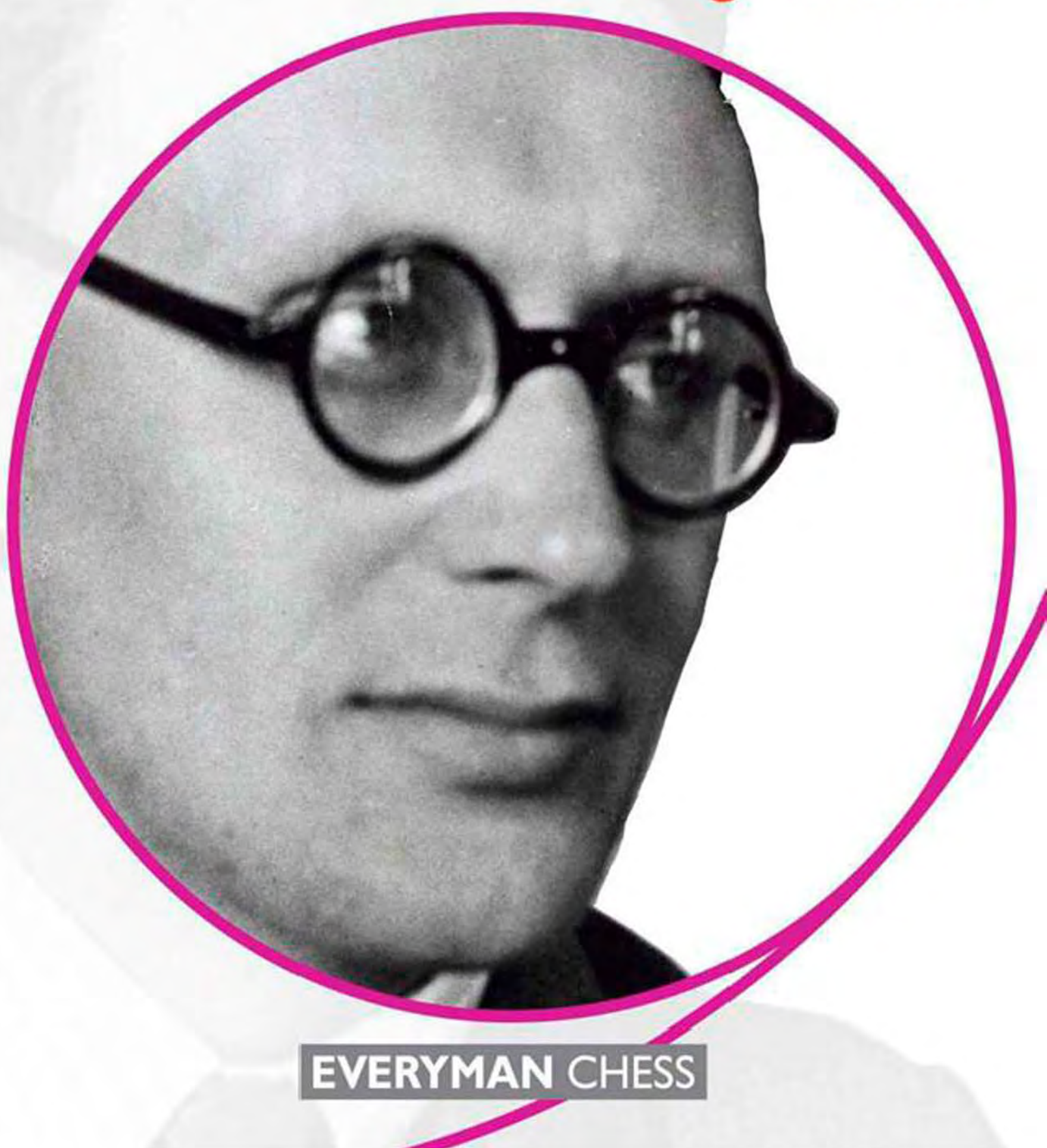


Cyrus Lakdawala

Botvinnik

move by move



EVERYMAN CHESS

Cyrus Lakdawala

Botvinnik

move by move

EVERYMAN CHESS
www.everymanchess.com

First published in 2013 by Gloucester Publishers Limited, Northburgh House,
10 Northburgh Street, London EC1V 0AT

Copyright © 2013 Cyrus Lakdawala

The right of Cyrus Lakdawala to be identified as the author of this work has been
asserted in accordance with the Copyrights, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a
retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic,
electrostatic, magnetic tape, photocopying, recording or otherwise,
without prior permission of the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Kindle ISBN: 978-1-78194-104-1

Ebook ISBN: 978-1-78194-103-4

Distributed in North America by The Globe Pequot Press, P.O Box 480,
246 Goose Lane, Guilford, CT 06437-0480.

All other sales enquiries should be directed to Everyman Chess, Northburgh House,
10 Northburgh Street, London EC1V 0AT
tel: 020 7253 7887 fax: 020 7490 3708
email: info@everymanchess.com; website: www.everymanchess.com

Everyman is the registered trade mark of Random House Inc. and is used in this work under licence from
Random House Inc.

Everyman Chess Series

Chief advisor: Byron Jacobs

Commissioning editor: John Emms

Assistant editor: Richard Palliser

Typeset and edited by First Rank Publishing, Brighton.
Cover design by Horatio Monteverde.

About the Author

Cyrus Lakdawala is an International Master, a former National Open and American Open Champion, and a six-time State Champion. He has been teaching chess for over 30 years, and coaches some of the top junior players in the US.

Also by the Author:

Play the London System

A Ferocious Opening Repertoire

The Slav: Move by Move

1 ... d6: Move by Move

The Caro-Kann: Move by Move

The Four Knights: Move by Move

Capablanca: Move by Move

The Modern Defence: Move by Move

Kramnik: Move by Move

The Colle: Move by Move

The Scandinavian: Move by Move

Contents

About the Author

Bibliography

Introduction

1 Botvinnik on the Attack

2 Botvinnik on Defence

3 Riding the Dynamic Element

4 Botvinnik on Exploiting Imbalances

5 Botvinnik on Accumulating Advantages

6 Botvinnik on Endings

Index of Opponents

Bibliography

100 Selected Games, Mikhail Botvinnik, (Dover 1960)

Botvinnik-Petrosian: The 1963 World Chess Championship Match, Mikhail Botvinnik (New in Chess 2010)

Botvinnik's Best Games 1947-1970, Mikhail Botvinnik (Batsford 1972)

Botvinnik's Secret Games, Jan Timman (Hardinge Simpole Publishing 2006)

Chess from Morphy to Botvinnik, Imre Konig (Bonanza Books 1950)

My 60 Memorable Games, Bobby Fischer, (Batsford 1969)

My Great Predecessors Vol. II, Garry Kasparov (Everyman Chess 2003)

Pachman's Decisive Games, Ludek Pachman (Pitman Publishing 1975)

Tal-Botvinnik 1960, Mikhail Tal (Russell Enterprises 1970)

Twelve Great Chess Players and their Best Games, Irving Chernev (Oxford University Press 1976)

Introduction

"All told, there is not a single weakness in his armour." – Reuben Fine.

On August 17th 1911, in St Petersburg, a titan of the game entered the world. Mikhail Botvinnik was born to a dentist mother, and a father who was a dental technician. He learned chess at the unbelievably late age (for a world champion) of 12. It was love at first sight. Botvinnik displayed staggering natural talent (although he claimed, rather outrageously, that he had little) and, through the help of his coach, Abram Model, won the 1931 USSR Championship at age 20, the youngest to do so. In this period he casually annexed a PhD in Electrical Engineering as well. In fact he continued work as an engineer even as world champion – unthinkable by today's requirements to reach the most exalted level. Botvinnik claimed – a claim I don't believe at all! – that his side job as engineer actually helped him in his chess, since he was always hungry to play.

By 1936 he was perhaps the strongest player in the world, demonstrated by his performance at Nottingham, with an undefeated tie for first with Capablanca and ahead of World Champion Alekhine. Due to the interruption of WWII, Botvinnik had to wait twelve long years before he became the official sixth World Champion, after having won the great 1948 World Championship tournament at The Hague/Moscow. He dominated the event, surging a full three (!) points ahead of his closest rival, Smyslov. There were whispers that the Communist Party authorities forced Botvinnik's Soviet rivals to throw games, but there is no proof of this. A similar charge was made later that Bronstein was forced to throw the next to last game in his World Championship match versus Botvinnik, yet Bronstein's widow vehemently denied the claim and said Botvinnik drew the match (and retained his title) fair and square.

Max Euwe noted: "Most players feel uncomfortable in difficult positions, but Botvinnik seems to enjoy them!" The match format, Botvinnik's forte, he considered the ultimate test of one's character. Botvinnik held on to the title, which he subconsciously considered his private property, for a full 15 years, with two intermissions – when Smyslov and Tal briefly "borrowed" his title. Botvinnik's lengthy reign quite possibly surpassed Lasker's, since Lasker tended to dodge his great contenders, whereas Botvinnik faced all of them. Botvinnik, through dint of his superior preparation methods, decisively won both rematches. Smyslov he simply outprepped and outplayed strategically. But perhaps most impressive was how he dodged Tal's frantic attempts to complicate and forced his younger, less experienced (World Champion!) opponent into blocked positions and endings. Botvinnik quashed every attempt to confuse, and regained the title in convincing fashion, albeit bolstered by Tal's ill health.

Botvinnik – along with Morphy, Capablanca, Fischer, Karpov (and Carlsen!?) – was the greatest strategist of his day (or any day!). An argument can be made that Botvinnik was the single most important chess figure of the 20th century – yes, you heard me correctly. Perhaps even more so than Fischer. The reason: players such as Capablanca, Alekhine, Tal, Fischer, Karpov, Kasparov and Carlsen are merely isolated geniuses, all of whom produced beautiful games, yet none revolutionized modern chess training into a formulation, a school. Botvinnik, on the other hand, through his intensely rigorous pre-game preparation techniques, was the father of the Soviet School of chess and, by proxy, the father of all modern day professional preparation and coaching. Botvinnik's secret (to Westerners) training techniques may be the main reason the Soviets took sole control over the world championship title for the next quarter century, when only the anomaly of Bobby Fischer ripped it from

Soviet hands. The reason we all so frantically order and study the latest opening books is due to Botvinnik, who understood the deep importance of opening theory and pre-game preparation.

One senses from Botvinnik's play, the residue of a rigorously efficient personality, utterly incapable of tolerating failure in himself. And when he did fail (his losing matches versus Smyslov and Tal) he returned to the rematches with demonic resurgence, upending the pretenders to what he considered his private kingdom: the title of World Chess Champion.

He was a stern man, who, from my personal 1977 simul meeting with him as a teen, lacked affability. (He slammed and screwed in the pieces when he moved and glared at your terrified, pimple-faced writer through those scary coke-bottle glasses of his, as a stern principal would to a difficult student.) Botvinnik, a lifelong, devout Communist Party member, was a man his peers mostly disliked and distrusted, yet couldn't help but respect. He was prone to make outrageous overstatements on perceived character flaws of his rivals, and yet, one senses, never bothered to ponder any particular defects in his own. Through chess, this incredibly confrontational personality discovered a novel method of diverting his monumental inner aggression into the harmless realm of the abstract.

Botvinnik's style

With Botvinnik, there emerged a new style of play I call *power chess*—high end aggression, yet arising from strategic, not solely tactical bases. To my mind Vladimir Kramnik (Botvinnik's student—yes, yes, I know: nobody equates Kramnik to such an aggressive style, but having written a book on him, I declare to you it's true!) is Botvinnik's spiritual chess son, who embodies Botvinnik's power chess in the present. As Capablanca, Alekhine, Keres and others learned to their dismay, Botvinnik was not a man to be trifled with in battles of calculation power, and when he seized the initiative – especially in his prime – his fortunes always rose. Initiative was always the prime focus as we see in this book over and over again, Botvinnik rejecting material offers if they interfered with his initiative, the way a picky eater walks through an unappetizing discount buffet line with a nearly empty plate.

Botvinnik claimed his great weakness was his inability to spot combinations at critical junctures. But I harbour grave doubts about Botvinnik's self-confessed, purported weakness. Having gone over most of his games in preparation for the book, I was staggered to discover that Botvinnik virtually never missed a combination in his prime – the mid 1930s to the mid 1950s. If *Houdini* saw it, Botvinnik saw it too. His alleged weakness began to arise from the late 1950s onward, when Botvinnik was past his prime (yet unbelievably, still world champion!).

Botvinnik, like Lasker before him, cultivated a psychologist's insight into each of his rival's shortcomings, and deftly and diabolically weaponized this understanding over the board in his pre-game preparation. For instance, if he played Keres, he would try and reach a position where it was bad for Keres to open the game (e.g. the white side of a Nimzo-Indian, where Botvinnik's side had the bishop pair), and yet Botvinnik knew Keres loved open positions! If he played Tal, he frustrated the Latvian's love of tactics by bogging him down in blocked positions and endings, where Botvinnik reigned. Conversely, against the sedate Petrosian, Botvinnik would jar him by provoking an early crisis and opening the position. In this fashion, Botvinnik filed away his opponent's quirks and weaknesses for his own future reference.

King of the Opening

Botvinnik plumbed the depths of the early stages of the game, understanding and dissecting his lines the way a novelist's head is populated with a cast of dozens of characters. Botvinnik virtually kept his opponents in mental shackles, most breathing a relieved sigh if they managed to escape that phase of the game. He understood his opening systems like no other before him. So intimately and deeply did he understand the nuances, that even players such as Keres, Tal and Smyslov sometimes failed to emerge alive from the opening stage. He was the first world champion truly to weaponize the opening phase of the game, using it as a whip, which had the effect of cowing nervous opponents into meek theoretical dodges. Each early crush of a strong GM opponent came across as a warning shot to posterity itself.

Botvinnik, like Alekhine before him and Fischer after him, strove for perfection in his pre-game prep, with a work ethic bordering on fanaticism. He exemplified the spirit of modern professionalism – an anomaly in his age – of a game which was then considered a hobby, a pleasant intellectual pastime, in which one relied upon natural ability. He never played blitz: “Yes, I have played a blitz game once,” he said, “It was on a train, in 1929.” He was also vehement in his scorn for the memorization of opening variations without understanding: “Memorization of variations could be even worse than playing in a tournament without looking in the

books at all!"

He was methodical, almost to the point of predictability. He would bring to each game a thermos of secret content to nourish his brain. When his clock ran, Botvinnik would calculate variations in purely mathematical fashion ("If 23 Rxe6, then I have the trick 23 ... Kh7!" etc). When his opponents were on the move, Botvinnik worked schematically, verbally forging plans and potential futures.

Botvinnik's opening/pre-game research produced a rich yield of new understanding, branching out in multiple directions. Through his unbelievably high level of erudition, Botvinnik gave direct theoretical challenge to the opening ethos of his time in a compendium of lines, including the French Defence, Caro-Kann, Grünfeld, Sicilian Dragon, Nimzo-Indian, and many, many other lines. In fact, he continually altered and improved upon theory in whichever lines he played, always at the forefront of theory. He had a disconcerting habit of radically altering long-held assessments, almost as a routine occurrence, and systematized opening knowledge to new, previously unheard of levels. I for one am grateful to Botvinnik, since those who lack the creativity to invent ourselves (e.g. your writer!), can still imitate giants before us, who blazed new theory on a routine basis.

Here we see the 14-year-old Botvinnik dismantle a great world champion in a simultaneous game. We are reminded of the words from The Who's *Acid Queen*: "Your boy won't be a boy no more; young, but not a child."

Game 1

J.R.Capablanca-M.Botvinnik

Leningrad (simul) 1925

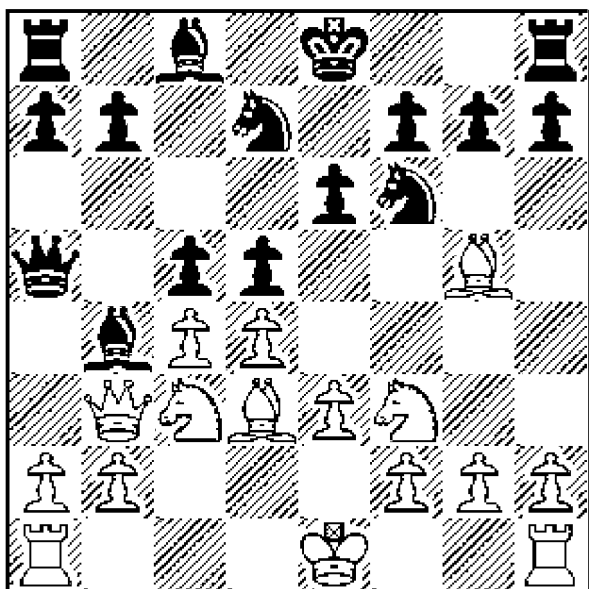
Queen's Gambit Declined

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Nbd7 5 e3 Bb4

Botvinnik had a lifelong penchant for meeting queen's pawn openings with ... Bb4 and ... c7-c5, Ragozin-style positions. He sidesteps the more solid Queen's Gambit Declined lines 5 ... c6 and 5 ... Be7.

6 cxd5

Capablanca beat Edward Lasker from Black's side after 6 Nf3 c5 7 Bd3 Qa5 8 Qb3?.



Exercise (combination alert): Although White's last move was a blunder, very few of us are awake to combinational possibilities this

early in the game. What did the usually hyper-alert Capa miss here?

Answer: He missed the bizarre anomaly 8 ... b5!!, winning material no matter how White responds.

Instead, the game continued 8 ... Ne4? (the natural move but not the best) 9 0-0!? (offering material for development) 9 ... Nxc5 (Capa always veered toward the simple, avoiding the great complications arising from 9 ... Bxc3 10 cxd5! which *Houdini* rates at even) 10 Nxc5 cxd4 11 Nb5?! (White should sac with 11 exd4! dxc4 12 Qxc4 Bxc3 13 Nxe6! fxe6 14 Qxe6+ Kd8 15 bxc3 with reasonable attacking chances for the piece) 11 ... Nc5 12 Qc2 Nxd3 13 Qxd3 a6 14 Nxd4 dxc4 15 Qxc4 Bd7 and Capa went on to out-technique his opponent from this point in Ed.Lasker-J.R.Capablanca, New York 1915.

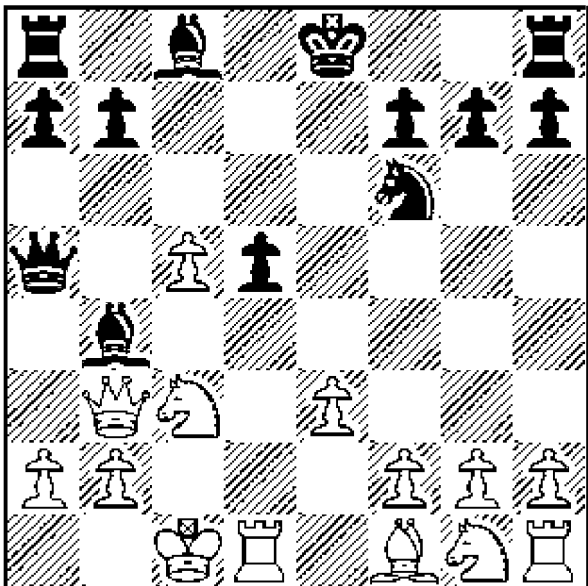
6 ... exd5 7 Qb3

The queen is vulnerable on b3, both to a future ... c7-c5-c4 (or d4xc5 Nxc5), and ... Be6. Today, 7 Nf3 and 7 Bd3 are normally played at this point.

7 ... c5 8 dxc5 Qa5

The queen piles on to the pin with the routine of a farmer deciding which of his unfortunate chickens is to be tonight's dinner.

9 Bxf6 Nxf6 10 0-0-0?



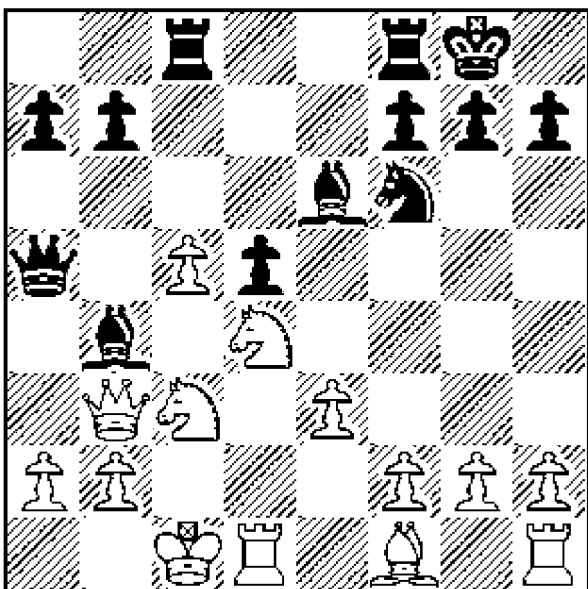
Overly optimistic. The white king's counsellors, fatal advisors, whisper sweet promises of conquest into his ears, and convince him to sign an unwise declaration of war. This opportunistic decision isn't exactly born of the precision or logic to which we are normally accustomed from Capablanca. If you decide to embark on an adventure, be sure not to run into the waiting arms of an enemy! When the powerful congregate in a fixed location, it makes for a tempting target if you are an assassin. Capa launches an unmodulated notion with, one senses, mingled misgivings and exuberance, allowing his king to wander precipitously far from the natural security of his own side. Indeed, he ventures an agitated and clumsy demonstration on the queenside, which soon gets drowned out in a barrage of black threats.

Question: This decision certainly doesn't fit Capablanca's profile, does it?

Answer: Agreed, but simul exude their own social mores. Capa, not being clairvoyant, doesn't realize the kid in front of him in the simul is destined to be a world champion. Compare this game to Botvinnik's upending of Keres in Game 25. At this point Capa fails to acquire understanding of his rising misery index.

10 ... 0-0 11 Nf3 Be6 12 Nd4 Rac8

Perhaps the wrong rook. I would have played the other one to c8; *i.e.* 12 ... Rfc8! and if 13 c6 bxc6, when the a8-rook is available for b8.



13 c6

Capa desperately attempts to block the open c-file.

Question: Yes, but at the cost of opening the b-file! Shouldn't White just play for an ending with the simple 13 Kb1 Bxc3 14 Qxc3 - ?

Answer: Capa loved endings – but not *lost* endings, which he would enter after 14 ... Qxc3 15 bxc3 Ne4! 16 Rc1 Nxf2 17 Rg1 Rxc5, when White's strategic woes continue to accrete like a chemical company's effluent, surreptitiously dumped into the local river.

13 ... Bxc3

13 ... bxc6 looks promising as well.

14 Qxc3 Qxa2 15 Bd3 bxc6 16 Kc2!

A little simul cheapo, threatening Ra1.

16 ... c5! 17 Nxe6

Not now 17 Ra1?? cxd4 and wins.

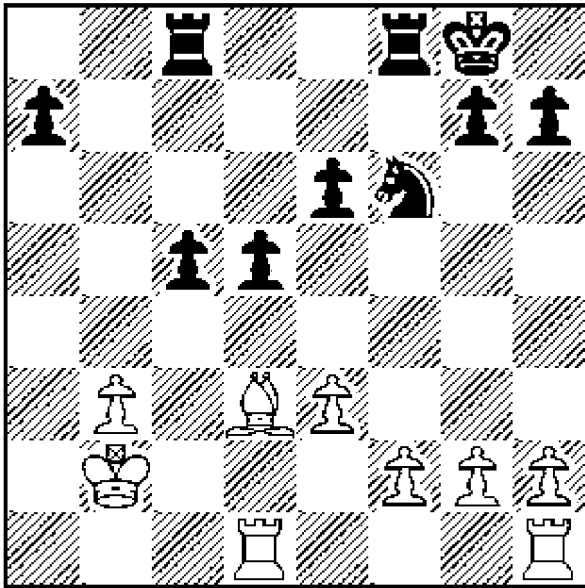
17 ... Qa4+!

17 ... fxe6? allows an escape after 18 Ra1 d4! 19 Rxa2 dxc3 20 bxc3 Ng4 21 f3 Nxe3+ 22 Kc1 and White should be okay, despite being a pawn down, since he acquires targets on a7 and e6.

18 b3 Qa2+ 19 Qb2

The queen abruptly decides to leave, absolving herself from all involvement in the matter. White's chances look grim in the ending when juxtaposed against Black's, but there is no real choice since retaining queens with 19 Kc1?? fxe6 leaves White's king fatally exposed to the elements.

19 ... Qxb2+ 20 Kxb2 fxe6



Understanding dawns, the “=” sign at the tail end of a difficult mathematical equation: White is completely busted. Not only is he a pawn down, his king remains terribly insecure. The young Botvinnik embarked on the final assault with great purpose, and never gave his legendary opponent a speck of hope.

21 f3 Rc7

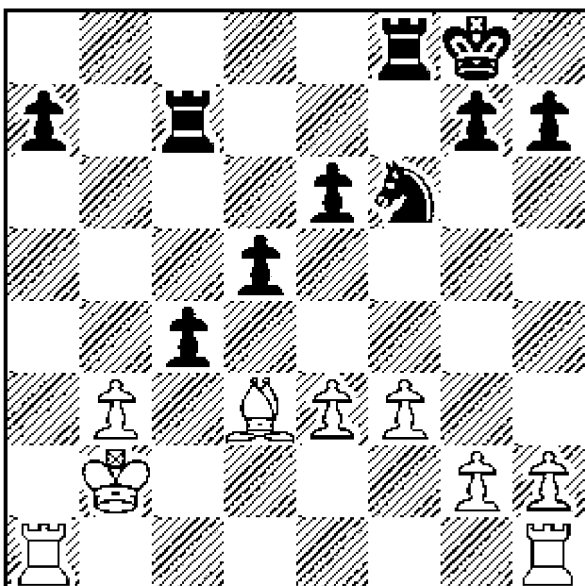
The immediate 21 ... c4! looks a shade more accurate.

22 Ra1

22 e4! Rb8 (22 ... dxe4 is met by 23 Bc4!) 23 exd5 exd5 24 Kc2 was White’s best defensive chance.

22 ... c4!

Excellent judgment. Botvinnik’s salivating remaining pieces luxuriate in the taste of hunting down a world champion’s king. The attack isn’t over, despite the fact that queens have come off the board.



23 bxc4 dxc4 24 Bc2 Rb8+ 25 Kc1

The king lollops around, the way a drunk attempts to get out of a chair but keeps falling back into it. When surrounded by the courageous, a man is ashamed if he

doesn't follow suit. Unfortunately, 25 Kc3? walks into 25 ... Nd5+ 26 Kd4 c3! (threatening ... Rb4+, followed by ... Nxe3) 27 e4 Nf4 and now 28 Ke5 (28 g3? Rd8+ 29 Ke3 Ng2+ 30 Kf2 Rd2+ mates in a few moves) 28 ... Nxg2 29 Kxe6 Rb2 is hopeless for White.

25 ... Nd5 26 Re1 c3! 27 Ra3 Nb4!

Threatening to capture on c2, followed by ... Rb2+.

28 Re2 Rd8!

Toying with ... Rd2 ideas.

29 e4 Rc6!

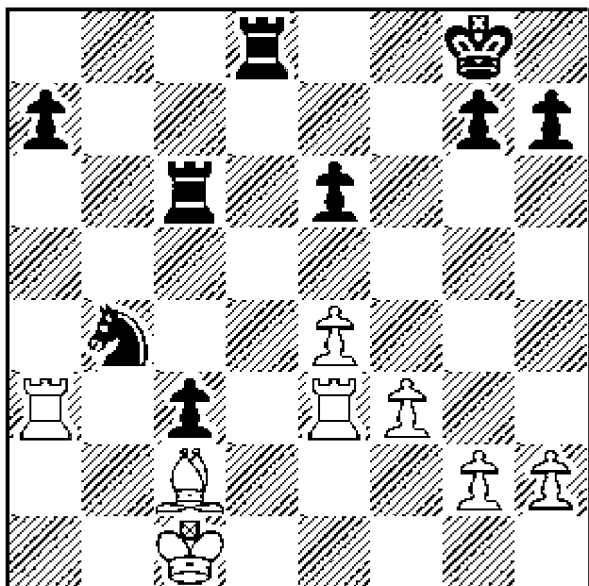
The rook affects a humble posture with a servile hunch to get past the guards.

Question: Why not 29 ... Rd2 immediately?

Answer: Even when busted, Capa was always alert to opportunities for mischief. In this case, destitute of defensive resources, White tries his hand in a semi-swindle with 30 Rxc3! when he still harbours some hope of survival.

30 Re3

Botvinnik's attack, now completely out of control, transforms into an unalterable property of nature, outside of White's control. Capa continues to resist desperately as well as fruitlessly. 30 Rxa7 Rd2! also wins.



Acknowledgements

Many thanks as always to editors GM John Emms and Jonathan Tait for vigilantly cleaning up your careless writer's numerous goof-ups throughout the book. Thanks also to Nancy and Tim for proof-reading and computer back-up. May Botvinnik's iron logic percolate into deepened understanding for us all.

Cyrus Lakdawala,
San Diego,
July 2013

Chapter One

Botvinnik on the Attack

When researching Botvinnik's games I quickly realized that the entire book could easily be comprised solely of his numerous attacking games. When a young man, Botvinnik, like most of us, loved to attack. But in his case attacks were systematically built. His masterpiece against Capablanca above is a clear example. He would first accrue appreciable strategic gains, and only later attempt to cash out with direct assaults upon the opposing king. Botvinnik's attacks were rarely desperado style—you know the ones I mean: you emit a hoarse war-cry and charge headlong with the sole intention of inflicting as much damage as possible before one side succumbs. Instead, Botvinnik's opponents were subjected to lengthy interrogation under the harsh glare of the lamp, and were gradually brought low, their ragged forces shivering in their tented encampments, awaiting the arrival of the inevitable final blow.

Game 2

I.Rabinovich-M.Botvinnik

USSR Championship, Moscow 1927

Dutch Defence

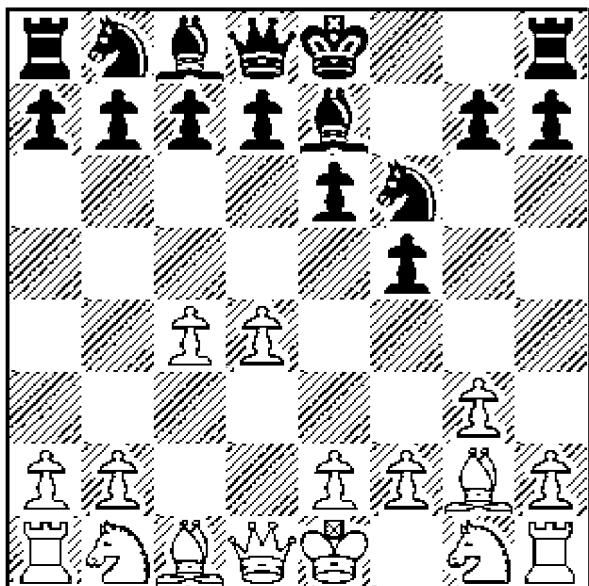
1 d4 e6

Botvinnik was equally comfortable in the French, Semi-Slav or Stonewall Dutch.

2 c4 f5

Dutch it is.

3 g3 Nf6 4 Bg2 Be7



Question: In the Stonewall, isn't it better for Black to place his bishop on d6, a more aggressive square, which also fights for e5?

Answer: Well, I play Stonewall, albeit usually as White via a Colle move order, and do like to place my bishop on the correspondingly aggressive d3-square if possible. But there are arguments for posting the bishop on e7 as well. If Black posts his bishop on d6: 1. White may play a set-up like b2-b3, Bb2 and then Ne5. Then if Black exchanges with a d7-knight, he gets forked and drops a piece. However, if his bishop is on e7 in this position, then ... Nxe5 is just fine for

Black, who manages to plug up the e5-hole.

2. White may challenge the d6-post with something like 4 ... d5 5 Nf3 c6 6 0-0 Bd6 7 Bf4!. Again, Black would be better off with a bishop on e7.

5 Nc3 0-0 6 Nf3 d5

It's official – a Stonewall.

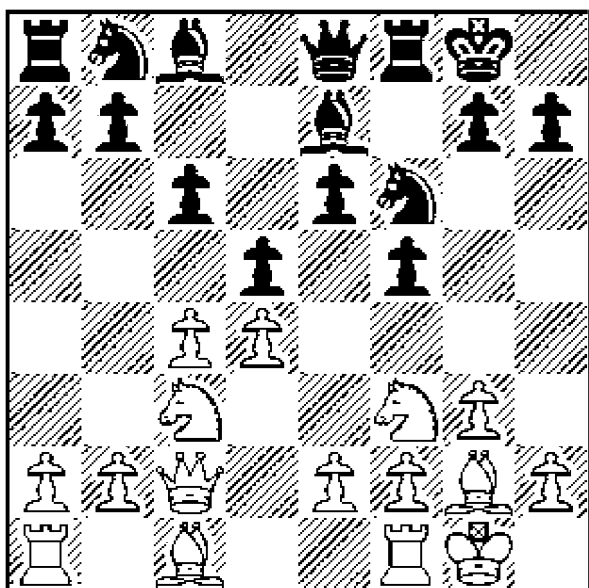
Question: Is the Stonewall a sound line for Black?

Answer: I don't care for it as Black, but there is no accounting for personal tastes. My wife Nancy squeals in joy and claps her hands in delight at the thought of a trip to Disneyland, while I view the same trip as a wilful descent into vulgar commercialism. Instead, 6 ... d6 would be a Classical Dutch.

7 0-0 c6 8 Qc2

8 b3 Qe8 is another set-up for White.

8 ... Qe8



Botvinnik's favourite manoeuvre. He plans to swing the queen over to h5, in the neighbourhood of White's king.

9 Bf4

I am always wary of playing this move on the White side versus a Stonewall, mainly because Stonewallers, nearly always pathological attackers, just love to toss in a quick ... g7-g5!? to go for mate.

Question: Well then, what would you suggest as an alternative plan for White?

Answer: My tendency is to play for a quick b2-b4; e.g. 9 Rb1 Qh5 10 b4 Nbd7 11 b5 as I.Stohl-M.Kujovic, Slovakian Team Championship 1999. I would be very nervous here as Black, since the queenside opens with alarming rapidity.

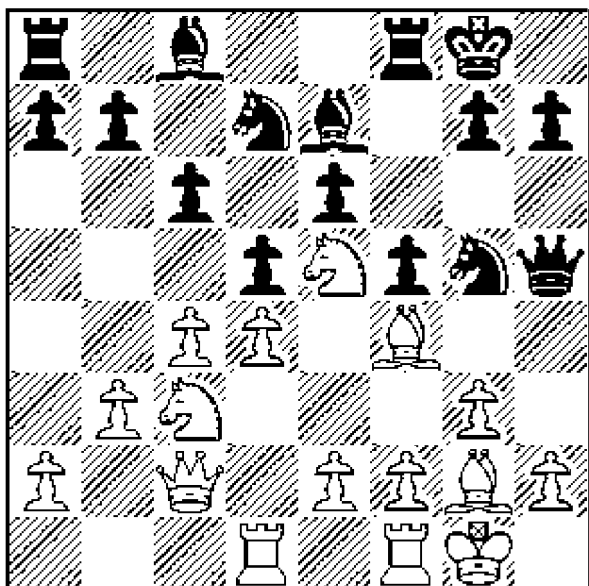
9 ... Qh5 10 Rad1

It isn't too late for my favourite plan: 10 Rab1 Ne4 11 b4 Nd7 12 b5 g5 13 Bc1!? (I would go for 13 Bc7) 13 ... g4 14 Ne1 Nb6 15 c5 Nxc3 16 Qxc3 Nc4 17 bxc6 bxc6, J.Hammer-S.Haubro, Oslo 2012, when I still prefer White after 18 Nd3.

10 ... Nbd7 11 b3

11 Ng5 is met by 11 ... Ng4!, which forces White to weaken with 12 h4 Ndf6 13 f3 Nh6 with growing complications.

11 ... Ne4 12 Ne5 Ng5



Botvinnik looks for trouble on h3.

13 h4!?

Risky. Some of us indulge in the transgressive need to disobey that which is considered lawful. *Principle: Don't unnecessarily weaken your king's pawn front.*

Question: What other move does White have?

Answer: I would go for a more cautious approach like 13 Bxg5! (this move effectively short circuits the black attack's nervous system) 13 ... Bxg5 14 Nxd7 Bxd7 15 e3 and I prefer White, who slowly expands on the queenside.

Question: Aren't you worried about Black's bishop pair?

Answer: Not here, for two reasons:

1. From my experience, Black's attack sags considerably in Stonewall structures when you remove his knights from the board.

2. The position is closed and probably will remain so when White plays f2-f4 and c4-c5, in which case, Black's bishops may be more of a liability than advantage.

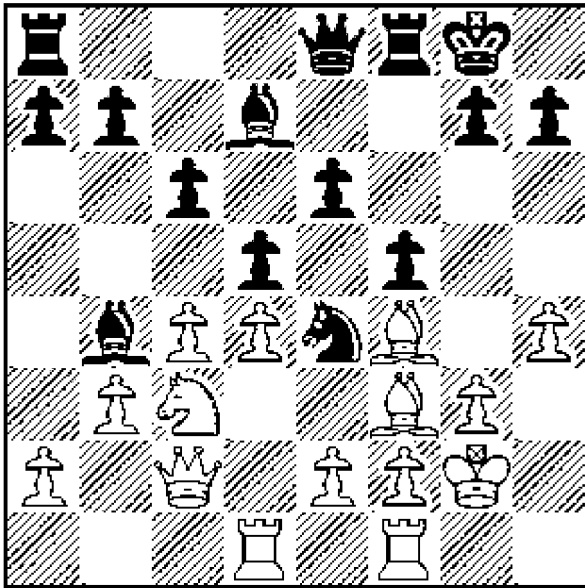
13 ... Ne4 14 Bf3 Qe8 15 Nxd7

White is well advised to swap a few pieces.

15 ... Bxd7 16 Kg2

Now any future ... g7-g5 will be met by h4xg5 and Rh1, seizing the newly opened h-file.

16 ... Bb4!



Provoking White's next move.

17 Bxe4?!

White cedes control over key light squares. The humble 17 Na4 looks better.

17 ... fxe4 18 Rh1 Qh5!

Black menaces potential exchange sacs on f4, as well as threats to chop the white knight and swipe White's e-pawn.

19 f3?

White engineers his own ruin with this weakening move.

19 ... Qg6!

The vengeful queen's eyes narrow in deliberate calculation. The dual threats are ... e4xf3+, winning the queen, and ... Rxf4.

20 Kf1

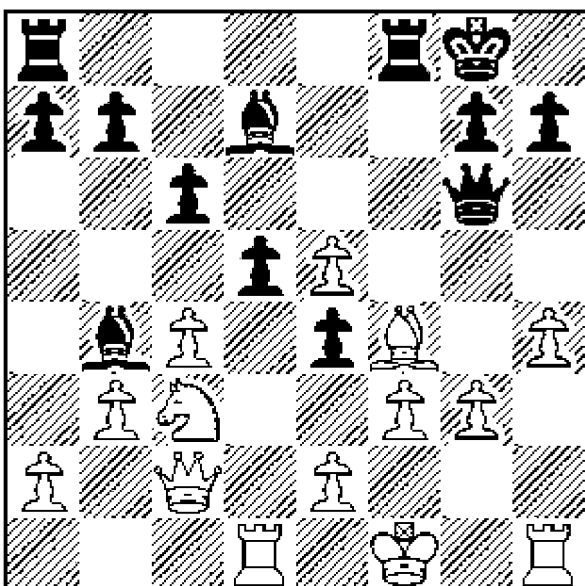
Evading both threats at the cost of placing his king on the open f-file.

20 ... e5!

Powerfully introducing the light-squared bishop to White's king. 20 ... Rxf4! 21 gxf4 Qg3! was also very strong.

21 dxe5?

No better was 21 Bxe5? Qg4! 22 Bf4 Rxf4! 23 gxf4 exf3 and the attack's leading indicators all out perform expectations. His best chance lay in 21 h5 Bh3+! 22 Rxh3 Qe6 23 Rh2 exf4 24 g4 Rae8 with an admittedly awful position for White.



Exercise (planning): Work out a winning attack for Black.

Answer: Step 1: Destroy White's only functional defender.

21 ... Rxf4!

A shot which blows a gaping hole in the white defensive barrier.

22 gxf4

Step 2: Infiltrate deep into the recesses of White's inner sanctum.

22 ... Qg3!

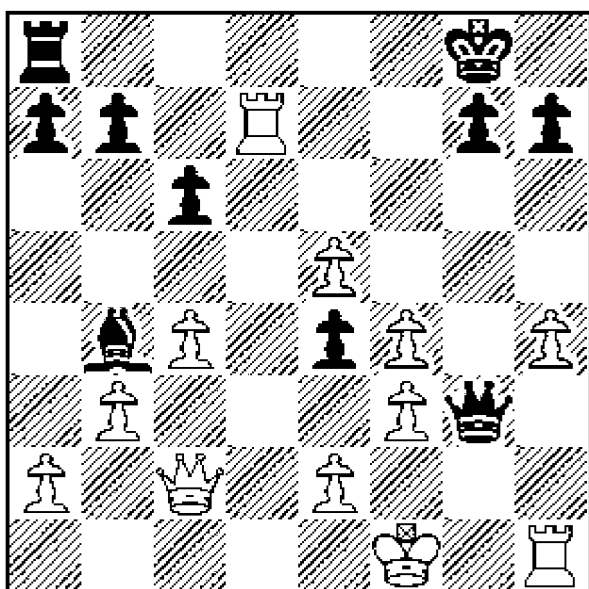
Black threatens both ... e4-e3 and ... Bh3+. The contagion, gradual in its onset, now proliferates on the dark squares. White's king, exasperated by the intrusive black queen's endless monologue, takes a deep breath, exhales slowly, and takes a sip of wine, praying his dinner-date ordeal soon comes to a conclusion.

23 Nxe4

White's only try.

23 ... dxe4 24 Rxd7

The f2-square appears to be the epicentre of diverse ambitions: Black's to engineer mate; White's to avoid that fate. Both 24 ... e3 and 24 ... Bc5 look like they win for Black but this is an optical illusion. One wins, the other walks into a trap.



Exercise (combination alert/critical decision):

We must make a decision. Choose carefully.

Answer: Black's queen is the super-villain and the dark-squared bishop is her Mini Me. **24 ... Bc5!**

The genetically altered mutation smiles inwardly at the challenge, which is really no challenge at all, since he now possesses the strength of eight men in one body. The alternative 24 ... e3?? also looks devastating, until we notice 25 Rxc7+!. King and queen trip gracelessly over themselves and wail their loss in simultaneous, inarticulate woe. Black must resign, since either capture of the rook loses to 26 Rg1.

25 e3 Qxf3+ 26 Qf2

26 Kg1 Bxe3+ 27 Kh2 Qxf4+ wins the d7-rook.

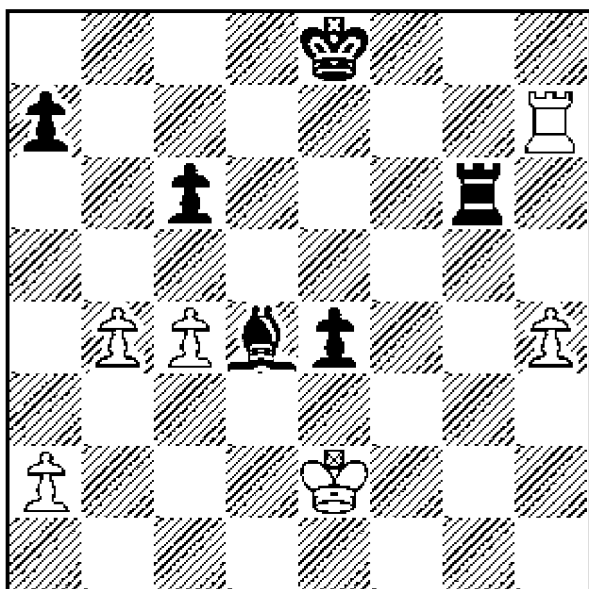
26 ... Qxh1+ 27 Ke2 Qh3 28 f5 Qg4+ 29 Kd2 Rf8

White's pawns are going nowhere.

30 e6 Qxf5 31 Qxf5 Rxf5 32 Rxb7 Rf2+ 33 Ke1 Rf6 34 b4 Bxe3 35 Ke2 Bg1 36 e7 Kf7 37 e8Q+ Kxe8 38 Rxb7

White plays on, much like the poor man who buys a lottery ticket, which essentially buys hope, far more than the infinitesimally minute actual chance of winning and striking it rich. At this stage, White's war-weary defenders are only capable of offering token resistance.

38 ... Rg6 39 Rxh7 Bd4



Black's passed e-pawn soon forces its way through.

40 c5 Rg2+ 41 Kf1 Rf2+ 42 Ke1

The dying old king rasps final instructions to his non-existent, now dead generals, his voice sounding like metallic scrapings: "Avenge me!"

42 ... e3 0-1

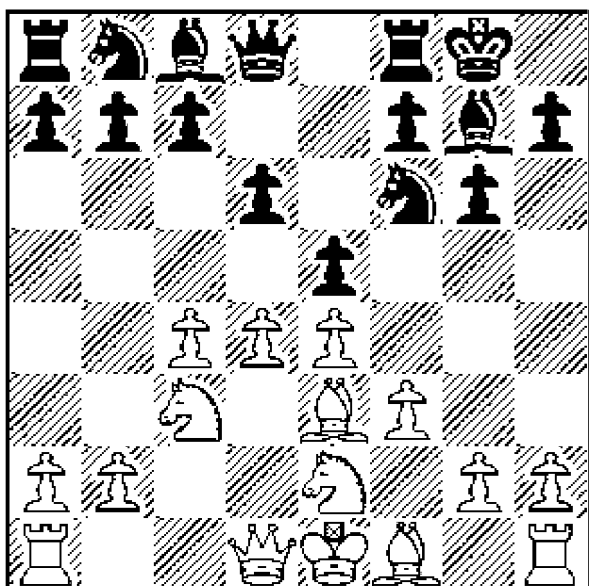
Game 3

M.Botvinnik-V.Alatortsev

USSR Championship, Moscow 1931

King's Indian Defence

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 f3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 Nc3 0-0 6 Be3 e5 7 Nge2



7 ... Nc6

I don't think this move works very well against the Sämisch.

Question: What do you suggest?

Answer: I like Kasparov's treatment: 7 ... c6 8 Qd2 Nbd7 9 Rd1 (9 d5 is probably White's best here) 9 ... a6 10 dxe5 Nxe5! 11 b3 b5 12 cxb5 axb5 13 Qxd6 Nfd7! 14 f4 b4!, when Black's pieces suddenly got scarily active, A.Karpov-G.Kasparov, Linares 1993.

8 Qd2 Nd7

Black tends to get squeezed after this move. Instead:

a) 8 ... a6 9 d5 Na5 10 Nc1 c5 11 dxc6 Nxc6 12 Nb3 Be6 13 Rd1 and White exerted pressure on d6, J.Sammour Hasbun-H.Nakamura, US Chess League 2007.

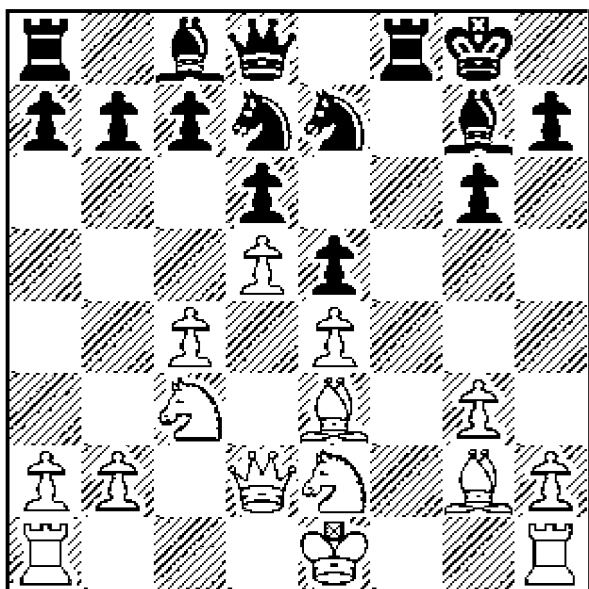
b) 8 ... exd4 is probably Black's best bet; e.g. 9 Nxd4 Nxd4 10 Bxd4 c6 11 Be2 Be6 12 0-0 Qa5 with only a minimal edge for White, V.Shinkevich-P.Enders, Budapest 1996.

9 d5 Ne7 10 g3

Question: Isn't this move a bit odd?

Answer: It is, but remember the King's Indian Defence was in its infancy in the 1930s. At that time everyone played it oddly. Also, Botvinnik's move scores well for White. With the hindsight of 70+ years of theory, 10 g4 f5 11 h3! is probably White's optimal line, as in A.Karpov-P.Virostko, Cannes (simul) 1998, when Black is denied normal KID kingside counterplay.

10 ... f5 11 Bg2 fxe4 12 fxe4



12 ... Nf6

M.Botvinnik-L.Szabo, European Team Championship, Hamburg 1965, saw 12 ... a6 13 h3 Rb8 14 Ba7! Ra8 15 Bf2!, cleverly gaining a tempo.

Question: How did this constitute a tempo gain?

Answer: The difference is with his bishop on f2, White can castle kingside. After 15 ... h6 16 0-0 Nf6 17 Be3 Kh7, White was ready for queenside expansion, while Black lacked kingside counterplay.

13 h3

Halting ... Ng4 ideas.

13 ... b6

This only delays c4-c5, which White can prepare with a future b2(b3)-b4.

14 b3

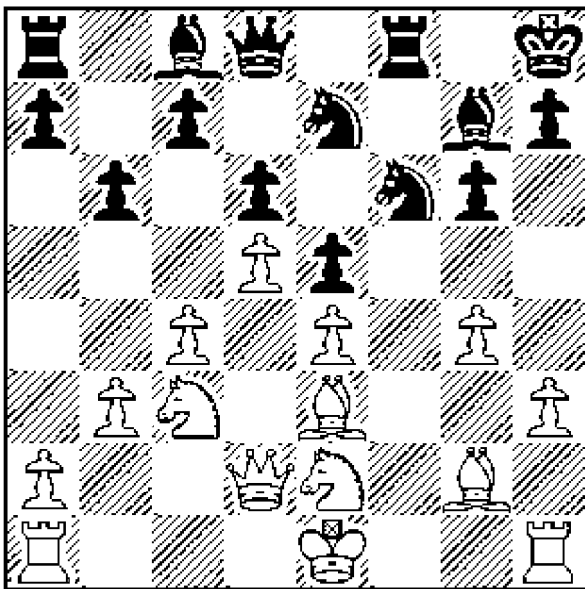
In those days everyone played KID with excruciating slowness! No modern GM would even consider this move.

14 ... Kh8

Question: What is the point of Black's last move?

Answer: He frees g8 for his knight. But after that, who knows? You actually put your finger on Black's main problem: he has no constructive method of improving his position. Clearly, the opening has not gone well for Black, who chafes under the restrictions of the ruling authority. At this point Alatortsev must have experienced that awful intuition one gets upon the realization that the power of penances are sometimes not enough to grant grace.

15 g4



Played in Botvinnik's younger style: he goes after Black's king. A more positional player would perhaps castle kingside and play for the queenside c4-c5 break.

15 ... Nc8 16 Ng3 Bd7 17 0-0-0

When going through Botvinnik's games, I was struck by the fact that he nearly always won the game in situations of opposite wing castling. Botvinnik the pure strategist is a myth! 17 g5 Nh5 (17 ... Ne8 looks even worse, since White eventually forces through h3-h4-h5) 18 Nxh5 gxh5 was tempting too.

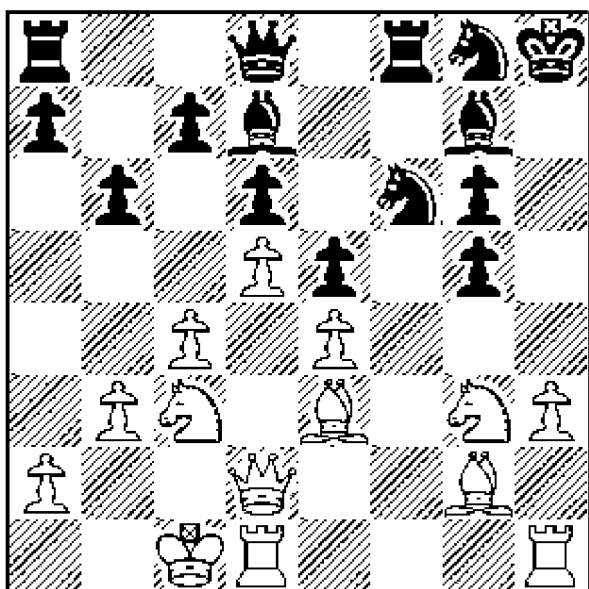
17 ... h6

Perhaps contemplating ... Nh7, but the move allows White to cleave open a passageway to Black's king even more quickly.

18 g5 hxg5?!

Black has to try 18 ... Nh7 19 h4 h5, when White may switch plans and expand on

the queenside unchallenged.



Clearly the white alien mothership rules this quadrant of space – trillions upon trillions of cubic miles – and woe to those spacefarers who dare to trespass upon the claim.

Exercise (planning): Find White’s optimal attacking plan.

Answer: Ram through the h-pawn.

19 h4!

The disparate activity ratios of the two parties are plain to see.

19 ... Bg4?

The unfortunate bishop is issued his first and last command: a suicide mission. 19 ... g4 20 h5 Kh7 21 hxg6+ Kxg6 was Black’s last dismal hope of survival, though even here his game looks irredeemable in its inherent wretchedness after 22 Rdf1, intending Nf5 next.

20 hxg5+ Nh5 21 Nce2

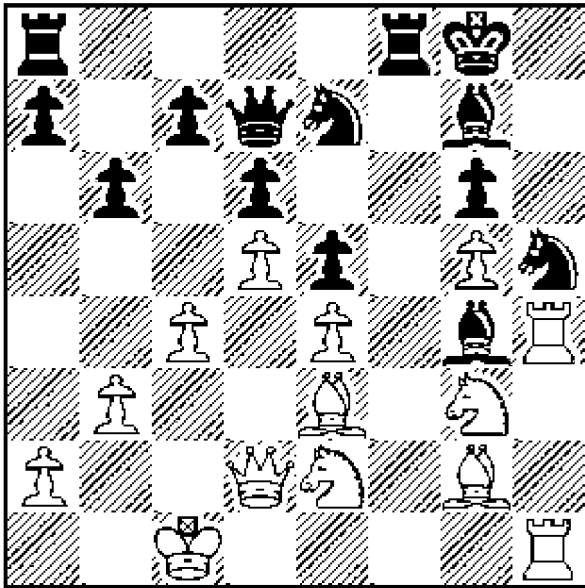
21 Nxh5! gxh5 22 Bh3! was more effective, eliminating Black’s only reliable defender.

21 ... Ne7 22 Rh4 Qd7 23 Rdh1

White’s rooks, wearing their Sunday best, show up on the black king’s doorstep, the way Jehovah’s Witnesses appear on mine, ready to convert me, despite the prominent “No Solicitors!” sign in my window.

23 ... Kg8?

Black’s king, who incautiously borrowed a large sum of money from a mob connection, now listens to his phone messages: two sales calls; three warnings; five outright threats.



Exercise (combination alert): Black's last move was a blunder in a lost position. His position destabilized into a quivering, gelatinous blob, unable to withstand the slightest pressure. How did Botvinnik exploit it?

Answer: Step 1: Eliminate the defender of the light squares by swatting the pest aside with contemptuous ease.

24 Rxg4!

A dark, underground branch of the government is required to do the dirty work, which, if done in the sunlight, would be illegal. Now the defence splinters and cracks open.

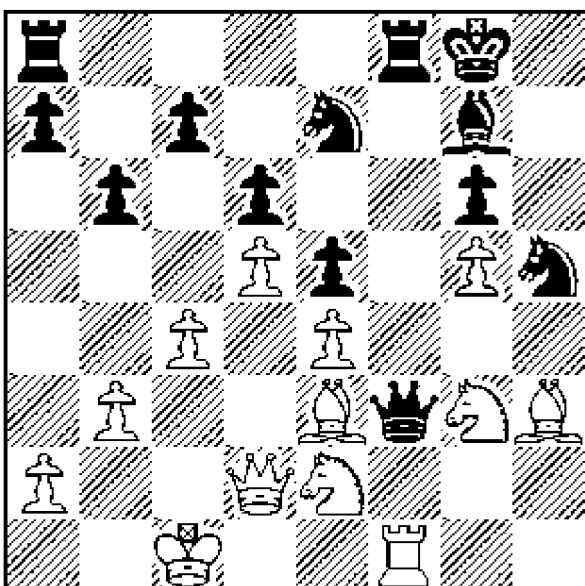
24 ... Qxg4

Step 2: Transfer his own bishop to a deadly diagonal.

25 Bh3 Qf3

Step 3: Trap Black's wayward queen.

26 Rf1



A move which confirms the black queen's darkest fears: she has no place to run.
26 ... Nxc3 27 Be6+ 1-0

The bishop closes his eyes and listens with rapt bliss to the black king's tormented screams.

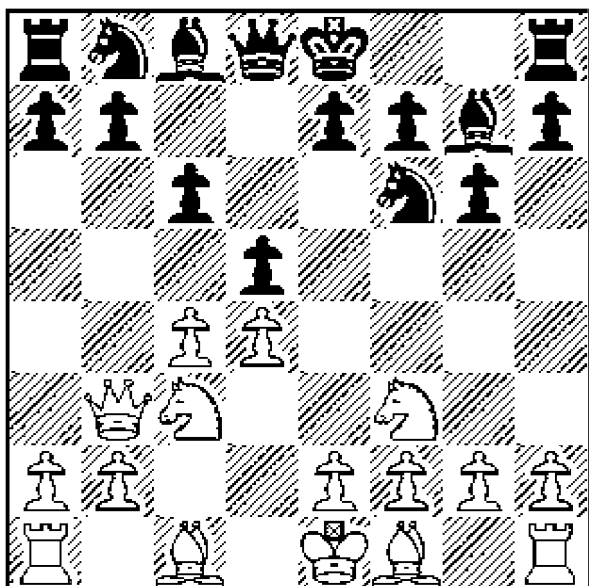
Game 4

M.Botvinnik-M.Yudovich

USSR Championship, Leningrad 1933

Grünfeld Defence

1 c4 Nf6 2 d4 g6 3 Nc3 d5 4 Nf3 Bg7 5 Qb3 c6



A solid but passive choice. The modern treatment runs 5 ... dxc4 6 Qxc4 0-0 7 e4 a6.

6 cxd5 Nxd5

6 ... cxd5 7 Bg5 also offers White an edge, as in M.Botvinnik-S.Flohr, AVRO Tournament, The Netherlands 1938. Black's fianchetto doesn't work all that well in an Exchange Slav format, since the bishop hits a wall on d4.

7 Bd2

Of course the more direct 7 e4 is possible too.

7 ... 0-0 8 e4 Nb6

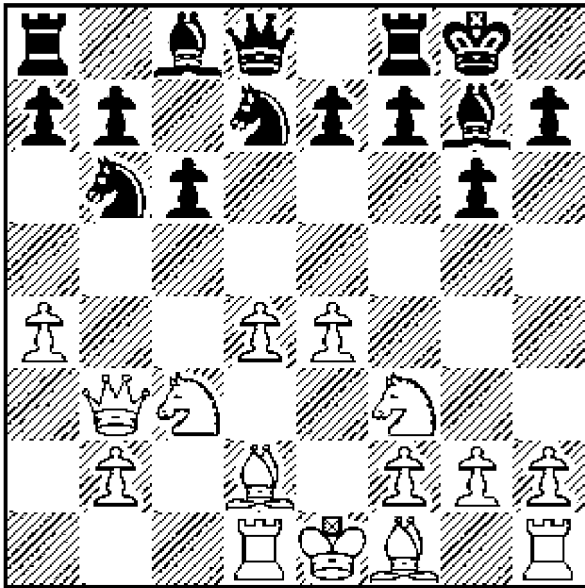
8 ... Nxc3 9 Bxc3 would in a sense justify White's earlier Bd2 move.

9 Rd1 N8d7

Black might consider easing his cramped quarters via swaps with 9 ... Bg4 10 Be3 Bxf3 11 gxf3 N8d7. Here 11 ... e6 12 h4 h5 13 a4 Qc7 14 f4 N8d7 15 f5 exf5 16 exf5 gave White a dangerous attack, V.Anand-S.Noll, Bad Mergentheim (simul) 1993.

10 a4

Perhaps White should toss in 10 Bg5! to prevent a freeing ... e7-e5.



10 ... a5

Question: Shouldn't Black break with 10 ... e5 - ?

Answer: I agree, he should indeed. After 11 dxe5 (or 11 Be3 exd4 12 Nxd4 Qe7 13 a5 Nc5 14 Qa3 Nbd7 and following ... Re8, Black begins to generate play against the e4-pawn) 11 ... Nxe5 12 Nxe5 Bxe5 13 Bh6 Qe7 14 Bxf8 Qxf8, Black may get enough dark square play to compensate the loss of the exchange.

11 Be3

Now it will be difficult for Black to engineer either ... e7-e5 or ... c6-c5.

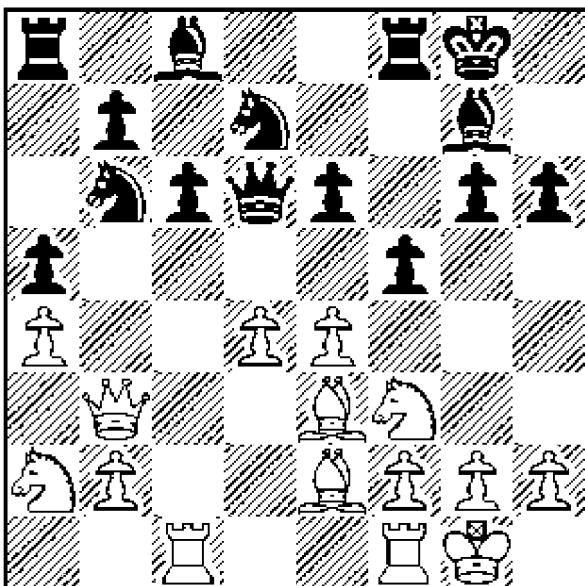
11 ... Qc7 12 Be2 Qd6

Intending ... Qb4. 12 ... e5?? is no longer possible, as after 13 dxe5 Black can't recapture because he would lose the knight on b6.

13 Na2!

Oh, nyet you don't!

13 ... e6 14 0-0 h6 15 Rc1 f5!/?



Sensing a gradual squeeze, Black lashes out for counterplay.

16 Nc3

White can also consider 16 e5! (grabbing space at the cost of handing Black a hole on d5) 16 ... Qe7 17 Nc3 g5 18 Ne1! with a clear advantage.

16 ... Kh7

16 ... Qb4?? hangs the e6-pawn.

17 Rfd1 fxe4?

Black allows himself to be tempted by the win of the white a-pawn. Instead, he could generate much needed play after 17 ... Qb4! 18 Qc2 Nc4.

18 Nxe4 Qb4?!

Question: Why dubious? The move looks like it forces White to swap queens or drop a pawn.

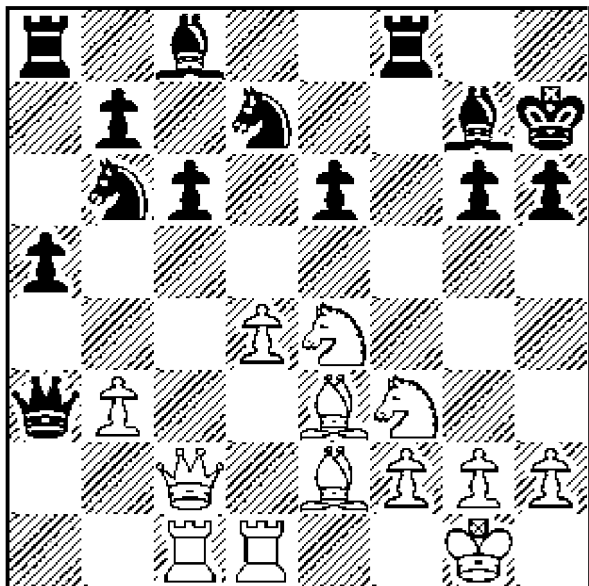
Answer: This move is less a mistake than a symptom, a flare-up of a degenerative disease: underestimation of an opponent's attacking potential. The issuing of demands from a position of inferiority seems an unwise policy. Black fails to sense the danger and the premise of his plan is flawed, thereby fatally contaminating his position. He should settle for 18 ... Qe7.

19 Qc2 Qxa4

A child (the a-pawn) inherits not only a parent's wealth, but his enemies too. In Game 8, Botvinnik also gives away his a-pawn in his attacking masterpiece against Capablanca.

20 b3 Qa3

Black soon pays for his avarice since he is unable to deal with a chronically weak square, susceptible to sudden assault.



Exercise (planning): First, you must discover which square ails Black, then work out the exploitation.

Answer: Botvinnik constructs his universe through sheer force of will. The chronic weakness of g6 costs Black the game.

21 Nh4!

The knight exhibits the unnerving characteristic of popping up where least expected. White's forces, having accumulated vast reserves of resentment against the black king, decide it's payback time and come after him from challenging angles.

21 ... Qe7

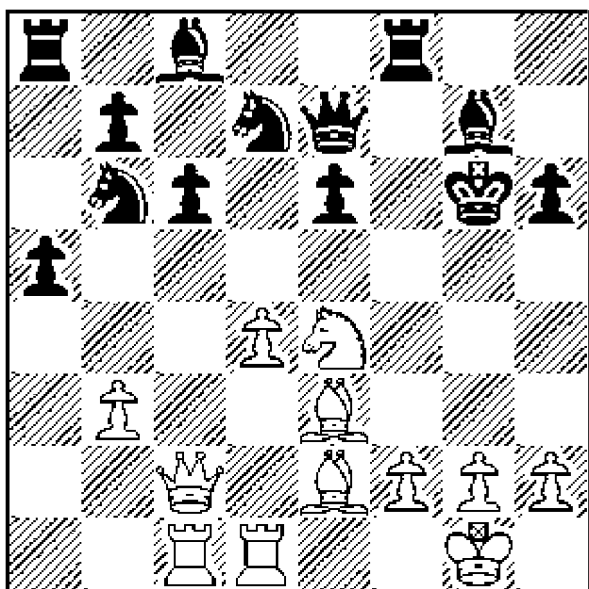
A move which presages a rather dismal tomorrow for Black's king, although it does have the benefit of shortening his suffering.

Question: Can Black save himself by offering an exchange with 21 ... Rf5 - ?

Answer: Your line is marginally better; the trouble is White isn't obliged to take the exchange. Instead, he can continue attacking by 22 g4! Rd5 23 Nc5 Nf8 24 Nxg6! Nxg6 25 h4! with a crushing attack.

22 Nxg6! Kxg6

Black's most awful suppositions have come to pass. Now society stratifies via strict caste distinctions - Black's king, of course, firmly placed in the "untouchable" category.



Exercise (combination alert): An explosive move is afoot. White to play and force mate.

Answer: Ignore all the tempting knight discoveries and come at Black with the bishop.

23 Bh5+!! 1-0

The bishop destroys his rival, wiping away the stain of his very existence. Now the dreadful attack flows unabated after 23 ... Kxh5 (on a moonless night, the black king tumbles overboard; otherwise 23 ... Kh7 24 Nf6+ Kh8 25 Qh7 mate or 23 ... Kf5 24 g4 mate) 24 Ng3+ Kh4 25 Qe4+ (the queen resurfaces) 25 ... Rf4 (the spite block!) 26 Qxf4 mate.

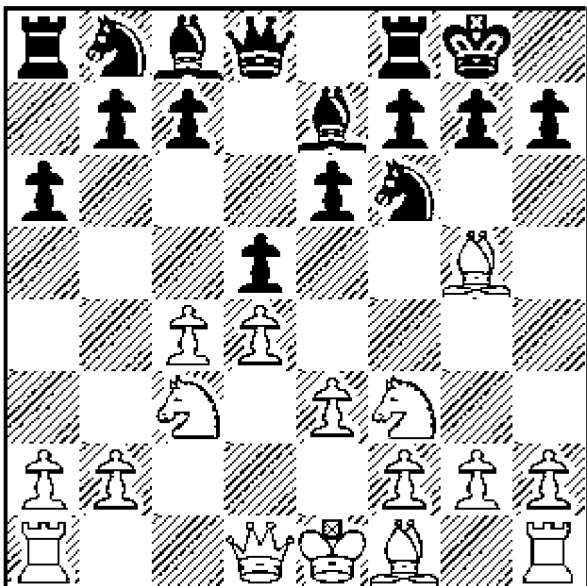
Game 5

M.Botvinnik-V.Alatortsev

Leningrad 1934

Queen's Gambit Declined

1 d4 e6 2 c4 d5 3 Nf3 Be7 4 Nc3 Nf6 5 Bg5 0-0 6 e3 a6



Question: What is the idea behind this move?

Answer: Black hopes for Bd3?! from White. Then he plans ... d5xc4, ... b7-b5, ... Bb7, ... Nbd7 and ... c7-c5, with a hybrid Queen's Gambit Accepted, but with an extra move since White took two moves, not one, to recapture on c4.

Question: So how does White deal with this idea?

Answer: Please see the next move!

7 cxd5!

Transposing to a QGD Exchange variation where Black's ... a7-a6 may not necessarily come in handy for him.

7 ... exd5

Question: If this is the case, can Black then head for a QGD Semi-Tarrasch formation with 7 ... Nxd5 - ?

Answer: He can, but I don't see how ... a7-a6 helps him in any way in the Semi-Tarrasch. For example, after 8 Bxe7 Qxe7 9 Rc1 Nxc3 10 Rxc3 c6, as in B.Jobava-Zhang Pengxiang, Dos Hermanas (online blitz) 2006, Black remains in a terribly passive position and everyone is left wondering why he played ... a7-a6, which is absolutely of no use to him in this position.

8 Bd3 c6?!

This just doesn't feel right and Black's ... a7-a6 begins to stick out as a wasted move. Perhaps his best bet is to offer an isolani position with 8 ... Nbd7 9 Qc2 c5.

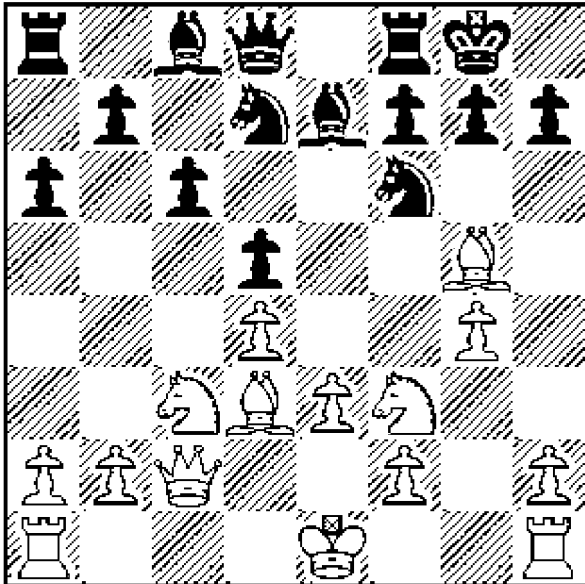
9 Qc2 Nbd7

A book position from the QGD Carlsbad line, but with the possibly useless ... a7-a6 tossed in for Black, rather than the developing move 9 ... Re8. But back then, ... a7-a6 wasn't considered a waste of time.

Question: Why not?

Answer: Well, the only known plan for White was to castle kingside and then play for a minority attack with Ra1-b1, b2-b4, a2-a4 and b4-b5, where Black's ... a7-a6 would actually come in handy. Botvinnik's next move was a completely new concept for the time.

10 g4!!



The rewards of lashing out often exceed the gratification of patience, its obverse. 10 g4 was a theoretical novelty at the time, and a powerful one, which virtually refutes Black's play. White threatens Bxf6 followed by g4-g5. The effect of this move, in 1934, was the equivalent of a man proposing to his parents that he is considering giving up his successful medical practice to follow his dream of becoming a street mime. Time to build a coalition force to take down Black's king.

Question: Isn't this just a standard idea? White plans to castle queenside and initiate opposite wing attacks.

Answer: The move is standard – *today*. At the time this game was played, it was a radically new concept. We tend to take such ideas for granted, when in reality we should bring to mind the Isaac Newton quote about “standing on the shoulders of giants”.

10 ... Nxg4?!

Caveat emptor – buyer beware! The knight, clearly displaying blithe contempt for principle taboos, happily snatches a pawn and dares to defy the most holy of precepts: *Don't open lines to your own king for the opposing major pieces*.

10 ... g6 is a better try, though even there White's attack progresses alarmingly quickly after 11 h3 Re8 12 0-0-0 Nf8 13 Kb1 Be6 14 Bh6 Rc8 15 Ne5 c5 16 f4 cxd4 17 exd4 b5 18 f5 and White's attack was faster, J.Garcia Padron-I.Miladinovic, Las Palmas 1994.

11 Bxh7+ Kh8

Black's king rails at the fact that White's attackers fail to accord him the deference his high birth demands. His desperate sense of isolation grows and he realizes he lacks friends, while his enemy's allies grow by the day.

12 Bf4 Ndf6

The defenders move sluggishly, as if on barbiturates. Black is also unlikely to

survive 12 ... g6 13 Bxg6 fxg6 14 Qxg6 Rxf4 15 exf4 Nf8 16 Qh5+ Nh7 17 Rg1.

13 Bd3

The bishop scampers back to safety.

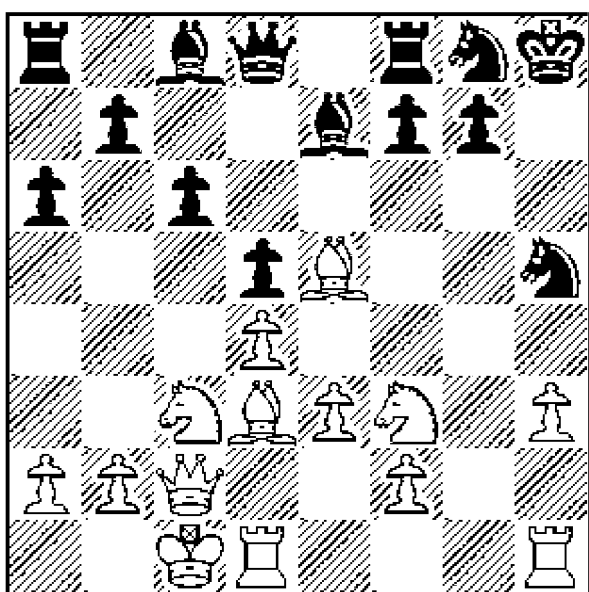
13 ... Nh5!?

The knight's flailings only produce an avalanche of further frustrations.

14 h3 Ngf6 15 Be5 Ng8

The defenders brace for the oncoming wave, hoping to arm the perimeter.

16 0-0-0



A casual glance tells us White's attack is destined to arrive first.

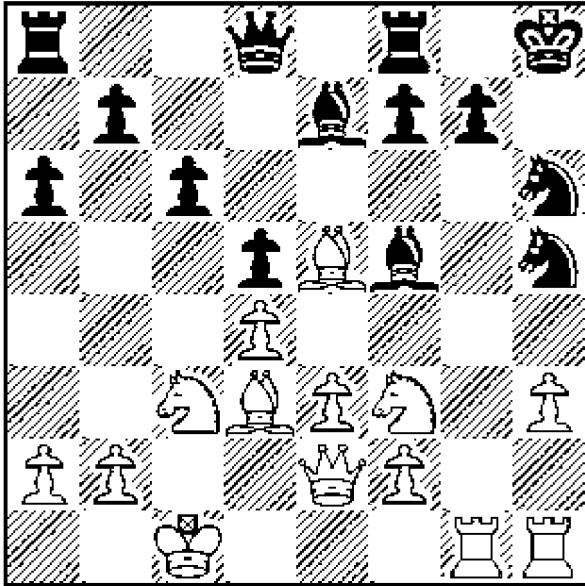
16 ... Nh6 17 Rdg1 Be6 18 Qe2!

Eyeing h5. The queen, rich with scorn, finally condescends to glance in the black king's direction.

18 ... Bf5?

A blunder, but Black wouldn't have been able to save himself after 18 ... Nf6 19 Ng5 either.

Black just blundered in an already troubled position. The geometry shifted ever so slightly, leaving an opening ajar for White's forces to enter. The flimsy mask is stripped away and the black king no longer able to conceal his presence.



Exercise (combination alert): Now Botvinnik orders the execution with prim finality. How did he do it?

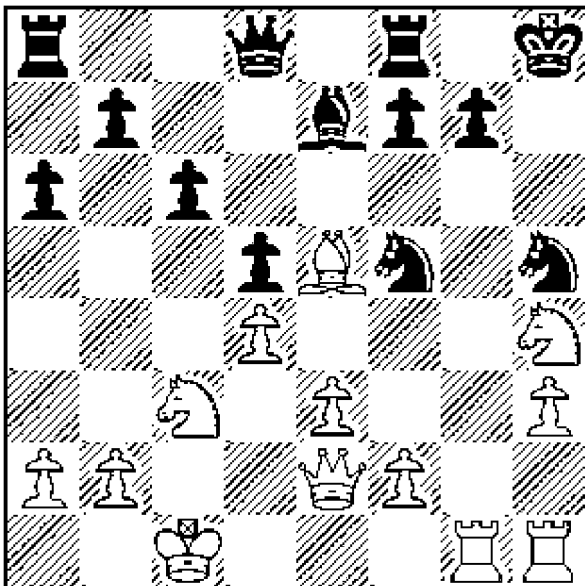
Answer:

Step 1: Lure Black's knight to f5.

19 Bxf5! Nxf5

Step 2: The crushing discovered attack leaves Black's unorganized pieces unable to save themselves. Black's kingside gets sliced apart like an order of sashimi.

20 Nh4! 1-0



White begins a pincer movement: two arms raking in chips won in a big poker hand. Black's hapless knights are harshly reminded that not all of us can be extraordinary, for then who remains to take on the thankless task of being ordinary?

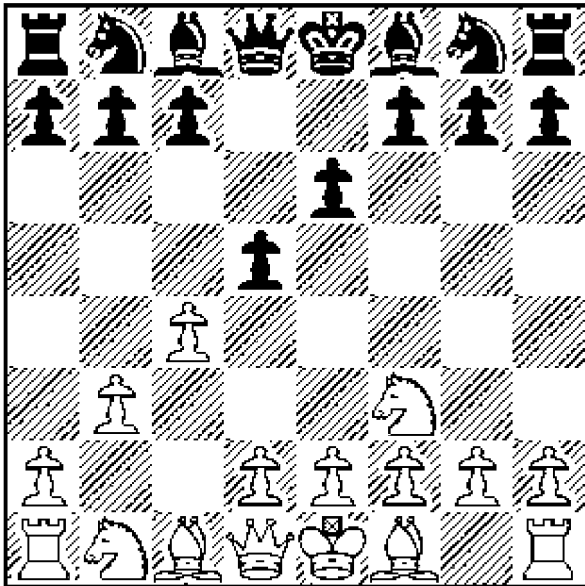
Game 6

M.Botvinnik-V.Chekhover

Moscow 1935

R ti Opening

1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 e6 3 b3



Botvinnik experiments with Réti's Opening, rare for the time because the idea of controlling the centre from the wing was still considered an eccentric notion, only reserved for hypermoderns.

3 ... Nf6 4 Bb2 Be7 5 e3 0-0

This line occasionally transposes to QGD Tarrasch-style isolani positions. For example, 5 ... c5 6 cxd5 exd5 7 d4, as in C.LakdawalaL.Sussman, San Diego (rapid) 2012.

6 Be2

6 g3 leads to a more common set-up after 6 ... c5 7 Bg2 Nc6 8 0-0 b6 9 Nc3 Bb7 10 cxd5 Nxd5 11 Nxd5 Qxd5 12 d4 Rad8 13 Ne5 Qd6 14 dxc5! Qxc5 15 Qe2 Nxe5 16 Bxb7 with an edge for White due to the bishop pair, Botvinnik/Polugaevsky-Keres/Prins, exhibition game, Amsterdam 1966.

6 ... c6

A solid but passive reaction. Black sets up a Semi-Slav vs. Reversed Queen's Indian formation.

Question: How is that passive?

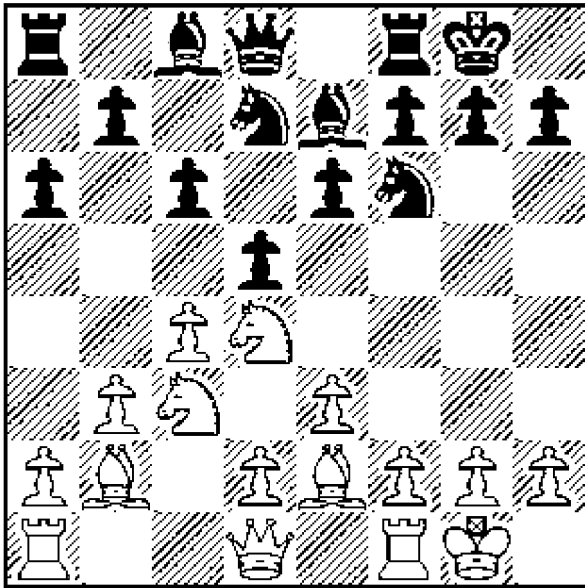
Answer: I reach a position similar to Chekhover's but with White in a Colle vs. Queen's Indian. In that version my bishop is more aggressively posted on d3. Here we see Chekhover's bishop on e7, where it fails to fight for control over the e5-square. Both 6 ... c5 and 6 ... b6 are more active methods of challenging White's opening.

7 0-0 Nbd7 8 Nc3 a6

Question: Why did Black toss this move in?

Answer: Black probably intended a queenside expansion with ... b7-b5.

9 Nd4?!



Well, this move proves that Botvinnik was no true hypermodern!

Question: Doesn't this just lose time? What is the point anyway?

Answer: Botvinnik's mysteriously dubious move must be in response to some fictional exigency – or at least one I can't fathom. And yes, it does lose time. Botvinnik hopes to provoke ... c6-c5, which may be a good move for Black! His move introduces an unprecedented level of subtlety – either that or it's just a weak move! My guess goes with the latter theory. 9 d4, 9 Rc1 and 9 Qc2 all look like better options for White.

9 ... dxc4?!

Question: And now Black voluntarily cedes some control over the centre by swapping his d-pawn for Black's b-pawn?

Answer: Well, this is 1935, so even strong GMs played this way in the opening. Today, I think an average club player would know not to make Black's last move and would automatically go for the superior 9 ... c5!, thinking "Thanks for the tempo!"

Question: How is that a tempo gain? Black moved his c-pawn twice as well.

Answer: Yes, but when White retreats his knight to f3, he will have moved his knight three times to reach a square he already reached in one! Then 10 Nf3 b6 11 cxd5 exd5 12 d4 Bb7 reaches a potential hanging pawns (or isolani) formation. The only other option is 10 Nc2, but there seems little point in putting the knight there.

10 bxc4

Now White's pawns enjoy greater central influence.

10 ... Nc5?!

More time wasted, since the knight later gets the boot from a d2-d4 push. I wish this hypermodern experiment would end soon! Somehow the mishandled (by both sides!) opening stage of this game grimly reminds me of how I played openings as a

kid, trying and failing in a misguided attempt to transform myself into a wannabe, poor man's Nimzowitsch. Black should go for 10 ... c5, though after 11 Nb3 b6 12 a4!, he now has to worry about his backward b6-pawn, and a4-a5 is also in the air. If Black halts this with 12 ... a5?!, he creates a hole on b5 for White's knight.

11 f4!

Halting ... e6-e5 and finally fighting for some control over the centre.

11 ... Qc7 12 Nf3

Once again halting ... e6-e5, and preparing for Qc2 and d2-d4.

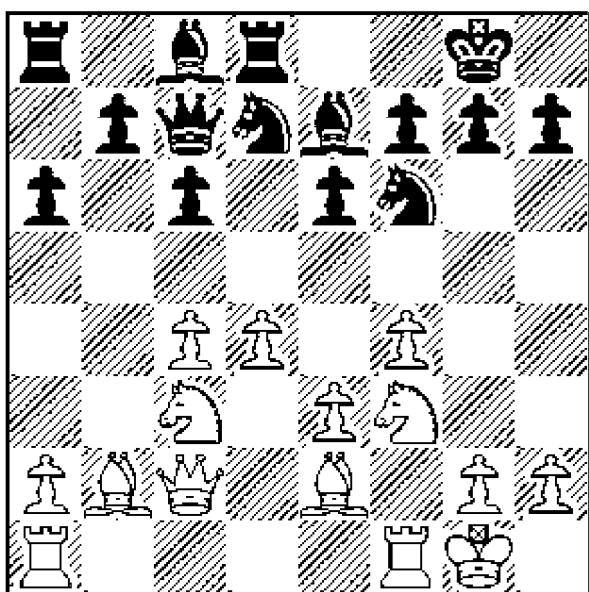
12 ... Rd8

12 ... b5!? is more active but also weakens the queenside.

13 Qc2 Ncd7

In advance of White's next move.

14 d4



Thank God. Back to classical chess. Botvinnik's epiphany: he isn't suited for the hypermodern lifestyle! It's as if a mad scientist, realizing he isn't cut out for a life of evil, unnatural experiments, unexpectedly throws away his lab coat, puts on a business suit and tie, and goes to work for an insurance company to earn an honest living.

14 ... c5

Chekhov apparently experienced the same epiphany!

15 Ne5

Botvinnik prefers to play to his strength and enter a hanging pawns formation.

Question: What is the alternative?

Answer: I think he missed an opportunity to enter a kind of super Benoni after 15 d5! exd5 (15 ... Nb6 16 Ng5! is also promising for White, since 16 ... h6? runs into 17 dxe6 hxg5 18 exf7+ with a decisive attack) 16 cxd5 b5 17 Ng5! Nb6! (not 17 ... b4?? 18 d6! Qxd6 19 Rad1 Qb8 20 Nd5 Re8 21 Bc4 and White is winning) 18 e4, when 18 ... h6 can be met by the promising sac 19 Nxf7! Kxf7 20 e5! Kg8! (20 ... Nfxd5? 21 Qh7! is crushing) 21 d6 Bxd6 22 exf6 with a dangerous attack.

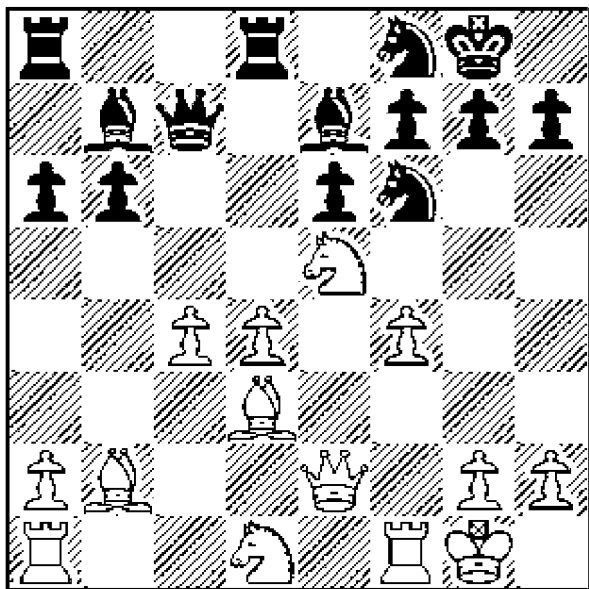
15 ... b6 16 Bd3 cxd4 17 exd4 Bb7 18 Qe2

18 Rad1 was more accurate.

18 ... Nf8

Understandably, both sides miss the impossible-to-find, computer-generated line 18 ... Nxe5!! 19 fxe5 Rxd4! 20 Nb5! (20 exf6?? loses on the spot to 20 ... Bc5! and if 21 Kh1 Rh4 forces mate) 20 ... axb5 21 Bxd4 bxc4 22 Bxc4 (or 22 exf6 cxd3 23 Qg4 Bf8) 22 ... Bc5 23 Bxc5 Qxc5+ 24 Kh1 Ne4 25 Bd3 Qxe5, when Black gets more than enough compensation for the exchange.

19 Nd1!



Dual purpose – by interweaving a pair of minor ideas, the effect is the creation of a major plan:

1. Botvinnik protects d4.

2. Botvinnik transfers his knight to the kingside, where he plans to launch a direct assault.

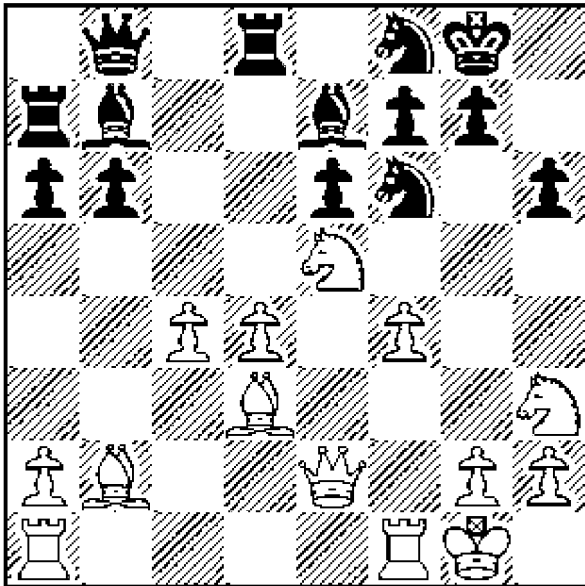
19 ... Ra7

Hoping to reinforce f7 via long distance. GM Ludek Pachman, who didn't like this move, writes: "Such unusual moves are only good on the rarest of occasions, and this is not one of them." He suggests the passive manoeuvre ... Bc6 and ... Be8, covering f7. The trouble with Pachman's line is that White simply picks off the bishop on c6 with a clear advantage; *i.e.* 19 ... Bc6 20 Nxc6 Qxc6 21 Ne3, when f5 is in the air and Black remains far from equality. Instead, *Houdini* suggests simply 19 ... Ng6.

20 Nf2!

Intention: Nh3 and Ng5. The immediate 20 f5! looks quite promising too: 20 ... exf5 is met by 21 Ne3! and if Black "consolidates" with 21 ... g6?! there follows 22 Bxf5!, when Black dare not accept the piece.

20 ... Qb8 21 Nh3 h6



Black's last move was designed to prevent Ng5. So now what? The blanket of Black's defence may look safe, snug and warm, but it's also too short, unable to cover the king's freezing toes.

Exercise (planning): How did Botvinnik continue his attack?

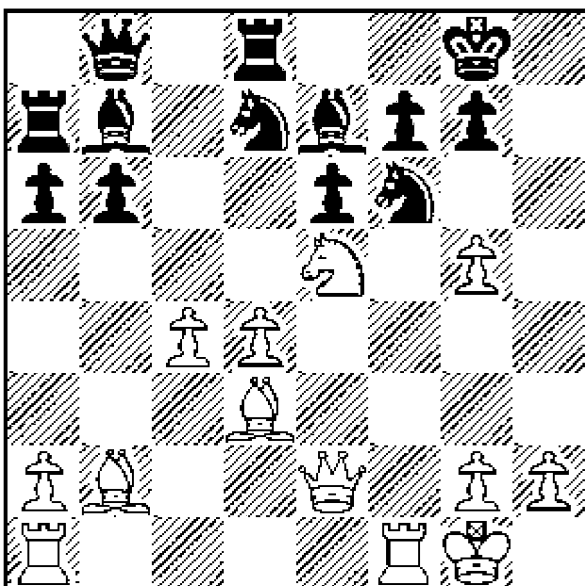
Answer: Play the move anyway! Perhaps Black's ... h7-h6 interpreted the position too literally. The experimental scientific model for data gathering – trial and error – is used here. The sac just *looks* right. An experienced GM would probably play such a move without calculation.

22 Ng5! hxc5

No choice, since f7 falls if he declines.

23 fxc5 N8d7?

He had to try 23 ... N6h7 24 Nxf7 Nxc5 25 Qh5 (threatening mate in one) 25 ... Bf3! (the only move; 25 ... Nxf7?? 26 Qxf7+ Kh8 27 d5! e5 28 Rf5! mates) 26 Rxf3 Nxf3+ 27 Qxf3 Rdd7 28 Ne5 (threatening a queen infiltration to f7) 28 ... Bd6 29 Nxd7 Bxh2+ 30 Kh1 Rxd7 31 Rf1, when White retains a dominating position.



Exercise (combination alert(s)): White's position, flush with promise, finds access to two crushing continuations. How would you continue?

Answer: The f7-pawn is the blackened bruise.

24 Nxf7!

Answer #2: 24 Nxd7! Nxd7 25 Rxf7!! is even stronger, since 25 ... Kxf7? 26 Qh5+ Kg8 27 Qh7+ Kf8 28 Qh8+ Kf7 29 g6+ Kf6 30 Qh4 is mate.

24 ... Kxf7 25 g6+?!

Botvinnik goes astray! He misses the pretty line 25 Qh5+! Kg8 26 gxf6 Nxf6 27 Rxf6! Bxf6 28 Bg6! Qd6 (28 ... Kf8? 29 Ba3+! mates straight away) 29 Rf1 Bc6 30 Qh7+ Kf8 31 Rxf6+ gxf6 32 Qh8+ Ke7 33 Qg7 mate.

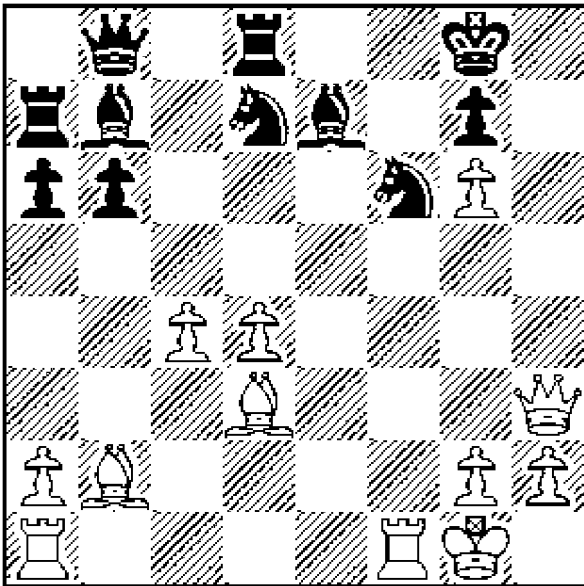
25 ... Kg8?

After his last move Black's struggles fail to dissipate an iota of anxiety around his enfeebled king. Chekhover misses an impossibly hidden defence with 25 ... Kf8! (25 ... Ke8? also to 26 Qxe6 Nf8 27 Qf7+ Kd7 28 Bf5+) 26 Qxe6 Ne5! 27 Qh3 (not 27 dxe5? Bc5+ 28 Kh1, intending 28 ... Bc8?? 29 Rxf6+! and wins – Pachman, because of 28 ... Bxg2+! 29 Kxg2 Rxd3 and suddenly it is White, not Black, who is in deep trouble) 27 ... Nf3+! 28 Rxf3 (or 28 gxf3 Qf4) 28 ... Bxf3 29 Rf1 (or 29 Qh8+ Ng8 30 Rf1 Bf6) 29 ... Ke8 30 Rxf3 Bf8 and White still has a strong attack, but there is nothing immediately conclusive.

26 Qxe6+

After the brief but jarring spatio-temporal distortion of the last couple of moves, now all is set aright once again and White is winning. His queen's flagrant, teasing coquetry begins to make Black's very proper king distinctly uncomfortable.

26 ... Kh8 27 Qh3+ Kg8

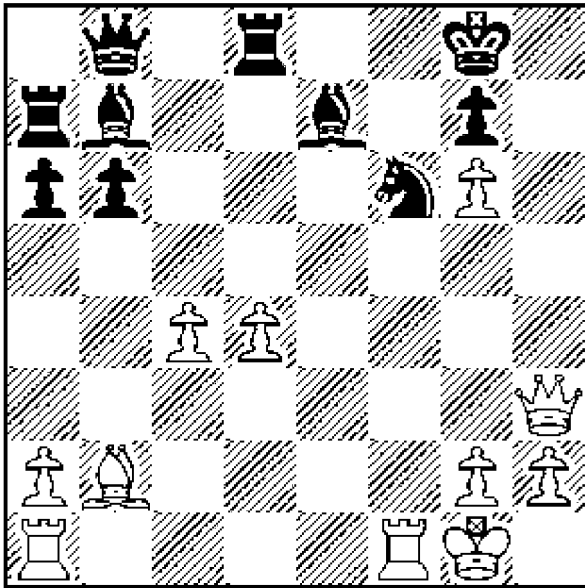


It isn't so easy to take aim at the target, which for now remains shrouded in defensive mist. It looks like Black has everything covered. But does he?

Exercise (planning): Find a plan to flare up the attack.

Answer: Transfer the bishop to e6.

28 Bf5! Nf8 29 Be6+ Nxe6 30 Qxe6+ Kh8 31 Qh3+ Kg8



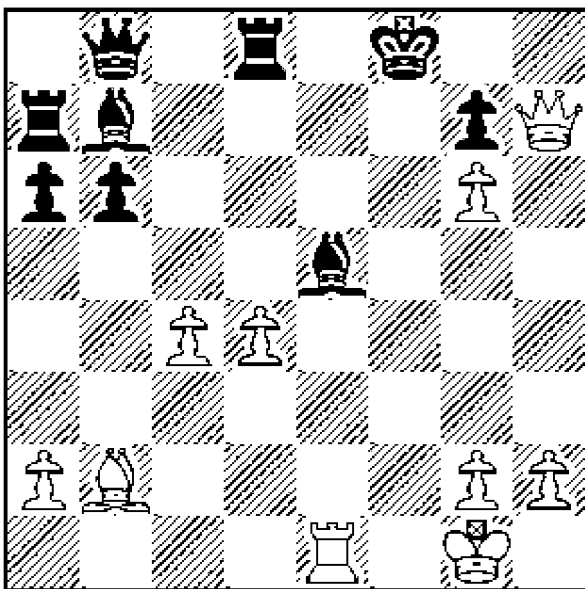
Exercise (combination alert): Fear of the unknown and raw opportunism risk war with one another. Would you sac the exchange on f6?

Answer: In a heartbeat. White must destroy the defender of h7 to progress in his attack. *Houdini* assessment: +27.85!.

32 Rxf6! Bxf6 33 Qh7+ Kf8 34 Re1!

A key attacking principle: *Don't chase the enemy king. Instead, cut off escape routes.*

34 ... Be5



Black's last move is akin to tossing coins in a fountain, hoping that his wishes may come to fruition. Chekhov hopes to buy his opponent off by giving up his queen. However, Botvinnik is only interested in the delivery of mate.

35 Qh8+!

Monica, one of my old cats, would kill a bird in the yard and then bring it inside as a gift for me, not realizing that, touched as I was, I place no value on a dead bird. In the same way, Botvinnik declines Chekhov's gift and settles for nothing short of mate.

White wins after the crass 35 Rxe5 Qxe5 (material is a finite commodity in limited supply; Black's queen, a bored, affluent woman, has no problems in life, so she invents a few just to keep her existence interesting) 36 Ba3+ as well, but doesn't

force mate, the way Botvinnik's move does.

35 ... Ke7

From this moment on, the black king's assembly line grows monotonous, each remaining repetitive motion naturally following the other.

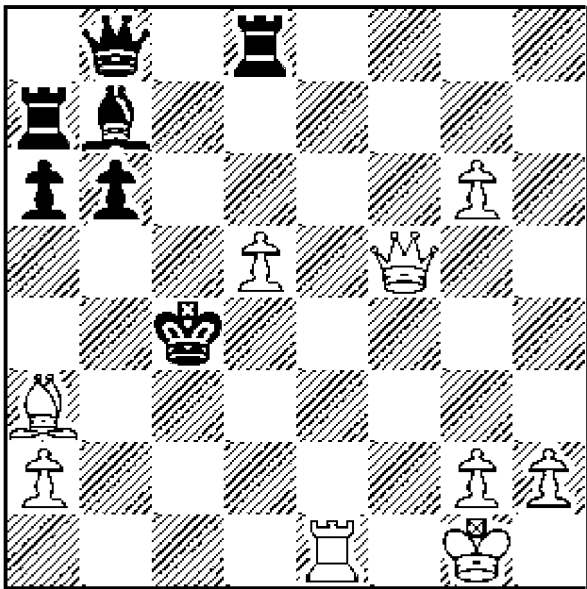
36 Qxg7+!

The high strung queen, keyed to violence, predictably lunges for Black's king with murderous intent.

36 ... Kd6 37 Qxe5+ Kd7 38 Qf5+ Kc6 39 d5+! Kc5

The king lives in a universe devoid of joy or hope.

40 Ba3+ Kxc4



Exercise (combination alert): Let's see if we can work this one out in our mind's eye. White to play and force mate in three moves.

Answer: Just follow the remainder of the game.

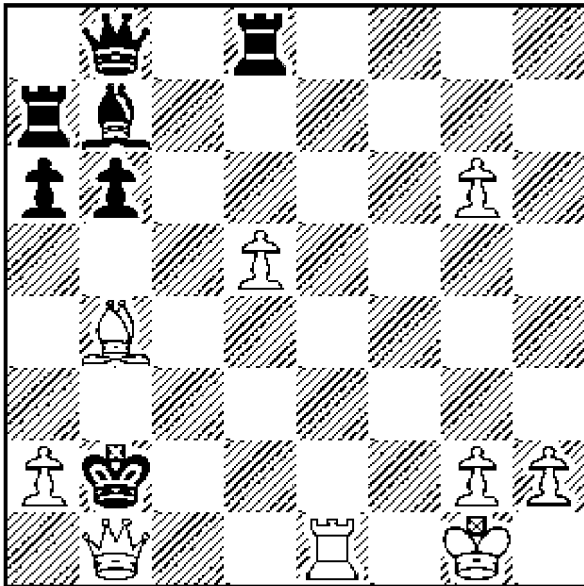
41 Qe4+ Kc3

The king's spasming muscles, already sore from the previous day's overuse, now experience yet another unwanted workout.

42 Bb4+! Kb2

In his solitude, the king finds ample time for reflection on a misspent youth.

43 Qb1 1-0



Mate! Your writer is inexplicably left speechless by Botvinnik's staggering attacking skills.

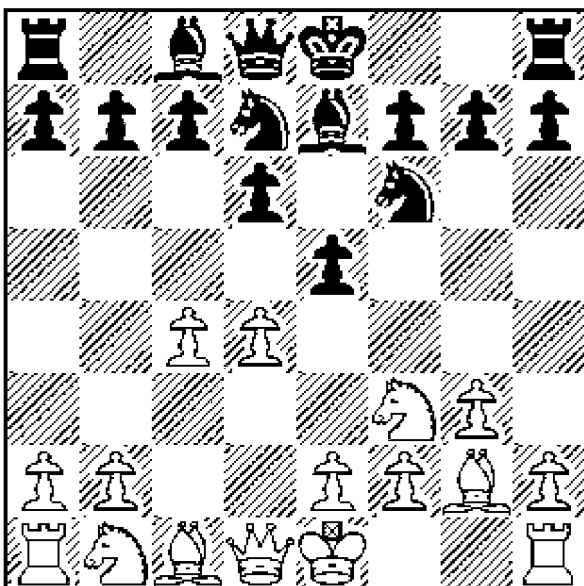
Game 7

M.Botvinnik-S.Tartakower

Nottingham 1936

Old Indian Defence

1 Nf3 Nf6 2 c4 d6 3 d4 Nbd7 4 g3 e5 5 Bg2 Be7



The solid but passive Old Indian, the Philidor of queen's pawn openings.

6 0-0 0-0 7 Nc3 c6 8 e4 Qc7

Painfully passive.

Question: What would you suggest?

Answer: A more modern treatment runs 8 ... Re8 9 h3 a6 10 Be3 b5, as in A.Fominyh-V.Malaniuk, St Petersburg 2001, when Black fights back against White's space advantage.

9 h3

Question: Why is h2-h3 played in this kind of position?

Answer: White would like to rest his bishop on e3, without the annoyance of ... Ng4 from Black.

9 ... Re8 10 Be3 Nf8?!

The knight has few prospects on g6 or e6. It isn't too late for 10 ... Bf8 11 Rc1 a5 12 Qc2, L. Van Wely-A. Zapata, Ledyards 2006, and now 12 ... exd4 13 Nxd4 Nc5 with at least an attempt at counterplay.

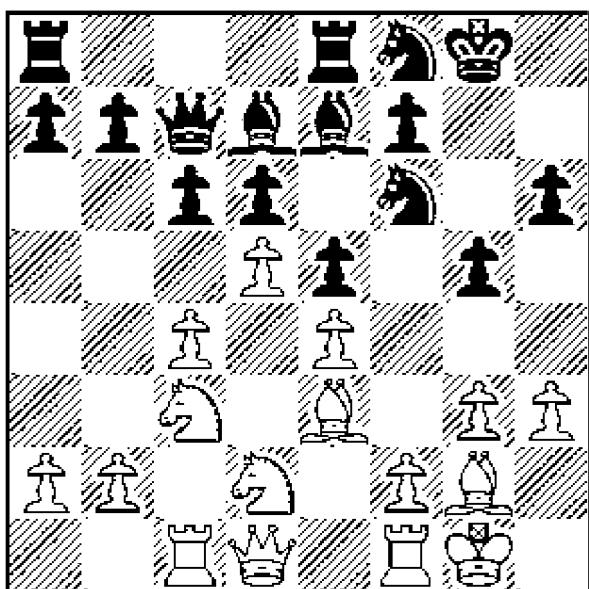
11 Rc1 h6 12 d5

Grabbing more queenside territory.

12 ... Bd7 13 Nd2

White is ready for b2-b4 and an eventual c4-c5 clash.

13 ... g5?!



Some would deem such a move impulsive, while others would label it instinct. Tartakower's arousal to fury falls flat as an opened can of yesterday's Diet Coke. This tirade, curiously at odds with his previously meek play, quickly backfires, subsiding into subdued resentment. Soon a combination of despondency and advanced age leaves black's king three degrees more hunched over than he was on the previous move.

Question: What is Black's idea?

Answer: Black hopes to inhibit f2-f4, or perhaps provoke it. In any case, it looks like a rather shady strategic decision.

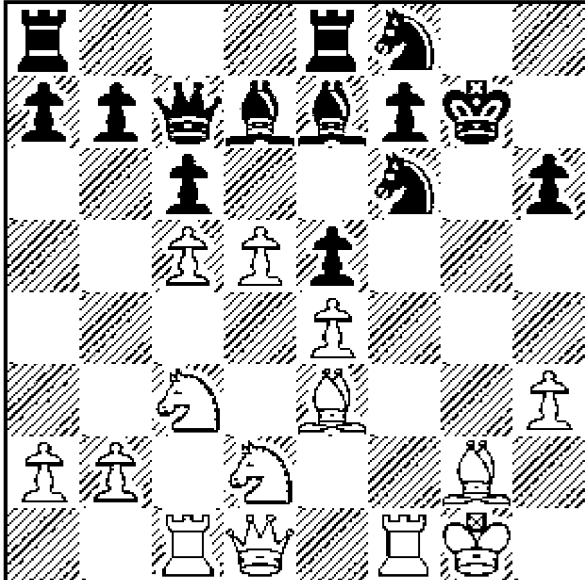
14 f4!

A move which casts grave doubt upon the true potency of Black's "counterattack". Occasionally, direct, brutish confrontation yields more than patience and subterfuge to achieve one's aims. Botvinnik, a ferocious king hunter in his youth, immediately instigates the process of punishment for Black's rash ... g7-g5 move.

Question: Can't White just ignore it and continue his focus on the other side?

14 ... gxf4 15 gxf4 Kg7?

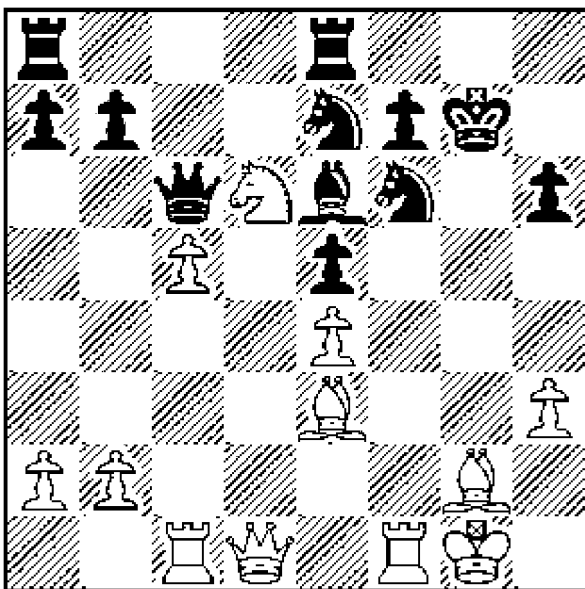
16 fxe5 dxe5 17 c5



17 ... cxd5 18 Nxd5 Qc6 19 Nc4 Ng6 20 Nd6 Be6 21 Nxe7

Eliminating Black's sole defender of his now porous dark squares.

21 ... Nxe7



Answer: The exchange sac is crushing since it sucks Black's king into the vortex.

22 Rxf6! Kxf6

Black's king plays the role of unwilling host to White's war party, who files portentously into his position.

23 Qh5 Ng6

After a moment of sour reflection, the e8-rook plucks up his courage and sacrifices himself. It never occurred to him that nobody wants him! Black hopes to appease White by relinquishing his hard-earned gain, the exchange – a devalued currency, unlikely to be accepted.

24 Nf5!

In this harsh, socially Darwinian society, all deformities are utterly rejected and Black's king is left to die in the snow on f6. The knight, who radiates malice from f5, is far more powerful than Black's worthless rook, since Black's king is prevented from running away via e7.

24 ... Rg8

24 ... Rh8 is simply met by 25 Bxh6.

25 Qxh6

Threatening mate on the move. The old black king passes his days punctuated with spasms of pain, stemming from memories he wishes he could expunge from his tormented mind.

25 ... Bxa2 26 Rd1

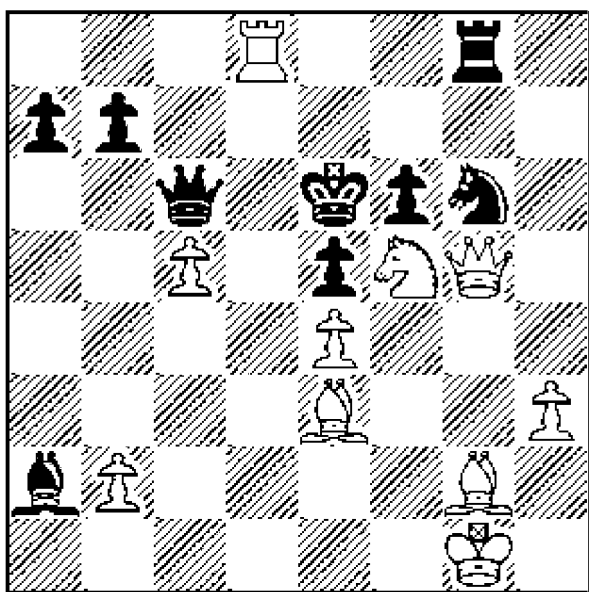
Threatening Rd6+. Also powerful is 26 h4!, intending Bg5+ followed by Bh3.

26 ... Rad8 27 Qg5+ Ke6

The intimidated king gazes intently at his own feet, refusing to meet the queen's eyes.

28 Rxd8 f6

Zwischenzug. This stroke of imagined good fortune has the effect of flooding the now blissfully deluded black king's brain with high levels of serotonin.



Exercise (combination alert): Both white queen and rook hang ... or do they?

Answer: Bit by bit, Botvinnik dismantles every conceivable aspect of the defence's achievements, until all that remains of its former lustre is a humiliated, blushing opponent.

29 Rxc6! Nf4

29 ... fxg5 30 Rxc6+ (this rook makes everyone feel awkward and uncomfortable, the way a best man, flush with alcoholically-generated goodwill, delivers an off-colour toast/joke to the bride and groom about pre-marital sex at the wedding reception) 30 ... Kf7 31 Rxc6 bxc6 leaves White two pieces up.

30 Qg7 1-0

The poxy constellation of Black's forces isn't a pretty sight and I suggest we all proceed quickly to the next game!

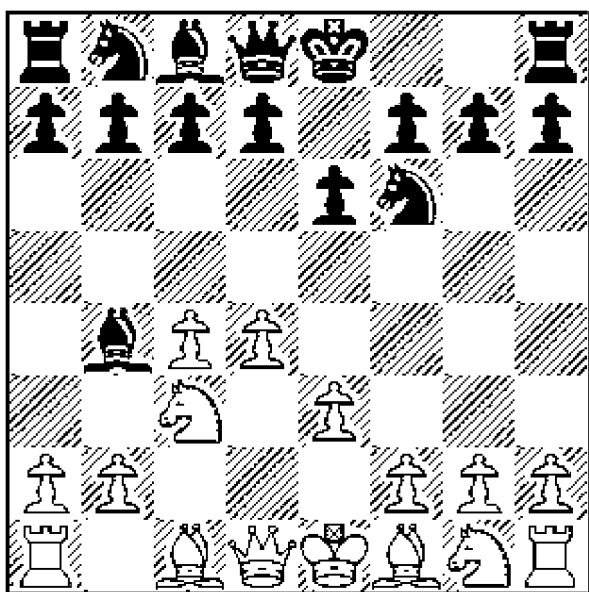
Game 8

M.Botvinnik-J.R.Capablanca

AVRO Tournament, The Netherlands 1938

Nimzo-Indian Defence

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3



Botvinnik was faithful to his beloved Rubinstein Nimzo-Indian his entire life. He didn't care to play 4 Qc2, the Capablanca variation, possibly due to the opening's name!

4 ... d5

The most common response and belief at the time: establish a central grip with your pawns. Nimzowitsch's radical idea of controlling the centre from the wings was still in its infancy and distrusted by most strong players of era. Today, Black tends to prefer more flexible set-ups after 4 ... 0-0, 4 ... c5 or 4 ... b6.

5 a3!?

Botvinnik's Variation of the Rubinstein Nimzo-Indian. Keep in mind that, at the time, this was all relatively new theory.

5 ... Bxc3+

Capa refuses to back down from the upstart and play the safer 5 ... Be7.

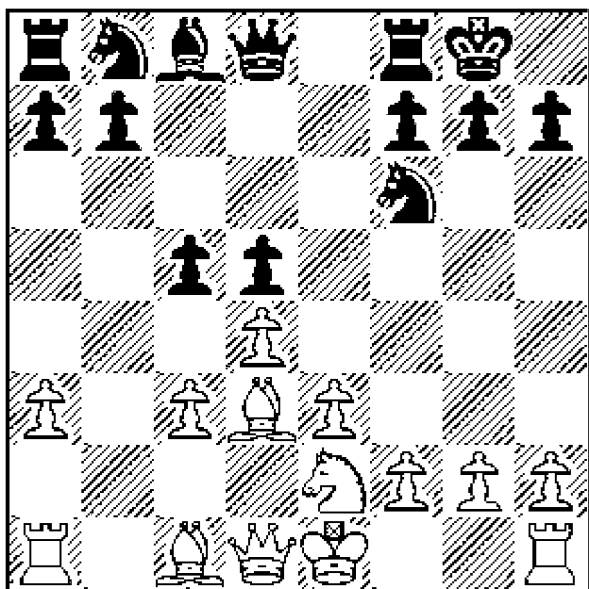
6 bxc3 c5

The heck with Nimzowitsch's ideas. Capa, always a classical player, decides to fight for the centre with his pawns. Black's position is quite satisfactory. His lead in development compensates for White's bishop pair.

7 cxd5

In an open position the bishop pair is the coin of the realm, although the move helps Black free his game as well.

7 ... exd5 8 Bd3 0-0 9 Ne2!



Question: Why not develop the knight to f3 instead?

Answer: White plans a central/kingside expansion with f2-f3 and e3-e4. The knight is to be transferred to g3 to help out in this cause.

9 ... b6!

Preparing to swap off White's monster light-squared bishop via a6.

10 0-0 Ba6 11 Bxa6?!

Under the assumption that Black's knight will be out of play on a6. The immediate 11 f3! gives White a better version; *e.g.* 11 ... Re8 12 Ng3 Bxd3 13 Qxd3 Nc6 14 Bb2 cxd4 15 cxd4 Na5 16 e4 Nc4 17 Bc1 b5 18 e5 Nd7 19 f4 and I prefer White, who brews an attack on the kingside, V.Korchnoi-A.Lein, Johannesburg 1979.

11 ... Nxa6 12 Bb2?!

Kasparov writes: "Alas, pioneers are doomed to make mistakes."

Question: Why did Botvinnik develop his bishop into a wall on b2?

Answer: He must have had a hidden idea behind it, but for the life of me I don't understand what. Fortunately, it is an easily repairable inaccuracy. For every dubious decision, Botvinnik compensates with two excellent ones later in the game. All the same, it is better to leave the bishop uncommitted with 12 Qd3.

12 ... Qd7 13 a4

13 Qd3?! Qa4! favours Black.

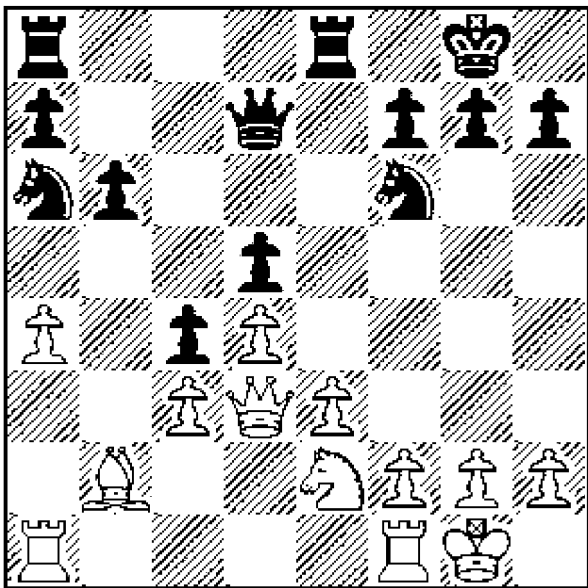
13 ... Rfe8?!

A natural move isn't always the best one in the position.

Question: I don't see any other reasonable move for Black. What do you suggest?

Answer: White plans a slow central build-up, culminating in a kingside attack. Therefore Black should adhere to the principle: *Counter in the centre when attacked on the wing*. The only way to create a central distraction for White here is to play 13 ... cxd4! 14 cxd4 Rfc8!, intending ... Rc4, generating sudden queenside counterplay. More importantly, White just doesn't have the leisure to do what he wants in this line.

14 Qd3 c4?!



Question: Why would you criticize this natural gain of a tempo?

Answer: Capa should consider being a little less partisan in his unwavering faith in his queenside ambitions. His move violates the principle stating: *Don't close the centre when attacked on the wing*.

Botvinnik responds to your question: "This is a really serious positional blunder. Black evidently assumed that White would be unable to advance the e-pawn later, and Black's superiority would tell on the queenside. However, Black's superiority on the queenside happens to be of no great consequence in this case, and the breakthrough e3-e4 proves inevitable. Black should have contented himself with the modest defence 14 ... Qb7". By keeping the centre fluid, Black would then decrease White's chances of a successful kingside build-up, due to Black's constant threat of central distractions.

15 Qc2 Nb8

A case of retrograde ambition, intending ... Nc6-a5-b3 and eventually ... Qxa4.

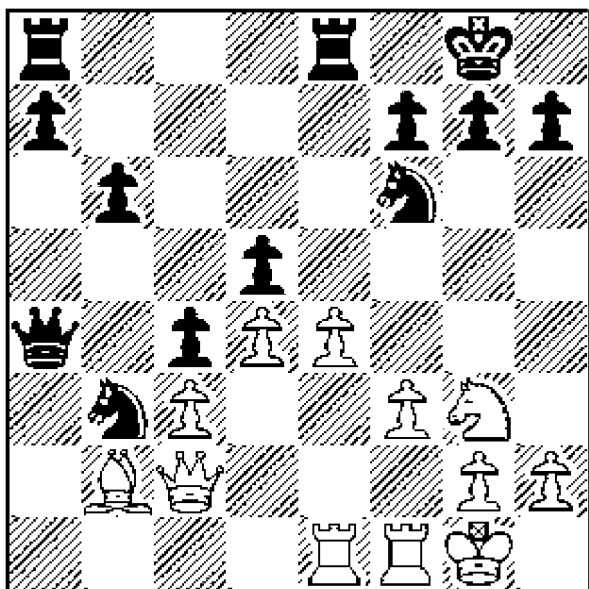
16 Rae1 Nc6 17 Ng3 Na5?!

Allowing White the e3-e4 break without challenge. The players interpret the position with radical, antipodal outlooks. Black should strive to challenge e4 with 17 ... Ne4!, which is met by the strange 18 Nh1! f5 (the desperate fight for e4 continues) 19 f3 Nf6 20 Ng3 Ne7 21 Ba3 g6, and even though Black's kingside dark squares have been weakened, his position looks infinitely more defensible than what he got in the game. I assumed White had a clear advantage here, but after playing around with several computers from this position, I realized it was quite difficult to play e3-e4 without allowing Black all sorts of counterplay based on the newly vacated d5-square.

18 f3 Nb3

The wandering knight is destined to remain a tourist on the queenside for the remainder of the game.

19 e4 Qxa4



A successful pirate requires the following factors to ensure success:

1. A ship capable of outrunning the authorities.
2. Lightly defended, concentrated wealth to plunder.
3. A market to unload the spoils.

It feels to me that Black's missing elements are numbers 1 and 3 on the list. The problem is that while he does indeed win the pawn, he is also very likely to get mated on the other wing! In essence, Black refuses to yield to safeguards and burns down all bridges. If two of White's enemies (Black's queen and b3-knight) go off to war in a far-off land, does this not benefit him? Evidently, Capa didn't believe the biblical quote about a rich man being unable to enter the kingdom of heaven. In reality, Black is in deep trouble and his extra pawn won't be of much assistance to him.

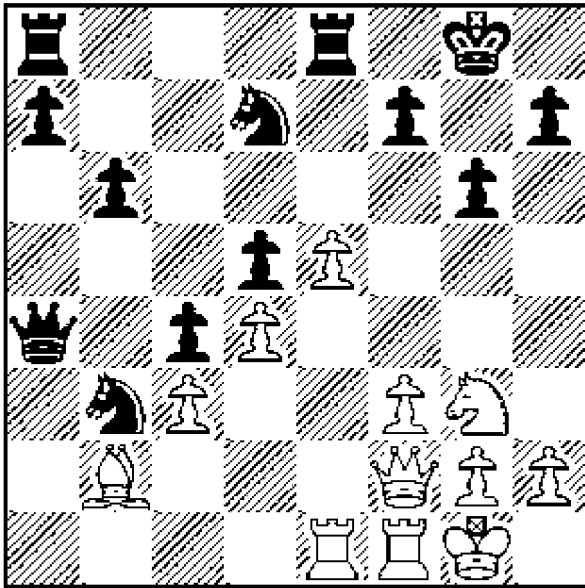
Question: Does Black have anything better at this stage?

Answer: I don't think so, and he may as well make the attempt and grab the pawn. Still, Capa's strategy resembles that of a 100-year-old billionaire who suggests to his new 23-year-old bride that they make love. Sometimes determination to get the job done just isn't enough!

20 e5 Nd7 21 Qf2!

In order to avoid ... Nc5 tricks, which allow Black's knight back into the fight. Alternatively, Vladimir Goldin, in *Shakmaty v SSSR*, suggested the interesting 21 Re2! to counter ... Nc5. The idea was to sac a knight on f5 on the coming ... g7-g6 and ... f7-f5.

21 ... g6?!



