

starting out: the c3 Sicilian

JOHN EMMS



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Introduction

What is the c3 Sicilian?

The c3 Sicilian is a popular way of meeting the most famous opening in chess history, and it arises after the moves 1 e4 c5 2 c3 (**Diagram 1**).

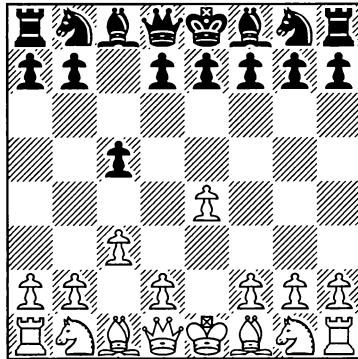


Diagram 1 (B)
The c3 Sicilian

The idea behind White's second move is easy understand because it follows general guidelines concerning central control. White simply wishes to play d2-d4 and to be able to recapture with a pawn, thus creating two pawns abreast in the centre.

Why play the c3 Sicilian?

I began playing the c3 Sicilian nearly 30 years ago, and I'm just as happy playing it

now as I was back then. I've always been attracted by its solid positional foundation, and yet it's also an active opening. Furthermore, the positions that are reached are generally open rather than closed, and White's development is straightforward and easy to understand. There's also a practical advantage which may appeal to those who have only a finite amount of time to study chess: despite some development in the theory over the years, there's still far less for a White player to learn than in the Open Sicilian with 2 Nf3 and 3 d4.

A Brief History of the c3 Sicilian

The c3 Sicilian was initially championed in the late 19th century by the Lithuanian player Semyon Alapin, and for this reason it is sometimes referred to as the Alapin Variation of the Sicilian. It was used sporadically for a long time, but in the early 1970s it began to receive much more attention, thanks in no small part to the games and analysis of players such as Sveshnikov, Vasiukov and Dvoretsky. The c3 Sicilian steadily became more popular, and by the mid 1990s it was being used by some of the World's greatest players, for example Karpov, Kramnik, Adams and Ivanchuk. In recent years there have been quite a few grandmasters who have specialized in the c3 Sicilian, enriching the theory of the opening with their creative ideas. A special mention goes to the efforts of players such as Tiviakov, Rozentalis, Pavasovic, Nisipeanu, Sermek, Smagin and Rausis (and many apologies to those I've forgotten).

Black's Main Responses

Black has two main replies to White's second move: 2...d5 and 2...Nf6. Their popularity when compared to other replies is overwhelming and for this reason they occupy a vast majority of the space in this book. Both moves aim to exploit the fact that White's queen's knight can no longer reach c3.

Chapters 1-2 deal with 1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 (**Diagram 2**).

Black's early queen sortie into the centre is justified because White cannot attack it with Nc3. Having said that, Black cannot always rely upon this generalization. For a start he must always be wary of the possibility of c3-c4, while any pawn trade on d4 suddenly re-opens the possibility of Nc3.

2...Nf6 attacks the e4-pawn and encourages it to move forward. The basic position after 3 e5 Nd5 (**Diagram 3**) is covered in Chapters 3-4. The traditional main line is 4 d4 cxd4 5 cxd4, when White has successfully achieved his goal of placing two pawns in the centre. On the other hand Black can argue that because the e-pawn has advanced to the fifth rank it can be attacked more easily (...d6 is an obvious way to do this). As well as the traditional main line, in this book we also study

gambit ideas (5 Nf3 instead of 5 cxd4) and lines involving delaying or omitting the advance of White's d-pawn (4 Nf3 instead of 4 d4).

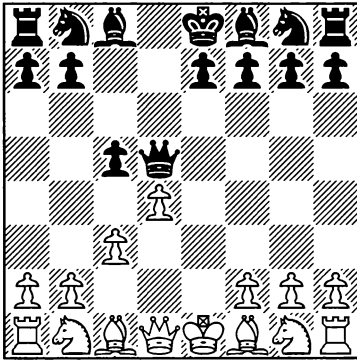


Diagram 2 (B)

Basic position for 2...d5

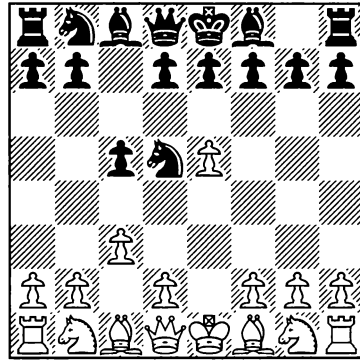


Diagram 3 (W)

Basic position for 2...Nf6

Pawn Structures

The c3 Sicilian offers you considerable experience in dealing with typical pawn structures, ones that are not only seen in this opening but also in many others, and this should certainly help you to improve your overall understanding of the game.

Given that whole middlegame books have been devoted to just a few pawn structures, it's impossible in an opening book like this to give them the full attention they really deserve. I have tried, however, to highlight important positional features of the pawn structures as they arise in the theory sections and the illustrative games. At this stage I just want to classify and very briefly describe some of the main ones that are seen in the book.

1. The Isolated Queen's Pawn

The isolated queen's pawn (IQP) is the most common pawn structure in the c3 Sicilian. In fact, it's one of the most important pawn structures in chess, since it also arises from various other openings, for example the Caro-Kann, the Queen's Gambit, the Nimzo-Indian and the English Opening.

Purely from a static viewpoint the d-pawn is a weakness, since there is no adjacent pawn that can protect it and it lies on a half-open file. This weakness becomes more significant as pieces are exchanged and the game heads towards the ending. The d-pawn, however, also has many strengths: it promises White a space advantage, which virtually always equates to active piece play; it controls two key

squares in the centre – e5 is especially important and this square can often act as a very useful outpost; and last but not least, it offers dynamic ideas based on the possibility of d4-d5, a push that if achieved often leads to very favourable consequences for White (see Game 16 for a striking example of this).

2. The Isolated Pawn Couple

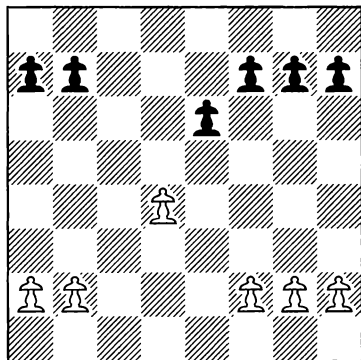


Diagram 4

The Isolated Queen's Pawn

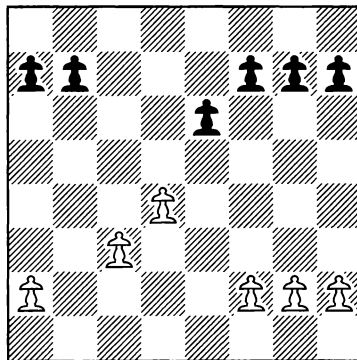


Diagram 5

The Isolated Pawn Couple

This pawn structure usually arises from an IQP where Black captures White's knight on c3 and White recaptures with the b-pawn. The pawn on c3 offers extra protection to the d4-pawn, which usually means that White's centre is under less immediate pressure. White can often use this extra freedom to build up a quick kingside attack, a devastating example of which can be seen in Game 23. If given time, Black may be able to target the backward c3-pawn, which stands on a half-open file. Black may also attempt to restrain White's pawns by controlling the d5- and c4-squares.

Sometimes White plays c3-c4, creating what are commonly known as 'hanging pawns' on c4 and d4. By doing so he gains extra space and also dynamic possibilities based on pawn advances: d4-d5 pushing Black further back and creating a passed pawn is always a consideration. On the other hand, side by side the pawns are now more vulnerable to attack: the d-pawn because it no longer has protection from its partner; the c-pawn simply because it is one square further forward.

3. The Majority Structure

This structure, where both sides have pawn majorities, usually arises from 2...d5 lines in which White plays dxc5 or Black plays ...cxd4 and White recaptures with a

piece. The asymmetric structure provides a basic imbalance in the position and offers both sides the opportunity to utilize their pawn superiorities. When I first began studying the c3 Sicilian I remember reading a considerable amount about the legendary power of White's queenside pawn majority. I soon realized from experience that this advantage had been somewhat exaggerated, and that Black's solid kingside structure and extra central pawn also demanded respect. But there's no denying that in the right circumstances the queenside pawn majority can become a potent weapon (see the notes to Game 17, for example).

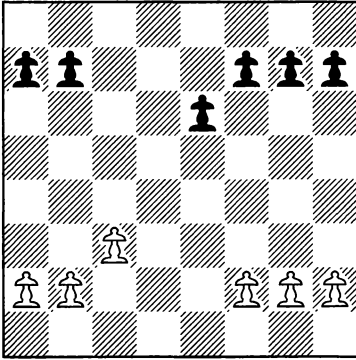


Diagram 6

The Majority Structure

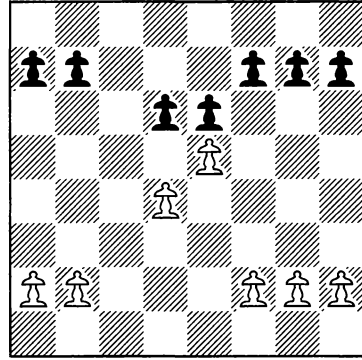


Diagram 7

The Tension Centre

4. The Tension Centre

This structure arises from 2...Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 variations, for example 4 d4 cxd4 5 cxd4 e6 6 Nf3 e6 (see Chapter Three). The most important feature here is White's pawn on e5, which acts as a powerful spearhead in any attack that White conducts on the kingside. The value of denying Black's knight the use of its natural defensive square on f6 cannot be underestimated, and White's pieces can take up aggressive positions by flooding the space behind the pawn (for example, e4 is an excellent post for a knight or even a queen).

Black needs to keep pressuring White's pawns on d4 and e5, and both sides need to be aware that at any moment the structure could change to an IQP if White plays exd6. It's usually in Black's interests to maintain the tension, and he will normally only exchange pawns on e5 if he gains something tangible in return. Relieving the tension is tempting, but a premature ...dxe5, dxe5 often only reduces Black's counterplay – there's no longer any concern about the defence of the d4-pawn – and leaves White with a free hand to attack with abandon on the kingside.

About This Book

As part of the Everyman Chess *Starting Out* series, this book is aimed primarily at those players who have previously had little or no experience with the c3 Sicilian and who wish to learn the basics. In each section I've begun with an introduction to the variation in question, studying the early moves of the main lines and highlighting the key alternatives for both sides. I've summarized the theory and have indicated places where I disagree with previous assessments.

The illustrative games have been chosen with instruction and entertainment value a slightly higher priority than theoretical relevance, which is sometimes left to the side notes. I've occasionally tweaked the move orders of the illustrative games in order to align them with those in the section introductions. I thought this would cause less confusion, and instead I've highlighted all transpositional possibilities in the section introductions.

The c3 Sicilian has always been one of my favourite openings, and I readily admit a certain bias for the White side is expressed here. After all, I expect most people who read this book will be looking to play the c3 Sicilian rather than defend against it. On the other hand, I've not restricted the coverage to a repertoire for White. I've dealt with all the main lines, pointed out what I believe to be the best choices for both White and Black, and explained why I think some lines are ineffective. So I hope that those playing Black will also find the book to be useful.

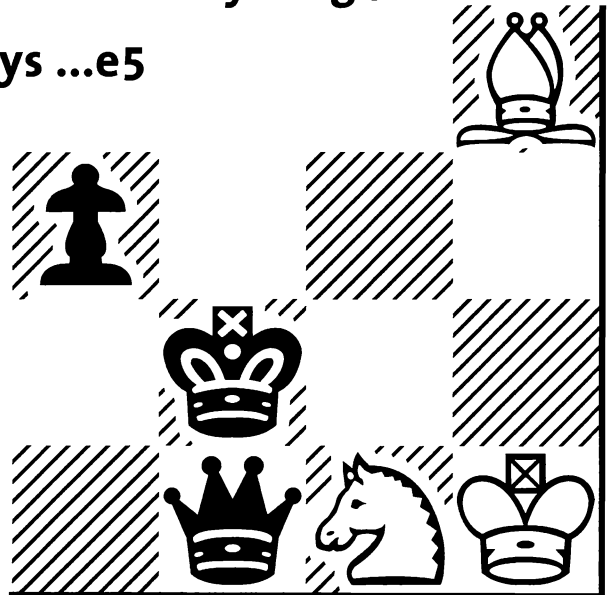
I hope you enjoy the book, and good luck with your c3 Sicilian adventures!

John Emms
Kent, UK
August 2008

Chapter One

2...d5: Black Plays Aggressively

- Introduction
- 4...cxd4 with an early ...Bg4
- 4...Nc6 with an early ...Bg4
- Black Plays ...e5



Introduction

In this chapter we deal with Black's most aggressive tries after 1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 (**Diagram 1**).

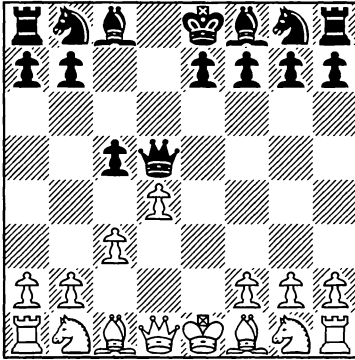


Diagram 1 (B)

Main line after 2...d5

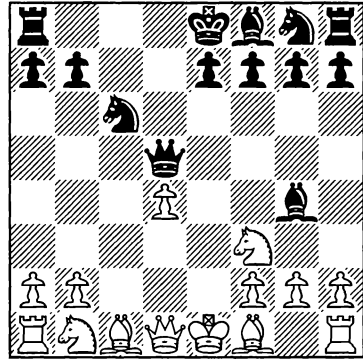


Diagram 2 (W)

The d-pawn is under attack

All of these involve exerting early pressure on White's d4-pawn. Black can either attack it with ...Nc6 and (after Nf3) ...Bg4, or aim to blast open the centre with a quick ...e5. In both cases Black must decide if and when to trade pawns with ...cxd4.

These aggressive lines are popular, especially amongst club players, because it's such a natural reaction to attack White's centre as quickly as possible. Black's strategy, however, does involve some risk: in many lines he lags behind in king-side development and opening up the position so early on is always dangerous for the side which moves second.

4...cxd4 with an early ...Bg4

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 cxd4

4...cxd4 is a common reaction amongst those with little experience of facing the c3 Sicilian. There's clearly a strong temptation to isolate the d4-pawn as soon as possible and then to attack it from all angles. On the negative side (from Black's point of view), the c3-square instantly becomes available to White's queen's knight, and Nc3 will inevitably gain time by attacking Black's queen.

5 cxd4 Nc6 6 Nf3 Bg4 (Diagram 2)

Black is turning up the pressure on the d4-pawn and it looks like White must do something about this, but the next move is a surprise:

7 Nc3!

White does nothing at all to protect d4! When as a youngster I began looking into playing the c3 Sicilian, this particular position was one of the first I came across. I remember at the time being astonished that White could play 7 Nc3, but after some convincing I realized that it was actually Black who had to be really careful, not White.



TIP: If for some reason you wish to shy away from the favourable complications arising after 7 Nc3, then 7 Be2 is a perfectly good option. This transposes to the line 4...Nc6 5 Nf3 Bg4 6 Be2 cxd4 7 cxd4, which is covered in the next section of this chapter.

7...Bxf3

Black is wise to enter the forced sequence, since retreating the queen can lead him into all sorts of trouble. For 7...Qa5? and other queen moves, see Game 1.

8 gxf3! (Diagram 3)

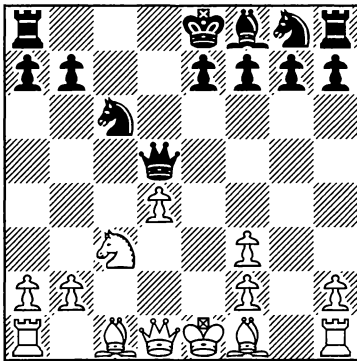


Diagram 3 (B)

Better than 8 Nxd5

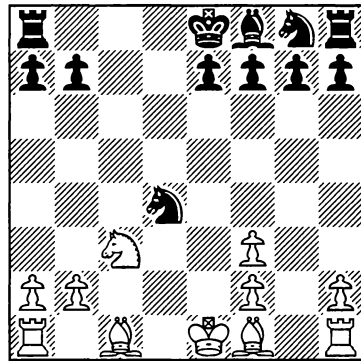


Diagram 4 (W)

Looks are deceptive!



WARNING: Don't be tempted into winning an exchange with 8 Nxd5 Bxd1 9 Nc7+. In many lines White's knight is not getting out of the corner alive, and then it's Black who is ahead on material with two pieces for a rook.

For example, 9...Kd7 (9...Kd8!? is also good) 10 Nxa8 Bh5! 11 d5 Nd4 12 Be3 Nc2+ 13 Kd2 Nxe3! (much better than 13...Nxa1? 14 Bb5+!) 14 Bb5+ Kd6 15 Kxe3 Nf6 16

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Bc4 g6 17 f3 Bh6+ 18 Kf2 g5 19 Rhe1 Rxa8 and Black went on to win in H.Schmidt-J.Marsalek, Zittau 1957. There may be improvements for White but my overall impression is that 8 Nxd5 is simply not worth the risk, especially since 8 gxf3 is such a good option.

8...Qxd4 9 Qxd4 Nxd4 (Diagram 4)

Amazing! Black is a pawn ahead, White's f-pawns are doubled and isolated, and Black threatens both ...Nc2+ and ...Nxf3+. Yet after **10 Nb5!** it's Black who faces all the problems. To find out why, see Game 2.

Theoretical?

Not especially, but there are one or two forcing sequences that need to be known.

Statistics

White's score of 74% from the position after 10 Nb5 suggests that Black has a difficult time of things in this line, even if, as Game 2 demonstrates, from a theoretical standpoint his position is just about playable.

Illustrative Games

Game 1

□ D.Pavasovic ■ R.Koemetter

St Veit 2000

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 cxd4 5 cxd4 Nc6 6 Nf3 Bg4 7 Nc3 Qa5? (Diagram 5)

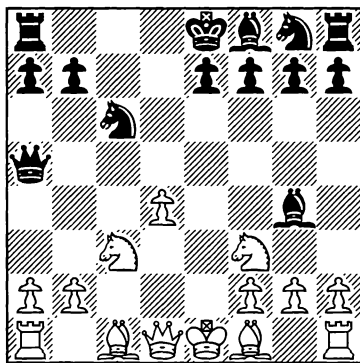


Diagram 5 (W)

Asking for trouble

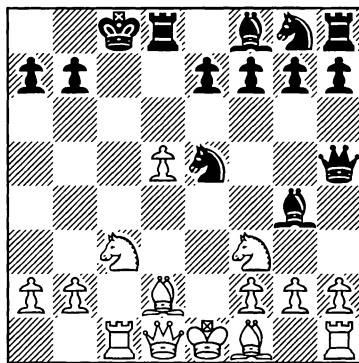


Diagram 6 (B)

White's has a lethal attack

The problem for Black after 7 Nc3 is that there is no turning back – he must plunge headfirst into the complications of 7...Bxf3. There have been plenty of games where Black has chickened out, opting to move his queen instead, with a crushing victory for White the usual outcome.

8 d5!



TIP: If White has the chance to play d4-d5 early on, forcing the c6-knight away from its post, more often than not this opportunity should be grabbed with both hands. Having to move the c6-knight disrupts Black's development, and it leaves him vulnerable to checks on the a4-e8 diagonal.

8 Be2? e6! would transpose to a position discussed later in the chapter, but White shouldn't allow Black's mistake to go unpunished.

Going back a move, alternative queen retreats can also be met very effectively by the d4-d5 advance. For example:

a) 7...Qd8? 8 d5 Ne5?? 9 Nxe5! Bxd1 10 Bb5+ is perhaps the most graphic demonstration of what can go wrong for Black if he plays without care in this line, and I've found more than a handful of games following this exact path!

b) 7...Qh5 is more sensible, but White can still advance promisingly with 8 d5! Here are a couple of possible lines illustrating the danger Black faces:

b1) 8...Ne5 9 Bb5+! Bd7 (after 9...Kd8 10 Be2 Black's king on d8 is a permanent worry) 10 Bxd7+ Nxd7 11 0-0 leaves Black with problems over his king: castling queenside is clearly hazardous, and he's a long way from organizing something on the other wing.

b2) 8...0-0-0 9 Bd2! Ne5 (or 9...Bxf3 10 Qxf3!? Qxf3 11 gxf3 Nd4 12 Bh3+ e6 13 0-0-0!) 10 Rc1! (**Diagram 6**). White's attack proves to be far more potent than Black's: for example, 10...Kb8 11 Bf4; 10...Bxf3 11 Ne4+! Kb8 (11...Nc6 12 Rxc6+! bxc6 13 Ba6+ Kd7 14 dxc6+ Kc7 15 gxf3) 12 Qc2!; and finally 10...Nxf3+ 11 gxf3 Bxf3 12 Nb5+ Kb8 13 Bf4+ Ka8 14 Qd4 b6 15 Rc7 when it will be checkmate very soon. Some entertaining variations, and clearly it's White who's having the fun!

8...Ne5

If Black pins the d-pawn by playing 8...0-0-0, White can reply with 9 Bd2! renewing the threat to the c6-knight and at the same time lining up a discovered attack on the black queen. Black is in trouble here, and one possible continuation would be 9...Nb4 10 a3! Nxd5 11 Na4! Bxf3 12 gxf3! (**Diagram 7**). 12...Qc7 is the only move available, but then 13 Rc1 pins and wins the queen.



NOTE: There are one or two exceptions, but queenside castling is generally a risky venture for Black in the c3 Sicilian. His king often misses the protection a pawn on c7 would provide, and if the c-file opens up White enjoys a ready-made avenue of attack.

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9 Bb5+!

This check is simple and very strong.

9...Nd7

9...Bd7 10 Bxd7+ Nxd7 11 0-0 is a dream position for White: he's way ahead in development and Black is clearly struggling to get organized. Arranging kingside castling is laborious, and after 11...Ngf6 12 Re1 g6 13 Bf4 Bg7 White can if he wishes just play 14 Bd6.

10 Qb3! Ngf6

I'm sure Black was reluctant to allow Ne5, but 10...Bxf3 loses to 11 Bxd7+! Kxd7 12 Qxb7+ and Qxa8.

11 Ne5! Rd8

11...a6 12 Bxd7+ Bxd7 13 Qxb7 wins a pawn, and things get even worse for Black after 13...Rd8? 14 b4!.

12 0-0 Qc7? (Diagram 8)

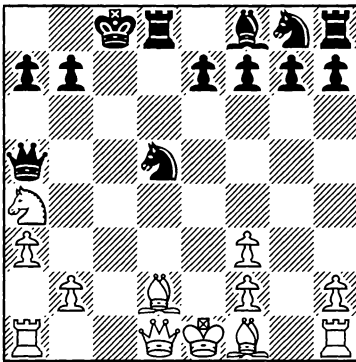


Diagram 7 (B)

Nowhere to hide

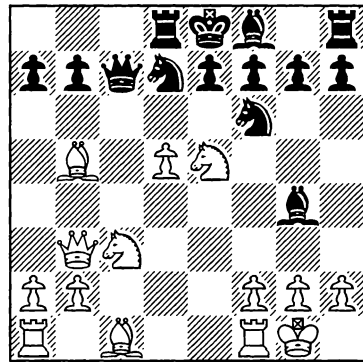


Diagram 8 (W)

White drags it out

This is suicidal, although even after 12...a6 13 Bxd7+ Bxd7 14 Qxb7 Black has no real hope of surviving in the long run.

13 Bf4

Why not 13 d6! followed by Qxf7 mate? I can only think that Pavasovic was enjoying the game so much he didn't want it to finish just yet!

13...Qc8 14 Rac1 Qa8 15 Nxd6 Nxd6 16 Ne4 a6 17 Rfe1! 1-0

17...axb5 18 Nd6 mate would have been a fitting end to a rather one-sided game.

Game 2

□ V.Kirilov ■ F.Salata

Riga 1964

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 cxd4 5 cxd4 Nc6 6 Nf3 Bg4 7 Nc3! Bxf3 8 gxf3 Qxd4 9 Qxd4 Nxd4 10 Nb5! (Diagram 9)

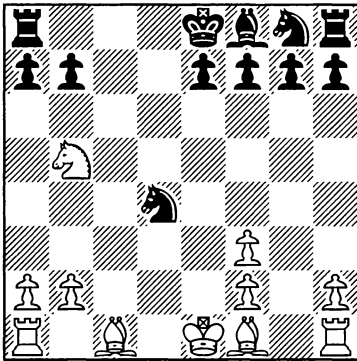


Diagram 9 (B)

The complications begin

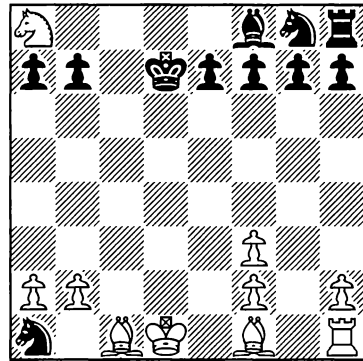


Diagram 10 (B)

The knights need rescuing!

Even though Black is a pawn ahead, and a move ahead if he decides to 'trade' rooks on a1 and a8, he is lumbered with all the problems in this position. The simple reason for this is that White's pieces are much freer – look how easily White will develop his forces and compare this to Black's onerous task of activating his kingside.

10...Ne6

Given White's potential for activity, trying to keep things tight is an understandable reaction from Black. But this backwards step actually makes things even worse, and the knight on e6 is doing its fellow pieces on the kingside no favours at all.

Lets take a brief look at Black's other options here, of which 10...Nc2+ (note 'c') is by far the most important:

- a) After 10...0-0-0 11 Nxd4! Rxd4 12 Be3 White's pieces come alive and Black's king suffers from a lack of cover: for example, 12...Rd7 13 Bb5 Rc7 14 Bxa7 e6 15 Bb6 Rc2 16 0-0 Ne7 17 Rac1 Rxc1 18 Rxc1+ Nc6 19 a4 with a clear advantage for White, M.Rohde-R.Seltzer, Los Angeles 1991.
- b) 10...e5!? 11 Nc7+ Kd7 12 Nxa8 Bb4+!? 13 Kd1 Ne7 is an exchange sacrifice, but it

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doesn't seem to be sufficient for Black after, say, 14 Be3 Rxa8 15 f4! Bd6 16 Rc1 Nec6 17 fxe5 Bxe5 18 Bg2, as played in M.Rytshagov-A.Holmsten, Finnish Championship 1995.

c) 10...Nc2+! is the critical move, and the main line runs 11 Kd1 Nxa1 12 Nc7+ Kd7 13 Nxa8 (**Diagram 10**).

Both knights are trapped in the corners, but Black's is in more danger because of White's very active pieces. However, if Black displays some accuracy theory suggests that this line is just about okay for him. For example, 13...g6 14 Be3 Bh6! (14...Bg7 15 Bxa7 Bxb2 16 Bb5+ Kd6 17 Nb6 looks like trouble for Black with all those pieces swarming around his king) 15 Bb5+ Kd6 16 Bxa7 Nf6 17 Nb6 Rd8 18 Ke2 Nc2 19 Rd1+ Kc7 was the old game C.Crouch-R.Balinas, London 1979. Black is making a good fight of it, but I still prefer White. One option is 20 a3!?, preventing ...Nb4 and intending to meet 20...Nd4+?? with 21 Rxd4! Rxd4 22 Na8+!

11 f4! (Diagram 11)

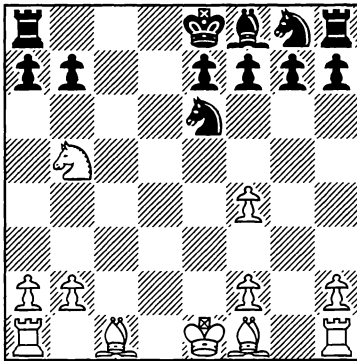


Diagram 11 (B)

The threat is 12 f5

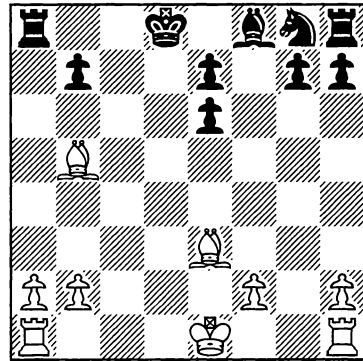


Diagram 12 (B)

A dream position

Obviously the main intention is f4-f5 and Black must deal with this threat, but there's also now the possibility of Bg2.

11...a6?

Black's only chance lies with 11...g6, although even here he is skating on thin ice: 12 Bg2! 0-0-0 (12...Bh6 is more resilient, even if Black is likely to drop both queen-side pawns) 13 Be3 a6 14 Rc1+ Kb8 15 Ba7+! Ka8 16 Bb6 Rb8 17 Rc3! Bg7 18 Ra3 Rc8 19 Rxa6+ Kb8 20 Ba7+ Ka8 21 Bd4+ Kb8 22 Rb6! and 1-0, J.Borst-D.Voin, correspondence 2000, is a nice demonstration of White's attacking possibilities in this line.

12 f5!

Of course! The 'exchange' of knights is only going to help White.

12...axb5 13 Bxb5+ Kd8 14 fxe6 fxe6 15 Be3 (Diagram 12)

White couldn't hope for a better position: his bishops dominate the board and the rooks will soon enter the game with devastating force. Something nasty is going to happen to Black's king, and his undeveloped pieces are powerless to do anything about it.

15...Nf6 16 Bb6+ Kc8 17 Rc1+ Kb8 18 0-0 Nd5 19 Bd4 Rxa2 20 Bd7!

Threatening mate in one.

20...b6 21 Rc8+ Kb7 22 Be5! 1-0

There is absolutely no hope left for Black. One possible finish could be 22 Be5 Nb4 23 Rfc1 (threatening 24 R1c7+ Ka6 25 Ra8 mate) 23...Na6 24 Re8 b5 25 Bd4 Nc7, and now White has many ways to win but 26 Bc8+! Kb8 27 Ba6+! Nxe8 28 Rc8 mate is the most pleasing.

4...Nc6 with an early ...Bg4

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 Nc6

If Black wishes to play ...Nc6 combined with ...Bg4, while avoiding the dangerous line 4...cxd4 5 cxd4 Nc6 6 Nf3 Bg4 7 Nc3! (see the previous section), then this is the correct move order to use. The only possible drawback is that White gains an extra option of capturing on c5, either on move 5 or 6. Whether Black should be afraid of this possibility is another matter. On reflection I would say the answer to this question should probably be 'no'.

5 Nf3

White can completely change the character of the position by playing 5 dxc5. See Game 7 for coverage of this move.

5 Be3, avoiding the pin, is discussed in the next section.

5...Bg4 (Diagram 13) 6 Be2

6 Be2 is by far the most popular move here, and with good reason. That said, recently 6 dxc5 has been played by some strong grandmasters, and this move is covered in Game 8.

The idea of Nbd2 planning Bc4 is seen in some lines, but it's not very effective here. After 6 Nbd2 cxd4! (this is logical now that the knight can no longer reach c3) 7 cxd4 (I prefer Black after 7 Bc4 Bxf3! 8 Qb3 Qe5+ 9 Kf1 Bxg2+ 10 Kxg2 0-0-0) 7...e6 8 Bc4 Qd7 White's d2-knight is not ideally placed, Black can continue developing without problems and there are concerns over the defence of the d4-pawn.

6...cxd4!

Now the timing is just right for this capture. The main alternative has been 6...e6,

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

and this is covered in Game 6.



TIP: I have seen many examples of the natural developing move 6...Nf6 (Diagram 14). Against this White should certainly take the opportunity to gain a space advantage by advancing in the centre.

White should continue with 7 h3! (the correct move order, as 7 c4?! Qf5! 8 d5 Bxf3! 9 Bxf3 Nd4 is annoying for White) 7...Bh5 8 c4! Qd6 (now 8...Qf5? can be met by 9 g4!) 9 d5 Bxf3 (probably the best) 10 Bxf3 Nd4 11 Nc3 and now 11...g6 12 Be3! Nxf3+ 13 Qxf3 Bg7 14 0-0 0-0 15 Rfe1 was very pleasant for White in the game M.Adams-C.Lutz, Dortmund 1994 – there's the easy plan of playing Rad1, Bf4 and piling on the pressure down the central files. 11...e5 looks stronger, when 12 0-0 is possible but more ambitious is 12 dxe6!? Qxe6+ 13 Be3.

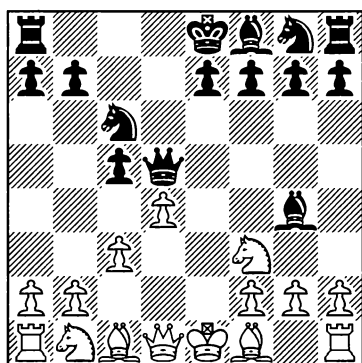


Diagram 13 (W)

The main line

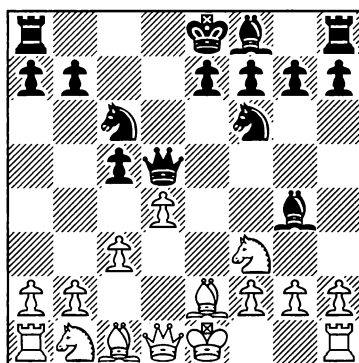


Diagram 14 (W)

White should punish 6...Nf6

6...0-0-0 (**Diagram 15**) is aggressive, but undoubtedly risky for the reasons explained earlier. White has good chances of success simply by continuing to develop in normal fashion. 7 0-0 Nf6 8 h3 Bh5 9 Be3 has been seen in a handful of games, with encouraging results for White. Here's one example: 9...e5 10 c4 Qd7 11 d5! Bxf3 12 Bxf3 Nd4 13 Nc3 Rg8 (preparing ...g5-g4, but White gets moving first) 14 b4! g5 (14...cxb4 15 Nb5!) 15 bxc5 Bxc5 16 Na4! Nxf3+ 17 Qxf3 Bxe3 18 fxe3 and White was doing well in H.Jonkman-Z.Krnicek, Wijk aan Zee 1997; even more so after 18...Nxd5? 19 Nc5!.

7 cxd4 e6 (Diagram 16)

We've already seen that Nc3 followed by d4-d5 can prove troublesome for Black if he has to move his c6-knight again. This is why Black draws some sting out of this idea by playing ...e6.

Now, does White immediately attack the queen with Nc3 or play h2-h3 first? Does it matter?

8 Nc3!



WARNING: Leading c3 Sicilian sources claim either that 8 h3?! (my dubious mark) is the most accurate move, or that it matters little whether White plays h2-h3 or Nc3 first. But in my opinion 8 h3?! is at best a move order inaccuracy and at worst a clear mistake which hands the advantage over to Black!

Game 5 explains why I think this is the case. It should be mentioned that 8 0-0 has also been played many times, and usually the continuation is 8...Nf6 9 Nc3 Qa5 10 h3 Bh5 with a transposition to Game 4.

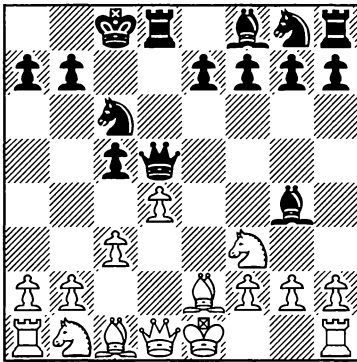


Diagram 15 (W)

Risky for Black

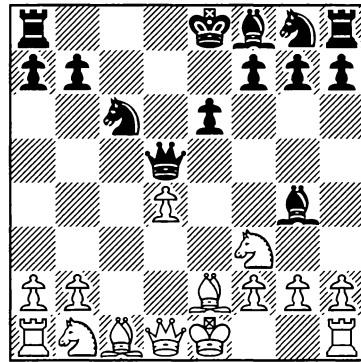


Diagram 16 (W)

8 Nc3 or 8 h3?

8...Qa5

The a5-square is the best place for the queen in this line: it is actively placed and yet not particularly vulnerable to attack. Other queen retreats are perhaps playable if backed up with precise defence, but White seems to be able to cause Black more problems. For example after 8...Qd6 Black has to be wary of an attack with Nb5, and I like the approach shown by Mickey Adams when he has reached this position: 9 d5 exd5 10 0-0! Nf6 11 Nb5! (**Diagram 17**) 11...Qd7 (11...Qb8 12 Nfd4!) 12 Bf4 Rc8 13 Ne5 Bxe2 14 Nxd7 Bxd1 15 Nxf6+ gxf6 16 Raxd1 left Black with a horrific queenless middlegame to defend in M.Adams-N.McDonald, Hastings 1995. There's an improvement with 13...Nxe5 14 Bxe5 Bxe2 15 Qxe2 Be7 16 Bxf6 gxf6 (M.Adams-Z.Hracek, German League 1996), but overall this is not a particularly appetizing line for Black to play.

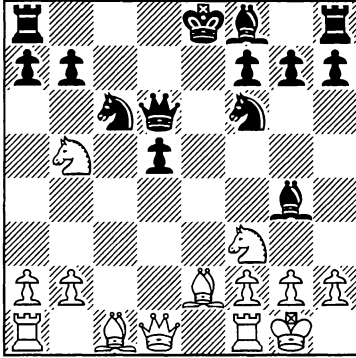


Diagram 17 (B)

A promising gambit

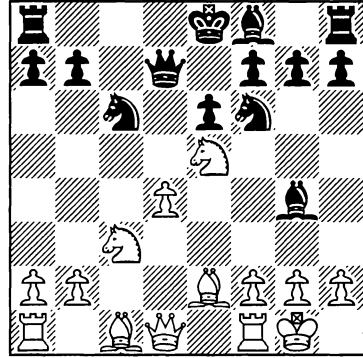


Diagram 18 (B)

Watch out for Nf3-e5 ideas

If Black plays 8...Qd7 White has some Ne5 possibilities, and following 9 0-0 Nf6 even the immediate 10 Ne5!? (**Diagram 18**) might be enough to give White at least a small advantage. For example, 10...Nxe5 11 dxe5 Qxd1 12 Bxd1! (it's easy to miss this strong recapture) 12...Bxd1 13 Rxd1 Nd7 14 Nb5 Rc8 15 Bg5!?, intending to meet 15...a6? with 16 Rxd7! Kxd7 17 Rd1+ Ke8 18 Nc7+! Rxc7 19 Rd8 mate! Or 10...Bxe2 11 Nxd7 (sacrificing a pawn with 11 Qxe2!? is an interesting alternative) 11...Bxd1 12 Nxf6+ gxf6 13 Rxd1 with the plan of d4-d5.

If Black doesn't want to move his queen he has to play 8...Bb4 9 0-0 Bxc3?! 10 bxc3 (**Diagram 19**).

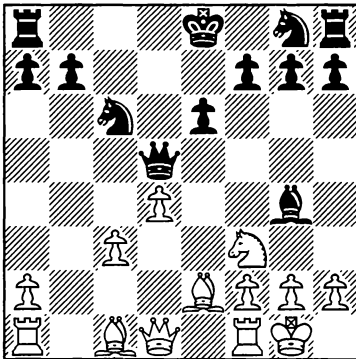


Diagram 19 (B)

Good for White

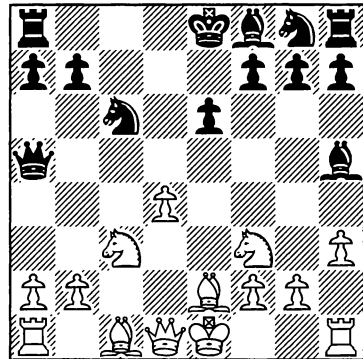


Diagram 20 (W)

A choice for White

In fact many Black players have chosen this option, but to me it makes little sense to both give up the dark-squared bishop and strengthen White's centre, just for the sake of one tempo. After 10...Nge7 (or 10...Nf6 11 Ba3!) 11 Rb1 Qd7 12 Ba3 White must have some advantage, especially as 12...0-0? loses material to 13 Ne5!. Instead of 9...Bxc3?! Black should probably still choose 9...Qa5. If White answers with 10 a3!? (certainly not the only move) then 10...Bxc3 makes more sense, even if after 11 bxc3 he doesn't grab the gambit pawn on c3: White has effectively lost a second tempo with a2-a3 and now the position is genuinely unclear.

9 h3

9 0-0 is again likely to transpose to 9 h3 Bh5 10 0-0 Nf6 after 9...Nf6 10 h3 Bh5 (see Game 4).

9...Bh5

This is what virtually everyone plays, but 9...Bxf3 is probably not a bad move if Black follows it up correctly. After 10 Bxf3 Bb4! 11 0-0 Nge7! (11...Bxc3 12 bxc3 Qxc3 13 Rb1 looks too risky for Black) 12 Be3 0-0 13 Qb3 Rfd8 14 a3 (14 Rad1?) 14...Bxc3 15 bxc3 Qc7 (I.Papaioannou-I.Cheparinov, European Team Ch., Gothenburg 2005) we reach a position that offers both sides chances of success: White has the bishop pair and the possibility to mobilize his c- and d-pawns; Black on the other hand hopes to nullify White's plays by blocking the pawns with his knights. Returning to the main move, 9...Bh5 (**Diagram 20**). White now has an important decision to make: whether to opt for the relatively quiet 10 0-0 or go for the dangerous pawn sacrifice 10 d5. These options will be discussed in Games 3-4.

Theoretical?

Reasonably so, especially since 4...Nc6 5 Nf3 Bg4 is currently the most popular of Black's aggressive 2...d5 lines.

Statistics

Overall White has scored 57% in over 3000 games after 6 Be2. Looking at the options at move 10, White has scored 62% with 10 d5, but only 47% with 10 0-0, which suggests that Black has greater difficulties facing 10 d5, at least over the board. Checking out early captures on c5, White has scored 57% with 5 dxc5 and a surprisingly good 66% with 6 dxc5.

Illustrative Games

Game 3

□ M.Kobalija ■ E.Ghaem Maghami

Stepanakert 2004

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 Nc6 5 Nf3 Bg4 6 Be2 cxd4 7 cxd4 e6 8 Nc3 Qa5 9

h3 Bh5 10 d5!? (Diagram 21)

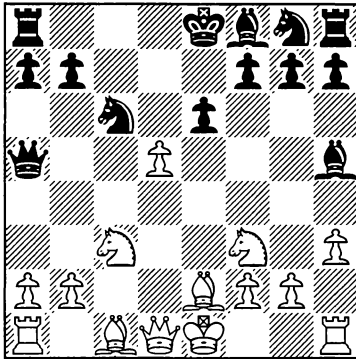


Diagram 21 (B)

A dangerous gambit

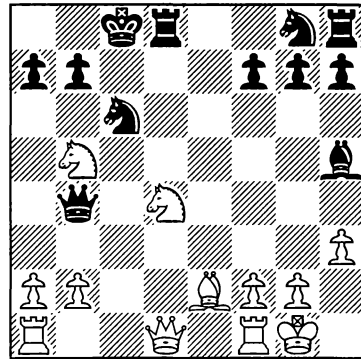


Diagram 22 (B)

Going on the attack

I believe this pawn sacrifice was introduced by Joel Benjamin over twenty years ago, and it still remains a dangerous weapon, especially against the unprepared.

10...exd5

We've already seen that castling queenside can be hazardous for Black, and 10...0-0 looks very risky here. For example, 11 Bd2!? exd5 12 0-0 Nf6 13 Rc1 intending 13...Kb8? 14 Nb5 is a line given by Dorian Rogozenko in *ChessBase Magazine*, when White's compensation can't be denied. Richard Palliser, who recommends 4...Nc6 5 Nf3 Bg4 as one of Black's weapons in *Fighting the Anti-Sicilians*, tries to improve with 12...d4 13 Nb5 Bb4 14 Bxb4 Qxb4, but you would need nerves of steel to play this position as Black and even that might not be enough. Indeed, instead of 15 a3 the tactic 15 Nfxd4! (**Diagram 22**) appears to be very strong here. One possible line would be 15...Bxe2 (15...Nxd4 16 Qc1+) 16 Qxe2 Rxd4 (16...Nxd4 17 Rac1+ Nc6 18 Qe5!) 17 Rac1, and with Qe5 in the air White enjoys a very strong attack.

11 Nd4!

The idea behind 10 d5 is not to tamely recapture the pawn with 11 Qxd5?!, but instead to try to exploit Black's lack of kingside development and his king on e8. 11 0-0!? is an interesting alternative. If Black replies 11...Nf6 White should probably play in a similar fashion to the main game with 12 Nd4.

11...Bxe2

I'm not convinced by 11...Nxd4 12 Bxh5 Ne6 (or 12...Nc6 13 0-0 Nf6 14 Bg5 Be7 15 Bxf6 Bxf6 16 Nxd5 Be5, and now Richard Palliser's suggestion of 17 b4! looks promising for White; his analysis continues 17...Qd8 18 Re1 0-0 19 b5 Bxa1 20 bxc6

Bf6 21 c7 Qd6 22 Bg4) 13 0-0 Nf6 14 Re1 (**Diagram 23**) 14...g6 (White was threatening Rxe6+) 15 Bg4 Nxc4 16 Qxc4. White's lead in development coupled with Black's shaky king means this position is no easy ride for Black. After, for example, 16...Be7 17 Bh6 Rd8 18 Qf3 d4 19 Ne4 Qf5 20 Qb3 White continues to create annoying threats.

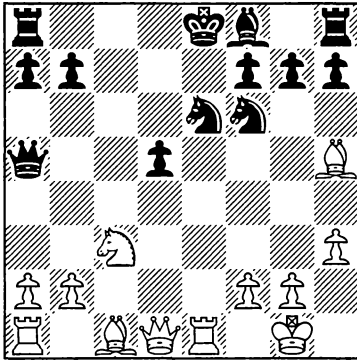


Diagram 23 (B)
Threatening Rxe6+

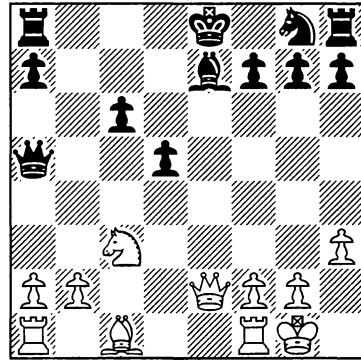


Diagram 24 (B)
Dynamic equality

12 Qxe2+ Be7 13 Nxc6 bxc6 14 0-0 (**Diagram 24**)

The position has clarified to some extent. Black remains a good pawn ahead, but because of the pressure down the e-file he has no chance of castling, at least in the immediate future. White cannot crash through easily because Black's position is fairly resilient. However, there are one or two chinks: sometimes he can regain his pawn on the queenside while Black is consolidating, and the resulting positions often favour White. Summarizing, I would offer an assessment of 'dynamic equality' but I do feel that White's position is easier to play over the board.

14...Kf8

Give up castling rights has been Black's most common choice but 14...Rd8, intending in some lines to play ...Rd6-e6, has also been played. White retains compensation after 15 Bd2 d4 16 Ne4 Qb5 17 Qf3 Qd5 18 Rac1, even into the endgame following 18...f5 19 Ng5 Qxf3 20 Nxf3 c5 21 Rfe1. The more direct 15 Re1 might be stronger: 15...Kf8 (15...d4 16 Ne4 d3 is met by 17 Bd2! Qd5 18 Qe3) 16 Bd2 d4 17 Ne4 Qb5 18 Qf3 Qd5 19 Rac1 offered White a typical long-term initiative in M.Krakops-T.Papadopoulou, Patras 2001, and things soon got even better after 19...h5 20 Qd3 g5? 21 Bxg5! Bxg5 22 Rc5.

15 Bd2 Nf6 16 Rfe1 Qd8 17 Rac1 (**Diagram 25**)

Black has coped with the pressure down the e-file, but he still has to deal with the

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

issue of his sleeping rook on h8. White attempts to use this 'power play' by focusing on Black's queenside pawns.

17...h6

17...Qd7 18 Qd3 Bd6 19 Bg5 Ne8 20 Na4 Nc7 21 Qc2 Ne6 22 Qxc6 Qxc6 23 Rxc6 Bb4 24 Re5, as played in L.Nisipeanu-A.Zapata, Juan Dolio 2003, is a typical scenario: Black has relieved some of the pressure by exchanging queens, but White has regained his pawn and his more active pieces promise him a slight advantage.

18 Bf4 Qd7 19 Qa6 g5?

Black wants to gain time for ...Kg7, but the pin on the long diagonal proves to be a real pain. It was time to evacuate with 19...Kg8!. Here 20 Na4 Kh7 21 Rxc6 Rhe8 22 Nc3, a line given by Kobalija in *Chess Informant*, offers White only a small advantage.

20 Be5 Kg7 21 Nxd5! (Diagram 26)

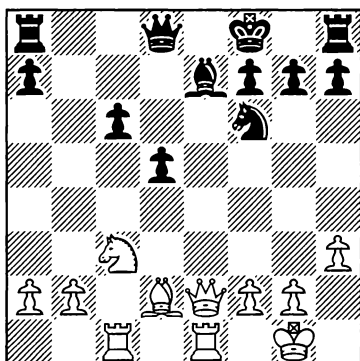


Diagram 25 (B)

Targeting the c6-pawn

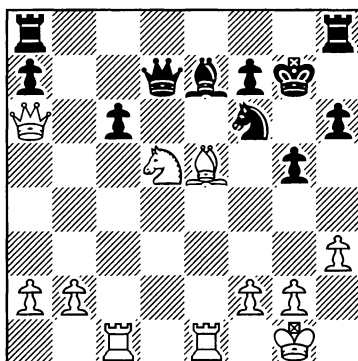


Diagram 26 (B)

A bolt from the blue

This must have come as a bit of a shock!

21...cxd5 22 Rc6 Qd8

Against 22...Qf5 White replies 23 Bd4!, threatening to capture on e7 even if Black defends the bishop. Black's best is 23...Rhc8 but then 24 g4!? Rxc6 25 Qxc6 Qc8 26 Qxc8 Rxc8 27 Rxe7 (Kobalija) promises White an advantage similar to the one he gets in the game.

23 Bd4! Rc8

23...Re8 24 Rxe7! Rxe7 25 Rxf6 Kg8 26 Rxh6 would give White a winning attack. Instead Black returns the piece and seeks salvation in an inferior ending, where White has a stronger minor piece and better pawns.

24 Rxc8 Qxc8 25 Qxc8 Rxc8 26 Rxe7 Rc1+ 27 Kh2 Rd1! 28 Be5!

Keeping control. 28 Bxa7?! d4 would allow too much counterplay.

28...Kg6 (Diagram 27)

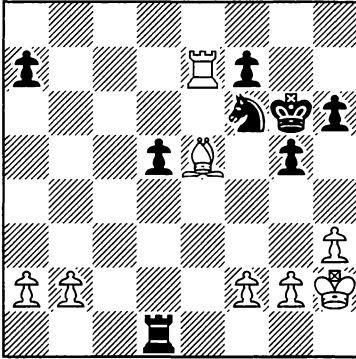


Diagram 27 (W)

Both sides err

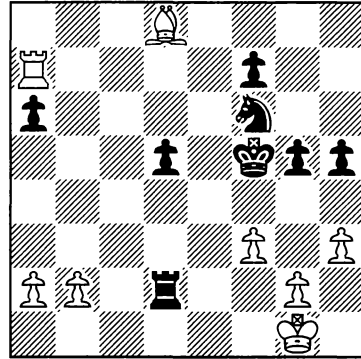


Diagram 28 (B)

Winning for White

29 f3?!

A slip by Kobalija, who in his notes recommends 29 Rxa7.

29...a6?!

After 29...a5! White's winning chances are reduced. The problem with the text move is that in some lines the pawn on a6 is captured with check, so Black loses time.

30 Ra7 Kf5 31 Bc7!

Again Kobalija demonstrates excellent technique by keeping his strong bishop. 31 Bxf6 Kxf6 32 Rxa6+ Ke5! 33 Rxh6 wins a couple of pawns, but Black gains serious counterplay with his passed d-pawn and active king.

31...Rd2 32 Kg1 h5?

Now Black is definitely losing. 32...Rxb2 33 g4+ Ke6 34 Rxa6+ Ke7 35 Be5 Rb1+ 36 Kf2 Ne8 37 a4 (Kobalija) would offer White excellent winning chances due to his active pieces and passed a-pawn.

33 Bd8! (Diagram 28)

Perhaps Black was hoping for 33 g4+? hxg4 34 hxg4+ Nxc4! 35 fxg4+ Kxc4, when suddenly the position is very unclear.

33...Ne8 34 Rxf7+ Kg6 35 Rf8 Ng7 36 Rf6+ Kh7 37 Rxa6 Rxb2 38 Bf6 Rb1+ 39 Kf2 Nf5 40 g4 hxg4 41 hxg4 1-0

After 41...Nh4 42 Bxg5 Ng6 43 Ra7+ White is winning easily.

Game 4

□ C.Cooley ■ J.Emms

British League 2007

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 Nc6 5 Nf3 Bg4 6 Be2 cxd4 7 cxd4 e6 8 Nc3 Qa5 9 h3 Bh5 10 0-0 (Diagram 29)

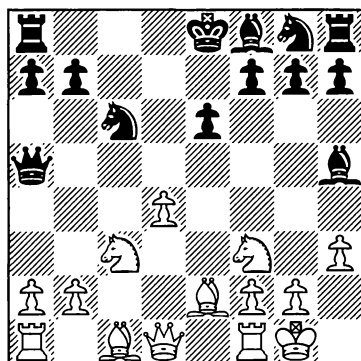


Diagram 29 (B)

The quiet approach

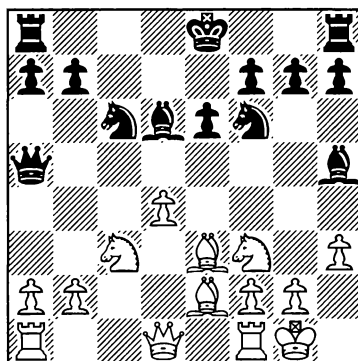


Diagram 30 (W)

The equalizer

It used to be thought that quiet methods were enough to claim an edge, but more recently it has been discovered that, while it is perfectly acceptable for White to play this way, Black doesn't have anything to fear from a theoretical viewpoint – the chances should basically be assessed as equal.

10...Nf6 11 Be3



TIP: White's most aggressive posting for the queen is on b3, where it hits b7, supports a possible d4-d5 and vacates the d1-square for a rook. White just has to decide what preparation, if any, is needed before playing this move.

Against the immediate 11 Qb3 Black has the standard response 11...Qb4!, which is almost always a good move to play if possible. White can eliminate ...Qb4 ideas by playing 11 a3, but after 11...Bd6! he is still not ready, since 12 Qb3 Bxf3! 13 Bxf3 Nxd4 is good for Black, and 14 Qxb7? Rb8 even better! Thus we see the value of the seemingly passive bishop move to e3: White can now play Qb3 without worrying about his d4-pawn.



WARNING: It's worth remembering the trap 11 Ne5? Bxe2 12

Nxc6??, when the desperado 12...Qxc3!! wins a piece. Quite a few players have fallen for this.

11...Bd6! (Diagram 30)

11...Bd6 is a crucial move, one which assures Black of an equal position. In the early days everyone played the seemingly more natural 11...Be7, but White can gain at least a slight advantage after 12 Qb3! Qb4 (12...Qc7 is met by 13 g4! (13 Qxb4 Bxb4 14 g4 Bg6 15 Ne5 is similar) 13...Bg6 14 Ne5! as has been shown in quite a few games: for example, 14...0-0 (or 14...Qxb3 15 axb3 0-0 16 Bf3) 15 g5 Qxb3 16 axb3 Nd5 17 Nxd5 exd5 18 Rfc1 (**Diagram 31**) intending to meet 18...Rfc8 with 19 Bg4.

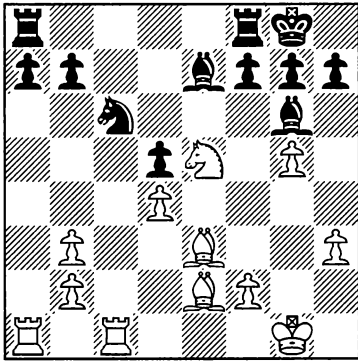


Diagram 31 (B)
Better for White

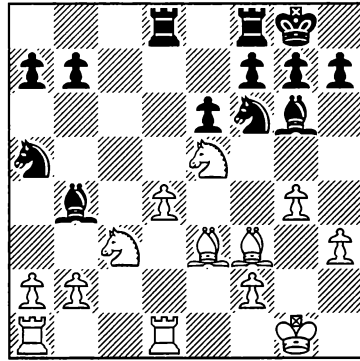


Diagram 32 (W)
Roughly equal

White builds up an initiative with the sequence g2-g4 followed by Ne5. By covering the e5-square with 11...Bd6, Black simply prevents this plan and so White is forced to seek alternative action. The trouble is, nothing else is quite as promising.

12 a3

12 Qb3 is met by 12...Qb4!, and here I think White should aim for d4-d5 by playing 13 Rfd1 (13 Qxb4 Nxb4! 14 Bb5+ Ke7 holds no fears for Black). If Black casually castles, White can energize his position, gaining an edge with 13...0-0 14 d5! Qxb3 15 axb3 exd5 16 Nxd5 – note the vulnerability of Black's bishops if an exchange occurs on d5.

It makes more sense for Black to prevent d4-d5. 13...Qxb3 14 axb3 Nd5 is one obvious way, while in O.Lemmers,-G.Van Laatum, Belgian League 1997, Black preferred 13...Rd8 which stops d4-d5 because of tactics with ...Bh2+. The game continued 14 g4 Bg6 15 Ne5! 0-0! (15...Nxe5 16 dxe5 Qxb3 17 axb3 Bxe5 18 Rxa7 leaves Black struggling to defend b7) 16 Bf3 Na5 17 Qxb4 Bxb4 (**Diagram 32**) reaching a

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queenless middlegame that looks roughly equal – Black is under less pressure here than in the similar positions arising after 11...Be7.

12 Nb5 looks threatening but achieves little after 12...Bb8. Black will kick the knight back with a timely ...a6, and further aggression could easily backfire: for example, 13 Ne5!? Bxe2 14 Qxe2 0-0! 15 Bg5? Nxd4! 16 Nxd4 Qxe5.

12...0-0 13 Qb3

13 b4 Qd8 and only then 14 Qb3 has also been played, most notably by Sveshnikov in a recent game: 14...h6 (Black wants to play ...Ne7 without allowing Bg5 but this is not strictly necessary, and 14...Rc8 15 Rfd1 Ne7 16 Bg5 Nfd5 17 Nxd5 exd5 has been shown to be okay for Black) 15 Rfd1 Ne7! (otherwise d4-d5 would be very strong) 16 g4!? Bg6 17 Ne5 Ned5 (17...Bh7!? 18 Bf3 Qb8, as played in S.Zawadzki-K.Gratka, Straszecin 1999, is also possible) 18 Nxd5 Nxd5 19 Bf3 Rc8? (19...Bc7!?) 20 Nxc6 fxc6 21 Bxd5 exd5 22 Qxd5+ Rf7 23 Qe6! Rc6 24 d5!! (**Diagram 33**)

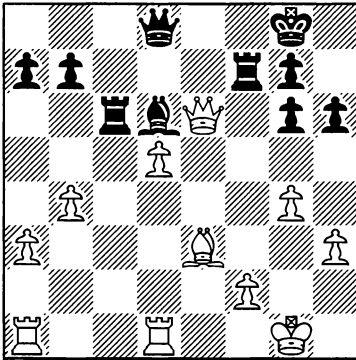


Diagram 33 (B)

Allowing the discovered attack

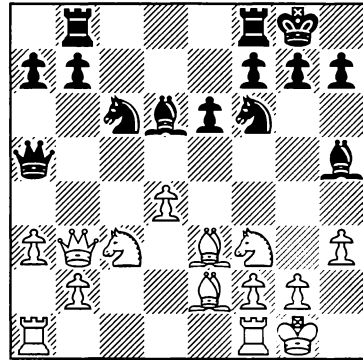


Diagram 34 (W)

Which rook to d1?

24...Bh2+ 25 Kg2! Ra6 26 b5 and Black resigned in E.Sveshnikov-V.Rojicek, Pardubice 2007 – after 26...Rxe6 27 dxe6 Qb8 28 exf7+ Kxf7 29 f4! the bishop on h2 is trapped and 29...Bxf4 30 Bxf4 Qxf4 loses to 31 Rf1. A nice game by Sveshnikov, but it doesn't really alter the assessment that Black is okay in this line.

13...Rab8 (Diagram 34)

13...Ne7!? is also possible, since 14 Qxb7?! Rab8 15 Qa6 Qxa6 16 Bxa6 Bxf3 17 gxf3 Rxb2 probably favours Black, N.Benmesbah-Zhao Jun, Shenzhen 2005.

14 Rad1

It makes more sense to play 14 Rfd1 because the queen's rook usually belongs on c1 here. Black normally replies by preventing d4-d5 with 14...Rfd8 or 14...Nd5.

One line worth mentioning after 14...Rfd8 is 15 Bg5?? Bxf3! 16 Bxf6 Bxe2 17 Bxd8 Bxd1 18 Bxa5 Bxb3. Seven captures in a row, and Black ends up a piece ahead!

14...Rfd8 15 Rfe1 h6 16 Nb5 Nd5

There's also nothing wrong with 16...Be7, but I was quite happy to plonk a knight on d5.

17 g4?! (Diagram 35)

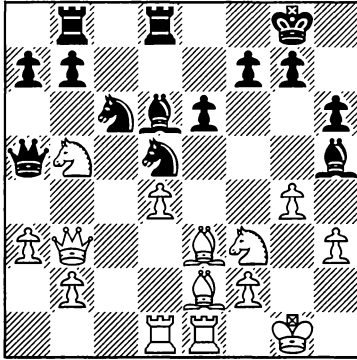


Diagram 35 (B)

Unjustified aggression

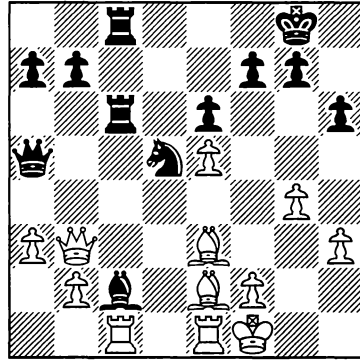


Diagram 36 (W)

Black is winning

I think that this aggression is no longer justified – White doesn't get anywhere and the weakness on the kingside is a deciding factor later on. Probably White should settle for 17 Nxd6 Rxd6 18 Rc1, although it's true that Black is more than comfortable here.

17...Bg6 18 Nxd6

18 Nd2 planning Nc4 is critical, but I was intending 18...Nxe3 19 fxe3 Bg3 20 Nc4 Qa6 21 Rf1 Rbc8 when White has no good way to take advantage of Black's slightly misplaced queen and I was confident of exploiting those kingside weaknesses later on.

18...Rxd6 19 Ne5 Nxe5! 20 dxe5 Rc6 21 Rc1

21 Rd2 can be met by the surprising 21...Rb6!, which leaves White in big trouble (during the game I missed this and was intending 21...b5).

21...Rbc8 22 Kf1?

White had to try 22 Qb5, although even here 22...Qc7! 23 Rxc6 bxc6 24 Qc5 Qxe5 is good for Black.

22...Bc2! (Diagram 36)

This is decisive. The queen cannot stay protecting the bishop on e3, so White's

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

whole kingside collapses.

23 Qxb7

23 Qb5 loses to 23...Nxe3+ 24 fxe3 Qxb5 25 Bxb5 Bd3+!

23...Nxe3+ 24 fxe3 Qxe5 25 Qxa7 Qg3

A double rook sacrifice with 25...Be4! 26 Rxc6 Qg3!! is a pretty way to win: after 27 Rxc8+ Kh7 White has no way to prevent mate. I decided to go for the prosaic route – I didn't fancy the idea of missing a tactic and then being two rooks down!

26 Rxc2 Qxh3+ 27 Kf2 Rxc2 28 Qd4 Qh2+ 29 Kf3 Qh4 30 Qb4 e5 0-1

Game 5

□ I.Rausis ■ A.Miles

Las Palmas 1996

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 Nc6 5 Nf3 Bg4 6 Be2 cxd4 7 cxd4 e6 8 h3?!



WARNING: This move has been recommended by experts and played by quite a few grandmasters, but there's a strong possibility that it is simply a mistake. White should instead choose 8 Nc3.

8...Bb4+

Most players retreat with 8...Bh5, but Tony Miles was always an original thinker in the opening and here he comes up with something much more testing.

