

THE NEW WINAWER REPORT

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Into the Labyrinth—I

It's easy to understand the appeal of the modern 12 ... d4 lines in the Poisoned Pawn: Black appears to equalise fully and reliably, and does so while allowing White far less latitude in setting the direction of the game. In the former main line, 'White can play perhaps 8-10 fundamentally different set-ups, and several of them are ultra-critical, requiring ingenious tactics for Black to stay in the game', as Watson puts it in his most recent book.

On the other hand it's also a matter of some regret: the traditional lines are far more varied, complex, and interesting. One such line, perhaps the most critical, is the 13 ♖xc3 variation, where Black's efforts to break up the centre can leave White with up to four passed pawns on the K-side and up to a two-pawn advantage. In "A French Labyrinth" *New in Chess 1997/7* pp. 86-90, Timman described the 'magnificent games' resulting from these 'fantastical pawn sacrifices', and hoped to inspire further examples. Fortunately the call has been heeded. This issue considers one defence to 13 ♖xc3, where there have been important recent discoveries ...

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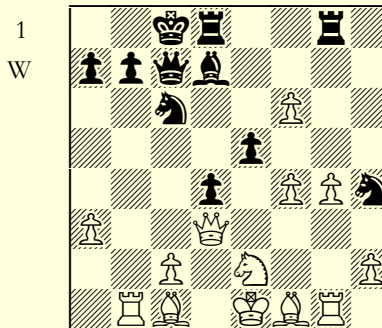
Poisoned Pawn: 13 ♖xc3 and 16 ... f6!?

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♙b4 4 e5 c5 5
a3 ♙xc3+ 6 bxc3 ♘e7 7 ♖g4 cxd4 8
♗xg7 ♖g8 9 ♗xh7 ♗c7 10 ♘e2
♘bc6 11 f4 dxc3 12 ♗d3 ♙d7

13 ♖xc3 ♘f5
14 ♖b1 0-0-0
15 ♖g1 d4
16 ♖d3 f6!?

A critical juncture. The main current alternative is 16 ... ♘a5.

17 g4 ♘h4
18 exf6 e5(1)



White has tried nine (!) different moves from (1).

A: (from (1)) 19 g5/h3/♙h3/♖b5/♔d1

These continuations, a mix of older and rare tries, are not best, but they well illustrate the themes from the critical lines.

With 19 g5 White resolves the attack on the g-pawn and threatens ♙h3. This featured in early correspondence games but has an elementary drawback: 19 ... e4! 20 ♖xc4 (or 20 ♖b3 ♗/3+7) 20 ... ♙f577, confirmed by several examples.

Instead 19 h3 covers g4 without weakening the light squares, and this time 19 ... e4? (a common try in early games) 20 ♖xc4±± leaves Black with nothing. But Djurhuus's suggestion (cf. C below) 19 ... ♙e6 halts the K-side pawns and leaves White with no obvious plan: 20 ♙g2 ♗xg2+ 21 ♖xg2 ♖ge8 has been most common (=, at most) and 20 ♖g3 ♖h7 21 fxe5 d3 (21 ... ♖xc2? 22 ♖b2 ♖h7 23 ♗/4±±) 22 ♗f4 dxc2∞/= seems best.

With 19 ♙h3 White shores up g4 and plans to meet 19 ... ♙e6? with 20 g5±±. Black gains the advantage via 19 ... ♖ge8! 20 f7! (20 ♖g3? d3! 21 cxd3 ♗d4, though still complicated, seems to be winning for Black) 20 ... ♖e7 21 ♖g3 exf4! (now 21 ... d3 22 ♖xd3 exf4 23 ♙xf4 ♖xf4 24 ♖f1 is no better than equal) 22 ♙xf4 ♖a5+ 23 ♔d1 d3 24 ♖xd3 ♙e6 25 f8=♖ ♖xf8∞/7, with a perfect record from three correspondence games.

With 19 ♖b5 (one example) White plans to meet ... ♙e6-d5 with ♖xd5. This has similarities with 19 ♖g3 (E below), but is less accurate: 19 ... ♖ge8 20 ♖e4? exf4 21 ♖xf4 ♗e577; 20 ♖g3 d3!∞/=.

Finally 19 ♔d1, with one (unsuccessful) example, removes the king from the e-file and from knight checks on f3. The king is

surprisingly safe on d1, and White gains an edge after 19 ... e4 (19 ... ♖ge8?! 20 f7 ♖e7? 21 ♖b3!±±: cf. 19 ♙h3 above; 19 ... ♙e6 20 ♖b5 a6 21 ♖c5! ♖d6 22 ♖xe5!±) 20 ♖xc4 ♖xg4 (20 ... d3?! 21 cxd3 ♖ge8 22 ♖c4 ♙e6 23 ♖c2±±) 21 ♖xg4 ♙xg4 22 ♖b5∞/±.