Neither Botvinnik nor Kasparov criticized this, but to my mind it's the losing move. Capa generously hands Botvinnik a target to open with f3-f4-f5.

Question: What do you suggest?

Answer: A three-step defensive plan: 1. Bring Black's wayward queen back into the defensive fold with 21 ... Qc6 and leave the kingside pawns alone.

2. Push madly on the queenside with ... a7-a5 and ... b6-b5-b4, hoping to undermine d4.

3. Pray Black doesn't get mated!

I fiddled around with *Houdini* with these ideas and Black seemed to obtain better survival chances than in the actual game.

22 f4

White's e-and f-pawns race forward, each one attempting to outdo the other in height. 22 ... f5

No choice, since allowing f4-f5 would be catastrophic.

23 exf6!

When I showed this game to students, many of the lower-rated ones were surprised that White willingly gave up his passed e-pawn. White must pry open Black's kingside at all costs and this is the only way to do so.

23 ... Nxf6 24 f5

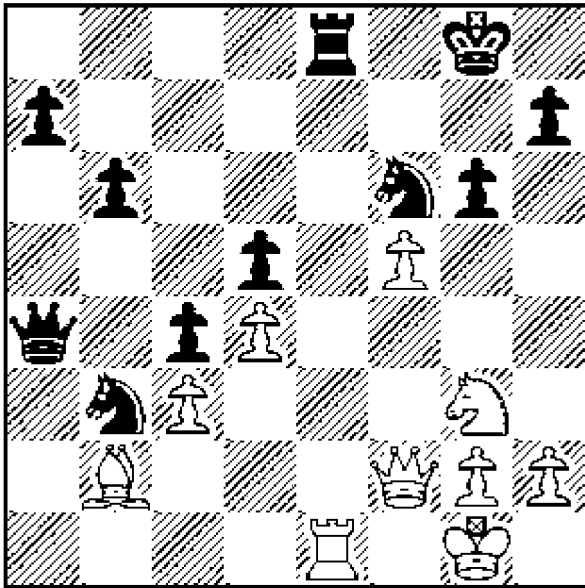
Remarkably, *Houdini* correctly assesses this in White's favour, showing just how far computers have progressed in their ability to evaluate a difficult position.

24 ... Rxe1

24 ... g5? fails to stem White's tidal wave after 25 Re6 Rf8 26 Qe3 h6 27 Qe5.

25 Rxe1 Re8!

Kasparov offers lengthy and convincing analysis on White's winning attack after 25 ... Rf8 26 Qf4!.



Exercise (planning): Capa reduces material as quickly as possible.
 How did Botvinnik ramp his attack up to lethal levels?

Answer: Force the creation of another passed e-pawn.

26 Re6!

Not 26 fxg6 hxg6! and Black’s knight remains immune on f6.

26 ... Rxe6

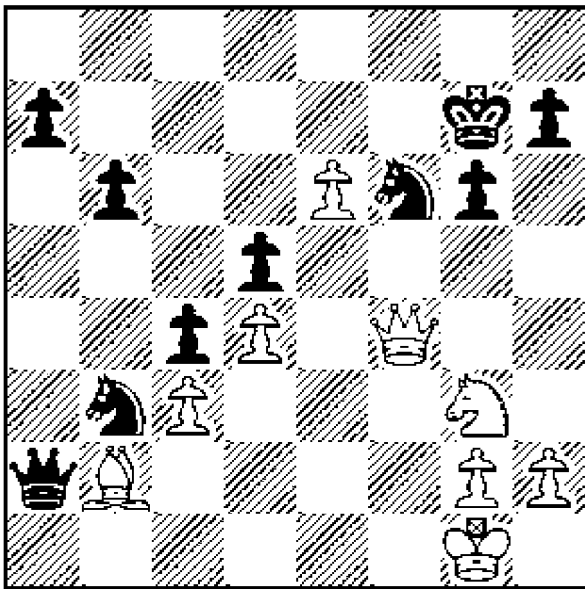
No choice, since 26 ... Kg7? loses to the shot 27 Rxf6! Kxf6 28 fxg6+ Kxg6 29 Qf5+ Kg7 30 Nh5+ Kh6 31 h4! Rg8 32 g4! (threatening mate in two) 32 ... Qc6 33 Ba3! when the long-ridiculed bishop has his say in court. White forces mate in three moves.

27 fxe6 Kg7 28 Qf4!

With an ugly threat.

28 ... Qe8!

28 ... Qa2? loses at once.



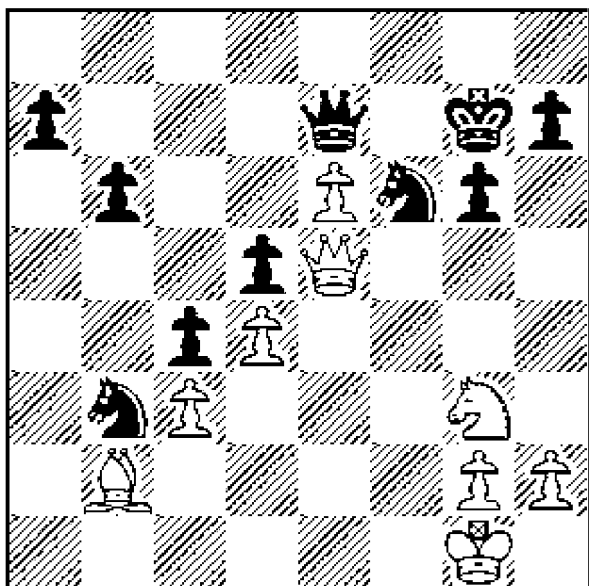
Exercise (combination alert): Capa deftly avoided this position, since White forces mate here.
 How?

Answer: 29 Nf5+! gxf5 30 Qg5+ mates in three moves.

29 Qe5

Kasparov and *Houdini* point out a simpler win beginning with 29 Qc7+!, but then we would be deprived of Botvinnik's magnificent concluding combination.

29 ... Qe7



The position teeters on the precipice of imminent violence. Now follows a combination of monumental scale and scope, one of the greatest in chess history. It is quite evident that Botvinnik envisioned the position to move 41, the end of the game.

Exercise (combination alert): How did Botvinnik break down Capa's resistance?

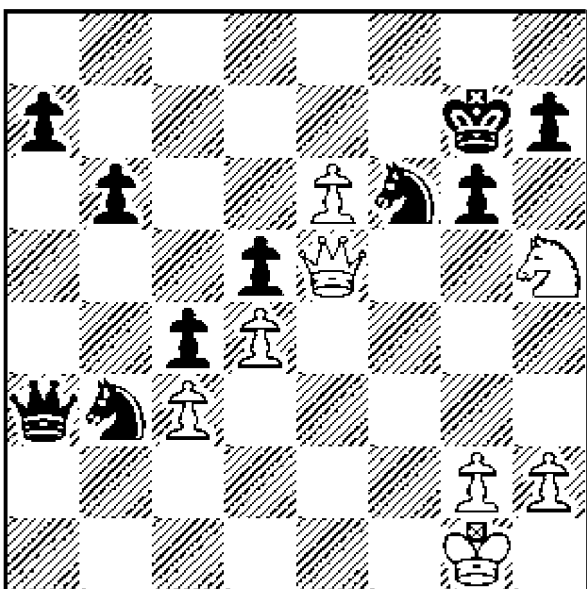
Answer: The mother of all deflection sacrifices. The bishop, once just a faint outline of a shadowy figure at the edge of the forest, suddenly approaches.

30 Ba3!! Qxa3

Question: Can't Black just decline the sac, sliding the queen to e8?

Answer: This allows White's queen infiltration to c7 with decisive effect: 30 ... Qe8 (the awed queen can only look at the ground until commanded by the bishop to meet his eyes) 31 Qc7+! Kg8 32 Be7! Kg7 (or 32 ... Ng4 33 Qd7 Qa8 34 Bd6 and mates) 33 Bxf6+ Kxf6 34 Qe5+ Ke7 35 Ne2!, threatening Nf4, Nxd5+ and wins; e.g. 35 ... Qa4 36 Qc7+ Kxe6 37 Nf4+ Kf6 38 Nxd5+ Ke6 39 Qe5+ Kd7 40 Qe7+ Kc6 41 Qe8+ and 42 Qxa4.

31 Nh5+!



A second blow pierces the defensive barrier.

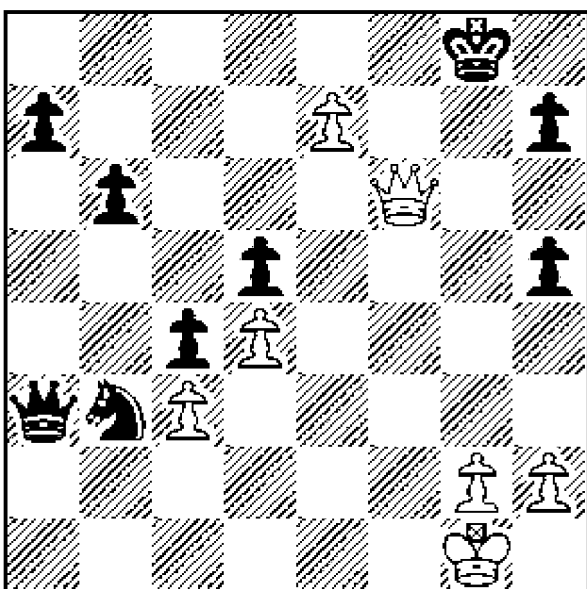
31 ... gxh5 32 Qg5+

The queen looms large over the puny, chihuahuaesque f6-knight, who falls with check. The black king realizes with dismay that there is no safe haven. White's queen declares to her hated brother on g7: "I wear a crown now – ergo, I, and I alone, rule!"

32 ... Kf8 33 Qxf6+ Kg8

33 ... Ke8 34 Qf7+ mates next move.

34 e7



The e-pawn, an adept in voodoo, squeezes the doll. Instantaneously, Black's king doubles over in agony.

Botvinnik relates a story at this point. Euwe walked up to Capa and asked how he was doing. Capa shrugged and said loudly enough for Botvinnik to hear, something to the effect of: "Anything is possible", implying that the position may be drawn by perpetual check. Of course Botvinnik saw through the attempted con job and had worked out the win to the finish line. Even more staggering than the double piece sac of the actual combination is Botvinnik's calculation power. He foresaw that Black had no perpetual check.

34 ... Qc1+ 35 Kf2

The final part of this famous game – the king starts his long walk up the board.

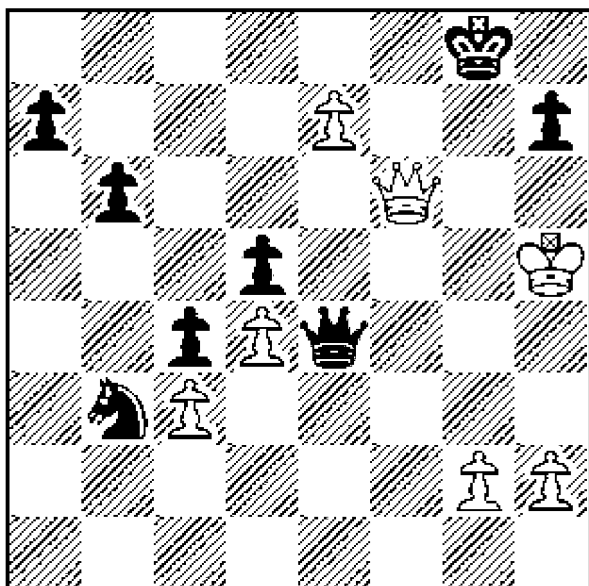
35 ... Qc2+

35 ... Qd2+ 36 Kg3 Qxc3+ 37 Kh4 Qe1+ 38 Kxh5 Qe2+ 39 Kh4 Qe4+ 40 g4 doesn't alter anything.

36 Kg3 Qd3+

Capa's queen does all the heavy lifting, following Botvinnik's king around. White also escapes from the checks after 36 ... Qxc3+ 37 Kh4, as in the previous note.

37 Kh4 Qe4+ 38 Kxh5!



The duplicitous king is a master of playing one enemy against the other. The h5-pawn must be removed. Black's checks are destined to end very shortly.

38 ... Qe2+ 39 Kh4 Qe4+ 40 g4

Now possible since Black's h5-pawn has been eliminated.

40 ... Qe1+ 41 Kh5 1-0

The black queen's dramatically tiresome gesticulations finally come to an end. She is denied her most fervent wish: perpetual check.

What a wondrous thing when a once-hazy fantasy takes form into actual reality over the board. Truly one of the greatest attacking masterpieces of the 20th century. It happened again: your normally verbose writer finds himself uncharacteristically rendered mute by such attacking prowess!

Game 9

A.Denker-M.Botvinnik

USA vs. USSR radio match 1945

Semi-Slav Defence

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 c6 4 Nf3 Nf6 5 Bg5

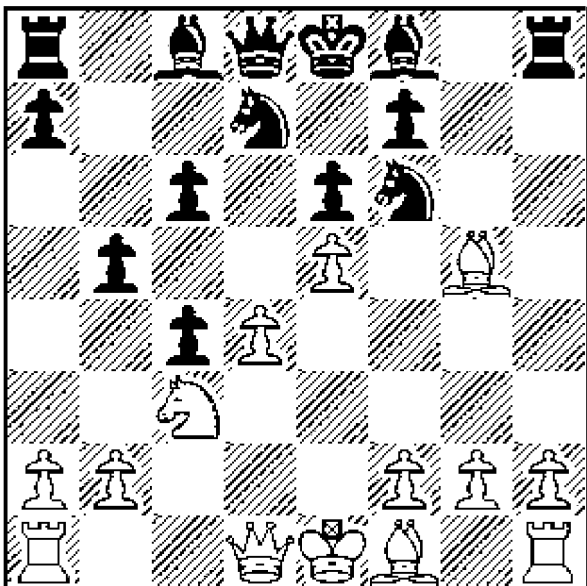
Boldness isn't necessarily a virtue in every instance. Denker opts to challenge with a line against its very founder.

5 ... dxc4

5 ... h6 is the Moscow Variation, played more often today.

6 e4 b5 7 e5 h6 8 Bh4 g5 9 Nxc4 hxc4 10 Bxc4 Nbd7

The starting position of the Botvinnik Variation. Luckily for me, this isn't an opening book and therefore I sneakily circumvent all discussion of this totally confusing line.



11 exf6

11 g3 is the other main branch here.

11 ... Bb7 12 Be2?!

Question: This move isn't normal, is it?

Answer: The move is inaccurate, but we must remember that the Botvinnik Variation was still in its infancy in 1945, so nobody (except Botvinnik) understood this fact. The problem with developing the bishop to e2 is that Black gets strong play against the g2-square, which may force White into playing g2-g3 later anyway. So theory evolved to the conclusion that White should match Black's queenside fianchetto with a kingside fianchetto of his own, to keep his king safer. 12 g3 is normally played today, when 12 ... Qb6 13 Bg2 0-0-0 14 0-0 Ne5, V.Smyslov-M.Botvinnik, World Championship (5th matchgame), Moscow 1954, was another key Botvinnik game from this line. Or if 12 ... c5 then 13 d5.

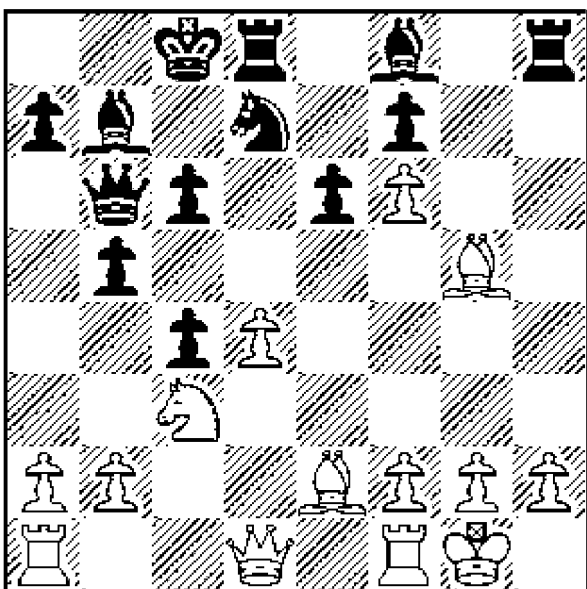
Question: Isn't 13 ... Nb6 strong here?

Answer: Dang, you cleverly drew me into the theory, despite my frantic attempts to dodge! Apparently, Polugaevsky refuted it with the stunning idea 14 dxe6!! Qxd1+ 15 Rxd1 Bxh1 16 e7 a6 17 h4! Bh6 18 f4!, L.Polugaevsky-E.Torre, Moscow 1981.

Question: How on earth is this a refutation? Black is up a rook in the ending!

Answer: And stands clearly worse, possibly busted, despite *Houdini's* frantic assertions to the contrary! His h8-rook will never see the light of day.

12 ... Qb6 13 0-0 0-0-0



Battle lines are established and both sides plan to nurse their super-majorities on respective wings, as well as launch attacks against opposing kings.

14 a4 b4 15 Ne4

Question: Why not gain a tempo on Black's queen with 15 a5 - ?

Answer: A trap. Black simply plays 15 ... Qc7 and White can resign, since Black threatens both mate on h2 and White's hanging c3-knight. In fact, you just demonstrated exactly why White should fianchetto!

15 ... c5!

Black's dormant pieces spring to life, pushing White on the defensive.

16 Qb1

If you need to make a move like this in a wide open position, it is a very bad sign about the general health of your game.

16 ... Qc7

A vulgar checkmate in one move always seems magically to uplift a player's spirits!

Question: So is Botvinnik playing for a one-move cheapo?

Answer: Not at all. He simply probes White's kingside for weakness.

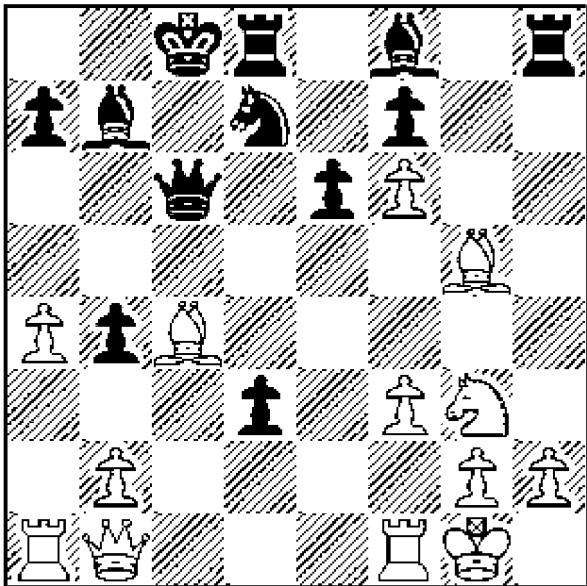
17 Ng3

Perhaps Denker had to try the (admittedly dismal) line 17 g3 cxd4 18 Bxc4 Nc5 19 f3, though even here White's game remains on the critical list after 19 ... Nxe4 20 fxe4 d3!, clearing the g1-a7 diagonal.

17 ... cxd4 18 Bxc4 Qc6!

It's a little creepy how Black's queen dotes on her pampered children on b7 and f8. Ah, the sweet nectar of the vulgar one-move mate again! From this point White never gets a chance to rest. Botvinnik quickly adapts to the new ecosystem, his pieces the predators at the top of the food chain.

19 f3 d3!



Black bursts forth in a dazzling starburst of piece activity. Alarmingly, the groove in White's defensive barrier grows wider by the move, destined to be sliced in half, by thrusts of a handsaw to a log of firewood.

20 Qc1

The only move, since 20 Rc1?? Qc5+ 21 Kh1 Qxg5 picks off a piece. White's queen eyes Black's intruders with apprehension, making certain to remain a good distance ahead of the pursuers. One gets the uneasy feeling that White's last eight moves were amendments in an attempt to correct his first twelve.

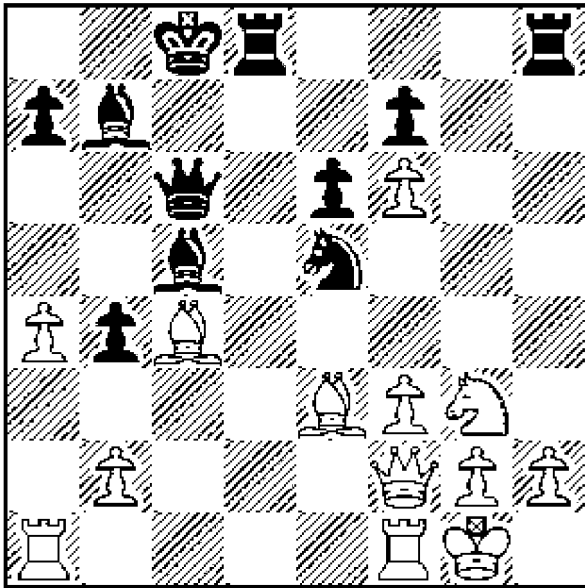
20 ... Bc5+

Troubles pour forth for White, as his opponent's pieces stream out.

21 Kh1!

Question: Why doesn't White simply block with his bishop?

Answer: It's not so simple. White's guard is up. He deftly sidesteps a cheapo attempt, having been around the block before. If he enters your suggested line, Black wins with a combination: 21 Be3 d2! (attraction) 22 Qxd2 Ne5 (discovered attack) 23 Qf2, when White's unstable structure looks dried out and crumbly, food left too long in the refrigerator.



Exercise (combination alert): Black to play and force the win of heavy material.

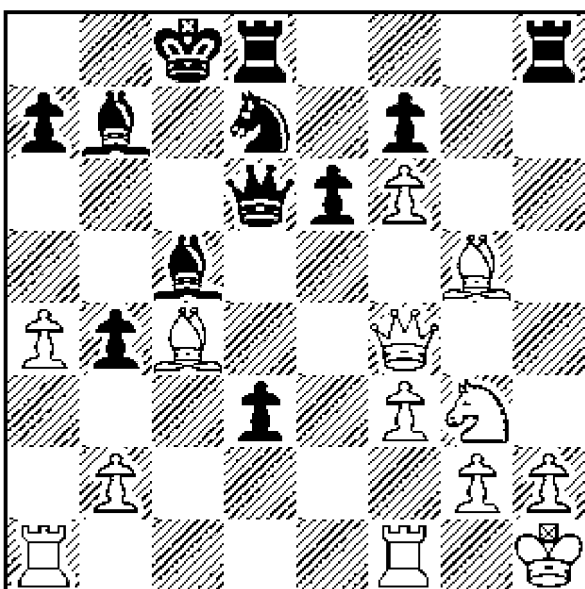
Answer: Overload. 23 ... Ng4!! and the knight is untouchable since 24 fxe4?? Bxe3 25 Qxe3 Qxg2 is mate. The queen profits from the discord in White's camp, howling off with the spoils.

21 ... Qd6!

Threatening ... Qxg3. The queen inhales deeply, recharging her lungs for the bellowed tirade which follows. So smooth are Botvinnik's best attacks, they seem almost as if fashioned by natural design, more than human thought.

22 Qf4

22 Bh6 is met by the chillingly quiet move 22 ... Rh7!, when White has no defence to the coming doubling along the h-file.



Denker was undoubtedly bewildered by the rapid intensity of his downward spiral. Despite White's best efforts, the kingside proves ungovernable. Any accountant would inform you that White's defence is in the red, perilously close to filing for bankruptcy.

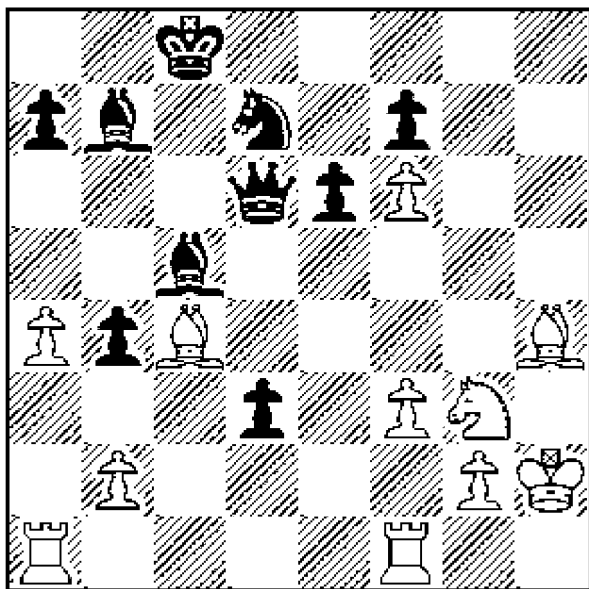
Exercise (combination alert): How can Black smash his way through to White's king?

Answer: Through the process of impermanence, those in positions of privilege and power don't always remain where they are in perpetuity. White's king realizes he forestalls the onset of madness only by distracting himself from the awful truth – his power, his life itself, is on the wane, about to be usurped by those who despise him, unaided by those who profess to love him. Now he is forced to enter the sarcophagus while still alive.

22 ... Rxh2+! 23 Kxh2

Die rich or die poor. It doesn't matter. It is of no solace to adorn your tomb with treasure.

23 ... Rh8+ 24 Qh4 Rxh4+ 25 Bxh4



The perspiring bishop arrives on h4 in the nick of time, or so he believes, in the aid of his king. It looks like White is okay (he most certainly isn't!). After all, he got two rooks for the queen ...

Exercise (combination alert): Or did he?

Black's next move tears away the flimsy veil.

Answer: Double attack. Black's queen doles out punishment to the deserving. "The rich get richer!" bemoan White's bishops, at the queen's endless greed.

25 ... Qf4! 0-1

Game 10

S.Tartakower-M.Botvinnik

Staunton Memorial, Groningen 1946

French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5

Question: A tad cowardly?

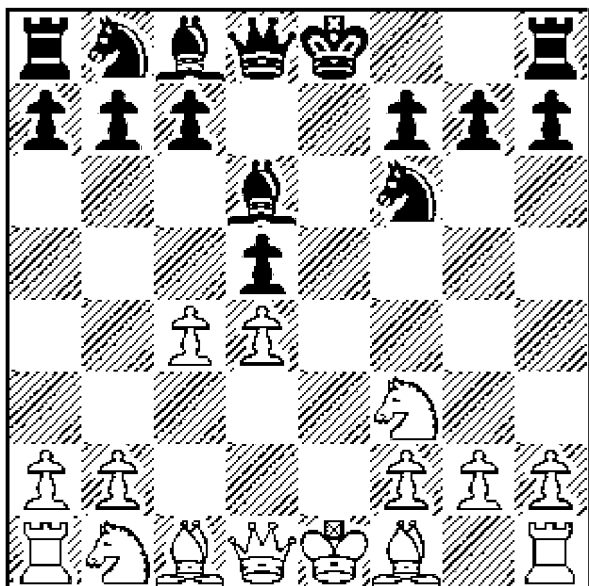
Answer: A wise decision. Surviving the opening against Botvinnik was no simple task, so Tartakower takes a suitable precaution and veers clear of Botvinnik's deadly opening arsenal. Sometimes it is okay to give away the first move advantage if your opponent represents a library of theory which you could never

hope to match. Tartakower would most certainly have been killed had he entered the intricacies of almost any other French line against the maestro. Botvinnik said Tartakower played this way “in order to exclude any surprises in the opening ...”

3 ... exd5 4 Nf3 Bd6 5 c4

I think this line is more promising than 5 Bd3 Ne7 6 Bg5 Nbc6 7 c3 Bg4 8 Nbd2 Qd7, as in Z.Bogut-A.Grischuk, European Cup, Kallithea 2008. I reached this position a few times as Black and have the feeling he already stands a shade better since he can castle queenside and launch a swift kingside attack.

5 ... Nf6



6 c5

Logical, since it comes with tempo.

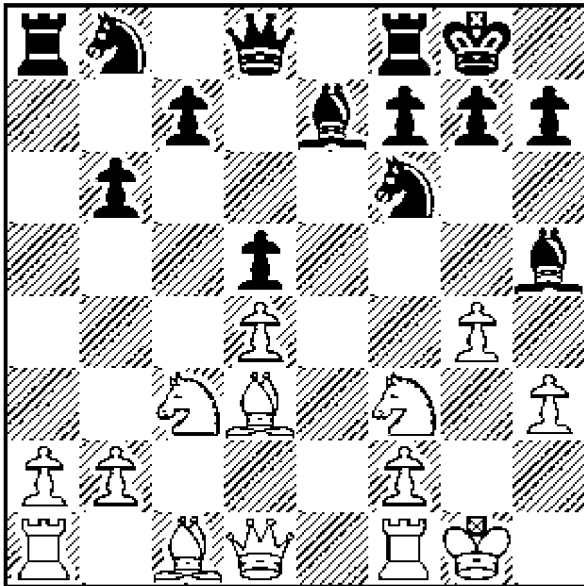
Question: Can White also play in pure isolani fashion with 6 Nc3 0-0 7 cxd5 - ?

Answer: This is possible too, but White gets a more passive version than normal after 7 ... Re8+ 8 Be2 Nbd7 9 0-0 h6 10 Bc4 Nb6 11 Bb3 Bg4 12 h3 Bh5 13 Be3 Qd7 14 a4 a5 15 Rc1 Qf5! 16 Bc2 Bxf3 17 Bxf5 Bxd1 18 Rfxd1 Nfxd5. You are witness to a miracle. Your normally bumbling writer managed to achieve the slightly superior ending versus a World Champion (and win!), G.Kasparov-C.Lakdawala, Internet (blitz) 1998.

6 ... Be7 7 Bd3 b6 8 cxb6 axb6 9 0-0 0-0 10 Nc3

Possibly inaccurate as Black's g4-pin now grows irritating. I would play 10 h3 as in G.Russek Libni-A.Valle, Sao Paulo 1991.

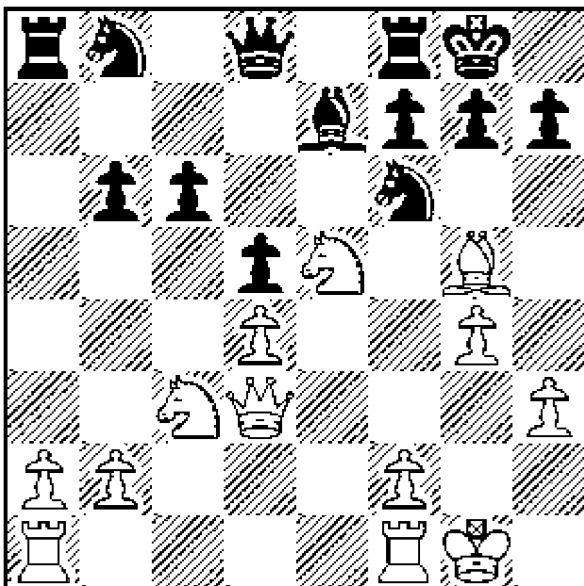
10 ... Bg4 11 h3 Bh5 12 g4!?



One man's territorial gain is another's overextension.

Question: Why does White agree to weaken his position to this degree?

Answer: He must, since the alternative is the nauseatingly passive pin-breaker 12 Be2. 12 ... Bg6 13 Ne5 Bxd3 14 Qxd3 c6 15 Bg5?



Exercise (combination alert): The ever-vigilant Botvinnik found a trick to exploit White's natural but weak last move. How?

Answer: By engaging an excelsior theme combination.

Question: What is an excelsior theme?

Answer: One of those: "I chop on g4, then he takes e7, then I take his knight on e5, then he takes my
chesstouring.com

queen on d8 ... " deals.

15 ... Nxc4!

From researching this book, I was staggered to discover that from about 1936 to around 1950 Botvinnik almost never missed a combination in his games. I had *Houdini* running, looking at hundreds and hundreds of games, and whenever *Houdini* sounded the combination alert, Botvinnik, in stereo, always seemed to find the same combination as well.

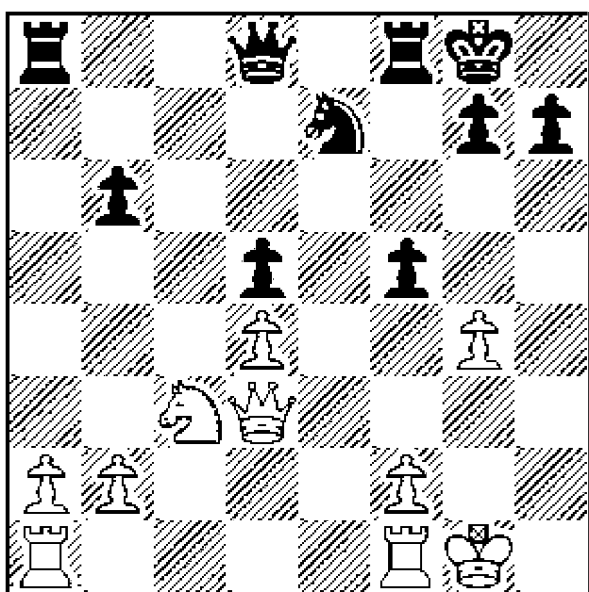
16 Nxc6

If 16 hxg4 Bxg5 and Black wins a pawn; as does the line 16 Bxe7 Nxe5 17 Bxd8 Nxd3 18 Bxb6 Nd7 19 Bc7 Nxb2.

16 ... Nxc6

Tartakower retains the material balance at the cost of his king's security.

17 Bxe7 Nxe7 18 hxg4 f5!



"A great unpleasantness for White." Botvinnik immediately goes after White's weakened king.

19 Rae1!

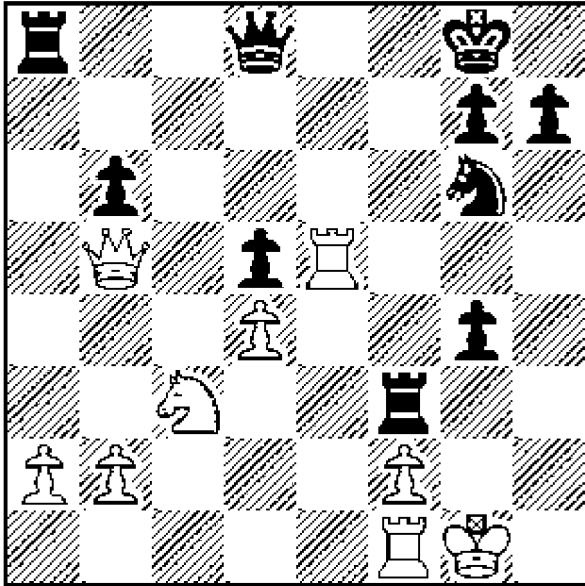
White hands over the pawn, relying on his lead in development. Instead, 19 g5?! f4! looks pretty scary for White; as does 19 gxf5?! Nxf5 with a strong attack.

19 ... fxg4 20 Re5 Rf3 21 Qb5 Ng6!?

The addict self-medicates, offering yet more material to bring on the blessed relief which attack provides. Botvinnik, who gave himself an exclaim for this move, sacs the pawn back to increase his piece activity. His decision is based on the theory that elective, partial defeat is actually a key component to victory. One must first learn to give up something to make gains later on. I'm not as confident; perhaps Black can play the more circumspect 21 ... Kh8 and try to hang on to the material.

Question: You dare to contradict Botvinnik's assessment of the position?

Answer: Well, normally I would be too gutless to do so if relying upon my own stunted brain, but with 3200-rated big brother *Houdini* helping out, yes, I dare.



22 Rxd5!?

Question: Why didn't White force queens off the board?

Answer: I had the same thought, but then computer analysis proved that White remains in deep trouble there as well: 22 Qxd5+ Qxd5 23 Rxd5 Raf8 (threatening 24 ... g3) 24 Ne4 Nf4 25 Rb5 h5! 26 Rxb6 h4, and ... g4-g3 looms again, a menace upon the landscape. I'm not so sure White can save himself after 27 Rb3 Rxb3 28 axb3 Ne2+ 29 Kg2 Nxd4.

22 ... Qf6 23 Rg5?!

White's best chance to save himself is to centralize madly with 23 Ne4 Qf4 24 Re5! (threatening Qd5+) 24 ... Rf8 25 Re8!.

23 ... Rf8 24 Ne4 Qf4

Threatening ... Rh3 and ... Qh2 mate. However, the seemingly helpless white king merely feigns sleep and is ready to call on his guards.

25 Qd5+ Kh8 26 Rh5

Covering the mating threat, while threatening Ng5 himself.

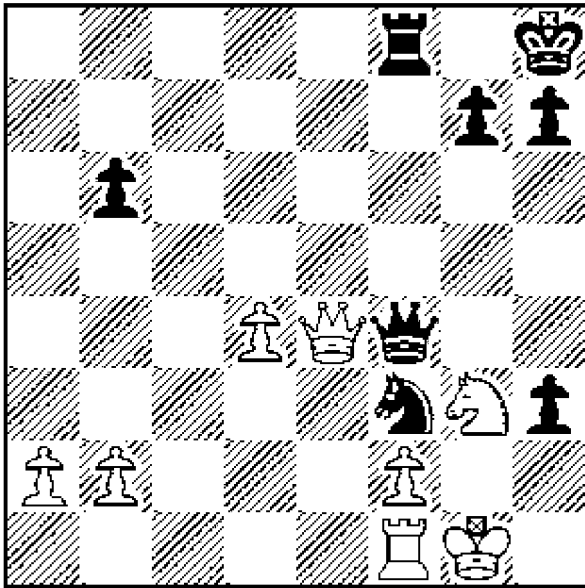
26 ... Rh3

Threatening mate in one. Botvinnik was in severe time trouble at this point.

27 Rxh3 gxh3 28 Ng3

White avoids the trap 28 Ng5?? Qg4+ 29 Kh1 Ne7!, overloading his queen, which can't cover both the g2-mate threat and the g5-knight.

28 ... Nh4 29 Qe4 Nf3+



White's king can only faux-smile at the intrusive guest, as he resigns himself to the new reality. His infirmity on f3 is destined to be a fixture in his life and have a paralyzing effect for the remainder of the game.

30 Kh1 Qxe4?!

A misguided overture. Now his plans to checkmate begin to degenerate into a somewhat incoherent facsimile of an earlier intent.

Question: Shouldn't Black keep queens on the board?

Answer: Strangely enough, Botvinnik doesn't comment on the move, but yes, the computers scream to retain the queens and claim that Black's decisive advantage slips after 30 ... Qxe4. Perhaps Botvinnik's decision was based on his time pressure. 30 ... Qf7! was much stronger, threatening to fork on d2. *Houdini* assesses it at -2.20, winning for Black.

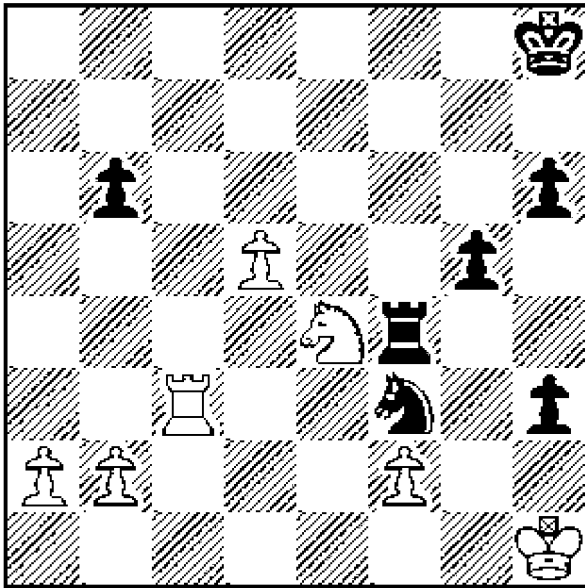
31 Nxe4 Rf4 32 Rc1 h6

32 ... g5 is slightly more accurate and may later save a tempo.

33 Rc3 g5?!

Time trouble, that malignant moment of each game where even unbelievably strong players, without warning, degenerate into flustered beginners. Ah, yes, the tyranny of the improbable. In our chess lives, how many good positions have we all tossed aside to chase some illusion? Botvinnik's chronic time problems nearly mess things up. Black is still winning after the obvious 33 ... Nxd4, eliminating White's dangerous, passed d-pawn.

34 d5!



White arrives at the estate of pure desperation, a dangerous realm for both him and his opponent. The derelict archipelago of White's pawns surge forward (well, not his queenside pawns just yet!). Tartakower gratefully seizes upon his chance and pushes the d-pawn forward. After considerable expenditure of capital and resources, Black looks like he received precious little from his earlier investments.

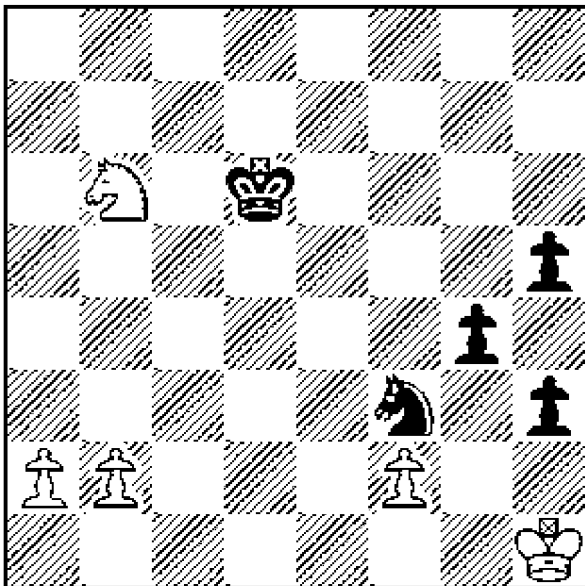
34 ... g4

Now White's knight really is hanging.

35 Re3 Rf5 36 Nc3 Rf6 37 Re6 Kg7 38 Rxf6 Kxf6 39 d6 Ke6 40 Nd5

Black's win isn't so simple after 40 Ne4! Ne5 41 Kh2 Kd5 42 f4! Nd7 43 Ng3 Ke6! 44 b4 Nf6 45 a4 h5 46 Ne2 Kxd6 47 Nc3 Kc6. I tried to defend this as White against *Houdini* and lost every time. But it may not be so easy for a human to convert Black's position.

40 ... Kxd6 41 Nxb6 h5!



The sealed move. Botvinnik had worked out the win in the adjournment.

Question: What win? Isn't Black the one in desperate trouble?

After all, White has two passed pawns, helped forward by the knight.

Answer: Let's do an exercise:

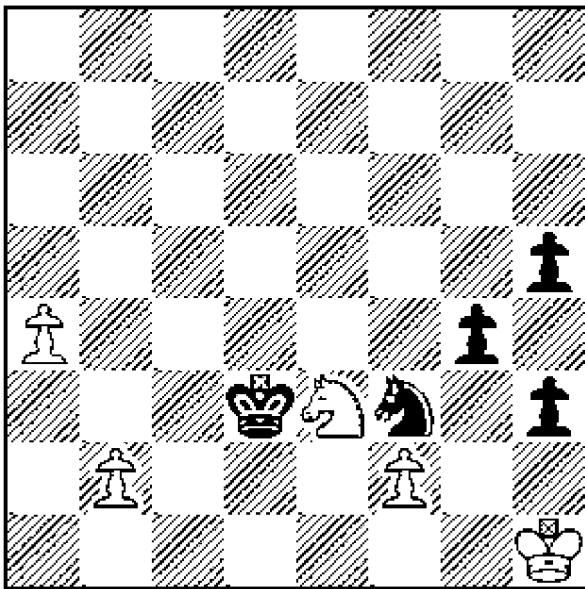
Exercise (planning): White plans to push his passers down the board. We must act and act quickly. What can Black do?

Answer: Play for mate! Botvinnik alchemically attempts to transmute a base g-pawn into checkmate on g2. Botvinnik writes: "White's misfortune consists in the desperate position of his king, under mortal threat of ... h4 followed by ... g3 and ... g2 mate." Amazingly, in every variation, Black's mate arrives before White promotes and consolidates.

42 Nc4+

42 a4 Ne5 43 Kh2 h4 44 a5 Kc6 45 b4 Nf3+ 46 Kh1 g3 mates.

42 ... Kd5 43 Ne3+ Ke4 44 a4 Kd3!



Suddenly the unthinkable becomes quite thinkable: Black forces checkmate. 44 ... g3? only draws after 45 fxc3 Kxe3 46 a5 Nd4 47 a6 Nb5 48 Kh2 Kf3 49 Kxh3 Na7 50 Kh4.

45 Nd5 Ke2 46 Nf4+ Kxf2 47 Nxe3+

47 a5 g3 48 Nxe3+ Kf1 49 Nf4 Ne5 and if 50 a6 Ng4 mates next move.

47 ... Kf1

Alternatively, 47 ... gxc3 48 a5 Kg3 49 a6 Nd2 50 a7 Ne4 51 a8Q Nf2+ 52 Kg1 h2+ 53 Kf1 h1Q+ 54 Qxh1 Nxe3 55 b4 Nf2 56 b5 Ne4 57 b6 Nd6 and Black wins by a single tempo – whew!

48 Nf4 g3 49 Ng2

Not 49 Nxe5? g2 mate.

49 ... Kf2!

The taskmaster approaches White's lazy king with whip in hand. Botvinnik squeezes every ounce of energy from his pieces the way a thrifty person (i.e. my mother!) makes three cups of tea from just one teabag.

50 a5

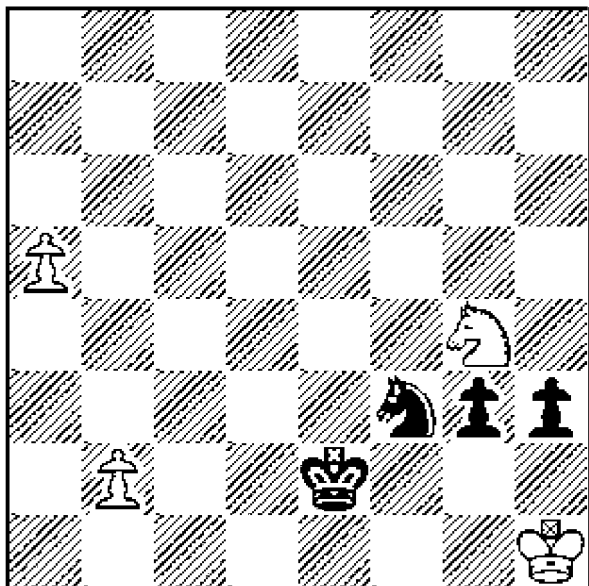
White's hoped-for transformative potion turns out to be empty of magic and chemically inert as well. The final promotion attempt is no more than a ceremonial gesture.

50 ... h4 51 Nf4 Kf1! 52 Ng2

Or 52 a6 h3 53 a7 g2+ 54 Nxe2 hxe2 mate. The defibrillator paddle administers a

jolt of electricity to the king. His body spasms and jerks, yet his heart refuses to restart.

52 ... h3 53 Ne3+ Kf2 54 Ng4+ Ke2 0-1



A strange picture to observe the emboldened, hungry small confront the large, challenging through sheer numbers. White's king realizes that a rescue operation will not be forthcoming. There is no remedy to the coming pawn mate on g2. Here Tartakower samples the awful truth, like the taste of your own blood after losing a fight with the larger kid two grade levels above yours.

Game 11

M.Botvinnik-P.Keres

World Championship Tournament, The Hague/Moscow 1948

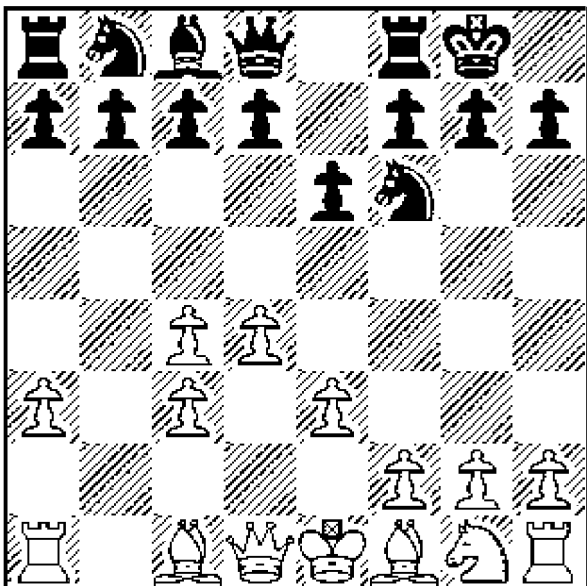
Nimzo-Indian Defence

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 0-0 5 a3 Bxc3+

Question: The same as in Botvinnik's game against Capablanca?

Answer: Not quite. In Game 8, Capa committed to an early ... d7-d5. In this instance, Keres played the more flexible ... 0-0, which allows his pawn structure far more leeway.

6 bxc3



6 ... Re8!?

Question: What is the point of this move?

Answer: It's a little odd but actually logical. Black plans to set up his central pawns on dark squares.

Question: What would be the modern treatment of the line?

Answer: A recent game went 6 ... c5 7 Bd3 Nc6 8 Ne2 b6 9 e4 Ne8 10 e5 Ba6 11 Qa4 Qc8 12 Bf4 f5 13 exf6 Nxf6 14 0-0 (or similarly 14 Bd6 Rf7 15 dxc5 Na5) 14 ... Na5 15 Bd6 Rf7 16 dxc5 Ne8 and Black had excellent play, A.Ipatov-G.Kamsky, Istanbul Olympiad 2012.

7 Ne2

As in his game against Capa, Botvinnik's knight heads for its optimal post on g3.

7 ... e5 8 Ng3 d6 9 Be2 Nbd7?!

This looks inaccurate and fails to apply sufficient pressure upon White's centre. Keres should reserve the knight for c6, with the plan: ... c7-c5, ... Nc6, ... b7-b6, ... Na5, ... Ba6 and ... Rc8, when Black often picks off the c4-pawn, White's weakest link.

10 0-0 c5 11 f3!

Botvinnik displays deep understanding of the structure. He owns the bishop pair and therefore strives to retain central fluidity.

11 ... cxd4?!

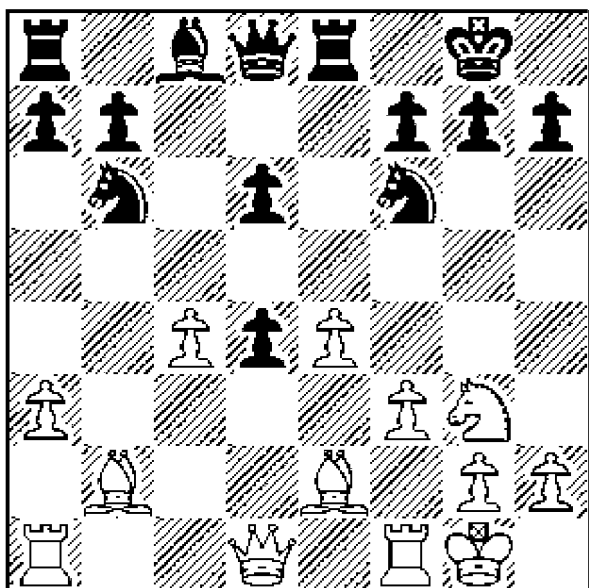
Question: What is wrong with Black's last move?

Answer: Keres falls victim to his love of open games in a position he should keep closed. He violates the principle: *Avoid opening the game when the opponent owns the bishop pair.*

Botvinnik writes: "Hardly a useful decision in the given position as White's queen's bishop now comes to life, and the doubled pawn is dissolved away."

Botvinnik was a master of ferreting out an opponent's mistaken and recurring patterns. He noted: "Keres nearly always exchanges these pawns in the Nimzo-Indian ... but here he should have refrained from doing so." Keres' move may be a sin, albeit of the venial variety, not yet a mortal sin – though he certainly moves in that direction.

12 cxd4 Nb6 13 Bb2 exd4 14 e4!



The incontrovertible evidence of Black's distress is strewn about him.

1. White clamps down on Black's ... d6-d5 pawn break.
2. In doing so he fixes d6 as a chronic weakness.
3. White's dark-squared bishop reigns unopposed on its diagonal and stares menacingly at f6 and g7.
4. In comparison, White's weakened c4-pawn is easy to protect.

14 ... Be6 15 Rc1 Re7 16 Qxd4

The queen vents her displeasure at d6, f6 and g7.

16 ... Qc7?!

Botvinnik camouflages his true intent (mate!) with success and Keres, blind to the actual menace, grossly underestimates the danger to his king. 16 ... Na4 should have been played.

17 c5!

Question: Didn't White's last move just dissolve Black's only pawn weakness?

Answer: It did, but White received a lot in return with the multipurpose move. The cumulative end product of Black's anxieties: 1. White opens the game further.

2. His c1-rook enters the game and may swing over to g5, further stressing out Black's worried king.

3. White dissolves his own pawn weakness on c4.

17 ... dxc5 18 Rxc5 Qf4?!

18 ... Qd8 was a better try, but Botvinnik claims that after 19 Qe3! "[White's] threats can hardly be repulsed."

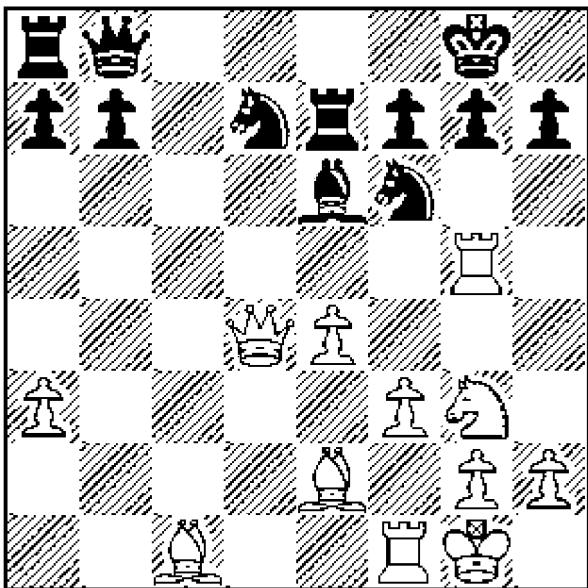
19 Bc1! Qb8?

The black queen, sensing unpleasant commotion in front of her, finds herself exasperated by her fruitless labours, so she blows strands of hair off her forehead and stalks off. After Black's last move, the till of the defence runs empty of funds. 19 ... Rd7 was his only chance to prolong resistance.

20 Rg5!

The rook arrives in a swirl of meaning. Targets: f6 and g7. Black undoubtedly had hopes of keeping his kingside innocent of the rook's contaminating influence.

20 ... Nbd7



On the surface Black's defenders may appear a pleasant sight, but they're not of much actual use in advancing the plot, like bikini-clad extras in a 1950s' Elvis movie. We feel it in our bones. A constrictive band wraps around Black. All about him, he notices a deficit of the friendly and a surplus of the hostile. He realizes he is soon to be evicted from his once safe haven, with nothing to return to but woe.

Exercise (combination alert): Find White's kingside breakthrough which purées Black's kingside cover into a smooth paste.

Answer: The rook wallops g7 the way my wife Nancy, in a daily fit of pique, viciously swats her radio/alarm clock each morning as it goes off at 6:00 a.m.

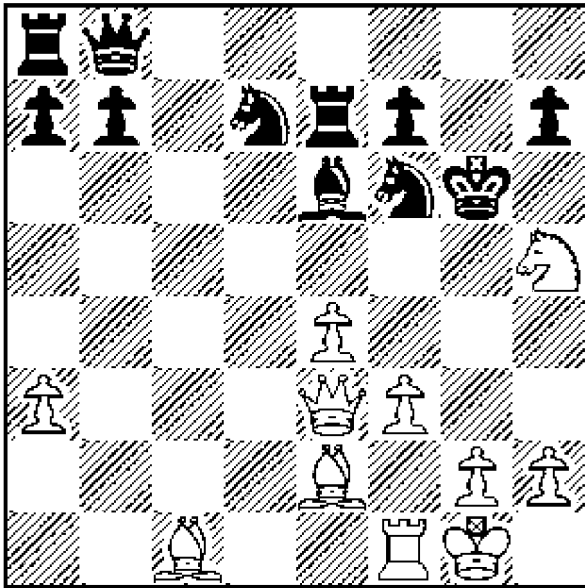
21 Rxg7+!

After such a sac, for Black's king there is no going back to a place of past innocence.

21 ... Kxg7 22 Nh5+ Kg6

The walking wounded attempt to cross the mesa to safer territory. 22 ... Kh8 23 Bb2 Qe5 24 Nxf6 Qxd4+ 25 Bxd4 Kg7 26 Nxd7+ is equally hopeless for Black, while 22 ... Kf8 23 Nxf6 Nxf6 24 Qxf6 forces mate.

23 Qe3! 1-0



The extent of the queen's wilful evil now grows quite apparent. Black has no remedy to the dual mate threats.

Keep in mind that Keres was a contender for the world title in 1948! In this game (and the next!) Botvinnik made him appear as anything but a contender.

Game 12

M.Botvinnik-P.Keres

USSR Championship, Moscow 1952

Queen's Gambit Declined

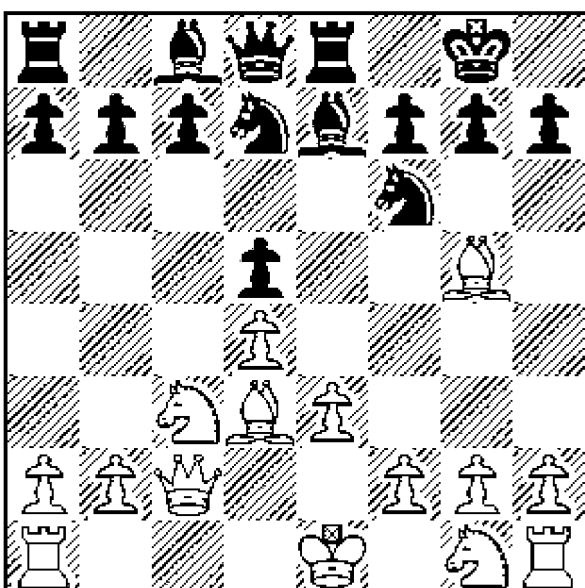
1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 d5 4 cxd5

The Exchange Variation of the Queen's Gambit Declined.

Question: Doesn't release of the central tension help Black?

Answer: Well, I think such decisions are a matter of style. Personally, I always play the exchange lines versus the Slav and QGD, where I feel equality isn't so easy for Black. Botvinnik writes: "This move causes Black the greatest problems, since now all that he can contemplate is a tenacious defence, whereas White has an enduring initiative." Kasparov also liked this line and piled up an astronomical score with it. In essence, the line in which you score best is the best line!

4 ... exd5 5 Bg5 Be7 6 e3 0-0 7 Bd3 Nbd7 8 Qc2 Re8



9 Nge2

Question: I see a pattern where Botvinnik nearly always develops his g1-knight to the e2-square rather than f3. Why?

Answer: Once again, a personal preference. Botvinnik deeply understood the nuances of these positions which arose from the Nimzo-Indian and QGD and used the Ng3, followed by f2-f3 and e3-e4, plan to deadly effect in his games. 9 Nf3 is an alternative set-up, and then 9 ... Nf8 10 h3 Be6 11 0-0 c6.

Question: What is White's plan in this position?

Answer: A person's choice of pawn structure reveals a lot about his personality. Here White has a choice of two plans: Plan A: Stonewall set-up: 12 Ne5 N6d7 13 Bxe7 Rxe7 14 f4, when White plays Rae1 and then goes all out with g2-g4 next, V.Kramnik-O.Renet, European Cup, Clichy 1995.

Plan B: Minority attack on the queenside: 12 a3 Rc8 13 b4 N6d7 14 Bf4 Ng6 15 Bg3 Ndf8 16 Na4 Bd6 17 Bxd6 Qxd6 18 Nc5 Rc7 19 Rac1 Bc8 20 Rfe1 Qf6 21 Qd1 Ne6 22 Nxe6 Bxe6 23 b5 as in V.Topalov-A.Yusupov, Frankfurt (rapid) 2000.

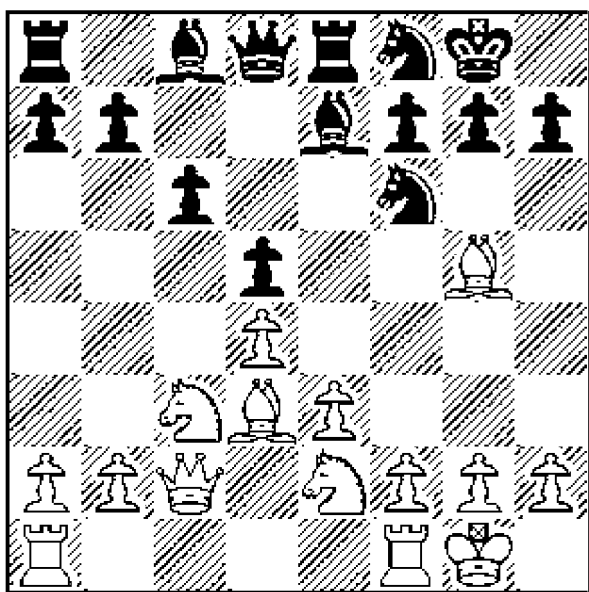
9 ... Nf8 10 0-0

At the time it was an almost unheard-of plan to castle kingside.

Question: What else would White do?

Answer: In the 1950s, in such set-ups, White would castle long and then go for an attack. In this case, Botvinnik replicated the same plan he used in his game against Capablanca from this chapter: Ng3, then play for f2-f3 and e3-e4. This took Keres by surprise and he failed to react properly.

10 ... c6



11 Rab1

Botvinnik toys with the minority attack but later changes his mind due to an inaccurate plan on Keres' part. I prefer the more direct path, as in G.Kasparov-

D.Barua, Internet (rapid) 2000: 11 f3 Ng6 12 Rad1 h6 13 Bxf6 Bxf6 14 Bxg6 (Kasparov is willing to hand over both bishops for Black's knights to engineer the e4-break) 14 ... fxg6 15 e4 g5 16 e5 Be7 17 f4! gxf4 18 Nxf4 Rf8 19 Ng6 Rxf1+ 20 Rxf1 Be6 21 Ne2 Qd7 22 h4! Re8 23 Ng3 Bf7 24 Nxe7+ Rxe7 25 Nf5 Re6 26 Nd6, when White's knight dominates his f7-bishop counterpart.

11 ... Bd6?

It transpires this bishop is the agent of Black's downfall. Keres, buoyed by false hope, rather naïvely attempts a cheapo with all the markings of a sleazy transaction. The bishop fails to intimidate and Keres falls prey to the temptation of ... Bxh2+ and makes a poor decision, moving his bishop twice.

12 Kh1! Ng6

12 ... Bxh2?? fails miserably to the zwischenzug 13 Bxf6.

13 f3!

The opposing factions strive and scheme in discord. Botvinnik alertly revises his plans and vetoes the minority attack in favour of an central pawn break. Botvinnik writes: "Black can no longer prevent e3-e4, since in the given position it is hard for him to counter with ... c6-c5." All because of Black's lame 11 ... Bd6!.

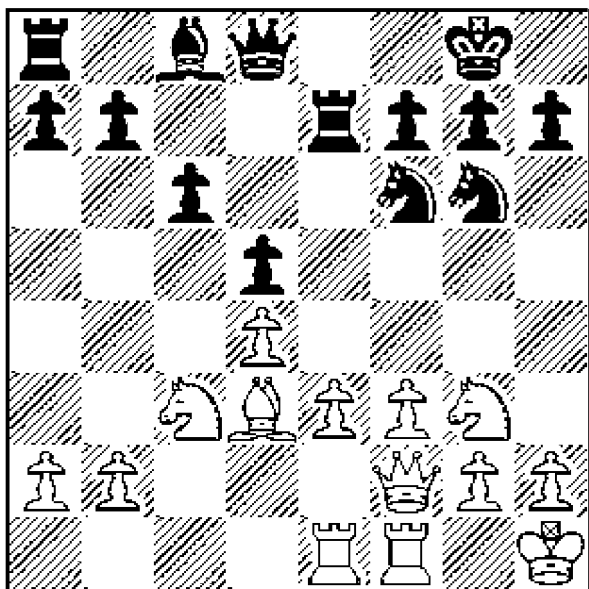
13 ... Be7

Back again. The earlier planting on d6 produced precious little yield, so Black essentially expended two tempi for absolutely nothing in return.

Question: Why not put the question to White's bishop with 13 ... h6 - ?

Answer: It isn't much of a question since the bishop already knows the answer. White takes over the initiative and attack after 14 Bxf6 Qxf6 15 e4.

14 Rbe1 Nd7 15 Bxe7 Rxe7 16 Ng3 Nf6 17 Qf2!



Reinforcing d4, to prepare his future e3-e4 break.

17 ... Be6 18 Nf5!

More accurate than the immediate 18 e4 dxe4 19 fxe4 Rd7, when Black achieves some central counterplay.

18 ... Bxf5

Criticized by Botvinnik – but after 18 ... Re8 he intended 19 g4, when any capture on f5 would be met with g4xf5, prying open the g-file.

19 Bxf5 Qb6 20 e4 dxe4!?

Question: Why did Keres allow Botvinnik to open the f-file?

Answer: This is one of those damned-if-you-do-and-damned-if-you-don't moments. Keres' last move follows the principle: *Counter in the centre when attacked on the wing*. However, following principle this time may not have been best, since the extenuating circumstances of White's open f-file may take precedence. On the other hand, 20 ... Nf8 21 e5 N6d7 22 f4 doesn't look like a whole lot of fun for Black either.

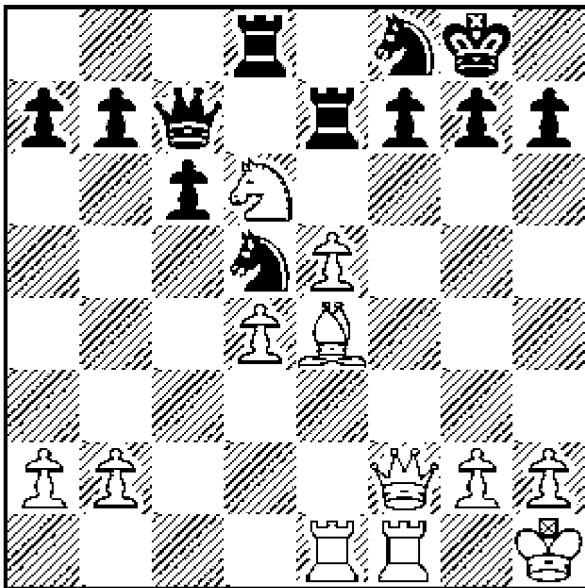
21 fxe4 Rd8 22 e5!

Excellent strategic judgment. Botvinnik gladly hands over d5 to allow his knight access on d6. I marvel at the way Botvinnik skilfully accrues and merges multiple strategic and tactical themes; the cumulative effect leaves Black hopelessly awaiting his fate.

22 ... Nd5

22 ... Ne8 retains some pressure on d4, but in the end fails to save Black after 23 Rd1 Nf8 24 Bc2! (intending transfer to b3) 24 ... Nc7 (24 ... Ne6?? loses instantaneously to 25 Qh4) 25 Ne4 Nd5 26 Bb3 with enduring pressure.

23 Ne4 Nf8 24 Nd6 Qc7 25 Be4!



A catalogue of Black's woes:

1. White clears the f-file for his major pieces.
2. White clears f5 for his knight where it eyes the sensitive g7-and h6-squares, as well as gaining a tempo on Black's e7-rook.
3. White may decide to plug up the d5-hole with Bxd5.

25 ... Ne6

Question: Can Black ease the pressure by sac'ing the exchange for a pawn on d6?

Answer: Botvinnik thought this was Black's only hope, but in reality he simply exchanges one problem for another. Black is still busted after 25 ... Rxd6 26 exd6 Qxd6 27 Bxd5! cxd5 28 Rxe7 Qxe7 29 Qf5 with a technically won position.

26 Qh4

Forcing weakness in Black's camp.

26 ... g6

Forced, but in making this move, Keres offends an entire demographic: the dark squares around his king.

27 Bxd5

No more hole on d5.

27 ... cxd5 28 Rc1

Chasing Black's queen into further passivity.

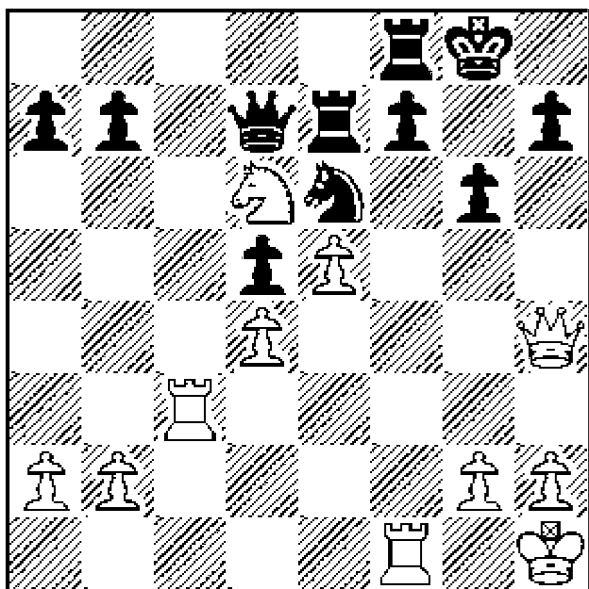
28 ... Qd7

The ageing queen's disposition deteriorates in sync with her fading looks.

29 Rc3!

Preparing transference to the kingside.

29 ... Rf8



Exercise (combination alert): Black's position has been reduced to grovelling passivity. Now comes the time to strike. How would you continue White's attack?

Answer: Add the final attacker. Black's king had hoped to be spared the insufferable annoyance of the knight's presence, but such was not to be his fate. Now White's heroic knight galvanizes his comrades into action.

30 Nf5! Rfe8

The knight is immune as 30 ... gxf5?? 31 Rg3+ Ng7 32 Qf6 mates next move. If instead, 30 ... Ree8 31 Nh6+ Kh8 (or 31 ... Kg7 32 Qf6+! Kxh6 33 Rh3 mate) 32 Qf6+ Ng7 33 Nxf7+, Black must fork over the exchange, since 33 ... Kg8 34 Nh6+ Kh8 35 Qxf8+ Rxf8 36 Rxf8 is mate again.

31 Nh6+!

The knight thunders past. More cold-bloodedly effective than merely taking the exchange – h6 is the puncture wound through which Black's misery drips. With the feast yet to come, Botvinnik is disinclined to be bought off with gifts of scraps from Black's table.

31 ... Kf8

31 ... Kg7 is once again met by 32 Qf6+ Kxh6 (the king wanders off to who-knows-where, like a child who plays hooky from school) 33 Rh3 mate.

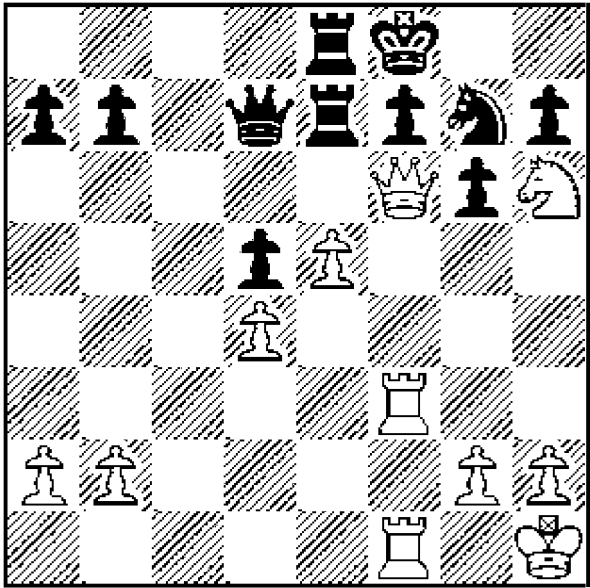
32 Qf6

Threatening mate on the move.

32 ... Ng7

Black's overcrowded pieces scrunch in close.

33 Rcf3



Game over. White threatens mate, beginning with Qxf7+!. In this hopelessly busted position, even Black's most sincere efforts are rendered moot.

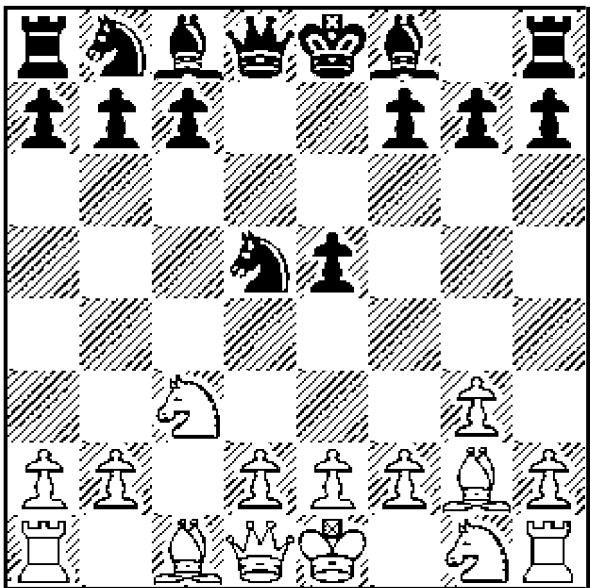
33 ... Rc8 34 Nxf7 Re6 35 Qg5 Nf5 36 Nh6 Qg7 37 g4 1-0

Black's king cringes, beleaguered by the swirl of hostiles all around him, and he drops a piece as well, almost as an afterthought.

Game 13
M.Botvinnik-L.Portisch
Monte Carlo 1968
English Opening

At the time of this game, Portisch was a contender for the World Championship, while Botvinnik's career entered its twilight.

1 c4 e5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 g3 d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 Bg2



The Reversed Dragon. Botvinnik once wrote that the Open Sicilian position was too potent an opening to allow White to attain it a full move up.

Question: Is this true?

Answer: Probably not. Top GMs continue to allow the Reversed Dragon to this day and score just fine with the black side. However, Black must play one of the quiet, positional lines. If he goes for some ultra-sharp Yugoslav Attack variation, the extra tempo turns deadly potent against him.

5 ... Be6

GMs play 5 ... Nb6 today.

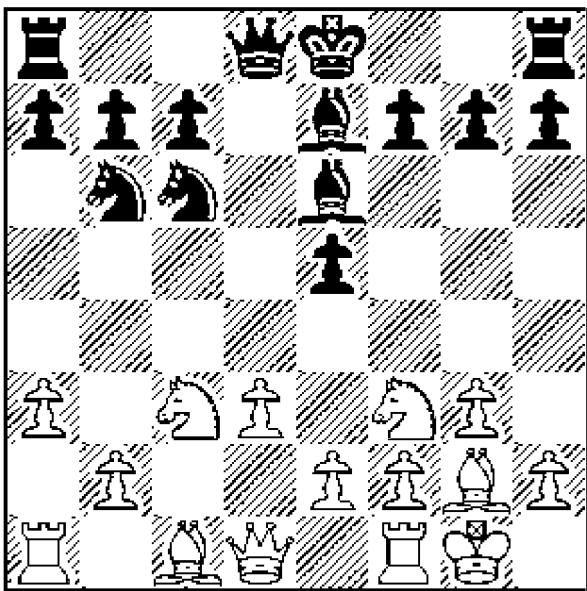
Question: What is the difference?

Answer: It is in Black's best interest to keep a firm grip over the d4-square and not allow White to play the move in one go.

6 Nf3 Nc6 7 0-0 Nb6

The most accurate move. White gets a clear edge if allowed d2-d4. For example: 7 ... Be7 8 d4! Nxc3 9 bxc3 e4 (or 9 ... exd4 10 Nxd4 Nxd4 11 cxd4 c6 12 Rb1 Qd7 13 Qc2 with advantage to White, who dominates the centre and may apply pressure down the open b-and c-files, L.Christiansen-E.Handoko, Surakarta 1982) 10 Nd2 f5 11 e3 0-0 12 c4 and White's extra central control gave him the edge, G.Kasparov-V.Korchnoi, Paris (rapid) 1990.

8 d3 Be7 9 a3



9 ... a5?!

It isn't worth weakening the queenside to prevent b2-b4. Current theory has Black playing ... a7-a5 only *in response* to White's b2-b4. For example: 9 ... 0-0 10 b4 f6 11 Bb2 a5 (the correct timing) 12 b5 Nd4 13 Nd2 c6 14 bxc6 Nxc6 15 Nb5 a4 16 Rc1 Ra5 with mutual chances, E.Bacrot-V.Topalov, Dubai (rapid) 2002.

10 Be3 0-0 11 Na4

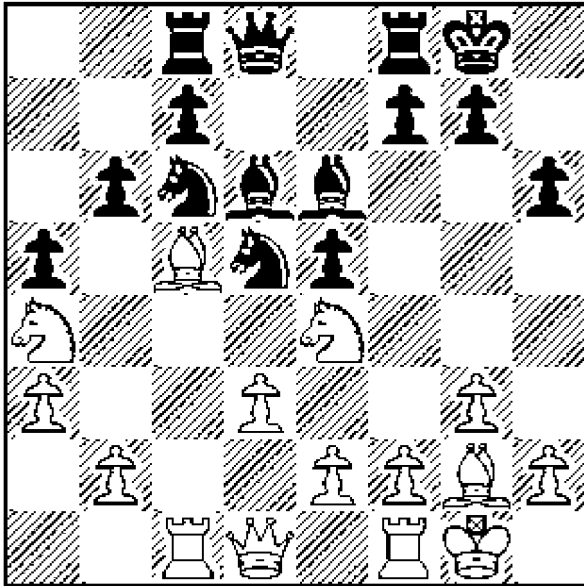
A standard Dragon manoeuvre. The swap of the b6-knight helps White out in his queenside ambitions.

Question: Doesn't taking on b6 damage Black's pawn structure?

Answer: A little, but Black is compensated in the form of increased dark square control and the bishop pair; e.g. 11 Bxb6 cxb6 12 Rc1 f6 13 Nd2 Rc8 14 Nc4 Rf7, when I prefer White but Black's game is quite playable as well, Zhao Xue-B.Yildiz, FIDE Grand Prix, Nanjing 2009.

11 ... Nxa4

G.Kasparov-Kir.Georgiev, World Blitz Championship, Saint John 1988, saw 11 ... Nd5 12 Bc5 Bd6 13 Rc1 h6 14 Nd2 Rc8 15 Ne4 and, just as White began to exert a degree of queenside pressure, Black blundered with 15 ... b6? which allowed Kasparov a combination.



Exercise (combination alert): White to play and win material.

Answer: Deflection. 16 Nxd6! cxd6 17 Bxb6! Nxb6 18 Rxc6, picking off a pawn.

12 Qxa4 Bd5 13 Rfc1

Question: Why not the a1-rook?

Answer: Botvinnik's attack (for now) is on the queenside, so he logically utilizes both of his rooks in that sector of the board.

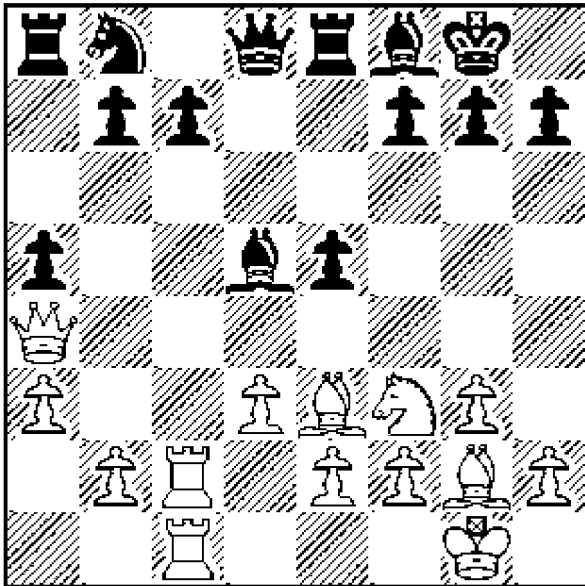
13 ... Re8 14 Rc2 Bf8

Labelled "complacency" by Botvinnik, who gave 14 ... Bd6 15 Nd2 Bxg2 16 Kxg2 as Black's best chance to defend his queenside.

15 Rac1

Now White may contemplate Nd2 and, after a bishop swap, a potentially damaging exchange sac on c6.

15 ... Nb8



Welcome, welcome! Please enter my humble home. If we take on c7, then Portisch plans to slam the door in our face with ... Bc6, trapping our rook. If we don't take, then Black plans ... c7-c6, rendering our doubled rooks rather silly on the c-file.

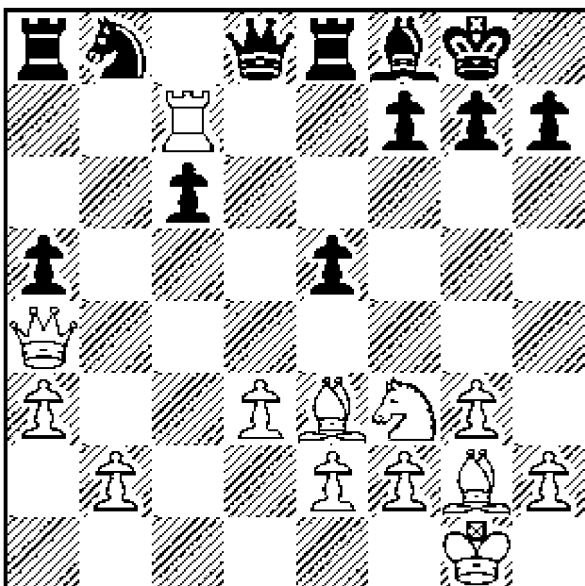
Exercise (critical decision): Should we accept Black's dare and enter with 16 Rxc7 - ?

Answer: Black's last move fails to fit the position's requirements. We absolutely should take the dare. Black's last move was a blunder. Rare is the occasion when one side is able to retreat a fully developed piece back to its home square in an open position and get away with the crime. His knight retreat proves to be a dangerous cocktail, high on ambition and short on effectiveness.

16 Rxc7!

Apparently both parties are amenable to the deal.

16 ... Bc6 17 R1xc6 bxc6



Exercise (combination alert): White can play 18 Rb7, when he gets excellent compensation for the exchange. Instead, he found an infinitely stronger continuation. What was it?

Answer: The inherent weakness of f7 wafts its unpleasant odour, until it permeates Black's camp. How often do you see a game where one side gets the good fortune to offer both rooks?

18 Rxf7!!

This move must have come as a jarring shock to Portisch. Now we sense a radical shift of energy, Black's decreasing and White's increasing with each move.

18 ... h6

The rook's firm grip is met by the black king's dreaded limp-fish handshake. Declining is the only way to continue playing.

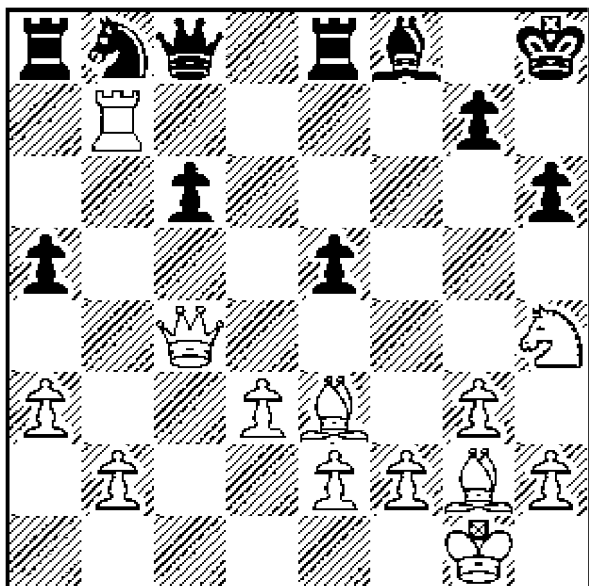
Question: Why didn't Black accept?

Answer: Acceptance leads to slaughter after 18 ... Kxf7? (the old king, overestimating his grip on power, indulges in a poor decision) 19 Qc4+ Kg6 (other moves fail to come into consideration 19 ... Ke7? 20 Bg5+, 19 ... Kf6? 20 Bg5+, or 19 ... Qd5? 20 Ng5+) 20 Qe4+ Kf7 21 Ng5+ Ke7 22 Qxe5+ Kd7 23 Bh3+ and Black's plate is so empty that he sees his own reflection.

19 Rb7 Qc8 20 Qc4+ Kh8

20 ... Qe6 21 Nxe5 Qxc4 22 Nxc4 is also completely lost for Black. White simply gets too many pawns for the exchange.

21 Nh4!



Yet another punishing foray – g6 is punctured. Now Botvinnik's pieces spit forth.

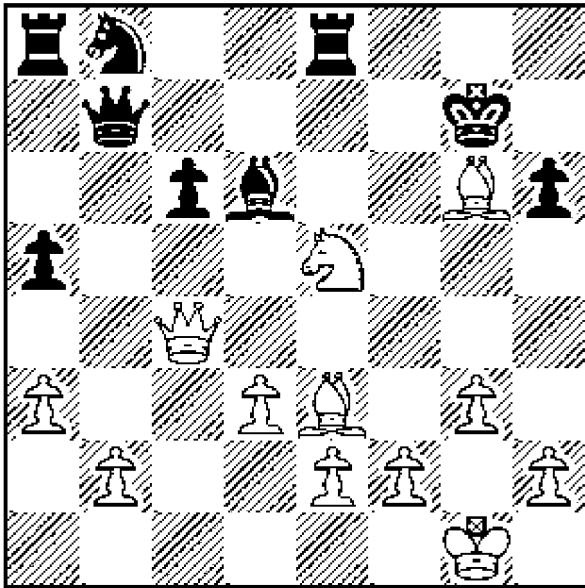
21 ... Qxb7

The queen strives to expunge the unpleasant association with White's intruding rook from her memory.

22 Ng6+ Kh7 23 Be4 Bd6 24 Nxe5+ g6

24 ... Kh8 (the haunting images dancing within the black king's mind feel more real than actual reality) 25 Nf7+ wins the queen.

25 Bxg6+ Kg7



Exercise (combination alert): The once rich black king's furnishings are now as Spartan as a monk's in a monastery. How did Botvinnik end all resistance?

Answer: The crushing tide of events press uncomfortably upon Black's king, who is cast out of his domain to wander in dangerous places.

26 Bxh6+! 1-0

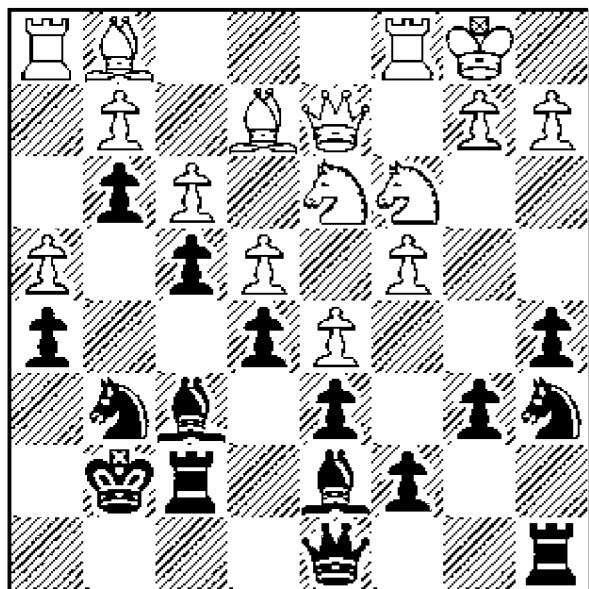
After 26 ... Kxh6 27 Qh4+ Kg7 28 Qh7+ Kf8 (the king falls to his knees and prays to some saint who specializes in rescuing believers from lost causes) 29 Qxb7 (the Botvinnik giveth and the Botvinnik taketh away; the duration of the black queen's life comes to a tragic and sudden end, as she slumps forward) 29 ... Re7 30 Qxa8 does the job. I was about to say something clever here but find that I am unable.

Question: Don't tell me. Let me guess. Could it be that for the third time in just one chapter you are rendered mute, bedazzled by Botvinnik's attacking prowess?

Answer: ...

Chapter Two

Botvinnik on Defence



I had the black pieces in this position from a 1977 simultaneous game against Botvinnik. Fortune finally smiled on me. Just look at White's trapped g1-bishop and rook, glued to their posts indefinitely, and his pathetic, stray, sick lamb of an h-pawn, about to fall by the wayside. If victorious, I imagined a wondrous destiny: 1. The city of Montreal throws a parade in my honour.

2. Popular kids at high school remorsefully seek absolution for past indiscretions toward your humble writer, and high five me incessantly.

3. Curvy high school cheerleaders, aghast at not earlier recognizing my unseen depths, fall tearfully to their knees, hands prayerfully clasped, imploring forgiveness and begging me for dates.

4. My stubborn case of acne finally clears up.

In the game, Botvinnik's position stretched elastically, yet never snapped. Alas, none of my dreams came to pass – wait; my mistake; the acne did indeed clear up – since Botvinnik hung on like grim death, complicated into a firestorm, and in tacit partnership with your writer's incompetence, managed rudely to steal the point from your deserving writer.

When you are so utterly outmatched (even with receiving simul odds) by a legendary opponent, it's not such a bad idea to factor in crushing disappointment. Nevertheless, I remember leaving the building teary-eyed. I discovered, as did Botvinnik's opponents in this chapter, that achieving a superior or winning position against Botvinnik didn't necessarily equate to actually scoring the point against the legend. In this chapter, we examine just how Botvinnik regains his mojo when under attack or struggling in an inferior position.

Game 14

A.Kotov-M.Botvinnik

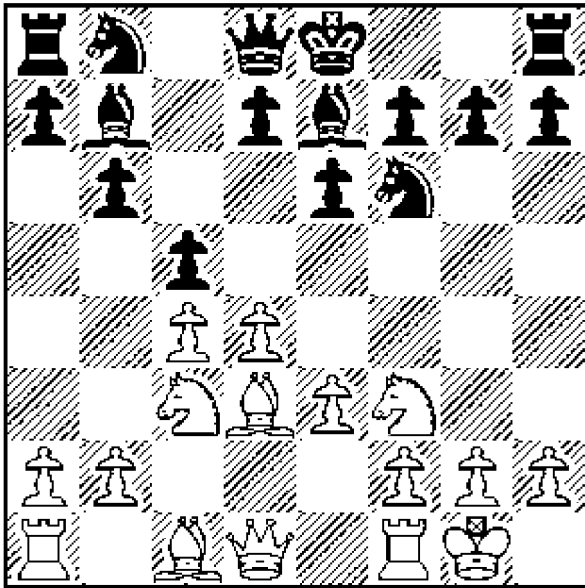
USSR Championship, Moscow 1944

Queen's Indian Defence

Who among us has not read Kotov's classic book, *Think Like a Grandmaster* - ?

1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 b6 3 e3 c5 4 Bd3 Bb7 5 c4 e6 6 0-0 Be7 7 Nc3

7 b3 leads to Zukertort Colle positions.



7 ... d5!?

Perhaps this move is playable, but I don't like it.

Question: Why not? Black simply challenges the centre.

Answer: He shouldn't be confronting White and opening the game when lagging in development. Instead: a) The very natural 7 ... 0-0! may be a strategic error as well. White forces an advantage after 8 d5! exd5 9 cxd5 d6 (or 9 ... Nxd5 10 Nxd5 Bxd5 11 Bxh7+ Kxh7 12 Qxd5 and White's grip on d5 nets a clear advantage) 10 e4 a6 11 a4 with a good Benoni, since Black's light-squared bishop hits a pawn wall on d5, V.Malaniuk-M.Simantsev, Minsk 1998.

b) 7 ... cxd4 8 exd4 d5 9 cxd5 Nxd5 10 Ne5! 0-0 11 Qh5 g6 12 Qh3 looks like a dangerous version of an isolani for Black, E.Danielian-M.Brodsky, Cappelle la Grande 2006.

c) 7 ... h6!

Question: What is the point of Black's last move?

Answer: I like this idea, which denies White d4-d5 tricks by removing the Bxh7+ theme. After 8 b3 0-0 9 Bb2 cxd4, Black is okay whichever way White recaptures, R.Edouard-Al.David, Le Port Marly (rapid) 2012.

Principle: Open the game when leading in development.

8 cxd5 exd5

Botvinnik always favoured central control over hypermodern piece play. 8 ... Nxd5 9 Nxd5 isn't pleasant for Black either. J.Akesson-K.Pilgaard, Gothenburg 2003, continued 9 ... Qxd5 10 e4 Qd8 11 dxc5 Bxc5, when 12 b4! looks tough for Black.

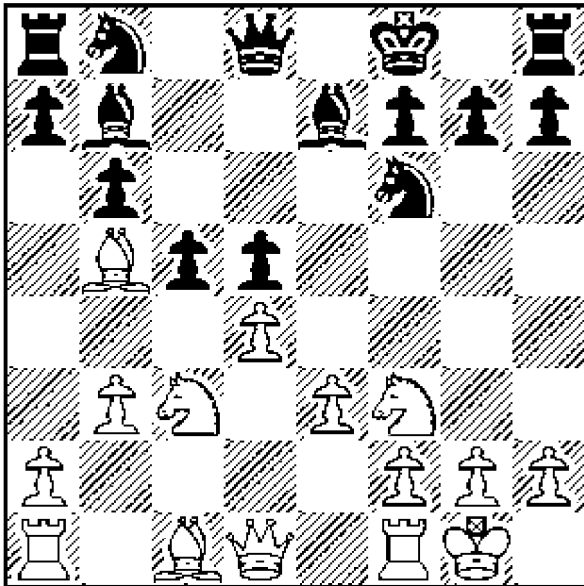
9 Bb5+!

Principle: Confront the opponent when leading in development.

9 ... Kf8?

If the position were given an EEG, the brainwaves produced would be reliably abnormal. This overreaction looks like a case of the cure exceeding the discomfort of the original ailment. 9 ... Nbd7 10 Ne5, unpleasant as it appears, may be superior to self-denying castling.

10 b3!



Dual purpose:

1. Kotov prepares to fianchetto his dark-squared bishop.
2. This, in turn, discourages Black from the unravelling plan ... g7-g6?! and ... Kg7, since it would put his king in the direct fire of White's fianchettoed bishop. Botvinnik's opening has been an unquestioned disaster!

10 ... a6 11 Be2 Nc6 12 Bb2 Rc8 13 Ne5

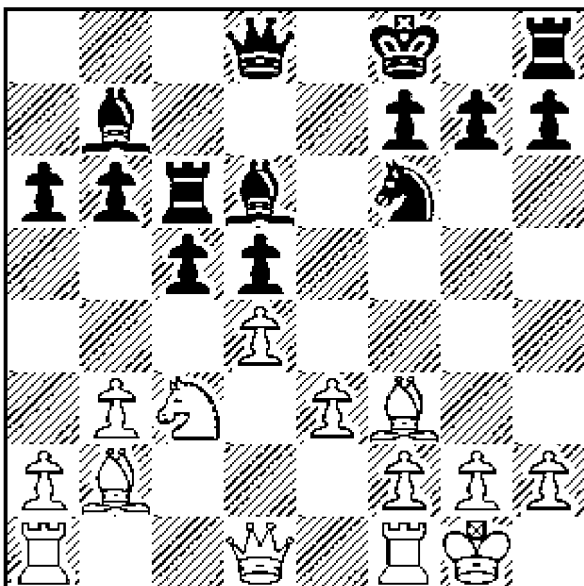
I don't think this is White's most direct plan.

Question: What would you suggest?

Answer: With Black's king on f8, his h8-rook will be out of play for quite some time. White's best bet is to confront in the centre and on the queenside as soon as possible, when Black is essentially short five fighting units, due to his AWOL h8-rook. Here 13 Rc1 h5 14 dxc5! looks exceedingly difficult for Black, whose position, in the throes of dissolution on every front, hangs by a worn thread.

13 ... Bd6 14 Nxc6 Rxc6 15 Bf3!?

White retains a clear advantage after the correct 15 dxc5!. The text looks like a case of too much preparation. Kotov's move, a by-product of the main idea – like foam's relationship to beer in the mug – may be a sub-optimal choice in a very promising position.



Exercise (planning): How did Botvinnik manage to relieve a good chunk of his troubles with his next move?

Answer: Principle: Close the position when lagging in development.

15 ... c4! 16 g3

Now White threatens to chop on d5.

16 ... Rc8 17 bxc4 Rxc4 18 Qd3! Qc8

Botvinnik, still well short of equality, covers against cheapos such as 18 ... g6?? 19 Nxd5!, picking off an important central pawn. The alternative was 18 ... Bb4, challenging an enabler of White's e3-e4! break; but even then White retains the advantage by opening the position once again with 19 Nxd5! Bxd5 20 e4 Be6 21 e5 Ne8 22 d5 b5 23 Rfc1 Rxc1+ 24 Rxc1 which gives him a promising attack, despite Black's extra piece.

19 Rac1?!

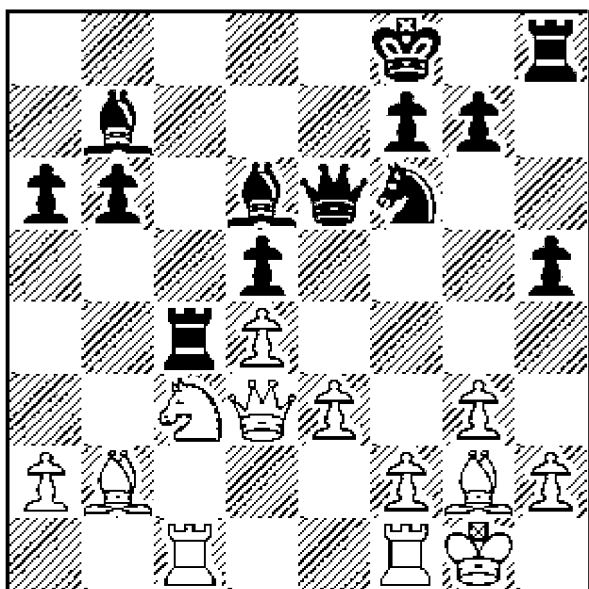
"An idle mind is the devil's playground!" so my third grade math teacher would admonish me when she caught me daydreaming of a mathless world, while gazing out the window at the enticing playground. One can only amend and cross-reference a plan so much and then the need for action overrides the need to edit. No need to cook the banana. Just peel and eat. But Kotov vacillates.

The e4-square is the governing body of the position, where authority flows down. White's goal gets bogged down in a series of interminable delays and difficulties – all unnecessary and all self-inflicted. The time is now to seize the initiative with 19 e4! Nxe4 (Black also remains on the defensive in the line 19 ... Rxc3 20 Qxc3 Qxc3 21 Bxc3 dxe4 22 Bg2 Ke7 23 Rfb1 Bc7 24 Ba5! Nd7 25 Bh3 Rb8 26 Bxd7 bxa5 27 Ba4) 20 Nxe4 dxe4 21 Bxe4 Bxe4 22 Qxe4 Qc6 23 Qf5 Qc8 24 Qf3, when the sullen h8-rook will probably cost Black the game.

19 ... Qe6!

Fighting for e4, while retaining control over c4.

20 Bg2 h5!



Intending ... h5-h4, a move which accurately reflects the increasingly hostile tinge to Botvinnik ambitions. He attempts to brazen it out by moulding a virtue from a vice, threatening to activate the h8-rook and launch an unexpected kingside attack.

21 Ne2

Now an e3-e4 break will be near impossible to achieve. I would have tossed in 21 h4.

21 ... b5

And here perhaps the immediate 21 ... h4 should be played.

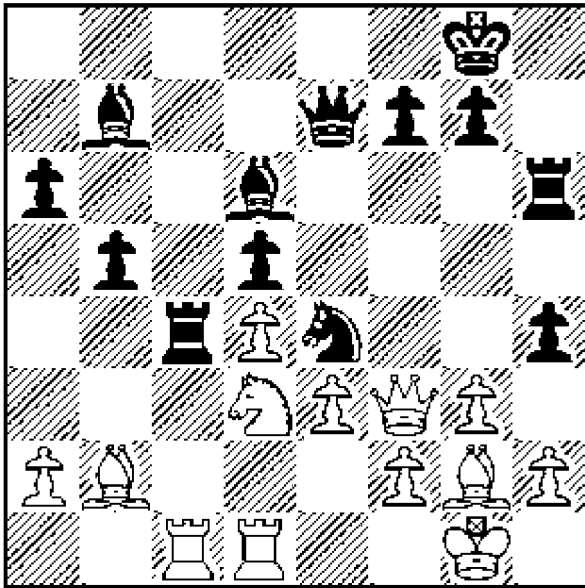
22 Nf4 Qe7 23 Qd1

The last chance for 23 h4.

23 ... h4

The once-heavy volume of White threats declines to zero. Kotov's sluggish middlegame play allowed Botvinnik to make full repairs and suddenly I prefer Black's position.

24 Qf3 Kg8 25 Rfd1 Ne4 26 Nd3 Rh6!



The sleeping rook awakens.

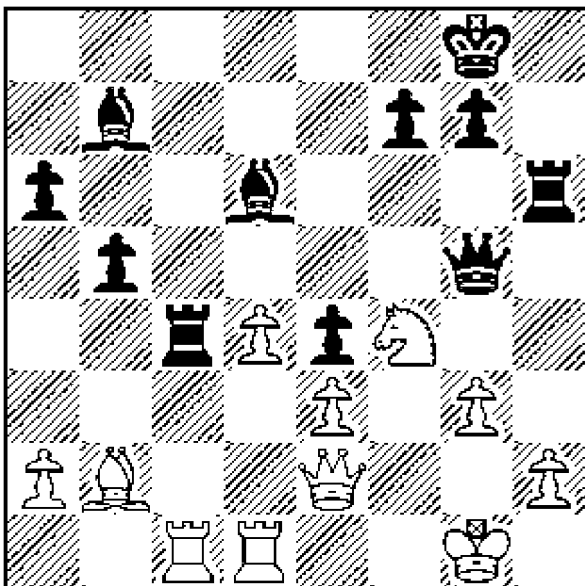
27 Qe2 hxd3 28 fxd3?!

The wrong recapture. White voluntarily accepts a weak, backward e-pawn.

28 ... Qg5 29 Bxe4?

This move is indisputable evidence that White's advantage, now long gone, took a wrong turn. Kotov removes the offending knight, but in so doing, fatally weakens his light squares.

29 ... dxe4 30 Nf4



Exercise (planning): Just compare Black's position to his dismal one after the opening! What a change. Come up with a plan to break White's resistance.

Answer: Principle: Opposite-coloured bishops favour the attacker.

30 ... Bxf4!

The bishop greets his wayward brother with precious little warmth or affection.

31 exf4 Qd5!

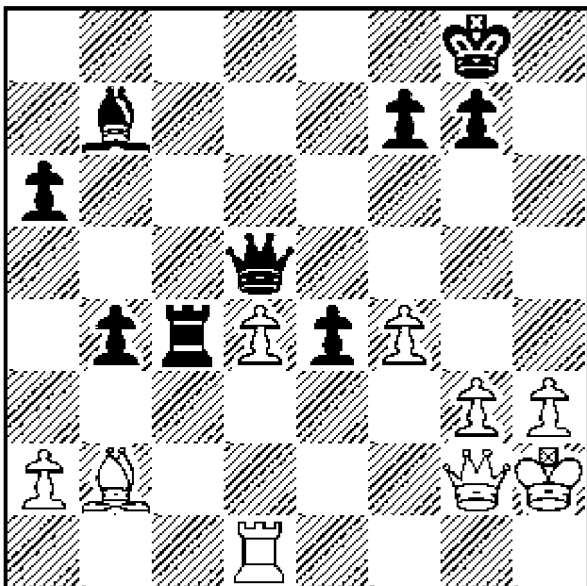
Dual purpose:

1. Blockading White's d-pawn.
2. Threatening to unleash light square pain with ... e4-e3 next.

32 Qg2 Rhd6 33 Rxc4 Rxc4 34 h3 b4!

Advancing his majority and fixing a2 as a target as well.

35 Kh2?



White is at least consoled with an illusion of safety. His king position, now absent of defenders, stands derelict.

Exercise (combination alert): In fact Kotov just blundered in a busted position. How did Botvinnik exploit it?

Answer: The start of a zwischenzug combination. Botvinnik concludes crisply, without wasted motion.

35 ... e3! 36 Qxd5 Rc2+!

There it is: zwischenzug! Black's rook sneaks in and puts finger to lips in a "silence" gesture to White's forces. He takes control over the seventh rank, rendering White helpless.

37 Kg1

The unbelieving king, who up until now had only seen the inside of churches and temples via funerals and weddings, decides to engage upon spiritual matters.

37 ... Bxd5 0-1

White can't save his bishop, since 38 Bc1 is met by 38 ... Rg2+ 39 Kf1 (the confused king's eyes glaze over, like discount chinaware) 39 ... e2+.

Game 15

D.Bronstein-M.Botvinnik

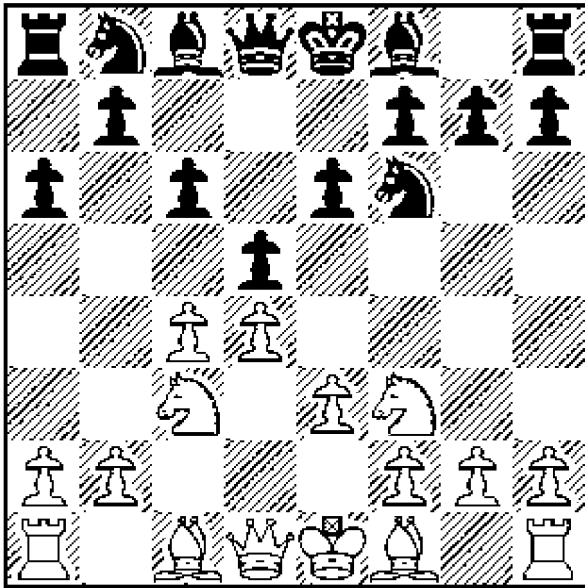
World Championship (18th matchgame), Moscow 1951

Semi-Slav Defence

1 d4

One of the great shortcomings of life is that most people rarely achieve their heart's desire, unless blind luck plays a role. Had Bronstein won this game, he would very likely have defeated Botvinnik in their world championship match and had his name enshrined in history, next to the likes of Morphy, Lasker, Capablanca, Botvinnik, Fischer, Karpov and Kasparov. Unfortunately, Bronstein's life fell a sliver short of his dreams.

1 ... d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Nf3 e6 5 e3 a6



This line continues to be played by GMs, but it's a thankless task for Black, in my opinion, and I believe 6 ... Nbd7, the main line, is clearly a superior choice. I was tempted to give Black's move a "?!" mark but realized it would outrage all the people who play this line, so I chickened out!

Question: Can you explain this move?

Answer: Black can either play for an immediate ... b7-b5, or he can meet 6 Bd3 with 6 ... dxc4 7 Bxc4 b5 8 Bb3 b5, transposing to a Queen's Gambit Accepted. In my opinion, the ... a7-a6 lines work better in a pure Slav rather than in a Semi-Slav where Black is already committed to ... e7-e6. Black's light-squared bishop normally belongs on the outside of the pawn chain.

6 Bd3

The immediate 6 b3 is White's best shot at an advantage. G.Kasparov-B.Gelfand, Linares 1991, continued 6 ... Bb4 7 Bd2 Nbd7 8 Bd3 0-0 9 0-0 Bd6 10 e4 dxc4 11 bxc4 e5 12 c5! Bc7 13 Na4 exd4 14 h3 Re8 15 Re1 h6 16 Rb1 Nh7 17 Bc4 Qf6 18 Rb3 Nh8 19 Bc1 Ng6 20 Nxd4 (Rf3 is in the air) 20 ... Nde5 21 Bf1 Rd8 22 Bb2 and I prefer White, whose kingside majority feels more potent and his pieces look more threatening than Black's.

6 ... b5

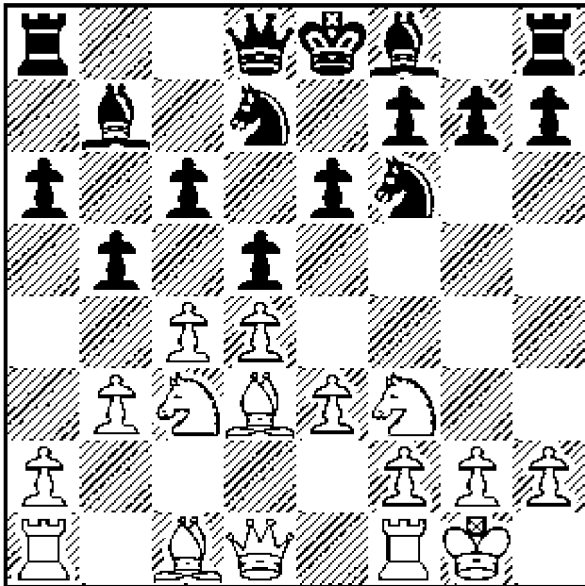
6 ... dxc4 7 Bxc4 b5 followed by ... c6-c5, transposes to Queen's Gambit Accepted. But Botvinnik probably declined to enter for two reasons: 1. Bronstein was a monster in open positions.

2. Botvinnik himself liked to take on the isolated d-pawn positions, with their resulting kingside attacking chances. So, due to this bias, he may have been somewhat hesitant to enter from the Black side.

7 b3!

A good reaction. White may recapture on c4 with his b-pawn.

7 ... Nbd7 8 0-0 Bb7



9 c5!

White's extra space gives him a slight but enduring advantage. Bronstein's move is stronger than retaining the central tension with something like 9 Bb2 Bd6 (now Black's bishop reaches a superior square) 10 Qe2 (it isn't too late for 10 c5!) 10 ... bxc4! 11 bxc4 dxc4! 12 Bxc4 c5 13 Rfd1 cxd4 14 Rxd4 Bc5 15 Rd2 Qe7 16 Rad1 0-0 and Black equalized, D.Zilberstein-V.Akopian, US Championship, San Diego 2004.

9 ... Be7

Question: Can Black free his position with an ... e6-e5 trick?

Answer: This violates the principle: *Avoid confrontation when behind in development.* 9 ... e5? 10 Nxe5 Nxe5 11 dxe5 Nd7 and now 12 e6! looks good for White after 12 ... Nxc5 (12 ... fxe6? 13 Qh5+ Ke7 14 e4 is obviously awful for Black) 13 exf7+ Kxf7 14 Bc2, when Black remains behind in development in an open position.

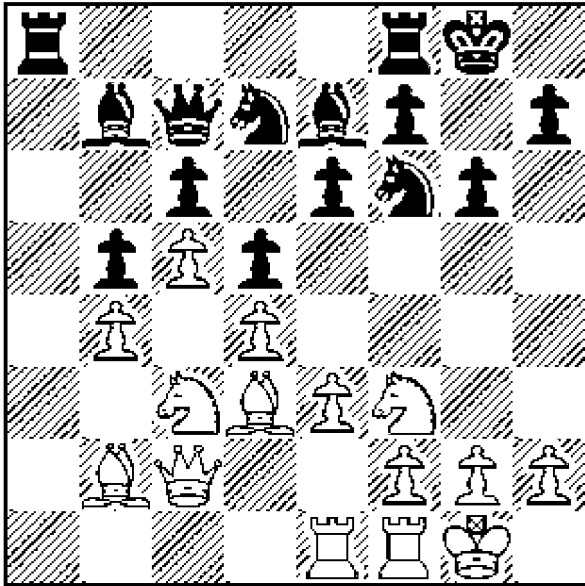
10 a3 a5 11 Bb2 0-0 12 Qc2 g6

Question: Is this weakening move necessary?

Answer: Sooner or later it will be. Black wants to retain options of ... Nxe5 in case of Ne5 from White.

13 b4 axb4 14 axb4 Qc7?!

Black should jump on every possible exchange, starting with 14 ... Rxa1 15 Rxa1 Qc7, followed by ... Ra8. 15 Rae1!



In the presence of my mother, I use the word "shoot!" when I'm annoyed; when at home, your foul-mouthed writer often uses a similar sounding but different word. My feeling is that Botvinnik's thoughts

were clearly not along the lines of “shoot” about here! Bronstein deftly retains rooks.

Principle: The side with extra space should avoid swaps.

Botvinnik is getting squeezed:

1. The ... e7-e5 break, his only source of counterplay, remains an impossible dream.
2. A closed centre means that White gets to attack with ease with ideas like Ne5 and f2-f4.
3. Black's light-squared bishop is a disgrace to the brotherhood of bishops, as he continues to sit in Zen-like silence on b7.

Question: Well, if this is the case, then just where did Botvinnik go wrong?

Answer: Honestly, I think his mistake was entering this lemon of a line in the first place.

15 ... Rfe8 16 Ne2 Bf8 17 h3 Bg7 18 Ne5 Nf8

Botvinnik decides upon passive defence, since confrontation favours his opponent after 18 ... Nxe5 19 dxe5 Nd7 20 f4 f6 21 exf6 Nxf6 (Black must recapture with his knight since 21 ... Bxf6?? gets slaughtered by 22 Bxg6) 22 Be5 Qd8 23 Nd4 Nd7 24 Bxg7 Kxg7 25 e4! e5 26 Nf3 d4 27 Qd2 Bc8 28 Rd1 and Black will eventually drop d4.

19 f3 N6d7 20 f4 f6

The immediate 20 ... f5. intending ... Nf6-e4, is a thought.

21 Nf3 Re7 22 Nc3 f5

Achieving ... f7-(f6)-f5 has not brought about equality.

23 Ra1!

Question: Didn't you say earlier that the side with space shouldn't swap?

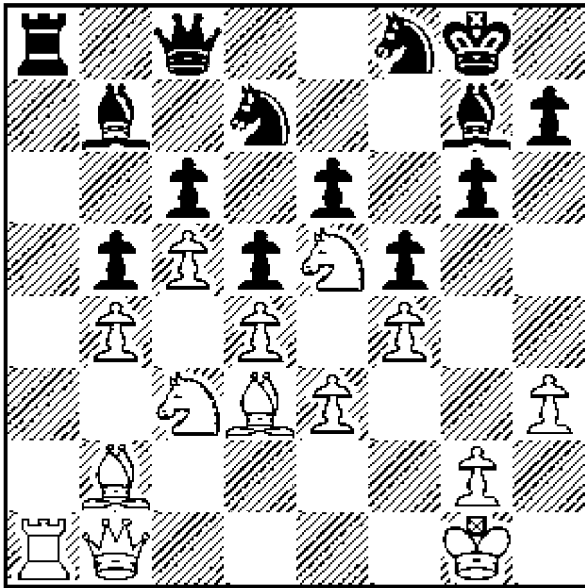
Answer: Flexibility is important. Sometimes you must deliberately violate a principle if you believe the situation is an exception. By achieving a semi-locked kingside, Black defended well against a coming attack on that flank, so Bronstein switches gears and turns his attention to the queenside.

23 ... Ree8 24 Ne5 Rxa1 25 Rxa1 Ra8 26 Qb1!

Question: Why an exclamation?

Answer: The queen frees the b2-bishop for duty elsewhere. I can't say anymore about the move or I risk giving away the answer to the coming exercise!

26 ... Qc8?!



Botvinnik, with his last move, makes a rare strategic evaluation misjudgment. He should have played his queen to b8 instead. Coming up with a viable offensive plan in such a situation is no simple task. Hypotheses rapidly form and as quickly die, killed off by their own future implications. Bronstein enters a hidden portal of thought, discovering a solution.

Exercise (planning/critical decision): How would you play for the win as White in this position?

Answer: Give up a piece for two connected passed pawns.
27 Bxb5!!

Question: Isn't White in reality making purchases he can't afford?

Answer: Bronstein's move shows brilliant judgment. White's sac sets in motion a new chain of thought. Kasparov writes: "A purely positional sacrifice: the pair of connected b-and c-pawns will be stronger than the bishop. White's dynamic evaluation proves more correct." White is probably winning at this stage, but as in horse racing, there is no such thing as a sure winner.

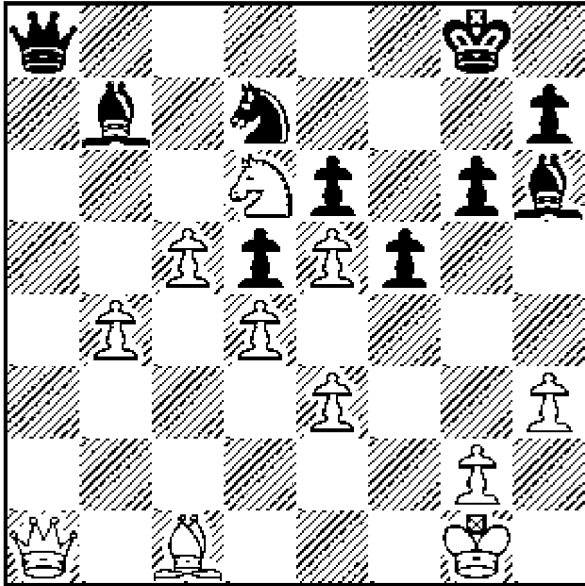
27 ... Nxe5 28 fxe5 Bh6 29 Bc1!

Now we see the hidden point of 26 Qb1!.

29 ... cxb5 30 Nxb5 Nd7 31 Nd6

And now we see why Botvinnik's 26th move was inaccurate. White's knight, who smears d6 with his very presence so deep in Black's territory, arrives with tempo.

31 ... Rxa1 32 Qxa1 Qa8



33 Qc3

Botvinnik felt that 33 Qb2 was more accurate and led to a win, while Kasparov vigorously disputed the claim, giving lengthy analysis on how Black should be able to hold.

Question: And your opinion on the matter?

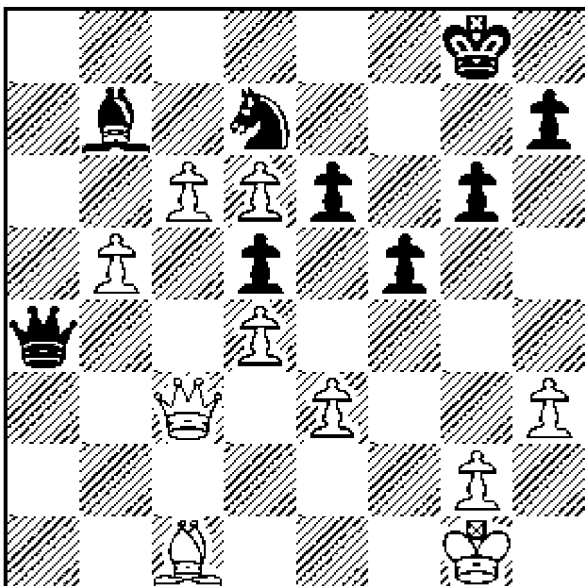
Answer: As I plead to my mother and sister, when they erupt into an argument and both try and woo me to their camp: “Keep me out of it!” I’m neutral, like the Swiss! Actually, the writer’s declaration of the dreaded “unclear” is in a sense without pertinence to the actual truth over the board and, instead, may simply be a testimonial to the limitations of your writer’s not-so-expansive mind to comprehend.

33 ... Bf8 34 b5 Bxd6

No choice in the matter. Now Bronstein gets three deeply entrenched passers.

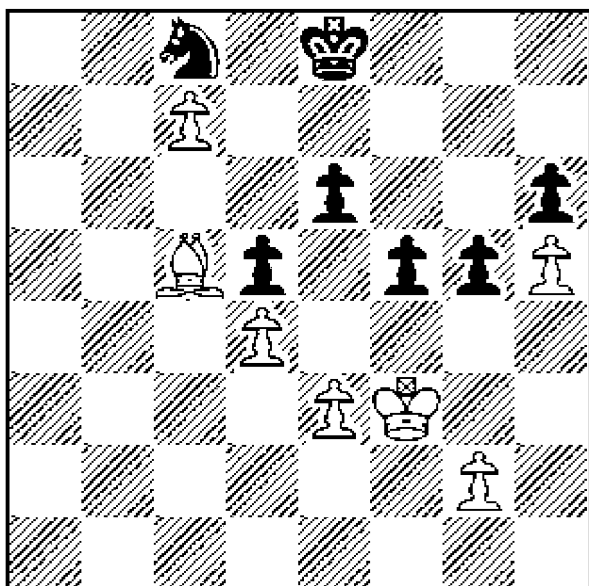
35 exd6 Qa4 36 Qb2

Question: Why not 36 c6 - ?

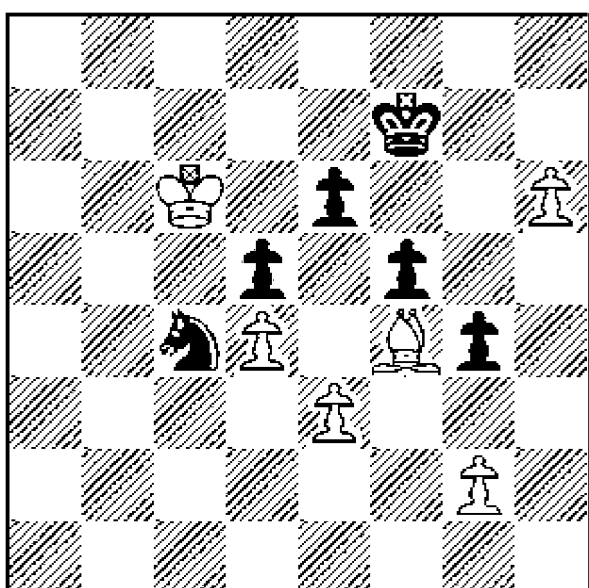


Answer: Actually, I was about to lecture you and tell you that your suggestion would be an answer to Botvinnik's prayers, since Black angles to sac his piece back to eliminate White's pawn armada. However, looking deeper into the line, apparently your suggestion may be a double exclamation, which may win for White! I realize that most readers don't go over detailed analysis, but I urge you to do so here. I learned a lot studying the breakthrough technique.

The analysis: 36 ... Qxb5 37 cxb7! (37 cxd7? Qxd7 is a near-certain draw) 37 ... Qxb7 38 Qc7 Qxc7 39 dxc7 Nb6 40 Kf2 Kf7 41 Kf3 g5 (Black must keep White's king out of the kingside, but apparently he cannot do so forever) 42 Ba3 Ke8 43 Bc5! (taming the would-be rescuer knight, who offends more than soothes the harried defenders) 43 ... Nc8 44 h4! (White must find a way to puncture the kingside) 44 ... h6 (44 ... gxh4? 45 Kf4 Kd7 46 Ke5 is an easy win for White) 45 h5!



(a key move: White fixes h6 as an eternal target; this means Black's king must remain on the kingside) 45 ... Kf7 46 Ke2! (now White's king infiltrates on the other wing) 46 ... Ke8 47 Kd3 g4 48 Kc3 Kd7 (otherwise White's king simply marches to b7) 49 Bf8 Kxc7 50 Bxh6 Kd7 51 Bf4 Ke7 52 Kb4 Nb6 53 h6 Kf6 54 Kc5 Nc4 55 Kc6 Kf7.



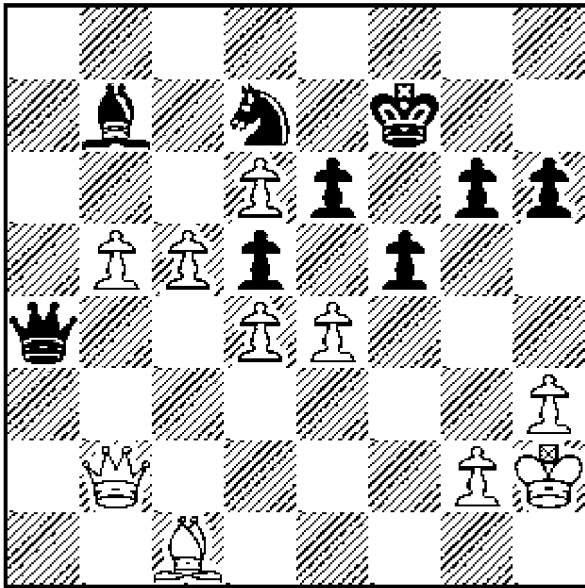
Exercise (planning): How does White win?

Answer: Deflection. Black's king feels constriction of the chest and a queasy stomach at the thought of the invaders at his gate. After 56 h7! Kg7 57 Kd7, Black's pawns fall.

36 ... Kf7 37 Kh2

Bronstein was critical of his own move and suggested the plan 37 Bd2 and Qb4. And please don't ask me what I think. I just applied for Swiss citizenship.

37 ... h6 38 e4!



