



## Is the Najdorf Poisoned Pawn Edible?

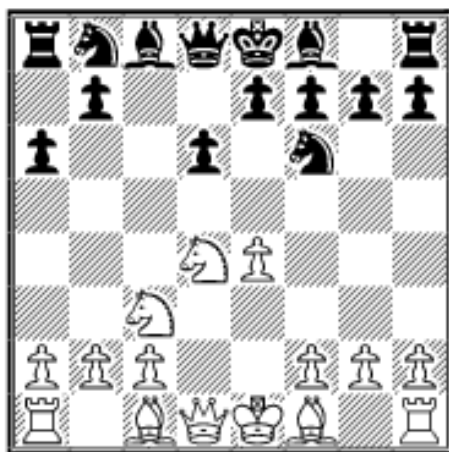
A recent email tournament game caused me to take a completely new look at a variation I first analysed as a teenager in the 1960s. Somewhat to my surprise, and defying the advice of friends who preferred Black's chances to avoid the line, I managed to defeat a higher-rated ICCF international master who played the Poisoned Pawn against me.

### COLUMNISTS

## *The Kibitzer*

Tim Harding

Let us have a little history before the theory, to provide context for readers who are unfamiliar with this variation. The Najdorf Variation arises after **1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 a6**.



Black's fifth move serves various purposes: it can be a fulcrum for a ...b7-b5 advance, it can help shelter the black queen on c7 and it rules out bishop checks on b5. The primary intention behind the move, however, was to keep the d4-knight out of b5, so that Black could continue ...e7-e5 against likely White replies such as 6 Be2, 6 Be3, 6 f4 and 6 g3. It can be seen as a refinement of the Boleslavsky Variation (5...Nc6 6 Be2 e5) which is respected but seldom seen because White

can avoid it by 6 Bg5 (Richter-Rauzer) or 6 Bc4 (Sozin).

In the early 1960s, when I started to play competitive chess, the Najdorf Variation was enormously popular at all levels of chess, not least because Bobby Fischer was so successful with it. This popularity continued well into the 1970s and really has never ceased, although White's methods against the variation and Black's responses have mutated over the years.

In recent years, 6 Be3 has perhaps become the most popular anti-Najdorf move with 6 f4 also showing signs of making a comeback. In the mid-1960s and 1970s, however, attention was mostly concentrated on two aggressive moves for White, namely 6 Bc4 and 6 Bg5. You will note that these are the same two moves by which White can avoid the Boleslavsky variation. The two moves have very different aims, but they share one feature: both moves

effectively rule out Najdorf's original ...e5 idea. Against 6 Bc4 it would be unwise to play ...e5 because the actively posted bishop immediately threatens the weak spot f7, as well as controlling d5.

Against 6 Bg5 the move ...e5 is also undesirable because it creates a self-pin and d5 will fall strongly under White's control. Compared with the Sveshnikov variation (2...Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 5 Nc3 e5 6 Ndb5 a6) the moves ...a6 has not been played with a direct threat and the white knight is not driven to the edge of the board.

Therefore, in the Najdorf variation, **6 Bg5** is almost invariably met by **6...e6** (6...Nbd7 having been discarded on account of 7 Bc4). In turn, after a brief flirtation with Nezhmetdinov's 7 Qf3, and recognising that the Rauzer move 7 Qd2 is ineffective against 7...h6, White almost invariably replies **7 f4**, which creates the threat of e4-e5 (possibly not at once but it hangs in the air).



The main theoretical debates on the **6 Bg5 e6 7 f4** line revolve around how Black meets this threat. A simple unpin by 7...Qc7 is possible but seems to pose little threat to White. The move 7...h6 is possible but after 8 Bh4 Black still has to decide on his plan and the square g6 may prove to have been weakened and the scope of the black king's bishop restricted.

In the early games, the unpin by 7...Be7 and the more flexible move 7...Nbd7 (covering e5 for the time being) received the most attention, and a sequence combining these two ideas was very popular (7...Be7 8 Qf3 Qc7 9 0-0-0 Nbd7 10 g4 b5) as was a variant on this where White plays 10 Bd3, e.g. Spassky-Fischer, game 15, Reykjavik 1972.

