

The Modernized O'Kelly Sicilian

Jan Boekelman

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Key to Symbols

!	a good move
?	a weak move
!!	an excellent move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
□	only move
N	novelty
☉	lead in development
⊙	zugzwang
=	equality
∞	unclear position
∞	with compensation for the sacrificed material
±	White stands slightly better
∓	Black stands slightly better
±	White has a serious advantage
∓	Black has a serious advantage
+−	White has a decisive advantage
−+	Black has a decisive advantage
→	with an attack
↑	with initiative
↔	with counterplay
Δ	with the idea of
⊃	better is
≤	worse is
+	check
#	mate

Table of Contents

Key to Symbols	4
Bibliography.....	6
Foreword	7
Preface.....	8
Theoretical Overview	12
Chapter 1 – Slow Set-Ups By White.....	15
Chapter 2 – The Routine Open Sicilian – 3.d4	43
Chapter 3 – The Maroczy Bind – 3.c4.....	103
Chapter 4 – The Delayed Alapin – 3.c3.....	133
Chapter 5 –The Sicilian Kan – Via 3.♘c3 e6 4.g3	183
Chapter 6 – The Sicilian Kan – Via 3.♘c3 e6 4.d4	207
Chapter 7 – Anti-Sicilians – With Early an ...a6	285

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Foreword

Writing forewords is usually a routine task. The person who writes the foreword introduces the subject matter and how the author's contribution ties into the subject matter. It is common for the author and the person who writes the foreword to know each other quite well. But in this case, I have never met Jan Boekelman from the Netherlands therefore I must skip the usual comments about the author and discuss the author's text.

The content had a profound enough impact on me that I decided to add the O'Kelly to my repertoire within a short period of time when participating in my first luckless US championship this year. While I lost both of my games to Super GM Sam Shankland and one of the best players in the world, GM Wesley So, the outcome of both openings was more than satisfactory for me. Given that I only added the O'Kelly as a surprise weapon for one game, it was pretty remarkable that it worked the second time since GM So could easily have anticipated facing it.

You are in for a treat. Jan Boekelman is either a chess enthusiast who likes to learn different openings in-depth, a very competitive player or a bit of both. In either case Jan has provided you with a playable repertoire out of a somewhat sideline of an opening. This is something which no one has dared to attempt before.

I offer the following suggestions to maximize your benefit from this book.

1. Try to expand your knowledge in the 3.c3 variation and go beyond the book's content.
2. Deepen your knowledge in the 3.c4 variation and do not play it before you know it well.
3. Study the games of super GM Vladislav Artemiev as he has had a relatively successful run with this opening in rapid online events.

Generally, I am a man of few words, which also applies to this foreword. I hope you find as much fun as I had while reading this book and learn the nuances of this opening while enjoying the newest evaluation of modern engines in this opening!

GM Elshan Moradiabadi

Durham, North Carolina, United States of America, October 2022.

Preface

Interest in the Sicilian O'Kelly Variation

As a result of the COVID pandemic there has been a soaring increase in the number of games as players have undertaken rapid and blitz. This increased chess activity has also seen an increasing interest in new ways to play the opening or to refresh old and forgotten lines. One of the openings benefitting from this trend has been the Sicilian O'Kelly which has recently attracted considerable attention. Apart from the surprise value it still carries, especially at the club level, the opening is attractive as it is based on sound Sicilian principles. Those players already familiar with the Sicilian Defence will find the O'Kelly Variation an easy fit into their repertoire.



Count Albéric O'Kelly de Galway

The Sicilian O'Kelly is named after Albéric Joseph Rodolphe Marie Robert Ghislain O'Kelly de Galway (*pictured*), who lived from 17 May 1911 to 3 October 1980. O'Kelly was a Belgian chess grandmaster (1956), an international correspondence chess grandmaster (1962), and the third ICCF world champion in correspondence chess (1959–1962). O'Kelly won the Belgian championships thirteen times between 1937 and 1959. He placed first at Beverwijk 1946. In 1947 he became one of Europe's leading players having finished first at the 1947 European Zonal tournament at Hilversum. He earned the IM title in 1950 which was the first year the title was awarded. In his youth he took lessons from the legendary Akiba Rubenstein.

For many years O'Kelly was a strong grandmaster in both over-the-board and correspondence play. During the 4th Capablanca Memorial (Havana, 1965) he drew

with Black against future world champion Robert Fischer using a Ruy Lopez Marshall Attack. In that tournament Fischer famously played his games by telex from the Marshall Chess Club in New York.

O'Kelly descended from John O'Kelly, an Irish-born British army officer who was granted a nobility title in 1720 in the then Austrian Low Countries. Consequently, he was often styled as 'Count O'Kelly de Galway', for example on the front cover of his 1965 book about Tigran Petrosian.

A short history

2...a6 in the Sicilian was already known long before O'Kelly adopted it regularly. During his initial use its application was more trial and error as key moves following 3. d4 did not demonstrate a good positional understanding of the opening. Straight after the second world war the opening became very fashionable. In 1948 former World Champion Max Euwe became the first to play the typical 5...e5 after 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♖xd4 ♗f6 5. ♗c3. The ...e5 maneuver in the Open Sicilian would later become common ground in variations like the Najdorf, the Sveshnikov and the Kalashnikov. During the next few years O'Kelly himself was the one playing the opening on a consistent basis, with excellent results for Black. Soon a number of strong masters and grandmasters joined in the exploration of this opening set up. Nicolas Rossolimo, Lodewijk Prins, Enrico Paoli and Laszlo Szabo all used the O'Kelly frequently from 1949. Max Euwe played the O'Kelly various times around 1950. Mark Taimanov picked up the O'Kelly in the second half of the 1950s and played it as one of his main defences against 1.e4 until the mid-1970s.

Presently several elite players have employed the O'Kelly as well, although many of them only use it in rapid and blitz or against weak opposition. A number of grandmasters are an exception to this rule and have shown their ongoing commitment to the O'Kelly in games with classical time limits against strong opposition, notably Vladislav Artemiev, Nikita Vitiugov, Dmitry Andreikin, and Richard Rapport.

Artemiev leads the way in particular. The number of games in the databases in which he played the O'Kelly is high and show many new ideas introduced into existing lines. His enthusiasm for the O'Kelly is strong and he has achieved a healthy positive score with Black against strong opponents.

Important theory

Many Sicilian repertoire books treat the O'Kelly from a White perspective and while I will elaborate on the existing theory the repertoire books currently tend to give superficial analysis which is not challenging the longevity of the O'Kelly. From Black's perspective there exist a few current resources. W. John Lutes wrote the first complete book on the O'Kelly. The book is a bit difficult to navigate, but it contains some interesting chapters and covers the entire opening spectrum. With the increased interest in the O'Kelly, more publishers have recently published work on the O'Kelly. Andrew Martin presents a nice set of full games which serves as a good primer to an opening repertoire for Black based on the O'Kelly. Christof Sielecki (*pictured, still with hair!*) in his Chessable course is more thorough. Due to the nature of the Chessable approach, he cannot give a full overview of the O'Kelly from Black's perspective, but he shows a good selection of lines covering important highlights. I usually agree with the theoretical choices he makes. The course is a welcome addition to the book you hold in your hand.



Christof Sielecki

Acknowledgements

A thank you to Daniel Vanheirzeele and his colleagues at Thinkers Publishing for the opportunity to publish this book. Their enthusiasm and understanding provided an excellent breeding ground for such an effort.

A thank you as well to Elshan Moradiabadi who was so kind to write the foreword to this book.

At the grandmaster level the O'Kelly has yet to become a mainstream opening against 1. e4. After Teimour Radjabov's fiasco against Fabiano Caruana in the Candidates Tournament of 2022 that will probably not change any time soon. As a result, there is still a lot to be discovered. I have based this book mainly on my own insight and practice with it on Chess.com and lichess.org. By doing so I have tested my own ideas about this opening. Therefore, I must apologize in advance for the disproportionate number of my own games that appear in these pages. A thank you to all of my opponents who kindly let me play the O'Kelly against them! A big thank you in particular to Kiril Georgiev (*pictured*) who employed the 3.c3 variation on many occasions but, as one might expect, he has yet to find a refutation.



Kirill Georgiev

Another great thank you to my beloved partner Leonoor, who supported me so kindly during the time I was working on this book.

In summary

The O'Kelly is the 5th most popular response to 2. ♘f3 in the Sicilian. It is a sound weapon and still contains a lot of surprise value. You will notice this in the time White generally takes for his third move when you play on one of the internet platforms. With some general knowledge about the Sicilian Defence and good theoretical preparation, built on the basis of the lines presented in this book, you will have an excellent starting point to obtain good results in this intriguing chess opening.





Jan Boekelman
Overveen, the Netherlands

Theoretical Overview

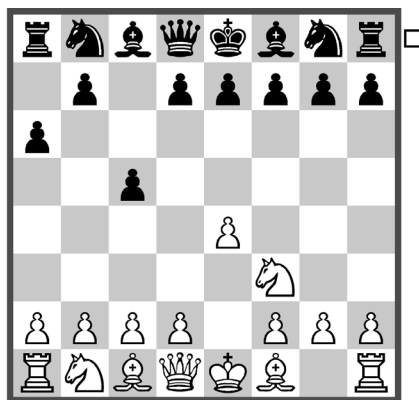
1. e4 c5

Black chooses the Sicilian Defence, an opening normally used by ambitious Black players. In general the Sicilian is the most popular response to 1.e4.

2. f3

White develops his knight naturally prior to playing d4 to reach the open variations of the Sicilian. In chapter 7 of the book, I will demonstrate that Black can do good business with an early...a6 against a number of anti-Sicilians as well, i.e. the Morra Gambit (2. d4 cxd4 3. c3 a6), the Alapin (2. c3 a6), the Chameleon (2.  c3 a6 3.  ge2), the Grand Prix (2.  c3 a6 3. f4) and the Closed Sicilian (2.  c3 a6 3. g3 and various other third moves). Our knowledge of the O’Kelly will ensure that we can apply the setups with an early ...a6 in those systems as well.

