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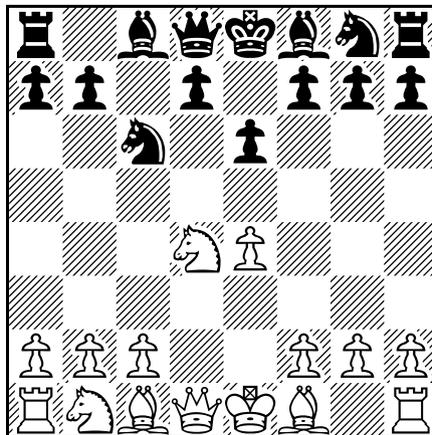
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Introduction

What is the Sicilian Taimanov?

This book is about the Sicilian Defence, and more specifically the Taimanov Variation, which has been my favourite reply to 1 e4 for more than 15 years.

The Sicilian Taimanov arises after the opening moves 1 e4 c5 2 f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 fxc6 (see Diagram).



It's named after the Russian Grandmaster and former World Championship Candidate Mark Taimanov, who has played hundreds of games with it and helped to develop many lines.

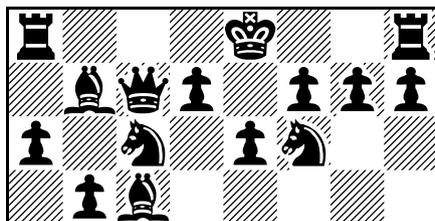
Why play the Sicilian Taimanov?

The Sicilian Defence really needs no selling at all. It's the most famous chess opening of all – and the most popular one too. Its main attraction is that by choosing an asymmetrical pawn structure, Black is able to unbalance the position from move one, and crucially he can do so in a sound way. This allows Black to fight for the initiative from the very start of the game. It also means that White is less likely to gain a risk-free edge, as the position will always contain some measure of imbalance.

Of all the Sicilian variations on offer – and there are many! – why choose the Taimanov? I can think of two attractions which are immediately evident:

1. These days it's virtually impossible to expect success in any mainline opening without learning at least some opening theory, and the Sicilian Taimanov is no exception. However, the amount of theory you have to contend with in the Taimanov is still minimal in comparison to more illustrious variations such as the Najdorf or the Dragon, and developments in theory also tend to move at a slightly slower pace. The Taimanov Variation is certainly a manageable project for anybody wishing to take up the Sicilian.

2. Black's system of development is arguably one of the more active ones in the Sicilian, and it also allows a good degree of flexibility and creativity.



The diagram shows a kind of “ideal” development system for Black. Of course in the real world, White is making moves too, and putting obstacles in Black's way, but even so this set-up is well worth noting. The Taimanov is characterized by the d7-e6 pawn structure, which allows the king's bishop to play an active role. Depending on the situation, this bishop sometimes develops to e7, d6, b4, c5 (as in the diagram) or occasionally, as you'll find out, even a3! Both knights are developed on their favourite squares, and the light-squared bishop can be activated via the queenside fianchetto ...a6, ...b5 and ...♗b7. Finally, the queen is virtually always deployed on c7, her favourite square in most Sicilian lines, and certainly in the Taimanov.

What this book covers

I approached this book in exactly the same manner as my previous one in the *Move by Move* series, which studied the Nimzo-Indian Defence. With apologies to those who have seen it, I'd like to borrow from the introduction to that book. I mentioned a key moment in virtually every game we play: the moment where our opening knowledge runs out, we are “out of book” and we have to think for ourselves. To help to understand what we need to do in these situations, I've again focussed on the following themes:

1. Typical situations in opening and middlegame positions (and very occasionally thematic endings).
2. Typical plans for both sides and how players react to these.
3. Typical and thematic tactical opportunities for both sides.
4. The principles and guidelines of each variation covered.
5. The key questions we should be asking ourselves during study and in game situations.

I've presented the opening theory for each variation covered, and delved into and updated my long-running Taimanov study files. I've highlighted move-order issues and possible transpositions into other lines.

I've covered main lines, but generally my choices are those which I feel teach us a great deal about the basic principles of the Sicilian Taimanov. For example, barring a few exceptions, I've chosen lines where Black maintains a Taimanov set-up rather than transposing to a Scheveningen with an early ...d6. Also, I've focussed on the modern main lines in which Black plays ...d6, rather than Taimanov's original treatment with ...d7.

This book is primarily aimed at those who play (or want to play) the Sicilian Taimanov as Black. I've covered a sufficient number of lines so that those playing Black can choose at least one option against every main line White can play. I do feel, though, that the general study of Sicilian Taimanov positions, as well as the opening theory, will also be of value to those who prefer playing the White side.