9 Nc3 Bxf3! 10 Bxf3 Qc4! (Diagram 37)

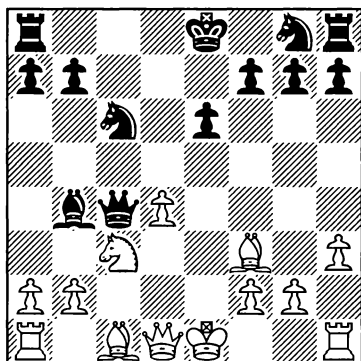


Diagram 37 (W)

A powerful queen

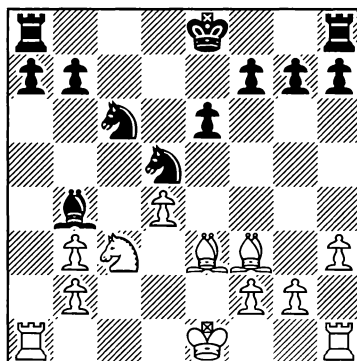


Diagram 38 (W)

Black is more than okay

White has some major issues to deal with. First of all there's the pressure on c3;

there's also some concern over the d4-pawn. But the main problem is that White cannot castle – this is why 10...Qc4 is such a strong move.

11 Qb3

Probably best. 11 Bxc6+ is a toothless way of dealing with the threat to d4, and I prefer Black after 11...bxc6! 12 Qb3 Qxb3 13 axb3 Ne7 – his weak pawns are not as bad as White's weak pawns.

11 Be3 Bxc3+ 12 bxc3 Qxc3+ 13 Kf1 Nge7 left White with no compensation in R.Djurhuus-T.Bae, Roros 2002, chiefly because he still has to spend time organizing his king.

Finally, against 11 Bd2 both 11...Qxd4 and 11...Nge7 are fine for Black, while 11...Rd8 12 Qa4 (R.Rechel-A.Lisanti, Frankfurt 1998) 12...Rxd4 might well be stronger, intending 13 Bxc6+ Qxc6 14 Qxa7 Bc5 or 13 Be2 Qc5.

11...Qxb3 12 axb3 Nge7

12...Nxd4 is also possible, but I think that White gains some compensation for the pawn after 13 Bxb7 Nc2+ 14 Ke2 Nxa1 15 Bxa8 Nxb3 16 Be3 a5.

13 Be3 Nd5!? (Diagram 38) 14 Ke2

Black is slightly better after 14 Bxd5 exd5 15 Ke2 0-0-0, although the smart money would be on a draw.

14...Bxc3! 15 Bxd5 Nxd4+ 16 Bxd4

Or 16 Kd3 Bxb2 17 Bxb7 Rd8 18 Ra2 Nf5+ 19 Ke2 Bd4, and this time Black has some winning chances.

16...Bxd4 17 Bxb7 Rb8 18 Rhd1! e5

18...Rxb7! 19 Rxd4 Rxb3 20 Rxa7 Rxb2+ 21 Rd2 doesn't really give Black any realistic winning chances with best play, despite the extra pawn. Miles tries to keep some tension in the position by retaining bishops, but Rausis plays accurately and manages to secure the draw. Even so, this is obviously not a great advert for 8 h3.

19 Bd5 Rd8 20 Ra5 0-0 21 Bc4 g6 22 Rb5 Kg7 23 Rb7 Rd6 24 Rd3 Rf6 ½-½

Game 6

□ N.Vlassov ■ K.Landa

Polanica Zdroj 1993

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 Nc6 5 Nf3 Bg4 6 Be2 e6

6...e6 is a common choice because many players are reluctant to exchange on d4 at an early stage and thus allow White the chance to play Nc3. However, White now has the possibility of playing c3-c4 followed by d4-d5, an opportunity he shouldn't pass up.

7 h3!



WARNING: Move order is important! 7 c4? Qf5! 8 d5 exd5 9 cxd5 Bxf3! 10 Bxf3 Nd4 is certainly not what White wants. Compare the main game, where 8...Qf5 is impossible due to 9 g4 forking the queen and bishop.

7...Bh5 8 c4 (Diagram 39)

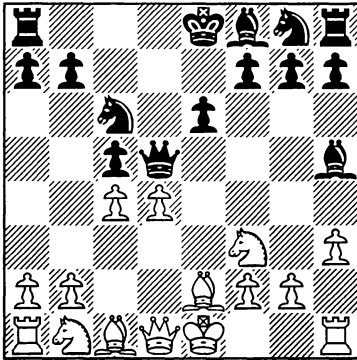


Diagram 39 (B)

The way to punish Black

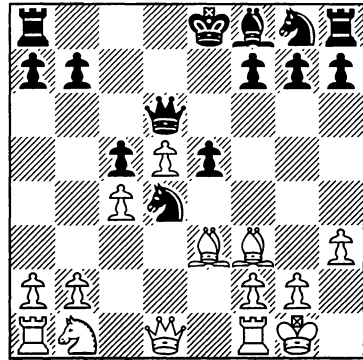


Diagram 40 (B)

Black encourages danger

8...Qd6!

This is stronger than 8...Qd7, which gives White extra possibilities based on the idea of a quick Ne5. The line 9 g4!? Bg6 10 d5 exd5 11 cxd5 Nb4 12 Ne5! Qxd5 13 Bb5+ Kd8 14 0-0 is known to give White a powerful initiative and has scored well for him.

9 d5!

9 g4 is riskier without the possibility of Ne5 as in the previous note, and indeed Black enjoyed good counterplay after 9...Bg6 10 d5 Nb4 11 0-0 exd5! 12 cxd5 0-0-0 13 Nc3 Nf6 in N.Short-J.Polgar, Isle of Lewis 1995.

9...Bxf3

Black will sink a knight into d4 and then try to keep the position as closed as possible to disguise his development lag. Alternatives are not particularly appetizing: for example, 9...Ne5 10 Nxe5 Qxe5 11 g4 Bg6 12 Qa4+ when Black is forced to move his king; or 9...exd5 10 cxd5 Bxf3 11 Bxf3 Nd4 12 Be3! Nxf3+ 13 Qxf3 Nf6 14 Nc3 and White has an easy plan of 0-0 and Bf4.

10 Bxf3 Nd4 11 0-0

White can also consider 11 dxe6!? Qxe6+ 12 Be3. In L.Keitlinghaus-T.Fogarasi, Budapest 1996, Black grabbed on c4 with the queen, and after 12...Qxc4 13 Bxd4 cxd4

14 Nd2 Qb5 15 a4 Qa6 16 Qb3 0-0-0?? (16...Qe6+! 17 Qxe6+ fxe6 18 Bxb7 Rb8 19 Bc6+ is only a bit better for White) 17 Rc1+ Kb8 18 Rc6! b6 19 Qxf7 Bd6 20 Rxd6 Rxd6 21 Qf8+ Kc7 22 Qxg7+ he was forced to resign.

11...e5

Otherwise White will certainly play dxe6 to free his bishop on f3.

12 Be3 (Diagram 40) 12...0-0-0?!

This, along with Black's next move, is far too ambitious. He should probably settle for the solid 12...Nf6 planning ...Be7 and ...0-0. The game R.Alvarez-G.Pyrich, correspondence 1997, demonstrates a way for White to fight for the advantage: 13 Nd2 Be7 14 Bxd4 cxd4 (against 14...exd4 Alavarez intended to play 15 b4!) 15 c5! Qxc5 16 Re1 Nd7 17 Rc1 Qb4 18 a3 Qb5 19 d6! Bxd6 20 Nc4 Bc7 21 a4 Qb4 22 Qxd4 and Black was under some pressure.

13 Nc3

13 Nd2 also makes sense, meeting 13...Nf6 with 14 b4! and 14...cxb4 with 15 Bxd4 exd4 16 Nb3.

13...f5?

This is too much. At least after the developing 13...Nf6 Black would be in some sort of position to cope with White's aggression on the queenside.

14 b4! (Diagram 41)

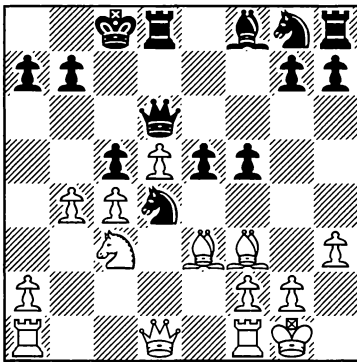


Diagram 41 (B)

This lunge is strong

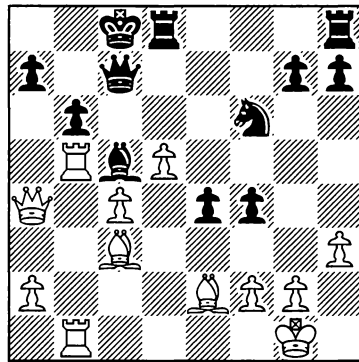


Diagram 42 (W)

A choice of wins

There's no need to prepare this move. It's powerful enough without any support, especially as more than half of Black's pieces are still in bed.

14...cxb4 15 Bxd4 bxc3 16 Bxc3

Shipov and Vlassov offer the nice line 16 c5! Qc7 17 d6 Bxd6! 18 Rb1!! (18 cxd6?

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

Rxd6) 18...exd4 19 cxd6 Rxd6 20 Rxb7 Qc4 21 Rxa7 (21 Qb1! is even more decisive). There's nothing wrong with the text, though, and White maintains a big advantage.

16...Qc7 17 Rb1 Nf6 18 Qa4

Threatening 19 d6.

18...e4 19 Be2 Bc5 20 Rb5 f4

Black had to try 20...e3, although 21 f4 keeps White on top.

21 Rfb1! b6 (Diagram 42) 22 Be5

White has more than one way to win: for example, 22 Bxf6 gxf6 23 Rxc5! Qxc5 (or 23...bxc5 24 Qa6+ Kd7 25 Qe6 mate) 24 Qxa7 crashes through after 24...Qc7 25 Bg4+!

22...Qxe5 23 Rxc5+ Kb8

23...bxc5 allows mate after 24 Qc6+ Qc7 25 Qa6+ Kd7 26 Qe6.

24 Ra5 Qc7 25 c5! Nxd5 26 cxb6 Nxb6 27 Rxb6+! 1-0

Game 7

□ I.Markovic ■ S.Zakic

Belgrade 1996

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 Nc6 5 dxc5 (Diagram 43)

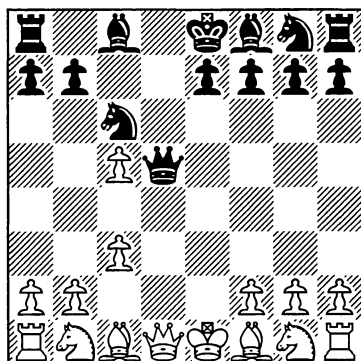


Diagram 43 (B)

A radical departure

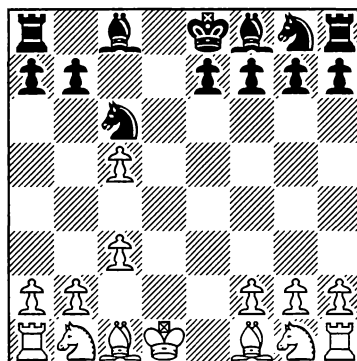


Diagram 44 (B)

Won't appeal to everyone

Given that the main idea of the c3 Sicilian is supposedly to create some kind of pawn centre, 5 dxc5 must be considered as something of a radical move. However, early dxc5 ideas have been increasing in popularity in recent years, as play-

ers attempt to present Black with some new problems, and indeed the statistics show that White has been scoring pretty well.



TIP: If you're not particularly happy with the thought of your king being stuck in the middle of the board for a long period of time, think carefully before choosing to play dxc5 lines. Also, for those looking to learn and understand the c3 Sicilian from scratch, it's probably a good idea to get used to the classical lines first; dxc5 ideas can always be explored later, once you have more experience in the opening.

Now Black has to make a game-defining decision: whether to recapture on c5 or to sacrifice a pawn and displace White's king by capturing on d1.

5...Qxc5

I think if everybody took on c5, more White players would choose 5 dxc5. It's not that 5...Qxd1+ is necessarily the stronger move (although this may well be true); it's more a case that 5...Qxd1+ is more difficult to face over the board. After 6 Kxd1 (**Diagram 44**) White is a pawn ahead, but this type of position will certainly not be to everyone's taste. There are many possible continuations, but usually Black is able to gain reasonable compensation due to his lead in development and White's misplaced king. For example, 6...e5 7 b4 (of course White must keep hold of the pawn!) 7...a5 (likewise Black does his best to dismantle White's pawn chain) 8 Bb5! (after 8 b5 Nd8 9 Be3 Nf6! Black intends ...Ng4 or ...Nd5, when it's difficult for White to hold on to the c5-pawn) 8...Bd7 (the more aggressive 8...Bf5!? has also been played) 9 Nf3 f6 10 Nbd2 axb4 11 Bxc6 Bxc6 12 cxb4 (A.Murariu-A.Bratu, Buzias 2002) and now as well as the game's 12...0-0-0 Black could consider 12...b6 13 cxb6 Bxb4 with a very unclear position.

Returning to 5...Qxc5, White has chances for at least a slight advantage here, without the risk associated with 5...Qxd1+ 6 Kxd1. He will try to exploit the awkwardly placed black queen in order to boost his development.

6 Na3!

A good move – the knight is heading either for b5 or c4.

It's tempting to attack the queen immediately with 6 Be3, but in fact more problems are caused if this move is held in reserve. 6 Be3 Qa5 7 Na3 Nf6 8 Nc4 Qc7 sees the queen reaching a safe post and Black should be able to develop and equalize without too many problems.

6...e5

As a prophylactic measure against Nb5, Black can consider playing 6...Qa5 even without the provocation of Be3. F.Roeder-E.Dizdarevic, Bad Wörishofen 1988, continued 7 Nf3 Bg4 8 Be2 Nf6 9 0-0 Rd8 10 Qb3 Rd7 11 Nc4 Qc7 12 Bg5 when White's lead in development was enough to offer him a slight edge.

7 Nb5! (Diagram 45)

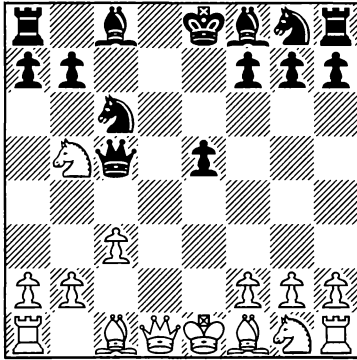


Diagram 45 (B)

Black must deal with Nc7+

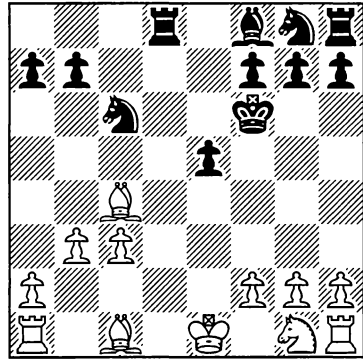


Diagram 46 (B)

A move of class

7...Qe7

7...Qb6? 8 Be3! would be awkward for Black.

Black's idea after 7...Qe7 is to drive away the knight with ...a6 and then organize his development, so White needs to keep up the pressure.

8 b3!? Be6

After 8...Qd8!? Black has spent four moves out of eight on his queen, only to get it back to its original square! Paradoxically this might even be Black's strongest option, and indeed 9 Qxd8+ Kxd8 10 Be3 Be6 11 0-0-0+ Kc8 12 Nf3 a6 13 Nd6+ Bxd6 14 Rxd6 h6 15 Be2 Nf6 was only slightly better for White in M.Ragger-S.Guerrero Olmos, Heraklion 2004.

9 Ba3 Qd8 10 Qxd8+ Rxd8 11 Nc7+ Kd7 12 Nxe6 Kxe6 13 Bc4+ Kf6 14 Bc1!! (Diagram 46)



TIP: It is often worth going backwards for a move or two, if it means that you are able to keep your positional advantages.

It would have been so easy to have played the stereotypical 14 Bxf8 Rxf8 15 0-0-0, but in this case White would have lost much of his advantage after, for example, 15...Nh6 16 Nf3 Rd8. Being part of a pair, White's dark-squared bishop is much stronger in the long term than its counterpart. It even proves to be stronger in the short term, albeit with a little assistance from Black!

14...Bc5 15 Nf3 Nge7?

Black had to play 15...h6, although White is still doing pretty well after. say, 16

Ke2 Ke7 17 b4 Bd6 18 Be3.

16 Ng5! (Diagram 47)

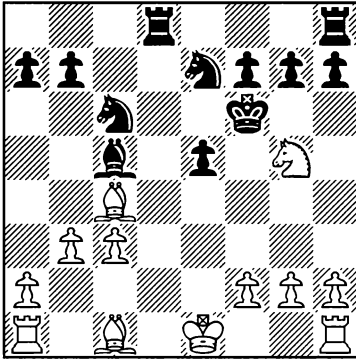


Diagram 47 (B)

A basic double threat

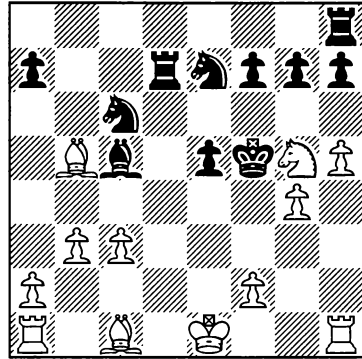


Diagram 48 (B)

Hunting the king

Oops! Suddenly White threatens both 17 Ne4+ and 17 Nxf7, so Black is forced to give up a pawn.

16...b5 17 Bxb5 Kg6 18 h4!

White continues to play aggressively and is handsomely rewarded after another mistake by Black.

18...Rd7?

Black had to prevent White's next move with 18...h5.

19 h5+ Kf5

Of course the f6-square is mined because of 20 Ne4+, so Black's king is forced to walk the plank.

20 g4+! (Diagram 48) 20...Kxg4 21 Be2+ Kf5 22 Rg1 1-0

A possible finish would be 22...Rdd8 23 Bg4+ Kf6 24 Ne4 mate.

Game 8

□ **M.Dubois** ■ **M.Verot**

French Women's Championship, Val d'Iserre 2002

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 Nc6 5 Nf3 Bg4 6 dxc5

This move has many similarities to 5 dxc5.

6...Qxd1+

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

Again trading queens on d1 is the most challenging response.

6...Qxc5 is not as safe as it looks, and White can cause Black a few problems with 7 Be3 (7 Na3 Qa5 transposes to Roeder-Dizdarevic – see the note to Black's sixth move in Game 7) 7...Qa5 8 Qb3!? (**Diagram 49**).

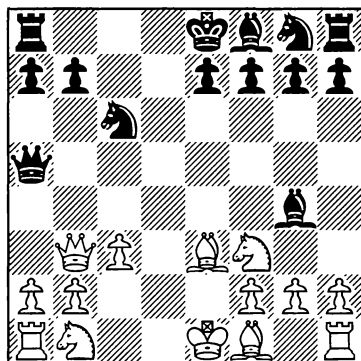


Diagram 49 (B)

Hitting b7

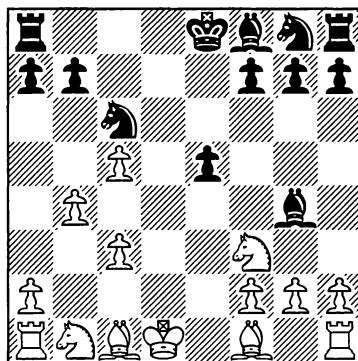


Diagram 50 (B)

It's easy to err

White tries to exploit the absence of the bishop from c8 – compare 5 dxc5, where this possibility doesn't exist. H.Langrock-T.Dovramadjiev, Santanyi 2004, continued 8...Bxf3 (8...0-0-0 9 Qxf7!? Ne5! 10 Qf4 g5!? 11 Qg3 is interesting, but ultimately Black's compensation probably falls a bit short) 9 gxf3 Qc7 10 Na3! a6, and now after the game's 11 0-0-0 or 11 Nc4 it's obvious that White's active pieces offer him good chances of a long-term initiative.

7 Kxd1 e5

Black has reasonable alternatives here, such as 7...0-0-0+ or even just 7...Nf6, but 7...e5 is clearly the most direct move.

8 b4 (Diagram 50)

Against 8 Be3 Black's recommended reply is 8...f5!

8...a5



NOTE: This type of position is demanding for both sides: White clearly has to take great care over Black's threats, and Black must play energetically otherwise he risks allowing White to consolidate his extra pawn.

This position demands precision from Black, since a number of tempting continuations lead nowhere. For example ...e4 is an enticing possibility which forces some 'only moves' by White, but it's not always effective so the timing has to be

right. 8...e4 9 h3 Bh5 10 g4 exf3 11 gxh5 0-0-0+ 12 Kc2 Nf6 13 Nd2 g6 14 Nxf3 Ne4 15 Ng5 Nxg5 16 Bxg5 Rd5 17 h4 Bg7 18 Bg2 (D.Howell-R.Mueller, Kirishi 2004) is an example of Black running out of gas, leaving White with virtually a winning position.

9 Bb5

After 9 b5 Nd8 White is struggling to defend c5, and 10 Be3 Ne7 11 Be2 f6 12 h3 Bd7 13 c6 (Black was intending ...Nf5 or ...Nd5 to win the pawn in any case) 13...bxc6 14 a4 Nd5 was roughly equal in L.Vajda-S.Benderac, Herceg Novi 2007.

My only experience with White in this line was not a happy one: 9 Bd2 Nf6 10 h3 Bxf3+ 11 gxf3 Be7 12 Bb5 0-0 13 Bxc6 bxc6 14 Kc2 Nd5 15 a3 Rfb8 16 Re1 Kf8 17 Re4 g6 18 Ra2 f5 19 Rc4 Kf7 20 Kb3 a4+! 21 Kc2 g5! (**Diagram 51**) and I could hardly move any of my pieces (J.Emms-A.Kuzmin, Port Erin 2003). It's true that my play could have been improved upon at one or two stages, but overall I feel that Kuzmin's plan is a convincing one.

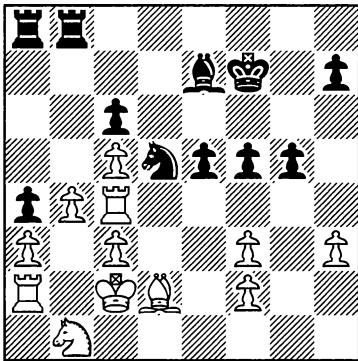


Diagram 51 (W)

Virtually paralysed

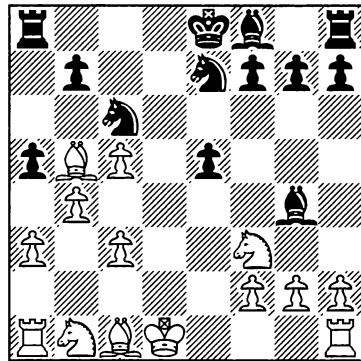


Diagram 52 (B)

Black is tempted to check

9...Nge7 10 a3 (Diagram 52)

The game D.Howell-C.Ward, Gausdal 2005, demonstrates the type of complications that can arise from this position: 10 Kc2 Bxf3 11 gxf3 axb4 12 cxb4 0-0-0 13 Bxc6 Nxc6 14 a3 Nd4+ 15 Kc3 b6! 16 Be3 (16 cxb6 Kb7 offers Black another avenue of attack, down the c-file) 16...Nxf3!? (16...bxc5 is obviously not bad) 17 cxb6 e4 18 Kb3 Nd4+ 19 Kc4!? Nc2 20 Nc3!? Nxa1 21 Rxa1 when nothing had been settled and all three results were still possible. A more recent game featuring Britain's youngest ever GM, D.Howell-Bu Xiangzhi, Liverpool 2007, continued 10 Bd2 e4 11 h3 Bd7 12 Ne1 Nd5 13 Nc2 Be7 14 a3 Bf6 15 Re1 0-0-0; I think here that most players would prefer Black's activity to White's extra pawn.

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

10...0-0-0+?!

The temptation to castle and give check at the same time is understandably difficult to resist, but this is an instructive mistake because Black suddenly forgoes any possible tactics down the a-file, leaving White with an alternative recapture after ...axb4.

In A.Ledger-C.Ward, British League 2005, Black improved with 10...axb4! 11 cxb4 0-0-0+ 12 Nbd2, and in this position Rowson, Palliser and Rogozenko have all shown that 12...e4 is promising for Black. After 13 h3 exf3 14 hxg4 fxg2 15 Rg1 Nd4 16 Bd3 the key move is 16...h5!, intending to activate the rook on h8.

11 Nbd2 e4

Of course after 11...axb4? White wouldn't hesitate to reply 12 axb4! with a nice open a-file, thank you very much!

12 h3 Bh5? (Diagram 53)

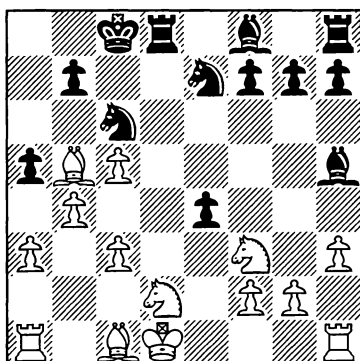


Diagram 53 (W)

The tide is turning

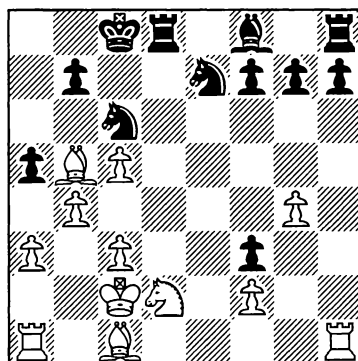


Diagram 54 (B)

Ideal for White

Now Black is really struggling. She should still follow the recipe given in the previous note by playing 12...exf3 13 hxg4 fxg2 14 Rg1 h5!.

13 g4 Bxg4

After 13...Bg6 14 Nh4! Nd5 15 Nxc6 hxg6 16 Kc2! e3 17 fxe3 Nxe3+ 18 Kb3 Nxc4 19 Nc4 Black has regained her pawn but White is completely coordinated, and with Bf4 in the air it's Black's king who will begin to feel uneasy.

14 hxg4 exf3 15 Kc2 (Diagram 54)

Material is level, but White enjoys a clear advantage. The f3-pawn is weak, White's pieces will become active, and Nc4 followed by Bf4 is an obvious plan.



NOTE: White's pawn phalanx on the queenside is a major asset which grows in importance as the game progresses.

15...Ne5 16 g5 Nd5 17 Nc4! Nxc4 18 Bxc4 b6

This loses, but suggesting a decent alternative is difficult. For example after 18...Be7 19 Re1! Black's bishop is lacking squares, and 19...Rhe8 20 Re5 Nc7 21 Bxf7 wins material.

19 Rd1 Ne7

Or 19...Nc7 20 Rxd8+ Kxd8 21 cxb6.

20 Ba6+ 1-0

Black Plays ...e5

In this section we look at another aggressive approach from Black, where he seeks to blast open the centre with a very quick ...e7-e5. There are quite a few different positions in which ...e5 can be played, and White's reaction is not always the same. In some situations it makes sense for White to capture on e5, while in others he is better off keeping the tension. It all depends on specifics and I hope to clarify the subtle differences between each ...e5 line in this section. As one would expect with an open centre, piece activity and speed of development become the most important factors.

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 Nc6

Black can also play ...e5 before this move, with or without ...cxd4 first. Let's look at both cases:

a) After 4...cxd4 5 cxd4 e5 (**Diagram 55**),

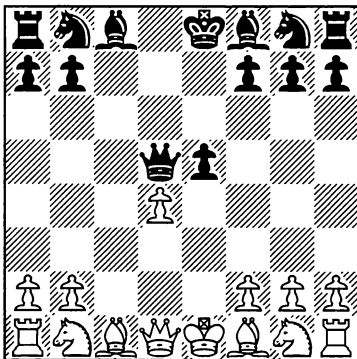


Diagram 55 (W)

6 dxe5 or 6 Nf3?

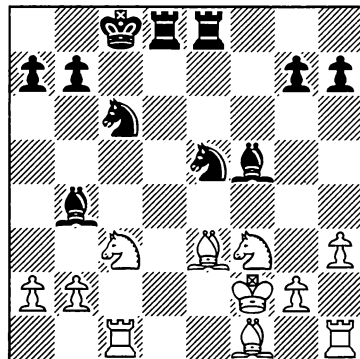


Diagram 56 (W)

Black is active

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White must make a decision: should he capture on e5 or keep the tension with 6 Nf3?

After 6 dxe5?! Qxd1+! 7 Kxd1 Nc6 Black has nothing to fear: his active development and White's king on d1 add up to offer him enough compensation for the missing pawn. For example, after 8 f4 Bf5 9 Nf3 0-0-0+ 10 Ke1 f6! 11 Be3 Nh6 12 h3 Bb4+ 13 Nc3 Rhe8 14 Kf2 fxe5 15 fxe5 Nf7 16 Rc1 Nfxe5 (**Diagram 56**) Black has regained his pawn and was at least equal in the game A.Likartsis-Z.Stanojoski, Kavala 1997.



NOTE: This type of pawn sacrifice – involving dxe5 or dxc5 followed by a queen trade on d1 – is extremely common in the c3 Sicilian. It's important to develop a feel for the viability of these sacrifices. In this situation it was certainly justified, but we will come across scenarios in which White can happily take the pawn and keep an advantage.

With this in mind, I believe White's strongest move to be 6 Nf3!, inviting Black to be the one to release the tension. I suspect that Black's best move here might well be 6...Nc6, transposing back to our main line, because alternative seem weaker. 6...e4 7 Nc3 Bb4 8 Ne5 intending Bc4 looks better for White, and White's results have been good after 6...exd4 7 Qxd4! Qxd4 (7...Nf6 8 Nc3! Qxd4 9 Nxd4 is similar) 8 Nxd4. The idea of Nb5 is annoying, and Black has generally prevented this by playing 8...a6, but after 9 Nc3 White's lead in development in an open position – albeit in a queenless middlegame – assures him of a least a slight advantage.

b) 4...e5 can also lead to the main line after 5 Nf3 cxd4 6 cxd4 Nc6, but with this move order the possibility of 5 dxe5! is a much more serious one for White. Why is this so? After 5...Qxd1+ 6 Kxd1 (**Diagram 57**),

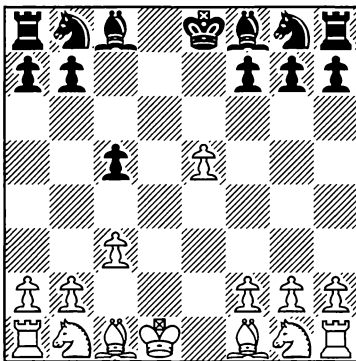


Diagram 57 (B)

Spot the difference?

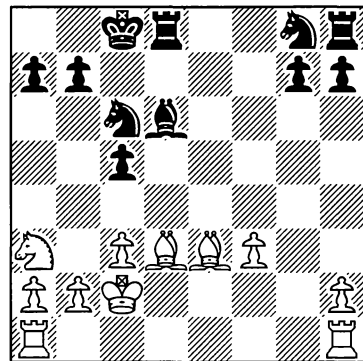


Diagram 58 (B)

Advantage to White

let's compare this position to the similar one reached after 4...cxd4 5 cxd4 e5 6 dxe5?! Qxd1+ 7 Kxd1 (see above). The one difference is the presence of pawns on c3 and c5. This may not seem that significant at first sight, but in fact this wrinkle favours White in a number of ways:

1. With c-pawns on the board it's more difficult for Black to develop his pieces as actively as possible. In particular the f8-bishop is restricted, while the pawn on c3 does a good job of preventing any incursions on b4 and d4.
2. With the c-file closed White's king is more likely to find a safe haven. In some lines it can tuck itself away on the c2-square, a place which would be extremely hazardous if the c-file were open.



NOTE: As a rule of thumb, captures on e5 are more likely to be successful if the c-pawns remain on the board.

Of course it's easy to sit here and generalize. In truth each given situation has to be judged on its own merits. My feeling is that, although Black possesses a number of resources, White has reasonable chances of an advantage here. One possible line would be 6...Nc6 7 f4!? (7 Nf3, transposing to 5...e5 below, is also good) 7...f6 8 Nf3 (8 exf6?! Nxf6 only accelerates Black's development, so this should be avoided) 8...Bg4 9 Kc2!? 0-0-0 10 Bd3! (offering to return the pawn – trading a material advantage for a positional one) 10...Bxf3 11 gxf3 fxe5 12 Na3 exf4 13 Bxf4 Bd6 14 Be3 (**Diagram 58**). With two bishops, and with Nc4 or Nb5 in the air, White certainly has chances of success in this position.

Obviously Black is not obliged to sacrifice a pawn – there is also the simple recapture with 5...Qxe5+. While certainly playable for Black, perhaps unsurprisingly this approach hasn't appealed to many because White is likely to gain more time hitting the queen. Following the typical sequence 6 Be2 Nf6 7 Nf3 Qc7 8 Na3! White continues to think of harassment (Nb5) and is likely to achieve at least a small advantage.

5 Nf3 (Diagram 59)



NOTE: The ...e7-e5 idea works particularly well against 5 Be3, which some White players might adopt to avoid the ...Bg4 pin. Following 5...cxd4 6 cxd4 e5! 7 Nc3 Bb4! 8 Nf3 exd4 9 Nxd4 Nf6 Black's development is active and he is assured of an equal position.

5...cxd4

After 5...e5!? White's best try for an advantage lies with 6 dxe5 (6 Nxe5 Nxe5 7 dxe5 Qxe5+ isn't quite as promising here, since there is no Nf3 to hit the queen) 6...Qxd1+ 7 Kxd1. Black has some possibilities of rounding up the e5-pawn, but even this isn't a guarantee of equality. For example, 7...Bg4 8 Bf4 Nge7 9 Kc2!? (after 9 Be2 Ng6 10 Bg3 0-0-0+ 11 Nbd2 h5 12 h3 Bxf3 13 Bxf3 Ngxe5 Black is very close to equality) 9...Ng6 10 Bg3 h5 11 h4 0-0-0 (so far L.Vajda-Z.Vukovic, Bucha-

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rest 1999) 12 Na3 Bf5+ (12...Bxf3 13 gxf3 Ngxe5 regains the pawn but White's pieces spring to life, something that is graphically demonstrated after 14 Re1 Nxf3?? 15 Bh3+!) 13 Kb3 Be6+ (White need not be afraid of 13...Na5+ 14 Ka4 Nc6 15 Nc4 followed by Nd6+) 14 c4 when White plans to reorganize by Kc3 and Nc2.

6 cxd4 e5 7 Nc3! (Diagram 60)

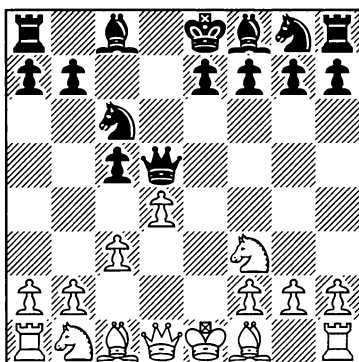


Diagram 59 (B)

Black trades before ...e5

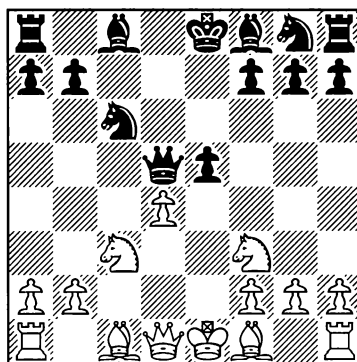


Diagram 60 (B)

White must attack the queen

Taking into consideration the previous variations, White should certainly avoid 7 dxe5?! Qxd1+ 8 Kxd1 Bg4!.

7...Bb4

Only this move justifies Black's trade on d4. Retreating the queen and allowing d4-d5 would totally undermine Black's opening strategy.

8 Bd2!

Again White keeps the tension. There would be much less chance of an opening advantage after 8 dxe5 Qxd1+ 9 Kxd1 Bg4. There is, however, an interesting alternative in 8 Be2!? – see Game 9 for coverage of this move.

8...Bxc3

Alternatives make little sense.

9 Bxc3 (Diagram 61) 9...e4!

This is much stronger than 9...exd4?! 10 Nxd4, which would bring the bishop on c3 to life for no compensating reasons.

10 Ne5

White has also tried 10 Nd2!? (**Diagram 62**) intending a quick Bc4. I think this gives Black fewer long-term problems, as long as he is careful over the next few moves. The main line runs 10...Nf6 (10...Nxd4?? loses material to 11 Qa4+!) 11 Bc4

Qg5! (disrupting White's development, as 12 0-0? allows 12...Bh3!) 12 d5 and now:

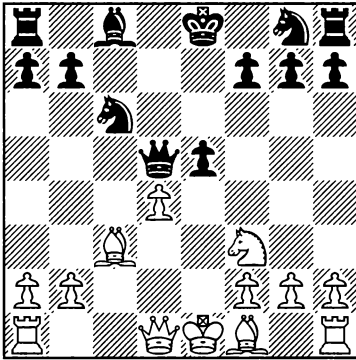


Diagram 61 (B)
...exd4 or ...e4?

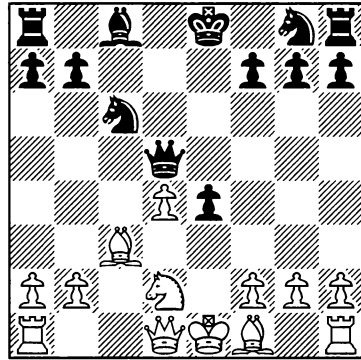


Diagram 62 (B)
Planning Bc4

a) 12...Qxg2!? is a complicated line, but White has every chance of gaining an advantage after 13 Rf1 Bg4 (13...Ne7 14 Qb3 followed by 0-0-0 looks promising for White) 14 Qb3 e3! (better than 14...Ne7 15 Bxf6 gxf6 16 d6!) 15 fxe3 Nxd5 16 Bxg7 (16 Qxb7? 0-0! 17 Qxc6 Rad8 left Black with a dangerous attack in J.Blauert-F.Fuglsang, Lyngby 1990) 16...0-0-0! (after 16...Rg8?, 17 Qxb7! wins because Black can no longer castle) 17 Bxh8 Rxh8 18 Rf2 Qh1+ 19 Nf1 (**Diagram 63**).

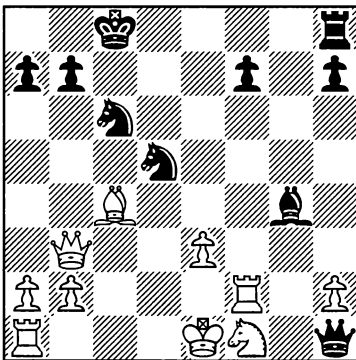


Diagram 63 (B)
Complex, but good for White

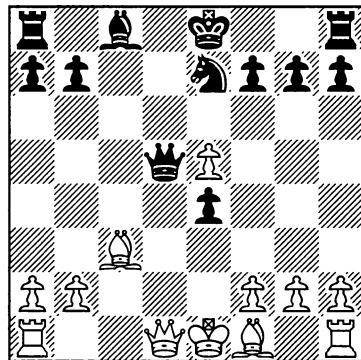


Diagram 64 (W)
The main line

There's plenty of play in this position but my feeling is that Black doesn't have

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enough compensation.

b) 12...Ne5 is solid enough: 13 Bb5+ Bd7 (13...Kf8!? has also been played) 14 Bxd7+ Nxd7 15 0-0 0-0 16 d6 Rfe8 17 Nc4 Re6 18 Bxf6!? (18 Rcl!?) 18...Rxf6? 19 Qd4! gave me some advantage in J.Emms-J.Hall, Harplinge 1998, but 18...Nxf6! is stronger because Black gains counterplay based on ...Ng4 or ...Nh5-f4.

10...Nxe5

There was little choice, as Bc4 was threatened.

11 dxe5 Ne7! (Diagram 64)

11...Be6? is inferior, and one way to punish it is with 12 Qa4+! Bd7 13 Bc4!? Bxa4 14 Bxd5 Bc6 15 Bxc6+ bxc6 16 0-0-0 when Black has no good answer to Rh1-e1xe4. Also unappealing for Black is 11...Qxd1+?! 12 Rxd1 Ne7 13 Bb5+ Nc6 14 Rd6.

Returning to 11...Ne7, we have a position that most experts agree offers White good chances for at least a small advantage. White's trump cards are his two bishops, the possibility of attacking Black on the dark squares and the slight vulnerability of the e4-pawn. On the other hand Black's development is fairly unobstructed and sometimes he can restrict White's advantage to a minimum with some simplification. Various continuations are considered in Games 10-11.

Theoretical?

Not especially, probably because Black has more promising lines available to him.

Statistics

White scores a fairly healthy 58% from the position after 11...Ne7. The gambit line with 8 Be2!? scores an even more impressive 65%.

Illustrative Games

Game 9

□ S.Vajda ■ L.Hovanez

Salgotarjan 2002

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 Nc6 5 Nf3 cxd4 6 cxd4 e5 7 Nc3 Bb4 8 Be2!? (Diagram 65)

The main idea behind this move is an imaginative piece sacrifice, which apparently was originally suggested by Sir Stuart Milner-Barry. Though his gambit in the French Defence is much better known, in all likelihood this c3 Sicilian gambit is stronger. Indeed, White's results have been very encouraging.

8...e4

Black takes up the challenge. These days it's generally acknowledged that 8...Nxd4! is a safe way for Black to continue, with White having chances of only a very slight advantage: 9 Bd2 Bxc3 10 Bxc3 Nxf3+ 11 Bxf3 Qxd1+ 12 Rxd1 f6 13 Ba5 Be6! 14 Rc1 (or 14 Bxb7 Rb8 15 Bc6+ Kf7 followed by ...Ne7) 14...Ne7! (Black was under some pressure after 14...Rc8 15 0-0! b6 16 Rxc8+ Bxc8 17 Rc1 Ne7 18 Bb4 Bd7 19 Rc7 in P.Acs-J.Fang, Budapest 1996) 15 Bxb7 (maybe 15 Rc7!? offers more chances) 15...Rb8 16 Rg7 Bd5 17 Bxd5 Nxd5 18 Rxc7 Rxb2 and a draw was soon agreed in R.Har Zvi-E.Wiersma, Rotterdam 1998.

9 0-0! Bxc3 10 bxc3 exf3 11 Bxf3 (Diagram 66)

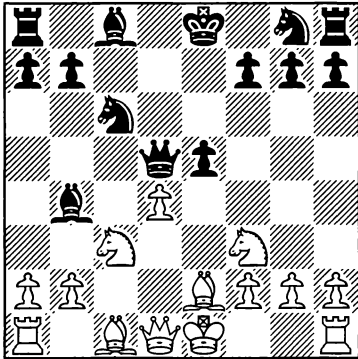


Diagram 65 (B)

Planning a piece sacrifice

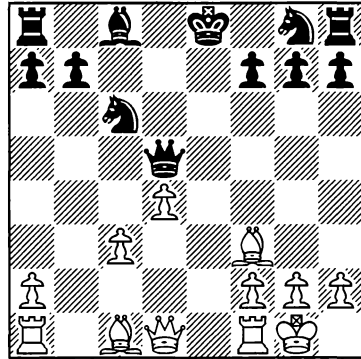


Diagram 66 (B)

Enough compensation, and more!

White enjoys a big lead in development, two raking bishops, a chance to attack Black's uncastled king down the e-file and mobile pawns in the centre. Together this adds up to more than enough compensation, and despite various attempts Black has struggled to come up with a decent solution to his problems.

11...Qa5

Black has a wide choice of queen moves, but the difficulties remain wherever it goes. A couple of examples:

a) 11...Qf5 12 Ba3 Nge7 13 Re1 Be6 14 d5! 0-0-0 15 dxc6! (a brilliant solution, although there's absolutely nothing wrong with 15 c4!) 15...Rxd1 16 cxb7+ Kc7 17 Raxd1 Nc8 (A.Motylev-V.Malakhov, Ekaterinburg 1996) and now 18 Re2, as suggested by Jonathan Rowson at *ChessPublishing.com*, leaves Black struggling due to the simple idea of Rb2.

b) 11...Qd6 looks the most logical, and is perhaps Black's best chance. 12 Re1+ Nge7 13 a4! 0-0 14 Ba3 Qf6 15 Bxc6 Nxc6 16 Bxf8 Kxf8 17 d5! is advantageous for White: for example, 17...Nd8 (or 17...Ne7 18 d6 Nc6 19 d7) 18 Qb1! g6? (Black had

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to play 18...h6, when he is still alive) 19 Qb4+ and Black resigned in F.Alozy-M.Kronche, correspondence 1997, on account of 19...Kg7 20 Re8.

12 Re1+ (Diagram 67)

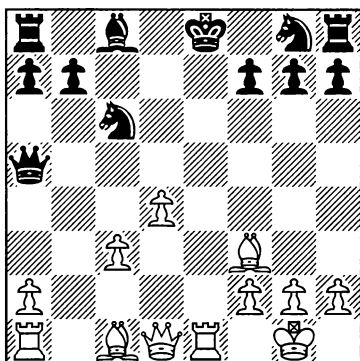


Diagram 67 (B)

A difficult choice for Black

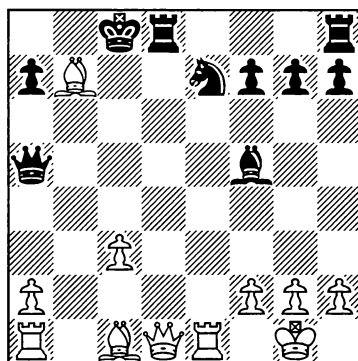


Diagram 68 (B)

Winning for White

12...Nce7

Black can choose to return material with 12...Nge7 13 d5 0-0 but he still doesn't equalize. For example, 14 c4 Rd8 (M.Rytshagov-G.Mohr, Moscow 1994) 15 Bg5! Ng6 (or 15...f6 16 Bd2 Qc7 17 dxc6 Nxc6 18 Bd5+ Kh8 19 Qh5) 16 Bxd8 Nxd8 17 Re8+ Nf8 18 Bg4! f5 19 Bxf5! Bxf5 20 Qf3 g6 21 g4 and Black is completely tied up. Avoiding the pin with 12...Kf8 carries its own dangers: 13 d5 Nd8 14 Qe2! Bd7 (14...g6 15 Qe5 f6 16 Qd6+ Kg7 17 Re8) 15 Bg4! f5 16 Bxf5! and it's highly unlikely that Black can survive, even though he can avoid immediate defeat with 16...Qa4.

13 d5

Simple, logical and very strong. Now Black decides to return the piece, but is soon blown away. That said, his position after 13...Kd8 14 d6 is also unenviable.

13...Bf5 14 d6 0-0-0 15 dxe7 Nxe7 16 Bxb7+! (Diagram 68)

White would be doing very well even without this move, but as it is he is winning because Black's king has no hope of surviving in the open.

16...Kxb7 17 Rxe7+ Kc8 18 Qb3 Qd5 19 Bf4! Qxb3 20 Rc7+!

A decisive intermezzo, before Black can play ...Rd7.

20...Kb8 21 axb3 1-0

Something very nasty is about to happen to Black's king.

Game 10

□ P.Vogelmann ■ P.Stuemer

German League 2005

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 Nc6 5 Nf3 cxd4 6 cxd4 e5 7 Nc3 Bb4 8 Bd2 Bxc3 9 Bxc3 e4 10 Ne5 Nxe5 11 dxe5 Ne7 12 Qa4+ (Diagram 69)

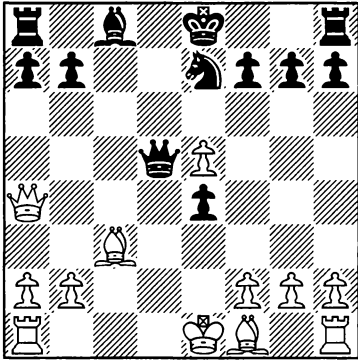


Diagram 69 (B)

White's main move

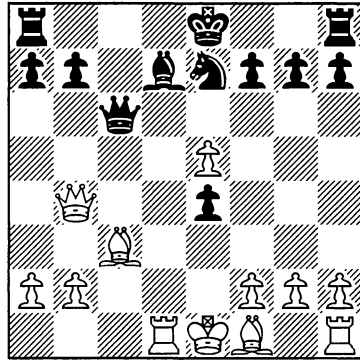


Diagram 70 (B)

Rd6 is coming

12 Qa4+ has been White's most common choice. The idea is twofold: White's queen will move to the a3-f8 diagonal, forcing Black to do some organizing before he can castle; and the white rook will quickly reach the d1-square, and maybe later d6.

12...Bd7 13 Qb4

The similar 13 Qa3 has also been played many times.

13...Qc6

Black sensibly takes prophylactic action against Rd1, and ...Nd5 is now a consideration in some lines – even as a pawn sacrifice.

The problem for Black is that after 13...Nc6? White can safely play 14 Qxb7!. Black still cannot castle because of 15 Rd1, and 14...Rb8 achieves nothing after 15 Qc7 – White's queen always has the safe haven of d6 at its disposal.

13...a5 is a reasonable alternative to 13...Qc6, but White can keep some hopes of an advantage with 14 Qd6 (14 Qb6 is also not bad): for example, 14...Bc6 15 Be2 Qxd6 16 exd6 Nf5 17 0-0-0, A.Karpatchev-A.Stephan, Schwarzach 2001.

14 Rd1 (Diagram 70) 14...e3

14...Nd5!? simplifies the position at a cost of a pawn. After 15 Qxe4 Nxc3 16 Qxc6

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Bxc6 17 bxc3 0-0 only White can win, but it's not that easy given his slight lag in development and split queenside pawns. F.De la Paz-O.Zambrana, Santa Clara 2003, continued 18 f4 g5! 19 Bc4 gxf4 20 0-0 Rae8 21 Rde1 Rd8 22 Rxf4 Bd5 and Black eventually succeeded in drawing this pawn-down endgame. That said, not many would fancy playing this way as Black!

The idea of 14...e3 is to reach a much better version of the above line after 15 fxe3?! Nd5 16 Qd4 Nxc3 17 Qxc3 Qxc3+ 18 bxc3, when White's split pawns are not a pretty sight.

15 Rd6!

The rook often reaches d6, and this suggestion of Chandler's seems to be promising for White.

15...exf2+ 16 Kxf2 Qc7 17 Bb5

17 Bd3 0-0 18 Rc1 also looks threatening.

17...Bc6 18 Bxc6+ Nxc6 19 Qc5 0-0 20 Rhd1 (Diagram 71)

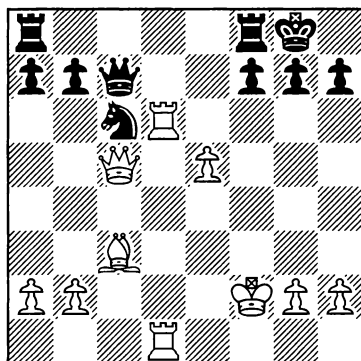


Diagram 71 (B)

A bit better for White

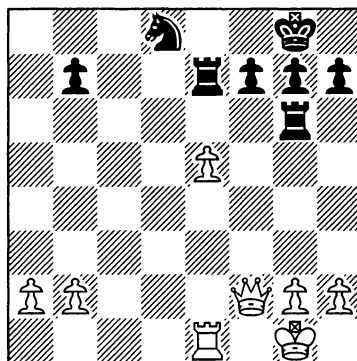


Diagram 72 (W)

White should win this!

Black is rather tied down and under some pressure. White dominates the d-file and Black always has to be watchful of the possibility of e5-e6, bringing the bishop into play.

20...Rae8 21 Kg1 Qe7

21...Re7! would keep White's advantage to a minimum.

22 Re1 Qg5

And this is simply too ambitious.

23 Rd7! Nd8

It's too late for defence, as 23...Re7 24 Rxe7 Qxe7 25 Qxe7 Nxe7 26 Rd1 followed by

Rd7 leaves Black struggling.

24 Qxa7 Re6 25 Qf2 Rg6 26 Bb4 Re8 27 Be7! Qxe7 28 Rxe7 Rxe7 (Diagram 72)

Of course White is completely winning now, but some serious errors – no doubt induced by time trouble – allow Black to escape with an unlikely draw.

29 Qa7 Rd7 30 Qb8

30 Qa4 Nc6 31 Rd1! is the easiest – just cut out all potential swindles by exchanging a pair of rooks.

30...h5 31 Rc1 Rd2 32 g3 Rg4! 33 Rc8 Rgd4! 34 Qxb7??

34 e6 fxe6 35 Qe5 should be good enough.

34...h4??

Both sides overlooked 34...Rc2!.

35 gxh4??

White can still win with 35 e6 fxe6 36 Qe7.

35...Rd1+ ½-½

Now there's no way for the white king to avoid perpetual check, e.g. 36 Kf2 R1d2+ 37 Ke3 R2d3+ 38 Ke2 Rd2+ etc.

Game 11

□ **A.Deviatkin** ■ **K.Kostin**

Russian League 2005

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 cxd4 5 cxd4 Nc6 6 Nf3 e5 7 Nc3 Bb4 8 Bd2 Bxc3 9 Bxc3 e4 10 Ne5 Nxe5 11 dxe5 Ne7 12 Be2 (Diagram 73)

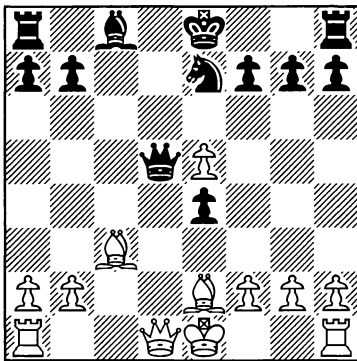


Diagram 73 (B)

White chooses development

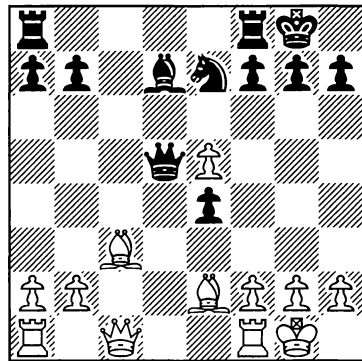


Diagram 74 (B)

Dark square action

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

I believe that White also has good chances for an advantage with this quiet developing move. Of the alternatives, 12 Qc2 is visually the most tempting, but Black seems to be doing okay in this line, not least because of 12...0-0 13 Rd1 Qxa2 14 Bb4 Bg4!.

12...0-0 13 0-0 Bd7?!

I think that Black's best chance to equalize lies with 13...Bf5!. If White then adopts the same approach as in the main game, Black is better prepared, and 14 Qc1 Qe6 15 Rd1 Rfd8 16 Qg5 h6 17 Qg3 Nd5 hasn't presented him with any serious problems (18 Bc4 can be met by 18...Nxc3!).

White has better chances of success if he changes tack with 14 Qa4!, and in the game A.Tzermadianos-G.Nikolaou, Ermioni Argolidas 2005, he kept a nagging edge after 14...Qe6 15 Rfd1 Nd5 16 Bc4! Nxc3! (16...Rfd8?? 17 Qb3! would be highly embarrassing) 17 Bxe6 Nxa4 18 Bxf5 Nxb2 19 Rdb1 Nd3 (19...Na4!?) 20 Bxe4 Nxe5 21 Rxb7.

14 Qc1! (Diagram 74)

This is a very promising idea. The queen will reach the kingside via g5 and cause Black some real problems on the dark squares. At the same time the d1-square is vacated for the rook.

14...Bc6

14...Qe6 15 Rd1 Nd5 (15...Bc6 transposes to the main game) 16 Bc4! Nxc3 17 Bxe6!?! Ne2+ 18 Kf1 Nxc1 19 Rxd7 Nd3 (19...fxe6 20 Rxc1 e3 21 f3) 20 Bd5 Nxe5 21 Rxb7, O.Lemmers-P.Vandevoort, Belgian League 2000, is another example of a favourable endgame for White.

15 Rd1 Qe6 16 Rd6 Qf5 17 g4! (Diagram 75)

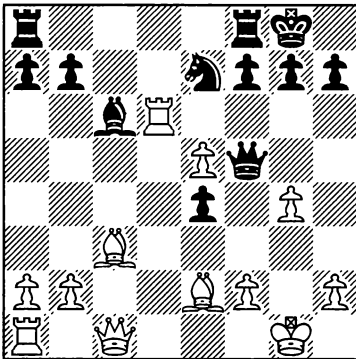


Diagram 75 (B)

The queen must retreat

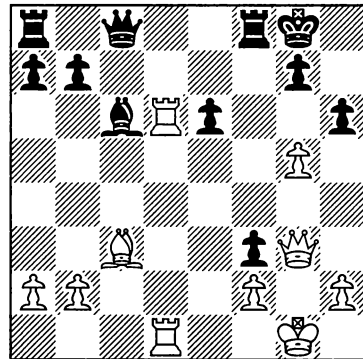


Diagram 76 (B)

A monster bishop on c3

It's worth the concession of weakening the kingside in order to force the black queen back to c8. In any case, this g-pawn will eventually play a starring role in White's attack.

17...Qc8 18 Qg5 Ng6 19 Rad1 h6

As the game demonstrates Black should probably avoid this move, although it's not that easy to suggest an alternative plan of action. Perhaps 19...Qc7 20 Bc4 Rae8, planning ...Qe7, although it's not pretty.

20 Qe3 Nh4 21 Qg3! Nf3+ 22 Bxf3 exf3 23 e6 fxe6 24 g5! (Diagram 76)

Suddenly Black is in real trouble. White combines threats against g7 with those down the d-file, and Black is in no real position to deal with this. For example, 24...h5 25 Qe5 Qc7 26 g6 followed by Qxh5; or 24...hxg5 25 Qxg5 and now 25...Qc7 26 Rd7! or 25...Rf7 26 Rd8+. His choice in the game smacks of desperation, but I can't find a good alternative.

24...Rf5 25 gxh6 g5 26 Re1 Bd5 27 Rxd5!

The easiest: Black's defences fall apart.

27...Rxd5

Or 27...exd5 28 Re7 Kf8 29 Qd6 etc.

28 h7+! Kxh7 29 Qh3+ 1-0

White soon mates after 29... Kg6 30 Rxe6+ Kf7 31 Rf6+ Ke7 32 Qh7+.

Summary






Many of the lines considered in this chapter lead to very sharp positions, and this means that a careful study of the tactical ideas and theory is a basic requirement. White shouldn't shy away from the main lines; in fact he should positively encourage them. None of Black's options are bullet-proof – in reality some entail considerable risk – and the well prepared White player has every chance of being rewarded handsomely.

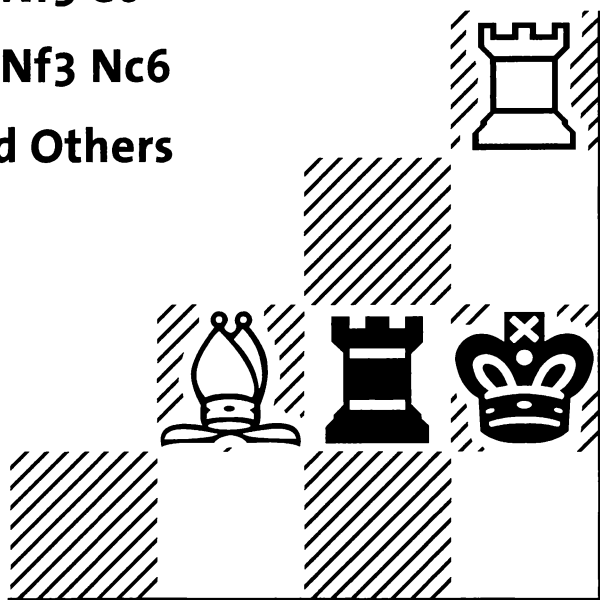
In the main line with 4...Nc6 5 Nf3 Bg4, I can recommend the 10 d5 pawn sacrifice (see Game 3) as an excellent practical weapon. White should also be ready to punish any inaccuracy early on, for example with c3-c4 and d4-d5 if Black fails to capture on d4 (as in Game 6).

Variations with ...e5 are interesting, but I feel that White has excellent chances of gaining an advantage here. In these lines it's important to develop a feel for when to capture in the centre (with dxe5 or dxc5) and when to maintain the tension.

Chapter Two

2...d5: Positional Lines

-  Introduction
-  4...Nf6 5 Nf3 Bg4
-  4...Nf6 5 Nf3 e6
-  4...Nf6 5 Nf3 Nc6
-  4...g6 and Others



Introduction

This chapter deals with Black's positional options after 2...d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4, which include two very popular systems of development. Firstly, there's 4...Nf6 5 Nf3 Bg4 (**Diagram 1**), which over the years has established itself as one of Black's most reliable methods of meeting the c3 Sicilian. Clearly there are some similarities with the previous chapter's 4...Nc6 5 Nf3 Bg4, but as we'll see, the seemingly minor difference of ...Nf6 instead of ...Nc6 plays an important role and significantly changes the character of the position. We will cover White's two main replies, 6 Be2 and 6 dxc5, as well as the tricky 6 Nbd2.

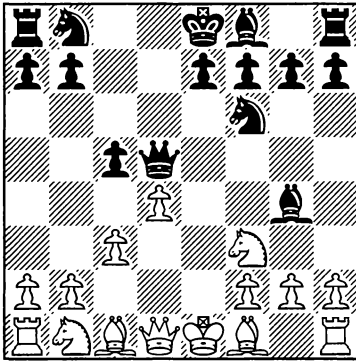


Diagram 1 (W)

4...Nf6 5 Nf3 Bg4

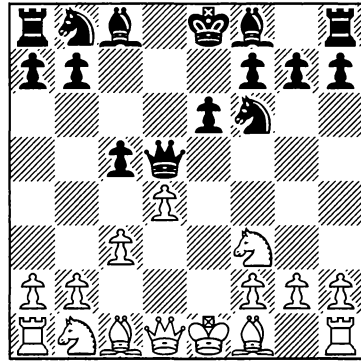


Diagram 2 (W)

4...Nf6 5 Nf3 e6

Black's second major option is 4...Nf6 5 Nf3 e6 (**Diagram 2**), another line with a solid reputation. More often than not a typical IQP position is reached, especially if White forces the issue with 6 Be3. Alternatives such as 6 Be2, 6 Na3 and 6 Bd3 will also be studied.

The final part of the chapter covers alternative lines for Black, including the flexible 4...Nf6 5 Nf3 Nc6 and the kingside fianchetto with 4...g6.

4...Nf6 5 Nf3 Bg4

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 Nf6 (Diagram 3)

4...Nf6 is Black's most common choice in this position, if nothing else because it's so flexible and can lead to many different systems. Unlike 4...Nc6 Black doesn't directly attack the d-pawn. On the other hand, he's a step closer to kingside cas-

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

tling and with his knight remaining on b8 he has fewer concerns over c3-c4 followed by d4-d5 – an important point as will soon be demonstrated.

5 Nf3

Occasionally White tries to avoid 5 Nf3 Bg4, but alternatives aren't really very promising; perhaps their only advantage is to get Black out of theory:

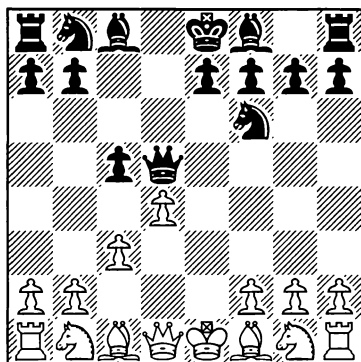


Diagram 3 (W)

The main choice

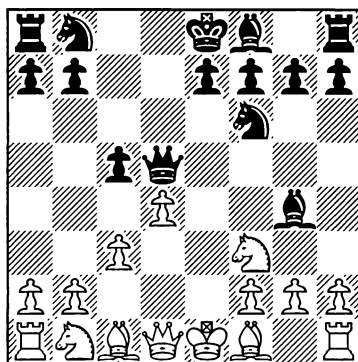


Diagram 4 (W)

An important moment

a) Against 5 Be3 Black can still go ahead and play 5...Bg4. After 6 f3 cxd4! 7 cxd4 Bd7 8 Nc3 Qa5 9 Bc4 e6, which has been seen in a few games, we get an IQP position in which White has played the ugly f2-f3 instead of Nf3, and this can't be bad for Black.

b) The move Nb1-a3 is something we'll see quite a bit of in this chapter, but in this particular situation 5 Na3 is not particularly challenging, and 5...cxd4 6 Nb5 Na6 7 Qxd4 Qxd4 8 Nxd4 e5 has equalized for Black in a few games.

c) 5 dxc5 Qxc5 6 Na3 a6 7 Be3 Qc7! 8 Nc4 Nbd7 9 a4 e6 has been seen in a few games, and Black is holding his own here.



NOTE: After dxc5, recapturing on c5 with the queen usually makes more sense if Black has played ...Nf6 rather than ...Nc6, because the queen has a direct passage back to the relatively safe haven of c7.

Of course Black can still play 5...Qxd1+ 6 Kxd1, although here he would probably slightly prefer a knight on c6 rather than f6 because activating the queenside usually takes precedence.

