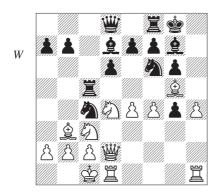
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9 15 f4!?: The Ultimate Main Line

1 e4 c5 2 🖺 f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 🖺 xd4 🖺 f6 5 🖺 c3 g6 6 \(\) e3 \(\) g7 7 f3 \(\) c6 8 \(\) d2 0-0 9 \(\) c4 \(\) d7 10 0-0-0 \(\) c8 11 \(\) b3 \(\) e5 12 h4 h5 13 \(\) g5 \(\) c5 14 g4 hxg4 15 f4 \(\) c4 (D)



This position represents what came to be regarded as the modern main line of Soltis Variation in the mid-1990s. However, my use of the term 'modern' is something of a misnomer in this context: most professionals handling the white pieces currently steer clear of these lines because Black's defensive resources have simply proven too powerful. Following 15...\(\)2c4 White has three options, only the last of which gives White any real chance to fight for an advantage:

A: 16 **≜xc4** 98 **B:** 16 **₩d3** 98 **C:** 16 **₩e2** 104

A)

16 ≜xc4

White captures on c4 immediately, thereby gaining time to launch an attack in the centre immediately. Unfortunately (well, not for us!) Black is already a pawn up and is well placed to meet any central strike.

16... \alphaxc4 17 e5

Other possibilities leave White in difficul-

a) 17 \div d3?! runs into 17...\dixc3!.

17...公h5! 18 營d3

Several commentators have described this move as forced, which is understandable given the alternatives: the immediate 18 exd6? runs into 18... \(\text{Z} \text{xd4} \) (I imagine the more obvious 18... \(\text{f6} \) may be even stronger) 19 dxe7 \(\text{Z} \text{xd2} \) 20 exd8 \(\text{\text{Z}} \) \(\text{Z} \text{xd1} \) \(\text{Z} \text{xd8} \) \(\text{2} \text{xd8} \) \(\text{2} \text{cd} \) when the bishop-pair, the passed g-pawn and White's weak kingside pawns combine to provide Black with a decisive advantage according to Sherzer. Similarly the ambitious lunge 18 \(\text{\text{D}} \) d5 can be reprimanded accordingly with 18... f6 19 exd6 exd6 \(-+ \) as in Rodriguez-Granara Barreto, Montevideo 1999, when the g5-bishop found itself condemned.

18... **基xd4!** 19 **豐xd4 遠c6** 20 **包d5**

20 \(\frac{1}{2}\) he 1 f6 21 \(\frac{1}{2}\) c4+ \(\frac{1}{2}\) he 22 \(\frac{1}{2}\) xf6 exf6 23 \(\frac{1}{2}\) xd6 \(\frac{1}{2}\) c4 \(\frac{1}{2}\) d5 \(\frac{1}{2}\) xd5 \(\frac{1}{2}\) d5 \(\frac{1}{2}\) xd5 \(\frac{1}{2}\) he -+ Siedler-Pantaleoni, corr. 1990.

20...f6 21 \(\digce\)c4 \(\digce\)h8 22 f5 fxg5 23 fxg6 \(\digce\)f4!

Black is clearly better according to Gojković, whose annotations for *Informator 42* continue as follows: 24 營d3 e6 25 hxg5 干 (25 公f6 全xf6! —+), 24 營e2 e6 25 hxg5 營xg5 26 黨xh5+營xh5 27 公xf4 營g5 干, and 24 公xf4 gxf4 干.

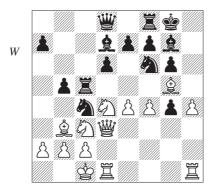
B)

16 ₩d3

When the line with 15 f4 first became popular, White's attention focused primarily upon this logical queen move: White preserves his light-squared bishop so that it can participate in an attack on the black king, attacks the knight on c4, and increases the potential strength of the central break e5 by keeping queen and rook doubled on the d-file. White also creates the potential threat of subsequently capturing on g6

with the white queen (e.g. because the b3-bishop pins the f7-pawn to the black king).