2... a6



The modest 2...a6 is the starting point of the O’Kelly Variation. Now White has various options:

- Chapter 1: 3. others – Slow setups by White
- Chapter 2: 3. d4 – the Routine Open Sicilian
- Chapter 3: 3. c4 – the Maroczy Bind
- Chapter 4: 3. c3 – the Delayed Alapin
- Chapter 5 & 6: 3. ♖c3 – the Sicilian Kan

White's slow setups (e.g., 3.b3, 3.d3 or 3.g3) will be countered with a Botvinnik system, i.e., ...♖c6, ...g6, ...♙g7, ...e5 and ...♗ge7. In the closed nature structures of the Botvinnik Black will have excellent chances. Often 2...a6 is a welcome addition to Black's development setup.

In part II we analyze the routine 3.d4. This move has a dubious reputation for some reason as Black actually has to be precise to maintain the balance. More often than not, Black should not open the centre with a quick ...d5 (after the thematic 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♖c3 e5 etc.), which was the standard practice in the early years of the opening. New and more sophisticated methods of a more positional nature have since been developed that offer Black something to play for with less risk and more opportunity.

After the enthusiasm for 3.d4 waned, White began exploring other methods of fighting the O'Kelly. A principled one is 3.c4 (Chapter 3), as Black is not in a position to close the centre quickly with ...e5. White takes a lot of space like in the Maroczy Bind. One consideration to bear in mind is that White has to make sure that he stays within his opening repertoire as Black may decide to play 3...e6 which after 4...cxd4 5.♗xd4 leads to a 5.c4 Sicilian Kan. Negi explains in his book that that is the reason he cannot recommend 3.c4 against the O'Kelly, as his main line Sicilian Kan is played with 5.♙d3. In this book I will examine the thematic 3... ♖c6 4.d4 cxd4 5.♗xd4 e5. At this point 6.♗f5 is the critical choice when I examine the modern 6...d6, followed by 7...g6, which is Artemiev's favourite, as well as the classical 6...d5.

Another method to try to show that 2...a6 is less useful than 2. ♗f3 is the transposition into a late Alapin with 3.c3 (Chapter 4). Theorists like Negi and Khalifman recommend this approach in their highly valued repertoire series. There are many ways to respond to this setup. The current day elite prefer 3...d5 4.exd5 ♕xd5, playing against an isolated white d-pawn with the queen on d5. I will investigate this mainstream solution in a separate chapter. This book makes a case for 3...d5 4.exd5 ♗f6, intending to take the pawn on d5 with the knight. This is less well known and relatively aggressive as it may involve the long-term sacrifice of material

by Black. Previously this setup was not held in high esteem, but I will show that it is very much alive and kicking.

If White plays the clever 3.♘c3, the O'Kelly player essentially has three options. He can select one of the specialized systems recommended by some other books on the O'Kelly. These systems tend to place Black in cramped positions with a high Benoni content, unlike the open positions we aim for in a Sicilian. Alternatively, he can play a Sicilian Najdorf. This is typically the choice of grandmasters with the O'Kelly in their repertoire. As we all know playing the Najdorf is a rather laborious challenge for the non-professional player. That is the reason this book has chosen the third option, the Sicilian Kan. The Kan is an elegant system that arises after 3...e6 4.d4 cxd4 5.♘xd4. I will investigate the classical 5...♙c7. The positions that arise after that move are strategic in nature and quite interesting. A lot of attention has been paid lately to the more aggressive 5...b5, e.g., by Adrien Demuth in his excellent "The Modernized Sicilian Kan", and Christof Sielecki in his Chessable course. That is another good reason to look at the alternative 5...♙c7 in this book. The Kan will give Black a fair share of chances in the ensuing game.

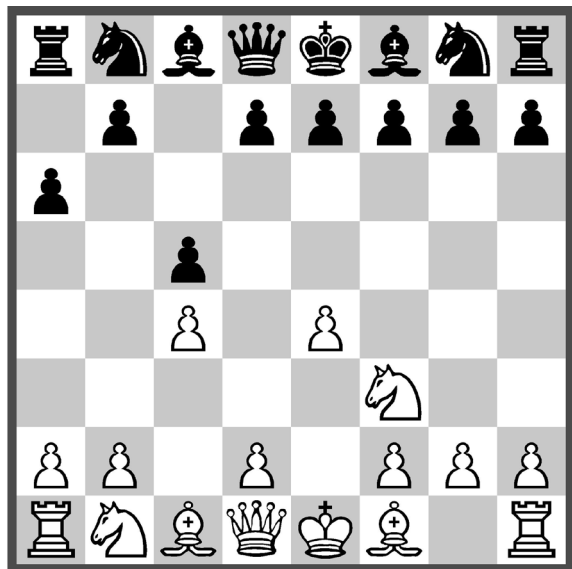
That is the overview of what is covered in this book. It has been very rewarding to work on such an interesting and respectable system as the Sicilian O'Kelly. Black already has an answer to White's 2.♘f3. The underlying development plans and structures are sound, natural and easy to understand especially if you have some basic knowledge of the Sicilian as a whole. White players are generally not well prepared for the O'Kelly. Recent theoretical developments have further enhanced Black's case. The Sicilian O'Kelly gives Black an excellent opportunity to leave the opening phase in positions with mutual chances, both in theory and in practice. I hope this book contributes to the knowledge of the O'Kelly variation in general and will further increase the enthusiasm for using it in practice.



The Maroczy-Bind

- 3.c4

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 a6 3.c4



Chapter Guide

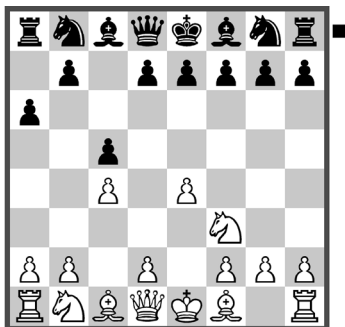
Chapter 3 – The Maroczy-Bind – 3.c4

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 a6 3.c4 ♘c6

a) Introduction.....	105
b) 4.♘c3	107
c) 4.d4 cxd4 5.♘xd4 e5 6.--.....	112
d) 4.d4 cxd4 5.♘xd4 e5 6.♘c2.....	118
e) 4.d4 cxd4 5.♘xd4 e5 6.♘f5.....	122

a) Introduction

1. e4 c5 2. ♖f3 a6 3. c4



Position after: 3. c4

As Black's 2...a6 does not challenge White's center (2...d6, 2...♘c6 or 2...e6 directly or indirectly all do), White takes the opportunity to increase his central presence with 3. c4. This is one of the key theoretical battlegrounds of the O'Kelly variation. As recent as the 2022 Candidates Tournament we have seen this principled approach, so one may expect to see more of it in the near future.

3... ♘c6

We follow the main line here.

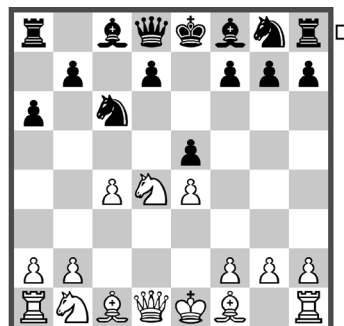
4. d4

The principled continuation.

4. ♘c3 [White refrains from the immediate 4. d4. 4... e5! This gives Black the opportunity to close the center and aim for a Botvinnik setup (...c5, ...e5, ...g6,

...♗g7, ...♘ge7 etc.), where the white knight, misplaced on f3, compensates for the potentially less relevant ...a6. The game is equal, but Black's play is easier.

4... cxd4 5. ♘xd4 e5



Position after: 5... e5

The typical O'Kelly move, just like in the Kalashnikov – played immediately after the knight arrives on d4. This way Black maintains the flexibility to put his g8-knight on e7. White has a choice of 5 squares for the knight.

6. ♘f5!

White's best. Theoretically, this is the most challenging continuation. White plans ♘e3 and ♘ed5 with a full bind, Black has to act quickly.

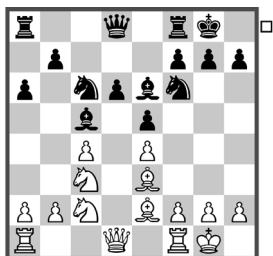
A) 6. ♘f3 ♘f6 7. ♘c3 ♗b4 8. ♗d3 ♗xc3+! A maneuver we have seen before in the lines starting with 3. d4. The

pawn on c4 does not improve the story for White. 9. bxc3 d6 First ...d6 to be ahead of c4-c5. 10. 0-0 0-0= 0-1 (48) Haskin, Z (1945) – Grinberg, E (2491) Lichess.org 2020.

B) 6. ♖xc6 dxc6! A nice move reintroduced by Rapport instead of the usual 6...bxc6. 7. ♔xd8+ ♕xd8 8. ♕e3 ♖c7 9. ♗c3 ♗f6= This ending is equal, but Black has good chances to outplay his opponent. 0-1 (74) Socko, B (2622) – Rapport, R (2701) Budapest 2014.

C) 6. ♗b3 ♗f6 7. ♗c3 ♕b4 8. ♕d3 ♕xc3+! Again, this maneuver in which we damage White's pawn structure on the queenside. 9. bxc3 d6 10. 0-0 0-0 11. h3 [11. c5 d5! ♣ an important move, keeping White's double pawn in place.] 11... ♕e6 12. f4 exf4 13. ♕xf4 ♖c8 ♣ 0-1 (108) Saranya, J (2094) – Pantsulaia, L (2597) Chennai 2019.

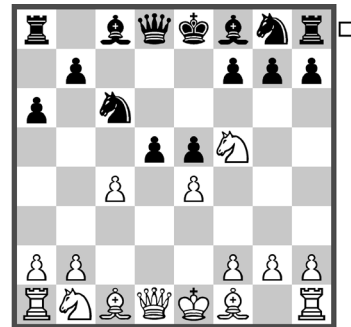
D) 6. ♗c2 A move popular in the early days of the O'Kelly. 6... ♕c5 As the b4-square is not available to the bishop this is best. 7. ♗c3 [7. ♕e3 d6! = We would rather be taken, than take.] 7... ♗f6 8. ♕e2 d6 9. 0-0 0-0 10. ♕e3 ♕e6!



Position after: 10... ♕e6!

We only take on e3 very late in this variation, if ever. 11. ♔d2 More than 70 years ago this was already an important line! 11... ♖c8! = Generally followed by ...♗b4 with equal chances. 12. ♖ab1 ♗b4 13. ♕xc5 dxc5 14. ♔xd8 ♖cxd8 = ½ – ½ (27) Pilnik, H – Euwe, M New York 1948.

6... d5!



Position after: 6... d5!