5...Bg4 (Diagram 4) 6 Be2

6 Be2 has been by far the most common choice, and that's no surprise given how natural it appears. But there are some alternatives that need to be highlighted.

The most important of these is the ambitious 6 dxc5!?, when Black faces the usual dilemma of whether to capture on c5 or d1.



NOTE: Out of all the early dxc5 lines in the c3 Sicilian, this one is the most popular.

There is more than one reason for this. Firstly, many of the resulting positions are fascinating, and rich in possibilities for both sides. Secondly, 6...Qxd1+ seems more favourable for White than some of the analogous lines we've already seen, or at least more fun to play. Last, and certainly not least, Black's theoretical standing in the 'main line' after 6 Be2 is much more solid than in some other 2...d5 variations, and so it's only natural for White to further explore non-classical ideas. Black's two options against 6 dxc5 are covered in Games 13-14.

6 Nbd2 is also interesting – see Game 15. One further try for White is 6 Qa4+. The main line runs 6...Bd7 7 Qb3 cxd4! 8 Bc4 (8 Nxd4 Nc6 is equal) 8...Qe4+ 9 Kf1 e6 10 cxd4 Nc6 11 Nc3 Qf5 12 Qxb7 (if White doesn't grab this pawn, with his king on f1 there would be no justification to the preceding play) 12...Rb8 13 Qc7 Be7, when Black's superior development is at least a match for White's extra pawn.

6...e6 7 h3

White usually forces the bishop back, either now or after 7 0-0 Nc6 8 h3.

7...Bh5 (Diagram 5)

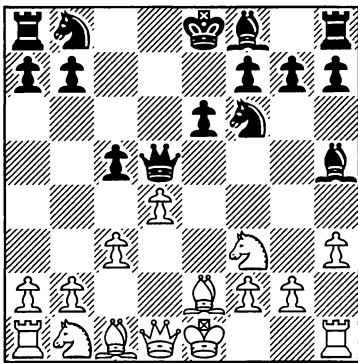


Diagram 5 (W)

c3-c4 is no worry

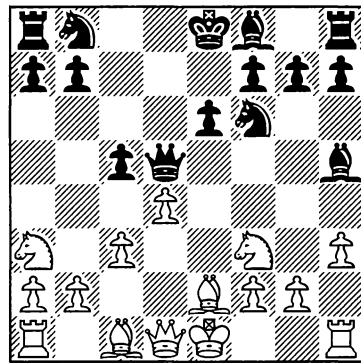


Diagram 6 (B)

Planning Nb5

8 0-0



NOTE: Compared to the variation 4...Nc6 5 Nf3 Bg4 6 Be2, in the present line Black is under no pressure to exchange quickly on d4 because he need not fear the advance c3-c4 and d4-d5.

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

After 8 c4 Qd8! (it's safer to avoid 8...Qd6 9 Nc3 cxd4 10 Nb5) there is no danger of d4-d5, and actually there's no danger at all for Black: 9 Nc3 cxd4 10 Nxd4 Bxe2 11 Qa4+ Nbd7 12 Ndx2 Be7 is pretty toothless; 9 Qb3 is more ambitious, but 9...cxd4 10 Qxb7 Nbd7 11 Nxd4 Rb8 12 Qa6 Bb4+ 13 Nc3 0-0 has proved to be a strong pawn sacrifice – Black's activity is pretty obvious here.

8 Be3 usually transposes to the main line after 8...cxd4 9 cxd4 Nc6 10 Nc3 Qd6 11 0-0 Be7. One further move worth mentioning is 8 Na3 (**Diagram 6**). White's idea with this move – and with Na3 in general – is to try to cause Black problems with the possibility of Nb5, which is very nearly always the answer to ...cxd4 (otherwise Na3 would make no sense). A typical continuation is 8...Nc6 9 Be3 (after 9 Nb5 the simple retreat 9...Qd8 is okay) 9...cxd4 10 Nb5 0-0-0 (a rare occasion where castling queenside is justified; 10...Rc8 is also playable, but after 11 Nbx4 Black needs to avoid 11...Bc5?! which runs into the surprising 12 Nxe6!) 11 Nbx4 Bc5 12 0-0 e5 13 Nxc6 Qxc6 14 Qc1 Rhe8 (R.Markus-A.Zaremba, correspondence 2001) and Black's excellent piece activity compensates for his slightly draughty king position.

8...Nc6

Again Black is in no rush to trade pawns on d4, although there's nothing wrong in doing so. For example, 8...cxd4 9 cxd4 (9 Nxd4 could easily transpose to the note to White's 10th move after 9...Bxe2 10 Qxe2 Nc6 11 Be3) 9...Nc6 10 Nc3 Qa5 transposes to a line considered in Chapter One – 4...Nc6 5 Nf3 Bg4 6 Be2 cxd4 7 cxd4 e6 8 Nc3 Qa5 9 h3 Bh5 10 0-0 Nf6.

9 Be3 (Diagram 7)

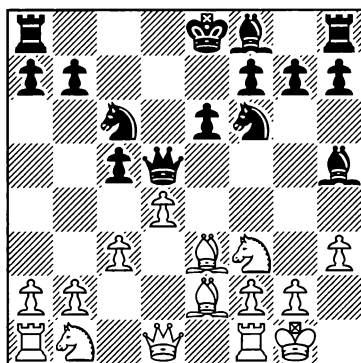


Diagram 7 (B)

Forcing the issue?

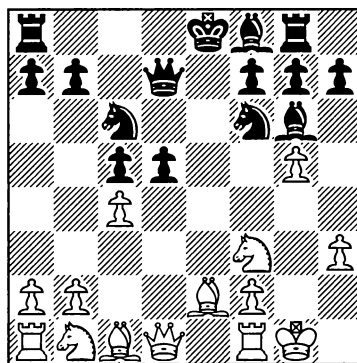


Diagram 8 (W)

A Fritz-inspired idea

Now Black has to consider the possibility of dxc5, and 9 Be3 usually induces Black

to finally trade pawns on d4. At least he can claim that White has had to commit his bishop to e3 to force the issue.

9 c4 isn't a worry for Black, as long as he chooses the correct queen retreat: 9...Qd7! 10 g4!? (10 dxc5 Bxc5 is toothless) 10...Bg6 11 d5 exd5 12 g5 Ne4 13 cxd5 Qxh3! (this is the reason for 9...Qd7!) 14 dxc6 Bd6 and Black has at least perpetual check. *Fritz* comes up with the brilliant alternative to 12...Ne4 in 12...Rg8! (**Diagram 8**), which might be even stronger. Certainly after 13 gxf6 gxf6 White's king would have every right to feel nervous about what was in store!

9...cxd4

American GM Alex Yermolinsky has played 9...Rd8!? here. After the critical 10 dxc5 his analysis runs 10...Qxd1 (10...Bxc5? loses material after 11 Qxd5 Rxd5 12 c4!) 11 Rxd1 Rxd1+ 12 Bxd1 Nd5 13 b4 Be7 14 a3 Bf6 15 Bd2 0-0 16 Ra2 Rd8, when I slightly prefer White's extra pawn to Black's superior piece activity.

10 cxd4

White can also choose a majority structure by playing 10 Nxd4 Bxe2 11 Qxe2, although he cannot expect to gain any theoretical advantage and the positions are quite drawish in nature. One example, from many, continued 11...Be7 12 Rd1 0-0 13 c4 Nxd4 14 Bxd4 Qc6 (14...Qe4 is also okay) 15 Nc3 a6 16 b3 Rfd8 17 a4 Rd7 18 Rd3 Rad8 19 Rad1 h6 20 Kf1 and ½-½, P.Zarnicki-G.Kasparov, Buenos Aires (simul) 1997. Of course either side could play on in the final position, and this line might appeal to those who feel at home in these fairly simple positions.

10...Be7

10...Bd6!? 11 Nc3 Qa5 transposes to a line considered in Chapter One – 4...Nc6 5 Nf3 Bg4 6 Be2 cxd4 7 cxd4 e6 8 Nc3 Qa5 9 h3 Bh5 10 0-0 Nf6 11 Be3.

10...Bb4!? (**Diagram 9**) is of interest, not least because of its deployment by Garry Kasparov.

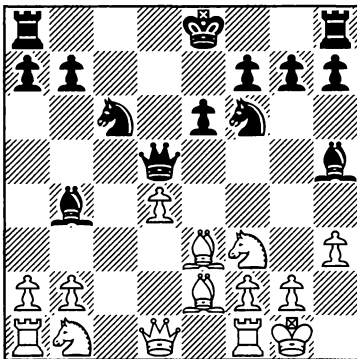


Diagram 9 (W)
Kasparov's choice

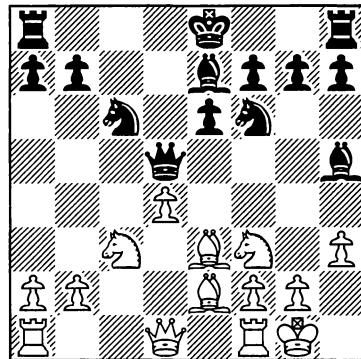


Diagram 10 (B)
Where to retreat?

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

Of course the bishop can be attacked by a2-a3, but White must be careful he doesn't drive the bishop to a more desirable post (for example, to b6 where it attacks d4). The sequence 11 a3 Ba5 12 Nc3 Qd6 13 Nb5 Qe7 14 Ne5 Bxe2 15 Qxe2 0-0 16 Rac1 Rac8 17 Bg5! gained an advantage for White in *Deep Blue*-G.Kasparov, Philadelphia 1996, due to the awkward pin on the f6-knight, but Kasparov's recommendation of 13...Qd5! is an improvement. The idea is ...Bxf3 and it's possible that White has nothing better than to return with 14 Nc3.

Perhaps it's wiser not to disturb the bishop, and just carry on as normal with 11 Nc3. Then 11...Qd6 (11...Qa5 is also not bad; White replies to this in the same way) 12 Qb3 0-0 13 Rfd1 Rfd8 14 g4! Bg6 15 Bg5! tried to exploit the absence of the bishop from e7 in the game V.Ivanov-A.Kharlov, Russian Championship 1994, and White did succeed in gaining an edge after 15...Qe7 16 Bf1 Na5 17 Qa4.

11 Nc3 (Diagram 10) 11...Qd6!

The d6-square is a good post for the queen, much more active than d8. After ...0-0 Black is ready to move his rooks to d8 and c8, and his position will be well organized. The only real way to harass the queen is with Nb5, but after ...Qd8 or ...Qb8 the knight is doing little on b5 and probably ends up just going back to c3.

11...Qa5 transposes to Chapter One, but here Black would prefer his bishop to be on d6, and White can play 12 Qb3! Qb4 13 g4 – see the note to Black's 11th move in Game 4 for more details.

12 Qb3!

As we've already seen in similar positions in Chapter One (with Black's queen on a5), the b3-square is the most natural post for White's queen. Looking at alternatives, 12 a3 0-0 and only then 13 Qb3 is certainly possible, but real aggression seems to backfire here. For example, 12 Nb5 Qb8 13 Ne5 Bxe2 14 Qxe2 0-0! (14...Nxe5?! 15 Bf4!) 15 Nxc6 (or 15 Bf4 Qd8 16 Rfd1 Nd5) 15...bxc6 16 Nc3 Nd5 left Black comfortable in L.Ljubojevic-G.Kasparov, Moscow Olympiad 1994.

12 g4 Bg6 13 Ne5?! (**Diagram 11**) is even more aggressive, but with accurate play Black can even gain an advantage: 13...0-0! (White's idea was 13...Nxe5?! 14 dxe5 Qxe5 15 Qa4+ Kf8 16 Bf4 when it's clear he has good compensation for the pawn) 14 Bf4 Nd5! (an excellent exchange sacrifice) 15 Nxg6? (declining with 15 Nxd5 Qxd5 is better, but I still prefer Black) 15...Nxf4 16 Nxf8 Rxf8 left Black with many weaknesses to exploit, not least the white king, in F.Fritsche-H.Engl, correspondence 2000. The game ended rather abruptly with 17 Kh1 e5 18 Bd3 Qh6 19 Qf3 Nxf3 20 Kg2 Nf4+ 21 Kg1 Nxd4. Perhaps White could have defended more resiliently, but his task is an unenviable one.

12...0-0! (Diagram 12)

12...Qb4?! once again reaches the note to Black's 11th move in Game 4.

After 12...0-0 we reach the main starting position for the early middlegame. Both sides are ready to bring their rooks into play, often d1 and c1 for White and d8

and c8 for Black. White will always be on the lookout for a chance to play d4-d5; Black takes care to prevent this possibility while always keeping an eye on the consequences of Qxb7. Further play from here will be discussed in Game 12.

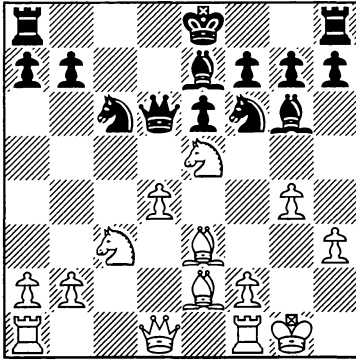


Diagram 11 (B)
over-aggressive

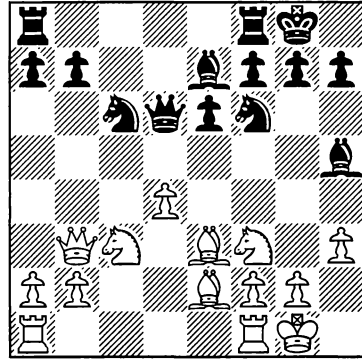


Diagram 12 (W)
The 'starting' position

Theoretical?

6 Be2 has built up a fair body of theory, but because the positions are fairly quiet it's not as important to learn fixed sequences of moves as it might be in other lines. There have been far fewer games, relatively speaking, with 6 dxc5, but it's probably more important to know the forcing lines in that variation because the positions are much sharper and more difficult to work out over the board.

Statistics

White has scored 51% in over 300 games from the position after 12...0-0. Half of these games ended in draws, which does give some indication as to how solid this line is for Black (and for White!). The modern 6 dxc5!? has been more successful, 63% in over 500 games, with the draw ratio dropping significantly to 32%. Overall White's score against 4...Nf6 5 Nf3 Bg4 has been 52% in over 5000 games.

Illustrative Games

Game 12

□ **F.Alava Moreno** ■ **A.Morano**

Correspondence 2000

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 Nf6 5 Nf3 Bg4 6 Be2 e6 7 h3 Bh5 8 0-0 Nc6 9 Be3

cx d4 10 cxd4 Be7 11 Nc3 Qd6 12 Qb3 0-0 13 Rfd1! (Diagram 13)

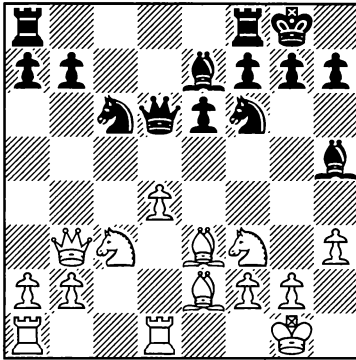


Diagram 13 (B)

Idea: d4-d5

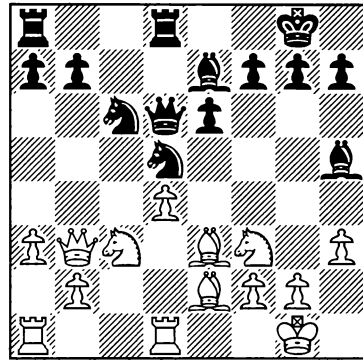


Diagram 14 (W)

Super-solid

13 a3 is likely to reach the main line, but in my opinion 13 Rfd1 gives Black more chance to err.

Black's previous move shows that he is not concerned about Qxb7 for the moment, and indeed after 13 Qxb7?! Rab8 14 Qa6 Rxb2 White has succeeded only in activating Black's rook.

13...Rfd8!

13...Nb4 intending ...Nd5 is a decent alternative but the natural response 13...Qb4?! allows White to gain an advantage after 14 d5!, and 14...Qxb3 15 axb3 exd5 16 Nxd5 Nxd5 17 Rxd5 Bg6 (or 17...Bxf3 18 Bxf3) 18 Rd7 has proved to be a difficult ending for Black.



TIP: If White has the chance to play d4-d5 in this variation, more often than not this opportunity should be taken. In the resulting positions he is usually left with the more active pieces.

14 a3

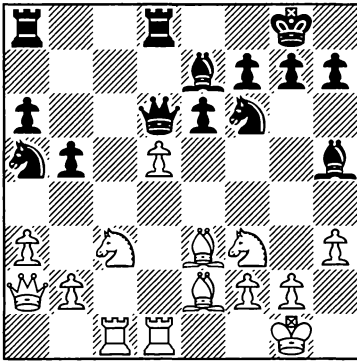
14 Rac1 can be safely met by 14...Qb4! here, since Black now has the d5-square under sufficient control.

14...Nd5 (Diagram 14)

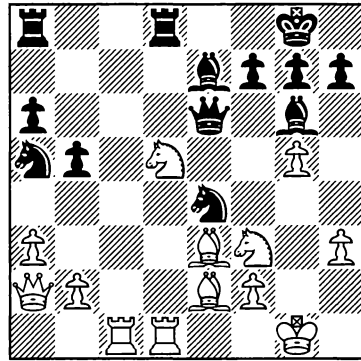
This super-solid move rules out any chance of d4-d5. Protecting the b7-pawn with 14...Rab8 is another safe option, and 15 Rac1 Nd5 16 Nxd5 exd5 17 Qb5 f6 18 b4 Qd7 19 Qd3 Bf7 was roughly equal in I.Rausis-C.Lutz, Meisdorf 1996.

A more ambitious approach by Black is to advance his pawns on the queenside

with ...a6 and ...b5. White must react energetically to fight for the advantage, and the resulting positions are very complicated. The main line runs 14...a6!? 15 Rac1 (15 Qxb7?? loses to 15...Rdb8 trapping the queen) 15...b5 16 d5! (a crucial move; if White plays quietly Black will grab the initiative with ...Rac8 and ...Na5-c4) 16...Na5 (against 16...Nxd5 White has the surprising trick 17 Nxd5 exd5 18 Rxc6! Qxc6 19 Nd4 Qg6 20 g4: for example, 20...Bc5 21 Bd3 Qf6 22 gxh5 Bxd4 23 Bxd4 Qg5+ 24 Kf1 Qxh5 25 Be2 and the two bishops proved to be stronger than the rook and pawns in M.Chovanec-T.Klapiszewski, correspondence 2001; 16...exd5 17 g4 Na5 18 Qa2 reaches the main line, but White also has 18 Qb4!?) 17 Qa2 (**Diagram 15**) and now Black has a choice of captures:

**Diagram 15 (B)**

Leading to complications

**Diagram 16 (W)**

A critical position

a) 17...Nxd5 18 Nxd5 exd5 19 Bc5 is more comfortable for White, but with accurate play Black can equalize: for example, 19...Qf6! (Black must avoid 19...Qe6 20 Nd4! Qe5 21 Bxh5 Bxc5 22 Bxf7+, or 19...Qd7 20 Ne5! Qe6 21 Bxh5 Qxe5 22 Bxf7+! Kxf7 23 Re1 Qxe1+ 24 Rxe1 Bxc5 25 b4) 20 Rxd5 Bxc5 21 Rdxc5 Bg6 22 b4 Nb7 23 Rc7 Nd6, R.Rybak-L.Blatsky, correspondence 2000.

b) 17...exd5 leads to very sharp play: 18 g4! (White must regain the pawn) 18...Bg6 19 g5 Ne4 20 Nxd5 Qe6! (**Diagram 16**) 21 Nh4!? (21 Bb6? Bd6!! 22 Bxa5 Qxh3 is known to give Black a dangerous attack; 21 Rc7! might well be White's best move, and 21...Bd6 22 Ne7+! Bxe7 23 Qxe6 Rxd1+ 24 Bxd1 fxe6 25 Rxe7, as played in B.Onoprijchuk-V.Avdeeva, Saratov 2006, offers White some chances of success in the endgame due to his bishop pair and active rook) 21...Nxc5! (21...Bxc5 22 Bg4! Qd6 23 Bxc5 Nxc5 24 Nxc6 hxc6 25 Nc7 was very good for White in J.Canibal-K.Chorfi, correspondence 1999) 22 Nxc6 (22 Bg4 Nxc3+ 23 Bxh3 Qxh3 24 Nxe7+ Kh8 25 Nxc6+ fxg6 26 Ng2 Nc4 – planning ...Ne5 – 27 Bf4 g5! 28 Bxc5 Rxd1+ 29 Rxd1 Qh5 30 Rd5 Re8 31 Qb1 h6 and Black regains the piece, K.Chorfi-G.Cardelli,

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

correspondence 2000) 22...hxg6 (Black has no good follow up after 22...Nxh3+? 23 Kg2 Qxg6+ 24 Kxh3) 23 Bg4 Nxh3+! (23...Qe5 loses to 24 h4! Ne4 25 Bf4!) 24 Bxh3 Qxh3 25 Nxe7+ Kh8! (25...Kf8? 26 Nxb6+) and Black seems to have sufficient resources here, as 26 Rxd8+ Rxd8 27 Qxf7 Qg4+ 28 Kf1 Rd1+ 29 Rxd1 Qxd1+ 30 Kg2 Qg4+ is perpetual check.

This is a very sharp line with some possible improvements. White should certainly look more closely at 21 Rc7!, which looks quite promising.

15 Nxd5

15 Ne4 Qc7 16 Rac1 Rab8 intending ...Nf4 is very solid for Black.

15...Qxd5

15...exd5 16 Rac1 Rab8 would transpose to 14...Rab8, as seen in the note to Black's 14th move, but it's understandable that Black wants to keep the d-file open so that he can attack the d4-pawn.

16 Qxd5

16 Qxb7?! Rab8 is again undesirable for White.

16...Rxd5 17 g4 Bg6 18 Ne5! (Diagram 17)

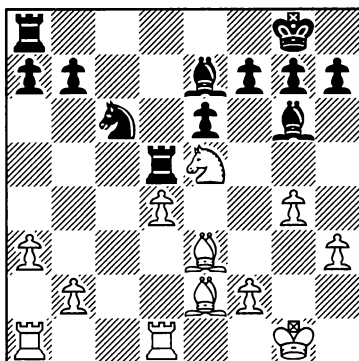


Diagram 17 (B)

An excellent idea

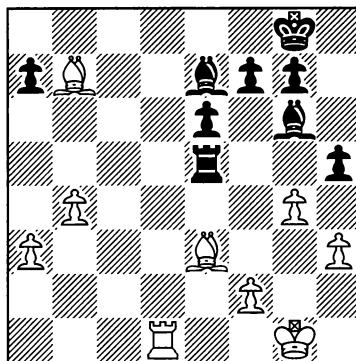


Diagram 18 (B)

Should be winning

Temporarily sacrificing a pawn to gain activity. This is a very good idea because if Black consolidates, as he did after 18 Bc4 Rdd8 19 Ne5 Be4! in V.Bashkov-P.Schlusser, European Club Cup 1992, he can even claim a slight advantage – the weakness of White's d-pawn becomes more prominent as pieces are exchanged.

18...Nxe5 19 dxe5 Rxe5 20 Bf3!

This is stronger than 20 Rd7?! Bg5! 21 Bxg5 Rxe2! 22 Rxb7 Be4, which favoured Black in T.Ravi-V.Babula, Moscow 1994. After 20 Bf3! White is going to regain his

pawn by capturing on b7, after which his majority on the queenside offers good chances to play for a win.

20...h5?

Black should play 20...Rb5, although even then White can still keep the pressure going with 21 Rd7!.

21 Bxb7 Rd8 22 b4 Rxd1+ 23 Rxd1 (Diagram 18)

Now White enjoys a clear advantage: his pieces are better coordinated (Black's rook is particularly poor); a7 is attacked; and his pawn majority is more threatening than Black's.

23...a5 24 Bd4 Rg5 25 f4 Rb5 26 Bc6 Rb8 27 bxa5 Rc8 28 Bb7 Rd8 29 Kg2!

There was still time to blunder with 29 a6?? allowing 29...Rxd4! 30 Rxd4 Bc5.

29...Bf6 30 a6! Rxd4 31 a7 Rxd1 32 a8Q+ Rd8 33 Qa5 hxg4 34 hxg4

This is winning for White.

34...Rd4 35 Kf3 Rd3+ 36 Ke2 Rd4 37 Qc7 Bd3+ 38 Ke3 Bg6 39 Ba6 Re4+ 40 Kf3 Bd4 41 Qc8+ Kh7 42 Qc1 Ba7 43 Bd3 1-0

43...Rd4 44 Qh1+ Kg8 45 Bxg6 fxc6 46 Qb1 is hopeless in the long run, while after 43...Re3+ 44 Qxe3 Bxe3 45 Kxe3 the outside a-pawn is decisive.

Game 13

□ I.Dolgov ■ J.Mrkvicka

Correspondence 2002

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 Nf6 5 Nf3 Bg4 6 dxc5!?

This is currently seen as the greatest test of 4...Nf6 and 5...Bg4.

6...Qxd1+

6...Qxc5 is examined in the next game.

7 Kxd1 e5

Not entirely forced (for example, Black could continue development with 7...Nc6!?), but there's no doubting the critical nature of 7...e5, and that's why it's been by far the most common choice. Black immediately threatens the c5-pawn, and ...e5-e4 is also a major consideration.

8 b4 e4 (Diagram 19)

Nothing else is as challenging. White's next few moves are forced.

9 h3 Bh5

9...exf3? is inferior, and 10 hxg4 Nxg4 11 Bb5+ Nc6 12 Re1+ Be7 13 gxf3 Rd8+ (13...Nxf2+ is better but 14 Kc2 still leaves Black in a mess) 14 Kc2 Nxf2 15 Be3 Nh3 16 Bf1! won a piece in H.Jonkman-M.Babar, Senden 1999.

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

10 g4 Nxg4

Again Black must keep his bishop. 10...exf3?! 11 gxh5 Nc6 12 Bb5 Ne4 13 Kc2! Be7 (13...Nxf2 14 Rf1) 14 Re1! Nxf2 15 Nd2 Nxf3 16 Nxf3 significantly favoured White in D.Sermek-J.Isaev, Turin Olympiad 2006 – just look at how active his pieces have become.

11 hxg4 Bxg4 12 Nbd2 exf3

Black has occasionally delayed this capture, but I think 12...exf3 is the strongest choice.

13 Bd3 (Diagram 20)

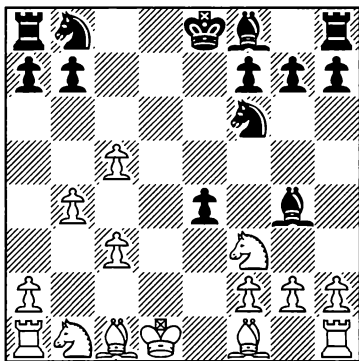


Diagram 19 (W)

The most challenging

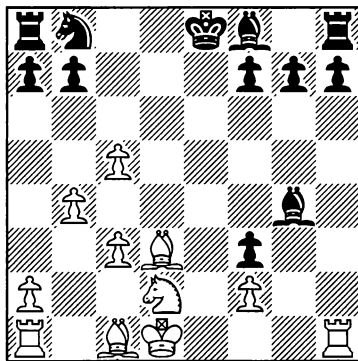


Diagram 20 (B)

A fascinating position

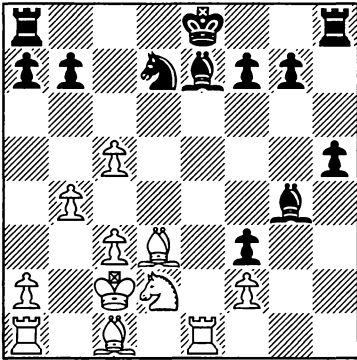
A fascinating position has arisen. At first sight it looks like the advantage should be with Black, who is a pawn up and has a big majority on the kingside. But when you look more closely it becomes apparent that White possesses quite a few trump cards:

1. In most lines the pawn on f3 is quickly captured with Be4 followed by Nxf3.
2. White's development is easier and more active than Black's: his king goes to c2; he plays Be4, Nxf3 and then develops the c1-bishop; and his rooks are not lacking open files.
3. White's pawn phalanx on the queenside is a major positive: not only is it dangerous in itself, and more advanced than Black's majority on the other wing, but it also acts as a cramping device which restricts Black's movement.

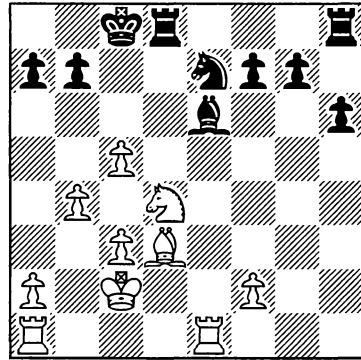
The position is very complex and it's difficult to make an assessment with any certainty. What can be said, though, is that in practice White has enjoyed considerable success.

13...Nc6

In B.Miljanic-B.Vuckovic, Petrovac 2004, Black preferred 13...Nd7 and after 14 Re1+ Be7 15 Kc2 h5 (**Diagram 21**) White eschewed 16 Be4 (which is met by 16...0-0-0!) in favour of 16 Nc4!, preventing Black from castling and threatening Nd6+. The game continued 16...Be6 17 Na5! b6 (17...0-0-0 is answered by 18 Be4!) 18 Be4 Rc8 19 Nc6 bxc5 20 Nxa7 (even 20 b5!? is possible) 20...Rc7 21 Nb5 Rc8 22 Bb7!? (22 Na7 repeats the position) 22...0-0! 23 Bxc8 Rxc8, when White is the exchange up but Black has just about enough compensation and any result is still possible.

**Diagram 21 (W)**

16 Nc4 or 16 Be4?

**Diagram 22 (B)**

An ideal scenario

14 Re1+ Be7

Black can aim for queenside castling by playing 14...Be6?!, but allowing White to capture the f3-pawn without any effort is unwise. J.Emms-A.David, Andorra 1998, continued 15 Nxf3 0-0-0 16 Kc2 Be7 17 Bg5! h6 18 Bxe7 Nxe7 19 Nd4 (**Diagram 22**), and here I was really beginning to enjoy my position. The rest of the game is worth seeing, if only because it's a nice demonstration of the power of White's queenside pawns: 19...Nd5 20 a3 Nf4 21 Be4 Bd7 22 a4 a6 23 Nf5 Bxf5 24 Bxf5+ Kb8 25 Re7 Rhf8 26 c4 Rde8 27 Rae1 Ne6 28 Rxe8+ Rxe8 29 Kc3 g6 30 Bh3 Rd8 31 Bxe6 Re8 32 Rh1 Rxe6 33 Rxh6 Rf6 34 b5 Kc7 35 Rh8 axb5 36 axb5 b6 37 c6 Rf3+ 38 Kb4 Rxf2 39 Ra8 g5 40 Ra7+ Kc8 41 c5 and my opponent resigned – 41...Rb2+ 42 Kc4 Rc2+ 43 Kd5 Rxc5+ 44 Kd6 Kb8 45 Rb7+ Kc8 46 Rxf7 Kb8 47 Rf8+ Ka7 48 c7 wins for White.

15 Kc2

15 Be4 f5!? (15...Kf8 16 Kc2 reaches the main text) 16 Bxf3 Bxf3+ 17 Nxf3 0-0-0+ 18 Kc2 Rhe8 19 Bg5 was perhaps a bit better for White in S.Skoriupin-J.Geller, Dagomys 2004.

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

15...Kf8

It makes sense for Black to get his king out of the firing line as quickly as possible, and since castling is out of the question due to b4-b5 winning a piece, f8 is probably the best square available.

In one of the first games in this line, E.Relange-J.Nunn, Hastings 1997/98, Black took some prophylactic action on the queenside with 15...a6 16 Be4 Rc8. This looks too slow to me, and 17 Nxf3 (instead of the game's 17 a4, which was also not bad) 17...h5 18 Nd4! h4 19 Bf4 (**Diagram 23**) looks very promising for White; Black would be reluctant to expose his b-pawn by trading knights on d4.

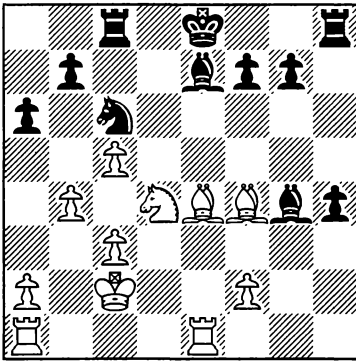


Diagram 23 (B)
Under pressure

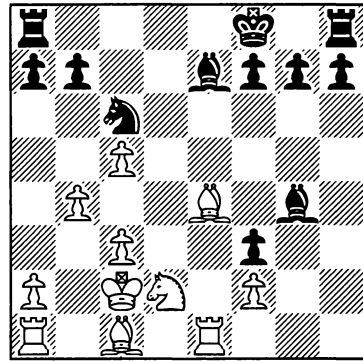


Diagram 24 (B)
A strong bishop on e4

16 Be4 (Diagram 24)

White can also ignore the pawn on f3 and begin attacking on the queenside. The game V.Potkin-E.Najer, Moscow 2002, is a good illustration of how complicated these positions can become: 16 Nc4 h5 17 Bf4 g5 18 Rxe7! Nxe7 19 Bxg5 h4 20 Nd6 Rh5 21 Bf4 b6 22 Be4 Nd5 23 Bh2 bxc5 24 Rd1 Nxc3 25 Kxc3 cxb4+ 26 Kxb4 Rb8+ 27 Kc3 and White later missed some winning chances before the game ended in a draw.

16...Re8!

A clever move: Black's idea is to answer 17 Nxf3?! with 17...Bf6!. The threat of ...Rxe4 would force White to play 18 Bxc6, but after 18...Rxe1 19 Nxe1 bxc6 I would rather be facing the looming threat of the h-pawn with my light-squared bishop rather than without it!

17 Bxf3 Bf5+

I'm slightly surprised by this decision to allow White to keep his light-squared bishop. I would have thought 17...h5 or 17...Bxf3 18 Nxf3 h5 was more logical. In

the second line 19 Be3 h4 20 Rad1 plans to meet 20...h3 with 21 Rd7!, as 21...h2? can always be answered by 22 Rh1.

18 Kb3 a6 19 Nc4

I really like White's position now: his attack on the queenside is much quicker than Black's on the other wing.

19...h5 20 Bf4

20 a4! Be6 21 Rxe6! fxe6 and now 22 b5 might be an even stronger sacrifice than the one seen in the game. White's pawns look very dangerous here.

20...Be6 21 Rxe6! (Diagram 25)

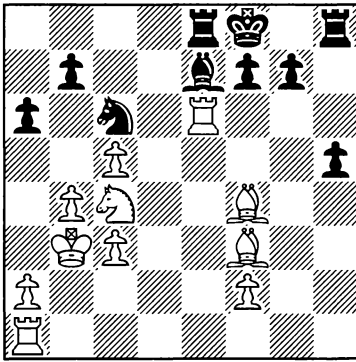


Diagram 25 (B)

A good exchange sacrifice

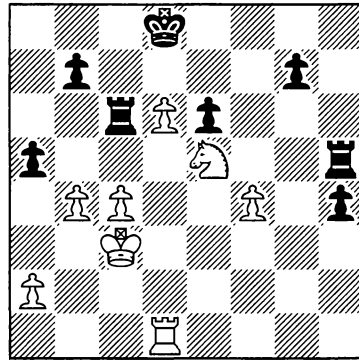


Diagram 26 (W)

Both sides playing to win

A drastic way to break the pin, but a good one.

21...fxe6 22 Ne5 Rc8 23 Rd1

I fancy White's chances after 23 Ng6+! Kf7 24 Nxb8+ Rxb8 25 a4. Now it becomes very unclear again.

23...Ke8 24 Ng6 Rh7 25 Bd6 Bxd6 26 cxd6 Kd8 27 c4 h4 28 Kc3 Rh6 29 Bxc6 Rxc6 30 Ne5 Rh5 31 f4 a5 (Diagram 26) 32 Nxc6+

White could draw here with 32 Nf7+ Kd7 33 Ne5+ Kd8, but my impression from the game so far is that neither player wanted that result!

32...bxc6 33 a4 h3 34 bxa5 h2 35 a6! Kd7 36 a7 Ra5 37 Kb4 Rxa7 38 c5 Ra8 39 Rh1 Rh8 40 a5 e5! 41 f5! ½-½

41 fxe5?? g5! wins for Black. After 41 f5 one possible sequence to the draw is 41...Rh4+ 42 Kc3 Rh3+ 43 Kc4 Kc8 44 a6 Kb8 45 d7 Kc7 46 a7 Ra3 47 Rxb2 Rxa7 48 Rg2 Ra4+ 49 Kc3 Rf4 50 Rxb7 Rxf5.

Game 14

□ A.Karpatchev ■ Y.Bruned

Salou 2005

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 Nf6 5 Nf3 Bg4 6 dxc5 Qxc5 (Diagram 27)

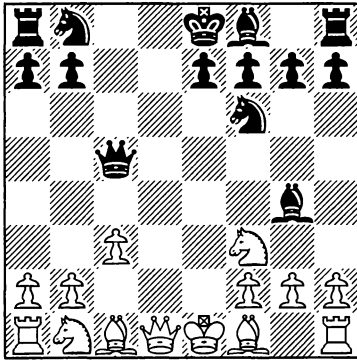


Diagram 27 (W)

A dangerous line

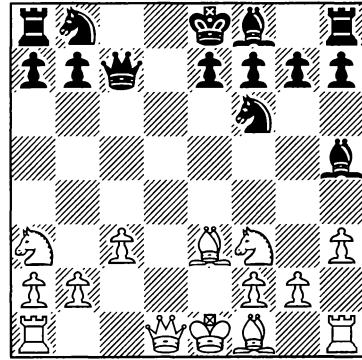


Diagram 28 (B)

Black must play ...a6

This line is considered to be dangerous for Black, especially for the unwary. This may seem strange when you consider that 5 dxc5 Qxc5 is so innocuous, but the insertion of Nf3 and ...Bg4 is certainly in White's favour. For one thing, Black sometimes misses the presence of that bishop on the queenside, where he is vulnerable to attack. Second, White can actually exploit the bishop's position on g4 by gaining time with h2-h3 and (after ...Bh5) g2-g4.



TIP: White must play aggressively in this line, to exploit his lead in development and active pieces while Black is still trying to coordinate. If he does this he has good chances of success.

7 h3 Bh5

In V.Ivanchuk-A.Areshchenko, Yerevan 2004, Black chose to retreat with 7...Bd7 and Ivanchuk gained an edge after 8 Na3 e6 9 Be3 Qc7 10 Nb5 Bxb5 11 Bxb5+ Nbd7 12 Qa4 a6 13 0-0-0 Rd8 14 Bxd7+ Rxd7 15 Bg5.

8 Be3 Qc7 9 Na3 (Diagram 28) 9...a6

Black finds it difficult to do without this move, as allowing the knight to reach b5 usually causes more trouble than it's worth. 9...Nbd7 10 Nb5 Qb8 11 g4! Bg6 12 g5! Ne4 13 Nh4! a6 14 Nxg6 hxg6 15 Qd5! Rh4 16 0-0-0 Qc8 17 Rd4 Ndc5 18 f3 e6 19

Qe5 f6 20 Nc7+ Kf7 21 Qh2 e5 22 Bc4+ Ke7 23 gxf6+ gxf6 24 Nd5+ and 1-0, N.Vlassov-B.Avrukh, Moscow 2002, is a classic demonstration of what this line is all about. White played with great energy throughout (12 g5! to displace the knight; 13 Nh4! to trade the bishop and win the light-squared battle) and Black was never able to consolidate. The Russian IM Nikolai Vlassov is a specialist in the 6 dxc5 variation and his games are well worth studying.

10 Qa4+

10 Nc4!? is an interesting alternative for White that has scored pretty well. The main continuation runs 10...Nbd7 (10...Nc6 hasn't been played much, but 11 Bb6 Qf4 12 Qd2 Qxd2+ 13 Nfxd2 Nd5 14 Be2 Bxe2 15 Kxe2 e6 16 Ne4 was probably only a tiny bit better for White in D.Pavasovic-M.Pavlovic, Wijk aan Zee 2004) 11 g4 Bg6 12 g5! (**Diagram 29**) and now:

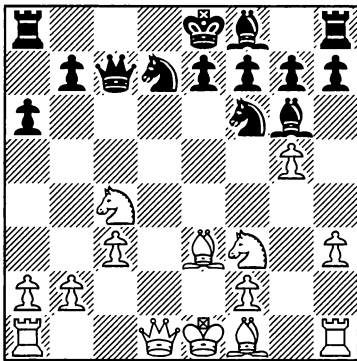


Diagram 29 (B)

A difficult choice for Black

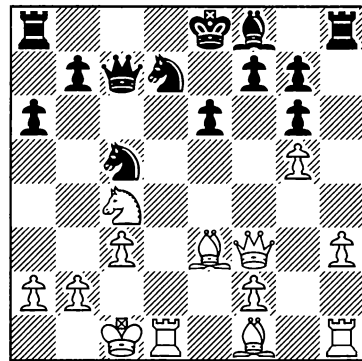


Diagram 30 (B)

Better for White

a) 12...Ne4 13 Nh4! (adopting the same aggressive approach as Vlassov) 13...e6 14 Qf3 Nec5 15 Nxc6 hxc6 16 0-0-0 (**Diagram 30**) is advantageous to White, who has the bishop pair, a safer king and the chance to attack Black on the kingside with h4-h5. The game A.Van Beek-D.Baramidze, Dutch League 2006, continued 16...Be7 17 h4 Rc8 and here the direct 18 h5 looks promising to me.

b) 12...b5!? 13 gxf6 bxc4 14 Bxc4!? Qxc4 15 Qxd7+ Kxd7 16 Ne5+ Kc7 17 Nxc4 gxf6 18 0-0-0, as played in S.Vysochin-A.Truskavetsky, Alushta 2007, is unclear but probably easier for White to play. He was certainly better after the game's 18...Rb8 19 Rd2 e5 20 f4! Bh6?! (20...Bf5) 21 f5 Bxe3 22 Nxe3.

c) 12...Nh5 13 Qd4!? e6 14 Rd1 Rd8 15 Nd6+ Bxd6 16 Qxd6 Qxd6 17 Rxd6 Be4 18 Be2 gave White a small advantage in S.Vysochin-M.Rocius, Kemer 2007.

10...Nbd7

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

10...Nc6 is known to be an inaccuracy, and N.Vlassov-T.Radjabov, Internet 2003, shows one of the World's top players on the receiving end as Black, albeit in a blitz game: 11 g4 Bg6 12 0-0-0 e6 13 Bf4 Qc8 14 Ne5 b5 15 Nxb5! (we'll see more of this sacrifice later on) 15...axb5 16 Qxb5 Be4 17 f3 Bd5 18 Rxd5! Nxd5 19 Nxc6 Qd7 20 Ne5 Qxb5 21 Bxb5+ Ke7 22 Nc6+ Kf6 23 Be5+ Kg6 24 Bd3+ f5? (24...Kh6 is more resilient but there's no doubting White's advantage) 25 gxf5+ exf5 26 Rg1+ Kh6 27 Nd4 Ne7 28 Bf4+ Kh5 29 Rg5+ Kh4 30 Ne6 Kxh3 31 Bf1+ and Black resigned as it's mate next move. Another impressive game by Vlassov.

11 Bf4 (Diagram 31)

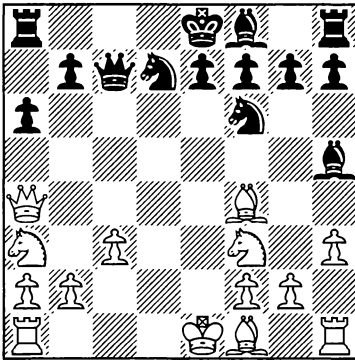


Diagram 31 (B)

Where to move the queen?

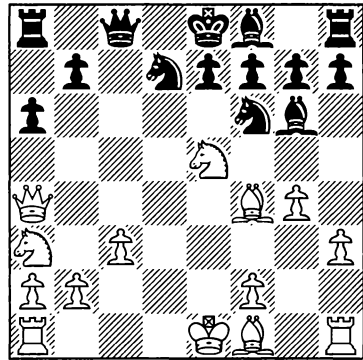


Diagram 32 (B)

Continuing with aggression

11 g4! Bg6 12 Bf4 Qc8 reaches the same position, and this might even be a more accurate move order because it prevents the possibility of 12...b5.

11...Qc8

11...Qc6 releases the pressure but at a cost of allowing permanent weaknesses on the queenside after 12 Qxc6 bxc6; this position must be at least a bit better for White.

Against 11...Qb6 White should probably just play 12 0-0-0 followed by Nc4.

12 g4 Bg6 13 Ne5 (Diagram 32) 13...b5

Alternatively:

a) 13...e6 14 Bg2 Bc5?! (Markovic offers the line 14...Bxa3 15 Qxa3 Be4 16 Bxe4 Nxe4 17 0-0-0!? Nxe5 18 Bxe5 Nxf2 19 Bxg7 Rg8 20 Bf6 Qc7 21 Qa4+ b5 22 Qd4 Nxb1 23 Rxb1, when White has good compensation in the form of a monster bishop on f6, although of course there are quieter ways to play such as 17 f3 or 17 Qb4) 15 0-0-0! Ra7 16 Nxd7 Nxd7 17 Bd6 b5 18 Qf4 Bxd6 19 Qxd6 Qc5 20 f4 with a strong position for White, E.Sveshnikov-V.Gashimov, Dubai 2003 – another ex-

ample of aggression paying dividends.

b) 13...Be4!? 14 Nxd7 can be met by the surprising 14...Bc6!, and 14 f3 by 14...b5!?. Instead 14 Rg1 b5 15 Qd4 would transpose to the main game.

14 Qd4 Be4

Black moves the bishop onto the important h1-a8 diagonal, so that it can help in the defence of the queenside.

14...e6 offers White the chance of a dangerous sacrifice with 15 Nxb5!?, an opportunity he should probably take. The consequences are not entirely clear, but the position is difficult for Black to defend. A.Karpatchev-C.Renner, German League 2004, continued 15...axb5 16 Bxb5 Ra5 (16...Bc5 17 Nxd7 Bxd4 18 Nb6+) 17 Qb6 Rxb5 18 Qxb5 Be4 19 0-0 Bc5 20 Rfd1 Qb7 21 a4 Bh1 22 Qxb7 Bxb7 23 b4 Ba7. With those three connected passed pawns on the queenside this ending should be very good for White, even if Black's active minor pieces do offer him chances of counterplay.

15 Rg1 Bb7

After 15...e6 the sacrifice seen in the previous note is even stronger: 16 Nxb5! axb5 17 Bxb5 Bd5 18 g5 Qb7 (B.Morgan-D.Wise, British Ch., Millfield 2000) and now 19 c4! (Wise) would have kept White well on top.

16 0-0-0! (Diagram 33)

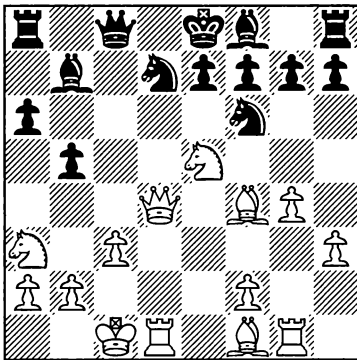


Diagram 33 (B)

Black faces an onslaught

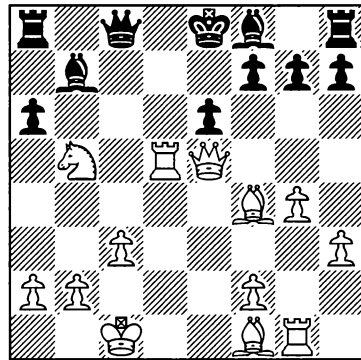


Diagram 34 (B)

White has crashed through

16 Nxb5? doesn't work here, and 16...Nxe5! 17 Bxe5 axb5 18 Bxb5+ Bc6 shows why Black was so keen to get his bishop onto the h1-a8 diagonal. Nevertheless, after 16 0-0-0 White retains a strong initiative, something Black was unable to cope with in the game. In fact it's difficult to come up with a good defence for Black here, so perhaps he needs to look again at earlier alternatives.

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

16...Nd5?

Now the sacrifice is back on. It's still powerful after 16...e6 17 Nxb5! axb5 18 Bxb5, and 16...Nxe5 17 Bxe5 also doesn't fully solve Black's problems.

17 Nxb5! Nxe5

17...axb5 18 Bxb5 is game over.

18 Qxe5 e6 19 Rxd5! (Diagram 34)

Now White is winning easily.

19...f6 20 Nc7+ Kf7 21 Qxe6+! Qxe6 22 Nxe6 Bxd5 23 Nc7 Bc5

23...Rd8 fails to 24 Nxd5 Rxd5 25 Bc4.

24 Nxd5 Bxf2 25 Rg2 Bc5 26 Bc4 Ra7 27 b4 Be7 28 Re2 Bd8 29 Ne7+ Kf8 30 Nc8 Bc7 31 Be3 Ra8 32 Bc5+ 1-0

Game 15

□ L.D.Nisipeanu ■ S.Kiselev

Bucharest 1997

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 Nf6 5 Nf3 Bg4 6 Nbd2!? (Diagram 35)

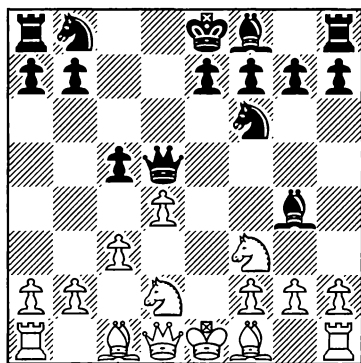


Diagram 35 (B)

A tricky move

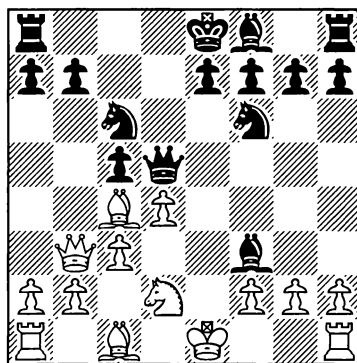


Diagram 36 (B)

White doesn't recapture



TIP: 6 Nbd2 is a tricky move, and could prove to be an effective weapon against unsuspecting opponents.

White intends to attack Black's queen with Bc4 and possibly follow up with Qb3. Black should be able to equalize, but he must be careful to avoid one or two pitfalls and it's interesting that 6 Nbd2 has recently been favoured by Tiviakov.

6...Nc6

This has long been considered to be Black's most reliable reply, but there are playable alternatives. For example:

a) 6...e6 7 Qa4+! Nc6 8 Bc4 Qd6 9 Bb5! (intending either Nc4 or Ne5) 9...Bxf3 10 Nxf3 is a bit better for White, J.Palkovi-C.Horvath, Paks 1996.

b) 6...cxd4 7 Bc4 Qd7 8 Qb3! (7...Qh5 is met in the same way) 8...e6 9 Ne5!? (9 Nxd4 is a good alternative) 9...Qc7 10 Bb5+ Nc6 11 cxd4 (offering a pawn with 11 Ndc4!? has also been played) 11...Bd6 12 Ndc4 0-0 13 Bxc6 bxc6 14 Bd2 c5 15 Ba5 Qe7 16 Qg3! (threatening both 17 Nxd6 Qxd6 Nxc4 and 17 Nc6!; Black finds the only defence) 16...Bb8! 17 Qa3 and a draw was prematurely agreed in M.Saltaev-V.Shtyrenkov, Volgograd 1997. After the possible 17...Qb7 18 f3!? cxd4 19 Nxc4 Nxc4 20 fxg4 Qxg2 21 0-0-0 Rc8 22 b3 the game is far from drawn(!) and very difficult to assess.

7 Bc4 Bxf3!

Black will struggle to regain his pawn after 7...Qd7 8 dxc5!, while against 7...Qd6 White should continue with 8 dxc5! Qxc5 9 Qb3!.

8 Qb3! (Diagram 36)

8 gxf3?! occurred on quite a few occasions until 8...Qf5! 9 Qb3 0-0-0! 10 Bxf7 Nd5 11 Bxd5 Rxd5 was found to be a more than adequate response. 8 Qxf3 allows Black too many exchanges, not an ideal scenario in an IQP position: after 8...Qxf3 9 Nxf3 cxd4 10 Nxd4 Nxd4 11 cxd4 e6 12 Bb5+ Kd8 Black will follow up with ...Bd6 and ...Ke7. Finally, against 8 Qa4? Black can gain the advantage with the amazing Fritz-inspired 8...Bd1!.

8...Bxg2?!

This move is tempting because Black grabs quite a bit of material for the queen: a rook, bishop and knight. But this is not the end of the story. In the resulting positions Black suffers from development problems and vulnerable pieces (including the king), and White's queen is often able exploit these factors to run riot.

8...Na5! is safe and solid. The main line has been 9 Qb5+ Qd7 (9...Qc6? 10 Qxa5 threatens Bb5) 10 Nxf3 Nxc4 11 Qxc4 cxd4 12 Nxd4 e6, after which White can expect only a slight advantage at the most. S.Tiviakov-W.Spoelman, Dutch Ch., Hilversum 2007, continued 13 Bg5 Rc8 14 Qe2 Nd5 (against 14...Be7 Palliser suggests 15 0-0-0!? intending 15...Qd5 16 Bxf6 Bxf6 17 Nb5! Qg5+ 18 Kb1 0-0 19 Nd6) 15 Rd1! (now Black must be wary of c3-c4, and 15...Be7 isn't an easy answer because 16 Bxe7 Qxe7 17 Nf5! exf5 18 Rxd5 promises White an edge) 15...h6 16 Bh4 Bc5 17 Nf3 b5 (to prevent c3-c4) 18 Ne5 Qb7 19 Qf3 0-0 20 0-0 and Tiviakov later managed to drum up an initiative, even though at this stage Black's position looks fairly sound.



NOTE: Against 8...Qg5? (Diagram 37) White has a very powerful rook sacrifice: 9 Nxf3! Qxg2 10 Qxb7! Qxh1+ 11 Ke2 Rb8 12 Qxc6+ Nd7 (or 12...Kd8 13 Bf4!! Rxb2+ 14 Kd3!) 13 Bxf7+! Kxf7 14 Ng5+ and 15 Qxh1 wins.

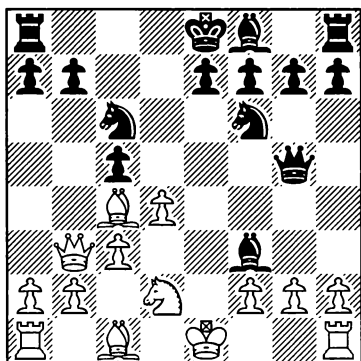


Diagram 37 (W)

White sacrifices and wins

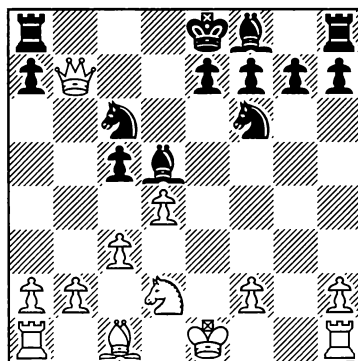


Diagram 38 (B)

The queen will run riot

9 Bxd5 Bxd5 10 Qxb7! (Diagram 38) 10...Nxd4

Alternatives are worse:

a) 10...Rb8? loses to 11 Qc7 Bxh1 12 f3!.

b) Nisipeanu and Stoica give the instructive line 10...Nd8?! 11 Qb5+ Bc6 12 Qxc5 Bxh1 13 f3! Bg2 14 Qb5+! Nd7 15 Qh5! Nf6 16 Qh4! and White wins the bishop with Qg3.

c) 10...Nb4 11 Qc7 Nc2+ 12 Kd1 Nxa1 13 Re1 Rd8 (13...cxd4 14 c4! Bg2 15 Rg1 leaves the bishop with nowhere to go) 14 Qxc5 e6 15 Qb5+ Rd7 16 Nc4 Bxc4 17 Qxc4 and the knight in the corner cannot be saved, K.Samraoui-D.Henrich, correspondence 2002.

11 Qa6 Nc2+ 12 Ke2! Nxa1

12...Bxh1 is met by 13 Qa4+ and 14 Qxc2.

13 Rd1!

This is the reason why White played 12 Ke2 rather than 12 Kd1. For Black to have any hope of survival he needs to keep his bishop on the long diagonal, and White plans to disturb this piece with c3-c4.

13...Rd8

Against 13...e6 White can win with the brilliant 14 c4 Bg2 15 Ne4!! (**Diagram 39**) [not the only move, but the most effective one] 15...Bxe4 16 Qb5+ Ke7 17 Qxc5+ Ke8 18 Qb5+ Ke7 19 Be3. Alternatively, 13...Nd7 14 Nf3 e6 15 c4 Bxf3+ (15...Be4 16 Ng5) 16 Kxf3 Rd8 17 Bg5 Be7 18 Bxe7 and Black resigned in G.Sametz-E.Itter, correspondence 1999. Perhaps this is a bit premature, although his position is not an enviable one after 18...Kxe7 19 Qd6+ Ke8 20 Rxa1 or 18...Ne5+ 19 Ke2 Rxd1 20 Bg5!

Rd8 21 Bxd8 Kxd8 22 Qxa7 Ng6 23 Qxc5.

14 Qa4+ Nd7

14...Rd7 15 Nf3 Be4 is met by 16 Qb5!, when Black has no good answer to the threat of Ne5 (but not 16 Ne5? Bc2!).

15 Nf3 Be6

White also gains a big advantage against 15...e6 after 16 Ne5 Bd6 17 Nxd7 Rxd7 18 c4! Nc2 19 cxd5 Nd4+ 20 Kf1 e5 (20...exd5 is met by 21 b4! – Nisipeanu/Stoica) 21 Kg2 Ke7 22 Re1, as played in H.Kiefhaber-A.Shaley, correspondence 2001.

16 Bf4 f6 17 Rxa1 (Diagram 40)

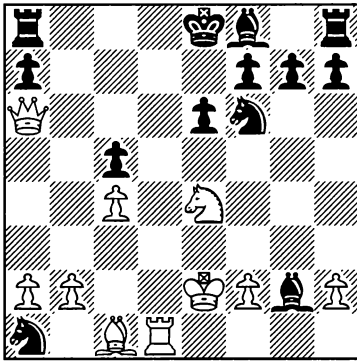


Diagram 39 (B)

Either capture loses

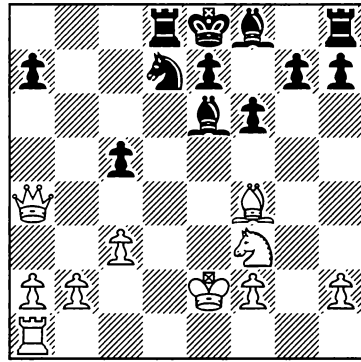


Diagram 40 (B)

Winning for White

White has won the knight in the corner and Black is still a long way from getting coordinated. It's impressive how Nisipeanu wins comfortably with a single-minded plan: take the pawn on a7 and then push the a-pawn up the board!

17...Kf7 18 Rd1 Nb6 19 Qxa7 Rxd1 20 Kxd1 Nd5 21 Bd2 Bg4 22 Ke2 g5 23 Qb7 Nf4+ 24 Bxf4 gxf4 25 a4 Bh6 26 a5 Rd8 27 a6 Bc8 28 Qc6 Bd7 29 Qd5+ Ke8 30 Qh5+ 1-0

4...Nf6 5 Nf3 e6

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 Nf6 5 Nf3 e6 (Diagram 41)

4...Nf6 5 Nf3 e6 is a very popular choice for Black; it occurs with roughly the same frequency as 5...Bg4. Most of those who adopt this line are content to play traditional IQP positions and are perhaps also happy to avoid some of the sharper lines that can be reached after...Bg4 (e.g. 5...Bg4 6 dxc5!?).



NOTE: 4...e6 5 Nf3 Nf6 is an alternative move order to reach the same position.

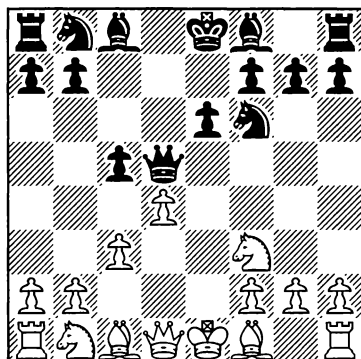


Diagram 41 (W)

A popular choice

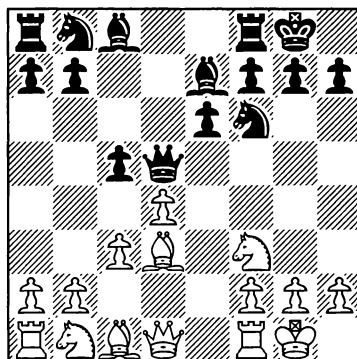


Diagram 42 (W)

Black doesn't trade

Why not 6 Bd3?

In the old days nearly everyone played the natural **6 Bd3**, but White found it increasingly difficult to prove any advantage in lines where Black refused to exchange pawns on d4. The most reliable method for Black is to keep the tension, only trading when he is forced to or when he can do so under favourable circumstances. The main line after 6 Bd3 runs **6...Be7! 7 0-0 0-0 (Diagram 42)** and the general consensus is that Black is holding his own. For example:

a) 8 Be3 is ineffective here because Black can ignore the threat of dxc5. In some lines the bishop can prove to be a liability on d3, something that can be exploited by a timely ...Rd8, and 8...Nc6! 9 Qe2 (9 dxc5 Rd8! is known to be fine for Black) 9...cxd4 (only now does Black play this) 10 cxd4 Nb4! 11 Nc3 Qh5! 12 Bc4 b6 (J.Speelman-C.Hansen, Munich 1992) offers Black a comfortable IQP position. The queen is actually well placed 'out of the way' on h5, Black's knight on b4 is ready to block the pawn on the d5-square, and ...Bb7 is coming too. Basically, Black is under much less pressure than usual.

b) As we've already seen, the advance c3-c4 is a way of exploiting Black's delay in capturing on d4, but here 8 c4 (**Diagram 43**) hasn't proved to be particularly troublesome for Black: 8...Qh5! 9 Be2 (Black also replies 9...Rd8 against both 9 dxc5 and 9 Nc3) 9...Rd8 10 Be3 (10 Ng5 Qh4 11 Nf3 Qh5 is a repetition of moves that has been seen more than once) 10...cxd4 11 Nxd4 Qe5! 12 Nc3 Bd7 13 Bf3 Nc6 equalized comfortably for Black in the game M.Dvoretzky-L.Polugaevsky, USSR Ch.,

Leningrad 1974, and the more ambitious 10...Ng4 is also playable.

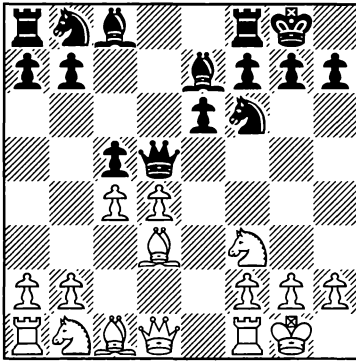


Diagram 43 (B)

A typical advance

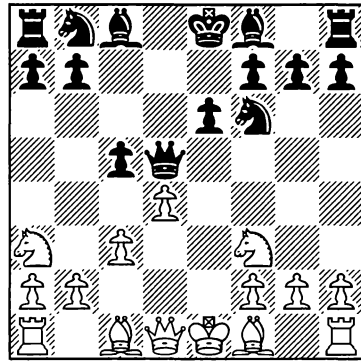


Diagram 44 (B)

The tricky 6 Na3

6 Be2 and 6 Na3

The quiet-looking **6 Be2** actually carries more sting than 6 Bd3, because when White advances with c3-c4 the bishop is generally better placed on the e2-square where it isn't vulnerable to harassment. On the other hand, Black will now be happier to trade on d4 to reach an IQP position in which the bishop is less actively placed. Even so, 6 Be2 remains an important option, and this move will be studied in Game 17.

White can also play the tricky **6 Na3 (Diagram 44)** which, as we've previously seen, tends to lead to a majority structure rather than an IQP. This is not a bad way for White to play, and interestingly Tiviakov has favoured 6 Na3. Indeed, he recently utilized it successfully to win a crucial final-round game, becoming European Individual Champion in the process: 6...Nc6 (the solid 6...Qd8 is usually met by 7 Nc2 followed by Bd3 and 0-0, planning to answer ...cxd4 with Nxd4) 7 Be3 (7 Nb5 Qd8 8 dxc5 Bxc5 9 Qxd8+ Kxd8 10 Bf4 has been seen many times, but 10...Ne4! has proved to be an adequate response for Black) 7...cxd4 8 Nb5 Qd8 9 Nbx4 Nd5! (or 9...Nxd4 10 Bxd4! Be7 11 Bd3 and 0-0) 10 Bg5 Qb6 11 Bc4 Nxd4 (11...Qxb2 looks very risky in view of 12 Nb5!) 12 Nxd4 Bc5 13 Bxd5 Bxd4 14 0-0! Bc5 (14...Bxf2+ is also risky, this time because of 15 Rxf2 exd5 16 Qa4+! Qc6 17 Qa3) 15 Qe2 h6 16 Bf4 0-0 17 Bc4 and White's slight lead in development gave him an edge in S.Tiviakov-E.Sutovsky, European Ch., Plovdiv 2008.

