

Nigel Davies

The Queen's Gambit Declined

move by move

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About the Author

Nigel Davies is an International Grandmaster and respected coach. He's the author of numerous books and DVDs on the game and is known for the clarity of his explanations.

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Contents

About the Author	3
Bibliography	5
Introduction	7
1 Exchange Variation with $\mathfrak{f}3$	8
2 Exchange Variation with $\mathfrak{ge}2$	107
3 Main Line with $\mathfrak{g}5$	160
4 Main Line with $\mathfrak{f}4$	223
5 The Catalan and the Réti	260
Index of Variations	291
Index of Complete Games	299

Introduction

The Queen's Gambit Declined is normally introduced via the moves 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6, but it can also be reached via 1 ♘f3 and 1 c4. In fact this is the first great advantage of playing the QGD as Black: it provides the basis of a defence to flank openings as well as 1 d4. It is one of the oldest and most respected defences and has been played by every World Chess Champion in history.

Although I have used the Queen's Gambit Declined in my own games, it has been as a coach that I really learned to appreciate its value. Besides its well-deserved reputation for soundness, which has made it a firm favourite with so many top players, the QGD is relatively immune to both the changing tides of opening theory and computer analysis. Meanwhile, the greatest advantage for improving players is in its didactic value: it is a superb vehicle for teaching positional play because of the clarity of plans and pawn play. For this reason it has become a major part of my teaching syllabus at my Tiger Chess (<http://tigerchess.com>) website.

In writing this book my main focus has been on teaching the reader how to play the black side, starting out in the simplest and most economical way by aiming to develop with ...♘f6, ...♗e7 and (usually) ...♘bd7 against all White's possible systems. Besides that, I look at how particular finesses can be used to improve Black's chances against particular systems. This is by far the best approach to learning an opening; having a vast array of different set-ups and plans is impractical for people with busy lives – it makes more sense for them to master a few set-ups and then expand these gradually as they gain experience.

Some readers may also be interested in playing White and here I recommend a simple and economical approach in capturing on d5 at the earliest opportunity. This is covered in Chapter One.

Acknowledgements

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Nigel Davies, Southport
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Chapter One

Exchange Variation with f3

Introduction

1 d4 d5 2 c4

Question: What if I want to play a Torre Attack with 1 d4  f6 2  f3, followed by 3  g5, but my opponent replies 2...d5 so as to meet 3  g5 with 3... e4 - ? Can I still play an Exchange Variation with 3 c4 and 4 cxd5 - ?

Answer: Yes, you can, and the Exchange Variation with 1 d4  f6 2  f3 d5 3 c4 e6 4 cxd5 exd5 5  c3 represents a simple and economical repertoire choice. Note, however, that Black has important extra options besides going for the traditional set-up with ... bd7. The most important of these is 5... e7 6  g5 c6 7  c2 g6, intending 8... f5, which is covered in Games 1-3. As for 5...c6 6  c2  a6, see Game 4.

Having said that I've found that club players usually go back into the main line with 5... e7 6  g5 0-0 7  c2  bd7 8 e3 c6 9  d3  e8 10 0-0  f8, when White gets to choose between a number of different 11th moves. Positional players will probably like Anatoly Karpov's 11 h3, while for those who are tactically inclined I suggest 11  ae1 which plays for e3-e4. These moves are discussed in more detail below.

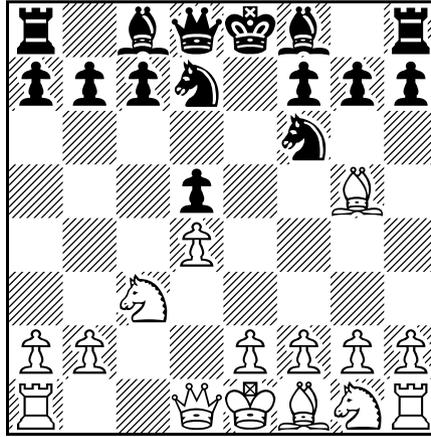
2...e6 3  c3  f6

Black can also play Alatorsev's 3... e7, though I don't recommend this route for newbies to the Queen's Gambit Declined. You still have to face a form of Exchange Variation with 4 cxd5 exd5 5  f4 and at the same time lose the important ... bd7 and ...d5xc4 option against the 4  f3 and 5  f4 plan because Black has already committed the bishop to e7.