Again I'd like to say that my studying and writing has been made easier by the creative efforts of so many players whose games and ideas have contributed immensely to the development of the Sicilian Taimanov over the years. Some of these players are featured in this book, and they all deserve a huge amount of appreciation. To list just a very few, I would mention Vishy Anand, Judit Polgar, Alexander Morozevich, Sergei Movsesian, Pavel Tregubov, Bartłomiej Macieja, Igor Miladinovic, Sergei Rublevsky, Aleksander Delchev, Pia Cramling and, of course, Taimanov himself. It's certainly worth playing through their Sicilian Taimanov games to gain ideas and inspiration.

The Move by Move Series

The *Move by Move* format used in this book is designed to be interactive, and is based on questions asked by both teachers and students. It aims – as much as possible – to replicate chess lessons. So the reader is encouraged to do some work! To gain the most benefit, please pause for thought to consider each question asked, and allow yourself a few minutes to try each exercise before moving on to the answer below. I've highlighted some of the more difficult exercises and also included a few hints in places.

Many thanks go to all those who have been kind enough to offer inspiration, advice and assistance in the creation and development of *Move by Move*. Special thanks go to Darren Reed.

Now let's begin our Sicilian Taimanov journey!

John Emms
Kent
March 2012

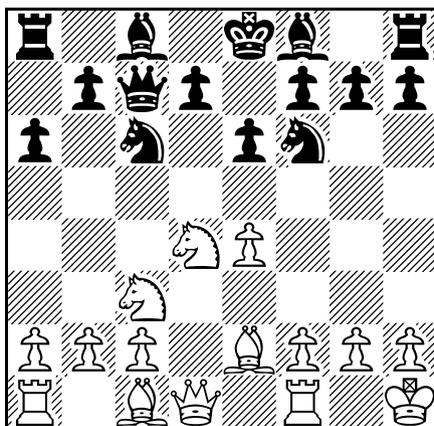
Chapter Two

White Plays e2: Alternative Lines

Not every White player chooses the main line after 6  e2, and in this chapter we'll take a look at some other options. After 1 e4 c5 2  f3  c6 3 d4 cxd4 4  xd4  c6 5  c3  c7 6  e2 a6 7 0-0  f6, the most important alternative to 8  e3 is 8  h1, but there's also 8  g5 and 8  xc6 to consider. In addition, White can play an early a2-a3, either before or after castling. Let's begin with the most popular alternative to 8  e3 – the 8  h1 variation:

Game 8 M.Szelag-S.Beshukov Koszalin 1999

1 e4 c5 2  f3  c6 3 d4 cxd4 4  xd4  c7 5  c3 e6 6  e2 a6 7 0-0  f6 8  h1



Question: What's the idea behind this king move?

Answer: White wants to play the typical f2-f4 advance, but that's impossible at the moment – although 8 f4?? ♗xd4 9 ♖xd4 ♘c5 has claimed a number of victims and is always worth hoping for! 8 ♔h1, just like 8 ♘e3, removes this problem and f2-f4 is now on the cards. If Black responds with 8...♘e7, then 9 f4 d6 transposes to the Sicilian Scheveningen (just like 8 ♘e3 ♘e7 9 f4 d6 does).

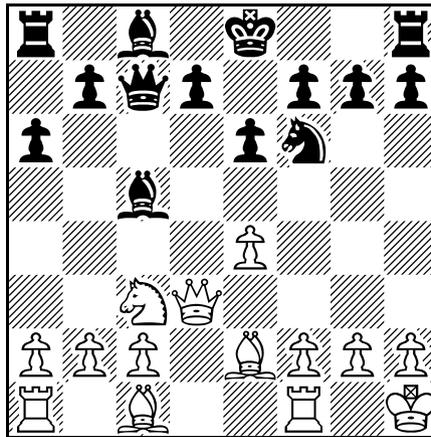
8...♗xd4!

Black changes tack from the first chapter. This time the bishop comes to c5, and with gain of tempo against the white queen. Of course this wouldn't be possible against 8 ♘e3.

Question: Can Black simply play as in the last chapter, with 8...♘b4?

