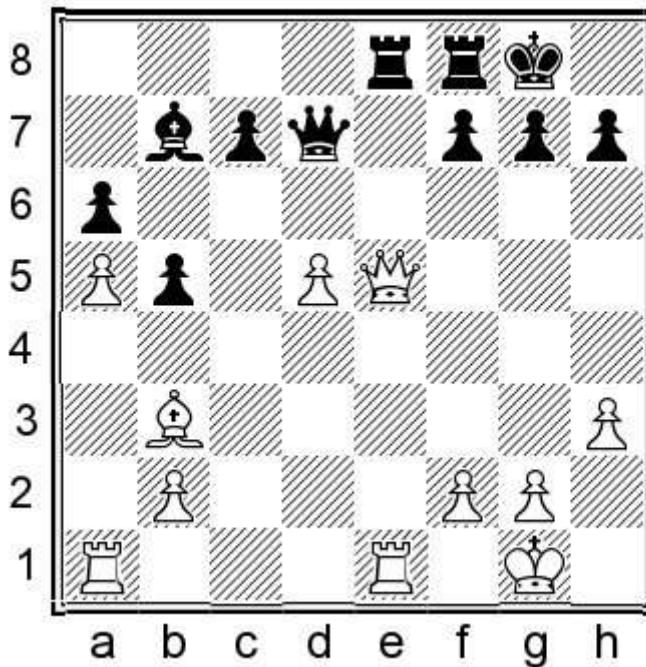
Position after: 15...0-0

16.Rfe1 [16.Rae1!? doesn't change much. 16...Qd7 17.d5 Bxe3 18.Rxe3 Ne7 19.Rfe1 see 16.Rfe1] 16...Qd7 17.d5 Bxe3



Position after: 17...Bxe3

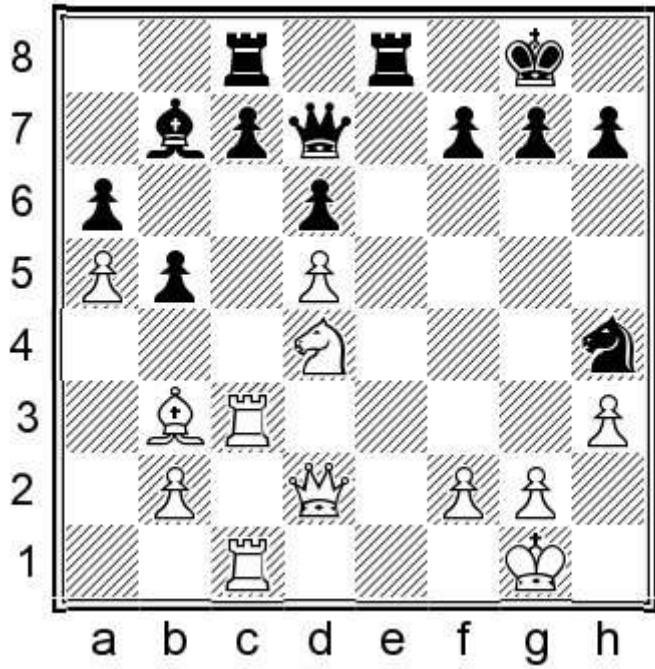
A) 18.Qxe3 Ne5 19.Nxe5 dxe5 20.Qxe5 Rbe8



Position after: 20...Rbe8

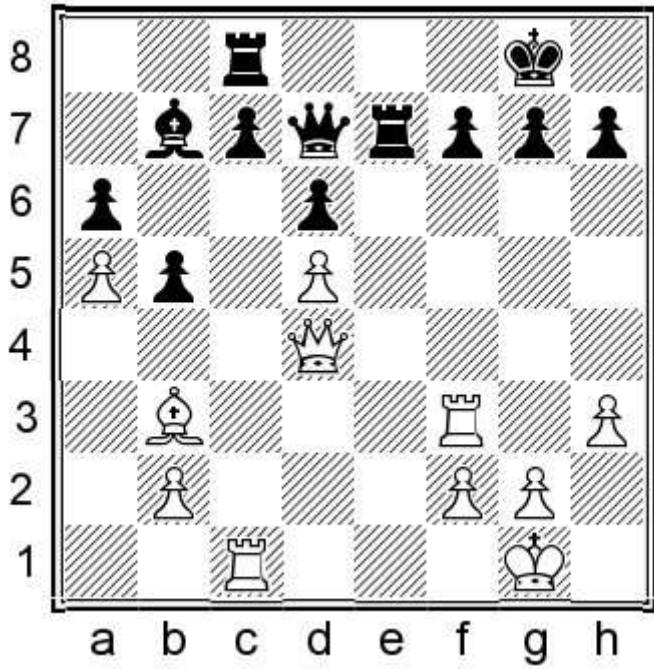
21.Qd4 Qd6 22.Qa7 Bxd5 23.Bxd5 Rxe1+ [23...Qxd5 24.Red1 Qa8 should be equal too – Black has many roads to Rome.] 24.Rxe1 Qxd5 25.Qxa6 h6=

B) 18.Rxe3 Ne7 19.Rae1 Nf5 20.Rc3 Rfe8 21.Rec1 Rbc8 22.Nd4 White has decent positional compensation. 22...Nh4!



Position after: 22...Nh4!

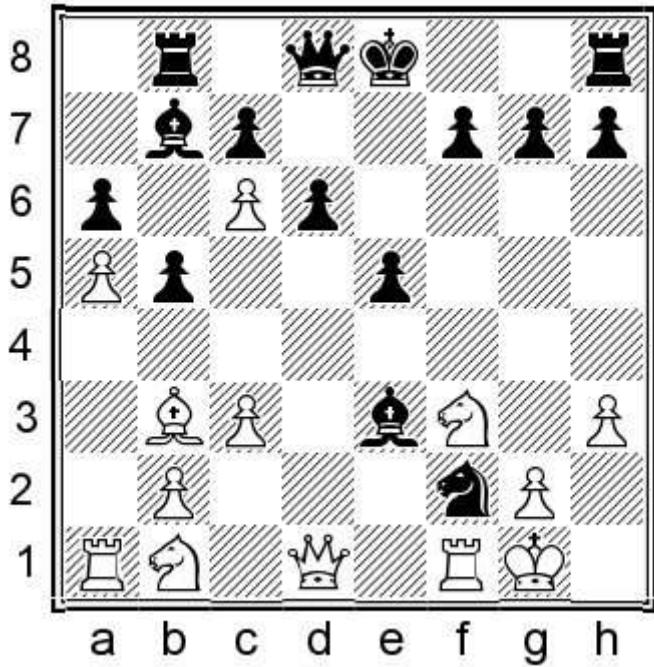
[22...Nxd4? 23.Qxd4 and now 24.Qa7 is going to hurt.] 23.Rg3 Nf5!? is a reasonable try. 24.Nxf5 [24.Rgc3 Nh4=] 24...Qxf5 25.Rf3 Qd7 26.Qd4 Re7



Position after: 26...Re7

Black is a little passive, but we have an extra pawn. Play might continue: 27.Qa7 c5 28.dxc6 Rxc6 29.Rxc6 Bxc6 30.Qxd7 Rxd7 31.Rc3 Bb7 32.Bd5 Kf8 33.Bxb7 Rxb7 34.Rc6 Re7 35.Kf1 Re4 36.Rxd6 Rb4 37.Rxa6 Rxb2 38.Rb6 b4 39.a6 Ra2=

13...Bxe3 14.dxc6 Nxf2



Position after: 14...Nxf2

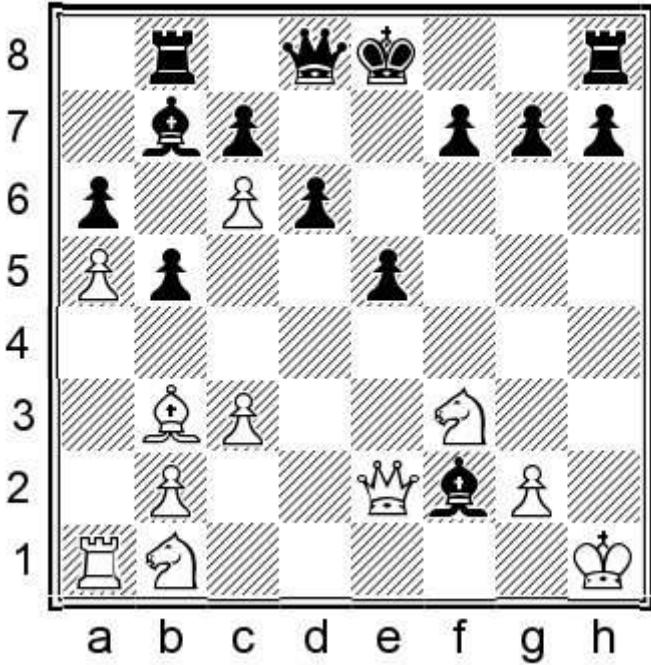
15.Qe2

15.Qd5? makes less sense: 15...Qf6! [15...0-0 can lead to repetition: 16.cxb7 Ne4+ 17.Kh2 Bf4+ 18.Kg1 Be3+ 19.Kh2 Bf4+ 20.Kg1 Be3+ ½ (20) Anton Guijarro, D (2675) – Grischuk, A (2777) chess24.com INT 2020.] 16.Rxf2 Bc8 and Black is better.

15...Nhx3+ 16.Kh1

16.Kh2? loses to 16...Bf4+ 17.g3 Bc8! 18.Nbd2 0-0 19.gxf4 Nxf4–+ as Black has too many pawns.

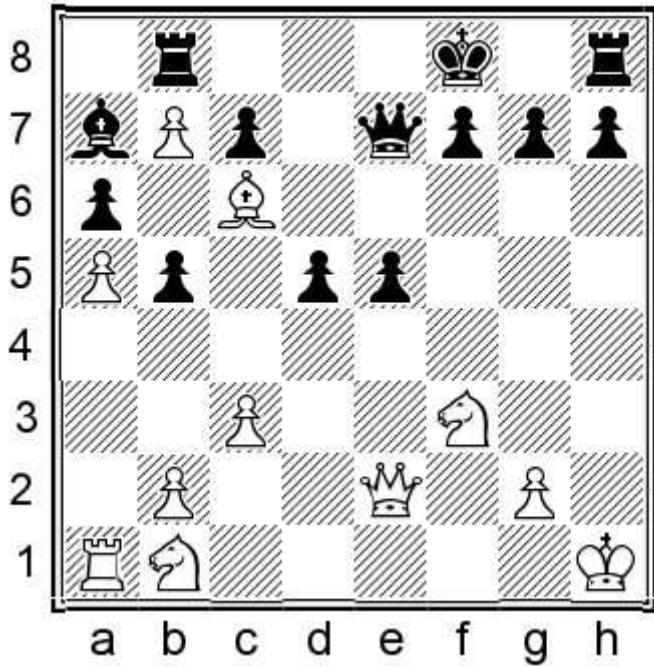
16...Nf2+ 17.Rxf2 Bxf2



Position after: 17...Bxf2

18.Qxf2

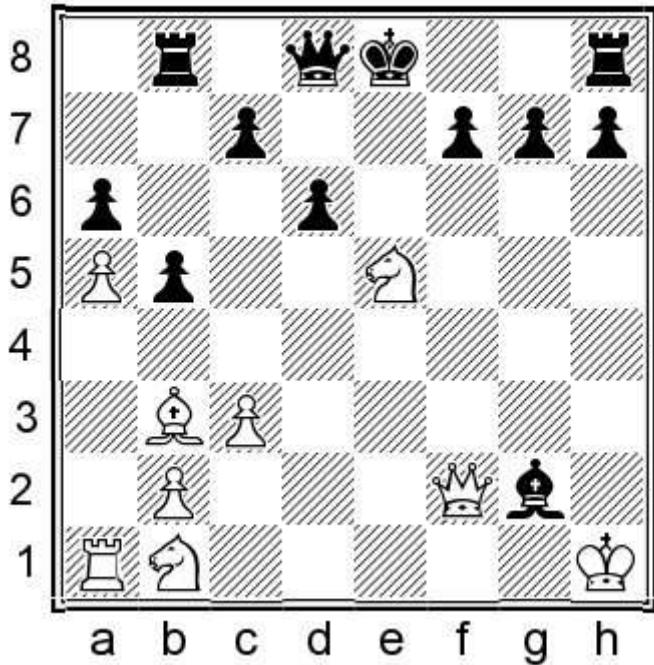
18.cxb7 Ba7 19.Bd5 Qd7! 20.Nd4™ [20.Qe4? was a mistake in Vachier Lagrave, M (2760) – Aronian, L (2781) Paris 2021: 20...f5! Chasing the queen away from control of the c6-square is essential. 21.Qh4 c6 22.Ba2 Qe7–+ Black is likely convert this material advantage.] 20...Qe7 21.Bc6+ Kf8 22.Nf3 d5!



Position after: 22...d5!

An important freeing move. 23.Qxe5 Qxe5 [23...Qe6!?] 24.Nxe5 Ke7! Black kicks out the pieces from c6 and the game should be drawish. 25.Bxb5 axb5 26.a6 Kd6 27.Nxf7+ Kc6 28.Ne5+ Kd6 29.Nf7+ Kc6 30.Nxh8 A logical try. [In Grischuk, A (2778) – Giri, A (2776) Zagreb 2021 White took the draw right away. 30.Ne5+ Kd6 31.Nf7+] 30...Rxh8 31.Nd2 d4 32.cxd4 Bxd4 33.Nf3 Ba7 34.Ne5+ Kb6=

18...Bxc6 19.Nxe5! Bxg2+!

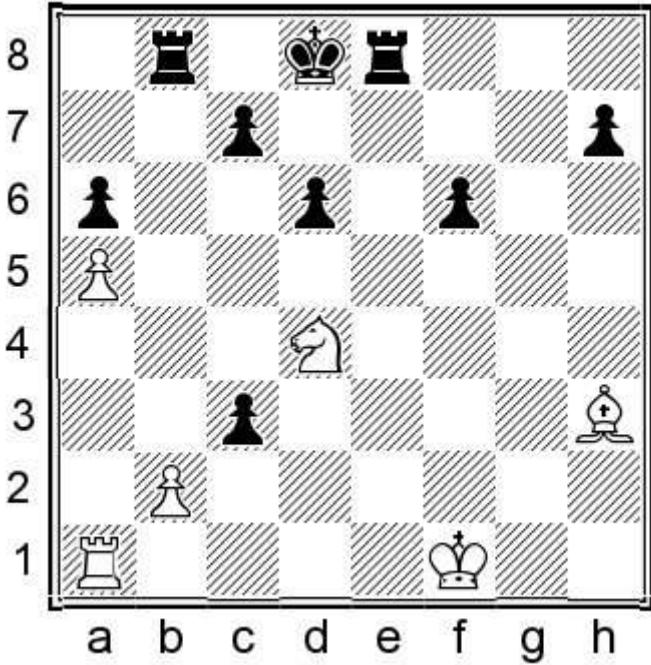


Position after: 19...Bxg2+!

A nice counter-sacrifice and necessary

20.Kg1!

20.Kxg2 This looks to be less challenging. 20...Qg5+ 21.Kf1 Qxe5 22.Qxf7+ Kd8 23.Be6 Qf6+ 24.Qxf6+ gxf6 25.Na3 Re8 26.Bh3 b4 27.Nc2 bxc3 28.Nd4!



Position after: 28.Nd4!

28...Ke7 29.Nc6+ Kf7 30.b4 Rb5 31.Bd7 Rg8 32.Re1©

20...0-0!?

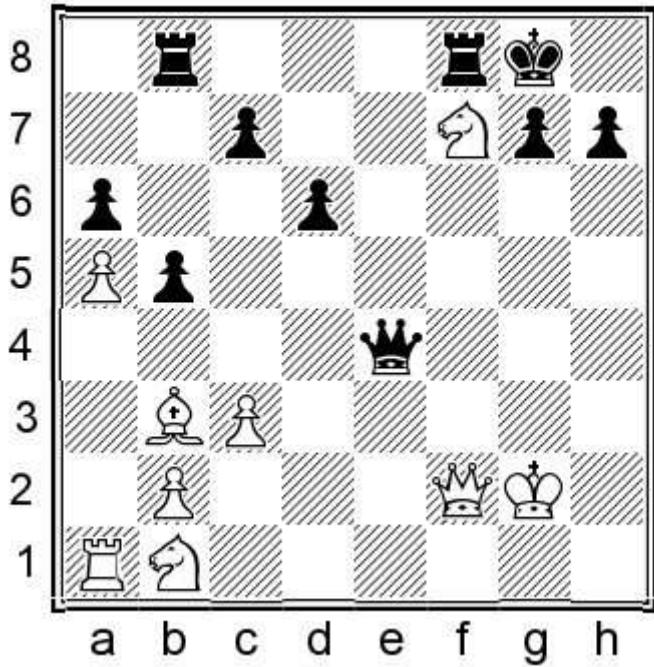
I slightly prefer this move-order.

20...Qf6 21.Nxf7 Qxf2+ 22.Kxf2 Rf8 23.Kxg2 Rxf7 24.Bxf7+ Kxf7 25.Nd2 has been encountered twice. 25...b4 25...Re8 was played in Duda, J (2738) – Vudit, S (2726) Krasnaya Polyana 2021 where White went on to win an instructive game. 26.c4! White should keep as many pawns as possibly. The position is equal, but there might occur some difficulties here in practice. Nihal, S (2655) – Arjun, K (2503) Riga 2021.

21.Nxf7 Qe7 22.Kxg2

22.Nd2 d5 23.Qxg2 Qe3+! 24.Kh1 Kxf7! Unusual complications favoring neither side and a draw is likely.

22...Qe4+!?

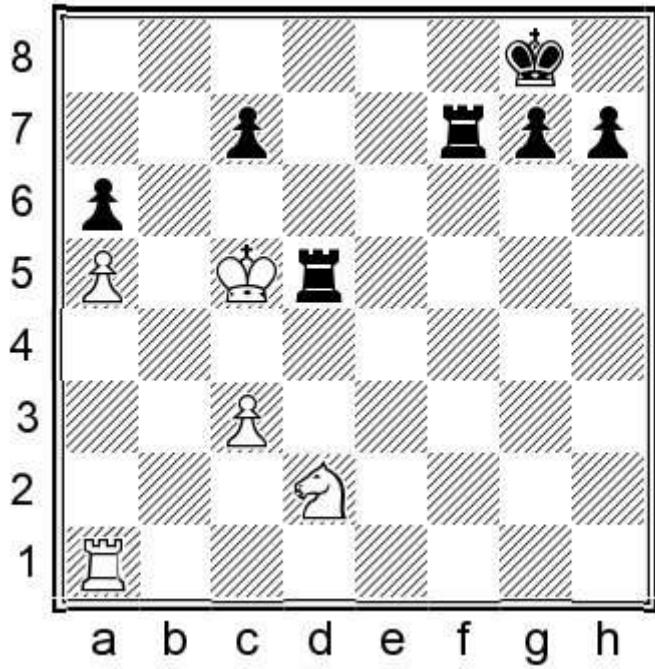


Position after: 22...Qe4+!?

This has been encountered only once, though it's my preferred solution here.

23.Kg1

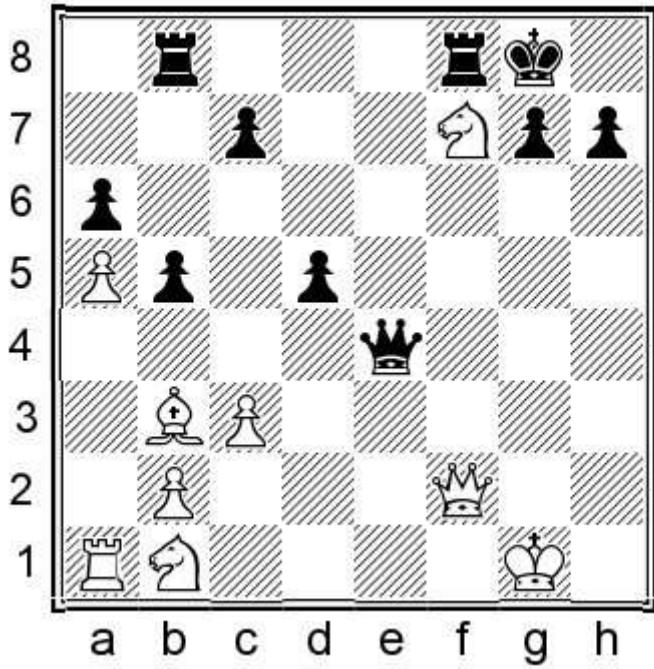
23.Qf3 Qxf3+ 24.Kxf3 b4! In comparison with the other line, Black manages to exchange one more pair of pawns, which reduces the risk factor in this endgame. 25.Nd2 bxc3 26.bxc3 Rxf7+ 27.Bxf7+ [27.Ke4 d5+! 28.Bxd5 Re8+ 29.Kd4 Rd8 30.Kc5 Rxd5+]



Position after: 30...Rxd5+!

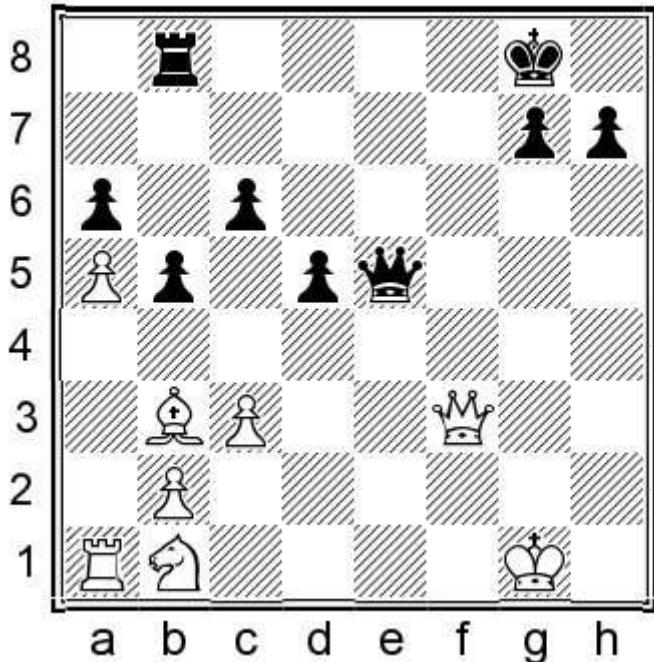
31.Kxd5 Rd7+ 32.Kc6 Rxd2 33.Kxc7 h5= is probably still a draw, but feels easier for Black.] 27...Kxf7 28.Ke4 Rb5 29.c4 Re5+ 30.Kd3 g5 was complex in Harvey, D (2351) – Pastukhov, I (2339) ICCF email 2018.

23...d5



Position after: 23...d5

24.Ng5!? Qe5 25.Nf3 Rxf3! 26.Qxf3 c6!



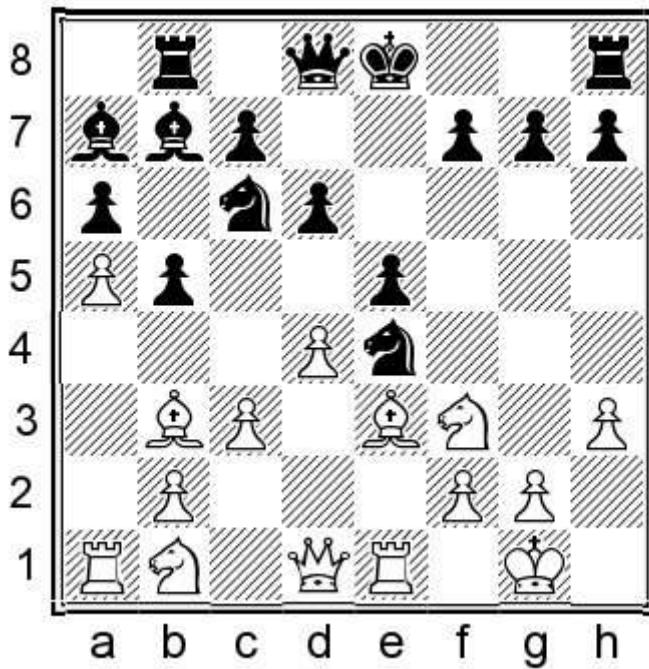
Position after: 26...c6!

It may seem shocking, but actually White has no chance of converting the extra two pieces here due to his weak king, e.g.

27.Nd2 Rf8 28.Qh3 Rf6 29.Qc8+ Kf7 30.Qd7+ Kg8=

h) 11.h3 Bb7 12.Be3 Nxe4 13.Re1

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.a5 Ba7 11.h3 Bb7!? 12.Be3 Nxe4! 13.Re1



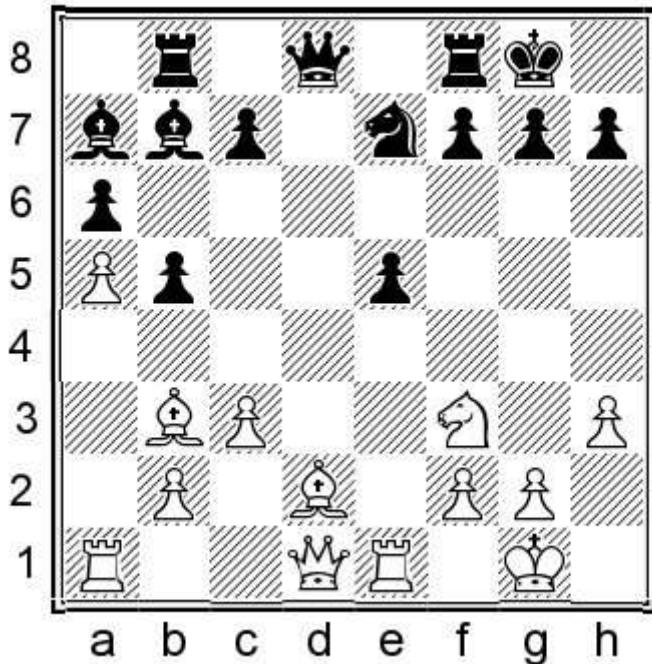
Position after: 13.Re1

13...Ne7!

13...exd4 is less appealing after 14.cxd4 d5 15.Nbd2 Ne7 16.Nxe4 dxe4 17.Ng5!

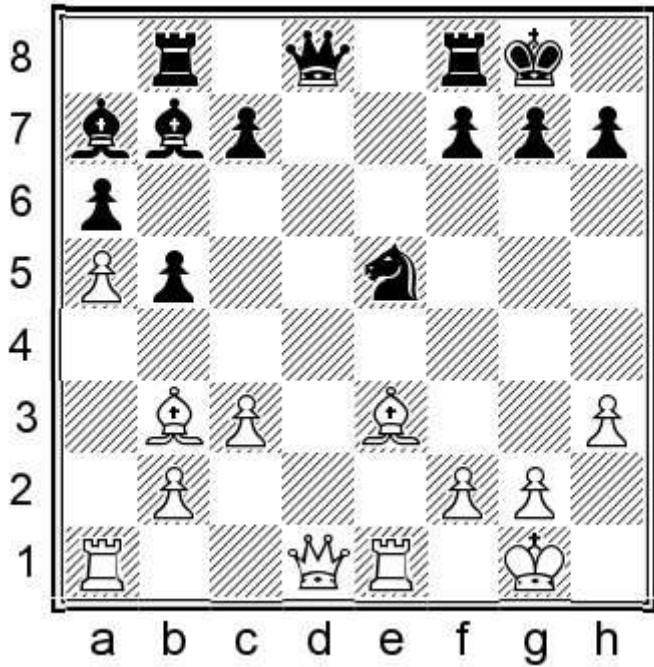
14.dxe5

14.Nbd2 This move surprisingly peters out to an equal endgame. 14...Nxd2 15.Bxd2! [15.Qxd2 Bxf3 16.gxf3 0-0 17.dxe5 Bxe3 18.Qxe3 dxe5 19.Rad1 Qc8 20.f4 Nc6 21.fxe5 Nxa5 22.Bc2∞] 15...0-0 16.dxe5 dxe5



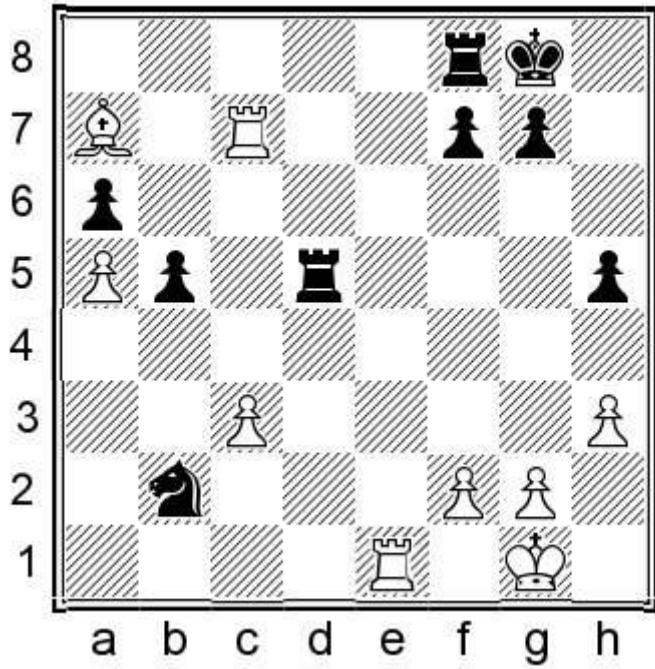
Position after: 16...dxe5

17.Nxe5 [17.Bg5 Qxd1 18.Raxd1 Bxf3 19.gxf3 Nc6 20.Rd7 Nxa5 21.Bd5 c6 22.Be4 Bb6 23.b4 Nc4 24.Bxc6 f6 25.Bd5+ Kh8 26.Bxc4 bxc4 27.Be3=] 17...Ng6 18.Be3! [18.Nxg6 hxg6 19.Be3 Bxe3 20.Rxe3 c5=] 18...Nxe5!



Position after: 18...Nxe5!

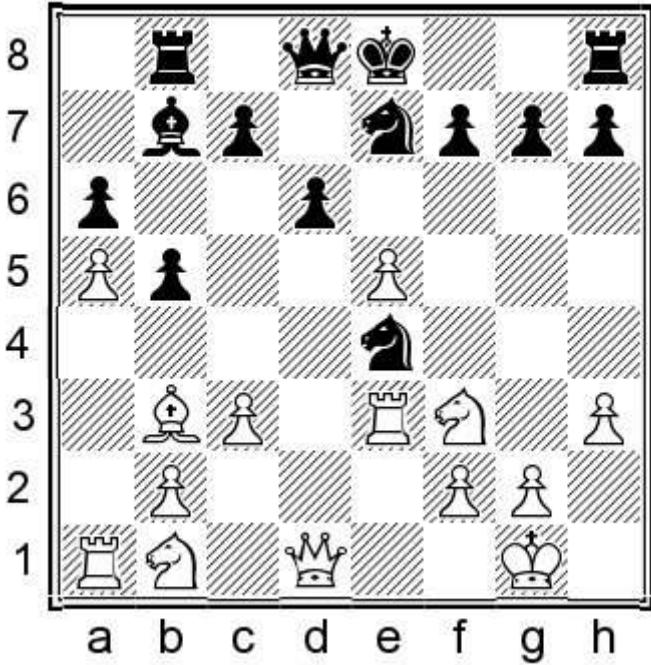
19.Qxd8 [19.Bxa7 Nf3+ 20.gxf3 Qg5+ 21.Kf1 Rbd8 Black has nice compensation.] 19...Rbxd8 20.Bxa7 Nd3 21.Re7 Bd5! Accurate, though obvious. 22.Bxd5 Rxd5 23.Rxc7 Nxb2 Black needs to play precisely, but it should not be too big of a problem here – 3 against 2 in the rook endgame should be the worst-case scenario. 24.Re1 [24.Bb6 Nc4 25.Ra7 h5 26.Rxa6 Rd6 27.Rb1 h4 28.Kh2 Nd2 29.Re1 Nc4 30.Re4 Nxa5 31.Rxa5 Rxb6 32.Rxh4 Rc8 33.Rf4 Rbc6 34.Rxb5 Rxc3=] 24...h5!



Position after: 24...h5!

25.Bb6 Nc4 26.Ra7 Nxb6 27.axb6 Rb8 28.Rxa6 [28.Ree7 Rxb6 29.Rxf7 Rg6=] 28...Rd6 29.Re5 Rdxb6 30.Rxb6 Rxb6 31.Rxh5 b4=

14...Bxe3 15.Rxe3



Position after: 15.Rxe3

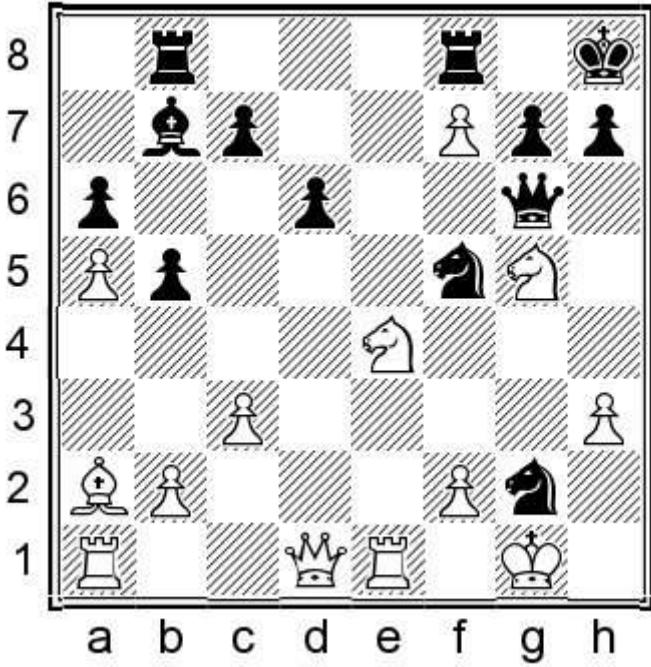
15...0-0!

Aronian probably failed to remember his notes and blundered with 15...dxe5? 16.Rd3! Nd6 17.Ng5! Nd5 18.Nxf7! Nxf7 19.Bxd5 Bxd5 20.Rxd5 Qh4 21.Nd2 when White's position was already close to winning in Volokitin, A (2652) – Aronian, L (2782) Riga 2021.

16.Bc2

A) 16.e6 f5 17.Nbd2 Qe8 18.Nxe4 fxe4 19.Nd2 Qg6 20.Qg4 Qf6 21.Re2 d5=

B) 16.Nbd2 leads to some fun variations: 16...Nc5 17.Ba2 [17.Bc2 see 16.Bc2] 17...Nf5 18.Re2 Nd3 19.e6 Nf4 20.exf7+ Kh8 21.Re1 Qf6 22.Ne4 Qg6 23.Nfg5! Nxg2!

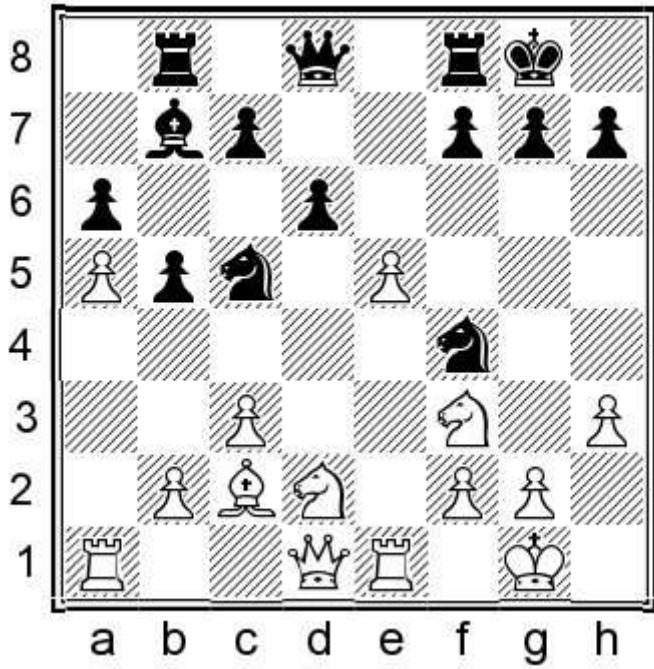


Position after: 23...Nhg2!

24.Kxg2 Qxg5+ 25.Qg4 Qxg4+ 26.hxg4 Nh6 27.Kg3 Nxf7 28.f4©
Black still has problems to solve but is a pawn up.

16...Nc5 17.Ng5

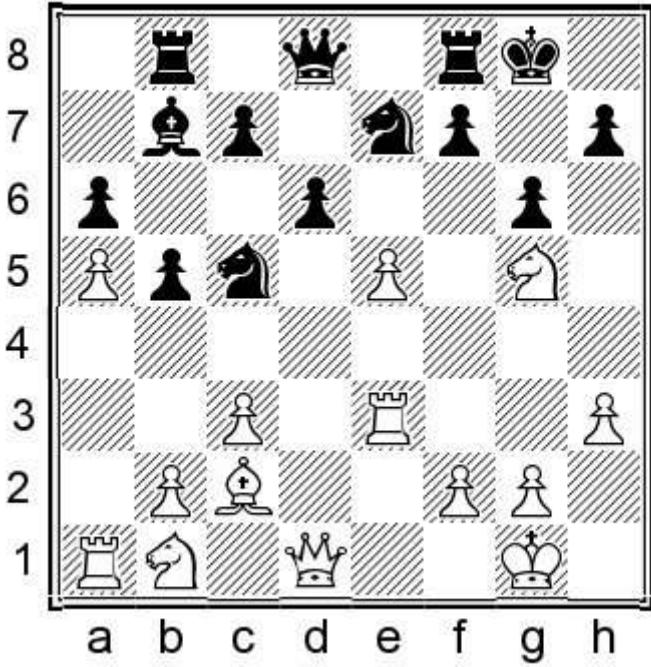
17.Nbd2 Nd5 18.Re1 Nf4



Position after: 18...Nf4

I like Black's counterplay now. 19.Ne4 [19.exd6 Ncd3 20.Re3 Qxd6 21.Ne4 Nxb2 22.Nxd6 Nxd1 23.Nxb7 Nxe3 24.fxe3 Nxh3+ 25.gxh3 Rxb7∞] 19...Re8 20.Qd4 Nce6 21.Qe3 dxe5 22.Nxe5 f5 23.Rad1 Nd5 24.Qf3 fxe4 25.Bxe4 Nef4 26.Bxd5+ Nxd5 27.Qf7+ Kh8 28.Qh5 Kg8=

17...g6



Position after: 17...g6

Dubov's choice in a recent online game.

18.e6

The most straightforward idea.

18.Qg4 dxе5! An important move and Black is even a little better. 19.Rxe5 Qd6 20.Qd4 Nd5 21.Ne4 Nxe4 22.Bxe4 Rbd8 23.Bxd5 Bxd5 24.Nd2 c5 25.Qe3 Bxg2³

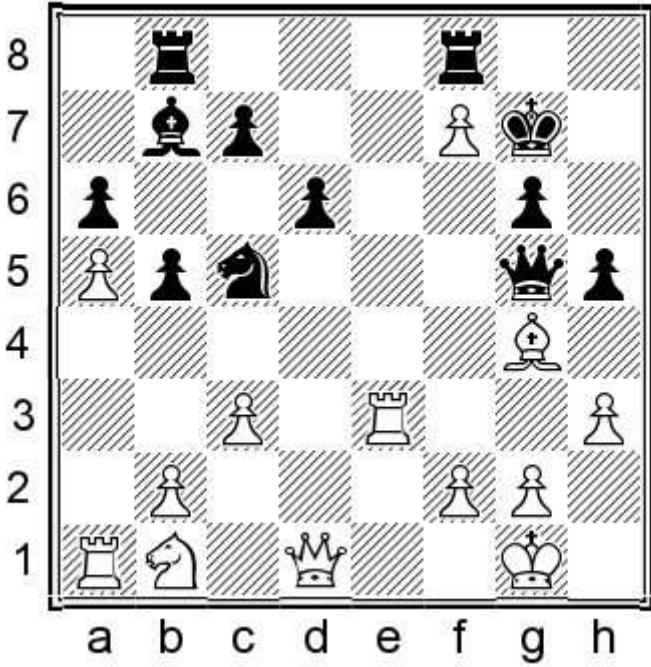
18...Nf5! 19.exf7+ Kg7!

Nice defence.

20.Bxf5

20.Ne6+?! Nxe6 21.Rxe6 Qg5 22.Qg4 Qc1+ 23.Qd1 Qxd1+ 24.Bxd1 Kxf7³

20...Qxg5 21.Bg4 h5!



Position after: 21...h5!

Precise.

21...Rxf7 22.Nd2 Rbf8 23.Bf3²

22.Bf3 Bxf3 23.Rxf3 Rxf7 24.Rxf7+

24.Nd2 Rbf8=

24...Kxf7 25.Na3 Re8

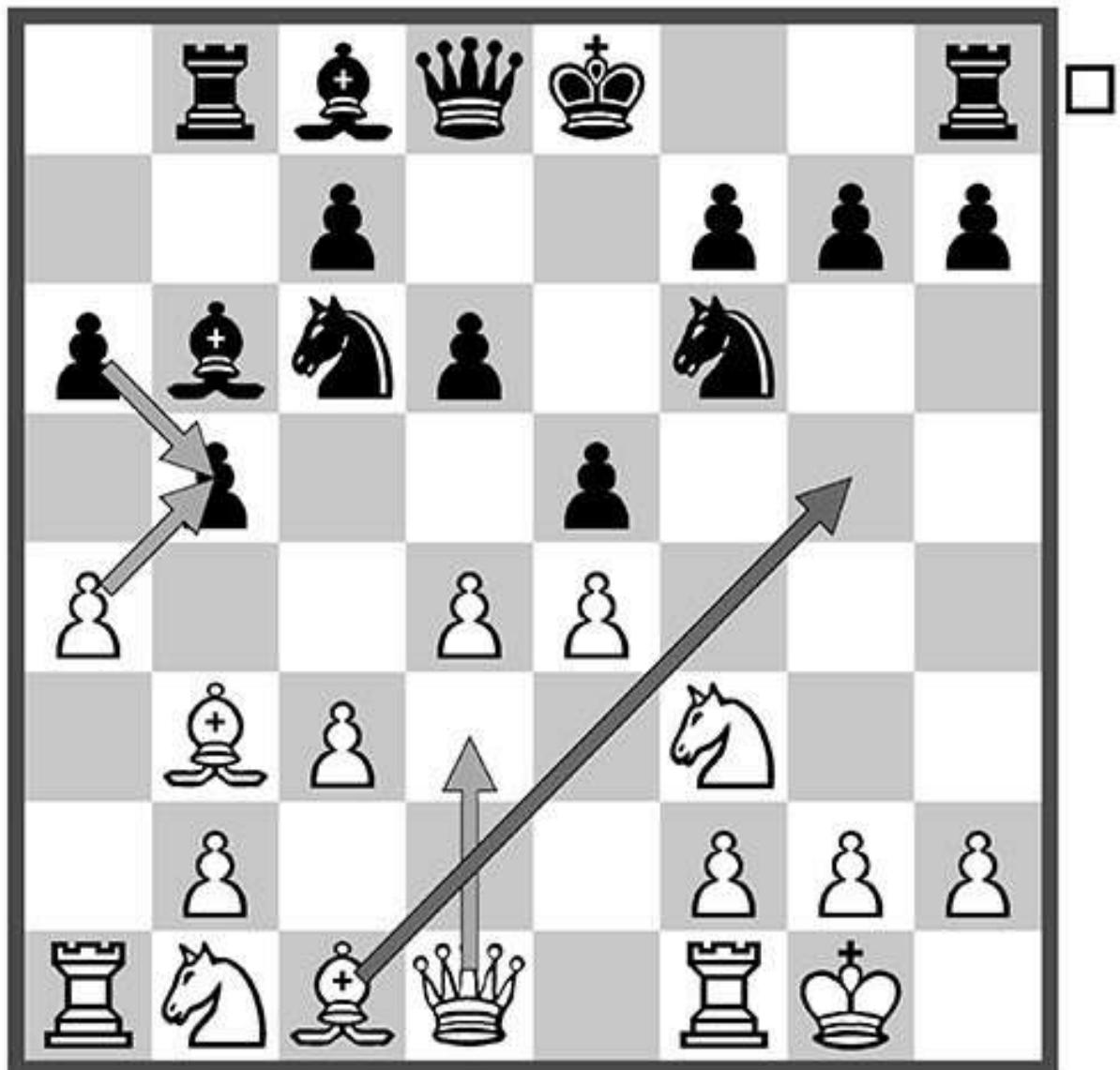
Black's king is not the safest ever, but the material is balanced and our pieces are active, so we have an equilibrium here.

26.c4 b4 27.Nc2∞

Chapter 10

Sidelines Starting on the 10th Move

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6



Chapter Guide

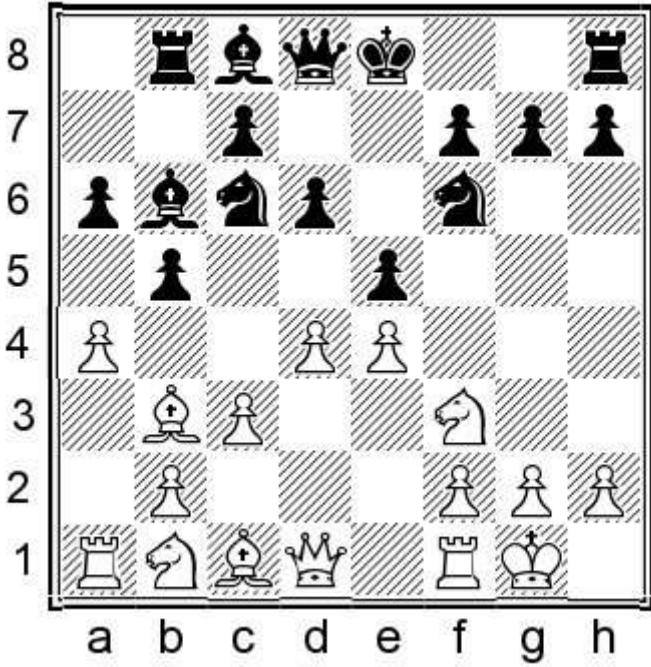
Chapter 10 – Sidelines Starting on the 10th Move

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6

- a) 10.Bg5
- b) 10.axb5 axb5 11.Bg5
- c) 10.axb5 axb5 11.h3 0-0 12.Re1 Bb7 13.Bg5
- d) 10.axb5 axb5 11.h3 0-0 12.Re1 Bb7 13.Na3
- e) 10.Qd3
- f) 10.axb5 axb5 11.Qd3 Bd7 12.--
- g) 10.axb5 axb5 11.Qd3 Bd7 12.Na3 0-0 13.Nxb5
- h) 10.axb5 axb5 11.Qd3 Bd7 12.Na3 0-0 13.Bg5

a) 10.Bg5

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6



Position after: 9...Bb6

Now – apart from 10.a5 – White normally opts for taking on b5 at once. I don't see many benefits in postponing that exchange, though sometimes it is the case and we should examine such possibilites.

10.Bg5

A) 10.Na3 0-0 11.axb5 axb5 12.Nxb5 leads to our main line in the next subchapters.

B) 10.h3 0-0 11.Re1 Bb7 and here White has mostly transposed with 12.axb5 [I failed to notice anything beneficial for White in either 12.Na3 exd4 13.cxd4 Na5 or 12.Bg5 h6 13.Bh4 g5 14.Bg3 Re8.] 12...axb5 see 11.h3

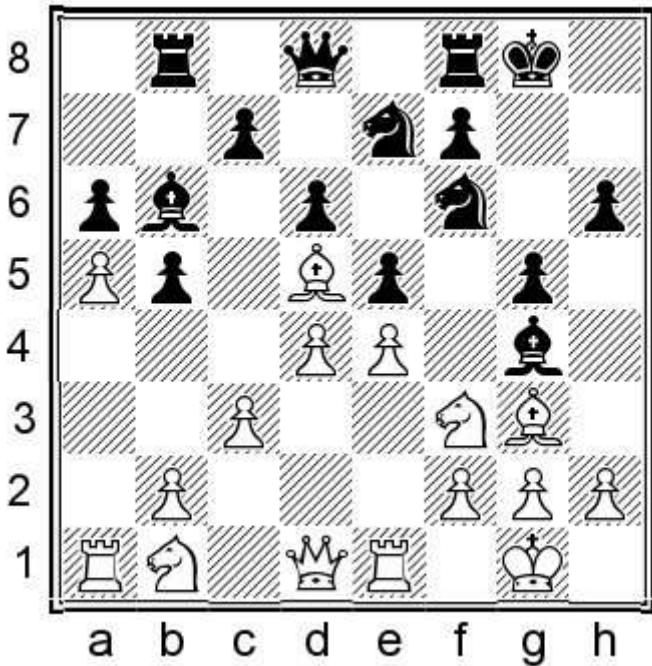
C) 10.dxe5 Nxe5 11.Nxe5 dxe5 12.Qxd8+ Kxd8 13.a5 Ba7 – see 10.a5

10...h6 11.Bh4 g5 12.Bg3 0-0

Now I would expect the inclusion of 13.axb5 axb5 which leads to 11. Bg5 in

this chapter.

13.Re1 Bg4 14.Bd5 Ne7 15.a5



Position after: 15.a5

This is one case where this additional option matters a bit.

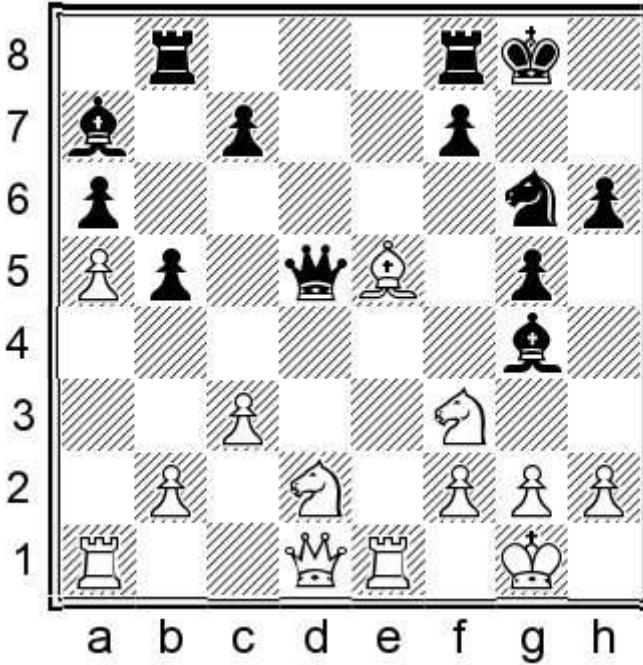
15...Ba7 16.dxe5 dxe5 17.Bxe5

Now Black has more than one way to continue, e.g.

17...Nfxd5 18.exd5 Qxd5

18...Nxd5 19.Nbd2 f6=

19.Nbd2 Ng6



Position after: 19...Ng6

20.Ne4

This is practically a draw offer.

20.Bxc7?! Bxf2+ 21.Kxf2 Qc5+

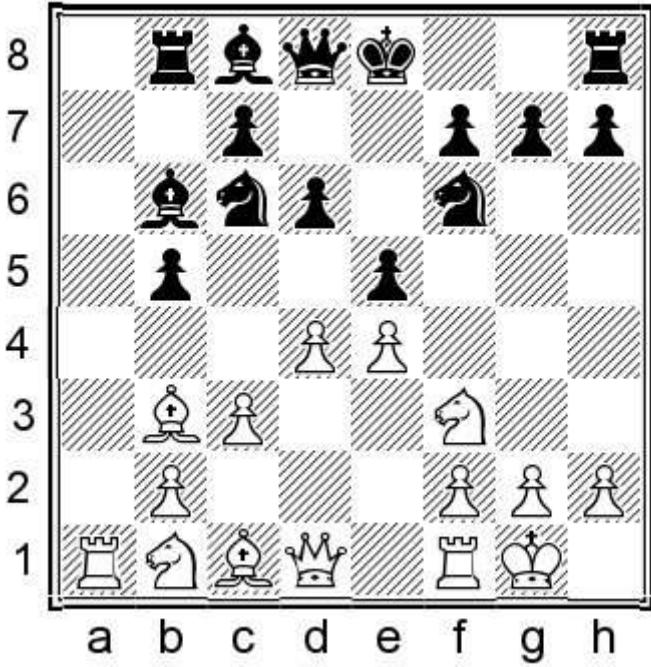
20...Qxd1 21.Nf6+ Kg7

White has nothing better than repeating moves.

22.Ne8+ Kg8 23.Nf6+ Kg7=

b) 10.axb5 axb5 11.Bg5

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5



Position after: 10...axb5

11.Bg5

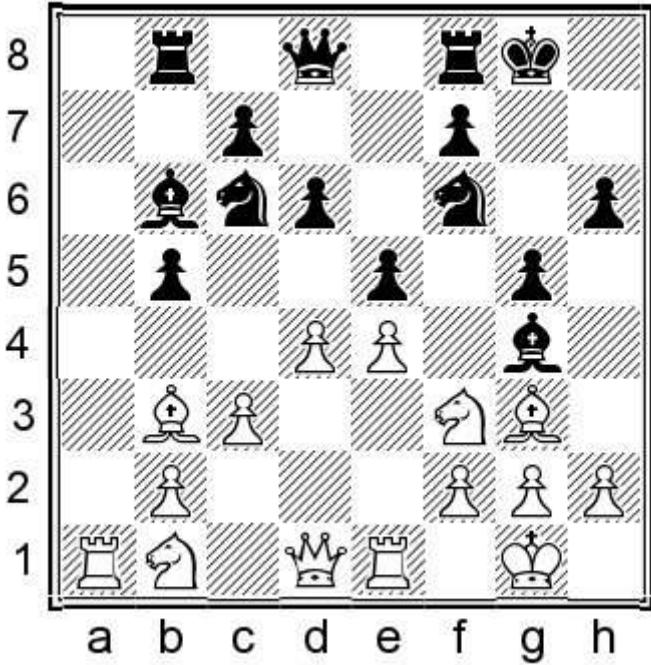
Against this line we should use the same method of play as we did against 9.Bg5.

11.Re1 has never been popular thanks to 11...Bg4 12.Bd5 [12.d5 Ne7] 12...Ne7 when Black is very comfortable, since 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.Bxf7+? Kxf7 15.Nxe5+ doesn't work due to 15...Kf8, or the more daring 15...Ke6!

11...h6 12.Bh4

12.Bxf6?! is not an option. 12...Qxf6 13.Qd3 exd4 14.Qxb5 Bd7

12...g5 13.Bg3 0-0 14.Re1 Bg4



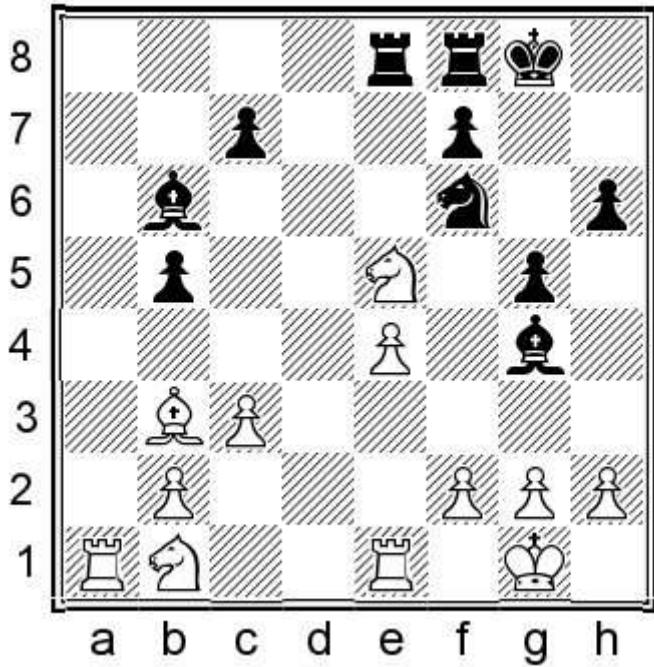
Position after: 14...Bg4

White can try many different moves here, but Black is ready to meet them all.

15.Nbd2

A) 15.h3 Bxf3 15...Bh5 is also good. 16.Qxf3 exd4 17.Na3 [17.Qf5 Kg7 18.Qxb5 Ne5 19.Bxe5 dxe5 20.Qxe5 dxc3 21.Qxc3 Bd4 22.Qc4 c5 Black is in full control.] 17...dxc3 18.bxc3 Ne5 19.Qe2 Qd7 I don't see a problem for Black.

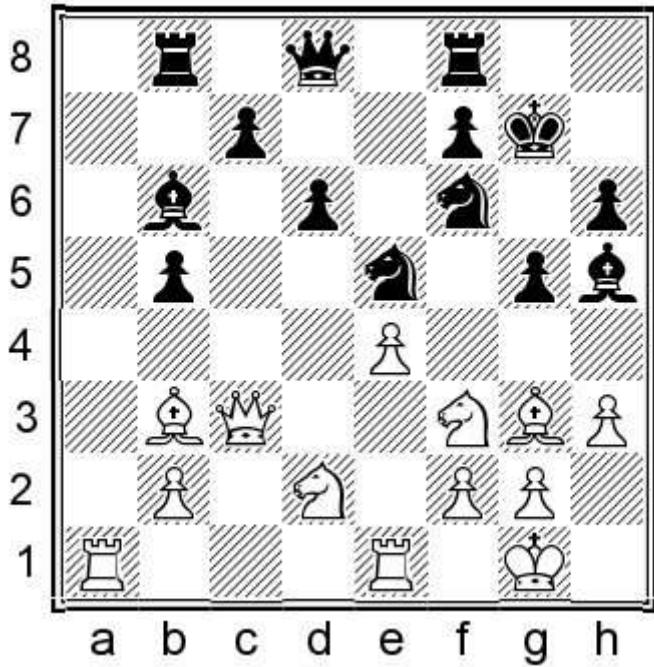
B) 15.dxe5 doesn't work well, e.g. 15...Nxe5 16.Bxe5 dxe5 17.Qxd8 Rbxd8 18.Nxe5 and White wins a pawn but hands the initiative over to Black. [18.Nbd2? Bxf3 19.Nxf3 g4 20.Nxe5 Rd2μ] 18...Rde8!



Position after: 18...Rde8!

A strong move and easy to miss. 19.Nxg4 [19.Ng6? Nxe4 20.Rf1 Be2 21.Nxf8 Kxf8 22.Bd5 Nxf2 23.Rxf2 Re5–+] 19...Nxg4 20.Re2 Nxf2! 21.Rxf2 Rxe4 22.Kf1 Forced. 22...Bxf2 23.Kxf2 Rfe8 24.Bd1!? [24.Na3 Re2+ 25.Kf1 Rxb2μ] 24...Rf4+ 25.Bf3 g4 26.Kg3 Ra4! Instead 26...gxf3 leads only to equality. 27.Rxa4 bxa4 28.Bxg4 Rb8μ Black wins an important pawn and creates an outside passer. With this type of material distribution that makes a huge difference.

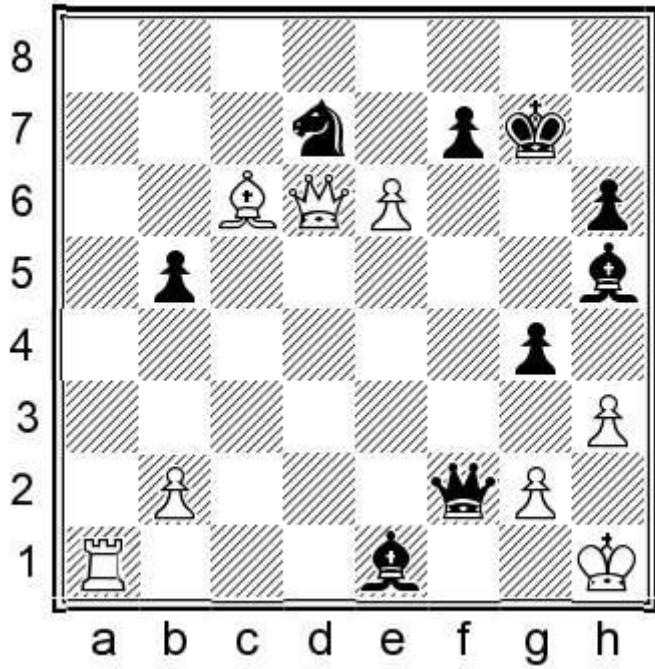
15...exd4 16.Qc2 Kg7 17.h3 Bh5 18.Qd3 dxc3 19.Qxc3 Ne5!



Position after: 19...Ne5!

20.Nxe5 dxe5 21.Bxe5 Re8 22.Nf1

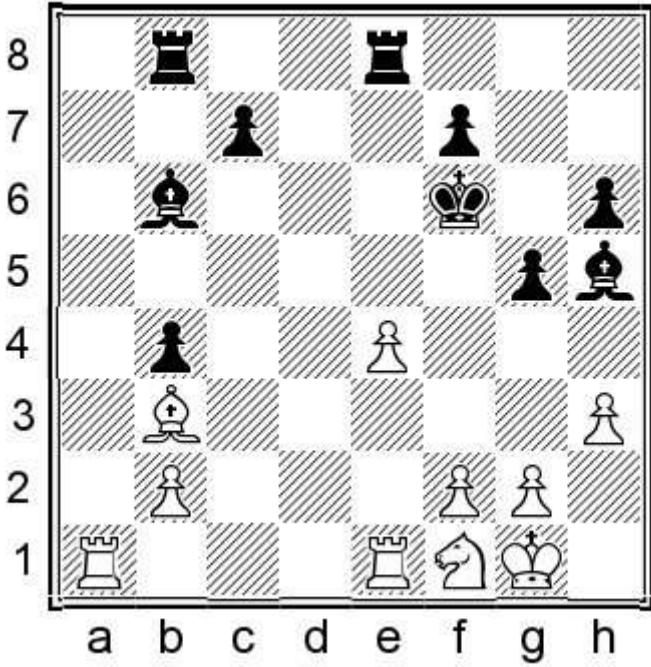
22.Bd5 Rxe5!? 23.Qxe5 c6 24.Bxc6 [24.g4 Bg6 25.Bxc6 Qxd2 26.Qxb8 Qxf2+ 27.Kh1 Qf3+ 28.Kh2 Qf2+=] 24...Qxd2 25.Qxb8 Bxf2+ 26.Kh1 Bxe1 27.e5 Nd7 28.Qd6 Qf2 [28...Qe2 29.e6 Nf6 30.e7] 29.e6 g4!



Position after: 29...g4!

30.hxg4 Nf6 31.Bf3 Qh4+ 32.Qh2 Nxg4 33.Qxh4 Bxh4 34.Ra7 Kf8=

22...b4 23.Bxf6+ Qxf6 24.Qxf6+ Kxf6



Position after: 24...Kxf6

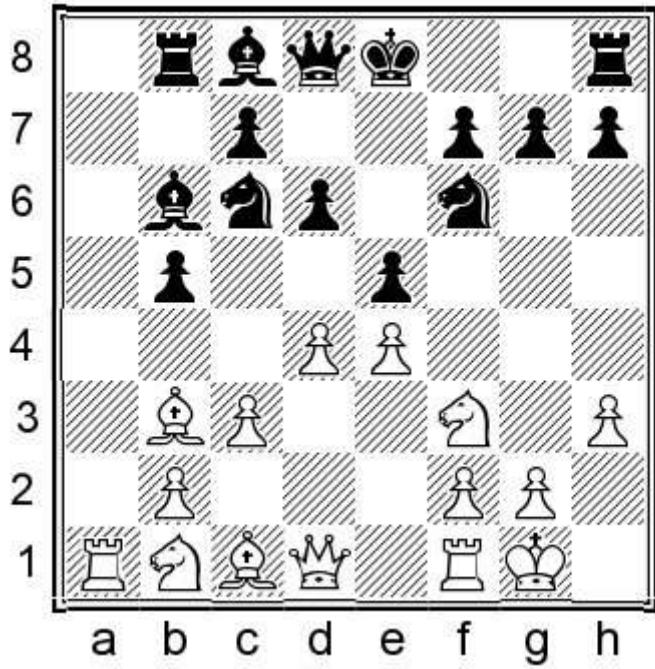
25.Ne3 Kg7 26.Nf5+ Kf8 27.Bd5

27.Nxh6 proves to be too greedy after 27...Rbd8 when ...Rd2 is coming.

27...Bg6=

c) 10.axb5 axb5 11.h3 0-0 12.Re1 Bb7 13.Bg5

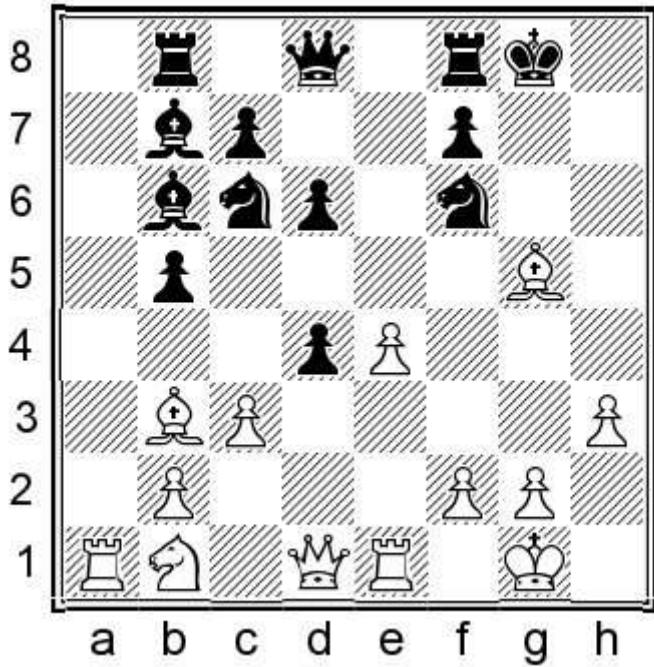
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.h3!?



Position after: 11.h3!?

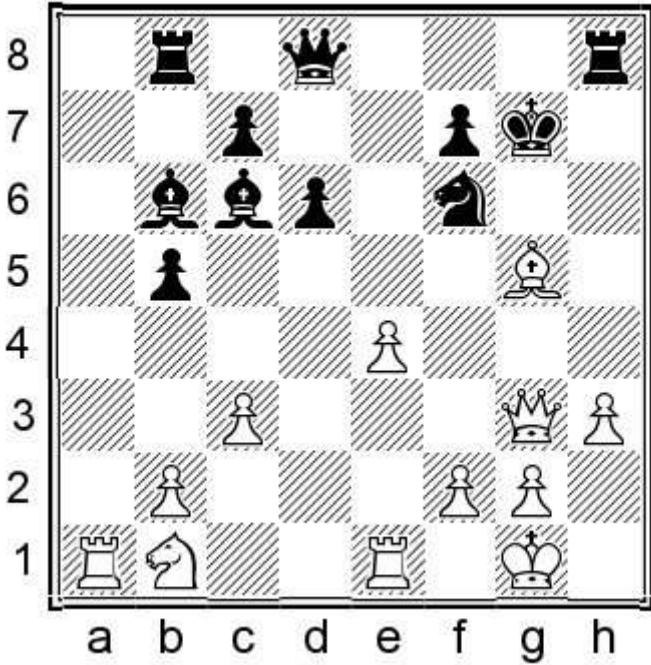
11...0-0 12.Re1 Bb7 13.Bg5 h6 14.Bh4 g5 15.Bg3

15.Nxg5 has only been tried once: 15...hxg5 16.Bxg5 exd4



Position after: 16...exd4

A) 17.Bd5 Berg, E (2558) – Ochsner, B (2413) Vaxjo 2015. 17...d3! would have been a really interesting way to counter White's sacrifice. 18.Bxc6 [18.Qxd3 Ne5 19.Qg3 Kg7 20.Be3+ Ng6] 18...Bxc6 19.Qxd3 Kg7 20.Qg3 Rh8!



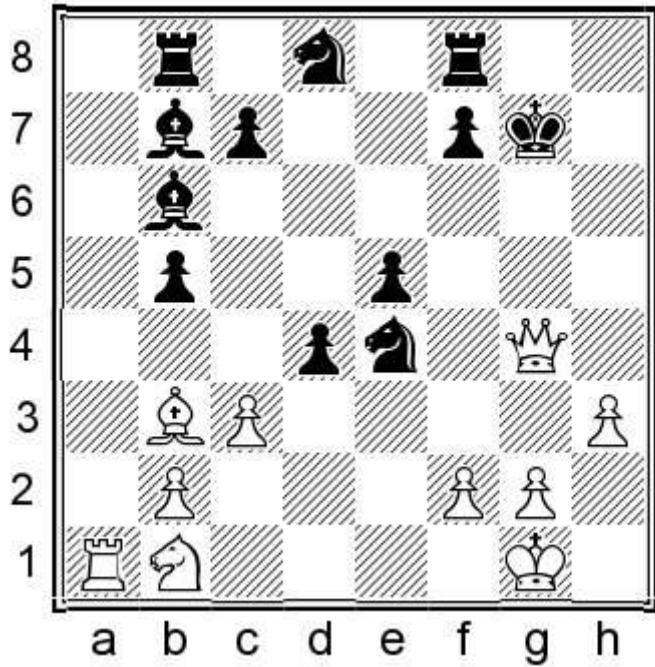
Position after: 20...Rh8!

A typical defensive method. 21.Bh4+ Kf8 22.Qg5 Rh5! 23.Qxh5 [23.Qxf6 Rxh4] 23...Nhx5 24.Bxd8 Rxd8μ

B) 17.e5 dxe5 is the safest, leading to a perpetual check.

B1) 18.Nd2?! dxc3 19.Ne4 [19.bxc3 Qd6] 19...Qxd1 20.Nxf6+ Kg7 21.Raxd1 cxb2 22.Nd7 f6 looks good for Black.

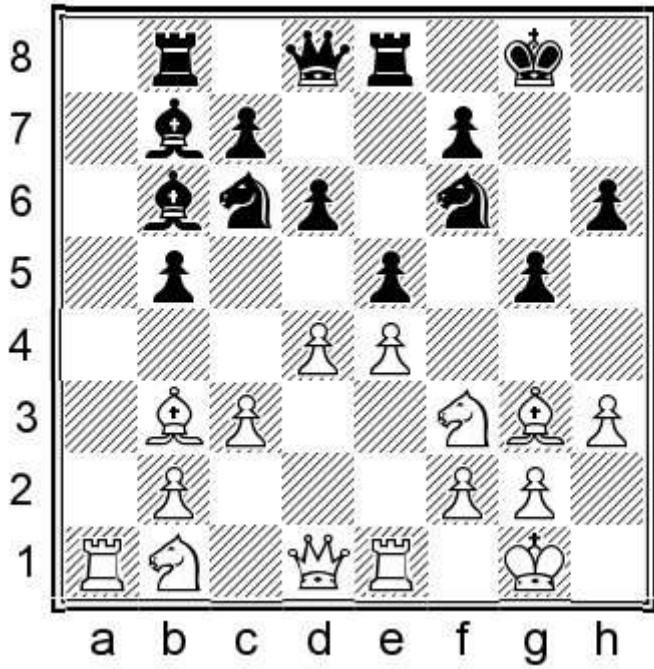
B2) 18.Qf3 Kg7 19.Re4 [19.Nd2 Qd6 20.Qg3 Nh5 21.Bf6+ Kxf6 22.Ne4+ Ke7 23.Qh4+ Nf6 24.Nxd6 cxd6] 19...Nxe4 20.Bxd8 Nxd8 21.Qg4+



Position after: 21.Qg4+

21...Kh6 22.Qh4+ Kg6 23.Qg4+ Kh6=

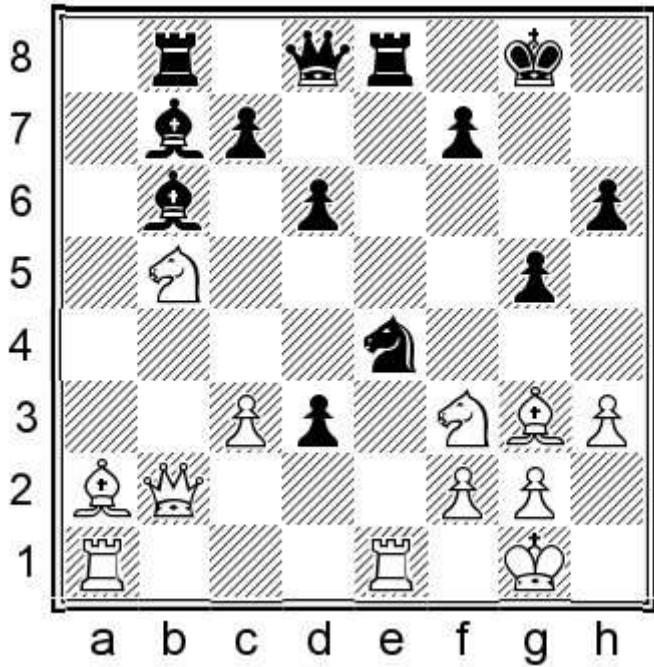
15...Re8



Position after: 15...Re8

16.dxe5

- A) 16.Qd3 Na5! 17.Ba2 [17.Rxa5 Bxa5 18.dxe5 dxe5 19.Qxb5 Bb6 20.Qc4 Re6 21.Nbd2∞] 17...Nc4 18.Na3 exd4 19.Nxb5 Nx b2 20.Qc2 d3 21.Qxb2 Nxe4



Position after: 21...Nxe4

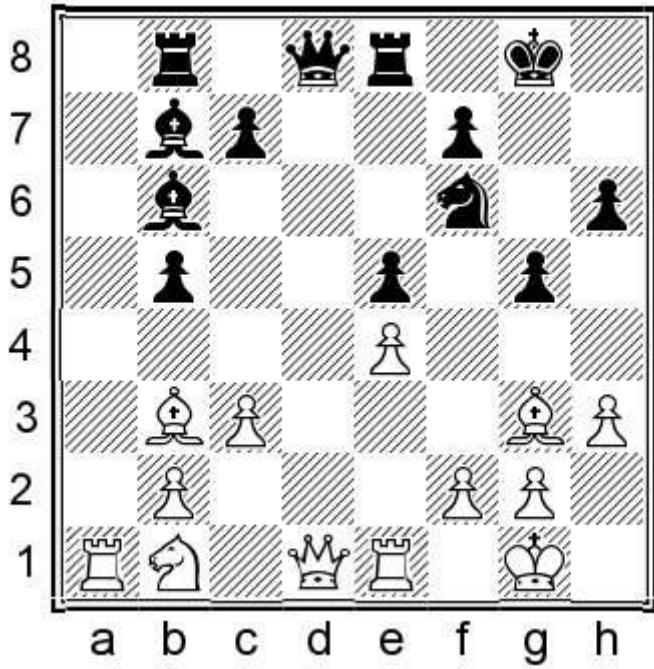
22.Nfd4 Bxd4 23.Nxd4 c5 24.Nb5 Bc6 25.c4 Nxg3 26.fxg3 d5=

B) 16.d5 Ne7 17.Na3 c6 18.dxc6 Bxc6 The position is roughly equal.

B1) 19.Nd2 Ng6 20.Nc2 Kg7 21.Ne3 Bxe3 22.Rxe3 Qb6= [22...Nf4=]

B2) 19.Qd3 Ng6 20.Nc2 Bc5 21.Nb4 Bb7=

16...Nxe5 17.Nxe5 dxе5

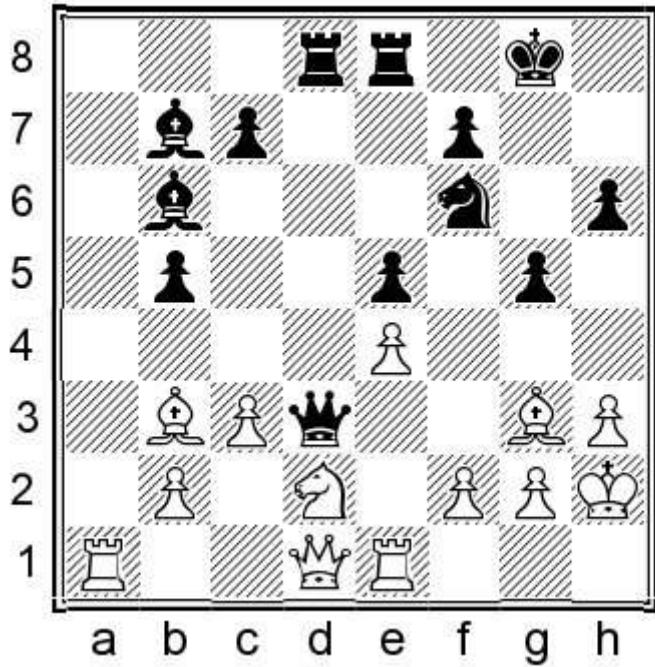


Position after: 17...dxe5

Despite its innocent appearance, this position is venomous and there are a lot of tricky calculations.

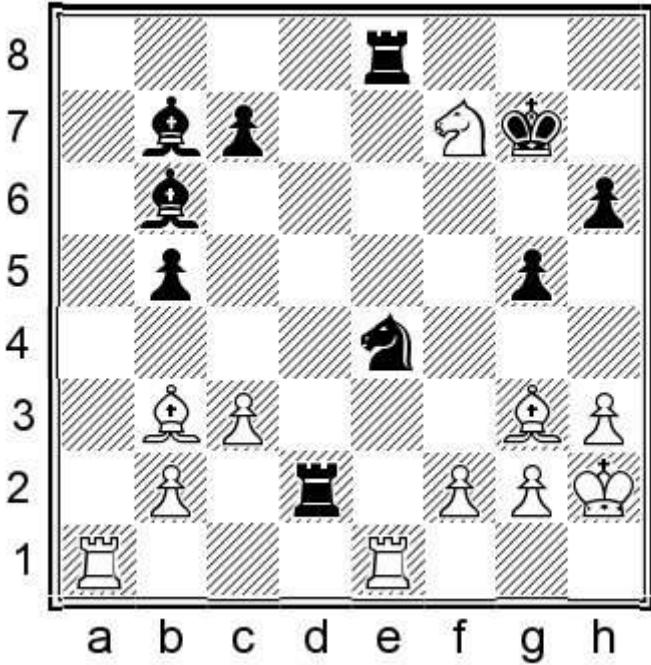
18.Qf3

18.Nd2 Qd3! 19.Kh2 Rbd8



Position after: 19...Rbd8

A) White went wrong in the only available game. 20.Qf3? This move is a miscalculation. 20...Qxf3 21.Nxf3 Nxe4 22.Nxe5 Kg7! Cold-blooded. 23.Nxf7 Rd2!



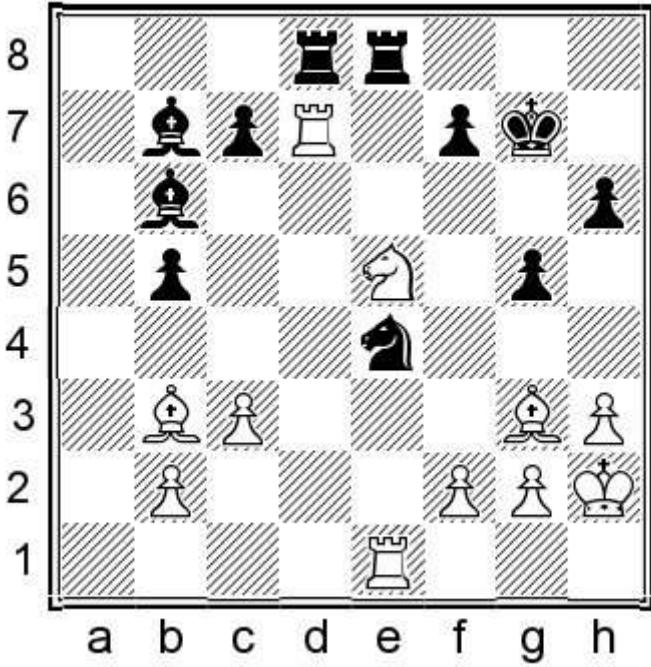
Position after: 23...Rd2!

Accurate and strong play from a modestly-rated player. 24.f3 was more stubborn. [24.Be5+? Rxe5! 25.Nxe5 Bxf2+ and the complications ended in disaster for White in Thipsay, P (2410) – Jeet, J (2185) Ahmedabad 2018] 24...Rxb2 25.Be5+ Rxe5 26.Nxe5 Bf2!

A1) 27.Rxe4 Bxe4 28.Bc4 [28.Ra2 Rxa2 29.Bxa2 Bh7] 28...Bc5

A2) 27.Bd5 Bg3+ 28.Kg1 Bxd5 29.fxe4 Bxe1μ

B) 20.Nf3 leads to equality. 20...Qxd1 21.Raxd1 Nxe4 22.Nxe5 Kg7 23.Rd7!



Position after: 23.Rd7!

An important move. 23...Rxd7 24.Nxd7 Nxe3 [Or 24...Ba7 25.f3 Nxe3 26.Rxe8 Nf1+ 27.Kh1 Ng3+=] 25.Rxe8 Bxf2= leads to perpetual check with ...Nf1-g3.

18...Bc8!

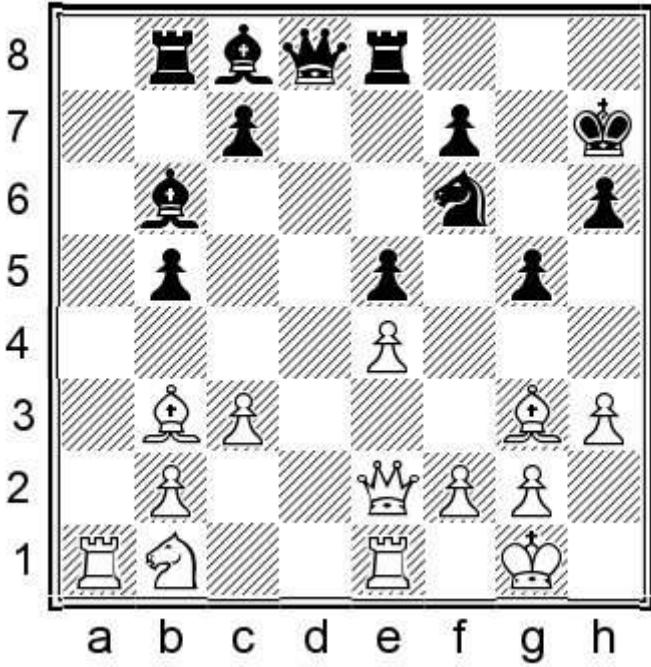
This move was suggested by Svidler. 18...Qe7 and 18...Kg7 are logical too.

19.Qe2

Here, Black has an exciting option at his disposal.

19.Na3?! g4 is unpleasant, as Black seizes the initiative, e.g. 20.Qd1 [20.Qe2? Nh5 21.Kh2 Nf4 22.Qd1 Qf6 with a nearly winning attack as 23.hxg4? fails to 23...Qg5+=] 20...Qxd1 21.Raxd1 gxh3 22.Bh4 Nh7 23.Nxb5 Ng5 looks good.

19...Kh7!?



Position after: 19...Kh7!?

Leaving the f7-pawn unattended and going for a quick ...g4, with ...Rg8 or ...Nh5 to follow!

