Valeri Bronznik & Steve Giddins

The Lazy Man's Sicilian

Attack and Surprise White with the Basman-Sale Variation

New In Chess 2015

Contents

Introduction

Dear Chessfriend,

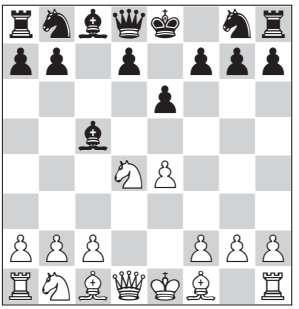
I can well imagine that you are somewhat puzzled by the title of this book. Surely every child knows that if White plays the main line Open Sicilian (with 2.♘f3 followed by 3.d4), then there is no such thing as a variation for lazy men. It is just impossible to play such positions over the board, with no deep home preparation.

The Najdorf, Scheveningen, Dragon, Paulsen and Sveshnikov Variations are all lines where one needs to fill one's head with a mass of variations. We also have to ensure that we do not miss a single important novelty, as every week, the Internet publishes literally hundreds of new Sicilian games. Where is there any room for the lazy man here?

But there is! I was quite stunned when, some years ago, I found an article in the New in Chess Yearbook by Srdjan Sale, in which he gave a number of games with the rare system

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♗c5!?

Looking in my database, I found he had a more-than-respectable score for Black in this line: 20½ out of 29, including the following:
Palas (2500) – Sale (2370) 1992 ½-½
Leko (2555) – Sale (2350) 1993 0-1
Malisauskas (2510) – Sale (2445) 1995 ½-½
Dvoirys (2580) – Sale (2445) 1995 0-1!
So, I decided to put this system under the microscope, and soon found it extremely fascinating. In order to explain my thoughts to you more closely, let us look briefly at the position on the board.



The black bishop is developed to a very active position. From c5, it attacks the enemy knight, keeps an eye on the pawn at f2, and Black will soon increase the pressure with the threat of ...♕d8-b6, as well as ...♘b8-c6. It remains an open question where the ♘g8 will develop, either to f6 or e7.

The most natural moves for White in this position are 5.♘b3, 5.♘c3 or 5.♗e3. In practice, the first of these is the most commonly-played, because after the other two moves, White must reckon with the reply 5...♕b6, which gives Black good counterchances. So...

5.♘b3 ♗b6!

The bishop stays on the a7-g1 diagonal.

6.♘c3

By far the most common move. White develops his knight and takes the important square d5 under control.

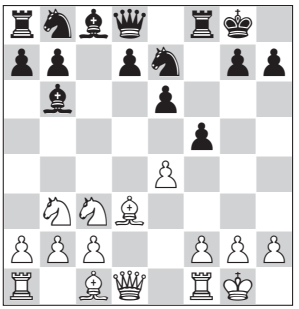
6...♘e7! 7.♗d3

7.♗e2 is much rarer.

7...0-0 8.0-0

The natural decision.

8...f5!



Now the black opening idea is clear:

- After the exchange of the e4- and f5-pawns, the f-file will be opened and the tandem of ♖f8+♗b6 will attack the f2-pawn;
- Once the e4-pawn is gone from the board, Black intends to play ...d7-d5. If he then manages to get in ...e6-e5 as well, he will have a lovely pawn centre;
- It can also happen that the f5-pawn does not get exchanged for the e4-pawn, but instead advances to f4. This gives Black a space advantage on the kingside and ensures the e5-square as an outpost for a black knight;
- The ♘b3 is temporarily out of play, and its activation can sometimes become a serious problem.

Naturally, the foregoing moves are not forced, but they frequently occur and show that the main idea behind 4...♗f8-c5 is to place the bishop

actively, and to exert pressure against d4 and the white kingside. If the bishop is attacked by ♘d4-b3, it drops back to b6 and then Black has the typical counterplay resulting from ...♘g8-e7 and ...f7-f5.

It would of course be quite wrong to claim that this system solves all of Black's problems in the Open Sicilian. But which system does? White naturally has his own trumps and ideas. Even so, I see the following grounds for including this rare system in your opening repertoire:
- This variation requires much less work and preparation time than any of the other main lines in the Open Sicilian;
- Because the system is not (yet) so popular, we do not need to analyse important new games every week;
- The system is still very little known, so there is an excellent chance that after the move 4...♗c5 the opponent will find himself on unfamiliar terrain, which cannot be said of other main line Sicilians;
- In addition, the resulting positions are not so much like those which typically arise in most Sicilian variations. Even if the line does not come as a total shock to the opponent, he is unlikely to have much experience in the types of position that arise.

During my work on this book, I have realised that this system offers a great deal of scope for independent analysis, because the positions reached are often completely unexplored. I have done my best to fill in some of the gaps.

If you are not satisfied to be merely a lazy player, but prefer to do some serious analytical work on the line (for which there is plenty of scope!), then this can only be an advantage, because you will develop a greater feel for the nuances of the typical positions you will reach in your games with 4...♗c5.

I must admit that this system is practically never played by super-GMs, and this might be considered as something which counts against it. But these days, it frequently happens that one of the top players will find some new ideas in a completely forgotten system, after which the revival begins. This is especially well-known in the case of Alexander Morozevich. And within a short time, every player is playing the line.