Answer: Yes, he can, and this is certainly a playable alternative. White has more than one option against 8...♘b4, but to me the most consistent move is 9 ♘g5 utilizing the fact the bishop didn't commit to e3 last move. White's idea is to answer 9...♘xc3 with 10 ♘xf6! gxf6 (10...♘xb2 11 ♘xg7!) 11 bxc3 and White has scored well from this position. Taimanov specialist Miladinovic prefers answering 9 ♘g5 with 9...♖d6!?, e.g. 10 ♗xc6 ♖xd1 11 ♗xd1 bxc6 12 e5 ♗e4 13 ♘e3 f6 14 f3 ♗g5 15 ♗f2 ♗f7 16 ♗d3 ♘e7 17 f4 with a very slight edge for White, but Black is solid, V.Kotronias-I.Miladinovic, Kallithea 2003.

9 ♖xd4 ♘c5 10 ♖d3!



Exercise: Consider how Black should continue his development.

10 ♖d3 is most logical retreat. The e-pawn is protected and in many lines the queen can use the third rank to swing over to the kingside.

Answer: 10...b5!

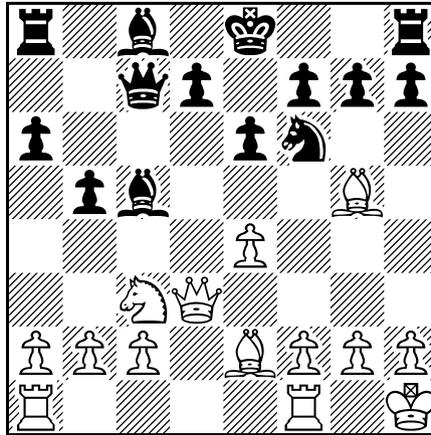
Typical Sicilian play!

1. The bishop will be very actively placed on b7, where it will attack the e4-pawn.
2. The pressure on the e4-pawn might be intensified by ...b4, threatening its defender.
3. Black can increase the pressure down the half-open c-file with ...♖c8.

10...b5 is better than 10...0-0 which rather invites White's attacking plans after 11 f4 or 11 ♗g5.

11 f4

White carries on his plan. The alternative is 11 ♗g5.



Question: Should Black be worried about ♗xf6, doubling the f-pawns?

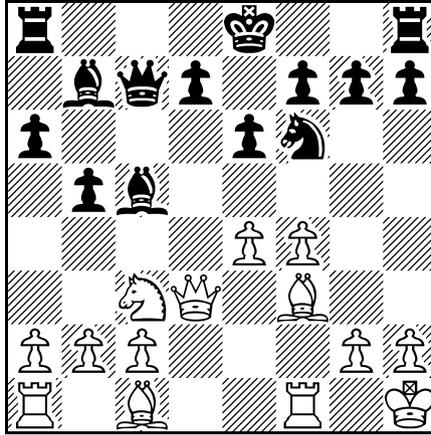
Answer: Not really – at least he shouldn't be taking any special precautions against it, like moving the bishop back to e7. After 11...♗b7 12 ♗xf6 gxf6 Black has very good compensation for the slight structural damage: the bishop pair, the opened g-file, and of course the king can still castle long. For example, 13 ♗h5 (13 f4 h5!) 13...♖g8 14 ♗ad1 ♗g7 15 a3 0-0-0 16 ♗f3 h5 17 ♗d2 h4 with good play for Black, L.Bensdorp-H.Van der Poel, Dieren 2007.

After 11...♗b7 White is more likely to play 12 f4 as in our main game, but with the dark-squares bishop outside the pawn chain. The position after 12...h6!? 13 ♗xf6 gxf6 still looks playable for Black, despite the tempo loss. 12...♗b4 is more usual, and here 13 ♗f3 ♖c8 14 ♗xf6 gxf6 15 ♗ad1 ♗xc3 16 bxc3 ♖e7 is roughly equal. Note, though, that the tempting 12...b4 is well met by 13 e5!, and here 13...bxc3 14 exf6 cxb2 15 fxg7! bxa1♗ 16 ♗xa1 ♗g8 17 ♗xh7 ♗xg7 18 ♗xg7 is slightly in White's favour.

11...♗b7!

Black doesn't fear 12 e5, as 12...♗d5 13 ♗xd5 (13 ♗e4? ♗b4!) 13...♗xd5 is fine for him.

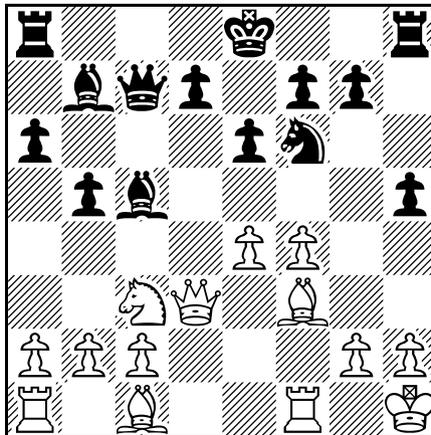
12 ♗f3!



