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CARLSEN'S ASSAULT on the THRONE

Kotronias & Logothetis



QUALITY CHESS



Carlsen's Assault on the Throne

By

Vassilios Kotronias & Sotiris Logothetis

Photos by **Anastasiya Karlovich**



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Carlsen's Assault on the Throne

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Key to symbols used

=	with equal chances
?	a weak move
??	a blunder
!	a good move
!!	an excellent move
!?	a move worth considering
?!	a move of doubtful value
#	mate
1–0	White wins
0–1	Black wins
½–½	draw agreed

Time control for London and Chennai

120 minutes for the first 40 moves,
60 minutes for the next 20 moves
then 15 minutes for the rest of the game with an increment
of 30 seconds per move starting at move 61.

Foreword

“This is the beginning of a new era,” Nigel Short tweeted after Game 9 of Magnus’s World Championship match with Vishy Anand. He was a bit early. Magnus still needed half a point to secure the title. Now we can say for sure: a new era has started!

The World Number 1 also being World Champion is significant. Vishy Anand has been a truly worthy champion. And so were Veselin Topalov and Vladimir Kramnik. However, we have been lacking a real king. I grew up with Anatoly Karpov winning almost every tournament he played, and later Garry Kasparov was even more impressive. Now a new king has arrived on the throne. And Magnus has the potential to stay there for decades. We may have witnessed the crowning of the king of our generation.

Magnus has proved he is now the best in the world. Kasparov said recently he couldn’t see any other young contenders. So perhaps the main challenge will simply be handling the situation. The world is at Magnus’s feet. The opportunities are endless. And that’s a scary situation. Magnus has been modeling for the clothing brand G-Star Raw and was nominated as one of the sexiest men in the world by *Cosmopolitan*. *Time Magazine* even had him on the list of the 100 most influential people in the world. What’s next? And how will that affect his chess?

And how will the enormous wealth affect him? I studied sociology for a year a long time ago and I learned the expression *anomie*. This is something that can happen when, for example, you win a huge sum in the lottery. “Normlessness” it is called. What is there left to strive for? Why go to work and actually do anything? Everything has already been achieved.

So there will be challenges ahead, off the board as much as on it. The wolves out there in the wider world may actually be as much of a threat as Kramnik, Aronian and the other chess players.

At *The Norwegian College for Top Athletes*, the school where I work and where Magnus trained for the first ten years of his career, we learn that you have to improve 20 percent every year just to keep up with your rivals. Magnus has spent an enormous amount of time on chess. He is of course a fantastic talent, but it hasn’t come by itself. Explaining everything by just calling him a genius is much too simplistic. He has worked hard, and I am sure he will work just as hard in the future, or perhaps even harder, to maintain his status as Number 1 in the world.

Magnus has already had a revolutionary impact on the level of interest in chess in Norway. It has exploded beyond our wildest dreams. The main TV channel secured the rights to show the games live. Many people laughed at the prospect of a hundred hours of chess on TV. “It’s just two people sitting there thinking, what’s fun about that?” Those critics certainly had to chew their words. It was an enormous success.

During the last game the website of the biggest bank in Norway crashed because so many employees were following Magnus on the net. *VG*, the biggest tabloid and news site in Norway and Magnus’s sponsor, also covered everything in great detail. And all the other newspapers have been writing about chess.

The owner of a chess shop in Norway mentioned his sales had increased eightfold, so TV reporters visited him to report his story! In a monthly kid's tournament we organize, we now have 300 players wishing to enter. Normally there are 30 or 40.

Suddenly chess seems to be the biggest and most popular sport in Norway. Magnus has become a huge hero and the general opinion is that this is the biggest ever achievement in Norwegian sports history. If Magnus can give chess the same boost globally, then we really are talking about a new era. Magnus has the potential to make this a reality. I believe he also has a strong enough back to bear everything that will come with it.

Simen Agdestein

Asker, 26th November 2013



Publisher's Foreword

It has been a dream of ours almost since the inception of Quality Chess to do an “instant” book on the World Championship. It almost happened a few times, but in the end we did not have the nerves for such a colossal undertaking. In 2012 I covered the match between Anand and Gelfand in Moscow for various magazines as a journalist, but I was still overwhelmed by the task of doing a book about it.

It was only in the spring of 2013 when I mentioned this idea to my sometime co-author Nikolaos Ntirlis (Nikos) that the project became real. He talked to our mutual friend Sotiris Logothetis, Tournament Director at the 2011 European Team Championship, several European Club Cup finals and technical manager at the 2013 London Candidates, convinced Sotiris he could do this, and then went back to me, stating: “You have to do the book now.”

Sotiris asked to bring on board Grandmaster Vassilios Kotronias, as the chess expert for the book, sharing in confidence that besides being maybe the greatest Greek chess hero of all time, he was also Sotiris's favourite chess author. As Kotronias and Quality Chess already had a good working relationship, ever since he brutally demolished both John and me over the board (while still in his preparation, but in such obscure lines that his analysis was done before computers), it proved easy to find a common vision: not only should the book be great, it should also be out quickly.

In what follows there is a clear division of labour between Vassilios and Sotiris – Vassilios wrote Part 1 and, in the rest of the book, he analysed and annotated the games, while Sotiris wrote everything else. So when you see a game heading, you can imagine Sotiris stepping aside and Vassilios taking over.

It is not a novel idea to put out a book on the World Championship quickly after the match has finished. Several books were published quickly after the 1972 match, outselling by many thousand percent the great books that were later published by such highly-esteemed chess authors as Larsen, Timman and Gligoric.

With instant access via the Internet, there is no need for us to worry about runaway sales for this book. Still it has been hugely rewarding for us artistically to combine the idea of publishing a good book with the idea of having it out in time for Christmas. With the limited financial rewards chess publishing offers those that cannot stay away from it, it is important to do something fun once in a while.

Quality Chess would like to congratulate Magnus Carlsen on becoming the 16th undisputed World Champion. Despite his big lead in the world rankings at the start of 2013 it was by no means obvious that he would manage to take the title. And as you will see in this book, he very nearly did not.

Jacob Aagaard
Glasgow, 26th November 2013

The publishers would like to thank the following people for their assistance in making this dream a reality:

Vassilios Kotronias, Sotiris Logothetis, Anastasiya Karlovich, Simen Agdestein, Harald Fietz, Barry Adamson, Nikolaos Ntirlis, Matt Read, Tarjei Svensen and Lawrence Trent.

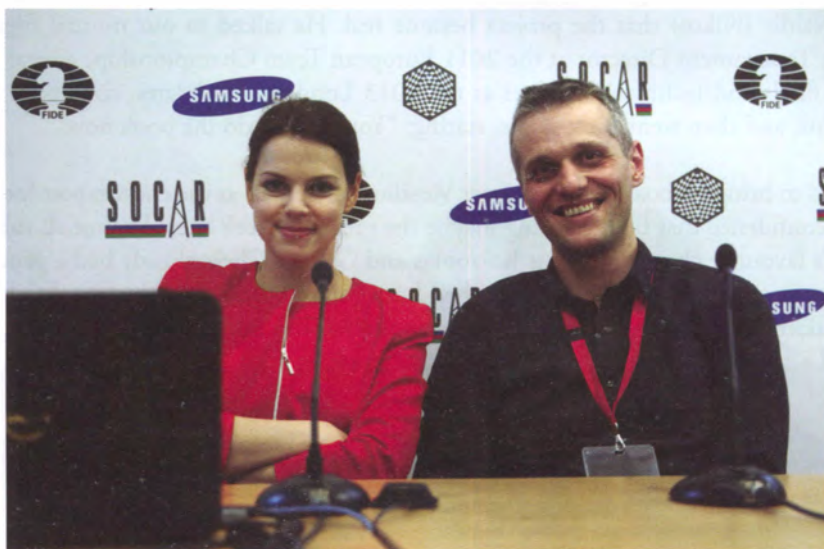
Sotiris would like to thank:

Anastasiya, for everything

Peter Doggers and Lennart Ootes for useful data

Theodoros Theodoulidis for Chennai impressions

And Nikos, who once thanked me for believing in him; it is now time to return the compliment



Vassilios:

I would like to thank Quality Chess for giving me the chance to write about these great players, and Sotiris for a great collaboration.

This book is dedicated to the future generations, including my own children.



Part 1



The Contenders



It seems that the chess world is periodically blessed with charismatic figures, who break all the stereotypes in the process of their ascent, achieve amazing feats, and eventually become the stuff of legends. It is only in this light that one can view the fairytale story of Magnus Carlsen, the 22-year-old Norwegian 'wonderboy' who conquered the world, much like Bobby Fischer and Garry Kasparov had done before him.

Born on November 30th, the same date as your humble author, in the not-so-distant year of 1990, Magnus clearly has no connection with the Cold War that spawned and fuelled so many myths and legends. In a world that is considerably more apolitical, it is difficult to compare his development and rapid rise to the top with that of the two aforementioned great champions. And yet, a simple search on the Internet is enough to reveal the enormous impact this young man has had on chess, at least in the public's perception. Google returns no fewer than twenty million search results connected to his name, as opposed to four million for Kasparov and under two million for Fischer. These numbers alone are a clear indication of Carlsen's worldwide popularity, as well as the public attention he has attracted. And though I am not old enough to have a personal recollection of the period of Fischer's supremacy, judging by the narratives of the times I cannot help but notice the obvious similarities: the little boy from the western world, who quickly became a chess grandmaster without any real help from established training systems or chess politics, who did almost everything on his own, who reached the status of superstar while still a teenager, who rose to the very top of the world rankings and then dominated everything; the boy who brought chess into every home, whose photos and interviews were published in all kinds of newspapers and magazines, who regularly showed up on television, who became a true household name. The boy who captivated the world with his assault on the World Champion's throne.

And then there is the legend of Garry Kasparov, another wunderkind, who fought his way up the ladder in a similar manner, equally spectacularly, and reached the final stage of the World Championship cycle in his very first attempt. The story of Kasparov's eventual ascent to the throne (and his establishment there) remains, to my mind, the most captivating part of modern chess history, in view of the incredible drama, political shenanigans, psychological ordeals, moments of triumph and corresponding failures, espionage, betrayal. In an era when the Cold War was fluctuating between nuclear alert and the eventual demise of the Soviet Union, two very different Soviet citizens went head to head for the title. Kasparov quickly became a legend, not just in his homeland, but in the western world. And while he wasn't the first to capture the throne at his first attempt and while still in his early 20s, he, unlike his predecessor Mikhail Tal, succeeded not only in conquering the greatest heights but also commanding them for fifteen years.

In Person

I vividly remember the first time I saw Magnus Carlsen, during the 2002 World Youth Championships in Crete. Though barely twelve years old, he was already a very decent player and a serious contender for the medals in his age category; during the next year he became an International Master. In an enormous playing hall hosting more than 800 boys (the girls were playing on a different floor) his blonde head clearly stood out by virtue of the determination on his face; this kid was very competitive and he certainly didn't try to hide it. In the end he had to settle for the silver medal, behind Ian Nepomniachtchi, and an old photo in my archives shows



him holding up his medal and feeling very proud of it, although the gold one was well within his reach. I assume he was taking pride in the vindication of his efforts.

I saw him again in December 2003, in a cold and rainy Budapest, when he was already fighting for the grandmaster title. This time I was a player, rather than a tournament official, and we were hosted in the same playing hall for two weeks; an aura of special importance was already building around him back then, not by virtue of some publicity campaign but due to his powerful moves and dashing victories against considerably higher-rated players. Having followed his early career quite carefully, I remember feeling like almost the only one in that playing hall who was really aware of what this kid was capable of; and so I followed his games with interest, secretly hoping he would destroy every single one of his opponents and show them what I already knew. He didn't quite manage that in Budapest, but less than six months later he did become a grandmaster.

Barely two months had passed and I saw him again, in a snowy Moscow, at the imposing "Rossiya" Hotel that once stood between the Kremlin and the river; the annual Aeroflot Open festival was being held, and Magnus was one of the very few invited players – no doubt because of his popularity with the media. Outside the playing hall he seemed somewhat out of place, and I fully understand this: his knowledge of the Russian language was probably even worse than my three words of "dva", "Marlboro" and "lights" (for lack of knowledge, back then, of the word "adin"). The city felt strange, the weather was terrible; but the chess...

That tournament was Carlsen's breakthrough into the world of adult chess: he beat several grandmasters in convincing games, including a massacre of the highly-respected former Candidate Sergei Dolmatov. It was here that he was first noticed by several of his future colleagues, and I recall that he was the topic of discussion everywhere in the venue; no Russian vocabulary was necessary to understand the word "Carlsen".

Our next encounter occurred four years later, in the autumn of 2008: by now he had become a true superstar, constantly haunted by the press – and girls seeking autographs and commemorative photos. As if in full realization of his duty in the popularization of chess, he patiently satisfied all such requests, though his interests clearly lay on the chessboard. In that year's European Club Cup he was heading a very strong Armenian club, even above the local hero Levon Aronian. Having been entrusted with the first board, he obviously felt a responsibility to justify this honour and so he fought valiantly in every game – though not with much success. I recall the last moments of his ill-fated game against Sergei Movsesian: trying hard for a very long time to extract something out of nothing, he finally seemed to be getting close to his goal, but Sergei, who always has a smile on his face and is another devoted Manchester United fan, was defending very well and rebuffing all attacks on his position. Refusing to give up, Magnus kept trying everything – until a simple one-move blunder turned the tables completely; without flinching, he executed his next move and then, upon his opponent's reply, resigned, without any public expression of frustration, and left the board so quietly that some onlookers, unable to see the board and judging only by his expression, thought the game had been drawn.

Our paths crossed once again in the Dresden Olympiad, shortly after the European Club Cup, with Carlsen heading the Norwegian team for the third consecutive time. He seemed to feel at ease in this environment and played a number of good games, but I especially cherish the memory of him closely following one of Peter Heine Nielsen's games, in which the Danish grandmaster had introduced a quite unexpected 8.g4!? novelty against the Tartakower variation of the Queen's Gambit Declined; Carlsen's expression upon seeing the move on the board was worth

the risk of playing this move alone. A smile betraying both amusement and approval appeared on his face and he seemed to welcome this novel approach to generate play against an opening that served so many world champions.

A Prodigy

The early stages of Carlsen's chess career have been covered elsewhere in great detail, by people much better suited than the authors of this book. As a brief summary of his earlier years, we may mention that Magnus showed signs of extraordinary intelligence from a very young age, though this initially was directed towards activities other than chess. He was taught how to play by his father, a very decent player in his own right, but didn't display any real interest in the game until a few years later. Very soon his talent became obvious, and a frantic career thus began, with the Carlsens (father, mother and three sisters) travelling all around the world to further this career (and harvesting the immense educational benefits of travelling as well – it seems to me that they had already discovered the meaning of life back then). Indeed, his family has been incredibly supportive of Magnus throughout, and it must have been a psychologically difficult moment for him when, in the sixth round of the Smartfish Masters event in 2007, at a time when he was already a world championship candidate, he was paired against his father; it's not easy to tell if Magnus tried his best in this particular game, as he usually does, but Henrik Carlsen's solid and correct play didn't leave much room for fireworks, making Magnus's win in the game appear more diplomatic than it probably was.



Child prodigies usually emerge in countries where chess is firmly established in the collective mind and a certain structure is in place to aid the development of chess talent – think of former states of the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia, for example. Norway, a Nordic country with a rather small and not so well developed chess community (no doubt due to the fact that chess is usually not played on ice or snow) is an unlikely home to the world's greatest chess talent. True, there are several titled players in Norway, headed by grandmaster Simen Agdestein, a talented player who became a grandmaster at the young age of 18 and eventually reached top-ten status, while at the same time pursuing a football career; this same Agdestein was to be the experienced head behind the coaching of the young Magnus Carlsen, first through Torbjørn Ringdal Hansen and then directly.



Chess life in Norway had been a moderate affair: a long series of events in Gausdal had become firmly ensconced in the tournament calendar, but not much else was there at international level. Such circumstances require, on the part of the young and upcoming player, a lot of personal work – and the necessary motivation and self-discipline, which is certainly not a given with young children. But Magnus seemed infatuated with the game.

His first steps in international chess clearly betrayed his passion for chess literature. You could see it in his openings, if you compared his constantly-expanding tastes with the publication schedules of the major chess publishers: as soon as a popular opening book would come out, soon afterwards Magnus would be playing the opening in question. Family stories confirm that Magnus was a true book lover, consuming them in bulk, even using a separate dining table from the rest of the family so as not to interrupt his reading – it seems this is a common trait among those born on the 30th of November. Such intensive study, coupled with an equally intense tournament schedule, can be a powerful development tool; in fact, I believe that this intensive and broad relationship Magnus had with chess literature at such a young age greatly contributed to the development of his unique chess style and especially his ability to play well in almost any kind of position. This is not hard to understand: just like people who grow up with the Sicilian Dragon lose their respect for the relative value of rooks (and give up the exchange on every occasion, even away from c3), or French Defence lovers often refuse to appreciate the benefits of a space advantage, a player exposed to a large variety of position types (and corresponding openings) during his teething years is bound to acquire a better feeling for handling these.

Evolution

Carlsen was not always the strategical fighter and endgame grinder that he is today. In his childhood he was more of a tactical monster, using sharp openings and his excellent calculation skills to score crushing defeats. The transition to his current playing style was gradual and was probably necessitated by the higher levels of opposition he was facing. Here is a typical example from that earlier period, with my esteemed co-author sharing a personal experience:

Magnus Carlsen – Vassilios Kotronias

Calvia Olympiad, 26th October 2004

Not so long ago (but it already feels like a fairytale lost in the mists of time) I was walking in a sunny park on an exotic island; I was trying to collect my thoughts as I had a difficult game to play in the afternoon, when I saw a tall man coming towards me. It was former World Championship Candidate Simen Agdestein, who was at the time playing on the second board of the Norwegian team. The place was Calvia, Spain, the event the World Chess Olympiad.

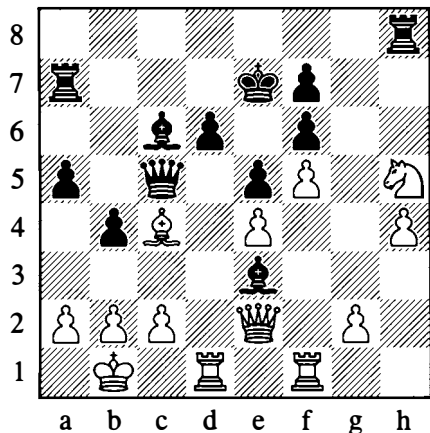
After we greeted each other, Simen asked me the question that I was afraid he would ask: ‘What do you think of the kid?’ The “kid” he was referring to was Magnus Carlsen, his trainee and already the first board of the Norwegian team. The reason for asking was my game with Magnus on the previous day, when I had narrowly managed to escape defeat.

After a pause of a few moments, I said: ‘He played quite well, but why on earth didn’t he take a moment to stop my counterplay first?’ For those who do not know what I am talking about, “counterplay” is an annoying little beast that almost always appears when you get a winning position; in today’s world, where no one ever gives you anything for free, it is the favourite pet of every player who respects himself. When you think the moment has come to resign, it keeps nudging you, telling you “DON’T!”

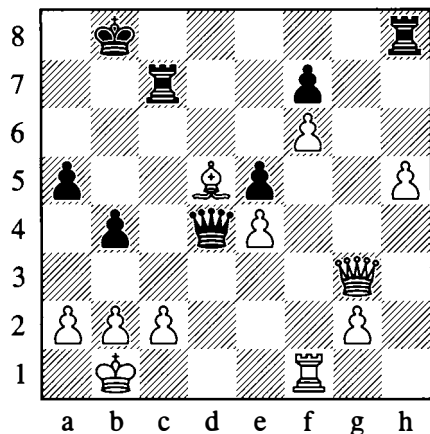
My own little beast had nudged me on the previous day during the apparently hopeless task I was facing after White’s brilliant sacrifice on the 22nd move:

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6
5.♘c3 d6 6.♙g5 e6 7.♚d2 a6 8.0-0 ♙d7
9.f4 b5 10.♙xf6 gxf6 11.♙b1 ♚b6 12.♘xc6
♙xc6 13.f5 ♚c5 14.♙d3 ♙a7 15.♙hf1 b4
16.♘e2 e5 17.♘g3 h5 18.h4 ♙e7 19.♚e2
a5 20.♙c4 ♙h6 21.♘xh5 ♙e3





22. ♖xf6!! ♕xf6 23. ♝xd6† ♕e7 24. ♝xc6
 ♜xc6 25. ♜xe3 ♝c7 26. f6† ♕d8 27. ♜d3†
 ♕c8 28. ♙d5 ♜b6 29. ♜g3 ♜d4 30. h5 ♕b8



31. h6?

This move is rash, endangering the precious pawn's life. I would have preferred 31. a4!, stopping all counterplay first, and winning.

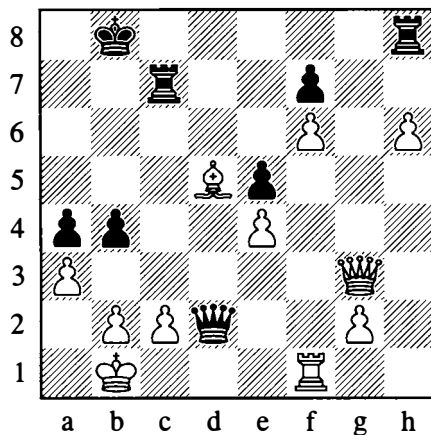
31... a4?

My mind was solely intent on preventing White's a2-a4, so I overlooked 31... ♜c5!, which would have given me some hope.

32. a3

Now White is back on the winning track again.

32... ♜d2



33. axb4??

The miracle happens.

33. ♝c1 would have won trivially. Why not protect c2 when it's the only weakness in the white camp? Probably Magnus was afraid of 33... b3, but after 34. c4 Black cannot play 34... ♜xh6 in view of 35. ♜f2!, so I might as well give up.

33... ♜xc2† 34. ♕a1 a3! 35. bxa3 ♝xh6
 36. ♜xe5 ♜d3!

Suddenly it's a draw.

37. ♜e8† ♝c8 38. ♜e5† ♝c7 39. ♜e8† ♝c8
 40. ♜e5†

½-½

Since that time, the kid has been forged through steel and fire, turning such accidents into a rarity in his tournament practice. I am sure he worked hard to eliminate this defect – the loss of control in winning positions – with all his prominent trainers. Nowadays, precision in exploiting even the slightest advantage is one of his trademarks.

The evolution of Carlsen's style was a gradual process, most likely prompted by his foray into top-level chess, where the demands imposed on the players are much different than those he had been used to. First of all, his opening erudition proved to be inadequate for competition at this level, where the opponents have years of experience (and loads of analysis by themselves and their helpers) in their favourite openings; it started proving impossible to obtain opening advantages with White, and the games with Black often turned into ordeals. Without a trainer specializing in opening theory, or an extensive collaboration with his peers on this subject, this prompted a gradual switch to less theoretical systems, where he could at least avoid opening disasters, and with it came a reassessment of his priorities: he would now have to rely more on middlegame strategy and endgame technique. Thanks to his extensive studying during his childhood, he at least had decent knowledge of pretty much every major opening, and this allowed him to easily jump from one to another, turning him into a moving target that was difficult to hit, and thus compensating for his inadequate theoretical preparation.

His games slowly began turning into longer affairs, often decided in their later stages, and it became evident that his main virtues were well suited to such an approach: his determination and great energy enabled him to fight on for hours, without lapses in concentration and the mistakes that come as a consequence, and he would often be the recipient of serious errors by his tired opponents. He would often be compared with Anatoly Karpov, a great master in exploiting minute advantages through patient purposeful play and accuracy in simplified positions. He acquired the reputation of a player who won his games through tenacity and endurance, and in turn this reputation began to instil fear in his opponents, who would often self-destruct in an effort to avoid a long and arduous defence. Of course, his tactical expertise was a great help in this endeavour: endgame technique is about, above all, accurate tactics and Magnus always had a keen eye for tactical opportunities. By amassing experience at the top level, he also improved his playing rhythm and he would no longer overlook strong prophylactic moves while focused on concrete action.

Kasparov

In 2009 Magnus was an established member of the elite, with a sky-high rating, and it was considered to be only a matter of time before he would become World Number 1 – and then World Champion. At this point he embarked on a collaboration with Garry Kasparov; the thirteenth World Champion had often hinted he was interested in such a venture, and now the considerable amount of money involved had been found. The fruit of working with the world's best ever player, as many consider Kasparov to be, showed almost immediately: a completely refreshed Carlsen showed up in the Nanjing tournament in October, with new (and very sharp) openings, and swept the field on his way to a remarkable tournament victory; his excellent performance won him enough rating points to catapult him into the coveted first place in the rankings, at the age of 19.

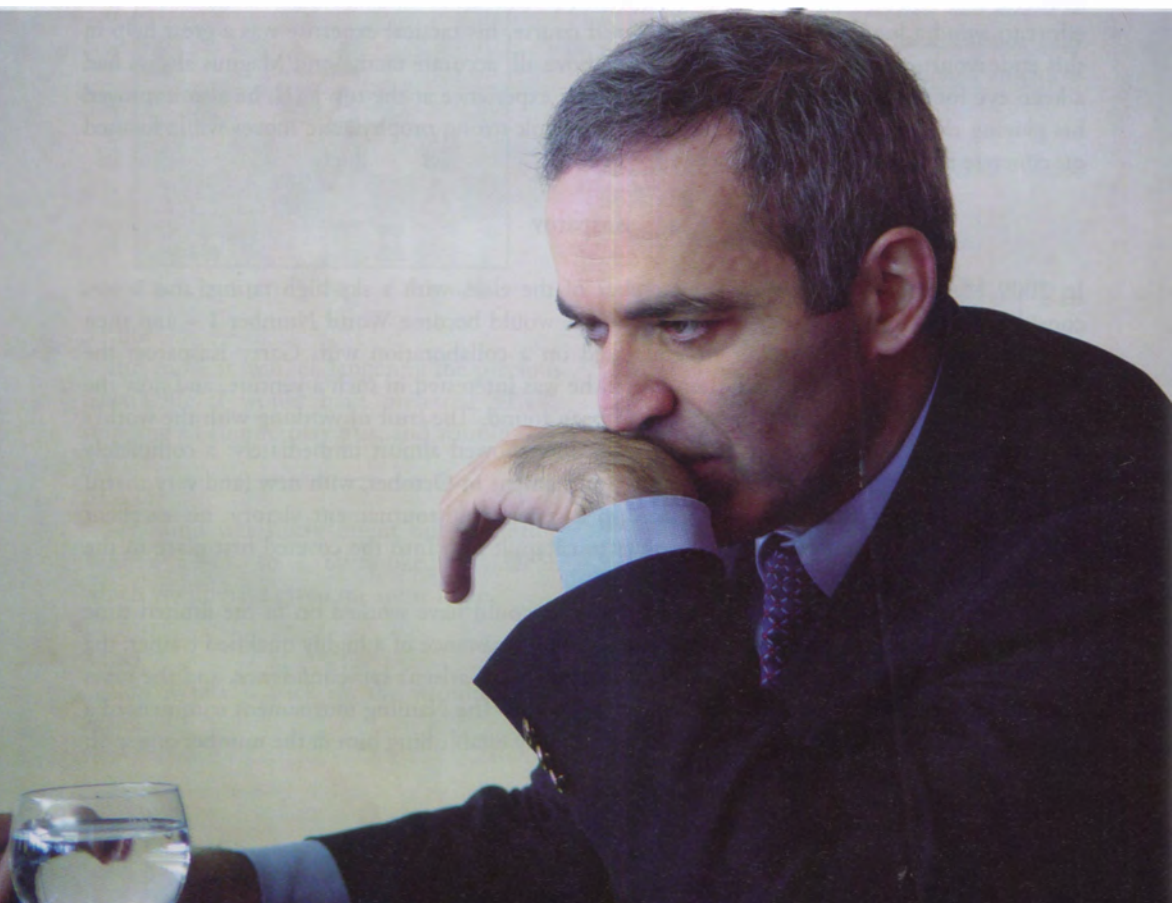
Of course, there was only so much that the duo could have worked on in the limited time since the start of their joint training sessions; but the assistance of a highly qualified trainer, the best player in the world, had surely worked wonders for Carlsen's self-confidence, and the news of their collaboration had visibly shaken his opponents. The Nanjing tournament commenced a fantastic rise in his rating (and his playing level), firmly establishing him in the number one spot;

after a short period of falling from that peak, he quickly reclaimed it and has been the undisputed leader for over two years.

Working with such a tremendous analyst and theoretician as Kasparov helped Magnus improve his openings; he now had a wide array of dangerous opening ideas at his disposal, plus excellent advice on even the most complex ones. Some of them he didn't feel at home with; after a few quite successful experiments with the Sicilian Najdorf, he nevertheless decided to set it aside. But others stuck, such as the Grünfeld Defence and the Scotch, and overall it was now much more difficult for his opponents to put their fingers on a weak spot in this area.

His play also became more concrete under the influence of Kasparov, whose chess philosophy was always centred on finding the very best move in any given position. In general, Kasparov's approach to chess was quite different than that of Magnus, who always was a more practical player; but working with Garry enabled him to make his style more universal and improve his skills in dynamic play. Needless to say, Kasparov's general advice also proved extremely valuable, tuning him into the top players' way of thinking, both on and off the board. In a sense, he was acquiring valuable experience at lightning speed.

However, it wasn't all roses: it is well known that Kasparov has a very strong personality, and this aspect didn't blend well with Carlsen's more relaxed attitude. When at some point Garry's pressure became unbearable, Magnus decided to end the relationship on the spot; it turned out that Kasparov's personal ambitions were often seeking fulfilment through him, and this was more



than Magnus could handle. Still, the divorce was on friendly terms and both sides left open the possibility of working together again in the future.

With Garry out of the picture, Magnus slowly reverted to less critical opening systems, but it is clear from his handling of them that he had spent a lot of time and effort in researching them. This wasn't so easy for the public to realize: Magnus would often be accused of laziness in studying openings; a simple dissection of such a statement, accusing the World Number 1 of being too lazy to study theory, clearly displays its absurdity. What was happening instead was the development of a clever practical repertoire, perhaps less threatening in theory but certainly venomous in practice. Magnus fully realized the exertions necessary to maintain a high-class sharp theoretical repertoire, in the style of Kasparov, and had decided against this approach – unlike some of his peers, like Sergey Karjakin. Instead, he preferred to devote his time to less deeply researched opening set-ups, which however offered realistic chances of obtaining some advantage in practice; not ideally suited for everyday use, but also less demanding in their preparation in the first place.

Moreover, a study of his games also shows his periodical studying of various typical pawn structures; this would be accompanied with the introduction, in his repertoire, of opening lines leading to these structures. In short, what often comes off as a lazy attitude to the problems of opening theory is, in fact, a deeply thought-out practical approach that is well suited to this particular player.

Draws in Chess

Fischer's ranting about the many quick draws in Curacao 1962 may seem like irrefutable evidence of collusion if seen with modern eyes, but back then such draws were quite normal. With tournaments often lasting a few weeks and usually including several weaker players in the mix, the strongest grandmasters would often avoid entering tiresome and complicated battles when playing each other, instead focusing on decimating the lower end of the field. Let's not forget that in those days the time control was much slower and adjournments were the norm rather than the exception. This was as much a 'professional' approach as it was self-preservation instinct, and it didn't necessarily have to be the result of a pre-game arrangement.

The circumstances under which top-level chess was played in those days also encouraged such an approach. The two most important events were world championship cycles and Soviet championships, both of which consisted mainly of long and large qualifying tournaments, where the primary aim was not to win outright, but merely to advance to the next stage. Players got accustomed to playing not to prove they were the best, but merely to perform well enough to qualify for the next stage. In addition, the main attraction of other top tournaments was the number and level of the Soviet participants. The players in question, taking advantage of a rare chance to cross the Iron Curtain, were hardly in the mood to fight with their compatriots; besides, they had to make sure the main purpose of their trip would be fulfilled: the winner had to be Soviet. In view of all this, it seemed only natural that several quick draws were registered between the favourites in practically every event, with only a handful of games providing the decisive results that determined the eventual winner.

Bobby Fischer's contribution in this respect was enormous. Never missing a chance to express his aversion to short draws (and draws in general), he would almost invariably refuse draw offers

if there was even the slightest semblance of play left in the position. Glued to the board for virtually the entire game, he would never stop seeking chances to win; unlike his rivals, Fischer wasn't interested in merely being 'good enough'. This is not to say that he played recklessly: on the contrary, a hallmark of his style was his adherence to principles and his quest for absolute objectivity. He wasn't the type of player who would knowingly play an inferior move just to avoid drawish simplification – he always sought to play the best move possible. Unlike most other top players of that era, however, Fischer he would not curtail the game just because the position was equal and the likelihood of his opponent making a mistake was small; rather, he would just keep playing until the final result was clear beyond any reasonable doubt. Fischer's robust, uncompromising attitude was evident in many aspects of his life, but its chess manifestation made him a formidable opponent for everyone: they knew they couldn't hope for an easy way out, and that they would have to exert themselves. Unaccustomed to this type of pressure, his opponents would often succumb, adding fuel to the Fischer myth that mesmerized the chess world of those times.

The same pacifist attitude was also prevalent when Garry Kasparov was making his ascent of the world rankings. After all, Fischer's impact had been relatively short-lived, in view of his complete absence from tournament play after the legendary match of 1972. The reign of Anatoly Karpov also played a role: a fantastic player, but above all a cold-blooded competitor, Karpov was focused on one thing: winning. Not every single game, like Fischer, but rather tournaments and titles. Blessed with a pragmatic mind and an excellent feeling for the opponent's moment of weakness, Karpov would adjust his chess personality to the demands of the situation and subordinate all his emotions to the main cause. He sought to achieve his aim in the most efficient way, involving the minimum expenditure of energy. His instinctive grasp of such things made him ideally suited for any kind of gaming competition, which is corroborated by many sources of the time. Thus, the twelfth world champion was not averse to quick draws if he believed they served his primary objective of winning the tournament. In fact, realizing his clear superiority over his contemporaries and the stability in his play, Karpov understood that he could win virtually every tournament he entered with a relatively modest plus score, while his rivals would often beat each other and fall behind. And so, the mid-to-late 70s and early 80s saw what was perhaps the most pacifist period in the history of top-level chess.

Garry Kasparov's attitude was closer to that of Fischer. Spurred by the ambition and energy of youth, he sought to engage his opponents in battle at all costs, allowing easy draws only in rare situations dictated by his competitive aims. Unlike Fischer though, Kasparov would not just show up, play the best moves and just keep going. Rather, from the very start of the game he would invite as many complications as possible, in a way that arguably no other player, with the exception of Mikhail Tal, had done before him. Kasparov's success was partly due to his sheer calculating ability, but was also greatly aided by his immense efforts in the field of opening preparation. Tremendous work, as measured both in units of time and of energy, facilitated his adoption of the most complex opening schemes available. Such an approach would unavoidably take a toll on the great man himself, and I was personally not surprised when he announced his retirement in 2005. For Kasparov it has always been everything or nothing, and no compromise between his chess philosophy and the practical deterrents of age could ever possibly be reached.

'Death by draw' seemed to be making a comeback already before Kasparov's retirement, but this time it came from an entirely different direction. The explosion in opening research, as championed by Kasparov, was soon injected with a dose of rocket fuel, in the form of several extremely strong computer programs. It could even be argued that the obviously fertile ground of opening analysis was the main motivation behind the developers of these programs.

With the advent of the computer era, deep opening preparation soon spread to the masses: the software was cheap and at the same time incredibly strong. It became easy for any conscientious player to collect information, organize it in a suitable way, study it and analyse it deeply, with a level of precision surpassing that of any human player. It wasn't long before even amateur players knew more opening theory than the grandmasters of the recent past. They may not have understood exactly what was going on, but they knew it by heart and this was often enough. As a consequence, analysis of the most fashionable openings went deeper and deeper; soon, entire games would be the fruit of home preparation, and there appeared the phenomenon of 30- or 40-move affairs blitzed out in half an hour (and concluding with a draw), without either player creating anything at the board. This time the draws were coming not because of a lack of fighting spirit, but because by the time players started thinking, there was virtually nothing left to try. Many games were played that looked incredibly complicated and spectacular to the untrained eye; but the more experienced observer could understand that the outcome was already decided back at home – in the quiet of the players' study, as Botvinnik would say. The Kramnik – Leko match of 2004 is one high-profile example of what has been discussed. Since then, of course, computers have become more powerful and playing engines ever-more sophisticated.

In Magnus Carlsen, one can see the natural product of evolution. Stylistically, his approach could be described as a well-balanced mixture of Fischer and Karpov. His pure chess style is





perhaps closer to the latter: he is pragmatic and doesn't necessarily pursue clarity and objectivity, instead seeking practical chances at every opportunity. He excels in quiet strategic battles and has outstanding technique.

Like Karpov, Carlsen's desire to win is his main driving force, but his competitive attitude is much closer to Fischer's: he almost never agrees to early draws and will fight long and hard against anyone, with no ceasefire until the ammunition has been exhausted. He adapts his style depending on the opponent, but generally prefers to avoid irrational complications and ultra-dynamic play, probably because he understands his superiority over his opponents and fears that the wildness and unpredictability of such positions only improves their chances against him. Instead Magnus will keep playing for as long as it takes, ready to pounce on any mistake; his well-developed feeling for piece placement and his sharp tactical eye ensure that the danger of this approach backfiring on him is miniscule. Apart from his pure chess abilities, his determination, perseverance and devotion to the cause are the qualities that set him apart from his rivals and make him such an unpleasant opponent to face across the board.

Carlsen's Strengths

Carlsen's fighting spirit, energy and desire to win are perfectly complemented by his awe-inspiring technique. It is difficult to define this term precisely; the concept of technique can be represented in the accurate conversion of a favourable endgame, or the unshakeable defence of an inferior position, or the gradual and successful exploitation of a weakness in the opponent's camp.

Technique can be identified and admired, but it cannot be codified; therefore it may be interpreted in many different ways. If we attempt a more detailed definition of technique, at least as it applies to Carlsen, we can quickly draw up a list of attributes that combine to form something greater than the sum of the parts:

- He spots and takes advantage of any chance that comes his way, exploiting virtually all of his opponents' inaccuracies.
- He has a thorough knowledge of endgame theory and will usually convert a winning endgame without errors.
- He has a well-developed sense of where the pieces are optimally placed and fully functional.
- He is skilled in establishing coordination between his pieces and pawns.
- He seldom makes errors.
- He can quickly and efficiently draw up a plan, whether short- or long-term.
- He has a keen sense of danger which enables him to judge the level of risk admissible in a given position.

All these attributes help to explain the uniqueness of Carlsen's performances, compared to the other top players of our era: *Magnus never plays badly*. His games don't always dazzle, to be sure, but he never plays truly badly. His tournament results are irrefutable evidence of this: aside from his many victories, he almost never finishes below third place. No matter what, he will always be on a plus score and will rarely lose a game; even when he is out of form, his defensive skills remain intact. Factor in his great energy reserves and his burning ambition, and you have before you the ultimate chess warrior; perhaps not the ultimate chess player in the scientific way of seeing things, but the ultimate practical player indeed.

Media

As if his already impressive career wasn't enough, Carlsen's ascent to the number-one spot in the world rankings catapulted his fame and turned him into a superstar. The media had for years been interested in this special boy who excelled in a world dominated by adults, and the fairytale of the young prodigy provoked unceasing attention. Sponsors were not long in coming – and not only in his homeland. By the time he became number one, and recognized (unofficially at least) as the best player on the planet, the media world was feasting. Carlsen's appearances became major media events, attracting large crowds and countless cameras.

His management team deserves credit for handling this mayhem, for they succeeded in protecting his image and avoiding overexposure, while at the same time cashing in on his recognisability and popularity. Magnus became the face of Dutch denim company G-Star Raw, heading their 2010 campaign along with Liv Tyler, Hollywood actress (and daughter of Aerosmith front man Steven Tyler). Magnus's face was everywhere, from clothes outlets to public buses to fashion magazines.

Wary of the deceptive power of media reports, I didn't fully realize the extent of Carlsen's fame until November 2010, during the chilly evening of that fine American institution known as Black Friday. While strolling on the streets of the Lower East Side of Manhattan with a chess-playing friend of mine, I entered the G-Star Raw store. Under the watchful eye of a salesman, I pointed out Magnus's posters on the walls to my friend and, when I tried on a jacket intended for her brother (we have a similar build), the salesman, amazed to hear that I had personally met and even spoken to "their boy, Magnus", offered me a 20% discount. I liked the jacket, so I accepted the offer and bought it for myself! It was at that moment when I finally understood the market value that Magnus represented, not only for my own pocket but for chess as well.

Since then, of course, the world has become even more Carlsen-crazy. As the successes and records kept coming, his fame has grown still further, drawing more and more sponsors. Interviews, television shows (including that most enjoyable staple of American TV, *The Colbert Report*), photo shoots, catwalk appearances – Magnus truly has become a worldwide celebrity. Carlsenmania, especially in the western press, was slowly but surely surpassing that around the Cold War icon that Bobby Fischer represented. All this exposure occasionally prompted concern over his varied and seemingly endless media activities; any relative tournament failure would be attributed to his lack of focus on pure chess matters, and a mediocre showing in the 2010 Olympiad seemed to vindicate these assumptions. However, a quick return to form and numerous subsequent successes quickly dispelled this argument and made it clear that the Olympiad in question was no more than a temporary, isolated dip.

World Championship Cycle

With Magnus firmly established in the coveted number-one spot in the world rankings, the next and final step to his ascent was believed to be the capture of the World Champion title. It was therefore with widespread amazement that the world learned of his decision to abstain from the Candidates matches leading up to the 2012 World Championship match. Though Magnus had taken part in the qualifying process twice before – both times being knocked out by Levon

Aronian in rapid tie-breaks – the 2011 Candidates matches would have been considered his first serious (and likely successful) assault on the throne. In 2004 he was merely a freshly-minted, young and inexperienced grandmaster, but in 2007 he was breaking into the top echelons and had really given Aronian a run for his money. Four years later, he was the world's highest-rated player and would have been the clear favourite.

It remains unclear why Magnus decided against his participation back then; it seemed illogical, even more so since this would be his last chance to break one of Kasparov's records, that of the youngest world champion ever. Magnus himself stated the confusing and absurd structure of the qualifying process as the main reason for his withdrawal; he indicated his clear preference for a Candidates tournament instead of several short knockout matches. Nevertheless, it is hard to accept that mere dissatisfaction with the process could have been sufficient a reason for bowing out of the cycle.

Several other arguments were put forth by esteemed members of the chess community: perhaps he wasn't feeling ready for such a steep climb; perhaps the fear of failure was too oppressive; perhaps he didn't want to jeopardize his reputation as the world's best player at a time when he hadn't yet fully settled in his new role.

Whatever the exact combination of reasons, the choice of format must have been a significant factor. Carlsen's style was better suited to a round-robin tournament than to a knockout series of short matches, and he would have had to win three of those in order to qualify for the championship match. The feeling remained that he wasn't going to undertake this colossal venture until he was fully armed and ready. As if to corroborate his doubts, the 2011 Candidates matches spawned an unlikely (though of course fully deserved) winner in the face of Boris Gelfand, who went on to contest a close match with Anand in Moscow the next year; Boris narrowly went down in the rapid tie-breaks.

On New Year's Day of 2013 Magnus became the highest-rated player in the history of chess. A dominant showing at the London Chess Classic propelled him to the lofty figure of 2861, surpassing Kasparov's previous record of 2851. A further successful performance in Wijk aan Zee in January pushed him all the way up to 2872. Slight adjustments followed in subsequent months, leaving him currently rated at 2870, a stratospheric figure within striking distance of the mythical 2900 barrier. With his tournament dominance unchallenged and nothing else to prove, the time was ripe for Magnus to finally compete for the title of World Champion.

The course of events in Magnus's career closely resembles that of Bobby Fischer's. The American had abstained from one cycle and withdrawn from another, before returning to seize the number one spot and forcing his way through to the world championship match. That remarkable journey, which started with an ordinary Interzonal tournament in Palma de Mallorca, before erupting in a series of crushing match wins against Taimanov, Larsen and Petrosian, has truly become the stuff of legends. Its culmination, the dramatic 1972 match in Reykjavik against the incumbent Boris Spassky, became the spark that ignited an incredible chess boom all over the world. It is not without reason that even today, more than forty years later, stories and myths surrounding that historic encounter between the Soviet champion and his solitary American challenger continue to resonate with people around the world.

Qualification

With Magnus having established his place atop the world rankings, the only remaining step to assure his complete dominance was an assault on the world championship throne. By 2012, several of his desired changes to the world championship cycle had been implemented by FIDE, most importantly the switch to a round-robin Candidates tournament instead of matches. Finally, after several years of disputes and controversy, the cycle had settled on a clear and stable format encompassing a two-year period. A series of Grand Prix tournaments and a biennial World Cup would offer qualifying places to the Candidates tournament. The loser of the latest world championship match would be guaranteed a place, as would the highest-rated players on the list not to have already qualified.

Exceptionally, it was decided that three world championship matches would be held between 2012 and 2014, in order to streamline the transition to the new format, before settling on a biennial schedule. This new structure seemed to satisfy Magnus, who went on to announce his participation in the cycle culminating in 2013. Needless to say, this announcement created a media frenzy, adding special importance to the cycle already in progress. Of course, by virtue of his permanent possession of the number one rating spot, Magnus would not need to go through the lengthy qualifying process; his predecessors, including Fischer and Kasparov, had been less lucky. Assured of a place in the Candidates tournament scheduled for early 2013, he could focus on his aim and prepare accordingly.

Viswanathan Anand

The greatest obstacle standing in Carlsen's path was, of course, the reigning World Champion Anand. The Indian, already in his fifth decade of life, had held the title continuously since his convincing victory in the Mexico City World Championship tournament of 2007, a year that may signify the beginning of the second part of his illustrious career. In fact, his world championship trials began as early as 1990, when a comfortable qualification from the Manila Interzonal took him to the Candidates matches, where he competed for the right to an eventual championship match against Kasparov, scheduled for 1993. Anand easily dispatched of the young Russian grandmaster Alexei Dreev, but then ran into former world champion Anatoly Karpov. Despite being considered a clear underdog, Anand dominated most of the match, but missed several chances to cement the impending upset and eventually went down in the final game. Although he failed to achieve what his friend Nigel Short did later in the cycle, Anand's performance against Karpov, along with his numerous successes in top-level tournaments of the time, firmly ensconced him in the world elite, where he still resides.

The schism of 1993 resulted in two separate world championship cycles, one organized by FIDE (with Karpov waiting at the end of the marathon) and one by the Professional Chess Association (PCA), with Kasparov as the title-holder. Anand joined both cycles. In the FIDE one he had to bow out to Gata Kamsky, but he exacted revenge against the same player in the PCA cycle, earning the right to a match against Kasparov. This match signified the conquering of new heights for the talented Indian, both metaphorically and literally: it took place on the 107th floor of the south tower of the World Trade Center (which, tragically, no longer exists) in New York. Anand

prepared diligently for that match and stood his ground for quite a while, even gaining the lead with a win in the 9th game. However, a couple of opening disasters, combined with an evident loss of self-assurance, eventually led to his demise in the second half of the match. Evidently, in his first world championship match he was not quite ready to tackle the titan of a player that Kasparov was. Further events led to the dissolution of the PCA and Anand rejected participation in future cycles organized by Kasparov's various ventures.

FIDE completely changed the nature of the world championship cycle after 1996, switching to a 128-player knockout format; this decision created great controversy and arguably devalued the world champion's title by reducing the entire cycle to a relatively random series of two-game matches with rapid and blitz tie-breaks. The very first incarnation of this system had another debatable aspect: the winner of the knockout phase would have to play the reigning FIDE World Champion, Karpov, in a six-game match for the title. Anand gradually made his way through the various obstacles and reached that final match, but all the odds were against him: he had to play a rested and prepared Karpov right after a gruelling month of constant fighting on the chessboard, with his reserves of both energy and opening novelties severely depleted. The mere fact that he fought his way to a tie (and to the rapid tie-breaks) was an amazing feat, but on the final day he could no longer muster any strength and lost the rapids. Karpov tried to justify his excessive privileges by claiming that being warmed up by the knockout was an advantage, but the subsequent decision by FIDE to abolish this system speaks volumes about its merits in the first place.

Anand skipped the 1999 knockout in Las Vegas but returned for the next year's edition, which took place in New Delhi, the capital of his homeland. The local fans were not disappointed, as Anand once again convincingly reached the final. This time the match would be played on equal terms, against the other remaining survivor of the knockout event, Alexei Shirov. For this final match the entire circus moved to Teheran – not the most obvious of locations, but Anand did not seem perturbed, winning the match convincingly to become FIDE World Champion.

While the significance of Anand's title – obtained via the knockout format without the participation of Kasparov or Kramnik – has been debated, one can only admire Vishy's consistency; fighting your way through a whole month's worth of short matches is no easy feat. A year later in Moscow, Anand had to surrender this title, losing in the semi-final against Vassily Ivanchuk (who, in turn, lost the final to Ruslan Ponomarev). This would be his last participation in the knockout events, and for some years he showed no interest in contesting any of the cycles in place, instead focusing on top-level tournaments and a quest to occupy the number-one spot in the rating list. This lack of interest on Anand's part serves, in my mind, as a clear indication of how disastrous FIDE's approach to the world championship was at the time. As for Anand, he finally did reach the top spot of the rating list in 2005, after Kasparov's retirement from competitive chess, and would go on to spend a total of twenty-one months there, in several brief spells.

In 2005 FIDE commenced the process of merging the two world championship cycles and finally putting an end to the chaos. The first step was a world championship tournament held in San Luis, Argentina, the winner of which would be crowned as FIDE World Champion and go on to



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play a unification match against Vladimir Kramnik. Anand's interest in the cycle was immediately rekindled and he readily agreed to participate in San Luis; with Kasparov gone, he was the obvious favourite. He played quite well in Argentina, but his quest was derailed by Topalov's devilish form; the Bulgarian won six of his first seven games and left no doubt as to who would be the eventual winner. Anand's play slumped towards the end, no doubt due to indifference. Topalov lost a controversial match to Kramnik in 2006, leaving Kramnik as the first undisputed world champion since 1993.

Then came Anand's finest hour: the 2007 Mexico City event, with Kramnik's participation, would determine the world champion and Vishy did not let the opportunity pass. With excellent preparation and determined play, he overpowered the field and convincingly claimed the throne, with Kramnik a distant second. This was followed by a match next year, in "a small town in Germany", as John le Carré dubbed Bonn in one of his novels, against Kramnik. This resulted in another brilliant performance by the Indian, who achieved a comprehensive victory in the field of opening preparation and in overall play, firmly establishing him as the undisputed world champion and essentially commencing the reign that would last until the present day. While it is hard, of course, to single out individual moments in such a long and successful career as Anand's, I believe that the 2007 tournament and 2008 match represent his best competitive achievements, both in pure chess terms and in the competitive sense. Anand had proved his superiority over the top players in the world, in both tournament and match formats.

In 2013, five years later, Anand is still the world champion, having defended his title twice in matches: in 2010 against Topalov and in 2012 against Gelfand. Both of these contests were close and hard-fought, the first being decided in the final game, and the second in the rapid tie-breaks. These narrow victories, coupled with a series of moderate tournament performances in the last few years, created the impression that Anand's power was declining and his abdication was imminent, as soon as an elite challenger came his way; naturally, this role has been widely attributed to Carlsen. Things are never that simple though: a world championship match is a chess contest unlike any other, involving a unique blend of chess warfare and psychology. In such a battleground, the significance of Anand's extensive experience of world championship matches should not be forgotten.

The latest qualifying cycle was awaited with bated breath, with most of the chess world certain that the moment for Carlsen's crowning was coming. True, to get to Anand, Magnus would have to overcome one major obstacle: the London Candidates tournament.

Part 2

The London Diaries Clash of the Candidates



*Sitting: Peter Svidler, Vladimir Kramnik and Boris Gelfand
Standing: Teimour Radjabov, Magnus Carlsen, Alexander Grischuk,
Levon Aronian and Vassily Ivanchuk*

As the landing gear of the British Airways Boeing that carries me from Athens to London touches the ground at Gatwick Airport, a sense of excitement overcomes me; the most important chess event of the first half of the year, the Candidates tournament, is ahead. It is right in the centre of the British capital that the world's best chess minds will be fighting it out for three weeks, to determine a challenger for World Champion Anand. This year's event is special in many ways, but most notably because the world's number one, the Norwegian prodigy, the young man who broke Kasparov's rating record, the media darling Magnus Carlsen is set to make his first real assault on the throne. There is one of Garry's records that he is not going to break, that of the youngest world champion (he is already past that age), but the ascent to the throne – and thus the fulfilment of the 13th World Champion's prediction – is a worthy goal in itself. It only remains to be seen just how attainable it is.

History

Candidates tournaments have always occupied a special place in chess history, ever since their inception by FIDE as a means of determining a worthy opponent to the incumbent world champion. The first one was held in Budapest in 1950 and was won by David Bronstein (after a play-off with Isaak Boleslavsky) and, in the absence of a remarkable tournament book (which was common at those times), it never attracted the interest of future generations. Bronstein himself made sure this sad fate wouldn't befall the next one, held in 1953 in Zurich, by penning one of the most legendary chess books of all time; another, less celebrated, work by Miguel Najdorf has recently been rediscovered. That tournament was a gruelling thirty-round marathon, won by Vassily Smyslov and immortalized by Bronstein's book. Amsterdam 1956 saw a switch back to a more reasonable 10-player double round-robin, again won by Smyslov, but not much else about it is etched in the mind of the chess collective. The 1959 event, held in various cities of what was then Yugoslavia, saw a convincing triumph by the young Misha Tal, on his way to a remarkable storming of the chess Olympus – such a roller-coaster ride all the way to the top would only be seen again in the 1980s.

Also making his first appearance in such events was the even younger Bobby Fischer, who, three years later, arrived in the tropical climate of Curacao in the Caribbean, aspiring to fulfil the last requirement before a one-on-one clash with the Patriarch of Soviet chess, Mikhail Botvinnik. Alas, it was not to be. In a controversial event, marred by Tal's withdrawal due to illness and by Fischer's accusations that the Soviet grandmasters were colluding by making quick draws with each other (and thus saving energy for their meetings with Fischer and the other players), Tigran Petrosian earned the right to challenge Botvinnik, while Fischer declared himself disgusted with the cheating that, in his opinion, had taken place, and announced his abstention from future world championship cycles. Admittedly, the evidence supports (but does not necessarily confirm) Fischer's accusations; this was reason enough for FIDE to change the format of future cycles, opting for knock-out matches instead. Fischer did return to the fight for the title several years later, but the world would have to wait 23 years for another Candidates tournament.

1985 saw a return to the tournament format, with a 16-player event being held in the French town of Montpellier. While it was a very interesting event, won by Artur Yusupov in a tie with

Andrei Sokolov and Rafael Vaganian, the 1985 Candidates tournament was somehow overlooked by the public in the midst of the fascinating and controversial Karpov – Kasparov rivalry. Due to the abrupt termination of their first match in February 1985 and the resulting mess, the significance of this event was not even clear to the public. It was followed by knock-out matches between the four qualifiers, with Andrei Sokolov emerging the winner and going on to meet (and lose to) Karpov in a “Superfinal”, held in 1987. Looking back all these years later, it all feels like an insignificant parenthesis in the recurring K–K duels. And FIDE switched back to the match format.

Half a century after Bronstein’s masterpiece, Israeli grandmaster Alik “Dead end, Mr Anderson” Gershon and Igor Nor penned another wonderful tournament book for a publishing house based in Glasgow, then making its first steps in the chess world. The beautifully-produced opus, which would go on to win numerous awards and worldwide acclaim, was about the World Championship tournament of 2005, held in San Luis, Argentina. While technically not a Candidates tournament, as the winner was declared World Champion, it shared many of the distinguishing features of one (an 8-player double round-robin, involving most of the world’s top players, with the winner, Veselin Topalov, going on to meet the “other” World Champion, Vladimir Kramnik, in a match) and it can be considered a forerunner to the London event. Another such tournament followed in 2007, in Mexico City, with Vishy Anand dominating the field and ascending to the throne – and settling there. While both these tournaments proved highly exciting for the public and attracted immense attention, for some reason FIDE didn’t see fit to organize further editions, instead settling on a combination of Candidates matches and knock-out World Cups to determine future challengers.

About the London event

With Magnus Carlsen, a fervent supporter of the tournament format, now firmly ensconced at the very top of the rating list, and a media disaster in the 2011 Candidates matches (where many of the games were quickly drawn and most matches were decided in the rapid and blitz play-offs), the switch was inevitable. A Candidates tournament was announced for the first half of 2013, with the winner meeting the World Champion at the end of the same year. The eight spots were distributed by various means, such as rating, the Grand Prix series and the World Cup. The entire World Championship cycle was entrusted to an internet media entrepreneur, Andrew Paulson, and his newly-founded company Agon, in an effort to ensure stability and consistency across its various stages. A major sponsor was also found in Azerbaijani energy colossus SOCAR, and the tournament seemed perfectly on track for Baku, the capital of the former Soviet republic from which the sponsor originates. Along the way, certain concerns were raised in view of the inevitable participation of Armenia’s top player Levon Aronian, taking into account the less than ideal relations between the potential hosts and their neighbours. In the end a compromise was reached, with the event being moved to London but SOCAR remaining as a sponsor. And that is why your humble author, on an appropriately cold and rainy morning in March, found himself standing in a queue to board a British Airways Boeing to Gatwick...

To me, London feels like the capital of Europe. With a population of 15 million (including the entire metro area), one-and-a-half times the population of my home country, it feels like a world

of its own, one which people from every corner of the world call “home”. It is no stranger to top-level chess either: in the 18th and 19th centuries it provided the setting for numerous battles between the world’s best players, and was the host of the world’s first serious chess tournament in 1851. Indeed, it could be considered that several unofficial world championships were contested in this city: the match between de la Bourdonnais and McDonnell in 1834, that between Saint-Amant and local hero Howard Staunton in 1843 (a return match was played in Paris that same year), as well as the duel between Wilhelm Steinitz and Adolf Anderssen (the winner of the 1851 tournament) in 1866; Steinitz would become the first official world champion twenty years later. Much of that chess was played in the famous Simpson’s-in-the-Strand, a historic restaurant right next to the River Thames, where Agon’s first event was also held – the London Grand Prix in late 2012. It is true that for the greater part of the 20th century no top-level chess events were held in the British capital, but this changed with the hosting of two Candidates matches in 1983, the second USSR – Rest of the World match in 1984 and the first half of the third Kasparov – Karpov match in 1986, in a period when English chess was enjoying a boom, undoubtedly boosted by the existence of top-class players such as the late Tony Miles, John Nunn, Nigel Short and Jonathan Speelman, as well as the recurring successes of the English team in the Olympiads. Nowadays London hosts the wonderful annual London Chess Classic, in which the world’s top players regularly participate.

London’s World Championship history does not end with 1986 – not at all. In 1993 England finally had its first (and last, to this day) World Championship challenger in Nigel Short. The circumstances under which the related match was organized deserve a book of their own, not least in view of the continuous fights between the competitors and FIDE, resulting in a split among the chess world, two World Championship titles and a wound that would take thirteen years to heal completely. In any case, the match did take place and was convincingly won by Garry Kasparov, though the final score clearly does injustice to Short, who often had his mighty opponent on the ropes in his white games; looking back after all these years, the feeling remains that both competitors expended too much energy on the pre-match organizational and political arguments, and were unable to show their best in the match itself – the less experienced player suffered more as a result.

At the venue

Garry Kasparov may have had pleasant memories when returning to London in 2000 to face Vladimir Kramnik in a World Championship match; after all, both the one against Short and the Candidates match against Korchnoi ten years earlier had ended favourably for him. The third time was different, though, and this match can well be regarded as the beginning of the end of Kasparov’s era. A well prepared and fully determined Kramnik managed to dictate the pace of the match from start to finish, securing a memorable victory that very few had expected (and even fewer bet on). This changing of the guard at the top did not dampen Kasparov’s determination for long: he continued to dominate top-level chess all the way until his retirement in 2005, but was never given the opportunity to reclaim his title, something that clearly played a role in his decision to retire. As for Kramnik, this historic victory on the banks of the Thames was followed by a period of ups and downs, where he seemed to be struggling not so much with his opponents,

but with himself and the burden that the title of World Champion placed on his shoulders; this was further aggravated by health problems, and it was only in 2006 that he was once again his true self.

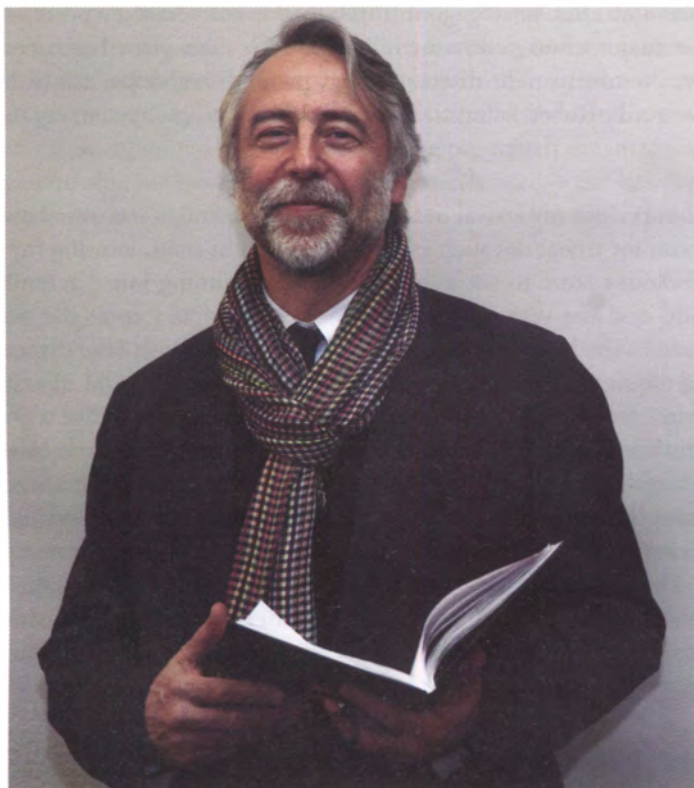
Fast forward to March 2013, and the same Kramnik is the first familiar face I encounter upon reaching the playing venue, the Institution of Engineering and Technology, right next to the river at Savoy Place. He is taking a walk at a very fast pace, clearly a part of his daily exercise routine, and his long legs ensure that hardly anyone can keep up with him. His tall, well-built frame is coupled with a strong determination that is evident on his face. He shakes every single hand extended his way, truly en passant and without the slightest hint of slowing down, and then quickly disappears around the corner. The assured look on his face leaves a lasting impression on me, and I can't help but wonder how many times he paced this same path during the 2000 match. This short encounter leaves no doubt as to the purpose of his presence in London: he has come to win the tournament.

The IET London seems, in many ways, an ideal venue for this event. Located just behind Simpson's-in-the-Strand, right next to the water, it is very close to the Embankment tube station and offers a wonderful view to anyone standing right in front of it: Big Ben, Westminster, the London Eye are all a stone's throw away. Though the area and its main street, the Strand, are crowded and bustling with life, immediately after turning left and walking down Savoy Road the hurly-burly seems a distant memory. The slow and steady flow of the waters is soothing and gives one a feeling of serenity. The famous scientist Michael Faraday adorns, in the form of a metal statue, the porch next to the entrance of the building and greets its visitors. Once through the door and after having gone through the accreditation process, I finally see the first signs that a major chess tournament is about to take place here: French grandmaster Robert Fontaine, the tournament director, greets me and introduces me to Mr Paulson. After exchanging a few words, Robert offers to show me around and points the way towards the playing hall.

During the few hours since my arrival in London, the tournament has somehow slipped from my mind, leaving room for trivialities such as catching the right train, locating my hotel, unpacking and visiting a Vodafone store to get a local SIM card. Running into Kramnik put me back in 'Candidates mode' and the very first image my eyes record as I enter the playing hall further imprints this notion. The hall is a spacious amphitheatre laid with blue carpets and seat covers, dim lighting and a quite large stage. Right in front of the stage, a team of craftsmen are setting up seemingly incomprehensible wooden structures – the floor looks like a construction site, a beehive during rush hour. In the middle of the arena a man is giving instructions, pointing out corrections and coordinating the deceptively chaotic activity around him, much like a seasoned maestro conducting his orchestra. The maestro turns out to be the renowned designer Daniel Weil of Pentagram fame, the mind and soul behind the décor, but also many other things, as I later find out. Though I can hardly make sense of what exactly is going on before my eyes, I figure there must be a method to this madness, and I exercise patience. A short while later my assumption is vindicated, as the playing area is beginning to take shape – but more about that later.

In a corner on the stage, a small group of young people is trying to make sense of their own mess, one made up of cables, electronic chessboards and laptops. Robert introduces the boys and girls of software company ThoughtWorks, the creators of the brand new ChessCasting software that is to make its debut in this tournament. ChessCasting has been conceived as a new way of presenting live tournament coverage to the audience, both locally and through the internet. The software seeks to place a large amount of data at the viewer's fingertips, on multiple screens, including player bios, a graphically represented computer evaluation of the position, broken down into five major parameters, as well as a graph showing time consumption by each player.

In addition, the viewer is able to follow the live commentary through an embedded video frame. While all this may appear none too spectacular to the average internet spectator, the real innovation lies in the way the chess fans are treated at the venue: on each seat of the auditorium lies a tablet, accompanied by a pair of headphones, that boots directly into ChessCasting and enables the spectator to follow the live coverage in all its glory, just as he would while sitting at home in front of his computer screen. The interface of the software, designed by Daniel Weil as well, seems somewhat strange: I very much like the use of black, bright white and blood red, as well as various shades of grey – it feels very modern – but the unusual design of the pieces and the sharp contrast between the colours quickly rings alarm bells in my head: staring at this screen for a while could prove strenuous to the eyes and perhaps confusing. Indeed, Boris Gelfand confirms a few days later that he sometimes mixes up the rooks with the queen when staring at the giant demonstration board on the stage, but the colour combination slowly grows on me, particularly when displayed in such large dimensions; it feels futuristic in a good way and it blends well with the rest of the setting.



The ThoughtWorks team in front of me is comprised of five people, all very different from each other. Todd, the coordinator, must be American, I assume, while Tom, with his reddish hair, looks decidedly British. Giles could well have been transported in time from the 1970s: he wears a colourful shirt, has a beard and is always smiling. I hesitate to hazard a guess as to his nationality, but the subject is brought up in conversation a couple of days later anyway: he grew up in New Zealand. Minno is from the Far East and looks very much like another software engineer I know; it turns out they come from neighbouring countries. Aurora, with her black hair and fiery eyes, is the easiest one to guess for someone coming from the Mediterranean: Spanish indeed. Over the next three weeks they are joined by other colleagues, including Arun who is Indian, a very decent chess player and, unsurprisingly, a great fan of Anand. This multinational team coordinates seamlessly throughout the event and I can't help thinking that technology does indeed make the world feel a much smaller place. As for the software, apart from a few minor glitches in the opening round and a troubled showing in Round 3 (probably due to an outside hacking attack), it performs admirably and without issues. The spectators quickly warm to the idea of using the tablets and, by the time the tournament ends, it all feels like it had always been there.

Another novelty of this event is the chess sets used. While the boards are nearly identical to the standard wooden electronic ones used in all major tournaments, the pieces are another story altogether. They are based on the standard Staunton design (that would be the very same Staunton who played Saint-Amant in this same city back in 1843), but there are some differences – subtle but discernible. It comes as no surprise that, yes, they have been designed by a certain Daniel Weil, who claims to have been influenced by the Parthenon when conceiving the design. Being a distant descendant of Iktinos and Kallikratis, the architects who designed the famed monument two-and-a-half thousand years ago, as well as the very direct descendant of an archaeologist who spent years of her life working in the Acropolis, I examine the set with the eyes of the self-appointed expert I have proclaimed myself. Although the Parthenon's influence does not really stand out, at least in my eyes, the relative height of the pieces does invoke familiarity when they are set up in their starting positions. Overall, the set looks pretty good, though one is entirely justified in questioning the wisdom of introducing a new design in the most important tournament of the last six years. Several of these sets are dispersed around the venue, and grandmaster Ian Rogers, here in his journalistic capacity and accompanied, as always, by his wife Cathy, is requested to set up a recognizable position on the set next to the playing hall's entrance. He selects a famous and spectacular piece of Shirov endgame magic, from an old game against Topalov, and every time I walk by this set (not very often, as I mainly use one of the back entrances to the stage) my inner voice keeps whispering "...h3!"

The chief arbiter of the tournament, the always pleasant and extremely likeable Werner Stubenvoll, arrives, along with deputies Carlos Dias and David Sedgwick (they were later joined by Adam Raoof), to oversee the preparations and discuss the security measures with the private security company Paulson has hired. Contrary to what many people believe or read on the internet, security was pretty tight throughout the event. The players would enter the building from a side entrance, receive a detailed scan and then be directed straight to the playing area. The restrooms and other facilities for the players were carefully checked every single day, approximately one hour before the round, while the same applied to anyone trying to enter the playing hall from the



spectators' entrance. Moreover, at least two high-resolution cameras were recording everything happening in the playing hall, and several security guards were always on hand to react in case of some anomaly. The spectators' tablets were preset to load the ChessCasting environment only and not allow their users to visit websites; there were a few attempted violations by tech-savvy users, but these people would be spotted by the security guards and have their tablets removed.

As preparations proceed, Daniel's vision becomes clearer and clearer. A sense of uniformity and consistency is apparent everywhere, from the furniture to ChessCasting to the tournament posters: the fonts are the same, the hexagonal logo of World Chess (no prizes for guessing the designer!) makes subtle appearances almost everywhere, the design language is unified across the entire range of products – physical or digital. Even at such an early stage, with construction still in full swing and a worker hammering away, one begins to feel that this will be a tournament like no other.

Before the start

For many, this is Magnus Carlsen's tournament and all eyes are on him. His domination of the world rankings, his recent tournament wins, everything points to a relatively easy victory for him – in the eyes of the uninitiated. There's no denying that he is the hot favourite, of course, but to write off such tremendous players as Aronian and Kramnik is nothing but foolish. Carlsen of course knows this well, which is why he has prepared for the event much harder than usual. His preparation included a training camp with Danish GM Peter Heine Nielsen, who also worked with Magnus back in the latter's childhood. This news breaks out a while before the Candidates and raises a lot of questions, as Peter has faithfully served Anand as a second for years, including three world championship matches. While Peter's integrity is of course unquestionable and not even the slightest implication of information leakage can be entertained, the psychological implications of this switch can hardly be overlooked. Peter is accompanying Magnus in London as well, and he is the next to appear in the playing hall, along with Magnus's manager, Espen Agdestein. A quick negotiation with Paulson about Magnus possibly skipping the technical meeting later that evening fails; they take a quick look at the playing hall and rush back to the hotel.

And so the players arrive at the IET London, to take part in the technical meeting and become acquainted with the playing hall. Magnus attracts attention as usual, but it is Peter Svidler who steals the limelight – or, rather, what is left of him. In an amazing metamorphosis that has taken place in less than six months, Peter has lost more than twenty kilos. He looks slim and fit, and incredibly healthy. I recall reading about how Kramnik underwent a similar change before his match against Kasparov, and this makes me realize that Peter is taking this tournament very seriously; this impression is reinforced by the fact that he has come to London with not one but two seconds: Nikita Vitiugov and Maxim Matlakov. In my mind Svidler is quickly promoted into the group of tournament favourites, even if only because of his visual transformation; it is evidence of his determination.

The technical meeting runs smoothly and no serious issues are raised; time is spent on matters of such critical importance as the location of the players' refreshments buffet, Grischuk's smoking

habit and how to order a coffee through the arbiters. Players are also briefed on their obligations to the press; these include their presence at the press conferences after each game, regardless of the result. The atmosphere is serious but calm, devoid of tension between the players, and so the meeting ends relatively quickly and without any arguments whatsoever. The players then inspect the playing hall, the lighting, the chess sets, the temperature. Some of them find the new pieces slightly too large in relation to the size of the squares on the board, but no one complains; they receive a set each, to take to their hotel room and get used to it. The only real complaint is directed towards the tiny white World Chess logo printed on the chessboard – some find it distracting. Daniel joins the conversation and I anticipate a fierce defence of his design and its principles, but instead he takes it in his stride; the next morning all the white logos have been covered by black stickers.

A short and relatively quiet opening ceremony follows, in the form of a cocktail party. Most players mingle with the crowd a little and then are off to the hotel, but a few stick around and enjoy some moments of relaxation. Levon Aronian is one of them, unsurprisingly, and nothing in his external appearance betrays the increased tension of a Candidates tournament: his standard broad smile is almost always on his face. He nods gently in response to every single greeting he receives from afar, even from people I am sure he has never met before, and chats about pretty much everything except chess. Sometimes it is hard for me to believe that this friendly and good-natured individual can handle the enormous pressure of top-level chess, but here he is – probably an immense amount of talent and creativity more than makes up for his less than bloodthirsty character.





Meanwhile, the cocktail party goes on. Andrew Paulson runs around and chats with everyone in the room, trying to make sure that no single person will leave the room without a clear idea of his vision. He speaks with admirable self-confidence, as if this is the closing ceremony, the tournament is already behind and it has been an unqualified success. He is clearly charismatic in this role and sounds very convincing. I especially like his idea (and Daniel's execution of it) of branding a tournament so that it becomes recognizable even in the most unlikely settings. It all adds to the feeling of being part of something special, something extraordinary. Several months later, when I see a video on the internet of Carlsen playing blitz on the signature chess set, my thoughts immediately run back to the London Candidates. Mission accomplished.

The crowd has dispersed and so I go back to the playing hall – and I am impressed with what I see. The installation of the décor is almost over and the outcome is certainly imposing. The lights of the IET amphitheatre have been dimmed, but the four chessboards are glowing under the soft white lighting hanging immediately above them. The entire scenery, with its large doses of wood, straight lines, and pale colours evokes the feeling of a medieval battlefield. The arena will definitely be the centre of attention, not only because this is where the chess battles of the modern age will be taking place, but also because it's the only lighted area during the rounds; all other lights are dimmed, the audience is submerged into darkness and is barely discernible, with only a few red and white pixels on the tablet screens giving any indication of life around the battlefield.

It all feels otherworldly, as if I have travelled back in time. When preparing to leave the hall, I take one last look and ponder King Arthur's ascension to the throne: perhaps Daniel should have incorporated a Sword in the Stone in the set, awaiting its rightful owner to come pull it out. I imagine the eight contestants turning up for the game in clunky armour and intimidatingly waving their long swords above their heads – in such a battle would Carlsen prevail? In the real event, can Kramnik repeat his feat of thirteen years ago? I exit knowing the latter question will be answered in the near future.

Round One

Despite my early arrival at the venue, a crowd has already gathered. Members of the press are preparing their gear to immortalize the moments, amidst last-minute preparations all over the place. The playing hall is more serene, with the arbiters attaching magnetic nametags of the players to the sides of the tables and putting stickers on the adjustable leather chairs – from now on, each player's chair will be moved over to his table for the next round, preserving the adjustments made and thus relieving the players of one extra worry. The tablets are being switched on and placed on the spectators' seats, the refreshment buffet is being set up and Giles munches away on a sandwich he has carefully sneaked in right under the eyes of a supervisor who has no understanding of his survival needs. Macauley Peterson, the producer of the live commentary feed, makes slight adjustments to the cameras pointed towards the tables and hides away the kilometre of cables he has dispersed across the playing area. Despite his youth, Macauley is already an accomplished producer of live chess shows and his considerable experience guarantees the quality of the final product.

This tournament is as much for the spectators as it is for the players, but they don't seem to appreciate this much, as their numbers on the first day are pretty moderate. Andrew is hardly disheartened by the relatively low turn-out, explaining that he wasn't aiming for large crowds, but rather numbers that can be accommodated properly – after all, there are only so many tablets available. It is the internet crowd that matters most to him, and he expects record numbers of cybernetic viewers; three weeks later his expectations prove to have been fulfilled. I stand on the stage and observe the crowd entering the hall and taking up their seats in semi-darkness, and the atmosphere is full of anticipation. Photographers have filled the arena and are patiently waiting for the entrance of the players, under the watchful eye of the high-resolution cameras and an enormous countdown clock projected on the screen. This clock is meant as precaution against the much maligned zero-tolerance rule, but since one can hardly expect a participant in a Candidates tournament to be forfeited in such a ridiculous way, it mostly serves to boost the anxiety instilled in us by the surroundings and the décor. Just in case, the chief arbiter starts the countdown a couple of minutes late, and approximately ten minutes before the start, the players start making their entrance.

What follows is rather amusing. The cameras start flashing and their operators swiftly move among the large press crowd, hoping to catch that million-dollar facial expression or gesture that will make them famous (and, hopefully, rich). Until Magnus arrives. In an instant, the entire entourage gathers around his table, completely ignoring the other players – I suspect that even

Aronian ends up in all these photos just by virtue of being Carlsen's opponent in this first round. Kramnik walks in last and quietly heads to his table, almost unnoticed, while on the other side of the wooden separator that stands between him and Carlsen there is complete mayhem, worthy of a red-carpet moment at a film festival.

Gelfand approaches me and asks permission to leave his bag under the arbiters' table; permission is granted, naturally, but I keep wondering about its contents. The next day I realize that the object of my curiosity is a nice pair of shoes, matching his suit; considering the low temperatures and occasional snowflakes adorning London, Boris prefers to walk around the city in his winter boots, reserving his more formal footwear for the playing hall only. The swap to and from these shoes will ceremoniously take place before and after every round, without exception. Boris is a man of unquestionable integrity, so of course this is no problem; with a certain infamous lower-level player, this could have been a very clever method of sneaking in his technology.

With the players now all seated, a SOCAR representative enters, along with other FIDE and tournament officials, to mark the start of the tournament. He chooses the board of his countryman, Teimour Radjabov, who is playing Boris Gelfand. The chief arbiter must be excited by all this, because he accidentally announces the game as "Anand – Radjabov". Teimour smiles at the implication that he may already have qualified for the World Championship match, but for Gelfand this might be a painful reminder of the previous year's match with the Indian champion – if only for a few details in the rapid play-offs, it may well have been Anand playing Radjabov here in London instead. 1.d4 is executed on the board, more photos are taken and the chief arbiter declares the start of the round. A few seconds later, confirmation comes on our screens that the live transmission of the games is working as it should, and we all breathe a sigh of relief. Congratulatory handshakes follow in the small dark corner of the stage where we are situated, while the players are carefully sizing up their opponents and making their first moves in this long and agonizing journey. The tournament is well and truly underway.

First rounds of tournaments are a tricky affair. Some players prefer to keep it solid and get their name on the scoreboard as soon as possible – this helps to relieve some of the stress. Others seek a complicated battle, hoping for indications of their form and sharpness. Here this second attitude does not seem very relevant to me, as all eight players must surely have a clear indication of their fighting condition – no doubt they have played several training games before the event. Seen in this light, I find it rather unfortunate that Aronian and Carlsen have been paired against each other so early in the tournament; it is very likely that neither will want to risk much, with thirteen more games lying ahead. Indeed, Magnus navigates the tranquil waters of a Bogó-Indian he has employed several times in the past, and soon simplifies to a dead-drawn position. The players are not allowed to agree to a draw before the thirtieth move, and so they move around until this milestone is reached. With his 31st move Aronian brings about a completely symmetrical position and offers a draw; I have no doubt that his subtle sense of humour has played a part here. And thus, this eagerly awaited clash concludes peacefully.