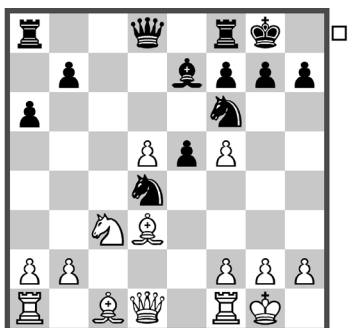
The classical response to 6. ♗f5.

7. cxd5 ♕xf5 8. exf5 ♗d4 9. ♗c3

This is the main move, defending the d-pawn.

9. ♕d3! ? will be investigated as well. It was the choice of Caruana against Radjabov in the 2022 Candidates Tournament. As Fabi achieved such a relatively easy and straightforward success with it in that game, it is more than likely that this will receive more attention in the near future.

9... ♗f6 10. ♕d3 ♕e7 11. 0-0 0-0

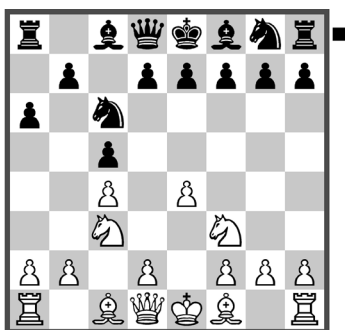


Position after: 11... 0-0

This is the key position after 6...d5. Black's e-pawn is relatively weak. With a precise move order, White should be able to unleash an attack on the kingside. The variations get quite complex, but Black seems to have enough resources to hold his own.

b) 4. ♘c3

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 a6 3. c4 ♘c6 4. ♘c3



Position after: 4. ♘c3

White refrains from the immediate 4. d4 which gives Black the opportunity to close the center and aim for a Botvinnik setup where the misplaced white knight on f3 compensates for the potentially less useful 2...a6. In my experience, this is a popular choice. White players shy away from the theoretical 4. d4 after having played 3. c4.

4... e5

The obvious move and a good one.

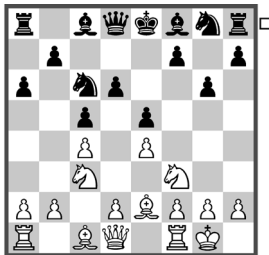
5. d3

White prepares for a game in the Botvinnik trenches.

A) 5. a3!? Immediately expanding on the queenside is a pet line of Israeli WIM Masha Klinova. 5... d6 6. ♖b1 a5 in these closed positions the loss of a tempo is not something to worry about. 7. ♙d3 [7. g3 transposes back into the main line.] 7... g5 8. ♙c2 g4 9. ♘g1 ♙g7 10. ♘d5 ♘ge7 11. ♘e2 h5= 0-1 (44) Klinova, M (2368) – Golod, V (2532) Saint Vincent 2003.

B) 5. ♙e2 This is an elegant setup with its own characteristics. A dozen or so games have been played with this modest move. White postpones d2-d3 in order to maintain control over the b5-square. A later d2-d3 will transpose to

the main line with 6. ♖e2. 5... d6 6. 0-0 g6!.



Position after: 6... g6!

The most practical solution. Black waves activity on the queenside based on ...b7-b5 and is prepared to lose a tempo with ...a6-a5 when needed against the threat of b2-b4. Black has all the benefits of the Botvinnik setup with a kingside initiative in due course. White's light-squared bishop is rather passive on e2.

B1) 7. d3 ♖g7 8. ♗e1 [8. ♗d5 ♗ge7 9. a3 a5=; 8. ♙e3 ♗ge7 9. ♖d2 h6 10. ♗d5 f5 11. exf5 gxf5 12. ♖d1 ♗xd5 13. cxd5 ♗e7 14. ♖b3 0-0-1 1-0 (70) JurgenSanchez97 (2861) – Pap, G (2855) lichess.org 2022.] 8... ♗ge7 9. f4 0-0 10. fxe5 ♗xe5 11. ♙g5 h6 12. ♙xe7 ♖xe7 13. ♗d5 ♖d8 0-1 (27) Pavlov, V (2043) – Nikolov, M (2542) Kiten 2021.

B2) 7. ♚b1 ♙g7 8. a3 a5! As already mentioned, Black loses a tempo, but it is important to stop White's b2-b4. 9. d3 ♗ge7



Position after: 9... ♗ge7

B2.1) 10. ♗b5 0-0 11. ♗e1 f5 1-0 (39) putraf (2091)-ustedesunmar-rano (2159) lichess.org 2018.

B2.2) 10. ♗e1 0-0 11. ♗c2 White has made all the thematic moves and is ready for b2-b4. [11. f4 f5 0-1 (34) Kiss, K (2060) – Kovacs, G (2067) Hungary 2008.] 11... a4!

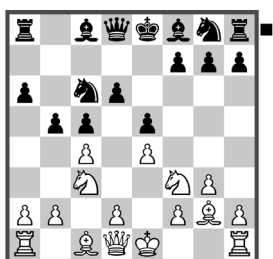


Position after: 11... a4!

In the English opening it is not that easy for Black to play this move as the pawn on a4 may become weak. 12. b4 [12. ♗e3 ♗d4! Black makes handy use of the bishop on e2. 13. ♗ed5 ♗xd5 14. ♗xd5 f5 15. ♖h1 ♙e6 ½-½ (35) Nikcevic, N (2468) – Tkachiev, V (2642) France 2003.] 12... axb3 13. ♚xb3 ♗d4 14. ♗xd4

cx d4 15. ♘b5 ♘c6= 0-1 (52)
Gorbatov, A (2363) – Plischki, S
(2333) Hradec Kralove 2012.

C) 5. g3 The most natural way forward but this may allow Black to stir things up a bit. 5... d6! Black plays carefully and waits for the bishop to arrive on g2. 6. ♗g2 (6. d3 goes back to the main line.) 6... b5!?



Position after: 6... b5!?

An interesting pawn sacrifice played twice by Andreikin. With a smart move order starting with 5. d3 White can avoid it, so the main line with kingside fianchetto's on both sides remains relevant. If Black does not like this variation, he can take the main line as his compass.

C1) 7. cxb5 Accepting the pawn sacrifice gives Black excellent chances. 7... axb5 8. ♘xb5 ♗a6=

C1.1) 9. ♘c3 ♘b4

(see analysis diagram next column)



Position after: 9... ♘b4

10. ♖a4+ [10. ♗f1 ♘d3+ 11. ♗xd3 ♗xd3+] 10... ♖d7 11. ♖xd7+ ♔xd7 12. ♘d5 ♘d3+! 13. ♔d1 ♘xf2+– 0-1 (22) badplayer_CM (2330) – Boekelman, J (2317) lichess.org 2022.

C1.2) 9. ♗f1 ♘f6 10. ♘c3 ♗xf1 11. ♔xf1 d5 12. exd5 ♘xd5 13. ♔g2 ♗e7 14. ♖e1 ♘db4! 15. ♘xe5 ♘d4 16. ♖b1 ♘bc2 17. ♖e4 ♖a6 18. ♔g1 0-0=

C2) 7. d3! bxc4 Black creates a juicy outpost for his knight on d4. [7... ♖b8 was the stem game of this gambit and play went into positional territory instead of tactics. 1-0 (40) Neshkov, V – Alagulian, K (2263) Samara 2002.] 8. dxc4 ♘f6

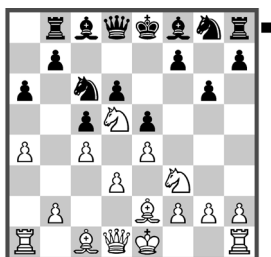


Position after: 8... ♘f6

This time we do not go for the Botvinnik set-up. 9. 0-0 ♖e7 10. ♘h4 ♘d4! 11. ♙e3 0-0= 12. h3 ♜b8 13. b3 ♘e8 14. ♘f3 ♙e6 15. ♘d5 a5 16. ♘d2 ♙g5 17. f4 ♙h6 18. f5 ♙xd5 0-1 (33) Mammadova, G (2382) – Andreikin, D (2725) Chess.com 2021.

5... d6 6. g3

6. ♙e2 The bishop on e2 gives this line its own character. It has a lot of similarities with 5. ♙e2 and the lines often transpose into each other. With a white pawn on d3, Black's plan with a quick ... ♜b8 makes good sense. 6... ♜b8! With the bishop on e2 Black should immediately push ...b5 otherwise he runs the risk that he played ... a6 for nothing. 7. a4 stops Black's queenside expansion and builds a nice trap. [7. 0-0 transposes to 5. d3.] 7... g6 8. ♘d5



Position after: 8. ♘d5

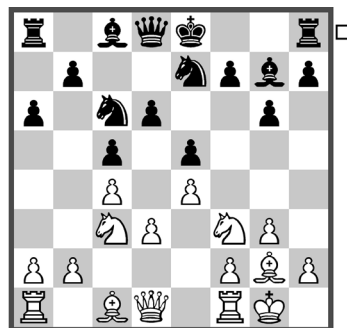
8... ♙g7! 9. 0-0 ♘ge7 No need to be concerned about White's next move. 10. ♙g5 h6! 11. ♙xe7 [11. ♙f6 0-0 12. ♘xe7+ ♘xe7 13. ♙xe7 ♙xe7] 11... ♘xe7 12. a5 0-0 13. ♙d2 ♘xd5 14. cxd5 b5=

6... g6 7. ♙g2 ♙g7 8. 0-0

A) 8. ♙e3 ♘ge7 9. ♘d2 h5!? 10. h3 h4 11. g4 ♘d4 12. f4 exf4 13. ♙xf4 ♘e6 14. ♙e3 ♘c6= ½ – ½ (42) Jaro13 (2224) – Pap, G (2695) lichess.org 2022.

B) 8. ♘d5 ♘ge7 9. ♙g5 h6! 10. ♙xe7 ♘xe7 White cannot maintain the knight on d5.

8... ♘ge7



Position after: 8... ♘ge7

Time to take stock of the situation. Both sides have a sort of a Botvinnik development structure and will complete their development smoothly. White may be a move ahead but the position is relatively closed so that should not matter too much. Black has a number of small, but important advantages. He is one step ahead on the queenside which ensures that he will keep the initiative there. Furthermore, White's knight is misplaced on f3. If White wants to push f4 the knight must move first. Finally, when a black knight arrives on

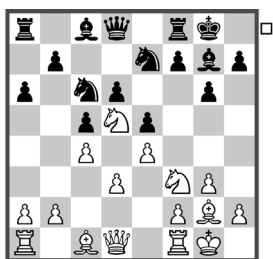
d4 a subsequent ...♙g4 will force White to make a difficult decision. Either the f3-knight must move to an inactive square or the e3-bishop must be exchanged for Black's knight on d4.

