



COLUMNISTS

From the Sidelines

Hannes Langrock



*The Modern
Morra Gambit*
by

Hannes Langrock

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The Sicilian Kan: 6...Qb6!? 7.Be3

In the [September 2007](#) column, I tried to rehabilitate a line of the Sicilian Kan that had a bad reputation from Black's point of view: **1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 a6 5.Nc3 b5 6.Bd3 Qb6 7.Nf3**. Well, I recently had the chance to test this variation over-the-board against a young, improving Swedish player.

Axel Smith (2384) – Hannes Langrock (2403)
Hamburg, 23.10.2007

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 a6 5.Nc3 b5 6.Bd3 Qb6 7.Nf3 Nc6 8.0-0 Qb8

I was looking forward to playing 13...Qc8 in the critical line 9.e5, but, after some thought, my opponent decided to deviate from the main line.

9.a4 b4 10.Nb1

The knight is heading to c4. This is a solid plan, but it doesn't promise White anything special.

10...Bd6



A novelty, but also the most logical move. Black wants to follow up with ...Nge7-g6 and maximize control over the e5-square.

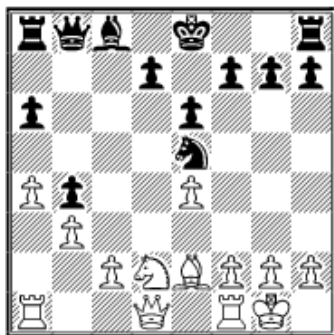
11.Nbd2 Nge7 12.b3

The bishop finds a good place on b2, but the weakness of the c3-square can be important later. My opponent didn't like 12.Nc4 Bc7 because of Black's option to play ...d7-d5.

12...Ne5

This could be the most precise. I didn't play 12...Ng6 13.Nc4 Bc7 14.Bb2 0-0 because of 15.e5!? and if 15...Nxe5, then 16.Nxe5 Nxe5 17.Nxe5 Bxe5 18.Bxh7+ (But not 18.Qh5? f5) 18...Kxh7 19.Qh5+ Kg8 20.Bxe5 d6 21.Bxg7 Kxg7, when White has at least a draw.

13.Bb2 N7g6 14.Nxe5 Bxe5 15.Bxe5 Nxe5 16.Be2



16...g5?

A horrible move; however, it is easy to explain. Black has been fighting for the e5-square since move eight and I didn't realize that it was time to switch plans. Black has already achieved quite a bit: he has gained space on the queenside and White has weaknesses on c3 and c2. After the simple 16...0-0, Black just stands well: 17.f4 Ng6 18.e5 (18.f5 Ne5) 18...d6.

17.Nf3 Nxf3+ 18.Bxf3 Qe5 19.a5!

Now I realized what I had done. Black indeed controls the e5-square, but he paid a high price for it: the b4- and a6-pawns are weak, as is Black's king. Still, the position is very complicated.

19...h5 20.g3?!

It is only natural to fianchetto the bishop in order to give the king extra security, but perhaps this already gives away the advantage. I was afraid of 20.Ra4!, when 20...g4 21.

Be2 Qxe4 is dangerous: 22.Qd2 Bb7 (22...Rb8 23.Qd6!) 23.f3.

20...g4 21.Bg2 Rb8 22.Qd2 Rb5 23.Ra4 Rxa5 24.Rxb4

White could try the pawn sacrifice 24.Rxa5 Qxa5 25.Qd4, but Black holds his own upon 25...e5 26.Qd6 Rg8.

24...Rc5 25.Rd4 a5 26.Ra1 h4 ½-½

Now the position is unclear. Black can further protect a5 with ...Rh8-h5, so he is just in time after 27.Rda4 hgx3 28.hxg3 Rh5. Nor does the desirable c3-b4 work: 27.c3 hxg3 28.hxg3 Qh5 29.b4? Qh2+ 30.Kf1 Ba6+. I was happy about having solved my problems after 16...g5? and offered a draw.

As mentioned in the [September](#) column, White has two alternatives to 7.Nf3. Namely, 7.Nb3 and 7.Be3. A lot has happened in these lines since John Emms' [Sicilian Kan](#) (2002 Everyman) and little has been written since. This is especially true in the 7.Be3-line, which, as we will see, is a critical test of the 6...Qb6 variation.