If you meet 3... e7 as White I suggest just going into a standard Exchange Variation with 4  f3  f6 5 cxd5 exd5 (or 5... xd5 6 e4!) 6  g5, when 6...c6 7  c2 g6 requires special treatment. White has three different choices on his eighth move: 8 e3, 8 xf6, and 8 e4

(see Games 1-3).

4 cxd5 exd5 5 ♗g5 ♘bd7



Question: Hang on a second, doesn't this allow 6 ♘xd5 winning an important pawn?

Answer: No, because Black can meet that with 6... ♗xd5! 7 ♗xd8 ♗b4+, when White has nothing else than 8 ♖d2, which gives back the queen and leads to the loss of a piece. Black can also play 5... ♗e7, but as White is still falling into this trap (as a database search will confirm!) it's worth giving him some rope.

6 e3 ♗e7 7 ♗d3 c6 8 ♖f3

This is the most common destination for this knight. Part of the reason is that White frequently puts the knight here before capturing on d5 and entering the Exchange Variation.

White does have another important option here in 8 ♖c2, which delays the decision on where to put the king's knight for another move.

8...0-0

Question: Can Black play 8... ♗h5 as he often seems to do in other variations?

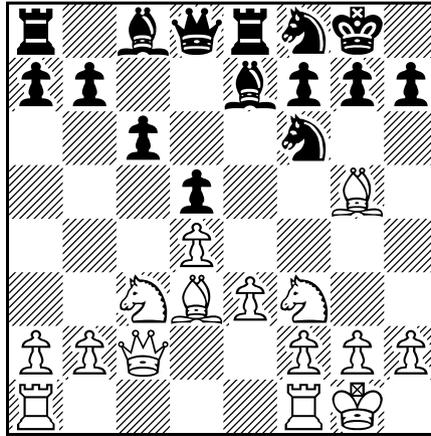
Answer: Here it's not such a good idea because of 9 ♗xe7 ♖xe7 10 0-0, and now if Black gets his king out of the centre with 10...0-0 White can play 11 ♖b1, simultaneously attacking h7 and preparing to play b2-b4. This is a far more efficient version of the minority attack than many we will see.

9 ♖c2 ♗e8 10 0-0

This looks obvious but it's not the only move. Besides castling on opposite sides with the aggressive 10 0-0-0 (as in Game 5), White can stay flexible with 10 h3. This often trans-

poses into the 10 0-0 ♖f8 11 h3 line, though occasionally White gets the idea to castle queenside (Game 6 is an example of this).

10...♞f8



11 h3

This is now the main line at grandmaster level, having taken over from more traditional moves.

Question: What's the idea?

Answer: It's a subtle semi-waiting move that was brought into the limelight by Anatoly Karpov. There are a number of effects in that 11...♞e4 is well met by 12 ♕xf4 and 11...♞g6 can be answered by 12 ♕xf6, followed by 13 b4. Meanwhile the g4-square gets taken away from Black's minor pieces, which is important because he often plays ...♞g4 in answer to ♞e5 and will sometimes drive a white knight from f3 with ...♙g4.

Here's a round-up of the alternatives:

a) 11 ♖ab1 aims for the traditional minority attack with b2-b4-b5, creating some sort of pawn weakness on the queenside which White then hopes to attack. All the games I've featured have Black replying with 11...a5, to hold up White's planned advance, which for the most part is then met by 12 a3. In turn I like 12...♞g6 for Black, preventing White's bishop from going back to f4, when Black plays ...♞e4 on his next move. White then has a choice: the obvious 13 b4 often sees White sleepwalk to defeat as he does in Games 7 and 8, so 13 ♕xf6 is better (as in Game 9), though here too Black is not without his chances.

Apart from 12...♞g6, there is another interesting move in 12...g6, which intends a re-grouping with ...♞e6-g7 and then a possible exchange of light-squared bishops with ...♕f5. Sune Berg Hansen specializes in this plan and we can see a good example in Game 10.

