

opening repertoire

# the Sicilian Taimanov

Nigel Davies

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# About the Author

Nigel Davies is an International Grandmaster and FIDE Senior Trainer. He is the author of numerous books and DVDs on the game and is known for the clarity of his explanations.

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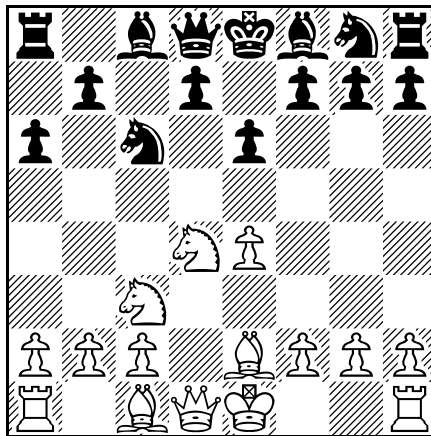
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# Introduction

I first met Mark Taimanov at the Paz E Amizade tournament in Lisbon in 1985, a small round robin event in which he was the invited star. Knowing we would be playing I watched his games quite closely and then noticed something strange in his game against Jorge Guimaraes. Hoping for a repeat of this line I opened with 1 e4 in my game against him instead of my habitual 1  $\text{♞f3}$  followed by 2 g3. This is how the game went.

## Game 1 N.Davies-M.Taimanov Lisbon 1985

1 e4 c5 2  $\text{♞f3}$   $\text{♞c6}$  3 d4 cxd4 4  $\text{♞xd4}$  e6 5  $\text{♞c3}$  a6 6  $\text{♙e2}$



6... $\text{♞c7}$

Taimanov thought for a few minutes before varying from the 6... $\text{♞ge7}$  he played in the Guimaraes game.

**Question:** Had he rightly suspected some preparation?

**Answer:** This is very possible, not least because I varied from my usual 1 ♘f3.

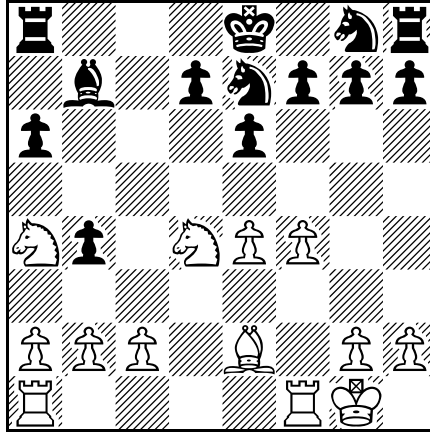
7 f4

After 6...♖c7 I had nothing special in mind and was making it up as I went along. This becomes evident over the coming moves, with Black achieving a very comfortable position.

7...b5 8 ♙e3 ♙b7 9 0-0 ♙c5 10 ♘f5

This was starting to feel uncomfortable, so I decided to exchange the dark square bishops. White could also play just 10 ♖d2 and then further defend the knight with ♗ad1.

10...♘ce7 11 ♙xc5 ♖xc5+ 12 ♖d4 ♖xd4+ 13 ♘xd4 b4 14 ♘a4 ½-½



**Question:** Why did Black agree to a draw?

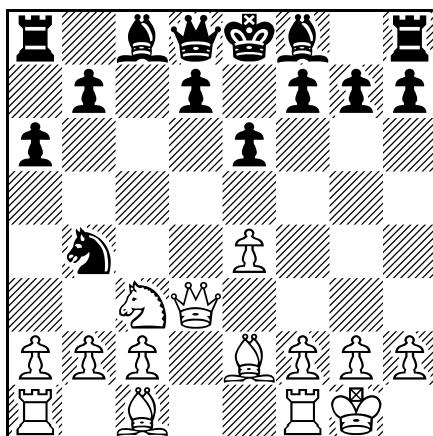
**Answer:** The position is actually quite balanced here, for example after 14 ♘a4 ♙xe4 15 ♘c5 ♘f6 16 ♘a6 ♘ed5 17 g3 ♙e7 18 a3. It also seems possible that my opponent was okay with a rest day in which to do some sight-seeing. After his loss to Bobby Fischer in 1971 his opportunity for travel had been severely limited.

Afterwards I showed him what I had found, after 6...♘ge7 7 0-0 ♘xd4 8 ♖xd4 ♘c6 9 ♖d3 ♘b4 White can play 10 ♖g3 instead of Guimaraes's move 10 ♖d2. Taimanov was astonished as Anatoly Karpov had also played 10 ♖d2 against him. He was also quite appreciative that I had shown him this line rather than wander into 10 ♖g3 in a subsequent game. He found a few resources for Black before concluding that White had a very powerful initiative, also pointing out that 9...♘b4 was not Black's only move, and he could also play 9...♖c7.

Interestingly James Plaskett made this same 10 ♖g3 discovery over the board, when he played against William Hartston a few years later:

Game 2  
J.Plaskett-W.Hartston  
England 1986

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘c6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♙e2 ♘ge7 7 0-0 ♘xd4 8 ♚xd4 ♘c6 9 ♚d3 ♘b4



I was surprised to see this line come up, but Hartston had been a keen exponent of the Taimanov Variation. At this point Plaskett went into thought and, like I did a year earlier, decided there was no need to defend the c2-pawn.

10 ♚g3! ♘xc2

**Question:** Did Black not see what was coming when he took the pawn?

**Answer:** I think that at this stage it is hard to find other reasonable moves. The queen on g3 prevents Black from developing his f8-bishop and unless he takes the pawn moving the knight to b4 will be a waste of time.

11 ♙g5! f6

**Question:** With the rook on a1 and bishop attacked, does this not win material?

**Answer:** Unfortunately for Black there is a sting in the tail, as given in the note to Black's next move.

**Question:** So should Black have done something else?

**Answer:** It's not easy to find a good alternative, for example 11...♙e7 12 ♙xe7 ♚xe7

(12...♖xe7 13 ♖xg7) 13 ♖g5+ ♔e8 14 ♖xg7 regains the sacrificed pawn with an overwhelming position, and 11...♗b6 or 11...♗a5 can be met by 12 ♖ad1, when White's lead in development gives him very good compensation for the pawn.

**12 ♖f4! ♖f7**

Ugly but necessary.

**Question:** Why doesn't Black just take the rook with 12...♗xa1 - ?

**Answer:** The problem is that White then has the line 13 ♖h5+ g6 (13...♔e7 14 ♖d6 is mate!) 14 ♖xg6+ hxg6 15 ♖xg6+ ♔e7 16 e5! (threatening mate with 17 exf6!) 16...d5 17 ♖xf6+ ♔d7 18 ♖xh8, and when the knight on a1 tries to escape with 18...♗c2, White can just pick it up with 19 ♖h7+, winning back all the sacrificed material with a two pawn surplus.

