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The "Anti Max Lange"

by Ian Simpson

This line follows the position stemming from 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nf6 4.d4 exd4 5.0-0. It can arise via a few other move-orders, e.g. the Scotch Gambit (1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 exd4 4.Bc4 Nf6 5.0-0) or the Urusov Gambit (1.e4 e5 2.Bc4 Nf6 3.d4 exd4 4.Nf3 Nc6 5.0-0) and various lines beginning 2.d4 exd4 3.Nf3 or 3.Bc4.

White's idea is that after 5...Bc5, defending the d4-pawn, White hits the black knight on f6 with 6.e5, the Max Lange Attack, which currently looks promising for White. However, castling leaves the e4-pawn unprotected, and Black can get away with grabbing the pawn: 5...Nxe4.



To those unfamiliar with the line, it may appear that Black is dicing with death, opening up the e-file in front of the black king. However, Black does eliminate an important centre pawn, and has resources in giving back the two sacrificed pawns in order to blunt White's attack down the e-file.

This line leads to very "visual" tactical play, which often attracts juniors (as it did with me as an 11-year-old). It has a dull, drawish reputation at grandmaster level, but I will show that for club-level players, it offers plenty of scope for interesting and equal play, for both sides.

Black is threatening 6...d5, attacking the bishop on c4 and reinforcing the knight on e4. So White should play 6.Re1, pinning the knight against the king and threatening to take it. Black should then continue with 6...d5 anyway.

Instead 6...f5?!, which you might see at club level sometimes, is met by 7.Nxd4, threatening 8.f3, winning the knight on e4 for a pawn. Black does not appear to have an adequate defence against this. If 7...Nxd4 8.Qxd4 and White still threatens 9.f3.

If Black has prepared this line, it might be with the tricky idea of sacrificing the knight on e4 for compensation, with 7...d5 8.Bb5 Bc5 9.f3 0-0 10.Bxc6 bxc6 11.fxe4 fxe4.



Black has two pawns and a strong centre for the piece, and the knight on d4 is currently pinned against the king. However, Black's compensation is probably insufficient because White has easy development, and can readily bring pieces over to the kingside to help defend the white king. The line has been tried in three low-level games according to the Chesslive.de database. 12.Be3 was played in all three games and is probably best, breaking the pin on the d4-knight and giving White more options regarding how to get the remaining white pieces out.

After 6...d5 White has a choice of temporary piece sacrifices.



A. 7.Nc3?!

B. 7.Bxd5

Before we consider the sacrificial lines, it is worth answering the question, why doesn't White just move the bishop on c4 to a safe square? The problem is that White is currently two pawns down, and after 7.Bb5 or 7.Bb3, Black continues with 7...Bc5 or 7...Bb4 and then castles kingside. Or if 7.Bd3 Bf5. Black gets pieces out and White is left with insufficient compensation for the sacrificed pawns.

A. The tricky but unsound Canal Variation 7.Nc3?!



This is the Canal Variation. Instead of saving the attacked bishop on c4, White puts a second piece *en prise*! The idea is that Black has no ideal way to hold onto the piece, as Black can only take one piece at once, and 7...dxc4 immediately drops the e4-knight, while 7...dxc3 8.Bxd5 leaves the e4-knight attacked twice and undefended, so Black must give the piece back, or play the weakening 8...f5.

The Canal Variation gives White practical chances and contains many interesting variations, but it is not fully sound. Black has resources in giving the piece back and aiming for a simplified pawn-up position.

The line is named after Esteban Canal, who won the following nice game with it:

Canal - Johner, Trieste 1923

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nf6 4.d4 exd4 5.0-0 Nxe4 6.Re1 d5 7.Nc3 dxc4

Both 7...dxc3 and 7...Be6 are probably stronger moves, and transpose to each other with best play.

8.Rxe4+ Be6 9.Nxd4 Nxd4 10.Rxd4



10...Qc8?

Most reliable is 10...Qf6. 10...Bd6 is the other reasonable option.

11.Bg5

Now White threatens 12.Rd8+, winning the queen for rook and bishop.

11...Bd6 12.Ne4 0-0



Black may have been relying on this to get out of trouble, but the king has castled to a spot where it has very little protection. Canal found a powerful knight sacrifice:

13.Nf6+! gxf6

13...Kh8? 14.Rh4 forces checkmate.

14.Bxf6 Be5

14...Rd8 is the other way to avoid being mated, offering to sacrifice the exchange back. White should not take immediately, and should continue with 15.Qh5, whereupon Black's only way to survive is 15...Kf8, but White is still winning after 16.Rad1.

15.Bxe5 f6 16.Bg3 Rd8 17.Bh4 c5 18.Rxd8+ Qxd8 19.Qf3 Kg7 20.Qxb7+ Bf7 21.Qf3 Rb8 22.Rd1 Qb6 23.Qg3+ Bg6 24.Rd7+ Kg8 25.Bxf6 Rb7 26.Rd8+ Kf7 27.Qf4 Qe6 28.Bc3+ Qf5 29.Qxc4+ Qe6 30.Rf8+ 1-0

I include coverage of all three of Black's options in case you fancy playing this with White, although you do play it at your own risk! More reliable is line B, 7.Bxd5.

A1. 7...dxc4

A2. 7...Be6

A3. 7...dxc3

A1. The equalising but unambitious 7.Nc3 dxc4



Black lets White take the knight on e4, but for the time being is two pawns ahead.

Here White has to play **8.Rxe4+**.

8.Nxe4? is refuted by 8...Be7, closing off the e-file and preparing kingside castling, while in the meantime Black retains the two-pawn advantage. If 9.Bg5, Black can get away with 9...f6, since the piece sacrifice 10.Nxf6+ gxf6 11.Bxf6 doesn't work for White: 11...0-0 and Black threatens to take the white bishop on f6, giving White no time to follow through with an attack on the black king. If 10.Bf4 0-0, White has very little compensation for two pawns.

So Black blocks the check with either: **A1a. 7...Be6** or **A1b. 7...Be7**

A1a. 7.Nc3 dxc4 8.Rxe4+ Be6



John Emms, in his 2000 book *Play the Open Games as Black*, gave this as good for Black. White has to play 9.Nxd4 here, since the c3-knight is attacked and White gets nowhere with 9.Nb5?! Qd7. One of Black's key ideas was demonstrated in the game **Mindeguia Guruceaga - Estremera Panos, Pamplona op Pamplona, 1995**:

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 exd4 4.Bc4 Nf6 5.0-0 Nxe4 6.Re1 d5 7.Nc3 dxc4 8.Rxe4+ Be6 9.Nxd4 Nxd4 10.Rxd4



White has regained one of the two sacrificed pawns and retains some initiative, though Black can equalise by returning the extra pawn and focusing on getting pieces out.

10...Qf6

10...Qc8? 11.Bg5, threatening Rd8+, is no good for Black.

Black might also be able to equalise with 10...Bd6, but it requires Black to play accurately. It relies on the resource 11.Bf4 0-0 (if 11...Qe7 12.Bxd6 cxd6 13.Qe2, followed by 14.Rxc4, regaining both sacrificed pawns with some advantage) 12.Ne4 Bxf4 13.Rxd8 Rxd8, giving up the queen for a rook and bishop. Although queen for rook, bishop and pawn often tends to favour the queen, Black's bishop-pair is quite powerful and may offer enough compensation.

