♖b4? (20 ♗h3±: the d-pawn will fall) 20 … ♘c6 21 ♖b1 (21 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 22 ♘xd4 ♗b5! peters out into a draw) 21 … b6 22 ♗e4 ♘ce7 23 ♔f2 (23 ♘xd4 ♗a4 24 ♖b4 ♗xc2=) 23 … ♕c5 24 ♘g3? (24 ♖b4±/±: the d-pawn is a persistent worry) 24 … ♗a4 25 ♔g2?? (25 ♕e2∓) 25 … ♘e3+∓∓ and 0-1, 30.

This crushing win hides some Black difficulties. The most accurate defence is simply 17 … ♘fe7(!). Now 18 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 19 ♕xd4 is met by 19 … ♗b5∓∓/=, e.g. 20 ♔f2 ♗xf1 21 ♕xf1 ♕c5 22 ♖b5 (22 ♘g3?! ♕d4 23 ♖d3 ♕e4+ 24 ♔f2 ♖xd3 25 ♕xd3 ♕xd3 26 cxd3 ♖xg4∓) 22 … ♕d4 23 ♖b4=. Otherwise Black follows up with … ♗c8, … b6, and … ♗b7, with a solid position as in E above but a more harmonious piece placement. White has a nominal edge but no obvious way to make progress.

There are few examples. **Ilyin–Borisovs, RUS/Pearl-3 ICCF corr 2011** is the most illuminating, continuing 18 ♔f2 ♗c8 19 h6 b6 20 a4 ♗b7 21 ♗g2 ♖h8 22 ♖h1 ♘d5 23 ♗xd5 ♖xd5±. After 24 ♗a3 ♕c8 25 ♗d6+ ♔a8 followed by … ♗a6 and … ♘a5-c4xd6, White generated some pressure but Black had enough to hold (½-½, 52).

Conclusion: 16 … ♔b8(!) is best.

<div align="center">✳ ✳ ✳</div>

Is this not mysterious? The quiet, almost nondescript king move—on the opposite side of the board from the main action—was not among the first half a dozen can-didate moves. By what principle can it succeed where the alternatives fail? Or, to put it another way, what is the source of the Tait's venom?

'White prefers to concentrate on exploiting his passed pawn rather than recapture on c3' is McDonald's explanation *FW p. 30* of the early h4. But this cannot be the main point. The Tait primarily aims to prise the knight from f5: the h-pawn advances only to h5, to prevent a future … ♘h4 by cutting off a subsequent retreat to g6. And with the knight forced back, the outpost on d4 will fall: the immediate threat is simply g4 followed by ♘xd4.

Aside from sacrifices of the knight on f5—usually unsound—the defences 16 … ♘h6?, 16 … ♘a5? and 16 … ♘ce7? further White's aims by weakening d4, and 16 … f6? creates a new problem in the mass of advanced passed pawns. On the other hand the more successful 16 … ♗e8 addresses the threat by covering d4 immediately, and 16 … ♔b8(!) does so indirectly by covering a7.

The Tait's one drawback is that White has had no time to capture on c3 and is for the moment not a pawn up. 'It is difficult to believe that White will obtain an advantage as long as Black's powerful pawn pair d4-c3 remains on the board', Vitiugov *p. 240*. Once Black is able to protect the d-pawn and regroup, White's advantage is limited.

It is an inaccuracy to play … ♘f5?! while the Tait setup is possible. But the best defence is to admit the error and retreat to e7, achieving near-equality. ▶

*GMR-2*   BERG, Emanuel, *The French Defence 2* (Grandmaster Repertoire 15) (Quality Chess 2013) —see issue 13.

*MbM*   GIDDINS, Steve, *The French Winawer Move by Move* (Everyman 2013)—see issue 23.

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

*aCBR-2*   VITIUGOV, Nikita, *The French Defence Reloaded.* (Tr.: Evgeny Ermenkov.) Sofia: Chess Stars 2012. ISBN-13: 978-954-8782-86-9.

# THE NEW WINAWER REPORT

## The Eye of the Hurricane

The Tait variation of the Winawer Poisoned Pawn, considered in the last issue, poses some exceptionally difficult problems for the second player. Many of Black's varied and generally well-proven defensive resources are not merely insufficient for equality versus the Tait setup: instead they fail catastrophically, and for most the failure was already convincingly demonstrated by Tait in his original article.