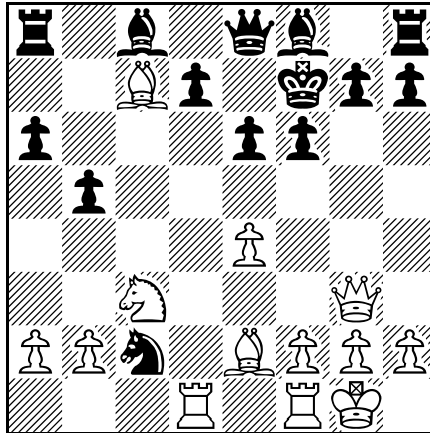
**13 ♖c7 ♗e8**

13...♗e7 14 ♖ad1 would be similarly horrific for Black, due entirely to his lack of development.

**14 ♖ad1**

Threatening ♗a4, amongst other things.

**14...b5**



**15 e5!**

Now threatening both ♖f3 and exf6, and there's no good defence to both of these. Hartston's position rapidly goes down in flames.

**15...♖b7**

After 15...f5 there follows 16 ♖f3 ♖a7 17 ♖b6 ♖b7 18 ♖xb7 ♖xb7 19 ♖d3, with a further loss of material being inevitable.

**16 exf6 ♔g8**

This loses by force but there was nothing else, for example 16...gxf6 17 ♖h5+ ♔e7 18 ♖d6 mate; 16...g6 17 a3 traps the knight on c2, or if 16...♖xf6 there follows 17 ♖e5+ ♔e7

18 ♖g5+ ♜f7 19 ♙h5+ g6 20 ♗f6+ ♚g8 21 ♗xh8+ ♜f7 22 ♗xh7+ followed by mate.

**17 fxg7 ♙xg7 18 ♙e5 1-0**

Black will lose a piece after 18 ♙e5 ♗g6 19 ♗xg6 hxg6 20 ♙xg7 ♜xg7 21 ♚xd7+ and taking on b7.

Taimanov would later ascribe the discovery of 10 ♗g3 to ‘English chess players’, perhaps not sure if it was the result of individual efforts or teamwork. I would meet Taimanov at several events after that, for example Tel Aviv 1990 and Gausdal 1992, subsequently inviting him to the Owens Corning tournament in Wrexham in 1997. Although we could only communicate via my poor German I felt a sense of kinship with him, perhaps partly because Taimanov, like my parents, was also a pianist. My mother had been an aspiring concert pianist before taking lessons with the former Russian star Iso Elinson, who learned at the conservatoire in Taimanov’s native St. Petersburg. I was used to being around classical musicians, even if their efforts to involve me fell on stony ground.

Because of this connection, when I became interested in the Sicilian Defence Taimanov was my first source of insight, and I carefully went through his book which was inappropriately titled *Winning with the Sicilian* (Batsford, 1991). I became interested in particular in how he described the evolution of the Taimanov Variation from his earlier studies on 6...♗c7:

“So, in analytical work one day there was born the idea to refrain from the conventional early development of the queen, but instead to develop the king’s knight not on the square f6, where it is subject to the threat of attack, but to the more intricate and flexible e7-square. This innovation turned out to be highly significant and enriched the traditional opening scheme with original strategic content.

“In the process of practical tests and theoretical research the new idea found its adherents, gradually gaining in prestige and popularity and finally, having detached itself from the Paulsen system, it became an independent and highly diversified opening scheme known to theory as the ‘Taimanov system.” (Taimanov, 1991),

This makes it abundantly clear that Taimanov himself considered his innovation to be 6...♗e7 and that it was the development of the knight on e7 that distinguishes it from the Paulsen system with 6...♗c7. Curiously this seems to have been ignored by many authors who simply apply the ‘Taimanov’ label the position after 1 e4 c5 2 ♗f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♗xd4 ♗c6, regardless of where Black develops his king’s knight. I have chosen to go instead with the inventor’s definition, that Taimanov’s innovation was the development of Black’s knight on e7, and the repertoire presented here will reflect this. In a couple of lines, I felt it necessary to give 6...♗xd4 followed by ...♗e7 rather than 6...♗ge7 because otherwise White can effectively move the knight from d4, but these two are in the Taimanov spirit rather than being Paulsens.

The distinction can be a subtle one, for example the following game starts out with 6...♗c7 but later features the development of Black’s king’s knight to e7. It was also one of Taimanov’s most brilliant games:



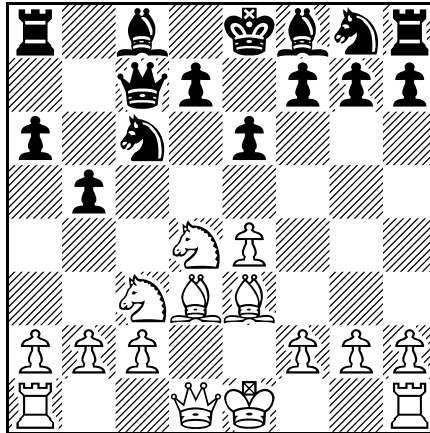
*Game 3*  
**A.Lutikov-M.Taimanov**  
 USSR Championship, Moscow 1969

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♗xd4 e6 5 ♗c3 ♚c7

**Question:** Does this not introduce the Paulsen Variation?

**Answer:** Essentially it is a Paulsen, though as Black's king's knight later goes to e7 it has a Taimanov feel. Chess openings are not always easy to define, especially if they involve various transpositions. The formal Taimanov Variation is brought about by 5...a6 followed by ...♗ge7.

6 ♙e3 a6 7 ♙d3 b5



**Question:** Shouldn't Black be developing his pieces instead of this?

**Answer:** In many modern openings, where the position stays relatively closed, you can often afford to develop more slowly. Here it's difficult for White to open files, even though his pieces are currently more active than Black's. 7...♗f6 would stay solidly in Paulsen territory because the knight has gone to f6.

8 ♗xc6 ♚xc6 9 ♙d4

**Question:** What's the point of moving the bishop a second time?

**Answer:** He is trying to make it difficult for Black to develop his kingside.

The following year a game D.Minic-M.Taimanov, Palma de Mallorca Interzonal 1970

## Opening Repertoire: The Sicilian Taimanov

varied with 9 a3 after which 9...♙b7 10 0-0 ♗e7! 11 ♖g4 ♗g6 12 f4 ♙c5 13 ♙xc5 ♜xc5+ 14 ♖h1 0-0 15 ♜ae1 f6!? 16 ♗e2 ♜ae8 17 ♗g3 ♜d4! 18 ♗h5 f5! 19 exf5 exf5 20 ♜g5 (20 ♙xf5? loses to 20...♜xe1 21 ♜xe1 ♜xf5 22 ♜xf5 ♙xg2+! 23 ♖xg2 ♗h4+ etc.) 20...♜xe1 21 ♜xe1 ♜xb2 22 h3 ♜xa3, with a clear advantage for Black. Another possibility is just 9 0-0.