11.Nb5?! Rc8!

White can't take on a7 because if 12.Nxa7? Bc5 forks the knight on a7 and the rook on d4. Therefore White ends up with scant compensation for a pawn, and soon lost the game:

12.Bf4 Bc5 13.Re4 Bb6 14.Qe2 0–0 15.Be5 Qg6 16.Bc3 Rce8 17.Re5 Bd5 18.g3 f6 19.Qd2 Rxe5 20.Bxe5 Qe4 0–1.

But in *Kaissiber* 34, Lev Gutman pointed out that **11.Nd5** is alright for White, with the idea of **11...Nxd5 12.Rxd5 Bd6 13.Be3**. Instead **13.Bg5?! Qe6** has scored 100% for Black in my database.



Black can't get away with 13...Qxb2? because 14.Bd4, followed by Bxg7.

The line with 13.Be3 generally leads to White regaining the pawn on c4, but this only promises equality in a fairly simplified position, so while this line is playable for White, it may have limited appeal.

A1b. 7.Nc3 dxc4 8.Rxe4+ Be7



White has to play **9.Nxd4** here, since Black is preparing to castle kingside and 9.Nb5 0-0 achieves nothing. Then Black disrupts White's piece co-ordination by hitting out at the rook on e4, with **9...f5**. Instead if 9...0-0 then White gets a slight advantage with 10.Bf4, due to the more active pieces.



This is almost identical to the position that arises in **line B1b**, 7.Bxd5 Qxd5 8.Nc3 Qd8 9.Rxe4+ Be7 10.Nxd4 f5, except that here Black has an additional pawn on c4.

Unfortunately, it seems that neither of White's sacrificial tries work. The exchange sacrifice with 10.Rxe7+ is playable in line B1b, but that extra black pawn on c4 leaves White a bit too far down in material here. Play will continue along the same lines as in line B1b: 10...Nxe7 11.Bg5 0-0 12.Ndb5 Qxd1+ 13.Rxd1 Ng6 14.Nxc7 Rb8, or 11.Qh5+ Ng6 12.Nf3 0-0 13.Ng5 h6 14.Qg6 hxc5 15.Bxc5 Qd7, but White will end up a full exchange down, rather than getting a pawn for the exchange, and this leaves White with insufficient compensation.

10.Bh6?! is a crazy-looking line that appealed to Max Zavannelli. It turns out that the extra pawn on c4 allows Black to get away with taking the rook with 10...fxe4 (11.Bxc7 Rf8! 12.Qh5+ Rf7), but this requires Black to play very accurately for several more moves. It is easier to play 10...Kf8, which prevents Qh5+ and leaves White's bishop on h6 and rook on e4 still hanging.

So White's best is 11.Rf4 0-0, whereupon White has nothing better than 12.Nxc6 Qxd1+ 13.Nxd1 bxc6 14.Rxc4 with an equal queenless middlegame.

One of the earliest games to occur in this line was **Ragozin – Botvinnik, Leningrad 1930**:

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nf6 4.d4 exd4 5.0–0 Nxe4 6.Re1 d5 7.Nc3 dxc4 8.Rxe4+ Be7 9.Nxd4 f5 10.Rf4 0–0 11.Nxc6 Qxd1+ 12.Nxd1 bxc6 13.Rxc4 Bd6



In this position Black's poor pawn structure is offset by Black's powerful pair of bishops vs. White's passively-placed bishop and knight.

Why not take the pawn on c6? The problem is that Black gets too much play: 14.Rxc6?! Re8 threatens a back-rank mate at e1, and if 15.Be2 Rd2, establishing a powerful rook on the seventh rank.

However, the move White played in the game is inaccurate. 14.Bf4, stopping the black f-pawn from advancing, leads to an equal position.



14.Be3 f4 15.Bd4 Rf5 16.g4 Rg5 17.f3 (Diagram)

17...h5

Black would probably have got the upper hand by playing 17...c5.

18.h4 Rg6 19.g5 a5 20.Nf2 Re6 21.Ne4 Ba6 (See diagram below)



22.Rc3?

White is doing pretty well in this position, but now was the right moment to take on c6. 22.Rxc6 Bb7 is met by 23.Nc5! intending 23...Bxc6 24.Nxe6+.

The move played in the game results in the white rook, amazingly, being trapped, forcing White to give up the exchange. White fought bravely and had some counter-chances, but against as skilled an endgame player as Mikhail Botvinnik, was always likely to fall short.

22...Bb4 23.Rb3 Bc4 24.c3 Bxb3 25.axb3 Bf8 26.b4 a4 27.Kf1 Ree8 28.Ke2 c5 29.bxc5 Reb8 30.Ra2 Rb3 31.Nd2

Rb5 32.b4 g6 33.Kd3 Bg7 34.Nb3 Rbb8 35.Na5 Bxd4 36.Kxd4 Re8 37.Rxa4 Re3 38.b5 Rxf3 39.b6 cxb6 40.cxb6 Rd8+ 41.Kc4 Re3 42.Nc6 Re4+ 43.Nd4 f3 44.Ra2 Rc8+ 45.Kb4 Re1 46.c4 Re4 47.Kc3 Re3+ 48.Kb4 Re4 49.Kc3 Rd8 50.Nc6 Re3+ 51.Kb4 Re2 52.Ra1 f2 53.Nxd8 Re1 54.Ra8 f1Q 55.Nc6+ Kg7 56.Ra7+ Kf8 57.b7 Rb1+ 58.Kc5 Qf5+ 59.Kd6 Rd1+ 60.Kc7 Qd7+ 61.Kb6 Rb1+ 62.Kc5 Rxb7 63.Ra8+ Kg7 0-1

So these lines look playable for White, but if Black plays accurately (a big "if" at the club level), the resulting positions are often quite sterile.

A2. Black ignores the piece offers: 7.Nc3 Be6



Black refrains from taking any pieces for now, and blocks the e-file.

White has to play **8.Bxd5**.

8.Nxe4?! dxc4 is sometimes seen, but White cannot get enough compensation for two pawns. It is possible to get one of them back, with 9.Neg5 (putting extra pressure on the bishop on e6, and if 9...Qd7 10.Nxf7!) 9...Be7 10.Nxe6 fxe6 11.Rxe6 0-0, but then White is left with virtually no compensation. 9.Nfg5 may be a slight improvement according to Lev Gutman in *Kaissiber* 34, but still insufficient.

After **8.Bxd5**, Black can try **8...Nxc3?!**, which is quite sneaky, since Black attacks the white queen, and if White plays **9.bxc3?** then Black plays **9...Qxd5**, winning a piece for nothing. But White should instead flick in **9.Bxc6+ bxc6** and then **10.bxc3 dxc3**.



White is two pawns down, but Black has tripled pawns on the queenside, and the black king is still in the centre and does not really have a safe home. White can get sufficient compensation for the pawns with **11.Nd4**, as discussed by Lev Gutman and Stefan B cker in *Kaissiber* 34. The primary idea of this move is to open up the e-file and blast through to the black king. Black most commonly replies **11...Qd5**, whereupon White plays **12.Nxe6 fxe6 13.Qg4**, attacking g7.

Instead of **8...Nxc3?!**, Black should prefer **8...dxc3!**, which transposes to line A3: **7...dxc3 8.Bxd5 Be6**.

