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Preface

Dear reader,

Mark Evgenievich Taimanov was born on 7 February 1926 in Kharkov. He is a grandmaster (since 1952), a former World Championship candidate, an author and a musician.

At the age of 11, Mark had two pieces of luck – he was accepted into the Leningrad chess circle and invited to appear in a film called ‘Beethoven’s Concert’. From that time on, his life has been shared between chess and music. ‘All my life I have been happy to serve two masters’, wrote Taimanov, an acclaimed pianist and talented grandmaster. He participated in 23 Soviet Championship finals, winning a prize seven times. In 1953, he lost a playoff match for the title by a score of 2,5-3,5, to Botvinnik, but in 1956, he triumphed in a playoff tournament against Averbakh and Spassky.

For 20 years (1952-1971), he was involved in the battle for the World Championship. After successfully appearing in the 1952 Interzonal in Stockholm and the 1970 Interzonal in Palma de Mallorca, he twice played in the Candidates’ tournament. But here, disappointments awaited him. In the 1953 Candidates’ at Zurich, he managed only 8-9th place, and in his match against Fischer in 1971, he was crushed 0-6.

The latter was not just a moral defeat for the 45-year old grandmaster. In Moscow, the Sports Committee decided to punish him for losing ‘so shamelessly’ to an opponent who was threatening to take the world title away from the USSR. Recalling those painful days 20 years later, Taimanov wrote: “If I were asked which was the most important, dramatic and memorable event of my life, I would undoubtedly say the quarterfinal match against the great American grandmaster, Bobby Fischer. And not just because I was one of the last players to have the honour to battle the most legendary and mysterious player of the modern era, and play six remarkable games against him, but also because the events of the match led to unpredictable and dramatic changes in not only my chess life, but my life generally.’

It all started on his return journey to the USSR, when the customs officers found in his baggage a book by the ‘dangerous’ writer, Alexander Solzhenitsyn. For this ‘crime’, he was punished – he lost his title of Distinguished Master of Sport and was thrown off the national team.

Taimanov writes: “I don’t know what would have happened further, if support had not come from an unexpected quarter. I thank my colleague Bent Larsen, who

followed me by also losing 6-0 to Fischer. This somewhat reduced the shame felt by my accusers. Even they could not accuse the Dane of a secret compact with the imperialists. The sharpness of the accusations against me dropped, although for many more years, the press voiced its dissatisfaction.'

A combination of time, music and chess gradually restored Taimanov's emotional balance and he again began to play successfully in strong tournaments. His long list of past successes (he won prizes in over 40 strong international tournaments) was augmented by new trophies.

His pen has produced a number of books, including a well-known monograph on the Nimzo-Indian Defence. Many openings have a Taimanov Variation.

This book is devoted to a study of the Taimanov Variation in the Sicilian Defence, which in my opinion is one of the most popular variations, and is particularly interesting for the fact that it is widely practiced amongst players of all levels: starting with newcomers to chess, the list extends as far as such great players as the 13th World Champion, Garry Kasparov, the ex-champion and current World Championship challenger Vishy Anand, and such elite players as Peter Svidler, Alexander Morozevich, Alexander Grischuk, Vasily Ivanchuk, Veselin Topalov, Vladimir Akopian, Sergey Movsesian and many others.

When I began work on this book, I set myself the task of writing it for every level of player. After long thought, I decided how to do this, so that it would have something for everyone, from those who have only just started to study this variation, up to those players whose repertoire already includes the line, but who will find here many new ideas and much useful information.

For beginners, the book should be useful, in the fact that there are not so many concrete variations which need to be memorised, and those that there are can be studied at home, in training, whilst moving the pieces around the board.

In learning a new variation, it is very important to study it at first without the help of the computer. This may seem very difficult, in this computer era, but this is why I have written a book, in which the fundamental and key positions are collected together. This book is your guide through the labyrinth, for those of you who are not familiar with the variation.

On the other hand, strong players who regularly play this variation will find in the book many new ideas, even in positions which have been played many times before, but where the strongest line has not been tried in practice.

Here is an interesting fact. For many years, studying the Taimanov, I chose sidelines for White, which unfortunately led to no opening advantage. I always understood that the line with ♙e3, ♖d2 and 0-0-0 was strongest, but I avoided it and suffered as a result. My friend, grandmaster Avetik Grigorian, used to criticise me for relying on sidelines, because he showed me many interesting ideas in this main line, and was surprised that for some reason, I did not use them in practice.