The early finish to the game satisfies the journalists in the press centre, as they now have plenty of time to ask questions. This pattern will be repeated several times in the first half, and players

are often called upon to discuss the most irrelevant matters. In the following week we will hear all about Aronian enjoying the theatres and musicals of London, Svidler's obligatory renovation of his wardrobe, and Carlsen's way of spending his free time during the event: in his room, practising a new board game he has invented; he defers further discussion of this to the end of the tournament, but by then it seems everyone but me has forgotten all about it. He doesn't really seem interested in answering questions regarding the "revolution he has brought to chess" and other such topics, and his facial expression when encountering such inquiries makes them look completely out of place. He has come here to play (and win), and nothing else seems relevant to him right now.

During the first round I can't shake a bad premonition about Radjabov's chances in the tournament. I have noticed, the day before, that he and his charming wife are expecting a new member in their family, and such a drastic change in one's everyday life cannot possibly avoid impacting his psychological stability – in a positive way, of course, but one that is probably less than ideal for playing chess. This impression is further aggravated by the fact that he is essentially representing the sponsor as well as himself, and he surely feels added pressure on his shoulders. Be that as it may, he doesn't show any such signs in his first game; after surprising Gelfand with a calm and somewhat passive Bogó-Indian, which leaves his opponent with a stable space advantage but not much more, he slowly but surely neutralizes the pressure and equalizes completely.

Svidler has apparently not only changed his wardrobe (and body weight) but also his opening repertoire, since he opens with 1.d4, executed in his characteristic super-confident way. Kramnik replies with the Semi-Tarrasch, which seems to take his opponent by surprise, and confidently navigates around the reefs to secure a draw. Post-mortem analysis reveals that a great number of



sharp variations were hidden behind this game, the shortest of the round, and that Kramnik's powers of calculation have been working full time throughout – certainly a positive sign for his fans. He even succeeds in keeping up with Svidler's breakneck speed of commenting on the game during the press conference, something very few usually manage. A person with impressive command of the English language and a devoted fan of cricket, a sport with a scoring system that is utterly incomprehensible to us mere mortals, Peter is a true gift to the journalists: he is ready to discuss pretty much everything under the sun, explain every single thought he had during the game and at the same time he is ready to express an opinion on the other games as well; with him, there is never an awkward moment. It seems to me that this vivacious and truly charismatic person has never received the amount of recognition he really deserves; perhaps he is also to blame for this, as he never misses an opportunity to shed light on his shortcomings as a chess player – this makes for some amusing comments, from which the uninitiated may easily get the impression that he sees himself as nothing more than a third-rate player. Which of course he is not.

This tournament, as well as the Grand Prix series, has an unusual time control, with no increments all the way up to the 61st move. This detail makes the clash of the two famed time-trouble addicts, Vassily Ivanchuk and Alexander Grischuk, all the more inviting. While a certain period of rushing does occur, both players escape unscathed and yet another draw is recorded on the tournament table, bringing the first round to an end and leaving us all none the wiser about the possible fortunes of the players in the subsequent rounds. Everyone involved with the organization of the event appears content, if not happy, and we all head home with a feeling of satisfaction.

On my way out, I pass by a table where Jonathan Speelman is showing a recent game to John Nunn and Julian Hodgson; my interest is raised by the smiles and laughter emanating from this table, so I take a peek: the white king is on e4, with black pawns on c4 and d3! "Typical Speelman", I think to myself, and proceed to the exit, out into the chilly London weather I so adore.

Round Two

Although in such a strong tournament every round abounds with important match-ups, the Carlsen – Kramnik game of Round 2 is the focus of attention. The start of the round is almost identical to that of the first, minus the ceremonial first move, with photographers and TV crews attracted to Magnus like to a magnet. Reporters are surely dreaming of a big result in this game, giving them plenty to write home about, but the game disappoints: Kramnik knows the rare line of the English Opening chosen by Carlsen very well and equalizes with precision, leaving his opponent no chance of trying for more than the half point he gets. Both players' chances seem to be in the ascendancy – Kramnik has made two comfortable draws with Black against dangerous opponents, while Carlsen has gotten the two biggest hurdles behind him and can now focus on doing what he does best: beating the rest.

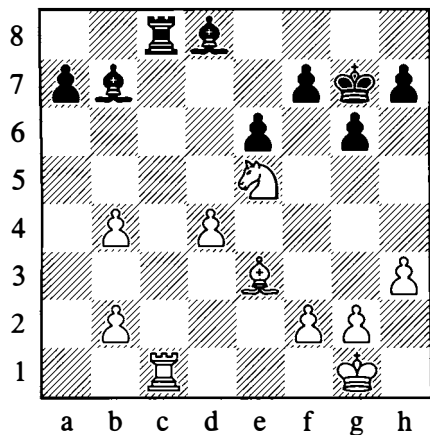
Kramnik is unusually relaxed and chatty in the press conference, never missing an opportunity to express his appreciation of a short game, now that "he is an old man". He is brimming with self-confidence and doesn't hesitate to reply to questions with perfect honesty. "Thank you for

showing us your game" receives the "I wouldn't come if I weren't obliged to" retort it probably deserves.

While Grischuk and Svidler battle out a tough Ruy Lopez, Aronian has Gelfand on the ropes. In a position that very much suits the Armenian, Levon slowly but surely nurses a slight positional advantage deep into the middlegame. Gelfand clearly feels uncomfortable in his solid but passive position, as evidenced both by his great expenditure of time and his behaviour at the board. With purposeful manoeuvres, betraying a very deep and careful study of the typical position resulting from this opening line, Aronian steadily increases his advantage and turns the screws on his opponent. The Israeli grandmaster gives up a weak pawn that Aronian himself refused to capture when he had the chance, in order to liberate his pieces – a very common motif in his games when he is defending – but this doesn't bring much relief. When, in time pressure, he blunders by overlooking a tactical blow that forces his pieces in disarray, his position collapses and he resigns shortly afterwards. Aronian seizes the lead and is visibly satisfied.

Levon Aronian – Boris Gelfand

Round 2, 16th March 2013



26. ♖h6†!

A tactical shot that is simple to calculate *after* you have spotted the move.

26... ♜g8

26... ♜xh6 27. ♜xc8 ♜xc8 28. ♜xf7† ♜g7 29. ♜xd8 is decisive.

27. ♜xc8 ♜xc8 28. ♜c6 ♜f6 29. b5

The black pieces are completely dominated.

29... ♜d7 30. g4 g5 31. h4 gxh4 32. g5 ♜xc6 33. bxc6 ♜d8 34. ♜g2 ♜c7 35. ♜h3
1–0

On the neighbouring board, Radjabov scores an impressive victory against Ivanchuk. Before the tournament, just as before every tournament, Ivanchuk has been the greatest mystery of all: the famed unpredictability of this genius chess player has everyone mystified. It has always seemed to me that, during a game, Ivanchuk is less interested in the result and more in decoding the secrets of the position on the board – so much so, that he often neglects that haunting element of nature, time. The time control in use here certainly doesn't help his cause, and this game becomes the start of his misfortunes: faced with a good novelty in a Dutch Defence, he reacts imprecisely, while also spending oceans of time on his subsequent moves. This cocktail is lethal, and from early on it all goes downhill. Radjabov wins material with forceful play and collects the scalp when his opponent loses on time in a hopeless position. Ivanchuk is evidently frustrated by this turn of events; a miscommunication with the arbiters results in him missing the press conference, and he disappears into the dark streets of London before anyone can find him. In the meantime, Grischuk and Svidler conclude their game peacefully, and once again it's time to pack and go home.

Round Three

Svidler repeats his 1.d4 and tackles Radjabov's King's Indian head-on with the Sämisch variation, undoubtedly under the influence of his second, Vitiugov. The Azeri grandmaster opts for a rare recent idea, but he doesn't handle it very well and his opening play soon backfires, leaving him in a difficult position. He tries to cut the Gordian knot by means of a materially unbalancing operation, but this only allows Svidler to cement a positional advantage. Having finally coordinated his pieces, Peter attacks his opponent's weaknesses and forces capitulation. This win seems to do wonders for his self-confidence and it is clear to everyone by now that he is a serious force to be reckoned with in this tournament.

Right behind the wooden separator, Ivanchuk is self-destructing with amazing consistency against Aronian. Some inexplicably random opening play is accurately countered by Levon, who quickly finds himself with a powerful initiative and his opponent once again in serious time trouble. It is a sign of Ivanchuk's great class that he not only avoids the worst despite making his moves in just a few seconds, but he also manages to shore up his defences and hold a difficult position in the face of impending disaster. Still, this enormous effort comes at the cost of more time, and he sees his flag fall while executing his 34th move. This all proves too much for him, but this time he sticks around for the press conference, though his mind is clearly somewhere else. Aronian delights in his clear lead, but deep inside he is perhaps regretting the missed opportunities to finish his opponent off when the chance was there. Still, it's a good day for him.

Kramnik's first White game is seen by many as a good chance to score a win and put the pressure on the other favourites, but it is not meant to be. A clever novelty and some good preparation give Kramnik a pleasant position and a clear target in the shape of a weak pawn on c6, but Grischuk has no intention of going down in such an unspectacular manner and he fights back with all his might. He gets rid of the weakling (true, by just giving it up) and activates his pieces to an annoying extent. Kramnik is unable to completely shake off the annoyance and the game ends in a repetition. In the press conference the players discuss the final part of the game and conclude that no clear improvement on White's play can be found, leaving Grischuk's impressive defensive display as the highlight of the game.

Long after all the other games have finished, the scent of Carlsen's first win is in the air. Having obtained a comfortable position with Black out of the opening, Magnus carefully handles the middlegame and does not allow Gelfand to drum up any significantly dangerous play on the kingside. The distant prospect of an outside passed pawn on the queenside allows him to hope for more than the draw that seems likely, and some inconsistent play by his opponent before the time control raises his expectations. Gelfand misses some opportunities to resist harder and eventually goes down in the endgame; it all looks like a trademark Magnus victory, without really doing anything special. His manager looks relieved now that the first win has been scored, and Carlsen himself appears just as energetic and composed as when the game started, several hours earlier. The ThoughtWorks technicians, unaccustomed to the Carlsen phenomenon, are very impressed.

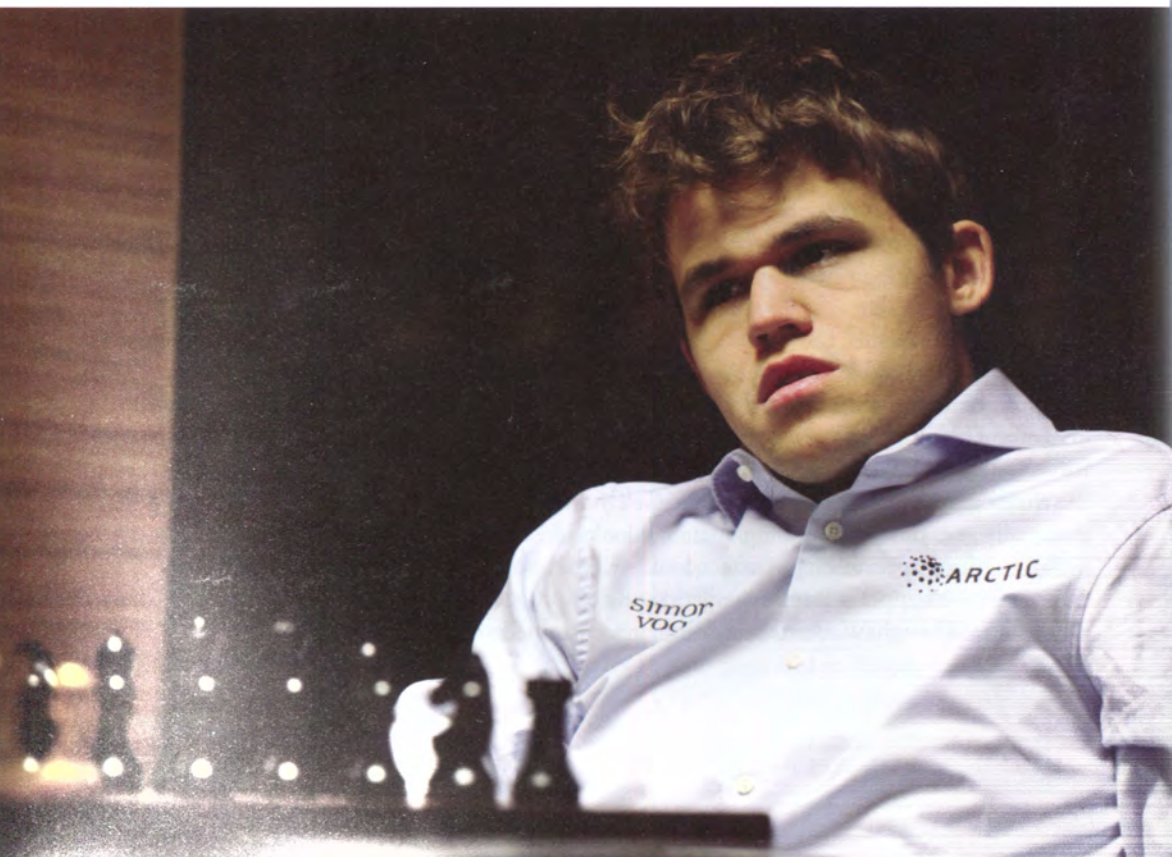
The Grind

Boris Gelfand – Magnus Carlsen

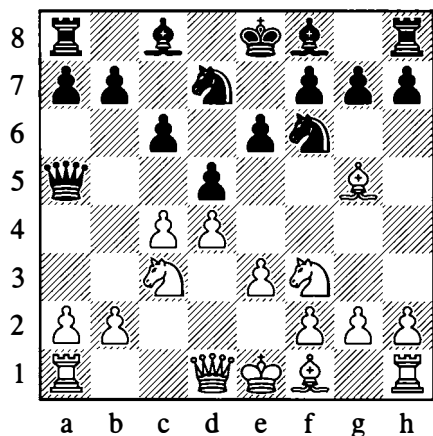
Round 3, 17th March 2013

On the way to play his game against the latest world title challenger, Boris Gelfand, Magnus must have been thinking that this was a chance to win a crucial game, one that would help him on his way to becoming Gelfand's successor. Magnus generally commands a plus score against Boris, but in a Candidates tournament there is a special atmosphere and different tactics, a combination that attaches to every game a greater weight than it would have in a normal tournament. And Boris would be eager to beat Magnus, not only to avenge previous losses, but also to show people that he had established himself as part of the absolute chess elite and that he intended to stay there. His excellent preparation with the white pieces, powerful tactical sense and good form of late would all be there after all, pushing him to prevail over the world's number one.

So this game was very important for both players and I am sure that the choice of opening against Boris's 1.d4 was a difficult decision for Magnus to make, all the more so as deep inside he knew he was playing for a win. He would have to find something not so well trodden, sufficiently unbalanced, solid, but with enough positional nuances. Thus the not-so-fashionable Cambridge Springs Variation found its place in this elite event.



1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 d5 4.♟c3 ♘bd7
5.♙g5 c6 6.e3 ♚a5!?



7.cxd5

Boris steers clear of the traditional main line.

7.♟d2 ♙b4 8.♚c2 0–0 9.♙e2 is more solid, but I guess that Boris, an opening connoisseur, wanted a less dry game that would offer him sufficient chances to play for a win. The text is more dynamic.

7...♟xd5 8.♞c1

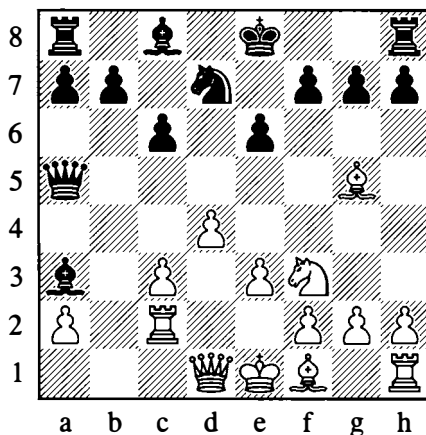
A logical move that seems to me at least as good as the established 8.♚d2. But I guess that Magnus was prepared for both continuations in any case.

8...♟xc3 9.bxc3 ♙a3!

With Black, the Norwegian star likes quick development, leading to playable positions where his king is not in danger.

For this reason, 9...♚xa2 10.♙d3 would almost certainly be automatically dismissed, even if after 10...♙d6 11.0–0 ♚a5 12.c4 the position is considered playable. White is far ahead in space and development and in my opinion this far outweighs the sacrificed pawn.

10.♞c2

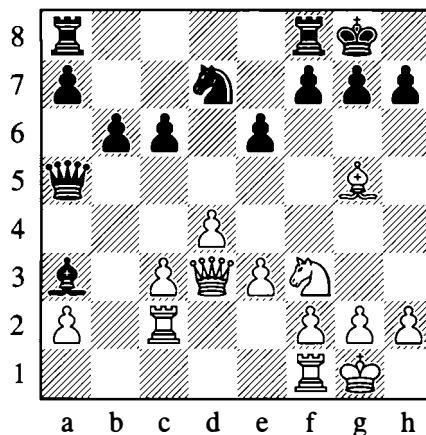


10...b6

Unveiling his strategic preference for exchanging light-squared bishops; in doing so, he again stays true to his style, as he removes from the board a piece that could potentially be dangerous to his king.

10...e5 11.♙d3 f6 12.♙h4 exd4 is another possibility which I am sure Carlsen considered in his preparations, but I think he eventually rejected it in view of: 13.exd4 0–0 14.0–0 ♟b6 15.♟d2! ♙f5 16.♟b3 ♚d5 17.c4 ♚d7 18.♙xf5 ♚xf5 19.c5 ♟d5 20.♟a5 ♚d7 21.♟c4 ♙b4 22.a3 b5 23.cxb6 Maybe Black has just enough for the pawn after 23...♙e7, but it is certain that he has no winning chances, and he would still have to play a string of accurate moves to make sure of the draw.

11.♙d3 ♙a6 12.0–0 ♙xd3 13.♚xd3 0–0



14.e4

A move displaying Boris's appetite to gain space and subsequently attack. GM Evgeny Postny has indicated that this may not be the best way to play the position though.

He suggests instead the more positional:

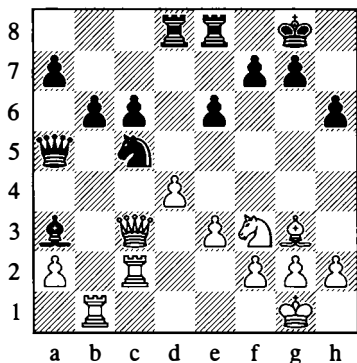
14.c4 h6 15.♘f4

15.♘h4 ♜fe8 16.♞d1!? is another option, according to Postny, the plan still being to put the bishop on g3 at a later stage, preventing the advance ...e5. I believe that this is actually the stronger of his two recommendations, not allowing a black rook to come to d8 for the time being.

15...♞ad8 16.♞b1 ♜fe8 17.♙c7

17.c5? e5

17...♞c8 18.♙g3 ♞cd8 19.c5! ♜xc5 20.♞c3



20...♞e4

Viable is: 20...♞b7!? 21.♞xc6 ♞d6 22.♙xd6 ♙xd6 23.a4 ♞f5! 24.e4 (24.♞cc1 e5!)=) 24...♞f4 25.e5 ♙f8 When Black does not seem to be any worse.

21.♞xa5 bxa5 22.♞xc6

Postny assessed this position as slightly better for White. However, after for example:

22...♞c8 23.♞a6 ♞e7 24.♞xa5 ♞b7!

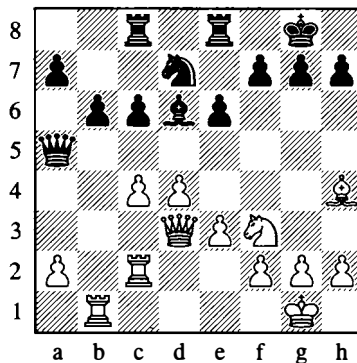
Black has serious counterplay in view of his powerful concentration of pieces on the queenside. So, although Evgeny's suggestion is certainly interesting, White has to find some improvements earlier on in this variation.

Recently Alexei Dreev followed in Magnus's footsteps in a game against European Champion Moiseenko, and in that game White did not go for e4:

14.♞b1 ♜fe8 15.♙h4 ♞ac8 16.c4

White has adopted a strategy similar to that suggested by Postny.

16...♙d6



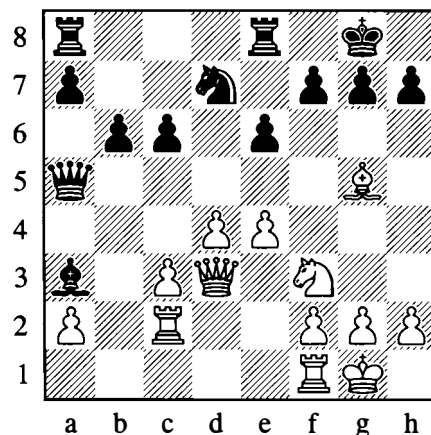
17.♞g5!?

17.c5 ♙f8! is okay for Black.

17...♞f5! 18.♞xf5 exf5 19.♙g3 ♙xg3 20.hxg3 c5

All this happened in Moiseenko – Dreev, Jakarta 2013, and at this stage Black enjoys an excellent position with the chances being about equal. Later on, Dreev went astray and had to suffer before making a draw.

14...♜fe8



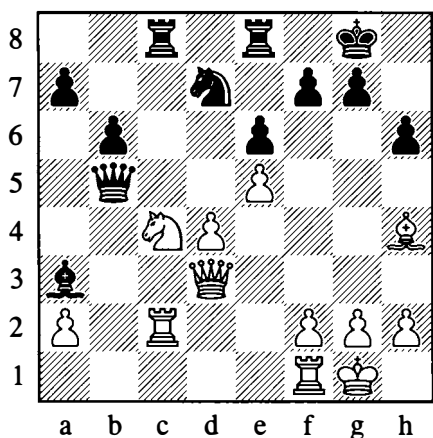
15.e5?!

A questionable decision by Boris, although White may not be worse yet; however I believe that Magnus must have been licking his lips around here, as the impetuous pawn advance does not lead to any attack for White; on the contrary, it merely leads to a further weakening of his light-square control.

15.♠f4, as suggested by several commentators, is preferable. But after a move like 15...♞ad8 Black is already not worse and can slowly prepare ...c5. I believe this is the reason Boris rushed things on the kingside, and this is a typical case of Carlsen waiting for his opponents to overextend or resort to a rushed attack in order to avoid entering his own domain of protracted manoeuvring.

15...h6 16.♠h4 c5! 17.♞d2 cxd4 18.cxd4 ♞ac8!

Black has forced a weakness on d5 and now proceeds to contest the c-file, exploiting a tactical nuance. With a pair of rooks exchanged, White will have no attack.

19.♞c4 ♞b5

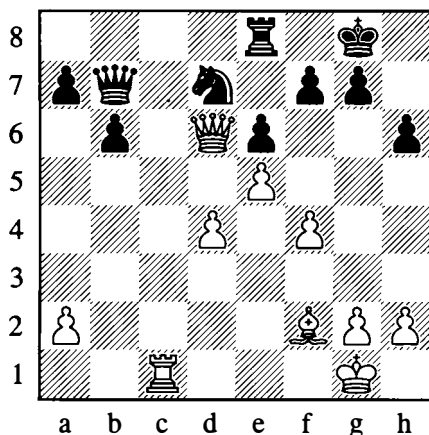
The point; it would be naive to hope that Magnus has blundered a piece. White is now slowly but surely getting lured into a position

where Black enjoys the better minor piece and a queenside pawn majority, while more and more pieces are being exchanged.

20.f4

20.♞b3 ♞xb3 21.axb3 ♠b4 is excellent for Black.

20...♞c7 21.♞xa3 ♞xc4 22.♞xc4 ♞xc4 23.♠f2 ♞c7 24.♞c1 ♞b7 25.♞d6



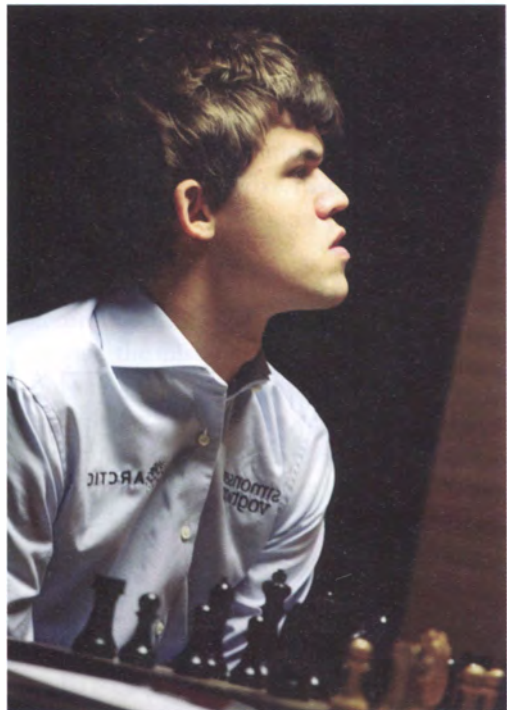
A turning point in the game; White should have sensed around here that there is nothing to attack and switched to defence-and-maintenance mode. But Boris probably felt the need to prove something, all the more so as he had lost in the previous round to Aronian.

As Postny has remarked, 25.♞f3!? ♞xf3 26.gxf3 would have kept the position equal because the white rook penetrates to c7. He gives 26...♞f8 27.♞c7 ♞g6 28.f5 exf5 29.♞xa7 with equality, an assessment that cannot be challenged. Indeed, the result would almost certainly have been a draw.

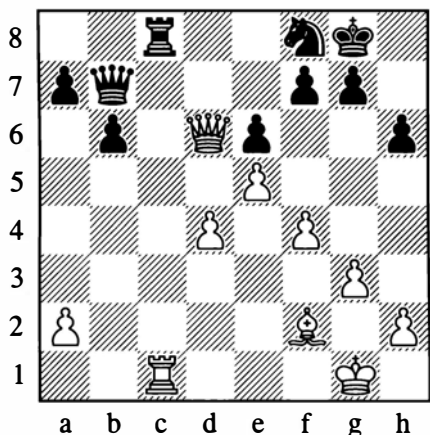
25...♞f8 26.g3

Further weakening his light squares, but f4 needed protection, sooner or later.

26...♞c8!



This is where the grind starts! Black goes for the ending of ♖+♘ versus ♖+♗ as that is known to favour the side with the knight. The reason is that a queen and knight can combine beautifully to create all sorts of threats, particularly if they are aided by some other element in the position. Such an element here is the queenside pawn majority, which can distract White's forces from the defence of their king.



27.♟xc8 ♜xc8 28.d5

Forced, getting rid of a weakness and opening up the f2-bishop.

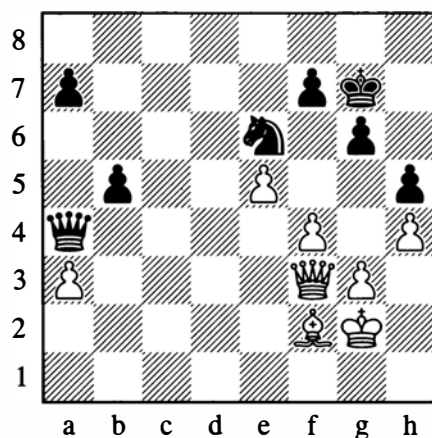
28...exd5 29.♜xd5 g6

More light squares, please!

30.♔g2 ♘e6 31.♜f3 ♔g7 32.a3 h5 33.h4

A sad necessity, as allowing ...h4-h3 would seriously compromise the white king's position.

33...♜c2 34.♗b7 ♖a4 35.♗f3 b5



Black has improved his position to the maximum and it's time to start pushing his queenside pawns.

36.f5!

Boris is not a man to sit and be slaughtered like a lamb; he immediately makes use of his only chance, which is to expose the enemy king.

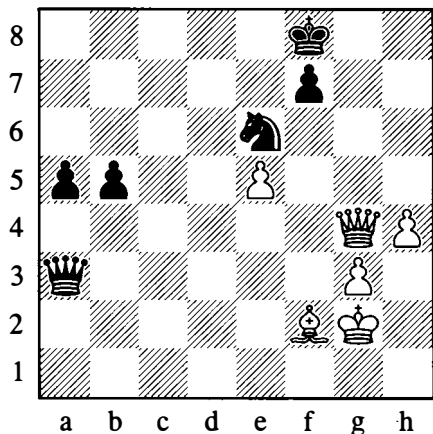
36...gx f5 37.♜xf5 ♖xa3 38.♜xh5 a5

As long as White does not have a perpetual, Black should continue pushing his passers.

38...♖a4 prevents the check on g4 but loses time; after: 39.♜f5 a5 40.h5 ♖c4 41.h6† ♔g8 (41...♔xh6 42.♜f6† ♔h7 43.♜xf7† transposes) 42.h7† ♔g7 43.♜f6† ♔xh7

44. ♖xf7† ♜h8 45. ♜e8† ♜g7 46. ♜e7† ♜g8 47. ♜e8† ♜f8 The timely 48.e6! ♜xe6 49. ♜xb5 clinches the draw.

39. ♜g4† ♜f8



40.h5?

A costly mistake by Boris on the last move before the time control. But mistakes do often happen when your opponent puts you under pressure; and Magnus knows very well how to put the pressure on.

I have nothing to add to the variations given by the machines and several commentators:

40. ♜h5!

This plans to target the f7-pawn by means of ♜h8-f6† in case Black rushed to push his b-pawn by 40...b4. This would have drawn, as the black king cannot desert f7 and escape to the open. Pushing the b-pawn blocks the avenue of the black queen towards f8 and exposes the black king to a perpetual. Pushing the a-pawn instead is too slow, and White can meet it with a check on h8 followed by h4-h5 when actually he is faster and it is Black who must force the draw by perpetual.

40...b4

40... ♜c3 41. ♜h8† ♜e7 42. ♜f6† ♜e8 43. ♜h8† ♜d7 44. ♜f6 ♜c6† 45. ♜g1 ♜d8

46.e6†! ♜xe6 47. ♜g5 could well have been the line Boris missed; White is not worse as his h-pawn is extremely dangerous.

40... ♜d3 41. ♜h8† ♜e7 42.h5! a4 43.h6 a3 44.h7 ♜e4† 45. ♜h2 ♜d7 46. ♜g8 ♜f3 47.h8= ♜ ♜xf2† 48. ♜h3 ♜f1† 49. ♜h4 ♜h1† 50. ♜g4 ♜e4† 51. ♜h5 ♜h1† is a perpetual.

40...a4 41. ♜h8† ♜e7 42.h5!= is similar.

41. ♜h8† ♜e7 42. ♜f6† ♜e8 43. ♜h8† ♜d7 44. ♜f6=

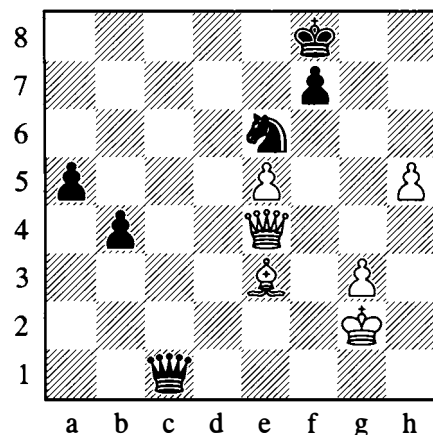
This is an illustration of the drawing mechanism I described above.

40... ♜c1!

Now White has difficulties supporting the advance of the h-pawn to its queening square; something that would have been feasible with the queen on h8.

41. ♜e4! b4 42. ♜e3

42. ♜a8†? ♜g7 43. ♜xa5 b3 and Black wins; this is easy to calculate by anyone's standards.



42... ♜c7?!

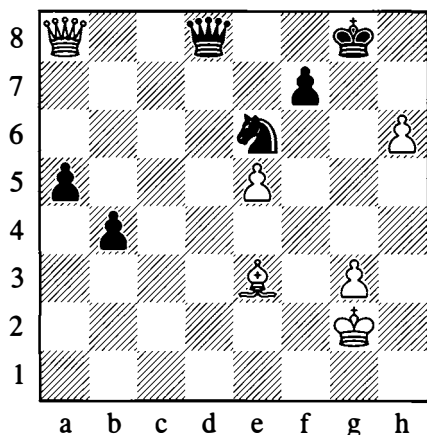
What happened to Magnus? Why does he suddenly forget to seize the light squares he has been seizing for the whole game?

The answer is that 42... ♜c8! allows White to reintroduce with tempo the ♜h8-f6 idea. After

43. ♖h7! ♜c6† 44. ♕f2 b3 45. h6 b2 46. ♖h8†
 ♕e7 47. h7 ♜c2† 48. ♕f3 ♖f5† 49. ♕g2 b1=♖
 50. ♖f6† ♖xf6 51. exf6† ♕d6 52. h8=♖ a4,
 Black should nevertheless win, and this was
 the best way to continue.

His failure to play 42... ♜c8! proves that
 Magnus is only human after all.

43. ♖a8† ♕g7 44. h6† ♕h7 45. ♖e4† ♕g8
 46. ♖a8† ♖d8



47. ♖xd8??

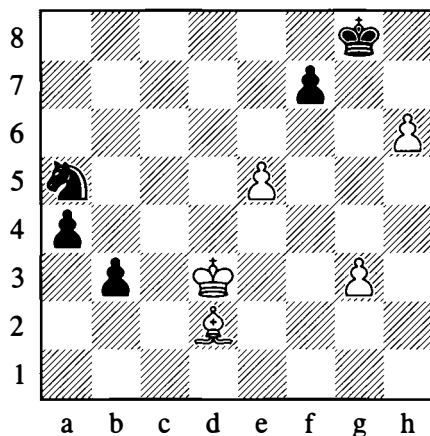
An inexplicable decision for a player of
 Boris's status. I guess he was worn out by the
 relentless struggle.

The only move was 47. ♖c6 when it is White
 who controls the light squares; he can make
 Black's life difficult. Probably Black is still
 winning, but the following illustrative line
 shows there were still at least practical chances
 of survival: 47... b3 48. ♕c1 And White is
 still struggling after: 48... a4 49. ♖xa4 ♖d5†
 50. ♕h2 ♕h7 51. ♖g4 ♖d3 52. ♖h5 ♖c2†
 53. ♕h3 ♖f2 54. ♕a3 ♖f1† 55. ♕g4

47... ♕xd8

After the exchange of queens, the game
 is already history. Two united passed pawns
 supported by a knight are impossible for the
 poorly-placed white pieces to cope with.

48. ♕f3 a4 49. ♕e4 ♕c6 50. ♕c1 ♕a5 51. ♕d2
 b3 52. ♕d3



52... ♕c4!

The finishing blow, albeit not too difficult.

53. ♕c3 a3 54. g4 ♕h7 55. g5 ♕g6 56. ♕d4
 b2 57. ♕c2 ♕d2!

After 58. ♕xb2 axb2 59. ♕xb2 ♕c4† Black
 picks up all the kingside pawns, so Boris
 resigned.

0-1

This game proves to be exactly what anonymous
 internet commentators have been waiting for;
 numerous Carlsen-haters troll the popular
 chess websites in response to the cheers of the
 devoted Magnus fans, attributing this win to
 the erratic play of his "weak" opponent, who
 is a "spent force". I read these comments in
 the quiet of my room, with an ironic smile on
 my face, as they clearly betray a very limited
 understanding of the sheer magnitude of
 Gelfand's chess strength, as well as of chess
 itself. It was the same right before the 2012
 World Championship match, when for these
 same "pundits" Gelfand would be "easy prey"
 and a "walkover" for Anand, only to be proven
 wrong by the events.

I, on the contrary, find it perfectly obvious
 that the bad start of the top Israeli grandmaster

(and the relatively bad performance associated with it) is a clear indication of bad form; his immense positional understanding and combative powers, as evidenced in numerous powerful strategic masterpieces created by him, past and present, are simply not there for the moment. Boris himself attributes this slump to the late rescheduling of the Candidates tournament, initially planned to start one week later, a change that affected the proper timing of his preparation. His play in the second part of the event fully justifies his claim, and in the months following the London event he goes on to win (or tie for first) in three super-tournaments, proving that some forces, though seemingly spent, are inexhaustible.

Round Four

Just like first rounds, rest days are also perceived differently by the players. While one might assume that the prospect of a day free from competitive obligations would encourage them to give all they've got in the preceding game, assured of enough time to rest and recuperate from any possible exertions, there is also a different point of view: a rest day is 24 additional hours to torment oneself with regrets after a possible loss. Therefore, one hardly knows what to expect of the eight contestants as they arrive for the fourth round. Still in the early stages of this relatively long tournament, the former viewpoint seems to prevail this time, and all games turn out hard-fought, at least from one side. With three days of competition already behind us, all minor organizational issues have now been completely solved, and we all slowly settle into the daily routines that will govern our lives almost until the end of the event. Finally freed from concerns and trivialities, we relax and observe the games and the players, engrossing ourselves in the battles.

Much of my time during the fourth round is spent in the live commentary room, where Nigel Short has replaced Malcolm Pein alongside Lawrence Trent and the spectacle is amazing. It's not only about Nigel's level of expertise – true, having a World Championship challenger explain the ins and outs of the games in progress is noteworthy in itself. He and Lawrence make up a fantastic pair and are highly entertaining. Short, a top player with a commentary style ideally suited to teaching, constantly jabs at poor Trent with a healthy dose of sarcasm and a typically British sense of humour. Lawrence stoically swallows the friendly insults and plays along, often adopting the role of the hapless ignoramus that Nigel tries to bestow upon him. Sometimes he raises his voice in excitement when an unexpected and seemingly powerful move appears on the screen, only to be brought back down to Earth by Short's more controlled tone and his irrefutable arguments; disappointment then sets in and Lawrence makes it clearly discernible in his words, holding himself back and leaving the floor to his esteemed colleague. It's all acting, of course, and it makes for a highly enjoyable commentary session that earns praise all over the world. The captivating nature of their commentary is also evident inside the playing hall as well: occasionally short bursts of laughter disrupt the silence in the spectator's area, no doubt the result of a humorous comment made by the pair having travelled all the way to the ears of the crowd via the tablet's headphones.

The hero of the day is, once again, Carlsen. It all starts in the usual manner, with Magnus arriving at the board under a barrage of cameras flashing. He settles in his chair, fills in the scoresheet and patiently waits for the game to start and the photographers to satisfy their insatiable thirst for a photo of him. He looks around indifferently, as if he wouldn't really be there if he had the

choice. His whole demeanour doesn't change much during the game, as he often swivels in his chair, looking around with an expression on his face that can easily be mistaken for boredom. I fire up a discussion on this subject with the ThoughtWorks crew, who are essentially a bunch of intelligent young individuals with no prior experience of the Norwegian grandmaster's habits; their thoughts and comments prove intriguing. They are impressed by the sharp contrast between his outwardly indifferent appearance and the intensity of the thought process surely taking place inside his head. Only rarely does Magnus display signs of emotion during the game, most notably an occasional biting of his lips – likely an emotional reaction to a variation in his head not quite working out as he had been hoping for. Still, there's no mistaking his powerful concentration on the task at hand. It may be the clever lighting effect that Daniel designed playing tricks on our minds, but the feeling does prevail that Carlsen is completely cut off from his surroundings while the game lasts.

The game itself is also vintage Carlsen. Grischuk reacts energetically to a quiet but venomous opening line, only to find that his position, though objectively sound, is rather difficult to handle in a practical setting. Magnus calmly makes natural and seemingly obvious moves, as if he is just reaching out and executing the first thought that comes to his head, but somehow miraculously the pressure keeps growing. Grischuk tries hard to drum up some initiative on the kingside, but Carlsen appears contemptuous to the impending dangers and grabs a pawn on the other side. It's not clear if the Russian's counterplay really was there or not, but some inaccuracies on his part leave the question unanswered on the board – and him struggling. Magnus refutes a bunch of tactical threats with precision and collects the point, bringing him into a tie for first place, while Grischuk is left pondering where exactly he missed his chances.



**Give me a Place to Stand,
and I will move the Earth!**

Magnus Carlsen – Alexander Grischuk

Round 4, 19th March 2013

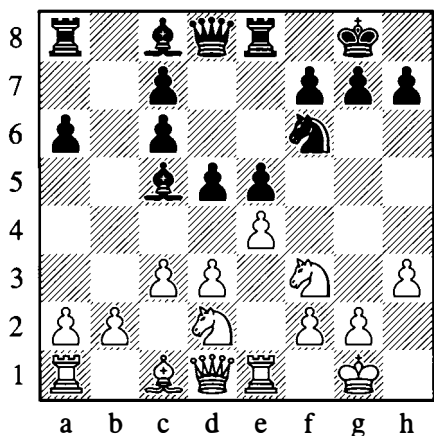
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6

Grischuk chooses the Berlin; this is one of the most annoying openings for 1.e4 players to face nowadays.

4.d3

Carlsen's practical attitude is one of his strongest points; by avoiding the heavily-analysed Berlin ending he is indirectly telling his opponent that he is ready for an uncompromising fight, no matter what the evaluation after the opening is.

4...♗c5 5.c3 0-0 6.0-0 d6 7.h3 a6 8.♗xc6 bxc6 9.♖e1 ♖e8 10.♘bd2 d5!?



An interesting move; Black will get a bad pawn structure now, but the position opens up for his bishops and he will have a target on d3 to pile upon. Still, one is tempted to ask, wasn't this a kind of committal decision against such a good technician as Carlsen? The answer is by no means easy. But what crosses my mind, and I am sure many grandmasters share the same opinion, is that it is very difficult to keep

playing good solid chess for as long as Carlsen does, because this means playing almost like a computer, for a large number of moves. Besides, Grischuk, albeit a very tenacious and practical player himself, likes to add spice to his play here and there, when he is given the chance.

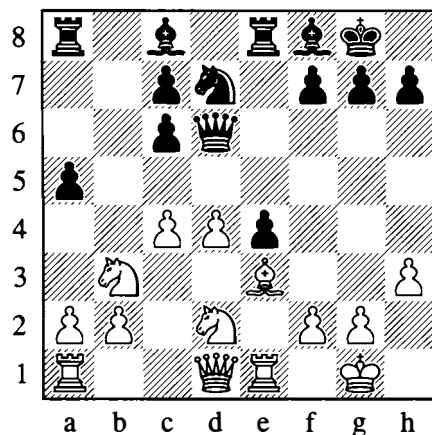
11.exd5 ♖xd5 12.♘b3 ♗f8 13.c4 ♖d6 14.♗e3 ♘d7!

Unveiling the main idea of Black's strategy, which is to attack by means of ...c5, ...♗b7 and ...f5. Of course it would be naive to believe Carlsen would allow such a scenario.

15.d4

Stopping ...c5, but now Black gets a kingside pawn majority which will give him attacking chances anyway.

15...e4 16.♘fd2 a5!



One of those moves that you can't take back, but at the same time very principled. Now ...a5-a4 is threatened, so White is forced to weaken himself along the b-file in order to stop it.

17.a4

I am sure Magnus was happy to fix the pawn on a5, despite the disadvantages a2-a4 entails.

What he excels at, after all, is working on a weakness and squeezing the best he can out of it.

17...f5

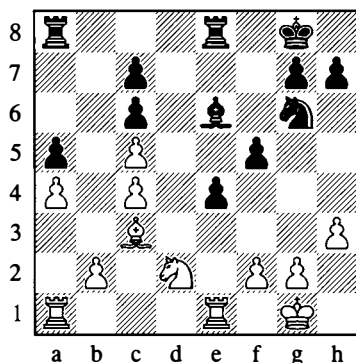
A principled move again, going for the throat.

Arkadij Naiditsch has offered

17...♖g6!?

as a good alternative, planning to continue ...♜f6 next. In his words, "In case of 18.♖g4, I cannot imagine White being better in this endgame; the knight on b3 is very badly placed." Indeed, that would be the case had the endgame arisen, and I fully agree with his evaluation, but I think that Carlsen would have gone into this ending all the same.

18.♖g4! ♜e5 19.♖xg6 ♜xg6 20.♜c5! ♜xc5
21.dxc5 f5 22.♜d4 ♜e6 23.♜c3



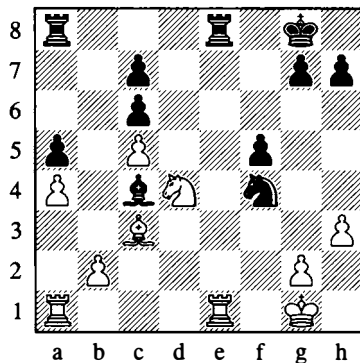
In my opinion this is best play for both sides and here we can stop for a moment and take a look at the situation on the board. "Draw?" you may ask. Well, probably yes, almost certainly yes, but there is still some play left in the position in spite of the presence of opposite-coloured bishops, and against Carlsen such draws have to be played out to the last pawn before a draw is signed on the scoresheet. White can try to attack the a5-pawn or offset Black's kingside advantage by means of f2-f3, factors that explain my

reluctance to say "It is a dead draw." To illustrate there is still some life in the position I will give a couple of lines:

23...♜f4 24.f3!?

24.♜e3 ♜ed8 25.♜h2! ♜d3 26.♜ae1 ♜xe3
27.♜xe3 ♜d3 28.f3 ♜xc5 29.fxe4 ♜xa4
30.♜e5 fxe4 31.♜g3 is indeed very close to a draw.

24...exf3 25.♜xf3 ♜xc4 26.♜d4



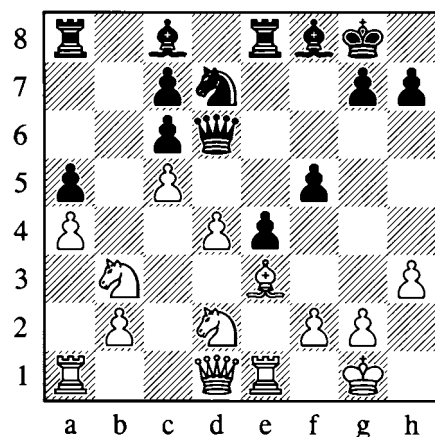
26...♜e2†

26...♜d5 27.♜xa5! ♜xe1† 28.♜xe1 ♜xg2
29.♜d2 creates an imbalance that can certainly lead to a variety of results.

27.♜xe2 ♜xe2 28.♜f2 ♜h5 29.♜xe8† ♜xe8
30.♜d1

White has excellent compensation for the pawn and slight pressure, as the a8-rook is passive.

18.c5

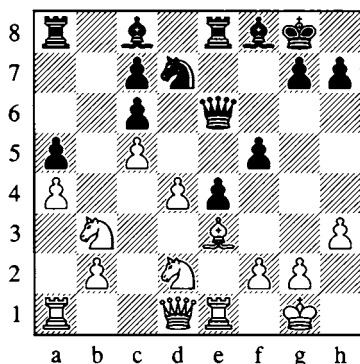


With this move Carlsen is setting his sights on the a5-pawn, burning some bridges in the process; the d5-square is surrendered to the enemy knight and when the knight reaches it, Black will have the makings of a very strong attack. It's certainly a race now, as White wants to play $\text{c}4$ followed by $\text{b}5$ in the next couple of moves, and in races, as we all know, the utmost precision is needed.

18... $\text{g}6$?

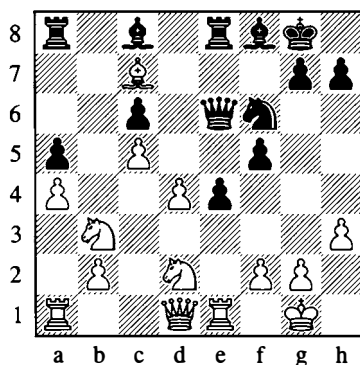
A serious error by Grischuk just when the battle was heating up. He had to slow down White's play by:

18... $\text{e}6$!



Preventing the immediate $\text{c}4$.

19. $\text{f}4$! $\text{d}6$ 20. $\text{xc}7$



20... $\text{f}7$!?

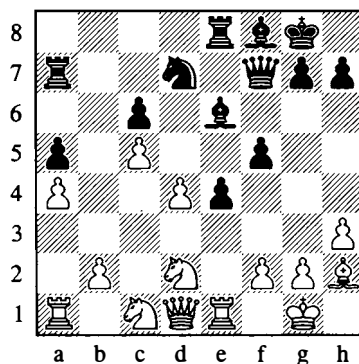
20... $\text{d}5$ 21. $\text{e}5$ $\text{b}4$ 22. $\text{f}3$ $\text{d}3$ 23. $\text{fx}4$!
 $\text{dxe}5$ 24. $\text{dxe}5$ $\text{xe}5$ 25. $\text{exf}5$ $\text{xe}1$ † 26. $\text{xe}1$

$\text{xe}1$ † 27. $\text{xe}1$ $\text{xf}5$ should also offer Black good compensation.

21. $\text{e}5$!

21. $\text{xa}5$ $\text{f}4$ gives Black a tremendous, possibly winning, attack in return for two pawns.

21... $\text{e}6$ 22. $\text{c}1$ $\text{d}7$ 23. $\text{h}2$ $\text{a}7$!



Black has very serious compensation for his pawn, as the computer's evaluation of 0.00 indicates. The obvious question that arises is: was all this so difficult for Grischuk to find or understand?

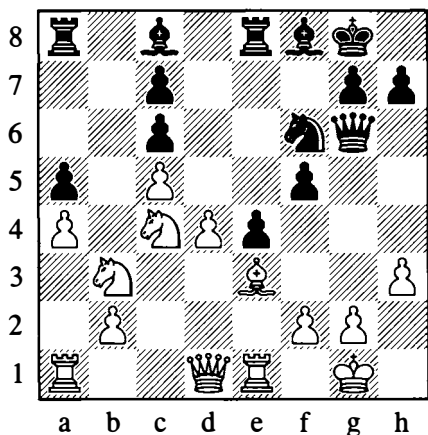
I think the answer is not difficult here. Playing actively against Carlsen is a desirable tactic, as far as I'm concerned, but it requires: a) a reasonable sense of danger, and b) restraining his own play as much as possible.

These requirements are necessary ingredients for success against him, because the guy, once given the chance, will calculate like a computer, taking all that is offered at him, repel the threats, and win.

Grischuk does not lack calculating powers, but I think he simply underestimated or overlooked White's configuration in the game. He probably thought that after placing a knight on d5, the position would play itself, but conquering a square is simply not enough to beat Magnus. You need to distract his forces as much as possible, slow down his pawn-grabbing operations as much as possible, to enjoy chances of success. That did not happen

here, because Grischuk did not pay attention to the details, at least not as much as he should have. I would rather attribute his mistake to relaxation once he got such a good position from the opening. I refuse to believe it is an intuitive mistake or a calculation mistake.

19. ♖c4 ♜f6



20. ♗f4! ♜d5 21. ♖d2!

White does not care for his bishop; all he cares for is simply stopping any kind of counterplay before grabbing the doomed a5-pawn. A simple conception apparently, but isn't simplicity a gift all the champions possess?

21... ♗c6 22. ♜bxa5

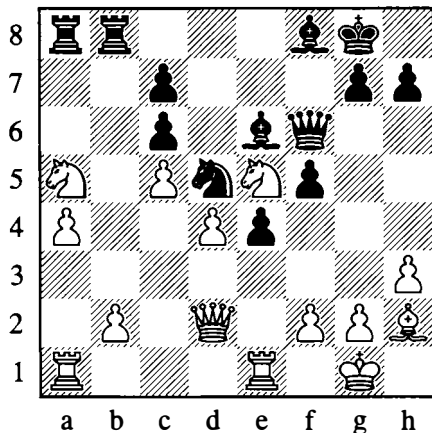
One mistake, and Black is already busted. White has not just won a pawn, the most important things are that his extra pawn is a dangerous passer and that no counterplay is in sight for Black.

22... ♗eb8?!

22... ♜xf4! 23. ♖xf4 ♖f6 24. ♗ed1 ♗d5 25. b4 ♗a7 26. ♜e3 g6 would have been more tenacious.

23. ♜e5 ♖f6 24. ♗h2

24. ♜axc6! is winning, as Black has nothing of substance after it.



24... ♗xa5!

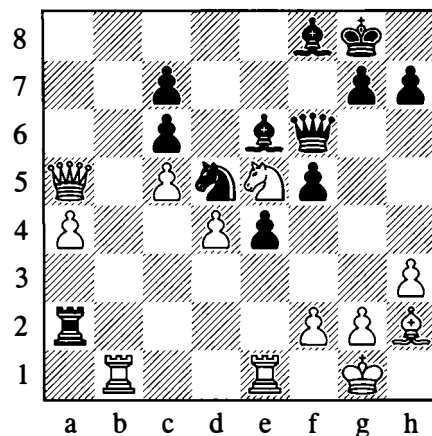
From this point onwards, Grischuk tries his best to complicate the issue, allowing Magnus to display his highest chess quality: consolidating a winning advantage with precise moves.

25. ♖xa5 ♗xb2 26. ♗ab1

Activating his rook with tempo, by trying to expel the annoying intruder.

26... ♗a2

Obviously the only move to keep Black in the game.

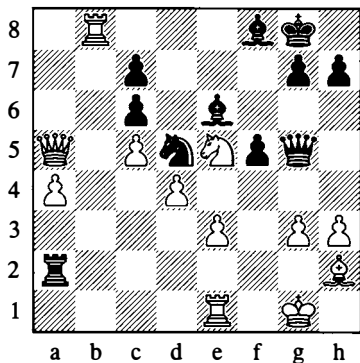


27. ♖a6!

As several commentators have pointed out,

27.♖b8 looks great at first, but is risky because of 27...e3! 28.fxe3 ♖g5.

After 29.g3 a sharp position is reached:



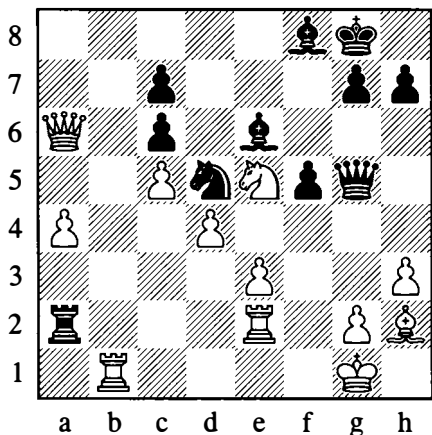
Black has at least two promising options:

Naiditsch gave 29...g6! when Black has practical chances due to his piece activity.

Golubev instead continued the line with 29...♖h6 30.♖a8 g6 31.h4 ♖a1! 32.♖xf8† ♔g7 33.♖xa1 ♖xe3† 34.♔f1 f4 and White should look for a draw as he is the one in danger.

27...e3 28.fxe3 ♖g5 29.♖e2!

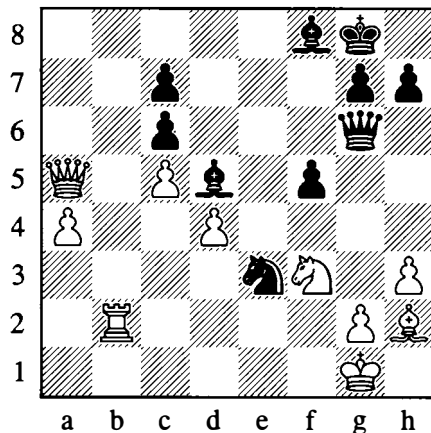
The winner, finally expelling the annoying intruder, even at the cost of returning some material. That is why 27.♖a6! was the best move earlier on.



29...♔xe3

29...♖xe2 30.♖xe2 ♔c3 31.♖d3 ♔xb1 32.♔f3! ♖d8 (32...♖h6 33.♔f4 and wins) 33.♖xb1 ♖c8 34.a5 ♔d5 35.♔f4 g6 36.♔e5 ♔g7 37.♖f1 would have been curtains as well. The game continuation shortens Black's agony.

30.♔f3 ♖g6 31.♖xa2 ♔xa2 32.♖b2 ♔c4 33.♖a5 ♔d5



34.♖e1

The return of the queen to the defence signifies the end of Black's hopes. Alexander played a few more moves before acquiescing to the inevitable.

34...f4 35.♔xf4 ♔c2 36.♖f2 ♔xf3 37.♖xc2 1-0

Not a work of art, but certainly a powerful display of middlegame chess, and an awesome example of consolidating a winning advantage. After this game, there was certainly enough wind in Carlsen's sails to go on and win the most important tournament of his life, but the way was not paved with roses...

Only slightly later I take a walk around the venue and overhear discussions about the tournament being "finished" now that Carlsen has started scoring wins, about the possible venue of the inevitable Anand – Carlsen

match and so on. These premature discussions are no doubt further encouraged by the perfectly decent but uninspiring showing of Carlsen's main challengers in this round. Aronian clearly is in a combative mood, but Svidler dampens his enthusiasm with a carefully selected and deeply analysed surprise – a rare line in the Queen's Gambit Accepted that leads to great simplifications. Playing with the confidence of a man who has discovered the one and only Truth, Svidler makes it all look like it was a forced draw all along – though of course some accuracy is required. He displays this effortlessly, concluding a successful and convincing performance in this first leg of the tournament that leaves him only a short step behind the leaders. Of course, Aronian has nothing to complain about either, and so this draw seems like the perfect result for both before the rest day.



Radjabov's self-confidence appears somewhat shaken after the painful loss against Svidler, as he quickly ends up in a slightly unpleasant position with White right after the opening against Kramnik. Having taken advantage of a minor move-order confusion on the part of his opponent, the former World Champion settles on the better side of an equal position and skilfully tries to apply pressure on a pair of hanging pawns in the centre. The rest of the game sees a strong defensive effort by Radjabov, who combines careful prophylaxis with timely counter-measures and keeps the position within the bounds of equality. Kramnik recognizes the dead end he has reached and agrees to the draw.

The round is completed by a fascinating game between the tail-enders, Gelfand and Ivanchuk, that unfortunately goes by almost unnoticed. Back in 1990, this game would be a clash between the Numbers 3 and 4 in the world, the leaders of the then new generation. In March 2013, it is the game between the oldest players in the tournament, both trying to recover from a bad start – it would be reasonable to assume that they would be agreeable to a quiet draw, one that would end their losing streaks. A draw it is indeed, but the players arrive there from an entirely unpredictable direction – a tribute to their great fighting spirit. Ivanchuk plays somewhat unorthodoxly in the opening and Gelfand, as always, feels obliged to respond in a maximalist and consistent manner. The subsequent events are full of difficult decisions and deceptive appearances, with the tension rising after every move. When it finally explodes, a series of forcing moves leave Gelfand a piece up but facing serious threats to his king. He manages to defend against them, but there is not much more he can do.

Hidden in my corner, I have no direct view of the tables where the battles are in full swing, but I have all the relevant data on my liquid crystal display; still, I prefer to close my eyes and try to sense the tension in the atmosphere. The players are in a rush, as is evidenced by the frequent presses on the clock levers; a few consecutive occurrences of this characteristic sound serve to indicate a repetition, perhaps perpetual check? I open my eyes and verify the correctness of my assumption.

By the time almost everyone else has left to enjoy the prospect of the coming rest day, the two combatants are still immersed in the ifs and maybes of their game in the press room, lost in a sea of variations. Ivanchuk rattles out one variation after another, without a board, staring at the ceiling, without even pausing for breath; I cannot help but admire this expression of his genius and melancholically think about what a great player he can be when he wins the battle with the enemy within.

After such lengthy games, I do feel a little tired and badly in need of some glucose. During the round I have set my eyes on what appears to be a Bounty bar on Kramnik's table, and now, several hours later, I remember the object of my affection and pray he hasn't been too hungry during the game; now that the arena is empty, I walk to his table and my prayers are answered.

I share this story with some friends; months later, when I arrive at a mountainous village on Crete for a tournament, I find a bag of Bounty bars awaiting me inside my fridge.

Rest Day

The rest day has a soothing effect on everyone involved in the tournament, except of course the players. The IET London feels like home by now, most tasks are executed in an automated way, without thinking, and our days feel more and more similar to the preceding ones. With ten more rounds to go, results and standings lose some of their significance – temporarily, of course. The players' sentiments are different, no doubt: the rest day must have been spent adjusting their opening preparation to the fresh information gleaned from the first four rounds.

It's interesting to observe the differing working schedules of the players and their helpers, as evidenced by the visits of the assistants to the venue. Alexander Riazantsev, who is accompanying Grischuk, often attends the start and spends plenty of his time in the press room. Peter Heine Nielsen usually shows up right after Magnus has finished his game, as is the case with Svidler's seconds. We never get to see Gelfand's helpers in the venue, but late one night I run into Evgeny Tomashevsky near the hotel where the players are staying. Kramnik's team is a mystery, finally dispelled by the great man himself in a post-tournament interview: he has come only with his masseur, and Zahar Efimenko has been assisting him from home. The masseur's presence is not really a surprise – it has recently become common practice in top-level chess to employ the services of such professionals. Indeed, Kramnik later attributes his good shape and great reserves of strength in the second half of the tournament to his regular massages (three times a day). At a level where differences in strength and knowledge are minute, every single detail counts and thus great attention is paid to anything that may boost one's playing strength on a given day, even if only by a tiny little bit.

Round Five

The fifth round is the stage for an eagerly awaited Kramnik – Aronian clash, where the former is called upon to finally win a game and show that he can fight for first place, while the latter must prove that he can keep up with Carlsen in the standings. This particular game is followed very attentively by your humble author, a devoted Kramnik fan, not only for its chess content but also because of its great competitive significance: it feels like some kind of last chance for the Russian grandmaster and he seems to share that opinion, because he comes to the game in a very determined mood.

He chooses a Reti Opening, most likely because he finds it very difficult to dent Aronian's strong grasp of the Slav Defence and so he prefers to keep the game more fluid. Aronian goes through the opening in his customary manner: making his moves very quickly with one hand, while writing them down with the other in an impressive show of multi-tasking (my esteemed co-author being another player with the same talent), never wasting any seconds on moves that are well known to him, all the way up to move 11, when he selects a rare and ambitious move with the idea of a queenside assault (funnily enough, Kramnik himself will employ a similar set-up in a completely different position two days later against Gelfand). This move telegraphs the message that Levon is thinking about more than a draw, and an uncompromising fight is on the cards – I quickly grab a coffee from the press room and return to my seat. Kramnik reacts in a classical manner, breaking in the centre, and the battle flares up. After a more-or-less logical sequence, the

battle lines have been drawn: Aronian is about to decimate White's queenside, but Kramnik is able to build a dangerous attack against his opponent's king, which has been deserted by its army.

I have no way of knowing this at the time, but two days later Kramnik appears to have forgotten the lesson, in what turns out to be his wake-up call. In any case, his attack turns out to be even more menacing than it first appeared, and it looks like Aronian will be harshly punished for his audacious play. But once again, it's not meant to be: Kramnik spends a lot of time on a decision of crucial importance and fails to solve the task at hand. After long calculations, he rejects a seemingly very promising attacking continuation in favour of a quieter alternative, one leading to a favourable but by no means decisive endgame.

As it turns out later, the former option would have given him a winning advantage, but the means to this end were hardly trivial; there is no doubt that Kramnik, a player with great calculating powers, has seen most of what is there to see, but probably stumbles on some unlikely defensive idea and overlooks the tricky refutation. Instead of scoring a convincing victory against one of the leaders – and what a confidence-booster that would have been – he finds himself disappointed in the face of a spirited and very energetic defence by the resourceful Armenian. Much like Grischuk two rounds earlier, Aronian manages to save the game, not without exertions, and maintains his position in the lead. Kramnik leaves the venue with disappointment all over his face, and probably disillusioned with his repeated failure to exploit the advantages he keeps getting.

In the meantime, Peter Svidler goes straight for the throat against Gelfand, employing a very dangerous new idea in the Grünfeld and catching his opponent completely by surprise. Gelfand's reaction is unexpectedly meek and he soon ends up in a very passive and difficult position; after the game he himself cannot explain his play in the first part of this game. It is a tribute to his strength of character that, while everyone is simply waiting for Svidler to finish him off, he digs in and puts up tremendous resistance, making it as difficult as possible for his opponent to convert his advantage. And it works. Svidler in turn gives up a pawn for reasons even he could not explain, then feels compelled by the preceding events to force things and, as a result, completely loses control of the position. Despite time pressure, Gelfand finds all the right moves to defuse the attack and even gets an opportunity to seize the advantage, but the timing of this sudden chance is not ideal; Boris opts for a safer option instead and offers a draw on his next move, which is accepted.

The press conference is very lively and full of exciting variations, just like the game was, and it becomes clear how difficult it must have been for both players to make decisions in such a complicated position. Both players seem affected by the events in this game, as evidenced by the following rounds: Svidler's first signs of weakness in the tournament probably shake his self-confidence, while Gelfand's determined comeback does exactly the opposite.

Things in the other games seem to be working out well for Carlsen, but his own game is another story. Obviously hoping to take advantage of Ivanchuk's indifferent form, Carlsen tries to keep the game relatively complex, but this quickly backfires and he ends up in a very unpleasant position. For the first time in London we see him in trouble and one doesn't even need to look at the board to realize this: his body language tells it all. Glued to his seat and visibly uncomfortable, Magnus tries hard to find a solution to his problems, finally settling on a pawn sacrifice to relieve the tension. Ivanchuk plays the next phase of the game with uncertainty and hesitation,

allowing Carlsen a lot of counterplay – so much so that the Norwegian even sees fit to reject a draw offer, estimating his chances to be in the ascendancy. This proves to be a judgement error, as Ivanchuk steers the game to a knight ending where he has an extra pawn, and suddenly Magnus has to fight for salvation once again. He does this very efficiently, but by the time the scoresheets are signed it is clear who is the one breathing a sigh of relief.

A Few Signs of Weakness

Vassily Ivanchuk – Magnus Carlsen

Round 5, 20th March 2013

Vassily Ivanchuk has long been around, and many people regard him as the uncrowned champion of chess. However, in chess, like in all other sports, endurance is needed, and I think this is what distinguishes players who “almost made it” from those who did. Vassily clearly has neglected or underestimated the ‘endurance factor’ in his chess career and thus part of his vast talent has been wasted. Magnus, on the other hand, is renowned for his endurance in the most difficult situations, and that is regarded mostly as a developed character trait rather than a physical element.

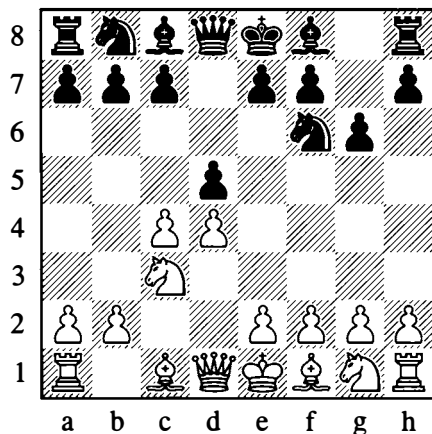
In London, Ivanchuk started badly, a fact that relegated him to the role of regulator rather than allowing him to be a protagonist. Magnus, who has a clear lifetime plus score against the Ukrainian, probably thought it was high time to take advantage of the situation, but in the end had to settle for just half a point out of their two encounters. Why did that happen?

My humble opinion is that Carlsen underestimated his opponent, no matter how naive this may sound. Naive for Carlsen, because when you are the World Number 1 you simply can't afford to underestimate

anyone; naive about Ivanchuk because when you are Ivanchuk you simply cannot be underestimated, even in your worst form. Fortunately for the Norwegian wunderkind, his undoings in the games against Ivanchuk didn't have a major impact on his expected final outcome, but it could well have been otherwise. Already from their first game, a few signs of weakness were apparent:

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5

Just like Fischer and Kasparov, Magnus has advocated the Grünfeld for a large part of his small yet impressive chess career, although he practically plays everything against 1.d4. Playing it against Ivanchuk reveals a certain degree of ambition which in itself is not a bad thing.



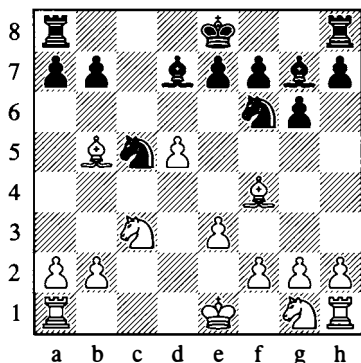
4.♙f4

A solid variation.

The extravagant 4.♘f3 ♙g7 5.h4!? was played by Grischuk in the same event against Magnus. After: 5...c6 6.♙g5 0-0 7.♙xf6 ♙xf6 8.h5 ♙f5 9.e3 e6 10.hxg6 ♙xg6 11.♙d3 ♘d7 12.♖e2 e5 13.♙xg6 hxg6 14.dxe5 ♘xe5 15.cxd5 cxd5 16.♗d1 ♖a5 17.♘f1 ♗ad8 18.♘d4 ♖c5 19.♘b3 ♖c6 20.♘a5 ♖c7 21.♘b3 ♖c6 22.♘a5= They agreed a draw in this equal position.

4...♙g7 5.♘f3

Ivanchuk deviates from their previous encounter in the same opening, which had continued: 5.e3 c5 6.dxc5 ♖a5 7.♗b3 ♠a6!? 8.cxd5 ♘xc5 9.♗b5† ♗xb5 10.♙xb5† ♙d7

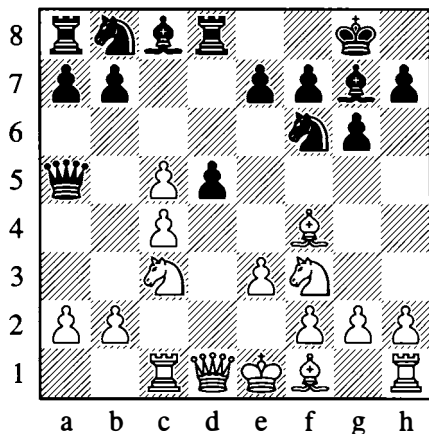


11.♞d1 (A better course is 11.♙xd7† but Black retains excellent chances of equality after: 11...♙xd7! 12.♘f3 ♘d3† 13.♙e2 ♘xf4† 14.exf4 ♞hd8! 15.♞hd1 ♞ac8 16.♞d3 ♙e8 17.♞ad1 ♘h5 18.g3 ♙xc3!) 11...♘h5 12.♙xd7† ♙xd7 13.♙g3 b5 14.d6 e6 15.♘f3 b4 16.♘b5 ♘xg3 17.hxg3 ♞ab8 18.♘bd4 h5 19.♞h4 f5 20.♘e2 e5 21.♞c4 ♞hc8 22.♙f1 ♘e4 23.♞c7† ♞xc7 24.dxc7† ♙xc7 25.♘d2 ♘xd2† 26.♞xd2 a5 Black was slightly better in Ivanchuk – Carlsen, Moscow 2011.

5...0-0 6.e3 c5 7.dxc5 ♖a5 8.♞c1 ♞d8

Displaying his aggressive attitude once more. This is a very rare move, and by using it Magnus clearly wants to lure his opponent into uncharted territory, hoping to outplay him there. Since the move is not objectively the best, the word “provocation” unavoidably springs to mind.

8...dxc4 is the good old main line, but it has been analysed inside out, and I guess anyone can understand what the verdict is.

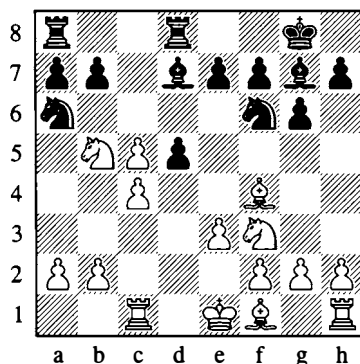


9.♗a4!

The best move in the position, showing that Ivanchuk really understands the structure. As long as the queen remains unchallenged on a5, Black can develop his counterplay smoothly.

Such is the case after 9.♘d2 dxc4 10.♙xc4 ♘a6!? 11.a3 ♘h5! when Black gets free play and excellent chances to play for a win.

After 9.♗b3 the direct 9...♘a6, aiming to recapture on c5 with the knight rather than the queen, also gives Black excellent chances. For example: 10.♗b5 ♗xb5 11.♘xb5 ♙d7



12.cxd5 (12.♘c7?! ♘xc7 13.♙xc7 ♞dc8 14.♙e5 ♞xc5 15.b4 ♞cc8 16.c5 a5 17.b5 ♘e4 18.♙d4 f6 19.♘d2 ♘xd2 20.♙xd2 e5 21.♙b2 ♙f8 22.♙a3 b6 was ugly for White in F. Portisch – Sax, Budapest 1976, although

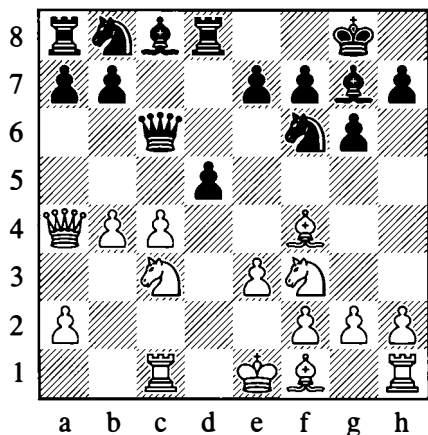
he managed to draw in the end.) 12...♖xd5 13.♙e5 And now 13...♞ac8!= is equal, while the messy option is 13...f6!? 14.♙g3 ♞dc8 15.♖fd4! with an unclear position.

9...♞xc5

Black wants his pawn back, and I can understand him...

More natural is 9...♞xa4 10.♖xa4 ♖c6 11.♖e5!? ♙e6, but after 12.♖xc6 bxc6 13.♙e5 Black is not assured of equality.

10.b4! ♞c6



11.♞a3!

A very strong novelty by Ivanchuk, creating the threat of b4-b5 with direct pressure against e7.

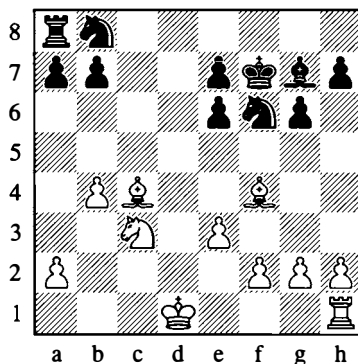
11.♞xc6 ♖xc6= looks at least equal for Black.

I am certain that a move Magnus had subjected to close scrutiny was:

11.♞b3

This has been the main move for White so far. Looking at it briefly, I think a good line for Black is:

11...♙e6!? 12.♖d4 ♞d7 13.♖xe6 dxc4 14.♞d1 ♞xd1† 15.♞xd1 ♞xd1† 16.♖xd1 fxe6 17.♙xc4 ♖f7

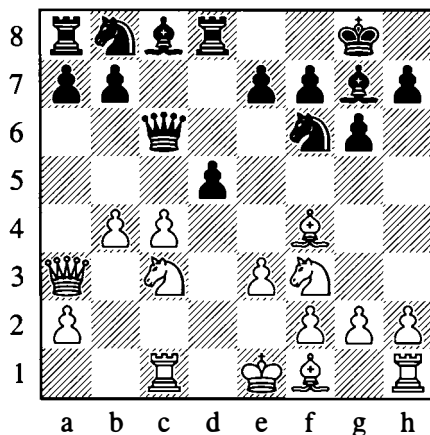


18.♙xb8!

18.♖c2 ♖c6 19.♖b3 ♖h5 20.♙g3 a5 21.a3 axb4 22.axb4 ♙xc3 23.♖xc3 ♞a3† 24.♙b3 b5 looks equal.

18...♞xb8 19.♖c2 ♞d8 20.♞d1 ♞xd1 21.♖xd1 h6 22.♖d2 ♖e8

Black should comfortably hold the ending in spite of the weakness on e6. I don't know if Magnus intended to play this or had in mind some more ambitious line, but in any case, Ivanchuk's move in the game is a stiffer test of the 8...♞d8 idea.

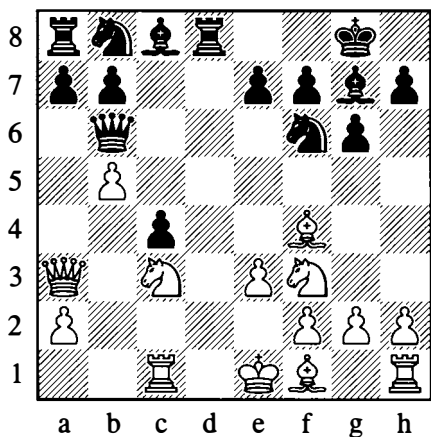


11...dxc4!

A sensible reaction.

11...♙e6?! 12.♖d4 And now 12...♞e8 13.♖cb5 ♖a6 14.♖xe6 fxe6 15.♙e2 is unpleasant, and 12...♞d7 also does not work, with the queen on a3, in view of 13.♖a4 with advantage.

12.b5 ♖b6!



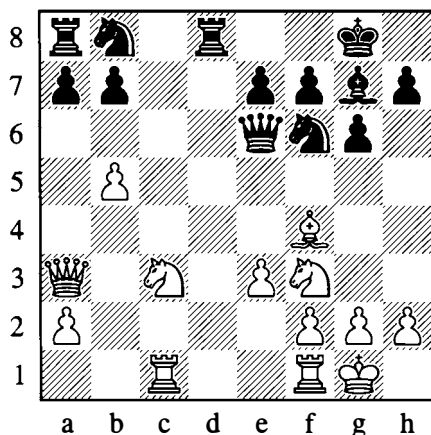
13.♙xc4!

White dare not take the pawn on e7: 13.♖xe7?! ♙f8 14.♖c7 ♙a3 15.♙xc4 ♖xc7 16.♙xc7 ♖d7 and Black is suddenly better.

13.♙e5 should be met by Stohl's recommendation of: 13...♖d6!? 14.♖b2 ♖b6! 15.♙xc4 (15.♙xc4 ♙e6 16.♖b3 ♙bd7=) 15...♖c5 16.♙e5 ♙e6 17.♙a4 ♖d5 with an unclear position.

13...♙e6! 14.♙xc6 ♖xe6 15.0-0

After 15.♙g5 Black should not abandon the a2-g8 diagonal to White, but rather play 15...♖c4! 16.♙ce4 ♖xb5 17.♖xe7 ♖a5†! 18.♙f1 ♖b5† 19.♙g1 ♖d7!= exploiting the mate threat on d1 to acquire complete equality.



15...♙bd7?!

Black has defended excellently so far after White's novelty, but here he sacrifices a pawn on general grounds when he had a better continuation.

15...♙f8!?

This was rather easy to find as it points at the white queen.

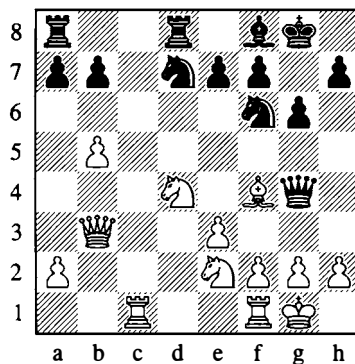
16.♙d4

16.e4 ♙bd7 17.♖fd1 ♙b6! with counterplay, and 16.♙g5 ♖f5!? 17.♖b3 ♙e6 18.f3 ♙bd7 19.g4 ♖c5 20.♙ge4 ♖a3= are lines showing the resilience of Black's position, as pointed out by Stohl.