Note that, after 11...a5, White changed plans with 12 ♖be1 in Game 11. This is a valid thing to do, though it's difficult to see much advantage for White in having Black's a-pawn

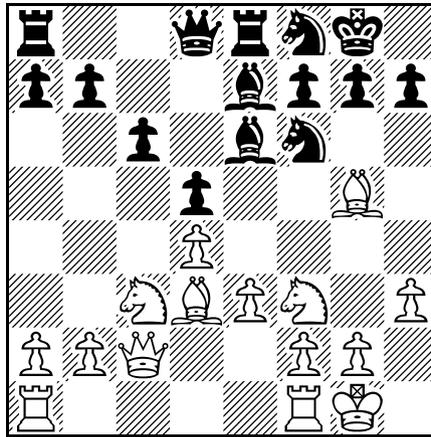
on a5 instead of a7.

b) 11 ♖xf6 is another way of going for a minority attack, as after 11...♗xf6 White can play an immediate 12 b4. The cost is that it gives away the bishop pair, which Black used very effectively in Game 12. Particular attention should be given to the way Black met 15 b5 with 15...a5 in this game, holding up White's operations on the queenside due to Black's grip on the b4-square.

c) 11 ♗e5 is a move which needs to be met accurately as a Stonewall attack plan with f2-f4 could be very dangerous against passive play. The key move for Black is 11...♗e4, immediately exchanging this knight off. Game 13 provides an excellent example of how Black should play these positions.

d) 11 ♖ae1 is quite a good move to play at club level. White has two dangerous plans in mind – e3-e4, or ♗e5 followed by f2-f4 – and Black needs to play accurately to obtain a decent game. The right way is 11...♗e4, after which 12 ♖xe7 ♜xe7 13 ♖xe4 dxe4 14 ♗d2 f5 15 f3 is covered within Games 14 and 15.

11...♗e6



As with 11 h3, this is a very modern treatment.

Question: What's Black's plan?

Answer: Besides developing his pieces he's also preparing to bring his queen's rook to c8. This will mean that if White plays a minority attack with b2-b4-b5, he can just push past with ...c6-c5.

Question: Won't that leave Black with a weak d5-pawn?

Answer: The d-pawn tends to be quite easy to protect; the issue is more the d4-square which White will gain as a possible outpost for a knight. But Black has compensation here

in that he gets squares along the c-file such as c5 and c4.

A more traditional response to 11 h3 is 11...♘g6, which prevents the retreat of White's bishop to f4 in preparation for 12...♗e4. In Game 16 White then chose 12 ♟xf6, attempting to show that the insertion of 11 h3 and 11...♘g6 provide an improved version of the 11 ♟xf6 plan. They do, but Black's position remains quite playable.

One more interesting option for Black is to meet 11 h3 with 11...g6, which is what happened in Game 17. It looks as if there might have been some very serious opening preparation behind Black's 23...♟xd4! in this game.

12 ♟ab1

The standard move, aiming for a minority attack with b2-b4-b5. But White has tried various alternatives here:

a) 12 a3 looks like an inferior way of preparing b2-b4 as White may later want to force b4-b5 through with a3-a4, apparently losing a tempo. But there is a subtle point to this in that 12...♗e4 is no longer possible because of 13 ♟xe7 ♚xe7 14 ♗xe4 dxe4 15 ♟xe4 (whereas after 12 ♟ab1, Black would have 15...♟xa2). With 12...♗e4 out of the question Black should play either 12...♗6d7 (as in Game 18) or 12...♝c8 (as in Game 19).

b) 12 ♟fc1 is Karpov's original treatment, just improving the position of his pieces before adopting a particular plan. This is illustrated in Game 20.

12...♝c8

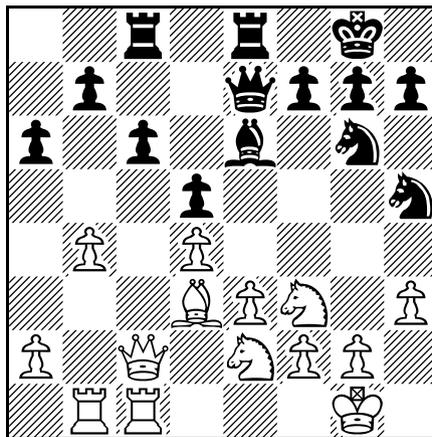
Preparing to meet White's b2-b4-b5 with ...c6-c5.

Black has a good alternative in 12...♗6d7 which is covered in Game 21. As noted above, Black can also play the surprising 12...♗e4 here (as in Game 22) because 13 ♟xe7 ♚xe7 14 ♗xe4 dxe4 15 ♟xe4 is met by 15...♟xa2!

13 b4 ♗h5

Ensuring the exchange of dark-squared bishops by stopping White's bishop from going back to f4.