20.Kh2

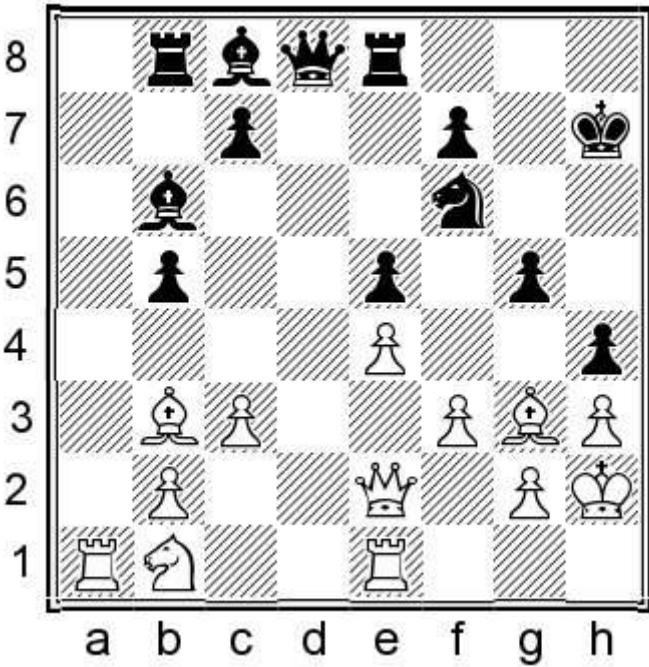
A) Accepting the sacrifice with 20.Bxf7? Rf8 21.Bh5 g4! is extremely dangerous.

B) 20.Nd2?! g4! 21.Rad1 Nh5 22.Nf1 Nxg3 23.Nxg3 Qg5 24.Rd3 gxh3 25.Qh5 Rg8!f

20...h5

20...g4!? 21.Bh4 Rg8

21.f3 h4



Position after: 21...h4

22.Bf2 Qe7 23.Bxb6

23.Rd1 Nh5

23...Rxb6 24.c4

24.Nd2 Nh5 25.Red1 Nf4 26.Qf2= [26.Qe3? Bxh3! 27.gxh3 Qd7 28.Qf2 Qxh3+ 29.Kg1 g4–+]

24...bxc4

24...Nh5 25.Nc3 Nf4 26.Qc2 Bxh3? 27.Nd5

25.Bxc4 Nh5 26.Nc3 Nf4 27.Nd5

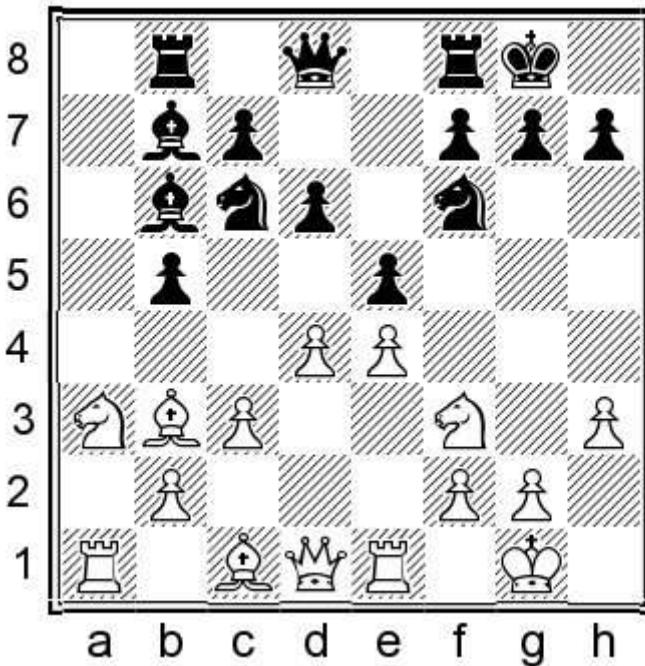
27.Qc2 c6 28.Ne2=

27...Nxe2 28.Nxe7 Rxe7 29.Rxe2 Be6=

The position is balanced.

d) 10.axb5 axb5 11.h3 0-0 12.Re1 Bb7 13.Na3

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.h3!? 0-0 12.Re1 Bb7 13.Na3!?



Position after: 13.Na3!?

This line was popular in the late 90's and Shirov has faced it many times. This curious variation gives White some practical chances, but objectively speaking it's not a big deal, and can only really be used as a surprise weapon.

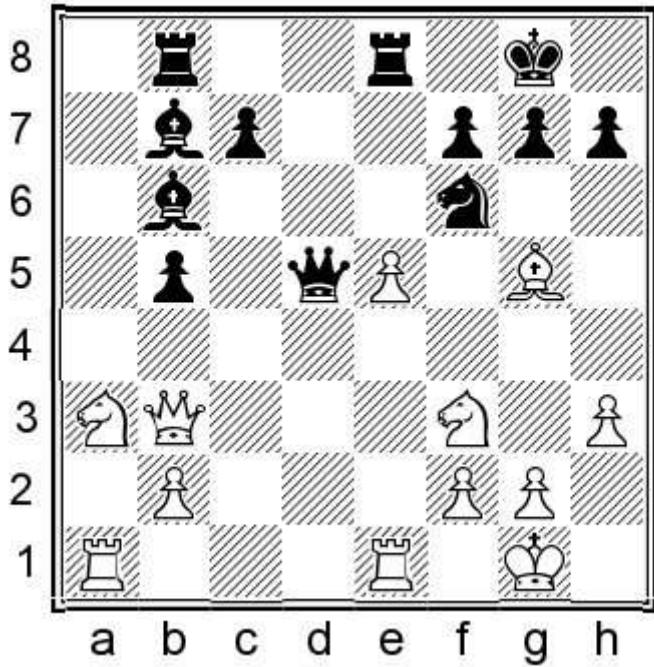
13...exd4! 14.cxd4 Na5!

This is obviously the best reaction. White is now forced to make a concession.

15.Bc2

15.Bg5 This pin is not so dangerous this time. 15...Nxb3 16.Qxb3 Re8

A) 17.e5 dxe5 18.dxe5 Qd5

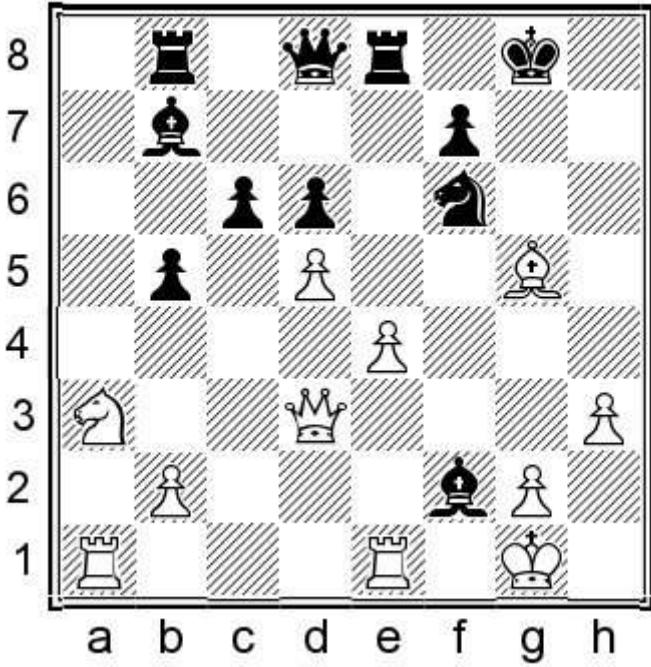


Position after: 18...Qd5

Very typical and Black is fine. 19.Qxb5 [19.Qxd5 Nxd5 20.Nxb5 Nb4] 19...Qxb5 20.Nxb5 Nd7

B) 17.Qd3 Rxe4 18.Rxe4 Bxe4 19.Qxe4 Nxe4 20.Bxd8 Rxd8 21.Nxb5 f5 is a comfortable position.

C) 17.d5 The best try. 17...c6 18.Qd3 [18.dxc6?! Bxc6 can't be good for white.] 18...h6 19.Bh4 g5 20.Nxg5 hxg5 21.Bxg5 Bxf2+



Position after: 21...Bxf2+

[21...Re5 22.Qg3©] 22.Kxf2 Ng4+ 23.hxg4 Qxg5= Black is in control.

15...b4 16.Nb1

After this sad retreat it is hard to imagine that Black can objectively be worse.

16...Re8

The modern treatment. In the past 16...c5 was the main reply.

17.Nbd2

17.Bg5?! h6 18.Bh4 g5 19.Nxg5 hxg5 20.Bxg5 Nc6³ Ochsner, B (2195) – Bok, B (2453) Porto Carras 2010.

17...b3!

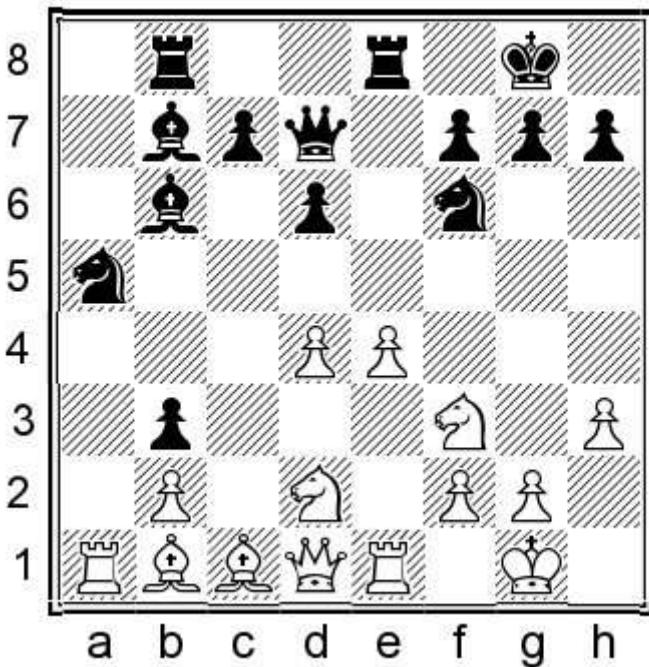
This is a useful intermediate move; White is tied to protecting the e4-pawn.

18.Bb1

A) 18.Bd3 h6∞

B) 18.Nxb3?! Nxb3 19.Bxb3 Bxe4 helps only Black.

18...Qd7

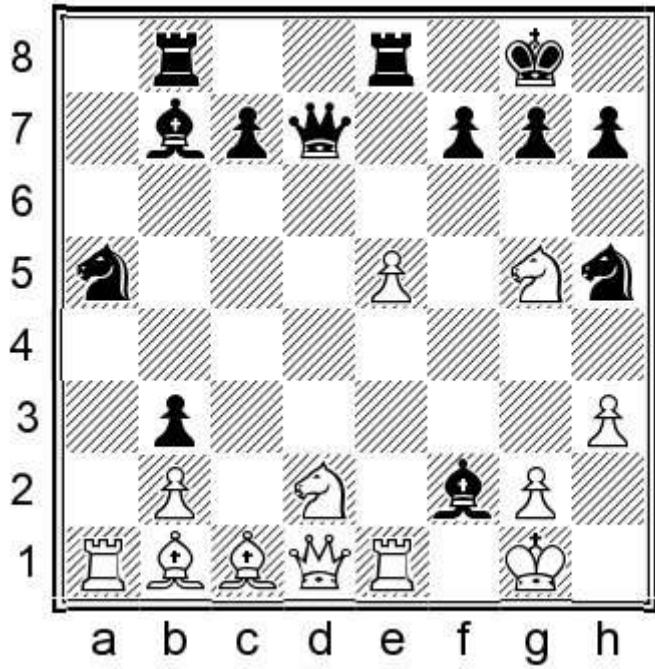


Position after: 18...Qd7

This was played in both previous games. There are two alternatives: 18...h6 and 18...Ra8.

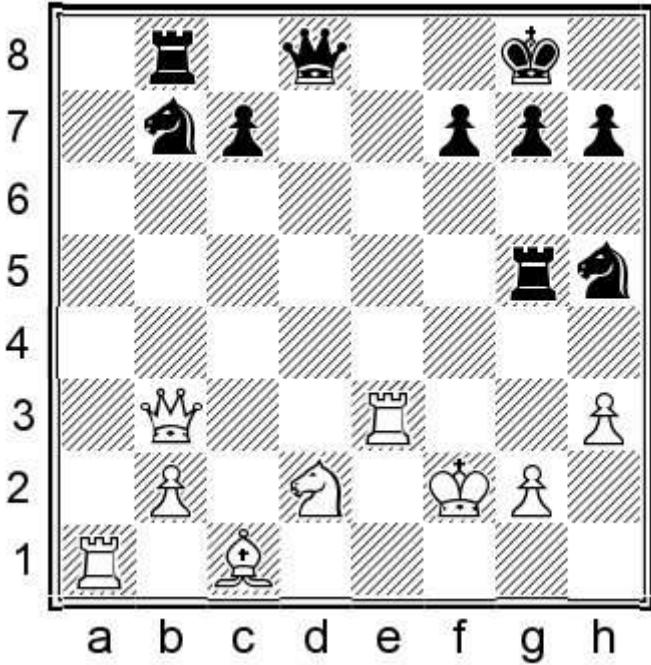
19.Nh4!?

A) 19.e5 was tried by the Bulgarian ex-world champion. True to his direct attacking style, he went for the sharpest continuation – although objectively it's not very good, it is dangerous. 19...dxe5 20.dxe5 Nh5 21.Ng5 and here in Topalov, V (2772) – Nakamura, H (2787) Saint Louis 2014, Black missed an obvious-looking opportunity, though the complications arising are really hard to assess over the board. 21...Bxf2+!



Position after: 21...Bxf2+!

A1) 22.Kxf2 Qd4+ 23.Re3 Rxe5 24.Be4 [24.Bxh7+ Kf8 25.Nge4 Bxe4 26.Bxe4 Rxe4 27.Qe1 Nf4 28.Nf3 Nd3+ 29.Kf1 Qxe3 30.Qxe3 Rxe3 31.Bxe3 Nc4–+] 24...Rxg5 25.Bxb7 Nxb7 26.Qxb3 Qd8!

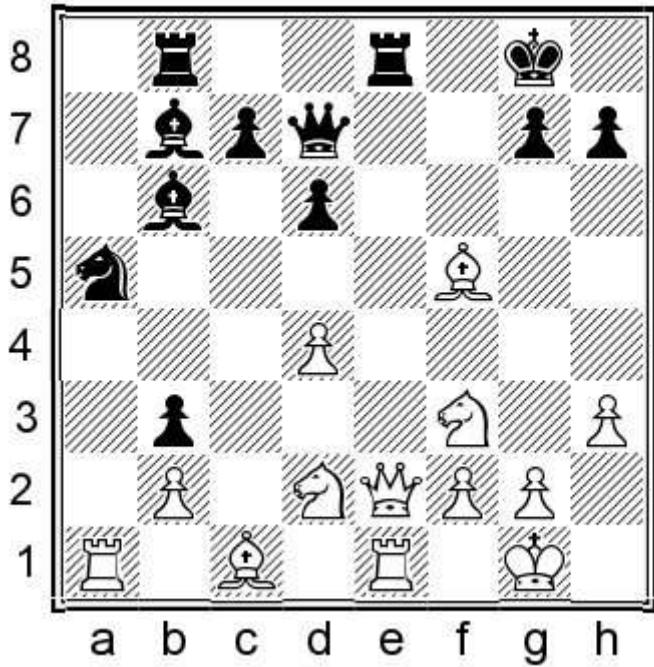


Position after: 26...Qd8!

Black is a pawn up.

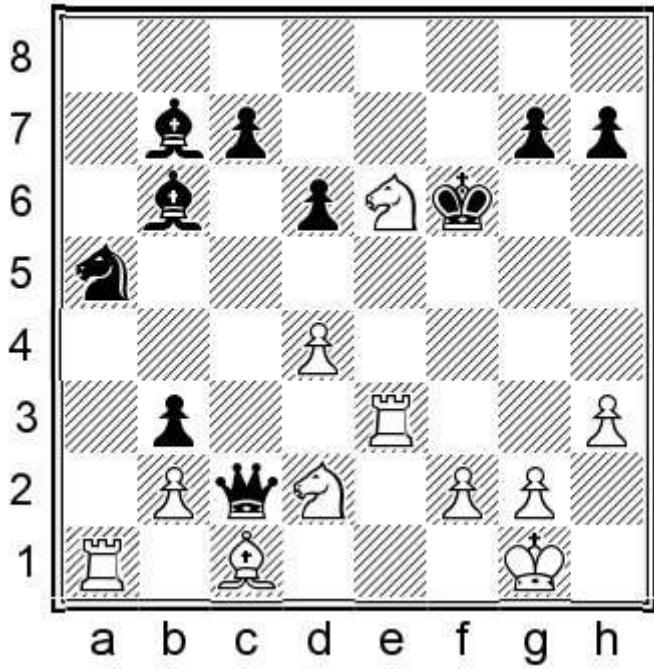
A2) 22.Kh2 A challenging move to calculate precisely. 22...h6!? 23.Qxh5 Bxe1 24.Ndf3 [24.Bh7+ Kf8 25.Nde4 Rxe5 26.Bf4 Rxg5 27.Nxg5 Bb4 28.Rd1 Qe7μ] 24...Nc4 25.Bh7+ [25.Nxe1 Nxe5–+] 25...Kf8 26.e6 Bxf3! 27.Qxf3 Rxe6 28.Nxe6+ Qxe6μ

B) 19.Qe2?! walks into a pin. 19...Nxe4! Instead 19...h6 was played in Kulaots, K (2577) – Caruana, F (2721) Caleta 2011, but the text is stronger. 20.Bxe4 [20.Nxe4 f5 21.Rxa5 Bxa5 22.Qc4+ d5 23.Nf6+ gxf6 24.Rxe8+ Rxe8 25.Qxb3μ and Black still has some practical problems to solve.] 20...f5 21.Bxf5!



Position after: 21.Bxf5!

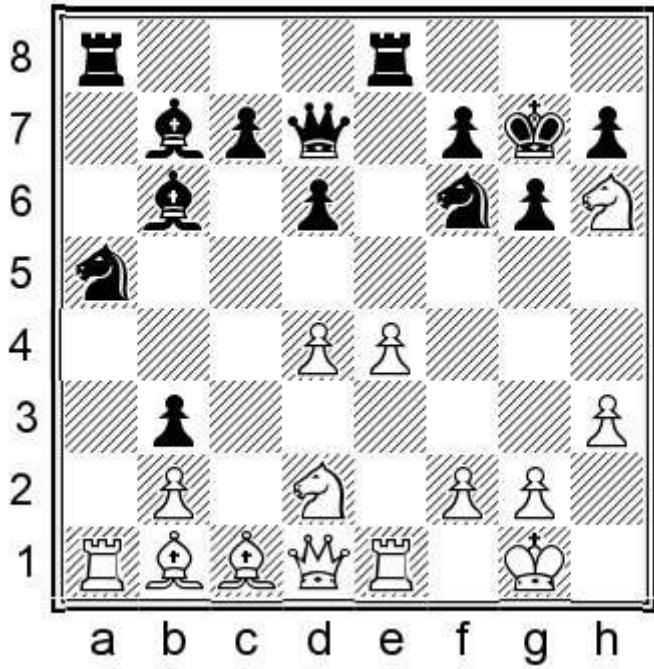
21...Qxf5 22.Qxe8+ Rxe8 23.Rxe8+ Kf7 24.Re3 This position is not without danger in practice, but Black has the more active pieces and the bishop pair, so I believe in our chances here. For example: 24...Qc2! 25.Ng5+ Kg6 26.Ne6 [26.Re6+? Kxg5 looks suspicious, but it's just winning. 27.Nf1+ Kf5 28.Ne3+ Kxe6 29.Nxc2 bxc2–+] 26...Kf6!



Position after: 26...Kf6!

Tying the rook to the e-file. 27.Nf1 Nc4 28.Re1 [28.Rc3 Qe4 29.Nf4 g5 30.Rf3 Ke7–+] 28...h6 29.Ng3 Kg6 30.Re2 Qd1+ 31.Kh2 Bxd4 32.Be3 Qxa1 33.Bxd4 c5 34.Bc3 Bc8!μ

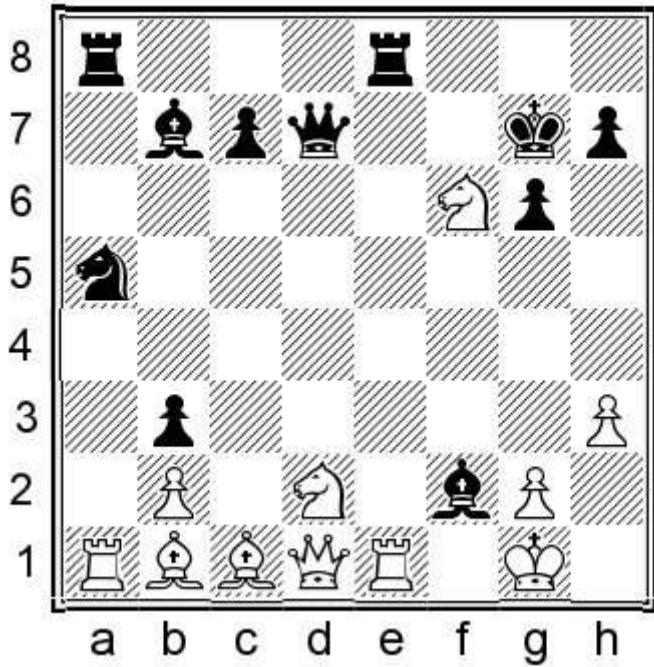
19...Ra8 20.Nf5 g6 21.Nh6+ Kg7



Position after: 21...Kg7

22.Ng4

A) 22.e5 dxe5 23.dxe5 Nh5!? 23...Ng8 was an option too. 24.Ng4 f5! A counterblow in typically Ark fashion. 25.exf6+ Nxf6 26.Nxf6 Bxf2+!

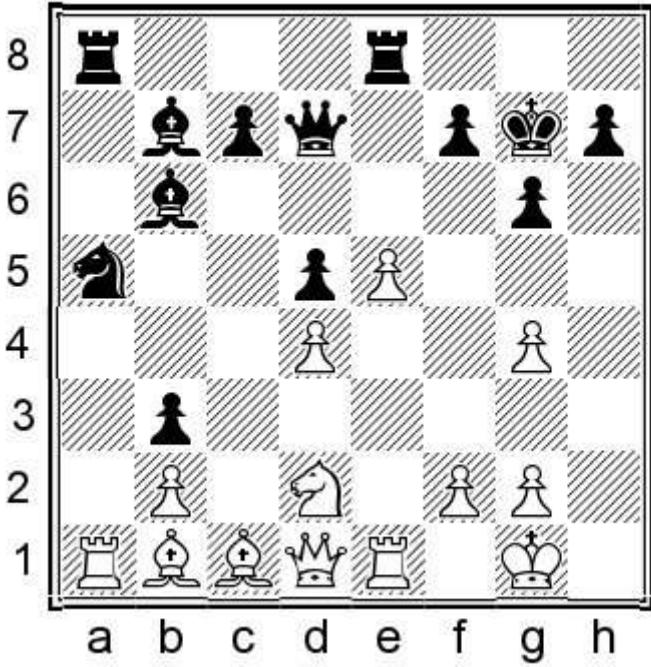


Position after: 26...Bxf2+!

The point. 27.Kxf2 [27.Kf1 doesn't change much. 27...Ba6+ 28.Kxf2 Qd4+ 29.Kg3 Qd6+=] 27...Qd4+ 28.Kg3 Qd6+ and adraw is inevitable. 29.Kf2 Qd4+=

B) 22.Nf3 Bxe4 23.Ng4 Nxg4 24.Bxe4 d5 25.Bd3 Nf6 26.Ne5 Qd6 27.Bh6+ Kg8 28.Ra4 c5 29.Bf4 c4 30.Nxc4 Rxe1+ 31.Qxe1 Qxf4 32.Nxb6 Re8 33.Qxa5 Qc1+ 34.Kh2 Qf4+=

22...Nxg4 23.hxg4 d5 24.e5



Position after: 24.e5

24...Kg8

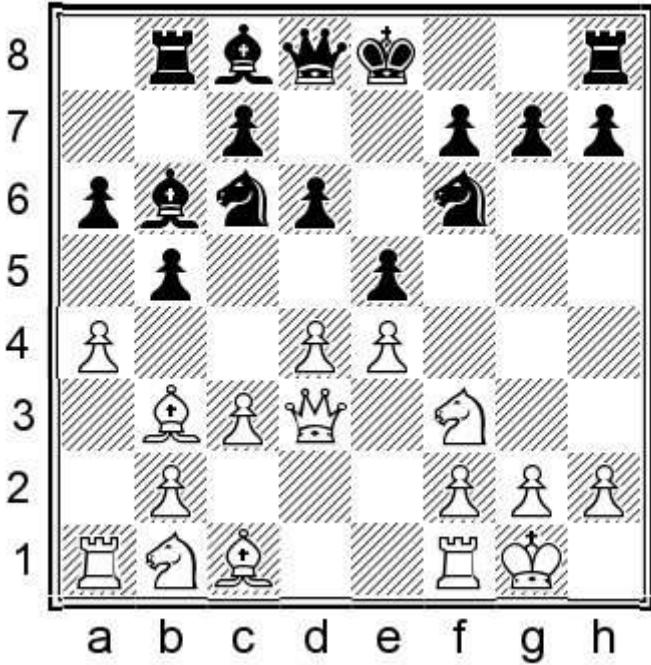
24...Bxd4? 25.Nf3

25.Nf3 Qxg4 26.Be3©

Black is a pawn up, but the position remains very complex.

e) 10.Qd3

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.Qd3



Position after: 10.Qd3

The very existence of this move order convinced me to go for ...Bd7 in the main line as well, since here 10...Bd7 is a simpler solution than 10...0-0. Now, thanks to the presence of the a4- and a6 -pawn pair, both sides gain some additional ideas.

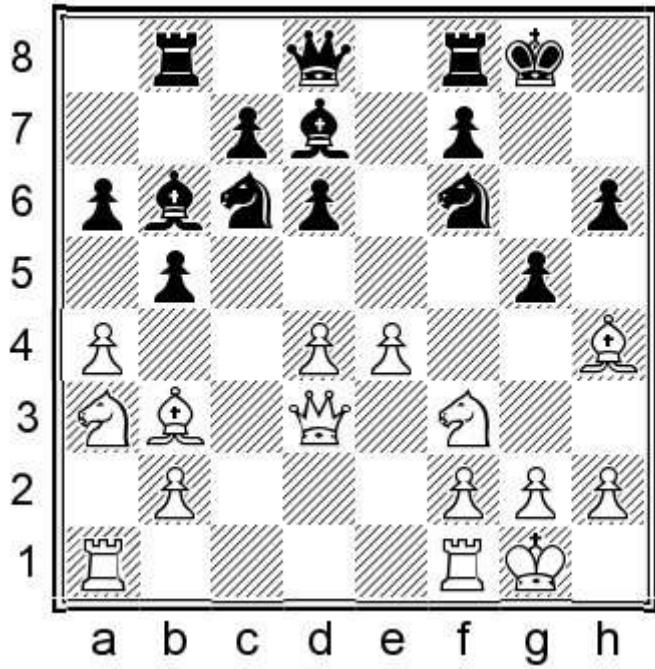
10...Bd7 11.Na3

11.Bg5 h6 12.Bh4 g5 13.Bg3 Nh5 Here I don't think White has anything better than to pick up the b5-pawn, so 14.axb5 axb5 15.Na3 just transposes to 11.Qd3.

11...0-0 12.Bg5

Here and on the next two moves White can once again simply transpose to the 11.Qd3 line by means of axb5.

12...h6 13.Bh4 exd4 14.cxd4 g5

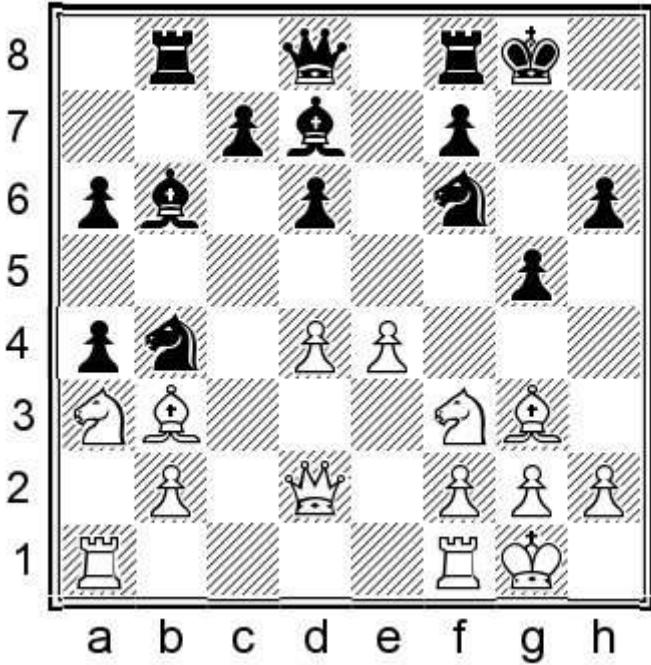


Position after: 14...g5

15.axb5

Probably best, but now Black has an extra option:

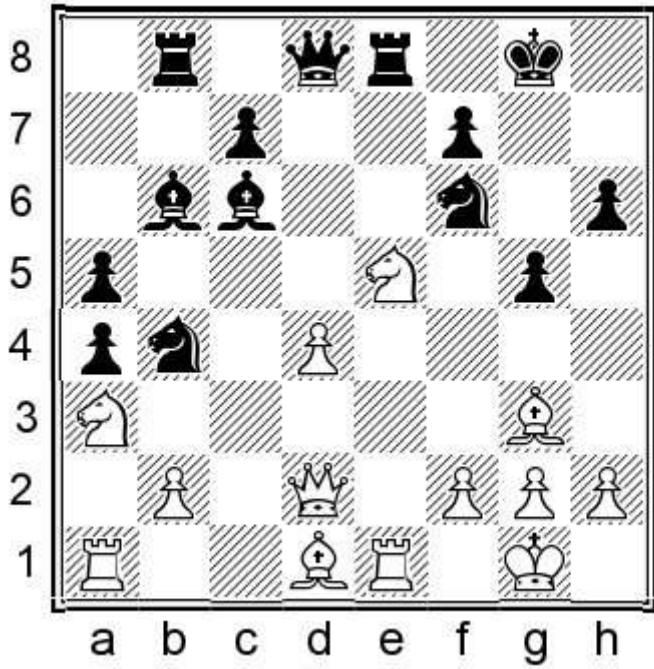
- A) 15.Bg3 Nb4! 16.Qd2 bxa4! Now this is a real difference!



Position after: 16...bxa4!

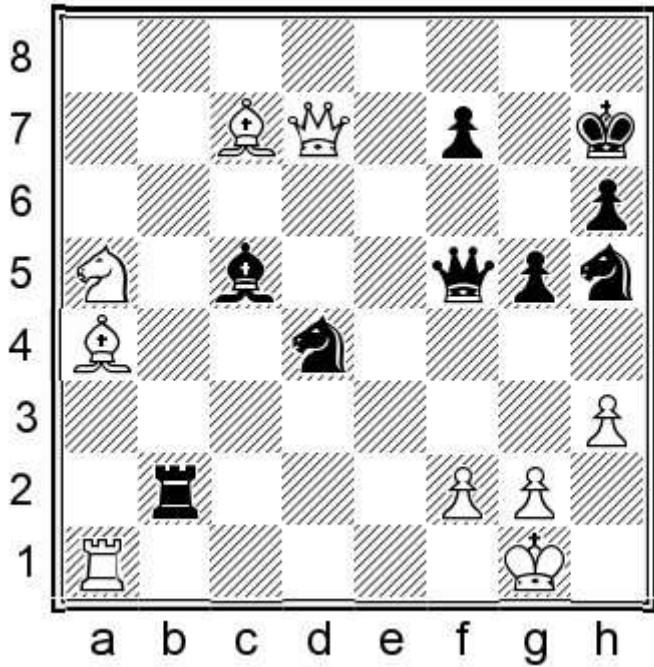
A1) 17.Bc4 Nc6 18.Qd3 There are a lot of tempting moves, the simplest being 18...Nh5 19.Nc2 [19.e5 Kg7 20.exd6 Nxg3 21.dxc7 Ne2+!? 22.Qxe2 Qxc7 23.d5 Rfe8μ] 19...Qf6 20.e5 Qg7³

A2) 17.Bd1 a5 17...Ba7 is an alternative. 18.Re1 Re8 19.e5 and now 19...Nh5 is just pretty normal, but I would like to draw your attention to an extra possibility: 19...dxe5!? 20.Nxe5 [20.dxe5 Nh5μ; 20.Bxe5 Bc6 21.Nc4 Ne4 22.Qe3 Nd6 23.Nxb6 cxb6 24.h4 f6 looks depressing for White.] 20...Bc6



Position after: 20...Bc6

The idea behind the previous move. 21.Nxc6 [21.Nc2 Ne4] 21...Rxe1+ 22.Qxe1 Nxc6 23.Bxa4 Nxd4 Black gets the more promising position. e.g. 24.Nc4 Bc5 25.h3 Rb4 26.Nxa5 Nh5 27.Be5 Qd5 28.Bxc7 [28.Bxd4 Nf4 29.Qe8+ Bf8 30.Bc6 Qxd4μ] 28...Rxb2 29.Qe8+ Kh7 30.Qd7 Qf5!?



Position after: 30...Qf5!?

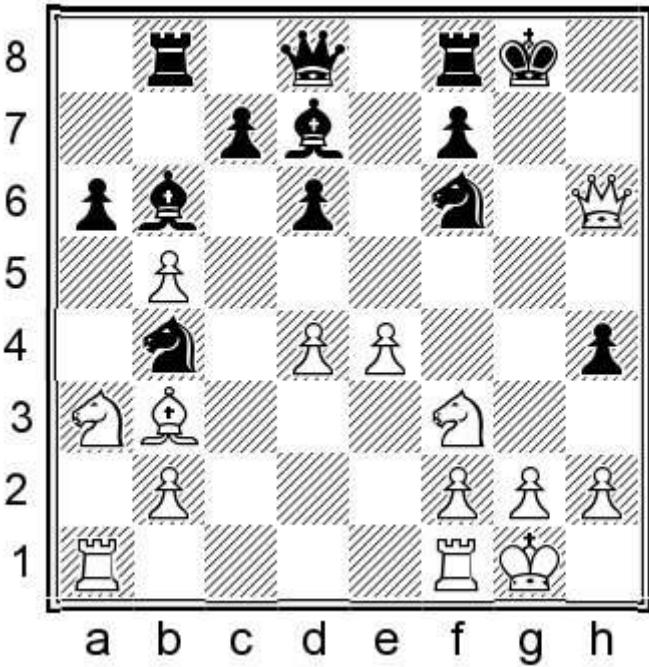
31.Qxf5+ Nxf5 32.Kh2 Bxf2 33.Nc4 Re2μ

B) 15.e5 gxh4 16.axb5! [16.Qg6+? Kh8 17.Qxh6+ Nh7 18.Bc2 f5] 16...axb5 once again transposes.

15...Nb4! 16.Qe3

16.Qd2 16.Qc4 would be the same. 16...Nxe4 17.Qxb4 gxh4 18.bxa6 Bg4 19.Bd1 h3³

16...gxh4 17.Qxh6



Position after: 17.Qxh6

17...Ng4

17...Nh7 18.e5©

18.Qd2

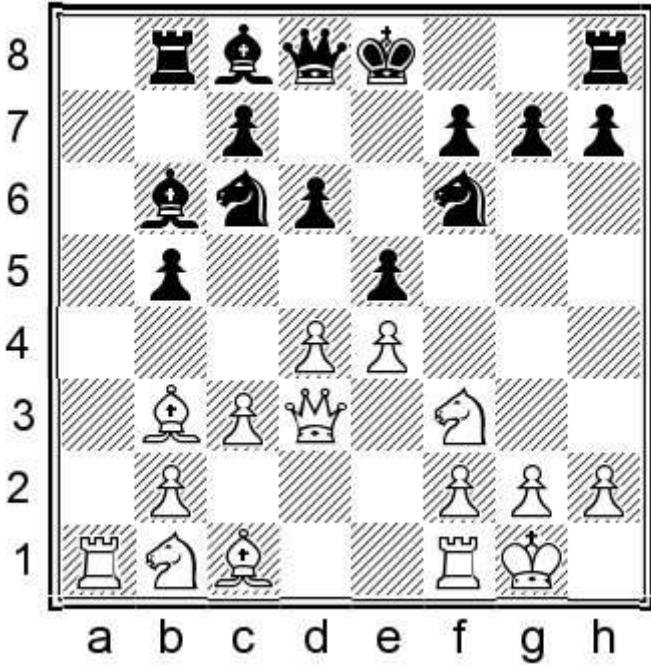
Here I had a feeling that we might look for an advantage, but it turns out that White can maintain the balance.

18...h3 19.gxh3 Qf6 20.hxg4 Qxf3 21.Qg5+=

This is perpetual check.

f) 10.axb5 axb5 11.Qd3 Bd7 12---

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Qd3



Position after: 11.Qd3

11...Bd7!?

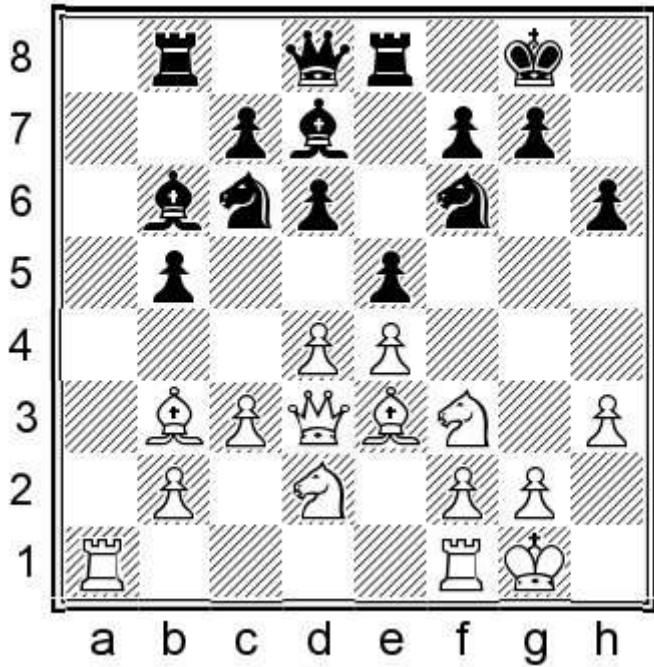
11...0-0 used to be the obvious move here, but recently the text has started to gain a bit more attention – deservedly so, in my opinion.

12.Bg5

This is pretty much always a question in the Ark.

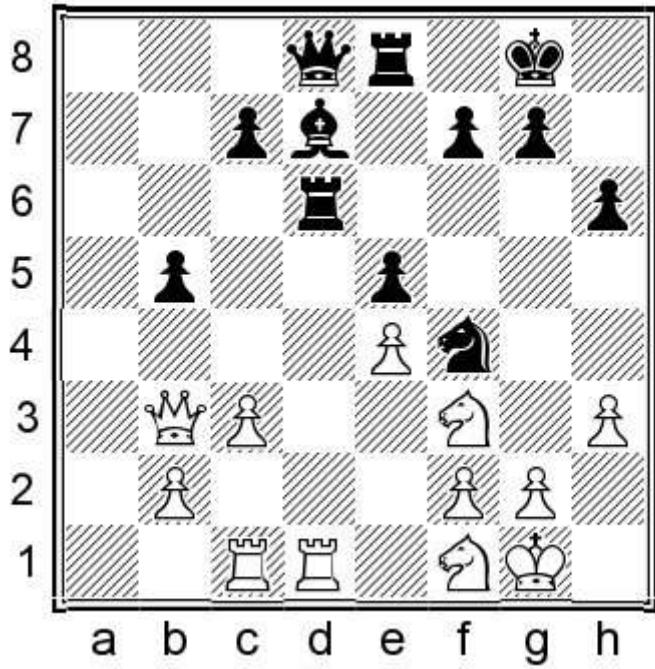
12.d5?! is hardly serious. On 12...Ne7 Black has no problems whatsoever.

Instead, 12.Be3 is a calm but harmless variation and doesn't require long lines to recall. 12...0-0 12...h6 is another move order. 13.Nbd2 h6 14.h3 Re8



Position after: 14...Re8

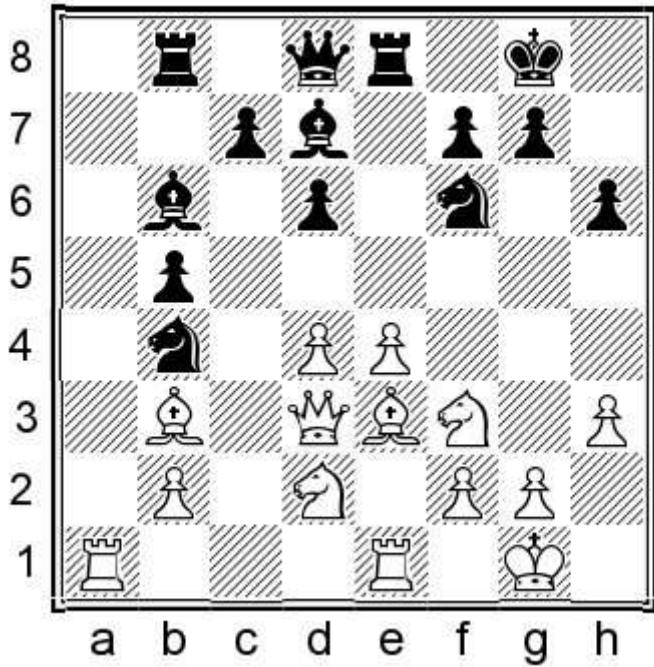
A) 15.Rac1 Na5 White's rook has just left the a-file, so this idea makes a lot of sense. 16.dxe5 [16.Bc2 c5=] 16...dxe5 17.Bxb6 Rxb6 18.Rfd1? This is careless. 18.Ra1 or 18.Qe3 was called for. 18...Rd6 19.Qc2 Nh5 19...c5 would have been good too. 20.Nf1 Nxb3 21.Qxb3 Nf4



Position after: 21...Nf4

22.Ng3 Qf6 23.Rxd6 cxd6 24.Qd1 h5 Black got excellent chances
in Liang, A (2540) – Quesada Perez, Y (2624) Greensboro 2017.

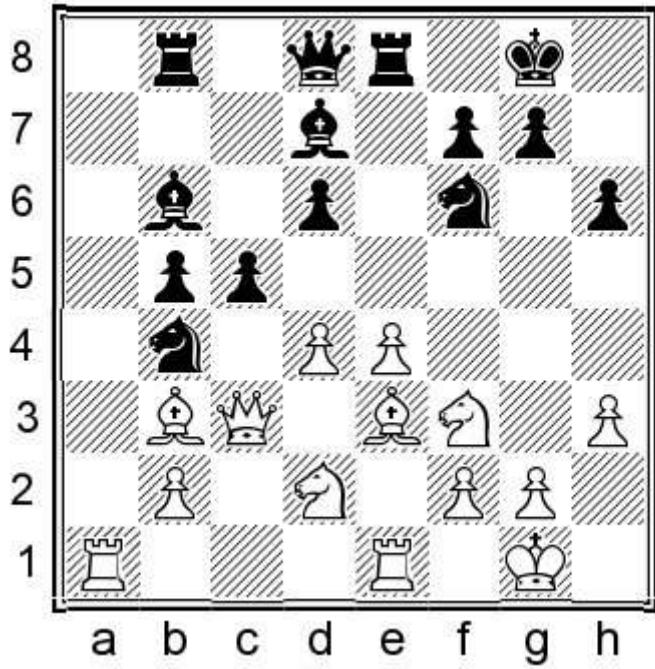
B) After 15.Rfe1 exd4 16.cxd4 Nb4!



Position after: 16...Nb4!

B1) 17.Bxf7+ Kxf7 18.Qb3+ Nbd5! A recurring idea in the Ark. 19.exd5 Ra8 Black has compensation, since the d5-pawn is permanently weak and Black's bishop pair is also a worry for White in the long run. Play might develop: 20.Rac1 Qc8 21.Nb1 A good plan for White. 21...Qb7 22.Nc3 Ba5= Black is fine.

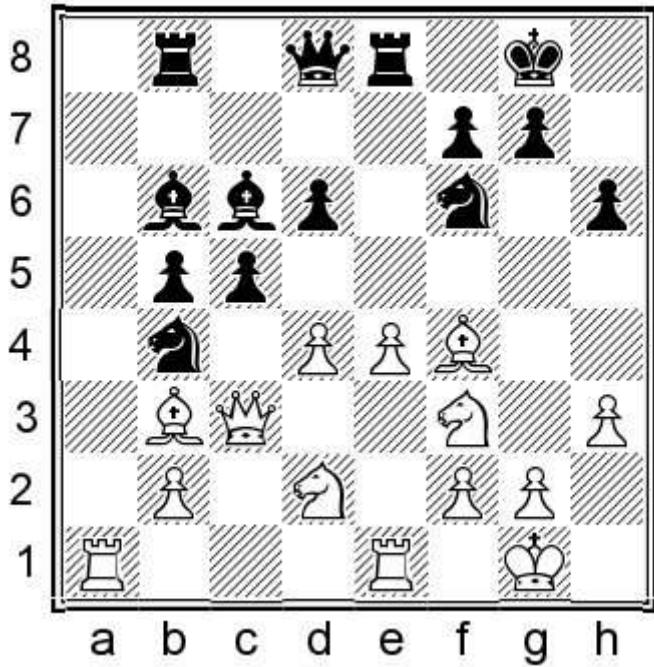
B2) 17.Qc3 c5!



Position after: 17...c5!

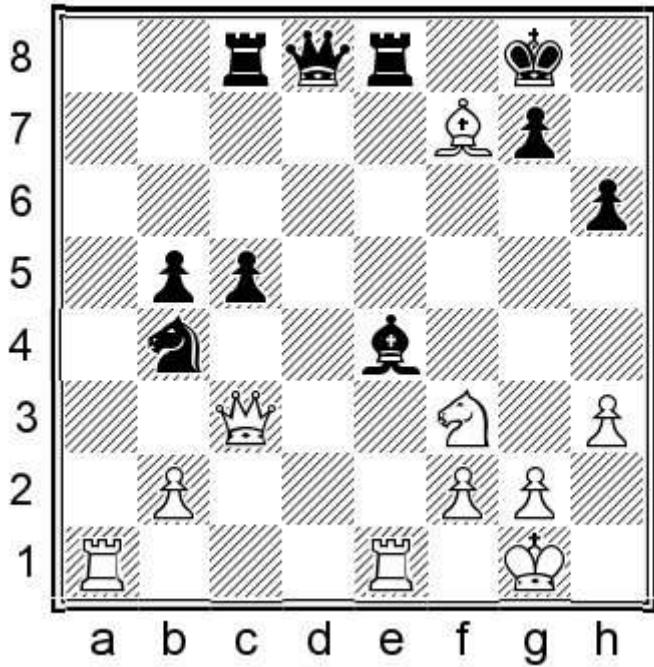
B2.1) 18.dxc5?! dxc5! gives Black the upper hand already: 19.Bxc5 [19.Ne5 Be6; 19.e5 Nfd5] 19...Bxc5 20.Qxc5 Nd3

B2.2) 18.Bf4 Bc6! This contains a serious trap.



Position after: 18...Bc6!

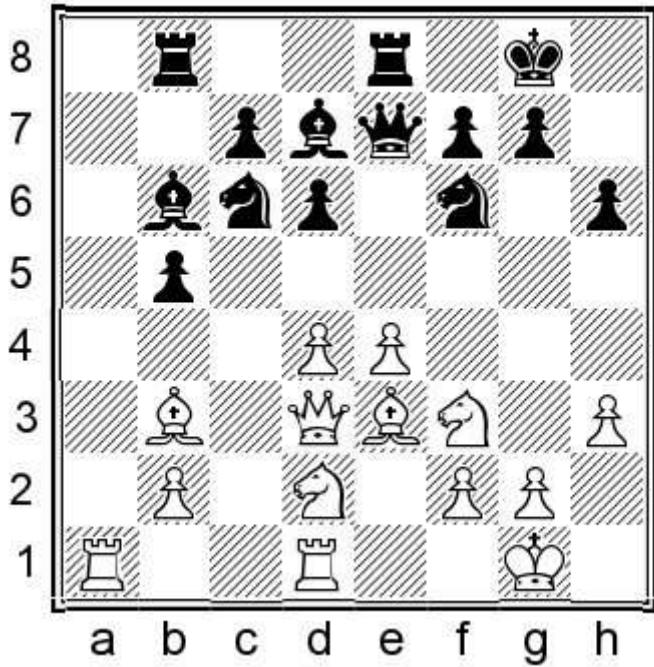
19.dxc5 Bxc5 20.Be5!? A clever move. 20...Rc8!? Black is not afraid of the doubled f-pawns. 21.Bd4 Nxe4 22.Nxe4 Bxe4 23.Bxc5 dxc5 24.Bxf7+!



Position after: 24.Bxf7+!

This trick maintains the balance. [24.Ne5 is bad due to 24...Bd5 25.Rad1 Qd6!] 24...Kxf7 25.Ne5+ Kg8 26.Rxe4 Qd5 27.Rae1 Nd3 A fun way to reach a drawish endgame. [27...Rcd8=] 28.Qxd3 Rxe5 29.Qxd5+ Rxd5 30.Re7=

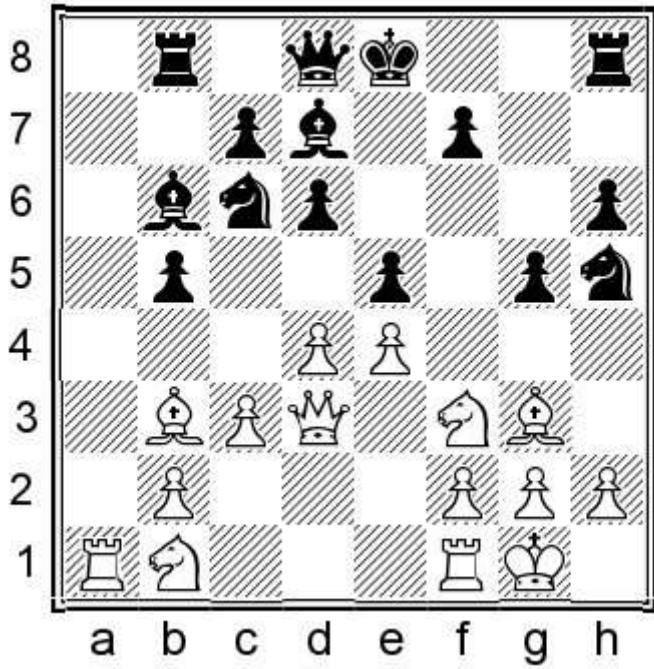
C) 15.Rfd1 is a sensible move. 15...exd4!? 16.cxd4 Qe7



Position after: 16...Qe7

This is a slightly unusual, but dynamic option. 17.Rac1!? After this ambitious move Black has a lot of interesting ideas in mind. [17.d5 Nb4 18.Qc3 Bxe3 19.Qxe3 c5 20.dxc6 Nxc6 21.Nd4 Qe5 22.Nxc6 Bxc6 23.Ra7 Rb7= and the position is drawish.] 17...Nxe4!? 18.Nxe4 Qxe4 19.Qxe4 Rxe4 20.Bd5 Rxe3 21.fxe3 Nb4 22.Bb3 Bf5 Black has nice piece coordination. 23.Ne1 c5©

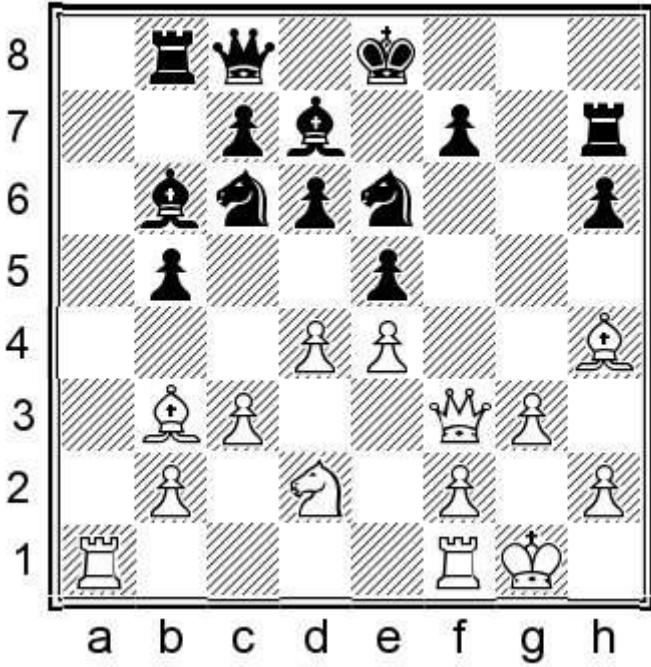
12...h6 13.Bh4 g5!? 14.Bg3 Nh5



Position after: 14...Nh5

15.Na3

A) 15.Nbd2 g4 16.Bh4 Qc8 17.g3 gxf3 18.Qxf3 Rh7 19.Bd1 [19.Qe2 Kf8μ] 19...Ng7 20.Bb3 Ne6!



Position after: 20...Ne6!

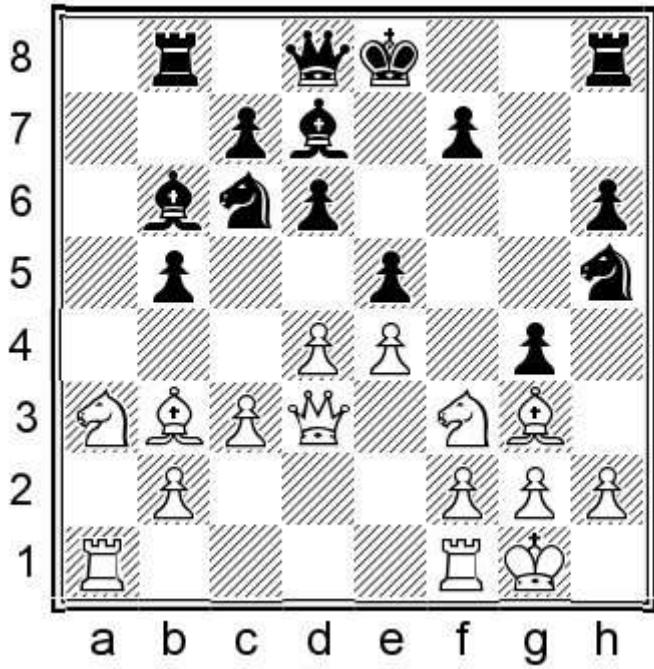
A1) 21.Qf6 Qd8 22.Qf5 Nf8! 23.Qf3 Ne7 24.Bf6 Qc8 25.dxe5 Bg4 26.Qd3 dxe5 27.Qxb5+ Nd7–+

A2) 21.Bxe6 fxe6 22.Qh5+ Kf8 23.Qg6 [23.Bf6 Qe8] 23...Rg7 24.Qxh6 Kg8 25.Bf6 Qf8 26.Bxg7 Qxg7 27.Qxg7+ Kxg7 28.dxe5 Nxe5 29.Kg2 Bc6μ

A3) 21.d5 Ng5 22.Bxg5 hxg5 23.dxc6 Bxc6μ

B) 15.Bd5 0-0 16.Na3 Nxg3 17.hxg3 Ne7 18.dxe5 g4 19.Nh4 Nxd5 20.exd5 dxe5 21.d6 cxd6 22.Qxd6 Be6 23.Qxe5 Qg5©

15...g4!?

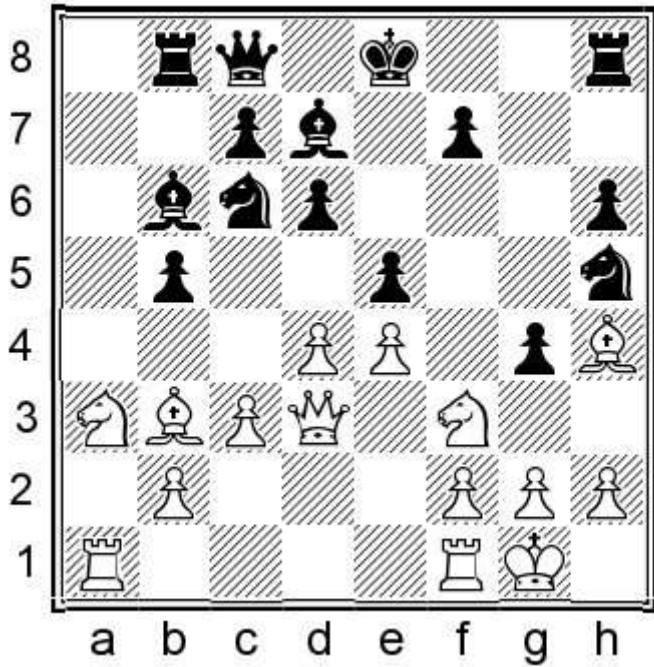


Position after: 15...g4!?

This leads to fascinating complications.

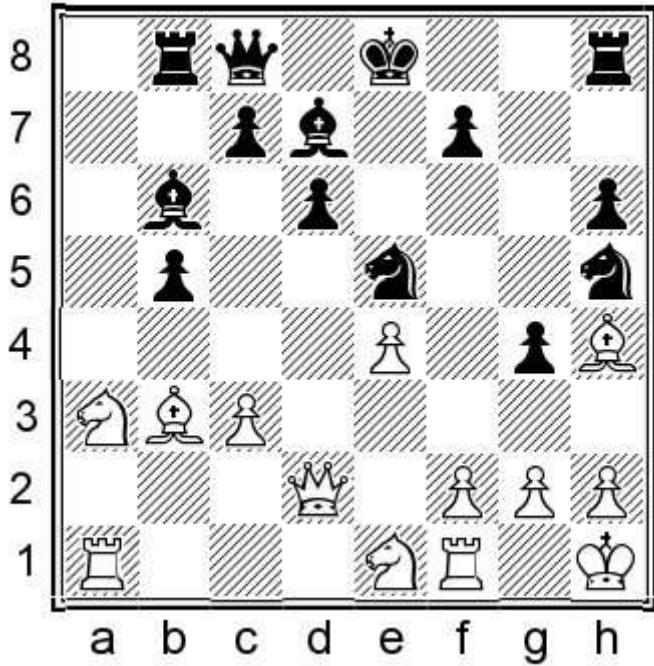
16.Nh4

16.Bh4 Qc8!



Position after: 16...Qc8!

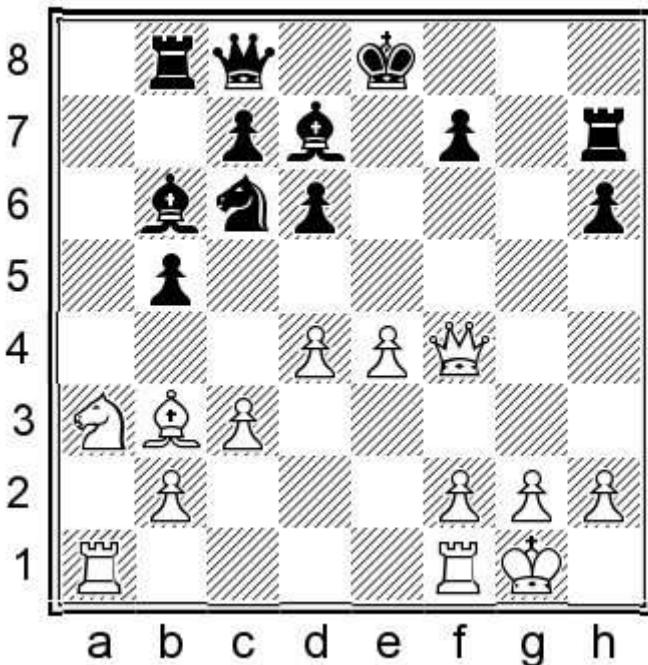
- A) 17.Ne1 exd4 18.Qd2 [18.cxd4 Nxd4 19.Bd5 c6 20.Ba2 Be6³] 18...dxc3 19.bxc3 Ne5 20.Kh1!



Position after: 20.Kh1!

20...Ng6 21.Qd5 Rh7! 22.Nd3 [22.Qxh5?? Nf4! 23.Bxf7+ Kf8–+] 22...Nxh4 23.Qxh5 Qd8! 24.Qd5 Kf8 25.Nb4 Qg5³

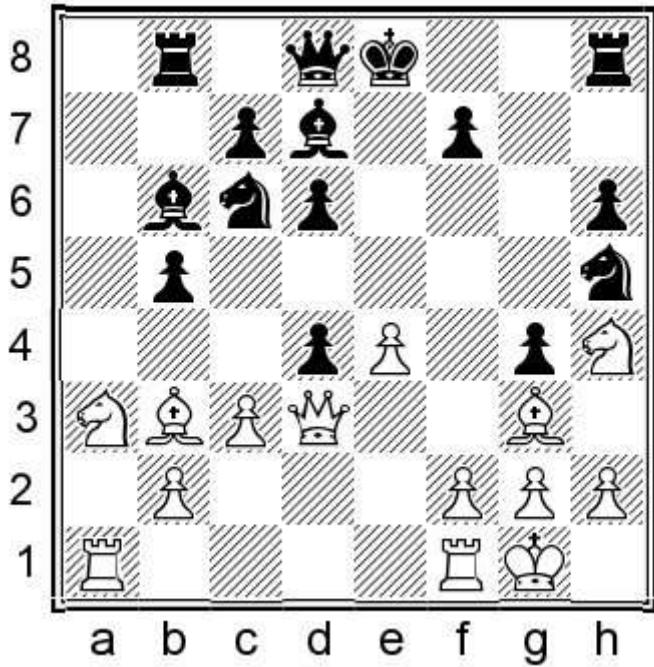
B) 17.Bg3!? gxf3 [17...Qd8!? 18.Bh4 Qc8= is a repetition if Black wants it.] 18.Qxf3 Nf4™ 19.Bxf4 exf4 20.Qxf4 Rh7™



Position after: 20...Rh7™

This is an important move to remember. 21.Bc2 [21.Nxb5 Nxd4! 22.Nxd4 Bxd4 23.cxd4 Rxb3μ] 21...Qd8 22.e5 [22.Nxb5 Qg5³] 22...dxe5 23.Qg3 Rh8 24.d5 [24.Qg7 Ke7!? 25.dxe5 Rg8 26.Qxh6 Ke8μ] 24...Ne7 25.Qxe5 Rg8 26.Bh7 Kf8 27.Bxg8 Kxg8 and now 28...Ng6 or 28...Nf5 when Black is slightly better.

16...exd4

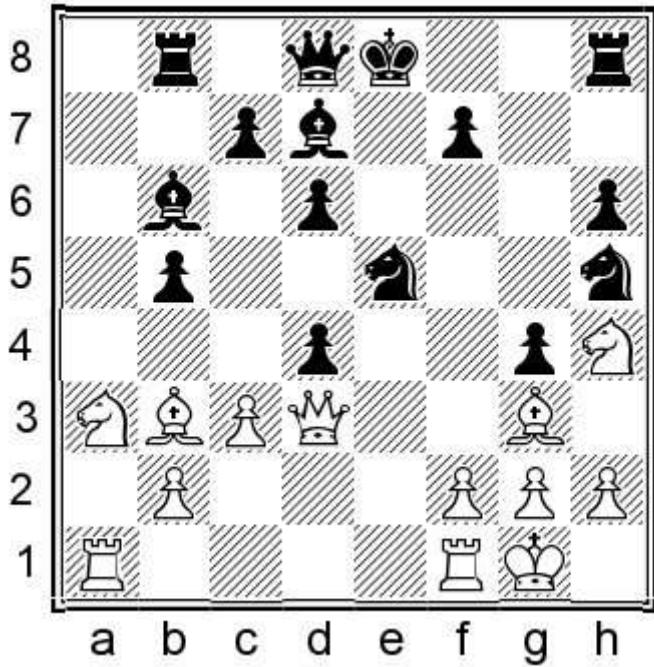


Position after: 16...exd4

17.Nxb5

A) 17.cxd4 Nxd4

B) 17.e5!? looks dangerous, but it transpires that Black is very much ready to meet this aggression: 17...Nxe5



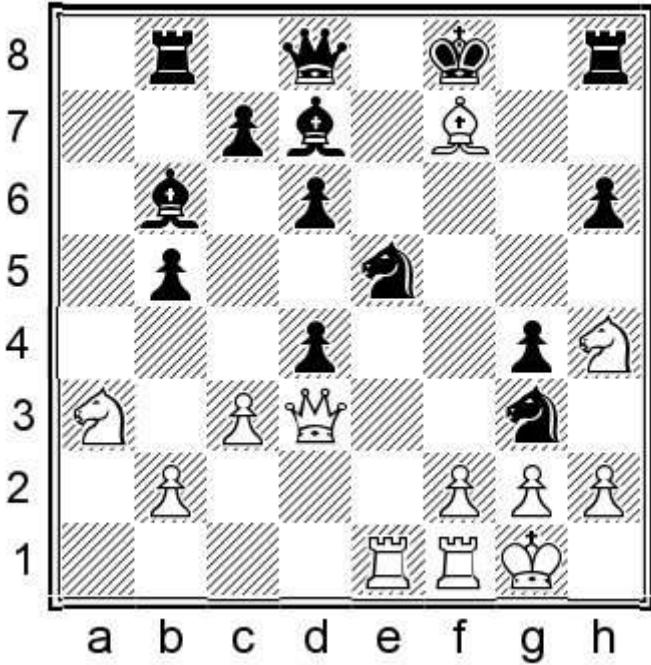
Position after: 17...Nxe5

B1) 18.Rae1? A totally logical human idea. A losing one, actually!
18...Nxg3

B1.1) 19.fxg3 Be6! 20.Qd1 dxс3+ 21.Kh1 cxb2 22.Nf5 Qd7
23.Ng7+ Kd8–+

B1.2) 19.cxd4 Nxf1 20.dxe5 [20.Ng6 Qf6–+] 20...Qxh4–+

B1.3) 19.Bxf7+ Kf8!!



Position after: 19...Kf8!!

This resource can easily be missed – there is no mate. 20.Rxe5 [20.fxg3?? dxc3+! 21.Kh1 Nxd3 22.Bg6+ Nf2+–+] 20...dxe5 21.Ng6+ [21.fxg3 Qg5!–+] 21...Kxf7 22.Nxe5+ Kf6! 23.fxg3+ Kxe5–+ White runs out of attacking pieces.

B2) 18.Bxe5 dxe5

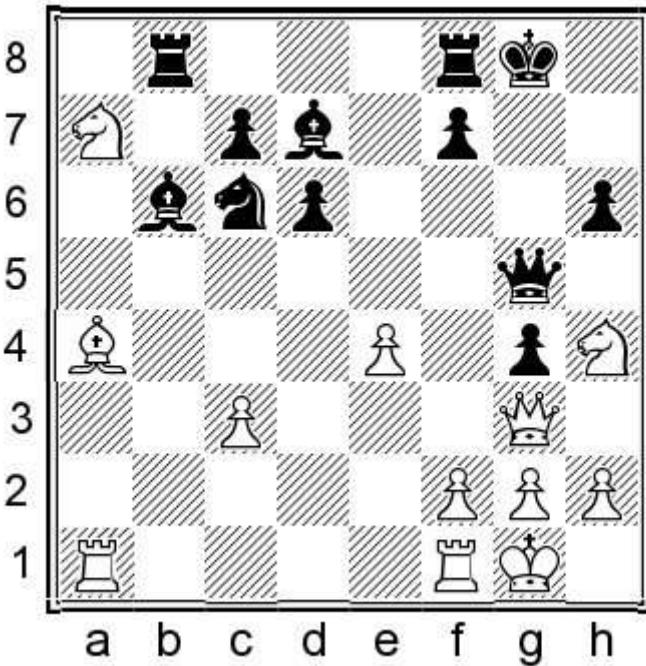
B2.1) 19.Bxf7+ Kxf7 20.Qg6+ Kf8 21.Qxh5 Qe8 21...Qg5 is also good. 22.Qxe5 [22.Qg6 Qf7!] 22...Qxe5 23.Ng6+ Kg7 24.Nxe5 Rhd8 Black is very comfortable, e.g. ... 25.Nxd7 Rxd7 26.Nxb5 d3 27.Rfd1 c6 28.Na3 Rf8

B2.2) 19.Ng6!? An ingenious move, but after 19...Nf4! 20.Nxf4 exf4 21.Qe4+ [21.Nxb5 Kf8 22.Nxd4 Qf6³] 21...Kf8 22.Qxf4 we have 22...Rh7TM Our usual defense. 23.cxd4 Qg5³ and Black is better thanks to the bishop pair.

17...Nxg3 18.Qxg3 dxc3 19.bxc3

19.Nxc3 Bd4 20.Bd5 Ne7 21.Nf5 Nxf5 22.exf5 Bxf5 23.Bc6+ Kf8³

19...Qg5 20.Ba4 0-0 21.Na7!



Position after: 21.Na7!

21...Ne5

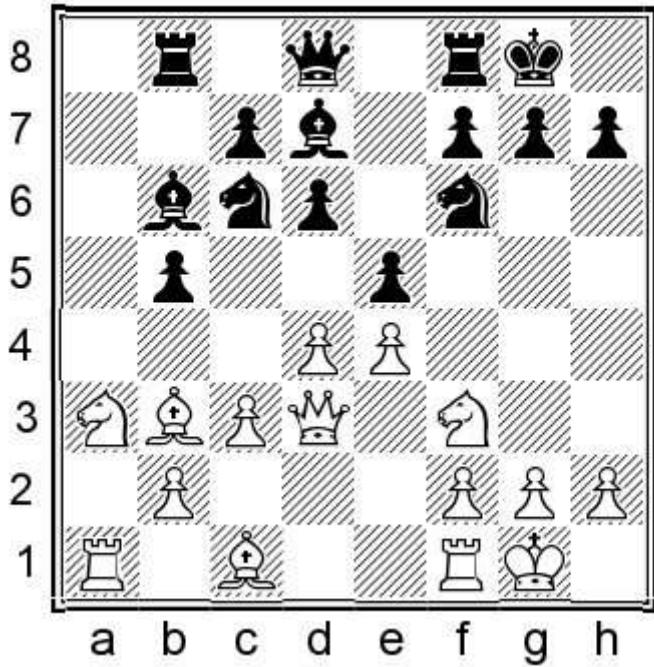
21...Bxa7 22.Bxc6 Bxc6 23.Rxa7=

22.Bxd7 Nxd7 23.Nf5 Kh7 24.Nc6 Rbe8,,

Black is at least alright.

g) 10.axb5 axb5 11.Qd3 Bd7 12.Na3 0-0 13.Nxb5

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Qd3 Bd7!? 12.Na3 0-0

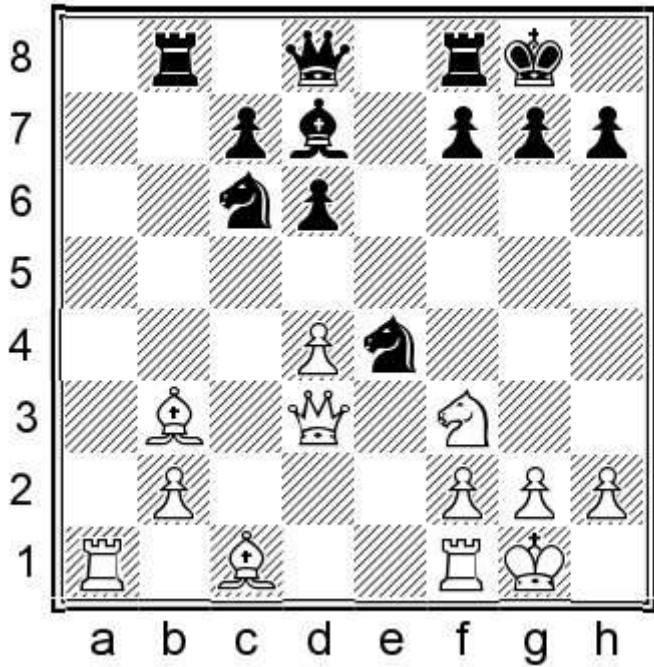


Position after: 12...0-0

The critical position in our main line: White can choose between a wild, tactical option and a calmer, more positional approach.

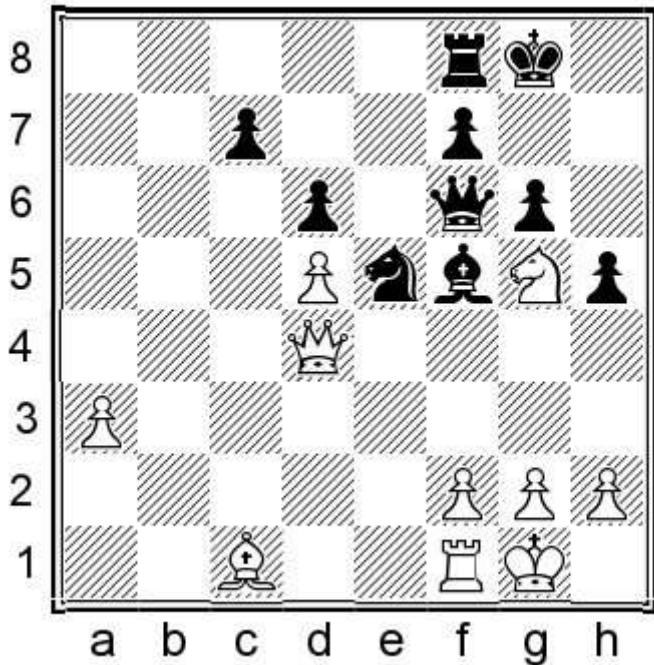
13.Nxb5 exd4 14.cxd4

14.Nbxd4 Bxd4 15.cxd4 [15.Nxd4 Nxd4 16.cxd4 Bb5 17.Bc4 Bxc4 18.Qxc4 Nxe4 19.Ra7 c5 20.dxc5 Nxc5 21.Rd1 Qb6= is likely to end peacefully soon.] 15...Nxe4



Position after: 15...Nxe4

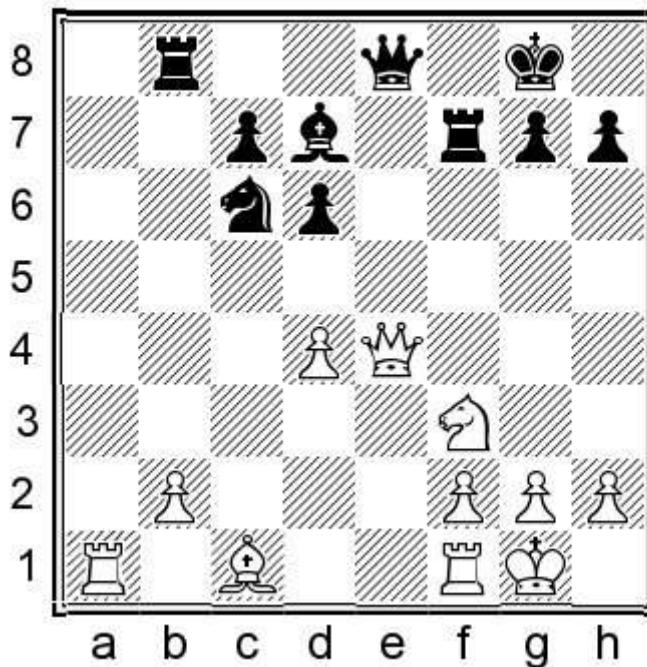
A) 16.Qxe4 Rxb3 17.Ng5 g6 18.d5 [18.Qh4 h5] 18...Ne5 19.Ra3 Rxa3 20.bxa3 Qf6 [20...f6!?=] 21.Qh4 h5 22.Qd4 Bf5



Position after: 22...Bf5

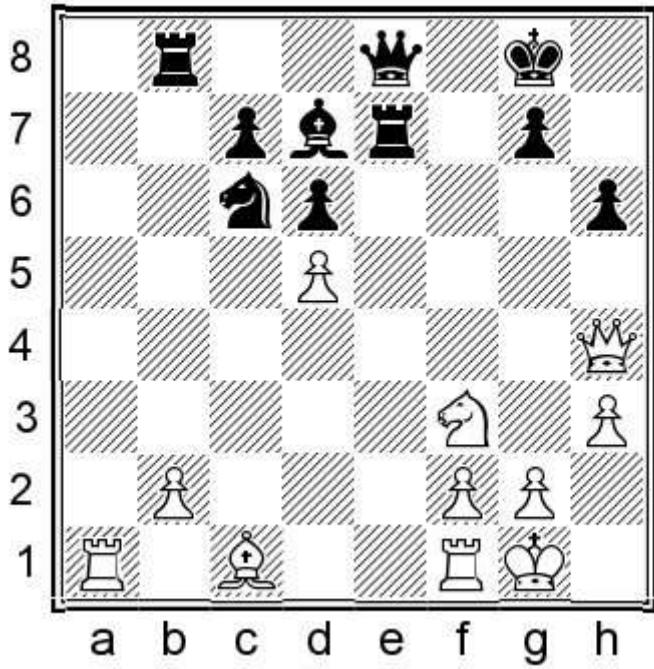
The position is complex and around equal.

B) 16.Bxf7+ Rxf7 17.Qxe4 Despite Black being a pawn down, the position is close to equal. 17...Qe8 Probably the simplest reaction.



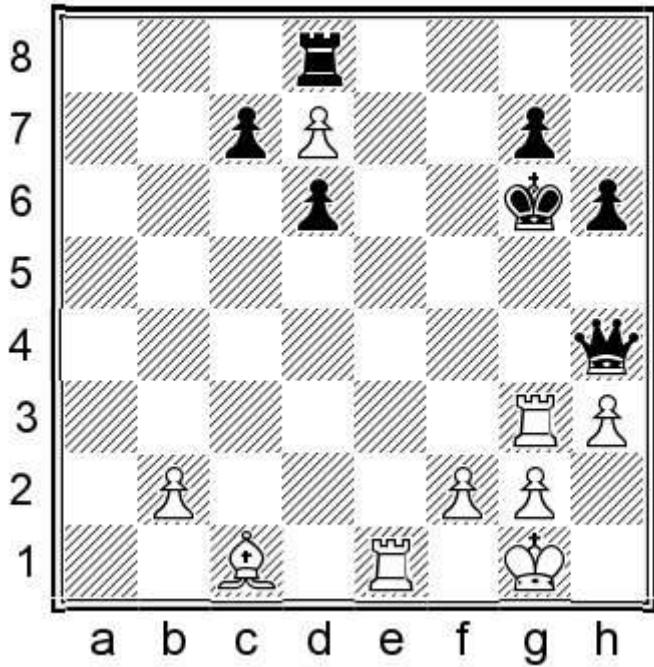
Position after: 17...Qe8

B1) 18.Qh4 Re7!? 19.h3 [19.Bg5 Re4] 19...h6 20.d5



Position after: 20.d5

This is one of the few positions in this sub-line requiring real calculation: 20...Re4 21.dxc6!? [21.Qg3 Ne7 22.Re1 Nf5 23.Rxe4 Qxe4=] 21...Rxh4 22.cxd7 Qe7 23.Nxh4 [23.Re1?? Re4–+] 23...Qxh4 24.Re1 Kf7 25.Ra3 Rd8 Only but good. 26.Rf3+ Kg6! 27.Rg3+



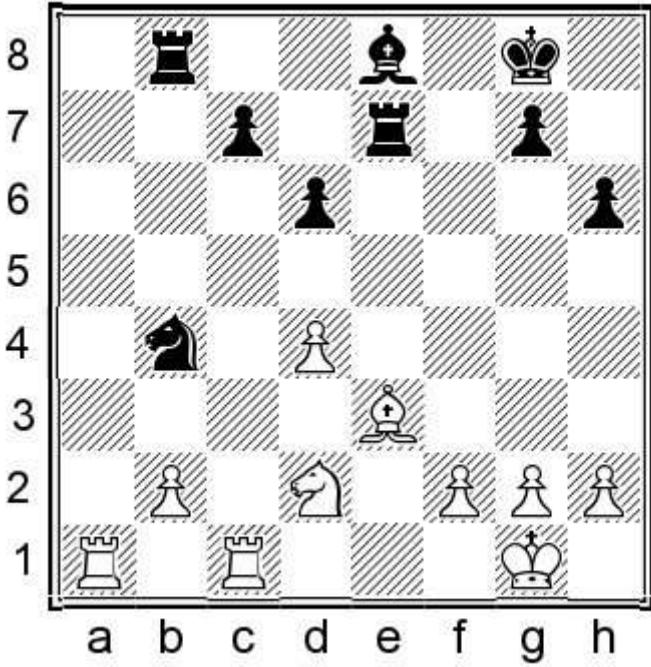
Position after: 27.Rg3+

[27.Rf4 Qh5 28.Rg4+ Kf7 29.Rf4+=] 27...Kf7 28.Rg4 Qh5 29.Rf4+ Kg8 is drawish, etc. 30.Re7 Qd1+ 31.Kh2 Qxc1 32.Re8+ Kh7 33.Rf7 [33.Rxd8 Qxf4+ 34.Kg1=] 33...Qg5 34.f4=

B2) 18.Qxe8+ Bxe8 19.Be3 Nb4 [19...Rxb2 allows 20.Ra8; Black could start with 19...h6 too] 20.Rfc1 h6 Black's setup is super-solid.

B2.1) 21.Bd2 Nd3!? [21...Nd5 22.Ra5 Bb5©] 22.Rc3 Nxb2 23.Rb1 Rb5= I can't see a way to catch the daring black knight.

B2.2) 21.Nd2 Re7



Position after: 21...Re7

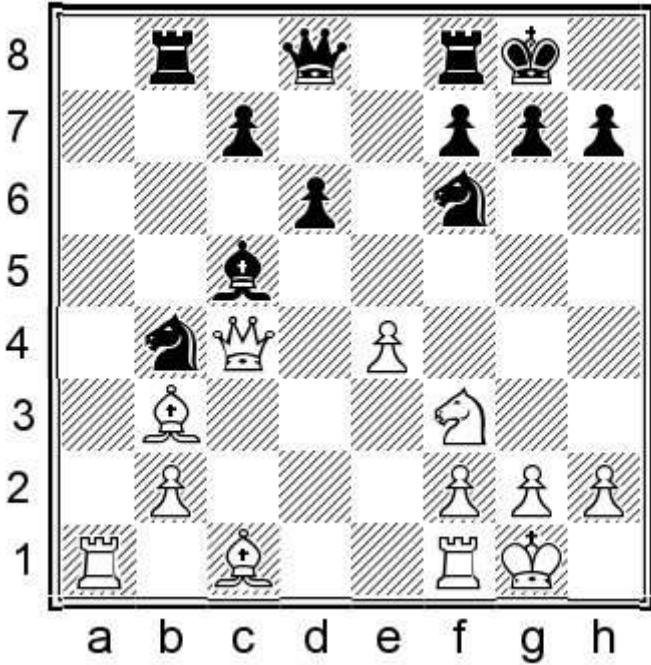
B2.2a) 22.Nc4 Nd3 23.Rc2 [23.Rc3 is not a problem because of 23...Nxb2 24.Rb1 Na4! 25.Rxb8 Nxc3] 23...Bg6=

B2.2b) 22.Ra3 Nd5 23.Nc4 Bf7 24.b3 Kh7© and it's really hard to imagine how White can ever make any progress.

14...Nb4

The former world champion opted for 14...Ne5?! but he had to suffer in a worse endgame: 15.dxe5 Bxb5 16.Bc4 Bxc4 17.Qxc4 dxe5 18.Nxe5 Qd6 19.Nd3 [19.Nf3²] 19...Rfd8 20.Ra3 Qd4 21.Qxd4 Rxd4 22.e5 Nd5 23.g3 h6 24.Re1² Dominguez Perez, L (2712) – Anand, V (2790) Wijk aan Zee 2010.