Eventually, I decided to trust my friend and to study this variation in detail and soon understood how good the positions were in this line, compared with the ones where I had for so long suffered in the search for a non-existent advantage. In main lines, it is generally easy to find an advantage for White. I was afraid of such lines, because I feared that one needed to know and remember by heart a great deal, but when I started to get into the lines, I realised that in this system, it is not necessary to know so much by heart, but instead one simply needs to understand which piece should stand where. A great many of these positions are reminiscent of the French Defence, and it is no coincidence that many French players also play the Taimanov.

And now let us say a few words about the variations we will study together.

This book is written as a repertoire for White and aims to find paths to an opening advantage for White.

The book consists of three Parts and nine Chapters. Part II, devoted to the most popular continuation in contemporary practice, 8...♟b4 9.0-0-0, is divided into five Chapters, including three on the Main Line 9...♞e5. The strongest reply to this move is 10.♞b3. In Chapter 4, we analyse two black replies, which are not the strongest, but are often played: 10...d5 and 10..0-0. In the next two Chapters, we concentrate on Black's main reply 10...b5 and four main continuations for White (Chapter 5 and 6), out of which I would especially single out 11.♟f2.

But Black also has two other continuations at move 9, and these are each the subject of a separate chapter. These moves are 9...♞e7 (Chapter 3) and 9...♞a5 (Chapter 2), but they have lost popularity in recent years, because White has found the right path to an opening advantage, and we will acquaint you with these lines in the appropriate chapters.

But in this variation, there is also one other very popular position, which is reached frequently in games between leading players, and I think this position is one of the most critical for the whole variation. This is the position from Part III arising after 8...♟e7 9.0-0-0 0-0 10.g4 b5 11.g5. In view of the large number of games which have been played, I decided it was logical to devote separate chapters to Black's two possible replies, 11...♞h5 (Chapter 9) and 11...♞e8 (Chapter 8), so as to give each detailed treatment.

The above are the main lines of this set-up against the Taimanov. But this line of the great grandmaster's variation also has its sidelines, examined in Part I. One involves the move 7...b5 (Chapter 1), by which Black tries to sidestep the main lines, although in my opinion, it does not solve all his problems.

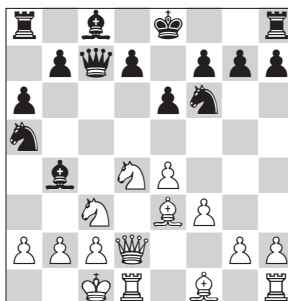
The book also covers the interesting move 6...♞f6, without the subsequent ...d7-d6. This has become more and more popular in recent years and leads to sharp and complicated positions, which we will also examine in Chapter 1.

Finally, I should like to thank everybody at New In Chess, especially Peter Boel and René Olthof, who have greatly helped me to make my book better. My thanks also to publisher Allard Hoogland, for giving me the opportunity to write another book.

Chapter 2

A Knight on the Edge – 9...♞a5

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 ♚c7 6.♙e3 a6 7.♚d2 ♘f6 8.f3 ♙b4 9.0-0 ♘a5



In this chapter, we examine the move 9...♘a5. The idea is to take on c3 and spoil the white queenside pawn structure, whilst if appropriate, the knight may also transfer to c4. White has several possible replies and in this chapter we will examine five of these. Let us summarise these moves and their ideas.

We begin with the move 10.♘b3. This offers the exchange of knights and opens the d-file for White's major pieces. It is not favourable for Black to take on b3, because the white pawn arriving on that square will be well-placed and Black's attack will become extremely difficult to carry out. The main reply to 10.♘b3 is 10...d5, when interesting tactical operations begin.

The next reply is 10.♙f4. This is probably the only move which does not pose Black any problems, and White even loses a tempo, which is not favourable for him.

After 9...♘a5, White also has the interesting move 10.a3, which looks like it just provokes Black into doing what he intends anyway, but this is not quite the case. White has an interesting pawn sacrifice, which gives him the possibility of opening diagonals for his two bishops. It is worth noting that the move 13.♘b3 is very important in this line.

White's next reply is the waiting move 10.♙b1, which again leads to an end-game reminiscent of the French Defence, but with some differences. These consist in the fact that Black has no dark-squared bishop and White has a damaged pawn structure.