Szelag adds protection to the e4-pawn and opposes Black's bishop on the long diagonal. With ...♗d5 no longer an option, White threatens to drive Black's knight back to g8 with 13 e5.

Exercise: Beshukov's next move is a creative solution to Black's problems. Can you guess what it is? (Hint: Find an attractive square for the knight.)

Answer: 12...h5!



If you found this move, you are most definitely a natural Sicilian Taimanov player! If you didn't, don't worry – the most important thing is to remember the concept now.

The g4-square is an enticing option for the black knight; 12...h5 makes this possible and immediately gives Black counterplay. It's worth noting that, because of the position of

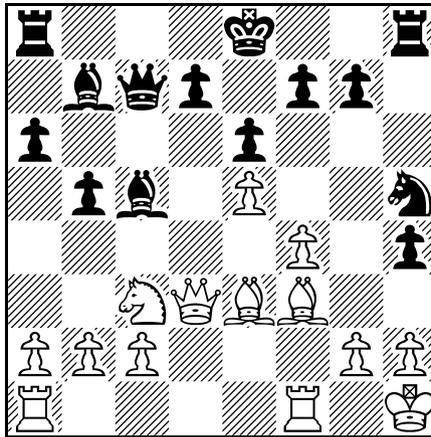
White's king, Black can still play ...♘g4 even after h2-h3. Or he might play ...h4 intending ...♘h5 and ...♘g3+! Black could play 12...0-0, intending 13 e5 ♖e8, but 12...h5 is probably better – and much more fun!

Question: How about driving White's knight away with 12...b4?
Then e4-e5 can be answered by ...♘d5 again.

Answer: Always consider counter-threats. Instead of moving the knight, White can play 13 e5! bxc3 14 exf6. Black cannot avoid weakening himself, and White has scored well from this position.

13 e5

Szelag continues in the most direct fashion, and with the most popular move. The game J.Degraeve-A.Horvath, Charleville 2000, is a good demonstration of Black's counterattacking possibilities against less direct play by White: 13 ♙d2 h4! (idea: ...♘h5, ...♘g3+! and mate) 14 e5 ♘h5 15 ♙e3 (White stops the mate threat, but...)

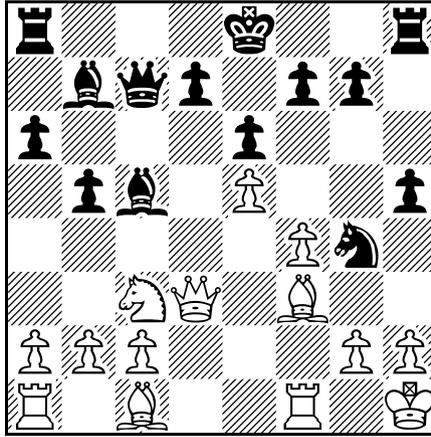


15...♘g3+! (Black plays it anyway!) 16 hxg3 hxg3+ 17 ♔g1 ♜b6 18 ♜fe1 (if 18 ♜ae1 then a clever switchback 18...♜d8!! and White gets mated) 18...♙xf3 19 gxf3 (perhaps White should bail out with 19 ♙xc5 ♜xc5+ 20 ♜e3) and here Rybka gives the long line 19...♜d8! (instead of Horvath's 19...♙xe3+) 20 ♘e4 (20 ♙xc5 ♜h1+ 21 ♔xh1 ♜h4+ 22 ♔g1 ♜h2+ 23 ♔f1 g2+ 24 ♔e2 g1♜+ wins) 20...♜h4 21 ♔f1 ♜h1+ 22 ♔e2 ♜h2+ 23 ♔d1 (23 ♘f2 ♜xf2+ 24 ♙xf2 ♜g2) 23...♜xf3+ 24 ♔c1 ♙xe3+ 25 ♜xe3 ♜xf4 26 b3 ♜h1+ 27 ♔b2 ♜xa1 28 ♔xa1 g2 29 ♘d6+ ♔e7 30 ♜e1 ♜f2 31 ♜d1 ♜h8 32 ♘f5+ ♔d8! winning!