16...b5 (D)



White now has these options:

B1: 17 e5 99 B2: 17 f5 100 B3: 17 h5 101 B4: 17 \(\hat{\(\)}\)xf6 102

In terms of minor alternatives it is worth noting 17 ②dxb5?. Black should be ever vigilant of such captures when playing these lines, as there is a risk that Black can suddenly find himself missing an important pawn and with a piece on c4 hanging (which, incidentally, is the case here!). Fortunately, most of the time these cheeky pawn-grabbing antics don't work, either because they leave the e4-pawn insufficiently protected, or because they allow Black to exact some retribution on the old h8-a1 diagonal: 17...@xb2! 18 \(\div xb2 \) \(\div xe4 19 \) \(\div xe4 \(\div xb5 \) ₩a1+ 27 \$\dagger d2 \dagger c3+ 0-1 Bendana Guerrero-Isaev, corr. 1988.

B1)

17 e5 (D)

Black has tried various approaches here, but the direct approach seems best:

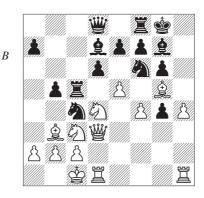
17...dxe5! 18 🖾 dxb5

18 \(\delta xf6 \) \(\delta xf6 \) transposes to Line B4.

18...**∮**\xb2!

18...豐c8!? has also yielded Black satisfactory results in this line, but objectively the text-move is probably preferable.

19 **\$\delta**xb2



If 19 ∰xg6 then 19...e6 20 ≜xf6 fxg6 21 ≜xd8 ᡚxd1 ∓.

19...e4! 20 ₩d2

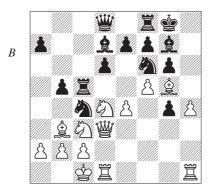
20 "d4? runs into 20... Zxb5 21 2xf6 2xf6 22 "xd7 "xd7 23 Zxd7 Zc5 -+.

After the text-move (20 \(\frac{\pi}{d}\)d2), Black must choose between four equally unclear options:

- a) 20... 置xb5 gives rise to an endgame in which Black has good compensation for the exchange according to Habermehl; e.g., 21 公xb5 总xb5 22 營xd8 公d7+ 23 含b1 罩xd8 24 总xe7 置e8 with compensation.
- b) Moingt's 20... 2d5 throws more wood on the fire. Moingt maintains that Black is winning after 21 2xd5 2xb5 22 2xf7+ 2xf7 23 2xd8 2xc3+ 24 2c1 2xd8 25 2xd8 e3 -+ and this analysis is cited with apparent approval by Mayer. However, White's play in this line was rather compliant, and I suspect something like 21 2c1! could give Black problems, because 21...e3 can be met by 22 2xd5! 2xd5 23 2xd5, when White has a rook and two knights for the queen, and may well be better.
- c) 20... 營b6! is Schneider's preference, and may well be best. The only practical example with it went 21 ②d4 罩fc8 22 ②ce2 a5! ∓ 23 a4 ②xa4 24 ③xf6 ②xf6 25 ⑤a2 罩xc2+ 26 ③xc2 罩xc2+ 0-1 Atri-Vescovi, Moscow OL 1994.
- d) 20...e3!? 21 營d3 e2 (21....皇xb5!? is also interesting; play might continue 22 營xd8 罩xd8 23 罩xd8+ ②e8 24 皇xe7 罩xc3 25 含c1 e2 when Black's passed e- and g-pawns provide definite compensation) 22 營xe2 (22 罩d2? 營a8 23 罩e1 皇xb5 24 營xg6 皇c4 25 皇xc4 罩xc4 26 營d3 ②e4 wins for Black, Cordes-Jakobsen, Esbjerg 1986) 22...營a5 (22...公d5! looks stronger, although things are still very unclear) 23 營xe7 ②e4 24 罩xd7 營xb5 25 營xf8+ 含xf8 26 罩xf7+ 含e8 27 罩e7+ 1-0 Lacey-Jobe, corr. 1999.

B2)

17 f5 (D)



With this kingside thrust White abandons all notions of delivering mate down the h-file and instead focuses on generally cracking open the black kingside. Theory has established that Black now has two satisfactory responses.