Apart from the 7...Be7 line, two treatments for Black have had the best theoretical reputation. Both involve a much more radical approach. One of them is the Polugaevsky variation 7...b5 (Black says "OK you can play 8 e5 but it does not win a piece") and the other is the Poisoned Pawn, **7...Qb6** where Black unpins with an active queen move and White in turn offers a gambit by 8 Qd2.

(White can, and sometimes does, meet 7...Qb6 by 8 Nb3, but this ducks the main issue and the black queen can later go to c7 without loss of time, because the b3-knight is decentralised. It is also possible to play the sneaky 8 a3, when 8...Qxb2 loses the Queen to 9 Na4, but against sensible replies. 8 a3 hardly achieves anything constructive.) After **8 Qd2 Qxb2** Black has won a pawn. On the other hand, he has defied three pieces of advice commonly given to novices:



- a) Don't bring out your queen too early;
- b) Don't make several moves with the same piece before completing your development;
- c) Don't grab b-pawns.

That is why the variation acquired the name the 'Poisoned Pawn'. General maxims for novices do not, however, White, carry much weight in ultra-sharp

lines like the Najdorf where only strong moves count. White must now prove that his gambit really is venomous.

There are four distinct approaches White can adopt in the diagram position:

- a) 9 Rb1 Qa3 10 e5;
- b) 9 Rb1 Qa3 10 f5;
- c) 9 Rb1 Qa3 met more positionally by 10 Bxf6 or 10 Be2;
- d) 9 Nb3.

The first three of these plans involve White making the "obvious" move 9 Rb1 but it is not really clear that the rook will have anything positive to do on the b-file which will remain closed for the foreseeable future.

When I first studied the Poisoned Pawn in the late 1960s, 9 Rb1 was almost an automatic choice. I wrote an article for Bob Wade's magazine *Chessman Quarterly* and Bob provided material to GM O'Kelly to assist his research in one of the earliest Batsford books, which dealt with the Najdorf.

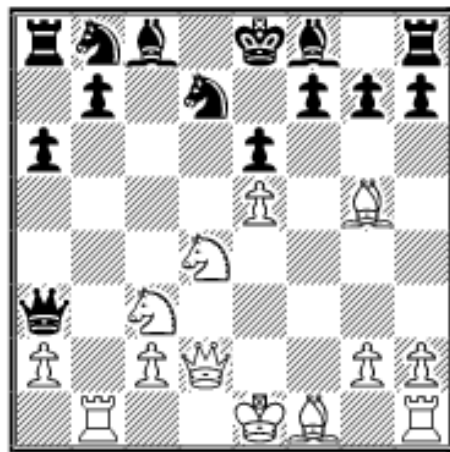
After 9...Qa3 White often tried to win the game by direct attack with 10 e5, but Fischer, O'Kelly and others showed that this would rebound on him. The alternative 10 Bxf6 was introduced as an attempt to gain positional compensation for the pawn, while 10 f5 became the new main attacking line. The alternative 9 Nb3 was little seen in the early days of the

Poisoned Pawn but its merits became clearer when it featured in the 1972 Spassky-Fischer match. White protects the rook, uses the Knight to restrict the black queen's mobility and soon Black usually has to play ...Qa3 soon anyway.

When the diagrammed position arose last November in my game with Jorg Kracht, from the ICCF Delegates and Officials IM-A tournament, I had to spend a long time on research.

I suspected that I would end up playing 9 Nb3, but I decided to work on the basis of eliminating alternatives and went back to look at the old lines first. I looked up my old articles and O'Kelly's book, together with the last John Nunn book on the variation (dating from 1996) and all the games I could find that had been played since Nunn wrote his book. This was quite a lot of material, as you can imagine! However, I found that Nunn's *The Complete Najdorf 6 Bg5* was still quite useful — since once a try by White has been refuted in the Poisoned Pawn, it tends to stay refuted.

My first hope was that something might turn up in the lines following **9 Rb1 Qa3 10 e5 dxe5 11 fxe5 Nfd7**, although even if it did, White would then have to recheck 10...h6.