Assuming White wants to avoid these tricks, exchanging bishops with 13 ♙e3 is wiser. An example: 13...♙xe3 14 ♜xe3 b4 (14...d6 is also possible) 15 ♘a4 (on this occasion the counter-threat 15 e5? is met by a counter counter-threat: 15...♘g4!) 15...♘g4 (Black should avoid 15...♜xc2? 16 ♘c5) 16 ♜b6 ♜xb6 17 ♘xb6 ♜b8 18 ♘c4 ♔e7 19 e5 ♙xf3 20 gxf3!? (or 20 ♜xf3 ♜bc8 21 b3 f6! 22 h3 fxe5 23 fxe5 ♜c5 24 ♜e1 ♘h6) 20...♘h6 21 b3 ♜b5 22 a3 a5

with an equal position, C.Santagata-A.Mastrovasilis, correspondence 2003.

13...♗g4



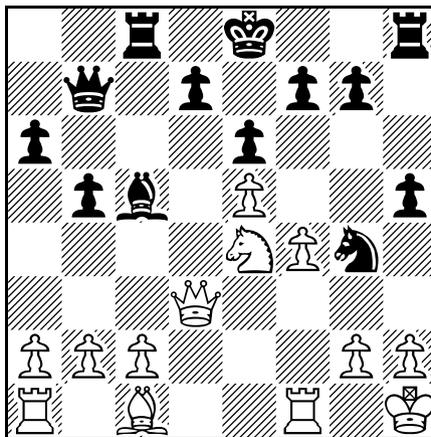
14 ♖xb7

Black has more than one good way to meet 14 ♖e4. One is 14...♖b8 threatening to take on e4 and play ...♗f2+. Black is very happy after 15 ♗d6+ ♖xd6 16 exd6 ♖c5, e.g. 17 ♖xg4 hxg4 18 f5 and now 18...♗h3!! followed by ...g3 is an absolute killer, D.Von Wantoch Rekowski-V.Djuric, Belgrade 2001. 15 ♖e2 is better, and 15...♖xe4 16 ♖xe4 ♖b6! (16...♖a7!? intending ...♖c4) 17 h3 ♗f2+ 18 ♖h2 ♗xe4 19 ♖xe4 g6 gives level chances, M.Mosquera-J.Magem Badals, Bled Olympiad 2002.

14...♖xb7 15 ♖e4

With the light-squared bishops exchanged, the knight is more secure on this excellent central outpost.

15...♖c8



Black can also play 15...♗e7 and this often transposes to 15...♖c8, but the rook move is slightly more active.

Question: Should Black allow White to exchange knight for bishop?

Answer: He should not only allow it; he should welcome it! At the moment at least, White's knight on e4 is stronger than Black's bishop. Likewise, Black's knight is stronger than White's bishop. So lines like 16 ♖xc5?! ♜xc5 and 16 ♖d6+? ♗xd6 17 exd6 ♝b6! are very much to Black's liking. White would ideally like to exchange bishop for bishop, as this would leave the knight free to jump into the juicy d6 outpost.

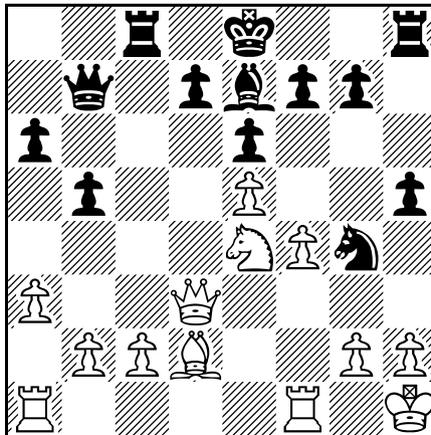
16 h3

Forcing the knight back so that White can play ♗e3 next go. This might seem a logical course for White, but in fact it doesn't challenge Black at all.

Question: Why is this? It looks like a good idea to force the knight back to h6.

Answer: g4 is a good square for the knight, but f5 is even better! Black often plays ... ♖(g4)-h6-f5 of his own accord, so it's not such a great idea to spend a tempo forcing Black to do what he wants. Furthermore, the g3-square is weakened, and this offers Black tactical possibilities when ... ♖f5 comes.

Before moving on with the game, let's look at some more challenging plans by White:
a) The first is 16 ♗d2 ♗e7 17 a3!?



Question: Challenging? What's the point of this little move?