So, maybe it is just a matter of time before the elite players start taking a serious interest in 4...♗c5.

Valeri Bronznik
Stuttgart, April 2004

A word about the history of our variation

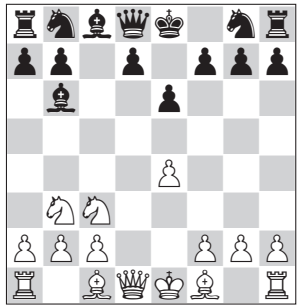
Please don't panic: I am not going to bore you with a detailed, multi-page journey through the entire history of the system. I will make it as short as possible. I also apologise to the reader for the fact that I have relied on standard databases for the information presented here, and have not consulted specialised historical works.

As far as I can establish, the first time the system with 4...♗c5 was played was in a correspondence game between two Dutch cities: Zeist-Amsterdam, 1847. It is noteworthy that the Amsterdammers managed to realise one of the main strategical aims of the system – the attack on f2: 5.♘b3 ♗b6 (staying on the a7-g1 diagonal!) 6.♗d3, and now the attack on f2 followed at once: 6...♕f6?. This was naturally rather premature, but despite reaching a fairly obscure position, the Amsterdam team won in 48 moves.
In 1851, 4...♗c5 was played at the famous London tournament in the first semifinal game Anderssen-Staunton. Unfortunately, after 5.♘c3 Staunton chose not the principled 5...♕b6, but the half-hearted 5...a6, and although his bishop stayed on the a7-g1 diagonal and his knight later developed to e7 (as in most modern games in our variation), he was unable to produce any effective ideas for counterplay.

The correct approach was shown two years later by the Russian player Shumov. His opponent Urusov responded to 4...♗c5 by strengthening the ♘d4 with 5.♗e3. Shumov attacked it again with 5...♕b6!, and after 6.♘c3 he continued with 6...♘c6!. This is the first game which is really important for the theory of this variation.
Naturally, we have today only a sketchy picture of the chess world of those days, and so the next significant event we know of in the history of our variation came four years later, when Louis Paulsen chose the line in all the black games of his match against Morphy (Final of the First American Chess Congress, 1857). Morphy twice replied with 5.♘b3, when Black replied 5...♗b6.
The following game had a serious impact on the development of the variation:

(see next page)

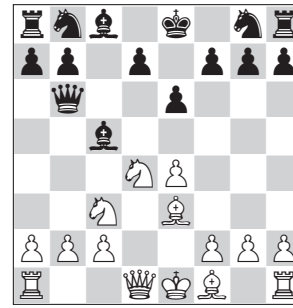
Paul Morphy
Louis Paulsen
New York 1857
1.e4 c5 2.d4 cxd4 3.♘f3 e6 4.♘xd4 ♗c5 5.♘b3 ♗b6!? 6.♘c3



6...♘e7! 7.♗f4 0-0?!
If my database is correct, this was the first game in which the black plan in this 4...♗c5 5.♘b3 variation, involving the typical thrust ...f7-f5, was demonstrated. Unfortunately though, in positions with the white bishop on f4, this plan is not always good, because White can occupy the d6-square at once and prevent the advance ...d7-d5 (at least for a time). As a result, the black queenside is blocked.
8.♗d6! f5 9.e5
and White won in good positional style.

Even today, 7.♗f4 0-0?! 8.♗d6! is regarded as unfavourable for Black. In the other two games, Morphy played 5.♗e3 and was met with 5...♕b6!. Unfortunately, Paulsen in one game snatched the b2-pawn mistakenly:

Paul Morphy
Louis Paulsen
New York 1857
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♗c5 5.♗e3 ♕b6! 6.♘c3



You may remember that this position arose in Urusov-Shumov!
6...♕xb2??
Correct is 6...♘c6!.
7.♘db5! ♗xe3 8.♖b1,
and White won.

Another of Paulsen's games from the same event is worth noting:

Benjamin Raphael
Louis Paulsen
New York 1857
1.e4 c5 2.d4 cxd4 3.♘f3 e6 4.♘xd4 ♗c5 5.♘c3 ♕b6! 6.♘a4 ♕a5+ 7.c3

7...♗xd4! 8.♕xd4 ♘f6 9.f3?!

Stronger is 9.♘c5.

9...♘c6 10.♕d1,

and here, the simplest was 10...d5, with a comfortable game for Black.

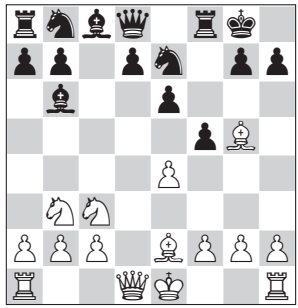
Unfortunately, after 1857, Paulsen did not experiment any further with this variation (½ out of 4 against Morphy was probably too depressing), and this rare system was forgotten altogether for a long time. The few games in which 4...♗c5 was played were of no significance, because their quality left a great deal to be desired and the black players did not produce any interesting ideas.

So it lasted for almost 120 years! But in 1973 the highly talented English master Michael Basman began to bring the variation back to life. First he began to show the possibilities for counterplay that are hidden in this variation:

George Botterill
Michael Basman

Eastbourne 1973

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♗c5 5.♘b3 ♗b6 6.♘c3 ♘e7! 7.♗g5 0-0 8.♗e2 f5!