A3. Black heads towards a pawn-up endgame: **7.Nc3 dxc3**

7...dxc3 must be met by **8.Bxd5**.



Black can now hold onto the extra piece with **8...f5**, but White gets very dangerous compensation. White continues with **9.Ng5**, and if **9...cxb2 10.Nxe4!** (threatening **11.Nf6** mate, so Black doesn't have time for **10...bxa1Q**) **10...fxe4 11.Rxe4+ Be7 12.Bxb2**. Although White lost both of the games I can find with it in the database, this was due to White subsequently misplaying the attack.

Also **8...Bf5** doesn't work very well after **9.Bxe4**, and if **9...Bxe4 10.Rxe4+ Be7 11.Qe2**. White is a pawn down but has very good compensation.

Instead, Black plays **8...Be6!**. Then after **9.Bxe4**



The old main line runs **9...Bb4** (with the deadly threat of **10...cxb2** uncovering an attack on the rook on e1). However, White plays **10.b3!**, meeting **10...Qxd1** with **11.Rxd1**, and Black's extra pawn on c3 turns out to be of little use, and the game is level.

But Black can improve by exchanging queens immediately: **9...Qxd1+ 10.Rxd1 cxb2 11.Bxb2 f6**. (See diagram below).



With this continuation, Black keeps quite a solid pawn plus. White has some compensation for the pawn due to open lines for the white bishops and rooks, and the pawn formation with a- and c-pawns will offer some drawing chances if Black manages to simplify into a pawn-up ending. But overall, Black stands better, as with queens off the board it is hard for White to build up an attack.

Lifshitz – Francisco. email 2003

1.e4 e5 2.Bc4 Nf6 3.d4 exd4 4.Nf3 Nc6 5.0-0 Nxe4 6.Re1 d5 7.Nc3 dxc3 8.Bxd5 Be6 9.Bxe4 Qxd1 10.Rxd1 cxb2 11.Bxb2 f6 12.Re1

White makes use of the half-open e-file, threatening **Bxc6+** followed by **Rxe6**.

The main alternative is **12.Bc3**, aiming to attack Black down the half-open b-file. Then if **12...Ba3?!**, then **13.Rab1** gives White quite reasonable compensation for the pawn, since the rook on d1 prevents Black from castling queenside.

But instead, Black should close off the d-file by retreating the bishop on e6: **12...Bd7! 13.Rab1 0-0-0 14.Nd4 Re8**, as played in Blatny-Smejkal, Prague 1986, and Gagliardi-Schumacher, email 2010. Both games continued with **15.Nxc6 Bxc6 16.Bxc6 bxc6**, devaluing Black's pawn plus by shattering the queenside pawn structure. White can probably draw this with best play (indeed Gagliardi did achieve a draw) but an uphill struggle to get a draw is hardly what White wants to get out of the opening!

12...Kf7

Black should get the king out of the way. Now Black can no longer castle, but with queens off the board this is not such a big deal, as long as Black avoids one or two traps.

13.Bc3

White wants to make use of the half-open b-file as well, with Rab1 to follow



13...Be7

This is quite good for Black, but as Stefan Bucker pointed out in *Kaissiber* 35, 13...Ba3! is even stronger, preventing White's a-pawn from advancing.

Black must, however, avoid 13...Bb4? 14.Bxb4 Nxb4, because after 15.Rab1 White will crash through on b7. Harding-Campbell, corr. 1987 didn't last much longer: 15.Rab1 Nd5 16.Rxb7 Rhc8 17.Nd4 Rab8 18.Nxe6 Kxe6 19.Bf3+ 1-0.

14.Rab1 Rab8 15.a4 a6 16.a5 Bc5



Although White doesn't quite have full compensation for the pawn, Black is a bit tied down and it is hard for Black to make progress. White managed to scrape a draw by simplifying down to a pawn-down rook ending. While it's not quite true that "All rook and pawn endings are drawn", they do have quite a large "drawing margin", so White followed the right policy.

17.h3 g6 18.g4 Rhd8 19.g5 Be7 20.gxf6 Bxf6 21.Bxf6 Kxf6 22.Ng5 Kxg5 23.Bxc6 Bxh3 24.Rxb7 Rxb7 25.Bxb7 Kf6 26.Re3 Bc8 27.Bxc8 Rxc8 28.Rb3 Ke5 29.Rb7 g5 30.Ra7 Rd8 31.Rxa6 Rd1+ 32.Kg2 Ra1 33.Ra8 Kd6 34.a6

½-½

So is this line playable for White? I quote IM "pfren" from Chess.com: "Yes, if he is a masochist".

For these reasons, I don't trust 7.Nc3, although it may be worth a punt in rapid games.

B. The main line: 7.Bxd5

This temporary piece sacrifice is White's best option. Then after 7...Qxd5, 8.Nc3 follows.



This exploits two pins: the d4-pawn is pinned against the black queen on d5, and the e4-knight is pinned against the black king. White can thus regain the piece on the next move by taking on e4. Thus, Black faces a major decision: where to put the black queen?

The main options are

B1. 8...Qd8

B2. 8...Qh5

B3. 8...Qa5

8...Qh5 and 8...Qa5 are both definitely sufficient for equality, but it is far less clear if 8...Qd8 equalises, and it is perhaps a little too passive.

Other squares for the queen are unlikely to equalise. For example, 8...Qc4?! 9.Nd2 Qa6 10.Nd5 Qa5 11.c4, Dauth-Brener, Berlin 2004, saw White generating a very dangerous initiative. 8...Qf5 is not as bad, but White gets an advantage due to the superior piece activity following 9.Nxe4 and then 10.Nxd4, attacking the black queen on f5.

B1. Black goes conservative: 7.Bxd5 Qxd5 8.Nc3 Qd8



This line is quite passive, but it gives White some scope to go wrong. Normally White takes on e4 with the knight on c3, but in this variation, 9.Nxe4 is inferior to 9.Rxe4+, and the reasons are not immediately obvious. The key turns out to be that Black's queen adds protection to the important f6-square. However, after 9.Rxe4+, it is not clear if Black can equalise.

Let's see why:

B1a. 9.Nxe4?!

B1b. 9.Rxe4+

B1a. 7.Bxd5 Qxd5 8.Nc3 Qd8 9.Nxe4?!

If **9.Nxe4**, Black plays **9...Be7!**. The black pawn on d4 is now adequately defended. If White tries to gambit the pawn with **10.c3**, then Black has the irritating **10...Bg4**, with the idea that after **11.cxd4 0-0**, Black threatens **12...Bxf3**, whereupon **13.gxf3** weakens the pawn structure in front of the white king, and **13.Qxf3** allows **13...Nxd4**, emerging with an extra pawn again.



So White should play **10.Bg5**, but then the key point is that after **10...f6** (Diagram), the black queen on d8 adds much-needed protection to the f6-pawn.

The piece sacrifice **11.Nxf6+? gxf6 12.Bxf6 0-0** leaves the black king bare, but White does not have enough behind the attack. White resigned quickly in the game B.Stein-Smejkal, Bundesliga 1987: **13.Bxe7 Bxe7 14.c3 Ng6 15.Bc4 dxc3 16.Qb3+ Kg8 17.Qxc3+ Qf6 0-1**.

Also **11.Bxf6? gxf6 12.Nxf6+ Kf7** doesn't work.

