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13 Benko Accepted: King Walk

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6
5 bxa6 g6 6 ♗c3 ♙xa6

Here we shall examine lines where White plays an early e4, allowing an exchange on f1 and recapturing with his king. The king will then generally 'walk' to g2 or h2, completing a 'castling by hand' manoeuvre. The standard way for White to do so is 7 ♗f3 followed by 8 e4, but there are also two other ideas:

1) Bringing the knight to e2 to back up the c3-knight.

2) Advancing White's g-pawn two squares to gain space on the kingside as well as giving the king a square.

Thus at this point we need to look at two moves:

A: 7 e4 158

B: 7 ♗f3 161

In Line A we only examine lines without an early ♗f3.

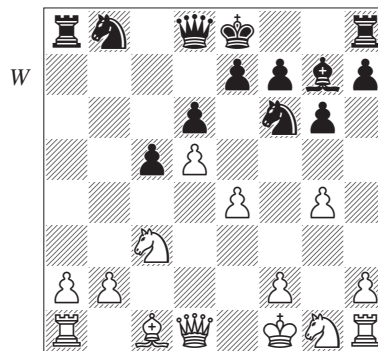
A)

7 e4 ♙xf1 8 ♚xf1 d6 9 ♗ge2

After 9 g4 ♙g7 (D) White has two main continuations:

a) 10 ♚g2 0-0 and then:

a1) 11 f3 was played in Seirawan-Fedorowicz, USA Ch, Long Beach 1989. Then I like the look of the untried 11...♗fd7!. Since White has prevented



the knight from reaching e5 via g4, there is no reason to keep it on f6, so it moves to d7; the other knight can take its place later (after ...♗b6 or ...♗e5) or be developed via a6. White's kingside pawn-structure provides some vague hopes of creating a kingside attack but can easily become a weakness in an endgame. After 12 ♗ge2 ♗e5 13 b3 ♙a5 14 ♙c2 ♗bd7 followed by ...c4 Black has sufficient compensation.

a2) 11 g5 ♗h5 12 ♗ge2 f5 13 gxf6 (White gets a bad pawn-structure after 13 ♗g3 f4! 14 ♗xh5 f3+ 15 ♚f1 gxh5 followed by ...♗d7-e5 with an advantage for Black, Denayer-Krivoruchko, Cappelle la Grande 2005) 13...♙xf6 14 ♙g5 ♙f7 15 ♙d2 ♙f8 16 ♙af1?!

(this rook is needed on the queenside; White should prefer 16 ♖hf1 ♜d7 17 f4 c4, intending to bring the knight to d3) 16...♜d7 17 f4 (Haba-Andruet, Toulouse 1990) 17...♙xc3 18 bxc3 (18 ♖xc3 ♖xa2 leaves Black better in all parts of the board) 18...h6 19 ♙h4 ♖a4 ♢. Black wins one of the pawns back, with the advantage.

b) 10 g5 ♜h5 11 ♜ge2 ♖c8! (the queen eyes the kingside and leaves the d7-square available for the queen's knight) 12 ♔g2 (12 ♜g3? is extremely bad because of 12...♖h3+ 13 ♔g1, when the white king and rook will be trapped for a long time; after 13...♜d7 14 ♜xh5 gxh5 15 ♖f1 ♖h4 16 ♖g2 ♙xc3! 17 bxc3 ♖a4 Black won back the pawn with a much better position in Kaminik-Zso.Polgar, Israeli Team Ch 1996) 12...h6! (Black naturally attacks the far-advanced pawn). Now:

b1) 13 h4 and then:

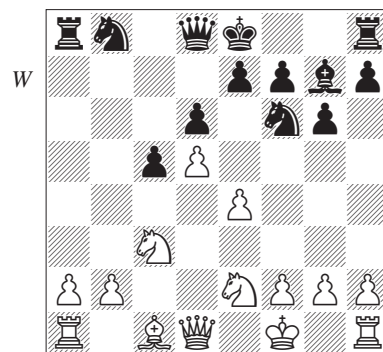
b11) Julian Hodgson opted for an endgame by 13...hxg5 14 hxg5 ♖g4+ 15 ♜g3 ♖xd1 16 ♜xd1 ♜xg3 17 ♖xh8+ ♙xh8 18 ♜xg3 ♜a6 but it does not look very convincing: 19 ♙d2 ♜b4 (Suba-Hodgson, Spanish Team Ch 1993) 20 a4!? ♜c2 21 ♖a2 ±.