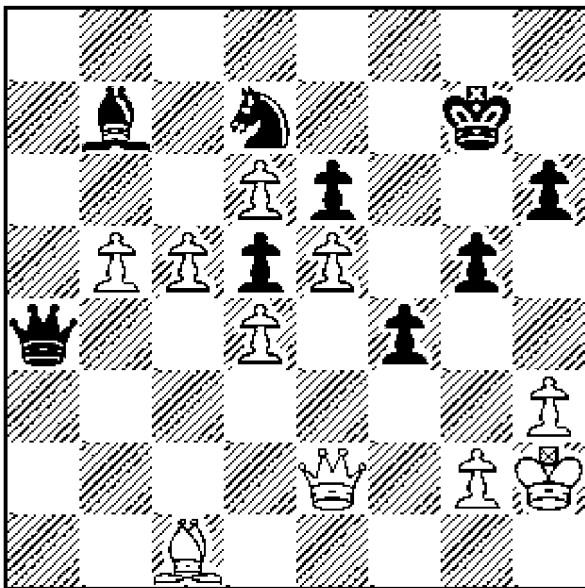
Pawns mesh and clot in the central tangle. Bronstein does his con artist best to contrive deceptive pitfalls for his opponent. “The best practical chance”, according to Kasparov.

38 ... f4?

Here, Botvinnik claimed that 38 ... dxe4 39 d5 wins for White, but Kasparov correctly disputes the evaluation, citing 39 ... e3!! (this is not a fair fight, since Kasparov gets to use computers while poor Botvinnik is on his own for the analysis). After 40 c6 (*Houdini*’s suggestion) 40 ... Qf4+ 41 Kg1 Bc8 42 dxe6+ Kxe6 43 Qb3+ Kxd6 44 Bxe3 Qe4 45 Bf2 Nc5 46 Qg8 Qb1+ 47 Kh2 Qxb5 48 Bg3+ Kxc6 49 Qxc8+ Kb6 Black still struggles but may yet hold the game.

39 e5 g5 40 Qe2 Kg7

White wins after 40 ... Qxd4. For example: 41 c6 Qxe5 42 Qxe5 Nxe5 43 cxb7 Nd7 44 Bd2! e5 45 Ba5 d4 46 Kg1 e4 47 Bc7 d3 48 Kf1 h5 49 b8Q Nxb8 50 Bxb8 Ke6 51 b6 Kd7 (or 51 ... g4 52 d7 Kxd7 53 Bxf4) 52 Ke1 h4 53 b7! Kc6 54 d7 Kxd7 55 Bxf4 *etc.*



“In this critical position the game was adjourned and no one, myself included, had any doubts that White would win,” wrote Botvinnik.

41 Qd3?

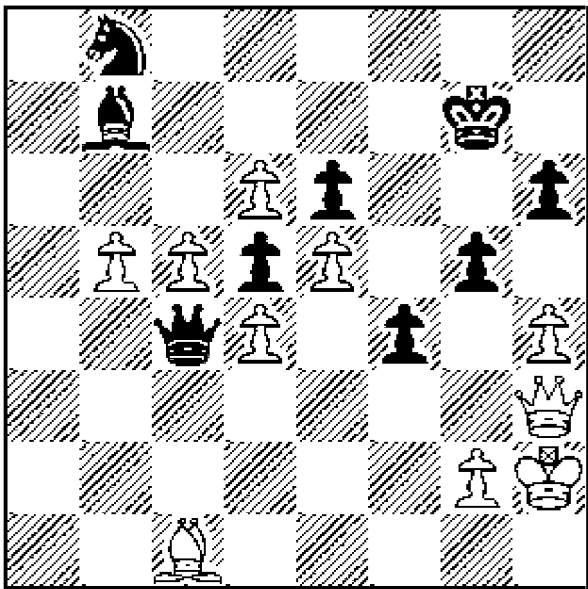
Bronstein sealed this move, which raises more questions than answers, and allowed Botvinnik a miraculous escape. 41 h4! is completely winning for White after 41 ... Qxd4 42 c6 f3 43 gxf3 Qxh4+ 44 Kg2 Bc8 45 cxd7 Bxd7 46 b6 Bc6 47 d7.

41 ... Nb8!!

The queenside is littered with warring fiefdoms and municipalities, all determined to establish pre-eminence over the others. Botvinnik finds an incredibly hidden fortress defence. The key is control over the critical c6-square.

42 h4!

White's best chance: strip Black's king of shelter.
42 ... Qc4 43 Qh3!



43 ... Qxb5!

The pawn is more important than the bishop! After 43 ... Qxc1? 44 hxg5 hxg5 45 Qxe6 Qe3 46 Qf6+ Kh7 47 Qxg5 Qg3+ 48 Qxg3+ fxg3+ 49 Kxg3 White wins; or if 45 ... f3 46 Qf6+ Kg8 47 e6 fxg2, then 48 Qf7+! (not yet 48 Kxg2?? Qc2+ 49 Kg3 Qd3+ 50 Kg4 Qe2+ 51 Kxg5 Qg2+ and draws) 48 ... Kh8 49 Kxg2 (now there is no perpetual check) 49 ... Qc2+ 50 Kg3 Qd3+ 51 Kg4 Qe2+ (or 51 ... Qxd4+ 52 Kf5 Qf4+ 53 Kg6 or 51 ... Bc8 52 Qf8+ Kh7 53 Qf5+) 52 Kxg5 Qg2+ 53 Kf6 and the white king escapes.

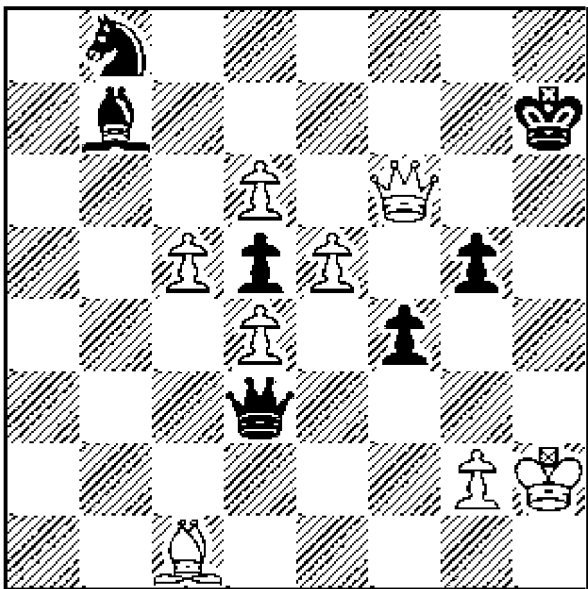
44 hxg5 hxg5 45 Qxe6 Qd3!

The two camps fling blows in each other's direction with mutual vehemence. Inspired disorder is a form of energy which should never be underestimated on the chess board. Botvinnik is still within his adjournment analysis at this stage and tidies up with a bit of housekeeping. The threat is a perpetual check, starting with ... Qg3+ next.

46 Qf6+ Kh7 47 Qf7+

Botvinnik's deep point: after 47 Qxg5 Qg3+! 48 Qxg3 fxg3+ 49 Kxg3 Bc8 50 Kf4 Kg6, Black achieves a fortress draw. Compare this with the variation 43 ... Qxc1? 44 hxg5 hxg5 45 Qxe6 Qe3 etc above. Here White has an extra piece (instead of a pawn on b5), but can now only draw because he cannot contest the light squares.

47 ... Kh8 48 Qf6+ Kh7



49 Bxf4

Redoubling one's efforts into a hopeless cause (winning!) only adds to one's frustration. Admittedly, Bronstein's move, Wagnerian stuff, displays theatrics more than the infliction of any real damage. But once again, after 49 Qxg5 Qg3+! 50 Qxg3 (White's queen raises a soprano outcry over the intrusion into her chamber) 50 ... fxg3+ 51 Kxg3 Bc8! 52 Kf4 Kg6 53 g4 Nc6, Black miraculously achieves his fortress and a

draw.

49 ... gxf4 50 Qf7+ Kh8 51 Qe8+

Of course 51 Qxb7 leads to immediate perpetual check by 51 ... Qg3+ 52 Kg1 Qe1+ *etc.*

51 ... Kg7 52 Qe7+ Kh8 53 Qe8+ Kg7 54 Qe7+

The queen professes her tender, eternal love for her beloved, Black's king. His cold response:
"Whatever."

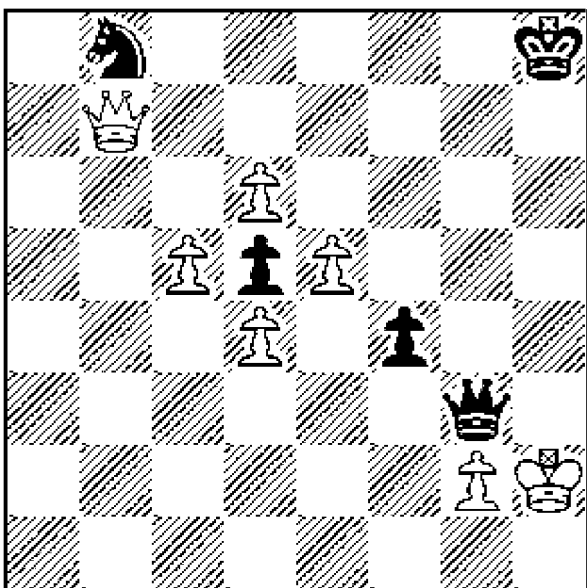
54 ... Kh8 55 Qf8+ Kh7 56 Qf7+ Kh8 57 Qxb7

Question: Can White gamble and just take on f4?

Answer: It's still a draw after 57 Qxf4 Qh7+ 58 Kg1 Qb1+ 59 Kf2 Qc2+.

57 ... Qg3+

The miracle arises and White's king lacks a graceful avenue of escape from his perpetual predicament.



58 Kh1 1/2-1/2

Your bleary-eyed writer invested more time into this game than any other in the book. After their precipitous climb, the white pawns failed to reach the summit.

It's scary to think about just how close Botvinnik came to losing the tied World Championship match against his great rival, Bronstein.

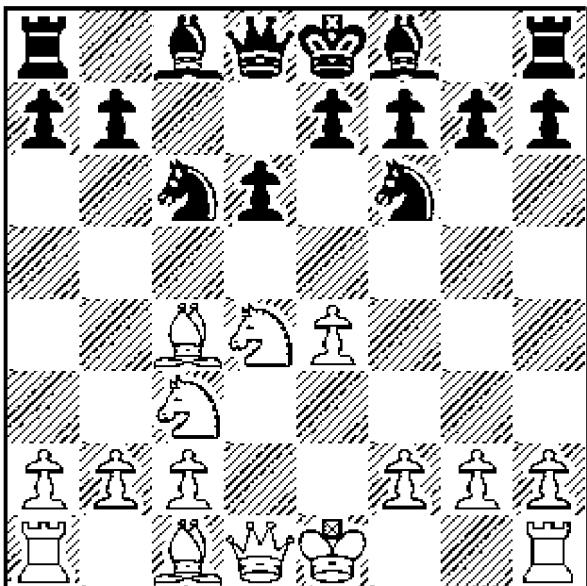
Game 16

N.Padevsky-M.Botvinnik

Alekhine Memorial, Moscow 1956

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 d6 6 Bc4



The Sozin Sicilian. White's c4-bishop development scheme was a lifetime favourite with Bobby Fischer.

6 ... e6 7 0-0

This tends to be a quieter line (although certainly not in this game!).

Question: How can White play more aggressively?

Answer: By entering the psychotic Velimirovic Attack with 7 Be3 Be7 8 Qe2 a6 9 0-0-0 Qc7 10 Bb3 0-0 11 Rhg1 Nd7 12 g4 Nc5, when a standard continuation is just to go for it with 13 Nf5!?

7 ... Be7 8 Be3 0-0 9 Bb3

Here J.Emms-A.Grischuk, Esbjerg 2000, went 9 Kh1 a6 10 a4 Qc7 11 Qe2 Bd7 12 f4 Rac8 13 Ba2 Nxd4 14 Bxd4 (now White threatens e4-e5 with attacking chances) 14 ... e5 15 Be3 Be6 16 a5! Bxa2 17 Rxa2 Qc4 18 Qf3 exf4 19 Bxf4, and in this equal position my editor John went on to score a draw against his intimidating opponent.

9 ... Na5

Botvinnik goes after the bishop pair.

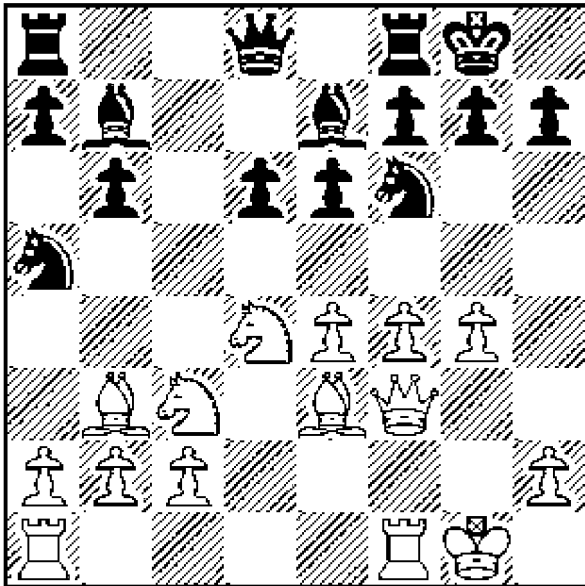
10 f4 b6!?

After 10 ... a6 11 e5 dxe5 12 fxe5 Nd5 13 Nxd5 exd5 14 Qf3 Be6 15 Rad1 Nxb3 16 axb3 White's control over d4 gave him a tiny edge, J.Van der Wiel-F.Nijboer, Dutch Championship, Rotterdam 1997.

11 Qf3

It doesn't make much sense to me to develop the queen in the path of a b7-bishop's angry gaze. 11 e5 is probably White's only hope for an edge in this position.

11 ... Bb7 12 g4?!



Gambling usually represents a vice unless one possesses a surplus of wealth. The g-pawn, determined to defy common sense, unilaterally veers off to attack, all by himself.

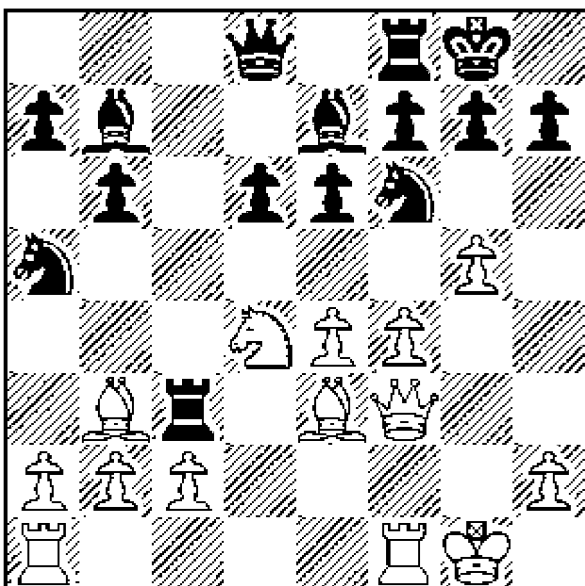
Question: Isn't his aggressive g2-g4 push standard in Sicilians?

Answer: Aggressive doesn't always equate with effective or sound. This overly risky attempt to disturb the natural order of life on the kingside is misplaced, since the white bishop normally sits on f3 in Scheveningen Sicilians where White tosses in g2-g4. In this instance, the e4-pawn lacks the necessary protection. White's entire attack appears more possessed by passion and fury, than by exact execution.

12 ... Rc8

The most exact move. 12 ... d5 is also possible. *Principle: Counter in the centre when menaced on the wing.* Mok Tze Meng-K.Murugan, Kuala Lumpur 1996, continued 13 e5 Ne4 14 f5 Bc5, when I like Black's chances – but then again, he may get mated!

13 g5 Rxc3!



Black's exchange sac is both thematic and sound. *Principle: Strike in the centre when assaulted on the wing.* Here the road divides.

Exercise (critical decision): White can accept the rook with 14 bxc3, or he can enter the complications of 14 gxf6. One way leads to near-dynamic equality; in the other he is busted. Calculate and evaluate both lines, and make your choice.

14 bxc3?

Answer: He should take the f6-knight rather than the rook. White is slightly worse but still remains in the game after 14 gxf6! Rxe3 15 Qxe3 (15 fxe7? Rxf3 16 exd8Q Rxf1+ 17 Rxf1 Rxd8 leaves White a pawn down and busted) 15 ... Bxf6, as in P.Poutiainen-Z.Ribli, World Junior Championships, Athens 1971. I still prefer Black here, but this is infinitely better than what Padevsky got in the actual game.

14 ... Nxe4

White's troubles:

1. Black dominates the light squares and the h1-a8 diagonal. His light-squared bishop's capabilities, when contrasted with any of White's minor pieces, seem godlike in comparison. The bishop goes on to become an enforcer, an instrument of fate, destined to bring on cataclysmic changes upon White.

2. This in turn means White's king is in a lot more danger than Black's.

3. White's queenside structure is ruptured and weak.

4. With a pawn for the exchange, Black isn't really even down material.

15 Qg4 Qc8! 16 Rf3

Planning to load up on the h-file and target h7.

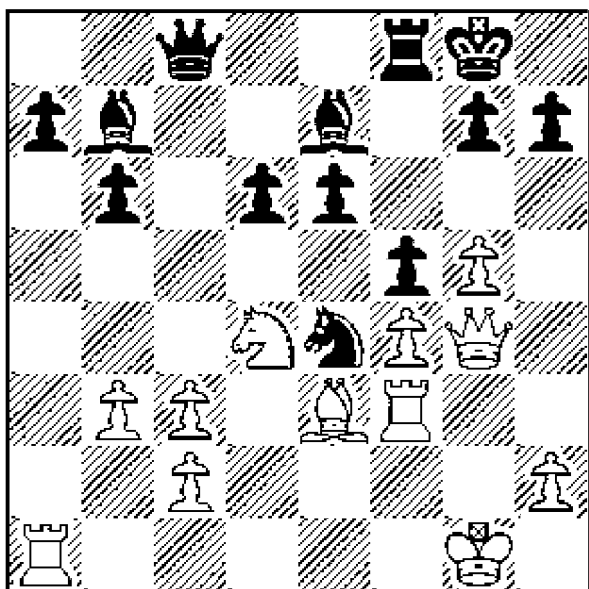
Question: Didn't Black just blunder on his last move? White now can play 16 Nxe6.

Answer: When you set a trap be careful not to be the one trapped. White's shot on e6 is a big blunder, since Black coolly responds with 16 ... d5! and wins the rash white knight.

16 ... Nxb3!?

I'm not sure why Botvinnik decided to repair White's damaged queenside. I would have avoided it and played 16 ... g6.

17 axb3 f5!



Black is ready, sitting on his rocking chair on the front porch, pump-action shotgun over his knees.

18 Qh4?

Not 18 gxf6?! Rxf6 when it is Black, not White, who attacks. But 18 Qh3! would have prevented Black's next move.

It saves us a lot of grief if we avoid a dubious idea in the first place, rather than later try and fix a past error. The delusional queen mistakenly believes that by divine decree, she has been granted dominion over the kingside and all its inhabitants. The wrong square, but White has already savoured the drug of attack in his veins and now demands more.

18 ... e5!

Mutual ambitions meet and overlap. This move effectively cancels multiple hostile variables, kills them before their seed has a chance to take root. Time to take a stand. White's kingside build-up, if left unchecked, could spell trouble if his opponent gets careless – something Botvinnik almost never did. Black continues to distract White vigorously in the centre in anticipation of the coming wing attack on h7.

19 Rh3

The tiny flicker of hope's flame soon dies out in the attack which never was. 19 Rxa7 exd4 20 Bxd4 Qc6 21 Rxb7 Qxb7 22 Rh3 h6 23 Qh5 Bxg5! 24 fxg5 Nxb5 leaves White's king fatally exposed.

19 ... h6

Exploiting the pin and effectively undercutting White's attacking ambitions. Now despite White's great efforts, he fails to reach h7 and the square remains tenantless. His attack bogs down, while Black's zooming counterattack slalom's effortlessly to the finish line.

20 Qh5 Qxc3 21 Rd1

The rook must guard the first rank. 21 Rxa7?? Qe1+ 22 Kg2 Nd2+ mates.

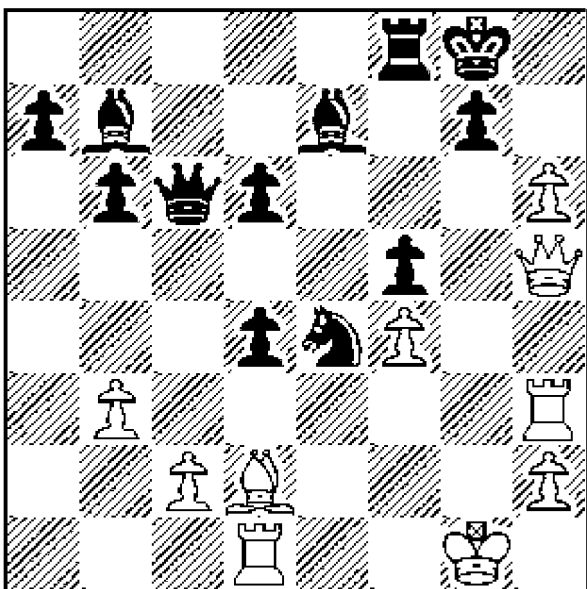
21 ... exd4 22 Bd2

22 Bxd4 Qxc2 23 gxh6 Nf6! overloads White's queen, who cannot simultaneously cover the d1-rook and the mate threat at g2.

22 ... Qc6

The queen's nagging wears on White's king.

23 gxh6



Exercise (combination alert): Pressure mounts on White's king, who sits alone in his provisional rule, soon destined to lose all power. How did Botvinnik force mate?

Answer: The Red Sea parts. Double attack. The threats on g2 and h3 are unanswerable.

23 ... Ng5!

White can no longer conceal the ugly blemishes along the h1-a8 diagonal. The knight offers a precious gift: his life. Now White can do nothing more than watch hope diminish and recede into the horizon.

24 Rg3 Qh1+ 25 Kf2 Ne4+ 0-1

Game 17

M.Tal-M.Botvinnik

World Championship (9th matchgame), Moscow 1960

Caro-Kann Defence

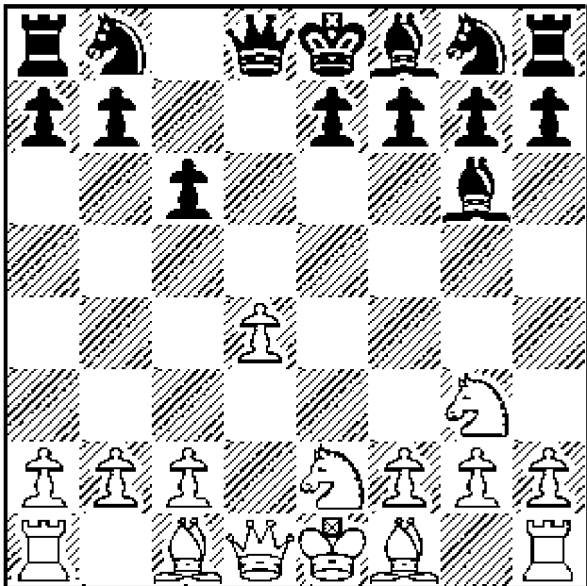
One wonders just what heights Tal would have scaled if his mind could have been transplanted into a healthy body, and if he had preferred soymilk tea lattes to vodka. Tal's remarkable chronicle on his 1960 match with Botvinnik is probably the best match book ever written. As a kid I eagerly poured through Tal's insights. My only regret is I would be a stronger player today if I had spent more time in my misspent youth studying games like this (rather than chewing on grass while gazing upon the Canadian, ale-coloured sunrise in a daydream each morning). Tal's book differs from others. Instead of doling out reams of data, Tal offers the reader a glimpse into his "personal feelings, thoughts, agitation, joys and

disappointments of a direct participant in the combat.”

1 e4 c6

The Caro-Kann is a sensible choice against a computer-like calculator opponent.

2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 dxe4 4 Nxe4 Bf5 5 Ng3 Bg6 6 N1e2!?



Question: Why block in the f1-bishop?

Answer: The block is only temporary since White plans to move the knight to f4, from where: 1. It may pick off Black’s light-squared bishop.

2. It may assist in harassing the bishop further with h2-h4-h5.

3. It eyes e6, a tempting target for a sacrifice.

6 ... Nf6 7 h4

The immediate 7 Nf4 is more common, as in the later game M.Tal-M.Botvinnik, USSR Spartakiad 1964, which continued 7 ... e5 (probably better than 7 ... e6 8 h4 Bd6 9 h5) 8 Nxc6 hxc6 9 dxe5 Qa5+ 10 Bd2 Qxe5+ 11 Qe2 Qxe2+ 12 Bxe2, when White’s bishop pair may be offset by Black’s active pieces and open h-file.

7 ... h6

Hurrying to give his bishop some air.

8 Nf4 Bh7 9 Bc4

A sac on e6 beckons. Tal had the equal fortune/misfortune of being tantalized with ideas most others regarded as preposterous. His unhealthy obsession with the e6-square is destined to be the central node to his subsequent misfortunes in this game.

9 ... e6 10 0-0!?

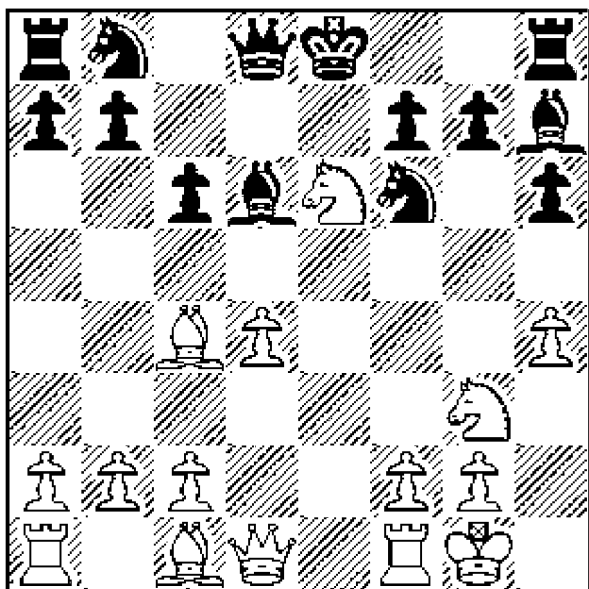
Question: Isn’t this rather dangerous for White after he pushed forward his h-pawn?

Answer: It is, but Tal simply looks to make trouble everywhere he can find it. White puts his own king in possible future risk in order to deploy a rook rapidly to e1, where it adds a third agitator upon the e6-square.

10 c3 may be a safer course, but with the downside of reduced complications as well. After 10 ... Nbd7 11 Qf3 Nd5 12 Ngh5 N7f6 13 Bd2 Nxf4 14 Bxf4 Nxh5 15 Qxh5 Bd6, Black achieved a reasonable position in O.Korneev-A.Riazantsev, Portuguese Team Championship 2007.

10 ... Bd6 11 Nxe6!?

Such a bold assertion also comes with great peril to the aggressor. This is vintage Tal, whose sacs often exude from the recipient, that credulous, child-like, “it-can’t-possibly-work” feel to them, yet through his mysteriously awesome power of tactics and deceit, they so often did work. In situations like this, his compulsion to sacrifice something – anything! – was almost Pavlovian. Here he erupts in a typically grand gesture, displaying his lifelong inclination to gamble, even when the smart money would bet against his chances. A machine can’t be designed to play like this, since a non-sentient chess program is incapable of Tal’s impulsive spontaneity. (Well, okay, not this time. His move was home prep!) Perhaps a computer’s fatal flaw is its inability to dream.



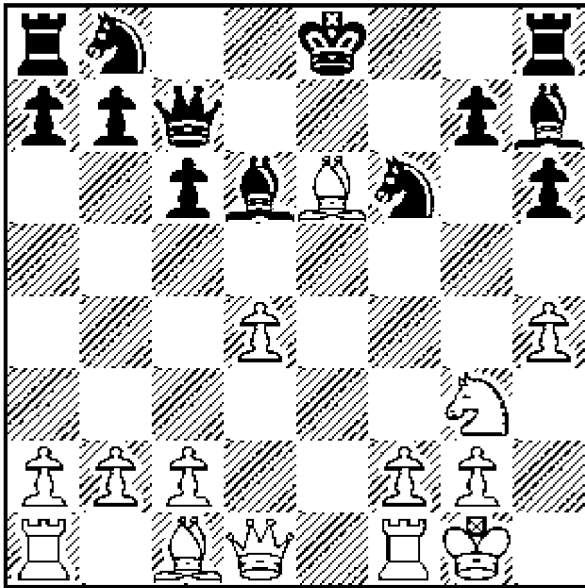
Question: Holy mother of Alekhine!?

Answer: Technically, that is not a question. But I share your sentiments. Clearly, we are dealing with a man who fails to hold material things dear. Sound sacs were never Tal’s strong suit! If he sac’ed, it was often fishy, yet they worked so terrifyingly often against his befuddled opponents.

But not this time. Although the sac was pre-game prep, to the Tal camp’s dismay Botvinnik made his next few moves very quickly, confirming that he had foreseen it and worked it out the defensive formula at home! Such was the level of Botvinnik’s legendary preparation, that he was ready and on the alert for moves which had never been tried before!

Tal writes: “Botvinnik usually won by getting his opponent in a vice-like grip without giving him any respite.” So Tal’s successful strategy throughout the match was to disrupt the natural strategic flow with jarring anarchy. He continues: “Our (Tal’s analytical camp) miscalculation was that this time we had somewhat underestimated the phenomenal analytical powers of Botvinnik, even assuming that this sacrifice would be unexpected (which it wasn’t!).”

11 ... fxe6 12 Bxe6 Qc7



Question: What compensation does White get for the piece?

Answer: Suddenly, Black's king gives rise to feelings of consternation upon viewing the approaching hostiles. White's coming attack, for now, is an amorphous creature, devoid of shape, whose presence we merely sense, yet cannot distinguish from its environment. The lowbrow attack, upon closer inspection, turns out to be closer to a middlebrow one – not so easy to refute.

Tal himself responds:

1. "His bishop on e6 prevents Black from castling on either side.
2. The open e-file likewise confirms the fact that Black will scarcely be able to castle at all in this game – he will not have the time and therefore it might take several moves to get his rooks into the game.
3. If the white-squared bishops are exchanged, then the white knight goes to f5, from where it will be able to put dangerous pressure on Black. If Black prefers to eliminate the knight, giving up his black-squared bishop for it, he will have catastrophic weakness on the dark squares and White's queen's bishop will take up a very dangerous position on f4."

Tal gives the line 12 ... Bxg3 13 fxg3 Bg8 14 Qe1!! Qe7 15 Bc8! with the intention to "completely plunder the queenside."

13 Re1 Nbd7!

Daring White to launch a discovery.

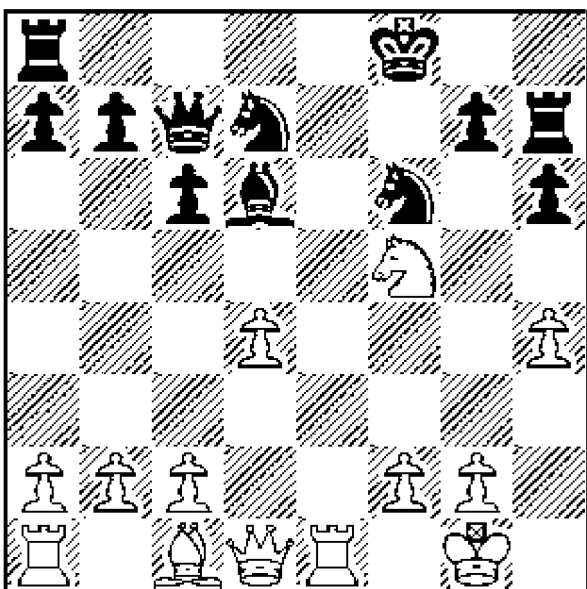
14 Bg8+

Swapping off Black's best defender so as to weaken f5.

14 ... Kf8!

The old king capers about with the agility of a much younger man. Tal laments that Botvinnik in this game, time and time again unearthed the best moves, even under terrible duress, claiming that "The position of the king on d8 would have been much worse."

15 Bxh7 Rxh7 16 Nf5



Exercise (planning): Tal's camp examined this position and incorrectly evaluated it as "rosy, since White's knight is there to stay on f5 and the h7-rook is badly out of position." How did Botvinnik solve both these problems with just one little move?

Answer: 16 ... g6!!

Hey, Tal said "White's knight is there to stay!" This startling idea had apparently been overlooked by camp Tal. Botvinnik unearths a brilliant defensive plan which dampens and constricts the flow of White's attack/initiative.

Question: Why did Botvinnik hand over his h-pawn, and with check to boot?

Answer: By returning the pawn, Black solves two major headaches and displays the apparent, impermanent, evaporative nature of White's initiative: 1. He eliminates that hateful knight from f5.

2. He immediately activates the sleeping h7-rook. Very soon, the attack which once was, quickly fades and passes from memory – and Botvinnik's king, by what appears to be some mystical inadvertence, passes through his ordeal unscathed.

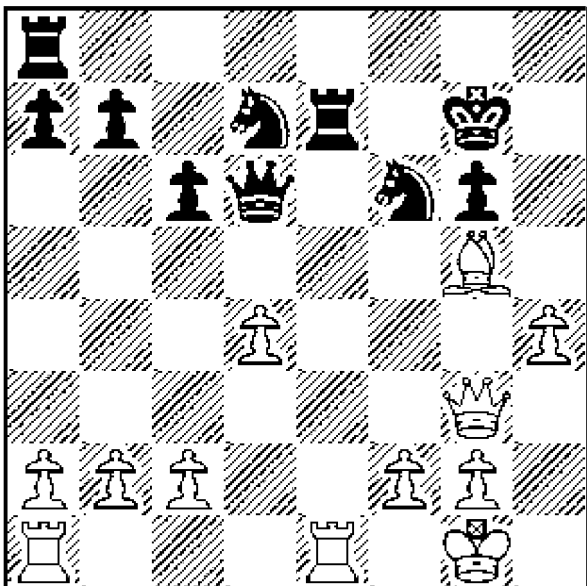
17 Bxh6+ Kg8 18 Nxd6 Qxd6

Tal points out the devilish trap 18 ... Rxh6 19 Re6 Rxh4 20 Qd3?? (20 g3! is correct, when White's super-active pieces compensate for his material deficit) 20 ... Nf8! 21 Rxf6 Qh7!.

19 Bg5 Re7

White's attack grows cold in a condition of dismal grandeur and is no more. Just look at the difference: Black's pieces emerge, while White's mope about in desultory fashion. The extra knight is superior to White's three pawns.

20 Qd3 Kg7 21 Qg3?



A lifelong physical aberration or deformity always seems normal to the one gazing in a mirror. The queen attempts to dance away from an earlier promise to deliver checkmate, but I suppose in an economic depression there are few buyers and a glut of people desperate to sell. Tal, in a hurry to sell, inexplicably endeavours to go on strike against logic, without an iota of basis behind the move. The unruly queen flagrantly disobeys societal laws, violating the principle: *Avoid trades when behind in material and structure*. Tal short-circuits and illogically offers to swap queens (which Black wants) and damages his structure in doing so (which Black wants!). The move strikes one as decidedly out of sync with the position's requirements.

Question: How can a player as formidable as Tal make so lame a decision?

Answer: Tal saw ghosts and malicious spirits hovering around his own king, and felt he had to take queens off the board, like it or not. He confessed: "Unquestionably the weakest move of the match. I frankly thought it was bad, but somehow all the other continuations were worse." World Championship matches have their own rules, and the mind of genius is an unfathomable environment of wonderful secrets and strange motivations. The inconceivable strain, for so long a time period, wears down a player's nervous system. Do you remember Bobby's Fischer's inexplicable 29 ... Bxh2??, self-trapping his bishop in his first match game against Spassky?

Tal points out the plan which puts up the most resistance: 21 f4 Rae8 22 Re5!, but even here my spider senses tell me Black can unravel and consolidate. All the same, this is the one lucid hope to rehabilitate White's flagging initiative.

21 ... Rxe1+ 22 Rxe1 Qxg3

Thanks!

23 fxg3

White's kingside pawn majority has been fatally compromised.

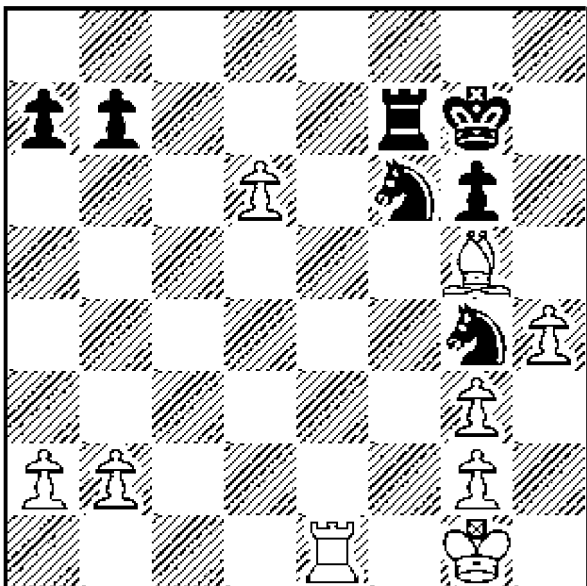
23 ... Rf8!

Ruthless accuracy. Botvinnik blocks White's king access to the centre, since ... Ne4+ would be fatal.

24 c4 Ng4 25 d5

Passive defence fails; e.g. 25 Re4 Ndf6 26 Rf4 Re8.

25 ... cxd5 26 cxd5 Ndf6 27 d6 Rf7



The overextended d-pawn, a solitary anomaly among Black's multitude, soon falls. "White's pawn has run aground and Black intends to systematically destroy it."

Question: If this is the case, then why did Tal push it to a vulnerable square.

Answer: Tal probably decided to jettison the pawn in the hope of distracting Black's rook, so as to activate his own king.

28 Rc1 Rd7 29 Rc7

Tal noted to his dismay that the "combination" 29 Bf4 Nd5! 30 Rc7?? Nxc7 31 dxc7 Rd1 mate ends on a dismal note for White.

29 ... Kf7

Botvinnik's king dutifully runs off to fetch the d6-pawn with Golden Retrieverish zeal.

30 Bxf6

Tal jumps on the chance to free his king, but only at the cost of another swap.

30 ... Nxf6 31 Kf2 Ke6 32 Rxd7!

White's slim hope of a draw is to remove rooks from the board.

32 ... Kxd7 33 Kf3 Kxd6

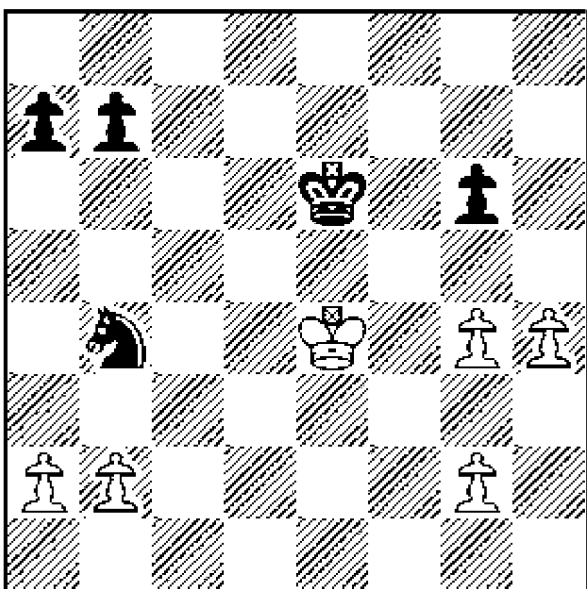
No desired object is too expensive for a thief, who views it all as free.

34 Kf4 Ke6 35 g4 Nd5+ 36 Ke4 Nf6+ 37 Kf4 Nd5+

In order to gain advantage over Botvinnik's lifelong, hated enemy – his clock.

38 Ke4 Nb4

The immediate 38 ... g5! is very strong too.



39 a3

Tal felt his move was a blunder: “ ... the pawns on a3 and b2 are wonderful targets for Black’s knight.” 39 a4! “would significantly increase Black’s difficulty in realizing his advantage.” But I think everything loses at this point.

Question: What would Black’s winning technique be after 39 a4 then?

Answer: 39 ... Nc6 40 h5 g5 41 h6 Kf6 42 Kd5 Nb4+ 43 Kd6 Nd3 44 b3 a5 45 Kc7 Nc5 46 Kb6 Nxb3 and if 47 Kxb7 Nc5+ removes White’s last chance.

39 ... Nc6 40 h5 g5!

Principle: The piece up side should avoid pawn exchanges.

41 h6

A martyr tends to romanticize his own suffering. The final hope – in order to deflect Black’s king and allow White’s entry to the queenside. But as it turns out, the lavish expenditure in vain.

41 ... Kf6 42 Kd5 Kg6 43 Ke6

43 Kd6 Na5 44 Kc7 b5 45 Kb8 Nc4 46 Kxa7 Nxb2 47 Ka6 Nc4 is curtains for White.

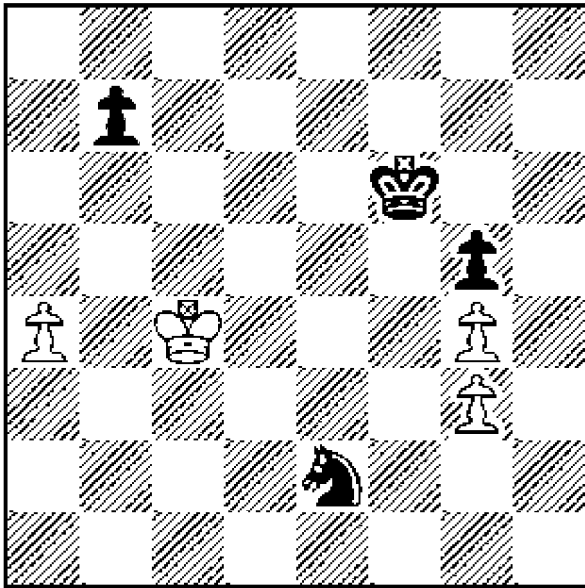
43 ... Na5 44 a4 Nb3

Tal complains: “This would have been of some use to White if he had correctly played it on the 39th move!” But I don’t think it would have mattered.

45 Kd6 a5 46 Kd5 Kxh6 47 Kc4 Nc1 48 Kb5 Nd3 49 b3 Nc1 50 Kxa5 Nxb3+ 51 Kb4

Or 51 Kb6 Kg6 and capture of b7 is again met by ... Nc5+.

51 ... Nc1 52 Kc3 Kg6 53 Kc2 Ne2 54 Kd3 Nc1+ 55 Kc2 Ne2 56 Kd3 Nf4+ 57 Kc4 Kf6 58 g3 Ne2 0-1



After 59 Kc5 Nxg3 60 Kb6 (White's king, footsore and weary from his aimless meanderings, now lays down to rest – he can only sigh and muse upon those halcyon pre-sac days when material was even and his kingdom at peace and content) 60 ... Ne4! 61 a5 (once again chopping on b7 is met by that annoying knight check on c5) 61 ... Nd2 62 Kxb7 Nb3 63 a6 Nc5+ 64 Kb6 Nxa6 65 Kxa6 Ke5, Black wins easily.

Game 18

J.Littlewood-M.Botvinnik

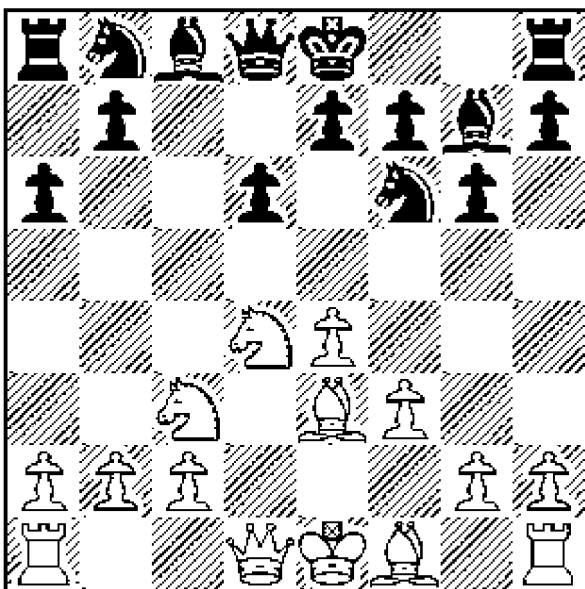
Hastings 1961/62

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6

Botvinnik was an early practitioner of the Dragon, dating back to the 1930s.

6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 a6



The Dragodorf, a hybrid line which combines the mean-spiritedness of the Dragon with the deceit of the Najdorf.

8 Bc4

Littlewood proceeds in Yugoslav formation.

Question: Can White hold back the bishop's development to avoid the loss of tempo?

Answer: Yes, White can refrain from Bc4 as well, although his control over d5 reduces. A.Shirov-S.K.Williams, British League 2004, saw 8 Qd2 Nbd7 9 0-0-0 b5 10 g4 Bb7 11 g5 Nh5 12 Nce2 Nb6 13 Ng3 Nxc3 14 hxg3 d5!, when Black took advantage of White's neglect of d5 and enforced his thematic break.

Principle: Counter in the centre when attacked on the wing.

8 ... b5 9 Bb3 Bb7 10 Qd2 Nbd7 11 0-0-0 Nc5

Botvinnik sets his sights upon the powerful light-squared bishop.

12 Kb1

After 12 Bh6 Bxh6! 13 Qxh6 e5! (Black switches to full Najdorf mode) 14 Nde2 Nxb3+ 15 axb3 Qe7 16 Rd2 0-0-0 Black equalized in S.Feller-T.Gelashvili, Khanty-Mansiysk Olympiad 2010.

12 ... Nxb3 13 cxb3

Question: White's last move looks pretty strange to me.

Why would he capture away from the centre?

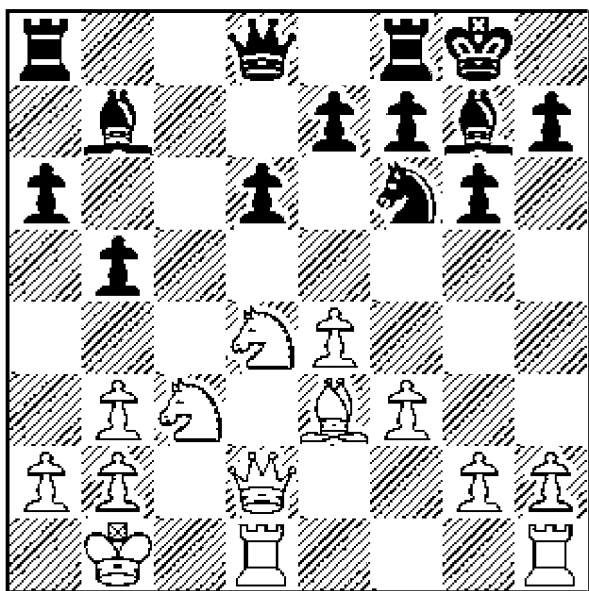
Answer: Not so strange, since every game in my database has White making the same capture in this position! There is a defensive principle: *Capture away from the centre if you sense that your king is in danger.*

Question: In this case, how does that help White defend his king?

Answer: Now if need be, White has the option of challenging Black on the c-file, which leads to swaps.

13 ... 0-0!?

Botvinnik was never afraid of an opposite wing attack in his life. The alternative is to stall with 13 ... h5!? as in L.Cernousek-K.Shanava, Olomouc 2006, leaving Black's king in the centre as long as possible.



14 Bh6 Bxh6!

Deflecting White's queen from the centre and correctly judging that she will not inflict damage on h6.

15 Qxh6

The queen transmits secret orders to the front, but what she doesn't realize is that her phone link is not secured.

15 ... b4! 16 e5?!

Often, fancy doesn't equate with best. 16 Nd5 is stronger and more natural; e.g. 16 ... Bxd5 17 exd5 Qd7 18 h4! Nxd5 19 h5 Nf6 20 g4 Rac8 21 Rh2 Rc5.

Question: Isn't Black about to get mated?

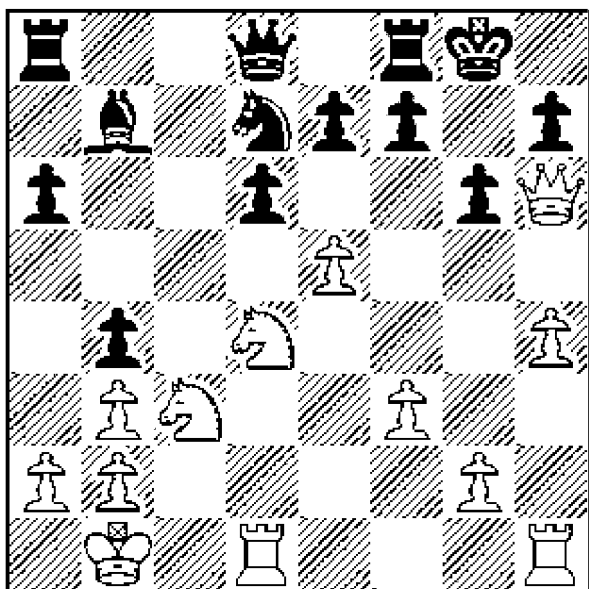
Answer: White's attack looks scary but if you play around with the computer in this position you see that Black defends. Let's go deeper into the analysis: 22 g5 Nxh5 23 Rxh5 gxh5 24 Rh1 e5 25 Rxh5 f6 26 Ne6! Rf7 27 Nxc5 dxc5 28 gxf6 Qd1+ 29 Qc1 Qxc1+ 30 Kxc1 Rxf6 31 Rxe5 Rxf3 32 Rxc5 Rf6 with a slight edge to Black, who can still dream about big things to come with his h-pawn.

16 ... Nd7!

Not 16 ... bxc3? 17 exf6 exf6 18 bxc3 when White's knight dominates its bishop counterpart on b7, who may be labelled a sub-species, a cheap facsimile, when compared to his more evolved brother on d4.

17 h4

On 17 e6, Black defends with 17 ... bxc3 18 exd7 Qxd7 19 h4 e5!.



The differences between the parties reaches irreconcilable levels and war is imminent. Littlewood goes for it with a dangerous piece sac which would probably have worked against an opponent who didn't calculate like *Houdini*.

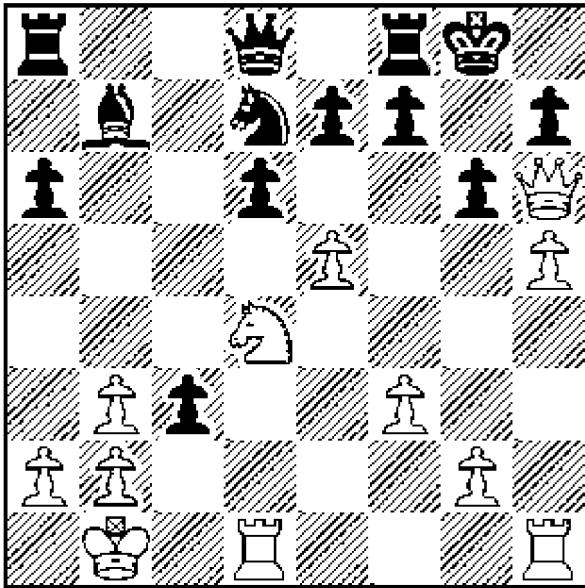
Exercise (critical decision): Can we take the c3-knight and live, or is there a better move?

Answer: Black gets away with the piece grab. White believes it is Christmas Day. He is wrong – it is judgment day.

17 ... bxc3!

Thanks, you shouldn't have! Botvinnik worked out every potentiality and came to the correct conclusion that they all fell short for his opponent. Even though White's sac fails to hold up under analytical scrutiny, this doesn't mean it isn't dangerous to a human labouring against the clock, and also perhaps paranoia.

18 h5



Question: Isn't Black just getting mated!? How does he defend h7?

Answer: I'm afraid your unauthorized outburst calls for a defensive exercise! Attackers approach Black's king with open intent. It does indeed look as though the defence reaches saturation levels, unable to take the pounding a minute longer as rival factions struggle for hegemony over h7. However, hidden in the secret weaves of the position hides the correct defensive plan, scribed in the cursive of a dead language. Can you extricate it and discover the position's essential core?

Exercise (planning): Black to play and *not* get mated!

Answer: Clear f6 for his knight.

18 ... dxe5! 19 hxe5 Nf6

Out of nowhere, Jack materializes from his box.

20 bxc3

If a child gets nabbed red-handed while perpetrating mischief, her impulse is to try and lie her way out, no matter how obviously guilty.

Question: Isn't White's last move somewhat accommodating?

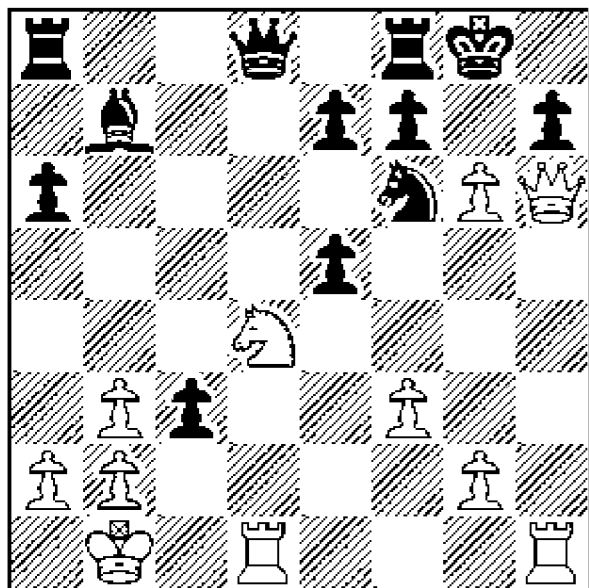
Answer: I agree that his overreaction, which is disproportionate to the offending provocation, converts that which was once a drama into a hastily rewritten farce. But it's hard for me to give White a question mark for a move in a position where every other attempt fails as well.

Question: What? It looks like White just went crazy in a position where he must have three or four ways to force mate.

Answer: At first glance, it does indeed look like there *should* be a mate for White, but there just isn't. It's as if the secret formula, written on a piece of scrap paper, gets inadvertently washed in the pocket of a pair of jeans, and is now hopelessly bleached and unreadable, the discovery lost forever. Littlewood managed

to achieve his fantasia of attacking possibilities, yet not one of them did him a bit of good.

The human brain is capable of absorbing only so many fragments of data before it overloads and short circuits – but not Botvinnik’s brain apparently! Behold, Botvinnik’s comp-like calculation powers. Every line I tried against the computers failed miserably for White:



a) 20 gxf7+ Kh8 21 Nc2 Nd5 22 Ne3 Qd7 23 g4 Qe6 and Black covers all hostile intent.

b) 20 g7 Re8 21 Nf5 is met by the cunning shot 21 ... c2+! 22 Kxc2 Qc8+!, which picks off the would-be hero on f5.

c) 20 gxf7+ Kxf7! covers the fork threat. And remember, any Nf5 is met by the crushing ... c3-c2+! trick.

d) 20 Nf5 c2+! (is this theme beginning to have a familiar ring to it?) 21 Kxc2 Qc8+! etc.

20 ... exd4

Wealth concentrates in the greedy, outstretched hands of a single individual (Botvinnik), while the rest are left to starve.

21 gxh7+

Now White’s h7-pawn chokes off his own attack and the exhausted yet triumphant black king basks in glowing languor on h8, safe as can be.

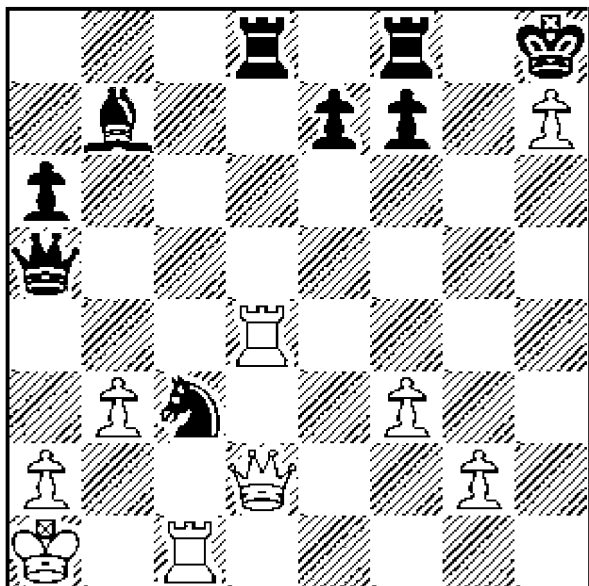
21 ... Kh8 22 Rxd4 Qa5 23 Qe3?

White’s attack proved to be merely a temporary leaven, which deflates to its new and unfortunate state. The two sides are now governed by opposite motivations: Botvinnik’s to pursue and Littlewood’s to survive. The queen sighs and retreats, the way a teenage girl rolls her eyes at her mother when ordered to perform a distasteful chore around the house. Retreating the queen to d2 was better, but maybe resigning was White’s best. Not such an encouraging sign. White is down two pieces and in the middle of his attack he must take time out for a defensive move!

23 ... Nd5

Forking e3 and c3.

24 Qd2 Nxc3+ 25 Ka1 Rad8 26 Rc1



Exercise (combination alert): Calculate 26 ... Qxa2+. Is it playable?

Answer: It certainly is. Black simplifies down to a trivially won endgame.

26 ... Qxa2+!

The controlling shareholder gets the final say.

27 Qxa2 Nxa2

The white king comments: “While I’m not physically in pain, the loss of dignity still really hurts!”

28 Rxd8 Rxd8 0-1

Game 19

M.Botvinnik-R.J.Fischer

Varna Olympiad 1962

Grünfeld Defence

The moment had arrived. The World Champion Mikhail Botvinnik faced the future champion in what became a titanic struggle. In a strange way the game proved nothing, since Fischer was only 19 years old and not yet *Fischer*, while Botvinnik was a tad past his prime (and yet still world champion!) and no longer *Botvinnik*!

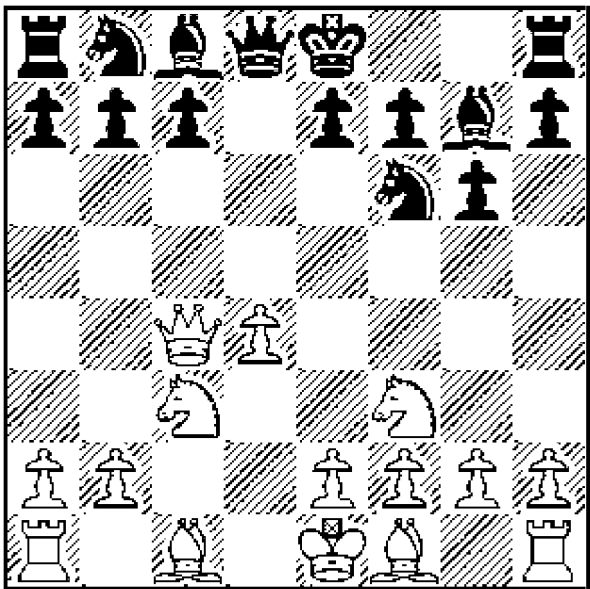
1 c4 g6 2 d4 Nf6 3 Nc3 d5!?

Fischer said he intuitively switched from his normal King’s Indian to the Grünfeld because of “the glint in his [Botvinnik’s] eye.” He just had a funny feeling Botvinnik would be ultra-prepared for him in the KID. But as it turns out, Botvinnik had come armed for the Grünfeld as well.

4 Nf3 Bg7 5 Qb3

Smyslov’s specialty.

5 ... dxc4 6 Qxc4



Question: What is the benefit? Isn’t White’s queen vulnerable to tempo loss?

Answer: It is, but White gets something in return: Black is denied his ... Nxd5 and ... Nxc3 freeing exchange, which is important in the Grünfeld, since Black remains more cramped than normal.

6 ... 0-0 7 e4 Bg4 8 Be3

Question: White isn’t concerned about ... Bxf3 - ?

Answer: Not really – he bags the bishop pair and, after g2xf3, strengthens e4 as well. The downside, of course, is that White’s shelter on the kingside grows somewhat compromised.

8 ... Nfd7

Question: Why move the already developed knight?

Answer: Black hopes to engineer ... c7-c5 or ... e7-e5. By moving his f6-knight to d7, he lays the groundwork for either pawn break.

9 Be2

9 Qb3, 9 Rd1 and even 9 0-0-0 are played here as well.

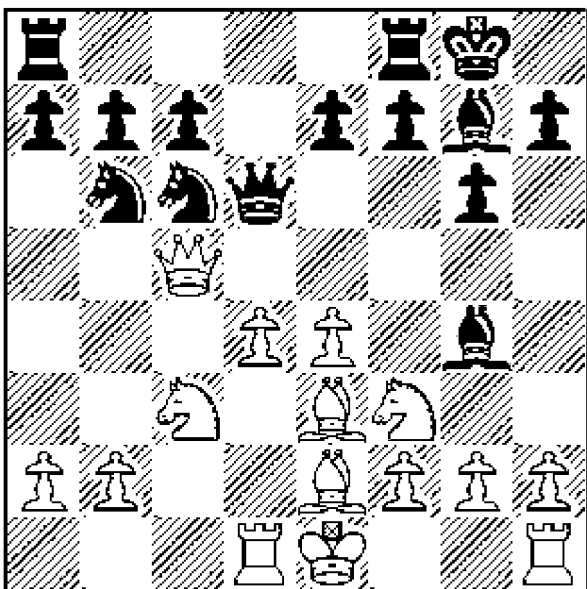
9 ... Nc6

Fischer wisely veers from 9 ... Nb6 10 Qc5 c6 11 Rd1 N8d7 12 Qa5 e5! which allowed Black dynamic equality in M.Botvinnik-V.Smyslov, World Championship (4th matchgame) Moscow 1958. However, the odds were close to 100% that Botvinnik was ready with an improvement in this variation.

10 Rd1 Nb6 11 Qc5

The queen must continue to cradle her tender d4-pawn.

11 ... Qd6!



12 h3

12 Qxd6 cxd6 allows Black a very decent Pirc-like position, where White’s extra space ceases to be such a great burden on Black with queens off the board.

12 ... Bxf3 13 gxf3

Question: Why not recapture with the bishop?

Answer: Doing so weakens the c4-square. Black looks good after 13 Bxf3 Qxc5 14 dxc5 Nc4 15 Bc1 Rfd8, when he leads in development.

13 ... Rfd8

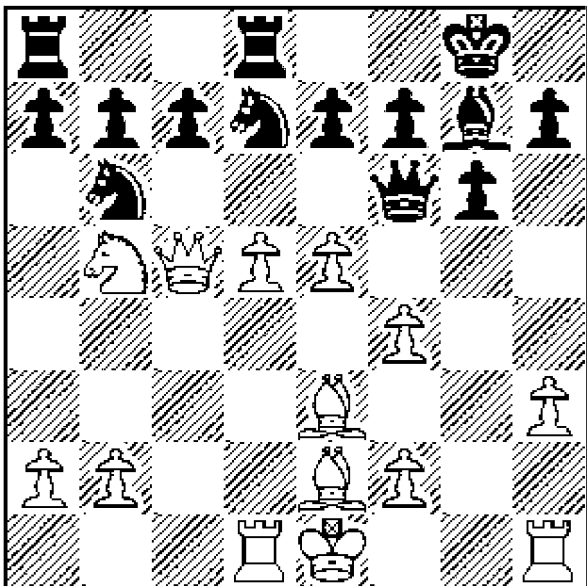
Botvinnik would welcome 13 ... Qxc5 14 dxc5 Bxc3+ 15 bxc3 Na4 16 Kd2!, when his bishops might later have a say.

14 d5 Ne5 15 Nb5 Qf6

Fischer gave himself an exclaim for this move and called 15 ... Qxc5 “weak”. Kasparov disagreed, offering the line 16 Bxc5 c6 17 Nc7 (17 Nxa7? is met by 17 ... Na4!) 17 ... Rab8 18 Bxe7 Rd7 19 d6 Nec4 and Black should be okay.

16 f4 Ned7 17 e5?

White’s e-pawn gives offence to Black’s queen and soon wishes he could unsay what he just said. Pieces and pawns entwine and grapple in desperation, neither side willing to cede even an inch of hard-won territory. Botvinnik writes: “When I was preparing to meet Smyslov, I, of course, made a thorough analysis of the Smyslov System in general and of the position in the diagram in particular!” Botvinnik had only analysed ... Qh4 and ... Qf5, concluding his analysis with a White advantage in both lines. But then Botvinnik adds: “Alas, my opponent found a third continuation!”



Exercise (combination alert): What did Fischer find in the position which took over the initiative, eventually won a pawn, and threw Botvinnik badly off his prep?

Answer: Upon inventory, White notices an item missing from the shelves. Overload. White’s bishop can’t simultaneously capture Black’s queen and protect his own.

17 ... Qxf4!

Fischer comes up with a strong theoretical novelty. The black queen offers her services with insincere solicitude, as she arrives on f4 with good tidings of comfort and joy to all. Botvinnik laments: “I had missed what Fischer had found with the greatest of ease at the board. The reader can guess that my equanimity was wrecked.” All the same, the by-blow inflicts damage, yet fails to kill.

18 Bxf4

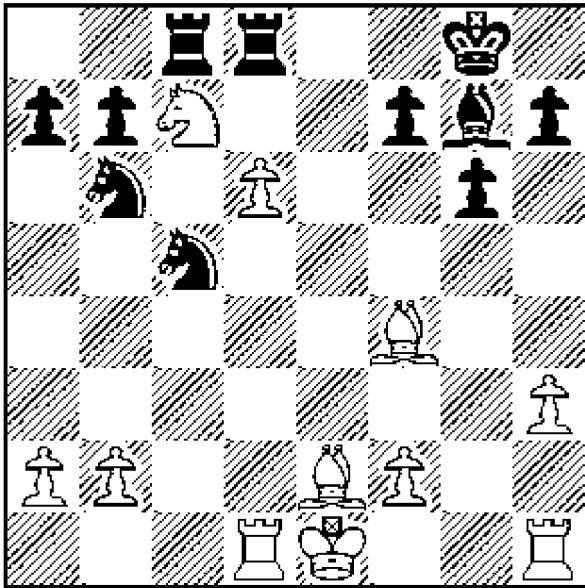
Black’s point is that 18 Qxb6?? fails to collect war dividends because of 18 ... Qe4! and White loses material, since 19 f3 is completely unplayable due to 19 ... Qh4+ 20 Bf2 Qb4+, picking off the queen.

18 ... Nxc5 19 Nxc7 Rac8 20 d6

Botvinnik’s game borders on overextension, but he has no choice since 20 Nb5? Rxd5 is terrible for White.

20 ... exd6 21 exd6

The d6-pawn may have fallen to his knees, yet remains a dangerous foe, a wounded gladiator, brought low but still managing to clutch sword and shield in each hand.



21 ... Bxb2 22 0-0 Nbd7

Botvinnik preferred 22 ... Ncd7.

Question: It looks to me like Black is all tied up defending against the cramping effects of the d-pawn. White owns the bishop pair in an open position as well.

Don't these two factors constitute full compensation for a pawn here?

Answer: Perhaps some compensation but not full. Black is a healthy pawn up with very active pieces to boot. White's d-pawn remains firmly blockaded and his compensating activity represents a mere abstraction since there doesn't exist an accompanying plan to increase it.

23 Rd5 b6 24 Bf3?!

Botvinnik's forces creep forward with enticing lassitude. "There is nothing for the bishop to do here," writes Botvinnik, instead suggesting 24 Bc4!, which keeps an eye on e6 and f7. White may then extract full compensation for his missing pawn.

24 ... Ne6!

Fischer seizes upon the inaccuracy.

25 Nxe6?

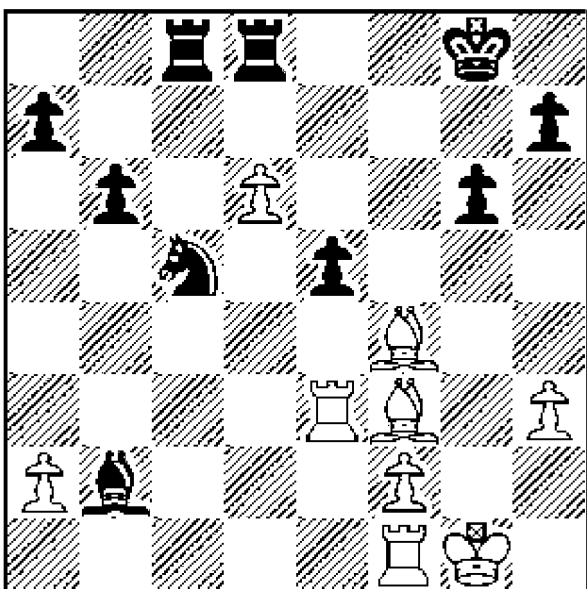
Botvinnik, still shaken by Fischer's superior analysis in the opening stage, begins to fall apart. 25 Bg3 was correct.

25 ... fxe6 26 Rd3 Nc5 27 Re3

Probably played with deep regret. White must hand over his pride and hope on d6 since the exigencies of his very survival demand it.

27 ... e5!

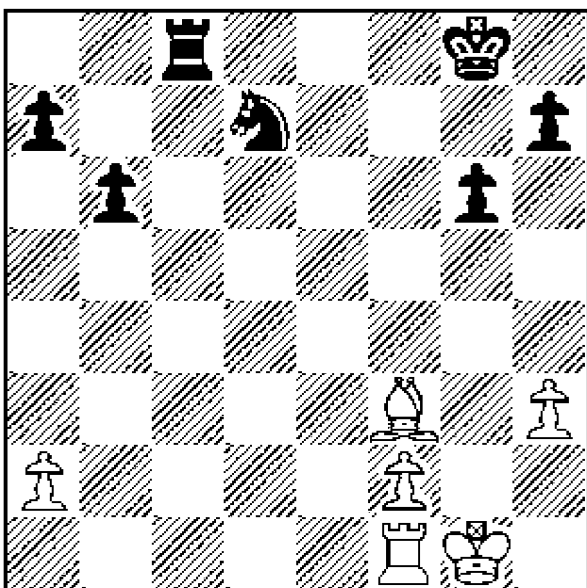
Dual purpose: Eliminating White's bishop pair and the deeply entrenched d6-pawn in one swoop.



28 Bxe5 Bxe5 29 Rxe5 Rxd6

The orphaned d6-isolani gets tossed out into the cold.

30 Re7 Rd7 31 Rxd7 Nxd7



A dismal picture. White deals with a distressing amalgam of woes:

1. Botvinnik finds himself a pawn down.
2. The landscape of White's structure – he nurses three isolated pawns – is the residue of a nightmare upon awakening.

3. Making matters worse, Botvinnik must defend this awful ending against a player who, in the writer's opinion, was the second strongest endgame player of all time. Fortunately for Botvinnik, Fischer was only 19 years old at the time, and hadn't yet reached the peak of his endgame skills.

32 Bg4 Rc7 33 Re1

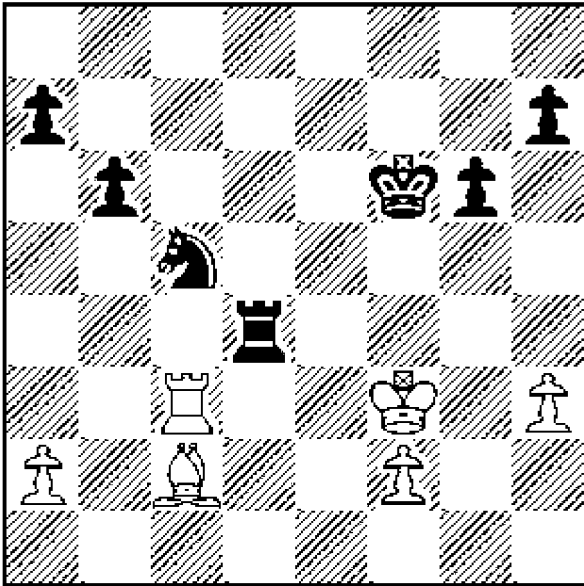
White might consider 33 Bxd7 Rxd7, transferring to a rook and pawn ending. But even here he nurses multiple, chronic, structural ailments.

33 ... Kf7 34 Kg2 Nc5 35 Re3 Re7 36 Rf3+ Kg7 37 Rc3 Re4 38 Bd1 Rd4

Possibly inaccurate, allowing White's bishop to its best post on c2.

Question: How can Black prevent this?

Answer: By playing 38 ... Re1!, when 39 Bc2?! walks into a pin after 39 ... Rc1.
39 Bc2! Kf6 40 Kf3



Exercise (planning): Seek out a step-by-step plan for Black to convert to a win.

40 ... Kg5?!

Although White's prognosis looks dismal, there now appears a dim hope. Fischer goes off on the wrong track. Botvinnik answers the exercise, with an added anti-Fischer barb as a bonus.

Answer: "An endgame specialist of the class of Capablanca or Smyslov would have immediately transferred his king to d6, defending his knight, after which the advance of the queenside pawns would have decided the outcome."

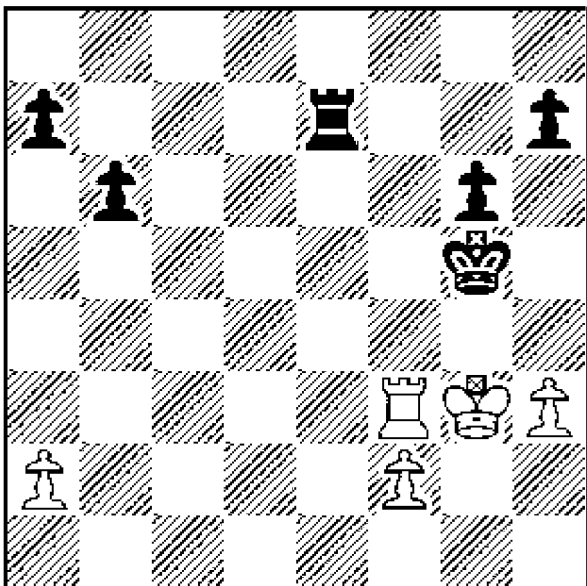
41 Kg3 Ne4+?!

A violation of the principle: *Rook and pawn endings are notoriously hard to win a pawn up.* Another poor decision and another anti-Fischer statement to come: "The defects in the character of my opponent begin to tell. Reckoning that the position was easily won, he was angry with me for playing on, and in his fervour, already after the time control he makes a rash decision." One sometimes wonders just how much time Botvinnik invested in pondering some of the malice festering within his own psyche.

42 Bxe4

Now White gets a better version of a rook and pawn ending than the one mentioned in the note to move 33 above.

42 ... Rxe4 43 Ra3 Re7 44 Rf3



Exercise (planning): Fischer's king is boxed in. Come up with a concrete plan to free him.

44 ... Rc7?!

Answer: The trouble with Shangri-La: if you leave, you age rapidly and die. In just the same way, Black's king finds himself trapped within his paradise. Here Fischer, unable to find the solution, should strive to activate his king, which can be accomplished by 44 ... Kh6!, intending ... Kg7 and ... Rf7.

45 a4!

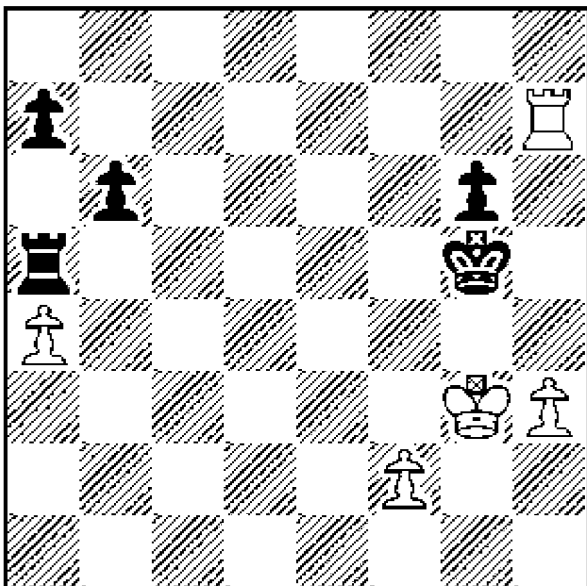
Question: What is the point of this move, which just looks like it weakens?

Answer: Botvinnik hopes, with a4-a5 at some stage, to swap one set of pawns on the queenside, which would ease his defensive task. Someone asked Botvinnik at breakfast what he thought his chances were. He said without looking up, "Nichia" – draw! Apparently Fischer felt the position was a straightforward win for Black and hadn't worked too hard on the adjournment. Botvinnik, on the other hand, refused to give up, and laboured on the position until 5:30 a.m. the next morning. Apparently it was time well spent, since his dream team – Boleslavsky, Spassky, Geller, Keres and Furman – toiling together with their leader, unearthed an incredibly hidden drawing idea.

45 ... Rc5!

The sealed move and, as it turns out, the strongest in the position. Fischer, drunk on exultation, can just taste it now. Botvinnik looks busted and Fischer's victory seems to be in plain sight. What Fischer failed to factor in was Botvinnik's vast database of endgame understanding, which exceeded even that of Fischer's at the time.

46 Rf7 Ra5 47 Rxh7!!



A stunning idea, discovered by Geller. Magic oozes from the wizard's aura, so that candle flames bow in respect when he enters the room. Correspondingly, Black's dark powers noticeably begin to abate. Apparently, Fischer had also analysed the move but misassessed it. White neatly finds a method of unifying aggregate strategic troubles and eventually dissolving them. Soon, Black's once-promising future of a full point is quashed on appeal.

Question: I don't get it. This looks resignable for Botvinnik's side now. Why on earth would White allow Black two connected passed pawns on the queenside?

Answer: White plays on the principle: *Keep your rook active at all costs in rook and pawn endings*. White correctly assessed that passive defence would lose. Play on to discover the drawing idea. Instead, 47 Rf4? Rf5! 48 Rd4 Rf7! allows Black's king out of his box and into the fight on the queenside. White can't save the game here.

47 ... Rxa4 48 h4+!

More accurate than 48 f4+, the move Fischer had concentrated on in his analysis.

48 ... Kf5

48 ... Kf6 49 Rb7! (the key move, which dramatically slows down Black's pawns) 49 ... Ra5 50 Kg4 b5 51 f4 a6 52 Rb6+ Kf7 53 Rb7+ also leads to a draw, despite Black's prize pair of passers on the queenside.

49 Rf7+ Ke5 50 Rg7 Ra1

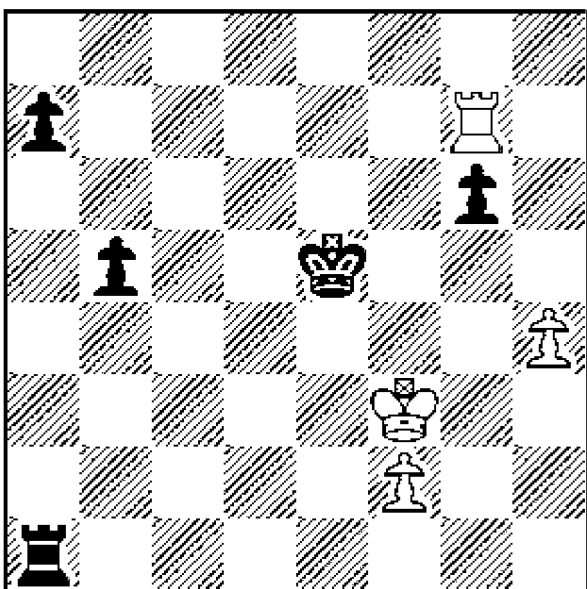
50 ... Kf6 51 Rb7! transposes to the previous note.

51 Kf3

Botvinnik, even with virtually zero sleep, isn't about to fall for 51 Rxg6?? Rg1+, winning the rook.

51 ... b5?!

Botvinnik offers lengthy analysis, claiming that 51 ... Kd4! is more challenging to White, but still maintains that he draws, whereas Fischer vigorously disputes the assessment and claims a win for Black! Kasparov backs Botvinnik's drawing claim, so take your pick and believe who you like!



52 h5!!

A sweet final bar in a rousing symphony. The once inert figure from a two-dimensional painting, through strange magic, takes birth and steps out into our three-dimensional world. Botvinnik wrote, with obvious malicious glee: "Here my opponent turned pale ... " The profound point of White's 47th move, which forces a pair of rook pawns on the a-and h-files, is apparently a drawn position! Supposedly, after this move the titans created more drama. Botvinnik walked up to the Russian captain Abramov and repeated "Nichia!" most certainly intended to rattle Fischer. The always paranoid Bobby overheard, went ballistic, and accused the Russians of collusion and cheating to the arbiter.

Black is faster in the race after the rote 52 Rxc6? b4.

52 ... Ra3+ 53 Kg2 gxh5 54 Rg5+ Kd6 55 Rxb5 h4 56 f4 Kc6 57 Rb8 h3+ 58 Kh2 a5 59 f5 Kc7

Black finds that a lone pawn, the paltry sum of his wealth, is insufficient for victory.

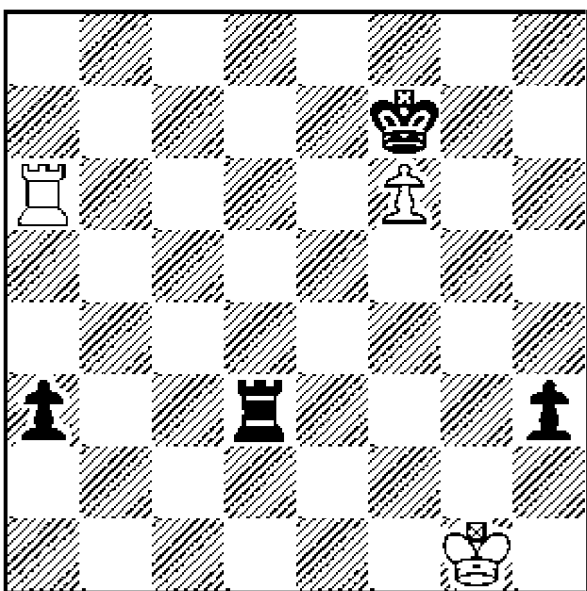
60 Rb5 Kd6 61 f6 Ke6 62 Rb6+ Kf7

Black's king continues to nurse grievances against his tormentor but is powerless to do more than merely voice a complaint.

63 Ra6 Kg6 64 Rc6 a4 65 Ra6 Kf7 66 Rc6 Rd3 67 Ra6 a3

Black attempts to herd cats, prodding the unruly h-and a-pawns forward to nowhere in particular.

68 Kg1 1/2-1/2



Black has no way to make progress. The funny thing is that the computers get fooled here. *Houdini* misevaluates it at - 2.01, winning for Black, when the reality is a dead draw. I played it out against *Houdini*, and it couldn't do a thing and allowed an easy draw.

It was reported that Fischer left the tournament hall in tears. Botvinnik salted the wound further when he wrote of Fischer, who he clearly despised: "Success in chess is decided not only by talent, but also by other qualities, including the character of a player." He continued later with "and Fischer's character was always clearly inadequate, as the reader will probably agree, after playing through our game." Ouch! Kasparov, not a Fischer fan either, piled on, writing about the missed win, " ... Bobby lost part of his halo ... " As revenge, Fischer, in an article two years later, offered his list of the top ten greatest players of all

time, with Botvinnik noticeably absent from the list! Ouch again!

Game 20

P.Benko-M.Botvinnik

Monte Carlo 1968

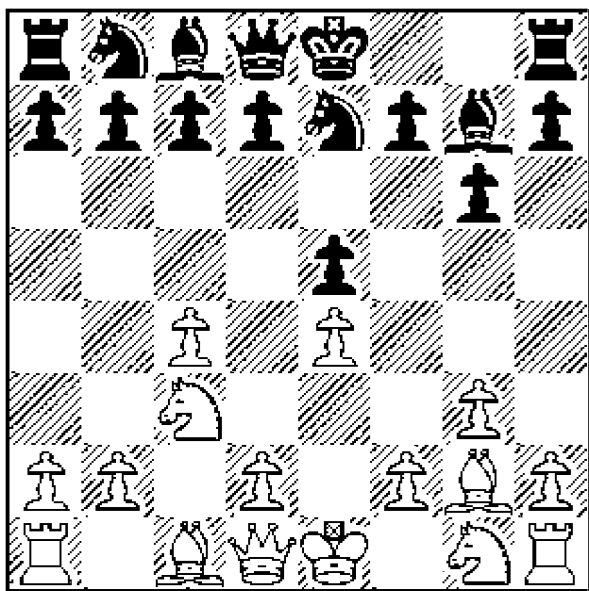
English Opening

1 c4 g6 2 g3 Bg7 3 Bg2 e5 4 Nc3 Ne7

Today, theory frowns upon e7 as a sub-par post for the knight, although I still see recent grandmaster games with it in the database. Better to toss in ... f7-f5 earlier and then follow with ... Nf6; e.g. 4 ... Nc6 5 d3 f5 6 e4 Nf6 7 Nge2 0-0 8 0-0 d6, Y.Balashov-S.Dvoiryys, European Cup, Cheliabinsk 1991.

5 e4

Benko, perhaps in an attempt to mess with his opponent's head, played Botvinnik's own variation of the English Opening against its founder. Botvinnik introduced the then startling idea with reversed colours in his 1954 match with Smyslov (which we examine in Chapter Five) and it so utterly discomfited his opponent that it induced Smyslov to abandon the Closed Sicilian altogether as White.



Question: Doesn't it create a gaping hole on d4?

Answer: It does indeed, but Botvinnik realized that the hole's dangers are more appearance than reality. White may later simply capture on d4 and plug the hole with a black pawn. Meanwhile, White receives far greater central control than in other variations of the English versus King's Indian.

5 ... d6 6 Nge2 Nbc6 7 d3 f5

The immediate 7 ... 0-0 is more common but it probably doesn't make such a great difference here.

8 Nd5

M.Botvinnik-T.V.Petrosian, USSR Team Championship 1966, saw 8 0-0 0-0 9 Nd5 Kh8!? 10 Be3 Be6 11 Qd2 Qd7 12 Rae1 Rae8 13 f4 exf4 14 Nxf4 Bg8 15 Nxe7 Nxe7 16 Bh3! b5 17 b3 c5 18 d4!, when Botvinnik held a slight initiative in a very complex position.

8 ... 0-0

If 8 ... Nxd5 9 cxd5 Ne7 10 h4!? c6 (10 ... h6 is a try, intending to bypass any h4-h5 with ... g6-g5) 11 dxc6 bxc6, N.Miezis-F.Velikhanli, Geneva 1999, then I prefer White's position after 12 h5.

9 Be3 Be6 10 Qd2 Qd7 11 0-0 Rf7!

The f-file is the optimal placement for Black's rooks.

12 Rae1 Raf8 13 f4

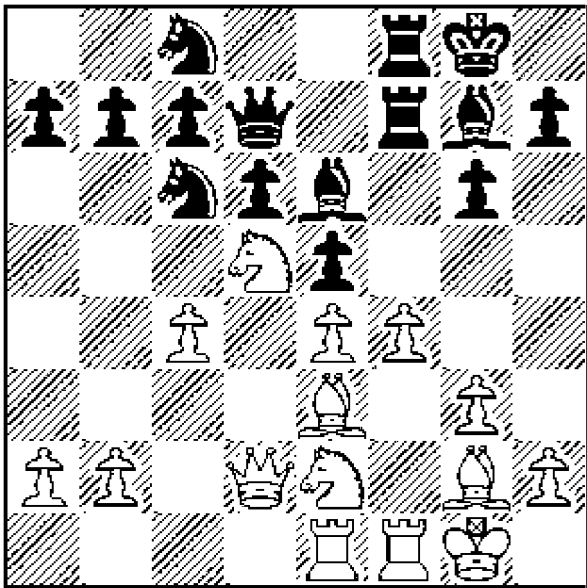
Believe it or not, this move may actually be slightly inaccurate.

Question: How can such a natural move possibly be inaccurate?

Answer: Kasparov himself questions this move. I agree that it certainly *looks* thematic in the position, but through one of Caissa's malicious vagaries it just isn't. As you well know, the chess goddess loves to play practical jokes on her worshippers. I have found myself on the wrong end of her jokes for quite some time now.

Question: What else is there for White?

Answer: He can temporize with a quieter plan. Kasparov suggests 13 f3!. White's stats are much higher with this move; e.g. 13 ... Kh8 14 b3 Ng8 15 exf5! Bxf5 16 d4! with an edge for White, J.Smejkal-A.Yusupov, German League 1992.
13 ... fxe4! 14 dxe4 Nc8!



Question: What is the idea behind this convoluted-looking move?

Answer: This is actually Step 2 in an incredibly deep strategic plan. Botvinnik explained his construct in the following stages: 1. Exchange on e4, inducing White to recapture with a pawn, since a bishop recapture allows an eventual ... Nf5.
2. Exchange on f4, forcing White to once again recapture with a pawn, since a piece recapture hands over the e5-square to Black.
3. Swap off light-squared bishops via h3, weakening White's e-pawn.
4. Shift rook (or rooks) to the e-file.
5. This in turn induces Ng3, to cover the weakened e4-pawn.
6. Follow with ... h7-h5! and ... h6-h4, undermining the defender of e4, after which White may have great difficulties defending the pawn.

Question: This plan sounds absolutely logical and strong but how did he work all of this out over the board!? I would never be able to do this kind of planning.

Answer: Because he was Botvinnik! His games, especially ones involving strategic planning, are remarkable for their iron clarity, as well as their incredible depth. As I mentioned in the introduction to the book, Botvinnik, Morphy, Capablanca, Fischer and Karpov (I have a feeling Carlsen may soon be added to this list) were the dominant strategists of their generation (or any generation for that matter!) and were, in my opinion, the greatest positional players of all time. I remember going over this game when I was around 10 years old. Botvinnik's explanation of his in-depth plan blew my kid mind! It was actually a revelation to me at the time. I realized that depth mattered, and to improve my game I had to get past vulgar, two-move cheapos (my deadly arsenal back then!) and actually work out plans schematically, *not* just mathematically.

15 c5

Benko softens up Black's centre, meeting a wing attack with a central counter. Kasparov also mentions 15 b4.

15 ... Bh3!

Step 3: Swap off light-squared bishops.

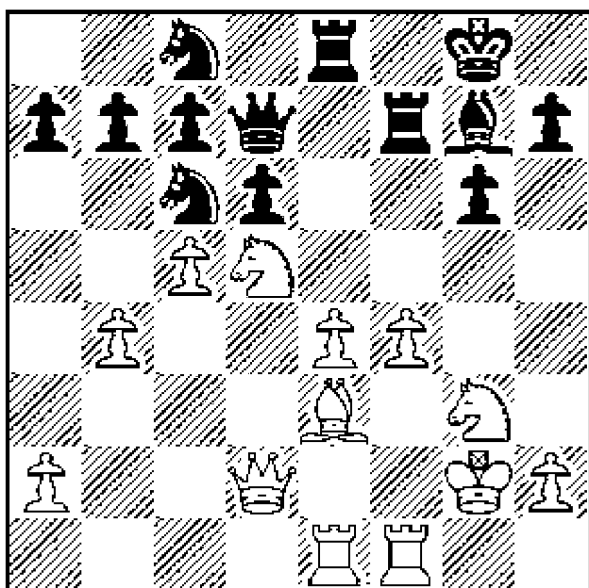
16 b4 Bxg2 17 Kxg2 exf4!

Step 4: Weaken e4.

18 gxf4 Re8!

Step 5: Pressure e4, to induce Ng3.

19 Ng3



19 ... h5?!

Step 6: Undermine the defender of e4.

Question: What? Why did you criticize Botvinnik's logical move, which was all part of his plan?

Answer: Kasparov gave Botvinnik's move an exclamation and Botvinnik gave it the seal of approval too, but it is mistimed. 19 ... N6e7 is better here.

Question: You, a puny little IM, dare to challenge the assessment of two World Champions?

Answer: Well, it does appear a bit presumptuous on your writer's part, but in my defence, there are mitigating factors: Botvinnik didn't have access to a computer. Kasparov did but he wrote his annotations around 2002/03, using computers much weaker than today's models. The *Houdini* and *Fritz* programs of 2013 are several levels stronger and apparently found a hole in Botvinnik's move order.

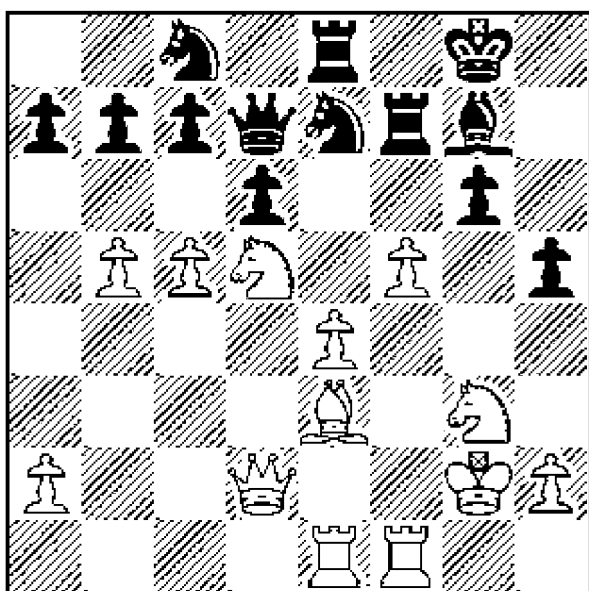
Believe me, ten years from now if you put this analysis in the top program of 2023, you will unearth a million improvements as well. This is why (I believe, at least) actual analysis in a chess book isn't all that important (!), since the "best" move or line is in constant flux, due to the increasing strength of chess programs. Only the prose, assessments, opinions, and verbal explanations of the thought process will be of real use in a few years to come.

20 b5?!

Houdini's impossible-to-find refutation of this classic game runs: 20 f5! h4 21 fxg6!! (the grinning, red-bodied imp continues to poke and prod with his trident from g6) 21 ... Rxf1 22 Rxf1! hxc3 23 Qd1! (threatening Qh5, which in turn forces Black to return his hard-earned gains) 23 ... N8e7 (23 ... Rf8?? 24 Qb3!! Kh8 25 Rxf8+ Bxf8 26 Qd1! and it's game over!) 24 Qh5 Nxc6 25 Qxc6 Rf8 26 Rxf8+ Kxf8 27 cxd6 cxd6 28 hxc3 with a winning position for White.

Dang. I simultaneously loathe/love these hateful yet alluring chess machines. They have the awful power to embolden the weak and confused (sadly, your writer must be included in this unfortunate group) and delude us into believing we play better than Capa, Botvinnik or Fischer, when in reality the computer performs all the work while we are just along for the ride!

20 ... N6e7 21 f5!



Benko, sensing strategic vulnerability from his side, goes for it.

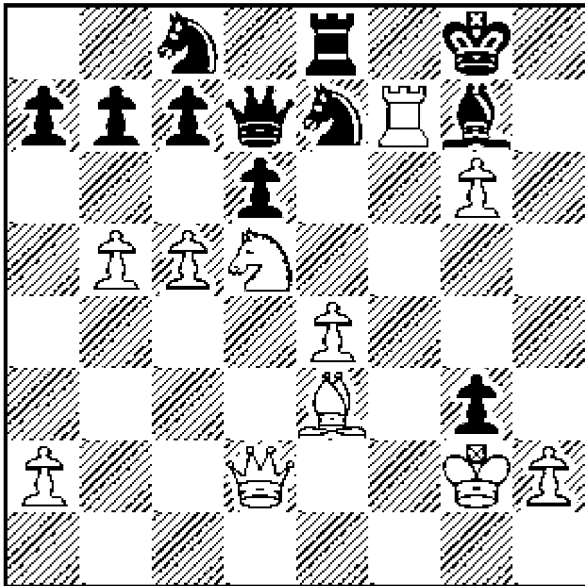
21 ... h4 22 fxg6

White's hope is that the g6-tumour grows so deeply and intricately embedded within the vital organs of Black's king position, that it may be inoperable. *Houdini* once again unearths another impossible yet playable line in 22 Bh6!! (the order to execute Black's king is delivered by papal seal on h6 – after this move, White's unending attack is a magic treasure chest which, when emptied, miraculously replenishes itself with gold and jewels) 22 ... Nxd5 (not 22 ... hxc3? 23 Bxc3 Nxd5 24 c6!! – power doesn't always equate to a numerical advantage if one side has access to a secret weapon to offset the superior numbers – 24 ... bxc6 25 bxc6 Qxc6 26 exd5 Qb5 27 f6 with a decisive attack) 23 Bxc3 Kxc3 24 fxg6! Rxf1 25 Rxf1 Qg4 (25 ... Nf6?? loses on the spot to 26 Qg5!) 26 Qxd5 Qxc6 27 Rf3! with raging complications and even a tiny edge for White, according to *Houdini*.

22 ... Rxf1 23 Rxf1!

It is too late to back down now with 23 Nxf1?? Qg4+.

23 ... hxc3 24 Rf7!



Very few players would survive Botvinnik's side against a top-level GM. Black's defensive hurdles are:

1. White's pieces swarm over the kingside. It feels to Black's king like his guard callously abandoned him in his time of need.

2. The dark squares are near collapse around the black king.

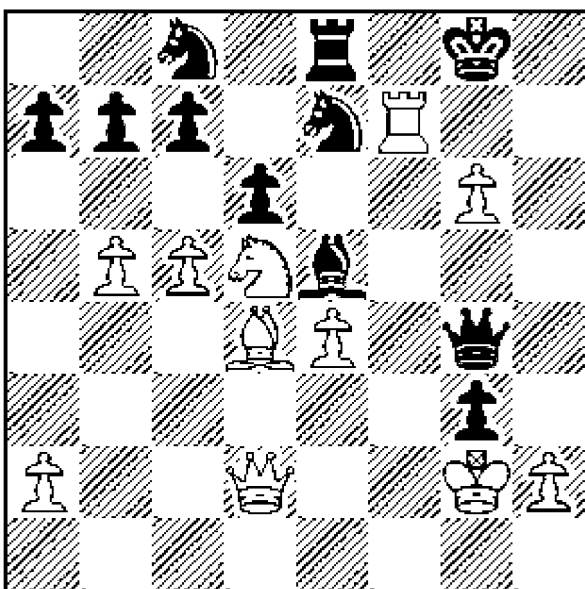
3. White's rook infiltrated f7 and pins the e7-knight, while his lazy, feckless brother continues to lounge on c8.

With this kind of raw data assaulting Black, it is hard not to distill it into panic. Remarkably, Botvinnik manages to stay calm and form defensive coherence from confusion.

24 ... Be5!

Chastity, poverty, humble submission, are the holy vows the bishop once took and now deeply regrets. The dark squares must be challenged at all costs. 24 ... Qe6?? 25 Rxc7+! Kxc7 26 Bd4+ wins.

25 Bd4 Qg4!



Kasparov writes: "It's difficult to reconcile Black's contradictory, hostile attacking gesture from his overall passivity." Yet Botvinnik does just that. Black's queen attempts to pull off an unseemly power grab from her brother on g2, who suspects nothing. Kasparov calls this "the turning point of the game, in which both sides have played brilliantly up till now."

Exercise (critical decision): Two moves occur to us: White can play 26 Bxe5, destroying a key black defender of the dark squares, or he can go for 26 Rf4, issuing challenge to Black's queen. Take your time here. What would you play?

26 Rf4?

Occam's razor advises that when given a choice, the simplest is usually the best. After White's incorrect

decision, opportunity vanishes. If you seek to destroy an enemy, then do it without hesitation. In this instance, the rook takes half measures, writing his hated sister on g4 a threatening letter instead, alerting his foe, now on high guard.

Answer: Correct was 26 Bxe5! gxf2+ 27 Bg3! (27 Kxf2?? loses to 27 ... Qh5+ 28 Kg2 Qxf2+) 27 ... Qxe4+ 28 Kxf2 Qxf2! (not 28 ... Qxd5?? 29 Qh6), when Black stands better with his extra pawn, but White retains some initiative and conversion will not be so easy. Botvinnik was of the opinion that White was in danger of losing, whereas Kasparov, while partially agreeing, felt White should hold the game.

26 ... Qh5!

A killing shot. Black threatens h2.

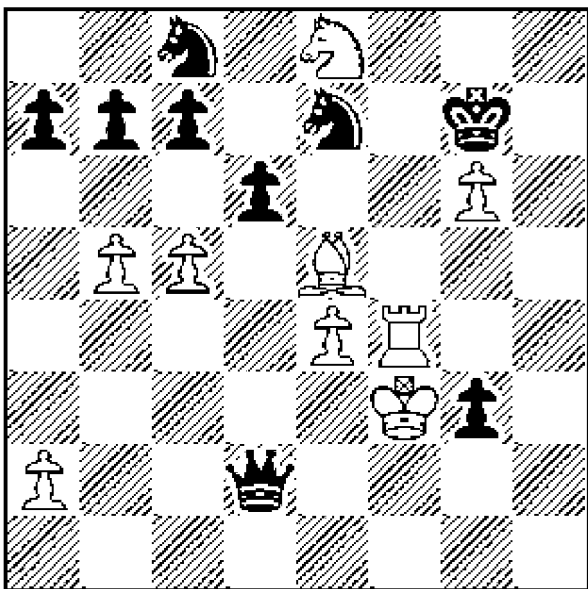
27 Bxe5

Perhaps the best practical chance, since 27 hxf3? Nxd5 leaves White a piece down with his attack run aground.

27 ... Qxf2+ 28 Kf3 Qxd2

White's queen clasped her palms together in fervent prayer, but they obviously went unanswered. Benko's remaining attempts to attack are soon rendered useless from his recent run of reverses.

29 Nf6+ Kg7 30 Nxe8+



The game isn't over yet, despite White's massive material deficit. Black must broach the delicate matter of his own king's safety. Botvinnik allows his opponent some leeway to attack, but only with the proviso of carefully defined, calculable limits and restrictions.

To us humans such positions are still pretty scary from Black's perspective. Yet *Houdini* calmly assesses it at -7.74; *i.e.* completely resignable for White! Unfortunately, it isn't possible to superimpose the human will upon a position which lacks the essential raw ingredients for success. In this instance, the camel somehow does indeed fit through the eye of the needle and the rich man is granted entry through heaven's gates.

30 ... Kxf6 31 Rf6+ Kh7 32 Bxf3

At last, the checks run out and now it's Black's turn. White is already dead. The remainder is simply Black dancing upon the grave. The would-be attack ends abruptly after 32 Rf7+ Kg8 33 Rg7+ Kf8.

32 ... Qd3+ 33 Kf2

Sometimes a grievously wounded soldier feels no pain. If there is pain everywhere in the body, his brain gets confused at the lack of a localized point of origin, and simply gives the command: "no pain".

33 ... Qxb5 34 cxd6 Qxe8 0-1

Chapter Three

Riding the Dynamic Element

When researching this book I was surprised to read Kasparov's statement that Botvinnik, who we normally associate with iron logic and patient manoeuvring, was a veritable thaumaturge with the initiative, and worked wonders and miracles when he seized power over the board. In fact, Kasparov claimed Botvinnik's feel for initiative rivalled or surpassed that of any legendary player in the history of the game. As I went through more and more of Botvinnik's early games, I saw very clearly that Kasparov's assertion was true.

In this chapter, we examine Botvinnik's remarkable handling of the initiative, mainly from his heyday, from the mid 1930s to the early 50s. Botvinnik's disputatious pieces surge forth, always seeking initiative, always finding conflict. His initiative, like unfulfilled malice, had a way of growing by feeding on itself. Even players associated with the initiative, such as Keres, were often casually brushed aside by Botvinnik in his prime.

Game 21

M.Botvinnik-M.Vidmar Sr.

Nottingham 1936

Queen's Gambit Declined

1 c4 e6 2 Nf3 d5 3 d4 Nf6 4 Bg5 Be7

Back in the 1930s, virtually everyone played the Queen's Gambit Declined in response to 1 d4.

5 Nc3 0-0 6 e3 Nbd7 7 Bd3

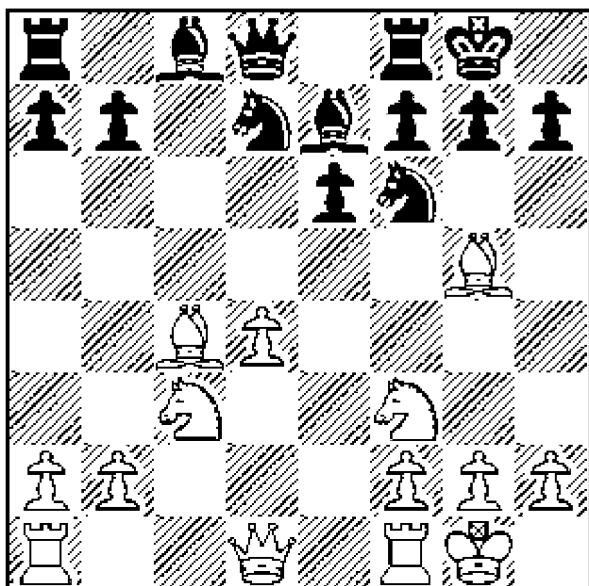
Question: Doesn't this lose White a tempo?

Answer: I'm not a big fan of this move, which obligingly cedes a tempo to Black. But it is played, even today by top GMs, so it can't be all that bad. I would go for 7 Rc1, 7 Qc2 or 7 cxd5.

7 ... c5

7 ... dxc4 8 Bxc4 a6, inducing 9 a4, is more accurate and only then 9 ... c5 10 0-0 cxd4 11 exd4, when Black reaches a more favourable version of the game, since he goaded a weakening of the b4-square.

8 0-0 cxd4 9 exd4 dxc4 10 Bxc4



Tyrants, in order to subjugate, keep the masses in the dark. They burn books,

along with the heretics who read them. To my mind, Botvinnik, a similar iron-fisted despot in such structures, was possibly the greatest practitioner of all time of both isolani and hanging pawns positions, inviting them all his life, especially arising from his Nimzo-Indians. If you look at his isolani/hanging pawn games from the 1920s and 30s, his opponents look like bumbling incompetents, while Botvinnik, infused with knowledge which his opponents lack, appears as a modern day GM, like Carlsen or Kramnik.

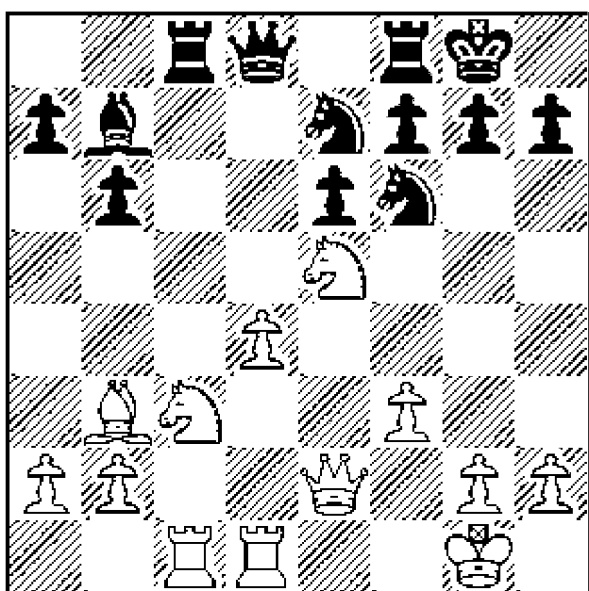
Kasparov writes that in such positions Botvinnik “disclosed virtually all their resources!” He continues: “But Botvinnik demonstrated that the activity of the pieces and the pressure in the centre more than compensate for the insignificant defect in the pawn structure.”

10 ... Nb6

Botvinnik suggested 10 ... a6 as Black’s most accurate move here.

11 Bb3 Bd7

M.Botvinnik-A.Batuyev, Leningrad 1930, saw 11 ... Nbd5 12 Ne5 Nd7 13 Bxe7 Nxe7 14 Qe2 Nf6 15 Rfd1 b6 16 Rac1 Bb7 17 f3 Rc8? (17 ... Nfd5 was necessary).



Exercise (critical decision): Black has just blundered. How did Botvinnik punish it?

Answer: Sac on f7 and force Black into a death-pin: 18 Nxf7! Rxf7 19 Qxe6 Qf8 20 Ne4 Rxc1?! 21 Rxc1 Nfd5 22 Nd6 Ba8 23 Re1 g6 24 Nxf7 Qxf7 25 Qxe7! 1-0.

12 Qd3 Nbd5

Black should seek swaps in such isolani positions. Therefore 12 ... Nfd5 may be more accurate.

13 Ne5 Bc6 14 Rad1

Question: Why did Botvinnik avoid 14 Nxc6 which picks up the bishop pair and also hands Black an isolani on c6?

Answer: This plan was tried in one game, D.Breder-R.Fridman, German League 2005. After 14 ... bxc6, Black reinforces d5 with a strong grip. This plus the fact that White's e5-knight, a dangerous attacker, may be the superior piece was probably why Botvinnik rejected the idea, and I believe rightly so.

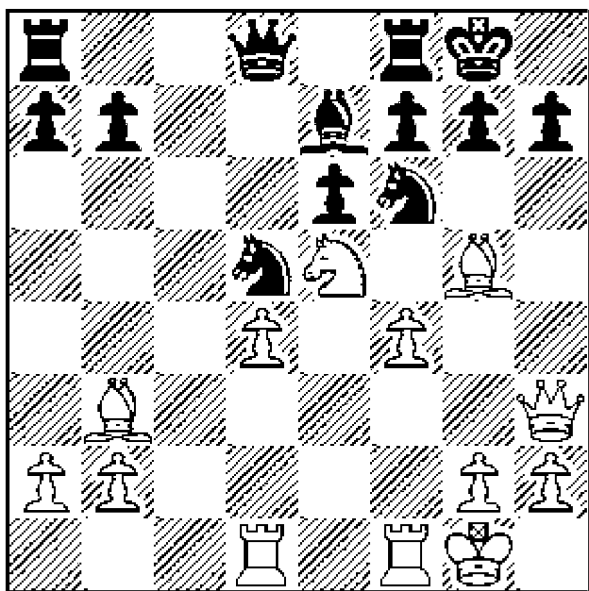
14 ... Nb4 15 Qh3 Bd5 16 Nxd5 Nbx d5?!

The knight moves out of his jurisdiction and holds little authority where he stands. This natural yet inaccurate move allows Botvinnik an attacking build-up on the kingside. Vidmar should have played 16 ... Nfxd5!. This minor yet significant emendation helps free Black's game.

Question: But with this recapture doesn't Black also move a defender away from his king and leave his b4-knight dangling on the queenside?

Answer: I prefer White after 17 Bd2 Nc6! (the wayward b4-knight comes back into play) 18 Bc2 g6 19 Bh6 Re8 20 Qf3 Bf6, but Black's position is not so bad, and certainly infinitely better than what he got in the game.

17 f4!



From this point on, Botvinnik intersperses direct threats with strengthening manoeuvres.

17 ... Rc8

Question: I realize 17 ... g6 weakens, but isn't it necessary for Black to halt f4-f5 - ?

Answer: The trouble is that it fails tactically to 18 Bh6 Re8 19 Ba4, winning the exchange. *Houdini* thinks the thematic 19 f5! is even stronger.

18 f5!

Botvinnik massages his once rigid structure into relaxed pliability.

18 ... exf5?

Vidmar grossly underestimates the explosive potential to White's game. He had to try 18 ... Qd6.

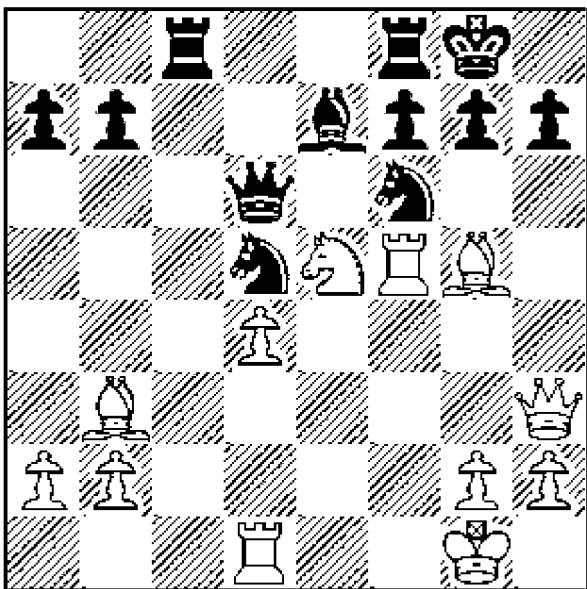
19 Rxf5

The old black king's joints begin to ache from the inclement weather. White's rook looms ominously and pressures d5, f6 and f7, all tender points in Black's camp.

19 ... Qd6

19 ... Rc7 was better, but even then Black is busted after 20 Rdf1, and if 20 ... Qd6 then 21 Nxf7! Rxf7 22 Bxd5.

Clearly, White prepares to make trouble on the kingside, yet the piece destined to perform the dirty deed for now remains shrouded in anonymity. Black just blundered in an already busted position. A hearing is convened and the sentence harsh.



Exercise (combination alert): How did Botvinnik exploit Black's last move?

Answer: Deflection/discovered attack. Force Black into multiple, deadly pins.

20 Nxf7!

Now White's forces dance with facile ease to the music of Botvinnik's desires.

20 ... Rxf7

To negotiate successfully, one must first possess something of value the other side desires – a something Black utterly lacks. Vidmar can do nothing but glumly await the further deterioration of his once sound position.

21 Bxf6!

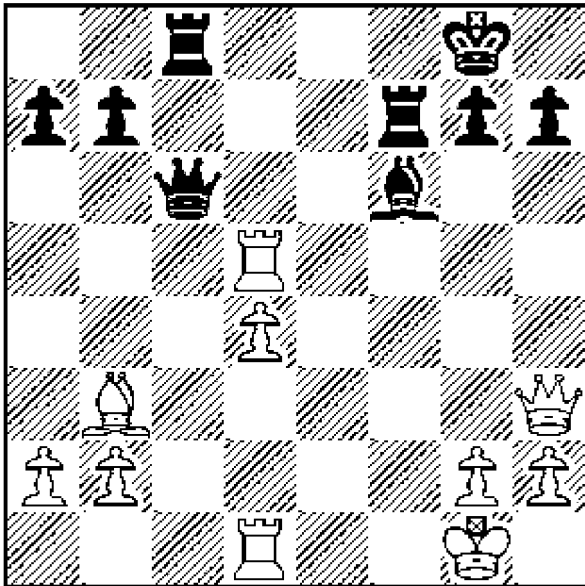
Undermining the defender of d5.

21 ... Bxf6

21 ... Nxf6 22 Rxf6! exploits Black's dangling rook on c8.

22 Rxd5 Qc6

One winces at the thought of Black's position. That's a lot of past sin to expiate. Black's queen backs off, exhaling reproachfully, while his king, precious little life left in him with such grievous threats pending, now comes to the awful realization that his so-called protectors are worthless. Some murmur prayers, while others lie around drunk.



Black's game reeks of unpunished strategic crimes, mainly imputed upon multiple underestimations of White's power, as his seemingly endless initiative flows unpunctuated and without resistance.

Exercise (combination alert): How did Botvinnik finish the job energetically?

Answer: Overload, since c8 again hangs if the offered rook is taken. "This unnatural abomination is not by God's design!" rails Black's queen at the offending rook, who floats to d6 as if propelled by dark magic.

23 Rd6!

Note that 23 Rc5?? fails miserably to 23 ... Bxd4+!

23 ... Qe8

23 ... Qxd6 24 Qxc8+ Qf8 25 Qxb7 ends the matter as well.

24 Rd7 1-0

Black's queen and king curse White's forces in one language, then plead for mercy in another.

If all the games I annotated were this simple, my job would be so much easier! Vidmar was a strong GM, yet appeared crudely inept in comparison with Botvinnik. It felt like the skill gap widened as the game went on. Even top GMs of Botvinnik's day recognized their own marked inferiority – which was almost shouted out – in comparison to Botvinnik in his prime. Such was his dominance from 1936 to the early 1950s.

Game 22

A.Alekhine-M.Botvinnik

Nottingham 1936

Sicilian Defence

Botvinnik acquitted himself well in his showdown against the reigning world champion, and at the height of Alekhine's powers. Alekhine himself wrote: "Botvinnik's wonderful achievement in Nottingham confirms that he is the most probable candidate for the title of world champion."

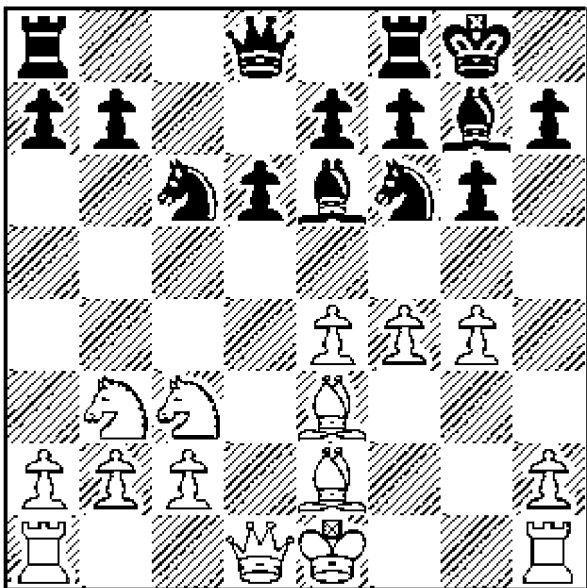
1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6

The obscure (for 1936) Dragon Sicilian apparently didn't come as a surprise to the heavily prepared Alekhine, perhaps Botvinnik's only equal in the opening phase of the game.

6 Be2

Alekhine would surely have jumped aboard the popular attacking set-up 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2, had it been invented at the time.

6 ... Bg7 7 Be3 Nc6 8 Nb3 Be6 9 f4 0-0 10 g4!?



In space, an object may generate incredible speed in the absence of friction's resistance. Botvinnik occasionally took on calculated risks; Alekhine, on the other hand, simply loved to gamble. It may be that Alekhine's brain had a curious defect: an enlarged lobe which controlled aggression. So to advise him to calm down would be belated and unheeded council. Here we see a brazen attempt by the world champion to put the young upstart in his place. (Unfortunately for Alekhine, Botvinnik's place at Nottingham was a tie for first with Capa!)

Question: The risk entailed in White's lunge feels disproportionately burdensome to the dreamed-of rewards, and it looks borderline unsound. Is it playable?

Answer: A crime in one society may be an honourable deed in another. I don't trust it under the theory: an attack must be comprised of more than just elemental will; there must exist an underlying strategic basis as well – a basis which I fail to identify in this position. But saying this, believe it or not, White's stats are quite reasonable after 10 g4!? and it is still played by GMs today, so it must be sound or, if failing that, borderline sound.

10 ... d5

Principle: Counter in the centre when attacked on the wing. A logical temporary pawn sac. Botvinnik hopes to deny Alekhine the attack to which he feels entitled. Botvinnik quickly adapts to the rapidly altering circumstances swirling about the centre. Now the combination of Alekhine's lust for adventure, mingled with Botvinnik's itch for counterplay tears a giant hole in the position's equanimity.

Alternatively, 10 ... Rc8 has scored well for Black; e.g. 11 f5 Bd7 12 g5 Ne8 13 0-0, M.Bartel-R.Wojtaszek, Wroclaw 2010, and here I would try 13 ... Bxc3!? (a theoretical novelty) 14 bxc3 Ng7.

Question: Are you serious? Black just gave up his powerful dark-squared bishop.

Answer: The reason I suggest giving it up, in order to damage the opposing structure, is that White's g-pawn sits on g5, blocking access to h6. I actually prefer Black's chances here, but please don't send me an angry Facebook message if you try my suggestion and get mated!

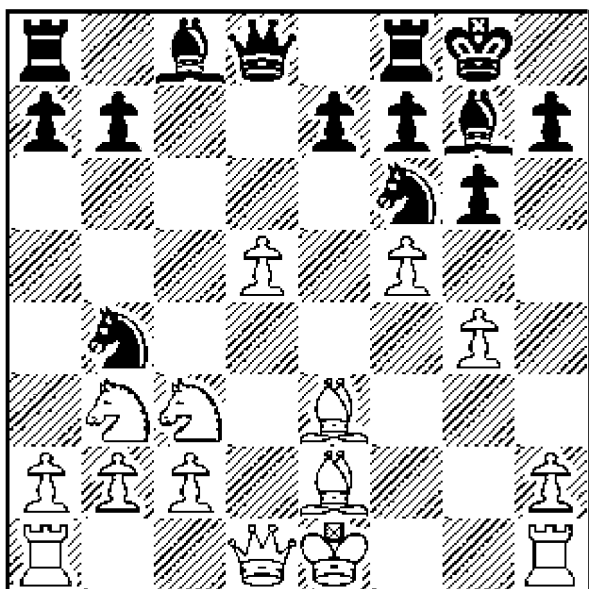
11 f5

Surging forward and knocking off a defender of d5.

Question: Isn't 11 e5 better, to keep the centre closed?

Answer: It isn't so closed after 11 ... d4! 12 Nxd4 (12 exf6? Bxf6 favours Black) 12 ... Nxd4 13 Bxd4, and now in G. Levenfish-M. Botvinnik, Moscow 1936, Black pulled an overload combination with 13 ... Nxg4! and attained the slightly better position.

11 ... Bc8 12 exd5 Nb4



13 d6!?

Alekhine's novelty.

Question: Why did Alekhine return the pawn?

Answer: He hoped to disrupt the flow of Black's initiative, and there is no way to hang on to the material anyway. For example: a) 13 fxg6 hxg6 14 Bf3 has occurred four times and no one found 14 ... Bxg4! (a novelty) 15 Bxg4 Nxg4 16 Qxg4 Nxc2+ 17 Kf2 Nxa1 18 Rxa1 Bxc3 19 bxc3 Qxd5. I'm not exactly sure whose king is in greater danger, but I like Black's chances in this wild position.

b) 13 Bf3 gxf5 14 a3 fxg4 15 Bg2 Na6 16 Qd3, intending to castle long next move, as in R.J. Fischer-S. Reshevsky, New York/Los Angeles (2nd matchgame) 1961, is the usual choice nowadays, when White looks like he has enough for a pawn.

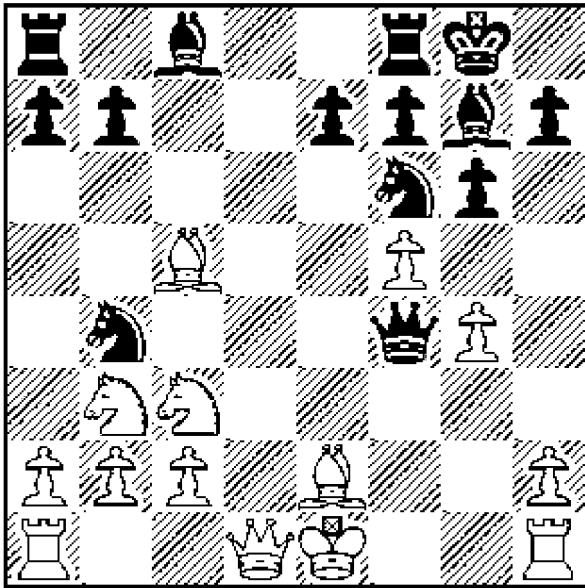
13 ... Qxd6

Botvinnik claimed 13 ... exd6 was unplayable but *Houdini* disagrees and offers 14 a3 Re8! 15 Bg5 (certainly not 15 Qd2?? Nxg4! or 15 Bf2? Nxg4! 16 axb4 Nxf2 17 Kxf2 Qh4+ 18 Kg1 Bxf5 and White's exposed king spells big trouble) 15 ... Nc6 and it's anybody's game.

14 Bc5

The bishop looms menacingly, the same way I do when a student dares to yawn loudly during a chess lesson. The alternative is the crazy line 14 Qxd6 exd6 15 0-0-0 Re8 16 Bg5 Nxa2+! 17 Nxa2 Rxe2 18 Rxd6 Ne8 19 Rd8 h6 20 Kd1 Re5 21 Re1 Rxe1+ 22 Kxe1 hxg5 23 Rxe8+ Kh7, when Black may be okay since he unravels with ... b7-b6 and ... Bb7.