In this position, White has two tries, namely 12 Bc4 and 12 Ne4!?

In the 1960s, White's hopes rested mostly on 12 Bc4 because lines like 12...Be7 13 Bxe6 and 12...Nxe5 13 Nxe6 were good fun. It seems, however that 12...Bb4 is somewhat better for Black and possibly 12...Qa5 is even stronger although it is very complicated e.g. 13 0-0 Nxe5 (13...Bc5 14 Bxe6!) 14 Rbe1 Nxc4 15 Qf4 Nd6 16 Ne4 Qc7 17 c4 Nb5!? (17...h6 18

Nf5 hxg5 is also playable.)

I did not see any prospect of finding an improvement for White where Fischer and others had trodden long ago, but I thought 12 Ne4!? was worth more attention. After looking at quite a lot of detail here, I decided that it was not reliable enough for a correspondence master tournament.

After 12 Ne4 Black can take the a-pawn or attack the bishop by 12...h6:

a) 12...Qxa2 13 Rb3 when after 13...Nc6 14 Nxc6 bxc6 Nunn's book shows

White has two promising tries in 15 Qc3 and 15 Bc4. Or 13...Qa4 14 Bb5!? Qa1+ 15 Kf2 Qxh1 16 Qa5 f6 17 exf6 axb5 18 fxg7 Rxa5 19 gxh8Q Qxh2 20 Rf3 1–0 was S.Goldshtein-J.Russell, IECC Email 2000. This shows what can happen to Black if he is careless but possible improvements are 14...axb5 and 16...f5. Perhaps more to the point, 13...h6 looks playable.

b) 12...h6 can be met in two ways:

b1) Nunn said 13 Rb3 Qa4 is good for Black but White seems to win in practice, so at first I thought this needed more investigation. Then I noticed that 13...Qxa2 returns to my suggestion in line a.

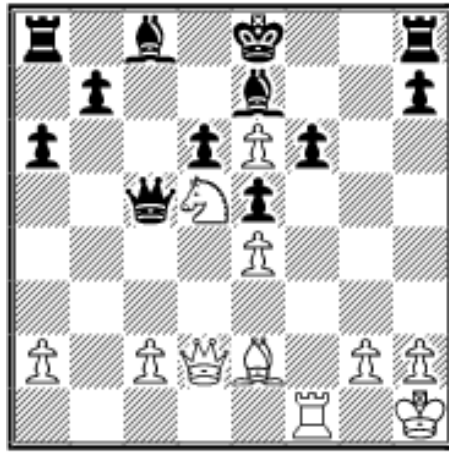
b2) 13 Bb5!? axb5! 14 Nxb5 hxg5 15 Nxa3 Rxa3 and nothing seems to have been discovered in recent years to overturn Nunn's view that Black's three pieces should be superior to White's queen. Therefore, I rejected the 10 e5 line.

In an ordinary game, especially at fast time limits, all kinds of combinations and swindles are possible. One of the hazards of playing the Poisoned Pawn is forgetting the analysis and playing a plausible losing move in a theoretically good position. In a correspondence game, whether by post or email, the opponent is not under clock or time pressure and can consult both printed sources and databases; he can even use the computer to analyse positions that may arise. Therefore speculative or unsound play is not really an option.

If you look at almost any Poisoned Pawn position with a program like Fritz, it will tell you Black is better because of the extra pawn, so it can be depressing to use a computer in the hunt for good continuations for White. It is better to switch it off and use your brain until you have a definite idea worth testing. Any lines proposed by a computer engine have to be re-evaluated anyway. Where a computer can be useful is in showing you what line your opponent may be planning (if he is relying on the machine more than you are); if you can find a weakness in a computer proposal, you may be able to take advantage.

Moving on, I decided not to spend so much time analysing the lines with 10 Bxf6 and 10 Be2. I had no special knowledge of these from before, and it seemed to me that they were primarily attempts to keep the positional rational. As winning attempts in a correspondence game, they did not offer so much.

I actually found a game my opponent had won against 10 Be2. E.Sowden-J.Kracht, Bernard Partridge Memorial corr, 1995, continued 10...Nbd7 11 0–0 Qc5 12 Kh1 Be7 13 f5 e5 14 Ne6 fxe6 15 fxe6 Nb6 16 Bxf6 gxf6 17 Rxb6 Qxb6 18 Nd5 Qc5.