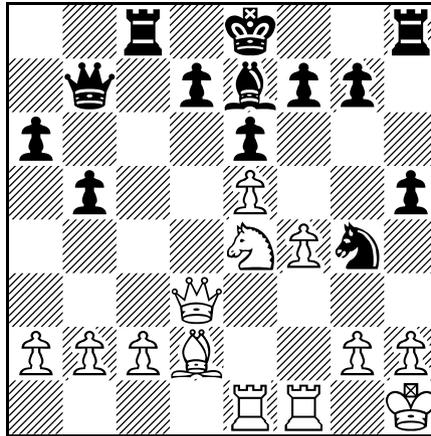
Answer: White's idea is ♗b4! to force an exchange of bishops which, as mentioned just

above, is one of his positional goals. After an exchange of bishops, ♖d6 is very much on the cards.

Question: So what should Black do?

Answer: He must disrupt White's plan, and one way to do so is 17...♖d5!?. If 18 ♕b4 there follows 18...♗xd3 19 cxd3 and now 19...f5! comes just at the right time – Black is fine here. Instead 18 ♗xd5 exd5 is no problem, because the c-pawn hangs after 19 ♖d6+ ♕xd6 20 exd6 ♖xc2.

b) Another option for White is to centralize his forces with 16 ♕d2 ♕e7 17 ♖ae1.



Exercise: Can you find a small tactical idea for White if Black plays 17...♖h6 intending ...♖f5?

Answer: If 17...♖h6 White has 18 ♗f3! with a double threat: the pawn on h5 and a decisive discovered attack on the queen with ♖d6+ or ♖f6+. This tactic is well worth remembering as the possibility of it crops up in many variations.

A wiser option for Black is 17...♗c6! which safeguards the queen against this tactic and prepares the knight manoeuvre:

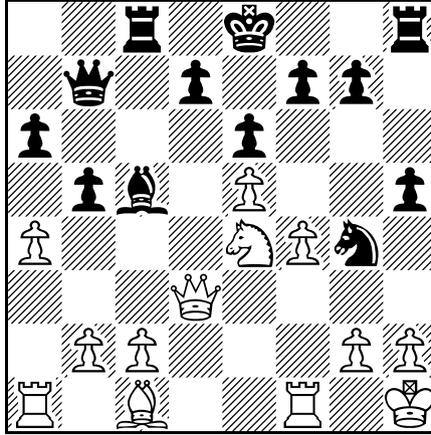
b1) S.Movsesian-C.Lutz, German League 2001, demonstrates some typical play from this position: 18 ♕c3 b4 19 ♕d2 ♖h6! (here comes the knight manoeuvre to f5; 19...♗xc2?! 20 ♖d6+ ♕xd6 21 ♗xd6 threatens ♖c1 and the b4-pawn) 20 c3 bxc3 21 ♕xc3 ♖f5 22 ♗f3 h4 23 ♖d1 ♗b6 24 ♖fe1 ♖c4 25 h3, and here Lutz suggests 25...♗c6! 26 ♖h2 ♖a4! 27 a3 0-0 with good counterplay for Black. Notice how the knight on f5 is both strong and secure.

b2) If White tries to prevent the ...♖h6-f5 plan, with 18 ♗f3!?, Black has another possibility: 18...f5! 19 exf6 gxf6 20 a3?! (White should try 20 f5 e5!, when ...d5 is the plan)

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20...f5! 21 ♖c3 ♜g8 22 ♘g5 ♜xc3 23 ♙xc3 ♜c4 with a great position for Black, Yu Shaoteng-Ye Jiangchuan, Yongchuan 2003. He has better pieces, a 2-0 central pawn majority, and the exchange of queens means that Black's king is "active" in a good sense!

c) A third possibility for White is the pawn break 16 a4.

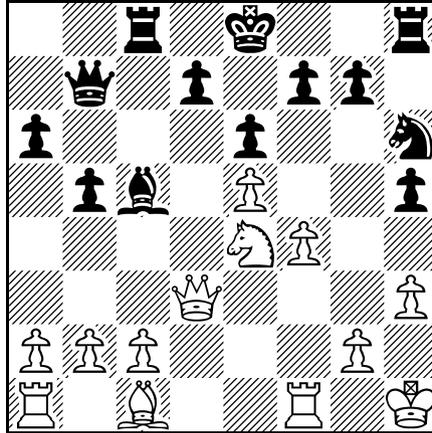


White's idea is 16...b4 17 c4! bxc3 (otherwise White plays b2-b3 and kills any queenside counterplay) 18 bxc3 0-0 and now 19 h3! ♘h6 20 ♜f3! with the same double attack mentioned above. White wins a pawn, but after 20...♜b3 21 ♜xh5 ♘f5 22 ♙h2 ♙e7, as in N.Short-D.Stellwagen, Hoogeveen 2004, Black gets some compensation in view of his active pieces and White's queenside weaknesses.