9. a3

The thematic continuation. Immediately trying to expand on the queenside.

A) 9. ♖h4 White prepares f2-f4. 9... 0-0 10. f4 exf4 11. ♙xf4 [11. gxf4 f5! 12. ♜f3 ♔h8 13. ♚e1 ♙e6 14. ♜g5 ♙g8 15. ♚h4 h6 16. ♜h3 fxe4 17. ♙xe4 ♜f5 18. ♚g4 ♜cd4 0-1 (39) Legend_of_Death (2166) – Pap – G (2711) lichess.org 2022.] 11... ♜b8 12. ♚d2 1/ 2-½ (76) Nunez Painchaud, R – Zhu, H (2293) Laval 2018. 12... b5! 13. ♙g5 f6 14. ♙e3 ♜e5 ½

B) 9. ♜d5 0-0!



Position after: 9... 0-0!

We first complete our development and next will play ...b5.

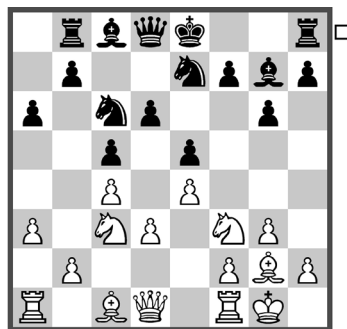
B1) 10. ♜d2 b5! 11. ♜xe7+ ♚xe7 12. ♜b1 ♙e6 13. ♜c3 ♜d4 14. ♜d5 0-1 Mestrovic, Z (2397) – Boskovic, D

(2402) Zenica 2003. 14... ♚a7! 15. b3 bxc4 16. bxc4 ♙xd5 17. cxd5 ♜fb8 ½

B2) 10. ♜h4 ♜xd5! 11. cxd5 [11. exd5 ♜d4 12. a4 f5 ½] 11... ♜d4 12. ♙e3 b5 ½

B3) 10. ♙g5 h6! 11. ♙xe7 ♜xe7 12. ♜d2 b5 ½ 1/ 2-½ (53) Dominguez Aguilar, G (2347) – Leon Hoyos, M (2428) Mexico City 2006.

9... ♜b8!



Position after: 9... ♜b8!

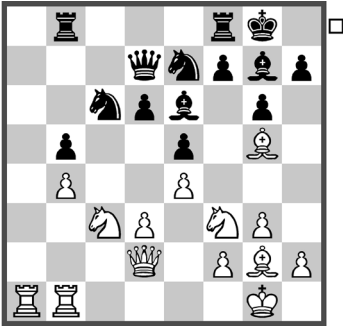
With this move Black maintains a one move advantage on the queenside.

10. ♙g5

A) 10. ♜d5 0-0 11. ♙g5 h6! 12. ♙d2 0-1 (24) Ofstad, P (2182) – Sloth, J (2328) Reykjavik 2011. 12... b5=

B) 10. ♜b1 b5= 11. cxb5 axb5 12. b4 cxb4 13. axb4 0-0 14. ♙e3 ♙g4 15. ♚b3 1-0 (47) Formanek, M (2233) – Dolensky, M (2073) Pardubice 2022. 15... ♚d7! =

10... b5 11. cxb5 axb5 12. b4 cxb4 13. axb4 0-0 14. ♖d2 ♙e6 15. ♖fb1 ♗d7=



Position after: 15... ♗d7=

In this almost symmetrical position Black's pieces have developed slightly more harmoniously.

16. ♙e3

With a draw in Anastasian, A (2520) – Minasian, A (2425) Yerevan 1995.

16... f5! 17. ♖a3f4 18. gxf4 ♙h3=

Conclusion

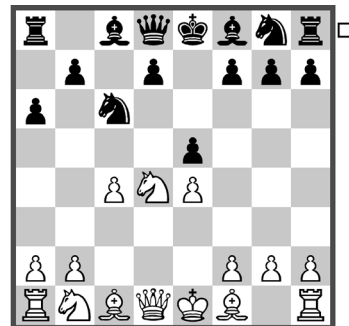
The line 3. c4 ♘c6 4. ♘c3 e5! does not pose any serious theoretical problems for Black. In general Black will aim for a Botvinnik structure (...d6, ...g6, ...♙g7, ...♘ge7) where he can take the initiative on both sides of the board. Black has some interesting ideas on his way to that position. One of these is Andreikin's pawn sacrifice with a quick 6...b5 after White has played 5. g3 and 6. ♙g2. If White is more careful with 5. d3, Black will aim for the standard Botvinnik structures. He can start a queenside initiative with ... ♖b8 and ...b5 or take the lead on the kingside with ...f5, possibly preceded by ...h6, ...♙e6. White's knight on f3 hinders White's options to produce some serious counterplay against Black's plans.

c) 4.d4 cxd4 5. ♘xd4 e5 6.--

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 a6 3. c4 ♘c6 4. d4 cxd4 5. ♘xd4 e5

In this subchapter we look at the non-critical continuations for White after 5...e5.

(see diagram opposite column)

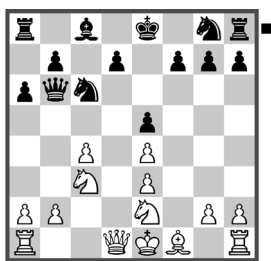


Position after: 5... e5

6. Nxc6

Taking the knight strengthens Black's influence in the center.

A) 6. Nc2 Not very popular and for good reason: the f2-b6 diagonal is weak. 6... Qc5 7. Nbc3 [7. g3? Qb6!-+] 7... Qb6 8. Qe3 Qxe3 9. fxe3



Position after: 9. fxe3

9... Nf6 [9... Qxe3? 10. Nd5+-] 10. Qd2 0-0 11. Nd5 Qd8 12. Ng3 d6 13. Qd3 Nxd5 14. exd5 White has eliminated his ugly double pawn but now has to live with a bad bishop and good attacking chances for Black. 14... Ne7 15. 0-0 f5= Black has a nice Svesnikov. 0-1 (34) Jun, R (1931) – Mitra, R (2104) Pardubice 2018.

B) 6. Nf3 The knight is not terribly active on f3. This normally leads to our thematic game against White's weakened queenside pawn structure after a subsequent ...Qf8-b4xc3 . 6... Nf6 [Martin makes a case for 6... Qc5 as after 6. Nc2 , but in my view the ...Nf6 and ...Qb4 approach is more thematic and promises more.] 7. Nc3

[7. Qd3 Qb4+ 8. Qd2 d6!-] 7... Qb4 8. Qd3 Qxc3+! 9. bxc3 d6



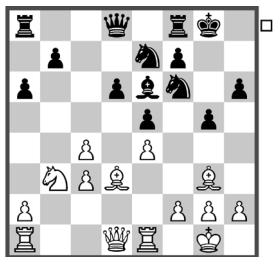
Position after: 9... d6

White has to decide how he wants to complete his development.

B1) 10. Qa3 Without any serious pressure along the d-file this immediate attack against the d6-pawn just puts the bishop on the wrong diagonal. 10... 0-0 11. Qc2? Qa5+

B2) 10. 0-0 0-0 11. Qa3 [11. Bb1 Nd7 12. Qe3 Nc5=] 11... Qc7 12. Qe2 Bd8 13. Bab1 b6= 0-1 (64) Richter, S (1754) – Schreiber, F (1791) Mecklenburg VP 2013. Theoretically an equal game, but Black's position is easier to play.

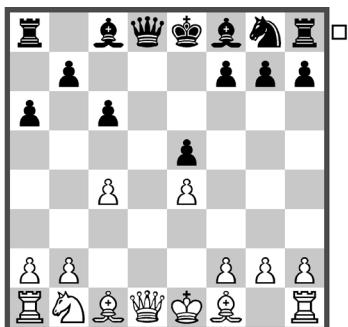
C) 6. Nb3 A bit more interesting than the retreat to f3. Anatoly Karpov, Pavel Eljanov and other strong GMs have tried this line. The knight covers c5 and stands ready for any activity on the queenside. We will combat this option with our thematic ...Qf8-b4xc3 , followed by positional play against White's weakened queenside pawns. 6... Nf6



Position after: 14... Nxe7!

transferring the knight to g6 and opening up the c-file. [14... a5 15. Bb1 Ke7 16. Nd2 Rab8 17. Nf1± 1-0 (50) Kobalia, M (2599) – Kryakvin, D (2567) Kolomna 2018.] 15. Bb1 Ng6 16. Nd2 Kc7

6... dxc6!



Position after: 6... dxc6!

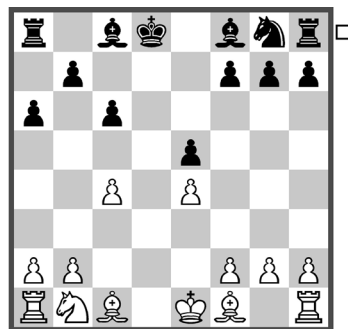
We follow in the footsteps of O'Kelly specialist Richard Rapport. In 2014 he reintroduced this move into master practice. The move is not very popular and has only been played in a handful of games but it shows great results for Black. It is the first choice of the engines.

7. Ke8+

The most natural continuation.

7. Nc3 Kxd1+ 8. Nxd1 [8. Qxd1 Qc5] 8... Nf6 9. f3 [9. Qd3 Qc5 10. 0-0 Qe6 11. Qe3 Qxe3 12. Nxe3 0-0-0 1-0 (40) Nimmes_97 (2380) – AndyBoehme (2283) lichess.org 2021.] 9... Qe6 10. Qe3 [10. Qd2 Qc5 0-1 (59) Abik02 (2812) – Experience_Chess (2767) lichess.org 2022.] 10... Nd7 11. Nc3 Qc5

7... Ke8



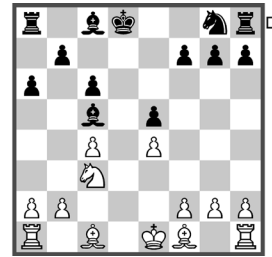
Position after: 7... Ke8

Objectively speaking, this endgame is balanced. However, Black's game is much easier to play as various factors are in his favour. Black tends to gain control of the d4 square, whereas White has no control over d5. Black's king will find a nice place on c7, controlling key squares along the d-file whereas his white colleague struggles to find a secure place. White and Black will both contest the d-file but Black will decide whether and when exchanges take place. It is easy for Black to exchange his dark-squared bishop when White runs

the risk of an ending up with a bad bishop.