16...♖g4!?

16...♖d7 is also possible, intending to pull the queen back to e8 and then develop by ...♙bd7.

17.♖b3 ♙bd7 18.♙ce2!?



18...♖h5!

18...e5?? 19.h3 ♖h5 20.♙g3 ♖h4 21.♙f3 and White wins.

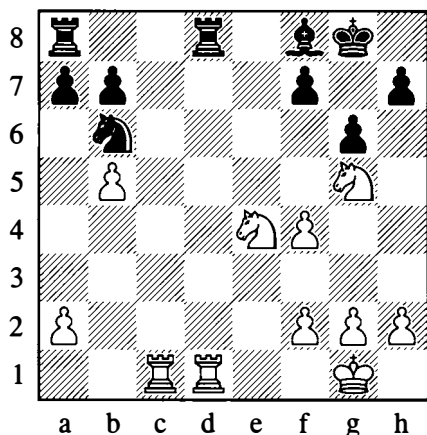
19.♙c7 ♖dc8 20.♙f4 ♖g5 21.♙f3 ♖f5

It turns out that the black queen is not in danger and a draw by repetition looks like the logical outcome.

16.♙g5!

Now White wins a pawn; Black gains some compensation but only for drawing purposes.

16...♖f5 17.♗xe7 ♘h5 18.♞fd1 ♙xf4
19.exf4 ♙f8 20.♗e4 ♗xe4 21.♙ce4 ♙b6

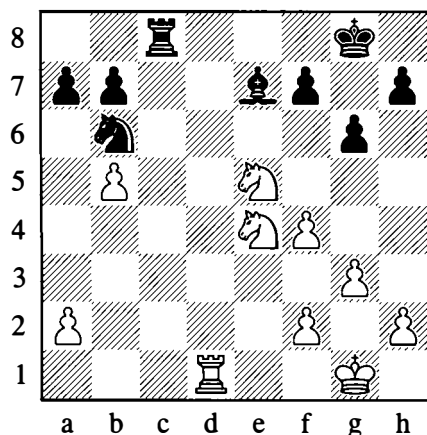


Evaluating the ending that has arisen, we can certainly justify to some extent Black's pawn sacrifice; White's extra pawn is doubled and his queenside pawns are a bit weak. On the other hand, the presence of a pair of white knights and an extra pawn on the kingside gives White some attacking chances there, so Black should be very precise from now on.

22.g3 ♞xd1† 23.♞xd1 ♙e7 24.♙f3

24.♙c1!? ♙d8 25.♙g2 was a good option.

24...♞c8 25.♙e5?!



A bad choice, illustrating Vassily's bad form in London. The knight jump into Black's camp is completely aimless.

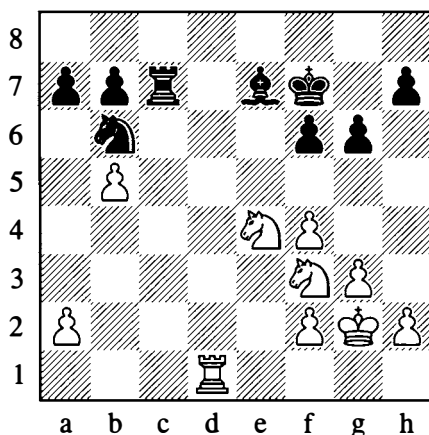
25.a4!? was a logical idea, but Black can probably hold by means of 25...♞c4 26.a5 ♞xe4 27.axb6 axb6 28.♞d7 ♙c5 29.♙e5 g5! 30.♙xf7 gxf4 31.♙h6† ♙h8 32.♙f5 ♙g8, as the material is reduced.

25.♞d2 ♙g7 26.♙g2 is probably best, trying to "sit" on the position, with lasting pressure.

25...♞c7?!

In this game we are witnessing a mix of perfect and trivial moves by Carlsen, a sure sign of underestimating his great opponent's abilities in the given circumstances. Defending the second rank is something almost anyone would play, but people would expect Carlsen to find the exceptional 25...f5! 26.♙g5 (26.♙d2 ♞d8 27.♙f1 ♞d5 is slight better for Black) 26...♞c5 27.♙e6 ♞xb5 28.♞c1 ♙d6 when the tables have turned and it is White who has to play accurately to hold the draw.

26.♙g2 f6 27.♙f3 ♙f7



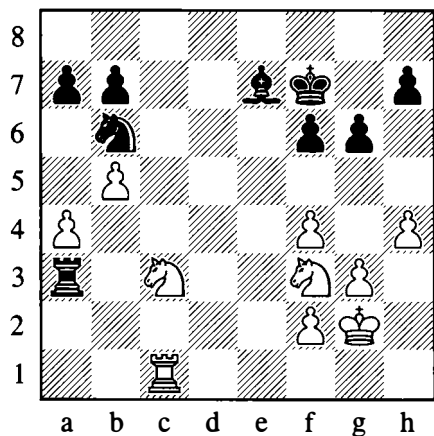
28.h4?!

Trying to prepare f4-f5 under the best possible conditions.

28.♖d4 defends against invasions on c2, but allows 28...♞d7! 29.♜c3 ♙b4 30.♜ce2 ♙c5 and White can't dream of winning anymore.

28...♞c2 29.a4 ♞a2 30.♜c3 ♞a3 31.♞c1

Ivanchuk offered a draw with this move.



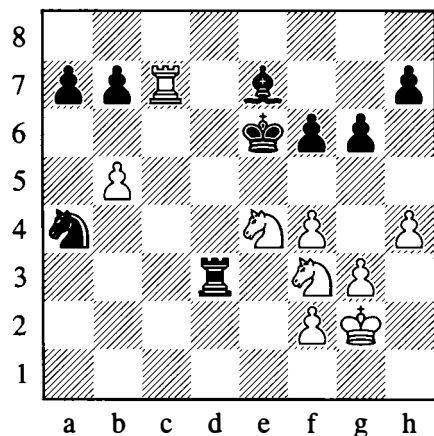
31...♜xa4?

A definite error and a clear sign of unjustified enthusiasm. As Stohl pointed out, 31...a5!? 32.bxa6 bxa6= was the right way to equality. Of course, even simpler was accepting the draw.

32.♜e4!

Carlsen had overlooked this move. Now White's initiative rages again as the c1-rook is set to penetrate to the seventh rank.

32...♞d3 33.♞c7 ♜e6

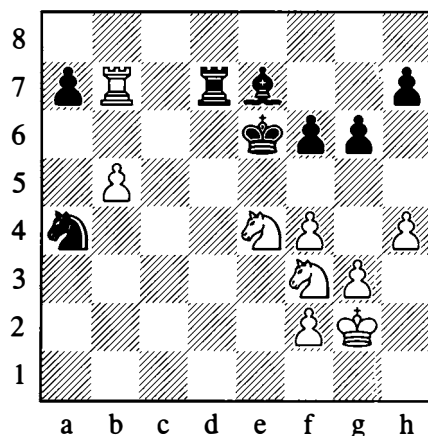


34.♞xb7?!

Luckily for Magnus, Ivanchuk was in really bad form in the first half of the tournament.

After Stohl's 34.g4! ♜b6 35.f5† gxf5 36.gxf5† ♜f7 37.♞xb7 ♞d7 38.♞xd7 ♜xd7 39.♜d4, Black is struggling; his light squares are vulnerable to penetration by the white king, and the a-pawn's weakness also gives cause for concern.

34...♞d7 35.♞b8 ♞d8 36.♞b7 ♞d7



Now it will be a draw, one way or another.

37.♞xd7 ♜xd7 38.♜d4 f5! 39.♜g5 ♙xg5 40.fxg5 ♜c3 41.h5 gxh5! 42.♜h3 ♜d6 43.♜h4 ♜d5 44.♜xf5 ♜xb5 45.♜xh5 ♜e4 46.♜e3 ♜d6 47.♜h6 ♜f7† 48.♜xh7 ♜xg5† 49.♜g6 ♜h3 50.♜d1 ♜f3 51.♜f5 ♜xf2 52.♜xf2 ♜xg3 53.♜d1 a5 54.♜e4 a4 55.♜d4 a3 56.♜c3 a2 57.♜xa2 ½-½

It is hard to say what the players' feelings were after this game, but I guess they were both dissatisfied; they probably experienced at least one or two lapses of concentration during the struggle, and if this was in some way expected for the disappointed Ivanchuk, it certainly was not for the in-form Magnus. It's clear to me that the first game between this

duo should have rung an alarm bell for Magnus concerning their second-half encounter, but, apparently, in the heat of the tournament, he didn't hear it well enough...

With all this action taking place, it is understandable that the Grischuk – Radjabov game fails to attract attention. Teimour switches to the trustworthy Queen's Gambit and the players follow a long and quiet theoretical line that leads to a blocked position. To the untrained eye, nothing much seems to be going on, but, as Grischuk himself explains later, White's long-winded strategic plan hides quite a bit of venom.

As often happens in his games, Alexander executes his plan with great consistency, but also at the cost of precious time. It's not entirely clear if Radjabov has sensed the danger in advance, but at the last possible moment he changes the pattern of the game with a piece sacrifice, setting his opponent some fresh problems. White may be better, or he may not, but the objective evaluation of the sacrifice is not of great practical importance; with very little time available, Grischuk's task of coordinating his pieces against the armada of black pawns is very difficult, and Radjabov secures enough counterplay to force further simplifications and a draw.

Round Six

The sixth round turns out to be even more exciting. After just one week of play, the London Candidates tournament is already looking like a memorable event, with many interesting and hard-fought games, and a relatively small percentage of draws. Judging a tournament's fighting spirit by such statistics is obviously wrong in the first place, but in this case statistics do tell the truth, if only moderately so: the tournament is slowly but surely turning into a slugfest. The results of

this round help to clarify the standings a great deal, as both leaders win their games and reach "plus three", way ahead of the rest of the field, setting up a neck-and-neck race between them for the coveted first place, or so it seems.

Svidler – Carlsen is the game of the day, and many believe that Magnus will not have it easy against the Russian. Svidler reverts to the fine tradition established by Ostaп Bender and opens with 1.e4, for the first time in London, and soon ends up regretting it, as Carlsen easily obtains a comfortable and sound position, with good prospects for active play. A couple of hesitant moves by Svidler, including leaving a rare inaccuracy unpunished, are enough to land him in trouble. Magnus understandably misses a tactical chance to decide the game, but he retains a very stable advantage, which he nurses home with his customary precision.

The Spanish Torture that never was

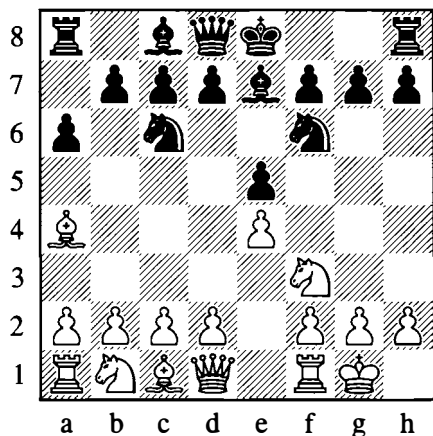
Peter Svidler – Magnus Carlsen

Round 6, 21st March 2013

Clashes between Svidler and Carlsen are almost always interesting, as the Russian player is a deep strategist and an experienced tournament player of the highest level. Their games in London lived up to the players' reputations, producing tremendous fights and an exchange of blows. Carlsen's win came with Black in a moment when it was most welcome for him: the penultimate round of the first half of the tournament, elevating him to an unbeaten +3 score.

Svidler is a great expert in the Spanish Game as White, but Carlsen seems unperturbed throughout this game by this fact, scoring a smooth win. This result undoubtedly opened up the way for Magnus's final tournament win and can be considered one of his best games of the event.

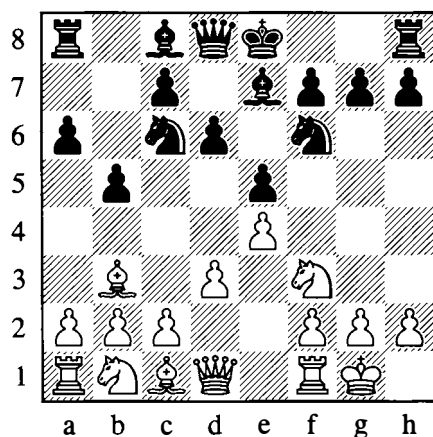
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♘f6
5.0-0 ♙c7



6.d3

White obeys the secret law of all these super-tournaments: If you want to fight then play 6.d3; if you want to blitz out a few moves and go home with half a point in your pocket, play 6.♞e1 b5 7.♙b3 0-0 8.c3 and allow the Marshall.

6...b5 7.♙b3 d6



8.a4

8.a4 has been chosen by Vishy Anand twice in 2013 in high-level encounters, and this fact suggests that the future of the Spanish might

be lying there. Svidler's choice allows Black to gain some queenside space.

8...b4 9.♘bd2

The knight is heading towards the square weakened after Black's last move.

9...0-0 10.a5

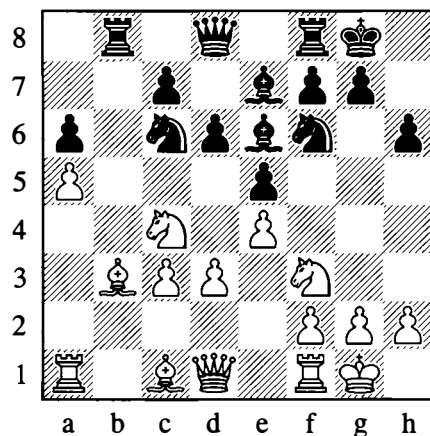
Practically isolating the pawn on b4 and fixing a6 as a potential target; this is a common idea in the Spanish but there is a risk entailed that the a5-pawn may itself become weak at some point.

10...♙e6 11.♘c4

By adding pressure on e5, White prevents for the time being the freeing ...d5 advance.

11...♞b8 12.c3 bxc3 13.bxc3 h6

Black defends against ♘g5 invasions, preparing methodically to carry out his plan which can be summed up in three moves: ...♞c8, ...♞d8, ...♙f8, bringing about a complete harmonization of his forces. All three moves appear in due course.



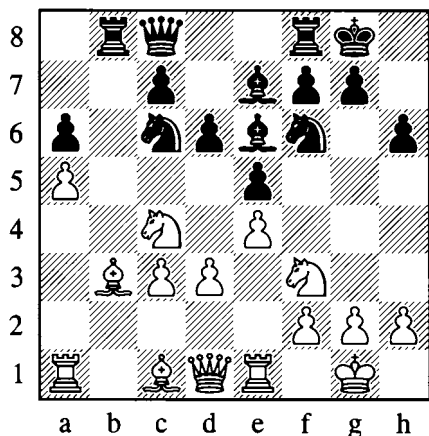
14.♞e1

Svidler is a classical player; his understanding of the position suggests to him that he must play d3-d4 to have any hopes of an edge, so he starts methodically preparing it.

The manoeuvres that follow in the next few moves are all associated with this idea.

14...♖c8

Guarding a6 and preparing ...♞d8, all according to plan.



15.♙c2!?

Svidler's novelty, after which his plan slowly seems to be taking shape; the c4-knight will retreat to e3 and then he will be more or less ready to push d3-d4.

15.♙a4 is another logical move, but after: 15...♙xc4 16.♙xc6 (16.dxc4?! ♞xa5 17.♞h4 ♞d8 18.♞f5 ♙f8 does not give White sufficient compensation) 16...♙b5 17.♙xb5 ♞xb5 Black's position was rock solid in Leko – Adams, London 2012.

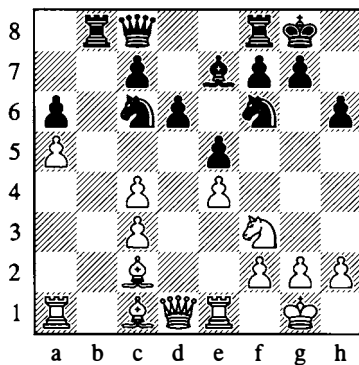
15...♞d8

Black does not get carried away by the tempting:

15...♙xc4!?

It is very likely that Svidler had analysed this position and found good play for his ruptured pawn structure, with a typical line being:

16.dxc4



16...♞d8!

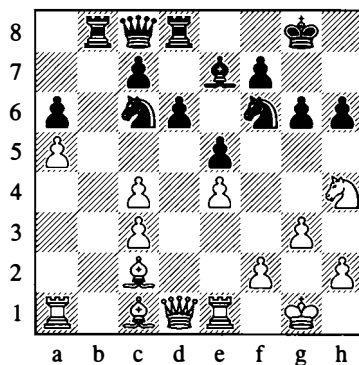
16...♙e6 17.♞h4! ♖xc4 18.♞f5 ♙d8 19.♙a4! ♖c5! (19...♖xc3 20.♞e3 and 19...♙e6 20.♙d3 are both good for White) 20.♞e3! This gives White a dangerous attack.

17.♞h4!?

Interesting, albeit not forced.

17...g6! 18.g3!

18.♙xh6? ♞g4! is good for Black.



18...♖h3!

18...♙f8 19.♞g2 is slightly better for White. 19.f3 ♖g7 20.♞g2 ♞d7 21.♙a4 ♞a7 22.♙e3 ♞c5 23.♙xc5 dxc5 24.♖e2 ♙g5 25.f4 exf4 26.gxf4 ♙e7 27.♞e3

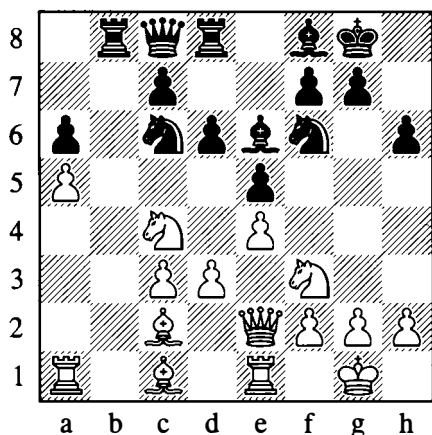
With an unclear game.

16.♖e2

In the event of 16.♞e3 Black plays 16...d5! with an excellent position.

16...♙f8!

16...♙xc4!? 17.dxc4 was at this point as serious a contender as it was on the previous move, but Carlsen's discipline is remarkable: he wants to carry out his own plan and does not succumb to the temptation of ruining the enemy pawn structure. After 17...♘d7 18.♙a4 ♘a7 19.♙e3 c5 20.♘d2 the computers give a small edge for White in any case, and Black has lost his precious light-squared bishop, which can be considered quite a gain from White's point of view.

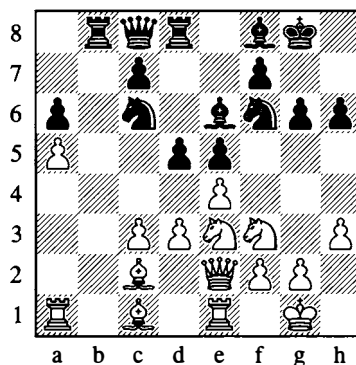


17.♘e3?!

This retreat is a concession; however, it is an understandable one, as White wanted to carry out his plan of d3-d4 and he lost patience, as so often happens with Magnus's opponents.

The immediate 17.d4?! was no improvement since after: 17...exd4 18.♘xd4 (18.cxd4?! d5! is also worse for White) 18...♘xd4 19.cxd4 d5 20.exd5 (20.e5!? dxc4 21.exf6 g6! 22.h4 ♖xd4 23.h5 g5 leaves White without a clear follow-up) 20...♘xd5 21.♙d3 g6 Black is better with ...♙f5 coming next.

However, 17.h3!? would have put the onus on Black to find a move. If, for example, 17...g6 then 18.♘e3 is an improved version of the game as after 18...d5:

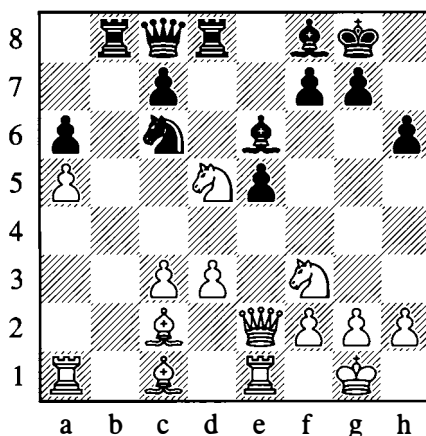


This can be met with the surprising 19.c4!! dxe4 20.dxe4 ♘d4 21.♘xd4 exd4 22.♘d5 ♙xd5 23.cxd5 and White dictates events.

17...d5!

Now this is simple and strong, giving Black a slight initiative.

18.exd5 ♘xd5 19.♘xd5

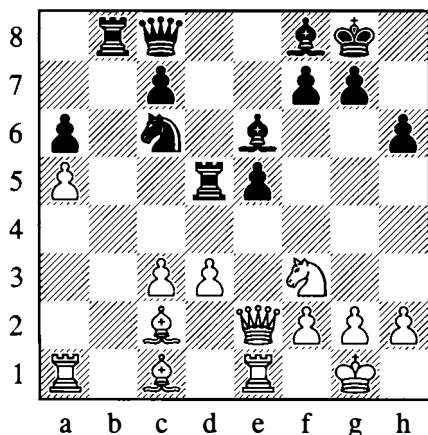


19...♖xd5!?

This is probably Carlsen's only error of real substance in this game, but Svidler fails to take advantage of it. However, taking with the rook on d5 was hard to resist, as it looks like a multi-purpose move, pressuring a5, defending e5 and preparing to attack d3.

The best recapture was with the bishop, preventing White from placing his queen on

e4 to prepare d3-d4. After something like: 19...♙xd5 20.♖a4 (20.♜xe5 ♜xe5 21.♗xe5 ♗e8! 22.♗xe8 ♖g4!! 23.♗e4 ♙xe4 24.♗xe4 ♗d7, as has been pointed out by several commentators, is better for Black) 20...♗e8 21.♜d2 ♗d7 Black has several ideas to improve his position and clearly enjoys the initiative.



20.h3?

Slow, when the position required concrete measures. Svidler thought for a long time and could not find anything he liked. Actually he had not even considered what turned out to be the best move at all.

20.♗e4!

This move, as suggested by the engines, would have been very strong. For example: 20...g6?!

20...f5 21.♗e2 leaves the e5-pawn weak, but seems the lesser evil; Black may try to mix things by 21...♗c5! 22.c4 e4 23.dxe4 ♙xc4 24.♗d1 ♜b4 although I prefer White after 25.♙b1.

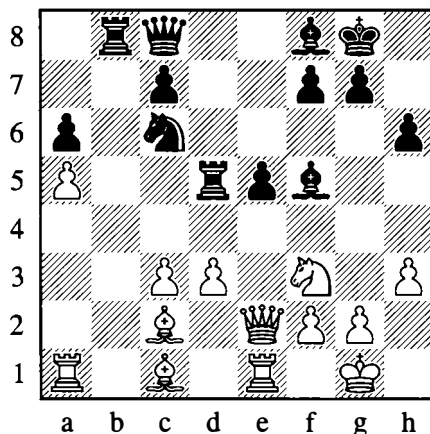
21.♙a4! ♜xa5 22.♜xe5 ♙g7 23.♙f4

White has a serious advantage because of his better pawn structure and more active pieces.

20...♙f5!

A typical situation for a Magnus game; his opponent had his chance, didn't take it, and

now he is going to suffer. Suffer without any real hope, so it seems.



21.♗d1 ♗e6 22.♙b1

A vain attempt to activate the bishop via a2, but the perceptive Norwegian stops it immediately.

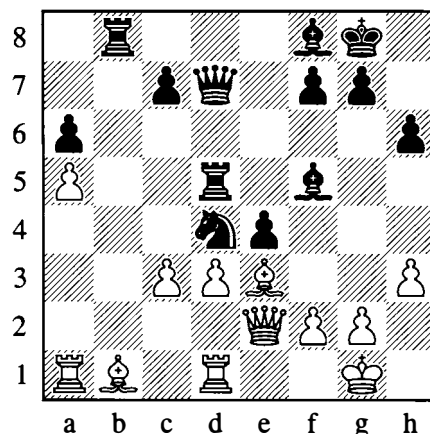
22...♗d7!

22...♗xa5 was also possible, but why let White breathe? After 23.♗xa5 ♜xa5 24.♙a2 White regains his pawn with chances to survive.

23.♙e3 e4!

Striking while the iron is hot.

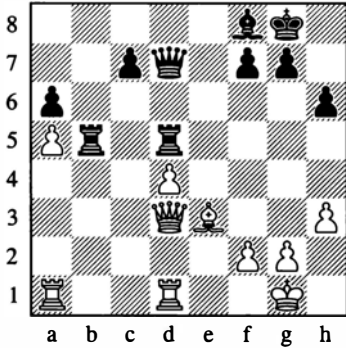
24.♜d4 ♜xd4



25. ♖xd4?

This should have lost immediately.

25. cxd4 exd3 26. ♖xd3 ♖xd3 27. ♖xd3 ♖bb5!



This was highly unappetizing in view of the terrible weakness of the a5-pawn, but still the only course. After: 28. ♖dc1 ♖xa5 29. ♖xa5 ♖xa5 30. ♖c3 ♖b5! 31. ♖xc7 ♖xc7 32. ♖xc7 ♖b1† 33. ♖c1 The only move. 33... ♖xc1† 34. ♖xc1 f6 35. ♖f1 ♖f7 36. ♖e2 ♖e6 37. ♖d3 ♖d5 38. ♖d2 ♖d6 39. ♖a5 f5 The ending is very difficult for White.

25...exd3

This is a clear positional method of keeping the advantage.

But the issue could have been decided immediately in a tactical manner: 25... ♖xh3!!



After this White is stone dead. The point is revealed after: 26. dxe4 (26. gxh3 ♖xh3 27. ♖e3 ♖d6 is out of the question for White) 26... ♖g5 27. g3 ♖g4! 28. f3



Defending against the threat of ♖h8† and setting up deadly threats of his own.

34.♖b2

There was no defence.

34...♖d5 35.♖e2 ♜b1† 36.♔h2 f6

White is losing at least a piece, so he threw in the towel.

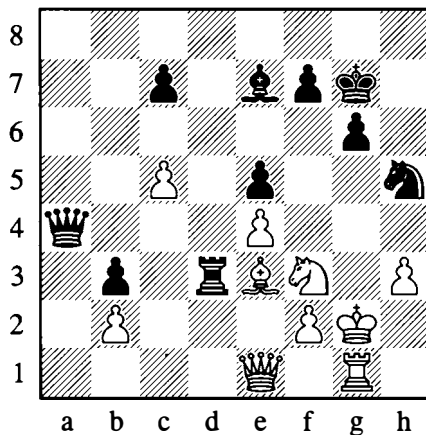
It is rare that Svidler goes down like this as White, but such is the strength of Magnus the Magnificent!

0–1

But Aronian keeps up the pace with a determined win against Radjabov. Having easily equalized against timid play, Aronian begins playing ambitiously and exploits Teimour's rather unfocused play to obtain some advantage. For a long time Radjabov defends well and doesn't surrender any ground, leaving his opponent rather frustrated. Nearing time trouble, disaster strikes, but the players don't realize it: the electronic board malfunctions and starts displaying some recording errors, throwing us all into panic. With swift actions the live transmission of this game is revived, though the moves have to be entered manually to ensure accuracy; thankfully, from where we sit, it is easy to see the moves played on the board. On the one hand, I finally get the feeling of doing something useful in the event; on the other, this chore becomes a bit annoying after a while. But it doesn't last too long: uncertainty creeps into Radjabov's thoughts, the first few inches are surrendered, time pressure sets in again, and this cocktail soon becomes lethal, in the form of a rather obvious and immediately conclusive tactical blunder, at a moment when his position was only marginally worse. Panic is officially declared over in our dark corner of the stage.

Teimour Radjabov – Levon Aronian

Round 6, 21st March 2013



53.♖xe5??

After a long and tiring defence, White suddenly collapses. Instead 53.♜e2 ♖d8 54.♖c1 would have held on.

53...♜xe4† 54.♖f3 ♖f4†

0–1

The game against Ivanchuk further reinforces the general feeling that this is not Kramnik's tournament. Day by day Kramnik's play becomes more and more risky, almost betraying frustration at his inability to finally win a game from so many promising positions. This time he allows his opponent to grab a pawn and doesn't bother with recovering it, preferring to direct his pieces towards the black king instead. Crunch time arrives on move 19, with Kramnik embarking on an intriguing exchange sacrifice for long-term compensation, based on the weakness of Ivanchuk's castled position. The objective merits of this operation are certainly debatable, but in a practical sense it is the only serious winning attempt, and this is the only thing that matters to Kramnik. And once again it fails. Ivanchuk defends well – not perfectly, but well – and not much later

Vladimir feels compelled to invite a repetition. With very little time on the clock, Ivanchuk agrees to the draw and the players move on to the press room to discuss this very complicated game. No clear conclusions are reached, but it is generally agreed that the game never strayed too far from the equilibrium. Ivanchuk seems to have recovered completely from his shaky start, but Kramnik is clearly troubled.

Meanwhile, Gelfand comes close to his first victory, but his time has not yet arrived. The game is almost like a negative copy of his game against Svidler: this time he reacts excellently to his opponent's opening choice, quickly seizes the initiative and shortly afterwards wins a pawn. Grischuk tries to keep his pieces active and restrain his opponent, and he succeeds to a great degree. His persistence is gradually rewarded, as Gelfand slips and loses the greater part of his advantage. With major problems already behind him, Grischuk even delivers a nice tactical blow that looks very strong, but his position is too compromised to hope for anything more than the draw his opponent forces with a few accurate checks.

And so the sixth round concludes, in the amazing situation of the two leaders already enjoying a one-and-a-half point lead over their closest pursuers.

Round Seven

With such interesting chess being played and the prospect of a Carlsen – Aronian showdown, the crowds keep gathering; the seventh round, played on a Saturday, sees the auditorium almost packed – until the lights are dimmed, that is, for there is not much you can see after that. By now I feel I can visualize everything that's going on before the start of play, without even taking a sneak peek: Ivanchuk comes early and awaits the call to

arms sitting on a chair in the front row, Carlos Dias brings Gelfand's espresso to his table, the paparazzi surround the chair that Carlsen will soon be occupying, Macauley adjusts the one camera that a clumsy spectator has knocked slightly off balance. The arbiters don't really have much to do, as everything is running smoothly; calling Ivanchuk's flag falls will prove to be practically their only interference during a game throughout the event. Which of course is a good thing.

In Round 7 even this will not prove necessary: Ivanchuk and Svidler go down a long theoretical line of the Scotch and reach an unbalanced but rather equal ending, the secrets of which were essentially demystified more than a decade ago. Being familiar with this line myself, I am amused at the oceans of time both players are consuming and become very curious as to what lies hidden beneath the surface. Instead of satisfying my curiosity, I get another shock by the outcome of all this: as soon as they reach move 30, the players (justifiably) agree a draw. Oh well.

In contrast to the playing hall, the press centre feels rather deserted, and even Nigel Short is not around to entertain the audience. It turns out that the Candidates event overlaps with a 4NCL weekend, with most of the journalists, titled players in their own right, joining their teams for a couple of days. The Russian delegation is still here and going strong, though; Russian Chess Federation director Ilya Levitov, who was around for a couple of days at the beginning, has apparently gone home, and so has Evgeny Bareev, but the others, including a television crew, will stay until the end. They are providing live coverage of the event for the Russian-speaking public, with commentary by the legendary Genna Sosonko; the mere observation of the proceedings makes me wish my Russian was better. I especially cherish the acquaintance

with Sergey Karjakin's manager and RCF public relations officer Kiril Zangalis, who is of Greek descent and a very enjoyable and lively character. He always seems to be arguing with his laptop (yes, with the piece of hardware itself), but he follows the games with greater interest than any of us, and cannot hide the emotions of joy or disappointment that overwhelm him after every second move; this is all in stark contrast to the quiet and reserved Evgeny Atarov sitting next to him. It is Atarov who stands up from his chair every day, approximately one hour after the start of play, jots down the orders of the other members of the Russian-speaking community and sets off to a nearby store. He returns several minutes later with a varied collection of sushi, which in turn prompts the consumption of a few shots of that integral element of Russian tradition, vodka. Today, in a half-empty press room with nothing much to do until the battles flare up, it all looks even more enticing, and so I join the party.

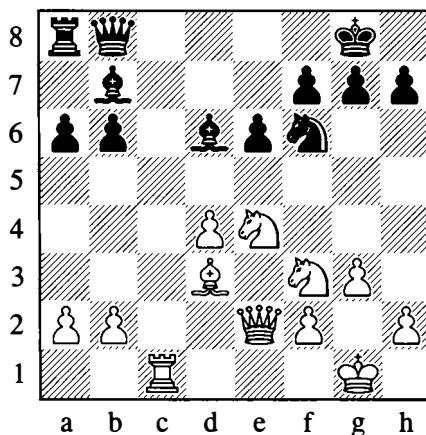
The first half of the tournament is destined to conclude not much later with four draws, but one of these games – the seemingly most boring one – will prove to be a turning point for the entire tournament. This we realize much much later, and for the moment the Gelfand – Kramnik encounter remains memorable for only two half-moves. By employing a new but effective set-up, Kramnik has very comfortably equalized with Black and feels optimistic about the future. Gelfand's immense experience tells him that he should focus on drawing the game with as little hassle as possible and, while Kramnik does have something to play for in the shape of an isolated pawn on d4, it seems highly unlikely that he will be able to eke something out of it. The critical moment arrives on move 18: frustrated by the course of his previous games, Kramnik decides to avoid the mass

simplifications that his opponent proposes, but he does so with a move that must surely have provoked an inner struggle between his will and his aesthetics. With his major pieces bunched together on the queenside, Kramnik now retreats the only piece around his king to the last rank, giving Gelfand a huge opportunity to conjure a thunderous attack.

To an amateur like me, this fated 18th move simply feels so wrong that I cannot understand why Kramnik's intuition didn't set his alarm bells ringing. Some minor excitement, perhaps aided by the vodka, flares up in the press centre, but it quickly dies down: Gelfand fails to spot the chance and replies with an equally meek move, after which Kramnik obtains some steady pressure. It proves impossible to avoid excessive simplifications though, and by the time a pawn ending is reached, the draw is clear.

Boris Gelfand – Vladimir Kramnik

Round 7, 23rd March 2013



18...♖e8?

An *almost* incomprehensible error for a player of Kramnik's stature; the explanation is that he desperately needed to win, and wanted to make something happen. But the kingside is now completely deserted...

19. ♖ed2?

But Gelfand lets him off the hook.

The obvious attacking lunge is strong: 19. ♖fg5! h6 (no better is 19...g6 20. ♖xf7! ♖xf7 21. ♖g5† ♖f6 22. ♖xe6† ♖xg5 23. ♖h3 with a crushing attack on the exposed black king) 20. ♖h5! hxg5 21. ♖xg5 ♖f6 22. ♖xf7† ♖h8 23. ♖xe6 Black is facing some very serious problems.

So why did Gelfand not go for this? He explained later that he tried to make the line work, but missed 23. ♖h3 in the 19...g6 line.

19... ♖d8 20. ♖e4 ♖c8 21. ♖f1 ♖xc1 22. ♖xc1 ♖c8

By now Black has everything in order, with a draw the likely outcome. As indeed was the result.

The moment of truth comes at the press conference, where a journalist points out the exchange of mistakes that has taken place. Both players seem perplexed, and Kramnik especially appears very troubled – his play so far has been at quite a high level, but this? It can be considered his only real error in the first part of the tournament, but how could he possibly be so impervious to the looming danger? He takes this heavy blow to his self-confidence with admirable composure, though, barely betraying how shaken he must feel inside. I venture a guess at the possible reasons for this incident, attributing this temporary blindness to psychological pressure caused by his inability to win a game so far, despite all the good positions he has had. And, incredibly enough, this moment of weakness eventually turns out to have exactly the opposite effect than one would readily assume.

Back in his hotel room, in an impressive show of inner strength, he, in his own words, concludes that the most significant part of this episode was not the mistake he made, but the

fact that he was so easily let off the hook; a rare sign that yes, this time it may be him who will get lucky. The second half of the tournament will see a completely different Kramnik, more akin to the Kramnik who stormed the chess Olympus in this same city thirteen years earlier.

While this psychological drama is taking place in the press room, chess is still being played next door and Radjabov seems well on the way to scoring a big upset. Carlsen has opted to tackle one of his opponent's favourite opening lines, obviously having great faith in the positional advantages this choice bestows upon him. True, Radjabov's pawn structure is ugly, but time and again he has proved, in this same opening line, that Black's dynamic possibilities more than compensate for this. Carlsen's play seems to lack the spark of the previous rounds and his slow positional manoeuvring is shown to be unsuited to the true demands of the position. Without the slightest hesitation, Radjabov pushes ahead on the kingside and his attack soon obtains menacing proportions. Magnus is in real trouble, and the faces of his staunchest supporters, Nielsen and Agdestein, are the clearest proof.

But, as usual, it's not easy to overcome his resistance: right after winning an exchange, and low on time, Radjabov selects a line-opening pawn sacrifice that appears decisive – but it isn't. His frustration is evident as he tries hard but fails to see a way to crash through, and Carlsen's positional advantages of a superior pawn structure and good outposts for his pieces finally bear fruit, if only as a solid and impregnable defensive line for his king; the game ends in a draw.

Inspired by the sad fate that appears set to befall Carlsen, Aronian tries hard to bring Grischuk down. The simplified position that arises out of the opening is deceptively quiet, but the Russian is hardly deceived by

appearances and opts for dynamic counterplay as a response to Aronian's subtle efforts to incur weaknesses. The play explodes with a temporary pawn sacrifice by White, giving him very active pieces in return. Grischuk is up to the task and doesn't hesitate to push ahead on the kingside, his energetic defence being eventually rewarded with further simplification and an inevitable draw – another show of good defence by Alexander in this event.

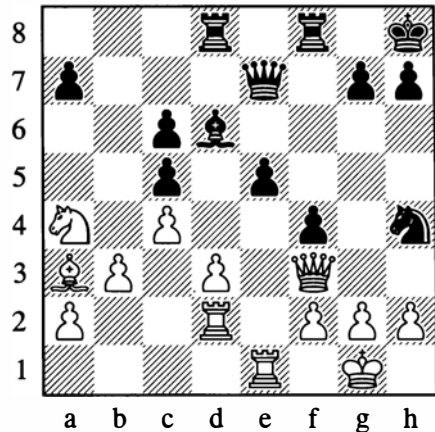
Aronian seems a little disappointed, but not at the outcome of his own game; he must have been expecting Radjabov to down Carlsen. Still, he remains in the shared lead and the competitive intrigue of the tournament carries over to the next round.

Magnus Carlsen – Teimour Radjabov

Round 7, 23rd March 2013

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 e6 4.♗xc6 bxc6
5.b3 d6 6.0-0 ♘e7 7.e5 ♘g6 8.exd6 ♗xd6

9.♘c3 e5 10.♞e1 0-0 11.d3 f5 12.♗a3
♗e6 13.♘a4 ♞e7 14.c4 ♞ad8 15.♞e2 ♗c8
16.♞e3 f4 17.♞e4 ♔h8 18.♞ad1 ♗g4
19.♞d2 ♗xf3 20.♞xf3 ♘h4

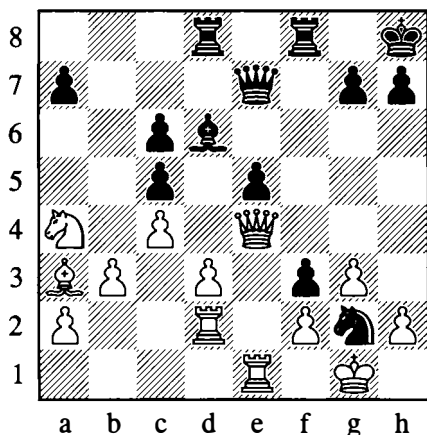


White has the neater pawn structure but Black's kingside initiative more than compensates. Carlsen should move his queen to h3 or g4, with an unclear position.



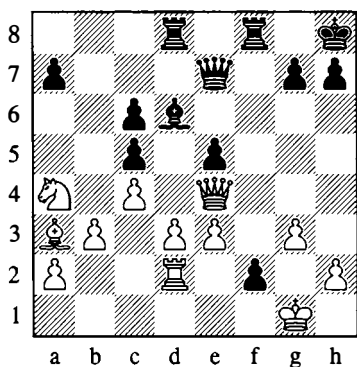
21. ♖e4? f3! 22. g3 ♜g2!!

Now we can see the problem with the queen choosing e4: the focal point of the attack is g2 and the queen is cut off from it. The black knight does an excellent job of holding off potential defenders, while the black queen heads for h3.



23. ♜c3!

23. ♜c3 loses to: 23... ♜xe3 24. fxe3 (24. ♖xe3 ♖d7 25. ♖e1 e4! 26. dxe4 ♖h3 27. ♖f1 ♖xf1+ 28. ♜xf1 ♜f4 and Black wins.) 24... ♜f2!



Now 25. ♖xf2 ♖xf2 26. ♜xf2 and the open f-file is decisive: 26... ♜f8+ 27. ♜e2 ♖f6 28. ♖g2 e4!

25. ♜f1 ♖e6 26. ♖g2 e4 is equally devastating.

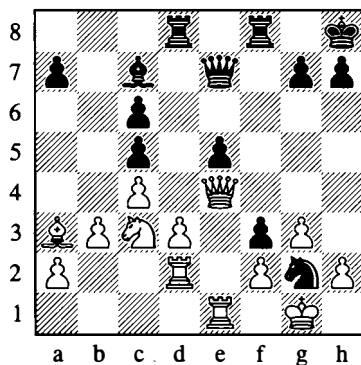
Now Radjabov misses his big chance.

23... ♖e6?

The winning move was:

23... ♜c7!

From a5 the bishop's gaze will burn all the way to e1.



The following line illustrates the hopelessness of White's task:

24. ♜c1

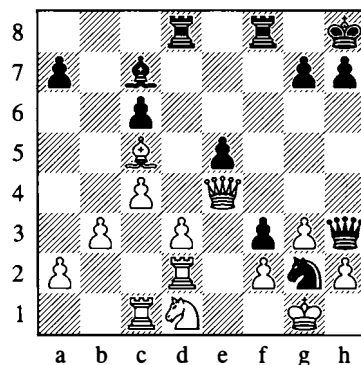
24. ♜c1 ♜xe3 25. fxe3 ♜a5 26. ♜b2 would last longer without offering any real hope.

24... ♖e6!

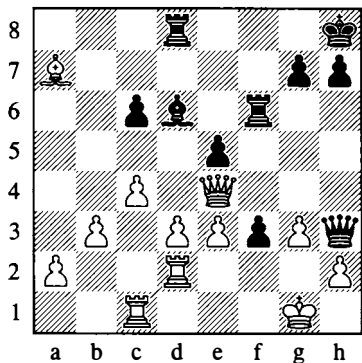
Heading for h3, of course, but also creating the threat of ... ♜d4, trapping the queen. Thus we see another downside of Carlsen's 21st move.

25. ♜xc5 ♖h3 26. ♜d1

To cover g2 the knight must head for e3.



26... ♜d6! 27. ♜xa7 ♖f6! 28. ♜e3 ♜xe3 29. fxe3



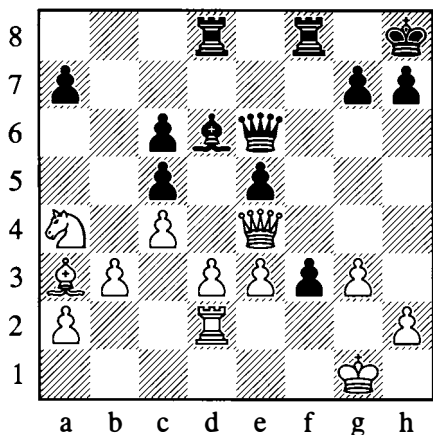
29...f2! 30. Bxf2 Bxf2 31. Qxf2 Rxf2
32. Qe1 Bb4! 33. Qf1 Bf8+

Black wins.

24. Bc3!

Carlsen spots his only chance is to give up the exchange.

24... Qxe3 25. fxe3

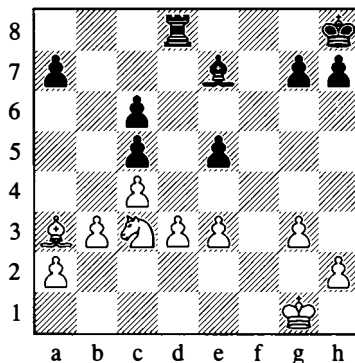


25... f2?

This sacrifice works beautifully in many positions, but not here. Better was 25... Qe7 simply retaining the extra material.

26. Bxf2 Bxf2 27. Qxf2 Bf8+

27... Rf3! was a better winning chance. The following line is forced: 28. Qg1 Bf8 29. Rg2 Rg4 30. Qe2 Rxe2 31. Qxe2 Qe7 32. Qc3 Bd8



33. Qf2! Bxd3 34. Qe2 Black has two promising lines. If he simply retreats the rook then his extra exchange may tell eventually or he can try 34... Bxc3!? 35. Qd2 Bxc4 36. bxc4 e4 and press in the bishop ending.

28. Qe2 Rf3 29. Rf1

Now Carlsen has the draw in sight, as the knight will be a superb blockader on e4.

29... Qe7 30. Qe4 Rg4+ 31. Qd2 Rf3
32. Qe2 h5 33. Qb2 Rg4+ 34. Qd2 Rf3
35. Qe2 Rg4+ 36. Qd2 Rf3 37. Qe2
1/2-1/2

Round Eight

Every morning, on my way out of my hotel to the grey skies and penetrating chill of London, I am greeted by the receptionist with a big smile and cheerful remarks about how “Spring is finally here”; being a person used to sunny weather and warm temperatures, this all sounds Greek to me. Today there is a change in the routine: large snowflakes are quietly falling from the sky; I smilingly point them out to the receptionist, and walk out to enjoy the change of scenery, for the twenty or so minutes it will take me to reach the IET.

The eighth round takes place on a Sunday afternoon and the venue is understandably

full, especially since the two leaders meet again. The 4NCL games have been held in the morning, so all the usual suspects are back in the press room, with several other weekend warriors making cameo appearances. Jonathan Speelman shares the details of his weekend games with John Nunn, and I feel greatly honoured to be in the company of two true legends of British chess, two very interesting and creative players, two of my favourite chess authors. Speelman is a regular in the Candidates tournament, commenting daily on the games online for a major chess server, as is Daniel King, an amiable and truly gifted chess instructor and commentator.

I vividly recall that Short and Speelman contested two Candidates matches right in this city, many years ago, with one win apiece, and suddenly it dawns on me that both of them, and especially Nigel, must be feeling somewhat melancholic, watching and commenting upon their successors. In the presence of all these remarkable players from a previous generation, I can't help but regret how much chess has changed over the years, under the influence of

the computers. And it is bittersweet to recall my very first opening book, Nunn's *Najdorf for the Tournament Player*, and admire the huge amount of work that must have gone into the analysis of this complex opening back then, without any silicon help, as well as the greatness of the brains behind the analysis that even today, under the critical eye of magicians and varying sorts of fish, cannot be faulted. As Speelman himself put it, in the conclusion of his comments on the game that clinched his final grandmaster norm, things were much more difficult back then.

The main battle disappoints the bloodthirsty crowd, but the other three games compensate. Carlsen, the 2013 model, is not a player to spread fear with a sharp and demanding opening repertoire; this is in sharp contrast with his childhood years, which are replete with crushing opening victories. He opts for a quiet Catalan, probably hoping to nurse a slight positional advantage, but Aronian turns out to be extremely well prepared and neutralizes any edge White might have dreamed off. When



the programmed ...c5 break inevitably comes, no doubt remains about the splitting of the point. To their credit, the players continue for a while, perhaps to pay tribute to the large audience, but that's all. By the time they sign the scoresheets, the crowd is no longer paying attention; instead, they are immersed in the bloodbath that is taking place all around the two leaders.

The news of the day is Kramnik's first win. In what Svidler will later call, in a common act of self-reproach, "a typical Kramnik – Svidler game", Vladimir reverts to the anti-Grünfeld system that gave him his first win in the match against Kasparov back in 2000, as well as countless other victories in subsequent years. This clever opening choice, no doubt evoking pleasant memories of past London glory, also serves to impose a claustrophobic effect on Svidler. Deprived of his beloved dynamic play and forced to defend accurately in a quiet and passive position, Peter is clearly not in his element. Already in response to the first new move, a novelty undoubtedly stored in Kramnik's drawer for many years, his reaction is sub-optimal and he falls into a bind. It's not plain sailing for White either, of course, but Kramnik seems to be making all the right decisions and his advantage grows with every move. A final attempt by Svidler to break free, right before the time control, ends in failure and I sit there and marvel at the positional masterpiece Kramnik has created.

Funnily enough, it is not even the first time Svidler has lost to the same opponent, in the same opening, in almost the same way. It proves difficult to even suspect the moments where Svidler could have defended better; the impression remains that it was a forced win all along. Which it was not, of course, but finally things have worked out in Kramnik's way; a big smile on his otherwise calm and controlled face betrays his satisfaction.

The other perpetrator of the mutual blunder of the previous round, Gelfand, is also having a good day. Radjabov obtains the same pawn structure as the day before, with reversed colours this time, but things develop very differently this time. Instead of trying to fix and attack the weak pawns, as Carlsen attempted in the previous round, Gelfand simply dissolves one of the weaknesses with the help of a good novelty and quickly obtains very promising piece play. Radjabov tries to react, but his kingside advances only serve to weaken his position further; when a time-trouble error comes, surely as a result of the strenuous pressure, his position collapses immediately and Gelfand celebrates a well-deserved first victory.

The round is concluded by a completely pointless loss by Ivanchuk – on time, of course. Solid opening play by both sides leads to a quiet and balanced position, but the Ukrainian makes his obvious moves too slowly. Grischuk does not really have pure chess reasons to hope for anything, but he keeps trying to entice a mistake. For a long time it seems as if nothing is happening, but time pressure rears its ugly head and voila: the first inaccuracies creep in, then a clear error, then the loss of a pawn and, one move later, the customary flag fall (the arbiter is of course at hand to point it out).

Before joining the press conference, Grischuk asks permission for a quick smoke; he dresses up in more layers than an onion and goes outside, to be greeted by –2 degrees Celsius. He returns semi-frozen five minutes later and goes to the press centre, where he remarks, with obvious pride, that this is his very first win in Candidates matches and/or tournaments since 2007.

For his opponent, it seems that a threshold has been crossed, and in the press conference Ivanchuk commences a long and entertaining



discussion about all sorts of things, including an insightful (and well-meant) comment about Grischuk's special talent of offering draws at just the right moment, complete with examples. FIDE Press Officer and expert photographer Anastasiya Karlovich tries very hard to keep up with her countryman, but, despite all her training with Svidler, she cannot, and the press conference turns into a torrential and amusing monologue. I don't even stick around to follow it to its end; with all the games finished and another rest day to follow, I head back to the hotel.

In my hotel room I switch on the TV, and discover the true reason for Svidler's defeat: on practically every channel there are reports of the thrashing the English cricket team is receiving at the hands of New Zealand. I don't have the slightest idea about this sport, but at least it is a welcome change from the football mania of the previous days, with the English press dealing intensively with the upcoming match of their national team against San Marino, a team at the bottom of the

207-long FIFA rankings after an uninterrupted series of about a hundred defeats. It speaks volumes about how football-crazy the English are that Theo Walcott's injury (and consequent absence from this titanic clash) is considered to be "a serious setback", but in the end England manage without him – and win the match 8-0. A much more serious test against Montenegro is next.

Later I try to draw conclusions and hazard predictions about the upcoming rounds. Against my better judgement, I decide against a courtesy visit to Cambridge, leaving one thing less to torment my mind, and try to elaborate on the tournament events. With the Kramnik – Carlsen game just around the corner, a renewed feeling of anticipation is slowly but steadily growing in me – and in hundreds of thousands of internet spectators as well. I quickly sift through the various reports surfacing on the popular chess internet sites. The greatest emphasis is placed on the low percentage of drawn games, for a tournament of such calibre, and the abundance of combative

games in every round. I feel vindicated for having always believed that the solution to the 'draw problem' is a combination of good playing conditions and high stakes, rather than restrictive rules and regulations. This is the tournament of the year for these eight players, and they know it very well; no matter in what form they are, they keep fighting to the best of their abilities. Expanding on these thoughts, I get a premonition that the remaining six rounds will contain a lot of drama and action, as the finish line gradually appears on the horizon.

The biggest question remains whether Carlsen will eventually achieve what public opinion considers as his right. True, his play so far has been quite good and, save for that game against Radjabov, convincing. But he hasn't managed to shake off the challenge from Aronian, and after all, this is his first real shot at the title; will he be able to withstand the pressure? Wijk aan Zee, the Tal Memorial, the London Chess Classic, Bilbao: these are all important tournaments in their own right, but now it's not about simply winning an important tournament; it is a chance to reach a World Championship match, to finally climb the last step to the throne, at a moment when everyone expects you to do so.

Trying to walk in his shoes for a moment, I immediately feel the pressure bearing down on me – and back off. For Aronian it's more a question of personal ambition, and somehow I find it difficult to believe that this congenial and emotional guy can be cold-blooded enough to stave off the inevitable stress. And one shouldn't forget about Kramnik either; "been there, done that" suddenly appears in a very different light, as some kind of reassurance that he can keep his emotions in check. And there is also that game against Carlsen, which is seemingly Magnus's last big hurdle in the Candidates. If only Kramnik had converted some of his chances in the first half...

For the rest of the field the priorities are different. Only Svidler can be considered a real threat; he is still on 'plus one' and did make a powerful impression at the start. He seems to have been going through a slump in the last few rounds, but he remains dangerous; everyone knows very well just how dangerous. For Boris Gelfand it is clear that a repeat of his feat of reaching the World Championship match will not happen this time, but he seems to have returned to form and there can be no doubts about his unceasing motivation. Alexander Grischuk is not playing badly either, but the time control has proved a hindrance and somehow he hasn't managed to raise a serious challenge; most likely he is already thinking of the next cycle. Radjabov displays a lack of energy and mettle as well, as the positive effect of his good start is wearing off. As for Ivanchuk... Losing three games out of eight on time can be considered unacceptable at this level, but it is a natural consequence of his entire showing in London: without a second, generally unprepared, he gives the impression that this tournament is no different than the others he plays in – he even goes on to as much as say so. There's not much to expect from him in the remaining six rounds, and the leaders will surely be targeting him in their quest for that one victory that might make all the difference.

With all these thoughts occupying my mind, I find it very difficult to do anything even remotely productive during the rest day. I adapt to the circumstances by doing some laundry and watching a lot of TV, activities that do not require any serious mental input. While the first rest day seemed like a refreshing and welcome break from the tournament routine, this one just cannot pass as quickly as I would like. All I can think about is going back to the IET London for the next round. Thankfully, sleep serves as a great time-waster. Around noon on the next day, I am joyously

walking down Savoy Road and turn right to meet Michael Faraday once again.

Round Nine

The eagerly awaited Kramnik – Carlsen game, seen by many as Kramnik's one real chance of getting back into contention, eclipses all the others at the start of the round. Kramnik's occasional cup of tea from the buffet has been replaced by a large teapot as the tournament progresses, which I take as a sign that the tension inside him is mounting. Carlsen, on the other hand, sticks to his usual regime: out of an elegant messenger bag he takes a large bottle of juice and a smoothie, which for the first time in London draws my attention; I recognize it that very same evening on the shelves of Sainsbury's.

Kramnik opts for his favourite Catalan and introduces another of his many novel ideas, one that has probably been waiting for years to see the light of day – two years, he later explains. He obtains a slight edge and has clear positional targets, an ideal scenario for such a crucial game. But it is not easy to break Magnus's resistance; following a course well documented by some of Vladimir's earlier games in this tournament, the Norwegian gives up a pawn for active counterplay and sets his opponent serious practical problems. With limited time, Kramnik keeps searching in vain for that elusive advantage he feels must be there and, when a chance for drawish simplifications arises, Carlsen confidently forces the splitting of the point.



Heavyweight Defence

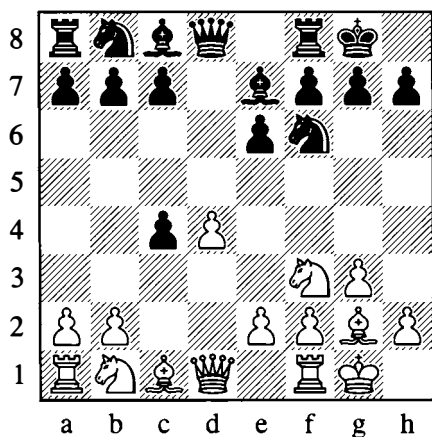
Vladimir Kramnik – Magnus Carlsen

Round 9, 25th March 2013

Playing Black against Vladimir Kramnik can easily turn into any chess player's worst nightmare. It's not just that he knows his way around his opening repertoire and often comes up with very interesting new approaches, like in the present game. It's not just his ability to alternate between squeezing a slight edge and attacking brilliantly. Big Vlad, as his fans like to call him, believes in himself and what he represents. And that is the good old classical brand of chess, which coincidentally, is best expressed when one enjoys the comfort of the white pieces and is a 1.d4 player.

Understandably, for all the above reasons, Magnus's game as Black against Vladimir was bound to be a key test for him on his way to gaining a shot at the world title.

1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 d5 4.♘g2 ♙e7 5.♗f3
0-0 6.0-0 dxc4



7.♗e5

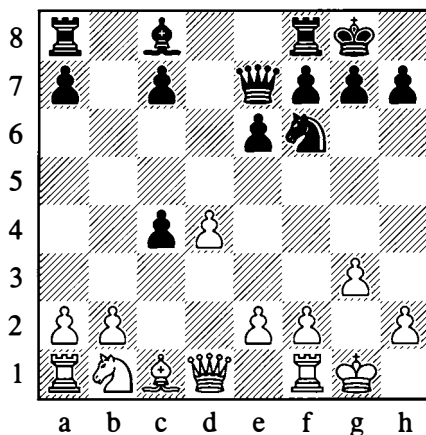
In 2007 Kramnik had twice used the more usual 7.♖c2 against Magnus. But to win an important struggle you have to spring a surprise

from time to time, and since "the kid" is not renowned for very deep opening preparation, I think 7.♗e5 was a suitable choice for the present game.

7...♗c6

In this line Black relies on quick development, not caring too much about his pawn structure. This fact alone justifies Kramnik's choice, who was probably hoping to capitalize on any possible mistake by his opponent and exploit the structural superiority of White's position.

8.♙xc6 bxc6 9.♗xc6 ♖e8 10.♗xe7 ♗xe7



11.♖c2?

According to Kramnik this had been prepared for the Candidates matches in Kazan, back in 2011.

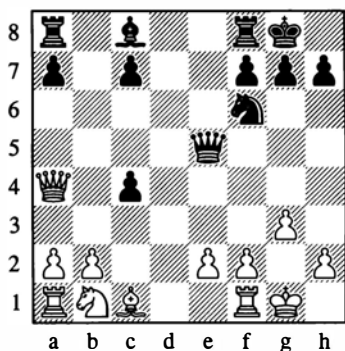
I had once met the more common

11.♖a4

against Korchnoi, and since then I know how important it is, in the delicate positions that ensue, to exchange the remaining pair of knights. This is a key device when you get a slightly worse pawn structure, as knights may easily exploit pawn weaknesses; on the contrary, if only opposite-coloured bishops are left on the board, the exploitation of such weaknesses is impossible. My game against



Viktor the Terrible had continued:
11...e5!? 12.dxe5 ♖xe5



13.♟c3!?

13.♖xc4 ♟e6 14.♗d3 ♞ad8 15.♗e3 ♗h5
16.f3 ♟c4 17.♟c3 ♞fe8 18.♗f2 (18.♗g5!?
♗h3 with counterplay) 18...♟d5! 19.♞e1
♟xc3= This is more or less equal, as Black's
activity compensates for the pawn.
13...♟e4! 14.♖xc4 ♟xc3 15.♖xc3!

15.bxc3 ♟e6 16.♗d3 (16.♟f4 ♟xc4
17.♟xe5 c6=) 16...♞ad8 17.♗e3 ♗b5! with
compensation for the pawn.
15...♖xe2 16.♞e1 ♗b5 17.♞e5 ♗d7 18.♟f4
♟b7=

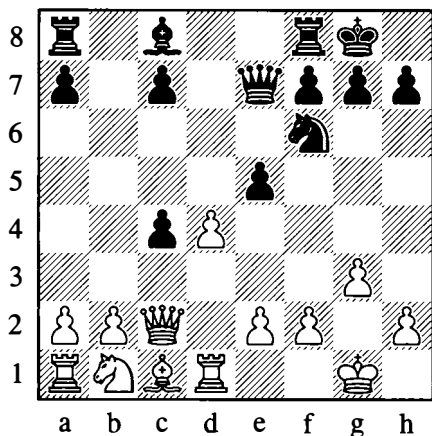
With equality in Korchnoi – Kotronias,
Haifa 1989. I went on to draw without too
many problems.

11...e5

More positional is 11...c5!? although I
cannot say there is anything wrong with the
text move, apart from the fact that it requires
more energy to play in such a way. But Carlsen
is a young man, isn't he?

12.♞d1!

A strong idea, which has rightly been
praised. White's priority is to consolidate his
structural advantage rather than grab the pawn
immediately.



12...Bb8!

I think this move is the source of the difficulties Magnus experienced in this important game. I would even go as far as to call this move 'pseudo-active' (sorry, Magnus!).

Real activity by

12...b7!

was the order of the day, but as so often happens, it is easy to go wrong when facing a new situation at such an early stage.

13.d3

13.g5 Bb8! is fine for Black.

13.Wxc4 Wd7! 14.d5! (after 14.f3? the powerful reply 14...e4! 15.Bf1 a5! led to a clear plus for Black in Andersen – Antonsen, Helsingor 2013) 14...xd5 15.Wh4 We6 16.d3 b7 17.g5 d5 18.d4 f6 19.d2 d4! Exchange the knights, remember? 20.xf4 xe4 21.e3 d5 22.b3 a5 This is just equal.

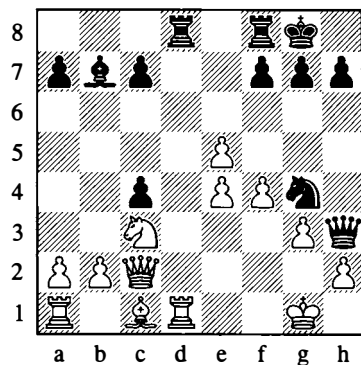
13...Wc6! 14.dxe5 Wh3!

14...d4 15.f4 h6 16.h3! dxe5 17.xe5 xe5 18.Wa4 is correctly assessed as better for White by Golubev, as he has kept the right minor piece for exploiting the pawn weaknesses.

15.e4!

15.f3! d4 16.e4 dxe5 17.Bf1 f5 18.f4 d3 is at least equal for Black.

15...d4 16.f4 Bb8



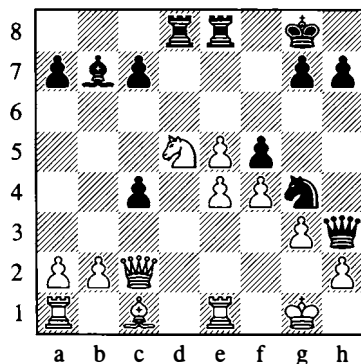
17.d5!

17.Wg2 leads to a very drawish ending after: 17...Wxg2† 18.xg2 xe4† 19.g1 Bxd1† 20.dxd1 xc2!? 21.d3 (21.d3 h5! 22.h3 d4 23.e3 [23.d2 f5!] 23...Bb8 24.Bc1 f5 25.Bc2 xh3 26.xa7 Bb8 This is not at all worse for Black.) 21...dxe3 22.xe3 Bb8=

17...f5!

A very sharp situation would have arisen on the board, which I am sure had been analysed by the Kramnik team in advance. But that does not prevent Black from standing fine, as my main line shows:

18.Bc1 Bfe8



19.Bc2

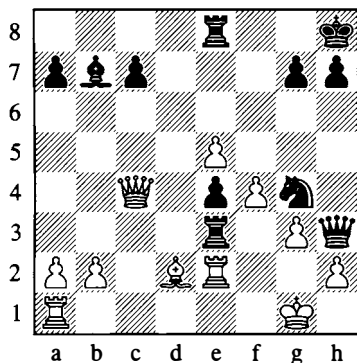
19.dxc7?? loses to 19...xe4.

19.a4 Bc6! and the rook heads for h6.

19...fxe4

19...c3! also looks good.

20.d3 Bb3 21.Wxc4† h8 22.d2 Bc3!



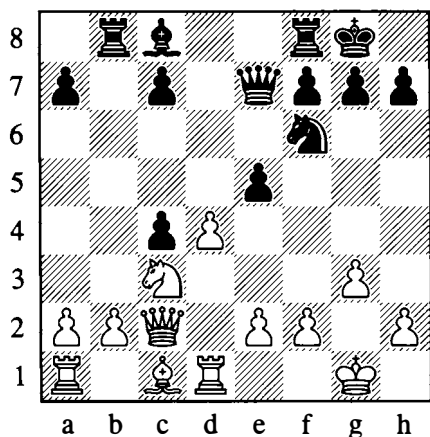
23.♙xc3

23.♙f7 ♜xg3† 24.hxg3 ♜g8! 25.♙xc7 ♙a8 looks dangerous, but White can hold the draw with: 26.♙e7! ♙xg3† 27.♜g2 After 27...♙d3 a perpetual check is the likely outcome.

23...♙xh2! 24.♜g2 ♙f3† 25.♙f2 ♙h4! 26.♜ag1 ♙xg2 27.♜xg2 ♙h5 28.♙e2 ♙f7=

13.♙c3!

White develops, ignoring for the time being the weak black pawns. It must have already been clear to Magnus that he stood worse, and that one of his usual heroic defensive performances was called for.



13...h6

Preventing ♙g5.

14.dxe5 ♙xc5 15.♙f4 ♙e7!

Switching to defensive mode.

Pointless is: 15...♙h5?! 16.♜d4! (16.♙xc7?? ♙g4 17.h4 ♙c5 is a trap I am sure Kramnik would never fall into.) 16...♙g4 17.h4 ♙e6 18.♙xc7! ♙c5 19.♜xg4 ♙xc7 20.♜d4 White's position can already be described as technically winning.

16.♜d4 ♙e6 17.♜ad1

The position has crystallized, and White's advantage is indisputable. Black's pawn structure is damaged and static, he has not exchanged the knights, and White controls the d-file. I am sure that against a lesser mortal Kramnik would have brought home a nice and clean point, but against Magnus such a task becomes a complicated affair.

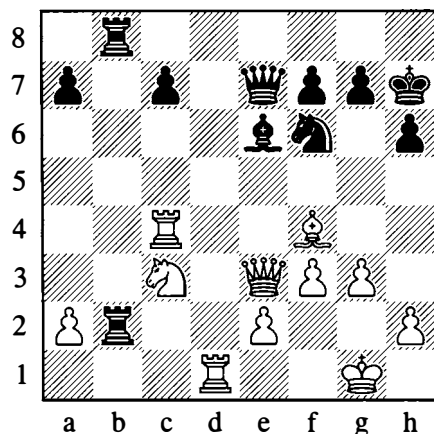
17...♜b6!

Black sticks to the only possible method of counterplay, which is targeting the b2-pawn.

18.♙d2! ♙h7!

Defending against a possible sacrifice on h6.

19.f3 ♜f8 20.♙e3 ♜xb2 21.♜xc4



21...♜b7

More active was: 21...♜b7!? 22.♜a4 (22.♜cd4!? c5 23.♜d6 ♙xa2 24.♙d3† ♙h8 25.♜d8† ♙g8 could still be defendable, as 26.♙c1 ♙b1! indicates.) 22...♜b6 23.♜a5 ♙e8

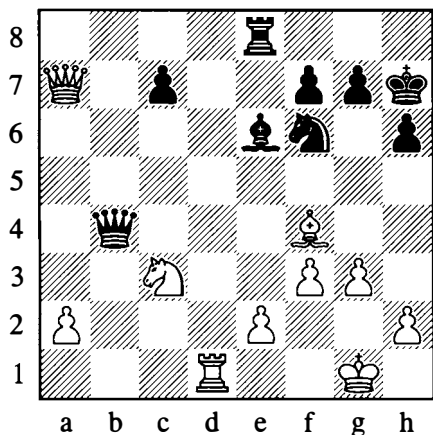
Although even in that case it is difficult to shake White's grip.

22. ♖a4 ♜c8!

The only attempt at counterplay; comparing with the previous note, the configuration of his rooks here prevents Black from saving his a-pawn, so he gives it away in the hope of acquiring some activity in return.

23. ♜xa7 ♜xa7 24. ♜xa7 ♜b4

Finally, the queen has broken free and Black can breathe more easily; even so, gaining half a point in this game would have required a continuing effort from Black had Kramnik kept his composure.



25. ♕e5?

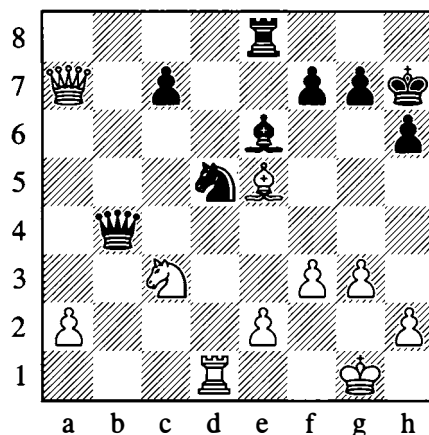
Faced with stubborn defence, White cracks and commits a big inaccuracy. However, this in no way reduces the importance of Magnus's defensive achievement, as chess is a practical game and mistakes are likely to happen any time; what makes a great defender is setting up circumstances for those mistakes to happen, and being alert in exploiting them.

25. ♜d4! was the way to make Black's life difficult; after 25...c5 26. ♜d2 ♖g8 27. ♖g2 White has a nice and clear pull, and can

torture his opponent for a long time, but I believe the game should be drawn with perfect defence. After Vladimir's move, Black has a neat trick to relieve his position by exchanges.

25... ♖d5!

Exchange the knights!



26. ♖xd5

Kramnik probably calculated 26. ♜a4 ♜c5† 27. ♖d4 ♖xc3 28. ♜c2† ♜f5 29. ♜xc3 ♖xa2 30. ♖d2 ♖d8 at this point, but understandably did not consider it to be a serious winning chance against Carlsen.

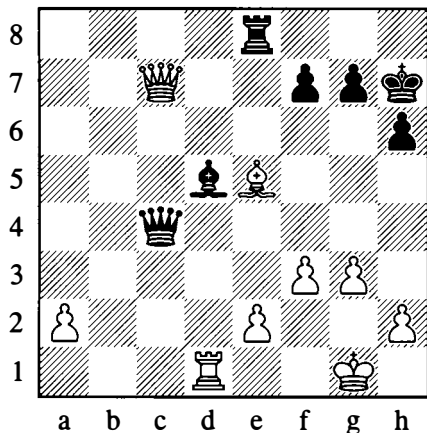
26... ♖xd5 27. ♜xc7

27. ♖xd5 ♜e1† 28. ♖g2 ♜xe2† 29. ♜f2 ♖xe5= is the tactical justification of Black's operation.

27... ♜c4!

The brilliant final point of Carlsen's calculations. He wants to regain one of the pawns by exchanging queens rather than bishops.

27... ♖xa2 28. ♜c2† ♖g8 29. ♜xa2 ♖xe5 may be drawable, but would have been much more difficult to hold.

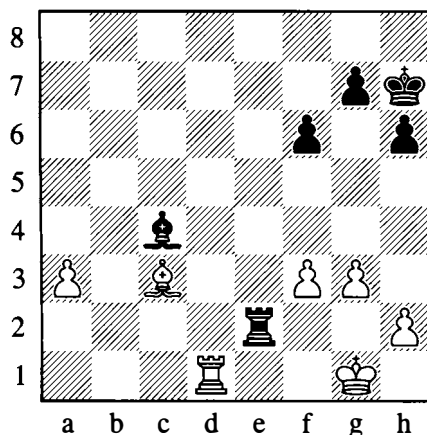
**28.a3?**

A clear indication that Kramnik was affected by Black's computer-like defence.

More to the point was 28.a4 ♖c6 29.♔f1 ♔c2 30.♖e1 ♔xa4 and the draw is almost certain despite White's extra pawn.

28...f6?!

Missing 28...♗c6! after which it is White who has to play accurately to make a draw. 29.♔f1! ♔b5! 30.♖c1 ♗xf3 (30...♖e6 31.a4) 31.♔c4 ♔b7 (31...♔xc4 32.♖xc4 ♗d5 33.♖c5 ♖xe5 34.e4!=) 32.exf3 ♔xf3† 33.♔g1 ♔e3† 34.♔g2 ♖xe5 35.♖f1 f5 36.♔f4 ♔c3 37.♖f2= This is a way to do it.

29.♔xc4 ♗xc4 30.♗c3 ♖xe2

The draw is unavoidable. The remaining moves were:

31.♖d4 ♗b5 32.♗b4 ♖e3 33.♔f2 ♖e2† 34.♔g1 ♖e3 35.f4 ♖e2 36.♖d6 ♖c2 37.g4 ♗c6 38.♗d2 ♗f3 39.h3 ♖a2 40.♗b4 ♖g2† 41.♔f1 ♖h2

½-½

Saving such a difficult position with Black can certainly add to one's confidence and be instrumental for further successes. I am sure Magnus will remember this game for quite a while with mixed feelings, but the final taste it leaves for the defender is a sweet one.

The draw obviously leaves Kramnik somewhat disappointed, but not disillusioned. He discusses the game at length in the press conference, examining various alternatives that could have perhaps promised something more; is it pure chess interest or an effort to convince himself that he really tried his best? If it was the latter, it seems the outcome is satisfactory, because he leaves the venue with the expression of a man who has already put the fight behind him and is only thinking of the next day. For Carlsen, relief is the obvious word to describe his feelings, but he doesn't show as much; he appears calm and collected as always and, without a hint of what is to come, I can't help but marvel at the extent of his emotional self-control.

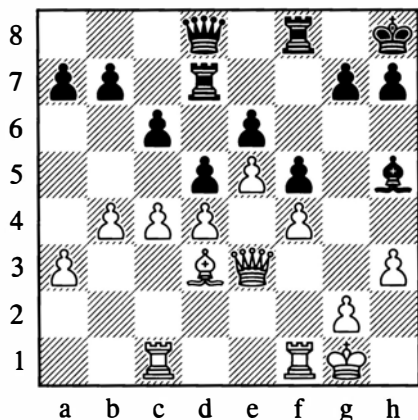
A change in the lead does occur in this round, but from an unexpected direction. After a solid Queen's Gambit, Aronian enjoys a comfortable position with Black, with only a slight space advantage for his opponent Gelfand and nothing more. After some manoeuvring, Aronian either loses his patience under the mounting psychological pressure or overestimates his chances, and embarks on an incomprehensible operation that just leaves him in trouble.



Very quickly a white pawn runs all the way to e7, one step from touchdown, and what once was a very sturdy stonewall has rapidly disintegrated into ruins. Trying to complicate matters, Aronian further exposes his king and a loss seems imminent, but Gelfand's shortage of time prevents him from finding a computer-like decisive shot. Instead, he exchanges down to a double-rook endgame, with the spearhead of his army still alive on e7; though it takes more time, the inevitability of Gelfand's second consecutive win is never seriously questioned, and Carlsen becomes the sole leader.

Boris Gelfand – Levon Aronian

Round 9, 25th March 2013



24...dxc4

Not bad in itself, but the introduction to an unfortunate operation.

25.♙xc4 ♖xd4?!

Aronian tries to fight for the win, but this exchange of pawns is not in his favour.

26.♙xe6 ♙f7?

A further error, leaving Black in a very difficult situation.

27.♙xf5 ♙c4 28.e6!

Perhaps Levon had overlooked this resource; White not only keeps his extra pawn, but also has a tremendous positional advantage.

The older generation completes its comeback with Ivanchuk's first win, at the expense of Radjabov. A move-order mix-up lands the Azeri in a passive if only slightly inferior position, and this time Ivanchuk is a model of patience, concentration and consistency. Little by little he shakes his opponent's hold on the central light squares, fixes some weaknesses on the queenside, exchanges the active black pieces and starts expanding in the centre. Radjabov makes no obvious mistake, but eventually crumbles under the force of a rock that is slowly inching towards him.

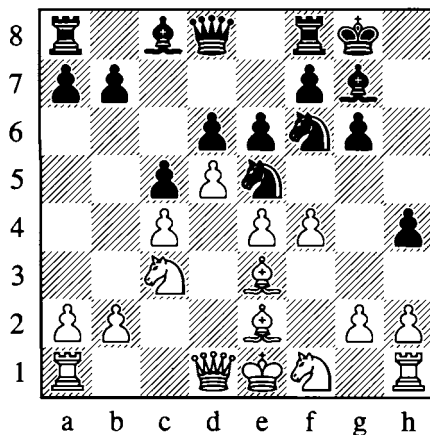
This game seems to kill his interest in the tournament completely, as in the remaining rounds he appears indifferent and lacking the grit and determination so characteristic of him. Regarding Ivanchuk, I am reminded of a comment the amiable Lithuanian grandmaster Eduardas Rozentalis once made to me, after a last-round win in an otherwise mediocre tournament performance: "one in a row". Ivanchuk seems to wake up at just the right moment, with games against the four players in the upper half of the standings still ahead; he could turn out to be the deciding factor.

With the tournament intrigue occupying most people's minds, the chaotic Svidler – Grischuk game doesn't get the attention it deserves. Svidler once again goes for the Sämisch against Grischuk's King's Indian, but Alexander is more than ready and he uncorks a spectacular novelty involving a piece sacrifice, which Garry Kasparov will later reveal he had already analysed long ago. Svidler is obviously caught by surprise, but he doesn't flinch; he goes down the critical continuation and fights back for the initiative with all his might. Not even the most powerful silicon monster is able to figure out exactly what is going on in the resulting mayhem, and it is to both players' credit that they never seem to seriously falter. The mind-boggling complications in a completely irrational position persist; Svidler's queen sacrifice appears to have ensured him the initiative, but, as a friend says, a queen is always a queen, and Grischuk's, with the help of a mere foot soldier, proves enough of a disruptive force to confuse Svidler's bunch of pieces. Amazingly, computer engines seem to agree that the dynamic equilibrium was never seriously disturbed, and it's only a pity that the game is agreed drawn right after the time control; the forcing continuation which justifies the result could well have been executed on the board to enlighten the mystified spectators.

Peter Svidler – Alexander Grischuk

Round 9, 25th March 2013

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♙g7 4.e4 d6 5.f3
0-0 6.♙e3 c5 7.♘ge2 ♘c6 8.d5 ♘e5 9.♘g3
h5 10.♙e2 h4 11.♘f1 e6 12.f4



12...♘xc4!

The novelty of the tournament! Black sacrifices a piece for a powerful initiative.

13.♙xc4 b5! 14.♙xb5 exd5 15.e5!?

Svidler makes an unconventional but fully justified bid for the initiative. 15.exd5 was the other option.

15...dxe5 16.fxe5 ♙g4 17.exf6!?

