

THE NEW WINAWER REPORT

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A Bridge Too Far

Repertoire books have so completely taken over the openings field that other approaches have become virtually extinct. In many ways this is excellent for reader and author alike: authors may evade the difficulties of tilling well-trodden ground by choosing a different repertoire, while readers gain a diverse set of viewpoints and much greater depth for each covered line. Certainly we live in a golden era for the Winawer, with a succession of books by Moskalenko, Williams, Vitiugov and Watson in the past three years alone, and another from Berg about to go to the printers.

Great as the gains are, though, something is also lost: many interesting lines fall through the cracks and are rarely covered. One such is a side line that became popular in Argentina after the war, in which Black tries an unusual development plan. It seems a bridge too far—but even in such minor lines theory continues to evolve, and the reasons are not the ones usually given.

* * *

Canoba-Eliskases

San Nicolás 1957 (8)

dFV pp. 17-18 (Schwarz, citing Eliskases (from Deutsche Schachzeitung 1963?))

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

10 ... **dx3**

11 f4 **b6?!(1)**

Black plans ... ♙a6 and ... ♘d7. 'Positionally well motivated but too slow' Moles *MLW pp. 35-36*: a good summary.

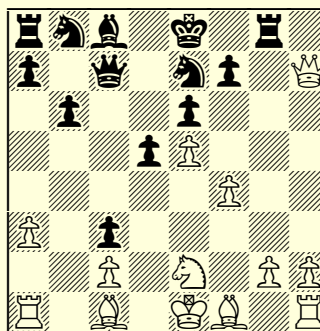
12 ♘d4 ♙a6

13 ♘e3?! ♘xf1

14 ♗xf1 ♘d7

15 ♘b5?!

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15 g3 (Minev *NFI-2 pp. 302-3*) =.

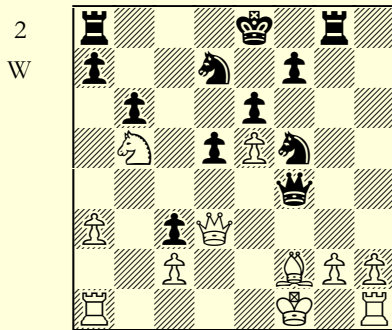
15 ... ♗c4+

16 ♗d3 ♘f5

17 ♖f2?!

Usually given '?'. Eliskases thought both 17 ♖d4 and 17 ♖f2 led to equality, but 17 ♖d4?! ♗xd3+ 18 cxd3 a6 19 ♘d6+ ♘xd6 20 exd6 ♘c5 21 ♖xc3 ♘xd3 22 g3 ♖c8♯ also leaves White in difficulties. Best is 17 ♖f2 ♗xd3 18 cxd3 ♖e7♯.

17 ... ♗xf4!!!? (2)

**18 ♘c7+?!**

Better 18 g3! first. Eliskases planned 18 ... ♗xe5, with main line 19 ♖e1 ♗f6 20 ♘c7+ ♖d8 21 ♘xa8 ♘c5! 22 ♗d1! (22 ♖xc5? ♘xg3+ mates quickly; 22 ♗β? ♘xg3+♯♯; 22 ♗e2? ♘e4♯♯; 22 ♗b5? ♘d4♯♯) 22 ... ♖c8 followed by ... ♖b7, ... ♘e4 'with more than enough compensation for the sacrificed material'. After 23 g4!, though, it's about equal, e.g. 23 ... ♘d6 24 ♖g2 ♘ce4 25 ♖g3 ♘xg3 26 hxg3 or 23 ... ♘h4 24 ♗d4 ♗f3 25 ♖g1 ♗h3+ with a perpetual.

On 20 ♗xd5?! ♖d8 (Eliskases), 21 ♗xf5! allows White to escape to an ending that's only slightly worse.

Instead computers prefer 18 ... ♗h6!, e.g. 19 ♘c7+ ♖e7 20 ♘xa8 ♗h3+ 21 ♖e2 ♖xa8 22 ♗xc3 ♖d8!♯ with ... ♖c8 to follow, or 20 ♘d5+ exd5 21

♗xf5 ♗e6 22 ♗xe6+ fxe6♯/♯ with prospects against White's weak pawns.

18 ... ♖e7

19 ♘xa8?

Again better 19 g3; then Black has the extra option 19 ... ♘e3+!? 20 ♗xe3 (20 ♖e2? ♗g4+!; 20 ♖e1? ♗β; 20 ♖g1? d4) 20 ... ♗c4+ and 21 ... ♗xc7♯.

19 ... ♘xe5

20 ♗xc3?

Here 20 g3 (the last chance) leaves Black with some work to do after 20 ... ♗xf2+ 21 ♖xf2 ♘xd3+ 22 cxd3 ♖xa8♯/♯♯. The text loses quickly.