14 ... Qf4



The queen continues to sow agitation. Black can also try 14 ... Qxd1+ 15 Rxd1 Nc6 16 g5 Nd7 17 f6 exf6! (Botvinnik suggests the inferior 17 ... Bh8) 18 Bxf8 Nxf8 19 gxf6 Bxf6, when his pawn and bishop pair give him more than enough compensation for the exchange.

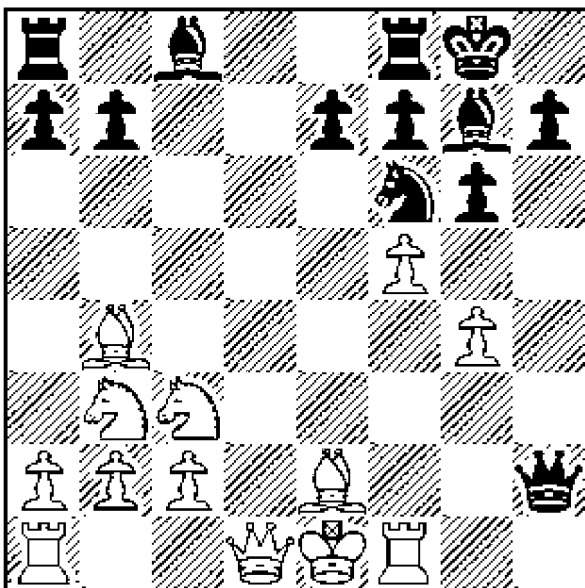
15 Rf1!

The rook hopes to circumvent the black queen's authority.

Question: Doesn't Black lack the funds to subsidize his expensive war? Now his queen can't cover the knight on b4.

Answer: This had been foreseen by Botvinnik. Play on!

15 ... Qxh2 16 Bxb4



If an assassin's target is one saturated in power, my advice is: don't miss. The creditors seize Black's assets, now in a state of arrears, on the queenside. But fortune is a fickle companion in times of confusion. Botvinnik had foreseen this position and had accurately calculated it to a forced draw. The possibilities appear as shifting shadows of leaves dancing in the sunlight.

Exercise (critical decision): Find the correct idea and work out Botvinnik's sequence. Black to play and force a draw:

Answer: Sac a second piece.

16 ... Nxc4!

Through dark powers the shaman, in death, transfers his spirit into the body of the black queen, who rises to take up the battle once again. Botvinnik actuates the final lunge at White's king - not enough to kill, but enough to neutralize. With the sac he tears away the fabric of Alekhine's king's shelter, now exposed to the elements. The move order 16 ... Qg3+ 17 Rf2 Nxc4! works too.

17 Bxc4 Qg3+ 18 Rf2

The rook block is forced and a perpetual check ensues.

18 ... Qg1+ 19 Rf1 Qg3+ 20 Rf2 Qg1+ 1/2-1/2

This game, like a sudden thunderstorm, erupts, rages for only a few minutes and, just as suddenly, subsides.

Game 23

M.Botvinnik-S.Reshevsky

AVRO Tournament, The Netherlands 1938

English Opening

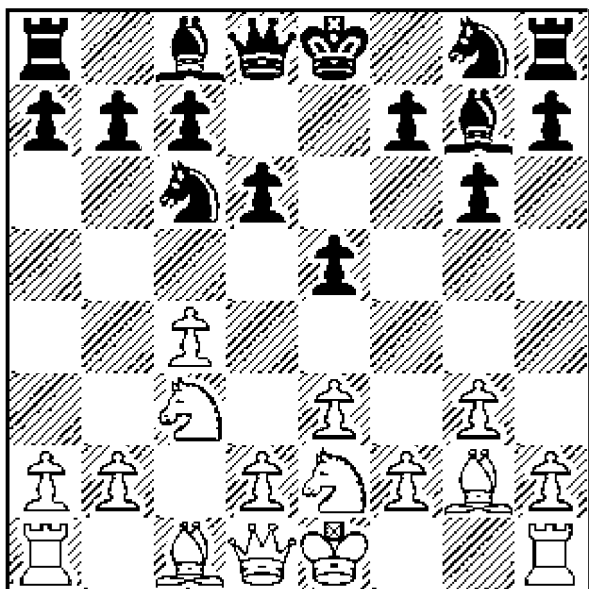
In the mid 1980s I had the opportunity to meet the great Sammy Reshevsky at several Los Angeles tournaments, as well as a simul he gave at the San Diego Chess Club. I got the impression, as I did with Botvinnik, of a deeply serious personality, of a person who never cracked a joke or smiled in his entire life. In fact, of all the world class players I met, with the exception of Boris Spassky, I noticed they all seemed to share this trait. Or, who knows, maybe I was just intimidated by being in their presence, and conjured this impression up in my own head.

1 c4 e5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 e3

Question: Why didn't Botvinnik play his own e2-e4 variation of the English?

Answer: He hadn't invented it yet! He worked out his system, originally intended with colours reversed against Closed Sicilian, in preparation for his 1954 match with Smyslov. Then it occurred to him: why not play the same system with White, a move up, in the English?

5 ... d6 6 Nge2



6 ... Nge7

Question: Why not play ... f7-f5 and only then ... Nf6, rather than post the knight on a passive

square on e7?

Answer: Well, that is exactly what most modern GMs would play, but that which we take for granted now was simply unknown back in 1938. The course of P.Leko-L.Ding, Beijing (blitz) 2012, 6 ... f5 7 0-0 Nf6 8 d3 0-0 9 b3 Be6 10 Nd5 Qd7 11 Bb2 Rae8 12 Qd2, shows a typical set-up for both White and Black.

7 d4

It's a little more common to hold the d-pawn back to d3 in these English lines.

Question: But isn't d3 a more passive square?

Answer: Think of it as flexible instead. By playing the pawn to d3, White retains both future d3-d4 and e3-e4 options.

7 ... exd4!

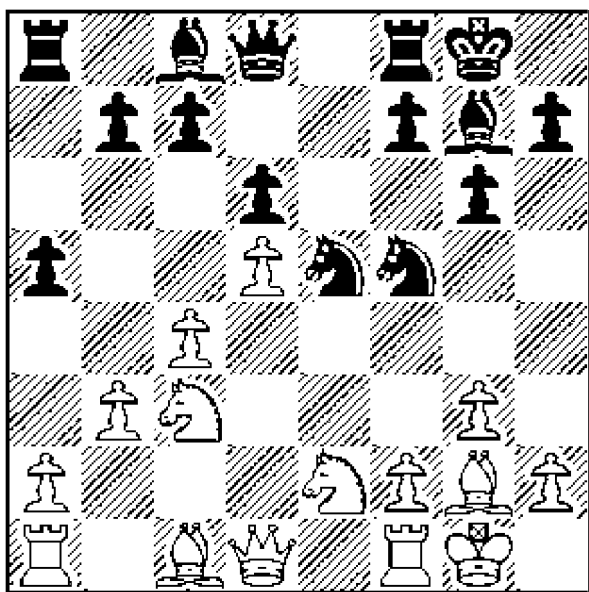
Question: Why an exclamation to a move which cedes White greater central influence?

Answer: In compensation, Black exerts piece pressure on White's centre and, especially, a softened up d4-square.

8 exd4 0-0 9 0-0 Nf5 10 d5 Ne5?!

Inaccurate. Black should follow the principle *Seek trades when cramped*, and play 10 ... Ncd4! 11 Nxd4 Nxd4 12 Be3 Nf5, when his piece activity and dark square control make up for his territorial deficit, H.Vonthron-V.Kostic, Vienna 2006.

11 b3 a5?!



Perhaps the beginning of an incorrect plan. Black intends ... Nd7-c5, but the trouble is that White simply ejects the intruder with a2-a3 and b3-b4.

Question: What do you suggest for Black?

Answer: Probably he should opt for an ... a7-a6, ... Bd7, ... Rb8, ... b7-b5 plan, to generate counterplay.

12 Bb2 Nd7 13 a3!

Warning Black that he will not tolerate an uninvited guest an extended stay on c5.

13 ... Nc5!?

Anyway.

14 b4 Nd7

Question: Didn't Black just lose two tempi?

Answer: He did, but he goads White's pawns forward in order to overextend them. Having played over hundreds and hundreds of Botvinnik's games in preparation for this book, I am hard pressed to find any where he overextended. Botvinnik's superior strategic grasp gave him the understanding of exactly when to push and when to hold back. On 14 ... axb4 15 axb4 Rxa1 16 Bxa1 Na6, Botvinnik said he intended 17 Ne4! Nxb4 18 g4! with a tremendous initiative for the pawn.

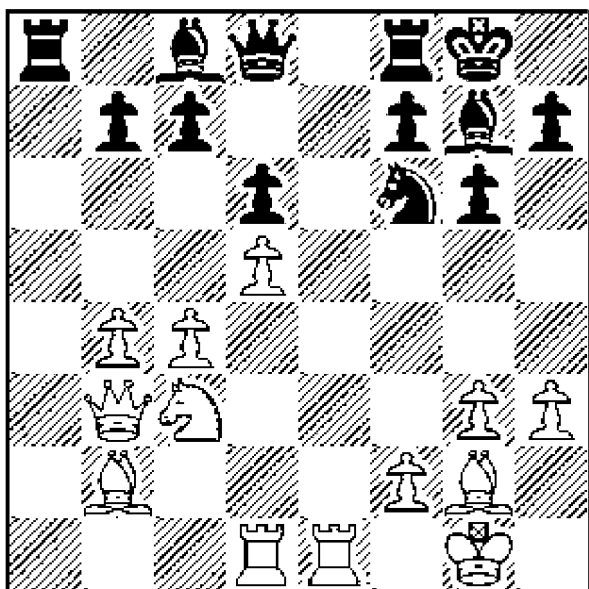
15 Qb3

Botvinnik would like to enforce an eventual c7-c5 break.

15 ... Nd4

Botvinnik felt this was an error, but I don't see any great alternatives on Black's part.

16 Nxd4 Bxd4 17 Rad1 Bg7 18 Rfe1 axb4 19 axb4 Nf6 20 h3!



Will Neil Armstrong's footprints on the moon still be there a million years from now? Black's counterplay deficit feels like an atmosphereless environment, trapped in eternal stasis. It's instructive to watch Botvinnik make progress.

Question: What is the idea behind his last move?

Answer: White denies his opponent the use of g4, and secondly, he plans to meet ... Bf5 with g3-g4, annexing even more territory.

20 ... h5

In order to post a bishop on f5 in comfort.

21 c5

Gaining more space.

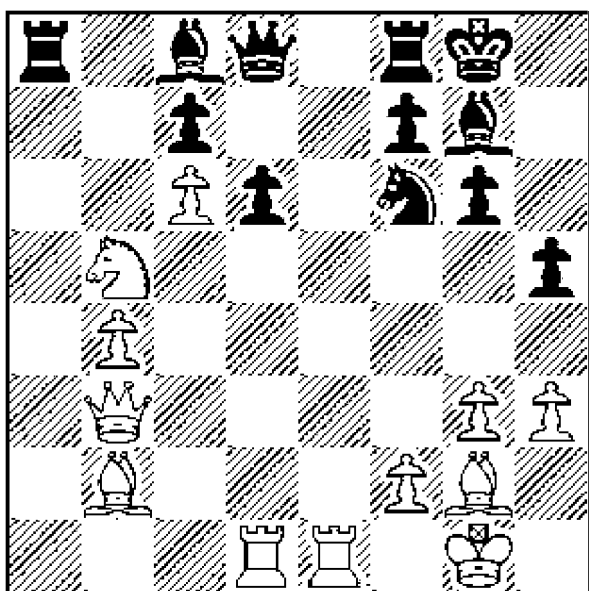
21 ... Bf5 22 Nb5

Intending to harass the bishop with Nd4 next.

22 ... Bd7?!

Almost unconsciously, without volition, Black's forces back up until they reach the lip of the precipice. Reshevsky provokes Botvinnik's next move, but as the old saying goes: be careful for what you wish for – you may get it.

23 c6! bxc6 24 dxc6 Bc8



Black's cosmopolitan bishop wallows out of his element in the rural outskirts on c8. This game would be a serious candidate for the *Accumulating Advantages* chapter, if not for Botvinnik's amazingly energetic finish. White's forces share conspiratorial glances in each other's direction, while Black's ambitions of survival flow in a reverse polarity of decreasing levels of feasibility. Black's once tough defensive barrier now lies fluffy and pliable.

Exercise (combination alert): Do you see how Botvinnik struck a serious blow from this position?

Answer: Discovered attack/double attack. The knight offers himself up as bait to lure Black's defenders out of their trenches.

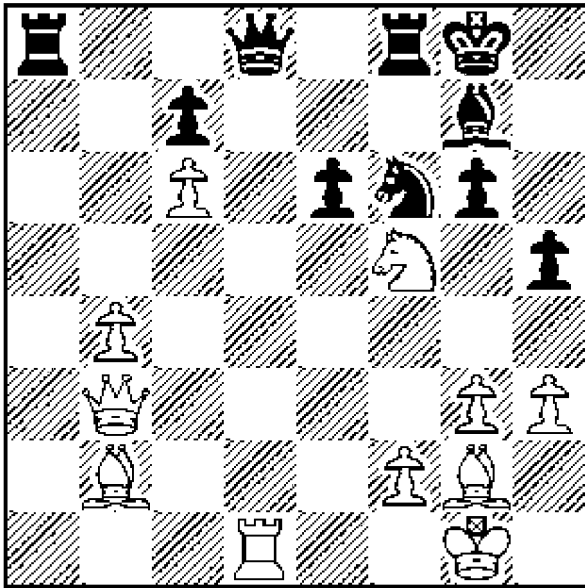
25 Nxd6! Be6

The delinquent bishop can only shrug and blow out his cheeks in response to White's open aggression. Reshevsky desperately tries to complicate, seeing that the line 25 ... cxd6 (the aggrieved party demands heavy recompense, which it will never receive) 26 c7! (discovered attack/double attack – Black's queen and rook hang simultaneously) 26 ... Qxc7 27 Bxa8 Bxh3 28 Bf3 is hopeless for Black. White simply pushes his b-pawn down the board.

26 Rxe6!

Intelligence, cunning and resourcefulness are no match when faced against a logician, brute-force calculator. Like a savvy investor, Botvinnik has a sharp eye for profitable ventures. An exchange is a trifle to eliminate Black's only active piece.

26 ... fxe6 27 Nf5!

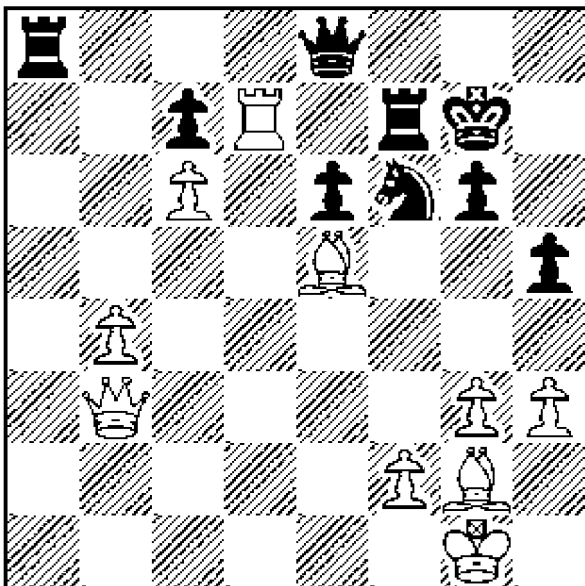


Discovered attack. The persistent knight insinuates himself into Black's business once again. Botvinnik goes after Black's g7-bishop, steward of his dark squares.

27 ... Qe8 28 Nxg7

After the elimination of Black's most important defensive piece, the remainder of his tangled forces find themselves garlanded with the hangman's noose.

28 ... Kxg7 29 Rd7+ Rf7 30 Be5!



The bishop's services are freely at anyone's disposal; his blessings, however, require cold, hard cash up front. The powerful legate on e5, already a prince of the church, brooks even higher aspirations as supreme pontifex of the board. White's rook remains immune and c7 falls, after which White's advanced passers take the day.

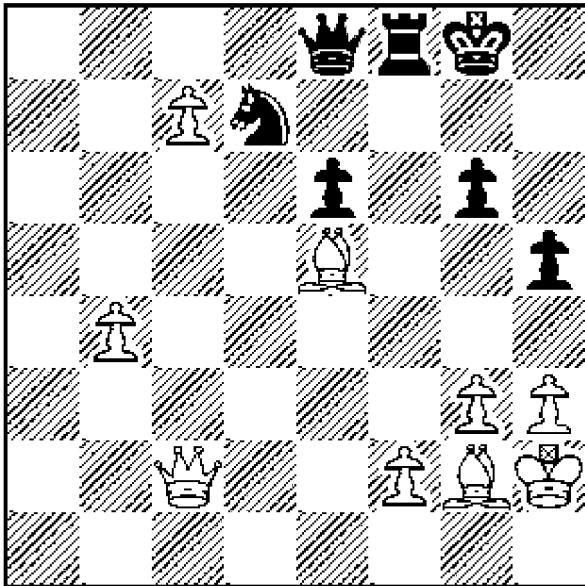
30 ... Kg8

Black's destitute king lacks even basic amenities and his defenders, completely unequal to the organizational task required, scatter in panicked confusion. 30 ... Rc8 31 Qd3 is too horrible to contemplate.

31 Rxc7

The rook's startling accession to power continues unabated.

31 ... Rxc7 32 Bxc7 Ra1+ 33 Kh2 Ra7 34 Be5 Rf7 35 c7 Nd7 36 Qc2 Rf8



Black's confused defenders stumble about, disoriented. His pieces receive a memorandum from the bank, warning of a lack of funds in his account and imminent foreclosure on all properties. They find themselves surrounded by screaming creditors and conniving litigants.

Exercise (combination alert): Find one simple move and Black's position crumbles.

Answer: Overload.

37 c8Q! 1-0

Game 24

M.Botvinnik-G.Levenfish

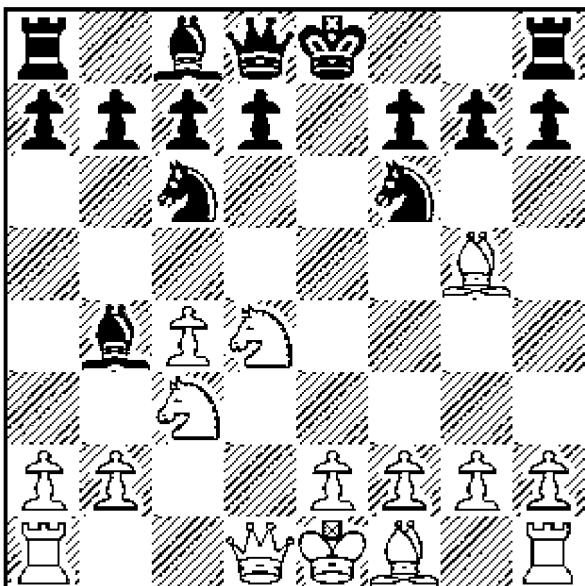
USSR Championship, Moscow 1940

English Opening

1 c4 e5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 Nf3 Nc6 4 d4!?

4 g3 and 4 e3 are much more commonly played today.

4 ... exd4 5 Nxd4 Bb4 6 Bg5



Question: Doesn't Botvinnik care that Black can do great harm to his structure by taking on c3?

Answer: Objectively, this line isn't so hot for White, but Botvinnik probably felt comfortable in this position, due to his advocacy of the White side of the Nimzo-Indian, where he commonly encouraged a bishop to chop on c3. Here matters are more structurally serious for White, since he soon takes on a set of doubled isolanis on the c-file.

6 ... h6 7 Bh4 Bxc3+ 8 bxc3

Question: Those broken pawns are no joking matter.

What is White's motivation behind allowing the damage?

Answer: White gets the bishop pair and fair piece activity. Should the game drift toward an ending, then White would probably regret his decision.

8 ... Ne5

I like this move more than allowing 8 ... d6 9 Nxc6 bxc6 10 c5!, I.Smirin-S.Tiviakov, Rostov on Don 1993.

9 e3

After 9 f4 Ng6 10 Bxf6 Qxf6 11 g3 Nf8 12 Bg2 Ne6 13 0-0 0-0 14 e4 d6 15 Qd2 Nc5 16 Rae1, White's greater central influence compensated for his inferior structure, V.Kramnik-A.Karpov, Las Palmas 1996.

9 ... Ng6

So as to break White's pin without weakening with ... g7-g5.

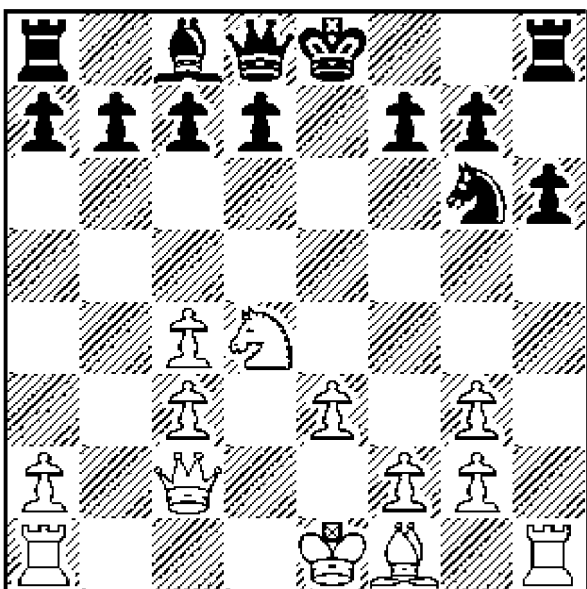
10 Bg3 Ne4!?

Often, that which we want and that which we actually need appear contradictory. Levenfish eliminates Botvinnik's bishop pair, when it may actually be better to refrain from this move and simply develop with 10 ... d6.

Question: Why?

Answer: Handing White an open h-file means that Black's king never rests easy castling kingside. Queenside castling remains tricky due to the open b-file.

11 Qc2 Nxg3 12 hxg3



White's extra space and attacking chances easily compensate for his damaged c-pawns.

12 ... d6 13 f4!

Grabbing more space and denying Black use of e5. Already we sense hostile overtones from Botvinnik's side.

Question: But didn't White just inflict a backward e-pawn upon himself?

Answer: The backwardness of the pawn is merely cosmetic, since Black is in no position to add pressure to it.

13 ... Qe7 14 Kf2

The correct home for the king, where it is quite secure and helps out defending e3.

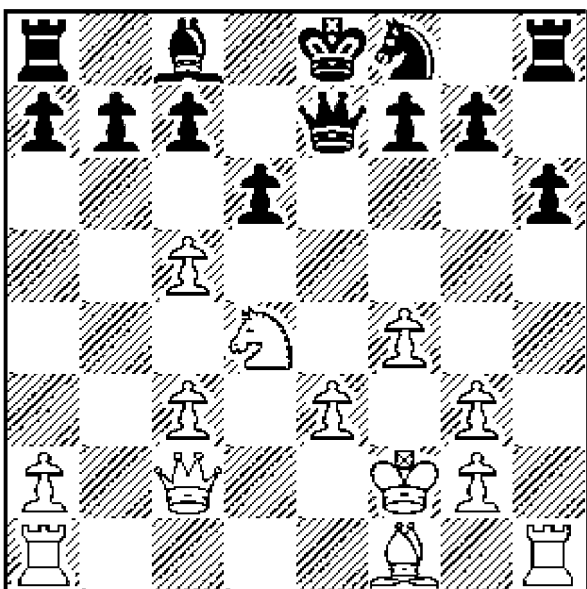
14 ... Nf8?!

After this move Black's mighty labours are rewarded with distressingly diminutive returns. The intention is probably to head for c5, but Black doesn't have time in an open position for such retrograde luxuries.

Question: What do you suggest?

Answer: I like my Everyman cousin IM Richard Palliser's treatment: 14 ... c5! (Black grabs much needed central influence) 15 Nf3 (perhaps White should try 15 Nf5, but he probably feared too many swaps with his inferior structure – Black may continue 15 ... Bxf5 16 Qxf5 Qe6! to allow queenside castling) 15 ... Bd7 16 Bd3 0-0-0! and suddenly I prefer Black's position, since his king looks safe enough and he retains structural benefits, V.Krutti-R.Palliser, York 2000.

15 c5!



Botvinnik's nimble mind rapidly adjusts to the changed circumstances, and from this moment, he seizes the initiative and never lets go.

15 ... dxc5?

An apology to the deity before commission of the crime hardly counts as an expiated sin. With his last move, Levenfish impregnates his position with more optimism than efficiency. He should balk at an offer of early confrontation when he clearly isn't ready for it. Unfortunately, we all desire that which we don't possess. Henry VIII romanced Mary Boleyn, when all along he desired sister Anne. How to reconcile the discrepancy of yearning with the harsh vicissitudes of ill fortune? Black soon regrets his decision and the vagaries of a fickle wind blow his position far off course.

Wretched as it looks, Black had to try 15 ... Nh7! (heading for e4 or g4) 16 cxd6 cxd6 17 Bb5+ Kf8 with an inferior but still playable game.

16 Bb5+! Nd7?

Black has to try 16 ... Bd7 (16 ... c6?? loses to 17 Nxc6) 17 Nf5 Qf6 18 Qe4+ Ne6 19 Bxd7+ Kxd7 20 Rhd1+ Kc8 21 Rab1 Rb8, when he still hangs on, albeit just barely.

17 Nf5 Qf6

The queen raises an eyebrow, with ample justification.

18 Rad1

Just like that, Black is helpless.

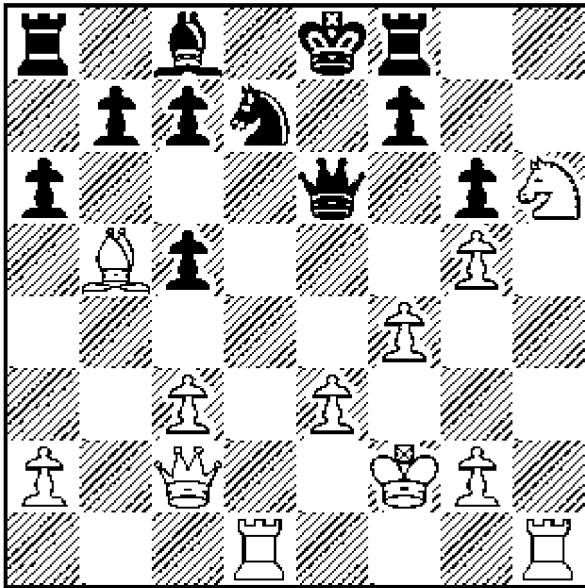
18 ... g6

18 ... a6?? loses immediately to 19 Qe4+ Kd8 20 Bxd7 Bxd7 21 Qxb7 Rc8 22 Rxd7+! and mates.

19 Nxh6 Rf8 20 g4!

The kingside brims with White's hostile intent.

20 ... a6 21 g5 Qe6



Exercise (planning): What is the best post for White's bishop? Come up with an attacking plan.

Answer: That which is beneficial to white's bishop is also good for his brother on h6, and vice versa. The bishop convenes a clandestine meeting with his h6 counterpart by taking control of g4, after which White threatens to swing his knight round to either to e5 or f6, while clearing the path for Rh7.

22 Be2! Nb6

Question: Why did Black move his defender of f6 away and allow White a devastating knight entry?

Answer: All true, but what else can Black try? He is in virtual zugzwang. For example, 22 ... a5 23 Ng4 and then what? Black is paralysed.

23 Ng4 Ke7 24 Nf6

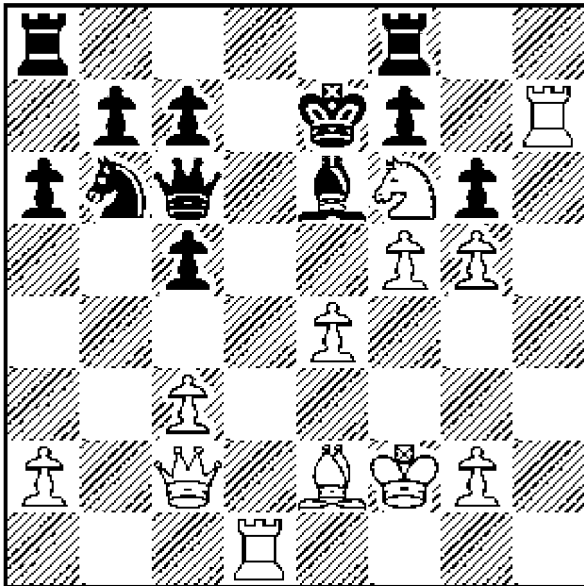
Black is unable to remain outside the breadth of the toxic knight's influence.

24 ... Qc6 25 Rh7

Threatening Qxg6.

25 ... Bf5 26 e4 Be6 27 f5 1-0

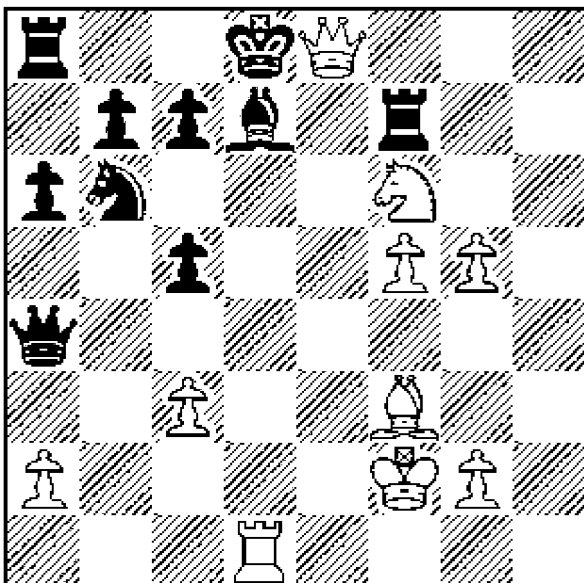
Oh, the wondrous possibilities. Botvinnik looks here, looks there, like a bedazzled eight-year-old at the county fair, not knowing which ride or what food to begin with. Black's game morphed into an allegory on the evils of sloth.



Question: I realize Black is in bad shape, but is this position really resignable?

Answer: *Houdini* assessment: + 6.15(!) – more than a rook up if converted into the realm of the material! In every variation Black simply gets pushed off the board.

One possible nightmarish future for Black: 27 f5 gxf5 28 exf5 Bd7 29 Bf3 Qa4 30 Qe2+ (the ruthless queen's eyes gaze coldly on those foolish enough to cross her) 30 ... Kd8 (the exhausted black king slumps over, limp as an old, worn-out pillow; he once couldn't conceive of a world without himself in it, and now must reconfigure his thoughts, and contemplate his own imminent non-existence) 31 Rxf7! and if 31 ... Rxf7 then 32 Qe8 is a brutal mate.



A complete annihilation of one of Botvinnik's key Russian rivals of the 1930s.

Game 25

P.Keres-M.Botvinnik

USSR Absolute Championship, Leningrad/Moscow 1941

Nimzo-Indian Defence

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 Qc2

Capablanca's variation.

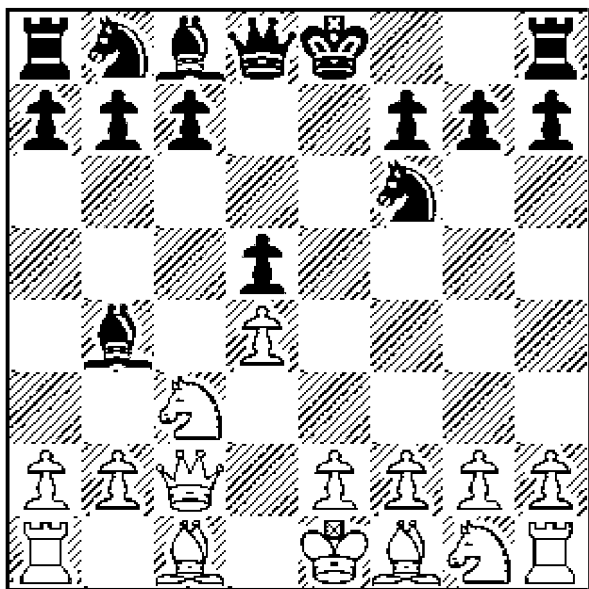
4 ... d5

4 ... 0-0 and 4 ... c5 are Black's main lines.

5 cxd5

5 a3 is also played here.

5 ... exd5



We reach a position akin to the Ragozin Variation of the Queen's Gambit Declined, one of Black's sharpest options, where he often sacrifices both structure and bishop pair to gain a lead in development and early initiative – the only difference being that White has played Qc2 here, instead of Nf3.

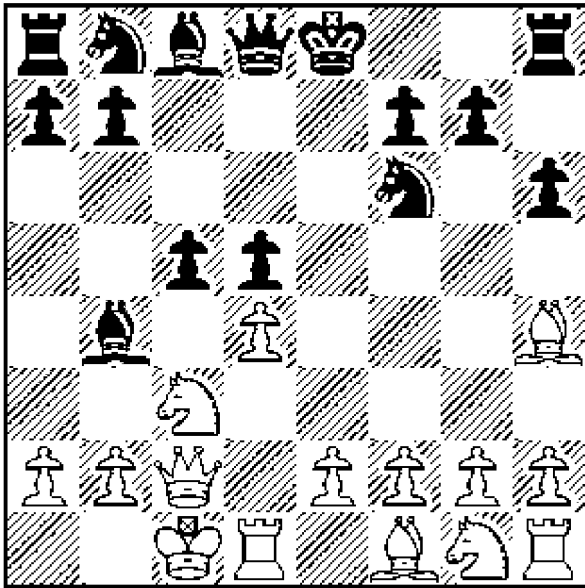
Botvinnik was fond of 5 ... Qxd5 throughout the 1930s. For example: 6 Nf3 (or 6 e3 c5 7 a3 Bxc3+ 8 bxc3 Nbd7 9 Nf3 b6 10 c4 Qd6 11 Bb2 Bb7 and Black has developed harmoniously and looks okay, despite White's bishop pair, M.Euwe-M.Botvinnik, Nottingham 1936) 6 ... c5 7 Bd2 Bxc3 8 Bxc3 cxd4 9 Nxd4 e5 10 Nf3 Nc6 11 Rd1 Qc5, and Black's superior development and greater central influence compensate for White's bishop pair, G.Levenfish-M.Botvinnik, Moscow/Leningrad (7th matchgame) 1937.

6 Bg5 h6 7 Bh4 c5

Question: It looks to me like Black tries to wrest the initiative in an unjustified manner. Am I correct?

Answer: It has always looked that way to me too, but the variation is sound and White must know what he is doing or face an early loss of initiative, as occurs in this game.

8 0-0-0?



The devil invariably offers unlimited power. Just make certain you read the fine print before signing any contracts. White's king suffers from a congenital impairment which leaves him no match for his healthy twin on e8. Usually I don't dole out question marks early on in older games, but this time Keres had it coming! This move is weak, even in the context of 1941. His theory of parallel evolution in separate solar systems doesn't apply in this instance to his own attack, which fails to materialize in this game. His somewhat outlandish decision is based upon the philosophy: that which is never strived for, never transpires.

Question: I fail to see the problem. What is so awful about Keres' idea of initiating opposite wing attacks?

Answer: If two princes of the realm vie for the throne by engaging in a civil war, then you had better not pick the pretender's side as an ally. Here we have a situation where Black is clearly faster, due to the soon-to-be open c-file, where White's king and queen huddle against the coming ... Rc8.

Question: If the move is as bad as you claim, then what was Keres' motivation behind it?

Answer: I conjecture: Keres understood that he was clearly Botvinnik's inferior strategically and may have felt that his best shot was to mix things up. The problem was that Keres (and many others, including myself in my simul game against Botvinnik!) underestimated Botvinnik's power tactically and with the initiative, which was at least equal to Keres' level, if not superior. Secondly, I believe Keres naively – like a person who tells his interviewer: "I would like the job, but I have absolutely no aptitude or work experience with it!" – hoped to get the better game by following in the footsteps of Mikenas-Botvinnik played a year previously (see the next note).

But here Keres learned a painful lesson: never ever repeat a line against Botvinnik, unless you are ready to face the wrath of his formidable home preparation. 8 dxc5, 8 Nf3 and 8 e3 are all superior options for White.

8 ... Bxc3!

Superior to 8 ... 0-0 9 dxc5 Bxc3 10 Qxc3 g5 11 Bg3 Ne4 12 Qa3 Be6 13 f3 Nxc3 14 hxg3 Qf6 15 e3 Rc8 16 Kb1, when White stood a shade better in V.Mikenas-M.Botvinnik, USSR Championship, Moscow 1940.

9 Qxc3 g5!

This kind of move is routine today, though it was considered a radical weakening back then.

Question: Why does Black get away with such a blatant weakening move?

Answer: For one simple reason: he owns, and will never relinquish, the initiative. White simply isn't given the time to exploit Black's structural weaknesses.

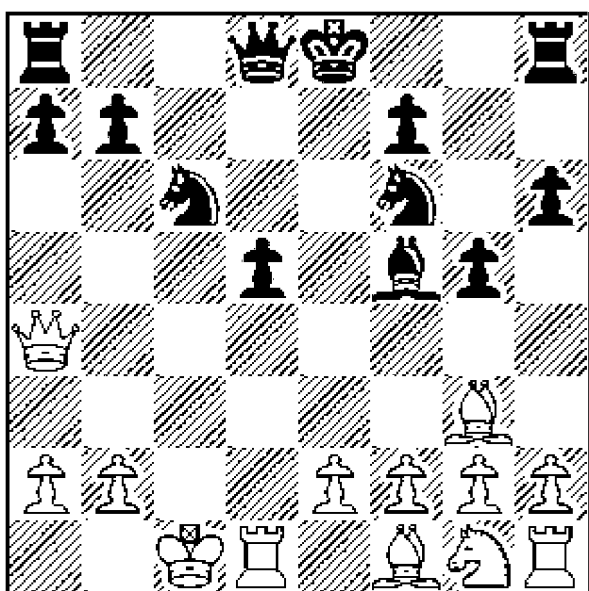
10 Bg3

The fuming bishop clearly deems Black's last move an impertinence.

10 ... cxd4!

A theoretical novelty for the time. Black takes on d4 before White can play Nf3 or e2-e3 and recapture on d4 with knight or pawn. Botvinnik's move is a clear improvement over 10 ... Ne4, as played in S.Belavenets-V.Simagin, Moscow 1941.

11 Qxd4 Nc6 12 Qa4 Bf5!



Dual purpose:

1. Cutting off a b1 escape route for White's king, who now lounges in the centre.
2. Black clears c8 for a rook.

13 e3

If Botvinnik had a character flaw, it was that he loved to trash his rivals in his annotations: "The deficiencies of Keres' character tell. He was unable to endure the stoically unpleasant surprise, and he misses an obligatory opportunity to complicate the play: 13 f3 Qb6 14 e4 dxe4 15 Kb1, moving his king away from the threats of the enemy pieces." However, in Kasparov's opinion, this position is completely hopeless for White. *Houdini* backs him up assessing it at a dismal -5.36! So perhaps Botvinnik owes Keres (and Fischer too!) an apology!

13 ... Rc8 14 Bd3?!

A half-fulfilled promise is a half-broken one as well. Keres hopes to cleanse his kingdom of an evil influence but only manages to make matters worse. Now White's h1-rook and g1-knight clearly suffer an aversion to hard work and are content to remain in stasis, unpromoted. Then again White's game was beyond saving, even after the superior 14 Ne2 0-0 15 Nc3 Ne4 16 Nxe4 Bxe4, and now White must play the god-awful 17 Kd2, a move no chess player wants to make when facing the strongest player in the world across the board!

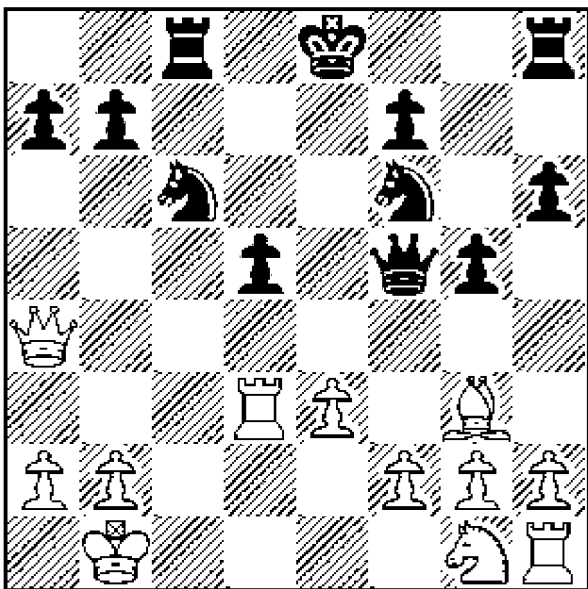
14 ... Qd7!

Black breaks the pin on c6 and threatens ... Nb4+. Both queens arrive at the party wearing the same blue dress – a dress which both believe fails to suit the other in the least.

15 Kb1 Bxd3+ 16 Rxd3

This guy lumbers up the board with cumbersome, mastodonic apathy.

16 ... Qf5!



Botvinnik embroiders a not-so-delicate attacking pattern. Now the incongruous parts converge into a harmonious whole. We see the second deadly point behind 14 ... Qd7!. White is forced into a death pin.

17 e4

No choice, since 17 Qb3 Nb4 is crushing.

17 ... Nxe4 18 Ka1

The white king's haggard face feels disproportionate to his actual years.

18 ... 0-0

Threatening ... Nc5.

19 Rd1

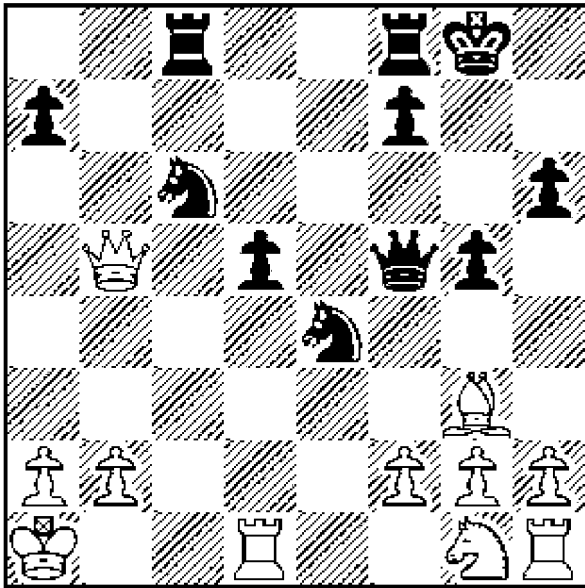
Question: Why not 19 Rf3 - ?

Answer: White's back rank is vulnerable and Black responds with the crushing shot 19 ... Nd4!, winning on the spot.

19 ... b5!

The general's philosophy: kill first; negotiate later.

20 Qxb5



White's queen raises eyebrows in sharp, silent rebuke, only to be hit with a devastating counter next move when she turns her back.

Exercise (combination alert): Find a path which finishes White's resistance.

Answer: Back rank/fork/overload. Black's knight reaches out and smites, like the Old Testament hand of God to the disobedient and the wicked.

20 ... Nd4! 21 Qd3 Nc2+ 22 Kb1

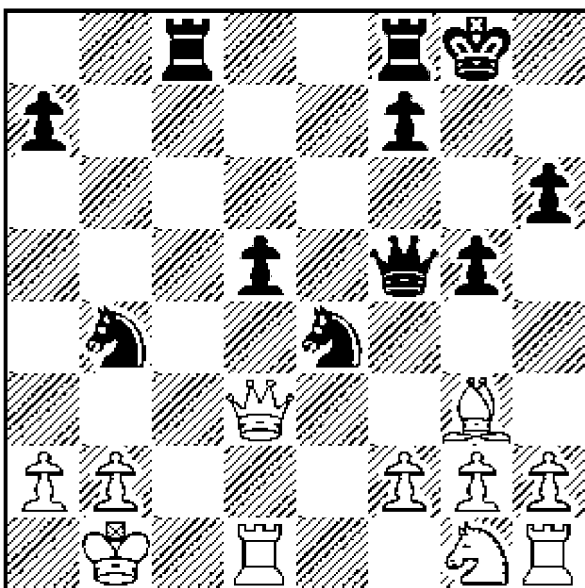
A prisoner harbours two primal thoughts:

1. How to avoid discomfort.

2. How to escape.

In this instance, Keres' king achieves neither.

22 ... Nb4! 0-1



If White's queen moves, Black unleashes a horrific discovered check.

How does one go about defeating a leading contender for the world chess crown in 22 moves and with the black pieces? Somehow, Botvinnik managed to pull it off, making Keres look like a bumbling amateur in the process. Botvinnik couldn't resist stating the obvious: "White's kingside pieces took no part in the game." I'm pretty sure Keres was well aware of this unhappy fact!

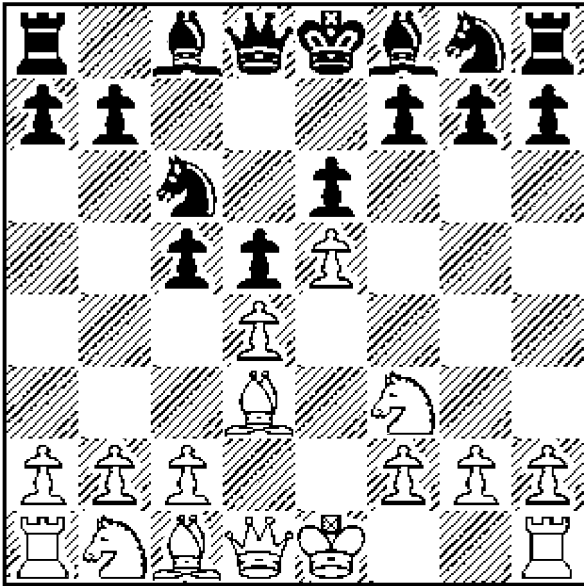
1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 Nf3

Question: Why didn't White back up his centre with 4 c3 - ?

Answer: Bondarevsky tries a Nimzowitsch idea, where he temporarily sacs his d4-pawn. Later on White plays Nbd2 and Nb3, hoping to regain his pawn with a blockading piece on d4. I think it's a sub-par line because Black eventually erodes away White's centre entirely – although, having looked at the database stats, White seems to do okay with it, I suspect, due to its surprise value.

4 ... Nc6 5 Bd3

5 c3 transposes to the main line.



5 ... cxd4

Question: Why not gain a tempo with 5 ... c4 - ?

Answer: Because Black gives up too much for a mere tempo. By playing ... c5-c4, Black releases the tension on d4, allowing White's centre to remain unchallenged – after which White has the leisure to use his space and central influence to build up an attack.

6 0-0 Bc5 7 a3

If Black underestimates the danger he/she/it can easily walk into disaster, as in this game: 7 Re1 Nge7 8 Nbd2 0-0?? 9 Bxh7+! (the bishop piously raises his eyes heavenward and sacrifices himself on h7) 9 ... Kxh7 10 Ng5+ Kg6 11 Qg4 and White had a winning attack, R.Dzindzichashvili-Comp Fritz, New York (blitz match) 1991.

7 ... Nge7 8 Nbd2 Ng6

Having undermined the e5-pawn's support, Black now pressures the head of the chain.

9 Nb3

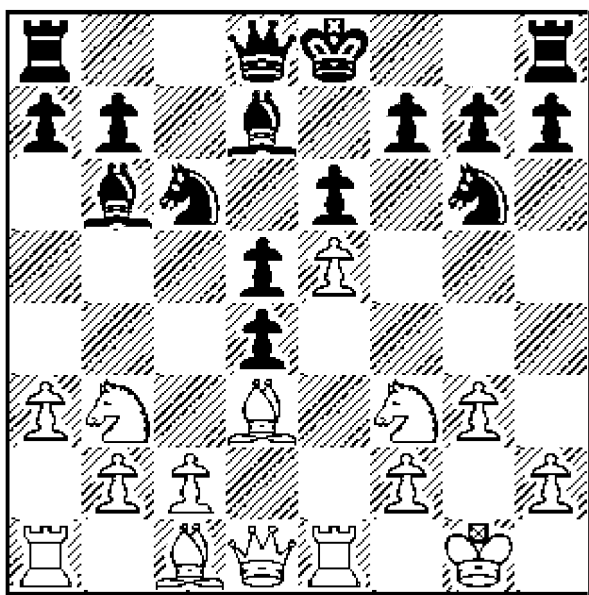
M.Crosa Coll-Lui.Gonzalez, Mendoza 2004, saw 9 Re1 f6 10 Nb3 Bb6 11 Bxg6+ hxg6 12 Qd3 Kf7 13 Bf4 g5 14 Bg3, when I have grave doubts about White's

compensation after 14 ... g4 15 Nfxd4 Nxe5 16 Qe2 (16 Bxe5? fxe5 17 Rxe5 Bc7 is even worse) 16 ... Bc7 17 Rad1.

Question: Isn't 9 b4 White's most logical move here?

Answer: Your move seizes queenside space with tempo and leaves open possibilities of Bb2 if necessary. Curiously, I don't see a single game with this move in the database. So perhaps the problem lies in the line 9 ... Bb6 10 Re1 Qc7, after which White has trouble defending his e-pawn. He can either sac it, which looks fishy, or he can play 11 Bxg6 hxg6 12 Nb3, when he reaches a position similar to what Bondarevsky gets in the game, except that it isn't clear if the inclusion of b2-b4 actually helps White.

9 ... Bb6 10 Re1 Bd7 11 g3



Question: What is the point of this move?

Answer: Dual purpose:

1. White intends h2-h4-h5, chasing away the g6-knight, but Botvinnik simply doesn't give Bondarevsky the time.

2. White prevents all future ... Nh4, or even ... Qh4, tricks.

Instead, L.Maltsev-J.Bai, World Junior Championships, Kemer 2009, saw 11 Bxg6 hxg6 12 Bf4 (12 Nbxd4?? Nxd4 13 Nxd4 Qh4 wins, due to simultaneous attacks on h2 and d4 – and f2, should White retreat his knight to f3) 12 ... Rc8 13 Qd3 a5! 14 Rac1 a4, and now White fell for the same trap with 15 Nbxd4?? Nxd4 16 Nxd4 Qh4! and was busted, having too many loose points in his position.

11 ... f6

A direct challenge to the head of the chain.

12 Bxg6+

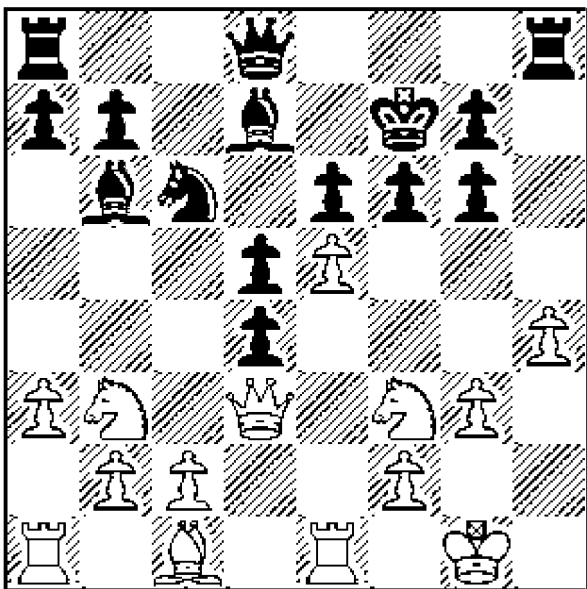
12 exf6?! Qxf6 would simply give Black an automatic attack down the f-file.

12 ... hxg6 13 Qd3

Question: Why does White settle for a truncated version of his original desire when he can simply regain the lost pawn with 13 Nbxd4 - ?

Answer: This may be White's best bet, though I still like Black with his bishop pair and open h-file.

13 ... Kf7 14 h4



Exercise (planning): White plans Bf4 and then the leisurely recapture of his lost d4-pawn. How did Botvinnik completely cross him up and disrupt this plan?

Warning: This one is unbelievably difficult to solve. If you find this idea you are a GM or will be one soon!

Answer: The sorceress traces strange patterns with her forefinger in the air, which begin to swirl with power. The queen, graceful and supple, glides about on the contours of the back rank to enter the attack. Botvinnik embarks upon a quixotic – one may argue unreasonable – idea. His plan, opaque as frosted glass, comes across as artificial, yet it works.

14 ... Qg8!!

Question: What on earth?

Answer: A move which leaves an indelible imprint upon our minds. I realize the move looks incomprehensible, designed to transport who-knows-what-piece-to-who-knows-where? The idea is actually quite straightforward: ... Qh7, followed by ... g6-g5! which pries open White's king, even though it may soon be an ending.

15 Bd2

Question: Why did White back off from his Bf4 plan?

Answer: If 15 Bf4 Qh7 16 Nbx d4?, then Black strikes with 16 ... Nxd4 17 Nxd4 g5! 18 Qxh7 Rxh7 (two white pieces hang) 19 Be3 gxh4 and White drops a pawn.

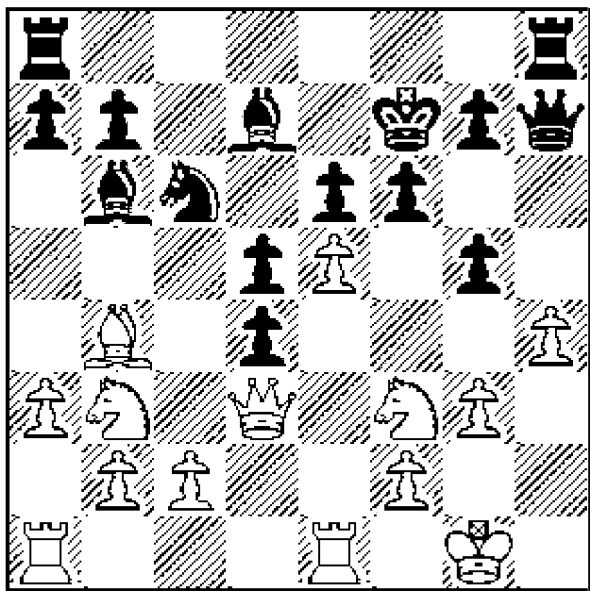
15 ... Qh7

15 ... Rh5! is also powerful, increasing pressure to e5 and thinking about adding major pieces behind the rook and then following with ... g6-g5.

16 Bb4

Intending to enter to d6.

16 ... g5!



The impulse to sac bubbles up. Now Botvinnik’s forces erupt into frenzied activity around Black’s king, even in the absence of queens on the board.

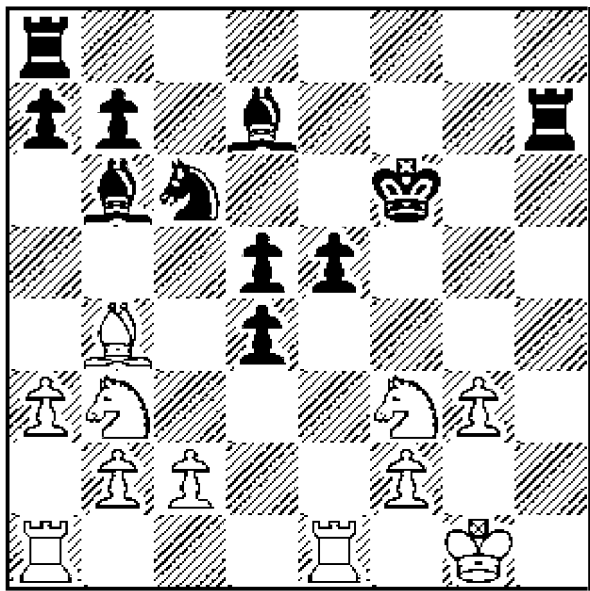
17 Qxh7 Rxh7 18 exf6

If 18 hxg5 fxe5 19 Nxe5+? then 19 ... Nxe5 20 Rxe5 Rah8 21 Kg2 d3! (threatening ... Rh2+) 22 Kf3 dxc2 23 Rc1 Ba4 and White is busted.

18 ... gxf6 19 hxg5 e5!

Just look at Black’s rolling centre!

20 gxf6 Kxf6



Question: Does Black have enough compensation?

Answer: For the pawn, Black received: 1. An open h-file and serious threats to White’s king. In fact, he even has access to an open g-file, which he later uses to advantage as well.

2. A powerful, centre, just itching to surge.
3. The bishop pair in an open position.
4. An explosion of light square activity from his bishop, now unchained and unopposed.
5. Black's king, unlike his cowering counterpart, participates in the fight, bolstering the centre. This means that Black essentially has a bonus, three extra fighting units on his side.

Conclusion: Discounting a miracle, the odds of White's survival are negligible.

21 Bd6 Re8

Cautious, but there is no need for it. He should plough ahead with 21 ... e4! 22 Nh4 Rg8 23 Kf1 Ne5! 24 Bxe5+ Kxe5 25 Nf3+ Kd6 26 Nfxd4 Bg4! 27 Kg2 Rgh8, when White is helpless to deal with the coming rook invasion, since 28 Rh1 is met by 28 ... Bf3+, winning on the spot.

22 Nh4

This loses – as do all other tries.

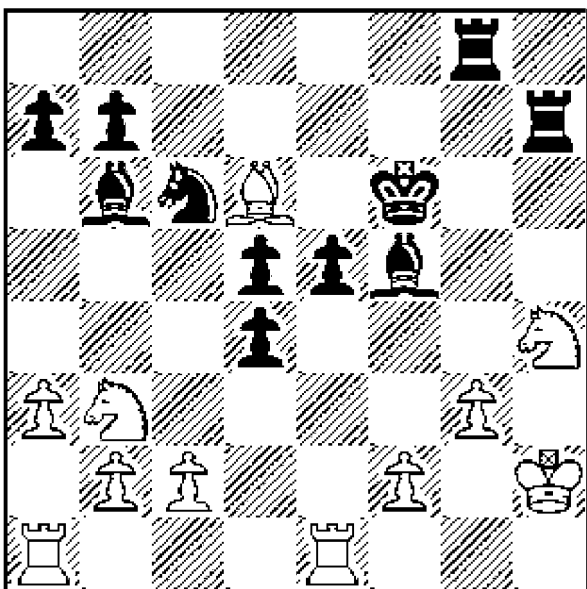
22 ... Rg8

Threatening a cheapo on h4.

23 Kh2

The king hides in the corner, his face a lambent picture of terror. After 23 Nf3 d3! Black threatens both c2 and ... Rxc3+.

23 ... Bf5!



Another attacker brought into the mix. Now ... d4-d3! becomes a major threat.

24 Re2

Covering c2. The rook makes an impassioned plea for calm and co-operation to his panic-stricken brethren, who refuse either to listen, stay calm or co-operate. He soon learns a harsh lesson: a single dissenting voice is no match for an authoritarian regime.

24 ... d3! 25 Rd2

The equivalent of resignation, though 25 cxd3 Bxd3 26 Rd2 Bc4 27 Nc1 (27 Nc5

Rd8 wins) 27 ... Nd4 is crushing anyway.

25 ... dxc2 26 f4

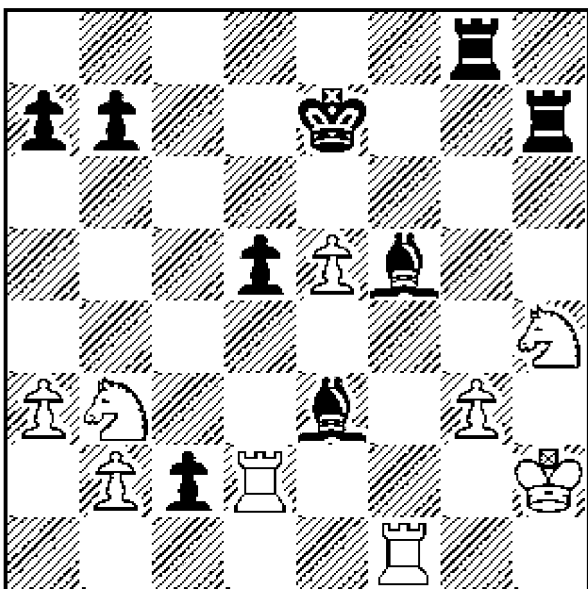
26 Rh1 Ke6 27 Bc5 Bd8! wins. Bondarevsky makes a desperate attempt to mix it up, but fails to confuse his opponent.

26 ... Be3!

Yet another member of the attack force begins to haunt the vicinity of White's king.

27 Bxe5+ Nxe5 28 fxe5+ Ke7! 29 Rf1

Instead, 29 Rg2 is met by 29 ... Be4, while 29 Rxd5 Rxh4+! 30 gxh4 Bf4+ 31 Kh1 Be4 is mate.



The ruling authority collapses and the makeshift interim government is clearly inadequate to deal with the baleful threats. Bondarevsky holds on by the most tenuous wisp of threads, but now it finally snaps.

Exercise (combination alert): Black can simply capture the rook on d2, but there is a more deadly and more elegant finish in the position. How can we expedite the process and force White's immediate resignation?

Answer: 29 ... c1Q! 0-1

Overload/deflection. To play on constitutes an exercise in futility: 30 Rxc1 (the absence of White's f1-rook allows a mating combination; 30 Nxc1 Bxd2 31 Rxf5 Bxc2 wins a whole rook) 30 ... Rxh4+! (forensic analysis of blood spatter patterns indicate that the killer is left-handed) 31 gxh4 Bf4+ 32 Kh1 Be4+ and White's king stares with incredulity at the insolence of the upstart on e4. Soon, he breathes his last, his face set in the severity of the deceased.

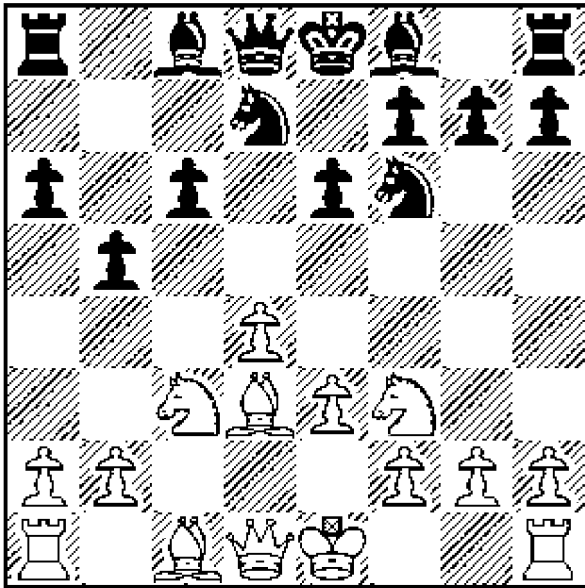
Game 27

M.Botvinnik-M.Euwe

World Championship Tournament, The Hague/Moscow 1948

Semi-Slav Defence

1 d4 d5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 c4 e6 4 Nc3 c6 5 e3 Nbd7 6 Bd3 dxc4 7 Bxc4 b5 8 Bd3 a6



What once was new is now old. The combatants vie for control in what is currently a fashionable line of the Semi-Slav.

9 e4 c5 10 e5

10 d5 is White's major option in the position.

10 ... cxd4 11 Nxb5

The knight sells himself as dearly as possible before White captures f6.

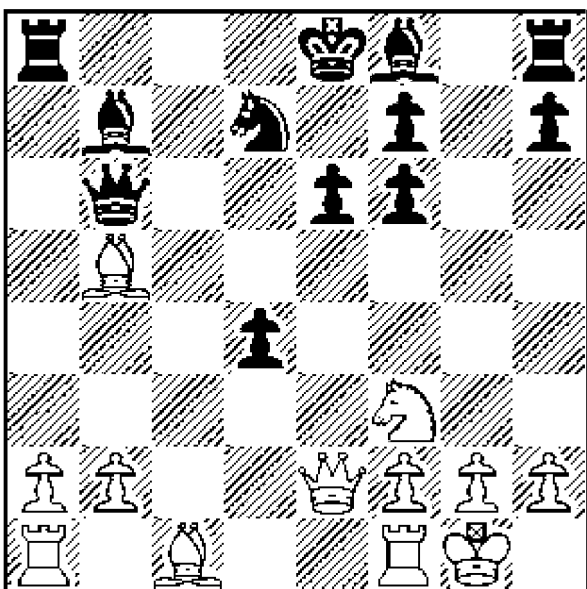
11 ... axb5

Considered superior to 11 ... Nxe5 12 Nxe5 axb5 13 Bxb5+ Bd7 14 Nxd7 Qa5+ 15 Bd2 Qxb5 16 Nxf8 – White tends to score well in this position after either recapture on f8.

12 exf6 Qb6

Botvinnik and Euwe, two of the giants of opening theory of their time, agree to enter the wildest recesses of an already bewildering variation, ignoring its terrors or privations.

The modern move order is 12 ... gxf6 – it is generally believed that this position cost Kramnik his world champion title. He suffered two stinging losses, mainly due to Anand's superior opening prep, in their 2008 match. One cannot lose two games with the white pieces and then salvage a title match – 13 0-0 Qb6 14 Qe2 Bb7!? 15 Bxb5.



Question: Is the sac of b5 sound?

Answer: Opinions naturally differ widely, even among very strong players. My feeling is absolute, incontrovertible evidence isn't always necessary when deciding to embark on such a course. It just looks right. For example: a) 15 ... Bd6 16 Rd1 Rg8 17 g3 Rg4!? with dizzying complications. V.Kramnik-V.Anand, World Championship (3rd matchgame), Bonn 2008.

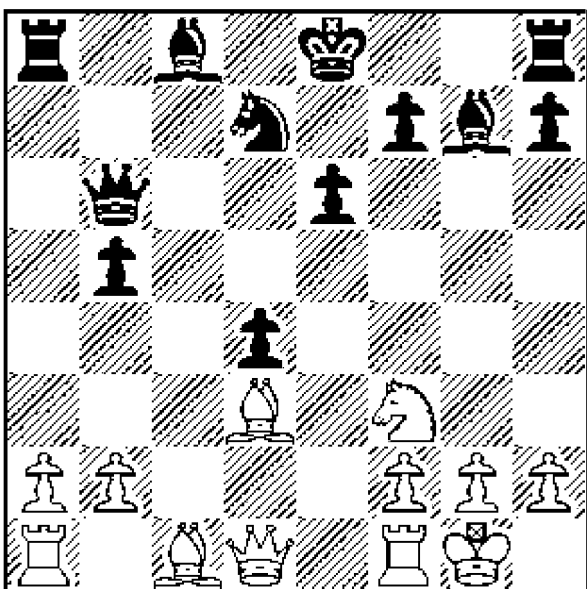
b) 15 ... Rg8 16 Bf4 Bd6 17 Bg3 f5 18 Rfc1 f4 19 Bh4 Be7 20 a4 Bxh4 21 Nxh4 Ke7 and your guess is as good as mine here, V.Kramnik-V.Anand, World Championship (5th matchgame), Bonn 2008.

13 fxg7

Question: This helps Black develop. Can White sac to increase his lead in development with 13 0-0 - ?

Answer: That is quite possible, when play would likely transpose to the Kramnik-Anand games above after 13 ... gxf6 14 Qe2.

13 ... Bxg7 14 0-0



14 ... Nc5!?

Risky, but probably playable if Black follows through correctly.

Question: Why? It is played in accordance to principle: *Bishops are more valuable than knights in an open position.*

Answer: True enough, yet Black goes after the bishop pair at the cost of time, in violation of the spirit of the precept he intended to follow. From my experience, a lead in development means more than bishop pair in open games. Moreover, Black relinquishes control over the key e5-square, a factor Botvinnik was later able to exploit. 14 ... Bb7 and 14 ... 0-0 are common and, in my opinion, superior alternatives.

15 Bf4

15 Re1 may be slightly more accurate, retaining options for White's dark-squared bishop.

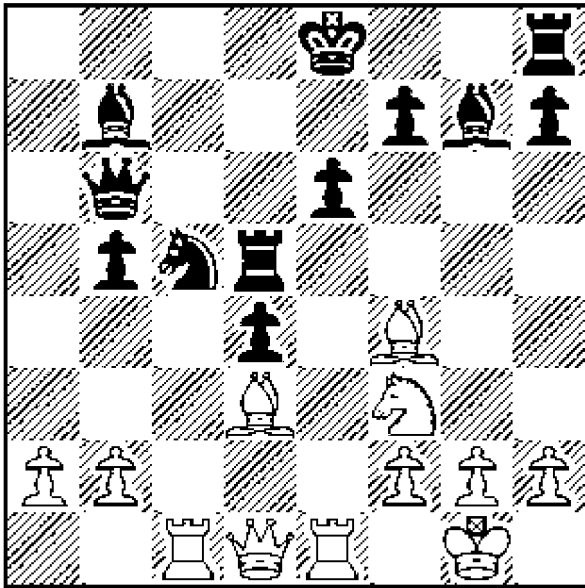
15 ... Bb7 16 Re1 Rd8?!

This move looks okay, but be warned: the stats show a 9% success rate for Black!

Question: What do you suggest instead?

Answer: I like Black's treatment in the following game: 16 ... Nxd3! 17 Qxd3 Bxf3! (relinquishing the bishop pair but, in doing so, diluting White's kingside attacking chances) 18 Qxf3 0-0 19 Qg3 Kh8, when Black has a central pawn majority and a safe (for now) king, E.Bogoljubow-P.F.Schmidt, Salzburg 1943.

17 Rc1 Rd5



Euwe fights for control over e5, but Botvinnik still owns the square.

Exercise (planning): Come up with a plan to strengthen White's position.

Answer: Eliminate Black's best piece.

18 Be5! Bxe5?

After this move Black's position degenerates quickly. *Houdini* suggests the rather desperate-looking exchange sac 18 ... Rg8!! (an anomalous move which only a computer could find) 19 Bxh7 Bxe5! 20 Bxg8 Bf4!, after which it looks like he gets reasonable play for the exchange.

19 Rxe5 Rxe5?!

Question: Why did Euwe allow the white knight a free jump into e5?

Answer: It doesn't look right to me either. Euwe probably didn't want to drop a pawn in the line 19 ... Ke7 20 Rxd5 Bxd5 21 Nxd4, but at least Black remains active after 21 ... Rg8.

20 Nxe5

Threatening Qh5.

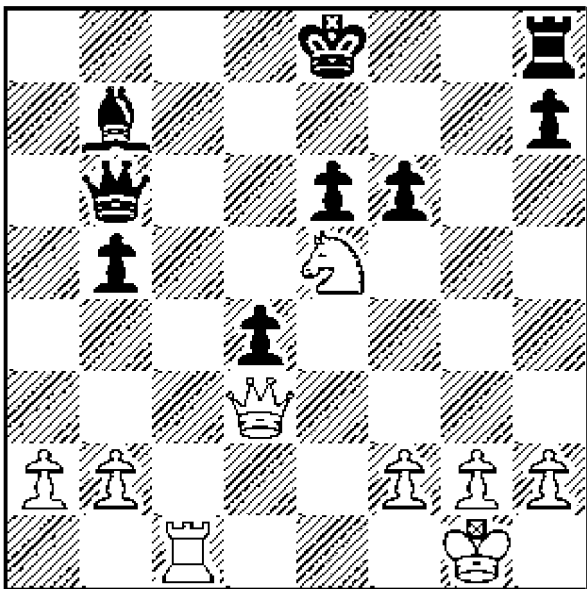
20 ... Nxd3

Black, fearing for his king's safety, understandably feels an urgency to swap down. Instead:

a) 20 ... Rg8 21 Bf1! (threatening both the d4-pawn and Qh5) 21 ... Nd7 22 Qh5 Nxe5 23 Qxe5 Ba6 24 a4! is hopeless for Black as well.

b) 20 ... h5 21 b4! Nxd3 22 Qxd3 Rg8 23 Qh7! and if 23 ... Rxc2+? (an unwise incursion since White's king is amply fortified with able defenders, whereas Black's isn't so lucky) 24 Kf1, when there is no good way to cover f7.

21 Qxd3 f6



Even in the most terrifying natural disasters, there is always a handful of recalcitrant citizenry who refuse to leave their homes. Black's king is destined to remain in the centre.

Exercise (planning/combination alert): One glance tells us that Black's king experiences serious difficulties. How did Botvinnik manage to get at it?

Answer: Sac the knight in order to infiltrate at g7. The black king nervously mops his forehead with a handkerchief upon hearing that rumours begin to fly and proliferate about his inability to rule the kingdom. Meanwhile, White's queen brushes aside all petty, intervening functionaries and demands a private audience with Black's king.

22 Qg3!!

White's knight, to the exasperation of Euwe,, rejects the philosophy: after reaching the brink of a precipice, there is no other sane direction but reverse. And so he remains intransigent in his continued refusal to remove himself from e5.

22 ... fxe5

White's knight may be gone, yet somehow its presence is still felt, like the spectral death-shriek of a long-dead warrior. Black may as well accept, since if he refrains from capture, Black toils without pay.

In the year 1456, astronomers spotted what is now known as Halley's comet, seen streaking across the heavens. In those days the common belief was that comets were portents of ill tidings and the precursor to the fall of entire nations. So Pope Callixtus III saved the day. His solution: excommunicate the comet! I'm guessing Callixtus' action didn't bother the comet much, just as Euwe's chopping of the e5-knight didn't exactly worry Botvinnik.

23 Qg7 Rf8 24 Rc7!

The point. Black must hand over his queen to avoid immediate annihilation.

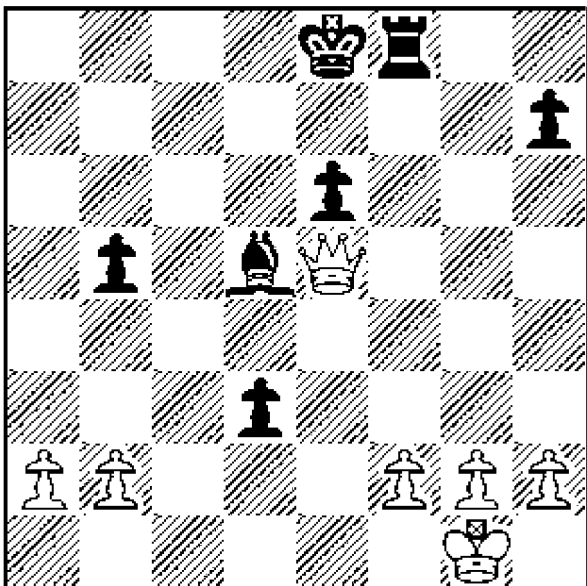
24 ... Qxc7

The disoriented queen sees only blurred shapes and muted colours dancing before her eyes.

25 Qxc7

Tears well up in the black king's swollen eyes at the sight of his now deceased queen.

25 ... Bd5 26 Qxe5 d3



The d-pawn is Euwe's final prayer. He hopes to lodge it deeply enough into enemy territory to force White to take perpetual check.

27 Qe3 Bc4 28 b3 Rf7!

Question: Why did Black hand over a piece?

Answer: Euwe continues to offer tenacious resistance in the face of insurmountable difficulties. 28 ... Bd5 29 Qxd3 is resignable for Black. The deeply entrenched d-pawn is Black's lone hope. When heavily down in material, the losing side has little to lose and much to gain in continuing the generosity to feed an idea, even one conceived in desperation's womb. Nevertheless, Euwe's clever idea is flawed by a single insurmountable obstacle: it doesn't work if White follows through correctly.

29 f3

White's king heads for d2, the key blockade square.

29 ... Rd7 30 Qd2

Most certainly not 30 bxc4?? d2, when White must take perpetual check with 31 Qxe6+.

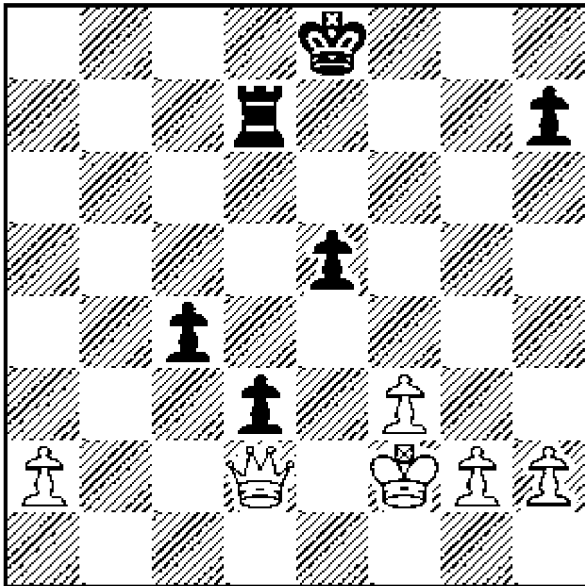
30 ... e5 31 bxc4!

Now he can take it.

31 ... bxc4

Black threatens to deflect the queen with his c-pawn next.

32 Kf2



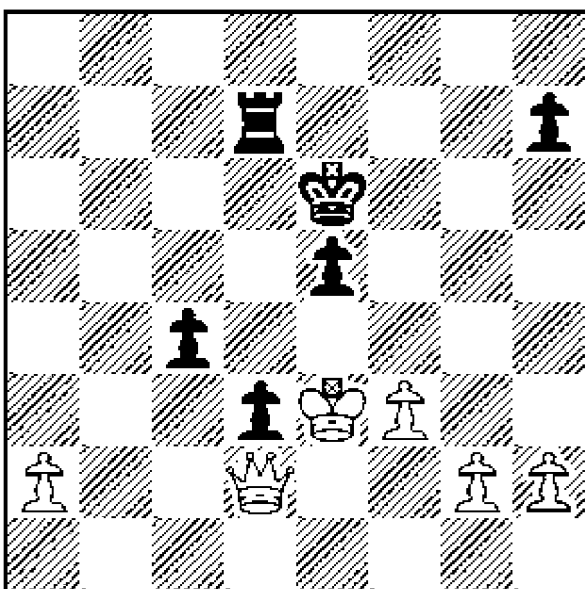
The reinforcement arrives, as cool rain to a wilting, thirsty plant. At first glance it appears as if Black's passers continue to hold the white king and queen hostage, but Botvinnik easily sees through the attempted subterfuge.

32 ... Kf7

Question: Can't Black draw with the deflection sac 32 ... c3 33 Qxc3 d2 - ? White's queen can't get back to d1, so he must now take a perpetual check, correct?

Answer: Incorrect. White simply returns the queen to win a trivially easy king and pawn ending with 34 Qc8+ Ke7 35 Qxd7+! Kxd7 36 Ke2, eliminating the renegade d-pawn.

33 Ke3 Ke6



Exercise (planning): How can White transform his considerable material advantage into the full point?

Answer: Transfer the king to the job of menial labour on d2 to free White's queen.

34 Qb4!

A move which effectively locks the gate on Black's further cheapo attempts.

34 ... Rc7

34 ... d2 fails to the simple 35 Qxd2.

35 Kd2

Black's passers have been constrained, leaving White's a-pawn free to surge to its queening square.

35 ... Rc6 36 a4 1-0

Game 28

V.Smyslov-M.Botvinnik

Training match, Moscow 1952

Dutch Defence

1 d4 f5

Botvinnik normally began his Dutch lines with the 1 ... e6 2 c4 f5 move order.

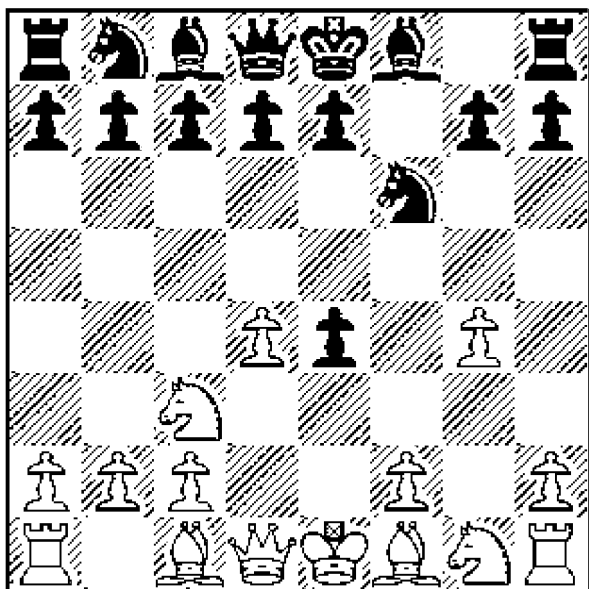
2 e4

The Staunton Gambit, greatly feared at club level but really not so hot for White, according to current theory. In reality, the line, much like a disparaging comment, only has the power to dent Black's ego, rather than inflict physical pain. Sometimes players who essay this shaky gambit emerge with a scalp, but often than not, the scalp ends up being from their own heads.

Question: Why is that?

Answer: In the age of computers, most gambits dwindle and die. The comps are just too savvy at grabbing and holding the extra material. All we have to do as humans is to spar with them, and watch and learn their techniques.

2 ... fxe4 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 g4!?



Reason and logic collapse when attempting to negotiate with an unpredictable and unreasonable foe. Played under the theory: sometimes the only way for a lesson to sink in is to teach with a pair of swinging fists.

4 ... h6!

Question: Doesn't this move dramatically weaken the light squares around Black's king?

Answer: It's a calculated risk, and probably a good one. His defensive armour may not look pretty, yet it proves capable of withstanding a fearsome blow without piercing.

Black loses a lot of time if he refuses to weaken. For example, after 4 ... d5 5 g5 Ng8 6 f3!, White gets an especially mean-spirited-looking version of the Blackmar-Diemer, as Black lags dangerously behind in development, S.Tartakower-J.Mieses, Baden-Baden 1925.

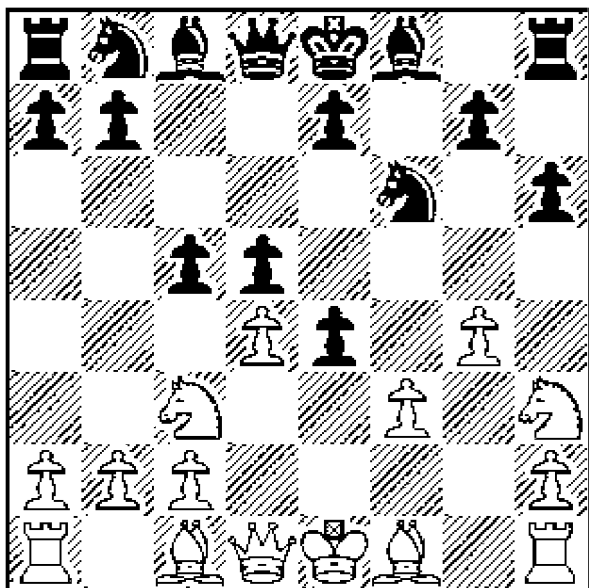
5 Nh3!?

A new move in the position which looks like a poor one, and has never been tried again, probably due to this game. Smyslov gathers the data but collates to a faulty inference. His move has the effect of adulterating an already waning initiative. Soon, Smyslov learns: if you risk confrontation, you must also be psychologically prepared for a rebuff.

Question: How should White continue?

Answer: He should chip away at e4, starting with 5 f3, though even then, I don't believe in White's compensation after 5 ... d5 6 h3 Nc6, D.Bronstein-M.Gurevich, Moscow 1987.

5 ... d5 6 f3 c5!?



Botvinnik ups the ante and complicates further, attempting to dismantle White's centre completely. I would go for the more thematic 6 ... Nc6, simply because it is a developing move. Black intends ... e7-e5, freeing his kingside pieces.

7 dxc5

7 g5 hxg5 8 Nxg5 Nc6 9 fxe4 cxd4 also looks rather sickly for White.

7 ... e5 8 fxe4 Bxg4

The simple 8 ... d4 looks quite promising for Black too.

9 Qd3

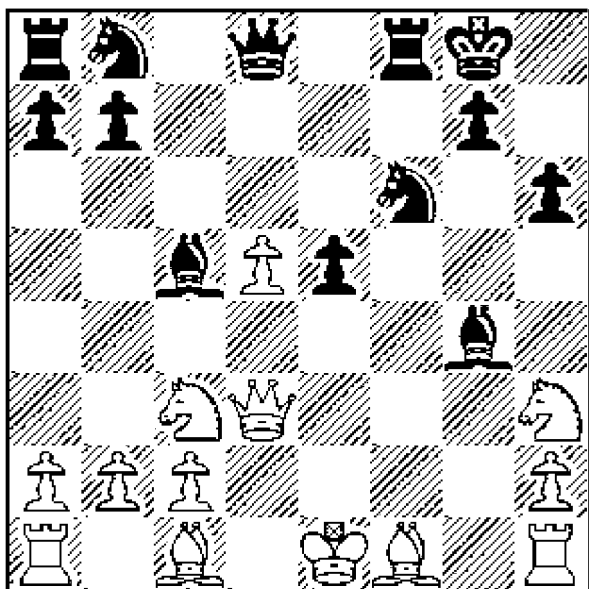
Black takes clear control after this move. Perhaps it was time to go psycho with a speculative piece sac, starting 9 Be2!? Bxh3 10 Bh5+ Kd7 11 exd5 (threatening Qf3) 11 ... Kc8 12 Be3. White may have some compensation here with those intimidating central pawns and a disrupted black king. Still, a piece is a piece.

9 ... Bxc5!

Moses would agree: “An eye for an eye. A tooth for a tooth.” Botvinnik refuses to get outsac’ed by Smyslov and keeps pace by promptly returning his extra material to increase his growing lead in development. Persuasion or coercive threats had little effect on Botvinnik who, from the very start, desired one thing only: the initiative. The archbishop on c5 dreams of one day becoming a cardinal, just as the cardinal on g4 dreams of becoming pope. Our good and evil are sometimes compartmentalized: knights of the middle ages conducted themselves with a strict chivalric code of honour, yet at the same time, they committed savage, murderous acts upon their enemies on the field of battle, burned crops and holy books, pillaged and murdered peasants who had the misfortune to live under the enemy’s domain.

In the same way, Botvinnik goes into kill mode, laying waste to all in his path. He seeks initiative not material, and isn’t sidetracked with bribery lines like 9 ... d4 10 Nd5 Nxd5 11 exd5 Qxd5 12 Qg6+ Kd8 13 Qxg4! Qxh1, when White’s light square grip, coupled with Black’s insecure king, offers some compensation for the exchange.

10 exd5 0-0



Question: How would you assess this position?

Answer: Advantage Botvinnik. Material is even but Black leads in development in a wide open position.

11 Be3

The piece sac 11 Bxh6 appears refuted by 11 ... gxh6 12 Qg6+ Kh8 13 Qxh6+ Nh7 14 Bd3 Rf7 and if 15 Rf1 Rxf1+ and if 16 Kxf1 Qf6+, when queens come off the board.

11 ... e4!

The e-pawn, which cannot be captured, allows Black an infiltration hook into f3 and acts as a caustic agent, slowly eroding White’s patience.

12 Qd2

Not 12 Nxe4?? Nxe4 13 Qxe4 Bf5 and White can resign.

12 ... Bxe3 13 Qxe3 Bf3 14 Rg1 Ng4! 15 Rxc4

There is no lengthy mourning period for a plague victim. The rook's corpse gets tossed unceremoniously into a lime-soaked ditch. No choice anyway, since ... Qh4+ was in the air.

15 ... Bxc4 16 Nf2 Bf3 17 Bh3!?

After recent depletions, White tries to make do with a Spartan attacking force, but there just is no attack to be found. Instead, Smyslov should probably see to the welfare and comfort of his king, starting with 17 Kd2.

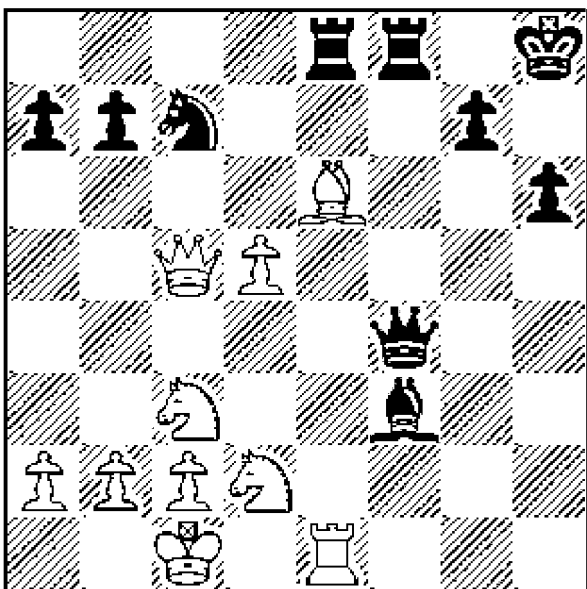
17 ... Qd6 18 Be6+ Kh8 19 Kd2 Na6 20 Re1 Nc7

Ejecting the intruder.

21 Nfxe4 Qxh2+ 22 Kc1 Rae8 23 Qc5 Qf4+

Or 23 ... Bxe4! 24 Nxe4 Qh4! (double attack) 25 Re2 Rf1+ 26 Kd2 Qf4+, winning.

24 Nd2



Exercise (combination alert): We arrive at a moment which requires divination and magic as much as rational analysis.

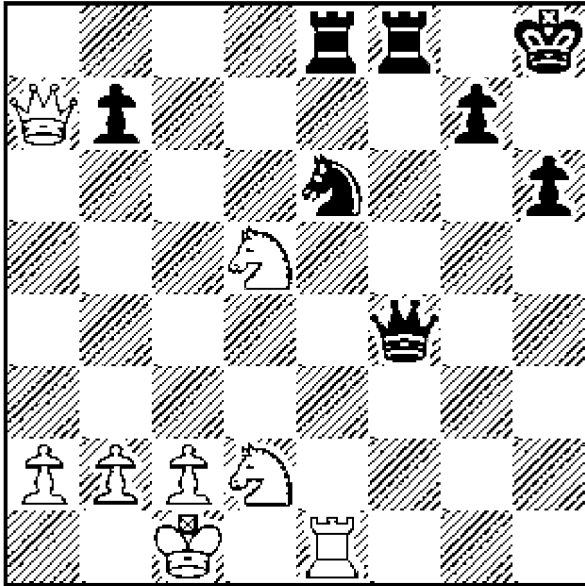
White's game teeters. How do we push him over?

Answer: Pin.

24 ... Bxd5! 25 Nxd5 Nxe6!

Leaves near the black witch on f4 rustle and swirl; the air around her begins to crackle with power.

26 Qxa7



Exercise (combination alert): The air is ripe with presentiment of imminent misfortune in the region of White's king. Black has access to tactics and two ways to force the win. Find one of them.

Answer: Back rank.

26 ... Nc7!

"J'adoube," announces the emboldened knight, who operates under the aegis of his rook and queen's authority. Black's hanging queen isn't really hanging at all.

Answer #2: Black has a secondary back rank trick with 26 ... Nd4! and White collapses.

27 Rxe8 Rxe8! 0-1

Due to 28 Nxf4 Re1 mate. White's king lays down the burden of this life as his spirit moves on to the next.

Game 29

T.V.Petrosian-M.Botvinnik

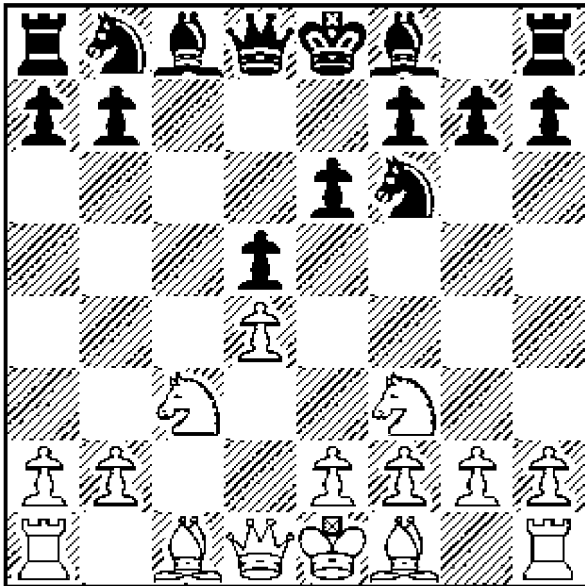
Training match, Moscow 1952

Semi-Slav Defence

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 d5 4 Nc3 c6 5 cxd5

Petrosian prefers to clarify the position, rather than challenge Botvinnik in a theoretical showdown with 5 Bg5 or 5 e3.

5 ... cxd5

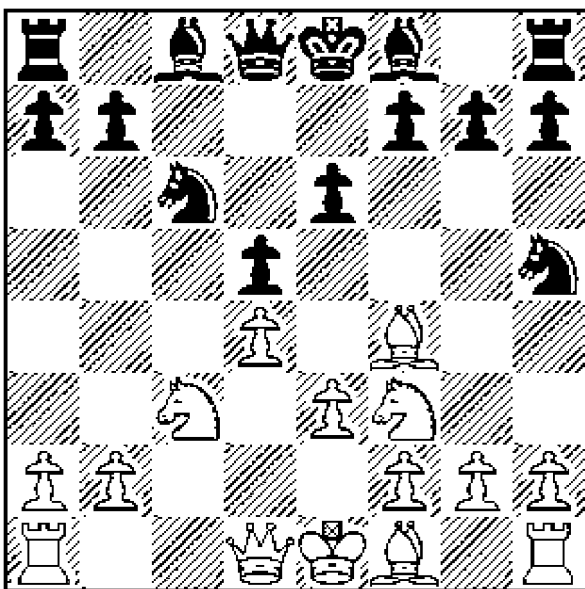


Transposing to the Exchange Slav, a virtually unlosable position for White – but as Petrosian discovers in this game, there are exceptions to every rule. Instead, 5 ... exd5 leads to the Exchange Variation of the Queen's Gambit Declined, albeit a less testing version, since White has already committed a knight to f3.

Question: What difference does that make?

Answer: The early f3-knight deployment cuts out set-ups like e2-e3, Bd3, Nge2, f2-f3 and then later e3-e4, which is generally considered one of White's more dangerous formations in QGD Exchange lines.

6 Bf4 Nc6 7 e3 Nh5!?



Dreev's favourite line, perhaps Black's most combative and also most perilous course. He attempts to chase down the f4-bishop and grab the bishop pair, but at the heavy cost of weakening and risking a lag in his own development. A more sedate developing set-up like 7 ... Be7 8 Rc1 0-0 9 Bd3 Bd7 10 0-0 Rc8 11 Ne5, as in Wang Hao-V.Malakhov, China vs. Russia match, Ningbo 2010, would suit the tranquil Petrosian just fine.

8 Bg5 Qb6 9 a3

9 Bb5 is White's main option; *e.g.* 9 ... Bd7 10 0-0 h6 11 Bh4 Bd6! (11 ... g5?! 12 Bxc6 Bxc6 13 Ne5 Ng7 14 Bg3, V.Bhat-J.Becerra Rivero, US Team Championship 2005, is dangerous for Black who cannot grab on b2; *e.g.* 14 ... Qxb2? 15 Nxc6 bxc6 16 Qa4! is awful) 12 Nd2 Nf6 13 Nb3 Ne4!? 14 Nxe4 dxe4 15 Be2 Ne7! 16 Bg3 Bxg3 17 hxg3 Ba4 and Black stood at least equal, V.Milov-A.Dreev, Internet (blitz) 2004.

9 ... h6

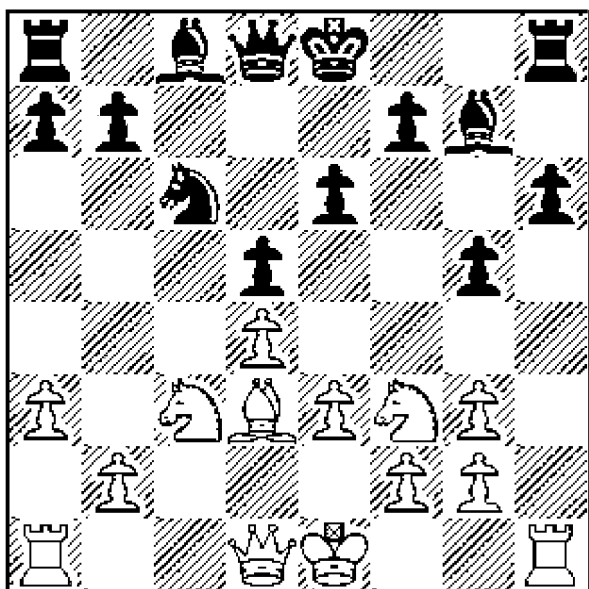
After 9 ... Qxb2?? the genie's boon proves illusory and loses on the spot to 10 Na4, when Black's queen breaks down into a hiccupping sob.

10 Bh4 g5 11 Bg3

Question: Why not toss in 11 Ne5 - ?

Answer: In some lines b2 is tactically vulnerable, especially ones where White's queen gets diverted from d1. For example, 11 ... Nxe5 12 dxe5 Bd7 13 Na4 (after 13 Qxh5?? Qxb2, White has too many pieces hanging simultaneously) 13 ... Qa5+ 14 Nc3 gxh4 15 Qxh5 Rc8, when Black enjoys the bishop pair, development lead and initiative.

11 ... Nxg3 12 hxg3 Bg7 13 Bd3 Qd8



The queen no longer serves a purpose on b6 and returns home. We reach a classic imbalance of slightly superior structure and open h-file versus Black's bishop pair and potential on the dark squares. For now, the position remains closed, so the bishop pair doesn't constitute much. But if the game later opens up, they grow meaningful.

14 Nh2?!

A head-scratching moment. Petrosian's pieces begin to behave irrationally, like characters in a dream who say and do the incomprehensible.

Question: What is White's idea behind this bizarre retreat?

Answer: I suspect that Petrosian, like your unfortunate writer, over-studied Nimzowitsch in a misspent youth and hyper-finesses in a position where he should be making simple developing moves. Petrosian may have planned Qh5, followed by Ng4, when his idea works well. But with his contortion, he pays too high a price in decentralizing a knight, sending it on to a mission to nowhere. What we see here is the positional player's disease, with which your writer has also been afflicted his entire life: an oblivious underestimation of a position's dynamic potential. Botvinnik, who suffered no such illness, soon began a vigorous exploitation of Petrosian's eccentricity.

I.Morovic Fernandez-A.Dreev, Moscow 2010, continued far more naturally: 14 Rc1 Bd7 15 Nd2!? (White stalls, nervous about castling and walking into some sort of ... h6-h5-h4 attack) 15 ... e5! (a good reaction to White's last move – Black opens the position for his bishop pair) 16 dxe5 Nxe5, and now 17 Nf3 again would leave the position dynamically even.

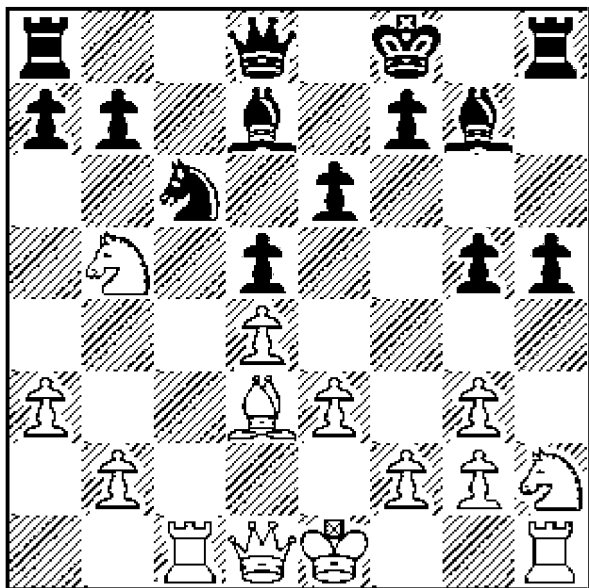
14 ... h5!

Botvinnik alertly prevents Qh5.

15 Rc1 Bd7 16 Nb5!?

Yet another eccentricity and yet another mission to nowhere. As is White's custom in this game, he is a bit too keen to weird it up. Petrosian, lulled by the rigidity of the position, incorrectly believed this fact gave him license to manoeuvre to his heart's content. It was probably high time to apologize, lose face, concede that his previous idea was weak, and play 16 Nf3.

16 ... Kf8!



Sidestepping the vulgar cheapo on d6.

Question: But at the cost of losing castling rights?

Answer: After playing ... h6-h5, Black never intended to castle kingside, since his rook now belongs on the h-file. Here f8 is a safe haven for Black's king – in fact, far safer than castling.

17 Nf1?!

The “to each his own” philosophy has its limits, and here Petrosian takes personal self-expression a bit too far. The knight sighs, reconciling himself to his new, demoted post. To a classical player, Petrosian's hyper-refined finesses and odd strategic gesticulations may look incomprehensible. White's knights, oblivious to danger, caper about like children at play at a picnic. White's dilemma: continue even further down an obviously incorrect path, or submit to a humiliating reversal of his previous efforts? Petrosian opts for the former, indulging in a further contortion to threaten h5, but he forgets that positions fraught with tension are not conducive to such leisurely manoeuvres.

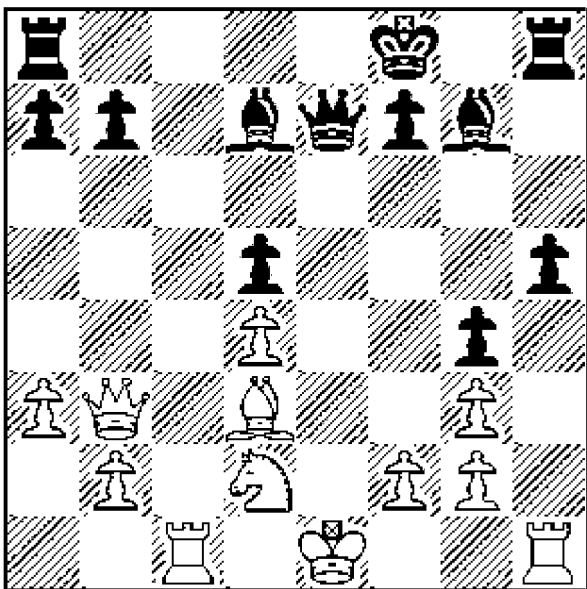
17 ... g4 18 Nd2 e5!

Principle: Open the position when you own the bishop pair. Black hopes to kindle some central heat.

19 Qb3

Black controls the initiative after 19 dxe5 h4! too.

19 ... exd4 20 Nxd4 Nxd4 21 exd4 Qe7+



22 Kd1?!

Petrosian's normally astonishing receptivity to the most minute strategic nuance apparently took an extended vacation this game. The eccentricity-fest continues and White's wacky pieces wander about the board in hallucinatory fashion. Petrosian can ill afford yet another extravagance when he should busy himself putting his ramshackle house in order.

Question: Why did Petrosian's king veer toward the centre?

Answer: He wanted to activate his h1-rook at e1, at the cost of an insecure king – too high a price. His move is simply at odds with the position's requirements. He should settle for 22 Kf1 Bxd4 23 Qxb7 Rd8 24 Qxd5 Bxb2 25 Rb1 Be6 with only a clear advantage to Black.

22 ... Bxd4 23 Rc7

23 Qxb7?? fails miserably to 23 ... Ba4+, picking off the queen; while 23 Qxd5?? is also a no-go due to 23 ... Bxb2 24 Rb1 Ba4+ 25 Bc2 Rd8 with a crushing attack after 26 Qa5 b6! 27 Qxa4 Bc3.

23 ... Bb6 24 Re1 Qd6 25 Rxb7

Now Botvinnik finds a path to freedom for his king's rook.

25 ... Rh6!

The rook emerges, eager to participate.

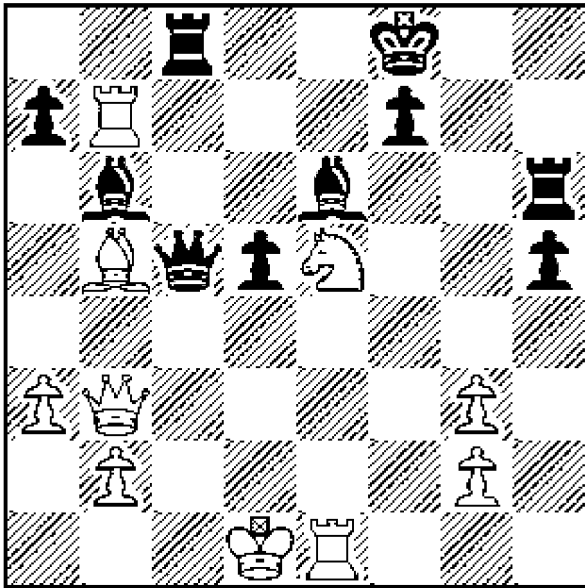
26 Bb5 Be6 27 f4

Petrosian probably wanted to avoid the dismal ending which arose after 27 Re2 h4 28 gxh4 Rxh4 29 Qb4 Qxb4 30 axb4.

27 ... gxf3!?

A trade-off: Botvinnik opens the position further but allows White's knight back into the game.

28 Nxf3 Rc8 29 Ne5 Qc5



Exercise (critical decision): Black threatens a huge check on c1, after which White's king goes for a ride. White can play 30 Qb4, agreeing to an inferior ending, or else the startling shot 30 Rxf7+, which exploits a fork tactic on d7. Analyse both and decide carefully.

30 Rxf7+?

Answer: If a person with a dark, violent past invites us into his home, we should be disinclined to enter. Petrosian, whose restraint vanishes when pitted against such temptation, displays tactical ingenuity, but unfortunately not enough to save him from himself! Not all combinations should be played. White should have entered the inferior ending with 30 Qb4! Qxb4 31 axb4 with some hope of saving the game.

30 ... Kg8!

A strange double attack arises: Black threatens the hanging rook on f7, as well as a deadly queen check on c1.

31 Rf3?

Petrosian had to appease the gods with sacrifice by tossing the exchange after 31 Nd3 Qd4 32 Rf3 Bg4.

31 ... Qc1+

Black seeks to force the extradition of White's king to face trial for past crimes.

32 Ke2

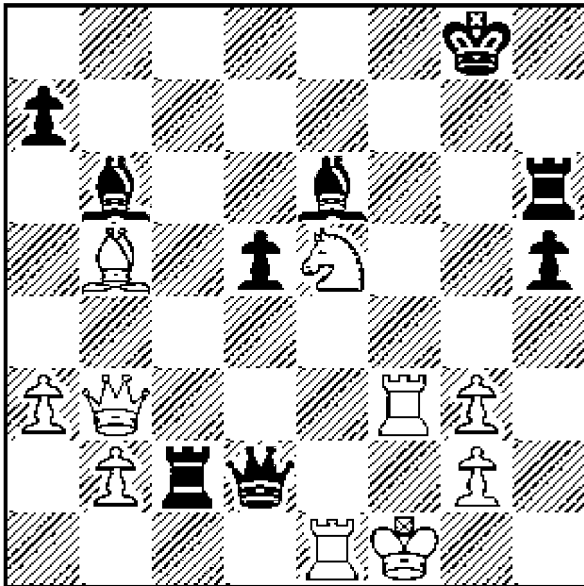
The king receives his guest with cold indifference.

32 ... Rc2+

Black's queen and rook toss the king's body aside, the way a rancher would diseased livestock.

33 Kf1 Qd2 0-1

Black's major pieces leave a plume of misery along White's second rank. The white king's dilemma reminds me of the Pink Floyd lyrics: "Your lips move, but I can't hear what you're saying. I've become comfortably numb."



Question: Why did White resign when he had two ways to block on e2?

Answer: Both fail miserably: 34 Re2 Rc1+! or 34 Be2 Qd4!.

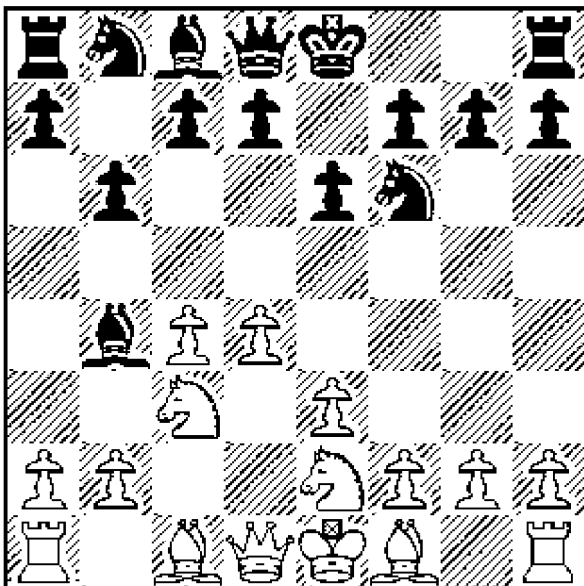
Game 30

M.Botvinnik-V.Smyslov

World Championship (2nd matchgame), Moscow 1954

Nimzo-Indian Defence

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 b6 5 Ne2



White covers c3 against structural damage but contorts a bit to do so.

5 ... Ba6

Smyslov immediately puts his finger on the downside to White's last move and pressures the now hanging c4-pawn. 5 ... c5, 5 ... Bb7 and 5 ... Ne4 are Black's alternatives.

6 a3 Be7 7 Nf4

More active than the g3-square.

7 ... d5 8 cxd5

Question: This move compromises White's castling rights. Can he avoid losing them?

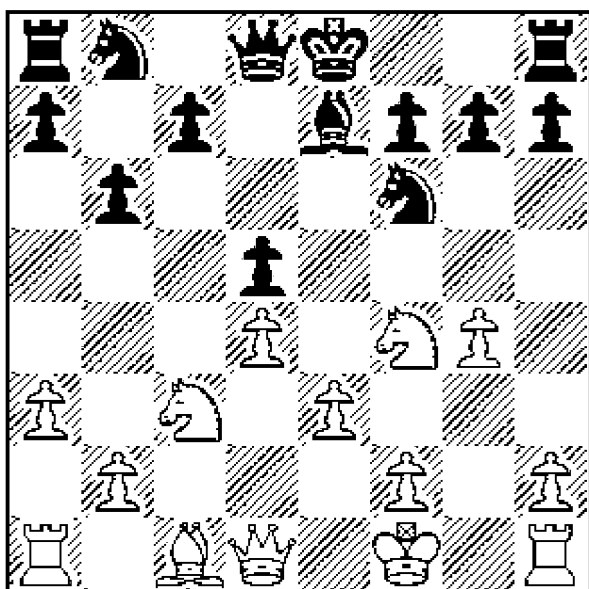
Answer: If he wants, he can retain the central tension with 8 b3 0-0 9 Bb2, as in the earlier game M.Botvinnik-N.Novotelnov, USSR Championship, Moscow 1951.

8 ... Bxf1 9 Kxf1 exd5

Question: It looks to me like White may have botched the opening. He has a bad bishop on c1 and can't castle, meaning his h1-rook will be out of play for quite some time. Is this correct?

Answer: Not if you factor in White's next move. His rook may actually be well placed on h1 with his kingside expansion plan. White may also later play for e3-e4, as he does in this game, which frees the c1-bishop. The chances are probably closer to even.

10 g4!



If you work for a mob boss it's useful to understand his weaknesses – but never, ever mention them aloud. Now this move is routine, whereas at the time it was a startlingly new plan for White, who attacks with a kingside pawn storm. His once out-of-play rook now looks well posted on h1.

10 ... c6

Smyslov stabilizes his d-pawn. Black's main alternative is to lash out with 10 ... g5!, which may in fact be Black's best bet in the position; *e.g.* 11 Nh5 Nxf5 12 gxh5 c6 13 Qf3 Qd7 14 e4 with tremendous complications, M.Nacu-J.Tait, correspondence 2002.

11 g5 Nfd7

11 ... Ne4 12 Nxe4 dxe4 13 h4, J.Rendboe-M.Sechting, Pardubice 2005, is another possibility.

12 h4 Bd6?!

Black agrees to the deal in principle but hesitates to put it into writing and sign by castling immediately. The bishop unwisely diverts himself with a side issue. The threat to damage White's structure on f4 comes at the serious price of time, never mind that White easily avoids it with his next move.

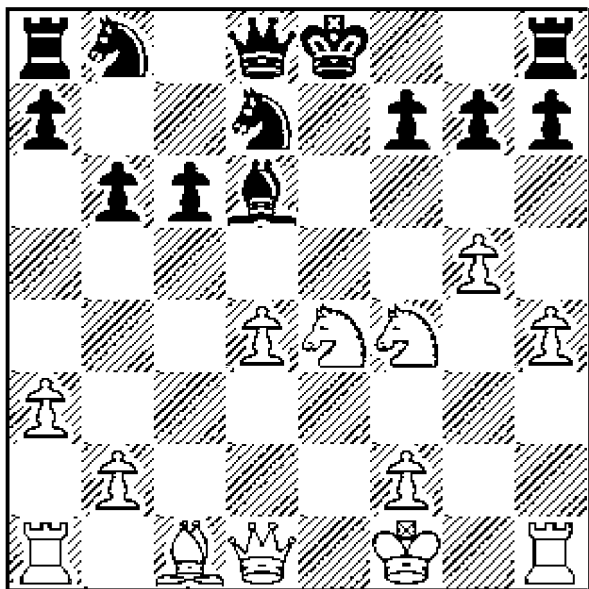
Instead, Black should probably enter the storm head on with 12 ... 0-0, and if

White follows Botvinnik with 13 e4 dxe4 14 Nxe4, then 14 ... Nc5! has a freeing effect on Black's game, T.Irzhakov-R.Rizzo, correspondence 2006.

13 e4!

Botvinnik, at the cost of an isolani on d4, solves the secondary problem of his formally inactive bishop and augments his piece activity further.

13 ... dxe4 14 Nxe4



Question: Does White risk overextension?

Answer: He certainly does if he mishandles the position (which Botvinnik doesn't), but Black risks underextension, which is a greater threat. Botvinnik willingly takes on structural deficiencies in exchange for piece activity, which he now enjoys in abundance. At this stage Smyslov must have endured extreme frustration in his inability to locate a single fissure or crevice in Botvinnik's seamless campaign of offence.

14 ... Bxf4?!

The bishop engages in an exaggerated reaction to a trivial slight, and fails to collect fair remuneration for his toil. Sometimes the medicine itself is the factor which kills the patient. Smyslov appraises the position incorrectly, hoping to solve one difficulty, but by doing so he takes on another one even larger. Black, probably looking for pressure-easing swaps, agrees to a bad deal. Now White soon posts a knight on d6 with powerful effect. Here 14 ... Bc7, retaining some degree of control over his dark squares, was relatively best.

15 Bxf4 0-0 16 h5 Re8

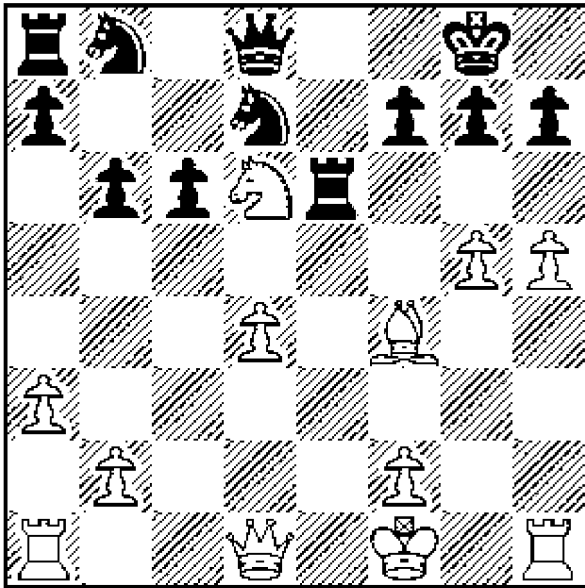
Walking into White's next move, but 16 ... Na6 17 h6 g6 18 Qa4 is no improvement.

17 Nd6

Eight beams of power radiate from the knight, like spokes on a wheel.

17 ... Re6

Black is unable to survive 17 ... Re7 18 g6!.



Exercise (planning): Botvinnik found a way to seize the initiative. What can you come up with in this position?

Answer: Principle: Create confrontation when your opponent lags in development.

18 d5!

The human move.

Answer #2: Houdini points out that 18 g6! fxc6 19 hxc6 h6 20 d5 is also quite awful for Black.

18 ... Rxd6!

Black's only chance. Smyslov deftly sidesteps immediate annihilation, the same way George W. Bush did when the Iraqi journalist shoe-thrower flung two smelly projectiles Bushward.

Passive play is fatal here. After 18 ... Re7? 19 Qd4 c5 20 Qc3, Black can barely move and h5-h6 is a horrific threat.

19 Bxd6 Qxg5 20 Qf3

Black's queen and her odious sister on f3 silently regard one another with mutual detestation. Botvinnik takes the steam out of Black's counterplay before it even begins. A pure attacker like Tal would undoubtedly have retained queens and continued with something like 20 Rg1 Qf5 21 Qd4 g6 22 hxc6 fxc6 23 Re1.

20 ... Qxd5

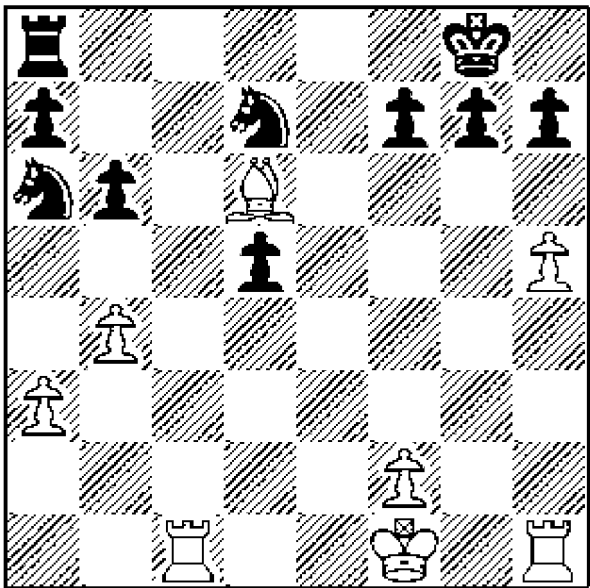
Black's queen exhales in consternation and agrees to the deal: a vastly inferior ending. To do otherwise is suicidal. For example, 20 ... cxd5?? 21 Rg1 Qd2 22 Rd1 Qc2 23 Qxd5 Nc6 24 Rd2! Qa4 25 Be7! Nf8 26 Rxc7+! Kxc7 27 Qg5+ Ng6 28 Bf6+ Kf8 29 hxc6 is crushing.

21 Qxd5 cxd5

Black's king lets out a happy sigh of relief. To him the absence of the white queen is infinitely preferable over her presence. Unfortunately, the ending is lost for him as well.

22 Rc1

Threatening a back rank mate.
22 ... Na6 23 b4!



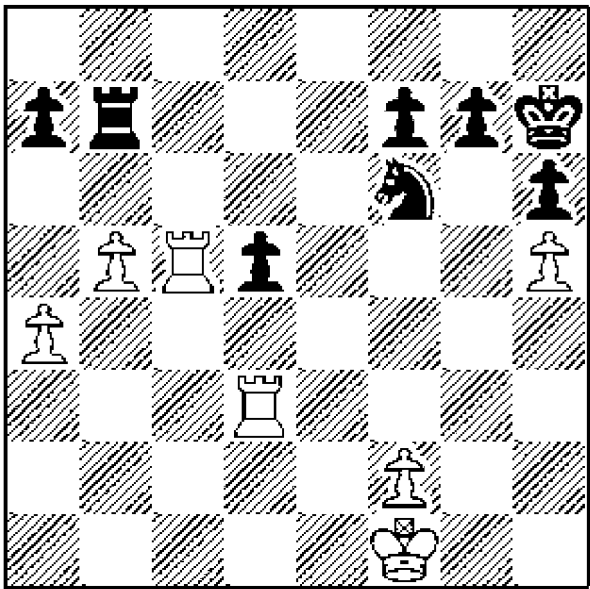
Black's offside knight is less than flattered by the lowly role assigned to him. The parasite on b4 controls its a6-host, who is dead, yet alive and absolutely under the pawn's insidious control.

23 ... h6 24 Rh3
Botvinnik activates his last undeveloped piece.

24 ... Kh7 25 Rd3 Nf6 26 b5
Deciding the time has arrived to cash out.

26 ... Nc5
The castaway waves his arms frantically, only to watch the cruise liner recede over the horizon.

27 Bxc5 bxc5 28 Rxc5 Rb8 29 a4 Rb7



Blasphemous thoughts continue to bubble up in the minds of Black's forsaken pieces, which they dare not utter aloud. The lone survivors of his desperate campaign are encumbered with a porous defensive border.

Exercise (planning): Come up with a concrete plan to convert White's advantage to victory.

Answer: Double rooks on the c-file to invade the seventh rank, after which Black's defenders are unequal to the task of fending off the queenside pawn majority, which soon rolls forward.

30 Rdc3! 1-0

Black resigns, beset with the understanding that he has little time before White's rooks overwhelm him on the queenside.

Game 31

M.Botvinnik-M.Tal

World Championship (7th matchgame), Moscow 1961

Nimzo-Indian Defence

1 c4 Nf6 2 Nc3 e6 3 d4 Bb4 4 a3

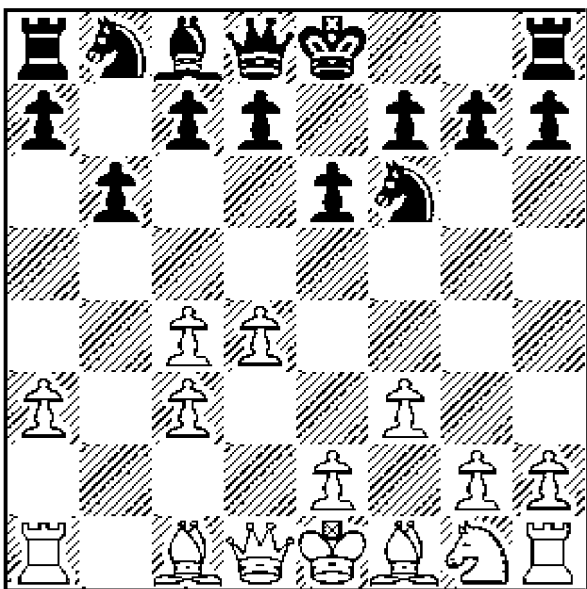
Question: This move just doesn't appear logical, does it? White expends a precious tempo, only to force Black into inflicting damage upon the white structure.

Answer: In a sense this line is the epitome of dynamism. White willingly hands over a tempo and allows damage, but he gets both bishop pair and strengthened centre in return. Today, satisfactory defensive plans have been worked out for Black, but at the time it was mysterious territory to most of Botvinnik's opponents. In this game, Botvinnik displayed far deeper understanding of the opening, from which Tal never managed to recover equilibrium.

4 ... Bxc3+ 5 bxc3 b6

Today 5 ... c5 and 5 ... 0-0 are more popular.

6 f3



6 ... Ba6

Instead:

a) 6 ... d5 enters similar waters to Botvinnik-Capablanca (Game 8) from Chapter One, and indeed 7 cxd5 exd5 8 e3 0-0 9 Bd3 c5 10 Ne2 Ba6 11 0-0 transposes to the note with 11 f3 in that game.

b) 6 ... Nc6 (going directly after White's sore spot, the c4-pawn) 7 e4 Ba6 8 e5 Ng8 9 Nh3 Na5 10 Qa4 Ne7 reaching an unbalanced position with mutual chances, A.Kotov-P.Keres, Budapest Candidates 1950.

7 e4 d5

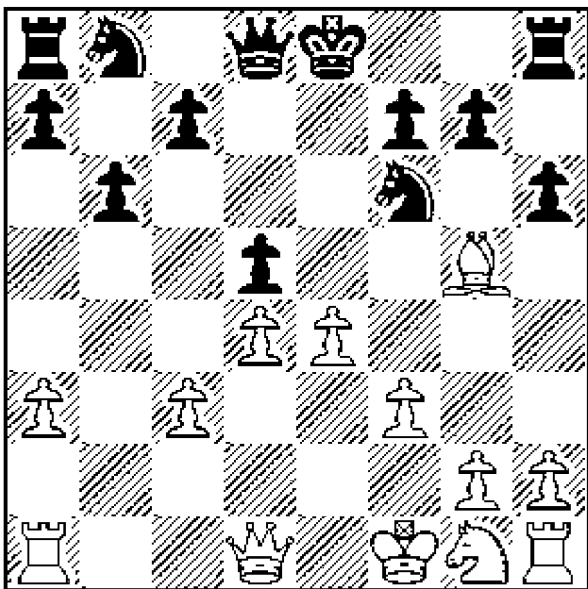
The last chance for 7 ... Nc6 which seems like a superior way for Black to play this position.