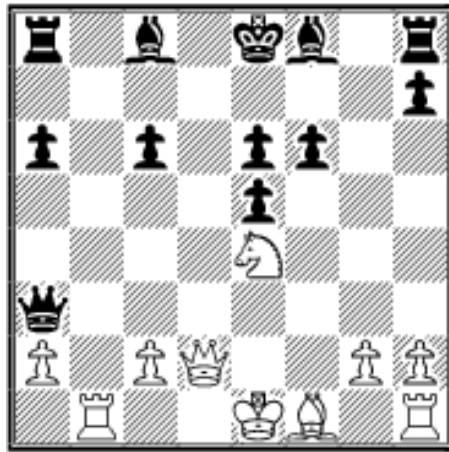


White was following *Nunn's Chess Openings* (p.255 note 22) which stops here, saying "unclear". However, White has lost every correspondence game in my database from this position (0/8).

Sowden-Kracht ended 19 Bh5+ Kd8 20 Qh6 Qc4 21 Kg1 Bxe6 22 Qg7 Bxd5 0-1.

I had higher hopes of the 10 f5 line, against which I once lost a game in Oxford in the late 1960s. However, theory

has developed in a fairly definite way and once more it did not seem likely that surprises could be found. After the long-established continuation 10...Nc6 11 fxe6 fxe6 12 Nxc6 bxc6 13 e5 dxe5 14 Bxf6 gxf6 15 Ne4 the next diagram position arises.

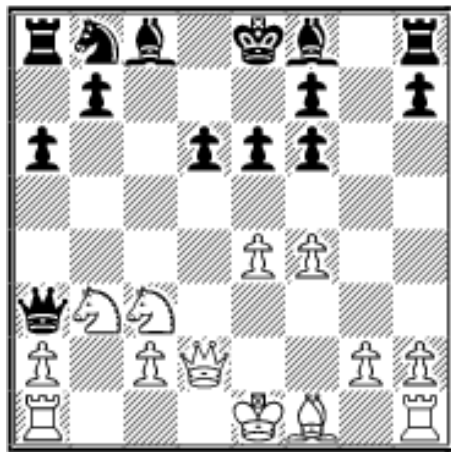


Here Black has tried a few moves. If he takes the third pawn by 15...Qxa2 then a draw is likely after 16 Rd1 Be7 17 Be2 0-0 18 0-0 f5 19 Qh6 Qxc2 20 Rd3 e.g. 20...Qxe2 21 Rg3+ Kf7 22 Rxf5+ exf5 23 Rg7+ Ke8 24 Qxc6+ kd8 25 Qb6+ 1/2-1/2 Velimirovic-Ftacnik, Vrsac 1981.

Instead of this, 15...Qe7 is probably refuted but 15...Be7 16 Be2 h5 17 Rb3 Qa4 18 Nxf6+ Bxf6 19 c4 is a serious obstacle. A piece and pawn in arrears, and

still not castled, White may yet have compensation, but certainly no spectacular win. Once more, it seemed to me that it is unlikely anything new can be found here and Black seems to have at least a draw.

Reluctantly, I decided that **9 Nb3** would have to be the move. There was a game Boll-Sanakoev, from a correspondence world championship, which I could follow for a few moves if I could not find anything better. One advantage of 9 Nb3 is that if Black replies 9...Nc6 then White can (if he wants) head for a slightly favourable endgame with 10 Bxf6 gxf6 11 Na4 Qa3 12 Nb6 Rb8 13 Nc4, so I was not surprised when my opponent quickly replied **9...Qa3** (9...Nbd7 is also possible). Now after **10 Bxf6 gxf6** (see next diagram) it was time for another big research session and long think.



Here White has to decide where to develop his king's bishop; on e2 or d3. It is also possible to play 11 f5 at once, but 11...Nd7 12 Be2 h5 13 O-O Nc5 14 Kh1 Bd7 15 Rab1 Rc8 was good for Black in Merdinian-Tringov, Plovdiv 1977, and moreover he can play 11...Nc6.