The Modern 6 Be3

6 Be3 (Diagram 45)

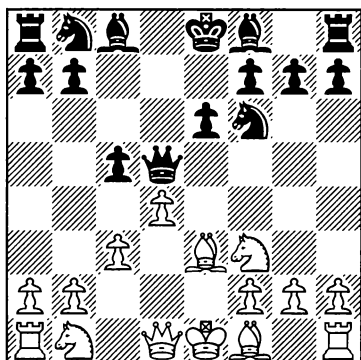


Diagram 45 (B)

Forcing the issue

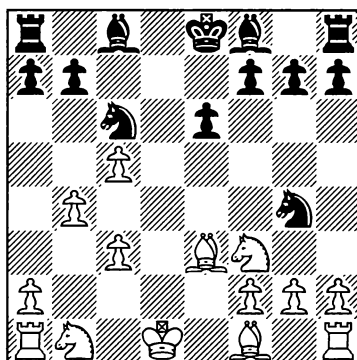


Diagram 46 (B)

A good version for White

is the modern approach. White's idea is straightforward enough: by pressuring the c5-pawn he hopes to force Black to trade on d4, immediately creating an IQP. It could be argued that White makes a slight concession in committing his bishop to e3, when in the long run g5 might be a more active post. On the other hand, the bishop actually performs an admirable if unglamorous role by bolstering the d4-pawn, allowing White to develop the rest of his pieces freely. Without the bishop on e3 Black can sometimes make life awkward by attacking d4 with ...Nc6 and, after castling, with ...Rd8.

6...cxd4

The overwhelming majority of Black players facing 6 Be3 respond by capturing on d4, but what happens if Black ignores White's 'threat' to capture on c5?

If 6...Nc6 the onus is on White to punish Black with 7 dxc5!, otherwise 6 Be3 doesn't really make any sense. 7...Qxd1+ 8 Kxd1 Ng4 9 b4 (**Diagram 46**) reaches a position similar to those we've seen before, but this particular version looks less active for Black than normal, and indeed I think White's position is quite promising. The game T.Kosintseva-O.Alexandrova, Warsaw 2001, is a good demonstration of what White should be trying to do: 9...a5 10 Bb5 Nxe3+ 11 fxe3 Bd7 12 a3! axb4 13 Bxc6 Bxc6 14 cxb4 b6! 15 Nc3! (this is better than 15 cxb6 Bxb4) 15...bxc5 16 b5 Bb7 17 a4. Black has regained her pawn and even has two bishops against two knights, but I still prefer White because of those two monster passed pawns on the queenside. The game continued 17...c4 18 Kc2 Bb4 19 Nd2! Ke7 (or 19...Bxg2 20 Rhg1 followed by Rxg7) 20 Rhb1! Ba5 21 Nxc4 Bxg2 22 Nxa5 Rxa5 23 Rg1 Bd5 24

Rxg7 and White was definitely in the driving seat.



NOTE: After 12 Nd4 axb4 13 Bxc6 Bxc6 14 Nxc6?! Black has the clever trick 14...b3!, a resource that both sides need to remember.

6...Ng4 (**Diagram 47**) is occasionally seen. White usually allows Black to capture on e3, reckoning that the strengthening of his centre and Black's loss of time will more than compensate for the bishop-for-knight exchange. A typical sequence is 7 Bd3 (7 Bf4?? is a blunder due to 7...Qe4+; there doesn't seem to be much wrong with 7 Bg5!/? though) 7...Nxe3 (if Black delays with 7...Be7?! White can now play 8 Bf4!) 8 fxe3 Be7 9 0-0 Nc6 10 Nbd2 0-0 when White's position is easier to play because of his strong centre and chances to create pressure on the kingside, but Black doesn't have any weaknesses and with careful play he can probably restrict White's advantage to a minimum.

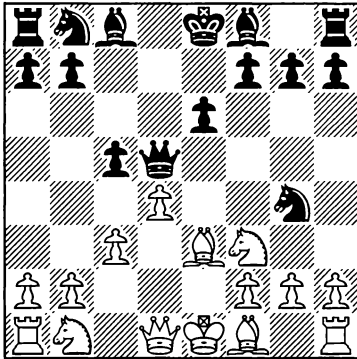


Diagram 47 (W)

Occasionally seen

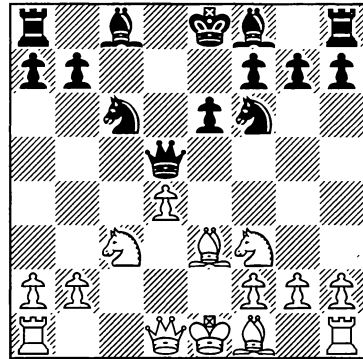


Diagram 48 (B)

Where to?

7 cxd4 Nc6

This has been the most popular move for many years but recently it has been rivalled by 7...Bb4+ 8 Nc3 0-0, when Black adopts a different plan to the one seen in the main line. The idea is to trade on c3, giving White an isolated pawn couple on c3 and d4, and this approach is covered in Game 18.

8 Nc3 (Diagram 48) 8...Qd6!

Retreating to d8 is possible but much more passive than the text; ideally Black wants to keep the d8-square free for a rook.

Going to a5 makes slightly less sense here than it does in the lines with ...Bg4. After 8...Qa5 9 Bd3 Be7 10 0-0 0-0 11 a3! Black must take care developing his c8-bishop, as the plausible 11...b6? (11...a6 and ...b5 is the right way) allows White to

exploit the position of Black's queen to win a piece for two pawns after 12 Bb5! Bb7 13 b4.

9 a3 (Diagram 49)

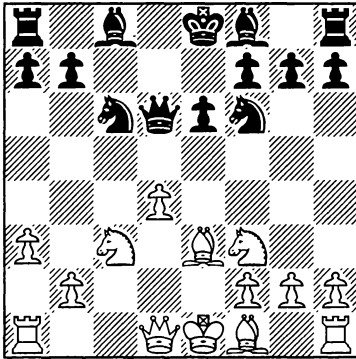


Diagram 49 (B)

When to play a3?

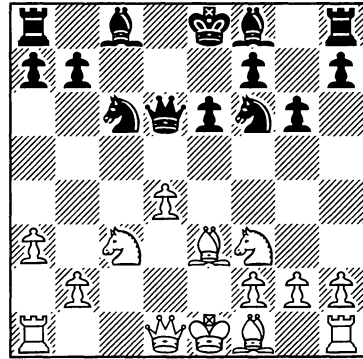


Diagram 50 (W)

Tiviakov's 9...g6



NOTE: The move a2-a3 is nearly always useful for White in IQP positions because it prevents ...Nb4(-d5), which is a typical idea for Black.

White has generally played a2-a3 on this move, but after 9 Bd3 most Black players have simply reacted with 9...Be7 instead of 9...Nb4. Indeed, 9...Nb4 may not be such a great move because of 10 Bb5+: for example, 10...Bd7 11 Rc1!? intending to meet 11...Be7 with 12 Bxd7+ Qxd7 (12...Nxd7? 13 Nb5!) 13 Ne5 followed by Qa4+. So maybe White really doesn't have to play a2-a3 at this very moment.

9 Bc4!? is another option for White. It's not played a great deal, but after the possible 9...Be7 10 0-0 0-0 11 a3 b6 12 Qe2 Bb7 13 Rad1 we get something very like the main line, the only difference being White's bishop is on c4 rather than d3. The resulting play is bound to have similarities, especially since White sometimes moves his bishop to the a2-g8 diagonal in the main line, so 9 Bc4 might appeal to those who want to choose something with a bit less theory attached to it.

9...Be7

Tiviakov has recently been experimenting with 9...g6!? (**Diagram 50**). It's well known that a kingside fianchetto can be effective against an IQP, but it's quite rare for Black to do this here because he is already committed to ...e6 and a further ...g6 and ...Bg7 is time consuming. On the other hand it could be argued that 9 a3 is hardly helping White's development, so maybe Black can afford this luxury after

all. Certainly in the game D.Howell-S.Tiviakov, Port Erin 2005, Black's plan worked, and after 10 Bc4 Bg7 11 0-0 0-0 12 Qe2 b6 13 Rad1 Ne7! 14 Ne5 Bb7 he was very comfortable, with ideas of ...Nf5 and ...Nd5 to look forward to.

Perhaps White shouldn't adopt the usual pattern of development against 9...g6, and more direct play in A.Berelovich-S.Tiviakov, Pfalz 2008, offered him a small advantage after 10 Qd2!? Bg7 11 Bf4 Qd8 12 Bb5 Bd7 13 Ne5 Rc8 14 0-0. Even so, 9...g6 certainly looks playable, and it will be interesting to follow future developments with this move.

10 Bd3

In recent years some players have been adopting a slightly different approach based on trying to prevent Black from fianchettoing his queen's bishop. For example, 10 Qc2!? 0-0 (10...b6? is bad due to 11 Nb5! Qd7 12 Rc1 Bb7 13 Ne5! Nxe5 14 Nc7+) 11 Bd3 (**Diagram 51**).

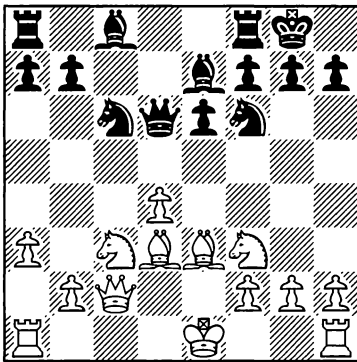


Diagram 51 (B)

Trying to prevent ...b6

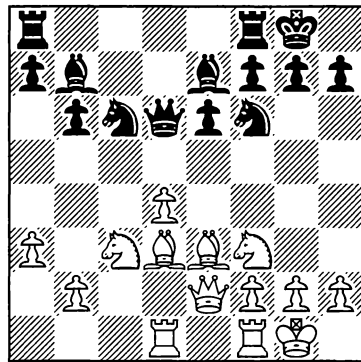


Diagram 52 (B)

The main line

Again 11...b6 is risky, this time because of 12 Ne4!. Because of this, Black normally settles for the more modest 11...Bd7 with a typical follow up of ...Rad8, ...Rac8 and then ...Be8 to clear the d-file. The bishop may not be so actively placed on e8, but it's certainly not bad there. It usefully defends the f7-pawn and may come back to life via the c6-square if the knight moves from that post. Here's one possible line, from many: 12 0-0 Rac8 13 Rad1 Rfd8 14 Rfe1 Be8 15 Bg5 h6 16 Bh4 Qc7 17 Qb3 Na5 18 Qa2 was J.Shaw-J.Emms, Gibraltar 2004. Here I should have probably played something like 18...Nc6, when White's advantage is minimal. Instead I fell for a typical IQP tactic: 18...a6? 19 d5! Nxd5 20 Nxd5 Rxd5 21 Bxe7 Rxd3 (21...Qxe7? 22 Qxd5) 22 Rxd3 Qxe7, after which I was material down for no compensation.



TIP: Both sides must constantly be on the lookout for d4-d5 tactics in IQP positions.

10...0-0 11 0-0 b6 12 Qe2

This is the best square for the queen.

12...Bb7 13 Rad1 (Diagram 52)

And this is the best place for the queen's rook, directly behind the IQP and thus supporting central action and a possible d4-d5. This is a very common position, and ideas for both sides will be discussed further in Game 16.



NOTE: The c1-square may appear to be an enticing place for the rook, but White has little chance of creating any play on this file, especially if Black opposes with ...Rac8. Indeed, this would only lead to an increased possibility of rook exchanges down the c-file, and White generally tries to avoid unwanted exchanges in IQP positions.

Theoretical?

To some extent, because this variation has occurred many times and has built up a quite a body of theory. On the other hand, IQPs can nearly always be played by general principles coupled with calculation.

Statistics

White has scored a fairly healthy 59% in over 400 games from the position after 13 Rad1. Overall 6 Be3 has scored 55% whereas 6 Be2 has scored a disappointing 47%, although it should be noted that in the second case White's average rating was lower than Black's.

Illustrative Games

Game 16

□ **A.Tzermiadianos** ■ **N.Mohota**

Olomouc 2004

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 Nf6 5 Nf3 e6 6 Be3 cxd4 7 cxd4 Nc6 8 Nc3 Qd6 9 a3 Be7 10 Bd3 0-0 11 0-0 b6 12 Qe2 Bb7 13 Rad1 Rfd8

This is Black's most natural move. The f8-rook comes to the d-file, adding pressure to d4, and the other rook will occupy the open c-file.

14 Rfe1! (Diagram 53)

At the moment it looks like this rook is doing very little on e1, but once White re-

deploys his bishops to more active squares, the full force of the rooks will be felt down the central files.

14...Rac8 15 Bg5!?

Now White's play is becoming more direct, and you can already see that threats based on d4-d5 might appear because of the pressure down the e-file.

15...Qb8 (Diagram 54)

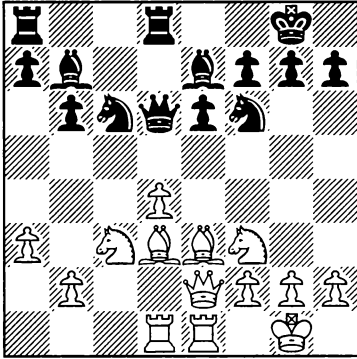


Diagram 53 (B)

A deep rook move

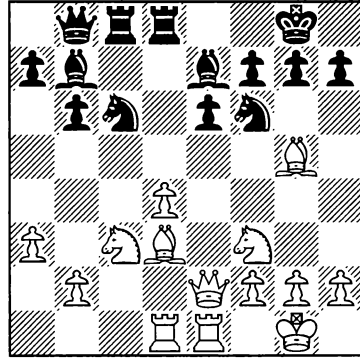


Diagram 54 (W)

A typical queen retreat

Removing the queen from d6 is a typical idea, and there are two main points behind 15...Qb8:

1. The rook on d8 now directly hits the d4-pawn. Black might increase the pressure by doubling rooks on the d-file.
2. On d6 the queen is vulnerable to attack from Ne4, Bxf6 followed by Ne4, or sometimes even Nb5.

The drawback of ...Qb8 is that the queen is long way from the action on the king-side, and in this particular position I don't think it's Black's best move. That distinction might go to 15...h6!. It looks somewhat risky to weaken the b1-h7 diagonal, but there is more than one point behind ...h7-h6.

Firstly, the direct 16 Bxf6 Bxf6 17 d5 causes Black no real problems as long as he finds 17...Nd4! (17...exd5 18 Nxd5 is more of a concern, as 18...Qxd5? 19 Bh7+ Kxh7? 20 Rxd5 Rxd5 21 Qe4+ is winning for White) 18 Nxd4 Bxd4 19 dxe6 Qxe6! 20 Qxe6 fxe6, which led to an equal endgame in R.Seger-J.Emms, German League 2000.

16 Bh4 intending Bg3 in some lines also looks logical, but then Black can employ a surprising manoeuvre: 16...Qf4! (threatening 17...Nxd4) 17 Bg3 Qg4 18 h3 Qh5,

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

when Black's queen on h5 is well placed to meet White's aggressive ideas.

Finally, there's 16 Bc1. Having 'induced' ...h6, White now plans Bb1, Qc2 and then some breakthrough with d4-d5 and hopefully a mating attack with Qh7. But Black can reveal a point behind ...h6 with 16...Bf8! (without ...h6, Bg5 would now be a worry) 17 Bb1 g6!, when he bolsters his kingside and reorganizes effectively with ...Bg7 and possibly ...Ne7-d5 (or f5) with a decent position.

With all this in mind, from an objective viewpoint it might be better for White to play a less committal move like 15 Bb1.

16 Bb1!

Qc2 is a crude but effective follow-up, and White already threatens to crash through with 17 d5!: for example, 17...exd5 18 Qd3 g6 19 Rxe7 Nxe7 20 Bxf6 and Black will be lucky to survive for long in view of ideas such as Qe3-h6.

16...g6!



NOTE: Blocking threats along the b1-h7 diagonal by playing ...g6 is a common defensive idea for Black.

16...h6 17 Bh4 Qf4 suffers in comparison to the previous note because White's extra tempo (Bd3-b1) means that 18 d5! is now a strong move, and White is very active after 18...exd5 19 Bxf6 Bxf6 20 Nxd5.

Another typical idea for Black is to try to relieve pressure via exchanges. 16...Nd5 is the move to achieve this, but in this position White can exploit Black's lack of pieces on the kingside with 17 Qe4! g6 18 Qh4! (**Diagram 55**) when Black is already in some trouble: for example, 18...Bxg5 19 Nxg5 h5 20 Nxd5 Rxd5 21 Nxf7!! Kxf7 22 Bxg6+! Kxg6 23 Rxe6+ when the queen and rook will combine to force checkmate in a few moves.

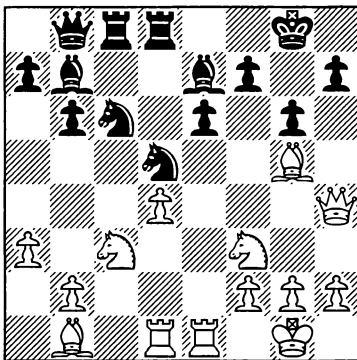


Diagram 55 (B)
Kingside action

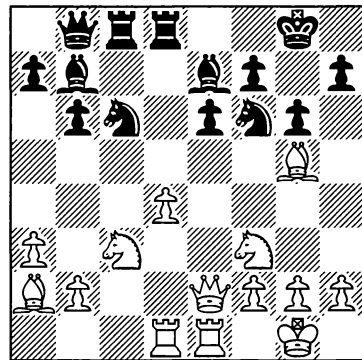


Diagram 56 (B)
Switching diagonals

17 Ba2! (Diagram 56)

TIP: Once the b1-h7 diagonal has been closed by ...g6, it's nearly always worth relocating this bishop to the adjacent a2-g8 diagonal. Now Black has to be wary of sacrificial ideas such as Bxe6, or Ne5xf7.

17...Kg7 18 h3

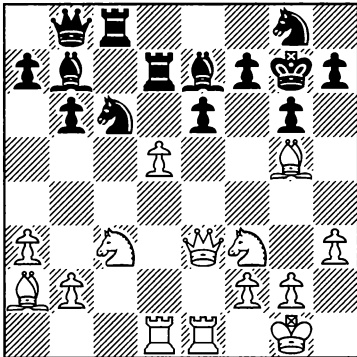
White wants to play Qe3 to support Bh6+, but the immediate 18 Qe3? runs into 18...Ng4!, and here 19 Qd2?? (19 Qf4!) loses to 19...Nxd4! 20 Nxd4 Qxh2+ 21 Kf1 Qxg2+ 22 Ke2 Ba6+. With Black's queen on b8 eyeing the h2-pawn, White must always be wary of ...Ng4.

18...Rd7?

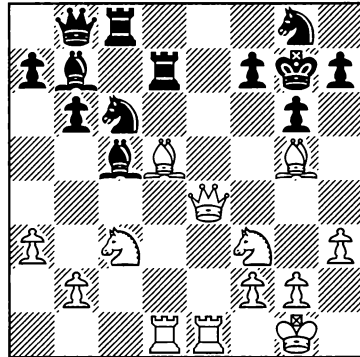
Black wants to double rooks, but there are more urgent matters to deal with. 18...h6! (Tzermadianos) should probably be played, although after 19 Bc1 (or 19 Be3) Black would obviously prefer a bishop on g7 rather than a king!

19 Qe3 Ng8

A sad retreat, but 19...Rcd8 20 Bh6+ Kg8 21 Bxe6! fxe6 22 Qxe6+ Kh8 23 d5 Na5 24 Ne5 is a line which demonstrates how perilous Black's position has become.

20 d5! (Diagram 57)**Diagram 57 (B)**

Thematic and effective

**Diagram 58 (B)**

Black folds under pressure

This thematic push arrives just at the right time, with White's pieces all in their optimum positions.

20...Bc5

White is also very active after 20...Bxg5 21 Nxg5 exd5 22 Bxd5, or 20...exd5 21

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

Nxd5 Bxg5 22 Nxg5.

21 Qe4 exd5 22 Bxd5 (Diagram 58) 22...Nd8?

Now White's attack is decisive. Black could have put up more resistance with 22...h6, although 23 Bc1 meeting 23...Nf6 with 24 Qh4 still leaves White well on top.

23 Qh4! Bxd5 24 Nxd5 h6 25 Bf6+ Nxf6

Or 25...Kf8 26 Ne5.

26 Qxf6+ Kg8 27 Re8+ 1-0

It's mate after 27 Re8+ Bf8 28 Rxf8+ Kxf8 29 Qh8. This game provides an excellent model for handling this IQP position as White.

Game 17

□ **A.Maciejewski** ■ **R.Dautov**

Germany 1986

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 Nf6 5 Nf3 e6 6 Be2 Be7



NOTE: Black has an important choice to make after 6 Be2: whether to trade on d4 to create an IQP position, or to delay capturing in anticipation of a c3-c4 lunge by White. In this game he chooses the latter option.

The IQP usually arises via 6...Nc6 7 0-0 cxd4 8 cxd4, and the main line is currently 8...Be7 9 Nc3 Qd6 10 Nb5 Qd8 11 Bf4 Nd5 12 Bg3 a6 (12...0-0 13 Bc4 a6! 14 Bxd5 axb5 15 Be4 is also seen) 13 Nc3 0-0 14 Rc1 (**Diagram 59**).

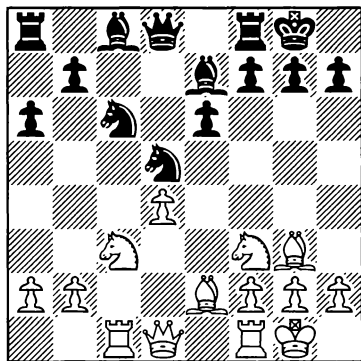


Diagram 59 (B)

Another IQP

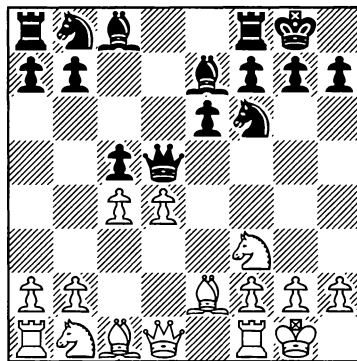


Diagram 60 (B)

The principled choice

At some point White will probably try to relocate his light-squared bishop onto a more active square. If we continue the 'main line' this is indeed what happens after 14...Nf6 15 a3 b6 16 Bc4 Bb7 17 Ba2.

7 0-0 0-0 8 c4 (Diagram 60)

This is White's most principled move: Black has avoided trading on d4 so White will alter the position himself by creating a majority structure.

If White is looking for an alternative, 8 Ne5 exploiting the absence of ...Nc6 is interesting, even if Black's is close to equality after 8...cxd4 9 cxd4 Rd8! 10 Be3 (Black has nothing to fear in the line 10 Nc3 Qxd4 11 Qxd4 Rxd4 12 Nb5 Re4 13 Bf3 Rxe5 14 Nc7 Nc6 15 Nxa8 Nd4 – some old analysis from Sveshnikov that hasn't been threatened) 10...Nc6 11 Nc3 Qa5, and now 12 Nc4 Qc7 or 12 Nxc6 bxc6.

8...Qd8 9 dxc5!

White can also play 9 Nc3 but I quite like the directness of 9 dxc5.

9...Bxc5 10 Nc3 b6

Exchanging queens is possible, but the position after 10...Qxd1 11 Rxd1 offers White good prospects of at least a slight advantage.



NOTE: The plan for White is the same with or without queens: an expansion on the queenside using the pawn majority to gain space, which in turn leads to greater piece activity.

The game J-P.Wallace-E.Agrest, Stockholm 1996, provides an excellent example of White putting Black under pressure: 11...Nc6 12 a3! b6 13 b4 Be7 14 Bf4 Bb7 15 Nb5!? Rfd8 16 Ne5 (16 Bc7 is also promising) 16...Nxe5 17 Bxe5 a6 18 Nd6 Bc6 19 a4! (White's queenside pawns are becoming threatening) 19...Nd7 20 Bg3 Bf6 (Diagram 61) 21 b5!!

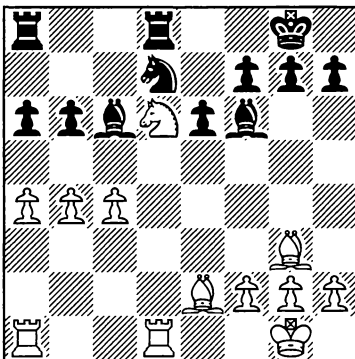


Diagram 61 (W)

White ignores the attack

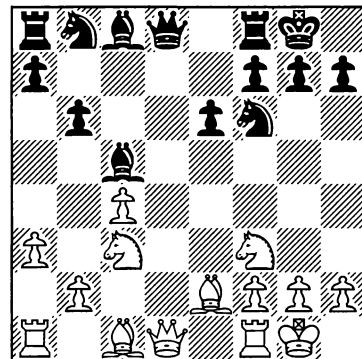


Diagram 62 (B)

Preparing queenside expansion

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

(a brilliant move, but Black's creative defence is even more striking) 21...axb5 22 axb5 Bf3!! (22...Rxa1 23 bxc6 Rxd1+ 24 Bxd1 followed by c7 wins; or 22...Bxa1 23 bxc6 with the same idea; 22...Bxg2 is met by 23 Rac1 Bh3 24 Nb7 – Wallace) 23 Rxa8 Bxa8, and here Wallace shows that he could have maintained an advantage with 24 Ne8! Rxe8 25 Rxd7 intending 25...Rd8 26 Ra7 Bd4 27 Bc7 Rc8 28 Bf3 Bxf3 29 gxf3 followed by Kf1-e2-d3 and Rb7.

10...Nc6 has also been played, but Black usually ends up fianchettoing the c8-bishop in any case so there is good argument for remaining flexible over the knight's development, especially as it often prefers the d7-square.

11 a3! (Diagram 62)

A crucial move in White's plans for expansion, and b2-b4 is even more appealing given that it gains a tempo on Black's bishop. There is nothing wrong with trading queens by 11 Qxd8 Rxd8. Even so, it must be less favourable for White than the previous note because Black is better developed.

11...Bb7 12 b4 Be7 13 Qb3

13 Bf4 Nbd7 14 h3!? is an interesting alternative for White. The idea is that ...Nh5 can now be answered by Bh2, keeping the bishop on the diagonal (compare the note to White's 14th move).

13...Nbd7

13...Nc6 is also reasonable, but it's hard to argue with Black's decision to keep the a8-h1 diagonal open.

14 Rd1

The logical 14 Bf4 should be met by 14...Nh5! chasing the bishop off the diagonal. After 15 Be3 Black claims the diagonal himself with 15...Qb8!, and 16 Rfd1 Rd8 17 Nd4 Nf4 18 Bf1 Nf6 left him with sufficient counterplay to hold the balance in A.Cherniaev-T.Horvath, Davos 2004.

14...Qc7?!

It seems unwise to invite White's next move. I think Black should play 14...Qb8!.

15 Nb5! Qb8 16 Bg5 Rd8

White was threatening 17 Rxd7 Nxd7 18 Bxe7.

17 Bh4! (Diagram 63) 17...a6 18 Bg3 e5 19 Nc3

White's clever Bg5-h4-g3 manoeuvre has forced Black into playing ...e5 under unfavourable circumstances. The pawn is vulnerable on e5, White has access to the d5-square, and another rather unexpected problem soon raises its head...

19...Qc7 20 c5!

...the sudden weakness of the f7-pawn! White now enjoys a clear advantage.

20...bxc5 21 Ng5! Rf8 22 Bc4! g6

Black must evacuate his king. 22...cxb4 23 Nxf7 leaves Black with too many prob-

lems to solve: 23...bxc3 24 Nxe5+, or 23...Nb6 24 Nxe5+ Nxc4 25 Nxc4.

23 Nxf7 Kg7 24 Ng5! Qc6 25 Nd5 (Diagram 64)

So far White has played perfectly, but the rest of the game is marred by mutual mistakes which were probably the result of time trouble.

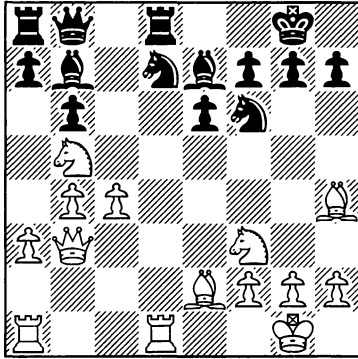


Diagram 63 (B)

A clever manoeuvre

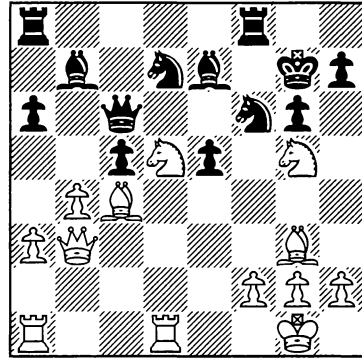


Diagram 64 (B)

Almost perfect

25...cxb4 26 Nf3

26 axb4! is stronger. Perhaps White was worried about 26...Nb6 27 Rac1 Nxc4 28 Rxc4 Qxd5 29 Rxd5 Bxd5, but 28 Ne3! leaves Black in some trouble.

26...Rac8 27 Nxf6 Nxf6 28 Bf1 Qc3

28...Qc2! is a stronger defence because after 29 Qe6 Bxf3 30 gxf3 Rce8, 31 Bxe5 no longer hit the queen.

29 Qe6! Bxf3 30 gxf3 Rce8?

Black had to try 30...Bc5.

31 Bxe5 Bc5

Desperation, but 31...Qxf3 loses to 32 Rd7! Rf7 33 Bc4.

32 Bxc3?!

32 Qd7+! wins immediately.

32...Rxe6 33 axb4 Bb6 34 Rxa6 Kh6 35 b5 Bxf2+? 36 Kxf2 Rxa6 37 Bd2+! 1-0

Game 18

□ I.Dolgov ■ V.Filipchenko

Correspondence 2004

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 Nf6 5 Nf3 e6 6 Be3

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

Some players have dabbled with the ultra-refined 6 a3!? (Diagram 65).

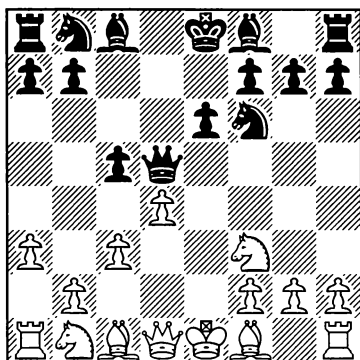


Diagram 65 (B)

Ultra-refined

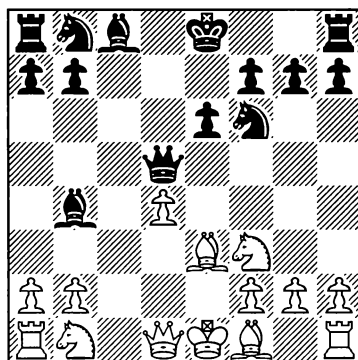


Diagram 66 (W)

Not a duffer's check!

The idea is to sidestep ...Bb4+ completely and to steer the game back to the main lines after 6...Nc6 7 Be3 cxd4 (a2-a3 comes in handy after 7...Be7 8 dxc5!) 8 cxd4 Be7 9 Nc3 Qd6. Of course there are issues White must be aware of when playing a2-a3 so early. For example, something like 6...Be7 7 Be3 Ng4!? suddenly becomes more appealing to Black as it's not really clear how relevant a2-a3 is in this type of position. Even so, 6 a3 is worth considering for White, especially against an opponent booked up on 7...Bb4+ who might unwittingly return to the main line.

6...cxd4 7 cxd4 Bb4+ (Diagram 66)

This crude-looking but actually rather sophisticated check was played by the Soviet legend Alexander Kotov as far back as 1942, but for some unknown reason it was then forgotten for half a century. However, some current-day grandmasters have revived interest this line, which is now considered to be a serious alternative to 7...Nc6.

Black's plan is to exchange this bishop for a knight on c3 and also, if possible, the light-squared bishops (with ...b6 and ...Ba6, or ...Bd7-b5). Then he will activate the rest of his pieces and play against White's hanging pawns on c4 and d4. The battle usually revolves around how strong or weak these pawns become.

8 Nc3 0-0

Black can also begin his plan straightaway, and 8...Bd7 9 Bd3 Bb5 10 0-0 Bxc3 11 bxc3 0-0 12 Bxb5 Qxb5 13 Rb1 Qa6 14 Qb3 b6 leads to positions very similar to those reached in the main game.

It's been noticeable that one or two c3 Sicilian experts (such as Pavasovic and Sermek) have recently tried to prevent the exchange of light-squared bishops. Af-

ter 8...Bd7 White can do this with 9 a3!? Bxc3+ 10 bxc3. True, White has 'lost' a tempo with a2-a3, but at least 10...Bb5?? is no longer possible due to the trick 11 c4! Bxc4 12 Bxc4 Qxc4 13 Rc1 (**Diagram 67**) followed by a devastating Rc8+. Instead 10...0-0 renews the threat, and of course 11 Bd3?! Bb5 would be a foolish waste of a tempo from White's point of view. The consistent follow-up is 11 c4 (although 11 Qb1!? also deserves attention) 11...Qa5+ 12 Qd2 Nc6 13 Bd3 Rac8 14 0-0 Qxd2 15 Bxd2 when both sides have plus points but I slightly prefer White.

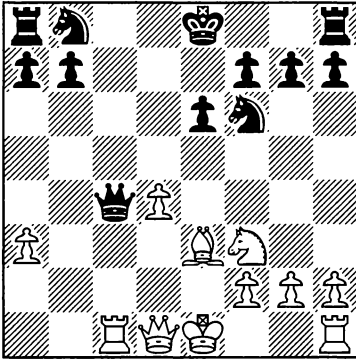


Diagram 67 (B)

A devastating trick

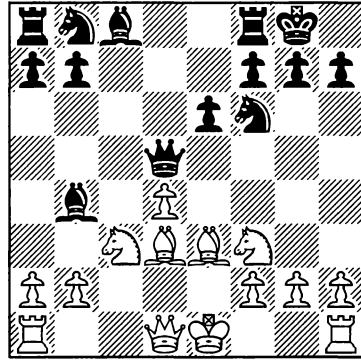


Diagram 68 (B)

The usual move

9 Bd3 (Diagram 68)

By far the most common move in practice – unsurprisingly so given how natural it looks – but alternatives are definitely worth consideration:

a) 9 Be2!? is a tricky move, because if Black now continues 9...b6 there follows 10 Ne5!? when suddenly Black has issues over how to deal with Bf3. D.Sermek-G.Guseinov, Plovdiv 2003, continued 10...Ba6 11 Bf3 Ne4 12 Qa4! Nxc3 13 Qxb4 Ne4 14 Rc1! when Black could find nothing better than 14...Bb7 allowing White to castle, and following 15 Qe7 Na6 16 0-0 White enjoyed a nice advantage.

There may be some improvements for Black in this line, but without doubt a safer way to meet 9 Be2 is with 9...Bd7!. Now 10 Ne5 is less of a concern, with either 10...Bc6 or 10...Nc6 a satisfactory reply. White is normally content to play 10 0-0 when Black continues 10...Bxc3 11 bxc3 Bb5 etc.

b) 9 a3!? has similar motives to 8...Bd7 9 a3!?, and this ambitious way of playing is certainly worth studying. 9...Bxc3+ 10 bxc3 b6 (10...Qa5 11 Qc2 b6 12 Bd2 Bb7 13 c4 Qh5 14 Be2 Qg6 15 Qxg6 hxc6 looked roughly equal in D.Pavasovic-D.Gjuran, Bled 2008; 10...Bd7 transposes to the note to Black's 8th move) 11 c4! (11 Bd3?! Ba6!) 11...Qd6 12 Qd2 Nbd7 13 Bf4 Qc6 14 Be2 Bb7 15 0-0, as seen in D.Pavasovic-

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

M.Vukic, Rijeka 2005, certainly offers White more potential than the main line because of his bishop pair, even if there's nothing hugely wrong with Black's position here.

9...b6

9...Bd7 10 0-0 Bxc3 11 bxc3 Bb5 12 Bxb5 Qxb5 transposes to 8...Bd7, but maybe White could force Black to come up with a new plan by playing 10 Qe2!?

10 0-0 Bxc3 11 bxc3 Ba6! (Diagram 69)

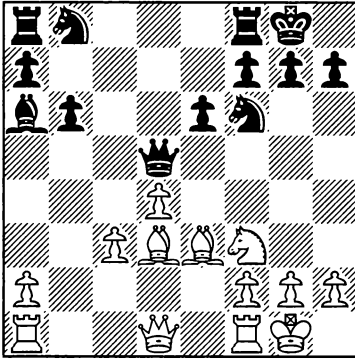


Diagram 69 (W)

A favourable trade

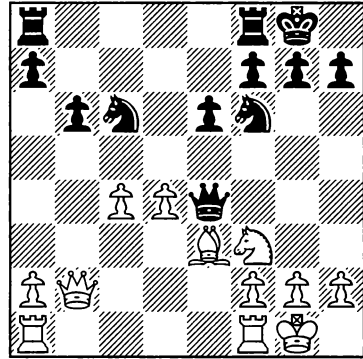


Diagram 70 (W)

Roughly level

Carrying out the intended plan. White would certainly be happy to see 11...Bb7?! 12 c4.

12 Bxa6 Nxa6 13 Qe2

White must arrange c3-c4 before Black has time to clamp down on the light squares, and hitting the knight with the queen seems to solve this problem.

13 Qa4 is a more active, but 13...Nb8 14 c4 Qd7! demonstrates that 'active' sometimes also means 'vulnerable', and 15 Qa3 Nc6 16 Rfd1 h6 17 Rac1 Rfd8 18 h3 Rac8 saw Black coordinating sufficiently well to reach equality in B.Kharchenko-O.Annageldyev, Alushta 2005.

13...Nb8!

Immediately rerouting the knight to a more favourable post appears to be the most accurate. 13...Qb7 14 c4 Rac8 15 a4! Ne4 16 Rfc1 Nb8 17 a5 Nd7 18 Qb2 Qc7 19 axb6 axb6 20 Ra4 Qc6 21 Rb4 was slightly better for White in D.Pavasovic-B.Kurajica, Solin (rapid) 2002.



TIP: This 'minority attack' with a2-a4-a5 forces a weakness on b6 or a7 and is almost always a good idea.

14 c4 Qe4 15 Qb2

In contrast to the previous note, after 15 a4 Black can prevent a4-a5 with 15...Nc6! – this is why Black hurries to reposition his knight.

15...Nc6 (Diagram 70)

After 15...Nc6 the position must be close to equal, but still with plenty of play left in the position. Black must be careful not to allow a powerful advance in the centre; White must not allow his pawns to become static weaknesses.

15...Nbd7 invites 16 a4!, as played in S.B.Hansen-M.Krasenkow, German League 2005. White then answered 16...Rac8 with 17 Rac1, but 17 Rfc1! (Rogozenko) leaves a rook on a1 to support a4-a5 and is clearly much more logical.

16 Qb5

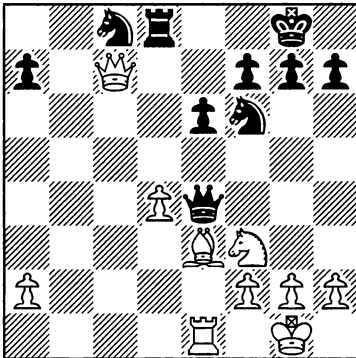
Trying to cause some problems with the queen. 16 Bg5 Qf5 17 d5!? is also worth considering.

16...Rac8 17 Rfe1 Qg6 18 Rac1 Rfd8 19 c5!?

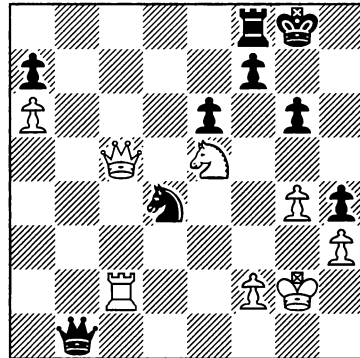
This is obviously committal, but White is trying to exploit Black's offside queen on g6.

19...bxc5 20 Rxc5 Ne7 21 Rxc8 Nxc8

21...Rxc8 may have been a better practical choice. After 22 Qa6 Qc2 23 Qxa7 Ned5 Black's light-squared compensation would make it exceedingly tough for White to realize his extra pawn.

22 Qb7 Qe4 23 Qc7 (Diagram 71)**Diagram 71 (B)**

· A poor knight on c8

**Diagram 72 (W)**

White to play and win

Black is under some pressure because it's difficult to get the knight on c8 back into the game.

23...Rf8 24 Bg5 Qf5 25 Bxf6! Qxf6 26 Rc1 h6 27 a4 Qe7 28 a5 Re8 29 Rc6 Qb4 30 g3 Ne7 31 Rc5 Nf5

Finally the knight returns, but the vulnerability of Black's a-pawn (and also the strength of White's!) is a major cause for concern.

32 Kg2 Qb2

32...Nxd4?? loses to 33 Rc4.

33 Rc2 Qb1 34 a6 Rf8 35 h3 g6 36 Qc5 h5 37 Ne5 h4 38 g4 Nxd4 (Diagram 72)

White has a powerful response to this, but Black's position was already becoming more and more difficult.

39 Nd7! Ra8 40 Nf6+ Kg7 41 Nh5+! Kg8 42 Qxd4 gxh5 43 Rc5 Qg6 44 Rxh5 Qg7 45 Qf4 f6 46 Qe4 1-0

Black can fight on for a bit after 46 Qe4 Re8 47 Rxh4, but ultimately it's a lost cause.

4...Nf6 5 Nf3 Nc6

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 Nf6 5 Nf3 Nc6 (Diagram 73)

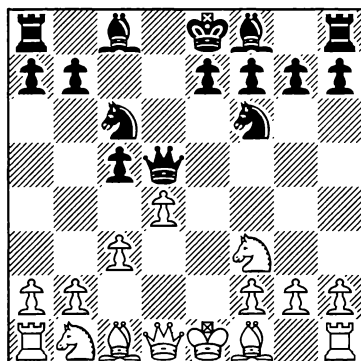


Diagram 73 (W)

A flexible approach

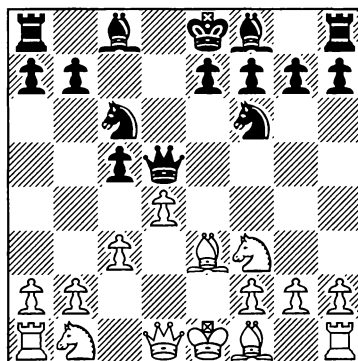


Diagram 74 (B)

A logical choice

Black neither blocks his bishop with ...e6, but nor does he commit to ...Bg4. The value of this flexible approach is demonstrated if White tries 6 Bd3?!, when 6...Bg4! is very effective.



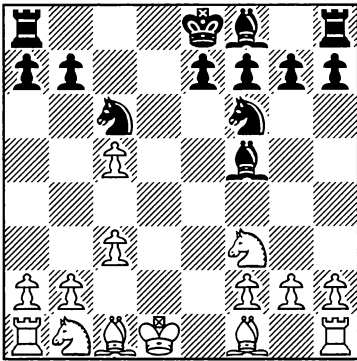
NOTE: This line is often reached via 4...Nc6 5 Nf3 Nf6.

6 Be3 (Diagram 74)

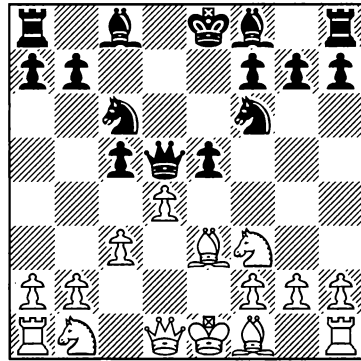
In my opinion 6 Be3 is the most logical move for those starting out in the c3 Sicilian, especially if 6 Be3 is your choice after 5...e6 since a transposition is more than likely. However, White does have two decent alternatives:

a) 6 Be2 is as playable here as it is against 5...e6. In fact the most common continuation has been 6...cxd4 7 cxd4 e6 8 0-0 Be7 9 Nc3 Qd6, when we have directly transposed to the note to Black's 6th move in Game 17.

b) We've already seen quite a few examples of capturing on c5, and 6 dxc5!? is another critical try for White. After 6...Qxd1+! (6...Qxc5 7 Na3! followed by Be3 offers White a good chance of at least an edge) 7 Kxd1 the plan of 7...Bf5! (**Diagram 75**) intending a quick ...0-0-0, as recommended by Richard Palliser in *Fighting the Anti-Sicilians*, gives White plenty to think about while trying to consolidate his extra pawn. For example, 8 Be3 0-0-0+ 9 Kc1 (9 Nbd2 e6 10 Bb5 Nd5 11 Bxc6 bxc6 12 Ne5 Nxe3+ 13 fxe3 Bxc5 was fine for Black in E.Sveshnikov-P.Martynov, Val Maubuee 1990, as 14 Nxf7? is met by 14...Bxe3!) 9...Nd5 10 b4?! (against 10 Bb5 Palliser suggests 10...g6 11 Nbd2 Kc7 12 Re1 f6 followed by ...e5, when Black has lasting compensation) 10...g6! 11 b5 Nxe3 12 fxe3 (D.Bucher-F.Maeser, Swiss League 2006) and now 12...Na5! (Palliser) followed by ...Bh6 presents White with a major headache. Of course there are alternatives along the way for both sides, but even if you disregard for the moment the objective merits of the position, many White players would feel uncomfortable giving Black all this action for a measly pawn.

**Diagram 75 (W)**

Rapid development

**Diagram 76 (W)**

Unrefuted?



WARNING: 6 Na3?! is dubious here because the delay in ...e6 allows Black to develop aggressively, and after 6...Bg4! 7 Be2 cxd4 8 Nb5 0-0-0! 9 Nbxtd4 e5! 10 Nxc6 Qxc6 11 Qc2 Bc5 12 0-0 Rhe8 it's White who is looking to equalize.

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

6...cxd4

6...Ng4 is very similar to (and can transpose to) 5...e6 6 Be3 Ng4. White should again respond with Bd3, Nbd2 and 0-0, allowing Black to capture on e3.

If Black is looking for something a bit different, then 6...e5!? (**Diagram 76**) is an interesting possibility. I remember first analysing this move 15 years ago and I still haven't been able to refute it. One of the main line runs 7 dxe5 Qxd1+ 8 Kxd1 Ng4 9 Na3 Bf5! (I didn't quite manage to equalize after 9...Nxe3+ 10 fxe3 Bg4 11 Nc4 0-0-0+ 12 Ke1 Be7 13 Be2 Be6 14 a4! in E.Rozentalis-J.Emms, German League 1995) 10 Nc4 0-0-0+ 11 Ke1 Re8 12 Rd1 Ncxe5 13 Nfxe5 Nxe5 14 Nxe5 Rxe5 15 Bc4 Be6 16 Bxe6+ Rxe6 17 Rd5 Be7 18 Ke2 Rd8 19 Rhd1 b6, as played in J.Emms-A.Muir, British Ch., Torquay 2002. Although I did manage to grind out a win in the end, White's advantage in this position is bordering on non-existent.

7 cxd4 e6 8 Nc3

and we have transposed to the previous section.

4...g6 and Others

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5

3...Nf6!? (**Diagram 77**) is an interesting gambit try for Black. Indeed, if White tries to hold on to the pawn Black's play is justified: for example, 4 c4?! e6 5 dxe6 Bxe6 followed by ...Nc6 with excellent compensation; or 4 Bb5+!? Nbd7 5 c4 a6 6 Bxd7+ Bxd7 and again Black plans ...e6.

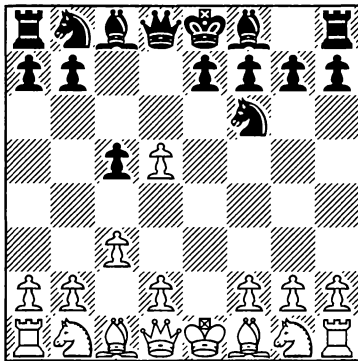


Diagram 77 (W)

Black offers a gambit

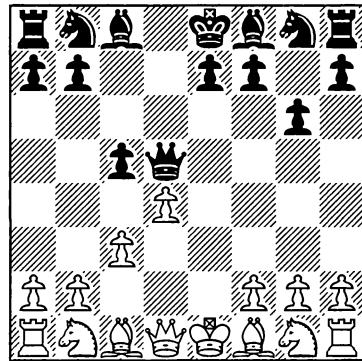


Diagram 78 (W)

A decent alternative

Probably White's best bet is 4 d4! cxd4, and now 5 Bb5+ is rather more disruptive. If 5...Bd7, 6 Bc4! leaves Black's bishop somewhat misplaced on d7, and 6...b5 7 Bb3 dxc3 8 Nxc3 g6 9 Nf3 Bg7 10 0-0 0-0 11 Re1 left White with a pleasant position in

L.Vajda-I.Nemet, Basle 2002. In an earlier game, R.Ekstroem-I.Nemet, Pontresina 2000, Black tried 5...Nbd7 6 Qxd4 g6, but then 7 d6!? exd6 8 Nf3 proved to be an effective way of returning the pawn. This looks promising for White, although Black can surely do better than 8...Qe7+? 9 Kd1! a6 10 Re1 which gave White a decisive advantage after only ten moves!

4 d4 g6 (Diagram 78)

It took a while to gain acceptance, but over the last ten or so years 4...g6 has emerged as a reasonable way of avoiding the main lines, and nowadays it's sometimes employed by players as an attempt to unbalance the position against lower-rated opponents.

4...Nf6 5 Nf3 g6 is similar to 4...g6, but here White has the additional possibility of 6 Qb3!?. It seems surprising that White can gain an advantage simply by offering to swap queens, but 6...Qxb3 7 axb3 opens the a-file and isn't particularly comfortable for Black in view of Na3-b5 ideas (...a6 doesn't prevent this!). 6...Be6 7 c4 Qd7 8 d5 is also nice for White, and 6...cxd4 allows White to demonstrate the point behind his previous move: 7 Bc4! Qe4+ 8 Kf1! e6 9 cxd4, when White's lead in development is more important than his loss of castling rights after, for example, 9...Bg7? 10 Nc3 Qg4 11 Nb5! or 9...Be7 10 Nc3 Qf5 11 Nb5 Na6 12 Bh6 Ng4 13 Bg5!.

5 Nf3

5 Be3 and 5 Na3!? have also been played, but White's main alternative is 5 dxc5. Trading queens on d1 is possible but looks less logical here as it doesn't really fit in with the slow ...g6. Thus 5...Qxc5 6 Be3 Qc7 is the main continuation (6...Qa5 is also not bad) when White can continue in typical fashion with 7 Na3, or try the greedy but aesthetically pleasing 7 Bxa7!?. This works because 7...Rxa7 8 Qd4 creates a nice picture by forking both rooks. However, after 8...Nc6 9 Qxh8 Nf6 White's queen is locked out of the game and there's no denying Black's compensation. Given the choice, I would probably resist the temptation to grab the pawn.

5...Bg7 6 Na3!? (Diagram 79)



NOTE: Na3 is usually more effective against ...g6 than against ...e6 because Bc4 hits the f7-pawn and so this becomes a weapon White can use. Indeed, 6 Na3 is White's most popular move in practice.

6 Be3 presents Black with fewer problems, as long as he doesn't fall for 6...cxd4 7 cxd4 Nh6?? (intending ...Nf5) which loses instantly to 8 Qc1! (**Diagram 80**).

Quite a few players have missed this, and in one game between two grandmasters (I won't embarrass them by naming names) White returned the compliment by playing 8 Nc3??(!). Instead 7...Nf6 8 Nc3 Qa5 9 Bc4 0-0 10 0-0 Bg4 11 h3 Bxf3 12 Qxf3 Nc6 leads to a roughly equal position.

6...Nf6

After 6...cxd4 7 Bc4 Qe4+ White has the amazing move 8 Be3!. Now 8...dxe3??

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

loses the queen to 9 Bxf7+! Kxf7 10 Ng5+ (or 9...Kf8 10 Qd8+) so Black deals with the threat of Bxf7+ by playing 8...Nh6!. Following 9 cxd4 0-0, bringing the knight back into the game with 10 Nb5 looks sensible, and 10...Nc6 11 Qd2!? Nf5 12 0-0 Nxe3 13 fxe3 Qg4 14 Nc3 was a bit better for White in D.Howell-M.Rodshtein, Yerevan 2007.

7 Bc4

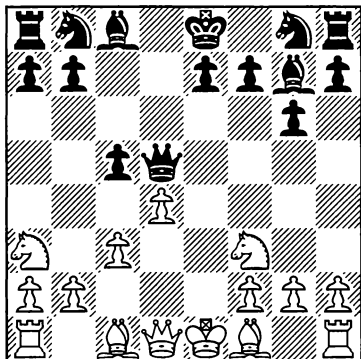


Diagram 79 (B)

Effective against ...g6

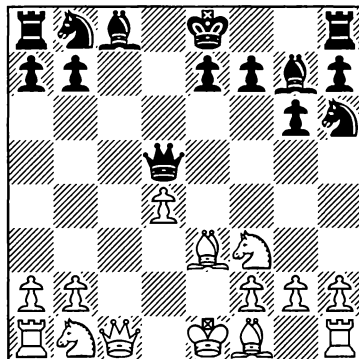


Diagram 80 (B)

Remember this one!

7 Nb5 Na6, intending to meet 8 Be3 with 8...Ng4!, is considered to be okay for Black.

7...Qe4+ 8 Be3 (Diagram 81) 8...0-0 9 0-0

White can also grab a pawn with 9 dxc5!?, when Black must seek immediate action with 9...Ng4!. N.Pedersen-D.Kjartansson, Fuegen 2006, continued 10 Qd5 (wisely offering a queen trade) 10...Qxd5 11 Bxd5 Nxe3 12 fxe3 and now instead of the game's 12...Nd7 13 c6, Rogozenko suggests that Black should regain the pawn by force with 12...e6 13 Be4 f5 14 Bc2 Na6 when he has good chances of reaching equality.

9...cxd4 10 Nxd4! (Diagram 82)

10 Bxd4 Nc6 11 Re1 Qf4! has proved to be okay for Black. 10 Nxd4 is certainly more challenging, and some accuracy is required by Black to restrict White's advantage. 10...Nc6 11 Re1 Qh4 12 Nxc6 bxc6 13 Qf3 was better for White in D.Pavasovic-S.Movsesian, Rabac 2003. Black also accepts a weakening of his queenside pawns after 10...Qe5 11 Qf3 Nc6, but at least here the queen can head back to c7 to offer them protection, and 12 Nxc6 bxc6 13 Rae1 (White should avoid 13 Qxc6? Ng4, but 13 Rfe1 is more natural) 13...Qc7 14 Nc2 a5 15 Nd4 Ba6 16 Bf4 Qd7 17 Bxa6 Rxa6 18 Nb3 Ra7 19 Be3 Raa8 20 Bd4 Rfe8 saw Black more or less

solving his problems in D.Pavasovic-M.Cebalo, Bizovac 2007.

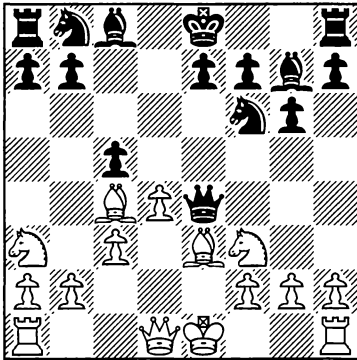


Diagram 81 (B)

Threatening 9 Bxf7+

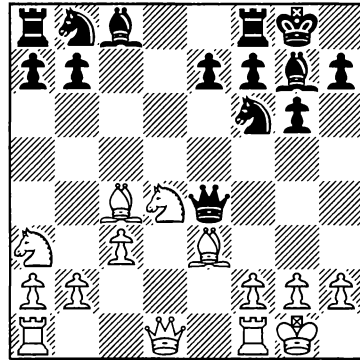


Diagram 82 (B)

Black must be accurate

Summary

4...Nf6 5 Nf3 Bg4 has deservedly built up a reputation as a reliable answer to the c3 Sicilian. But recent developments, in particular the materialization of 6 dxc5 as a dangerous weapon, suggest that this line is not quite as bullet-proof for Black as once thought.

Against 4...Nf6 5 Nf3 e6, White's best choice is 6 Be3 if his aim is to force an IQP, and I feel that White has excellent practical chances in those positions, although Black's resources have been strengthened by the emergence of 6...cxd4 7 cxd4 Bb4+ as an alternative to the main line. 6 Be2 is a decent option if White is happy to play the majority structure seen in Game 17, while the tricky and relatively non-theoretical 6 Na3 is the move most likely to catch an opponent off guard.

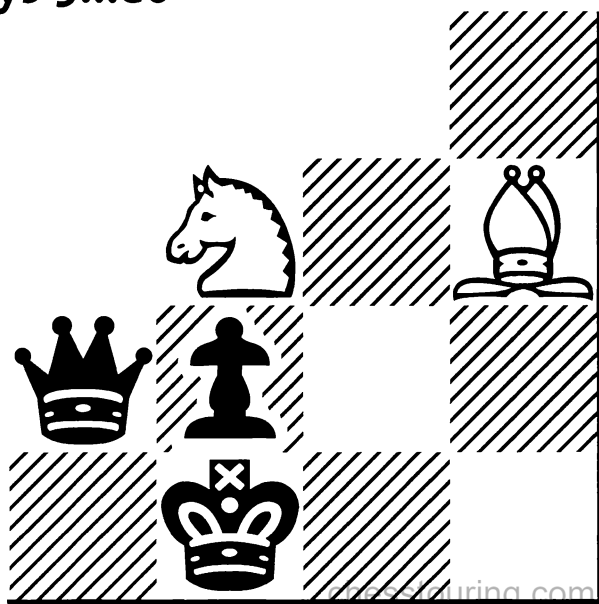
The main thing to remember about 4...Nf6 5 Nf3 Nc6 is to avoid 6 Na3?! and 6 Bd3?!. Those who play 6 Be3 against 5...e6 can do the same here; likewise with 6 Be2.

4...g6 mustn't be underestimated, especially since pedestrian development by White poses no real problems to Black. I feel that White's best chance to claim an advantage is with an early Na3, which tends to be more effective against ...g6 than against ...e6.

Chapter Three

2...Nf6: Traditional Lines with cxd4

-  Introduction
-  Black Plays 5...d6
-  Black Plays 5...e6



Introduction

This chapter covers the traditional main lines with 2...Nf6. After 3 e5 Nd5 White advances with 4 d4 and following 4...cxd4 he immediately recaptures the pawn, usually with 5 cxd4 (**Diagram 1**), but also occasionally with 5 Qxd4. Modern alternatives for White at moves 4 and 5 are dealt with in the next chapter.

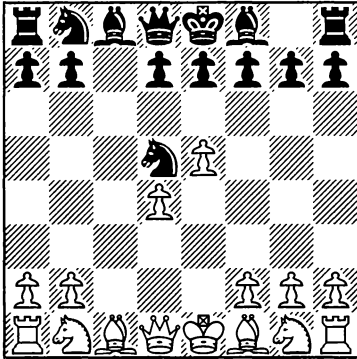


Diagram 1 (B)

5 cxd4

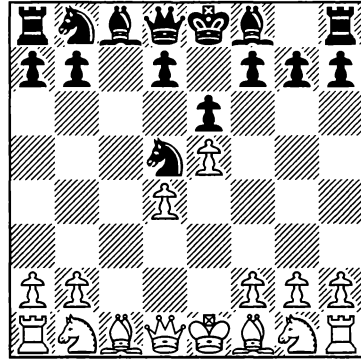


Diagram 2 (W)

5...e6

There are two main moves for Black in the position after 5 cxd4. The first is 5...d6, which has always enjoyed a solid reputation. In recent years, however, new ideas for White have emerged, and these days Black's life is not as easy as it was once thought to be.

The second option for Black is the more ambitious 5...e6 (**Diagram 2**), which generally leads to positions of greater tension. White replies with 6 Nf3 and here Black faces another decision: 6...d6 or 6...b6. In either case White will often try to utilize his pawn spearhead on e5 in order to create attacking chances on the kingside, although there are also a many occasions where the structure changes to an IQP, for example after exd6 or ...dxe5 answered by Nxe5.

Black Plays 5...d6

1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 d4 cxd4 5 cxd4

The alternative recapture, 5 Qxd4, is covered in Game 21.

5...d6 (Diagram 3)

Black immediately attacks the front of White's centre. The equally important 5...e6

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is covered in the next section.

6 Nf3



NOTE: 4 Nf3 Nc6 5 d4 cxd4 6 cxd4 d6 and 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nf3 Nc6 6 cxd4 d6 are two common ways to reach this position. Chapter Four covers these move orders.

The immediate 6 Bc4!? can lead to an interesting gambit after 6...Nb6 7 Bb5+ Bd7 8 e6! (**Diagram 4**) 8...Bxb5 (or 8...fxe6 9 Bd3) 9 Qh5 Qc8! 10 Qxb5+ Kd8 11 Be3 and White enjoys compensation due to the poorly placed king on d8, whichever way Black captures on e6.

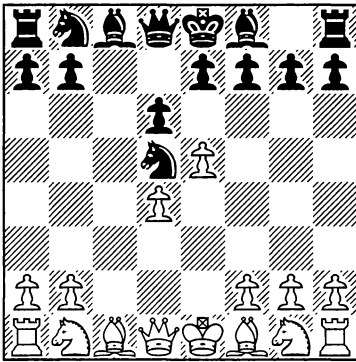


Diagram 3 (W)

Attacking the front

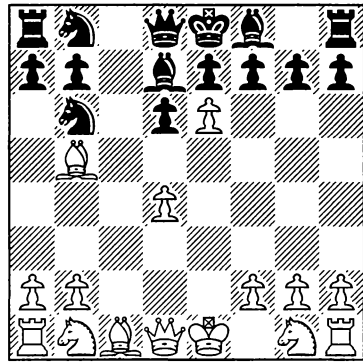


Diagram 4 (B)

A promising gambit

7...Nc6! is perhaps a stronger move, after which White's best bet may well be to transpose to the main line with 8 Nf3. Instead 8 d5 a6! leads nowhere, and 8 Nc3?! dxe5! 9 d5 a6 10 Ba4 Nxa4 11 Qxa4 b5 12 Nxb5 Bd7! 13 Nc3 Nd4 14 Qd1 Bf5! left White struggling in E.Rozentalis-M.Sadler, Hastings 1997/98.

6...Nc6 7 Bc4

7 Nc3!? is tricky because the natural 7...Nxc3 8 bxc3 dxe5?! is met by 9 d5!, after which Black has some problems to solve. Much stronger is 7...dxe5! 8 dxe5 Nxc3 9 Qxd8+ Nxd8 10 bxc3 Bd7, when White's activity is counterbalanced by Black's superior pawn structure.

7...Nb6 (Diagram 5)

The alternative 7...e6 is often played and this is a direct transposition to the next section. 7...dxe5!? is relatively rare, but this is also playable for Black; it's certainly better than its reputation. Of course White can continue sensibly with 8 dxe5 Ndb4 9 Qb3 e6 10 0-0 or 8 Nxe5 e6 9 0-0, but the traditional recommendation has

always been 8 Bxd5!? Qxd5 9 Nc3 Qd6 10 d5 Nd4 11 Nxd4 exd4 12 Qxd4 e5 13 Qd3. However, Black's counterplay based on his bishop pair and kingside majority after 13...Bd7 14 0-0 f5 15 Re1 Kf7! seems to provide an equal match for White's superior development and passed d-pawn. Probably best for White is 16 a4, introducing ideas such as Nb5 or b2-b3 and Ba3.

Returning to 7...Nb6, White now has to make a fundamental choice: solidity or sacrifice?

8 Bb5

8 Bb3!? is the sharp option, and this is covered in Game 20.

8...dxe5

This is by far the most popular choice, but Black can also try to either maintain the tension or block the centre:

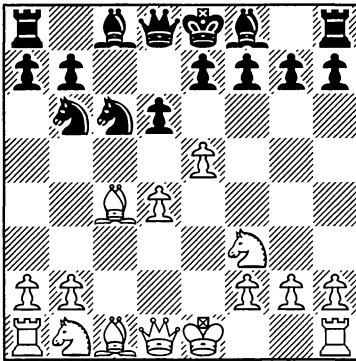


Diagram 5 (W)

Bb5 or Bb3?