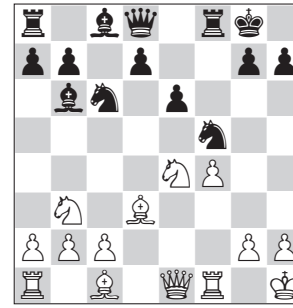


9.exf5? ♗xf2+! 10.♔xf2 ♖xf5+ 11.♗f3 ♖xg5, and Black won.

Robert Bellin
Michael Basman

England 1974

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♗c5 5.♘b3 ♗b6 6.♗d3 ♘e7 7.♘c3 0-0 8.0-0 ♘bc6 9.♔h1 f5! 10.f4 fxe4 11.♘xe4 ♘f5 12.♕e1

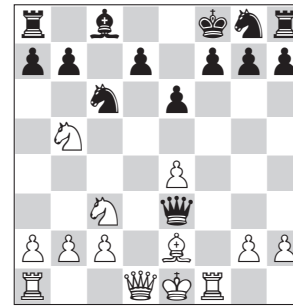


12...a5!? 13.c3 a4 14.♘bd2 d5 15.♘g5 e5!⇄

William Hartston
Michael Basman

London 1974

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♗c5 5.♗e3 ♕b6 6.♘c3 ♘c6 7.♘db5 ♗xe3 8.fxe3 ♕xe3+ 9.♗e2 ♔f8!? 10.♖f1



10...♘ge7! 11.a4 ♘g6! 12.♖f2 ♘ge5! 13.♔f1 h5! 14.h3 h4 15.♖a3 ♕c5 16.a5 ♖h6!,

and White has insufficient compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

After Basman's successes, the variation began to attract some other interested players, although amongst really strong players, only Jim Plaskett played it much, and without great success.

The next important step in the evolution of the system with 4...♗c5 came from IM Srdjan Sale. Between 1992 and 1999, he played this variation, and did so with unbelievable success. Many strong GMs must in their games against him have experienced how unpleasant and dangerous this unusual system can be.

After Sale's impressive successes, the number of strong players using the system became greater. Despite this, it has remained something of a theoretical black hole to this day – so much the better for those who devote attention to this truly interesting and promising system!

Before I turn to the main contents of this book, I should clear up one more thing. To date, this system has never acquired an accepted name. One could call it the Paulsen System, but this name is already used for another Sicilian system.

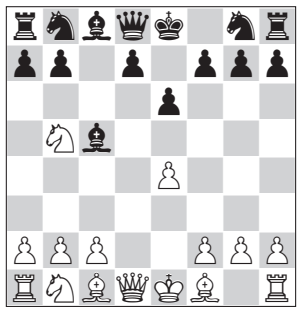
In the publication *Randspringer* (5/1992) the system with 4...♗c5 was called the 'Ur-Paulsen'. This has some logic to it, but even so, I cannot accept such a name, because Paulsen turned away from using 4...♗c5 too rapidly. The truth is that he was not much in love with the system, so it seems a little wrong to bind the two of them together for ever.

On the other hand, I must emphasise that the games of Basman and Sale have made an enormous contribution to the line. In view of this, I have decided to call it the 'Basman-Sale Variation'.

Chapter 2

The Sharp 5.♘b5

Game 5
Mikhail Brodsky
Piotr Staniszewski
Rowy 1999 (8)
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♗c5 5.♘b5



The knight leaves the attacked square and threatens the squares d6 and c7. Now Black must reckon with 6.♘d6+.

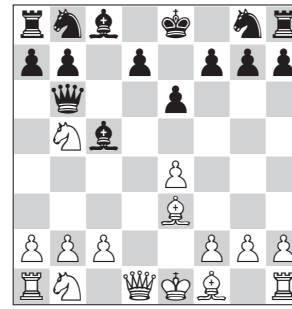
5...♕b6

As in the variation 5.♘c3, this is a fine square for the queen. From here, she covers d6, attacks f2 and controls d4.

6.♗e3!?

An alternative is 6.♕f3 – White protects f2, develops the queen and prepares ♕f3-g3, attacking g7, in some variations. Unfortunately, there is too little material with this continuation but I think Black is OK, e.g. 6...a6 7.♘5c3 ♘c6 8.♕g3 ♘ge7 9.♗d3 0-0 10.0-0 (now the threat is 11.♘a4) 10...♗d4!? (10...♕d8 11.♘d2 ♘g6 12.♘b3 ♗e7, as played in the game Dutreeuw-Christiansen, Antwerp 1993, strikes me as too passive) 11.♘d2 f5! 12.♘c4 ♕a7 13.♘d6 ♗e5 14.♗f4 ♕d4 15.♗xe5 ♘xe5 16.♘xc8 ♖axc8 17.exf5 (17.♖ad1? f4! with advantage for Black) 17...♘xf5 18.♗xf5 ♖xf5 with comfortable play for Black.