14 ♟xe7 ♚xe7 15 ♟fc1 ♗g6 16 ♗e2 a6



We are following I.Sokolov-K.Asrian, Stepanakert 2005 (Game 23), in which White soon gave up on the minority attack; but when he turned his attention to the kingside he could make little progress there either.

Game 1
Bu Xiangzhi-J.Rowson
Turin Olympiad 2006

1 ♖f3 d5 2 d4 ♖f6 3 c4 e6 4 cxd5

Capturing on d5 at this stage is a sensible and practical option for White, not least because it avoids sharp lines such as 4 ♖c3 dxc4, not to mention the Semi-Tarrasch with 4...c5 and others. Black has some extra options because of this early capture, which we will explore here and in the next couple of games. Yet at club level it has been very noticeable to me that Black usually carries on his usual plan of development with ...♗e7 and ...♖bd7.

4...exd5 5 ♖c3 c6 6 ♗g5

There are actually some subtle differences between this move and 6 ♖c2!, and in the position after 5...c6 I do think the queen move is more accurate. On the other hand, I suggest that White meets 5...♗e7 with 6 ♗g5 rather than 6 ♖c2.

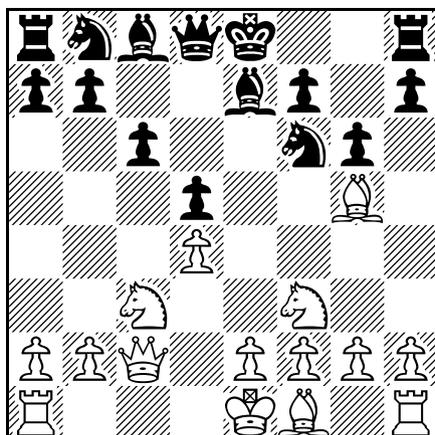
6...♗e7

Black should play 6...♗f5! in this situation, as he doesn't even need to prepare the bishop move with ...g7-g6. This is why White should prefer 6 ♖c2 over 6 ♗g5.

Question: Can't White play 7 ♖b3, attacking the b7-pawn?

Answer: Indeed he can, though Black then has 7...♖b6 (the dynamic 7...♖bd7!? 8 ♖xb7 ♖b8 9 ♖xc6 ♖xb2 is also interesting and was successful in A.Karpov-G.Kasparov, blitz match, Valencia 2009) 8 ♗xf6 gxf6 9 e3 ♖a6 10 ♖xb6 axb6 11 ♗d2 ♖c7 12 ♗d3 ♗e6 13 a3 b5 14 ♖h4 ♗d7 15 ♗c2 ♖e8 16 ♖f5 ♖d6 was fine for Black in F.Berkes-Ki.Georgiev, Serbian Team Championship 2008, his two bishops and potential pressure on the a-file compensating for the weakness of his kingside pawns.

7 ♖c2 g6



Now this is necessary if Black wants to put his bishop on f5.

Question: Doesn't this weaken Black's kingside?

Answer: Yes, it does, though White's main plan to exploit this weakness is to castle queenside and shove his h-pawn up the board. So Black might be careful not to castle kingside before White is also committed to doing so.

8 e3

This looks obvious, but it's not White's only move. In the next two games we will examine 8 ♖xf6!? and 8 e4, respectively.

8...♗f5 9 ♖d3 ♗xd3 10 ♚xd3 ♘bd7!

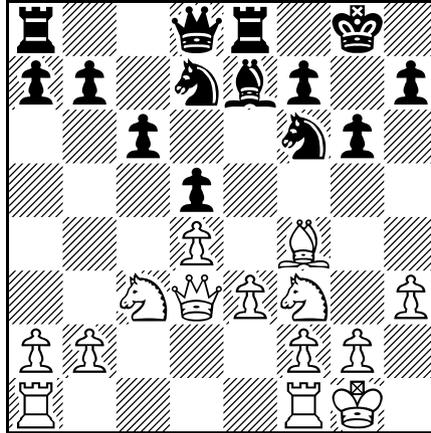
Carefully delaying castling short in case White lays siege to the g6-pawn with h2-h4-h5. Indeed, after 10...0-0 11 h4 ♘bd7 12 ♗xf6 ♘xf6 13 ♘e5 ♗b4 14 g4 c5 15 h5 ♚e7 16 hxg6 fxg6 17 f3 cxd4 18 ♚xd4 ♜fe8 19 f4 ♜ad8 20 g5 ♘h5 21 ♘g4, White developed a strong attack in B.Lajthajm-B.Ivanovic, Montenegrin Team Championship 2010.