20 ... d4!

21 ♗c7+ ♖f6

22 ♖g1 ♖c8!

Usually given '!'. Direct and spectacular but not strictly necessary: any reasonable move suffices. Indeed Black could pass and still have a winning position.

23 ♗xc8 ♘g4

And mate cannot be avoided. The finish was 24 ♗d8+ ♖g7 25 ♖e2 ♗xf2+ 26 ♖d3 ♘e5+ 0-1.

Canoba or Canobra?: Schwarz, Moles, Minev and van der Tak (see below) all give White as 'Canoba', but ChessBase.com's *Big Database 2012*, with all games from the tournament, gives '(Juvenal) Canobra', also given by McDonald (see below).

The tournament bulletin *SN57 p. 13* specifies 'Carlos Canoba'.

* * *

Theory had long considered the variation practically refuted based on an early win by Ivkov and analysis by Eliskases, but a flurry of analysis in 2004-6, from McDonald, van der Tak, and Khalifman, gave conflicting recommendations. Which is correct? We turn to further practice for an answer.

The increased interest may have been prompted by a game featuring a line

considered critical since Eliskases' original analysis (1963?).

Shaw-Levitt
4NCL, West Bromwich 2004

(from (1))

12 ♖g3?!

?! Moles, Khalifman, and long considered strongest: the knight heads for f6. But this solution is itself slow.

12 ... ♗d7?

13 ♗h5 ♗b7!?

The stem game **Ivkov-Rossetto, Belgrade 1962**, continued 13 ... ♖f8 14 ♗b5! ♖c5 15 ♗d3 a6? 16 ♗f6+ ♗d8 17 ♗xd7! ♗xd7 18 ♗e3±± with a decisive grip (1-0, 34). Allowing White an uncontested stronghold on f6 was fatal: Black could have put up sterner resistance via 15 ... ♖h8! and ... ♗g8-h6, ±/±.

14 ♗f6+ ♗xf6

15 exf6 0-0-0

16 fxe7 ♗xe7(3)

17 a4?!

Schwarz' 17 ♗d3?! *dFV* p. 9 is no better than equal after 17 ... d4. The text is Moles' recommendation.

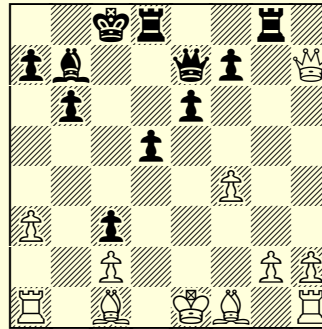
17 ... d4

18 a5 b5!

Several consecutive inaccuracies now make White's position critical: 19 a6? (19 ♖g1±) 19 ... ♗xg2 20 ♗xg2?! (20 ♖g1±) 20 ... ♖xg2 21 h4? (21 ♖b1 ♗c5±) 21 ... d3! 22 cxd3 ♗c5 23 ♖f1. Now McDonald *ChessPublishing.com*, May 2004 and *CHESS* 69/5, August 2004, p. 47 suggests 23 ... c2 24 ♗d2 ♖g3 (±?); much better is the immediate 23 ... ♖g3!±±. The game continued 23 ... ♗f5? and ½-½, 28.

The critical line is 17 ♗e3!, forestalling ... d4. After 17 ... ♗f6 18 ♖d1! the evaluation has been debated ('with double-

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edged play after 18 ... e5!? or 18 ... ♗b8!?' McDonald; 'White refutes the enemy threats' Khalifman). Though there are indeed complications, the verdict must be that White is winning after either 18 ... ♗b8 19 ♗d3 (less clear-cut is 19 g3?!, Zapf via *UltraCorr3*, ±) or 18 ... e5 19 ♗h3+! ♗b8 20 fxe5 ♗xe5 21 ♖d4 (again clearer than Zapf's 19 ♗b5?! e.g. 19 ... ♖de8 20 ♗b5 ♖e7±).

A. (from (1)) 12 ♗g3?! ♗c5!

The only chance for survival: White is prevented from castling and faces an awkward problem placing the QB and more generally in developing. Opinions differ on how effective this is: '12 ... ♗c5 just might be playable', van der Tak *New in Chess Yearbook* 73, 2004, pp. 68-71; 'Black's defence will be extremely difficult' Khalifman *OWA* pp. 169-70.

