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now completed our analysis of 17 ♘f1. The main points are:

- 1) White is in no danger of being worse.
- 2) With accurate play, Black can reach either a draw or an equal position. Although he has various ways to achieve this, none of them is especially obvious.
- 3) If Black goes wrong, he can get a bad or even lost position with remarkable speed.

Whether one considers 17 ♘f1 a good idea is a matter of taste. It is probably no better than the usual lines of the Poisoned Pawn (most of which are also considered to be roughly equal), but the fact that it is relatively unknown territory means that you are more likely to succeed with it than with more familiar lines (of course, this might not be true if your opponent has also read this book!). We have gone into 17 ♘f1 rather deeply, and I would consider the above analysis of sufficient depth to prepare any player up to average grandmaster strength. In any case, there is a limit to how much you can remember, hence going deeper might be of little practical value.

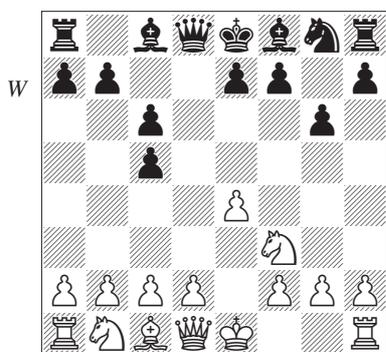
However, the above analysis is important not only for its own sake. It shows how by using powerful computers, it is possible for even players of modest strength to examine tactical opening lines in considerable depth and prepare themselves with analysis which is likely to lead to success

over the board. The same techniques (tracking down existing material, using different engines, playing engine tournaments, and so on) can be applied to many sharp opening lines. By gradually working through the sharp lines in your opening repertoire, it is possible to create an arsenal of dangerous ideas which can be stored on your computer ready for instant revision before an important game.

Case study 2: Rossolimo Sicilian with 3...g6

In our first case study, we took the part of a player wanting to prepare thoroughly for a sharp opening variation. Now we examine the contrasting situation of a player who wants to prepare for a quiet opening line with few sharp variations. Moreover, he hasn't much time to spare and doesn't want to spend more than a couple of hours on the job. The line we shall examine is one of the main continuations of the Rossolimo Sicilian and our starting position arises after 1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♙b5 g6 4 ♙xc6 dxc6 (*D*) (4...bxc6 is a less popular but important alternative; however, we shall not look at it here).

Our objective here is quite different from that in the first case study. This line is relatively quiet and positional, and there are few forcing variations. In order to play it well, we shall have to understand the general plans for both



sides and try to decide which circumstances favour a particular plan. This will be backed up by a limited number of concrete variations in the most popular lines. If we were preparing this line for real, it might be helpful first to take a look at some of the various books on the Rossolimo Variation. A good book will describe the general plans mentioned above and enable us to save the time it would take to work them out for ourselves. However, for this case study we shall use only our database; readers may be surprised to find how far we can get using only this and some general chess intelligence. Working out the general principles governing a particular line involves the exercise of considerable chess skill; this time we won't be able to rely so heavily on the computer and shall have to use our brains to a greater extent.

As in the first case study, we must avoid being too ambitious since a quiet line such as this is unlikely to produce much advantage against good

play. Rather than searching for a tiny theoretical advantage in every line, it is more important to understand the general principles and to have a simple and easy-to-remember repertoire that gives some chances of an advantage while avoiding any risks.

The first step is to do a position search for the starting position (see diagram above) in our main database. This gives 2469 games in my database. You may get slightly different numbers of games according to which version of *ChessBase* you use and how up to date your database is. *ChessBase* 7 has a bug which results in the position search function also finding the target position with colours reversed, and if you use this version you will get a handful of games starting 1 c4 e5 2 ♘c3 ♙b4 3 g3 ♙xc3 4 dxc3 ♘f6. These anomalous games represent only a tiny percentage of the total and we can safely ignore them. With so many games, we cannot hope to examine every one as we did in our first case study. Instead, we shall have to employ a broader approach based on statistics. As we have mentioned earlier, the statistical approach has its dangers. Just because a move has been played more often than another, or has scored a higher percentage, doesn't mean that it is a better move. However, in a quiet line such as this, a statistical plus based on a large sample of games should mean something, even if we have to apply caution in interpreting the results.

What does our chess common sense tell us about the position after 1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 ♗c6 3 ♕b5 g6 4 ♕xc6 dxc6? As in many other openings (Exchange Ruy Lopez, Winawer French) one player has given up a bishop for a knight in order to double the enemy's c-pawns. However, the resemblance ends there. In the Exchange Ruy Lopez, for example, White usually plays d4 quickly, with the aim of exchanging queens and trying to exploit his healthy kingside pawn-majority. In the above diagram, however, Black's pawn is on c5 rather than e5 and therefore the advance d4 would only serve to undouble Black's c-pawns. This would seem to be a considerable advantage for Black compared to the Exchange Spanish. The compensating disadvantage is that the move ...g6 indicates that Black will play ...♗g7 and this will leave the c5-pawn weak. Thus White can count on a tempo after a later ♕e3. If White's plan is not to play for an endgame, what is his plan? Possible candidate plans are:

1) Assuming that Black is going to castle kingside, play 0-0-0 and aim for a kingside attack.