Now back to the position after 6.♗e3:



This variation is one of the most aggressive reactions to the Basman-Sale System: White wants to remove the ♗c5 as a defender of the weakened dark squares, especially the important square d6, and to do so, he is prepared to sacrifice a pawn. He then hopes to punish Black for his unusual opening play, with ♕d1-d6 or ♘b5-d6+. Of course, there are close similarities with the line 5.♘c3 ♕b6 6.♗e3

♘c6 7.♘db5 ♗xe3 8.fxe3 ♕xe3+ 9.♗e2, examined in the previous chapter. The only difference is that here, neither side has developed his queen's knight. This circumstance definitely favours White, for two reasons:

1. He has the option of bringing his queen's knight out to a3 or d2, which, as we shall see, is often a dangerous alternative to ♘c3.

2. The fact that Black's queen's knight is still on b8 means that ♘c7 threatens to win a rook, even if it is not actually check. This in turn means that Black will be forced to put his queen's knight on a6 in this variation, from where it is less active than on c6 (it does not cover the key e5-square, for instance).

These two factors make the variation examined in this chapter more dangerous for Black than that seen in Game 4, and it requires careful study.

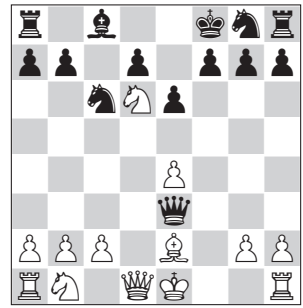
It should also be pointed out that this position can also arise via the alternative move-order 5.♗e3 ♕b6 6.♘b5.

6...♗xe3

The most principled response, but the alternative 6...♘f6 is discussed at the end of this chapter.

7.fxe3

The immediate 7.♘d6+?! forces the black king to f8, rather than e7, but on the other hand, removes the threat of a check on c7. After 7...♔f8 8.fxe3 ♕xe3+ 9.♗e2, Black can exploit the latter factor with 9...♘c6, when his control of e5 is more important than anything else.



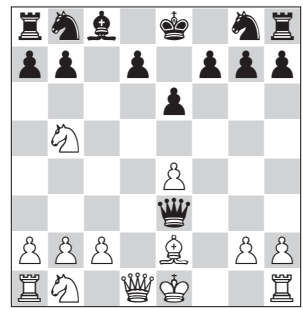
analysis diagram

The old game Williams-Basman, Woolacombe 1973, continued 10.♖f1 ♘f6 (again exploiting the increased control of e5) 11.♘a3 b6 12.♘ac4 ♕c5 13.c3 b5 14.e5?! (14.b4 ♕g5 15.♘a5 retains more compensation) 14...♘xe5 15.b4 and now 15...♕c6 (better than Basman's 15...♕c7, after which 16.♘xb5 was still unclear) forces 16.♕d4 ♘xc4 17.♗xc4 ♔e7 18.0-0-0 bxc4, and White's dark-square grip probably doesn't compensate fully for the two pawn deficit.

7...♕xe3+

Black accepts the offer, dangerous though this looks. I think he is justified in doing so, but I have also looked for alternatives, which I present after this game.

8.♗e2



8...♘a6!

This is practically the only way to defend c7. The game Kurylo-Lacrosse, corr. 2001, ended catastrophically after 8...♔d8? 9.♘d6 ♘h6 10.♘d2 ♘c6 11.♘2c4 ♕f4 12.♕d3 b5 13.♘xb5 f5 14.♕c3 ♕h4+ 15.g3 ♕xe4 16.0-0-0 ♕xe2 17.♖he1, and Black resigned.

9.♘1c3

A) 9.♕d2 is dubious here, on account of 9...♕xd2+ 10.♘xd2 ♔e7!, e.g. 11.0-0-0 ♘f6 12.♖hf1 (after 12.e5 there follows 12...♘e8 and then ...f7-f6) 12...d5 – Black frees himself and retains a healthy extra pawn, Hanhörster-Dobosz, Görlitz 1999;

B) However, another challenging move for Black to face is 9.♘1a3. Black suffered a crushing defeat after playing standard moves in the following game: 9...♘h6 10.♘d6+ ♔e7 11.♖f1 f6 12.♘ac4 ♕c5 13.e5! ♕d5 14.♕c1, and Black was already defenceless in Sahl-Stray, Norwegian tt 2007.

So what should Black play after 9.♘1a3 ? After some thought, Stockfish suggests 9...d5 10.exd5 ♘f6, when there could follow the sharp variation 11.♘c4 (11.dxe6 ♗xe6 12.♘c4 ♗xc4 13.♘d6+ ♔f8 14.♘xc4 ♕e7 15.0-0 is a dangerous try) 11...♕c5 12.♘cd6+ ♔e7 13.dxe6 ♖d8 14.♕d4 ♖xd6 (14...♕xd4? 15.♘f5+) 15.♘xd6 ♕xd6 16.♕xd6+ ♔xd6 17.0-0-0+♔e7 18.exf7 ♘c7 with rough equality. This is clearly another variation which the black player needs to prepare carefully.

C) The game Lubbe-Ebert, German U16 Championship 2005, saw White play the immediate check 9.♘d6+ ♔e7 and only then 10.♘a3, which also brought him a crushing win after 10...♘f6? (as usual in this type of position, the knight is bad on f6) 11.♘ac4 ♕c5 12.e5 ♘e8 13.♕d2 with virtually a winning advantage for White.