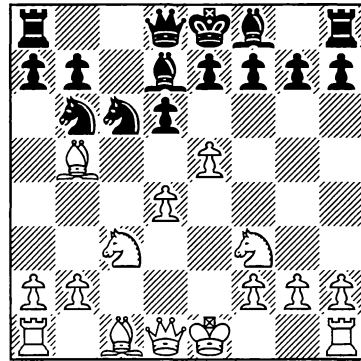


Diagram 6 (B)

Retaining the tension

a) 8...Bd7 9 Nc3 (**Diagram 6**) [after 9 exd6 Black usually recaptures with the bishop to reach an IQP after 9...e6! 10 0-0 Bxd6 11 Nc3 0-0] 9...dxe5 10 dxe5 (10 Nxe5 Nxe5 11 dxe5 Bxb5 12 Nxb5 Qxd1+ 13 Kxd1 is known to be equal) 10...a6?! 11 Be2! Bg4 12 Be3 Qxd1+ 13 Rxd1 Nd7 14 h3 Bxf3 15 e6! fxe6 (15...Bxe2?? allows mate after 16 exd7+ Kd8 17 Bb6) 16 Bxf3 left Black struggling in S.Tiviakov-S.Karjakin, Wijk aan Zee 2006. The problem with such an early ...a6 is that it leaves Black's knight vulnerable on b6. Black should instead continue development with 10...g6! 11 0-0 Bg7 when White supports his e5-pawn with 12 Bf4 followed by Qe2.

b) 8...d5 9 Nc3 Bg4 10 h3 Bxf3 (10...Bh5 offers White the chance of ruining Black's development with the pawn sacrifice 11 e6!) 11 Qxf3 e6 12 0-0 Be7 13 Qg3! Kf8 (13...0-0? is impossible because of 14 Bh6!; 13...g6 is also met by 14 Bh6) 14 Bxc6!? bxc6 15 Be3 h5 16 Rac1 Rc8 17 b3 h4 18 Qg4 g6 19 Rc2 Kg7 20 Rfc1 Rh5 left White

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with the better position in M.Godena-E.Ghaem Maghami, Majorca 2004, especially if he now plays 21 Ne2! planning Nf4-d3.

9 Nxe5 Bd7 (Diagram 7)

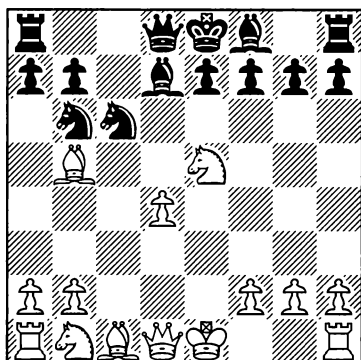


Diagram 7 (W)

Black unpins

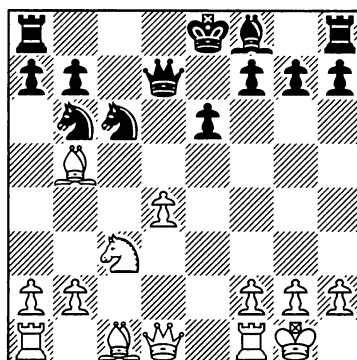


Diagram 8 (B)

The main line

10 Nxd7!

The old line continued 10 Bxc6 Bxc6 11 Nxc6 bxc6 12 0-0 but it was soon discovered that 12...g6! is a fully adequate response based on the line 13 Re1 Bg7 14 Bg5 0-0! (14...Nc8 is also okay) 15 Bxe7 Qxd4 16 Qxd4 Bxd4. Here 17 Bxf8? (17 Nd2!) temporarily leaves White a rook up, but after 17...Bxb2! he actually ends up losing a pawn!

10...Qxd7 11 Nc3 e6

Black needs to prevent d4-d5 before going any further (he should certainly avoid 11...a6?! 12 Bxc6 Qxc6 13 d5!). The alternative is 11...Rd8 12 0-0 (12 Be3 can be played if White wants to steer clear of 12...Qxd4) when in the majority of cases Black transposes with 12...e6. Grabbing the pawn with 12...Qxd4!? is clearly risky and here I like 13 Qe2 intending Rd1 and/or Be3.

12 0-0 (Diagram 8)

White enjoys a lead in development and has active pieces, while Black can point to his ultra-solid structure and the possibility of eventual pressure on the d4-pawn. As we shall see in Game 19, it's very important for White to maintain the initiative, as this is his only chance of keeping any advantage.

Theoretical?

Because it's been around for a while, there have been quite a number of games in

this line. On the other hand, the positions are not particularly sharp and only one or two key ideas really need to be remembered.

Statistics

White has scored 52% in the position after 12 0-0. The large number of draws (over 50%) emphasizes just how solid Black's position is. The sharp 8 Bb3!? dxe5 9 d5! has scored 54% in around 400 games. Unsurprisingly with this line there is a far greater fraction (68%) of decisive games.

Illustrative Games

Game 19

□ M.Godena ■ A.Antunes

European Team Championship, Pula 1997

1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 d4 cxd4 5 cxd4 d6 6 Nf3 Nc6 7 Bc4 Nb6 8 Bb5 dxe5 9 Nxe5 Bd7 10 Nxd7 Qxd7 11 Nc3 e6 12 0-0 Be7

After 12...Rd8 White can play 13 Be3 planning 13...Be7 14 Qg4, but the most aggressive move is 13 a4!? (**Diagram 9**) with the idea of causing Black problems with a5-a6. This idea is seen most clearly in the line 13...Qxd4 14 Qxd4 Rxd4 15 a5 Nc8 16 a6 Nd6 (S.Vysochin-V.Grebionkin, Internet 2004) at which point 17 Ba4! would give Black a major headache.

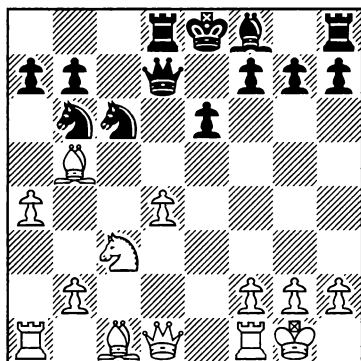


Diagram 9 (B)

Planning a5-a6

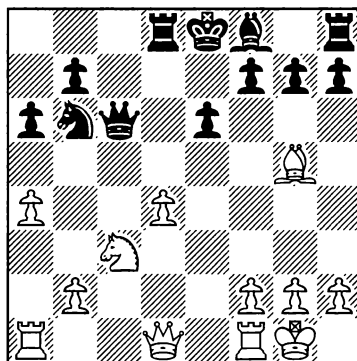


Diagram 10 (B)

Continuing aggressively

Black might be able to ignore the advance of the a-pawn if he defends accurately, and 13...Be7 14 a5 Nd5 15 a6 Ndb4 16 axb7 Qxb7 17 Qf3 0-0 18 Be3 a6 19 Ba4 was

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acceptable for him in D.Howell-V.Mikhalevski, Ottawa 2007. Black still has to display some care, though, as demonstrated by the game's 19...Bf6 20 Rfd1 Qb6?? (virtually any other move would have been better!) 21 d5 Nd4 22 Qe4! e5 23 f4 when Black couldn't hold on to his d4-knight and soon lost the game.

If Black wants to halt the a-pawn's march, 13...a6 is the move to choose. After 14 Bxc6 Qxc6 White continues aggressively with 15 Bg5! (**Diagram 10**), planning to meet 15...Be7 with 16 Bxe7 Kxe7 17 Qg4. In M.Sebag-S.Karjakin, Cap d'Agde 2006, Black instead chose 15...f6, and 16 Be3 Be7 17 Qh5+!? g6 18 Qh6 led to a position where both sides have weaknesses but White's position looks easier to play over the board. It's worth seeing some more moves from this game, as White soon misses a big chance: 18...Kf7 19 Rfc1 Nd5 20 Nxd5 Qxd5 21 Rc7 Rd7 22 Rac1 Rxc7 23 Rxc7 Qa5 24 Rxe7+ Kxe7 25 Qg7+ Kd6 26 Bf4+ Kd5? (Black had to play 26...Kc6 27 d5+! Kc5!) and here Sebag could have won with 27 Qd7+!: for example, 27...Kc4 28 Qxe6+ Kd3 (or 28...Qd5 29 b3+ Kxd4 30 Qe3 mate) 29 Qb3+ Kxd4 30 Qd1+! Ke4 31 f3+! Kxf4 32 Qd4+ Kf5 33 Qe4+ Kg5 34 Qe3+! Kh5 35 g4+ Kh4 36 Qh6+ etc.

13 Qg4 0-0 14 Bxc6! (**Diagram 11**)

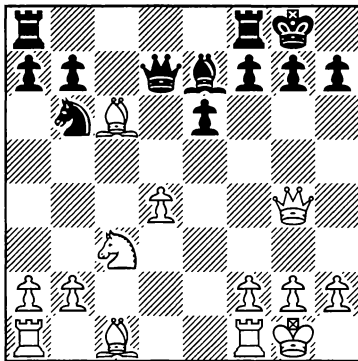


Diagram 11 (B)

A necessary trade

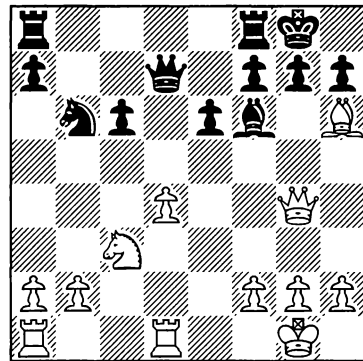


Diagram 12 (B)

The right rook

At first glance it seems strange to trade on c6 without any provocation from Black's a-pawn, but the truth is White needs to relieve the pressure on d4 before concentrating on attacking the kingside. 14 Rd1 looks more natural but the spare tempo allows Black to play 14...Rfd8!, and here 15 Bh6 g6! has proved to be super-solid for Black.

14 Bh6? would be nice if it worked, but 14...Qxd4 15 Qg3 Bh4! is an effective antidote for Black.

14...bxc6

Black would prefer to keep his structure intact with 14...Qxc6 but then he would need to spend another move returning his queen back to perform defensive duties on the kingside, and this tempo allows White to build up a promising initiative. 15 Bh6 Bf6 16 Rad1! (now Black must deal with the threat of Ne4) 16...Qd7 17 Ne4 Qd8 (Black is suffering after 17...Qe7 18 Rd3 Kh8 19 Bf4! Rfd8 20 Rh3! Rd5 21 Nxf6 Qxf6 22 Be5 Qg6 23 Qxg6 fxc6 24 Rc3) 18 Rd3! Kh8 19 Bd2 Qd5! (after 19...Nd5 20 Rh3! Black's king has every right to feel nervous, with tactics like 20...Kg8 21 Qh5 h6 22 Bxh6! on the cards) 20 Bb4 (20 Rh3!?) 20...Rfc8 21 Nxf6 (21 Rh3!?) 21...gxf6 22 Be7 Qg5 23 Qxg5 fxc6 24 Bxg5 Nd5 saw Black escaping with compensation for the pawn in S.Movsesian-V.Kotronias, Istanbul 2003, but defending in this line requires strong nerves because any slip could be fatal.



NOTE: This rook lift to the third rank is a typical way for White to develop an attack on the kingside.

15 Bh6 Bf6 16 Rfd1! (Diagram 12)

With a pawn weakness to aim at on c6, it makes sense for White to place this rook on d1 and leave c1 free for the other rook. Now White is ready to play Ne4 again.

16...Rfd8

16...Kh8 17 Ne4 Qe7 18 Bf4 Rfd8 19 Nxf6 Qxf6 20 Be5 Qg6 21 Qe2 Nd7 22 Bg3, as played in S.Tiviakov-F.Nijboer, Dieren 2006, is typical: Black so very nearly equalizes but some tension remains and White's position is slightly easier to play. Indeed, after 22...Qf5 23 Rac1 Rdc8 24 Rc3 a5 25 Rf3 Qh5 26 Be5 f6 27 Bg3 Qd5 28 b3 a4 29 b4 a3 30 Re3 Re8 31 Qc2 Rec8 32 Rc3 Kg8 33 Rdd3 Nb6 34 Rc5 it was unquestionably Tiviakov who was doing all the pressing.

17 Ne4 Qe7 18 Rac1 Rac8

After 18...Kh8 19 Bg5 Bxg5 20 Qxg5! Black would certainly rather have his king back on g8, and 20...Qb4 21 Qh5! f6 22 Qc5 Qa4 (22...Qxb2? is met by 23 Rc2! Qb5 24 Nd6!) 23 Nc3 Qc4 24 Qxc4 Nxc4 25 Na4 Nb6 26 Nc5 reached a very favourable endgame for White in A.Korotylev-P.Smirnov, Russia 2004.

19 h4!

One of the ideas of this move is that after 19...Kh8? 20 Nxf6 Qxf6 21 Bg5, Black no longer has the resource 21...Qg6 on account of 22 h5!.

19...Rd5 20 Rc3! (Diagram 13)

Again we see a rook lift to the third rank. Perhaps worried by possibilities of Rf3 and Rg3, Black immediately commits a serious error.

20...Kh8?

20...Nd7! offers the kingside extra support, and 21 Rg3 g6 22 Bg5 Kg7 left Black with a defensible position in F.Kroeze-J.Van der Wiel, Enschede 2004.

21 Rf3! Rg8

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21...Rxd4 22 Rxd4 Bxd4 23 Ng5! gives White a strong attack, and 23...Bf6 24 Bxg7+! Bxg7? (24...Kxg7 is better but still good for White after 25 Ne4+ Kh8 26 Nxf6) 25 Nxf7+ Kg8 26 Nh6+ Kh8 27 Nf7+ (27 Rf7!) 27...Kg8 28 Nh6+ Kh8 29 Rf7 led to another success for the Italian Grandmaster and c3 Sicilian expert in M.Godena-A.Shomoev, Internet 2004.

22 Nxf6 gxf6 (Diagram 14) 23 Qxg8+! Kxg8 24 Rg3+

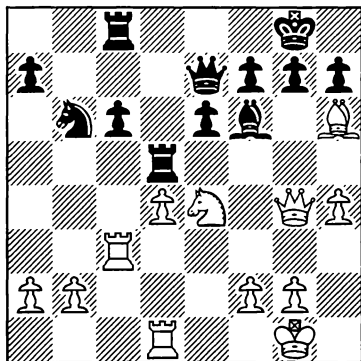


Diagram 13 (B)

A typical rook lift

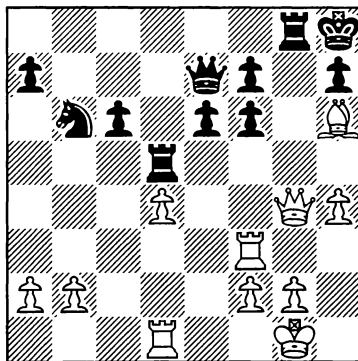


Diagram 14 (W)

The queen sac is strong

Another point of 19 h4! is revealed!

24...Rg5 25 hxg5 f5 26 Rc1

The material balance is roughly level, but White has a decisive advantage as his rooks can plough through the c-file and Black's king is in a mating net.

26...f4 27 Rgc3 f6 28 Rxc6 fxc5 29 Rc7 Qf6 30 Bg7 Qf5 31 Be5 f3 32 Rg7+ Kf8 33 Rcc7 1-0

There is no good defence to the threat of 34 Bd6+ Ke8 35 Rg8+.

Game 20

□ **D.Smerdon** ■ **D.Johansen**

Brisbane 2005

1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 d4 cxd4 5 cxd4 d6 6 Nf3 Nc6 7 Bc4 Nb6 8 Bb3!? (Diagram 15)

I first became aware of this gambit idea in the 1990s when I saw a few games by the Russian IM Viktor Ivanov in *Chess Informant*. Then c3 Sicilian experts such as Pavasovic, Sermek and Rausis began playing it and nowadays 8 Bb3 is seen as a

serious alternative to 8 Bb5. It's certainly very useful for White to have an aggressive option to go with the solid 8 Bb5, as it gives Black players something else to think about.

8...dxe5

8...e6 can be met by 9 0-0 or 9 Qe2, but the simplest is 9 exd6 which transposes to 1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nf3 Nc6 6 Bc4 Nb6 7 Bb3 d5 8 exd6 e6 9 cxd4 (see Game 28).

8...d5 aims for a French-type structure with Black's bishop outside the pawn chain. It seems like the critical response is to prevent this idea by playing 9 Nh4!. After 9...e6 10 Nf3 (**Diagram 16**) White may have lost a tempo overall (White lost two with Nf3-h4-f3; Black lost one with ...d7-d6-d5) but it was certainly worth it just to hem in Black's light-squared bishop. This type of position must be at least marginally better for White, if only because Black would much prefer his knight on b6 to be on f5 just as in the normal French Advance. The game E.Atalik-A.Skripchenko, Halle 2000, offers a demonstration of White's attacking chances on the kingside: 10...Be7 11 0-0 Bd7 12 Nc3 a6 13 g3 Nc4 14 h4! b5 15 Ne2 f6!? 16 exf6 Bxf6 17 Nf4 0-0 18 Bc2 Nd6 19 Re1 Re8 20 Ne5, and White's pieces were beginning to look very threatening.

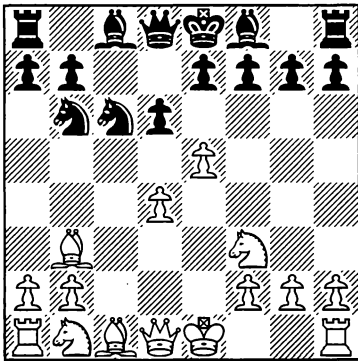


Diagram 15 (B)

A dangerous gambit

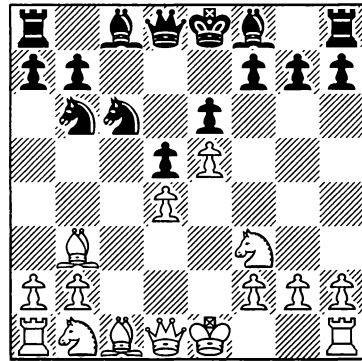


Diagram 16 (B)

A good French?

9 d5!

9 Nxe5 Nxe5 10 dxe5 Qxd1+ 11 Bxd1 Bd7 offers White nothing.

9...Na5

9...Nb4 10 Nc3 e6 11 Bg5 can lead to wild complications after 11...f6 12 Nxe5! fxg5 13 Qh5+ g6 14 Nxc6 hxc6 15 Qxh8. From the limited number of games I've found White has scored very well from here. Black's position might be defensible if he

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displays extreme accuracy, but this is not an easy task over the board, as demonstrated in the game D.Pavasovic-I.Kurnosov, Istanbul 2003: 15...Nd3+ 16 Kf1 exd5 17 Qd4 Nf4 (*Fritz* prefers 17...Nc5, when I would be inclined to continue as in the game with 18 h4) 18 h4 Be6? (understandably Black is anxious to develop, but this leaves him vulnerable; 18...Ne6 is more resilient) 19 Re1! Qc7 20 hxg5 0-0-0 21 Rh4! and with both f4 and e6 attacked, Black was forced to give up a piece.

10 Nc3 (Diagram 17)

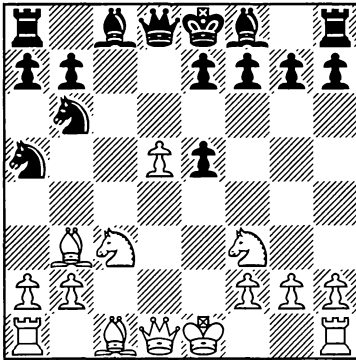


Diagram 17 (B)

Decision time for Black

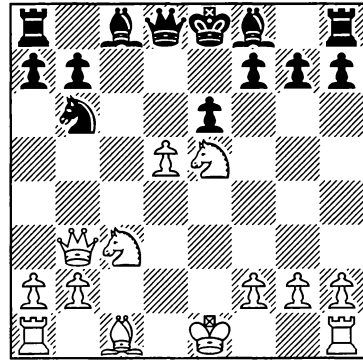


Diagram 18 (B)

Which way to capture?

10...Nxb3

10...f6 looks incredibly ugly and not everyone would be happy to play such a move, but it does at least secure the e5-pawn which in itself is very important. White must continue energetically: for example, 11 0-0 g6 12 Be3 Bg7 13 d6!? (13 Bc5 is a decent alternative) 13...Qxd6 14 Nb5 Qc6 15 Nxa7! Rxa7 16 Rc1 Qd7 17 Bxb6 Nxb3 18 Qxb3 Ra8 19 Rc7 Qe6 20 Bc5! kept the initiative in D.Pavasovic-A.Fedorov, Rabac 2003. After 20...Bf8, instead of Pavasovic's 21 Qb5+ Kf7 I prefer 21 Qb4 keeping the pressure on e7.

Strangely, 10...Bg4 has been seen on fewer occasions than 10...f6, even though it appears to be a much more natural move. 11 Be3 Nxb3 12 Qxb3 Bxf3 13 gxf3 g6 has been played a few times; the most recent game continued 14 a4 Qd7 15 a5 Nc8 16 Ne4 Nd6 17 Nc5 Qb5 18 Qxb5+ Nxb5 19 Nxb7 a6 with an unclear but roughly equal position, D.Smerdon-E.Sveshnikov, Pardubice 2007.

11 Qxb3 e6 12 Nxe5 (Diagram 18) 12...exd5

12...Nxd5!? 13 Qb5+ Bd7 14 Qxb7 at first sight looks treacherous for Black, since 14...Nxc3 15 bxc3 Qc8 16 Qf3! f6 17 Nxd7 Kxd7 18 0-0 leaves his king horribly exposed in the middle of the board, and 14...Qc8 15 Qxd7+ Qxd7 16 Nxd7 Kxd7 17

Nxd5 exd5 18 Be3 Bb4+ 19 Ke2 leaves Black with a joyless ending defending his d-pawn and battling against White's queenside majority. However, 14...Bb4! is playable due to the very clever resource 15 Nxd7 Qc8! regaining the piece by force. 15 Bd2 is a better try for an advantage, but accurate defence just about held the balance for Black in L.Fressinet-J.Van der Wiel, Wijk aan Zee 2004, after 15...Bxc3 16 bxc3 Qc8 17 Rb1 Nb6 18 Qf3 0-0 19 Qg3 Nd5 20 c4 Ne7 21 Bb4 Re8.

13 Be3 Bd6 14 Qb5+! Bd7?

There's nothing more natural than to block the check (otherwise why would an experienced grandmaster choose this move?) but in reality Black is now in some trouble. Many players would be reluctant to lose their castling rights, but this is exactly what Black should do! Even so, after 14...Kf8! White has very good compensation for the pawn in view of his far superior development and the vulnerability of Black's d-pawn. 15 Nf3! (15 0-0-0?! offers Black undeserved counterplay after 15...Be6 16 Nf3 Rc8, so White should castle short) 15...Be6 16 0-0 Nc4 17 Qxb7 Qc8! 18 Qxc8+ Rxc8 19 Bd4 saw White regaining his pawn and keeping a slight advantage in D.Pavasovic-I.Jelen, Ljubljana 2002; 19...Nxb2 is met by 20 Nb5 Nc4 21 Nxa7 when Black still has some problems to solve.

15 Nxd7 Qxd7 16 0-0-0! (Diagram 19)

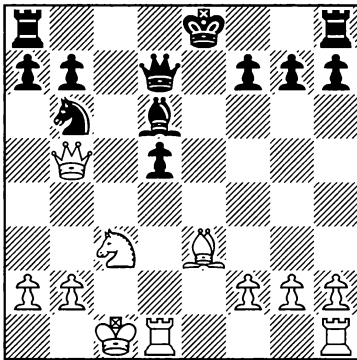


Diagram 19 (B)

Black is struggling

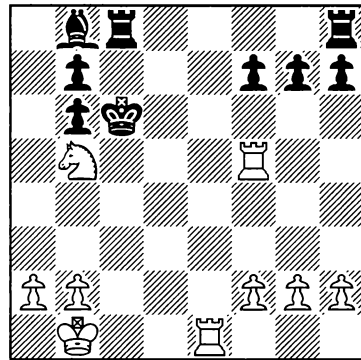


Diagram 20 (B)

In the firing line

The problem here for Black is that castling kingside loses a piece, while after 16...0-0-0 White avoids the exchange of queens with the powerful 17 Qa5!

16...Qxb5 17 Nxb5

White's initiative hasn't dampened despite the exchange of queens. He will regain his pawn and Black's king will be stuck in the centre.

17...Rc8+ 18 Kb1 Bb8 19 Bxb6 axb6 20 Rhe1+ Kd7 21 Rxd5+ Kc6 22 Rf5 (Diagram 20) 22...Rhf8

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Black would prefer not to tie down this rook, but 22...f6 23 Nd4+ Kd6 24 Re6+ is pretty grim and 23...Kd7 24 Rd5+ Kc7 25 Rc1 mate is even worse!

23 Rh5 h6 24 Nd4+ Kd6

Now Black loses a pawn and his position collapses, but 24...Kd7 25 Rd5+ shows that it was beyond repair in any case.

25 Nf5+ Kd7 26 Nxg7 Rc6 27 Nf5 Re8 28 Rxe8 Kxe8 29 g3 Rc5 30 b4 Rc3 31 Rxh6 Be5 32 f4 Bc7 33 Nd6+ 1-0

Game 21

□ N.Krivun ■ A.Friedman

Correspondence 1981

1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 d4 cxd4 5 Qxd4 (Diagram 21)

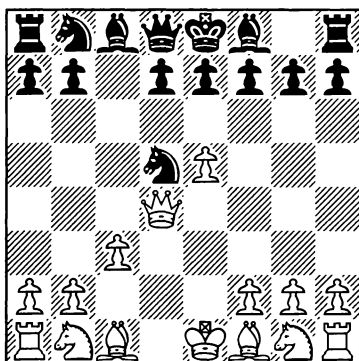


Diagram 21 (B)

5 Qxd4

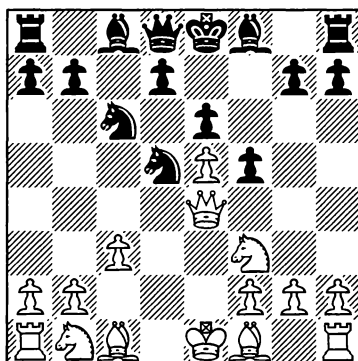


Diagram 22 (W)

Aggressive and good

5 Qxd4 leads to a completely different type of position to those we usually see after 5 cxd4. The general consensus is that this early queen sortie doesn't cause Black any major problems, but this hasn't prevented some strong grandmasters from employing it. Black still has to display some accuracy and there's a good argument for 5 Qxd4 to be used as an occasional surprise weapon.

5...e6 6 Nf3

6 Bc4 is too committal, as the c4-square isn't necessarily the best place for this bishop. Black equalizes comfortably with 6...Nc6 7 Qe4 d6 8 exd6 Nf6 9 Qe2 Bxd6 10 Nf3 0-0, and he can also play more ambitiously with 7...Nde7!? intending to hit e5 with ...Ng6 and ...Qc7.

6...Nc6 7 Qe4 f5! (Diagram 22)

Black has a few reasonable moves here (for example, 7...Qc7 or even 7...b6!?) but 7...f5 has the strongest reputation.

7...d6 used to be considered very safe, and after 8 Nbd2 dxe5 9 Nxe5 Nxe5 10 Qxe5 Qd6 Black has nothing to fear. However, recently White has been enjoying some success with 8 Bb5! Bd7 9 c4 Nc7 (or 9...Nb6). Black should be okay here as well, but he has to be a bit careful because White can soon become very active and sometimes Black's pieces end up stepping on each other's toes. An example of what Black must avoid is 10 Bg5!? Qc8?! (10...Be7? runs into 11 exd6! Bxg5 12 dxc7; the strange-looking 10...Qb8! is best) 11 exd6 Bxd6 12 Nc3 0-0 13 0-0 Nxb5? 14 cxb5 Ne7 (with a queen on b8 Black would now have 14...Ne5!) 15 Rfd1! Qc7 16 Qd3 and Black, facing the loss of a piece, had to resign in A.Deviatkin-A.Savickas, Krakow 2006.

8 Qe2

No other queen moves work because White has to stay protecting his e-pawn. True, the f1-bishop is now blocked, but this is no big deal because White intends to find a home for it on the h1-a8 diagonal.

8 exf6 Nxf6 gives up the centre. This is not totally without reason, as after 9 Qh4 White has a plan of Bd3-g6+, but Black can actually ignore this idea and achieve a decent position after 9...d5 10 Bd3 Bd6! 11 Bg6+ Ke7. Now White has to waste further time (...hxg6 is a threat!) and in practice Black's strong centre and better development have fully compensated for his misplaced king.

8...Qc7 9 g3 b6!? (Diagram 23)

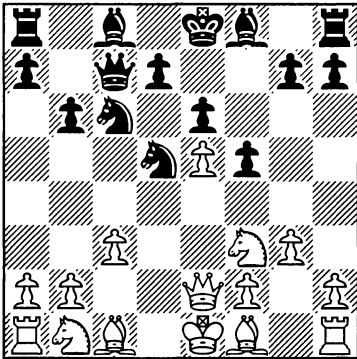


Diagram 23 (W)

9...b6 is tricky

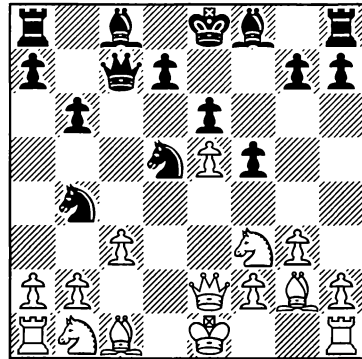


Diagram 24 (W)

Threatening ...Ba6

This is a tricky move which can – as in this game – lead to great complications. Black's plan is to arrange ...Ba6, which is usually assisted by ...Ncb4!

The solid 9...d6 10 exd6 Bxd6 11 Bg2 0-0 12 0-0 has been seen many times and is equal. Another interesting try for Black is 9...b5!? 10 Bg2 (10 Qxb5 is met by

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

10...Nxe5) 10...a5 11 0-0 Ba6. Black's direct plan of action on the queenside certainly has some appeal, and ...b4 is already a possibility. In practice White has usually taken his rook out of the firing line with 12 Re1 or 12 Rd1. However, 12 Nh4!? is an ambitious alternative, and here 12...g6 13 Rd1 Bg7 14 Nxf5! gxf5 15 Qh5+ Kf8 16 Rxd5! Nxe5! 17 Bh6 gave White a strong attack in A.Deviatkin-V.Papin, Moscow 2006. (Deviatkin is a 5 Qxd4 expert so it's certainly worth checking out his games.)

10 Bg2

10 c4?! Ba6! makes life difficult for White, and after 11 b3 Bb4+ 12 Bd2 Bxd2+ 13 Nbx2 Ndb4 he cannot deal with the threat of ...Nc2+ without making a concession of some sort. 10 Nbd2 prevents ...Ncb4, although Black can still obtain counterplay with 10...a5! and ...Ba6.

10...Ncb4! (Diagram 24)

Now 11...Ba6 is a serious threat!

11 c4

Deviatkin has recently tried the paradoxical 11 Qd1 Ba6 12 Bf1!, which is not as bad as it looks (Black has a very strong attack after 12 cxb4 Nxb4). Indeed, 12...Bxf1 13 Kxf1 Nc6 14 Qe2 Nde7 15 Kg2 Ng6 16 Re1 Be7 offered equal chances in A.Deviatkin-D.Yevseev, St Petersburg 2005. It's worth seeing how this game progressed: 17 h4 0-0 18 h5 Nh8 19 Bf4 Nf7 20 Nbd2 Qb7! 21 a4 g5! 22 hxg6 hxg6 (threatening ...g5-g4) 23 Rg1! g5 24 Kf1! g4 (White's attack is very strong after 24...gxf4 25 gxf4+ Kh7 26 Nh4! so Black prevents g3-g4) 25 Nh2 Nh8? (Deviatkin gives 25...Ng5! 26 Bxg5 Bxg5 27 f4 Be7 28 Nxc4 fxg4 29 Qxc4+ Kf7 30 Qh5+ with perpetual check, and indicates 26 f3! as a winning try) 26 Nxc4! fxg4 27 Qxc4+ Kf7 28 Qh5+ Ng6 29 Qh7+ Ke8 30 Qxc6+ and White went on to win.

11...Ba6 12 b3 b5! (Diagram 25)

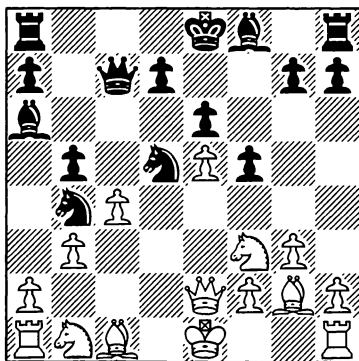


Diagram 25 (W)

Point of no return

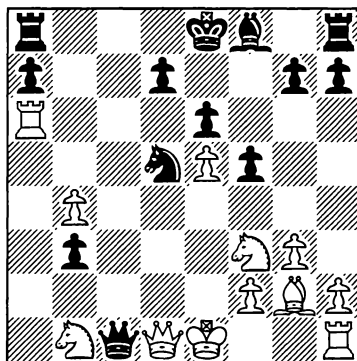


Diagram 26 (B)

Draw by repetition

Black is at the point of no return. He must continue with aggression, otherwise he will be pushed back with a2-a3 and will stand worse. As far as I can see, the remaining moves leading to a draw by repetition are virtually forced.

13 a3! bxc4! 14 axb4 cxb3 15 Rxa6 Qxc1+ 16 Qd1 (Diagram 26) 16...Qc4

Black can grab a pawn with 16...Bxb4+ 17 Nfd2, but he is still advised to take the repetition with 17...Qc4 18 Qe2 Qc1+.

17 Qe2 Qc1+ ½-½

Black Plays 5...e6

1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 d4 cxd4 5 cxd4 e6 6 Nf3 d6 (Diagram 27)

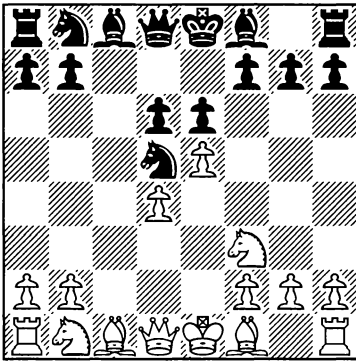


Diagram 27 (W)

Bd3 or Bc4?

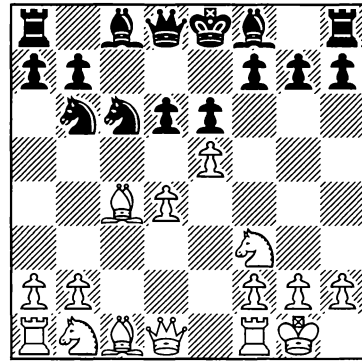


Diagram 28 (W)

Asking the question

6...b6 is an important alternative, which is discussed in Game 26.

7 Bc4



NOTE: White's light-squared bishop is his best minor piece, and so its development and security is always a major issue.

Of course the b1-h7 diagonal is its ideal home, but here 7 Bd3 can be met by the annoying 7...Nb4! when White can only hold on to his prize asset by making some sort of concession. For example, 8 Bc4 dxe5 9 Nxe5? allows 9...Qxd4! so White is forced to play 9 dxe5 and recapture on d1 with his king. If White wishes to play Bd3, the way to do so is by spending a tempo on the preparatory 7 a3. This is White's main alternative to 7 Bc4 and is discussed in Game 25.

One of the advantages of 7 Bc4 is that White's direct play makes it harder for

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

Black to employ systems of development which are possible against the slower 7 a3. For example, 7...Bd7 intending ...Bc6, which is the main response to 7 a3, looks a bit shaky here if White simply plays 8 Bxd5! exd5 9 Nc3.

7...Nc6

7...Nb6 is covered in Game 24.

8 0-0 Be7

Against 8...Nb6 (**Diagram 28**), White can play 9 Bb5 but I would favour a retreat to b3 or d3. 9 Bb3 can lead to an exchange of queens after 9...dxe5 10 dxe5 Qxd1 11 Rxd1, but I think White's extra space and ease of development offers good chances of an edge after, for example, 11...Bd7 12 Nc3 Na5 13 Bc2 (this bishop must be kept!) 13...Rc8 14 Bd3.

9 Bd3 is more likely to reach a typical IQP position after 9...Nb4! (9...dxe5 10 dxe5 Nb4 11 Be4! Qxd1 12 Rxd1 is an even better version of the queenless middlegame for White). For example, 10 Be2! (Black's decision to avoid exchanging pawns on e5 is justified after 10 Be4?! d5!) 10...dxe5 11 Nxe5 (11 dxe5 Qxd1 is less favourable for White, as 12 Rxd1?? loses material to 12...Nc2) 11...Bd7 12 Nc3 Be7 13 Bf3 Bc6 14 a3 N4d5 15 Qd3 0-0 16 Be4 h6 17 Bd2 and White is actively placed, D.Pavasovic-A.Horvath, Austrian League 2002.



WARNING: It's always tempting to give a check, but Bb5+ tends to only help Black in these lines. After ...Bd7 White is reluctant to exchange his best minor piece so quickly without gaining any concessions, and 10 Bb5+?! Bd7 11 Nc3 Bxb5 12 Nxb5 Be7 leaves White struggling to generate meaningful attacking chances.

9 Qe2

A multi-dimensional move: White supports the e5-pawn, vacates d1 for the rook (although the rook doesn't automatically go to this square) and sets up the possibility of Qe4 with the idea of a queen and bishop battery on the diagonal after Bd3, as well as Qg4.

For a long time 9 Qe2 was seen as the only way forward for White, but in recent years c3 Sicilian experts have developed new methods of attacking Black. For example 9 Re1 0-0 10 a3 (**Diagram 29**) is a less direct approach that has been played a few times recently, and this looks quite promising. For example, 10...Bd7 11 Qd3 Rc8 12 Bd2! (planning Nc3 and to recapture on c3 with the bishop; Bd2 was also possible a move earlier) 12...a6 13 Nc3 Nxc3 14 Bxc3 d5 15 Ba2 Na5 16 Rac1 Bb5 17 Qd2 Nc4 18 Qf4 a5 19 h4 (D.Howell-T.Hillarp Persson, Oslo 2008) when White plans Bb1 and to build up pressure on the kingside. White can also alter the pawn structure with the zwischenzug 14 exd6 Bxd6 15 bxc3, as noted by John Shaw at *ChessPublishing.com*, when attacking ideas on the kingside include Ng5.

Another option for White is to reach an IQP position with 9 exd6, and this ap-

proach is discussed in Game 23.

9...0-0 (Diagram 30)



NOTE: Black must be careful not to exchange on e5 without good reason. For example, after 9...dxe5?! 10 dxe5 0-0 all the tension has gone from the centre, and White can even make good use of the d-file with 11 Rd1!.

The position after 9...0-0 has been reached many times in practice. Typically White's extra space and pawn spearhead on e5 offer him good chances to attack on the kingside, while Black will continue to pressure the centre and will look for counterplay on the queenside where he is better developed. See Game 22 for further coverage.

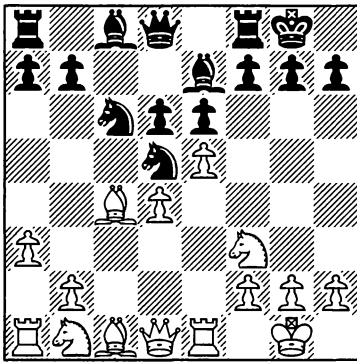


Diagram 29 (B)

Less direct

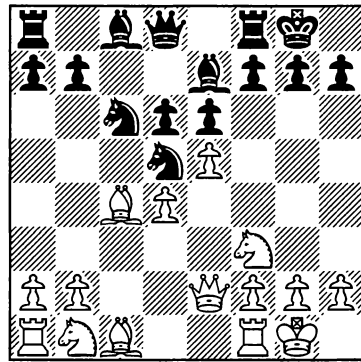


Diagram 30 (W)

The main line

Theoretical?

Again I would say it's more important to understand the ideas in this variation; there is little in the way of move memorization.

Statistics

White has scored 54% from the position after 9...0-0. Overall 7 Bc4 has scored 52% in just under 2000 games. 7 a3 has scored 49%, but here Black's average rating was considerably higher than White's.

Illustrative Games

Game 22

□ D.Pavasovic ■ H.Jurkovic

Bizovac 2007

1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 d4 cxd4 5 cxd4 e6 6 Nf3 d6 7 Bc4 Nc6 8 0-0 Be7 9 Qe2 0-0 10 Qe4 (Diagram 31)

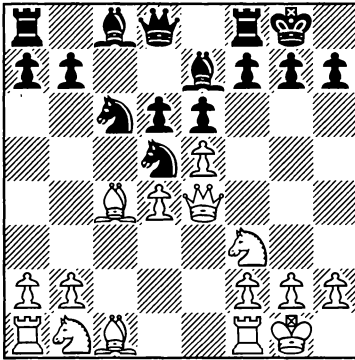


Diagram 31 (B)

One of many moves

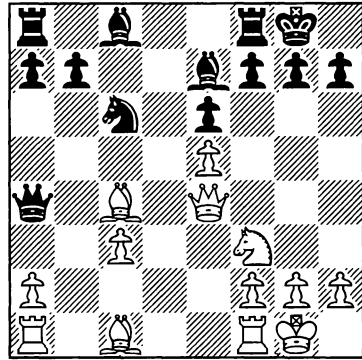


Diagram 32 (W)

An awkward pin

White has a wide variety of alternatives here, including 10 Re1, 10 Rd1, 10 a3 and 10 exd6, and all of these are decent options.

10 Nc3 used to be considered the main line, with White accepting structural weaknesses after 10...Nxc3! 11 bxc3 dxe5 12 dxe5 in return for clear attacking chances on the kingside. White did score some crushing victories, but then it was discovered that 12...Qa5 13 Qe4 Qa4! (**Diagram 32**) makes life awkward because White can now only play Bd3 at the cost of exchanging queens. In view of this, much of the sting has been drawn from 10 Nc3.

10...Bd7

This move and 10...Qc7 have been Black's main two choices here.

11 Re1

White builds up slowly. He has to consider how to develop his queenside, and one possibility Re1 does allow is the manoeuvre Nb1-d2-f1.

11 Bd3 is more direct (threatening mate in one usually is!) and 11...g6 allows White to complete his development harmoniously with 12 Bh6 Re8 13 Nbd2.

However, 11...f5! 12 exf6 Nxf6 13 Qe2 has proved to be okay for Black. True, White has forced a weakness on e6, but only at a cost of some time, and Black's activity after 13...Qe8! followed by ...Qh5 is enough to hold the balance.



WARNING: Grabbing a pawn with 11 Bxd5?! exd5 12 Qxd5 is unwise, and 12...Nb4 13 Qe4 Bc6 leaves White struggling to hold everything together. 11 exd6 Bxd6 and now 12 Bxd5 exd5 13 Qxd5 has been played a few times, but Black's compensation is too strong here as well. For example, 13...Be6 14 Qh5 Qd7 15 h3 Bc4 16 Re1 Nb4, as played in D.Sermek-A.Jankovic, Steinbrunn 2005.

11...Rc8 12 a3!? (Diagram 33)

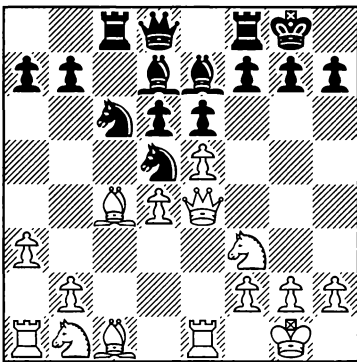


Diagram 33 (B)

Making room for Ba2

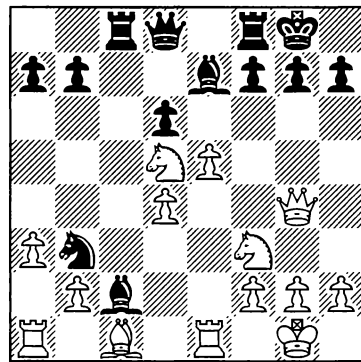


Diagram 34 (B)

The complications begin

Preventing ...Nb4 and giving the bishop a hidey-hole on a2. Now White's plan is Nb1-d2-f1-g3 (and Ba2 if necessary). If White manages all of this he will be ready to storm the kingside and will enjoy a clear advantage, so Black wisely tries to exploit the slight weakening of the light squares a2-a3 creates.

12...Na5 13 Ba2 Ba4!?

Very creative play by Black. He not only intends ...Nb3, but also ...Bc2!

14 Qg4 Bc2

Neatly dealing with the threat of 15 Bh6, which can now be met by the rock-solid 15...Bg6.

15 Bxd5!

Black has nothing to fear after 15 Nbd2 Bf5! so Pavasovic courageously changes the character of the position, sacrificing all the light squares on the queenside to

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

activate his remaining pieces and set up a kingside attack. Play now becomes very sharp.

15...exd5 16 Nc3 Nb3 17 Nxd5! (Diagram 34)

Let's face it, there was never a chance of Pavasovic agreeing to the self-incarcerating 17 Ra2!

17...f5!

17...Nxa1? loses to 18 Qxc8!.

18 exf6 Bxf6 19 Bg5!

The only way to keep the attack going. Now 19...Nxa1? loses to 20 Nxf6+ Rxf6 21 Bxf6 Qxf6 22 Qxc8+.

19...Bxg5 20 Nxg5 Bf5

Again 20...Nxa1 can be met by 21 Qxc8!.

21 Qf4 Nxa1 22 Ne7+ Kh8 23 Nxc8 Qxc8

23...Nc2 is critical, but after 24 Nxd6 Bg6 25 Ndf7+ Bxf7 26 Nxf7+ Rxf7 27 Qxf7 Nxe1 28 Qc4! Black's knight is trapped and White retains the advantage. If Pavasovic saw up to here when playing 15 Bxd5, that would be very impressive calculation. I suspect it's more likely that he used a degree of intuition when weighing the possibilities.

24 Rxa1 h6 25 Ne4 Bxe4 26 Qxe4 (Diagram 35)

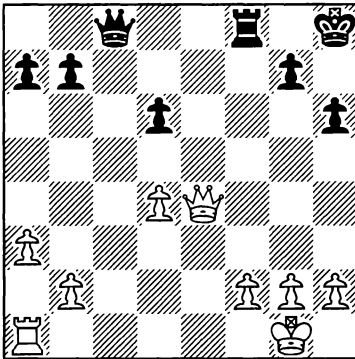


Diagram 35 (B)

Good winning chances

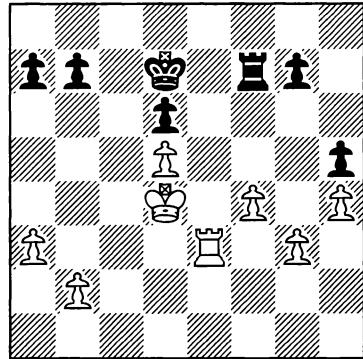


Diagram 36 (B)

Planning Ke4 and f4-f5

The dust has settled. White is a pawn up with good chances to convert.

26...Qf5 27 Qxf5 Rxf5 28 Kf1 Rb5 29 Rb1 Kg8 30 Ke2 Kf7 31 Kd3 Ke6 32 Kc4 Rg5 33 Re1+ Kd7 34 g3 Rh5 35 h4 Rf5 36 f4 h5 37 d5 Rf6 38 Re3 Rf7 39 Re6 Rf6! 40 Re3

Fritz assesses 40 Rxf6? gxf6 as winning for White, but this is a rare pawn ending where a one-pawn advantage is insufficient. For example, 41 f5 a6 42 Kd4 b6 43 Ke4 Ke7 44 Kf4 Kf7 and even though White can create a passed pawn with g3-g4, there is simply no way through for his king.

40...Rf7 41 Kd4! (Diagram 36)

White's idea is Ke4, pawn to f5 and then Kf4-g5.

41...Rf6 42 a4 Rg6 43 Ke4 Rf6 44 a5 Rf8 45 Rb3 Kc7 46 Rc3+ Kd7 47 a6! b6

Or 47...bxa6 48 Ra3 Ke7 49 Rxa6 Rb8 50 Kf5! Rxb2 51 Rxa7+ Kf8 52 Ke6 and White wins.

48 Rf3 Rf7

48...g6 is still met by 49 f5. More resilient is 48...Ke7 intending 49 f5 Kf6!, but White can play 49 Rc3! Kd7 and only then 50 f5.

49 f5! Ke7 50 Kf4 1-0

After 50...g6 51 Kg5 gxf5 52 Re3+ Kf8 53 Re6 Rg7+ 54 Rg6 Black loses all his pawns. This game suitably highlights the complexities of this variation. White sometimes has issues over his queenside development, but there certainly no doubting the huge potential for a kingside attack.

Game 23

□ **B.Filipovic** ■ **A.Kveinys**

Pula 2003

1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 d4 cxd4 5 cxd4 e6 6 Nf3 d6 7 Bc4 Nc6 8 0-0 Be7 9 exd6 (Diagram 37)

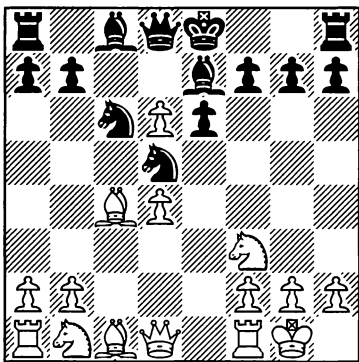


Diagram 37 (B)

Changing the structure...

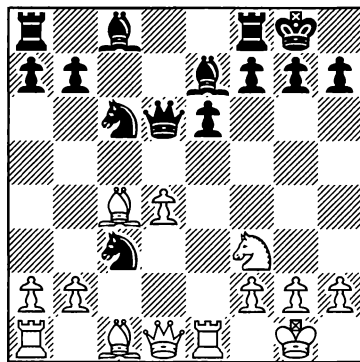


Diagram 38 (W)

...and again!



TIP: 9 exd6 is logical for those who enjoy playing IQP positions.

9...Qxd6 10 Nc3 0-0 11 Re1

11 Qe2 intending Rd1 is also possible.

11...Nxc3 (Diagram 38)

Again there's a change in the pawn structure, this time to an isolated pawn couple. Black intends to follow up with the basic plan of ...b6, ...Bb7, ...Rc8 and ...Na5. Looking at the statistics it's noticeable that 11...Nxc3 has been played a lot, and it's quite understandable that Black wishes to clarify the situation as early as possible. But this strategy entails considerable risk because of two reasons:

1. Black exchanges one of his main kingside defenders.
2. In the short term White's structure is strengthened – there is no immediate pressure on the centre to worry about.

With these two factors combined, White finds it easy to begin a kingside attack.

Looking at alternatives, 11...Nf6, 11...a6 and 11...b6 are all decent options. The most ambitious try for Black is 11...Rd8!?, which adds extra pressure to the d4-pawn. A critical line runs 12 Bb3 Nf6!? (prophylaxis against 12...Nb6, which can now be met by 13 Be3; 12...a6 is safer) 13 Nb5!? (13 Be3 b6 14 Qe2 Bb7 15 Rad1 Na5 16 Bc2 Rac8 was equal in J.Emms-A.Moiseenko, Bled Olympiad 2002) 13...Qd7 14 Bf4 a6 15 Nc7 Ra7 16 d5! exd5 17 Rc1 with good compensation for the pawn, which got even better after 17...h6 (17...Bb4!?) 18 Ne5 Qf5 19 Bg3 in L.Altounian-A.Wojtkiewicz, San Francisco 2001.

12 bxc3 b6 13 Ng5! (Diagram 39)

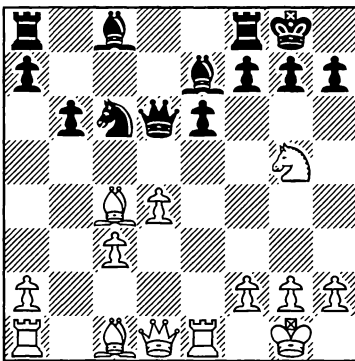


Diagram 39 (B)

White starts to attack

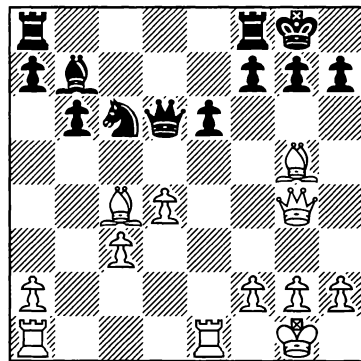


Diagram 40 (B)

Threatening Bh6

An excellent move, which highlights Black's lack of protection on the kingside. What would Black give to have a knight on f6 rather than c6?

13...Bxg5

This is hardly ideal; it's almost an admission that 11...Nxc3 was an error, as White is handed the long-term advantage of the bishop pair. However, when you check out the alternatives it's easy to see why Black made this decision.

The problem for Black is that the most natural move, 13...Bb7, runs into 14 Nxe6!. Also, 13...Na5 14 Bd3 only drives White's bishop to a better diagonal, and the variation 14...g6 15 Nxf7! Kxf7 16 Qh5+ Kg8 17 Bxg6 fxe6 18 Qxg6+ Kh8 19 Re3 e5 20 Qh5+ Kg7 21 Rg3+ Kf6 22 Qg6 mate certainly demonstrates the potential in White's attack. In R.Ekstroem-B.Kutuzovic, Pula 2000, Black avoided an immediate catastrophe by playing 14...h6 but after 15 Qh5! he was forced to weaken himself with 15...f5, since 15...Bb7 runs into 16 Bh7+ Kh8 17 Nxf7+ Rxf7 18 Qxf7 Kxf7 19 Rxe6 while after 15...Bxg5 16 Bxg5 a subsequent Bxh6 is likely to be very strong. 13...h6 is another idea for Black, but White's position still looks threatening after 14 Ne4 Qc7 15 Bd3.

14 Bxg5 Bb7

This variation has not been a happy one for the Lithuanian Grandmaster. The following year Kveinys tried 14...Re8, but this led to an even quicker defeat after 15 Qh5 Ne7 16 Bd3 Ng6 17 Re3! (simple and very strong) 17...Qf8 18 Rh3 (E.Rozentalis-A.Kveinys, Dzwirzyno 2004) and Black is busted after 18...h6 19 Bxh6 gxe6 20 Bxg6.

Perhaps Black should flick in 14...h6 here, while he has the chance to do so.

15 Qg4! (Diagram 40)

Now 16 Bh6 is a threat, and 15...Ne7 gets hit by 16 Bxe6!.

15...Kh8 16 Qh4!

An excellent move, lining up the idea of Re3-h3 and at the same time preventing the key defensive resource ...Ne7.

16...Rfe8 17 Re3! Qf8

There's no time for 17...Ne7, as 18 Rh3 h6 19 Bxh6! is too easy for White.

18 Rh3?

Missing a chance. It's unlikely that Black would survive after 18 Bf6! gxf6 (or 18...Ne7 19 Rh3) 19 Rg3 Qg7 (19...Qe7 20 Rh3!) 20 Rxe7 Kxe7.

18...h6 19 Bd3 f5?

Good or bad, Black had to try 19...Ne7. I'm not sure why Kveinys avoided this natural move.

20 Re1! (Diagram 41)

White's final piece joins in the fun; the threat is now 21 Bxh6! gxe6 22 Qg5 Kh7 23

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

Rxe6! Rxe6 24 Bxf5+.

20...e5 21 Ree3

And here it's 22 Reg3 Kh7 23 Qxh6+! gxh6 24 Bxh6 Qxh6 25 Bxf5+ Kh8 26 Rxb6 mate. Black has to try 21...f4!, even if 22 Bxh6 gxh6 23 Qg5 Re6 24 Bg6! Rxb6 (24...Qg7 25 Rxb6+ Kg8 26 Reh3) 25 Qxg6 fxe3 26 Rxb6+ Qxh6 27 Qxh6+ Kg8 28 fxe3 should be winning for White. His choice in the game leads to immediate defeat.

21...exd4? 22 Bxh6! (Diagram 42) 22...gxh6 23 Qg5 1-0

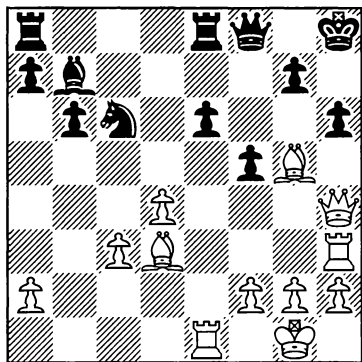


Diagram 41 (B)

Everyone joins the party!

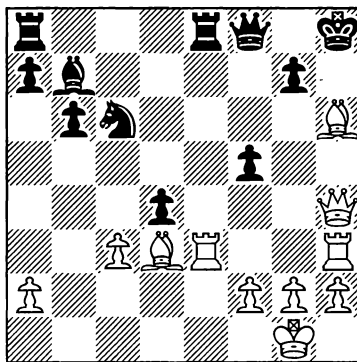


Diagram 42 (B)

A crushing blow

White is mating Black after 23...dxe3 24 Rxb6+ Qxh6 25 Qxh6+ Kg8 26 Bc4+, or 23...Qg7 24 Rxb6+ Kg8 25 Bc4+ Kf8 26 Rf6+. This game is an excellent illustration of the attacking chances White can create after an early ...Nxc3.

Game 24

□ S.Vysochin ■ S.Kozhuharov

Istanbul 2006

1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 d4 cxd4 5 cxd4 e6 6 Nf3 d6 7 Bc4 Nb6 (Diagram 43)

With 7...Nb6 Black is looking for an early resolution in the pawn structure. A capture on e5 is coming next regardless of whether White's bishop retreats to d3 or b3.

8 Bd3

As usual checking on b5 only helps Black after 8 Bb5+?! Bd7, but 8 Bb3 is a serious alternative. The main line runs 8...dxe5 9 Nxe5 (9 dxe5 Qxd1+ 10 Bxd1 is equal)

9...Nc6! 10 Nxc6 bxc6 11 0-0 Be7 12 Nc3 0-0 13 Bf4 Ba6 14 Re1 which has proved to be quite resilient for Black. The pawn on c6 may be considered a weakness in general terms, but it does have its uses, the main one being that it offers Black absolute control over the d5-square.

Interestingly, quite a few players have recently taken to retreating with 10 Nf3!?, when once again a normal IQP position is reached and a typical course is 10...Be7 11 Nc3 0-0 12 0-0 Bf6 13 Be3.

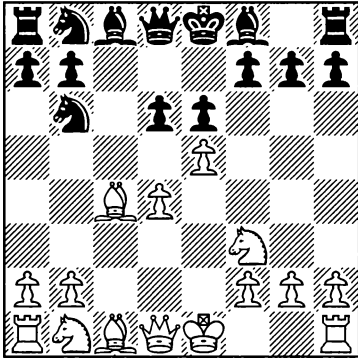


Diagram 43 (W)

Two good retreats

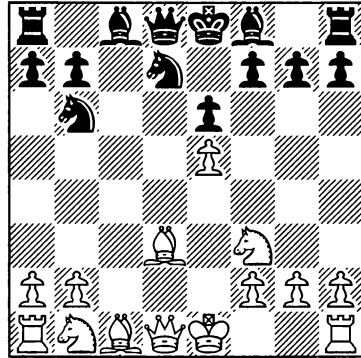


Diagram 44 (W)

Intending ...Nc5



NOTE: In IQP positions a knight on b6 rather than f6 does allow Black the possibility of playing ...Bf6 to attack d4. On the other hand, perhaps more importantly Black is missing the vital defensive attributes of a knight on the kingside.

8...dxe5

8...Nc6 9 0-0 transposes to the note to Black's 8th move in the section introduction, but once again White can consider going straight for an IQP with 9 exd6.

9 dxe5

As against 8 Bb3, Black's plan is to meet 9 Nxe5 with 9...Nc6!.

9...N8d7! (Diagram 44)

Black's idea is to play ...Nc5, exchange queens on d1 and then further develop the queenside with ...Bd7 and ...Rc8. The move 9...Na6 has a similar purpose and could easily transpose, but 9...Nc6 puts the knight on a poorer circuit, and the endgame after 10 0-0! Nb4 11 Be4! Qxd1 12 Rxd1 is more favourable for White than the one in the note to White's 10th move.



NOTE: 10 a3 prevents ...Nb4, but Black can reply with 10...Nd7! planning 11 Bf4 Nc5! or 11 Qe2? Ndxex5!.

10 Qe2!?

White avoids the exchange of queens. His advantage after 10 0-0 Nc5 11 Bc2 Qxd1 12 Rxd1 Bd7 13 Nc3 Rc8 is very small.

10...Nc5 11 Bc2 Nd5

Black plans to develop rapidly on the queenside with ...Bd7, but first of all he prevents White from being able to play Nc3 without incurring a weakness (11...Bd7 12 Nc3! is good for White).

12 0-0 Bd7 13 Rd1

Another possibility is 13 Nc3 Nxc3 14 bxc3 Be7 15 Rd1 when White is quite active, but Vysochin chooses not to accept pawn weaknesses on the queenside.

13...Nb4? (Diagram 45)

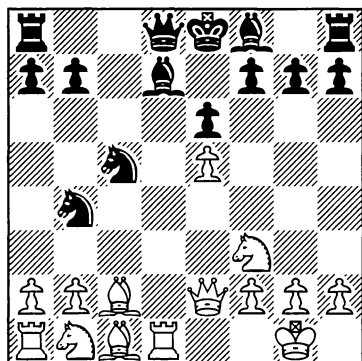


Diagram 45 (W)

Trying too hard to exchange?

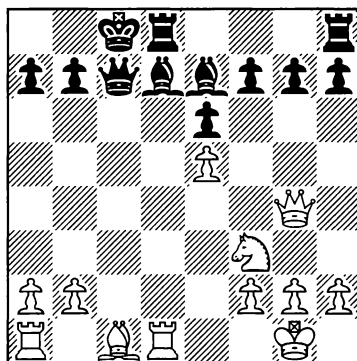


Diagram 46 (W)

Castling into it!



NOTE: Even though it's positionally desirable to get rid of White's light-squared bishop, Black must always consider how much time is spent achieving this aim.

Judging from what happens in this game, it seems that this is a case where Black would be better off simply continuing to develop. 13...Be7 14 Nbd2 (another possibility is 14 Bd2 Rc8 15 Nc3 Nxc3 16 Bxc3, as played in D.Sermek-D.Doric, Sibenik 2007) 14...0-0 15 Ne4 Rc8 16 Bg5 Nxe4 17 Qxe4 g6 was A.Zubarev-L.Van Wely, Baku 2007, and here I would play 18 Bh6 Re8 19 Bb3 when I think White can claim an edge.

14 Nc3 Nxc2

It's now or never, otherwise the bishop might retreat to b1 leaving the knight on b4 looking redundant.

15 Qxc2 Be7 16 Ne4!

It's vital that White attacks before Black has a chance to get fully organized.

16...Nxe4 17 Qxe4 Qc7

17...0-0 18 Qxb7 Bc6! 19 Rxd8 Bxb7 20 Rxa8 Rxa8 offers Black compensation for the pawn, but *Fritz* likes 18 Bh6! gxh6 19 Qxb7 when White regains his piece and maintains an advantage.

18 Qg4! 0-0-0 (Diagram 46)

Frying pan and fire are two words that come to mind. But Black is struggling anyway, with 18...g6 19 Bh6! leaving his king with nowhere to hide (19...0-0-0 is met by 20 Ng5!).

19 Be3 Bc6 20 Rxd8+ Qxd8?

20...Rxd8 must surely be a better practical chance, even though White can safely continue with 21 Qxg7 (21 Rc1 is also strong).

21 Rc1! Kb8 22 Nd4 Bd5 23 Nb5! Qa5

23...a6 loses to 24 Qd4.

24 Qxg7 Rf8

This allows a queen sacrifice and mate, but 24...Rd8 25 Qxf7 must be winning.

25 Bxa7+ Ka8 26 Qxf8+! 1-0

Black is 'back ranked'.

Game 25

□ S.Yudin ■ A.Shelk

Russia 2007

1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 d4 cxd4 5 cxd4 e6 6 Nf3 d6 7 a3 (Diagram 47)

This move, preparing Bd3 without the worry of ...Nb4, used to be considered the main line but in recent years it has been overtaken by the speedier 7 Bc4. Even so, this may simply be a whim of fashion and it's clear that 7 a3 remains a dangerous move to face.

7...Bd7!