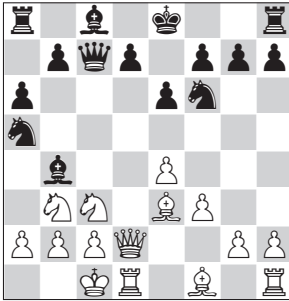
And finally, the main move 10.♙f2. This has the same waiting strategy, but the bishop heads to the superior square g3, and opens the c1-h6 diagonal for the queen, which now has the possibility of coming to g5.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4
 ♘c6 5.♗c3 ♖c7 6.♙e3 ♘f6 7.♖d2
 a6 8.f3 ♙b4 9.0-0 ♘a5?!

Not the best move, as we will see. This variation was popular 7-8 years ago, but now White has found several variations, which give him the advantage.

10.♙f2

A) 10.♘b3 and now:



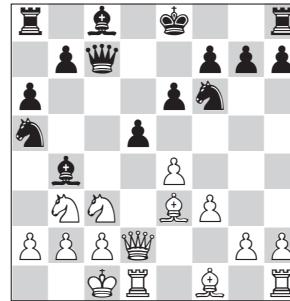
A1) 10...♘b3+? cannot be the right idea, as Black loses too many tempi with the same piece, while his king is in the centre and his queenside undeveloped: 11.axb3 d5 12.exd5 ♘xd5 13.♙d4 and now:

A11) 13...♖a5 14.♗b1 0-0 15.♙c4! Black has real problems, as his queenside is undeveloped and it is not obvious how to solve this problem. White meanwhile threatens to attack the black king: 15...♙xc3 With 15...♘xc3+ Black attempts to keep the two bishops, but following 16.bxc3 ♙e7, 17.♖e3!± is a strong move. White wants to put his bishop on b6 and take control of d8, which is very important for the development of the black queenside. 16.bxc3± White has an enormous advantage: two powerful bishops, and possibilities both to attack the king and to pressurise the queenside, Akopian-Anand, Moscow 2004;

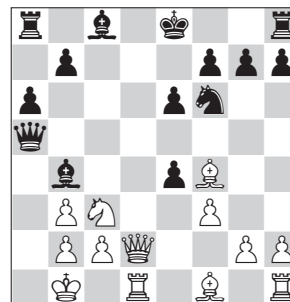
A12) 13...f6! It is better to leave the queen in her defensive position and

the pawn on f6 helps Black's defence, by taking control of e5 and shielding g7. 14.♗b1 With the threat of 15.♘d5, whilst taking on c3 is not favourable for Black. 14...♖f7 15.♖f2! 0-0 16.♘xd5 exd5 17.♙d3 White is better, with two excellent centrally-placed bishops and chances to attack on both flanks, while Black is condemned to defence.

A2) 10...d5



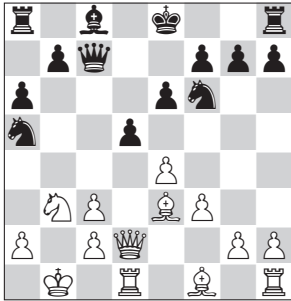
A21) 11.♙f4 ♘xb3+ 12.axb3! 12.cxb3 ♖a5 13.e5 ♘d7 with a fully playable position with chances for both sides; it seems to me White needs a pawn on the c-file: 14.a3 ♙e7 15.♗b1 b5 16.b4 ♖d8 17.♘e2 ♘b6 18.♘d4 ♙d7 19.b3 and White has solved the problem of the black knights, but this is only temporary, as there will always be a threat of a sacrifice on e4, and Black can advance the a-pawn, Topalov-Anand, Monaco (blind) 2004. 12...♖a5 13.♗b1 dxe4



14. ♖e5!± The bishop cannot be taken, and White begins active operations on the kingside, while the black pieces are standing idle on the other wing;

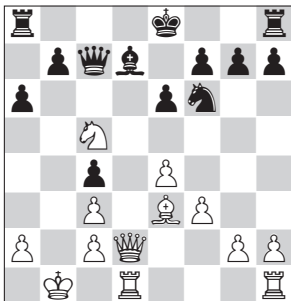
A22) 11. ♖b1

A221) 11... ♖xc3 12. bxc3 and now:



A2211) 12... h6 13. ♖f4 e5 14. ♖xe5 ♗xe5 15. ♖xa5 ♖e6 16. ♗d4 White has an extra pawn, but his structure is spoilt, and if Black manages to castle, he will obtain the advantage. However, it seems White can prevent this and reach an unclear position, with roughly equal chances, Leko-Anand, Wijk aan Zee 2004;

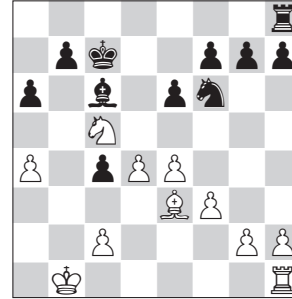
A2212) 12... ♖c4 is an interesting move, leading to opposite-coloured bishops; Black hopes to take the initiative, but he does not equalise: 13. ♖xc4 dxc4 14. ♖c5 ♖d7



15. ♗d6! An important exchange, as Black has only one good piece, which

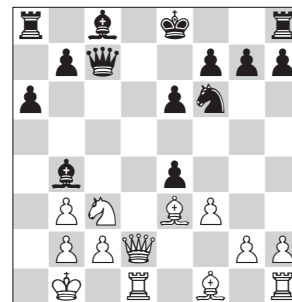
is now exchanged off. He is left without counterplay, and although White's advantage is not great, it is stable.

15... 0-0-0 16. ♗xc7+ ♖xc7 17. ♖d4 ♖b5 18. a4 ♖xd4 19. cxd4 ♖c6



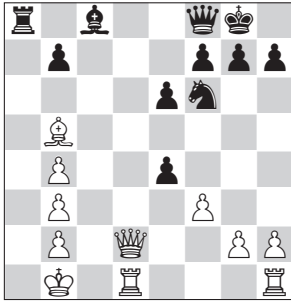
20. a5!± White has straightened out his pawn structure, put his pawn on a5 and fixed two black pawns. The c4-pawn is weak, cut off from its army, and will always be under fire from the white pieces, Volokitin-Haba, Germany Bundesliga 2004/05.

A222) 11... ♖xb3 12. axb3 Black has lost a couple of tempi and exchanged off one knight, but it is not clear if this was necessary or not. The pawn on d5 is now hanging. 12... dxe4



13. ♖b5 ♗e7 13... axb5 14. ♗xb4± and the main problem is that Black cannot castle. Now White has two possibilities, but it seems to me he should play 14. ♖c7+:

A2221) **14.c3** This move has a large minus, in that it weakens the white king. Admittedly, there are not yet any concrete threats or problems, but White will have three pawns on the b-file, and things will not be easy for him, even if he has a material advantage: **14...0-0 15.cxb4 axb5 16.♙c5 ♖e8 17.♙xf8 ♜xf8 18.♙xb5**

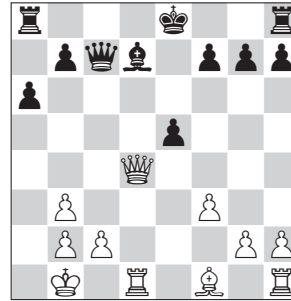


18...e5! An excellent move. Despite White's extra exchange, Black has a good game, as the white king is not entirely comfortable and the b-pawns are tripled. **19.fxe4?** **19.♜g5!±** is a strong move, which gives White the advantage – firstly, he does not let the black bishop onto the b1-h7 diagonal, and secondly he attacks the pawn on e5. **19...♘xe4 20.♜e1 ♙f5 21.♙d3 ♜d8!**

An excellent move. Black gets good compensation for the exchange, and now White must play very carefully, so as not to fall under attack. **22.♜f1 ♘f2 23.♜xf2 ♙xd3+** Black recovers the exchange and the position is equal, Leko-Anand, Monaco (blind) 2004;

A2222) **14.♘c7+ ♜xc7 15.♜xb4 ♘d5 16.♜xe4 ♘xe3 17.♜xe3** After the exchanging operations, we have reached a position in which White probably has the advantage, and Black faces a very important choice of which direction he should send his king in. I

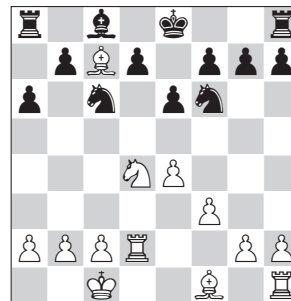
think Anand made the right decision: **17...♙d7 17...0-0 18.♙d3**, and White begins to march his h-pawn, whilst Black does not have quick counterplay. **18.♜d4 e5**



19.♜b4?! **19.♜h4!** It was important to prevent Black castling queenside, and force him to go kingside instead, when White will have the initiative. **19...0-0-0!** Black has equalised. He is ready to play **...♙e6** and exchange rooks, Topalov-Anand, Sofia (blitz) 2004.