8. ♖e3!

Otherwise, Black just needs to put his bishop on c5 to achieve a somewhat better position.



Position after: 8... ♖c5!

A) 8. ♖e2 ♖c5 9. 0-0 ♗f6! 10. ♖g5 ♗c7 11. ♖f3 [11. ♖xf6 This gives a lot of dynamic potential to Black's bishop pair. 11... gxf6 12. ♗c3 f5+] 11... ♖d4+ 0-1 (35) mariodan1985 (2302) – Wlfi (2336) lichess.org 2021.

B) 8. f4



Position after: 8. f4

Here White runs the risk of weakening his pawn structure. 8... ♗f6! 9. ♗c3 [9. fxe5 ♗g4! A maneuver known from the Sicilian Kan. 10. ♖e2 ♗xe5 11. ♖e3 ♖e6 12. ♗d2 ♗c7 13. 0-0-0 ♗d8+] 9... ♖b4 10. ♖d3 ♗e7 11. ♖d2 ♖c5 12. ♗a4 ♖d4+

C) 8. ♗c3 This is inaccurate. 8... ♖c5!

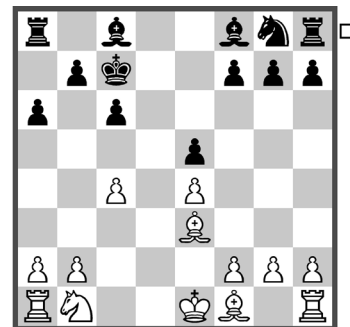
(see analysis diagram next column)

Black takes immediate ownership of the important diagonal.

C1) 9. ♖d3 ♖e6 10. ♗e2 [10. ♗a4 ♖d4+] 10... ♗f6! 11. ♖e3 ♗d7+ 11... ♗xe3 b5 12. ♗a4?! ♖xe3 13. ♗xe3 b5 14. cxb5 axb5 15. ♗c3 b4 16. ♗e2 ♗c7+

C2) 9. ♗a4 ♖d4! Always the place to move to after ♗a4. 10. ♖d2 ♗f6 11. f3 b5! 12. ♖a5+ ♗e7 13. ♗b6 ♗b8 14. ♗xc8+ ♗hxc8+ 0-1 (36) Cappelletto, J (2051) – Lodici, L (2469) Chiongia 2019.

8... ♗c7!



Position after: 8... ♗c7!

In order to be able to develop the knight to f6, without being bothered by ♖g5. While the structures after ♙xf6 gxf6 tend to favour Black there is not much difference between 8...♔c7, 8...♙e6 or 8...♘f6.

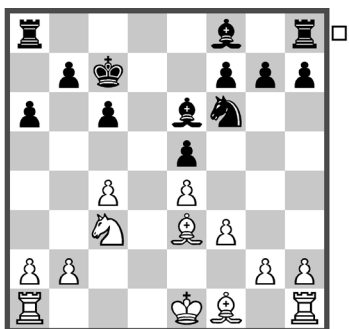
9. ♘c3

9. c5? White's pawn structure is too loose to play such a move successfully. 9... ♘f6 10. f3 [10. ♘c3 ♘g4♣ 10... ♘d7 11. ♙c4 [11. b4 a5 12. b5 ♙xc5 13. ♙xc5 ♘xc5♣ and Black had an extra pawn, ½ – ½ (72) CuattroPrincesses (2506) – Romvid (2721) lichess.org 2022.] 11... f6 12. b4 a5♣ and White's queenside collapses, 0-1 (35) jshutzman (2474) – DeathDynasty (2549) lichess.org 2021.

9... ♘f6 10. f3

10. ♙e2 ♙b4 11. f3 ♙e6= Black will follow with ...♘d7 and ...♙c5.

10... ♙e6



Position after: 10... ♙e6

This endgame is equal, but it is easier to play for Black.

11. c5

White takes space on the queenside.

A) 11. a3 White prevents ...♙b4 and prepares expansion on the queenside. 11... ♘d7 12. ♙e2 [12. b4 a5♣; 12. ♘d5+!? cxd5 13. cxd5 ♙xd5 14. exd5 ♙c5 15. ♙d2 ♔d6=] 12... ♙c5♣ 0-1 (59) Martynyuk, E (2059) – Afonasiaeva, A (2133) Loo 2016.

B) 11. ♙c1 Anticipating further piece activity on the queenside, including potentially ♘d5. 11... ♘d7

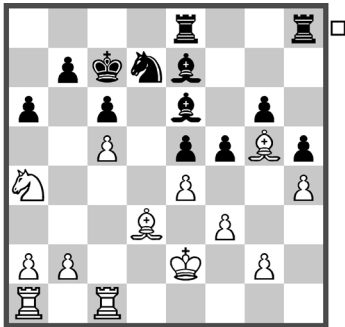
B1) 12. ♙e2 a5 13. ♘a4 b6 14. a3 ♙b8! 15. 0-0 [15. h4 ♘c5 16. ♘xc5 ♙xc5 17. ♔f2 ♙hd8 18. ♙hd1 ♙xe3+ 19. ♔e3 c5♣] 15... ♘c5!♣ 0-1 (60) Popovich, A (1891) – Lvov, N (2007) Cheliabinsk 2021.

B2) 12. ♘d5+! If White misses this one, Black is already slightly better. 12... ♔b8 13. ♘b6 ♘xb6 14. ♙xb6 a5 15. h4 a4=

11... g6 12. ♘a4 ♘d7 13. ♙d3 ♙d8 14. ♔e2 f5

Time to show who is the better chess-player.

15. ♙g5 ♙e8 16. ♙hc1 h5 17. h4 ♙e7♣



Position after: 17... ♕e7

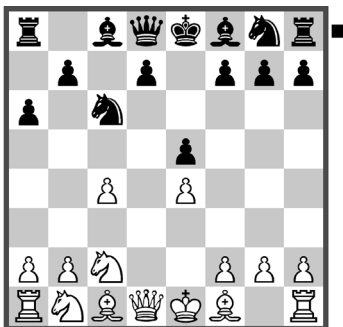
0-1 (74) Socko, B (2622) – Rapport, R (2701) Budapest 2014. Black is about to enter a good versus bad bishop ending.

Conclusion

In this subchapter we analyzed the positions where White plays alternatives to 6. ♖f5 or 6. ♖c2 in the main line 3.

d) 4.d4 cxd4 5. ♖xd4 e5 6. ♖c2

1. e4 c5 2. ♖f3 a6 3. c4 ♖c6 4. d4 cxd4 5. ♖xd4 e5 6. ♖c2



Position after: 6. ♖c2

c4 O'Kelly. 6. ♖e2 may cause White problems along the g1-a7 diagonal. He has to play carefully to fight the danger and will lose valuable time in the process.

6. ♖f3 is an easy target for our standard strategy of playing against White's weakened pawn structure with ...♗b4xc3. 6. ♖b3 moves the knight to an inactive square. Again, the standard strategy of weakening White's pawn structure with ...♗xc3 will do its job. With the unexpected 6. ♖xc6 dxc6! Richard Rapport has added a new chapter to the 3.c4 O'Kelly. Black ends up in an easier ending with a better pawn structure and better options for his pieces. White has to be precise to keep the balance.

A pawn structure known from the Sicilian Kalashnikov has arisen. White has gained time with his knight, having spent only one move instead of three to go from d4 to c2. In return Black will have his bishop outside the pawn chain in an influential position on c5. Exchanging this bishop against White's dark-squared bishop will automatically leave White with a bad bishop. Black has his familiar hole on d5 and weak pawn on d6. In return Black has access to the d4-square and dynamic possibilities like ...b5, ...f5, or kingside piece activity. Black has the more active

pieces. The chances are equal as confirmed by the statistics which level out. That does not take away the fact that strategically Black has a much more straightforward and active game to play.

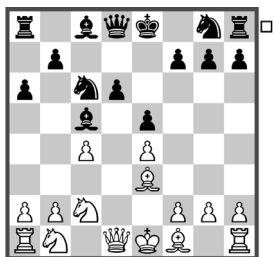
6... ♖c5!

As b4 is not available for the bishop c5 is perfectly acceptable.

7. ♘c3

A) 7. ♙d3 White waits with challenging the strong bishop. 7... d6 8. 0-0 ♘ge7 9. ♘c3 is the main line.

B) 7. ♙e3 Assisted by his knight on c2 White wants to get rid of the strong black bishop immediately. 7... d6!



Position after: 7... d6!

In the 1900s GMs had established that "being taken" is advantageous compared to "taking" in this instance.

8. ♙xc5 is hardly ever played, and for good reason. Black is ahead in the quest for a central outpost, and he has the a6 pawn as a bonus. Moreover, unlike his

black colleague, the white bishop is bad. 8... dxc5 9. ♖xd8+ ♔xd8 10. ♘c3 [10. f3 ♙e6 11. ♚f2 ♘d4 12. ♘e3 ♘e7 13. ♘c3 ♚c7 14. ♘cd5+ ♙xd5 15. cxd5 b5] 10... ♘f6 11. ♘e3 [11. 0-0-0+ ♚c7 12. f3 ♙e6= 13. g4 ♘d4] 11... ♙e6 12. ♘ed5 ♙xd5 13. exd5 ♘d4 14. 0-0-0 ♚c7

7... d6



Position after: 7... d6

8. ♙e2

A belated 8. ♙e3 is a valid option after which 8... ♘f6 is the most solid continuation which normally transposes into the main line.

8... ♘f6 9. 0-0 0-0

Black first completes his development before determining where to put his light-squared bishop.

10. ♙e3

Thematic and leading to the key position of this variation. This position can

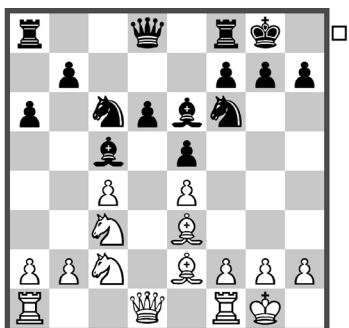
be reached via many different move orders.