**9...♙b7 10 ♜e2 ♗e7**

A Taimanov style move. By bringing the knight to e7 instead of f6, Black makes it harder for White to create a breach in Black's position. After 10...♗f6 11 ♙xf6 gxf6, Black's doubled pawns would make it very difficult for his king to find safety on the kingside.

**11 f4**

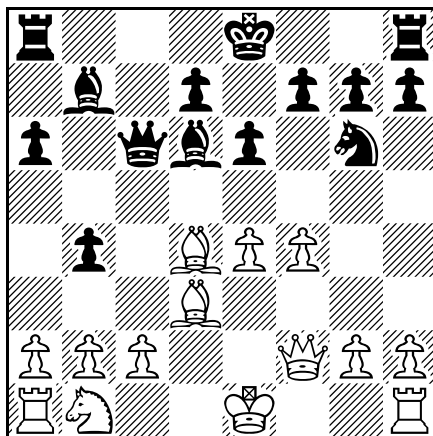
A surprising point of Black's last move is that 11 0-0 can be met by 11...♗f5! 12 ♙e5 f6 13 ♙f4 ♗d4, with counterplay.

**11...b4 12 ♗b1**

12 ♗d1 was a better move.

**12...♗g6 13 ♜f2 ♙d6!**

A provocative move which threatens the f4-pawn.



**14 ♙e3**

**Question:** Can White not answer this with 14 ♙xg7 - ?

**Answer:** He can, but then 14...♜g8 (14...♗xf4 is also possible) 15 ♙h6 ♙c5 16 ♜e2 ♙d4 will win the b2-pawn and leave Black with tremendous activity.

**Question:** Then can White not win time with 14 e5 - ?

**Answer:** He can, but Black would then play 14...♙e7 threatening the g2-pawn and meeting 15 0-0 with 15...♗xf4. The knight is immune to capture because of 16 ♜xf4 ♜xg2 mate, and meanwhile Black would be threatening 17...♗h3+ 18 gxh3 ♜h1 mate.

**Question:** So that leaves him with 14 g3 then?

**Answer:** It's playable, but Black can then play 14...e5 15 fxe5 ♖xe5 with excellent play.

**14...0-0 15 ♗d2 ♜ac8 16 h4!? ♛c7**

Alternatively Black could consider 16...e5, for example 17 g3 (17 f5 ♗f4) 17...exf4 18 gxf4 ♛c7 19 ♖b6 ♛b8 20 ♖a7 ♛a8 21 ♖e3 ♖xf4!? 22 ♖xf4 f5! threatening 23...fxe4.

**17 e5**

17 g3 would be well met by 17...f5!.

**Question:** What about 17 f5, attacking that g6-knight?

**Answer:** Besides giving the e5-square away, that could be met by 17...♖g3.

**17...♖c5 18 h5 ♖xe3 19 ♛xe3 ♗e7 20 ♗c4**

White could also consider 20 ♗e4, but then Black can gain counterplay with 20...♗f5 21 ♛f2 f6, for example 22 exf6 ♖xe4 23 fxg7 ♗xg7 24 ♖xe4 ♜xf4 etc.

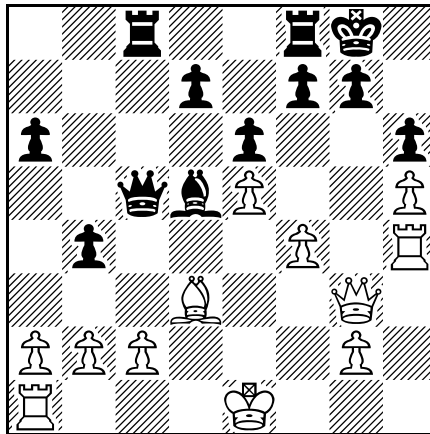
**20...♗f5 21 ♛d2**

21 ♖xf5 is most simply met by 21...♛xc4 (21...exf5!? is also possible) 22 ♖d3 ♛d5, when chances remain balanced in this sharp position.

**21...♖d5 22 ♗e3 ♗xe3 23 ♛xe3 ♛c5 24 ♛g3**

After 24 ♛xc5 ♜xc5 Black could then proceed with ...f7-f6! breaking White's centre.

**24...h6 25 ♜h4**



**25...♛g1+**

Heading into some mind-boggling complications. There was a solid option in 25...f5 after which 26 exf6 ♜xf6 27 ♛g4 ♛f8 defends Black's king and leaves him with options such as an advance of his a-pawn.

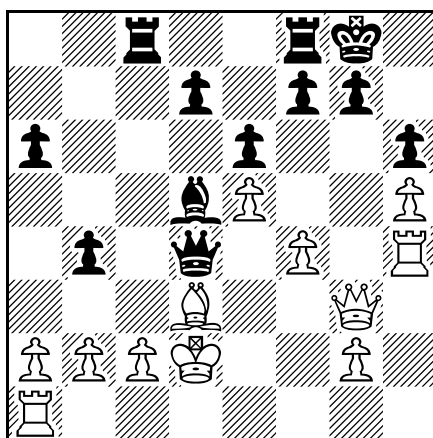
**26 ♗d2**

Analysts have considered this White's best move for decades, but engines consider 26 ♖e2 to have equal value, draws resulting after 26... ♜xa1, 26... ♜xc2+ or even 26... ♙f3+. The easiest to see is after 26... ♜xc2+ 27 ♙xc2 ♙c4+ 28 ♖d2 ♜d4+ 29 ♖c1 ♜g1+, when White must allow the draw with 30 ♖d2 because 30 ♙d1 ♜c8 gives Black a winning attack.

**26... ♜d4!?**

**Question:** Why did Black not take the rook with 26... ♜xa1 - ?

**Answer:** Unfortunately that would be met by 27 ♜g4!, with a winning attack. At the same time the engines do not favour Taimanov's move, giving instead the line 26... ♜xc2+! 27 ♙xc2 ♜d4+ 28 ♜d3 (28 ♙d3 ♜xb2+ 29 ♖e3 ♜xa1 30 ♜g4 ♜c1+ would draw this time) 28... ♜f2+ 29 ♖d1 ♜g1+ 30 ♖e2 ♜xg2+ with a draw by repetition.



**27 f5**

Threatening f5-f6.

**Question:** What about 27 ♜g4 threatening the g7-pawn?

**Answer:** Black could then play 27... ♙e4! 28 ♜xg7+ ♖h8 when White's attack comes to nought.

**27... ♜xc2+! 28 ♖xc2 b3+!**

The best chance. The immediate 28... ♜c8+ is met by 29 ♖d1 ♜g1+ 30 ♜e1 ♜xg2 31 ♜e3, when Black's attack is running out of steam and there is the small matter of that sacrificed rook.

**29 ♖d1?**

In this wild position White goes astray. It turns out that he can get away with 29 axb3! ♙xb3+ 30 ♖d2! (30 ♖xb3 ♜b8+ 31 ♖c2 ♜xb2+ 32 ♖d1 ♜xa1+ wins back the rook and leaves Black able to take pot-shots at White's exposed king) 30... ♜xb2+ 31 ♖e3 ♜xa1 32 f6!