So White should play **11.Bf4**, but it is then a struggle to generate enough play for the sacrificed pawn. Black plays **11...0-0** with the idea **...g7-g5-g4**, possibly leading to a black kingside offensive. After **12.c3** (**12.Qd3?! is**

well met by **12...g5**) Black can return the pawn in order to get a large positional advantage, starting with **12...g5** and then playing **...d4-d3**, for example, **13.Bc1 d3 14.Re3 Qd5 15.Qxd3 Qxd3 16.Rxd3 Bf5**, Vatter-Okhotnik, Gleichenberg 2013, which Black went on to win.

B1b. 7.Bxd5 Qxd5 8.Nc3 Qd8 9.Rxe4+

This line has similarities with the Canal Variation line **7.Nc3 dxc4 8.Rxe4+**, but here Black does not have a second extra pawn at c4.

Black should meet this check with **9...Be7**, since **9...Be6?! 10.Nxd4** gives White powerful central control: if **10...Nxd4 11.Rxd4 Qf6 12.Be3**.

After **9...Be7**, White can regain the second sacrificed pawn with **10.Nxd4**, whereupon **10...f5** follows, creating some disruption to the co-ordination of the white pieces. If Black does not play **10...f5** then White gets the upper hand due to the powerful centralised white pieces.



Now Stefan B cker in *Kaissiber* 28 recommended **11.Rf4 0-0 12.Nxc6 Qxd1+ 13.Nxd1 bxc6 14.Ra4** (instead of 14.Rc4 which transposes to a line of the Canal Variation, and does not put Black under pressure). Black's bishop-pair is offset by the weak black pawn structure, which can soon come under pressure from the white pieces. The continuation of Go-Zelbel, Vlissingen 2012, ended up slightly better for White: 14...g5 15.f4 Rd8 16.Be3 gxf4 17.Bxf4, with some pressure against the black queenside.

The obvious move is 14...Re8, since moving the black bishop off e7 then threatens mate on e1, but then 15.Bd2 cuts out Black's mating possibilities. (Instead, in the game Meijker-Sidenko, email 2003, White continued with

the inferior 15.Be3 and lost, but White was heavily outgraded in that game).

Objectively, this line is probably in the grey area between "=" and "+/=", the sort of situation which Mark Hebden has called "a slight nibble".

Instead, Max Zavanelli won a nice game with the crazy-looking, dangerous, but unsound, 11.Bh6!?. Here is the game, and I've highlighted some problems with 11.Bh6 in the notes.

Zavanelli – Canibal, corr. 1999

1.e4 e5 2.Bc4 Nf6 3.d4 exd4 4.Nf3 Nc6 5.0-0 Nxe4 6.Re1 d5 7.Bxd5 Qxd5 8.Nc3 Qd8 9.Rxe4+ Be7 10.Nxd4 f5 11.Bh6 fxe4?!

Black might be able to scrape a draw after this, but that's all; White definitely gets a rook's worth of compensation. 11...gxh6? is even worse: 12.Qh5+ followed by 13.Nxf5 gives White a winning attack.

As Stefan B cker pointed out in *Kaissiber* 28, best is 11...Kf8!. White ends up an exchange for a pawn down after 12.Nxc6 Qxd1+ 13.Nxd1 fxe4 14.Nxe7 gxh6, with a dreary endgame. A better practical try is the exchange sacrifice 12.Rxe7 Qxe7 13.Bf4, with some, but not enough, compensation in the middlegame with queens still on the board.

12.Bxg7



White's main threat is 13.Qh5+. The obvious 12...Rg8? loses the rook straightaway: 13.Qh5+ Kd7 14.Qd5+ Ke8 (14...Bd6 15.Qe6#) 15.Qxg8.

12...Rf8 13.Qh5+ Rf7 14.Rd1 Bd7

Black may be able to force a draw with 14...Qd6 with the idea 15.Ndb5 Qf4 16.Nd5 Qxf2+ 17.Kh1 Bd7, when White has a perpetual check starting with 18.Nf6+ Bxf6 19.Nxc7+, but probably no more.

15.Nxc6 bxc6 16.Nxe4



White has a full rook's worth of compensation, and, remarkably, can maintain a strong position by playing fairly quiet moves.

16...Rb8 17.c4 c5 18.Qxh7 Bf8 19.Re1 Qe7

Black gives back a queen in return for a rook and bishop, leaving Black with two rooks and a bishop for a queen, normally a favourable material balance. However, White has three connected kingside passed pawns, and these ultimately turn out to provide more than enough compensation.

20.Nf6+ Kd8 21.Rxe7 Rxe7 22.h4 Rxc7



With Black's king still stuck in the middle and White being able to freely advance the kingside pawns, White is better despite only having a queen for two rooks and a bishop. The game continued:

23.Qh8 Ke7 24.Nd5+ Kd6 25.h5 Be6 26.h6 Rf7 27.f4 Kd7 28.h7 Rc8 29.f5 Bxd5 30.Qe5 Bd6 31.Qxd5 Rff8 32.Qe6+ Kc6 33.g4 Rce8 34.Qh6 Kd7 35.f6 Be5 36.g5 Bxb2 37.Kf2 a6 38.Kf3 c6 39.Kg4 Bd4 40.Kf5 Bc3 41.Kg6



It's always satisfying to see the king march up to the opponent's end of the board despite there still being some major pieces left on the board. White's pawns are too far advanced for Black to deal with.

41...Kd6 42.Qg7 a5 43.Qh6 Be5 44.Kf5 Bd4 45.f7+ Kc7 46.g6 Kd7 47.Kg4

1-0

A nice game, but 11...Kf8 turns out to be a significant problem with 11.Bh6.

But perhaps most in keeping with the spirit of this variation is the immediate exchange sacrifice, **11.Rxe7+!?**. In this particular variation it appears fully sound. **11...Qxe7?! 12.Nd5** is very dangerous for Black, so Black should respond with **11...Nxe7**.



In *Kaissiber* 28, Stefan Bücken gave **12.Bg5**, which tends to lead to a quick queen exchange, but White ends up with a pawn and good piece activity in return for the exchange. **12...0-0 13.Ndb5 Qxd1+ 14.Rxd1 Ng6 15.Nxc7**. This line still, as of 2016, appears to be untested.

A good alternative is **12.Qh5+**, which gives White more attacking chances against the black king. Then **12...Ng6 13.Nf3 0-0 14.Ng5 h6 15.Qxg6 hxg5 16.Bxg5** is a forcing line, with good compensation for White. White should, however, avoid the tempting **13.Nxf5?! in that line, which loses the initiative after 13...0-0.**

Instead, **12...g6?! 13.Qh4 Nc6 14.Bg5 Qxd4 15.Re1+** gave White very dangerous compensation in Seegert-Hartl, EU-ch 2009. Black has to give up castling rights with **15...Kf7**, since **15...Be6?** was refuted in the game by **16.Rxe6+ Kd7 17.Re7+!**, the point being that **17...Nxe7** drops the black queen on d4.

So it seems that after **8...Qd8 9.Rxe4+ Be7 10.Nxd4 f5**, White has quite a pleasant choice between **11.Rf4** and the more daring **11.Rxe7+**.