Once again we see Black activating quickly on the queenside. This time the plan is to develop harmoniously and without creating weaknesses by playing ...Bc6 and ...Nd7, at the same time exerting pressure on the e5-pawn. In truth it's probably this system of development which has led to 7 Bc4 overtaking 7 a3 in the popularity stakes.

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

The positives of 7 a3 are seen most clearly if Black relies upon classical development. After 7...Nc6 8 Bd3 Be7 9 0-0 0-0 10 Qe2 the comparison with Pavasovic-Jurkovic (Game 22) is clearly favourable for White as the bishop is much better placed on d3 than on c4. Going back, 8...Qc7 is an attempt to force an exchange on d6 (9 Qe2?? Nxd4! is embarrassing), but White can ignore the threat with 9 0-0! as grabbing the pawn is more trouble than it's worth after 9...dxe5 10 dxe5 Nxe5 11 Nxe5 Qxe5 12 Bb5+!. If Black is looking to exploit the slowness of 7 a3, a better way to do so is with the rare but perfectly reasonable 8...g6!? 9 0-0 Bg7.

8 Bd3 Bc6 9 0-0 Nd7 (Diagram 48) 10 Re1

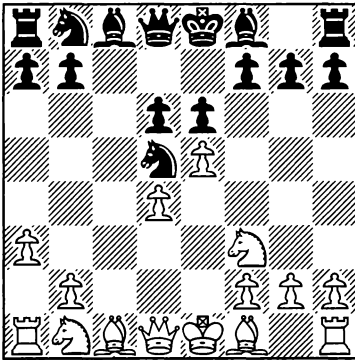


Diagram 47 (B)

Preparing for Bd3

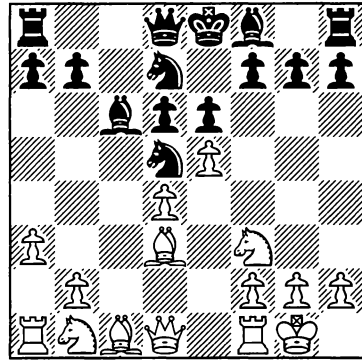


Diagram 48 (W)

Black develops harmoniously

One of the advantages of Black's set-up is demonstrated if White tries to develop 'normally' on the queenside. After 10 Nbd2 Black immediately springs to life, gaining considerable counterplay after 10...dxe5! 11 dxe5 Nc5 intending 12 Bc2 Nf4!?. Furthermore, 10 Nc3?! Nxc3 11 bxc3 dxe5 12 dxe5 Nc5 is something White should avoid, and 10 Bd2 Be7 11 Nc3 Nxc3 12 Bxc3 dxe5! 13 dxe5 Nc5 is also comfortable for Black.

10...Be7

10...Rc8 is possible, but 10...dxe5 11 dxe5 Nc5 12 Bc2 is less of a concern for White than in the previous note because ...Nf4 is no longer an option and White is ready to play b2-b4 or Nd4.

11 b4! (Diagram 49)

Initially I was unsure of this move but now I realize it forms a crucial part of White's development plans, as it prevents the persistently annoying ...Nc5. Of course it helps that 11 b4 comes with tempo – Black has to prevent the threat of 11 b5 winning a piece.

11 Nbd2 can once again be answered by 11...dxe5! 12 dxe5 Nc5! with good counterplay.

11...a6 12 Nbd2 dxe5



NOTE: 12...Nc3?! 13 Qb3 Rc8 has been played a few times, the idea being to meet 14 Qxc3 with 14...Bxf3 regaining the piece due to the discovered attack. However, I'm not sure why White can't play 14 exd6! Bxd6 15 Nc4! (Diagram 50), when Black seems to be in some trouble.

Tiviakov's games in the c3 Sicilian are always worth studying, and S.Tiviakov-R.Vera, Merida 2006, is no exception: 12...Bb5!? (I remember Jonathan Rowson proposing ...Bb5 in a similar position) 13 Bxb5 (13 Ne4 is a decent alternative, and there's certainly an argument against opening the a-file) 13...axb5 14 Bb2 N7b6 15 Qe2 Qd7 16 exd6 Bxd6 17 Ne5 Bxe5 18 dxe5 0-0 (Vera was probably right not to enter the complications of 18...Nf4 19 Qe3 Nd3 20 Qxb6! Nxe1 21 Ne4!) 19 Rad1 Rfc8 20 Ne4 Nc4 21 Qg4 Kh8 (21...Nxb2?? 22 Nf6+) 22 Nd6 Rc7! (22...Nxb2? 23 Rxd5!) 23 Ba1! Rg8 (White has nothing concrete after 23...Nxa3, as 24 Rxd5 exd5 25 Nf5 is met by the calm 25...Rg8) 24 Qh3 Ra8 25 Qg4 Rxa3?? 26 Rxd5! (now this works!) 26...f5 (perhaps Vera had missed that after 26...exd5 27 Nf5 g6 28 e6+ Rxa1, White can play 29 Qd4+) 27 exf6 Rxa1 28 Rxa1 Nxd6 29 Qxg7+ and Black resigned. Another c3 Sicilian win for Tiviakov, but this ...Bb5 idea does look interesting.

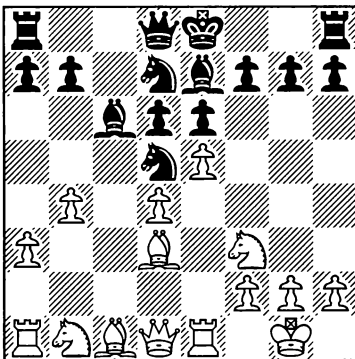


Diagram 49 (B)

b2-b4 is very useful

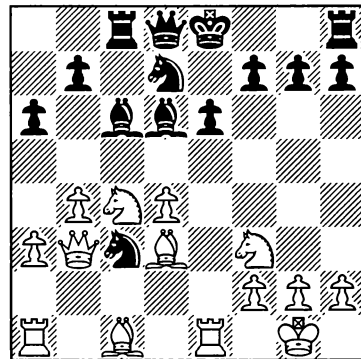


Diagram 50 (W)

Why not?

13 dxe5 Nf4

Now that Black has traded on e5, the idea of 13...Nc3 14 Qc2! (14 Qb3 Nc5!)

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

14...Rc8 is sound. That said, after 15 Qxc3 Bxf3 16 Qd4 Bd5 17 Ne4 0-0 18 Bf4, as seen in S.Tiviakov-J.Bosch, Hilversum 2006, White space advantage still counts for something.

14 Be4!

It's strange that in some lines Black is trying to trade these bishops, while in others it's White! In fact 14 Be4 is borne out of necessity, as bishop retreats are met by 14...Nb6 when ...Nd3 becomes a possibility. At least when the d2-knight moves White will gain precious time by attacking Black's knight on f4.

14...Bxe4

14...Rc8 15 Nf1 Bxe4 16 Rxe4 Nd5 17 Rg4 was a bit better for White in A.Onischuk-J.J.Degraeve, Groningen 1995.

15 Nxe4 Nd5 16 Qd3 h6? (Diagram 51)

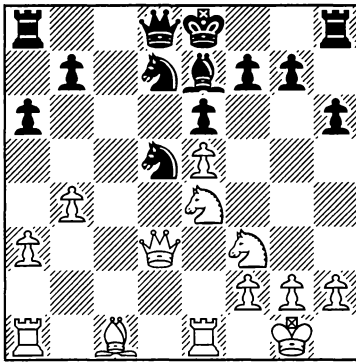


Diagram 51 (W)

Black's problems begin

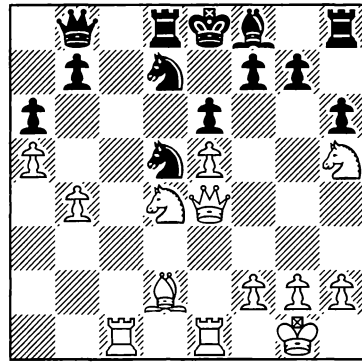


Diagram 52 (B)

White dominates

I suspect Black's problems in this game stem from this move. After 16...0-0 it's true White can play 17 Neg5, but is Black so badly off following 17...g6 18 Ne4 Qb6?

17 Bd2 Qb6

The difference from the previous note is that after 17...0-0 18 Ng3! White has a basic plan of Qe4-g4 and possibly Nh5 when it's clear that ...h6 is a real weakness. Black tries to avoid these problems by delaying castling, but this only makes matters worse.

18 Ng3! Rd8 19 Qe4 Qb5?

19...0-0 is still the best chance. The queen proves to be very badly placed on b5.

20 Nh5! Bf8

20...g6 21 Nd4! Qb6 22 Nxe6! demonstrates why 19...Qb5 was such a bad move.

21 a4 Qb6 22 a5 Qc7

22...Qb5 23 Nd4 traps the queen.

23 Rac1 Qb8 24 Nd4! (Diagram 52)

White's position has become overwhelming, and Black's next move allows a winning tactic.

24...g6?

24...Rc8 hangs on, if you can call 25 Rxc8+ Qxc8 26 Nf5! hanging on!

25 Nxe6! fxe6 26 Qxg6+ Ke7 27 Ng7! 1-0

It's mate on e6, or massive material losses after 27...Bxg7 28 Qxg7+ Ke8 29 Qxh8+.

Game 26

□ **S.Brynell** ■ **L.Schandorff**

Torshavn, 1997

1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nf3 e6 6 cxd4 b6 (Diagram 53)

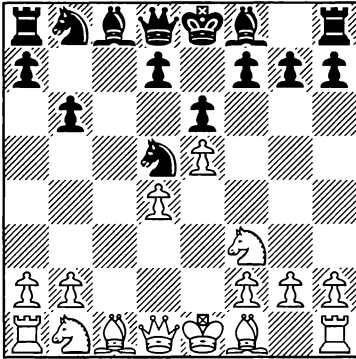


Diagram 53 (W)

A logical move

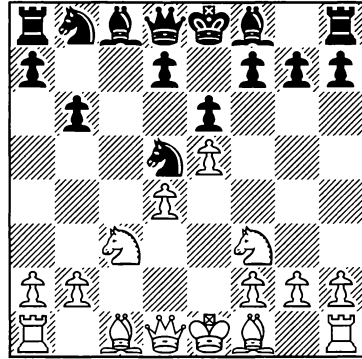


Diagram 54 (B)

The sharp 7 Nc3

6...b6 is logical because Black's bishop looks very much at home on the a8-h1 diagonal, while in some cases it can travel to a6 to trade off White's best minor piece. On the other hand, unlike 6...d6 this move doesn't put the centre under any immediate pressure and so White has a relatively free hand to develop quickly and then try to build up an initiative. Overall, 6...b6 is a positionally ambitious but somewhat risky line which is often employed by those looking to confuse lower-rated opponents.

7 Bd3

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

Clearly this is the most natural move, and it's useful that 7...Nb4, which works with 6...d6, is unwise here because of 8 Be4. Even so, it's worth providing some coverage of White's two main alternatives.

The most important of these is 7 Nc3!? (**Diagram 54**) which has traditionally been the main line. This can lead to very sharp play and Black certainly needs to know what he is doing, but from a theoretical viewpoint it's not clear that White really has a concrete advantage and it's interesting that many top grandmasters have shied away from 7 Nc3. The main continuation runs 7...Nxc3 8 bxc3 Qc7! (it's important to play this now – compare the note on 7 Bd3 Bb7 8 Nc3) 9 Bd2 Bb7 10 Bd3 d6! (Black must attack the centre) 11 0-0 Nd7 12 Ng5! (12 Re1 dxe5 13 Nxe5 Nxe5 14 Rxe5 Bd6 has proved to be okay for Black) 12...dxe5 13 Qh5 g6 (13...Nf6? 14 Bb5+!) 14 Qh3 Be7 with a very complicated position in which White has good compensation for the pawn but there are many possibilities for both sides. Currently White's most dangerous option appears to be 15 Rae1!? (**Diagram 55**), keeping the other rook on f1 in anticipation of f2-f4. White certainly obtained a very strong attack after 15...Bd5 16 f4! exd4 17 cxd4 Bf6 18 f5! gxf5 19 Rxf5 Bxd4+ 20 Kh1 in F.Peredy-C.Kerek, Budapest 1997, and Black also must be wary of cheap tricks (e.g. 15...exd4 16 Nxf7!). However, 15...a6 16 f4 e4! 17 Nxe4 Bd5 18 a4 f5!? 19 Ng5 Bxg5 20 fxg5 0-0, which looked roughly equal in P.Aveline-A.Goloshchapov, Le Touquet 2003, shows that there are ways for Black to defend this position.

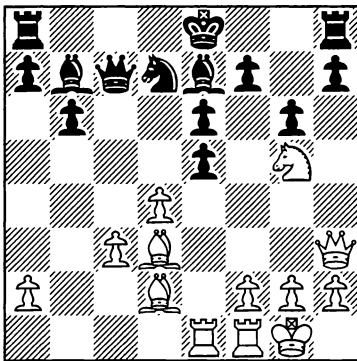


Diagram 55 (B)

Dangerous for Black

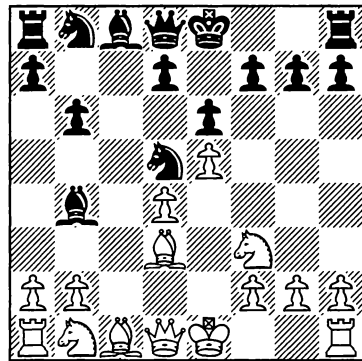


Diagram 56 (W)

To trade both bishops

7 a3 prevents ...Bb4+ and delays the development of the f1-bishop so that no time is wasted in the event of an exchange after ...Ba6. The game Z.Almasi-J.Polgar, Groningen 1997, continued 7...Be7 8 Nbd2!? 0-0 9 Ne4 f5! 10 exf6 Nxf6 11 Bd3 Bb7 12 Nxf6+ (Almasi suggests 12 Nc3!?) 12...Bxf6 13 0-0 Bd5 with an equal position.

7...Bb4+ (**Diagram 56**)

Black's idea is to play ...Ba6, but first of all he swaps off the other bishops too.

If 7...Bb7 8 Nc3!? Nxc3 9 bxc3 Qc7 White can ignore the attack on c3 by playing 10 0-0!. Grabbing the pawn with 10...Qxc3 is risky because after 11 Be3 and Rc1, together with the possibility of Ng5, White clearly gets a dangerous initiative. On the other hand, after 10...d6 11 Bf4 Nd7 12 Re1 White has a more favourable version of the 7 Nc3 variation because he hasn't spent a tempo on the defensive Bd2. Against 7...Ba6 White has excellent chances of keeping the advantage simply by normal development, for example 8 0-0 Be7 9 Nc3! Nxc3 10 bxc3 Bxd3 (10...0-0 11 c4!) 11 Qxd3. Here 11...0-0 12 Bf4 Nc6 13 d5 exd5 14 Qxd5 is a bit better for White. Black would like to halt White's activity in the centre by playing 11...d5, but then White has the trick 12 exd6 Qxd6 13 Ba3! (**Diagram 57**).

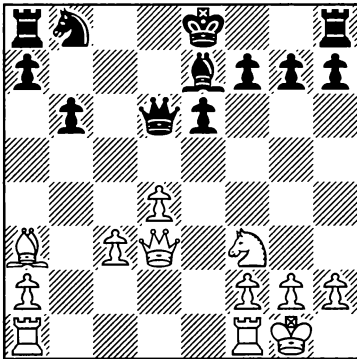


Diagram 57 (B)

A well-known trick

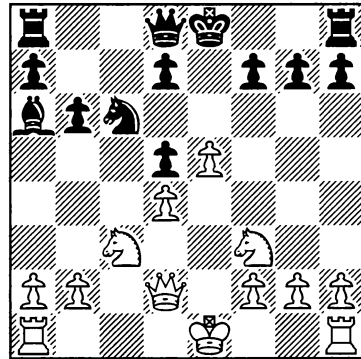


Diagram 58 (B)

A common line

13...Qxa3 loses material to 14 Qe4, while 13...Qc7 14 Bxe7 Kxe7 leaves Black's king stuck in the centre and in some trouble after 15 d5!.

8 Bd2

This is almost universally played, but it might be worth looking into the complications arising after 8 Nbd2 Nf4!? (8...Ba6 is safer) 9 Be4! Ba6!? 10 Qa4!.

8...Bxd2+ 9 Nfxd2!?

I hadn't been aware of this paradoxical recapture until I saw this game. White's idea is to place this knight on e4, the other one on c3, and meanwhile the queen now has a route to the kingside.

9 Nbx d2 Ba6 10 Ne4 0-0 11 0-0 Bxd3 12 Qxd3 Nc6 is probably a touch better for White, although Black is pretty solid. 9...Nf4!? has also been played a few times, and here 10 Be4!? (I can't find any games with this) 10...Ba6! 11 Qa4 0-0 (11...Nxc2+? 12 Kd1 wins material) 12 Qa3!? might be fun to investigate.

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

A common line in recent years has been 9 Qxd2 Ba6! 10 Be4!? (10 Nc3 Nxc3 11 bxc3 Bxd3 12 Qxd3 d5 13 exd6 Qxd6 14 0-0 Nd7 is equal) 10...Nc6 11 Bxd5!? exd5 12 Nc3 (**Diagram 58**) 12...Nb4 13 a3! Nd3+ 14 Kd1 d6 15 Ne1! Nxe1 16 Rxe1 0-0 17 Kc2 when White has managed to coordinate and can claim an edge due to his superior minor piece. I imagine this line may look a bit scary to the inexperienced player, and I must admit I'm not 100% convinced by it. For example, instead of 12...Nb4 maybe Black should play 12...Rc8!?. The point of this move is revealed after 13 0-0-0 Nb4!, and 13 Nxd5 d6! 14 Nb4 Nxb4 15 Qxb4 0-0! 16 Qa3 Bb5 17 Qxd6 Rc2! 18 Qxd8 Rxd8 really was worrying for White in F.Guido-B.Belotti, Bratto 2002. The safest course for White is 13 Ne2 0-0 14 0-0, but 14...d6! 15 Rfe1 Bxe2! 16 Rxe2 Re8 equalized for Black in J.Thorn-G.Pyrich, correspondence 1998.

Instead of 11 Bxd5, one further option to consider is 11 Nc3. For example, 11...Nxc3 12 bxc3 Rc8 13 h4! Ne7 14 Rc1 h6 15 Rh3 Qc7 (S.Marjanovic-O.Cvitan, Budva 1986) and here Cvitan prefers White after 16 Rg3.

9...Ba6

This is certainly consistent with Black's previous play, but it does rather fall in with White's plans. According to Blatny, Black should try 9...0-0 10 Nc3 Bb7 followed by ...d6, which looks roughly equal.

10 Ne4 0-0 11 Nbc3 Nxc3 12 bxc3 Bxd3 13 Qxd3 (Diagram 59)

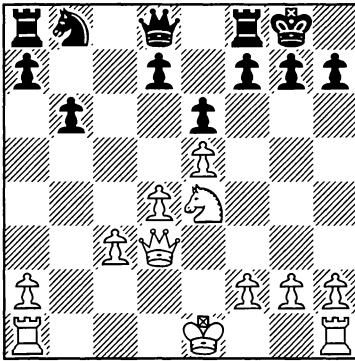


Diagram 59 (B)

Better for White

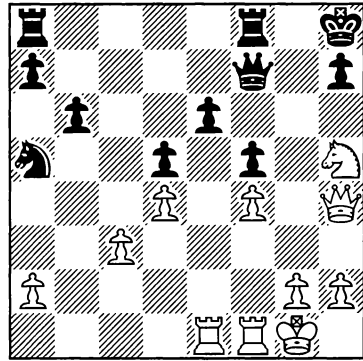


Diagram 60 (W)

Too far away

13...Nc6

13...d5 14 exd6 f5 15 Nd2 Qxd6 16 0-0 Nd7 17 Rfe1 is slightly better for White – e6 is a more serious weakness than c3.

14 0-0 f6

Black really has to do something to challenge White's solid centre and strong

knight on e4.

15 exf6 gxf6 16 f4!

White's e-pawn spearhead no longer exists, but he still has more space, a safer king and a very simple plan of massing his pieces on the kingside.

16...d5 17 Ng3 Qd7 18 Nh5 Qf7 19 Qh3 Kh8 20 Rae1 f5 21 Qh4 Na5? (Diagram 60)

The c4-square is an enticing outpost, but the knight is urgently required elsewhere. 21...Ne7 is a tougher defence.

22 Rf3! Rg8 23 Nf6! Rg6

This runs into a tactic, but 23...Rg7 is no better since White can play 24 Rh3 followed by 25 Rxe6!

24 Rxe6!

Black loses a vital pawn and his position soon collapses.

24...Rf8 25 Rh3 h6 26 Qxh6+!

A nice trick, netting another pawn.

26...Rxf6 27 Rxf6+ Kg7 28 Nh5+ Kg8 29 Reg6+ Qxg6 30 Rxf6+ Kh7 31 Rd6 Rc8 32 Nf6+ 1-0

Summary

Against the ultra-solid 5...d6, the main line with 8 Bb5 is reliable and offers White a chance for a slight advantage (see Game 19), although with accurate play Black should probably equalize. Those who wish to play more aggressively can choose 8 Bb3, which I imagine still packs some surprise punch (even an experienced grandmaster quickly goes wrong in Game 20).

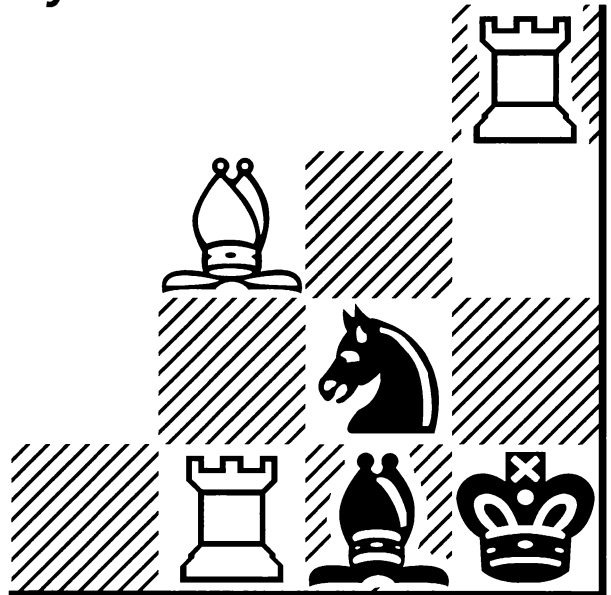
There have been some recent developments in the main lines with 5...e6, and there are quite a few different options for both sides. One of the main differences between 5...e6 and 5...d6 is that White can usually maintain a pawn spearhead on e5, and because of this he has a greater chance of launching a successful attack on the kingside (see, for example, Game 22). On the other hand, Black's pressure in the centre and on the queenside shouldn't be underestimated.

Finally, 5 Qxd4 (Game 21) could easily be used as an effective surprise weapon. It's certainly not as toothless as its reputation suggests, and theory still hasn't completely decided upon Black's most reliable answer.

Chapter Four

2...Nf6: Modern Lines

- Introduction
- The 6 Bc4 Gambit
- White Delays d2-d4



Introduction

In this chapter we deal with modern lines against 2...Nf6: the 6 Bc4 gambit and ideas involving holding back on d2-d4. I should stress that 'modern' is very much a relative term, used here as a comparison to the traditional lines discussed in the previous chapter.

The gambit line arises after 1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nf3 (instead of 5 cxd4) 5...Nc6 6 Bc4 (**Diagram 1**).

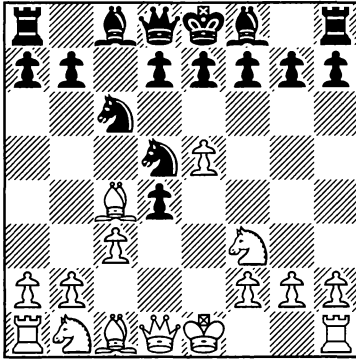


Diagram 1 (B)

The 6 Bc4 Gambit

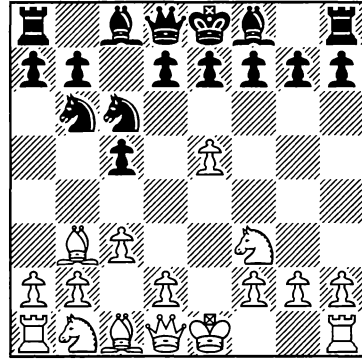


Diagram 2 (B)

Omitting d2-d4

This became fashionable in the 1980s because it offered White an aggressive alternative to 5 cxd4 d6 6 Nf3 Nc6 7 Bc4 Nb6 8 Bb5 (8 Bb3 dxe5 9 d5 wasn't on the radar at that stage), and it has remained popular right up to the present day.

The plan of delaying d2-d4 came to prominence in the 1990s (the earliest game of note I could find was Ivanchuk-Kasparov, Dortmund 1992). The main line runs 1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 Nf3 Nc6 5 Bc4 Nb6 6 Bb3 (**Diagram 2**), although White can also delay d2-d4 against 4...e6 and 4...d6. There are of course quite a few transpositional possibilities, and I'll try to point these out whenever they occur, but delaying d2-d4 does throw up many independent possibilities for both White and Black.

The 6 Bc4 Gambit

1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nf3 (**Diagram 3**)



NOTE: Many players choose 5 Nf3 instead of 5 cxd4 even if they are simply planning to transpose back to cxd4 lines. 5 Nf3 is more flexible than 5 cxd4, and since Black cannot capture on c3 White is losing very little by adopting this move order.

5 Bc4 may transpose to gambit lines after 5...Nb6 but is inaccurate because of the clever resource 5...Qc7!. The point is that after 6 Qe2 (6 Bxd5 Qxe5+!; 6 Qxd4 Nb6!) 6...Nb6 7 Bb3 Black can play the annoying 7...d3!, exploiting the attack on the e5-pawn. 7 Bd3 avoids this idea but places the bishop on an inferior diagonal. This is demonstrated in the line 7...Nc6 8 Nf3 d5 9 exd6 Qxd6 10 0-0 when Black can play 10...Bg4! without fear of Bxf7+.

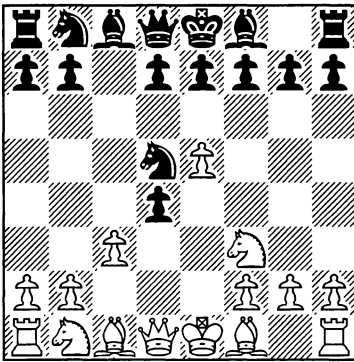


Diagram 3 (B)

The flexible 5 Nf3

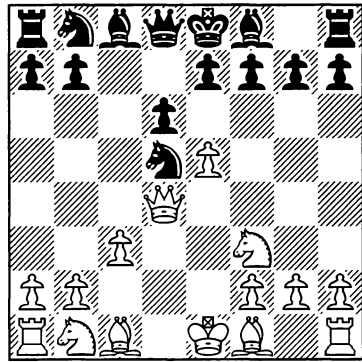


Diagram 4 (B)

A favourable Qxd4?

5...Nc6

If Black wishes to transpose to the ...e6 lines of the previous chapter, he can do so with 5...e6 6 cxd4.

5...d6 invites a transposition to the ...d6 lines of the previous chapter with 6 cxd4, although here White is more likely to choose something different. 6 Bc4 is the obvious try, and here 6...Nb6 7 Bb3 Nc6 8 exd6 transposes to the gambit line. But Black does have other options: for example, 7...dxe5 8 Nxe5 e6 9 cxd4 Nc6 transposes to Game 24, note to White's 8th move.

Another possibility for White after 5...d6 is 6 Qxd4!? (**Diagram 4**), aiming for an improved version of the 5 Qxd4 line. Indeed, after 6...e6 7 Nbd2 Nc6 White has gained the possibility of 8 Bb5!? and practice has shown that he can fight for an advantage after 8...Bd7 9 Bxc6 Bxc6 10 Nc4 dxe5 11 Nxe5.

6 Bc4

This is the move that finally indicates White is happy to sacrifice a pawn. White often plays 6 cxd4, when 6...d6 leads us back to Chapter Three.

6...Nb6

Equally, Black can still play 6...e6 when 7 cxd4 d6 is again Chapter Three.

7 Bb3 (Diagram 5)

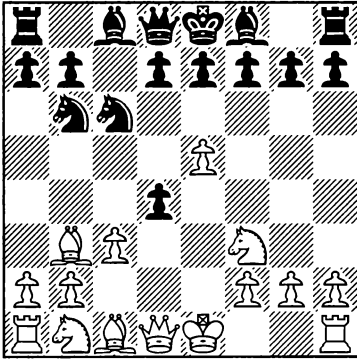


Diagram 5 (B)

Black has a choice

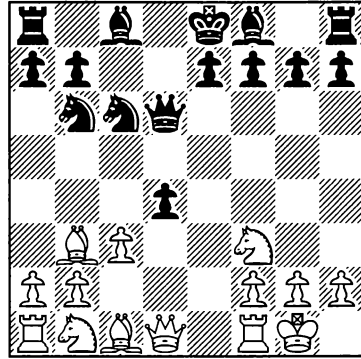


Diagram 6 (B)

The critical line

7...d5

7...d6 usually comes to the same thing, but it also gives White the opportunity to transpose to Game 20 with 8 cxd4. Black's main alternative is 7...g6!?, which is covered in Game 29.

8 exd6

8 cxd4 Bg4! followed by ...e6 is very comfortable for Black, who has a good version of the French with his bishop outside the pawn chain.

8...Qxd6!

The greedy 8...dxc3?! encourages White's development, and 9 Nxc3 exd6 (9...Qxd6 10 0-0 transposes to 8...Qxd6 0-0 9 dxc3?!) 10 Ng5! d5 11 0-0! is known to be very promising for White, especially since 11...h6 12 Nxf7! Kxf7 13 Nxd5, as played in M.Gola-S.Arhipov, Moscow 1989, leaves Black's king walking the tightrope with minimal chances of survival. 11...Be7 is wiser, but 12 Qh5 g6 13 Qh6 Be6 14 Re1 gives White a strong initiative for the pawn.

8...exd6 is rare, and here I think 9 Nxd4!? Be7 10 0-0 0-0 11 Bf4 is the most promising continuation for White. Black is more likely to recapture on d6 with the bishop, and 8...e6 9 cxd4 Bxd6 leads to a typical IQP, albeit one which I believe to be favourable for White (see Game 28).

9 0-0! (Diagram 6)

White sticks to his guns, continuing to offer a gambit. Of course he could recapture on d4, but after 9 cxd4 Black can utilize the fact that he has yet to block in his light-squared bishop by playing 9...Be6! (but not 9...Bg4? 10 Bxf7+! – a typical problem for Black in this line). Normally the trade of light-squared bishops dampens White's potential for the initiative. This is no exception, and 10 0-0 Bxb3 11 Qxb3 e6 12 Nc3 Be7 has proved to be pretty comfortable for Black.

The other way to gambit a pawn is with 9 Na3, but I've always suspected that this is less challenging than 9 0-0 Be6 10 Na3, and Black has generally done well after the critical 9...dxc3!. For example, 10 Qe2 Bf5! 11 Nb5 Qd7 12 Ne5 Nxe5 13 Qxe5 Rc8! 14 0-0 Nc4 15 Bxc4 Rxc4 sees White struggling to justify his play. One important point is that 16 Re1 can be met by 16...e6!, as 17 Qxf5 Rc5! regains the piece. 10 Qxd6 exd6 11 Nb5 Rb8 has also been seen in quite a few games, but Black is more than holding his own: for example, 12 bxc3 a6 13 Be3 axb5 14 Bxb6 Be6 15 0-0 Be7 16 Rhe1 Kd7, S.Biro-A.Motylev, Predeal 2007.

9...Be6! (Diagram 7)

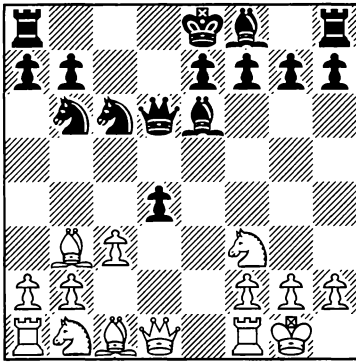


Diagram 7 (W)

An important discovery

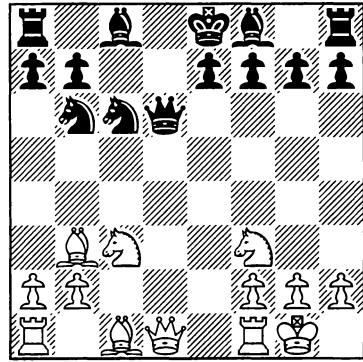


Diagram 8 (B)

Too risky

It was the discovery of 9...Be6 which made this whole line playable for Black. I touched upon the motives behind ...Be6 in the previous note: Black wants to trade off White's most powerful minor piece before completing his development.

In the early days of this line Black usually played 9...Bf5 (9...Bg4 allows 10 Bxf7+!) but White can keep some advantage here with 10 Nxd4! (freeing f3 for the queen) 10...Nxd4 11 cxd4 e6 12 Nc3 Be7 13 Qf3! 0-0 (13...Qxd4 14 Qxb7) 14 d5!: for example, 14...Qd7 15 Rd1 e5 16 d6!. Alternatively, 9...dxc3 10 Nxc3 (**Diagram 8**) entails too much risk. It's true that Black can exchange queens, but after 10...Qxd1 11

Rxd1 White still has many dangerous ideas, the most obvious of which is Nb5 coupled with Be3 or Bf4.

9...d3!? is also supposed to be risky on account of the line 10 Na3 Bf5 11 Nb5 Qd7 12 Bf4 Rc8 13 Nxa7! Nxa7 14 Ne5, but 12...0-0-0! (yes, this is legal!) is more challenging and 13 Bc7 (this isn't forced, and 13 a4 intending 13...f6 14 a5 Nd5 15 Nd6+! exd6 16 Bxd5 is worth investigating) 13...e5 14 Bxd8 Qxd8 offered Black some compensation for the exchange in V.Khachatryan-A.Anastasian, Yerevan 2007. Perhaps White should follow Rogozenko's suggestion of 15 Nxa7+ Nxa7 16 Nxe5 Bg6 17 Nxf7 (or even the immediate 17 a4) 17...Bxf7 18 Bxf7 followed by pushing the a-pawn up the board.

Finally, there's also 9...e6, which leads to a typical IQP after 10 cxd4 Be7 11 Nc3 0-0 albeit one where Black's knight isn't ideally placed on b6. Compare this with Game 28.

10 Na3! (Diagram 9)

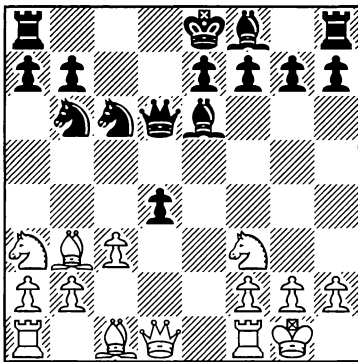


Diagram 9 (B)

Nb5 is looming

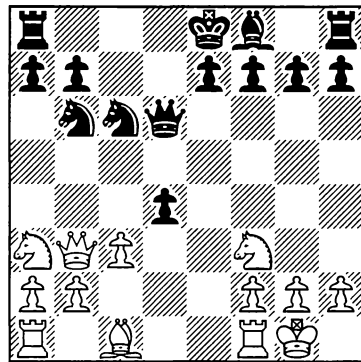


Diagram 10 (B)

A nagging edge for White

This move, intending Nb5, is unquestionably the most dangerous for Black to face.

I'm really unsure why there have been so many games with 10 Bxe6 Qxe6 11 Nxd4 because it looks completely toothless to me. For one thing, the main line after 11...Nxd4 12 Qxd4 Rd8 13 Qh4 is suitably dealt with by 13...h5! (planning to force the queens off with ...Qg4; White welcomes the complications of 13...Qe2 14 Be3! Qxb2 15 Nd2) 14 h3 Qc4. Secondly, 11...Qd7 has proved to be just as solid, and White has absolutely nothing after, for example, 12 Nxc6 Qxc6 13 Qe2 e6 14 Nd2 Be7.

10...dxc3!

Grabbing the pawn is the critical test of White's opening. Black has two alterna-

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

tives which allow White to restore material equality, but it would be slightly inaccurate to call them 'safe' options because White has good chances of keeping at least a slight advantage.

The first is 10...Bxb3 11 Qxb3 (**Diagram 10**).

White is a better after, for example, 11...Qd5 12 Nb5 Rc8 (or 12...Qxb3 13 axb3 Rc8 14 Nfxd4 Nxd4 15 Nxd4 a6 16 b4! intending b5 to open up the queenside) 13 Nfxd4 Nxd4 14 Nxd4 e6 15 Rd1 Bc5 16 Qb5+ Qd7 17 Qe2 Qe7 18 Nb3 0-0 19 Nxc5 Qxc5 20 Be3 Qc6 21 Bd4, or 11...e6 12 Nb5 Qd7 13 Nbx d4 Nxd4 14 Nxd4 Be7 15 Rd1 (see Game 32, note to Black's 11th move). In either case it's not an enormous advantage, but the position is slightly uncomfortable for Black.

The other possibility is 10...a6 ruling out Nb5 ideas. Now 11 Bxe6 Qxe6 12 Nxd4 Nxd4 13 Qxd4 Rd8 14 Qh4 is typical, and certainly more favourable for White than the comparable line with 10 Bxe6 (Na3 is more useful than ...a6). However, an interesting sideline that caught my attention is 12 Re1 Qd5 13 Nxd4 Nxd4 14 Be3!. White regains the piece with this clever skewer, and following 14...Nb5 15 Bxb6 Qxd1 16 Rxd1 Nxa3 17 bxa3 e6 18 a4 Be7 19 Rab1 0-0 (A.Hoffman-R.Vasquez, Buenos Aires 1995) White could have kept up the pressure with the straightforward 20 Rd7!.

11 Qe2!

White has enjoyed little success with 11 Nb5 Qxd1 12 Rxd1 Rc8 13 Bxe6 fxe6 14 bxc3 (or 14 Nxc3 g6 15 Ng5 Nd8) 14...Nc4.

11...Bxb3

11...cxb2? 12 Bxb2 really would be pushing greed to its limit. Black has enough problems to deal with without helping to activate White's final piece!

12 Nb5! (Diagram 11)

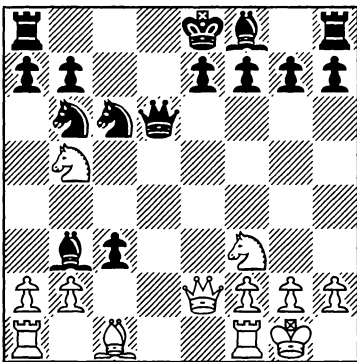


Diagram 11 (B)

A vital zwischenzug

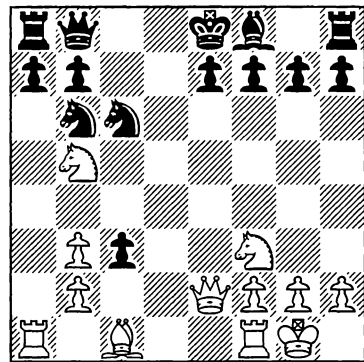


Diagram 12 (B)

White has compensation

12 axb3 sometimes transposes but is less accurate because it offers Black new possibilities such as 12...0-0-0!? 13 Nb5 Qd3.

12...Qb8!

12...Qd8? 13 axb3 leaves Black having to deal with the threat of Rd1, and this is not easy to do. 12...Qd7 13 axb3 Rd8 prevents 14 Rd1, but now 14 Bf4! becomes a problem.

13 axb3 (Diagram 12)

White's development advantage and active pieces undoubtedly provide a good amount of compensation for the pawn, although Black could argue that he has no obvious weaknesses in his position. Black must choose between a number of ways of trying to deal with White's initiative, and his options are covered in Game 27.

Theoretical?

Yes! This is one of the sharpest, if not the sharpest line of the c3 Sicilian, and so both sides need to know their stuff and good preparation is likely to be rewarded.

Statistics

White has scored 48% in over 200 games from the position after 13 axb3, although this goes up to 55% if White chooses the critical 14 Nbd4! in response to 13...e5. Overall White has scored 52% in over 4500 games with 6 Bc4.

Illustrative Games

Game 27

□ S.Lakatos ■ J.Claridge

Correspondence 2002

1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nf3 Nc6 6 Bc4 Nb6 7 Bb3 d5 8 exd6 Qxd6 9 0-0 Be6 10 Na3 dxc3 11 Qe2 Bxb3 12 Nb5 Qb8 13 axb3 e5

Black must do something about his kingside development sooner rather than later, and 13...e5 has been the most common choice.

Preparing to fianchetto with 13...g6!? (**Diagram 13**) is a decent alternative. Originally this was considered to be risky in view of 14 Rd1?! intending Nd6+, but later analysis proved that Black can safely allow this check: 14...Bg7! 15 Nd6+ Kf8 16 Nxf7!? (16 Ne4 cxb2 17 Bxb2 h6! and Black escapes with the advantage by playing ...Kg8-h7) 16...cxb2 17 Bxb2 17...Bxb2 18 Qxb2 Kxf7 19 Ng5+ Kg8 20 Ne6 Qe5 and Black wins (Rechel). More recently White's efforts have focussed upon 14 Be3 Nc8! (against 14...Nd5 White has the tactical trick 15 Bxa7! intending 15...Nxa7 16 Rxa7 Rxa7 17 Nxa7 Qxa7?? 18 Qb5+, and 15...cxb2 16 Qxb2 Nxa7 17 Nxa7 Rg8 18 Nb5

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

Rxa1 19 Qxa1, as played in S.Lakatos-V.Zaichuk, correspondence 2002, gives White good compensation for the pawn) 15 Ra4! (**Diagram 14**) [a creative preparation of Bf4!] 15...Bg7 16 Bf4 e5 17 Nxe5! Nxe5 18 Bxe5 Bxe5 19 f4 0-0 20 fxe5. There are many interesting continuations, but Black's resources appear to be sufficient here. For example, 20...cxb2 21 Raf4 f5! (21...Nb6? 22 Qxb2 Nd5 23 R4f3 left Black facing severe problems defending his f7-pawn in E.Alekseev-K.Aseev, St Petersburg 2000) 22 Rh4 a6 23 Qc4+ Kh8 (23...Rf7 is met by 24 Rxh7! Kxh7 25 Qxf7+ and now Black draws if he finds the resource 25...Kh6! 26 Nc7 Qa7+ 27 Kh1 Qf2!, forcing White to give perpetual check with 28 Qf8+) 24 Qc5 (24 Nc7!?) 24...Rg8 25 Qd4 h5! 26 Qf4 Rg7 27 Rxh5+! gxh5 28 Qh6+ Kg8 29 Qe6+ Rf7 30 Qg6+ Rg7 (30...Kf8? 31 e6!) 31 Qe8+ with perpetual check, S.Vysochin-I.Rausis, Cairo 2002.

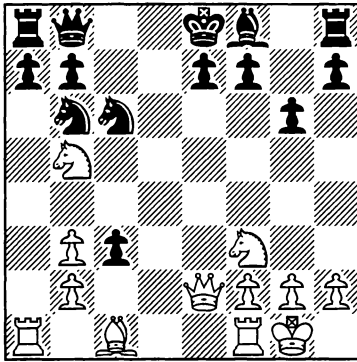


Diagram 13 (W)

A good alternative

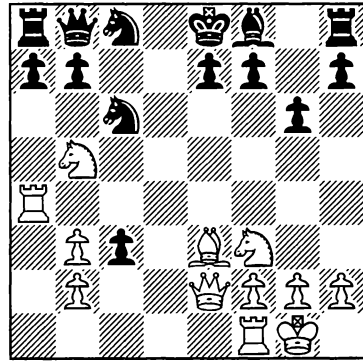


Diagram 14 (B)

Threatening Bf4

The difference between 13...e6 and the text move is that after 14 g3! Black faces the threat of Bf4. Sidestepping with 14...Qc8 (14...e5 is still possible) intends to meet 15 Bf4 with ...Nd5, but in G.Gottardi-S.Brzozka, correspondence 1993, White created an attack with 15 Ng5! a6 16 Qh5 and won after 16...Nd8?! (16...g6) 17 Nxc3 h6 18 Be3 Nd7 19 Rfd1 Ne5? 20 Rxd8+! Kxd8 21 Nxf7+ Nxf7 22 Qxf7. Not the most resilient of defences by Black, but this game does demonstrate the type of pressure White can apply if he plays with sufficient dynamism.

14 Nbd4! (**Diagram 15**)

White has tried quite a few ideas here, including 14 Nfd4, 14 Re1 and also the simple recapture 14 bxc3, but I think 14 Nbd4 is the most dangerous move for Black to face. The immediate threat is to the e5-pawn.

14...f6

Black would prefer not to have to weaken himself like this, but look what can

happen after the more natural-looking 14...Bd6: 15 bxc3 0-0?! (it wasn't too late for 15...f6!) 16 Nf5! (this possibility is an obvious point behind 14 Nbd4) 16...Re8? 17 Ng5! f6 18 Nxf7! Kxf7 19 Qh5+ Kg8 20 Nh6+! gxf6 21 Qg6+ Kf8 22 Qxf6+ Kg8 23 Qg6+ Kh8 24 Qxf6+ Kg8 25 Qg6+ Kh8 26 Rd1! (**Diagram 16**) 26...Qc7 (26...Bf8 27 Rd3!) 27 Bg5 Bf8 28 Rd3 Bg7 29 Rh3+ Kg8 30 Qh7+ Kf8 31 Rf3+ Qf7 32 Bh6! and Black was forced to resign in M.Ragger-R.Jones, European Team Ch., Crete 2007. An excellent example of White's attacking chances in this line.

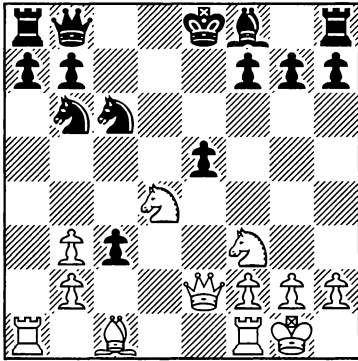


Diagram 15 (B)

The most challenging

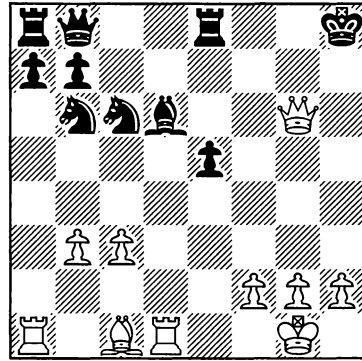


Diagram 16 (B)

A winning attack

In practice the 'main line' has been 14...Nxd4 15 Nxd4 f6 16 bxc3 Kf7 17 Nb5 a6 18 Be3 axb5 19 Bxb6 Rxa1 20 Rxa1 Qe8 21 Ra5. My feeling is that this is not as safe for Black as some sources have suggested:

a) 21...b4 22 c4! (White wants to win this pawn without crippling his potential majority on the queenside) 22...Qc6 23 Rb5 Be7 24 Ba5 Ra8 25 h3 followed by Bxb4 is probably a little bit better for White because of his queenside majority and safer king.

b) 21...Qc6 22 Qxb5 Qxc3 23 Qd5+ Kg6 24 h4! Qc6 25 h5+! (**Diagram 17**) gives White a very dangerous attack, with analysis showing that at the very least White has excellent practical chances: 25...Kxh5 (or 25...Kh6 26 Be3+ g5 27 Qf7 Bg7 28 Rc5 Qe8 29 Qxb7 Qxh5 30 Rd5! – I.Markovic – when White's position looks favourable despite the pawn deficit) 26 Qf7+ g6 27 Be3 Bh6 28 Rc5 Qd6 29 Rd5 Qf8 30 Qe6 Bxe3 31 Qh3+ Kg5 32 Qxe3+ Kf5 33 Qd3+ Kg5? (Black had to try 33...Ke6 34 Qc4 Kf5) 34 f4+ and Black resigned in G.Gottardi-V.Gritsaenko, correspondence 1993, on account of 34...Kxf4 35 g3+ Kg5 36 Qe4 (threatening 37 Qf4+ Kh5 38 Qh4 mate) 36...Kh6 37 Qh4+ Kg7 38 Rd7+.

15 bxc3 Qc8 (Diagram 18)

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

It's too late for 15...Nxd4? because White can now play 16 cxd4!, but two other moves have been seen:

a) 15...Kf7 16 Nxc6 bxc6 17 Qe4 Qd6 18 Ra5! saw White's rook take control of many important squares in E.Rozentalis-A.Lesiege, Montreal 2000. White intends Be3 (or Ba3) and doubling rooks on the a-file, and enjoys excellent play for the pawn.

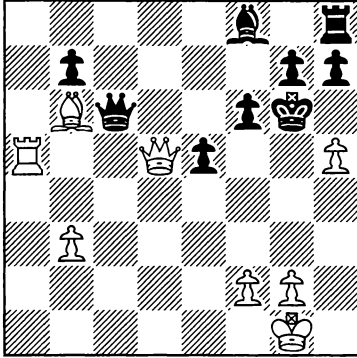


Diagram 17 (B)

Black's king wanders

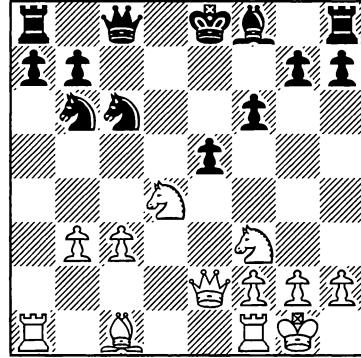


Diagram 18 (W)

Preventing Nf5

b) Maintaining the option of castling with 15...Be7 looks safer. S.Nadyrhanov-M.Brodsky, Krasnodar 1999, continued 16 Nf5 (Rowson suggests 16 Nxc6 bxc6 17 Qe4 Qc7 18 c4 with ideas such as Be3, Raa6 and Rfa1) 16...0-0 17 N3h4 Rf7 18 Qg4 Kh8 19 Be3!? (White can force a draw with 19 Qh5 Kg8 20 Qg4, since 19...Qe8? runs into 20 Ng6+ Kg8 21 Ngxe7+ Nxe7 22 Nd6) 19...Bf8 20 Rfd1 Qe8 21 b4 and White keeps some pressure, enough for a pawn anyway.

16 Nxc6 bxc6?!

I'm not sure why Black has avoided 16...Qxc6! here. It's true that after 17 Nd4 Qxc3 18 Bb2 his position looks precarious, but if Black chooses the wiser 17...Qd7! it's not so easy for White to gain an advantage despite a number of enticing possibilities.

17 Nxe5! (Diagram 19)

17 Nxe5 is certainly a major improvement over 17 Nh4?! g6 18 f4 Bc5+ 19 Be3 Bxe3+ 20 Qxe3 0-0 21 fxe5 Qe6!, when it was White who was looking to equalize in the stem game M.Rytshagov-M.Sadler, European Team Ch., Pula 1997.



TIP: Correspondence games are a very good place to look for new ideas in the opening.

17...fxe5 18 Qh5+! Kd8

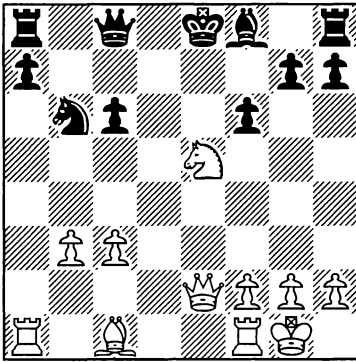
18...Ke7 is certainly undesirable, but in view of what happens in the game maybe this is Black's best chance.

19 Qxe5

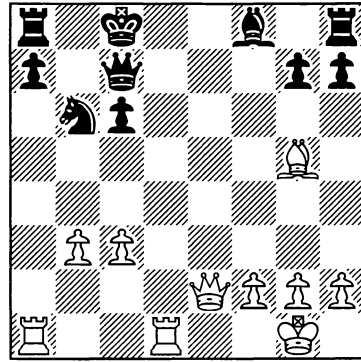
White's queen, bishop and two rooks combine powerfully. Black's king is lacking cover and his pieces are uncoordinated. In reality this can only lead to one result.

19...Qd7 20 Bg5+ Kc8 21 Rfd1 Qc7

Or 21...Nd5 22 c4 Bd6 23 Qd4.

22 Qe2! (Diagram 20)**Diagram 19 (B)**

A strong novelty

**Diagram 20 (B)**

No good defence

The threat is 23 Qa6+, and the problem for Black is that there is no safe development for his bishop. Claridge decided to return his extra piece, but with constant difficulties surrounding his king he was never able to get back into the game.

22...Bc5

22...Nd5 loses to 23 c4 Nb6 24 Bd8! Qxd8 25 Rxd8+ Kxd8 26 Rd1+ Kc7 27 Qe5+ Kb7 28 c5 Nd5 29 Rxd5!.

23 b4 Bxf2+ 24 Qxf2 Kb7 25 Be3 Rhf8 26 Qa2 a6 27 Bc5 Rf7 28 c4 Rd7 29 Rf1 h5 30 Rf8 Rxf8 31 Qxa6+ Kb8 32 Bxf8 Qd8 33 h3 Rd1+ 34 Rxd1 Qxd1+ 35 Kh2 Qd4 36 Bc5 Qf4+ 37 Kh1 Nxc4 38 Qxc6 1-0

Game 28

□ J.Emms ■ R.Sagall

London (rapidplay) 1995

1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nf3 Nc6 6 Bc4 Nb6 7 Bb3 d5 8 exd6 e6 9 cxd4

Bxd6 10 0-0 0-0 11 Re1 (Diagram 21)

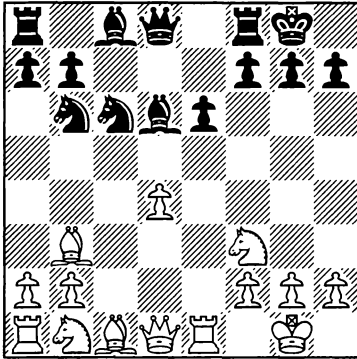


Diagram 21 (B)

A good IQP for White

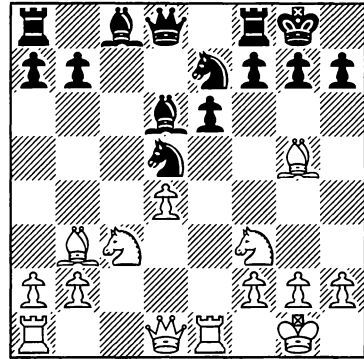


Diagram 22 (B)

Pressuring d5



NOTE: This is a favourable IQP position for White. With a knight on b6 rather than f6, and a bishop on d6 rather than e7, Black has much less cover on the kingside than normal and so he is vulnerable to the threat of an attack.

Indeed, it was no real surprise when my opponent decided to reposition his knight back into the centre.

11...Nd5 12 Nc3 Nce7

A good move, solidly protecting d5. 12...Be7 would be seen as another lost tempo, while we've already seen in Game 23 the dangers of exchanging on c3.

E.Sveshnikov-R.Maninang, Manila 1982, supplied further evidence, with 12...Nxc3?! 13 bxc3 Qc7 14 Qd3! (preparing Ng5) 14...e5 15 dxe5 Nxe5 16 Nxe5 Bxe5 17 Ba3! Bxh2+ (17...Rd8 18 Rxe5!) 18 Kh1 Rd8 19 Qf3 Be5 20 Qe3! Bd6 21 Bxd6 Qxd6 22 Rad1 proving to be all too easy for White.

13 Bg5!? (Diagram 22)

There are some promising alternatives, including 13 Bc2, 13 Ne5 or even 13 Ng5!?, but I had a specific idea in mind.

13...Qb6 14 Qd3! Bd7 15 Rad1 Bc6?

Of course ...Bc6 is a desirable move in the long run, but in this particular situation there were more pressing matters to deal with. Black had to play 15...h6, against which I was planning to blast open the centre with 16 Bxe7!? Nxe7 17 d5. Looking at it now, though, 17...Rad8! holds the position, as 18 dxe6 Bxe6 19 Bxe6?? can be met by 19...Bxh2+!.

16 Bxe7!

Square vacation: g5 is urgently required by another piece.

16...Nxe7 17 Ng5 Ng6 18 Rxe6! (Diagram 23)

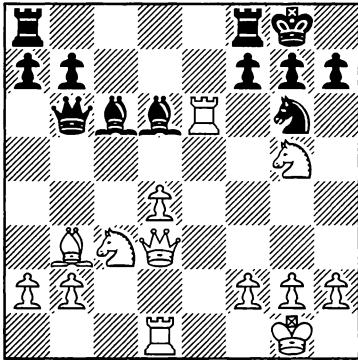


Diagram 23 (B)

A very strong rook sac

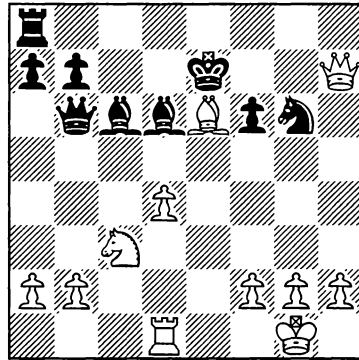


Diagram 24 (B)

Forcing the king forward

Exploiting the absence of the bishop from d7. This rook sacrifice is virtually winning for White.

18...fxe6 19 Qh3!

19 Bxe6+? Kh8 20 Qxg6 (20 Qh3 h6) 20...hxg6 21 Rd3 and Rh3 mate would be a pretty finish, but Black only has to spot 21...Bf3! to spoil the fun.

19...Rf6

19...h6 loses to 20 Qxe6+ Kh8 21 Qxg6 Be4! 22 Qxe4 (but not 22 Ncxe4?? Bxh2+) 22...hxg5 23 Bc2 g6 24 Qxg6 Bxh2+ 25 Kxh2 Qxg6 26 Bxg6 Rxf2 27 b3.

20 Bxe6+ Kf8 21 Nxe7+

21 Qxh7! is even stronger.

21...Ke7 22 Nxf6 gxf6 23 Qh7+! (Diagram 24)

Black has no choice but to take the bishop.

23...Kxe6 24 d5+ Bxd5 25 Nxd5 Qxb2?

Black's only chance was 25...Rh8!, even though White should win after 26 Qxh8 Nxh8 27 Nxb6 axb6 or even 26 Qxg6 Bxh2+ 27 Kf1 Qb5+ 28 Rd3.

26 Qxg6

Good enough, although strictly speaking mate in four with 26 Nc7+! Bxc7 27 Qd7+ Ke5 28 Rd5+ Ke4 29 Qf5 would have been more accurate!

26...Rh8 27 Qg4+ Ke5 28 Ne3 1-0

Game 29

□ G.Szabo ■ D.Milanovic

Bucharest 2007

1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nf3 Nc6 6 Bc4 Nb6 7 Bb3 g6!? (Diagram 25)

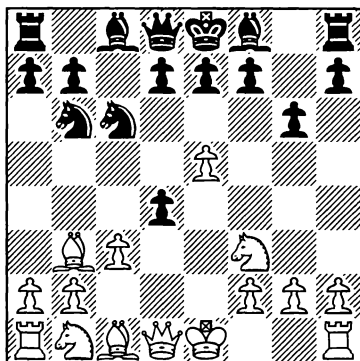


Diagram 25 (W)

The modern 7...g6

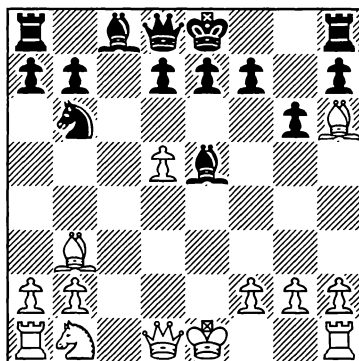


Diagram 26 (B)

An interesting gambit

7...g6 is a relatively modern idea, with Black avoiding the gambit line and allowing cxd4. The plan after ...Bg7 and ...0-0 is to attack White's centre with a very quick ...d6, and for this purpose the bishop on g7 is ideally placed. A practical advantage of 7...g6 is that against pedestrian play Black is able to reach a comfortable position, and this is a possible reason why 7...g6 has enjoyed reasonable success. On the other hand, I believe that the critical line (8 Ng5!) is very dangerous for Black to face.



NOTE: This position can also be reached via the move order 4 Nf3 Nc6 5 Bc4 Nb6 6 Bb3 g6 7 d4 cxd4 (see the next section).

8 Ng5!

8 cxd4 Bg7 has proved to be okay for Black in practice. For example: 9 Nc3 0-0 10 0-0 d6! 11 exd6 (there's nothing better) 11...Qxd6 12 Nb5 (or 12 d5 Na5) 12...Qd8 13 h3 Na5 14 Bc2 Be6; or 9 Bf4 d6 10 exd6 0-0 11 h3 exd6 12 0-0 Na5!. In general Black is well positioned to combat the IQP with his bishop on g7.

Those looking for more action after 8 cxd4 Bg7 could do worse than try the pawn sacrifice 9 d5!? Nxe5 10 Nxe5 Bxe5 11 Bh6! (**Diagram 26**), when Black faces issues over what to do with his king. The potential in White's position is demonstrated if Black is too greedy: 11...Bxb2 12 Nd2 Bxa1? (12...d6!) 13 Qxa1 f6 14 d6! and with

Ne4 up next, Black is in dire trouble.

Of course Black doesn't have to be so material hungry, but even so White has decent practical chances, and I couldn't help but notice the entertaining game Y.Nepomniashchy-I.Khairullin, Kirishi 2005, which is certainly worth including here: 11...d6 12 Nc3 Nd7 13 f4 Bf6 14 Ne4 Qb6 15 Qe2 Qb4+ 16 Kf2 Bd4+ 17 Kg3! f5!? 18 Nc3 Bxc3 19 bxc3 Qxc3+ 20 Kh4! (White's king has marched half way up the board, but it's Black's which is in greater danger!) 20...Nc5 21 Rac1 Qa5 22 Rxc5! Qxc5 23 Re1 Qc7 24 Qb2 Rg8 25 Qf6 Kd8 26 Qf7 Re8 27 Bg5 b5 28 Rxe7! Qxe7! (28...Rxe7?? 29 Qf8+) 29 Qxh7 Bd7 30 Bxe7+ Rxe7 31 Qh8+ Re8 32 Qf6+ Kc7 33 Qc3+ Kb7 34 Qb4 Kc7 35 Qa5+ Kb7 and the players agreed a draw. Of course there are many more possibilities to consider, but 9 d5 could well appeal to bold gambiteers.

Returning to 8 Ng5! (**Diagram 27**).

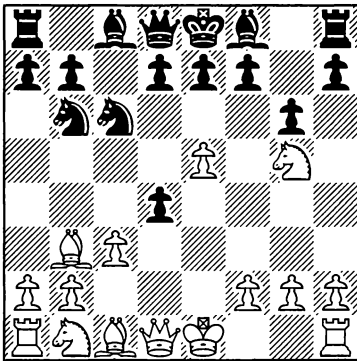


Diagram 27 (B)

The test of 7...g6

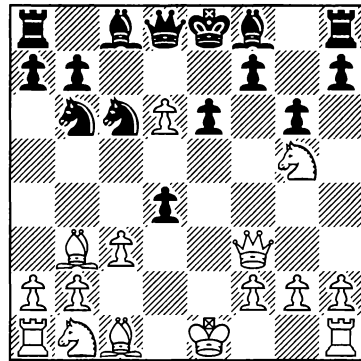


Diagram 28 (B)

Dangerous for Black

8...d5!

8...Nxe5? 9 Qxd4! leaves Black struggling, since 9...Bg7 runs into 10 Bxf7+! and 9...f6 is met by 10 Qxe5!. In this second line Black can actually regain his piece with 10...d5, but 11 Qe2 fxc5 12 Bxc5 still looks very promising for White.

8...e6 9 cxd4 is also favourable for White, as 9...d6 10 Qf3! is a bit awkward for Black after, for example, 10...Qc7 11 Nc3 intending 11...Nxd4? 12 Qf6 Nxb3 13 exd6!.

9 exd6

9 cxd4 f6! is okay for Black.

9...e6 10 Qf3! (**Diagram 28**)

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

10 cxd4 is possible, but 10 Qf3 is more dangerous for Black.

10...Ne5

10...f6 11 Nxe6 Bxe6 12 Bxe6 is better for White because the bishop on e6 is of great nuisance value. For example, 12...Bxd6 13 Qh3! (13 0-0 Bxh2+! is less clear) 13...f5 14 0-0 Qf6 15 Re1 Be5 16 cxd4 Nxd4 17 Bb3 Nxb3 18 Qxb3! (preventing ...0-0) 18...0-0-0 19 Nd2 Bc7 20 Nf3 f4 21 Bd2 Nd5 22 Rac1 left Black's king more vulnerable than White's in A.Karpatchev-X.Parmentier, Creon 2007.