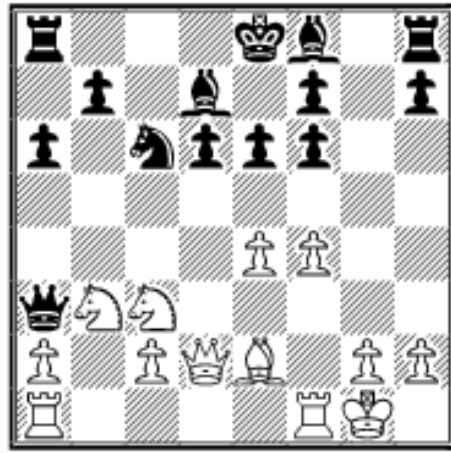
So I tried first to make 11 Bd3 work, as Nunn had hinted it might be good, citing a postal game Geenen-Delabie. The more I looked at 11...Nd7 12 O-O Nc5 13 Kh1

Bd7 14 f5 the more obvious it became that the suggested improvement on Delabie's play, 14...Rc8 15 fxe6 fxe6, was good. It has often been suggested and may bust the line. White has practical chances but in CC they seem insufficient even to draw. For example, 16 Qf4 Bg7! or 16 Ne2 Bg7 followed by castling.

So I continued on the basis of eliminating alternatives and followed the Dutch master Peter Boll, playing **11 Be2** without analyzing it at this stage. As Nunn explains, Black has a major strategic decision coming up: whether to play ...h7-h5 or not. If he is going to play ...h5, he can do so at move 11, 12 or 13. Until you know whether he will do this, you cannot really analyse because there is just such a vast amount of material that it is easier for White to react than act. The idea of playing ...h5 is to keep the white bishop out of that square and to remain in the centre with the black king. Kracht (and Boll's opponent Sanakoev), on the other hand, chose the alternative plan in which Black aims to castle kingside.

Since, in this game, my opponent never played ...h5, I have done a huge amount of research and analysis on the other lines and virtually none on 11/12/13...h5. In view of the outcome of my game, I think Black might prefer the ...h5 plan in future (or until the next big improvement turns up).

So from the last diagram, my game continued **11 Be2 Nc6 12 O-O** (I rejected the sideline 12 f5?!, which seems premature.) **12...Bd7**. Here Black's alternatives were 12...h5 (which he was avoiding as a matter of policy) or 12...Bg7, which should not be good if White can get in f4-f5 before Black can play ...f6-f5.



My opponent was moving virtually instantly and he may well have had this position before, though I could find none of his games in the line. It is a well-known position that has arisen, for example, in two games Kasparov-Magerramov from 1982, and in the 4<sup>th</sup> game of the Short-Kasparov PCA world championship match, London 1993.

White has an important choice, which I could no longer make entirely on the basis of rejecting alternatives, although this was still my main method.

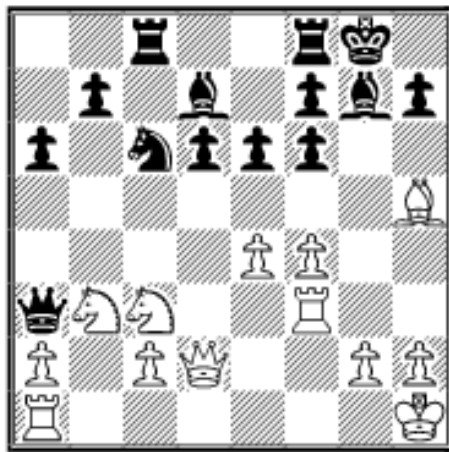
Kasparov's choice as White was 13 Rf3 and this was recommended in the Nunn book, but 13...Be7 seems a strong reply. For example, 14 Kh1 h5! (after all) 15 Rh3 h4 16 Qe1 Rc8 17 Rd1 b5 18 Nd2 Qa5 19 Nb3 Qb6!? (19...Qa3 was possible of course.) White won in the 2001 email game T.Winckelmann-K.Fuhrwerk but only after Black rejected at least two more drawing lines.