B2. Black eyes the white king plus a possible queen trade: **7.Bxd5 Qxd5 8.Nc3 Qh5**



Black moves the queen over to the vicinity of the white king. While the move looks aggressive, it can lead to very level situations, with a possible exchange of queens if White's knight on f3 moves out of the way. However, there appear to be ways for both sides to avoid the "drawing lines" and keep a fair amount of play in the position.

White should avoid **9.Rxe4+** in this line. After **9...Be6** White has the problem that **10.Nxd4 Qxd1+**, White cannot recapture on d1 with a rook, and **11.Nxd1 0-0-0** is much better for Black. Meanwhile, White's knight on c3 is still attacked, and if **10.Ne2 Bd6**, Black gets a slight lead in development.

So White plays **9.Nxe4** instead.

Then **9...Be7** is slightly inferior because of **10.Bg5**, and because of the position of the black queen on h5, Black cannot get away with **10...f6? 11.Bxf6 (11...gxf6? 12.Nxf6+ forks the black king and queen).** However, **10...Bg4** is just about playable: **11.Bxe7 Bxf3 12.gxf3 Nxe7 13.Qxd4** with

superior white piece activity offsetting the shattered kingside pawn structure. Instead, Black should block the e-file with **9...Be6**.



How does White exploit the open e-file and the position of the black queen on h5? There are two good options for White here:

B2a. 10.Bg5

B2b. 10.Neg5

Inferior is the offer of a queen exchange with 10.Nxd4. After 10...Qxd1 11.Rxd1 0-0-0, Black has the advantage of two bishops vs. bishop and knight in an open position. It is not as drawish as it may look; in the database Black is scoring an impressive 71%. In his book *The Italian System and a Guiding Repertoire for White*, Jude Acers

gave the continuation 12.Be3 Nxd4 13.Bxd4 Bf5 14.Ng5 Bg6, "promising a long afternoon".

B2a. Sliding into the f6-square? 7.Bxd5 Qxd5 8.Nc3 Qh5 9.Nxe4 Be6 10.Bg5

With this move, White is threatening 11.Bf6, taking advantage of the position of the black queen on h5, whereupon Black can't play 11...gxf6 because 12.Nxf6+ would then fork the black king and queen.



10...h6?!, encouraging 11.Bf6, is very risky. Black has scored well after 11.Bf6 Qg6, but after 12.Nh4 Qg4, 13.Qd3! (see diagram) gives White very strong threats, Smerdon-Saw, Melbourne 2002, and the black queen is short of squares. One idea is simply f2-f4-f5, targeting the bishop on e6. If Black meets 11.Bf6 with 11...Qa5, as has been tested in numerous games, 12.Nxd4 is very good for White (12...gxf6? 13.Nxf6+ now gives White a winning attack). 11...Qd5 has also been tried, but 12.c3 is then quite strong, with the idea of 12...dxc3 13.Qc2 cxb2 14.Qxb2 with very dangerous compensation. So I cannot recommend 10...h6 for Black.

Instead, Black's two most reliable moves are:

B2a1. 10...Bb4

B2a2. 10...Bd6

B2a1. Heading for the endgame: 7.Bxd5 Qxd5 8.Nc3 Qh5 9.Nxe4 Be6 10.Bg5 Bb4



Black counterattacks against the rook on e1. White can't afford to go full steam ahead with 11.Bf6?, since 11...Bxe1 12.Bxg7 Bxf2+, followed by ...0-0-0, and even 11...0-0, are both good for Black.

White has a pawn sacrifice line in 11.c3!?, although it is not clear if White can get enough for the pawn. Following 11...dxc3 12.bxc3 Ba5, Black's queen is short of squares.



White's best may be the radical piece sacrifice 13.Nd6+!?, as has been tried successfully in two games in the database. 13...cxd6 14.Qxd6 then led to a quick loss for Black in the game Barbaut-Dumas, La Fere 2012: 14...Bd6? 15.Rab1 Bxg5 16.Rxb7 Rd8 17.Rxe6+ 1-0. The main snag is that Black can and should return the piece with 14...Bc7 15.Qxc7 0-0, with at least equality.

Instead, harassing the black queen with 13.Ng3 Qg6 14.h4 h6 15.h5 Qh7 16.Qb3 0-0 doesn't seem to work for White. The spirited exchange sacrifice of Saverymuttu-Kristiansen, Arosa 1972, 17.Rxe6 fxe6 18.Qxe6+, seems to me to be refuted by 18...Rf7!, instead of 18...Kh8?! 19.Nh4 with a strong attack, as was played in the game.

The immediate 13.h4 can transpose after 13...h6 14.Ng3 Qg6, and Black also has the additional possibility 13...Qg4. The game Yudin-Plisetsky, Russia 1979 continued with 14.Ng3 Bb6 15.Rb1 Qc4 16.Re4 Qxa2 17.Re2 Qc4 18.Nh5 0-0 19.Bf6, which is superficially attractive, throwing pieces at the black king, but the line was refuted by 19...Bf5 20.Bxg7 Qd3 and White soon resigned.

Or 13.Qc1 0-0 14.Ng3 Qg6 15.Nh4 Qd3 with advantage for Black, Kamsky-Kupreichik, Belares 1989, when White's subsequent victory was definitely in spite of the opening.

Finally, 13.Bf6 is another idea, exploiting the position of the black queen on h5 (13...gxf6?? 14.Nxf6+ and 15.Nxh5) but instead Black plays 13...0-0 and it is hard to see how White continues the attack. And 13.Nc5 0-0! 14.Nxe6 fxe6 leaves White wide open to ...Rf8xf3 ideas.

So 11.c3 looks quite dubious.

Hence White's most reliable continuation is to allow the exchange of queens: **11.Nxd4 Qxd1 12.Rexd1 Nxd4** (otherwise White gets the advantage with 13.Nxe6, forcing 13...fxe6, weakening Black's pawn structure) **13.Rxd4 Be7** (opposing White's strong bishop on g5) **14.Re1**



In this position White has a slight "nibble" due to the more active pieces, but most games end in draws. 14...Rd8 15.Ra4 a6 16.Bxe7 Kxe7 is the usual continuation.

Another line is 14.Bxe7 Kxe7 15.Nc5 Rhd8 16.Nxe6 fxe6, when White might have a microscopic edge due to Black's isolated pawn on e6, but in practice Black actually has a slight plus score.

B2a2. A decent winning attempt for Black: 7.Bxd5 Qxd5 8.Nc3 Qh5 9.Nxe4 Be6 10.Bg5 Bd6



This is Black's best winning try, as it does not allow White immediate simplification, and sets up some cheapos against h2.

One important point behind 10...Bd6 is that if 11.Bf6?, Black gets in 11...Bxh2+! 12.Nxh2 (Not 12.Kf1? Bc4+) 12...Qxd1 13.Raxd1 gxf6 14.Nxf6+ Kf8, and comes out a pawn ahead in the ending.

11.c4 can also be tried but then Black can keep plenty of play in the position and reach at least an equal game with 11...h6 (John Emms, *Play the Open Games as Black*). 12.Nxd6+ cxd6 13.Bf4 Qc5 14.Rc1 0-0 was fine for Black in Guizar-Hynes, corr. 2007, and Black went on to win that game.

Also good is 11...0-0 12.c5 Be5, although this tends to lead to more simplification after 13.Nxe5 Qxd1+ 14.Raxd1 Nxd4 15.Rxd4, when Black's best is 15...Nc6 (Nigel Davies, *Play 1.e4 e5*).