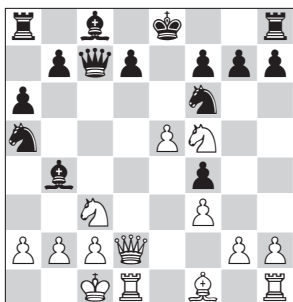
B) **10.♙f4** and now:

B1) **10...♙xc3?** A weak move. Black cannot afford to give up the defender of his dark squares, which are very weak. **11.♙xc7 ♙xd2+ 12.♜xd2 ♘c6**



13.♙d6± One can even go so far as to say White's position is winning, as Black cannot castle or complete the development of his pieces;

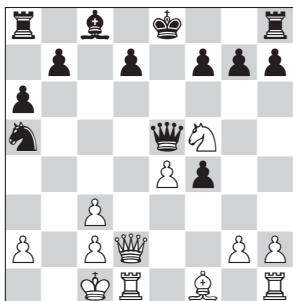
B2) **10...e5? 11.♘f5!** An excellent piece sacrifice, which gives White a very strong attack. **11...exf4 12.e5**



B21) On **12...♙xe5?? 13.♖e1** wins the queen;

B22) **12...♘h5 13.♘d6+ ♕xd6 14.exd6+-** The two black knights are cut off on opposite sides of the board and all his remaining pieces are still at home. Meanwhile, White is ready to attack the defenceless black king with all his pieces;

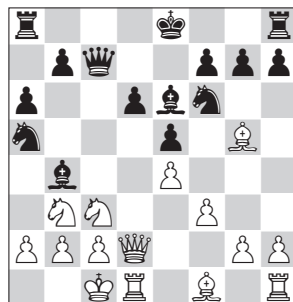
B23) **12...♕xc3** Trying to eliminate one of White's attacking knights, but also eliminating Black's best defensive piece. **13.bxc3 ♘e4** He must give back the piece, but this also fails to save him. White has a decisive advantage. Also, **13...♗g8? 14.♘d6+ ♔f8 15.♙xf4+-** leads to White's domination, as one can see from just looking at the black pieces. **14.fxe4 ♙xe5**



15.♙e1!+- Opening a path for the rook, whilst the queen will attack on the kingside;

B24) **12...♘e4!** It is best to return the piece and keep his bishop as a defender. **13.fxe4 ♙xe5 14.♙d5! d6 15.a3 ♕c5 16.♗xd6+ ♕xd6 17.♙xd6 ♙xd6 18.♖xd6** White has the better endgame, as the pawn on f4 is weak, the white pieces are active and the white knight has an excellent post on d5, Morales Romero-Borges Mateos, Havana 2010.

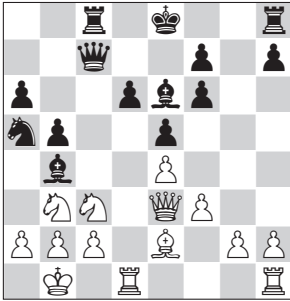
B3) **10...d6** The only move. Now White must consider how to continue the struggle, whether to take on d6 or start play on the kingside. **11.♘b3 e5** There is no other way to defend the d6-pawn. **12.♕g5** Now White begins to attack the square d5, for which he starts attacking the square's main defender, the knight on f6. **12...♕e6**



Defending d5. Now White has a choice whether to exchange on f6 and weaken the black structure, or to wait:

B31) **13.♕xf6 gxf6 14.♙d3 ♕xc3! ♙xc3 16.bxc3 ♘xb3+ 17.axb3 ♔e7=** Black has good play on the kingside with the move ...f7-f5 and the advance of the h-pawn;