Boll-Sanakoev (the subject, for example, of a *New In Chess* Yearbook survey) had gone 13 Nd1 but in the game Claridge-Bennedik, IECG World Championship 2000, the improved reply 13...Rd8! was shown to be good, although White managed to escape with an ingenious draw. After 14 f5 Bg7 15 fxe6 fxe6 16 Bh5+ Ke7 17 Ne3 Ne5 18 Rad1 Black would have stood better with 18...Bc6 according to Martin Bennedik, who is one of my co-authors on *The Total Marshall* CD.

I wasn't sure if Kracht knew that game but it had been published in *Chess Mail* and in the IECG database, so that meant 13 Nd1 was out.

I also looked at 13 f5, 13 Nb1 and 13 Bh5 but eventually I decided to play **13 Kh1**, which cannot be bad and was the main move in Nunn's book. This was Black's last chance to select 13...h5 but he remained consistent and chose **13...Rc8**. I want to play Rf3 of course, to get my rook on the same rank as his queen, but first my bishop must be activated. So I now ruled out Black's other option by **14 Bh5** and Kracht continued with the plan to get castled, **14...Bg7 15 Rf3 0-0**.





White has tried several moves here, but it is noteworthy that his bishop no longer defends his d-pawn. Now my last undeveloped piece comes into play with **16 Rd1**, as recommended by GM Ftacnik in *ChessBase Magazine* 61. In some lines, White will regain his gambit pawn (e.g. 16...Na5 17 Qxd6); it depends what Black does.

After moving instantly until now, Kracht spent 4 days and selected 16...Rfd8 from a wide choice. Of course Black is not lost yet by any means. 16...f5, 16...b5 and even 16...Rc7 also come into consideration.

### 16...Rfd8 17 Rg3!

This is the only move so far played in practice. I looked at some others but it is probably best: after all it pins his Bishop and Rxg7 may happen in some tactical lines. The alternative would be to play 17 f5 but it was not clear. I preferred to optimise the placement of my pieces and see what he would do.

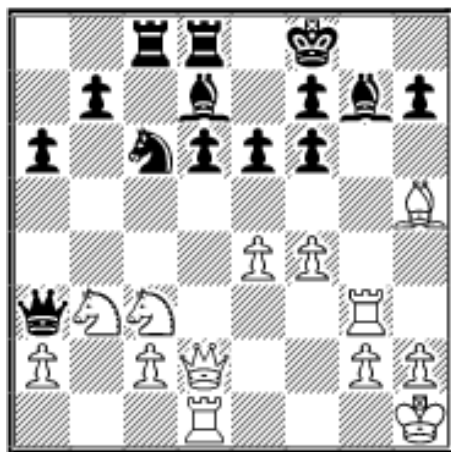
### 17...Kf8!?

This was his innovation, but I was expecting it. Black unpins the bishop. Fritz7 (at least on my 1 GHz computer) thinks this king move gives Black an edge and therefore considers it better than the moves so far tried.

If 17...b5?! then 18 f5 Kf8 transposes to the game below. (In the past 18 Qe2 has been played.)

The old move here was 17...Ne7 but I think this is not to be feared. After 18 f5 the reply 18...d5 has been recommended but I think 19 fxe6 fxe6 20 exd5 Nf5 21 Rf3 (M.Rocius-H. Buczynski, ICCF Email 2000) is at least a bit better for White.

I half-expected Black to try 17...Qb4, which is tempting, but with 18 f5 Ne5 (18...Kf8 see the 18...Qb4 line below) 19 Nd4! the pressure is building. White has good piece coordination and threatens to crash through on f7.



Returning to his actual choice, 17...Kf8, what is White to do? It did not take long to reject the recapture of the pawn by 18 Qxd6+?!, because after 18...Qxd6 19 Rxd6 Be8 Black will get the initiative. White's queenside pawns are irretrievably damaged for an endgame; he must play for the attack.

18 Qe2!? was suggested years ago with an exclamation mark and an "attack" assessment in notes to a game Loginov-

Slekys. Perhaps this is what Black expected? Then Black has five moves that do not obviously lose and need to be examined in more detail. Unfortunately, I could not bust one of them, and 18...Ne7! 19 Qg4 (obviously right, but insufficient) 19...Ng6! was especially awkward.

