



## COLUMNISTS

*Over the  
Horizons*

Stefan Bucker



## Repairing the Steiner Variation

A continuation of last month's article [\*Only a Storm in a Teacup?\*](#) was not intended, but **ChessCafe** columnist **Karsten Müller** (Hamburg) found a significant improvement for White that changes the assessment of a critical variation. So I returned to the laboratory to brew an antidote. After some hours it became clear that Müller was right, and that his suggestion 16 Qf3 was stronger than both alternatives considered in my article. Even worse, the resulting ending was not only difficult for Black, it was probably lost.



The Bishop Sacrifice © by Zygmunt Nasiolkowski, Lüdenscheid

Apparently the Herman Steiner Variation had a problem. Because of the forcing nature of most of its lines, there wasn't an abundance of alternatives. The loss of one of its main lines would have been a serious blow for this already dubious gambit. Fortunately I can offer a solution that leads to a strange situation, not untypical for the Steiner Variation. By sacrificing both bishops, Black gets a lasting attack that should suffice for at least a draw.

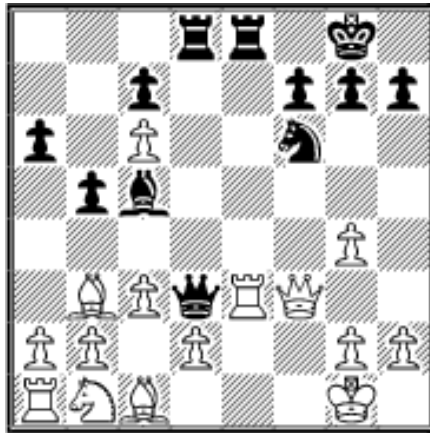
1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 b5 6 Bb3 Be7 7 Re1 0-0

**8 c3 d5 9 exd5 e4**

This last move defines the Steiner Variation of the Marshall Attack.

**10 dxc6 exf3 11 Qxf3 Bg4 12 Qg3 Re8 13 f3**

A critical situation for this opening. The next queen move was attributed an ! in my last article, but after Müller's analysis it rather deserves another sign. I'll explain why, before we return to this situation and continue with the stronger alternative 13...Bd6.

**13...Qd3? 14 fxg4 Bc5+ 15 Re3 Rad8 16 Qf3!**

My article had only considered 16 g5 and the move recommended “in the books” (or rather on the CD [\[5\]](#)) 16 Na3. Müller was right to suggest the text move “as a refinement, to play 16 Qf3 first and only after 16...Nxg4 to play 17 Na3, e. g. 17...Re5 18 Bc2 Nxe3 19 dxe3 Bxe3+ 20 Bxe3 Qxe3+ 21 Qxe3 Rxe3 22 Bb3 Rd2 23 Rf1 and White is clearly on top.” The text move 16 Qf3 has been played before, but

without recognizing its merits.

**16...Nxg4**

The main line in [\[5\]](#) was 16...Re5 17 h3 Ne4, Sevkeira – Iten, Tyrol 1977, a game that ended drastically (18 Qf4?? Nxd2 19 Bxd2 Rxe3). But a clear refutation exists: 18 Qxf7+ Kh8 19 Qf1 Nxd2 20 Qxd3 Rxd3 21 Bxd2 Rxd2 22 Nxd2 Bxe3+ 23 Kf1 Bxd2 24 Rd1 Bg5 25 Rd7 and wins.

I tried alternatives; however, neither 16...Re7 17 h3 Ne4 18 Kh2 Qd6+ 19 Kh1, nor 16...Re4 17 Na3 Bxe3+ 18 dxe3 Nxg4 19 Qxf7+ Kh8 20 h3 look promising.

**17 Na3!**

Müller's new move, instead of 17 Bxf7+ Kh8 18 Qxg4 Rf8!, when Black was already better in Gonzalos – Santos, correspondence 1993 (Spain) [\[5\]](#).

White's move order is much more precise than 16 Na3? Ne4!. Only after the additional moves 16 Qf3 Nxg4, when it is no longer important

to keep the d2-square protected, White puts his knight to a3.