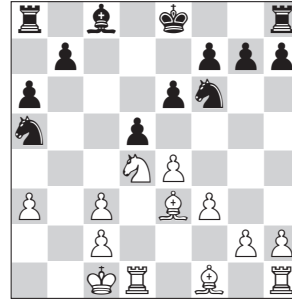
B32) 13.♖b1 ♜c8 14.♞e3 This move gives White the possibility to fight, but Black is no worse and his pieces are more ready for battle than White's. It was necessary to take: 14.♙xf6 gxf6 15.♞d3 ♙xc3 16.♞xc3 ♞xc3 17.bxc3 and we have reached the same equal endgame. **14...b5!** Anand plays well. He often uses this variation, and knows which ideas work in which positions. Now things are not easy for White at all. **15.♙h4** 15.♙xf6 may be the strongest move in this position, but there is already no sense in playing like this: 15...gxf6 16.♙e2



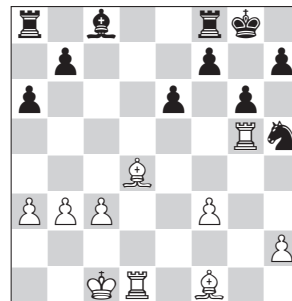
16...♞e7! ♞. Black has a huge attack and White must defend carefully.

15...♙xc3! 16.♞xc3 ♞xc3 17.bxc3 ♞b7! 18.♞b2 ♞d7 Black has a great advantage, as the white pawns are shattered and the bishop pair confers no advantage at all. The white pieces are still not developed and Black will play ...f7-f6, ...♞e7 and begin an attack on the queenside pawns, Grischuk-Anand, Bastia (rapid) 2003.

C) **10.a3!? ♙xc3 11.♞xc3 ♞xc3 12.bxc3** Even the move 10.a3, forcing the endgame, gives White some advantage, as Black has weak dark squares and he has surrendered his dark-squared bishop. **12...d5**



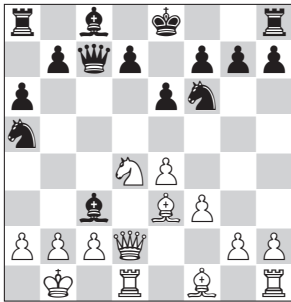
13.♞b3!? Offering a pawn sacrifice, when the strength of White's two bishops will tell. 13.e5?! leads to a typical French position, where Black has no problems: 13...♞d7 14.f4 b5 15.♞b3 ♞c4 16.♙xc4 bxc4 17.♞c5 ♜b8 18.♞d2 ♞b5= Topalov-Anand, Bastia (rapid) 2003. Black has easily equalised, having already exchanged knights, and will soon exchange the rooks on the b-file. **13...♞xb3+ 14.cxb3 dxe4 15.♙d4! exf3 16.gxf3±** White has two bishops and very active pieces, with his rook on d1 tying Black down. Next he will follow up with ♞g1 and start attacking on both wings. **16...0-0 17.♞g1 ♞h5 18.♞g5 g6**



19.♞xh5! Removing the only black piece which is in play, whilst White also obtains the g-file for the attack. **19...gxh5 20.♙f6 e5 21.♙d3** Abergel-

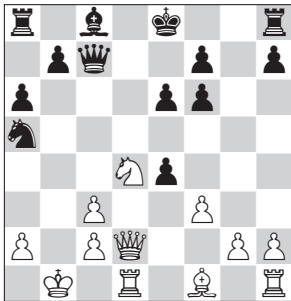
Tredinnick, Gibraltar 2007, where White soon mated the black king;

D) 10.♖b1 ♕xc3



White has a choice between exchanging queens or keeping them on. We will examine both possibilities:

D1) 11.bxc3 d5! A correct blow in the centre, and now White has to solve the problems with the e4-pawn. 12.♕g5!? dxe4 13.♕xf6 gxf6

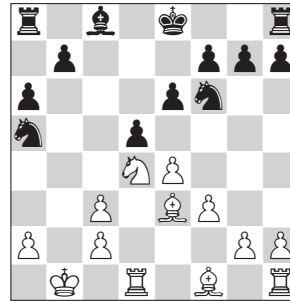


D11) 14.fxe4?! Very slow, as the black king is still in the centre and it is not so easy for him to castle kingside, so it was possible to play more aggressively, although we will see that Black can defend. 14...♕d7 15.♖b3 0-0-0 16.♕d3 ♕c6 17.♗f2⇒ A fighting position with chances for both sides. Each has his weaknesses, which offset each other, Ni Hua-Ye Jiangchuan, Tripoli Wch 2004;

D12) 14.♖b3 ♖xb3 15.axb3 ♔e7 16.♕e2 ♗d8= Black has equalised –

his king is excellent on e7 as White has no dark-squared bishop with which to harass it.

