

- 1 e4 e5
- 2 Nf3 Nc6
- 3 Bb5 a6
- 4 Ba4 Nf6
- 5 Bxc6

The principle behind the delayed Spanish exchange variation is that, whereas in the normal exchange 4 Bxc6 dxc6 5 O-O, Black often supports his centre by ... f6 and develops his king's knight at e7, here the knight is 'misplaced' and ... f6 is impossible immediately.

- 5 ... dxc6
- 6 d3 Bd6
- 7 Nbd2 c5
- 8 b3 Be6
- 9 Bb2 Nd7

Now it is possible to see why the delayed exchange is rarely played. The knight retreat does not constitute a loss of tempo, as White had to 'lose' a move himself (by 4 Ba4) in order to tempt it to f6 in the first place! Black has achieved a harmonious development of his minor pieces, has prevented White from playing d4, and is almost ready to castle queenside when his rook will be on the half open d-file.

- 10 Nc4 f6
- 11 Nh4 g6
- 12 g3 Qe7
- 13 Qd2 O-O-O

The transition from opening to middle game begins. White's plan is to prepare the pawn break f4 to put pressure on the centre and the a1-h8 diagonal. Black, meanwhile, must maintain a firm hold on the e5 square, whilst generating counterplay on the queenside, in particular on the d-file.

White's is the easier of these two plans to carry out. It does, however, necessitate him castling on the queenside (f4 would be too risky with the white king on the kingside) which will present Black a target to aim at.

- 14 Ng2 Rhe8
- 15 O-O-O Nb8!

The knight is headed for d4 where it will obstruct the white bishop's view of the e5 and f6 pawns, and thus reduce the effectiveness of White's projected f4 break.

- 16 Nce3 Nc6
- 17 f4 Nd4

Now 18 Bxd4 is clearly unacceptable,

as after 18 ... cxd4 the black pieces will infiltrate White's queenside via the weakened black squares. After 18 c3, Black will play 18 ... Nc6 and White's own pawn blocks the bishop's diagonal. If he then moves that to c4, the knight will hop back to d4!

- 18 Rhf1 b5
- 19 c3 Nc6
- 20 f5!

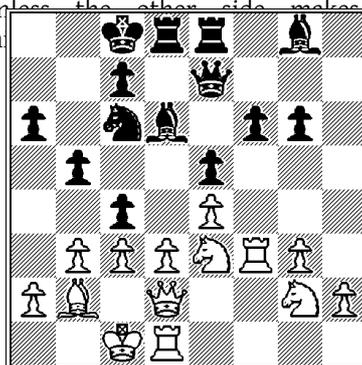
In view of the predicament of his bishop, White shifts the focus of his attack from the a1-h8 diagonal to the f-file.

- 20 ... Bg8
- 21 fxg6 hxg6
- 22 Rf3 c4!

This move involves a pawn sacrifice. That statement alone is often enough for a move to be labelled risky. However, in the particular circumstances of this position, I believe that it is the only move that is not risky!

The point is this - if White is left to build up his attack unhindered, he will (with moves such as Rdf1, Qf2, Nh4 and Ng4) provoke weaknesses on the f and g-files. He may, for instance, force Black to play ... g5 whereupon there will be a hole at f5 (ideal for a white knight!) and a backward pawn at f6. There is simply no way that Black can defend his kingside well enough to retain equal chances.

But how can this be? Black equalised in the opening, and began the middle game with a clear and precise plan (see note to Black's 13th) which he has carried out inventively (15 ... Nb8!) and correctly (17 ... Nd4, 18 ... b5). Logic does not permit an equal position to become favourable to one side, unless the other side makes a m



(position after 22 ... c4)

Black has not made a mistake - and with 22 ... c4! he does retain equal chances! Logic tells Black that he must be consistent, and continue with his plan of pressurising the queenside, and in particular the d-file. An attempt to defend passively on the kingside would be a mistake! This is why White would get the advantage in that case.

