THE NEW WINAWER REPORT

Editor: Seán Coffey

The Ghost of Theory Past

The 13 ♗e3 variation in the main line poisoned pawn, considered in the last issue, well illustrates a rarely-discussed feature of opening theory development. That there is a constant, intensive hunt for new ideas is a given, of course, but where can these be found? It is often the case that they're in the archives: old lines and discarded continuations frequently contain critical resources and important ideas, perhaps awaiting only small adjustments. Even when the verdict of theory on these side-lines is correct (which is far from always the case) it can and does happen that the same idea is good—even essential—in another context.
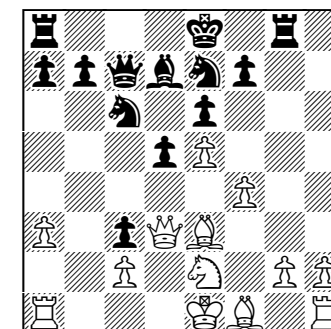
The classic plan to meet 13 ♗e3 involves … ♘f5, … 0-0-0, and … d4 in some order, followed by … f6. But when first introduced it was thought that Black's best response was 13 … ♛a5. This seems strange to modern eyes and it is indeed not best (though not for the reasons usually given). With some modest preparation, though, the same idea is indispensable.

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Poisoned Pawn: Ragozin's … ♛a5 versus 13 ♗e3

In the main line poisoned pawn (*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 ♗e3(1) is not only considerably better than its reputation and results, but it also allows White to bypass some recently-popular Black options. After 10 … dxc3 11 f4 ♘bc6 12 ♛d3 both 12 … d4!? and 12 … ♘f5 have scored well, but 12 ♗e3!? essentially forces play back into familiar channels. Black is still fine, though care is required.

(0-1, 35). Cf. Watson *PtF-2 p. 161*.

This is impressive but misleading: again a single error turned an equal game into a rout. White should continue the plan of dislodging the knight: 17 g4 ♘fe7 (or *17 … ♘b4!?*: cf. B3 below) 18 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 19 ♗xd4 ♗c6=, e.g. **Lorentzen-Oren, EM/CL/Q13-1 ICCF email 2002** (1-0, 54).

d) **15 … ♛b6!?** should transpose, i.e. 16 g4 ♛b2 17 ♖d1 ♛xa3! and now 18 ♖b1 is forced (*18 gxf5?? ♘b4++*).

B3. (*13 … ♘f5 14 ♗f2 d4*) **15 ♖g1!?**
With the same idea as in B2, and again Black must react vigorously:

a) **15 … 0-0-0?!** 16 g4 ♘e3? (*16 …♘fe7 17 ♛c4 and 18 ♗xd4±*) 17 ♗xe3 dxe3 18 ♛xe3±± (*18 ♛xc3? ♘e7 19 ♛xc7+ ♔xc7 20 ♖g3±* **Rensch-Shavardorj, Berkeley Masters 2008** (½-½, 46)).

b) **15 … ♛b6?!** is now less effective: 16 g4 ♛b2(!) (*17 … ♘e3? 18 ♗xe3 dxe3 19 ♛xe3±*) 17 ♖d1 ♛xa3 18 gxf5 ♖xg1 19 ♗xg1 opens a bolthole for the king (∞/±).

So here Ragozin's idea is essential:

c) **15 … ♛a5!** 16 g4? ('I can't find a satisfactory continuation for White', Minev *NFI-2 p. 304*) 16 … ♘b4++ 17 ♛d1? d3 0-1 **Pyhälä-Raaste, Järvenpää 1985**.

Minev's remark is mysterious as again White may chose to jettison the a-pawn: 16 ♖b1! ♛xa3 17 g4. Now 17 … ♘fe7 18 ♗xd4! gives White an edge, e.g. 18 … ♘b4 19 ♛xc3 ♛xc3 20 ♗xc3 ♘xc2+ 21 ♔f2±. **Kindbeiter-Höbel, EM/MN/074, ICCF email 2004,** continued 18 … ♘d5 19 ♗xc3 a5 20 ♖g3± and Black struggled to a draw.

It seems Black can only hold the balance via 17 … ♘b4!?, e.g. 18 ♖xb4 ♛xb4 19 gxf5 ♖xg1 20 ♗xg1 ♗b5! 21 ♛xd4 ♛b1+ 22 ♛d1 ♛xd1+ 23 ♔xd1 a5, still murky but about equal. ▶

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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 ♗e3(1) ♘f5 14 ♗f2 d4(2)

15		16		17		18		19		
♘g3	0-0-0	♘e4?	♘xe5!							++
…	…	♘xf5	exf5	g3	f6	exf6	♖ge8+	♗e2		=
h3	0-0-0?	g4	♘fe7	♗g2						±
…	♛b6!?	g4	♛b2	♖d1	♛xa3	♖b1				
…	♛a5!	♖b1	♛xa3	g4	♘fe7	♘xd4	♘xd4	♗xd4		=
♖g1!?	♛a5!	♖b1	♛xa3	g4	♘fe7	♗xd4!				∞/±
…	…	…	…	…	♘b4!?	♖xb4	♛xb4	gxf5		∞/=

FZ   KERES, Paul, *Frantsuzskaya Zaschita* (Moscow 1958)—*see issue 4*.