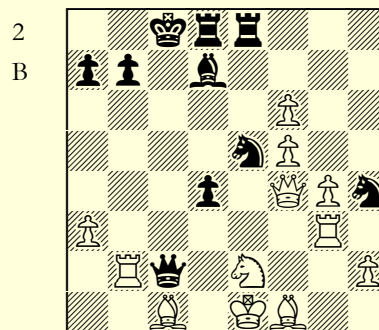
B: (from (1)) 19 f5

White prevents ... ♙e6, one of Black's main resources, and cuts off the retreat of the knight on h4. But he also gives up control of e5, which is too high a price.

19 ...	♙e4!
20 ♖xe4	♖ge8
21 ♖f4	

The stem game **B. Nikolić–Plchut, WT/M/GT/229 corr 1988 Informator 47/377 (Plchut)** saw White massacred in short order after 21 ♖d3? ♗e577 22 ♖b3 d3 23 cxd3 ♙a4 0-1.

21 ...	♗e5
22 ♖g3	♖xc2
23 ♖b2(2)	



For some time theory thought this bad for Black, based on **Goloshchapov–Ahlers, Essent Open, Hoogeveen 2002:** 23 ... ♗d3+? 24 ♖xd3 ♖xd3 25 f7±± (1-0, 45) *ChessPublishing.com, October 2002 (McDonald)*, Psakhis *FD-ps* p. 227. The

improvement 23 ... ♖c5! came to the notice of theory with **Goloshchapov–Svane, North Sea Cup, Esbjerg 2005**: 24 f7 ♗xf7 ½-½ (a charitable draw: ‘clearly better for Black’, Goh *ChessPublishing.com, July 2009*; ‘Black has the advantage, and a big one at that’, Williams *AC:tF p. 183*). If instead 24 ♖f2 ♗c6+, **Termeulen–Ahlers, Corus 4B, Wijk-aan-Zee 2005** (‘∞’ Neven *ChessBase Magazine 129, March 2009*; ‘with initiative’ Moskalenko *tWW pp. 216-7*), Black has halted White’s K-side pawn roller and dominates the centre (though ½-½, 32).

The improvement should already have been known, having appeared in **Ruzo–Boissel, CCOL13 prel4-02 corr 1998** *Le Courier des Échecs 501 (November 2000) pp. 286-7 (Boissel)*: 24 ♖bb3? ♗a4 25 f7 ♗xf7 26 ♖b4 ♗c6 27 ♖bb3 ♖e4 0-1.

Conclusion: 19 f5? gives Black a clear advantage.

C: (from (1)) 19 f7

Often given as best (‘! McDonald *FW p. 27*, Neven, Williams *p. 181*).

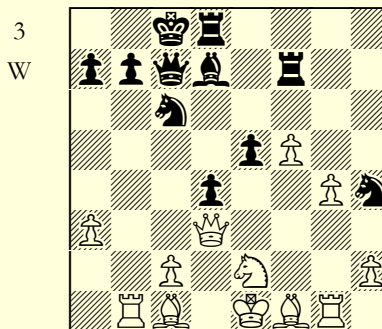
19 ... ♖g7!?

A vast proliferation of theory emanated from **Hellers–Djurhuus, Gausdal 1992** *Informator 55/290 (Djurhuus)*: 19 ... ♖xg4 20 ♖xg4 ♗xg4 21 ♗h3 ♖d7. This was long held to be a forced draw after 22 ♗xg4 ♖xg4 23 ♖g3 ♖h5 (McDonald *pp. 26-8*), but later White racked up an overwhelmingly positive record via 23 ♖b3, threatening to exchange queens: cf. Neven and Williams. The text is now usually recommended (‘!, ‘with great compensation’, both Goh *ChessPublishing.com, May 2009* and Moskalenko).

20 f5! ♖xf7(3)

And now:

1) 21 ♗g5 e4! (the more common 21 ... ♖b8? leaves White much better after



Timman’s 22 ♗xb4 ♖xb4 23 b3), and if 22 ♗xd8 ♖xd8! (only thus), leading to a forced draw after 23 ♖xe4 ♖e7 24 ♖d5 (24 ♖d3? ♖e3++) 24 ... ♗b4! (so that ... ♗ef3+, ... ♖c3 will lead to a perpetual) 25 axb4 ½-½ **Dambrauskas–Stengelin, SUI-25/B2 corr 2010**. Instead 22 ♖xe4 ♖e8 23 ♖d5 ♗e5! or 23 ♖f4 ♗e5 give Black good play (∞/±).

2) 21 ♖g3 e4! 22 ♖b3 (22 ♖xe4 ♖e8=) 22 ... e3!! 23 ♖xf7 ♗e5 24 ♖d5 (24 ♖b3 ♗h3+ 25 ♗d1 d3=) 24 ... ♗c6 25 ♖e6+ with a draw by repetition was **Jirků–Volek, CZE/C21 Czech corr Ch final 2009**.