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 a6 5.Nc3 b5 6.Bd3 Qb6 7.Be3

Now Black must play...

7...Be5



The critical continuation is 8.Be2. And, 8.Nce2 Nf6 gives Black good play. However, Black should know what to do after 8.Qg4. It is amazing that this is playable at all, especially since by accepting the sacrifice Black also protects the g7-point!

8.Qg4 Bxd4 9.e5



The same position can arise via 8.e5 Bxd4 9.Qg4.

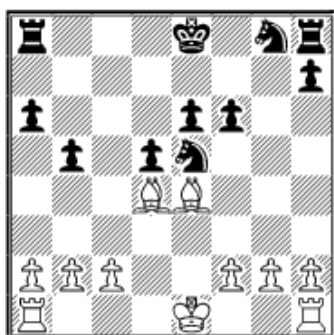
9...Nc6(!)

This move leads to endgame positions in which the material balance is re-established and Black's chances are not worse. There is no need for Black to enter complications with 9...Bxe3 10.Qxg7 Bxf2+ 11.Kf1 Bh4, which according to Emms (p.163/164) leads to equality.

10.Qxg7 Bxe3 11.Qxe5 Nxe5 12.Bxb6 Bb7 13.

Ne4

Or 13.Bd4 f6 14.Ne4 Bxe4 15.Bxe4 d5:



White has to give up the bishop-pair and Black has at least equal chances because of his nice pawn center. Here are two examples:

A) 16.Bd3 Ne7 17.Kd2 Kf7 18.Bxe5 fxe5 19.c3 Nc6 20.f3 h5 21.Rhe1 Kf6 22.Re2 Rhg8 23.Rae1 h4 24.Ke3 Rg7 25.Kf2 Rb8 26.Kf1 Ke7 27.a4 Kd6 28.axb5 axb5 29.Ra1 Rf7 30.Ke1 h3 and White had problems in I.Vovk-K.Kulaots, Tallinn 2006.

B) 16.Bxe5 fxe5 17.Bd3 e4 18.Be2 Nf6 19.c3 Ke7 20.f3 exf3 21.Bxf3 Rab8 22.a3 Nd7 23.0-0

Ne5 24.Rae1 Kd6 25.Bh5 Rhf8 26.Bd1 Nc4 27.

Re2 Rxf1+ 28.Kxf1 a5 29.Bb3 Rf8+ 30.Kg1 a4 31.Bd1 e5 32.h3 e4-/+ R.Kotter-E. Kengis, GER 2000.

13...Bxe4 14.Bxe4 d5 15.Bd3

For 15.Bd4 f6, see 13.Bd4 f6 14.Ne4 Bxe4 15.Bxe4 d5.

15...Ne7 16.a4 Nxd3+ 17.cxd3 Kd7 18.Be5

18.axb5 axb5 19.Kd2 Nc6 was equal in H.Asauskas-D.Ruzele, Platelia 2001.

18...bxa4 19.Bxe7

With this exchange White shows that he is only playing for a draw. Yet defending a slightly inferior position against a stronger player is not a pleasant task.

19...Kxe7 20.Rxa4 Rbh8 21.Ra2 Rb4 22.Kd2 Rab8 23.Rb1 R8b6 24.b3 h5 25.Ra3 h4 26.h3 e5 27.Rba1 Rg6 28.Rg1 f5 29.Ra5 Rb5 30.Rxb5 axb5 31.d4 f4 32.dxe5 Ke6 33. Kd3 f3 34.g3 hxg3 35.Rxg3 Rxg3 36.fxg3 d4 37.h4 Kxe5 38.h5 Kf5 39.Kd2 b4 40.g4+ Kg5 41.Kd3 Kxg4 42.h6 f2 43.Ke2 Kg3 44.h7 d3+ 0-1 (M.Lanzani-V.Epishin, Bratto 2000)

Now let's look at the critical 8.Be2:

8.Be2 Nc6!

Black continues to put pressure on d4, thus forcing White to exchange on c6. If Black plays a move such as 8...Bb7, then 9.a4!, with the idea 9...b4 10.a5, would be unpleasant.