After 13 ♗h5 ♖f8 14 ♗f6+ ♗d8 examples include:

a) **Naiditsch-Luther, German Ch, Bad Königshofen 2007: 15 ♗d3 ♗d7** 16 ♗h4 ♗xf6 17 ♗xf6 ♗c7 18 a4, and now instead of the game's 18 ... ♗c6? 19 ♗a3 ♗b4 20 ♗xb4 ♗xb4± and 1-0, 70, Black could have improved with 18 ... ♗d7!, planning to meet 19 ♗a3 with

19 ... ♖e3+ 20 ♜f1 ♠f5 21 ♘xf5 ♖xf4+ with a perpetual, or 19 ♜e2 with 19 ... d4 20 ♘a3 ♖c6 21 ♞g1 (21 ♜/2? ♠d5 22 ♖b4 ♞b8+) 21 ... ♠d5 22 ♘e4 ♖c4+ 23 ♘d3 ♖c6=.

b) **de Silva-Neven, WC.T.2008.00001 corr 2007**, followed the same course until Black varied with **18 ... ♠f5!?** and ended quickly after 19 g4 ♠e3 20 ♘a3 ½-½ (20 ... ♠xc2+ 21 ♘xc2 ♖e3+=). Instead 19 a5 b5 20 ♘xf5 exf5 21 ♘a3 seems to yield no advantage after 21 ... b4 22 ♖d6+ ♖xd6 23 exd6+ ♜d7=.

c) **Morais-Prokopp, Foglar Veterans III GM-B corr 2007: 15 g4!?** ♠ec6 16 h4 ♠d7 17 ♠xd7 ♜xd7 and White's difficulty in arranging castling is no longer significant, while Black also has fewer prospects of counterplay down the g- and h-files. Play continued 18 ♖d3 ♘b7 19 ♞h3 d4 20 h5± and 1-0, 35.

d) **Wiwe-Meessen, 25th European Club Cup 2009** varied with (15 g4 ♠ec6 16 b4) **16 ... ♠d4**, which seems no improvement after 17 ♞h3 ♘a6 18 h5±; the game went 18 ♘e3 ♘xf1 19 ♜xf1 ♖c4+ 20 ♜g2± and after further complications Black even won (0-1, 35).

B. (from (1)) 12 ♠d4!

'Not as strong as it looks', Moles, and indeed Black does well after all White tries but one. After **12 ... ♘a6 13 ♘xa6** (not considered by Moles) **13 ... ♠xa6**,

Black is fine after the older 14 ♠b5? ♖c5 15 ♠d6+ ♜d7 (cf. Minev), but van der Tak cites the major improvement **14 0-0!** planning a quick f5 before Black has time to complete development. **Rychagov-R. Lehtivaara, Helsinki 1991 Informator 51/(289)** continued 14 ... ♠c5 15 a4 a6 16 ♘a3± and 1-0, 31, while **Hellers-Sørensen, Copenhagen Open 1991** went instead 15 ♘e3 a6 16 ♞ae1 0-0-0 17 ♖xf7 ♞df8 18 ♖h5 ♜b7 19 ♞b1± and 1-0, 34.

Subsequent practice has failed to provide Black with an adequate antidote. **Guliyev-P. Lehtivaara, 13th Corsican Open 2009** saw Black attempt to hold the f-pawn with (15 ♘e3 a6 16 ♞ae1) 16 ... ♞f8?, but to no avail after 17 f5! 0-0-0 (17 ... exf5 18 ♘b6±±; 17 ... ♖xe5 18 fxe6 0-0-0 19 ♠b5 ♠e4 20 ♠xa7+ ♜b7 21 ♞xf7±±) 18 fxe6 fxe6 19 ♞xf8 ♞xf8 20 ♖h6±± (1-0, 36). And **Roos-Prokopp, Foglar Veterans III GM-B corr 2007** reaffirmed that Black has no real compensation if the pawn is given up, diverging from Hellers-Sørensen with **18 ... ♠f5**, but without success after 19 ♖e2 b5 20 ♞f3 ♠xd4 21 ♘d4 ♠e4 22 a4± (1-0, 34).

Conclusion: despite many interesting possibilities, 11 ... b6? is unsound. White can claim some advantage even with the older 12 ♠g3?!, but best is 12 ♠d4! ♘a6 13 ♘xa6 ♠xa6 14 0-0!, essentially a refutation. ►

SN57 —, *Gran Torneo del Acuerdo, 22 de mayo — 1 de junio de 1957*. San Nicolás: Asociación Regional de Ajedrez de San Nicolás 1957.

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MLW MOLES, John L., *The French Defence Main Line Winawer* (Batsford 1975)—see issue 3.

NFI-2 MINEV, Nikolay, *French Defense 2: New and Forgotten Ideas* (Thinkers' Press 1998)—see issue 5.

dFV SCHWARZ, Rolf, *Die Französische Verteidigung* (Das Schach-Archiv Fr. L. Rattmann 1967)—see issue 5.