10...f5!? is more challenging because the automatic 11 Nxe6? falls short due to 11...Bxe6 12 Bxe6 Qxd6! (in the previous line White would have 13 Qxf6 here). Keeping all the threats with 11 0-0! causes Black more problems, and White gained an advantage in M.Markovic-D.Mozetic, Nis 1998, after 11...Bxd6 (11...Qxd6 12 Bf4!) 12 Re1! 0-0 13 Na3 Kg7 14 Qh3 h5 15 Bxe6.

11 Qg3 (Diagram 29)

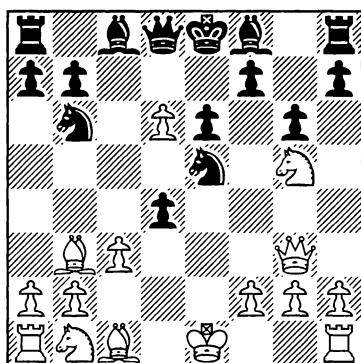


Diagram 29 (B)

How to defend the knight?

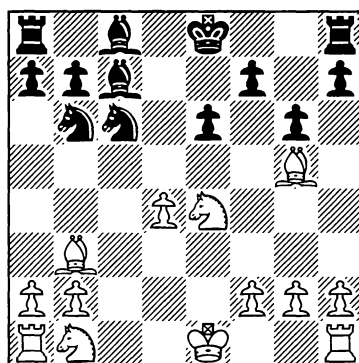


Diagram 30 (W)

Dark-squared weaknesses

11 Qe4 is also possible, and I have fond memories of this move which brought me a crushing win in one of the earliest games in this line: 11...Qxd6 12 cxd4 Nc6 13 0-0 Bg7 14 Rd1 0-0 15 Nc3 Qe7 16 Nf3 Na5?! 17 d5! Rd8 18 Bf4 Nxb3 19 axb3 Bd7 20 Bc7 Rdc8 21 d6 Qe8 22 Ne5 Bxe5? 23 Qxe5 Bc6 24 Bxb6 axb6 25 d7! Bxd7 26 Rxa8 Rxa8 27 Ne4 and 1-0, J.Emms-V.Tukmakov, Copenhagen 1996. Since then it's been ascertained that 11...Bg7! 12 cxd4 Nec4 intending ...Nxd6 is a better option, and overall I feel that 11 Qg3 causes Black more problems.

11...Bg7

11...Qxd6 12 Ne4 Qc7 13 0-0 looks treacherous for Black, but 11...Bxd6!? has been played a few times. 12 Ne4! Nec4 13 Qd3 Ne5 14 Qxd4 Bc7 15 Bg5! Qxd4 16 cxd4 Nc6 (**Diagram 30**) 17 Nf6+ Kf8 left Black with horrible dark-squared weaknesses in

the game S.Zhigalko-I.Khairullin, Chalkidiki 2003, although the position wasn't entirely clear after 18 Bh6+ Ke7 19 Bg7 Rd8 20 Nxb7 Nd7 21 d5 Be5!. Going back a few moves, maybe White should consider 17 Nbc3!? intending to meet 17...Nxd4 with 18 Rd1 e5 (18...Nxb3? 19 Nb5!) 19 Nf6+ Kf8 20 Ncd5 Nxd5 21 Bh6+ Ke7 22 Nxd5+ Kd7 (22...Kd6 23 Rxd4!) 23 Bg7!.

12 cxd4

12 0-0 is a strong alternative. 12...0-0 (12...Qxd6 13 Bf4!) 13 cxd4 Nc6 14 Rd1 h6 (14...Nxd4 loses to 15 Rxd4! Bxd4 16 Qh4) 15 Nf3 Na5 16 Bc2 has been seen in a few games, and White's extra pawn on d6 must give him some advantage. Also, why can't White play 16 Nc3? I don't think 16...Nxb3 17 axb3 really helps Black all that much.

12...Nc6 13 Nf3 Nxd4 14 Nxd4 Bxd4 15 Nc3 Bd7 16 0-0 0-0 17 Bh6 (Diagram 31)

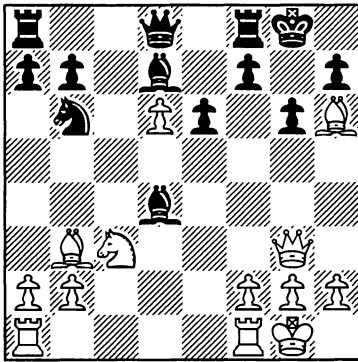


Diagram 31 (B)

Better for White

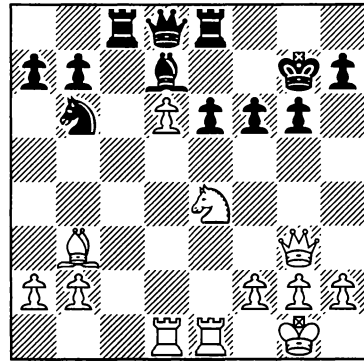


Diagram 32 (W)

Too many holes to patch up

I like White's position here. His pieces are active, the passed pawn on d6 is more a strength than a weakness and Black's dark squares on the kingside remain vulnerable.

17...Re8 18 Rad1 Bg7

Black would prefer not to exchange this bishop, but 18...Bh8 19 Bg5 Qc8 20 Ne4 looks horrible for him.

19 Bxg7 Kxg7 20 Ne4 Rc8 21 Rfe1 f6 (Diagram 32)

As soon as Black patches up one hole, another one appears. The problem with shoring up the dark squares is that it suddenly brings the b3-bishop back to life.

22 Qe3 e5 23 Nc5 Rb8 24 Rc1 Bf5 25 Red1

The d-pawn is getting stronger by the minute. Black can hardly move, a fact rather

emphasized by his choice in the game!

25...Na8 26 Qf3 e4 27 Qf4 b6 28 d7! 1-0

White wins easily after 28...Re5 29 Na6 Rb7 30 Rc8.

White Delays d2-d4

1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 Nf3 (Diagram 33)

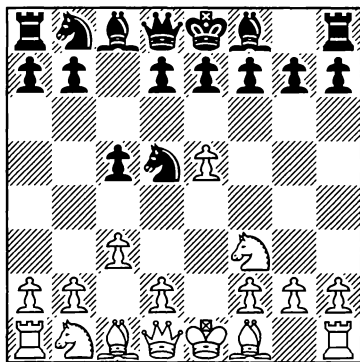


Diagram 33 (B)

Delaying d2-d4

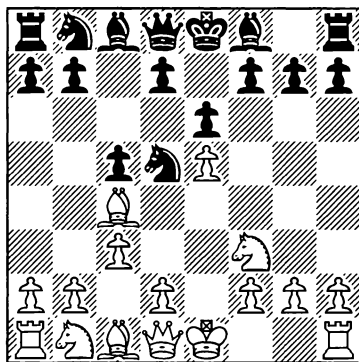


Diagram 34 (B)

An anti ...b6 idea

White sometimes plays 4 Bc4, which is more than likely to reach the main text below after 4...Nb6 5 Bb3 c4 6 Bc2 Nc6 7 Nf3. Instead 4...e6 5 d4 will probably transpose to the main lines considered in Chapter Three. I've noticed that Tiviakov has tried 5...cxd4 6 Bxd5!? (instead of 6 cxd4) 6...exd5 7 Qxd4, although this doesn't look too frightening for Black and 7...Nc6 8 Qxd5 d6 9 exd6 Bxd6 10 Bg5 Qc7 gives him good compensation for the pawn in view of his better development.

The only other serious try for White is Rozentalis's 4 g3!? . The main line runs 4...d6 5 exd6 e6 6 Bg2 Bxd6 7 Nf3 Nc6 8 0-0 0-0 9 d4 cxd4 10 Nxd4 Nxd4 11 Qxd4 Qc7, which has proved to offer equal chances in practice. Here White should certainly prefer 12 Nd2 to the greedy 12 Bxd5?! exd5 13 Qxd5, which leaves his light squares looking painfully weak after 13...Bh3!.

4...Nc6



NOTE: If Black wishes to transpose to the ...e6 lines of the previous chapter there is nothing wrong with the solid 4...e6.

Normally White responds with 5 d4, although 5 Bc4!? (**Diagram 34**) should be

given a mention as this move can be used as an anti ...b6 idea. After 5...b6 6 d4 Bb7 (6...cxd4 is met by 7 Bxd5! exd5 8 Qxd4, illustrating an advantage of delaying d2-d4) White has some independent ideas here, such as 7 dxc5!? bxc5 8 0-0 Be7 9 Nbd2 (as played by Tiviakov) and 7 0-0 cxd4 8 Qxd4!? (or 8 Nxd4!?) 8...Nc6 9 Qg4. These are not necessarily more favourable for White than the usual ...b6 lines, but they do give Black players something else to think about. Instead 5...d6 6 d4 cxd4 7 cxd4 transposes to Chapter Three, while Black can also try 5...Nb6 6 Bb3 c4!? 7 Bc2 d6 when White should probably reply with 8 exd6 Bxd6 9 d4 cxd3 10 Qxd3 Nc6 11 0-0.

4...d6 is comparatively rare, but I'm not sure why because it looks like a decent move to me. 5 Bc4 Nb6 6 Bb3 c4! 7 Bc2 dxe5 8 Nxe5 N8d7 9 Qh5 g6 10 Qe2 Nxe5 11 Qxe5 f6 12 Qe2 Qd5 13 0-0 Bf5, as played in D.Pavasovic-M.Palac, Pula 2001, is roughly equal, as is 5 exd6 e6 6 d4 Bxd6 7 dxc5 Bxc5 8 Bd3 0-0 9 Qc2 h6 10 0-0 Nc6 (S.Tiviakov-R.Ponomarev, Pamplona 2005). In practice White's main response has actually been 5 d4, when 5...cxd4 leads us back to the previous section.

5 Bc4 (Diagram 35)

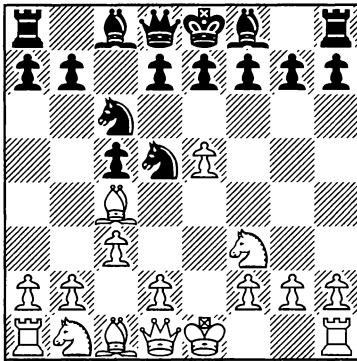


Diagram 35 (B)

Still no d2-d4

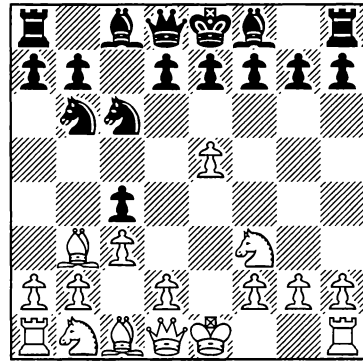


Diagram 36 (W)

The ambitious option

5...Nb6

5...e6 will usually transpose back to Chapter Three after 6 0-0 d6 7 d4 cxd4 8 cxd4 or 6 d4 cxd4 7 cxd4 d6.

6 Bb3

6 Be2 has been played a few times, although I suspect as a way to avoid theory rather than to try for an advantage. Black has a few good responses, including 6...d6 7 exd6 Qxd6 8 0-0 e5 and 6...g6 7 d4 cxd4 8 cxd4 Bg7 9 Nc3 d6.

6...c4!? (Diagram 36)

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

The most ambitious choice, exploiting the fact that White's d-pawn has remained on its initial square. Now any move by this pawn will lead to a positionally desirable capture on d3, and with no natural protection on offer from its adjacent number, this raises issues over the safety of the e5-pawn. The risk for Black is that the c4-pawn is similarly vulnerable, either to a direct attack by pieces (Qe2, Na3) or via b2-b3 which aims to loosen Black's control of the centre. This unusual position in the centre takes us away from the typical structures that we have met so far, and the positional considerations raised by this structure are more complex.

Black's main alternative is 6...d5, and this is covered in Game 32. He can also play 6...g6 7 d4 cxd4, which transposes to Game 29.

7 Bc2 Qc7

Black immediately guns for the e5-pawn, a logical and consistent response to his previous move. 7...d6 and 7...g6 are covered in Game 31.

8 Qe2 g5! (Diagram 37)

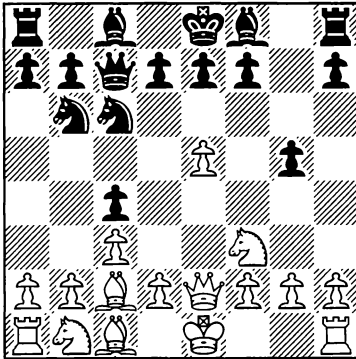


Diagram 37 (W)

What's this?

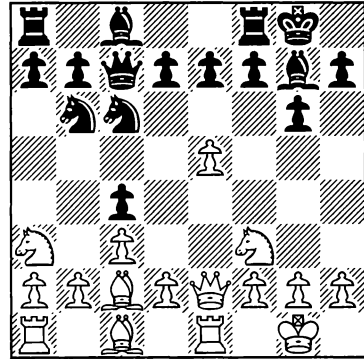


Diagram 38 (B)

The c4-pawn is weak

It's this creative idea, a discovery of Ivanchuk's, that really justifies Black's decision to play 6...c4. It may seem excessively risky to lunge forward with the g-pawn, and I can understand many players being wary of playing such a move. But the fact is White can no longer hold on to his e5-pawn, and for Black it's worth making some concessions – sacrificing a wing pawn and compromising safety on the kingside – in order to capture a pawn of such importance.

The problem with a slower move such as 8...g6 is that it gives White time to protect e5 and then attack Black's weak point after 9 0-0 Bg7 10 Re1 0-0 11 Na3! (Diagram 38), while 8...d6?! is most certainly a mistake because after 9 exd6 Qxd6 Black has lost a tempo with his queen.



TIP: If Black wants to play an early ...d6 or ...d5 he should leave his queen on d8, as he does in Games 31-32.

9 h3



WARNING: 9 Nxc5?! should be avoided, as 9...Qxe5 10 d4 cxd3 11 Bxd3 Qxe2+ 12 Bxe2 Bg7 is at least equal for Black. He certainly enjoys the advantage in the centre, and the exchange of queens minimizes problems regarding king safety.

The idea behind 9 h3 is to force Black to capture on e5 with the knight, thus avoiding an early exchange of queens. If White wants to play without queens, 9 e6!? dxe6 and only then 10 Nxc5 Qe5 11 d4 cxd3 12 Bxd3 Qxe2+ 13 Bxe2 (Diagram 39) introduces significant advantages over the line with 9 Nxc5:

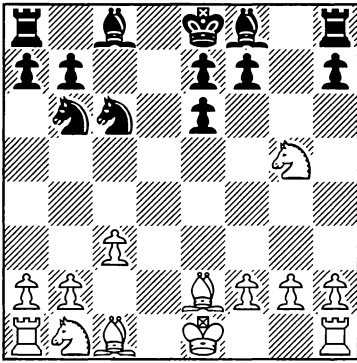


Diagram 39 (B)

A complex queenless middlegame

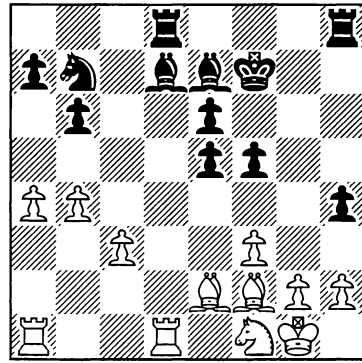


Diagram 40 (B)

White's majority is activated

1. Black's central pawn structure is now compromised. It still has the potential to become strong, but it is less flexible and advances could leave behind weaknesses.
2. After the exchange of the d2-pawn for c4, White will be left with a queenside majority that could be utilized in the long run.

This probably all sounds a bit abstract, so let's take a brief look at a successful White strategy from the game S.Tiviakov-D.Stellwagen, Dutch Championship 2006: 13...h6 14 Ne4 e5 15 Ng3 (White wants to prevent ...Bf5) 15...e6 16 0-0 f5 17 Nd2 Bd7 18 Nc4 Nxc4 19 Bxc4 h5 20 Rd1 h4 21 Nf1 Rd8 22 Be3 Be7 (22...f4?! kicks back the bishop but 23 Bd2 h3 24 g3 demonstrates the inflexibility of Black's central pawns – they can't move any further without creating a weakness) 23 f3 Kf7 24 Bf2 Na5 25 Be2 b6 26 b4! Nb7 27 a4! (Diagram 40) 27...Bc8 28 Ne3 Rxd1+ 29 Bxd1 Nd6 30 a5 Bb7 31 c4 Rc8 32 Be2 Ke8 33 axb6 axb6 34 Ra7 Ra8 (Tiviakov prefers

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

34...Rc7) 35 Rxa8+ Bxa8 36 c5! bxc5 37 bxc5 Nf7 38 Bb5+ Kd8 39 Nc4 Bd5 40 c6 Bxc4?? (Black can hang on with 40...Kc8, when 41 Bb6 Bd8 42 Nd6+ Nxd6 43 Ba6+ Kb8 44 Bxd8 Bxc6 45 Bxh4 – Tiviakov – offers White winning chances due to his passed h-pawn) 41 Bb6+ and Black resigned since 41...Kc8 42 Bxc4 is hopeless. In all honesty it's difficult to believe that White has any real advantage to speak of after 13 Bxe2, but there's considerable play left in the position and endgame lovers may well prefer this to the complications arising in the main line.

Finally, for those with gambiteering tendencies it might be worth exploring 9 Na3!? (**Diagram 41**).

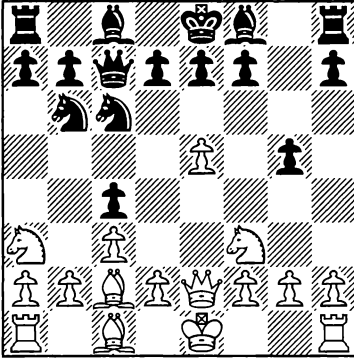


Diagram 41 (B)

Worth investigating

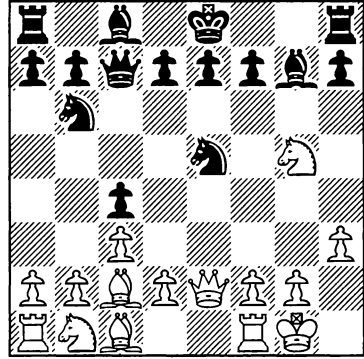


Diagram 42 (B)

Difficult to assess

So far there's been little experience with this move, but White's play in 'Rentner2'-R.Nebula, Internet (freestyle) 2006, is worth checking out: 9...g4 10 Nb5 Qb8 11 Nh4!? (11 Nd6+? loses to 11...exd6 12 exd6+ Be7!) 11...Nxe5 12 0-0 d6 13 b3 a6 14 Nd4 Qc7 15 a4!? cxb3 (15...Bh6!? 16 Nhf5 Bg5) 16 Bxb3 Nbc4 17 f4! gxf3 18 Nhxf3 (the half-open f-file offers White serious compensation for the pawn) 18...Bg7 19 d3 Na5 20 Nxe5 Nxb3 21 Qh5! Bxe5 (initially *Fritz* likes 21...0-0, but it soon changes its opinion after 22 Rxf7! dxe5 23 Rxg7+ Kxg7 24 Bh6+) 22 Qxf7+ Kd8 23 Qxb3 Bg4 24 Be3 Kd7 25 h3 Bh5 26 Qe6+ Ke8 27 Rae1 Bg6 28 Bg5 Kd8 29 Nf5 Bxf5 30 Rxf5 h6 31 Bh4 Qd7 32 Rfxe5! Qxe6 (32...dxe5 loses to 33 Qxe5 Re8 34 Re4) 33 Rxe6 Kd7 34 Rxe7+ and Black resigned.

9...Bg7 10 0-0 Nxe5

I'm surprised by the lack of games with 10...h5!?. Perhaps it's because after 11 e6 dxe6 12 Nxg5 Qe5 White can avoid the queen swap by playing 13 Ne4!?, intending to meet 13...f5 with 14 f4!.

11 Nxg5 (Diagram 42)

This position is quite difficult to evaluate. White's e5-pawn is gone, leaving Black with a clear superiority in the centre, especially as d2-d4 will almost certainly be answered by ...cxd3 giving Black a 2-0 majority. On the other hand, as soon as White moves his d-pawn his position can be classified as 'normal', whereas Black faces issues regarding his development. Castling short involves some risks, while arranging to castle queenside takes a bit of time. If Black decides on the latter option White can begin activity on the queenside, with a2-a4-a5 a common theme (although White must be wary of delaying his own queenside development for too long). Overall an extremely complicated battle is expected (see Game 30 for further coverage).

Theoretical?

This line is positionally very complex but it's not as theoretical as the 6 Bc4 gambit. There are not as many tactical lines and fewer games have been played.

Statistics

Taking the position after 11 Nxg5, White has scored 51% in around 100 games. Overall, 6 Bc4 Nb6 7 Bb3 has scored 54% in just over 1000 games.

Illustrative Games

Game 30

□ **D.Pavasovic** ■ **A.Fedorov**

Rabac 2004

1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 Nf3 Nc6 5 Bc4 Nb6 6 Bb3 c4 7 Bc2 Qc7 8 Qe2 g5 9 h3 Bg7 10 0-0 Nxe5 11 Nxg5 d5

Black has also played 11...h6 here, and that move does have the value of avoiding 12 Bxh7. Black might feel, however, that this sort of thing should be encouraged rather than prevented!

12 a4!? (Diagram 43)

There are other options available (12 Re1 and 12 b3 are sensible, although it's worth noting that unlike in some lines Black has c4 pretty well covered here), but 12 a4 has actually been White's most common move, which says something about the unorthodox nature of this position.

At first sight it looks a bit strange to further delay development on the queenside, but this pawn push does have some points. Firstly, a4-a5 will interfere with Black's development: either the knight will retreat to d7, blocking the bishop, or after ...Bd7 the knight will have to return to the back rank on c8. Secondly, after the knight retreats from b6 Black has less control – temporarily at least – of both c4

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

and d5. And finally, if Black castles queenside, which looks likely, a5-a6 will create a weakness in Black's camp.

Brave souls can grab a pawn with 12 Bxh7, but there's no doubting Black's compensation after 12...Bf6 13 d4 cxd3 14 Bxd3 Nxd3 15 Qxd3 and he could also consider making it an exchange sacrifice with 12...Rxh7!? 13 Nxh7 Bf5.

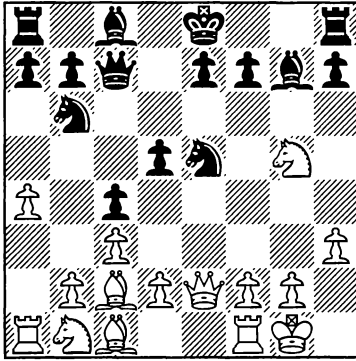


Diagram 43 (B)

Requiring unorthodox play

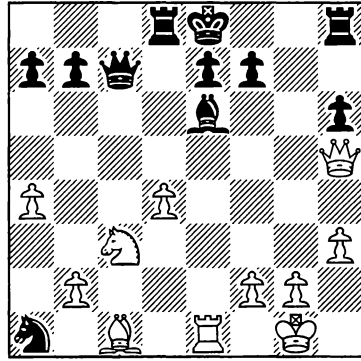


Diagram 44 (W)

A powerful sacrifice

12...Bd7

Jan Timman demonstrated a good approach for Black in a game against Tiviakov (Hilversum 2006): 12...h6 13 Nf3 Nbd7!? 14 Re1 (White could try 14 Na3 a6 and only then 15 Re1) 14...Bf6! (defending e7 and also preparing ...Rg8) 15 d4 cxd3 16 Bxd3 Nxd3 17 Qxd3 Nc5! 18 Qxd5 Be6 19 Qh5, and here 19...0-0-0! would have given Black good play for the pawn. For some reason Timman chose the unnatural 19...Rd8?, whereupon Tiviakov unleashed a brilliant sacrifice with 20 Nd4! Bxd4 21 cxd4 Nb3 22 Nc3!! Nxa1 (**Diagram 44**).

Here White played 23 Rxe6, which is fine, but Tiviakov later demonstrated that 23 d5! is even stronger: for example, 23...Bc8 24 Ne4 Qb6 25 d6 Be6 26 Nf6+ exf6 27 Rxe6+ Kd7 28 Rxf6 Rdf8 29 Qe5! Qc6 30 Bxh6 Rhg8 31 Qe7+ Kc8 32 d7+ Qxd7 33 Bxf8 and White wins.

13 a5 Nc8 14 d4 cxd3 15 Bxd3 Nd6 16 Re1 0-0-0 17 Be3

S.Tiviakov-A.Shabalov, Port Erin 2005, continued instead with 17 Nf3 Nc6!? 18 a6 b6 19 Na3 e5 20 Nb5! Nxb5 21 Bxb5 Rhg8 22 Bg5 Rde8 23 Qd2 e4 and here 24 Bf4 looks more logical than Tiviakov's 24 Nh2. After 24...Ne5 25 Bxd7+ Qxd7 26 Nxe5 Bxe5 27 Kh1! (as suggested by Rowson) Black's activity on the kingside is balanced by concerns over his open king and possible pressure on the d5-pawn.



NOTE: With such potential in the centre, Black often prefers to keep pieces on the board rather than exchange them, and Shabalov's 17...Nc6 ensured that ...e5 came with a threat to fork with ...e4. Conversely, Tiviakov was only too happy to ease the congestion by trading a pair of knights with 20 Nb5.

17...Kb8 18 Nd2 h6 19 Ngf3 (Diagram 45)

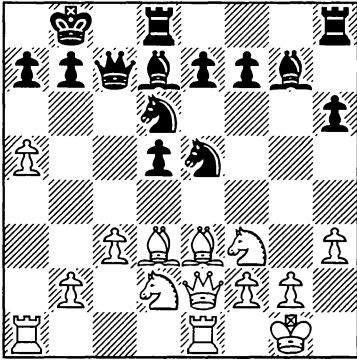


Diagram 45 (B)

Bishop or knight?

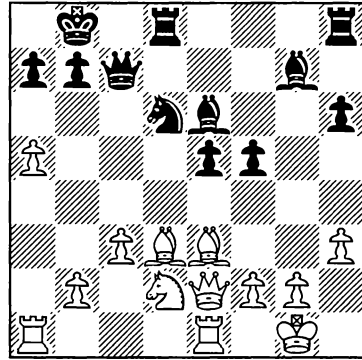


Diagram 46 (B)

White has consolidated

19...Nxf3+

Because White has developed his queenside, he is in a stronger position to meet a knight retreat: for example, 19...Nc6 20 c4!.

19...Nxd3!? is a serious alternative; there's certainly a temptation to get rid of this bishop. After 20 Qxd3 e6 21 Bf4 White looks to be getting some sort of grip on the position, so maybe Black should consider offering a pawn with 21...f6 22 Bg3 e5!? 23 Qxd5 Bc6 in order to blunt White's remaining bishop.

20 Qxf3 e5?!

This pawn sacrifice is probably too speculative, because with accurate play Pavasovic is able to regroup successfully.

20...e6 21 a6 b6 22 Bf4 f6 23 c4! is a line which demonstrates how Black's centre can suddenly come under pressure (23...e5 can be met by 24 cxd5! exf4 25 Rac1). Instead 20...Bc6 is probably best, when 21 Bd4 can be met by 21...e5!? intending 22 Bxe5? Bxe5 23 Rxe5 Ne4!. Perhaps Fedorov avoided this line because of 22 Rxe5!, which looks like a promising exchange sacrifice for White.

21 Qxd5 Be6 22 Qf3 f5 23 Qe2! (Diagram 46) 23...f4?

Maybe Fedorov had been banking on this move, but it fails due to tactical reasons.

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

23...Rhg8 is better, but Black's compensation after 24 f4 e4 25 Qf2! Nc8 26 Bf1 is minimal.

24 Bxf4! exf4 25 Qxe6

There are two white pieces lined up on the d-file, but Black has no way to exploit their vulnerability.

25...Nf7 26 Qe2 Qd7 27 Bc4! Rhe8 28 Ne4 Ng5 29 Bb5! Qf5

After 29...Rxe4 30 Qxe4 Qxb5 31 Qxf4+ Ka8 White has a choice of winning lines, with 32 h4 Nh7 33 Qf7 being the easiest option.

30 Bxe8 f3 31 Ng3! 1-0

Game 31

□ D.Pavasovic ■ P.Wells

European Championship, Warsaw 2008

1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 Nf3 Nc6 5 Bc4 Nb6 6 Bb3 c4 7 Bc2 d6 (Diagram 47)

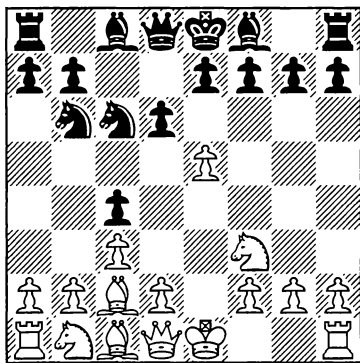


Diagram 47 (W)

The restrained 7...d6

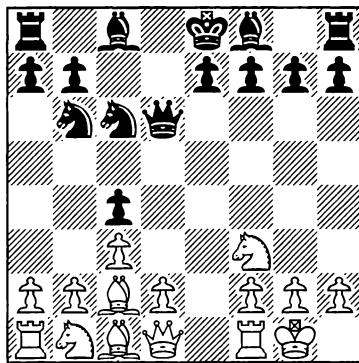


Diagram 48 (B)

9...Bg4 or 9...g6?

This is Black's main alternative to 7...Qc7 8 Qe2 g5. The move 7...g6 has also been played a few times, and here a transposition to the note to Black's 9th move is possible after 8 Na3 d5 9 exd6 Qxd6 10 0-0 Bg7 11 b3.

8 exd6

White answers 7...d5 in the same way.

8...Qxd6

8...e5!? intending ...Bxd6 is an ambitious alternative. After 9 0-0 Bxd6 10 d3 cxd3 (Black must avoid 10...0-0? 11 dxc4 Nxc4?? 12 Qd3!) 11 Qxd3 Black has some initial

problems to overcome but he will hope that his central pawn, which may be joined by ...f5, will stand him in good stead later on. The recent game B.Predojevic-A.Timofeev, Sarajevo 2008, demonstrated how White can make life difficult for Black: 11...h6 12 Rd1 Bc7 13 Qe2 Qe7 14 b3 (14 b4!?) 14...f5 15 Ba3 Qf6 16 Nd4! Nxd4 17 cxd4 Kf7 18 Nc3 Bd7 (18...exd4 19 Nb5 looks a bit better for White, but this is probably what Black should try) 19 Bc5! Rhe8 (19...e4 20 f3!) 20 Bxb6 Bxb6, and here I'm not really sure why White avoided the obvious 21 dxe5 Qc6 22 Nd5 which looks very good for him.

9 0-0 (Diagram 48) 9...Bg4

This move is very natural (and quite a rare opportunity given that Black always has to watch out for Bxf7+ tricks). He can continue his development with ...e6 and ...Be7, while ...Ne5 becomes a major consideration too.

Against 9...g6 White should take the opportunity to play 10 b3! Bg7 11 Na3!. The position after 11...cxb3 12 axb3 0-0 13 d4 remains complex, but White's central structure offers fairly good chances of success. For example, 13...Bg4 14 h3 Bxf3 15 Qxf3 e5! 16 Nb5 Qd7 17 Rd1 exd4 18 Nxd4 Nxd4 19 cxd4 f5 20 b4! Kh8 21 Ra5! Rac8 22 Bb3 and White was ready to push his d-pawn in D.Pavasovic-A.Grosar, Bled Olympiad 2002.



TIP: Always be on the lookout for this idea of b2-b3, trying to induce an exchange on b3 to loosen Black's grip on the centre.

Trying to maintain the c4 stronghold with 11...Be6 12 Qe2 Na5!? looks a bit artificial, although White achieved only a slight advantage after 13 Nb5 Qd7 14 Nbd4 Bg4 15 h3 Bxf3 16 Nxf3 0-0 17 Re1 Rfe8 18 Ne5 in A.Gavrilov-D.Bocharov, St Petersburg 2004.

10 Re1

Flicking in 10 h3!? Bh5 before playing 11 Re1 is worth consideration. The point is revealed in the line 11...Ne5 (11...e6 12 b3 transposes to 10 Re1 e6) 12 Rxe5 Bxf3 13 Qe1 Bd5 14 b3 e6 15 Ba3 Qc6 16 Bxf8 Kxf8 17 Rg5 f6 18 Rg3 h5, when in comparison to the game Adams-Miladinovic below, the extra move h2-h3 must favour White at least slightly: for one thing, Black can no longer play ...h4-h3.

10...Ne5!? (Diagram 49)

This move leads to a very unusual position. 10...e6 reaches more 'normal' positions, in which White again aims for an early b2-b3. For example, 11 h3 (the immediate 11 b3 is also possible) 11...Bh5 12 b3 Be7 (12...Bg6!? 13 Ba3 Qd5 14 Bxf8 Kxf8 15 Na3 Rd8 was J.Nunn-V.Anand, Monte Carlo (rapid) 1994, and here as well as Nunn's 16 bxc4 White could consider the sneaky 16 Rb1!? which contains the trap 16...Rd7? 17 bxc4 Nxc4?? 18 Rb5!) 13 Na3 cxb3 14 axb3 0-0 15 d4 a6 16 Nc4! Nxc4?! (Black should probably prefer 16...Qc7, when 17 Be4 keeps an edge for White) 17 bxc4 Bg6?! 18 Bxg6 hxg6 19 d5! and with Ba3 coming Black was facing severe problems in D.Pavasovic-M.Ramesa, Rabac 2004.

11 Rxe5 Bxf3 12 Qe1 Bd5 13 b3! (Diagram 50)

White must get going on the queenside.

13...e6 14 Ba3 Qc6 15 Rg5!

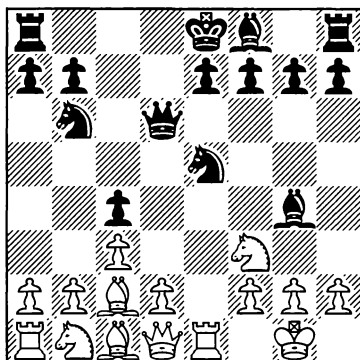


Diagram 49 (W)

Raising the stakes

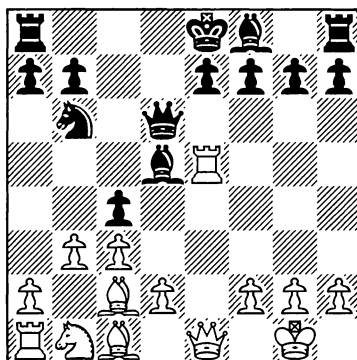


Diagram 50 (B)

Queenside action begins

This is a clever refinement by Pavasovic on the stem game M.Adams-I.Miladinovic, Belgrade 1995. That game continued 15 Bxf8 Kxf8! 16 Rg5 f6 17 Rg3 h5! 18 Na3 (18 h4 is met by 18...g5! – Adams – intending 19 hxg5 h4 20 Rg4?! h3!) 18...h4 19 Rg4 h3!? (19...e5 is a decent alternative) 20 bxc4 Bxg2 21 Nb5. In this position Black blundered with 21...Nxc4??, and White reached a winning position after 22 Nd4! Ne5 23 Rg3! Qd5 24 Bb3 Qe4 25 Nxe6+ Ke7 26 Qxe4 Bxe4 27 Re1 Nf3+ 28 Rxf3 Bxf3 29 Nd4+. However, 21...e5! 22 Qb1 a5 23 Qb3 (Adams) would have left the position roughly equal and very unclear.

15...f6 16 Rg3 0-0-0

The point behind Pavasovic's novelty is demonstrated by the sequence 16...h5 17 Bg6+! Kd7 18 h4!, when clearly ...g5 is no longer available to Black!

17 Bxf8 Rhxf8 18 Na3! (Diagram 51)

It's much more important to fight the battle over c4 than to grab a hot pawn on g7. After 18 Rxg7 Rg8! 19 Rxg8 Rxc8 20 g3 Nd7, intending ...Ne5, White has every right to be fearful of his king's safety.

18...g6 19 bxc4 Bxc4?! (Diagram 52)

I'm not convinced by the idea of trading the bishop rather than the knight. It's true that after 19...Nxc4 20 Nxc4 Bxc4 21 d3 Black cannot play 21...Bd5?? due to 22 c4, but 21...Ba6 22 d4 Bc4 23 Bb3 can only be a bit better for White.

20 Nxc4 Nxc4 21 d3 Nb6 22 a4! e5 23 a5 Nd5 24 d4!

Bringing the rook on g3 back into the game. I feel that White must be somewhat better now because the safety of Black's king will always be an issue.

24...Qc7 25 a6 b6 26 c4 Qxc4?

26...Nf4! would have restricted White advantage.

27 dxe5

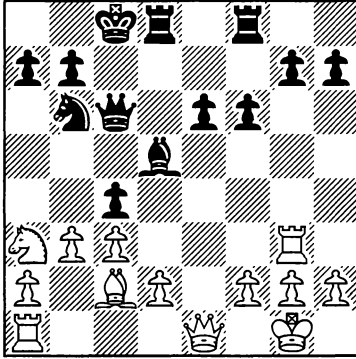


Diagram 51 (B)

Pressuring c4

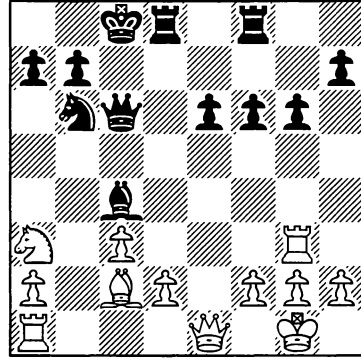


Diagram 52 (W)

The wrong recapture?

27 Bb3! intending 27...Qb5 28 dxe5 or 27...Qb4 28 Qc1+ Nc7 29 Qc6! is even stronger.

27...Nf4 28 Re3 Kb8

28...fxe5 is probably best, even if 29 Bxg6! threatening Rc1 is good for White.

29 e6! Qc6 30 Be4! Qxe6 31 Bf3 Qd7 32 Re7 (Diagram 53)

White's passed e-pawn may have disappeared, but it has been replaced by a decisive attack against the black king. However, this game is far from over...

32...Rfe8!

The only chance.

33 Qe4! Ne2+!

Capturing on e7 allows checkmate: for example, 33...Rxe7 34 Qa8+ Kc7 35 Qxa7+ Kd6 36 Qxb6+ Ke5 37 Ra5+ Nd5 38 Qe3+ Kd6 (or 38...Kf5 39 g4 mate) 39 Rxd5+ Kc7 40 Qa7+ Kc8 41 Qa8+ Kc7 42 Qb7 mate. Peter Wells's choice in the game tries to cause some confusion (and perhaps gained a decisive few seconds on the clock...).

34 Kf1! Qxe7

There was no decent defence available and White can now force mate. I assume from the repetition of moves that Pavasovic was very short of time here.

35 Qa8+ Kc7 36 Qc6+ Kb8 37 Qa8+ Kc7 38 Qb7+! Kd6 (Diagram 54) 39 Rd1+??

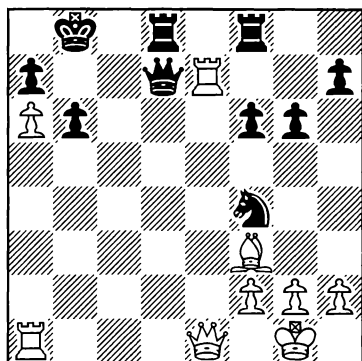


Diagram 53 (B)

White's attack is deadly

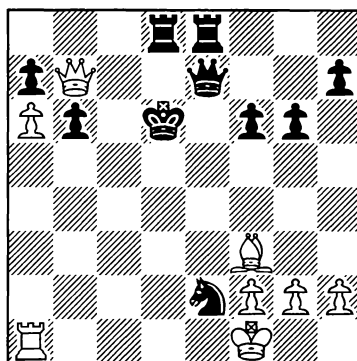


Diagram 54 (W)

Can you see the mate?

A tragedy for Pavasovic, especially considering the quality of the preceding play. 39 Qc6+! would force a win after 39...Ke5 40 Qe4+! Kd6 41 Rd1+ Kc5 42 Qc2+ Kb4 43 Rb1+ Ka5 44 Qa2+ Qa3 45 Qxa3 mate.

39...Ke6!

Suddenly the tables are turned: White has no follow-up and Black wins on material.

40 Re1 Kf7 0-1

Game 32

□ **S.Tiviakov** ■ **K.Kulaots**

Gausdal 2005

1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 Nf3 Nc6 5 Bc4 Nb6 6 Bb3 d5

It makes little difference whether Black plays 6...d5 or 6...d6; in either case White should capture.

7 exd6 Qxd6

7...c4 8 Bc2 transposes to Game 31.

8 Na3! (Diagram 55)



NOTE: 8 d4 cxd4 would transpose to the 6 Bc4 gambit.

White's idea with 8 Na3 is to play in a similar fashion to the gambit lines (indeed

there are some transpositions), but without allowing Black to win a pawn! Unlike the alternative 8 0-0, this move prevents 8...c4.

8...Be6

Again we see this bishop move, offering the exchange of White's best minor piece. 8...Bg4? 9 Bxf7+! should be a familiar tactic by now, and 8...Bf5 9 d4 cxd4 10 Nb5 followed by Nxd4 gains time attacking the bishop. Black can, however, prepare ...Bf5 with 8...a6 and this is a reasonable way to play. The main line has been 9 0-0 Bf5 10 d4 (Rowson suggests 10 Bc2!?) 10...cxd4 11 Nxd4 Nxd4 12 cxd4 e6 13 Qf3 Qd7 14 d5!? Nxd5 15 Rd1 Bxa3 16 bxa3 0-0 (**Diagram 56**).

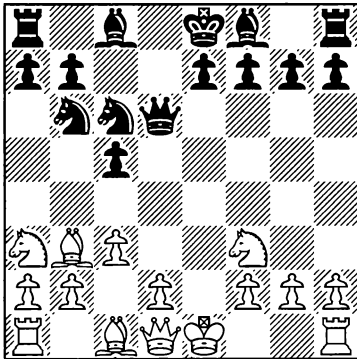


Diagram 55 (B)

Preventing ...c4

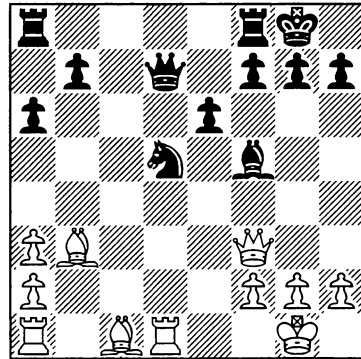


Diagram 56 (W)

White has compensation

White undoubtedly enjoys compensation for the pawn, although whether this is enough to claim an advantage against accurate defence is unclear. In S.Tiviakov-M.Carlsen, Wijk aan Zee 2007, Black equalized after the sequence 17 h4 (threatening to trap the bishop with g2-g4; 17 Bxd5 exd5 18 Rxd5 doesn't win a piece, as 18...Qe6 threatens a back-ranker) 17...Rac8! (preparing ...Bc2) 18 Bxd5 exd5 19 Rxd5 Qe6! (there's no longer a back-ranker, but this move is still effective) 20 Rxf5 Qe1+ 21 Kh2 Rxc1 22 Rxc1 Qxc1 23 Qxb7 Qxa3 24 Qd5 and the players agreed a draw. 17 Bb2!? threatening to capture on d5 keeps the tension, and 17...Rad8 18 h4 f6 19 Rd4 (19 Rac1!?) 19...Bg6 20 h5 Bf7 21 h6 gave White the initiative in D.Sermek-P.Soln, Dresden 1998.

9 d4 (Diagram 57) 9...Bxb3

9...cxd4 10 0-0 again transposes to the 6 Bc4 gambit, but White can also play 10 Nb5! Qd7 11 Nbx4 Bxb3 12 Qxb3 which reaches the note to Black's 11th move, below. 11 0-0!? Bxb3 12 axb3! might be even stronger: 12...e5 13 cxd4 a6 14 d5 Nb4 15 Nc3 f6 16 Nxe5!? fxe5 17 Qh5+ Qf7 18 Qxe5+ gave White a dangerous attack in

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

M.Kobalija-D.Khismatullin, Krasnoyarsk 2007, while 12...e6 13 Bf4! Nd5 14 Bg3 leaves Black struggling in view of the threat of c3-c4.

10 Qxb3

10 axb3!? cxd4 11 Nb5 Qd7 12 Nbx d4 Nxd4 13 Nxd4 g6! 14 0-0 Bg7 15 Be3 0-0 was equal in M.Adams-P.Leko, Wijk aan Zee 2006, although here White has the opportunity to transpose to the previous note with 12 0-0!?

10...cxd4 11 Nb5! Qb8

The main line runs 11...Qd7 12 Nbx d4 Nxd4 13 Nxd4 e6 14 0-0 Be7 15 Rd1 (**Diagram 57**), reaching a position that can also arise via the 6 Bc4 gambit. White is a bit better here, and Black has to play carefully to avoid this advantage increasing without any real hope of gaining much counterplay himself – not an enviable task. Here's an example of White's edge carrying all the way through to the endgame: 15...0-0 16 Bf4 Qa4 17 Be3 Qxb3 18 axb3 Nd5 19 Nf5! Bf6 20 Nd6 b6 21 b4 Rfd8 22 Nb5 a6 23 Nd4 Nxe3 24 fxe3 Bxd4 25 Rxd4 Rxd4 26 exd4 Kf8 27 Kf2 Ke7 28 Ke3 b5 29 b3 Rc8 30 Kd3 Rc6 31 c4 f5 32 c5 and White, with a protected passed pawn on c5, has excellent winning chances, S.Tiviakov-S.Savchenko, German League 2005.

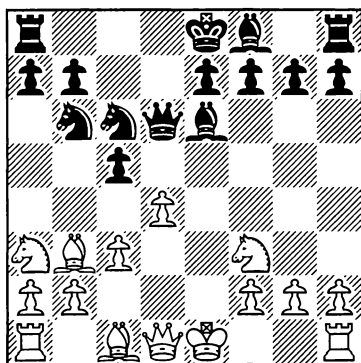


Diagram 57 (B)

A choice of captures

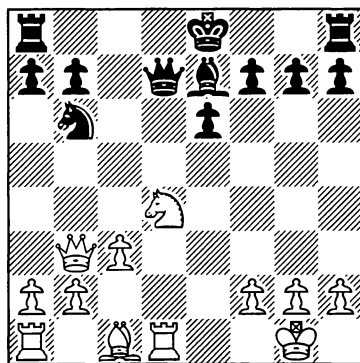


Diagram 58 (B)

A nagging edge

12 g3!?

Now 12 Bf4 is a major threat, although after the simple 12 Nbx d4 Nxd4 13 Nxd4 I'm not really sure what the queen is doing on b8 and this might well be a simpler route to an advantage.

12...Qd8?!

Two queen moves in a row is a bit of a luxury here, and it's unsurprising that Black now faces some major problems. Tiviakov indicates 12...d3 as a better try, his main line running 13 0-0 e5 14 Ng5 Nd8 15 Rd1 h6 16 Nf3 Ne6 17 Be3 with a

slight advantage to White (if 17...Be7 18 c4 and Qxd3 regains the pawn, as 18...e4 19 Nd2 Qe5 20 Nxa7! is good for White).

13 Bf4 Rc8 14 0-0-0! (Diagram 59)

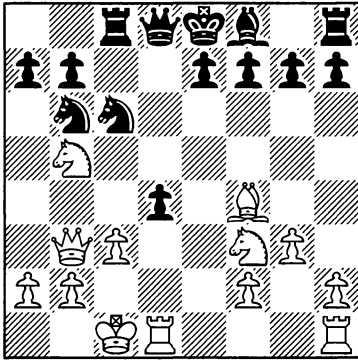


Diagram 59 (B)

Black trails in development

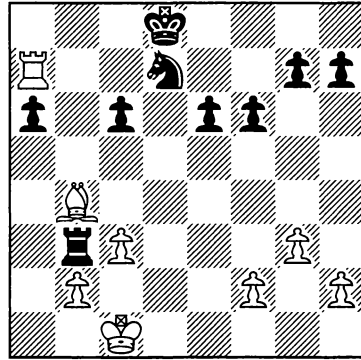


Diagram 60 (B)

An imprisoned rook

14...Qd5

Yet another queen move! Given White's lead in development Black's desire to trade queens is understandable, but as we've seen before this doesn't always solve all the problems.

15 Nfxd4 Nxd4 16 Nxd4 Qxb3 17 axb3 e6 18 Rhe1 Bc5

In an ideal world Black would like to prevent Nb5, but 18...a6? 19 Nxe6! is far from ideal!

19 Nb5! a6

White now gains two positional advantages: bishop for knight, and pawn weaknesses in Black's camp. 19...Ke7 is a move Black would like to play but this leaves the bishop on c5 lacking squares, something that can be exploited by 20 b4! Bxb4 21 Re4 Bc5 22 b4 Bxf2 23 Bd6+.

20 Nd6+ Bxd6 21 Rxd6 Rc6 22 Rxc6 bxc6 23 Be5 Rg8 24 Re4 Ke7 25 Rb4 Nd7 26 Rb7 f6 27 Bd4 Rb8 28 Ra7 Rxb3

With his a-pawn ready to be captured at any moment, Black had to try this move, but now his rook becomes incarcerated.

29 Bc5+ Kd8 30 Bb4! (Diagram 60) 30...c5 31 Kc2! c4 32 Rxa6 Ne5 33 Rd6+ Kc7 34 Rd4 1-0

Black didn't want to wait for f2-f4 followed by Rxc4. Another impressive game by Tiviakov in the c3 Sicilian.

Summary

Even though I think Black can equalize with accurate defence against the 6 Bc4 gambit, I still feel that it's an excellent weapon, especially if the White player is well prepared. One practical advantage White has is that Black's best options from a theoretical perspective are those in which he boldly takes the pawn (e.g. 10 Na3 dxc3!) and not everyone is willing to play in this fashion. Refusing the gambit, a natural response of many who might not be 100% familiar with the theory, is not an entirely safe option because White seems to enjoy a definite edge here. Also, 7...g6 is interesting but somewhat risky (see Game 29).

Lines without an early d2-d4 are complex and difficult to handle for both sides due to the unusual pawn structures and piece developments (Games 30 and 31 are striking examples). This line should particularly appeal to those who thrive in unorthodox positions.


There are many transpositional possibilities, and it should be stressed that both lines in this chapter are mainly weapons against those who play (after 4 d4 cxd4 5 cxd4) 5...d6 6 Nf3 Nc6. Black players who prefer 5...e6 6 Nf3 d6 can reach this line by maintaining a knight on d5 after Bc4.


In summary, White players have three main possibilities against 2...Nf6: the traditional main line, the 6 Bc4 gambit, and lines without d2-d4. As well as having all the transpositions covered, from a repertoire viewpoint it might be worth adopting more than one line. This would certainly offer more flexibility to alter your approach depending on your opponents' strengths and weaknesses.


Chapter Five


Second Move Alternatives

 Introduction

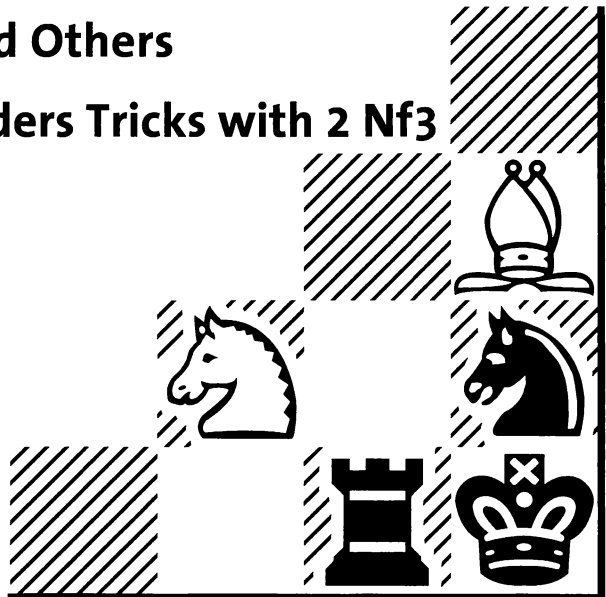
 2...e6

 2...d6

 2...e5

 2...g6 and Others

 Move Orders Tricks with 2 Nf3



Introduction

In this final chapter we look at Black's second move alternatives to 2...d5 and 2...Nf6. I also briefly cover a second move alternative for White (!) in 2 Nf3, which can sometimes be a useful move order to employ for those with wider repertoires.

Perhaps the most important alternative for Black is 2...e6, which is a perfectly solid move. Probably the only reason it's not seen more often is that after 3 d4 d5 Black must be prepared to transpose to the French Defence, which is something the majority of Sicilian specialists would be reluctant to do.

With 2...d6 Black allows White to set up his desired pawn centre and aims for a Pirc/King's Indian system of development. At some point Black will strike in the centre with ...e5, whereupon White can decide between closing the centre with d4-d5 or creating a more open position with dxe5.

2...e5 is a preventative measure against d2-d4, but it doesn't stop it completely. Interestingly, the positions that are reached resemble 1 e4 e5 openings more than the Sicilian, and comparisons with the Giuoco Piano and the Two Knights Defence are useful here.

Finally there's 2...g6, which differs from 2...d6 in that Black's idea after 3 d4 cxd4 4 cxd4 is to strike in the centre with 4...d5.

2...e6

1 e4 c5 2 c3 e6 3 d4 d5

Black rarely plays 3...cxd4 4 cxd4 d5 because after 5 e5 we get a French Advance where Black has prematurely exchanged on d4, thus allowing early Nc3 possibilities for White.

4 exd5

4 e5 (**Diagram 1**) is a direct transposition to the French Advance (1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3). This would be a natural choice for those who normally play this variation against the French, whereas 4 exd5 is very similar to (and can transpose to) the French Tarrasch.

4...exd5

There's still time for Black to transpose to 2...d5 by playing 4...Qxd5.

5 Nf3 (**Diagram 2**)

5 Be3 is a decent alternative, but I prefer 5 Nf3 because after 5...cxd4 (5...c4 is also possible) 6 Bxd4 Nc6 I would rather have a knight on d4 than a bishop. Black has an IQP so in general exchanges favour White, but I'm not entirely convinced that White should be allowing Black to eliminate this bishop so early. 7 Nf3 Nxd4 8 Qxd4 Nf6 (8...a6!? avoiding Bb5+ is also possible) 9 Bb5+ Bd7 10 Bxd7+ Qxd7 11

0-0 Be7 12 Nbd2 0-0 13 Rfe1 Bd8! (with no opposite number to worry about, Black's bishop becomes a strong piece) 14 Qd3 Bb6! 15 Nd4 Rfe8 was J.Palkovi-D.King, German League 1996, and looks okay for Black. White wants to pressure the d5-pawn, but moving the knight from d4 to do so brings Black's bishop to life, bearing down on f2

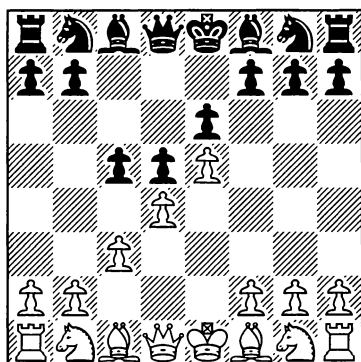


Diagram 1 (B)

An option for White

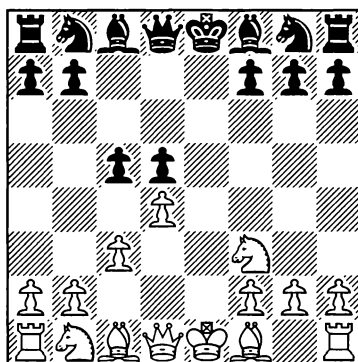


Diagram 2 (B)

Knights before bishops!

5...Nc6

The most common move, but Black has a few alternatives:

a) 5...Bd6 6 dxc5 Bxc5 7 Bb5+ Nc6 8 0-0 transposes to the main line.

b) 5...Nf6 develops the knight to its most natural square, but in this variation Black usually prefers a ...Bd6/...Nge7 set-up in order to avoid potential problems caused by a Bg5 pin. In view of this 6 Bg5! is a logical response, and here 6...Be7 (if Black plays 6...Qb6 then 7 Bxf6!? Qxb2 8 Nbd2 gxf6 9 Rb1 Qxc3 10 Bb5+ Nc6 11 0-0 is a promising gambit for White) 7 dxc5 Bxc5 8 Bb5+ Nc6 9 0-0 would transpose to 7...Nf6 below.

c) 5...a6!? (**Diagram 3**) prevents Bb5 and also suggests some queenside expansion by Black. 6 Bd3 c4 7 Bc2 Bd6! (the right way to develop; after 7...Nf6 8 0-0 Be7 9 Ne5! 0-0 10 Nd2 b5 11 Re1 Be6 12 Nf1 Qc8 13 Ng3 everything pointed to a successful kingside attack for White in J.Emms-A.Mestel, British Ch., Plymouth 1989) 8 0-0 Ne7 9 b3! cxb3 10 axb3 0-0 11 Ba3 Nbc6 12 Re1 Ng6 (12...Bf5 is safer) was J.Emms-I.Glek, German League 1995. White is better here, and instead of 13 Bxd6 I should have played 13 Ng5!? intending to meet 13...Bxa3? with 14 Qh5! h6 15 Nxf7!.

White can also exploit the slow nature of 5...a6 by playing 6 g3!?, which is favoured by Rozentalis and Harley in their book *Play the c3 Sicilian*. I feel that the

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

logical response from Black is to pressure d4 with 6...Nc6 7 Bg2 Bg4, but perhaps White can respond aggressively with 8 h3 Bh5 9 0-0 cxd4 10 Qb3!?

d) 5...c4 6 b3 cxb3 (6...b5 7 a4!) 7 axb3 Bd6 8 Bd3 is very similar to 5...a6 and also a bit better for White: for example, 8...Ne7 9 0-0 Nbc6 10 Re1 0-0 11 Nbd2 Bf5 (11...Bg4? 12 Bxh7+!) 12 Nf1 Rc8 13 Ne3 Bg6 14 Nh4, A.Kharlov-J.Gokhale, Calcutta 2001.

6 Bb5 (Diagram 4)

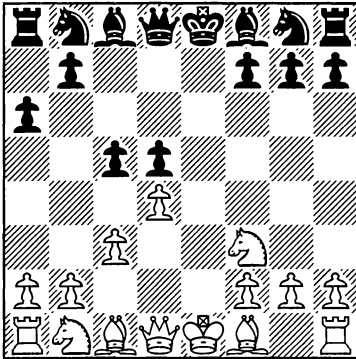


Diagram 3 (W)
Preventing Bb5

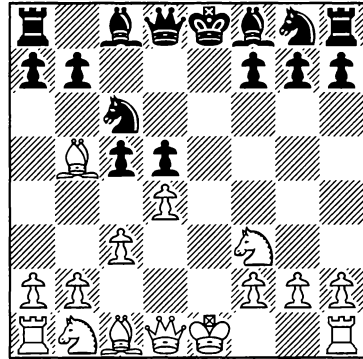


Diagram 4 (B)
The most active move

Again White can play 6 Be3 but I still feel that the bishop is slightly misplaced here, either after 5...c4 or 6...cxd4 7 Nxd4 Nf6! 8 Bb5 Bd7 9 0-0 Bd6 when I would certainly prefer it to be more aggressively posted on g5.

6...Bd6

6...Nf6 7 0-0 Be7 8 dxc5 Bxc5 transposes to 7...Nf6.



TIP: As a general rule, White should wait for Black to move his f8-bishop before capturing on c5, thus gaining a tempo by forcing the bishop to move again.

Blocking with 6...c4?! makes less sense once the bishop has already developed to b5, and in A.Karpov-J.Polgar, Linares 1994, the ex-World Champion exploited this error with some energetic play: 7 Ne5! Qb6 8 Bxc6+ bxc6 9 0-0 Bd6 10 b3! cxb3 11 axb3 Ne7 12 Ba3! Bxe5 (12...Bxa3 is stronger, but 13 Rxa3 0-0 14 Re1 still gives White a nice advantage) 13 dxe5 Be6 14 Qd4! Nf5 15 Qc5 h5 16 Nd2, when Black was unable to castle and was held in an uncomfortable dark-squared bind.

7 0-0

7 dxc5 Bxc5 8 0-0 is another way of reaching the main line. Black's only way to stir

things up is with 7...Qe7+, but 8 Be3! Bxc5 9 Qxd5 Bxe3 10 Bxc6+ Kf8 11 fxe3 bxc6 12 Qd3 left him with no real compensation for the pawn in F.Mayr-A.Kubasky, correspondence 2003.

7...Nge7

After 7...Nf6 8 dxc5 Bxc5 White should take the opportunity to pin the knight with 9 Bg5! (Diagram 5).

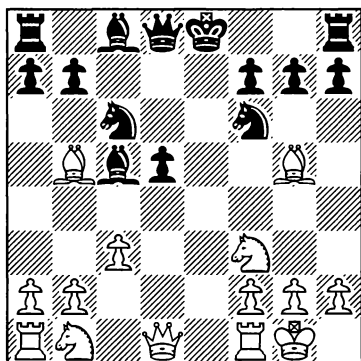


Diagram 5 (B)
An awkward pin

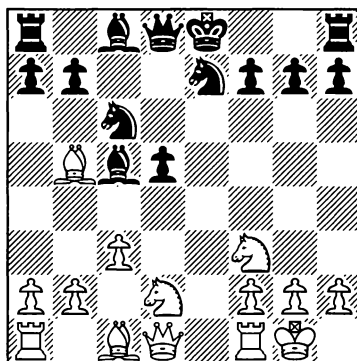


Diagram 6 (B)
Preparing Nb3

If 9...0-0 White can safely grab the pawn with 10 Bxf6 Qxf6 (10...gxf6 is clearly undesirable!) 11 Qxd5, and 11...Bb6 12 Qg5! Qxg5 13 Nxg5 Rd8 14 Na3 left Black struggling to justify his sacrifice in M.Godena-D.King, Swiss League 2002.

Black should protect the d5-pawn with 9...Be6, after which White can return to the Nd2-b3 plan, and 10 Nbd2 h6 11 Bh4 0-0 12 Nb3 Bb6 13 Nbd4 Rc8 14 Re1 Bg4 15 Qd2 gave him a small but solid advantage in D.Pavasovic-Z.Arsovic, Bizovac 2005.

8 dxc5 Bxc5 9 Nbd2 (Diagram 6)

Now 9...0-0 10 Nb3 is normal, and this reaches positions which can arise via the French Tarrasch, although in that line (1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 c5 4 exd5 exd5 5 Ngf3 Nc6 6 Bb5 Bd6 7 dxc5 Bxc5 8 0-0 Nge7 9 Nb3) White doesn't always play c2-c3 so early. It's impossible to give this the full theoretical coverage it really deserves – the French Tarrasch after all is an important and major opening in its own right. Instead here's a summary of what I believe to be White's best chance of gaining an edge in the main lines:

a) 10...Bb6 11 Re1! (planning Be3, which Black's next move prevents; Black's dark-squared bishop is his best minor piece, so it's usually favourable for White to exchange this) 11...Nf5 12 Bd3 h6 (12...Qd6 13 Bxf5 Bxf5 14 Be3! forces a trade of

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

bishops in view of 14...Bc7? 15 Bc5; 12...Bc7 13 g3 h6 14 Bc2 Bb6 15 Qd3 g6 16 Bf4 was a bit better for White in J.Emms-E.Mortensen, Hastings 1995/96) 13 Bc2! (**Diagram 7**) 13...Be6 14 Qd3 Qf6 (14...g6? 15 Bxh6! Nxf6 16 Rxe6! is a trick worth remembering) 15 Be3! (the knight on f5 is temporarily disabled) 15...Bxe3 16 Rxe3 g6 17 Re1 Rad8 18 Rad1 with a small plus for White, D.Pavasovic-I.Jelen, Bled 2003.