On the other hand, all lines with 18 f5 seemed promising for White, if not so drastic. Black has a very wide choice of potentially playable moves against this pawn thrust (maybe as many as ten that only concede White an edge). This made it is extremely hard to analyse, compared with the more forcing 18 Qe2 where Black has to find "only" moves or choose between at most two or three alternatives. But is it better to force an opponent to analyse accurately (and hope he doesn't) or give him a wide choice to let him go to hell in his own way?

It partly depends on how big a plus is obtainable with 18 Qe2 against best defence and on how many of his plausible answers to 18 f5 actually conceal good lines for White.

Once more I found myself making my choice primarily on negative considerations. I decided to mostly analyse 18 Qe2 and if it proved unsatisfactory, which it did, then play f4-f5.

### 18 f5! b5!?

Although chosen by him from a wide range of possibilities, this was the reply I thought most likely.

I had been hoping, however, for 18...Qb4?, which is the same as 17...Qb4 18 f5 Kf8. I found that computers, even when given a long time, analysed the position after 18...Qb4 very badly.

a) 19 fxe6? Bxe6 20 Qf2 Ne7 21 Nd5 Bxd5 22 exd5 f5 (Various programs tried to tell me this was equal.) 23 Nd4 Bxd4 24 Rxd4 Rxc2 25 Qe3 f4! leads to a superior, probably winning endgame, for Black.

b) However, the line is close to losing for Black after the key move 19 a3! (which I had to find for myself) 19...Qxa3 20 Ra1 Qb4 21 Ra4 Qb6 22 Qxd6+ Kg8 23 Bxf7+ (23 Nd5!?) 23...Kxf7 24 Nc5 Qc7 (After 14...Kg8 25 Nxd7 White regains all sacrificed material with good chances.) 25 fxe6+ (If White exchanged queens first, Black would have a ...Kf8 option after fxe6+.) 25...Kg8 26 Qxc7 Rxc7 27 exd7 and there are other good lines for White, too.

Apart from 18...Qb4 and the move played, Black can consider 18...Be8, 18...h6, 18...Ne7 or capture on f5 but I think that none of these are fully satisfactory. He is perhaps past the point of no return and needs to look earlier in the game for his improvement.

### **19 fxe6 Bxe6**

The only move. If 19...dxe6 20 Rf1 his king position is too weak.

### **20 Rf1**

White must have good compensation now.

### **20...Ne7**

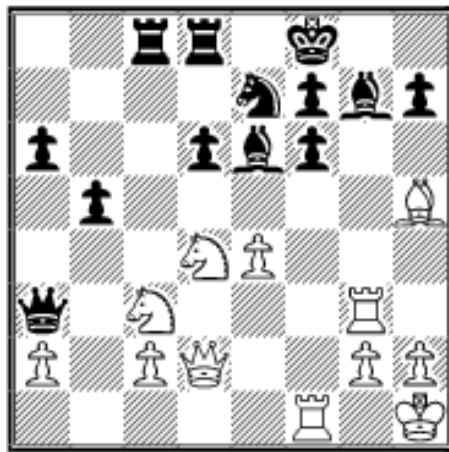
This was one of the moves I had considered a bit but not in any detail. If instead:

a) 20...Bc4 21 Qf4! Ne5 (22...Bxf1? 21 Qg4) 22 Rxc7! with a very strong attack.

b) 20...Qb4 21 Qf2 Ne5 2 Nxd5 Bxd5 23 exd5. Black's extra doubled isolated f-pawn is worthless and I prefer White.

c) 20...Qb2 21 Qf2!? (maybe not best) 21...Ne5 22 Nd4 and White's forces gravitate towards the black King.

### **21 Nd4**



The pressure is becoming too much. Black will have to give up his Queen for two rooks.

### **21...Bc4**

After the game, my opponent sent me a comment that I thought rather strange: "Next time I won't play 21. ... Bc4 again (my blunder)."

I expected him to play 21...Bc4 and I don't see that he has anything better. For example, 21...Qb2? 22 Nxe6+ fxe6 23 Rxf6+! Kg8 24 Rxg7+! is a massacre.