15.Qc4 Bxb5 16.Qxb5 Bxd4 17.Qc4 Bc5



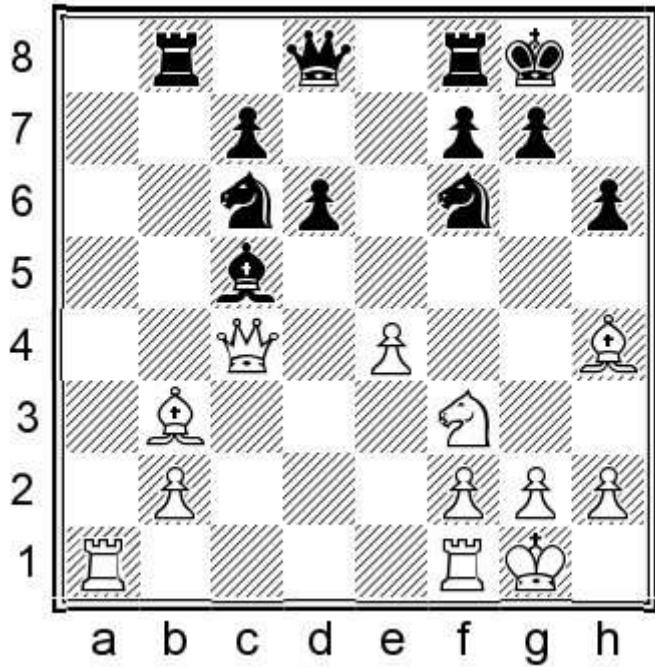
Position after: 17...Bc5

This position is still relatively fresh: it has only seen 4 tries altogether. White puts his hopes into his strong bishop pair, while Black counts on his tricky knights and good central control.

18.e5!

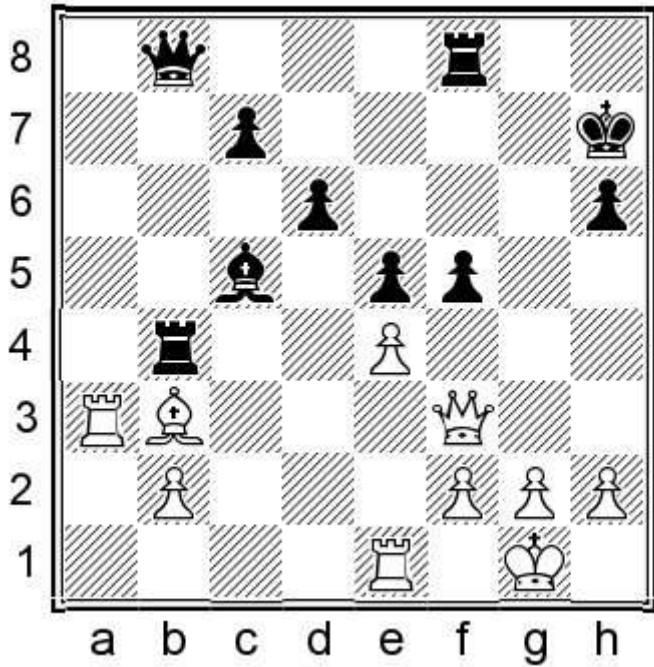
Opening the position generally supports the side with the bishop pair – this is no exception.

18.Bg5 h6 19.Bh4 Nc6 19...g5 is also possible, but it's not necessary. Black has little to worry about in this sub-variation.



Position after: 19...Nc6

A) 20.Rfe1 Rb4 21.Qc2 Qb8!? 22.Bxf6 gxf6 23.Ra3 Ne5 leads to an interesting battle. 24.Nh4 [24.Nxe5 fxe5 25.Qd1 Kh7 with the idea: 26.Qf3 f5!

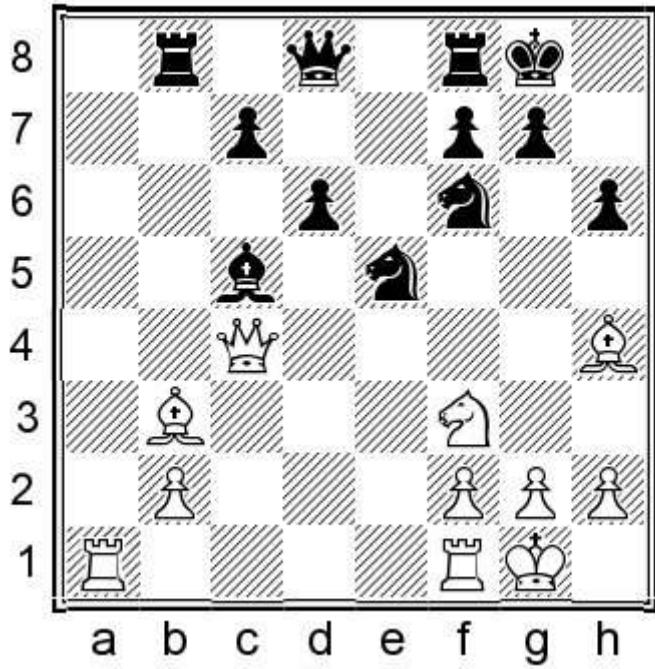


Position after: 26...f5!

27.exf5 Rf4 28.Qh5 Rf6–+] 24...Kh7 is good for Black too, as 25.Nf5 Rg8 26.Kh1 Rb6 27.f4 Ng4 is very pleasant for the second player.

B) 20.Bc2 leads to consequences that finally favour Black. 20...Rxb2 21.e5 Rb4 22.Qd3 dxe5 23.Bxf6 Qxd3 24.Bxd3 gxf6 25.Rac1 Bd6 26.Rxc6 e4³

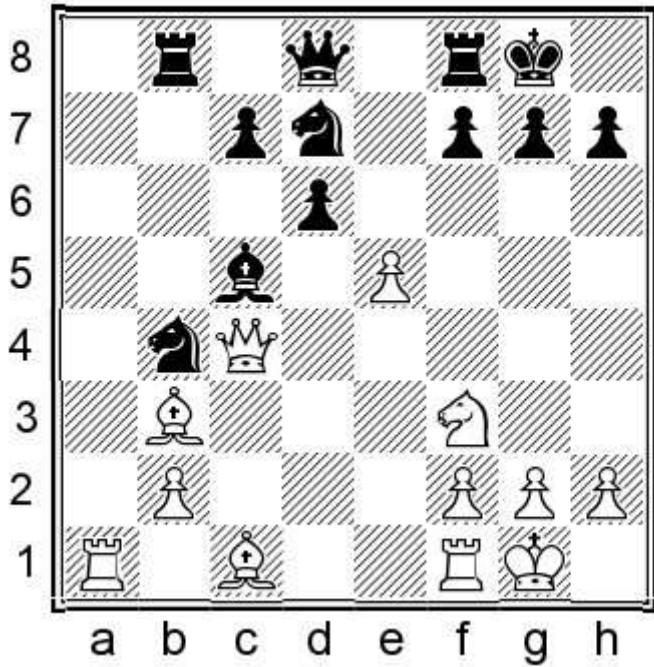
C) 20.e5 Nxe5!



Position after: 20...Nxe5!

21.Nxe5 dxe5 22.Qxc5 Rxb3 In this simplified position the draw is likely and near, e.g. 23.Rad1 Qb8 24.Qxe5 Re8 25.Qf5 Ne4 [25...Rb5=] 26.Rd7 Nd6 27.Qc2 Rxb2 28.Qxc7 Qxc7 29.Rxc7 Nf5=

18...Nd7

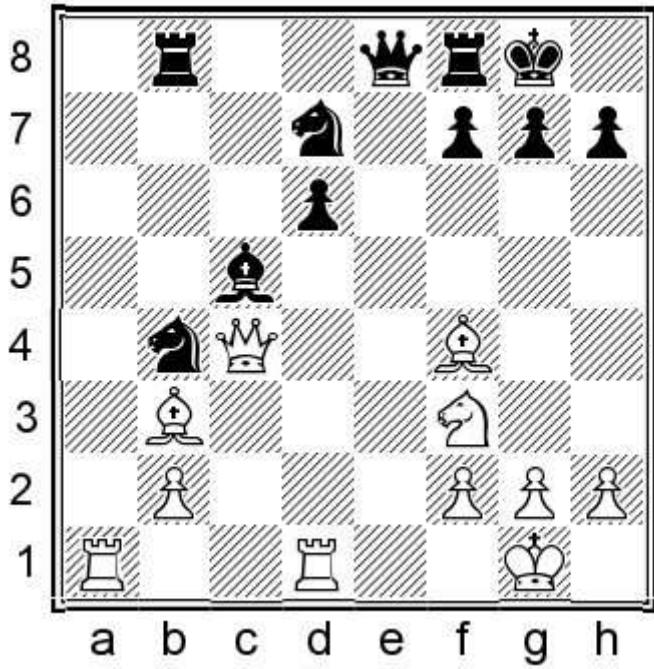


Position after: 18...Nd7

19.Bg5

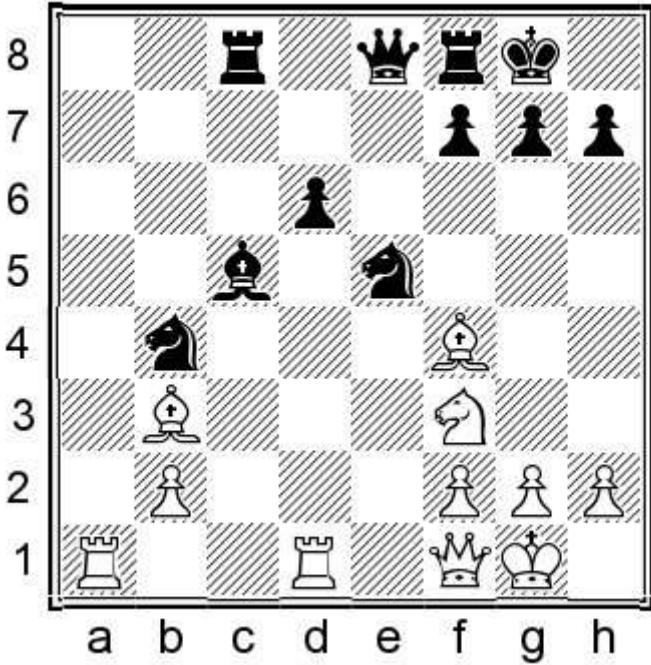
The most logical follow-up, accelerating White's development.

19.Rd1 Qe8 20.exd6 [20.Bf4 dx5 21.Bg3 Bd6 22.Ba4 Ra8 23.Bxd7 Rxa1 24.Rxa1 Qxd7=] 20...cxd6 21.Bf4



Position after: 21.Bf4

White immediately puts Black's central pawn under pressure, but he surrenders protection of the f2-pawn, which becomes a target in many lines.
21...Rc8 [21...Qe7 22.Bg5] 22.Qf1 Ne5!? [22...Qe7 is also playable.]



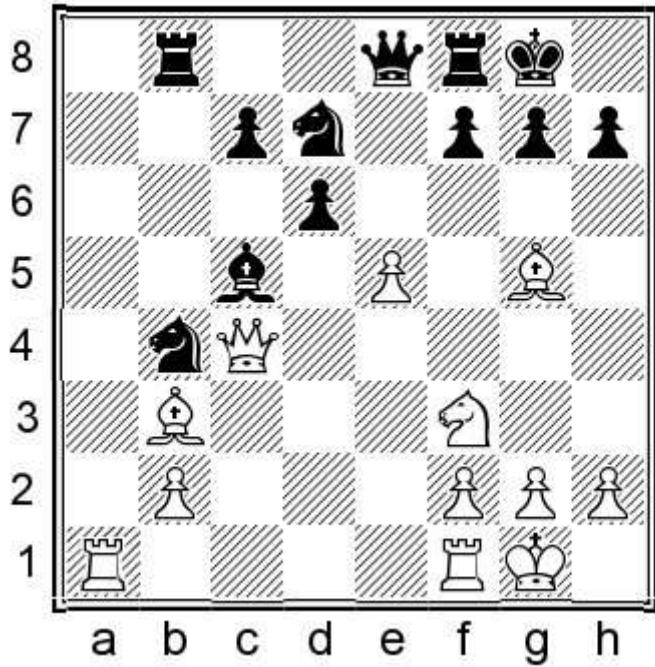
Position after: 22...Ne5!?

The position is more or less balanced. See the example lines below:

A) 23.Nxe5 dxe5 24.Bg3 [24.Bd2 e4=] 24...e4!? [24...Nc6=] 25.Bc4 Qe7 26.Qe2 Kh8 27.b3 f5 28.Bf4 Rcd8∞

B) 23.Ng5!? Qe7 24.Qe2 [24.Ne4?! Ng6! A sudden-double attack. 25.Nxc5 Nxf4] 24...Rce8! 25.Qh5 [25.Ba4? Ned3; 25.Qe4 g6=] 25...h6 26.Bxe5 dxe5 27.Ne4 [27.h4=] 27...Rb8 28.g4!? Rb6 29.g5 Kh8 30.Nxc5 Qxc5 31.Rd7 Nc2 32.Bxc2 Qxc2 33.Rxf7 Rxf7 34.Qxf7 Kh7= The position is level.

19...Qe8



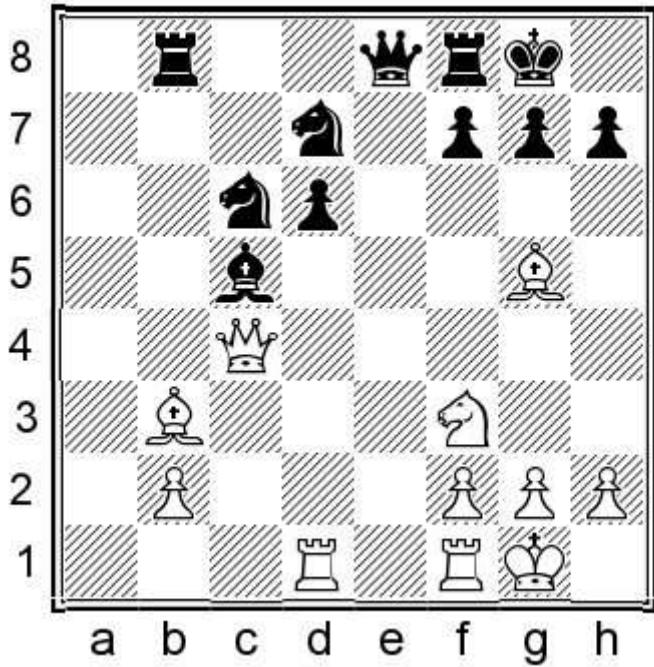
Position after: 19...Qe8

20.exd6

20.Rfe1 d5 21.Qc3 Qe6 22.Bh4 h6= is ok for Black.

20...cxd6 21.Rae1

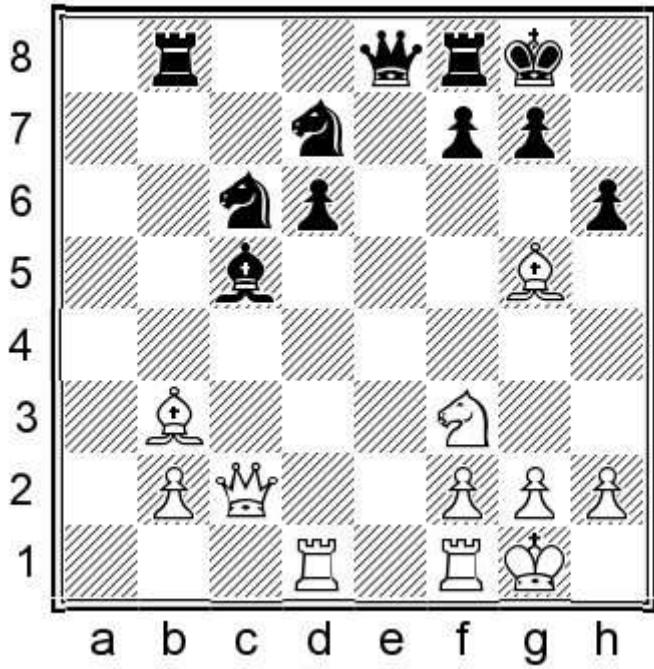
21.Rad1 Nc6



Position after: 21...Nc6

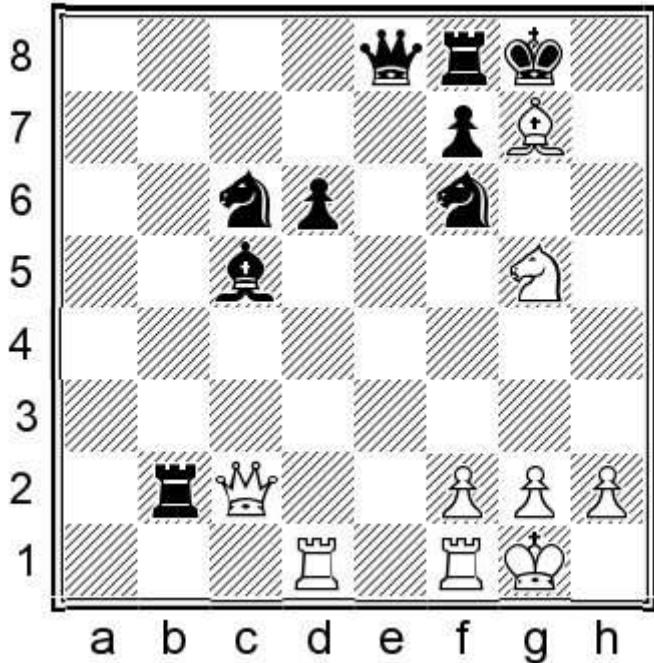
A) 22.Rfe1 Nde5 23.Nxe5 Nxe5 24.Qc2 Qb5 25.Bd5 Ng4 [25...Qxb2 26.Qf5=] 26.Bh4 Qxb2 27.Qf5 White has enough compensation to keep the balance.

B) 22.Qc2 h6



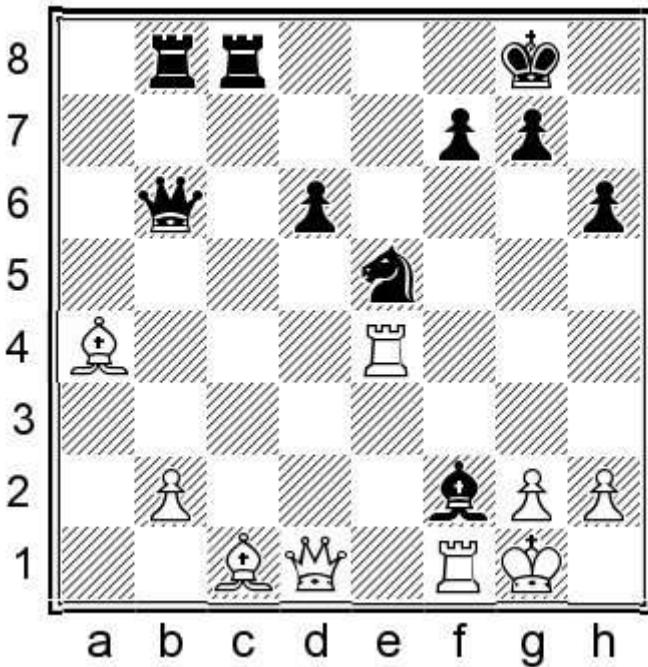
Position after: 22...h6

23.Rfe1 White has fully mobilized his forces. [23.Bxh6?! Rxb3 24.Ng5 Nf6 25.Bxg7 Rxb2!?



Position after: 25...Rxb2!?

26.Qxb2 Kxg7 27.Rfe1 Ne5 Black has a small material advantage.]
23...Nde5 24.Nxe5 Nxe5 25.Bc1 Qb5! 26.Ba4 [26.Bd5 Ng4] 26...Qb4!?
27.Re4 [27.b3 Rfc8=] 27...Qb6 28.Rf1 Rfc8 29.Qd1 is around equal. For example: 29...Bxf2+!?



Position after: 29...Bxf2+!?

[29...Rc7=] 30.Rxf2 Rxc1 31.Qxc1 Qxf2+ 32.Kxf2 Nd3+ 33.Ke3 Nxc1
34.Re8+ Rxe8+ 35.Bxe8 Kf8 36.Ba4 Ke7=

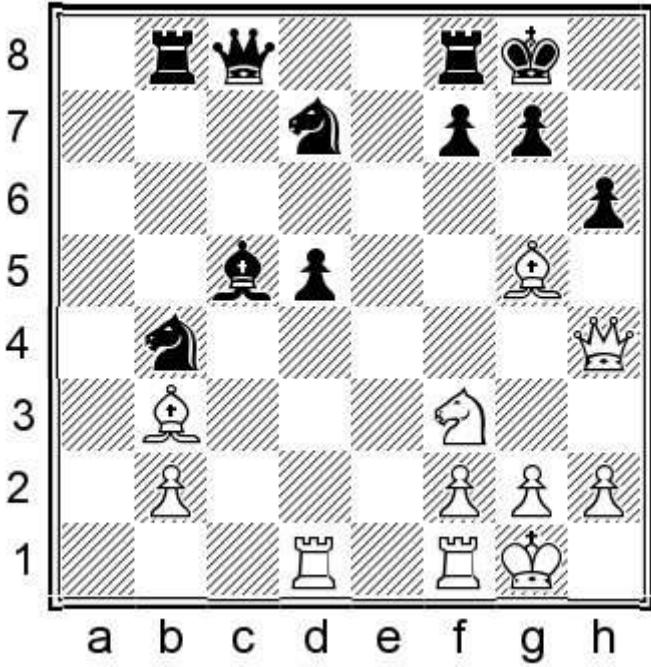
21...Qc8 22.Qh4

22.Be7?! is of course met by 22...d5=

22...d5 23.Rd1

23.Qg4 Nd3 24.Bh6 g6 25.Bxf8 Kxf8 26.Bxd5 Nxe1 27.Nxe1 [27.Rxe1 Nf6=] 27...Ne5 28.Qxc8+ Rxc8 29.Nf3 Nd3=

23...h6



Position after: 23...h6

Black should fear neither the sacrifice on h6, nor giving up the pawn on d5.

24.Bf4

- A) 24.Bd2 Rb6 25.Bc3 Nf6 26.Rfe1 [26.Qg3 Bd6=] 26...Re8=
- B) 24.Bxh6?! gxh6 25.Bxd5 [25.Qxh6 Rb6 This move comes in handy.] 25...Rb6 26.Bc4 Rg6 should be ok for Black.

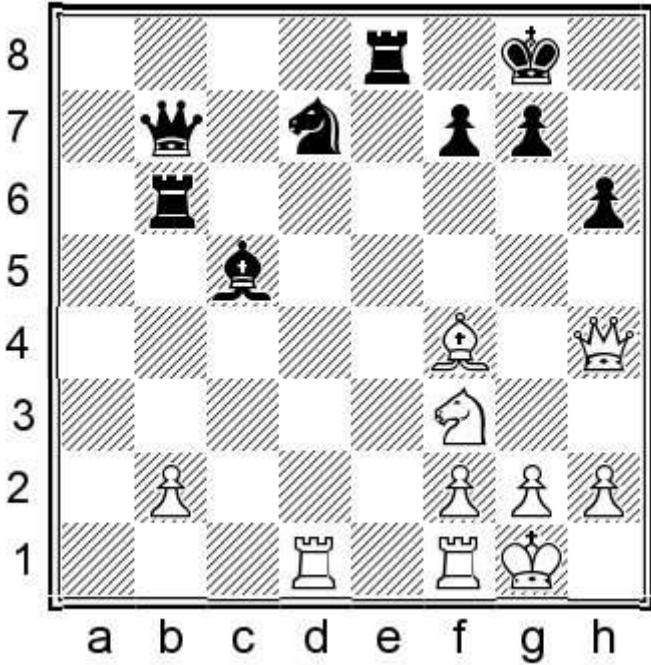
24...Rb6 25.Bxd5 Nxd5 26.Rxd5

White has won a pawn, though his position is still not better.

26...Qb7

We should refrain from 26...Rxb2? because of 27.Bxh6!+–

27.Rdd1 Re8



Position after: 27...Re8

Black's forces are extremely active.

28.Qh3

28.Bc1 Nf6 29.Qc4 Rc6 30.Qa4 Ne4 31.Nd4 [31.Rde1 Rce6=] 31...Rcc8© and it's hard to see how White can make any progress.

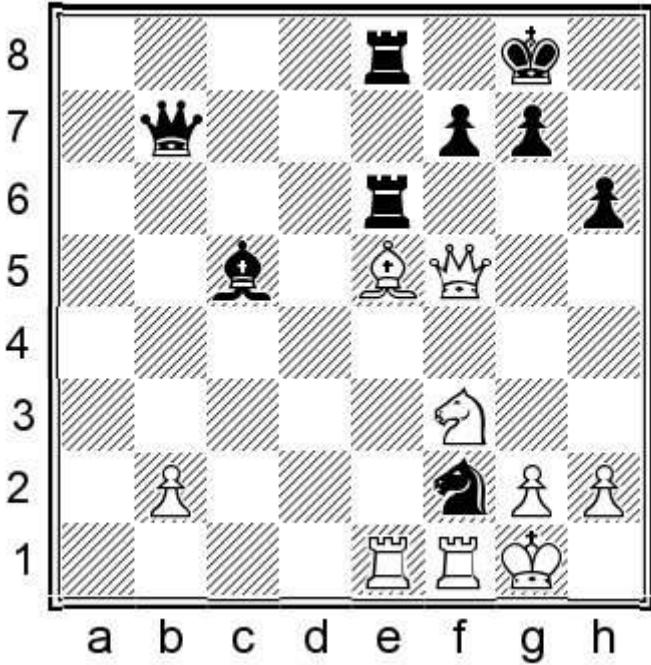
28...Nf6

28...Nf8 Can also be considered, with ideas like: 29.Be5 Ng6 30.Bc3 Nf4 31.Qg4 Ne2+ 32.Kh1 Rg6 33.Qf5 Nxc3 34.bxc3 Qc8=

29.Be5 Rbe6 30.Qf5

30.Bxf6 Rxf6 31.Qd7 Qxd7 32.Rxd7 Re2 33.Rd2 Rxd2 34.Nxd2 Re6! 35.Rc1 [35.Nc4 Re2 36.g3 Rc2=] 35...Re2 36.Rxc5 Rxd2=

30...Ne4 31.Rde1 Nxf2!



Position after: 31...Nxf2!

32.Rxf2 Qa7 33.Ref1 Bxf2+ 34.Rxf2 Qc5

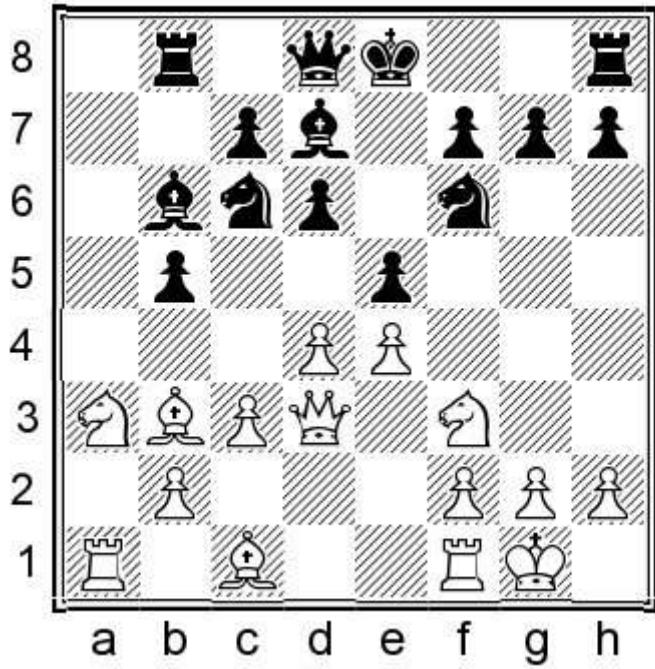
Now ...f6 is threatened.

35.g4 Rxe5 36.Nxe5 Rxe5 37.Qxf7+ Kh7 38.Kg2 h5©

We have been following the perfectly executed game Cadillon Costa, L (2350) – Cavalcanti, B (2173) ICCF email 2015 where Black easily held the draw.

h) 10.axb5 axb5 11.Qd3 Bd7 12.Na3 0-0 13.Bg5

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Qd3 Bd7!? 12.Na3

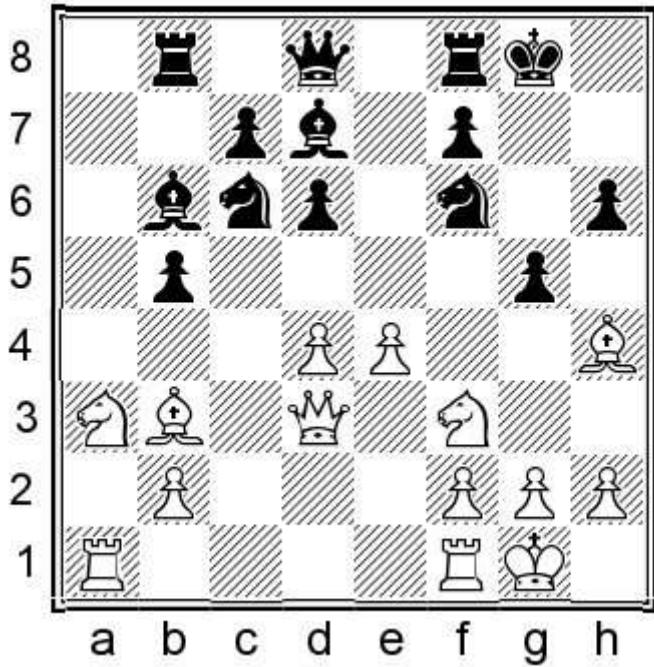


Position after: 12.Na3

12...0-0 13.Bg5 h6 14.Bh4 exd4 15.cxd4

15.Nxd4? Ne5 16.Qc2 Ng6 makes Black's life significantly easier.

15...g5!

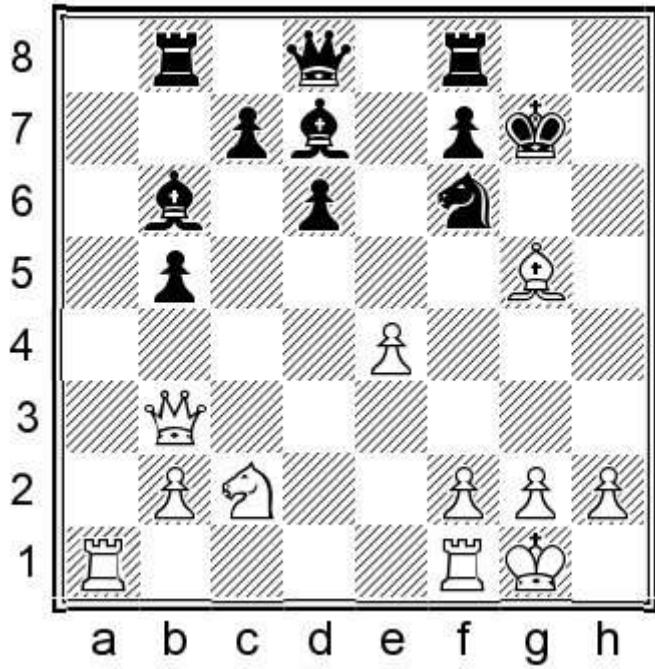


Position after: 15...g5!

Quite surprisingly a new position! It was thoroughly analyzed by Svidler in his videos, but it still hasn't been tried in tournament practice. His analysis was of course very valuable, and I have built many of them into this material. In comparison with the old main line (starting with 11...0-0) we have an additional Na3/Bd7 move pair, which I feel slightly favours us.

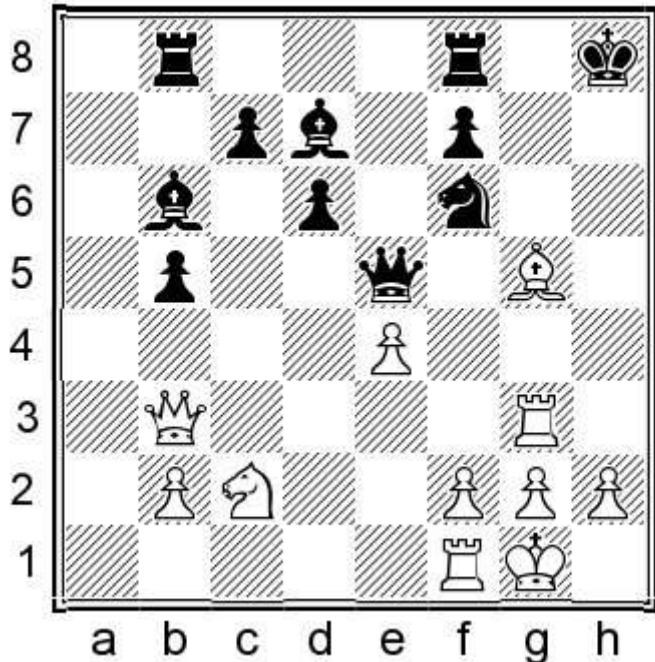
16.Bg3

A) 16.Nxg5? This is also far from being ideal, thanks to the misplaced a3-knight. 16...hxg5 17.Bxg5 Nxd4 18.Nc2 Nxb3 19.Qxb3 Kg7 Critical. It seems as though White can't organize a successful attack if we are careful enough. I offer some lines to show how Black should proceed with his defense:



Position after: 19...Kg7

A1) 20.Rad1 Qe7 21.Rd3 Qe5 22.Rg3 Kh8!



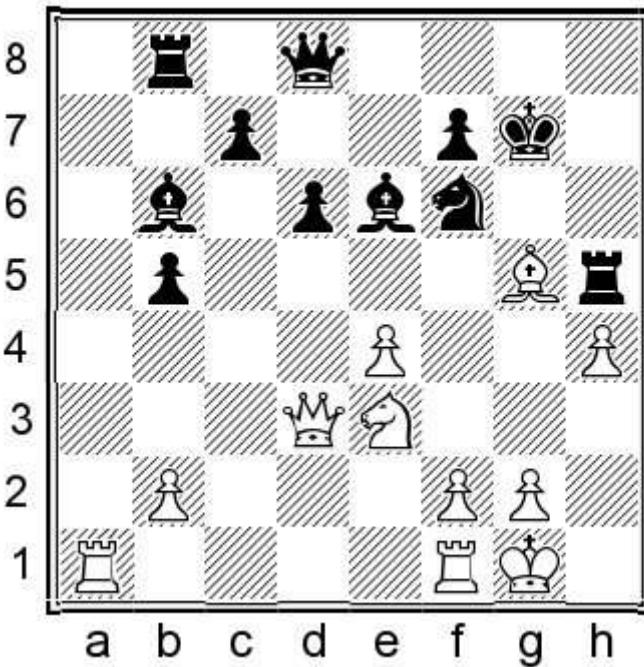
Position after: 22...Kh8!

23.Qf3 Nh7 24.Bd2 f6 25.Bc3 Qe7–+

A2) 20.Ne3 Be6

A2.1) 21.Nd5 Bxd5 22.exd5 Qd7 23.Qf3 [23.Bxf6+ Kxf6 24.Qc3+ Ke7! 25.Rfe1+ Kd8 26.Qf6+ Kc8 27.Re7 Qg4–+] 23...Ng4! 24.h3 f6!–+

A2.2) 21.Qd3 Rh8 22.h4 Rh5!

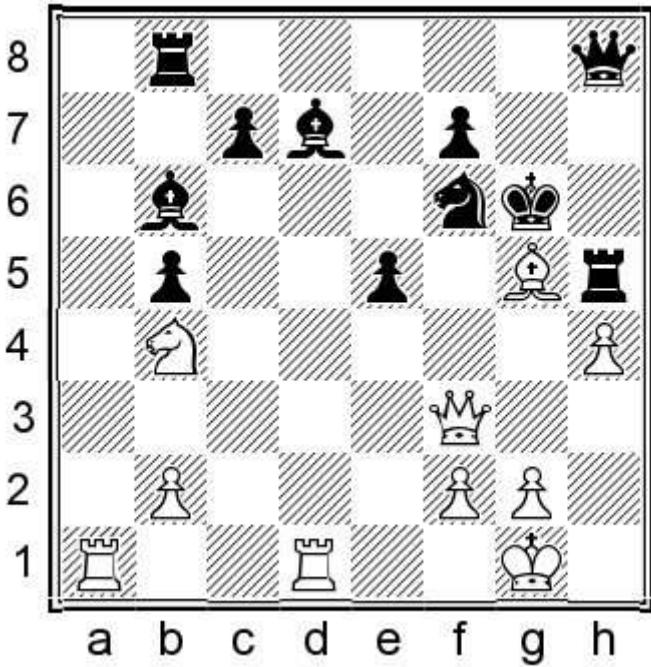


Position after: 22...Rh5!

23.Nd5 Bxd5 24.exd5 Qd7 25.Qf3 Ng4 26.Rae1 f6 27.Re6 fxg5 28.Qxg4 Qf7–+

A3) 20.Nb4 Rh8 21.e5 The trickiest try also fails. [21.Nd5 Be6! 22.Qf3 Bd4 23.Rad1 Be5 24.h3 Bxd5 25.exd5 Qd7 26.Rfe1 Nh7 27.Bf4 Bxf4 28.Qxf4 Nf8 29.Re3 Ng6 30.Qd4+ Kg8–+] 21...dxe5 22.Qf3 Black has many good options, one example being: [22.Nd5 Be6] 22...Kg6 23.h4

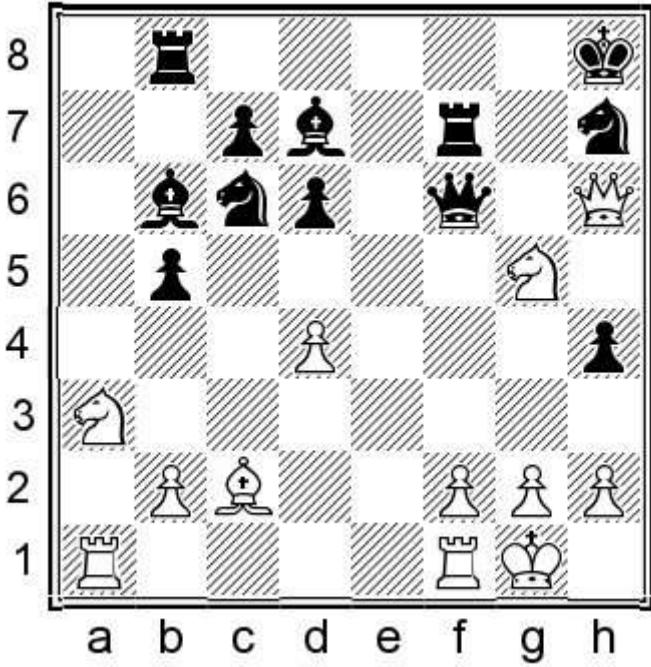
Rh5 24.Rfd1 Qh8!?



Position after: 24...Qh8!?

I've decided to give this line, since it's very instructive. 25.Rxd7 [25.Bxf6 Qxf6 26.Qxf6+ Kxf6 27.Rxd7 Rxh4 28.Nd5+ Ke6 29.Nxb6 Rbh8!–+] 25...Rxh4 26.Bxh4 [26.Qxf6+ Qxf6 27.Bxf6 Kxf6 transposes to 25.Bxf6] 26...Qxh4 27.Re7 Rh8 28.g4 Bxf2+ 29.Kf1 Qh1+ 30.Qxh1 Rxh1+ 31.Kxf2 Nxg4+ 32.Kg3 Rxa1 33.Kxg4 Ra4–+

B) 16.e5?! The push doesn't work this time. 16...gxh4 17.Qg6+ Kh8 18.Qxh6+ Nh7 19.Bc2 f5 20.exf6 Rf7 21.Ng5 Qxf6



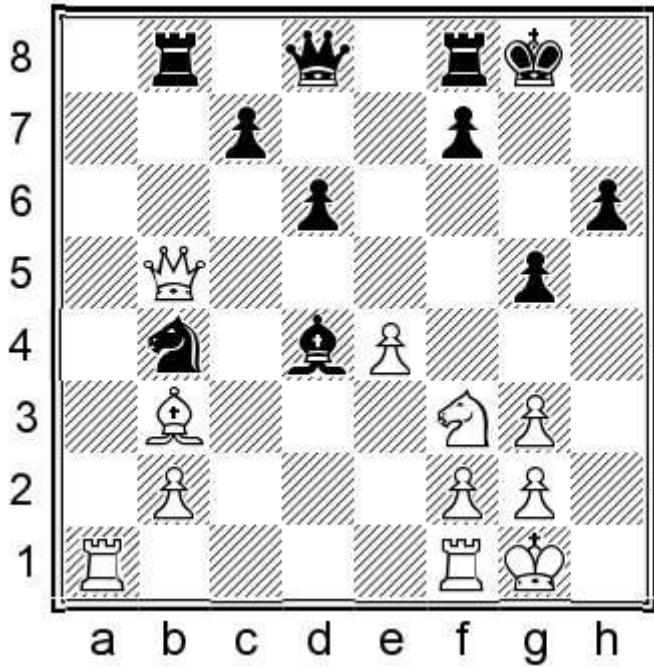
Position after: 21...Qxf6

22.Nxf7+ [22.Qxf6+? Rxf6 23.Bxh7 Nxd4+] 22...Qxf7 23.Nxb5 [23.Bxh7 Qxh7 24.Qf6+ Kg8+] 23...h3 [23...Bf5 24.Qf4 Bg6 25.Qxf7 Bxf7μ] 24.Ra3 Qg7 25.Qxg7+ Kxg7 26.Rg3+ Kh8μ

16...Nh5 17.e5

A) 17.Nc2?! Qf6 18.e5 dxе5 19.dxe5 Qf5 [19...Bf5!?] 20.Qd5 Rbd8 21.Ne3 Qg6 22.Bc2 Qg7 23.Qe4 Nxg3 24.hxg3 Rfe8 and Black is at least fine.

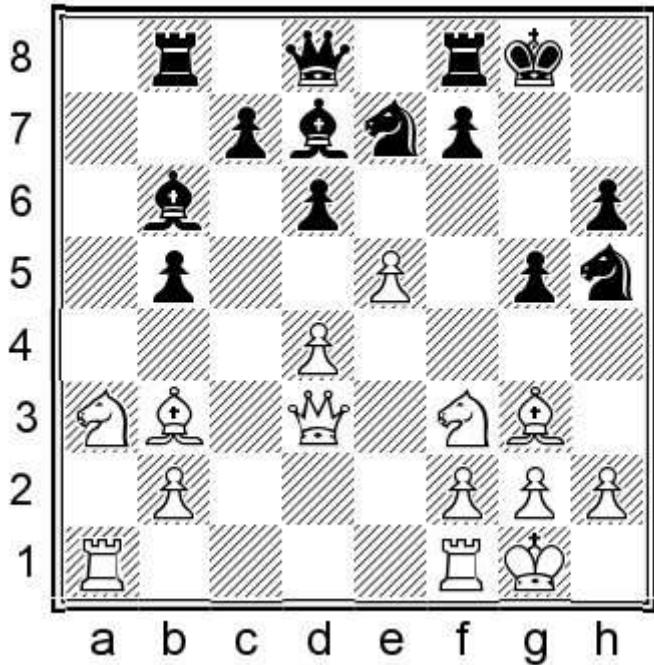
B) 17.Nxb5 Nb4 18.Qe2 (or 18.Qc4) 18...Bxb5 19.Qxb5 Nxg3 20.hxg3 Bxd4



Position after: 20...Bxd4

21.Qc4 [21.Qf5 Bg7 The safest. 22.e5 d5 23.Rfc1 Qc8,, I got a comfortable position out of the opening in an online blitz game.]
21...Bxb2 22.Ra7 Nc6! 23.Qxc6 Rxb3 24.Qc2 [24.Rxc7? Rc3; 24.Qxc7 Qxc7 25.Rxc7 Bg7=] 24...Qb8 25.Rxc7 Bg7= Black has fully equalized the game.

17...Ne7!



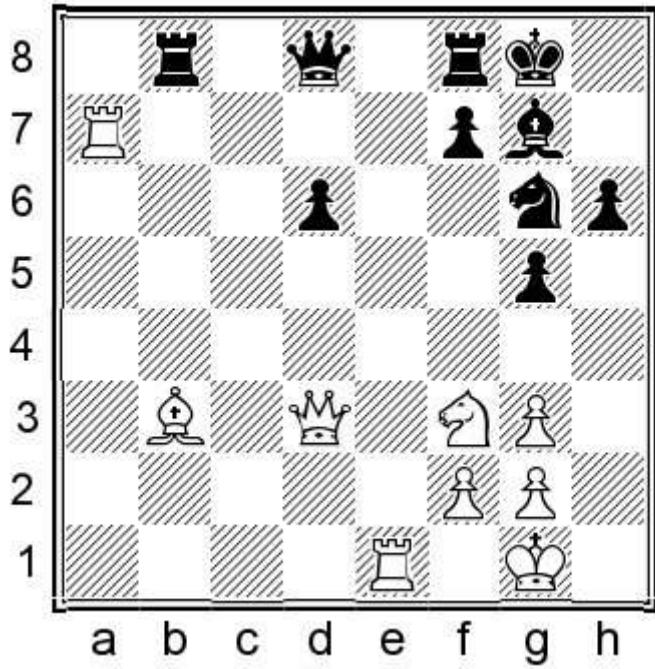
Position after: 17...Ne7!

Now Black can safely block the mating threat after 18.Bc2 with 18...Bf5! White can try a handful of moves here.

17...Kg7?! is not optimal: 18.Bc2! Rh8 19.exd6

18.Rfe1

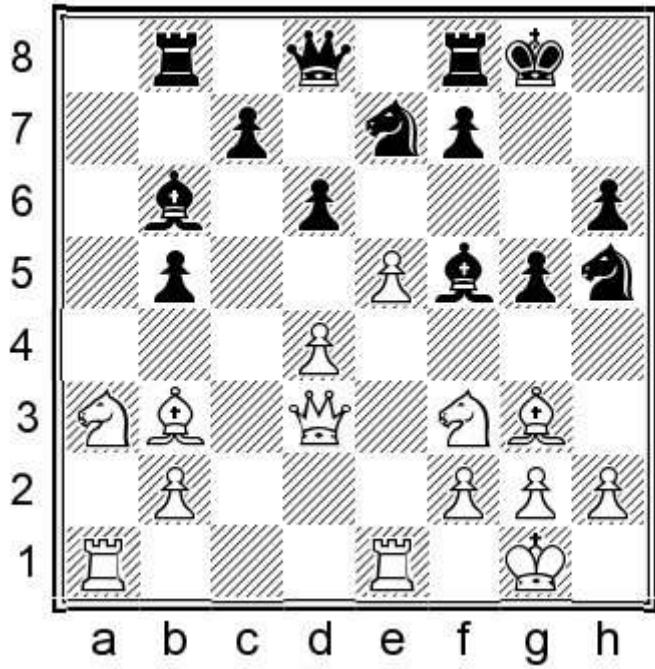
18.exd6 cxd6 19.Nxb5 [19.Bxd6 Bf5 20.Bxe7 Bxd3 21.Bxd8 Rbxd8 only helps Black.] 19...Nxg3 20.hxg3 Bxb5 21.Qxb5 Bxd4 22.Qd3 Bxb2 23.Ra7 [23.Ra6 Qc7 24.Bc2 Ng6 25.Rxd6 Rfd8=] 23...Bg7 24.Re1 [24.Rd1 d5] 24...Ng6!



Position after: 24...Ng6!

25.Bd5 [25.Qxg6? Rxb3] 25...Qf6 Black has reached maximum solidity.
26.Rxf7 [26.Rd7 Kh8=] 26...Rxf7 27.Re6 Qa1+ 28.Re1 [28.Kh2?? Rb1-+] 28...Qf6 29.Re6 Qa1+=

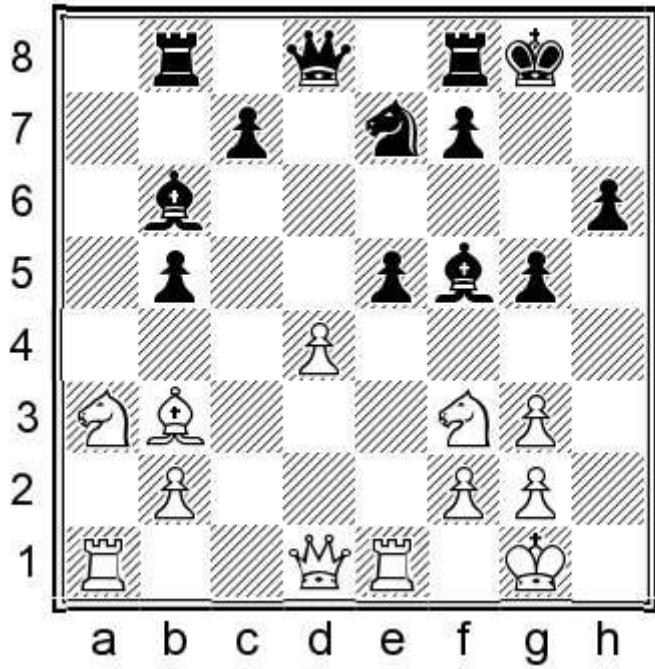
18...Bf5



Position after: 18...Bf5

19.Qe3

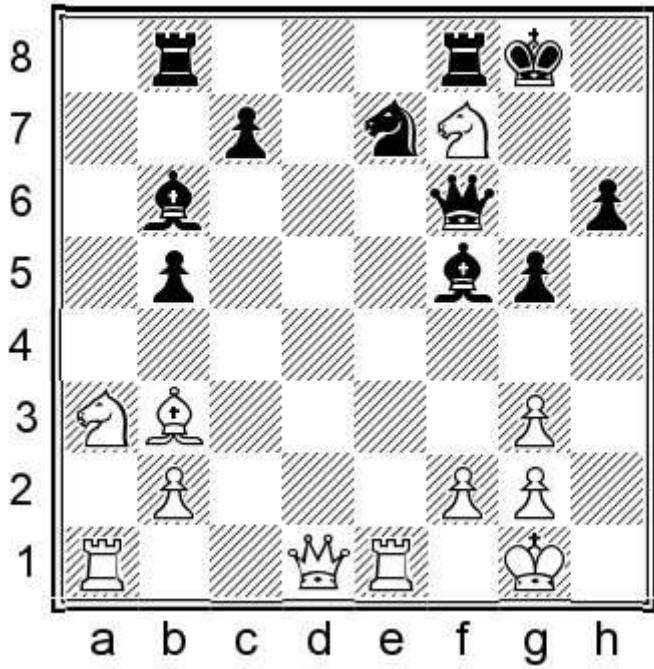
A) 19.Qd1 Nxg3 20.hxg3 dx5



Position after: 20...dxe5

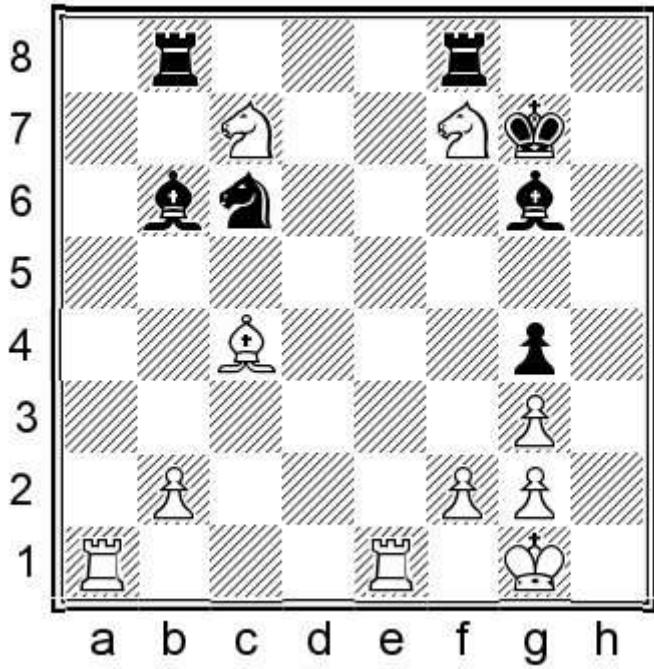
A1) 21.Nxe5 Qxd4

A1.1) 22.Nxf7 Qf6



Position after: 22...Qf6

White has no good discovery check. 23.Qf3 [23.Nxg5+ Kh8 24.Nf3 Bg4 25.Nxb5 Nf5 26.Re6 Qg7] 23...g4!? Ambitious. 24.Nxh6+ Kh8 25.Qc3™ 25...Nc6 26.Nf7+ Kg7 27.Qxf6+ Kxf6 28.Nxb5 Kg7 29.Bc4 Bg6 30.Nxc7

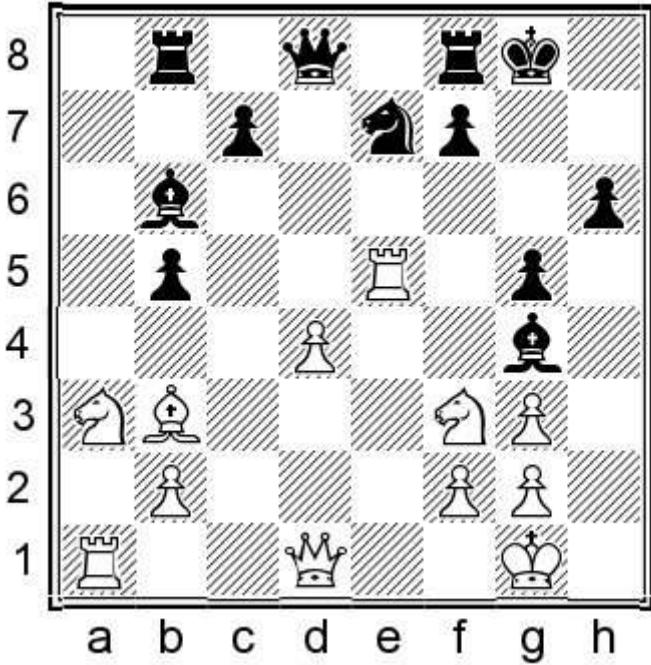


Position after: 30.Nxc7

30...Bxf7 31.Bxf7 Bxc7 32.Bh5 Bb6 33.Re2 Rxf2 34.Rxf2 Rf8
35.Bxg4 Rxf2³

A1.2) 22.Qxd4 Bxd4 23.Nxf7 Bg6 [23...Bxb2!?] 24.Ne5+ Kg7
[24...Kh8 25.Re2∞] 25.Nf3 Bf6 26.Rad1 c5 27.Ne5 c4 28.Bc2=

A2) 21.Rxe5 Bg4!



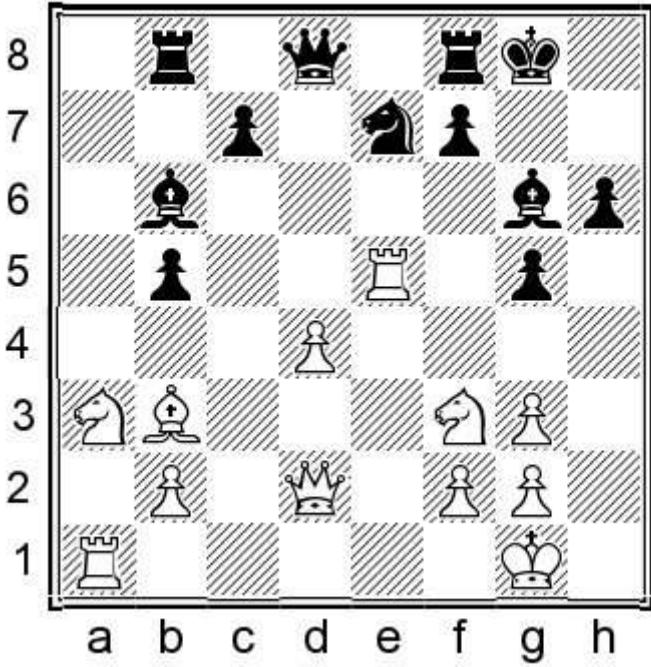
Position after: 21...Bg4!

This is not possible when the queen is placed on d2, but while it's on d1, pinning the knight and undermining the d4-pawn is a good idea.

A2.1) 22.Nxb5 c6 23.Qe2 Bxf3! [23...Ng6? 24.Qe4! would be a huge burn.] 24.Qxf3 [24.gxf3? Ng6] 24...cxb5 25.Qe4 [25.Rae1 Ng6 26.Re8 Qd7 27.Qf6=] 25...Qxd4 26.Qxd4 Bxd4 27.Rxe7 Kg7= is drawish.

A2.2) 22.Re4 Bf5 23.Re1 [23.Re5 Bg4=] 23...c6 24.Qe2 [24.Nc2 c5∞] 24...Ng6 25.Nc2 g4 26.Ne5 Nxe5 27.Qxe5 Bg6∞ The position is complicated.

B) 19.Qd2 Nxg3 20.hxg3 dx5 21.Rxe5 Bg6



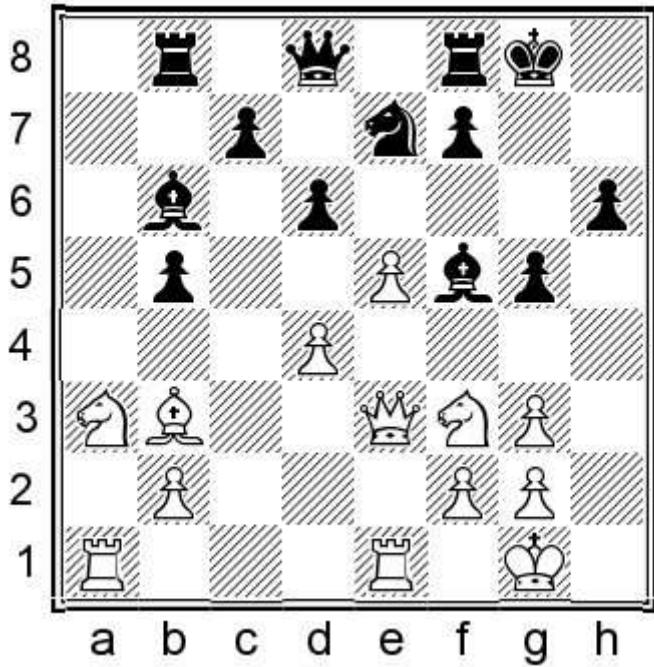
Position after: 21...Bg6

The position remains complex. I like the bishop pair but our king needs care in a lot of variations, e.g. [21...Bg4?? 22.Rxg5++–]

B1) 22.Nxb5 c6 23.Rxe7 [23.Rae1 cxb5 24.Rxe7 Ba5 25.Bxf7+ Bxf7 26.b4 Bb6 27.Qd3=] 23...Qxe7 24.Ne5=

B2) 22.Nc2 Nc6 23.Rd5 [23.Rxb5 Qf6] 23...Qf6 24.Ne5 Nxe5 25.dxe5 Qg7∞

19...Nxg3 20.hxg3

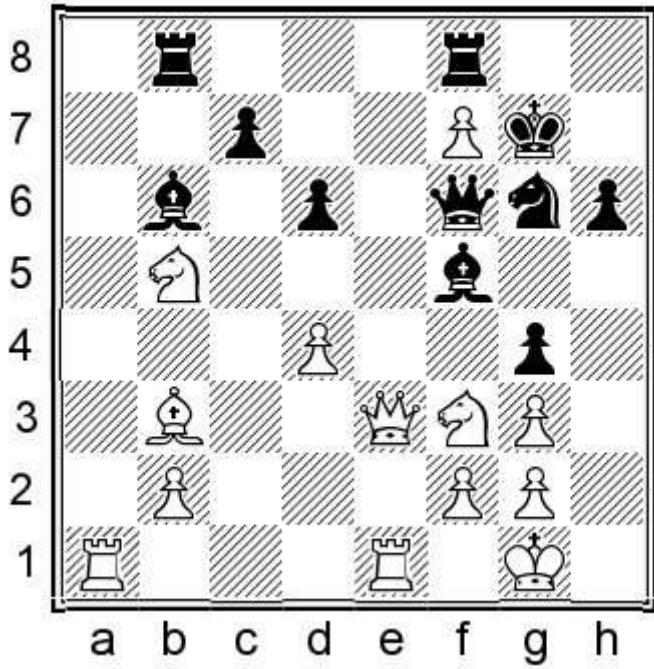


Position after: 20.hxg3

20.exd6 Qxd6 21.hxg3 Nc6 22.Nxb5 Qb4=

20...Ng6 21.exd6

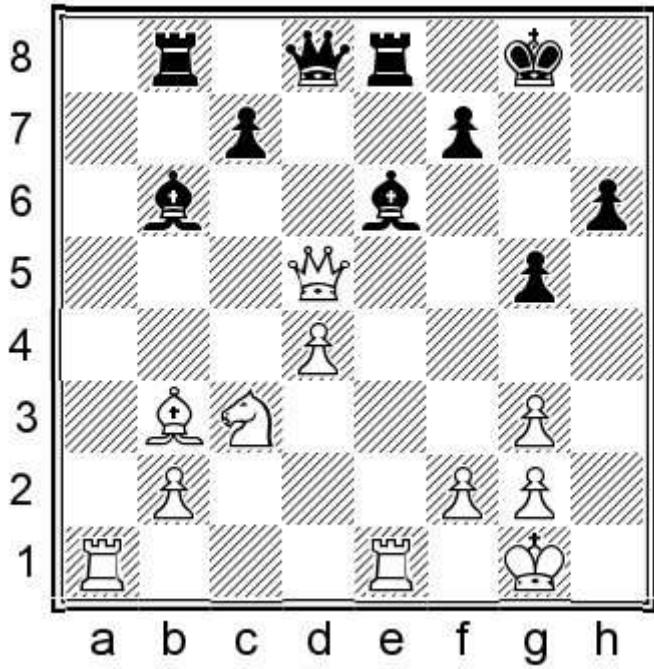
A) 21.e6 Qf6 22.Nxb5 [22.exf7+?! Kg7] 22...Kg7 and Black is fine since 23.exf7? is answered by 23...g4!



Position after: 23...g4!

24.Nd2 c6 and Black is winning.

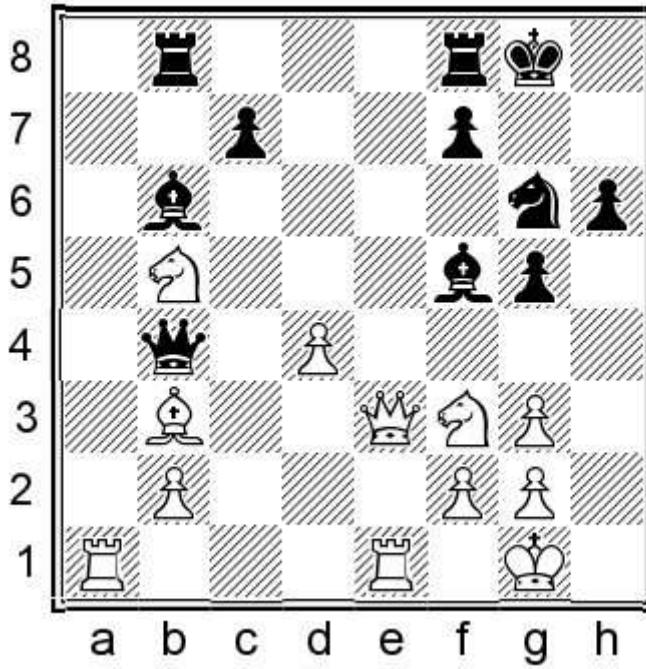
B) 21.Nxb5 dx \times e5 22.Nxe5 Nxe5 23.Qxe5 Bd7 24.Nc3 Re8 25.Qd5 Be6!



Position after: 25...Be6!

26.Qxd8 Rbxd8 27.Bxe6 [27.d5 Bg4©] 27...fxe6 28.d5 exd5 29.Rxe8+ Rxe8 30.Nxd5 Re2 31.Nxb6 cxb6 32.Rb1 Rc2= Black can't lose with his active rook.

21...Qxd6 22.Nxb5 Qb4



Position after: 22...Qb4

A typical manoeuvre in this line.

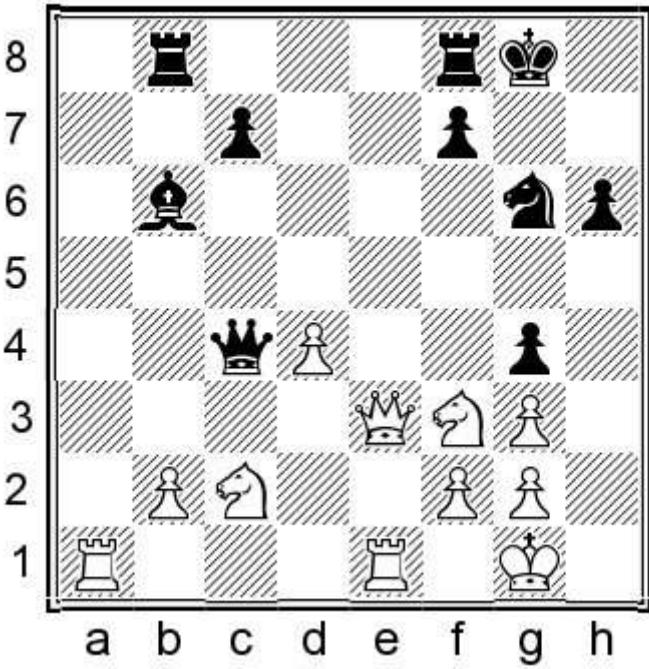
23.Na3 g4

23...Rfe8 24.Qxe8+ Rxe8 25.Rxe8+ Kg7 26.Re3 g4,, makes sense too.

24.Bc2! Bxc2

24...Rfe8!? is possible again.

25.Nxc2 Qc4!?



Position after: 25...Qc4!?

Simpler than 25...Qxb2 when after 26.Qd3 gxf3 27.Reb1 Black has to find 27...Ne5! 28.Qf5 Qc3 29.dxe5 Rfe8 to hold the balance.

26.Nh2

26.Ne5 gives Black an additional option.

26...Qxc2 27.Nxg4

The position should be balanced, e.g.

27...Rbd8 28.Rad1!?

A) 28.Nxh6+? Kh7 29.Re2 [29.Ng4 Bxd4 30.Qh6+ Kg8] 29...Bxd4

B) 28.Rec1 Qxb2 29.Nf6+ [29.Nxh6+? is just bad. 29...Kh7 30.Nf5 Bxd4 31.Qh6+ Kg8] 29...Kg7 30.Nh5+ Kh7=

C) 28.Qxh6? Bxd4

D) 28.Nf6+ Kg7 29.Nh5+ Kh7 30.Nf6+ Kg7 with a draw by repetition.

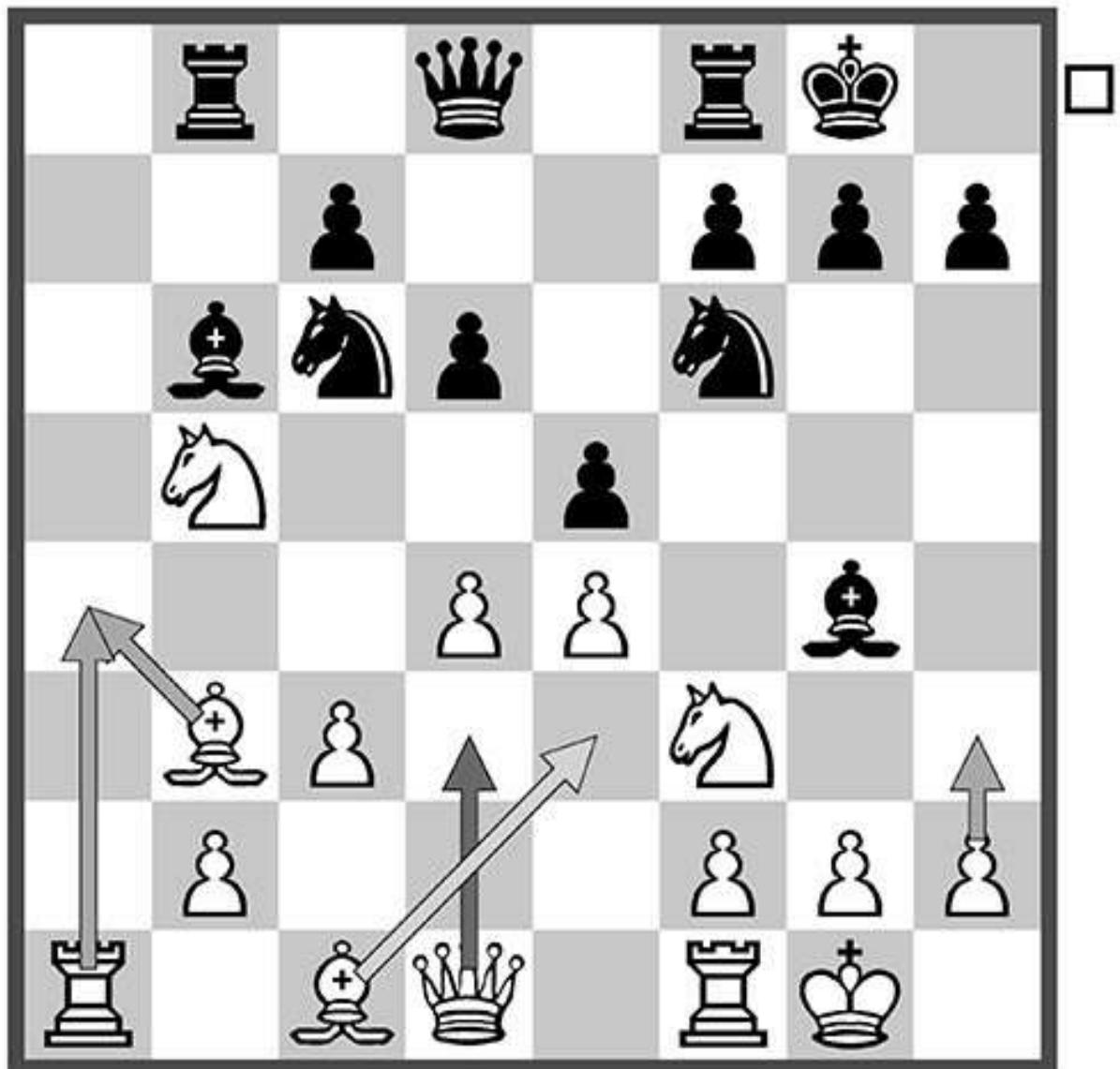
28...f5!? **29.Rc1** **Qe4** **30.Nxh6+** **Kh7** **31.Qg5** **Qd5** **32.Qh5!** **Kg7** **33.Qg5**
Kh7=

Once again, a repetition ends the game peacefully.

Chapter 11

Alternatives on Move 13

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4



[Chapter Guide](#)

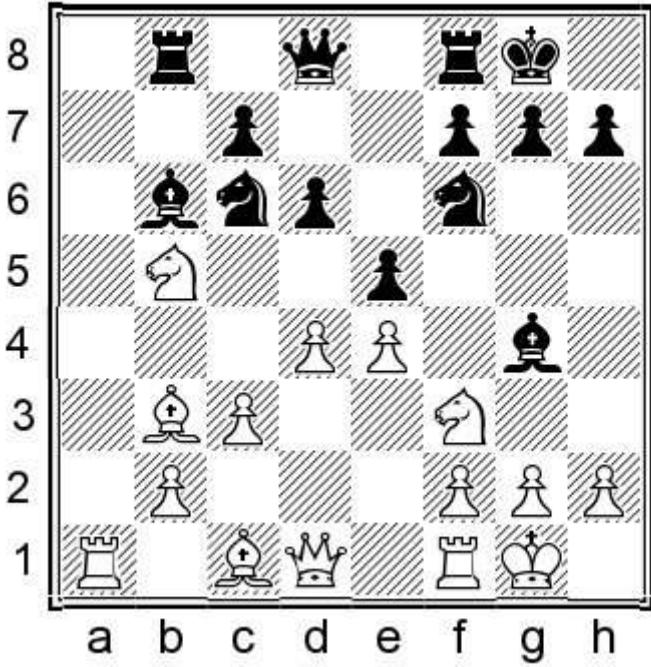
Chapter 11 – Alternatives on move 13

**1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8
9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4**

- a) 13.--
- b) 13.Ra3
- c) 13.Bg5
- d) 13.Be3
- e) 13.Ba4
- f) 13.d5 Ne7 14.--
- g) 13.d5 Ne7 14.Bc2 Qd7 15.Na3
- h) 13.d5 Ne7 14.Bc2 Qd7 15.c4

a) 13.--

**1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4
Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4**

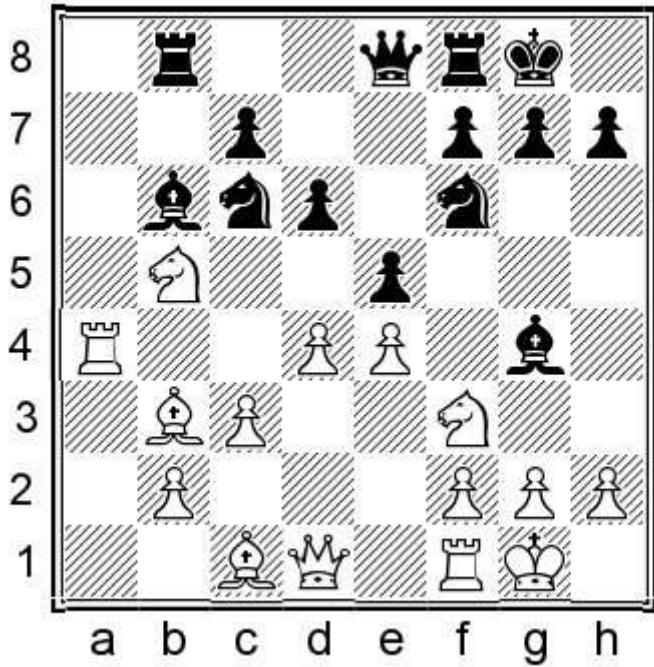


Position after: 12...Bg4

The main position of the Modern Ark. It first occurred in tournament practice in Almasi – Onischuk, Wijk aan Zee 1995, where the game continued 13.Be3. Later on our hero, Alexey Shirov, adopted the line and his imaginative playing style inspired a lot of players to follow in his footsteps. The position is very complex and sharp: for the sacrificed pawn Black gets harmonious development, a lot of activity, direct threats against White's center and quite frequently against the white king too! White has no less than 10 playable options, which suggests that by stating that the position is complex was not an exaggeration! Firstly, we will start with the less popular replies.

13.Qd3

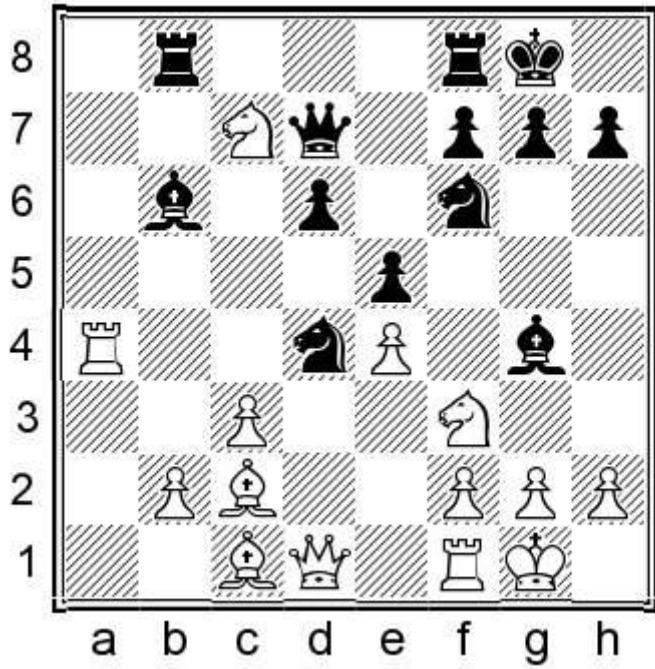
A) 13.Ra4 A weird way to protect e4 indirectly. 13...Qe8 Here 13...Bd7 is pretty good too, but I would rather leave my active bishop on g4.



Position after: 13...Qe8

A1) 14.h3 Bxf3 15.Qxf3 Na5 16.Rb4 A strange manoeuvre. [16.dxe5 Qxb5 17.exf6 Qxb3 18.Qg4 g6 19.Rxa5 Bxa5 20.Qg5 Qe6 21.Qxa5 c5³] 16...Nxb3 17.Rxb3 exd4 18.cxd4 Qxe4 and Black is at least ok.

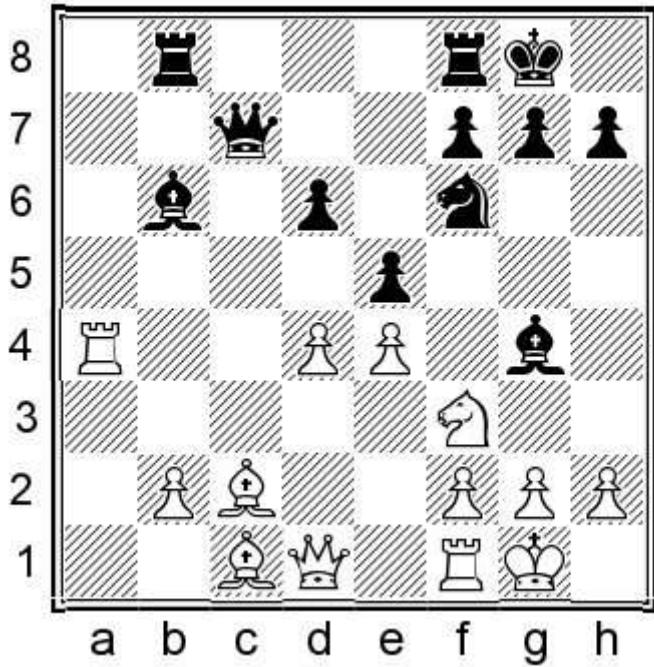
A2) 14.Bc2 This has been seen in a couple of games but here I suggest an interesting novelty: 14...Nxd4!?^N 15.Nxc7 [15.Nbxd4 exd4 16.cxd4 Nxe4 17.Re1 d5 18.h3 Bh5 19.g4 Bg6 20.Ne5 f5,,] 15...Qd7



Position after: 15...Qd7

A3.1) 16.Na6? Nxc2 17.Qxc2 [17.Nxb8? Qxa4–+] 17...Ra8 18.Be3 Bxe3 19.fxe3 Qb7 20.Rfa1 Bd7³

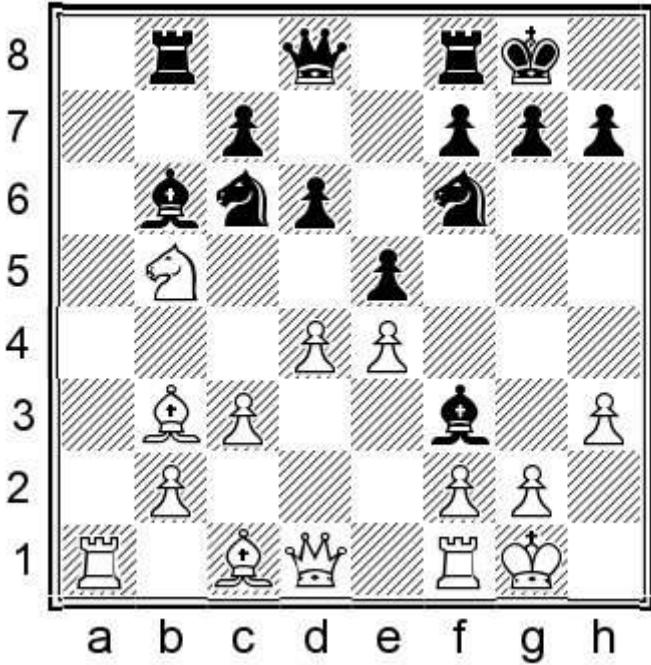
A3.2) 16.cxd4 Qxc7



Position after: 16...Qxc7

17.dxe5 [17.d5?! Bxf3 18.gxf3 Nh5 19.b4 Qe7© looks very good.]
 17...Bxf3 18.exd6! [18.gxf3 dxe5© Black will continue with ...Nh5, Qe7] 18...Bxd1 19.dxc7 Bxc2 20.cxb8=Q Rxb8 21.Rb4
 Here Black can either force simplifications or hang on to the material. 21...Bd3!? is safe. 22.Rd1 Bxf2+ 23.Kxf2 Rxb4 24.Rxd3 Nxe4+ 25.Ke3 f5= The position is drawish.

B) 13.h3 This looks artifical but it has some merits. 13...Bxf3



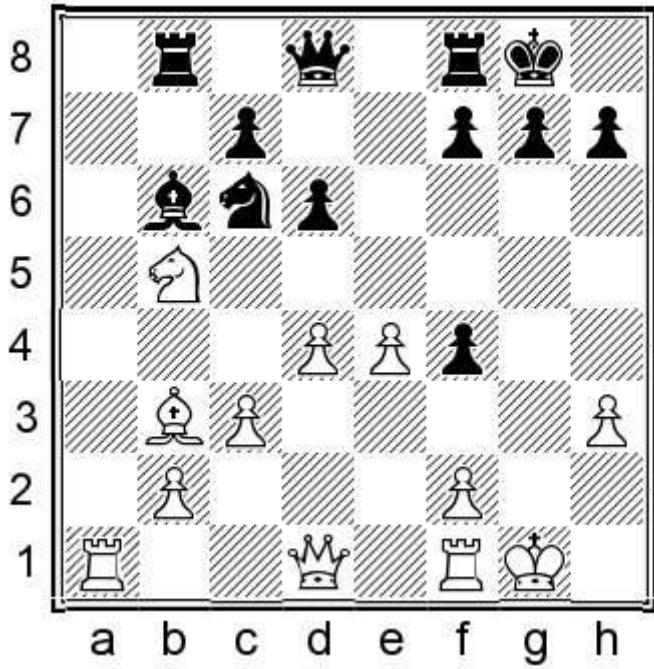
Position after: 13...Bxf3

B1) 14.Qxf3 exd4 15.Bg5 dxс3 15...Ne5 is a good alternative. 16.Bxf6 Qxf6 17.Qxf6 gxf6 18.Nxc3 Here Dauletova, G (2250) – Zhukova, N (2324) Moscow 2019 continued with 18...Bd4, but I slightly prefer 18...Bc5!? when 19.Ba4 Nd4 20.Ra2 c6 21.Rd1 Rb4 22.Rd2 Rfb8= gives Black a comfortable game.

B2) 14.gxf3 Nh5

B2.1) 15.Kh2 exd4 16.Bd5 [16.f4 g6 is fine.] 16...Ne7 17.Nxd4 Nxd5 18.exd5 Qh4 19.Nf5 Qf6©

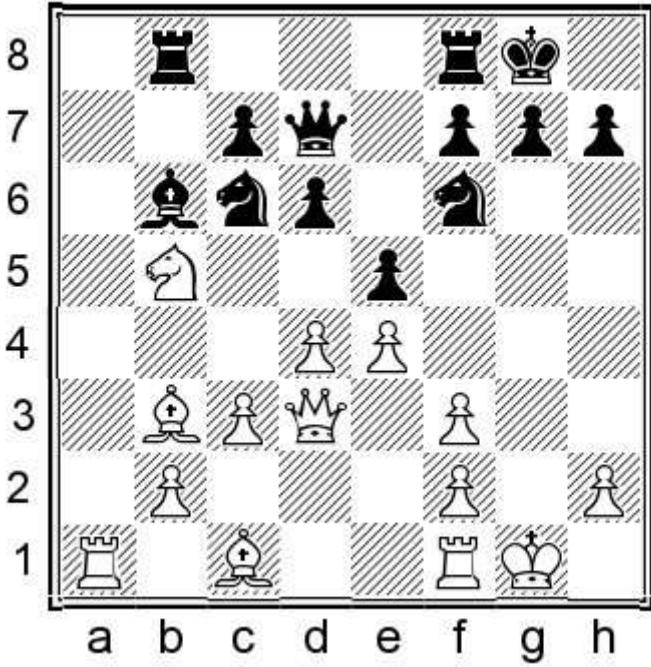
B2.2) 15.f4 Nxf4 [15...Qh4? 16.Qg4 This is one idea behind 13.h3 – the g4-square is under control, so White has this queen sortie.] 16.Bxf4 exf4



Position after: 16...exf4

17.Bc4 Ne7 is more typical, but Black has an amazing idea in mind! 18.Bd3 [18.Qh5 c6 19.Na3∞ would have been a better choice.] 18...Ng6 19.Qg4 was Onoprienko, V (2372) – Sofronie, I (2471) Budva 2009, and here Black can play 19...c6 20.Na3 and then 20...c5 with a nice initiative.