A) 10. ♖g5 h6 11. ♗h4 the bishop is going astray here. 11... ♗e6 12. ♘e3 g5! 13. ♖g3 ♘d4= 14. h4? ♘xe2+ 15. ♚xe2 ♗xe3 16. ♚xe3 ♘g4 17. ♚e2 gxh4

B) 10. a3 White prepares an expansion on the queenside. 10... ♘d4!. The simple equalizer. 11. b4 ♘xc2 12. ♚xc2 ♗d4 13. ♗b2 ♗e6= Here Black has nothing to worry about.

C) 10. ♔h1 White prepares f2-f4. 10... ♘d4! 11. ♚b1 [11. ♗g5 h6 12. ♗xf6 ♚xf6 13. ♘e3 ♚d8=] 11... ♘xc2 12. ♚xc2 ♗d4!= An important maneuver.

10... ♗e6



Position after: 10... ♗e6

The main move in this position since the early 1950 as well as the main line in the variation starting with 6. ♘c2.

11. ♚d2!

The most logical move, connecting the rooks and facilitating ♚xe3 and making doubling along the d-file possible. In this structure it is quite challenging for Black to create sufficient counterplay.

A) 11. ♗xc5?! dxc5 12. ♘e3 ♘d4 13. ♘ed5 ♗xd5 14. exd5 ♘e8N 15. ♚e1 ♘d6 16. ♗f1 ♚e8

B) 11. a3 ♗xe3! 12. ♘xe3 ♘d4 13. ♗d3 ♚c8 14. ♚c1 [14. b4 b5] 14... h5 15. ♘e2 g6=

11... ♚c8!

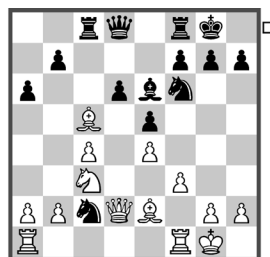
The old masters already played this move as it solves Black's problems.

12. b3!

A) 12. ♚fd1?! ♘b4! Black's key move in this position. 13. b3 [13. ♗xc5 dxc5=] 13... ♘xc2 14. ♚xc2 [14. ♗xc5 ♘xa1] 14... ♗xe3 15. fxe3 b5

B) 12. ♚ad1 ♘b4 13. b3 ♚a5 [13... ♘xc2 14. ♗xc5!]

C) 12. f3 ♘b4 13. ♗xc5 ♘xc2

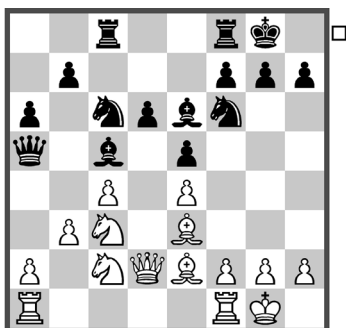


Position after: 13... ♘xc2

14. ♖xc2 [14. ♖xd6 ♖xd6 15. ♙xd6 ♗xa1 16. ♙xf8 ♗xf8 17. ♖xa1 ♙xc4=] 14... ♖xc5! 15. b3 b5=

D) 12. ♖ab1 ♗b4! 13. ♙xc5 dxc5 14. ♖xd8 ♖cxd8 15. ♗e3 ♗c6 16. ♖fd1 ♗d4= ½ (27)-½ (27) Pilnik, H – Euwe, M New York 1948.

12... ♖a5



Position after: 12... ♖a5

This is Black's most precise move.

13. ♖fd1

A) 13. ♖ad1 ♙xe3 14. ♖xe3 ♖fd8 15. ♖b1 ♖c5!= Black has the better bishop.

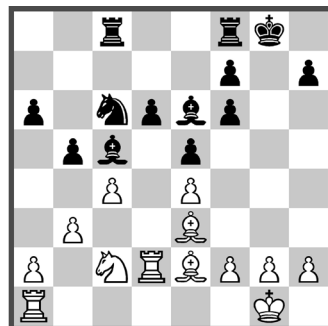
B) 13. a4 ♗d4 14. ♗xd4 exd4 15. ♙xd4 ♗xe4 16. ♗xe4 ♖xd2 17. ♗xd2 ♙xd4 18. ♖ad1 ♙c5 19. ♗e4 ♖fd8=

C) 13. ♙g5 ♗d4=

13... b5!

This move liberates Black's game.

14. ♗d5 ♖xd2 15. ♗xf6+ gxf6 16. ♖xd2



Position after: 16. ♖xd2

16... ♙xe3

16... bxc4 17. ♙xc4 ♙xc4 18. bxc4 ♗a5=

17. ♗xe3 ♗d4=

Black's fractured pawn structure is compensated for by his better minor pieces. Only Black can play for more.

Conclusion

In the early 1950s the variation 3. c4 ♗c6 4. d4 cxd4 5. ♗xd4 e5 (or 5... ♗f6 6. ♗c3 e5 7. ♗c2) 6. ♗c2 was one of the most popular lines against the O'Kelly. White has lost less time than in the Kalashnikov to put his knight on c2.

At the same time, Black has his dark-squared bishop outside the pawn chain in an influential position. The masters of the past did their analysis properly and have shown us how Black can reach a

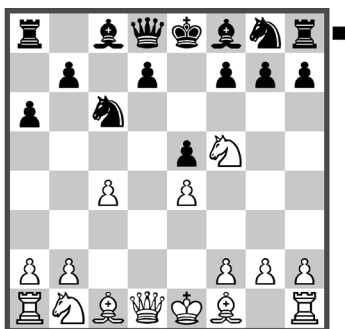
comfortable position. Black should not take the bishop on e3 but maintain the tension. The black knight on g8 should preferably be put on f6 although on e7 it is not bad.

Black should complete his development

with ...0-0, ...♘e6 and ...♝c8. Then he should take stock and make up his mind whether he can best continue with 12...♘b4, preparing for exchanges, or with 12...♙a5, with a subsequent ...b5 in mind. Black should not have any difficulties reaching an equal position.

e) 4.d4 cxd4 5.♘xd4 e5 6.♘f5

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 a6 3. c4 ♘c6 4. d4 cxd4 5. ♘xd4 e5 6. ♘f5



Position after: 6. ♘f5

The critical continuation in the 3. c4 line. Recently there have been quite a few theoretical developments in this line.

6... d5

The traditional response to 6. ♘f5, and the main line of the system started with 3. c4.

A) 6... ♘f6 It has a very low independent value as the logical continuation

transposes back into the main line. 7. ♘c3 d5 8. cxd5 ♘xf5 9. exf5 ♘d4

B) 6... d6 It has also proved to be quite popular recently, but I prefer to keep the text move as our main line.

7. cxd5

Alternatives are better for Black.

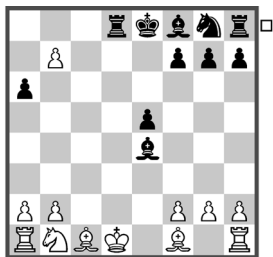
A) 7. exd5 ♘xf5 8. dxc6 ♙xd1+ 9. ♙xd1 bxc6 10. ♘e3 ♘f6 11. f3 0-0-0+ ♣ Black is much better developed, and White's king is exposed, ½-½ (26) Benza, A (2130) – Zhuravlev, A (2348) Smolensk 2005.

B) 7. ♙xd5 ♘xf5! 8. ♙xd8+ ♝xd8 9. exf5 ♘b4 10. ♘a3 ♘c5 ♣ Black is very active for the sacrificed pawn.

7... ♘xf5 8. exf5

8. dxc6?! ♙xd1+ 9. ♙xd1 ♘xe4! 10. cxb7 ♝d8+!

(see analysis diagram next page)



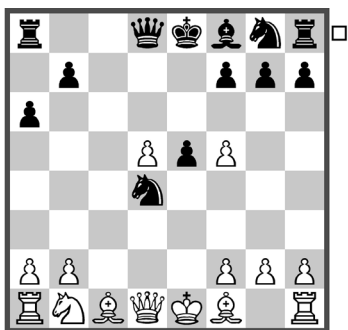
Position after: 10... ♖d8+!

Immediately a nuisance to the white king.

A) 11. ♔d2?! ♕xb7 12. ♘c3 ♕c5 13. ♔c2 [13. f3 ♕e3⊔] 13... ♕xf2→ 0-1 (18) Protput (2479) – Undercover1 (2315) lichess.org 2021.

B) 11. ♔e1 ♕xb7 12. ♘c3 ♘f6 13. f3 ♕c5 14. ♕g5 ♔e7 15. a3 h6 16. ♕xf6+ ♔xf6 17. ♖d1 ♔g6⊔ Black is much better developed in this endgame. 1-0 (39) Lakarah (2237) – Undercover1 (2320) lichess.org 2021.

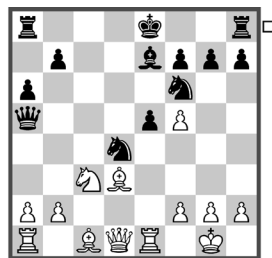
8... ♘d4



Position after: 8... ♘d4

9. ♘c3

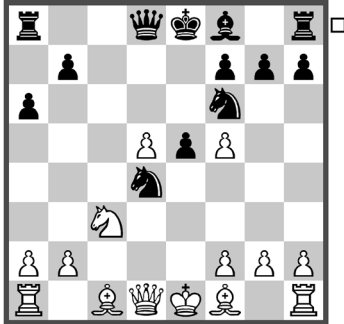
9. ♘d3!? An interesting concept. White postpones ♘c3 which would take us into the main line. White tries to get a rook on e1 as quickly as possible to focus on the main weakness in Black's camp, his e-pawn. As Fabiano Caruana played this move quite successfully in the 2022 Candidates Tournament, we may see more of it in the near future. 9... ♘f6! is the better move, as already demonstrated by a number of O'Kelly regulars. 10. 0-0 ♕e7! 11. ♖e1 ♔xd5! That is a better idea! By taking at the last possible moment Black can optimize how to take the pawn and, if taken by the queen, where to put his queen after White's next move. 12. ♘c3 ♔a5!



Position after: 12... ♔a5!