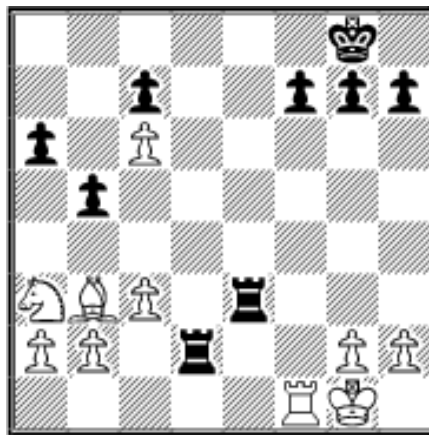
### 17...Re5

For a while my best bet for an escape route was 17...Nxe3 18 dxe3 Bxa3, when Black gets reasonable drawing chances after 19 Bxf7+?! Kh8 20 Bxe8 Rxe8 21 bxa3 Qxc3 22 Qf7 Rd8 or 21 e4 Bc5+ 22 Kh1 Rxe4 23 Bd2 Qd5 24 Bf4 Qe6 25 Rf1 Re1, or finally 21 Qf1 Qc2 22 bxa3 Rd8. But after the calm and strong reply 19 bxa3! Qxc3 20 Rb1 or 19...Kh8 20 e4 Black's position is hardly tenable.

### 18 Bc2 Nxe3 19 dxe3 Bxe3+ 20 Bxe3 Qxe3+ 21 Qxe3 Rxe3 22 Bb3 Rd2

Infiltration with the other rook doesn't make a big difference: 22...Re2 23 Rf1 Rxb2 24 Nc2 Rd2 25 Ne3 g5 26 Bxf7+ Kf8 27 a4 +/-.

### 23 Rf1



In this final position of Müller's analysis, White has excellent winning chances:

(a) 23...Rxb2 24 Bxf7+ Kf8 25 Nc2 Rxc3 26 Bb3+ Ke7 27 Nb4 Kd6 28 Rd1+ Kc5 29 Nd3+ Rxd3 30 Rxd3 Kxc6 31 Bg8 h6.

(b) 23...Re7 24 Nc2 h5 25 h4 a5 26 Nd4 a4 27 Bc2 b4 28 Rc1 a3 29 bxa3 bxc3 30 Nf3 Rd5 31 a4 g6 32

Bb3 Rc5 33 Nd4 Re3 34 Nc2 Re4 35 Rf1 Re7 36 Nb4.

Neither line is forced, but there can be no doubt that Black is in serious difficulties.

### A New Proposal

Now let us return to move 13. The first moves were: 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 b5 6 Bb3 Be7 7 Re1 0-0 8 c3 d5 9 exd5 e4 10 dxc6 exf3 11 Qxf3 Bg4 12 Qg3 Re8 13 f3. Instead of the move 13...Qd3?, which can no longer be trusted, I now recommend the following sharp treatment:

### 13...Bd6



**14 Qf2**

14 Qh4 Rxe1+ leads to the same position.

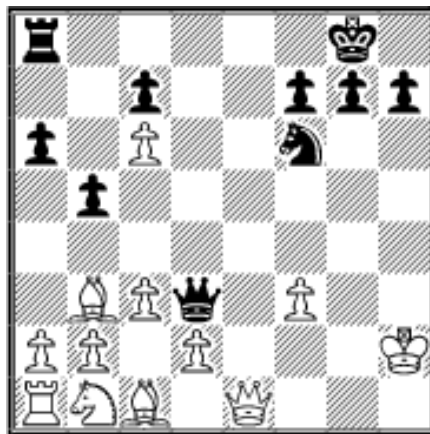
**14...Rxe1+ 15 Qxe1 Bxf3!**

Apparently a novelty. The usual path permitted by theory was 15...Qe8, and then:

(a) 16 Qf2!!” was considered the main line: 16...Bf5 17 d4 Qc6 18 Be3 Nd5 19 Nd2! (Keres). The assessment of this position varies, from += (ECO) to +/- (Keres). However after 19...Re8 20 Bxd5 (other moves return the pawn: 20 Re1 or 20 Nf1 Bxh2+! 21 Kxh2 Qh6+. Or 20 Ne4 Bxe4 21 fxe4 Rxe4 22 Rf1 Nf4, but again I don’t see much of an advantage) 20...Qxd5, and Black seems to have sufficient compensation for the pawn.