11 0-0 0-0 12 h3!?

This and White's next move constitute an interesting plan to play in the centre and possibly activate his central pawn majority with a later f2-f3 and e3-e4.

The traditional plan is to play for a minority attack with 12 ♜ab1, trying for b2-b4-b5, but this doesn't seem very effective here because the c4-square can become weak (...♘b6-c4 often happens in such positions). Black can also make b2-b4 very difficult with 12...a5; for example, 13 h3 ♜e8 14 ♗f4 ♗f8 15 ♚c2 ♚b6 16 ♜fc1 ♚a7 17 ♘e5 ♘xe5 18 ♗xe5 ♘d7 19 ♗h2 a4 20 ♘e2 ♘f6 21 ♘f4 ♘e4 saw Black gradually outmanoeuvre his opponent in V.Burmakin-A.Dreev, Russian Team Championship 1999.

12...♜e8 13 ♗f4

**13...a5**

This certainly inhibits b2-b4 ideas, but White has other plans.

Black has an interesting alternative here in 13...♖h5 14 ♗h2 ♖g7, aiming to get this knight to the nice d6-square after ...♗f5 and a subsequent exchange of White's h2-bishop with ...♗d6. Bu Xiangzhi-J.Lautier, Internet 2004, continued 15 ♖ac1 ♗f5 16 ♖d2 a5 17 ♖a4 ♗d6 18 ♗xd6 ♖xd6 19 ♖b3 ♗g5 20 ♗e2 ♖e7 21 ♖bc5 ♗f6 22 ♖c3 ♗f5, when Black was successfully inhibiting White's plans of a central expansion with f2-f3 and e3-e4. The exchange of dark-squared bishops is a useful way to do this in fact.

14 ♗c2 ♖b6 15 ♗e5

This makes sense, putting the knight on a good square and freeing the way for his f-pawn to nudge forward. White has also played a preliminary 15 ♖fe1 here. D.Flores-J.Granda Zuniga, Linares (rapid) 2008, continued 15...a4 16 ♗e5 ♗d6 17 ♖ad1 ♗e7 18 ♖d3 ♗e4 19 f3 ♖xc3 20 bxc3 with balanced play at this point.

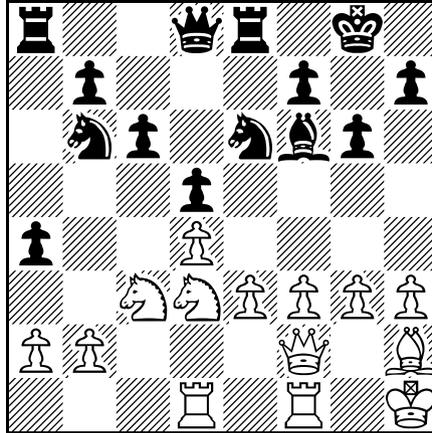
15...♗fd7 16 ♗d3 ♗c8

I'm not sure why Black played this rather than the immediate 16...♗f8. In a couple of moves time the queen goes back to d8 with an apparent loss of time.

17 f3 ♗f8 18 ♗f2 ♗e6 19 ♗h2 ♗d8 20 ♖ad1 a4 21 ♖h1

All these moves can be perceived as preparation for e3-e4, but White has another idea too as we shall see. Black meanwhile seems confined to preventing White's ideas, at least at the moment. His next provokes another pawn move by White in the hope that this will later prove to be a weakness.

21...♗h4 22 g3 ♗f6



23 f4!?

Question: Isn't that just a horrible move, turning the bishop on h2 into a big pawn and giving Black an outpost on e4?

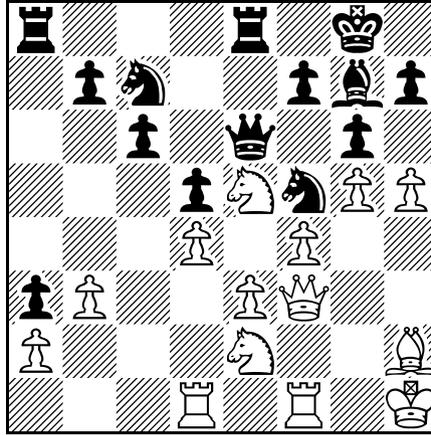
Answer: That's a good question! From a structural point of view this move does create weaknesses and the bishop on h2 is shut in. But if we look more closely at the position it's possible to see some positive sides. First of all White is taking space and may be able to put a knight on e5. The e4-square is currently defended by the knight on c3 and there are ideas such as g3-g4 and f4-f5 in the position, which might open up Black's king while liberating the bishop on h2. So let's say there's "dynamic compensation" for the weaknesses created.