If White now 'wins' the pawn (by 23 bxc4 bxc4 24 dxc4 or by 23 bxc4 bxc4 24 Nxc4 Bxc4 25 dxc4), he will be burdened with doubled and isolated c-pawns which will be easy for Black to attack (eg by ... Na5 or ... Qe6). In addition, his bishop would be even more shut in than it was before. That's at least a pawnsworth!

An incidental point of 22 ... c4 is that it sets a trap...

- 23 Nd5? Bxd5
- 24 exd5

... which White falls into! If Black has to move his knight to b8 or a5, then he will stand worse...

- 24 ... e4!
- 25 dxe4 Ne5

... but e5 is the ideal square. Now 26 Rff1 would allow 26 ... Nd3+ 27 Kb1 or Kc2 Qxe4 so White's next two moves are forced.

- 26 Re3 Bc5
- 27 Re2 Nd3+
- 28 Kb1 Rxd5
- 29 bxc4?

It is understandable that White wishes to swap pawns, as he would otherwise need to be perpetually on guard against the possibility of a ... b4 thrust (or an ... a5 one, if White plays b4 himself). Nonetheless it exposes White's king (fatally as it turns out), and this becomes another 'bad move created by a bad position' as Dr Tarrasch used to call them.

- 29 ... bxc4
- 30 Ne1 Rd6
- 31 Nxd3 cxd3

Finally, the knight that has wreaked havoc on its journey from g8 to f6 to d7 to b8 to c6 to d4 to c6 again then e5 and d3, has been captured, but (in addition to walking off with the 'man-of-the-match' award) it leaves a mighty passed pawn on d3 in its wake.

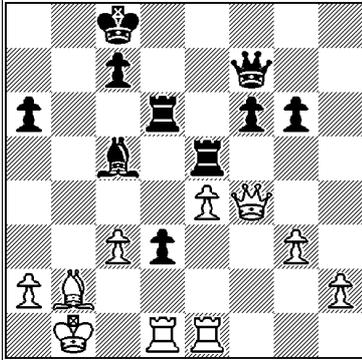
The pawn, in turn, has left hole on

the c4 square. Ideal for a...

32 Ree1 Qf7

... queen! Note also that while the knight and pawn were hogging the limelight, the black rook has crept quietly into position at d6.

33 Qf4 Re5!



(position after 33 ... Re5)

It wasn't too late to ruin all the good work. The hasty 33 ... Qc4? would be met by 34 e5! and White would be back in the game.

The text occupies e5 and aims Black's last piece at the queenside. 34 c4 in reply would lose to 34 ... Qxc4 35 Bxe5 Rb6+ 36 Ka1 (or 36 Bb2 Qc2+ 37 Ka1 Qxb2 mate) 36 ... Qd4+ 37 Bxd4 Bxd4 mate - I know that 36 ... Bd4+ mated as well, but I'd have sacrificed the queen - and let's be honest, so would you!

34 Qf3 Qc4

35 Rd2

This loses immediately. However, Black's attack does seem to be winning in all lines. 35 g4 (an attempt to prevent ... f5, so that White may play Rd2 safely with Rd1 to follow) 35 ... Ba3! is a pretty line. 36 Bxa3 loses to 36 ... Rb5+ 37 Bb2 Rxb2+ 38 Kxb2 Rb6+ etc. Meanwhile, Black threatens 36 ... Bxb2 with ... Rb5 and ... Rb6 to follow, and he also threatens to play ... Rb5 and ... Rb6 straight away.

35 Kc1 also loses to 35 ... Ba3!, while 35 Ka1 is beaten by 35 ... Bb6 when White is unable to cope with the threat of 36 ... Ra5 37 a3 Bc5.

Finally 35 Qg2 removes the pressure on Black's d3 pawn allowing 35 ... Rb6 with 36 ... Ba3 or 36 ... Bd6 to follow and 37 ... Re5 or 37 ... Ra5 next.

35 ... f5

36 Resigns

There is no point in trying to play on against two such powerful passed pawns as Black will have after ... fxe4.