Black should defend his e-pawn. 13. ♕g5 [13. ♕d2 ♖d8 14. ♘e4 ♔b6 15. ♕c3 0-0 16. ♘xf6+ ♔xf6 17. ♔g4 b5=] 13... 0-0 14. ♕xf6 ♕xf6 15. ♘e4 ♔d8! 16. ♔g4 ♖c8 17. ♖ad1 [17. ♖e3 g6 18. ♘xf6+ ♔xf6 19. h4 ♘c2 20. ♕xc2 ♖xc2 21. ♖f3 ♔d6=] 17... b5= It will be difficult for White to set up an attack on the kingside, as in the main line, as he has exchanged his dark-squared bishop. The chances are even.

9... ♖f6



Position after: 9... ♖f6

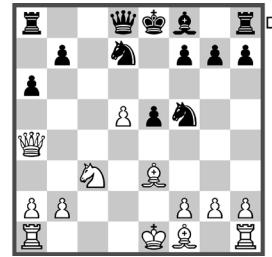
The most natural continuation which transposes to the next chapter.

10. ♙d3

White defends his pawn on f5. This is seen most often in practice.

A) 10. ♙c4 ♖c8! With a free tempo for Black. 11. ♙d3 [11. ♙b3 ♙b4! 12. 0-0 0-0 13. ♙e3 ♖xf5 1-0 (75) Galan, A (2210) – Manak, J Slovakia 1997.] 11... ♙e7 12. 0-0 0-0=

B) 10. ♙e3 White challenges the strong knight in the center, but after Black's next move it is clear that this is not the most principled continuation. 10... ♖xf5! Time to take back some material. Now it is Black's turn to challenge the white bishop. 11. ♗a4+ The idea behind White's 10th move. Black has two good moves. [11. ♙c4?! ♖xe3 12. fxe3 ♙c5 1-0] The quiet option is 11... ♖d7.



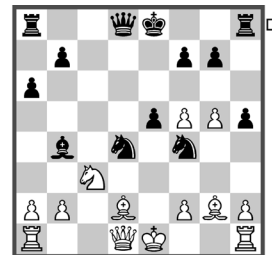
Position after: 11... ♖d7

Black will gain further time as the white queen is in a vulnerable position.

B1) 12. ♙d2 saving the bishop costs time. 12... b5!? 13. ♗d1 ♙c5 1-0

B2) 12. 0-0-0 ♖xe3! 13. fxe3 b5!N 14. ♗g4 ♖f6 15. ♗g3 ♙b4 [15... ♙d6 16. ♗xg7 ♖g8 17. ♗h6 ♙b4 1-0] 16. ♗xe5+ ♗e7 17. ♗xe7+ ♗xe7= Black will soon win back a pawn leading to an equal endgame.

C) 10. g4 A sharp continuation which weakens White's kingside. 10... h5! A good recipe against and early g2-g4. We first weaken White's kingside before taking the d-pawn. 11. g5 ♖xd5 12. ♙g2 ♙b4! 13. ♙d2 ♖f4!



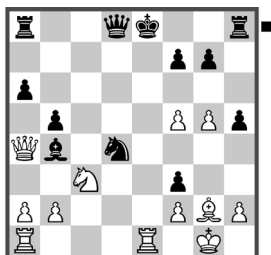
Position after: 13... ♖f4!

The board is on fire, but Black has excellent chances in the complications which follow.

C1) 14. ♖xb7 ♜d3+ 15. ♔f1 ♜xb2
16. ♖c1 ♜b8 17. ♙g2 ♜d3 18. ♖d1
♜xf5+–

C2) 14. ♙e4 0-0 15. a3 ♙xc3 16.
bxc3 [16. ♙xc3 ♖xg5] 16... ♜de2 17.
♙f3 ♜xc3 18. ♙xc3 ♖c8=

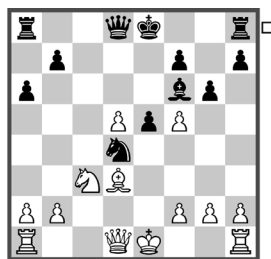
C3) 14. ♙xf4 exf4 15. 0-0! [15. ♖a4+
b5♭; 15. f6 gxf6 16. 0-0 ♙xc3 17. bxc3
♜e6 18. g6 ♖xd1 19. ♜axd1 ♜d8=]
15... f3! 16. ♖a4+ b5 17. ♜fe1+!



Position after: 17. ♜fe1+!

17... ♙e7 18. ♖d1 fxg2 19. f6 gxf6 20.
gxf6 ♜e6= With equal chances.

D) 10. ♙g5 White is materialistic and exchanges the bishop pair in order to keep his extra pawn. 10... ♙e7! 11. ♙xf6 White must avoid losing a pawn after ...♜xd5. [11. f4 ♜xd5 12. ♙xe7 ♜xe7 13. fxe5 ♜exf5♭ 0-1 (28) marbingao (2270) – Undercover1 (2332) lichess.org 2022.] 11... ♙xf6 12. ♙d3 [12. g4?! h5!♭ and White cannot maintain his kingside structure.] 12... g6!

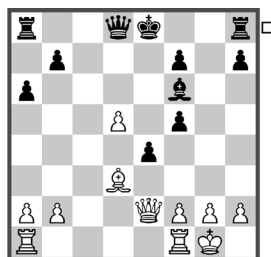


Position after: 12... g6!

An essential move to keep the initiative. If Black does not sacrifice a pawn this way he is already in serious problems. Black will be a pawn behind but will create more than sufficient counterplay with his strong knight in the center and the open h-file.

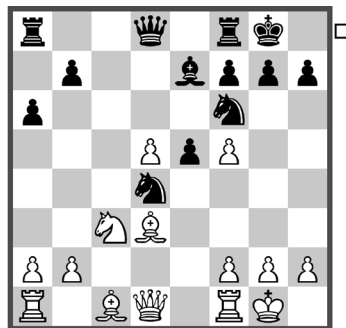
D1) 13. fxg6 The most natural move and played most often. 13... hxg6 14. 0-0 [14. a4 ♙g7 15. a5 f5 16. ♖a4+ ♔f7 17. ♜d1 ♖d6 18. h4 ♜ac8= 0-1 (31) Cadavid, J (1992) – Ruiz Jaraba, V (1850) Pereira 2022.] 14... ♔f8= Black castles by hand and keeps the rook on the h-file.

D2) 13. 0-0! The best choice but only seen in one game. White does not accept the pawn sacrifice. 13... gxf5 14. ♜e2 ♜xe2+ 15. ♖xe2 e4!



Position after: 15... e4!

An improvement on the known game. The situation becomes rather complicated. 16. ♖ad1 ♔d6 17. f3 [17. ♘c2 h5 18. f3 ♘e5 19. h3 0-0-0] 17... 0-0-0 Again Black sacrifices a pawn with a tense struggle ahead. The opposite-colored bishops ensure that Black will not run into any problems in the endgame. 18. fxe4 fxe4 19. ♘xe4 ♔b8



Position after: 11... 0-0

10... ♘e7!

Black should postpone taking the d-pawn as long as possible and give priority to development.

A) 10... ♖xd5?! 11. ♘e4± is an example of where Black loses more time. [11. 0-0 ♘e7 12. ♘e4± is also good for White.]

B) 10... ♔d7?! This is a nice defensive move against a white attack with a queen on g4. However, Black played it with something else in mind. 11. 0-0 0-0-0?! This is too risky. The king is in the open air on the queenside. My database shows a 100% score for White. 12. ♘g5!± 1-0 (26) Fiensch, G – Schuetz, H DDR 1978.

11. 0-0

11. ♘e3 0-0 12. f4?! ♖xd5 0-1 (25) dashjury (2528) – Romvid (2658) lichess.org 2022.

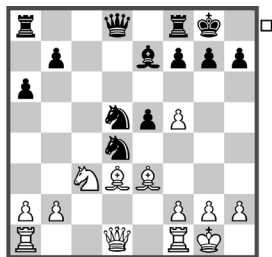
11... 0-0

12. ♖e1

The natural continuation, played most often and preferred by the engines.

A) 12. f4 exf4! 13. ♘xf4 ♖xd5! 14. ♔d2 [14. ♘d2 ♖f6] 14... ♘f6 15. ♖e4 ♖xf4 16. ♔xf4 ♔e7=

B) 12. ♘e3 ♖xd5! Soon leads to an equal position.



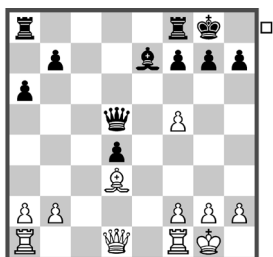
Position after: 12... ♖xd5!

B1) 13. ♖xd5 ♔xd5 14. ♔g4 ♘f6 and we play the main line where 12. ♖e1 has been replaced by the less effective 12. ♘e3.

B2) 13. ♘e4 ♖f6! 14. ♘xb7 [14. ♔d2? ♖xe4 15. ♖xe4 ♖xf5]

14... ♖b8 15. ♕xa6 ♗xb2 16. ♕d3 ♖a5 17. ♘e4 ♘xe4 18. ♕xe4 ♘e2+ 19. ♔h1 ♗d8! [19... ♘c3? 20. ♖f3= 1-0 (34) higescha– Romvid (2594) lichess.org 2020.] 20. ♖e1 ♕b4–+

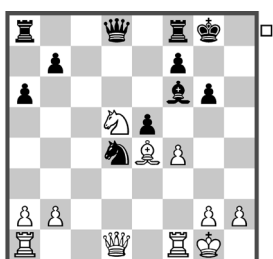
B3) 13. ♕xd4 exd4 14. ♘xd5 ♖xd5



Position after: 14... ♖xd5

15. ♖h5 ♕f6 16. ♗fe1 ♗fe8 17. b3 b5= ½ – ½ (23) Chesstomioka (2624)-cutemouse83 (2911) lichess.org 2021.

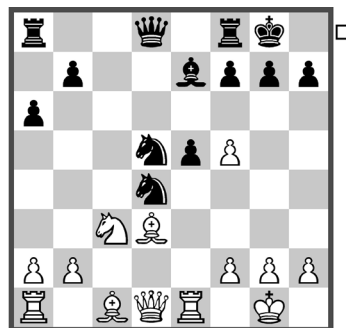
C) 12. ♕g5 ♘xd5 13. ♘xd5 ♕xg5 14. ♕e4 g6! 15. f4 ♕f6 16. fxg6 hxg6



Position after: 16... hxg6

17. f5 gxf5 18. ♖h5 ♕g7 19. ♗xf5 ♘xf5 20. ♕xf5 ♗e8 21. ♕h7+ ♔f8 22. ♖f3 ♗e6 23. ♗f1 ♖d7 24. ♕f5= There is too little material on the board for White to have any winning ambitions.