D2) 11.♗xc3 ♗xc3 12.bxc3 d5



D21) 13.e5 We reach a typical French position, where Black has no dark-squared bishop and White has a broken queenside pawn structure, which we can say compensate for each other. 13...♖d7 14.f4 b5 15.♖b3 ♖c4 16.♕d4 16.♕xc4 bxc4 17.♖a5 f6 and here Black is fine; he just needs to exchange off the white knight, to equalise completely. 16...♕b7 17.♕d3 ♗c8 18.g4 ♖cb6 19.♖c1 0-0 20.♗he1 ♖a4 21.♗e3 with a fighting position, where Black has no great problems, as he is prepared for counterplay on the c-file and the c4-square is very important, Karjakin-Tregubov, Sochi tt 2012;

D22) 13.♖b3 is a good idea. White offers a pawn sacrifice and will have two strong bishops in an open position, plus the black pieces are undeveloped. 13...♖xb3 14.axb3 dxe4 15.fxe4 ♖xe4 16.♕d4 f6 17.♕d3 Black has a choice of where to put his knights, but all the white pieces are in the game, while Black's are undeveloped. 17...♖g5 After 17...♖d6 18.♕c5 ♖f7 19.♗he1 White has excellent compensation for the pawn, as the black king is stuck in the centre, under attack from all the white

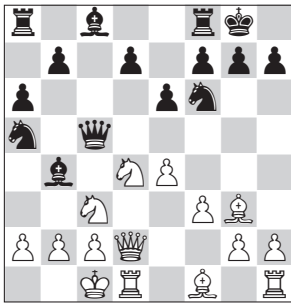
pieces. **18.♖he1** Here too, White has excellent compensation for the pawn, and Black should think of how he can give back the pawn, so as to exchange off one of the bishops.

Now we continue with the main move, 10.♙f2.

10...♙xc3

A) **10...0-0 11.♙g3** An excellent bishop transfer, causing Black problems. Now he should decide whether he should put his pawns on d6 and e5, or wait and play ...d7-d5 in one move.

A1) **11...♖c5**

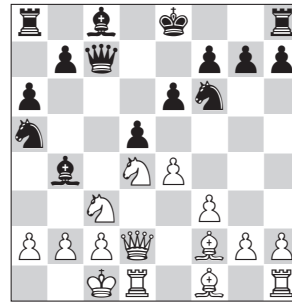


12.♙e1! Defending the knight on c3 again, and now White wants simply to play a2-a3. **12...♘c4 13.♙xc4 ♖xc4 14.♖d3! ♖xd3 15.♖xd3±** White has the better endgame, where he is ready to cause problems for Black on the dark squares, whilst the black pieces still remain at home. White needs to exchange dark-squared bishops and then his advantage will grow;

A2) **11...d6 12.a3!** Forcing Black to give up his strong bishop, plus the queens will automatically be exchanged, and White will obtain a superior endgame. **12...♙xc3 13.♖xc3 ♖xc3 14.bxc3 d5 15.♙d6 ♖e8 16.♙c7±** The two bishops and play on the dark squares give White

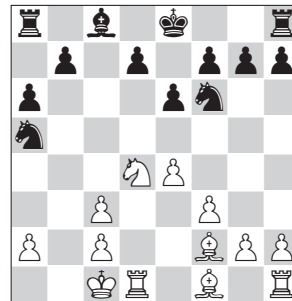
a large advantage. Black's position is extremely difficult in this endgame.

B) **10...d5?**



11.♙g3! ♖c5 12.♙e5! An excellent bishop transfer, threatening ♖g5. Now Black has real problems. **12...0-0 13.♙xf6 gxf6 14.exd5 exd5 15.♙d3 ♙xc3 16.♖xc3 ♖xc3 17.bxc3±** After several exchanges, White obtains the better endgame, as Black has pawn weaknesses on the kingside plus an isolated pawn on d5 and a bad bishop.