♖c1+ (Or 32...♗g1+ 33 ♔e2! ♗d1+ 34 ♕f2 ♗d2+ 35 ♘e2 etc.) 33 ♕f2 ♗d2+ 34 ♘e2 ♗g5 35 ♔g4 ♗f5+ 36 ♔g1 ♗b1+ 37 ♕h2, when White's king finally finds safety and leaves him with deadly threats.

**29...♗g1+ 30 ♗e1 ♗xg2! 31 ♗f1**

Black can meet both 31 ♗f4 and 31 ♗e3 with 31...bxa2. The engines indicate that he has sufficient compensation for the sacrificed rook.

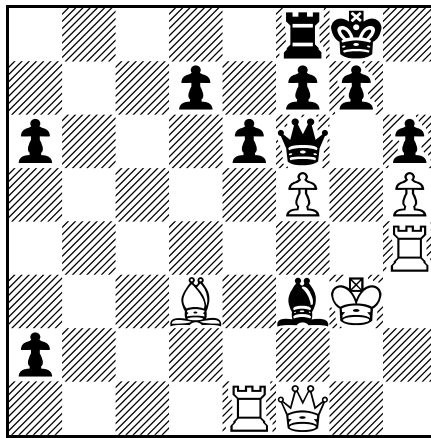
**31...♘f3+ 32 ♔e1**

32 ♔c1 ♗g5+ 33 ♔b1 ♗xh4 34 ♗xf3 ♗e1+ 35 ♗d1 ♗xd1 is mate.

**32...♗xb2 33 ♗b1 ♗xe5+ 34 ♕f2 bxa2 35 ♗e1**

35 ♕xf3 was another possibility, but White still has the problem that his king is totally exposed.

**35...♗f6 36 ♔g3**



**36...♘g2!?**

Unnecessary fireworks from Taimanov. The engines like the mundane 36...♘c6, leaving White to think about his exposed king and that a2-pawn.

**37 ♗g1?**

Black's simple reply is crushing.

**Question:** What happens if White takes the bishop?

**Answer:** He has two ways of doing this, 37 ♕xg2 being simply met by 37...♗xh4. On the other hand, 37 ♗xg2 is considerably less clear as after 37...a1♗ 38 ♗xa1 ♗xa1 Black has given up his magnificent, passed a-pawn, and this is the line that Lutikov should have chosen.

**37...exf5 38 ♗d4 ♗g5+ 39 ♔h2 ♘e4! 40 ♗hxe4 fxe4 41 ♗xe4 ♗xh5+ 0-1**

With the time control having been passed, White resigned this hopeless position. Black

can easily defend against the threat of mate on h7 and then activate his f8-rook.

The type of counter-attacking possibilities seen here are typical of the Sicilian Defence, what is less usual about the Taimanov Variation is that the lines are not well charted by theory. Partially this is because 6...♗g7 never developed a huge following, but it is also due to the early play developing more slowly and offering scope for originality. For this reason, you can find Ukrainian Grandmaster Oleg Romanishin on the Black side of the Taimanov.

Besides covering the actual Taimanov Variation with 1 e4 c5 2 ♗f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♗xd4 ♗c6 5 ♗c3 a6 followed by 6...♗g7, I have added other lines to make it a complete repertoire against 1.e4. There are several Open Sicilian lines that preclude Taimanov's 6...♗g7, such as 6 ♗xc6 and 5 ♗b5. Given the popularity of Anti-Sicilian lines I have also devoted much of this book to handling them as Black.

It remains for me to wish the reader good luck with your own Sicilian adventures. I recommend going through all the games at least once before playing it in friendly and then competition games.

St. Helens, UK  
January 2022

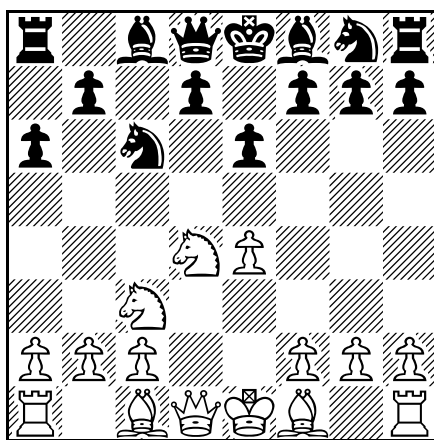
### **Acknowledgements**

My thanks go to Byron Jacobs of Everyman Chess for his support and encouragement throughout this project.

## Chapter Three

# Taimanov: 6 $\text{♙e3}$ and 6 $\text{f3}$

1  $\text{e4 c5}$  2  $\text{♘f3 e6}$  3  $\text{d4 cxd4}$  4  $\text{♗xd4 ♖c6}$  5  $\text{♘c3 a6}$



6  $\text{♙e3}$

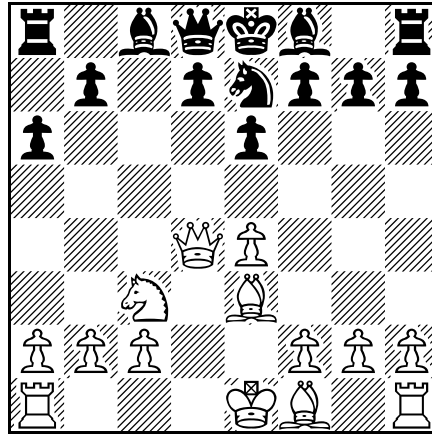
This and 6  $\text{f3}$  can come to the same thing if both moves are played, though  $\text{♙e3}$  can also be played with independent significance. Another difference is that Black can meet 6  $\text{f3}$  with 6... $\text{♗ge7}$ , as in Inarkiev-Mchedlishvili (Game 15), though it might be simpler from a repertoire perspective to meet it with 6... $\text{♗xd4}$  7  $\text{♙xd4 ♗e7}$  8  $\text{♙e3 b5}$  as in Vallejo Pons-Kobalia (Game 16).

6... $\text{♗xd4}$

**Question:** Why does Black make this exchange so early?

**Answer:** There are a couple of lines in which White can effectively move the d4-knight away if Black doesn't exchange immediately, 6 ♖e3 is one of them and 6 f4 is another. In this position 6...♗ge7 would be well met by 7 ♖b3, for example 7...d6 (7...b5 8 a4! b4? 9 a5! ♗xa5 10 ♖a4 ♗xb3 11 ♖b6 ♗xa1 12 ♗xa1 was winning for White in Y.Zaderman-M.Taimanov, New York 1992) 8 ♖a4!? b5 9 ♖b6 ♗b8 10 ♗xc8 ♗xc8 11 c4 ♖e7 12 ♗c1 ♗d7 13 cxb5 axb5 14 ♖e2 0-0 15 0-0 ♗b7 16 f4 was better for White in A.Sulypa-M.Taimanov, Lvov 2000.