8 cxd5 Bxf1 9 Kxf1 exd5 10 Bg5

Retaining central tension feels stronger intuitively than 10 e5 Nfd7 11 Nh3 0-0, after which Black is ready for central counters with ... c7-c5, R.Meulders-R.Douven, Hilversum 1997.

10 ... h6

Botvinnik frowned upon this move; but I don't much care for Black's game after 10 ... dxe4 11 Qe2 Nbd7 12 fxe4 h6 13 Bh4, F.Gonda-R.Hirr, correspondence 1990.



11 Qa4+!?

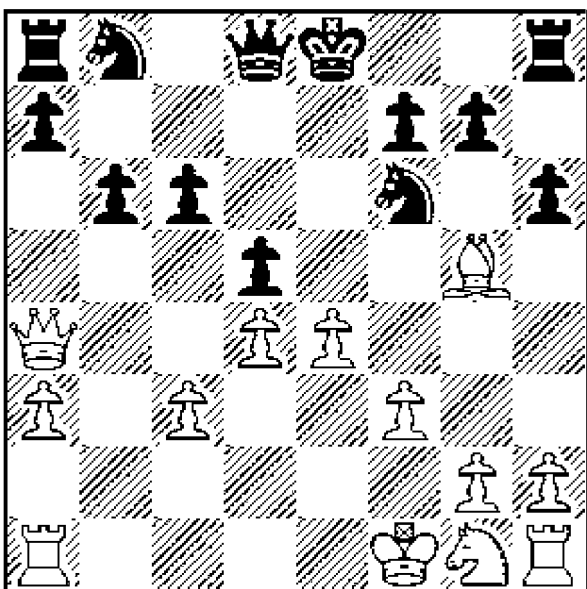
Botvinnik employs a crafty psychological ploy, correctly guessing that Tal's love of complications and distrust of simplification would be his own worst enemy in the position. Chess isn't always about playing the intrinsically best move. Sometimes there is a best move for a given opponent, which supersedes the overall best move.

Question: Why didn't White win a pawn with 11 Bxf6 Qxf6 12 exd5 - ?

Answer: That is probably the line Tal hoped to enter. After 12 ... 0-0 Black's lead in development somewhat compensates for the missing pawn. Botvinnik writes: "True to my match tactics, I declined the pawn sacrifice, so as not to concede the initiative to my opponent."

White can also speculate with 11 Bh4 dxe4 12 Qc2!? (entering a strange Nimzo-Blackmar-Diemer hybrid) 12 ... exf3 (perhaps declining is better: 12 ... 0-0 13 fxe4 Ng4! 14 Bxd8 Ne3+ 15 Ke2 Nxc2 16 Rc1 Nxd4+ 17 cxd4 Rxd8 18 Nf3 c5! 19 dxc5 Na6 20 cxb6 axb6 with at least equal chances for Black, who has fewer weaknesses to nurse) 13 Re1+ Kf8 14 Nxf3 Nbd7 15 Kf2, when White obtained full compensation for his pawn, G.Khodos-M.Mukhitdinov, Novosibirsk 1962.

11 ... c6?!



Tal is understandably nervous about challenging Botvinnik in the ending. Nevertheless, he should remain resolute and play the best move: 11 ... Qd7! 12 Qxd7+ Nbx d7 13 Bxf6 Nxf6 14 Re1! (stronger than pushing forward, according to Botvinnik) 14 ... Kd7 15 Nh3 with a microbe of an edge for White. I have a feeling Tal wouldn't have lost this position.

12 Bh4!

Botvinnik, wisely distrustful, isn't fooled a bit by his opponent's falsely benign manner. Sacrificing a pawn is much stronger than grabbing one with 12 Bxf6 Qxf6 13 exd5 0-0 14 dxc6 Nxc6, when Black's lead in development more than compensates.

12 ... dxe4

Somewhat forced, since e4-e5 is in the air. Botvinnik gives this move a "?!" mark and writes: "A highly dubious decision. The opening of lines in the centre merely assists the development of White's initiative." But Kasparov very sensibly responds with: "It is easy to criticize – but what should Black play?" I agree. The big question: "Now what?" finds no easy answer.

13 Re1 g5 14 Bf2!

Covering d4 and reinforcing against a future ... c6-c5 break. Botvinnik's move is more accurate than 14 Bg3, which allows 14 ... Qd5!.

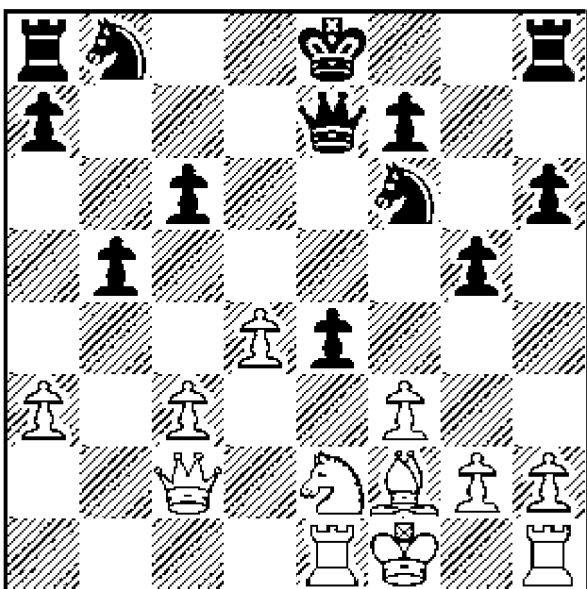
14 ... Qe7

Now 14 ... Qd5?! is met by 15 fxe4 Nxe4 16 c4 (only possible because of White's bishop on f2) 16 ... Qe6 17 Qc2 f5 18 g4! and Black finds himself in danger of being undermined on e4.

15 Ne2!

The knight heads for g3, where it eyes both the e4-and f5-squares. This is much stronger than 15 fxe4 Nxe4! (this time Black gets away with the crime) 16 Qc2 f5 17 g4 Nd7 18 gxf5 Ndf6 and Black looks okay, despite the pin on the e4-knight.

15 ... b5 16 Qc2



16 ... Qxa3!

Question: This looks crazy. Why would Tal, under fire, take time out for pawn grabbing?

Answer: It may appear outlandishly greedy but it's played under the theory: it's better to have something without need, rather than need something you don't have. Tal didn't like the looks of his position after 16 ... e3 17 Bxe3 Qxa3 18 h4 g4 19 Ng3, when Black is in deep trouble.

17 h4 gxh4?!

Tal's pieces hold back and mill about, none willing to be at the forefront of the fight.

Question: Why did Black just allow the decimation of his already poor structure?

Answer: I don't understand the motivation behind the move, except to say: in a position where there are no good answers, all moves are bad. Kasparov called Tal's last move "negligent" and recommended 17 ... g4, which would be my choice, or 17 ... Rg8. In all cases, White has a firm grip on the advantage.

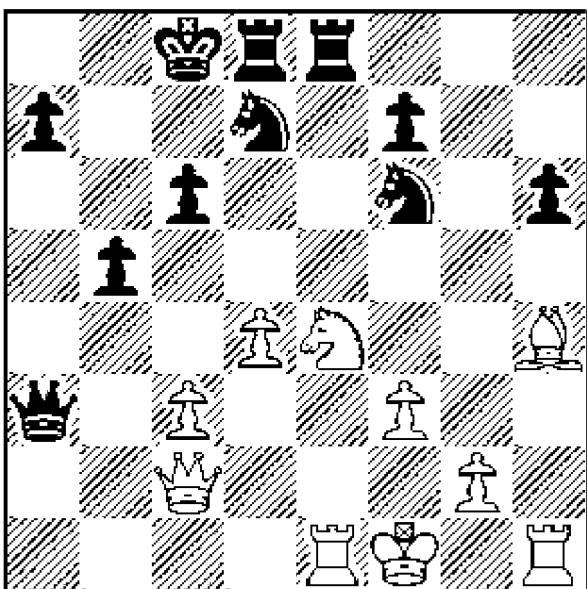
18 Bxh4

Tal's opening experiment goes horribly awry, much like the scientist who builds a time machine, goes back 60 years, and falls in love with and marries his own grandmother, becoming his own grandfather. Tal's aversion to endings (especially versus Botvinnik) costs him this game. Tal said afterwards: "For the first time in my life I was knocked out in the opening!"

18 ... Nbd7 19 Ng3 0-0-0

Black's king runs away, tired of the flow of White's reproaches down the e-file. There is no safe haven for the king across the board, but Tal continues to cling to his shred of faith.

20 Nxe4 Rhe8!?



Tal attempts to mix it up with a piece sac. He is unlikely to save himself in the line 20 ... Nxe4 21 Qxe4 Qxc3 22 Bxd8 Rxd8 23 Rxh6 Nb8 24 Rh4, when White's extra exchange should be decisive, despite Black's two connected passers.

21 Kf2!

A great practical decision, which deems material inconsequential over initiative and board control. Each of Tal's frantic attempts to complicate run aground on the reef of ineffectuality, and his hopes fall one by one. Instead, after 21 Nxf6 Rxe1+ 22 Kxe1 Qa1+ 23 Qd1 Qxc3+ 24 Kf1 Nc5 25 Bf2 a5, Black would still retain fishing chances.

21 ... Nxe4+ 22 fxe4 f6 23 Ra1!

White's initiative grows to lethal levels.

23 ... Qe7

After the rebuff, the queen's dour silence makes everyone around her uncomfortable. Now she cocks her ear as she listens for the approach of enemy footsteps near her king's chambers.

24 Rxa7 Qxe4 25 Qxe4

One can be a pragmatic realist, and at the same time believe in miracles. Botvinnik's attack continues, even queenless.

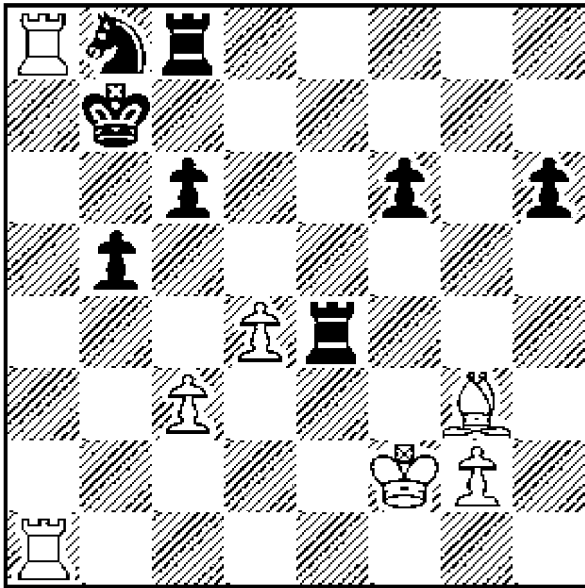
25 ... Rxe4

Tal must have breathed a bit easier at this point, having forced queens off the board. However, Botvinnik had seen deeper and soon surges forward with attack-induced élan.

26 Ra8+ Nb8

Black is forced into the unpleasant pin, since 26 ... Kc7? 27 Bg3+ wins on the spot.

27 Bg3 Kb7 28 Rha1 Rc8



What was once thought to be a safe haven is now a bomb-scarred, tangled abstraction of fragmented metal and concrete. Black's king is caught in a box, despite the comforting absence of queens on the board.

Exercise (combination alert): Find White's most accurate path to victory.

Answer: The black king's survival skills, accumulated over a long life of hardship and deprivation, are still not enough to save him.

29 R8a7+!

29 R1a7+ Kb6 (the king, cowering in his closet, claps hands to ears, the sounds of White's army's forced ingress unbearable to his ears) 30 Bd6 c5 31 dxc5+ Kc6 32 Rxb8 is still winning but not as strong as the game continuation.

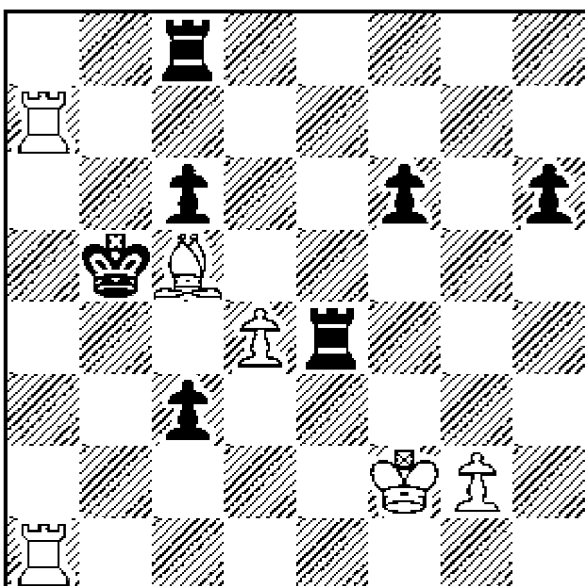
29 ... Kb6 30 Bxb8!

The bishop adheres to b8.

30 ... b4

Dazed and dejected, Tal can only muster token resistance. Botvinnik's point: he procures a piece from his labours since the automatic recapture 30 ... Rxb8?? runs into 31 R1a6 mate.

31 Bd6 bxc3 32 Bc5+ Kb5



Exercise (combination alert): Black's king loathes his doctor's enforced callisthenics. White to play and force mate.

Answer: The creature, inconceivable in size and scope, looms above the horizon, blotting out the entire sky. The first principle of the king hunt: *Cut off the enemy king, rather than give chase.*

33 R1a4! 1-0

The other rook delivers mate on a5 and Tal's king floats belly up, a dead fish in a polluted bay.

Chapter Four

Botvinnik on Exploiting Imbalances

In this chapter we study Botvinnik's acute receptivity to imbalances on the chess board. The games which stick out to me in this chapter are the last two: Medina Garcia-Botvinnik and Matulovic-Botvinnik (Games 37 and 38) – both variants of the Bc4 Pirc, and both strikingly similar in their exploitation of opposite-coloured bishops when attacking. Soon it becomes clear that Botvinnik's domination of the dark squares – which his bishops in both games root out like pigs sniffing out truffles – heavily outweighs White's control of the light. As it is with most great strategists, their imbalance always shines while the opponent's grows irrelevant.

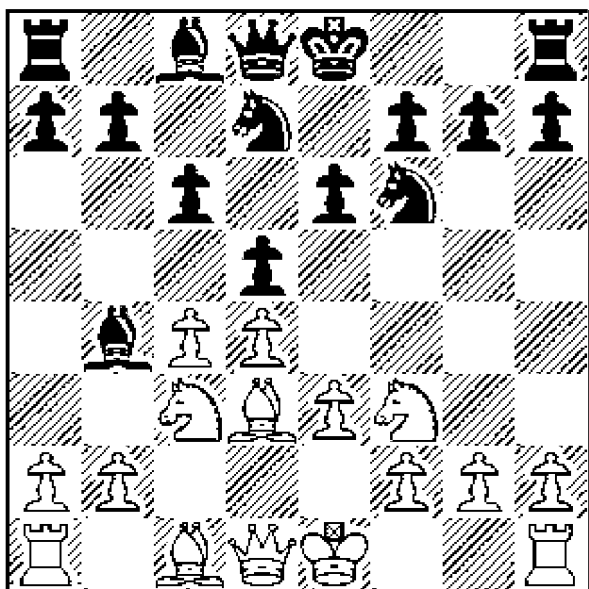
Game 32

M.Botvinnik-M.Euwe

World Championship Tournament, The Hague/Moscow 1948

Semi-Slav Defence

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 Nc3 c6 5 e3 Nbd7 6 Bd3 Bb4?!



A book move at the time and rather shady.

Question: Why criticize this move? Black simply plays the position in Nimzo-Indian style.

Answer: The trouble is this is a Semi-Slav, not a Nimzo. Black placed his pawns in a light square triangle on c6, d5 and e6. This means his dark-squared bishop is of great value and should not be swapped off on c3. In a sense you are right: this is a Nimzo-Indian, but a bad one for Black, since he exchanges the useful move ... 0-0 (a position which John Emms covers in *The Nimzo-Indian Move by Move*) with the rather redundant ... c7-c6.

Question: But Euwe didn't swap it off on c3, did he?

Answer: True, but he did lose time, giving White the useful a2-a3 move for free.

7 a3 Ba5

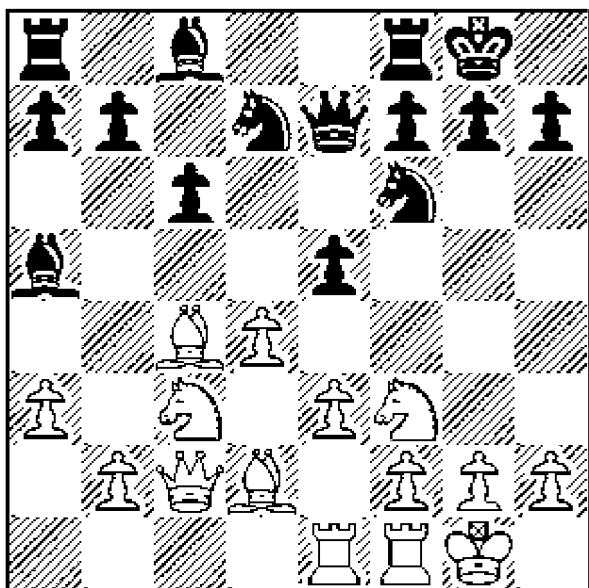
Instead:

a) 7 ... Bxc3+?! 8 bxc3 scores a dismal 17% for Black according to my database.
 b) 7 ... Bd6 allows 8 e4 dxe4 9 Nxe4 Nxe4 10 Bxe4, as in G.Kasparov-R.Hübner, Brussels 1986. Now Black lacks ... Bb4+, a move he would normally have access to if he hadn't already inserted this earlier on.

8 Qc2 Qe7

Black seeks a freeing ... d5xc4 and ... e6-e5 central break. 8 ... 0-0 may just transpose.

9 Bd2 dxc4 10 Bxc4 e5 11 0-0 0-0 12 Rae1!



Question: Isn't this the wrong rook?

Answer: It looks like the correct rook, based on the principle: *Mass forces on your strong wing*. White may at some point trade on e5 and then surge his kingside pawn majority forward with f2-f4, e3-e4-e5.

12 ... Bc7

12 ... e4?? runs into the tactic 13 Nxe4! – yet another flaw in Black's ... Bb4 development scheme.

Question: If this is the case, why can't Black chop on c3 and then play ... e5-e4 afterwards?

Answer: Black's position still looks rather sour to me after 12 ... Bxc3 13 Bxc3 e4 14 Ne5, followed by f2-f3, with a strong initiative for White. Note that 14 ... Nb6?? loses on the spot to 15 Bb4.

13 Ne4

Perhaps stronger than 13 dxe5 which may be mistimed: 13 ... Nxe5 14 Nxe5 Qxe5 15 f4 Qh5, O.Karpeshov-M.Sher, Volgodonsk 1983, when White can't continue thematically with 16 e4?? since it hangs a piece to 16 ... Qc5+.

13 ... Nxe4 14 Qxe4 a5!

Denying White any future Bb4 cheapos. 14 ... Kh8?!, intending ... f7-f5, can be met with 15 Bb4! c5 16 Bxc5! Nxc5 17 dxc5 f5 (17 ... Qxc5?? loses to 18 Ng5) 18 Qd5. Now if Black tries to regain the pawn immediately with 18 ... Rd8?, White responds 19

Qf7 and if 19 ... Qxc5?? 20 Ng5! Black is helpless, since White threatens a smothered mate with 21 Qg8+! etc, as well as 21 Qh5 h6 22 Qg6! hxg5 23 Qh5 mate.

15 Ba2

Perhaps thinking about sliding back to b1 at some future date.

15 ... Nf6

15 ... Kh8! may be Black's best, since it forces White to resolve the central tension.

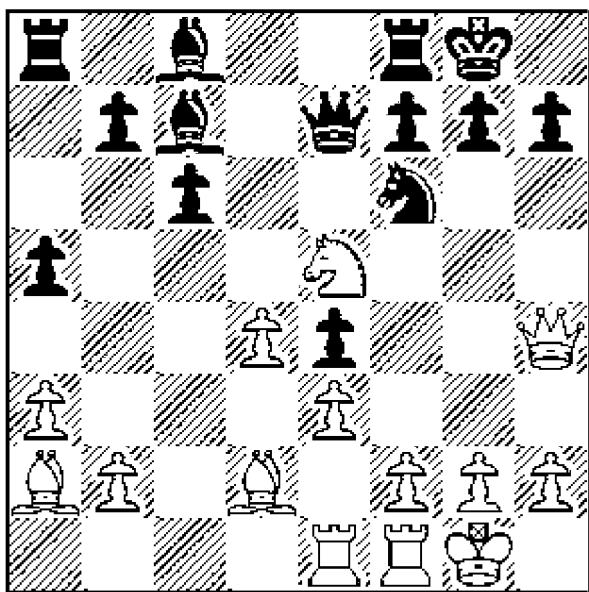
16 Qh4

The queen hopes to augment her income with some freelance work on the kingside.

16 ... e4

Black must pick his discomfort. 16 ... exd4 17 exd4 Qd6 18 Bb1 looks like a bad isolani position for Black, whose king may soon be under fire with so many white pieces gazing in the direction of the kingside.

17 Ne5!



An excellent pawn sac.

17 ... Bxe5!?

... which probably should be declined.

Question: Why do you think Euwe accepted it?

Answer: He may have feared White's kingside build-up after 17 ... Be6 18 Bb1 Bd5 19 Bc3 Rae8 20 f3 exf3 21 gxf3, though this looks better for Black than what he got in the game. Another possibility is 21 e4!? fxg2 22 Rxf6 Qxf6 23 Qxf6 gxf6 24 Nd7 with some advantage to White.

18 dxe5 Qxe5 19 Bc3 Qe7

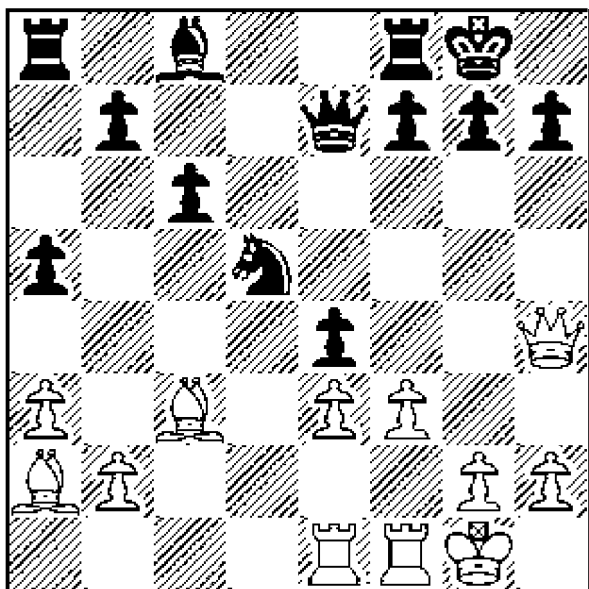
19 ... Qh5?? would be a regretful decision after 20 Bxf6.

20 f3!

Dual principles followed: *Open the game when leading in development, and also when you own the bishop pair.* For the pawn, Botvinnik gets two bishops versus two knights in an open position and the potential for a kingside attack – more than enough

compensation.

20 ... Nd5?!



If an ally refuses to help out, then at least make certain he doesn't hinder. Overreaction is the great appeaser of long-carried fear. Black pays off White's importunate queen, just to get her out of his life. After this move Black's entire world spins out of the plane of the sun's ecliptic cycle. In other words, a strategic misjudgment on Euwe's part. He eliminates White's attacking chances for the heavy price of landing in a very difficult ending.

Question: What should he play?

Answer: His best may be 20 ... Be6 21 fxe4! (probably the move Euwe feared in this line) 21 ... Bxa2 22 Rxf6 b5 23 Qg3! (Kasparov's suggestion) 23 ... b4 24 Be5 g6 25 axb4 axb4 26 Rxc6 f6 27 Bd4 Qxe4 28 Rb6 Bd5 29 Rxb4 with better chances to hold than in the game.

21 Qxe7 Nxe7 22 fxe4 b6?!

Black frees his a8-rook from babysitting duties on the a5-pawn at the cost of weakening his queenside. Botvinnik, Euwe and Kasparov all labelled this move an error. Alternatives: a) 22 ... Ng6 (Euwe's suggestion) 23 Rd1 Be6 24 Bxe6 fxe6 25 Rd7 Rxf1+ 26 Kxf1 Rf8+ 27 Ke2 Rf7 28 Rd6 a4 29 Rd4 b5 30 Rd8+ Rf8 31 Rd6 doesn't look saveable for Black.

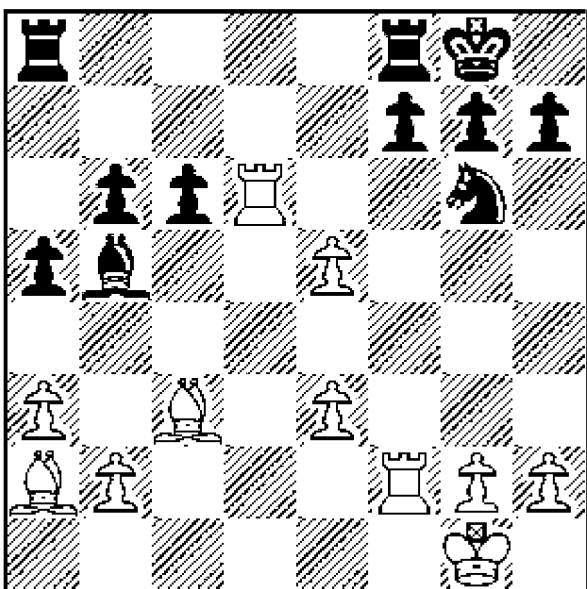
b) 22 ... Be6! (Botvinnik's suggestion, and the best try in my opinion) 23 Bxe6 fxe6 24 Rd1 Rfd8 (Black must cover against the threatened invasion of the seventh rank) 25 Rxd8+ Rxd8 26 Bxa5 with an extra pawn. This line may be Black's best hope since White's kingside majority is somewhat hobbled by the doubled e-pawns.

23 Rd1 Ng6

Black remains under heavy pressure after 23 ... Bg4 24 Rd6 Bh5 25 Rd7 Rfe8.

24 Rd6 Ba6 25 Rf2 Bb5 26 e5!

The e-pawns, evil influences, soon manage to destroy all virtue in Black's position. Botvinnik continually enlarges upon his previous strategic gains by adding the e5-e6 ramming threat to his ledger; e.g. 26 ... Rae8 27 e6 fxe6 28 Bxe6+ Kh8 29 Rxf8+ Nxf8 30 Ba2 and Black can barely move.



26 ... Ne7

There is no need for a homeless wanderer to make haste. What is the rush when your destination is nowhere and anywhere?

27 e4

Botvinnik seeks to cut out all ... Nd5 ideas. However, Black's position is completely hopeless if White simply seizes and impounds the seventh rank with 27 Rd7! Nd5 28 e6! Nxc3 29 exf7+ Kh8 30 bxc3.

27 ... c5

War's upheaval created dislocations among Black's citizens, and several pieces and pawns feel out of sync. Black's frantic motions convey a sense of dire urgency. 27 ... Rae8 is no improvement due to 28 e6 f6 29 Rd7 and Black is paralysed.

28 e6

The lead e-pawn creates a deep wedge in Black's position.

28 ... f6

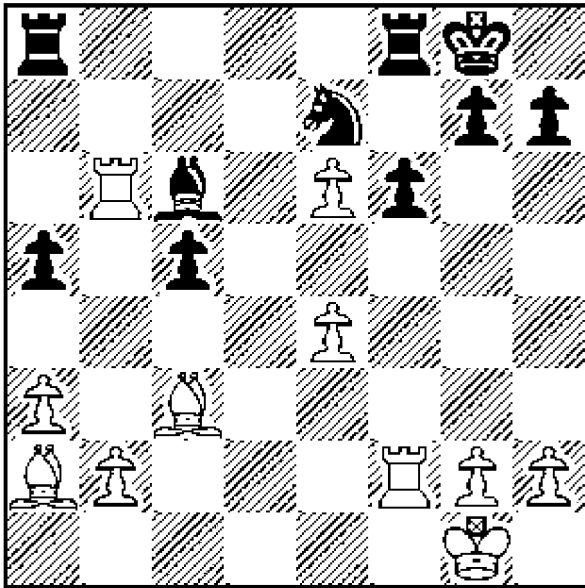
Not 28 ... fxe6? 29 Rxe6 Rxf2 30 Kxf2 Kf8 31 Rxb6 and Black can resign.

29 Rxb6

In the heat of battle, the loss of comrades feels like an almost commonplace event.

29 ... Bc6?

Truth, which appears before us, is always the destroyer of delusion. The air feels saturated with the essence of imminent violence. Black just blundered in a hopeless position. Now the archer awaits, thinking: "Come closer, just a little closer and I have you within arrow-shot range." You only get one shot. The position is cranked to maximum tension. Now is the time to take aim and fire.



Exercise (combination alert): How did Botvinnik forcefully end the game?

Answer: Deflection. The ramshackle construct collapses, as we all knew it would.

30 Rxc6!

The rook emerges, crashing down sideways, like a blue marlin breaking water.

30 ... Nxc6

The incapacitated knight is not up to the task of halting White's intent.

31 e7+ Rf7

The wayward rook in despair, reflecting upon Black's many sins, asks himself:
"What have I become?"

32 Bd5! 1-0

This was a breakthrough first win over Euwe, previously Botvinnik's boogie man. If you are going to break a losing streak, then the optimum time to do so is in a world championship tournament!

Game 33

W.Uhlmann-M.Botvinnik

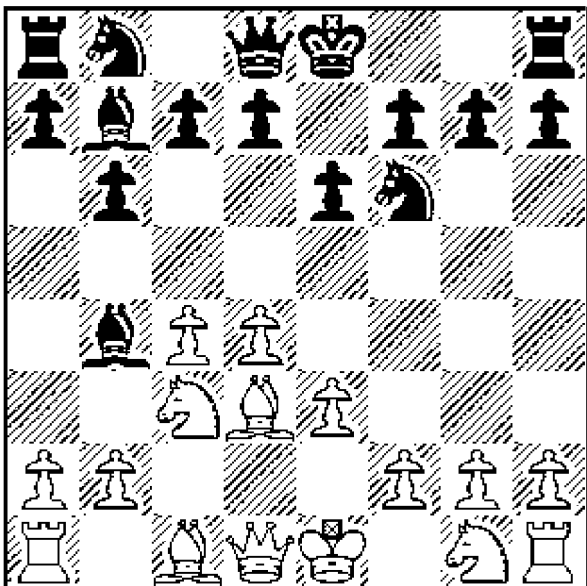
Munich Olympiad 1958

Nimzo-Indian Defence

1 d4 e6 2 c4 Nf6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 b6 5 Bd3

Botvinnik, perhaps the greatest Nimzo-Indianer of all time, was fluent with Black's side as well. In my opinion White's best chance at an edge lies in 5 Ne2, which Botvinnik played against Smyslov in Chapter Three (see Game 30).

5 ... Bb7



6 Nf3

I don't trust 6 Ne2 Bxg2! 7 Rg1 Be4 for White; *e.g.* 8 Bxe4 (the rook gets cornered after 8 Rxd4? Bg6) 8 ... Nxe4, and now if White insists on regaining his material with 9 Rxd4?, he walks into 9 ... Nxf2!, H.Restifa-D.Adla, Buenos Aires 1992.

Question: Why doesn't White go for 6 f3 to build up for a big centre with e3-e4 - ?

Answer: Black won't give him the time. For example, after 6 ... c5 7 Ne2 cxd4 8 exd4 0-0 9 0-0 d5, White gets a passive version of the isolani since his knight sits on e2 rather than on f3. He can't opt for hanging pawns either, since 10 b3?! is met by 10 ... dxc4 and White is forced to recapture with his bishop, R.Liguori-S.Fedorchuk, Porto San Giorgio 2008.

6 ... Ne4 7 0-0!?

Uhlmann offers a pawn.

7 ... f5!

Botvinnik – unlike Lasker, Korchnoi and Fischer – was never much of a pawn grabber. He held a deep aversion to ceding initiative, even temporarily, for material of any kind.

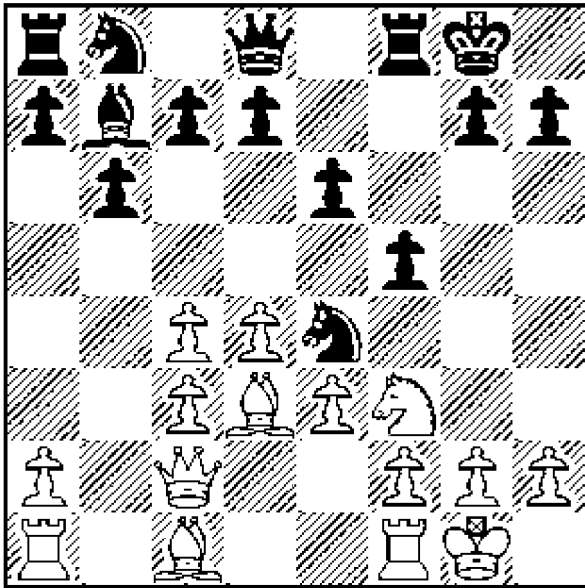
Question: Does White get enough compensation if Black goes ahead and accepts the sac?

Answer: According to my database White scores above average after both 7 ... Bxc3 and 7 ... Nxc3.

8 Qc2 Bxc3

Finally, Botvinnik gives up a bishop for a knight to inflict damage upon White's structure.

9 bxc3 0-0



10 Rb1

A rare line.

Question: Why does White post his rook on a file without targets?

Answer: He intends to undouble his pawns with c4-c5 – which Botvinnik doesn't allow. So, essentially, the move accomplishes nothing. Instead: a) 10 Ne1 c5 11 f3 Nd6 12 Ba3 Na6 13 Qe2 Qe7 14 e4 fxe4 15 fxe4 Rxf1+ 16 Kxf1 e5! and I prefer Black's chances in this rigid structure, A.Graf-G.Kasparov, Geneva (rapid) 1996.

b) 10 Nd2 Qh4 11 f3 Nxd2 12 Bxd2 Nc6 and Black achieved harmonious development, V.Smyslov-D.Bronstein, Moscow 1956.

10 ... c5

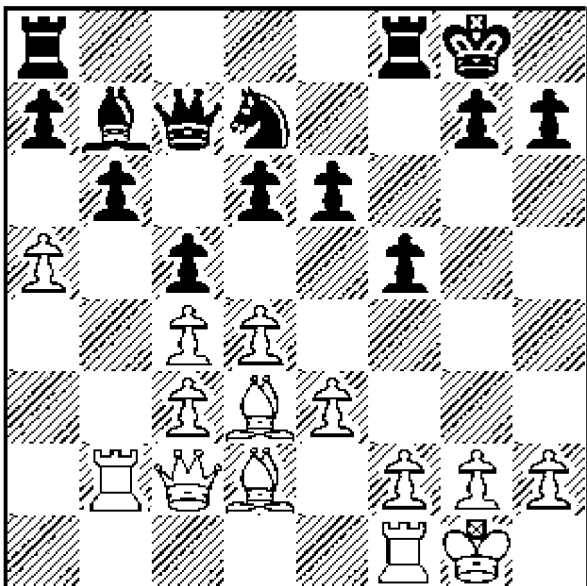
Blocking White's intention.

11 a4

Planning a4-a5 and axb6, creating a target on b6.

11 ... Qc7 12 a5 d6 13 Nd2 Nxd2 14 Bxd2 Nd7 15 Rb2?

White should exchange on b6. The text has a way of adulterating an already ineffective plan and the hoped-for augmentation of his queenside build-up fails to pass. With a single careless move Uhlmann doubles his difficulties and quadruples the brain power requirements to extricate himself. Botvinnik ruthlessly exploits what seems at first just a tiny inaccuracy.



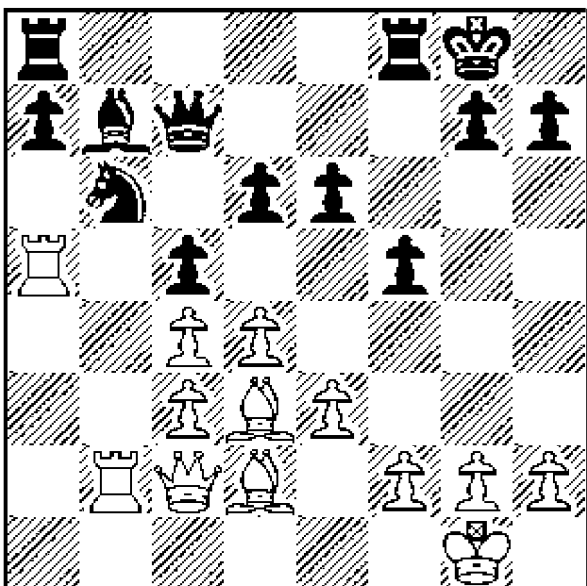
15 ... bxa5!

Black's strategic threat is ... Nb6 followed by ... a5-a4, so White must hurry to regain his pawn.

16 Ra1?!

Uhlmann was afraid to enter a rather sour-looking ending after 16 e4 Bxe4 17 Bxe4 fxe4 18 Qxe4 (menacing e6, as well as Rb7) 18 ... Nb6! 19 dxc5 dxc5 20 Qxe6+ Qf7 21 Qxf7+ Rxf7 22 Ra2 a4, but this may have been White's best bet to save the game.

16 ... Nb6! 17 Rxa5



The discovered attack 17 ... Nxc4?? fails for Black, since it hangs two pieces for a rook. Nevertheless, Black's position throbs with potential and sweet dreams of plunder.

Exercise (critical decision): How did Botvinnik get around the problem and manage to inflict the discovery in another way?

Answer: The meddling bishop decides to intervene in the matter. Botvinnik eliminates White's best defender to undermine c4.

17 ... Be4!!

The pseudo-sac has the effect of inflicting upon White a state of confused disequilibrium and arrives as a jarring end to Uhlmann's previous flow of

tranquillity.

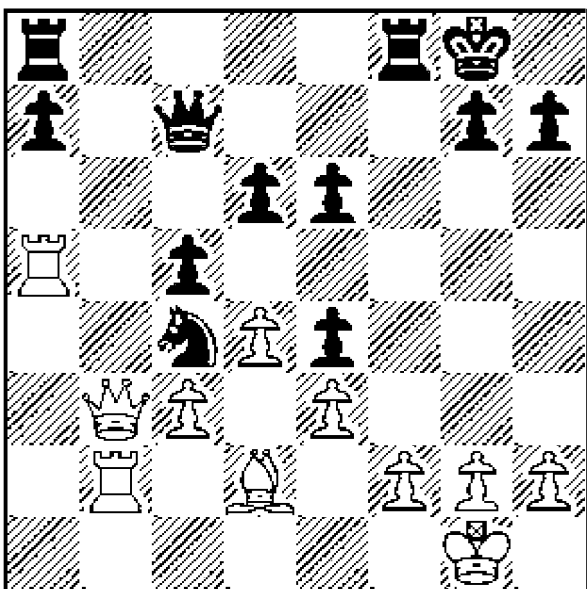
18 Bxe4

The old priest on d3 crosses himself and mutters a protective prayer, wary of the unnatural creature passing by on e4. Not 18 Ra6 Nxc4! and White's bishop flubs the mission of defending c4 big time.

18 ... fxe4 19 Qb3

Botvinnik's clever point is that, after 19 Qxe4? Nxc4 20 Qxe6+ Qf7!, Black's queen deals with her sister with the casual ease of a woman swatting a mosquito that dares to make a nuisance of itself. Black wins the exchange with an easy conversion.

19 ... Nxc4!



Discovered attack. Black's knight emerges with terrible purpose. Botvinnik is dismissive of Uhlmann's attempts to hang on to c4, so as to seem almost offhand and derisive.

20 Qxc4

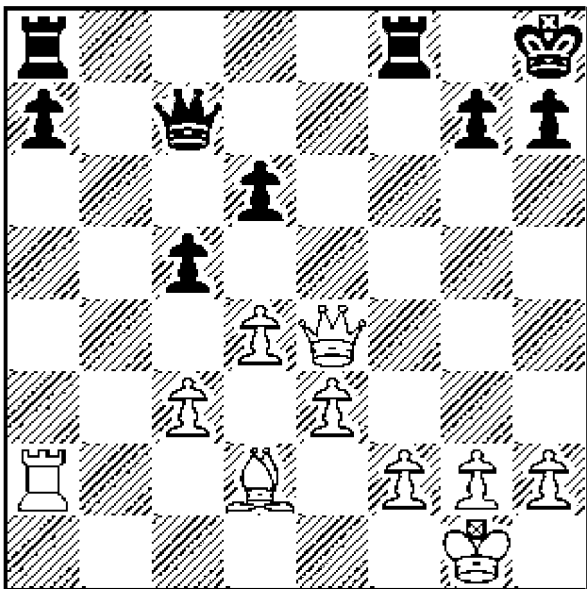
Finally removing that hated knight, who sat so smugly on c4, but for the high price of the exchange. So White's queen acquiesces to the concession, vowing: "This is the last time!" Unfortunately, her prediction turns out to be incorrect.

20 ... Qxa5

The a5-rook is remanded to disciplinary action for earlier indiscretions.

21 Qxe6+ Kh8 22 Ra2 Qc7 23 Qxe4??

The white queen's eyes soon well up with remorse at her mistake. Uhlmann, by now completely demoralized, blundered in a hopeless position.



Exercise (combination alert): How did Botvinnik end the game in a single move?

Answer: Double attack.

23 ... Qf7! 0-1

After 24 Be1 White's king weeps with gratitude that his life is spared. But the celebration turns out to be premature since 24 ... Qxa2 picks off a rook.

Game 34

V.Smyslov-M.Botvinnik

World Championship (1st matchgame), Moscow 1958

Caro-Kann Defence

Botvinnik had a deep, lifelong respect for his opponent. In 1983, Smyslov, in his sixties and well past his prime, miraculously qualified for the World Championship Candidates matches, normally the preserve of the young, upsetting GM Zoltan Ribli in his first match. He drew his next (and then advanced on a lucky coin toss) against the heavily favoured German GM, Robert Hübner. Then he faced by far his most fearsome threat, Garry Kasparov. I remember top players predicting that the ageing Smyslov would be unable to score a single half point against the young superstar. Someone asked Botvinnik if he thought Smyslov would get crushed in the match. Botvinnik's stern response: "One does not crush Smyslov." In the event, Smyslov gave a good account of himself but lost 8½-4½ against the unstoppable force of Kasparov.

1 e4 c6 2 Nc3 d5 3 Nf3

The infamous Two Knights variation of the Caro-Kann reached a level of notoriety, mainly due to Fischer's repeated, disastrous losses with it in the 1959 Candidates Tournament.

3 ... Bg4 4 h3 Bxf3

The first imbalance appears. Black gives up bishop for knight.

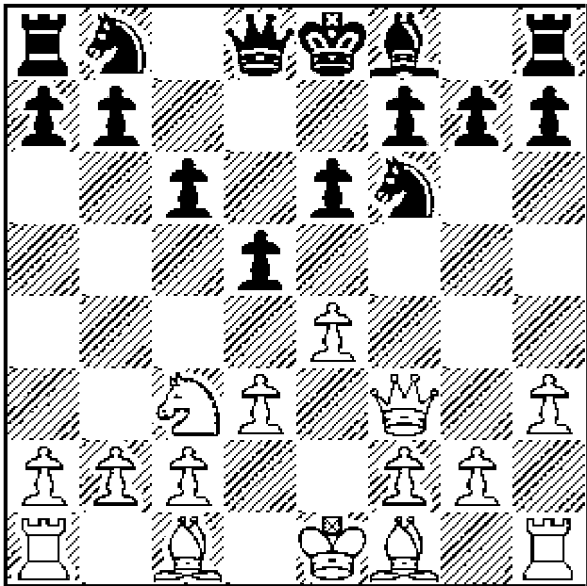
Question: Why hand over the bishop pair without a fight?

Answer: Black plans to set up a light square pawn triangle on c6, d5 and e6, so he logically hands over his technically bad light-squared bishop, to remain with a single good dark-squared bishop. The loss of the bishop pair at this point doesn't constitute a real problem for Black since the position for now remains closed, and his knights deem themselves on equal footing with White's bishop pair.

4 ... Bh5!? is the psychotic cousin. Play may run 5 exd5 cxd5 6 Bb5+ Nc6 7 g4 Bg6 8 Ne5 Rc8 9 d4 e6 10 Qe2 Bb4 11 h4 Nge7 12 h5 Be4 13 f3 0-0 – all theory so far, to

reach this irrational position. I suspect White is slightly favoured in the coming complications.

5 Qxf3 Nf6 6 d3 e6



7 Be2

Alternatively:

a) 7 Bd2 (the move favoured by most FIDE 2600+ players, though it gives Black few difficulties) 7 ... d4 8 Nd1 c5 9 g3 Nc6 10 Bg2 h5 11 h4 g6 12 Qe2 Bg7 13 f4 Qb6 14 b3 Ng4, when ... Ne3 is in the air and Black achieved dynamic equality, F.Vallejo Pons-A.Motylev, German League 2012.

b) 7 g3 (Bobby Fischer's unfortunate favourite here) 7 ... Bb4 8 Bd2 d4 9 Nb1 9 ... Bxd2+ (or 9 ... Qb6 10 b3 a5 11 a3 Be7 12 Bg2 a4 13 b4 Nbd7 14 0-0 c5 with excellent queenside counterplay for Black, R.J.Fischer-P.Keres, Bled/Zagreb/Belgrade 1959) 10 Nxd2 e5 11 Bg2 c5 12 0-0 Nc6 13 Qe2 g5! 14 Nf3?! (14 f4 was necessary to free White's position) 14 ... h6 15 h4 Rg8 16 a3 Qe7 and Black may already be slightly better in a reversed King's Indian-style position, R.J.Fischer-T.V.Petrosian, Bled/Zagreb/Belgrade 1959.

7 ... Nbd7

Halting e4-e5.

Question: Isn't Black supposed to play 7 ... Bb4 at this point?

Answer: Both moves are possible. One of my students experienced difficulties from 7 ... Bb4 8 e5!? Nfd7 (8 ... d4!? 9 a3 slightly favours White) 9 Qg3, which is annoying for Black but may be okay after 9 ... d4!? 10 Qxg7 Rf8 11 Qg4 Nxe5 12 Qe4 Qd6 13 a3 Ba5 14 b4 Bc7.

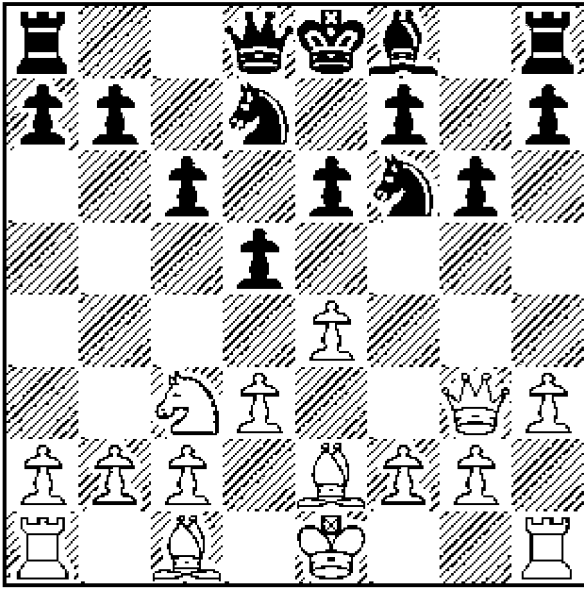
8 Qg3

White's idea is to exert pressure on g7.

Question: How does Black complete his development?

Answer: See his next move!

8 ... g6!



Question: But doesn't this create terrible punctures along the dark squares?

Answer: There is no basis for nervousness in this position. Black keeps control over his dark squares here, mainly since he remains with a dark-squared bishop.

9 0-0

Question: How about 9 Bf4, intending to meet ... Bg7 with Bd6 - ?

Answer: Your plan looks dangerous, but Black need not play his bishop to g7. He can counterattack with 9 ... Qb6 10 0-0 Bb4 11 e5 Bxc3 12 bxc3 Ng8, when he is indeed weakened along the dark squares, but still generates sufficient counterplay against White's king and weakened queenside pawns. For now Black's knights hold their own against the bishop pair, since the position remains clogged.

9 ... Bg7 10 Bf4

10 Qd6 Bf8 11 Qg3 Bg7 wouldn't bother Botvinnik a bit, since every drawn game with Black in a World Championship match represents a minor victory.

10 ... Qb6 11 Rab1 0-0 12 Bc7?!

As it later turns out, this move does more harm to himself than good.

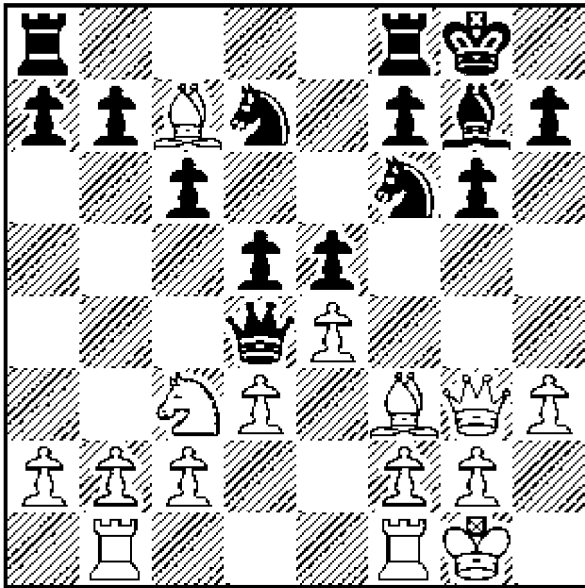
12 ... Qd4!?

I have the feeling Botvinnik eggs his opponent on, taunting him by centralizing his queen. Curiously, White has no obvious method of exploiting the queen's position.

13 Bf3?!

The bishop should return from its misadventure with 13 Bf4.

13 ... e5!



Seizing his fair share of the centre.

Question: But doesn't the move also loosen his central pawns a tad?

Answer: The minute loosening of Black's centre is overshadowed by the fact that he also cuts the d6-bishop off from the kingside, forcing it to a3, where it looks a bit irrelevant and somewhat vulnerable.

14 Bd6

Smyslov isn't going to fall for 14 Ne2?! Qc5 15 c3?? dxe4 16 dxe4 Rfc8 17 b4 Qe7 18 Ba5 b6, when White's bishop gets ignominiously trapped.

14 ... Rfe8 15 Ba3 dxe4

Botvinnik decides the timing is right for release of central pawn tension.

16 dxe4

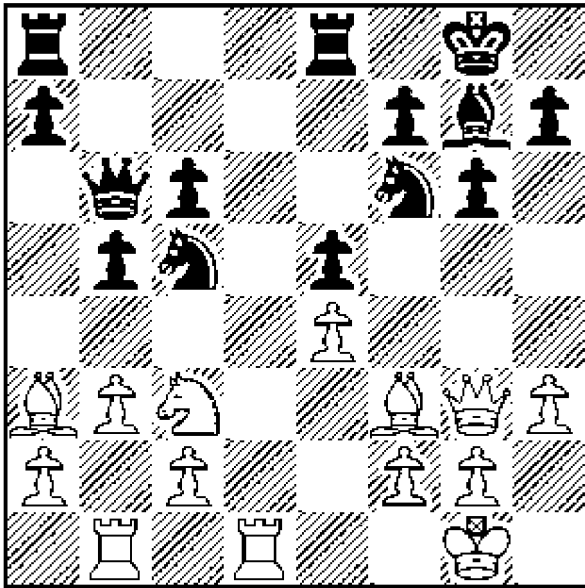
Question: Shouldn't White recapture with a piece to open the position for his bishop pair?

Answer: By doing so, he would hand over a greater share of the centre; i.e. 16 Nxe4 Nxe4 17 Bxe4, when Black looks fine after 17 ... Nf8, intending ... Ne6.

16 ... b5

Grabbing space and playing upon the bishop's strange position on a3 by threatening the cheapo ... b5-b4.

17 Rfd1 Qb6 18 b3 Nc5!



Dual purpose. Botvinnik gradually improves the positioning of his pieces and:

1. He renews the ... b5-b4 threat by covering a4.
2. He plans to sink the knight into d4, via e6.

Of course 18 ... b4 fails to win a piece after 19 Na4.

19 Bc1

I already prefer Black's game, due to his growing grip over the central dark squares.

Question: Even though White owns the bishop pair?

Answer: Correct. White's bishops fail to impress in this clogged position.

Question: What is so wrong with White's position?

Answer: Not much right now, but you feel the degeneration about to happen with little things. For instance, White's out-of-play queen cannot be easily roused from her Snow White-ish coma where she lies. That, together with the eroding nature of White's dark square control, leads me to favour Black. White's corresponding control over the light squares just isn't there to compensate.

19 ... Qc7

Sidestepping the coming Be3 pin.

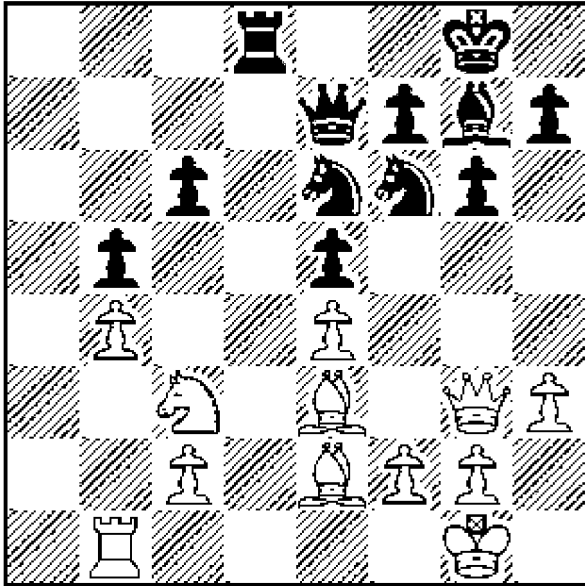
20 Be3 Ne6 21 a4 a6

Botvinnik prefers retaining the tension over the line 21 ... b4 22 Na2 c5 23 c3.

22 b4!?

This pawn turns out to be a future weakness. Somehow White's position continues to degenerate and it's difficult to see just why.

22 ... Rad8 23 Be2 Qe7 24 axb5 axb5 25 Rxd8 Rxd8



26 Bb6

Of course the naïve 26 Qxe5?? hangs a piece to 26 ... Nh5.

26 ... Ra8 27 f3?!

Smyslov, anxious to reintroduce his queen to the game, further weakens the kingside dark squares. *Houdini* suggest the rather awkward 27 Ba5 as White's best move.

27 ... Ra3 28 Qe1

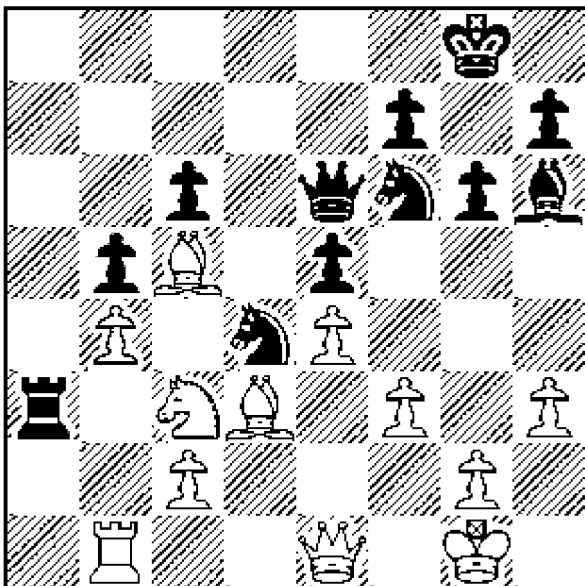
28 Nd1?? drops material to 28 ... Nxe4!.

28 ... Bh6 29 Bf1?!

Wasting time. The bad bishop, of choleric temperament and disposition, doesn't take kindly to the label "bad" when referred to himself. 29 Nd1 was more accurate.

29 ... Nd4 30 Bc5 Qe6 31 Bd3

White's gangly bad d3-bishop appears to be the big, dumb kid who fails two grades and now looks ridiculous packing his fifth grade behind his third grade desk. Meanwhile, we sense more dissonance from White's side, the way a high school band incompetently attempts to piece together a difficult Bartók orchestral piece.



Exercise (planning): Find a plan which dramatically increases Black's growing advantage.

Answer: A convenient expedient presents itself to generate a new and favourable imbalance: force opposite-coloured bishops.

31 ... Nd7!

Ensuring the swap.

32 Bxd4 exd4 33 Ne2 Be3+

The tiresome, know-it-all bishop elucidates the obvious: he rules the dark squares.

34 Kh1 Ne5

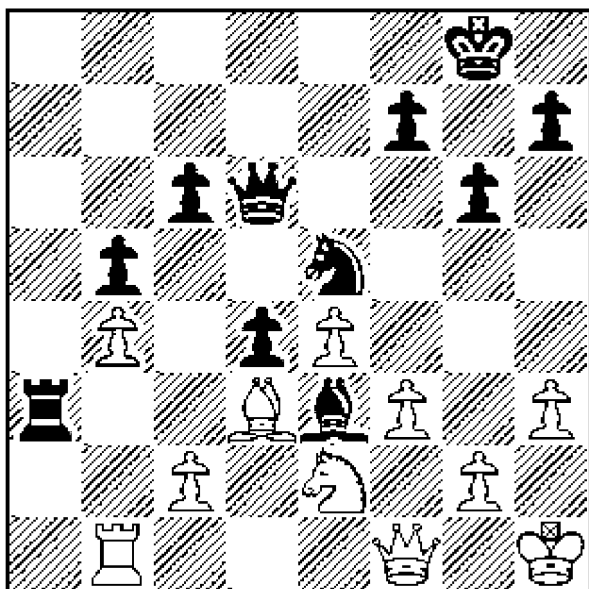
The knight establishes residency on e5, similar to the onset of a migraine.

Question: Why does the presence of opposite-coloured bishops help Black?

Answer: Black dominates the dark squares, whereas White's moping pieces do anything but dominate the light squares.

35 Qf1 Qd6

Now d3 really is under attack. The growing dark square plague brings on fever, boils, delirium and eventually death to the infected. Botvinnik avoids the shallow trap 35 ... Nxd3 36 cxd3 Rxd3? 37 Nf4.



36 f4

Complete desperation. 36 Nc1 Rc3 37 f4 Nxd3 38 Nxd3 (38 cxd3 Qxf4 is no solace) 38 ... Qe6 39 Qf3 Qa2 40 Rd1 Qxc2 41 Qf1 Bd2 is even more hopeless.

36 ... Nxd3 37 cxd3 Rxd3

Botvinnik snags a key pawn, creating a passed d-pawn, and all the while retaining all his activity advantages.

38 Qf3 Rd2 39 Rf1!

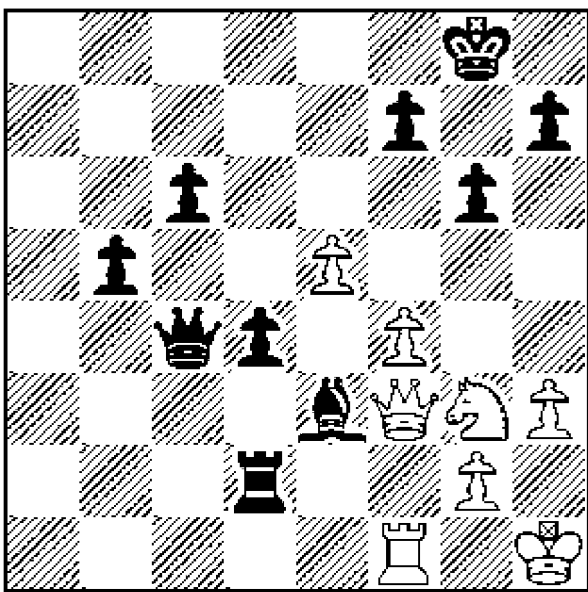
Praying he can stir something up on the f-file. Up to here White's pieces floated aimlessly, chunks of vegetables simmering in a broth. But now he prepares a last ditch effort to reach Botvinnik's king.

39 ... Qxb4 40 e5

Hoping to have time for Ng3 and Ne4, when he may be able to generate kingside threats. Hope of a happy ending, a bright future – no matter how unlikely – has a way of transforming an unbearable present into a slightly more bearable one. 40 f5 Qc4 covers everything.

40 ... Qc4 41 Ng3

If a six-year-old is given a choice between a chocolate chip cookie and a slice of sashimi, I'm guessing she will go for the cookie. In the same way, Smyslov refuses to submit to passive defence and plans a final lunge in a position where his pieces fumble about in disarrayed squalor. If given time for Ne4, f4-f5 and e5-e6, something may happen.



Exercise (planning): How did Botvinnik greatly diminish his opponent's lofty attacking ambition and quell the insurgency even before it began?

Answer: Force a swap of rooks via c1.

41 ... Rc2! 42 f5 Rc1

The rook clears his throat with "Ahem", attempting to get the master's attention on f1.

43 e6!?

The hoped-for crushing shot just isn't there.

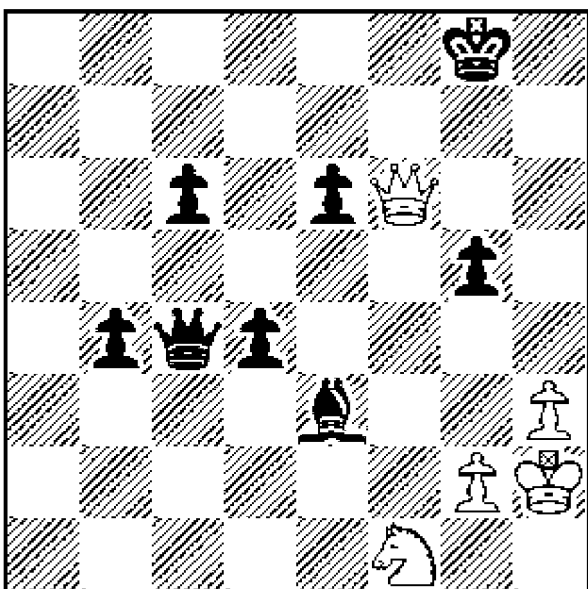
43 ... fxe6 44 fxg6

44 f6 is effectively quashed by 44 ... Kf7.

44 ... Rxf1+ 45 Nxf1 hxg6 46 Qf6

46 Nxe3 dxe3 47 Qxe3 b4 is hopeless.

46 ... b4 47 Kh2 g5



Forcing more simplification. Now Smyslov's only prayer is an unlikely perpetual check.

48 Nxe3 dxe3 49 Qxg5+

White's unenviable state of destitution leaves him with little choice but stealing to feed his hungry family.

49 ... Kf7 50 Qxe3 b3 51 Qe5 c5

Here they come. White's dream of perpetual check fails to materialize.

52 Qc7+ Kg6 53 Qb8

Or 53 Qg3+ Kf5 and if 54 Qf3+? then 54 ... Qf4+ (check!) forces the queens off the board.

53 ... Kf5!

Black's king has too many hiding places and a perpetual check just doesn't exist.

54 Qf8+ Ke4 55 Qf6 Qd5!

The surrogate mother, as stipulated in her contract, must hand over the infant upon birth, yet refuses to do so. Botvinnik's queen jealously guards her property, while making room for her king to dance his way out of the checks.

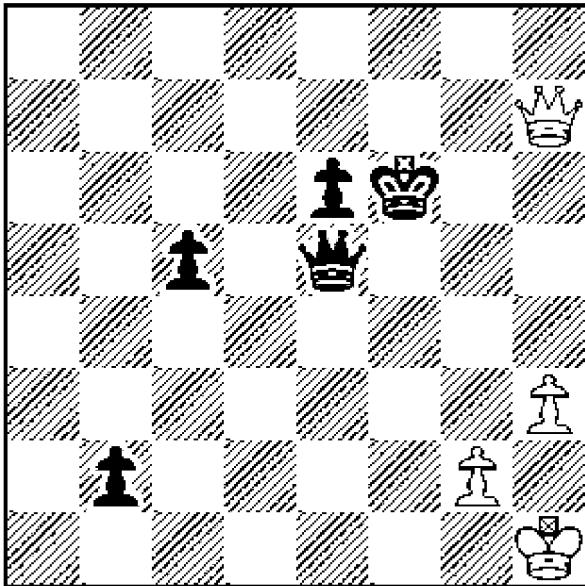
56 Qf3+ Kd4 57 Qd1+

57 Qf4+ Qe4 58 Qf2+ Kc4 59 Qf1+ Kb4 dodges again. Each time the black king is handed a check-free move, a pawn advances nearer promotion.

57 ... Ke5 58 Qe2+ Kd6 59 Qa6+ Ke7 60 Qa7+ Kf6

The king edges away from the amorous queen's advances with a strong degree of revulsion.

61 Qh7 Qe5+ 62 Kh1 b2 0-1



Black's queen midwives the pawn to birth on b1 after Black's king escapes a barrage of checks. Smyslov realizes the futility of playing out a line like 63 Qh8+ Kf5 64 Qh7+ Kf4 65 Qh4+ Ke3 66 Qe1+ Kd4 67 Qd2+ Kc4 68 Qc2+ Kb4 69 Qd2+ Qc3 70 Qf4+ (White, in his endless attempts to stall and filibuster, only manages to remain filibusted) 70 ... Qd4 71 Qb8+ Kc3 72 Qg3+ Kc2 73 Qg6+ Qd3 ends the checks, as well as the game.

Game 35

M.Botvinnik-M.Tal

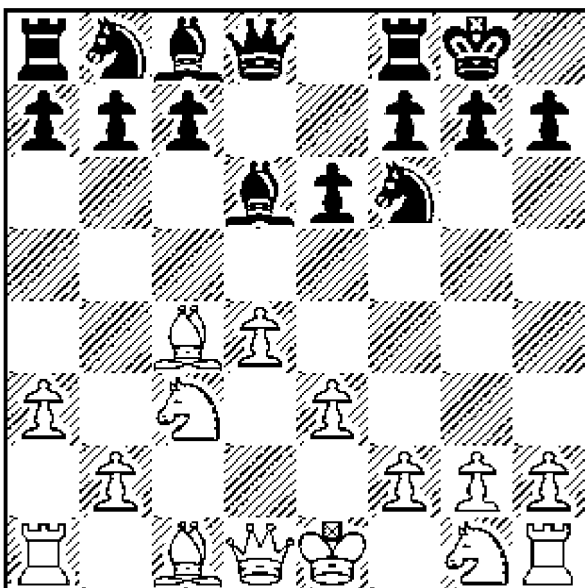
World Championship (3rd matchgame), Moscow 1961

Nimzo-Indian Defence

1 c4 Nf6 2 Nc3 e6 3 d4 Bb4 4 e3 0-0 5 Bd3 d5 6 a3 dxc4

This is a side line, as is 6 ... Be7. Taking the knight could transpose to Botvinnik-Capablanca in Chapter One; *i.e.* after 6 ... Bxc3+ 7 bxc3 c5 8 cxd5 exd5 (see Game 8), though Black might also play 8 ... Qxd5!? or, more usually, 7 ... dxc4 8 Bxc4 c5.

7 Bxc4 Bd6



Question: Isn't Black wasting time with his bishop?

Answer: Black does agree to a tempo loss in this line, but remember, White lost time moving his c4-bishop twice as well. Black plays for an ... e6-e5 break, slightly offbeat for a Nimzo-Indian but quite sound.

8 Nf3 Nc6 9 b4!?

9 0-0 e5 10 h3 (10 d5 Ne7 is playable too) 10 ... Bf5 11 d5 Nb8 gives Black a reasonable position since he controls e4, G.Kuzmin-B.Gulko, USSR Championship, Tbilisi 1978.

9 ... e5 10 Bb2 Bg4 11 d5

White seizes a little central space. Two games later, Botvinnik deviated with 11 dxe5 Nxe5 12 Be2 Qe7 13 Nb5 Rfd8 14 Qc2 a6 15 Nxd6 cxd6 with an edge to White due to his superior structure and bishop pair, M.Botvinnik-M.Tal, World Championship (5th matchgame), Moscow 1961.

11 ... Ne7 12 h3 Bd7

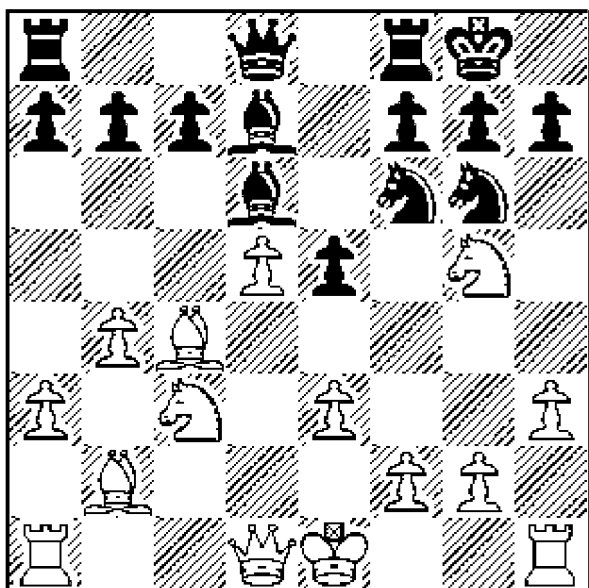
12 ... Bf5! is a possible improvement, A.Savin-K.Shoup, correspondence 1994.

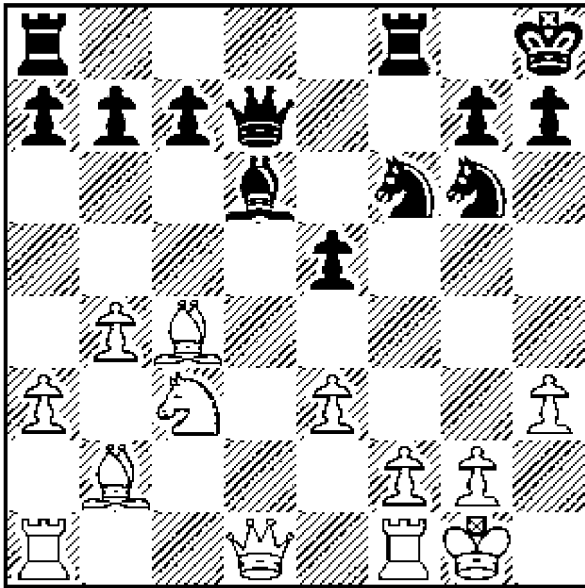
13 Ng5!

Botvinnik fights for control over e4.

13 ... Ng6?!

And here 13 ... a5! was correct.





White has clearly got the better of the deal:

1. He picked up the bishop pair.
2. White has the superior pawn structure.
3. White controls the light squares and potentially a hole on e4.
4. Black has a bad remaining bishop.

Nonetheless, Tal remains dangerous since many of his pieces lurk menacingly around White's king.

17 ... Qf5 18 Nd5

I prefer 18 Qb1! (still fighting for the key e4-square) 18 ... e4 19 f4!, which pretty much ends Black's attacking stabs on the kingside.

18 ... Ng8?!

Black's knight, tender of the royal stables, dreams of a life greater than just merely that of a shoveller of horse manure. Tal displays a marked proclivity toward extremes and, in doing so, walks precariously close to the precipice of passivity. Played under the philosophy: if we can't find truth, then let's invent our own – much the same way a disreputable research scientist fudges data to match a dubious hypothesis. After this uncharacteristically passive/aggressive response, Botvinnik strengthens his position significantly.

Question: Isn't it insane to retreat in this situation?

What is the motivation behind the move?

Answer: If a sane person meets one who is insane, does there not at least exist an equal polarity of opinion? From Tal's perspective, his move is completely natural! Human frailty displays itself most when we try and tame natural forces to our liking. Tal idealistically sought to retain pieces on the board, but retreating in an open position is not a good way to do it. As he later discovers, the trouble with his idealism is that it fails to hold up under the stern test of Botvinnik's practicality.

19 Qg4 Qc2

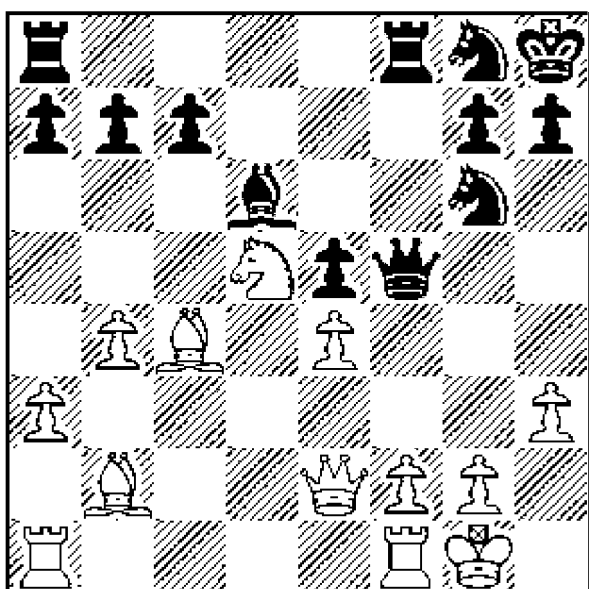
Tal has little interest in defending an inferior ending after 19 ... Qxg4 20 hxg4 e4 21 Rad1.

20 Qe2 Qf5 21 Qg4

Botvinnik, a lifelong time pressure addict, never missed an opportunity to toss in

a repetition to get himself a couple of moves closer to the move 40 time control.

21 ... Qc2 22 Qe2 Qf5 23 e4!



Nyet to the draw!

23 ... Qd7 24 Rad1 Rad8

24 ... Nf4?? walks into 25 Nxf4 Rxf4 26 Bxe5.

25 Qg4

Hi! I'm back again.

25 ... Qe8 26 g3

Botvinnik continually improves his position, cutting off access to both f4 and h4. Now Black's knights are consigned to a life of dreary ennui and overpowering mediocrity.

26 ... Nh6?!

A waste of time. 26 ... a5 would at least represent a small distraction to White on the other wing.

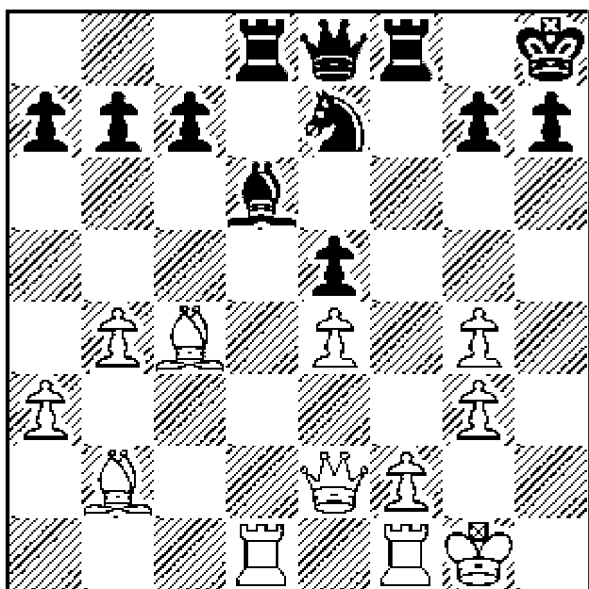
27 Qh5 Ng8 28 Qe2 N6e7 29 Ne3!

White's knight is better placed than either of Black's, so now it is he who avoids a swap.

29 ... Nh6 30 Ng4!

Now he does allows an knight exchange since it strengthens his pawn structure.

30 ... Nxf4 31 hxf4



Tal has been thoroughly outplayed strategically:

1. White has the bishop pair in a semi-open position.
2. Black endures a bad bishop.
3. White has a grip on the light squares.
4. White has access to an open h-file, and may continue with Kg2 and Rh1, launching a future kingside attack.
5. Black must watch out for f2-f4 ideas later on.

31 ... Nc6

Tal's defence is based on ... Nd4, which would result in opposite-coloured bishops. But as he later discovers, this in no way helps his position, since opposite-coloured bishops favour the attacker – White.

32 Kg2

Now Rh1 is in the air.

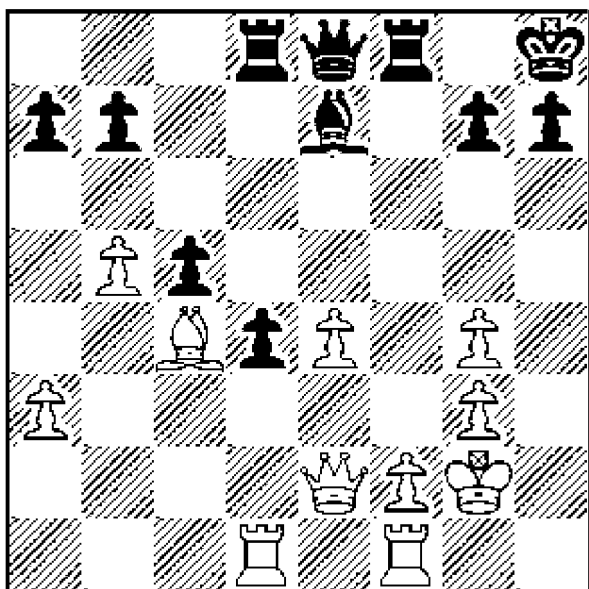
32 ... Be7 33 Bd5 Nd4!?

Complete desperation. Tal must make an excruciating decision: inexpensive submission or an expensive lunge at independence? In either case it matters little since neither path saves him.

34 Bxd4 exd4 35 Bc4!

A typical Botvinnik decision, choosing initiative over material. Botvinnik's lust for power will not be placated with tribute of a mere pawn. He blockades, preparing a final assault on Black's king, rather than distractedly chase after the b7-pawn.

35 ... c5 36 b5



Principle: Opposite-coloured bishops favour the attacker. This imbalance proves to be Tal's undoing and his position remains weighed down with multiple, dreadful strategic woes: 1. His two connected, central passers are uselessly blockaded, and therefore negated.

2. White's kingside majority soon rolls forward toward Black's king.

3. In conjunction with the open h-file and opposite-coloured bishops, this spells doom for Black's king.

36 ... Bf6 37 f4 d3

Some chieftains attempt to control an unruly populace not through raw military might, but through the subtle doling out of privileges. The bishop's shift to d4 does little to alleviate his king's troubles.

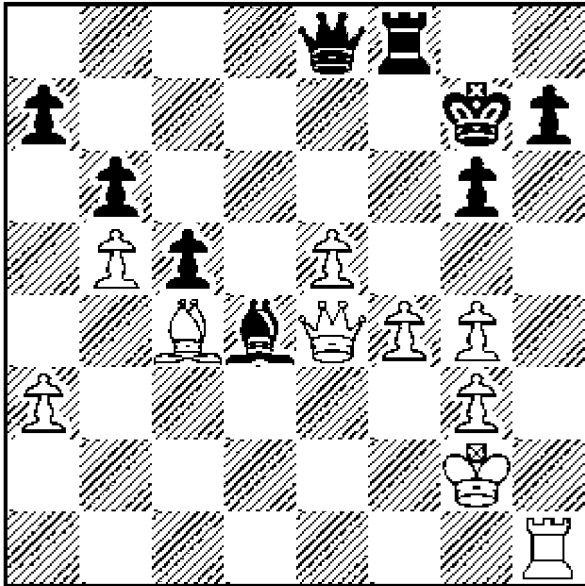
38 Rxd3 Rxd3 39 Bxd3 Bd4 40 e5

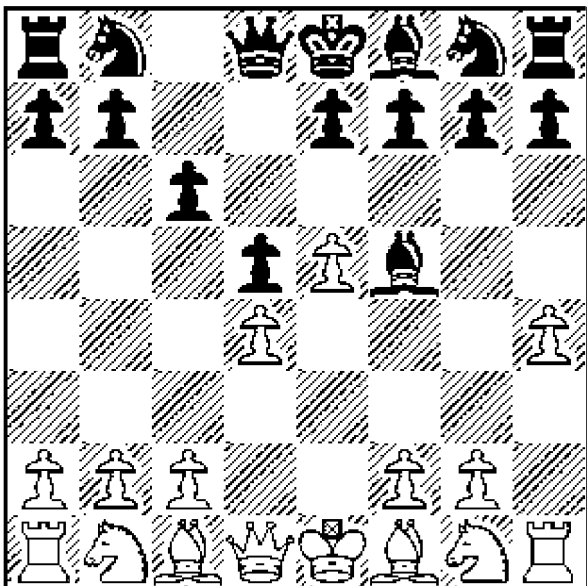
Targeting h7. White's initiative flows in a ceaseless stream of threats and unremitting strategic pressure. It almost feels like White is two pawns up, since his 4:2 kingside majority advances unopposed.

40 ... g6 41 Rh1

The clairvoyant rook gazes into the opposing king's future and is puzzled to find only a black void.

41 ... Kg7 42 Qe4 b6 43 Bc4 1-0





In my book on the Caro-Kann, I label this line a “dangerous option”.

Question: This almost appears a random move. What is the point?

Answer: This point is that if Black continues normally with 4 ... e6??, he walks into the trap 5 g4! Be4 6 f3 Bg6 7 h5, winning the bishop. So far, 56 unfortunates have entered the trap according to my database. (Over the years at least half a dozen of my students have fallen for it as well.) Even more amazing is the fact that three times, White didn’t know how to win the piece *from this position*!

4 ... h6

In *The Caro-Kann: Move by Move*, I advocate 4 ... h5 as possibly Black’s best line; e.g. 5 c4 e6 6 Nc3 Ne7 7 Nf3 Bg4 8 Bg5 Qb6 9 Qd2 reaches a messy position with chances for both sides, E.Alekseev-P.Eljanov, European Cup, Eilat 2012.

5 g4 Bd7

Question: Why not to h7, the natural square?

Answer: A strategic trap. White gets terrific compensation for the pawn after 5 ... Bh7 6 e6! fxe6 7 Bd3 Bxd3 8 Qxd3, when the queen invades on g6.

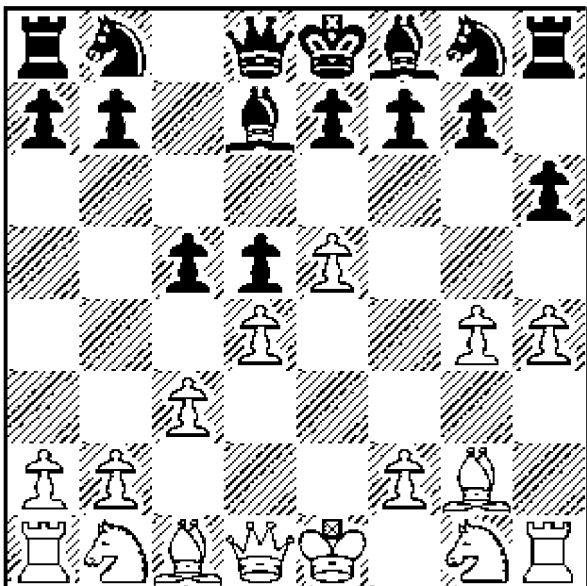
6 c3

6 h5 is probably White’s best shot at an edge; e.g. 6 ... e6 7 f4 c5 8 c3 Nc6 9 Nf3 Qb6 10 Rh2!? (a clever method of covering b2 to enable the dark-squared bishop to develop; Tal himself tried 10 Na3 and 10 Bh3 here, while 10 Kf2!? and 11 Kg3!? is another option) 10 ... Rc8 11 Be3 cxd4 12 cxd4 Na5 (or 12 ... Bb4+ 13 Kf2) 13 Rc2 Na5 14 Nbd2, D.Navara-A.Shimanov, Vilnius (rapid) 2010.

6 ... c5

The position resembles a funky Advance French, where White gets g2-g4 and h2-h4, basically for free, but whether this represents a significant space advantage or an overextension of his position is yet to be seen.

7 Bg2?!



A theoretical novelty and not a very good one. Tal's move is less a plan and closer to a daydream. A plan requires a strategic or tactical basis and cannot be fabricated – propped up from nothingness, from imagination alone. It's difficult to fathom just what urgency prompted the bishop to vacate his normal post and shift over to the demoted square g2. The bishop simply doesn't belong on this diagonal in an Advance French-style position, since it hits a solid wall on d5. We sense a lack of continuity, a breaking away from previous intention, merely for the sake of doing something different.

7 ... e6 8 Ne2

Question: If d5 represents a solid wall as you say, then why not chip away at it with 8 c4 - ?

Answer: Two reasons: 1. It violates the principle: *Don't open the position when lagging in development.*

2. The move destabilizes White's entire centre and begs overextension. Black can continue vigorously with 8 ... Nc6! and White's centre crumbles.

8 ... Bb5!

Botvinnik achieves the goodification (it would be best not to Google this "word"!) of his formally bad bishop.

9 Na3?!

This most natural of moves may be inaccurate, as we shall later discover. 9 dxc5! Bxc5 10 a4! is a superior method of going after the light-squared bishop.

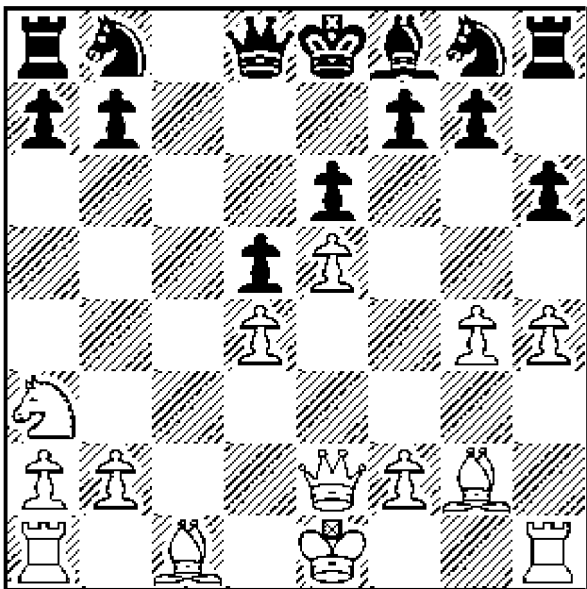
9 ... Bxe2

The first imbalance. Botvinnik is quick to hand over bishop for a knight, to achieve a French, sans bad bishop.

10 Qxe2 cxd4

Principle: *Rigid structures tend to favour knights over bishops.* This also eliminates any thoughts of a later c3-c4 on Tal's side.

11 cxd4



Exercise (planning): Would you play 11 ... Bxa3, handing White both bishops for two knights or is it better to refrain? We have diametrically opposite choices. Which of the hypotheses yields the greatest profit for Black?

Answer: Black should chop the knight.

11 ... Bxa3!

The bishop breaks a bottle over the knight's head, lamenting: "what a waste of excellent scotch!" The conclave develops into a schism of opposing and antagonistic camps. Botvinnik correctly assesses that his pair of knights will be an equal or superior force to White's two bishops.

Question: Didn't Black just greatly weaken his dark squares on his last move?

Answer: He weakened them a little and there is a touch of danger involved. But with his last move, Black achieved two goals: 1. He set up a hole on c4 for his pieces. In particular, he plans a future ... Nc6-a5-c4, when his knight dominates.

2. He damaged and weakened White's queenside pawns, handing him a pair of doubled isolanis on the a-file. This may become a factor should queens come off the board.

12 bxa3 Nc6 13 Be3!?

Question: A bold sac of a3, or a presumptuous overreach?

Answer: A little of both! No power short of death mollified Tal's lust for war. He occasionally indulged in frenzied excess of raw emotion on any given day. It's one thing to sense an awful truth about the inherent defects in your position; it is entirely another to acknowledge this truth. This move may well deserve a "?!" mark. Rash decisions made in the heat of passion have a way of demanding sober amendment when calm reason finally sinks in. For most people, fear of deprivation, even if unfounded, is a powerful motivating factor – but apparently not to Tal, who offers, and continues to offer, his a3-pawn, considering it deadweight, rather than defend awkwardly with 13 Qd3 h5 14 gxf5 Nh6 15 Be3 Nf5, when White is on the defensive. Still, this looks like a better bet for White than the game's continuation.

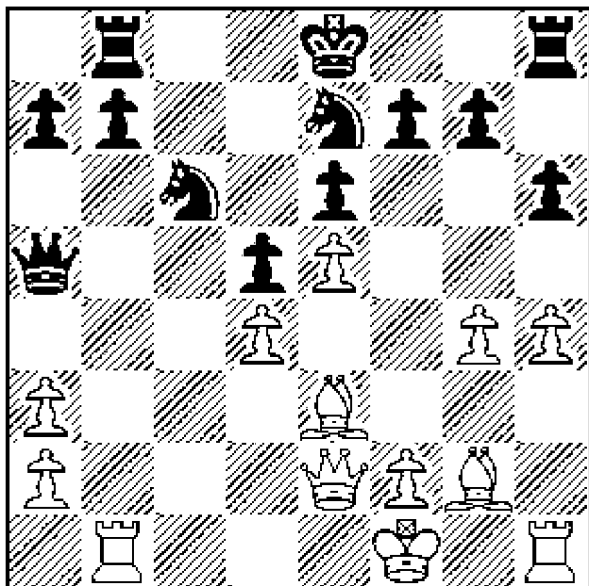
13 ... Qa5+!

Inducing White into foregoing castling rights.

14 Kf1 Nge7

Here we see Botvinnik's aversion to pawn grabbing. I would take on a3 straight away and not give Tal an opportunity to cover it.

15 Rb1 Rb8



16 Bh3!?

16 Qd3 just isn't in Tal's vocabulary.

16 ... Qa4!? 17 Rd1!?

Last chance for 17 Qd3.

Question: Don't free pawns matter to either player?

Answer: Apparently both show an almost spiritual contempt for all things earthly. I'm with you and would snatch the pawn at the very first opportunity.

17 ... Qxa3

It almost feels like Botvinnik accepts the offer grudgingly, as if doing Tal a favour.

18 Kg2 Qa6! 19 Qxa6!?

I'm certain Tal didn't make this decision lightly, entering an ending a pawn down against a superior technical player.

Question: Why not play the queen over to d2 or b2?

Answer: Tal undoubtedly feared loss of tempi after ... Na5-c4. 19 Qc2 is the only way to keep queens on the board without dropping another pawn, but then Tal probably didn't like the queen sitting on the open c-file, where it is sure to lose a tempo to a future ... Rc8.

19 ... bxa6

Black's extra pawn may be doubled and isolated, but it's still extra!

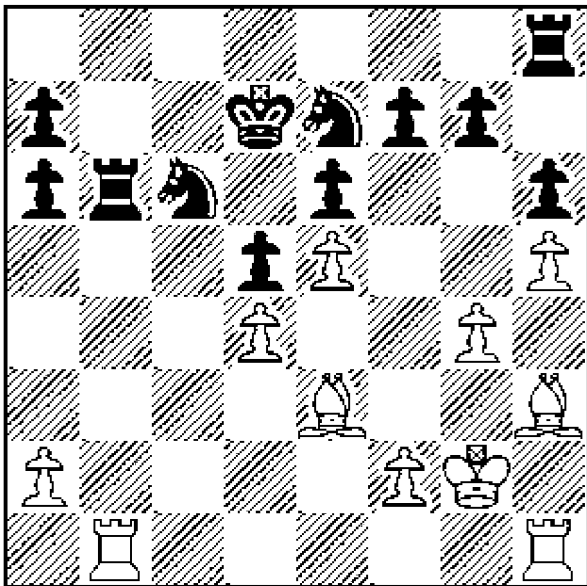
20 h5!

So that Black can't sneak in ... h6-h5 at an inopportune moment.

20 ... Kd7

Now it's safe for the black king to come out of hiding.

21 Rb1 Rb6



The defence forms a tight circle which White is unable to pierce. Botvinnik gives his opponent a choice of fixing Black's structure or losing control over the only true open file on the board.

22 Kg3 Na5

Hello c4-square.

23 Rxb6?!

Too much of a concession. Tal had to grin and bear it with 23 Rxc1 Nc4 24 Bf1 Rc8, when his position is admittedly still rather poor.

23 ... axb6 24 f4 Nc4

The knight continues to swim laps with undiminished vitality.

25 Bc1

White's bishops, once thought so formidable, have been tamed and brought low.

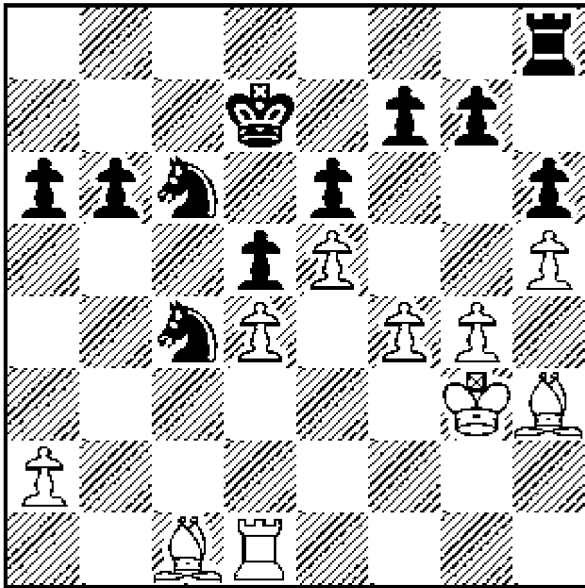
Question: White's last move looked passive. Why didn't Tal play 25 Bf2 instead?

Answer: Tal looked to future f4-f5-f6 tricks, when a bishop on the c1-h6 diagonal is still aimed at the h6-pawn.

25 ... Nc6

The knights set aside servility and go to war, challenging their counterpart bishops with the almost insulting self-assurance of those who enter battle already knowing of the outcome.

26 Rd1



Exercise (planning): As mentioned before, Tal plans f4-f5-f6 to undermine Black's control over h6. This problem would be eliminated if Black forced a swap of White's dark-squared bishop. How did Botvinnik accomplish this feat?

Answer: Step 1: Gain a tempo on the white a-pawn.

26 ... Nb4 27 a3

Step 2: Corner the dark-squared bishop.

27 ... Na2!

The lovers rendezvous in the moonlight. The knights wander where they will, causing disruption with contemptuous disregard for the law which states that bishops are their social superiors.

28 f5 Nxc1 29 Rxc1 b5

29 ... Nxa3?! doesn't make much sense since White regains the pawn with a touch of piece activity after 30 Ra1.

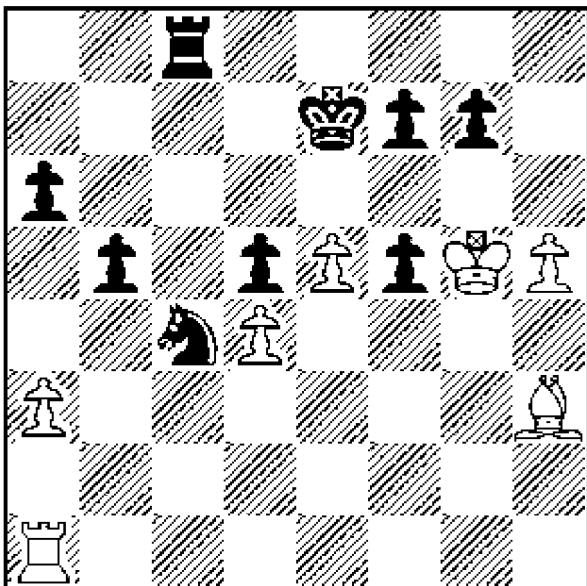
30 Ra1 Ke7

Botvinnik continues his vigilance over f5-f6 tricks, which represent White's only chance of a swindle in this game.

31 Kf4 Rc8 32 g5 hxg5+ 33 Kxg5

Intending f5-f6+.

33 ... exf5!



No more f5-f6 worries.

34 Bxf5 Rc6!

The third rank proves to be the best posting:

1. Botvinnik thinks about ... Rh6 and possibly future ... f7-f6+ ideas.
2. Black's rook may back up a future queenside passer on b6 or a6, after activation of his queenside pawn majority with an eventual ... a6-a5.

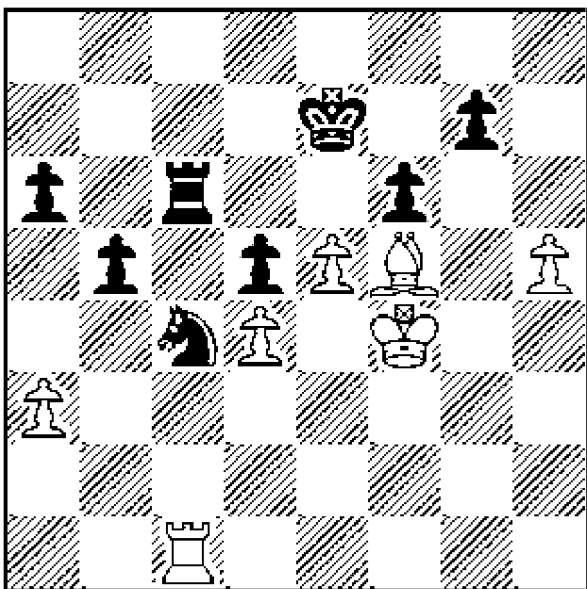
35 Kf4 Rh6 36 Bg4 Rc6

Botvinnik stalls, undoubtedly to reach the time control.

37 Rc1 f6!?

Houdini frowns on this move. Another possibility is to leave the kingside alone and push his majority forward with 37 ... a5!.

38 Bf5?



Exercise (combination alert): Tal, by now dejected, blunders away pawn number two. Do you see Botvinnik's trick here?

Answer: 38 ... fxe5+ 39 dxe5 Nxe5!

The armoured knight raises a metallic fist and smites e5. Apparently Black's hanging knight is not so hanging.

40 Rd1

Question: What about pinning the knight?

Answer: 40 Re1 Kf6! covers the knight, since 41 Rxe5?? is met by 41 ... Rc4+ 42 Be4 Rxe4+ 43 Rxe4 dxe4 44 Kxe4 (the white king smiles weakly and asks "my friend, my old friend, surely the time for vengeance and petty recrimination is long past?" – obviously Black's king, who continues to nurse a grudge, strongly disagrees) 44 ... Kg5 and White's odds fall to zero.

40 ... Kd6 41 Be4 Rc5 0-1

Two clean pawns down against Botvinnik is two too many!

Game 37

A.Medina Garcia-M.Botvinnik

Palma de Mallorca 1967

Pirc Defence

1 e4 d6

Late in his career, Botvinnik dabbled in non-classical opening lines, such as the Pirc.

2 d4 Nf6 3 Nc3 g6 4 Nf3

In those days most players played the old classical line, now relatively unfashionable compared with the 4 f4 Austrian Attack and the more flexible 4 Be3 variations.

4 ... Bg7 5 Bc4

I find the Bc4 lines ineffective against the Pirc or Modern Defences. The move is more of an affectation of aggression by the social-climbing bishop, rather than any real damaging blow to Black.

5 ... c6

The most precise move order.

6 Bb3

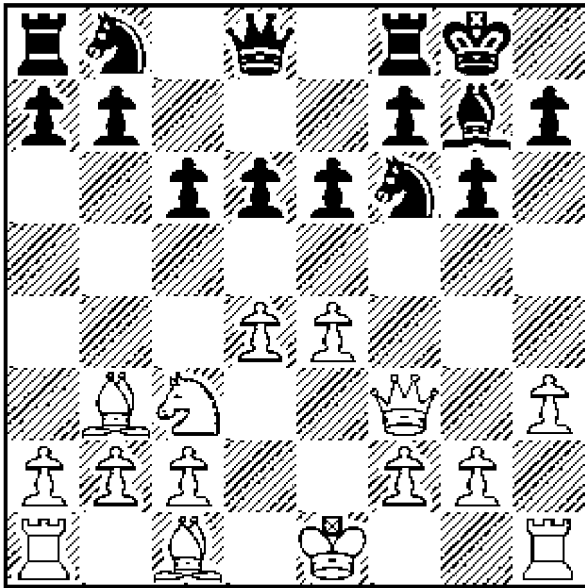
This is the last time this bishop is destined to move in the entire game. The treacherous piece decides his main loyalty is to himself, rather than his king. The direct 6 e5 achieves little after 6 ... dxe5 7 Nxe5 0-0 8 0-0 Nbd7, while 6 a4 runs into 6 ... d5! and Black has equality at minimum.

6 ... 0-0 7 Qe2

Question: What is the idea behind this move?

Answer: In many Bc4 lines against the Pirc, White hopes to disrupt by ramming his e-pawn into Black's position by e4-e5 and sometimes e5-e6. The queen move backs up this plan.

7 ... Bg4! 8 h3 Bxf3 9 Qxf3 e6!!



A radically new strategic concept at the time.

Question: This move looks unnatural. What is Black's idea?

Answer: Having given up his light-squared bishop, Botvinnik switches his structure to a c6/e6/d5 formation, favouring his remaining bishop and shutting out White's b3-counterpart. In my book *1 ... d6: Move by Move*, this concept is used by Black over and over again, and players who utilize this system owe Botvinnik a round of thanks for coming up with the idea.

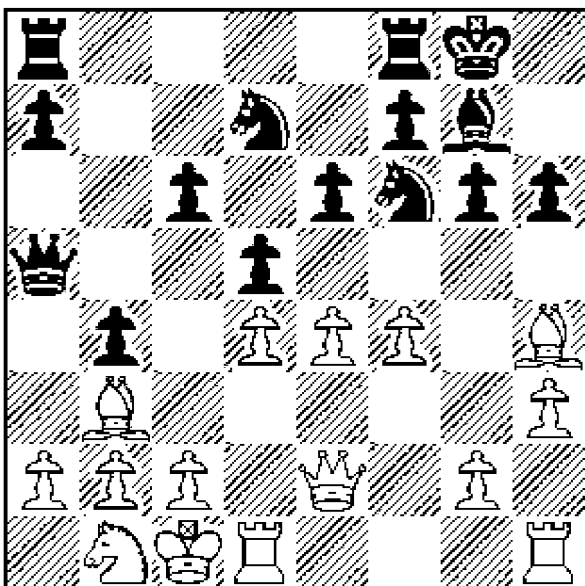
10 Bg5 h6 11 Bh4 Nbd7 12 0-0-0?!

After this natural move Black's attack arrives quickly. Perhaps White should be less ambitious and send his king the other way with 12 0-0 with approximately even chances, W.Watson-W.Swic, Jelenia Gora 1980.

12 ... Qa5 13 Qe2 b5 14 f4

This move weakens e4 but I'm not sure what else to suggest. White must do something or risk annihilation on the queenside.

14 ... b4! 15 Nb1 d5!



Stressing the inefficiency of White's bishop, who is determined to keep vigil on b3. Vigil for what exactly, no one can say.

16 Nd2 c5!

The c-file opens. Black's attack arrives with alarming rapidity.

17 Bxf6

Question: Why give up the bishop pair when he can gain a tempo with 17 e5 - ?

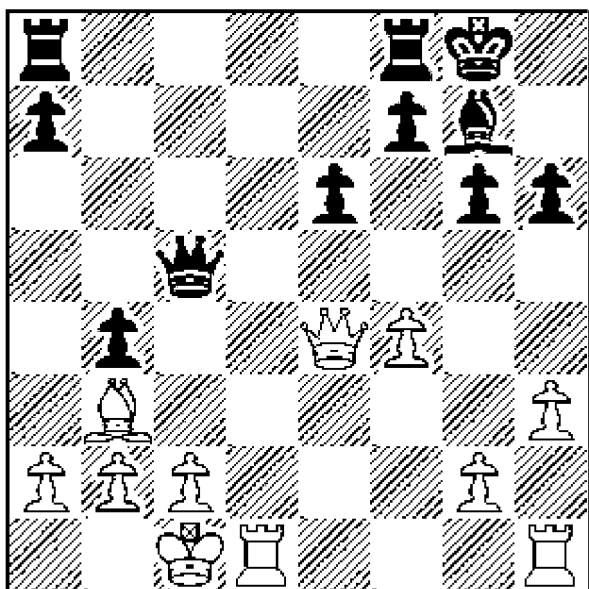
Answer: The trouble is after 17 ... Nh5! Black threatens both ... Nxf4 and ... c5-c4, smothering the unfortunate b3-bishop.

Instead, 17 exd5! keeps White's disadvantage to a minimum by following the principle: *Counter in the centre when challenged on the wing*. For example: 17 ... exd5 (or 17 ... Nxd5 18 f5!) 18 Bxf6 Nxf6 19 dxc5 Qxc5 20 Qd3 Rfe8 (toying with ... Re3) 21 Rhe1 Rxe1 22 Rxe1 a5 23 Ba4.

17 ... Nxf6 18 dxc5?!

To give his bishop breathing room. 18 e5? Nh5! is the same story as the previous note. Perhaps White can try a desperate counterattack, starting with 18 exd5 Nxd5! 19 f5! gxf5 20 g4 f4 21 g5! Ne3, when Black's prospects still look better, but at least White is attacking.

18 ... dxe4 19 Nxe4 Nxe4 20 Qxe4 Qxc5



Question: How would you rate the chances?

Answer: White's position is on the critical list. Although things seem fine when viewed from a quick outward configuration, when examined deeper his position is found lacking: 1. Opposite-coloured bishops favour the attacker – clearly Black in this case. White's out-of-play bishop nervously declines participation, claiming fatigue and the need to begin vespers prayers.

2. White must watch out for ... a7-a5-a4 tricks.

3. White must deal with a black queen transfer to the a1-h8 diagonal, for example with ... Qe7-f6.

Conclusion: White's position is borderline busted, if not already there.

21 Rd7?!

Believe it or not, this move merely loses time.

21 ... Rad8!

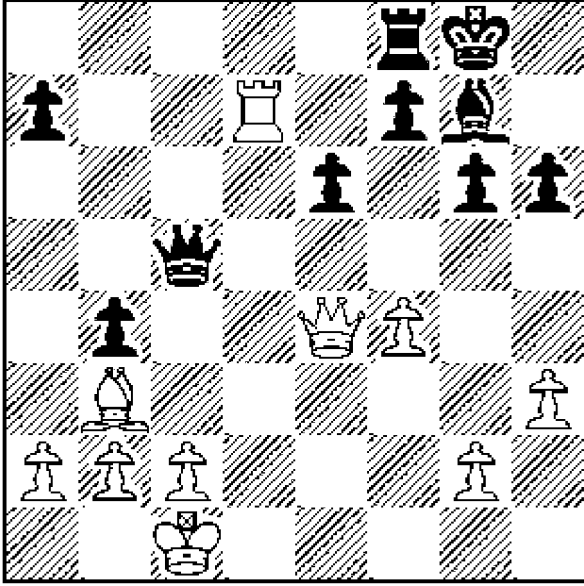
Tactically alert play. Botvinnik avoids the trap 21 ... a5? 22 Bxe6! when Black can't accept the sac. Nor can he pin the bishop with 22 ... Rae8?? as that walks into the secondary shot 23 Bxf7+!.

22 Rhd1?

The rather sorry-looking 22 Rdd1 was necessary.

22 ... Rxd7! 23 Rxd7

In chess, as in life, sorrow always has a mean-spirited way of arriving in waves. Now we get to see why opposite-coloured bishops favour the side with the initiative and attack.



Exercise (combination alert): Black to play and win material.

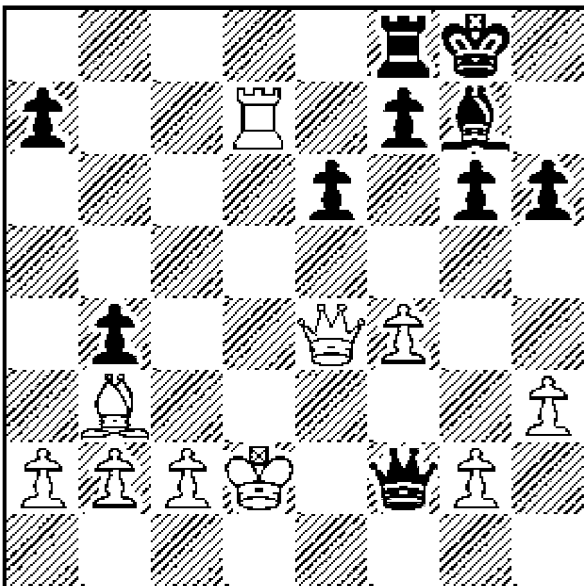
Answer: 23 ... Qg1+! 24 Kd2

The king awakens, shaking in his sweat-soaked bed, recalling a nightmare too terrible to be put into words. 24 Rd1?? loses instantly to 24 ... Bxb2+.

24 ... Qf2+!

Computer-like accuracy. The queen's face is a portrait of false concern. She allows an actress-practiced tear to stream down her left cheek, as she pronounces to White's king: "Your Grace, my prayers are for your swift recovery."

Botvinnik's move is much stronger than 24 ... Bxb2 25 Ke2! Bc3 26 Rd1, when White continues to resist.



25 Kd3

The survival instinct is perhaps an even more elemental reality than the will to win. White's terrified king, sensing a flicker of motion to his right, sidesteps potentially fearful blows with inches to spare, and in doing so fails to alleviate his desperate situation an iota. White's dismal alternatives: a) 25 Qe2 Qxf4+.

b) 25 Kd1 Qf1+ 26 Qe1 (26 Kd2? Bxb2 threatens ... Bc1 mate) 26 ... Qxf4.

c) 25 Kc1 Qf1+ 26 Kd2 (or 26 Rd1 Bxb2+) 26 ... Bxb2 is the same story.

25 ... Qf1+

Black's queen applies checks like war paint.

26 Qe2

Again 26 Kd2 Bxb2 threatens ... Bc1 mate.

26 ... Qxf4

Botvinnik's nimbly destructive queen inflicts damage with blinding speed, then dances away to organize yet another blow.

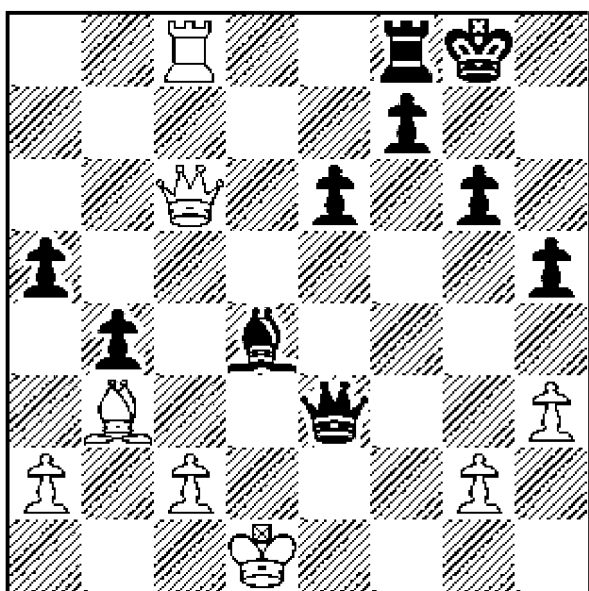
27 Qf3

27 Rxa7?? Qd4 mate would be somewhat inconvenient. From this point White's resistance sinks from view, the way rising floodwaters overtake and envelop a small town. Note how White's useless bishop, not deigning to participate, merely observes the proceedings, eyebrows raised in disdain, from a dignified distance. Just compare the power of the bishops on the board. So marginalized is the pathetic twin on b3, compared to his g7-brother, that the pair when added up come out to a number less than two.

27 ... Qe5 28 Qb7 a5 29 Qc6 Qxb2

The creature lunges, its terrible mandibles clicking and snapping in anticipation of the flesh it will soon taste. Clearly, there is no saving White, now that a vein has been opened on b2, freeing c3 as yet another problem square for White.

30 Ke2 Qe5+ 31 Kf1 h5 32 Rc7 Qf4+ 33 Ke2 Bd4! 34 Rc8 Qe3+ 35 Kd1



Answer: Double attack: mates are threatened on e1 and d2. The white king's curses are wasted on Black's bishop, who merely appears amused.

35 ... Bc3!

The king drops from the gibbet, his legs kicking as he sways. Within the witnessing crowd, his conniving bishop and queen, brother and sister, whisper: "Let us never utter his vile name again."

36 Rxf8+ Kxf8 0-1

Game 38

M.Matulovic-M.Botvinnik

World vs. USSR match, Belgrade 1970

Pirc Defence

Compare Botvinnik's play in this game to the previous one. They are eerily similar.

1 e4 g6 2 d4 Bg7 3 Nf3 d6 4 Bc4

As I mentioned last game, on c4 the bishop is a skilled professional in the wrong profession, with no place to apply his skill. In my opinion, the Bc4 lines, especially against the Modern Defence, fail to fit the overall plan, like mismatching furniture which sours the decor of an otherwise elegant room. In *The Modern Defence: Move by Move*, I rather rudely call this line the Cro-Magnon Variation.

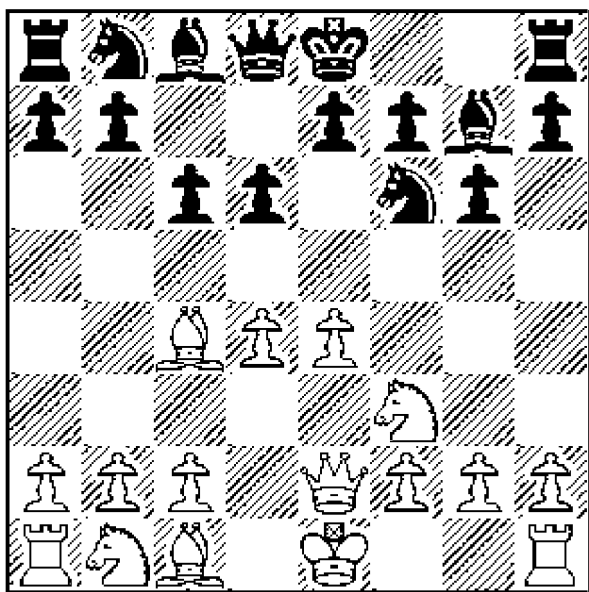
4 ... Nf6

Transposing from Modern to Pirc. In my book I advocate a wall, erected with 4 ... e6, to blunt the bishop's influence, when it can only hobble around with impinged function on the a2-g8 diagonal.

5 Qe2

Just slightly altering from the previous game. Qe2 is given precedence over Nc3.

5 ... c6



6 Bb3

Question: Shouldn't White surge forward with 6 e5 this time?

Answer: I believe this is his only chance at an edge. For example: 6 ... Nd5 7 0-0 0-0 8 h3 dxe5 9 dxe5 (after 9 Nxe5 Nb6! 10 Bb3, J.Mullon-L.Fressinet, French Championship, Pau 2012, Black may be able to get away with grabbing the pawn; *i.e.* 10 ... Qxd4 11 Nf3 Qd7 12 Rd1 Qc7, when I don't believe in White's compensation) 9 ... Qc7 10 Re1 h6 11 Nbd2 and White's extra central space and potential kingside attacking

chances may give him an edge, V.Kramnik-R.Ponomarev, Moscow (blitz) 2008.

6 ... 0-0 7 Bg5

Matulovic's attempted improvement over Botvinnik's game with Medina.

Question: But isn't this the same position?

Answer: Not quite. White left out Nc3 and replaced it with an earlier Bg5.

Question: What is the significance?

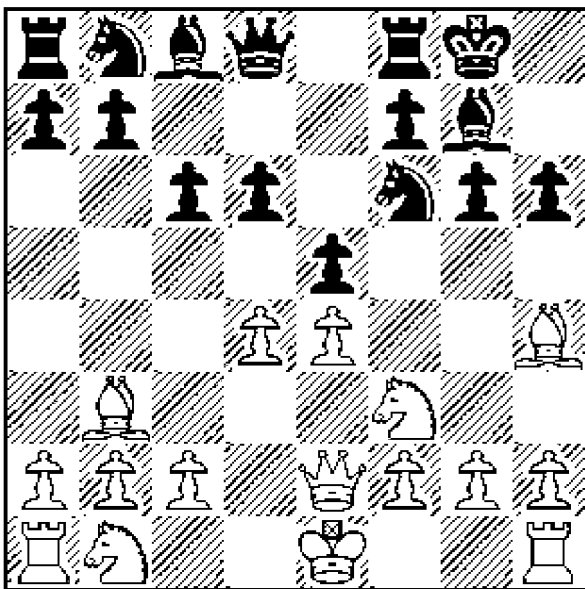
Answer: It means that Botvinnik doesn't have access to his (then) revolutionary ... Bg4 plan, mainly because White responds with e4-e5 as soon as Black plays ... e7-e6. However, Matulovic soon learns that it is not so easy to outprep Botvinnik, who is ready for Matulovic's idea as well.

7 ... h6!

Question: Why an exclamation mark for such a mundane move?

Answer: Please ask me this question again on move 11! Perhaps Matulovic expected Botvinnik to continue in similar fashion to the previous game with 7 ... Bg4, when 8 Nbd2! gives White a slight advantage.

8 Bh4 e5!



Botvinnik initiates a radical new reform to old party doctrine by switching gears and setting up a dark square configuration instead.

9 dxe5 dxe5 10 Nbd2

10 Nxe5?? is dealt with harshly by 10 ... Qa5+, picking up the knight.

10 ... Qc7!

Again, amazing precision. Botvinnik unpins rather than develops.

11 Nc4 Nh5!

Now we see the idea behind Botvinnik's 8th and 10th moves: ... Nf4 becomes an

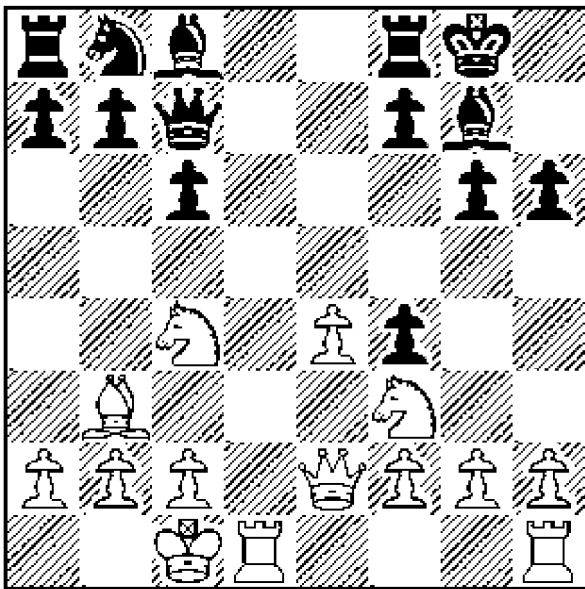
annoying issue for White.

12 Bg3 Nf4!

Picking up the bishop pair and the dark squares with it. The obvious 12 ... Bg4? is a mistake. White grabs an advantage after 13 Bxe5! Bxe5 14 Ncxe5 and if 14 ... Nf4 15 Qd2! Nxe2+ 16 Kf1 Bxf3 17 Nxe6!, his position borders on winning.

13 Bxf4 exf4 14 0-0-0?!

A few grains of sand ensconced within the works of a watch are enough to throw off the finely tuned gears. White reaches the high point of his "initiative". His position is destined to degenerate in anti-climatic fashion. GM Alex Volzhin writes: "A very risky approach. White makes the same mistake as in the game Medina-Botvinnik, clearly underestimating the power of Black's dark-squared bishop."



Black also stands better if White refrains from castling and plays 14 e5 Bg4 15 Qe4 Nd7 16 Qxf4 Bxf3 17 Qxf3 b5 18 Ne3 Nxe5 19 Qe2, but perhaps this is how White should have played to minimize his disadvantage.

14 ... Bg4

Aiming for opposite-coloured bishops once again.

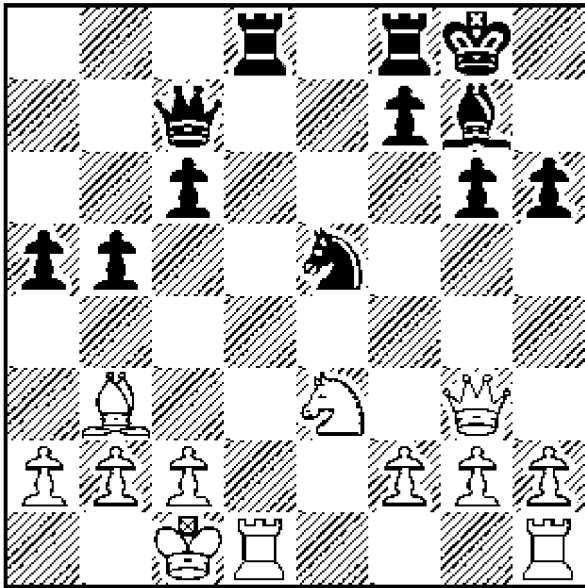
15 e5

Or 15 h3 Bxf3 16 Qxf3 Nd7, when ... b7-b5 is in the air, and if 17 Nd6 Ne5 18 Qxf4??, then 18 ... Rfd8! wins a piece: the white knight cannot move because of ... Nd3+!, winning the queen, while 19 Qd2 fails to 19 ... Bf8.

15 ... Nd7 16 Qe4 Rad8

Botvinnik snorts at the offered trifle. Of course he is not about to squander his good position for a crumb after 16 ... Bxf3 17 gxf3 Nxe5?! 18 Nxe5 Qxe5 19 Qxe5 Bxe5 20 Rd7, when White's control of the seventh rank compensates the missing pawn.

17 Qxf4 Bxf3 18 Qxf3 b5 19 Ne3 Nxe5 20 Qg3 a5



Threatening ... a5-a4. Haven't we seen this movie before? As in the previous game:

1. Black owns the stronger bishop. An ill general's rank is subordinate to the will of his lower ranking army doctor, since the general's body is actually the property of the government, not his own to degenerate wilfully. White's bishop, which looks powerfully posted on b3, in reality does little and is merely a stationary target for ... a5-a4 or ... c6-c5-c4 pawn thrusts.
2. Black enjoys domination of the dark squares.
3. Black has the stronger attack.

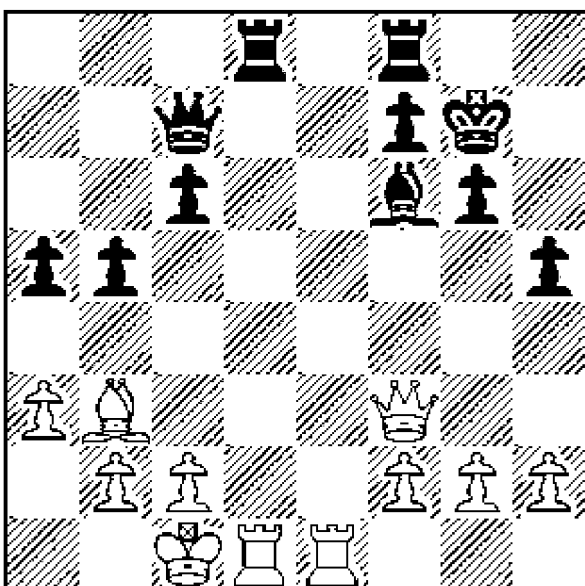
21 a3 Kh7

Black might also consider giving up the d5-square to launch his armada straight away with 21 ... c5!? 22 Bd5 c4.

22 Ng4 h5 23 Nxe5 Bxe5

Once again, Botvinnik's bishop towers over his counterpart on b3.

24 Qf3 Kg7 25 Rhe1 Bf6



Question: I don't really see Black's advantage or attack. Isn't the position rather drawish?

Answer: Patience and all unfolds. White may even be busted here. Once again, the imbalance/principle: *Opposite-coloured bishops favour the attacking side* – and generate terrible force in just a few moves.

26 c3

Question: On his last move, Matulovic weakened his king position. The question is: how would Botvinnik attack if White sat tight and did nothing?

Answer: A sample line: 26 Qg3 (the nervous queen sinks her teeth into her lower lip) 26 ... Qb7! (of course Black is unwilling to swap) 27 Kb1 Rxd1+ 28 Rxd1 a4! 29 Ba2 b4 (targeting b2) 30 axb4 Qxb4 31 c3 Qe4+! 32 Qd3 (32 Ka1? a3 33 bxa3 Qc2 leads to mate) 32 ... Qxg2 and White is busted, down a pawn, perhaps losing more, and remaining with an exposed king.