C18-19   KORCHNOI, Victor, *C18-19 French Defence* (Chess Informant 1993)—*see issue 3*.

NFI-2   MINEV, Nikolay, *French Defense 2: New and Forgotten Ideas*. Davenport, Ia.: Thinkers' Press 1998. ISBN-10: 0-938650-92-0.

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

dFV-51   SCHWARZ, Rolf, *Die Französische Verteidigung*. Berlin: Sportverlag GmbH 1951.

dFV   —, *Die Französische Verteidigung*. Hamburg: Das Schach-Archiv Fr. L. Rattmann 1967.

PtF-2   WATSON, John L., *Play the French,* 2nd edition (Cadogan 1996)—*see issue 3*.

FPP   ZEUTHEN, Steffen, & JARLNÆS, Erik, *French Poisoned Pawn: A Study of the Sally Qd1-g4:g7*. Copenhagen: ZeuSS Transactions 1971. No ISBN.

A. 13 … ♕a5?!

The 13 ♗e3 line has a curious prehistory (see issue 4): its début game **Panov-Ragozin, Moscow Ch 1944-45** continued with the 'clever but dubious' (Moles *MLW p. 29*) 13 … ♕a5, threatening … ♘b4. After 14 ♗f2?! ♘b4 15 ♕d1 ♘a6 16 ♘g3 ♘c5 (∓ Schwarz *dFV p. 12*, Moles) Black had a comfortable equality.

And there the matter rested for over ten years. Until the next 13 ♗e3 games, in the late 1950's, sources dismissed it with 13 … ♕a5∓ (Kloss *Fernschach 15/11, Nov. 1954, pp. 201-208*) or simply 13 … ♕a5 with no further comment (Schwarz *dFV-51 p. 130*).

Opinion finally shifted, though with the skimpiest of analysis. Keres *FZ p. 133* wrote 'but 13 ♗e3 is still a good continuation … instead of the unnecessary loss of time with 14 ♗f2, White could improve with 14 ♘d4 or the immediate 14 g3'. After White's disastrous results with 13 ♗e3 ♘f5, the variation was already long out of favour by the time Schwarz *dFV p. 12* fleshed out the analysis in 1967.

a) *(13 … ♕a5)* **14 ♘d4** ('!') ♘xd4 15 ♗xd4 ♖c8 16 ♕f3 ♗b5 17 g3 ♗xf1 18 ♔xf1 ♖c4 19 ♗f2 ♕a4 20 ♕d3 ♘c6 21 ♖b1 b6 22 ♖b3 ♘a5 23 ♖xc3± Schwarz (and Moles). This does not hold up as 16 … ♕a4∓∓ wins, 22 … ♔d7 is still ∓, and even the end position is no worse for Black. Better 16 g3 or 16 ♖b1, each well met by 16 … ♘f5∓.

b) 14 g3 was never analysed further ('is worth considering', Schwarz; 'is also good', Moles) and has never been played. After 14 … ♘b4 15 ♕d1 ♘c6 White may have nothing much better

than taking the repetition.

So is 13 … ♕a5 good after all? No, for there is one elementary drawback, though it appears in no games or commentary:
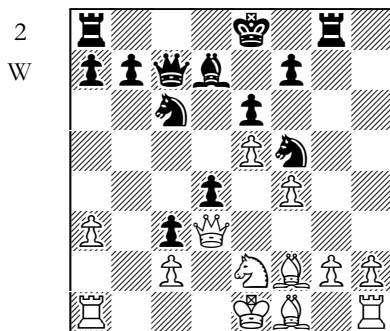
c) 14 ♕xc3! ♕xc3 15 ♘xc3 d4 (did analysts stop here?) 16 ♘e4 dxe3 17 ♘f6+ and White emerges with a solid edge, e.g. 17 … ♔d8 18 0-0-0 ♘b8 19 ♘xg8 ♘xg8 20 ♗c4.

So 13 … ♕a5?! is indeed dubious. But matters might be different if Black first plays … d4, not only to prevent ♕xc3 as above, but to add extra punch to … ♘b4 via a subsequent … d3. In this modified form the idea works well, as will be seen below.