Instead, 10...♕c5 11.♘ab5 ♘c7 is Stockfish's logical choice, immediately challenging the white occupation of d6. After the further moves 12.♖f1 f6 (an important reason for not playing ...♘f6 in such structures) 13.♕d2 ♘xb5 14.♘xb5 a6 15.♘c3 ♕d6! (more accurate than 15...b5 16.0-0-0) 16.♕e3 (16.♕xd6+ ♔xd6 17.0-0-0+ ♔e7 is fine for Black) 16...b5, the uncastled black king and his undeveloped kingside give White enough for the pawn, but no more than that. As always in such positions, the command of e5 is a big defensive factor for Black.

9...♘h6!

An original and creative way to play. The second black knight joins his colleague on the edge of the

board. However, in this opening, one frequently needs to play in an unusual and non-stereotyped way and it is an excellent opening for developing such skills.

There is a concrete point to the move – just as the knight on a6 defends c7, so the one on h6 covers the f7-square, the Achilles Heel of the black position.

What can happen after the 'normal' 9...♘f6 is shown by the game Staniszewski-Ostrowski, Augustow tt 1996: 10.♘d6+ ♔f8 11.♖f1! h5 12.♘c4! ♕g5 13.♕d6+ ♔g8 (if 13...♔e8 14.♕a3 ♘c5 15.♘b5 ♔f8 16.e5 ♘e4 17.♘bd6! wins) 14.♕e7 d6 15.♘xd6 ♗d7 16.♘xf7 ♕h4+ 17.g3 ♕xh2 18.0-0-0 ♖e8 19.♕a3 ♔xf7 20.♖xd7+ ♔g6 21.♖xb7 and White was winning.

In addition, the position after 9...♘e7 10.♘d6+ ♔f8 11.♘c4 (11.♘xc8?! ♖xc8 12.♕xd7 ♘b4 gives Black counterplay) 11...♕c5 12.♕d2, followed by 0-0-0, ♖h1-f1 and eventually e4-e5, seems to me to be better for White.

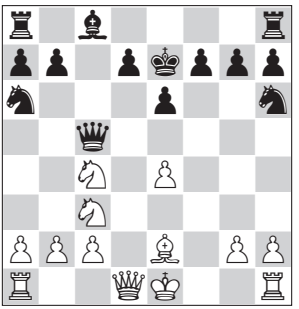
10.♘d6+ ♔e7

Naturally not 10...♔f8? 11.♘xc8 ♖xc8 12.♕xd7.

11.♘c4

Or 11.♖f1 f6 (11...♕c5! is possibly more accurate, intending to meet 12.♘c4 with 12...b5, when Black looks to have solved most of his problems) 12.♘c4 ♕c5 13.♕d2 b5?! (13...♘f7! is safer, with equal chances) 14.♘e3?! (14.e5! is dangerous for Black) 14...♘c7 15.0-0-0 ♖d8 and White probably has enough for the pawn, but no more, Pleasants-Smith, England tt 2008.

11...♕c5



After 11 moves, we have reached a position worthy of closer examination. Black has two extra pawns, but his position suffers from a number of drawbacks:

- His king is in the centre and cannot castle.
- The knights on a6 and h6 create at least a rather comical effect.
- The bishop on c8 is still undeveloped, and also blocks the rook on a8.
- The square d6 and the d7-pawn are both problems, especially if White gets in e4-e5.
- The white rooks will have a comfortable location on the half-open f-file.

So, does all this mean that Black's opening play was at fault and he should regret his greed?

I do not believe so at all! Let us also mark the following:

- White has also not yet completed his development. Short castling is prevented at the moment, whilst long castling will take at least two more moves.

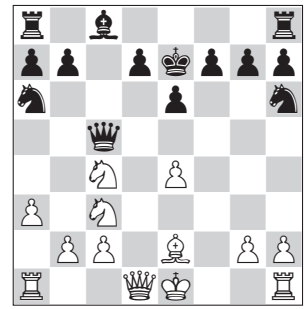
• The white e-pawn is isolated and can eventually become weak.
• The black queen is very active on c5 and controls the important squares d6, e5, d4, g5 (preventing ♕d2-g5+) and, of course, g1.
• The e5-square can serve as a beautiful outpost for a black piece, which cannot be attacked by a white pawn, and Black can strengthen his control over this square with ...f7-f6 and/or ...d7-d6.
• The black knights may not look so lovely at the moment, but if in time he manages the manoeuvre ...f7-f6 and then ...♘h6-f7, this knight will control the squares d6 and e5 and will be fulfilling an extremely useful function. White must also reckon with ...♘h6-g4, whilst the other knight can at some point emerge via c5 or c7.
• It is not easy for White to get at the enemy king, as the latter is relatively secure behind his three pawns.
• If White plays e4-e5, to secure the square d6 and fix the d7-pawn backward, the pawn on e5 can in many cases be challenged by means of ...f7-f6.

Now that we understand this position somewhat better, let us proceed with the game continuation.

12.a3!?

After 12.e5 there could follow 12...f6!? 13.exf6+ gxf6 14.♘e4 ♕d5! with unclear play. Another interesting idea is 12...♘f5!?, intending 13.♖f1 f6!?.