So the main continuation is **11.Nxd6+ cxd6 12.Bf4 Qd5** (if 12...Qc5, the queen is a bit misplaced after 13.Ng5 and 14.Ne4).



This position has typically led to a lot of quick draws after 13.c3 (exploiting the pins against the d4-pawn and the e6-bishop) 13...Rc8, preparing for an endgame. White's best is 14.b3, protecting the a2-pawn, and then 14...0-0 15.Nxd4 Nxd4 16.Qxd4 Qxd4 17.cxd4 d5 leads to a dead drawn ending. If White doesn't exchange the queens in that line, Black gets an edge due to the strongly-placed queen on d5.

If Black wishes to avoid that, 13...Qf5!? is fully playable (Craig Evans at the Chesspublishing.com forum). For example 14.cxd4 0-0-0 (Or 14...Qxf4 15.d5 0-0 16.dxe6 fxe6 17.Rxe6 =, Dauth-Sawatzki, Berlin 2009.) 15.Qd2, with a combative game with the kings castled on opposite sides of the board.

White should avoid 13.c4?! Qxc4 14.Bxd6 Qd5 15.Be5 0-0 16.Bxd4 Bg4, Kontic-Gligoric, Belgrade 1998, where although White regains the two sacrificed pawns, Black has an edge because White can't stop Black from inflicting a weakness in White's kingside pawn structure.

But White also has a way to keep more pieces on the board: **13.Ng5!?**, intending to bring the knight into the central square e4, where it attacks the vulnerable black d6-pawn. Black's best response is to castle to either side, with 13...0-0-0 14.Ne4 Kc7 being quite risky, but playable. Instead, **13...0-0 14.Ne4** has invariably followed, in the six games in the database. This was played successfully in Chan-Hasenohr, U14-Wch 2008. However, I'm not sure that White has a good response to 14...Rfd8 (instead of the 14...Rfe8?! played in the game). 15.c4 dxc3 16.Qxd5 Qxd5 17.Nxc3 probably allows White to regain the pawn, but then we're left with another very level situation.

B2b. Revived by a pawn sacrifice? 7.Bxd5 Qxd5 8.Nc3 Qh5 9.Nxe4 Be6 10.Neg5



This has long been regarded as inferior, but Stefan Bücken came up with an intriguing pawn sacrifice which may revive it.

Black has to return the second sacrificed pawn here. If 10...Qg6, White plays 11.Nxf7!, with the idea 11...Kxf7 12.Ng5+ and 13.Nxe6. If 10...Bb4, simply 11.Nxe6 is very good for White, since 11...Bxe1? 12.Nxg7+ picks up the queen on h5. (If 11.Rxe6+?! fxe6 12.Nxe6, as in Morphy-NN, Paris 1859, then 12...Kd7 leaves White with enough compensation for the exchange, but probably no more).

So Black usually plays 10...0-0-0! 11.Nxe6 fxe6.



White should not be too hasty in regaining the pawn. 12.Rxe6?! Bd6 is better for Black, as Black is developing significant kingside threats while White is nowhere near developing a queenside attack. Black's choice of 8...Qh5 (instead of 8...Qa5) makes a big positive difference in this particular line.

White's best way to survive was recently pointed out by the late Mark Morss: 13.Qd3! Nb4 (threatening 14...d3) 14.Qe4 Na6 15.b4! Nxb4 16.Bg5 Rde8 17.h4, where White sacrifices a pawn to blunt the black attack, leaving Black only slightly better. But in practice, this line is surely not what White wants.

Stefan Bücken's idea is 12.Bg5 Re8 13.Re4!, tying Black down to the defence of the centre pawns, with the aim of subsequently starting a queenside attack, rolling the queenside pawns forward. The idea still has not been tried in the database. A sample line is 13...Bd6 14.Bh4 (cutting out any cheapos against h2) 14...e5 15.Qe2.



White's idea is to play c2-c3, dislodging Black's d4-pawn and leaving the e5-pawn isolated and blocked from advancing by the rook on e4. White will then push the a-pawn, and also the b-pawn if Black does not take on c3. If Black meets c3 with ...dxc3, this opens the b-file for the white rook on a1. Like many of Stefan B cker's ideas, it's pretty unorthodox, but it appears that White's compensation for the pawn is pretty reasonable.

Of course Black doesn't have to hold onto the pawn. Mark Morss, at the Chesspublishing.com forum, suggested meeting 12.Bg5 with 12...Rd5, which may be Black's most reliable option. One of the many possibilities from there runs 13.Rxe6 Bd6 14.Bh4 Qg4 15.Re1 g5 16.c4!?, suggested by both Morss and B cker, with equal chances and interesting possibilities for both sides.

I am inclined to recommend this line as White's best way to generate unbalanced and equal play, since 10.Bg5 gives Black a choice between 10...Bb4 and 10...Bd6, and the 10...Bb4 line has a high drawish tendency. From Black's point of view, the line 10.Bg5 Bd6 is a good winning try.

B3. The main line: 7.Bxd5 Qxd5 8.Nc3 Qa5



This line is as good as 8...Qh5, and the choice between the two is really a matter of taste.

White should again play **9.Nxe4**, since 9.Rxe4+?! Be6 leaves White in trouble. If 10.Nxd4 0-0-0 and the knight is pinned against the queen. If White moves the c3-knight, 10.Ne2 0-0-0 reinforces Black's d4-pawn and White doesn't have much to show for the sacrificed pawn.

Black should again reply **9...Be6**. If 9...Be7 10.Bg5, and 10...0-0 11.Bxe7 Nxe7 12.Nxd4 is slightly better for White. Or if 10...f6 then 11.Nxf6+! gxf6 12.Bxf6 is a fully sound sacrifice.

One advantage of the 8...Qa5 line is that **9.Nxe4 Be6** 10.Bg5?! is ineffective: 10...h6 11.Bh4 Bb4. Following 12.c3 dxc3 13.bxc3 Bxc3 14.Nxc3 Qxc3, White may have enough compensation for one pawn, but happens to be *two* pawns down. Black has scored 100% in the database from this position.

So White must choose between:

B3a. 10.Bd2

B3b. 10.Neg5

B3a. White gives Black a few too many choices: 7.Bxd5 Qxd5 8.Nc3 Qa5 9.Nxe4 Be6 10.Bd2



This attempts to chase the black queen off from a5, and thus make 11.Bg5 more feasible. I don't recommend this continuation for White since it gives Black various options which range from the aggressive to the ultra-drawish, but it is worth covering, as you might well face it if you play this line from the black side. 10.Neg5 gives White more scope to dictate the course of the game.

I look mainly at three moves:

B3a1. 10...Bb4

B3a2. 10...Qa4!?

B3a3. 10...Qf5

B3a4. 10...Qd5

Black can also try 10...Qh5, which transposes directly to 8...Qh5, after 11.Bg5, or after 11.Neg5 0-0-0 12.Nxe6 fxe6 13.Bg5. But if Black wants to get into those lines, why not 8...Qh5 at once? It is worth examining the independent alternatives to keep the game firmly in 8...Qa5 channels.