9.Nxc6 dxc6

This is the main line and it also Black's most ambitious choice. The disadvantage of 9...Bxe3 is that Black can hardly play for a win in the endgame after 10.fxe3 dxc6 11.Qd4 Qxd4 12.exd4 e5. A third option is Vladimir Epishin's pet line 9...Qxc6.

10.Bxc5 Qxc5 11.Qd3!



This move was introduced by Peter Svidler against Rustam Kasimdzhanov in 1999 and it is the only way for White to fight for an advantage. White prepares to castle queenside and he has Qg3 in some lines. Harmless is 11.0-0 Nf6. Black plays ...e6-e5, when he will already have a slight advantage with the better bishop and somewhat more active position: 12.Bd3 e5 13.a4 Bg4 14.Qd2 0-0 15.Nd1 Rfd8 16.Qe3 Nd7 17.f3 Be6=+ S.Naby-E.Kengis, Tanta 2002.

11...Nf6!

Move-order is important here. After the inaccurate 11...e5?!, 12.Qg3 forces Black to weaken his king's position with 12...Kf8 or 12...g6.

12.0-0-0

Instead, White can push e4-e5 with 12.Qg3 0-0 13.e5, but it is premature: 13...Nd5 (The greedy 13...Nd7!? deserves attention as well: 14.0-0-0 (14.f4 b4 15.Ne4 Qxc2) 14...Qxe5 15.f4 Qe7) 14.0-0 Nxc3 15.bxc3 a5 16.Rfd1 b4 with good prospects for Black in D. Guadalpi-N.Sulava, FRA 2001. White is more active, but Black has the superior pawn-structure and will solve the problem of his bishop by playing ...Ba6. White can also play 12.f4 e5 and then:

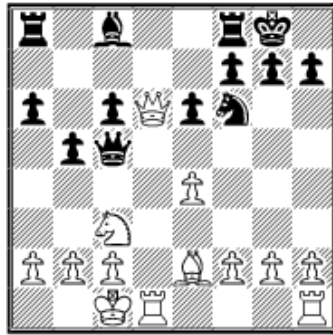
A) 13.f5 0-0 14.0-0-0 transposes to 12.0-0-0 0-0 13.f4 e5 14.f5.

B) The same goes for 13.0-0-0 0-0 (13...Be6!?) 14.f5.

C) 13.Qg3 is not dangerous: 13...0-0 14.fxe5 Nd7 15.e6 fxe6 16.0-0-0 e5 17.Rhf1 Nf6= 18.Qd3 Ra7 19.Qd6 Qxd6 20.Rxd6 Bd7 21.a3 Kf7 22.Rdd1 Ke7 23.Kd2 Be6 24.Ke3 Rd7 25.Rxd7+ ½-½, R.Kuczynski-E.Kengis, Germany 2002.

12...0-0 13.f4

In S.Nyysti-E.Hossain, Turin 2006, White came up with a poisonous new idea: 13.Qxd6!?

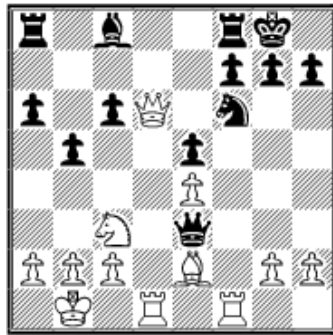


Exchanging queens would now be problematic as the c6-pawn hangs after 13...Qxd6 14.Rxd6 and White also threatens e4-e5. Going for the e4-pawn with 14...b4 doesn't solve Black's problems: 15.Na4 Nxe4 16.Rd4 If the knight moves, White takes on b4 with a structural advantage, and 16...Nxf2 17.Rf1 is bad for Black. Finally, 16...f5 17.f3 c5 18.Rc4 is also good for White. Therefore, Black played 13...Qxf2 14.Rhf1, but now went wrong with 14...Qb6? 15.Rxf6! gxf6 16.Qg3+ Kh8 17.Qf4 f5 (17...Kg7 18.e5!) 18.Qh6 Bb7 19.Qf6+ Kg8 20.Rd3 Rfd8 21.Bh5 Qc7 22.Rg3+ Kf8 23.e5 1-0. A Nice performance, but Black should have played 14...