7 ♗xd4 ♗e7



8 f4

8 ♖c4 is an aggressive move by White common to many Sicilian lines, but here it seems less appropriate. Black played 8...b5 9 ♖b3 ♗c6 10 ♗d2 ♖e7 11 0-0 ♖b7 in Kabisch-Moor (Game 17).

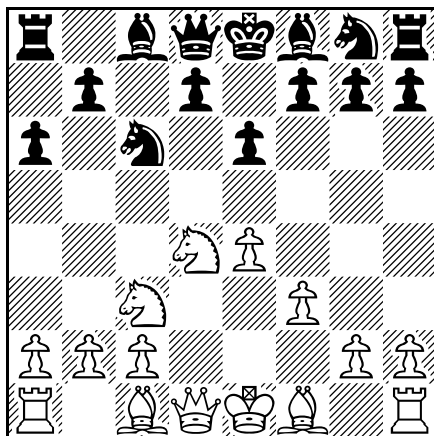
8...b5 9 0-0 ♗c6 10 ♗d2 ♖e7 11 ♗f2 ♖b7

This brought about a typical Sicilian Taimanov middlegame in S.Polgar-M.Taimanov (Game 18) in which experience triumphed over youth.



Game 15  
E.Inarkiev-M.Mchedlishvili  
European Championship, Jerusalem 2015

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘c6 5 ♗c3 a6 6 f3



**Question:** As the e4-pawn is not being attacked, what is White's idea with this move?

**Answer:** He is presumably envisaging a set-up with ♗e3 but keeps some short-term flexibility with his bishop. It could also be to lend the opening a new twist to get his opponent to think for himself.

6... ♗ge7

6... ♘xd4 7 ♗xd4 b5 is arguably more flexible as Black can still bring his knight out to f6. I could not find any games from this position, which is surprising given that we are only up to move seven in a Sicilian.

7 ♗b3

After 7 ♗e3 ♘xd4 8 ♗xd4 b5 9 0-0-0 ♘c6 10 ♗d2 Black should probably play 10... ♗e7 followed by ...0-0 so that the bishop on c8 will continue to defend d7 for the time being. As with 6... ♘xd4 there is a dearth of experience in this position.

7...b5 8 ♗e3 d6

Playing ...d7-d6 generally has a low priority in the Sicilian Taimanov. Black does still intend a manoeuvre that is known in the Taimanov; he is planning to bring his e7-knight to c8 and b6. 8... ♗g6 would have been a typical alternative, intending 9... ♗e7 followed by 10...0-0.

9 ♗d2 ♗b7 10 0-0-0 ♘c8 11 g4 ♗e7 12 f4 0-0 13 g5 ♗b6

The e7-knight completes its voyage to the queenside and may now take part in action against White's king. One of nice things about having a knight on b6 is that White cannot meet ...b4 with ♖a4.

14 ♖g1 b4 15 ♘b1 ♗e8 16 ♜f2 ♘d7 17 ♘1d2

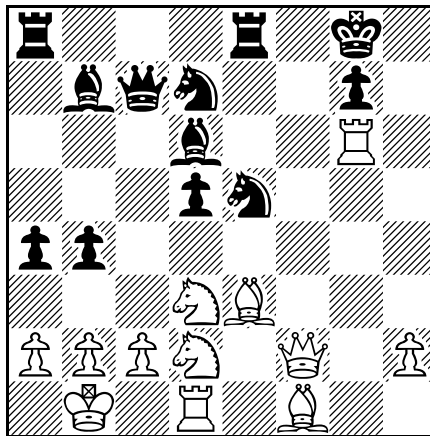
**Question:** Can White launch an attack with 17 f5 - ?

**Answer:** It would be a playable move, but it's not clear that any attack would be served up after 17...♗f8 followed by ...♘ce5.

17...a5 18 ♙b1 a4 19 ♘c1 ♜c7 20 ♘d3 d5 21 exd5 exd5 22 f5 ♗d6

22...♘ce5 would also have been a logical move, meeting 23 f6 with 23...♗f8.

23 g6 hxg6 24 fxg6 fxg6 25 ♝xg6 ♘ce5



26 ♝g1?

From here until the end of the game the advantage seems to change hands every move or two. In such a complicated position inaccuracies can be expected, especially if the players were short of time, though this has little to do with our consideration of the opening moves. Apparently 26 ♝g5 was the right move here.

26...♝ac8 27 ♝c1 ♘c5 28 ♘f4 ♜f7 29 ♜h4 b3 30 ♗h3 bxa2+ 31 ♙a1 ♗e7 32 ♜f2 a3 33 ♗d4 ♝c6 34 b3 ♗f8?

Here 34...♗f6 was the right move with Black being well on top. White in turn misses an apparent chance, he should have played 35 ♝cf1.

35 ♜h4? ♗e7?

35...♘e4 was the right move, and now White should have played 36 ♜h5.

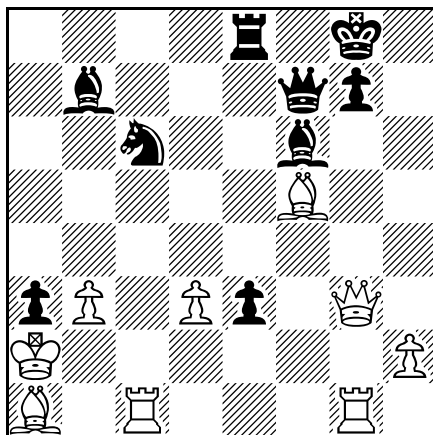
36 ♜f2? ♗f6 37 ♙xa2 ♘e4 38 ♘xe4 dxe4 39 ♗f5 ♝d6?

We are approaching the final moments of this dramatic encounter. Stockfish indicates that 39...♘f3 was correct, assessing the position as very good for Black after 40 ♗g6 ♜f8 41 ♗e3 ♗h4.

40 ♔a1?

Nimzowitsch wrote that a passed pawn is 'a criminal that must be kept under lock and key', but this unlocks Black's e-pawn. 40 ♔c5 would have kept Black's e-pawn under guard when it's still anybody's game.

40...e3! 41 ♖g3 ♘c6 42 ♞d3 ♜xd3 43 cxd3?



Losing immediately. After 43 ♜f4 ♔xa1 44 ♔h7+ ♚f8 45 ♜xf7+ ♚xf7 46 ♔g6+ ♚e7 47 ♔xe8 White could certainly fight on for a while.

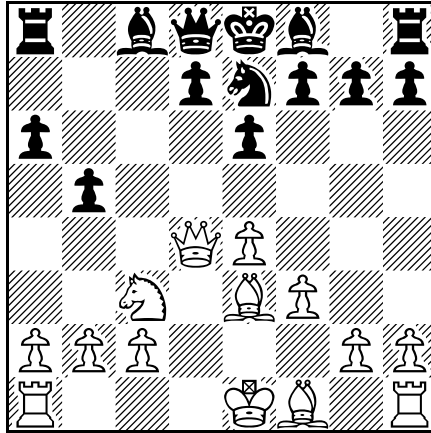
43...♔xa1 44 ♜xa1 ♜f6 45 ♜xg7+

45 ♜ab1 is met by 45...♞b4+ 46 ♚xa3 ♞c2+ followed by 47...♜a8 mate.