Yet another brave decision, completely changing the course of the game: instead of hanging on to whatever material advantage he has been enjoying, White sacrifices his queen to seize back the initiative.

17...♙xd1 18.fxg7 ♖xg7 19.♙xc5 h3
20.♙xd1 hxg2 21.♙g1 gxf1=♖† 22.♖xf1

The complications have somewhat died down, leaving a very unbalanced and unclear middlegame on the board.

Later the two players are discussing the game in the press centre, which was worth

the price of admission alone, making all of us mere mortals feel like these two players come from an extra-terrestrial dimension. With hindsight, it turns out that the world has indeed been paying attention: from the very next day Svidler's ambitious 12.f4 all but disappears from tournament practice.

Round Ten

The tournament is now on fire, with spectators flocking to its website and live coverage, and when, on the next day, Radjabov repeats moves against Svidler right after the opening, nobody seems to care about the "draw-death" that might befall chess; in the other three games, those involving the three main contestants, the battle is raging.

Aronian, seemingly unaffected by his loss the previous day, stages a not-entirely-convincing but efficient comeback. Ivanchuk continues his exploration of second-rate openings by playing the Budapest Gambit, against which Aronian appears well prepared (more likely the fruit of labour of the past rather than a lucky guess). Still, his quick and ambitious handling of the opening doesn't refute Ivanchuk's venture: the advantage of an extra pawn is there, but Black has a sound structure and good squares for his pieces. The Armenian keeps playing quickly and aggressively, though the objective merits of his efforts may well be debated; this approach works wonders, not on the board but right next to it: Ivanchuk's clock is quickly running down. During the game I can't understand if all this is just a display of the confidence and ambition so typical of Aronian, or a loss of self-control that leads to hasty and ill-considered decisions. Ivanchuk grabs a couple of pawns that were on offer, correctly judging his opponent's kingside designs to be ineffective, but with time ticking away he

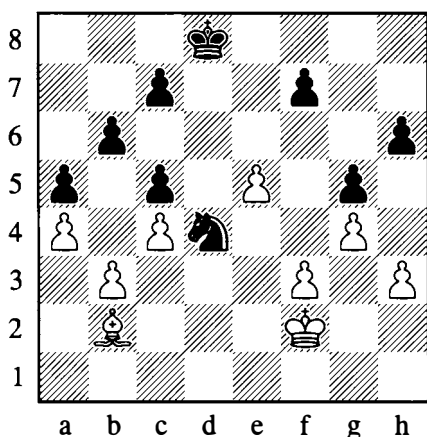
finally collapses: two consecutive blunders cost him a rook, right before his flag falls for the fourth time in ten games. Aronian loudly announces that he is still here, metaphorically of course, but the worrying signs are there for those with an inclination to dissect the course of the game more deeply.

The ghosts of Curacao 1962 rear their ugly heads a little later, when Grischuk ignominiously goes down against Kramnik. In a game that Kramnik later points out is his first ever win with Black in the Berlin endgame in a classical game, much to the amazement of the press, Grischuk out-prepares himself and is already on the defensive from early on. In the press conference he will go on to show the ins and outs of this variation, unable to explain why he went for it, with Kramnik listening attentively and only making slight corrections. The ease with which Kramnik obtains a very pleasant position with his entirely expected opening choice confounds the observers. I follow the next part of the game with interest, trying to guess Kramnik's moves, and I do pretty well, as most of them seem very obvious to anyone with even moderate experience of this type of position. Even on the rare occasion that Kramnik's thought process produces a different result than mine, the explanation becomes readily apparent after just a little retrospective thought. Even more amazingly, it all turns out to be sufficient for victory: with very little time available already from early on, a miscalculation on the 28th move prompts Grischuk to trade down to a pawn ending that is simply lost. This error was most likely caused by the evaluation of a very similar variation that was possible on the move before, but the slight difference turns out to be decisive. Kramnik later confesses that he was already more or less resigned to the seemingly inevitable draw.

Alexander Grischuk – Vladimir Kramnik

Round 10, 27th March 2013

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♖xe4
 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♙xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♗f5 8.♚xd8†
 ♙xd8 9.♘c3 ♙d7 10.h3 h6 11.♙d1 ♙c8
 12.a4 a5 13.b3 b6 14.♙b2 ♘e7 15.♙d2
 c5 16.♘e2 ♘g6 17.♙ad1 ♙e6 18.c4 ♙e7
 19.♘c3 ♙b7 20.♘d5 ♙ad8 21.♘xe7 ♙xd2
 22.♘xd2 ♘xe7 23.♘f1 ♙c8 24.f3 g5
 25.♘g3 ♙d8 26.♙xd8† ♙xd8 27.♙f2 ♙f5
 28.♘f5 ♘xf5 29.g4 ♘d4



With b3 hanging, it looks like White has no choice, but in fact Kramnik considered this position to be simply drawn...

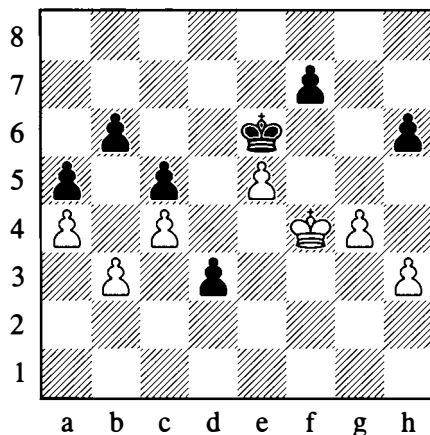
30.♙xd4??

But this is a blunder.

30.♙e3 was fully possible, since Black probably does well to steer clear of: 30...♘xb3?! 31.e6! ♙e8 (or 31...fxe6 32.♙g7) 32.exf7† ♙xf7 33.♙e5 White's bishop has been awakened and Black may even be in some trouble.

30...cxd4 31.♙e2 ♘d7 32.♙d3 c5 33.♙e4 ♙e6 34.f4 gxf4 35.♙xf4 d3

With a trivial win in the pawn ending.



36.♙e3 ♙xe5 37.♙xd3 ♙f4 38.♙e2 ♙g3
 39.♙e3 ♙xh3 40.♙f4 ♙h4 41.♙f5 ♙g3
 0-1

This turn of events quickly fuels speculation about this seemingly effortless win. Long before the tournament, a lot was written about the possibility of seven ex-Soviet players colluding against the westerner Carlsen, much like the Soviet grandmasters did against Fischer in the sweltering heat of Curacao. True, Carlsen and his manager have consistently rebuffed these claims, both before and during the London Candidates, but logic is hardly strong enough to fight the human mind's desire for any explanation of seemingly irrational events. But this is 2013, and the iron hand of the state Ronald Reagan once called the "Evil Empire" is no longer present. Listening to Kramnik explain his moves in the press conference, I quickly realize that the justification behind them, those same moves I was so effortlessly predicting while observing his game from the stage, is far deeper than I could ever have imagined. A lot of calculation and evaluation has gone into choosing each move carefully and rejecting alternatives, always with the practical concern in mind of keeping his winning chances alive.

The game now appears to me in a different light, and very similar to his previous win against Svidler. It all reminds me of Kazimir

Malevich's suprematist compositions, such as "Black Circle", "White on White" and his various "Squares": the work appears as simple as it gets, the title is so obvious, and yet there is so much more hidden backstage. Kramnik leaves the venue visibly satisfied.

Carlsen is not to be outdone, though. Facing a Gelfand on the ascendancy, he plays what he will later single out as his best game in London. Building on a slight but comfortable edge from one of his standard openings, he skilfully increases the pressure. Gelfand counters energetically, but an accurate tactical operation, culminating in the unexpected and powerful 28th move, brings Carlsen a significant advantage that he accurately converts, retaining the sole lead and completing another exciting round.



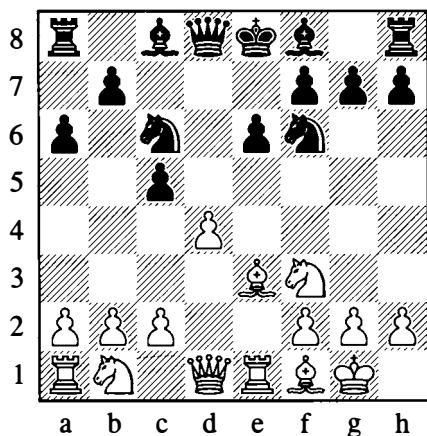
Magnus Carlsen – Boris Gelfand

Round 10, 27th March 2013

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 e6 4.0–0 ♘ge7
5.♞e1 a6 6.♙f1

Peter Heine Nielsen seems to have spotted a soft spot in Gelfand's preparation and Carlsen is able to secure an advantage from the opening. Nielsen was Anand's chief second in the Moscow match and thus had plenty of time to cook up ideas against Gelfand in the Rossolimo.

6...d5 7.exd5 ♘xd5 8.d4 ♘f6 9.♙e3



9...cxd4?!

Probably this was the place where Gelfand went wrong in the opening. He had to defend this position in three further games in 2013 and in all of them he went for 9...♙e7.

In the first encounter, the game immediately became complicated: 10.dxc5 ♞xd1 11.♞xd1 ♘g4 12.♙f4 ♙xc5 13.♙g3 h5 14.♞d2 h4 15.♙hx4 ♘hx2 16.♙hx2 ♘d4 versus Svidler in the Alekhine Memorial in St Petersburg.

Later games continued with 10.c4, when after 10...0–0 11.♘c3 cxd4 12.♘xd4 ♘e5 13.h3 ♙d7 Black is probably entirely fine. Here Anand played 14.♞c1 in the Tal Memorial and Bacrot 14.♞b3 in Elancourt.

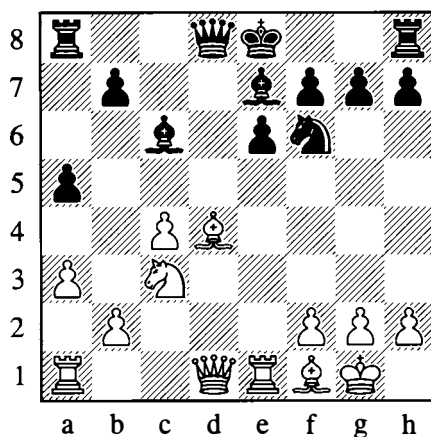
All three games ended in draws.

10.♘xd4 ♙d7 11.c4 ♘xd4 12.♙xd4 ♙c6
13.♘c3 ♙e7

Carlsen would be happy with his opening at this point. White has a slight technical advantage because of his greater space and the three vs. two advantage on the queenside.

14.a3! a5

It is debatable if this is a good decision. But White is also slightly more comfortable after 14...0–0 15.b4, where the bishop on c6 feels a bit squeezed.



15.♞d3!

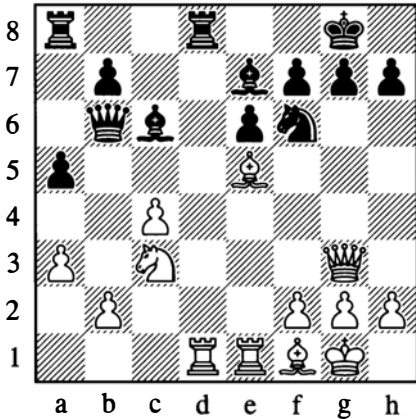
The start of Carlsen's powerful play in this game. The pieces are rearranged so they all appear on the best possible squares.

15...0–0 16.♞ad1 ♞c7 17.♙e5!

Accurately played. Black is not allowed to harmoniously complete his development. Carlsen manages to combine strong positional play with vigorous prophylactic action and razor-sharp calculation.

17...♞b6 18.♞g3 ♞fd8!

Gelfand lost this game, but his play was still great. At this point he did not fall for 18...♞ac8? 19.♙d4! ♞c7 20.♞xc7 ♞xc7 21.♙b6! when White wins a pawn and very likely also the game.

**19. Rxd8†**

Accurately played. Black cannot recapture with the rook.

19. Qc7? Rxd1 would force White to take back with the knight to avoid being worse.

And 19. Qd5? exd5 20. Qd4 as Carlsen was contemplating for a while, does not work on account of 20... Qc5 21. Qxf6 Qxf2† and Black is at least not worse in the ending.

19... Rxd8 20. Rd1 Qb6?

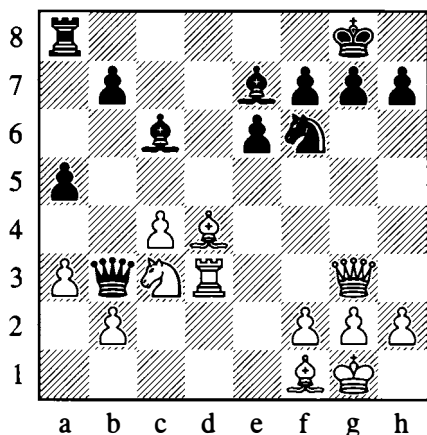
After the game Gelfand was criticized for this move, but he explained the exact reasons for choosing it. True, 20... Qf8 was a cautious move, but Gelfand had not given up hope of winning the tournament. The move played was an attempt to win the game and enter the race for first place. However, he had made a calculation error, as we shall see later on.

21. Qd4 Qb3 22. Rd3

Carlsen was also not interested in forcing a draw with 22. Qd5?! Qxd1 23. Qxe7† Qh8 24. Qxf6 gxf6 25. Qh4 Qg7 26. Qg3† though it is doubtful Gelfand would have gone for the



draw either. Most likely he would have played 26...♖f8!?: 27.♖g8† ♕xe7 28.♖xa8 and here continued with 28...a4 with even chances, rather than forcing a perpetual with 28...♙xg2.



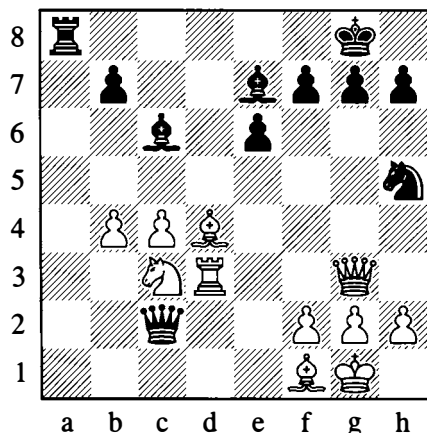
22...♖c2

22...♖xc4?? loses the queen to 23.♙xf6 ♙xf6 24.♙d8†.

23.b4 axb4 24.axb4

White's majority is advancing on the queenside, but he has some problems on the first rank. Here it is all about who has seen furthest.

24...♘h5



25.♖e5!

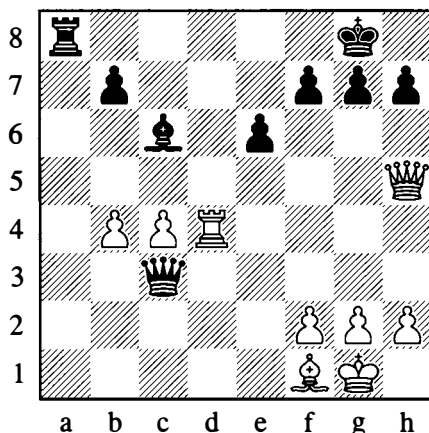
As an interlude we can mention that the computer gives 25.♖e3!?: with the idea 25...♙xb4 26.♖g5! and White has the advantage after 26...f6! 27.♖xh5 e5 28.♖f5, though Black keeps it to a minimum with 28...♙f8!.

25...♙f6

Originally Gelfand had planned to play 25...♖a1, when the following position arises by force: 26.♙d1 ♙xd1 27.♘xd1 ♖xd1 28.♖b8† ♙f8 29.♙c5 h6 30.♖xf8† ♕h7 Here he had prepared to meet 31.♖xf7 with 31...♙e4! when Black is winning. But along the way he had noticed that White plays 31.♙d6! with a big advantage. For this reason he changed direction.

26.♖xh5 ♙xd4 27.♙xd4 ♖xc3

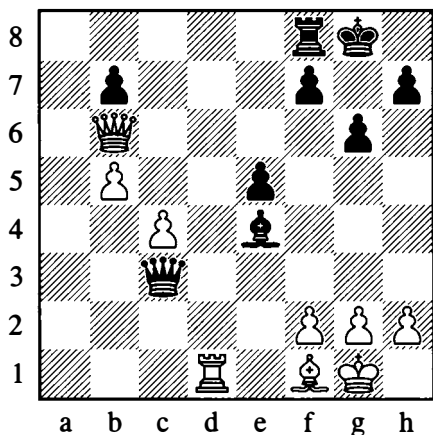
To humans, normal grandmasters and everyone else, the next move is not something we see too far in advance. But both players *had* and quickly played their next few moves.



28.♖a5!! ♙f8 29.♖b6

White has managed to put the black queenside in a chokehold.

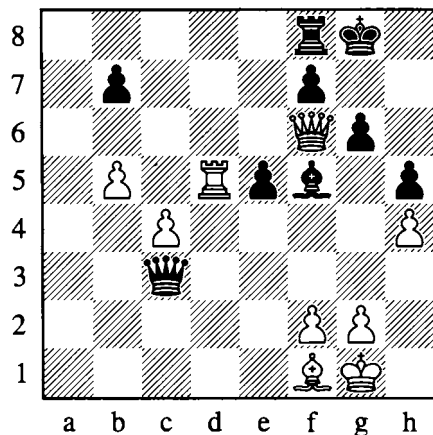
29...e5 30.♙d1 g6 31.b5 ♙e4

**32. ♖f6?**

Carlsen loosens the grip. There were quite a lot of good moves here, with Balogh's 32. ♖d7! being the most convincing. Black is paralysed. For example: 32... ♗g7 33. ♖d6 ♖e8 34. ♖c7 ♖f8 35. ♖e7 and White wins a pawn.

32...h5

I think a better shot would have been 32... ♗f5! with the following point: 33. ♖d5 ♗e6 34. ♖xe5 ♖xe5 35. ♖xe5 ♖c8 and here White cannot play 36. c5, as Black will have ... ♗d7 and ... ♖f6 ideas, most likely regaining the pawn and securing the draw. Instead White must play 36. ♖e4, when after 36... ♗f8 Black has reasonable drawing chances, though White keeps the upper hand with 37. ♖d4! cutting off the king.

33. h4 ♗f5 34. ♖d5**34... ♖c1!?**

Gelfand chooses to keep the queens on, looking for active counterplay.

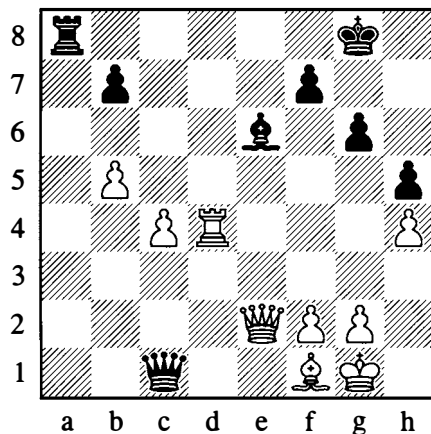
34... ♗e6 35. ♖xe5 ♖xe5 no longer works in quite the same way. After 36. ♖xe5 ♖c8 White has 37. c5! as Black cannot play ... ♖f6 without seriously weakening the g6-pawn. Still, Black is not without drawing chances.

35. ♖xe5 ♗e6 36. ♖d4 ♖a8

Black is threatening counterplay on the back rank. Carlsen blocks it with another nice little tactic.

37. ♖e2!

Preparing ♖d1. But can't Black take control of the back rank first?

**37... ♗h7?**

A passive move that allows White to consolidate.

37... ♖a1? does not work. White wins with 38. ♖d8+ ♗h7 39. ♖e5! and Black will soon run out of checks.

37... ♖a1! was a better try. Black is considering ... ♖a2 and after 38. ♖d1 ♖f6! White cannot defend his h-pawn in any satisfactory way. For example 39. ♖e4 ♖a2! with counterplay. For

this reason White should play 39.c5! and keep a technical advantage.

38.♖d1 ♖c3 39.♞e4!

With the queen centralized, White is in control.

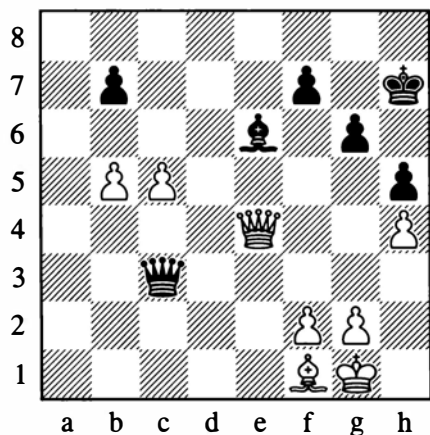
39...♞a1?!

Exchanging the rooks is wrong; all chances of active counterplay disappear. But there were no pleasant alternatives.

Something like 39...♞b8 might be better, but it looks awful all the same.

40.♞xa1 ♞xa1 41.c5 ♞c3?!

A final trap.

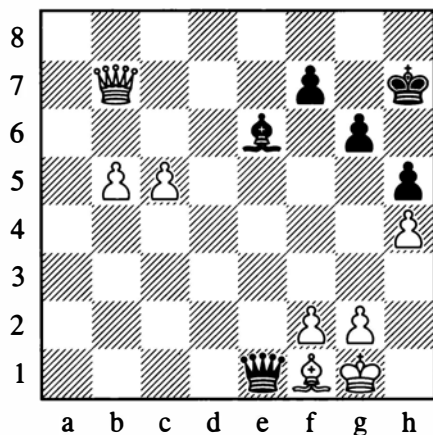


42.♞xb7

And Carlsen falls for it! Unfortunately for the trickster, it is not enough.

42...♞e1

Carlsen had completely missed this, but he said he did not get nervous, as he quickly realized that he was winning anyway.



43.b6

The computer gives other ways to win the game, some with a higher evaluation. But Carlsen preferred the variation that required least calculation and thus reduced the chance of oversights.

43...♙c4 44.♞f3 ♞xf1† 45.♙h2 ♞b1 46.b7 ♞b5 47.c6 ♙d5 48.♞g3 1-0



With both Kramnik and Aronian hot on his heels, Magnus is not allowed to relax, but the day's convincing victory and overall strong play in London demonstrate his mettle and provoke justified optimism in his supporters.

Round Eleven

The eleventh round brings the first signs of hesitation on Carlsen's part. Facing an out-of-form Grischuk, he must clearly have hoped to fight for victory, which explains his choice of the Grünfeld Defence against one of its strongest adherents. Grischuk surprises him with a very unusual 5th move that will become all the rage in the following months, and Carlsen sinks into thought. He opts for a solid but uninspiring response, primarily focused on safety; I interpret this as a sign of worry, but also a quick and sober readjustment of priorities. A classically-minded central counter to Grischuk's kingside activity frees his position, at the cost of a slightly exposed isolated queen's pawn, but White's pieces are hardly able to take advantage of this. Some active defence prevents Grischuk from properly coordinating his army and the game concludes with an early repetition that appears entirely justified.

Vladimir Kramnik is the man of the hour. Playing White against a drifting Radjabov, he again arrives very well prepared and obtains promising pressure. Radjabov deviates from known theory, for reasons unknown to us but surely not to his opponent, but unsuccessfully. I cannot withhold a smile when Kramnik once again makes a mysterious ♙e1 move that a friend has identified as his trademark; as often happens, the move is vindicated as the position opens up for his bishops and the pressure grows. Radjabov tries hard, but it turns out that the Russian is always one step ahead; an accurately calculated sequence, including difficult intermediate moves, forces the win of an exchange, and from there the win is straightforward. With this display of strength and self-confidence, Kramnik comes within striking distance of Carlsen and suddenly appears very much in contention. He is clearly on a roll and seems unstoppable; the only question is if Magnus can cling on to his lead.

The drastic change of scenery in the standings is completed by Svidler's win over Aronian. Peter sticks to his guns and again plays a Sämisch, this time against a different opening – but it doesn't matter. Aronian makes the debatable decision to deviate from the long-established recipes against this system, in favour of a rare and more dynamic continuation; but such a course certainly doesn't bother his opponent, who relishes the active piece play that results. Svidler's initiative soon turns into a stable advantage, and when Aronian declines a queen exchange that would leave him in a passive but probably defensible position, he forges ahead without restraint. What follows is pure psychological stress in action: Aronian makes two consecutive suicidal wing pawn advances that seriously compromise his position, and his opponent immediately pounces on the opportunity with a powerful switch of his queen to the other flank. Very much like in the game against Gelfand, Aronian's weak king once again proves to be his undoing; the queens are exchanged on e5 in this game as well, and an endgame arises with Svidler having an extra pawn and a dominating position. The scenario is well known from two days ago, and Svidler confidently follows the script all the way to its concluding chapter, bringing him back to fifty percent; judging from his showing in the tournament so far, this score clearly doesn't do him

justice. As for Levon, he has now fallen further behind and Kramnik has overtaken him; the next round's game against him will be his last chance.

Barely noticed amidst the ground-breaking developments, the two oldest participants play the shortest game of the tournament, a 17-move draw. Ivanchuk tries to repeat the same line he used against Carlsen, to which Gelfand replies with a highly interesting new try, introduced in top-level chess by Kramnik in a very rare – for him – outing of the Grünfeld. Ivanchuk is caught unprepared, thinks for a long time and invites a repetition, which Gelfand sees no reasonable way to avoid. Perhaps on another day Boris would try harder to keep the game going, but after eleven gruelling rounds, tiredness must surely be setting in. The early truce is hardly criticized by the public, who have their eyes fixed on the leaders.

With plenty of time until the next game ends, the press room plays host to a lengthy discussion on various topics. Ivanchuk stumps everyone by explaining that he sees the Candidates as preparation for the upcoming Russian League, certainly not the most appropriate of attitudes when coming to such an event, while Gelfand muses about the misconceptions of our computer era. This is not the first time Boris has raised this topic, and while he himself never tires of explaining how computer evaluations and the practical setting of a game are two entirely different things, other players have not been restrained in expressing their annoyance at journalistic comments accompanied by incomprehensible variations straight from the silicon monster's mouth (or window). Still, respect for the machine's calculating powers is in no way undermined, as evidenced, for example, by Kramnik's constant referrals to them whenever he is called upon to give his opinion on a highly complicated position. As for Carlsen, one cannot help being amazed by the strange paradox of him playing chess in a very human style, avoiding extreme complexity and long forcing lines, but at the same time his moves coinciding with the engines' top lines much more often than not. One could easily admire the advances in artificial intelligence, making the engines play chess so humanly – or is it just that their programmers simply adjust them to Carlsen's style? This whole debate gives rise to a discussion with members of the ThoughtWorks team, but no conclusion is reached, as none of us is any kind of expert in this field. Instead, we focus on our everyday problems, wrestling with Microsoft's inexplicable interface decisions in our quest to find a way to shut down a Windows 8 machine.

Round Twelve

As the tournament is reaching its climax – or its end, depending on the way one sees it – more and more familiar faces turn up in London to visit. Among them, two acclaimed French professional poker players, who are accompanied by the likeable grandmaster Almira Skripchenko, a successful player in both fields. One of the two, Manuel, appears highly interested in chess and follows the action closely, sometimes fully focused. As he himself explains, his chess skills are rather limited, and he often turns to Almira for advice; but he is well trained in reading the players' body language and facial expressions, and can often deduce from this evidence how the game is progressing. He is particularly impressed by Carlsen, who to the rest of us appears like an expressionless iceberg; Manuel doesn't share this opinion, and he often voices evaluations about the position on the board, based on his observations of Magnus, which are remarkably accurate.

Long ago, such a practice would be directly linked with various stories about parapsychologists

sitting in the audience and influencing the course of play with their mental powers; I funnily compare this vivacious modern man with an imaginary portrait of the infamous Dr Zukhar, whose presence caused so much commotion during the 1978 World Championship match in Baguio City. Taking that thought further, I fantasize about chemical tests being run on Carlsen's smoothies or the mysterious liquid emerging from the flask Aronian brings to the game every day (the innocent side of me has always assumed it is some flavour of tea), and I can even visualize in the corner of my mind the arbiters running X-ray analysis on the eight leather chairs they so elaborately move round the arena after the end of each round. In 2013, such stories sound like they belong to a distant past, if not entirely unlikely, and this is not Dr Zukhar who is speaking about it, but a normal-looking person who makes his living (and a bit more) from 'reading' people. And so I change my outlook entirely, and Manuel now represents, in my mind, a new Dr Cal Lightman of *Lie to Me* fame, whom even the world's best players cannot deceive.

The twelfth round, right before the final free day, turns out to be the longest of the tournament in terms of number of moves played, and so the draw agreed between Svidler and Gelfand right after the time control is the first game to finish. Boris avoids his opponent's pet Grünfeld and soon obtains just the type of position that is annoying to Black; Svidler acknowledges the clever opening choice in the press conference. With two bishops and a flexible pawn structure, Gelfand strives to slowly improve his position and expand in the centre, but Svidler is up to the task and restricts White's ambitions with energetic counterplay. At times it looks like he might be losing control, and it is very difficult to ascertain whether this has indeed been so, but he constantly reacts just in time to prevent the worst. In the end, Gelfand recognizes the impregnability of Black's position and acquiesces to the draw.

Aronian has shown up to play Kramnik with grim determination written all over his face. He absolutely must win this game if he is to harbour any hopes for first place, so at least he knows exactly what he is after. As for Kramnik, the circumstances are rather positive: he is still lagging Carlsen by half a point and his remaining schedule is more difficult – in any other situation, a win with Black against Levon would seem extremely unlikely. But now he is facing an opponent who must try to win at all costs and may easily overstep the mark, even more so since Aronian has done this all too often in the past. He doesn't have to worry about simplifications and avoiding draws; his opponent will take care of that for him. And so he decides to just play chess, hoping to capitalize on possible errors by his opponent, and pray for the best. Meanwhile, he keeps an eye on Carlsen's game against Ivanchuk, realizing full well that, though a loss on time has become the bookmakers' nightmare in this tournament, well, Ivanchuk is Ivanchuk and nobody knows which one of his many identities will show up...

How to approach a must-win situation has always been one of the greatest unanswered mysteries of chess psychology. Two Kasparov – Karpov matches attempted to provide clues to this matter, with Karpov uncharacteristically going straight for the throat in the last game of their second match, and Kasparov attempting a calm Karpov-like squeeze two matches and two years later. The results vindicated Garry's approach, which has since been exalted by multiple authors and heralded as the only way to go about tackling this problem. Hindsight is always 20-20, they say, and one cannot help feeling that this conception has perhaps been dictated by the results rather

than the actual merits of the two sides; though it can be argued that constant, slow-burning pressure that cannot be resolved by drastic means definitely gives rise to unpleasantness for the opponent. In any case, Aronian is of a different opinion, perhaps fearing that Kramnik's deep preparation may allow him to kill the game off without having to make a single move of his own, and so he opts for a typical IQP position against the Semi-Tarrasch.

I am sure that, if Aronian had succeeded in implementing a powerful central break and blowing Kramnik to pieces with a kingside attack, this game would become the go-to example of how to defeat the former world champion; as it is, Kramnik is unfazed by his opponent's tricky move order, doesn't hesitate to make a couple of slightly weakening but also very dynamic pawn pushes and, all of a sudden, he has forcefully seized the initiative. The aforementioned psychological elements kick in when Kramnik proceeds in the indicated way; Aronian must now objectively accept some drawish simplifications, but that is as good as a loss for him and thus not a real option. I cannot be sure if Kramnik followed this path in the certainty that his opponent would find himself obliged to seek chances in an objectively inferior position, or if he was just playing the best chess he could, without caring for the competitive circumstances. In any case, Aronian does keep the game alive by means of a piece sacrifice, and Kramnik now has very realistic hopes of winning, if he can successfully tame Aronian's kingside attack. Already at the first hurdle he stumbles, allowing Levon to practically force a draw with some nice tactics; but once again the Armenian plays differently, this time probably because he, like his opponent, missed the cunning tactical idea. It now appears that Aronian's dwindling initiative will soon be extinguished completely, but in a very complicated position Kramnik makes another inaccuracy, allowing him to exchange down to a seemingly hopeless ending, but one that turns out not to be simple at all. And the battle starts all over again.

Kramnik now has an extra bishop in an endgame with rooks, and it does look like some good technique will be enough to finish his opponent off. However, a passed c-pawn and an active



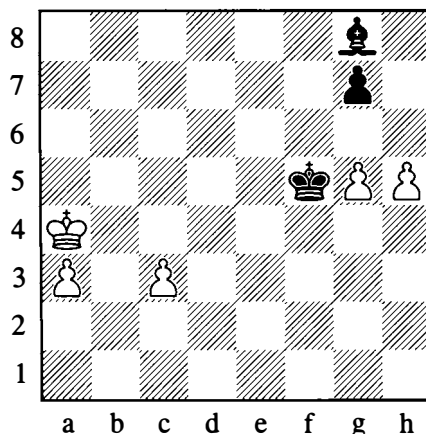
king give Aronian some hopes of salvation. The discussion heats up in the press centre, with opinions, variations and evaluations flying about; this endgame keeps everyone fascinated, to the extent that the drama taking place on Carlsen's board is relegated to a triviality. First impressions of an easy win give way to more sober assessments; the latter are reinforced when Aronian suddenly offers a seemingly suicidal but actually inspired rook exchange that Kramnik cannot refuse. The position now is clarified, it can be calculated all the way to the end (if you have a board to move the pieces about, or an engine running on your laptop) and it seems to be drawn. I spend most of my time in the press room, so captivated by this endgame that I simply cannot sit in my corner on the stage, without the option of switching on an engine and unable to solve the puzzle on my own. The sad truth must have dawned on Kramnik as well by now, as he is radiating dissatisfaction, but he doesn't give up; he opts for the most complex and tricky tries, making it as difficult as possible for his opponent. Immediately after the time control, Aronian spends most of his time trying to match the press room's efforts, but he is alone in the arena, unaided by colleagues and silicon, and full of swirling emotions. For quite a few moves he acquits himself admirably and now, with only one black pawn remaining on the board, the draw is at hand – a just reward for his herculean effort. One more important move remains to be played, 50.h6, and there is no way through for Kramnik; the press room entourage has already ascertained as much.

And then the miracle happens. His hand reaches out towards the kingside, but he pushes the wrong pawn. Kramnik, who has spent most of his time walking about, returns to the board and a careful observer can notice the glint in his eye. After a few seconds of disbelief, he seems to have assured himself of

his opponent's blunder. He calculates carefully, convinces himself of his impending victory and then confidently executes a series of moves. It's still complicated, as Aronian is hoping to win Black's bishop for one of his pawns and rush the other to promotion in time; from the way he makes his moves it seems that he still believes it is a draw. But it's not. With a few clever bishop manoeuvres, Kramnik gains the time necessary to promote first, and the final couple of moves gives Aronian a rude awakening, as becomes clearly evident by the shaking of his head. Still shaken and unable to digest his mistake, he resigns. Kramnik has completed an incredible comeback, with four wins in his last five games, and is now fully in the hunt. He doesn't know it yet, but by the time we pack up and go home tonight, he will be the sole leader.

Levon Aronian – Vladimir Kramnik

Round 12, 29th March 2013



Almost six hours of hand-to-hand combat have led to this ending. White has admirably fought back to save a draw, and now needs only one more accurate move...

50.g6??

But this is not it.

50.h6 was correct, securing the draw. The main line is: 50...g6 51.♖b5 ♗xg5 52.a4 ♗xh6 53.a5 g5 54.a6 g4 55.a7 ♙d5 56.c4 ♙e4 57.c5 g3 (Black would even lose after 57...♙a8?? 58.c6 g3 59.c7) 58.c6 g2 59.a8=♖ g1=♖ With a simple draw.

50...♗g5 51.♖b5 ♗xh5 52.a4 ♗xg6 53.a5 ♗f6 54.a6 ♙d5 55.c4 ♙a8 56.♖b6 ♗e5 57.♗c7 g5 58.♖b8 ♙e4 59.♗c7 g4 60.a7 g3 61.c5 ♙a8 62.♖b8 ♙c6
0-1

In the press conference the critical points of the game are dissected and it turns out that this grandiose battle has been more than the players could handle under such tension. Aronian looks sad and disappointed, as the reality of his failure slowly sinks in, but he still tries to participate in the discussion and even manages a few smiles. Both are still very emotional after their encounter, understandably, and their differing fates are very distinctly evidenced on their faces. For one the tournament is practically over; for the other, it is just beginning. I wonder if this sad blow of fate will cause Aronian to collapse in the last two rounds (he doesn't), and assume that this is one of the cases when you don't want a rest day at all; there are wounds that time does not heal, but only makes worse.

Manuel the poker player is engrossed in Carlsen's game against Ivanchuk and for good reason: the course of the game gives him plenty to observe. It is practically impossible to predict Ivanchuk's opening choice on any given day, which for a less theoretical player like Magnus can actually be an advantage: he cannot feel regret for guessing his opponent's intentions wrongly, and his knowledge of the chosen opening is not likely to have been much greater anyway. Vassily selects a Sicilian Taimanov. The subsequent pick of a rare line in the English Attack set-up catches the Norwegian completely out of book (or, rather, out of memory) and the very first move that Carlsen comes up with after deep soul-searching is sub-par. White's weak opening play leads to a slightly inferior position with a ruined structure, a position with distinct characteristics of the French Defence, which Ivanchuk has always had a fondness for. However, the nature of the position is such that nobody really doubts Carlsen will hold it easily. Exploiting some slight hesitation on Ivanchuk's part, Magnus at least equalizes; play goes on, with both players seemingly trying to achieve something. One gets the impression that Carlsen seriously entertains thoughts of winning the game, fuelled by the fact that he is playing a very off-form opponent who sits at the bottom of the standings; the by-now-serious possibility of Kramnik winning his game probably spurs him on to try and score a full point.

But Ivanchuk is not the same player who lost those four games on time in the previous rounds. Today he handles his clock better, doesn't commit real errors and his play is sound. At some point an opportunity arises, and he grabs it; now he is a pawn up, with good winning chances. Magnus switches to dogged defence, placing his chips on the theory of infinite resistance. With both players very low on time, it's hard for the attacking side to evaluate possible changes in the position, so Ivanchuk often hesitates to undertake concrete action; on a couple of occasions he even almost loses on time, making his move with one or two seconds left. There is deathly silence in the auditorium, with the spectators glued to their seats and observing the unfolding action with bated breath. Vassily finally decides to exchange knights and go into the rook ending, but this is soon followed by an inaccuracy and Magnus pounces on the chance; the position now



appears almost certainly drawn, and talk about the missed opportunities already commences in the press room. But it ain't over till it's over: only a few moves later, Magnus commits a decisive mistake, essentially leaving him in an inferior version of what he could have had, had he played the correct move. This is more than his fortress could handle, and now Ivanchuk is clearly winning, the only question being whether playing on just the thirty-second increment will cause a blunder in return. It doesn't, and the Ukrainian brings the game to its conclusion without glitches. The audience bursts into applause, which Ivanchuk seems to greatly appreciate; he adopts his standard smile, eyebrows raised, and nods in acknowledgement.

When it Rains, it Pours

Magnus Carlsen – Vassily Ivanchuk

Round 12, 29th March 2013

At the same time Magnus was losing his 12th round game, with White against Vassily Ivanchuk, his main rival in the event Vladimir Kramnik was beating Levon Aronian with Black, obtaining a half-point lead over the Norwegian with just two rounds to go. This is obviously a loss that could leave a mark, one that won't be easily erased. But I'm sure that Magnus wouldn't like to erase this mark, even if he had a chance to do so. It's true that he played the opening like a child, it's true that in the middlegame he overestimated his chances, or to put it another way, underestimated the form of his opponent. But it is equally true that he fought in a difficult ending to the last pawn like a man, and even had the courage to attend the post-game press conference and analyse in the presence of his opponent what had happened, showing that above all for him is chess, sport and the fans. I am not sure many people would have done that. What I am sure

of, though, as I have lived for several years in Sweden, is that Scandinavians are used to grim days...

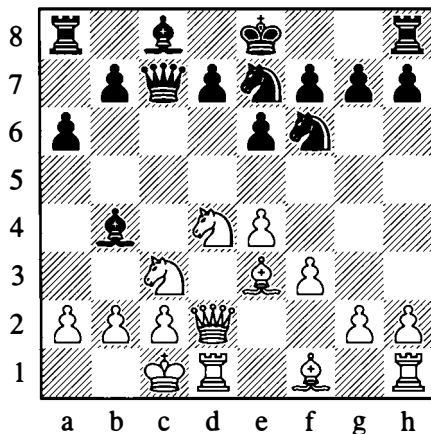
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♘c3 e6 4.d4 cxd4 5.♘xd4 ♗c7 6.♙e3 a6 7.♗d2 ♘f6 8.0-0 0-0 ♙b4 9.f3

A fashionable line against the Taimanov that I sometimes play myself. The plan of going long and attacking the black king is attractive even when you're getting old...

9...♘e7!?

An interesting continuation, which I always considered topical.

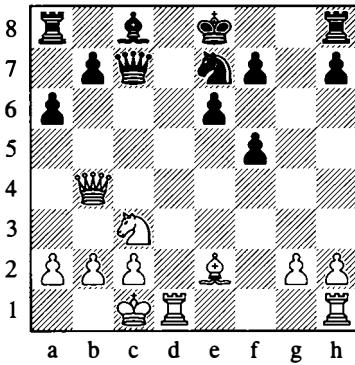
9...♘e5 is regarded as the main line, but in fact I am not sure it's better than the line Ivanchuk chooses in the present game. After 10.♘b3 b5 11.♗e1 ♙e7 12.f4 ♘g6 13.e5 ♘g4 14.♘e4 I believe that White has the better prospects.



10.♘b3?

A terrible mistake by Magnus, who probably mixed up the lines in his mind.

Best is 10.♘de2! d5! 11.♙g5! dxe4 12.♙xf6 gxf6 13.♗d4 exf3 14.♗xb4 fxe2 15.♙xe2 f5 with chances for both sides; Black has an extra pawn but the more exposed king.



After something like: 16.♖d6 (16.♖he1, 16.♖hf1!? and 16.g4!?, all leading to unclear positions.) 16...♙d7 17.♖hd1 ♙c6 18.♙f3 ♖c8 19.♙xc6† ♜xc6 20.♗f4 ♖g8 21.g3 ♗e7! The chances are balanced.

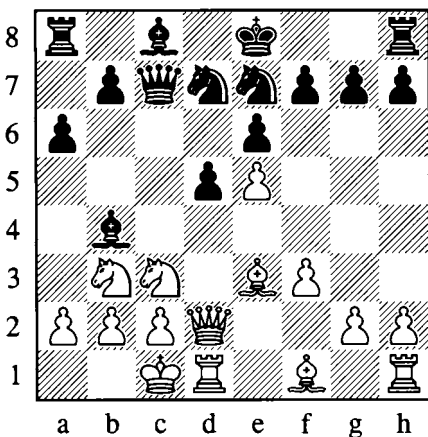
10...d5 11.e5

Trying to close the position in order to avoid the worst.

11...♜d7

Black has clearly the more pleasant game.

A terrible mistake would be 11...♗xe5?? 12.♙f4 ♗f5 13.g4 and Black must lose a piece to stave off the loss of his queen.



12.f4

As Ivanchuk said in the press conference, this is a good version of a French Defence

structure for Black. Indeed, with his adversary's knight placed passively on b3 and his own knights impressively placed on e7 and d7 there is nothing more Black could ask from the opening.

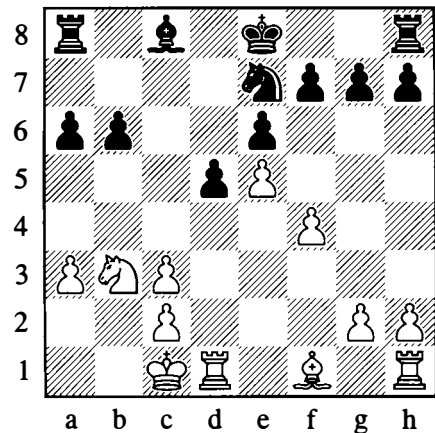
12...b6 13.♙d4?!

Imperative was 13.a3! ♙xc3 14.♗xc3 ♗xc3 15.bxc3 ♙b7 16.♙d3 with chances to equalize.

13...♜c5!

A strong albeit expected move, rendering White's situation extremely difficult. Magnus's next move is the only way to avert an immediate catastrophe.

14.a3 ♜e4 15.♗e1 ♜xc3 16.♙xc3 ♙xc3 17.♗xc3 ♗xc3 18.bxc3



Thus, after making some unavoidable concessions leading to a ruined pawn structure, Magnus was left struggling to save the game as White, after only 18 moves. Well, chess players are used to suffering you may say, and Ivanchuk is not just anyone. It's not a shame to be worse against this man.

However, the way White got a worse position must have been particularly annoying, even for a player with nerves of steel like Carlsen. Mixing up moves at such an early stage is one of the worst nightmares for a professional chess

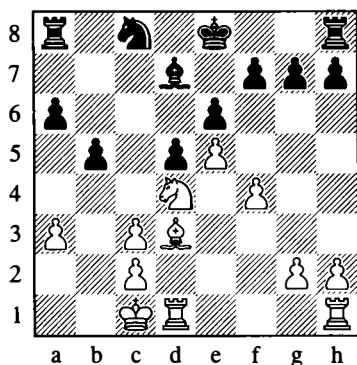
player, especially at such a critical juncture of his most important tournament ever. To be sure though, he didn't lose because of that.

18...a5?

What is this? Has Ivanchuk forgotten how to play chess?

Well, as the continuation of the game showed, he hasn't, so this can be described as one of his rare positional misjudgements. I would be ready to understand this move if Black wanted to expel the b3-knight from its present position, but actually he doesn't. All he wants to do is exchange the light-squared bishop but in the present position White's pawn structure is so bad that Black should actually be looking for a way to directly attack the pawn on c3 and win it.

After 18...♙d7! 19.♘d4 b5! 20.♙d3 ♘c8! the plan ...♘b6-a4 would have forced White to act quickly, but even that does not seem to equalize.



White could have completed an impressive turning of the tables by 27.f5!. For example: 27...♞c8 (27...exf5? 28.♞f1 g6 29.g4 with advantage to White is a well-known idea in such positions.) 28.g4 ♞c6 29.h4 ♞a8 30.♞f1 ♞ac8 31.a4 Black is reduced to passivity and can only mark time while White can try to further improve his position on the kingside.

23...♞ab8

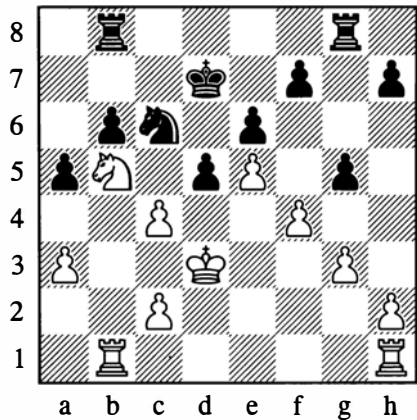
It's only now that the position has become equal, but it's the type of equality that is slightly more pleasant to play as Black. In the next few moves Magnus becomes over-optimistic and loses the thread completely.

24.♘b5?!

24.♞hf1 was preferable, to stop ...g5 ideas.

24...g5! 25.g3 ♞hg8 26.c4

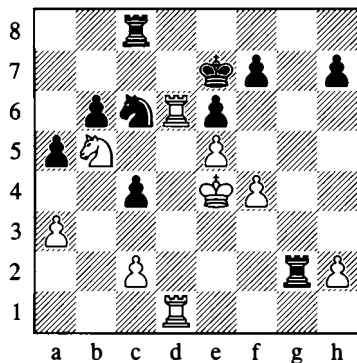
A justified attempt at activity, but Magnus didn't follow it up correctly.



26...gxf4 27.gxf4 ♘e7!?

27...dxc4† 28.♞e4! ♞g2 29.♞hd1† ♞e7 30.♞d6 gives White sufficient play; for example: 30...♞c8 31.♞bd1



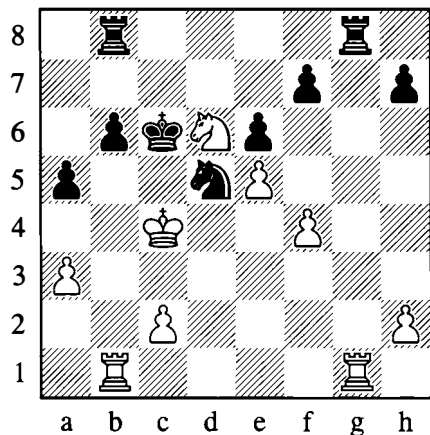


31...♞d8? (31...♞c2? 32.♞xc6! ♞xc6 33.♟d4 and White wins, as pointed out by Golubev) 32.♟a7!! And wins, as Ivanchuk remarked in the post-mortem.

28.♞hg1!?

28.cxd5 ♟xd5 29.♞hf1 ♞g4 30.f5=

28...dxc4† 29.♟xc4 ♟d5 30.♟d6 ♟c6



The position is tense, but Black is better. The next few moves were marred by time pressure.

31.♟f7 ♟xf4

31...♞gf8! 32.♟g5 ♞xf4† 33.♟b3 ♞e8 34.♞be1 h6 35.♟e4 ♞h4 is better for Black.

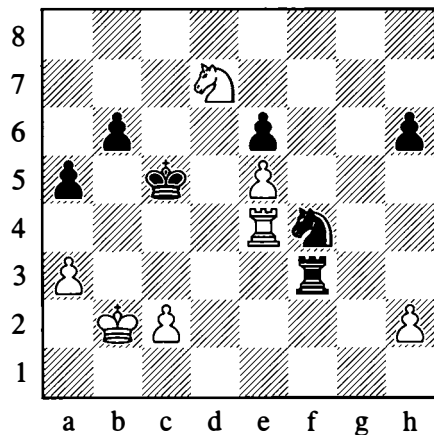
32.♟b3?!

32.♞bd1! ♞xg1 (32...♟d5 33.♟d4=) 33.♞xg1 b5† 34.♟b3 ♞f8 35.♞g7 a4† 36.♟b2 h5 37.♟d6 would limit Black's advantage.

32...♟c5?!

32...♞gf8! is better.

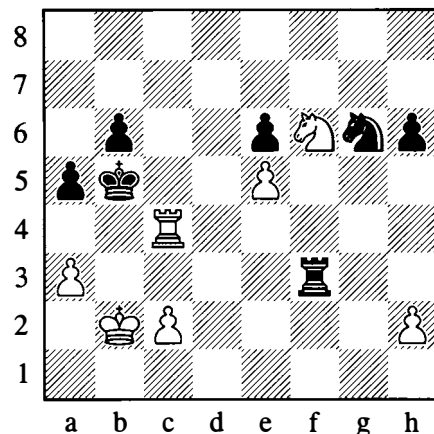
33.♟g5 h6 34.♟e4† ♟d4 35.♟f6 ♞xg1 36.♞xg1 ♞c8! 37.♞e1 ♞c3† 38.♟b2 ♞f3 39.♞e4† ♟c5 40.♟d7† ♟d5 41.♟f6† ♟c5 42.♟d7†



42...♟c6!

The time control has been made, and the smoke has cleared. Black is better, but converting the advantage, if done at all, will not be an easy task.

43.♟f6 ♟g6 44.♞c4† ♟b5!



45.♞e4?

Condemned by various endgame experts, including Karsten Mueller.

The active 45.♖c8! would have drawn, the main line going as follows: 45...♜xe5 46.♜e4 ♖e3 47.♜d6† ♜a4 48.♖f8 b5 49.♖f4† b4 50.axb4 axb4 51.♖f8 ♜a5 52.♖b8 ♖e2 53.♜b3=

45...♖f5

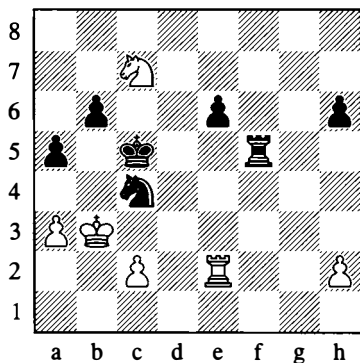
Suddenly Black obtains strong winning chances; Ivanchuk's persistence has paid off. In the next couple of moves White neglects to improve his king, depriving himself of his last practical chances.

46.♜e8?!

46.a4† ♜c5 47.♜b3 ♜xe5 48.c3 was called for.

46...♜c5 47.♜b3? ♜xe5! 48.♖h4

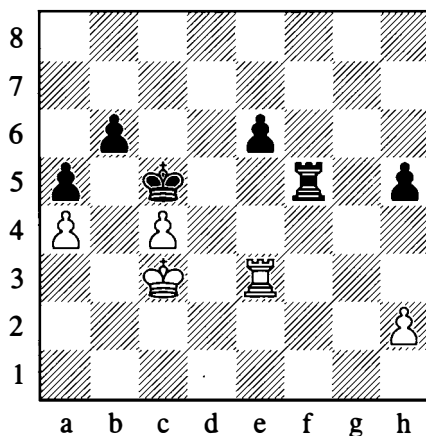
Mikhail Golubev pointed out that Black would have an elegant win against 48.♖e2 ♜c4† 49.♜b3:



49...a4†!! 50.♜xa4 Otherwise the king is forced out of the game and White has no chances to hold. 50...♜d2!! 51.♖xd2 ♜c4 and the threat of ...♖a5 mate forces White into a lost pawn ending after 52.♜b5 ♖xb5 53.♖d4† ♜xd4 54.♜xb5 e5 and Black comes first.

48...♜d6 49.♜b5† ♜d7 50.a4 h5 51.♜d4 ♖g5 52.♖e4 ♜c4† 53.♜c3 ♖e5! 54.♖h4 ♜d6 55.♜d3 ♖d5 56.c4 ♖g5 57.♜f3 ♖c5

58.♜d2 ♖f5 59.♜b3 ♜b7 60.♖h3 ♜d6 61.♜c3 ♜c5! 62.♜xc5 ♜xc5 63.♖e3

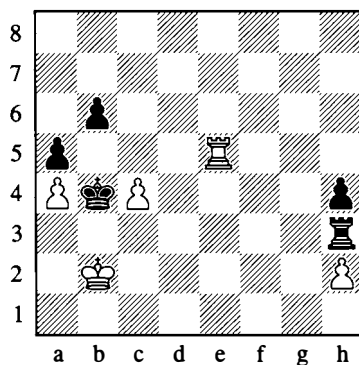


After so many twists and turns, the position is clearly winning for Black, but now fatigue takes over:

63...e5?

A bad move, after which Magnus could have escaped.

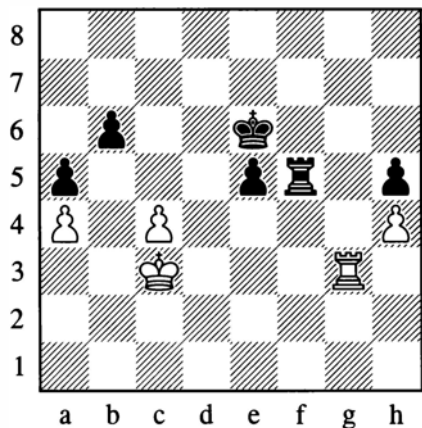
It was important to gain space by 63...h4! rendering g3 inaccessible to the white rook. The pawn on e6 is not important as shown by the line: 64.♖xe6 ♖f3† 65.♜b2 (65.♜d2 ♖h3 and wins) 65...♖h3 66.♖e5† ♜b4



67.♖b5† (67.♖e2 ♜xa4 and wins) 67...♜xc4 68.♖xb6 ♖xh2† 69.♜a3 ♖h3† 70.♜b2 ♖d3 71.♖b5 ♖d5 and Black wins; this line was given by Karsten Mueller.

64.h4!

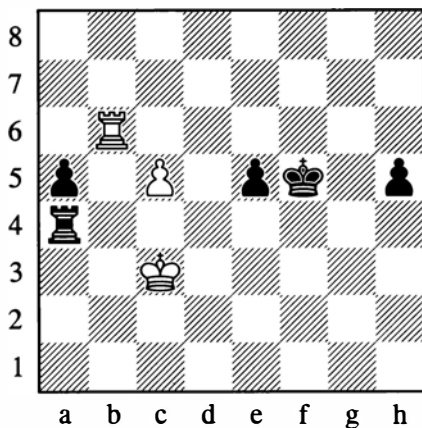
Magnus spots Black's mistake and the fight flares up anew.

64...♔d6 65.♞d3+! ♕e6 66.♞g3!

The brilliant point – the rook threatens to infiltrate with counterplay. This would be impossible if the black pawn was on h4.

66...♔f6 67.♞d3 ♞f4 68.♞d6+ ♕f5 69.♞xb6 ♞xh4 70.c5

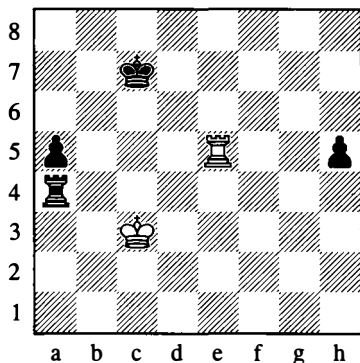
White is inching closer to the miracle. Passed pawns must be pushed!

70...♞xa4**71.♞h6?**

A fatal mistake after a heroic defence.



71.c6! ♖e6 72.♞b5 ♜d6 73.c7 ♜xc7 74.♞xe5 is a tablebase draw as the black rook is simply badly placed on a4.



For example, 74...h4 75.♞h5 ♜b6 76.♞h6† ♜c5 77.♞h5† ♜d6 78.♜b3 ♞f4 79.♞xa5 ♞f1 80.♞h5 ♞h1 81.♜b2 ♜e6 82.♞c5 h3 83.♞c3 ♜e5 84.♞b3 ♜f4 85.♞c3 with a well-known theoretical position.

71...♜e4!

The move Magnus missed. The black king returns to take care of the c-pawn, putting an end to White's hopes.

72.♞d6

72.c6 ♜d5 and Black wins.

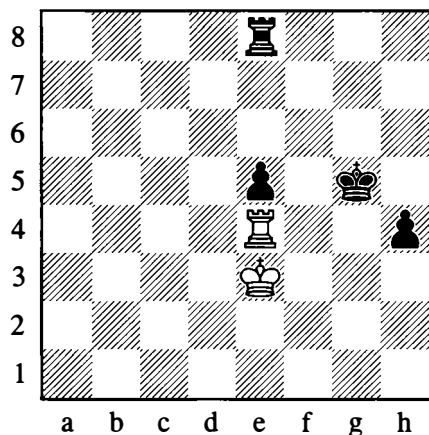
72...♞d4! 73.♞a6 ♜d5 74.♞xa5 ♞c4† 75.♜d3 ♞xc5 76.♞a4 ♞c7 77.♞h4 ♞h7 78.♜e3 ♜e6 79.♜e4 ♞h8

Now White must give way with either his king or rook.

80.♜e3

After 80.♞h3 h4 81.♞a3 ♜f6! Black wins (but not 81...h3?? 82.♞xh3!=).

80...♜f5 81.♜e2 ♜g5 82.♞e4 ♞e8 83.♜e3 h4



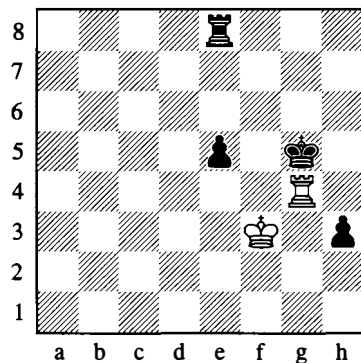
84.♜e2

More stubborn was:

84.♜f3

As pointed out by Golubev; Black then wins by:

84...h3 85.♞g4†



85...♜f6!!

In the line 85...♜f5? 86.♞h4 ♞a8 87.♞h5† ♜f6 88.♜g4! ♞a3 89.♞h6†! ♜e7 90.♜f5 ♞e3 91.♜g4= Black is pushed back and White miraculously holds.

86.♞h4 ♞a8! 87.♜g3

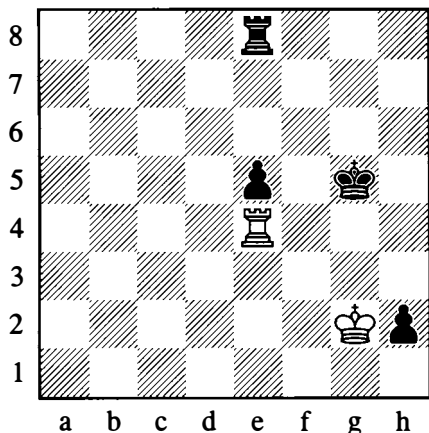
87.♞xh3 ♞a3† 88.♜g2 ♞xh3 89.♜xh3 ♜f5 and wins.

87...♞a3† 88.♜h2 ♞f3

Black is winning.

84...h3 85.♜f2 h2 86.♜g2

Show me!



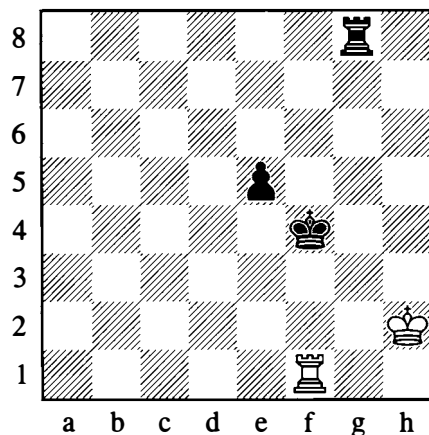
86...h1=♖! 87.♗xh1 ♕f5 88.♖e1 ♜g8!

Sealing White's fate by cutting off the king.

89.♗h2

89.♖f1† ♕e4 90.♖a1 ♕f4 91.♖f1† ♕e3
92.♖e1† ♕f2 would be similar.

89...♕f4 90.♖f1†



90...♕e3!

Magnus resigned, because of 91.♖e1† ♕f2
92.♖xe5 ♜h8†.

0-1

Carlsen's frustration at this completely unexpected turn of events is vented on a trashcan as he enters the press room. It's nothing too violent, just a natural burst of

emotion, but the onlookers are surprised, because this deeply human side of Magnus is not a common sight. It is only in this very short but intense moment that he succumbs to the pressure; in the press conference he is more like his usual self, more self-critical than is the norm, but respectful. Perhaps deep inside he is still wondering why Ivanchuk chose this particular game to play like the real him; perhaps his mind is already running ahead, trying to figure out how he's going to get out of the mess he put himself in. In any case, his emotional outburst betrays the immense amount of pressure on his shoulders – pressure that he hasn't really felt before, simply because the stakes were never this high. Nielsen and his father Henrik, who had left the hotel at the time when a draw seemed on the cards, have arrived to see their protégé losing this important game and trailing Kramnik by half a point. Nothing is over, of course, and it will be their task to convince Magnus of this during the rest day. And once again I realize how painful it must be, having 24 additional hours to torment yourself with sad thoughts.

My database confirms that one more game was played on that day, but I find it hard to recall it; it seems lost in the haze of agony and anxiety evoked by the conflicting fates of the leaders. The moves of the game show Grischuk easily obtaining a comfortable position from the opening as Black against Radjabov, with further play never seriously disturbing the equilibrium. The Azeri is the one with the chances in the rook ending that eventually arises, and by now I seem to recall a Ukrainian grandmaster in the press room explaining to me the correct defensive method against f- and h-pawns. Grischuk displays good knowledge of this particular part of endgame theory and unfalteringly leads the game to the drawing haven.

The various possible scenarios regarding the outcome of the tournament are already under discussion all over the venue, even before Carlsen's game has ended. So far the fate of the tournament has been under his control, but now the tables have turned and he has been relegated to the role of pursuer. Two rounds away from the conclusion, the possibility of a tie for first place is for the first time seriously considered. A quick perusal of the tournament regulations reveals that a rapid tie-break, the habitual method of breaking ties in top-level events, is not a likely option in London: the player with the highest number of wins (and, consequently, losses) prevails. Carlsen has the advantage in such a case, but first he must make up the half-point difference that separates him from Kramnik.

Immersed in the excitement of the tournament, all involved suddenly regret the unlikelihood of a play-off that would certainly add to the intrigue. To me, it is surprising that the players agreed to this regulation; I would have thought they would prefer matters to be settled at the board, even at a faster time control, rather than on paper; it should feel more reassuring to know that you control your own fate. In a post-tournament interview, Kramnik will go on to explain that he hardly paid attention to this particular clause; especially for him, a player with a solid classical style, someone who loses so rarely (but also doesn't win as often), it would seem that the selected tie-break criterion would be far from ideal. In addition, the criterion itself is debatable as well: while it certainly does its part in encouraging fighting chess, completing such a strong and important tournament with fewer (or no) losses could also be considered an achievement. Be that as it may, the worries of whether ChessCasting can meet the rigorous demands of rapid chess are dispelled and we rest assured that in the evening of the 14th round we will know Anand's challenger.

The rest day before the final two rounds must have been agonizing, at least for Carlsen and Kramnik; each of the remaining two games is vital, tournament tactics must be readjusted, opening surprises must be honed and crafted. Kramnik is playing his good friend Gelfand next, but this is sure to be no walkover: their friendship, strong as it may be, has nothing to do with a competitive game of chess. The danger of falling prey to conspiracy theories provides added motivation to both Gelfand and Kramnik's last-round opponent, Ivanchuk, to try their best and at least avoid losing. As things stand at the moment, Kramnik is set to get the worse of any tie with Carlsen; it is clear that he must try to win both games. For Magnus, things are slightly different: the 13th round game, as Black against an indifferent Radjabov, becomes a clear candidate for the full point that might bring him back to the lead. The last-round game against Svidler, however, is an entirely different story; Peter is extremely dangerous, has been playing well (and very aggressively) and is free of any stress connected to the tournament standings: he will just want to play chess. There is nothing more dangerous than a carefree opponent in a situation where the whole world is at stake for you, and I am sure Carlsen realizes that.

For the non-participants, the day's chats are mainly dominated by our predictions and guesses, accompanied by seemingly logical arguments that should really have no place in a situation like this, where psychology will play a decisive role. No matter how hard we try, it is impossible to even remotely walk in the shoes of the two protagonists and try to decipher their thoughts and emotions. Fully realizing the futility of attempting to understand the incomprehensible, I walk all the way to Harrods to fulfil a special request and then spend the rest of the day walking around

London. On the way to the famed store, I walk by the Park Lane Hotel, where back in 1986 the Iron Lady of British politics opened the first half of the third Kasparov – Karpov match, and where the first twelve games of that centenary battle for the World Championship had taken place. For someone like me, who was introduced to the wonderful world of chess precisely by those repeated clashes between the two Ks, the stories around these matches hold a special place in my heart, and the Park Lane Hotel feels like a temple, dedicated to a deity beyond most people's comprehension but so crystal clear to me.

Fast forward to the present, and it occurs to me that the London Candidates of 2013, with its rich content of chess and drama, is steadily earning its place in history, right next to the inspirations of my childhood – and I am a part of this history, even if a very small and insignificant one. With my pilgrimage completed, I set off to meet Nastja and other friends at the players' hotel, and upon entering I receive a quick reality check, as I run into the entire Carlsen family, sisters et al, going out for an evening walk around the city. Magnus is among them, looking fresh as ever and quite cheerful; a smile adorns his face as he greets our entourage. This very brief encounter away from the IET London with the world's top player leaves a strong and lasting impression on me; this guy, the little kid who I have known since the World Youth Championships of 2002, is not to be outdone so easily.

Round Thirteen

With tension reaching boiling point, the players arrive for the thirteenth round and sit down at their tables. With full confidence in the live transmission system that has served us so well in the preceding rounds, I accommodate the arbiters' request to take photos of them in turn starting Carlsen's clock; this involves some pushing and shoving with the photographers and the television crews, but is crowned with success. The games commence, the members of the press take the millionth picture of the Norwegian wunderkind and, just in case, snap a few photos of Kramnik as well. Then they disperse, and the players are left alone on the battlefield, fighting against their opponents and their demons.

Kramnik's opening preparation has often been extolled to legendary proportions, but today it surpasses all expectations: on the fifth move he introduces an entirely new set-up against the Grünfeld, leaving his opponent Gelfand to ponder for almost half an hour; providing live commentary is Lawrence Trent with tournament director Robert Fontaine having replaced Nigel Short for the last two rounds. In London, Kramnik showcases a different approach to the opening than we have been used to from him: the deep exploration of long opening variations has been replaced with a search for conceptual novelties that his opponents are most likely unaware of, setting fresh and complicated problems to the unlucky players who run into them. This has been especially true in his games with White, and this final case is the most telling of them all.

To his credit, Gelfand navigates the previously untrodden path with precision: instead of trying to hang on to a potential extra pawn, he develops naturally and executes an important freeing break in the centre. Kramnik's moves flow unhurriedly but confidently, and he enjoys a slight edge for a while; but hopes of plain sailing to a solid advantage are quickly dispelled by Gelfand's no-nonsense approach to the problems of the position. Quite quickly, the game becomes more and more mind-boggling, with both sides' pieces creating tactical threats. The computer engines

seem to dislike Kramnik's prospects somewhat, but both players are convinced that Black is under some pressure and must try hard to maintain the dynamic balance; they agree to this evaluation in the press conference. Gelfand soon commits an inaccuracy, allowing his opponent to strike some blows and seize the initiative for good, which in turn brings Kramnik an extra pawn; but the position remains very complicated and both players are short of time. Just when it seems that the Russian is about to crash through, Gelfand keeps finding resources to continue the battle and does not budge one inch. A string of mutual inaccuracies follows, though this is only ascertained far far later, with the help of the silicon mind, and the Israeli's active defence is rewarded with rich counterplay against his opponent's exposed king. When the first forty moves are completed and the players can relax a little, Kramnik still has that extra pawn but the real winning chances he was enjoying appear to be gone.

With the firm belief that a draw is inevitable spreading around the press room, the commotion surrounding this game slowly dies down, only to flare up again as Kramnik's at first incomprehensible tries finally acquire a discernible shape. With his king cut off and exposed to a possible perpetual check, he realizes that a rook ending is his only chance and so he carefully angles towards the optimal version of it. A lesser player may well have missed the point of all this strange manoeuvring, but not Gelfand; he remains focused and allows no detail, no matter how tiny, to escape his attention. With accurate play he rebuffs all of Kramnik's tries and soon finds himself with his rooks doubled on the second rank: draw.

The press conference that follows helps to shed light on some of the mysteries of this game, but mainly confirms the very high level of Gelfand's practical defence and of the game in general. Kramnik ponders over some moments when he could perhaps have played more strongly, but doesn't waste much time or energy on regrets; there is no point in doing that, especially now. Consoled by the fact that Carlsen's game looks like an inevitable draw as well, he leaves the venue in clear first place.

I have no idea whether Kramnik followed the last part of the Radjabov – Carlsen game from his hotel room, but if he did, it must have been a very painful experience. Carlsen has come to the game with his mind fully set on winning, and his opening choice betrays his intention of avoiding any kind of opening discussion and just playing chess from the very start. This logical approach does not work out too well at first, as his passive opening gives his opponent a free hand to fight for the initiative; but Radjabov is clearly not the same player who started the tournament as Number 4 in the world, and he seems neither interested nor capable of seeking to exploit any kind of subtle advantages his position may offer. Instead, his thoughts seem to be directed straight towards splitting the point, and such an attitude is often the first step towards disaster. One such indifferent move allows Carlsen to breathe freely, and then even seize the initiative himself, but the position is not terribly complex and this burst of activity fails to translate into anything more concrete than a slight structural advantage. Radjabov rejects some more active possibilities and goes into an endgame that hovers very close to equality.

Despite the apparent impossibility of the task at hand, Carlsen digs in and gets down to business. A long period of manoeuvring follows, in which the position doesn't change in any truly significant way, but Magnus slowly inches ahead and harvests small gains; unfortunately for him, they are too small. Radjabov again renounces activity in favour of passive solidity, builds some kind of seemingly impregnable fortress and starts waiting. The collective mind in the press room,

despite its size, skill and pro-Magnus attitude, is unable to spot a way for the World Number 1 to break through. What everyone agrees on, though, is that this game will last a long time, very long, and will not end before Magnus has tried everything possible – maybe the 50-move rule will end Radjabov's torture?

Manuel the poker player takes no part in all this; instead, he sits tight in the auditorium and watches the players carefully. Earlier on he has given a very interesting interview to the Russian TV crew, where he has explained his appreciation for chess and its theoretical foundation. He expresses his intention of enlightening the world of poker pros about the importance of studying and theoretical preparation, using examples from the chess world to convince his peers of his views. I marvel at the thought that this interview, by someone who doesn't even play chess regularly, is more interesting in content than anything else spoken in the press room throughout the almost three weeks we have been there. And now he sits motionless on a chair, hidden in the darkness surrounding Daniel Weil's medieval setting, captivated by the persistence and grim determination exhibited by the facial expressions and body language of Magnus Carlsen.

For quite a while Radjabov's defensive lines remain watertight, but slowly the first cracks begin to appear, both to his fortress and to his attitude: some small inaccuracies here and there lead to the creation of slight but meaningful weaknesses, some of which are inflicted upon him by himself alone. It's not hard to understand his emotional state during the torture he is submitted to: so close to the end of an unsuccessful tournament, with nothing to look forward to, no active prospects but also with the finish line barely discernible on the horizon, the boundaries of his patience and coolness are slowly but steadily crossed; ghosts begin to make their appearance on the board, every threat, no matter how harmless, starts to look very imposing and all this leads to ill-considered preventive measures that only make matters worse. The position hardly



ever changes, and only minute differences in the exact placement of the pieces prevent him claiming a draw by threefold repetition. He has all the details of how to maintain his fortress clearly jotted in his head, but eventually the lines start to blur, confusion sets in and a crisis breaks out: by means of a clever and unexpected regrouping, Carlsen is now suddenly winning a pawn.

The sudden change in fortunes gives rise to a furore in the press room, like a powerful injection of caffeine. Carlsen's external appearance also changes: he now resembles a wild animal that has cornered its prey and is ready to deliver the final blow. Despite the pawn loss, Radjabov's position is not hopeless at all; he needs to switch to active defence, and he surely realizes that himself, but the lack of clarity and the sad turn of events have evidently discouraged him. Unable to muster the strength to start all over, he fails to find the moves that promised better saving chances and eventually goes down.

The spectators jump from their seats at the sight of Radjabov extending his hand in resignation and provide a beaming Magnus with a long and intense ovation that doesn't go unappreciated by their hero. Manuel doesn't hide his amazement at the incredible show of strength, persistence and determination he has just witnessed.

**Grim determination or luck?
Well, both actually!**

Teimour Radjabov – Magnus Carlsen

Round 13, 31st March 2013

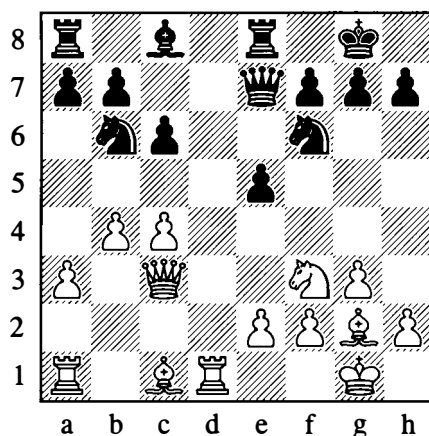
After his traumatic loss to Ivanchuk, Carlsen's qualification to play a world title match against Anand was in serious jeopardy; he was trailing Kramnik by half a point with only two rounds to go, and thus, entering the 13th round he needed a combination of results that would

keep him alive in the race. First of all he had to win his own game against Radjabov, but that is not the easiest thing in the world when you are Black against an almost 2800 player. Secondly he had to hope that Kramnik would stumble against Gelfand with the white pieces, right in the moment Kramnik was acquiring terrific momentum in the second half of the event.

In the beginning of the round things looked dismal for Carlsen as he quickly got a bad position against Radjabov, while Kramnik was nurturing the usual slight plus he gets with the white games. But as time was passing, things dramatically changed: Magnus managed to equalize after some uninspired play by Teimour and even grind him down in a long ending, while Kramnik failed to break Gelfand's solid defence and had to settle for a draw.

The miracle had happened; the players were on equal points going into the last round, but Magnus's fate was again in his own hands as he had a better tie-break than the Russian.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.♚c2 d6
5.♘f3 ♘bd7 6.g3 0-0 7.♙g2 e5 8.0-0
c6 9.♗d1 ♗e8 10.dxe5 dxe5 11.a3 ♙xc3
12.♚xc3 ♚e7 13.b4 ♘b6



To be honest, before writing the notes for this game I has only seen a live transmission of its concluding stages, where Carlsen was

trying to squeeze a win out of a slightly better position. Looking at the position on the board after 13...♖b6, it is hard to believe that Black can even make a draw here, as White's advantage is sizeable and Magnus hasn't the slightest chance for counterplay. Luckily for him, his opponent's next move was a colossal error, allowing him to make a comeback in the game and the tournament:

14.♙e3??

In London everything had gone wrong for Teimour and this move is the direct product of disappointment.

After

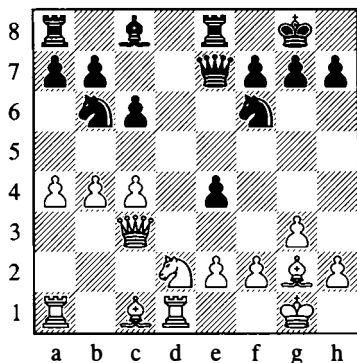
14.a4!

Carlsen would have been reduced to passive defence, with very few chances of holding.

For example:

14...e4 15.♖d2!

15.♖g5 h6 16.a5 ♖bd7 17.♖h3 is another possibility, but I don't like knights on the edge of the board.

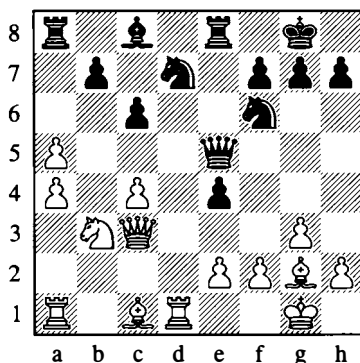


15...a5!?

Trying to slow down White's queenside offensive without opening up the long diagonal for the g2-bishop.

Worse are 15...♙g4 16.a5 ♖bd7 17.♙b2 ♞f8 18.♞e1 ♞ad8 19.♖f1! and 15...e3 16.fxe3 a5 17.b5.

16.bxa5 ♖bd7 17.♖b3 ♞e5



18.♙b2!

If 18.♞xe5 ♖xe5 19.♞d4 ♙e6 20.♖c5 ♙xc4,

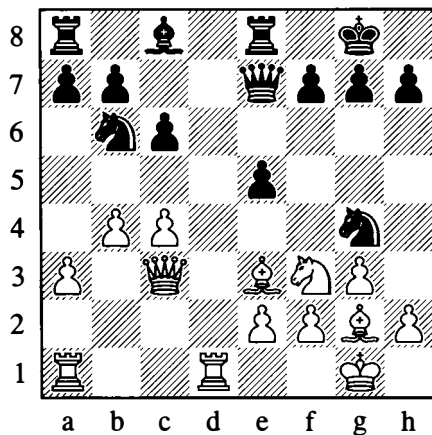
then Black has chances of survival.

18...♞h5 19.f3 ♖f8 20.♞d2!

With a clear advantage for White.

14...♖g4!

Simple and strong; the bishop cannot invade c5 because of ...♖a4.



15.♖d2 f5 16.h3 ♖xe3 17.♞xe3 e4

Blocking the g2-bishop. Three moves ago Black was on the ropes and now is on the verge of becoming better. Who said that chess is a boring game?

