

THE NEW WINAWER REPORT

Editor: Seán Coffey

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Issue 2

February 19, 2013

ISSN 2326-1757

Sacrificing a Different Exchange

Euwe's line, considered in the last issue, has some of the sharpest play in the entire Winawer Poisoned Pawn, and the entire variation is drastically underexplored compared to 10 ♖e2; it really deserves to be played more often. Before moving on to more mainstream topics, here is a taste of the possibilities in this unknown realm: a radically different and completely new approach to the modern main line. Current grandmaster practice after 10 ♖d1 has converged on transition to a roughly balanced ending (or queenless middlegame). Instead Black can force a turn into uncharted—and much sharper—territory ...

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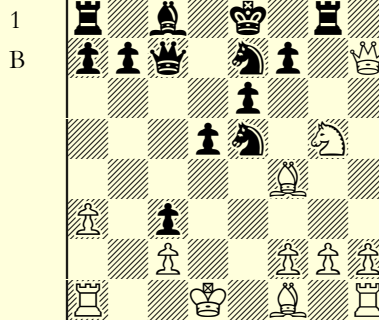
Euwe variation: an exchange sacrifice for the 13 ♘f4 line

The theory of the 10 ♖d1 variation features two much-studied exchange sacrifices. Another one, in the current main line, has escaped attention.

In Euwe's variation (1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♗c3 ♘b4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 ♗xc3+ 6 bxc3 ♗e7 7 ♖g4 ♖c7 8 ♖xc7 ♗g8 9 ♖xb7 cxd4) 10 ♖d1, the modern main line runs 10 ... ♗bc6 11 ♗f3 dxc3 12 ♗g5 ♗xe5 and:

13 ♘f4!(1)

The former 13 f4 has fallen out of favour. Not because of the original exchange sacrifice 13 ... ♗xg5, when the tremendous complications appear to leave Black worse, even lost: instead 13 ... f6! gives excellent play; cf. Watson *PtF4 pp.* 254-56. (Another celebrated line features a White sacrifice after 10 ... ♗d7!? 11 ♗f3 ♗xe5 12 ♘f4 ♖xc3 13 ♗xe5 ♖xa1+.) The text was introduced in **Matulović-**



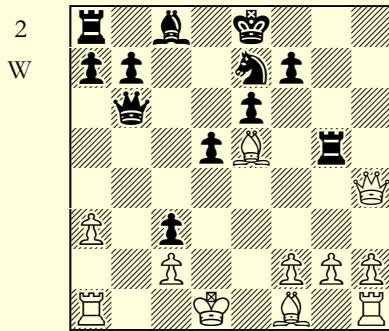
Uhlmann, Halle zonal playoff 1967.

The result was a success, but the opening was not, and the line was considered

dubious for years.

13 ... ♖b6!
14 ♗xe5 ♜xg5

The stem game continued 15 h4? ♜g8; even better 15 ... ♜xf2!. Since 15 ♗xc3?! is also unsatisfactory after 15 ... ♜g8/ ♗d7, White's next is critical.



15 ♖h4!(2)

First mentioned by Balogh *Fernschach* 33/3, Mar. 1972, pp. 51-52: 'on 15 ♖h4, not 15 ... ♜xe5? because of 16 ♖h8+, but rather 15 ... ♜f5'.

15 ♖h4 aims to take control of d4, usually with exchange of queens, and was pioneered by Shkurovich-Khazin in correspondence games in the mid-1980's, with considerable success. 'White takes advantage of a tactical nuance to gain time to bring his queen back to the centre', McDonald *FW* p. 36 ('definitely not 15 ... ♜xe5? 16 ♖h8+', McDonald *ChessPublishing.com*, February 2008; 'of course, Black cannot continue 15 ... ♜xe5?, owing to 16 ♖h8+', Pedersen *tMLF* p. 157; cf. also Balogh above).

In response, opinion is divided between 15 ... ♜f5 and 15 ... ♜g8:

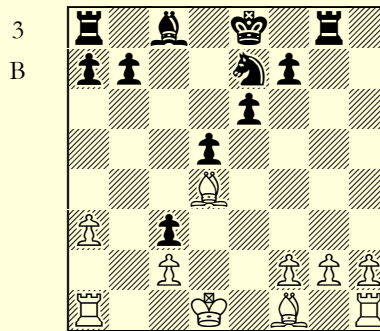
A: 15 ... ♜f5

Now after 16 ♖h8+ (not 16 ♗d4? ♗g6!