b12) I prefer 13...♜d7!?, intending ...♜e5-d3 (after ...c4). White's pawn-structure looks awkward while Black has two unusual features compared with normal lines: the knight on h5 and the uncastled king, but both pieces are quite comfortable in their 'new' locations.

b2) Black has a comfortable position after 13 gxh6 ♙xh6 14 ♙xh6

♖xh6 with compensation, Seirawan-Alburt, USA Ch, Estes Park 1986.

9...♙g7 (D)



Now White must decide where to put his king: h2 or g2.

10 h3

After 10 g3 0-0 11 ♔g2, Benko himself demonstrated a viable plan for Black (although there are other good options too): 11...♖b6 12 ♖b1 ♜a6. The reasoning behind this is that the long light-square diagonal is weakened by the knight's absence from f3, so Black will bring his knight to c7 to prepare to break it open by ...e6. Then:

a) After 13 f3 it's not yet a good moment to play ...e6, and Black should prefer 13...♜d7, with good compensation. It's instructive to see why 13...e6?! is not so good: 14 dxe6 fxe6 15 ♙g5 (now Black cannot make the ...d5 advance) 15...♖c6 16 ♖d2 ♖ad8 17 ♖hd1 ♖d7 18 ♜f4 ♜c7 19 ♖c2 ± Narciso Dublan-Rodriguez Guerrero, Calvia tt 2007. Then 19...d5? fails to 20 ♙xf6 ♙xf6 21 exd5 exd5 22 ♜cxd5!

♞xd5 23 ♜xd5 ♜xd5 24 ♞c4 ♜f8 25 ♜d1 +.

b) 13 b3 ♞c7 14 f3 e6! (now everything works well for Black because ...d5 is guaranteed) 15 dxe6 fxe6 16 ♙e3 ♞c6 followed by ...d5, Gross-Benko, Aspen 1968.

10...0-0 11 ♙g1 ♞bd7 12 ♙h2

We have a position very similar to the main lines but the knight is on e2. What are the fundamental differences? First of all, White is less scared by the idea of ...♞a4, since the e2-knight is ready to replace the knight on c3 (one of the main ideas of White's scheme), although this is not so crucial for the evaluation of the position. On the other hand, there are fewer tools for White to fight for the c4-square since on e2 the knight is a long way from this square (whereas from f3 it can get there quickly via d2).

12...♞a5

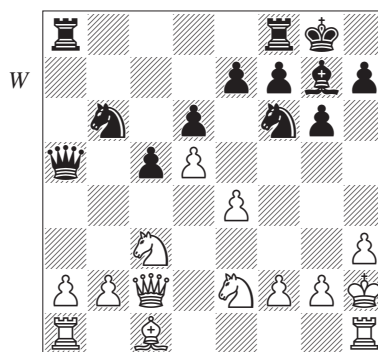
Black can also play 12...♞b6.

13 ♞c2

13 ♜f1?! does not actually weaken White's position, but I don't understand what point it might have. Perhaps White feels it is useful to defend the f2-pawn in some variations but it looks weird to me. 13...♜fb8 14 ♞c2 ♞a6 15 ♜d1 (now 13 ♜f1 looks even more strange) 15...♞e5!?! (the knight moves towards c4; Black mistakenly blew up the centre in Akobian-L.Martinez, Las Vegas blitz 2005: 15...e6? 16 dxe6 fxe6 17 ♙g1 ±, when he couldn't play ...d5 but the d6- and e6-pawns come under pressure) 16 b3 (16 a4 ♜b4 with compensation) 16...c4 17 ♙e3 ♞d3 (17...cxb3?! 18 axb3 ♞xa1

19 ♜xa1 ♜xa1 20 ♞d4 ±; the b3-pawn is quite dangerous, while the c6-square will soon be a good outpost for the white knight) 18 ♙d4 ♞b4 19 ♞b2 ♙h6! (unpinning the f6-knight and so intending ...♞d7) gives Black strong pressure on the queenside.