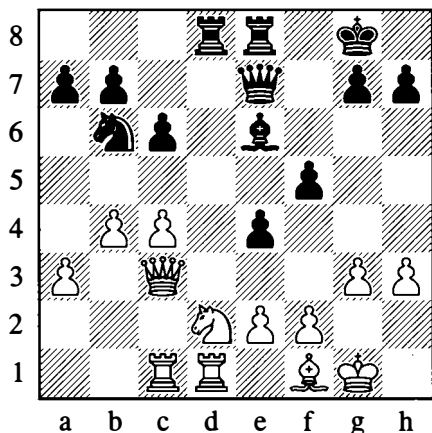
18.♞ac1!?

Only the dynamic 18.c5!? ♖d5 19.♞d4=, intending to plant the knight on d6, would

have kept the equilibrium. Now White drifts into a prospectless position.

18...♙e6 19.♖c3 ♜ad8 20.♙f1?!

20.c5 ♘d5 21.♗e5 was imperative. Now things could have turned really serious for White.



20...c5!:

A move indicating that Magnus is still affected by the twists and turns of the previous round.

After the accurate 20...♙f1!, as proposed by Sergey Zagrebely, the liberating e2-e3 would have been prevented, leaving the Azeri GM in serious difficulties. For example, 21.e3 ♙h5 22.♙e1 ♘d7 and the knight comes to e5 to haunt White.

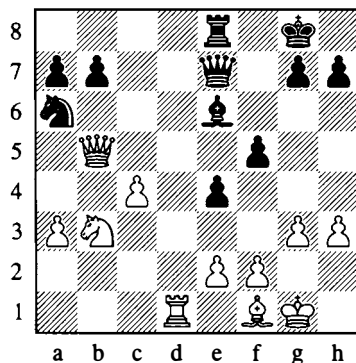
21.bxc5 ♘a4 22.♗b4 ♘xc5 23.♘b3

Now it's more or less equal; the only chance for Magnus to get the advantage is to obtain a stronghold over the c5-square, but for the moment this seems like a remote possibility.

23...♜xd1 24.♜xd1 ♘a6 25.♗xe7?!

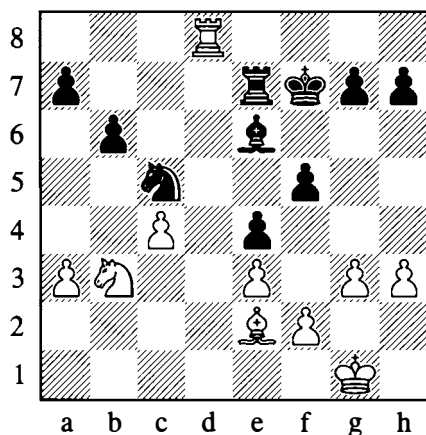
This must have been accompanied by a sigh of relief from Black.

25.♗b5! was best, all the more so as it is Black who has the weaker king now:



25...♜c8 26.♗e5 ♘f7 27.♜d6 ♗f6 28.♗b5 ♗e7 29.♗e5= is a line indicated by the computers.

25...♜xe7 26.e3 ♘f7 27.♙e2 b6 28.♜d8 ♘c5



29.♘d4?!

A very strange decision; 29.♘xc5 bxc5 30.♜b8= would have practically killed the game, leading to a draw.

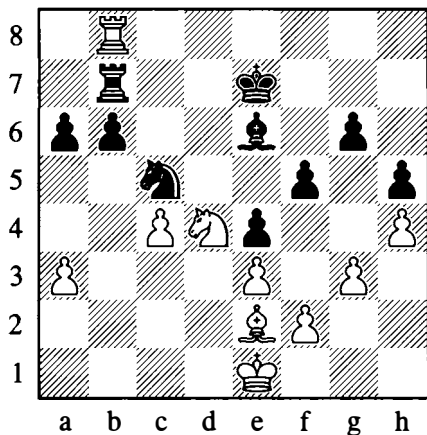
29...♘f6 30.♘f1 ♜d7 31.♜f8+ ♙f7

In spite of White's 29th move, the game is basically drawish. In the next few moves Black resorts to consolidating manoeuvres in his camp, awaiting a chance to become active.

32.♘e1 g6 33.h4 h6 34.♜c8 ♙e6 35.♜f8+ ♜f7 36.♜h8 ♜c7 37.♘b5 ♜d7 38.♘d4 h5

Preventing h4-h5 once and for all.

39.♖f8† ♕f7 40.♞c8 ♜e5 41.♞a8 a6 42.♞c8
♞d6 43.♜c6† ♜f6 44.♜d4 ♕e6 45.♖f8†
♜e7 46.♞a8 ♞d7 47.♞b8 ♞b7



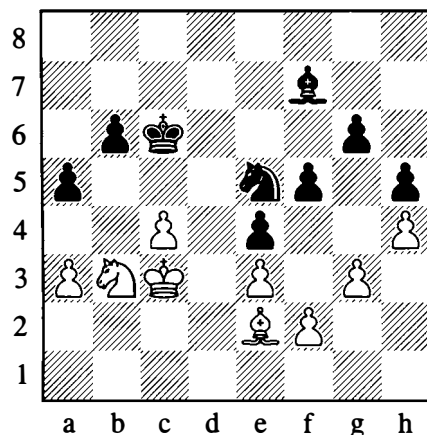
48.♞xb7?!

Another strange decision by Radjabov, giving Black real chances to play for a win. White had to keep his active rook, as it was a source of constant irritation for his opponent.

48...♜xb7

Having taken fresh heart, Magnus starts a long grind.

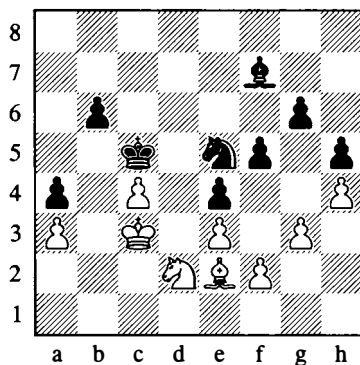
49.♜d2 ♜d6 50.♜c3 ♕f7 51.♜b3 ♜e5
52.♕f1 a5 53.♕e2 ♕e6 54.♕f1 ♕d7 55.♕e2
♕a4 56.♜d4 ♜c5 57.♜b2 ♕e8 58.♜c3 ♕f7
59.♜c6† ♜d6 60.♜d4 ♜d7 61.♜b5† ♜c5
62.♜d4 ♜e5 63.♜b3† ♜c6



64.a4?!

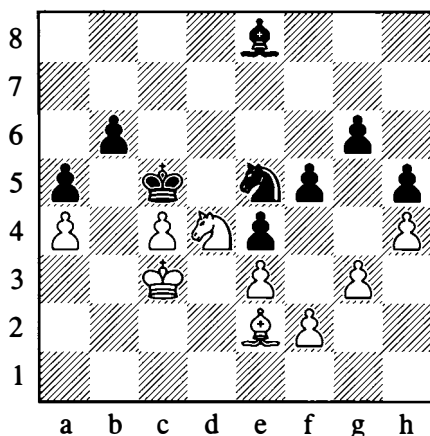
A dubious move, although White may not be lost yet; White needlessly weakens his a-pawn.

After 64.♜d4† ♜d6 65.♜b3 a4 66.♜d2 ♜c5 White seems to be getting zugzwanged, but as several commentators pointed out, this is only an illusion.



67.f3! (67.♕d1 ♜g4 68.♕xa4 ♜xf2 69.♜b3† ♜d6 70.♜c1! ♜e5 71.♕b3! ♜g4 72.♜d2 also looks OK) 67...exf3 68.♜xf3 ♜xf3 (68...♜xc4 69.♕xc4 ♕xc4 70.♜e5=) 69.♕xf3 ♕xc4 70.e4 ♕e6 71.exf5 ♕xf5 72.♕g2 White has a fortress.

64...♜d7 65.♜d4 ♜d6 66.♜b5† ♜c5
67.♜d4 ♕e8



68.♜b3†

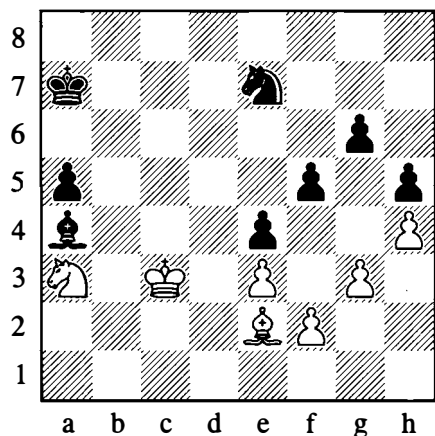
The text is the only move as 68.♜b3? ♕d7! would have forced White to shed material.

68...♙d6 69.c5† ♙c7

Black of course keeps his a-pawn.

70.♙d4 ♙c6† 71.♙c3 ♙e7 72.cxb6† ♙xb6
73.♙d2 ♙xa4 74.♙c4† ♙a6! 75.♙a3† ♙b7
76.♙c4 ♙a6 77.♙a3† ♙a7

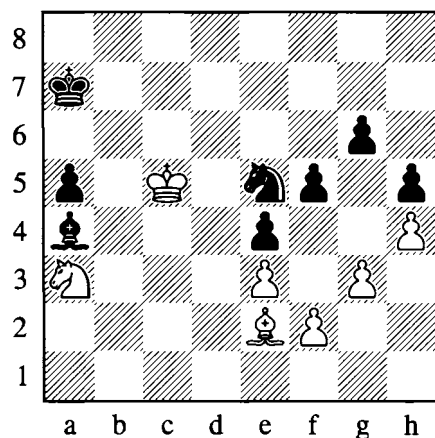
The only try; Black keeps the a-pawn by the skin of his teeth, and with it his hopes to progress and play Anand.



78.♙d4

78.♙c4!? ♙e8 79.♙e6 would have been interesting, activating the bishop and keeping the enemy forces occupied with the defence of the g6-pawn.

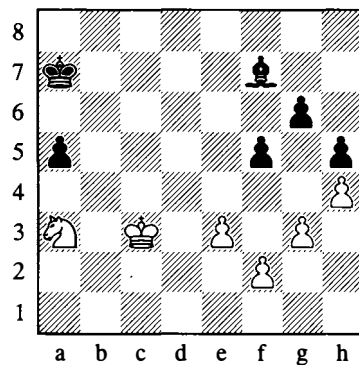
78...♙c6† 79.♙c5 ♙e5



80.♙c4?

The final error.

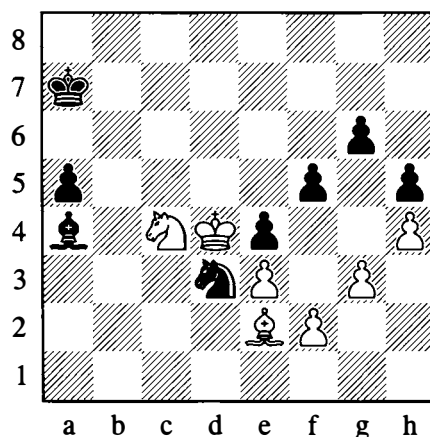
80.♙d4 ♙d3!? (80...♙c6† 81.♙c5 ♙b4 82.♙b5†! seems to hold for White) 81.♙xd3 exd3 82.♙xd3 ♙b3 83.♙c3 ♙f7



84.♙b5† ♙b6 85.♙d4 ♙d5 86.♙e2 ♙c5
87.♙f4 ♙f7 88.♙c2 is probably still a draw.

80...♙d3†! 81.♙d4

81.♙xd3 loses simply to 81...exd3 82.♙d4 ♙c2 83.♙c3 a4.

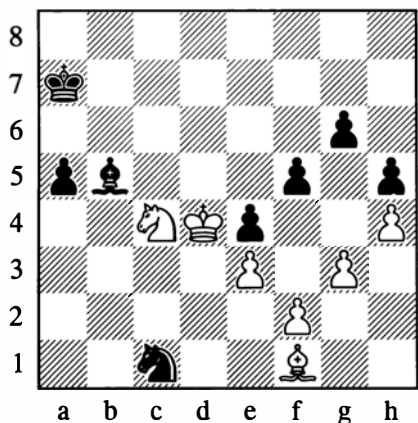


81...♙c1!!

A brilliant move, destroying any illusions White might have had of saving this game.

81...♙xf2?! allows 82.♙xa5 ♙h1 83.♙c4 with a few practical chances for White, although even here, after 83...♙e8 Black should prevail.

82. ♖f1 ♗b5!



83. ♖xa5?

Despair. 83. ♖c3 is tougher, but Black will win all the same after: 83...a4 84. ♖b2 ♖d3† (84...♖b3!?) 85. ♗xd3 exd3 86. ♖d2 ♖b6

83... ♗xf1 84. ♖c6† ♖b6 85. ♖e7 ♖d3 86. ♖xg6 ♖c7 87. ♖e7 ♗h3 88. ♖d5† ♖d6 89. ♖f6 ♗g4

0-1

Thus, with a proper measure of determination and luck, Magnus had kept his hopes of becoming the challenger intact. Everything was ready for the showdown of the last round. This time, Magnus's entrance to the press room is accompanied by a high-five with his manager, Espen Agdestein, expressing his satisfaction with a job well done. He is now back into a tie for first which, in view of the tie-break rules, means a lot more than just that. He only needs to match Kramnik's last-round result in order to win the tournament; his fate is in his own hands again.

With all the emphasis placed on his and Kramnik's games, the other two encounters of the round have been justifiably neglected,



though at least one of them could prove to be of great significance for the upcoming fourteenth round. This assumption does not refer to the Grischuk – Aronian game, though the game itself is not indifferent: Grischuk adopts Kramnik's recipe of avoiding a theoretical clash with the Armenian in the Slav Defence and opts for a rare Catalan set-up, and after Aronian grabs a pawn on c4 and fianchettoes his dark-squared bishop, the position begins to bear great similarities to Kramnik – Gelfand, which is taking place right behind Alexander's back. Aronian obtains a comfortable position, but after a critical central break by his opponent he is called upon to display good defensive skills in order to avoid problems. He does so, and further simplification brings about the draw. In the press conference Grischuk tries to discover the ways in which he could have maintained the edge he was sure he had, but nothing clear-cut is shown.

In contrast to this relatively uneventful game, the clash between Svidler and Ivanchuk has far greater implications for the fate of the first place, in view of the fact that these two players are, respectively, Carlsen's and Kramnik's opponents in the last round, and their mood going into that final round may well affect their performance. The game promises excitement from the very start, with Ivanchuk, hot off his victory against Carlsen, opting for complicated play in the French Defence, with Svidler retorting in style with the Advance variation. The Ukrainian adopts an active but rather risky novel treatment of a quiet system, obtaining good piece play at the cost of neglecting his king's safety. Given one more tempo to castle, his position will become very promising; Svidler fully realizes this and goes down the critical path, sacrificing a pawn to trap his opponent's king in the centre. Both players refuse to compromise and a principled exchange of blows follows, winning Svidler

an exchange. Ivanchuk's position would, in a quieter setting, offer him good compensation, but a couple of strong moves by the St Petersburg grandmaster put him in the driving seat, which he never relinquishes. Steadily increasing the pressure until breaking point, Svidler brings his opponent down with force, even provoking the inevitable flag fall.

Vassily again looks devastated after this convincing defeat, and it is only Nastja's patient and compassionate smile that succeeds in bringing him to the press conference – after his opponent has given one himself. This outcome doesn't seem to bode well for Carlsen, who has to play a self-confident Svidler clearly on the rise, while the desolate Ivanchuk, constantly plagued by indecision and time trouble, will be meeting Kramnik. True, Magnus will be playing with the white pieces and can surely make a draw if needed, but what if the unpredictable Ukrainian genius suffers yet another collapse against the former world champion? After all, there is only so much one can take...

The events of the last few rounds have clearly affected the judgement of everyone involved, because a certain feeling of confidence is built up around Kramnik. A win against Ivanchuk hardly seems unlikely, while Carlsen's task against Svidler seems comparatively more difficult. Kramnik himself has made a more sober assessment and considers that the ill-fated thirteenth round has killed off most of his chances; he probably spends a great part of the evening lamenting the tie-break rules. He must do half a point better than Carlsen and he fully realizes how difficult this is. Without much hesitation, he quickly settles on the apparently correct strategy: a draw will be enough if Carlsen loses, but for this to happen he must provoke his rival into risky play; and this can only be done if he himself applies pressure on his opponent. Thus, he must keep

the tension at all costs, hoping for either another collapse by Ivanchuk, or Svidler inflicting punishment on an over-pressing Magnus. Hardly reassuring, but it will have to do.

For Magnus, things are more complicated: it is very likely that a draw will be all he needs, but a Kramnik win cannot be ruled out totally, and so he must always be in a position to play for more. While for Kramnik the last-round tactics can be summed up in just one phrase ("keep the game going"), he must find the right balance between risk and safety, always maintain some play but also never cross the line. Such a dilemma usually places great strain on a player and leads to doubts and hesitation; experience would certainly come in handy in these circumstances...

Round Fourteen

Chess history abounds in examples of critical last-round games, decisive fights that could have gone either way, ending in glorious triumphs or abject failures. The aforementioned final games of two Kasparov – Karpov matches immediately spring to mind, or Kramnik's win in the final game of his match against Leko in 2004 – and many others. But cases of not one but two such games taking place simultaneously, as on the fateful 1st of April 2013 in London, are extremely rare. As if all the drama of the Candidates tournament was not enough to earn this event a special place in history, the truly unique finishing straight of the three-week long race was added to the mix, making for a truly unforgettable evening for all those present in the IET London that afternoon, as well as the hundreds of thousands of viewers closely following the action on their screens. These thoughts were surely in the minds of those spectators as they were walking next to the River Thames, on the way to the entrance to the imposing building that had been our home for almost three weeks. Little did they know what was to come...

The anticipation of something spectacular is already indicated by the early arrival of the spectators, who quickly take their seats in the auditorium, fire up their tablets and await the start. A small moment of anti-climax, but also a reminder that life goes on, comes when I overhear Andrew Paulson on the phone arranging the dismantling and storage of 'Stonehenge' for the next day. The setting feels as awe-inspiring as ever and the arena has never before seen so many photographers.

The players arrive and four of them are more relaxed than usual; after this game they can go home and continue their lives, setting their sights on new battles that the future holds for them. For Carlsen and Kramnik it feels like there is no tomorrow, and their two opponents seem fully aware of their responsibility in determining the outcome of this grand event. The flashes go off as the contestants take their seats and turn the semi-darkness into broad daylight for several minutes, but the main protagonists do not appear disturbed by this, as they are fully focused on their mission. A few agonizing moments pass, I take a picture of the chief arbiter starting Carlsen's clock, and we're off.

Kramnik selects the Pirc Defence in an effort to postpone the fight to a later stage of the game. It is true that, honed in the process of several world championship matches, his repertoire with Black is not particularly well suited to playing for a win, but something must be played after all. Ivanchuk selects an old classical set-up, avoiding complications and angling for some straightforward positional chess, where things cannot easily go wrong; this attitude surely fails to cheer up Kramnik.

On the neighbouring board, Carlsen and Svidler wage battle on the same field as in their earlier game, but with reversed colours; Carlsen is the first to deviate, selecting a slower and less researched approach, for which Svidler also appears prepared. The two games develop slowly, with the moves flowing with some difficulty and restraint from the players' hands, as if they feel the weight of the world on their shoulders.

In the press room a cheerful atmosphere prevails, with almost all of the previous days' visitors having shown up, like the actors in a theatrical show who go on stage after its conclusion, to receive a standing ovation. Miguel Illescas, Kramnik's long-standing trainer, second and friend, has come to support him – and hopefully celebrate with him in the evening; he seems calm and relaxed, as one should after having gone through the ordeal of two world championship matches. Excitement is all around.

The first game to end is between Gelfand and Grischuk, without any drama whatsoever. Gelfand seeks a slight positional edge with a rare line against his favourite Grünfeld, but Grischuk reacts correctly and the game never strays from equality. By the time the draw is agreed, both players appear relieved that the tournament is over, though one could imagine Gelfand wishing to play a couple of rounds more, now that he has warmed up.

Meanwhile, Aronian and Radjabov are drowning in the complexities of a King's Indian, with Levon being consistent as usual and tackling the challenges posed by his opponent straight on. Radjabov's ambitious play may be objectively justified, but he doesn't follow it up correctly and he soon ends up in some trouble. Aronian soon wins two rooks for his queen and leads play into



an endgame that seems very promising for him. It is, but taming the activity of Black's queen proves to be a difficult task and, for a while, it looks like Radjabov may be able to save his skin. However, a few lapses of concentration lead to the Azeri overlooking some obvious threats and, before long, Aronian collects the point, earning himself a pleasant memory to console him and concluding Radjabov's disappointing showing in London.

The first signs of indecision plague Carlsen already after the opening, as he cannot seem to decide how exactly to proceed. On more than one occasion he refrains from the most active options, maintaining a sound position with some play, but missing opportunities for greater activity. Svidler remains flexible and is facing no particular problems, but it's also not easy to imagine him generating any meaningful activity. On a different day, one could easily imagine the play being concluded with a peace treaty not long afterwards, but today the show must go on. And on it goes. A few feet away, Kramnik is making some uncharacteristic positional concessions in order to keep the position complex, and with simple and obvious moves Ivanchuk has obtained a slight but stable edge; nothing really serious, but difficult to shake. As things stand at the moment, it looks like Carlsen will not have much trouble achieving his aim, mainly because Kramnik's winning chances are very close to zero; but with the memories of Ivanchuk's collapses fresh in his mind, Magnus cannot be sure of anything.



As the games slowly move on, all four players are creeping towards time pressure and crunch time is not long in coming. Kramnik embarks on some strange and risky manoeuvres that look (and probably are) suspect, but, in the face of strong and concrete positional play by his opponent, he has decided that passively defending his queenside weaknesses is a prospectless affair and kingside counterplay must be sought. The computer engines unanimously claim that Ivanchuk's advantage is steadily increasing, and Kramnik is probably aware of this, but it doesn't matter at this point; at least his counterplay is taking shape. He is playing his moves faster than usual, perhaps trying to put some pressure on Ivanchuk and force him to think longer, and short thinks are interspersed with quick glances at the giant screen on the stage, checking out the progress in the other game. Carlsen does the same, obviously searching for some indirect advice regarding his further tactics. Svidler saves him the trouble, as he cannot restrain himself any longer and tries for activity on the kingside; a risky decision but perhaps justified under the circumstances, and made in the hope that Magnus will not wish to risk the ensuing complications. Decision time is fast approaching, the tension is rising and this game becomes the focus of attention, as it is about to explode.

And explode it does. Magnus finally makes up his mind and plunges ahead with a flashy move, at the same moment missing a more promising tactical alternative. Svidler replies with a central break, and the game turns into a tactical melee, of the kind that computer engines make their living off but that feels so perplexing to the human mind. With little time at hand, both players play sub-optimally but don't seriously falter; they do miss stronger continuations at various turns. The collective opinion quickly swings against Carlsen, mainly because everyone feels that Svidler is in his element and is more likely to escape the hidden reefs in the storm that has erupted.

This turn of events obviously gives Kramnik hope, because he audaciously goes on with his risky venture, allowing his queenside to be decimated but creating some threats on the other flank, all the while carefully not breaking the last safety net cast over his position. Ivanchuk tries to play as carefully as possible, and Kramnik has sensed this; no other explanation can possibly exist for the risks he is taking. In an effort to clarify the situation, Vassily gives up a kingside pawn but manages to extinguish his opponent's pressure there, and his clear positional advantage on the queenside still gives him good prospects; moreover, he keeps adequate reserves of time to ensure that he won't lose on time once again.

Agony is the prevailing feeling in the press room and words cannot really describe the atmosphere. People are holding their heads in their hands and only rarely take a peek at the screens displaying the games in progress; others have turned their backs on the live coverage, unable to withstand the tension, and ask around for quick updates. Journalists, who had so far been frantically typing up the first parts of their reports, have now abandoned their working habits and throw empty stares at their screens, simply watching history being made. A vodka flask is being passed around to relieve the stress, people are pacing back and forth aimlessly, computer engines are working overtime and the fans of the overstressed laptops are whirling with greater speed than ever. How much tenser can it get?

The most dramatic moment of this final round goes by unnoticed. On the 30th move, Kramnik has to make a crucial decision: a simple retreat of his knight will safeguard his position and is clearly the correct move, but it will result in simplifications and an almost certain draw. He sees this, as does pretty much everyone else, but understands that such a decision will prompt Carlsen

to simplify his position as well. The other game is still extremely messy and can go either way if neither player backs off; what to do now? There seems to be no option but to keep the game going. Kramnik wins the battle against his inner voice and plays something else, in the hope that this will unsettle Ivanchuk – and Carlsen. Perhaps it does: Magnus overlooks a pretty geometrical idea that would have secured him an advantage and instead blunders; a further error compounds the situation and Svidler doesn't miss the chance. Just like that, in only a couple of moves, the position has turned hopeless for the Norwegian, who seems rattled and frustrated. He has very little time, not even enough to look at the giant screen anymore; he is thus unaware of the fact that a few strong moves by Ivanchuk have placed Kramnik in a difficult situation. Magnus tries hard to resist, but Svidler is now unstoppable and delivers one blow after the other, like a machine. Carlsen even almost loses on time, a very rare occurrence for him, but it might as well have been so; his position is utterly hopeless.

One wonders how things would have turned out if Kramnik had had to make a decision about his 30th move just a little later. He can now see that his rival is going down in flames, but there is not much he can do himself. He tries to revert to the saving path, but Ivanchuk's play is extremely strong and Kramnik's position is getting worse and worse. The players exit time pressure with Ivanchuk enjoying an extra pawn and a dominating position. A truly incredible scenario now slowly unfolds: both contenders will probably lose their games. Nobody could have possibly imagined such a development before the round, but the feeling is now gradually sinking in. Carlsen is the first to resign.

A return ticket to Hell

Magnus Carlsen – Peter Svidler

Round 14, 1st April 2013

Entering the last round of the London contest Magnus knew all he needed was to equal Kramnik's overall score in the tournament to go through. The omens were good: they were both on the same points before the crucial round but his tiebreak was superior, and so he simply had to score not worse than Kramnik on that very day. Additionally, he would be White against Svidler while his rival in the race had Black against Ivanchuk. Last, but not least, he had managed to recover from a heavy blow in his game against the Ukrainian by beating Radjabov with Black in the very next game, while Kramnik must have been to a certain extent disappointed to have lost the sole lead after his draw with Gelfand.

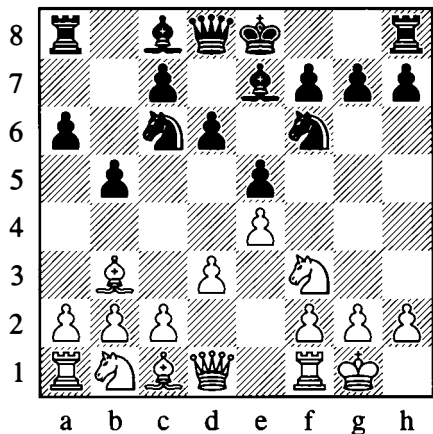
As it turned out, Caïssa, the Goddess of Chess, has a very refined sense of humour and enjoys torturing the young Norwegian. In the heat of the heightening tension, both Carlsen and Kramnik overreached themselves and actually lost their last-round games, but it was Magnus who resigned first and had to go through several agonizing moments till Volodya did the same.

So, the chess crown had found its challenger in Magnus Carlsen, but only after he went to hell and back...

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♘f6
5.0-0 ♙e7 6.d3

Magnus imitates Peter's choice from their encounter in the first half of the tournament; of course, if he knew that a draw would eventually be enough for him, he would have allowed the Marshall, but it was clearly not in his interests to let his fate be in the hands of others.

6...b5 7.♙b3 d6

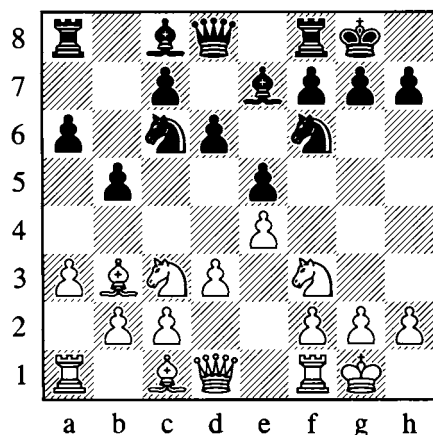
**8.a3**

Following this year's trend, as set by Vishy Anand.

8.a4 was played between the same players with reversed colours in the first half of the tournament.

8...0-0 9.♖c3

9.♖bd2 was White's choice in Anand – Caruana, Wijk aan Zee 2013. Magnus prefers a more straightforward approach.

**9...♖b7**

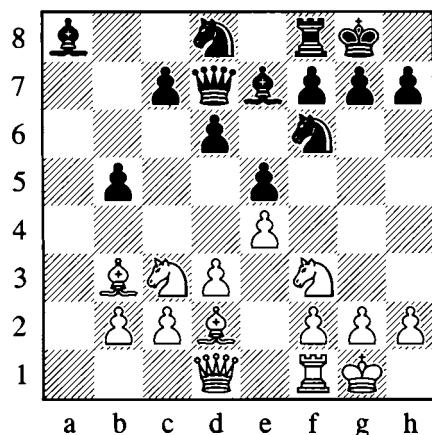
Also interesting is 9...♖a5 10.♖a2 c5 as played in Anand – Adams, Baden-Baden 2013.

10.♖d2 ♗d7

A multipurpose move, vacating d8 for use by the other black pieces.

11.a4 ♖d8!?

The knight seeks a better future on e6; at the same time another point of having the queen on d7 is revealed, as the b5-pawn is now protected.

12.axb5 axb5 13.♖xa8 ♖xa8**14.♖e2**

White is rushing to transfer his knight to the kingside, but in doing so he gives up central control for a moment.

Better was: 14.♗a1 ♖e6 15.♗a2 ♖c6! (15...♖b7 16.♖xb5! ♗xb5 17.♖xe6 fxe6 18.♗xe6† ♖f7 19.♖g5 gives White a clear advantage) 16.♖d5! ♖a8 17.♖xc6 ♗xc6 18.♗b3 ♖b8 19.♖d5 Although, even here, after 19...♖d8 20.♖a1 ♖c5 White does not have much.

14...♖e6

More straightforward would have been:

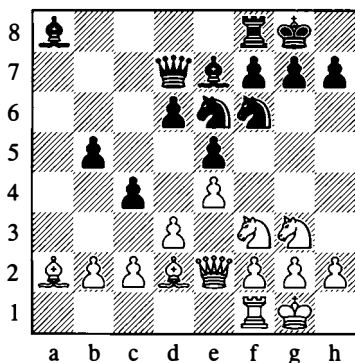
14...c5 15.♖g3!

I dislike 15.c4 b4! 16.♖g3 (16.♖a4 ♖c6 17.♖xc6 ♖xc6 is slightly better for Black) 16...♖c6 and if anyone it is better, it is Black; the bishop on b3 cuts an inglorious figure.

15...c4!? 16.♔a2 ♖e6

Temporarily locking the bishop out of play on a2; however, after the accurate:

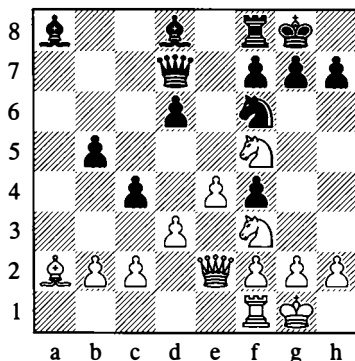
17.♟e2!



White, who is combining defence and attack, is *not* worse, as certain commentators rushed to conclude. For example, consider the following double-edged line:

17...♘f4!?

17...♟b8?! 18.dxc4! bxc4 19.♔xc4 ♟xb2 20.♔b3! ♘c5 21.♔c3 ♟xb3 22.cxb3 ♘cx4 23.♟a1 actually looks a bit better for White. 18.♔xf4 exf4 19.♘f5 ♔d8



This is best answered with the solid: 20.♘d4!

The adventurous line is: 20.♟d2?! d5! 21.♟xf4 dxe4 22.♟g5! g6! (22...♘e8? 23.♘e5! ♟e6 24.♟xd8 ♟xe5 25.♘e7+ ♔h8 26.dxc4 is a nice line, giving White a clear advantage) 23.♘h6+ ♔g7 24.♘e5 ♟e6! (24...♟a7 25.♘f5+ ♔g8! [25...♔h8?

26.♟h6! ♟g8 27.♘d6 and wins] 26.♘h6+ ♔g7 27.♘f5+ leads to a draw) 25.♘hx7 exd3 26.cxd3 ♔c7 27.dxc4 ♔xe5 28.♘xe5 ♘e4 29.cxb5! ♟e8! 30.♟e3 ♟xe5 This is indeed better for Black.

20...♔b6 21.♔b1!

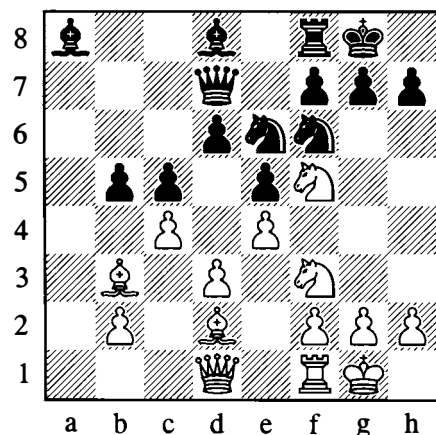
The bishop will be reintroduced to play, while Black's weakened pawn structure may prove a source of concern for him at a later stage.

15.♘g3 c5 16.♘f5 ♔d8!?

16...♟e8, with the idea of ...♔f8, would have been more natural, as Svidler pointed out after the game. But I guess Peter knows better than anyone else that to beat Carlsen you need intriguing methods, and the double-edged text move surely serves that quest as the bishop is potentially more active on c7 or b6 if the ...d5 advance is achieved.

17.c4

Trying to stifle ...d5, or at least make Black think twice before carrying it out.



17...bxc4!

The best course, from both an objective and psychological point of view.

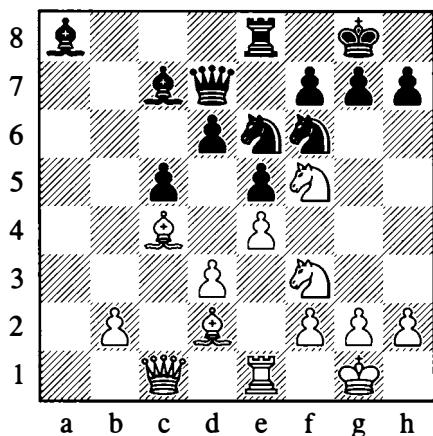
17...b4 18.♔a4 ♟c7 19.g3 would have reached a semi-blocked position that suited better White's needs in the tournament situation:

he could manoeuvre around for a while, waiting to see how things would evolve in the Kramnik game, before deciding to embark upon a concrete plan of action.

18. ♖xc4

White has made a slight gain himself as well, in that his light-squared bishop now stands proud and safe on c4.

18... ♖c7 19. ♖e1 ♖e8 20. ♖c1



20... ♖h5

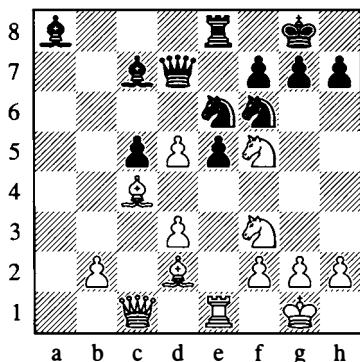
This decentralization is a sly method of tempting White into g2-g3, weakening himself along the long diagonal.

The immediate

20... d5?!

would have been somewhat dubious on account of:

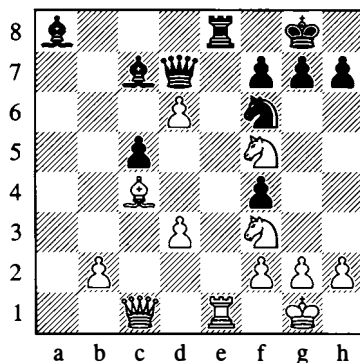
21. exd5



21... ♖f4

The text is the only move.

21... ♖d4?! 22. ♖3xd4 cxd4? 23. ♖xg7! ♖xg7 24. ♖h6† ♖h8 25. ♖g5 and White wins, as pointed out by the players after the game. 22. ♖xf4 exf4 23. d6!



23... ♖xd6

23... ♖xf3 24. dxc7 ♖xf5 25. gxf3 ♖c8 26. b4! ♖xc7 27. b5 is also good for White. 24. ♖xe8† ♖xe8 25. ♖xd6 ♖xd6 26. ♖g5 ♖d5 27. ♖xd5 ♖xd5 28. ♖xf4

Black is a pawn down and would have to struggle hard to draw this.

21. g3

Yielding to temptation.

However, ignoring the f4-square by 21. b4 doesn't lead to an advantage either: 21... cxb4 22. ♖xb4 d5! 23. exd5 ♖ef4! 24. ♖e3 ♖f6 25. ♖c3 h6 26. ♖b2 ♖6xd5 27. ♖xe5 ♖f6 28. ♖xf4 ♖xf4 29. ♖f1 ♖xf3 30. ♖xe8† ♖xe8 31. gxf3 ♖d6 Black has enough compensation for the pawn.

21... g6?!

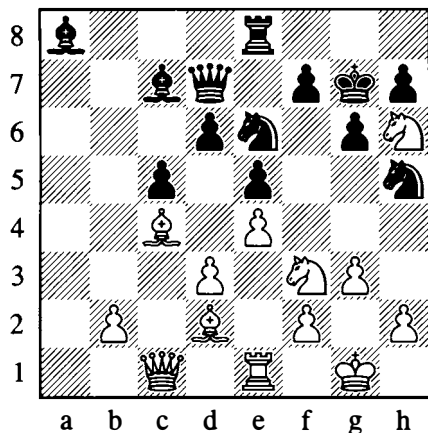
Inviting complications. However this move is not objectively good.

21... ♖b8!= would have been equal according to the computers.

22. ♖h6†

Magnus of course plunges in.

22...♔g7



23.♖g5?!

Certainly aesthetically pleasing, but it seems that he could have played better at this point.

23.♖xf7 ♕xf7 24.♖g5† ♕g8 25.♕xe6† ♖xe6 26.♖xe6 ♗xe6 27.b4 ♕c6! 28.bxc5 d5 29.♗c2 ♗d7! 30.f3 (30.♖a1 dxe4 31.dxe4 ♖f6!) 30...♖g7! 31.♕e3 ♖e6 This is hardly the way to embarrass Black, as White's major pieces have no penetration points and he may even end up worse.

However

23.b4!

would have been quite annoying for Black to meet.

23...cxb4

23...♕b6 24.♖xf7! ♕xf7 25.♖g5† ♕g8 26.♕xe6† ♖xe6 27.♖xe6 ♗xe6 28.♕e3! ♕c7 29.♗c3! ♕c6 30.♖a1! ♖f6 31.bxc5 d5 32.♗b3 produces a vastly improved version of the position arising after 23.♖xf7.

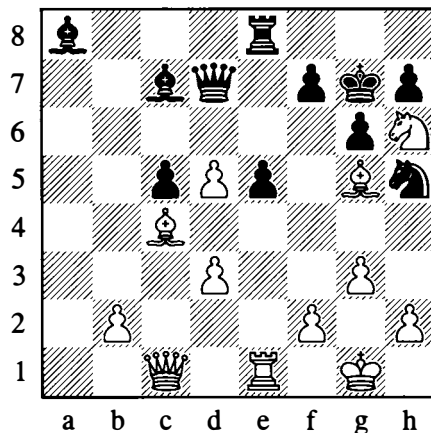
24.♖xf7! ♕b6

24...♕xf7?? loses immediately to 25.♖g5† ♕g8 26.♕xe6† ♖xe6 27.♖xe6 ♗xe6 28.♗xc7.

25.♖g5 ♖d8 26.♕g2

Black has a lot of weaknesses compared to White's none, so White is clearly better.

23...♖xg5 24.♕xg5 d5 25.exd5



25...♕xd5?!

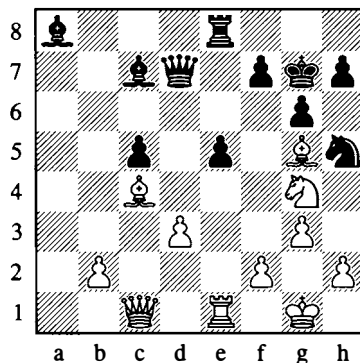
25...♕a5! 26.♖e2 ♕xd5 27.♕xd5 ♗xd5 28.♖g4 f6 29.♕h6† ♕f7 would have prevented any b2-b4 ideas by White and given Black a fair share of the chances.

26.♖g4

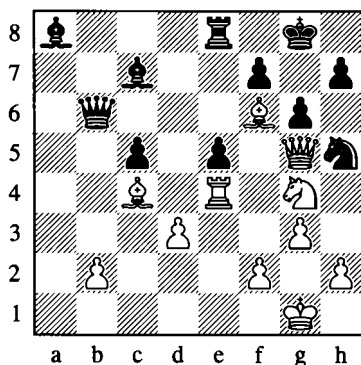
White misses the idea mentioned above. Correct was 26.♕xd5 ♗xd5 27.♖g4, intending to answer 27...f6 28.♕h6† ♕f7 with 29.b4! taking the initiative.

26...♕f3

The long string of inaccuracies continues; both players were apparently exhausted from the nerve-racking situation and the tiredness such a long event can cause to the brain and body. Svidler should have played 26...♕a8!!, although admittedly this wasn't an easy one to find even under normal conditions.



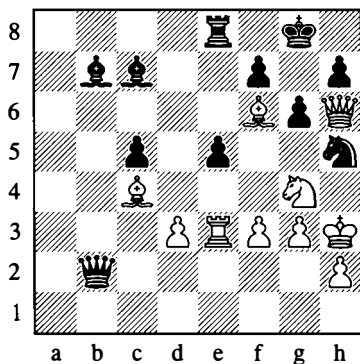
Several commentators have provided the following majestic line leading to a perpetual check: 27.♔f6! ♖g8 28.♖g5 ♖c6 29.♗e4 ♖b6!!



Now there is a split:

30.♗e7 ♖xb2 31.♗e1 ♖b7 32.♘f6! ♘xf6
33.♙xf7 ♙xf7 34.♖xf6 ♖g8 35.♖e6 ♖g7
36.♖f6=

30.♗e3 ♖xb2 31.f3 ♗b7! 32.♖h6 ♖c1+
33.♗g2 ♖b2+ 34.♗h3



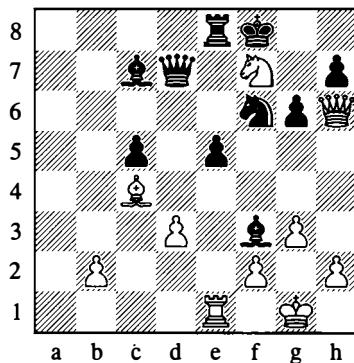
34...♗c8!! 35.♙xf7 ♙xf7 36.♖xh7 ♙f8
37.♖xc7 ♗xg4+ 38.fxg4 ♘xf6 39.♗f3 e4!
40.dxe4 g5 41.e5 ♖xe5 42.♖xe5 ♗xe5
43.♗xf6 ♙e7= Absolutely wonderful stuff.

27.♔f6

Svidler calculated 27.h3 to a draw: 27...♗xg4
28.hxg4 ♘f4! 29.gxf4 ♖xg4+ 30.♙f1 ♖h3+
31.♗g1 ♖g4+=

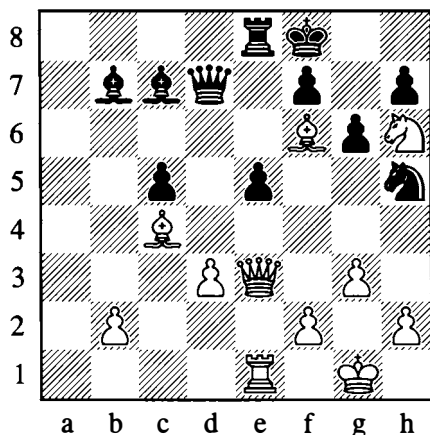
27...♗g8 28.♘h6 ♙f8 29.♖e3

Of course taking on f7 at once was also an option: 29.♘xf7 ♘xf6 30.♖h6+



30...♗g8 (30...♗e7? 31.♘g5! ♖f5 32.♗e6
♖xg5 33.♖xg5 ♗xe6 34.♖e3 ♗d5 35.♖xc5
♗d6 36.♖c3 ♙f7 37.♗a1 ♗e7 38.♗a6 is
better for White, although, admittedly, not
easy to convert.) 31.♘d6+ ♗h8 32.♘f7+
♗g8 33.♘d6+ This is a perpetual. It is quite
possible that Magnus calculated this line, but
was unsure whether a draw would be enough
for him to qualify.

29...♗b7!



At this point Magnus was sinking deeper and deeper in time pressure as Black's counterplay on the long white diagonal leading straight to his king's headquarters was becoming quite an

issue. The stressful load eventually proved too much, even for him.

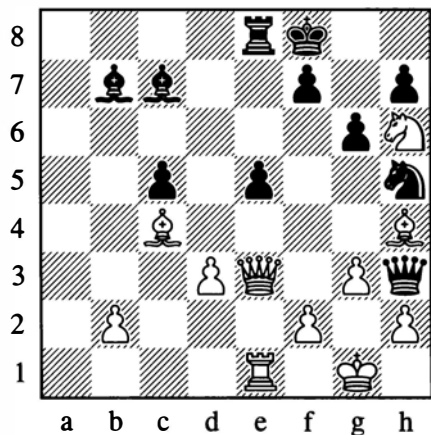
30.♠h4

This bishop is awkwardly placed here.

30.♞xc5? would have been bad due to 30...♙d6 and White loses a piece.

However, the bizarre 30.♠h8!? ♞c6 31.f3 ♜e7 32.♜xf7 ♜xf7 33.♙xf7 ♜xf7 34.♙xe5 ♙d8 35.h3 ♜f6 36.♜g2 would have led to an approximately balanced position, which can definitely be described as “unclear”.

30...♞h3



31.f3?

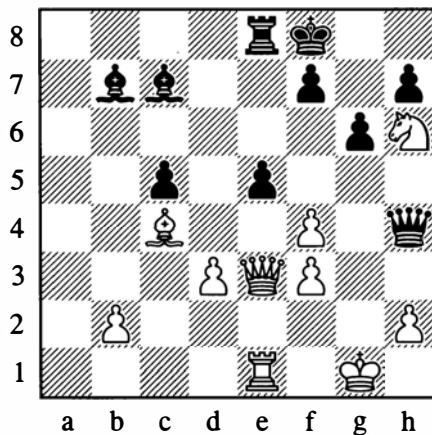
A bad mistake, after which the tables are turned.

31.♙d5! ♙xd5 32.♞xc5† ♜g7 33.♞xd5 ♜xh6 34.♞xf7 ♙a5 35.♞xe8 ♙xe1 36.♞xe5 ♙xf2† 37.♜xf2 ♞xh2†= would have led to a perpetual.

31...♜f4! 32.gxf4?!

32.♞f2! ♞xh4! 33.gxh4 ♜h3† 34.♜g2 ♜xf2 35.♜xf2 ♙d8 36.♜g3 would have been tenable; I haven't been able to find a winning line for Black here.

32...♞xh4



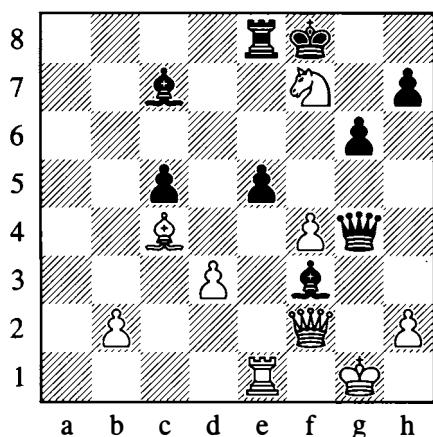
Now things become difficult for White, and in time pressure he missed his last chances.

33. ♖xf7 ♕xf3! 34. ♖f2

Terrible is 34. ♖xe5?? ♜xe5! and Black wins on the spot.

34... ♖g4+!?

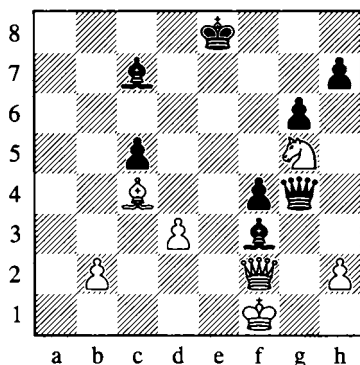
Svidler was affected by time pressure too. 34... ♖xf4! was simple and good.



35. ♖g3?

Equivalent to resignation.

After 35. ♖f1! ♖h3+ 36. ♖g1 exf4 37. ♜xe8+ ♖xe8 38. ♖g5 ♖g4+ 39. ♖f1 things are not so clear.

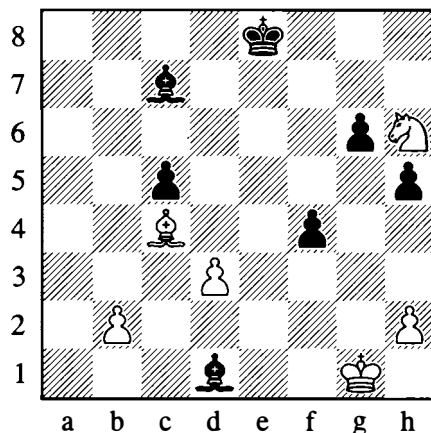


For example: 39... ♕c6 (or 39... ♖xg5 40. ♖xf3 ♖f8 41. ♖d5 and after a queen

exchange the opposite-coloured bishops could save White) 40. ♖xc5 ♖d1+ 41. ♖f2 ♖d2+ 42. ♖f1 ♖c1+ 43. ♖e2 ♖xb2+ 44. ♖e1 And White resists.

35... exf4 36. ♜xe8+ ♖xe8 37. ♖xg4 ♕xg4 38. ♖g5 h6 39. ♖f7 h5 40. ♖h6 ♕d1

There is nothing White can do to stop the kingside pawns.



41. ♖f2 f3 42. h3 ♕f4 43. ♖f7 g5 44. ♖e1 g4 45. hxg4 hxg4 46. ♖xd1 g3 47. ♖e1 g2 48. ♖f2 ♕h2

And Magnus resigned. However relief was not long in coming as Kramnik soon lost, paving the way for the young genius's first World Championship match.

0–1

Carlsen moves on to the press conference and, freed from stress now that there is nothing more he can do, he indulges in the analysis of the game with his opponent. Svidler's performance receives the admiration it deserves, but Peter is not particularly interested in laurels; instead, he seems engrossed in the analysis, apparently oblivious to what everyone else really cares about.

Meanwhile, Kramnik is a truly tragic figure: he sits dejected in his chair, staring at the ruins of his hopeless position, looking for a



miraculous way to clinch that elusive half point. In the press centre Carlsen gives a detailed interview on a wide variety of topics, claiming that he played the best chess in the tournament overall, even taking the disasters in rounds twelve and fourteen into account. He occasionally catches a glimpse of the position in Kramnik's game and awaits a conclusive result; until Vladimir actually resigns, some doubts remain.

The moment of truth comes not much later: Kramnik accepts the inevitable and extends his hand in resignation, provoking thunderous applause from the crowd, directed to both players as well as to Carlsen and Svidler. There are no signs of despair in his face, no emotions – just a shocking lack thereof. The moment is, like every single moment in this tournament, captured live on video and relayed to the world – and the press room.

Carlsen, his manager, and Peter Heine can finally release the stress and anxiety of the last three weeks (and the many months before) and celebrate. Congratulations are extended to the winner in a crowded room that resembles a Manhattan metro station commute. I see some people typing frantically again, others still shaking from the agony, a couple are even in tears – images I have never seen before in a chess event. Carlsen imperceptibly slips out of the press room and is spotted lying on a nearby staircase, head buried in his hands; this lasts for several moments and some lucky photographers finally catch that million-dollar shot they had been seeking.

Kramnik swallows the bitter pill with dignity. Without any melodrama or out-of-place fanfare, he joins the press conference that takes place while the majority of the press is hunting Magnus around the venue. He discusses the most significant parts of the game that just cost him a ticket to yet another world championship match, sets forth his arguments in favour of the tactics he employed, and expands on his overall showing in the Candidates.



I am left in awe, admiring his calmness and composure; I cannot decide whether it is derived from a general self-control that is part of his character, or the immense experience that all those world championship matches have infused in him. He strongly contends that it was he who showed the best chess in the tournament and, putting things in perspective, promises that he will try again in the next Candidates tournament; a remarkable comment, taking into account that disappointment must surely be conquering his soul.

As for Ivanchuk, he doesn't seem to realize the effect he has had on chess history in these last few days in London. His victories over the two players who tied for first complete his preparations for the Russian League, which will take place one week later in the unfortunately-named resort of Loo, and where he will go on to score a none-too-memorable three out of five.

While there can be no doubt that Carlsen has been a deserved winner of the Candidates (and Kramnik would have been one as well), the discussion about the merits of the two protagonists' performance in London will continue for a while. In a sense, they are both justified in their claims. Magnus really shone in the first part of the tournament, scoring some of his trademark wins and reaching a significant plus score without many exertions, at a time when Kramnik was stuck in a drawing rut. He had his share of problems in a couple of games, most notably the first against Radjabov, but he overcame them successfully. He even found the strength to win the second game against the same opponent, at a time when everything seemed to be going wrong for him and tournament victory appeared to be slipping away.

It's fair to say that in the last three rounds he hardly was himself, plagued by nerves and indecision; but then again, it's all part of the game, and the way one handles the pressure imposed by various circumstances is an important aspect of one's competitive personality. Maturity does

not necessarily come with age, but it definitely comes with experience; the three weeks in London have been Carlsen's first stress test at the highest possible level of pressure and, though he didn't acquit himself all too well, he did emerge as the victor in the end. In view of the forthcoming world championship match, there can be no underestimating how valuable this experience will prove: this is how champions are forged. And with this thought in mind, one can only barely scratch the surface of the hell that Garry Kasparov, back in the autumn of 1984, was living in...

As for Kramnik, the London Candidates was certainly his best performance in recent years. With the exception of the last-round game, where extraneous factors played the most significant role in pure chess decisions, he never once was in any danger of losing. Good and thoughtful opening preparation regularly gave him promising positions, he calculated well, his technique in simplified positions was as precise as ever, his persistence and determination were colossal. If one must point out a blemish in the overall picture, it could be his relative inefficiency in advantageous but still complex positions; several of his games saw the same scenario, of his opponents saving half a point through active defence, at a time when their positions were beginning to appear hopeless. It cannot be said that he played better in the second half – his play appears to have been on the same high level throughout the event, and it was only the little details that led to his unbalanced scoring in the two parts of the tournament. Perhaps his own assessment was, after all, correct: it was simply a matter of things going his way, as abstract a concept as this may sound. Unfortunately for him, the cold and cruel numbers indicate that you can hardly expect to win a Candidates tournament without scoring a single win throughout the entire first half; if only that strange twist of fate against Gelfand had occurred earlier...

With Carlsen and his entourage having departed the venue, an atmosphere of relaxation sets in. Stonehenge is being disassembled, the special chess sets dispersed around the halls are being packed away, the screens are being switched off, the whole place gets emptier and emptier. Andrew Paulson is beaming with joy, now that the tournament has proved to be the unqualified success he was sure it would be; even he, the irrepressible optimist, could not have come up with a better ending to the story of his event. Thanks to the miracles of modern technology, the entire





chess world is already buzzing about the incredible story of a Candidates tournament that kept everyone on their toes for days on end. It all feels like a dream, like it only took place in someone's fiery imagination; especially the way the last round evolved, on April Fools' Day, seems perfectly appropriate for a John le Carré novel. The peculiar coincidence gives rise to a troubling thought: maybe it was all a lie, a carefully constructed and brilliantly executed performance conceived by the mind of Daniel Weil?

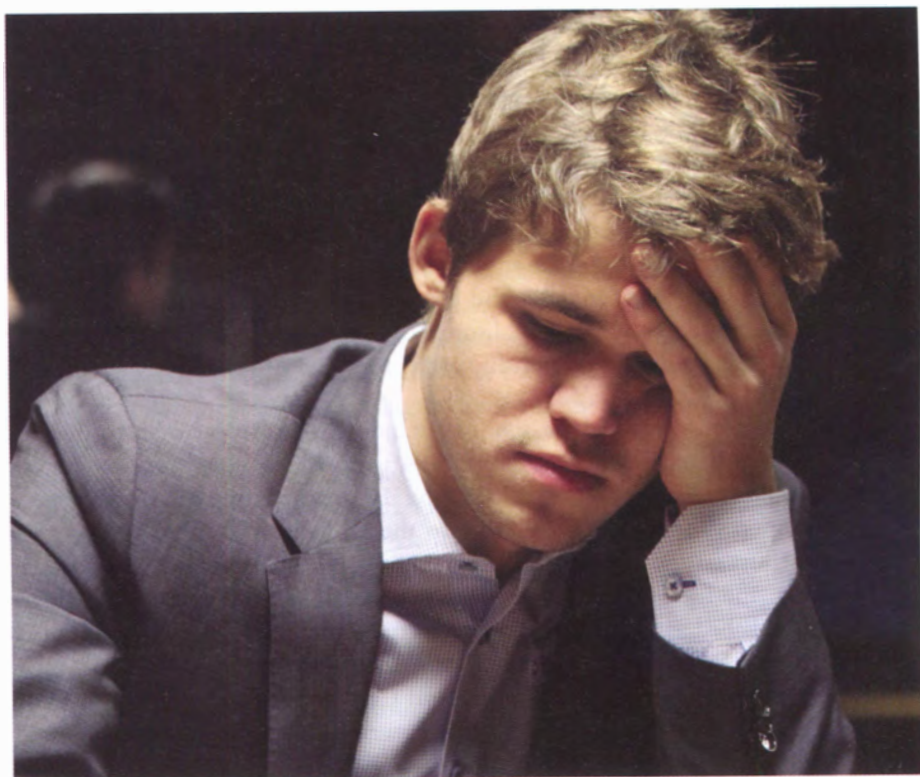
The next day is rainy and melancholic, as it should be. The return to reality after an exciting tournament is always depressing. In an effort to spare myself from sad thoughts, I involve myself in a conversation with my friend George about Bitcoin and Verizon's intended acquisition of Vodafone. Three cups of coffee and a few hours later, while boarding the flight to Athens at Heathrow, the London Candidates tournament of 2013 is already lost in the mists of time. There is a World Championship match ahead.





Part 3

Match Preparations



Preparations for a world championship match usually start the moment the challenger is determined – and sometimes even before that. It may seem straightforward, having to prepare against only one opponent (as opposed to, say, seven for the Candidates tournament), but what is perceived as a blessing can also prove to be a curse – whatever applies to one player applies to the opponent as well. Besides, the nature of a head-to-head match is decidedly different to that of a round-robin tournament: here there are no off-form or indifferent players to try and beat. It's just you and your opponent, face to face, and every decisive result has a direct influence on him too: his loss, your gain. Matches are the purest form of a fight for survival, in true "I live, you die" spirit, and a supreme challenge to one's strength of character; it is this attribute that makes them so attractive to the public.

The long list of world championship matches officially commences in 1886 but, as mentioned in the previous part of the book, clashes between the world's top players were also common earlier; in fact, matches were the norm in the first half of the 19th century, and it was only the 1851 London tournament that showcased a valid alternative method of determining the strongest player. Chess history abounds with stories and myths surrounding such duels, all the way back to De la Bourdonnais – McDonnell in 1834, a colossal undertaking spanning an incredible 86 games; they must have been really disappointed with their lives to embark on such a venture. Not that later matches were fully reasonable either: Alexander Alekhine and Max Euwe contested the thirty games of their 1935 match in thirteen different Dutch cities (the 1937 return match was less mobile, visiting only seven); this travelling circus imitation would be unthinkable today in an event where the world title is at stake, though the switch between different venues in the same city does occasionally take place. And the anticipation... Eleven whole years separated Emanuel Lasker's 1910 victory over David Janowski and his next challenge (and eventual defeat) against Jose Raul Capablanca; the chess public would surely have appreciated FIDE and its penchant for complicated and recurring world championship cycles back then.

A special place in history is reserved for the long-standing duel between Anatoly Karpov and Garry Kasparov. In a period of six years, from 1984 to 1990, these two giants contested five hard-fought world championship matches, totalling 144 games; this does not include other tournament encounters. The period from 1984 to the Seville match of 1987 saw one match every year, with the first one lasting five and a half months and 48 games (the rest were relatively minor affairs of 24), and leaving the players with not much time for anything else. Their rivalry has been firmly established as the most intense and gruelling in the modern history of chess, at least in over-the-board terms; of course, the assortment of challenges issued (and declined or evaded) and media shenanigans between Lasker and Capablanca, or the Cuban and Alekhine later, I have no doubt must have exhausted the rivals, even if only in view of their duration. The K-K matches coincided with a politically troubled period, marking the beginning of the end for the Soviet Union, and it is a tribute to the players' grandeur that interest in their rivalry remained unceasing even years later, when the Cold War-inspired concept of the young rebel fighting the establishment and the Party on his way to the chess Olympus had worn off and gradually disintegrated. Despite its evident intra-Soviet character, this rivalry captivated the attention of the western world like no other chess event had ever done, before or after the unforgettable summer of 1972, when Bobby Fischer won the title on the remote volcanic island in the Atlantic Ocean that is, in my entirely subjective personal opinion, the most beautiful place on Earth.

The City

It is only with such historic clashes that the Anand – Carlsen match can be compared in terms of public interest, as it was expressed even before the Candidates tournament. It could therefore be expected that a whole host of places around the globe, eager to ride the extreme wave of publicity and exposure, would be willing to stage the match, no matter what the cost. However, this discussion didn't even get off the ground; due to a prior commitment, connected with the awarding of the 2012 Anand – Gelfand match to Moscow, FIDE did not hesitate to select Anand's hometown, the Indian city of Chennai (formerly Madras), as the battleground for this new challenge against the local champion. Indeed, Chennai had submitted a quite satisfactory bid for the previous duel, only to be edged out by Moscow in a not-that-rare "liberal" interpretation of the rules and procedures of the bidding; this decision was later fully vindicated in the shape of an excellently organized and very successful match by the Russians. In appreciation of their substantial efforts, the Indians were given top priority in the selection process for the 2013 match, to which they quickly responded positively. No other formal bid was ever submitted in the short period of the related process; a few intentions were expressed, most notably by the Mayor of Paris, but none materialized in a real bid (or a real bank guarantee of the sizeable prize fund). And thus, Chennai earned the right to be the centre of the world for the month of November 2013, by virtue of being the stage for the fight between its favourite son and that of the media, who also happens to be the top-rated player in the world.

There is good reason to believe that neither contestant was satisfied with the selection of Chennai. For Magnus, the disadvantages were glaringly obvious, and both he and his manager raised the issues upfront. For a Norwegian, raised far closer to the Arctic Circle than the Equator, the tropical climate of India (and seaside Chennai in particular) would certainly prove uncomfortably unfamiliar, perhaps even smothering: November is the most humid month of the year for this region, with precipitation averages reaching extreme numbers. Adapting to such a climate can prove very difficult for an unaccustomed visitor and the consequences of such disharmony with the environment can be very disconcerting. To this one should also add the character of Indian cuisine and overall food practices of the region, which, though most certainly intriguing and delicious, are very different to those prevalent in Europe; it's not at all rare for Europeans to encounter serious difficulties in adjusting to Indian gastronomy, as I presume is the case vice versa as well.

Another important issue to consider was the vast cultural differences. When isolating yourself from the rest of the world for three whole weeks in a remote place, fully focused on your aim and needing to mobilize the entire array of your resources in order to achieve it, it is of paramount importance to remain psychologically stable, calm and concentrated on the task. You can't just stay confined to your hotel room for the duration of the ordeal, and while active interaction with the environment may be consciously limited to the absolute minimum, it is essential that you feel comfortable in your surroundings, at the same time avoiding potentially unbalancing distractions and excitement. For a westerner with no prior experience of the magical world of India, a world completely different than anything else on the planet, it is very hard to retain the inner balance necessary; there are just so many avenues to explore, so many impressions to be absorbed, so many novel emotions to be felt. It's not out of the question that Magnus, a seasoned traveller

despite his youth (though, surely, not as much of a nomad as Nigel Short, who has the passport control stamps of more than a hundred countries on his travel documents), actually enjoyed the prospect of fighting this battle on an unknown but certainly intriguing territory, but I would rather bet that a modest European setting would have been his preference.

The small matter of neutrality also had to be taken into account. After all, Chennai is Anand's hometown and the World Champion's status in his homeland is as great as that of Magnus in Norway; an acclaimed sportsman and personality, well known in every corner of this vast and diverse country, a popular face in television advertisements, Anand is truly worshipped in India, and it is the example he has set that has led to an incredible chess boom in the country. Indians consider chess as their own invention, a theory supported by significant archaeological evidence, and Vishy is often seen as the natural occupant of the throne at the top of the global chess pyramid. In the absence of an equally powerful contender from the region, it is no surprise that the massive population of India is supporting his cause. And Anand is one of the greatest celebrities there, even more so in Chennai: everyone wants to catch a glimpse of him, shake his hand, get his autograph. In such an environment, how can one remain unfazed?

It is precisely this aspect that makes me believe Anand was not too thrilled to play in Chennai either. A low-key, calm and measured person by nature, he never gives the impression of thriving in public attention and his celebrity status, preferring instead more quiet and intimate settings to deploy his undeniable charisma – with the solitude of the chessboard being perhaps the most comfortable of all. He has never indulged in chess politics or other fields that feed the media's curiosity and propensity for an effortless news story, instead focusing solely on his chess career and keeping everything else away from the prying eyes of the public. It's not hard to imagine his frustration at being unable to take a long, relaxed walk with his wife or seconds on a free day without being pestered by loving fans or inquisitive journalists, and that is a form of oppression not much different from that provoked by invading a hostile territory with the mission to seize what they call their own.

Therefore, it can be argued that this peculiarity of the current match could well play a significant role in the psyches of the two players – for distinctly different reasons, but with a similar effect. This is not to say that Magnus would ever feel unwelcome in his adversary's homeland: in a number of public statements, strongly supported by the actual facts, the hosts clarified that the Norwegian would be treated in no lesser way than the local hero. Fully realizing the implications of such declarations, the Indian organizers and people went out of their way to prove their determination not to allow the locality of one of the combatants to seriously affect the outcome of the match. A prime example was Carlsen's visit to Chennai in August, along with his father, his manager and the obligatory chef, to inspect the hotel and the city itself. His welcome left nothing to be desired (except some peace and quiet, perhaps) and his arrival at the scene of the future crime was a major media event. A visit to an all-female private school, arguably an ideal setting for worldwide Carlsen-mania to go on display, created a real frenzy; his somewhat sub-par score in a simultaneous exhibition against some strong up-and-coming youngsters of both genders was seen in a positive light as well, as a vivid illustration of India's promising chess future. Magnus left Chennai satisfied, or so his lack of any complaints indicated, to return a few months later under more serious conditions.

Anand himself is no stranger to playing under such conditions: in 2010 he contested a world championship match in Sofia, the Bulgarian capital, against the local grandmaster Veselin

Topalov, and acquitted himself quite well; there were no signs of him being affected by the local support for his opponent, and when he later confirmed this, there were no reasons to doubt his sincerity. Of course, it should be argued that the Bulgarian public is rather more moderate in its expressions of admiration and solidarity, but in any case the advantage of having the home crowd on your side didn't prove that meaningful. On the contrary, one might suggest that the expectancy of victory may have affected Topalov rather than Anand; it was he who crumbled under the mounting pressure in the last game.

Anand has experienced this feeling too: in 1994 he ignominiously lost a match against Gata Kamsky in the Indian town of Sanghi Nagar due to a complete collapse towards its end, wasting a sizeable lead and then losing the play-off hands down, and more than once afterwards attributed his unexpected demise to the pressure of playing under the eager eyes of the home crowd. He did extract revenge a year later against the same opponent, but that was in the remote Spanish island of Las Palmas. As a counter-argument one may refer to the successful conquering of Alexei Dreev in another Candidates match, back in 1991, in the very same city of Chennai, in a very convincing way; but that example could just as well serve the opposite purpose when taking into account Dreev's explanation: he couldn't get accustomed to the sweltering heat.

Physical

Be that as it may, Anand, a person who carefully chooses his words and generally avoids strong public statements, could never allow himself to express any dissatisfaction with the choice of his home town (if he ever felt any), and as for Carlsen, no realistic alternative was present; the decision was thus made. With that out of the way, the players could now focus on the various aspects of their preparation for the match.

The uninitiated reader might assume that this would be strictly related to chess, but that would be overlooking a number of other parameters that could affect the performance of the players throughout the event, including their physical condition. The significant investment of time and energy on their behalf in improving their strength and stamina, a common practice in the course of preparation for a major chess event, raises obvious questions to those not familiar with the demands of high-level chess: what is it necessary for, when all they do is spend their time sitting at the board? Indeed, while such exercise could prove useful to a famously restless player like Peter Svidler, its significance for less mobile individuals may easily be overlooked. The answer lies in the continuous physical and psychological strain imposed on the players by the long duration of the match and its great competitive significance, with all the implications this significance may carry for their mental state. It is important to be fit enough to combat the tiredness that is sure to set in towards the final stages of the match, but also to maintain the calmness and composure necessary to make correct decisions at the board; a strong nervous system is required to ensure that fleeting emotions, negative or positive, will not impact the decision-making process of the player at a crucial moment.

Carlsen's high level of fitness was established from a very young age and attributed to his liking for various forms of physical exercise, including hiking, skiing and football (read: soccer if you are from the US of A). His amazing stamina has been a weapon of paramount importance throughout his career so far and is often quoted as an explanation for his strong performance in the later

stages of games lasting four or more hours – numerous victories of his have been gained under such circumstances. His frequent participation in sport events of the most varied kind during the rest days of tournaments is further evidence of his athletic nature, and so it was no surprise when, in the end of July and beginning of August, he enriched a long training session in the Norwegian sports resort of Kragero with a large variety of sporting activities, including golf and diving.

As is typical of his very media-aware management team, a multitude of photos from these activities soon showed up on the internet, generating a media frenzy at a moment when, obviously due to his immersion in preparation, Magnus had been relatively forgotten by the press.

As for Anand, he typically avoided the limelight – but not the physical exertions, as he later revealed: through a rigorous program that involved a lot of running and swimming he sought to improve his physical condition as well, losing some weight in the process.

The Opening

The training camp at Kragero also involved some chess, of course, and this was hinted at on Carlsen's Facebook page. Various photos and videos emerged of him solving studies, refreshing his knowledge of endgame theory and even playing a friendly blitz game against French grandmaster Laurent Fressinet. While of course all these snippets were carefully selected to reveal nothing of importance (or, perhaps, to give false hints to Anand's team), one particular picture involving a well-known endgame theory book did attract attention, indicating that Magnus was perhaps working on eliminating the occasional disaster that has befallen him in simplified theoretical endings, like for example it had forty days earlier, in a game against Fabiano Caruana. Nothing else of any significance could be gleaned from this media blitz, but it had served its purpose of renewing interest in the match, a whole three months before its start.

Of course, while the elimination of any other chess deficiencies remains important, opening preparation is the core of the training sessions before such events. The clever and purposeful selection of the right openings against the particular opponent may have a devastating effect on the course of the match, as was evidenced by Kramnik's successful quest against Kasparov in 2000, where the unexpected adoption of the Berlin variation of the Ruy Lopez provoked the then World Champion to spend the better part of that match hitting his head against a brick wall (the name of the opening should have been a warning): time after time, in positions hardly to his liking, Kasparov would try to undermine Black's solid defensive fortress – and fail. This not only cost him points, but also his peace of mind; frustration eventually played a major part in his failure.

In 2008, against Anand, Kramnik found himself on the other side of the fence: by choosing a very risky and complicated variation of the Semi-Slav Meran, the Indian forced Kramnik to fight on his territory and reaped the fruits of his clever opening choice, not once but even twice, when Kramnik exhibited a rare instance of stubbornness and repeated the whole thing. Not only that, but the move-order flexibility of the Meran completely disarmed Kramnik's play with White, allowing Anand to safely cruise to victory in what is justifiably regarded as his most convincing world championship match showing.

It is Anand's undeniable expertise in this particular field that is constantly heralded as his main advantage over his young challenger. Taking into account that Vishy already has more than

twenty years of fighting at the very top behind him, against strong theoreticians such as Kasparov and Kramnik, among others, there can be no doubt of the immense quantity and impeccable quality of his opening arsenal. The participation in (and preceding preparation for) four world championship matches, two tournaments of the same status, Candidates events and pretty much every single one of the top tournaments of his era leaves no room for assumptions that a relatively inexperienced, young challenger with no special propensity for hard opening work can prove a match in this field for the reigning World Champion. And yet, even if one is to focus mainly on strategic middlegame play and endgame technique, something does have to be played in the opening after all, and it must be good enough to ensure a viable transition to the later stages of the game. Furthermore, it has to be researched deeply enough to protect against unpleasant surprises and opening catastrophes that can befall anyone, including that same Anand, as indicated by the first game of his match against Topalov.

The relative importance of the opening within the overall frame of chess development is often overestimated and underestimated at the same time. Precisely because of the very concrete nature of its study and the easily acquirable impression of immediate results it often gives rise to, the opening can easily become a subject of infatuation, even to experienced players, and quickly overshadow the remaining aspects of the game, leading to a one-sided development of the player's chess skills. On the other hand, it cannot be overlooked that the opening is the compulsory path to the middlegame, and a successful navigation of its reefs is necessary in order to ensure a decent starting point for the rest of the game, with good prospects and sufficient options at hand. In short, opening weakness will almost certainly lead to unpleasant or just plain bad middlegame positions, with only limited possibilities to display one's strategic and tactical expertise. At a higher level, the result of insufficient opening knowledge will usually translate into lots of harmless draws with White and passive suffering with Black. And while there do exist a few really strong players who successfully manage to evade the dangers posed, they are the rare exception rather than the rule. At the level of a world championship match, weak opening preparation is simply prohibited.

This matter must have greatly concerned Carlsen even before the London Candidates tournament; but while in that event, in view of its nature and relatively large field, specific opening preparation of the opponents could not be so clearly targeted, in a one-on-one match the demands automatically become much greater. There is no doubt that, already back then, he had started to tackle this problem very seriously, and in London he displayed some of the fruits of his labour. They weren't as spectacular as people usually associate with such efforts, under the influence of Kasparov's heritage in this field, but the work clearly was there: his openings, though remaining somewhat off the beaten track, were cleverly chosen and deeply researched, as shown by his two games with Gelfand, for example. On the other hand, the two games with Kramnik highlighted the other side of the coin: in the first, as Black, Kramnik gained a comfortable draw without really having to work at the board at all, while in the second game Magnus had to defend an unpleasant position very precisely in order to avoid the worst; he did succeed on that day, but in a match it is very likely that the opponent will manage to crash through eventually, and he simply cannot be allowed to enjoy such positions every other game.

A stark conceptual differentiation in the two players' styles can be considered to assist, rather than complicate their opening preparation. Their practical advantages are quite distinctive, and thus

the direction they may wish to give to the games are unlikely to cross paths. More on this will follow later on, but for the moment it is enough to emphasize that both players likely commenced their opening preparation for the match with very clear directives in mind, as dictated by their evaluation of the respective strengths and weaknesses. Such a clash of contradictory intentions is often the underlying theme of world championship matches, with each player trying hard to impose his own desires on the character of the play – and dominating if he succeeds in doing so, as in the aforementioned examples of 2000 and 2008. The significance of this topic can hardly be overestimated, as history has taught us, and therefore we can expect the players to have undergone considerable soul-searching before finally settling on their chosen sets of openings. It is self-evident that experience, a strong sense of self-awareness and a keen eye for detail play a prominent role in this process, and thus it can be considered that Anand, with a long and illustrious career behind him, would be better equipped to deal with this problem. Of course, a lot depends on the input of the two players' helpers.

The sudden departure of Danish grandmaster Peter Heine Nielsen from Anand's team sometime after the latter's successful title defence against Gelfand in 2012, in order to become Carlsen's trainer, caused quite some furore when it became widely known. In view of the inevitable crossing of the two players' paths in a match in the near future, as indeed happened, this switch of allegiance could well give rise to various conspiracy theories. Though Nielsen had worked with Magnus in the past, that was when the Norwegian was much younger and still not a direct threat to the Indian world champion. There can be several possible explanations for Nielsen's decision: the most likely would seem to be that, after a long and successful period as the leading member of Anand's team of helpers, adorned with triumphs in the battles for the world title, he decided to opt for a change of scenery; after all, one does need new challenges to reinvigorate oneself and rekindle interest. There is of course no question of him revealing Vishy's secrets to his new protégé – that would be an insulting insinuation directed at the unquestionable integrity of Peter Heine. Chatting in the London press room, right after Kramnik had resigned his last-round game and Carlsen's tournament victory had been sealed, I quipped to him that now he may be in a tough spot; he unhesitatingly replied that, on the contrary, this was the most convenient outcome: he could now stay completely neutral, sit back at home and enjoy the games like the average chess fan. The explanation was that Peter Heine had pledged to help Carlsen in the Candidates, but he would not help him against Anand – in the match Peter Heine really will be just a spectator.

As if the departure of Nielsen wasn't enough, the Anand team soon suffered a second loss, in the person of the Uzbek grandmaster Rustam Kasimdzhanov, who had also been a long-standing member of the team. In the face of more tough challenges lying ahead, with yet another World Championship match scheduled for 2014, Rustam likely decided that the hectic work of preparing for such events would hamper his own chess career and so he opted out.

These two departures essentially necessitated the overhaul of Anand's team, which can be both a good and a bad thing. On the one hand, it takes time to establish a proper work rhythm and the bonds of trust essential to the smooth operation of the team; after all, the memories of spying accusations thrown about during the 1986 Kasparov – Karpov match remain etched in our minds, despite the fact that those events took place so long ago. But on the other hand, some new blood could well blow fresh wind in the team's already powerful sails, as well as offer new perspectives in the research process.

After all, the link with the brilliant past remains in the shape of two other members, Polish grandmaster Radoslaw Wojtaszek and Anand's compatriot Surya Shekhar Ganguly. Other occasional contributors to the cause have at times been identified, such as the Indian grandmaster Sandipan Chanda, but of course the veil of secrecy usually remains in place until after the match is over; the identification of the player's helpers could well offer his opponents clues as to the possible topics under examination.

Carlsen's team of helpers remained a mystery throughout. The regular appearance of his childhood friend and Norway's second-rated grandmaster, Jon Ludvig Hammer, in the photos from Kragero indicated that the latter was playing an active role in the preparation stages, and of course there was that blitz game against Fressinet; but the Frenchman could well have been invited simply as a sparring partner, and overall it seemed pointless to read too much into this. Another of Carlsen's contemporaries, Russian grandmaster Ian Nepomniachtchi, had worked with Magnus in the past and could also be considered as a likely option; but even this remained unconfirmed. All in all, the line-up of the Carlsen team remained a well-kept secret throughout, adding to the intrigue.