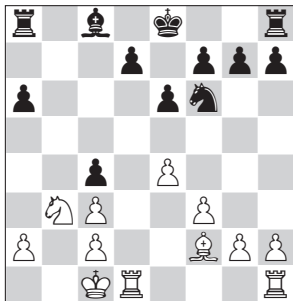
11.♖xc3 ♖xc3 12.bxc3



12...d5

Much better than 12...b5, as here Black tries to activate his light-squared bishop and bring his knight on f6 to life.

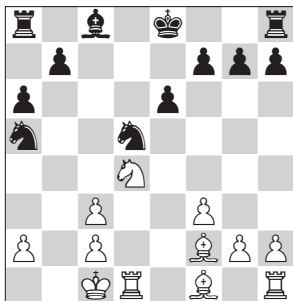
12...b5 13.♘b3 ♘c4 13...♘xb3+? 14.axb3 leaves White with two bishops and a much better position, as the enemy dark squares and the pawns on a6 and b5 are weak. **14.♙xc4 bxc4**



15. ♖a5! Despite the opposite-coloured bishops, White's position is winning, as all the dark squares are weak, the black light-squared bishop is out of play and her remaining pieces are undeveloped and it is not clear how they can be brought into play, Sebag-Zigangirova, Women's Olympiad, Calvia 2004.

13. exd5 ♜xd5

13...exd5 14. ♗h4!± with an enormous positional advantage; White wants to take on f6 and continue the development of his pieces.

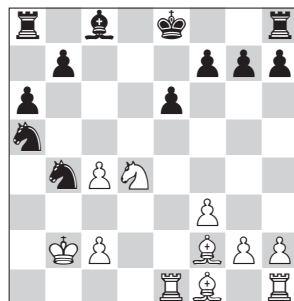


14. c4!

White has a dark-squared bishop, which has no opponent, and Black faces a very difficult battle against this bishop, whilst he also has problems with his development.

14... ♖e7

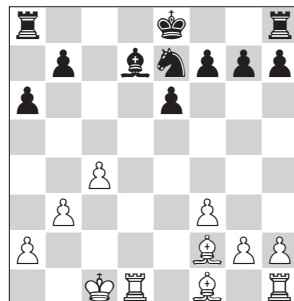
14... ♖c3!? **15. ♖e1 ♜xa2+** This idea of nicking a pawn, so as to have something to suffer for, does not work, as White immediately goes over to decisive operations. **16. ♗b2 ♜b4**



17. ♜f5 Black's position is collapsing, with everything hanging.

15. ♖b3 ♜ac6

15... ♜xb3+? Black's only trump here is the broken white pawn structure, and this move just repairs it. **16. cxb3 ♗d7**



17. ♗d3± With two strong bishops and a queenside pawn majority, White will try to create a passed pawn, Motylev-Xu Jun, Moscow tt 2004.

16. ♗c5 e5 17. ♗d3±

Here, White already has an advantage, without doubt, but Black can hope to defend successfully.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we dealt with the move 9...♘a5. I do not like this move very much, because its only main idea is to go into an endgame. White has a choice of which useful move he wants to make, whilst awaiting this. We have looked at various moves and it immediately became clear that 10.♙f4 is not in the spirit of the position and Black obtains excellent counterplay. I would even say that he seizes the initiative. The move 10.a3 is interesting because at move 13 White has the interesting pawn sacrifice 13.♘b3, which gives him excellent compensation, as his bishops come to life.

The waiting move 10.♖b1 does not bring White any special dividends, because the resulting endgame is harmless for Black.

And now we turn to the move 10.♘b3, where we have looked at many games. I can understand why White often avoids this move, because of Anand's magnificent handling of the black pieces – he has revealed many possibilities for Black, in his games in this line. Probably the most important game for this variation is that played between Topalov and Anand, where the former played very well, but made a strategic error on move 19, which gave Black the chance to castle queenside; it was necessary to keep the enemy king in the centre, after which White retains the initiative.

And now the move which I think is the strongest answer to Black's knight move. This is 10.♙f2. The idea is very simple and strong. Black takes on c3 and plays the programmed ...d7-d5. But here, instead of the usual continuations e4-e5 and ♘b3, White has the simple capture exd5 and when Black takes on d5 with the knight, White has the move c3-c4 and his bishop is not attacked on e3, because it has already moved to f2. Analysing this endgame, I am convinced that play proceeds for two results, and Black spends the whole game fighting for only half a point.