23...♞c4 24 ♘e5 ♘d6 25 g4 ♞c7 26 ♚f3 a3 27 b3 ♚e7 28 g5

Question: I thought you said White was playing for f4-f5 in order to liberate the h2-bishop. Doesn't this make that impossible?

Answer: This last move is another interesting strategic conception that often happens in Stonewall structures. The main idea is to prevent White's knight being driven away with ...f7-f6 while, at the same time, staking out more space on the kingside. White also has a new way to attack using the advance of his h-pawn. Meanwhile it should be noted that 28 f5 can be answered by 28...g5, keeping the kingside closed.

28...♙g7 29 h4 ♚e6 30 ♘e2 ♘f5 31 h5!?

**31...♗b5**

My engine prefers the immediate 31...gxf3, after which 32 ♖xh5 can be answered by the cold-blooded 32...♗xe5 33 fxe5 ♘xe3 34 ♖f6 ♗g4. It turns out that 35 ♖xf7+? is then a really bad move because of 35...♔h8 36 ♖f2 ♖f8, which isn't easy to see when playing 31 h5. Had White done so there might have been a case for the solid 31 ♗g3.

32 ♖d2 ♗bd6 33 ♗c3 gxf3?!

This pawn grab is now very risky with the engine preferring 33...♗h4.

34 ♖xh5 ♗xe3

The logical follow-up to Black's previous move, but storm clouds now gather around his king.

35 ♖f3 ♗ef5 36 ♖h3 ♗e4

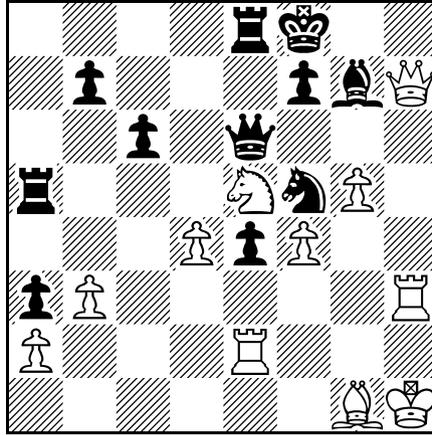
Perhaps 36...h6 was marginally better, though it's still very scary for Black after 37 ♖g2. This kind of position is especially difficult to play near the time control and under time pressure.

37 ♖xh7+ ♔f8 38 ♗xe4 dxe4 39 ♗g1 ♖a5

At this point Black should perhaps head for the hills with 39...♔e7.

40 ♖e2

40 g6 was also possible; White evidently preferred to keep this in reserve.



40...♞d6

Understandably wanting to support the e4-pawn. It is equally understandable that Black wished to avoid 40...♞e7, putting the king opposite White's newly posted rook on e2. Yet it turns out that this would have been Black's best move, resulting in approximate equality after 41 ♖xe4 ♜xe5 42 ♜xe5 ♙xe5 43 fxe5 (43 dxe5? ♜d5+ 44 ♙h2 ♜d2+ 45 ♙h1 ♜xf4 is good for Black) 43...♜d5+ 44 ♙h2 ♞xd4 45 ♙xd4 ♜xd4 46 ♜f5.

41 ♜eh2

According to the engine, 41 ♙f2 was objectively stronger.

41...♜f5??

Wanting to trade queens but allowing White to fan the flames of his attack. 41...♞f5 was the right way, keeping firm control over the position.

42 g6! ♜d5

Losing immediately, but there was no good defence to threats like 43 ♜h5 and 43 gxf7 in any case.

43 ♜h5 f6

After 43...♜xe5 44 dxe5 ♜xg6 45 exd6, Black has nothing for his lost rook.

44 ♜xf5 ♞xf5 45 ♜h3 1-0

Game 2
S.Atalik-J.Wawrzaszek
Stillwater 2011

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♞f3 ♞f6 4 ♞c3 e6 5 cxd5

A noteworthy and common way to get an Exchange Variation of the Queen's Gambit Declined. After 5 ♙g5, Black can go for the famous and difficult Botvinnik Variation with 5...dxc4 6 e4 b5 7 e5 h6 8 ♙h4 g5, which has been very heavily analysed.