Qe3+ 15.Kb1 and now:

A) Taking the second pawn looks too dangerous: 15...Nxe4 16.Nxe4 Qxe4 (Also, on 16...Qxe2, 17.Qe7!? deserves attention. Obviously Black is able to defend against the threat 18.Qxf7+, but then White can consider Ng3, followed by Rd8.) 17.Qe7! and the threats of 18.Qxf7+ and 18.Rd8 leave Black in trouble.

B) Black should give back the pawn to finish development by 15...e5!

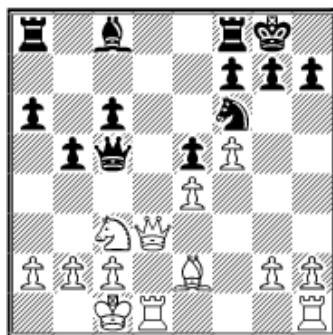


Black's position is entirely playable. 16.Qxe5 (16.Rxf6 is not dangerous now; for example, 16...gxf6 17.Qxf6 Qf4!? 18.Qxc6 Be6; 16.Qxc6 Be6) 16...Be6 17.Rd3 Qh6 with a balanced position. White is more active, but the good thing for Black is that White's minor pieces are not very effective at the moment. White could now play 18.Qd6, preventing ...Rd8 and ...b5-b4, but, after 18...Rac8, Black is solid enough.

13...e5

Black doesn't want to allow e4-e5.

14.f5



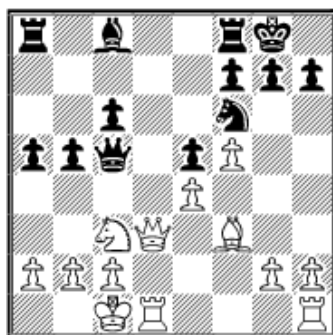
Now we have reached a critical position of the 7. Be3-line. White is ready to push his kingside pawns, so Black has to act.

14...a5

This natural move is the main continuation and Black has been doing well with it in praxis.

15.g4

White has a solid alternative in 15.Bf3:



The idea of this innocent-looking move is to protect e4 and prepare 16.Qd6 to exchange queens. Essentially White is hoping for an endgame in which he has some pressure and no risk of losing. 15...Ba6! Kveinys' move is probably more precise than the frequently played 15...a4 (16.Qd6 etc.). Now if 16.Qd6:

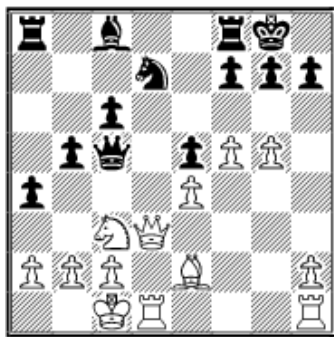
A) 16...Qxd6 17.Rxd6 Rfc8 18.Rhd1 is exactly what White wants after 14.Bf3. Black's position is unpleasant from a practical point of view. White controls the d-file and plans to make progress on the kingside by advancing his g-pawn. Black would like to exchange a pair of

rooks, but it is difficult for him to achieve.

B) 16...Qe3+! 17.Kb1 b4 18.Rhe1 (18.Na4 Bb5 (18...Nxe4 19.Bxe4 Qxe4 20.f6 could be dangerous for Black.) 19.Nc5 Rfe8 is unclear.) 18...Qf4 19.Ne2 Bxe2 20.Rxe2 Qxh2 21.Qxc6 This position is difficult to evaluate. White's bishop is a poor piece at the moment and his pawn-structure is also inferior. On the other hand, Black's queen is strangely placed on the kingside; however, the advantage in this is that it makes it difficult for White to develop an attack against the black king. It is difficult to see what either side is going to do in the near future. Black should probably not exchange a pair of rooks, as then the a-pawn would become weak. All in all, "unclear" looks like a fair assessment to me.