(b) 16 Qxe8+ Rxe8 17 Na3 Bf5 18 Nc2 Bd3 19 Ne3 +/- is analysis from the *Total Marshall* CD [\[5\]](#). I’d prefer 18...Bxc2 19 Bxc2 Re1+ 20 Kf2 Rh1; for example, 21 a4 bxa4 22 Bxa4 Nh5 23 Bc2 Bxh2 24 d4 Bg3+ 25 Ke2 g6 26 b4 and White’s chances on the queenside seem more concrete than Black’s play on the other side.

**16 gxf3 Bxh2+! 17 Kxh2 Qd3**



After this sequence of more or less forced moves, what does Black have for his sacrifice of two (!) bishops? The obvious result is that White’s king has lost his pawn shelter. Therefore, Black will be able to give perpetual check in many lines. Then there are immediate threats against the white queen: Re8, often followed by Re6-h6. And finally Black gets long-term chances because of his free h-pawn, which may advance at

an appropriate moment. On the other side, White “only” has to get all his pieces into play to win the game. But this goal is not easy to achieve.

Before we continue the analysis, let’s look at an older line with a similar sacrifice: 12...Bd6 is an important alternative (instead of 12...Re8). Then if 13 Qh4 Re8 14 f3 Bxh2+!? 15 Kxh2 Qd6+ 16 Kg1 Rxe1+ 17 Qxe1 Re8



(a) 18 Qf2 Bxf3! 18 gxf3 Qd3 20 Bd1 Nh5 (stronger is 20...Nd5!; for example, 21 Qh4 Ne3!) 21 Na3 (the correct move was 21 Qh4!? [5]) 21...Re6 (21...Nf4!) 22 Qd4? Re1+ 23 Kh2 Re2+! draw, Petursson – Johansson, corr. 1963. However, Vitomskis [5] has found 22 Qh4! Rg6+ 23 Kf2 +-. While this theoretical line looks okay for Black – in fact 14...Bxh2+!? is considered an interesting alternative to the main

line 14...Bf5 – I remain sceptical because of the following continuation:

(b) 18 Qh4!. Not mentioned in my sources. The best line that I can find is 18...Qf4, and then:

(b1) 19 Qf2 Bf5 (19...Bxf3 20 Qxf3 Qxf3+ 21 gxf3 Re1+ 22 Kf2 Rxc1 23 a4) 20 Na3 (20 c4? Nh5 21 Nc3 Ng3 followed by Qh4; another attractive line is 20 g3 Qh6 21 Na3 Qg6 22 d4 Re2! =>) 20...Bd3 21 Bd3 (21 g3 Qg5 22 Bd1 Nh5 23 f4 Qg6!) 21...Nh5 (or 21...Qf5 22 g4 Qg6 =>) 22 Nc2 Qg5 23 g4 Nf4 24 Qg3 Re2 =.

(b2) 19 Bd1! seems to refute Black's play; for example, 19...Qe5 20 fxg4 Qe1+ 21 Qxe1 Rxe1+ 22 Kf2 Rxd1 23 Na3 Nxg4+ 24 Ke2 Rg1 25 Nc2 Rxg2+ 26 Kf3 Rg1 27 d4 +-. So the old version of the double sacrifice is dubious.

### 18 Qe3

The natural reaction, to get rid of the nasty queen on d3. 18 Na3? Re8 19 Qf2 Re2.

More reasonable is 18 Bd1 (to protect the e2-square) Re8 19 Qf2 (19 Qh4? Qf1 -+) 19...Re6 20 c4 Ne8 21 cxb5 Rh6+ 22 Kg1 Rg6+ 23 Qg2 axb5 24 Nc3 Rxg2+ 25 Kxg2 h5 with chances for both sides; for example, 26 Ne4 h4 27 Nf2 Qg6+ 28 Kf1 Nd6 29 a4 bxa4 30 d3 Nf5 31 Rxa4 Ng3+ 32 Kg2 Ne4+ 33 Ng4 Nc5 34 Ra8+ Kh7 35 Bc2 Qxc6 36 d4+ g6 37 Rf8 h3+ 38 Kf2 h2 =.