The developing move 12.♕d2 can be answered with the flank action 12...b5!?, e.g. 13.♘e3 (13.♘a5 b4 14.♘b5 ♘g4! 15.♗xg4 ♕xb5 16.♘b3 ♕e5 looks very good for Black) 13...♘c7 14.0-0 ♗b7, and I cannot see any adequate compensation for White's pawn deficit. Also worth considering is 12...f6!? followed by ...♘h6-f7.



But the text-move threatens 13.b4, driving away the black queen and enabling White to castle short, and also removing Black's control of the important square d4. At first sight, things do not look so great for Black.

12...b5?!

Black believes that his greatest danger comes from the white knight on c4, which attacks the important square d6 and supports the advance e4-e5. However, the text is not tactically watertight, and leads by force to an inferior position.

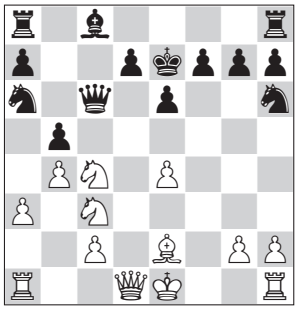
My analysis suggests that the best move was 12...♘g4! with the idea of 13...♕f2+. Then various possibilities could follow:

A) 13.♗xg4 ♕xc4, and without the ♘c4, the white threats are not half so strong, whilst Black still keeps his extra pawn;

B) 13.♕d2 b5 14.e5 bxc4 (again the knight perishes) 15.♕g5+ ♘f6 is unclear;

C) 13.♖f1 ♘xh2 (13...♘e3!? 14.♘xe3 ♕xe3 15.♘b5 ♕c5) 14.b4 ♕c7 15.♘b5 ♕g3+ 16.♖f2 d5! 17.exd5 ♗d7 with counterplay. These variations show that 12...♘g4 leads to a sharp and complicated game.

13.b4 ♕c6

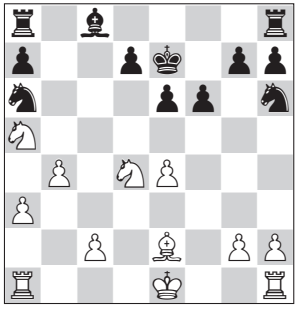


14.♕d4!

Probably Staniszewski had overlooked or underestimated this move.

The knight is immune: 14...bxc4? runs into 15.♕xg7 ♖g8 16.♕xh6 ♖xg2 17.♖f1 (17.b5?! ♕c5 18.♕h4+ f6 19.♕xh7+ ♔d8 is not so clear) 17...♔d8 18.e5 with a lasting attack.

14...f6 15.♘a5 ♕b6 16.♘xb5 ♕xd4 17.♘xd4



The position has suddenly become much quieter. White has regained his pawn and the weakness of the enemy d-pawn gives him clearly the better chances. It makes little sense for us to delve too deeply into the rest of the game.

17...♘f7 18.c4 d6 19.♖c1 ♘e5 20.♘dc6+ ♘xc6 21.♘xc6+ ♔f7?

21...♔d7 22.♘a5 ♔c7.

22.♖d1 ♘b8 23.♖xd6 ♘xc6 24.♖xc6 ♗d7 25.♖c7 ♔e7 26.♔f2 ♖hc8 27.♖xc8 ♖xc8 28.c5 ♗c6 29.♔e3 ♖b8 30.♖d1 f5 31.exf5 exf5 32.g3 a5 33.b5 1-0

In this game, Black's opening clearly failed, but we have seen that he has the much stronger continuation 12...♘g4!, after which the game is completely unclear.

However, maybe you would like to have a playable alternative in the variation with 5.♘b5 ♕b6 6.♗e3 ? – so let us return to the position after 6...♗xe3 7.fxe3:

Practice has seen two alternative continuations to the main line 7...♕xe3+ in this position: 7...♘f6 and 7...♔e7. Results-wise, Black

can be satisfied with both, but I am not totally convinced by the results alone. In more detail:

A) 7...♘f6 and now:

A1) 8.♕d4 ♕xd4 (8...♔e7 9.♘1c3 ♕xd4 10.exd4, and thanks to his space advantage White stands somewhat better, Koekoek-Van Beek, Hengelo 2001. 9.♕xb6 axb6 10.♗d3 also comes into consideration – here I would prefer the white doubled pawns on e3 and e4, which control the centre and are hard to attack, to Black's doubleton on the b-file. This position is probably also somewhat better for White) 9.exd4 ♔d8 (probably better than 9...♘a6?! 10.e5 with a clear advantage, as given in the First Edition) 10.e5 ♘e8 11.♘1c3?! (11.♗d3 ♘c6 12.c3 f6 13.exf6 gxf6 is pretty close to equality) 11... a6?! (11...d5 12.exd6 a6 13.♘a3 ♘xd6 is again close to equality) 12.♘a3?! (12.♘d6 ♘xd6 13.exd6 still causes Black a few problems) 12...d5 13.exd6 ♘xd6, with a reasonable position for Black, Pijpers-Hopman, Groningen 2008. None of these positions are especially exciting for Black, but it appears they may offer a good chances of achieving equality.

This may still be acceptable for the second player, but certainly not if Black is playing for a win. In addition, White has another good continuation:

A2) 8.♘d6+ ♔e7 9.♘c4!?.