13...Bxf3 14.gxf3 Qd7!?N



Position after: 14...Qd7!?

There is nothing wrong with 14...Nh5, but I find the text interesting and it might surprise the opponent too.

15.Rd1

A) 15.Kh1 exd4 16.cxd4 Nxd4 17.Nxd4 Bxd4 18.Qxd4 Qh3! The point of the line. 19.Bc4 [19.Bxf7+?! Rxf7 20.Qd1 Nh5 Can only be good for Black.] 19...Qxf3+= with a repetition.

B) After 15.Bc2 Black has many options, for example: 15...Nh5 [Or 15...exd4 16.Nxd4 Ne5 17.Qe3 d5 18.Qf4 Rfe8©]

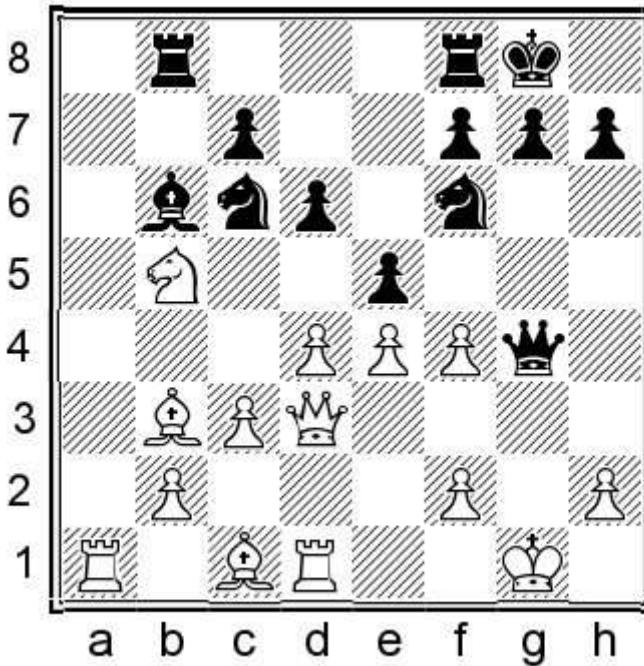
B1) 16.Re1 exd4 17.Nxd4 Ne5 18.Qe3 Qh3 19.f4 Qxe3 20.Bxe3 [20.fxe3 Bxd4] 20...Bxd4 21.fxe5 Bxe3 22.fxe3 Rxb2 [22...dxe5 23.b4=] 23.Bd1 g6 24.Bxh5 gxh5=

B2) 16.Bd1 Ne7 17.f4 [17.dxe5? Ng6!] 17...Nxf4 18.Bxf4 exf4∞

15...Qh3 16.f4

16.Bg5 Nh5

16...Qg4+



Position after: 16...Qg4+

16...Qh5 is also possible.

17.Kh1

17.Qg3 Qh5 18.Re1 [18.fxe5? Nxe5! 19.dxe5 Nxe4--+] 18...exf4 19.Bxf4 Qxb5 20.Ba4 Qxb2 21.Rab1 Qa2 22.Bxc6 Nh5 23.Qf3 Nxf4 24.Qxf4 Qc4 25.Bd5 Qxc3 and Black is slightly better.

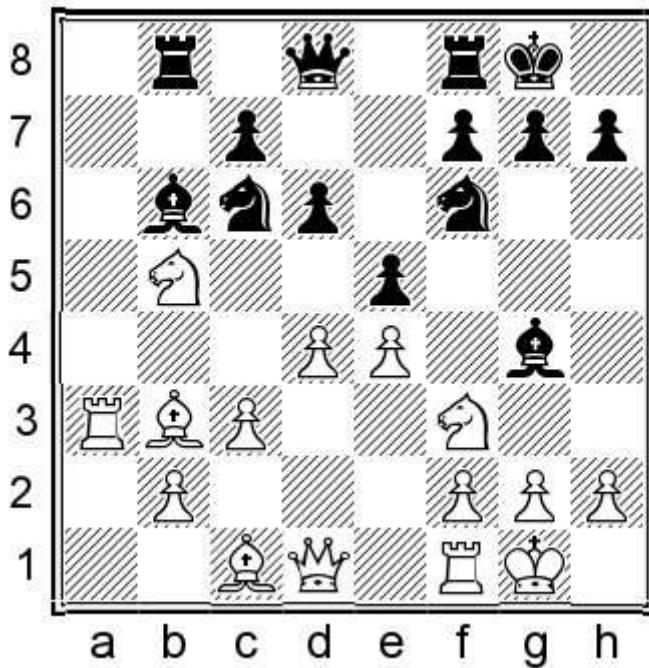
17...exd4 18.f3 Qh5∞

The position is complicated but Black has the easier game.

b) 13.Ra3

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4

Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4 13.Ra3



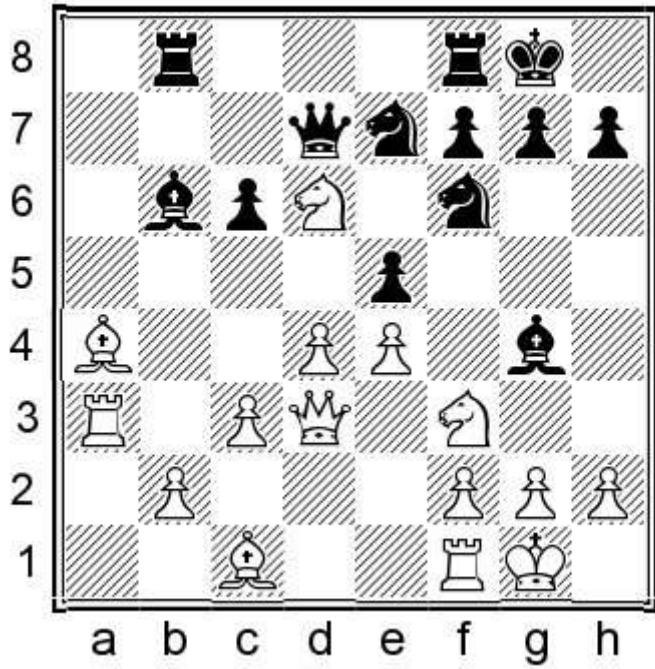
Position after: 13.Ra3

13...Qd7!

Finally, the e4-pawn is hanging.

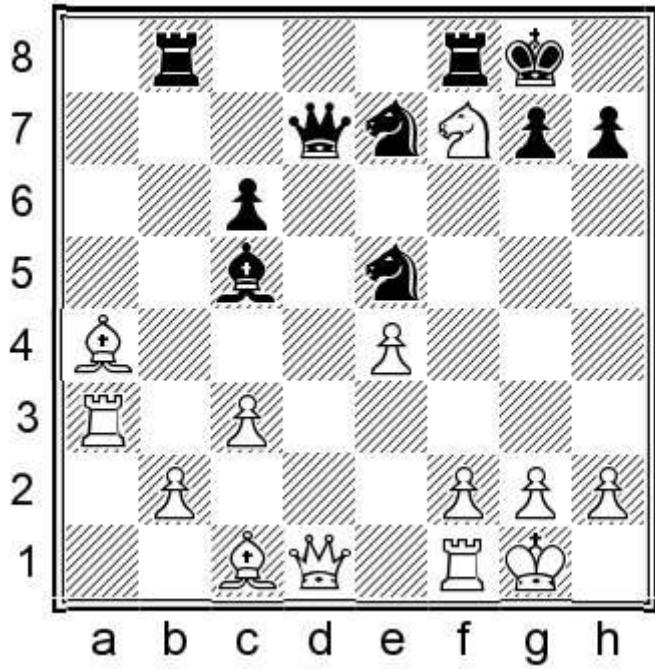
14.Bc2

14.Qd3 Ne7 Now 15...c6 is a serious threat. 15.Ba4 [15.dxe5 dxe5 16.Qxd7 Bxd7! 17.c4 c6 18.Nc3 Bc5 19.Ra5 Bb4 20.Rxe5 Ng6³] 15...c6 16.Nxd6!



Position after: 16.Nxd6!

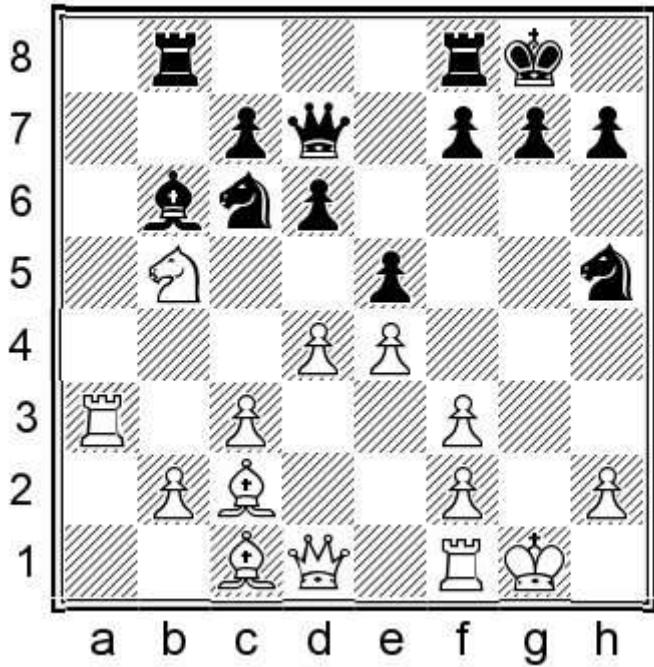
16...Bxf3! [16...Qxd6 17.Nxe5] 17.dxe5 Here Black has a pleasant choice:
17...Ng4 [Or 17...Ng6 18.exf6 Ne5 19.Qd2 Bxg2 20.Kxg2 Qg4+ 21.Kh1
Qf3+ 22.Kg1 Qg4+=] 18.Qxf3 Nxe5 19.Qd1 Bc5 20.Nxf7



Position after: 20.Nxf7

[20.Nf5 Qxd1 21.Bxd1 Bxa3 22.bxa3 Nxf5 23.exf5 Rfd8³] 20...Qxd1 21.Bxd1 Kxf7 22.b4 Bb6 This is more ambitious and Black is slightly better.

14...Bxf3 15.gxf3 Nh5



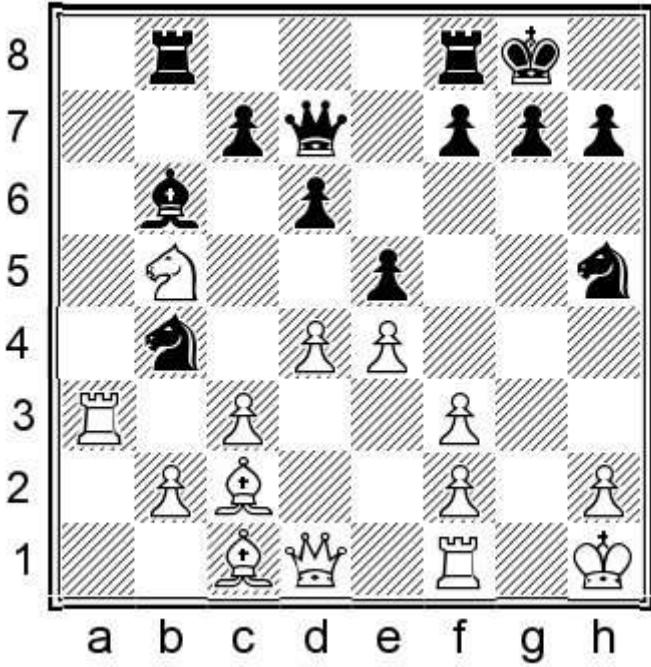
Position after: 15...Nh5

16.Kh1

A) After 16.Ba4 Black has many options, such as: 16...Ne7 which leads to direct play. [Or the simple 16...Qe7 17.Kh1 Nd8@] 17.Na7 Qh3 18.Nc6 Ng6 19.Kh1 Nh4 20.Rg1 Nxf3 21.Rg2 Nh4= with another repetition.

B) 16.dxe5 Nxe5 17.f4 Nxf4 18.Bxf4 Qxb5 can't be a problem for Black.

16...Nb4



Position after: 16...Nb4

17.Ba4!

17.cxb4 Qxb5 18.Rg1 [18.f4 Nxf4 19.Bxf4 exf4 20.Rg1 g6=] 18...g6=

17...c6

Svidler stops here in his analysis and I can understand why: play might become extreme here, and only be understood with computers. One thing is sure, Black must be ok in all lines.

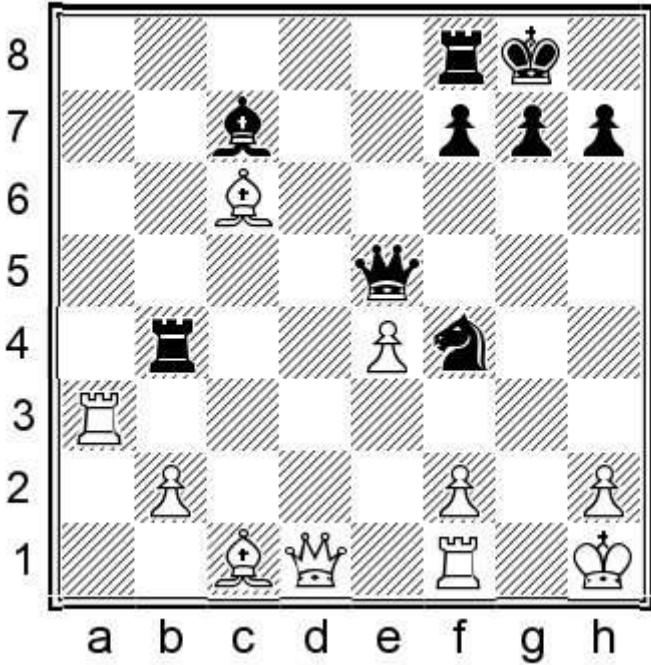
18.Nxd6

A) 18.Qe2 cxb5 19.Bxb5 Qh3∞

B) 18.Na7!? Qxa7 19.cxb4 Qb7 20.dxe5 dxe5 21.Qd6 Bd4 22.Bxc6 Qc8 23.Qd7 Qxd7 24.Bxd7 Rxb4 25.b3 Rfb8 26.Ba4 h6 27.Bd2 R4b6©

C) 18.cxb4 cxb5 19.f4 Nxf4 20.Bb3∞

18...Qxd6 19.dxe5 Qxe5 20.cxb4 Bc7 21.f4 Nxf4 22.Bxc6 Rxb4



Position after: 22...Rxb4

22...Rfd8 23.Qc2 Rxb4 24.Qc3∞

23.Qg4

23.Bxf4 Qxf4 24.Rh3 Rxb2 25.Qh5 h6=

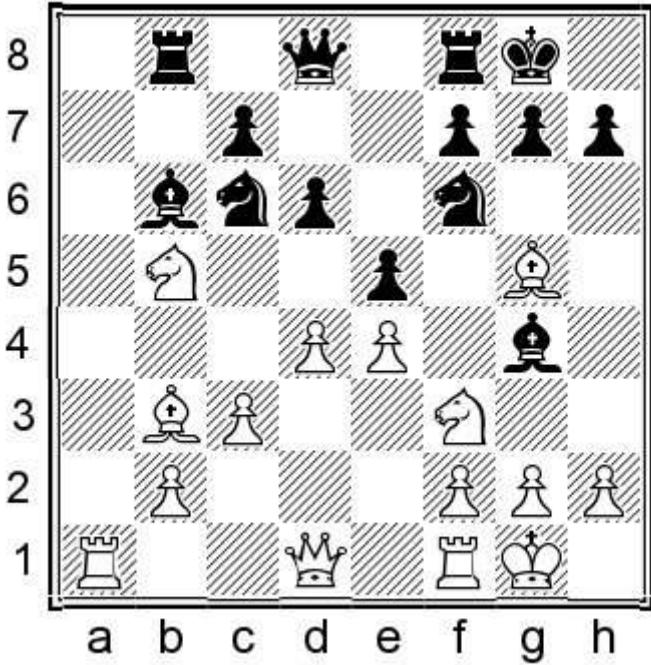
23...Nd3 24.f4 Qd4 25.Bd2 Rc4 26.Bb5

26.Qf3 Rxc6 27.Rxd3 Qxb2=

26...Nf2+ 27.Rxf2 Qxf2 28.Bxc4 Qxd2=

c) 13.Bg5

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4 13.Bg5!?



Position after: 13.Bg5!?

To my mind, a very logical try.

13...h6 14.Bd5!

This is the idea: White makes use of the pin immediately. Black has various ways to continue. I went through all of them and found that the text is relatively the simplest and keeps some chances too.

A) 14.Be3?! Re8

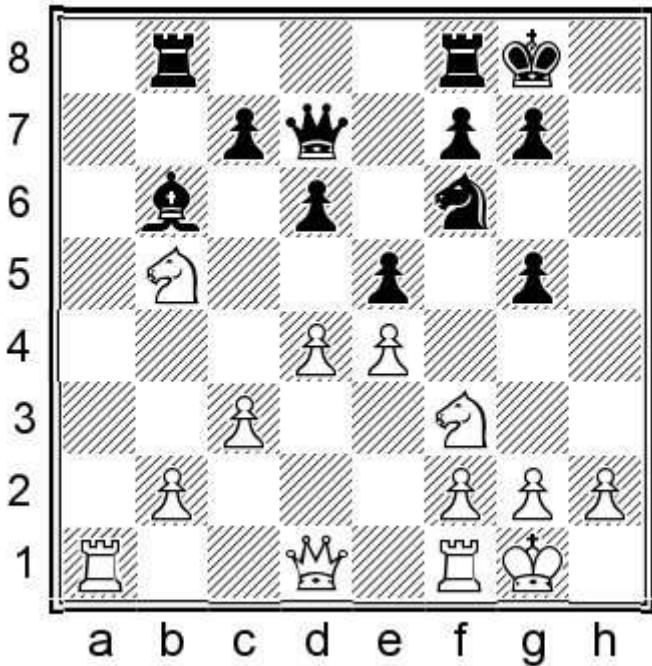
B) 14.Bh4?! g5 15.Bg3 Nxe4 can hardly be a serious idea, but it's worth noting that after 16.Qb1 d5! is strong. 17.Nxe5 [17.dxe5 Bxf3 18.gxf3 Nd2] 17...Nxe5 18.Bxe5 Nd2

14...hxg5

A) 14...Bxf3 leads to a very boring, one-sided but probably drawish game. We are looking for more. 15.Qxf3 Nxd4 16.Nxd4 [If 16.cxd4 hxg5] 16...exd4 17.Bxf6 Qxf6 18.Qxf6 gxf6

B) 14...Bd7!? is an exciting alternative.

15.Bxc6 Bd7! 16.Bxd7 Qxd7



Position after: 16...Qxd7

17.dxe5

17.Qd3 g4 18.dxe5 [18.Nd2 Bxd4! 19.Nxd4 exd4 20.cxd4 Rxb2=] 18...Nxe4!
19.Qxe4 gxf3 20.Nd4=

17...Nxe4 18.Nbd4 g4

At first my engines were not impressed, but this turns out to be just fine.

19.Nh4!

19.Qc2 gxf3 20.Qxe4 fxg2=

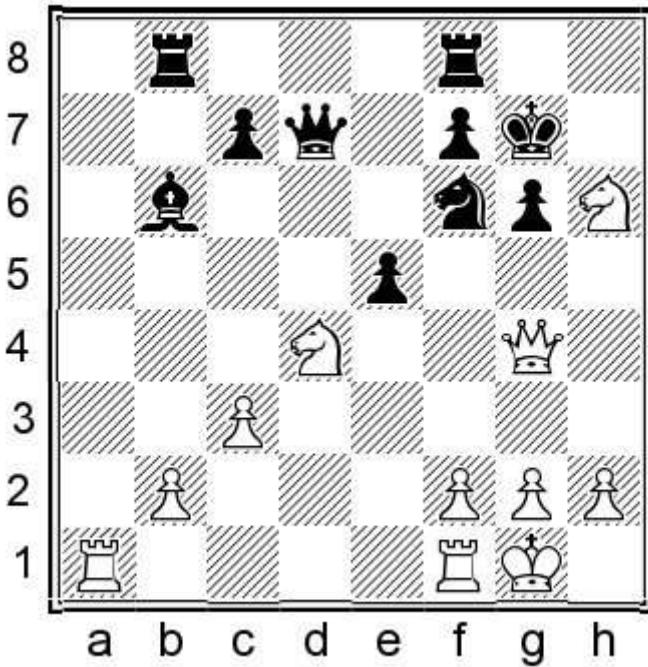
19...dxe5 20.Nhf5 g6

20...Nf6?! 21.Nc6!²

21.Qxg4

21.Nc6? Qxd1 22.Nfe7+ Kg7 23.Raxd1 g3! 24.hxg3 Rh8–+ 25.Nxb8? Nxg3.

21...Nf6 22.Nh6+ Kg7!



Position after: 22...Kg7!

This looks suspicious, but we should not be afraid of calculations in the Ark.

23.Ndf5+™

23.Nhf5+? Kh8–+

23...Kh8 24.Qh4

24.Qg5?! Nh7 25.Qe7 Qe8 26.Qxe8 Rbx e8 27.Nh4 Nf6 28.h3 Kg7 29.Ng4 Nxg4 30.hxg4 e4 31.Rfe1 f5 32.g5™ [32.gxf5 g5–+] 32...Rh8 33.g3 Rh5³

24...Nh7 25.Ne3

25.Rad1 Qe6 26.Ne3 f5©

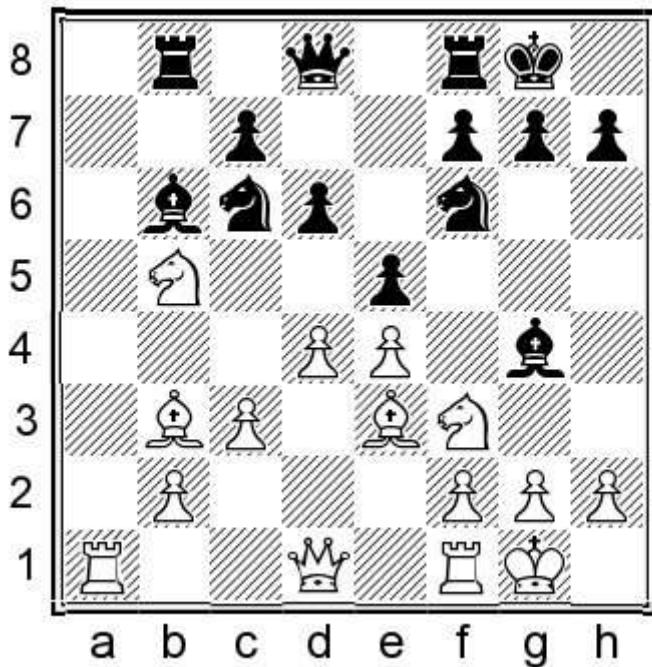
25...f5©

White's knight is stuck on h6, so Black's compensation is obvious.

d) 13.Be3

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4 13.Be3

The best among the 'lesser' lines. A logical developing move can never be wrong, hm?

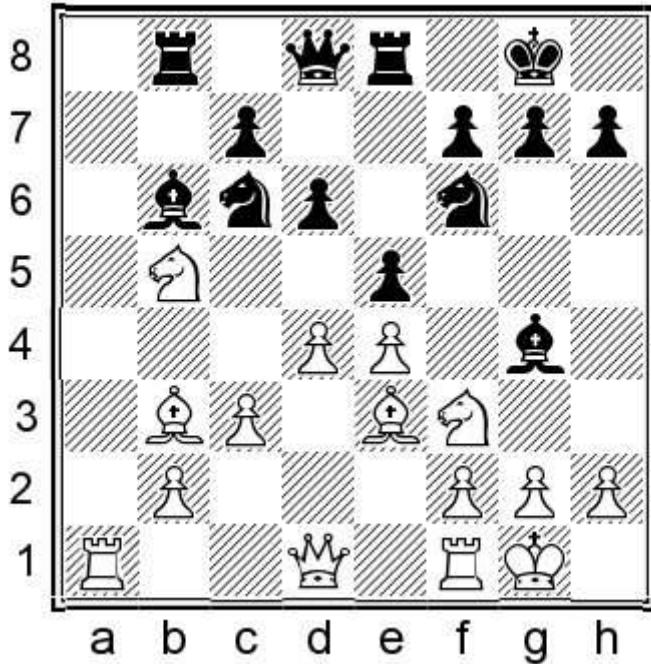


Position after: 13.Be3

13...Re8!?

There is nothing wrong with the official main move 13...exd4, but I like black's chances in my suggestion a bit more. Black puts white's center under a bit more pressure, before releasing the tension. White has quite some options trying to counter black's setup.

13...exd4 is the latest example for the ‘old’ move. 14.cxd4 Nxe4 15.h3 Bf5 16.Nc3 h6 17.Bd5 Nxc3 18.bxc3 Ne7 19.Bb3 c5= Vachier Lagrave, M (2777) – Grischuk, A (2764) Hamburg 2019

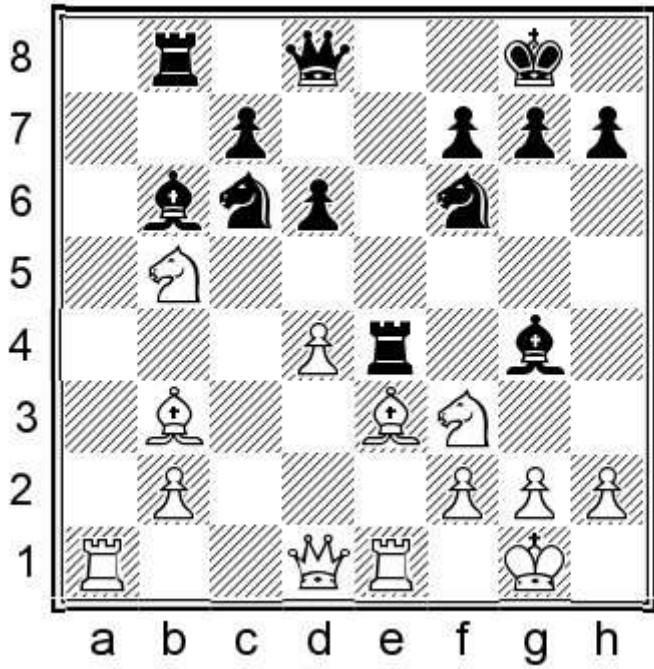


Position after: 13...Re8!?

14.Qd3

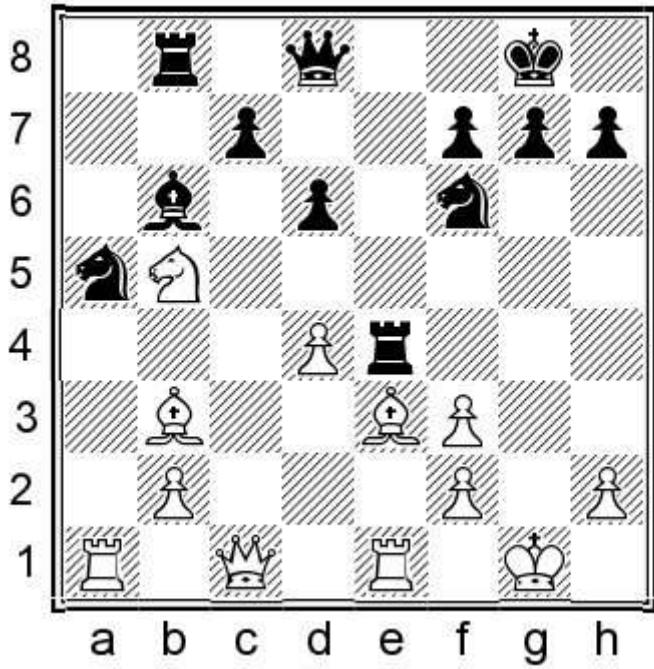
This move complicates matters, especially if Black opts for my recommendation.

A) 14.Re1 exd4 15.cxd4 Rxe4



Position after: 15...Rxe4

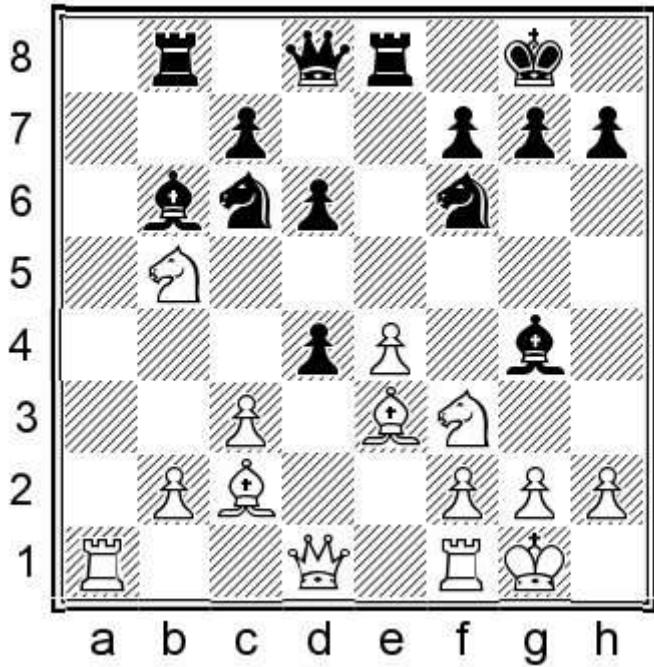
16.Qc1! A curious manoeuvre. [16.Nc3 Bxf3 17.Qxf3 Nxd4μ] 16...Bxf3 [16...Qd7!? 17.Ng5 Re7 18.Ba4 Nb4 19.Qc4 Ba5 is a bit too crazy for my taste; 16...Bd7 17.Nc3 Re7∞] 17.gxf3 Na5!



Position after: 17...Na5!

A cute motif! 18.Bxf7+ is of course the real test. [18.Rxa5?? Bxa5 19.fxe4 Bxe1 20.Qxe1 Rxb5–+; 18.Bd1!? Re7 19.b4 Nb7 20.Na7 Bxa7 21.Rxa7=] 18...Kxf7 19.fxe4 Qd7! A recurring theme in these minor lines, it seems; Black is fine. 20.e5 Qg4+ 21.Kf1 dxе5 22.dxe5 Qh3+ 23.Ke2 Qh5+ 24.Kf1 Qh3+=

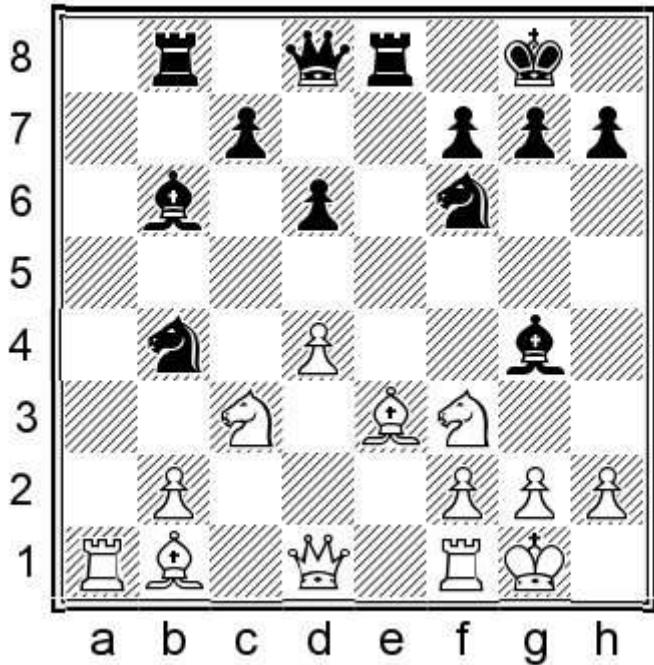
B) 14.Bc2 exd4



Position after: 14...exd4

B1) 15.Nbx_d4 Bx_d4 [15...Nx_d4 16.cxd4 Nx_e4 17.h3=] 16.cxd4 Nb4 17.h3 Bh5=

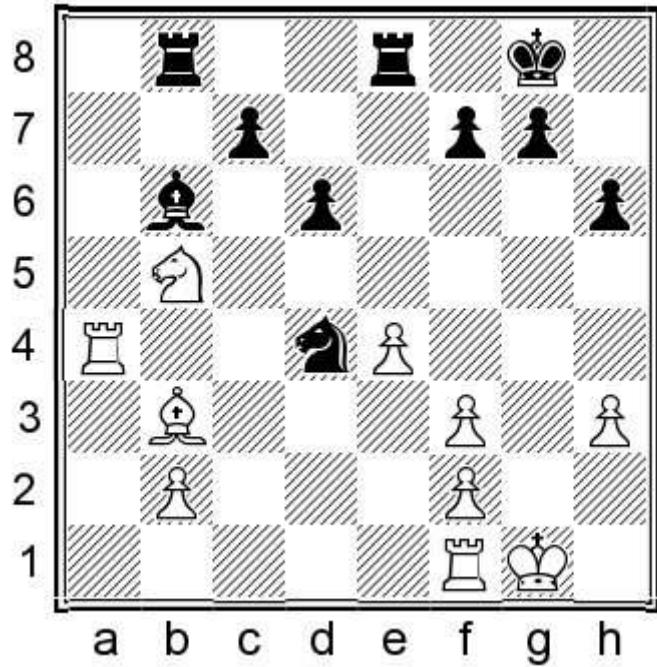
B2) 15.cxd4 Nb4 16.Bb1 [16.Bb3 Nx_e4 17.Nc3=] 16...Nx_e4 17.Nc3 Nf6!



Position after: 17...Nf6!

18.h3 Bh5 19.g4 Bg6 20.Bxg6 hxg6³ The e5-square is covered and Black can also use the d5 outpost for his knights.

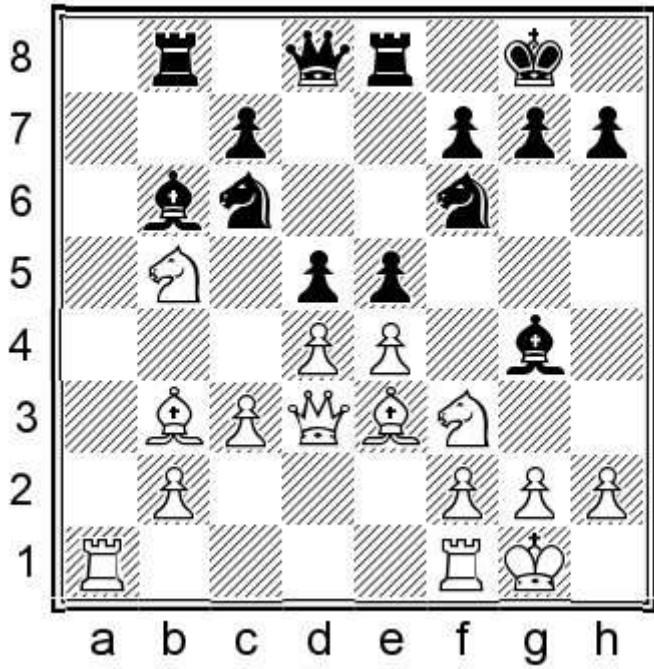
C) 14.h3 Bh5 15.Bg5 is given by the engines, but it feels awkward to make another move with the bishop – no wonder Black equalizes easily. [15.Bd5 was checked in Gracia Alvarez, G (2308) – Wagner, D (2572) Chess.com INT 2021 and here Black can simply play 15...Qd7 with the idea of 16.Re1 Nxd4!? 17.cxd4 Nxd5 18.exd5 e4 and the initiative is with Black, e. g. 19.Ne5 Rxe5 20.g4 Ree8.] 15...exd4 16.cxd4 h6 17.Bxf6 [17.Bh4? g5μ] 17...Qxf6 18.Ra4 Bxf3 [18...Rxe4 19.Bd5 Bxf3 20.Qxf3 Rf4 21.Bxf7+! Qxf7 22.Qxc6=] 19.Qxf3 Qxf3 20.gxf3 Nxd4!



Position after: 20...Nxd4!

21.Nxd4 Bxd4 22.Bxf7+ Kxf7 23.Rxd4 Rxb2 24.Rc1=

14...d5!?

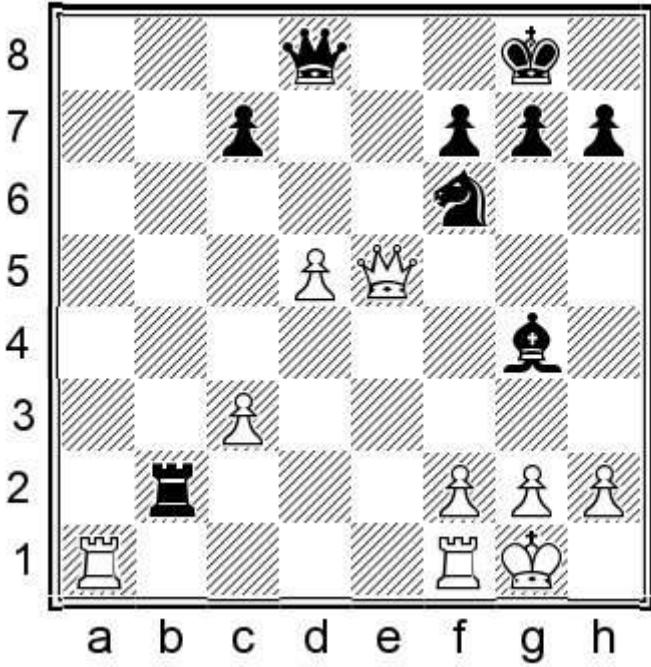


Position after: 14...d5!?

A spectacular push.

15.Ng5

A) 15.Nxe5 Rxe5! One of the main ideas. 16.dxe5 Nxe5 17.Qd2 Bxe3 18.Qxe3 Rxb5 19.exd5 Rxb3 20.Qxe5 Rxb2



Position after: 20...Rxb2

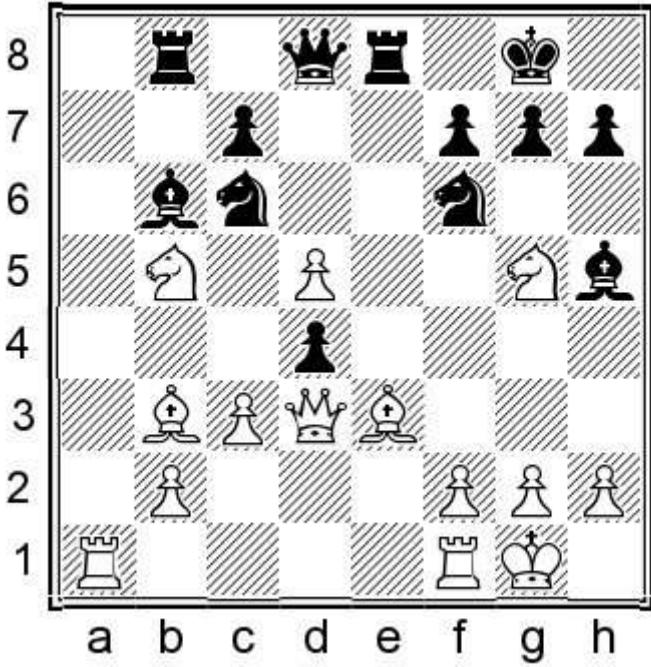
The position is approximately equal. 21.Rfe1 [21.c4 Re2,,] 21...h6 22.c4 Rb4 23.h3 Bd7,,

B) 15.exd5 seems dubious, but playable. Black has a lot of different ways to continue, for example: 15...e4 16.Qc2 Nxd5 [16...exf3 17.dxc6 Qc8 18.Rfe1 Bf5 19.Qd2 Be4©] 17.Ng5 [17.Nd2 Be2 18.Bxd5 Qxd5 19.c4 Qd7 20.Rfe1 Bd3∞] 17...h6 18.Nxf7 Kxf7 19.c4 [19.h3∞] 19...Ndb4 20.Qd2 Kg6!∞

15...Bh5 16.exd5

16.Bxd5?! exd4 17.Bxc6 [17.cxd4 Nb4 18.Bxf7+ Bxf7 19.Qa3 Nc2 20.Nxf7 Nxa3 21.Nxd8 Nxb5³; 17.Nxd4 Nxd4 18.cxd4 h6³] 17...dxe3 18.Nd4 exf2+ 19.Kh1 Re7 20.Rxf2 Qd6 21.e5 Qxe5 22.Rxf6 Qxg5 23.Rf5 Bg6 24.Rxg5 Bxd3³

16...exd4!



Position after: 16...exd4!

The gas pedal is pushed to the max!

17.Bxd4

A) 17.Nxd4 Ne5 18.Qc2 Bg6= 19.Qd1 [19.Qd2? h6 20.Nh3 Bxd4 21.cxd4 Nf3+ 22.gxf3 Rxb3μ is horrible for white.] 19...Bh5 leads to repetition. 20.Qc2 Bg6=

B) 17.cxd4? Nb4 18.Qd2 [18.Qc4 Nfxd5] 18...Nbxd5μ

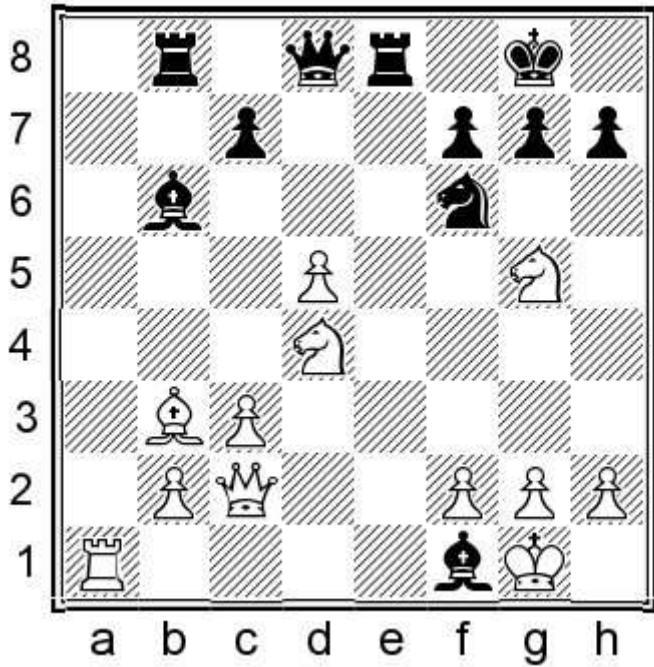
17...Be2

17...Nxd4 is playable too. 18.Nxd4 Bg6 19.Qc4 Bxd4 20.cxd4 Qd6©

18.Qc2

After the forced sequence 18.Bxf6 Bxd3 19.Bxd8 Nxd8 20.c4 Bxf1 21.Kxf1 h6 22.Nf3 c6 Black is at least ok.

18...Nxd4 19.Nxd4 Bxf1

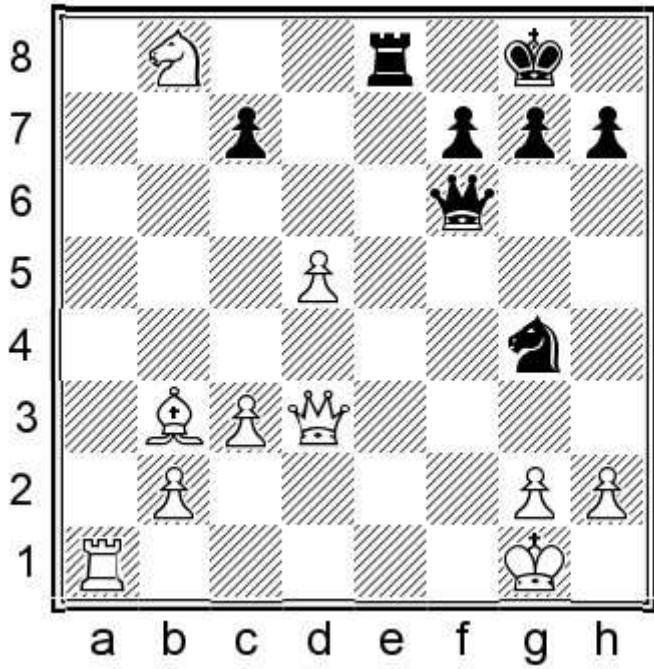


Position after: 19...Bxf1

19...Bxd4?! 20.cxd4 Bxf1 21.d6! Rxb3 22.Qxb3²

20.d6

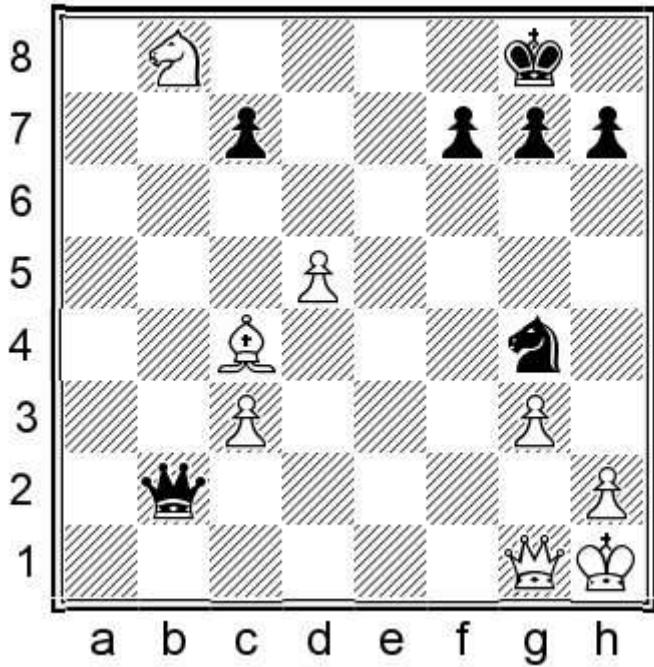
20.Nc6 Bd3!? This leads to some fireworks. 21.Qxd3 Bxf2+! 22.Kxf2 [22.Kh1 Ra8!–+] 22...Ng4+ 23.Kg1 Qxg5 24.Nxb8 Qf6!



Position after: 24...Qf6!

The key move.

A) 25.Qd4 Qh4 26.Qf4 Re1+ 27.Rxe1 Qxe1+ 28.Qf1 Qe3+ Black may be satisfied with the repetition or continue to torture White in the following long line: 29.Kh1 Qe5 30.g3 Qe4+ 31.Kg1 Qe3+ 32.Kh1 Qd2 33.Qg2 Qc1+ 34.Qg1 Qxb2 35.Bc4!

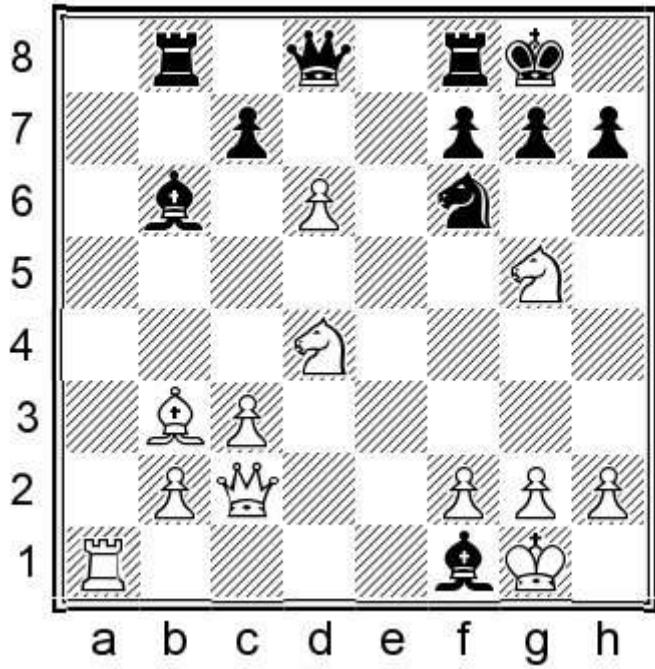


Position after: 35.Bc4!

35...Qxb8 [35...Nf2+ 36.Kg2 Ne4+ 37.Kh3 Qxb8 38.Qe3=] 36.Be2 Nf6 37.c4=

B) 25.Qd2 Qb6+ [25...Rxb8 26.d6 Qe5 27.g3∞] 26.Qd4 Qxb3 27.Qxg4 [27.Rf1? is too optimistic under these circumstances. 27...f5! 28.Nc6 Qxb2μ] 27...Qxb2 28.Rf1 Qxb8=

20...Rf8™

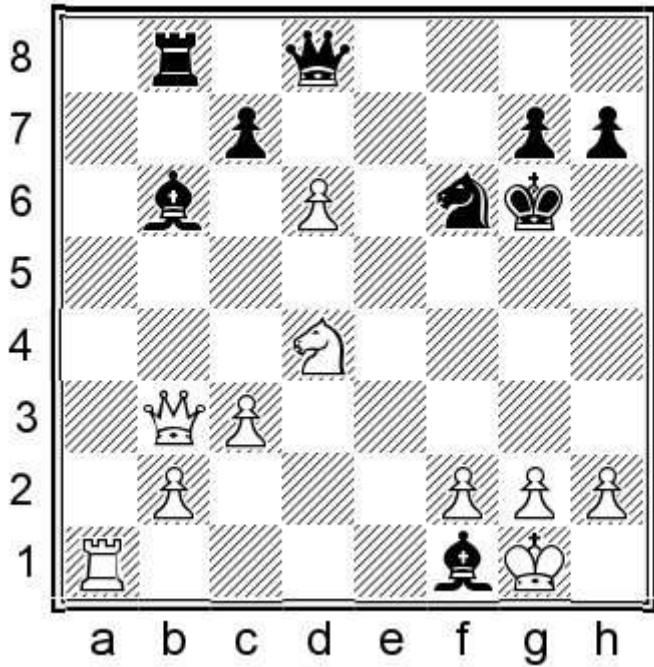


Position after: 20...Rf8™

21.Nxf7

21.Nc6?! Qxd6 22.Nxb8 Bd3μ

21...Rxf7 22.Bxf7+ Kxf7 23.Qb3+ Kg6™



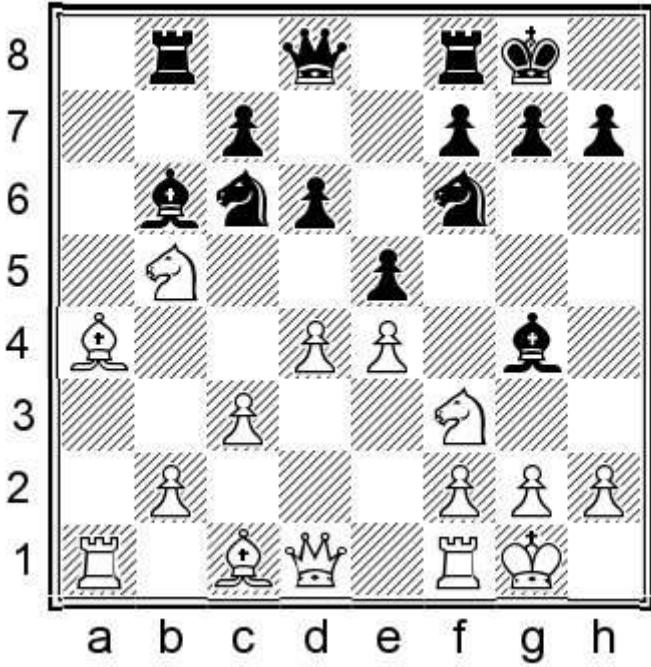
Position after: 23...Kg6™

24.Qc2+ Kf7 25.Qb3+ Kg6=

The final assessment is a draw by repetition.

e) 13.Ba4

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4 13.Ba4!?



Position after: 13.Ba4!?

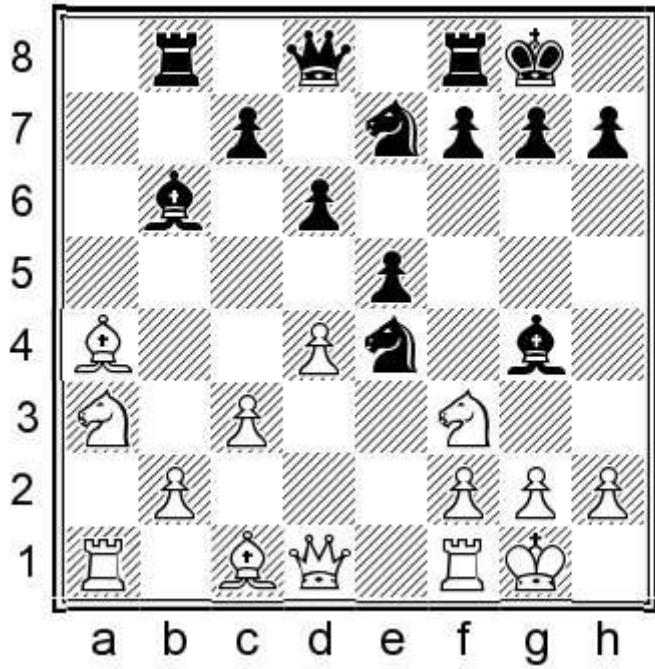
Probably the strangest of all the available moves.

13...Nxe4 14.Na3!

This was the idea: White chases away the c6-knight, the defender of our proud e5-pawn.

14...Ne7

14...Na5!? is an interesting alternative.

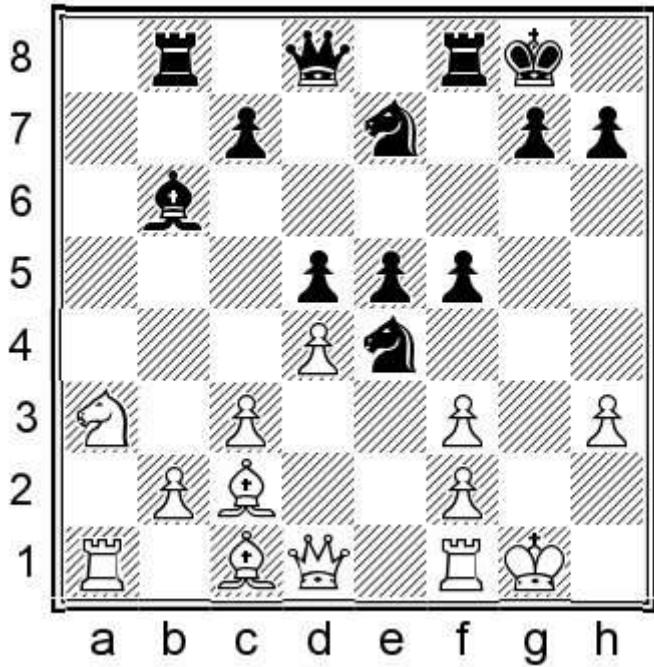


Position after: 14...Ne7

15.Qe1!?N

The engines' favourite.

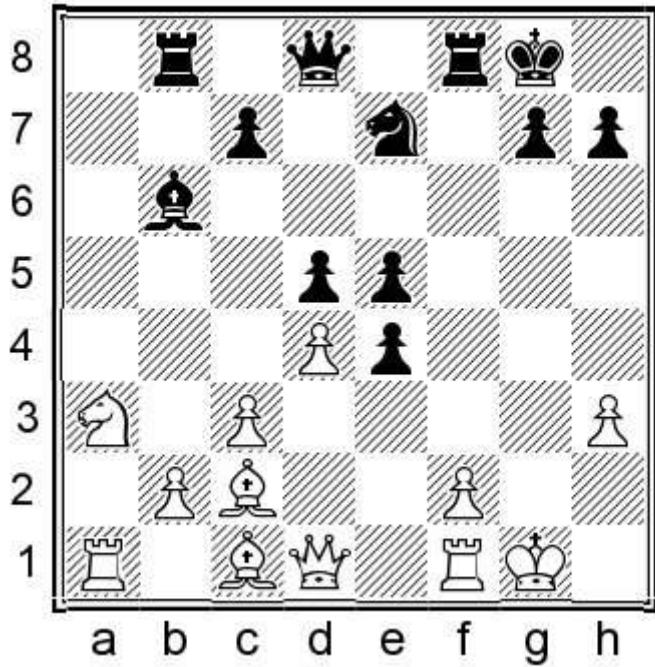
A) 15.Bc2 d5 16.h3 Bxf3 17.gxf3 f5!?



Position after: 17...f5!?

A1) 18.dxe5? was played in Kosintseva, N (2469) – Mkrtchian, L (2453) Sochi 2006 and Black missed a golden opportunity: 18...Ng3! 19.Re1? [19.f4 Nxf1 20.Kxf1μ is an easy exchange up.] 19...Ng6! 20.f4 [20.Kg2 Nh5–+] 20...c6! 21.Qf3 [21.Kg2 Ne4–+] 21...Qh4 with a winning attack. 22.Bd1 [22.Be3 Bxe3 23.fxe3 Ne4 24.Bxe4 fxe4 25.Qg2 Nxe5 26.fxe5 Rf3–+; 22.Kg2 Nh5–+] 22...Qxh3 23.Qg2 Qh4 24.Nc2 Ne4–+

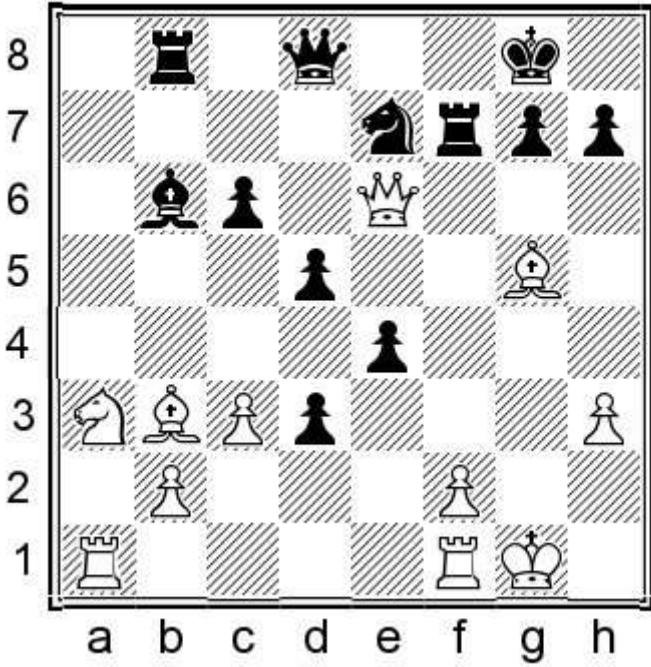
A2) 18.fxe4 fxe4



Position after: 18...fxe4

A2.1) 19.dxe5 Qe8!? 20.Qg4 Ng6 21.Nc4!? dxс4 22.e6 Rf6 23.Qxe4 [23.Bxe4 Kh8 24.Bg5 Rxе6 25.Rae1 Ne5 26.Qf5 Ng6 27.Bc6 Re5=] 23...Qxe6 24.Bg5 Qxe4 25.Bxe4 Rff8 26.Bd5+ [26.Ra4 h6 27.Bxh6 gxh6 28.Bxg6 Rxf2 29.Rxf2 Rf8=] 26...Kh8 27.Bxc4 Nf4 28.Kh2 Bc5 29.b3 Bd6©

A2.2) 19.Qg4 exd4 20.Bg5 d3 21.Qe6+ Rf7 22.Bb3 c6

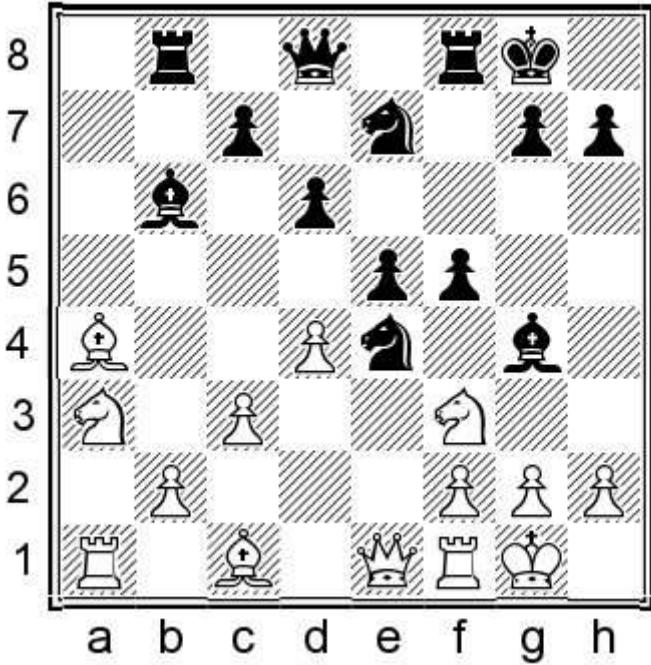


Position after: 22...c6

I must admit that the whole line is crazy, but it's very entertaining to have a look at some of the possibilities. 23.Nc4 [23.c4 Bc7 24.Ba2 Qe8 25.cxd5 cxd5 26.Bxd5 Nxd5 27.Qxd5 h6 28.Be3 Rd8 29.Qh5 Qe6© is very complex.] 23...Bc7 24.Ne3 h6 25.Nxd5 cxd5 26.Bxe7 Qxe7 27.Bxd5 Kh8 28.Qxf7 Qe5 29.f4 exf3 30.Rf2 Qg3+ 31.Kf1 Qxh3+ 32.Kg1 [32.Ke1 is probably too daring.] 32...Qg3+ 33.Kf1 Qh3+=

B) 15.dxe5?! is premature, for example: 15...d5 16.c4 f6 17.e6 Bxe6³

15...f5



Position after: 15...f5

The most aggressive reaction. Black has nice counterplay in all lines as far as I can see.

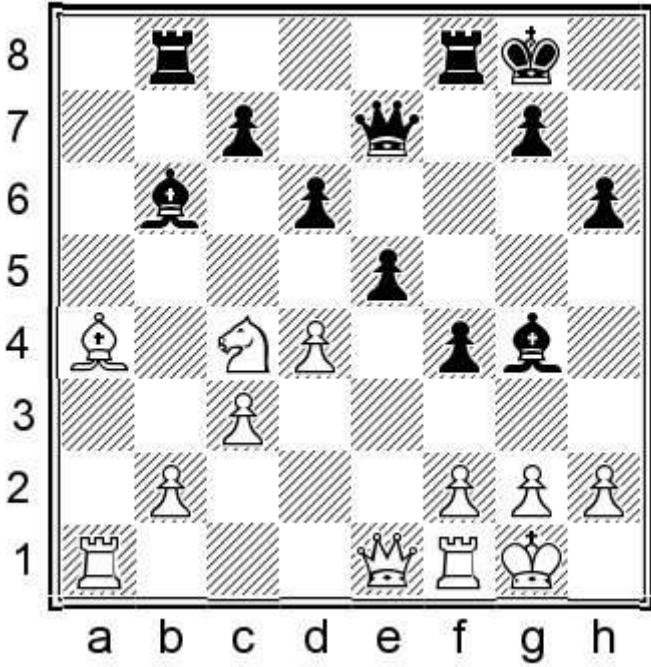
Or 15...Bxf3!? 16.gxf3 Nf6 17.dxe5 dxe5 18.Qxe5 [18.Nc4!?] 18...Ng6©

16.Ng5

A) 16.Nc4 Ng6 17.Bd1 Bxf3 18.Bxf3 exd4 19.Nxb6 Rxb6 20.cxd4 [20.Bxe4 fxe4 21.Qxe4 dxc3 22.bxc3 Qe8=] 20...d5∞

B) 16.dxe5 Bxf3 17.gxf3 Nc5 18.exd6 Ng6 19.Bc2 Qh4 [19...Qxd6 20.Nb5 Qf6 21.Nd4∞] 20.Kh1 Qh3 21.Qd1 Nh4 22.Rg1 Nxf3 23.Rg2 f4 24.Nc4 Rbe8∞

16...Nxg5 17.Bxg5 h6 18.Bxe7 Qxe7 19.Nc4 f4!?



Position after: 19...f4!?

Instead, 19...Qg5 allows 20.f4! exf4 21.Bc6 and White gets exciting positional compensation for the pawn.

20.dxe5 d5 21.Nxb6 Rxb6 22.f3 Bf5 23.b4!

23.Qd2 Qxe5 24.Rfe1 Qd6 25.Rad1 [25.b4 d4=] 25...Ra8! 26.Qxd5+ Qxd5 27.Rxd5 Rxa4 28.Rxf5 Rxb2 and Black is alright.

23...Bd3

23...Re6 24.Qd2 Rxe5 25.Qd4 should also be around equal.

24.Qd2!

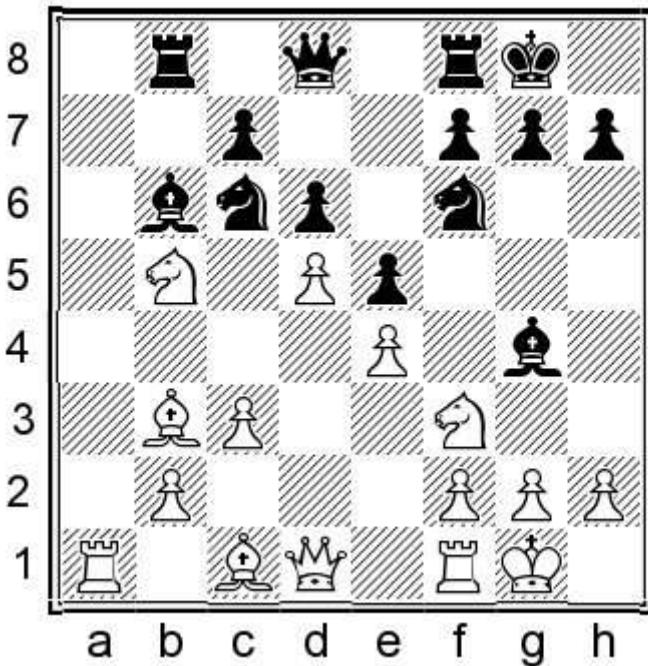
24.Rf2 Bc4!³

24...Bxf1 25.Qxd5+ Kh8 26.Rxf1

This is very drawish, as the computer's typical 0.00 suggests.

f) 13.d5 Ne7 14.--

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4 13.d5

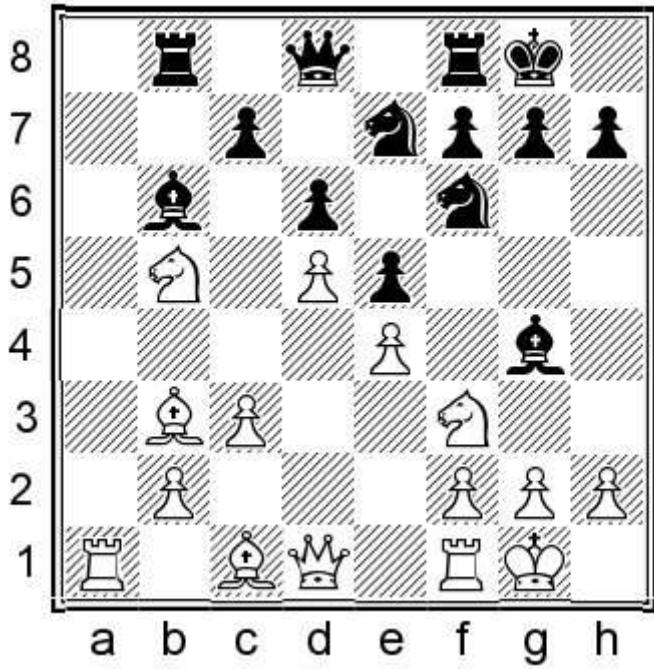


Position after: 13.d5

The second most-played move; White releases the tension by closing the centre, and keeps his material advantage. However 13.d5 has huge drawbacks too: it opens the the g1-a7 diagonal up to our Ark bishop and after the logical 13...Ne7-g6 manoeuvre Black starts to develop a dangerous initiative against the white king! In many cases White needs to play very accurately to avoid serious trouble.

13...Ne7

Now the e4-pawn is hanging and White has several ways to protect it.

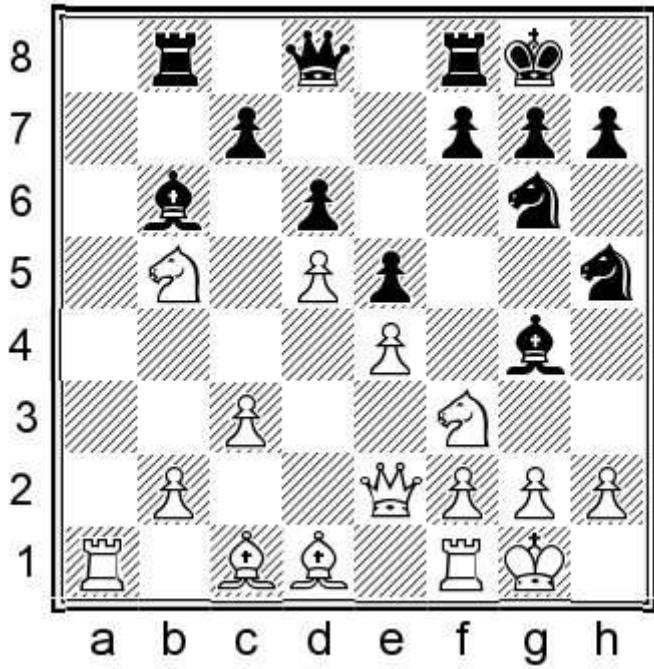


Position after: 13...Ne7

14.Qd3?!

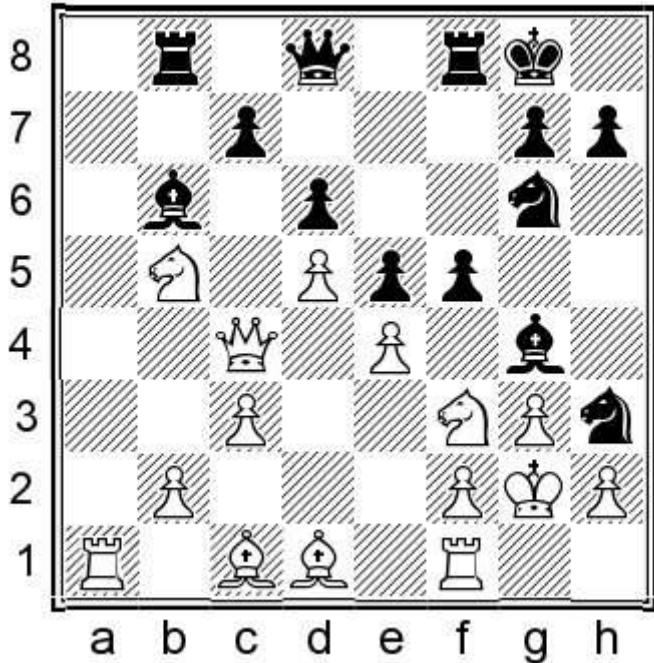
Hardly a good move.

A) 14.Qe2?! Nh5 or 14...Ng6 first. 15.Bd1 A sad necessity. 15...Ng6



Position after: 15...Ng6

A1) 16.Qc4 Nhf4 17.g3? Here in Kalezic – Moroni, Skopje 2019 Black could have played the direct 17...Nh3+ 18.Kg2 f5!?



Position after: 18...f5!?

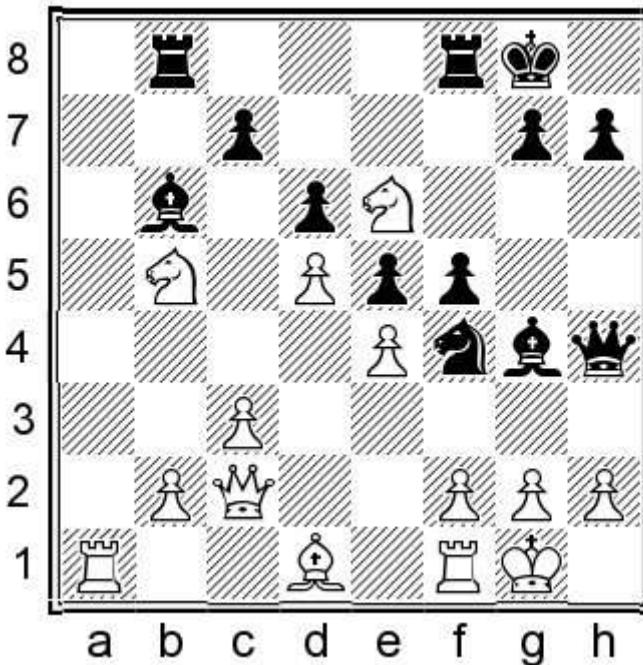
19.exf5 Bxf5.

A1.1) 20.Be3 Bxe3 [20...Qd7–+] 21.fxe3 Ng5 22.Nxg5 Qxg5–+

A1.2) 20.Be2 Qd7–+

A2) 16.Na7 Nh4 17.Qc2 Ra8 18.Nc6 Qf6.

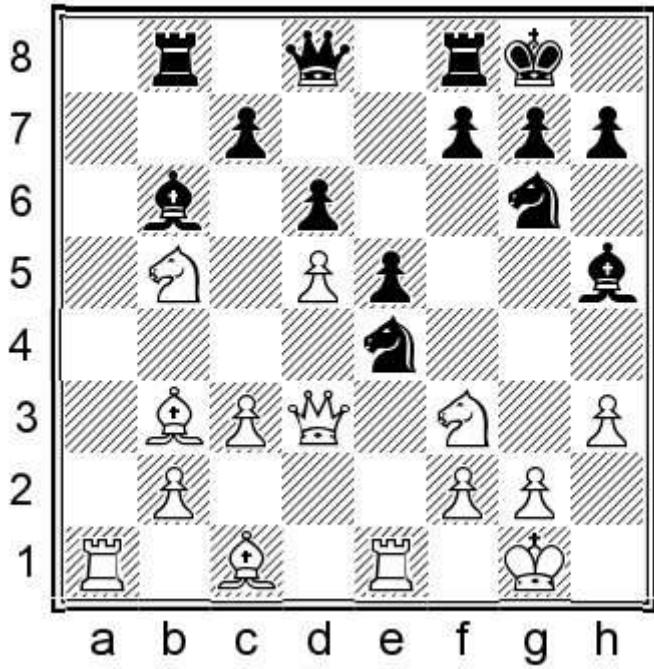
A3) 16.Qc2 f5 17.Na7 [After 17.Ng5 Nh4 18.Bxf4 Nxf4 19.Ne6 Qh4!]



Position after: 19...Qh4!

Black's initiative is visible. For example: 20.g3 Qh3 21.gxf4 Rf6! 22.Ng5 Rg6! 23.Bxg4 Qxg4+ 24.Kh1 Qxf4μ] 17...Bxa7 18.Rxa7 Nh4f is pleasant for Black.

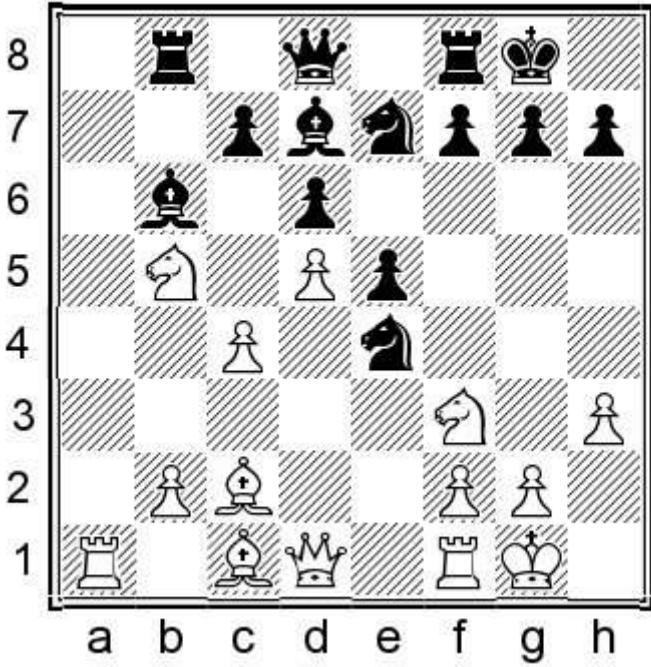
B) 14.Re1? is almost never seen, and for a good reason: 14...Ng6 15.h3 Bh5! 16.Qd3 [16.g4? Nxg4 17.hxg4 Bxg4 18.Qd3 f5 19.Bd1 Bxf3 20.Bxf3 Qh4 21.Be3 Nf4 22.Bxf4 Bxf2+–+] 16...Nxe4!



Position after: 16...Nxe4!

A typical blow. 17.Rxe4 f5 18.Rb4 e4 19.Bg5 Qd7 20.Qc4 exf3 21.Qc6 Qe8!μ

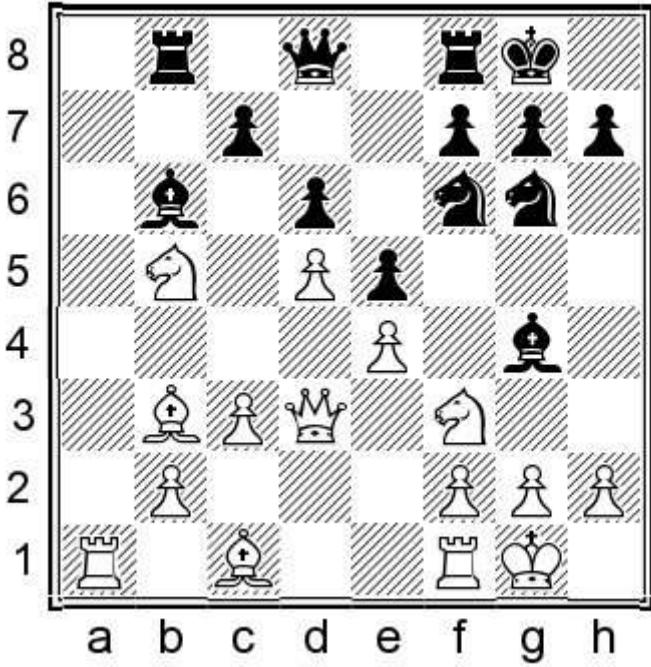
C) 14.h3? This move drops a pawn for no reason. 14...Bd7! 15.c4 [15.Na3 Nxe4 16.Bc2 f5³ was Martinez Alcantara – Akash Pc, Montcada 2018. 16...Nf6 is very good too.] 15...Nxe4 16.Bc2



Position after: 16.Bc2

Here Black's only problem is to choose from a lot of tempting possibilites. One good example is: 16...Bxb5 [16...f5!?] 17.Bxe4 [17.cxb5 Nf6 18.Bb3 Qd7 19.Bc4 Qf5³] 17...Bd7 [17...Bxc4 18.Bxh7+!] 18.b4 [18.Bc2 f5 19.Ba4 h6³] 18...f5 19.Bc2 Ng6³

14...Ng6



Position after: 14...Ng6

Black can play 14...Nd7 or 14...Nh5 too.

15.Bd1

15.h3 Bd7 16.Bc4 Nh5 17.b3 Ngf4,

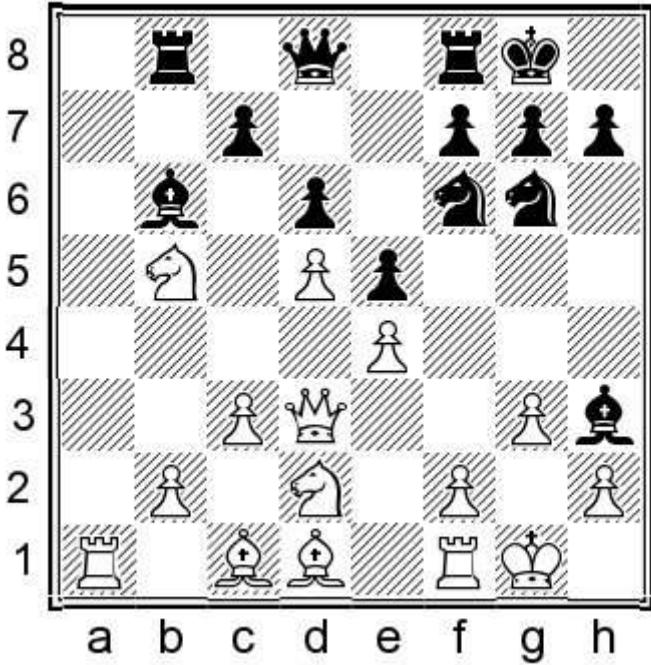
15...Nh5 16.g3

Here we can improve over the game Rapport – Bellia, Aschach 2007, with...

16...Bh3 17.Nd2!?

17.Re1 f5 is too dangerous.

17...Nf6!



Position after: 17...Nf6!

Black is in no hurry to collect material. The following illustrative lines show some ideas:

17...Bxf1 18.Nxf1 Nf6 19.c4©

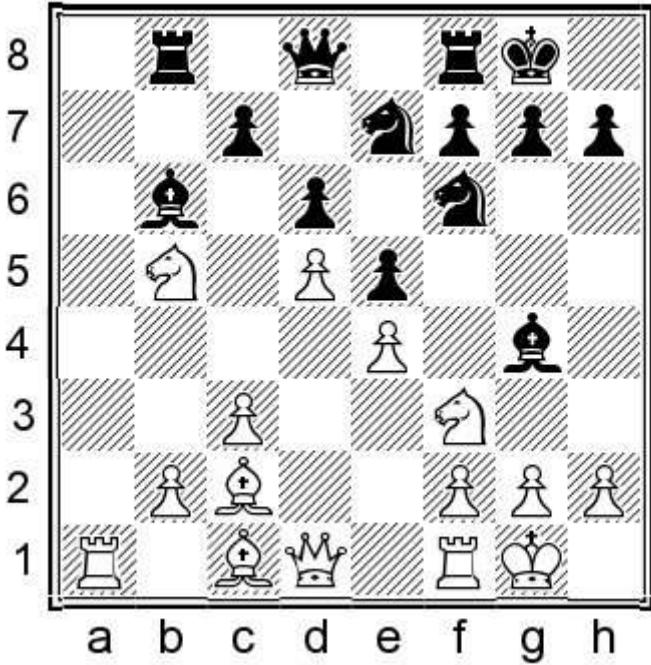
18.Na3

... 18.Re1 Ng4 19.Bxg4 Bxg4 20.Nc4 Bxf2+! 21.Kxf2 f5 22.Kg1 fxe4 23.Rxe4 Bh3 24.Re1 Qf6 25.Qe2 Rxb5μ

18...Bxf1 19.Nxf1 Ra8 20.Rb1 Qd7 21.Nc4 Ba7³

g) 13.d5 Ne7 14.Bc2 Qd7 15.Na3

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4 13.d5 Ne7 14.Bc2



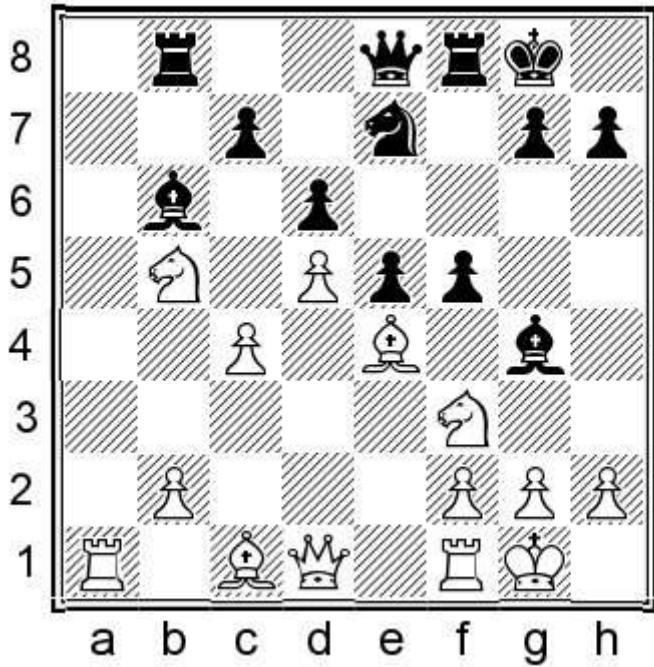
Position after: 14.Bc2

This logical retreat is the best; the bishop no longer had a duty on the a2-g8 diagonal. Other moves have serious disadvantages.