This secretive policy gave rise to speculation often exceeding the boundaries of journalistic principles; closer to the match, incognito "sightings" of various "helpers" were reported, mainly from Indian soil, with Vladimir Kramnik mentioned as one possible assistant of the World Champion. With the European Team Championship held on the same dates as the first half of the upcoming match, any strong player missing from the event would immediately become a candidate for the match, and Kramnik was one such case (others were Boris Gelfand and Peter Leko).

Overlooking such trivial possibilities as, for example, that the tournament didn't fit in one's schedule, or that the financial compensation wasn't deemed adequate, these names started flying around. Kramnik's assistance to Anand during his 2010 match against Topalov was used as a reminder that the two main rivals of Kasparov in the nineties were on very good terms and could possibly collaborate again in the future, with Gelfand and Leko added to the mix on the presumption of a joint effort of the old guard to head off the advent of the new generation. It's not impossible that part of this speculation was fuelled, if not instigated, by the two camps, to destabilize the opponent; and one may wonder if, in the future, we will see world champions and challengers giving employment to acknowledged experts in the field of mind games, such as Sir Alex Ferguson. As for Kasparov himself, his pledge of allegiance was never in doubt, and he was indeed reportedly offering his services to the Norwegian; though whether a collaboration extending further than the occasional discussion materialized remains unknown.

Anand's Tournament Practice

All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy, and so some competitive action is required to maintain the sharpness of the players. The proper scheduling of such action is always tricky: one has to find the right balance between playing too much (and burning out) and playing too little (causing some rustiness to show later), and at the right time. Such decisions are subjective and work out differently for each individual, but it can readily be assumed that the younger player will probably be less worried about expending too much energy.

It was therefore a mild surprise to see Anand embark on one of the busiest tournament schedules he has tackled in recent years, commencing at the end of 2012. This schedule involved seven

tournaments without any significant break between them – certainly not significant enough to allow for a proper training camp. Appearances in the London Chess Classic and Wijk aan Zee were closely followed by a comparatively weaker but still challenging event in Baden-Baden, the home of his German club, and the Zurich Chess Challenge, before the hectic schedule of top-level events was interrupted for the London Candidates.

One could assume that Anand was just getting a desire to play out of his system, and that after his challenger was confirmed he would immediately embark on preparation, but this was not so: only three weeks after that incredible April Fools' Day, Anand went into battle in the newly-established Alekhine Memorial, split between Paris and St Petersburg (a tribute to Alekhine's heritage, rather than the travelling circus of his matches against Euwe), followed almost immediately by an appearance in Norway's first ever super-tournament, the Supreme Masters held in the town of Sandnes. One month later he also showed up for the traditional Tal Memorial in Moscow, and that was the end of the road for him; he didn't play at all for the remaining four-and-a-half months to the start of the match – publicly, that is, for there can be no doubt that many training games formed part of his preparation programme.

Anand himself explained this unusual burst of tournament activity as feeding his desire to play after the long interruptions caused by his world championship matches and the preparation periods connected with them. Playing such matches every two years from 2008 on, his tournament schedule was regularly being messed up and he felt he was missing out on the fun of just playing chess. So, this time, he had decided to take up every single opportunity that came his way, just making sure that at the end of the marathon he would have enough time left for proper preparation. Such statements by the Indian were sometimes seen as evidence of psychological fatigue on his part; he was supposedly tired of all these matches and the related exertions, and was almost ready to hand over his title on a platter, like Lasker practically did to Capablanca in 1921. In a funny reversal of roles, Anand very quickly (and unintentionally) assumed, in the eyes of the public, the same role fulfilled by Boris Gelfand the previous year: that of the ageing and declining player who will be convincingly defeated in the upcoming match, never to rise from the ground again. A more plausible interpretation would be that Anand was simply being perfectly honest in his explanations, and was just trying to accumulate some practice after a long period of inactivity.

Truth be told, his performances in all these tournaments left much to be desired, at least on the scoreboard. The London Chess Classic was a moderate affair, with a blunder against Adams throwing him back to fifty percent, on which he ended up. A final-round game against Carlsen saw him suffering, a pawn down, for a long time, but on this occasion he withstood the grind successfully and was probably quite satisfied with the hard-earned draw. Their next encounter came in the Dutch seaside village of Wijk aan Zee, right after Anand's most glorious game of the last few years, a spectacular combinative victory with Black over Levon Aronian. Carlsen, affected by flu, chose a rare and passive line of the Petroff but gradually equalized and drew the game comfortably, but Anand did not seem perturbed; he was already on plus two, was playing well and was strongly in contention for first place in the long 13-round tournament. A further win against Loek van Wely was then followed by several wasted chances to increase his score, with the way he squandered his winning advantage against Hou Yifan being especially painful. Another win was finally notched up in the penultimate round against Erwin L'Ami, but it was already too late to think of first place, in the face of a blistering performance by Carlsen that allowed the Norwegian to equal the amazing record that Garry Kasparov had set in his very first appearance

in this traditional event in 1999. Going into the last round in a state of mild disappointment, Anand uncharacteristically lost a quiet game against Wang Hao, marring his otherwise very good showing in the tournament. Still, Carlsen did pay his dues to his rival's fantastic win against Aronian, declaring that game to be the best in the tournament.

The next event, the GRENKE Chess Classic in Baden-Baden, was of a different calibre and Anand could have expected to dominate, being in good form after Wijk aan Zee. But perhaps he was tired as well, as there arose no signs of the runaway victory that his fans may have wished for: seven of his first eight games ended in draws, though certainly not through lack of trying, and only a nice strategic win against Naiditsch gave some cause for optimism. Still, the end of the event was vintage Anand: first he completely outclassed Daniel Fridman in a theoretical Petroff that Anand must surely have spent months on during the years of Kramnik's regular adoption of this variation, and then he again beat Naiditsch, this time from an unbalanced position. This exertion at the last moment proved enough for tournament victory.

Though his play during most of this tournament lacked the sharpness of his better efforts, the promising finish was a reminder of his undeniable powers. But these powers were not on display in Zurich; the tournament format itself, a short double round-robin between Anand, Kramnik, Caruana and Gelfand, did not leave much room for combativeness to shine through, and in the first half Anand recorded three relatively uneventful draws. These were followed by a loss with White against Caruana, in a game leaving the impression that Vishy was not really focused. This trend continued in the last-round game against Kramnik, where Anand again got into some trouble with White, but this time he defended more efficiently and a serious blunder by his opponent was immediately punished for a return to fifty percent. Anand must have gone home with mixed feelings from this set of tournament appearances, but there was not much time to dwell on it because the London Candidates event was around the corner; he would finally know his next opponent.

The speculation regarding the upcoming match against Carlsen started already from April 2nd 2013, and the public was certainly interested in seeing how this would affect Anand in his next few tournaments. As could be expected, while his body was surely there at the board, his mind seemed to be wandering off at times and the series of three events must have disappointed his fans.

The Alekhine Memorial wasn't the culprit by any means: despite a first-round defeat with White against Adams (a strange new habit occurring with annoying regularity) Anand soon recovered and retorted with a crushing win against Ding Liren and a less convincing one against Fressinet; solid play with Black, including a fighting draw against Kramnik, secured him third place, half a point behind the winners, Aronian and Gelfand.

Only one week later, a psychologically tougher test awaited: in a celebrated event that marked Norway's foray into the world of top-level tournaments and under massive public attention, the second-round game against Carlsen became the main attraction in Sandnes. The game itself followed a common pattern, with Carlsen achieving some slight but persistent pressure from a quiet opening and Anand defending stoically, without much room for counterplay. To his credit, the World Champion never caved in to the pressure, remained focused and attentive all the way to the end and secured the draw; some chances might have been there for the local hero, but nothing clear-cut.

This strong defensive performance certainly was a boost to Anand's spirits, for in the next round he won a very good game against Topalov, but two days later he had another one of his off-days with White in the Spanish, with Nakamura joining the club of Adams and Caruana; this recently-acquired weakness must surely have been dissected by Carlsen's team. After a couple of uninteresting draws, Anand showed he had put the disastrous fourth round well behind him and convincingly beat Radjabov with Black; a very aggressive game against local boy Hammer followed, with the Indian outclassing his opponent for his second win in a row. But the memories of Wijk aan Zee were brought back when, again in the last round, the same Wang Hao ruined Anand's otherwise pleasant feelings about the tournament, with yet another victory over the World Champion; these recurring moments of weakness surely did not escape Carlsen's attention either.

Head to Head

And then came the Tal Memorial event in Moscow. By now Anand must have been feeling rather tired and, with the match inching closer and closer, it must have been very difficult to focus on the tournament and play well. These worries were fully vindicated, as he scored his worst result of the year; everything that could have gone wrong, did, starting with the obligatory Ruy Lopez loss with White against Caruana. The next few rounds saw Anand on the rebound, with a nice win against Morozevich bringing him back to fifty percent and restoring his self-confidence before the last pre-match encounter with Carlsen, who wasn't in the best of form either, but had a win against Kramnik under his belt. The game, closely followed by flocks of spectators on the site and on the internet, was a complete disaster for the Indian: after drifting in a quiet but not entirely harmless opening, Anand appeared completely oblivious to the coming danger and quickly collapsed under a couple of strong blows; unable to put up any kind of resistance, he concluded the game with a seemingly premature but in fact fully justified resignation.

A Warning to the Champion

Magnus Carlsen – Viswanathan Anand

8th Tal Memorial, 18th June 2013

In the Tal Memorial of 2013, held in the Russian capital, World Champion Vishy Anand finished in penultimate place with a meagre 3½/9, one of his worst tournament results ever. Some expressed the opinion that he was already too deeply involved in the preparations for the match against Carlsen to be focused, some others that he was simply bluffing, some that he was safely guarding secrets in view of the upcoming match.

Whatever it might have been, I think the final result has been a blow to Anand's confidence. Perhaps not such a big blow, as he is an expert in taking life as it comes, but still a blow. In the game against Carlsen he got crushed and the overall quality of his play was low. He also lost games to Caruana and Nakamura which in itself is a worrying sign as it showed he is losing ground to the daredevils of the young generation. Of course, one can argue that this was a company of titans where every single mistake would be punished, an opinion verified by the cruel fact that another all-time great such as Vladimir Kramnik had to content himself with last place; and

of course a couple of months earlier the very same Kramnik was fighting for first place in the Candidates, as we have already witnessed.

Another argument that has a certain dose of truth in it is that the distances separating the top players have been shortened to such an extent that we will see more of those results in the future, as young people are thirsty for success, unlike Anand or Kramnik who have many trophies under their belts. However, I don't believe that the World Champion wasn't motivated enough going into this particular event, first and foremost because Russia is the motherland of modern chess and it was there that he successfully defended his title for the last time. Everyone was expecting Anand to play great chess and I think he wanted that too, mainly in order to show Carlsen that he is still 'the boss' in the chess business. If that was really the case (and I believe it is), I think the way he lost to Carlsen (who finished second in the tournament with his usual stellar performance) was a cruel warning, to say the least.

1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗c3 ♠b4 4.e3 0-0 5.♗ge2 d5 6.a3 ♠e7 7.cxd5 ♖xd5

This is a popular choice at the highest level.

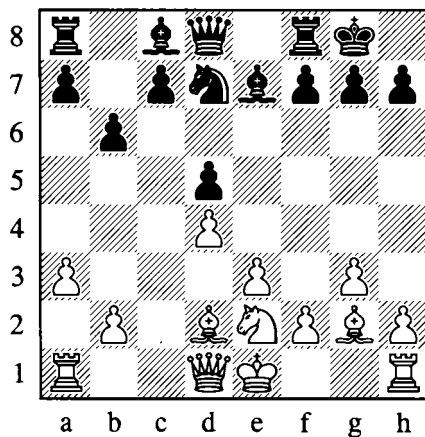
8.♠d2 ♖d7

Vishy had unpleasant memories from 8...♖xc3 9.♠xc3 b6 10.♖g3 ♠b7 11.♠d3 ♖d7 12.♖c2 h6 13.0-0 ♖f6 14.e4 c5 15.dxc5 bxc5 16.♠c4 ♖d7 17.f4 ♖b6 18.♠e2 ♠f6 19.♠ad1 as played in Aronian – Anand, Mallorca 2004. White has a slight edge. Although the game was eventually drawn, it was clear that it was a narrow escape for him and that Aronian had essentially outplayed him, at least in the opening stage.

9.g3 b6 10.♖xd5 exd5 11.♠g2

Carlsen has opted for a compact pawn structure, indicating that his motto is "safety

first". This is the type of position he excels at, calmly building on his own assets while waiting for the opponent's mistakes to come.



11...♠b7?!

Vishy had a choice of diagonals for this bishop, and it seems to me this is the wrong one.

Better seems:

11...♖f6 12.0-0

If 12.♠b4!? then the reply 12...c5 13.dxc5 bxc5 14.♠c3 ♠a6! 15.0-0 ♖b8 16.♠e1 ♠c4! 17.♖f4 ♠b3 18.♖d3 ♠e8 19.♠ac1 ♠f8= allows Black to solve the problem of the hanging pawns by preventing the important b2-b4 idea.

12...♠f5!?

12...♖e4 13.♠c1 ♠b7 14.♖c2 ♠c8 15.♠fd1 ♠d6 16.♠b4!? ♖f6 17.♖c3 ♖xc3 18.♖xc3 c6 19.♠xd6 ♖xd6 20.b4 ♠c7 21.a4 ♠c8 22.a5 ♠a6 23.♠a1 ♠b5 24.♠dc1 ♠e8 25.axb6 axb6 26.♠f1! ♠xf1 27.♠xf1! was better for White in Ponomarev – Kramnik, Wijk aan Zee 2003.

13.♠b4!?

13.♖f4 c6 should be similar.

13...c6

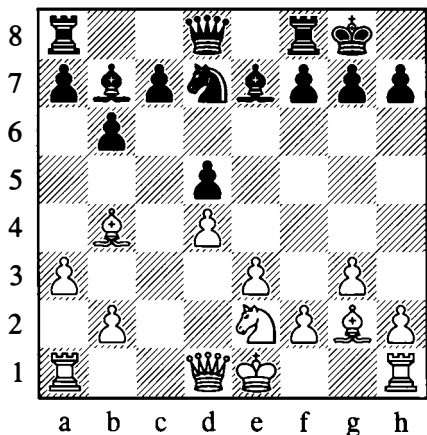
13...c5 14.dxc5 bxc5 15.♠c3 favours White. 14.♖f4 a5 15.♠xe7 ♖xe7 16.♠c1 ♖d6

With equality. It seems that, in principle,

Black should avoid positions with hanging pawns when a pair of minor pieces have been exchanged, and opt instead for an active placement of his bishop on the b1-h7 diagonal, where it makes the plan of f2-f3 followed by e3-e4 difficult to carry out.

12. ♖b4!

Carlsen follows the idea of Ponomarev from his game with Kramnik, exchanging Black's precious dark-squared bishop; this guarantees lasting pressure for White who can combine pressure on c6 with the above-mentioned plan of f3 and e4.



12... ♟f6

If 12...c5 13.dxc5 bxc5 14.♙c3 ♟f6 15.0-0 ♟e4 16.♟f4 ♙g5 White has a brilliant positional retort in: 17.♙xe4! dxe4 18.♖g4 ♙c8 (18...f5?! 19.♖h5 ♙xf4 20.gxf4 ♖e8 21.♖g5 is clearly better for White) 19.♖e2 ♖b6 20.♙fd1 ♙xf4 21.exf4 f6 White should be better; however this position may be drawable for a player of Visy's class and experience, while in the game he soon starts suffering without hope.

13.0-0 ♙e8 14.♙c1 c6

14...♙xb4!? 15.axb4 c6 may have been better, but Black's position is unpleasant in any case.

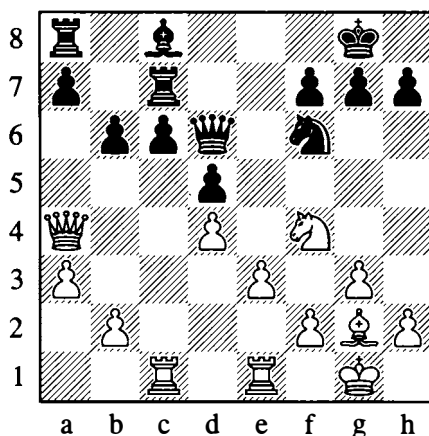
15.♙xe7 ♙xe7 16.♙e1 ♖d6 17.♟f4 ♙c8!?

Suddenly Black wishes to change diagonal with his bishop, but this cannot be good with so much time wasted.

The noncommittal 17...♙c7 was called for, when White is a little better, but Black has chances of a successful defence.

18.♖a4 ♙c7

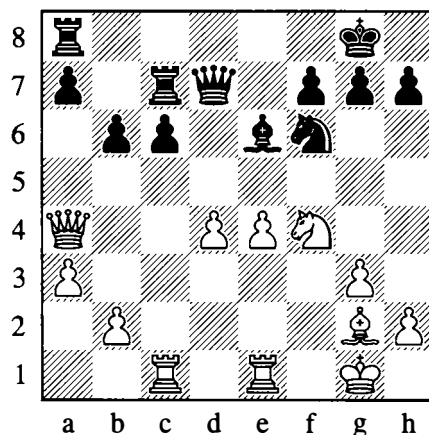
Too late; now White is ready for direct central action.



19.f3! ♙e6 20.e4 dxe4!

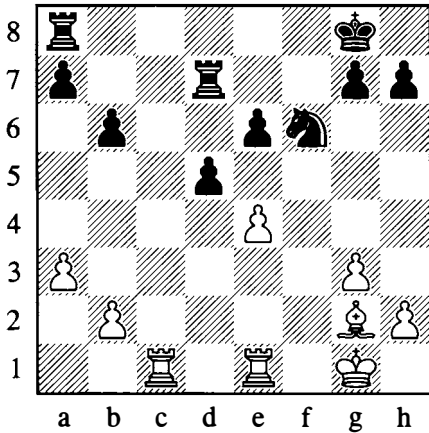
This move facilitates White's central expansion but it is already difficult to give Black good advice.

21.fxe4 ♖d7



22.d5!

A decisive breakthrough, making full use of the energy-radiating white pieces.

22...cxd5 23.♖xd7 ♜xd7 24.♘xe6 fxe6**25.♙h3!**

Played in Morphy style; it is true that the legendary American liked bishops and the present case is a typical example of the bishop's superiority over the knight. Black is a pawn up for the moment, but in spite of that he is completely helpless against the combined assault of the white pieces.

25...♘h8?

25...♜e8 26.exd5 ♜dd8 27.♙xe6† ♘h8 28.♘g2 h6 29.♜ed1 ♜d6 30.♘f3 ♜ed8 31.♘f4 ♘xd5† 32.♙e5 ♘e7 33.♜xd6 ♘g6† 34.♙e4 ♜xd6 35.♜c8† ♘h7 36.♙f5 h5 37.♜c7 a6 38.b4 was a slower way to lose.

26.e5 ♘g8 27.♙xe6 ♜dd8 28.♜c7 d4 29.♙d7!**1-0**

No, this is not a premature resignation against Magnus. As Black is completely paralysed, Anand gave up.

No matter what the circumstances might have been, such a crushing loss could not fail

to affect Anand; in the next round he went down to Nakamura in yet another white Ruy Lopez loss, and then he simply opted to draw the rest of his games with the help of his vast theoretical knowledge (he succeeded).

While speaking to the press, he tried to reassure his fans that this defeat against Carlsen didn't really mean much in the greater scheme of things, and that he will be fully armed and ready when November comes. Somehow, under the influence of the game above, all this failed to appear very convincing, especially to the bookmakers: Anand's odds soon became more and more inviting to true gamblers and speculators.

The Moscow encounter only served to emphasize the popular belief that Anand was no match for Carlsen. Despite nursing an overall positive score against the Norwegian, this statistical advantage had almost entirely been built several years ago, when Magnus was making his first steps in top-level chess. Indeed, Anand's last victory over his challenger in a classical game occurred as early as 2010, with several draws and two Magnus wins completing the picture from then on. This could well be interpreted as a clear sign of Carlsen's superiority in the last few years and it's not the only negative aspect of their more recent head-to-head clashes: in most of those games Magnus has been the one dictating the play, often putting his opponent under pressure while almost never coming close to losing. A cursory examination of the games reveals a picture of Carlsen dominance, but also of Anand approaching these games in a more cautious manner; there even seems to be some evidence of fear. This view has been supported by several prominent figures of the chess world, most notably Vladimir Kramnik, who expressed the opinion that Carlsen's most significant advantage going into this match is precisely Anand's fear of him; he emphasized the need for Anand to overcome this feeling

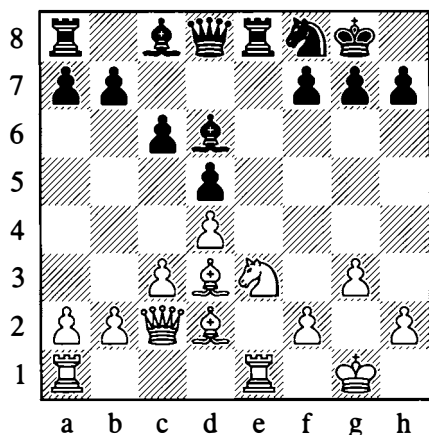
and establish belief in the possible success of his mission.

It seems that the turning point of the two players' competitive history was their game in the 2010 Nanjing tournament. Carlsen had already been heading the ranking list for more than a year, but Anand was close behind and enjoying a period of good results; he was the World Champion after all, and his claim to the Number 1 spot was barely weaker than Carlsen's. The course of that game probably instilled the first seeds of fear in him:

Magnus Carlsen – Viswanathan Anand

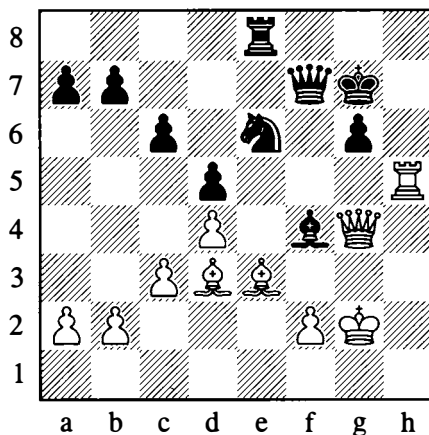
3rd Pearl Spring Nanjing, 27th October 2010

1.e4 e5 2.♖f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♖xe4
5.♗e1 ♘d6 6.♖xe5 ♗e7 7.♗f1 ♘f5 8.♘f3
0-0 9.d4 d5 10.c3 ♗d6 11.♗d3 ♘ce7
12.♘bd2 c6 13.♘f1 ♘g6 14.♖c2 ♘fh4
15.♘xh4 ♖xh4 16.g3 ♖d8 17.♘e3 ♗e8
18.♗d2 ♘f8



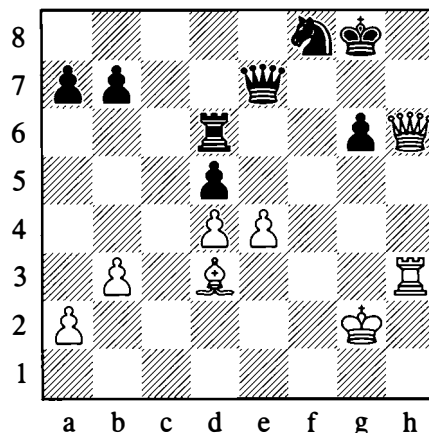
After a none-too-ambitious opening, an apparently equal symmetrical position has arisen. Anand was probably expecting to make a comfortable draw from here, but watch how Carlsen slowly conjures up pressure and puts Black on the defensive:

19.♘f5 ♗c7 20.♗xe8 ♖xe8 21.♗e1 ♗e6
22.♖c1 f6 23.♖d1 ♖d7 24.♖f3 ♗e8 25.h4
♗f7 26.♗f1 ♗g6 27.h5 ♗xf5 28.♗xf5 ♖f7
29.♘g2 g6 30.♗d3 f5 31.♗h1 ♘e6 32.hxg6
hxg6 33.g4 ♗f4 34.♗e3 fxg4 35.♖xg4 ♘g7
36.♗h5



Black is now under serious pressure and must defend with great precision. For a while, Anand is up to the task.

36...♗xe3 37.fxe3 ♘f8 38.♗h3 ♘g8 39.♗f3
♖e6 40.♖f4 ♘g7 41.b3 ♖e7 42.c4 ♗d8
43.♗h3 ♗d6 44.♖h6† ♘g8 45.cxd5 cxd5
46.e4



Black is holding on by the skin of his teeth, but White can create further discomfort.

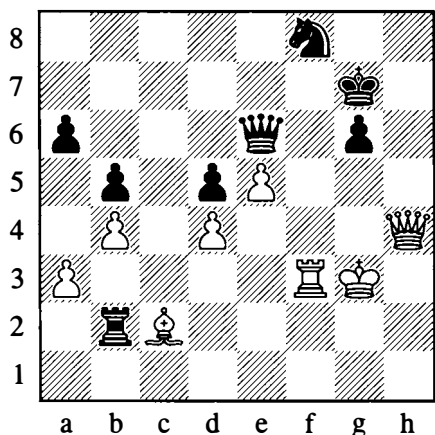
46...♖g7 47.♗e3 ♗e7 48.e5 ♜c6 49.♗h6
 ♗g7 50.♗h4 a6 51.♜f3 ♗d7 52.b4 b5 53.a3
 ♗c7 54.♔g3 ♔g7 55.♙b1 ♘h7 56.♙a2
 ♗d7 57.♙b3 ♜c1 58.♔h2 ♜b1 59.♙c2 ♜b2
 60.♜c3 ♗f7

Anand finally cracks and commits a decisive error.

61.♔g3

61.♔g1! would have won the game, as there is no defence to the threat of ♙xg6 followed by ♜g3; but now the g3-square is occupied by the king.

61...♘f8 62.♜f3 ♗e6



63.♗d8?

63.♜f6! ♗e8 64.♜f2!! would still have won the game. White wins by putting the rook on h2 and with an indirect attack on the rook via a ♙xg6† in several lines. 64...♗e6 (64...♜a2 65.♗f6† ♔g8 66.♙b3 ♜xa3 67.♜f3 and Black has to give up the exchange) 65.♜h2 ♔f7 66.♗h8 ♔e7 67.♗g7† ♗f7 68.♗xf7† ♔xf7 69.♙xg6†! and wins.

63...♘d7 64.♜f2 ♜a2!!

Carlsen had completely missed this move. Black now gets counterplay against the white king.

65.♔h2

White might still be able to play for a win after 65.♗h4!?: though it is understandable that Carlsen decided to go for a draw after a big blunder.

65...♗g4 66.♗e7† ♔h6 67.♗d8 ♗h5†
 68.♔g2 ♗g4†

½–½

Despite avoiding a loss in this hard-fought game, Anand must have been deeply affected by its course: in a rather simple position and without committing an obvious mistake, he was completely outplayed, failed to sense the critical moments, was unable to drum up counterplay and had to fight a bleak defence for a long time. Carlsen's play in this game gives a clear impression of his power, his energy, his determination; he did falter near the end and missed his chance, but overall he was dominating his opponent from start to finish.

Such games eventually became Carlsen's trademark, with his opponents succumbing under the pressure more often than not; moreover, it was now clear to Anand (and the rest of the world) that against Carlsen there will be no breathing space, no easy draws, no moments of relaxation; the psychological influence of this particular game can, in our opinion, hardly be underestimated.

Carlsen's Tournament Practice

In view of the vexing ordeal of the London Candidates, it was perfectly understandable that Carlsen would need some time to recuperate, recharge his batteries, and then return to battle refreshed. In addition, a lot of planning had to be made for the world championship match; while for Anand this may have been nothing more than a set of readjustments to the successful recipe of

previous matches, for Magnus it was a completely new experience, and one that had to be dealt with immediately, with no room for error. Perhaps he would have preferred to skip the Supreme Masters event as well, but such a gesture of indifference towards his country and its people would be out of the question.

His overall showing in this inaugural super-tournament on Norwegian soil was nothing special and was overshadowed by an incredible start (and decent finish) by his contemporary Sergey Karjakin, who went on to win the event and score the greatest tournament success of his career to date. Magnus started with four draws from positions where he could perhaps have earned a little extra, before he won against the tournament's runaway leader with Black in an uneven game: passive opening play had landed him in an unpleasant position, from which he tried to escape by sacrificing a pawn; this should not have succeeded, but uncertain play by Karjakin during time pressure led to the Russian committing a couple of serious errors; after that there was no way back, and Magnus convincingly finished his opponent off.

This win encouraged the local organizers, obviously hoping for Magnus to win the tournament, and the next two rounds gave them more reasons to get excited: Magnus defeated Radjabov in a typical long endgame grind and followed up on the next day by beating his friend Hammer as well, again thanks mainly to his determination. The stage was set for a fascinating finish to the event, but it was not to be: in the eighth round Carlsen went down against Wang Hao. Having achieved nothing from the opening and early middlegame, Magnus persistently chased his chances but went a bit too far, slipped and ended up in a rook endgame a pawn down; he could and probably should have drawn it, but he didn't. A solid but uninspiring draw in the last round against Aronian completed his campaign, leaving a bitter aftertaste. Meanwhile, considering the Chinese player's successes against both contestants of the match, a deep study of his games would seem to be no waste of time for either of them.

Any worries of Carlsen being affected by the pressure imposed by the world championship match were partly dispelled on the first day of the Tal Memorial: in a very characteristic game, Magnus brought down Vladimir Kramnik after a long and tough fight. The game had all one normally expects from Carlsen these days: an unpopular and hardly threatening opening choice giving him no real advantage, an accurate handling of the middlegame tussle, prolonged manoeuvring against his opponent's weaknesses in the resulting endgame and, eventually, the conversion of his advantages to victory. He must surely have been encouraged by this win, and this may explain his traumatic loss to Caruana in the third round: Magnus just blundered a pawn after the opening, in a rather obvious way, and had to try his best to fight back and save the game. Simplifying to an endgame quite similar to the one he lost against Wang Hao was already a success, and this time he came very close to the draw; but at the critical moment, when a tricky but nevertheless drawn theoretical endgame had been reached, Magnus faltered and went down. It was Anand's turn to take notes: simplified rook endings! With no particular reason to be happy, Carlsen arrived at the board for his fifth-round game against Anand stuck at fifty percent.

We've already seen what happened in that game and thus it will not come as a surprise that this psychologically significant win marked a turnaround for his tournament fate: a solid and hard-fought draw against a very on-form Gelfand followed, then an easily forgettable but none-too-bad draw with Morozevich, and finally a dynamic and convincing win against one of his favourite opponents, Hikaru Nakamura. Suddenly a chance to win the tournament had appeared, with

Gelfand only half a point ahead; this prompted Magnus into some very risky opening play in the last-round game against Mamedyarov, which could have ended dismally if Shakhriyar had been a little more efficient. Magnus was surely relieved when the game ended in a draw after all the adventures and, well, with Gelfand on fire, second place was not all that bad, especially keeping the win against Anand in mind. Off to the drawing board!

The Last Warning

Leaving aside a short friendly rapid match against one of his contemporaries, Bosnian grandmaster Borki Predojevic, Magnus fully engrossed himself in preparation. Taking into account his obvious deficiencies in the field of opening knowledge, as well as the overall increased demands of preparing for a world championship match, it came as a slight surprise that he included one more tournament appearance in his calendar.

In retrospect, the invitation to the first Sinquefeld Cup in Saint Louis could hardly have been declined under any circumstances, just like that for Sandnes. A frequent visitor to the United States and a man with full awareness of his brand name and his effect on the media, Carlsen headed for the new chess capital of the USA to shake off some of the rustiness that gathered in three months of preparation; besides, the allure of being the first winner of such an important new event must have been irresistible. After the usual media blitz, including a visit to a match of the local football team (Europeans: read “rugby with helmets”) Carlsen got down to business with a solid win against Gata Kamsky; despite some signs of lack of practice, he handled the game quite well, reacted accurately and efficiently to Kamsky’s kingside attacking gestures and, when the need to accurately calculate arose, he handled the task admirably. A relatively quiet draw with Black against Aronian took place the day after, with Magnus enjoying the better side of it but not being sharp enough to exploit the possibilities offered to him by the position.

As mentioned above, Hikaru Nakamura has generally been rather unsuccessful against Carlsen, as opposed to his quite promising results against Anand and Kramnik, for example. In an effort to reverse the trend, he showed up for their game in sunglasses, which he didn’t take off even for a moment. Carlsen seemed unperturbed by this novelty, but some inaccuracies after the opening gave his opponent some initiative; Magnus defended well, sacrificing an exchange for positional compensation that proved enough for a draw. Having warmed up by now, he put up another show of determination in downing Kamsky once again; in a simplified position Magnus ambitiously sought every single chance there was, eventually reaching a superior ending that he managed to convert, despite a few hiccups. It wasn’t 100% convincing, but it certainly was impressive and indicative of his good form. By making a convincing draw against Nakamura with Black the day after, Magnus entered the last round in the lead.

Various stories are known of players who couldn’t find the strength (or necessity) to fight on, once their aim had been achieved. I remember from childhood reading about Euwe agreeing a draw from a clearly winning position in the last game of the travelling circus match with Alekhine, or Karpov doing the same in the concluding game of the 1974 Candidates Final against Korchnoi. There’s nothing strange in this: with the important goal you set yourself having been completed, it’s not easy to focus anymore; you’d rather put an end to the ordeal and go celebrate. It all sounds logical and very human; which is why the events of the last round in Saint Louis

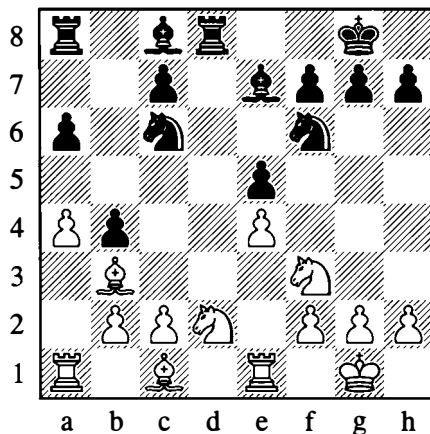
proved so impressive. After an uninspiring opening and some careless play in the early middlegame, Magnus was soon forced onto the defensive by an Aronian with something to prove. The Armenian's initiative did not unduly concern him, though, and with careful and purposeful defensive moves Carlsen quickly set up a seemingly impregnable fortress – and waited. The always emotional Aronian tried long and hard to force a breach in his opponent's defensive walls, but to no avail; his understandable frustration gave rise to a certain absentmindedness, which in turn resulted in a couple of inaccuracies. Realizing that his advantage had completely evaporated, and that he was probably already worse, Aronian offered to conclude the game and the tournament with a draw that would secure Carlsen clear first place.

To the utter amazement of everyone present, with the sole exception of his father Henrik, Magnus declined the peace offer; having sensed his opponent's disappointment and the disturbance of his emotional balance, he quickly decided to keep pressing for the win, although it wouldn't make any impact on the standings anymore. The initial scepticism and surprise at this decision gradually evolved in admiration for the young man's courage, determination and willpower, even more so when he, move by move, started pushing his opponent off the board. Devastated by the surprising turn of events, Aronian failed to put up serious resistance and ended up a piece down, eventually resigning the game a few moves later.

Magnus Carlsen – Levon Aronian

Sinquefield Cup, Saint Louis, 15th September 2013

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♘f6
5.0-0 ♙e7 6.♙e1 b5 7.♙b3 0-0 8.a4 b4 9.d4
d6 10.dxe5 dxe5 11.♙xd8 ♙xd8 12.♘bd2



Magnus chose a quiet line of the Ruy Lopez, as a draw would guarantee first place in the tournament for him. Levon, on the other hand, needed desperately to win in order to force a tiebreak.

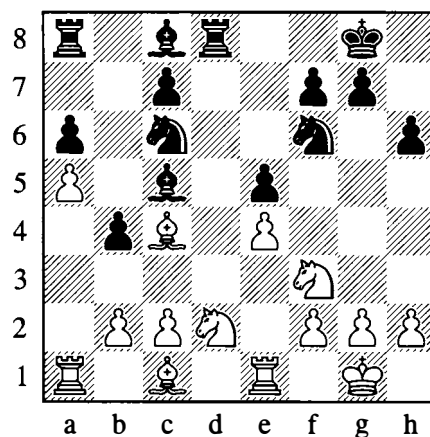
12...h6 13.a5 ♙c5

An active move, pointing at the f2-square, which is traditionally feeble in open games; Black has equalized.

14.♙c4?!

A slightly careless move that hands the initiative over to Black.

14.♙a4 ♘xa5 15.♘xe5 ♘g4 16.♘xg4 ♙xg4 17.h3 ♙e6 18.♘f3 would have led to an interesting position with mutual chances. But Magnus didn't want to unbalance the pawn structure.

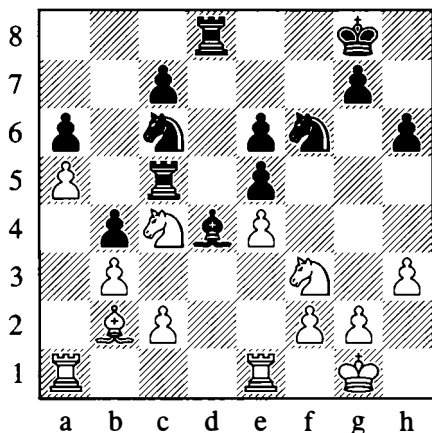


14...♖g4! 15.♞e2 ♜e6!

This may look like a slight concession, but appearances are deceiving; after the exchange on e6 Black will have sufficient control over the central light squares, while his rooks gain access to b5, from where the weak a-pawn can be attacked.

16.♜xe6 fxe6 17.h3 ♘f6 18.♞e1 ♞ab8
19.♜c4 ♞b5 20.b3 ♜d4! 21.♜b2 ♞c5!

The start of a squeeze that relegated Carlsen to the role of a passive spectator for the greater part of this game; luckily for him, there was some inherent solidity in his position which made it extremely difficult for Black to increase his advantage.



22.♞a2 ♜xb2 23.♞xb2 ♜e8 24.♞a2 ♜d6
25.♜fd2 ♜b7

Levon chooses a materialistic course that eventually proved to be insufficient. As he indicated after the game, 25...♜b5! would have been a better option, with annoying pressure.

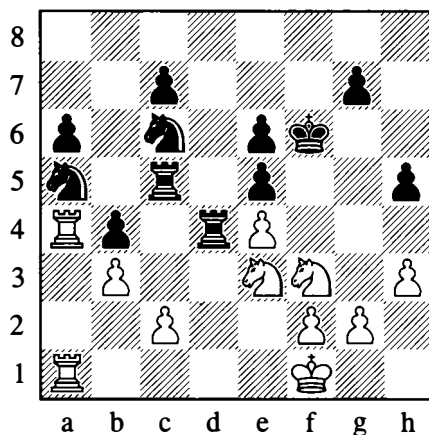
26.♜f3 ♜f7 27.♜f1 ♜f6 28.♞a4 ♜bxa5?!

The pawn shouldn't have been taken, as Black will find it impossible to untangle his knights.

It was not too late to revert to the correct formation with 28...g5!? 29.g3 ♜d6 30.♜fd2

♜b5! when White is being pressed on all fronts and there is no counterplay in sight.

29.♜e3 h5 30.♞eal ♞d4?!



31.♜e1!!

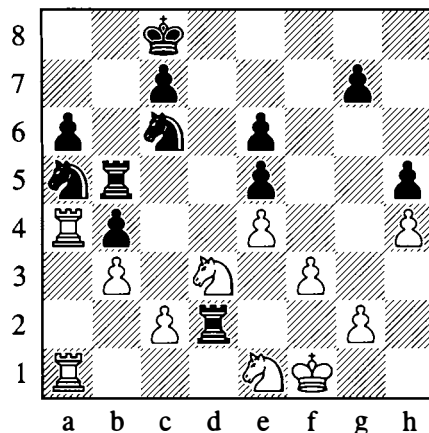
Instead of taking a worthless rook, White focuses on reinforcing the pawn on e4.

31.♜xd4? exd4 32.♜d1 d3 is clearly bad for White.

31...♜e7

31...♞xe4? 32.♜d3 ♞b5 33.c4!! with a clear advantage, is the brilliant tactical justification of 31.♜e1. Apparently Levon had missed it.

32.f3 ♞d2 33.♞d1 ♞d6 34.♞da1 ♜d7 35.♜d1
♞d2 36.♜f2 ♜c8 37.♜fd3 ♞b5 38.h4



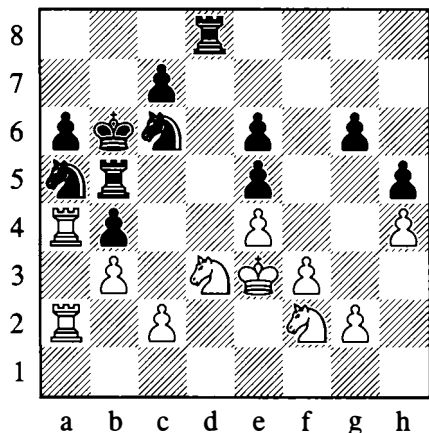
The game is already equal, as White has consolidated his position and Black cannot untangle his knights. Not sensing that this could be a turning point in the game, Levon started to play aimlessly:

38...♙b7 39.♖1a2 ♙a7 40.♙g1 ♙b6 41.♙f1 g6 42.♙g1 ♙b7 43.♙f1 ♙c8 44.♙f2 ♖d8?!

44...♖c5 45.♙fd3 ♖b5 would have been a silent draw offer that White couldn't refuse.

45.♙ed3 ♙b7 46.♙e2 ♙b6 47.♙e3

Suddenly White is better; and when he is better, Magnus rarely lets his advantage go.



47...♙b7 48.♙d1 ♙c8 49.♙1b2 ♖d6 50.♖a1 ♙d8?

A tactical mistake. Instead 50...♖d4 was the only chance of struggling on, but after 51.g3 White is ready to open a front on the kingside by f3-f4, after which Black's pawn weaknesses on that sector would be glaring.

51.♙c4!

Now White does not have to indulge himself in kingside activity as he is simply winning.

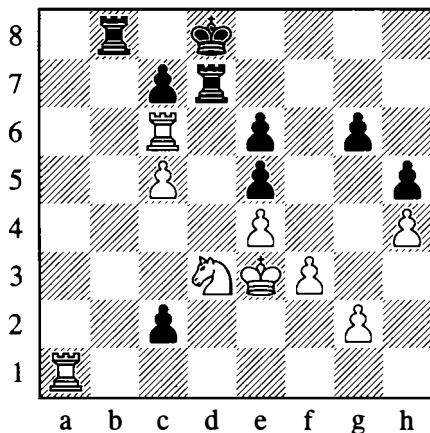
51...♙xc4† 52.bxc4 ♖b8 53.c5 ♖d7??

Cracking under pressure and disappointment. Instead 53...♖xd3† 54.♙xd3 a5 55.♙c4 would have led to a slower death.

54.♖xa6 b3

54...♙d4 succumbs to 55.♖a8! ♙xc2† 56.♙d2 ♙xa1 57.♖xb8† ♙e7 58.♖xb4 and the hapless knight on a1 will soon be collected.

55.♖xc6 bxc2



56.♙e1

Magnus is simple and practical when there is no need for brilliancies.

56.♖xe6! was the aesthetically-pleasing conclusion; after 56...♖xd3† 57.♙xd3 ♖b1 58.♖a8† ♙d7 59.♙xc2 White ends up tons of material ahead.

56...♙e7 57.♙xc2 ♖b3† 58.♙e2 ♖b2 59.♖c1

Further resistance is pointless. Levon dragged it out merely because he couldn't believe he was losing a game where he had stood so much better.

59...♖a2 60.♙e3 ♙f7 61.f4 ♙f6 62.fxe5† ♙xe5 63.♙e1 ♖a3† 64.♙f2 ♖d2† 65.♙f1 ♖d7 66.♙f3† ♙f4 67.♖xe6 g5 68.hxg5 ♙g3 69.♖f6 ♖a2 70.♙e5

1-0

A game like this leaves a lasting impression on the players involved, as well as to anyone

who followed it closely (as Anand surely did). Its chess content was nothing special; with the exception of a few critical moments, there's nothing in it destined for an anthology. But the entire game serves as a model for decision-making and psychology: the properly-timed switch to passive defence, the calmness and composure despite the unhappy course of the game, the timely seizure of the slightest chance to fight back, the sensing of the opponent's indecision, the sudden switch to activity, the maturity in handling the unpleasant situation, the determination in the fight for an otherwise unimportant victory...

There could have been no better way for Magnus to conclude his preparations than this game: it greatly boosted his spirits and sent a clear message to Anand and the rest of the world.

Conclusions

While there is certainly much to be gleaned from the short but intense period of competition between the London Candidates and the World Championship match, drawing accurate conclusions is not an easy task. One could discern some repeating patterns and deduce certain pieces of advice from them, such as that Anand should aim for rook endings or that Carlsen's best option against 1.e4 is 1...e5, but that would be very naïve; after all, it is certain that both players have also identified their own weaknesses and have worked on eliminating them (the endgame book in one of Carlsen's pictures probably serving that purpose). Instead, some more subtle observations may serve this purpose better: Anand's hesitant and indifferent middlegame play in quiet positions, for example, as manifested in several of his recent games, could well provide some hints to Carlsen as to the proper strategy to follow. This and Anand's other well-documented relative shortcomings, such as a certain inefficiency in the defence of passive inferior positions, have surely been taken into account by Magnus when devising his battle plans, and blend in well with what is universally recognized as Carlsen's forte: the slow but steady application of positional pressure, followed by a lengthy endgame grind.

These observations, however, fail to take into account a very important detail: in recent years Carlsen's playing style has been generally consistent and, in a sense, predictable; there are no great fluctuations in the way he approaches his games. The same does not apply to Anand, not in any way. The World Champion has gone through several readjustments of his style, each time in accordance with his competitive goals. The cautious and positionally-minded Anand of the 2010 match against Topalov was much different from the aggressive and risky Anand who dominated Kramnik in Bonn in 2008; and the Anand who turns up to play Carlsen in November 2013 may well be completely different to the safety-first, reserved Anand who ultimately trumped Gelfand in Moscow last year.

Rather than speak about a general lowering of Anand's playing level in recent years, one could well speak about his successful adaptation to the needs of each specific task, essentially nullifying the advantages of his opponents and creating the grounds for his eventual victory. In all of these matches we didn't see a player who was trying, above all, to impose his own style and principles on his opponents; we saw a versatile and flexible player who correctly identified the shortcomings of his adversaries and successfully adapted his play to them.

Moreover, it is rather foolhardy to draw conclusions from his admittedly lacklustre tournament performances of late. Instead, one has to think about his comparatively advanced age and the limitations it imposes on his competitive regime: his reserves of energy are certainly smaller

than they used to be, and these reserves must be expended with restraint. Doesn't Kramnik, after all, constantly point out how "old" he is and how he's had to cut down on his tournament appearances in order to better allocate his energy to important events? And then there is the issue of motivation; how strong can it be in the heart and mind of someone who has won it all? Anand's long and illustrious career has certainly taken a toll on him, both physically and psychologically; it is only natural that he refrains from exerting himself chasing goals that he has already attained in the past – and it is only natural that his entire chess life nowadays revolves around the title that matters most: that of World Champion. Therefore, there can be no doubt about Anand's dedication to the cause of this match. He's certain to give it all he's got, especially now that he is facing his most serious challenge ever, under the eyes of the entire world; for the first time in years, he finally has ahead of him a task than can eclipse all his other successes in the eyes of the public.

As regards Carlsen, a big question mark hovers over the lessons he has learnt from the final few days in London. There, for the first time in his career under such immense amounts of pressure, he failed to cope and it was only the magic hand of fate that kept him afloat. How will he fare under similar or even greater pressure in Chennai? Will he be able to withstand the tension? How will he react to an unfortunate loss? For Carlsen, all these are questions which remain to be answered during the match; while for Anand they have been answered long ago, in the course of his several world championship campaigns, and the answers have been quite positive. And one should not forget that, in London, Magnus had several moments of chess weakness, especially in the face of dynamic attacking play by his opponents; remember the first game against Radjabov, or the last-round game against Svidler...

Maybe the Anand who shows up will be the same youthful, dynamic Anand who played in Bonn, trying to decide the games before his opponent has the chance to slowly turn the screws? And maybe then, under such strenuous circumstances, young inexperienced Carlsen will be driven into a state of confusion and will crumble under the weight of the complications? With this funny and paradoxical assumption, of the older player attacking with youthful optimism, and the younger one craving less taxing "middle-aged" play, we can curtail the guesswork and leave the match itself to answer all these questions for us.

Part 4

The Match



Before the present match, the 127-year-long history of World Championship matches has only seen one such contest ever held in the largest and most populous continent of our planet, Asia: the notoriously troubled 1978 match between Anatoly Karpov and Viktor Korchnoi, in the unlikely location of Baguio City, Philippines. True, only in the last few decades have Asian countries, most notably India and China, emerged as chess superpowers, and therefore it can be easily understood that our ancient game has not enjoyed sufficient popularity in the region in the past, such as to merit the considerable financial investment necessary to stage such a match. It was only through the persistent efforts of former FIDE president Florencio Campomanes (and his close ties with Ferdinand Marcos's regime, one might add) that a contest for the highest title was awarded to a relatively unpopular and remote Asian country back in the 70s. Any assumptions regarding a certain desire of the Soviet machine wishing to contest this match, against the maligned defector threatening their hegemony, on soil where they would be able to exercise control, would probably not be unrealistic.

In 2013, the motivation for the government of the Tamil Nadu region to invest an amount exceeding three million euros in order to host a few games of chess in its territory was entirely different. India, one of the world's most rapidly growing economies and its second most populous country, has been enjoying a chess boom for several years, not least under the spell of Anand's brilliant successes and world championship reign. With a media icon such as Magnus Carlsen for an opponent, there could be no doubt of the exposure of such a match all over the world – nor of the corresponding economic benefits, both present and future. The eagerly anticipated moment when the Wonderboy would contest the world crown was always certain to become headline news all around the globe; adding the excitement and interest of more than a billion local fans in the efforts of a true national hero would be the perfect complement. The match's commercial success could be considered a certainty long before it even started; it only remained for the players to contribute their two cents to make it truly unforgettable.

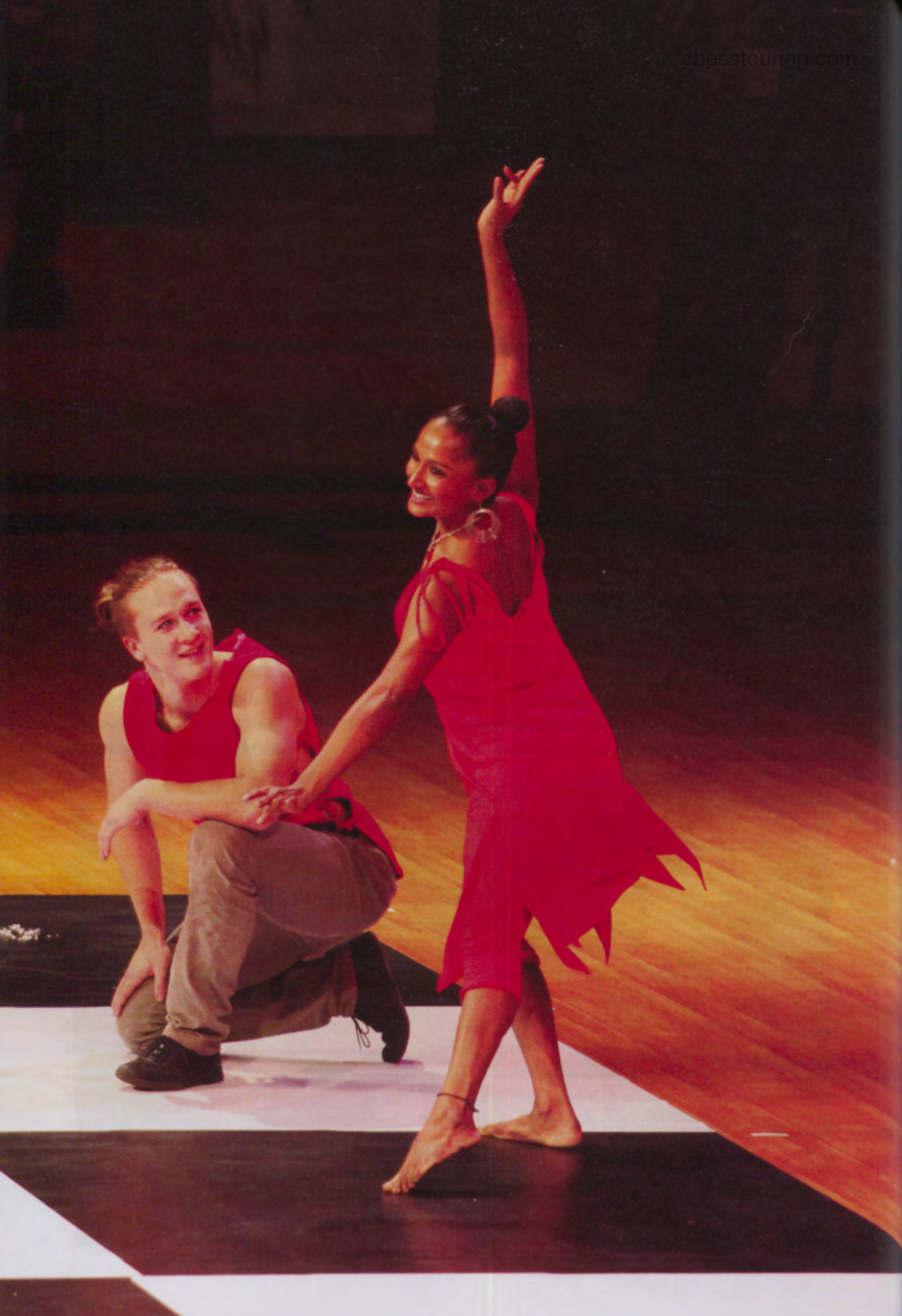


A quick stroll around Chennai in the days prior to the match would be enough to convince even the greatest sceptic of its impact on the local community. With posters, advertisements and chess-themed decorations spread all around the city, there could be no mistaking what was about to take place during the next few weeks. Anand-mania was the order of the day, both in the local media and in the everyday life of Chennai's inhabitants. In the match venue, the five-star Hyatt Regency Hotel, fervent preparations had been underway since Carlsen's first visit two months earlier. And as I write these lines, just a few days before the first moves are played, the venue resembles a beehive: the stage is being set up, hotel rooms and services are adapted to the players' needs and requests, and the entire building is slowly but steadily transformed into a chess paradise. There can be no question about the dedication and efficiency of the Indian organizers: this will be the greatest chess event ever.

Arrival

Carlsen arrives four days before the start, from a training camp in Oman (a country with a climate similar to that of Chennai), looking fresh, confident and full of energy. Everywhere he goes, he is escorted by police, both for protection and speed of transportation; the Indian chess fans are eager to meet and greet the world's number one player. His entourage includes his manager, most of his family, as well as a bodyguard and a doctor, but there is no sign of any chess helpers; quite obviously, their arrival and presence in Chennai is meant to remain a well-kept secret, as in any self-respecting spy novel. Magnus spends a couple of days in a nice resort on the outskirts of the city, before he finally checks in at the hotel, greeted by a large group of journalists who have camped in the hotel lobby for a while, awaiting this moment. The obligatory search for surveillance equipment, a relatively recent tradition in world championship matches, has taken place on the floor reserved for Carlsen and his team (the sixth) – not because the Norwegian delegation suspects any wrongdoing from Anand's side, but rather to prevent any interference from overeager journalists and fans, Carlsen's manager explains. Espen tries to make the best out of an obviously awkward situation, but nobody really pays attention anyway; the Toilet Wars of Elista 2006 are already long forgotten, not to mention similar stories from the more distant past.

Over the next few days, all concerns regarding Carlsen's acclimatization in India and his treatment by the local organizers are conclusively quenched. At every opportunity, Magnus speaks highly of the Indian hospitality, stressing that he has no complaints whatsoever. He even goes as far as to declare that, should the match turn out badly for him, its hosting in India will have had absolutely no impact on this. The organizers often go out of their way to accommodate him: the hotel hires a Norwegian chef and adapts its menu accordingly, and a considerable police force is always at hand to ensure his easy transport and peace of mind – a necessary precaution, as his mere presence is enough to generate huge public interest. In fact, one gets the impression that both the locals and the media are more interested in him than in Anand; quite logical, one might say, as they have had their share of interactions with the world champion over the years, but the fact remains that Carlsen is indeed most welcome in Chennai and he seems comfortable with the attention. Anand himself prefers to focus on the match in solitude, spending the last days before the match inside the hotel and out of sight of the media. He must surely feel a little strange being, in a certain sense, trapped inside a hotel in his native city, so close to his own house. All this



media hype feels so unlike him, and it can surely be considered an advantage for the Norwegian challenger – he just seems to feel more comfortable surrounded by it.

One can't help but think back to the famous match between Bobby Fischer and Boris Spassky, played in the summer of 1972. Neither of your authors was present there, of course: one was too young to travel that far, while the other hadn't even reached the stage of being an idea in his parents' minds. Still, going through press clippings and short videos of that era gives one a feeling of nostalgia. In those images it all feels like a moment in time at which chess was the most important thing in the world (it arguably was!), as if the entire Cold War was being fought on that wooden table, the two superpowers being personified in the two grandmasters battling it out at the board. A sense of *déjà-vu* fills me as I watch the related material from Carlsen's Chennai reception, which is reminiscent of a video clip of Fischer's (delayed) arrival in Reykjavik forty-one years earlier. It's 1972 all over again – and that's a good thing.

Only the background narrative is different: this is not a fight between two clashing sociological and political viewpoints, but the battle between the old and the new, the traditional and the modern. The bookmakers seem in little doubt as to who will emerge the winner, as evidenced by the offered odds, which are heavily in Carlsen's favour. G-Star Raw seems to consider the outcome a formality; it turns out they have already agreed for Magnus to model for them for a second campaign, starting right after the match. Somehow I can't seem to imagine Fischer warming to this idea, and this rude awakening brings me back to 2013.

Opening

Meanwhile, the various chess-related facilities in the hotel have been readied, and the two teams are called to inspect them. The setting for the match games will be not much different from previous world championships: a well-lit, spacious stage, separated from the spectators' area by soundproof glass. This time the glass, by agreement of the two teams, allows the players to see the spectators. In 2010 and 2012 it was only the other way around, but the dim lights around the stage will ensure that the players will not be disturbed by overzealous fans moving within their field of vision. The players will again be using Daniel Weil's chess sets, but nothing else reminds one of London – it's just a normal set-up. There are no major comments about the playing conditions and everyone appears satisfied: a testament to the efforts of the organizers, as well as to the meticulous perfectionist that FIDE CEO Geoffrey Borg is. The usual vast assortment of chairs has been gathered, so that each player can select the one most convenient for him; both settle on pretty much the same swivel model. A technical meeting follows, chaired by the two arbiters: Chief Arbiter Ashot Vardapetyan from Armenia and his deputy, Almog Burstein from Israel. Nothing much of consequence is debated, making it clear that both players are focused on playing chess rather than on mind games.

The pre-match action kicks off with a long-awaited press conference; the media will finally get their chance to see the two rivals and ask questions. Carlsen has apparently been misinformed about the purpose of the gathering, as he appears in a black-and-white attire that would best befit the world of snooker – a sentiment contradicted only by the absence of an accompanying cue. As for Anand, the results of his hard physical training are more than evident: he definitely looks



slimmer, and also younger; this transformation gives rise to some mild optimism among his fans. Naturally, neither player is expected to be informative in the least, so it comes as a surprise when Anand volunteers to disclose the names of his seconds; alongside long-time helper Wojtaszek and his countrymen Sasikiran and Sandipan, the name of Peter Leko is added, vindicating some of the pre-match rumours. Carlsen delivers an animated facial expression, perhaps another legacy from his past cooperation with Kasparov, before declining to offer any names himself. He doesn't appear surprised at the names he has heard, but is probably wondering what else Anand is hiding. Vishy hastens to add that his list is by no means conclusive, confusing the journalists and making me wonder which of the two players has emerged as the psychological winner from this short exchange. The rest of the press conference flows as expected, with Vishy appearing relaxed and confident, and Magnus being his usual not-too-excited-to-be-there self. Several observers interpret this as nervousness, though to me it doesn't seem like anything to write home about; it all looks like typical Magnus when his thoughts are occupied.

Later on the same day, the players go through that most unwelcome of chess tournament traditions: the opening ceremony. With their minds set on the games that are about to commence in a couple of days, and with months of preparation behind them, it is more than clear that they have absolutely no desire to be there – but they have to. It is to the credit of both that they patiently endure an almost two-hour procedure, including a long speech by the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Ms J. Jayalalithaa, a shorter one by FIDE President Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, and various

cultural events. The ceremony takes place in an indoor stadium and is attended by a few thousand spectators, which is quite impressive, and makes an interesting spectacle for the journalists and other visitors to India.

As for the players, I doubt that they can remember anything by the time they get back to the hotel, except for that one little moment they had anxiously been waiting for: the drawing of colours. Magnus will play White in the first game (as well as the third and the fifth); at the halfway stage the colour distribution will be reversed, with Anand having White in the remaining odd-numbered games. In case you, dear reader, are not familiar with the purpose of this practice, allow me to explain that it is applied in order to eliminate the advantage of someone always playing White after a rest day, when energy reserves are higher and the pressure on Black more intense. Indeed, with some games quite possibly lasting over six hours, the even-numbered games are likely going to be played under less than ideal circumstances; though why it is considered better to play Black rather than White in that situation is unclear to me.

With that out of the way, the remaining forty or so hours until the start of the first game pass quietly and without drama.



Game One



A Slow Start

First games of World Championship matches are always tricky. The players are obviously eager to show the fruits of their preparation on the board, but there also is stress, anxiety, and fear of the unknown. Such considerations apply to regular tournaments, of course, but here the stakes are much higher, the tension far greater; a player is sure to need some time to adjust to the circumstances and slowly get everything else out of his mind before finally being able to immerse himself in the task at hand.

As explained in the London Candidates chapter, there is no universal recipe for such situations, and thus chess history has seen both sides of the coin: relatively short, uninspiring draws after ultra-cautious play, but also sharp, complex fights with decisive results. One can recall, for example, a boring Exchange Slav in the first game of the Anand – Kramnik match, but also the same player (Anand) getting involved in a tough struggle (and an eventual opening disaster) in the first game of his very next campaign, against Topalov. Let us also not forget that opening surprises may be lurking; one has to try and sense the direction of the opponent's preparation, understand on which systems he has been working for all these months.

This time the atmosphere is crazier than ever. Long before the players arrive at the board, hoards of journalists are fighting for the prime spots from which to take their pictures, the tall and slim Peter Doggers of ChessVibes sporting an unfair advantage. Policemen hold a yellow “Do Not Cross” cord to prevent the rabble from crashing into the two-sided glass, but this task proves hard; a lot of shoving and pushing takes place, as everyone is eager to catch the first handshake of the match, some nervous expression on the contestants' faces, or any other little detail that will skyrocket the value of their photo. Amidst this mayhem, the players arrive at the board and shake hands, then depart again for the rest area behind the scenes, where a large countdown clock keeps them wary of the approaching moment of truth. The handshake actually goes unnoticed by most, leading the press to later speculate about possible tension in the rivals' relations. This theory is consistently rebuffed in the following games. The players relax on adjacent armchairs and are both probably quite nervous – this is the real thing. A buffet and a fridge are within



their reach, with Carlsen's reserves of juice and nuts clearly marked out. It would be amusing if Anand caused a scandal by consuming some of them, but such thoughts probably don't enter his mind, as he awaits the start of his fifth world championship match. I'd gladly give a penny for his thoughts right now, a Bitcoin even: is he thinking about the opening he will play, is he reminiscing about previous matches, is he perhaps singing a song inside his head? And what is going through Carlsen's mind?

Magnus comes back to the board first and tries to concentrate, but this is evidently hard when you can actually see the wrestling taking place on the other side of the glass. Four hundred spectators are to be accommodated in the playing hall, but he can hardly see them either – the wall of journalists is just too dense. He seems a little nervous, understandably, and at the same time quite amused at the extent of people's determination to catch a photo of him. His musings are interrupted by the arrival of his opponent, along with the two arbiters and FIDE President Kirsan Ilyumzhinov. Anand looks unperturbed by the surroundings, his face exuding the look of someone who's been there and done that. FIDE Press Officer Anastasiya Karlovich is the luckiest of them all: she has the best spot, inside the glass, where she can catch all the action on both sides of the glass in the same photo. The officials take their places for the ceremonial first move, and the chief arbiter leans towards Magnus to ask his intentions; "Knight f3" is the reply. Almog Burstein starts the clock, Kirsan makes the move on the board, a few quick photos are taken and Carlsen presses the lever – the show is on. The policemen drag the yellow rope further from the glass, or at least try hard to do so; eventually they succeed, leaving the players to battle it out in peace.

While a first move like 1.e4 or 1.d4 may be considered a clear indication of one's opening choices, of a decision made many months ago, it is less easy to interpret Carlsen's knight move. Apart from being a quality developing move, it has the benefit of allowing him to read something into Anand's preparation against 1.d4 set-ups without revealing much information about. Perhaps Magnus also just wanted to ease himself into the match while avoiding a theoretical duel. It



appears likely that he intends to fight on flank openings territory, instead of tackling Anand's Slav systems head-on, much like Kramnik did in London against Aronian. Anand is ready for this approach though, and executes his moves quickly and confidently. Soon the game transposes into a quiet variation of the Fianchetto Grünfeld, leaving observers perplexed as to which player has managed to outfox the other. The question is answered without delay by Anand's dynamic response, surrendering his central stronghold for the sake of active piece play. Already from the opening of the first game we see evidence of the two players' match strategies, neither of which comes as a surprise: Magnus seeks a slow positional game, while Anand tries to provoke concrete decisions as early as possible.

The interest generated by the match is immediately evident on the official website, which quickly encounters problems due to overwhelming demand, with millions of viewers trying to log on and follow the live commentary. The panel is full of familiar faces: Susan Polgar and Lawrence Trent are the main hosts, assisted by Indian grandmaster Ramesh and the popular international master Tania Sachdev, who is clearly a hit with the male population. There is no Nigel Short here, unfortunately; the clash of dates with the European Team Championships leaves him otherwise occupied for the first half of the match. There is a lot of talk about all aspects of the match, except perhaps the game itself, with only Ramesh trying to delve deeper into the players' decisions; I suppose first days are meant to be like that. Meanwhile, the webmasters struggle to keep the site alive, and eventually they succeed, breaking all attendance records for a chess event in the meantime. The official hashtag of the event on Twitter quickly begins trending and rises to unprecedented heights; it will go on to overtake several major events of the coming days, including a Victoria's Secret lingerie show – quite an amazing feat.

As the game proceeds, the tension is rising. Carlsen embarks on some committal decisions trying to justify his opening play, at least psychologically, but Anand is comfortable in the position that has arisen. An oversight by Magnus allows Anand to seize some initiative, but the champion makes no real effort to exploit the lack of coordination among the white pieces; he discards a couple of more ambitious alternatives and forces a threefold repetition as soon as the opportunity arises. True, playing on would not have promised him anything substantial, and the ease with which he neutralized Carlsen with the black pieces certainly counts as a success of sorts. Nevertheless, the fans are left somewhat disappointed by the anticlimactic finish. Carlsen appeared rather nervous and perplexed throughout the game, and while he cannot be overly happy with the outcome, he has emerged unscathed from his first world championship match game.



Magnus Carlsen – Viswanathan Anand

Game 1, 9th November 2013

Many must have expected the first game of the World Championship match to be a tense affair between two bloodthirsty warriors, full of thrust and counterthrust. The reality was much different and a peace truce was signed after just sixteen moves. Cautious starts are not rare in such matches, and considering that the present one is contested over just twelve games, I was neither puzzled nor disappointed with the outcome of the first battle. Going through Game 1 makes us aware enough that there is a lot at stake here, and that the players are prepared to throw punches only if they are certain to have an impact on the opponent, otherwise they would rather keep on 'dancing', waiting for an opportune moment to strike.

1.♟f3 (1:59:52)

No open-game slugfest today. Carlsen can play practically everything, but he tends to be more of a solid positional player than a tactical magician. At the start of such an important event he probably felt the need to display the quality at the core of his strength.

1... **d5** (1:59:38)

Anand reacts classically, which comes as no surprise. With the black pieces the Tiger of Madras has a significantly different style than with White, as he is often satisfied with mere equality and short fights that fizzle out to a draw.

2.g3 (1:59:43) **g6** (1:59:38)

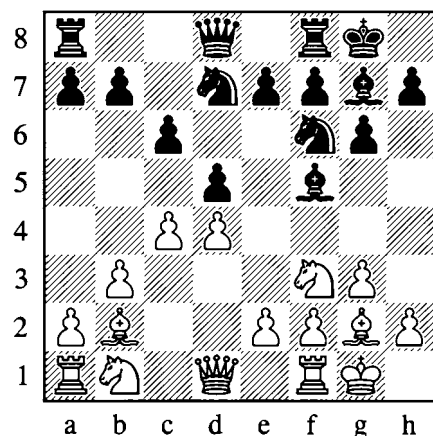
Could this be an indication that Anand intends to rely on the Grünfeld? Perhaps, but here White is already committed to a kingside fianchetto, which rules out the most ambitious set-ups.

3.♙g2 (1:59:43)**4.d4** (1:59:43)**5.0-0** (1:58:12)**6.b3** (1:58:01)**♙g7** (1:59:38)**c6** (1:57:33)**♟f6** (1:56:51)

The double fianchetto is hardly the most critical variation against Anand's Grünfeld, and is a clear indication of Carlsen's 'safety first' motto in this first game.

6...**7.♙b2** (1:54:58)**0-0** (1:55:46)**♙f5** (1:54:18)

A good position for the bishop, controlling the all-important e4-square. In the event that it is evicted by ♟h4 it can always retreat to e6, when White will have achieved nothing of substance with his knight placed on the rim.

8.c4 (1:54:37)**♟bd7** (1:53:43)**9.♟c3?! (1:50:57)**

White brings his last minor piece out, seeking to increase his influence over both e4 and d5. However, there is a certain problem with this move, which Anand is quick to exploit.

9.♟bd2

This has been the usual choice, keeping c4 well covered. But even here Black has a variety of good responses, a typical one being:

9...a5

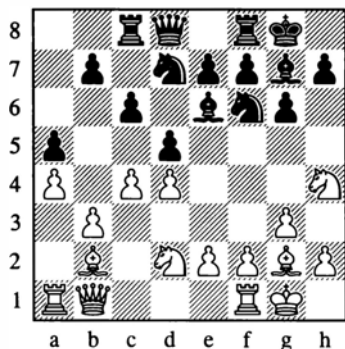
9...♖e4 10.♗h4 ♗xd2 11.♝xd2 ♕e6
12.cxd5 cxd5 is approximately level, too.

10.♗h4

After 10.a4 Black may even consider
10...♗b8!? with counterplay, intending to
post the knight on b4.

10...♕e6 11.a4 ♖c8 12.♝b1!?

Intending f4-f5.



12...♗b8!?

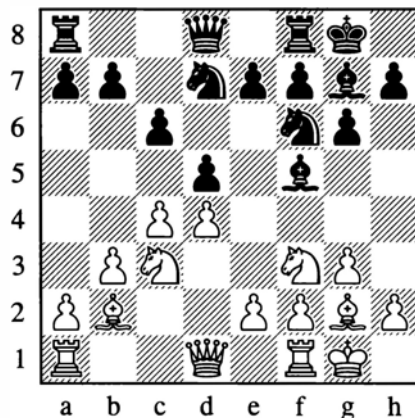
12...♖e8 13.f4 ♗g4 14.f5 gxf5 15.♗xf5 ♕xf5

16.♝xf5 ♗df6 was double-edged in Smyslov
– Hellers, Haninge 1989.

13.e4

13.f4!? ♗a6 14.f5 ♕d7 15.e4 is highly
unclear after either 15...e6!? or 15...dxe4
16.♗xe4 ♝b6 17.♗xf6† exf6 18.c5 ♝c7
with counterplay.

13...♗xe4 14.♗xe4 dxe4 15.♝xe4 ♗a6=
With mutual chances.



9... **dx c4!** (1:49:30)

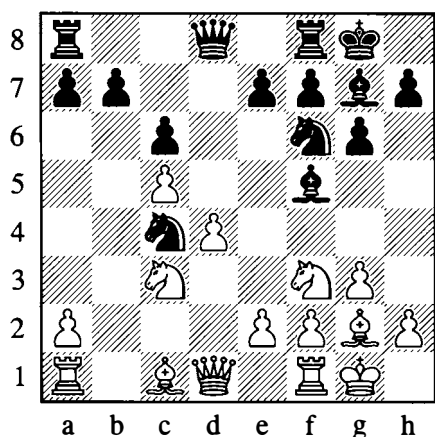
Anand uses a rare move, which looks like the best in the position. In response to White's last move, what could be more natural than trying to exploit the weakness of the c4-square?

10. **bxc4** (1:50:30) **Qb6** (1:45:46)

11. **c5** (1:44:33) **Qc4** (1:44:10)

12. **Qc1** (1:31:54)

The time Carlsen spent on his last two moves indicates that he may have been taken aback by Black's operation. White has a central pawn preponderance but he has been forced to retreat, and Black controls the light squares in the centre with his pieces.



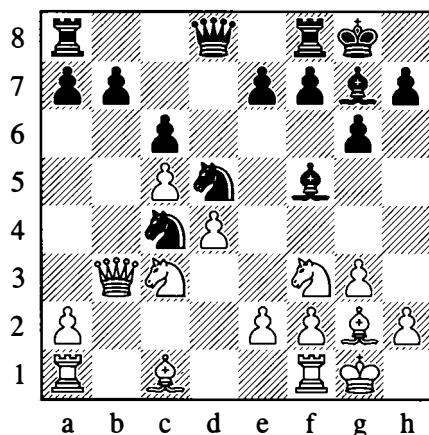
12... **Qd5** (1:36:13)

Vishy chooses the more conservative way to centralize his knight. The merits of his play are already obvious: the g7-bishop is a powerful piece and Black is ready to undermine the enemy central chain with either ...b6 or ...e5.

An earlier game continued 12... Qe4!? 13. Qb3 Qa5 14. Qb4 b6 15. Qxe4 Qxe4 16. Rd1 Qd5 and Black had equalized in Wagner – Aring, Gerlingen 2011.

13. **Qb3** (1:09:11)

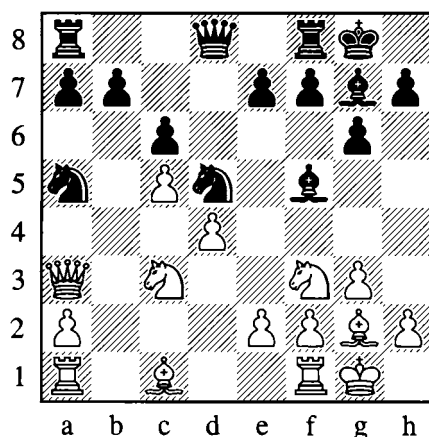
Magnus thought for quite a while over this move, but there is nothing better.



13... **Qa5** (1:30:34)

13...b5!? 14. cxb6 Qa5 15. Qb2 axb6 16. e4 Qxc3 17. exf5 Qxd4 18. Qxd4 Qxd4 19. Qe3 Qd3 20. Qxb6 Qc4 21. Qxc6 Qxe3 22. fxe3 Qxe3+ 23. Qh1 is a sample line showing a way for Black to try and spice up the game. The verdict is the same though: the position remains balanced.

14. **Qa3** (1:08:56)

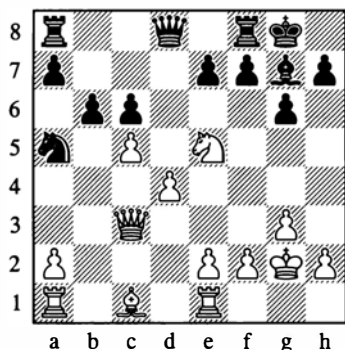


14... **Qc4** (1:28:58)

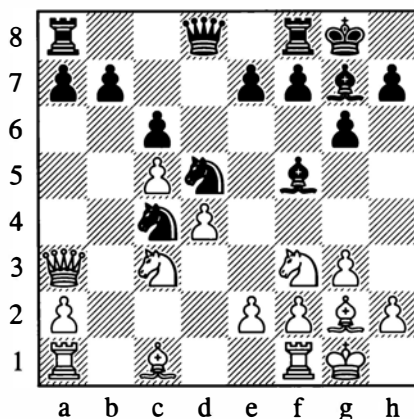
14...b5 15. Qxd5! cxd5 16. Qf4 may be just

a trifle better for White on account of his protected passed pawn.

14...b6! This undermining move was well worth a try. A likely continuation is: 15.♖e1 ♜xc3 16.♞xc3 ♙e4! 17.♞e5 ♙xg2 18.♜xg2



18...♙e4! 19.dxe5 ♞d5† 20.e4 ♞c4 Black can continue playing with a certain degree of ambition. The position is close to equal but slightly more pleasant to play as Black, who can strive for an ending where his better minor piece and queenside pawn majority may tell.



15.♖b3 (1:08:49) ♜a5 (1:22:38)
16.♞a3 (1:08:38)

White finds nothing better than to repeat moves.

16... ♜c4 (1:21:52)
½–½





Thus, the heavily anticipated first game ended in a relatively uneventful draw.

The press conference is rather light-hearted, as if the match hasn't really started yet. Anand is quite talkative and goes through the most important points of this short game, looking clearly satisfied with the result. Meanwhile Carlsen observes in silence, probably trying to understand what went wrong. Vishy is clearly enjoying the moment and dominates the discussion, but it is Magnus who makes the comment of the day: in reply to a question by Nastja regarding a "How to Beat Magnus Carlsen" article by Sergei Shipov, he self-critically confesses that perhaps he should have read it.

As for the game itself, the conclusion is that Black was comfortable throughout. Neither player seemed to mind the outcome but, judging from the way events unfolded in the next few games, I suspect that Vishy's decision not to press for the advantage may come back to haunt him.

With the press conference over, the attention shifts to the next day's game, when Anand will have his first shot with White. No real conclusions are drawn, except perhaps that Magnus was not quite up to the task today, perhaps due to the nervous tension. Some are saying that Anand has scored a small psychological victory but, as Garry Kasparov himself pointed out, a draw is just a draw.

Game Two



Is there Life on Mars?

With the hardships of the first day carefully dissected and processed, the organizers apply the necessary fixes to ensure swift operation on all fronts for the second game. Now the website is ready to withstand the armada of visitors, and the internet connection in the hotel is working as it should. It is quite typical of major chess events that such problems will occur on the first day – and only then.

The proceedings of the inaugural game fully have entirely consumed the spectators' attention. With the weight of anticipation out of their systems, the second game provides a much better opportunity for them to actually notice everything else that is going on around them. The hotel has fully adapted to the chess mania: there are boards all over, giant screens displaying live coverage, guess-the-move contests and other chess-related activities. The live commentary takes place in a lobby on the first floor, to which the entire clan of journalists and spectators flocks right after the end of the game. This inevitably causes congestion in the lifts, but for security reasons no other path to that lobby is available, so the unlucky ones have to make do with the live coverage from local TV channel DD Sports, which dedicates several hours of its programming to the match.