♜ Dekker-Quillan, Gibraltar 2007) 16 ... ♖d7 17 ♗d4 the debate over 17 ... ♖d6 18 ♗d3 ♖f4 would take us too far afield; Popescu *Correspondence Chess Yearbook* 3 p. 168 is probably right that 19 ♗xc3! ♖g4+ 20 ♖c1 ♜xf2 21 ♖b2 is ±. Instead 17 ... ♖d8 18 ♖xd8+ ♖xd8, as in Shkurovich-Khazin - Sabel, Baltic Sea tt5 corr 1986-91, seems quite playable.

B: 15 ... ♜g8

15 ... ♜g8 16 ♖d4 ♖xd4 17 ♗xd4 (3) has become the main line: cf. Djurić, Komarov & Pantaleoni *COE-1* p. 209, Pedersen *tMLF* p. 157.

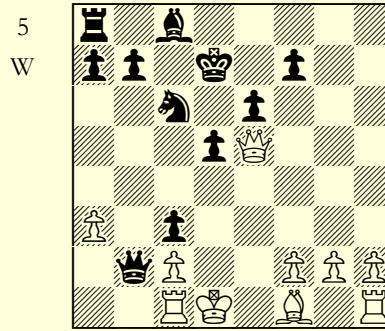
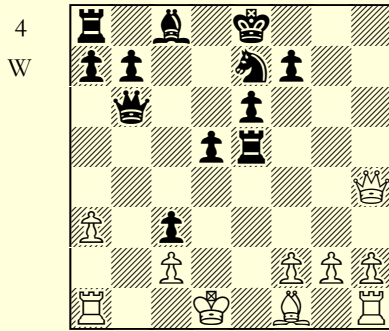


It's usual to evaluate White's two bishops and passed h-pawn as giving a slight edge. Nilsson-Berg, *Elitserien* 2011-12, Västerås 2012 continued 17 ... ♗d7 18 h4 ♗f5 19 ♗f6 ♜g6 20 ♗e5 f6 21 h5 ♜h6 22 ♗xc3 e5 23 g4 (with 'a slightly better ending', Grandelius *grandelius.blogspot.com*, 11 Mar. 2012) 1/2-1/2. Watson *PtF-4* p. 254 thinks otherwise, even giving Black a very slight edge from Fig. 2. Indeed Black has better piece coordination and can work up a slight initiative: let us split the difference and say about equal, with much intricate manoeuvring in prospect.

C: 15 ... ♖xe5!!?

But Black can force the game in a completely different direction by capturing on e5 after all:

15 ... ♖xe5!!?(4)



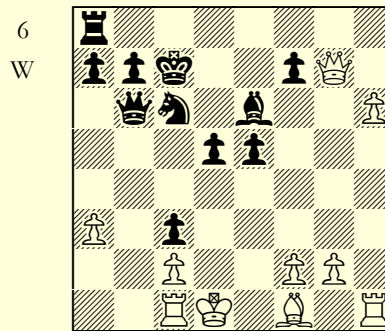
a) 19 ♖g7 ♖c7! 20 h4 (20 ♖xf7+ ♗d7 21 ♗d3 ♖xa3=) 20 ... e5 21 h5 ♗e6 22 h6 ♖b6(6) (22 ... ♖xa3?! leaves White with some advantage)

Not an oversight, but an exchange sacrifice to create a Q-side bind.

The only two practical examples diverged before the main idea: **Kagan-Warfield, Australian Ch Major, Sydney 1995**, 16 ♖h8+ ♗g8 17 ♖xe5 ♗d7 (17 ... ♖xf2!? 18 ♖xc3 ♗f6=/±) 18 ♖g5? = (18 ♖g7 ♗e7 19 ♖xc3±), and **'Flanker'-'Rezonator', HCL2072 playchess.de (18) corr 2003**, 16 ... ♗d7 17 ♖xe5 ♖xf2!? 18 ♖xc3 ♗f5±.

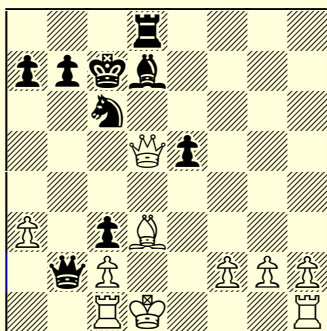
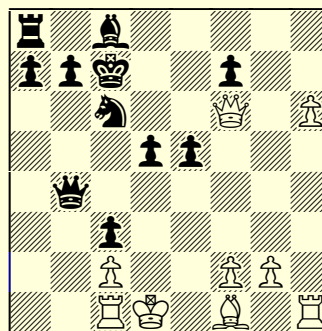
16 ♖h8+ ♗d7!
17 ♖xe5 ♖b2!
18 ♖c1 ♗c6!(5)