14...Qd7!?

This move order was also suggested by Svidler in his videos. Black accepts the fact that in order to continue the attack he very soon needs to sacrifice his bishop (there's no reasonable square to retreat to and why would we retreat anyway?!). 14...Ng6 used to be more common, but it allows the interesting 15.Na7!?.

In fact 14...Qe8 has been the most popular continuation, and actually the line I learned when I adopted the Ark in 2013. The next game was a great inspiration to me, so I've decided to mention it, despite the fact that from our perspective it's no longer that theoretically relevant: 15.c4 Nxe4 16.Bxe4 f5



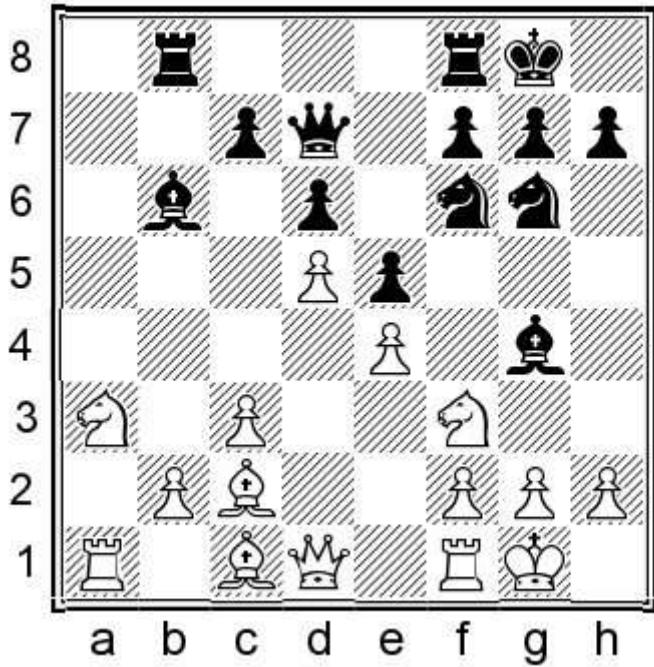
Position after: 16...f5

17.Bd3 [17.Bc2 A very problematic line that I failed to equalize completely.
17...e4 18.Be3! exf3 19.Re1!] 17...e4 18.Be2 exf3 19.Bxf3 Ng6! 20.b3? Nh4
21.Bxg4 fxg4 22.Bg5 Qh5 23.Bxh4 Qxh4 24.Ra2 Rf6 25.Qd3 Rbf8 26.Qg3
Qh6 27.Qd3 g3! 28.hxg3 Qh5!–+ 0-1 (37) Hou, Y (2527) – Adams, M (2726)
Merida 2008.

15.Na3?!

The only way to avoid the heavily-tested main lines.

15...Ng6!

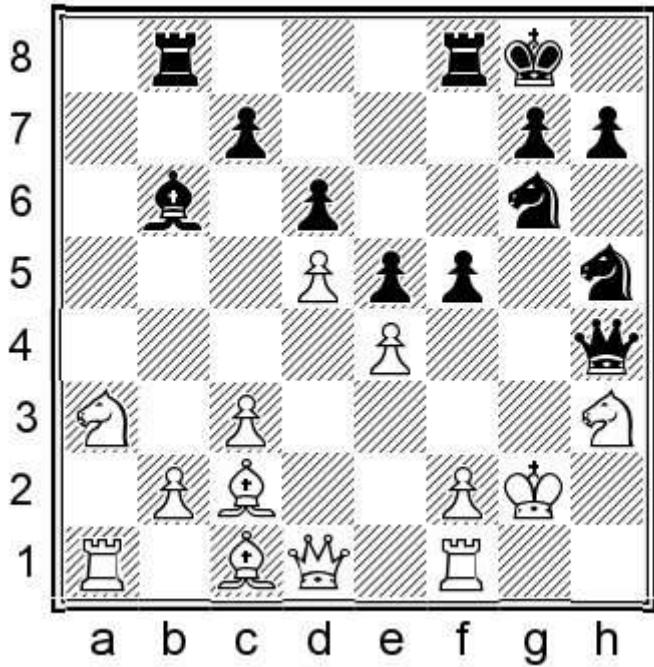


Position after: 15...Ng6!

16.Nc4

For a human it's very unnatural to make so many moves with the same piece in the early stage of the game, but the alternatives are also suspicious...

A) 16.h3 Bxh3 ... 17.gxh3? [If 17.Nc4 Bg4] 17...Qxh3 18.Ng5 Qg3+ 19.Kh1 Qh4+ 20.Kg2 Nh5 In comparison with our main line this is now possible and winning, since the 3rd rank is not available to the a1-rook! 21.Nh3 f5!

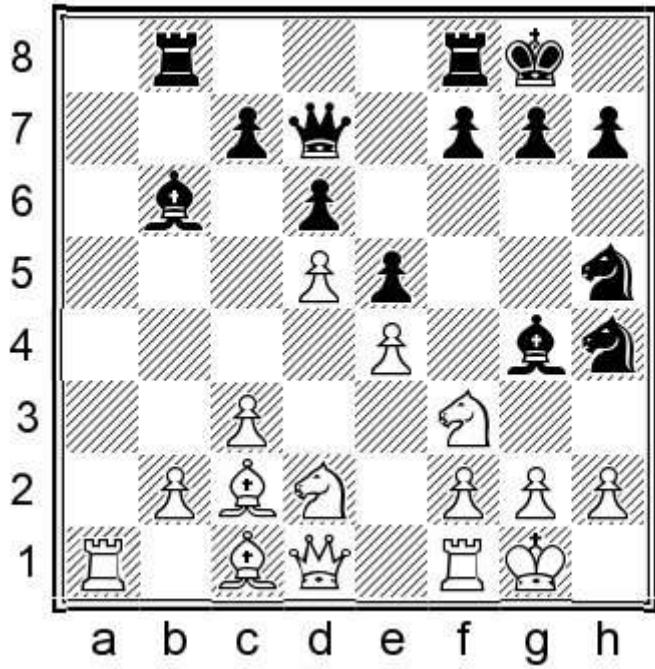


Position after: 21...f5!

A spectacular attack! 22.exf5 [22.Bg5 Ngf4+ 23.Bxf4 Nxf4+ 24.Nxf4 Qg5+! 25.Kh3 Rf6–+] 22...e4! 23.fxg6 Rf3–+

B) 16.Qd3 was chosen in the only game that has reached this position. The white queen is poorly-placed here and remains a target of the minor pieces. 16...Nh5 17.Nc4 Nh4, with already a nice game for Black, as in De Firmian, N (2546) – Aaron, D (2253) Philadelphia 2011.

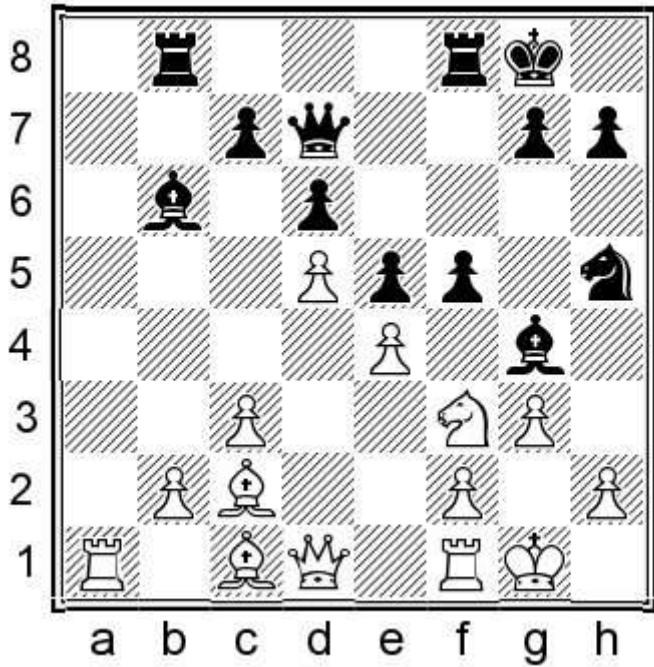
16...Nh4 17.Ncd2 Nh5!



Position after: 17...Nh5!

18.h3

18.g3 Nxf3+ 19.Nxf3 looks horrible, e.g. 19...f5



Position after: 19...f5

20.exf5 Nf6! 21.Ra4TM [21.h3? Bxh3 22.Ng5 Bg4 23.Qe1 Bxf5–+] 21...e4 22.Bxe4 [22.Rxe4? Nxe4 23.Bxe4 Bxf5 24.Qd3 Rbe8 25.Bxf5 Qxf5–+] 22...Nxe4 23.Rxe4 Qxf5³

18...Ng3!

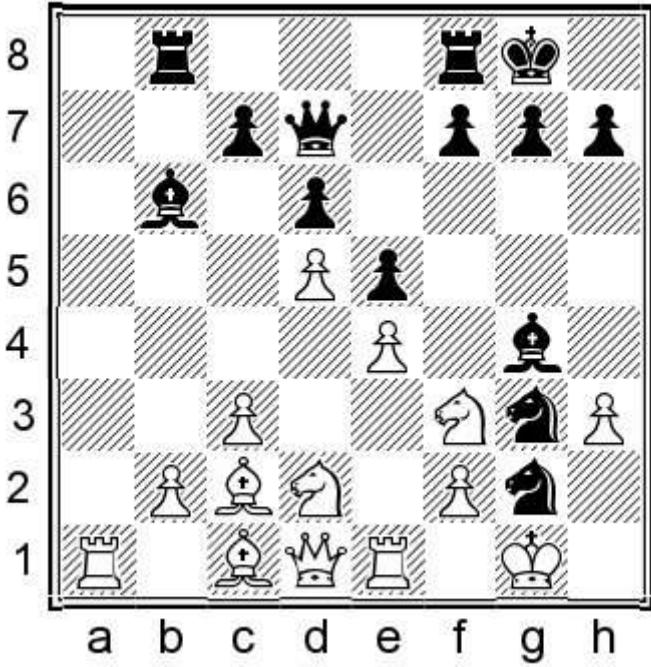
The story of the sneaky black knights – White barely survives, if at all.

19.Re1TM

A) 19.hxg4 Qxg4 20.Ne1 Ne2+–+

B) 19.Nxe5 Bxd1 20.Nxd7 Bxc2 21.Re1 Bd3! 22.Nxb6 Ne2+ 23.Rxe2 Bxe2 24.Nd7 Ra8!–+

19...Nxg2!?



Position after: 19...Nxg2!?

19...f5 is good as well.

20.hxg4

20.Kxg2 Bxh3+ 21.Kh2 Bxf2 22.Re2 Nxe2 23.Qxe2 Bb6μ

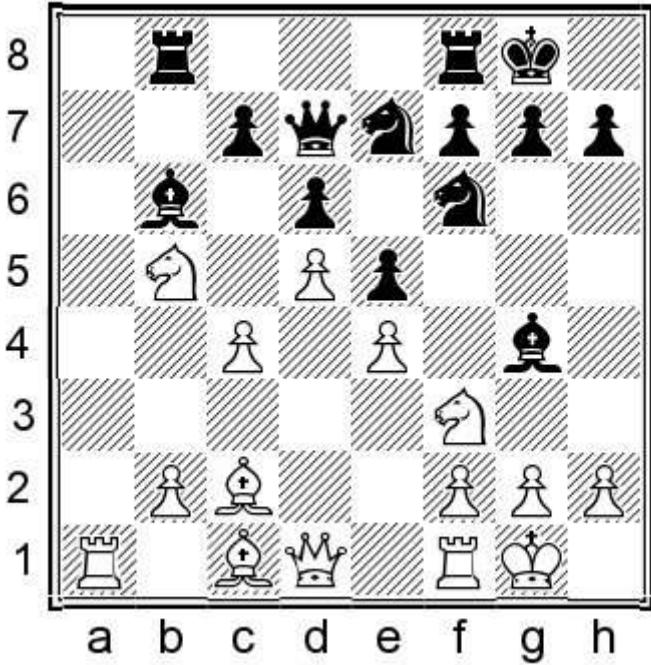
20...Qxg4 21.Ng5 Qxg5 22.Kxg2 Nxe4+

22...Ne2+? 23.Kf1 Qh5 24.Ra6!

23.Kf1 Nxf2 24.Qf3 f5 25.Nc4 Qh4 26.Nxb6 Ng4μ

h) 13.d5 Ne7 14.Bc2 Qd7 15.c4

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4 13.d5 Ne7 14.Bc2 Qd7!? 15.c4



Position after: 15.c4

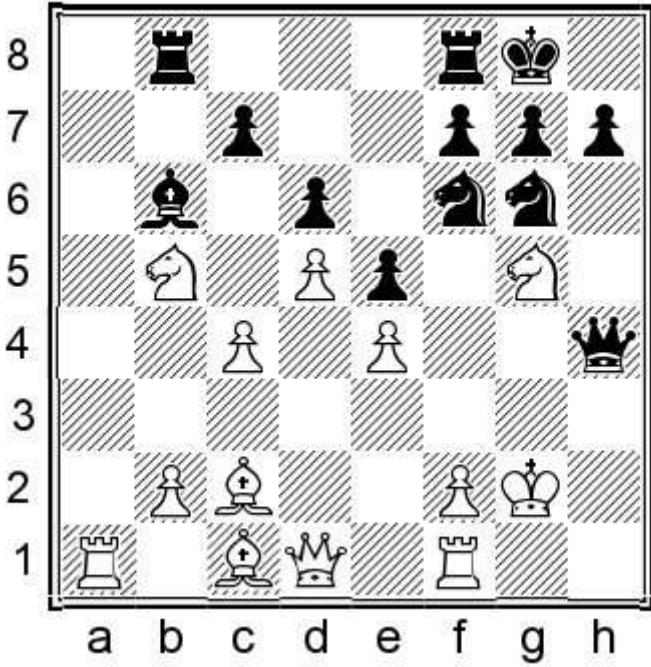
15...Ng6 16.h3

White has to get rid of the annoying pin.

A) 16.Bg5 Nh5 17.Ra3 Nh4³

B) 16.Qd3?! Nh5 17.Kh1 f5f

16...Bxh3! 17.gxh3 Qxh3 18.Ng5 Qg3+ 19.Kh1 Qh4+ 20.Kg2



Position after: 20.Kg2

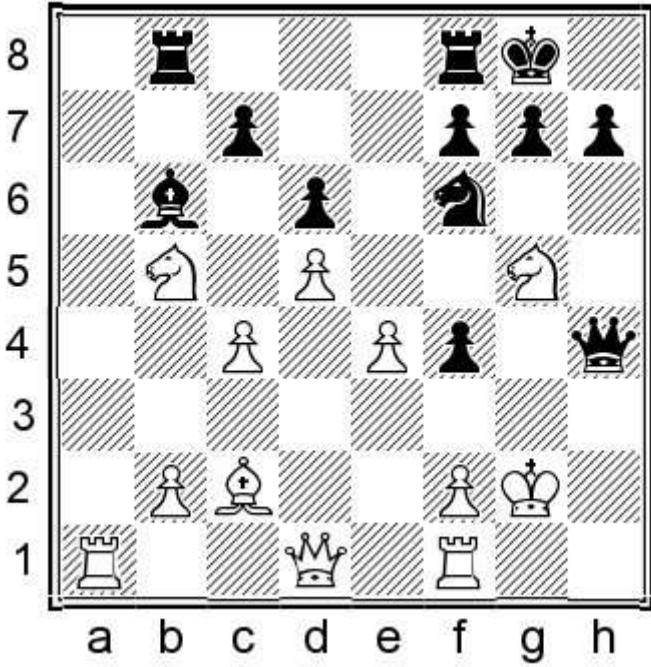
20...Nf4+

Only this way.

A) 20...h6 led to White's advantage in Karjakin, S (2672) – Radjabov, T (2729) Cap d'Agde 2006. 21.Nh3 Nxe4 22.Qe2 f5 23.Ra3²

B) 20...Nh5? is simply bad: 21.Nh3

21.Bxf4 exf4

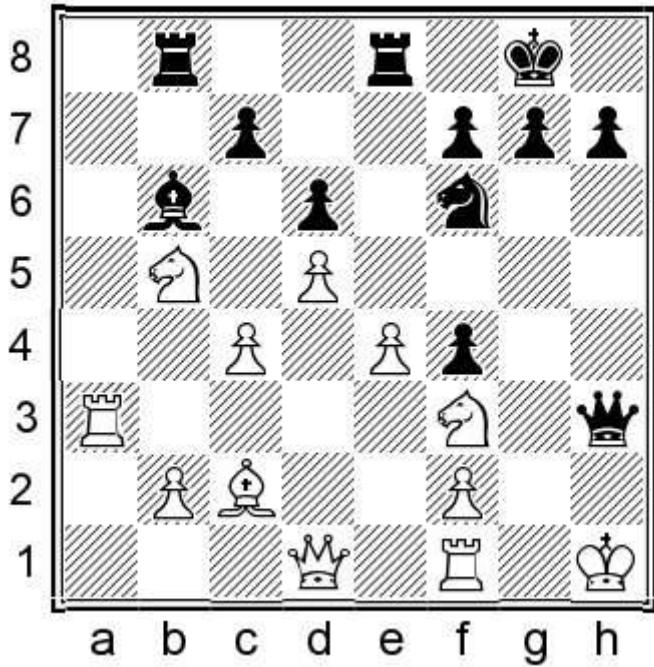


Position after: 21...exf4

An important position has arisen: Black has only one pawn for the piece but there are both positional and tactical reasons why his sacrifice works. White's king is pretty vulnerable, while Black's pieces are well-coordinated (look at that beautiful Ark bishop!) and if he can find time to include the rooks into the attack it might prove irresistible. I should also mention that the freshly created e5-square gives Black a nice outpost in many lines.

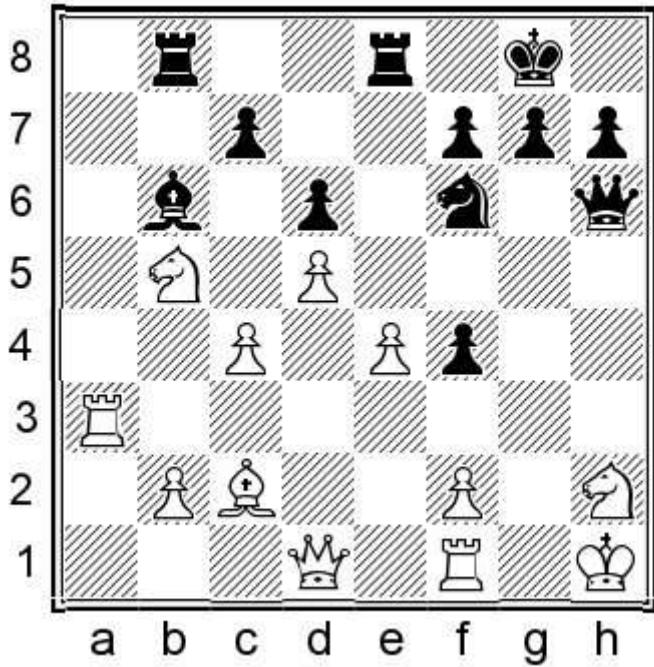
22.Nh3

22.Nf3 Qg4+ 23.Kh1 Rfe8 24.Ra3 [24.Nh2? Qh4 25.Qf3 Re5! 26.Rg1 Bxf2 27.Rg2 Bg3 28.Nd4 g6–+] 24...Qh3+!N



Position after: 24...Qh3+!N

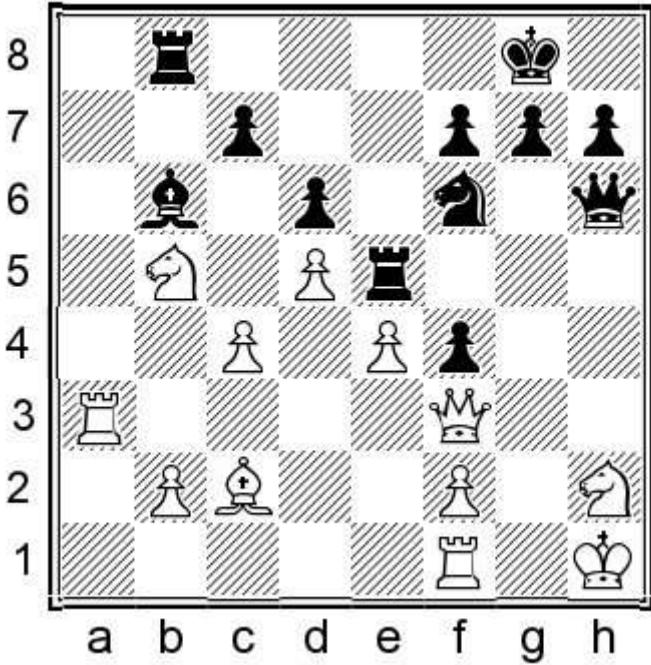
Shirov was my teammate in Baie Mare during the Romanian SuperLeague in 2017 when he faced this exciting line. In this position he didn't choose the optimal way. During dinner that day he brought to my attention this important detail and we chatted about it. Later on, when I prepared the Ark for one of my important tournaments, I checked it deeply with an engine and this as yet unplayed move proved to be the best reply here. The idea is simple: Black forces the knight back to h2, thus vacating the important e5-square for his pieces! 25.Nh2 Qh6



Position after: 25...Qh6

A) 26.Rg1 Bxf2 27.Rg2 Bg3 28.Qd2 Qh3 29.Kg1 Nxe4 30.Bxe4 Rxe4 31.Nf1 [31.Nd4 h5] 31...g6 32.Nxg3 fxg3 33.Raxg3 Qh4©

B) 26.Qf3 Re5!

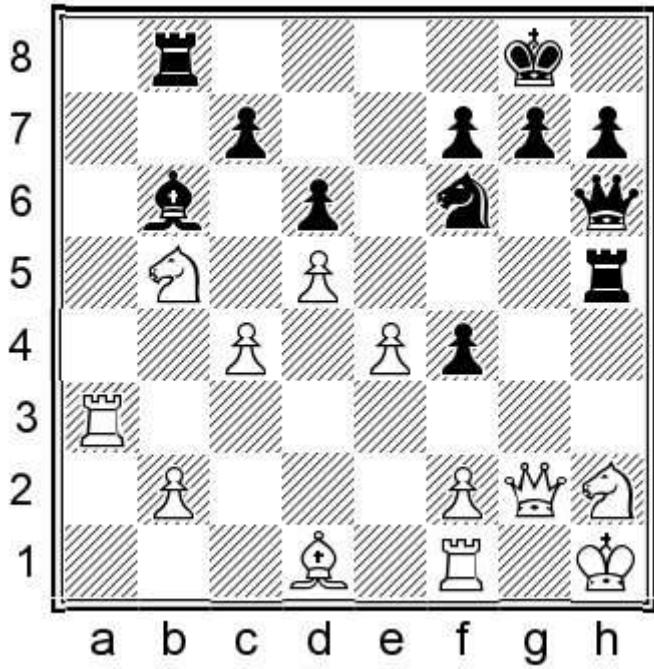


Position after: 26...Re5!

Here we go!

B1) 27.Rg1 Rh5 28.Rg2 Kf8! given by engines. [28...Rh4 29.Kg1 Nd7 30.Bd1 Ne5© is probably more human, but possibly less good objectively.] 29.Qd1 g5 30.f3 [30.e5 g4! 31.exf6 f3 32.Rxf3 gxf3 33.Qxf3 Re8,] 30...Rh4 31.Nd4 [31.b4 Nh5 32.Nd4 Ng3+ 33.Kg1 Qf6+] 31...Bxd4 32.Qxd4 g4! 33.fxg4 Nxg4,

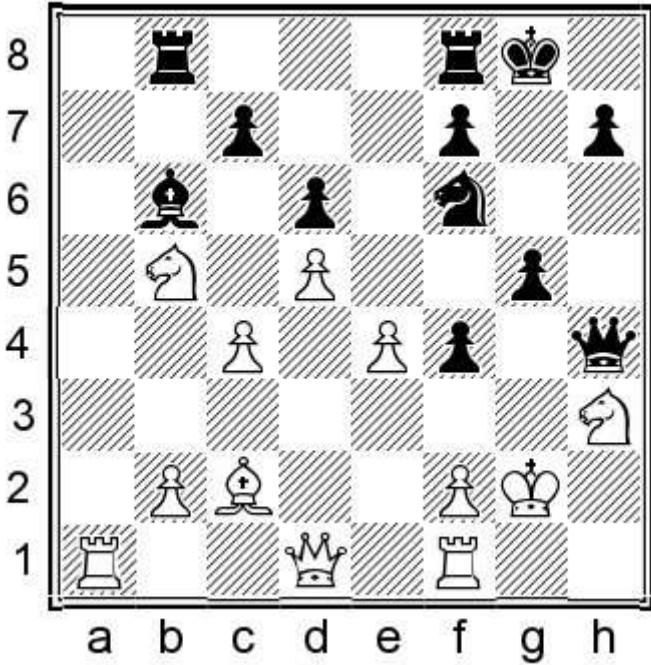
B2) 27.Qg2 The best practical move, leading to a very complicated game: 27...Rh5 28.Bd1™



Position after: 28.Bd1™

28...f3!? 29.Rxf3 [29.Bxf3?? Rg5–+] 29...Ng4 30.Rh3™ 30...Rxh3 31.Bxg4 Rb3∞ I came to this conclusion on my own, but later I found out that it had already been played in correspondance chess! Mulder, C (1987) – Buczinski, H (2025) ICCF email 2019.

22...g5

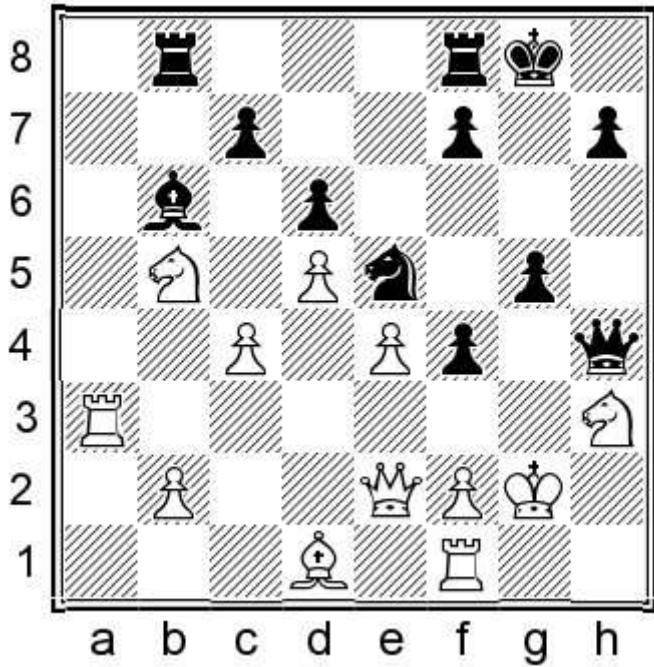


Position after: 22...g5

On h3 the knight looks terribly awkward, so Black doesn't hesitate to target it immediately.

23.Ra3

A) 23.Qe2 Ng4 24.Ra3TM [24.Bd1? A blunder. 24...Ne3+! 25.fxe3 Qg3+ 26.Kh1 Qxh3+ 27.Kg1 Bxe3+ 28.Rf2 Ra8! 29.Ra3 Rxa3 30.bxa3 h5 31.Qf3 Qxf3 32.Bxf3 g4-- and Black was winning in Korneev – Ragger, Leoben AUT 2007.] 24...Ne5 25.Bd1



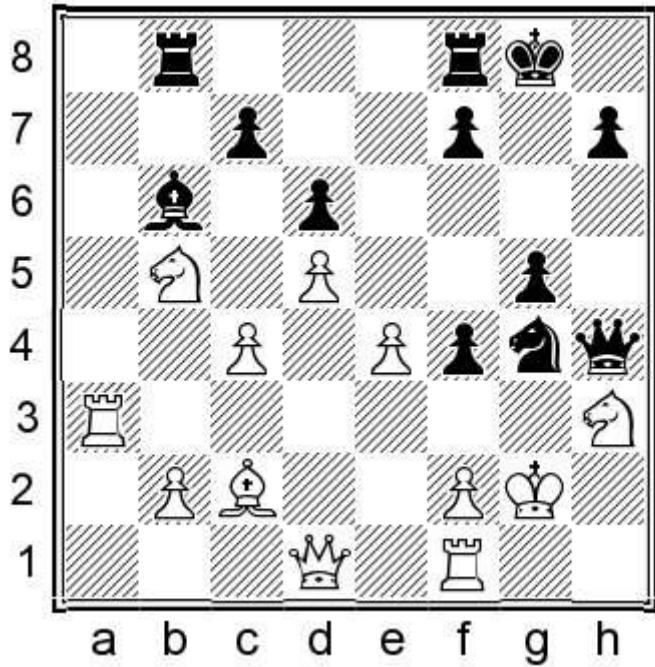
Position after: 25.Bd1

leads to a very complex game, something we should enjoy having opted for the Ark in the first place! ☺

B) 23.Nd4? is no good in view of: 23...Bxd4 24.Qxd4 f3+ 25.Kxf3 Qxh3+ 26.Ke2 Nd7 27.Rg1 [27.Rh1 Qg4+] 27...Qh5+ 28.Kd2 Ne5 29.Bd1 Qh6μ

23...Ng4

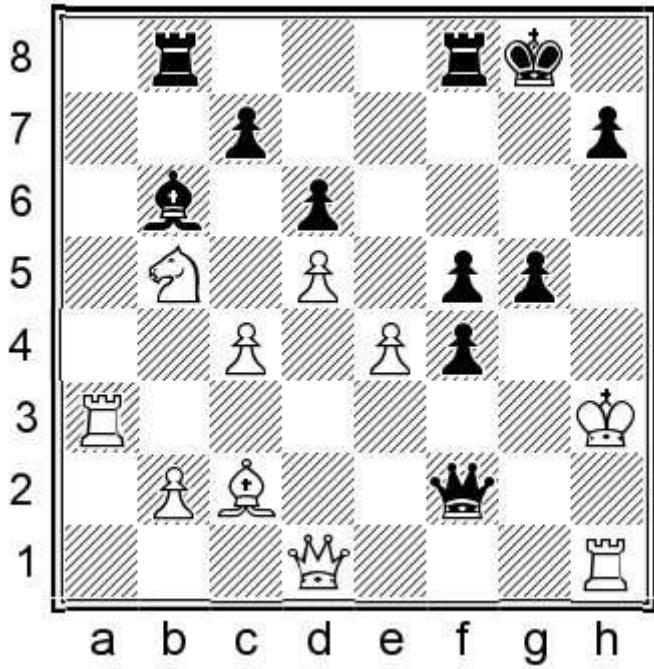
My preference here. I find this move much easier to understand than the 23...Ra8!? suggested by Svidler.



Position after: 23...Ng4

24.Nd4

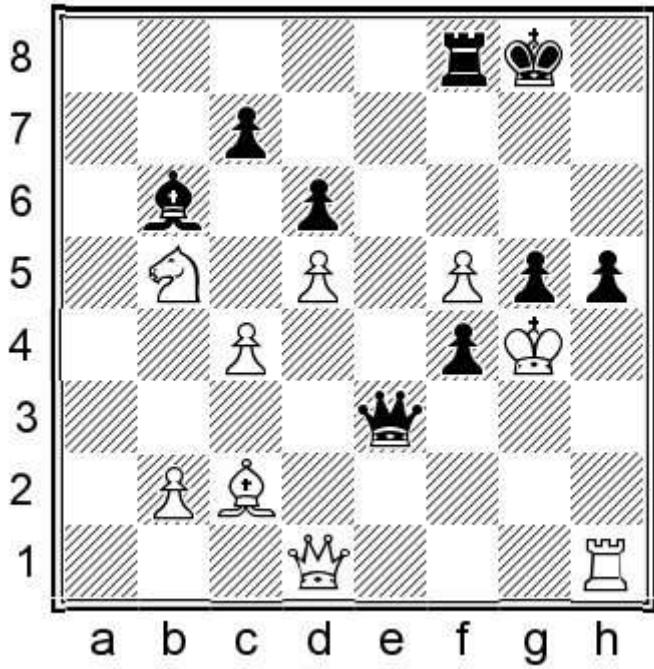
24.Rh1? A losing mistake, seen in the stem game of this line starting with 13.d5. 24...Nxf2! 25.Nxf2 Qxf2+ 26.Kh3 At first sight it might appear to you that there is no more than a perpetual check, but... 26...f5!



Position after: 26...f5!

27.exf5 Qh4+ 28.Kg2 Qf2+ 29.Kh3 Rbe8!—+ Black is just winning on the spot with strong – and at the same time spectacular – moves!

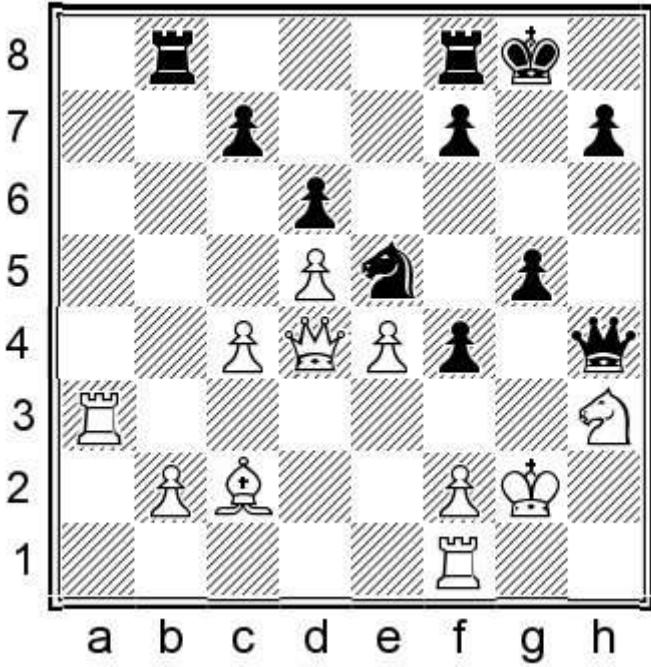
- A) 30.Kg4 h5+ 31.Rxh5 [31.Kxg5 Re7 32.f6 Qg2+] 31...Qg2+
- B) 30.Rf3 Re3 31.Rxe3 Qxe3+ 32.Kg4 h5+!!



Position after: 32...h5+!!

The only move; this brutal thrust concludes the fight. 33.Kxh5 Kf7! 34.f6 Rh8+ 35.Kg4 Kxf6 [35...Qg3+! leads to an even quicker end. 36.Kf5 f3] 36.Qe1 Rh4+ 37.Rxh4 Qxe1 38.Rh6+ Kg7 39.Rh7+ Kg8 40.Bg6 Qg3+ 41.Kf5 f3 0-1 Vocaturo – Godena, Cremona 2006. An amazing game by the Italian GM, who has been advocating the Ark for a very long time.

24...Bxd4 25.Qxd4 Ne5©



Position after: 25...Ne5©

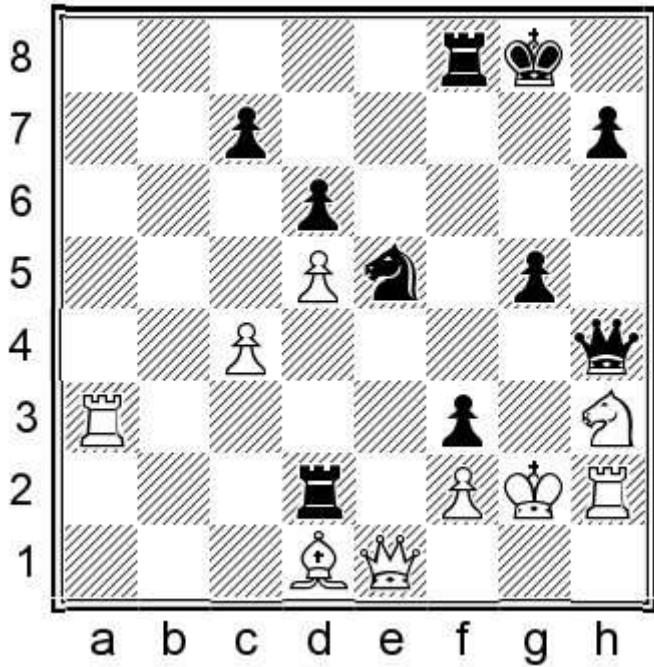
A key position. I believe it's reasonable to memorize the lines precisely up to this point. Here the battle is still sharp and rich, with a lot of possibilities, so it's almost impossible to remember each and every detail that follows, but I will offer you some additional lines to give you a general feel.

26.Rh1

After 26.Bd1 practice saw 26...f5 but engines tend to insist on 26...Ra8 as a better move. 27.Rh1 [27.Rg1 f3+ 28.Bxf3 g4 29.Bd1 gxh3+ 30.Rxh3 Qxe4+ 31.Kf1+ Kh8=] 27...fxe4 28.Qxe4 Rxb2 29.Rh2!? Rd2 Interestingly enough I happened to witness this game live too: White played pretty fast and, under some time pressure, Black went wrong. 30.Qe1

A) 30...Nxc4?? 31.Kh1! Qh6 [31...Rxd1 32.Qxd1 Nxa3 33.Ng1!+– Black missed this idea previously.] 32.Rc3 Rd4 33.Nxg5 Qg6 34.Bc2 Qxg5 35.Qe6+ Rf7 36.Rg2 1-0 Saric, I (2637) – Szabo, K (2512)/Sarajevo 2011.

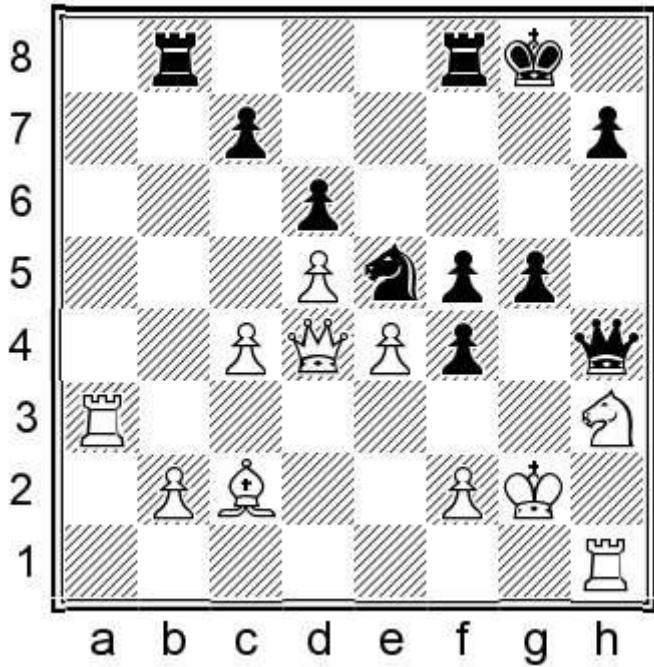
B) 30...f3+!



Position after: 30...f3+!

This move equalizes by means of: 31.Bxf3 Nxf3 32.Qe6+ Kh8 33.Rxf3 Rxf3 34.Kxf3 g4+! 35.Ke3 gxh3! 36.Qc8+ [36.Kxd2 Qf4+] 36...Kg7 37.Qxc7+ Kg8 38.Qc8+ Kg7 39.Qd7+ Kg8 40.Qe6+ Kg7 41.Kxd2 Qf4+ 42.Ke2 Qxh2 43.c5 Qf4=

26...f5!



Position after: 26...f5!

Of course! The pawn is obviously untouchable because of ...f3.

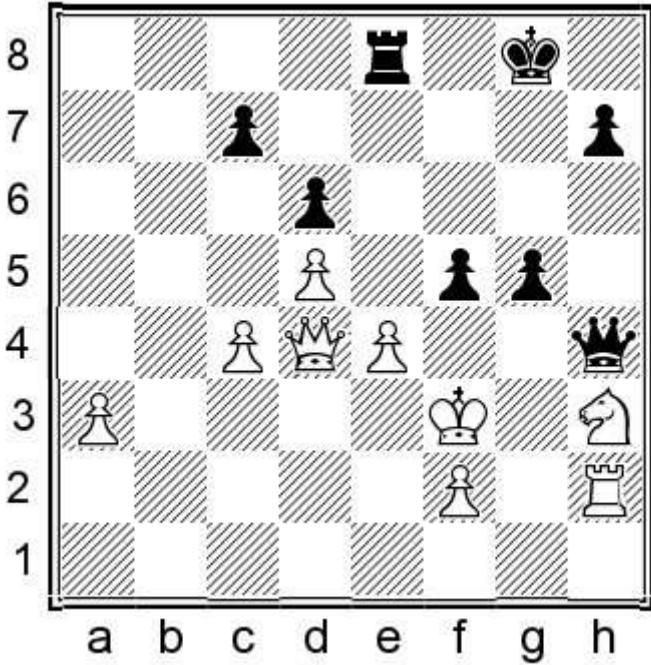
27.Rh2

27.Nxg5? Qxg5+ 28.Kf1 Ra8! 29.Rah3 [29.Rg1? Qxg1+ 30.Kxg1 Rxa3 31.bxa3 Nf3+--] 29...Ra1+ 30.Bd1 h5!--

27...Ra8 28.Bd1™ 28...Rxa3 29.bxa3 f3+ 30.Bxf3

30.Kh1 h6!f

30...Nxf3 31.Kxf3 Re8!?



Position after: 31...Re8!?

32.Kg2™ 32...Qg4+ 33.Kf1 Rb8!?

33...Rxe4 34.Qd2 h6∞

34.Qd3 fxe4 35.Qg3

35.Qc2 Rb2 36.Qxb2 Qd1+ 37.Kg2 Qf3+ 38.Kg1 Qd1+=

35...Qf3 36.Qxf3

36.Qxg5+ Kh8 37.Qc1 Qd3+ 38.Kg2 Rg8+ 39.Ng5 Rxg5+ 40.Qxg5 Qf3+=

36...exf3 37.Ke1 g4 38.Kd2

38.Ng5? Rb1+ 39.Kd2 g3!–

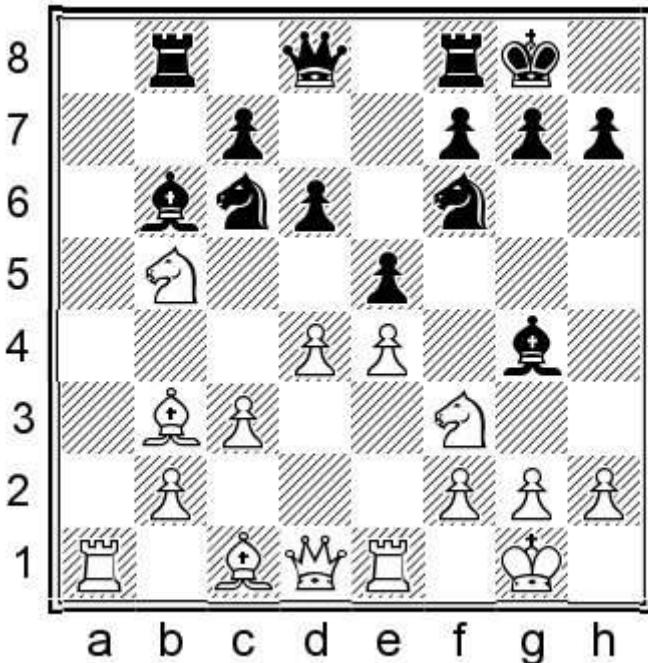
38...gxh3=

The smoke has cleared and the endgame is drawn.

Chapter 12

13.Re1

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4 13.Re1



Chapter Guide

Chapter 12 – 13.Re1

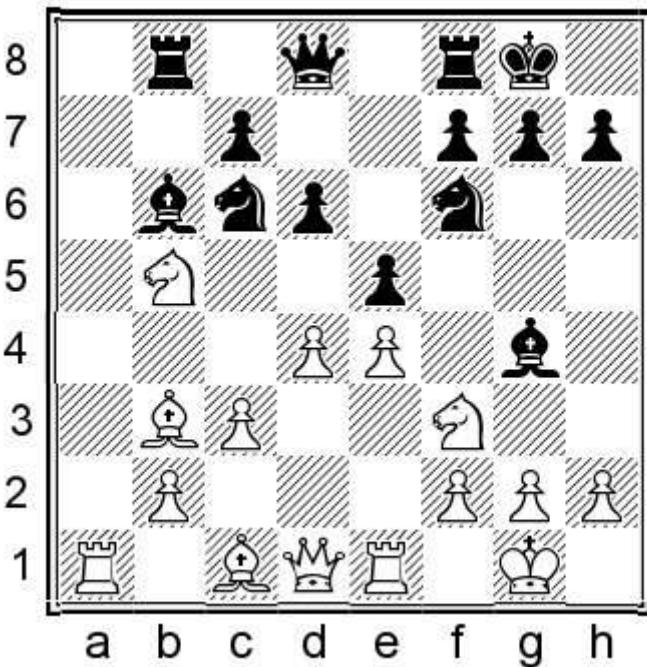
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4 13.Re1 Bxf3

- a) 14.Qxf3
- b) 14.gxf3 Nh5 15.--
- c) 14.gxf3 Nh5 15.Kh1 Qf6 16.Rg1 h6 17.--
- d) 14.gxf3 Nh5 15.Kh1 Qf6 16.Rg1 h6 17.Be3 Nd8 18.--

e) 14.gxf3 Nh5 15.Kh1 Qf6 16.Rg1 h6 17.Be3 Nd8 18.Bc4

a) 14.Qxf3

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4 Rb8 8.c3 d6 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4 13.Re1



Position after: 13.Re1

First employed by Ivanchuk in his well-known game against Shirov back in Belgrade 1997. Later on they continued their debate in Wijk aan Zee 2010 where they played one of the most beautiful games in the history of the Ark. 13.Re1 has never been as popular as the main move (13.Bc2) though it contains some poison as well: White claims that the bishop is very well placed on b3, and practically forces Black to make the trade on f3 himself, since the alternatives are unsatisfactory.

13...Bxf3

13...exd4?! 14.cxd4 Nxd4 15.Nbxd4 Bxd4 16.Bxf7+ Rxf7 17.Qxd4 Bxf3

18.gxf3 Nd7 [18...Qd7 19.Ra3 Nh5 20.Qd5² Solodovnichenko – Rainfray, France 2006] 19.f4 Nc5 20.Qc4! Nb3 21.Ra7!^f McShane – Zaja, León 2001.

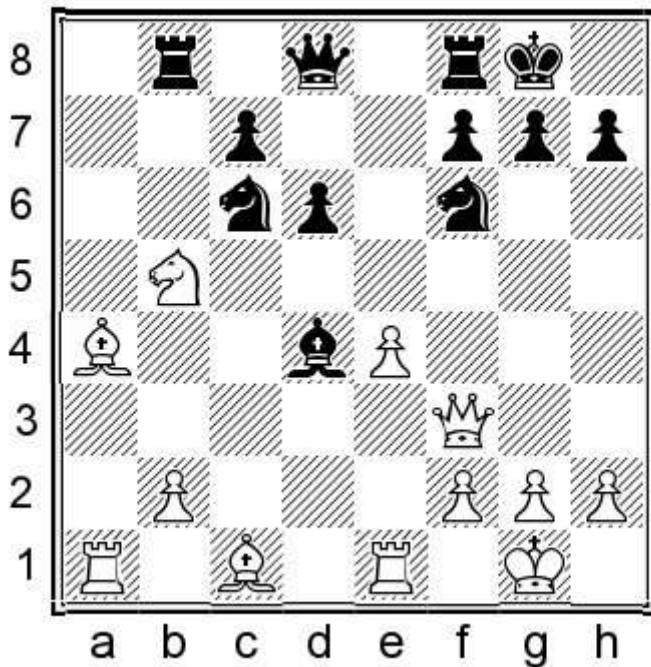
14.Qxf3?!

Only tried once, by the Indian GM Kunte, White gives back the pawn for no real reason. Black has many options.

14...exd4 15.cxd4 Bxd4

15...Nxd4 looks quite simple: 16.Nxd4 Bxd4 17.Qd3 Bc5 [17...c5=] 18.Be3 [18.h3 Nd7 19.Be3 Qf6=] 18...Nd7 19.Qc2 Qf6=

16.Ba4



Position after: 16.Ba4

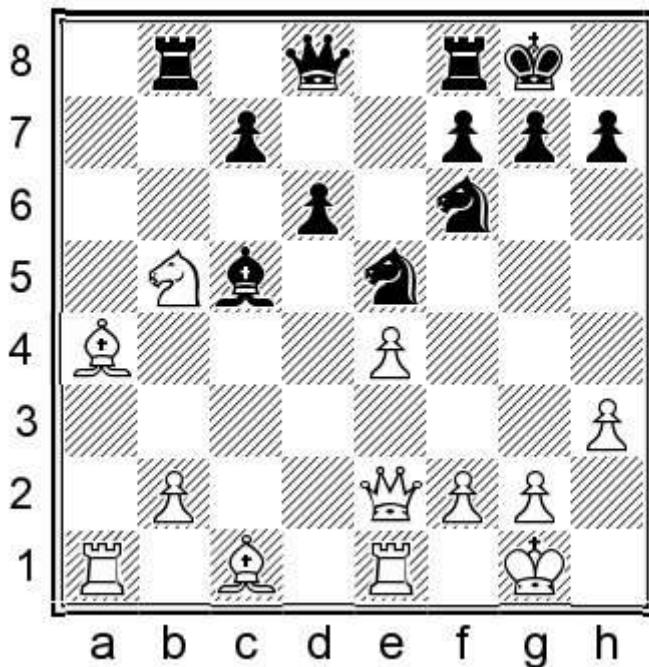
16...Bc5

The immediate 16...Ne5 can also be considered. 17.Qg3 [17.Qe2 Bc5 18.Bg5 c6 19.Nc3 Qe7=] 17...Bc5 and Black is fine, at least.

17.h3

17...Qe7 was played in this position in Kunte – Ganguly, India 2000 when Black was ok, but I prefer the text.

17...Ne5 18.Qe2



Position after: 18.Qe2

18...Re8

18...Nfg4!? leads to some excitement: 19.hxg4 Qh4 20.Ra3! Nxg4 21.Rh3 Qxf2+ 22.Kh1

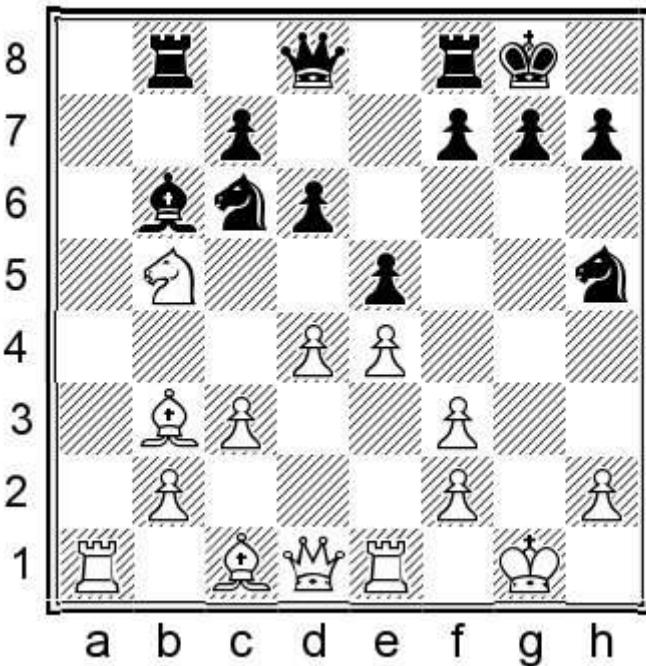
19.Nc3 c6 20.Bg5 h6 21.Bh4 Rb4

Black has nice activity.

b) 14.gxf3 Nh5 15.--

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4 Rb8 8.c3

d6 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4 13.Re1 Bxf3 14.gxf3 Nh5



Position after: 14...Nh5

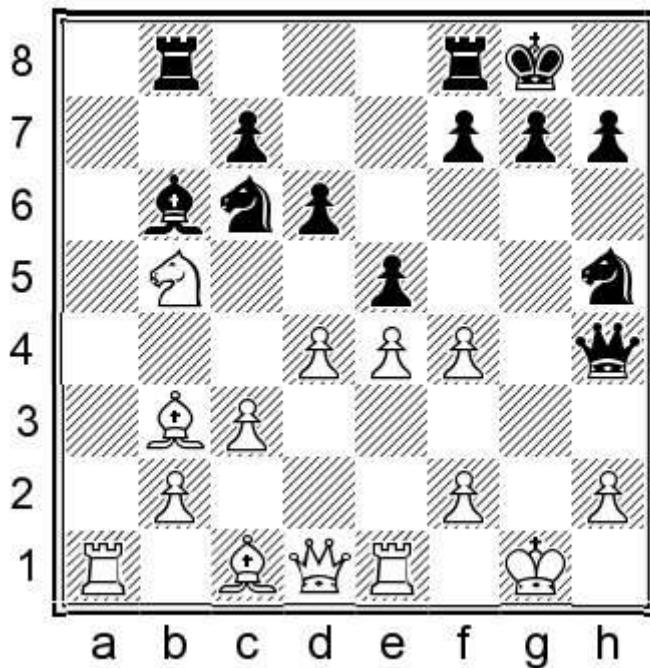
The f4-square is weakened so the f6-knight prepares to occupy it. There is a crossroad now and White has three interesting moves, all leading to a very complex and intense game.

15.Be3

The old line in which Black has been known to be fine from the late 1990s.

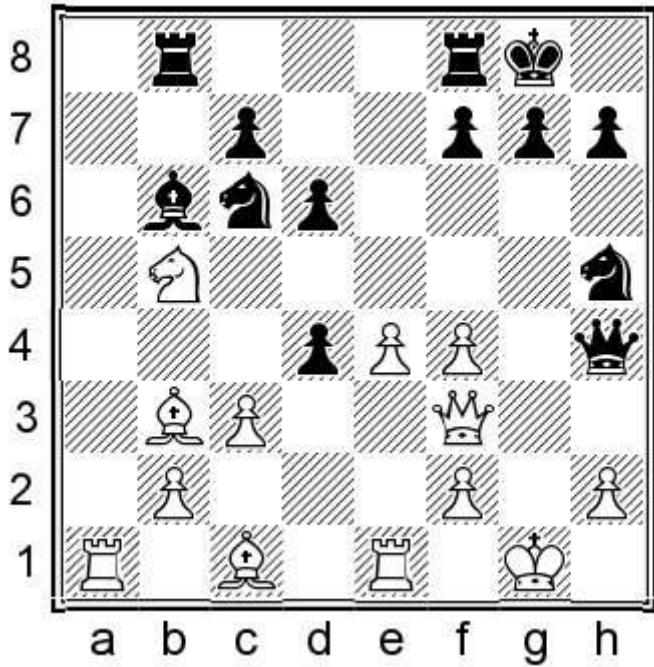
15.f4!? This move has gained some attention recently. It's similar to the line starting with 13.Bc2 Bxf3 14.gxf3 Nh5 15.f4, which has seen a fair amount of games, with good results for White. However, in our position White is struggling to prove his right about his bishop placement and the extra Re1 move, which actually gives Black an extra opportunity – 15...Qh4!? – which I recommend playing. This extremely ambitious-looking move was chosen by Shirov; the rook move has left the f2-square vulnerable, thus making this queen sortie possible. [There is nothing wrong with 15...Nxf4 16.Bxf4 exf4

as seen in Kovalev – Caruana, Wijk aan Zee 2020, where Black went on to win, although White can do much better than he did in the game.]



Position after: 15...Qh4!?

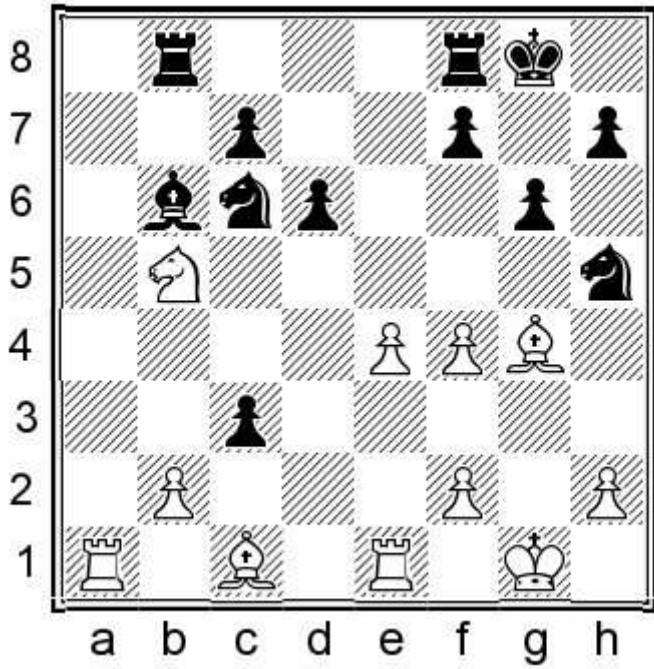
A) 16.Qf3 exd4



Position after: 16...exd4

A1) 17.e5? A blunder. 17...dxc3! 18.bxc3 dxe5 19.fxe5 Bxf2+ 20.Qxf2 Qxf2+ 21.Kxf2 Rxb5 22.Ba4 Ra5!–+ Kulaots – Shirov, Viljandi rapid 2017.

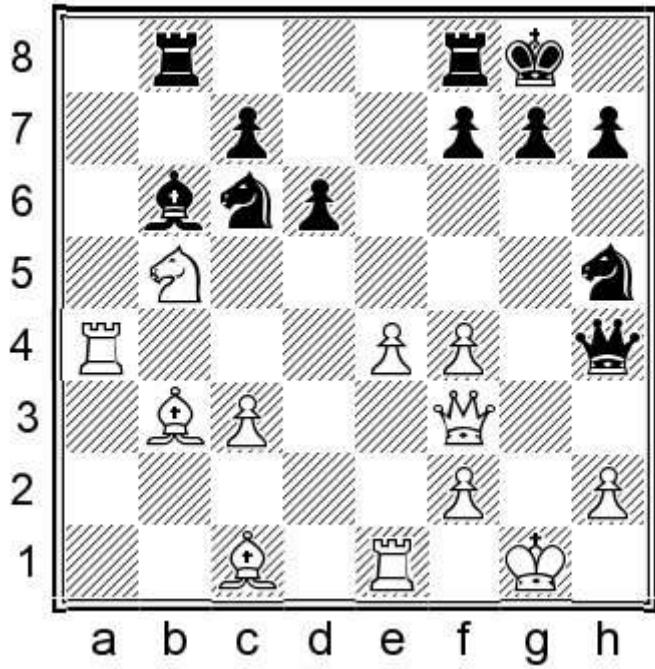
A2) 17.Bd1 g6 18.Qg4 Qxg4+ 19.Bxg4 dxc3



Position after: 19...dxc3

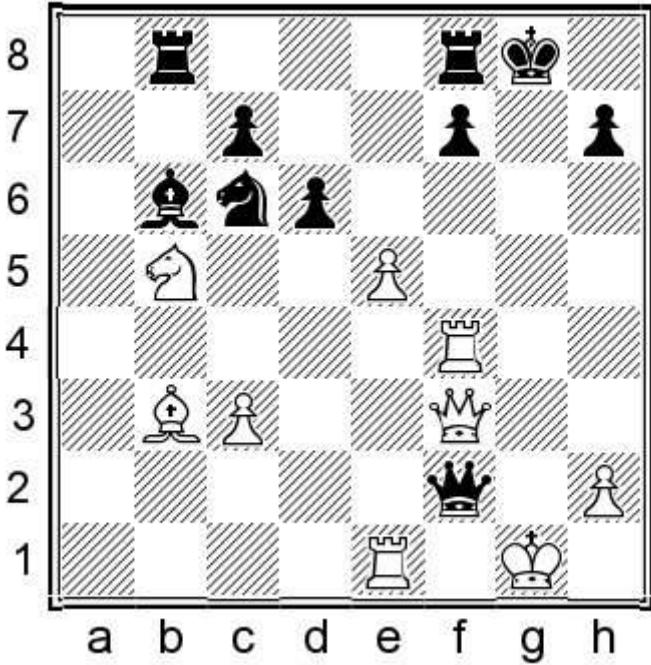
20.bxc3 [20.Bxh5? Bxf2+ 21.Kxf2 Rxb5 22.bxc3 Rxh5–+; 20.Nxc3 Nf6] 20...Nf6 21.Bf3 Na5 22.Nd4 Bxd4 23.cxd4 Nb3 24.Ra4 Nxe4! A rare motif. 25.Bxe4 [25.Rxe4 Nxc1] 25...Rfe8 26.f3 [26.d5 Nc5 27.Rc4 f5 28.f3 fxe4 29.fxe4 Rb1 30.e5=] 26...d5= is equal.

A3) 17.Ra4 dxc3 [17...d3!? is an exciting alternative.] 18.bxc3



Position after: 18.bxc3

A critical position. Black has many ways to continue apart from the text, such as 18...Bxf2 and 18...Nf6. 18...g5!? The most spectacular way. 19.e5 Nxf4 20.Bxf4 gxf4 21.Rxf4 [21.exd6?! Qxf2+ 22.Qxf2 Bxf2+ 23.Kxf2 Rxb5] 21...Qxf2+!



Position after: 21...Qxf2+!

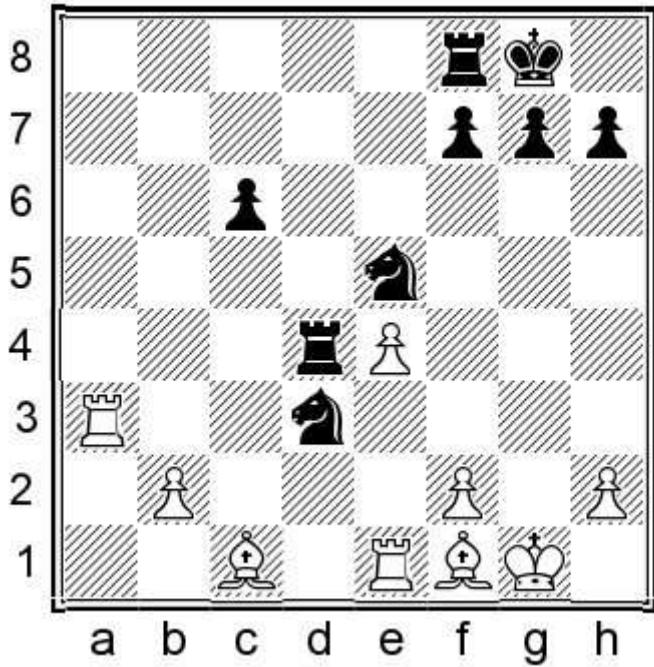
22.Qxf2 Bxf2+ 23.Kxf2 Rxb5 The simplest. 24.Rg1+ Kh8 25.Rxf7 Rxf7+ 26.Bxf7 Ne7 27.exd6 Rf5+ 28.Ke2 cxd6= is a draw.

B) 16.fxe5? is a mistake: 16...Nxe5! The point!

B1) 17.Qe2 Ng4 is dangerous: 18.f4 [18.f3 Nxh2] 18...Nxh2

B2) 17.Bc2 Rfe8 18.Nxc7 [18.f4 Nf3+] 18...Ng4 19.Qf3 Bxc7μ

C) 16.Bd5 Ne7 17.fxe5 dxе5 [After 17...c6 18.Nxd6 cxd5 19.exd5 White has too many pawns.] 18.Bc4 exd4 19.cxd4 Ng6 Black once again has nice counterplay for a mere pawn. The position gives a lot of practical chances for both sides, but I feel like playing this one as the second player. [19...Nf6!? 20.Qf3 c6 21.Nd6 Bxd4∞] 20.Qf3 Rbd8 21.Be3 [21.Bf1 c6 22.Ra6 Bxd4 23.Nxd4 Rxd4 ... 24.Qh3 Qxh3 25.Bxh3 Nh4 26.Bf1 Ne5 27.Ra3 Nfd3]



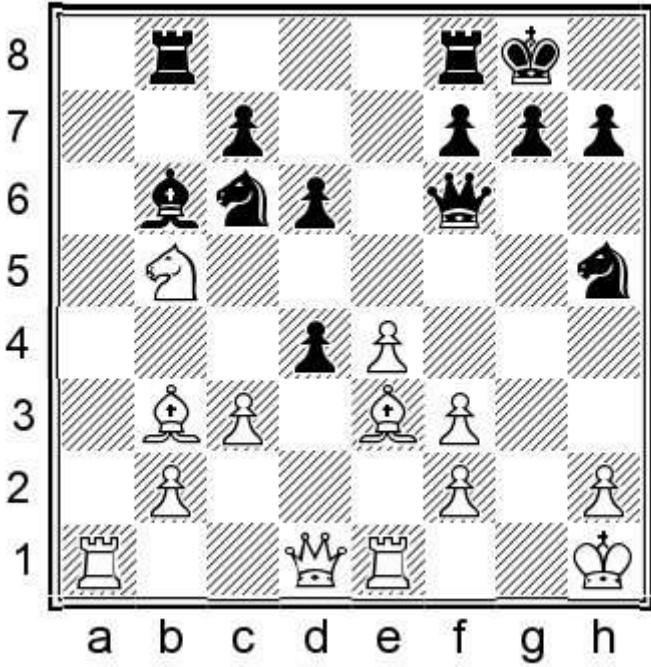
Position after: 27...Nfd3

28.Bxd3 Nxd3 29.Be3 Nxe1 30.Bxd4 Nc2 31.Ra4 Nxd4 32.Rxd4 Rb8=] 21...c6 22.Na7 Bxd4 23.Nxc6 Bxe3 24.Rxe3 [24.Nxd8 Ne5! 25.Qxe3 Nxc4] 24...Rd2 25.Re2 Qg5+ 26.Kh1 Rxe2 27.Bxe2 Nh4,, Black's counterplay is really annoying.

15...Qf6 16.Kh1

16.Bc4?! is questionable, as after 16...Ne7! 17.Kh1 c6 18.Rg1 [18.Na3 d5,] 18...cx b5! is possible. 19.Bg5 bxc4 20.Bxf6 Nxf6μ

16...exd4



Position after: 16...exd4

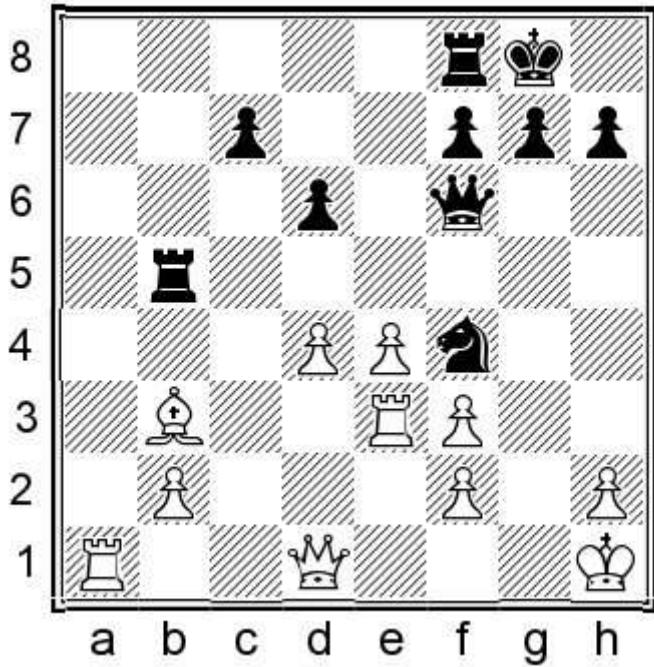
The established main move. As an alternative, 16...Nf4 can be a candidate.

17.cxd4

17.Nxd4? A natural move and ... a serious blunder! 17...Bxd4!

A) 18.cxd4?? loses to a typical sacrifice. 18...Rxb3 19.Qxb3? [19.f4 Rb5–+] 19...Qxf3+ 20.Kg1 Nf4 0-1 Tincu – Sofronie, Eforie Nord 1998.

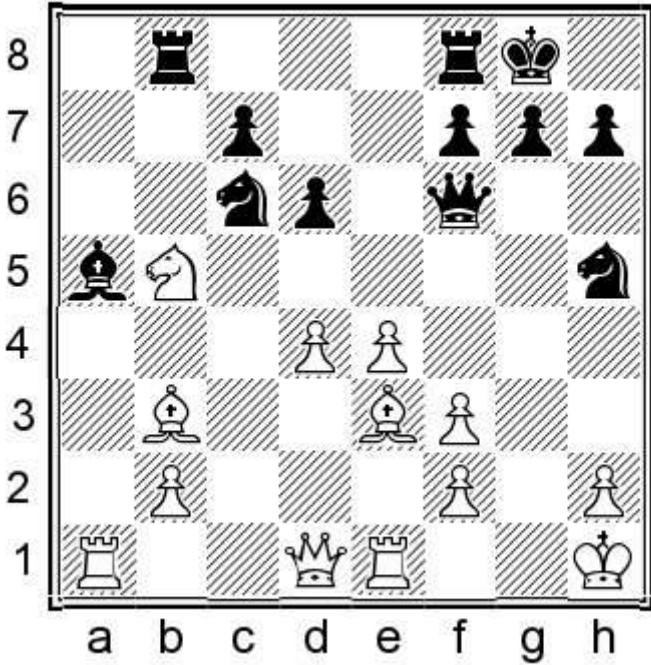
B) 18.Bxd4 Nxd4 19.cxd4 Nf4 20.Re3 Rb5!



Position after: 20...Rb5!

A lovely move. 21.e5 Qg5! Black is seemingly attacking... 22.Qg1 Qxg1+ 23.Kxg1 d5! and suddenly exchanges queens. A nice transition to a favourable endgame, e.g. 24.Kf1 Rfb8 25.Rc3 g6 26.Bc2 Rxb2 27.Rxc7 Ne6µ White is suffering.

17...Ba5!



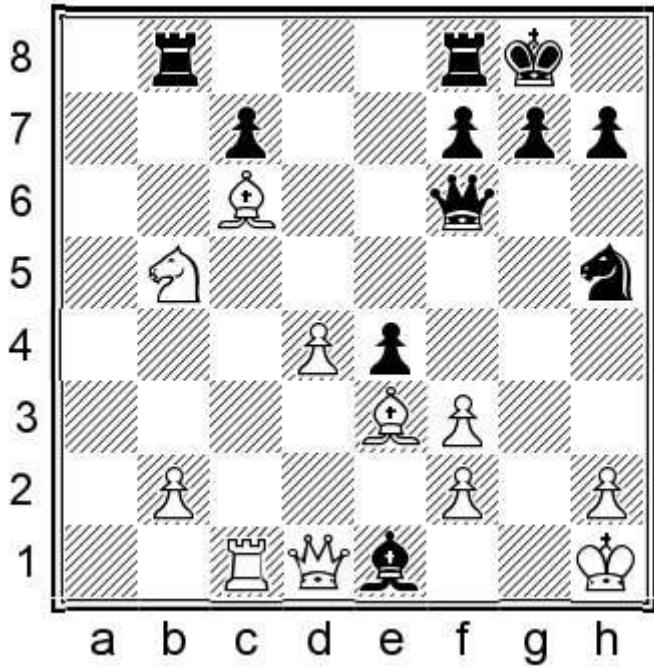
Position after: 17...Ba5!

A typical double-attack and the complications are about to start.

18.Rg1!

The best move.

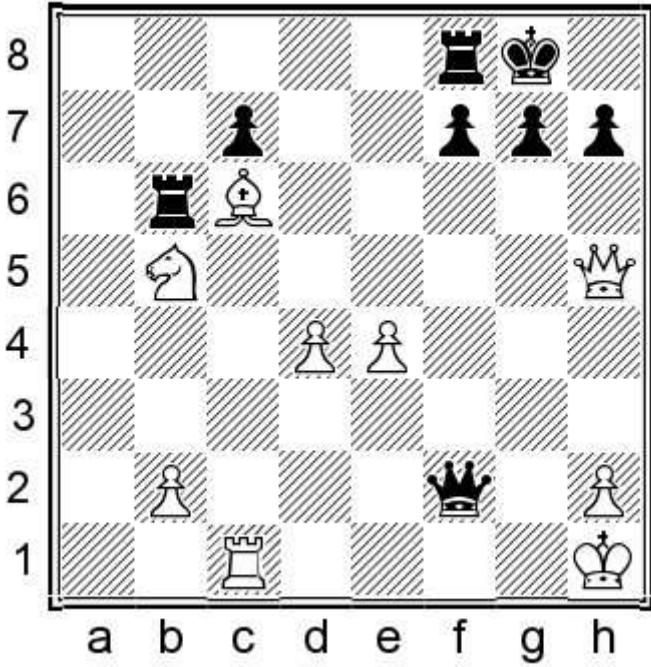
A) The clever 18.Bd5 Bxe1 19.Bxc6 is countered by: 19...d5! 20.Rc1! [20.exd5 Bb4 21.Nxc7 Bd6³; 20.Ra6? makes little sense: 20...dxe4! 21.Qxe1 Qxf3+ 22.Kg1 f5!, is extremely dangerous for White, if not already losing.] Now 20...Ba5 was played in Anand – Piket, Monaco rapid 1998, which is fine, but I find the text to be easier to handle. 20...dxe4!?



Position after: 20...dxe4!?

A1) 21.Qxe1 Qxf3+ 22.Kg1 Here Black can force a draw or go for the ambitious kingside expansion: 22...Qg4+ 23.Kf1 Qh3+ 24.Kg1 [24.Ke2? Nf4+ 25.Kd2 Nd3] 24...Qg4+=

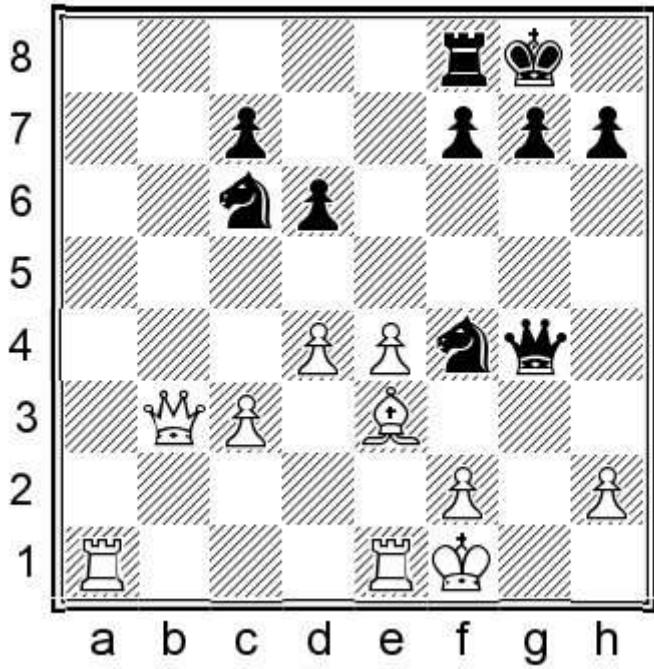
A2) 21.fxe4 Bxf2 22.Bxf2 [22.e5 Qh4 23.Bxf2 Qxf2 24.Qxh5 Qxb2 25.Rg1 Rxb5 26.Bxb5 Qxb5 27.Rxg7+ Kxg7 28.Qg5+= is a draw by perpetual check.] 22...Qxf2 [22...Rb6 23.Qxh5 Qxf2 simply transposes.] 23.Qxh5 Rb6!



Position after: 23...Rb6!

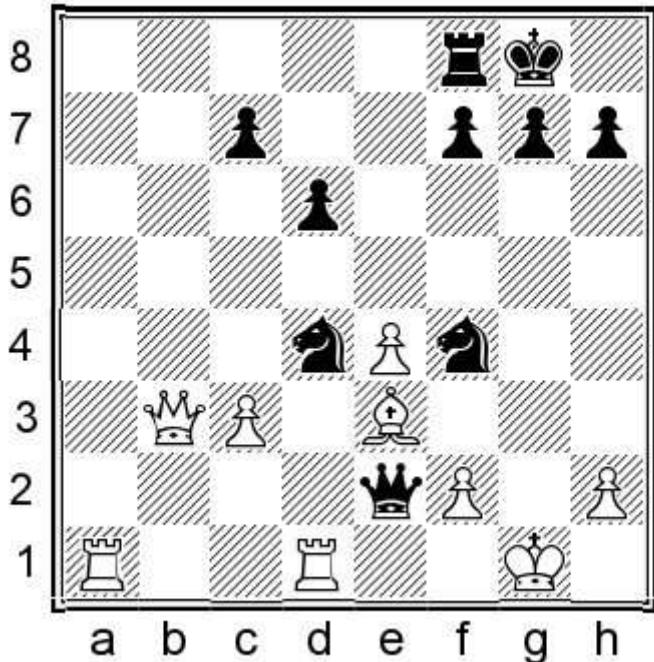
Despite the small material deficit, Black is doing fine since White's coordination is so poor and the king is also naked. The game is most likely to end in a draw, for example: 24.d5 [24.Qf5 Qe3 25.Qf1 Rxc6!? 26.Rxc6 Qxe4+ 27.Qg2 Qe1+=] 24...g6!? is drawish but a bit more exciting. 25.Qh3 [25.Qd1 Rfb8 26.Rc2 Qe3 27.Qd4 Qf3+ 28.Kg1 Ra6 29.b4=] 25...Qxb2 26.Qf1 Rfb8 27.Qf4 Rxc6 28.dxc6 Rxb5 29.Rf1=

B) 18.Nc3? Bxc3! [18...Rxb3? 19.Nd5!] 19.bxc3 Rxb3! Black strikes in a similar fashion to what we saw at 17.Nxd4. This motif is worth remembering. 20.Qxb3 Qxf3+ 21.Kg1. In Aroshidze – Mcchedlishvili, Black now missed his chance and continued with 21...Nxd4. But he could have played 21...Qg4+! 22.Kf1 Nf4!



Position after: 22...Nf4!

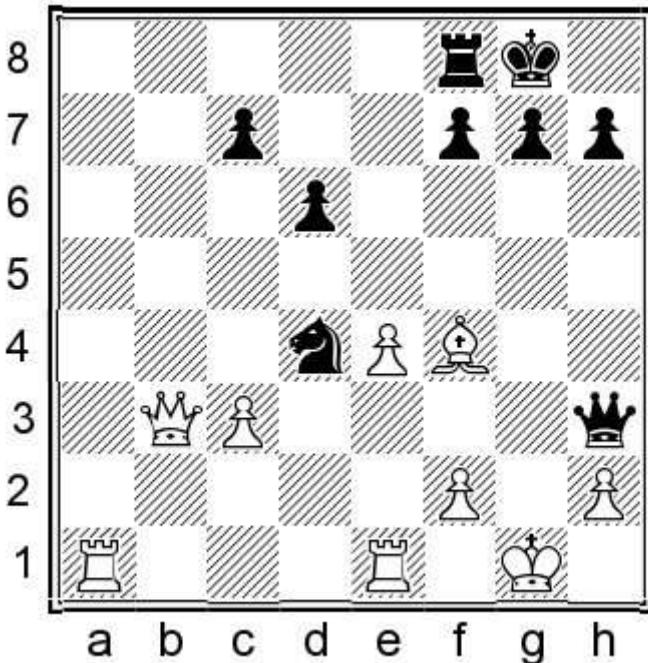
B1) 23.Red1? Qe2+ 24.Kg1 Nxd4!!



Position after: 24...Nxd4!!

This hidden idea can easily be missed. 25.Rxd4 [25.cxd4? Qg4+ 26.Kf1 Qf3–+ wins the queen.] 25...Nh3+ 26.Kg2 Qg4+ 27.Kf1 Qg1+ 28.Ke2 Qxa1–+

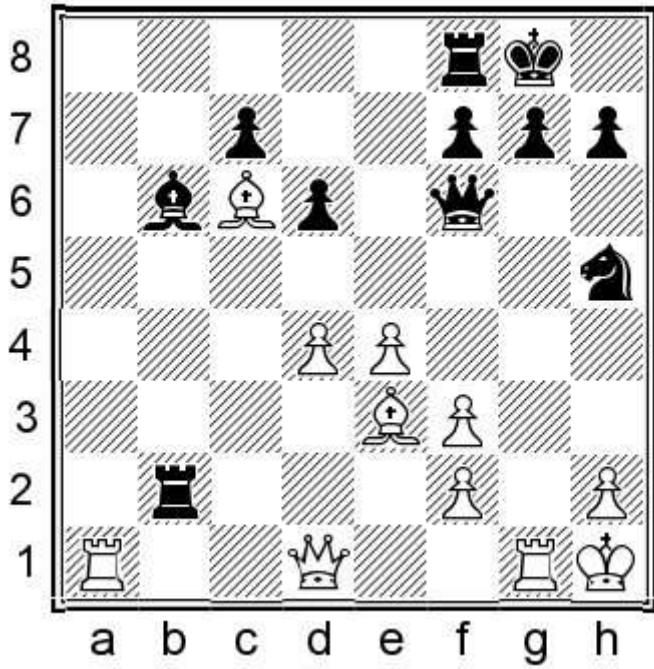
B2) 23.Bxf4 Forced. 23...Qh3+ 24.Kg1 Nxd4!



Position after: 24...Nxd4!

25.Qc4 [25.Re3 Nxb3 26.Rxh3 Nxa1³] 25...Nf3+ 26.Kh1 Nxe1 27.Rxe1 Qf3+ 28.Kg1 Qxf4 29.Qxc7 h5³ and Black has the safer king and better structure.

18...Rxb5 19.Ba4 Rxb2 20.Bxc6 Bb6

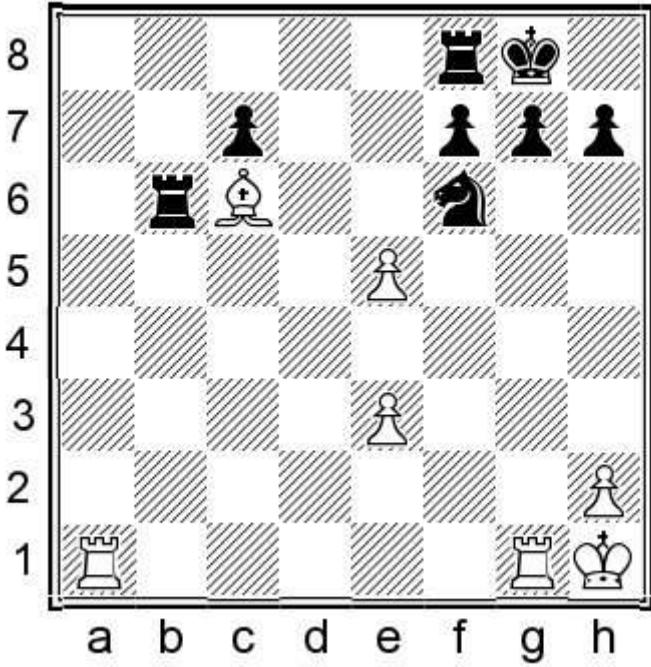


Position after: 20...Bb6

21.Rg4

A) 21.Rg5 g6∞

B) 21.f4 has a more forcing nature. 21...Nxf4 22.Qf3 Nd5 23.Qxf6 Nxf6 24.e5 dxe5 25.dxe5 Bxe3 26.fxe3 [26.exf6 Bh6] 26...Rb6!