2) Play 0-0 and attempt to exploit the weak c5-pawn by ♕e3, a3 and b4, developing pressure on the queenside.

3) Play 0-0 and aim for central or kingside play by ♗h2 and f4, possibly coupled with ♗g4 and ♕h6.

Here it is helpful to play over several top grandmaster games in the line to get a feel for which plans are most favoured by White. If you do this, it

becomes obvious that the current trend amongst leading players is to aim for the third of the above plans. We shall therefore adopt this as our main plan for White if Black develops along normal lines. However, we shouldn't forget the other ideas as they could also prove important if Black adopts a different plan of development. In particular, it may make sense for both sides to delay castling; White may wish to keep open the possibility of the first plan, while Black may try to delay making his king a target.

If we take the nearly 2500 games reaching the diagram position and make a tree out of them as described earlier, then we have easy access to the statistics of the line. In the diagram position, 5 d3 is by far the most popular move for White and was played in more than 50% of the games. It also scored the best percentage, 61%, of all White's main lines and, moreover, the average rating of the players using it was 2388, higher than for any of the alternatives. When everything points in the same direction and the sample of games is large, we can have more confidence in a statistical method, so we shall add 5 d3 to our repertoire. In well over 90% of the games with 5 d3, Black played the natural move 5...♗g7, but we should also note that 5...♗g4 was usually met by 6 ♗bd2 ♗g7 7 h3 ♕xf3 8 ♗xf3 (8 ♖xf3 has also scored well, aiming to play the knight out to c4, but it looks less logical than the knight capture), with White scoring

very heavily. This is not surprising, since Black gives up his main asset (the two bishops) without obtaining anything in return.

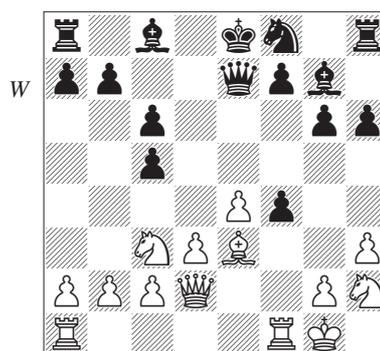
After 5...♙g7, we again find that the move which is by far the most popular (6 h3) also scored best and attracted the highest average rating of white players. 6 ♖c3 was played a fair number of times, but Black scored reasonably after the reply 6...♙g4. We can see some logic here, in that once White has committed his knight to c3 he can no longer meet ...♙g4 by ♖bd2 and h3, taking back with the knight on f3. If White intends ♖h2 and f4, then h3 is going to be essential in any case, so it makes sense to play it now and rule out ...♙g4.

After 6 h3, we finally come to a significant branch. 6...♗f6 has been by far the most popular move, but 6...e5 and 6...b6 have also been played. There are transpositional possibilities between these three moves, but let's look at the main line 6...♗f6 first. By continuing in the same vein, we can quickly derive the following lines:

6...♗f6 7 ♖c3 and now:

1) 7...♗d7 8 ♙e3 e5 (8...0-0 9 ♗d2 ♗e8 10 ♙h6 ♙h8 11 h4 is a line where it makes perfect sense for White to switch to a direct attack despite the loss of tempo involved in playing h3 and then h4; the 95% White scored from this position makes it clear that playing ...♗d7 and ...0-0 too early exposes Black's king to a virulent attack) 9 ♗d2 and now:

1a) 9...h6 10 0-0 ♗e7 11 ♖h2 (it is essential to force through f4 before Black completes the restraining manoeuvre ...♗f8-e6) 11...♗f8 12 f4 exf4 (D).



Now we have to make a tricky choice as to which recapture to add to our repertoire. 13 ♙xf4 has been played 13 times by players with an average rating of 2492 and achieved a 85% score, while 13 ♗xf4 has been played 48 times by players with an average rating of 2450 with a 65% score. Should we give preference to the larger sample of 13 ♗xf4 or the higher rating and percentage of 13 ♙xf4? The choice is between 13 ♗xf4 ♗e6 14 ♗f2 ♗d4 15 ♗af1 ♙e6 16 ♗g4 and 13 ♙xf4 ♗e6 14 ♙g3. In fact, both these lines look rather tempting for White and he can be well satisfied with his position in either case. However, my preference would be for the bishop capture, because after 13 ♙xf4 ♗e6 14 ♙g3 ♗g5 (14...♗d4 15 ♗ae1 0-0 16 e5 followed by ♗e4 is also