At a cursory glance Black seems to be in a dire predicament:, with his entire Q-side out of play and no immediate threats, while the white h-pawn threatens to race to promotion. Yet it seems White stands no better. The immediate h-pawn march fails (though barely) and White has no other pressing threats while Black can develop with ... ♗c7, ... e5, ... ♗d7/e6/g4+ and ... ♖xa3-b4 or ... ♖b6, when it is White who is often in peril:



23 ♗e1 (23 ♖g3? ♖d4+!!) 23 ... ♖b2 24 ♖d1 (24 ♗d1 repeats) 24 ... ♖xc2 25 ♗d3 (25 b7? ♖e4+!!) 25 ... ♖b2 26 h7 c2 27 ♗xc2 ♖xc2 28 h8=♖ ♖xh8 29 ♖/ ♖xh8 d4=.

b) 19 ♖f4 f5! 20 ♗d3 e5 21 ♖xf5+ ♗c7 22 ♖f7+ ♗d7 23 ♖xd5?! Rd8 (7). Black has excellent prospects, e.g. 24 ♖e4 ♗b8! 25 f3 ♗a8! (underscoring how tightly White is bound) 26 h4? (26 ♗e2? ♗f5+!!, a critical point; 26 ♖e1 ♗e6 27 ♖e2 ♖xa3+/-) 26 ... ♗d4 27 h5 ♗b3 28 ♖e3 ♗a4+!!.

7
W8
W

c) **19 ♖g3** (covering f2) 19 ... e5 20 h4 ♖d6! (20 ... ♗c7?! 21 h5 ♘f5 22 b6 ♜b8 23 ♗f3±). The h-pawn march still does not work: 21 h5 ♘e6 22 h6? ♘a5! 23 h7? (23 ♗b4 d4±) 23 ... ♘b3 24 ♗g5 f6 25 ♗h6 ♘xc1±±. Better 22 ♘d3 ♘d4, ∞/=, e.g. 23 ♗e3 ♜g8 24 h6 ♘g4+ 25 f3 (25 ♗e1?! ♘f3+!±) 25 ... ♘xf3+ 26 gxf3 ♜g2=.

d) **19 ♗f6** covers f2 and stops ... ♖d6 after ... e5. But g4 is left uncovered and leaves Black a way to survive: 19 ... ♗c7 20 h4 e5 21 h5 ♗xa3! 22 h6 ♗b4(8) and now:

d1) **23 h7?** ♘g4+ 24 f3 ♗d4+ 25 ♘d3 ♗f2±±, e.g. 26 ♘e2 ♜h8! 27 ♗xf7+ ♘d7 28 ♗g7 b6! and White falls into a remarkable zugzwang.

d2) **23 ♘d3** ♗g4+ (reaching here in time by omitting ... ♘e6) 24 ♗e1 (24 ♗f3? ♗g5 25 ♗e3 ♗xg2±±) 24 ...

♗xg2 with all to play for: ∞/= . A sample of the possibilities: 25 ♜h4 ♘h3 26 ♗xf7+ ♘d7! 27 ♗f6 ♜f8 28 ♗xf8 ♗g5 29 ♜f4 exf4 30 ♜d1 ♗e5+ 31 ♘e2 ♗e4 32 f3 ♗e5 33 ♜d3 d4 34 ♗f2 ♗g5 35 ♗g7 ♗g3+! = and Black's Q-side pawns save the day.

The analysis barely scratches the surface and is untested in practice: use at your own risk! In each of several critical variations it *appears* Black has enough time to stop the h-pawn and develop, but with not a moment to spare, for equal chances.

Assuming *arguendo* that the sacrifice is any good, why has it been missed? Is it because it looks a blunder rather than a sacrifice? Or because it is indirect? Where an enterprising ... ♜xg5! would be played with relish, perhaps the mind blocks out a sacrifice-via-fork for fear of embarrassment? ►

COE-1 DJURIĆ, Stefan, KOMAROV, Dimitri, & PANTALEONI, Claudio, *Chess Opening Essentials, vol. 1. 3rd English ed.* Alkmaar, The Netherlands: New In Chess 2010. ISBN-13: 978-90-5691-203-1.

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MLF PEDERSEN, Steffen, *The Main Line French: 3 Nc3*. London: Gambit 2001; reprinted 2006. ISBN-13: 978-1-901983-45-6.

PrF-4 WATSON, John L., *Play the French*, 4th edition (Everyman 2012)—see *issue 1*.