Black can also allow the a-file to open, and this also involves sacrificing a pawn for positional compensation. For example, 16...♙e7 17 axb5 axb5 18 ♜a5 (White needs to continue energetically) 18...♜c4!? (Delchev and Semkov suggest 18...b4 19 ♙d2 ♜c6) 19 ♘c3 0-0 20 ♜xb5 ♜c6 21 h3 ♘h6 22 ♜d1 (M.Acher-M.Cornette, French League 2007) and now 22...♜d8!. Again Black has compensation, with active pieces, pressure on the c-file and possibilities of ...♙b4, ...♘f5 and ...d6.

After that long digression, let's finally return to the game, and to Szlag's choice of 16 h3:

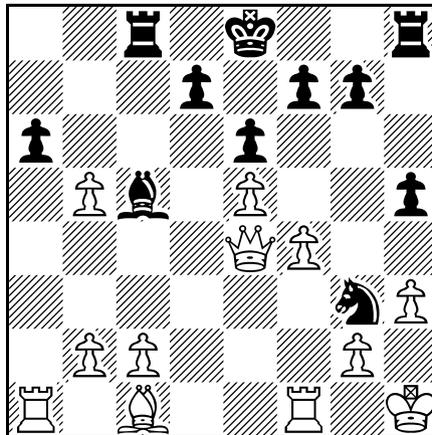
16...♘h6



Exercise: Why does 17...♗f5! slow down White's queenside play if he tries the 17 a4 plan here?

17 ♖e3

Answer: If 17 a4 ♗f5! White doesn't have time for 18 axb5 because Black's previous move contains a nasty threat: 18...♙xe4! 19 ♙xe4 ♗g3+ with a souped-up version of the family fork – the knight captures both the queen and the rook!



20 ♖h2 ♗xf1+! 21 ♖h1 ♗g3+ 22 ♖h2 ♗xe4 and Black wins. This ...♙xe4 tactic may seem obvious, but I have seen it missed.

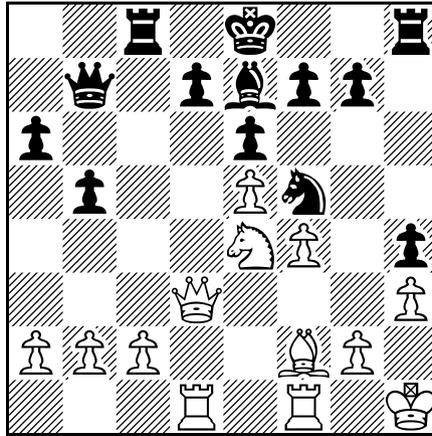
17...♗e7

Black doesn't want to exchange bishops, and obviously there's no choice here anyway!

18 ♖f2

A good square for the bishop, which now covers two key diagonals.

18...♞f5 19 ♖ad1 h4



Fixing the knight on f5.

Exercise: Evaluate the position after 20 ♞d6+ ♕xd6 21 exd6.

20 ♖fe1!

White keeps the tension and usefully protects the knight a second time.

Answer: 20 ♞d6+? ♕xd6! 21 exd6 0-0 gives Black everything he wants:

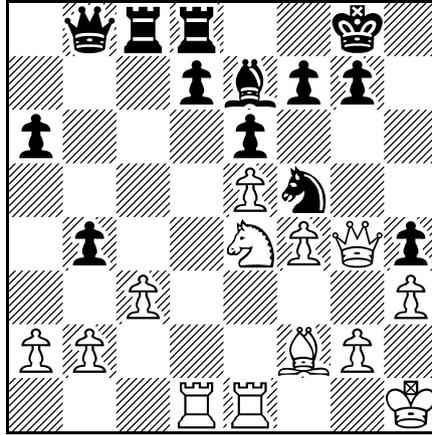
1. A monster knight on f5.
2. A great queen, dominating the long diagonal.
3. A clear plan of doubling rooks on the c-file.
4. Weak white pawns on d6 and f4.
5. No counterplay at all for White.

20...♖h6!?

The beginning of some creative play by Beshukov which is eventually rewarded with a nice win. He keeps his king in the centre, behind the solid f7-e6-d7 pawn wall, and activates his king's rook on the third rank. The plan involves an eventual ...f6 and ...♔f7, and of course ...♖g6 is also possible now.