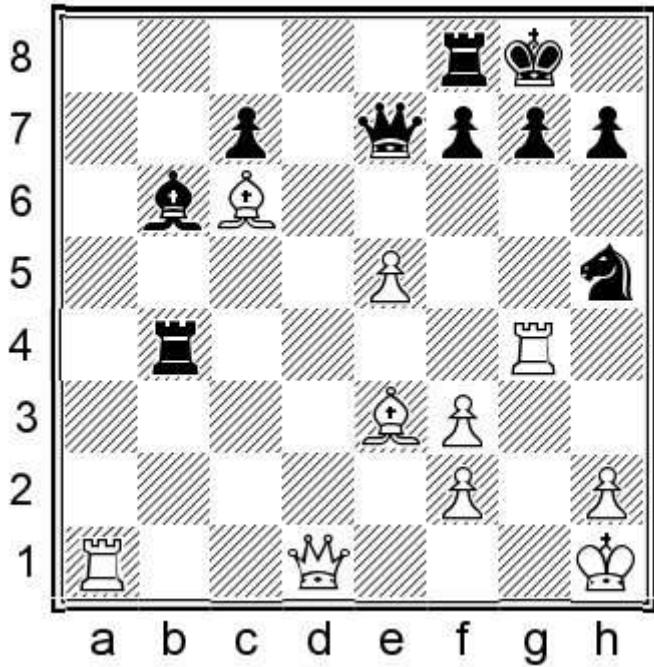
Position after: 26...Rb6!

27.exf6 [27.Rac1 Ne8 followed by ...g6 and ...Ng7. 28.Rgd1 g6 29.e6 fxe6 30.Bxe8 Rxe8 31.Rxc7 Rb2 32.Rdd7 Ra8=] 27...Rxc6 28.Rxg7+ Kh8 29.Rxf7 Rxf6 30.Rxc7 Re6 should be an easy draw. 31.Rc3 [31.Raa7 Rfe8 32.Rxh7+ Kg8=] 31...Rf3 32.Re1 Rf2=

21...Rb4! 22.Ra4

An interesting try.

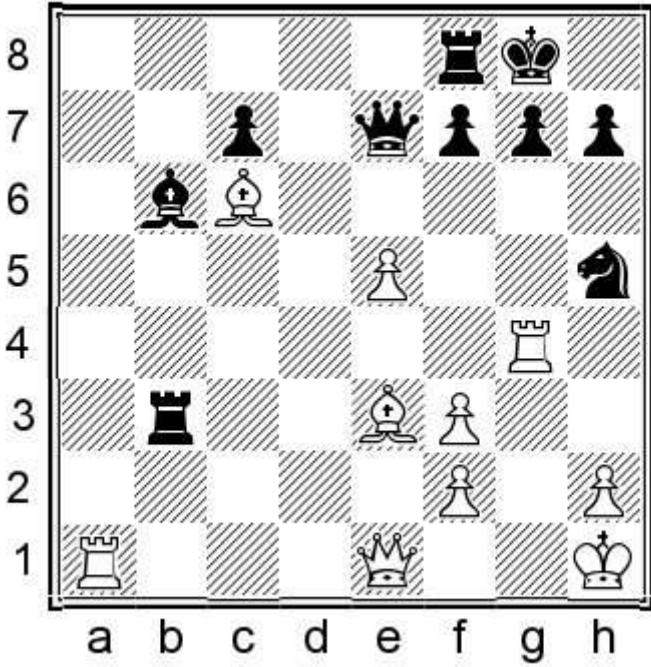
22.e5 dxe5 23.dxe5 Qe7 happened in our stem game Ivanchuk – Shirov, Beograd 1997, and here White chose line D) below:



Position after: 23...Qe7

A) 24.Bg5 Qxe5 25.Rxb4 Qxg5 is mentioned by Shirov as =/+, but it might be a bit optimistic. Nevertheless Black is totally fine, say after: 26.Rb5 Qh6 27.Qc1 Qxc1+ [27...Nf4 28.Rf5 g5©] 28.Rxc1 g6©

B) 24.Qe1 Rb3!



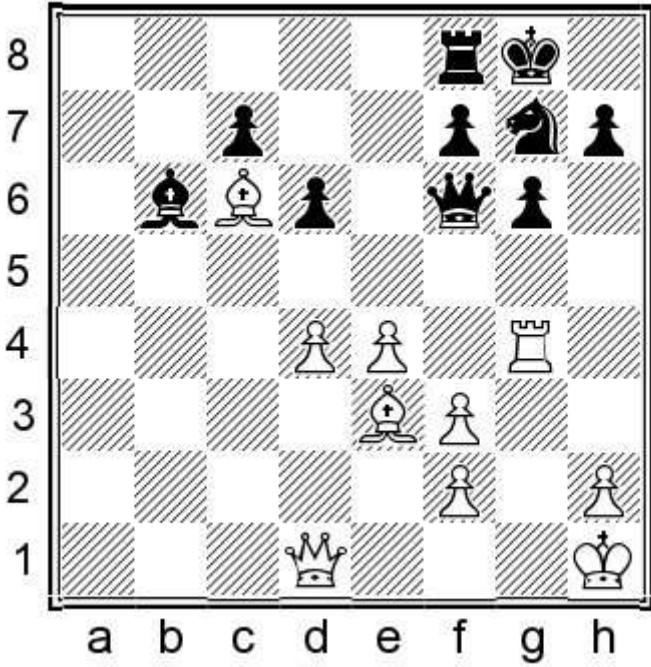
Position after: 24...Rb3!

The only safe spot, but sufficient. 25.Bd5 [25.Ba4 Rxe3 26.fxe3 Qxe5©] 25...Rxe3 26.fxe3 Qxe5© with typical compensation.

C) 24.Rxb4 Qxb4 25.Bd5 Qe7 26.f4 g6=

D) 24.Qd5 Bxe3 25.fxe3 g6 26.Rxb4 Qxb4 27.Qd4 [27.e6 A slight inaccuracy. 27...Qc3 28.Rg1 Nf6 29.exf7+ Rxf7 30.Qe6 Kg7³ favoured Black in the game.] 27...Qxd4 28.exd4 Nf4 29.d5 Rd8 30.Ra4 g5 31.h4 h6 32.hxg5 hxg5=

22...Rxa4 23.Bxa4 g6 24.Bc6 Ng7!



Position after: 24...Ng7!

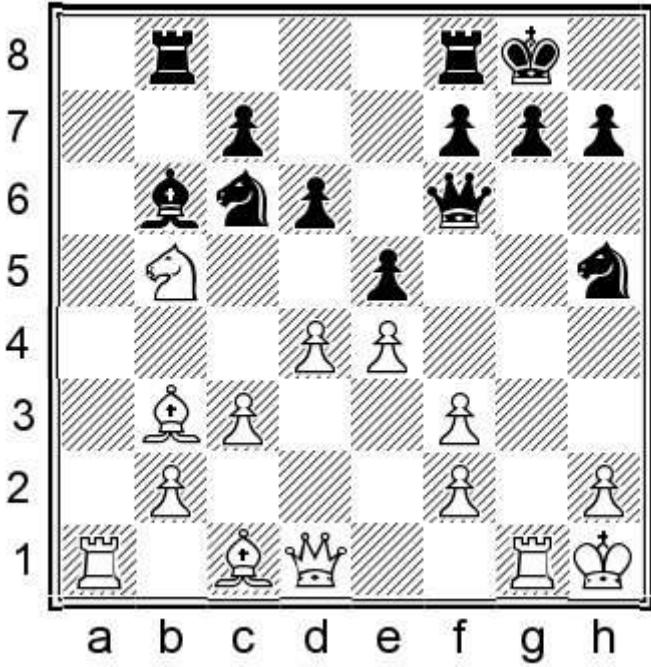
25.f4

25.Rf4 Qe7∞

25...Ne6 26.f5 Nxd4 27.Bd5 c6=

c) 14.gxf3 Nh5 15.Kh1 Qf6 16.Rg1 h6 17.--

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4 Rb8 8.c3 d6 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4 13.Re1 Bxf3 14.gxf3 Nh5 15.Kh1 Qf6 16.Rg1!



Position after: 16.Rg1!

Here Black faces a difficult choice. I have spent many hours here to understand the nuances and I'm glad that finally I came to a conclusion which I can be pleased with. From the historical standpoint, we can state that, as usual, Shirov contributed the most to the development of this line: first he played 16...Nf4 but lost to Svidler in 2008; then he tried the highly suspicious 16...exd4 and made a very nice and convincing draw against Ivanchuk in 2010 in Wijk aan Zee; the same tournament next year he forgot his analysis and lost to Smeets badly; then he held Nepomniachtchi four rounds later.

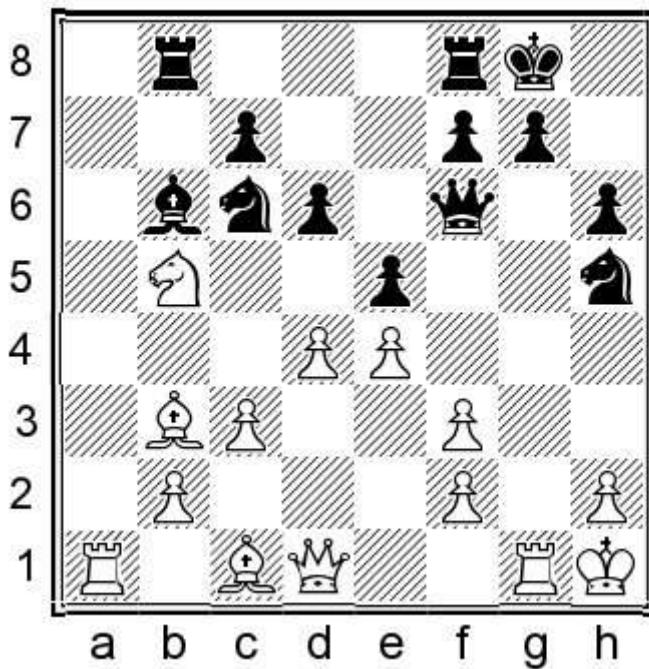
I doubt that he was fully satisfied with the outcome regarding results, but he altogether seemed to believe in his lines. For most players, the line with 16...exd4 looked just way too complicated, so later on attention turned to 16...Nf4. It proved to be playable, but it failed to convince me somehow. There is nothing else left but 16...h6, which indeed looks a bit slow, given the fact that Black has already sacrificed a pawn, his bishop pair...and now gives away a “free tempo” as well.

Things, however, are more complicated than that of course: covering the g5-square is useful, and Black actually prepares to transfer his c6-knight to the

kingside via d8-e6, or via e7-g6, to gain even more control over the f4-square.

16.Be3 leads to 15.Be3.

16...h6!?



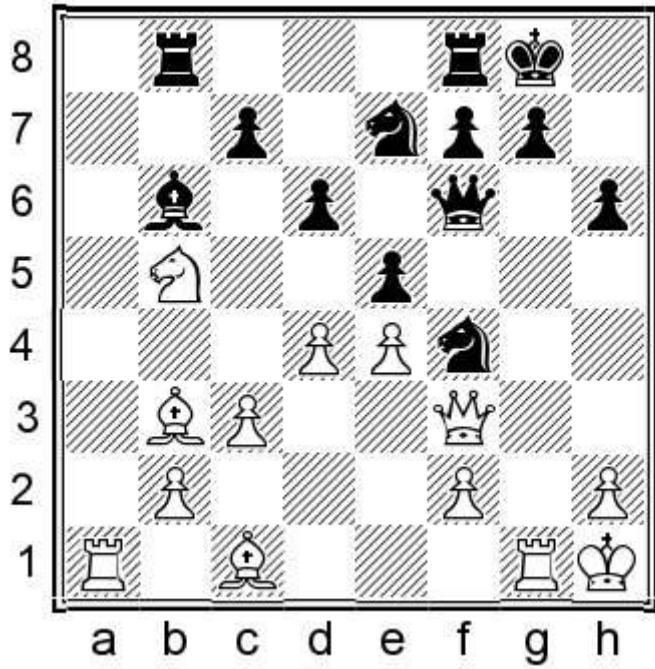
Position after: 16...h6!?

17.Ra6!?

Probably the wildest reply of all. Move by move knowledge is required here for both sides.

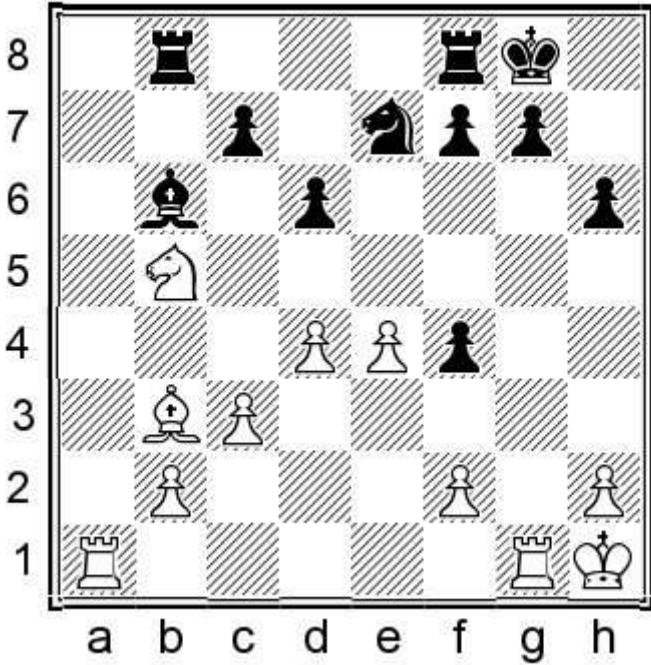
A) 17.Ra4 Ne7 18.Be3 Ng6∞

B) 17.f4 Nxf4 18.Qf3 Ne7



Position after: 18...Ne7

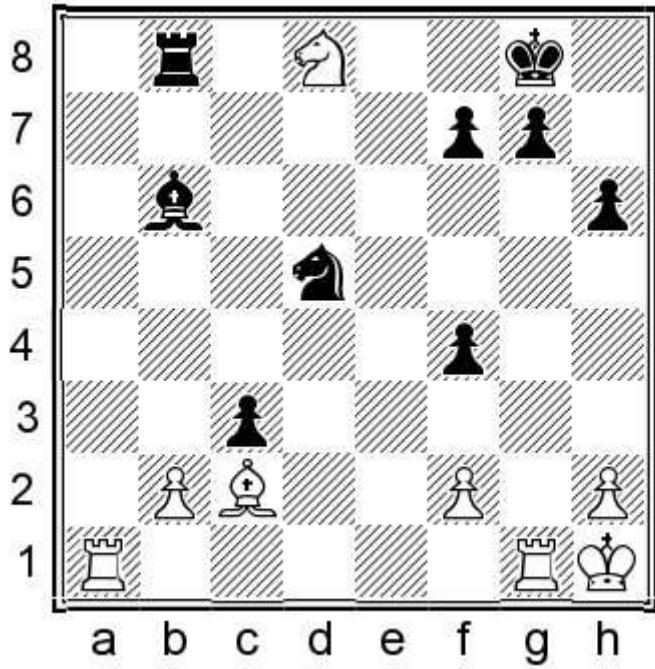
Here this is my preference, but 18...Nd8 is possible and even 18...Kh7 is worthy of consideration. [18...Nd8 19.Bxf4 Ne6 20.Bxe6 fxe6∞] 19.Bxf4 Qxf4 20.Qxf4 exf4



Position after: 20...exf4

B1) 21.Rg4 Bc5! Another recurring theme, one worth remembering in these structures! The arising endgames are drawish: 22.Bc4 [22.Ba4 c6 23.dxc5 cxb5 24.cxd6 bxa4 25.dxe7 Rfe8 26.Rxa4 Rxb2 27.Rxf4 Rxe7 28.Rc4 g5 29.Rf5 Re2=] 22...c6 23.dxc5 cxb5 24.cxd6 bxc4 25.dxe7 Rfe8 26.Rxf4 Rxe7 27.Ra2 g5 28.Rg4 Reb7 29.h4 f6 30.e5 Rxb2 31.Rxb2 Rxb2 32.exf6 Rxf2 33.hxg5 hxg5 34.Rxg5+ Kf7=

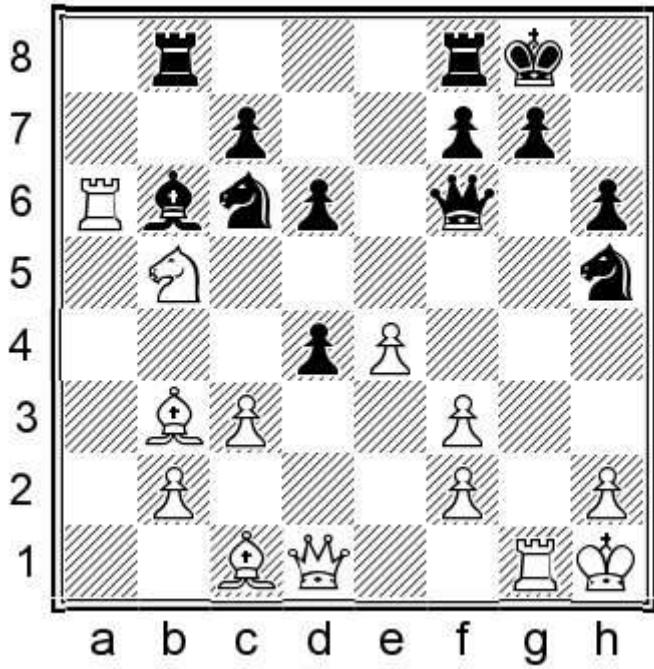
B2) 21.Bc2 Rfd8 22.Na3 d5 [22...c5 is possible, but I am less convinced.] 23.exd5 [23.b4 g5 24.h4 f6∞] 23...Nxd5 24.Nc4 c5 25.Ne5 [25.dxc5 Bxc5=; 25.Nxb6? Rxb6] 25...cxd4 26.Nc6 dxc3 27.Nxd8



Position after: 27.Nxd8

27...cxb2 28.Rab1= Despite the exchange deficit, it's equal.

17...exd4



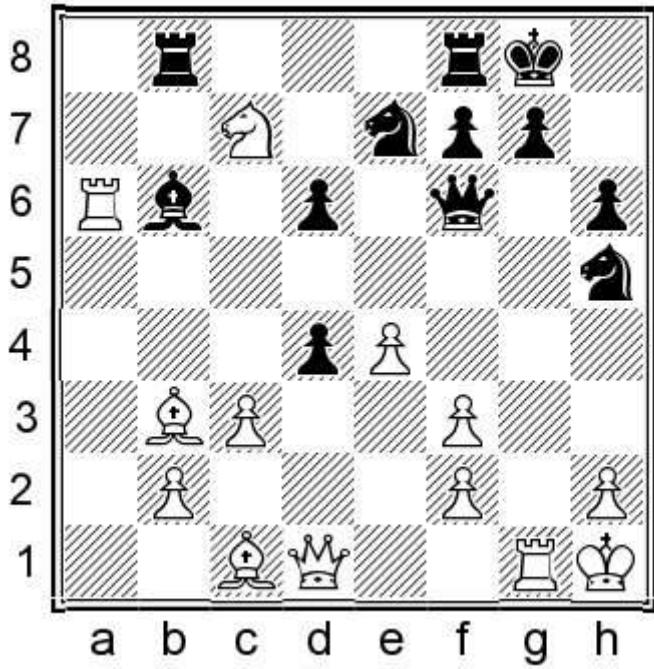
Position after: 17...exd4

18.Nxc7!

The point of the previous rook move.

18.cxd4 is not a problem: 18...Nxd4 19.Rxb6 Nxb3 20.Rxb8 Rxb8 21.Qxb3 [21.Nxc7? Nxc1 22.Nd5 Qxb2 23.Qxc1 Qxf2] 21...Rxb5 22.Qxb5 Qxf3+ 23.Rg2 Qd1+ 24.Rg1 Qf3+=

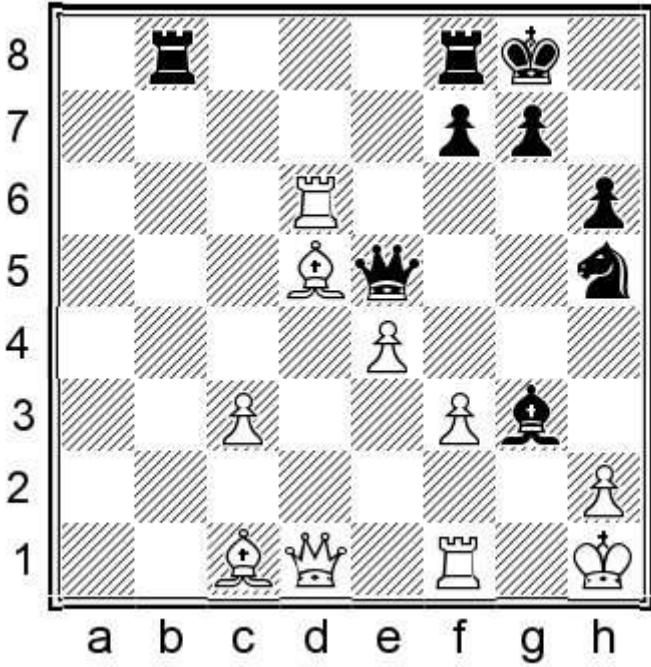
18...Ne7!



Position after: 18...Ne7!

19.Nb5

A) 19.Nd5 is highly complicated. 19...Nxd5 20.Bxd5 dxс3 21.bxc3 Bxf2 22.Rxd6! Qe5 23.Rf1 [23.f4 Nxf4 24.Bxf4 Qxf4 25.Qg4 Qxg4 26.Rxg4=] 23...Bg3!



Position after: 23...Bg3!

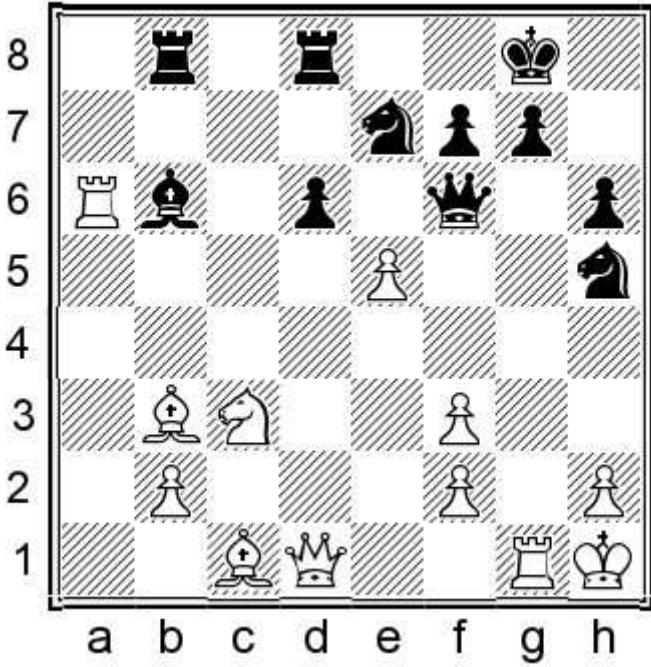
An original idea.

A1) 24.hxg3 Nxg3+!? [24...Qxg3 25.Qd2 Qh3+ 26.Kg1 Qg3+=] 25.Kg2 Nxg1 26.f4! [26.Kxf1 Rb1 27.Rg6 Rc8] 26...Qxc3 27.Kxf1 Qh3+ 28.Kf2 Qh2+ 29.Kf1 looks suspicious, but maybe it's only a draw.

A2) 24.Bxf7+ Rxf7 25.Rd5 Qxc3 26.Rxh5 Bc7 27.Rd5 Rb1© and Black has obvious compensation.

B) 19.cxd4 Rfc8 20.e5 dxе5 21.Nd5 Nxd5 22.Bxd5 exd4∞

19...dxc3 20.Nxc3 Rfd8! 21.e5!?



Position after: 21.e5!?

This interesting move leads to a very messy game. I doubt anyone could come up with these series of moves without serious preparation, which is only one part of the equation – you also need to remember them! Black has a somewhat easier life in a practical game.

21.f4 Bxf2 22.Rg4 Ra8∞

21...dxe5 22.Ne4 Qc6! 23.Qf1! Nf4!

23...Qc8 24.Bxh6

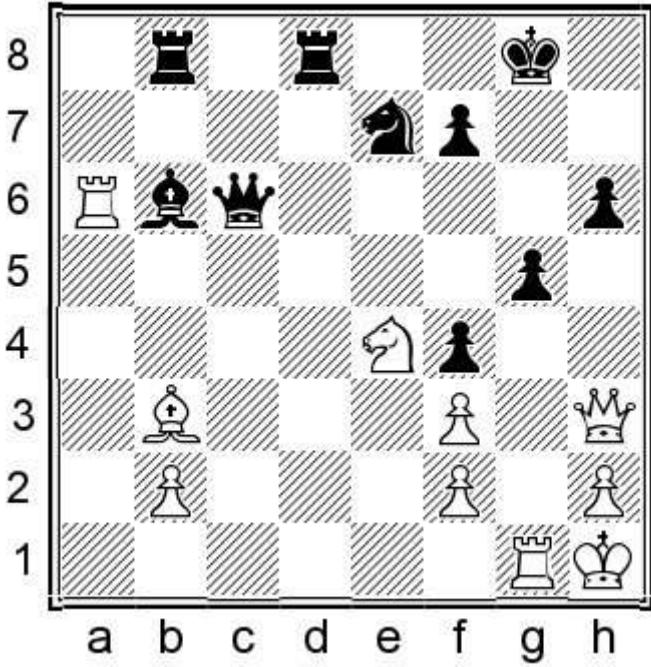
24.Bxf4

24.Be3 Nf5

24...exf4 25.Qh3

25.Qg2 Nf5 26.Qg4 Qb5 27.Bc4 Qxc4 28.Qxf5 Kh8∞

25...g5!!



Position after: 25...g5!!

The key defensive move, otherwise Black is lost, surprisingly.

25...Kf8? 26.Qh5+–

26.Qg4

26.Rxg5+ hxg5 27.Nxg5 Qc1+ 28.Kg2 Qb1! The only way to cover the h7-square. 29.Qh5 Qf5 30.Bxf7+ Kg7 31.Ne6+ Kf6 32.Nxd8 Qxh5 33.Bxh5 Kg5 34.Ne6+ Kxh5 35.Nxf4+ Kg5= The end of most hilarious lines are drawn, it seems.

26...Kf8!? 27.h4 Rd3

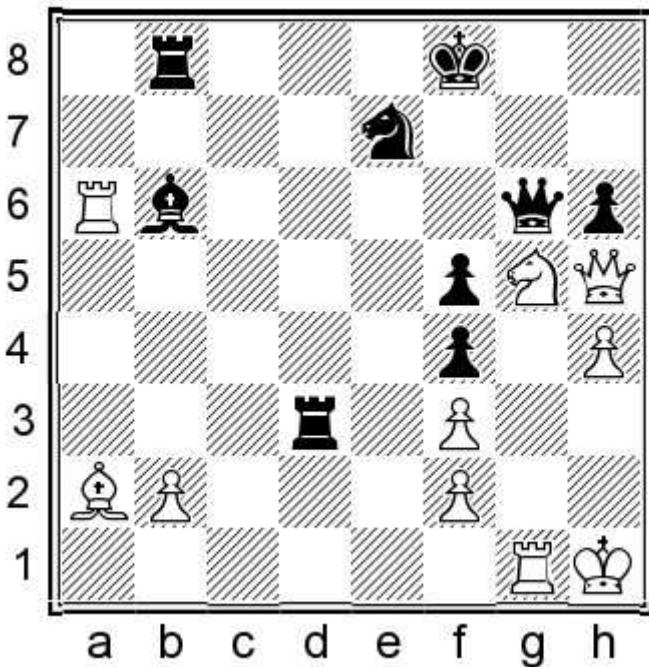
The active option; the position is still very intense.

28.Ba2

A) 28.Bxf7 Kxf7 29.hxg5 hxg5 30.Nxg5+ Ke8∞ is a hard position to assess.

B) 28.Ba4 f5 29.Qh5 Qg6= should be balanced.

28...f5 29.Qh5 Qg6 30.Nxg5!



Position after: 30.Nxg5!

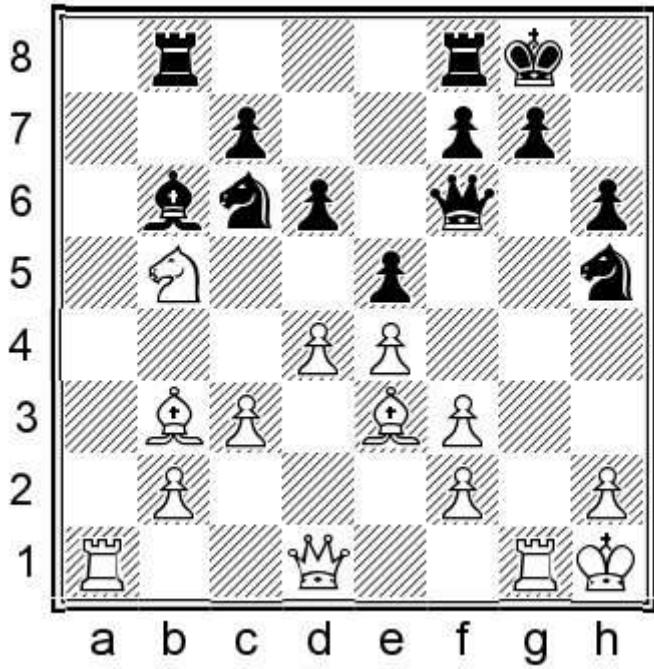
Spectacular.

30...Qxh5 31.Nh7+ Ke8 32.Nf6+ Kd8 33.Nxh5 Bxf2 34.Nxf4 Rd2 35.Ne6+ Kd7 36.Rc1 Rc8=

Black has finally solved the most critical problems.

d) 14.gxf3 Nh5 15.Kh1 Qf6 16.Rg1 h6 17.Be3 Nd8 18.--

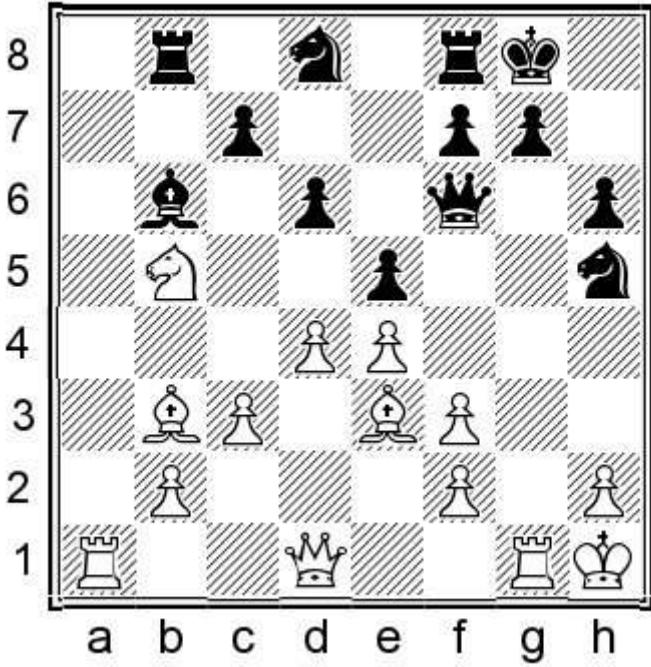
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4 Rb8 8.c3 d6 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4 13.Re1 Bxf3 14.gxf3 Nh5 15.Kh1 Qf6 16.Rg1! h6!? 17.Be3



Position after: 17.Bc3

The obvious reply, but White actually has several ways to continue:

17...Nd8!?



Position after: 17...Nd8!?

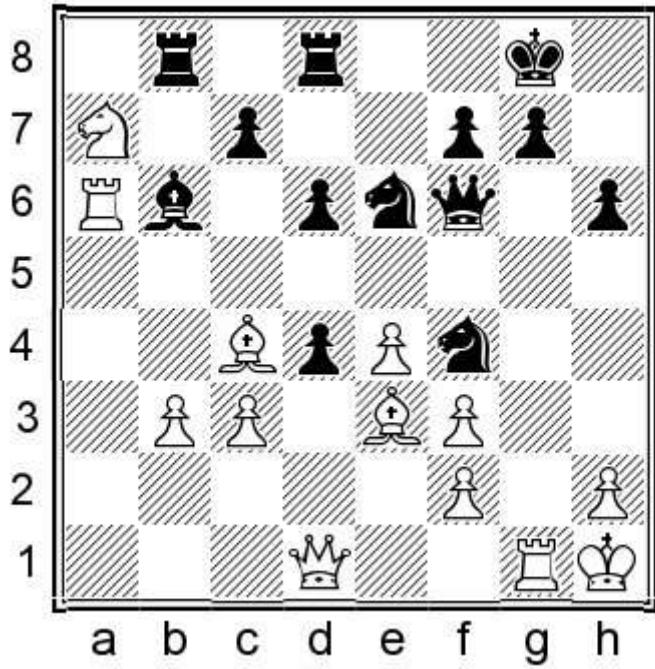
This is my discovery, and one that I like a lot. It is a very rare move, only played once, in correspondence chess. Black intends to put the knight on e6, from where it controls the vital f4-square and attacks d4 at the same time. In case of being taken, the f-file will open up, when f3 becomes a target. This is actually the start of a big regrouping of Black's forces, which might evolve into some interesting central play...

18.f4!?

Trying to “punish” Black’s slow play. Indeed, a very logical approach, but fortunately the second player is ready to meet it properly.

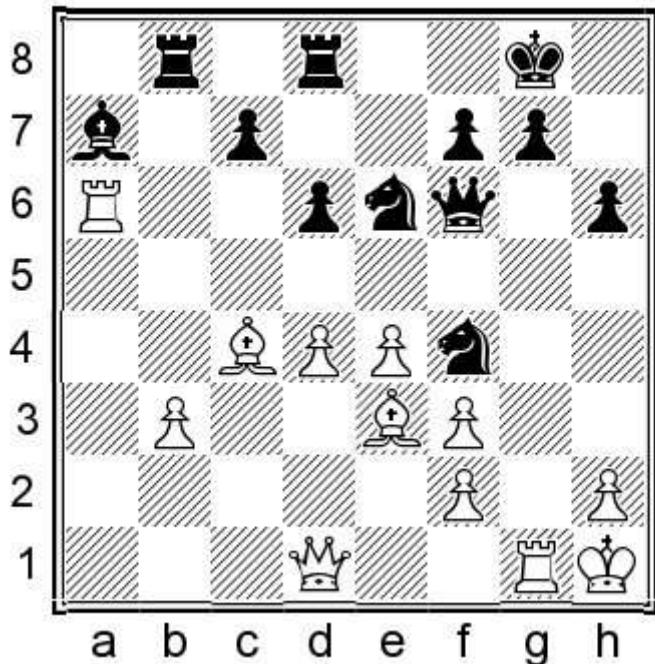
A) 18.Rg4 Ne6 19.Bc4 transposes to the main line.

B) 18.Ra6 Ne6 19.Bc4 Nh4 20.b3 [20.Bf1 Rfd8!,, ... 21.d5 Ng5 22.Bxb6 Rxb6 23.Rxb6 cxb6 Black is fine.] 20...Rfd8 Here it comes: Black is intending to act in the center by placing the rook in front of White’s queen! 21.Na7 Eyeing the weak c6-square, a typical idea for White. Black needs to be ready to meet this plan in all cases. 21...exd4!



Position after: 21...exd4!

22.cxd4 Bxa7

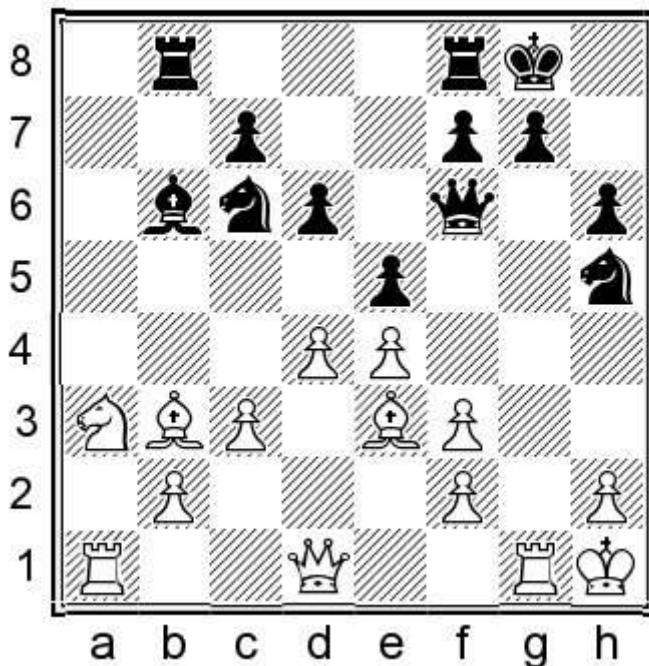


Position after: 22...Bxa7

B1) 23.Rxa7 d5 24.e5 [24.exd5 Nxd5,,] 24...Qf5 25.Bf1 Rb4! Black's compensation is obvious, with a fantastic blockade.

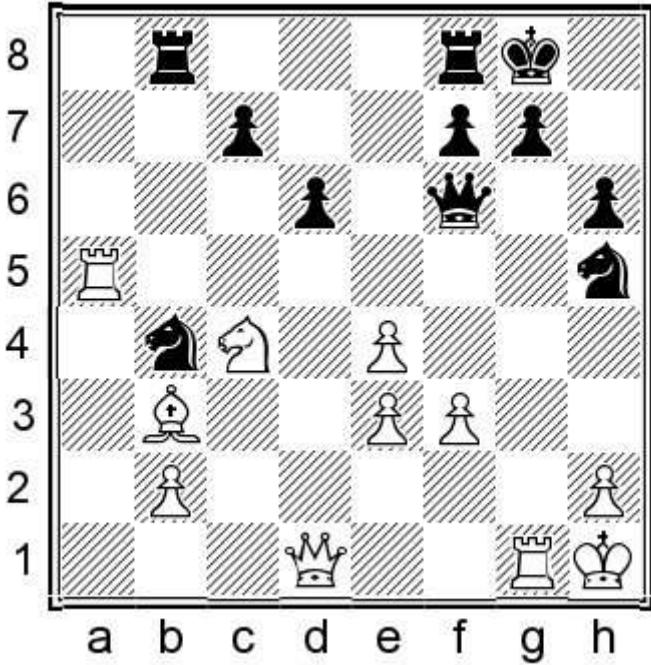
B2) 23.Bxe6 Nxe6 24.Rxa7 d5 25.e5 Qf5 26.Bxh6 Rb4 27.Ra4 [27.Be3?! Rxb3] 27...Rxa4 28.bxa4 Rb8© ... 29.Be3 c5 30.dxc5 d4f

C) 18.Na3 is a very clever move. White's b5-knight is active but tends to be a target in many lines, so finding a safer spot for it (on c4 or c2) is pretty logical. 18...Nc6 A paradoxical idea, though it seems best to me.



Position after: 18...Nc6

C1) 19.Nc4 exd4 20.cxd4 Bxd4 21.Ra6 Bxe3 22.fxe3 and here Black has two very active ways to secure even chances. 22...Nb4 23.Ra5



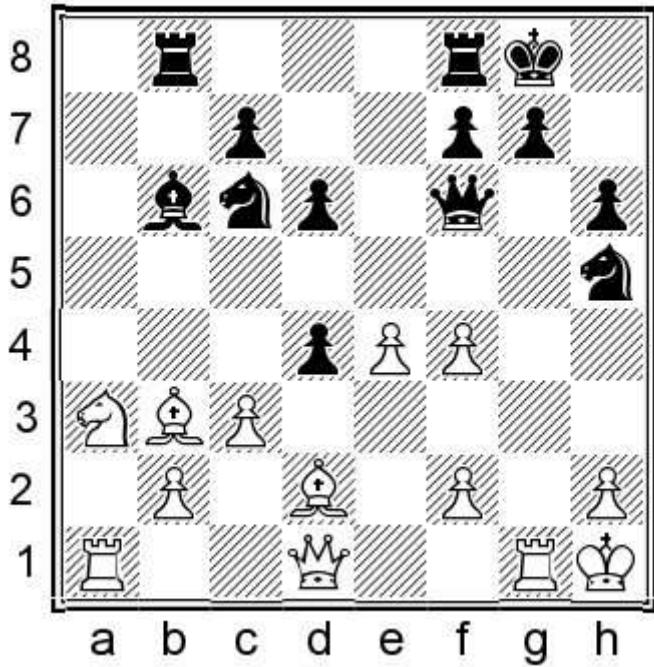
Position after: 23.Ra5

The most challenging, almost trapping the knight. [23.Ra3=] 23...Nd3 A spectacular solution. 24.Rg2 Rxb3! 25.Qxb3 Qxf3

C1.1) 26.Qxd3 Nf4 27.Qc2 Nxg2 28.Qxg2 Qd1+ 29.Qg1 Qd3 30.b3 Qxe4+ 31.Qg2 Qb1+ 32.Qg1 Qxb3 [32...Qe4+ is a draw, but this time Black can continue.] 33.Nd2 Qd3 34.Nf1 c5©

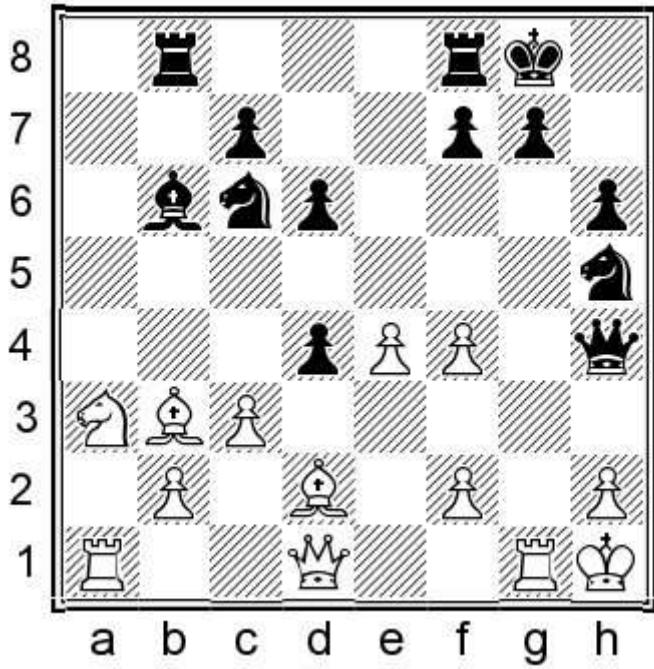
C1.2) 26.Nd2 Qxe3!? Complicating matters a bit. 27.Rxh5 [27.Rf5∞] 27...Qe1+ 28.Rg1 Qxd2 29.Rd5! Nf2+ 30.Kg2 Qe2 31.Qf3 Qxf3+ 32.Kxf3 Nh3 33.Rc1 Ng5+ 34.Ke3 Ne6 35.b4= The endgame is drawish, but playable.

C2) 19.f4!? The most challenging. 19...exd4 20.Bd2



Position after: 20.Bd2

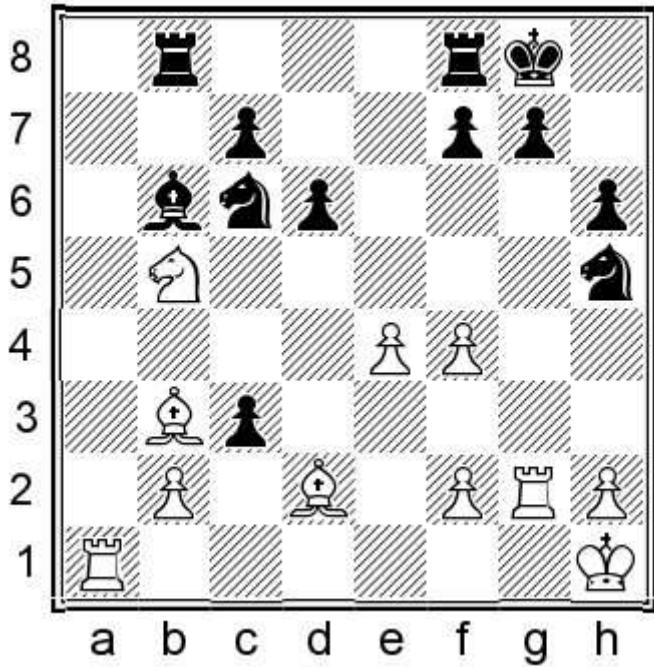
An unusual sacrifice, one it's good to be aware of. 20...Qh4 is pretty logical and leads to a complicated, intense game where Black cannot stand worse by any means, e.g.



Position after: 20...Qh4

C2.1) 21.Nc4 dxс3 22.Bxс3 Bd4 23.Na5!? Bxс3 24.Nxc6 Bxb2 25.Ra5 Nxf4 26.Nxb8 Rxb8 27.Bxf7+ Kxf7 28.Rg4 Qxf2 29.Rf5+ Kg8 30.Rgxf4 Qe3 31.Qd5+ Kh7=

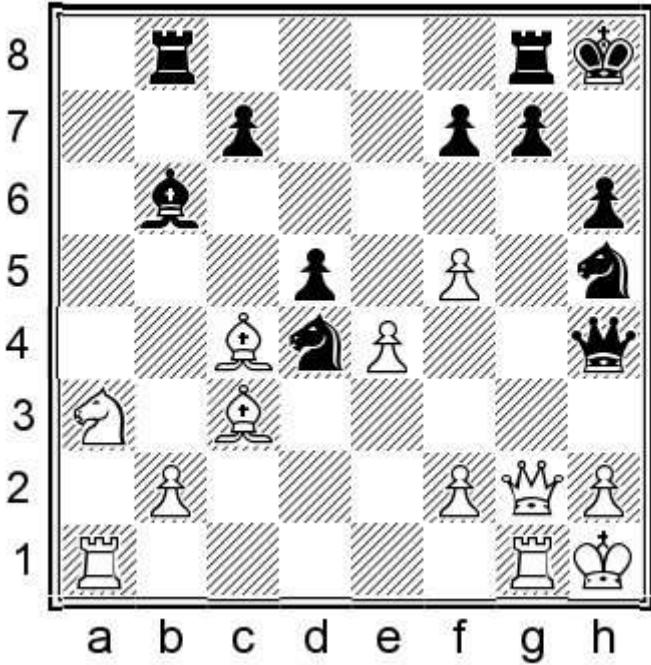
C2.2) 21.Nb5 Qh3 22.Qf1 [22.cxd4 Nxd4 23.Nxd4 Bxd4 24.Ra3 Qh4 25.Bc2 Rfe8 26.b4 Ra8,,] 22...Qf3+ 23.Qg2 Qxg2+ 24.Rxg2 dxс3



Position after: 24...dxc3

25.bxc3 [25.Bxc3 Ba5!? 26.Rxa5 Nxa5 27.Ba4 Nc4 28.Bd1 Rxb5 29.Bxh5 g6 30.Be2 Rc5 31.b4 Rc6 32.b5 Rc5 33.Bd4 Nd2 34.Bxc5 dxc5 35.f5 Nxe4 36.fxg6=] 25...Rfe8 26.Bd1 Nf6 27.f3=

C2.3) 21.Bc4 Kh8 22.Qf3 dxc3 23.Bxc3 Nd4 24.Qg2 Rg8!?
[24...Qxf4 25.Nc2 Qf6 26.Ra6] 25.f5 d5!?



Position after: 25...d5!?

Original.

C2.3a) 26.exd5 Nxf5 27.Qf3 Nd6 28.Bd3 Bd4 29.Nc4 [29.Rg4?! Qf6 30.Qxf6 Bxf6] 29...Bxc3 30.bxc3 Nxc4 31.Rg4 Qf6 32.Qxf6 Nxf6 33.Rxc4 Nxd5 34.Be4 Nf6 35.Ra7=

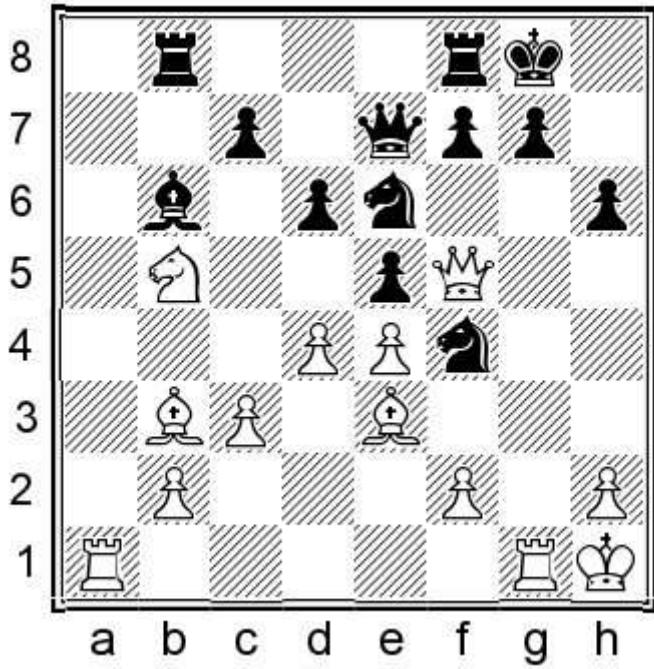
C2.3b) 26.Bxd5 Nf4 27.Qg4 Qxg4 28.Rxg4 Nxd5 29.exd5 Nxf5 30.Nc4 f6=

18...Nxf4 19.Qg4 Nde6 20.Qf5

A) 20.Bxe6 fxe6 21.Bxf4 exf4 22.Na7 e5 23.Nc6 Rbe8,,

B) 20.Bc4 Kh8 21.b4 Now 21...g5!? is interesting, with the idea of 22.Qf5 Qe7! 23.dxe5 dxe5 24.Qxe5+ f6 25.Qf5 Ng7

20...Qe7!



Position after: 20...Qe7!

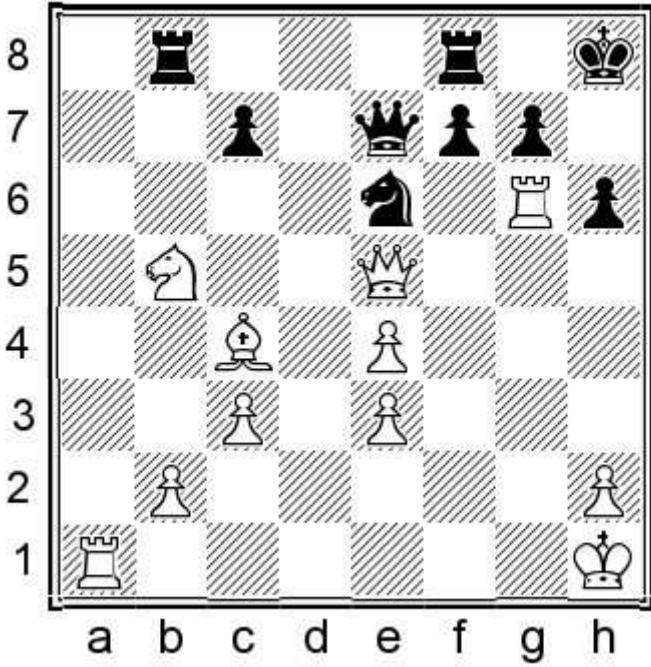
21.Bc4 Kh8 22.dxe5 dxe5 23.Qxe5

Black has an interesting idea to organize counterplay here.

23...Bxe3!?

23...Ng6 can also be considered.

24.fxe3 Ng6 25.Rxg6!



Position after: 25.Rxg6!

25...fxg6 26.Nd4 Qg5!

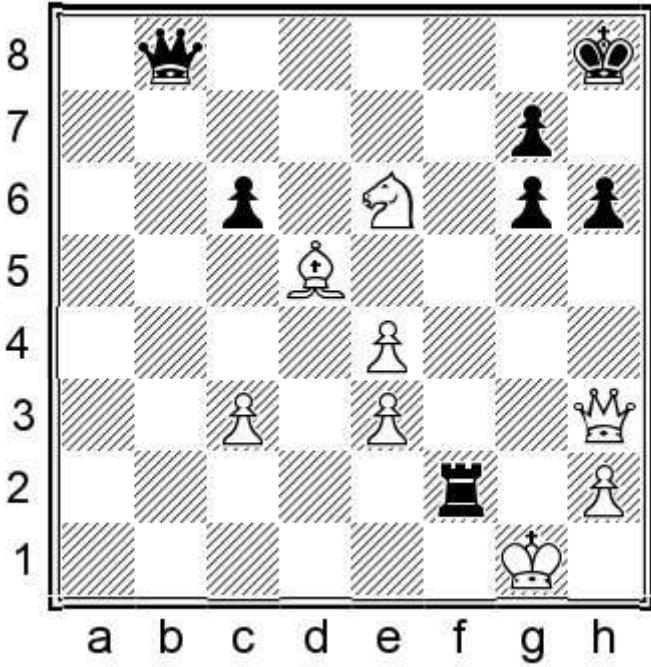
Forced, but sufficient.

27.Qxe6 Rxb2 28.Qh3 Qe5 29.Bd5! c6!

A very strong idea. Black disrupts the harmony of White's position by sacrificing a pawn.

30.Nxc6

30.Ne6 Rff2 31.Ra8+ Rb8 [It's never too late to blunder: 31...Kh7?? 32.Ng5+! Qxg5 33.Rh8+! Kxh8 34.Qc8++– Mate is coming.] 32.Rxb8+ Qxb8 33.Kg1



Position after: 33.Kg1

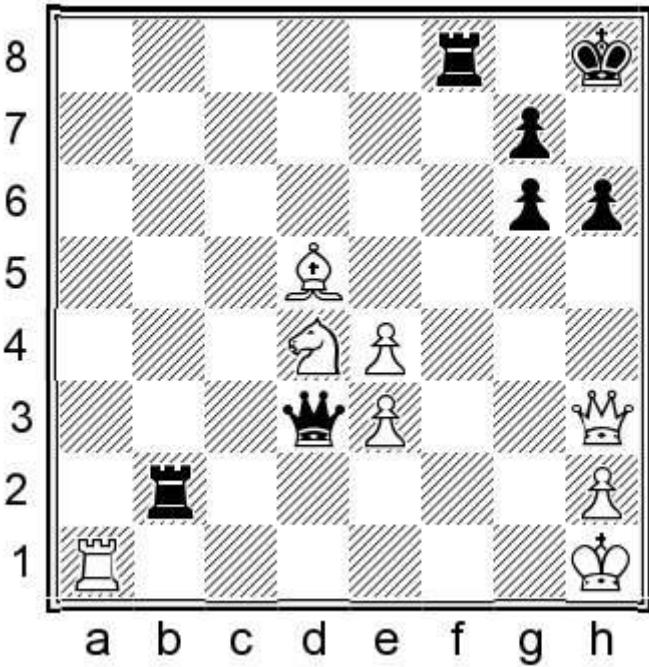
33...Re2 [33...Rf6 34.Bc4 Qb1+ 35.Bf1 Qxe4 36.Nf4∞] 34.Nf4! Qb1+ 35.Qf1 Re1 36.Nxg6+ Kh7 37.Nf8+ Kh8 38.Ng6+=

30...Qxc3 31.Nd4

31.Qg3 Rb6 32.Rg1 Rxc6 33.Bxc6 Qxc6 34.Qxg6=

31...Qd3!

And after these exciting complications Black should be fine. Play might end in a beautiful way:



Position after: 31...Qd3!

32.Nf3

32.Rg1 g5©

32...Qxe3 33.Ne5!

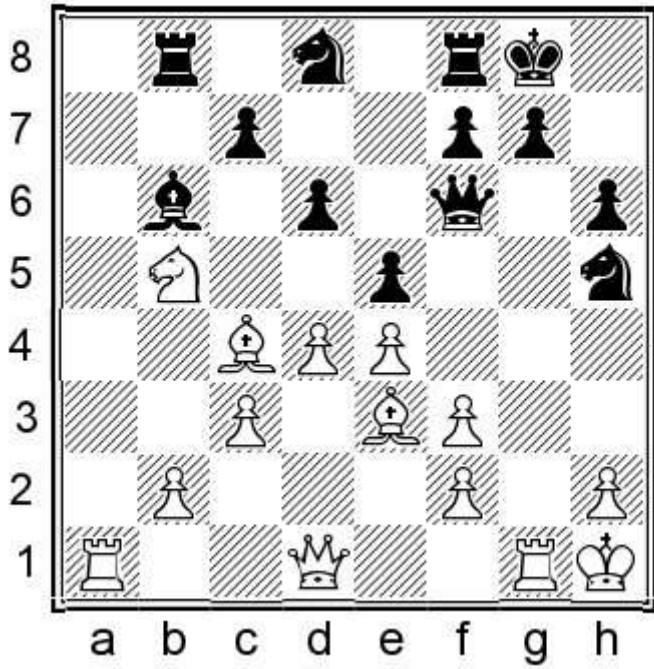
An elegant way to secure half a point.

33...Qxh3 34.Nxg6+ Kh7 35.Nxf8+ Kh8 36.Ng6+ Kh7 37.Nf8+=

Perpetual check!

e) 14.gxf3 Nh5 15.Kh1 Qf6 16.Rg1 h6 17.Be3 Nd8 18.Bc4

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.a4 Rb8 8.c3 d6 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4 13.Re1 Bxf3 14.gxf3 Nh5 15.Kh1 Qf6 16.Rg1! h6!? 17.Be3 Nd8!? 18.Bc4



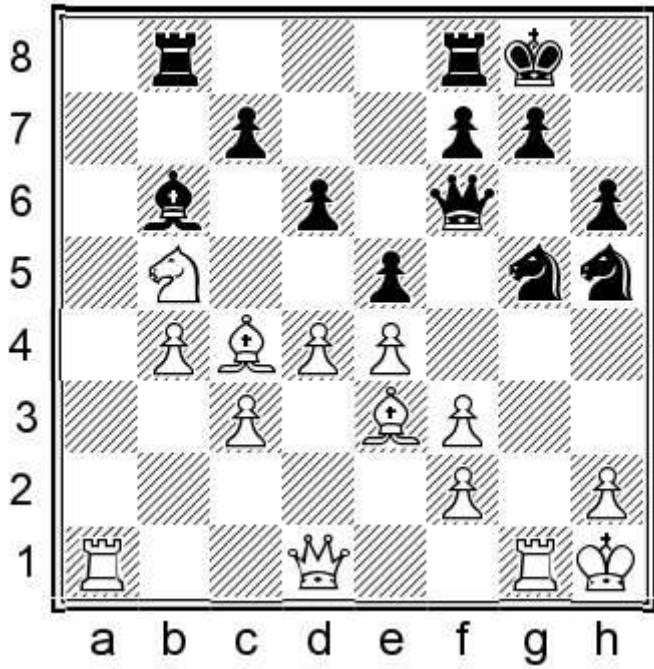
Position after: 18.Bc4

18...Ne6 19.Rg4

An interesting way to fight Black's set-up.

A) 19.Bxe6 fxe6! was mentioned in the introduction.

B) 19.b4!? Ng5!?

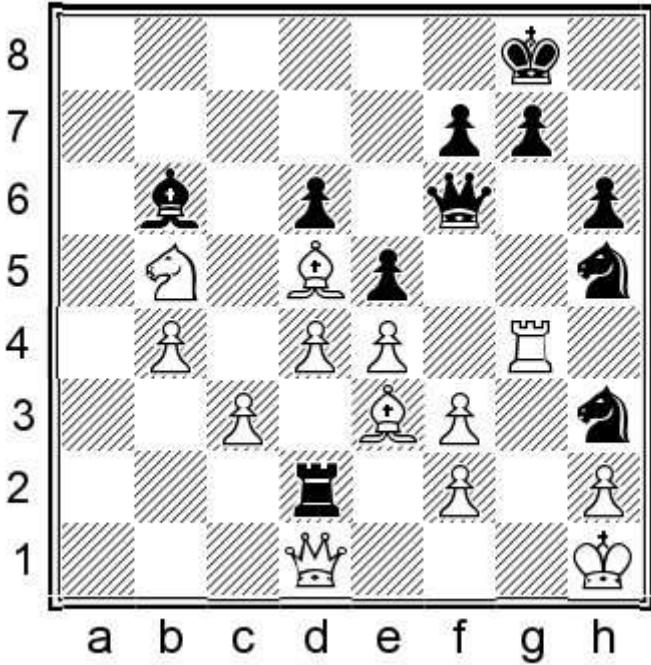


Position after: 19...Ng5!?

B1) 20.Bxg5 hxg5f

B2) 20.Ra6 doesn't achieve the desired result. 20...Nh3! 21.Rg4 Ra8!

B2.1) 22.Rxa8 Rxa8 23.Bd5 c6! 24.Bxc6 Ra2! 25.Bd5 Rd2!!

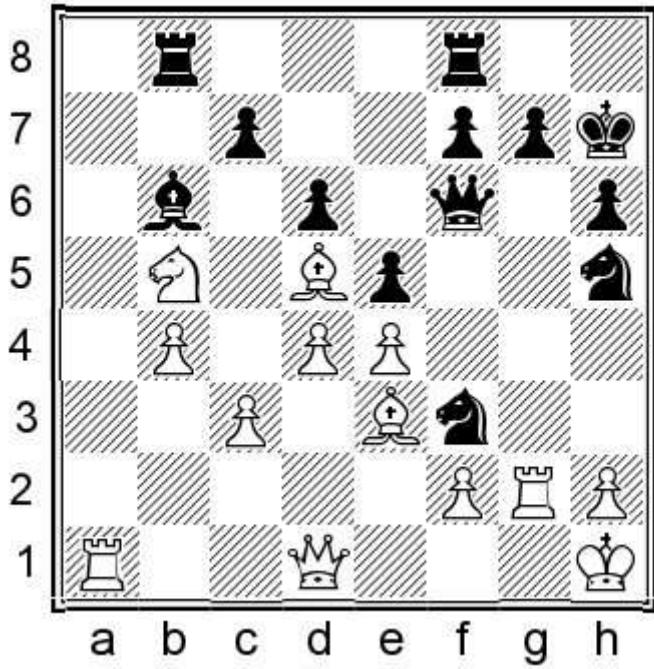


Position after: 25...Rd2!!

[25...Rxf2 is good too.] 26.Qxd2 Qxf3+ 27.Rg2 N3f4 28.Bxf4 Nxf4 29.Qxf4 Qxf4—+

B2.2) The first rank became weak, so Black doesn't hesitate to take over the only open line. Black has several spectacular ideas here, and I will reveal some of them for pure entertainment value: 22.Rxb6 cxb6 23.Nc7 Ra1! Of course! 24.Qxa1 Qxf3+ 25.Rg2 Rc8! 26.dxe5 [26.Ne6 N5f4 27.Bxf4 Nxf2+ 28.Kg1 Nh3+ 29.Kh1 exf4 30.Nxg7 Rxc4 31.Ne8+ Ng5,] 26...Rxc7 27.exd6 Ra7! 28.Qe1 Qxe4,

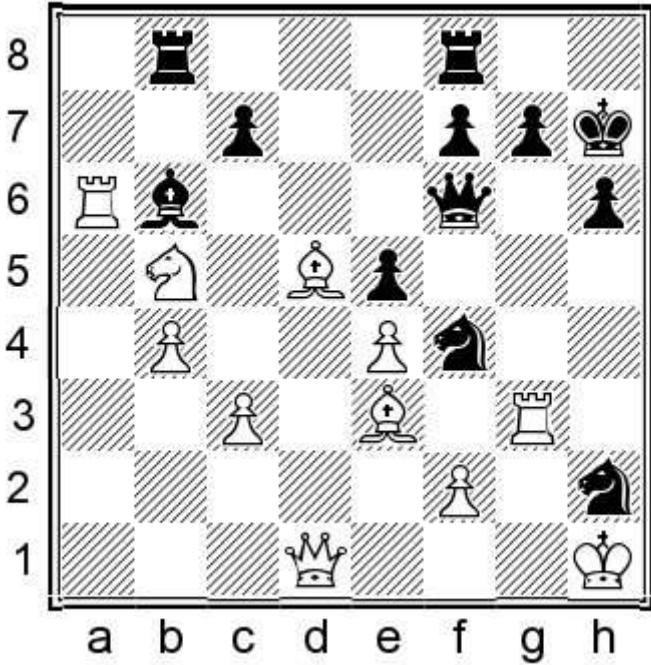
B3) Another way to target White's kingside! 20.Bd5 Nxf3 21.Rg2 [21.Kg2!? Nh4+ 22.Kh3 Nf3 23.Kg2 Nh4+= A rather crazy repetition ☺] 21...Kh7!



Position after: 21...Kh7!

Supporting the ... g6 idea. 22.dxe5 Probably best, reaching an equal endgame by force. 22...dxe5 23.Ra6 Nf4!

B3.1) 24.Rg3? Nxh2!!



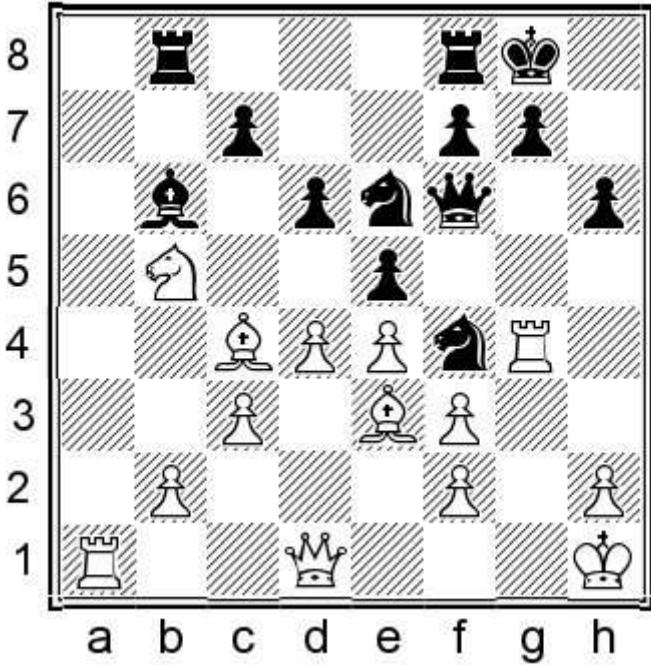
Position after: 24...Nxf2!!

An amazing trick. 25.Bxb6 [25.Nd4 Nf1!?; 25.Kxh2 Qh4+ 26.Kg1 Bxe3 27.Rxe3 Rxb5+] 25...Rxb6 26.Rxb6 Qxb6 [Or 26...Qh4 27.Kg1 cxb6] 27.Nxc7 Qxf2 28.Qg1 Ng4 29.Qxf2 Nxf2+ 30.Kg1 N2d3 is a pawn up for Black.

B3.2) 24.Qxf3 Nxd5 25.Qxf6 Nxf6 26.Bxb6 cxb6 27.f3 Rfd8f
Black is comfortable.

19...Nhf4

Black plans to play 20...Rfd8 and ...c6 or ...d5 next, depending on the circumstances. I like this position: it shares a pleasant balance between solidity and dynamic potential.



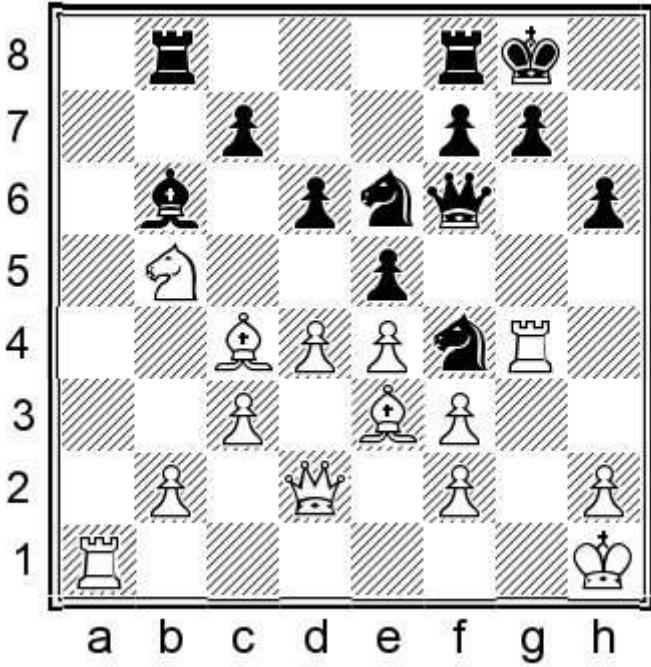
Position after: 19...Nhf4

20.b3

This was played in the only game I was able to find in my databases. It is also one of the main suggestions of the computer.

A) 20.b4 Rfd8! and now Black's threats need to be addressed, but 21.d5 Ng5 22.Bxf4 exf4 doesn't harm Black too much. The position is balanced.

B) 20.Qd2!? Now White might want to push 21.d5 and take on f4.

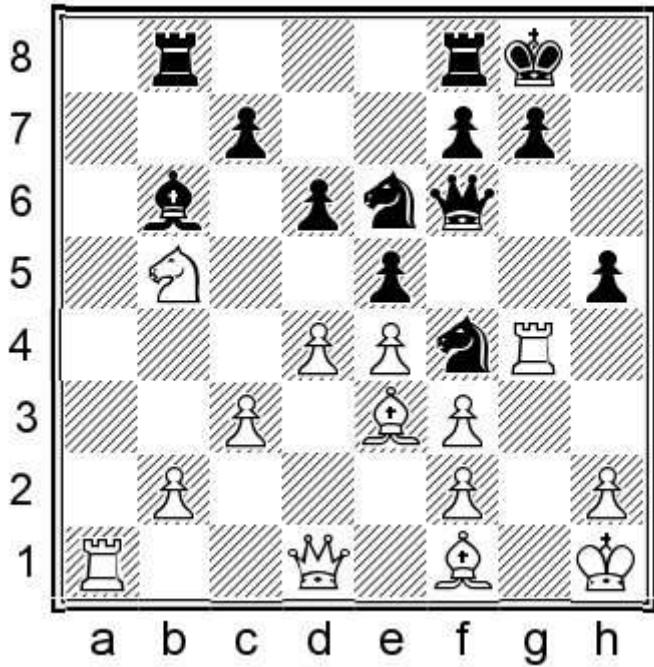


Position after: 20.Qd2!?

B1) 20...Rfd8 Should be playable too. 21.d5 h5!? 22.dxe6 hxg4 23.exf7+ Kf8 24.Bxb6 cxb6 [24...Rxb6 25.Nxc7] 25.fxg4 is very messy.

B2) 20...Nh5 21.Be2 [21.Qd1 Nh4=] 21...Nef4 22.Bd1 [22.Bf1 c6 23.Na3 Ne6 24.dxe5 dxe5; 22.d5?! Nh3 23.Qe1 Ra8 24.Rb1 Rfb8,] 22...Ra8 Black has good compensation: the knights around the white king are always dangerous.

C) 20.Bf1 h5! Now it's important to chase the rook away and Black gets an exciting game, e.g. [20...Rfd8 21.d5?]

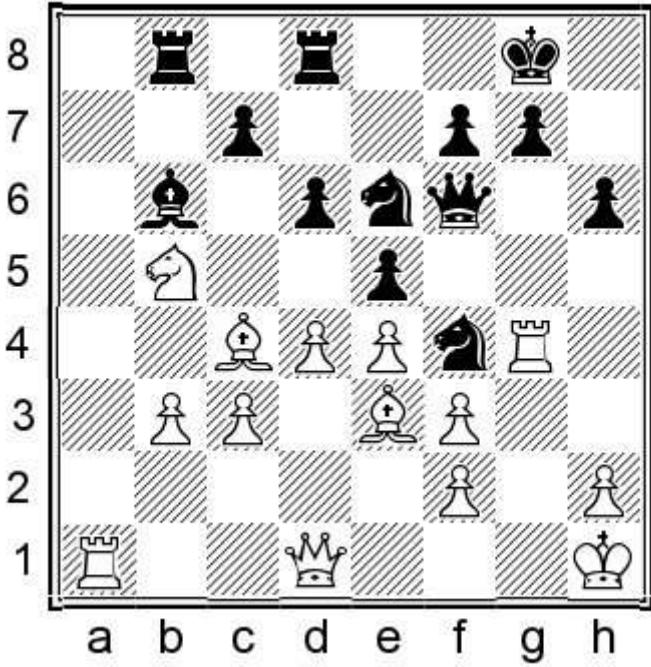


Position after: 20...h5!

C1) 21.Rg1 Rfd8 [21...c6 22.Nxd6 exd4 23.cxd4 Bxd4 24.Ra5 Qd8 25.Nc4 c5©] 22.d5 Ng5©

C2) 21.Rg3 c6! 22.Nxd6 [22.dxe5? dxe5 23.Na3 Rfd8 24.Qc2 h4 25.Rg1 Nd3!–+] 22...exd4 23.cxd4 Bxd4 24.Nf5 [24.Ra5 Qd8!? 25.Nc4 c5©] 24...Be5©

20...Rfd8!



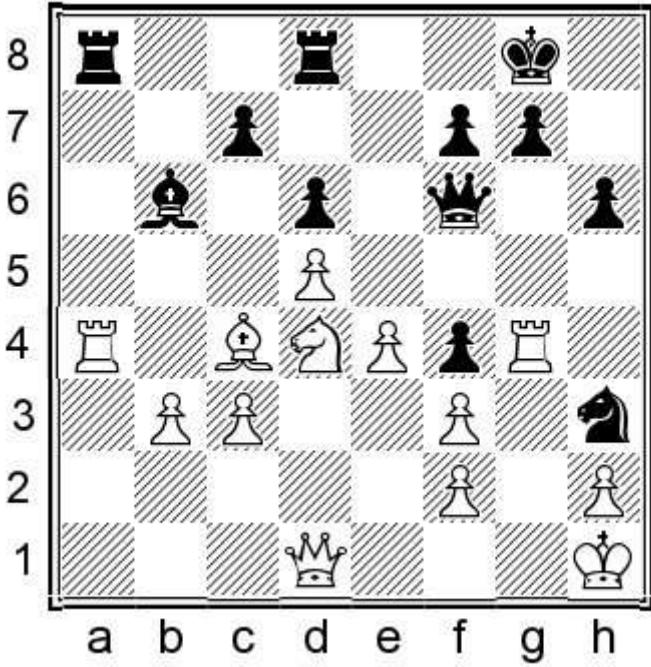
Position after: 20...Rfd8!

21.Na7

Apart from 21.d5 the only reasonable way to stop the future ...c6 move.

21.d5 Ng5 Black's knights are very tricky, so White needs to be careful.

A) 22.Bxf4?! Releasing the tension like this is no good. 22...exf4 23.Nd4 Ra8 24.Ra4 [24.Rxa8 Rxa8 25.h4 Nh3 26.Qf1 Bxd4 27.cxd4 h5 28.Rg2 Qxd4] 24...Nh3!



Position after: 24...Nh3!

25.Rg2 Bxd4 26.cxd4 [26.Qxd4? Qxd4 27.cxd4 Rdb8 28.Bb5 g5!+ would be extremely awkward.] 26...Rdb8,

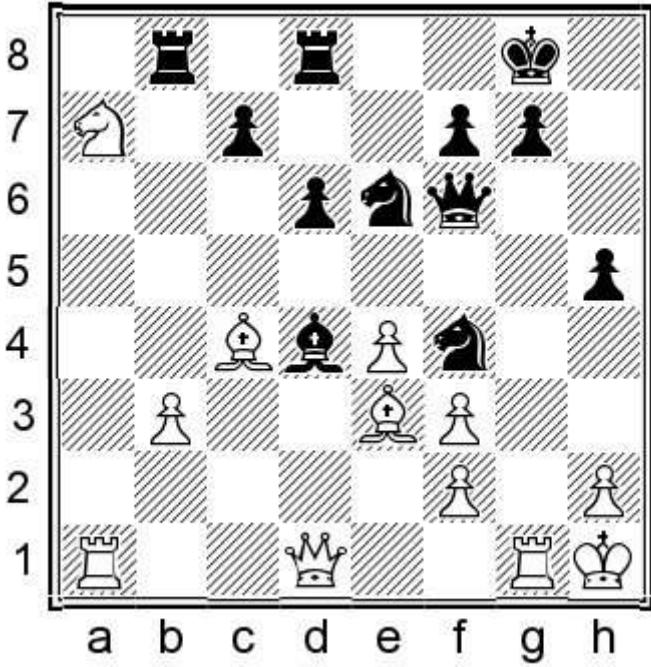
B) 22.Ra2 Ra8,,

C) 22.Bf1 Ra8! White closed the b-file successfully, so this is the right moment to find activity somewhere else. 23.Ra4 Rx a4 24.bxa4 Nfh3 [24...Ngh3!?] 25.Bxh3 Nxh3 26.Kg2 h5 27.Rg3 Nf4+©

21...h5! 22.Rg1

22.Rg3? is no good. 22...exd4 23.cxd4 Bxd4 24.Ra5 Bxa7 25.Rxa7 d5! 26.exd5 Nxd5 27.Bxd5 Qf5μ

22...exd4 23.cxd4 Bxd4



Position after: 23...Bxd4

24.Ra4

24.Ra5 d5! Of course! 25.exd5 Nh3!

A) 26.dxe6? Bxe3 27.Qe2 [27.exf7+ Kf8] 27...Nxf2+ 28.Kg2 Qg6+ 29.Kf1 Ng4! 30.fxg4 [30.exf7+ Kf8 31.Rxg4 Qb1+ 32.Kg2 Qg1+ 33.Kh3 hxg4+ 34.fxg4 Rd2–+] 30...Qb1+ 31.Qe1 Rd1–+

B) 26.Rf1 Bb6³

C) 26.Qf1 may save White with some unthinkable moves, but they are unlikely to be found over the board.

24...d5

This was played in the game, but the alternative is sound enough.

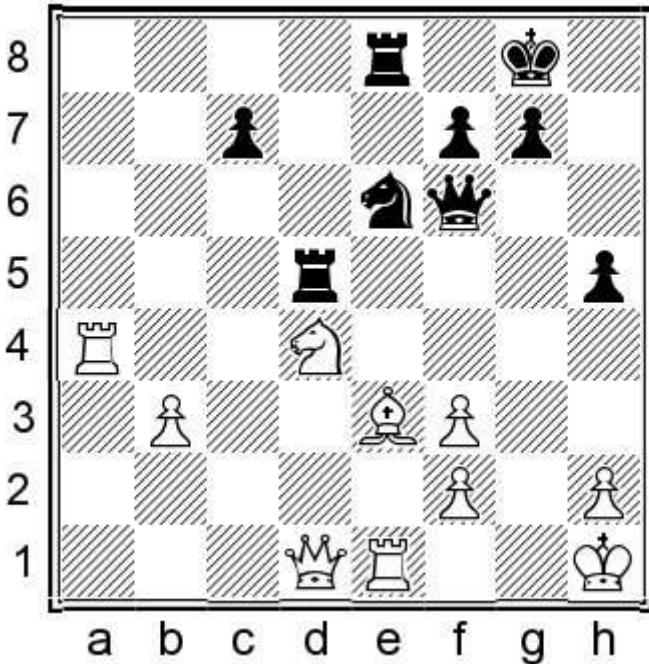
24...Bxa7 25.Bxa7 [25.Rxa7 d5 26.exd5 Nxd5 27.Bxd5 Qe5 28.Ra5 c5! 29.Bxc5 Rxd5 30.Bd6! Rxd1 31.Bxe5 Rxg1+ 32.Kxg1 Rxb3=] 25...Rb7 26.Be3 d5 [26...Ng6 27.Ra5] 27.exd5 Nxd5! 28.Bxd5 c6 29.Bd4 [29.Rd4

Nxd4 30.Bxd4 Rxd5 31.Bxf6 Rxd1 32.Rxd1 gxf6=] 29...Nxd4 30.Rxd4 Kf8!
Elegant. [30...Rxd5 31.Rxd5 cxd5 32.Qxd5 Rb5!= A bit too tricky, but the
result is the same.] 31.Rd3 Rbd7 32.Be4 Rxd3 33.Bxd3 Qc3 34.f4 Rxd3
35.Qxh5 Rh3!?=

25.exd5 Nxd5

Black can already think about playing for the advantage by 25...Nh3!? 26.Rf1
Bxa7 27.Rxa7 Qf5

26.Bxd5 Rxd5 27.Nc6 Re8 28.Re1 Nf4! 29.Nxd4 Ne6!



Position after: 29...Ne6!

A funny manoeuvre secures the draw.

30.f4 Nxd4 31.Bxd4

A draw was agreed here in Rekhtman – Pastukhov, ICCF 2017 since...

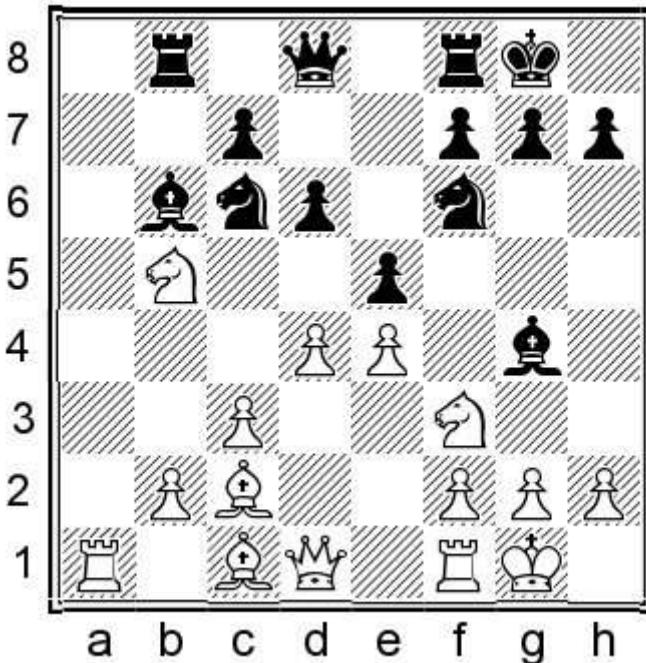
31...Rxe1+ 32.Qxe1 Rxd4 33.Rxd4 Qxd4 34.Qe8+ Kh7 35.Qxf7 Qd1+
36.Kg2 Qg4+=

And the game eventually ends in perpetual check.