B. 13 … ♘f5

And now:

    14 ♗f2   **d4(2)**

This sequence is not forced: in particular some prefer 13/14 … 0-0-0. But 14 ♗f2, 'the best chance', Moles *MLW p. 29*, '!' Watson *PtF-2 p. 161*, is now usual. (For 14 ♘ or ♗d4, see issue 4.)

But what now? White's main continuations have been 15 ♘g3, 15 h3, and 15 ♖g1.

B1. *(13 … ♘f5 14 ♗f2 d4)* **15 ♘g3**

This featured in yet another classic Black victory in the 13 ♗e3 line:

Cobo-Ivkov
5th Capablanca Mem., Havana 1963

    15 …   **0-0-0**
    16 ♘xf5

Roundly criticised at the time, this is best. Pachman *Schach-Echo 21/18, 23 Sep. 1963, p. 285* gave 16 ♘e4, planning g3 and ♗h3, as giving White some advantage, and this recommendation could be seen even decades later, e.g. Korchnoi *C18-19 p. 65*. But it was refuted by Zeuthen & Jarlnæs *FPP p. 81*: 16 … ♘xe5! and White is lost. The only known example, **Elich-Spieringshoek, Netherlands H197 corr 1983**, finished 17 fxe5 ♕xe5 18 ♗e2 ♗c6 19 ♘g3 ♘e3! 0-1 (*20 ♖g1 ♘xc2+!*).

    16 …   **exf5**
    17 ♗h4?

This should lose: 17 g3 was essential. Then Zeuthen & Jarlnæs' startling 17 … ♘xe5!? is playable, e.g. 18 fxe5 ♕xe5+ 19 ♗e2 ♗c6, with … ♗e4 to follow: ∞/=. Schwarz *dFV p. 24* gives instead the natural 17 … f6 '!', also approximately equal after 18 exf6 ♖ge8+ 19 ♗e2 ♖xe2+!? 20 ♔xe2 ♗e6!.

    17 …   **♖de8**
    18 ♔f2   **♖g4?**

An error—never pointed out—that could have let White off the hook. Better the immediate 18 … ♖xe5!!∓∓.

    19 g3?

White lets the reprieve slip. After 19 ♗g3! he survives: it's not even clear Black has any advantage. Euwe *Archives 15/12 (1440), 28 Oct. 1963* gave 19 … ♘xe5! 20 fxe5 f4 or 20 ♕xd4 ♘c6 'with a strong attack in each case', both

∓ per Moles *MLW p. 30*, but in the latter line it's not clear how Black follows up after 21 ♕c5±; better 20 … ♘g6=.

    19 …   **♖xe5!!**

The spectacular finish was 20 fxe5 ♘xe5 21 ♕d1 ♖xh4! 22 gxh4 ♘g4+ 23 ♔e1 ♘c4 24 ♕e2 ♗b5! 25 ♕g2 ♕e3+ 0-1.

B2. *(13 … ♘f5 14 ♗f2 d4)* **15 h3**

Even if 15 ♘g3 is enough for equality, it is hardly a try for an advantage. A much more enterprising approach is 15 h3, planning to push the knight back via 16 g4: then ♗e3-f2 will have had the effect of inducing the committal … ♘f5 and … d4. This was strongly recommended ('!') by Leisebein *Archives 36/10-11/48-1, Oct.-Nov. 1987* with many examples, and an attribution to Flügge.

Indeed this works well if Black does not react energetically:

a) **15 … 0-0-0?** 16 g4 ♘fe7 17 ♗g2 ♗e8± **Bakre-Neelotpal, Indian Ch, Nagpur 1999** (though 0-1, 67).

Several examples show that 16 … ♘e3? 17 ♗xe3 dxe3 18 ♕xe3±/±± is no improvement, and that the sacrifice 16 … f6? is inadequate (*17 exf6!±±*).

b) **15 … ♖h8?** 16 g4 ♘h4 17 ♗xh4 ♖xh4 18 ♘xd4±/±±.

So is there any answer? Yes, for now everything is in place for Ragozin's idea:

c) **15 … ♕a5!** (not considered by Leisebein). Now the best-known example is **Esser-Arounopoulos, German team Ch prel corr 1991-92** *Correspondence Chess Yearbook 6/187* (Arounopoulos): 16 ♖b1 (forced: *16 g4? ♘b4 17 ♕d1 d3∓∓; 16 ♘xd4? ♘xd4 17 ♗xd4 ♖g3∓∓*) 16 … ♕xa3 17 ♕c4? b5!∓∓ (or *17 … a5!∓∓*) 18 ♕b3 ♕xb3 19 ♖xb3 b4 20 g4 a5!!