45...♜xg7 46 ♜xg7+ ♚xg7 47 ♜g1+ ♚f6 48 ♔e4 ♞b4+ 49 ♚xa3 ♔xe4 50 dxe4 ♜xe4 0-1

Game 16  
**F.Vallejo Pons-M.Kobalia**  
 Germany 2006

1 e4 c5 2 ♞c3 e6 3 ♞ge2 ♞c6 4 d4 cxd4 5 ♞xd4 a6 6 f3 ♞xd4 7 ♜xd4 ♞e7 8 ♔e3 b5!



### 9 ♕e5!?

Vallejo Pons finds an interesting way to bring the queen to g3. A couple of alternatives are worth considering:

a) 9 ♕d2 ♘c6 10 ♖f2 ♗c7 11 0-0-0 ♖e7 12 ♖c5? 0-0 13 ♖xe7 ♘xe7 14 ♗g3 e5 gave Black a comfortable game in J.Alvarez Nunez-R.Leitao, Santiago Entel Cup, 2006.

b) 9 a4 can be met by 9...♘c6 10 ♕d2 ♕a5 (10...b4 allows 11 ♘d5 exd5 12 exd5 ♘e5 13 d6, when White will have a dangerous attack for the sacrificed piece) when 11 ♖d3 b4 12 ♘e2 (12 ♘d5? is no longer any good because of 12...exd5 13 exd5 ♗xd5) 12...♖c5 is about even.

### 9...♘c6

In his notes to the game, Kobalia also mentioned 9...♘g6 with the variation 10 ♗g3 ♕a5 (10...♖e7 is also playable) 11 ♖d3 b4 12 ♘e2 ♖c5 13 ♖xc5 ♗xc5 14 f4 offering a complex Sicilian middlegame fight.

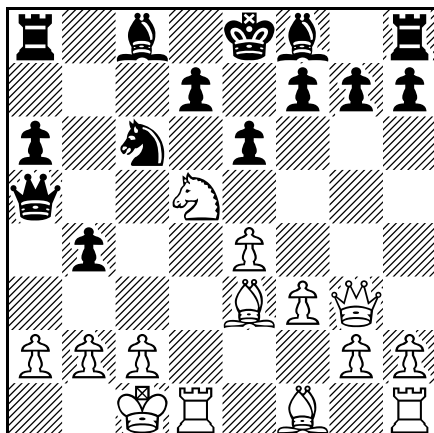
### 10 ♗g3 ♕a5 11 0-0-0

There's a good answer to 11 ♖d3 in 11...g6 followed by 12...♖g7.

### 11...b4!

Provoking the following sacrifice. Black could also play 11...♖b7 but this gives White time to protect his a-pawn with 12 ♖b1.

### 12 ♘d5!



With the a-pawn dropping this is the only show in town.

**12...exd5 13 exd5 ♖xa2**

Counterattack! 13...♘e7 14 ♙c4 would give White excellent compensation.

**14 dxc6 ♖a1+**

**Question:** Can't Black eliminate that dangerous c6-pawn with 14...dxc6 - ?

**Answer:** Unfortunately, that would lose on the spot to 15 ♖c7.

**15 ♙d2 ♖xb2 16 ♙e1**

Kobalia thought that 16 ♙d3! was better and he may well be right. My silicon friend then indicates that 16...d5 17 c7 ♖f6 is Black's best defence, aiming for ...♙e7 and ...0-0. Another possibility is 16 ♖e1 ♙e7 17 ♙g5 when Black can force a draw with 17...♖c3+ 18 ♙d1 ♖a1+ etc.

**16...♖c3+! 17 ♖d2!**

The best try. Black defends easily after either 17 ♙d2 ♖xc6 or 17 ♙f2 ♙c5 18 cxd7+ ♙xd7 etc.

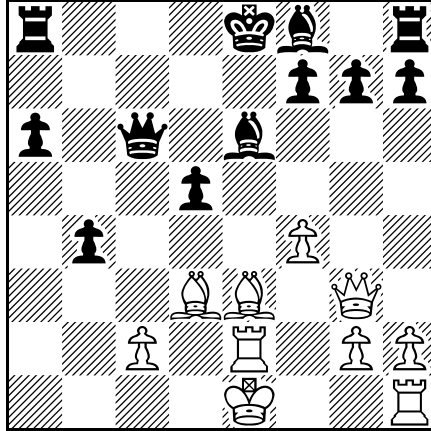
**17...♖xc6 18 ♙d3**

After 18 ♖e2 Black can cold-bloodedly allow the discovered check with 18...f6! and then play his king to f7 next.

**18...d5 19 ♖e2**

On 19 ♙d4 Black defends with 19...♙e6 20 f4 f6 for example 21 ♙xh7 0-0-0.

**19...♙e6 20 f4**



This time 20 ♖d4 can be answered by the immediate 20...0-0-0, for example 21 ♖f2 a5 setting in motion a passed a-pawn!

**20...d4!**

Suddenly taking the initiative.

**21 ♖xd4 0-0-0! 22 ♖f2**

After 22 ♖e3 Black can develop with 22...g6 followed by ...♗g7 when the raking bishops help keep White's pieces passive.

**22...♖c4 23 ♖d2?**

23 ♖e3 was a better chance but still good for Black after 23...♖xd3 24 ♖xd3 ♖b7.

**23...♖d5! 24 ♖b6 ♖xd3 25 ♖e5**

Or 25 cxd3 ♖xd3+ 26 ♖c1 ♖d5 27 ♖c2+ ♖b7 28 ♖c7+ ♖b8 escapes the checks after which it's Black's turn to 'attack'.

**25...♖c4 26 ♖c1 ♖c3+ 0-1**

### Game 17

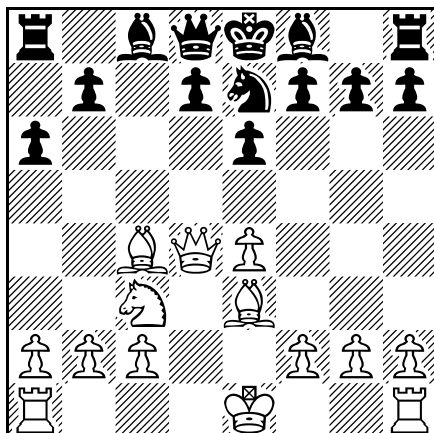
**T.Kabisch-R.Moor**

Dresden 2002

**1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 a6**

It's probably as well to ignore the early moves of the actual game and instead consider the relevant move order with 4...♖c6 5 ♖c3 a6 6 ♖e3 ♖xd4 7 ♖xd4 ♖e7 8 ♖c4.