He is right, however, that the rest of the game lacks theoretical interest and I give the remaining moves with minimal notes.

### **22 Nd5!**

This discovers the attack from my g3-Rook against his Queen. It is not the only move to keep some advantage but it is the only one to increase it.

### **22...Qxg3**

This is the only move to get full material value for the Queen.

### **23 hxg3 Nxd5!**

This is Black's only playable line. Now White has the options to keep his Rook if he wants (Rd1 or Rf2) or take on d5 or threaten Black Rook.

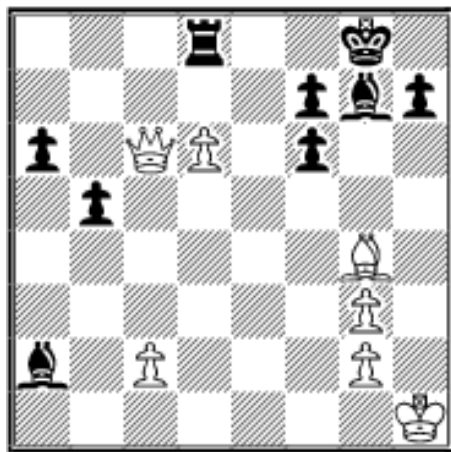
### **24 Bg4! Ra8 25 Nc6! Bxf1**

He cannot let my Rook live because it can do damage on the f-file. The simplification, however, helps my queen to infiltrate his position.

### **26 Nxd8 Rxd8 27 exd5 Kg8 28 Qe1**

The idea is to go to e7 and take his d-pawn rather than to a5 and take the a-pawn which will fall later anyway. To win with queen against rook and minor piece, I will need a passed pawn to tie down his pieces to defence, or else create new weaknesses to attack.

### **28...Bc4 29 Qe7 Rf8 30 Qxd6 Bxa2 31 Qc6 Rd8 32 d6**

**32...f5!?**

Rather than die slowly, Black tries a final swindle. He could have played 32...Bf8 when 33 d7 brings about a bind that could also have arisen by other move orders. At move 25, I spent quite a lot of time examining the consequences of this because that was the last point where it could really be avoided. The white King cannot get over to the queenside but otherwise he can more or less do what he

wants. White will gradually improve his position while Black can basically do nothing. The white B can go to f5, the front g-pawn goes to g4 and the white K marches up the h-file. When my K gets to h5, then Qe3 (attacking e7 and h6) is a killer.

**33 Bxf5 Be6**

Here is the trap. Black hopes for 34 Qb6 when he takes my bishop and plays with two bishops against queen, which actually gives him far more drawing chances in this case than rook and bishop would. For example, 34...Rxd6! 35 Bxh7+ Kxh7 36 Qxd6 Bf5 37 Qxa6 Bxc2 38 Qb5 Bg6. Although Queen versus Two Bishops (with no pawns) is normally a win, I cannot break down his blockade to achieve that? His pawn defends the g6-B and my K cannot get across the bishop barrier.

Instead, by capturing his bishop, I have a much quicker win than in the 32...Bf8 line.

**34 Bxe6! 1-0**

Black resigned. After 34...fxe6 35 Qxa6 he can eliminate my d-pawn but the passed c-pawn is hard to blockade because his remaining pawns are vulnerable. He cannot organise any serious resistance with his light squares so weak. For example, 35...Bf8 36 Qxb5 Rxd6 37 c4 h6 38 Qe8 Kg7 39 Kh2 (To play c5 without him having a check) 39...Rb6 40 Qd7+ Ke8 41 Qc8 e5 42 c5 Rg6 43 c6.

This game does not refute the Poisoned Pawn, of course. Much as I would like to believe I have found the ultimate refutation of Bobby Fischer's favourite Sicilian variation, I fear it is more likely that I have only done to death a minor sub- sub-variation, and that Black will soon come bouncing back to prove the b-pawn is edible after all.

At least the Harding-Kracht game does put the ball back into Black's court.

The onus is on the second player, once more, to prove that his backward development, insecure king and wayward queen are not more serious than the pawn he has gobbled.

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