B3a1. Wild: 7.Bxd5 Qxd5 8.Nc3 Qa5 9.Nxe4 Be6 10.Bd2 Bb4

This is the most common response to 10.Bd2. It seems that Black gets the upper hand if White exchanges bishops: 11.Bxb4 Qxb4, and then 12.a3 Qb6 13.Qd3 doesn't give White enough for a pawn, or if 12.Neg5 0-0-0 13.Nxe6 fxe6 14.Ng5, White wastes too much time getting the pawn back.

So White continues with a "fork trick": 11.Nxd4 Nxd4 12.c3.



Black can't hold onto the extra piece. Most often played is 12...Be7, whereupon after 13.cxd4 Qd5, White has enough piece activity to compensate for the isolated pawn on d4. 14.Bb4 is most often played and probably best, e.g. 14...Bxb4 15.Qa4+ Qc6 16.Qxb4 0-0-0.

More daring is 12...0-0-0!?. Best play then probably runs 13.cxb4 Qf5 14.Rc1 Bxa2 (This looks a risky pawn grab, but it is better than the more commonly-played 14...Bd5 15.Ng3 Qg6 16.Be3, with good attacking chances for White) 15.Bc3, Benatar-Ros, email 2000. White's queenside attacking chances are probably worth a pawn.

B3a2. Interesting and equal: 7.Bxd5 Qxd5 8.Nc3 Qa5 9.Nxe4 Be6 10.Bd2 Qa4!?

This is a tricky line but seems fully playable. It can lead to equal chances after 11.Neg5 0-0-0 12.Nxe6 fxe6 13.Rxe6 Bd6, Stambulian-Yandemirov, Russia 1998. But White can try for more by attacking the queen with 11.b3.



Black's best is probably 11...Qa6, since 11...Qb5 runs into 12.c4.

White's best is now 12.Neg5 0-0-0 (Black has no way to hold onto the extra pawn here) 13.Nxe6 fxe6 14.Ng5. White is threatening 15.Nxe6 attacking the rook on d8 and bishop on f8, which will allow White to gain the slight advantage of bishop for knight. So Black plays 14...Rd7 15.Nxe6 Bd6 and gets an equal position, as in Harding-Noria Silvestre, corr. 1987.

B3a3. Wild again: 7.Bxd5 Qxd5 8.Nc3 Qa5 9.Nxe4 Be6 10.Bd2 Qf5

This is another pretty wild line, but I think White has more of the fun in this variation. 11.Bg5 h6 12.Bh4 Bc5 typically follows.



And Black holds onto the extra pawn. But White can deflect the bishop with quite a forcing sacrificial line: 13.b4 Bxb4 (13...Nxb4? leaves d4 without adequate protection so White plays 14.Nxd4) 14.Nxd4 Nxd4 15.Qxd4 Bxe1 16.Qxg7 Bxf2+ 17.Nxf2 with board-wide chaos, Jurkovic-Yemelin, Rijeka 2001.

Secondly, the surprising 13.Bf6!? seems playable: 13...gxf6 14.Nh4 Qf4 15.Ng6! fxg6 16.Nxc5, followed by 17.Nxe6 and White gets both pieces back. However, it seems that 14...Qe5 15.Nf3 Qf5 leads to a repetition draw if Black wants it.

B3a4. The yawn-inducing 7.Bxd5 Qxd5 8.Nc3 Qa5 9.Nxe4 Be6 10.Bd2 Qd5

This is the dull line that puts me off from suggesting 10.Bd2 for White. 11.Bg5 Bd6 usually follows.



If 12.c3 0-0 13.cxd4, Black has an edge after 13...Bg4, putting the knight on f3 in an irritating pin.

White has the trick 12.Bf6, exploiting the position of the black queen on d5 (not 12...gxf6?? 13.Nxf6+ winning the queen). But Black plays 12...0-0, and typically, lots of pieces come off: 13.Nxd4 Nxd4 14.Qxd4 Qxd4 15.Bxd4, with a dead drawn ending. Indeed, in Bronstein-Tal, Keres Memorial 1979, the players agreed immediately to a draw. I presume this was due to the tournament situation, as it is rare to see two attacking players like those two play quickly into a drawn ending!

B3b. White wants to dictate the course of the game: 7.Bxd5 Qxd5 8.Nc3 Qa5 9.Nxe4 Be6 10.Neg5



This line is more forcing, as it threatens to immediately break through down the e-file with Nxe6, and if ...fxe6, Rxe6+ with a strong attack. White also threatens Nxf7 followed by Ng5+ and Nxe6. Black cannot hold onto the extra pawn here.

Black might be able to get away with 10...Be7 11.Nxe6 fxe6 12.Rxe6, but then the king's bishop is placed on the fairly passive e7-square, whereas it normally functions better on d6 in this line.

So play normally continues 10...0-0-0 11.Nxe6 fxe6, and then White chooses between:

B3b1. 12.Rxe6

B3b2. 12.Bg5!?

Another option for White is 12.Ng5, but then Black has the disruptive 12...d3. One likely continuation is 13.c3 Qf5 14.Nxe6 Rd6, with Black having the better piece play.

B3b1. The absolute main line of the anti-Lange: 7.Bxd5 Qxd5 8.Nc3 Qa5 9.Nxe4 Be6 10.Neg5 0-0-0 11.Nxe6 fxe6 12.Rxe6



With the black queen on a5 rather than h5, White can get away with immediately recapturing the second sacrificed pawn. This line has not been completely discarded at grandmaster level, as John Emms surprisingly used it against Mark Hebden at the 2016 Four Nations Chess League, and had a couple of opportunities to win that game. Max Zavarelli has also used it at fairly high levels. It should be fully equal with accurate play, though.

With kings castled on opposite sides of the board, there is scope for both sides to launch rival attacks against the opponent's king, but as two pairs of minor pieces have already come off, the position can sometimes become too simplified for such attacks to achieve much.

Black normally plays 12...Bd6 here, getting the last piece out and pointing the bishop towards the white kingside, but there are a few reasonable alternatives.

12...h6 is rarely mentioned but seems quite good, preventing 13.Bg5 and also preparing ...g7-g5-g4, attacking the white kingside. 13.Qe2 Bd6 (13...g5 can be met by 14.Qe4, preventing ...g5-g4, although that line is still OK for Black) 14.Bd2 Qh5 15.h3 Rhf8 was the continuation of Van Delft-Bok, Amsterdam 2011. There is a strong tendency for queens to get exchanged in this variation with White playing Qe4 and Black playing ...Qd5, but the rival pawn majorities mean that there is still

plenty of play left after queens are exchanged. Another idea for White, which appeals to me, is Re4 and a3 with the idea of pushing b2-b4-b5.



12...Qf5 leads to double-edged play. 13.Qe2 h6 usually follows, whereupon White's queen on e2 is quite tied down to defensive duties (see diagram).

Here White can try the daring sacrificial continuation, 14.Bd2!? Qxc2 15.Rc1 Qxb2 16.Rexxc6 bxc6 17.Qe6+ Kb8 18.Qe4, as in B.Andersson-Wiedenkeller, Norrkoeping 1988. White's attacking chances on the queenside are probably enough for the exchange. That said, White has only scored 37% in the database.

More reliable is 14.Re4, for example, 14...g5 15.Bd2 Bg7 16.Re1, Guizar-Swatski, corr. 2001. White has good control of the centre but Black has kingside hacking chances, and so the game is probably equal.