Thus the seeming refutation of the long-standing remedy 16 … f6—cf. issue 23—forces a deeper-than-usual reconsideration by Black. The best advice is to avoid the Tait, leading to the main line of Berg. By analogy this shows the best way in the Tait itself: the strongest move appears to be one that has rarely been played, and that was not even considered by Tait. But this poses a fresh puzzle: why does this unlikely-looking approach work where so many others fail … ?
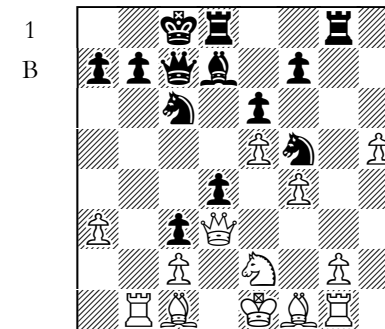
<div align="center">✳ ✳ ✳</div>

## Poisoned Pawn: Tait variation, alternatives to 16 … f6

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

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **12** | **♕d3** | **dxc3** |
| **13** | **♖b1** | **d4** |
| **14** | **h4** | **0-0-0** |
| **15** | **h5** | **♘f5** |
| **16** | **♖g1! (1)** | |



*Correspondence Chess 127, Summer 1995, pp. 10-15.*

The Tait variation. Black's longstanding remedy 16 … f6 has now been refuted—cf. issue 23—so what next? The first five alternatives below are taken in the same order as in Tait's original article "A Bust to the 7 … ♕c7 Winawer – ?",

**A:** (*from* **(1)**) **16 … ♖g4**

This attempt to restrain g4 'must be a blind spot for Black' according to Tait, who faced it half a dozen times in early games, since on 17 g3 and 18 ♗h3 ('±') the advance arrives anyway.

There is nonetheless a marginal point if Black insists on placing the knight on h4, since the bishop's placement blocks ♕h3. But after 17 g3 f6 (else White will have time to round up the knight) 18 ♗h3 ♖gg8 19 g4 ♘h4, as in **Kuipers–Ratsma, HZ Open, Vlissingen 2013** (0-1, 40), Berg *GMR-2 p. 151* gives the improvement 20 exf6, when 'White is simply winning'.

**B:** (*from* **(1)**) **16 … ♘h6**

Black 'prevents g2-g4—at the cost of putting the knight offside and the d4-pawn *en prise*', Tait, whose main line continues 17 ♘xd4! ♘xd4 18 ♕xd4 ♗b5 19 ♕xa7 ♗xf1 20 ♖xf1! ♖xg2.

**K. Szabó–Tóth, Hungarian Team Ch 2012-13, Paks 2013** now proceeded 21 ♕a8+? ♕b8 22 ♕a5 ♖xc2? (*22 … ♕c7=*) 23 ♖f3± ♖g8? (*23 … ♖d7*) 24 ♔d1 ♖gg2 25 ♖d3 1-0. But here 21 ♖f3!±±, threatening ♖xb7, wins in all variations, as already shown convincingly by Tait.

In the first high-level trial of the variation after the original article, **Djurhuus–Johannessen, Norwegian Ch, Alta 1996** *Informator 67/383 (Djurhuus)*, Black varied with 18 … b6 ('!?') 19 ♖b3 ♖g3 ('!'), and after 20 ♗d3 ♘f5 21 ♕b4 ♔b8 22 ♖xc3 ♗c6 23 ♕c4 ♖c8 24 ♕xc6! ♕xc6 25 ♖xc6 ♖xc6 26 ♔f2, instead of 26 … ♖g8 27 g4 (and 1-0, 42), Djurhuus evaluated 26 … ♖g4 27 ♖h1 ♖c8 as a mere ±. This is doubtful enough, and after 27 g3 White

is winning. Earlier Djurhuus's evaluation of 23 ♗xf5 ♖xc3 24 ♕xc3 exf5 ('∞ ♖×♔e1') is mysterious as Black is simply two pawns down with no compensation. Black is better advised to try 19 … ♗b5 (*19 … ♗c6 20 ♕xc3 ♔b8 21 ♗e3±*), e.g. 20 ♕b4 (not *20 ♕xc3? ♗xf1 21 ♕xc7+ ♔xc7 22 ♖c3+ ♔b7 23 ♖xf1 ♖xg2=*) 20 … ♕d7 with counterplay, even if insufficient for the material deficit.

Djurhuus's other suggestion 18 … ♔b8 ('!?') had a recent trial in **Butkiewicz–Kaňovský, Czech Team Ch East 2013-14, Prague 2014**. After 19 ♕d6 ♕xd6 20 exd6 ♗c6 21 ♗e2 (*21 ♖b3±*) 21 … ♖xg2 (or *21 … ♖g3 22 f5±*) 22 ♖xg2 ♗xg2 most exact is 23 f5!, e.g. 23 … ♘xf5 24 ♗g5!, though in the game White won quickly after 23 ♖b3± (1-0, 29).

Conclusion: 16 … ♘h6? is inadequate.

**C:** (*from* **(1)**) **16 … ♘a5**

Also poor: 17 g4 ♗a4 (*17 … ♘fe7/♘h6 18 ♕xd4±±*) 18 ♖b4±±: cf. issue 23.