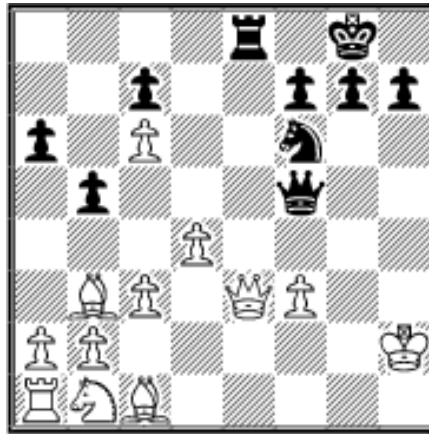
### 18...Qf5 19 d4

Two alternatives are worth mentioning:

(a) 19 Bd1 Re8 20 Qg1 Qh5+ 21 Kg2 Qg5+ 22 Kf2 Qh4+ 23 Qg3 Qh1 =.

(b) 19 Be6!?. Closing the e-file at the cost of a bishop. But Black still has enough activity to compensate for the material deficit: 19...fxe6 20 d4 (20 a4 Rf8, or 20 d3 Rd8) 20...e5 21 Nd2 (21 dxe5 Re8 22 Qf4 Qh5+ 23 Kg1 Rxe5 24 Qg3 Rd5 25 Bd2 Rd6 26 Kf2 Qf5 27 Kg2 Re6 28 Kg1 Re2 -/+ ) 21...exd4 22 Qxd4 Re8 23 Kg3 Qg6+ 24 Kf2 Qc2! 25 a4 Qd1 26 Nf1 Ne4+ 27 Qxe4 Rxe4 28 fxe4 Qc2+ 29 Kf3. The chances are even.

### 19...Re8



### 20 Kg2

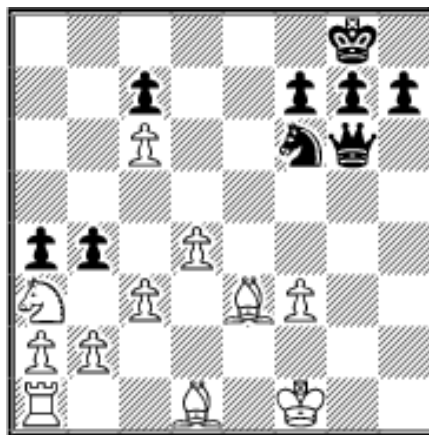
Since 20 Qf2? Ng4+ and 20 Qd2? Qxf3 lose on the spot, White has to give the queen for the rook. 20 Qxe8+ Nxe8 21 Kg2 can lead to the same position, but offers Black an additional option in 21...Nd6 instead of returning to f6.

### 20...Rxe3 21 Bxe3 Qg6+ 22 Kf1 a5!

Energetic – and necessary. Black disrupts the opponent's plans. Else White's rook could get into play too quickly, and then Black's resignation would be only a question of time.

### 23 a4

23 Na3 looks logical, but Black has active resources: 23...a4 24 Bd1 b4!



25 cxb4? (25 Nc4 Nd5 =) 25...Qd3+ 26 Kf2 Nd5 27 Nc2 f5! -/+ (28 f4 g5!)

### 23...bxa4

Much better than the short-sighted 23...b4? 24 Nd2 Qd3+ 25 Kf2 bxc3 26 bxc3 Qxc3 27 Rb1 Qxc6. For the cheap price of two pawns White has regained the long-desired activity of his rook. For example, 28 Bc4 h5 29

Rb8+ Kh7 30 Rb5 h4 31 Rxa5 Kg8 32 Rc5 Qd6 33 Nf1 h3 34 a5 h2 35 Kg2 +-.

It is less clear whether 23...Ne4 is good or bad. After 24 fxe4 Qxe4 25

Ke2 Qg2+ 26 Bf2 Qg4+ 27 Ke1 Qe4+ 28 Kd2 Qg2 29 axb5 Qxf2+ 30 Kc1 Qg1+ 31 Bd1 Qg5+ 32 Nd2 Qxb5, White certainly has an advantage, but Black's kingside pawns should not be underestimated.