Before darkness descends on the spectators' area, an observation of the playing hall reveals an interesting arrangement: a set of small tables, reminiscent of a 1980s discotheque, signifies the most exclusive seats available to the paying public. These tables are named after world champions and dressed in distinct colours, with a fiery red having been appointed to the Capablanca one; it would have seemed more appropriate to switch this with the brown shade allocated to Tal's. Thanks to two giant screens on either side of the stage, the spectators have full view of the proceedings, but unfortunately they are unable to listen in on the live commentary; it would arguably have





been wise to offer wireless headsets, as was done in Moscow 2012 and other times in the past, not to mention the tablets in London. As a result, the spectators often resort to discussing the position inside the playing hall, taking advantage of the soundproof glass separating them from the players. Considering the large number of local dialects spoken in India, it is no surprise that these discussions usually take place in English. The whole set-up works quite well, as the players appear not to be disturbed in the least; the only distracting moment occurs ten minutes after the start of play, when the policemen drag the yellow cord further from the stage. The photographers are not pleased, but the commotion quickly dies down and peace is restored.

The game commences and Anand opens with 1.e4. This was not unexpected and in tune with his assumed strategy of trying to provoke concrete play from the very start. Today Carlsen seems more relaxed – perhaps too relaxed, which shows when he picks up his c-pawn and drops it accidentally before placing it on c6. The lack of conviction in the execution of the introductory move to the Caro-Kann confuses the public, but Carlsen's subsequent play leaves no doubt as to the merits of his preparation. Anand follows the same path as in a recent game of his and is the first to deviate, but soon slows down; he clearly hasn't spent much time analysing the rare line his opponent has chosen. Carlsen moves relatively slowly, perhaps not feeling entirely at home in this opening, but he seems to know the position and, at an important juncture, introduces a new simplifying idea. The critical moment of the game arises, with Anand having to make up his mind about the direction the game will take from here. The spectators watch with great interest as the battle is poised to flare up.

Except it doesn't. Without much thought, Anand eschews the opportunity to pursue a seemingly promising kingside attack and instead exchanges queens on d5. Predictably, this is met with disappointment from the viewing public. The position quickly dries up and it is Magnus appears to have some chances now, but a simple rook manoeuvre by the World Champion forces another repetition and the scoresheets are signed, with the game barely exceeding the one-hour mark. It seems that Carlsen's opening choice was spot on, though it is once again hard to draw any firm conclusions from this; he may have just used this opening once to throw his opponent's team off balance at the start. In any case, Anand's first serve has stopped at the net and there are new issues to ponder.

Viswanathan Anand – Magnus Carlsen

Game 2, 10th November 2013

Mars, the so-called Red Planet, originally named after the ancient god of war, was long considered to be devoid of life. Lately, however, more and more shreds of "evidence" crop up, suggesting that its apparently inhospitable surface may conceal life forms, or the conditions for them to exist. Can it be true? Is it possible that dried seas and barren canyons are just an illusion, and that some form of life is there, waiting to be explored? I am sure that Magnus Carlsen and Vishy Anand, albeit not NASA experts, were besieged by similar questions when discussing their own Red Planet, the World Championship match in Chennai. The only difference is that this planet consists of deserts, canyons and other barren areas with slightly different names than those on Mars: The Berlin Desert, The Marshall Plain, The Petroff Steppe are a few such landscapes that might soon be explored.



“That’s fine”, I can hear you say, “we knew about those – but what about the oasis of the Caro-Kann?” Well, after a cursory glance at the second world championship game between these two great players, you may be tempted to think of it as the Caro-Canyon (or -Kannyon, if you prefer), every bit as arid as the aforementioned chess formations. On closer inspection, however, it may have been a different story had Visny played differently on moves 15 or 18. Instead he chose a safe continuation lacking in ambition, and soon had to find a way to force a draw so as to avoid becoming worse.

If the above comments still leave something to be desired, all I have left is a kind of sophistry to satisfy your curiosity. When life does not exist, great players have to invent it. And then the chess world goes on, sometimes even at their expense.

1.e4 (1:59:55)

Visny has been playing 1.e4 for most of his life, scoring many brilliant victories with it. Nowadays, the move is regarded as offering fewer opportunities for creative play than 1.d4, but it is still sharp enough to cause disasters to those who underestimate its power.

1... **c6** (1:59:54)

This may have come as a slight surprise for the World Champion, as Magnus had only used the Caro-Kann on a few occasions before. Then again, the real surprise would be if there were no surprises at all.

2.d4 (1:59:41) **d5** (1:59:47)
3.♘c3 (1:59:36)

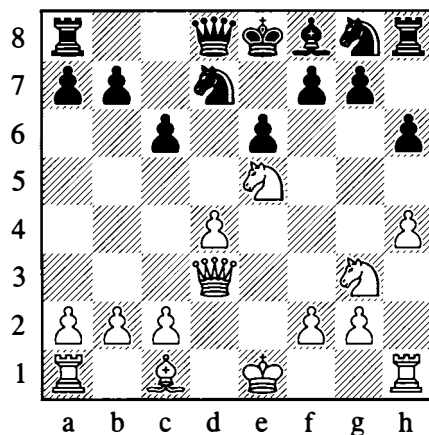
No Advance Variation today; the Indian grandmaster opts for an open, classical battle.

3... **dxe4** (1:59:40)
4.♘xe4 (1:59:31) **♙f5** (1:59:32)
5.♘g3 (1:59:19) **♙g6** (1:59:22)
6.h4 (1:59:09) **h6** (1:59:15)
7.♘f3 (1:59:02) **e6** (1:59:08)

7...♘d7 is more popular, but Magnus’s move is well known. Black allows the enemy knight to come to e5 with gain of tempo, with the intention of challenging it.

8.♘e5 (1:58:11) **♙h7** (1:59:00)
9.♙d3 (1:57:21) **♙xd3** (1:58:51)
10.♙xd3 (1:57:14) **♘d7** (1:58:32)

Until this point the players blitzed their moves out, but here Visny paused to take a small think.



11.f4 (1:53:26)

Anand goes for the most critical continuation, supporting his centralized knight, even if that means weakening his structure a bit.

11.♙f4 is a playable alternative, but it allows too many piece exchanges to suit the World Champion’s aims in this game.

11... **♙b4+**! (1:58:24)

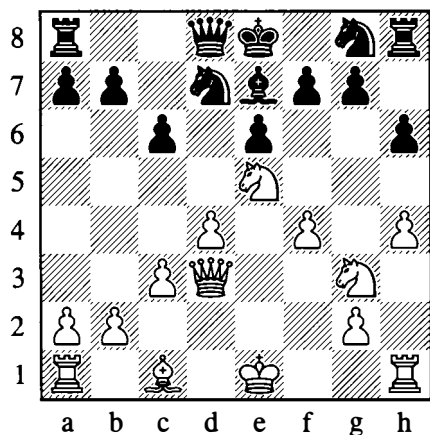
Magnus, of course, is familiar with the nuances of the variation. This check may appear silly to the uninitiated, but c2-c3 is a move Black is happy to provoke here, as it takes away the defence of the queen on d3, while rendering long castling more dangerous than with the pawn on c2. More abstractly, the Caro-Kann is primarily a light-squared opening system, and the last move serves to provoke additional light-square weaknesses in the white camp.

12.c3 (1:52:29)

12.♔d2 ♕xd2† 13.♖xd2 ♘gf6 14.0-0-0 0-0 is fine for Black, who has exchanged enough pieces to feel safe. The misplaced knight on g3 hampers White, who will not have time to get his attack off the ground, as Black is almost ready to liberate his position with ...c5.

12...

♕e7 (1:58:15)



13.♔d2 (1:48:59) ♘gf6 (1:58:05)

14.0-0-0 (1:48:40)

It is only understandable that Anand deviates here from an earlier game of his, played in April 2013. That encounter had gone:

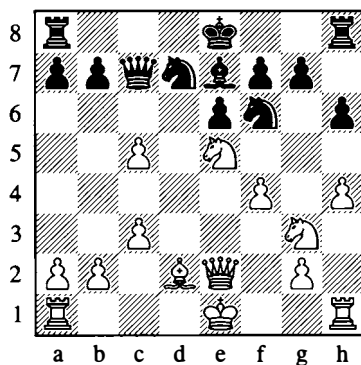
14.♖e2!? c5

14...0-0!? 15.f5!? ♔d6! 16.fxe6 (16.0-0-0?! ♔e8! 17.♖he1 ♖c7 18.♗b1 exf5 19.♘xf5

♘xe5 20.♘xd6 ♖xd6 21.dxe5 ♖e6 with a slight edge to Black) 16...fxe6 17.0-0-0 ♖c7 18.♘xd7 ♖xd7 19.♘e4 ♘xe4 20.♖xe4 ♕c7= is recommended by Sumets as an equalizing attempt.

15.dxc5 ♖c7?!

15...♕xc5 was better by far.



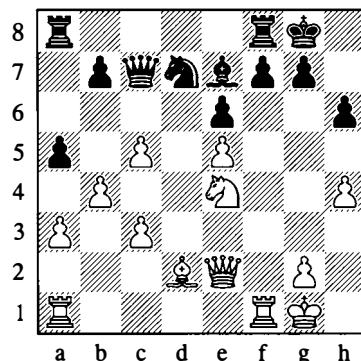
16.b4!

Now White holds on to a precious extra pawn.

16...0-0

The immediate 16...a5 seems better, but after 17.0-0 axb4 18.cxb4 0-0 19.a4 ♘d5 20.♘h5!? Black is a pawn down and faces dangerous pressure on both wings.

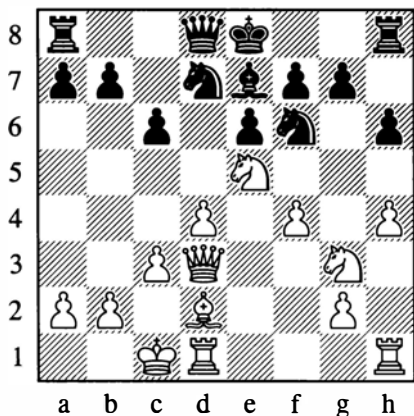
17.0-0 a5 18.a3 ♘xe5?! 19.fxe5 ♘d7 20.♘e4 White is clearly better.



20...axb4 21.cxb4 ♖xe5 22.♔c3 ♖c7 23.♖ad1 ♖ad8 24.♖g4 g6 25.♘d6 e5 26.♖c4 ♘b6 27.♖e4 ♘d7 28.h5 gxh5 29.♖f5 ♔f6 30.♖xh5 ♖c6 31.♖xf6 ♘xf6 32.♖xe5



Black decided he had had enough in Anand – Ding Liren, Paris/St Petersburg 2013. This was a smashing victory for White, but Magnus had undoubtedly cooked up something to improve Black's play, and Vishy was not willing to taste it.



14...

0-0 (1:54:35)

I guess most fans were rubbing their hands in sweet expectation around here since, with kings castled on opposite wings, the chances of a double-edged battle involving mutual attacks had increased considerably. Unfortunately, they were soon to be disillusioned.

15. ♖e4?! (1:37:37)

Apparently, White proceeds actively; his decision to unblock his g-pawn and start an attack is a principled one. On second thoughts, however, it's easy to see that this move plays into Magnus's hands as it allows him to trade some wood and activate his queen, solving thus all his opening problems.

15. ♖b1! was the move to play, and most

certainly not a new one. Probably Vishy didn't remember quite well what he had prepared, or underestimated Black's 17th. Now Black can breathe easily.

15...

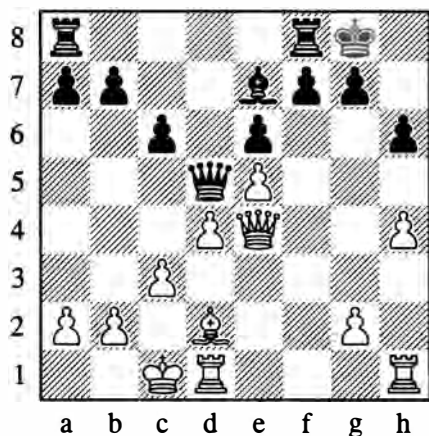
♖xe4 (1:44:32)

Magnus is, of course, not averse to exchanges, especially when they allow him to free his somewhat constricted position.

16. ♖xe4 (1:37:00) **♜xe5** (1:42:57)

17. fxe5 (1:35:12) **♜d5!** (1:41:34)

The second and last critical moment of the game.



18. ♖xd5 (1:31:23)

Whatever mutual attacking chances existed in this position disappear after the exchange of queens.

18. ♖g4!?

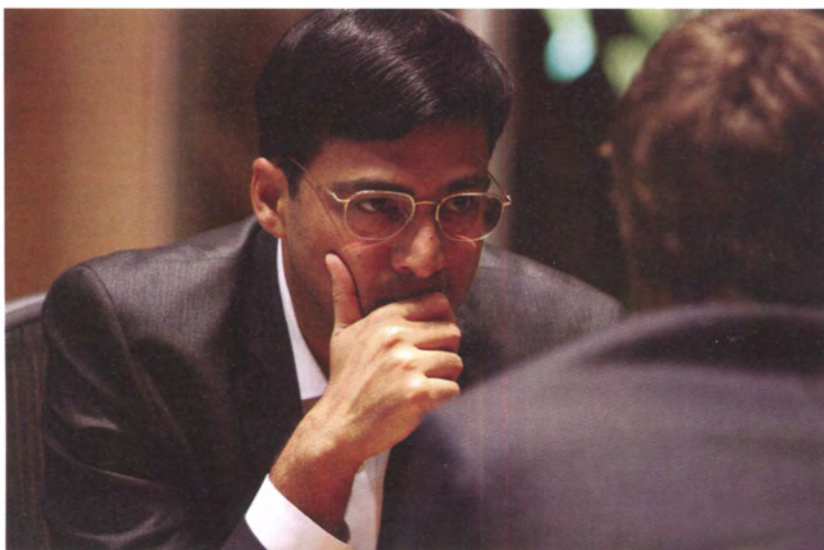
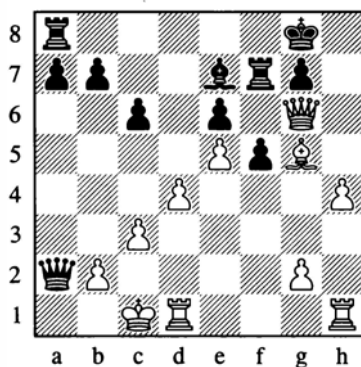
This was the move Anand had to play if he really wanted to press. Admittedly, Black seems to be okay after accurate play:

18...f5! 19. ♖g6

19. exf6 ♜xf6 20. ♙f4!? ♖xa2 **21. ♙e5 ♜f7 22. ♜hf1 ♜af8 23. ♜f3** gives White sufficient compensation for the pawn, but nothing more.

19...♖xa2 20. ♙xh6 ♜f7 21. ♙g5

Both kings feel draughty, but you can't make an omelette without breaking some eggs.



21...♖c8!

The most accurate defence, leading to full equality.

21...a5 22.d5! cxd5 23.♗xe6 ♖a1† 24.♕c2 ♖a4† 25.♕b1 ♖e4† 26.♕c1 ♖e8!! 27.♗xd5 ♗xe5! 28.♗xe5 ♕xg5† 29.hxg5 ♖xe5 30.g6 ♖f8 31.♖he1 is a trifle better for White.

22.♖h3 a5!?

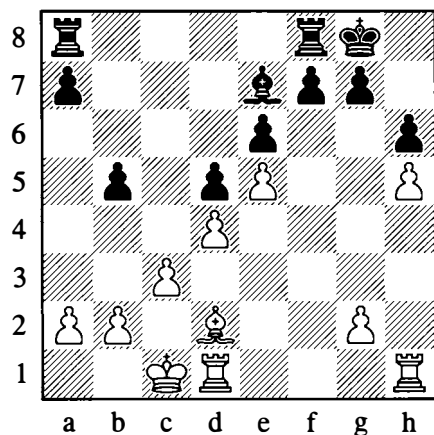
The immediate 22...♖a1† 23.♕c2 ♖a4†= is also possible.

23.d5 cxd5 24.♗xe6 ♖a1† 25.♕c2 ♖a4† 26.♕c1=

Eventually this line ends in equality as well, but my feeling is that in this sequence Magnus would have been forced to find a few good moves (especially 18...f5! and 21...♖c8!), whereas in the game his task is quite trivial.

18... cxd5 (1:38:23)
19.h5 (1:30:09) b5 (1:37:36)

Given enough time to mobilize his pieces, Black's minority attack could give him the more pleasant position. Therefore White hurries to force a draw by alternating threats on h6 and f7.



20.♖h3! (1:24:30) a5 (1:37:22)
21.♖f1 (1:22:43) ♖ac8 (1:36:16)
22.♖g3 (1:20:33) ♕h7 (1:36:10)
23.♖gf3 (1:19:43) ♕g8 (1:35:32)

24.♖g3 (1:19:21) ♕h7 (1:35:26)

25.♖gf3 (1:18:52) ♕g8 (1:35:12)
½-½

The move count was higher than in the previous game, but it was still a relatively quick draw by repetition. Houdini agrees, evaluating the final position with a flat 0.00.

The second short draw is not so well received. Anand rushes to apologize in the press conference, promising tougher fights in the coming games. The discussion mainly revolves around the 18th move, with Carlsen dismissing the attacking option in a confident manner. However, a careful checking of the lines he offers shows that things are not that simple, so it's not even clear if he is playing a game of misdirection about his intentions. Magnus seems to have fully settled into the match and appears more composed than the day before, perhaps encouraged by the ease with which he drew the game. Anand, on the other hand, is constantly apologetic, as if he has to publicly justify his decision to avoid complications. There is no doubt in his mind that the whole variation has been deeply analysed by his opponent, so there was no practical sense in him going down a "blind alley", as he calls it, searching for a treasure that probably wasn't there in the first place. The roles from the previous day's press conference seem to have been reversed and it is now Vishy who is the nervous one. It is obvious that playing on home ground creates a sense of obligation in him to justify the expectations of his countrymen (and perhaps also the money spent on hosting the match), and for the first time this is evident in his words.

With a total of two-and-a-half hours of play, the first two games of the match are history and the players move on to enjoy a well-deserved rest day.



Game Three



**Luck and Stamina –
In need of an Ally...**

Garry Kasparov's arrival in Chennai is the big news of the day when the third game is set to take place. The former World Champion and now candidate for the FIDE presidency embarks on a tour of the East in the hunt for exposure and votes, alongside current FIDE General Secretary Ignatius Leong (who probably finds himself in an awkward position because of his switch of allegiance, but doesn't seem too perturbed by this), and Kasparov simply cannot resist a stop at the place on which all the world's eyes are set.

After the first two games Garry offers his thoughts via his Twitter account, fully justifying their reserved play in the beginning of the match and predicting much more exciting tussles ahead. It is well known where his sympathies lie and he has made no effort to hide it; this makes him less appealing to the Indian crowd, who worship Anand and do not appreciate Garry's talk about the looming end of his reign.

His appearance in the playing hall fails to attract the attention usually accorded to him, and overall his presence is not felt much, since he doesn't even join the live commentary team, as he often does. The reasons for this are not made clear; rumours circulate that Anand's team has requested his expulsion from the front row of seats, reserved for match officials and VIP guests, in order to prevent his presence destabilizing the World Champion, but Anand himself dispels this notion after the game.

Others assume that, in view of his electoral activities against the current FIDE leadership, he is less than welcome in Chennai (and he has therefore been prevented from delivering a press conference – as he did in Moscow a year earlier – or participating in the live commentary), but Kasparov himself makes no mention of such treatment; FIDE Deputy President Makropoulos even has to give a short press conference himself the next day to put things straight.

Be that as it may, the players do their best to prove him right. Carlsen opens again with 1.♘f3, but this time prefers a different set-up, for which Anand also appears prepared. A position typical of the English Opening arises, with Anand enjoying quite easy development and everyone wondering about the point of Carlsen's opening choice. There doesn't seem to be any, as Vishy slowly but surely improves his position while Magnus seems at a loss for a plan, and after a few rather aimless manoeuvres the Norwegian finds himself stuck in an unpromising position.

Anand handles the typical pawn structure with confidence, consolidating his position and preparing further expansion while his opponent is bereft of any counterplay. The game seems to be running on auto-pilot and Carlsen's position becomes more and more unpleasant with every move; the possibility of Anand winning the game appears very realistic, even more so when Carlsen's queen is driven to the h1-square, bringing back memories of an old and hotly-debated game between Timman and Short, which had the unique distinction of having these two esteemed grandmasters finally agreeing on something, namely that "a fundamental lack of positional understanding may be an advantage in practical play"; both opinions voiced not with the best of intentions, obviously.

And then all hell breaks loose. Fully realizing the impending loss approaching, Carlsen makes the brave decision to give up a pawn in order to create counterplay, and makes a move that will become the subject of contention on several internet forums. Its practical merits can hardly be in doubt: Anand now has to switch from slow automated play to concrete calculation and the required change of pace, with time pressure just around the corner, is not easy to adapt to. Moreover, the opening of lines in the centre exposes some weaknesses in Anand's camp as well, and the multitude of options available serves to confuse the issue even further. Even the objective

evaluation of Carlsen's drastic measures is debatable; computers dislike the material loss and scream "error", but human understanding and the method of comparison conclude that Anand's advantage is now not necessarily greater than it was before.

The World Champion is somewhat knocked off balance by this sudden turn of events and initially refuses to grab the offered pawn, preferring instead to stabilize his positional advantage. However, the confusion spread by Magnus eventually hits home: Anand first misses a strong regrouping against the weakened white kingside and then, afraid of letting his advantage dissipate fully, he belatedly decides to snatch that pawn after all, but at a most unfortunate moment. With his queen now back into play, Carlsen makes full use of his pieces' activity and equalizes the position with forceful play, eventually even regaining his pawn.

Disappointment sets in for Anand's fans, while their counterparts exhale in relief now that the danger has passed. In a show of inner strength, Carlsen even declines a draw offer and decides to play a few more moves after the time control, obviously for psychological reasons, but his opponent quickly vacuums the board and the inevitable draw is agreed.



Magnus Carlsen – Viswanathan Anand

Game 3, 12th November 2013

Game 3 saw Viswanathan Anand build a large, probably decisive, positional advantage, only to refrain from reaping the fruits of his labour by failing to grab a lone white soldier on b2. Magnus didn't have to be asked twice, and given the opportunity he summoned all his energy in the closing stage of the encounter to achieve one of his usual miraculous saves.

This game must have served as a cruel warning to both players, first and foremost to Vishy as he can't allow himself to miss such chances in a short match, and secondly to the challenger for his lack of success when handling the white pieces.

After three games the only one to have had chances is the reigning champion and Magnus must have realized at the end of this game that he cannot go on relying on luck and stamina alone to dethrone Vishy; surely more powerful opening play will be needed?

1. ♟f3 (1:59:56)	d5 (1:59:44)
2. g3 (1:59:48)	g6 (1:59:36)
3. c4 (1:59:32)	♞xc4 (1:58:36)

A sign that the World Champion could be seeking more than plain equality with Black in this game;

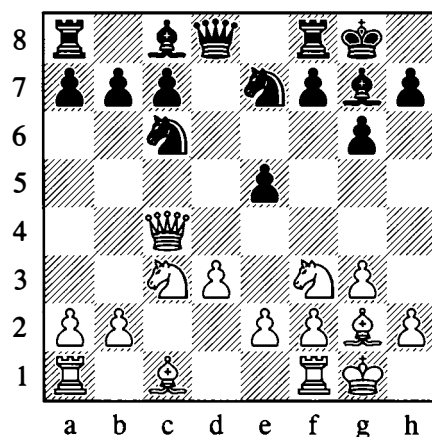
3...c6 is safe and good, but much less ambitious.

4. **♞a4†** (1:56:03)

White can try to recapture on c4 with the knight, but as the world's leading Grünfeld exponent has shown, this does not amount to very much either. After 4.♟a3 ♟g7 5.♟xc4 ♟c6 6.d3 e5 7.♟d2 ♟ge7 8.♟g2 ♟e6 9.♞c1 0-0 10.0-0 ♞d7 11.♟g5 ♟d5 the chances were balanced in Markowski – Svidler, Polanica

Zdroj 2000. The main idea is that 12.♟e4 can be met simply by 12...♞ad8 13.♟c5 (more interesting is 13.♟e3!? ♟xe4! 14.♟xe4 f5 15.♟g2 ♞e6 16.♞a4 e4 with double-edged play) 13...♞c8 and Black coordinates his pieces in time, defending b7.

4...	♟c6 (1:56:51)
5. ♟g2 (1:55:38)	♟g7 (1:55:41)
6. ♟c3 (1:51:06)	e5 (1:49:07)
7. ♞xc4 (1:50:13)	♟ge7 (1:47:26)
8. 0-0 (1:48:15)	0-0 (1:45:45)
9. d3 (1:47:18)	



It is hard to say what Magnus had in mind when making his opening choice for the present game, but my guess is that he just hoped to get an equal position and outplay his opponent at a later stage by applying queenside pressure. As it turns out, however, Black can meet this plan by simple means – centralization.

9... **h6!** (1:41:35)

A very nice prophylactic move by Vishy, showing he understands the subtleties of the position.

9...♟e6 would have allowed 10.♞h4! when the threat of ♟g5 allows White to aspire to concrete gains. For example: 10...♟f5

(10...f6 11.♖a4 ♗d7 12.♙e3 ♝ad8 13.♞fc1 can be described as a slight success for White, who can try to generate play by means of b4; the pawn on f6 obstructs the g7-bishop and reduces its influence over d4.) 11.♖xd8 ♜fxd8 12.♜g5 ♙d7 13.♜ge4 h6 14.b4!? And White does gain the slight endgame initiative Magnus was looking for.

10.♙d2 (1:37:56)

Now White must restrict himself to routine development.

10.♖h4?! would have been met by: 10...♜d4 11.♜xd4 (11.♙d2 ♜ef5 12.♖xd8 ♜xf3† 13.♙xf3 ♝xd8 14.♝ac1 ♜d4 15.♙g2 c6 is completely safe for Black, who is slightly better) 11...exd4 12.♜e4 ♜d5 13.♖xd8 ♝xd8 The knight's arrival on d5 neutralizes all potential queenside pressure, granting Black a slight plus.

10... **♜d4** (1:33:32)

10...♙e6 was a reasonable alternative, forcing the white queen to commit herself before plunging in with the knight on d4.

11.♜xd4 (1:29:17) **exd4** (1:33:16)

12.♜e4 (1:26:27) **c6** (1:26:25)

Thus, Black has accomplished the mission of blocking the dangerous g2-bishop, acquiring equality. Magnus's next move showed that he had grasped the right idea as to which pieces he should keep on the board, but the execution of the plan was inaccurate.

13.♙b4?! (1:18:14)

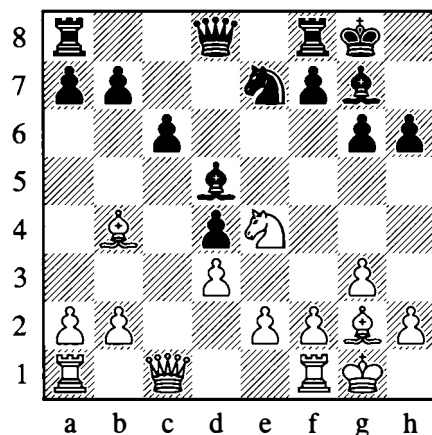
13.♖c1! ♜h7 14.♙b4 ♙g4 15.♙f3= would have led to balanced play; White of course understood that he had to exchange the

e7-knight before it reached d5, but his method of doing so allows the c8-bishop to reach d5 with gain of time.

13... **♙e6** (1:20:10)

14.♖c1 (1:17:13) **♙d5** (1:14:25)

Black definitely has the more pleasant position now. Magnus's next move is rather aimless, allowing Anand to consolidate his slight advantage.



15.a4?! (1:04:25)

White creates a weakness. Admittedly, he will soon get rid of it, but in doing so he invests more time and allows Black to prepare a smooth queenside pawn advance. Clearly, not one of the Norwegian's best days.

15... **b6!** (1:04:02)

16.♙xe7 (1:02:52) **♖xe7** (1:03:52)

17.a5 (1:02:49) **♝ab8** (0:54:56)

18.♝e1 (1:00:24) **♝fc8** (0:53:15)

19.axb6 (0:59:20) **axb6** (0:52:59)

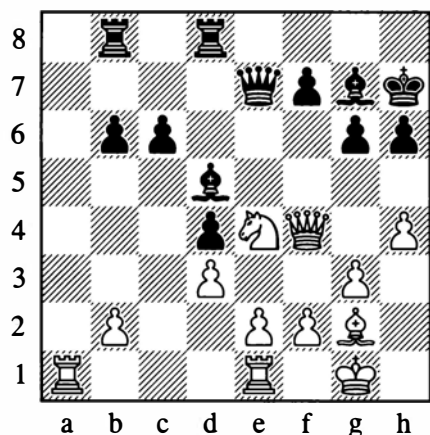
20.♖f4 (0:56:01) **♝d8** (0:46:50)

Black is playing simple chess, guarding all entrances to his position and preparing to slowly push his queenside pawn mass.

21.h4! (0:38:35)

A good move by Magnus, giving himself some breathing space on the kingside. Essentially, no great damage has been done yet and with careful play White should still be able to equalize.

21... ♔h7 (0:40:36)



Preparing to evict the white queen from her good position by ...♕e5.

22. ♖d2 (0:34:31)

An exchange of light-squared bishops is of course strategically desirable, but now the

white queen is destined to end up in a slightly awkward position.

I am sure that Magnus did consider the more human 22.h5!? and probably rejected it due to 22...g5 23.♟f5† ♔h8 24.g4 ♕e6 25.♟f3 ♟d7; his choice is not to be blamed, as White's position does indeed look a bit inferior after 26.♘g3 ♕xg4 27.♟xc6 ♟xc6 28.♕xc6 ♕e5 29.♖g2 ♖g7 30.♕f3 ♕e6 31.♕e4 ♖dc8 but on the other hand it is still within the drawing zone.

22... ♕e5 (0:34:38)

23. ♟g4 (0:34:29) h5 (0:32:07)

24. ♟h3 (0:34:19) ♕e6 (0:31:42)

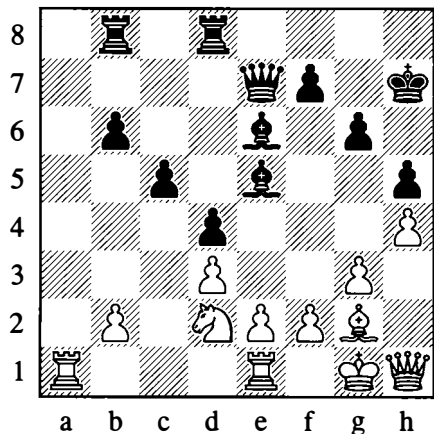
Black evades the exchange of his good bishop with gain of time, and I guess Vishy was very pleased with his position at this particular moment.

25. ♟h1 (0:34:10)

Thus, Queen Persephone has joined her husband Pluto on the throne. Strange how these 2800's play chess today, isn't it?

25... c5 (0:30:46)





26.♖e4? (0:31:24)

Impulsive and surrendering control of c4. I think the real trouble for Magnus starts around here, and I would go as far as to christen 26.♖e4? a losing mistake.

26.b3!

This would have been more sensible, bolstering the c4-square and preparing to double rooks on the a-file. In that case White would have kept his disadvantage to a minimum. A sample line goes:

26...b5 27.♖a6 ♕g7! 28.♖a1 c4!

Black should hurry with this move to exploit the presence of the rook on a1.

29.♖e4 ♖h8 30.bxc4 bxc4 31.♖g5! c3

32.♖xe6 fxe6 33.♕e4

White probably has enough counterplay against Black's king to compensate for his tremendous passed pawn. If, for example:

33...♖b2

33...c2 34.♖g2 is unclear.

33...♖f6 34.f4 ♖b2 35.♖f2 is also murky.

34.f4! ♖xe2 35.♕xg6 ♖e3 36.♖f2 ♖f6 37.♕e4

c2 38.♖a5! ♕h6 39.♖xh5 ♖f8 40.♖h3!! ♖xe4

41.dxe4 d3 42.♖g4 d2 43.e5 d1=♖ 44.♖xd1

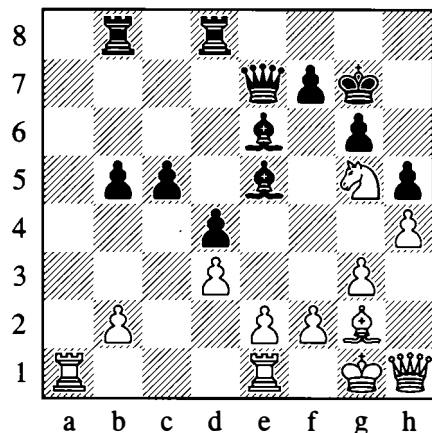
cxdl=♖ 45.♖xd1 ♖g6 46.♖g2 ♖g8 47.♖h3

And White holds.

26... ♖g7 (0:28:57)

27.♖g5 (0:28:33) b5! (0:24:38)

Not fearing ghosts; Black does not need his bishop pair anymore, all he needs is to get these queenside pawns going as quickly as possible. He is clearly better.



28.e3! (0:15:53)

With time pressure approaching, White tries to conjure up some counterplay, but this move should have objectively led to his demise. Having said that, it is difficult to suggest anything else:

28.♖xe6† ♖xe6 wouldn't have been much of an improvement as ...c4 is coming and White has no counterplay; Black is much better.

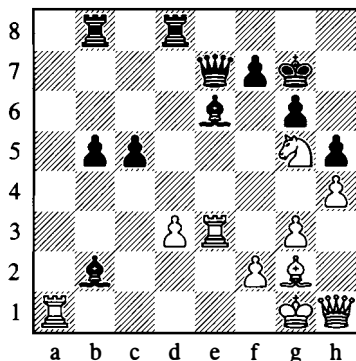
28.f4 is suggested by the computers, but after 28...♕f6 29.♖xe6† ♖xe6 30.♕e4 c4 31.♖f3 c3 the resulting position is depressing from the human point of view and almost certainly lost for White as well.

28... dxe3 (0:19:42)

29.♖xe3 (0:15:45) ♕d4? (0:19:32)

Vishy throws away the fruits of his hard work in one move. He should have called Magnus's bluff with the primitive:

29...♙xb2!



I can't see any way for White to justify his pawn sacrifice.

30.♖ae1 ♜b6 31.♙d5 ♙d4 32.♞xe6

32.♞e2 ♜f6 33.♙xe6 ♜xe6 34.♞g2 e5 should also lose in the long run.

32...♜xe6 33.♞xe6 ♜f8! 34.♞g2 ♙dd6 35.♞e2

The text is the only move.

35.♙f1 c4! is winning.

35.♙h2 ♞xe6 36.♙xe6 ♞xe6 37.♙xe6 ♜xf2 38.♜xf2 ♙xf2 39.♙g2 ♙e1 40.♙f3 ♙f6 is a lost opposite-coloured bishops ending for White because of his vulnerable pawns on g3 and h4, and the fact that the black king is in time to penetrate.

35...♞f6!

A tempting line was: 35...b4!? 36.♙e6 ♞xe6 37.♞xe6 ♞xe6 38.♙xe6 ♜e8! 39.♙c4! (If 39.♜e4? ♜b8! then the double threat of ...b3 and ...♜xg3 ♠ seems to guarantee victory for Black.) 39...♜e1 ♠ 40.♙h2 ♜xf2 41.♜xf2 ♙xf2 42.♙g2 ♙e1 43.♙f3 ♙f6 44.♙f4 ♙c3 45.♙f3 ♙e5 46.♙b3 ♙d6 47.♙f2 ♙e5 48.♙e3 ♙f8 But this does not seem to be winning after 49.d4 ♠ cxd4 ♠ 50.♙e2 ♙d6 51.♙c2 ♙f6 52.♙f3.

36.♖a2 ♜e7 37.♜e4 ♜xe4 38.♙xe4 ♞f7! 39.♙xf7 ♙xf7

Black has a very serious advantage in the resulting ending, which I am tempted to describe as practically winning.

30.♞e2 (0:13:51)

At this point I can imagine millions of fans of Magnus whispering: "Thank God he didn't take it!" As for the billion fans of Vishy, they must surely have been disappointed at the miss of such a colossal opportunity; you don't get those too often against the young Norwegian.

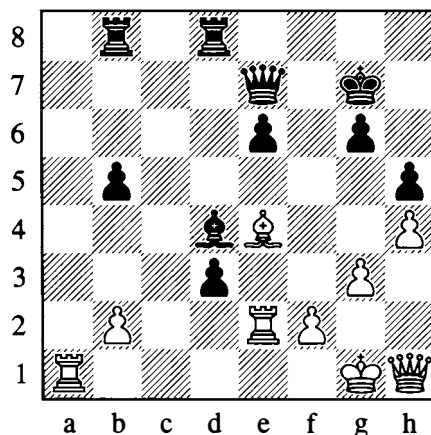
30... c4 (0:18:09)

31.♙xe6 ♠ (0:11:44) ♜xe6 (0:17:56)

32.♙e4 (0:06:42)

The rescue operation is in full swing now and Magnus makes sure he gets the job done well. His bishop and queen desperately need activation and that indeed becomes his priority in the next few moves.

32... cxd3 (0:16:04)



33.♞d2! (0:06:40)

This had to be visualized in advance.

A bad mistake would be 33.♙xd3? ♙xf2 ♠ 34.♞xf2 ♞xd3 and White is gone.

33... ♜b4 (0:12:33)

34.♞ad1 (0:06:33) ♙xb2? (0:09:29)

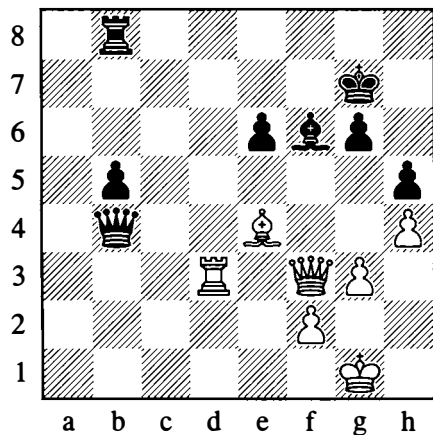
A strange mistake by Vishy.

34...♟f8! would have been a better try, preventing the immediate activation of the white queen. But White would have still been able to draw by: 35.♞h2 ♠xf2 36.♞xd3 ♞bc8 (36...♞xb2 37.♞1d2 ♞e5 38.♞g2 ♠c5 39.♞d7† ♞h6?! 40.♞c2! is all of a sudden better for White!) 37.♞g2 ♞c7 38.♞1d2 ♞cf7 39.♞h3! This is a very accurate string of moves, but I think Magnus would have found them all if he had been forced to. He is very good at consolidating his position when facing dangers of this type.

35.♞f3! (0:05:40)

White is essentially out of trouble now.

35... ♠f6 (0:06:38)
36.♞xd3 (0:03:22) ♞xd3 (0:06:27)
37.♞xd3 (0:03:10)

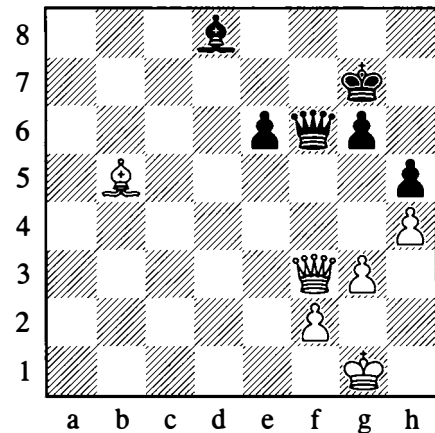


37... ♞d8?! (0:05:25)

Much more logical was 37...♠d4 38.♞e2 ♟f8 39.♟f3 ♞d6 when at least Black would have kept his extra pawn for a while. One gets the impression that Anand wanted to get rid of the game as quickly as possible, probably feeling some frustration about the turn of events.

38.♞xd8 (0:02:44) ♠xd8 (0:05:19)

39.♠d3 (0:01:56) ♞d4 (0:04:10)
40.♠xb5 (1:01:24) ♞f6 (1:03:57)



Anand offered a draw. The position is indeed a dead draw, but Magnus declined and kept playing for a while, probably thinking it is the best position he had in the whole game. If this is really what he thought, it is hard to blame him.

41.♞b7† (0:59:44) ♠e7 (1:03:37)
42.♞g2 (0:57:39) g5 (1:01:09)
43.hxg5 (0:57:11) ♞xg5 (1:01:01)
44.♠c4 (0:56:20) h4 (0:59:50)
45.♞c7 (0:55:54) hxg3 (0:59:31)
46.♞xg3 (0:55:44) e5 (0:59:20)
47.♞f3 (0:55:32) ♞xg3† (0:59:12)
48.fxg3 (0:55:26) ♠c5 (0:59:06)
49.♞e4 (0:55:08) ♠d4 (0:58:57)
50.♞f5 (0:55:01) ♠f2 (0:58:51)
51.♞xe5 (0:54:50) ♠xg3† (0:58:45)

1½–½

A great fight that must have bolstered Magnus's faith in his defensive powers. But as I mentioned in the introduction of this game, a cruel warning to both players at the same time...

In retrospect, both players have reason to be unhappy after this game. For Magnus, the second consecutive opening failure with White

must surely be a cause for concern; what have he and his team been working on for all these months? And his play in the early middlegame was nothing to cheer about either; as he himself admitted later, he missed several little things that eventually landed him in some trouble. His insecure play may well have been the result of nervous tension, and one does get the impression that he really got going once the battle heated up; during the press conference he doesn't hesitate to admit as much.

For Anand, the course of the game may have been even more disappointing: he had one of those rare chances to put pressure on, or even possibly beat, Magnus, and he squandered it with hesitant play. The speed with which he dismissed the early capture of the offered pawn seemed to betray insecurity, and overall one does get the impression that he was lacking a clear head at the critical moments. His expressed belief that White always had sufficient counterplay and that his winning chances never were realistic seemed to be based more on a lack of self-confidence than a sober assessment of the situation – and that's never a good sign.

As the players leave the press conference and the crowd disperses, anticipation builds up for the fourth game. The match is now truly on and it will be interesting to see which of the players has been more affected by the events of the third game.



Game Four



A Battle of Giants

With the match finally heating up, after a couple of quick and uneventful draws, public interest grows even higher. The crowds become more varied in terms of age, playing strength and ethnicity. Whereas in the first days the playing hall was mostly filled with officials, dignitaries and celebrities (the fact that Games 1 and 2 took place over the weekend may have played a role in this), one can now see lots of European tourists and large groups of schoolchildren flocking to watch the drama unfold. The publicity afforded to the match draws a lot of local chess fans as well, although the admission price – a standard one-day ticket costs 2,000 rupees, which equates to roughly twenty British pounds or thirty-two US dollars – is hardly inconsequential in relation to the average Indian wage.

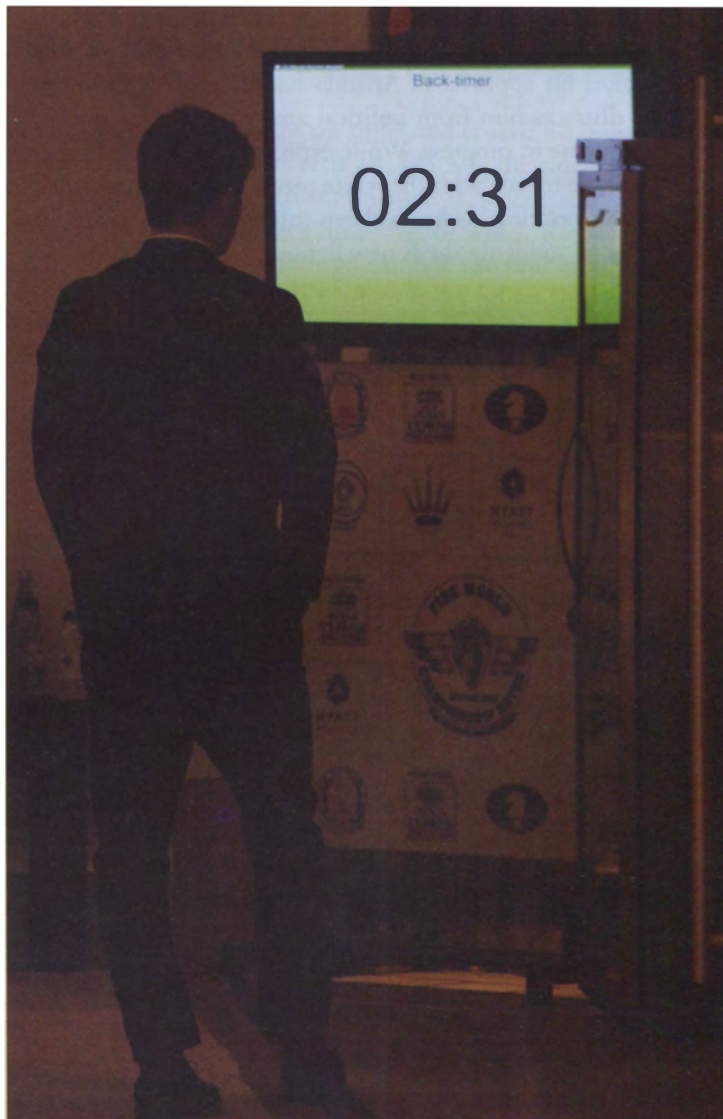
The enormous interest aroused in the Indian public is evidenced by the impressive viewing figures of the DD Sports channel, sometimes exceeding 80 million for a single game. In Norway things are not much different: there is live television coverage, and regular match reports in virtually all mainstream media outlets. With a chess Olympiad approaching next summer in the city of Tromsø, chess is clearly on the rise in this Nordic country, and the popularity of Magnus Carlsen surpasses seemingly unconquerable heights.

Security measures are in full swing at the hotel, with all spectators subjected to detailed examination of their tickets and paperwork before passing through metal detectors on the way to the playing arena. It's not entirely clear if this hardware works as it is supposed to, this impression being further reinforced by the security personnel asking about mobile phones even after the visitors have passed the detectors. During the third game a phone does indeed ring inside the playing hall, leaving both its owner and the organizers in a state of embarrassment. Thanks to the soundproof glass though, the players are not disturbed by this incident; nor do they notice the occasionally loud children that have come to admire their idols. True, the supervisors are always at hand to try and silence the eager Indian youth and, after all, it is encouraging to see the next generation being introduced to the highest level of chess competition from up close. One only needs to recall accounts of similar experiences by past world champions to understand the significance of such moments. Still, the children's escorts can well be considered to be violating the official Laws of Chess, which clearly state that it is forbidden to "introduce a source of noise to the playing hall."

Amidst all this attention, the players commence the fourth game of the match. Anand again opens with 1.e4, undoubtedly now ready to create problems against the Caro-Kann, but Carlsen switches to his usual first move 1...e5 and gives the Berlin an outing, essentially making it clear that 1...c6 was never intended to be his main opening weapon with Black in the match. One wonders if, on a more demanding occasion, Magnus will, as Alexei Shirov once put it, "find the strength to push that pawn one square further". With the Berlin being a mainstay of the Norwegian's repertoire, along with the Breyer, it cannot possibly have come as a surprise to Anand, but it quickly becomes apparent that he has been caught somewhat off guard; perhaps he had assumed that Magnus would refrain from employing his usual openings in Chennai. The Indian opts for a recent theoretical twist, justifying his reputation as "always the second top player to employ an interesting new idea." Carlsen replies solidly, following in the footsteps of his good friend Jon Ludvig Hammer, who had used the same set-up several times in the recent past. Berlin lovers all around the world stay glued to their screens, waiting to see what Anand has up his sleeve.

However, they are left empty-handed. In an uncharacteristic show of unpreparedness, Anand just makes a few relatively obvious but harmless moves, without any clear purpose, followed by an unsuccessful knight manoeuvre. Magnus quickly obtains a comfortable position, without doing anything out of the ordinary. The proceedings leave everyone perplexed; what was Anand doing all these months? How can he come unprepared against one of his opponent's main defences, and how can he possibly have not paid attention to games of his rival's good friend, who happens to be a strong Norwegian grandmaster himself? True, the Berlin is not exactly the first opening one would associate with a person bearing Jon Ludvig's last name, but then again, he has played it so many times, and Carlsen made no secret of the fact that his friend was an important member of his team. It is perhaps these considerations that made Anand consider the Berlin unlikely to occur – being such an obvious target for preparation, it may have seemed more natural for Magnus to avoid it. If that was indeed the case – later match games may provide more clues about this – the realization must surely have come as a blow to Anand, in both the sporting and psychological senses.

The upshot of all this is that Anand has landed in a slightly inferior position and must already play carefully. With his confidence boosted by the favourable course of the early middlegame, Magnus embarks on a Bobby Fischer moment, snatching a pawn on a2 and clearly displaying his intention to play for a win. Memories of Game 1 in 1972 are immediately evoked in the minds of the spectators. This is a much simpler case, as the bishop is not even remotely in danger of getting trapped. Nevertheless, Anand is able to gain a lot of time chasing it around; the extrication process also involves an opening of the game, with Vishy's centralized pieces eager to take advantage. Most viewers are mesmerized by the computer engines, which show confidence in Black's extra pawn and are not easily intimidated, but to a human eye Anand's activity appears quite threatening.



An exciting battle is in prospect. One can safely assume that Anand noticed that the pawn could be captured, but it is not clear if his decision was made after a deep evaluation of the ensuing counterplay, or if he simply underestimated the possibility and was forced to improvise. Magnus makes his next few moves with ease and confidence, and no immediate danger is apparent. However, a critical moment soon arrives, when the best way forward for Black is not obvious at all. Every plausible move seems to have some drawback, threats begin to appear and the untangling of the black pieces, particularly the rooks, looks like a puzzle that would challenge even the most experienced of solvers. Although his position remains fully viable, Carlsen must play with great care to avoid further problems, and one wonders whether he might be regretting his audacious pawn grab.

It turns out that he doesn't, for he continues in ambitious style, never once submitting to the allure of a safer but technically inferior option. Anand painstakingly seeks the most accurate way of pursuing his initiative, but his task is complicated by the sheer range of possibilities, many of which appear to be of roughly equal merit. Commentators argue for and against each of his moves, pointing out various enticing alternatives, and even the most exact move order of implementing Vishy's chosen plan is hard to pinpoint. Gary Kasparov, still present in Chennai, voices his approval of Anand's handling of the middlegame. The battle proves so exciting that it distracts him from political and other duties, and he stays in the lobby, fervently analysing the game in progress. While expressing respect for Carlsen's handling of the position, he doesn't hesitate to side with the white pieces and feels very much at home with the dynamic possibilities in his position, as he has been throughout his career. That is, until a cold shower in the form of 31...g6 suddenly sheds new light on the situation.





The game's most critical position has arisen. Both players are low on time, and crucial decisions must be made. A sober assessment of the position reveals that, after all, Black is the side with all the chances. Anand foregoes a path that seemed promising to commentators, having spotted a tricky and difficult tactical idea; when he makes his exquisite 35th move, of which Kasparov also speaks highly, the excitement reaches boiling point. The players go through the time-trouble phase without budging. Anand forces some simplifications, while Carlsen hides his endangered king on the square he has far-sightedly created several moves prior.

With forty moves completed, both players leave the board to relax and throw some water on their faces. Upon their return to the board, the contours of the impending four-rook ending with an extra pawn for Carlsen are already visible. White's active rooks and advanced pawn on e6 keep his drawing chances alive, and after a couple of accurate moves by Anand it appears that the game will be over soon.

Carlsen is of a different opinion. Instead of resigning himself to the seemingly inevitable, he remains focussed and keeps looking for any chances that might be there, eventually unearthing some hidden resources to continue the fight. Anand, who by this point must have been relaxed and confident of saving the game, is suddenly forced to start calculating again, knowing full well that, at this late stage of the game, one mistake may well cost him dearly. He buckles up and immerses himself in the position, managing to find all the right moves and avert disaster. A couple of times it appears to the viewers that the draw is assured, but time and again Carlsen keeps finding ways to pose further problems. At every turn though, Anand responds accurately. The world champion even finds himself in time pressure again, something extremely unusual for him, but he passes the sixty-move mark without hitch. The draw is now inevitable, and Magnus finally admits so; he allows the final simplification and the ceasefire is agreed. The players start discussing a few lines while still seated at the board, pointing at squares with their fingers. The audience remains in the hall, glued to the spectacle in a deathly silence – a magical moment.

Viswanathan Anand – Magnus Carlsen

Game 4, 13th November 2013

For the first time in the match the Challenger had the World Champion on the ropes, in a titanic tussle that kept chess fans stuck for many hours in front of their computers, all over the world. Magnus was Black, but that didn't prevent him from applying strong pressure after capturing an apparently poisoned pawn on a2 with his bishop. That brought back memories from the first game of the legendary match between Spassky and Fischer, contested in 1972 in Reykjavik, where the American lost a famous endgame after capturing a pawn on h2. Here the situation was different, though, and Magnus's calculating powers did not betray him. A few moves later his bishop emerged from the White camp triumphantly, leaving Anand fishing in muddy waters to find some form of compensation. Many predicted Carlsen's first win but the World Champion rose to the occasion, producing a tremendous defensive effort that yielded him a draw. A very complete and rich game in all respects, that was highly praised by ex-world champion Garry Kasparov and will surely be remembered for a long time by all those who had the chance to witness the live action.

1.e4 (1:59:56)	e5 (1:59:55)
2.♘f3 (1:59:49)	♗c6 (1:59:52)
3.♗b5 (1:59:42)	♗f6 (1:59:46)

The Berlin Defence is remarkably solid and abounds in positional manoeuvres. Carlsen's decision to use it in his first World Championship match displays a certain maturity and fully complies with his style.

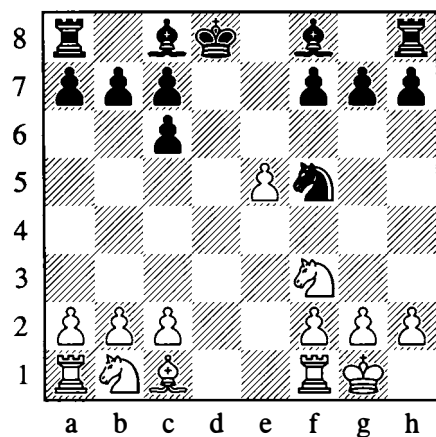
4.0-0 (1:59:25)

No 4.d3 today. Vishy is mostly a man of principle in his opening choices (emergency

situations excluded) and decides to test his young challenger in the most topical battleground, the so-called Berlin Endgame. As Kasparov has remarked, this is actually not an ending but rather a queenless middlegame.

4...	♗xc4 (1:59:41)
5.d4 (1:59:18)	♗d6 (1:59:37)
6.♗xc6 (1:59:12)	dx c6 (1:59:30)
7.dxc5 (1:59:06)	♗f5 (1:59:22)
8.♖xd8† (1:58:59)	♗xd8 (1:59:17)

This position has been the subject of numerous games, books and theoretical articles, not to mention heated discussions. The general feeling is that Black has a full share of the chances, and the imbalanced structure allows him to play for a win with some sort of restrained ambition. Normally such a pawn structure favours White, but the peculiarity of the present position is that his e-pawn stands on e5 rather than on e4, which gives Black additional chances to neutralize the first player's kingside pawn majority.



9.h3 (1:58:52)	♗d7 (1:59:10)

A typical idea; the Black monarch will seek safety behind his queenside pawn mass. Normally the bishop's development is preceded by ...h6 to guard against invasions on g5, but

recent games indicate that Black might be able to do without this move.

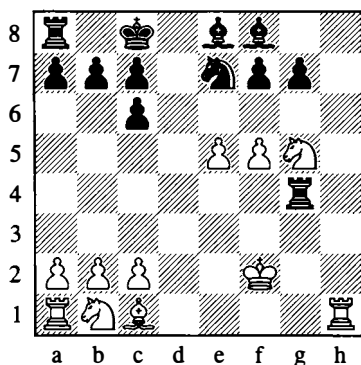
10.♞d1 (1:58:41)

White forces his opponent to think immediately about the defence of the f7-pawn.

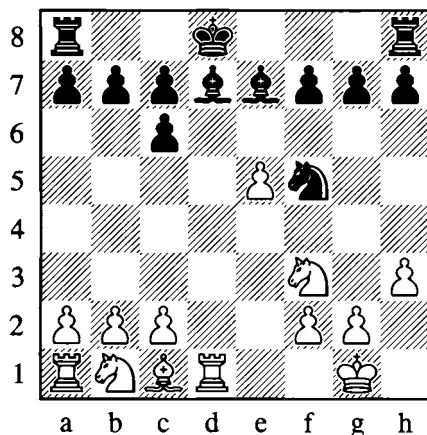
After 10.♞c3 b6 11.a4 a5 12.♙f4 h6 13.g4 ♞e7 14.♞d4 c5 15.♞db5 ♙e6 16.♙g3 ♜c8 17.♞ad1 a typically unclear position arose in Kotronias – Harikrishna, Patras 2013, which I eventually lost. White has chances to expand on the kingside by pushing the f-pawn or may, according to circumstance, try to exchange the strong bishop e6 by means of ♞e2-f4. Black has his trumps as well: a safe king and a slightly weakened white queenside that offers him long-term prospects for counterplay.

10... ♙e7 (1:58:56)

The immediate 10...♜c8 is also possible. Here is a recent remarkable game, showing the depths opening preparation can reach nowadays: 11.g4 ♞e7 12.♞g5 ♙e8 13.f4 h5 14.f5 hxg4 15.hxg4 ♞h4 16.♞f2 ♞xg4 17.♞h1



17...♞xf5! 18.♞h8 ♙c5† 19.♞f3 ♞g1! 20.♞xe8† ♞d7 21.♞xa8 ♞d4† 22.♞e4 ♞xc1 23.b4 ♙b6 24.c4 c5! 25.a3 ♞e1† 26.♞d3 ♞d1† 27.♞c3 ♞c1† 28.♞d3 ♞d1† 29.♞c3 ♞c1† 30.♞d3 ½–½ Caruana – Kramnik, Moscow 2013. Amazing stuff!



11.♞c3 (1:54:20) ♜c8 (1:58:05)

12.♙g5 (1:52:22)

Exchanging dark-squared bishops has pros and cons. White deprives his opponent of the powerful bishop pair, but at the same time allows him to relieve his position from its congestion.

12... h6 (1:56:16)

13.♙xe7 (1:51:47) ♞xe7 (1:56:13)

14.♞d2 (1:38:01)

Doubling rooks on the d-file is a natural plan, but the timing of it is a matter for debate.

14.a4!?

This interesting idea has been tested by the Swedish GM Emanuel Berg.

14...a5!

Black needs to play this, to establish some queenside space and fix a4 as a potential weakness.

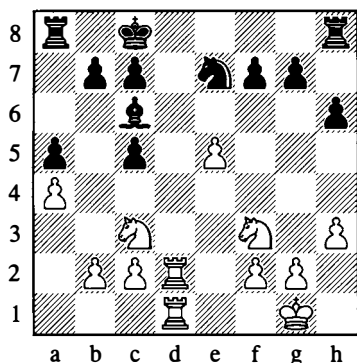
15.♞d2

This could be White's only try for an advantage. Compared with the main game, White can mobilize his pieces without leaving a pawn hanging on a2.

15...c5 16.♞ad1 ♙c6

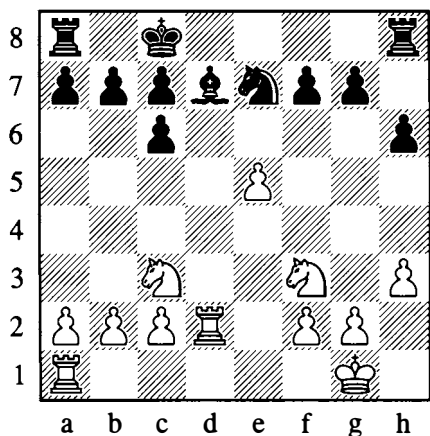
16...♙e6! 17.♞e4 b6 looks better. A possible continuation is 18.♞g3 ♞b7

19.♖h5 ♜hg8 20.g4 ♘g6 21.♙h2 ♜ae8
22.♙g3 ♙c8! 23.♞e1 ♘f8!? and the position
remains unclear. Black's last move prepared a
regrouping with ...♙b8, ...♙b7 and ...♖e6.



17.e6! fxe6 18.♖e5 ♜e8 19.♘b5 ♙xb5 20.axb5
♘d5 21.c4 ♘b6 22.h4!

White had achieved a promising initiative
in Berg – Hammer, Greece 2012 as Black's
pieces are uncoordinated and his kingside
slightly vulnerable to the manoeuvre ♜d3-f3.
Jon Ludvig Hammer is Norway's number-two
player and part of the Carlsen team, so Magnus
must have been fully aware of this game and
accompanying improvements for Black.

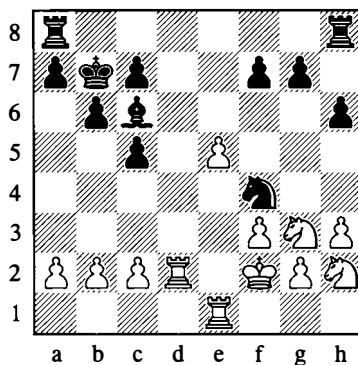


14...

c5 (1:54:32)

15.♞ad1 (1:35:41)

Jakovenko, an expert on the Berlin with both
colours: 15.♖e4!? b6 16.♘g3 ♙c6 17.♘h2
♘g6 18.♞e1 ♘f4 19.f3 ♙b7 20.♙f2



20...♞ad8?! (An improvement is 20...♞ae8!
when the engines prefer Black's position, if
only slightly.) 21.♞xd8 ♞xd8 22.♘hf1 g6
23.♖e2 ♖e6 24.♖e3 ♙b5 25.♖c3 ♞d2†
26.♙g3 ♙c6 27.♞d1 ♞d4 28.♙f2 ♙c8 29.♖e2
♞xd1 30.♖xd1 White slowly took over in
Jakovenko – Almasi, Khanty-Mansiysk 2007.
Trading both sets of rooks is a scenario Black
would generally like to avoid, as it renders his
position static and gives White good chances to
exploit his kingside pawn majority. There is no
doubt in my mind that Magnus knows which
pieces to trade and which ones to preserve in
these structures, so I don't believe this situation
would have been repeated had Vishy chosen
Jakovenko's move.

15...

♙c6! (1:53:05)

Magnus opts for solidity, preferring the less
ambitious placement of the bishop to e6 in
order to prevent troublesome e5-e6 ideas, as
occurred in the Berg – Hammer game noted
above.

16.♖e1 (1:33:57)

Paving the way for the f-pawn and planning
♘d3-f4. However, the game continuation
demonstrates that Black is at least equal.

It is worth noting the treatment of Dmitri

16. ♖e2

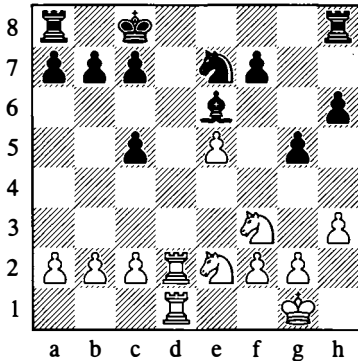
This was arguably a better try, although I see no advantage for White here either.

16...g5!?

Probably best; this is a typical method of cramping White's kingside activity in the Berlin.

The only variation where Black risks becoming significantly worse is 16...♙xa2? 17.b3 c4 18.♘fd4 when White obtains a dangerous initiative.

16...b6 17.♘f4 ♙xa2 18.♞d7 ♘c6 19.b3 c4 20.♞xf7 cxb3 21.♞dd7 b2 22.♞xc7+ ♖b8 (White is no worse after 22...♙d8 23.♞fd7+ ♖e8 24.♘d2) 23.♞b7+ ♖c8= leads to a draw by perpetual check.



17.g4!?

Not the only move, but a principled try.

17...b6 18.a3 ♘g6 19.♙g2 ♖b7 20.♙g3 ♞ae8 20...♞af8 21.♘c3 f5 22.exf6 ♞xf6 23.♞d8 is unclear.

21.♘c3 ♙c8 22.♞e1 ♞e6 23.♘d5 ♞d8 24.♞e3 ♖b8 25.b3 ♙b7 26.c4

The position remains balanced. As long as Black continues to prevent the g5-pawn being undermined by h3-h4, he runs no risk of falling at a disadvantage.

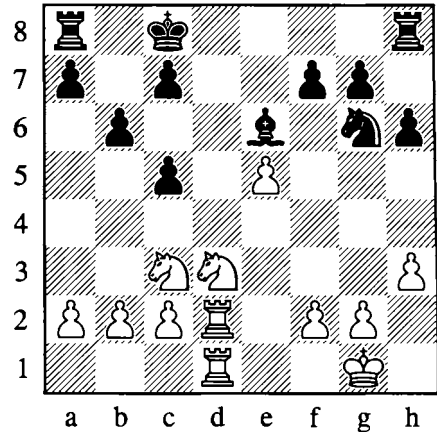
16... ♘g6 (1:49:31)

Black could have also considered 16...b6! intending: 17.f4! (17.♖e2 g5! and 17.♘d3 g5! both favour Black slightly.) 17...g5!

18.fxg5 hxg5 19.♘f3 g4 20.hxg4 ♙xg4 21.♞f1 ♞h5 22.♖e4 ♙xf3 23.♞xf3 ♞xe5 24.♘g3 f5 25.♞df2 ♖b7 26.♘xf5 ♘d5 With full equality.

16...g5! 17.f4 b6 transposes to the above line.

17.♘d3 (1:28:48) b6 (1:49:00)



18.♖e2?! (1:26:27)

This move plunges the game into a chaotic position where Black enjoys the better chances. It is the first real sign of weakness from Anand, and I am sure Magnus must have rejoiced at the idea that his opponent was, after all, not invincible in the opening stage. Vishy must have seen the possibility of Black taking on a2, but evidently misvalued the resulting situation.

In the champion's defence, it must be stated that the correct move was hard to find.

18.f4!

A stunning recommendation by the computers, based on the following point.

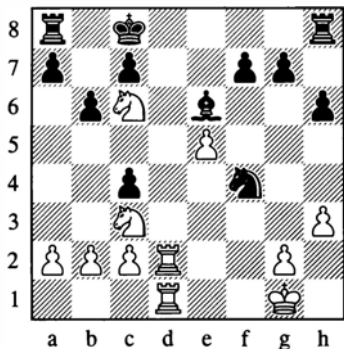
18...c4

Winning the f-pawn is the critical test, but not the only playable continuation.

18...♖b7! 19.b3 c4 20.bxc4 ♙xc4 21.g3 ♘e7 22.a3 ♙e6 23.g4 ♘c6 24.♖e4 is incredibly double-edged.

19.♖b4 ♜xf4 20.♜c6

Black has no easy way to hide his king; whenever it goes to b7, it will be harassed by an annoying check on d8.



20...♞e8

20...♜b7 21.♜d8† ♜c8 allows 22.♜c6 with a draw if White wants it.

21.a4 a5 22.♞d4 ♜d3!?

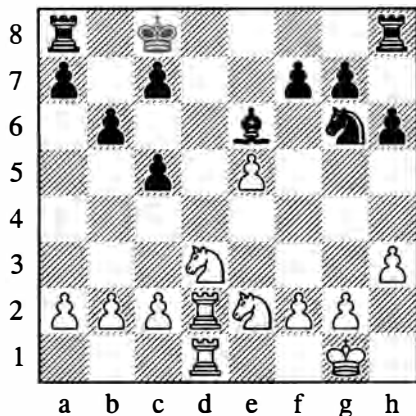
22...♜b7 23.♜d8† ♜a6 24.♜xe6 ♜xe6 25.♞d7 is at least equal for White.

23.cxd3 ♜b7 24.dxc4 ♜xc6

White's control of the d-file makes up for his positional disadvantages. The continuation might be:

25.♜f2 ♜b7 26.g4 ♞e7 27.♜g3 ♞ae8 28.♞f1

White remains active and I don't see a way for Black to exploit his structural superiority.



18...

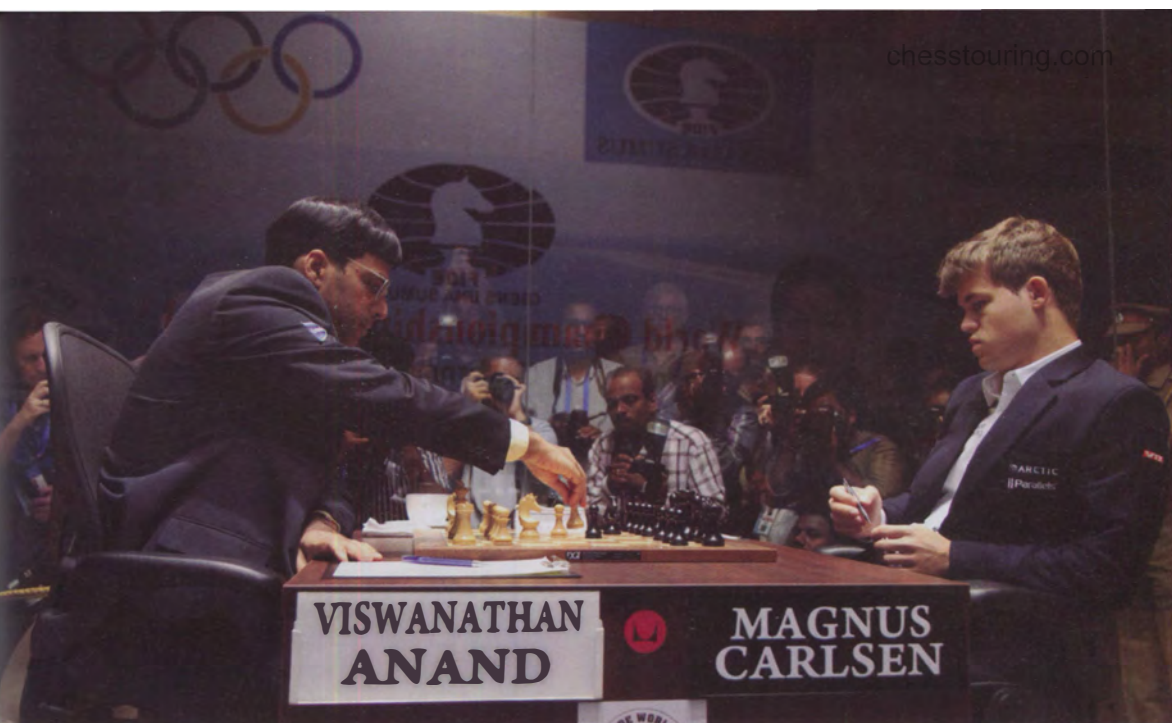
♞xa2! (1:36:25)

Magnus thought for a while before making this committal but correct decision. The bishop cannot be trapped and, while the position will become highly dynamic, Black should remain in control.

19.b3 (1:21:19)

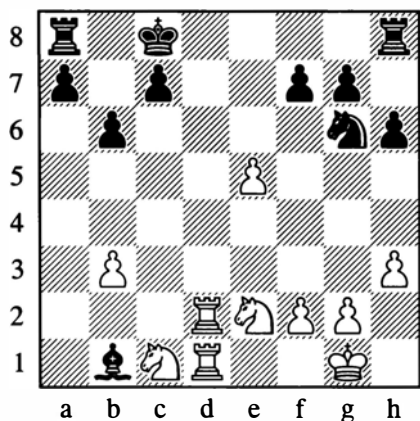
c4 (1:35:43)





20. $\text{d}1$ (1:20:07) $\text{c}3$ (1:35:18)
 21. $\text{c}3$ (1:20:00) $\text{b}1!$ (1:34:55)

The bishop sneaks its way back to safety by utilizing White's first rank. Now Vishy will be hard pressed to prove compensation, as Black's material advantage on the queenside might easily prove overwhelming.

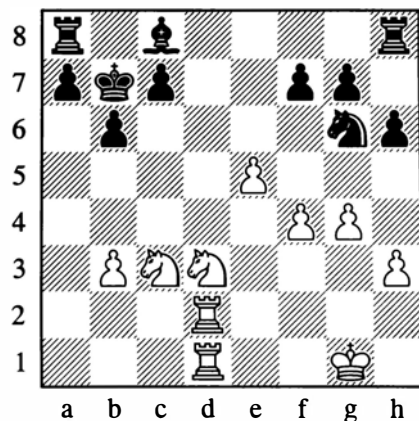


22. $\text{f}4!$ (1:18:08)

The only way is forwards!

22... $\text{b}7$ (1:28:02)
 23. $\text{d}3$ (1:13:08) $\text{f}5$ (1:27:55)
 24. $\text{g}4$ (1:12:49) $\text{c}8$ (1:26:48)
 25. $\text{d}3$ (1:12:09)

To endure the first wave of attack Black had to pull his bishop back to its original square, but that was not altogether a bad thing. After White's last, however, Black is threatened with suffocation by means of $\text{f}4$ - $\text{f}5$, so he needs to take active countermeasures.

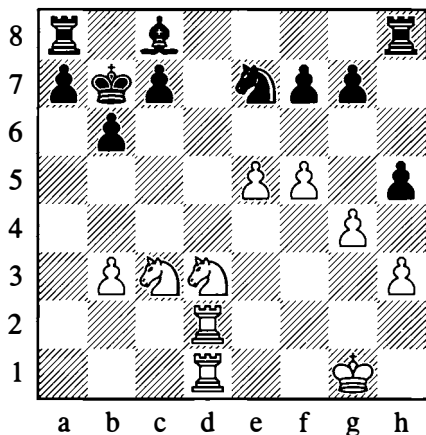


25... $\text{h}5!$ (1:18:49)

Undermining White's pawn chain and, more importantly, allowing the hitherto inactive rook on h8 to join the play.

26.f5 (1:07:20)

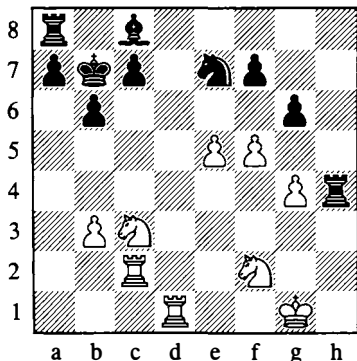
♟e7 (1:18:41)



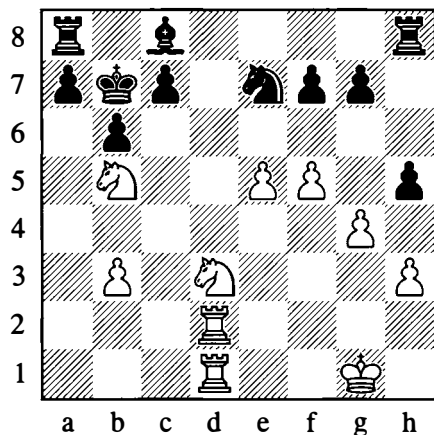
27.♞b5? (0:55:48)

It is hard to criticize someone when his position is teetering on the brink of being lost as opposed to merely worse, but this knight sally is objectively a mistake.

27.♞c2!! would have been the subtle choice, reserving the possibility of a knight jump for a more appropriate moment. The critical continuation is: 27...hgx4 28.hgx4 ♜h4 29.♞f2 g6



33.♞ce4 ♜f8 34.♞g5 leaves White with something approaching full compensation for the two-pawn deficit.) 33.♞xd5 exd5 34.♞e2! ♜f8 35.♞e7 ♟c6 36.♞c1† ♟d6 37.♞cxc7 White is close to drawing.



27...

hgx4?! (0:54:48)

A temporary loss of concentration from Magnus?

27...a6! 28.♞d4 hxg4 29.hgx4 a5 would have been simple and strong. I think Black's position is close to winning here.

28.hgx4?! (0:54:07)

It would seem tempting to call this an automatic recapture, but a glance at the clock times indicates that Vishy invested close to two minutes on this decision.

28.♞c1!

This dynamic move would have been best. It would be interesting to know how much of the following line Anand calculated before rejecting it.

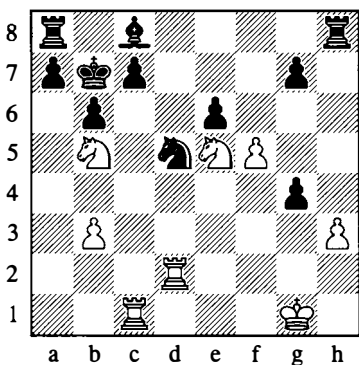
28...♞d5 29.e6! fxe6

29...a6 30.♞e5 axb5 31.♞xf7 ♜xh3 enables White to force a draw with 33.♞d8†.

30.♞e5

30.e6! fxe6 31.f6! ♞d5 32.f7 ♜h8 (32...♞d7

Threatening the brilliant Exc7! . Black's best response is:



29. Qf2 (0:52:21)

Qc6 (0:43:28)

30. Exc2 (0:45:43)

a5 (0:36:00)

Creating the threat of ...a4, freeing the other rook; the challenger certainly knows how to use his rook's pawns!

31. Exc4 (0:34:29)

A good multi-purpose move by Vishy, stopping ...a4 and supporting the g4-pawn.

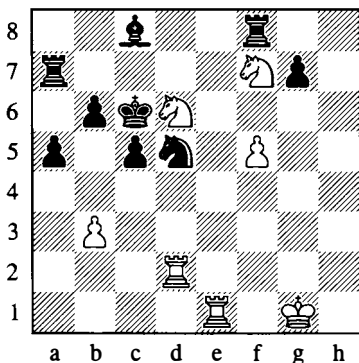
31...

g6! (0:26:53)

30...a5! 31.hxg4 c5!

This way Black keeps some advantage.

32. Qf7 Exf8! 33. Exe1! exf5 34. Qbd6+ Qc6 35. gxf5 Exa7!



36. Qxc8 Exaf7 37. Exe6+ Qc7 38. Qd6 Exf5 39. Qxf5 Exf5 40. Exg6 Qf4 41. Exg7+ Qc6 42. Exg3

White's defensive task remains unpleasant, but objectively he should be able to hold a draw.

28...

Exh4 (0:50:31)

Forcing the knight back.

Slightly more accurate was 28...a6! 29. Qd4 a5, transposing to the note to Black's 27th move above.

32. Exdc1 (0:17:55)

Qd7 (0:26:38)

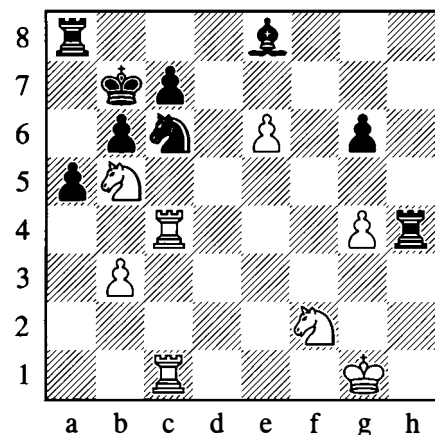
33. e6 (0:15:48)

fxe6 (0:26:32)

34. fxe6 (0:15:41)

Qe8 (0:26:25)

These moves were more or less expected, but what now?



35. Qe4!! (0:09:30)

Even the computer takes some time to spot this brilliant move. White gives up a second

pawn in order to activate his remaining pieces and close in on the black king.