But instead, Black usually plays 12...Bd6 as observed earlier.



Black threatens to play 13...Qh5, setting up threats against h2 and increasing the potency of the ...g7-g5-g4 lever. Hence, White should avoid the immediate 13.Qe2?!, which is well met by 13...Qh5, after which White is only scoring 31% in the database.

White should instead cut off the black queen's access to h5 by playing 13.Bg5, attacking the black rook on d8. Black can try to initiate exchanges with 13...Rde8, whereupon White can play 14.Qe2. Black's main choices are 14...Kd7 15.Rxe8 Rxe8 16.Qd3 (Schilling-Kriksciunas, email 2008) and 14...Rxe6 15.Qxe6+ Kb8 16.Bd2, Lowholt-Elison, email 2008. In both cases there are equal chances for both sides.



An alternative is to head for an en-masse set of exchanges with 14.Qe1!? Qxe1+ 15.Raxe1 Kd7 16.Rxe8 Rxe8 17.Rxe8 Kxe8 18.Kf1 Bd7 19.Bd2.

The rival pawn majorities, highlighted in green in the diagram, give both sides scope to play for a win in this endgame, although with accurate play it should be a draw. Max Zanavelli has frequently used it with White.

If Black would rather avoid this ending, 13...Rdf8 is "a useful alternative" (John Emms in *Play the Open Games as Black*). A good example of this line saw John Emms, as observed earlier, playing the white side!

Emms - Hebden 4NCL 2016

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nf6 4.d4 exd4 5.0-0 Nxe4 6.Re1 d5 7.Bxd5 Qxd5 8.Nc3 Qa5 9.Nxe4 Be6 10.Neg5 0-0-0 11.Nxe6 fxe6 12.Rxe6 Bd6 13.Bg5 Rdf8 14.Qe2 h6 15.Bh4 g5 16.Bg3 Bxg3 17.hxg3



With rival pawn majorities and kings castled on opposite sides, there are chances for both sides.

17...Qd5 18.Re4 Rd8 19.Rd1 Qxa2 20.Nxd4 Nxd4 21.Rexd4



21...Rde8

It might have been better to exchange off another pair of rooks with 21...Rxd4 22.Rxd4, since White is able to build up quite a dangerous queenside initiative after this.

22.Qb5 a6 23.Qc5 Kb8 24.Rd7 Qxb2 25.Qxc7+ Ka8 26.R1d6 Qa1+ 27.Rd1 Qb2 28.R1d6 Qa1+ 29.Kh2 Rb8 30.Qb6 Rhc8 31.c4 Qa4 32.c5 Qb5



Black has been able to repel the attack for now, but White nonetheless has the better chances. The computer now suggests 33.Rc7, but exchanging queens also leads to a better endgame for White because of the active white rooks.

33.Qxb5 axb5 34.Rd2 Rc6 35.Rb2 Ka7 36.Rxb5 Ka6 37.Rb2 Rxc5 38.Rd6+ Ka5 39.Rdb6 Rf5 40.f3 Rf7 41.Kh3 Rd7 42.Kg4 Rd2 43.R2b5+ Ka4 44.Rb1 Ka5 45.R1b5+ Ka4 46.Rxb7 Rxb7 47.Rxb7 Rxg2 48.Kh3



This ending is very good for White, because the black king is completely out of the action on the kingside. White was able to win a pawn due to this, and get a winning ending—although rook and pawn endings with an extra pawn are often tricky to win, as the rest of the game illustrated.

48...Rf2 49.Rb6 Rxf3 50.Kg4 Rc3 51.Rxh6 Kb5 52.Rf6 Ra3 53.Rf3 Ra8 54.Kxg5 Rg8+ 55.Kh5 Rh8+ 56.Kg6 Kc5 57.g4 Rg8+ 58.Kh5 Rh8+ 59.Kg5 Rg8+



60.Kf4?

60.Kf5 is a win for White. Black returns the favour at move 65, but White's final error at move 71 lets Black off with a draw.

60...Kd5 61.Re3 Rf8+ 62.Kg3 Rg8 63.Re1 Kd6 64.Re4 Kd5 65.Kf3 Rh8? (65...Rf8+) 66.Re7 Rf8+ 67.Kg3 Kd6 68.Re4 Kd5 69.Rf4 Rg8 70.Rf6 Ke5 71.Ra6? (71.Rh6) 71...Rh8 72.Rb6 Rh1 73.Rc6 Rh8 74.g5 Kf5 75.Rc5+ Kg6 76.Kg4 Rh1 77.Rc6+ Kg7 78.Rc7+

1/2-1/2

Since White was pressing for a win in this variation in a game between two grandmasters, I'd say that it should definitely offer enough winning chances at club level, where both sides are far more likely to go wrong early in the game.

B3b2. White sacs a pawn: 7.Bxd5 Qxd5 8.Nc3 Qa5 9.Nxe4 Be6 10.Neg5 0-0 11.Nxe6 fxe6 12.Bg5!?



This is similar to the 12.Bg5 idea in the line beginning 8...Qh5. Stefan Bucker pointed out in one of his Chesscafe.com articles that his gambit idea, letting Black hold onto the e-pawn in order to tie Black down to defence and then develop a queenside attack, also works against 8...Qa5.

Black usually holds onto the pawn with 12...Re8, and I have been able to locate one game with Stefan Bucker's 13.Re4. Burkett-Husemann, corr. 2011, continued: 13...h6 14.Bd2 Qb5 15.c3 d3 16.Qb3 Qxb3 17.axb3 g5 18.Nd4 Nxd4 19.Rxd4 Rd8 20.Rxd8+ Kxd8 21.Rxa7, and White regained the pawn and the game was soon drawn.

As this isn't really what White wants to get out of the opening, it is worth looking for alternatives: I suggest 16.b4, launching a queenside attack (see diagram), with the idea Qb3 and a4, and the earlier alternative 14.Bh4, as reasonable (and unexplored) alternatives.



As in the 8...Qh5 line, 12.Bg5 can also be met by 12...Rd5. It leads to a similar situation, e.g. 13.Rxe6 Bd6 14.Bh4 g5 15.Bg3 Bxg3 16.hxg3 h5 17.a3, with equal chances.

Conclusions

It seems that while the "Anti-Max Lange" is fully equal for Black, it is not as drawish as its reputation and the resulting middlegames offer chances for both sides.

The Canal Variation, 7.Nc3?!, is dubious, because Black can play 7...dxc3 8.Bxd5 Be6, with the idea of swapping off into a simplified pawn-up position: 9.Bxe4 Qxd1 10.Rxd1 cxb2 11.Bxb2 f6. I can't see any good way for White to deviate from that sequence.

7.Bxd5 is the right move, with the very "visual" follow-up, 7...Qxd5 8.Nc3. It is doubtful if 8...Qd8 equalises, so Black should choose between 8...Qh5 and 8...Qa5, and can achieve interesting and equal play in both variations.

Against 8...Qh5, Stefan Bucker's pawn sacrifice idea is probably the most promising, with 9.Nxe4 Be6 10.Neg5 0-0-0 11.Nxe6 fxe6 12.Bg5 (instead of recapturing the pawn on e6 immediately).

Against 8...Qa5, White can use the same idea, but with the black queen on a5 rather than h5, putting less pressure on the white kingside, 12.Rxe6 is also fully playable.