Chapter 13

13.Bc2 – Main Line

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4 13.Bc2



Chapter Guide

Chapter 13 – 13.Bc2 – Main Line

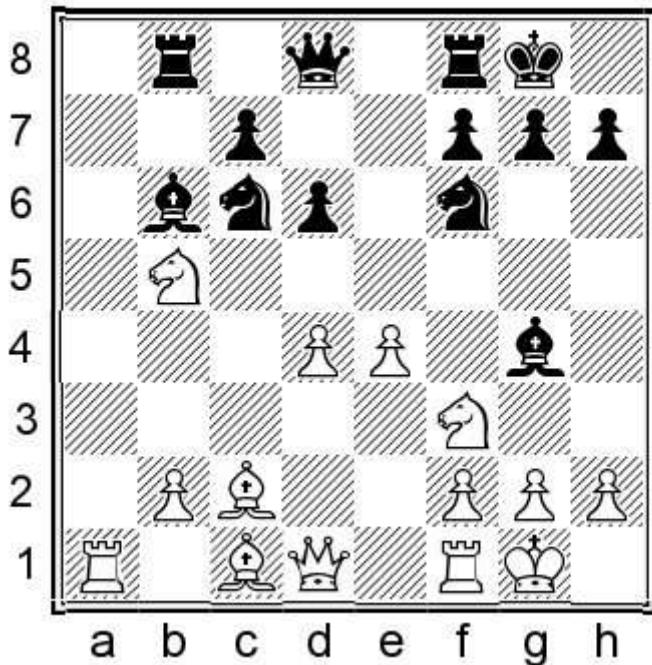
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4 13.Bc2 exd4

- a) 14.cxd4 d5 15.Bg5
- b) 14.cxd4 d5 15.e5 Ne4 16.Ra3
- c) 14.cxd4 d5 15.e5 Ne4 16.h3
- d) 14.Nbxd4 Nxd4 15.cxd4 Bxf3 16.gxf3 Nh5 17.--

- e) 14.Nbxd4 Nxd4 15.cxd4 Bxf3 16.gxf3 Nh5 17.Ra4
- f) 14.Nbxd4 Nxd4 15.cxd4 Bxf3 16.gxf3 Nh5 17.f4
- g) 14.Nbxd4 Nxd4 15.cxd4 Bxf3 16.gxf3 Nh5 17.Kh1 Qf6 18.--
- h) 14.Nbxd4 Nxd4 15.cxd4 Bxf3 16.gxf3 Nh5 17.Kh1 Qf6 18.Be3 c5 19.-- & 19.Rg1
- i) 14.Nbxd4 Nxd4 15.cxd4 Bxf3 16.gxf3 Nh5 17.Kh1 Qf6 18.Be3 c5 19.e5 Qe6 20.-- & 20.exd6 cxd4 21. Bxd4 Rfd8 22-- & 22.Bxb6
- j) 14.Nbxd4 Nxd4 15.cxd4 Bxf3 16.gxf3 Nh5 17.Kh1 Qf6 18.Be3 c5 19.e5 Qe6 20.exd6 cxd4 21. Bxd4 Rfd8 22.Re1

a) 14.cxd4 d5 15.Bg5

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4 13.Bc2 exd4 14.cxd4



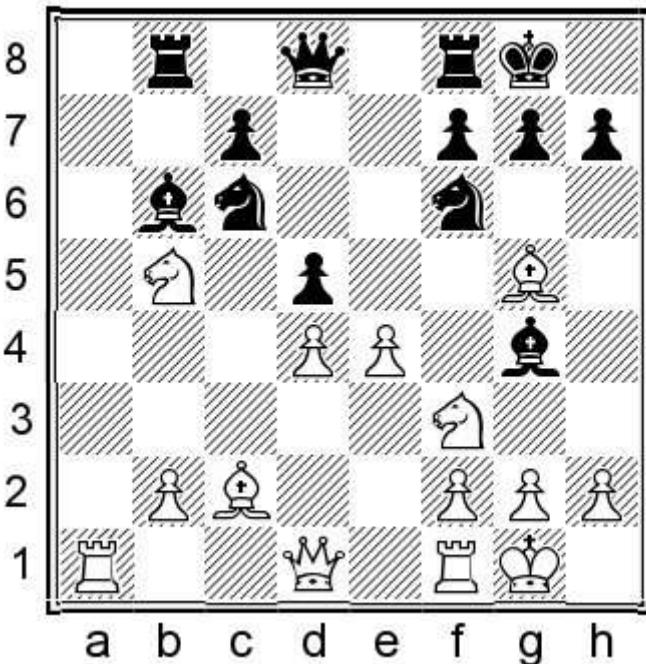
Position after: 14.cxd4

This move is much less popular and the reason for this is probably quite simple: White players tend to like exchanging the vulnerable b5-knight and reducing material while being a pawn up.

14...d5

The most logical response.

15.Bg5?!



Position after: 15.Bg5?!

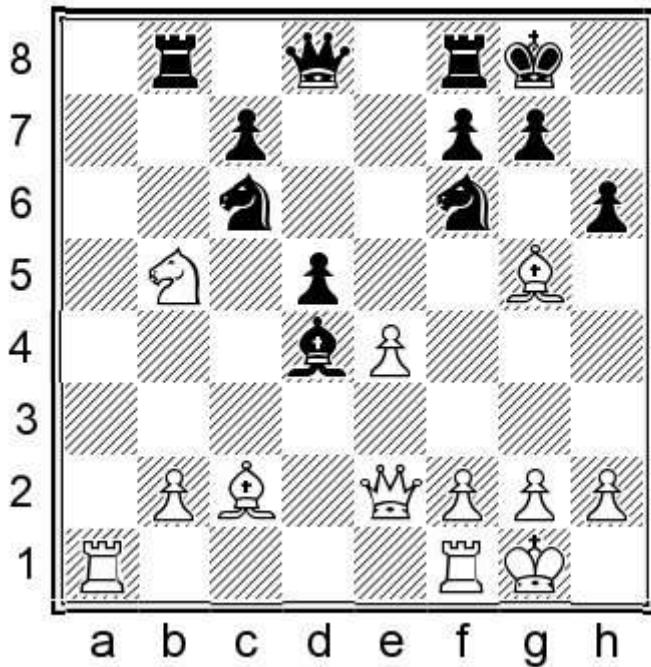
A dull line.

15...Bxf3 16.Qxf3 dxe4

16...Bxd4

A) 17.exd5 Qxd5 18.Qxd5 ½:½ Almási – Piket, Groningen 1998.
18...Nxd5 19.Nxd4 Nxd4 20.Be4 h6 [20...Nf6=] 21.Bxd5 hxg5 22.Ra7
Rfd8 23.Bc4=

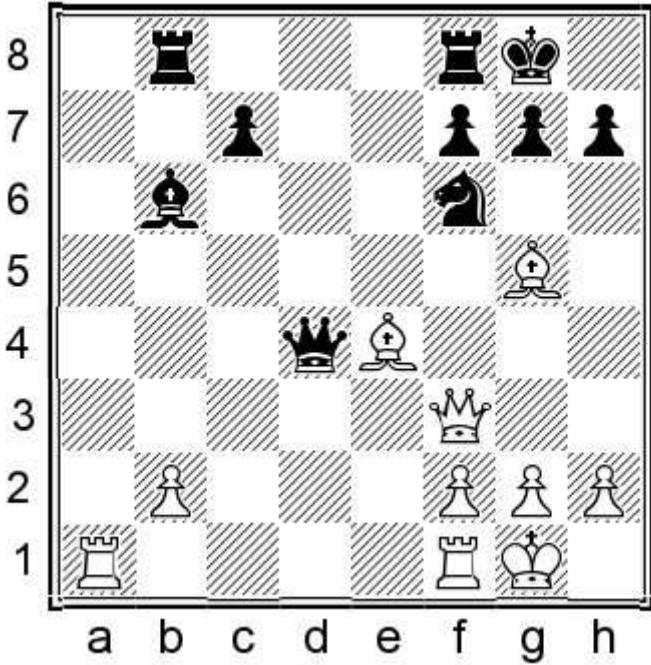
B) 17.Qe2 is a bit more interesting: 17...h6



Position after: 17...h6

[17...Re8 18.Rad1] 18.Bh4!? [18.exd5 Qxd5 19.Bxf6 Bxf6 20.Nxc7 Qe5 21.Qe4 Qxe4 22.Bxe4 Rfc8 23.Nd5 Bxb2= is drawish of course.]
18...Re8 [18...Qe7!?] 19.Rad1 Bb6∞

17.Bxe4 Nxd4 18.Nxd4 Qxd4



Position after: 18...Qxd4

19.Bc2

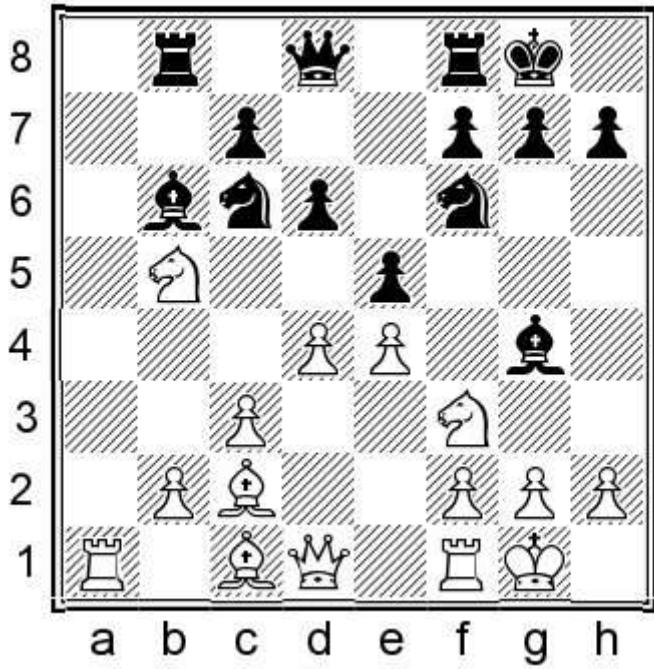
19.Bxf6 Qxf6 ½:½ was Gonzalez Vidal – Quesada Perez, Havana 2015.

19...h6 20.Bxf6 Qxf6 21.Qxf6 gxf6 22.Rfd1 Rfd8 23.Rxd8+

½:½ Harikrishna – Ganguly, Goa 2002.

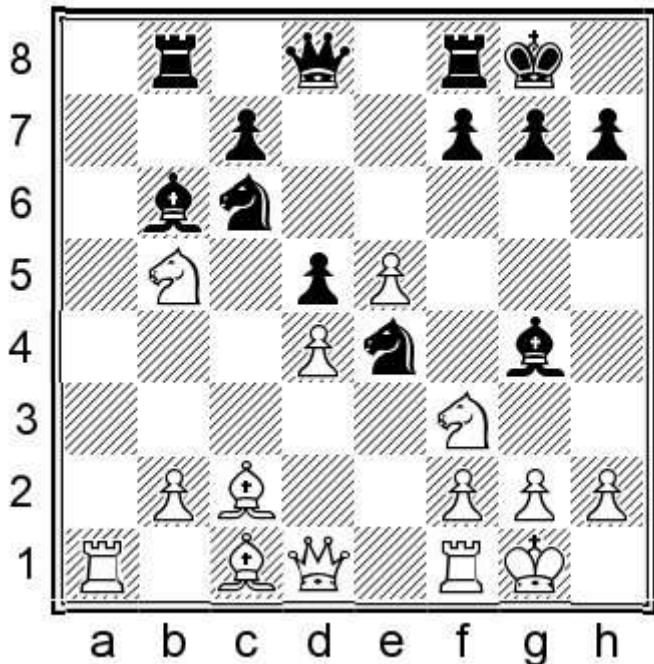
b) 14.cxd4 d5 15.e5 Ne4 16.Ra3

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4 13.Bc2



Position after: 13.Bc2

13...exd4 14.cxd4 d5 15.e5 Ne4



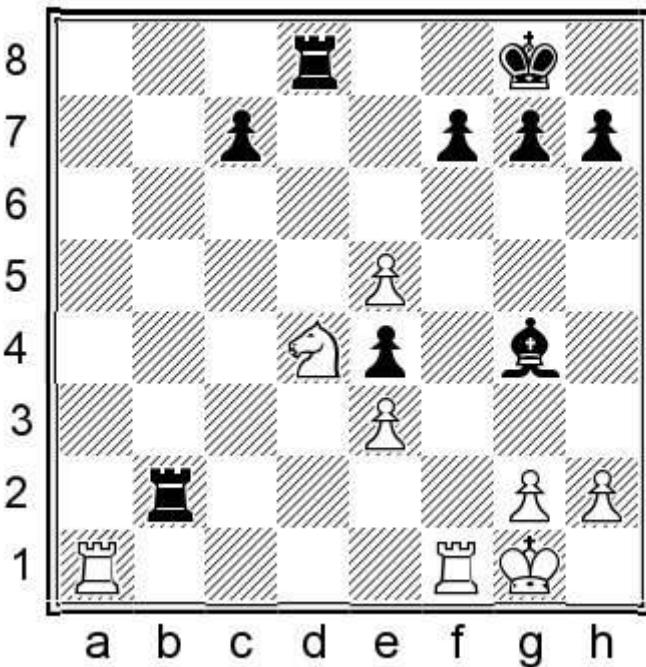
Position after: 15...Ne4

The main tabiya. Black's pieces are very active therefore the compensation should be enough for the pawn.

16.Ra3

Chosen by Giri and Shankland, so it's good to have ideas in mind to meet it properly.

A) 16.Be3?! This very natural move turns out to be pretty harmless. 16...Nxe5! Black wins back the pawn with this neat trick. This idea is worth remembering. 17.dxe5 Bxe3 18.fxe3 Rxb5 19.Bxe4 dxe4 20.Qxd8 Rxd8 21.Nd4 Rxb2

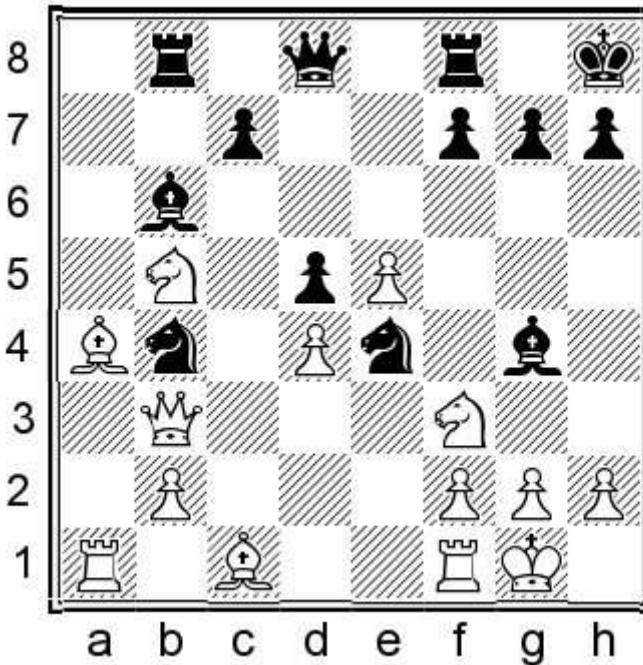


Position after: 21...Rxb2

22.Nc6?! is a bit too much, I think. After 22...Re8 23.Ra7 here I would improve on Azarov – Ganguly, Nakchivan 2003 by playing the little move 23...h6!? (or... 23...h5) with the idea being to meet 24.Rxc7? with 24...Ra8! 25.Rxf7? Ra1+ 26.Rf1 Raa2–+. Both 22.Ra7= Pokazanjev –

Petrushkin, Berdsk 2008 and 22.Rfc1= feel safer.

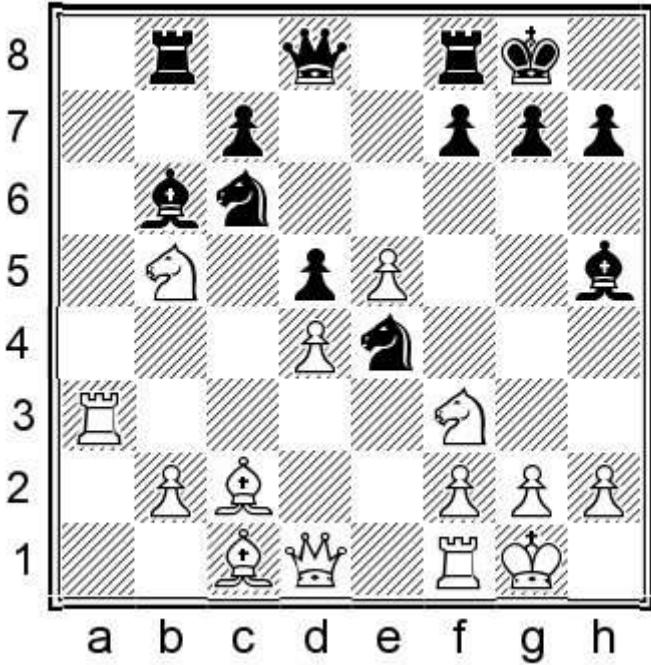
B) 16.Ba4 Kh8!? and now in case of 17.Qc2 Nb4 18.Qb3



Position after: 18.Qb3

Black can reply with the simple 18...Nc6!= [18...Qe7 is good too.] 19.Nd6 The only way to continue the game. [19.Qc2 Nb4 20.Qb3 Nc6=] 19...cxsd6 Both 19...Bxf3 and 19...Nxd4 are also equal. 20.Bxc6 dx5 21.Nxe5 Bxd4 22.Qxd5 Qxd5 23.Bxd5 Bxe5 24.Bxe4 Bxb2=

16...Bh5!



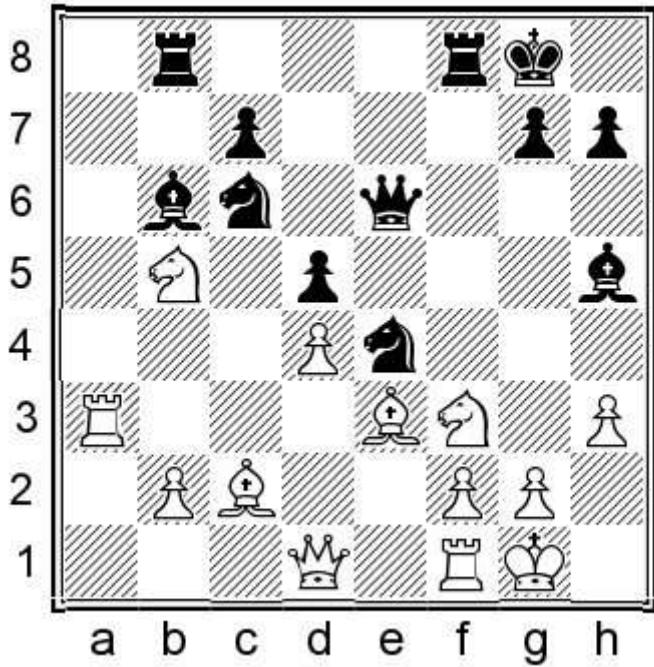
Position after: 16...Bh5!

Given by Svidler in his videos. This prophylaxis is required here.

17.Bf4

A) 17.Bd3 Nxd4! 18.Nbxd4 Bxd4 19.Bxe4 dxe4 20.Qxd4 exf3 21.Qxd8 Rfxd8 22.gxf3 and despite Black being a pawn down, I doubt White has any real chance to convert his extra material.

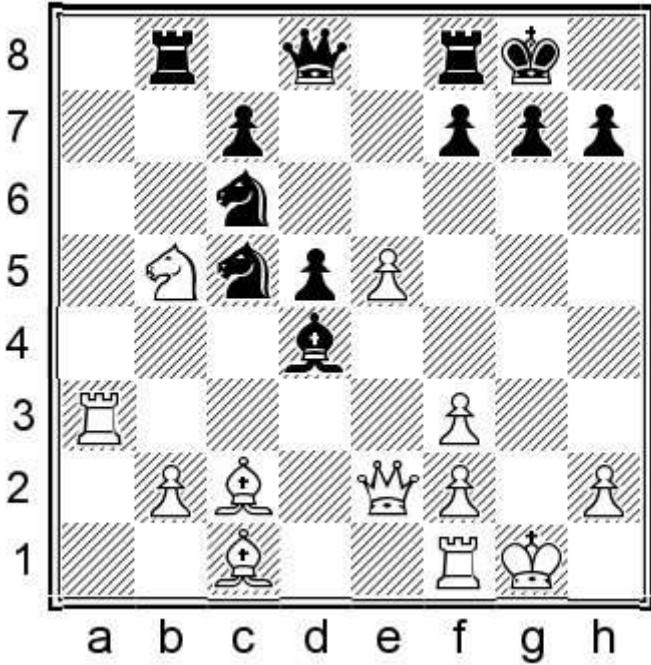
B) 17.h3 f6 18.exf6?! [18.e6 f5∞] 18...Qxf6 19.Be3 and here a draw was agreed in Baron, T (2544) – Brink, B (2309) Amsterdam 2017. I bet White didn't like his position and Black could have continued with 19...Qe6!?



Position after: 19...Qe6!?

20.Bxe4 [20.Kh2 Na5 21.g4 Be8 22.Nc3 Nc4 23.Nxe4 dxe4 24.Ng5 Qd6+ 25.Kg1 Nxa3 26.bxa3 Bg6μ] 20...Qxe4 21.Nc3 Bxf3 22.Qxf3 Rxf3 23.Nxe4 Rxe3 24.fxe3 dxe4 25.Rf4 Re8³

C) 17.Qe1 leads to complex play, for example: 17...Bxf3!? 18.gxf3 Bxd4! 19.Qe2! [19.Nxd4 Nxd4 20.Bxe4 dxe4 21.Qxe4 f5!? 22.exf6 Qxf6©] 19...Nc5!?



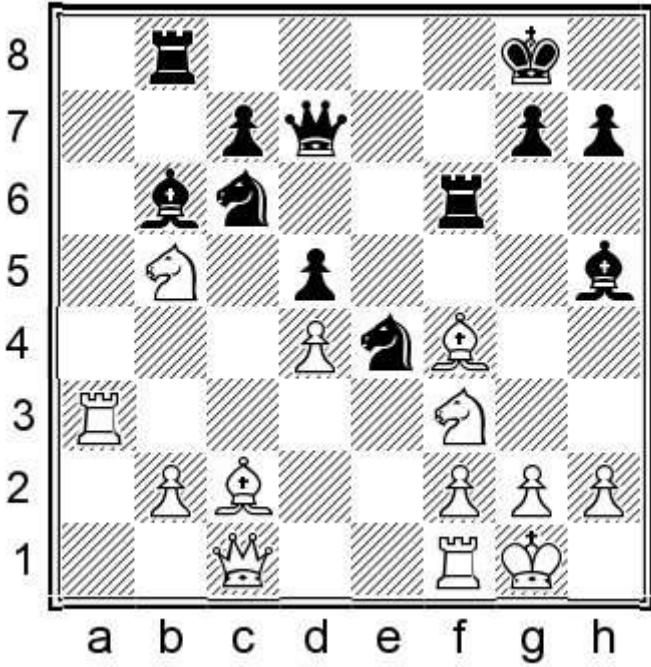
Position after: 19...Nc5!?

20.f4 f5 21.Rd1 [21.Rh3 Qe7 22.Rd1 Ne6∞] 21...Ne6 22.Bb3 Kh8∞

17...f6 18.exf6

18.Qc1 provokes some weird tactics: 18...Bxf3 19.Bxe4 dxe4 20.Qxc6 Be2 21.e6! Qe8!? For a human this looks like the most sensible. [21...Bxf1 22.Kxf1©; 21...Bxb5 Stockfish 22.Qxb5 Qxd4 23.Qc6 Rbe8 24.Ra4 Qxb2 25.Rxe4 Re7∞] 22.Qxe8 Rfxe8 23.Nxc7 Bxc7 24.Bxc7 Rxb2 25.Rc1 [25.d5 Rd2 26.Rfa1 Rxd5 27.Ra8 Rd1+ 28.Rxd1 Rxa8 29.Rd8+ Rxd8 30.Bxd8=] 25...Rxe6 26.Bf4 [26.d5 Ra6=] 26...Re7 27.h4 Rb5=

18...Rxf6 19.Qc1 Qd7



Position after: 19...Qd7

Black has typical pressure on the kingside for a mere pawn.

20.Bd1

It's a good sign if White has to play so passively.

20...Rbf8 21.Be3 h6!

Nice prophylaxis. White is struggling to find reasonable moves.

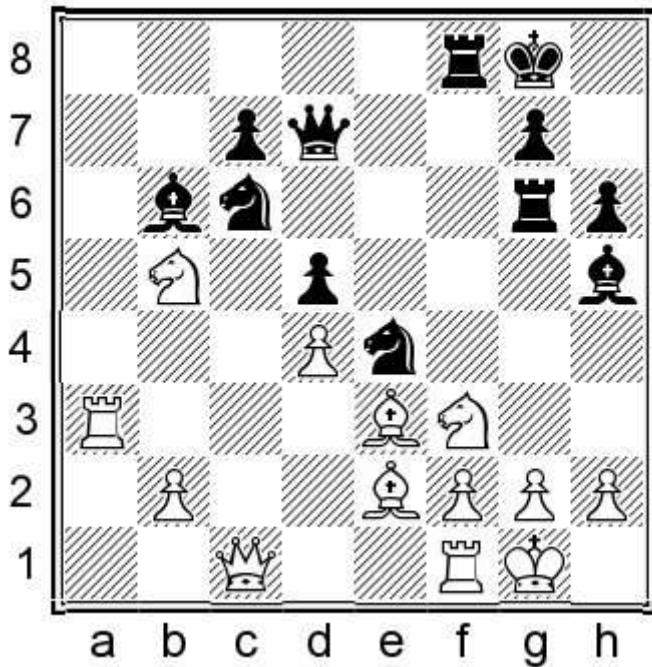
21...Rg6? 22.Nh4+–

22.Be2

A) 22.Ne5 Nxe5 23.dxe5 Rxf2! 24.Rxf2 Rxf2 25.Bxb6 [25.Bxf2? Nxf2+–] 25...Rf1+ 26.Kxf1 Qxb5+ 27.Kg1 Qxb6+ 28.Qe3 Qxe3+ 29.Rxe3 Bxd1 30.Rd3³

B) 22.Ng5 Nxf2 23.Rxf2 Rxf2 24.Bxf2 Bxd1 25.Qxd1 hxg5 Black is ok.

22...Rg6!



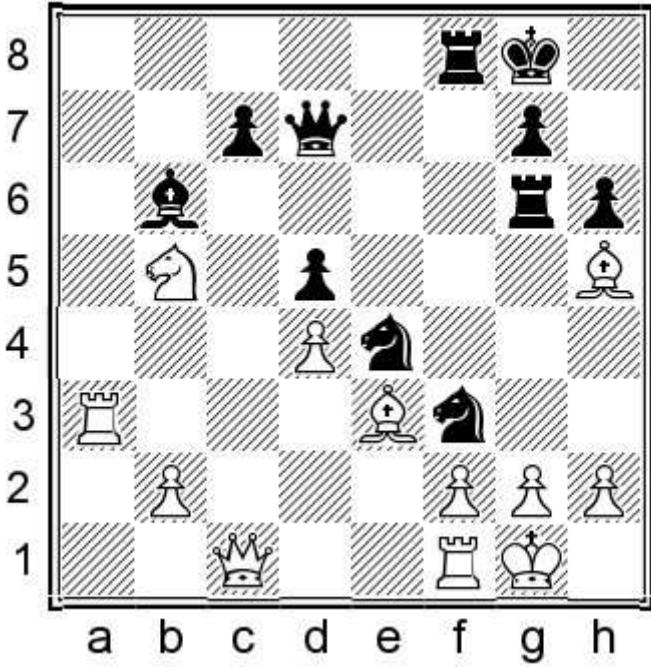
Position after: 22...Rg6!

White is on the edge of losing this, but with accurate moves the balance can be maintained:

23.Ne5

23.Kh1 Qg4 24.Rg1 Rxf3 25.Qf1™ 25...Rxf2 [25...Qf5] 26.Bxg4 Rxf1
27.Bxh5 Rxg1+ 28.Kxg1 Re6=

23...Nxe5 24.Bxh5 Nf3+



Position after: 24...Nf3+

25.Kh1

25.Bxf3? Rxf3 26.Kh1 Qg4 27.Rg1 Rxf2+–

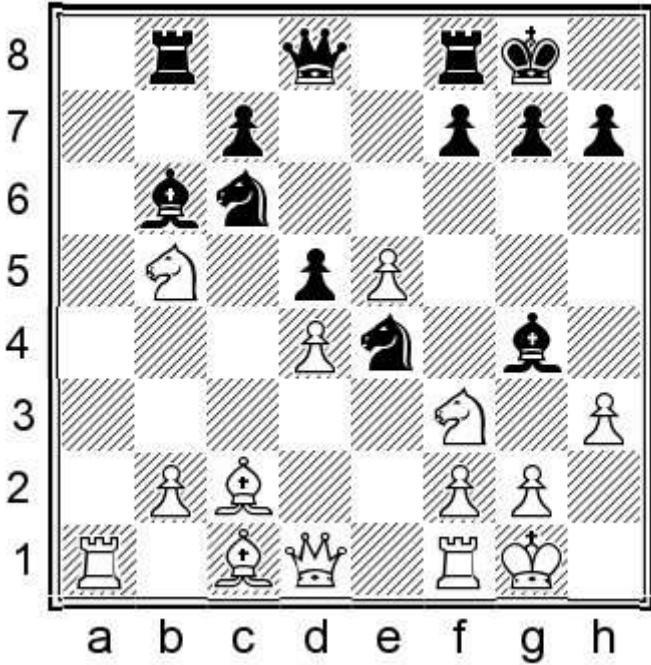
25...Rxg2 26.Kxg2

26.Bxf3 Rxh2+ 27.Kxh2 Rxf3 28.Bxh6 Qh3+ 29.Kg1 Qg4+ 30.Kh2=

26...Qf5 27.Bxf3 Qxf3+ 28.Kg1 Qg4+=

c) 14.cxd4 d5 15.e5 Ne4 16.h3

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4 13.Bc2 exd4 14.cxd4 d5 15.e5 Ne4 16.h3



Position after: 16.h3

Surprisingly, only 3 games have gone this way, and one of them actually ended here immediately...

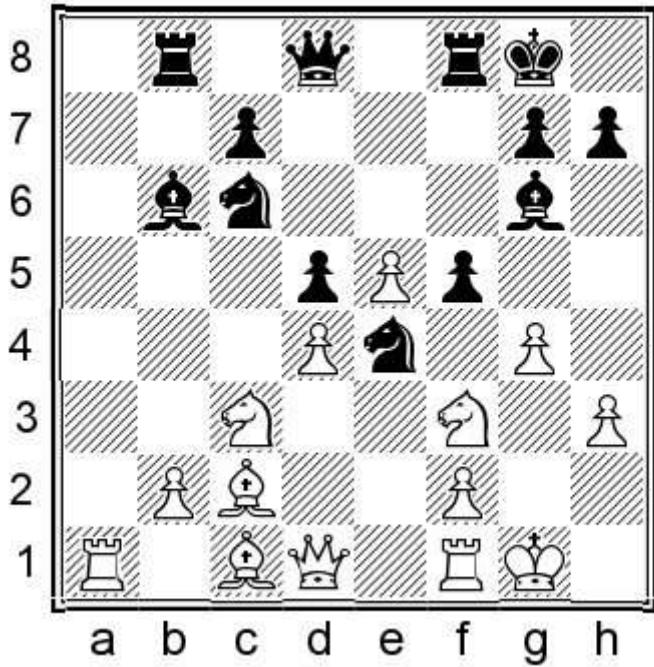
16...Bh5

16...Bxf3?! 17.gxf3 Ng5 18.f4 doesn't look great.

17.Ra4

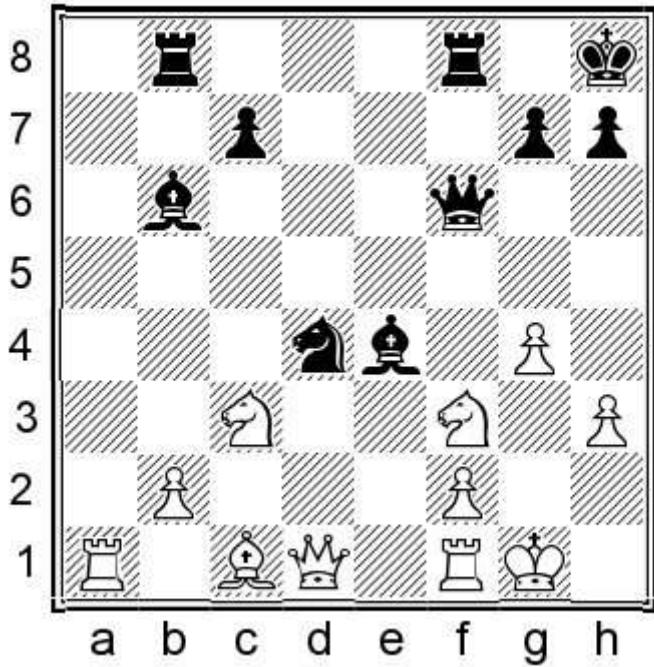
The d4-pawn needed extra care and this is the best way to protect it. White's set-up look a bit suspicious to the human eye, but it's much more venomous than it may appear at first glance. Black needs to bring accuracy to this position.

A) 17.g4 Bg6 18.Nc3 f5!



Position after: 18...f5!

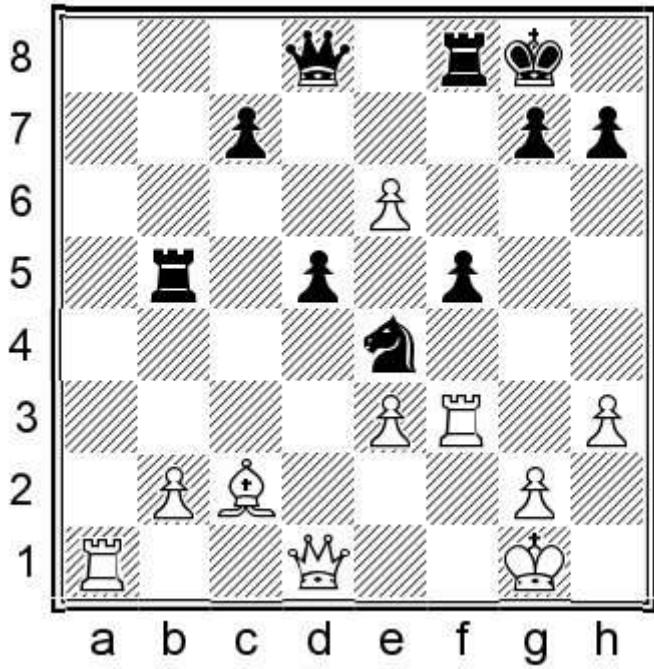
A novelty. 18...h5 was tried in Kanarek – Sevian, Lisbon 2018, but White has an edge if the position is played correctly: 19.exf6 Qxf6 20.Bb3 Kh8 21.Bxd5 Nxd4 22.Bxe4 Bxe4!?



Position after: 22...Bxe4!?

[22...Nxf3+ 23.Bxf3 Qxf3 24.Qxf3 Rxf3=] 23.Nxd4 Bb7 24.Nf5 Rbd8!
25.Qe2 Qc6 26.Qe4 Qxe4 27.Nxe4 Bxe4=

B) 17.Be3 Nxe5 [17...f6!? 18.exf6 Qxf6 is also an option.] 18.dxe5
Bxe3 19.fxe3 Bxf3! 20.Rxf3 [20.Qxf3 Rxb5 21.Bxe4 dxe4 22.Qxe4
Qe8=] 20...Rxb5 21.e6! f5!

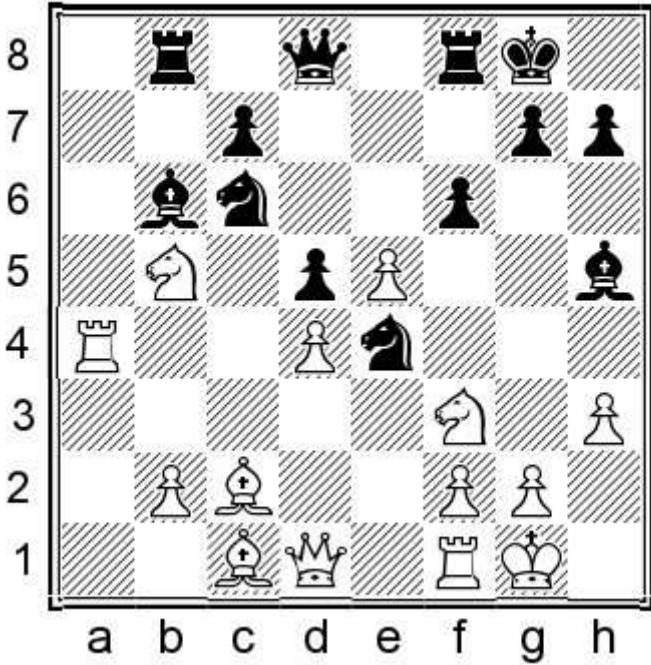


Position after: 21...f5!

The position is balanced, despite the dangerous looking e6-pawn. For example: 22.Rxf5!? Rxf5 23.Bxe4 Re5 24.Bxh7+ Kh8 25.e7 Qxe7 26.Ra8+ Kxh7 27.Qd3+ Re4 28.Qxb5 Qg5=

C) 17.Ra3 transposes to 16.Ra3.

17...f6



Position after: 17...f6

18.Nc3!

The main (and only) idea.

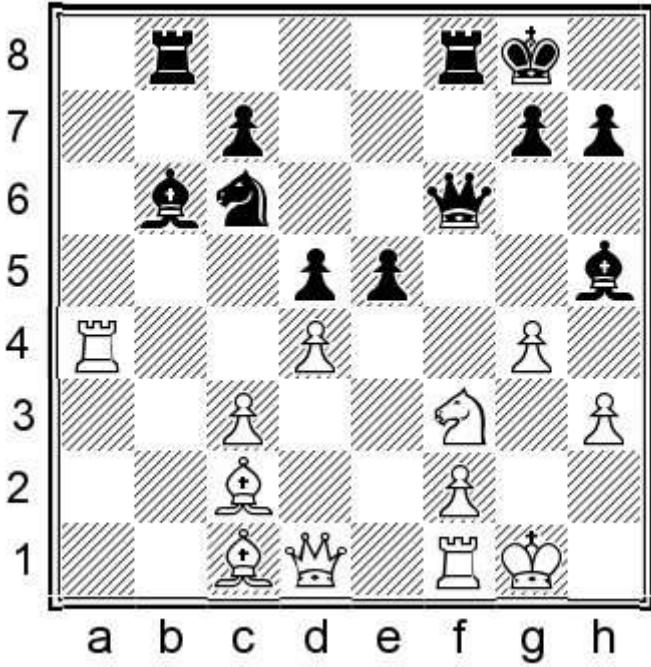
18.e6 Stockfish 18...Re8 19.g4 Bg6 20.Nh4 Rxe6 21.Nxg6 hxg6 22.Kg2 f5∞

18...Nxc3

A) 18...Bxf3 19.gxf3 Nxc3 20.bxc3 fxe5 21.dxe5 [21.f4!?] 21...Nxe5 22.f4 may not be satisfactory.

B) 18...fxe5 19.Nxd5! Bxf3 20.gxf3 Ng5 21.dxe5 Nxf3+ [21...Nd4 22.Be4²] 22.Kg2 Ncxe5 23.Nxb6 Rxb6 24.Qxd8 Rxd8²

19.bxc3 fxe5 20.g4 Qf6!



Position after: 20...Qf6!

This is how the main line goes for Svidler and I found no reason to deviate from his suggestion.

21.Ng5!

The ambitious try.

A) 21.gxh5 Qxf3 22.Qxf3 Rxf3 23.Bb3 Ne7 24.Bg5 [24.Be3 is also equal.] 24...Rxc3 25.Ba2 Kf8 26.Re1 e4 27.Bxe7+ Kxe7 28.Bxd5 Rxh3=

B) 21.Bb3!? Bf7 22.dxe5 Nxe5 23.Rf4 Qd6∞ 24.Nxe5 Stockfish 24...Qxe5 25.Rf3 Qd6 26.Bf4 Qd7 27.Bg3 Kh8 28.Ba4 Qd8 29.Re1²

C) 21.Ba3 Qxf3 22.Bxf8 Qxh3 23.gxh5 Rxf8 24.Qd3 Qxh5 25.dxe5 Nxe5 26.Qxd5+ Kh8 27.Bd1=

21...Bg6 22.dxe5

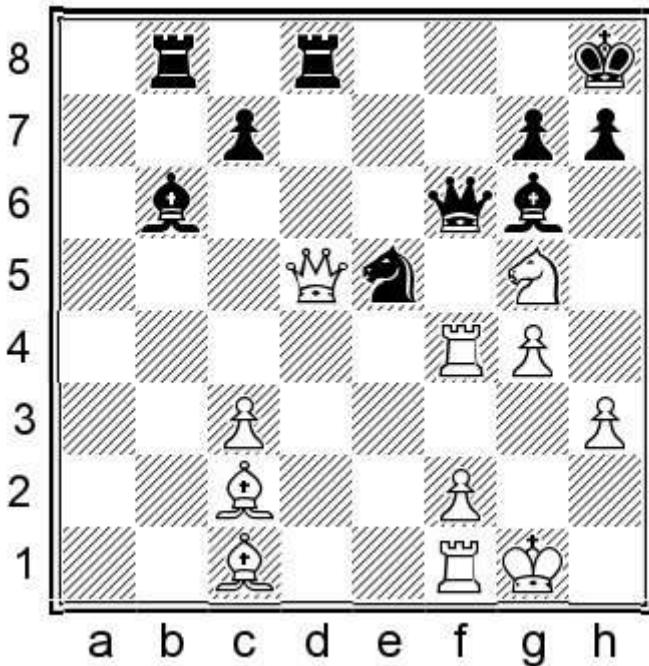
22.Bxg6 hxg6 [22...Qxg6 23.dxe5] 23.dxe5 Bxf2+ 24.Kg2 [24.Kh1 Qxe5

25.Rf4 Rxf4 26.Bxf4 Qxf4 27.Qxd5+ Kh8 28.Nf7+ Kh7 29.Ng5+=] 24...Qxe5 25.Rf4 Bc5! 26.Re1 Qd6 [26...Qxc3 27.Qxd5+ Kh8∞] 27.Re6 Qd7∞

22...Nxe5 23.Qxd5+

23.Bxg6 Nxg6 24.Qxd5+ Kh8 25.Qe6 Bxf2+ [25...Qxc3 26.Ra3] 26.Kh1 Qxc3 27.Ra3 Qf6 28.Ra2 Qc3 29.Ra3 Qf6 is a crazy-looking, computer-generated repetition.

23...Kh8 24.Rf4 Rfd8!



Position after: 24...Rfd8!

This is the essence of Black's previous play: in the arising endgame, Black has typical activity for the missing material.

25.Rxf6 Rxd5 26.Re6 Bxc2 27.Rxe5 Rd3!

27...Rxe5 28.Nf7+ Kg8 29.Nxe5 Re8 30.Bf4² is probably holdable too.

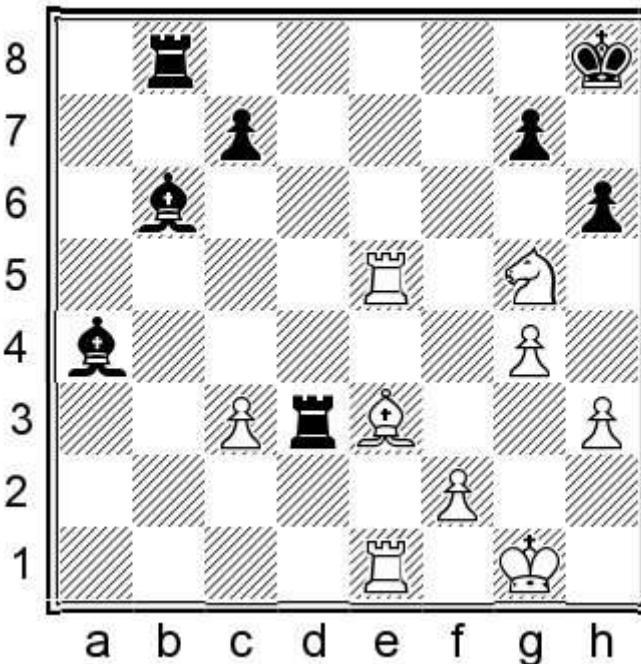
28.Rfe1

28.Re7 h6 29.Ne6 Rxh3 30.Kg2 Rxc3 31.Bb2 Bc5 32.Bxc3 Bxe7 33.Bxg7+ Kg8 34.Be5 [34.Bxh6 Rb6 35.Nd4 Be4+ 36.f3 Bxf3+=] 34...Kf7 35.Nxc7 Rg8 36.f3 h5 37.Nd5 hxg4 38.fxg4+ Ke6=

28...Ba4 29.Be3!?

29.Bf4 h6 30.Ne4 Kg8© is where Svidler stops, suggesting Black is alright.

29...h6



Position after: 29...h6

30.Ne4 Bc6 31.Bxb6

31.c4 Bxe3 32.Rxe3 Rb1+ 33.Kh2 Rxe3 34.fxe3 Rb4 35.Nc5 Rxc4 36.Ne6 Ba4=

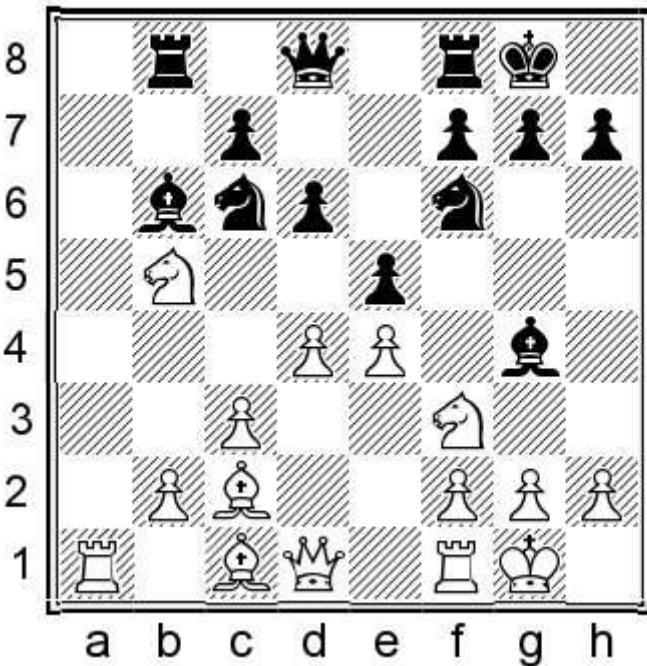
31...Rxb6 32.Re3

32.Ng3 Rxc3 33.Re7 Bd5 34.Rd7 Be6 35.Rd8+ Kh7 36.Kg2 c5=

32...Rb1+ 33.Kh2 Rxe3 34.fxe3 Rc1=

d) 14.Nbxd4 Nxd4 15.cxd4 Bxf3 16.gxf3 Nh5 17.--

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4 13.Bc2



Position after: 13.Bc2

The most popular move in the main line, and one of the most critical lines to assess the Ark altogether. First played in Topalov – Shirov, Wijk aan Zee 1996, White's bishop lands on a less-vulnerable square, from where it strengthens his center. The game continued with 13...d5, a move that served Black well, but later on White found ways to get an advantage there.

13...exd4

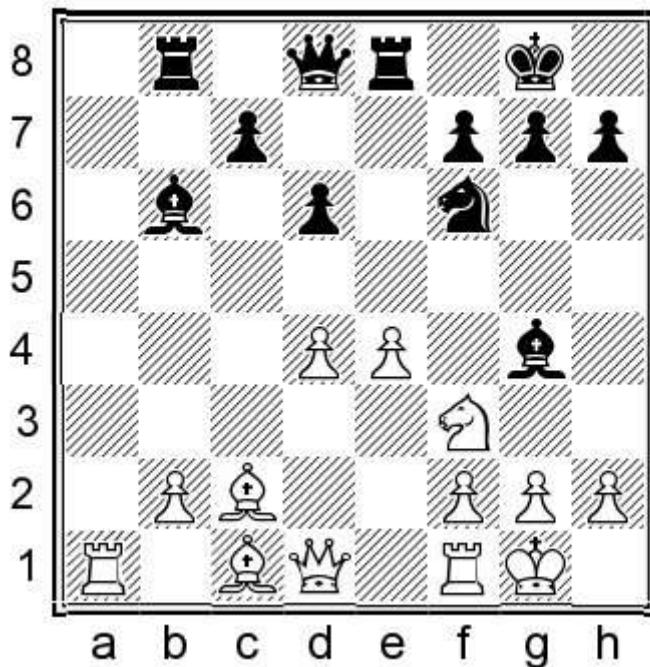
A) 13...d5?! 14.h3! Bxf3 15.Qxf3 exd4 16.exd5! Qxd5 17.Qxd5 Nxd5 18.Be4 Nde7 19.Bf4 dxc3 20.bxc3 Rfc8 21.c4² L.Dominguez – V.Rodriguez, Buenos Aires 2005.

B) 13...Bxf3 14.gxf3 Nh5 was my other serious candidate.

14.Nbx d4 Nxd4 15.cxd4 Bxf3

After days of revisiting my old analyses here I've decided to offer the 'official' main move.

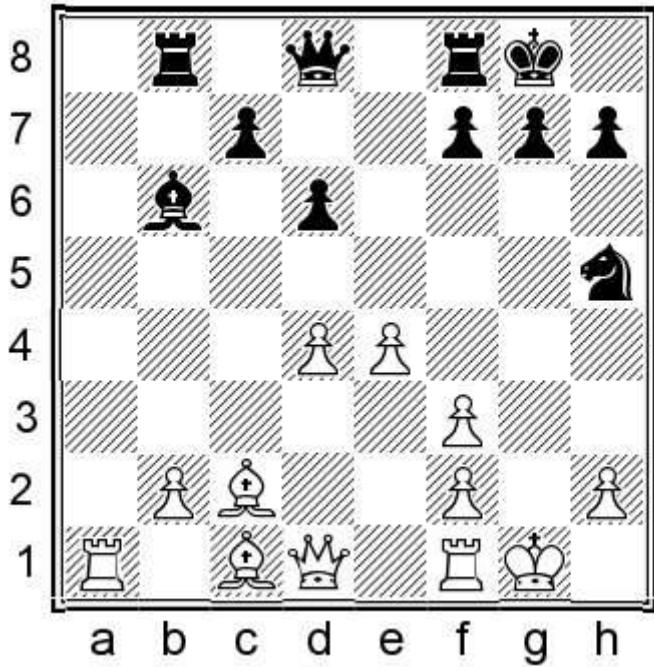
Back in 2013 I had prepared 15...Re8!?



Position after: 15...Re8!?

but later on it proved to be worse for Black in some lines. It may work as a surprise weapon, though. 16.Re1 Bxf3 17.gxf3 Nh5 18.Ba4 Re6 19.Kh1 Qh4 20.Bd7 Rf6 21.Bg4 Nf4 22.Be3 h5 23.Bf5² is one of the starting positions. It's very tricky for both sides to remember the ideas here.

16.gxf3 Nh5

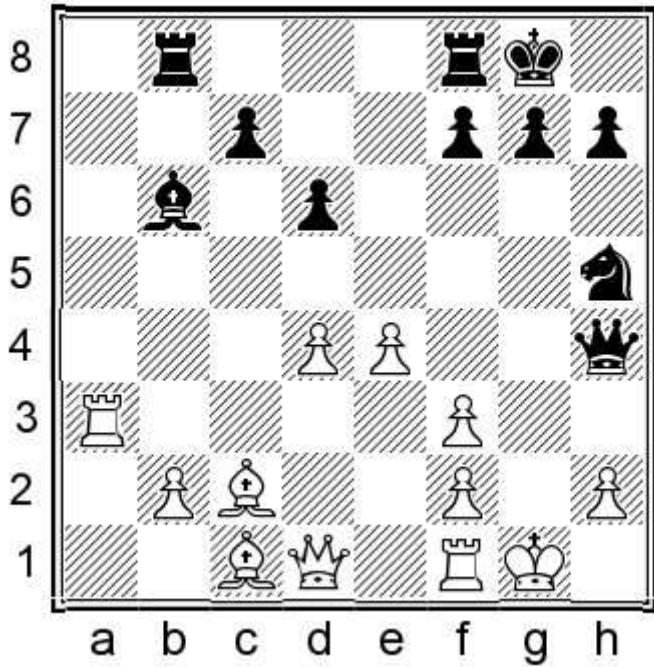


Position after: 16...Nh5

One of the main tabiyas in the entire Ark universe. White is a pawn up with the bishop pair, but his structure is severely damaged and his king is permanently weak. Black's task is to utilize the latter factors. With 16...Nh5, Black attempts to take control over the dark squares on the kingside.

17.Be3

A) 17.Ra3!? For this subtle move I have only found one single, but recent game. There is a serious chance that it's going to be heavily tested in the near future, so get ready to meet it properly. 17...Qh4

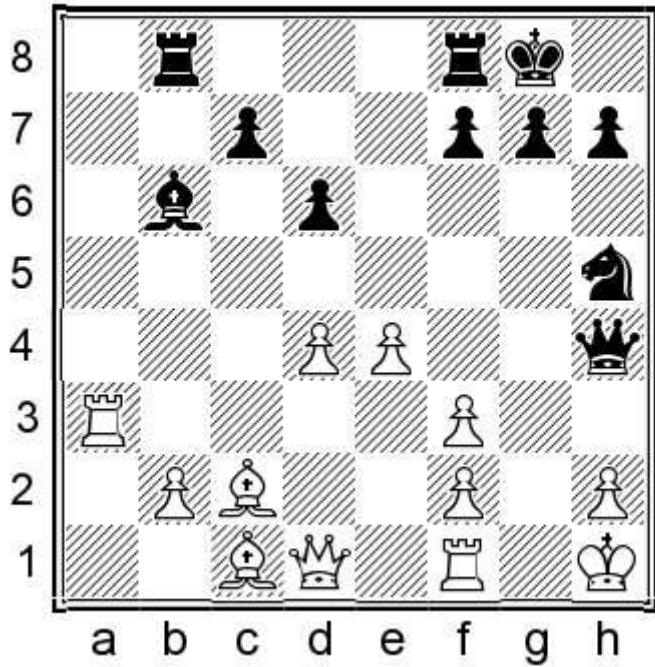


Position after: 17...Qh4

A1) 18.f4 transposes to 17.f4

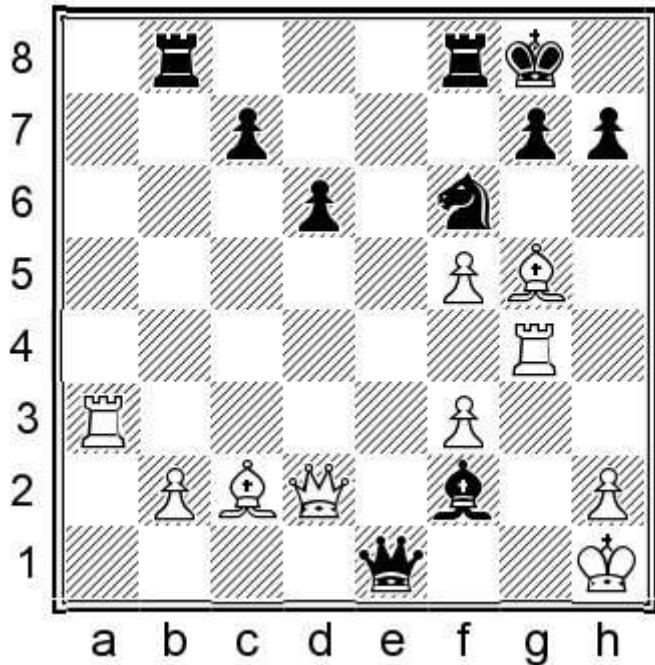
A2) The unorthodox 18.Qd2!?!N can be met with: 18...f5!?! [18...Kh8∞] 19.Re1 [19.e5 Bxd4 20.exd6 Rb6∞] 19...d5!?!∞

A3) 18.Kh1



Position after: 18.Kh1

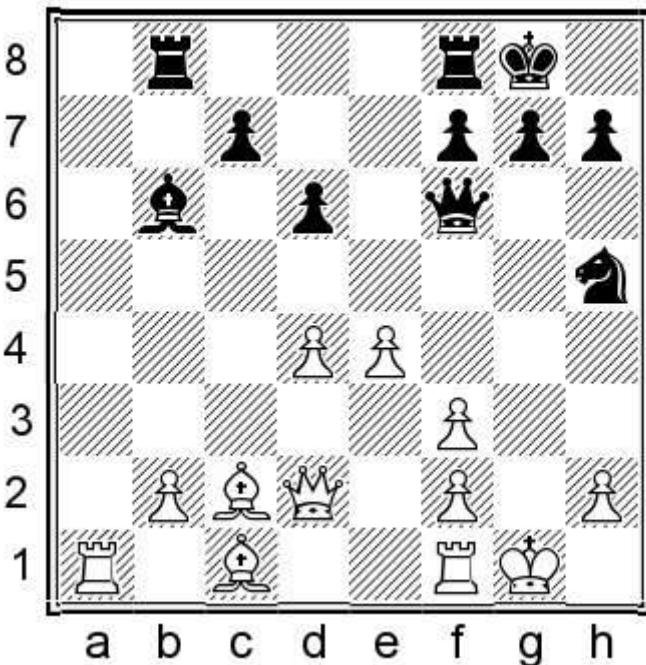
18...f5!? A Stockfish suggestion. 19.exf5 Bxd4 20.Ra4 [20.Rg1 Bxf2 21.Rg4 Qe7 22.Bg5 Nf6 23.Qd2 Qe1+!?



Position after: 23...Qe1+!?

24.Qxe1 Bxe1 25.Rg2 Bb4 26.Ra7 Bc5 27.Rxc7 Rf7©] 20...c5 21.Be3 Rxb2 22.Bxd4 [22.Rg1 Qe7 23.Bxd4 cxd4 24.Rxd4 Kh8∞] 22...cx d4 23.Rxd4 Nf4 24.Qc1 Rxc2 25.Qxc2 Qh3 26.Qb3+ Kh8 27.Rg1 Ne2 28.Rdg4 Nxg1 29.Kxg1 h5 30.Rg5 Rxf5 31.Qb8+ Kh7 32.Qb1 g6=

B) 17.Qd2 An interesting novelty option but Black holds his own.
17...Qf6



Position after: 17...Qf6

B1) 18.Rd1 c5 [18...Qxf3 19.Ra3²] 19.Ra3 cxd4 20.Qg5 Qxg5+ 21.Bxg5 Rfc8 22.Bd3 Bd8 23.Bxd8 [23.Bc1 h6 24.f4 g5=] 23...Rxd8 24.b3 d5 25.Bf1 dxe4 26.fxe4 Nf4 27.Bc4 Rd7=

B2) 18.Ra4 Ra8

B2.1) 19.Rc4 d5 20.exd5 Qxf3 21.Qd3 [21.Bd1 Qxd5 22.Qd3=] 21...Qxd3 22.Bxd3 Rfd8 23.Be4 Nf6 24.Bf3 Nxd5=

B2.2) 19.Qd3 Nf4 [19...g6©] 20.Bxf4 Qxf4 21.Qe3 Qf6 22.Rxa8 Rxa8 23.Rd1 g6©

B2.3) 19.e5 dxe5 20.dxe5 Qxe5 21.Re1 Qb5 is not dangerous for black: 22.Rxa8 Rxa8 23.b4 Re8 24.Rxe8+ Qxe8 25.Bb3 Nf6= and the position is around equal.

17...c5!N

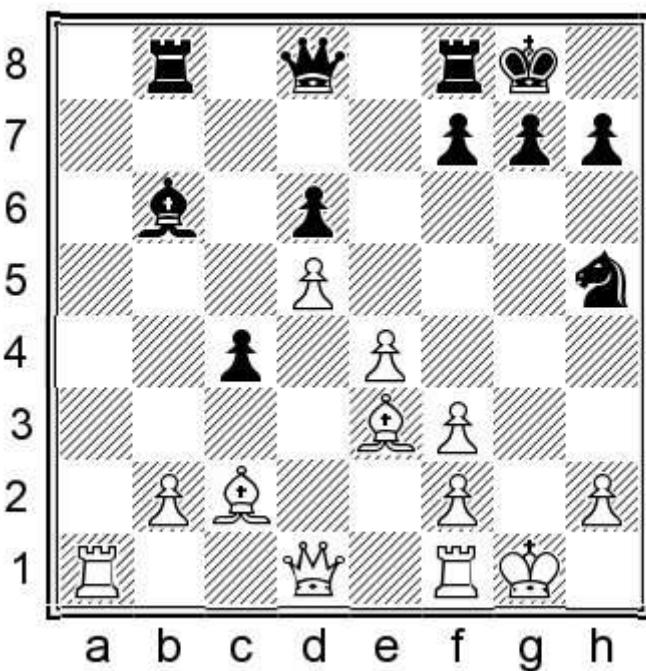
17...Qf6 and 17...Qh4 have been played.

18.d5

A) 18.dxc5 Bxc5©

B) 18.f4!? cxd4 19.Bd2 [19.Bc1 Qh4 20.Qf3 Bc5∞] 19...Qh4 20.Qf3 Bc5 ... 21.Rfb1 d3! 22.Bxd3 Rb3 23.Ra5 Rfb8,,

18...c4!



Position after: 18...c4!

This active plan is typical in the Ark.

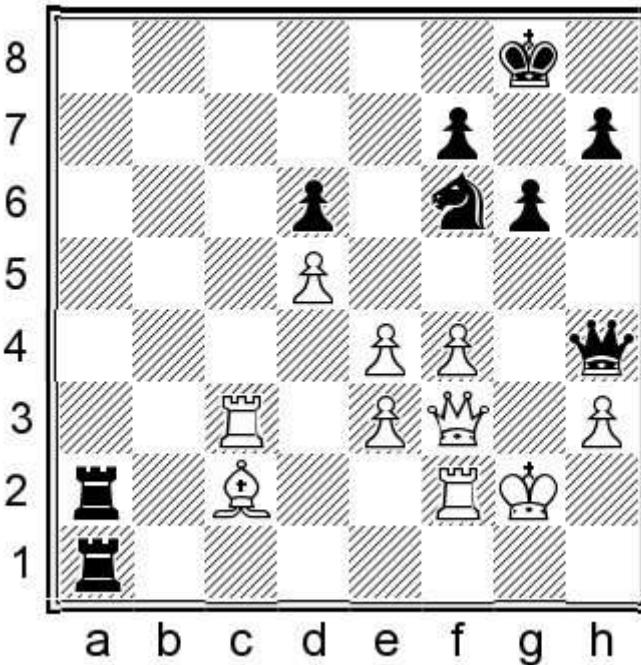
19.f4 Qh4 20.Qf3 Bxe3 21.fxe3 Rxb2 22.Rf2 g6

Black is at least fine, e.g.

23.Ra7

23.Ra6 Rfb8! ... 24.Rxd6 Ra8! 25.Rc6 Nf6 26.Qg3 Qh5 27.Rxf6 Rxc2 28.Rxc2 Qd1+–+

23...Nf6 24.h3 c3 25.Rc7 Ra8 26.Rxc3 Ra1+ 27.Kg2 Rba2!!



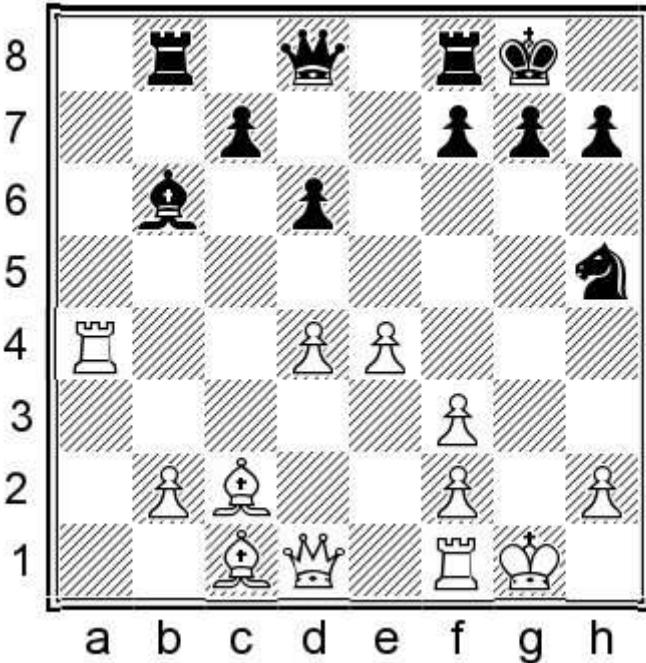
Position after: 27...Rba2!!

27...h5 28.Bd3? g5!! 29.Rxb2 g4+–+ is a fabulous line that illustrates the dangers facing White.

28.Bd3 g5 29.Rxa2 g4 30.hxg4 Rh1 31.Qg3 Rg1+ 32.Kxg1 Qxg3+ 33.Kf1 Nxg4+–+

e) 14.Nbxd4 Nxd4 15.cxd4 Bxf3 16.gxf3 Nh5 17.Ra4

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4 13.Bc2 exd4 14.Nbxd4 Nxd4 15.cxd4 Bxf3 16.gxf3 Nh5 17.Ra4



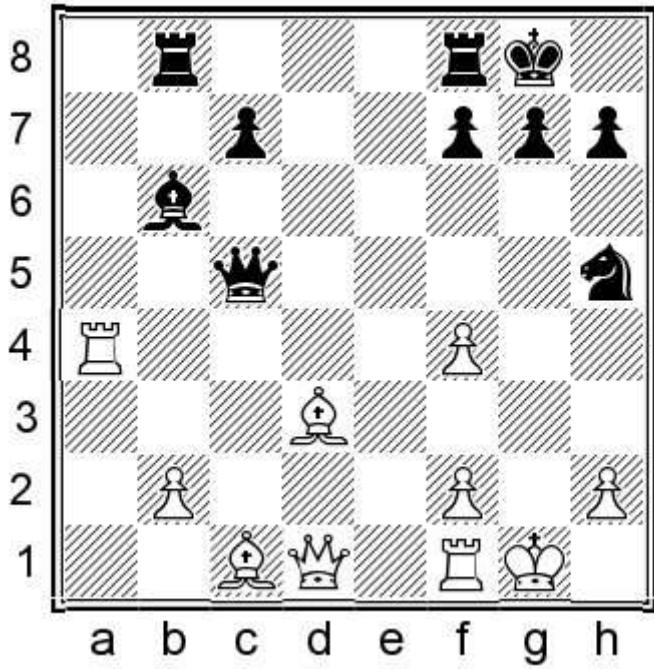
Position after: 17.Ra4

This rook-lift is the second most-played move.

17...Qf6 18.Be3!

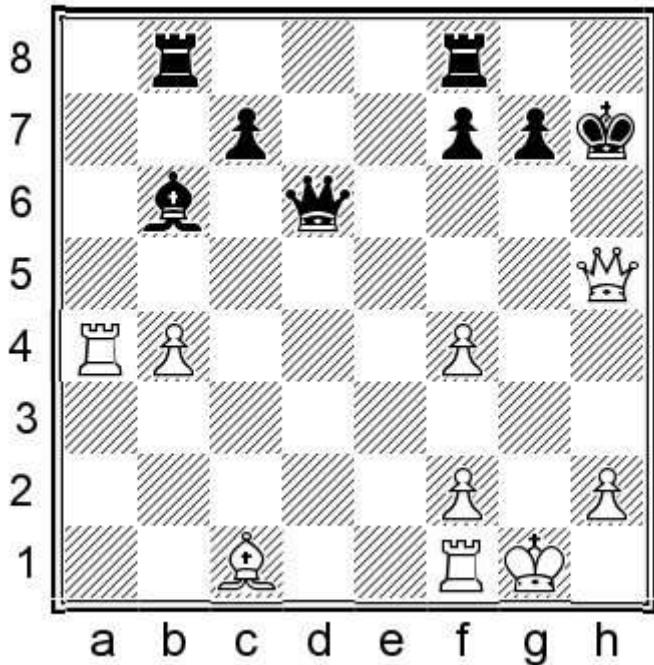
The most ambitious line.

18.e5 leads to a drawish endgame: 18...dxe5 19.dxe5 Qxe5 20.f4 Qb5 21.Bd3 Qc5



Position after: 21...Qc5

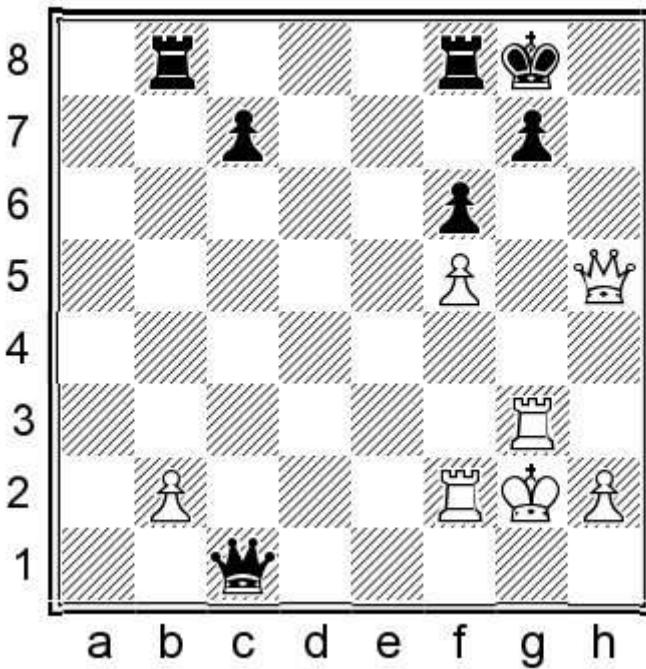
A) 22.b4 Qd6™ 23.Bxh7+ [23.Bc2 is hardly good: 23...Nxf4! 24.Qxd6 Ne2+ 25.Kg2 cxd6] 23...Kxh7 24.Qxh5+



Position after: 24.Qxh5+

24...Qh6 25.Qxh6+ Kxh6 26.Kg2 Rfe8 27.Ra3 Re4 28.Rh3+ Kg6
29.Rg3+ Kh7=

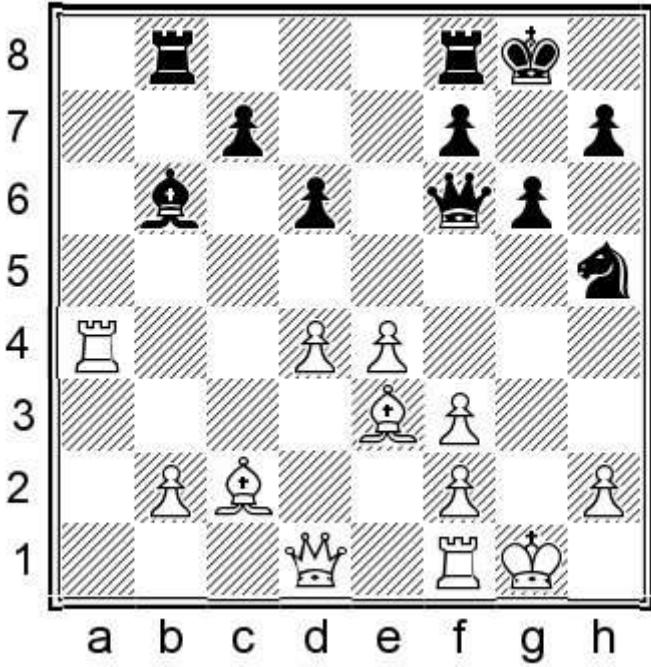
B) 22.Rc4 Qd6™ 23.Bxh7+ Kxh7 24.Qxh5+ Kg8 White is a pawn up but he can't make use of it. It's a typical conclusion in many long lines, where both sides play accurate chess. 25.Rc3 is maybe a slightly better try. [25.Qf3 was tested in practice: 25...Rfd8 26.f5 Qd3 27.Qxd3 Rxd3 28.Bf4 f6 29.Bxc7 Bxc7 30.Rxc7 Rxb2 31.Ra1 Rf3 32.Raa7 Rbxf2 33.Rxg7+ Kh8= led to perpetual check in Vallejo Pons, F (2697) – Anand, V (2780) Sao Paulo/Bilbao 2012.] 25...Bd4 26.Rg3 [26.Rh3 Qg6+ 27.Qxg6 fxg6 28.b3 Bc5!? ... 29...Bd6=] 26...Qc5 27.f5 Bxf2+ 28.Rxf2 Qxc1+ 29.Kg2 f6™



Position after: 29...f6™

is equal. 30.Rh3 [30.Rc3 Qe1!? 31.Rxc7 Qe5] 30...Rxb2 31.Qh7+= Kf7 32.Qg6+ Ke7!? [32...Kg8 33.Qh7+=] 33.Qxg7+ Rf7

18...g6



Position after: 18...g6

19.Kh1

19.f4!? Nx_f4 20.Qf3 Qg5+ [20...Nd5!?=] 21.Kh1 Qb5 22.Qd1 Ne6 23.f4
23...c5 is also interesting. 23...f5!?

A) 24.Bb3 Qd7 25.Qf3 [25.e5 d5] 25...Kh8

B) 24.exf5 gxf5 25.Bb3 d5∞

19...c5

19...Ra8 is more typical but I prefer the text. This is very similar to our main line with the inclusion of the moves Ra4 and ...g6.

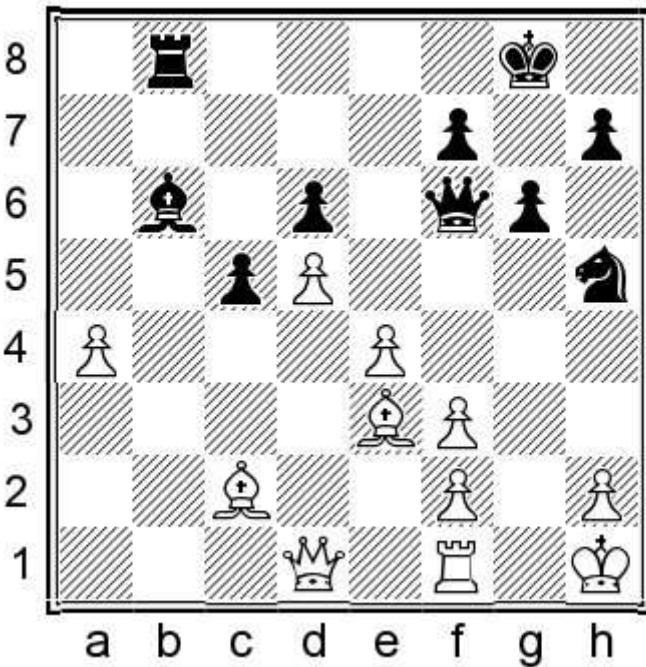
20.e5

The critical move, of course.

A) 20.Bh6 cxd4!? 21.Bxf8 Kxf8©

B) 20.dxc5 Bxc5 21.b3 Rfc8© [21...Qh4!?©]

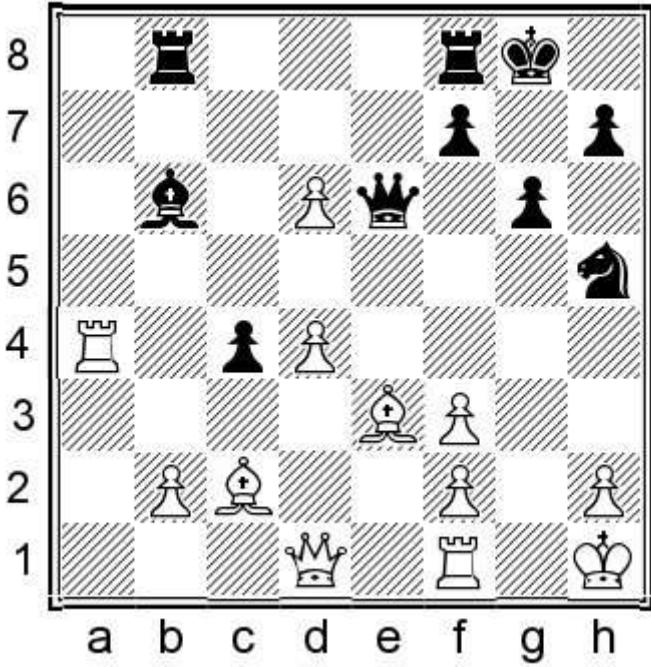
C) 20.d5 Ra8!?N [20...Qxb2 was played in Botev, K (2423) – Jedinger, A (2236) ICCF email 2015 but is less convincing.] 21.b3 [21.Rc4 Ra1!? forces a draw: 22.Qxa1 Qxf3+ 23.Kg1 Qg4+=] 21...Rxa4!? 22.bxa4 Rb8!?



Position after: 22...Rb8!?

A rather unusual idea, though it works just fine. Black combines his piece play on both flanks, e.g. 23.Qe2 Ba5 24.Rb1 Rxb1+ 25.Bxb1 Nf4 26.Qa6 Bb4=

20...Qe6 21.exd6 c4!



Position after: 21...c4!

22.Be4

I feel this to be the most challenging. It leads to a weird and exciting phase.

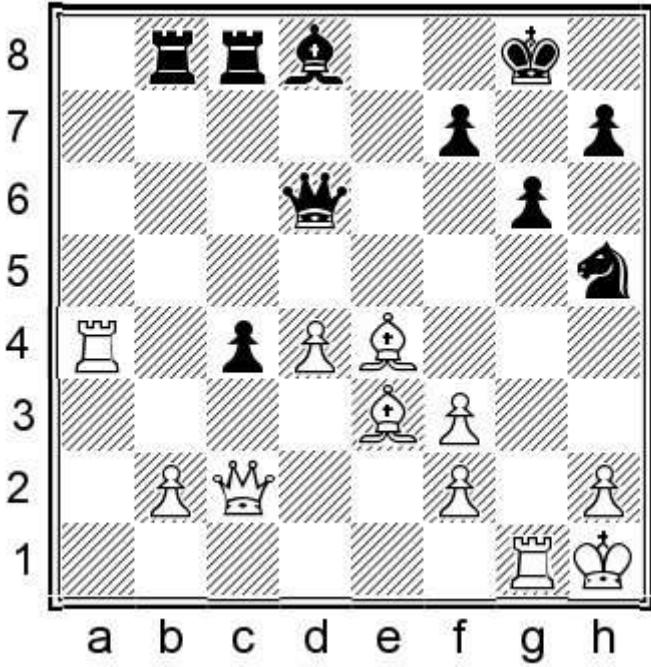
A) 22.f4 Qd5+ 23.Kg1 Rfd8 24.Qg4 Rxd6 25.f5 Re8,, is complicated.

B) 22.d5 Qxd6 23.Rxc4 Rfc8! 24.Rxc8+ Rxc8 25.Bxb6 Qxb6© Black should be able to hold this, thanks to White's poor king and limited material.

C) 22.d7 Rfd8 23.d5 Qxd7 24.Rxc4 Bxe3 25.fxe3 Ng3+! 26.hxg3 Qh3+ 27.Kg1 Qxg3+=

D) 22.Rg1 was played in the only game in which 21...c4 was tested, but Black got good compensation. 22...Rfc8 23.f4 Qd5+ 24.Rg2 Ng7© Walka, W (2307) – Spagnoli, L (2221) ICCF email 2018.

22...Rfc8 23.Rg1 Qxd6 24.Qc2 Bd8!



Position after: 24...Bd8!

Black opens the b-file for the rook.

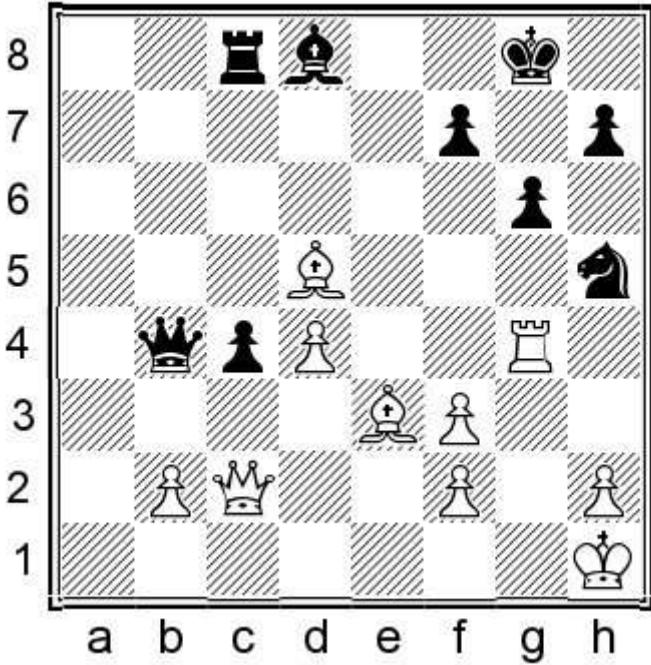
24...Bc7 25.Rg2

25.Rg4

Again, probably the most problematic.

25.Rxc4 Rxc4 26.Qxc4 Bc7! is the line which justifies the previous atypical bishop move. 27.Rg2 [27.f4 Nxf4 28.Qc6=] 27...Nf4© [27...Rxb2©]

25...Rb4!? 26.Rxb4 Qxb4 27.Bd5!



Position after: 27.Bd5!

This leads to some interesting complications.

27...Ng7!?

27...Nf6 28.Rxg6+ hxg6 29.Qxg6+ Kh8 30.Bxf7 Rc7 31.Bg5 Rxf7 32.Qxf7 Qe7 33.Qxc4² White has a lot of pawn islands, but at least he has pawns, unlike Black ☺

28.Rg1

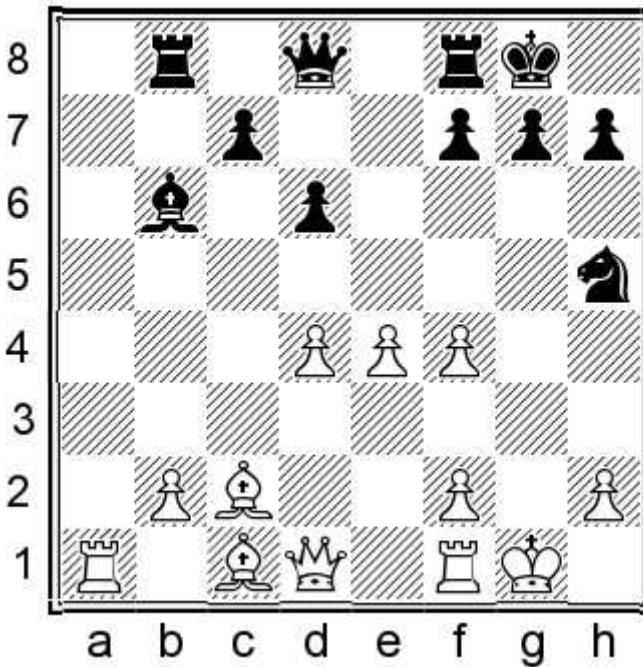
28.Rf4 Rc7 29.Kg2 Qb5 30.Qe4 Re7 31.Bc6 Qxb2 32.Qd5 Qb8 33.Qxc4 Nf5@

28...Bf6 29.Rc1 Nf5 30.Bxc4 Kg7@

f) 14.Nbx d4 Nxd4 15.cxd4 Bxf3 16.gxf3 Nh5 17.f4

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4 13.Bc2 exd4

14.Nbxd4 Nxd4 15.cxd4 Bxf3 16.gxf3 Nh5 17.f4!?



Position after: 17.f4!?

17...Qh4 18.Ra3!

Seldom played, but a very tough line to meet. White intends to give back the pawn in order activate his rook and gain some important tempi. Actually, in practice I only faced this particular line: Harikrishna surprised me by opting for the highly complicated main line, and here I just couldn't remember what I had in mind against it, so I started to burn a lot of time trying to understand the position... and actually I came up with the right move.

18...d5!

18...c5!? is worthy of consideration too.

19.exd5!