In truth, Black has a more straightforward plan of 20...0-0 intending ...♖fd8 and then ...d6 or ...d5. For example, 21 c3 (21 ♖xd7 ♖xd7 22 ♖xd7 ♖xc2 is good for Black) 21...♖fd8 22 ♔g1?! d5! 23 exd6 ♕xd6 24 ♞xd6 ♖xd6 25 ♖e2 ♖cd8 with an edge for Black in view of his strong knight and better pawns.

White should play more aggressively, e.g. 22 ♖f3 (instead of 22 ♔g1?!) 22...♖b8 23 ♖g4 b4!



This position is dynamically balanced. White seems to be well set to do something on the kingside, but the defensive power of Black's bishop and knight mustn't be underestimated. If 24 ♘f6+ ♕xf6 25 exf6 bxc3 26 bxc3 ♖c4! 27 ♕d4 g6 Black's knight remains a monster in both defence and attack.

21 ♖f3 ♗b8

Remember the threat!

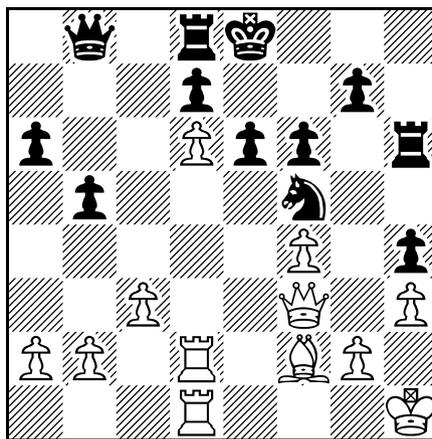
22 ♖d2 ♖d8 23 ♖ed1 ♗c7 24 c3 f6!

Planning ...♕f7.

25 ♘d6+

Finally Szelag releases the tension, but Black isn't unhappy to see this knight check.

25...♕xd6! 26 exd6 ♗b8



With the centre sealed up, Black's king will be very safe on f7. White must try to open up the queenside before Black assumes control with ...♖c8-c4. Play begins to progress more

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quickly, with both sides carrying out their plans.

27 a4 ♖c8 28 axb5 ♜xb5!? 29 b4 ♔f7 30 ♖a2 ♖c6 31 ♖a5 ♜b8 32 ♙c5 ♜c8 33 ♔h2 ♖g6! 34 ♜h5!

Otherwise the rook lands on g3.

34...♜b7 35 ♖a2 ♜b5!?

Beshukov goes for it, possibly in mutual time trouble, and is ultimately successful.

36 ♜h8!

Suddenly White is getting all sorts of counterplay based on ♜d8 ideas.

36...♜c4

36...♖g3! is better, meeting 37 ♜d8 with 37...♜b7!.

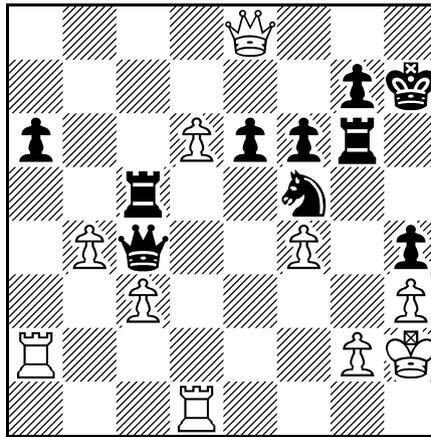
37 ♜d8!?

After 37 ♖f2! White defends, and the threat of ♜d8 still looms.

37...♖xc5! 38 ♜xd7+ ♔g8 39 ♜e8+

39 bxc5 ♜xa2 40 ♜b7 is likely to end in a draw! One possible finish is 40...♘e3 41 ♖g1 ♜f2 42 d7 (42 ♜f3?? ♖xg2+) 42...♜xf4+ 43 ♔h1 ♘f1 44 d8♜+ ♔h7 45 ♜bb8 ♘g3+ 46 ♔h2 ♘f1+ 47 ♔h1 ♘g3+ with perpetual check.

39...♔h7



40 bxc5?

This loses, as White gets a much inferior version of the previous note. He is still okay after 40 ♖f2!.

40...♜xa2 41 ♜c6 ♘e3 42 ♖g1 ♜f2! 43 d7 ♜xf4+ 44 ♔h1 ♘f1! 45 ♜d6

Or 45 ♖xf1 ♜xf1+ 46 ♔h2 ♜f4+ 47 ♔g1 ♜d2.

45...e5 46 d8♜ ♜h2 mate (0-1)

This was an excellent game by Beshukov, demonstrating how imaginative play can be rewarded in the Sicilian Taimanov.