**D:** (*from* **(1)**) **16 … ♘ce7**

Tait thought that 17 g4 ♗a4 18 gxf5 ♗xc2 was fully satisfactory for Black, but modern engines do not agree (±); even better 18 ♖b4!±±. But Tait's recommended 18 ♗g2 ('!'), citing **Simpson–Dilley, Notts v. Northants match, England 1994**, is not as good. After 18 … ♗c6 19 ♗xc6 ♕xc6 20 ♖b4 ♕d5? (*20 … ♔b8±, e.g. 21 ♔f2 a5! 22 ♖b5 ♘h4 or 22 ♖c4 ♕d5*) 21 gxf5? (*21 ♔f2±±*) 21 … ♖xg1+ 22 ♘xg1 ♕h1 23 ♖c4+ ♔b8 24 ♗e3 ♘xf5 25 ♗f2?! (*25 ♖xd4!?±/∞*), instead of 25 … ♕xh5?±± (and 1-0, 35) Black could have drawn immediately via 25 … ♖g8 26

♕f1 ♕e4+=.

Otherwise (16 … ♘ce7 17 g4) 17 … ♘h4 and 17 … ♘h6 have both been played but are insufficient after 18 ♕h3±± and 18 ♕xd4± respectively.

Conclusion: 16 … ♘ce7? is no good.

**E:** (*from* **(1)**) **16 … ♗e8**

'The main alternative *[to 16 … f6]*, which was discussed a lot when this variation was first being played', Watson *ChessPublishing.com, August 2010*. The immediate point is that the d-pawn is protected even if the knight on f5 is forced away.

After 17 g4 ♘fe7 18 h6 ♖h8 19 ♖h1±, the drawbacks become apparent: Black's pieces are awkwardly placed and back-rank communications are cut.

Much worse is the effort to break loose with 18 … f6?/f5? 19 exf6 ♘d5. Now **J. Geller–Velichko, Polugaevsky Mem, Samara 2014** continued 20 h7! (much better than *20 ♘xd4? ♘xf4 21 ♗xf4 ♕xf4 22 ♘xe6 ♕xf6=* **Würschner–Kuchyňa, Slovakian corr Ch ½-final-29 2003** (½-½, 35)) 20 … ♖h8 21 g5 e5? 22 g6 ♗xg6 23 ♖xg6±± and 1-0, 29. Watson gives instead 21 … ♖xh7 22 ♗h3, without evaluation: a much better try but White is also winning there.

The critical line is 17 … ♕e7!**(2)**. For once sacrificing the knight on f5 is sound: 18 gxf5?! ♖xg1 19 ♘xg1 ♕h4+ 20 ♔d1 f6!=, 'Tolotos' *ChessPublishing.com Forum, 20 July 2010*.

To seek an advantage White is forced into 18 g5 (or *18 ♕h3 ♘h6 19 g5 ♘f5*). **Popov–Greig, WS/M/500 corr 2014** continued 18 … a6!? (keeping the rook out of b5) 19 ♗h3 ♕c5 (transposing to **Matei–Dorner, World corr Ch 32 ½-final-10 2008** (½-½, 27) with two fewer moves) 20 ♗xf5 exf5 21 ♕xf5+

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W
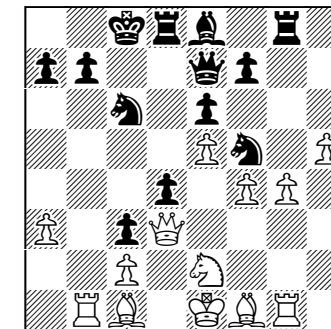
♗d7! 22 ♕d3 (practically agreeing a draw, but after *22 ♕xf7 ♖gf8 23 ♕b3 b5 24 a4* comes *24 … ♘xe5!*, when White has nothing better than *25 ♕a3∞/= (25 fxe5? ♕xe5∓∓)*) 22 … ♗e6 23 ♕e4 ♗a2 24 ♖a1 ♗d5 25 ♕f5+ ♗e6 26 ♕e4 ♗d5 ½-½.

The other two known examples of 16 … ♗e8 17 g4 ♕e7! 18 g5, **Necula–Dorner, BdF-60/S/½-final-07 corr 2008** (1-0, 41) and **Kalchev–Ritsema, Bulgaria v. Netherlands corr match 2012** (1-0, 42), have led to White wins, though hardly because of the opening, which led only to a slight White edge in each case.

Conclusion: 16 … ♗e8 comes close to equalising after 17 g5 ♕e7!.

**F:** (*from* **(1)**) **16 … ♔b8(!)**

Not considered by Tait, this 'multi-purpose move', Vitiugov *aCBR-2 p. 247*, is key to Berg's recommended line (12 h4 d4 13 ♖b1 ♗d7 14 h5 0-0-0 15 ♖g1 ♔b8!) *GMR-2 pp. 169-73*, and is the main choice from **(1)** of Giddins *MbM pp. 144, 146*.

Giddins cites the only over-the-board example **Vehí Bach–Vallejo Pons, Spanish Ch, Palma de Mallorca 2009**: 17 g4 ♘h6 18 g5 ('?!' Giddins, who prefers *18 ♗h3*) 18 … ♘f5 19 ♗g2 ♘a5? 20