**5 ♖c4 ♖c6 6 ♖c3 ♖ge7 7 ♖e3 ♖xd4 8 ♖xd4**



The development of White's bishop on c4 is typical of many lines of the Sicilian. Here it seems less well motivated, if only because Black's e6-pawn is so securely defended.

**8...b5 9 ♖b3 ♗c6 10 ♔d2 ♙e7**

A year later Moor would choose 10...♙b4, presumably to sidestep any preparation. A.Sokolov-R.Moor, Switzerland 2003 went 11 0-0 ♖b7 12 ♗fd1 ♙c8 13 f3 ♗a5 14 ♔d4 ♙c5 15 ♔d3 ♙e7 16 e5 ♗c4 17 ♙xc4 bxc4 18 ♔d2 ♙c6 19 ♔d4 0-0 20 ♗e4 ♙d5, ending in a draw after 21 ♗c3 ♙c6 22 ♗e4 ♙d5 23 ♗c3 (1/2-1/2).

**11 0-0**

**Question:** Can White castle long instead?

**Answer:** This might be where Sokolov intended to improve with 11 0-0-0, though the position looks fine for Black after 11...♗a5 12 ♖b1 ♙b7 13 f3 ♙c6, securely defending d7 and keeping the option of exchanging off the bishop on b3.

**11...♙b7 12 ♗ad1**

White can also play 12 f4 ♙c8 13 ♗ad1 ♗a5 14 f5 (14 e5 ♗c4 15 ♙xc4 ♗xc4 was fine for Black in D.Krklec-W.Karrer, Munich 2005) 14...♗xb3 15 axb3 ♔c7 16 ♙h1 was a game L.Olzem-H.Scepanik, Calella 1994, and now 16...♙c6 looks like a good move, envisaging ...♔b7.

**12...♙c8 13 ♙h1**

13 f4 would transpose into the previous note.

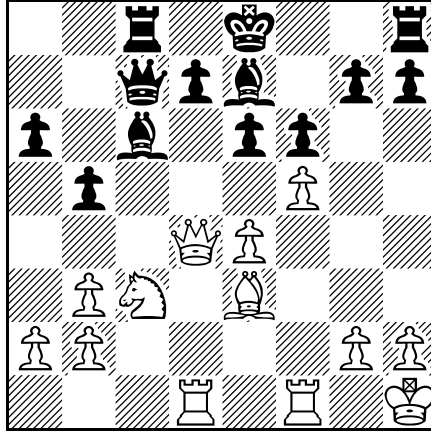
**13...♗a5 14 ♔d4**

Hereabouts it seems that White was running out of ideas; Black can easily handle the temporary activity of White's queen.

**14...f6**

14...♙f6 15 ♔a7 ♔c7 is also fine for Black.

**15 f4 ♔c7 16 f5 ♗xb3 17 cxb3 ♙c6**



Defending d7 and creating a rock-solid position. White has some space and activity, but his pawn structure is loose.

**18 a3 0-0 19 b4 ♖fd8 20 ♗d2 d5**

Opting to free his position, though this does allow White to exchange his weak e-pawn. 20...♗b7 would have been a good alternative, intensifying the pressure on e4 and the a8-h1 diagonal.

**21 ♗f2 ♗b7 22 fxe6**

A double-edged decision as the pawn on e6 might prove to be a weakness. 22 exd5 exd5 23 ♗e2 seems sounder, with approximate equality.

**22...dxe4 23 ♗g3 ♗d3 24 ♖xd3 exd3 25 ♗d1 ♗d8**

25...♗d5 26 ♖xd3 ♗xe6 was probably stronger, when Black has the two bishops and White would struggle to produce a passed pawn in this position with asymmetric majorities.

**26 ♗f4?!**

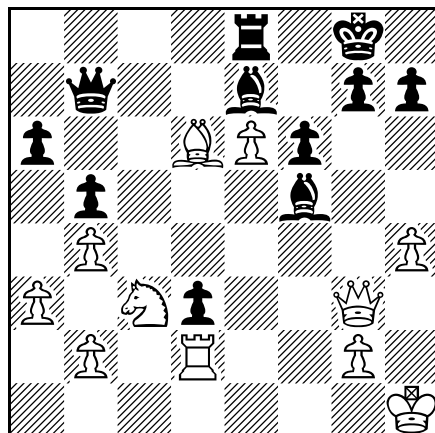
Missing his way. White should challenge the blockader of his passed pawn with 26 ♗c5 when 26...♗xc5 27 ♗xc5 ♗e7 28 ♖xd3 ♖xd3 29 ♗xd3 ♗xe6 is very slightly better for Black because of the strength of his bishop.

**26...♗e4 27 ♖d2?**

Making matters worse because rooks are notoriously poor blockaders. From d2 the rook cannot go to the open e-file which is his main source of possible counterplay.

**27...♗f5 28 ♗c7 ♖c8 29 ♗d6 ♖e8 30 h4**





30 ♔c7 ♖c8 followed by 31...♗xe6 would be winning for Black, so White's attempts to lash out are understandable. The remainder of the game might have been played with both sides short of time; improvements were certainly possible.

30...♔xd6 31 ♖xd6 ♗xe6 32 ♖d8+ ♔f7 33 ♖d5 ♗e5 34 ♖c3 ♖a7 35 ♖d5 ♗e8 36 ♖d6 ♗e2 37 ♖f4 ♗e4 38 ♖g3 ♗e2 39 ♖f4 ♗e1+ 40 ♔h2 ♖g1+ 41 ♔g3 ♗e5 42 ♗f2 ♗xd5 43 ♖c7+ ♗d7 44 ♖c5 ♖xf2+ 45 ♖xf2 d2 46 ♖xf5 d1 ♖0-1

*Game 18*  
**S.Polgar-M.Taimanov**  
 Women-Veterans, London 1996

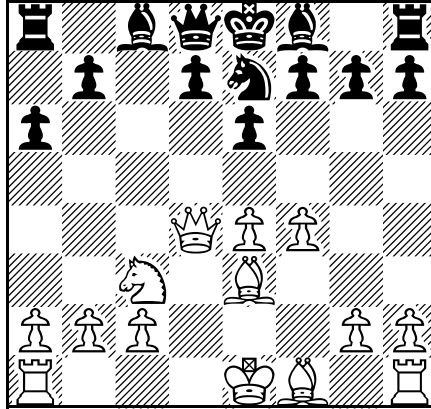
1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 ♖c6 5 ♖c3 a6 6 ♔e3

The position after White's eighth move can also arise after 6 f4 ♖xd4 7 ♖xd4 ♖e7 8 ♔e3.

6...♖xd4

There is a problem with the immediate 6...♖ge7 in that White can then play 7 ♖b3 b5 8 a4! b4? 9 a5! threatening to trap Black's queen with 10 ♔b6. For this reason, it's better to exchange immediately on d4.

7 ♖xd4 ♖e7 8 f4



8 0-0-0 b5 9 ♖d2 ♗c6 10 f4 would transpose into the position after White's 10th move.