13...♞b6 (D)



Preparing both ...♞a4 and ...♞c4, but which knight move will be better depends on the precise details of the position.

14 ♜d1

Or 14 ♜b1, and now:

a) 14...♞c4?! can be met with 15 a4! (intending b3; the immediate 15 b3? allows 15...♞a3 16 ♙xa3 ♞xa3 with good compensation) 15...♞b4 16 b3 ±, when 16...♞a3? does not work because of 17 ♙xa3 ♞xa3 18 b4! ± and ♜b3 wins the queen.

b) 14...♞a4! 15 ♙d2 ♞xc3 16 ♞xc3 ♜fb8 17 ♜he1 (17 b3 ♞a3! blocks White's a4 advance) 17...♞d7 18 ♙g5 ♙f8 gives Black solid compensation as White is unable to make progress with any of his queenside

pawns, Shulman-Khalifman, World Cup, Khanty-Mansiisk (rapid) 2005.

After the text-move, however, it is better to put the knight on c4.

14...♞c4!?

I feel this new move is better than 14...♞a4?!, because after 15 ♔d2 ♞xc3 16 ♞xc3 ♜fb8, as in Shulman-Khalifman, World Cup, Khanty-Mansiisk 2005 (where 17 ♜e1 was played), White can play the straightforward 17 a4!?. This is the main difference between 14 ♜d1 and 14 ♜b1. With the rook on a1, White can follow this pawn advance up with ♜a2. After 17...♞b4 18 ♜a2! ♞c4 19 a5 ♞d7 20 ♔g1 ± Black's play is complicated by the a5-pawn.

15 a3!?

Intending to play b3 and then a4. Black is at least OK after 15 b3 ♞a3, when he blocks the a2-pawn, or 15 a4 ♞b4 16 ♞b5 ♜fb8 17 ♞ec3 ♞d7, when his pieces are active enough.

15...♞b6 16 b3 ♞a5 17 ♜b1 c4!

Black uses a tactical motif to secure counterplay. 18 b4 ♞xf2! 19 ♜f1! (Black gets a decisive attack after 19 bxa5? ♞h5 -+; 19 e5? ♞h5 20 ♞e4 ♔xe5+ 21 ♔h1 ♞a7 22 bxa5 f5 ♚ and then ...♞f2) 19...♞xf1 20 ♔e3 ♞g4+ (forced) 21 hxg4 ♔e5+ 22 ♔h3 ♞f6 23 g5 ♞g7 24 bxa5 f6! is unclear because the white king is highly vulnerable.

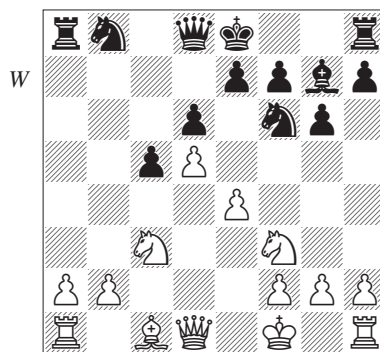
B)

7 ♞f3 ♔g7

Now we move on to the main lines of the King Walk.

8 e4 ♔xf1 9 ♔xf1 d6 (D)

White has two main options: to evacuate his king to g2 (after g3) or h2



(after h3). We discuss these lines as follows:

- B1: 10 h3** 161
- B2: 10 g3** 165

B1)

10 h3 ♞bd7 11 ♔g1

11 g3 0-0 12 ♔g2 transposes to Line B22.

11...0-0 12 ♔h2

The main disadvantage of this plan is that it takes three moves instead of two (g3 and ♔g2). The advantage is that the white king will not be attacked on the long diagonal after Black breaks with ...e6 or ...f5.

12...♞a5 13 ♜e1 ♜fb8

Now White should think about developing his queen's bishop. For this he needs to defend the b2-pawn, and there are two ways he can do so:

- B11: 14 ♞c2** 161
- B12: 14 ♜e2** 163

B11)

14 ♞c2 ♞e8 (D)

The knight heads for b5 to remove the white knight from c3.