12... ♘xd5!



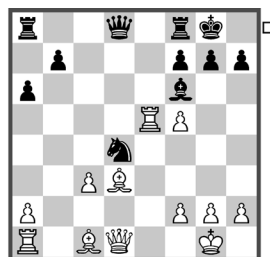
Position after: 12... ♘xd5!

It is time to take the pawn and introduce some tactics into the position.

13. ♘xd5!

Together with 13. ♖g4 this is White's most dangerous response. It could be the start of a ferocious attack against the black king.

A) 13. ♗xe5 If White plays the 3. c4 O'Kelly unprepared you will probably face this move. White temporarily wins a pawn, but has to be very careful as there are all kind of tactics which are favorable for Black. 13... ♘xc3 14. bxc3 ♕f6!



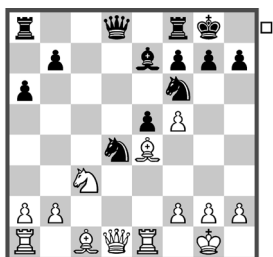
Position after: 14... ♕f6!

This has led to a lot of accidents for White.

A1) 15. cxd4? White expects 15... ♖xe5 winning material, but it is Black who immediately wins with a much better move. 15... ♖xd4!→ White's position can no longer be saved. 16. ♖b1 ♖xe5 17. ♖b2 [17. ♖xb7 ♖fb8→ 0-1 (53) Markus-Maischberger (2623) – Romvid (2748) lichess.org 2022.] 17... ♖d5 18. f6 the final trick. 18... g6 19. ♖e2 ♖xb2 20. ♖xb2 ♖ad8 21. ♖e3 ♖xd3→

A2) 15. ♖e1 Herewith White saves the game. 15... ♖b5! This will result in massive exchanges leading to an equal endgame. 16. ♖xb5 [16. ♖b2 ♖xc3 17. ♖f3 b5! 18. ♖ac1 b4] 16... axb5! 17. ♖b3 [17. ♖d2?! b4! 18. ♖c2 ♖c8 19. ♖ab1 bxc3 20. ♖e3 ♖d7] 17... ♖d3 18. ♖e3 ♖xf5! 19. ♖d4 g6= It is time to agree to a draw.

B) 13. ♖e4 Putting pressure on Black's centralized knight, with an X-ray towards Black's queenside pawns. 13... ♖f6!



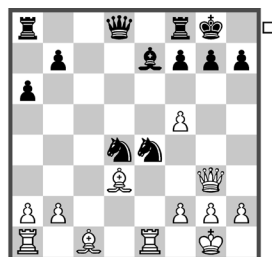
Position after: 13... ♖f6!

Active defense, keeping the d4-knight in position and mobilizing the rook if White takes on b7. That is the reason why in the main line White exchanges on d5 first. 14. ♖xb7 [14. ♖d3 ♖c7 15. ♖g5 ♖ad8=] 14... ♖a7

B1) 15. ♖f3 ♖d7 16. ♖g5 [16. ♖xe5?? ♖c6→] 16... ♖xf5 17. ♖a4 ♖d4 18. ♖e2 a5= The pawn count is equal again but Black still has a strong knight on d4. ½ – ½ (31) Patrelakis, E (2281) – Enchev, I (2483) Paleochora 2021.

B2) 15. ♖e4 may be a bit better, but Black should be able to obtain enough counterplay for the pawn. 15... ♖d7 16. ♖a4 ♖c8 17. ♖g5 ♖xe4 18. ♖xe7 ♖xe7 19. ♖xe4 [19. ♖xe4 ♖xf5=] 19... f6 20. ♖d1 ♖b7=

C) 13. ♖g4!? Another method to build up an initiative on the kingside. In itself an interesting idea but Wesley So had an unfortunate experience with this maneuver. 13... ♖f6 14. ♖g3 [14. ♖h3 ♖d6=] 14... e4! 15. ♖xe4 ♖xe4



Position after: 15... ♖xe4

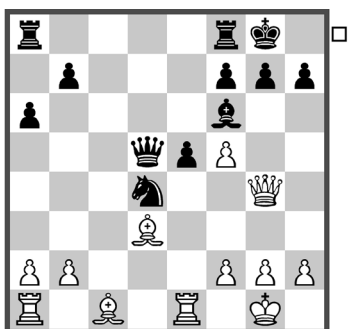
16. ♖xe4 [16. ♙xe4 ♘e2+-+] 16... ♗xf5 17. ♚f3 [17. ♚h3 g6=] 17... ♚d7= White has the bishop pair, but Black is solid.

13... ♚xd5 14. ♚g4

White has the bishop pair, a nice pawn on f5 and good chances to develop an attack against the black king. Black has a nice knight and a centralized queen.

14. ♙e4 ♚d7 looking forward to playing ...g6 at the right time, to get rid of White's annoying f-pawn. 15. ♙e3 [15. ♚g4 g6 16. ♙h6 ♗fe8 17. ♖ad1 ♖ad8 18. ♗d3 ♙h8 19. h3 ♙f6=] 15... ♖ad8 [15... g6? 16. ♙xd4 exd4 17. ♚b3±] 16. g3 [16. ♚g4 g6=] 16... g6=

14... ♙f6



Position after: 14... ♙f6

Black should defend carefully.

15. h4

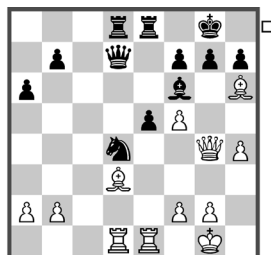
White gradually builds up his attack.

A) 15. ♙e4 only improves the position of the black queen. 15... ♚d7! 16. ♙e3 g6 17. ♖ad1 ♖ad8 18. ♗d2 ♚c8 19. ♙xd4 ♖xd4 20. ♖xd4 exd4 21. ♚f3 ♖e8= 1-0 (59) Checkmate_2022 (2333) – Undercover1 (2388) lichess.org 2022.

B) 15. ♙h6 This move immediately is an important alternative. 15... ♚d7! Black's best. It puts the queen on its best square preventing a future f5-f6.

B1) 16. h4 ♖ad8 17. ♖ad1 ♗fe8 etc. with ...g6 next. [17... ♙h8 18. ♙g5]

B2) 16. ♖ad1 ♖ad8 17. h4 ♗fe8!

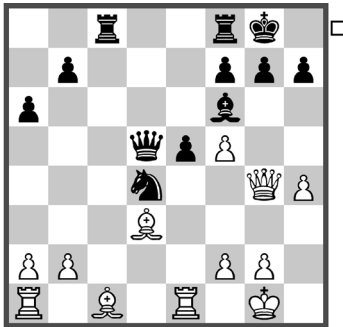


Position after: 17... ♗fe8!

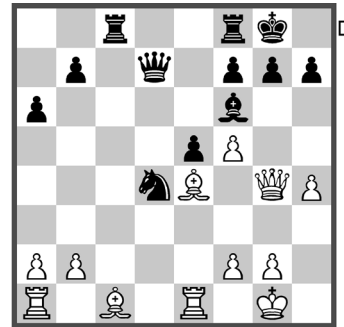
Black plays for a counterattack in the center. 18. h5 [18. ♙e4 ♙h8 19. ♙e3 ♚a4 20. ♗d2 ♚xa2= Black has good counterplay.; 18. ♙g5 ♙xg5 19. hxg5 g6=] 18... e4! equalizing the position. 19. ♙xe4 ♗xe4 20. ♖xe4 ♗f3+ 21. gxf3 ♚xd1+ 22. ♙g2 ♙h8 23. ♙g5 h6 24. ♙xf6 gxf6=

15... ♖ac8

(see diagram next page)



Position after: 15... ♖f8



Position after: 16... ♕d7

Black brings ...♘c2 into the equation.

The ideal square for the queen.

16. ♗e4

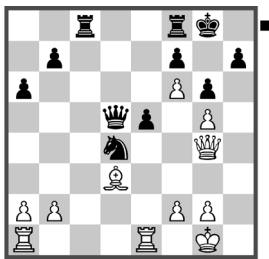
17. ♗h6

A) 16. ♗h6 ♘f3+! This is possible as White has two pieces hanging. 17. gxf3 [17. ♕xf3 ♕xf3 18. gxf3 gxh6=] 17... ♕xd3 18. ♖ad1 ♕c4=

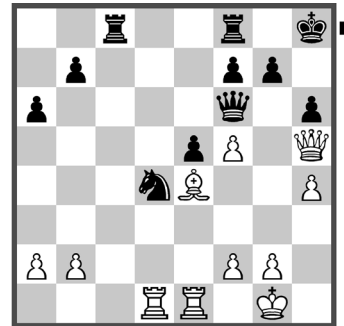
17. h5 ♖h8 18. ♖d1 ♖fd8 19. ♗g5 ♗xg5 20. ♕xg5 h6 21. ♕h4 f6=

B) 16. ♗g5!? ♗xg5 17. hxg5 g6 18. f6

17... ♖h8! 18. ♗g5 ♕e7 19. ♖ad1 h6 20. ♗xf6 ♕xf6 21. ♕h5



Position after: 18. f6



Position after: 21. ♕h5

looks frightening, but Black can defend easily. 18... ♖fd8 19. ♖ad1 [19. ♗e4 ♕d7 20. ♕h4 h5! =] 19... b5 20. ♕h4 h5 21. gxh6 ♖h7=

21... ♖cd8 22. ♖d3 ♖h7 23. ♖h1 ♖d6=

16... ♕d7

½ – ½ (56) Ivic, V (2620) – Van Foreest, L (2532) Terme Catez 2021.

Conclusion

Black's traditional method of combating the system with 3. c4 and 6. ♖f5 has long been under a cloud. Recent theoretical developments and elite practice have changed the assessment and have shown that Black should be able to obtain equality more easily with 6...d5 than with the fashionable 6...d6. The positions are sharp, White is often

able to build up an initiative. The key to Black's success is the postponement of taking back the pawn on d5 or on f5. Black should still not be materialistic but play for piece activity. The finesse 13. ♙e4 ♘f6! in the main line, a renewed pawn sacrifice, is a case in point. If White plays precisely with 13. ♘xd5, he will be able to develop attacking chances on the kingside. Black should be able to secure a draw with precise play.