### 8...b5 9 0-0-0

9 ♖b6 forces the exchange of queens, but generally speaking this is not a bad thing for Black in the Sicilian. N.Hoiberg-M.Taimanov, Copenhagen 1996 continued 9...♖xb6 10 ♖xb6 ♖b7 11 ♖d3 ♗c8 12 0-0 ♗c6 13 a3 ♖e7 14 ♗ad1 b4 15 ♗b1 g5!? 16 f5 bxa3 17 ♖xa3 ♗e5 when Black already had the more comfortable game.

### 9...♗c6 10 ♖d2 ♖e7 11 ♖f2

Taimanov has had this position several times, for example:

a) 11 ♖e2 ♖a5 12 e5 (12 ♖b1 b4 13 ♗d5 exd5 14 exd5 b3! forces the queens off) 12...b4 13 ♗e4 ♖xa2 14 ♗d6+ ♖xd6 15 ♖xd6 ♖a1+ 16 ♖d2 ♖xb2 17 ♖c5?! (17 ♖e1 f5!? 18 ♖h5+ g6 19 ♖f3 ♖f7 isn't clear, but certainly not worse for Black) 17...♖c3+ 18 ♖c1 b3 19 ♖d3 ♗b8 was winning for Black in A.Martin Gonzalez-M.Taimanov, Montilla 1977.

b) 11 g4 ♖b7 12 ♗g1 ♗c8 13 ♖b1 ♗a5 14 ♖d4 0-0 15 e5 was Xie Jun-M.Taimanov, London Wom-Veterans 1996, and now 15...♖f3 would have been much stronger than the immediate 15...♖c5, with Black taking the initiative.

c) 11 ♖d3 may be White's best when Taimanov would probably play 11...♖b7 12 ♖f2 and now 12...0-0 rather than the 12...d6 13 ♖b1 ♖c7 14 h4 ♗c8 15 ♖b6 ♖b8 16 ♗h3 of T.Tolnai-A.Felsberger, Velden 1994.

### 11...♖b7

Black needs to be aware of the threat of ♖b6, but he could also consider 11...0-0 12 ♖b6 ♖e8

### 12 g4

This traditional plan of attack seems less effective here, and meanwhile Black's play on the other flank is proceeding apace. 12 ♖b1 might have been a wiser choice.

### 12...0-0 13 ♖g2 ♖c8

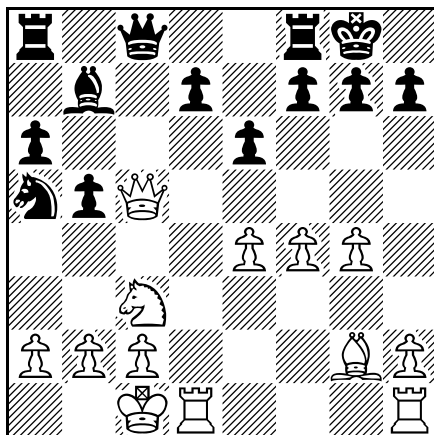
**Question:** That move looks odd, what's Black's idea?

**Answer:** He wants to play ...♘c6-a5-c4, but the immediate 13...♘a5?? is bad because of 14 ♙b6.

14 ♙c5

The prophylactic 14 ♖b1 might have been a better idea.

14...♙xc5 15 ♗xc5 ♘a5!



Offering White an endgame in which he has some activity and space but Black's pawn structure is more compact. In the current situation White's best option is to accept and 14 ♙c5 was quite committal in this respect.

16 ♗xc8

On 16 ♗d6 Black does not need to defend the d7-pawn but can instead proceed with 16...♘c4! 17 ♗xd7 ♘e3, placing White in deep trouble. The engine wants to give up the exchange immediately with 18 ♙f3, and this is certainly better than 18 ♗xc8 ♗axc8 19 ♗d2 ♘xg2 20 ♗xg2 b4 etc.

16...♙xc8

The engine actually prefers to sacrifice a pawn with 16...♗axc8, for example 17 ♗xd7 b4 18 ♘e2 b3 19 axb3 (Or 19 ♘c3 bxa2 20 ♘xa2 ♘b3+ 21 ♖b1 ♘c5 22 ♗d4 f5!) 19...♘xb3+ 20 ♖b1 ♘c5 21 ♗d4 f5!, regaining the pawn with approximate equality. Personally, I like Taimanov's choice, although his pieces are passively placed his pawn structure is very solid; over time he can improve his position and look to exploit White's pawn weaknesses.

17 ♗d3

17 e5 ♗a7 18 ♘e4 might have been better after which Black would start to unravel with 18...♗c7 followed by 19...♙b7. White's position may look nice because of the space advantage, but Black has the more solid pawn structure, can defend his only weakness (d7) and look to gradually improve his position.

17...♗a7 18 ♗hd1 ♗c7 19 b3

After 19 e5 Ribli advised 19...f6 20 exf6 ♗xf6, though it's also worth considering 19...♗d8 followed by bringing the king to e7. Black's position is very solid, and he can afford to

spend time unravelling.

**19...f6 20 h4 ♘c6 21 a4?**

The ongoing series of active moves will be the cause of White's undoing, this move weakens White's king position. 21 ♖b2 would have been a good consolidating move, though Black might then consider 21...g5!? to fight for the e5-square.

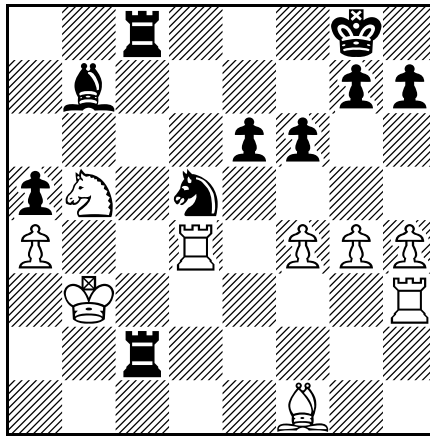
**21...♘b4! 22 ♖h3 bxa4 23 ♙xa4 ♙b7 24 ♖d4 a5 25 ♙f1 ♖fc8 26 ♖b2 d5!**

This powerful central blow leads, at the very least, to the gain of material.

**27 exd5**

White's best try was 27 ♙b5 after which 27...e5 28 fxe5 fxe5 29 ♖xb4 axb4 30 ♘xd5 ♖xc2+ 31 ♖b3 ♙f7 leaves Black the exchange but with some play left in the position.

**27...♘xd5 28 ♘b5 ♖xc2+ 29 ♖b3**



**29...♘xf4!**

This neat combination wins a second pawn.

**30 ♖c3**

**Question:** What happens if White plays 30 ♖xf4 - ?

**Answer:** There follows 30...♙d5+ 31 ♖a3 ♖a2 mate.

**30...♖2xc3+ 31 ♘xc3 ♘d5 32 ♘e4 ♘e3 33 ♘d6 ♖d8 34 ♙c4 ♙d5 0-1**