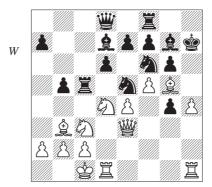
17...©e5

The other option is 17...gxf5:

- a) 18 🖾 xf5? 🗟 xf5 19 exf5 🖾 xb2! (surprisingly this thematic blow goes unmentioned by all sources; however, Attila Schneider does demonstrate an advantage for Black by alternative means following 19... 👑 d7 20 💆 df1 💆 fc8 ∓ with the threat of 21... 🖾 xb2) 20 🕏 xb2 🖾 xc3! -+. If 21 👑 xc3 then 21... 🙆 e4 wins the queen.
- b) 18 exf5 \(\mathbb{e}\)c8!. With this move Black enhances the pressure on the c-file and, more immediately, creates the threat of capturing the f5-pawn. White must defend f5 and has a choice of which rook to deploy to the task: 19 \(\begin{aligned} \alpha \text{df1} \) (19 国hf1 包e5 20 營e3 国xc3 21 營xc3 營xc3 22 bxc3 \(\begin{aligned} \frac{1}{2} \ext{e} & \text{e} & \text{e} & \text{e} & \text{e} & \text{e} & \text{f} & \text{g} & \text{d} & \text{f} & \text{f} & \text{s} Georgiev, Montreal 1986) 19... 2e5 (19... 2d5 has also been played with good results; to the best of my knowledge the move 19...b4!? has never been played in either practical or correspondence chess, but if I were faced with this position over the board this is the move that would most appeal to me, and I would submit that it deserves serious consideration) 20 \(\mathbb{\text{\mathbb{W}}}\ext{e}3\) 罩xc3!? 21 bxc3 (21 豐xc3 豐xc3 22 bxc3 罩c8 23 \$\displays b2 a5 gives Black excellent compensation for the exchange) 21...a5 22 h5 \$\disphi\$h7 23 h6 \$\disphi\$h8 24 & xf6 & xf6 25 \ h5 \ c5 26 \ g5 a4 27 \ g7+ \$\delta\$h8 28 \$\delta\$e6 fxe6 29 fxe6 \$\delta\$c6 30 \$\delta\$f5 \$\delta\$d5 0-1 Jandovsky-Hadraba, corr. 1987.

18 營e3 含h7!? (D)

18...b4! is probably best: 19 公d5 (19 兔xf6 兔xf6 20 公d5 gxf5! 21 公xf6+ exf6 22 exf5 a5 〒 Kulozewski-Nizynski, Poland 1986) 19...公xd5 20 兔xd5 gxf5 21 兔h6 (21 公xf5 兔xf5 22 exf5 豐a5 23 豐b3 罩fc8 24 罩d2 公c4 25 兔xc4 罩xc4 〒 Simola-Froberg, Finland 1996) 21...e6 22 兔b3 豐f6 23 兔g5 f4 24 豐e1 (24 兔xf4 公f3! -+) 24...豐g6 25 兔e7 罩fc8 〒 Bakalarz-Pekarek, Myslowice 1985.



The text-move was Curt Hansen's contribution to this variation. It caused quite a stir at the time (prophylaxis and whatnot), but I suspect it is probably not Black's best. I include it here because it embodies a particularly memorable example of how Black can employ the king in its own defence.

19 h5?!

Better is 19 fxg6+! 🖾 xg6 20 🖺 df1, which gave rise to an unclear position in Rachels-Rao, USA jr Ch 1986; although Black eventually won I suspect White may have been better at various points.

19...gxf5!

Black sidesteps the oncoming attack, using White's h-pawn as a shelter for the black king, and breaking up White's centre. Now:

- a) 20 exf5 罩xc3 21 bxc3 a5 22 h6 兔h8 23 兔f4 (23 a3!? is probably White's best here; 23 兔xf6? 兔xf6 24 豐e4 豐c8 25 罩h5 a4 26 兔e6 豐xc3 27 兔xd7 ②c4 0-1 Gasseholm-E.Pedersen, corr. 1986) 23...a4 24 兔xe5 axb3 25 兔xf6 兔xf6 26 axb3 e5 27 豐e4 exd4 28 豐xg4 兔c6 29 罩h2 罩g8 30 豐h5 兔d5 31 cxd4 豐a5 32 罩h4 兔xh4 33 豐xh4 豐a1+ 0-1 Mortensen-Cu.Hansen, Danish Ch 1986.
- b) 20 h6 \(\hat{\omega}\)h8 reveals another important aspect of the repositioning of the black king on