To avoid 16.Qd6 Qe3+! White played 16.Rhe1 in the game. However, this move loses time and Black had no problems achieving equality: 16...Ra7 17.Qd6 Qxd6 18.Rxd6 Rc8 19.g4 Rd7= By exchanging a pair of rooks, Black usually solves his problems in this kind of endgame. 20.Red1 Rxd6 21.Rxd6 Kf8 22.a3 Ke7 23.Rd1 h6 24.Kd2 b4 25.axb4 axb4 26.Na4 Rd8+ 27.Ke3 Rxd1 28.Bxd1 and the players soon agreed to a draw in U.Lauk-A. Kveinys, Puhajarve 2001.

15...a4 16.g5 Nd7



According to [MegaBase 2007](#), Black has scored an impressive 9½/13 from this position. Indeed, most of White's attempts lead nowhere:

I. 17.Rd2 This gives the knight a retreat square on d1, but Black has a good answer in 17...b4 18.Nd1 Ba6 19.Qe3 (White should probably take the draw with 19.Qxd7 Bxe2 20.Rxe2 (20.Kb1? Bf3 21.Re1 a3 22.g6 fxg6 23.fgx6 axb2-/+ Peng Xiaomin-Xu Jun, IND 2000.) 20...Rfd8 21.Qc7 Rdc8= Emms) 19...b3 (19...Bxe2!? is also possible; for example, 20.Qxe2 Rfd8 21.f6 Nf8 22.fgx7 Ne6 with good chances for Black.) 20.a3 Qxe3 21.Nxe3 Nc5 22.Bd3 as in P.Blehm-K.

Grycel, Glogow 2001, which Emms assesses as equal.

II. 17.f6 is too optimistic: 17...b4 18.Nb1 Ba6 19.Qxd7 Bxe2 20.Qd6 Black's attack has more potential, so White tries to enter an endgame. (Black's task is easier after 20.Rd6? b3 21.Nc3 Qe3+ 22.Kb1 bxc2+ 23.Kxc2 Bf3 24.Rf1 Bxe4+ 25.Nxe4 Qxe4+ 26.Kd2 Rab8-+ with a decisive attack against the white king in N.Huschenbeth-H.Langrock, Hamburg 2005.) Now, instead of 20...Qe3 21.Qd2 Qxd2+ 22.Rxd2 Bc4 as in O.Vasiliev-M.Roiz, Internet Blitz 2003, I would suggest keeping the queens on the board by 20...Qa5 21.Rd2 Rfd8 with good chances for Black. 22.Qxc6?! would then be dangerous for White, who can easily get into trouble along the c-file after 22...Rac8:

A) 23.Qb7 Rxd2 24.Qxc8+ Rd8 25.Qh3 Qc5! And, faced with threats such as 26...Rd3!-+, White is in trouble.

B) 23.Rd5 Rxd5 24.Qxd5 (24.Qxc8+ Rd8 transposes to 23.Qb7 Rxd2 24.Qxc8+ Rd8.) 24...Qc7 25.Qd2 Bf3 26.Re1 Qc4.

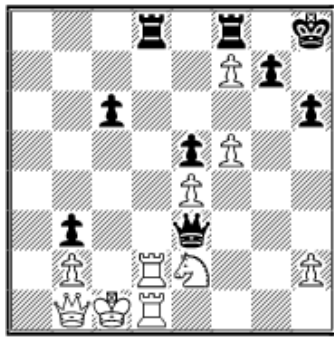
C) 23.Rxd8+ Qxd8 24.Qxa4 Qd4!-+ with too many attacking ideas such as ...Qxe4, ...Bf3xe4 or ...Rd8.

III. 17.g6 fxg6 18.fxg6 h6 19.a3 If Black now plays 19...Nf6, White has the annoying Qd6 in some lines. Therefore, she decided to take the d6-square under control with 19...Rf6!?, also attacking the g6-pawn. 20.Rhf1 (On 20.Rhg1, Black plays 20...Nf8 attacking g6 again and preparing to develop the bishop.) 20...Rxg6 21.Bh5 Rf6 22.Rg1 Kh8 and White didn't have sufficient compensation for the pawn in P.Malysheva-D.Ciukysyte, Chisinau 2005.