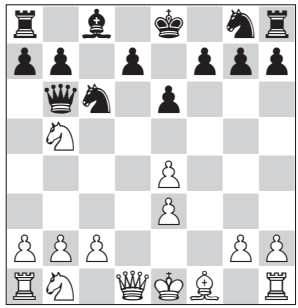
Wherever the black queen goes to, White will play e4-e5 next move, fixing the black d-pawn, and will have the initiative, e.g. 9...♕c5 10.e5 ♘e8 11.♘c3 b5 12.♘e4 ♕d5 13.♘cd6 ♘c6 14.♕xd5!? (14.♗xb5 ♕xe5 15.♗xc6 dxc6 16.♕d4 ♕xd4 17.♘xc8+ ♖xc8 18.exd4 ♘f6 19.♘c5±, Hruciov-Rusev, Oropesa del Mar jr 2000) 14... exd5 15.♘xe8 ♖xe8 16.♘d6 ♖d8 17.0-0-0 with the better chances.

B) 7...♔e7 8.♕d4 ♕xd4 (after 8...♘f6 we reach Variation A1) 9.exd4 a6 10.♘5a3, and, similar to variation A1, White's chances in the endgame are somewhat preferable. Also interesting is 8.♕d3!? (threatening 9.♕a3+) 8...♘a6 9.e5!?.

These examples show that, in the last diagram position, the squares d4 and e5 are of great significance. Remember this: in variations A1 and B White can secure the somewhat better endgame with ♕d1-d4. In line A2, he fixes the d7-pawn backwards with e4-e5 and strengthens his control over the square d6, and the same advance occurs with similar ideas in the other variation.

In view of these considerations, I came to a simple solution:

C) 7...♘c6!?.



analysis diagram

Black takes the key squares d4 and e5 under control, so now the move 8.♕d4 is no longer possible.

Similarly, with the continuation 8.♘d6+: after 8...♔e7 (8...♔f8!?) 9.♘c4 ♕c5 White no longer has the move 10.e5 whilst Black meanwhile threatens the strong move 10...b5.

Of course, 8.♘1c3 is also possible, but then after 8...♕xe3+, we reach the variation 5.♘c3 ♕b6 6.♗e3 ♘c6 7.♘db5 ♗xe3 8.fxe3 ♕xe3+ (see Game 4), which is fine for Black.

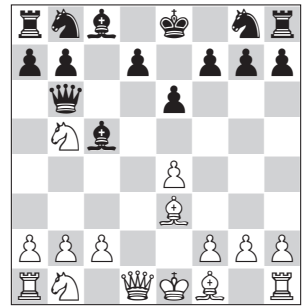
8.♕d2 is Stockfish's choice, and probably the most dangerous. White defends the e3-pawn and prepares to develop, arguing that Black's long-term development problems and dark-square weaknesses are more important than the doubled e-pawns.

Play could then continue 8...♘f6 9.♘d6+ ♔f8 10.♘c3 ♕xb2 11.♖b1 ♕a3 12.♗e2, and here White certainly has quite dangerous compensation for the pawn, although possibly not a clear advantage per se.

Sadler's Advice

If Black is not satisfied even with any of these alternatives, there is one other possibility which I (SWG) can suggest. This resulted from my seeking the advice of top GM Matthew Sadler. He suggested that Black should go back one move further, to this position:

(see diagram next column)



Sadler's opinion was that the exchange on e3 increases Black's problems here. Admittedly, it is extremely tempting to double the white pawns, but then Black cannot avoid a knight check on d6, which seriously disrupts his position.

Instead, Matthew thought Black's best try is

6...♘f6

Interestingly, this was the choice of the great pioneer Louis Paulsen, against Morphy in one of the games of their meeting at the New York Congress of 1857. Morphy now chose

7.♗xc5 ♕xc5

and now the toothless 8.♘d6+?! and after 8...♔e7 9.♘xc8+ ♖xc8 Black was already doing perfectly well.

The game continued 10.♗d3 ♘c6 11.0-0 and now Paulsen went in for the radical 11...h5!? (11...♔f8 is fine for Black) 12.♘d2 h4 13.h3?! g5 with very interesting dark-square counterplay (compare some of Larsen's games on the black side of the Maroczy Bind Sicilian in the 1980s and 90s, for an almost identical plan!).

Instead of the harmless knight check on d6, White should prefer

8.♘1c3

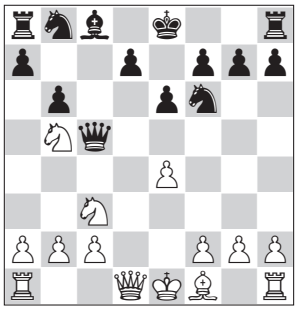
which Sadler regarded as slightly better for White. This is undoubtedly correct, but after some checking with Stockfish, I (SWG) believe that Black's positon is playable nonetheless. It looks somewhat unpleasant at first sight, as his dark squares are weak, but by patient play, he can gradually neutralise most of White's advantage and maintain a tenable position.

Some analysis:

8...b6!

I believe this is Black's best move here.

8...♔e7!? keeps the knight out of d6, but does not inspire confidence after simply 9.♕d2 a6 10.♘d4; 8...0-0?! is also less good, since after 9.♕d6, Black finds it harder to evict the enemy knight which lands on d6. Black needs his king on e7 in such endings.