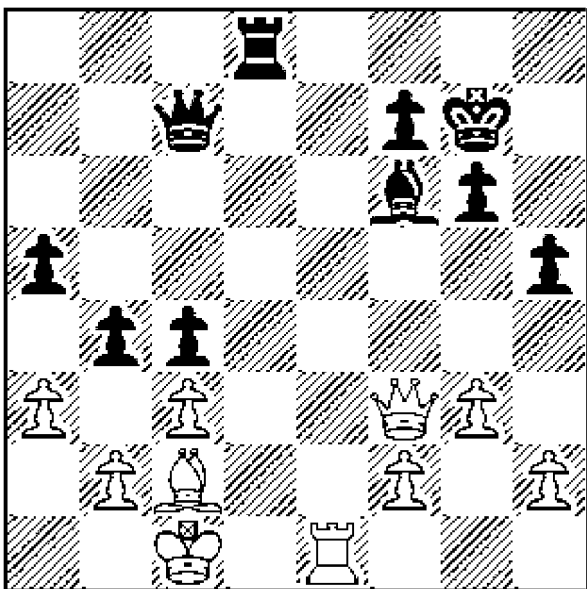
26 ... c5

Here they come.

27 Rxd8 Rxd8 28 g3 c4 29 Bc2

A soldier returning home from a failed, unpopular war shouldn't expect a victory parade.

29 ... b4!



Botvinnik relentlessly goes after White's king. The inflamed sore on b2 begins to throb to an unbearable level.

30 axb4 axb4 31 cxb4 Qb6 32 Rd1 Qxb4?!

This is too elemental a reaction for a position requiring finesse and was undoubtedly a hasty decision, influenced by the clock. Botvinnik jeopardizes his win by allowing too many swaps. He should retain a pair of rooks on the board with 32 ... Rb8!.

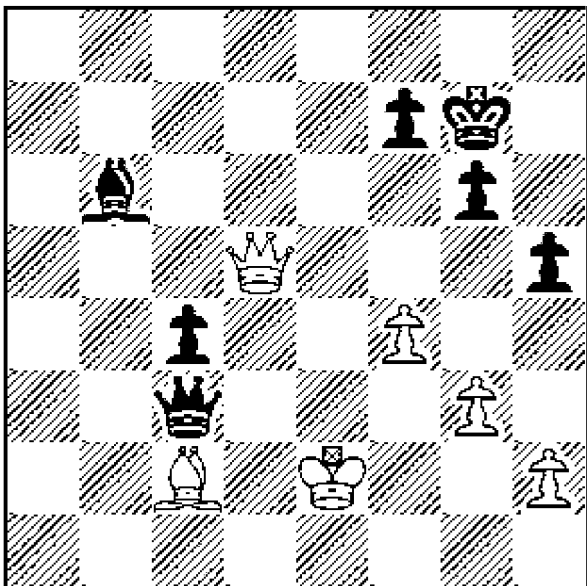
33 Rxd8 Qxb2+ 34 Kd1 Bxd8 35 Qd5 Qf6

The queen returns home to count her money.

36 Ke2 Bb6

Forcing a further weakness.

37 f4 Qc3



38 Qe4?!

If you sense the opponent's momentum gathering strength, sometimes your best bet is to confront the menace immediately, rather than stall a fight that is inevitable. Here 38 Qe5+! Qxe5+ (the queen petulantly agrees to the negotiation, mainly since she had no choice in the matter; now White's harried king begins to regulate his once ragged breath and Black's attack gutters out, like a candle near an open window) 39 fxe5 Bd4 40 e6! doesn't look so easy for Black to win, despite his two extra pawns.

38 ... Bd4!

Not giving White a second chance to remove queens from the board.

39 f5?

By attempting to expose Botvinnik's king, Matulovic exposes his own. After this move, his own foundation sags and collapses.

39 ... gxf5!

Deflection.

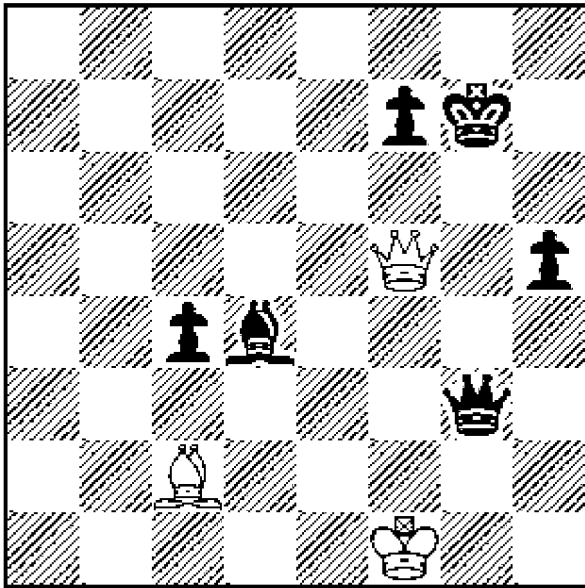
40 Qxf5 Qe3+

Black's queen enters with deadly effect.

41 Kf1

Not 41 Kd1?? Bc3! *etc.* The bishop is one of those scheming people who tends to enter rooms unnoticed and unseen. This is the identical mating pattern from Medina-Botvinnik, a game Matulovic must have studied heavily in his pre-game prep!

41 ... Qg1+ 42 Ke2 Qxh2+ 43 Kd1 Qg1+ 44 Ke2 Qe3+ 45 Kf1 Qxg3



White's queen can't take anything since she must stand guard against mate on f2. Nor does a perpetual check exist anywhere.

46 Qh7+ Kf8 0-1

The black king's person is every bit as sacrosanct as the populace believes. The curl of his lip (an unfortunate genetic trait inherited from a great aunt) makes him appear 35% more arrogant than he actually is. After 47 Qf5 Qg1+ 48 Ke2 Qg2+ 49 Kd1 Bc3! we veer closer to that familiar pattern once again!

Chapter Five

Botvinnik on Accumulating Advantages

An over-the-hill major league baseball player may still shine if demoted to the minor leagues. Botvinnik in his game against Szilagyi (Game 46), may have been past his prime but, when facing a non-world-class player, still packed a punch. This game is one of the clearest examples of seizing control over and then exploiting a weakness on one colour.

If we played a chess word association game and said “Accumulating Advantages”, I would reply “Botvinnik”! The power of Botvinnik’s logic endures and the once fragmented segments coalesce into a perfect whole. His microscopically detailed strategic surveillance revealed the most hidden nuances, unseen by the common eye of the majority of his opponents and a strategic advantage, once seized, was rarely relinquished.

Game 39

M.Botvinnik-S.Flohr

Moscow 1936

Alekhine’s Defence

1 e4 Nf6

Alekhine’s Defence was a rare guest in the 1930s. In my database, I count only 19 times when even Alekhine himself played his own Defence, and all but two of these were in the previous decade.

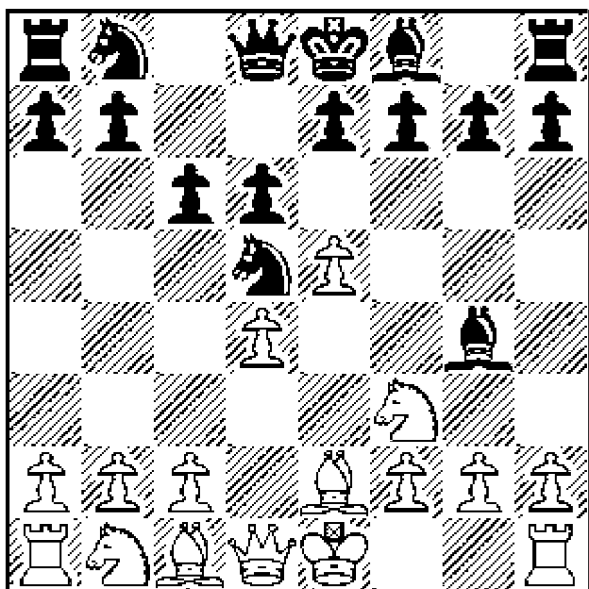
2 e5 Nd5 3 d4 d6 4 Nf3

The main line, perhaps White’s best shot at an edge.

4 ... Bg4

Currently, most top GMs favour the line 4 ... dxe5 5 Nxe5 c6.

5 Be2 c6



6 0-0

Sometimes White goes for 6 Ng5 and I always respond with 6 ... Bf5 7 e6 (almost everyone plays this, but I’m convinced 7 Bd3 is a better try for an edge) 7 ... fxe6 8 g4!? (after 8 0-0, I hung on to my extra pawn like grim death and won in N.De

Firmian-C.Lakdawala, World Rapid Championship, Mazatlan 1988) 8 ... Bg6 9 Nxe6 Qd7 10 Nf4 Nxf4 11 Bxf4 e5! (a theoretical novelty) 12 dxe5 dxe5 13 Bxe5 Qe6!? with ... Nd7 and 0-0-0 to follow, with a ferocious initiative for the pawn, A.Hancu-C.Lakdawala, San Diego 1984.

6 ... dxe5

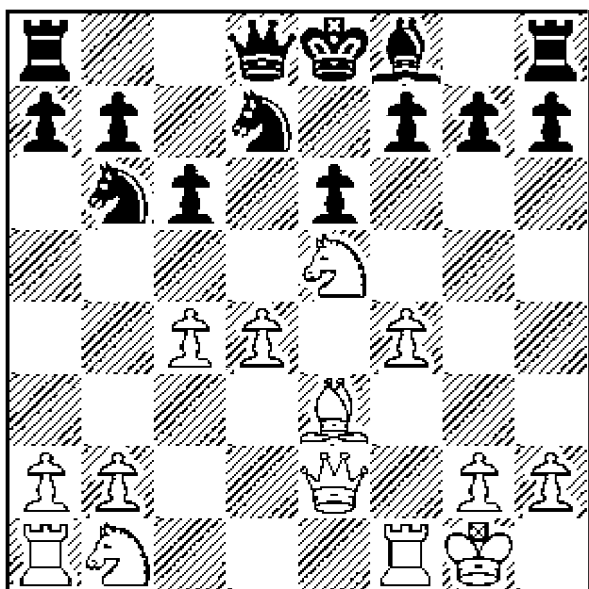
This leads to a passive position. Today, most players prefer 6 ... Bxf3 7 Bxf3 dxe5 8 dxe5 e6 9 Nd2! (believe it or not, the ending is quite okay for Black after 9 c4 Ne7 10 Qxd8+ Kxd8, since the e5-pawn provides a target for Black which easily offsets White's extra space) 9 ... Nd7 10 Re1 Qc7 11 Nc4 N7b6 (11 ... b5? 12 Bxd5! cxd5 13 Nd6+! Bxd6 14 Qxd5!, another dirty trick worked out by the computers, is very good for White) 12 Qe2 Nxc4 13 Qxc4 0-0-0, as in Al.Ivanov-C.Lakdawala, Los Angeles (rapid) 2000. Black's position is playable though again slightly passive. I went on to get squeezed by my opponent's space and bishop pair.

7 Nxe5 Bxe2 8 Qxe2 Nd7 9 f4

Ruling out ... Nxe5 possibilities, since the recapture with the f-pawn opens the f-file for White's rook. Alternatively, V.Malakhov-D.Labunskiy, Russian Team Championship 2001, continued 9 c4 Nxe5 10 dxe5 Nc7 11 Nc3 g6 (11 ... e6? leaves a gaping hole on d6) 12 Be3 Bg7 13 f4, when Black found himself cramped and short on counterplay.

9 ... e6 10 c4 N5b6 11 Be3

Black may be passive and cramped, but it isn't easy to exploit, since he remains free of weaknesses.



11 ... Be7 12 Nc3 0-0 13 Rf3!?

The younger Botvinnik always had one eye on the opponent's king. Most players would opt for the more normal 13 Rad1.

13 ... Qe8!?

Question: What is the point of this move?

Answer: I think Black was worried about Rh3 and Qh5, so he planned ... f7f5 at an appropriate moment.

14 Rd1 Rd8 15 b3 f5!

Black's king looks a bit safer after this move.

Question: But doesn't the move also create a backward e6-pawn?

Answer: As it turns out, e6 isn't so easy to exploit since Black easily defends the pawn as many times as White attacks it.

16 Nd3

Principle: The side with the extra space should retain pieces on the board. Botvinnik tries to make something from his space edge but has trouble making headway. Black feels apprehension but not yet fear.

16 ... Bf6

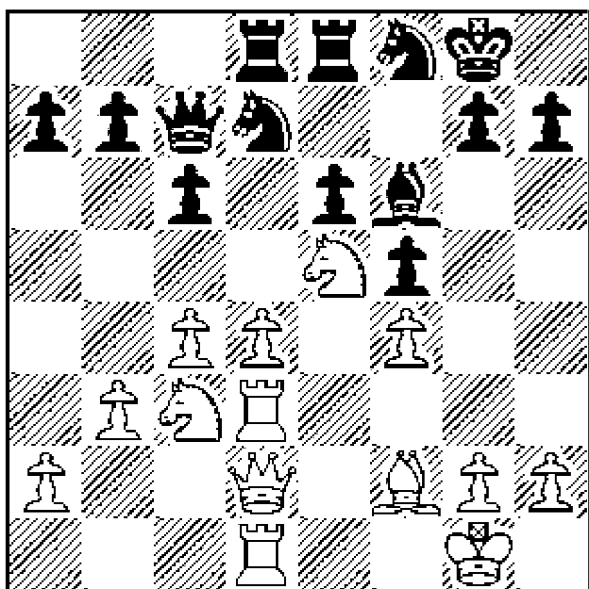
Black counterattacks d4 to offset White's potential pressure on e6.

17 Bf2 Qf7 18 Ne1

Intending Rfd3 and Nf3.

18 ... Rfe8 19 Rfd3 Nf8 20 Nf3 Qc7 21 Ne5 Nbd7 22 Qd2

Botvinnik decides that e6 is an unattainable target and allows Black to seal the square with ... Nxe5.



22 ... Be7

22 ... Nxe5!? 23 fxe5 (23 dxe5 offers nothing after 23 ... Rxd3 24 Qxd3 Be7, as White has no infiltration points down the d-file – Black can cover a7 and then challenge with a future ... Rd8) 23 ... Be7 is also playable. It won't be so easy for White to try and exploit his extra space since Black lacks even a single weakness in his position.

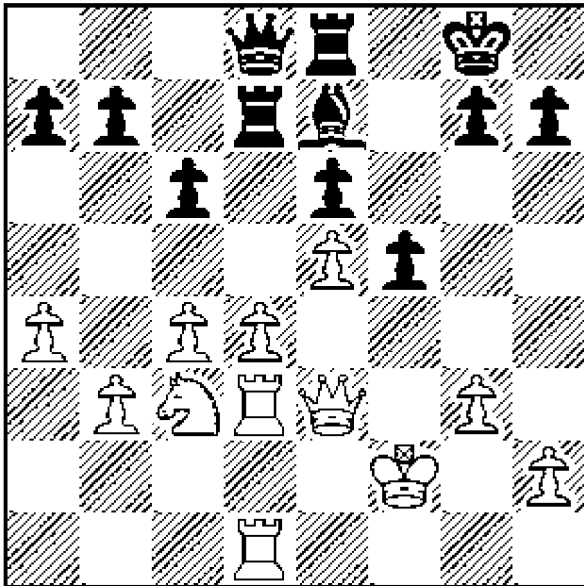
23 Nf3 Nf6 24 Qc1 Ne4! 25 Ne5

25 Be3 Bb4 is annoying for White.

25 ... Nxf2 26 Kxf2 Nd7 27 Qe3 Nxe5 28 fxe5

28 dxe5 Rxd3 29 Rxd3 b6 30 Ke2 Rd8 looks equal.

28 ... Qa5 29 a4 Rd7 30 g3 Qd8



31 Kg2

Question: Can White break through with 31 d5 - ?

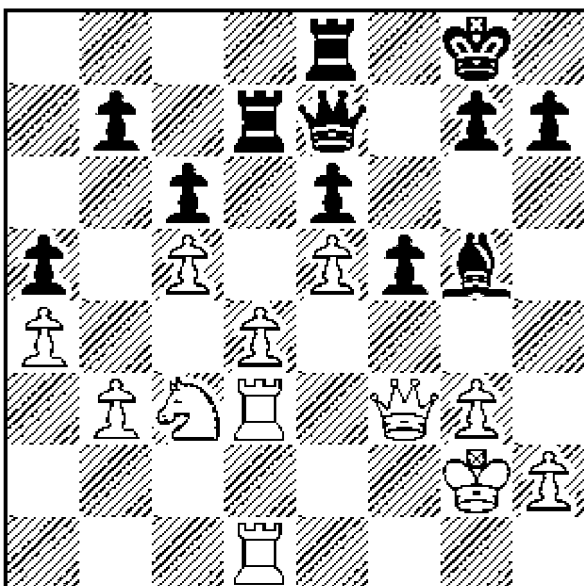
Answer: If Black is careful he can hold his own after 31 ... exd5 32 cxd5 Qa5! (not 32 ... cxd5?! 33 Nxd5 with a clear advantage to White, who threatens Nf6+ as well as Qxa7) 33 Kg2 (33 d6? overextends after 33 ... Bd8!, threatening to swing round to b6, and if 34 b4 Qxe5 35 Qxa7 Bg5, Black is better since White's king cover has been eroded) 33 ... Bb4 34 dxc6 Rxd3 35 Qxd3 bxc6!, when Black looks fine.

31 ... Bg5 32 Qf3 Qe7 33 c5!

Question: Why did White just give himself a backward d-pawn rather than play d4-d5 - ?

Answer: Botvinnik didn't want to release the central tension too early, and planned b3-b4-b5. Let's look at your suggestion: 33 d5 exd5 34 h4! Bh6 35 cxd5 Qxe5 36 dxc6 Rxd3 37 Rxd3 bxc6 38 Qxc6 Qe6 39 Qxe6+ Rxe6 40 Rd7 Re3 41 Nd5 Rxb3 42 Rxa7 Be3 and again Black should hold the position.

33 ... a5!



Exercise (planning): With his last move, Flohr stopped the b3-b4-b5 plan. White must now switch gears and find an alternative idea to make progress. Come up with a plan for White.

Answer: 34 Nb1!

Botvinnik plans to transfer his knight to the dominant d6-square via a3 and c4.

34 ... Qf8?

Flohr drifts – in fact after this move his position looks strategically lost. Black had to play 34 ... Rd5! 35 Na3 b6! 36 Nc4 bxc5 37 h4 Bh6 38 Nxa5 Qc7 39 Nc4 cxd4 40 Rxd4 g6, when he continues to fight on.

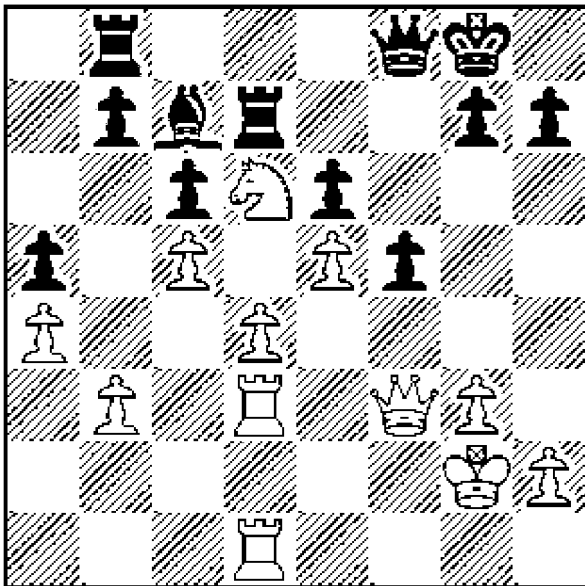
35 Na3 Bd8

This time the ... b7-b6 trick fails miserably after 35 ... b6?? 36 Qxc6 and White wins.

36 Nc4 Bc7 37 Nd6

The level of offence is heightened by the simple fact of the rude knight's absolute lack of contrition.

37 ... Rb8



What a difference from a few moves ago! If Black chops that d6-knight, he hands White a deeply embedded passed pawn and opens the e-file as well, which endangers e6.

Exercise (planning): Find a new plan for White to make progress.

Answer: Open the b-file and target b7.

38 Rb1! Qd8 39 b4 axb4 40 Rxb4

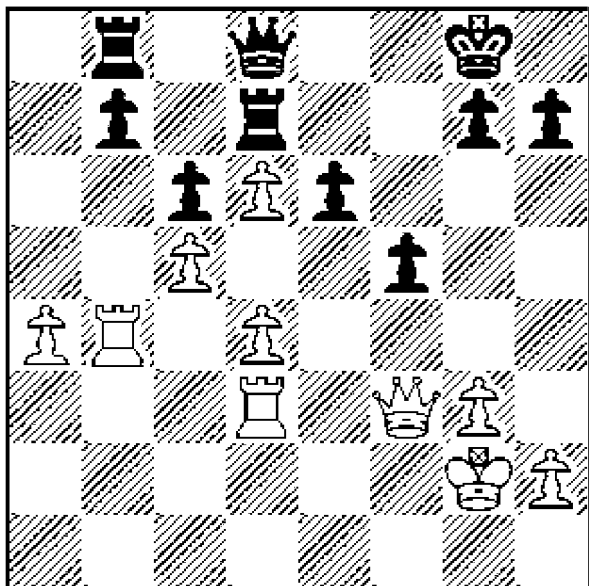
White's aim is to force Black to take on d6. Black must grudgingly settle for this unfortunate exchange since the pressure on b7 grows to unbearable levels.

40 ... Bxd6

The bishop's upper-bracket income takes a tumble, as he loses his old job and embarks on his new career as a street mime. Black reluctantly decides upon a

remedial surgical option to remove the inflamed sore from d6, only to have it replaced with another inflamed sore on d6!. Strategic suicide, but it's understandable that Flohr didn't want to endure a slow death after 40 ... Ba5 (the bishop finally reaches his destination, only to wish he were elsewhere) 41 Rb2 h6 42 Rdb3 Qe7 43 h4 (Black is close to zugzwang) 43 ... Kh8 44 Qd3! with Qb1! to follow.

41 exd6



An unpleasant protuberance pops up on d6, which Black finds as difficult to remove as a wart. New targets arise at e6 and b7. White's pristine structure shines in comparison to Black's dilapidations, which sprawl across the board.

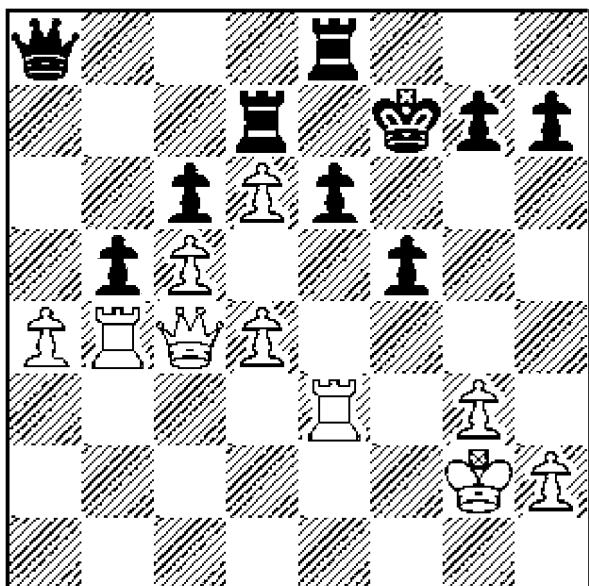
41 ... Qa5 42 Rdb3 Re8 43 Qe2

Botvinnik plays it safe, denying Black any potential counterplay after 43 Rxb7!, which *Houdini* works out to a win for White in the sequence 43 ... Rxb7 44 Rxb7 Qxa4 45 Qh5 Rf8 46 Qe2! (now e6 falls) 46 ... Qxd4 47 Qxe6+ Kh8 48 Rf7 Rb8 49 Rxf5.

43 ... Qa8 44 Re3 Kf7 45 Qc4

45 Qd3 is perhaps more accurate and avoids Black's next move.

45 ... b5!?



The desire to retaliate against an oppressor may be a cosmic universal. Black's clever, if insufficient, idea smacks of an artificial construct, since the intermission of Black's pain is of brief duration. Still, when busted, what else to do but look for tricks?

46 Qc2

Botvinnik declines, hurriedly engaging in alterations, while dodging a pair of traps with polite disinterest. Black's point:

a) 46 axb5?? cxb5+ wins the queen.

b) 46 cxb6? c5+ 47 b7 Rxb7 48 Rxb7+ Qxb7+ 49 Rf3 cxd4 50 Qxd4 Rd8, when Black may hold the game.

46 ... Rxd6!?

The crossbow was a deadly weapon but, once fired, took an eternity to crank up and reload. More tricks, but Botvinnik has everything under control. 46 ... Qa5 and now the startling 47 d5!! is hopeless for Black as well.

47 cxd6!

In a chess game it is impossible to be ready for every contingency, since we have no clue of their shapes or forms, or even if and when they arrive at all. Sometimes the only way to refute an opponent's trap is to fall into it!

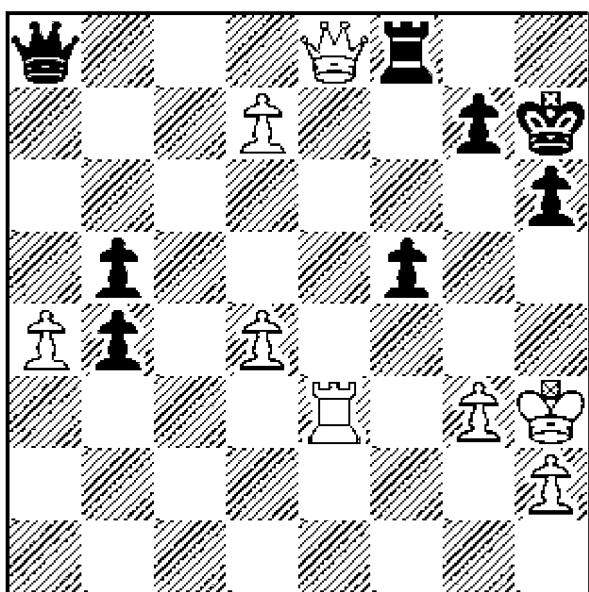
47 ... c5+ 48 Kh3 cxb4 49 Qc7+ Kg8 50 d7

This pawn paralyses Black, floating in rarefied air on d7.

50 ... Rf8 51 Qd6! h6

Not 51 ... bxa4?? 52 Qxe6+ Kh8 53 Qe8!, when Black has no defence to Qxa8 followed by Re8+.

52 Qxe6+ Kh7 53 Qe8!



The queen struts about with the unconscious ease provided by a life of privilege.

53 ... b3!

If a lifeguard sees two people drowning simultaneously, shouldn't he at least try and save one of them, even if he can't save both? So perilous is Black's position, that each move is a matter of grave finality. Flohr finds Black's best chance. Instead, 53 ... bxa4? 54 Qxa8 Rxa8 55 Re8 ends it, or 53 ... Rxe8? 54 dxe8Q Qxe8 55 Rxe8 bxa4 56 Ra8 and Black's pawns prove to be too slow in their dream to promote.

54 Qxa8

Botvinnik simplifies into an easily won rook ending.

54 ... Rxa8 55 axb5 Rd8 56 Rxb3 Rxd7 57 b6

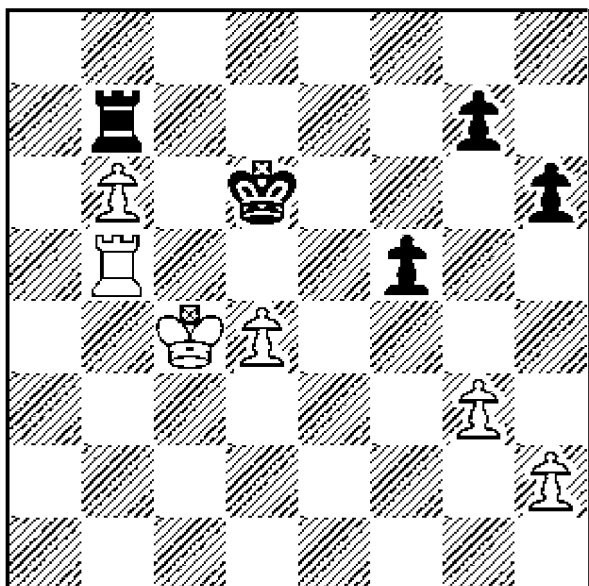
Principle: Passed pawns must be pushed.

57 ... Rb7

For a gravely wounded soldier, the mere fact that he remains among the living is not necessarily a cause for celebration. Black's rook is hopelessly tied down.

58 Kg2 Kg6 59 Kf3 Kf6 60 Rb5 Ke6 61 Ke3 Kd6 62 Kd3! Kc6 63 Kc4! Kd6

63 ... Rxb6 64 Rxb6+ Kxb6 65 Kd5 g5 66 Ke5 is game over. The black king's eyes are pools of hopeless resignation to a terrible fate.



Exercise (planning): No need for a convoluted, rambling plan.

Find one straightforward idea and you force Black's resignation.

How did Botvinnik convert his advantage in this titanic struggle?

Answer: Clear b5 for his king.

64 Rd5+! Kc6 65 Rc5+! Kd6

Black's king, who always regarded himself as head of the clan, the paterfamilias, now realizes he was mistaken, since White's king seems to have assumed the role. 65 ... Kxb6 66 Rb5+ simply transposes to a dead lost king and pawn ending.

66 Kb5 1-0

Is it not treason to obstruct a king's wishes?

Game 40

V.Smyslov-M.Botvinnik

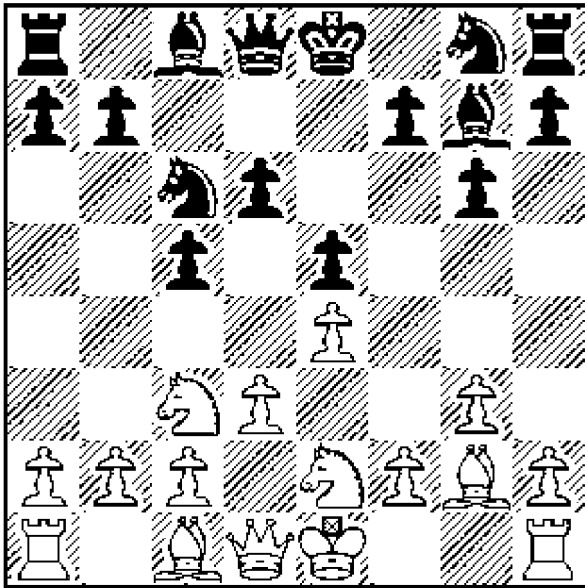
World Championship (15th matchgame), Moscow 1954

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 Nge2

Today, theory says play the knight to f3 (after f2-f4) or else to h3. But neither plan offers White an edge.

6 ... e5!!



Question: A double exclamation mark for a routine move in the Closed Sicilian?

Answer: It's a double exclamation mark if you invented the entire idea, which blossomed into two major branches of both the Sicilian and the English (when played a tempo up). This was the very first time this idea was played, and it had the effect of absolutely decimating Smyslov's home prep. In fact, he abandoned Closed Sicilian after this game.

The remarkable strategic concept behind Botvinnik's move is that Black can indeed get away with the creation of a giant hole on d5, due to his ample compensation of central control. In fact, it becomes apparent that White's control over d5 gives him little. Black's last move must have come as a complete shock to the witnessing audience, and Botvinnik may have been a bit like a frog trying to explain the concept of breathable air to fish – simply outside the realm of comprehension.

7 Nd5

Smyslov, undoubtedly startled by Botvinnik's last move, jumps his knight into the hole, probably expecting an edge. 7 0-0 and 7 Be3 are played more often today.

7 ... Nge7 8 c3

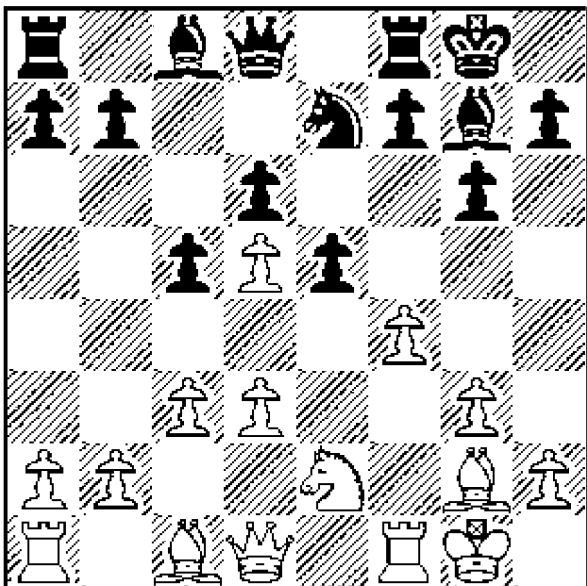
I don't think it's a wise idea to allow Black to seal the d5-square, White's single plus here. Smyslov probably saw that alternatives lead to less dynamic positions: a) 8 Bg5 h6 9 Bf6 0-0 10 Nec3 Bxf6 11 Nxf6+ Kg7 12 Nfd5 Nxd5 13 Nxd5 and White got nothing, B.Spassky-L.Christiansen, Linares 1985.

b) 8 Nec3 0-0 9 h4!? (the push of White's h-pawn is another try in this line) 9 ... Nxd5 10 Nxd5 Ne7 11 Nxe7+ Qxe7 12 h5 Be6 13 Be3 b5 14 Qd2 a5 15 a4 b4 16 Bg5 (a waste to time since Black wants to play ... f7-f6 anyway) 16 ... f6 17 Be3 Rad8 18 hxc6 hxc6 and Black stands slightly better with his greater space, whereas White's kingside attack is nonexistent, Y.Balashov-V.Filippov, Kazan 2005.

8 ... Nxd5

Botvinnik fills the d5 hole with a white pawn.

9 exd5 Ne7 10 0-0 0-0 11 f4?!



What was once a natural flow now alters into something viscous and syrupy. Botvinnik writes: "After this pseudo-active move, White gets a difficult game. The pawn on [f4] merely limits the mobility of his knight and QB. The white king position is somewhat weakened as well." I add: when Black exchanges on f4, he gets a healthy kingside pawn majority, which could trouble White in an ending. Furthermore, White weakens e3, a factor on which Botvinnik soon pounces.

11 ... Bd7 12 h3 Qc7 13 Be3

White should probably release the tension and go for 13 fxe5 Bxe5 14 Bh6 Rfe8 15 g4.

13 ... Rae8 14 Qd2?!

This completely natural move later walks into an unusual pin. Botvinnik suggests 14 Bf2, when Black still holds an edge after 14 ... exf4 15 Nxf4 Nf5 due to his healthy kingside pawn majority.

14 ... Nf5!

Botvinnik understands that he can utilize the f5-square. His move is much stronger than the routine 14 ... f5.

15 Bf2

The bishop raises a hand, signalling calm to his comrades, who grow agitated by the black knight's presence on f5.

15 ... h5! 16 Rae1

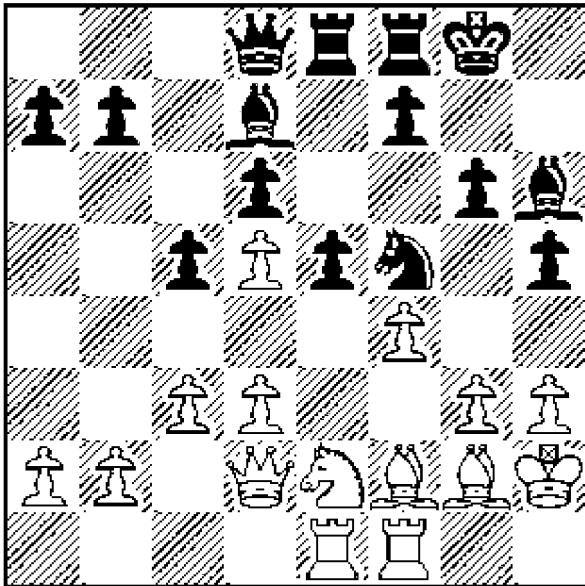
Question: Wasn't Black's last move risky since it allowed White to surge with 16 g4 - ?

Answer: This would quickly lead to White getting overextended: 16 ... hxg4 17 hxg4 Nh6! 18 g5 Ng4 19 Bg3 c4! with a clear advantage to Black.

16 ... Qd8!

Subtle positional insight. Botvinnik realizes he needs his queen for the fight on the kingside.

17 Kh2 Bh6!



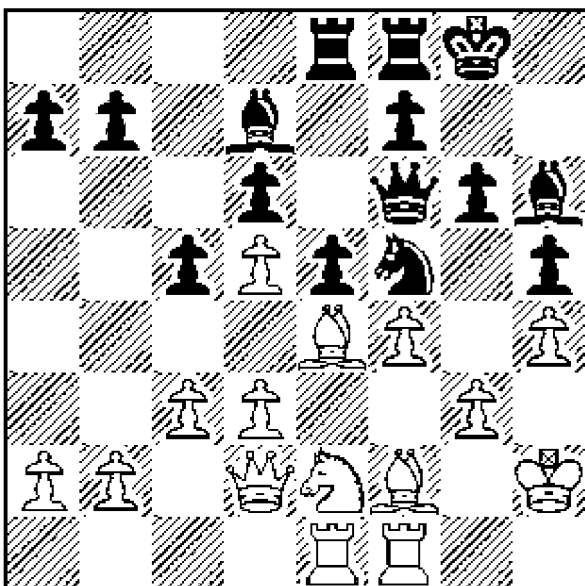
The old bishop delivers a sermon on the virtues of respecting your betters in society (i.e. himself!). We can safely deduce that this position was not what Smyslov had in mind when he essayed the Closed Sicilian! Now ... h5-h4 is in the air, which induces White into his next weakening move.

18 h4?!

An overreaction which loses material. The discomfort of the cure exceeds the initial complaint. Smyslov made natural moves and finds himself strategically busted! Such was the awesome power of Botvinnik's positional understanding.

18 ... Qf6! 19 Be4?

Apparently, only the weird computer move 19 Rd1! allows White to hang on by a thread.



On the one side there is hesitant disinclination; on the other we find confident preparation. White fails to appreciate the true import of Black's last move and his game spins out of control. The tension reaches its apex and now the bull begins to scrape the ground and snort, preparing the charge.

Exercise (combination alert): How did Botvinnik win material in this position?

Answer: 19 ... exf4! 20 Nxf4

The knight's soft, untroubled hands betray a life of ease and comfort – but this is about to change.

20 ... Nxh4!

Overload.

21 Be3 Nf5 22 Bxf5

A miserable move to be forced to make. Smyslov sees his possibly intended combination 22 Nxh5? gxh5 23 Bxf5 Bxe3 24 Rxe3 runs into 24 ... Qg5! 25 Bxd7 (25 Be4?? is met simply by 25 ... f5) 25 ... Rxe3 26 Rf3 Re5 with a clean, extra exchange.

22 ... Qxf5 23 Qg2

23 Ne6?? fails miserably to 23 ... Bxe3 24 Qxe3 Qxd5 25 Nc7 Rxe3 26 Nxd5 Rxe1 27 Rxe1 Kg7 28 Re7 (the infiltration leads nowhere) 28 ... Bc6 with two extra pawns in Black's account.

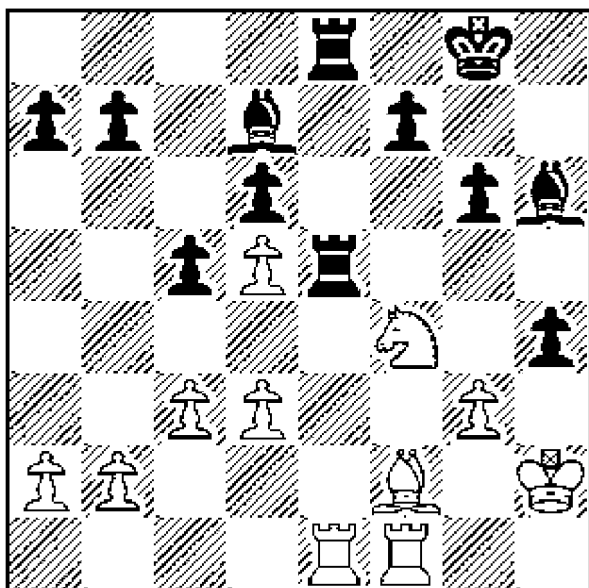
23 ... Qg4 24 Qe2

Complete desperation and the equivalent of resignation. 24 Bd2 Rxe1 25 Rxe1 g5 26 Ne2 Re8 27 Ng1 Rxe1 28 Bxe1 Bf5 is no better.

24 ... Qxe2+ 25 Rxe2 Re5 26 Ree1

After 26 d4?! cxd4!, White would have to recapture with his pawn.

26 ... Rfe8 27 Bf2 h4!



The demanding taskmaster wrings every ounce of sweat from his pieces. After suffering absolutely zero vicissitudes this game, Botvinnik now focuses on conversion. Events couldn't have flowed and resolved themselves more favourably if Botvinnik himself had orchestrated the story line. We encounter White's symptoms of decay and dilapidation across the board: 1. He is a clean pawn down.

2. Black owns the bishop pair.

3. White has a crippled queenside pawn majority, which effectively makes him two pawns down.

4. Black continues to chip away at the support of f4 with fastidious care.

5. Botvinnik creates a pair of kingside passed pawns.

6. Botvinnik plays the black pieces!

28 Rxe5 Rxe5 29 d4 hxg3+ 30 Kxg3

After 30 Bxg3 cxd4 31 cxd4 Re4, Black wins a second pawn. Instead, White's king, beaten down and humiliated, raises a fist to no one in particular, declaring: "I am resolved and will extract revenge!" Unfortunately, his prediction fails to come to pass.

30 ... Rg5+ 31 Kh2 Rf5! 32 Be3

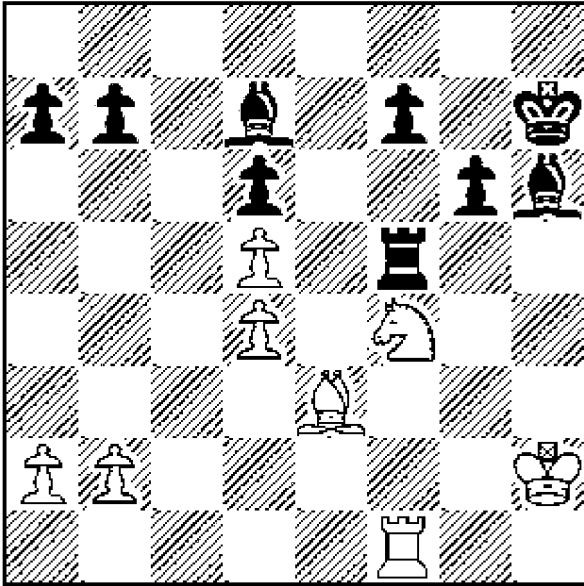
32 Ng2?? Bb5 ends the game at once.

32 ... cxd4!

Overloading White's bishop and handing him a pair of weaklings on the d-file.

Question: Why not win a piece with 32 ... g5 - ?

Answer: White can play the trick 33 Rg1, though even here, his position is hopelessly lost.
33 cxd4 Kh7!



Threatening ... g6-g5!.

34 Rf2 g5 35 Ne2

The long-pinned knight finally rouses himself from a state of petrification.

35 ... Rxf2+ 36 Bxf2 f5 0-1

By dint of hard labour and a frugal lifestyle, Botvinnik accrued a tidy sum for his retirement.

Game 41

M.Botvinnik-V.Smyslov

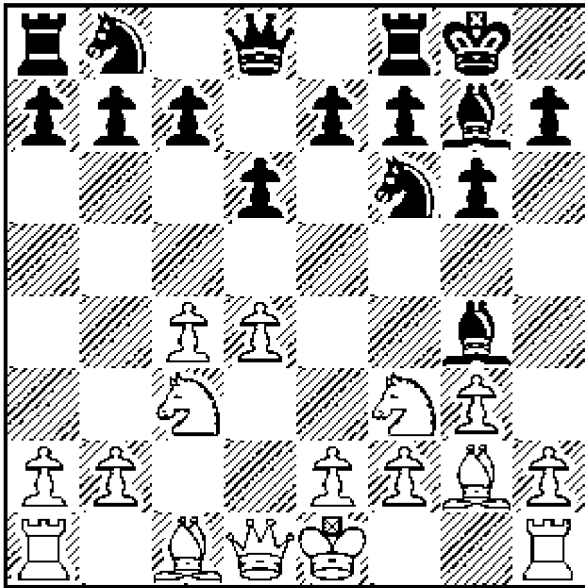
World Championship (5th matchgame), Moscow 1957

King's Indian Defence

1 c4 Nf6 2 Nc3 g6 3 g3 Bg7 4 Bg2 0-0 5 d4

Avoiding future d2-d3 English set-ups. Botvinnik tended to follow the philosophy: if the opponent offers you the centre, occupy it with your pawns.

5 ... d6 6 Nf3 Bg4!?



To my mind this variation is more dubious than aggressive, and perhaps an unwise choice against Botvinnik.

Question: Why unwise?

Answer: In this line Black prepares to chop the knight on f3, handing over the bishop pair. Smyslov, like Chigorin before him, was never shy about relinquishing the bishop pair to create an imbalance and play for the win. But to do so in a still fluid structure, against one of the greatest strategists of all time, seems overly defiant to me.

7 h3 Bxf3 8 Bxf3 Nc6

After 8 ... c6 9 0-0 Nbd7 10 e4 e5 11 d5 a5 12 Be3, Black's lack on the light squares is felt for some time to come, G.Gajewski-Skripion, Internet (blitz) 2009.

9 Bg2 Nd7

Intensifying pressure on d4.

10 e3

Much stronger than 10 d5?! which greatly increases the scope of Black's bishop.

10 ... e5 11 d5

Insuring that Black's remaining bishop will live his life surrounded by pawns of the same colour.

11 ... Ne7 12 e4 f5 13 h4!?

Question: Is Botvinnik attempting to launch a kingside attack?

Answer: Perhaps he considers h4-h5, but I don't think this is his main motivation. Instead, he plans a future Bh3!, increasing influence over the light squares.

13 ... f4?!

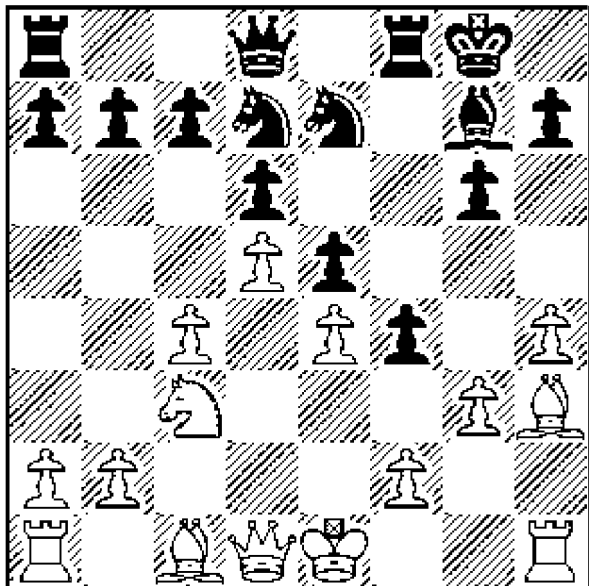
A dreadful self-inflicted wound on the light squares. Black should minimize his

disadvantage with 13 ... Nf6.

Question: Why would a player as strategically acute as Smyslov play such a move?

Answer: Smyslov's idea is to rid himself of his own bad bishop with ... Bh6 and eventually swap it for White's dark-squared bishop. But the price of light square damage exceeds the benefits.

14 Bh3



Of course! The bishop's unwanted presence presents an imposition on all in Black's camp.

14 ... Rf6 15 Qe2 Bh6 16 Bd2

White can also go for a direct assault with 16 h5! (hoping to induce the awful-looking ... g6-g5) 16 ... Kg7 17 hxg6 hxg6 18 f3 c6 19 gxf4 Bxf4 20 Bxf4 Rxf4 21 0-0-0 Nf6 22 Be6 cxd5 23 cxd5 and Black's king is in serious trouble.

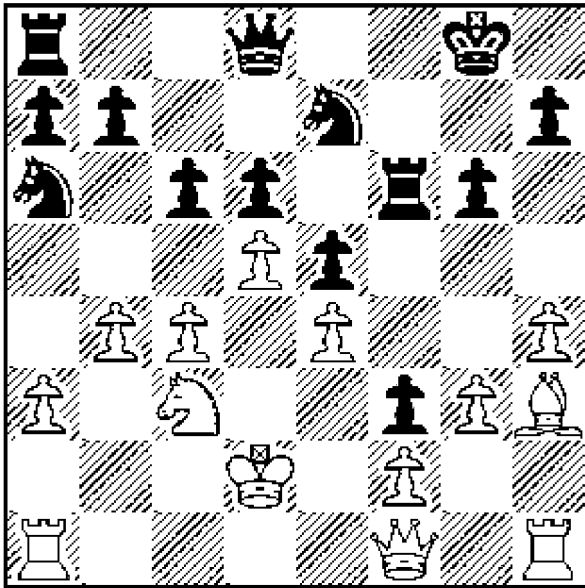
16 ... Nc5!?

Smyslov looks for trouble, inducing b2-b4, arguably a move White wants to play.

17 b4 f3 18 Qf1

Of course White must keep vigil over d3.

18 ... Bxd2+ 19 Kxd2 Na6 20 a3 c6



Question: Isn't White's king in danger?

Answer: Let's assess the position: 1. White's unflinching king isn't as vulnerable as it looks, since his massive queenside space advantage offers him ample protection.

2. White's central pawns are fixed on the same colour as his bishop, yet his bishop is anything but bad, due to its scorching influence on the h3-c8 diagonal.

3. The enemy f3-pawn, for now the bane of his existence, is for all intents and purposes an isolani, since it lacks support from neighbouring e-and g-pawns. This means Black is likely to drop the pawn should more pieces come off the board.

Conclusion: White's numerous strategic advantages easily outweigh the mild danger to his king.

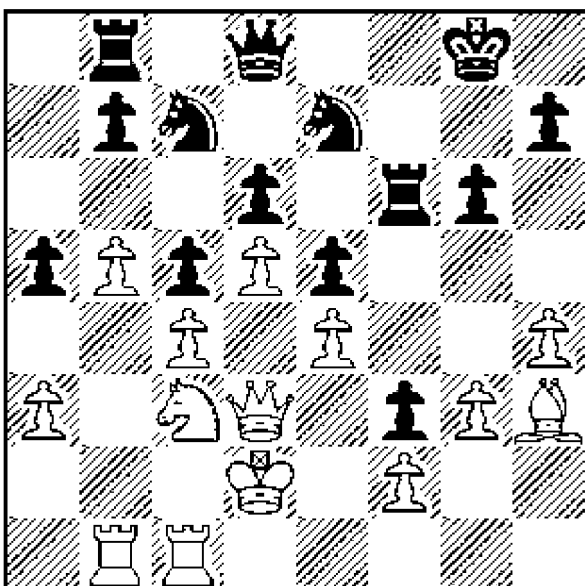
21 Qd3 Nc7 22 Rab1 Rb8 23 Rhc1

If centre and queenside open too quickly, White's king can always castle kingside manually with Ke1, Kf1 and Kg1. But my feeling is that the king is actually safer where he sits, dead centre.

23 ... a5 24 b5!

Botvinnik wisely declines to open queenside lines too soon.

24 ... c5?!



Question: Why hand Black a dubious mark when he clearly follows the principle: *Fix your opponent's pawns on the same colour as his remaining bishop* - ?

Answer: This position is an exception. After this move Black's chances dwindle and vanish, since he loses options of playing a knight to c5. The move effectively throws Black's remaining harmony into a state of complete disarray.

25 b6!

Introducing a sneaky little expedient to isolate artificially and weaken a5. What a strategic squeeze. Now Black can't play ... Na6-c5, since he sealed c5 with a pawn.

Question: Didn't Botvinnik do exactly the same by artificially isolating his own b-pawn?

Answer: He did, but there are huge differences: 1. White's b-pawn isn't weak.

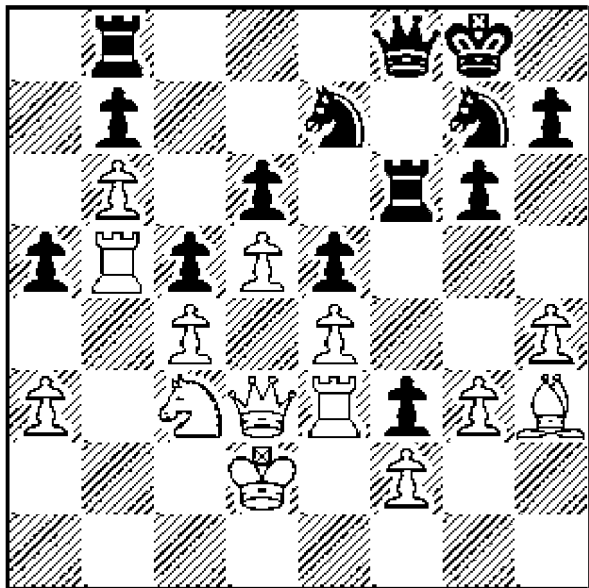
2. Black's f-pawn remains a possible problem should the game head for an ending. In fact, Black's defence of his advanced f-pawn distracts from any notion of picking off b6.

3. By playing his pawn to b6, Botvinnik separated the a-pawn from help, which is now a secondary concern for Black as well.

25 ... Ne8 26 Re1!

Worrying Black with the possibility of Re3, Bg4 (if necessary), and Rxf3.

26 ... Ng7 27 Re3 Qf8 28 Rb5!



Black is completely tied up to defence of his weaknesses on a5 and f3.

28 ... Ra8 29 Na4

Fixing a5 and opening the potential for Qc3, which adds another attacker on a5.

29 ... Qf7 30 Qc3 h5 31 Rxa5

Botvinnik's previous goodwill toward Black's weak pawns comes to an abrupt end.

31 ... Rb8 32 Nb2!

Multipurpose:

1. White may intend Nd3-e1, adding yet another attacker on f3.

2. White slowly clears the pathway for a3-a4-a5, with the intention of eventually creating a queenside passer with his majority.

32 ... Kh7 33 Qb3

Planning Qa4 and Ra8, with queenside infiltration.

33 ... Ng8 34 Nd3 Nh6 35 Re1

Question: Why is Botvinnik abandoning his quest of f3?

Answer: To cut the rose from the bush, one must be careful to navigate thorns. Botvinnik's refusal to take on f3, admittedly a perplexing decision, indicates a concrete wall of obstinacy – but keep in mind, taking the pawn too early could give Black unwanted counterplay on the f-file. So Botvinnik, for now, logically uses the f3-pawn as a shield and concentrates his efforts on the queenside.

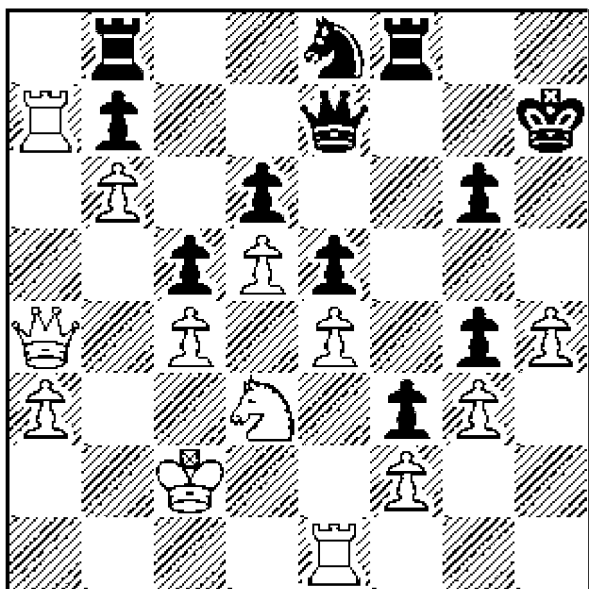
35 ... Ng4 36 Qa4

Now Ra8 is in the air.

36 ... Qe7 37 Kc2 Rff8 38 Ra7 Ne8 39 Bxg4

So f3 was never won. Botvinnik decides to eliminate the knight and keep the kingside as sealed as possible.

39 ... hxg4



Exercise (planning): Find a way for White to make progress on the queenside.

Answer: Clear the way for a3-a4-a5-a6, which creates a passed b-pawn.

40 Qb5!

The plan migrates from the realm of thought and imagination into a reality over the board.

40 ... Nf6 41 a4 Kg8 42 Qa5!?

There is no rush. Botvinnik marks time to gain time on the clock. Otherwise 42 a5 looks more consistent.

42 ... Qd8 43 Nb2 Nd7 44 Nd1! Nf6

If Black takes on b6, White seizes control after 44 ... Qxb6 45 Qxb6 Nxb6 46 Ne3, when a rook is about to swing over to the newly opened b-file and g4 is doomed as well.

45 Qb5 Qe7 46 a5 Qh7!

Eyeing e4, via a ... g6-g5 break.

47 Kd3!

Covering against tricks against e4.

47 ... Rf7 48 Qb2!?

Patience can be taken too far! It's as if Botvinnik grows tired of his dominance and

reconsiders other options. White should simply conduct his guest up the board with 48 a6 bxa6 49 Qxa6.

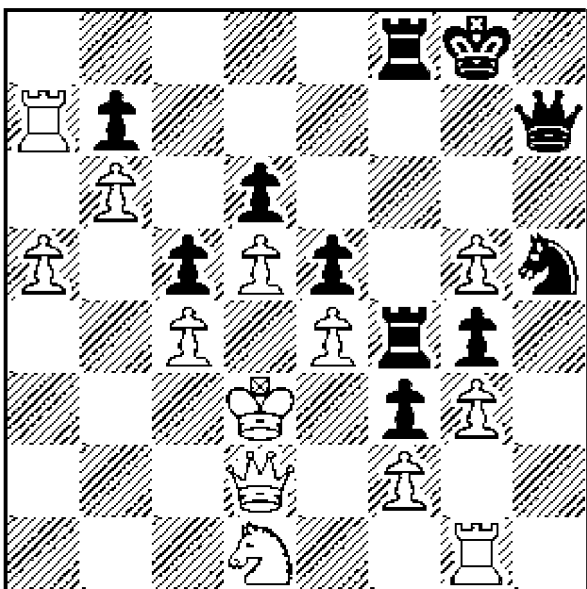
48 ... Nh5 49 Rg1

Just in case Black is thinking about desperado sacs on g3 or f4. Botvinnik skilfully weaves and eludes his pursuers, blocking off all avenues for potential sacs.

49 ... g5!?

Desperation. Black hopes for a miracle by a queen infiltration to h2. So Smyslov marches on, by now oblivious to the fiasco which lies ahead of him in his doomed endeavour.

50 hxg5 Rbf8 51 Qd2 Rf4!?



Now that's what I call desperation. Rare is the time when persevering eagerness for a task effectively supplants reality. High fences make for suspicious neighbours, and the message behind this move can hardly be construed as a peaceful gesture. Black's hoped-for revenge is a living organism which must be fed to be kept alive. This fact, combined with his life-threatening situation, has a marvellous way of shaking off apathy. In this case the predator grows bold in times of famine, when prey is scarce, and the rook presumes to approach White's king as an equal.

Botvinnik was undoubtedly in his habitual time pressure, so Smyslov attempts to out-Tal his opponent with one of those hyper-charged moments, like the split second before the other car impacts yours in a freeway collision.

52 Nc3!?

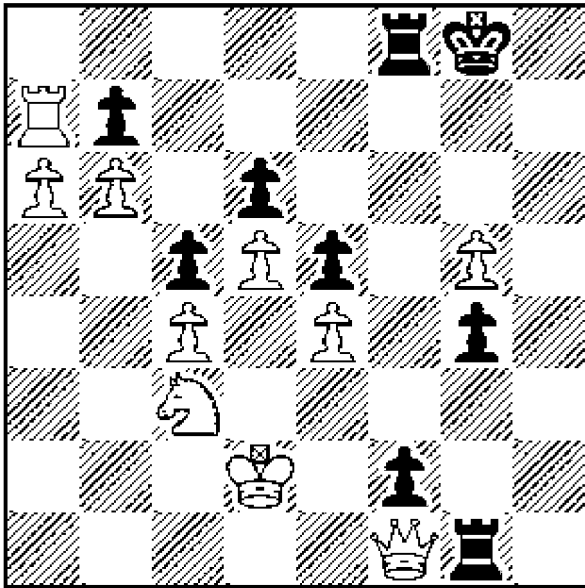
There was no accident after all. Of course, Black's "sac" exceeds credulity's boundaries and Botvinnik could take the rook as well: 52 gxf4 (White's g-pawn, like a religion, tolerates those who submit and remains unmerciful to heretics and unbelievers) 52 ... Nxf4+ 53 Kc2 Qxe4+ 54 Kb3 Qb1+ 55 Qb2 Qd3+ 56 Nc3 and Black's attack runs out of gas. But why allow Black any fun at all?

52 ... Nxg3!?

“I don’t fear you!” says the knight to the g3-pawn, a little too loudly. The knight flails in all directions, like a cat thrown into a body of water. Admittedly pursuing a rather flamboyant and lofty ambition, the knight decides to go out in a blaze of unsound glory, but nothing can save Black at this stage. Smyslov feels obliged to fork over an exorbitant ransom to seek counterplay, which in the end he is denied.

53 Rxf3 Qh2 54 Qe1 1-0

Smyslov could still continue his desperado ways with 54 ... Qxg3! (losing, but still a good practical chance) 55 fxxg3 f2 56 Qf1 Rf3+ 57 Kd2 Rxxg3 58 a6! (58 Ne2 does the job too) 58 ... Rg1.



Exercise (critical decision): Black is a huge amount of material down, yet manages to generate serious threats on f1, and also to keep pushing with ... g4-g3-g2. What would you play here for White?

Answer: Deflection. Go desperado right back at Black with the stunning 59 Ra8!! (the rote 59 Ke2?? actually loses to 59 ... Rxf1 60 Kxf1 g3 when White has no defence to the coming 61 ... g2+) 59 ... Rxf1 (or 59 ... Rxa8 60 Qxf2 and White wins) 60 Rxf8+ Kxf8 61 axb7 (now Black is too slow in the race) 61 ... Ra1 62 b8Q+ Kg7 63 Qc7+ Kg6 (63 ... Kg8 is met by 64 b7) 64 Qxd6+ Kxg5 65 Qxe5+ and White picks off the f2-pawn whichever way Black's king goes.

Game 42

M.Botvinnik-V.Smyslov

World Championship (2nd matchgame), Moscow 1958

King's Indian Defence

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 f3

The Sämisch King's Indian.

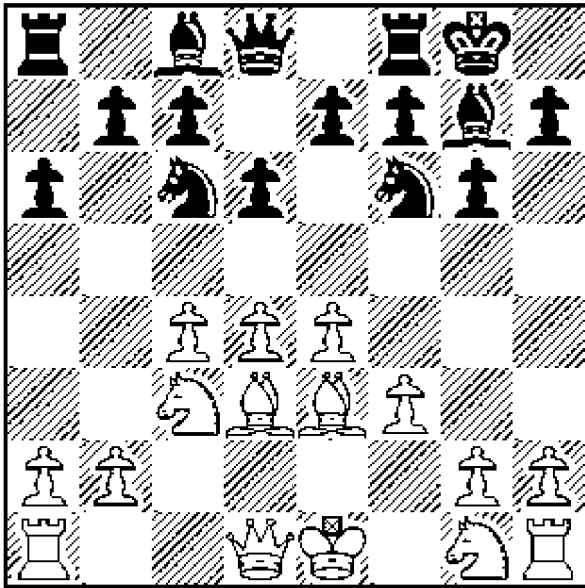
5 ... 0-0 6 Be3 a6!

The prelude to a remarkable, new (for the time) opening idea. 6 ... e5 was the normal move for 1958.

7 Bd3

This slightly weakens White's influence over d4, so today 7 Qd2 and 7 Nge2 are played more often.

7 ... Nc6!!



Now it's Smyslov's turn to rock Botvinnik in the opening, with a (then) completely unknown King's Indian set-up which remains fashionable to this very day. The move is even more potent when White commits to an early Bd3, since he has even less control over d4 than in normal lines.

Question: What is Black's plan?

Answer: Black plans both ... b7-b5 and ... e7-e5 at some stage, challenging and chipping away at White's centre simultaneously.

8 Nge2 Rb8

Black's true idea behind the line: he plans a queenside disturbance involving ... b7-b5, which may discourage White from queenside castling. Instead, 8 ... e5 tends to veer back toward the main lines after 9 d5 Ne7 10 Qd2 c6 11 0-0 cxd5 12 cxd5, P.Haba-M.Vokac, Czech Championship, Lazne Bohdanec 1999.

9 a3

Question: Why play a2-a3 - ?

Answer: Botvinnik wants to stop a future ... b5-b5 in its tracks with b2-b4.

9 ... Nd7

9 ... e5?! 10 d5 Ne7 11 b4 looks good for White, since Black's ... a7-a6 and ... Rb8 make little sense at this point.

10 Bb1!

Question: This move seems very odd. What is Botvinnik's point?

Answer: Botvinnik wants to keep firm control over d4. For example, if he played the rote 10 0-0, it could be met by 10 ... e5 11 d5 Nd4! with an equal game.

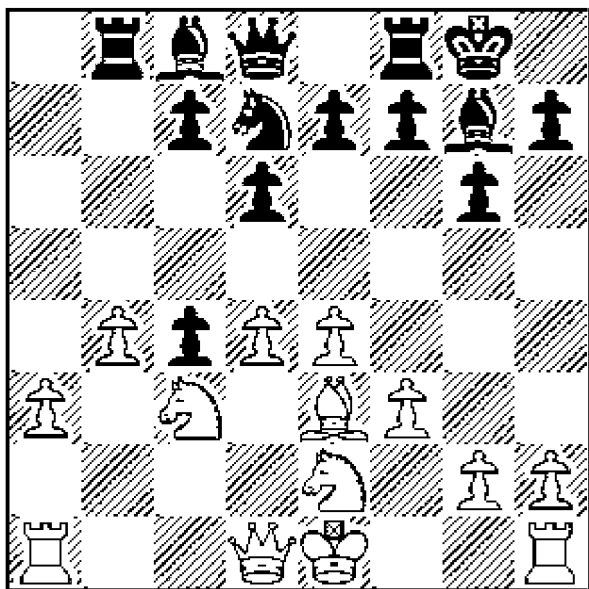
10 ... Na5

Targeting c4.

11 Ba2 b5

And once again.

12 cxb5 axb5 13 b4 Nc4 14 Bxc4 bxc4



Question: Which side got the better of that last skirmish?

Answer: Neither side did, but the position sharpened considerably. Black obtained the bishop pair, while White, who now owns a passed a-pawn, improved his structure.

15 0-0 c6 16 Qd2 Nb6?!

Smyslov begins to drift. I don't see what the knight does on b6, other than wait to get kicked by a3-a4-a5. Instead, 16 ... Re8! retains his bishop pair and looks more accurate.

17 Bh6!

Botvinnik seizes his chance.

Principle: Eliminate one of your opponent's bishops if he owns the bishop pair.

17 ... Bxh6!?

Smyslov is unafraid of a kingside attack and feels White's queen may actually be offside on h6.

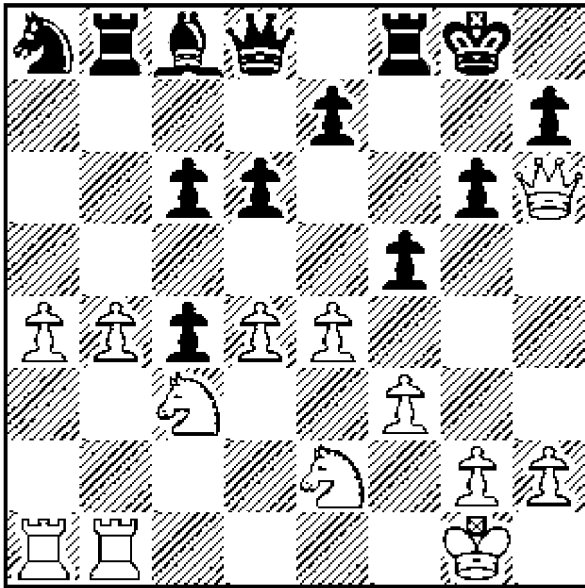
18 Qxh6 f6?!

Unfortunately, Smyslov's maiden voyage with his new system was not destined for an auspicious start. He walks away from his once-promising opening investment without profiting so much as a sou to his credit. I don't claim to understand this move, which weakens unnecessarily. Black realizes, with a shock, that his happiness, a mere abstraction, never existed in the first place.

19 a4 Na8

Running even before he is hit – c7 is a nice square for the knight.

20 Rfb1 f5?!



Sound advice is only of value to those who heed it. Why is it that gallantry and folly are always so closely intertwined? This move reflects Smyslov's emotions more than the objective reality of the position. Smyslov loosens his game in an attempt to generate activity and sharpen the struggle. Soon the pungent odour of his decision offends his nostrils, as a dinner of liver and onions would to a six-year-old who had counted on pizza instead.

21 Qe3?!

21 d5! looks strong: 21 ... cxd5 (21 ... fxe4 22 Nxe4, threatening Ng5, is good for White as well) 22 exd5 e5 23 dxe6 Bxe6 24 a5 gives White a strategically won game, since he dominates the dark squares and soon establishes a powerful knight blockade on d4.

21 ... fxe4 22 fxe4 Nc7 23 d5

Now Botvinnik gets a less powerful version of the previous note. Here 23 b5! cxb5 24 axb5 e6 25 d5 e5 (25 ... exd5?! 26 b6! Ne8 27 Nxd5 Nf6 28 Qd4 leaves Black struggling) 26 Ra7 was better, when White begins to exert pressure on the queenside. He may be able to pick up that stray c4-pawn as well.

23 ... cxd5 24 exd5 Bb7 25 Rf1! Qd7

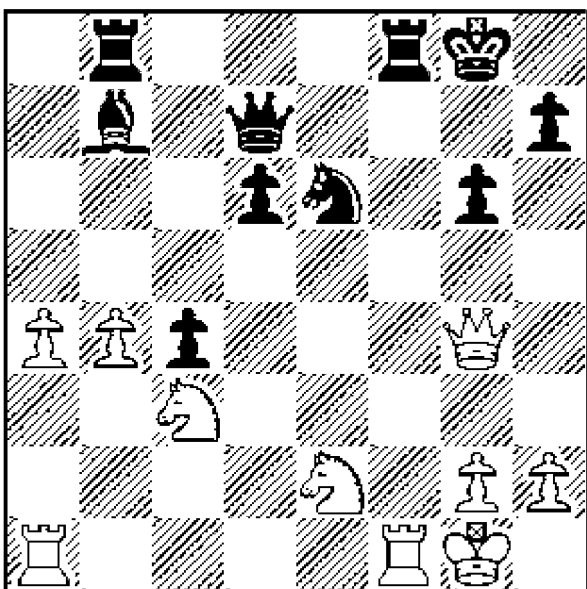
White's d-pawn isn't really hanging: 25 ... Nxd5?? 26 Qe6+ picks off a piece.

26 Qd4

Black's c-pawn is in very real danger now.

26 ... e6 27 dxe6 Nxe6 28 Qg4!

Dreaming and acting upon the dream are two entirely different things, although I do concede that the former is a lot easier to achieve. Still, a single act surpasses a hundred dreams in such positions. The queen strikes the e6-knight a glancing, disinterested blow, just for show, the way a school bully picks on a smaller kid, if only to advertise his own bully credentials to the witnessing children.



Botvinnik shows typical disdain for the material realm, foregoing Black's offer of his c-pawn – and now we observe an increased, qualitative shift in White's initiative. Less spiritually inclined players like me would grab a pawn in a heartbeat with 28 Qxc4, which the computers say isn't as powerful as Botvinnik's last move.

28 ... Rfe8

In this moment of hardship and duress for Black, the good old days of frolic and comfort feel fugitive and remote indeed. Black can't hold the game after 28 ... d5 29 Nd4 Rbe8 30 Rxf8+ Nxf8 31 Qxd7 Nxd7 32 a5 Re3 33 Ncb5 since his passers are firmly blockaded, while White's are free to roam forward.

29 Nd4

From a standpoint of clarity there is something to be said for the simpler line 29 Nf4 Nf8 30 Qxd7 Nxd7 31 Rad1, forcing the win of Black's d-pawn.

29 ... Qg7 30 Rad1?!

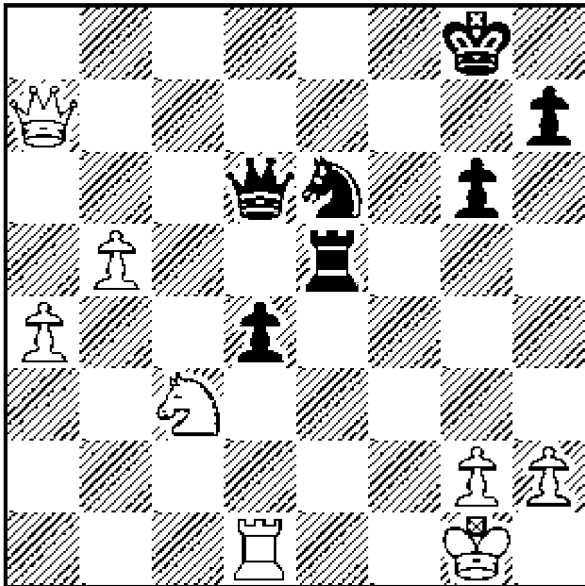
Now both players follow with a series of second-best moves, and progress arrives in discouragingly slow motion. Mutual misfires and failed lunges begin to take a toll on the clock and nerves of both sides. Much stronger was 30 Nxe6! Qxc3 31 Qf4!, when White targets f7 and d6. Black is busted here.

30 ... Nc7

After 30 ... Qe5!, Black keeps his disadvantage to a minimum.

31 Qf4! Re5?

But after 31 ... d5 32 b5, White's pawns roll once again, while Black's go nowhere.



Exercise (combination): How did Botvinnik deal with Black's attempted disruption and industriously vacuum away further resistance?

Answer: The e4-square is safe for the knight, who contemptuously swats the would-be challenge aside, as if dealing with an annoying insect.

41 Ne4! 1-0

After 41 ... Qd8 (41 ... Rxe4?? fails miserably to 42 Qa8+) 42 b6! (now he really does sac the knight) 42 ... Rxe4 43 b7, White's queen tenderly cradles her b-pawn to sweet dreams on b8.

Game 43

M.Botvinnik-S.Furman

Training match, Moscow 1961

King's Indian Attack

1 g3

Botvinnik is in an experimental mood in this training game against Furman, who later secured his place in chess history by becoming Karpov's coach.

1 ... d5

On 1 ... e5 Botvinnik would undoubtedly have played 2 c4, entering his favourite English variations.

2 Nf3 g6

Of course, in such non-confrontational opening systems, Black can set up how he pleases.

3 Bg2 Bg7 4 0-0 e5 5 d3

Botvinnik gives Black the choice of reversed King's Indian or reversed Pirc.

5 ... Ne7

5 ... c5 enters reversed KID territory.

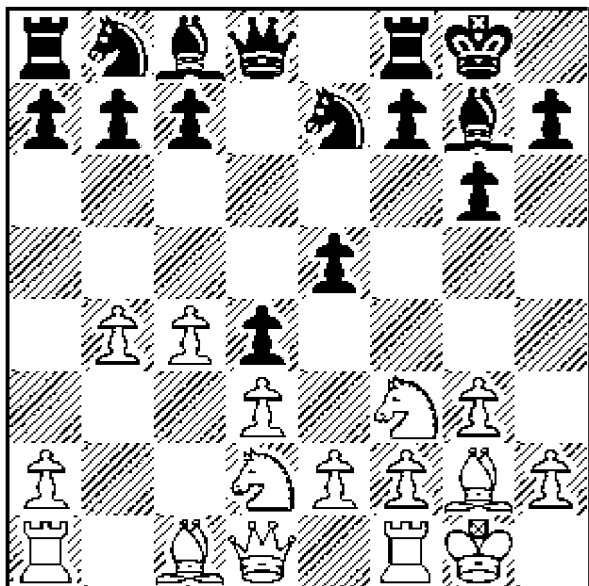
6 Nbd2 0-0 7 c4

7 e4 is played more often here; e.g. 7 ... c6 8 b4 a5 9 bxa5 Qxa5 10 Bb2 d4 11 Nb3 Qc7 12 c3 dxc3 13 Bxc3 c5, when chances look balanced, T.Radjabov-I.Cheparinov, FIDE Grand Prix, Baku 2008.

7 ... d4

7 ... c6 and 7 ... Nbc6 are also possible.

8 b4



8 ... a5

I think it's slightly more accurate for Black to wait for a2-a4 before playing ... a7-a5.

Question: Why?

Answer: It cuts down on White's options and disallows a2-a3 later on. For example: 8 ... Nd7 9 a4 a5! 10 b5 c5 11 bxc6 Nxc6 12 Ba3 Nb4 13 Nb3 (on 13 Rb1 Black is happy to offer a pawn for the bishop pair and dark squares with 13 ... Nc5! 14 Bxb4 axb4 15 Rxb4 Qe7, when I would take the black pieces if given a choice) 13 ... Re8 14 Qd2 Bf8 15 Rfb1 Nc5 16 Nxc5 Bxc5 17 Ne1 Bd7 18 Nc2 Nxc2 19 Qxc2 Bxa3 20 Rxa3 Bc6 21 Bxc6 bxc6 22 Rab3 and Black's coming ... e5-e4 counterplay should offset White's control over the b-file, E.Tomashevsky-Zhang Pengxiang, Russia vs. China match, Nizhnij Novgorod 2007.

9 b5 c5 10 bxc6

Question: Doesn't White's last move simply assist Black's development?

Answer: It does, but White must open the queenside, his arena of counterplay. If the queenside closes, then Black's ... e5-e4, by default, becomes the only viable pawn break in the position.

10 ... Nxc6! 11 Ba3 Nb4 12 Ne1!

Destination c2, to challenge the intruder on b4.

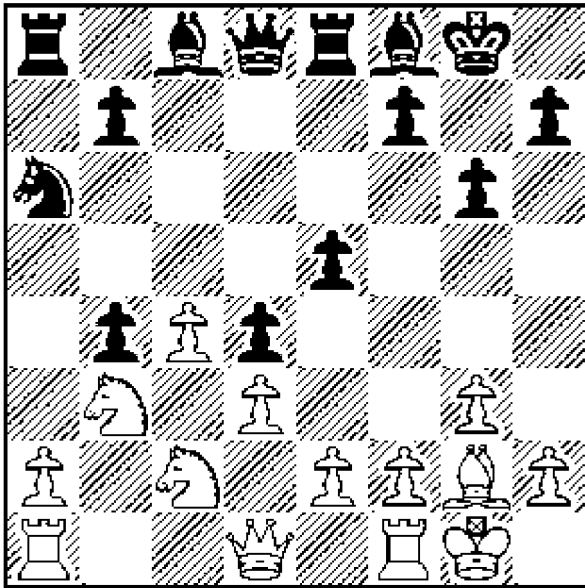
12 ... Re8

Dual purpose:

1. Black dreams of a future involving ... e5-e4.

2. Black allows for ... Bf8 to support b4.

13 Nc2 Bf8 14 Bxb4 axb4 15 Nb3 Na6



16 e3!?

A typically bold Botvinnik decision. He allows the game to open, despite Black's bishop pair, in order to roll his centre forward. Principles don't always imply restriction. Sometimes we are compelled to flaunt principle and violate it to its face.

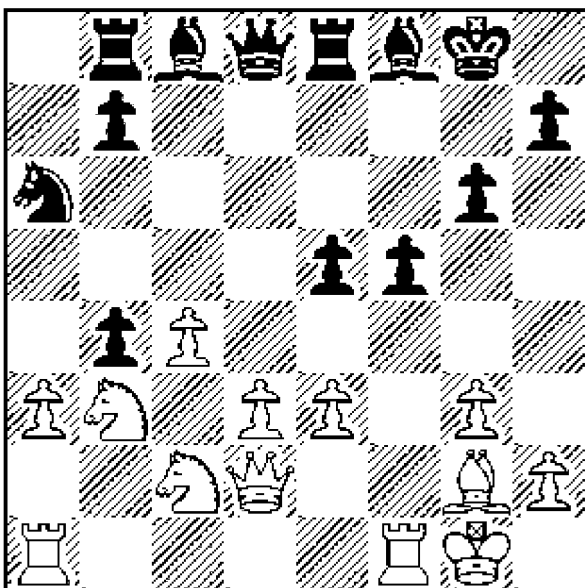
Question: What would be a safer alternative?

Answer: Chip away at b4 by 16 a3 bxa3 17 Nxa3 with an equal but less sharp position, resembling a Benko Gambit structure in reverse.

16 ... dxe3 17 fxe3 f5

This move weakens his king's position, which plays a role in some future variations. Perhaps Black's best line is 17 ... Nc5! (17 ... Bf5 18 Rxf5!? gxf5 19 Bxb7 offers White excellent compensation for the exchange) 18 Nxc5 Bxc5 19 Bd5 Be6 20 Bxe6 Rxe6 21 d4 exd4 22 exd4 Bf8 23 Qd3 with only a tiny edge to White, due to his extra central influence.

18 Qd2 Rb8 19 a3



Removing a thorn in his position.

19 ... bxa3 20 Nxa3 Bb4 21 Qe2 Nc7 22 Nc2 Bc3 23 Ra3 b5 24 Nc5 Qe7

Question: Why not gain a tempo and support his bishop with 24 ... b4 - ?

Answer: The advanced b-pawn may grow weak after 25 Rb3, when Na4! is in the air.

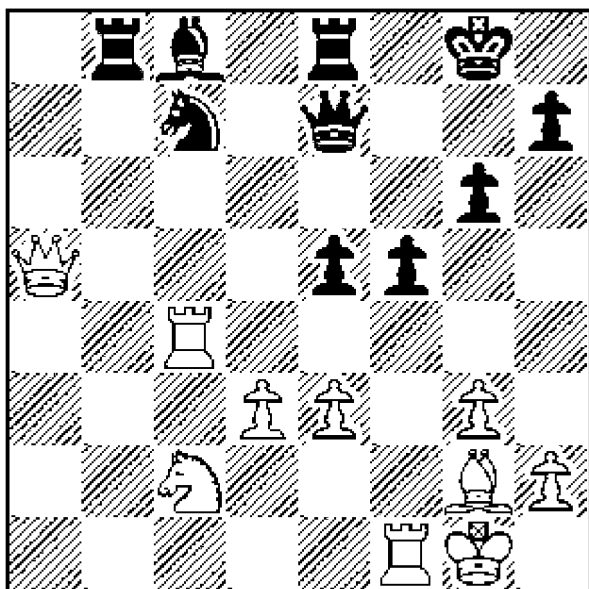
25 Rxc3 Qxc5 26 Qd2 bxc4

Houdini prefers 26 ... Rd8 27 cxb5 Qe7 28 Rc6 Nxb5 29 Nb4, after which Black may nearly be equal.

27 Rxc4 Qe7?!

And here 27 ... Qd6 is correct, when White only holds a miniscule edge.

28 Qa5!



A cursory glance would indicate equality. However, upon deeper examination we come to see this is not the case. Botvinnik unearths a hidden fundamental in the position: Black's knight remains in danger. With this single factor as a catalyst, White's game blossoms with each passing move. The facile fashion in which he snatches and hangs on to the initiative suggests a profound mastery of the strategic essence of the position.

28 ... Na6?!

Black's silence on the matter takes on greater meaning than an angry outburst. Furman is unable to varnish over his difficulties this way. The knight, finding himself singled out for ridicule by his classmates, sits alone, head bowed and arms clasping knees, while Botvinnik continues his attempts to corral it.

Rather than this listless policy of inaction, perhaps better was 28 ... Nb5! (the butterfly escapes the web and now his wings once again flutter and kiss the sun's rays) 29 Nb4 (threatening a fork on c6) 29 ... Qd6 30 Bc6 Bd7 31 Rfc1 Bxc6 32 Rxc6 Qd7 33 R6c5, when Black remains under pressure after 33 ... Qa7! 34 Qxa7 Nxa7 35 Nd5 Red8 36 e4, but isn't lost yet.

29 Rc6!

The stern rook deigns to elucidate an important lesson to his impertinent young student on a6. White adds a log to the fire of his pawnless, queenside attack, until it spits and crackles to life. Events proceed with mind-numbing swiftness and Furman is soon busted, even before he appreciates his predicament. Watch how Botvinnik continually seizes upon the a6-knight's discomfort.

29 ... Ra8

Black's knight, fraught with indecision, just sits there, refusing to turn left or right. Furman must tread carefully. If he attempts to free his knight with 29 ... Nb4??,

there follows 30 Rc7 Qd6 31 Nxb4 Rxb4 32 Bd5+! Kh8 33 Qa7 and Black must give up a piece to cover h7.

30 Rb1 Qd8

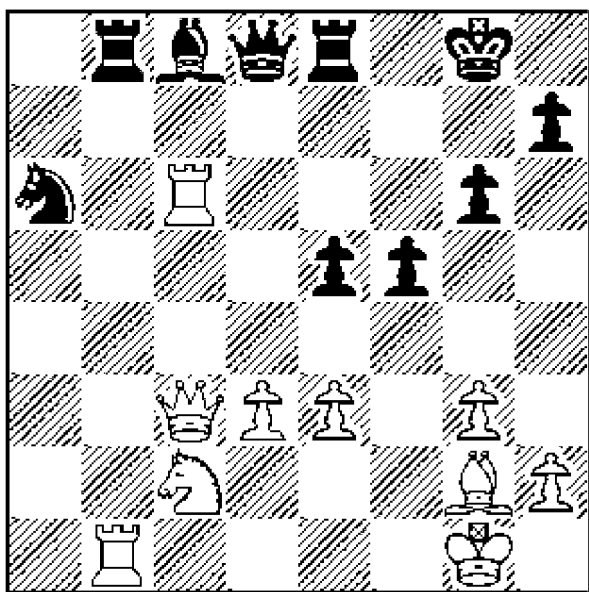
After 30 ... Ra7 31 Qc3! Qd8 32 d4!, the white queen's alluring dress flaunts the contours of her body, creating distinct discomfort for Black's shy, tongue-tied king, who suddenly looks fatally exposed on g8.

31 Qc3!

Threatening Rbb6!.

31 ... Rb8?

A mistake – though after 31 ... Ra7 32 d4!, Black is unlikely to save the game anyway.



When vague hope collides with the what-must-be, it is the former which must bow in acquiescence. Furman, in an already lost position, cracks under the pressure. Now his single, dreadful apprehension is given birth.

Exercise (combination alert): How did Botvinnik take advantage of the indolent, uncommunicative knight, who continues to brood on a6?

Answer: Double attack.

32 Rxb8! 1-0

Black drops a piece after 32 ... Nxb8 (the knight, caught in an illicit deed, hopes to talk his way out – unfortunately, his nervous stutter and rosy blush mark him as the most incompetent liar alive on the planet) 33 Qb3+! (double attack) 33 ... Kg7 34 Qxb8.

Game 44

M.Botvinnik-M.Tal

World Championship (15th matchgame), Moscow 1961

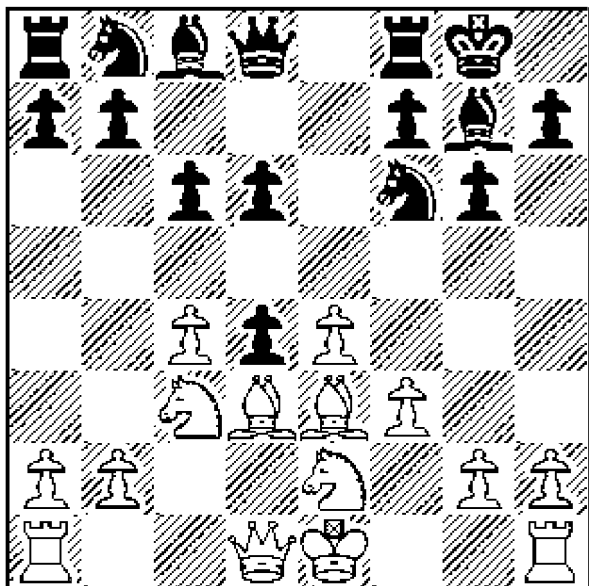
King's Indian Defence

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 f3 0-0 6 Be3 c6 7 Bd3 e5

7 ... a6 is another plan for Black; e.g. 8 Nge2 b5 9 0-0 Nbd7 10 Rc1 e5 11 a3 exd4 12 Nxd4 Bb7 13 cxb5 cxb5, when Black's active pieces make up for his slightly inferior structure, A.Karpov-G.Kasparov, World Championship (1st matchgame), New York/Lyons 1990.

8 Nge2 exd4

I think a good opening choice for Tal, who revelled in open games and was clearly Botvinnik's inferior if the position bogged down into a manoeuvring game.



9 Bxd4!

Stronger than 9 Nxd4 d5! 10 cxd5 cxd5 11 0-0 (11 e5? is met by 11 ... Re8 12 f4 Ng4 13 Bg1 f6, when White is in serious trouble) 11 ... dxe4 12 Nxe4 Nd5 13 Bf2 Nd7 and Black looked okay, J.Levitt-N.Davies, Preston 1989.

9 ... c5!?

Tal agrees to weaken d5 in order to fight for d4.

Question: Why can't Black play 9 ... d5 here?

Answer: This time the ... d6-d5 break isn't so hot for Black. After 10 cxd5 cxd5 11 e5 Nfd7 12 f4 Nc6 13 Bf2 Nb6 14 0-0 f6 15 Bh4, White stands pleasantly better, R.Hübner-S.Gligoric, Leningrad Interzonal 1973.

10 Bf2 Nc6 11 0-0 a6 12 Qd2 Be6 13 Rad1 Qa5 14 b3 Rab8 15 Bb1 Rfd8 16 f4!

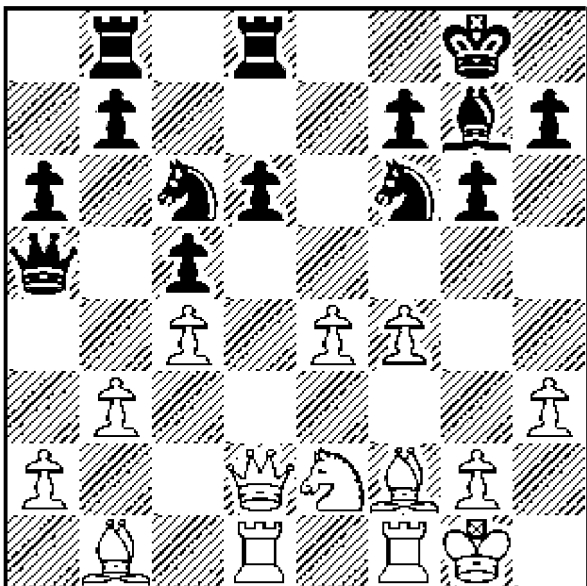
Now f4-f5 is in the air. Botvinnik senses a brewing kingside attack.

16 ... Bg4!

Dual purpose. Tal sidesteps f4-f5 and prepares to swap on e2, based on the principle: *The cramped side should seek swaps.*

Instead, 16 ... Ng4? walks into the unpleasant 17 Bh4, while 16 ... b5? 17 f5 Bc8 18 Bh4! sees Black in deep trouble.

17 h3 Bxe2 18 Nxe2



Botvinnik switches gears and allows an ending, realizing that:

1. He owns the bishop pair.
2. Black must worry about a hole on d5.
3. Black must nurse a backward d6-pawn.
4. White owns the greater share of space.
5. Botvinnik most certainly also factored in that he was superior to Tal in endings!

18 ... Qxd2

The black queen gives her sister a quick glance of calculation, mingled with malice.

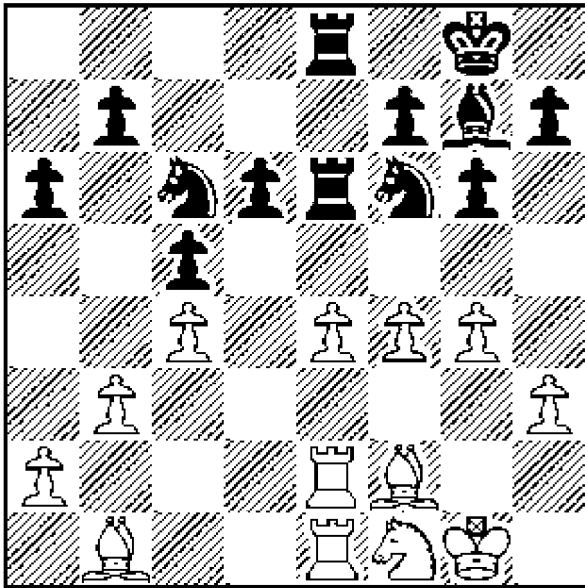
Question: If Tal was the superior player in complex middlegames, then why not keep queens on the board with 18 ... Qc7 - ?

Answer: Tal correctly swaps queens, realizing his active pieces and control over the dark squares make up somewhat for White's pluses. Tal had a healthy respect for Botvinnik's attacking skills. If he retains queens on the board, he gives White automatic kingside attacking chances after 19 f5!. Please return to Chapter One of this book, *Botvinnik on the Attack*, if you don't believe me!

19 Rxd2 Re8

Counterattacking White's weakest point: e4.

20 Ng3 Bf8 21 Re1 Re6 22 Nf1 Rbe8 23 Rde2 Bg7 24 g4!



Seizing more space.

24 ... Nd7

Here 24 ... Nd4!? 25 Bxd4 cxd4 26 Ng3 Nd7 is perhaps worth considering, since Black's dark square control may fully compensate for his weakened structure.

25 Kg2 R6e7

Tal can also go for a more radical dark square control strategy with something like 25 ... Nd4 26 Rd2 f5 27 Ng3 fxg4! 28 hxg4 g5! 29 fxg5 Ne5 30 Bxd4 cxd4 31 Nf5 Nxd4 32 Kg3 Ne5 33 Rxd4 Nf7 34 Rd5 with Black compensation for the pawn, although it was never a wise idea to try and hold a pawn down ending versus Botvinnik!

26 Nh2 Nf8!

Intending ... Ne6-d4.

27 Bh4 Ne6

The black knights, resting vultures awaiting the death of prey, eye d4 with studious interest.

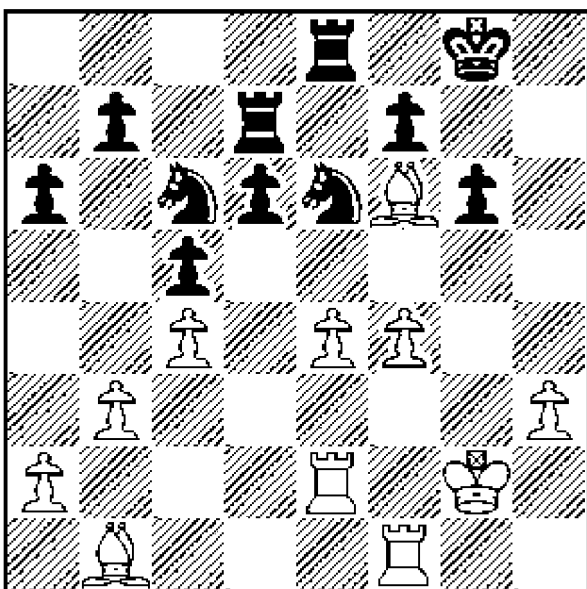
28 Rf1 Rd7 29 g5 h5!

Loosening White's grip over f6 and temporarily halting Ng4.

30 gxh6 Bxh6 31 Ng4! Bg7 32 Nf6+

Now Botvinnik gets two bishops for a pair of knights.

32 ... Bxf6 33 Bxf6



A bishop appears on Black's doorstep, as of yet an undefined, formless challenge, but a challenge nonetheless.

Question: Is Black just losing here? It looks like White's bishops, especially his dark-squared monster on f6, will be Black's undoing.

Answer: Actually, I think Black holds his own in this position, mainly due to his own dark-squared grip on d4.

33 ... Ng7?

The beginning of a false trail. The knight unwisely endorses a fantasy which he should have done his best to ignore, despite the temptation. Tal, very rationally, fears the bishop's reign on f6 and proceeds to remove it – but in doing so, he transfers his knight to a poor location. His plan feels out of phase with the position's requirements.

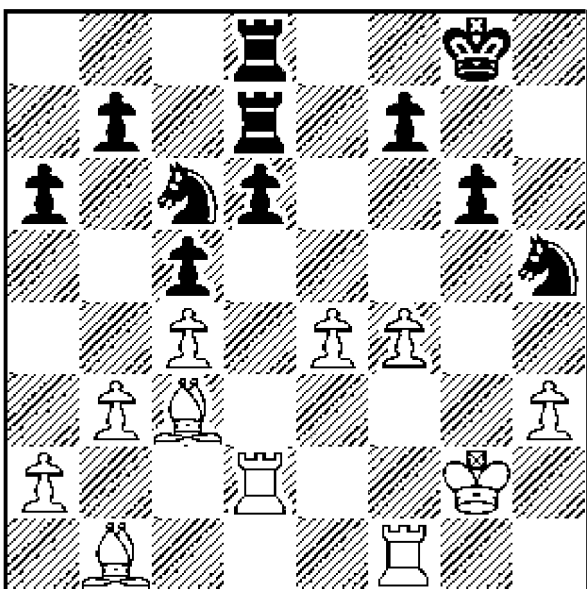
Question: What plan do you suggest for Black?

Answer: He should trust in his piece activity and play 33 ... Ned4! 34 Ree1 Re6 35 e5 Kf8 36 h4 Ne7 37 h5 gxh5 (37 ... Ng8 is met by 38 Bh8!) 38 f5 (38 Rh1 Ng8 39 Bg5 f6 40 exf6 Rxe1 41 Rxe1 Kf7 42 Rh1 Nxf6 43 Bxf6 Kxf6 44 Rxh5 Rg7+ is fine for Black as well) 38 ... Rxf6 39 exf6 Ng8 with reasonable compensation for the exchange.

34 Rd2!

Alertly targeting d6 now that Black lacks a ... Ned4 block.

34 ... Nh5 35 Bc3 Red8



Exercise (planning): How did Botvinnik strengthen his position?

Answer: Activate his only dysfunctional piece, the light-squared bishop, which he transfers to its optimum post on g4.

36 Bc2! Kf8 37 Bd1 Ke7!?

Unappetizing, as is 37 ... Ng7 38 Bf6 Re8 39 Bg4 Rc7 40 f5! gxf5 41 exf5. Black's position is in disarray and he soon drops a pawn.

38 Bg4

The arrogant bishop, believing himself spiritually elevated above all others, declares to Black's startled rook: "Bow before me, wretched little man! I am the light!"

38 ... Rc7 39 f5!

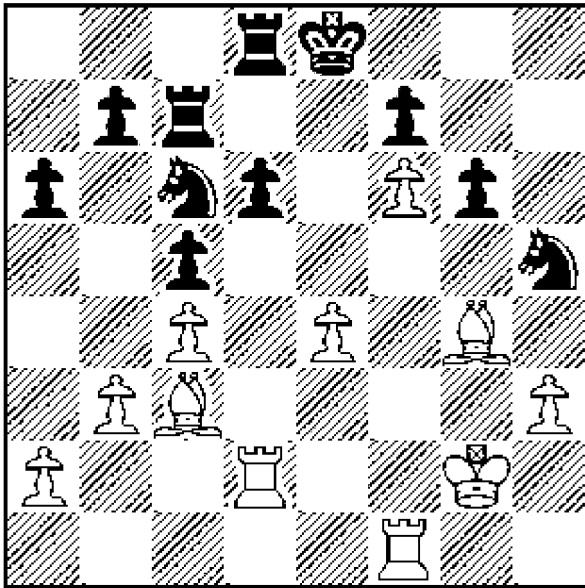
Entombing the h5-knight. Another brilliant strategic decision, correctly judging that Black's control over e5 yields him little benefit.

39 ... Ke8

39 ... Ne5? is met by 40 Ba5, when Black's irritated rooks remonstrate with their lax guard, who clearly lacks the necessary dedication to protect his charges.

40 f6!

A simple plan, devoid of glitter, yet powerful. White's f-pawn refuses to yield. Botvinnik's space advantage spins out of control and Tal begins to asphyxiate. One begins to wonder about the true net worth of the h5-knight, after its lacklustre performance over the past few moves, and who finds itself bereft of even a single viable square. Now White's g4-bishop continues to glare down on the incompetent underling on h5 with disconcerting intensity.



40 ... b5 41 Rd5

Going after the stranded h5-knight. 41 Rfd1! was even stronger.

41 ... bxc4 42 bxc4 Rb7

42 ... Nb4 is met by 43 Rg5!.

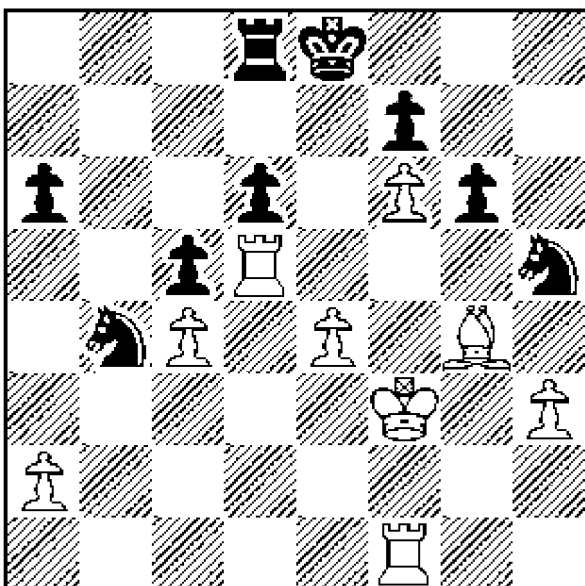
43 Kf3 Rb4!

Inventive play and a good practical try by Tal, whose tricks bubble up, even from the depths of his wretched position. The timid rook inches closer and dares more than he ever did before, refusing to self-veto his rash proposal. Generosity isn't only the prerogative of the wealthy. Sometimes the only path to reconciling a deteriorating position with multiple strategic woes is simply to stop trying to fix things and go to war. In a position brimming with premonitory, looming disaster, Tal attempts to seize fate by the collar and steer it in another direction. He embarks on a desperate venture, but when all else fails, is it really desperation or just common sense? In any event Botvinnik sees through the attempt to confuse, which whips up froth but little substance.

44 Bxb4

A coward has no qualms about assailing a normally more powerful foe who has fallen on hard times.

44 ... Nxb4



Heartened by the turn of events, Black managed to offer spirited resistance. After

45 Rd2?! Nxf6, Tal continues to resist with a pawn for the exchange and dark square counterplay.

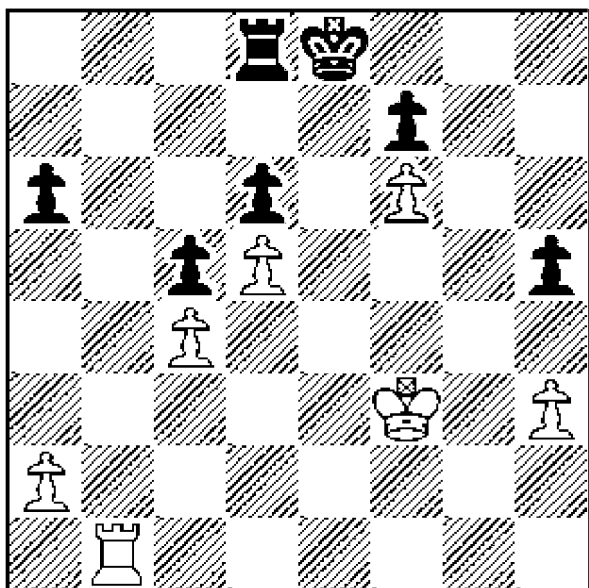
Exercise (planning): Do you see a stronger plan for White here?

Answer: Only saints maintain peaceful equanimity in times of extreme provocation. Returning the exchange yields a won rook and pawn ending.

45 Bxh5!

As noted above, 45 Rd2?! Nxf6 46 Rfd1 Ke7 47 e5 Ne8 allows Black to fight on.

45 ... Nxd5 46 exd5 gxh5 47 Rb1!



Black's revels come to a dismal conclusion, and now follows the hangover. This is the position Botvinnik envisioned when he returned the exchange. He targets a6 and d6, Black's softest points, while h5 is on the critical list too. After precious investment of toil, coin and blood, Tal receives precious little return. His game, suffused in misery, lies beyond redemption. Even though material is temporarily equal, there is no question whether Black will drop pawns, not with the massive activity dysfunction of both king and rook versus White's vigorous counterparts.

47 ... Kf8 48 Rb6 Kg8 49 Kf4

Giving h5 the eviction notice.

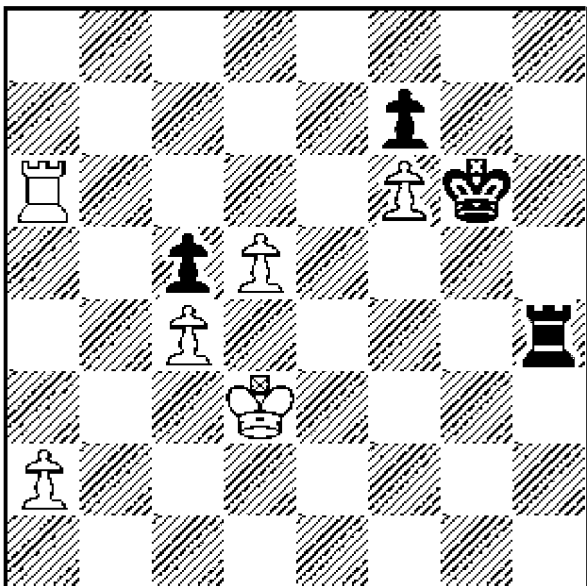
49 ... Kh7 50 Kg5 Rg8+

50 ... h4 51 Kf5! a5 52 Rb7 Kg8 53 Kg5 leaves Black helpless.

51 Kxh5 Rg3 52 h4 Re3 53 Rxd6 Re5+ 54 Kg4 Kg6

Or 54 ... Re4+ 55 Kg5 Rxc4 56 Rd7 Kg8 57 h5 and if 57 ... Rc1, intending to bombard the enemy king with checks, 58 Kh6! pulls a fast one, forcing mate in two moves, as White's tiresome king and rook continue to impose upon Black's king.

55 Kf4 Rf5+ 56 Ke3 Rh5 57 Rxa6 Rxh4 58 Kd3



58 ... Kf5

Or 58 ... Rh3+ 59 Ke4 Rh4+ 60 Ke5 Rxc4 61 d6 and there is no race.

59 Rc6 Rh2 60 Rxc5 Rxa2 61 Rc7! Kxf6 62 Rd7 Ke5 63 Re7+! 1-0

If 63 ... Kd6 (63 ... Kf6 64 d6 is totally hopeless as well) 64 Rxf7 Kc5 65 Rc7+ gets the job done.

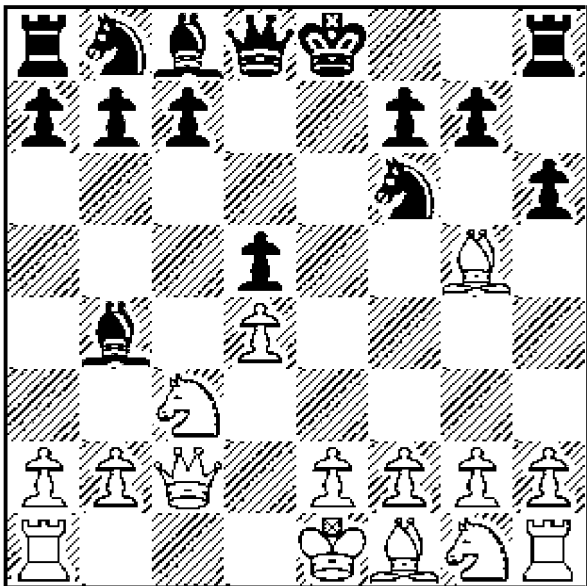
Game 45

T.V.Petrosian-M.Botvinnik

World Championship (1st matchgame), Moscow 1963

Nimzo-Indian Defence

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 Qc2 d5 5 cxd5 exd5 6 Bg5 h6



7 Bxf6

Question: Why did Petrosian break the tension?

Answer: He probably wanted to stay away from the Ragozin-like lines stemming from 7 Bh4 c5, which Botvinnik probably understood better than Petrosian. Then 8 dxc5 g5 9 Bg3 Ne4 10 e3 Qa5 is the usual continuation nowadays, rather than 8 0-0-0? Bxc3 9 Qxc3 10 Bg3 cxd4 11 Qxd4 Nc6 12 Qa4 Bf5, when White was already in trouble in Keres-Botvinnik (Game 25).

7 ... Qxf6 8 a3

Black must return the bishop pair.

8 ... Bxc3+ 9 Qxc3 c6 10 e3

White hasn't exactly played the position like a ball of fire and it won't come as a surprise when I assess it as equal. Black gains his freedom – though White still cherishes one tiny hope: his queenside minority attack to-be.

10 ... 0-0 11 Ne2!?

An attempt to veer from a heavily trodden path to an odd byway, which may be a bit too shifty for White's own good.

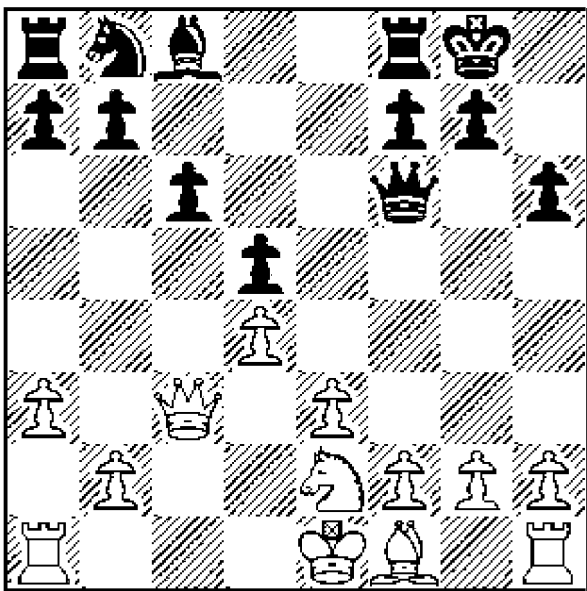
Question: What is his idea?

Answer: Petrosian wants to stay flexible and perhaps later play for: Plan A) Ng3, f2-f3 and e3-e4, as Botvinnik did versus Capa in Chapter One (Game 8). But here, too many pieces have been swapped for White to have any real attacking chances on the kingside.

Plan B) Nf4, Be2, 0-0 and a queenside minority attack, if given a chance.

Question: What do you suggest instead?

Answer: I prefer the straightforward 11 Nf3, going for a queenside minority attack, as Karpov did in this game: 11 ... Bf5 12 Be2 Nd7 13 0-0 Rfe8 14 b4 a6 15 a4 (White rolls his minority forward) 15 ... Re6 16 Rfc1, A.Karpov-J.Polgar, Monte Carlo (rapid) 1995. Actually Black should be fine here, but Karpov managed to win it anyway, just because he is Karpov.



11 ... Re8!

Believe it or not, this was a new move at the time. Not all theoretical improvements need to be double exclams. Sometimes a simple change improves. In this case, Petrosian probably expected 11 ... Bf5, after which White initiates Plan B: 12 Nf4 Nd7 13 Be2 Rfe8 14 0-0 Nf8 15 b4 Ne6 16 Nh5 Qg6 17 Ng3 Rac8 18 Rac1 Ng5 19 b5! with an edge in S.Reshevsky-E.Geller, Zürich Candidates 1953.

12 Ng3 g6!

A combative move in a non-combative position. Even dull positions can be played energetically.

Question: What is the point of Black's last move?

Answer: Botvinnik insists on a fight and prepares the disruptive ... h6-h5-h4.

13 f3?!

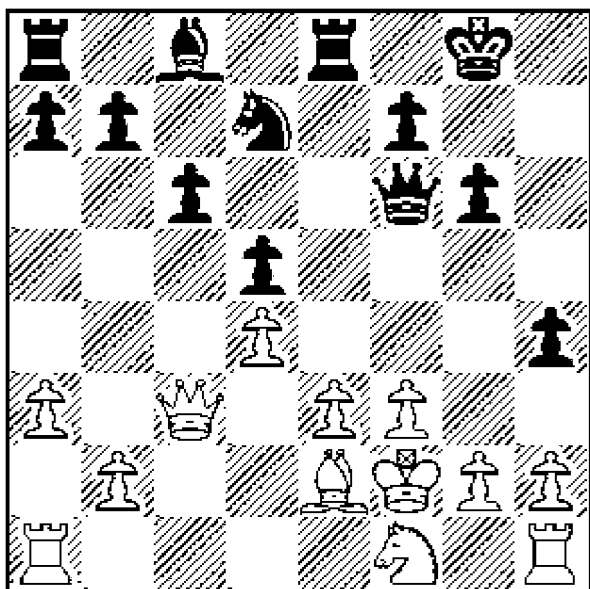
As mentioned earlier, this plan doesn't quite fit the position, since White is highly unlikely to get away with an e3-e4 break – and even if he does, his attacking chances will be diluted by earlier exchanges. Botvinnik writes: "This move can be understood only if White intended to castle long when he would first have to guard the pawn at bishop two (f2)." In this case, Petrosian plans no such adventure, so his move simply turns out to be a time-wasting weakness.

White should go for the simple 13 Bd3 h5 14 Qc2 Nd7 (14 ... Qxd4?! is met by 15 Bxg6! and if 15 ... fxg6?? 16 Qxg6+ Kf8 17 Qxe8+! wins) 15 h3 Nf8 16 0-0 h4 17 Ne2 Ne6 with an even position, A.Beliavsky-Y.Balashov, Minsk 1983.

13 ... h5! 14 Be2

I don't really like Botvinnik's suggested idea of 14 0-0-0?, after which 14 ... Qe7! just embarrasses White. For example, 15 Re1 h4 or 15 Rd3 h4 16 Ne2 Bf5 picks off the e-pawn, while 15 Kd2 hangs on to the pawn but is just asking for it!

14 ... Nd7 15 Kf2 h4 16 Nf1



White's game is a portrait of lethargy. Black now holds an edge.

16 ... Nf8 17 Nd2

In order to develop his h1-rook.

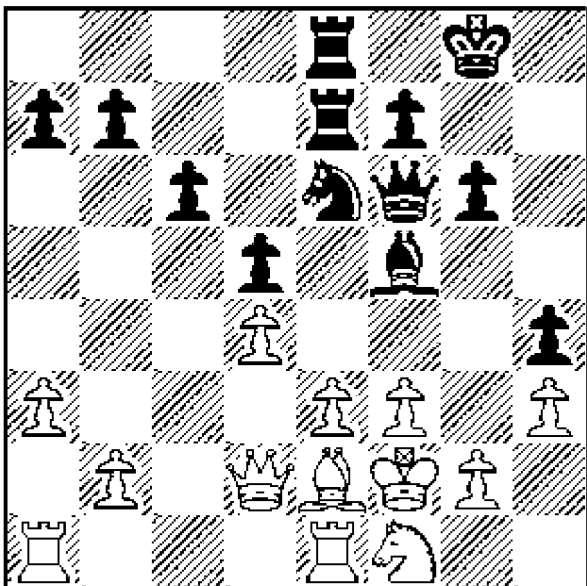
17 ... Re7

Preparing to double rooks to increase the pressure on e3.

18 Rhe1 Bf5 19 h3!?

Probably played to release himself from the worry of ... h4-h3 at every instance. On the downside, the move creates a weakness around White's king.

19 ... Rae8 20 Nf1 Ne6 21 Qd2



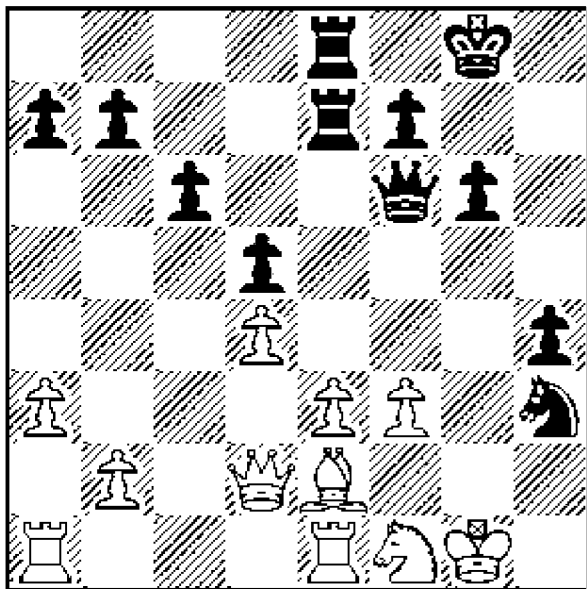
Petrosian refuses to initiate a minority attack, correctly sensing that any opening of the game would favour Black. So he sticks to his plan – do nothing at all! In this position Botvinnik considered but then rejected the plan of 21 ... Ng5, aiming to sac a bishop on h3. So we arrive at a deep divide – how to make a living? Honest mercantilism (21 ... Ng7) or crime (21 ... Ng5)? One cannot launch an attack vicariously, in thought alone. Does the idea work? Or is it better to lay such twisted ambition aside?

Exercise (planning/critical decision): Take 15 to 30 minutes and try your best to work out the ramifications. If you believe the sac works, then back it up with concrete lines. Warning: This is one of the most difficult exercises in the book!

21 ... Ng7?!

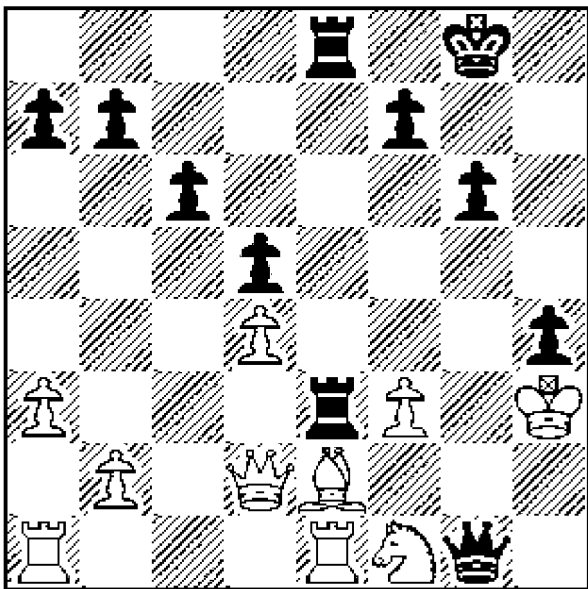
A time pressure misfire more than an error, but also a gigantic lost opportunity. The deep secret of the combination trembles, tantalizingly near yet far away, within Botvinnik's consciousness. Now Black's efforts lead to an accumulation of oddments more than actual tangible advantages, and irresolute dreams, rather than an actual plan. Botvinnik prepares a transfer to f5 or h5, which retains his advantage.

Answer: But much stronger was 21 ... Ng5!! (the sociopath on g5, devoid of normal human emotions, merely plays at life, at normalcy – it works! – the threat is ... Bxh3!) 22 Kg1 (not 22 Rac1?? Bxh3! and if 23 gxh3?? Ne4+! wins the queen) 22 ... Bxh3! (anyway!) 23 gxh3 Nxh3+ and now:



a) 24 Kh2 Rxe3!! 25 Nxe3 (the knight eyes the intruder with outraged detestation and orders him seized; 25 Kxh3?? gets crushed after 25 ... Rxe2!) 25 ... Qf4+ 26 Kh1 Nf2+ 27 Kg1 Qg3+ 28 Kf1 Nh3! 29 Bd1 Qg1+ 30 Ke2 (the king's stomach knots in dark premonition) 30 ... Nf4 mate.

b) 24 Kh1 Qg5! 25 Kh2 Qg1+ 26 Kxh3 (the aged, infirm king endeavours to walk on his own power, even if only a few steps) 26 ... Rxe3!.



Houdini assessment: -9.39! Botvinnik wrote: "It was difficult to perceive that, despite his two pieces up, White is helpless and doesn't have a single satisfactory move."

What blows my mind is that Botvinnik assimilated the attacking requirements and then collated them sequentially to perfection – his analysis exactly matched *Houdini*'s – but his misassessment of the variation threw him off! Chess proves to be a miserably tough game if a player can see all this and still go wrong!

Question: I still don't see it. How does Black win if White does nothing?

Answer: Like this: 27 Rac1 R8e4! 28 Rcd1 Rg4! with mate in two moves.

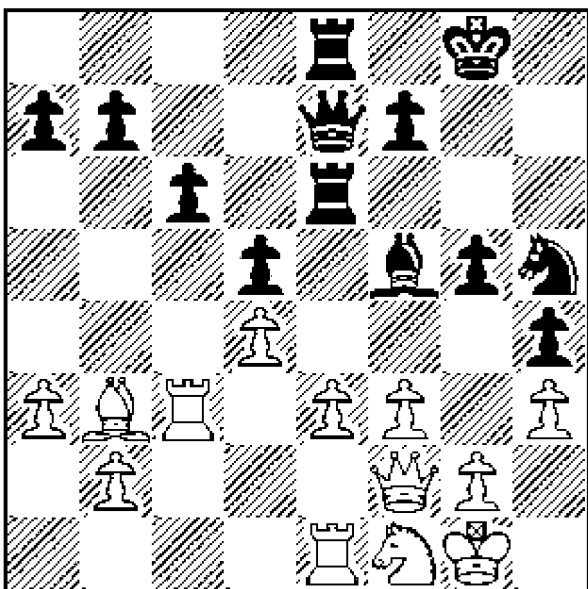
22 Rad1 Nh5 23 Rc1 Qd6 24 Rc3 Ng3 25 Kg1 Nh5

Just testing! In such positions there is no rush. Botvinnik tacks about, fishing for an attacking idea.

26 Bd1 Re6 27 Qf2 Qe7 28 Bb3

Contemplating e3-e4.

28 ... g5!



At last – motion. Botvinnik intends ... Bg6, followed by ... f7-f5 and then either ... f5-f4 or ... g5-g4. At this point 28 ... Nf4, with dual threats on d3 and h3, is simply met by 29 Qd2.

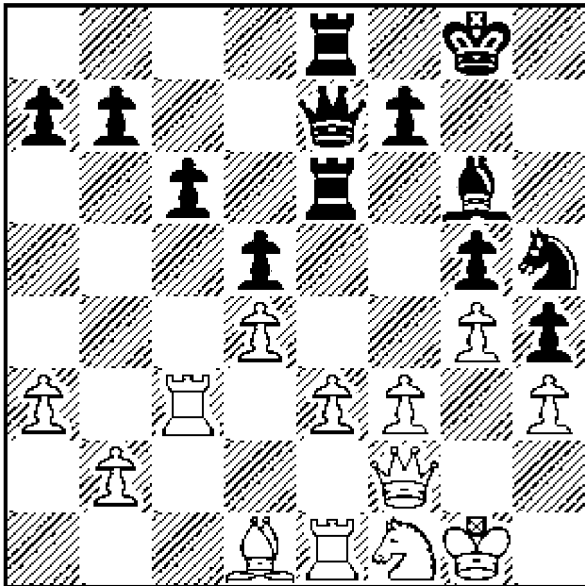
29 Bd1

Perhaps the time has come for White to take action himself with 29 e4 Bg6 30 Ne3 Nf4 31 exd5 Nxd5 32 Bxd5 cxd5 33 Qd2 f5! 34 Kf2 Qd6 35 Nc2 f4 36 Rxe6 Qxe6, which looks about even.

29 ... Bg6 30 g4??

Straightforward, bold, direct and completely incorrect! Petrosian has had enough and decides to right what he believes to be a blatant wrong, abandoning himself to the plunge. He refuses to extend trust in his waiting tactics, in what he believes to be a failing enterprise for himself on the kingside. But it's impossible to overstate the overtly brazen (and incorrect!) nature of this move. The position, for so long weighted with imminence, now erupts – on White alone! Petrosian, casting an apprehensive assessment, decides vigorous countermeasures are a necessity and gambles incorrectly.