IV. 17.a3 b4 18.axb4 Qxb4 This is the critical line. White has tried three different moves:

A) **19.Qc4** was played in R.Antoniewski-R.Berzinsh, Prerov 2001. Obviously exchanging queens would be wonderful for White, as it would dissipate Black's attack and Black's pawn weaknesses would begin to tell in the endgame. So of course Black plays 19...Qb6 20.g6 (Taking the pawn is too dangerous: 20.Nxa4 Qe3+ 21.Kb1 (21.Rd2 Nc5!-+ Ribli) 21...Ba6 22.Qc3? Qxe2 and White resigned in Berzinsh-Gonzalez de la Torre, Villalba 2001, as 23.Rxd7 Qxe4 (Emms) wins for Black.) 20...Nc5! 21.gxf7+ Kh8 22.Rhe1 (Ribli also gives: 22.f6? Be6 23.fgx7+ Kxg7 24.Rhg1+ Kh8-+ and 22.Qa2 Nxe4 23.Nxe4 Qe3+ 24.Nd2 Qxe2=+) 22...Ba6 23.Qa2 Nb3+! 24.cxb3? Accepting the sacrifice already loses. (24.Kb1 Bxe2 25.Nxe2 Nc5=+ Ribli) 24...axb3 25.Qb1 Qe3+ 26.Rd2 Rad8 27.Red1 Bxe2 28.Nxe2 h6-+:



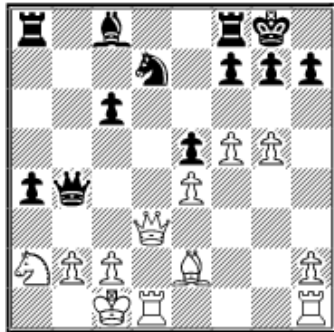


Despite his extra piece, White is totally helpless. Black is just going to take on f7, followed by maximizing the pressure on d2 or invading on the a-file. 29.Qa1 Ra8 30.Qb1 Rxf7 31.Nc3 Rd7 32.h3 Rad8 33.Nd5 cxd5 34.Qd3 Ra8! 35.Kb1 Rda7! 0-1.

B) In R.Perez-K.Landa, Paris 2005, White played **19.Qd6** Nc5 20.Qxe5 a3 (20...Rb8!? 21.Na2 Qb6 Emms) 21.b3 a2 (Emms indicates that the sacrifice 21...Nxb3+ 22.cxb3 Qxb3 is not decisive, as White plays 23.Kd2!) 22.Kb2 Ra5 23.Qc7! (Not 23.Qf4? Bxf5! 24.Qxf5 Nxb3 25.cxb3

Rxf5 26.exf5 Rb8 and Black wins.) because of the threat of Rd8, Black seems to have nothing better than a draw: 23...Qa3+ 24.Ka1 Qb4 25.Kb2 Qa3+ 26.Ka1 Qb4 1/2-1/2.

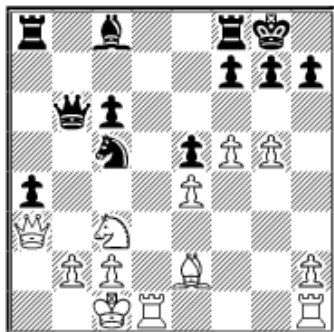
C) So far so good for Black. Yet White can do better with Zaragatski's **19.Na2!**



This looks promising for White, and Black has to find an improvement against it or deviate earlier with 14...Ra7!? (see below). The idea of 19.Na2 is to play Qa3 and block Black's queenside play. **19...Qb6** 19...Qc5 20.Qa3; possible is 19...Qe7, with the idea to take on g5 or play ...a4-a3. 20.f6 is then not dangerous as after 20...gxf6 21.gxf6 Nxf6 22.Rhg1+ Kh8, Black's king is safe.