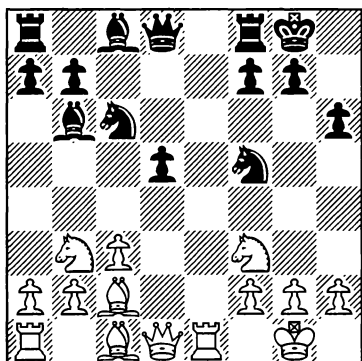


Diagram 7 (B)
Planning Qd3

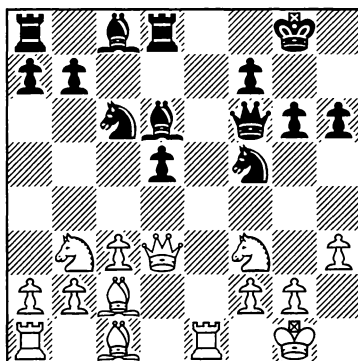


Diagram 8 (W)
The main line

b) 10...Bd6 11 Bd3! (preventing 11...Bg4 in view of 12 Bxh7+) 11...h6 (now ...Bg4 is possible again; hence White's next move) 12 h3 Nf5 (12...Bc7 13 Re1 Qd6 is answered by 14 Be3! intending Bc5) 13 Re1 Qf6 (or 13...Bc7 14 Bc2 Qd6 15 Qd3 – threatening 16 g4 – 15...g6 16 Qd1! h5 17 Bg5 Bd7 18 Qd2 Rae8 19 Rad1, A.Motylev-A.Roghani, Yerevan 2001) 14 Bc2! (again we see White employing the Bc2/Qd3 battery) 14...Rd8 15 Qd3 g6 (**Diagram 8**).

There are quite a few options for White in this mainline position, but perhaps the most promising is Timofeev's 16 Nh2!? intending Ng4: for example, 16...Bxh2+ 17 Kxh2 d4 18 Bf4 b6 19 Nd2 Nd6 20 Qg3, A.Timofeev-I.Lysyj, Sochi 2007.

I can't find any games with 16 Qe2!? but this also looks interesting. After 16...Kh7 (protecting h6 in the event of Bxf5) 17 Bd2 White plans to build up slowly with Rad1 and Bc1, coordinating his pieces and adding pressure to d5.

Returning to the position after 9 Nbd2, Black has a couple of independent options which avoid transposing into the French Tarrasch. These are 9...a6 and 9...Bg4, both of which are covered in Game 33.

Theoretical?

Not really. The moves in the main line are pretty logical and many of them could be worked out over the board.

Statistics

White has scored 55% from the position after 9...0-0 10 Nb3.

Illustrative Game

Game 33

□ J.Emms ■ P.Rossiter

London 1999

1 e4 c5 2 c3 e6 3 d4 d5 4 exd5 exd5 5 Nf3 Nc6 6 Bb5 Bd6 7 0-0 Nge7 8 dxc5 Bxc5 9 Nbd2 a6!? 10 Bd3 Bg4 (Diagram 9)

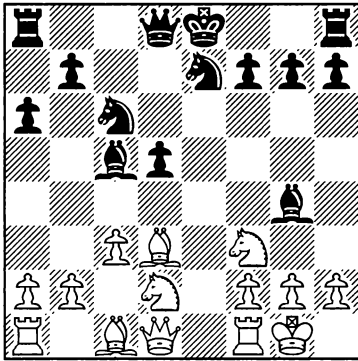


Diagram 9 (W)

A move-order wrinkle

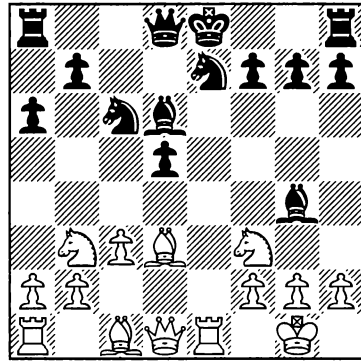


Diagram 10 (B)

Black can't castle yet

Black exploits the c3 Sicilian move order in order to play the desirable ...Bg4 before White has a chance to prevent it, as he does in the transposition to the French Tarrasch after 9...0-0 10 Nb3 Bd6 11 Bd3! h6 (11...Bg4? 12 Bxh7+!) 12 h3. On the other hand, Black now has more work to do before he can castle!

Black has also played ...Bg4 without the preparatory ...a6. After 9...Bg4 I feel that White's best chance of an edge lies with the active 10 Qa4!. For example: 10...Bh5 11 Qh4 Bg6 12 Nb3 Bb6 13 Bxc6+ bxc6 14 Re1 (T.Luther-S.Foisor, Arvier 2007); or 10...Bd7 11 Nb3 Bb6 (11...Bd6 12 Bf4) 12 Re1 0-0 13 Be3! offering to trade bishops.

11 Nb3 Bd6

11...Ba7 was tried in the later game S.Tiviakov-F.Berkes, British League 2005. After the typical 12 Re1! h6 13 Be3! the Hungarian Grandmaster avoided the trade of bishops with 13...Bb8. Positionally speaking this is desirable, but Black must be

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

careful not to fall behind in development, and here Tiviakov could have punished this extravagance with 14 h3! (Rowson) intending 14...Bh5 (14...Bxf3 is wiser, but 15 Qxf3 Ne5 16 Qd1 Nxd3 17 Qxd3 is still nice for White) 15 g4! Bg6 16 Bxg6 fxg6 17 Nc5, which presents Black with problems over the b7-pawn and the e6-square.

12 Re1 (Diagram 10) 12...Qc7!

12...h6 prepares short castling without allowing Bxh7+, but after 13 h3! Black has to be ready to accept a slightly inferior position with 13...Bxf3 14 Qxf3 Ne5 15 Qe2 Nxd3 16 Qxd3. 13...Bh5 is what he would like to play, but 14 g4! Bg6 15 Bxg6 exploits the pin on the e-file and after 15...fxg6 16 Nbd4 Black faces concerns over Ne6.

13 h3 Bh5 14 Be3

14 Bg5 achieves nothing after 14...f6!, but maybe White should consider 14 Bc2!? so that 14...Ne5 can be met by 15 Nbd4 without having to worry about ...Nxd3.

14...0-0-0!?

This took me by surprise – I don't think I'd ever faced queenside castling before in this variation.

The problem for Black is that 14...0-0? 15 Bxh7+! still works: 15...Kxh7 16 Ng5+ Kg6 17 g4 Rh8 18 gxh5+ Rxh5 19 Ne6! fxe6 20 Qg4+ wins an exchange. I was expecting 14...Ne5! 15 Be2 Nc4 and was trying to work out whether I should play 16 Bc1 or 16 Bxc4 dxc4 17 Nbd2 intending to grab a pawn after 17...0-0 (17...0-0-0!?) 18 g4 Bg6 19 Nxc4.

15 Nbd4 Ne5 16 Be2 Nc4 17 Bc1! (Diagram 11)

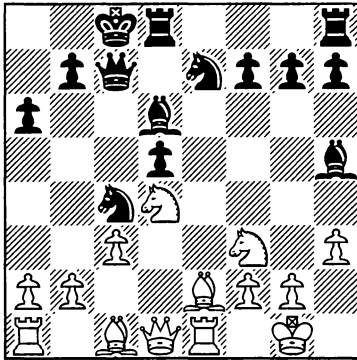


Diagram 11 (B)

Ready for queenside action

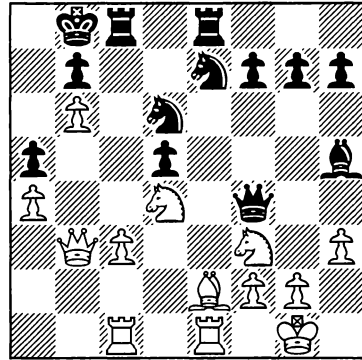


Diagram 12 (B)

Mating chances for White

In comparison to the previous note I was more than happy to retreat my bishop

back to base, as now b2-b3 will force the knight to retreat to an awkward square and facilitate White's operations on the queenside. A pawn storm is the obvious plan in view of the position of Black's king.

17...Kb8 18 b3 Nb6 19 Be3! Rhe8

19...Qxc3 is very risky. During the game I was intending 20 Nb5 axb5 21 Bxb6 Rc8 22 Bd4, but 22 Nd4 might be even stronger.

20 Rc1?!

I'm not sure why I played this; it doesn't look necessary. I can't believe Black can take the c-pawn after 20 a4!.

20...Bf4 21 Bxf4 Qxf4 22 a4 Nbc8 23 b4 Nd6 24 b5 a5 25 Qb3 Rc8?

After 25...Nef5! there's no time for 26 b6, which loses a piece to 26...Nxd4 27 Nxd4 (27 cxd4 Rxe2!) 27...Bxe2 28 Nxe2 Rxe2!. Instead White should play 26 Qxd5, but Black gains some activity here with 26...Nxd4 27 Qxd4 Ne4.

26 b6! (Diagram 12)

I was confident I had a clear advantage because in many lines there are mating threats against the black king (for example Qxd5xa5-a7 or Qb5xa5-a7 if Black moves his knights). My opponent responded by pushing the 'randomizer' button, a good practical idea as I was running a bit short of time.

26...Nef5!? 27 Nxf5 Rxe2!

After 27...Nxf5 28 Qb5! Black has nothing better than 28...Rxe2 29 Qxe2, but this is winning for White: for example, 29...Nd4 30 Qe5+ Qxe5 31 Nxe5 Ne2+ 32 Rxe2 Bxe2 33 Re1 Ba6 34 Nxf7 Rxc3 35 Nd6!.

28 Qxd5!

28 Nxd6 allows Black to escape with a nice drawing sequence: 28...Bxf3 29 Nxc8 Qh4! 30 Rf1 (30 Rxe2 Qg5) 30...Qg3! 31 fxg3 Rxg2+ 32 Kh1 Rf2+ 33 Kg1 Rg2+ etc.

28...Nxf5 29 Qxa5 Rce8!

The only chance. 29...Rxe1+ 30 Rxe1 Rd8 31 Ne5! forces mate with Qa7+ and Qa8.

30 Qa7+ Kc8 31 Qa8+ Qb8 (Diagram 13)

31...Kd7 loses to 32 Qxb7+ Kd6 33 Qc7+.

32 Qxb8+?

I could see with this move that I would regain my piece and reach a favourable endgame. However, 32 Rxe2! Rxe2 33 Qa5! wins: for example, 33...Bg6 (or 33...Qf4 34 Qc5+ Kd7 35 Qb5+) 34 Qc5+ Kd8 (or 34...Kd7 35 Qb5+) 35 Qf8+ Re8 36 Rd1+.

32...Kxb8 33 Rxe2 Rxe2 34 g4 Nd6 35 gxh5 Nc4 36 a5 Kc8?

Why give White the chance to protect the a5-pawn? After 36...Nxa5 37 Rd1 Kc8 Black has fighting chances to force a draw.

37 Ra1! (Diagram 14)

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

The rook is temporarily passive but the two-pawn advantage should be decisive in the end. The rest of the game, influenced by a sudden-death finish, is not particularly accurate, but I managed to get there in the end.

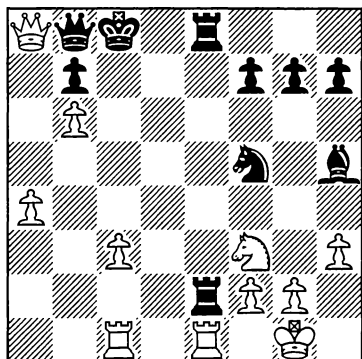


Diagram 13 (W)

White misses a win

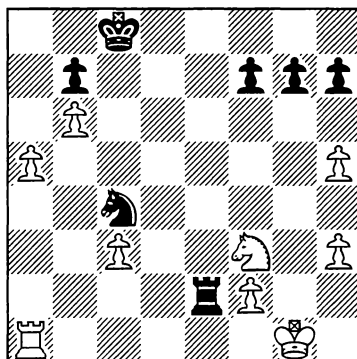


Diagram 14 (B)

Two pawns are enough

37...Rc2 38 Ng5 Rxc3 39 Nxf7 Kd7 40 Kg2 h6 41 f4 Re3 42 Ra4 Nb2 43 Rd4+ Kc6 44 Nd8+ Kc5 45 Rd7 Nc4 46 Nxb7+ Kb5 47 Nd6+ Nxd6 48 Rxd6 Re7 49 Rd2 Kxa5 50 Rb2 Rb7 51 Kg3 Ka4 52 Kg4 Ka3 53 Rb1 Ka2 54 Rb5 Ka3 55 Kf5 Ka4 56 Rb1 Ka5 57 Kg6 Ka6 58 f5 Ka5 59 f6 gxf6 60 Kxh6 f5 61 Kg6 f4 62 h6 f3 63 h7 f2 64 Ra1+ Kxb6 65 h8Q 1-0

2...d6

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d6 3 d4 Nf6!



NOTE: A vast number of games continue 3...cxd4?! 4 cxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 and now 5...g6 (or even 5...a6).

This can be explained by the fact that chess players are creatures of habit, and those with little or no experience against the c3 Sicilian may simply rely upon the moves they normally play against the Open Sicilian (e.g. the Dragon with 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6, or the Najdorf with 5...a6). Then they realize that neither of these openings are quite so effective when White has a nice pawn on d4! It's true that Black also plays ...cxd4 in our main line here, but at least he could argue that he does so only after forcing White to commit his bishop to d3.

4 Bd3! (Diagram 15)

Simply defending e4 and maintaining the centre is a much better practical option than 4 dxc5 Nc6! (4...Nxe4?? loses the knight to 5 Qa4+) and now 5 cxd6 Nxe4!, 5 f3 d5!, and finally 5 Bc4 Nxe4 6 Bxf7+ Kxf7 7 Qd5+ (7 Qh5+ Kg8 8 Qd5+ e6 9 Qxe4 d5) 7...e6 8 Qxe4 d5. All of these lines are okay for Black and, more importantly, would be prepared well by 2...d6 practitioners.

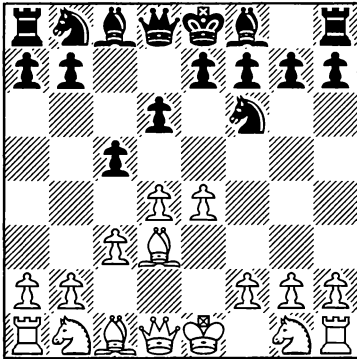


Diagram 15 (B)

The practical choice

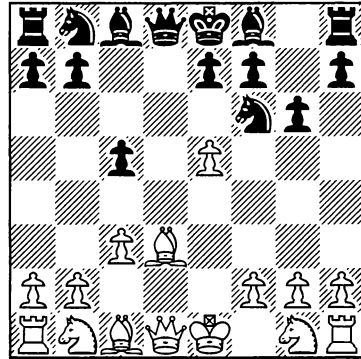


Diagram 16 (B)

A problem for Black

4...cx-d4

No clear main line has emerged with 2...d6. I've chosen 4...cx-d4 5 cxd4 g6 because it has been seen most frequently, but Black has also tried quite a few other options.

a) If Black wishes to fianchetto his bishop, then it's certainly safer to first trade on d4. 4...g6 gives White the option of playing 5 dxc5 dxc5 6 e5! (**Diagram 16**), when everything looks better for him: 6...Nfd7 7 e6!; 6...Ng4 7 Bb5+ Nc6 8 Bxc6+ bxc6 9 Qxd8+ Kxd8 10 Nf3; 6...c4 7 Qa4+; and finally 6...Nd5 7 Be4 Nb6 8 Qxd8+ Kxd8 9 Na3, as played in J.Lautier-J.Polgar, Dos Hermanas 1994.

b) White need not be worried by 4...Nc6 5 Nf3 Bg4, as 6 d5! is an effective response. For example, 6...Bxf3 (6...Ne5 can be met by 7 Nxe5!) 7 Qxf3 Ne5 8 Bb5+! Nfd7 9 Qe2 a6 10 Ba4 c4 11 0-0 b5 12 Bc2 Nc5 13 b4! Ncd3 14 Be3! and now because of the threat of f2-f4, Black was forced to give up a pawn with 14...g5 15 Bxg5 in I.Rausis-L.Barczay, Paris 1994.

c) 4...e5 is a solid move. Black's idea after 5 Nf3 Nc6 6 d5 Ne7 is to play ...g6 and ...Bg7 with a reasonable King's Indian set-up. The most challenging response is to cut across Black's plans with 7 Bg5! (**Diagram 17**), and after 7...Ng6 8 Bb5+! Bd7 9 Bxf6 gxf6 10 a4 White has good chances of gaining an advantage because of Black's weaknesses on the kingside which will not be helped by the trade of light-

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

squared bishops: for example, 10...a6 11 Bxd7+ Qxd7 12 Nbd2 f5 13 Qc2 fxe4 14 Nxe4 Be7 15 Ng3 Nf4 16 0-0 Nxd5 17 Rad1 Qe6 18 Nf5 Rg8 19 Qe4 Nf6 20 Qxb7 Rd8 21 Nxe7 Qxe7 22 Qxa6, A.Rizouk-S.Movsesian, Shenyang 2000.

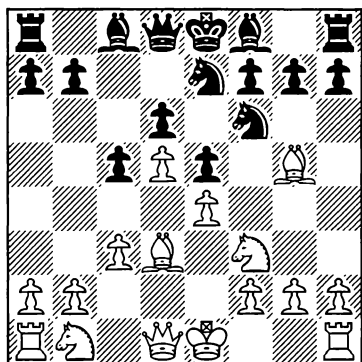


Diagram 17 (B)

Preventing Black's plan

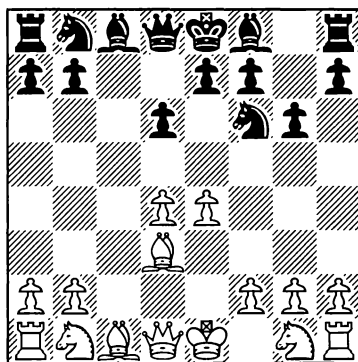


Diagram 18 (W)

Black fianchettoes

For those who would prefer not to block the centre, 5 dxe5 dxe5 6 Nf3 is a good alternative. White's long-term strategy here is to exploit the permanent hole Black has left on d5, and this aim can be facilitated by some subtle exchanges of minor pieces. For example, 6...Nc6 7 Na3! Be7 8 Nc4 Qc7 9 Bg5! (to remove a defender of d5) 9...Be6 10 Ne3 Rd8 11 Bxf6 Bxf6 12 Qe2 a6 13 Bc4! b5! (after 13...Bxc4 14 Qxc4 White is ready for Nd5) 14 Bxe6!? (14 Bd5 is a decent alternative) 14...fxe6 15 0-0 0-0 16 Rfd1, as played in M.Sorokin-A.Fedorov, Calcutta 1999. It's true that the d5-square is no longer an issue for Black, but White still enjoys an edge here. Black must be careful not to allow his doubled e-pawns to become targets and he must also find a role for the bishop on f6.

5 cxd4 g6 (Diagram 18)

5...e5 6 Nf3 Nc6?! 7 d5 Ne7 is a good deal inferior in comparison to 4...e5 5 Nf3 Nc6, because of the open c-file. In fact after 8 Nc3 g6 9 0-0 Bg7 10 Qa4+! Bd7 11 Qb4 Black is already in some trouble.



NOTE: An open c-file almost always helps White in King's Indian-type structures because the queenside is where he normally attacks.

6...exd4 7 Nxd4 Nc6 is stronger, although in my opinion White must be a bit better after 8 Nxc6 bxc6 9 0-0 – this somehow reminds me of a good version of the Scotch Opening.

6 Nc3 Bg7 7 h3

Preparing Nf3 without allowing a pin with ...Bg4. If White wants to answer...e5 with d4-d5 there's an argument here for 7 Nge2, so that a subsequent ...f5 by Black can be met by f2-f3. For example, 7...0-0 8 0-0 Nc6 9 h3 e5 10 d5 Ne7 11 Be3 Ne8 12 f3 f5 13 Qb3 and White was better in N.Vlassov-A.Kavalerov, St Petersburg 1994. In general these positions are much more favourable for White than normal King's Indians because he has not had to spend time opening the c-file – Black has done all the hard work for him!

7...0-0 8 Nf3 Nc6

8...e5 9 dxe5! (9 0-0 exd4! 10 Nxd4 Nc6 is okay for Black) 9...dxe5 10 0-0 Nc6 transposes to our main line.

9 0-0 e5 (Diagram 19)

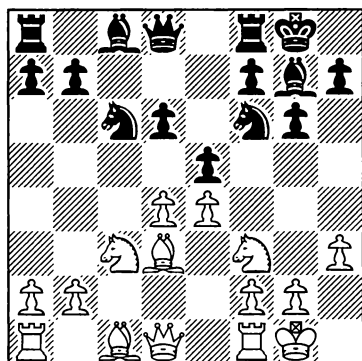


Diagram 19 (W)

Push or trade?

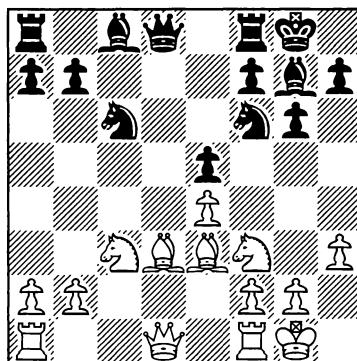


Diagram 20 (B)

An edge for White

Black has to challenge White's centre at some point.

10 dxe5

The simple approach. It's tempting to maintain the tension with 10 Be3, but this allows Black to equalize with 10...exd4! 11 Nxd4 d5! 12 exd5 Nxd5 13 Nxd5 Qxd5. It's still possible to play 10 d5, though. For example, 10...Ne7 11 Be3 Nh5 (or 11...Ne8 12 Nd2 f5 13 f3) 12 Rc1 Nf4 13 Nb5 with an edge for White, A. Fedorov-V.Bologan, Belfort 1999.

10...dxe5

Black has occasionally played 10...Nxe5 11 Nxe5 dxe5, but it makes more sense for him to keep this knight in view of ...Nd4 possibilities.

11 Be3 (Diagram 20)

The symmetrical pawn structure suggests that Black shouldn't have too many

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

problems here, so why have so many c3 Sicilian experts been happy to play this position? In reality it's not that easy for Black because it's difficult for him to find a suitable role for his bishop on g7. Indeed, it would probably rather be on e7 (with Black's pawn back on g7) where it would perform an excellent job of controlling some key squares.

White will aim for activity on the queenside, where he certainly enjoys more presence, and down the open c- and d-files. Both sides will look out for ways to utilize the outposts in the centre (the d5-square for White and the d4-square for Black). For further coverage see Game 34.

Theoretical?

Only if White plays 4 dxc5, which I suggest he should avoid. 4 Bd3 is easy to play and requires little or no memorization.

Statistics

White has scored an excellent 65% from the position after 11 Be3. Overall White has scored 51% in around 2400 games with 4 Bd3.

Illustrative Game

Game 34

□ J.Emms ■ A.Hunt

Port Erin 1999

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d6 3 d4 Nf6 4 Bd3 cxd4 5 cxd4 g6 6 Nf3 Bg7 7 h3 e5 8 dxe5 dxe5 9 0-0 Nc6 10 Nc3 0-0 11 Be3 Nh5

Typical play by Black: the intention is ...Nf4, and ...Nd4 also now becomes a possibility.

11...Be6 can be met by 12 Bb5!. White's not-so-subtle idea is to simply capture on c6, thus robbing Black's position of its dynamism and saddling him with queen-side weaknesses. The value of such an approach is seen in the line 12...Qa5 13 Bxc6! bxc6 14 Qc2 h6 15 Na4 Nd7 16 Nd2 Rfc8 17 b3 c5 18 Nb2! Nb6 19 Ndc4 Nxc4 20 Nxc4 Qa6 21 Rac1 (Smirin), when White will follow up with Rfd1 and Black's position is bereft of counterplay.

Avoiding the trade on c6 forces White to work harder, but 12...Na5 13 Qe2 a6 14 Bd3 Nc6 (Adams suggests 14...Nh5!? as an improvement, but I still think White keeps an edge here with 15 Rfd1) 15 Rfd1 gave White the advantage in M.Adams-B.Gelfand, Wijk aan Zee 1994. White has no need to fear 15...Nd4 in view of 16 Bxd4 exd4 17 Bc4! intending 17...Nh5 18 e5 Nf4 19 Qe4!.

Perhaps the best idea for Black is 11...Qe7!, defending e5 and intending a very quick ...Rd8 and ...Nd4. Black has good chances to equalize here: for example, 12 Bb5 Rd8 13 Qa4 Bd7 14 Bg5 a6 15 Nd5! Nxd5 16 Bxc6 Nf6! 17 Bxd7 Qxd7 18 Qb3 Qe7 19 Rfd1 h6 20 Bxf6 Bxf6, as played in D.Sermek-Z.Velickovic, Celje 2004, although White's position is still slightly easier to play after some 'tidying up' with 21 g3 followed by Kg2.

12 Bc4 (Diagram 21)

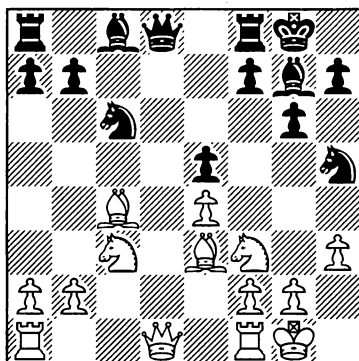


Diagram 21 (B)

The bishop prefers c4

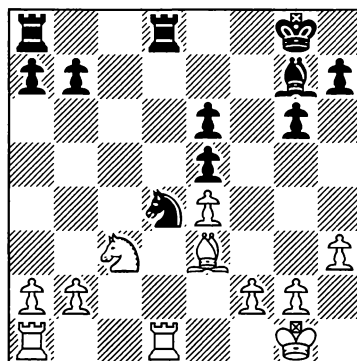


Diagram 22 (W)

Better for White

With the tension resolved in the centre, c4 is clearly a much better square for this bishop.

12...Nf4

12...Nd4?! is premature because of 13 Nd5!, when both 13...Ne6 14 Qb3 and 13...b5 14 Bb3 Nxb3 15 Qxb3 are good for White.

13 Qxd8 Rxd8 14 Ng5!



WARNING: It's true that Black has an active knight on f4, but removing it with 14 Bxf4? exf4 would be a grave mistake which would suddenly elevate Black's g7-bishop from the worst to the best minor piece on the board!

14...Be6 15 Nxe6 Nxe6 16 Bxe6 fxe6 17 Rfd1 Nd4 (Diagram 22)

The knight on d4 provides some compensation for Black's structural weaknesses, but there's enough room on the board for White to 'play around' this knight and thus keep some advantage. Furthermore, Black still has a very poor piece on the g7-square.

18 Rac1 Rac8 19 Kf1 Kf7

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

I must confess that I hadn't been forced to do much work to reach this position, since I had been following – albeit via a slightly different move order – the model game M.Adams-L.McShane, British Ch., Hove 1997. It's worth giving this game in full because it demonstrates that despite appearances this is not an easy position for Black to defend: 19...Rd7 20 Ne2 Rcd8 21 Bg5 Rf8 22 Rd3 h6 23 Be3 g5 24 Rdc3 Rfd8 25 Rc8 Rxc8 26 Rxc8+ Kf7 27 Nc1 Nb5 28 f3 b6 29 Ke2 Nd6 30 Rc6 Ke7 31 a4 Rb7 32 Nd3 Kd7 33 Rc2 Rc7 34 Rxc7+ Kxc7 35 b3 Nf7 36 Kd2 Bf8 37 Kc3 Kc6 38 Nb2 Bd6 39 Nc4 Bc7 40 Kd3 Bd8 41 Bd2 Be7? (Black should keep the bishop with 41...Bc7 42 Bc3 a6 – Adams) 42 Bc3 Bd6 43 Nxd6! Kxd6 44 Bb4+ Kc6 45 Kc4 Nd6+? (45...a6 46 Bf8! h5! is the last chance, but Adams indicates a winning plan of 47 Bb4 followed by Bd2-e3, Kb4 and a4-a5) 46 Bxd6 Kxd6 47 Kb5 Kc7 48 Ka6 Kb8 49 g4 Ka8 50 b4 Kb8 51 a5 bxa5 52 Kxa5! Kc7 53 Ka6 and Black resigned: after 53...Kb8 54 b5 Ka8 55 b6 axb6 56 Kxb6 he loses all his kingside pawns.

20 Ne2 Ke8 21 Bg5 Rxc1 22 Rxc1 Rd7 23 Rc8+ Kf7 24 Nc1! (Diagram 23)

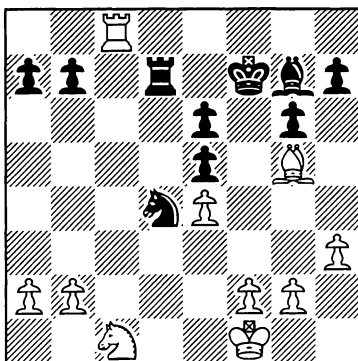


Diagram 23 (B)

Intending Nd3

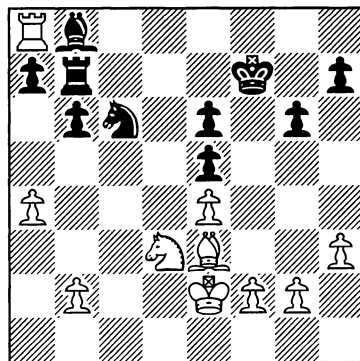


Diagram 24 (W)

Can you see White's rook?

Playing around the knight on d4 and planning Nd3.

24...Nc6 25 Be3 Bf8 26 Ke2 Bd6

If 26...Nd4+ White is now in a position to capture this piece. Following 27 Bxd4! exd4 28 Nd3 the knight is classically positioned, blocking the passed pawn, and White intends to follow up with f2-f4, e4-e5 and Kf3-e4 etc.

27 Nd3 Rc7 28 Ra8! b6 29 a3 Rb7 30 a4 Bb8?! (Diagram 24)

I think both of us found this position quite amusing – I couldn't remember a rook being trapped in such a way before. Given some time Black could play ...Ne7-g8-f6-e8-c7, but that's a considerable number of moves! Objectively speaking it was better to force the rooks off immediately with 30...Rb8 31 Rxb8 Bxb8.

31 b4! Bd6

31...Ne7 32 b5! Ng8 33 Nb4 followed by Nc6 puts paid to Black's rook-trapping idea.

32 b5 Rb8 33 Rxb8 Nxb8 34 a5! Nd7 35 a6! (Diagram 25)

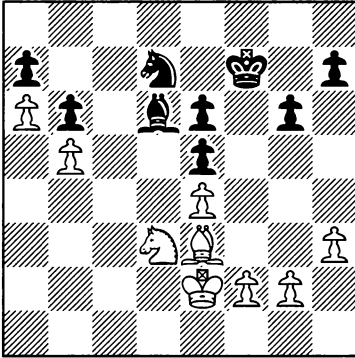


Diagram 25 (B)

Fixing the queenside

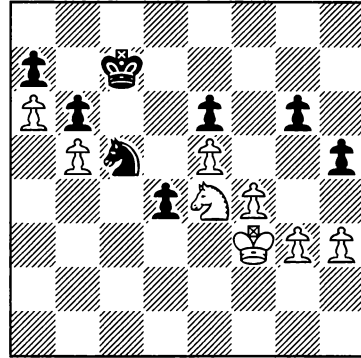


Diagram 26 (B)

Black cannot trade knights

Now Black is really tied up. His knight is chained to the defence of b6-pawn to prevent Bxb6, ...axb6, a6-a7 tricks.

35...Ke7 36 Nb2 Bc5 37 Bg5+ Kd6 38 Nc4+ Kc7 39 Bc1! Bd4 40 Ba3 Bc5

Or 40...Nc5 41 Bxc5! bxc5 42 f3, when White's winning plan consists of bringing the king to a4 and then playing b5-b6 followed by Kb5.

41 Bb2 Bd4

41...Bd6 42 f3 places Black in zugzwang – he cannot move a piece without losing something.

42 Bxd4 exd4 43 f4 Nc5 44 e5

I was very confident of winning now. It may appear difficult to attack the advanced d-pawn, but White can play Kf3 and Nd6-e4 to challenge Black's knight.

44...h6 45 Nd6 Kd7 46 g3 h5 47 Kf3 Kc7 48 Ne4! (Diagram 26) 48...Na4

The pawn ending is winning for White: 48...Kc8 49 Nxc5! bxc5 50 g4 hxg4+ 51 hxg4 c4 52 Ke4 c3 53 Kd3 Kc7 54 f5 gxf5 55 gxf5 exf5 56 e6 f4 57 e7 Kd7 58 b6 f3 59 bxa7 f2 60 e8Q+ Kxe8 61 a8Q+.

49 Ke2 Nb2 50 Kd2 h4

I was planning Kc2, and 50...Nc4+ 51 Kd3 Na3 is met by 52 Nd6.

51 gxh4 Nc4+ 52 Kd3 Ne3 53 h5

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

53 Ng3 Nd5 54 Ne2 is also good enough.

53...gxh5 54 Kxd4 Nf5+ 55 Kd3 h4 56 Ng5 Kd7 57 Nf3 Ke7 58 Nd4! Nxd4 59 Kxd4 Kf7 60 Ke3 1-0

White wins after 60...Kg6 61 Ke4 Kf7 62 f5 or 60...Kg7 61 Kf3 Kg6 62 Kg4.

2...e5

1 e4 c5 2 c3 e5 3 Nf3 Nc6 4 Bc4 (Diagram 27)

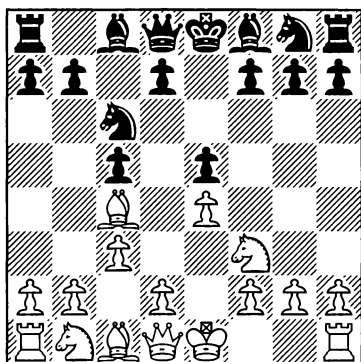


Diagram 27 (B)

The most appealing move

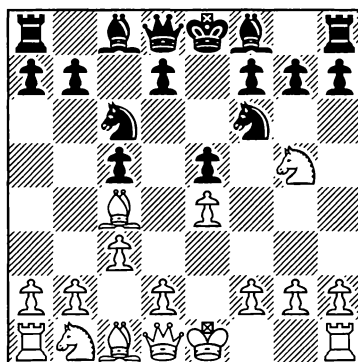


Diagram 28 (B)

This must be played!

With Black's pawns on e5 and c5, moving the bishop to the a2-g8 diagonal is appealing because of the outpost on d5. 4 Bb5 is another possibility, but it's worth pointing out that playing à la Scotch with 4 d4 cxd4 5 cxd4 exd4 6 Nxd4 is not so effective because the absence of the c-pawns favours Black. This can be seen in the variation 6...Nf6 7 Nc3 Bb4 8 Nxc6 dxc6! 9 Qxd8+ Kxd8 10 f3 Be6 which is fine for Black: without pawns on c7 and c2 (which would be there in the Scotch) Black's queenside majority is just as strong as White's on the kingside.

4...Be7!

Black prepares ...Nf6 without the hassle of Ng5. In my opinion 4...Be7 is Black's best move, even if alternatives have been played more often.

Just as in the Two Knight's Defence, the critical response to 4...Nf6 is 5 Ng5! (**Diagram 28**), but the advanced c-pawns lead to some differences between the two variations. After 5...d5 6 exd5 Nxd5! (6...Na5? makes no sense after 7 Bb5+ Bd7 8 Qa4) 7 Qh5! (White can also investigate a different version of the Fried Liver Attack with 7 Nxf7 Kxf7 8 Qf3+ Ke6, and also 7 d4 cxd4! 8 Qf3 Be6 9 Nxe6 fxe6, al-

though in my opinion neither of these lines carries an assessment better than 'unclear') 7...g6 (7...Qd7? 8 d3 leaves Black struggling to find defences to Nxf7 or Nxb7) 8 Qf3 Qxg5 (8...Be6 9 Nxe6 fxe6 10 d3 must be better for White because of the ugly e-pawns) 9 Bxd5 Nd8 10 0-0 White threatens 11 d4 and has good chances of achieving an advantage: for example, 10...Qf5 11 Re1 Bg7 12 d4 cxd4 13 cxd4 Qxf3 14 Bxf3 0-0 15 dxe5 Re8 16 Bf4 Ne6 17 Bg3 Nd4 18 Bd1! Nf5 19 Bf4 h6 20 h3 Be6 21 Nc3 Rad8 22 Ba4, A.Roldan-J.Barks, correspondence 2000.

4...Qc7 has been Black's most common move. The idea behind 4...Qc7 is twofold: to discourage an early d2-d4 by White because of tactics down the c-file, and to answer the attack on f7 by Ng5 with the defence ...Nd8. I'm not convinced, though; it looks a bit artificial to me. White has several good ways to play, and perhaps the best is 5 0-0 intending 5...Nf6 6 Ng5 Nd8 7 f4! h6 (or 7...exf4 8 e5!) 8 Nf3! exf4 9 e5 (**Diagram 29**), which is a King's Gambit type of position, but a very favourable-looking one for White. He can even meet 5...Be7 with 6 Ng5!?, as 6...Bxg5 7 Qh5 regains the piece. That said, 6...Nd8! 7 f4 exf4 8 Nf3, though still dangerous, is probably not quite as good as the previous line. On the other hand, against 5...Be7 there are promising alternatives. For example: 6 d4!? cxd4 7 Bb3! dxc3 8 Qd5 Nd8 9 Nxc3 with excellent compensation for the pawn in J.Stocek-M.Krasenkow, German League 2000 – this looks like a beefed up Morra Gambit; or 6 Na3 a6 (6...Nf6 7 d4) 7 d4 d6 8 dxc5 dxc5 9 Ng5 Nd8 10 f4!, as played in H.Grabher-G.Eiler, Vorarlberg 1996.

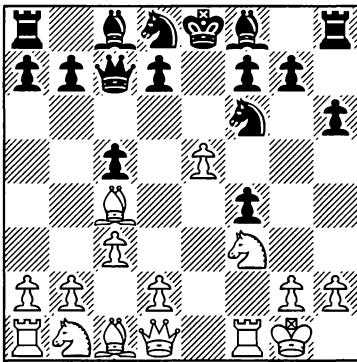


Diagram 29 (B)

A favourable King's Gambit

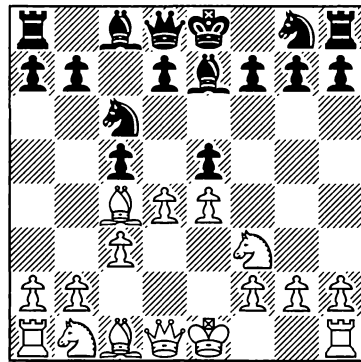


Diagram 30 (B)

The right time for d4

5 d4 (Diagram 30)

This is the time to play d4 if White is going to do so, as Black doesn't have time to support his centre (see the note to the next move). The quiet option is 5 0-0 Nf6 6 d3 0-0 7 Re1 d6 8 Nbd2, which may appeal to those who just want to reach a play-

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

able position without any hassle.

5...cxd4

Black needs to avoid 5...d6? 6 dxe5! dxe5 (or 6...Nxe5 7 Nxe5 dxe5 8 Qh5!) 7 Qb3!.

6 cxd4 exd4 7 0-0

The alternative is to recapture immediately with 7 Nxd4. Then 7...Nf6 8 Nc3 0-0 9 Nc2! (9 0-0 transposes to the note to White's 9th move, below) 9...a6 10 0-0 b5 11 Bd5 Bb7 12 Ne3 Nxd5 13 Ncxd5 left White with a nice position in A.Cherniaev-R.Webb, Portsmouth 2003. There are possible improvements in Black's play (11...b4 and 9...Bc5 10 0-0 d6 come to mind) but in any case this looks like a good way to fight for the advantage.

7...Nf6

Black can try to hang on to the d4-pawn by playing 7...Qb6, but I don't think this is a wise idea. See Game 35 to find out why.

8 Nxd4 (Diagram 31)

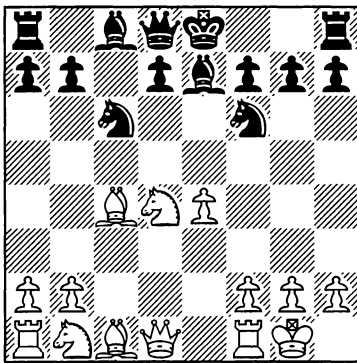


Diagram 31 (B)

The e-pawn is poisoned

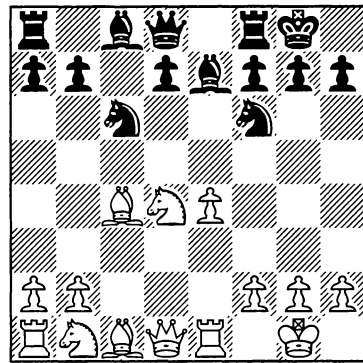


Diagram 32 (B)

Better than 9 Nc3

In J.Emms-A.Corkett, British League 2005, I tried 8 e5 Ne4 9 Bd5 (9 Re1 d5!) 9...Nc5 10 Re1, but I don't think 10...Ne6 11 Na3 0-0 is too frightening for Black. 10 Na3 0-0 11 Nb5 is a bit more challenging, while White could also investigate the bold 10 Nxd4 Nxe5 11 f4!?: for example, 11...Ned3 12 Be3 0-0 13 Nc3 d6 14 Qe2 Nb4 15 Rad1 with compensation for the pawn.

8...0-0

8...d5 9 exd5 Nxd5 10 Nb5! Nb6 11 Qxd8+ Bxd8 12 Re1+ Kf8 13 Bb3 (E.Najer-A.Shariyazdanov, Sochi 2004) is good for White, and 8...Nxe4? 9 Nf5! is even better!

9 Re1 (Diagram 32)

9 Nc3 is clearly the most natural move, but Black can equalize with the typical fork trick 9...Nxe4! 10 Nxe4 d5. The problem is that desirable-looking 11 Nxc6 bxc6 12 Bd3 dxe4 13 Bxe4 actually loses the exchange after 13...Ba6! 14 Re1 Bb4!. Instead 11 Bb5 is stronger, but 11...dxe4 12 Nxc6 bxc6 13 Qxd8 Rxd8 14 Bxc6 Ba6 15 Bxa8 Bxf1 16 Kxf1 Rxa8 was quickly drawn in V.Sareen-Z.Rahman, Calcutta 1998, and 14...Rb8 15 Bxe4 Bf6 is also okay for Black.

Returning to 9 Re1, White would be very happy after the pedestrian 9...d6?!, as then 10 Nc3! allows White to consolidate with a typical spatial and central advantage. Instead I feel that Black should be looking to disrupt the harmony in White's position with something like 9...Qb6!?, intending 10 Nf5 Bc5! or 10 Nb3 Ne5!. It's possible that White's best chance of an advantage lies with the somewhat paradoxical 10 Nxc6 dxc6 and now 11 h3 (to prevent ...Ng4) followed by Nc3, Qe2 etc and an eventual plan of utilizing the kingside pawn majority.

Theoretical?

Not at all. In fact it's even unclear what the 'main line' is.

Statistics

Taking the position from 4 Bc4, White has scored 58% in just over 1000 games.

Illustrative Game*Game 35*

A.Motylev **E.Beltugov**

Russian Cup, Ekaterinburg 1997

1 e4 c5 2 c3 e5 3 Nf3 Nc6 4 Bc4 Be7 5 d4 cxd4 6 cxd4 exd4 7 0-0 Qb6?!

There's an obvious temptation to hang on to the d4-pawn, but delaying development on the kingside is clearly a risky approach.

8 e5! (Diagram 33)

The most dangerous move for Black to meet, as now he faces the problem of how to develop his king's knight...

8...Qc5?

...and it's a problem he fails to address, with catastrophic results!

8...Nh6 9 Bxh6 gxh6 is clearly undesirable; so in my opinion Black has to face the consequences of 8...d6!. He has got every right to be worried by 9 exd6 Bxd6 10 Re1+ Nge7 11 Ng5, especially since 11...Ne5 12 Rxe5! Bxe5 13 Nxf7 looks promising for White: for example, 13...Qc7 14 Qh5!. However, 11...0-0 12 Qh5 Bf5 13

Starting Out: The c3 Sicilian

Bxf7+ Kh8 14 g4 Bc2, while precarious for Black, still leaves him with fighting chances.

9 Qb3!

Obvious and very strong. White has already achieved a close-to-winning position.

9...Nxe5 10 Nxe5 Qxe5 11 Bxf7+ Kf8 12 Nd2

White's position is so easy to play. His pieces can all be developed actively and his rooks will soon occupy the open files.

12...Nf6 13 Nf3 Qc5 14 Bg5!

So that 14...d5 can be met by 15 Rac1 Qd6 16 Bxf6 Bxf6 17 Bxd5.

14...Qb6 15 Rac1! (Diagram 34)

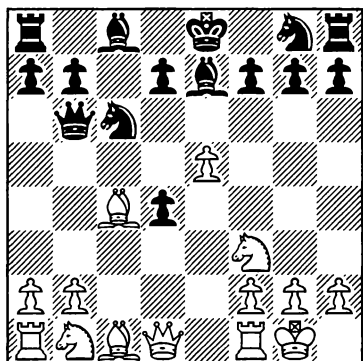


Diagram 33 (B)

Danger for Black

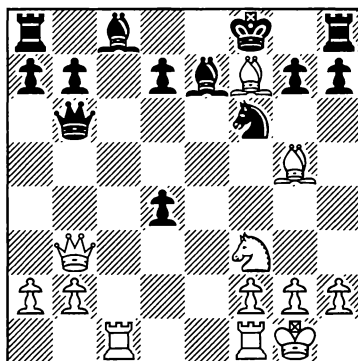


Diagram 34 (B)

Easy for White

Such is the strength of White's position that the exchange of queens does nothing to dampen his initiative.

15...d6 16 Qxb6 axb6 17 Bb3 Bg4 18 Nxd4 h6 19 Be3 d5 20 Nb5! Be2 21 Nc7 Rc8

A mistake, although after 21...Rb8 22 Rfe1 Bc4 23 Bxc4 dxc4 24 Bxb6 and Rxc4 White would have a decisive two-pawn advantage.

22 Nxd5! 1-0

Black is losing too much material: for example, 22...Rxc1 23 Rxc1 Bg4 24 Rc7 Nxd5 25 Bxd5 Ke8 26 Rxb7 etc.

2...g6 and Others

1 e4 c5 2 c3 g6

Here's a brief summary of Black's very rare choices on the second move:

a) 2...b6 3 d4 Bb7 4 Bd3 Nf6!? (**Diagram 35**) is tricky. The main thing for White to remember is to prevent Black from exchanging his knight for the light-squared bishop. Thus White must avoid 5 Qe2 cxd4 6 cxd4 Nc6! 7 Nf3 Nb4!, or 5 Nd2! cxd4 6 cxd4 Nc6 7 Ngf3 Nb4! 8 Bb1 Ba6. Instead of 7 Nfg3, White should play 7 Ne2!, after which 7...Nb4 is less effective: 8 Bb1 Ba6 9 Nf3 Qc7 (or 9...Rc8 10 a3 Bxe2 11 Kxe2! Nc6 12 d5 and Black is getting driven back) 10 Nc3 e6 11 a3 Nc6 12 Bg5 Nh5 (12...Be7 is probably stronger, but 13 Bd3 is still better for White) 13 d5! Na5 14 e5 (threatening 15 g4) 14...h6 15 Be3 g5 16 d6 left White in a dominating position in E.Schmittiel-H.Grooten, Wijk aan Zee 1993. Black has other options, but White keeps an advantage here too: for example, 7...e5 8 d5 Nb4 9 Bb1 Bc5 10 0-0 a5 11 a3 Na6 12 Nf3.

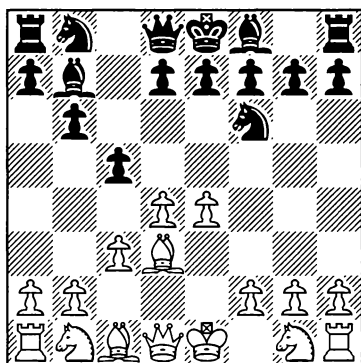


Diagram 35 (W)

Tricky

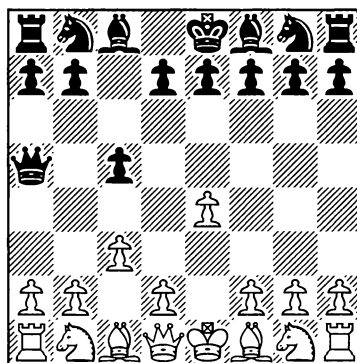


Diagram 36 (W)

Bizarre but not bad

b) 2...Qa5!? (**Diagram 36**) is a strange move, which isn't half as bad as it first looks. Black uses his most powerful piece to prevent White from playing d2-d4 (at least without being able to recapture on d4 with a pinned c-pawn). A logical reaction by White is to simply develop, as castling kingside breaks the potential pin. Thus 3 Nf3 Nc6 4 Bc4 followed by 5 0-0 is natural and good. I also like the idea of exploiting Black's early queen sortie with 4 Na3!?. For example, 4...e6 (or 4...d6 5 Nc4 Qc7 6 d4) 5 Bb5!? (5 Nc4 Qc7 6 d4 is still possible but less effective now after 6...cxd4 7 cxd4 d5) 5...Qc7 6 0-0 a6 7 Bxc6 Qxc6 8 Re1 Nf6 9 d4! cxd4 10 cxd4 Bxa3 (10...Nxe4? 11 Ne5 Qd5 12 Nac4 intends Nb6 and leaves Black in dire trouble) 11 d5! Qc4 12 bxa3 left White with a very strong position in A.Istratescu-B.Badea, Bucharest 2000.

c) 2...Nc6 3 d4 usually transposes to lines discussed in Chapter One after 3...cxd4 4 cxd4 d5 5 exd5 Qxd5 or 3...d5 4 exd5 Qxd5.

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d) 2...a6!? is another interesting sideline which is more playable than it first appears. After 3 d4 cxd4 4 cxd4 d5 5 exd5 Black's idea is 5...Nf6! and to recapture on d5 with the knight. 6 Nc3 Nxd5 7 Bc4!? Nxc3 8 bxc3 Qc7 9 Qb3 e6 10 Nf3 Bd6 11 0-0 b5 12 Be2 Bb7 13 a4 looked only a bit better for White in B.Margoline-S.Cicak, German League 2003.

3 d4 cxd4

After 3...Bg7 4 dxc5! Qc7 5 Be3! Black has trouble regaining his pawn.

4 cxd4 d5! (Diagram 37)

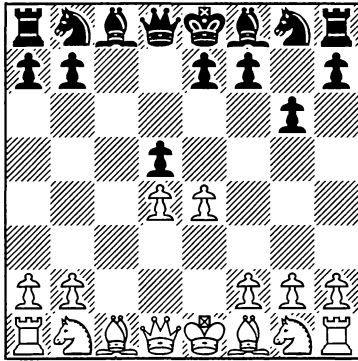


Diagram 37 (W)

Striking in the centre

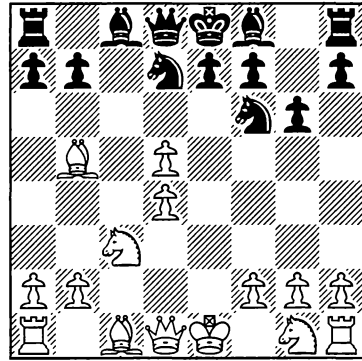


Diagram 38 (B)

A Caro-Kann transposition

This is the idea behind 2...g6: Black forces White to make a fundamental decision in the centre. After 4...Bg7 White should play 5 Nc3! (rather than 5 Nf3, which would give Black another opportunity to play 5...d5!) leading to positions similar to those seen after 2...d6, with the added bonus that White has not committed his bishop to d3.

5 e5

Blocking the centre and gaining space. At some point Black will usually strike back at White's centre with ...f6.

5 exd5 is a good alternative, and following 5...Nf6! (5...Qxd5 6 Nc3!) 6 Bb5+ Nbd7 (6...Bd7 7 Bc4) 7 Nc3 (**Diagram 38**) we reach a position that can also arise via the Caro-Kann: 1 e4 c6 2 c4 d5 3 cxd5 cxd5 4 exd5 Nf6 5 Bb5+ Nbd7 6 Nc3 g6 7 d4 Bg7. Theory suggests that White keeps an edge after both 7...Bg7 8 d6! (it's difficult to hold on to this pawn in view of ...0-0 and ...Nb6) 8...exd6 9 Qe2+ Qe7 10 Bf4 Qxe2+ 11 Bxe2! (relocating the bishop onto a better diagonal) 11...Ke7 12 Bf3 Nb6 13 Nge2, and 7...a6 8 Bxd7+ Qxd7 9 Nf3 Nxd5 10 Ne5 Qe6 11 0-0.

5...Nc6 6 Nc3!

White shouldn't allow Black to solve the problem of his light-squared bishop with 6 Nf3?! Bg4!.

6...Bg7 7 Bb5

7 h3!? is another decent option. On one hand White prepares Nf3 without allowing ...Bg4, but I've also noticed a few players adopting a more aggressive approach with some success: 7...f6 8 f4!? (the quiet way to play is with 8 exf6: for example, 8...exf6 9 Nf3 Nge7 10 Be2 0-0 11 0-0 g5 12 Re1 Bf5 13 Be3 Bg6 14 Rc1, as played in M.Adams-R.Dzindzichashvili, New York 1994) 8...Nh6 9 g4! (**Diagram 39**) [preventing ...Nf5] 9...fxe5 (or 9...f5 10 g5 Nf7 11 Bg2 e6 12 Nge2 Bf8 13 a3 Na5 14 h4 b6 15 Kf2 Bb7 16 h5 and White enjoyed a lasting advantage in Z.Gyimesi-I.Csom, Hungarian League 2005) 10 fxe5 0-0 11 Bg2 e6 12 Nf3 Nf7 13 0-0 b6 14 Rf2 a5 15 Be3 Ba6 16 Qd2 Qe8 17 h4 h6 18 Bf1 Bxf1 19 Raxf1 left White well placed in S.Smagin-M.Borriss, German League 2005. It will be interesting to see if this promising idea catches on.

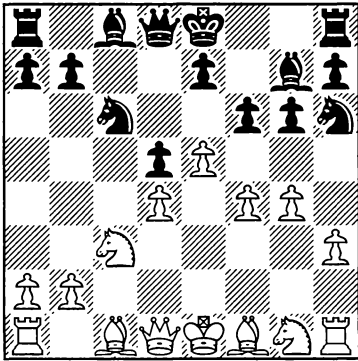


Diagram 39 (B)

An aggressive option

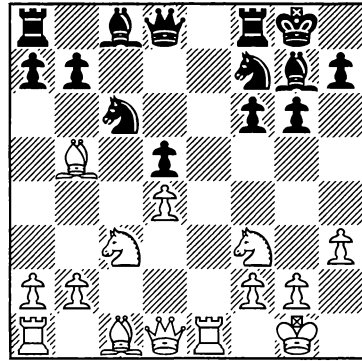


Diagram 40 (B)

A slight edge for White

7...Nh6

The immediate 7...f6 is also possible. 8 exf6 exf6 9 Nge2 Be6 10 Nf4 Bf7 11 0-0 Nge7 12 Bxc6+ bxc6 13 Na4 0-0 14 Nc5 Qc8 was D.Pavasovic-R.Zelcic, Solin/Spilt 2002, and here I feel that 15 b3 followed by Bb2 is White's best continuation.

8 h3

8 Nge2 has been played quite a bit, but I'm not convinced by this development and to me Black seems pretty comfortable after 8...0-0 9 0-0 Nf5.

8...0-0 9 Nf3 f6 10 0-0 Nf7 11 exf6 exf6 12 Re1 (Diagram 40)

We have been following the game A.Volzhin-M.Kobalija, European Ch., Ohrid 2001. Black is quite close to equality, but I still feel that White's position is more

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active and easier to play. 12 Re1 prevents ...Be6 for the moment, and Kobalija dealt with the threat of 13 Qb3 by playing 12...Qd6 13 Qb3 Rd8. Instead of 13 Qb3, White could consider 13 Ba4!? lining up ideas of both Nb5 and Bb3.

Theoretical?

There's hardly any theory at all with 5 e5; in fact, there's no obvious agreement as to what the main line is. The Caro-Kann transposition with 5 exd5 Nf6 6 Bb5+ Nbd7 7 d4 contains a bit of theory, though.

Statistics

I was very surprised by White's low score with 5 e5 (42% in over 500 games), but then I realized that 2...g6 is often used as a surprise weapon by Black players when facing much lower-rated opposition, which has skewed the statistics. In the Caro-Kann line White has scored 53% in over 300 games.

Move Order Tricks with 2 Nf3

Those who wish to play only the c3 Sicilian should stick to 2 c3. However, players who possess a wider repertoire with White have the opportunity to employ some sneaky move order tricks by playing 2 Nf3. Let's deal with Black's three main replies in turn:

If Black plays 2...d6 (as a Dragon or Najdorf player would do) then White can no longer transpose to the c3 Sicilian. Here 3 c3 Nf6! is not really a c3 Sicilian because White cannot drive the knight away with 4 e5 (although this is still a system in its own right and White can continue with 4 Be2, 4 Bd3 or 4 h3). So against 2...d6 White must be prepared to play something else (for example, an Open Sicilian with 3 d4, or another anti-Sicilian such as 3 Bb5+, 3 c3 or 3 Bc4).

If Black plays 2...Nc6 (as a Sveshnikov or Accelerated Dragon player would do) then White can transpose to a c3 Sicilian with 3 c3 (**Diagram 41**), but this is one where some of Black's options have been eliminated because his knight is committed to c6. For example, if 3...d5 4 exd5 Qxd5 5 d4 Black can no longer play the solid ...Nf6/...Bg4 line covered in Chapter Two. Alternatively, after 3...Nf6 4 e5 Nd5 Black cannot play the ...e6/...b6 line covered in Chapter Three.

There are also transpositional issues for Black after 2...e6 (the choice of a Kan or Taimanov player) 3 c3 (**Diagram 42**).

In this case, after 3...d5 4 exd5 Qxd4 5 d4, all of Black's ...Bg4 lines are no longer available, as well as the aggressive ...e5 options from Chapter One. If Black chooses 3...Nf6 4 e5 Nd5, he has lost the option of playing the traditional main line of ...d6 without ...e6. As far as I can see, the only major option White has given up is the chance to transpose to a French Advance after 3...d5 4 e5, as Black can avoid

this with the tricky 4...d4!?

In conclusion, 2 Nf3 can prove to be a valuable move order weapon for players who are happy to choose a different opening against 2...d6, or even for those who are confident against specific opponents that the reply will be 2...Nc6 or 2...e6.

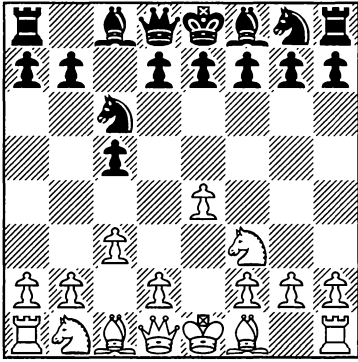


Diagram 41 (B)
2 Nf3 Nc6 3 c3

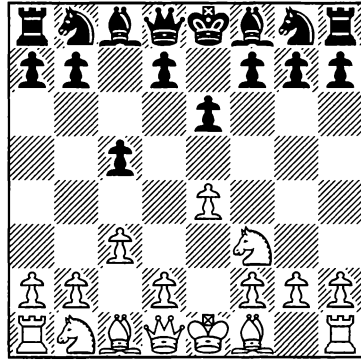


Diagram 42 (B)
2 Nf3 e6 3 c3

Summary

All of the lines considered in this chapter are playable for Black; there are no real duffers. However, with the possible exception of 2...e6 White has a greater chance of achieving an advantage than he has against 2...d5 or 2...Nf6 (which probably explains why these two moves are so universally popular).

Against 2...d6 3 d4 Nf6, I certainly feel that 4 Bd3 is the way to play for White. 2...e5 is trickier than it looks, especially if Black chooses 4...Be7 which I think is the best move, but with careful play White should be better. Finally, against 2...g6 3 d4 cxd4 4 cxd4 d5, both 4 exd5 and 4 e5 offer good chances of an edge. In the latter line, the aggressive 7 h3 f6 8 f4!? is certainly worth exploring.

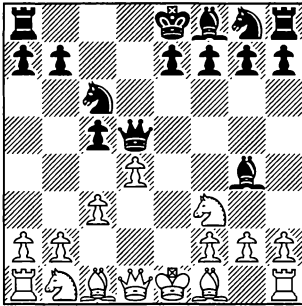
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1 e4 c5 2 c3

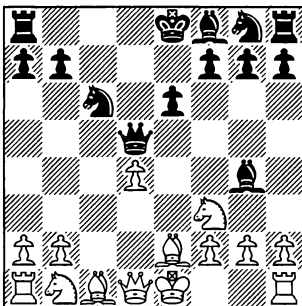
a) 2...d5

1 e4 c5 2 c3 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 Nf6

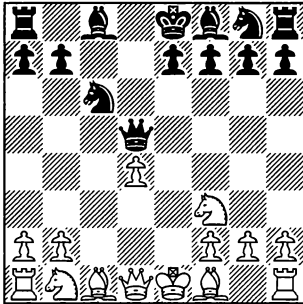
4...Nc6 5 Nf3 (5 dxc5 – 36) 5...Bg4



6 Be2 (6 dxc5 – 39) 6...cxd4 (6...e6 – 33) 7 cxd4 e6



8 Nc3 (8 h3 – 32) 8...Qa5 9 h3 Bh5 10 d5 – 24 (10 0-0 – 28)
 4...cxd4 5 cxd4 Nc6 6 Nf3



6...e5 (6...Bg4 – 12) 7 Nc3 Bb4 8 Bd2 (8 Be2 – 48) 8...Bxc3 9 Bxc3 e4 10 Ne5 Nxe5 11
 dxe5 Ne7 12 Qa4+ – 51 (12 Be2 – 53)

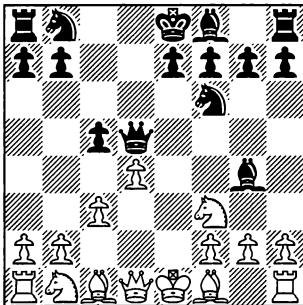
4...g6 – 100

4...e6 – 80

5 Nf3 e6

5...Nc6 – 98

5...Bg4



6 Be2 – 58, 63

6 dxc5 Qxd1+ – 67 (6...Qxc5 – 72)

6 Nbd2 – 76

6 Be3

6 Bd3 – 80

6 Be2 – 90

6 Na3 – 81

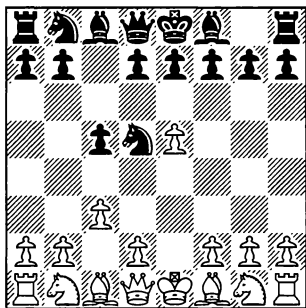
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6...cxd4 7 cxd4 Nc6 – 83, 86

7...Bb4+ – 94

b) 2...Nf6

1 e4 c5 2 c3 3 e5 Nd5



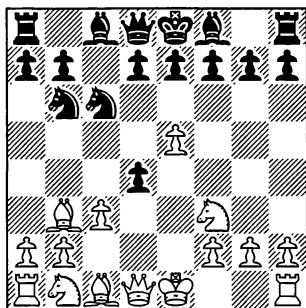
4 d4

4 Nf3 Nc6 5 Bc4 Nb6 6 Bb3 c4 (6...d5 – 170) 7 Bc2 Qc7 – 160, 163 (7...d6 – 166)

4...cxd4 5 cxd4

5 Qxd4 – 116

5 Nf3 Nc6 6 Bc4 Nb6 7 Bb3

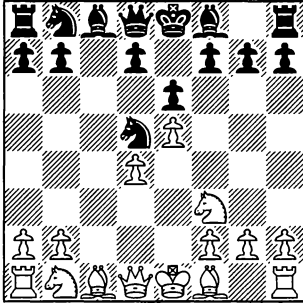


7...d5 (7...g6 – 154) 8 exd6 Qxd6 – 143, 147 (8...e6 – 151)

5...e6

5...d6 6 Nf3 Nc6 7 Bc4 Nb6 8 Bb5 – 107, 109 (8 Bb3 – 112)

6 Nf3



6...d6

6...b6 – 135

7 Bc4

7 a3 – 131

7...Nc6

7...Nb6 – 128

8 0-0 Be7 9 Qe2 – 122

9 exd6 – 125

c) Others

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starting out: the c3 Sicilian

The c3 Sicilian is a logical way of meeting Black's most popular defence to 1 e4. With his second move, White sets about constructing a strong pawn centre and cleverly sidesteps the labyrinth of opening theory associated with open Sicilians. Positions that are reached can be either tactical or positional in nature, and this opening particularly appeals to players who enjoy open positions with active piece play and clear objectives for both sides.

In this book, John Emms examines the c3 Sicilian by going back to basics, introducing the early moves and ideas, and taking care to explain the reasoning behind them – something that has often been neglected or taken for granted in other works.

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- All the main lines are covered
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John Emms is one of the UK's leading Grandmasters and has captained the English Team at two Chess Olympiads. He's an experienced coach who has worked with many top players, including World Championship finalist Michael Adams. He's also a highly respected writer; previous works for Everyman Chess include *The Scandinavian* and the best-selling *Starting Out: The Sicilian*.

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