Botvinnik wrote that he was in time trouble here. Was this a paranoid reaction on Petrosian's part, or did he get greedy and succumb to an opportunistic urge to muck the game up? The trouble is that White failed to complicate. Instead, he merely weakened his own position suicidally.

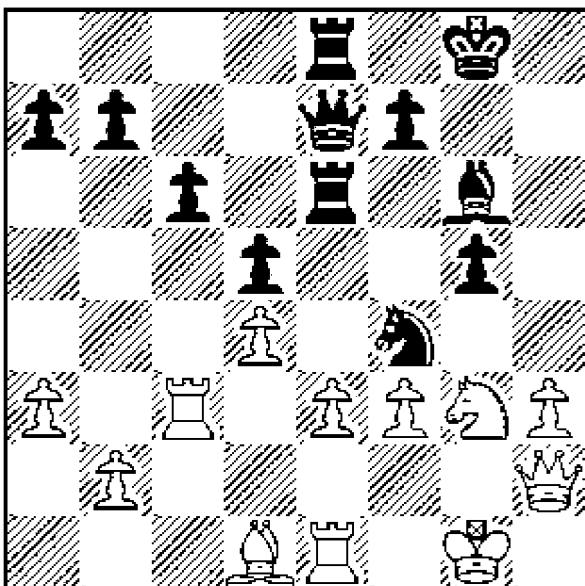


30 ... hxc3 31 Nxc3 Nf4!

After Petrosian's blatant violations, he must now deal with harsh exactions imposed by the law. "This move was apparently overlooked or underestimated by White." But I ask quite reasonably: how is it possible that a player of Petrosian's titanic playing strength actually overlooked such a simple move (which most A-level players would see) with plenty of time on his clock? The answer is that world championship matches, with their inconceivable nervous tensions involved, have their own quaint rules of who blunders and when.

32 Qh2

32 Qf1 is met by the crushing overload trick 32 ... c5!.



Exercise (combination alert): Black has two paths to the win – one simple, the other complex. Find one (or both) of them.

Answer: Pin/overload. Even in time pressure Botvinnik plays the forceful line over the simple one! Such are the ways of a perfectionist!

32 ... c5!

Answer #2: The simple interference 32 ... Nd3! crushes, since White drops the e3-pawn.

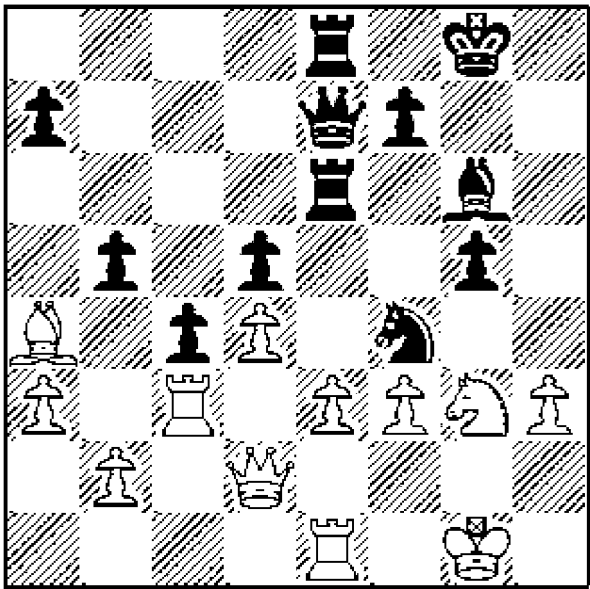
33 Qd2

Petrosian sees that other moves lose without a fight: 33 dxc5 d4! or 33 Rxc5 Rxe3.

33 ... c4!?

33 ... Qf6! wins on the spot after 34 Rxc5 Nd3 or 34 dxc5 d4.

34 Ba4 b5!



Even in dreadful time trouble, Botvinnik with the initiative was a monster.

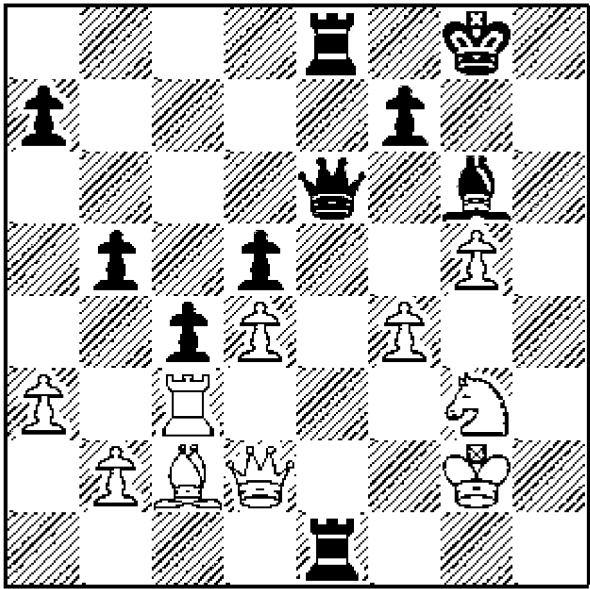
35 Bc2

Or 35 Bxb5 Rb8 36 Ba4 Nd3 37 Rb1 Rxe3 and White collapses.

35 ... Nxh3+ 36 Kf1 Qf6 37 Kg2 Nf4+ 38 exf4

The equivalent of resignation, though alternatives are of no service either; e.g. 38 Kg1 Bxc2 39 Rxc2 Nd3 40 Rc3 Qxf3 or 38 Kf2 (the confused king staggers about, unable to differentiate up from down) 38 ... g4! is crushing.

38 ... Rxe1 39 fxg5 Qe6 40 f4



Exercise (combination alert): There are a million ways to win here.

Find the path which simplifies to the easiest victory.

Answer: Simplification.

40 ... Re2+! 0-1

The rook condescends to glance at White's queen and king, both chill and arrogant. 41 Nxe2 Qxe2+ 42 Qxe2 Rxe2+ 43 Kg3 Rxc2 wins trivially. How wonderful when one's wealth is augmented with even more wealth.

Game 46

M.Botvinnik-G.Szilagyi

IBM Tournament, Amsterdam 1966

King's Indian Attack

1 g3 d5 2 Nf3 c6 3 Bg2 Bg4

This is how I normally play the black pieces against White's set-up. The reversed Torre is one of Black's most reliable set-ups.

4 d3

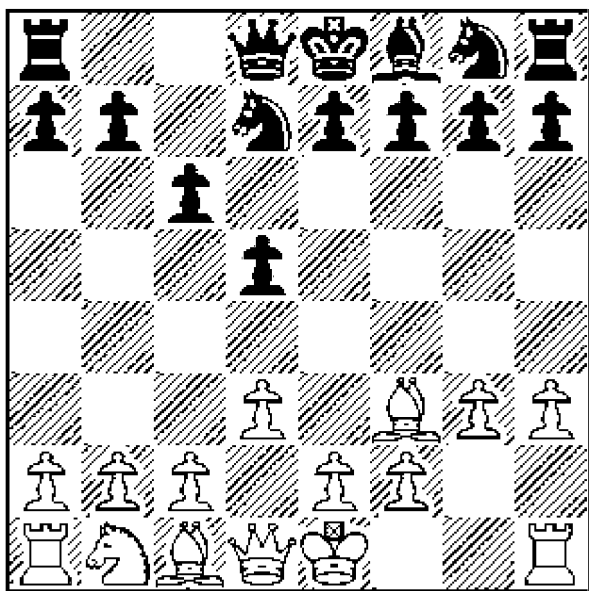
Botvinnik opts for the King's Indian Attack.

4 ... Nd7 5 h3 Bxf3

Question: Why hand over the bishop pair without a fight?

Answer: After 5 ... Bh5 6 g4 Bg6 7 Nh4 White gets the bishop pair anyway. However, Black did manage to induce h2-h3 and g3-g4, which could later prove a weakness for White. So in essence, I agree that Black should have backed his bishop to h5 rather than chop on f3 immediately.

6 Bxf3



6 ... e5

And here I would hold back the e-pawn to e6, forming a c6/d5/e6 wall designed to hinder White's light-squared bishop.

Question: You wouldn't take the centre if offered?

Answer: Black's last move is tempting but subtly weakens the light squares.

Question: What light square weakness?

Answer: Stay tuned and watch how Botvinnik goes about doing just that.

Instead, 6 ... Ngf6 7 Bg2 e6 8 0-0 Bd6 9 e4 Qc7, as in A.Morozevich-V.Kramnik, Monte Carlo (blindfold rapid) 2007, is how I would play the position as Black, who has rid himself of his bad bishop and achieved decent middlegame chances.

7 Nd2 Ngf6 8 e4 dxe4

Black can also retain the pawn tension with 8 ... Bc5, but then he must be on the constant look out for e4xd5, which opens the position for White's bishop pair.

9 dxe4 Bc5 10 0-0 Qe7 11 c3

Thinking about queenside expansion with b2-b4.

11 ... 0-0

It may have been prudent to toss in 11 ... a5, as in R.Hartoch-D.Marovic, Wijk aan Zee 1968, when Black curbs White's ambitions of expansion on the queenside for now.

12 b4 Bb6 13 a4 Rfd8

Here I would challenge White once again with 13 ... a5 14 Ba3 Qe6.

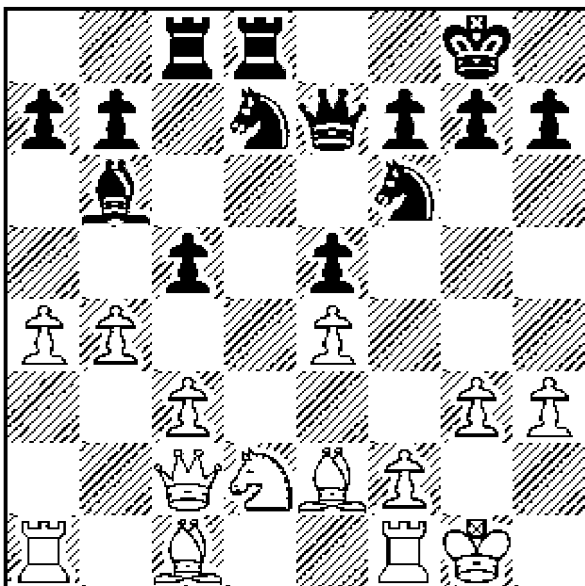
14 Qc2 Rac8

This move by itself isn't so terrible, but it is the beginning of an incorrect plan.

15 Be2!

Botvinnik senses Black's coming erroneous plan and transfers his bishop to cover c4.

15 ... c5?



The position's reality is clearly at odds with Szilagy's misperceptions of what constitutes truth. Black envisages a happy future of abundant counterplay, peace,

prosperity and longevity – none of which come to pass. This makeshift attempt at a queenside “attack” resembles actors playing at war, rather than war itself. 15 ... c5 is a serious strategic error, which by today’s standards would easily deserve a “??”.

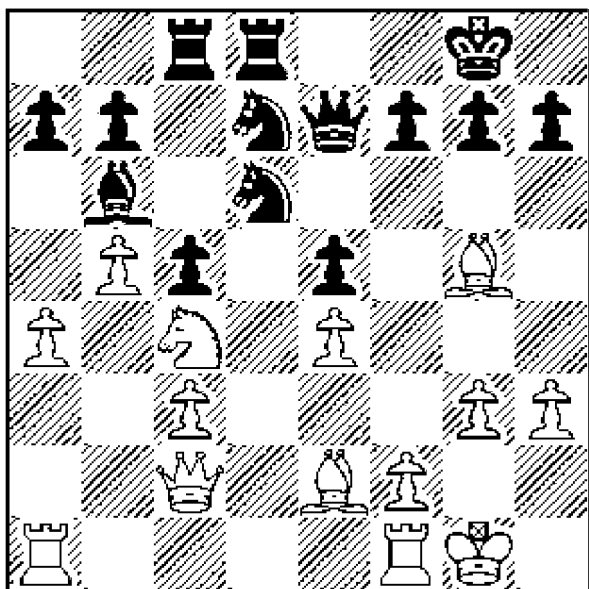
Question: Why? It looks thematic. Black finally challenges White on the queenside.

Answer: The move violates the principle: *Don't fix your pawns on the same colour as your remaining bishop.* This game is destined to become the poster child for this principle's violation!

16 b5 Ne8?!

Black wants to play ... Nd6 and ... c5-c4 but Botvinnik won't give him the time. Believe it or not, Black should be in desperation mode already and simply give his c-pawn away with 16 ... c4! to clear c5 and organize play down the c-file. In this case he is still probably busted, but at least he doesn't suffer the joyless, counterplayless, dystopian future which ensues in the game.

17 Nc4 Nd6 18 Bg5!



An alert shot which further weakens Black on the light squares.

18 ... f6

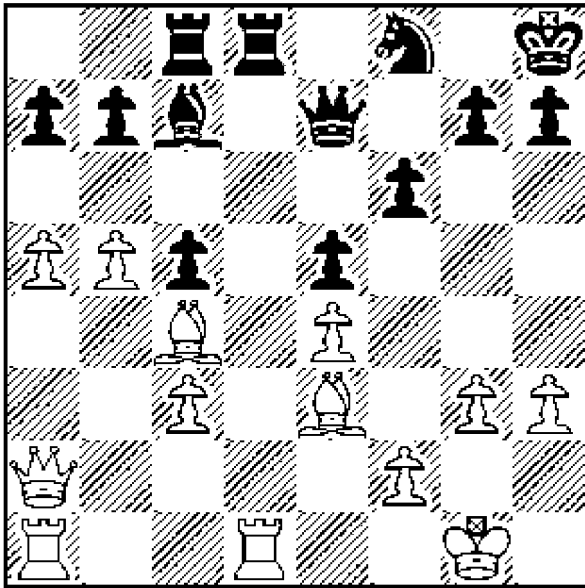
Underscoring Black's dwindling influence over the light squares. 18 ... Qxg5 19 Nxd6 Rb8 20 Bc4 Rf8 21 Rad1 may be even worse, when White dominates.

19 Be3 Nxc4

Question: How about 19 ... Nf7 - ? My idea: White owns c4, so by leaving the knight on that square, Black denies the bishop use of the a1-g8 diagonal. In essence, White has two powerful pieces which want to occupy c4, but he can only play one to the square.

Answer: Viable plans for Black in this position are fugitive. Lack of counterplay invests his position with an unspoken, drab sterility at the emptiness of future prospects. Your concept is clever but White's advantage grows in any case after 20 Qb3 Bc7 21 a5 Bb8 22 Bg4 g6 23 h4 Kg7 24 Rfd1, when Black is in a bad way. I think it's too late for Black. He sealed his fate strategically with his horrible 15th move.

20 Bxc4+ Kh8 21 a5 Bc7 22 Rfd1 Nf8 23 Qa2!



A disarmingly simple, yet powerful strategic strengthening. White increases his grip on the light squares, prevents ... Ne6, and covers and reinforces a5 which frees the a1-rook for action. Black's game is beyond redemption. We take inventory: 1. White owns the bishop pair.

2. White dominates the light squares.

3. White holds a grip on d5 and c4.

4. Black owns a worthless bishop, hemmed in by his own pawns (not to mention a rather lame knight). The bishop may be an excellent replica of a real, functioning piece, but no replica matches the pristine perfection of the original.

5. White owns a gigantic territorial advantage on the queenside.

Conclusion: Black is strategically lost.

23 ... Rxd1+

Hoping that swaps will ease his defensive troubles. In this case, they merely help Botvinnik, since Black weakens his back rank.

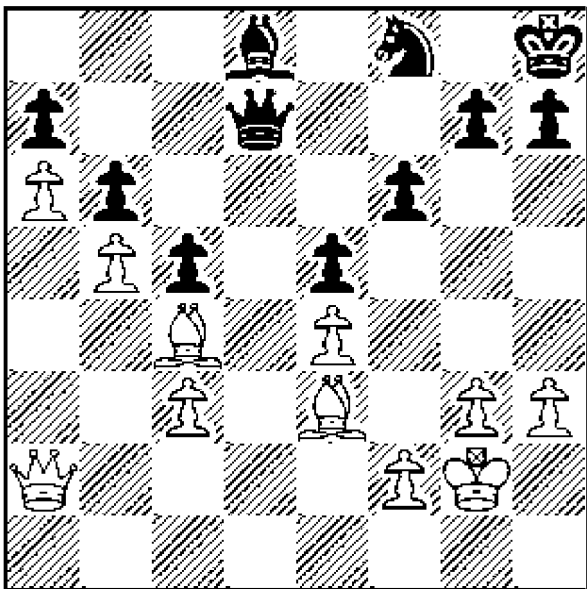
24 Rxd1 Rd8 25 Rxd8 Bxd8 26 a6 b6

No choice, since capturing on a6 is even worse.

27 Kg2 Qd7

A hawk haunts our street. She (or he, I only assigned the gender by intuitive default) sits atop an old telephone pole, her roving eye surveying her domain for potential prey. One time she swooped down on an unfortunate pigeon, who was merely minding his own business in our front yard, and scooped it up to her lair atop the pole. Soon it began raining feathers into our yard (which freaked out my wife big time!). Well, in this position Botvinnik plays the role of the hawk.

No one questions that White dominates the light squares which, up until now, have been pretty to look at, yet produced little tangible gain. To steal is to obtain that which is not yours through surreptitious means; to confiscate is to steal openly, from a position of power. In this instance, we see an example of the latter, where Botvinnik confiscates the light squares across the board (along with Black's hopes), assuming eternal stewardship.



Exercise (planning): Come up with one devastating idea and Black's world is ablaze in the fire of the light squares.

Answer: Queen and bishop simply trade places, after which White threatens Black's back rank, as well as multiple infiltrations. This was the downside to Black's swapping rooks. But if he didn't do it, then White would have initiated the rook exchange himself.

28 Qe2!

The queen, contriving a plan, thinks to herself: "That which I failed to achieve through war, I will now acquire through craft."

28 ... Ng6 29 Bb3! Ne7 30 Qc4!

The creature, so long dormant on a2, awakens to her own sentience and power. All speculations are resolved: White plays directly for mate.

30 ... h6 31 Qf7

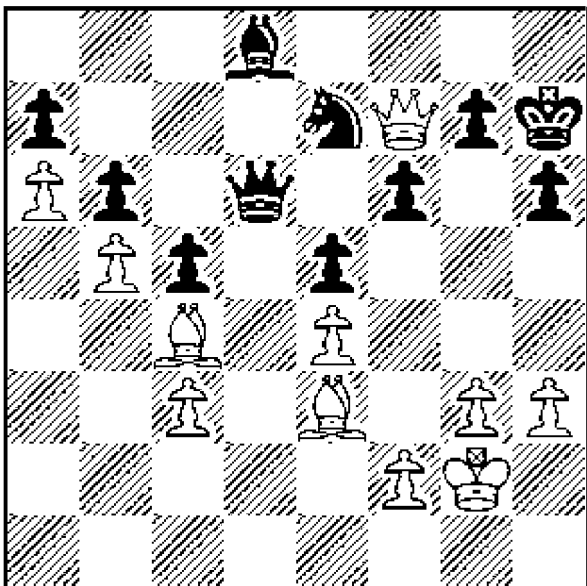
The queen strides forward, with only her eyes offering an intimation of imminent violence.

31 ... Kh7

The king cautiously peers forth, a nervous rabbit from his hole in a forest rife with predation.

32 Bc4 Qd6

The streets on the kingside are empty of inhabitants, other than Black's king, and the only sound heard is the rustling of leaves in the wind. In the glare of sunlight it's easy to miss the cracks in an environment of texture and shadow.



Exercise (planning): We arrive at Part II of Botvinnik's idea: weave mating nets based on the light square domination. Try and come up with two formations which lead to Black's early demise.

Answer: Mating nets:

1) h3-h4, f2-f3, g3-g4 and then Bxh6!.

2) h3-h4-h5, Qe8 (if allowed), Bf7 and Bg6+.

33 h4! Qd1

If Black shuffles and waits, his end arrives with 33 ... Qd7 34 f3! (mating net #1) 34 ... Bc7 35 g4 Bd6 (35 ... Kh8 36 g5 fxg5 37 hxg5 is also curtains for Black) 36 Bxh6! Kxh6 (the king slumps in despondency, like a partially filled sack of grain, folding forward) 37 Qh5 mate.

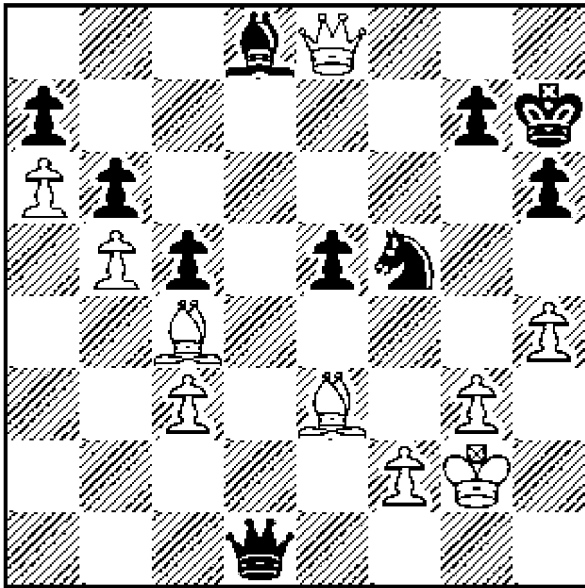
34 Qe8!

Mating net #2 it is! The queen dazzles with her feminine wiles: tilts of the head calculated to entice, sham pouts, actressy displays of mingled glee and chagrin, and tantalizing, mock allurements too numerous to mention.

34 ... f5

Or 34 ... Qd6 35 h5! Bc7 (the shuffling android bishop, to his horror, realizes his/its true nature: devoid of spirit, mind or identity – merely a copy of something else) 36 Bf7! and Bg6+ is coming.

35 exf5 Nxf5



Otherworldly, tremulous forms appear from the mist, floating in the direction of Black's king.

Exercise (combination alert): You get tossed an easy one! White to play and force mate.

Answer: No exclamation required for this!

36 Bg8+ Kh8 1-0

Since 37 Bf7+ Kh7 38 Qg8 is mate. Have you ever entered an empty, abandoned house, yet sensed the occupancy of now-dead previous owners?

Game 47

M.Botvinnik-B.Larsen

Palma de Mallorca 1967

Réti Opening

1 c4 Nf6 2 Nf3 e6 3 g3 d5 4 Bg2 Be7 5 0-0 0-0 6 b3 c5 7 Bb2

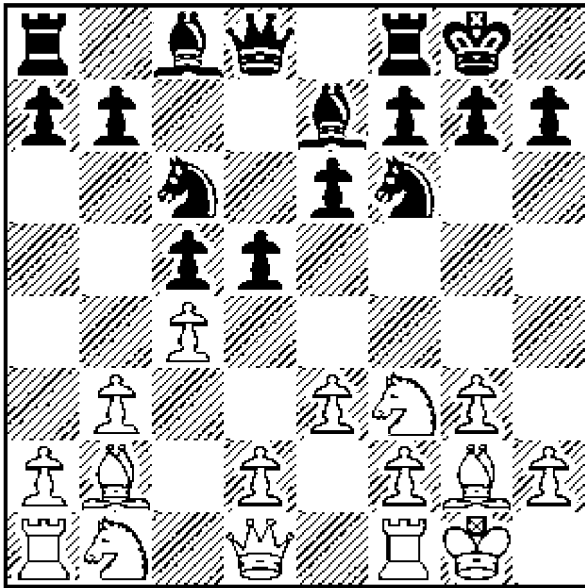
I tend to play 7 e3 at this point.

Question: Why would you make this move over the fianchetto of the bishop, which develops a piece?

7 ... Nc6

Answer: A personal preference. I don't want Black to toss in 7 ... d4, blunting the b2-bishop. White should continue 8 b4 a5 9 bxc5 Nc6 10 d3 e5, A.Miles-E.Geller, Wijk aan Zee 1977, when the position is perhaps unclear after 11 Na3. White's open b-file and b5-outpost compensate for Black's extra central control.

8 e3



Now the position is back to normal again.

8 ... b6

Question: Why can't Black play 8 ... d4, returning to the position you feared?

Answer: It's not quite the same. For example, after 9 exd4 cxd4 10 Re1 Ne8 (intending ... f7-f6 and ... e6-e5) 11 Ba3 f6 12 Bxe7 Qxe7 13 a3 a5 14 d3 e5, we reach an odd, reversed Benoni, E.Tomashevsky-M.Narciso Dublan, European Championship, Plovdiv 2008.

Alternatively, 8 ... dxc4!? also creates an immediate imbalance. D.Howell-L.Paichadze, European Championship, Plovdiv 2012, continued 9 bxc4 Qc7 10 Nc3 a6 11 Rc1 Na5 12 Qe2 Bd7 (Black normally plays for ... b7-b5) 13 e4!? (an interesting interpretation of the position by Howell. 13 ... Rfd8 14 e5 Ne8 15 Ne4 b5 16 d3 Bc6 17 Bc3 Rd7 18 Rfd1 Rad8 19 Rd2 b4 20 Bb2 Nb7 21 h4, when I like White's chances on the kingside.

9 Nc3 Bb7 10 d3

According to current theory, 10 cxd5 is White's best shot at an edge, when Black may respond in two ways: 10 ... Nxd5 11 Nxd5 Qxd5 12 d4 Qd8 13 Ne5 Nxe5 14 Bxb7 Rb8 15 Bg2 and White's bishop pair gave him the edge, V.Kramnik-T.Radjabov, Candidates match (2nd blitz game), Kazan 2011. Or the sharper 10 ... exd5 11 d4 Ne4 12 dxc5 Nxc3 13 Bxc3 bxc5 14 Qe2 Re8 15 Rfd1 with a sharp struggle ahead against Black's hanging pawns, V.Kramnik-G.Jones, London 2012.

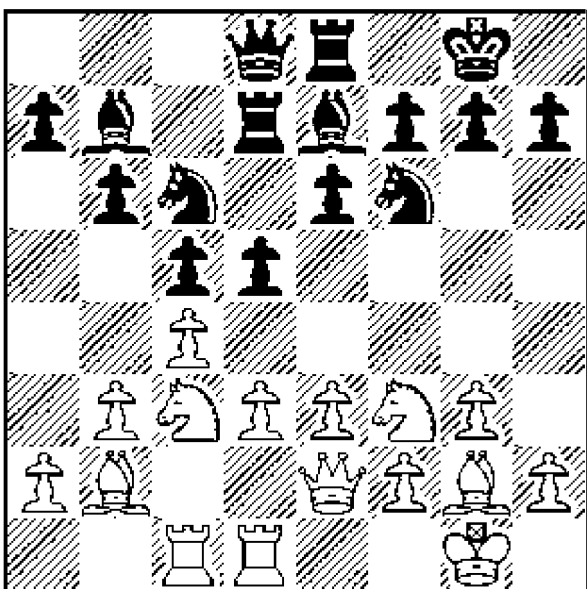
10 ... Rc8 11 Rc1 Rc7

I would go for 11 ... dxc4 12 bxc4 Nb4.

12 Qe2 Rd7

I still believe Black gets dynamic equality after 12 ... dxc4.

13 Rfd1 Re8



Question: Isn't Larsen playing overly cautiously this game?

Answer: It certainly appears that way. He putzes around for too long and now White gets an edge. Instead, Black can try the more dynamic 13 ... d4 14 exd4 cxd4 15 Nb1 Bc5. But don't be fooled into thinking that Larsen was merely playing for a draw. By 1967, he was stronger than Botvinnik, who was well past his prime and at the tail end of his career, while Larsen was just entering his heyday as a leading challenger for the world championship.

14 cxd5 Nxd5

14 ... exd5!? drops an exchange to 15 Bh3, when I think Black fails to get full compensation, despite his soon-to-be fearful light-squared bishop.

15 Nxd5 Rxd5

Larsen was rightfully fearful of entering any kind of hanging pawns situation against Botvinnik, arguably the greatest practitioner of that structure of all time. 15 ... exd5 16 d4 would lead to positions Botvinnik understood better than anyone else.

16 d4

Black's rook is a target on d5.

16 ... Qa8 17 dxc5!

Principle: Open the position when leading in development – even when only slightly leading, as in this case.

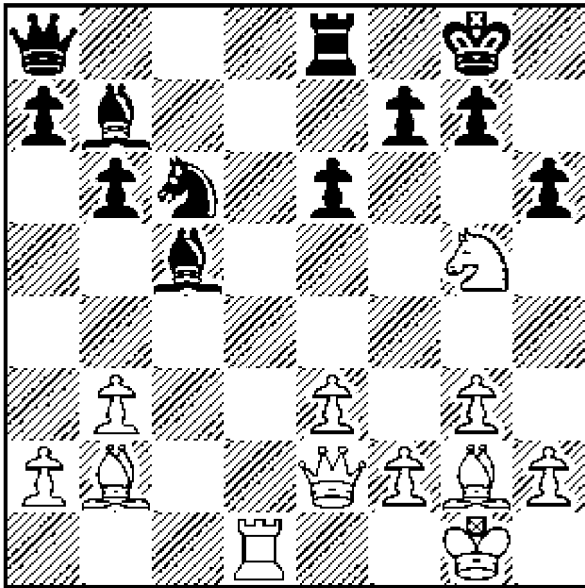
17 ... Rxd1+ 18 Rxd1 Bxc5?

Natural moves are not always the best. Larsen underestimates the danger to his king. 18 ... bxc5 was necessary.

19 Ng5!

Threatening Qh5. *Principle: Create confrontation when your opponent's forces are offside and out of sync.* Suddenly, Black's pieces look far away on the queenside, and the approaching knight, by default, is viewed by Black's king as a source of utmost distrust.

19 ... h6

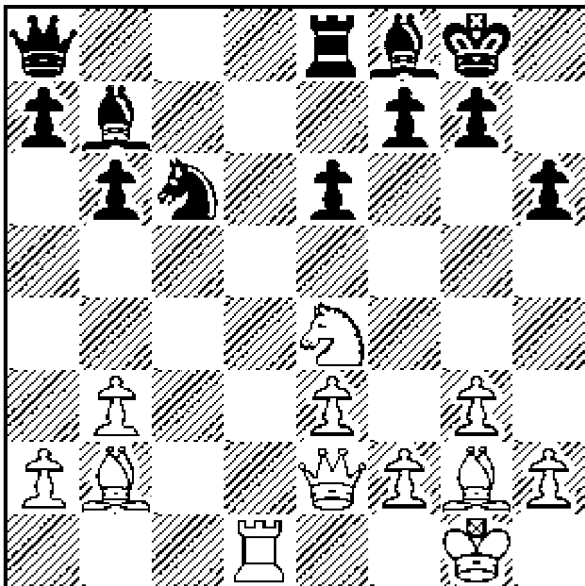


Exercise (combination alert): After Black's last, forced move, White has a nasty shot. Let's see if you can find the move two chess legends missed.

20 Ne4

Answer: Obliterate the king's cover. The text is still strong, but Botvinnik had 20 Nxf7!! Kxf7 21 Qg4! (even more accurate than the check on h5) 21 ... Nd4 (not 21 ... Bf8? 22 Be4! Ne7 23 Qh5+ Kg8 24 Bxb7 and White regains the piece with a crushing position, while if Black tries to hang on to everything, he gets mated after 23 ... g6 24 Qe5! Bxe4 25 Qf6+ Kg8 26 Qxe6+ Kh7 27 Qf7+ etc) 22 exd4 Bf8 23 Bxb7 Qxb7 24 Re1 with a clean extra pawn and initiative for White.

20 ... Bf8

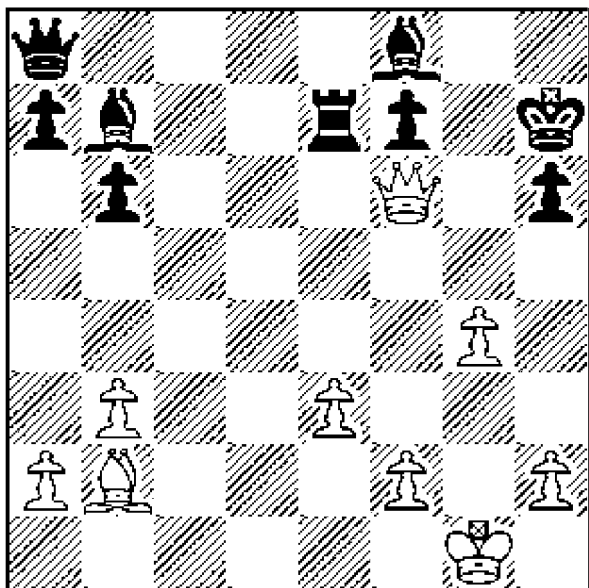


Exercise (critical decision/calculation/combination alert): This is possibly the most difficult exercise in the entire book! Take at least

15 minutes and calculate 21 Nf6+ as deeply as you can. Does it work?

21 Rd7?!

Answer: It works! Botvinnik missed what would have been one of the greatest combinations of his illustrious career: 21 Nf6+!! (when leaves begin to shiver in the forest on a windless day, it can only mean one thing: a predator approaches) 21 ... gxf6 (otherwise White simply picks off an exchange) 22 Qg4+ Kh7 23 Be4+! (a malevolent presence inflicts itself upon Black's king, as beams of light brush up and down his body, and he realizes: "the mothership scans me") 23 ... f5 24 Rd7! (an even quicker mate than 24 Bxf5+! which forces mate as well) 24 ... Ne7 (or 24 ... Re7 25 Bxf5+ with similar play) 25 Rxe7! (the mob boss may order the hit on Black's king, yet it is his capo and crew who get their hands dirty by performing the actual deed) 25 ... Rxe7 26 Bxf5+ (sometimes forced moves are good ones too) 26 ... exf5 27 Qxf5+ Kg8 28 Qf6! Kh7 29 g4!!.



Snaring Black's king, whose fragile skeletal system was not designed to bear the weight of the rubble crashing down around his now broken body. This move is impossibly difficult to see when beginning the combination! Black has no defence against 30 Qh8+ Kg6 31 Qg8+ Bg7 32 Qxg7 mate. The masterpiece combination which never was! Had Botvinnik found this over the board, this game would be prominently posted in Chapter One: *Botvinnik on the Attack!*

I remember once I played on a jungle gym in the park as a kid at the very highest level. I lost my grip and fell in stages, bouncing off each level, until I hit the grass below with a sickening "thud" sound. Similarly, in this variation, Larsen's pain arrives in stages. I guided the position from move 21 to my 2400 rated, 15-year-old student Varun Krishnan and, without moving the pieces, he found 29 g4!!, proving that this is not just some esoteric, theoretical exercise for the computers. If you practice these very difficult mental challenges, you get better and better over time.

21 ... f5?

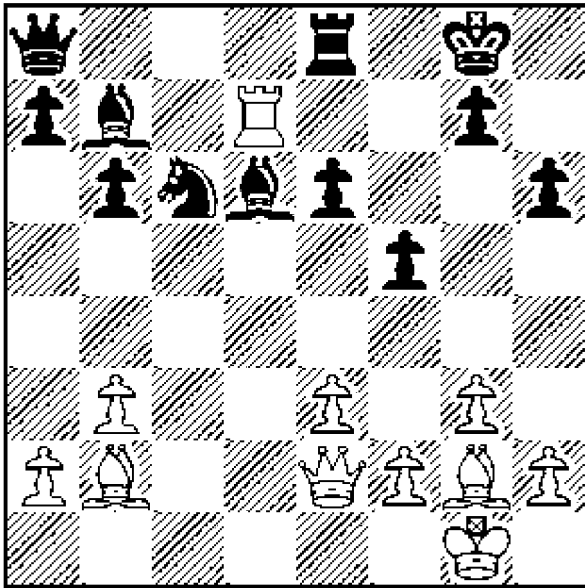
21 ... e5 was absolutely essential to Black's survival.

22 Nd6!

Even stronger than 22 Qh5!, which also wins after 22 ... Re7 23 Nf6+! gxf6 24 Qg6+ Bg7 25 Bxc6! Rxd7 26 Bxd7 Qd8 27 Bxe6+ Kh8 28 Bd4.

22 ... Bxd6

If 22 ... Re7?? 23 Rxe7 Bxe7 24 Nxb7 Qxb7 25 Qc4 wins a piece.



This is my twelfth chess book for Everyman and I don't remember a single game where I included two critical decision exercises in a single game. This game proves to be the exception.

Exercise (critical decision): Botvinnik is faced with an agonizing choice. Take on g7, in effect sac'ing a piece, or recapture the bishop on d6, with tremendous strategic control. Both paths lead to advantage, but one is infinitely stronger. What does your intuition tell you?

23 Rxd6?!

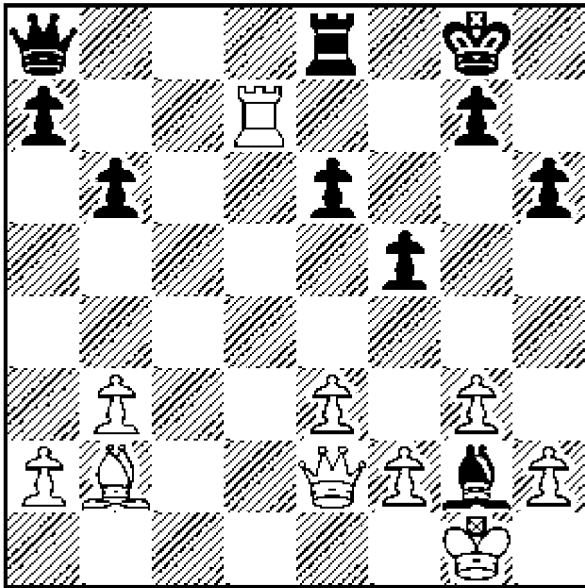
Old age makes fools of us all. We see that, at this very late stage in his career, Botvinnik's once legendary powers of calculation have degraded. Once again, he falters when on the cusp of a knockout blow.

Answer: White's bishop and rook superimpose their dominance upon g7. Here 23 Rxd6?! gives White a decisive attack after 23 ... Kf8 24 Rh7!!, threatening Qh5. This last move is very difficult to spot. Oddly enough, Black is paralysed and can't improve his position an iota despite the free move. *Houdini's* assessment is +16.43! Black can resign.

23 ... Nd4!

To the criminal mind, the concept of honesty is but an abstraction. Larsen cleverly contrives a method of complicating his way out of his predicament, or so he hopes.

24 Rxd4 Bxg2 25 Rd7



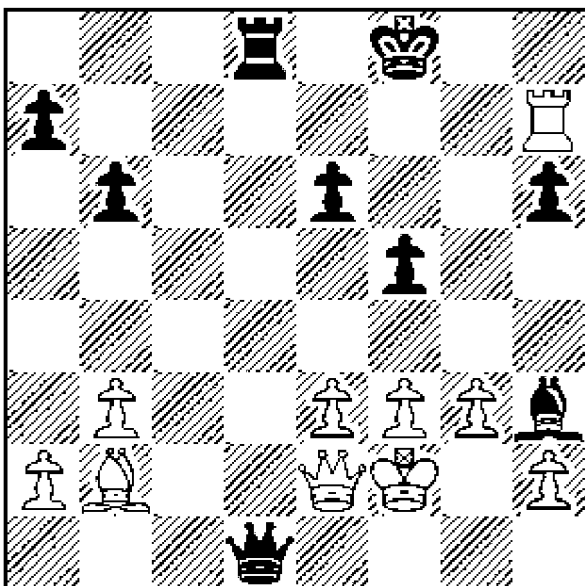
25 ... Bh3?

The master of misdirection only manages to confuse himself. The bishop pursues a distorted reflection of the position's reality. Here 25 ... Bh1! puts up far sterner resistance, following the principle: *Opposite-coloured bishops favour the attacker*. After 26 f3! (26 f4 is met by 26 ... e5! 27 Bxe5 Rc8) 26 ... Qxf3 27 Rxc7+ Kf8 28 Qd2! (threatening a huge check on d6) 28 ... e5 (not 28 ... Qd5? 27 Qb4+) 29 Rxa7 Qc6 30 Rd7 Kg8 31 h3!, White should still win with exact play, but it would be far more difficult.

26 f3

Now Black's bishop remains impounded to the warehouse on h3, to sit in the dark and collect dust.

26 ... Rd8 27 Rxc7+ Kf8 28 Rh7 Qd5 29 Kf2 Qd1



30 Rh8+

The human move, leading to simplification and a technically winning ending. *Houdini* insists on 30 Bc3! which, seen through dispassionate computer eyes, is indeed stronger.

30 ... Kf7 31 Rxd8 Qxd8 32 Qc2 Qd5

Perhaps thinking about ... Qb5.

33 Qc7+ Ke8

Certainly not 33 ... Kg6?? 34 Qg7+ Kh5 35 Qf7+ Kg5 (the agile king thinks to

himself: “I am not about to be taken hostage without a vigorous chase”, which ironically turns out to be the final thought of his life) 36 Bf6 mate.

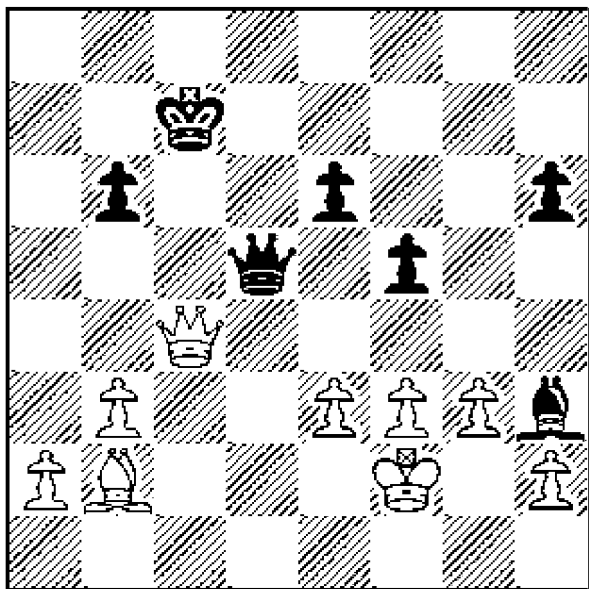
34 Qb8+? Kd7?

Mutual time pressure errors. Black’s fortitude collapses and, with it, all resistance as well. Instead, 34 ... Qd8! (monarchs merge alongside each other like docked cruise ships at port) forces queens off the board and should hold the draw.

35 Qxa7+ Kc8 36 Qa6+!

White’s queen gets back to defend against the ... Qd2+ threat.

36 ... Kc7 37 Qc4+!



Botvinnik feels a marked sense of relief, the same way I did on December 22nd, 2012 – the day after the one the Mayan calendar predicted the world would end. It took incredible judgment to see that White does indeed win here, even with two extra pawns. *Houdini* couldn’t solve it and gives White only a slight plus, when in fact Botvinnik already worked out the win.

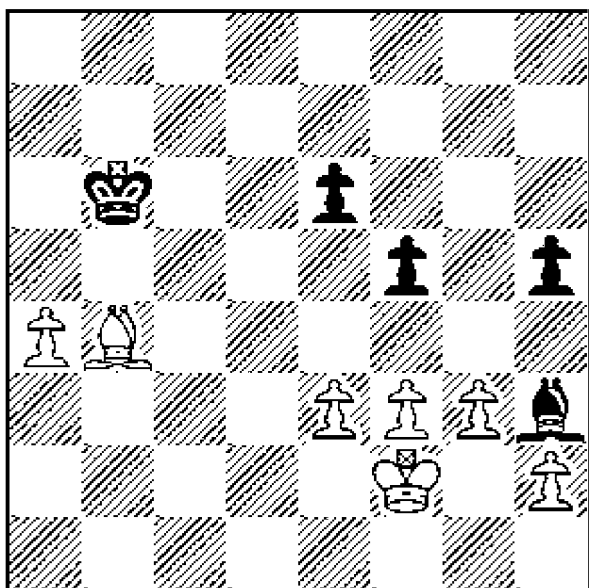
37 ... Qxc4 38 bxc4 Kc6 39 Bd4

Oh, no you don’t! Botvinnik denies Black’s king entry to c5.

39 ... h5 40 a4

Zugzwang! Black’s king must give way, allowing White his first passed pawn.

40 ... Kc7 41 c5! bxc5 42 Bxc5 Kc6 43 Bb4 Kb6



numerous indignities to which
they have been subjected. How does White make progress?

Answer: Force king entry on the kingside by sac'ing a pawn.

44 g4!!

Botvinnik's move is far more clear than the rote 44 a5+ Kb5 45 Bc3 Ka6 46 Ke2 Kb5 47 Kd3 Bg2 48 f4, when Black gets drawing chances, despite his two pawn deficit.

44 ... hxcg4

44 ... fxg4 45 Kg3 (threatening f4-f4, e3-e4 and f4-f5, creating a kingside passer) 45 ... e5 46 Bc3 does the trick.

45 Kg3!

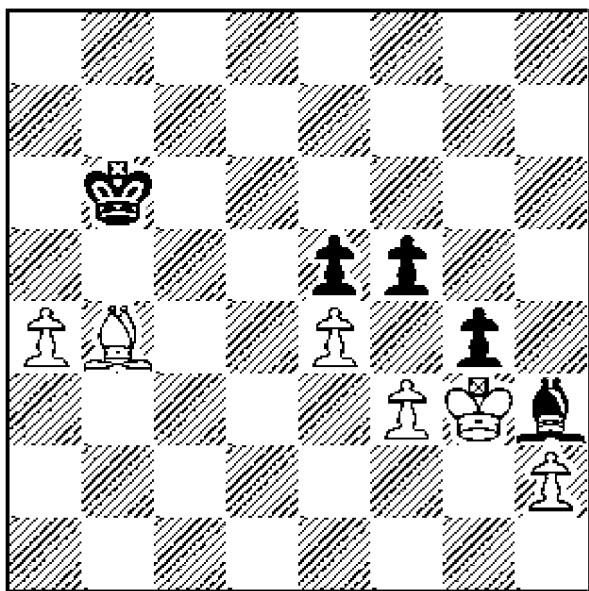
Black's bishop becomes no more than a specimen sealed in a glass case, to be inspected and experimented on at White's will. Both black king and bishop find themselves squeezed, unable to move forward or back – much like Han Solo, Luke Skywalker, Princess Leia and Chewbacca, when they were trapped in the trash compactor aboard the Death Star.

45 ... e5?!

Question: This looks like suicide, placing a pawn on the same colour as White's remaining bishop. How does he make progress if Black does nothing?

Answer: Larsen's last move makes it easier for Botvinnik, but he still wins if Black simply waits: 45 ... Ka6 46 fxg4 fxg4 47 Be1 Kb6 48 e4 Ka6 49 Kf4 Kb6 50 a5+ Ka6 51 e5 Kb5 52 Kg5 Ka6 53 Kf6 g3 (or 53 ... Kb5 54 Bg3! Kxa5 55 Kxe6, when the e-pawn costs Black a piece, and even more importantly, White's bishop is of the correct colour for his remaining h-pawn) 54 hxg3 Kb5 55 Kg5 Bg2 56 g4 Bf3 57 Kf4 Bd1 58 g5 Bc2 59 Bd2 Bh7 60 Ke3 Bg6 61 Kd4 Bh5 62 a6! (deflection) 62 ... Kxa6 63 Kc5 Bg6 64 Kd6 Bf5 65 Ke7 and the g-pawn costs Black his bishop.

46 e4!



Botvinnik kneads the soft structure into the shape of his desires.

46 ... fxe4

46 ... f4+ 47 Kh4! (the king comes to a decision, thinking: "if the rabble refuse to love me, then let them now fear me!") 47 ... Kc6 48 Bc3 Kd6 49 a5 is zugzwang, and game over since either Black's king or his bishop gets deflected from protecting his respective pawns.

47 fxg4 1-0

After 47 ... Bf1 (the bishop ends his long, self-imposed exile and returns to society a different man – but he finds upon his return, that all those who he loved are dead) 48 h4, White now has three passers, whereas Black's pathetic doubled e-pawns are easily held.

Chapter Six

Botvinnik on Endings

Botvinnik's remarkable acuity in endings arose from his calculation power and his intense receptivity to even the most minute shift in the geometry. Late in his career, when his middlegame powers were on the decline, Botvinnik began to switch to technical positions, where he still reigned supreme. The game which pops out to me is his opposite-coloured bishops ending versus Kotov (game 60). In his, Botvinnik sacs two pawns, going from pawn up to pawn down and, impossibly, wins the game. The effect of his double pawn sac hit me like a geometer's shock at discovering a four-sided triangle.

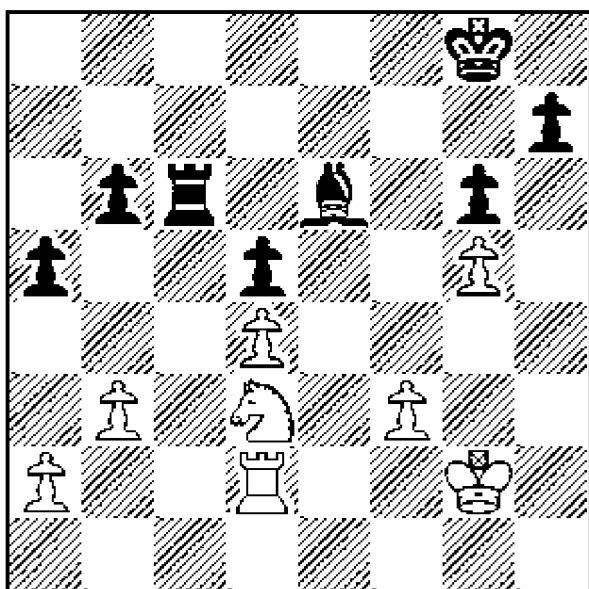
Game 48

M.Botvinnik-T.V.Petrosian

World Championship (14th matchgame), Moscow 1963

Queen's Gambit Declined

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Be7 4 cxd5 exd5 5 Bf4 c6 6 e3 Bf5 7 g4 Be6 8 h3 Nf6 9 Bd3 c5
10 Nf3 Nc6 11 Kf1 0-0 12 Kg2 cxd4 13 Nxd4 Nxd4 14 exd4 Nd7 15 Qc2 Nf6 16 f3 Rc8
17 Be5 Bd6! 18 Rae1 Bxe5 19 Rxe5 g6 20 Qf2 Nd7 21 Re2 Nb6 22 Rhe1 Nc4 23 Bxc4
Rxc4 24 Rd2 Re8 25 Re3 a6 26 b3 Rc6 27 Na4 b6 28 Nb2 a5 29 Nd3 f6 30 h4 Bf7 31
Rxe8+ Bxe8 32 Qe3 Bf7 33 g5 Be6 34 Nf4 Bf7 35 Nd3 Be6 36 gxf6 Qxf6 37 Qg5
Qxg5+ 38 hxg5



Question: Who stands better here?

Answer: Let's tally: 1. White's knight, with access to e5 and f4, looks superior to Black's bishop, who is hindered by his own d5-pawn. The presence of fixed pawns on g6 and h7, the same colour as the bishop, doesn't help Black either.

2. White's king has quick access to the centre via g3, f4 and e5.

3. White dominates the central dark squares, mainly made possible by the presence of his g5-pawn.

4. Black controls the c-file – not enough to offset White's three advantages.

38 ... a4?

A mistaken idea. Black hopes to eliminate all queenside pawns, but Botvinnik's

response dodges the attempt and creates further weakness in Black's camp.

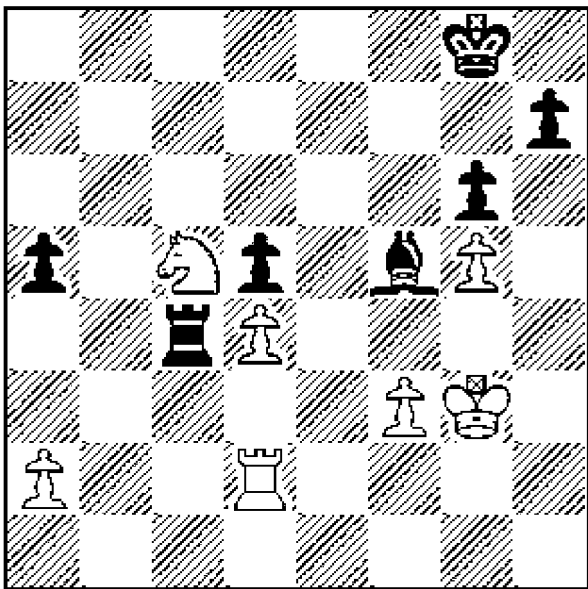
39 bxa4!

Much stronger than 39 Ne5 Rc3 40 bxa4 Ra3 41 Rb2 Rxa4 42 Rxb6 Rxa2+, when the trading away of the entire queenside would be helpful to Black's cause.

39 ... Rc4 40 a5!

Botvinnik is quick to return the pawn and seize control over c5. The weakening of this square is a fundamental Black must deal with, the way a child blurts out an unpleasant truth the adults in the room refuse to discuss. As usual, Botvinnik is quick to reject any line which wins material but loses the initiative. So he avoids 40 Nb2 Rb4, which ties White down.

40 ... bxa5 41 Nc5 Bf5 42 Kg3!



Preparing to travel deep into Black's camp.

42 ... a4

Question: What is the purpose of this move?

Answer: Petrosian plans to play the pawn to a3, where he may later have tricks, if he can get his rook to b2 or attack White's a-pawn with ... Bb1.

43 Kf4 a3 44 Ke5

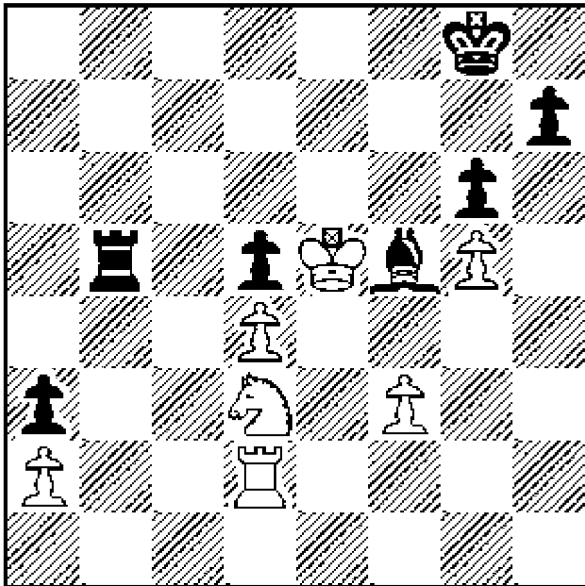
The king views d5 with icy animosity.

44 ... Rb4! 45 Nd3!

Botvinnik writes: "Of course, with such an active king, White can allow transposition into a rook ending but should not permit the enemy rook to invade on b2." Not 45 Kxd5? Rb2 and if 46 Nb3?? Bb1, suddenly Black is winning.

45 ... Rb5

It is too soon to transpose to a rook and pawn ending: 45 ... Bxd3? 46 Rxd3 Ra4 47 Kxd5 is hopeless for Black; e.g. 47 ... Kf7 (47 ... Ra5+ 48 Ke6 Rxd5 49 d5 is even worse) 48 Ke5 Ke7 49 d5 Ra5 50 Rb3 Ra7 51 Rb8 (threatening Rh8) 51 ... Kf7 52 Kd6 and Black can resign.



Exercise (planning): How does White make progress?

Answer: “The king is a fighting piece”, extolled Steinitz. Give chase to Black’s rook with the king.

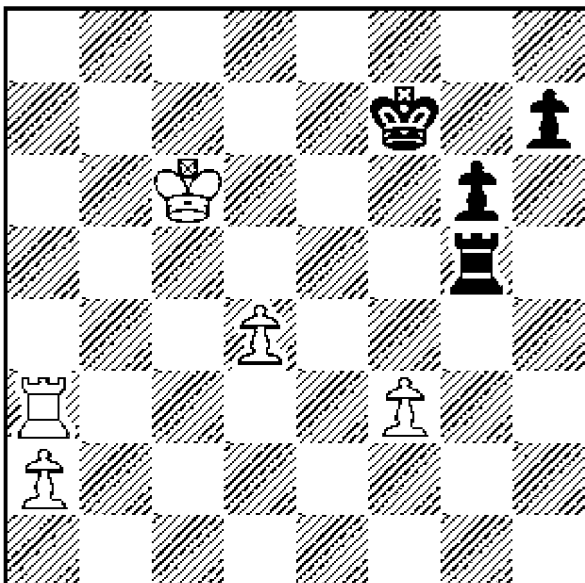
46 Kd6! Kf7 47 Kc6!

The wandering king takes on magnified influence from his new outpost.

47 ... Bxd3!

Petrosian correctly places his faith in the drawish nature of rook and pawn endings. The X-factor is White’s super-active king. 47 ... Ra5? 48 Nc5 leads to the loss of d5 with a hopeless game for Black.

48 Rxd3 Rb2 49 Rxa3 Rg2 50 Kxd5 Rxg5+ 51 Kc6



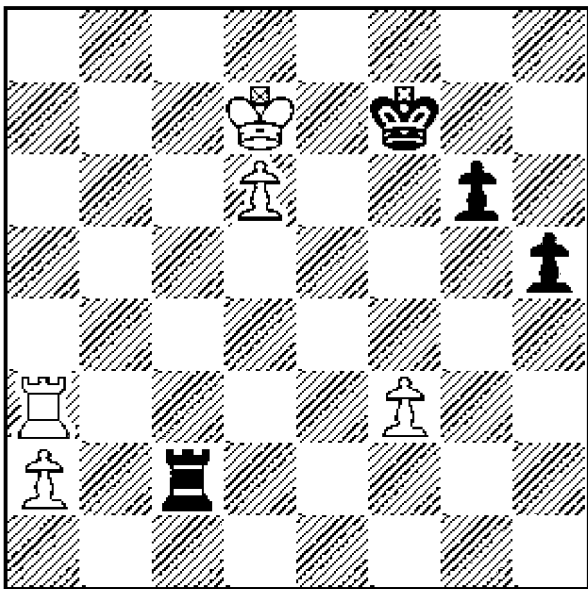
Question: How is this different from the rook ending we looked at earlier?

Answer: In this version Black still endures many difficulties, but both his king and rook are far more active than in the hopeless earlier version we examined. Black’s difficulties here: 1. He is down a pawn.

2. His passed h-pawn is slower than White's d-pawn.
3. Botvinnik's roving king assists his passed pawn up the board.

The deficiencies in Black's game are laid naked – yet he may still be able to draw! Such is the drawing power of rook and pawn endgames.

51 ... h5 52 d5 Rg2 53 d6 Rc2+ 54 Kd7



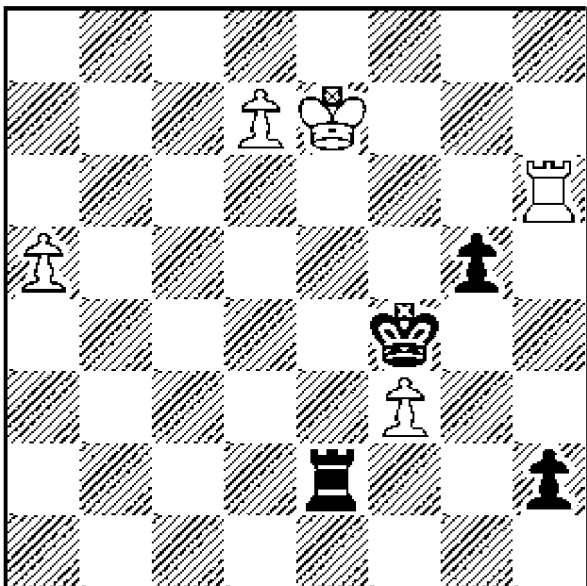
We enter depths difficult to fathom. Desire for promotion to a new queen is to be the bloody arena, the place of strivings, life and death. In the swirl of the position are dual avenues, dual fates. One line loses, the other draws. The time has arrived for us to enter our single, private future.

Exercise (critical decision): Black can play 54 ... h4, rolling his h-pawn forward. Or he can toss in the preparatory 54 ... g5, which prevents White from playing f3-f4. Choose wisely.

54 ... h4?

For any machine to run smoothly, every element must contribute positively to the whole. In this position, this move is the single jarring anomaly in an otherwise healthy entity. Perhaps Petrosian seeks rationality where none exists. Exuberance is no praiseworthy trait when the zeal is directed in the wrong direction, and the grace period on unpunished errors is about to expire. Now Black's h-pawn is the principle actor in a badly performed play, and the adjacent racers do not travel at an equal pace. In this instance, quality supersedes speed.

Answer: 54 ... g5! was correct. Botvinnik claims White should still win, but *Houdini's* analysis overrules. I defended with Black and *Houdini* failed to produce a win for White in any version. A sample line: 55 Kd8 h4 56 Ra7+! Kg6 57 d7 h3 58 Ra6+! Kf5 (not 58 ... Kg7?? 59 Ke7 Rd2 60 Re6! h2 61 Re1 and wins) 59 Rh6 h2 60 a4 Kf4 61 a5 Ra2 62 Ke7 Re2+



(Black's rook, an isotope of his twin brother on h6, may not be as active or influential, yet he remains genetically identical, therefore infused with equal potential as his more charismatic sibling) 63 Kf6 Rd2 64 Ke6 Re2+ 65 Kf7 Rd2 66 Ke8 Re2+ (Black's annoying rook continually clears his throat to get the white king's attention) 67 Kd8 Ra2! 68 Ke7 Re2+ 69 Kf6 Rd2 70 Ke6 (White's frustrated king is unable to cross over the impervious boundary before him – he keeps finding himself scrunched in, like a card table, four legs folded, before being put away) 70 ... Re2+ 71 Kf7 (the white king's pain at the constant rebuffs may be more psychosomatic than real; still, pain is pain) 71 ... Rd2 72 Ke8 Re2+ (the rook continues to follow, a private apparition of a dead brother, only seen by White's king and invisible to the rest of humanity) 73 Kd8 Ra2 with a draw, since 74 a6 is met by 74 ... Rxa6!.

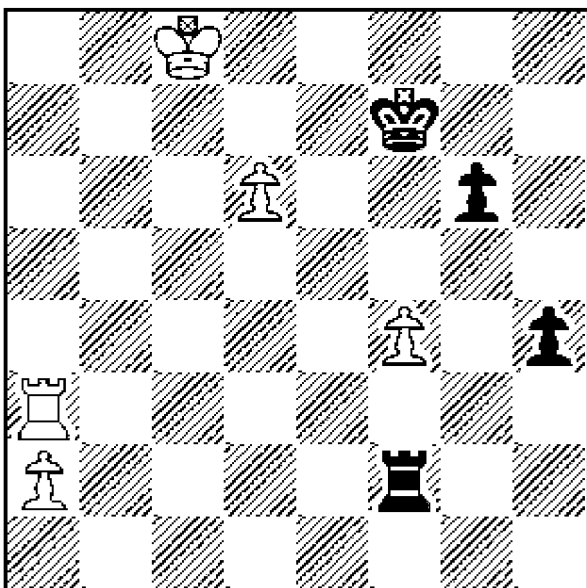
55 f4!

At this point a deeply troubling conviction bubbles up from the depths of Black's subconscious. He now understands his plan has gone badly awry. What was once rumour now morphs into reality: Black is too slow in the race.

55 ... Rf2

Petrosian retaliates as best as he is able, but it just isn't enough.

56 Kc8!



56 ... Rxf4

Alternatives fail. For example, 56 ... Rc2+ 57 Kd8 or 56 ... Ke6 57 d7 Rc2+ 58 Kd8.

57 Ra7+! 1-0

The rook sits back in his chair and puts his feet up on the desk, with a smug sense of accomplishment.

This move allows White to block a c-file check with Rc7, so 57 ... Ke6 58 d7 is curtains.

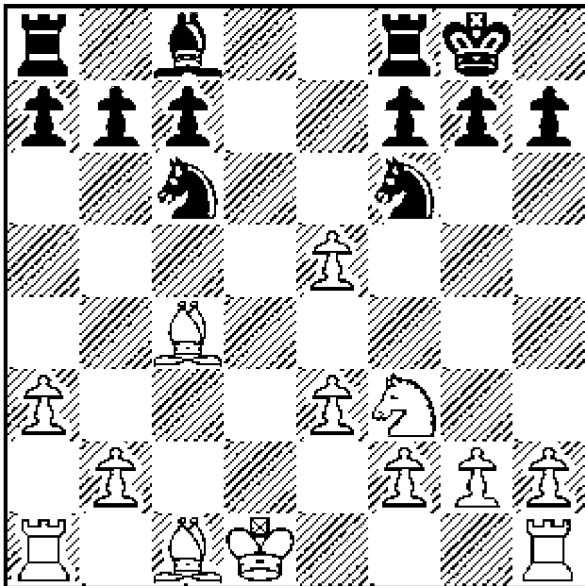
Game 49

M.Botvinnik-M.Tal

World Championship (1st matchgame), Moscow 1961

Nimzo-Indian Defence

1 c4 Nf6 2 Nc3 e6 3 d4 Bb4 4 e3 0-0 5 Bd3 d5 6 a3 dxc4 7 Bxc4 Bd6 8 Nf3 Nc6 9 Nb5 e5 10 Nxd6 Qxd6 11 dxe5 Qxd1+ 12 Kxd1



Question: How would you assess this ending?

Answer:

1. White has the bishop pair in a semi-open position.
2. Black leads microscopically in development.
3. Black, down a pawn for now, regains it on his very next move with a double attack.
4. d3 could be a source of worry for White, especially since will soon be ready with an e5-knight trained on that square.
5. White's kingside pawn majority and Black's queenside version seem to balance each other out.
6. White's king is in the centre, which for now is a wash between an active king and an endangered king.

Conclusion: Chances look dynamically balanced.

12 ... Ng4 13 Ke2 Nxe5 14 Bd5

Botvinnik may have feared the line 14 Nxe5 Nxe5 15 Bb3 b6!, when Black's bishop arrives with a splash on a6.

14 ... c6 15 Be4 Be6?!

The ever-optimistic Tal may be playing for the win, but it becomes apparent that he misjudged his chances. He should play 15 ... b6! 16 Nxe5 Nxe5 17 f4 (Black is also at least equal after 17 f3 Ba6+ 18 Kf2 Rfd8) 17 ... Ba6+ 18 Kf2 f5 19 Bb1 Nd3+ 20 Bxd3 Bxd3 21 Bd2 with a near certain draw.

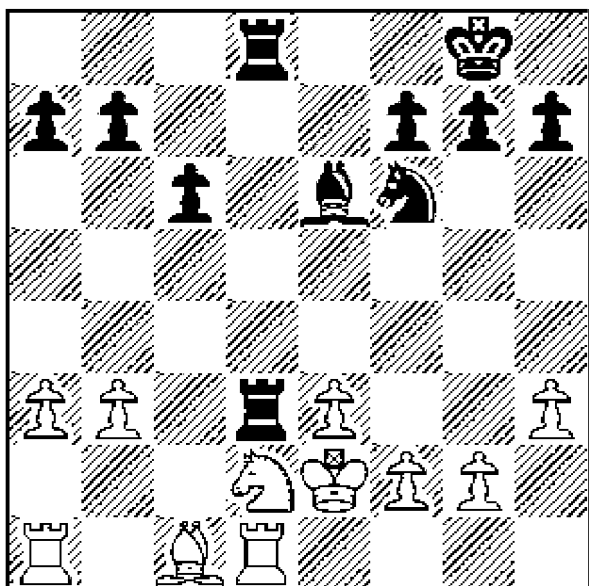
16 Nd2 Rad8 17 h3 Nf6 18 Bc2 Rd7 19 b3

Seizing control over c4.

19 ... Rfd8 20 Rd1 Nd3

The knight leaves his own safe precinct to enter White's enclave. There is no real choice since White's bishops come alive after 20 ... Nd5 21 Bb2 Ng6.

21 Bxd3 Rxd3



The white king's eyebrows rise in indignant arcs at the intrusion. The power in the position draws nearer d3, like iron filings to a magnet. Yet predictability is a liability on the chess board and appearances deceive. Looking closer, Black's apparent initiative is spent, and Tal's position soon lapses into lethargy, despite the opposite indicators of the given data: 1. Black leads in development.

2. b3 appears to be in danger.

3. White lost his proud bishop pair.

When I show this position to students they uniformly praise Black's position. Botvinnik had seen deeper into the ending's secrets and, in reality, Black stands slightly worse and must tread carefully.

Exercise (planning): What would you play as White?

Answer: 22 Bb2!

Confusion upon paradox upon irony, yet Botvinnik retains his bearings and sees through the subtleties of the position. The threat to b3 proves illusory due to a back rank trick; whereas White threatens to pick off an exchange with Bd4!, cutting off the d3-rook from its protection. And lastly, White threatens to damage Black's structure with Bxf6. Now the position mysteriously gets moulded to White's favour, by means secretly known to Botvinnik, only through his unbelievably deep strategic understanding.

22 ... R3d7

One hears surly murmurs emanating from Black's camp. Dissatisfaction with one's lot in life is human nature. Even the Garden of Eden wasn't good enough for Adam and Eve. Tal agrees to a damaged structure after slowly digesting the data.

Personally, I think Tal should have tried the exchange sac 22 ... Ne8!? (not 22 ... Bxb3?? 23 Nxb3 and Black can't recapture on b3) 23 Bd4! (the once sought-after d3-square transforms into a repository of pain for the stranded rook) 23 ... Bxb3 (24 Kxd3 Bxd1 25 Rxd1 c5 26 Nf3 cxd4 27 Nxd4 is unbalanced, as White's superior king position may be offset by Black's queenside pawn majority) 24 ... Rxd2+ 25 Kxd2 Bd5, since it is the most aggressive and suited his style. After 26 Ke1! b6 (26 ... Bxg2 27 Bxa7 b5 28 a4 also gives White winning chances) 27 f3 f5, Black has a pawn for the exchange. Okay, if anyone is going to win, it will be White, but I still prefer this

position to the drab defensive task handed to Tal in the game.

23 Bxf6

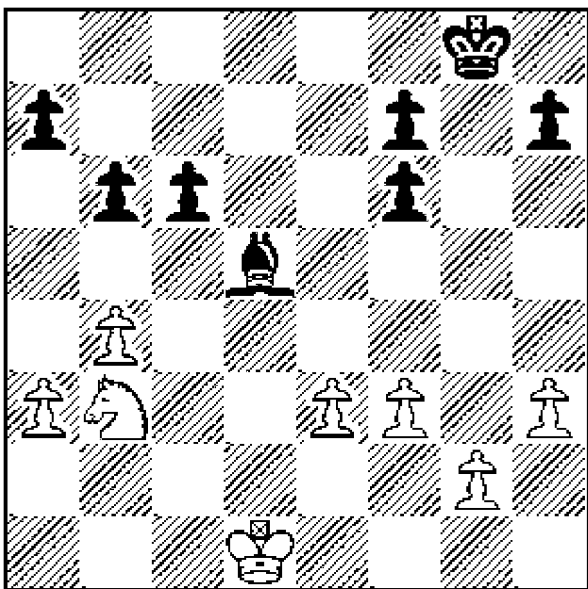
Botvinnik defaces Black's structure, as if compelled by an instinct to vandalize.

23 ... gxf6 24 b4 Bf5?!

This move merely catalyzes his difficulties and Tal gets pushed back. Black's best chance to remain active lies in the line 24 ... f5! 25 Nf3 Bd5 26 Nh4 f4! 27 Rd4 (27 exf4?? loses instantly to 27 ... Bc4+ and if 28 Ke1 Re8 mate!) 27 ... fxe3 28 Kxe3 Re8+ 29 Kf4 Rde7 30 f3 Re2.

25 Nb3 Bd3+ 26 Ke1 b6 27 Rac1 Be4 28 f3 Rxd1+ 29 Rxd1 Rxd1+ 30 Kxd1 Bd5?

Black may yet hold the endgame after 30 ... Bf5! 31 e4 Bd7 32 g4! (fixing the weakness on f6) 32 ... Kf8 33 Kd2 Ke7 34 Kc3 Kd6 35 f4 c5 36 bxc5+ bxc5 37 Na5 Kc7 38 Nc4 Bc6, but it still won't be easy.



Exercise (planning): Black is in serious trouble, with his structure damaged and White's king ahead in the centralizing race. Come up with a concrete plan for White to win the game.

Answer: The knight, as if succumbing to an arbitrary whim, goes chasing after black pawns. White must lure the c-pawn forward, after which king and knight can gang up and pick it off, mainly because Black's king remains AWOL on g8. Soon, the knight's assertion morphs into interrogation.

31 Nd4!

Threatening to undermine the c-pawn with e3-e4 next.

31 ... c5 32 bxc5 bxc5 33 Nb5! a6

Not 33 ... a5? 34 Nc3 Bc6 (to cover both e4 and a4) 35 Kd2 and Black can't do much about the coming Kd3, Kc4 and Kxc5.

34 Nc7 Bc4 35 Ne8!

The feisty knight continues to be unamenable to reason and annoyingly reiterates threats.

35 ... f5 36 h4

Question: What is the purpose of this move?

Answer: White avoids ... Bf1 tricks.

36 ... Kf8 37 Nd6 Bf1

The bishop goes through the motions with exasperated acquiescence. After 37 ... Be6 38 Nb7 c4 39 Nc5 Bc8 40 Kc2, White's king soon picks up the stray on c4.

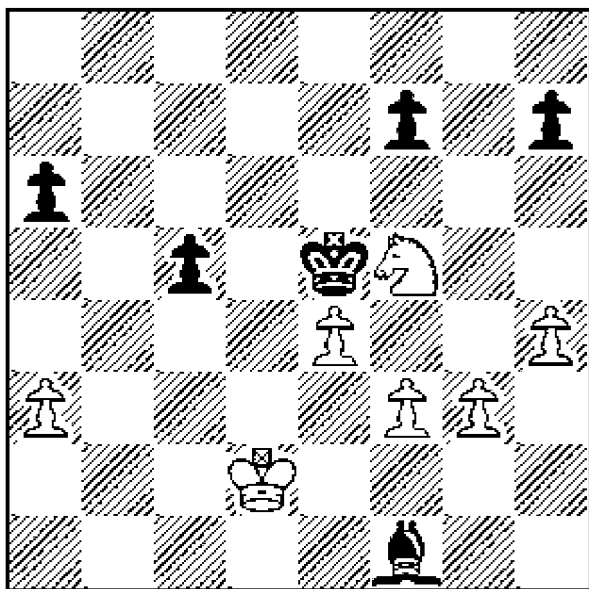
38 g3 Ke7

Or 38 ... Bh3 39 Ke2 Ke7 40 Nb7 c4 41 Nc5 a5 42 Nb7 a4 43 Nc5, when the sickly a4-pawn is no more than exercise for the knight's sarcasm.

39 Nxf5+

Black gets slapped with a surcharge of one pawn.

39 ... Ke6 40 e4 Ke5 41 Kd2 1-0



Black's resistance limps to dire finality.

Question: Isn't resignation premature, since Black can try 41 ... Bh3 and can infiltrate to d4 when the knight moves?

Answer: The trouble is White has no intention of moving the knight. He can play 42 Kd3! and Black can't take the knight since the king and pawn ending is hopeless. Otherwise 42 ... Bf1+ 43 Ke3 f6 44 f4+ Ke6 45 g4 wins, since Black's c-pawn wastes away to atrophied disuse, while White creates two passers on the other side.

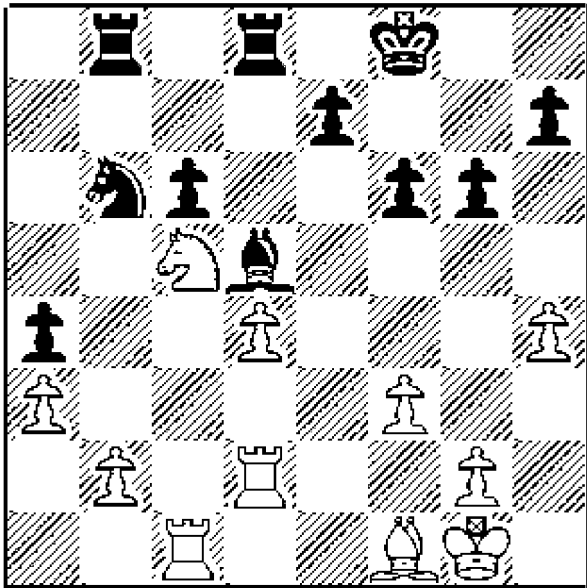
Game 50

M.Botvinnik-V.Smyslov

World Championship (6th matchgame), Moscow 1958

King's Indian Defence

1 c4 g6 2 e4 Bg7 3 d4 d6 4 Nc3 a6 5 Be3 Nf6 6 f3 c6 7 Bd3 b5 8 Qd2 bxc4 9 Bxc4 d5 10 Bb3 dxe4 11 Nxe4 0-0 12 Ne2 a5 13 0-0 a4 14 Bc4 Nbd7 15 Rac1 Rb8 16 Nxf6+ Bxf6 17 Nc3 Nb6 18 Be2 Be6 19 Rfd1 Bg7 20 Bh6 Bxh6 21 Qxh6 f6 22 Rd2 Bf7 23 h4 Qd7 24 a3 Rfd8 25 Ne4 Qe8 26 Bf1 Bd5 27 Nc5 Qf8 28 Qxf8+ Kxf8

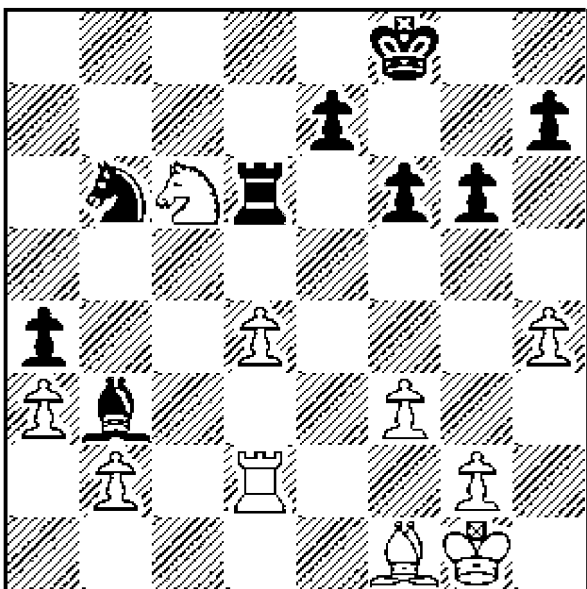


29 Na6 Rbc8 30 Nb4 Bb3?!

Question: Why did Black hand over a pawn?

Answer: I'm not so sure about this decision either, which is difficult to validate empirically. It looks to me like an overreaction which lacks connection to the actual requirements of the position. Smyslov bets on activity over material. In this case he rejects the passive line 30 ... Rd6 31 Rdc2 Rb8 32 Rc5 (32 Nxc6? fails to win a pawn after 32 ... Bxc6 33 Rxc6 Rxd4) 32 ... Kg7 33 Ra5 Rb7 34 Ra6 Kf7, where he is admittedly tied down, but I don't see a way to make further progress for White.

31 Rxc6 Rxc6 32 Nxc6 Rd6



Exercise (planning): For now, Black's single queenside pawn holds back White's two. How would you proceed with White?

Answer: Go after a4 in two steps: Step 1: Transfer the knight to c5, where it disturbs the

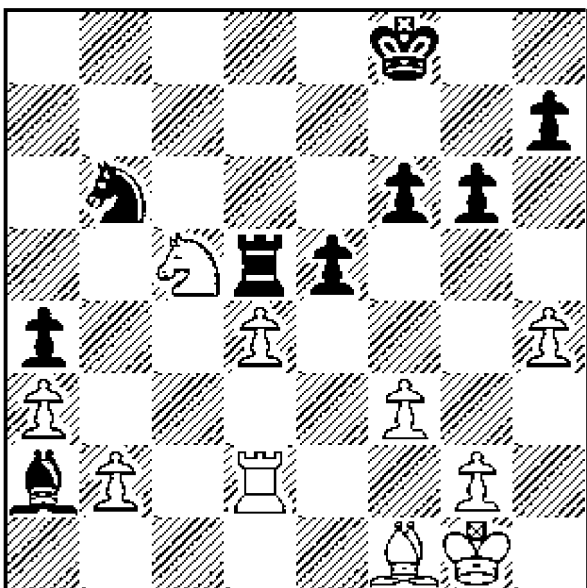
rest of Black's bishop and hits a4 as well.

Step 2: Play for Bb5, adding a second attacker to a4.

33 Na5! Ba2 34 Nb7! Rd5 35 Nc5

White intends to follow with Bb5, as well as Kf2-e3, reinforcing his d-pawn.

35 ... e5!



Question: Isn't Black just taking over the initiative now?

Answer: Let's do an exercise to find out:

Exercise (combination alert): Smyslov complicates, realizing waiting tactics are doomed to failure. He threatens to undermine

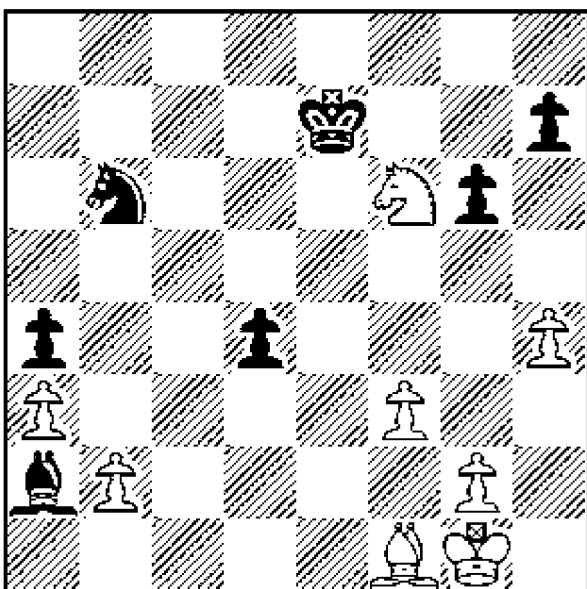
White's now unstable knight and adds pressure to the pinned d4-pawn.

White doesn't have time for his intended Bb5. What should he do?

Answer: Double attack, threatening the f6-pawn and a fork on c3.

36 Ne4! Rxd4 37 Rxd4 exd4 38 Nxf6 Ke7!?

Smyslov, sensing he is getting the worst of the argument, rallies by gambling, throwing himself into the fight with his antagonist with renewed vigour. The king hazards a desperate flight to centralization at the cost of another pawn. Once again, Smyslov trades material for dynamism, sinking more of his hard-earned money into the vague, risky enterprise of increased activity. Yet I can't help but feel his investment runs counter to the actual requirements of the position. Perhaps he had better drawing chances simply protecting his pawn with 38 ... h6.



39 Nxb7 Bb1 40 Ba6?!

Inaccurate. White should play 40 Bb5!, tying the black knight to a4.

40 ... Nd5 41 Kf2 Ne3!

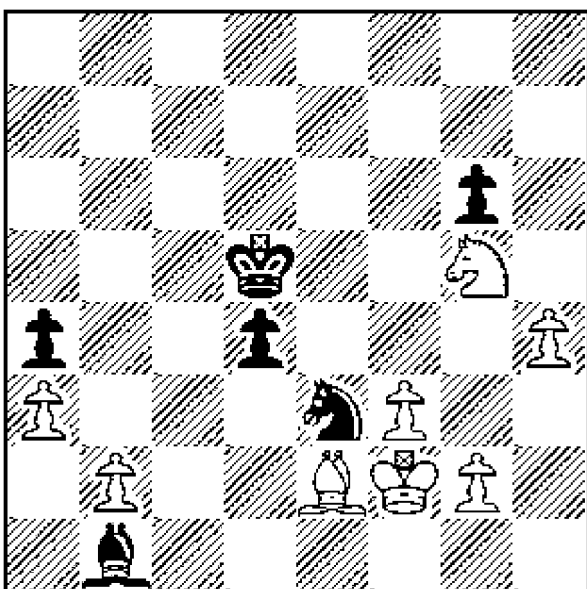
Threatening a fork on d1.

42 Be2 Ke6

Question: Does Black have a combination here with 42 ... Nxg2 43 Kxg2 d3 - ?

Answer: The combination merely regains the piece but the resulting ending after 44 Bxd3 Bxd3 45 Kg3 is totally hopeless for Black, who remains two pawns down and whose pawns are fixed on the same colour as his remaining bishop.

43 Ng5+ Kd5



The energy differential between the two armies provides a jarring juxtaposition. Black's forces all await in optimal posts, despite a two pawn deficit. Conversely, White is two pawns up, but his famine of constructive play continues in the midst of plenty: 1. He is tied down by Black's passed d-pawn.

2. Black threatens to make it into a race with ... Nc4.

3. Black's king puts his inactive counterpart on f2 to shame, who looks as uncomfortable as I do when awaiting my doctor's entry in his office, sitting on a tissue-covered examination table in my underwear.

4. White's knight has no targets.
5. White has difficulties in activating pawn majorities on either side of the board.

Exercise (planning/composition alert): Despite all these difficulties, Botvinnik discovers an anomaly, a loophole in conventional logic, which allows him to eradicate Black's gains by tearing the fabric of the position and stitching it together again to his own liking. How did he do it?

Answer: By offering to return one pawn. The creature from another dimension is felt before it is seen. Black's position reaches its sharpest peak and has nowhere to go but down.

44 Ne4!! Bxe4

Nobody wants admittance to another's misery, so the bishop callously bails out of the game. Declining with 44 ... Bc2 45 Nd2 is completely hopeless as well, since White's knight becomes the perfect blockader on d2.

45 fxe4+ Kxe4 46 g4!

Threatening h4-h5!. The clerk assumes a busy, preoccupied attitude when the boss passes by.

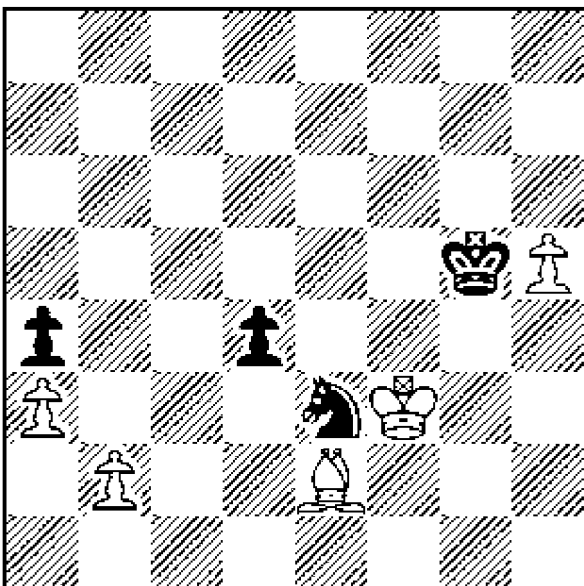
46 ... Kf4

The immediate 46 ... d3 is equally hopeless: 47 Bf3+ (the bishop decides to straighten out Black's delusional pieces on matters of obedience toward their betters) 47 ... Kf4 48 h5! (now truth unfolds before the dazed black king's eyes: the h-pawn creeps away, like a larcenous butler who makes off with the master's best silverware – the deflection power inherent in the passed h-pawn costs Black the game) 48 ... gxh5 49 gxh5 Nf5 50 Bd1 (the bishop, quick as thought, transfers to d1 and eyes a4 with decisive effect) 50 ... Kg5 51 Bxa4 Nd6 52 Bb3 (covering against ... Nc4) 52 ... Kxh5 (Black's king is shorn of all power and excommunicated to a wasteland as penance) 53 Ke3 and White wins.

47 h5! gxh5 48 gxh5 Kg5

48 ... Nf5 49 Bd1 does the job too.

49 Kf3! 1-0



Each moment White's king is allowed to grow in power is a moment of diminishing potential for Black's king. Smyslov decides to avoid prolonging resistance in a futile cause. 49 ... Kxh5 50 Ke4+ Kg5 51 Kxd4 Kf4 52 Bb5 picks off the a4-pawn.

Question: True enough, but what if Black goes after b2?

Answer: Botvinnik's final, hidden point: the knight gets trapped after 52 ... Nd1 53 Bxa4 Nxb2 54 Bb3! – and very importantly, White has the correct colour bishop for his a-pawn.

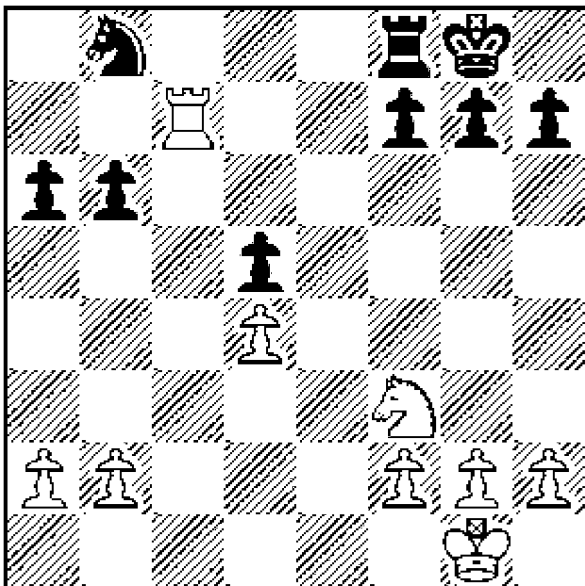
Game 51

M.Botvinnik-A.Alekhine

AVRO Tournament, The Netherlands 1938

Semi-Tarrasch Defence

1 Nf3 d5 2 d4 Nf6 3 c4 e6 4 Nc3 c5 5 cxd5 Nxd5 6 e3 Nc6 7 Bc4 cxd4 8 exd4 Be7 9 0-0 0-0 10 Re1 b6 11 Nxd5 exd5 12 Bb5 Bd7 13 Qa4 Nb8 14 Bf4 Bxb5 15 Qxb5 a6 16 Qa4 Bd6 17 Bxd6 Qxd6 18 Rac1 Ra7 19 Qc2 Re7 20 Rxe7 Qxe7 21 Qc7 Qxc7 22 Rxc7



Question: Is Black losing due to White's rook controlling the seventh rank?

Answer: Black may indeed be losing at this point, but it takes remarkable technique to convert against a determined World Champion. Alekhine foresaw a way to challenge on the seventh rank with his next move. I would say the position heavily favours White, but an actual win remains in the distance.

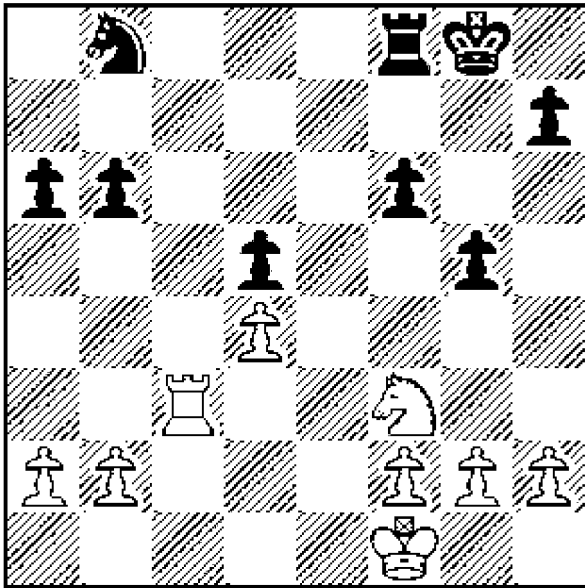
22 ... f6! 23 Kf1

If 23 Rb7 Rc8 24 Kf1 b5 25 Rb6, intending Rd6, then 25 ... Kf7 holds the position together, since 26 Rd6? is met by 26 ... Ke7! 27 Rxd5 Rc2.

23 ... Rf7 24 Rc8+ Rf8 25 Rc3

The most active square, where the rook may transfer across the third rank if needed. The rebuffed rook fails to make progress along the eighth or seventh ranks and must agree to a tactical retreat for the moment. For now, Alekhine erects a seemingly impregnable barrier to the rook's attempts at penetration.

25 ... g5!?



Exercise (planning): Typical Alekhine, who opts for the most aggressive defensive posture, even if it means risking further weakening. How would you go about strengthening White's position?

Answer: Transfer the knight to e3, via c2. From there, the knight pressures d5. White also has the strategic threat g2-g4, followed by Nf5, strengthening the knight's position further.

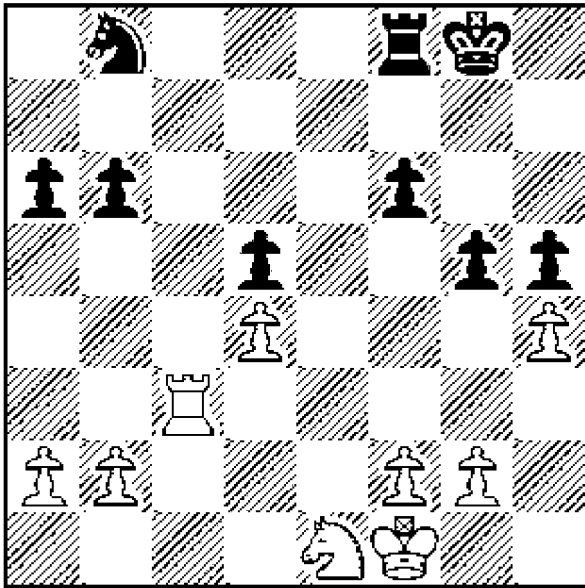
26 Ne1! h5!?

It might be argued that Alekhine continues to blow upon the embers of a fire which burns him. Optimism knows no bounds nor fears peril. Once again Black opts for aggression at the cost of potential overextension. Alekhine ensures White can't follow with the g2-g4, Nf5 plan later on. Our 25-pound runty terrier, Kahless, always wolfs down the distributed doggie treat before the other dogs. Step two occurs when Kahless rather optimistically approaches Nikki, our 100-pound behemoth of an Akita, hoping to purloin her doggie treat. Statistically, the results rarely favour Kahless in these tiresome canine legal disputes. In this game Alekhine's Kahless-like optimism receives the sharp rebuke of Botvinnik's paws. I'm not sure if this is a case of a player conjoining optimism with misassessment (giving birth to disaster) or just a good practical try in a hopeless struggle!

Question: Shouldn't Black's last move be considered an error since he seems hell bent on creating fresh weaknesses?

Answer: Black is virtually in zugzwang. If he tries to activate his king with 26 ... Kf7, White remains in control after 27 Rc7+ Kg6 28 Nc2 h5 29 Ke2 Re8+ 30 Kd3 Re6 31 Nb4 Rd6 32 Rc8 a5 33 Nxd5, winning a pawn since 33 ... Nc6?? is met by 34 Rxc6!, winning a second pawn.

27 h4!!



Immediately seizing upon Black's last move. Black's provocations only result in antagonizing a dangerous foe who now seeks reprisal. Alekhine soon learns a simple fact which has strangely eluded political leaders throughout millennia: war is expensive. Think carefully about declaring it if your country is broke to begin with.

Question: What was the purpose of White's last move?

Answer: White seeks to create a stationary target on h5 and also induce overextension.

27 ... Nd7

Instead:

a) 27 ... Kf7 28 Rc7+ Ke6 29 hxc5 fxc5 30 Rh7 h4 31 Nf3 wins a pawn, since 31 ... Rg8 is met by 32 Rh6+, picking off b6.

b) 27 ... gxh4 28 Nd3 Kh7 29 Nf4 Kh6 30 Rh3 Rc8 31 Rxh4 Rc1+ 32 Ke2 Rc2+ 33 Ke3 Rxb2 34 Rxh5+ Kg7 35 Rxd5 Rxa2 36 Rd6 Rb2 37 Nd5 and at least one black pawn falls, if not more.

28 Rc7 Rf7 29 Nf3!

The creature is roused from its lair ...

29 ... g4 30 Ne1

... only to enter its dark recesses once again. Intention: Nd3-f4.

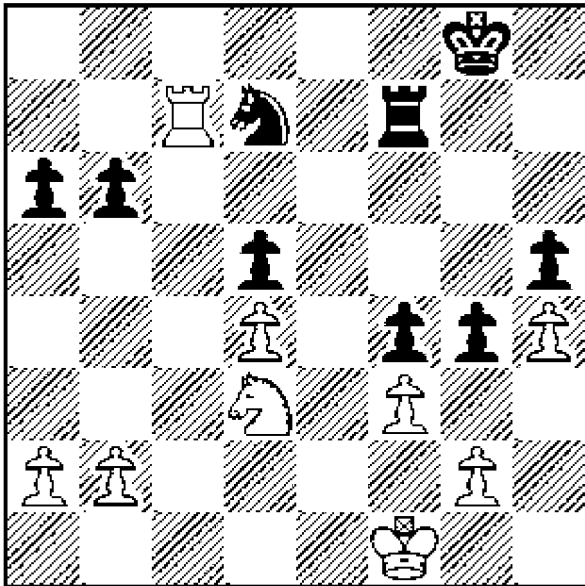
Question: It looks to me like Botvinnik indulges in too many revisions of his plan. Do you agree?

Answer: I disagree. Too many revisions of one's plans do indeed have a way of smudging efficiency, the way too many erasures on the same spot abrade and fray a sheet of paper. But this instance is not an example of myopic attention to detail eroding a plan's natural flow. Botvinnik's push-ups with his knight each serve a purpose and each in turn extract concession from his desperate opponent.

30 ... f5 31 Nd3 f4

A massive fighting force sprints forth, deeper into trackless, hostile terrain, destined to transform into a bloodied, haggard skeleton band, devoid of strength or morale. Black is now officially overextended, but to allow Nf4 is unthinkable.

32 f3!



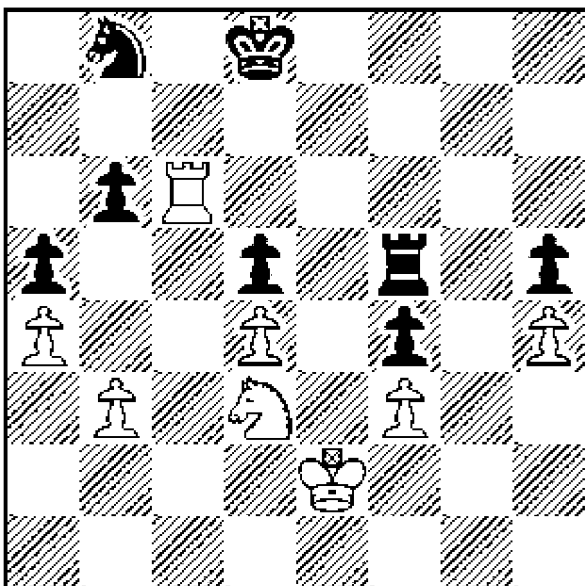
The byways of Black's circulatory system remain clogged and his pseudo-attack draws the slow, laboured breaths of the deathly ill. As we have seen throughout the book, Botvinnik habitually rejects material in favour of the initiative. In this case he creates a target on f4, rather than be coaxed into the line 32 Nb4 Nf6 33 Nxa6.

32 ... gxf3 33 gxf3 a5
Preventing Nb4.

34 a4

Fixing the pawns on the other wing.

34 ... Kf8 35 Rc6 Ke7 36 Kf2 Rf5 37 b3 Kd8 38 Ke2 Nb8!
A great practical try.



39 Rg6!

The rook, a creature of the heavens, refuses to debase himself with earthly sorrows of ageing, sickness and death. He flits about, like a fly who just sits on the wall for no reason, and then just as randomly flies off to nowhere in particular. The text is much stronger than grabbing b6, as Rg5 is now in the air. Botvinnik refuses to concern himself with trifles and rejects the pawn offer.

Question: Why on earth did Alekhine hand over the b-pawn, and then, even more perplexing,

why didn't Botvinnik accept?

Answer: Black's last move is a desperado. Alekhine is willing to pay a steep price to exhume his long buried knight. 39 Rxb6? is met by 39 ... Kc7 40 Rg6 Nc6, when Black regains the lost pawn and generates all sorts of counterplay on the queenside.

39 ... Kc7 40 Ne5!

Preventing both ... Nc6 and ... Nd7.

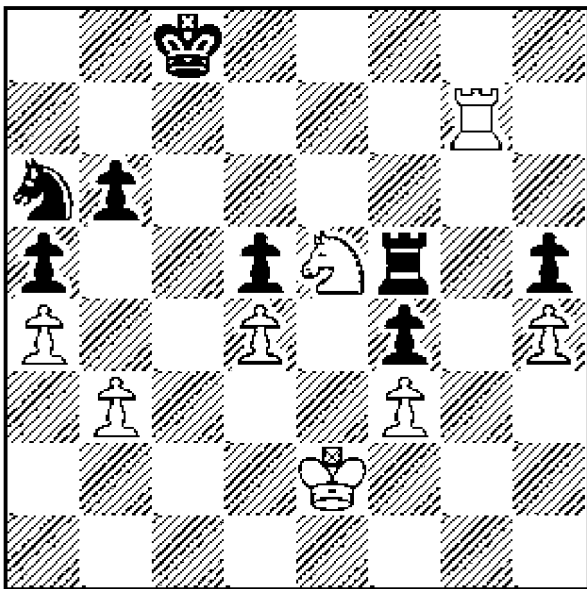
40 ... Na6

Black's knight, finally unencumbered of its burden, skips and bounds out with regret for precious playtime lost. The knight, which once lay inert on b8, imperceptibly twitches his facial muscles and his eyes unexpectedly open. Here the game was adjourned.

41 Rg7+

Alekhine told Botvinnik he would resign if he had sealed 41 Rg5!, which, as it turns out, is the *Houdini* approved move as well.

41 ... Kc8



Exercise (combination alert): Find a forcing line for White which wins a pawn.

Answer: Fork/double attack.

42 Nc6!

Threatening Ne7+. The mysterious knight continues to bring unwelcome tidings. One can't fail to be dazzled by Botvinnik's hypnotic - almost soporifically disorienting - knight gyrations.

42 ... Rf6

The connection between Black's rook and d-pawn is severed, as White's last move disturbed the once happy couple's connubial bliss. Regrettably, the rook must abandon his comrade on d5 due to the fork threat on e7.

43 Ne7+ Kb8 44 Nxd5

Success alights upon White's banner.

44 ... Rd6 45 Rg5!

Dual purpose: Covering d5 while menacing h5.

45 ... Nb4 46 Nxb4 axb4

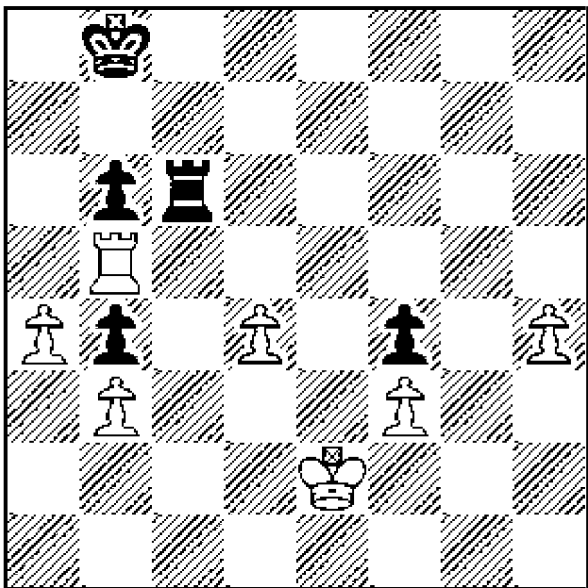
At long last, Black rid himself of his pariah knight, but this fact hardly lessens Alekhine's misgivings since his position degrades to a level the opposite of

reassuring, as he is induced into a hopelessly lost rook and pawn ending.

47 Rxh5 Rc6

47 ... Rxd4 48 Rf5! threatens the advance of the h-pawn. If Black's paralysed rook moves he drops more pawns.

48 Rb5!



Removing any possible ... Rc3 and ... Rxb3 counterplay.

48 ... Kc7 49 Rxb4 Rh6 50 Rb5 Rxh4 51 Kd3 1-0

Alekhine said this game was the only one in the great AVRO tournament where he felt completely outplayed by his opponent. In this event, Botvinnik achieved the impossible by defeating both Capablanca and Alekhine, producing masterpieces in each game. It would be a full ten years before Botvinnik became world champion himself, yet he, like Magnus Carlsen, showed that you don't necessarily have to be world champion to be recognized as the best player in the world.

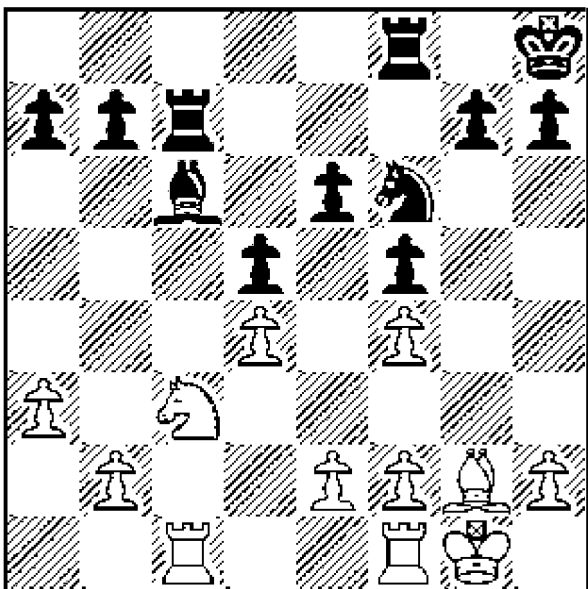
Game 52

P.Keres-M.Botvinnik

Chigorin Memorial, Moscow 1947

Dutch Defence

1 d4 e6 2 Nf3 f5 3 g3 Nf6 4 Bg2 Be7 5 0-0 0-0 6 c4 d5 7 Nc3 c6 8 Rb1 Kh8 9 cxd5 cxd5 10 Bf4 Nc6 11 Ne5 Bd7 12 Rc1 Rc8 13 Qd3 Nh5 14 Bd2 Bd6 15 Nxc6 Bxc6 16 Qf3 Qe8 17 Qd3 Nf6 18 a3 Rc7 19 Bg5 Ng4 20 Qd2 Nf6 21 Bf4 Qd7 22 Bxd6 Qxd6 23 Qf4 Qxf4 24 gxf4



Question: Would you say White stands a shade better due to Black's bad bishop?

Answer: In this instance, I would rate chances at even since Black's bishop can be reposted to h5, or even b5 and a4 after Black doubles rooks on the c-file. Furthermore, White's bishop, though technically "good", isn't really so good after all, since it hits a pawn wall on d5.

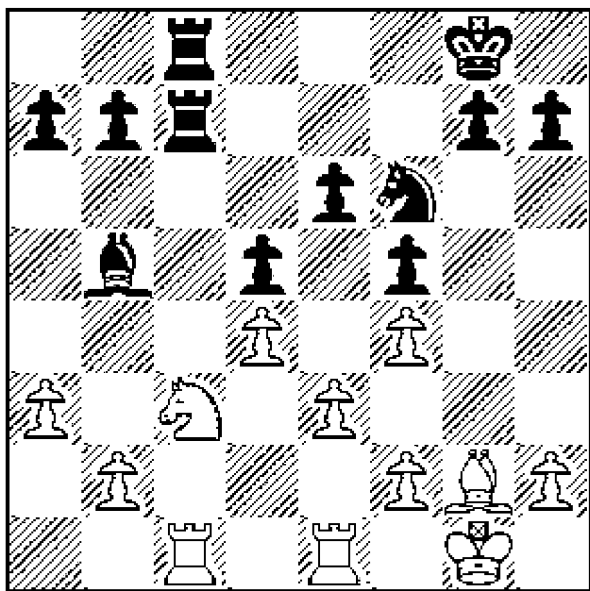
24 ... Rfc8 25 e3?

If we mess up our life through an unwise decision, we rarely get a second chance to fix the self-inflicted wound. We only get one life, not two, so it's important to get it right the first time. Keres violates the pristine nature of the position, the way an oil spill does to an ecologically sensitive area. This is one of those automatic moves which looks fine in the abstract, but upon deeper examination, is found to be lacking.

What is remarkable to me is how such an innocuous move cost Keres the game in what appears to be a completely unlosable position. What I learned from this game is the maddening epiphany: no matter how much I study chess, there is always so much more which I don't understand.

Rather than go for this worthless accoutrement, White should opt for 25 Na2! Bb5 26 Rxc7 Rxc7 27 Rc1! Rxc1+ 28 Nxc1, maintaining the balance.

25 ... Bb5! 26 Rfe1 Kg8



27 f3

Question: Why not challenge the b5-bishop with 27 Bf1 - ?

Answer: Black infiltrates in the line 27 ... Bxf1 28 Rxf1 Ne4 29 Na2 Rc2. Now if 30 b3? R8c6 31 Rxc2 Rxc2 32 Nb4 Rc3 33 Rb1 a5 34 Na2 Rc2 wins.

27 ... Bc4!

Perhaps thinking about ... Ne8-d6. Black's control over c4 gives him a tiny edge.

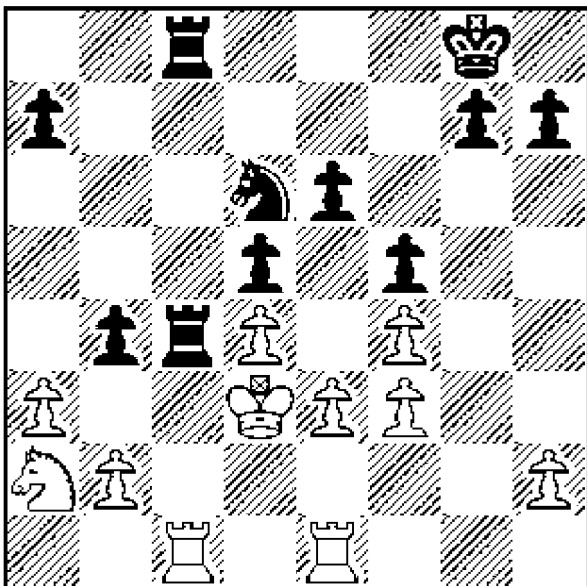
28 Bf1 Ne8!

The knight's services are needed on the queenside, Black's theatre of operations.

29 Bxc4 Rxc4 30 Kf2 Nd6 31 Ke2 b5

Now ... b5-b4, or first ... a7-a5, is in the air.

32 Kd3 b4! 33 Na2!?



Question: Isn't this a case of calm giving way to alarm, since White now just loses a pawn?

Answer: Keres sacs a pawn where the blood of the meek would curdle in fear. By doing so he avails himself of a chance to increase the level of efficiency in his position – which in the end he never gets. It's easy to swap one vice for another. I know a guy who began to chew nicotine gum to quit smoking. The trouble was he got addicted to the gum! Keres' sac does appear to look like a case of a person attempting to cast a vote the day after the election. In the end, after meticulous planning and expense, White's ponderous project is destined to leave him disappointed, since his fictional piece activity woefully fails to compensate.

Still, it's difficult to fault Keres since he would remain badly tied down in the line 33 axb4 Rxb4 34 Rc2 Nc4 35 Ra1 a5 36 Nd1 Rcb8 37 Ra2, when White can barely move. Black, on the other hand, can bring up his king and expand on the kingside, looking for targets.

33 ... bxa3 34 bxa3 Ra4

The a3-pawn is doomed.

35 Rxc8+ Nxc8 36 Nc3 Rxa3 37 Kc2 Nd6

Covering b7 infiltration attempts.

38 Rb1 Kf7 39 Rb4

39 Rb8 looks slightly more active.

39 ... Ra1!

Targets: e3, f3 and h2.

40 Kd3

Question: Why not play 40 Rb1 - ?

Answer: Keres desperately hopes to avoid a knight ending, the second worst ending to be down a pawn (behind a king and pawn endgame, which is generally the worst case scenario for the pawn down side).

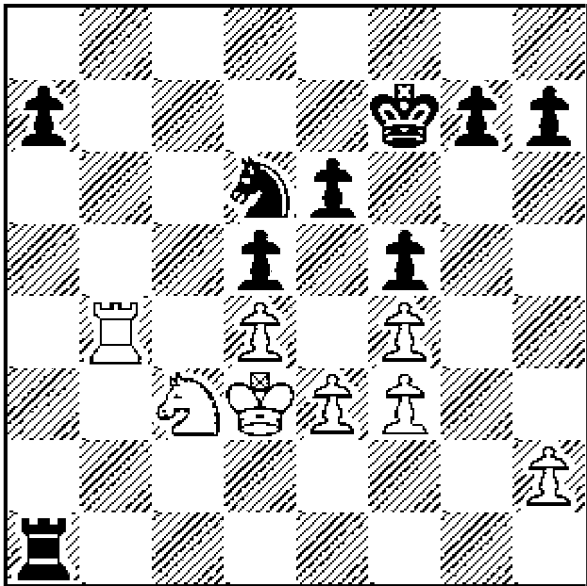
40 ... Ra3!?

40 ... Rh1 can be met by 41 Ra4 Nc8 42 Ra2.

41 Kc2 Ra1

Trademark Botvinnik repetitions, to draw closer to the time control and try to extract errors from the defender.

42 Kd3



Exercise (planning): Black has a choice of three potential soft spots in White's position: e3, f3 and h2. On which of the three should he focus his attention?

Answer: A dark cumulus forms over e3, the most tender spot in White's position.

42 ... Re1!

Threatening ... Nc4.

43 Ra4

43 Ne2? a5! is hopelessly lost for White as well.

43 ... Nc4 44 Rxa7+ Kg6 45 e4

White's once tight central formation has been lured forward to its doom.

45 ... Re3+

The supple rook twists and weaves its way into the underbelly of White's pawn mass, which now takes on the dishevelled look of a frat house the Sunday morning after a party.

46 Kc2 Rxf3 47 exf5+

47 exd5 is met by 47 ... Ne3+ 48 Kd2 Nxd5 49 Nxd5 exd5 50 Ra6+ Kh5 51 Rd6 Rxf4 52 Rxd5 g5 53 Rd7 Kg4 54 d5 h5, when Black should win the queening race.

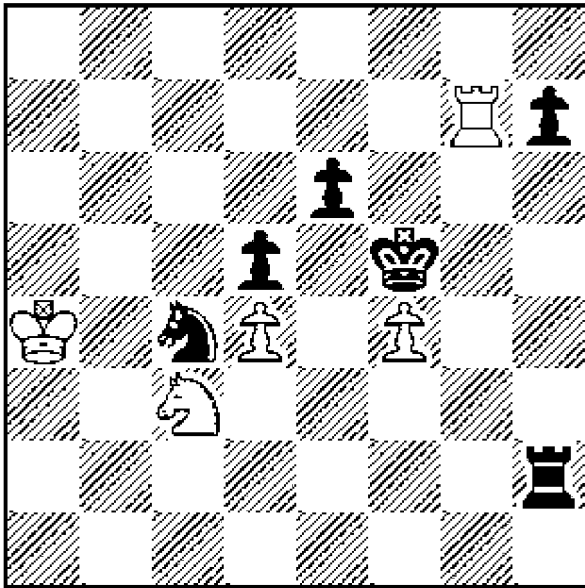
47 ... Kxf5! 48 Rxc7 Rf2+ 49 Kb3

49 Kd3?? Rd2 mate would be an embarrassing end to the game.

49 ... Rb2+

Black's rook and knight team prove to be the architect of the white king's peptic stress levels.

50 Ka4 Rxc2



White can't hold the ending:

1. He is down a pawn.
2. He nurses a pair of weakling isolanis.
3. His king is cut off on the west coast while Black's remains active and vibrant.

51 Rf7+ Kg6 52 Rf8 Nd6!

Target: d4, via f5.

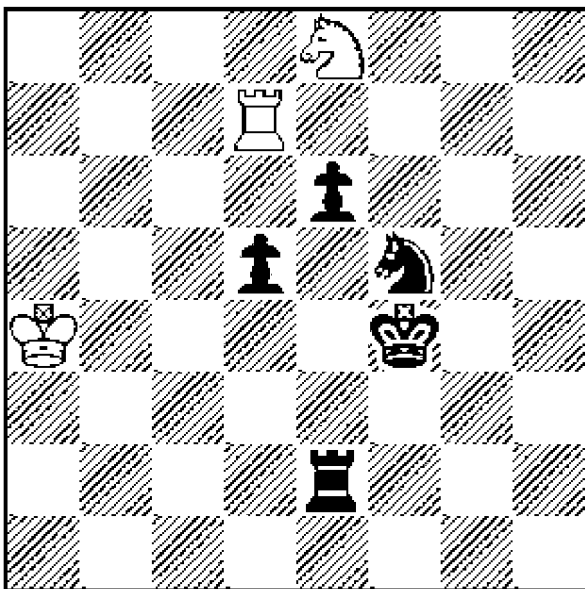
53 Nb5 Nf5 54 Nc7 Re2 55 Ne8 Nxd4

Relentless technique. Pawn number two falls.

56 Rf6+ Kh5 57 Rf7 Nf5

Botvinnik is happy to trade his h-pawn for White's f-pawn, which would also occur in the line 57 ... h6 58 Rf6 Kg4 59 Rxh6 Kxf4.

58 Rxh7+ Kg4 59 Rd7 Kxf4



The package arrives on f4, which Black's king eagerly unwraps.

Question: Why does Keres play on?

Answer: White cherishes one final hope: to sac his knight for Black's two remaining pawns, after which he would have excellent chances to draw. Botvinnik, of course, is much too precise to allow this to happen.

60 Nc7 Ke5 61 Kb4 Rc2!

Black's rook, having little tolerance for insubordination, sees to it that White's king

participates in the festivities as little as possible. In fact, Botvinnik's excruciatingly slow, careful technique borders on cruelty.

62 Kb3 Nd4+

Another swing of the blade cuts the white king's already scarred face.

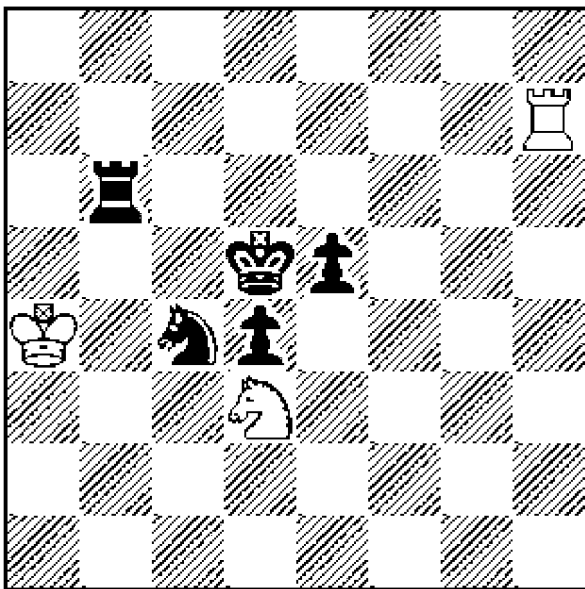
63 Kb4 Rc4+ 64 Ka5

The king, running for his life, taking little interest in anyone's troubles but his own.

64 ... Nf5 65 Kb6 d4 66 Na6 Nd6 67 Nc5 Kd5 68 Nd3 e5 69 Rh7 Rc6+ 70 Ka5 Nc4+ 71 Kb5 Rb6+

Back to the gulag.

72 Ka4



The king grudgingly agrees, while muttering vile obscenities under his breath.

72 ... Nb2+ 73 Ka5

Of course an exchange of knights means instant resignation for White.

73 ... Nc4+ 74 Ka4 Rb8 75 Nb4+ Ke6 76 Nc6 Nb2+ 77 Ka3 Nc4+ 78 Ka4 Rb1 79 Rh6+ Kf5 80 Nb4 0-1

Keres has had enough and concedes the futility of further play.

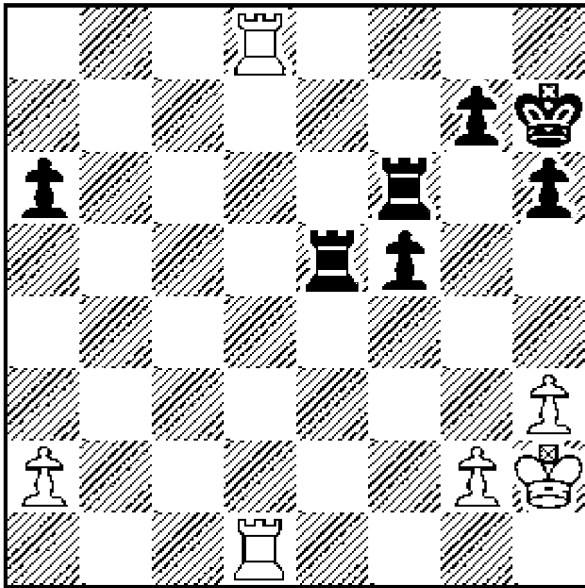
Game 53

P.Keres-M.Botvinnik

World Championship Tournament, The Hague/Moscow 1948

French Defence

1 d4 e6 2 e4 d5 3 Nd2 c5 4 exd5 exd5 5 Ngf3 a6 6 dxc5 Bxc5 7 Nb3 Ba7 8 Bg5 Nf6 9 Nfd4 0-0 10 Be2 Qd6 11 0-0 Ne4 12 Be3 Nc6 13 Nxc6 Bxe3 14 fxe3 bxc6 15 Bd3 Nf6 16 Qe1 Ng4 17 Qh4 f5 18 Rf4 Ne5 19 Qg3 Ra7 20 Raf1 Raf7 21 Nd4 Nxd3 22 cxd3 c5 23 Nf3 Qb6 24 Rh4 h6 25 Ne5 Rf6 26 d4 cxd4 27 Rxd4 Qxb2 28 Rxd5 Be6 29 Rd4 Kh7 30 Nd7 Bxd7 31 Rxd7 Rg6 32 Qf3 Qe5 33 Rd4 Rb8 34 Qf4 Qe6 35 Rd2 Rb5 36 h3 Re5 37 Kh2 Rf6 38 Rfd1 Re4 39 Qb8 Rxe3 40 Rd8 Qe5+ 41 Qxe5 Rxe5



Question: What is your estimation of Black's winning chances?

Answer: Considerably less than 50%. Rook and pawn endings a pawn up are hard to win. Black increases his winning chances, however, by the presence of the pair of a-pawns on the board.

42 R1d2 g5?!

Premature. Keres takes immediate advantage.

43 g4!

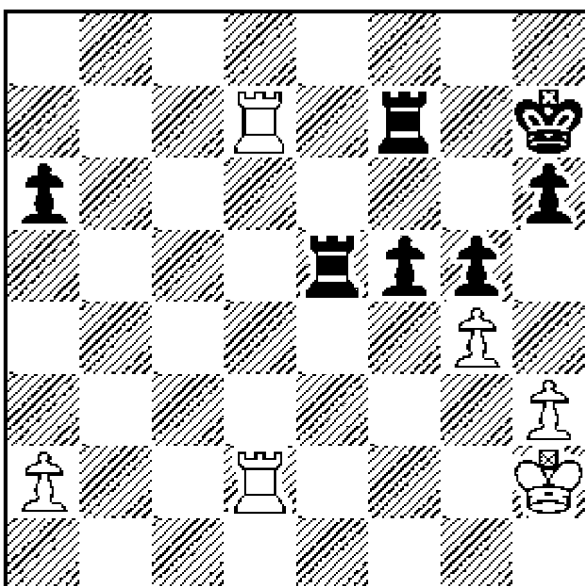
A cunning little move and Keres' familiar insignia: acute awareness of hidden mating patterns. A straight line sometimes looks out of place in a universe of crooked angles.

43 ... Rf7

Question: Why doesn't Black seize the opportunity to create a passed f-pawn with 43 ... f4 - ?

Answer: You walked into the trap! 44 R2d7+ Kg6 45 Rg8 is mate! Black's king, possibly the unluckiest chess piece ever, marvels at the infinite vagaries of fate.

44 R8d7!



Principle: Rook versus rook is usually easier for the defending side than a four-rook ending.

44 ... Kg7 45 gxf5!

Principle: The defending side in a rook and pawn ending should reduce the number of pawns if possible.