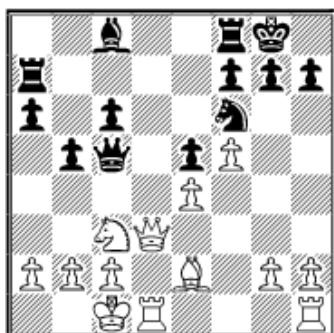
However, after 20.Rhg1 a3 21.b3, I prefer White, who controls the d-file and still has chances on the kingside. Black's queenside play is stymied at the moment and most endgames are good for White. **20.Qa3 Nc5** Instead, Black could go for the g5-pawn by 20...Qf2 21.Nc3 Qe3+ 22.Kb1

Qxg5, but White has nice compensation after 23.Rhg1 (or maybe 23.Rd3). **21.Nc3**



21...g6? This is very bad. Yet, it is difficult to suggest something good for Black. White is on top after 21...Ba6 22.Bxa6 Rxa6 23.Rd6; for example, 23...Nb3+ 24.Kb1 Na5 25.Nd5! Nc4 (25...Qb8 26.Ne3 Rb6 27.Rhd1 Rb4 28.Qc3 and White has a dominating position.) 26.Nxb6 Nxa3 + 27.bxa3 Rxb6+ 28.Ka1 with a nice double rook endgame for White (28...Rfb8 29.Rhd1 Kf8 30.Rd8+). **22.Rd6** White is now totally dominating and threatens to win directly with Nd5. His opponent quickly breaks down: **22...gxf5 23.Nd5 Qa7 24.Nf6+ Kh8 25.Qh3 1-0** (I.Zaragatski-A. Hilverda, Senden 2004)

Instead of 14...a5, Black has a solid alternative to in **14...Ra7!?**:



Black delays his queenside play in order to take control over the d-file. This move is less popular than 14...a5, but it has been played by strong grandmasters such as van Wely, Kobalija, Roiz or Landa. Still, I am not sure if it is sufficient for equality if White plays precisely.

15.g4

The new 15.Qf3!? may be a clever way to avoid Black's effective defensive setup with 17...Ne8 (see below). If on 15.Qf3, Black goes for this same configuration, then after 15...Rd7 16.Rxd7

Bxd7 17.g4 Rd8 18.g5 Ne8, the d7-bishop stands in the way of Black's rook. In A.Orlov-V.Malakhatko, Calvia 2007 Black played 15...Nd7 16.g4 a5 17.Rd2 Nb6 18.Nd1 Rd7 19.Rxd7 Bxd7, but White's kingside play proved to be more effective than Black's on the queenside: 20.Nf2 f6 21.h4 Be8 22.g5 Bh5 23.Qxh5 Qxf2 24.gxf6 Qf4+ 25.Kb1 gxf6 26.Rf1 Qg3 27.Qh6 Nd7 28.Bh5 Qg7 29.Qe3 Kh8 30.Qa7 Nb8 31.Qxa5+/-.

15...Rd7 16.Qf3 Rfd8 17.g5

White can close the d-file by 17.Bd3, but Black has been doing OK in both examples from

practice: 17...Ne8 Transferring the knight to the queenside. (17...a5 18.g5 Ne8 19.h4 a4 20.a3 b4 with counterplay (Gofshtein) in I.Yagupov-M.Kobalija, St. Petersburg 2001.) 18.Rhe1 Nd6 19.Qe2 Nb7 20.Kb1 Qe7 21.Qe3 Nc5 22.g5 Nxd3 23.cxd3 Bb7 24.Rd2 c5 25.Red1 Bc6 26.Ne2 Qd6 27.Rc1 c4 28.d4 exd4 29.Nxd4 Qc5 30.Rcd1 Re8-/+ and Black won a pawn and later the game B.Jonsson-K.Landa, Reykjavik 1999.

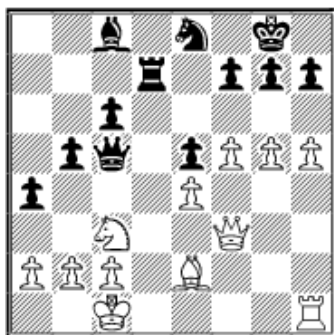
17...Ne8!

The inaccurate 17...Rxd1?! just helps White transfer his knight to the kingside. 18.Nxd1! (18.Rxd1?! White needs a rook in the attack. 18...Rxd1+ 19.Nxd1 Nd7 20.Qe3 h6 21.gxh6 Qxe3+ 22.Nxe3 gxh6 23.Ng4 Kg7 ½-½, Ye Jiangchuan-L.Van Wely, Moscow 2001.) 18...Ne8 19.Nf2 Qe7 20.Rg1 c5 21.Qe3 c4 22.c3 Bb7 23.f6 with an attack, as in I.Balinov-M.Hoffmann, Budapest 1999.