So far so good. But there’s a problem:

3) 21 ♖g3! (unplayed) forces Black to choose between the unpleasant 21 ... ♖h8 22 ♗g5± and the unconvincing 21 ... ♗xf5 22 gxf5 ♗xf5, when Black has some compensation but surely not enough (±/±).

Conclusion: notwithstanding some ingenious Black resources, White can gain the upper hand after 19 f7 (though not a clear win).

D: (from (1)) 19 ♖f2

Moskalenko’s recommendation (‘!’). The K-side pawns are well placed where they

are and it is useful to prevent a knight check on f3.

The theory on 19 ♖f2 is still in flux. After 19 ... ♗e6, the preliminary verdict must be that Black is in difficulties after 20 ♗h3! ♖b8 21 fxe5 ♗xe5 22 ♖g3! ∞/± **Menéndez Rodríguez–Kukla, CAPEA40-Pr-25 corr 2011** (1-0,40) (22 ♖e4 ♗h3 23 ♗f4 ♗d5 24 ♖f5 ∞/= and 0-1, 45, **E. Laine–Uusitalo, Pauli Aulaskari Memorial Corr A 2010** *Kinjeshakki 2012/04 p. 103* (*Uusitalo*) (not in ICCF archive)).

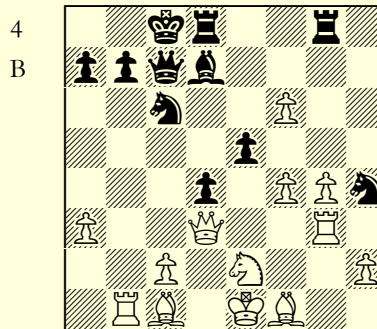
There is however an inspired defence, again due to Stengelin: 19 ... ♖ge8!!? 20 f7 (20 ♖e4 ♖d6 21 ♖g3 ♖xf6±) 20 ... ♖e7 21 ♖h7 exf4 22 ♖xh4 ♖xf7, when four correspondence games, **de Groot–Stengelin** and **Poulheim–Stengelin**, both **WC33/pr02 corr 2009**, **P. Laine–Stengelin**, **SUI-25/B2 corr 2010**, and **Ottesen–Stengelin, WC35/1/2-final-07 corr 2011**, all drawn, attest that Black has full compensation for the sacrificed piece.

Conclusion: 19 ♖f2 appears to give White an edge but no more.

E: (from (1)) 19 ♖g3!!(4)

Other tries leave Black under some pressure but holding. But this is a clear-cut refutation. White again leaves the K-side pawns in place and neatly neutralises all Black's defences.

White meets 19 ... ♗e6 with 20 ♖b5, planning 20 ... ♗d5? 21 ♖xd5!± (cf. 19 ♖b5 in A above). After 20 ... a6 21 ♖c5 ♖d6 22 ♖xc6+! ♖xc6 23 fxe5, Black does not have the saving resource 23 ... ♗c4 because of 24 ♗xd4!±±: cf. the cor-



responding lines after 19 h3 and 19 ♖f2, where Black takes on d4 and checks on f3 with knight and queen respectively.

After 19 ... ♖xg4 20 ♖xg4 ♗xg4 21 ♖g3 ♗f3+ 22 ♖f2 ♖d7 23 h3 ♗h5 24 ♖g7, play has followed Djurhuus's original analysis of 19 f7, but there Black could continue 24 ... ♗xf7=. Here 24 ... e4 25 ♖xd7+ ♖xd7 26 ♖b5 ♗f7 27 ♗g2±/±±, **Cerrato–Stengelin, SUI-25/B2 corr 2010**, leaves White a clear pawn ahead with well-placed pieces (1-0, 51).

On 19 ... ♖ge8, 20 ♖e4 now leaves Black poorly placed: 20 ... ♖d6 21 f5 ♖xf6 22 ♖h3±±.

If 19 ... e4, 20 ♖xe4±± (20 ... ♖xg4 21 ♖b7 or 21 ♖b5!? ♖e8 22 ♖xe8+).

Finally 19 ... a6 (vs. ♖b5 and preparing ... ♗e6) has often been reached by transposition. In addition to 20 f5±±, **Karpov–Giulian, simul, Glasgow 1984** (1-0, 43), White has 20 g5!±± (20 ... e4 21 ♖xe4 ♗f5 22 ♗b3: another benefit of 19 ♖g3).

Conclusion: in this labyrinth, there is no way out for Black. ►

FW MCDONALD, Neil, *French Winawer* (Everyman 2000)—see issue 18.

tWW MOSKALENKO, Viktor, *The Wonderful Winawer* (New in Chess 2010)—see issue 16.

FD-ps PSAKHIS, Lev, *French Defence 3 Nc3 Bb4* (Batsford 2004)—see issue 18.

AC:tF WILLIAMS, Simon, *Attacking Chess: the French*. London: Gloucester (Everyman) 2011. ISBN-13: 978-1-85744-646-3.