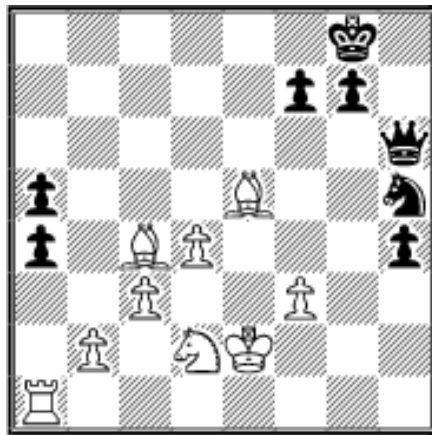
#### 24 Bc4

24 Bxa4 allows 24...Nd5 25 Bc1 (what else?) h5 26 Bb3 Nf6 27 Kf2 h4 28 Bf4 h3 29 Nd2 (29 Bg3 Qh6) 29...Qg2+ 30 Ke3 h2 31 Bxh2 (or 31 Bxc7 h1Q 32 Rxh1 Qxh1 33 Bxa5 Ne8 34 d5 Qg1+ with equality) 31...Qxh2 32 Rxa5 Qh6+ 33 Kd3 Qg6+ 34 Ke2 Nh5 =.

#### 24...h5! 25 Nd2 h4 26 Bf4

26 Ke2 Nh5 27 Rg1 Ng3+ 28 Kf2 Qxc6 with approximate equality; for example, 29 Bd3 a3! or 29 Bg5 Qd6 30 Bxh4 Qf4! or 29 Re1 Qd6 30 Bd3 g6 or 29 Bf4 Qf6 30 Bxg3 hxg3+ 31 Rxg3 Qb6!.

#### 26...Nh5 27 Bxc7 Qxc6 28 Be5 Qh6 29 Ke2



Or 29 Ne4 Ng3+!.

What follows is far from being forced, but the line gives an impression of how Black might use his menacing h-pawn to stay in the game. The diagrammed position is difficult to assess. There is a good chance, I believe, that the advanced h-pawn will cost White a piece. In the resulting position, Black's queen will have more space for her

maneuvers. It shouldn't be too difficult to exchange the a-pawns for White's b- and c-pawn, and then the draw cannot be far away.

#### 29...Qg5 30 Re1

If he finds the time for regrouping his pieces (Kd1, Bd3, Kc2), Black would be in trouble.

#### 30...h3 31 Ne4 Nf4+ 32 Bxf4 Qxf4 33 d5 Qh2+ 34 Kd3 Kf8

Not 34...Qxb2? 35 d6 Qb7 36 Nc5 Qxf3+ 37 Kc2 Qg2+ 38 Re2 Qg6+ 39 Bd3 Qxd6 40 Re8+ +-.

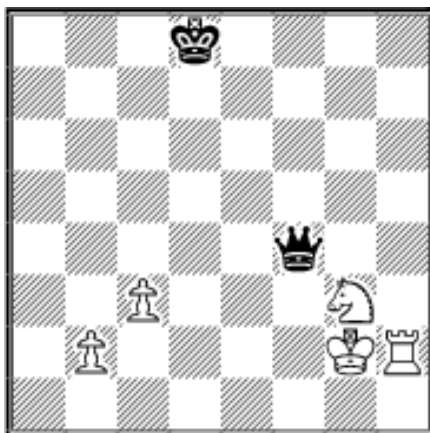
#### 35 d6

There is no time to wait, since Black's h-pawn is an enormous threat.

**35...Qe5 36 d7!? Ke7 37 Bxf7 h2!**

Better than the exchange 37...Kxd7 38 Be6+! Kc7 39 Bxh3 Qh2 40 Be6 Qxb2 41 Nd2 Qb6 42 Re4, where White has all the fun for the foreseeable future.

**38 Be8 Kd8 39 Ke3 g5 40 Rh1 Kc7 41 d8Q+ Kxd8 42 Bxa4 Qb8 43 Kf2 g4 44 Bd1 a4 45 Bxa4 Qa7+ 46 Kg2 Qxa4 47 Rxh2 Qd1 48 fxg4 Qxg4+ 49 Ng3 Qf4 ½-½**



After the hard fight the dust has settled, and the result is a draw.

#### Sources:

- [1] R. G. Wade, T. D. Harding: *The Marshall Attack*, London 1974.
- [2] A. Matanovic, etc., *Encyclopedia of Chess Openings*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., Belgrade 1974.
- [3] T. D. Harding: *Spanish (Ruy Lopez): Marshall*, London 1977.
- [4] N. Krogus, A. Mazukewitsch: *Marshall-Angriff*, Berlin 1989.
- [5] T. D. Harding, J. Vitomskis, M. Bennedik: *Total Marshall* (CD), Dublin 2002.

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