18.Rxd7 Rxd7 19.h4 a5 20.Nd1

White decides to play it safe by preparing to exchange queens with Qc3.

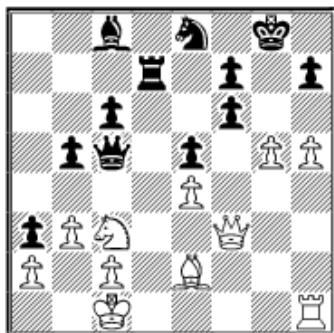
It is important to know that White's pawn mass is less threatening than it looks after 20.h5 a4 and now:



A) It is difficult to see how White makes further progress after 21.h6 g6.

B) The same goes for 21.g6 h6.

C) 21.f6 a3 22.b3 gxf6:



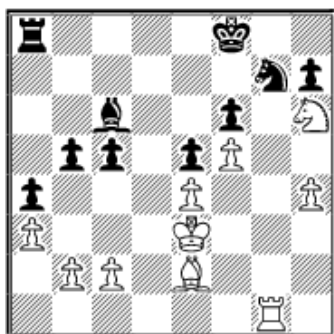
Black seems to be in good shape here. The problem for White is that he practically has to marshal the attack without his knight. Play could continue: 23.Qg3 (23.gxf6 Nxf6! 24.Qxf6? Qxc3 25.Rg1+ Kf8 26.Qh6+ Ke7 27.Qg5+ f6 28.Qg7+ Kd8 29.Qxf6+ Kc7-+) 23...Kf8 24.g6 fxg6 25.hxg6 hxg6 26.Rh8+ Ke7 (26...Kf7? 27.Bh5) 27.Qxg6 Qe3+! 28.Kb1 Rd8 29.Qg8 (Threatening 30.Qf8+ Kd7 31.Rh7+.) 29...Kd6 (Only move.) 30.Qf8+ Kc7 31.Qxa3 Qxc3 32.Qa7+ Kd6 33.Qb6 White now wins back the piece, but after 33...Rd7 34.Rxe8 Qe1+ 35.Kb2 Qxe2 36.Rxc8 Qxe4, Black is still a pawn up and the material is very reduced.

D) However, I would be worried about the prophylactic 21.a3! to stop ...a4-a3. This position needs further investigation. 21...b4 doesn't look very effective now. White can retreat the knight or maybe even take on a4; for example, 22.Nxa4 Qa5 22.b3 bxa3 23.Qc3. If Black can't create counterplay, he will suffer quite a bit, even if it will still be tough for White to breakthrough on the kingside.

20...a4 21.Qc3 Qxc3 22.Nxc3 Kf8= 23.a3 Ra7 24.Rd1 Ke7 25.Bg4 f6 26.Bh5 Nd6

The knight stands well here and the game is equal.

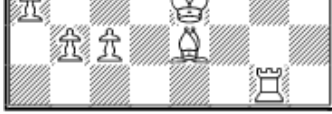
27.gxf6+ gxf6 28.Be2 Bd7 29.Kd2 Ra8 30.Rg1 Kf8 31.Ke3 Be8 32.Nd1 c5 33.Nf2 Bc6 34.Ng4 Ne8 35.Nh6 Ng7



36.Ng4 Ne8 37.Nh6 Ng7 38.Rd1 Ke7 39.Rg1 ½-½ (A.Kundin-M.Roiz, Tel Aviv 2002)

Conclusion

It turns out that things are difficult for Black in the main line 7.Be3 Bc5 8.Be2 Nc6 9.Nxc6 dxc6 10.Bxc5 Qxc5. After 11.Qd3 Nf6 12.0-0-0 0-0 13.f4 e5 14.f5, the natural 14...a5 brought Black good results, but Zaragatski's 19.Na2! is the last word in this variation. The alternative 14...Ra7 is



solid, but it may be too passive to promise Black full equality. White's general plan is to exchange one pair of rooks and keep the other for the

attack. White wants to minimize Black's queenside play and make progress on the kingside.



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