9.♕d6

9.f4 0-0 10.e5 ♘e8 11.♕f3 ♘c6 12.0-0-0 f6 is another critical line. Black can remove the e5-pawn, but still has some problems after 13.♘e4 ♕e7 14.exf6 ♘xf6 15.♘bd6.

Instead, 9...♕e3+ 10.♗e2 0-0 11.♕d2 ♕xd2+ 12.♔xd2 ♘e8 is another way to play, and possibly best. Although White has succeeded in reaching the endgame with the black king on g8, rather than e7, he will not actually manage to occupy d6. 13.♖hd1 a6 14.♘d4 ♗b7 15.♔e3 d6 leaves Black slightly passive, but defending everything.

9...♕xd6 10.♘xd6+ ♔e7 11.0-0-0 ♘c6

and now White has several tries:

A) 12.♗b5 ♘e8 13.♘c4 ♗b7 14.♖d2 ♖d8 15.♖hd1 ♘b8 16.♘e3 a6 17.♗e2 b5 is again slightly better for White, but Black is solid enough and should hold without too much trouble;

B) 12.f4 ♘e8 13.e5 ♘xd6 14.♖xd6 f6 is fine for Black;

C) 12.♖d2 ♘e8 13.♘xe8 ♖xe8 14.♘b5 ♖d8 15.♘d6 (15.♗e2 d6 16.♖hd1 ♗a6 holds everything, although White remains somewhat better) 15...♘a5 and Black will exchange off the other knight with ...♘b7, with only a symbolic disadvantage.

In all these lines, Black is somewhat passive, and play tends to be for two results, but they represent a reasonable way for Black to handle the position, if he is willing to suffer a little and settle for half a point. Of course, if he wants blood, he should grab the pawn on e3, and hope that the resulting crimson tide is not his own.

Conclusion

After 5.♘b5 ♕b6 White usually sacrifices a pawn with 6.♗e3 in order after 6...♗xe3 7.fxe3 ♕xe3+ 8.♗e2 to try to exploit the weakness of the dark squares in the black position, especially d6 and c7.

By comparison with the similar variation 5.♘c3 ♕b6 6.♗e3 ♘c6 7.♘db5 ♗xe3 8.fxe3 ♕xe3+ 9.♗e2, here the moves ♘b1-c3 and ...♘b8-c6 have not been played, which seems in White's favour. In some variations White can take advantage of this and play the manoeuvre ♘d2-c4. In addition, the move ♘b5-c7 can potentially win the rook on a8, even if it is not check.

This line is a very aggressive one and it requires great care and accuracy from Black.

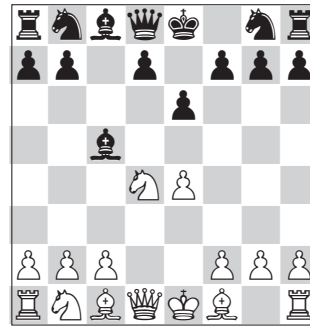
The most principled reaction is to accept the pawn – 6...♗xe3 7.fxe3 ♕xe3 8.♗e2 ♘a6!, when White must prove his compensation. Although he succeeds in doing so in Game 5, we have seen that Black has a clear improvement in 12...♘g4!. The resulting positions are sharp and unclear, although it must be said that Black's practical results are not good in this variation.

If this does not appeal to Black, or if he simply wants an alternative to fall back on, then he has several alternatives at move 7 and also Sadler's suggestion at move 6.

Overall, I (SWG) think that this gambit line is one of the most dangerous responses to the Basman-Sale system. It is true that in the line 5.♘b5 ♕b6 6.♗e3 White is also taking some risks, but in practice his position seems to be easier to play. Whatever his intended line, Black needs to be thoroughly prepared in this variation.

Index of Variations

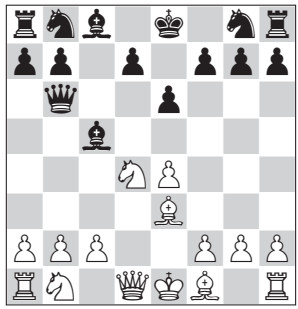
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♗c5



5.♘c3 ♕b6

5.♘b5 ♕b6

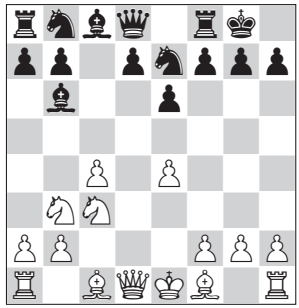
5.♗e3 ♕b6



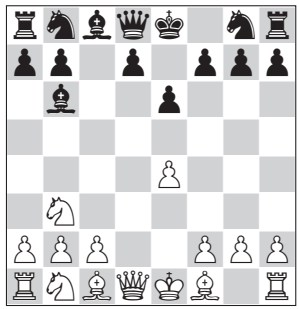
5.♘b3 ♗b6 6.♘c3 ♘e7

(5.♘b3 ♗b6 6.♘c3 ♘e7 continued)

5.♘b3 ♗b6 6.c4 ♘e7 7.♘c3 0-0



5.♘b3 ♗b6



1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.♘c3