45 ... Rxf5 46 a3

46 Rxf7+! Kxf7 47 h4! is much simpler, reducing the number of pawns further, since 47 ... g4? is met by 48 Rd6.

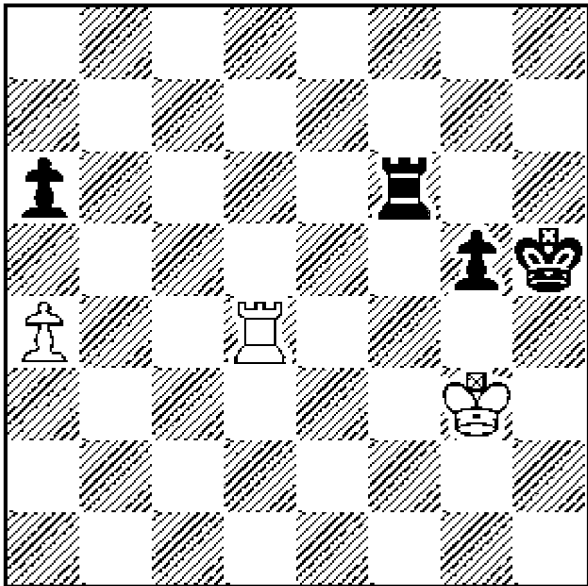
46 ... Rf2+ 47 Kg3 Rxd7

47 ... R2f3+ 48 Kg4 Rxa3 49 Rxf7+ Kxf7 50 Rd7+ Ke6 51 Rh7 Ra4+ 52 Kg3 should be drawn as well.

48 Rxd7+ Rf7 49 Rd4 Rf6 50 a4 Kg6 51 h4!

The same principle of pawn reduction followed.

51 ... Kh5 52 hxg5 hxg5



Exercise (planning): Come up with a clear plan which enables White to hold the draw.

53 Rd3?

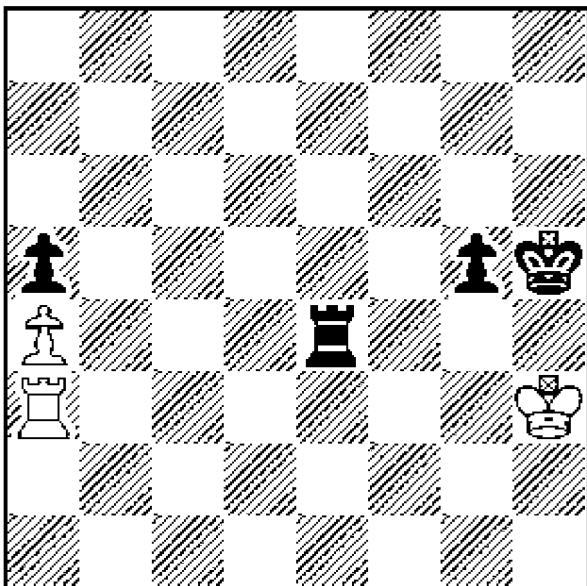
A serious error – a Band-Aid isn't medicine. Up until now, it has been Keres making all the strong moves, but here he violates a key principle: *Always remain active in rook and pawn endings*. In fact, it is often better to give away a pawn, rather than allow your pieces to assume a passive attitude.

Answer: 53 Rd5! was correct, targeting a5. The principles own the key to unlocking the enigma, as I will re-state: *Always remain active in rook endings!* After 53 ... Rc6 54 Ra5! (tying Black down to his a-pawn – he must toss the pawn if he is to make progress) 54 ... Rc3+ 55 Kg2 Kh4 (55 ... Rc6 56 Kg3 is no better) 56 Rxa6 Rc2+ 57 Kf1 Kg3 58 a5 Rf2+ 59 Kg1 Ra2 60 Kf1 g4 61 Ra8 Ra1+ 62 Ke2 Kg2 63 a6 g3 64 a7, the position is drawn.

53 ... Rf4!

Now White's rook is relegated to a passive posture, and Botvinnik bends the position to his will.

54 Ra3 a5 55 Kh3 Rb4 56 Kg3 Rf4 57 Ra1 Rg4+ 58 Kh3 Re4 59 Ra3



Exercise (planning): Keres banked on this position, incorrectly thinking Black was unable to make progress. He was mistaken.

How did Botvinnik seize upon his best winning chance?

Answer: Step 1: Black's king heads to the queenside.

59 ... Kg6!

Botvinnik is unfooled, the way a patient senses artifice in the too-soothing voice of his psychiatrist. White's thin veneer of security falls, only to reveal a new reality: Keres' attempted fortress is an unfounded plan.

60 Kg3 Kf5 61 Kf3 Ke5 62 Kg3 Rd4 63 Ra1 Kd5 64 Rb1 Rb4 65 Rf1 Ke5

Not yet 65 ... Rxa4?, when 66 Rf5+ Kd4 (or anywhere) 67 Rxc5 Ra1 68 Kh2 is a simple draw for White, who keeps the opposing rook tied to the a-pawn, while the black king cannot approach because of rook checks from the side.

66 Re1+ Kd4!

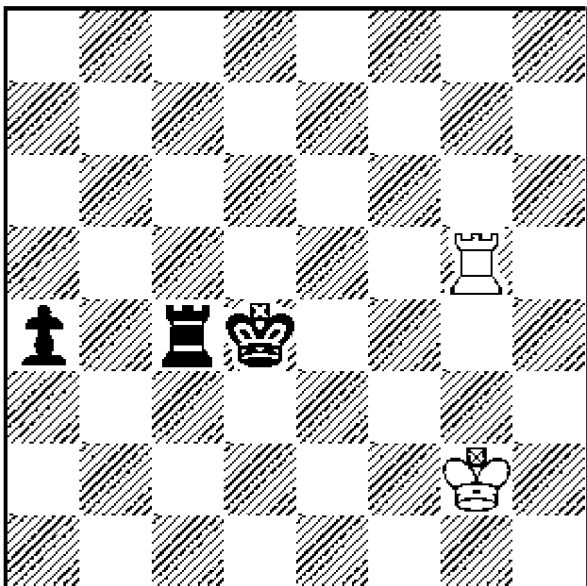
Step 2: Abandon the g-pawn and concentrate on promoting his soon-to-be passed a-pawn.

67 Kh2

Now if 67 Kg4 Rxa4 68 Kxc5 Rc4, Black wins easily because the white rook and king are misplaced.

67 ... Rxa4 68 Rg1 Rc4 69 Rxc5 a4 70 Kg2

Compared with the line after 65 ... Rxa4? above, Black's rook is on c4 rather than a1, which means the side checks no longer work. Meanwhile White's king is a million miles away, lost in thought.



70 ... Kc3 71 Kf3 a3 72 Ra5 Kb3 0-1

Keres resigned, seeing the line 72 ... Kb3 73 Ke2 a2 74 Kd2 Ra4 *etc.*

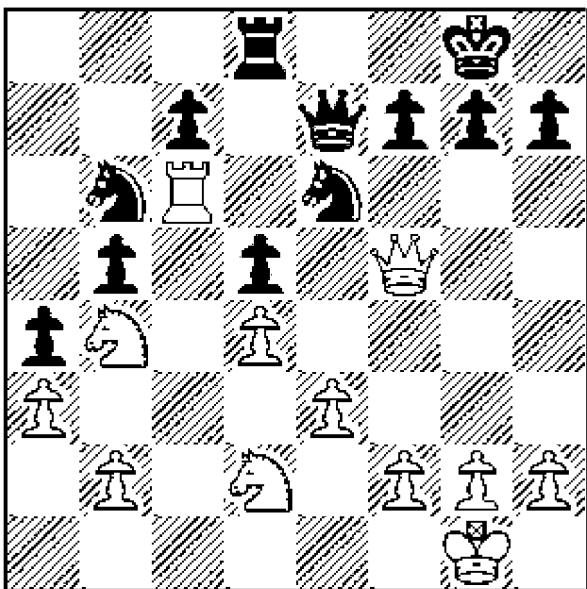
Game 54

M.Botvinnik-P.Keres

World Championship Tournament, The Hague/Moscow 1948

Baltic Defence

1 d4 d5 2 Nf3 Bf5 3 c4 e6 4 cxd5 exd5 5 Qb3 Nc6 6 Bg5 Be7 7 Bxe7 Ngxe7 8 e3 Qd6 9 Nbd2 0-0 10 Rc1 a5 11 a3 Rfc8 12 Bd3 a4 13 Qc2 Bxd3 14 Qxd3 Nd8 15 0-0 Ne6 16 Rc3 b5 17 Qc2 Rcb8 18 Ne1 Nc8 19 Rc6 Qe7 20 Nd3 Nb6 21 Nb4 Rd8 22 Qf5 Rd6 23 Rf1 Rxc6 24 Rxc6 Rd8

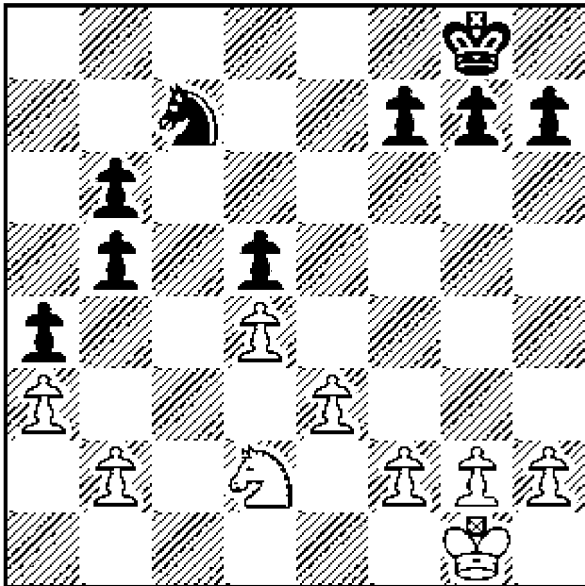


Exercise (combination alert): Not all combinations lead to mate. Do you see Botvinnik's little trick which earned him the superior pawn structure?

Answer: 25 Rxb6! cxb6 26 Nc6

The point. White regains the exchange after having damaged Black's queenside.

26 ... Qc7 27 Nxd8 Qxd8 28 Qc2 Qc7 29 Qxc7 Nxc7



Black is in trouble:

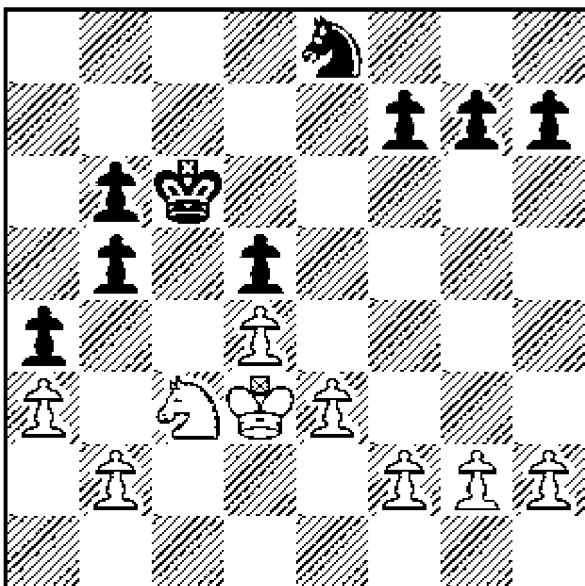
1. His queenside three to two pawn majority is unable to create a passed pawn, while White holds a healthy five to four majority on the kingside.
2. d5 is isolated and a potential target, as is b5. The odd eye sores in Black's camp trigger the visual effect of a well-dressed businesswoman walking into a meeting wearing one of those joke Groucho Marx plastic eyebrow/glasses/moustache deals.
3. Black must be on constant lookout for a white king invasion via b4.
4. Botvinnik himself once wrote: "Knight endings are very similar to pawn endings, and in both cases an outside passed pawn gives good winning chances." When White activates his kingside pawn majority, he will have his passed pawn.

30 Nb1!

Question: Why an involuntary retreat?

Answer: On c3, White's knight keeps an eye on both black pawn weaknesses, at b5 and d5. This in turn ties at least one black piece down to the defence of these pawns.

30 ... Kf8 31 Kf1 Ke7 32 Ke2 Kd6 33 Kd3 Kc6 34 Nc3 Ne8!



Exercise (planning): Keres' last move plans the transfer of his knight to c4, where it ties White down to b2. How did Botvinnik ruin this intent with one simple idea?

Answer: The threatened Nb4+ kills Black's plan.

35 Na2! f6

35 ... Nd6?? 36 Nb4+ Kd7 37 Nxd5 picks off a critical pawn.

36 f3

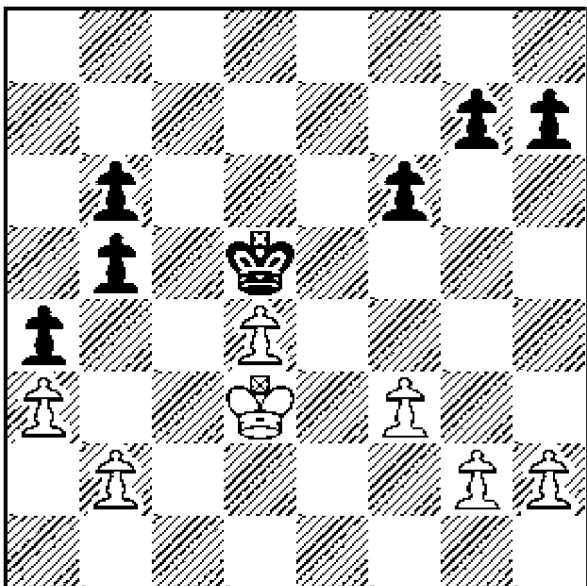
Keeping options of e3-e4 open.

36 ... Nc7 37 Nb4+ Kd6 38 e4

Botvinnik frees his majority.

38 ... dxe4+

Question: It seems to me that Black's last move helped White out. Rather than engage in all manner of odd inversions and perplexing sophistications, why not stand his ground with 38 ... Ke6 39 Nxd5 Nxd5 40 exd5+ Kxd5 - ?



Doesn't his king position compensate for White's passed d-pawn?

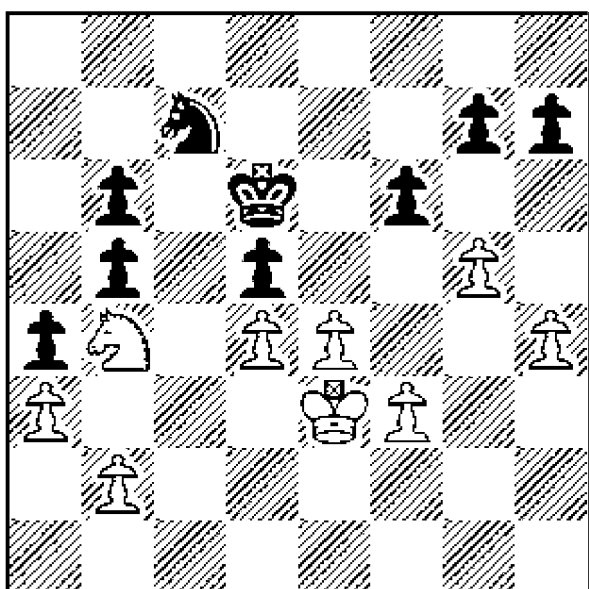
Answer: Let's look. At this point, *Houdini* assesses the position at equal – and indeed after 41 g4 (or 41 Kc3 f5! 42 Kb4 Kxd4 43 Kxb5 f4! 44 Kxb6 Ke3 45 Kb5 Kf2 46 Kxa4 Kxg2 47 b4 Kxf3 48 b5 Kg2 etc) 41 ... g6 42 Kc3 f5 43 Kd3 h5 44 h3 h4 45 Kc3 f4! (but not 45 ... fxg4?? 46 fxg4 Ke4 47 b3! Kd5 48 g5 Kd6 49 b4! Ke6 50 Kd3 Kf5 51 Ke3 Kxg5 52 Ke4! Kf6 53 Kf4! and White eventually wins by a single tempo, fulfilling the ideal of every industrialist to maximize production with minimized effort) 46 g5 Ke6, White cannot make progress, since 47 Kb4 Kd5 48 Kxb5?? Kxd4 49 Kxb6 Ke3 50 Ka5 Kxf3 51 Kxa4 Kg3 even wins for Black.

Question: That seems quite complicated! You're not claiming that both Botvinnik and Keres worked it all out, are you?

Answer: I don't make that claim. King and pawn endings are perhaps the most difficult of all to figure out at the board. So it is best not to enter one unless you are absolutely positive about the end result.

As it happens, White is not obliged to enter the king and pawn endgame just yet. Instead, he can seek to improve his kingside position, leaving the ending as a

potential threat if Black continues to pass. For example: 39 g4! Kd6 40 h4 Ke6 41 Ke3 Kd6 42 g5!



42 ... Ke6 (or 42 ... fxe5 43 hxe5 h5 44 gxh6 gxh6 45 Nd3) 43 gxf6 gxf6 44 Kf4 h5 45 e5! Kf7 46 Kf5 Ne6 47 Nxd5 Nxd4+ 48 Ke4 fxe5 49 f4! Ne2 50 fxe5 and White is winning since he is effectively a solid pawn up, and now with the superior king position too.

Rather than making a probably futile attempt to maintain the status quo, Keres perhaps felt it was easier to resolve the tension in the centre straight away.

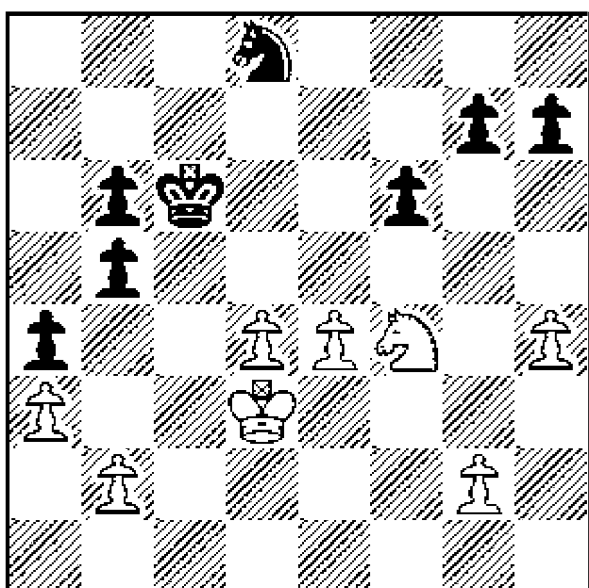
39 fxe4 Ne6 40 Ke3

Watching for the cheapo on f4.

40 ... Nc7 41 Kd3 Ne6 42 Nd5 Kc6 43 h4

Weaponized ambiguity. Botvinnik decides to gain ground on the kingside, all the while cleverly shielding intent.

43 ... Nd8 44 Nf4!



Now Nh5 is in the air.

44 ... Kd6

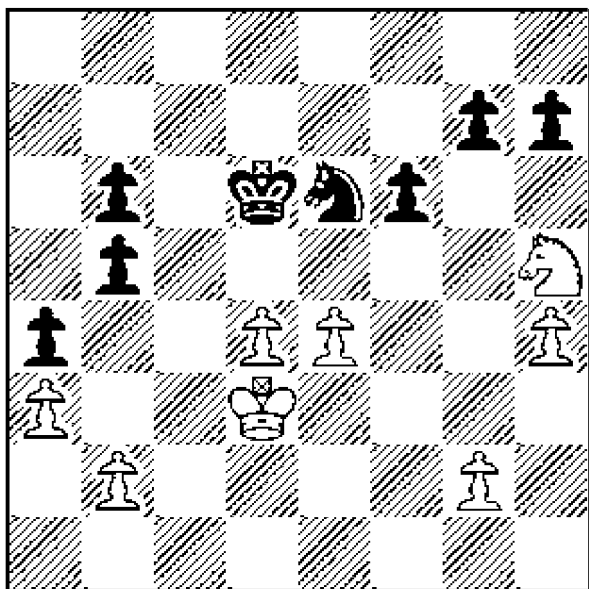
Question: Why not 44 ... g6 - ?

Answer: Fear of punishment proves a powerful deterrent. After 45 h5! Black suddenly loses a pawn, no matter how he responds.

45 Nh5

The assassin enters the target's home, treading soundlessly.

45 ... Ne6



Black's knight has been remanded to e6, in defence of g7, and held there under quarantine, where he vents grievances upon deaf ears. Now the old, ugly wallpaper begins to show its face through the new coat of paint in Black's house.

Exercise (combination alert): White has a little trick which wins a pawn. Can you find it?

Answer: Sidestep Black's knight check on c5, while covering the f4-square.

46 Ke3!

Now there is no good answer to d4-d5.

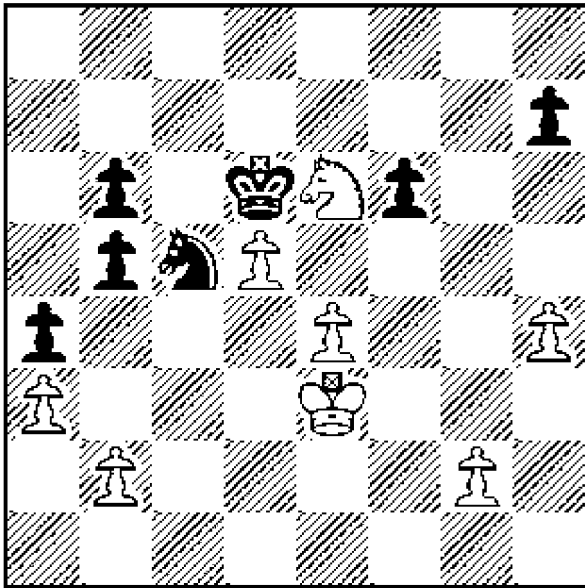
46 ... Ke7 47 d5 Nc5

Black's inefficient knight claws the air, swatting at nothing. As each move passes, so increases Black's utter sense of powerlessness. The two sides are a study in efficiency contrasts. 47 ... g6? 48 Nxf6 Kxf6 49 dxe6 Kxe6 50 Kd4 is totally hopeless for Black, since he is essentially a passed pawn down in a king and pawn ending, despite mathematical equality.

48 Nxg7

The sum of Black's woes compact into a dense ball on g7. Is it necessary to iterate the painfully obvious fact that Black is hopelessly busted? Not only did White win a pawn, Black remains with his crippled queenside, so he is now effectively two pawns down.

48 ... Kd6 49 Ne6!



49 ... Nd7

As mentioned before, the king and pawn ending is hopelessly lost for Black.

50 Kd4

Seizing king position.

50 ... Ne5 51 Ng7 Nc4 52 Nf5+ Kc7

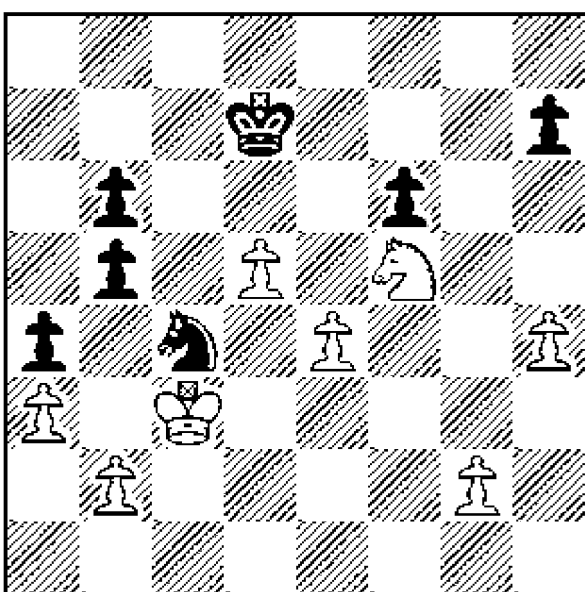
The nervous king backs up a step as White's knight approaches with bloodshot eyes and bulging veins on forehead.

53 Kc3

Keres forces a minor concession, which in no way alters the outcome.

53 ... Kd7

Or 53 ... Ne5 54 Kb4 Nc4 55 Kxb5 Nxb2 56 Ne3! Nd3 57 Ng4 and Black can resign, since his adventure met with abject failure.



Exercise (planning): Now we observe the delicate wrapping of the denouement unfolding before our eyes. Come up with a clear conversion plan for White.

Answer: Play g2-g4-g5. After the exchange of pawns, White creates two deadly central passers which Black can't halt.

54 g4! Ne5

Black's knight, finding his courage flagging, begins to whistle nervously and head for the kingside, where his opponent makes trouble.

55 g5 fxg5 56 hxg5

The plan is uncovered, strata by strata.

56 ... Nf3

The loss of g5 is irrelevant.

57 Kb4 Nxb5 58 e5

The crowd sways, mutters and swells. The metamorphosis is almost complete and soon the crowd surges forward in its new, terrifying form: a lynch mob.

58 ... h5 59 e6+

White's knight chaperones the d-and e-pawn pair up the board, as guards would escort unpredictably dangerous inmates from their cell block to a new maximum security location.

59 ... Kd8 60 Kxb5 1-0

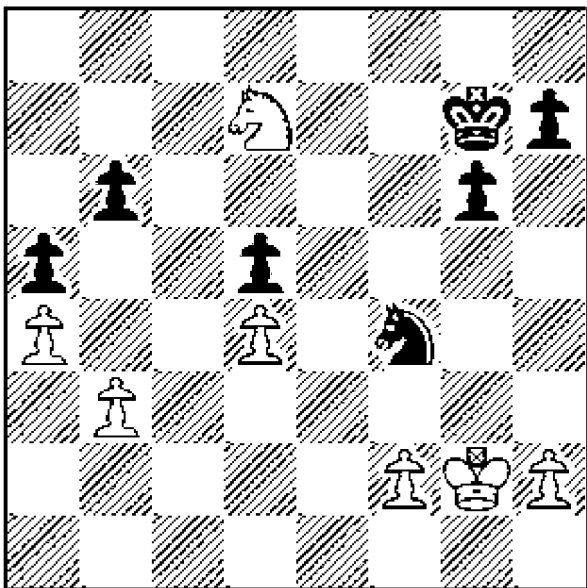
Game 55

M.Botvinnik-D.Bronstein

World Championship (7th matchgame), Moscow 1951

Dutch Defence

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c6 4 g3 f5 5 Bg2 Nf6 6 0-0 Be7 7 b3 0-0 8 Ba3 b6 9 Bxe7 Qxe7 10 Ne5 Bb7 11 Nd2 Nbd7 12 Nxd7 Nxd7 13 e3 Rac8 14 Rc1 c5 15 Qe2 Nf6 16 cxd5 Bxd5 17 Bxd5 exd5 18 Nf3 Rc7 19 Rc2 Rfc8 20 Rfc1 Ne4 21 Ne5 Nf6 22 Qd3 g6 23 Qa6 Kg7 24 Qe2 Qd6 25 a4 Ne8 26 Qd2 Nf6 27 Qc3 Ne4 28 Qd3 cxd4 29 exd4 a5 30 Kg2 Nf6 31 Qe2 f4 32 gxf4 Nh5 33 Rxc7+ Rxc7 34 Rxc7+ Qxc7 35 Qg4 Nf6 36 Qe6 Nh5 37 Qd7+ Qxd7 38 Nxd7 Nxf4+



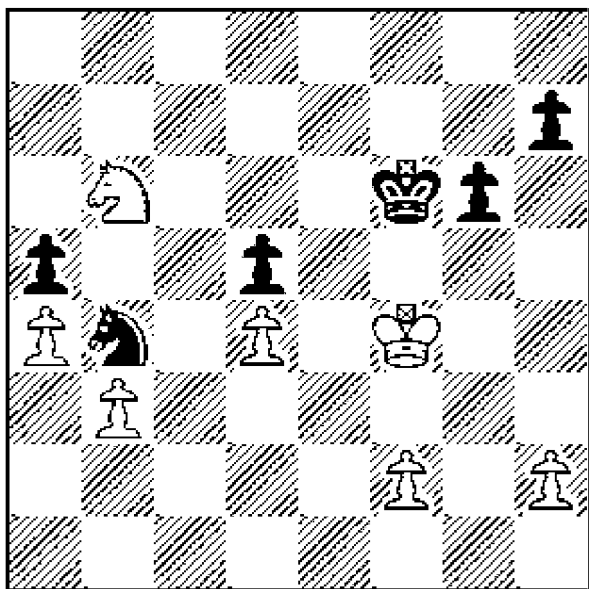
Botvinnik enters a knight ending, about to be a pawn up.

39 Kf3 Nd3 40 Nxb6 Nb4

Black's a-and d-pawns have been secured for now. The most terrifying words from a prospective publisher to a writer are these: "While your writing shows great promise, at this time we find that it fails to meet our commercially viable threshold

for publication.” These sad notices remind me a bit of Bronstein’s position, which comes tantalizingly close to draws, but misses in each key line. He does his best in this endgame, but there is no path to save himself against accurate White play.

41 Kf4 Kf6



Exercise (planning): White is a pawn up and holds an edge with king position as well. However, his two to one queenside pawn majority has been firmly blockaded. How would you make progress here?

Answer: Black’s dominant knight must be challenged via e5 and d3.

42 Nd7+! Ke7 43 Ne5 Ke6 44 Ke3!

Rarely do we see retrograde king strolls in an ending, but here ejection of Black’s knight represents the top priority.

44 ... Kf5 45 f3!

Question: What is the point of White’s last move?

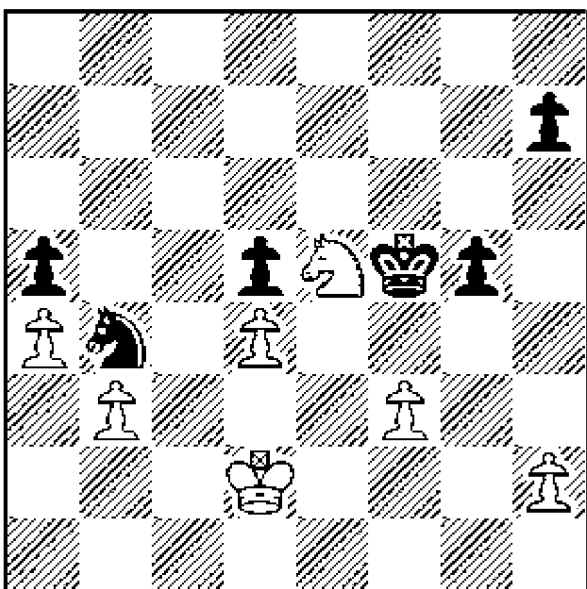
Answer: White blocks off ... Kg4 infiltration attempts when he moves his knight to d3.

45 ... g5

Question: Why not 45 ... Kg5, after which White’s king must stay put and guard the kingside?

Answer: The idea engages in a false supposition that Black holds his own in a promotion race. Botvinnik had worked out the win for White on your suggestion: 46 Kd2! (turning the game into a hair-raising scramble) 46 ... Kh4 (after 46 ... Kf4? 47 Nd3+ Nxd3 48 Kxd3 Kxf3 49 b4, White is much faster in the king and pawn ending) 47 Nd3 Na6 48 Kc3! Kh3 49 b4 Kxh2 50 bxa5 h5 51 Nb4 Nc7 (or 51 ... Nb8 52 Nxd5! Kg3 53 Ne3 Kxf3 54 d5!!, when Black’s knight proves unequal to the task of halting the surging a-and d-pawns) 52 Nxd5 Nxd5+ 53 Kc4 Kg3 (or 53 ... Ne7 54 a6 Nc8 55 Kc5 h4 56 d5 Kg1 57 d6 Nxd6 58 a7! and wins) 54 Kxd5 h4 55 a6 h3 56 a7 h2 57 a8Q h1Q 58 Ke6 with a winning queen endgame for White.

46 Kd2!



46 ... h5

Once again, Black loses the race after 46 ... Kf4?? 47 Nd3+! (the knight's eyes narrow as they trace the route of his intended victims - he realizes d3 is perfect terrain for an ambush) 47 ... Nxd3 48 Kxd3 Kxf3 49 b4.

47 Nd3 Na6

Or 47 ... Nc6 48 Kc3 followed by b3-b4.

48 Nc5 Nb4 49 Nd3

The trademark Botvinnik repetition of moves.

49 ... Na6 50 h3!

Black threatened ... g5-g4.

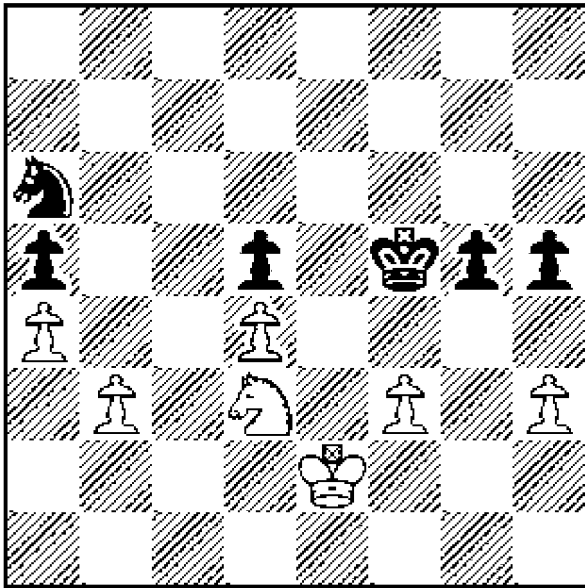
50 ... Nc7

The knight receives trifling remuneration for long hours of toil.

51 Ke3!

"My mistake," says White's king in his valium voice. His majesty cultivates his business with an air of casual neglect, when in reality he bides his time, awaiting the proper moment to strike. Botvinnik disguises his true intent with a few head-fakes on the kingside, while by tossing in a few random king moves, he draws closer to the time control without altering the position.

51 ... Na6 52 Ke2



Black's king must give ground since his knight must continue to remain vigilant against b3-b4.

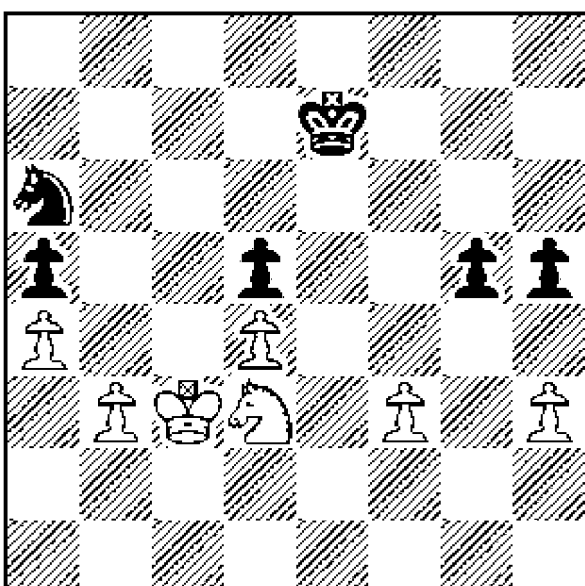
52 ... Ke6 53 Kd2! Ke7!

Black's king pulls an about-face and heads in what appears to be the wrong direction. Bronstein sees through Botvinnik's tricks, as if with x-ray vision.

Question: To retreat seems crazy. Why not move up with 53 ... Kf5 - ?

Answer: It fails to help Black after 54 Kc3 Kf6 (54 ... Ke6 loses instantly to 55 Nc5+, when White's knight pulls out his riding whip - to the consternation of Black's king and knight, they simultaneously realize that White's knight doesn't own a horse!) 55 b4 axb4+ 56 Nxb4 Nc7 57 a5 Kf5 58 Kd3 Kf4 59 Ke2 Kg3 (the king tosses money and resources on this junket to nowhere; instead 59 ... Kf5 60 a6 Ke6 61 a7 reaches a situation similar to what happened in the game - in a way this variation encapsulates Bronstein's lack of good fortune in the entire ending) 60 a6 Kxh3 61 a7 (the school bully on a7 grabs the adjacent, defending knight, turns him upside down by the ankles and shakes him, in order to empty his pockets of lunch money) 61 ... Kg2 62 Nxd5! Na8 (the beaten down knight, true to his religious beliefs of non-violence, enters the stadium, and sees salivating lions and cheering heathens) 63 Ne3+ Kg3 64 d5 and wins.

54 Kc3



At last, White's king heads for the aggrieved flank, ready for b3-b4, without fear

of Black's king infiltrating the kingside.

54 ... Kd6 55 b4

After reflection and cautious appraisal, Botvinnik follows through with his original plan to activate his queenside majority.

55 ... axb4+ 56 Nxb4 Nc7 57 a5 Nb5+ 58 Kd3 Ke6 59 Ke3

The white king comes at Black in two directions, in scissor formation.

59 ... Na7

The retreating knight walks with the leaden steps of the eight-year-old taking that long, slow pilgrimage to the principal's office.

60 a6 Nb5 61 Nc6!

Seizing control over a7.

61 ... Nc7

Insomniacs are often kept awake by their own fear of not falling asleep. Black's knight must remain ever vigilant to the passed a-pawn's threat to promote.

62 Nb4

More time gained on the clock.

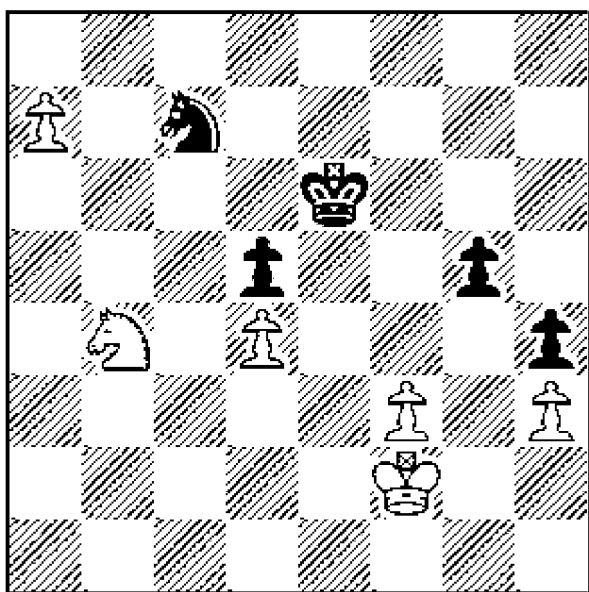
62 ... Kf5 63 a7 Ke6

Black's king is the office worker listening to his hated boss' unfunny joke, patiently awaiting its end, so that he can fake a hearty laugh and put on an insincere, amused expression.

64 Kf2!

Intending Kg3, followed by h3-h4! which creates a second passed pawn.

64 ... h4



The relentless desire to annihilate a wounded enemy is the basest and most primordial of emotions. Black's knight, a classic example of defensive claustrophobia, now bound and gagged, must remain in exile to cover against White's queening threat.

Exercise (planning): In order to win, White's king must participate in the fight. How to gain entry into Black's camp?

Answer: Clearance/overload. Temporarily sac a pawn to create an avenue to the kingside.

65 f4! gxf4 66 Kf3 1-0

Since 66 ... Kf5 is met by 67 Nxd5!, overloading Black's knight.

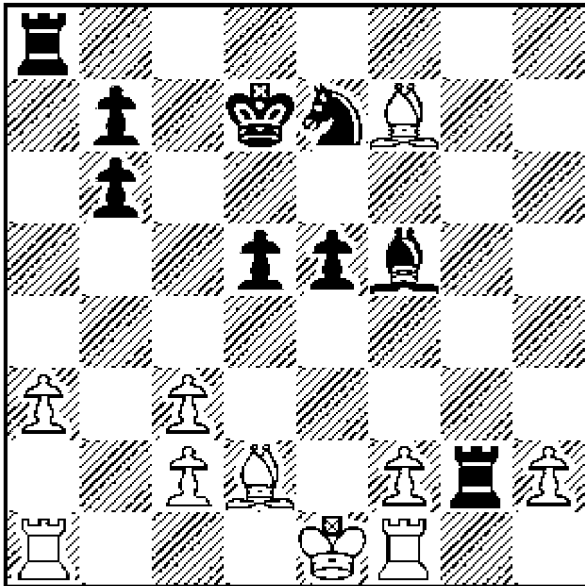
Game 56

S.Reshevsky-M.Botvinnik

USA vs. USSR match, Moscow 1946

French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 Ba5 6 Qg4 Ne7 7 dxc5 Bxc3+ 8 bxc3 Nd7 9 Qxg7 Rg8 10 Qxh7 Nxe5 11 Be2 Qa5 12 Bd2 Qxc5 13 Nf3 Nxf3+ 14 Bxf3 e5 15 Bh5 Bf5 16 Bxf7+ Kd7 17 Qh6 Rg2 18 Rf1 Qb6 19 Qxb6 axb6



Question: It looks to me like White is in trouble from the start of this ending. Would you agree?

Answer: This is a tough one to assess: 1. White is a pawn up but this is a purely temporary state, since Black attacks both c2 and h2.

2. White owns the bishop pair in a completely open position.

3. White's pawns across the board are asterisked with multiple structural defects.

4. Black's king is more active, as are his rooks.

5. Black controls the centre but may be vulnerable later on to f2-f4 or c3-c4 breaks.

Conclusion: Despite appearances, the position looks closer to even.

20 0-0-0!

Question: Why did White give away his valuable, passed h-pawn when he could simply push it?

Answer: Let's look: 20 h4 Rh8 21 Bg5 Rh7! (White's light-squared bishop has no place to go) 22 Bxe7 Rxf7 23 Bg5 Bxc2 and now let's assess: 1. Material is even but Black's forces are clearly more active than White's.

2. The presence of opposite-coloured bishops may not actually help White here, since his light squares look weak and vulnerable to infiltration.

Conclusion: Your line is playable, but it is White who fights for the draw at the end of it.

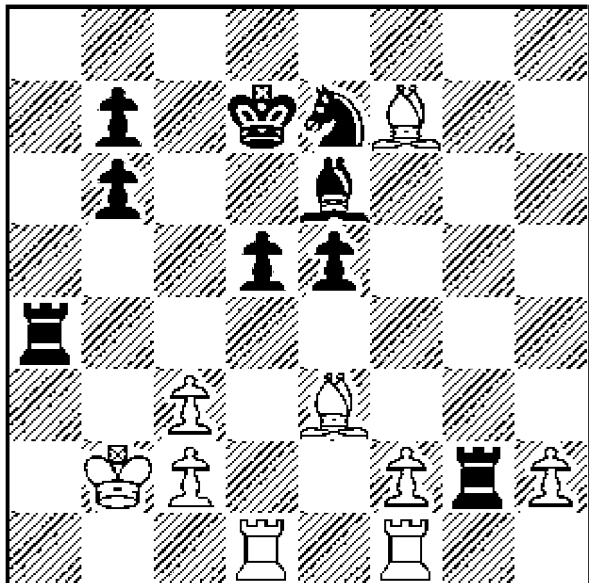
20 ... Rxa3

20 ... Rxh2 21 Bg5! Rxa3 22 Kb2 Ra5 23 Bxe7 Kxe7 24 Bxd5 looks like a draw.

21 Kb2 Ra4 22 Be3

Double attack on d5 and b6.

22 ... Be6



23 Bxe6+

Violating the principle: *Don't swap one of your bishops off if you already own the bishop pair.*

Question: So why did Reshevsky enter this line?

Answer: He probably didn't trust 23 Bh5 Rxh2 24 Be2 Kc6, when Black has an extra pawn. Indeed, I'm not so sure White's bishop pair provides full compensation.

23 ... Kxe6 24 Bxb6 Rxh2 25 Rg1

The position is a likely draw with so few pawns remaining on the board.

25 ... Rh6

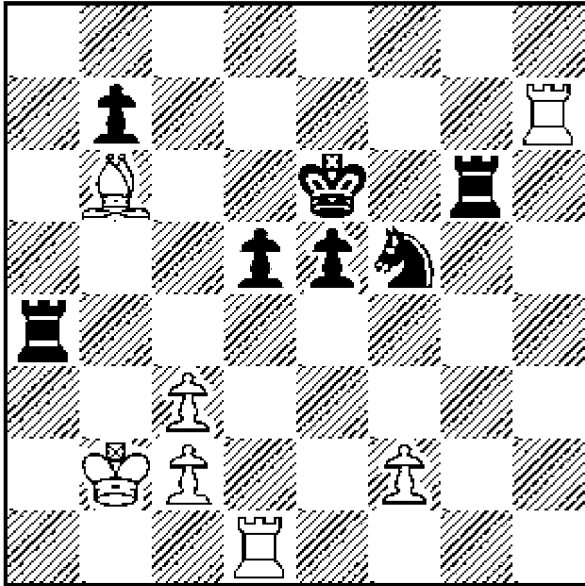
In order to cover g6 and free his e7-knight.

26 Rg7 Rg6 27 Rh7

Now Black's b-pawn is in danger since Bd8 is in the air.

27 ... Nf5!?

A typical Botvinnik decision, offering a pawn to activate his knight and transfer it to the dominating c4-square, albeit a plan designed to intimidate more than inflict actual damage. The Joker character from the Batman movies was never really motivated by thoughts of monetary gain. He simply wanted to spread terror and blow things up.



28 Rxb7 Nd6 29 Kb3

29 Rb8 Nc4+ 30 Kb3 Ra3+ 31 Kb4 Ra2 32 Kc5 Rxc2 33 Rxd5 Rxc3 34 Rdd8 Nd6+ 35 Kb4 Rc6 should end in a draw.

29 ... Ra8 30 Rc7 Rb8 31 Rc6 Kd7 32 Rc7+ Ke6 33 Rc6 Rb7!?

Botvinnik plays for the win a pawn down.

34 c4!

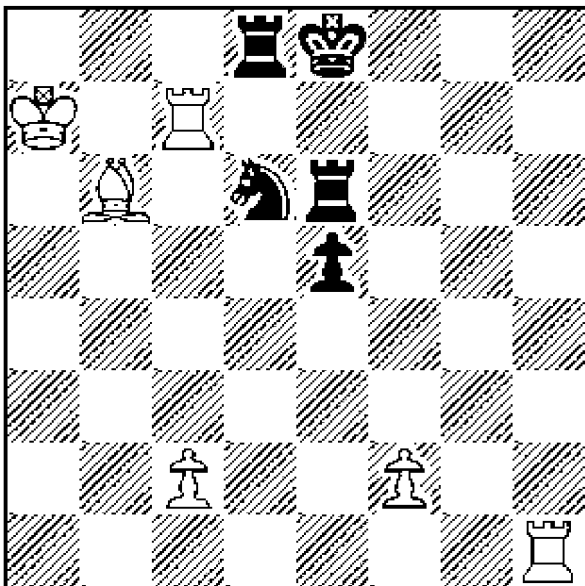
Reshevsky wisely offers a pawn in return to get his king out of the box.

34 ... dxc4+ 35 Kb4 Ke7 36 Ka5!?

Reshevsky plays for the win as well. Now Bc5 is menaced. Perhaps the issue of playing for the full point is one which both parties can agree upon, even if they can't agree upon anything else. 36 Rc7+ Rxc7 37 Bxc7 Nf7 is a near certain draw.

36 ... Kd7 37 Rxc4 Re6 38 Ka6 Rb8 39 Rc7+ Ke8 40 Ka7! Rd8 41 Rh1??

41 Rb1 Rd7 should be drawn despite White's extra pawn.



After some brilliant play, Reshevsky, perhaps not realizing he had already made the time control, bangs out an extra move which turns out to be a terrible blunder.

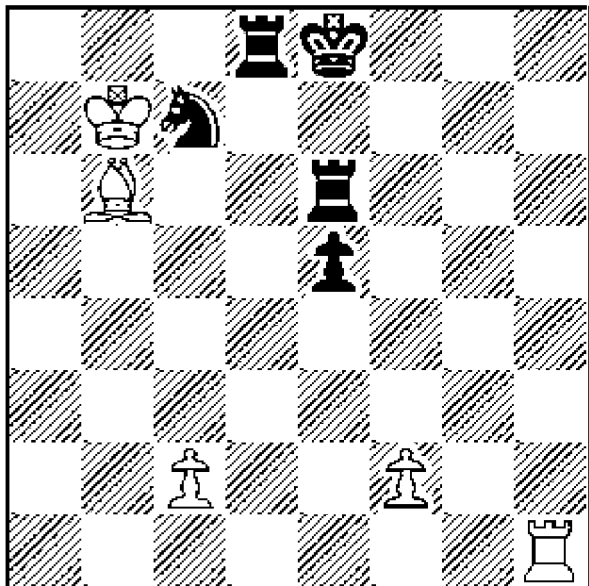
Exercise (combination alert/critical decision): This one is not as easy as it looks! Black can now fork on either b5 or on c8. Only one of them is correct.

41 ... Nb5+?

Fork. But not on the right square! Botvinnik endangers his win with a returned inaccuracy.

Answer: Black wins with 41 ... Nc8+! (the correct square) 42 Rxc8 (42 Ka6 Rxb6+ 43 Ka5 fails to 43 ... Rd5+ 44 Ka4 Kd8! 45 Rf7 Ne7, escaping the mating net) 42 ... Rxc8 43 Rh8+ Kd7 44 Rxc8 Kxc8 (the point: White's king is badly cut off, the result of which is he drops another pawn by force) 45 c4 (45 Ka6 Rc6 is equally hopeless) 45 ... Rc6! 46 c5 Rf6! and White is busted.

42 Kb7 Nxc7



Reshevsky, by now completely flustered at missing a simple fork, blundered again. The aperture of drawing opportunity closes rapidly upon White and we reach a divide. We always believe we have choices, but sometimes there is just one way and all others lose, therefore disqualified as true choices.

Exercise (critical decision): Should White play the immediate recapture with 43 Bxc7 - ? Or should he toss in a rook check first with 43 Rh8+ - ? Choose carefully.

43 Bxc7?

The wrong way. By allowing both black rooks to remain on the board, Reshevsky underestimates the dangers to his king.

Answer: He should have gone for 43 Rh8+! Kd7 44 Rh7+ Re7 45 Rxe7+ Kxe7 46 Bxc7 Rd7 47 Kc6 e4 48 Bf4 Ke6 49 Be3 and White should draw without any trouble.

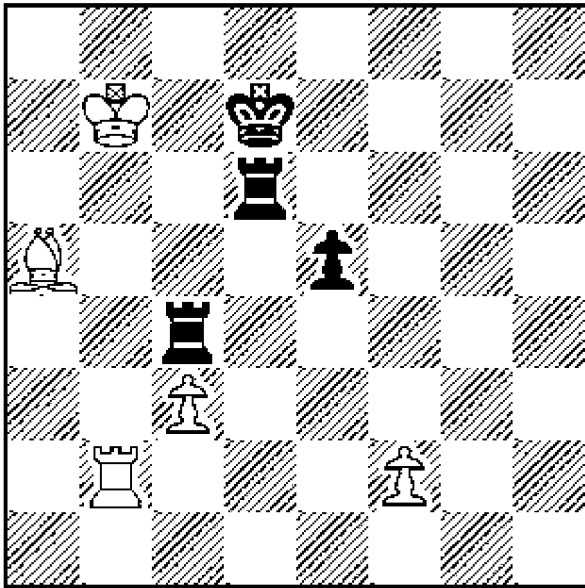
43 ... Rd4! 44 c3 Rc4

It isn't obvious at this point but White's king remains in danger. Botvinnik breathes life into his endgame mating attack, the way a sculptor imparts life to raw stone through chisel, hammer and imagination.

45 Ba5 Kd7 46 Rh8 Rf6 47 Rd8+ Ke7 48 Rd2 Rd6! 49 Ra2

Now the trade of rooks comes too late: 49 Rxd6? (49 Bb4?? of course runs into 49 ... Rxb4+ 50 cxb4 Rxd2) 49 ... Kxd6 50 Kb6 Kd5 51 Kb5 Rc8 52 Bb4 Rb8+ 53 Ka5 Rb7! and there is no good way to stop ... Rf7, picking up the f-pawn.

49 ... Kd7! 50 Rb2



Despite the lull, all of Reshevsky's pieces have fallen completely out of sync, while every black piece harasses White's king. Botvinnik forced the win of a pawn by combining it with mating threats, with a problem-like move. Black's remaining forces bristle, the way my haughty dogs behave when our mail carrier delivers a package.

Exercise (combination alert): We must discover the hidden locus of White's soft spot in the position. Can you find the geometric anomaly Botvinnik found?

Answer: 50 ... Rc5!! 51 Bb6

"God is testing me," the bishop mutters to himself. For this impoverished monk, life is perpetual Lent. There is a difference between a deliberate, reorganizational retreat and a full blown rout, but in this instance the difference becomes blurred. White's position, by now permeated with funereal gloom, gets even more depressing. White had no choice anyway: a) 51 Bb4?? (the bishop cannot leave c7 unguarded) 51 ... Rc7+ 52 Ka8 Ra6+ 53 Kb8 Rb6+ 54 Ka8 Kc8! forces mate.

b) 51 Ra2?? Rb5+ 52 Ka7 (the king flails about in renewed agitation - to a fugitive trapped and surrounded, food, water and ammunition is as necessary as breath itself) 52 ... Kc8! 53 Bb4 Rb7+ 54 Ka8 Rb8+ 55 Ka7 Rd7+ 56 Ka6 (Death's messenger hovers near White's king, who closes his eyes, as if the action makes his assailants disappear) 56 ... Rdb7!, when there is no defence to the coming ... Ra8+ mate.

51 ... Rxc3 52 Rb4 Ke6 53 Rb2 Rdd3!

Intending ... Rb3. Now Black wants rooks off the board.

54 Ra2 Rd7+

54 ... Rb3 is also winning.

55 Ka6 Rb3

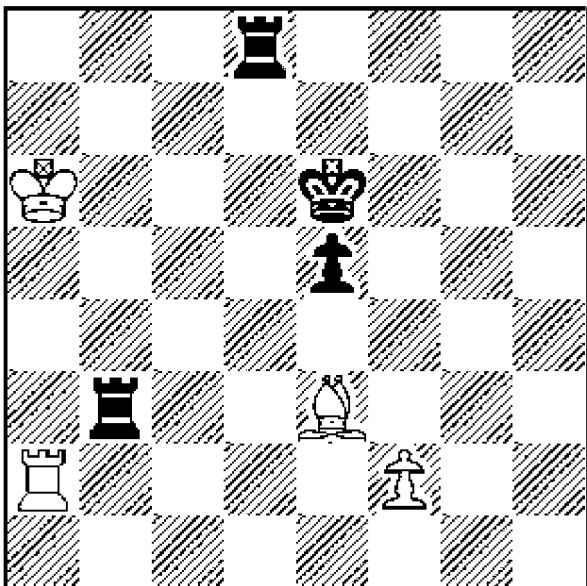
Threatening ... Rd6.

56 Be3 Rd6+ 57 Ka5 Rd8!

Threatening ... Ra8+.

58 Ka6

If 58 Ka4 Rb7 wins, while 58 Ba7 Ra8 59 Ka6 Kf5 60 Ra4 Rb2 61 Ra5 Rxf2 62 Kb7 Rxa7+ 63 Rxa7 Rc2 is an easy win for Black as well since White's king is AWOL.



Exercise (combination alert): White plans to block a rook check on a8 with Ba7, when the bishop, a frightened chipmunk, races down the declivity into its hidden nest. What did White miss in this position?

Answer: Removal of a defender. The genial, avuncular neighbour on b3 turns out to be the serial killer the police have been searching for.

58 ... Rxe3! 0-1

No more blocks on a7. White's bishop sells his blessings at a high price, but the rook is willing to pay.

Game 57

M.Botvinnik-M.Tal

World Championship (11th matchgame), Moscow 1961

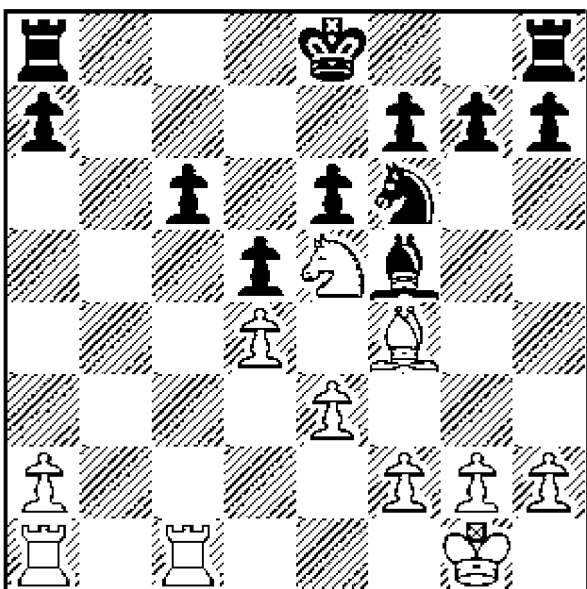
Slav Defence

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c6 3 Nc3 d5 4 cxd5!

Question: Why an exclamation for the dull Exchange Slav?

Answer: Precisely because of its inherent dullness. Who is better suited to the resulting static, technical positions arising? Botvinnik the monster technician, or Tal the tactical wizard? I think this was a poor opening choice on Tal's (and his coach's) part.

4 ... cxd5 5 Nf3 Nc6 6 Bf4 Bf5 7 e3 e6 8 Bb5 Bb4 9 Ne5 Qa5 10 Bxc6+ bxc6 11 0-0 Bxc3 12 bxc3 Qxc3 13 Qc1 Qxc1 14 Rfxc1



Question: A dead draw?

Answer: Not quite so dead, despite the presence of opposite-coloured bishops. White holds the advantage since he leads in development, and his knight, once it rests on c6 will be very difficult for Black to eject.

14 ... 0-0 15 f3!

Question: Why didn't he capture the c-pawn?

Answer: The c-pawn isn't going anywhere, so Botvinnik plays his last move with four intentions: 1. He prepares to activate his king via f2.

2. He denies Black use of the e4-square.

3. He leaves the possibility open for the space-gaining g2-g4.

4. Lastly, he tempts Black into ... Nh5, which favours White.

15 ... h6

Question: What is so wrong with 15 ... Nh5 - ?

Answer: It begs an inferior ending after 16 Nxc6 Nxf4 17 exf4 when White's knight dominates on its c6 post. Black is in danger of dropping his a-pawn later to a Rc3-a3 manoeuvre.

Nor does Black equalize after 15 ... Rfc8 16 g4 Bg6 17 h4 h5 18 g5 Ne8 19 Nxc6 fxc6 20 Rab1, when White threatens Rb7 and Be5, with a paralyzing bind, despite his one pawn deficit.

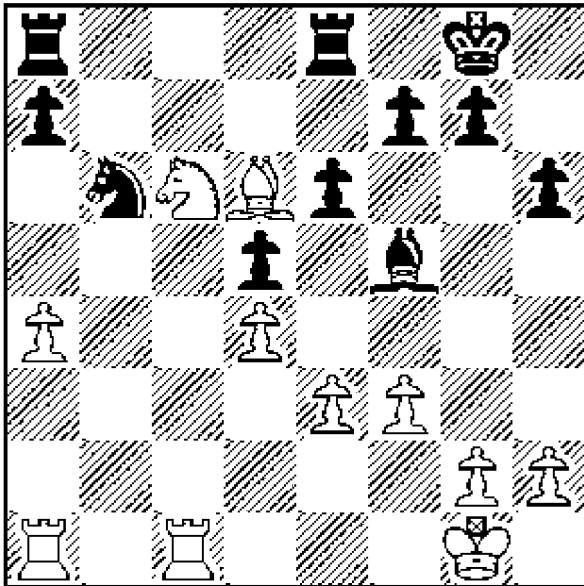
16 Nxc6 Rfe8 17 a4!

Perhaps intending a4-a5, contemplating the halt of ... Nd7-b6 ideas.

17 ... Nd7 18 Bd6!

Even stronger than the thematic 18 a5, since Botvinnik's move sets up a trap, which Tal walks into.

18 ... Nb6?!



Exercise (planning): How did Botvinnik improve his position?

Answer: Transfer the bishop to c5 and threaten Nxa7!.

19 Bc5! Bd3

Alternatives:

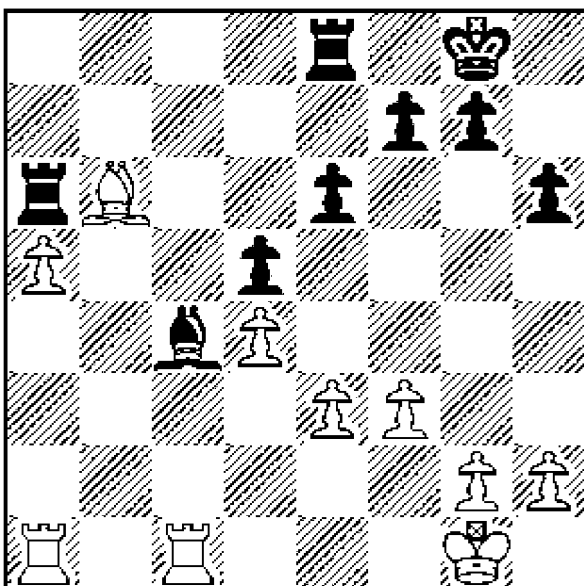
a) 19 ... Nc4 20 e4! Bg6 21 exd5 exd5 22 Ne7+ Kh7 23 Nxd5 picks off an important pawn.

b) 19 ... Nc8 20 Ra3! (cutting off ... Bd3, while preparing to transfer his rook unchallenged to the b-file) 20 ... a5 21 Rb3 and Black can barely move.

20 Nxa7!

Houdini prefers the fancier line 20 Ne5 Bh7 21 Bxb6! axb6 22 Nd7 Ra6 23 Rc6 Rea8 24 Nxb6, when White avoids drawing unpleasantness based upon bishops of opposite colours. On the downside, White's forces look a bit tangled up.

20 ... Rxa7 21 Bxb6 Ra6 22 a5 Bc4



Question: I understand that White is up a pawn, but Black holds the trump of the opposite-coloured bishops and a completely blockaded a5-pawn. Can White win?

Answer: It won't be easy but Botvinnik has pluses as well: 1. There may be the presence of opposite-coloured bishops, but White still stands a clean pawn up.

2. The passed a-pawn, although blockaded as you mentioned, has the beneficial effect of tying down two of Black's pieces.

3. White can even try a plan of loading up rooks on the c-file and perhaps transferring the king to b4. Then he may pull off an exchange sac on Black's bishop on c4, which would leave him with two pawns for the exchange and at least one black rook completely tied down to the a-pawn.

Conclusion: The presence of opposite-coloured bishops does little to subside Black's apprehensions, and in no way assures him of holding a draw.

23 Ra3 f6 24 e4

Botvinnik begins to gain kingside space, since Black can do nothing but await events.

24 ... Kf7 25 Kf2 Raa8 26 Ke3 Reb8

Threatening ... Rxb6.

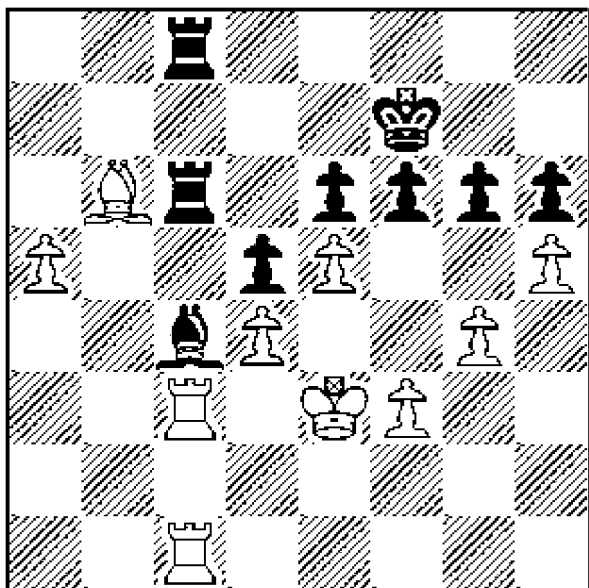
27 Rac3!

The exchange sac on c4, if not now, then at some point in the future, becomes a serious issue for Tal, who decides to invest the other rook on c8 to prevent it.

27 ... Rc8 28 g4 Rab8 29 h4 Rc6 30 h5

Botvinnik continues to annex territory.

30 ... Rbc8 31 e5 g6?



A plan which overpromises and under delivers. Oh, the suffering of wanting (counterplay) and not having it. Tal reads the position in the light of belligerence, hoping to rally with the renewed ferocity of one who already considers himself among the dead. Yet deep within him a voice arises: "If life remains, then so does hope."

Tal's dilemma is that of a king who realizes there may be riots if he declares war, and possible riots if he doesn't! Passively awaiting events was clearly not Tal's strong suit. His mind is made up, now impervious to sway from folly. So he indulges in a preposterous risk, with only diminishing chances of return.

The trouble that is any disturbance of the kingside pawns by Black only helps Botvinnik's side. In this case, Tal's move critically weakens h6, after which hope disappears, to be replaced with despair. Soon Black's position sags and the dark imputation falls upon his dubious 31st move, the natural suspect in the crime.

32 hxg6+ Kxg6 33 R3c2!

Targeting h6 after White doubles rooks along the h-file, which offers ready access into the enemy camp. The coalescence of Black's strategic woes grows to decisive proportions.

33 ... fxe5

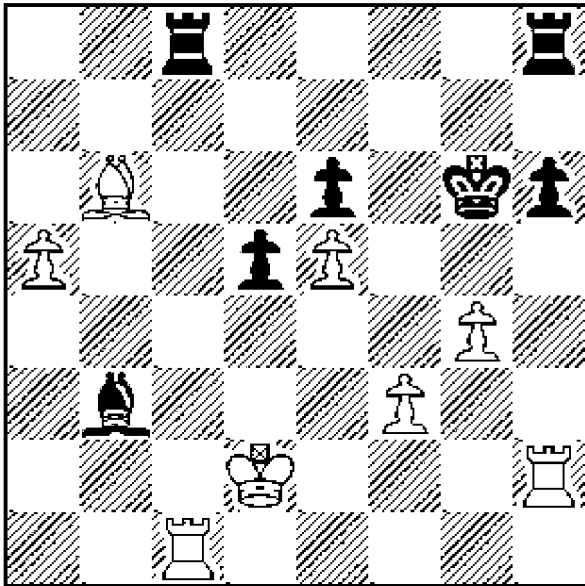
Question: Tal just handed Botvinnik a kingside pawn majority. Why not just shuffle and wait?

Answer: At this stage there was nothing better. For example: 33 ... Ra8 34 exf6 Kxf6 35 Rh1 Kg6 36 Rch2 (the rooks pile up on h6 like a column of hungry ants in search of food) 36 ... Rh8 37 Rh5 Rcc8 38 Kf4 Rcf8+ 39 Kg3 Bd3 40 Bc7 Ra8 41 g5, winning a second pawn.

34 dxe5 Rh8 35 Rh2 Rcc8 36 Kd2!

The king decides to accommodate by stepping out of the way, and clearing e3 for his bishop to pile up on h6.

36 ... Bb3?



A sentinel isn't much of a sentinel if he runs at the first sign of trouble. Tal gives vent to resentment with fruitless aggression. In his endeavour to achieve activity, he allows Botvinnik's a-pawn to dig yet deeper. It becomes painfully clear that Black's "initiative" is fashioned from bluster and facade, devolving with each move.

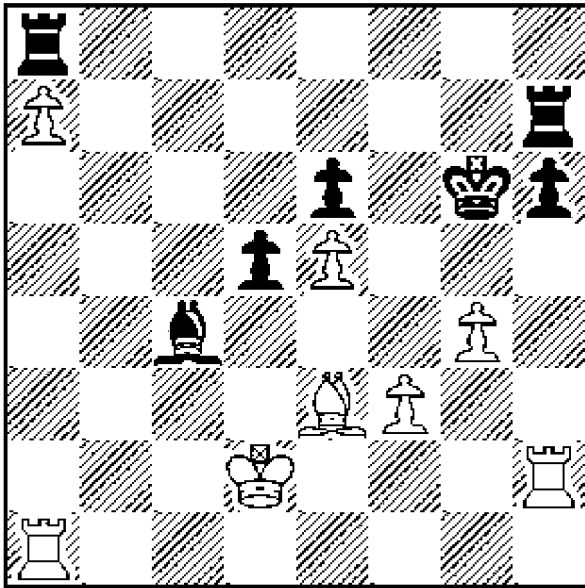
37 a6

Botvinnik isn't about to fall for 37 Rxc8 Rxc8 38 a6?? Rc2+, picking off White's rook.

37 ... Bc4 38 a7

This pawn has been driven in too deep and Black must keep a constant eye out for promotion schemes, as well as invest pieces to halt the pawn's further ambitions.

38 ... Rh7 39 Ra1 Ra8 40 Be3



The ship's gun barrels slowly pivot right, soon to discharge the fatal cargo at h6, where Black's pieces have been driven into pockets of utter helplessness. Note the bishop's dual directional efficiency: it attacks h6 while protecting the a7-pawn.

40 ... Rb7

40 ... Bb5 walks into an overload combination after 41 Rax1 Rax8 42 Rxh6+!.

41 Rxh6+ Kg7 42 Rax1 Rb2+ 1-0

Black's king is swept into the vortex of White's attack and 43 Kc1 Ra2 44 Rh7+ ends it.

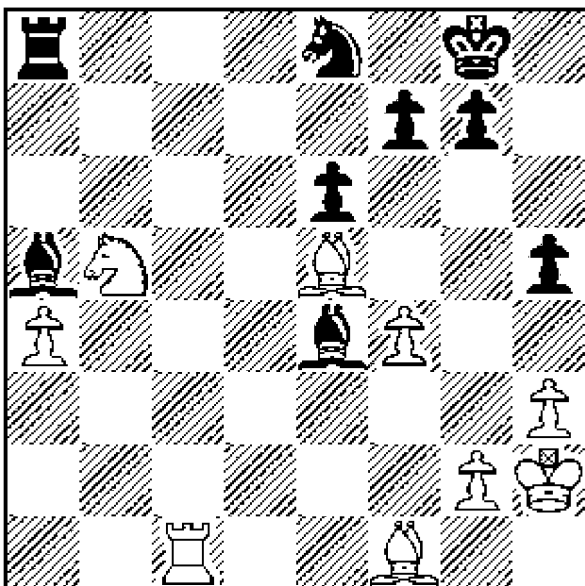
Game 58

Y.Averbakh-M.Botvinnik

Training match, Moscow 1956

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 d6 6 Bc4 e6 7 a3 Be7 8 0-0 0-0 9 Ba2 Bd7 10 Be3 Nxd4 11 Bxd4 b5 12 Qd3 a5 13 Nxb5 Nxe4 14 a4 Bc6 15 Rad1 d5 16 c4 dxc4 17 Bxc4 Qb8 18 Qf3 Qb7 19 Rfe1 Rfd8 20 Bd3 Nf6 21 Qh3 h6 22 Bc4 Rd7 23 Be5 Rad8 24 Rxd7 Rxd7 25 Qg3 Bd5 26 Be2 Ne8 27 Rc1 Bg5 28 f4 Bf6 29 Bf1 Bd8 30 h3 Be4 31 Kh2 h5 32 Qc3 Bb6 33 b4 Qa8 34 bxa5 Bxa5 35 Qc8 Rd8 36 Qxa8 Rxa8



Question: It looks to me like White is the only one with winning chances due to his passed a-pawn, correct?

Answer: It looks that way to me too. In fact, it looks like White can even drop his a-pawn and still maybe manage a draw. Yet Botvinnik won against a strong grandmaster (and an endgame specialist to boot), mainly due to Black's hidden plus: White finds it difficult to cover his second rank. All the same, with careful play, White should still hold an edge due to the power of his passed a-pawn.

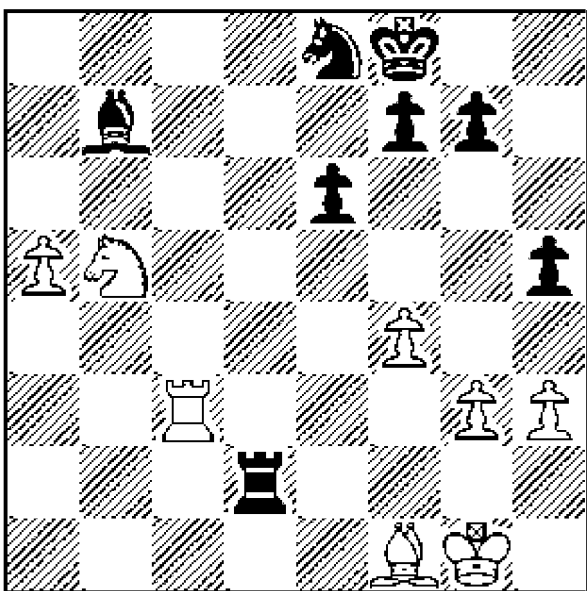
37 g3 Rd8!

Threatening to invade the seventh rank.

38 Bc3 Bxc3 39 Rxc3

Logical and probably inaccurate: White covers g3, the softest spot in his position and thinks about swinging his rook to a3. White's pieces begin to drift away from their goal, as if responding to a summons only they can hear. After the correct 39 Nxc3! Rd2+ 40 Kg1 Bf3 41 a5 Nd6 42 a6!, my feeling is that White is the only one with winning chances, since if Black insists on 42 ... Nf5 White meets it with 43 Nb5! and the g-pawn can't be touched due to Rc3.

39 ... Rd2+ 40 Kg1 Kf8 41 a5 Bb7



42 Na3?!

Last chance for 42 Nc7! Nd6 43 a6 Be4 44 Nb5! which reaches a position similar to the (favourable for White) previous note.

42 ... Rd1

Botvinnik prods here, pokes there, as if to awaken a dormant idea he doesn't have just yet.

43 Rb3 Ba6 44 Rb1 Rd5 45 Nb5

White fusses over his a-pawn, the way my neighbour washes his spotlessly clean car and then lovingly swabs it down, drying it with loving caresses of a ShamWow towel.

45 ... g5!

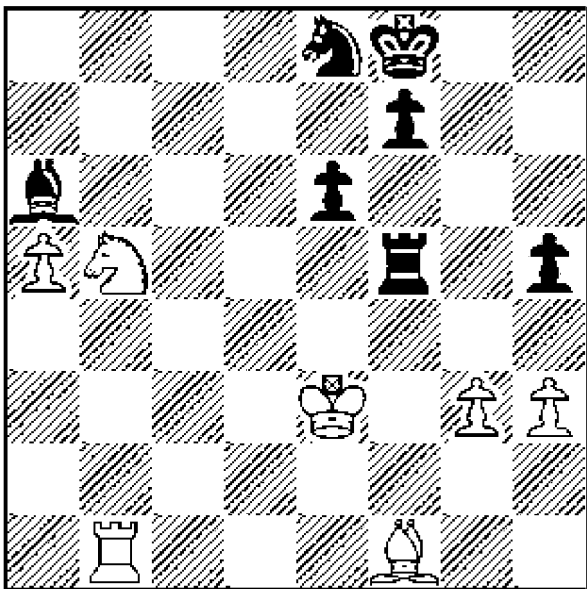
Botvinnik strengthens his position, activating his kingside pawn majority. Black is no longer worse.

46 fxg5 Rxc3 47 Kf2

The king reluctantly prepares to take leave of his home with a sense of melancholy.

47 ... Rf5+ 48 Ke3?

Unswerving, resolute and incorrect! White should have gone back again with 48 Kg1.



The nervous lab rat approaches, realizing that if he steps upon the correct lever, he gets rewarded with a chunk of cheese; if he steps on the wrong one, an electric shock. For a natural optimist, the world seems renewed and all things possible. White attempts to pay his debts with blue, \$50 Monopoly bills, which tend to be frowned upon as legal currency outside the Monopoly world. His last move followed the principle: *Centralize your king in an ending*. However, chess is a fickle game and it turns out this position is the exception to the norm.

Exercise (combination alert): The parties strive for control over b5 with mutual opportunism, but in this case Botvinnik exploited the geometry to pick off White's dangerous a-pawn. How?

Answer: Step 1: Chop the knight.

48 ... Bxb5! 49 Bxb5

This is the trouble with 48 Ke3? – White can't recapture with the rook. At this point, Averbakh may have realized he missed Botvinnik's coming trick in his calculations.

Step 2: Attack the bishop and pick up a5.

49 ... Nd6

The defence is breached, like a trash bag which now leaks and oozes its vile, foody residue of goo, consisting of smelly tuna, ketchup and rotten cabbage.

50 Bd3 Re5+ 51 Kd4

The king lowers his head in contrition, promising to change his ways, but then slyly gives a conspiratorial wink and plunges forward yet again. He sniffs contemptuously at the lout on e5, approaching him with punishment in mind. Once again this proves to be the exception to the principle.

Question: Why is it incorrect to centralize here?

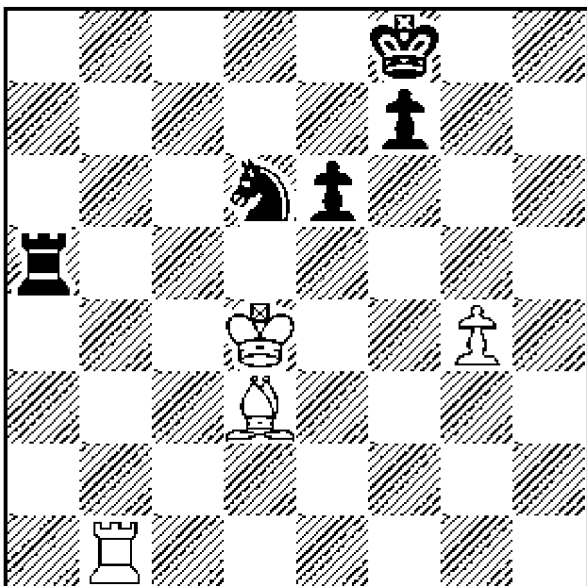
Answer: White's king is needed at home to defend his pawns. White was better off playing 51 Kf2.

51 ... Rxa5 52 g4?

Question: Why a question mark? White follows the endgame principle: *The defending side should reduce the number of pawns on the board*.

Answer: A third principle followed and a third exception to the rule. How frustrating for White – he dutifully follows protocol and finds himself under continual reprimand. The reason: tactics always take precedent over principles. Unfortunately for White, in this instance he only manages to reduce his own pawns, not Black’s! The move is a blunder which drops a pawn. He should backtrack again with 52 Ke3.

52 ... hxc4 53 hxc4



We sense movement from the shadows. Botvinnik has a final, mordant little joke with a nasty twist at its completion.

Exercise (combination alert): Black to play and win another pawn.

Answer: A skilled hunter only requires partial sight of his prey to take the shot.

53 ... Ra4+ 54 Kc5

“What is the meaning of this!” bellows the king, lamenting the fact that world events do not transpire to his liking, despite his great efforts to impose his will upon them. He is on high alert, the way a Huron scout spots Iroquois moccasin imprints on the trail.

54 ... Rxc4! 0-1

The point: 55 Kxd6 is met by 55 ... Rd4+, regaining the piece with interest. Investors from White’s side react to the news of sales running flat and quarterly reports bear alarming tidings of record depletions of stock value.

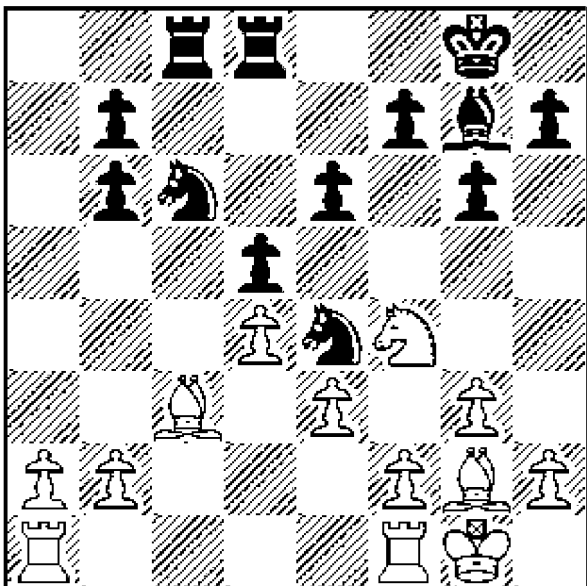
Game 59

M.Botvinnik-D.Bronstein

World Championship (23rd matchgame), Moscow 1951

Grünfeld Defence

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 g3 c6 4 Bg2 d5 5 cxd5 cxd5 6 Nc3 Bg7 7 Nh3 Bxh3 8 Bxh3 Nc6 9 Bg2 e6 10 e3 0-0 11 Bd2 Rc8 12 0-0 Nd7 13 Ne2 Qb6 14 Bc3 Rfd8 15 Nf4 Nf6 16 Qb3 Ne4 17 Qxb6 axb6



Now begins one of the most dramatic endings in world championship history. Botvinnik was a point down with only this game and the next remaining. He had to score 1½ out of 2, to tie the match and retain his title – and this was his final shot with the white pieces. So, with such intense pressure on him to win, Botvinnik placed his hopes on his endgame skills.

18 Be1

Question: Why retreat a bad bishop to avoid the swap?

Answer: Bad bishop or not, White must retain some kind of imbalance in this position if he is to have any hope of victory. The structure for now may be rigid, favouring Black's knights, but the game is long and things change. If the game opens up later on, White's bishops may come to life.

18 ... Na5

Introducing the ... Rc2 idea. GM Ludek Pachman writes: "I well remember that most commentators had a poor opinion of Botvinnik's position at this point."

Question: Does White stand worse?

Answer: I don't think so since, as mentioned, White's bishops, although rather sorry-looking for now, may later shine if the game opens. The position is probably dynamically balanced at this stage.

19 Nd3 Bf8

Question: Why didn't Bronstein go for the immediate invasion of c2?

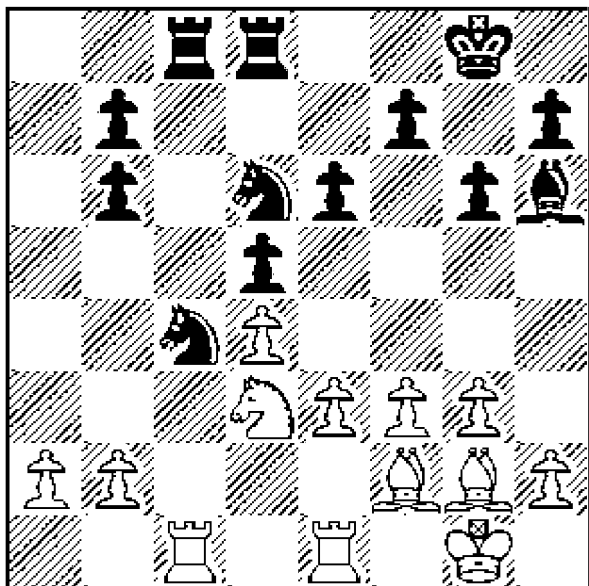
Answer: The immediate 19 ... Rc2 can be met by 20 Nb4! and if Black insists with 20 ... Rxb2?, he drops an exchange after 21 Bxe4! dxe4 22 Bc3 Re2 23 Rfc1 Rc8 24 Kf1 Rxc3 25 Kxe2.

Botvinnik also claimed an edge for White at the end of the line 19 ... Nc4! 20 Bb4 Bf8 21 Bxf8 Kxf8 22 Rfc1, but to my eyes, this one looks very difficult to try and win from White's side.

20 f3 Nd6 21 Bf2 Bh6

21 ... Rc2 is met by 22 Rfc1 Rdc8 23 Rxc2 Rxc2 24 Rc1, when the invasion party is repelled.

22 Rac1 Nac4 23 Rfe1



Exercise (planning): It is in Black's best interest to force White into a rigid pawn structure. How can he accomplish this feat?

23 ... Na5?!

Bronstein allows himself to be distracted from his mandate by marking time, perhaps thinking anything draws.

Answer: I have a feeling he would have won the world championship if he had played the simple 23 ... Nf5!, increasing the pressure upon e3, and forcing the unpleasant 24 f4, after which White's winning chances go up in a haze of smoke. Black may actually stand better after 24 ... Nfd6, and he certainly doesn't look like he can lose here.

24 Kf1

Centralizing his king.

24 ... Bg7 25 g4!

Cutting off ... Nf5 ideas.

25 ... Nc6 26 b3?!

Botvinnik rightfully criticized his move, which unnecessarily weakens both a3 and c3.

26 ... Nb5!

Bronstein immediately targets the weakened squares.

27 Ke2?!

27 a4 should be tossed in.

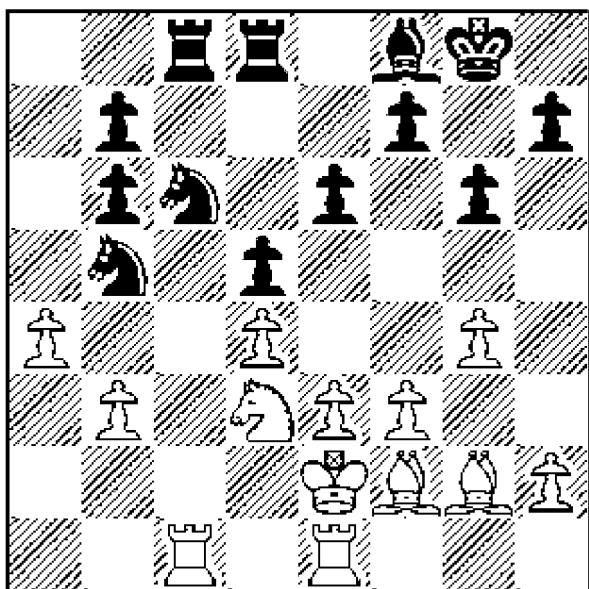
27 ... Bf8?!

Bronstein wants too much from the position, hoping to have time for ... Ba3.

Question: What should he play instead?

Answer: He had 27 ... Na3! followed by ... Bf8!, seizing the queenside dark squares, after which Black may again even stand better, but equal at the very minimum.

28 a4!



Rectifying his inaccuracy on his previous move.

28 ... Nc7!

In order to transfer to a6 and then possibly b4.

29 Bg3

The once-slow bishop begins to shine, like the schoolboy who the teacher believed was the dunce of the class, who now shocks her with newly discovered aptitude.

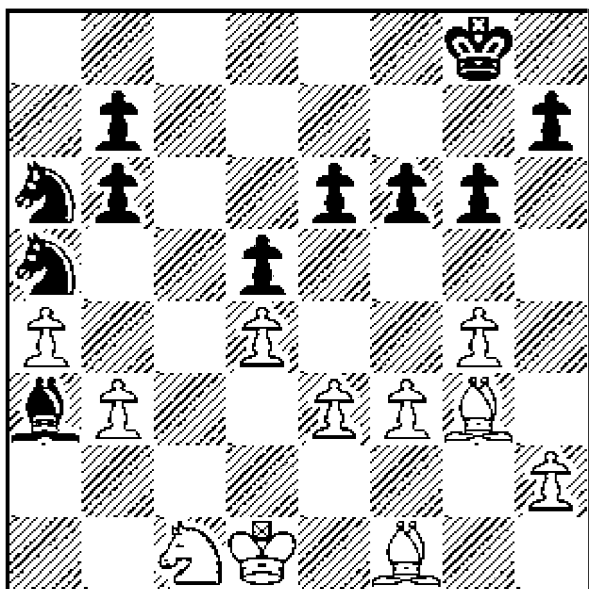
29 ... Na6 30 Bf1 f6 31 Red1 Na5

Bronstein continually probes the soft points in White's position. Botvinnik is pretty much forced into a pawn sac, for which he receives ample compensation.

32 Rxc8 Rxc8 33 Rc1 Rxc1 34 Nxc1

Both sides had foreseen the coming position and assessed it differently. Black can force the win of a pawn by attacking the single defender of b3.

34 ... Ba3 35 Kd1

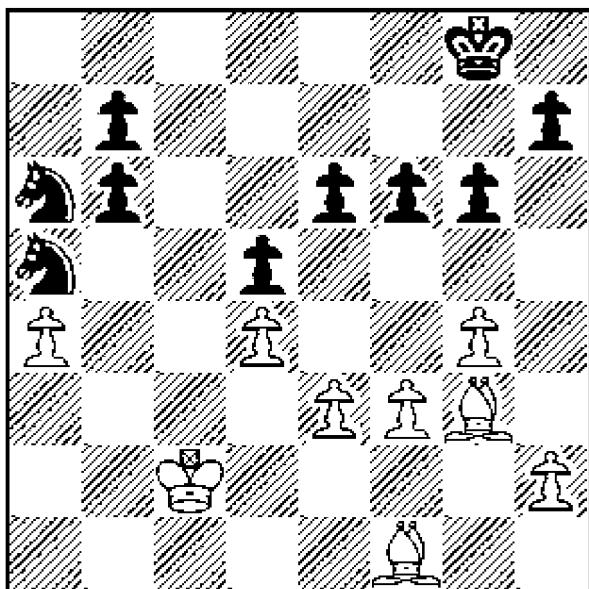


Exercise (critical decision): Would you chop on c1 to win the pawn, or avoid it and hang on to Black's bishop?

35 ... Bxc1?!

Nancy Reagan would agree: "Just say no!" Here Bronstein had to do something extraordinary – nothing! His move looks too mercantile in tone for the actual requirements of the position. I have a feeling this move is where Bronstein allowed the world title to slip away. White probably can't win if Black leaves the position as is, recognizing that further aggressive action proves unavailing to his greater cause of holding the draw.

36 Kxc1 Nxb3+ 37 Kc2 Na5



White's plentiful compensation for the pawn:

1. The bishop pair in a rapidly opening position.
2. A fluid pawn structure, which favours his bishops.
3. A slightly more active king.

4. The a6-knight, through no fault of his own, finds himself implicated in his bishop's crime. It doesn't have a single move after White's next, appearing reluctant, like an acne-faced teenager, self-conscious about posing for the school photo.

5. Black's extra pawn is that lame, isolated, doubled guy on b6. It comforts yet fails to help, a weak fan on a hot summer night, merely heard but not felt – which means that, for now, White's a4-pawn holds back both black b-pawns. So in essence, Black gave up a powerful dark-squared bishop to win a worthless pawn.

Conclusion: After his dubious decision to take the b3-pawn, Black must now fight for the draw.

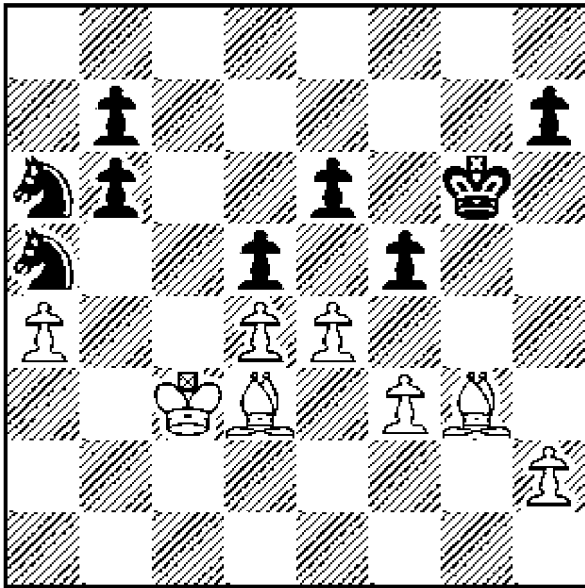
38 Kc3!

Hemming in the a6-knight.

38 ... Kf7 39 e4 f5?!

Black's pawns form an ugly arch, an old half-eaten doughnut, tossed in a dumpster. Bronstein wanted to force the issue and clarify the pawn structure, but this move only manages to increase the power of White's bishops by opening the position.

40 gxf5 gxf5 41 Bd3 Kg6



Another game with two critical decision exercises. Imagine the pressure: Botvinnik *must* win this game for a realistic shot to retain his world championship title. He frustratingly senses the winning plan lurking, yet inexpressible and unidentifiable – nearly non-existent, yet palpably there. Botvinnik attempts to grasp something from nothing, the way a wizard creates from pure empty space with a mere incantation. White’s initiative functions near capacity. The question is how can we tweak it to get just a little more kick?

Exercise (critical decision): White can play 42 Bb1, going after d5, or he can try to increase the pressure with 42 Bd6, imprisoning the a6-knight.

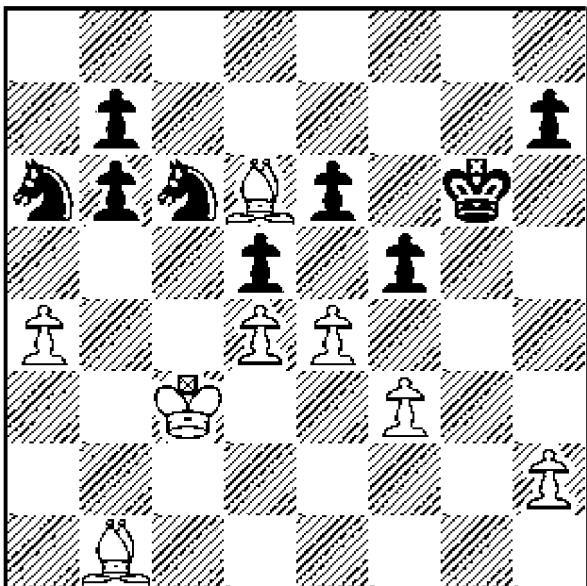
If you were in Botvinnik’s shoes, which move would you play?

42 Bd6?

The sealed move and an incorrect one. The inconceivable pressure gets to Botvinnik, as he picks an incorrect path. A discouraged Botvinnik, when leaving the playing stage, was heard to tell a member of his analytical team: “All is lost ... !”

Answer: White has every chance to win the game after 42 Bb1! Nc6 (not 42 ... Nc4? 43 exf5+ exf5 44 Bf4!, threatening Ba2 and wins) 43 exf5+ exf5 44 Ba2 (the bishop shows himself from his place of hiding, beginning to perforate the defensive wall via the extremities) 44 ... Ne7 (not 44 ... Nab4? 45 Bb3 with Bd6 next) 45 Bh4 Kf7 46 Bxe7 Kxe7 47 Bxd5 and White picks off b7, with every chance to convert to victory.

42 ... Nc6 43 Bb1



The bishop takes his leave. Black soon learns a bitter lesson: just because an enemy is gone doesn't mean he has disappeared.

43 ... Kf6?

Botvinnik himself pointed out the correct drawing pathway: the semi-*mea culpa* contortion 43 ... Na7!! 44 exd5 exd5 45 Ba2 b5! 46 a5 b4+! 47 Kd3 Nb5 (the knight emerges a free man with his prison sentence remitted) 48 Be5 Nac7 and Black should hold the game.

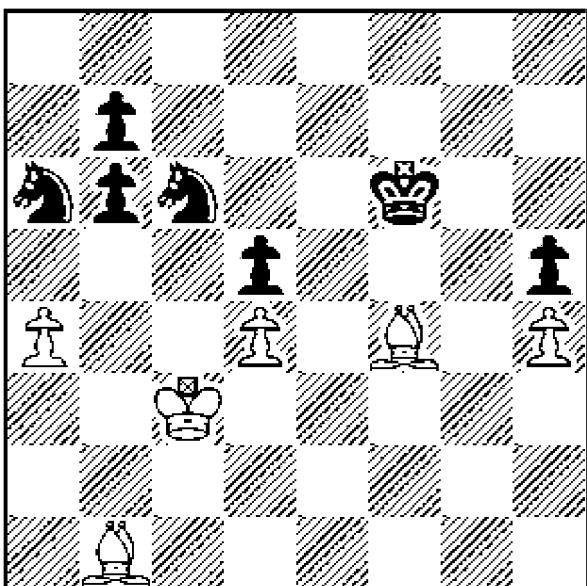
44 Bg3!

Botvinnik retains self-possession even under great duress, producing the ripened fruit of adjournment analysis with the trickiest move in the position. Instead, 44 Bf4?! Ne7 should draw.

44 ... fxe4?

Actuating a chain of events which flow forth by impulse. Bronstein violates the principle: *Don't open the position when the opponent has the bishop pair*. Kasparov claims Black should still draw in the line 44 ... h6! 45 Bf4 h5 46 exd5 exd5 47 h4 Ke6.

45 fxe4 h6 46 Bf4 h5 47 exd5 exd5 48 h4!



Dual purpose: Allowing the bishop entry to g5 and fixing h5 as a stationary target.

48 ... Nab8

After 48 ... Ne7 49 Bg5+ Ke6 50 Bxe7 Kxe7 51 Bg6, White should win due to the cumulative effect of:

1. White's soon to be passed h-pawn.
2. The bishop's superiority over the knight.

3. Black still has target pawns on d5 and c8.

49 Bg5+ Kf7 50 Bf5!

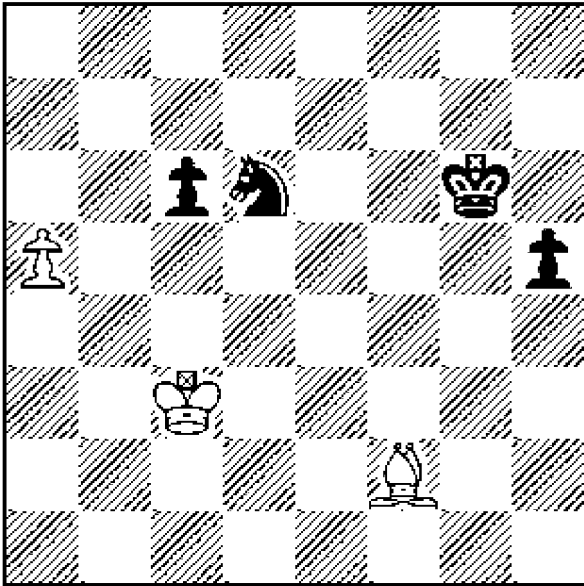
The bishop's right lip curls into a hateful half-smile at the thought of denying Black ... Nd7.

50 ... Na7 51 Bf4 Nbc6 52 Bd3!

Dual purpose: Preventing ... b6-b5 and preparing to reload on h5, via e2.

52 ... Nc8

Or 52 ... Ne7 53 Be2! Kg6 54 Bg5 Nac6 55 Bf3! (zugzwang!) 55 ... Nf5 56 Bxd5 Nfxd4 57 Be3! Nf5 58 Bxb6 should be enough for White to win, since 58 ... Nxe4?? is met by 59 Bf2! Nf5 60 Bxc6 bxc6 61 a5 Nd6.

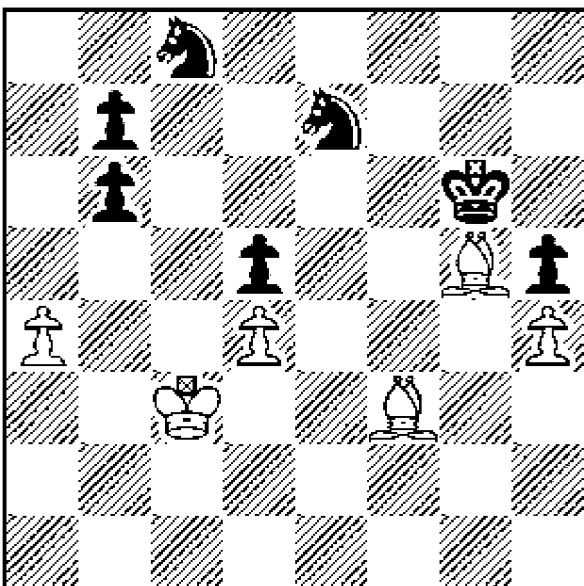


Visually, this looks like it should be an easy draw for Black, but due to a quirk in the geometry, Black's knight simply never gets a chance to sac itself for White's lone a-pawn: 62 a6 Kf5 (62 ... c5 63 Bg3 Nc8 64 Kc4 Kf5 65 Kxc5 Ke6 66 Kc6 is similar to the main variation, while 65 ... Ke4 66 Kc6 Kd4 67 Bh4! Na7+ 68 Kb7 Nb5 69 Be7 soon leads to zugzwang) 63 Kb4 Nc8 64 Kc5 Ke6 65 Kxc6 h4 66 Bxh4 Na7+ 67 Kb6 Nc8+ 68 Kc7 Na7 69 Bf2 Nb5+ 70 Kc6 and Black's unfortunate knight must step aside for White's last pawn to promote.

53 Be2! Kg6 54 Bd3+ Kf6 55 Be2

Botvinnik's signature time-gaining manoeuvres.

55 ... Kg6 56 Bf3! N6e7 57 Bg5! 1-0



Zugzwang shatters Black's expectations. Black's pieces freeze, like mimes. A disconsolate Bronstein resigned after a deeply inconsequential 40-minute think.

Question: Was his resignation premature?

Answer: Somewhat. He is busted but clearly could have played it out for a long time, hoping for an inaccuracy on Botvinnik's part. But I have a feeling Bronstein was depressed at having been so thoroughly outplayed after the adjournment, and wanted to save his energy for the final game with the white pieces – which Botvinnik managed to draw and hold on to his title.

Game 60

A.Kotov-M.Botvinnik

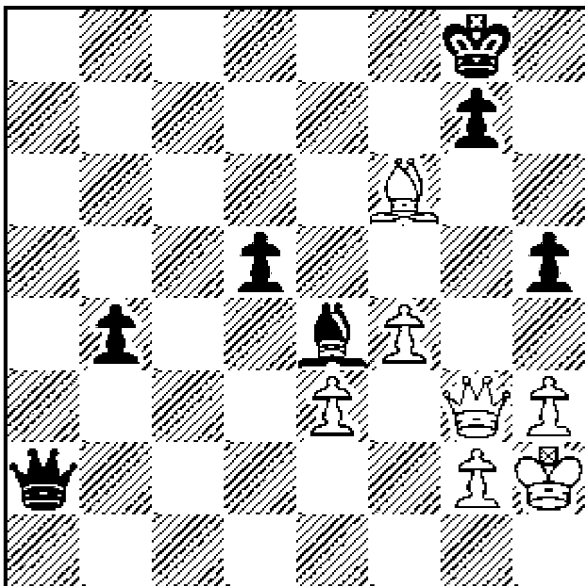
USSR Championship, Moscow 1955

Semi-Slav Defence

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Nf3 e6 5 e3 Nbd7 6 Bd3 Bb4?!

What we know now was a mystery back then. Botvinnik repeats Euwe's dubious move from Chapter Four (see Game 32).

7 0-0 0-0 8 Bd2 Bd6 9 b3 Qe7 10 Qc2 e5 11 cxd5 cxd5 12 dxe5 Nxe5 13 Nd4 Nxd3 14 Qxd3 Qe5 15 f4 Qe7 16 Rac1 Rd8 17 Rc2 Bc5 18 Na4 Bxd4! 19 Qxd4 Bf5 20 Bb4 Qd7 21 Rc3 Ne4 22 Rcc1 b6 23 Rfd1 f6! 24 Nc3 Nxc3 25 Rxc3 Be4 26 Qd2 Qg4 27 h3 Qg6 28 Qf2 h5 29 Kh2 a5 30 Ba3 b5 31 Bc5 b4 32 Rcc1 Rdc8 33 Bd4 Bc2 34 Rd2 Be4 35 Rdd1 Qf5 36 Qe2 Qg6 37 Qf2 a4! 38 Rxc8+ Rxc8 39 bxa4 Qe8 40 Rd2 Qxa4 41 Qh4 Rc2 42 Rxc2 Qxc2 43 Qg3 Qxa2 44 Bxf6



Question: I realize that Black has a passed b-pawn but isn't Botvinnik in big trouble? His king looks more exposed than White's.

Answer: Botvinnik had foreseen this position and was ready with a slick answer. Even after the combination, the position is still probably drawn, but it is Black's single chance to win if White goes wrong. In fact, let's do an exercise:

Exercise (combination alert): Black plays a little trick to win material. How?

Answer: The queen celebrates her divorce with a party.

44 ... Qxg2+!

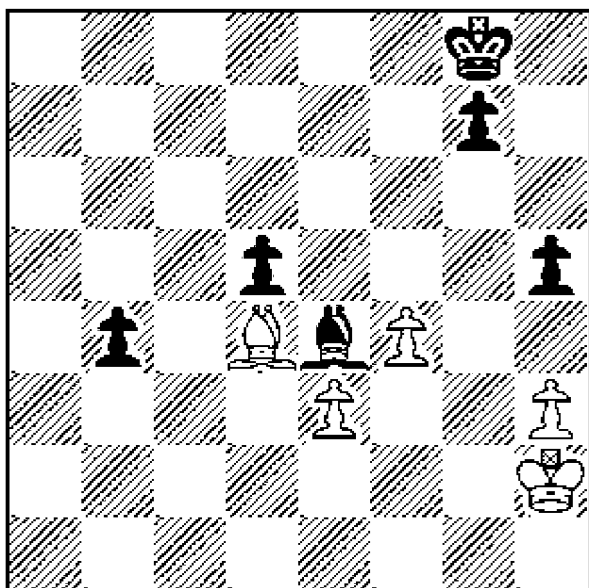
The townsfolk begin to murmur angrily, suspecting the black queen of bewitching

their beloved king. She is an amoral opportunist who manipulates matters to her favour, as she rushes to fill a power vacuum and hold sway and leverage over all who oppose her. There are many who find the charismatic black queen fascinating. However, White's royal pair are not among this group.

45 Qxg2 Bxg2 46 Bd4

Obviously forced, since White can resign the king and pawn ending immediately after 46 Kxg2?? gxf6.

46 ... Be4



A new situation arises. Black is now a pawn up but faces great technical difficulties due to the conversion woes involved with opposite-coloured bishops.

Question: Isn't this a dead draw? One extra pawn is not usually enough with bishops of opposite colours.

Answer: Only a threadbare filament of winning chances exist and Botvinnik planned to derive maximum benefit from them. But dead draw? No. White will be forced to struggle and find good moves to achieve his goal.

47 Kg3 Kf7 48 h4

Guaranteeing the safety of his remaining pawns.

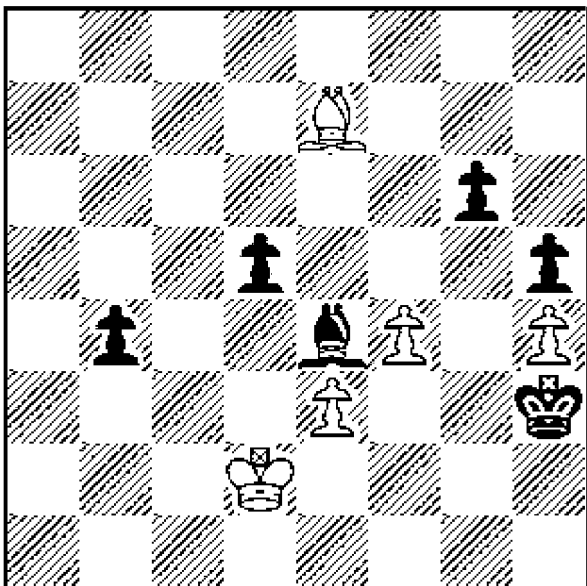
48 ... g6

Ditto.

49 Kf2 Ke6 50 Ke2 Kf5

Black fails to make progress if he tries king entry on the queenside. White simply plants his king on b2 and waits.

51 Kd2 Kg4 52 Bf6 Kg3 53 Be7 Kh3



54 Bf6?!

54 Bxb4! is a clear path to the draw: 54 ... Kxh4 55 Ke2 Kg4 56 Kf2 h4 57 Kg1 Kf3 58 Bc5 Kg3 59 Bb4 h3 60 Be1+! Kf3 61 Bd2 Bf5 62 Kh2 Ke2 (the mad king swirls about in a series of meaningless capers, like a drunk at a dance) 63 Bc1 *etc.*

Question: Why you think Kotov avoided this line?

Answer: I think Kotov saw it and knew it was drawn but believed he had no need to alter course.

54 ... Kg4 55 Be7 Bf5!

The precursor to a crafty idea, his only shot at winning. Botvinnik optimistically hopes to bridge the gap between the impossible and the possible. In the temporary respite, Botvinnik's forces rest and recharge before the next taxing battle. 55 ... b3 56 Kc3 Bc2 57 Bf6 Kg3 58 Kb2 Kf3 59 Bd4 g5 60 fxg5 Kg3 61 g6! is drawn.

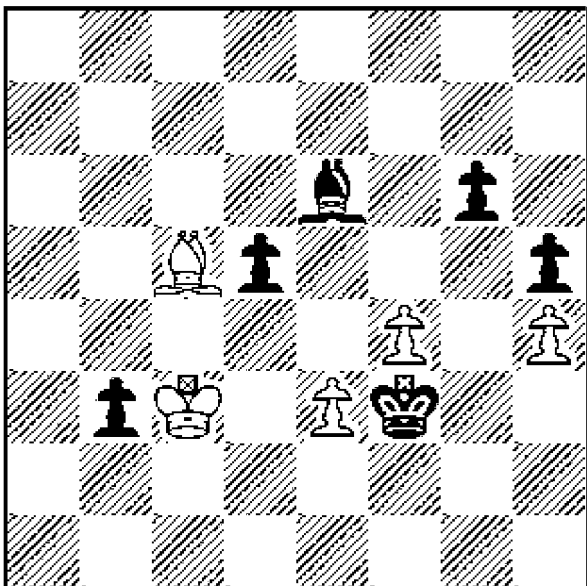
56 Bf6?

Now Black is winning. Exceed critical mass and you risk annihilation. For the time being Kotov is mistakenly content to lay quiescent and await Botvinnik's next thrust. Once again Kotov misassesses and fails to comprehend the magnitude of his opponent's idea. White still draws after 56 Bxb4! Kxh4 57 Ke2, as in the note with 54 Bxb4 above.

56 ... Kf3 57 Be7 b3! 58 Kc3 Be6!

Kotov must have expected 58 ... Kxe3? 59 Kxb3 Kxf4 60 Bg5+ Ke4 61 Kc3 d4+ 62 Kd2, which is easily drawn, despite Black's two extra pawns.

59 Bc5



The position truly looks like a dead draw. After all, White's bishop easily covers all his pawns, while his king halts the b3-passer.

Exercise (combination alert): This one is difficult. Black needs two passers, not one, to pull off the win from this position.

How did Botvinnik manage this impossible-looking feat?

Answer: Interference/deflection. Black forces the creation of a second passed pawn.

59 ... g5!!

For the remainder of the game, Kotov loses control over every phase of his rather dreary destiny. Now White is denied his deepest wish, like Henry VIII, who dreamed of sons but, to his consternation, was repeatedly handed daughters and stillborn sons by fate, which openly mocked him.

60 fxg5

60 hxg5 h4 61 f5 Bxf5 62 Bd6 Kxe3 63 Kxb3 d4 wins.

60 ... d4+!

The brilliant point behind 58 ... Be6!. Botvinnik correctly diagnoses that in order to win, he must retain his b-pawn. Black's hulk of a bishop heaves up his scrawny c5-counterpart and rattles his false teeth. Through black magic, the bishop controls both White passed pawns on its diagonal, and at the same time controls his own, key b3-passer.

61 exd4 Kg3

At long last, the king finds a measure of joy previously denied him. Black is actually down a pawn now, yet winning! From this point White can only erect dispirited resistance.

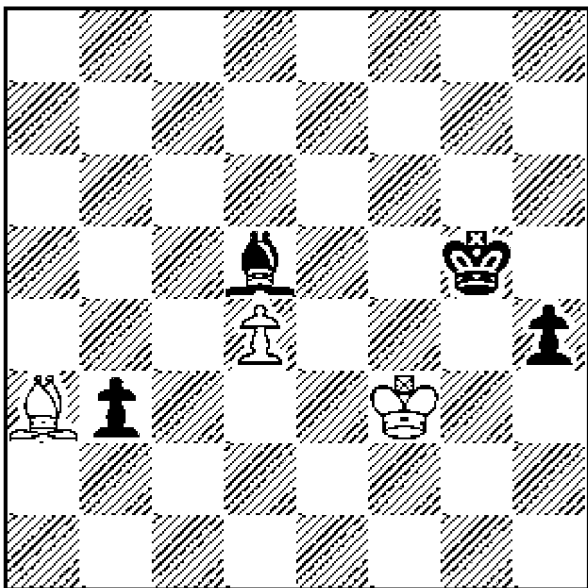
62 Ba3

Freeing his own king, but it is too late. Both monarchs jostle for position, one seeking inroads, the other fighting for survival.

62 ... Kxh4 63 Kd3

Or 63 g6 Kg3 64 Bd6+ Kg4 65 g7 h4 and White has no defence to ... h4-h3, ... Kf3-g2 and ... h3-h2.

63 ... Kxg5 64 Ke4 h4 65 Kf3 Bd5+ 0-1



Nothing is more painful than walking away empty-handed from a long labour.

Question: How does Black win if White places his king on h2 and simply waits?

Answer: It's only a matter of time before White must submit to conquest by attrition: 66 Kf2 Kf4 67 Kg1 Ke4 68 Kh2 Be6! (oh, no you don't!) 69 Bb2 h3 70 Ba1 Kd3 71 d5 Bd7 72 d6 Kc2 73 Kg1 (the dazed king wanders aimlessly, like an amnesia victim whose entire past is an expunged void – he is relegated to his new, humble post, shuffling aimlessly and awaiting his fate) 73 ... b2 74 Bxb2 Kxb2 and Black wins. Unfortunately for Kotov, his opponent remains with the correct coloured bishop to promote the h-pawn.

It's sometimes difficult to retain one's faith if the deity visits heavy tribulation upon the faithful. In this game Caissa smiled only upon Botvinnik, while ignoring Kotov's fervent pleas for the draw.

Index of Games

[Alekhine.A-Botvinnik.M, Nottingham 1936](#)
[Averbakh.Y-Botvinnik.M, Training match, Moscow 1956](#)
[Benko.P-Botvinnik.M, Monte Carlo 1968](#)
[Bondarevsky.I-Botvinnik.M, USSR Absolute Championship, Leningrad/Moscow 1941](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Alatortsev.V, Leningrad 1934](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Alatortsev.V, USSR Championship, Moscow 1931](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Alekhine.A, AVRO Tournament, The Netherlands 1938](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Bronstein.D, World Championship \(23rd matchgame\), Moscow 1951](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Bronstein.D, World Championship \(7th matchgame\), Moscow 1951](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Capablanca.J, AVRO Tournament, The Netherlands 1938](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Chekhover.V, Moscow 1935](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Euwe.M, World Championship Tournament, The Hague/Moscow 1948](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Euwe.M, World Championship Tournament, The Hague/Moscow 1948](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Fischer.R, Varna Olympiad 1962](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Flohr.S, Moscow 1936](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Furman.S, Training match, Moscow 1961](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Keres.P, USSR Championship, Moscow 1952](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Keres.P, World Championship Tournament, The Hague/Moscow 1948](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Keres.P, World Championship Tournament, The Hague/Moscow 1948](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Larsen.B, Palma de Mallorca 1967](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Levenfish.G, USSR Championship, Moscow 1940](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Petrosian.T, World Championship \(14th matchgame\), Moscow 1963](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Portisch.L, Monte Carlo 1968](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Reshevsky.S, AVRO Tournament, The Netherlands 1938](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Smyslov.V, World Championship \(2nd matchgame\), Moscow 1954](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Smyslov.V, World Championship \(2nd matchgame\), Moscow 1958](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Smyslov.V, World Championship \(5th matchgame\), Moscow 1957](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Smyslov.V, World Championship \(6th matchgame\), Moscow 1958](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Szilagyi.G, IBM Tournament, Amsterdam 1966](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Tal.M, World Championship \(11th matchgame\), Moscow 1961](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Tal.M, World Championship \(15th matchgame\), Moscow 1961](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Tal.M, World Championship \(1st matchgame\), Moscow 1961](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Tal.M, World Championship \(3rd matchgame\), Moscow 1961](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Tal.M, World Championship \(7th matchgame\), Moscow 1961](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Tartakower.S, Nottingham 1936](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Vidmar.M, Nottingham 1936](#)
[Botvinnik.M-Yudovich.M, USSR Championship, Leningrad 1933](#)
[Bronstein.D-Botvinnik.M, World Championship \(18th matchgame\), Moscow 1951](#)
[Capablanca.J-Botvinnik.M, Leningrad \(simul\) 1925](#)
[Denker.A-Botvinnik.M, USA vs. USSR radio match 1945](#)
[Keres.P-Botvinnik.M, Chigorin Memorial, Moscow 1947](#)
[Keres.P-Botvinnik.M, USSR Absolute Championship, Leningrad/Moscow 1941](#)
[Keres.P-Botvinnik.M, World Championship Tournament, The Hague/Moscow 1948](#)
[Kotov.A-Botvinnik.M, USSR Championship, Moscow 1944](#)
[Kotov.A-Botvinnik.M, USSR Championship, Moscow 1955](#)
[Littlewood.J-Botvinnik.M, Hastings 1961/62](#)
[Matulovic.M-Botvinnik.M, World vs. USSR match, Belgrade 1970](#)
[Medina Garcia.A-Botvinnik.M, Palma de Mallorca 1967](#)
[Padevsky.N-Botvinnik.M, Alekhine Memorial, Moscow 1956](#)
[Petrosian.T-Botvinnik.M, Training match, Moscow 1952](#)
[Petrosian.T-Botvinnik.M, World Championship \(1st matchgame\), Moscow 1963](#)
[Rabinovich.I-Botvinnik.M, USSR Championship, Moscow 1927](#)
[Reshevsky.S-Botvinnik.M, USA vs. USSR match, Moscow 1946](#)
[Smyslov.V-Botvinnik.M, Training match, Moscow 1952](#)
[Smyslov.V-Botvinnik.M, World Championship \(15th matchgame\), Moscow 1954](#)
[Smyslov.V-Botvinnik.M, World Championship \(1st matchgame\), Moscow 1958](#)
[Tal.M-Botvinnik.M, World Championship \(18th matchgame\), Moscow 1961](#)
[Tal.M-Botvinnik.M, World Championship \(9th matchgame\), Moscow 1960](#)
[Tartakower.S-Botvinnik.M, Staunton Memorial, Groningen 1946](#)
[Uhlmann.W-Botvinnik.M, Munich Olympiad 1958](#)

Table of Contents

[About the Author](#)

[Bibliography](#)

[Introduction](#)

[1 Botvinnik on the Attack](#)

[2 Botvinnik on Defence](#)

[3 Riding the Dynamic Element](#)

[4 Botvinnik on Exploiting Imbalances](#)

[5 Botvinnik on Accumulating Advantages](#)

[6 Botvinnik on Endings](#)

[Index of Opponents](#)

[Alekhine.A-Botvinnik.M, Nottingham 1936](#)

[Averbakh.Y-Botvinnik.M, Training match, Moscow 1956](#)

[Benko.P-Botvinnik.M, Monte Carlo 1968](#)

[Bondarevsky.I-Botvinnik.M, USSR Absolute Championship, Leningrad/Moscow 1941](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Alatortsev.V, Leningrad 1934](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Alatortsev.V, USSR Championship, Moscow 1931](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Alekhine.A, AVRO Tournament, The Netherlands 1938](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Bronstein.D, World Championship \(23rd matchgame\), Moscow 1951](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Bronstein.D, World Championship \(7th matchgame\), Moscow 1951](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Capablanca.J, AVRO Tournament, The Netherlands 1938](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Chekhover.V, Moscow 1935](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Euwe.M, World Championship Tournament, The Hague/Moscow 1948](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Fischer.R, Varna Olympiad 1962](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Flohr.S, Moscow 1936](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Furman.S, Training match, Moscow 1961](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Keres.P, USSR Championship, Moscow 1952](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Keres.P, World Championship Tournament, The Hague/Moscow 1948](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Larsen.B, Palma de Mallorca 1967](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Levenfish.G, USSR Championship, Moscow 1940](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Petrosian.T, World Championship \(14th matchgame\), Moscow 1963](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Portisch.L, Monte Carlo 1968](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Reshevsky.S, AVRO Tournament, The Netherlands 1938](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Smyslov.V, World Championship \(2nd matchgame\), Moscow 1954](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Smyslov.V, World Championship \(2nd matchgame\), Moscow 1958](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Smyslov.V, World Championship \(5th matchgame\), Moscow 1957](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Smyslov.V, World Championship \(6th matchgame\), Moscow 1958](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Szilagyi.G, IBM Tournament, Amsterdam 1966](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Tal.M, World Championship \(11th matchgame\), Moscow 1961](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Tal.M, World Championship \(15th matchgame\), Moscow 1961](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Tal.M, World Championship \(1st matchgame\), Moscow 1961](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Tal.M, World Championship \(3rd matchgame\), Moscow 1961](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Tal.M, World Championship \(7th matchgame\), Moscow 1961](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Tartakower.S, Nottingham 1936](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Vidmar.M, Nottingham 1936](#)

[Botvinnik.M-Yudovich.M, USSR Championship, Leningrad 1933](#)

[Bronstein.D-Botvinnik.M, World Championship \(18th matchgame\), Moscow 1951](#)

[Capablanca.J-Botvinnik.M, Leningrad \(simul\) 1925](#)

[Denker.A-Botvinnik.M, USA vs. USSR radio match 1945](#)

[Keres.P-Botvinnik.M, Chigorin Memorial, Moscow 1947](#)

[Keres.P-Botvinnik.M, USSR Absolute Championship, Leningrad/Moscow 1941](#)

Índice

About the Author	4
Bibliography	6
Introduction	7
1 Botvinnik on the Attack	15
2 Botvinnik on Defence	81
3 Riding the Dynamic Element	127
4 Botvinnik on Exploiting Imbalances	186
5 Botvinnik on Accumulating Advantages	230
6 Botvinnik on Endings	291
Index of Opponents	355
Alekhine.A-Botvinnik.M, Nottingham 1936	131
Averbakh.Y-Botvinnik.M, Training match, Moscow 1956	339
Benko.P-Botvinnik.M, Monte Carlo 1968	120
Bondarevsky.I-Botvinnik.M, USSR Absolute Championship, Leningrad/Moscow 1941	150
Botvinnik.M-Alatortsev.V, Leningrad 1934	28
Botvinnik.M-Alatortsev.V, USSR Championship, Moscow 1931	20
Botvinnik.M-Alekhine.A, AVRO Tournament, The Netherlands 1938	304
Botvinnik.M-Bronstein.D, World Championship (23rd matchgame), Moscow 1951	342
Botvinnik.M-Bronstein.D, World Championship (7th matchgame), Moscow 1951	324
Botvinnik.M-Capablanca.J, AVRO Tournament, The Netherlands 1938	45
Botvinnik.M-Chekhover.V, Moscow 1935	32
Botvinnik.M-Euwe.M, World Championship Tournament, The Hague/Moscow 1948	156
Botvinnik.M-Fischer.R, Varna Olympiad 1962	112
Botvinnik.M-Flohr.S, Moscow 1936	230
Botvinnik.M-Furman.S, Training match, Moscow 1961	255
Botvinnik.M-Keres.P, USSR Championship, Moscow 1952	70
Botvinnik.M-Keres.P, World Championship Tournament, The Hague/Moscow 1948	318
Botvinnik.M-Larsen.B, Palma de Mallorca 1967	281
Botvinnik.M-Levenfish.G, USSR Championship, Moscow 1940	140
Botvinnik.M-Petrosian.T, World Championship (14th matchgame), Moscow 1963	291

Botvinnik.M-Portisch.L, Monte Carlo 1968	75
Botvinnik.M-Reshevsky.S, AVRO Tournament, The Netherlands 1938	135
Botvinnik.M-Smyslov.V, World Championship (2nd matchgame), Moscow 1954	174
Botvinnik.M-Smyslov.V, World Championship (2nd matchgame), Moscow 1958	249
Botvinnik.M-Smyslov.V, World Championship (5th matchgame), Moscow 1957	242
Botvinnik.M-Smyslov.V, World Championship (6th matchgame), Moscow 1958	299
Botvinnik.M-Szilagyi.G, IBM Tournament, Amsterdam 1966	275
Botvinnik.M-Tal.M, World Championship (11th matchgame), Moscow 1961	334
Botvinnik.M-Tal.M, World Championship (15th matchgame), Moscow 1961	259
Botvinnik.M-Tal.M, World Championship (1st matchgame), Moscow 1961	295
Botvinnik.M-Tal.M, World Championship (3rd matchgame), Moscow 1961	205
Botvinnik.M-Tal.M, World Championship (7th matchgame), Moscow 1961	179
Botvinnik.M-Tartakower.S, Nottingham 1936	41
Botvinnik.M-Vidmar.M, Nottingham 1936	127
Botvinnik.M-Yudovich.M, USSR Championship, Leningrad 1933	25
Bronstein.D-Botvinnik.M, World Championship (18th matchgame), Moscow 1951	86
Capablanca.J-Botvinnik.M, Leningrad (simul) 1925	9
Denker.A-Botvinnik.M, USA vs. USSR radio match 1945	53
Keres.P-Botvinnik.M, Chigorin Memorial, Moscow 1947	309
Keres.P-Botvinnik.M, USSR Absolute Championship, Leningrad/Moscow 1941	145