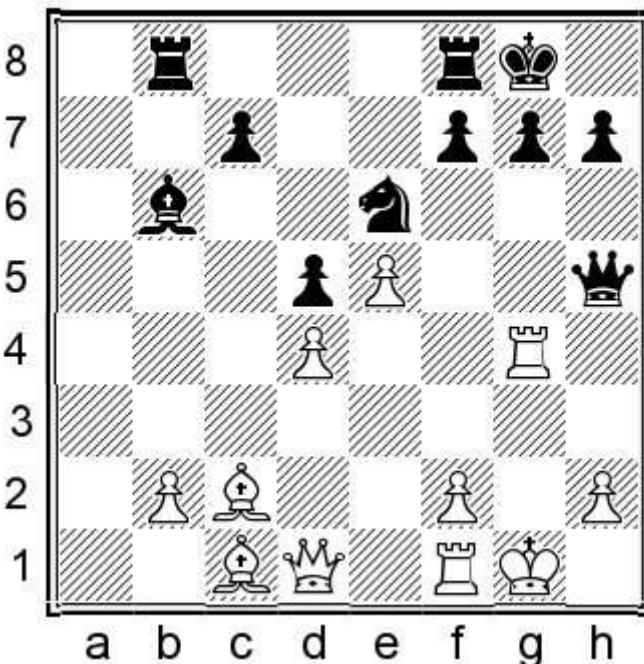
A brilliant move. White doesn't care that his structure is in ruins – he would rather collect some material and keep the position as open as possible,

enabling his bishops to work perfectly. The position is really difficult to evaluate.

During the game 19.e5 looked more worrying: 19...Nxf4 20.Rg3 Ne6

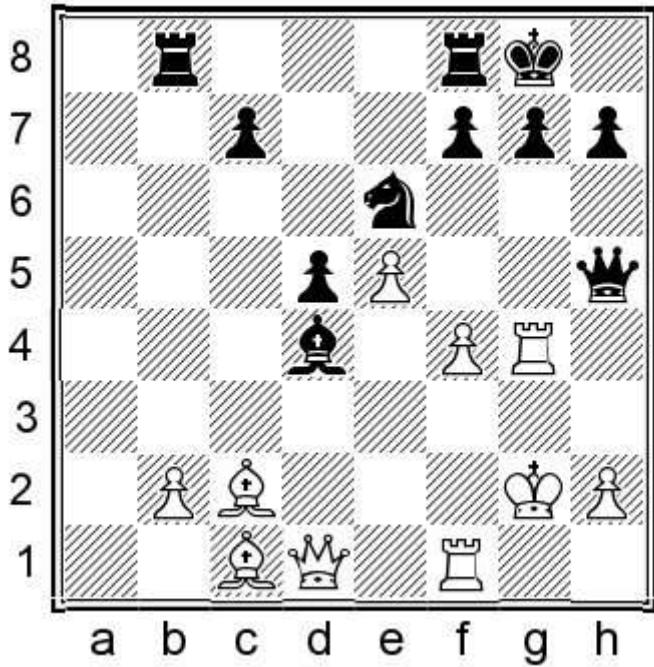
A) 21.Be3 f5 22.exf6 Rxf6 23.f4 c6= looks ok, e.g. 24.Rg4 Qh3 [24...Qh6!?] 25.Rg3 Qh4= is repetition.

B) 21.Rg4 Qh5!?



Position after: 21...Qh5!?

No-one likes to put the queen into basic tactical motifs like this one, but the Ark is an especially concrete defense so we need to be ready to play as actively as possible. 22.f4!? was a possibility I was afraid of for a while. [22.Be3 f5 23.exf6 Rxf6 and Black is active.; 22.Rxg7+?? Nxg7+ doesn't work, but this idea is always in the air, so be careful.] 22...Bxd4+ 23.Kg2



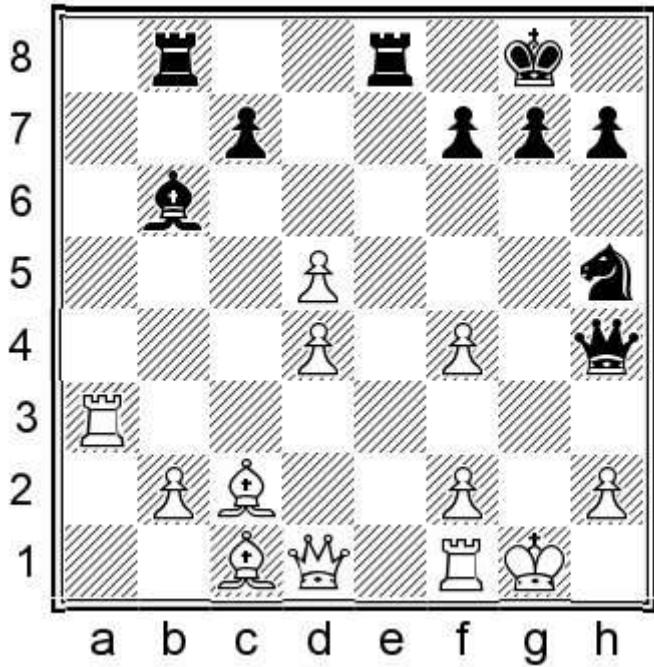
Position after: 23.Kg2

Certainly a critical position. 23...Kh8!? A very interesting reply.

B1) 24.f5?! Bxe5! 25.h3 Nd8™ 26.f6 g6 27.Qe1 Now 28.Rh4 or 28.Rg5 are big threats. [27.Qxd5 Ne6] 27...Bxb2! 28.Rb4 Bxc1! 29.Rxb8 Ba3³

B2) 24.h3 f5 [24...Bxb2!?] 25.exf6 Bxf6 26.f5 Nd8 27.Qxd5 and here Black should at least be fine after, say: 27...Nb7=

19...Rfe8!

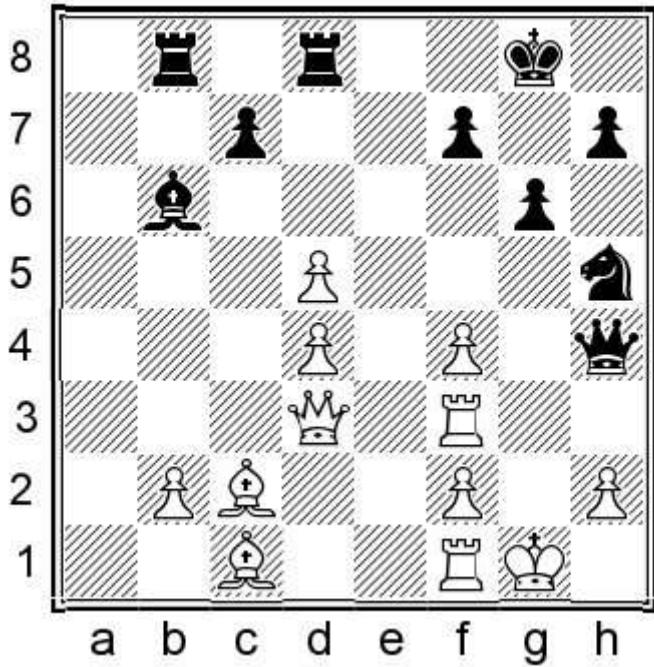


Position after: 19...Rfe8!

The best move as far as I can tell: Black keeps his options open and takes over the important e-file.

20.Be3

A) 20.Rf3!? White insists on the material. 20...Red8! A paradoxical move, but since the f3-square is occupied, this refinement makes sense. [20...Rbd8 21.Qd3 Nf6 22.Ba4! looks unpleasant.] 21.Qd3 g6

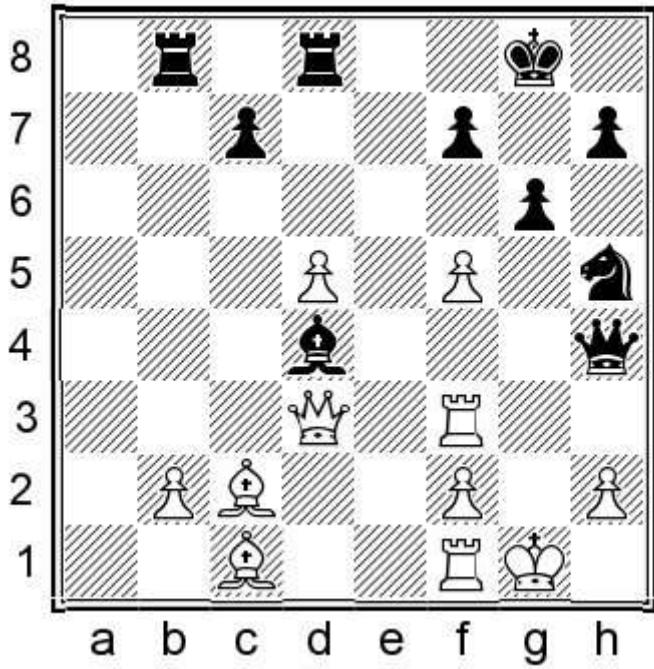


Position after: 21...g6

A1) 22.Bb3 Ng7 [22...Bxd4!?] 23.Bd2 Nf5,,

A2) 22.Kh1 Rxd5 23.Rh3 Qd8 24.Rg1 Ng7∞ [24...Bxd4 25.f5 Bxf2 26.fxg6 Rxd3 27.gxh7+ Kh8 28.Rg8+ Qxg8 29.hxg8=Q+ Kxg8 30.Rxd3 c5]

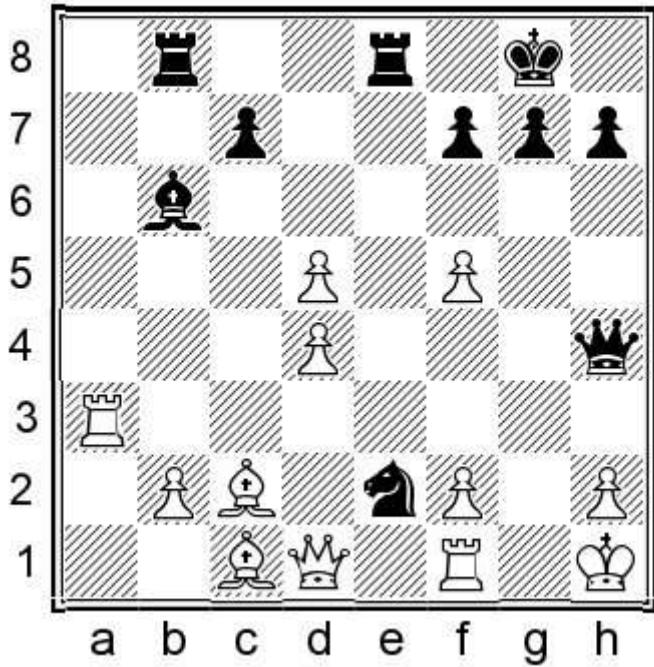
A3) 22.f5 Bxd4



Position after: 22...Bxd4

23.Kh1 [23.fxg6 hxg6∞ is good. 24.Rxf7? is a mistake here: 24...Kxf7 25.Qxg6+ Kf8 26.Bh6+ Ng7 27.Qf5+ Qf6–+] 23...Be5 24.h3 Qd4 25.Qxd4 Bxd4 26.Bb3 Kg7© White can hardly make progress.

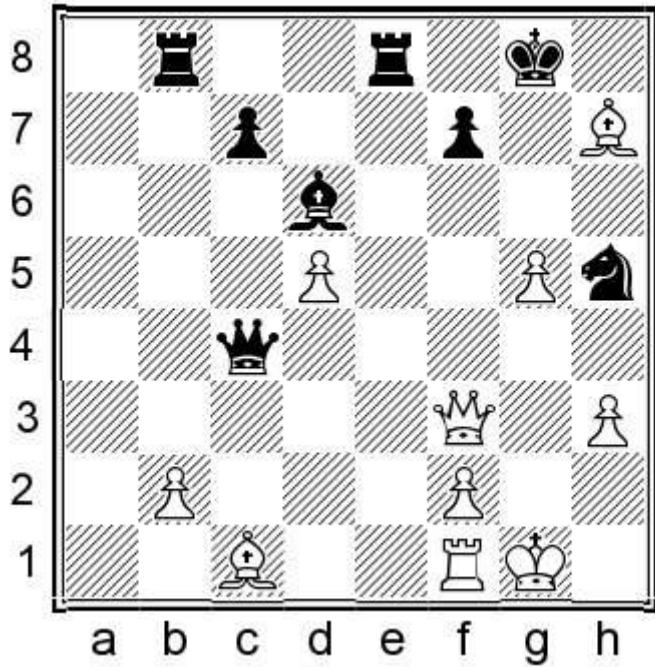
B) After 20.f5 Nf4 21.Kh1 Ne2!



Position after: 21...Ne2!

Black is doing alright: 22.Be3 Qg4 23.f3 Ng3+! 24.hxg3 [Or 24.Kg2 Nxf1+ 25.fxg4 Nxe3+ 26.Rxe3 Rxe3©] 24...Qh3+ 25.Kg1 Qxg3+=

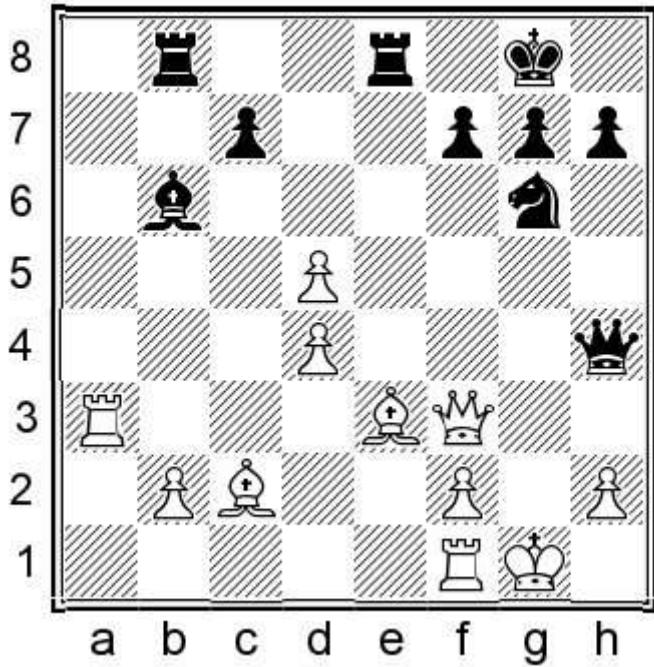
C) 20.Qf3 Bxd4 21.Ra4 Bc5 22.Rd1 [22.Rc4 Bd6 23.h3 g5!? 24.fxg5 Qxc4 25.Bxh7+]



Position after: 25.Bxh7+

25...Kxh7 26.Qxh5+ Kg7 27.Qh6+ Kg8 28.g6 fxg6 29.Qxg6+ Kh8=; 22.f5 Rb4 23.b3 h6@] 22...Rb4 23.h3 Rxa4 24.Bxa4 Rb8@ and Black has obvious compensation.

20...Nxf4 21.Qf3 Ng6



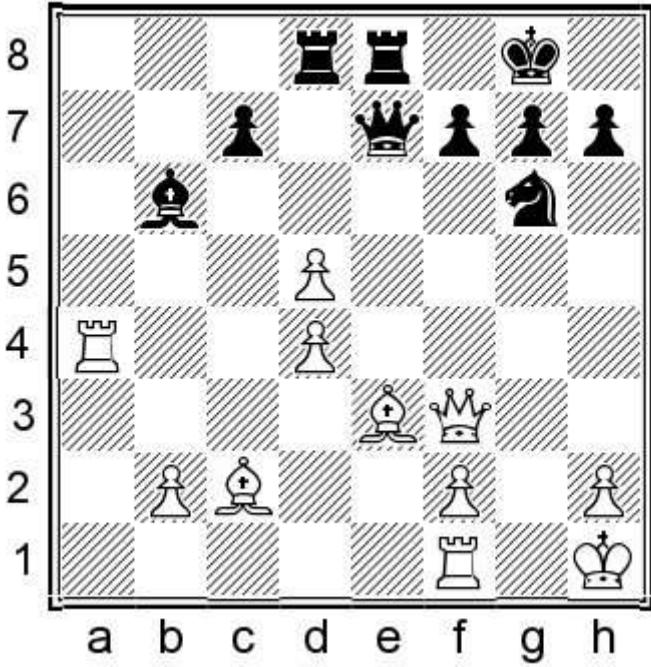
Position after: 21...Ng6

A hard position to evaluate, but I believe Black's chances are reasonable.

22.Ra4 Rbd8 23.Kh1

23.Rfa1 Qe7 24.Qf5 h6∞ The position is rock solid. To activate the bishop now with 25.Bf4? is ill-advised: 25...Qe1+! 26.Rxe1 Rxe1+ 27.Kg2 Nh4+-+

23...Qe7!



Position after: 23...Qe7!

It's very surprising how difficult it is to improve for either side.

24.Rg1

24.Bb3 Nh4 25.Qg4 h5 26.Qf4 Ng6 27.Qf3 Nh4=

24...Qd7 25.Bb3

25.Rg5 h6 26.Rh5 Qb5©

25...Qb5

25...Kh8 26.d6 Qxd6 27.Qxf7 Rf8©

26.Ra3

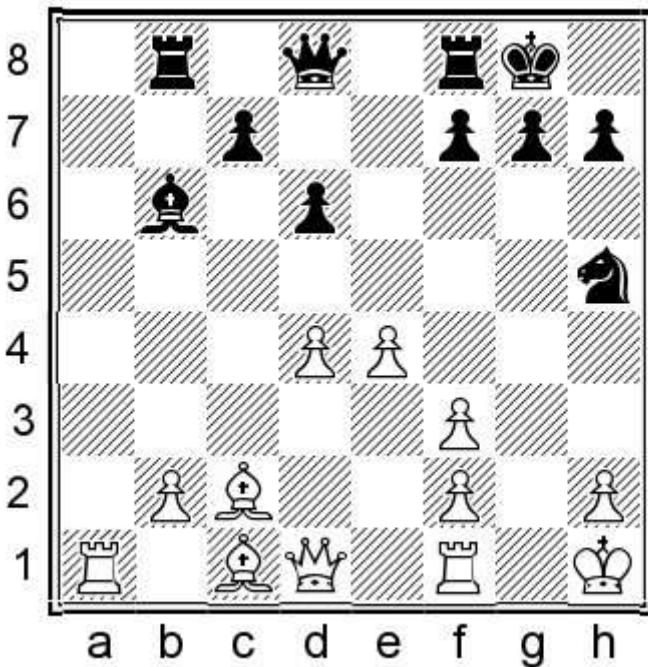
26.Qd1 Rxd5 27.Bc4 Qd7

26...Rf8!©

The position remains complicated

**g) 14.Nbxd4 Nxd4 15.cxd4 Bxf3 16.gxf3 Nh5 17.Kh1 Qf6
18.--**

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4 13.Bc2 exd4 14.Nbxd4 Nxd4 15.cxd4 Bxf3 16.gxf3 Nh5 17.Kh1



Position after: 17.Kh1

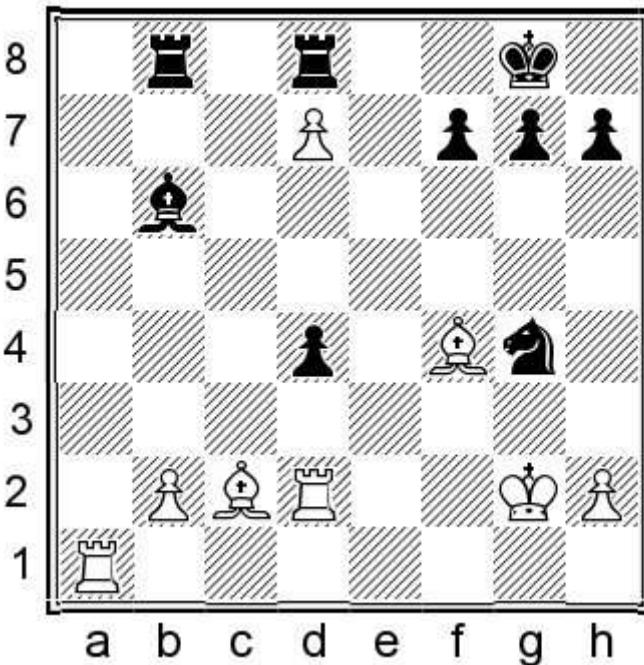
The most popular move is our main line, and half of the games in the database followed this approach. However, White has a huge amount of ideas here and some of them have never seen the light of day.

17...Qf6

Black's queen points towards 3 different weak spots: the f4-square and the f3- and d4-pawns.

18.Ra4

Alternatively: 18.f4!? Nxf4 19.Qf3 Nd5 20.Qxf6 Nxf6 21.Rd1 c5 22.Bf4 Rfd8 23.e5 Ng4 24.Kg2 cxd4 25.exd6 Nxf2 26.Rd2 Ng4 27.d7



Position after: 27.d7

27...Rb7 28.Ra6 Bc7 29.Bxc7 Rxc7 30.Ba4 Ne5 31.Rxd4 Kf8=

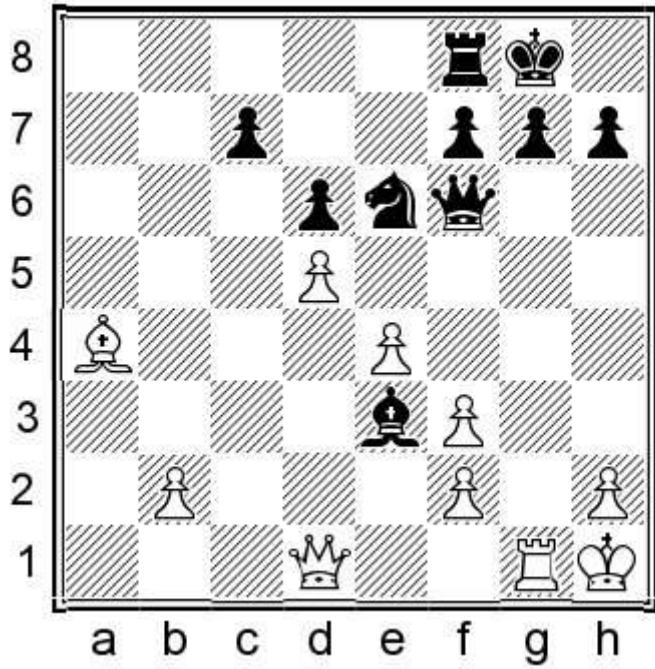
18...Ra8 19.Be3

19.e5 Stockfish 19...Qh4 20.Qd3 g6 21.exd6 cxd6 22.Qe4 Qh3 23.Kg1 Rac8©

19...Rxa4 20.Bxa4 Nf4 21.Rg1

21.Bd7 Ne6 22.Bxe6 fxe6 23.f4 d5 24.e5 Qf5 25.Rg1 Ra8! 26.Kg2!? Stockfish 26...Ra2 27.h3 Rxb2 28.Qa4 h6 29.Kh2 Qf7 30.Rg3 Kh7 31.Kg2

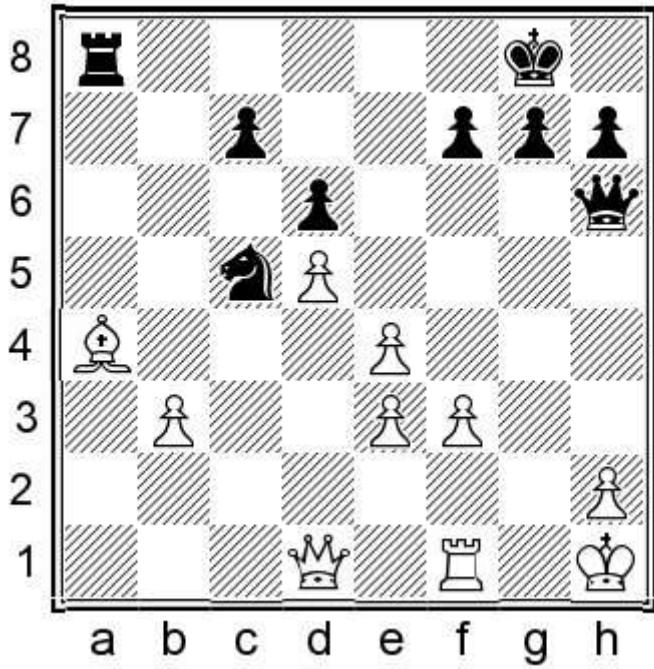
21...Ne6 22.d5 Bxe3



Position after: 22...Bxe3

23.dxe6

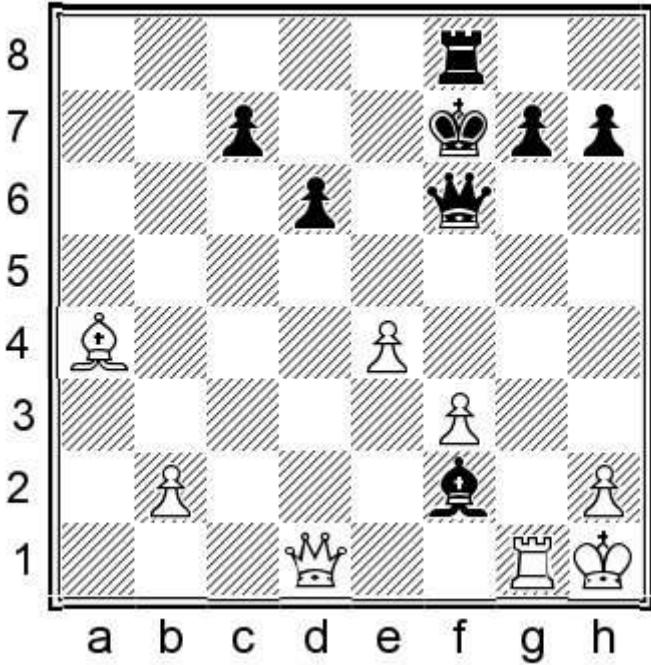
23.fxe3 Nc5 24.b3 is given by Svidler. The position is complicated, but I can imagine White players would definitely say no to playing with that awkward bishop on a4. The game might continue: 24...Ra8!? [24...Rb8 25.Rf1 g6 26.Qd4 Qh4©] 25.Rf1 Qh6!?



Position after: 25...Qh6!?

26.Qd4 [26.Re1 Rb8] 26...Qh3 27.Rf2 [27.Kg1=] 27...Qh4 28.Rg2 g6 29.Rg3 f5!? 30.exf5 Qxd4 31.exd4 Nxa4 32.bxa4 Rxa4=

23...Bxf2 24.exf7+ Kxf7!



Position after: 24...Kxf7!

A bit surprising, perhaps, but a perfectly fine capture.

25.Qd5+ Ke7 26.Rg2

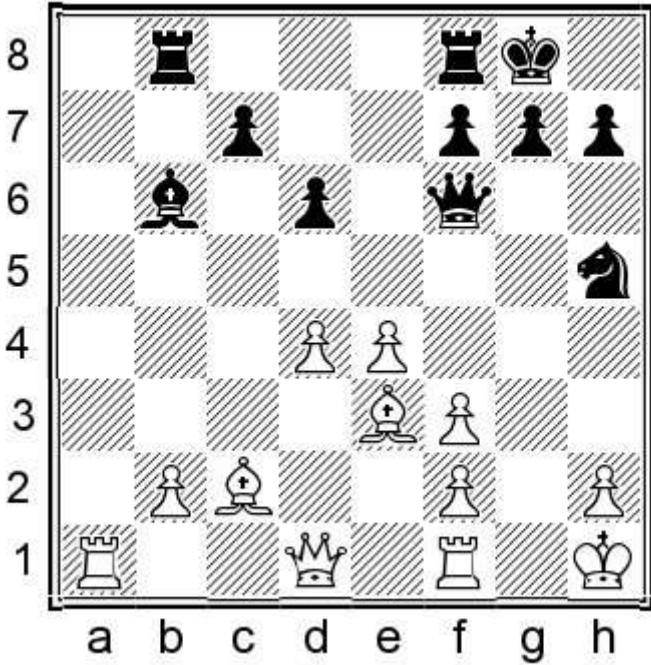
26.e5=

26...Bb6 27.e5 Qxe5 28.Qxe5+ dxe5 29.Rxg7+ Rf7 30.Rxf7+ Kxf7=

This is an inevitable draw.

**h) 14.Nbxd4 Nxd4 15.cxd4 Bxf3 16.gxf3 Nh5 17.Kh1 Qf6
18.Be3 c5 19.-- & 19.Rg1**

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4 13.Bc2 exd4 14.Nbxd4 Nxd4 15.cxd4 Bxf3 16.gxf3 Nh5 17.Kh1 Qf6 18.Be3



Position after: 18.Be3

Almost exclusively played.

18...c5

Objectively speaking I feel like this is the right path. Black attempts to undermine White's impressive center immediately.

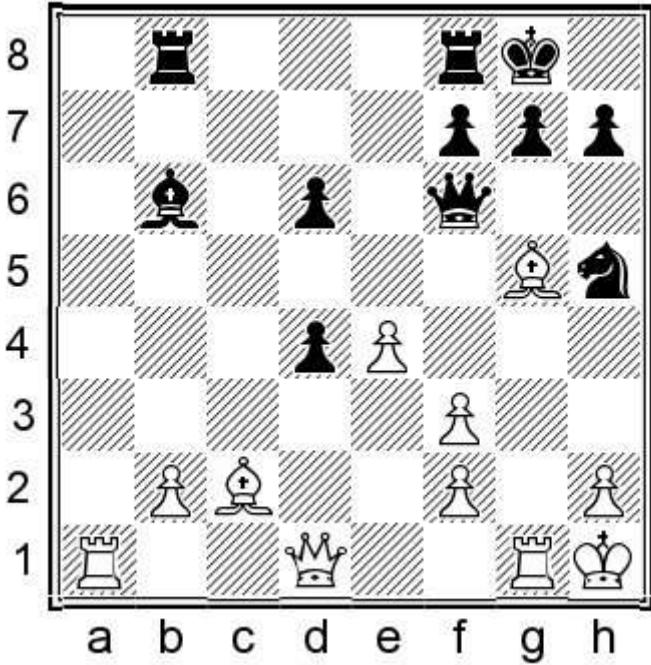
19.Rg1!?

A rare but very tricky move. I am surprised it hasn't being tested more.

A) 19.d5 c4 20.f4 [20.Ra4 Rfc8,,; 20.Ra6 Bxe3 21.fxe3 Rxb2 22.Qd2 c3,,] 20...g6 21.Ra4 Rfc8,,

B) 19.f4?! makes little sense: 19...cxd4 20.Qxh5 g6! 21.Qe2 dxe3 22.fxe3 Qxb2³

19...cxd4 20.Bg5



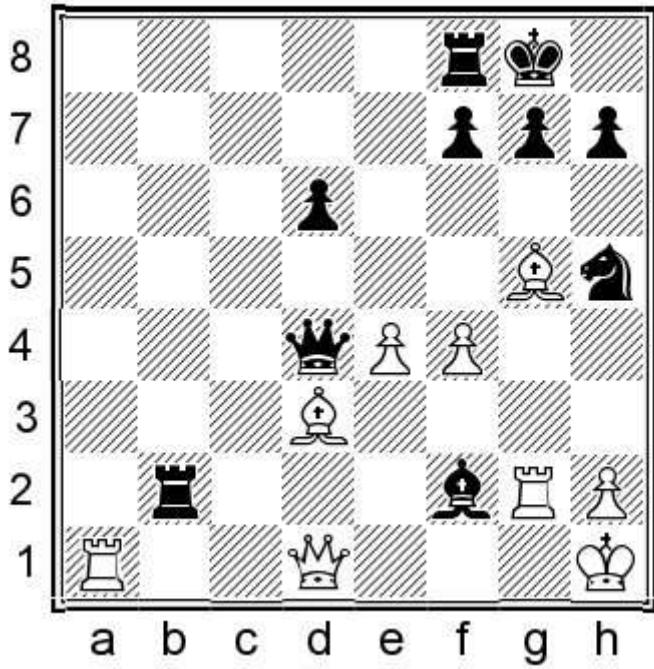
Position after: 20.Bg5

20...Qe5

Here both sides need to calculate precisely, though the complications tend to end peacefully.

21.f4!

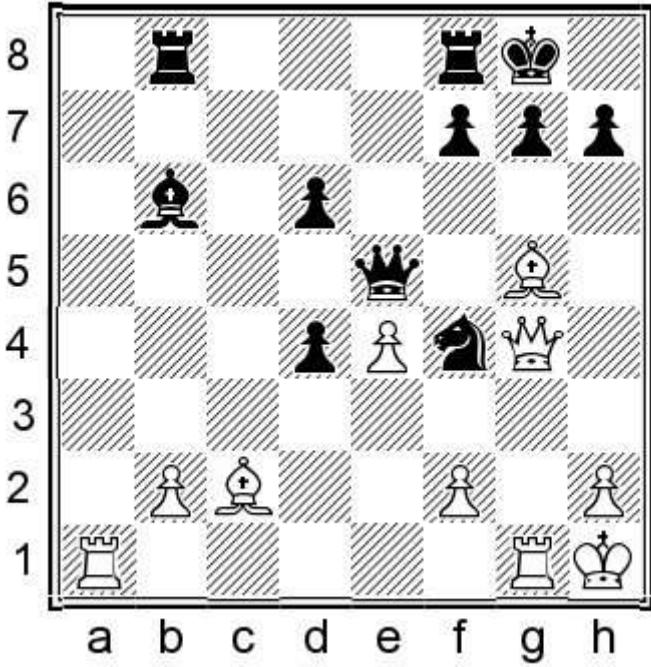
- A)** 21.Bh6 Now 22.f4 is threatened! 21...Qf6 [21...g6!?] 22.Bg5 Qe5=
- B)** 21.Bd3 Bd8 22.Bh6 Qf6 [22...Rxb2? 23.f4!] 23.Bg5 [23.Bc1 Nf4,,] 23...Qe5 24.Bh6=
- C)** 21.Rg4 d3! 22.Bxd3 Bxf2 23.f4 Qd4 24.Rg2 Rxb2



Position after: 24...Rxb2

25.f5 [25.Qxh5?? Qxd3–+] 25...h6!? [25...Rc8∞] 26.Bxh6 [26.Ra4 Rb1
27.Qxb1 Qxa4 28.Bxh6 Qd4 29.Bc1 Ra8 30.Bb2 Qb6,,] 26...Ng3+
27.hxg3 gxh6 28.Qg4+ Qg7 29.Qxg7+ Kxg7=

21...Nxf4 22.Qg4



Position after: 22.Qg4

22...Ng6

22...Ne6!? is also playable.

23.f4!

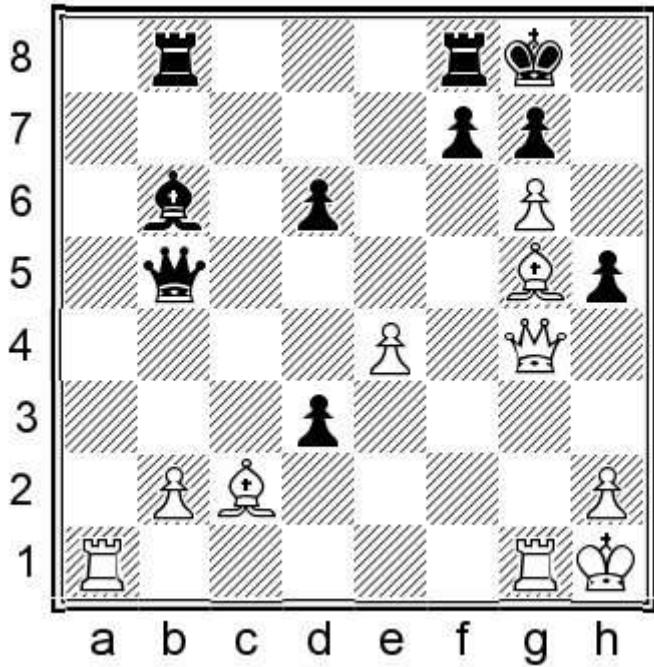
23.Bd3?! was played in Darini, P (2471) – Nezad, H (2366) Sharjah 2014. Here Black can play the precise 23...Qe6! with a pleasant position.

The text move is more to the point.

23...Qb5 24.f5

24.Qh3 d3!? [24...Qc6 25.Bd3 f6 26.Bh6 Rf7 27.f5 Ne5 28.Bxg7 Rxg7 29.Rxg7+ Kxg7 30.Rg1+ Ng6∞] 25.Bxd3 Qxb2 26.Rab1 Bxg1!? 27.Rxb2 Rxb2 28.Kxg1 Ra8=

24...d3 25.fxg6 h5!



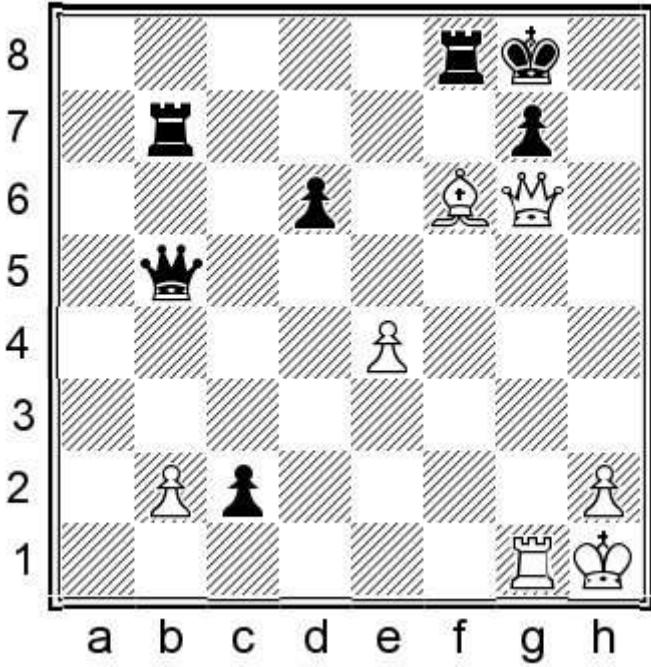
Position after: 25...h5!

An important zwischenzug.

26.Qxh5 fxg6 27.Qxg6 Bxg1 28.Rxg1

28.Bb1 d5! The only, but pretty nice defense. [28...Ra8?? 29.Bf6 Qb7 30.Rxa8 Rxa8 31.Bxd3+–] 29.Ba2 Rb6! 30.Qh5 [30.Bxd5+ Qxd5] 30...Ra6 31.Be7 Rxa2 32.Rxa2 Qc4=

28...dxc2 29.Bf6 Rb7



Position after: 29...Rb7

30.Qxg7+

30.Bxg7 Qe8! 31.Qg4 Rf4 32.Qxf4 Rxg7=

30...Rxg7 31.Rxg7+ Kh8 32.Rf7+ Kg8 33.Rg7+ Kh8=

The smoke has cleared and repetition is a logical outcome of these forcing sequences.

i) **14.Nbxd4 Nxd4 15.cxd4 Bxf3 16.gxf3 Nh5 17.Kh1 Qf6 18.Be3 c5 19.e5 Qe6 20.-- & 20.exd6 cxd4 21. Bxd4 Rfd8 22- - & 22.Bxb6**

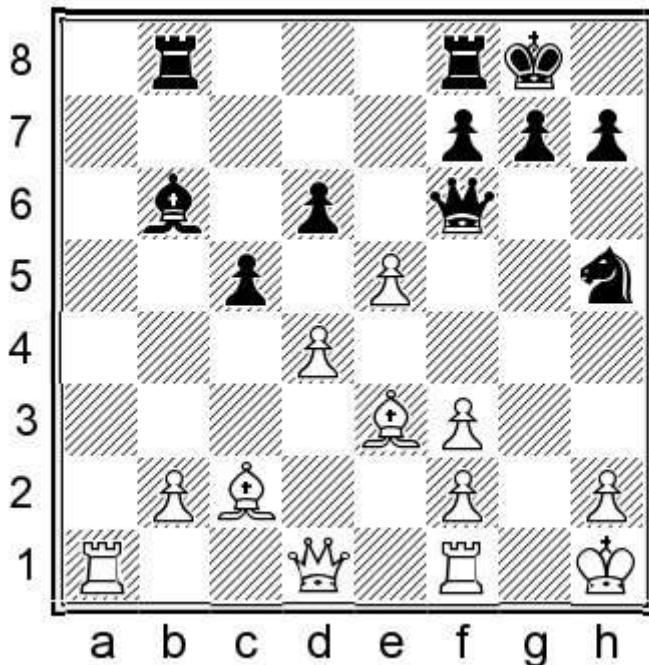
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4 13.Bc2 exd4 14.Nbxd4 Nxd4 15.cxd4 Bxf3 16.gxf3 Nh5 17.Kh1 Qf6 18.Be3 c5

18...g6 is given by Svidler in his video series. The reader may investigate that

as well.

19.e5!

This idea is the quintessential idea of White's setup! Now after 19...dxe5?! Black faces problems due to 20.dxc5! The alternatives didn't attract too many followers.

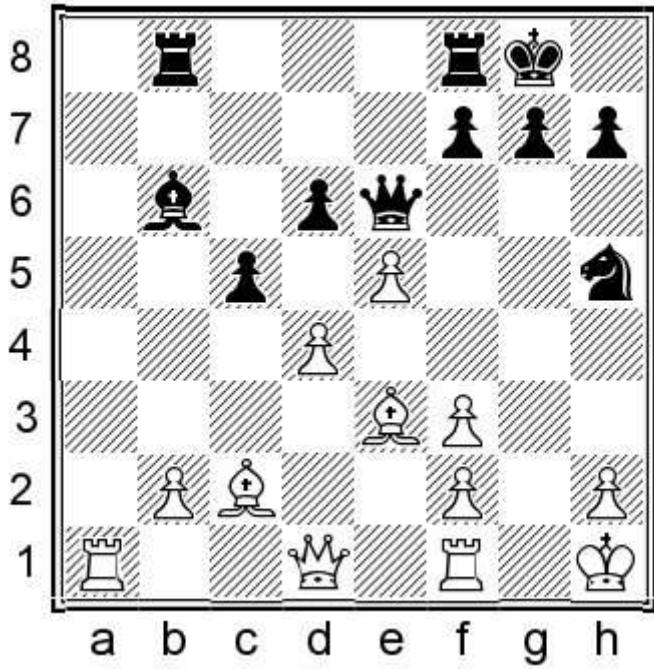


Position after: 19.e5!

19...Qe6!

The best reaction.

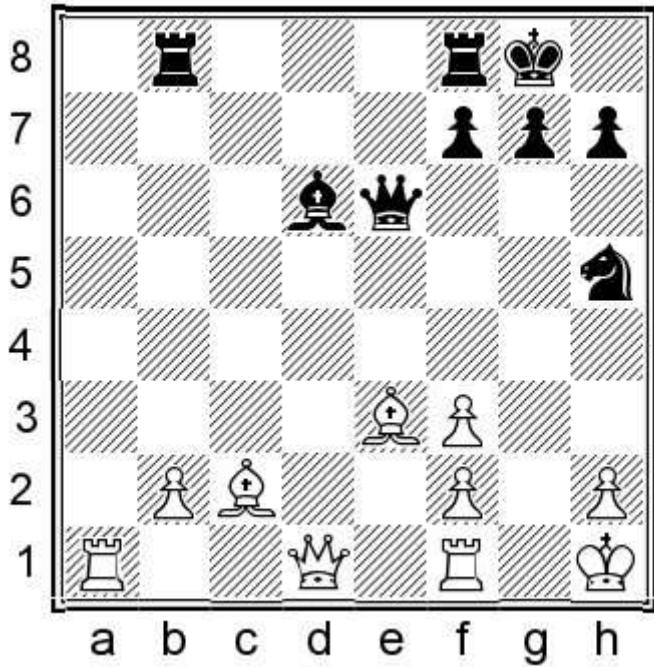
19...dxe5? 20.dxc5 is out of the question.



Position after: 19...Qe6!

20.exd6

- A) 20.dxc5!? Bxc5 21.exd6 [21.Qd3 g6 22.exd6 Bxd6 23.Ra6 Qh3 24.Rxd6 Qxf3+ 25.Kg1 Qg4+=] 21...Bxd6



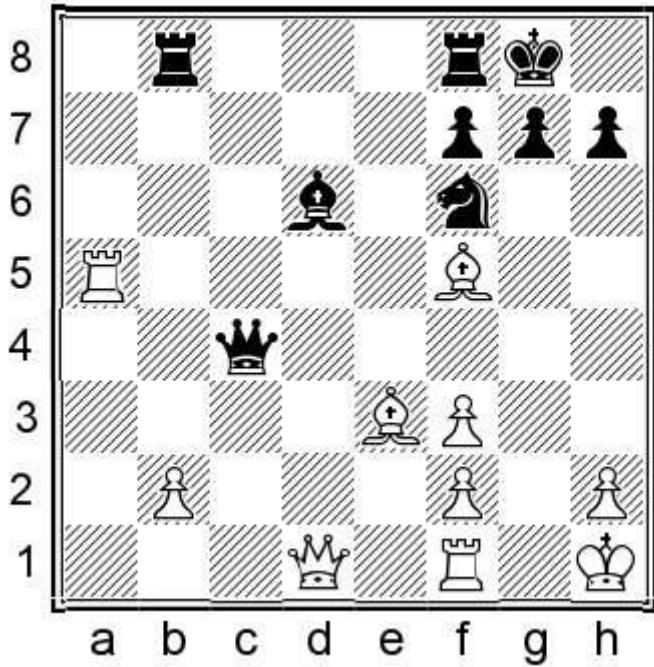
Position after: 21...Bxd6

A1) 22.Ra6 Rfd8 23.Re1 Qe5 24.f4 Nxf4 25.Ba7 Qg5 26.Qf3 [26.Rg1 Qb5 27.Qg4 Ng6] 26...Rbc8 27.Be3 Bb8=

A2) 22.Ra5 Nf6

A2.1) 23.Ra6 Rfd8 24.Rg1 Qe5 25.f4 [25.Rg2 Be7] 25...Qd5+ 26.Qxd5 Nxd5 27.Rd1 Nxe3 28.fxe3 Bc5 29.Rxd8+ Rxd8©

A2.2) 23.Bf5 Qc4!?



Position after: 23...Qc4!?

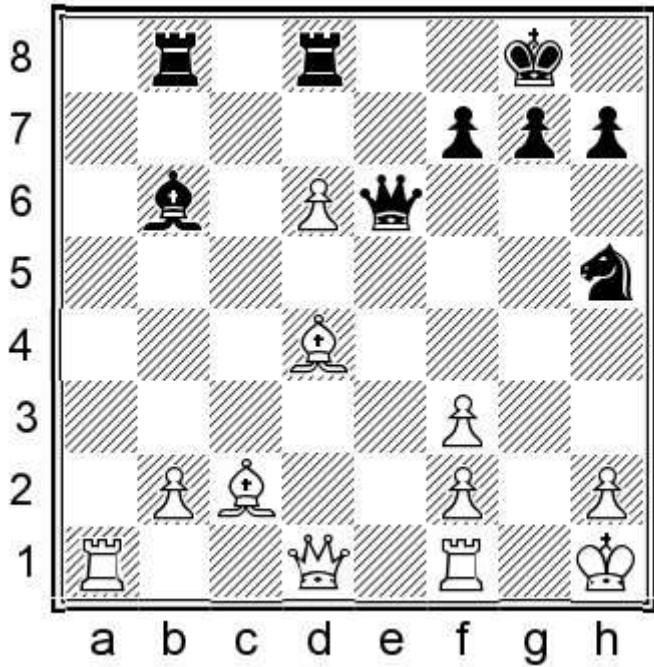
24.Rg1 Bxh2! 25.Ra4 Qc7 led to wild complications in Kovalev, V (2648) – Chigaev, M (2588) Lichess.org INT 2020.

B) 20.f4 cxd4 21.Qxh5 g6 22.Qf3 dxe3 23.fxe3 shouldn't worry Black, who can equalize with many moves, e.g. 23...Bc5.

20...cxd4!? 21.Bxd4

Here both games continued with 21...Qxd6 when after 22.Bc3 White enjoys a better game.

21...Rfd8!N

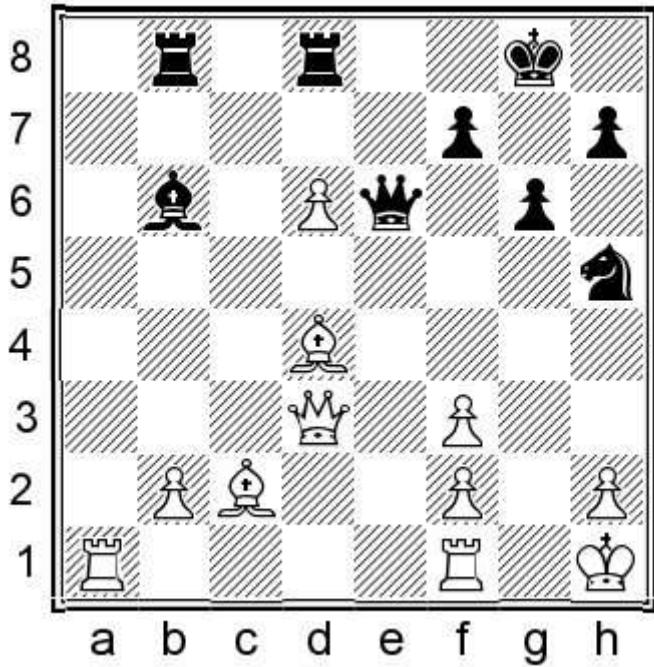


Position after: 21...Rfd8!N

However, this entirely logical novelty offers Black a very interesting way to counter White's most dangerous setup! I investigated three different ways for White to continue:

22.Bxb6

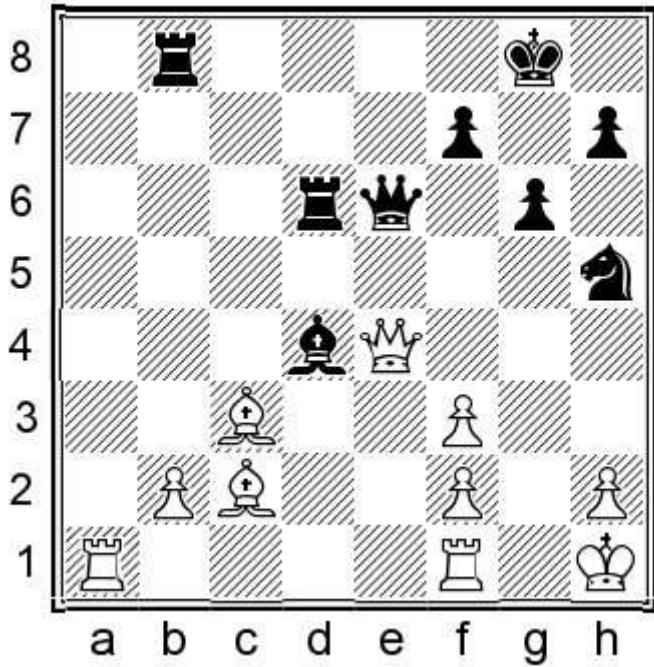
22.Qd3 g6



Position after: 22...g6

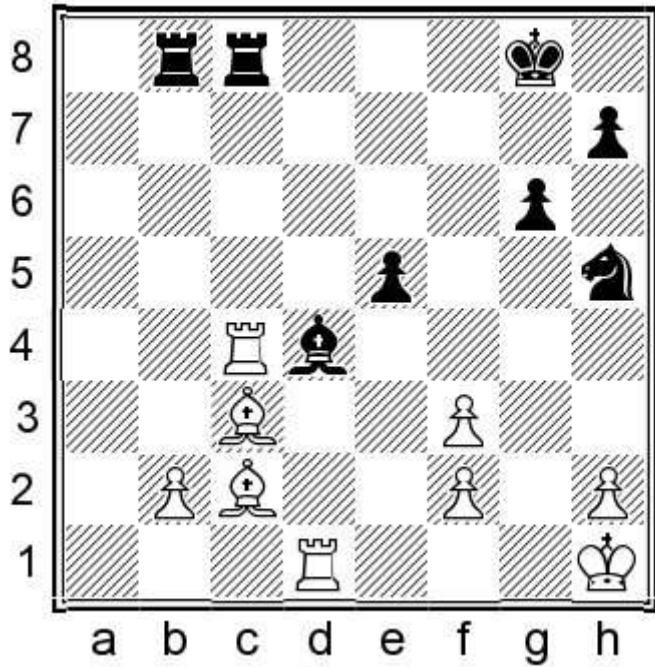
A) 23.Rae1 Nf4 24.Qe4 [24.Rxe6 Nxd3=] 24...Qxe4 25.Rxe4 Bxd4 26.Rxd4 Ne6 [26...Rxb2] 27.Rd2 [27.Rc4 Rxd6 28.Rb1 Rd2=] 27...Rxb2=

B) 23.Bc3 Rxd6 24.Qe4 Bd4!



Position after: 24...Bd4!

25.Qxe6 fxe6 This endgame offers little danger to the second player. After Black trades the dark-squared bishops off, he has little to worry about, e.g. 26.Rfd1 [26.Rad1 e5 27.b4 Rc8 28.Bb3+ Kg7 29.Bd2 Nf4©] 26...e5 27.Ra4 [27.Rab1 Stockfish 27...Rdb6 28.Rxd4!? exd4 29.Bxd4 Rb4 30.Bc3 R4b6 31.b4 Rc8 32.Bb3+ Kf8 33.Bd2 Ng7=] 27...Rdd8! 28.Rc4 Rdc8!

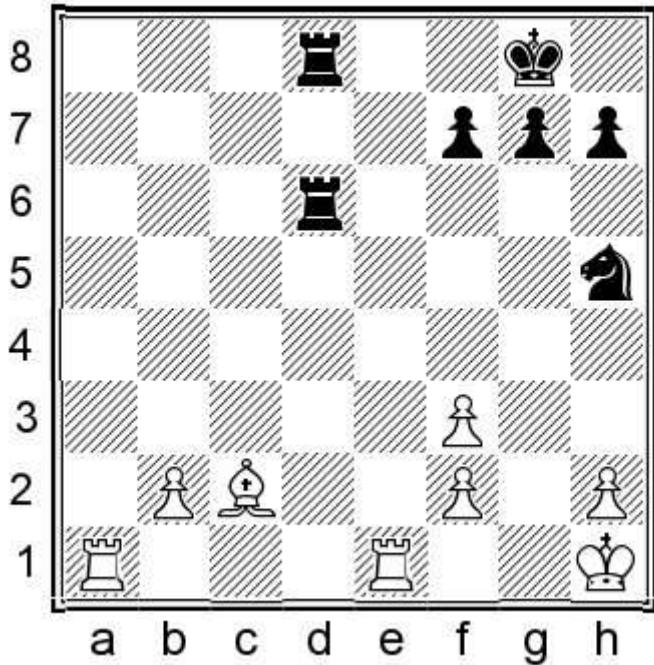


Position after: 28...Rdc8!

B1) 29.Bb3 Kg7 30.Bxd4 [30.Rcxd4 exd4 31.Bxd4+ Nf6] 30...exd4 31.Rxc8 Rxc8 32.Rxd4 Rb8 33.Rd3 Nf4©

B2) 29.Bxd4 Rxc4 30.Bxe5 Rxc2 31.Bxb8 Rxb2=

22...Rxb6 23.Re1! Qxd6 24.Qxd6 Rbxd6

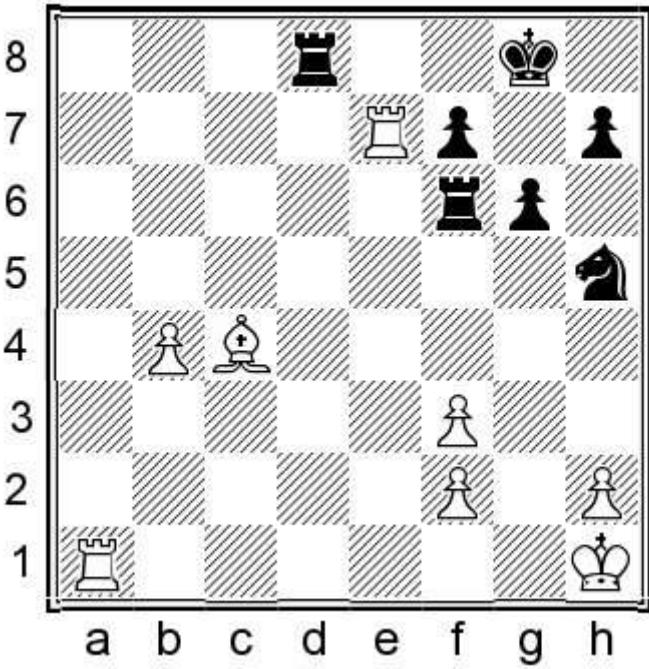


Position after: 24...Rbxd6

At first I was sceptical about this position, but the more I looked at it, the more I believed that this should be a draw. White's damaged pawn structure makes itself felt even in an endgame like this. Here, instead of remembering concrete variations, you should rather understand the defensive methods. I offer you some examples as an illustration.

25.Rad1

A) 25.Re7 Rb6 26.Bd3 [26.Rd7 Rdb8 27.b3 g6@] 26...g6 27.Bc4 Rf6 28.b4



Position after: 28.b4

28...Rxf3 29.b5 Rxf2 30.b6 Rdd2 31.Re2 Rfxe2 32.Bxe2 Rxe2 33.b7 Rb2 34.Ra8+ Kg7 35.b8=Q Rxb8 36.Rxb8=

B) 25.Ra7 Rb6=

25...g6

25...Kf8!? 26.Rxd6 Rxd6 27.b4 Rd2 28.Ba4 Nf6 29.Bc6 Rxf2 30.b5 Rb2=

26.b4 Rxd1 27.Rxd1+ 28.Bxd1 Kf8=

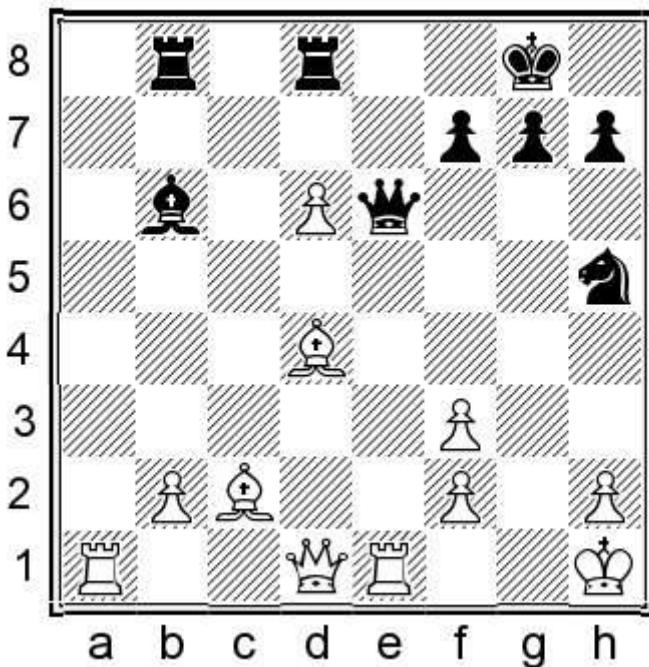
This is similar to the next subchapter...

**j) 14.Nbxd4 Nxd4 15.cxd4 Bxf3 16.gxf3 Nh5 17.Kh1 Qf6
18.Be3 c5 19.e5 Qe6 20.exd6 cxd4 21. Bxd4 Rfd8 22.Re1**

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5 7.c3 d6 8.a4 Rb8 9.d4 Bb6 10.axb5 axb5 11.Na3 0-0 12.Nxb5 Bg4 13.Bc2 exd4

14.Nbxd4 Nxd4 15.cxd4 Bxf3 16.gxf3 Nh5 17.Kh1 Qf6 18.Be3 c5 19.e5! Qe6! 20.exd6 cxd4!? 21.Bxd4 Rfd8!N 22.Re1

Probably the most dangerous try.



Position after: 22.Re1

22...Qxd6!

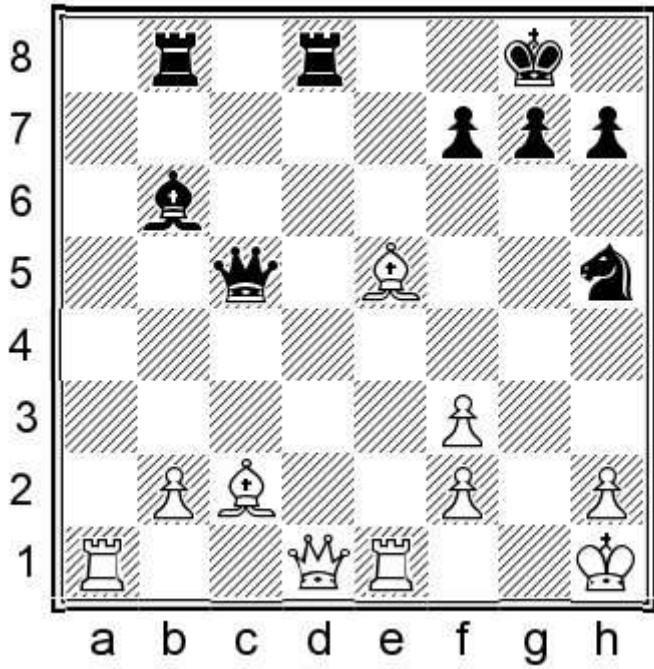
22...Qh3 23.Re4 Rxd6 24.Qe2²

23.Be5!

The only question.

23.Qd3 Qh6!

23...Qc5!



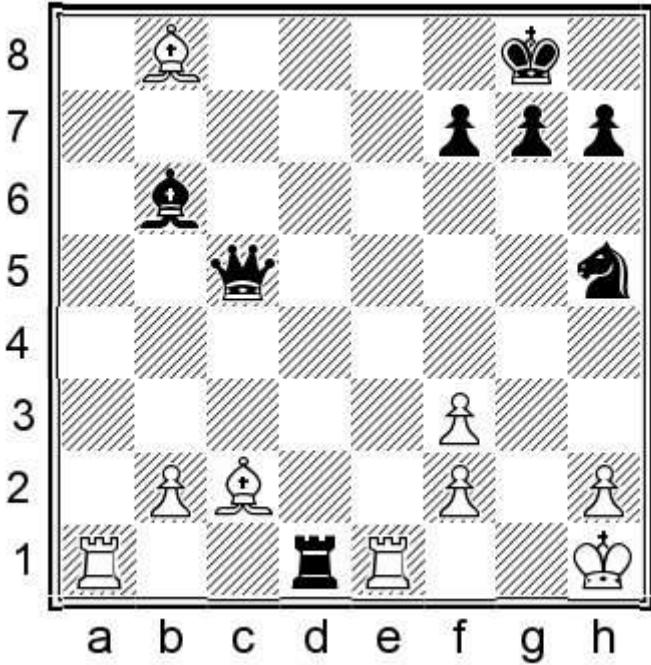
Position after: 23...Qc5!

And finally we have arrived at the last critical position in the book! White has several ways to confuse Black:

24.Qb1!?

This odd-looking move is White's best attempt.

A) 24.Bxb8 is probably the most tempting and the least good. 24...Rxd1



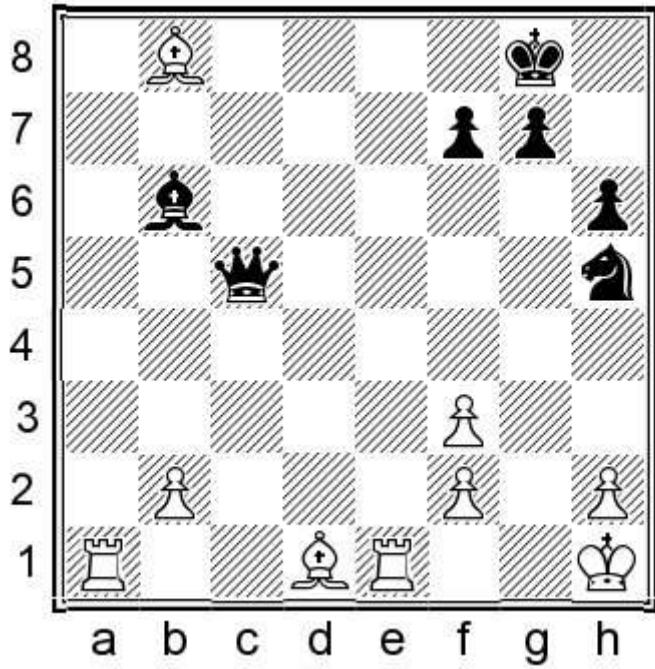
Position after: 24...Rxd1

A1) 25.Raxd1 g6! Black has no problems.

A1.1) The active 26.Re8+?! may lead to a disaster: 26...Kg7 27.Be5+? Kh6!–+ Black kings feels alright on h6. What's more, White is already lost according to the engines! 28.Be4 Qb5!? 29.Re7 [29.Rb8 Qe2] 29...Bxf2!

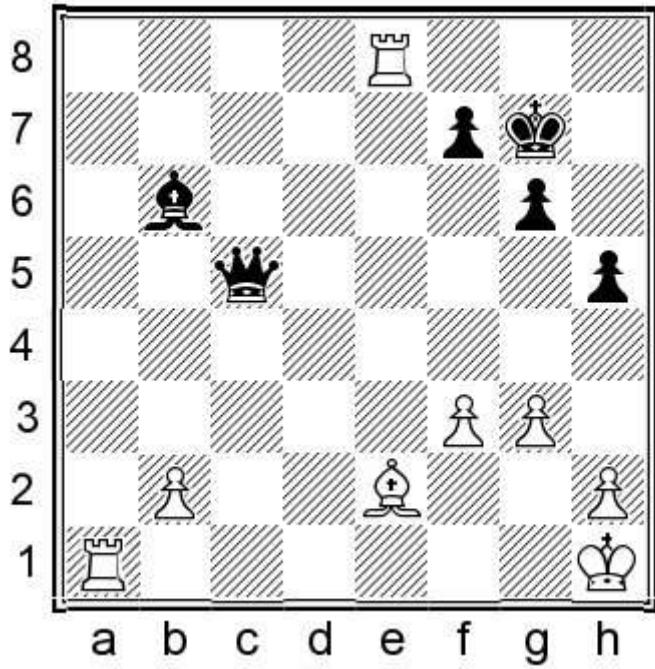
A1.2) 26.Re2 Bc7! 27.Bxc7 Qxc7©

A2) 25.Bxd1!? A bit trickier. 25...h6!



Position after: 25...h6!

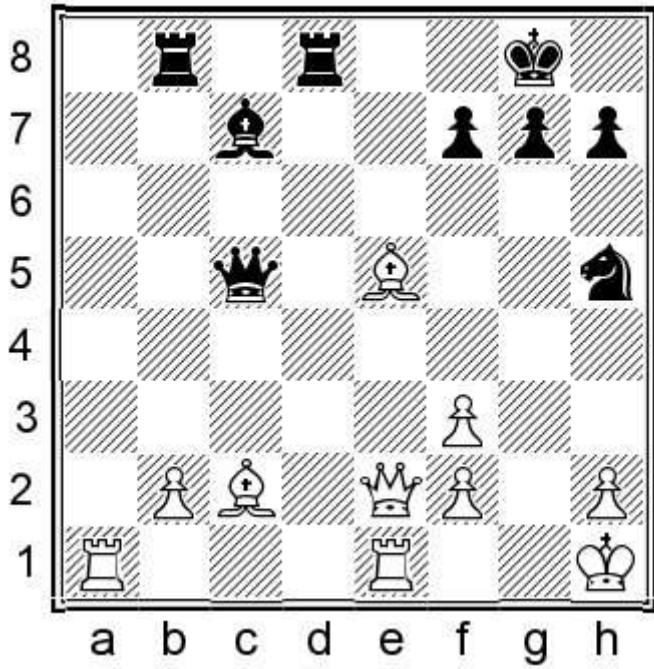
The correct back-rank opener. 26.Bg3 [26.Re2 Stockfish 26...Bc7 27.Bc2 g5 28.Bg6!? Nf4 29.Rc2 Qb5 30.Bxf7+ Kxf7 31.Bxc7 Qb3 32.Rc3 Qxb2=] 26...Nxg3+ 27.fxg3 g6 28.Re8+ Kg7 29.Be2 h5!



Position after: 29...h5!

Black creates targets on the kingside. 30.Re4 h4 31.gxh4 Bc7©

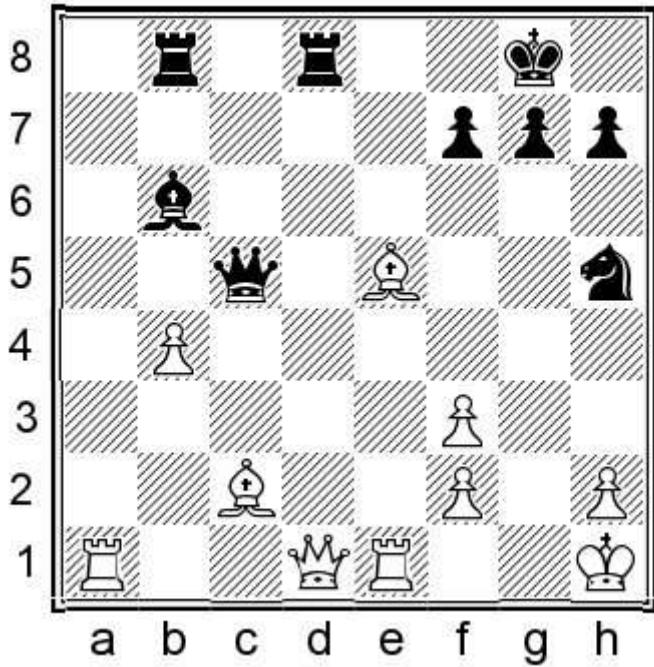
B) 24.Qe2 Bc7!



Position after: 24...Bc7!

An important idea – it's in Black's interest to trade off these bishops!
25.b4!? Qxe5 26.Qxe5 Bxe5 27.Rxe5 g6 28.b5 Rd2 29.Be4 Nf4 30.Bc6 Rxf2,, Black gets counterplay.

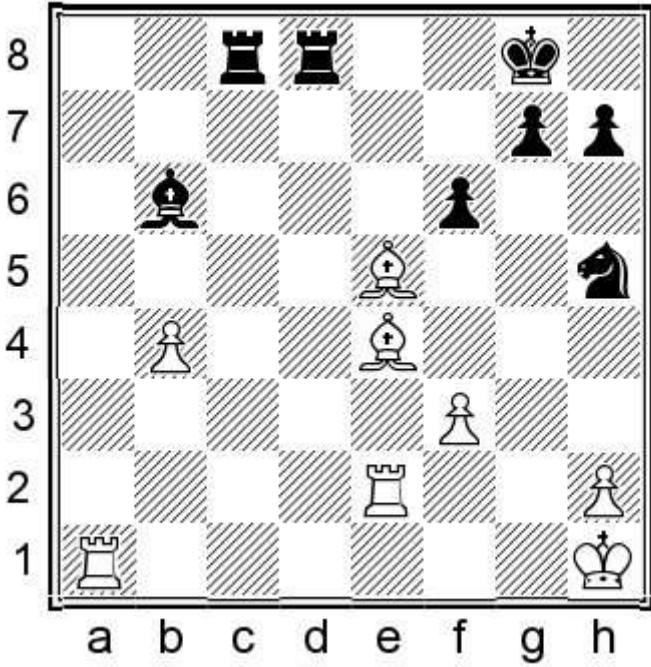
C) 24.b4!?



Position after: 24.b4!?

A funny and tricky idea, but Black holds. 24...Qxf2 [24...Qxb4?! 25.Bxb8 Rxd1 26.Rxd1 It's really interesting that, without the b2-pawn, Black's defence is more difficult. 26...Qc3 27.Be4 g6 28.Rac1f] 25.Qe2 Qxe2 26.Rxe2 Rbc8 White has the bishop pair and a potentially dangerous passer, but Black's pieces co-ordinate just too well.

C1) 27.Be4 f6!



Position after: 27...f6!

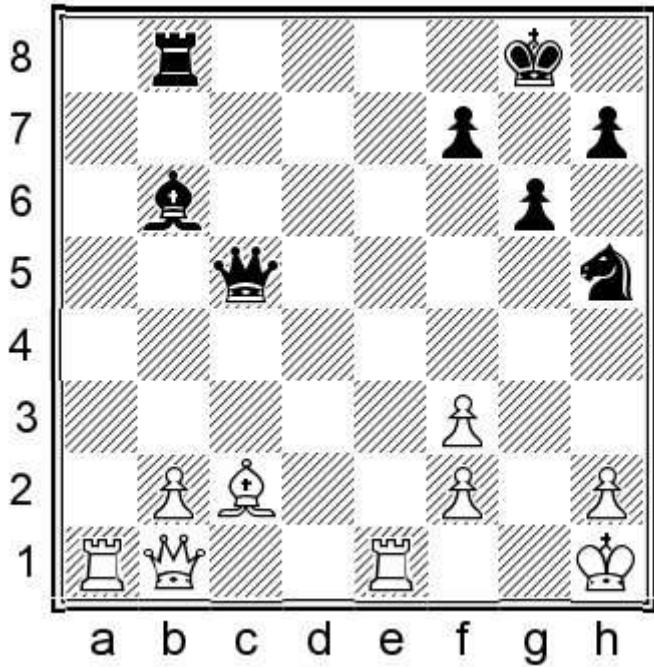
28.Bg3 [28.Bb2 Nf4 29.Rc2 Rxc2 30.Bxc2 Rd2 31.Bb3+ Kf8 32.Bc1 Rd3,,] 28...Nxf3+ 29.hxg3 Rxc4=

C2) 27.Ra6 Bc7! Once again eliminating the important bishop in time.
 28.Bxc7 Rxc7 29.b5 [29.Rd2 Rb8 30.Rb6 Re8=] 29...Nf4 [29...g6=]
 30.Rd2 Rb8 31.Rc6 Re7 32.h4 g6=

24...g6!

A cool reply.

25.Bxb8 Rxb8

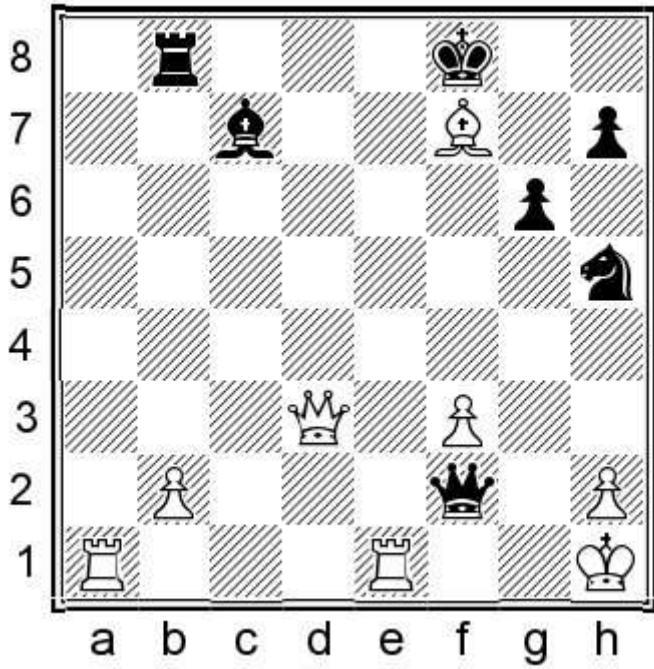


Position after: 25...Rxb8

Despite White's huge material advantage, Black keeps approximately even chances, thanks to the extremely weak dark squares in White's camp (especially around the king) and the nice coordination of the black pieces. Here come some lines to illustrate my point:

26.Be4

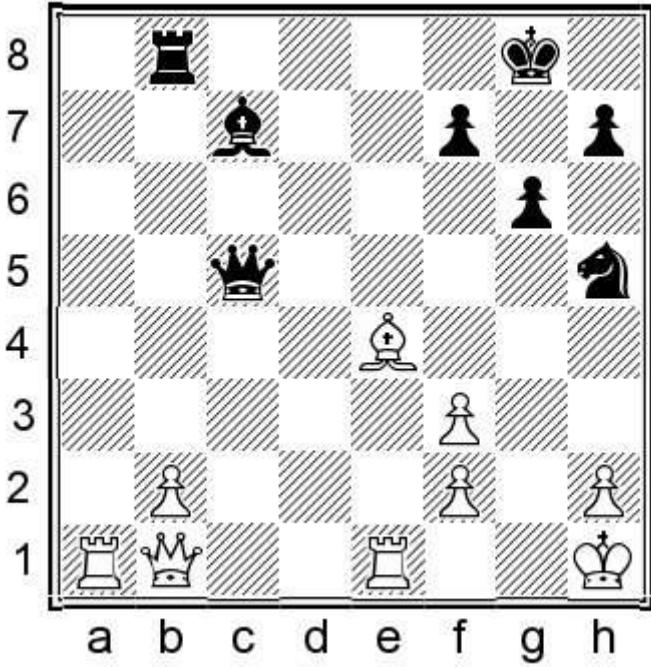
26.Bb3 Bc7 Aiming at the king! 27.Qd3 [27.Re3 Bf4 28.Rc3 Qxf2 29.Qc2 Qh4 30.Bxf7+ Kg7!?©] 27...Qxf2 28.Bxf7+ Kf8!



Position after: 28...Kf8!

29.Re2 Qh4 30.Rc2 [30.Rg1 Ng3+ 31.Rxg3 Bxg3©] 30...Ng3+ 31.Kg1
[31.Kg2 Nf5 32.Kh1 Ng3+=] 31...Bb6+ 32.Kg2 Nf5=

26...Bc7!



Position after: 26...Bc7!

26...Qxf2 27.Rf1 Qh4 28.Qe1 Qf6²

27.Qc1

27.Re3 Qd6 28.Qg1 Rxb2©

27...Qe5! 28.f4 Nxf4 29.Bg2

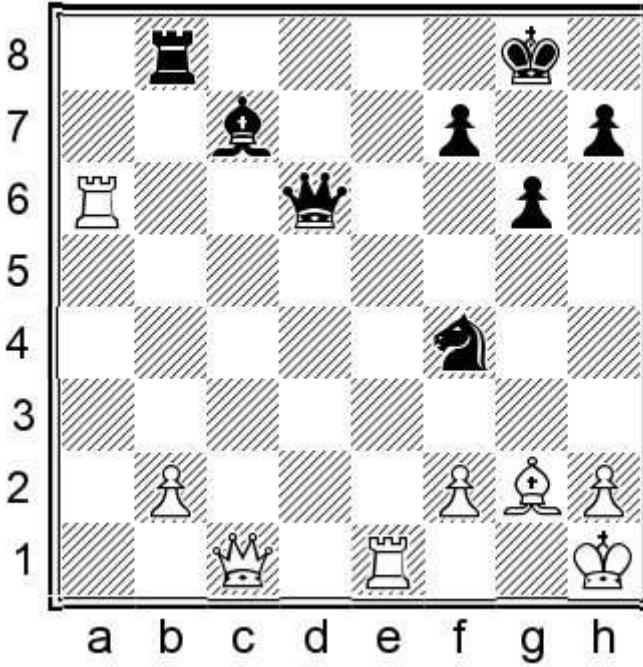
A) 29.Bxg6?? would be a huge a mistake: 29...Ne2 30.Bxf7+ Kg7!–+ abnd Black wins.

B) 29.Ba8 Qd6 30.Qc6 Qxc6+ 31.Bxc6 Rxb2 transposes to 29.Bg2.

29...Qd6

29...Ne2? 30.f4!

30.Ra6!



Position after: 30.Ra6!

The final trick.

30.Qc6 Qxc6 31.Bxc6 Rxb2 32.Re7 Bd6 33.Rd7 Bc5©

30...Qd8!

And now White is also facing some serious threats.

31.Qe3

31.Ra3 Qd6 32.Qc6 Nxg2 33.Qxg2 Rxb2= is drawish.

31...Nd3 32.Rf1

32.Re2 Bb6 33.Qf3 Nxf2+ 34.Rxf2 Bxf2 35.Qxf2 is the same story.

32...Bb6

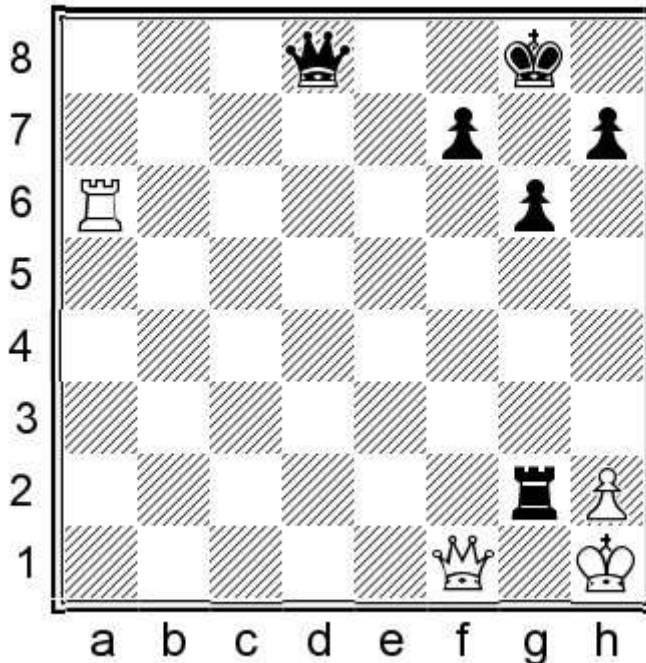
Possibly not the only way, but the most entertaining one!

33.Qd2 Nxf2+! 34.Rxf2 Bxf2 35.Qxf2 Rxb2! 36.Qf1

A) 36.Qxb2?? Qd1+

B) 36.Ra8 Rb1+ 37.Qg1 Rxg1+ 38.Kxg1 Qxa8 39.Bxa8= is a draw.

36...Rxg2!



Position after: 36...Rxg2!

Spectacular. I once managed to force a draw using similar tactics in 2008 against the famous GM, Ivan Sokolov.

37.Kxg2

37.Qxg2 Qd1+=

37...Qg5+=

There's no way to escape from the checks.

Table of Contents

[Title page](#)

[Key to Symbols](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Chapter 1 – The Exchange Variation](#)

[Chapter 2 – Sidelines on the 5th Move](#)

[Chapter 3 – 5.Nc3](#)

[Chapter 4 – 5.d3](#)

[Chapter 5 – 7.d3 & 7.Nc3](#)

[Chapter 6 – The Pseudo-Sacrifice 7.Nxe5](#)

[Chapter 7 – The Immediate 7.a4](#)

[Variations h-m](#)

[Chapter 8 – Sidelines on 8th and 9th Moves](#)

[Chapter 9 – The Closed Line – 10.a5](#)

[Chapter 10 – Sidelines Starting on the 10th Move](#)

[Chapter 11 – Alternatives on Move 13](#)

[Chapter 12 – 13.Re1](#)

[Chapter 13 – 13.Bc2 – Main Line](#)

The Modernized Arkhangelsk Variation



Viktor Erdos

Viktor Erdos was born in 1987, Tapolca, Hungary and learned to play chess at the age of 8. His trainers were his father, IM Ferenc Berebora (2000-2002) and GM Peter Lukacs (2003-2011). He became an IM in 2003 and GM in 2007, with a peak rating of 2661. He is a permanent member of the national Hungarian team since 2011, and represented his country on the first board on several occasions.

This book is a complete black repertoire starting from 3.Bb5 a6, the exchange line being the first chapter. We agreed on offering a full package which should become useful for many years to come!

My aim with my book was to provide the reader new insights of this remarkable variation named '*The Ark*', and to entertain Black with spectacular and resourceful lines. I must stress that my book will also be interesting for those who just want to enjoy chess not only for the fans of this line seeking revolutionary ideas! Of course you don't need to memorize everything to understand our variation successfully. Longer lines tend to be examples of how the game might develop, which will help you to enhance your understanding.

I hope my book will attract many chess and club players and that plenty of new games will surface soon! GM Viktor Erdos - May 2022.



Approved by the Grandmaster

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