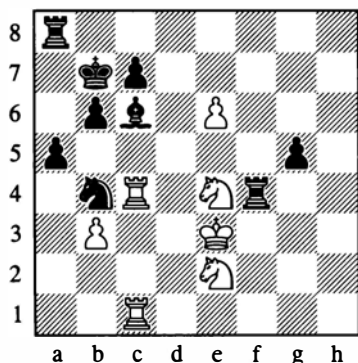
35... $\text{Bxg4}\dagger$ (0:24:07)

Black has nothing better, but now White gains valuable time to enliven his counterplay.

36. Qf2 (0:09:06) $\text{Bf4}\dagger$ (0:20:34)

37. Qe3 (0:08:22) Bf8 (0:14:59)

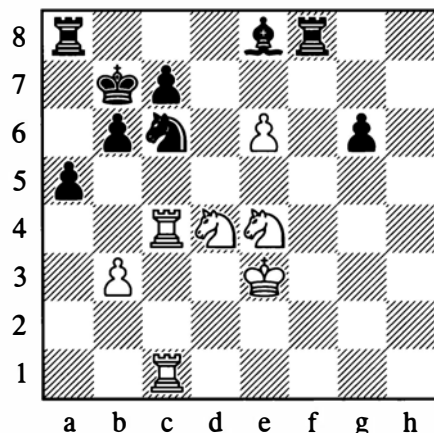
37...g5! was the last chance for Magnus to preserve serious winning chances. The critical continuation is: 38. Qd4 Qb4! 39. Qe2! Qc6!



40. Qxf4 $\text{gxf4}\dagger$ 41. Qxf4 $\text{Qd3}\dagger$ 42. Qf5! Qxc1 (42... $\text{Bf8}\dagger?$ 43. Qf6 leaves Black fighting for a draw.) 43. Bxc1 a4! 44. b4 a3 45. Qc3 a2 46. Ba1 Ba3 47. Qxa2 Qa4 48. e7 Qc8 White should be able to draw, but his position remains tricky.

38. Qd4! (0:06:15)

Now the draw is close.



38... Qxd4 (0:12:35)

39. $\text{Bxc7}\dagger$ (0:05:19) Qa6 (0:12:33)



40.♔xd4 (1:05:07) ♖d8† (1:12:28)

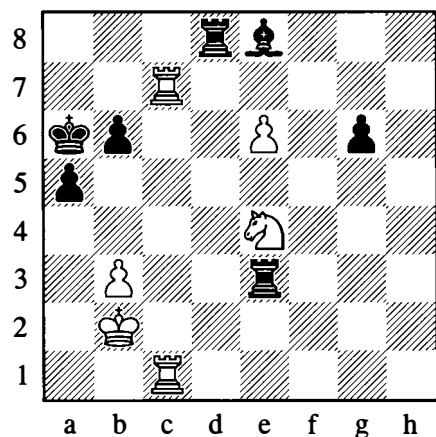
41.♕c3 (0:55:06)

Choosing the safe way, even if it means staying a pawn down.

Understandably, Vishy didn't want to tempt fate anymore by 41.♕e3 ♗b5 but it seems that 42.♖f7! ♖h8 43.♘f6= is something he should hardly fear. In any case, the move played draws easily.

41... ♖f3† (1:02:44)

42.♕b2 (0:54:34) ♖e3 (0:59:27)



43.♖c8! (0:48:12)

The last difficult move, forcing a trade of the minor pieces, thus securing the draw. The next few moves see Magnus shuffle his rooks around a bit before he finally acquiesces to the inevitable disappearance of the kingside pawns.

43... ♖dd3 (0:55:45)

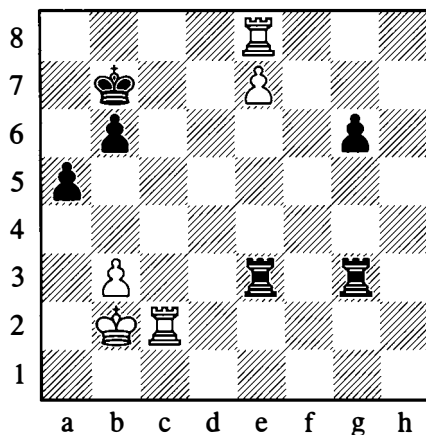
44.♖a8† (0:30:06) ♕b7 (0:55:39)

45.♖xe8 (0:28:54) ♖xe4 (0:54:26)

46.♞7 (0:27:11) ♖g3 (0:43:31)

47.♖c3 (0:21:27) ♖e2† (0:42:22)

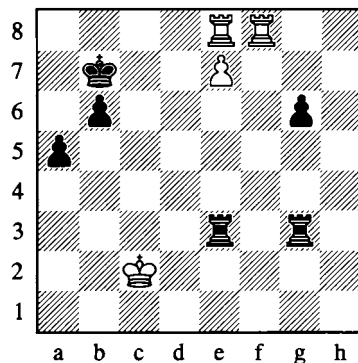
48.♖c2 (0:21:20) ♖ee3 (0:36:42)



49.♕a2 (0:21:08)

This looks like an automatic choice, and indeed Anand played it almost instantly.

There was actually a more attractive way of securing the draw: 49.♖f2! ♖xb3† 50.♕c2 ♖be3 51.♖ff8 and White suddenly threatens to check the black king and queen his e-pawn. Black has nothing better than forcing a draw as follows:



51...♖g2† 52.♕d1 ♖ge2! 53.♖b8† ♕a6 54.e8=♖ ♖e1†= The game ends in a curious perpetual.

49... ♖g5 (0:34:03)

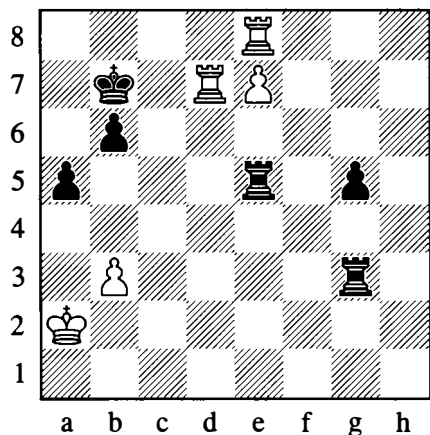
50.♖d2 (0:19:29) ♖e5 (0:30:08)

50...♖g1 cannot harm White either in view

of 51.♠d7† ♖c6 52.♠d2 ♠ge1 53.♠c8† ♖b7 54.♠g8, reaching a similar position to that of the game.

51.♠d7† (0:08:27)

Another long think in a relatively simple position. Presumably, after such a long and difficult defensive effort, Vishy was being ultra-cautious.



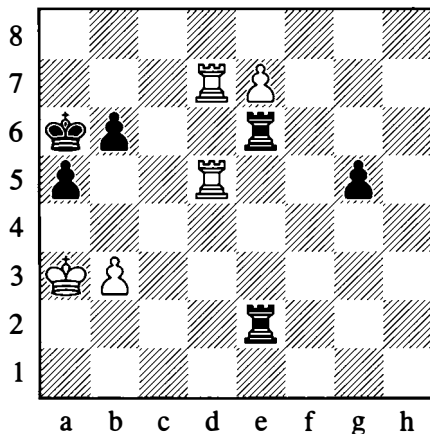
51... ♖c6 (0:30:02)
52.♠ed8 (0:06:29) ♠ge3 (0:26:29)
53.♠d6† (0:05:18) ♖b7 (0:22:08)

53...♖c5 is most simply met by 54.e8=♚ ♠xe8 55.♠d5† ♖b4 56.♠d4† ♖b5 57.♠d5† ♖c6 58.♠xe8 ♠xe8 59.♠xg5 and again the draw is trivial.

54.♠d7† (0:03:51) ♖a6 (0:21:55)
55.♠d5 (0:03:42)

It looks as though a handshake must be imminent, but Carlsen has still not exhausted his winning tries.

55... ♠e2† (0:18:08)
56.♖a3 (0:03:33) ♠e6! (0:17:31)



Setting a final trap.

57.♠d8! (0:01:31)

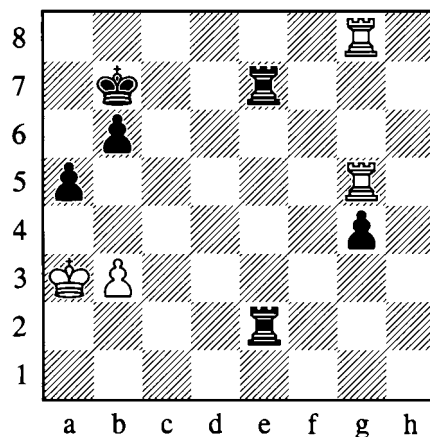
Carlsen's idea was 57.♠xg5?? b5 when White's king is caught.

57... g4 (0:10:56)
58.♠g5 (0:01:03) ♠xe7 (0:10:22)
59.♠a8†! (0:00:39)

This check was not strictly forced, but driving the black king back adds an extra layer of safety.

59... ♖b7 (0:10:13)
60.♠ag8 (0:16:05)

With Black's last kingside pawn about to fall, the draw is in sight. Magnus tries a final roll of the dice, but it leads nowhere.



60... a4 (0:22:33)
 61.♖xg4 (0:16:10) axb3 (0:22:56)
 62.♜8g7 (0:16:34) ♔a6 (0:23:19)
 63.♜xe7 (0:16:59) ♜xe7 (0:23:45)
 64.♔xb3 (0:17:25)
 ½–½

In spite of its imperfections, a brilliant game, doing credit to both players.

The press conference is a revealing one. Anand admits his bad handling of the opening and the lack of purpose behind his further play, which makes one wonder if the 'Spassky pawn' on a2 could even have been blundered. It is telling that he had regarded his position after that incident to be nearly hopeless in the long run. For the first time in this match, his assumed fear of Carlsen is expressed in words; not directly, but nonetheless clearly. My mind immediately switches to Vladimir Kramnik, who had opined that Vishy's main disadvantage in the match would be his extreme respect for Carlsen. I suppose that, upon viewing this press conference, the former champion may well feel that his contemporary has been unable to overcome this psychological hurdle.

As for Magnus, he gives the exact opposite impression. He had been confident in his position; perhaps too much so, as he underestimated White's counterplay and was surprised at the resources Anand kept finding. The middlegame complications are examined cursorily, without reaching any definite conclusion; the general consensus is that Anand played this part of the game extremely well. There is not much to discuss about the endgame either. The world champion

expresses his amazement at Carlsen's ability to constantly cause problems, but there does not appear to have been any moment when the result of the game could have turned out differently. With Anand and his fans in great relief, the players set off towards the second rest day.

A third of the match has passed, and while all four games have been drawn, the overall picture does not bode well for Anand. After an uncertain start by Carlsen, he appears fully settled into the match by now. The prevailing feeling is that the challenger's hardships in games one and three were most likely caused not by any lack of self-confidence, but rather by the uncertainty of the unknown; partially the unknown atmosphere of a world championship match, but mainly the unknown Anand of such matches: a turbocharged version of his usual tournament self, with increased focus and superior opening preparation.

Not knowing what to expect, Carlsen was perhaps intimidated by Anand's legendary match prowess and the reputation of the Indian magician, who always managed to outdo his opponents when it really mattered. In short, Magnus may have been mentally attuned to the prospect of encountering the most formidable version of Anand imaginable – on his home soil, no less. The reality has been different. True, Anand has done well with the black pieces, but he has been harmless with White. More importantly, he has showed signs of uncertainty, restraint and hesitancy at some critical moments. With four games under his belt, Carlsen could take stock, breathe more freely and return to his usual confident self.



Game Five



Breaking the Deadlock

A free day in the middle of an important event is a mixed blessing, not only for the players but also for visitors. Any break in a firmly established daily routine is generally unwelcome and not easy to adapt to without losing one's focus. With the exciting fourth game still fresh in mind, the second rest day is more like torture for the spectators, who can't wait to see what the future will bring. The Hyatt Regency feels deserted, prompting one to go outside and tour the city, though the curious traveller must be wary of certain dangers, such as the driving customs of Indian motorists. A countryman dares his luck and ventures to explore Chennai, setting off on an adventure that commences with the near-impossible task of crossing the avenue right next to the hotel. He lives to tell the tale, but it is one of horror and divine intervention. I find it amusing that a person hailing from the land that invented democracy and reckless driving can be intimidated by anyone with a steering wheel at his hands, but that's what happens; and as for divine intervention, it is the only possible higher force that guides him to the desired side of the thin line separating chess reporting and road-kill. Avenue crossed, the rest of the excursion flows most interestingly, if not entirely smoothly, and the daring citizen of the small country the authors call home returns to the Hyatt Regency with fond memories and rich new experiences.

Carlsen starts the fifth game with an expected 1.c4, remaining faithful to his closed-openings strategy but preventing an immediate 1...d5. Assuming that he has decided to refrain from tackling Vishy's theoretical preparation in the main openings, it is the obvious choice. Anand is also predictable: he aims for his Semi-Slav, admittedly with a move order he has never used before. It is consistent, in the sense that it avoids the set-up he also refrained from using in the first game. For a moment it seems that Carlsen may be about to show us some deep preparation in the opening that brought Anand his memorable victories in 2007 and 2008, but instead the Norwegian surprises everyone by opting for the Marshall Gambit with 4.e4, eliciting puzzled looks on many faces. The bewilderment lasts for only a couple of minutes, as he immediately backs down from the theoretical challenge with a quiet sideline, leading the game along more tranquil waters. Anand is surprised, but only mildly so, and with a few natural moves he seems to have obtained a perfectly sound position. Carlsen's set-up with long castling may be new, but it is hardly earth-shattering.



Having equalized without much trouble, things soon start to go wrong for the Indian. With a rather mediocre move, justified only by hesitation and lack of self-assurance, he invites immediate simplifications leading to a slightly worse ending, where he will have to engage in passive defence. Opting for a position that is definitely to Carlsen's liking can hardly have been the right idea, no matter how close to equality it may be, especially when there were perfectly fine alternatives available. It may be presumed that Anand, with faith in his defensive abilities, just wishes to dry up the game and limit risk as much as possible. The little detail here, though, is that 'playing safe' by accepting a marginally worse endgame is actually the riskiest approach possible against Carlsen. Clearly satisfied with this turn of events, the challenger quickly sets about applying some pressure. In the minds of the commentators, dark clouds are gathering over Anand's position, but the champion himself seems unconcerned. In a strange change of pace, similar to that of the previous game, he embarks on active defence and for quite a while he seems comfortable. Even though Magnus maintains a slight pull, there are no clear threats and no apparent danger. With his 34th move, Anand even provokes some worries in his opponent, as it looks as though his counterplay is assuming serious proportions.

Despite feeling some of the heat himself, Carlsen is not one to release his foot from the pedal. Instead he goes ahead with his planned operation to attack his opponent's kingside, having judged the safety margin in his position to be sufficient. In mutual time pressure, Anand eschews a couple of tempting options, but his play is good enough. Soon after the time control he finds himself a pawn down, but with active pieces and clear targets. His counterplay appears perfectly sufficient for a draw – and then he cracks. First comes a clear error of judgement, then a few small but significant inaccuracies. Further precise play by Carlsen suddenly puts the World Champion in a critical position and Anand, who seems to have completely lost the thread of this ending, misses his final few drawing chances. Magnus conducts the remainder of the game with his usual precision and forces his opponent, in a theoretically lost rook ending, to resign. Some members of the audience mistakenly think the game has ended in a draw and offer their applause, but the truth sinks in pretty quickly when "1–0" appears on the giant screens on either side of the stage. Magnus is in the lead.



Magnus Carlsen – Viswanathan Anand

Game 5, 15th November 2013

For most of the play it looked as if another splitting of the point was well on its way in the fifth round. After surviving a scare on the previous match day, the World Champion once more equalized with Black against his challenger and was apparently steering the game to its natural conclusion, a draw. But this time, a draw was not meant to be.

With the game well past the first control and with a lot of time on his clock, Anand played the careless 45...♖c1?, a move that turns a completely drawn ending into a very difficult one. According to my research a draw was still there for the taking with 51...♗e2!, but Vishy was apparently demoralized by the unexpected turn of events and didn't offer the best resistance. Magnus went on to finish the game convincingly, much to the delight of his numerous fans, demonstrating for the first time in this match the iron technique he is famous for.

1.c4 (1:59:56)

Magnus goes for a slightly more ambitious opening than in his previous two games with White: guerrilla tactics with 1.♟f3 didn't offer him anything concrete in those games, so the young challenger decided it was high time for some classical chess, involving occupation of the centre with pawns.

1... e6 (1:59:42)
 2.d4 (1:59:32) d5 (1:59:35)
 3.♟c3 (1:58:29) c6 (1:59:23)

Vishy chooses the so-called Triangle System, renowned for its solidity. Undoubtedly not a surprise for Carlsen, as the World Champion often defends this type of structure.

4.e4! (1:56:53)

But this could have been a slight surprise for Vishy, as the Norwegian had not used this sharp continuation before.

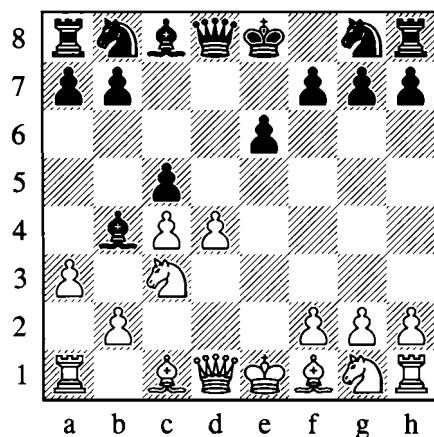
4... dxe4 (1:59:09)
 5.♟xe4 (1:56:47) ♟b4† (1:59:03)
 6.♟c3 (1:56:17)

Carlsen does not want to test his opponent's knowledge in the dynamic positions arising after the pawn sacrifice 6.♟d2!? ♖xd4 7.♟xb4 ♖xe4†; understandably so, as powerful preparation and striving for concrete play are two of Vishy's greatest qualities.

6... c5 (1:57:34)

Quite logically, Black meets White's meek retreat by striking immediately at the centre.

7.a3 (1:55:58)



7... ♟a5 (1:57:13)

Maintaining the tension.

Also possible is:

7...♟xc3† 8.bxc3 ♟f6 9.♟f3 ♖a5 10.♟d2
 ♟e4 11.♟d3 ♟xd2 12.♖xd2 0–0

But after:

13.♖b1!

13.♖a2 ♘c6 14.0-0 cxd4 15.cxd4 ♖xd2
16.♖xd2 b6 looks like a balanced ending.

13...h6!?

13...♖xa3 14.0-0 gives White the initiative.

13...cxd4 14.cxd4 ♖xd2† 15.♙xd2 is slightly better for White.

14.♖b5 ♖xa3 15.0-0 cxd4 16.cxd4

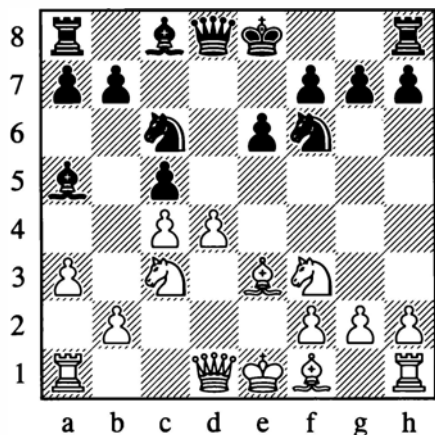
White has, in my opinion, at least enough compensation for the pawn.

8.♗f3 (1:55:33)

♗f6 (1:53:03)

9.♕e3 (1:46:49)

♗c6 (1:46:16)



10.♖d3? (1:42:02)

A weird-looking move that had been played only once prior to this game. White stops ...♗e4 and prepares to castle long. At the same time he reveals his intention to avoid doubled c-pawns.

The theoretical path is 10.dxc5 but in the endgame arising after 10...♖xd1† 11.♖xd1 ♗e4 Black has no problems at all, as he manages to ruin White's pawn structure. Lerner – Lukacs, Polanica Zdroj 1986, had continued 12.♖c1 ♗xc3 13.bxc3 e5 14.♗d2 and at this point Scherbakov's recommendation of 14...f5!? 15.f4 ♕c7 16.fxe5 ♗xe5 gives Black an excellent game.

10... cxd4 (1:33:42)

11.♗xd4 (1:41:50) ♗g4! (1:31:31)

Most elite players are bishop hunters and Vishy is no exception.

The only previous practical example had continued 11...♗e5 12.♖c2?! (Martins – Quintiliano Pinto, Brazil 2013) and at this



point the strongest continuation 12...♖fg4! would have given Black a slight advantage.

Carlsen obviously wasn't going to repeat this and I think he had planned the strong improvement: 12.♞d2! ♖e4 13.♞c2 ♖xc3 14.b4! ♖g4 15.♞xc3 ♖c7 16.♖b5 ♖e5 17.♖d4 ♖xd4 18.♞xd4 ♞xd4 19.♖xd4 with just a microscopic plus in the endgame.

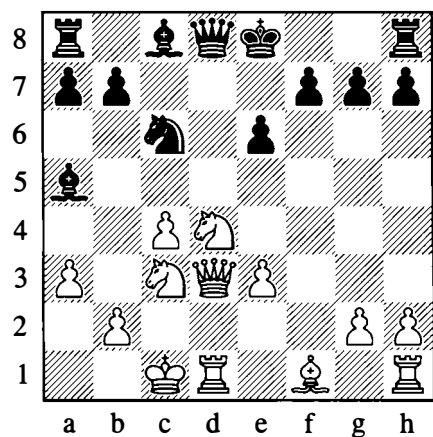
12.0-0-0 (1:29:29)

White resigns himself to the exchange of his precious e3-bishop for a knight, but quick development and a solid queenside pawn majority compensate for that.

12... ♖xe3 (1:25:24)

13.fxe3 (1:29:21)

Forced. 13.♞xe3? ♖b6 would have been bad news for White.



13... ♖c7!? (1:11:46)

Played after a relatively long think, as Vishy must have been weighing the consequences of not losing this tempo. But that would have required removing the king from the centre, something the World Champion apparently did not want to do, in anticipation of the upcoming ending.

Nevertheless, well worth examining is:

13...0-0 14.♖xc6 bxc6 15.♞xd8 ♖xd8 16.g3 ♖e7!?

16...♖b6 17.♖g2! ♖a6 18.b3 ♖xe3† 19.♖c2 must have been Carlsen's intention, with an edge.

17.♖g2

17.♖c2 a5! 18.♖g2 ♖a6 19.♖e4 e5 20.♖d6 ♖e6 21.c5 a4! is in fact better for the second player.

17...♖b8!

17...♖a6 18.♖xc6 ♖ac8 19.♖b5 ♖xb5 20.cxb5 ♖xa3 21.bxa3 ♖xc3† 22.♖b2 gives White a dangerous endgame pull.

18.♖xc6

18.♖c2 ♖b6 19.c5 ♖xc5 20.♖a4 ♖xe3 21.♖xb6 ♖xb6 22.♖xc6 e5 is highly unclear.

18...♖f6 19.♖c2 ♖a6 20.♖b5 ♖xb5 21.cxb5 ♖xc3 22.♖xc3 ♖xb5 23.b4 ♖c8† 24.♖b3 ♖e5 25.♖he1 a5=

The ending looks equal to me.

If Black didn't want to enter an ending right away, then 13...♞e7 also came into consideration. Probably Magnus intended 14.♖xc6 bxc6 15.♖e4 0-0 16.♞d6, but then 16...♞xd6 17.♖xd6 (17.♖xd6 ♖b6=) 17...f5 18.♖c5 ♖d8 19.♖xc6 ♖d2† 20.♖c2 ♖xe3 21.♖d3 e5 22.♖e1 ♖d4 reaches a complicated version of the ending with good counter-chances for Black.

14.♖xc6! (1:12:27)

Killing two birds with one shot! The challenger must have rejoiced at the chance of forcing three pawn islands on the enemy, and at the same time trading into an ending where he would be the only one to press, if only slightly.

14... bxc6 (1:10:31)

15.♞xd8† (1:09:49) ♖xd8 (1:10:24)

Strictly speaking, White's advantage is infinitesimal and Black should be able to draw

without too many problems. And indeed, this should have been the case as Vishy defended excellently over the next 30 moves or so.

16. ♖e2 (1:09:06)

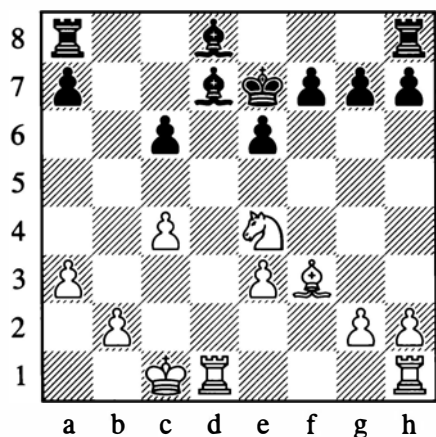
16.g3 may have been slightly more exact.

16... ♔e7 (1:04:32)

17. ♖f3 (1:07:17) ♜d7 (1:02:51)

The meaning of Black's 13th move is now apparent; with his king in the centre he can defend c6 harmoniously by placing his bishop on d7.

18. ♘e4 (1:01:30)



By threatening to jump into c5, White practically forces the following sequence of moves.

18... ♜b6 (0:58:24)

19. c5 (0:59:44) ♜f5! (0:57:37)

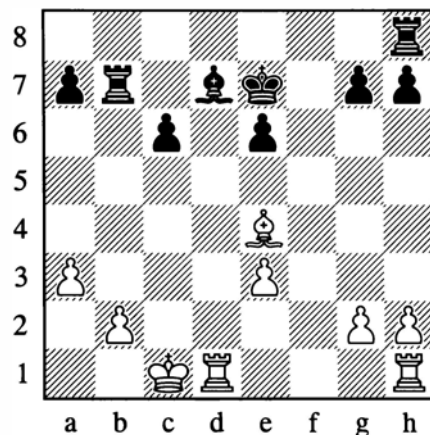
20. cxb6 (0:59:31) ♜xe4 (0:57:31)

21. b7! (0:59:19)

The point, ensuring that Black will have one more pawn island than White.

21... ♜ab8 (0:57:26)

22. ♜xe4 (0:59:13) ♜xb7 (0:57:20)



The position has stabilized and, although completely equal, it is the type of position Magnus was angling for. White's structural advantage is rendered nominal in view of the reduced material and the well-centralized black king, but Magnus has made a living out of turning nominal advantages into real ones. The remainder of the game proves that beyond doubt.



23. ♖h1 (0:53:46) ♜b5! (0:55:10)

Visy resorts to a well-known idea, activating his rook on the 5th rank. From there it can support a kingside pawn expansion as well as make use of the c5- and e5-squares to harass White.

24. ♜f4 (0:49:42) g5! (0:39:42)

No, young man, you can't imitate me!

25. ♜f3 (0:45:02) h5 (0:32:58)
26. ♜df1 (0:38:23) ♙e8 (0:30:38)

The bishop on e8 may appear passive, but it is a stout defender, sealing all entrances to the black camp.

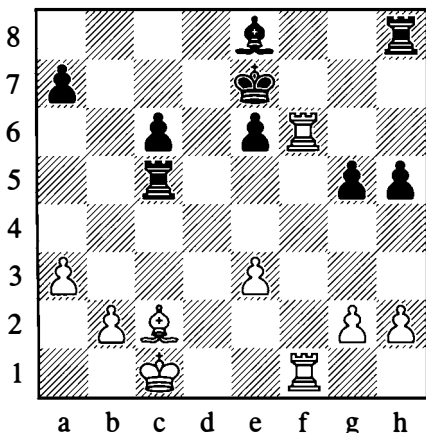
27. ♙c2! (0:38:16)

A strong move by Magnus; he probably realized at this point that e4 is not a stable base for his bishop and that he needed to play b2-b3 and ♖b2 and then try to place it on c4 somehow.

27... ♜c5 (0:26:40)

Threatening ...♙g6.

28. ♜f6 (0:29:53)



28...

h4! (0:22:56)

Visy is not a man to sit there and be eaten alive; he knows well how to grasp small opportunities to improve his position. His last move is a very instructive one, as it gains valuable kingside space and gives his bishop an outlet on h5.

29. e4 (0:25:47)

It may seem illogical to place the pawns on squares of the same colour as the bishop, but it is all about strategy here: Magnus knows that he has to take space and reduce the mobility of the black rook along the 5th rank.

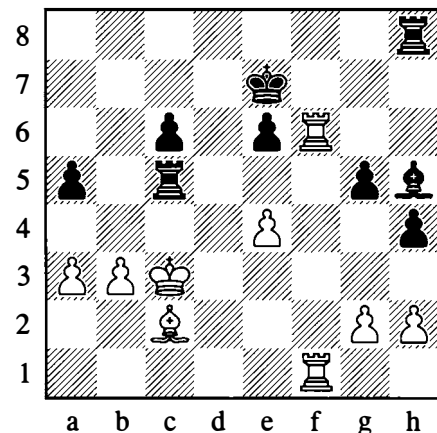
29... a5 (0:20:41)
30. ♕d2 (0:21:47) ♜b5 (0:20:27)

Visy makes sure his rook will not be trapped on the 5th rank at some point. So far, attack and defence are balancing each other nicely, in a game between two truly great masters.

31. b3 (0:19:00) ♙h5 (0:14:59)
32. ♕c3 (0:15:58)

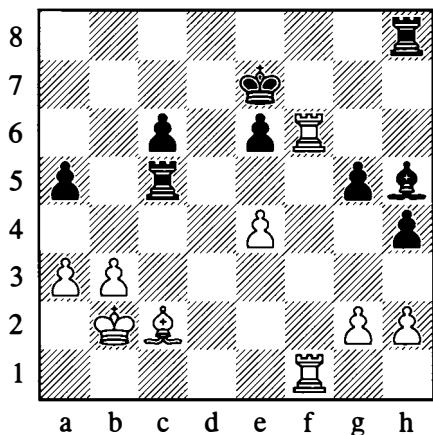
White is getting ready for ♙d3-c4.

32... ♜c5† (0:13:45)



And Vishy of course prevents it; but in doing so, he apparently has to make a slight concession in letting the white rook penetrate to h6.

33. ♖b2 (0:15:46)



33... ♠d8 (0:09:20)

The natural choice by human standards.

Various analysts recommended the computer move 33...g4!?, keeping h6 under surveillance. But it would be unfair to blame Anand for not playing in such a manner, as the game continuation is by no means bad and keeps the option of penetrating with the bishop into White's camp. In any case, this is how matters could have evolved after 33...g4!?: 34. ♠d3 (34.g3 ♠e8! is completely equal as suddenly the h8-rook becomes active) 34...g3! 35.hxg3 hxg3 36. ♠c4 ♠e5 37. ♠f4 ♠g6 38. ♠d3 ♠g5 39. ♠c1 c5= Black has nothing to fear.

34. ♠f2 (0:14:32) ♠d4 (0:08:55)

35. ♠h6 (0:07:32)

Magnus jumps at the opportunity as there is nothing else.

35... ♠d1 (0:08:41)

36. ♠b1! (0:06:41)

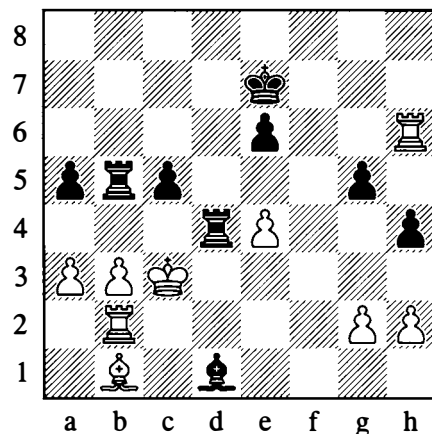
White obviously avoids exchanges; trying to prove that the black pieces are misplaced is the only way of keeping the game going.

36... ♠b5 (0:06:11)

But they are not misplaced; the draw should now have been a matter of time.

37. ♠c3! (0:04:48) c5 (0:05:19)

38. ♠b2 (0:04:36)



38... e5! (0:04:18)

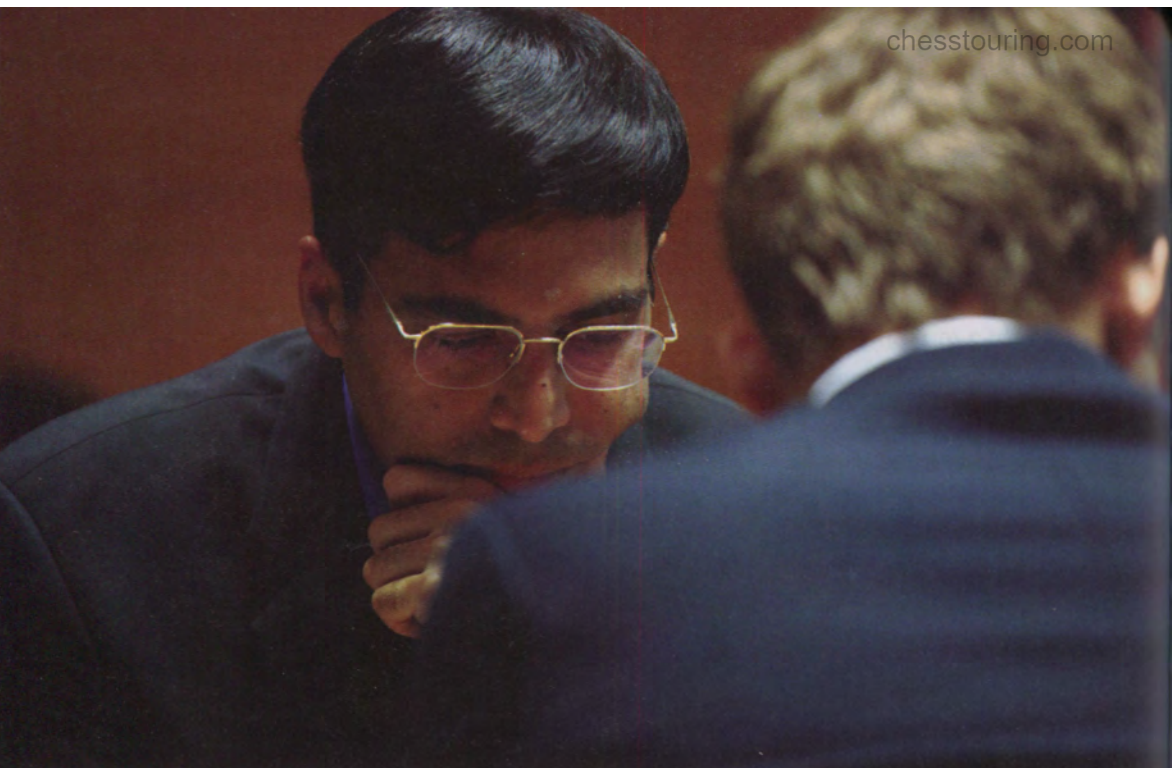
Excellent! Black solidifies the position of his rook in the centre, so as to make ...a4 possible.

39. ♠g6 (0:01:34) a4 (0:03:41)

Vishy shows a slight sign of impatience one move before the time control.

39...g4! 40. ♠d3 ♠xb3† 41. ♠xb3 ♠xb3 42. ♠xg4 h3 43.gxh3 ♠f6 44.h4 ♠f7= was the best way to continue as White's extra pawn is unimportant. But Black's move in the game should also be enough for a comfortable draw.

40. ♠xg5! (1:00:44)



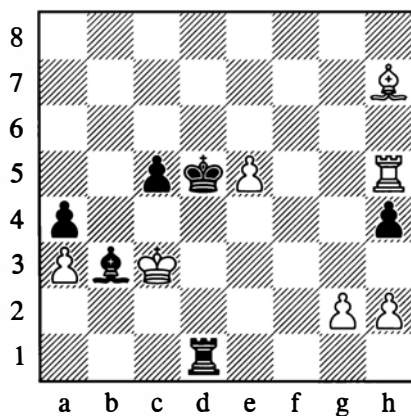
The best practical decision in a position that should be drawn anyway.

The computers favour 40.bxa4 ♖xb2 41.♗xb2 ♕xa4 42.♞xg5 but after 42...♜f6 43.♞g4 c4! 44.♞xh4 ♕b3! the bad position of the b1-bishop ensures Black of an easy draw. For example: 45.♞h3 ♞d2† 46.♜c3 ♞xg2 47.♕d3 cxd3 48.♜xb3 d2 49.♜c2 ♞e2=

40... ♖xb3† (1:01:17)
 41.♞xb3 (0:59:32) ♕xb3 (1:01:08)
 42.♞xe5† (0:49:51)

Thus, White has won a pawn, but the black pieces enjoy such tremendous activity that it shouldn't have mattered at all.

42... ♜d6 (0:58:47)
 43.♞h5 (0:48:42) ♞d1 (0:45:47)
 44.e5† (0:47:18) ♜d5 (0:44:01)
 45.♕h7 (0:40:17)



Magnus has finally freed his bishop from its entanglement, but this comes at the cost of making the a3-pawn vulnerable. With his next move the World Champion fails to take advantage of that:

45... ♞c1†? (0:35:49)

A bad mistake that must have haunted Vishy

for the rest of the match; the move may not be in itself losing, but as soon as he realized that the draw was not easy after it, he lost his morale and completely collapsed.

45...♖a1 46.♙g8† ♕c6 47.♙xb3 (47.♖h6† ♕b5) 47...♖xa3 is a trivial draw, and easy to find by anyone's standards.

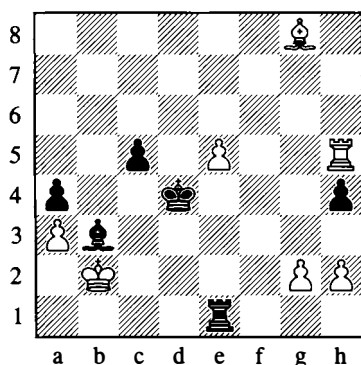
46.♕b2 (0:39:04)

Now White remains a pawn up. It shouldn't have been enough for a win against perfect defence, but Magnus's dogged determination and powerful technique provoked more mistakes from his great opponent.

46... ♖g1?! (0:28:14)

Depriving the black rook of checks from the side.

46...♞e1!! 47.♙g8† ♕d4!!



48.♙xb3 axb3 49.♖xh4† ♕d3! 50.♕xb3 (50.♖h3† ♕d4 51.♖xb3 ♞e2† 52.♕c1 ♖xg2=) 50...♖b1† 51.♕a2 ♖b7!= This was a brilliant draw, and admittedly a very hard one to find. White is three (!) pawns up in the rook ending, but the powerful c-pawn assisted by the black monarch guarantees equality.

47.♙g8† (0:38:49) ♕c6 (0:27:32)

48.♖h6†! (0:29:15)

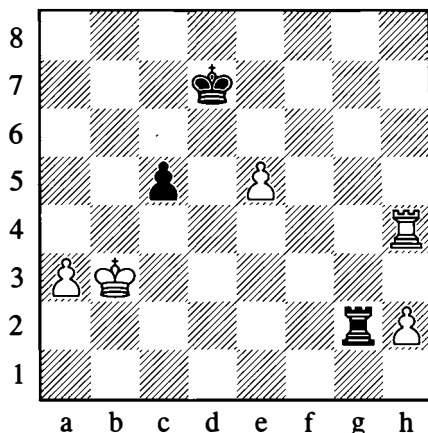
Pushing the black king back before capturing the pawns is a standard technique.

48... ♕d7 (0:27:08)

49.♙xb3 (0:27:17) axb3 (0:27:01)

50.♕xb3 (0:26:30) ♖xg2 (0:25:54)

51.♖xh4 (0:24:47)



This could be described as the critical moment of the World Championship.

51... ♕e6? (0:25:16)

The decisive mistake. 51...♞e2! 52.♕c4 ♖xe5 53.a4 ♕c6 54.♖h6† ♕b7 55.a5 ♖e4†! 56.♕xc5 ♖e2 57.a6† ♕a7 58.h4 ♖e4! would have led to a draw, as far as I can see. These endings with two rook pawns are quite tricky, and in the present situation the passive placement of White's rook does not allow him to make any progress.

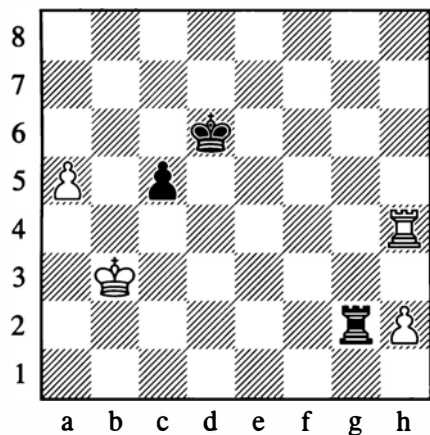
52.a4! (0:22:03)

Passers must be pushed! After capturing on e5 with the king, Black will not manage to return in time to halt the monstrous pawn.

52... ♕xe5 (0:21:27)

53.a5 (0:21:56)

♔d6 (0:15:00)



54.♖h7! (0:21:14)

By cutting off the king, White seals the victory. An impressive achievement given the scant means at Magnus's disposal.

54...

♔d5 (0:13:38)

55.a6 (0:19:01)

c4† (0:11:13)

56.♔c3 (0:18:50)

♖a2 (0:11:05)

57.a7 (0:18:42)

♔c5 (0:11:00)

58.h4 (0:18:06)

1–0

Black is helpless against the further advance of the h-pawn.

Anand, visibly shaken by his defeat, is not his usual charming and talkative self at the press

conference. Moreover, it turns out that he has played the entire game in a state of uncertainty and pessimism: he regarded his position as inferior throughout. Even his 34th move, the one that scared and impressed Magnus the most, is evaluated by the champion as a mistake. This psychological state is a logical explanation for his overall handling of the ending, in which his play was lacking in clear aims and direction, as well as accuracy. The players agree that Black's defensive task was trickier than they had assumed, and this mutual realization during the game clearly worked in Carlsen's favour.

The Norwegian himself appears happy with his victory and the course of the game, and is clearly enjoying the moment – just as his family and team of helpers obviously are. Magnus's fans go berserk on the internet in reaction to the favourable result.

Just as predictably, several Sunday-morning quarterbacks rush to declare the end of Anand's world championship reign, forgetting that the very same Anand came through the same situation of trailing in his last two matches, before hitting back and emerging as the eventual victor in both of them. While it certainly isn't easy to beat Carlsen (especially if you haven't read Sergei Shipov's article), there can be no doubt that Anand will be motivated to strike back in the very next game, where he will have the white pieces.



Game Six



A Goal in Injury Time

These are difficult times for Indian sports fans. Not only is Anand trailing in the world championship match, but the country's other favourite son, the famous cricket player Sachin Tendulkar, is playing his last innings before his scheduled retirement. It is hard to express just what cricket means to Indians; it is by far the most popular sport in the country: the one that children practice in their schools and everyone watches. Tendulkar is a legend of the sport – the most celebrated Indian cricketer of all time. Should one need any further convincing, it can be mentioned that Peter Svidler, the most devoted cricket fan amongst chess professionals, has been using Tendulkar's name as a handle on the Internet Chess Club for years.

Tendulkar's retirement, though it had been announced some time earlier, brings tears to the eyes of his fans all over India. To put Anand's popularity in his home country in perspective, he has often surpassed the legendary cricketer in various polls, even being awarded the title of Indian Athlete of the Century.

The prestige enjoyed by chess in India thanks to Anand can hardly be overestimated, all the more so at the time of the world championship match. The playing hall and hotel lobby are operating at full capacity every day, the ratings of the TV sports channel are skyrocketing and chess is everywhere in the media. The newspaper *New Indian Express* is delivered to Hyatt Regency's rooms every morning, complete with a full-page report on the match. Hot items, such as Anand's loss in the fifth game, are often hosted on the front page, where even chess moves are mentioned (the newspaper seems to concur that the move that scared Carlsen the day before was in fact a mistake). For a visiting chess player, the paper, full of reports about the two players and the match, is the perfect companion to a nice pastry that can be enjoyed in the hotel's "Vishy's Lounge", a shop complete with photos from Anand's illustrious career. Undoubtedly, if Tendulkar wanted maximum attention accorded to his retirement, he chose the wrong moment.

November is monsoon season for India, and Chennai averages over forty centimetres of precipitation during this month. For the first few days of the match the skies remained clear and bright, with no sign of rain whatsoever. As if by design though, the emergence of a dark cloud over Anand in the match has coincided with the appearance of clouds in the sky above his hometown.

When it rains it pours, as the saying goes, and if Game 5 was the start then Game 6 only serves to justify the adage. Anand again opens with 1.e4 and the Berlin appears on the board, but this time the world champion avoids the dreaded ending in favour of 4.d3, reinforcing the belief created by Game 4 that he hasn't actually prepared anything serious against this opening before the match. At least he shows some flexibility, as opposed to Kasparov against Kramnik in 2000, though the deviation could also be viewed as a small moral victory for Magnus. While 4.d3 avoids early simplifications and keeps the pawn structures flexible, it can hardly pose serious theoretical problems, so Magnus has once again nullified one of his opponent's main advantages. The players quickly move on to a standard slow Spanish set-up, with Anand employing a new, dangerous-looking but hardly venomous move. Carlsen takes his time to reply, making sure to avoid any unpleasantness, and the product of his thought is sufficient. With an accurate regrouping and some precise moves, Magnus equalizes the position, just before Anand can threaten anything serious on the kingside. Anand recognizes the failure of his opening play and makes a few nondescript moves, seemingly having settled for the apparent draw.

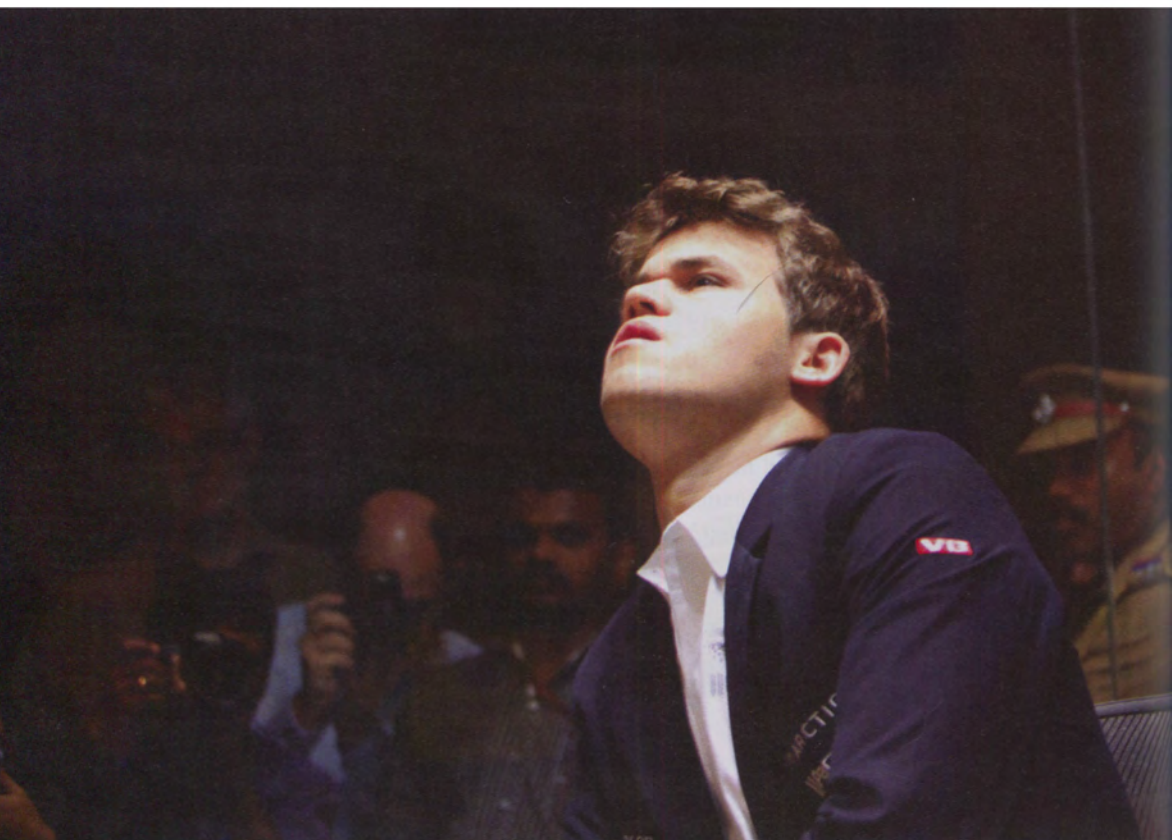
However, Carlsen has different plans. Already on the 24th move he has the option to exchange queens and kill the game completely, but instead he elects to keep it going, probably in view of his slightly superior pawn structure. Of course the position remains quite equal and it is hard to imagine any grandmaster, let alone the world champion, losing it with either colour. Nevertheless, the next few moves represent a turning point which Anand apparently fails to sense. Black's idea of ...c4 leading to pressure against e4 is pretty obvious, but Anand fails to take adequate measures against it, making a few irrelevant moves and even allowing Carlsen to create a clear target in the shape of the doubled, isolated pawns on the e-file. Magnus now has a clear positional advantage, but it still should not matter much, as a clear-cut plan of improving his position is not apparent, and Anand is able to defend his weak pawns with ease. Although Magnus is surely not going to acquiesce to the draw yet, he probably isn't expecting anything more than the satisfaction of causing his adversary some anxiety.

The game changes course after an inexplicable 38th move by Anand that leaves all spectators bemused; the world champion gives up a pawn to exchange off his weaknesses, leading to a rook ending where he will be a pawn down. Several pundits explain this decision as a conscious decision by the world champion to clarify the situation and avoid being tortured in passive defence, but I find myself unable to buy this. Why would anyone move, from a position with equal material and little to no danger, to a rook ending with a clear pawn less? Not only that, but Magnus also enjoys other advantages, such as a potentially unassailable home for his rook on f5, from where it can protect the bases of both his pawn chains; this factor alone, always an important one in rook endings with pawn on both flanks, should have sufficed to set alarm bells ringing in Anand's head and force him away from this possibility. I think the only plausible explanation is that Vishy simply miscalculated something, consumed by regrets of how he let things come to this. Admittedly, it must have been difficult to adjust to purely defensive play, when just a little while ago he had probably curtailed the game in his mind and perhaps already started thinking about the next one.



Carlsen sets about exploiting his advantage, but already at the start he falters and allows a disruptive h4-h5 push that eliminates his main positional advantage, that stable base on f5 for his rook. Anand is now two pawns down but he has managed to ruin his opponent's structure on the kingside and looks set to regain at least one if Carlsen is to try anything. Magnus embarks on a kingside assault, hoping to at least create some practical problems. It's not easy to defend, of course, but for quite a while Anand keeps everything under control, setting enough obstacles in Carlsen's path to prevent him from making any meaningful progress. Magnus appears convinced of the futility of other tries and decides to stake everything on promoting his f-pawn. Despite his earlier inaccuracy, he still enjoys good practical chances – a further condemnation of White's 38th move. The game has moved into the zone of perhaps-defensible endings where no clear-cut path to the draw is present: a zone in which Magnus excels and Anand, with a history of misplayed technical endings behind him, does not. The crisis arises after the 59th move, with Magnus ready to set his plan in motion and Anand needing to make a crucial decision.

As it turns out during the press conference, neither player has actually sensed the significance of the moment. Magnus feels that he is close to winning, if not already there, and Anand has also submitted to the apparently inevitable. Thus, instead of pushing his queenside pawns to complicate the issue, he makes yet another pointless move, allowing Carlsen to realize his plan and escort his f-pawn all the way to touchdown. Anand makes his last few moves in the game with trembling hands. Just before the lowly foot soldier reaches its holy grail, Anand resigns. Later analysis has shown that 60.b4! would have enabled White to save the game with precise defence.



Viswanathan Anand – Magnus Carlsen

Game 6, 16th November 2013

Imagine that you are playing in the home team in a soccer World Cup Final, in a stadium packed with your compatriots. The original cheering and enthusiasm of the crowd has been reduced to scepticism and frustration as the visitors managed to score as late as the 40th minute, rendering completely irrelevant the fact that you had enjoyed the lion's share of the chances before then. As the referee casts a glance at his chronometer in preparation for blowing the half-time whistle, the only thing on your mind is to calm down and take in the instructions of your coaches during the impending break. You know you are capable of reversing the situation – after all, you've been there before.

Then, what you thought of as impossible suddenly happens. A reckless pass in the middle of the pitch allows the enemy to steal the ball and launch a vicious stoppage-time attack. You run in panic behind him, trying to tackle, but he is young and fast. Worst of all, he is deadly accurate; after a few moments the ball rests at the back of your net and you are 2–0 down.

Disaster. I have no other word to express the feeling that must have overcome Team Anand at the end of the 6th game. Undoubtedly, recovering from being two down against Carlsen must have seemed like an impossible task to them, considering the number of games remaining and the psychological state of the champion, who had lost two in a row on 'technicalities'. Magnus's incisiveness in exploiting the slightest error is indeed phenomenal, and may come to be regarded as legendary in future years.

1.e4 (1:59:57)

It is easy to be a prophet after all has gone wrong, but I can't hide my feeling that things would have gone better for Anand had he immediately switched to 1.d4 at this point. To affect a breach in the Berlin Wall you need a lot of patience and good psychology, and I am almost certain that, at this particular moment, Anand was in need of something juicier than this dry battlefield could offer him. Having said that, I must admit that this game might well have gone differently if Anand had exploited Black's slight inaccuracy on move 10. After he missed his opportunity, Magnus was his usual relentless self.

1...**e5** (1:59:55)**2.♟f3** (1:59:51)**♟c6** (1:59:48)**3.♙b5** (1:59:43)**♟f6** (1:59:41)

Of course Magnus goes for the Berlin again; you don't make changes in a winning team.

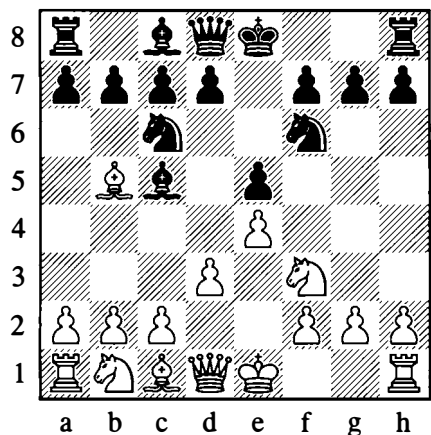
4.d3 (1:59:36)

The World Champion displays his preference for a fight with queens on; an understandable decision.

4...**♙c5!** (1:59:26)

My experience indicates that this is the best move here.

In a recent game I faced 4...d6 and I think I handled the opening phase quite well: 5.c3 ♙d7 6.0–0 g6 7.♞e1 ♙g7 8.d4 0–0 9.d5 ♟b8 10.♙xd7 ♟bxd7 11.c4 ♞e7 12.♟c3 c6 13.♙g5! h6 14.♙e3 ♞fc8 15.♟d2 h5 16.h3 ♞f8! 17.dxc6 bxc6 18.♟f3! ♞e7 19.♟g5 White had an edge in Kotronias – Anurag, Baku 2013.



5.c3 (1:59:28)

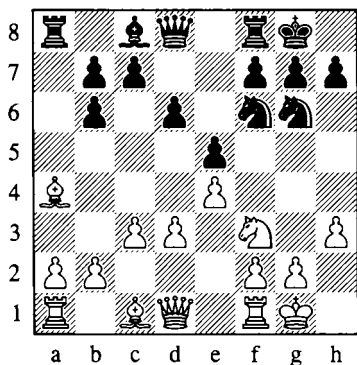
Black threatened to free his position by ...♘d4, so White should either take on c6 or play the text move.

5... 0-0 (1:59:07)

6.0-0 (1:59:20) ♖e8 (1:57:54)

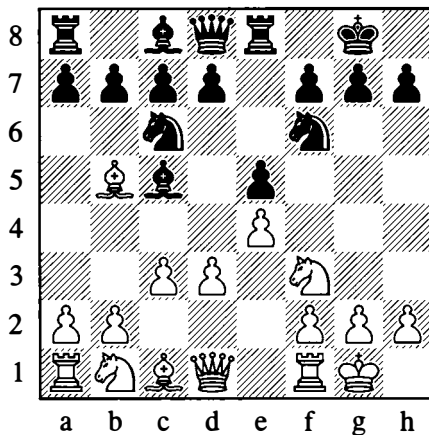
This flexible continuation is well known, although Carlsen had never used it before now.

In a previous encounter against Anand he had chosen the classical 6...d6. The game continued: 7.♗bd2 ♖b6 8.♘c4 ♘e7 9.♘xb6 axb6 10.♙a4 ♘g6 11.h3



11...♘h5! 12.♙g5 f6 13.♙e3 ♘hf4 14.♙b3+ ♘h8 Black stood slightly better in Anand – Carlsen, Moscow (rapid) 2011, as he had

solved all his development problems and was ready to attack with ...f5. Clearly Vishy must have had an improvement up his sleeve.



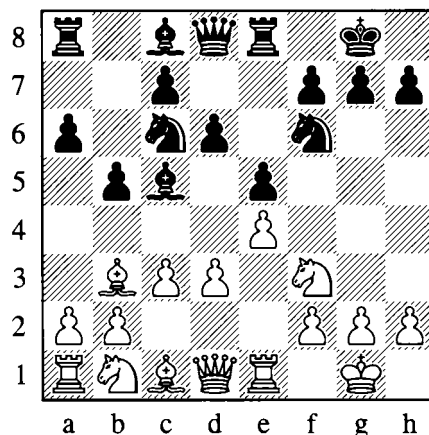
7.♖e1 (1:58:18)

This move is not the most common, but it is perfectly justified considering that the potential attacking plan involving ...♙g4 followed by ...f5 will be ineffective with the black rook on e8. Thus, White does not have to waste a tempo on the preparatory h2-h3 and can concentrate immediately on central affairs.

7... a6 (1:57:19)

8.♙a4 (1:58:04) b5 (1:53:47)

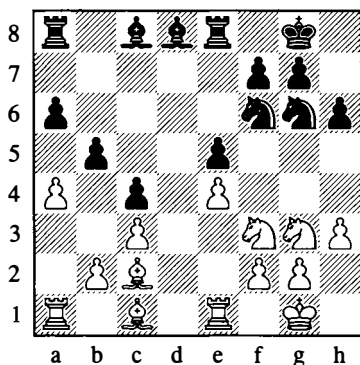
9.♙b3 (1:57:45) d6 (1:53:08)



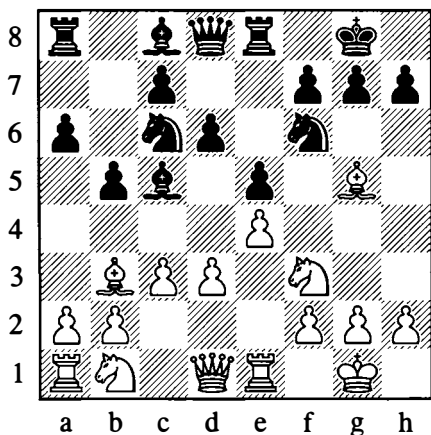
10. ♖g5!? (1:57:26)

This was Vishy's novelty, attempting to improve on his own game against Aronian.

That encounter had continued: 10. ♖bd2 ♖b6 11. ♖f1 ♖e7 12. ♖g3 ♖g6 13. h3 h6 14. d4 c5 15. dxe5 dxe5 16. ♖xd8 ♖xd8 17. a4 c4 18. ♖c2



18... ♖a5!? 19. axb5 axb5 20. ♖e3 ♖b7 21. ♖a2 ♖c7 22. ♖eal ♖xa2 23. ♖xa2 ♖a8 24. ♖xa8† ♖xa8 25. ♖f1 ♖e7 26. ♖d2 ♖f8 27. ♖c5 ♖d7 28. ♖a3 g6 29. f3 ♖e8 30. b3 cxb3 31. ♖xb3 ♖c8 With complete equality. Anand – Aronian, Paris/St Petersburg 2013.



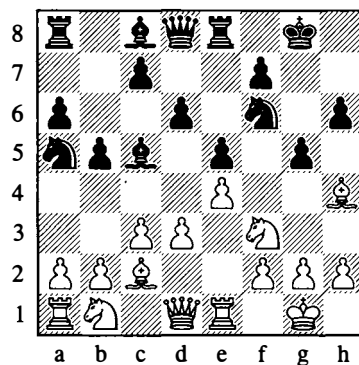
10... ♖e6?! (1:36:58)

With the bishop on g5 White has prevented the manoeuvre ... ♖e7-g6, so Magnus focuses

on simple development. However, his chosen move is not the most accurate.

My preference is:

10... h6!? 11. ♖h4 ♖a5 12. ♖c2 12. ♖xf7†! ♖xf7 13. b4 g5 14. ♖g3 ♖b6 15. bxa5 ♖xa5 is unclear. 12... g5!



13. ♖g3

13. ♖xg5!? hxg5 14. ♖xg5 ♖xf2†! 15. ♖xf2 ♖xe4† 16. ♖xe4 ♖xg5 17. ♖d2 reaches a wild position which I believe to be approximately equal.

13... ♖c6 14. b4 ♖b6 15. a4 ♖d7

Black is ready to carry out the customary ... ♖e7-g6 manoeuvre, obtaining a fair share of the chances.

11. ♖bd2?! (1:44:56)

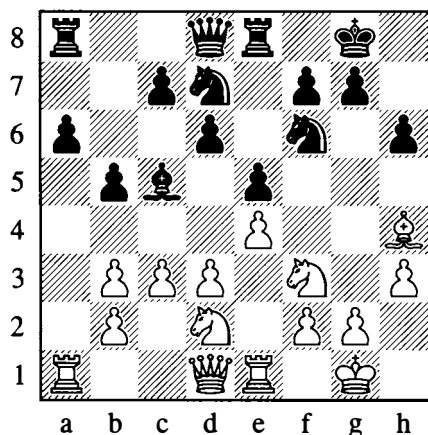
Vishy misses a good chance to put pressure on the challenger: 11. ♖xe6! fxe6 12. b4 ♖a7 (12... ♖b6 13. a4 h6 14. axb5 axb5 15. ♖xa8 ♖xa8 16. ♖xf6 gxf6 17. ♖bd2 is slightly better for White, as Black's kingside formation is loose.) 13. a4 h6 14. ♖xf6 ♖xf6 15. axb5 axb5 16. ♖a3 would have forced Magnus into defensive mode, in view of the weakness of the b5-pawn.

Now the Norwegian starts to navigate with his usual expertise.

11... h6 (1:36:14)
 12.♙h4 (1:42:37) ♙xb3 (1:33:17)
 13.axb3 (1:40:11) ♖b8! (1:30:43)

No, it's not the Berlin – it's the Breyer after all! Carlsen borrows a theme from another major Spanish branch to solve the problem of his pinned knight on f6.

14.h3 (1:30:19) ♖bd7 (1:29:43)



It is already remarkably difficult for White to create chances on either wing.

15.♖h2 (1:27:24)

This knight retreat is thematic, if slightly slow.

15.b4 ♙b6 16.♖c2!?

16.♖f1 ♖f8 17.♖e3 ♙xe3 18.fxe3 is a possibility mentioned by Josh Friedel, who evaluates the position as slightly preferable for White. However, after 18...♖g6 19.♙xf6 ♖xf6 20.g3 c6 the chances are absolutely equal in my opinion, as the pressure on a6 is balanced by Black's counterattacking prospects based on ...d5 or ...f5.

16...a5!

16...♖f8 does not solve all Black's problems due to 17.♖a3 ♖g6 18.♙xf6 ♖xf6 19.g3± with some queenside pressure.

17.bxa5 ♖xa5 18.♖xa5 ♙xa5 19.b4 ♙b6 20.c4!?

White has more active prospects than in the game, but it is hard to say if he has any real advantage.

15... ♖e7! (1:27:27)

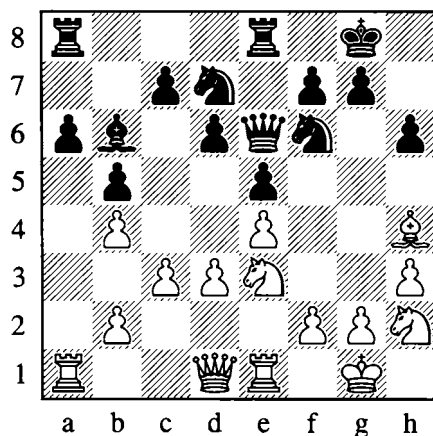
An excellent consolidating manoeuvre by Magnus; in the absence of light-squared bishops, his queen will be fine on e6.

16.♖df1 (1:25:13)

Vishy continues with his preparations for a kingside attack, but in all honesty they seem futile against Black's setup.

Another idea is: 16.b4 ♙b6 17.♖g4 ♖e6 18.♖xf6+ ♖xf6 19.♖b3 ♖d7 White has no advantage here either.

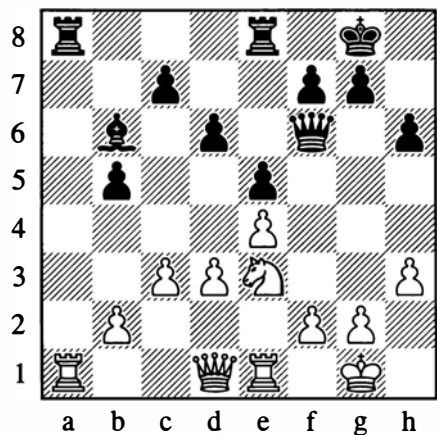
16... ♙b6 (1:21:48)
 17.♖e3 (1:18:17) ♖e6 (1:21:18)
 18.b4 (1:16:21)



18... a5! (1:16:45)

Black gets rid of his only weakness; the position is now fully equal, and most commentators and fans were expecting a quick draw.

19. **bxa5** (1:15:55) **♙xa5** (1:16:35)
 20. **♘hg4** (1:04:55) **♙b6** (1:13:49)
 21. **♙xf6** (1:01:02) **♘xf6** (1:12:43)
 22. **♘xf6†** (1:00:34) **♙xf6** (1:12:35)

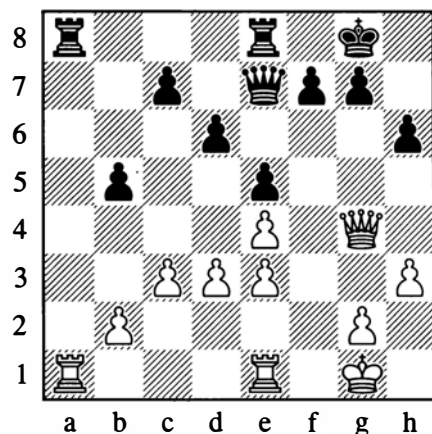


23. **♙g4!** (0:59:45)

By allowing an apparently imperceptible weakening of his pawn skeleton, Vishy once again allows Magnus to create something out of nothing. In the ensuing position with only heavy pieces on the board, Black can try to exploit White's inflexible structure.

23. **♙f3!** was the right way to secure a draw:
 23... **♙xf3** (Otherwise White will play **♘d5**.)
 24. **gxf3** **♙xe3** (24...c6 25. **♘f5!** is a bit better for White, as 25... **♙c7?** drops a pawn to 26. **♘e7†**.) 25. **fxe3=** and so on.

23... **♙xe3!** (1:09:24)
 24. **fxe3** (0:59:38) **♙e7** (1:08:19)



Suddenly it's a game. Vishy probably didn't realize at this point that he might end up in real danger, and this may have contributed to the gradual deterioration of his position.



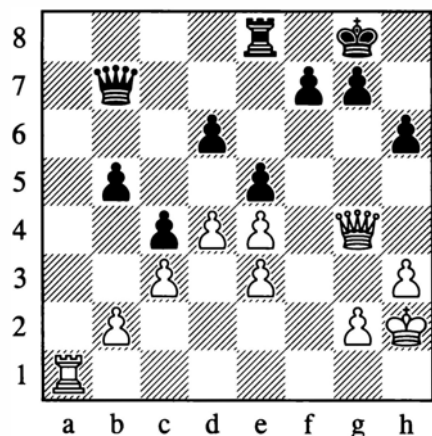
25. ♖f1 (0:59:11) c5! (1:07:07)

26. ♖h2 (0:56:24) c4! (1:05:07)

Magnus finds the right idea with ease. The advance of his c-pawn is designed to render the e4-pawn weak.

27. d4 (0:53:43) ♖xa1 (1:00:00)

28. ♖xa1 (0:53:35) ♖b7 (0:59:52)



29. ♖d1?! (0:49:43)

29.d5! would have shielded the e-pawns.

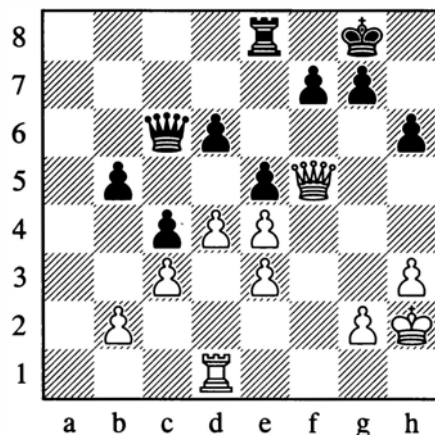
After a subsequent h4-h5, setting up potential perpetual checks, it would have been virtually impossible for Black to create realistic winning chances.

29...

♖c6 (0:52:24)

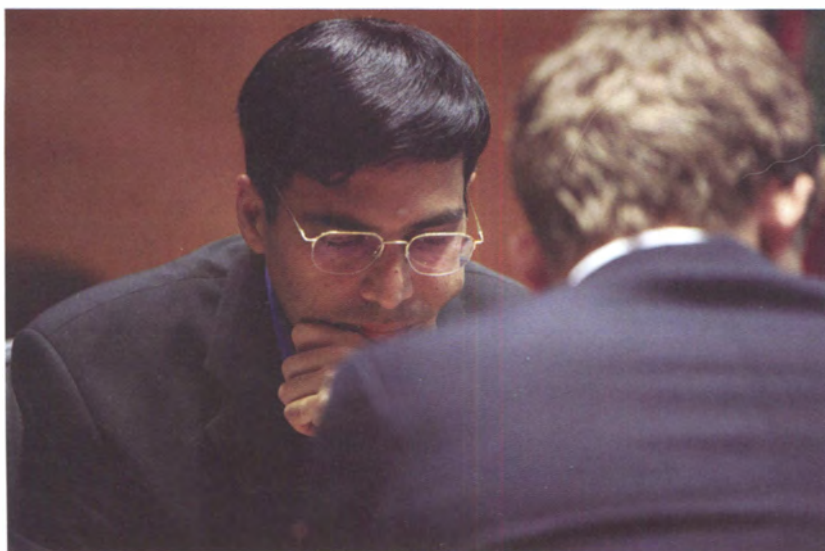
30. ♖f5! (0:47:11)

Once again 30.d5! was the right idea. Now Magnus gets a chance for a favourable transformation.



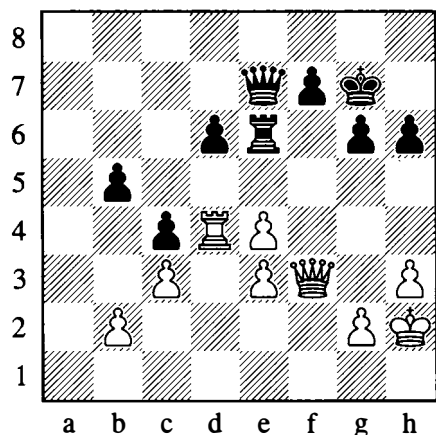
30...

exd4! (0:50:57)



The time is ripe for Black to open the path towards the static e-pawns. The world champion has no choice but to accept the weakness and try to endure the pressure in a nerve-wracking defensive process.

31. Bxd4 (0:46:59) Re5 (0:50:38)
 32. Wf3 (0:46:20) Wc7 (0:47:00)
 33. Ch1 (0:44:50) We7 (0:46:47)
 34. Wg4 (0:42:05) Ch7 (0:44:13)
 35. Wf4 (0:38:53) g6 (0:42:33)
 36. Ch2 (0:35:16) Chg7 (0:42:26)
 37. Wf3 (0:33:24) Re6 (0:39:19)



38. Wg3! (0:31:02)

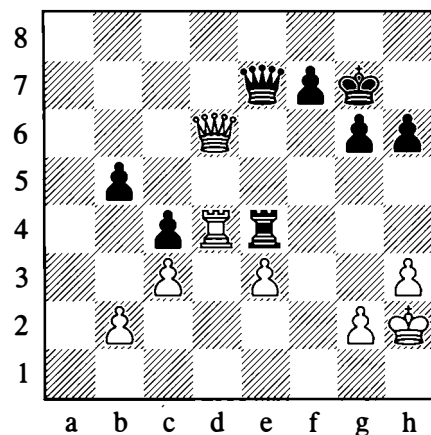
In the past few moves Magnus has been slowly improving the position of his pieces, waiting for more mistakes from his opponent. Once again the pressure pays off, as Vishy tries to make the situation simpler for himself by sacrificing a pawn to eliminate his weak pawns and activate his rook.

38. Chg1 would have been better, intending to meet 38... Re6 with 39. Wg3 . It is not clear how Black can improve his position any further.

38... Re4 (0:30:13)

When it comes to winning a pawn, Magnus does not need to be asked twice.

39. Wxd6 (0:30:26)



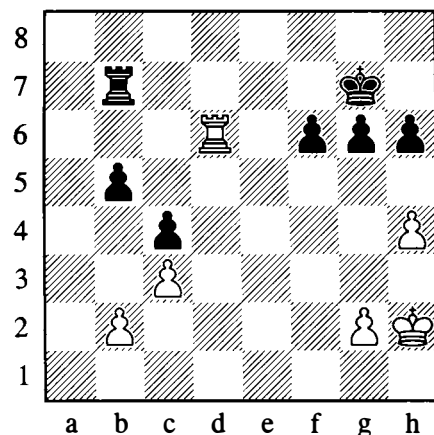
39... Re3! (0:30:05)

39... Wxd6+ 40. Bxd6 Re3 41. Bd5! b4 42. cxb4 Bb3 43. b5 is an easy draw for White, who will soon eliminate the last of the queenside pawns. Magnus wants more.

40. Wxe7 (1:29:12) Re7 (1:30:03)
 41. Bd5 (1:26:50) Bb7 (1:29:54)
 42. Bd6 (1:15:41)

Restricting the black king. Perhaps Anand thought this would be an easy draw, but his task is complicated by the difficulty of exchanging the queenside pawns.

- 42... f6 (1:21:44)
 43. h4 (1:03:54)



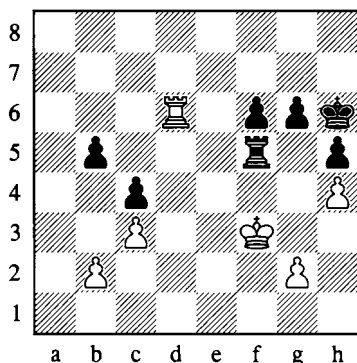
43...

♔f7?! (1:17:44)

A slight inaccuracy from Magnus. Correct was: 43...h5!

Black stabilizes the kingside and plans to bring his rook to the ideal f5-square. A likely continuation is:

44.♔g3 ♖e7 45.♔f3 ♖e5 46.♞d7† ♔h6
47.♞d6 ♖f5†

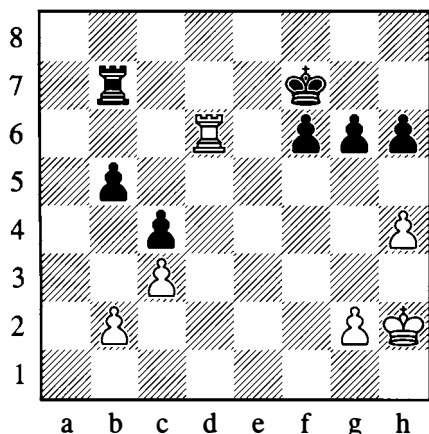


48.♔g3

48.♔e3 g5 49.hxg5† ♔xg5 looks risky as the white king is cut off from the kingside; nevertheless, he might still be able to hold after 50.♞d4!.

48...g5 49.hxg5† ♔xg5

Black can continue to press for quite some time. Compared with the note to White's 50th move in the main game, here Black has gained a useful pawn on b5 in return for one of the doubled h-pawns.



44.h5! (0:59:20)

An excellent positional sacrifice, breaking up Black's kingside pawns. At this point it seemed as though Anand was back on the right track, with the draw finally within his grasp.

44...

gxh5 (1:11:32)

45.♞d5 (0:58:49)

♔g6 (1:11:24)

46.♔g3 (0:57:54)

♞b6 (1:10:47)

47.♞c5 (0:53:35)

f5 (1:08:13)

48.♔h4 (0:49:25)

Apparently White has achieved his draw, but with Magnus you can never be sure.

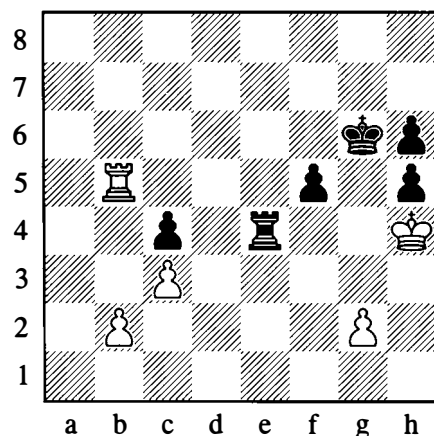
48...

♞e6! (1:07:35)

The only winning try, and a good one. The white king must be pushed back, even at the cost of a pawn.

49.♞xb5 (0:48:25)

♞e4† (1:07:29)



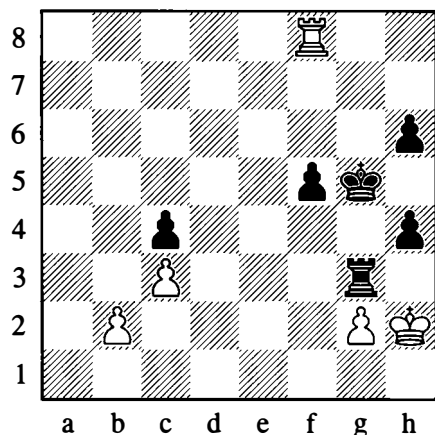
50.♔h3? (0:46:53)

White inexplicably complicates his task. 50.♔g3 h4† 51.♔f2 would have kept the king in a healthy position, and I see no way for Black to make further progress.

50...

♔g5 (1:06:51)

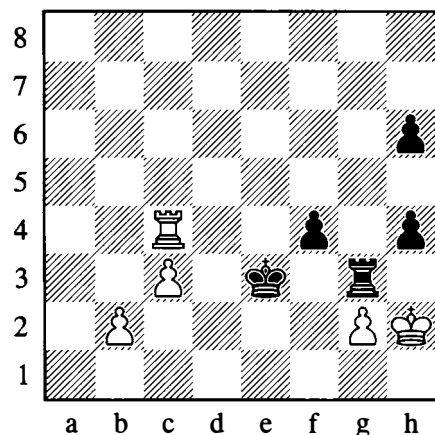
51. ♖b8 (0:45:58) ♠h4 (1:06:02)
 52. ♖g8† (0:44:46) ♜h5 (1:05:53)
 53. ♖f8 (0:43:14) ♖f4 (1:05:43)
 54. ♖c8 (0:41:03) ♖g4 (1:03:14)
 55. ♖f8 (0:38:16) ♖g3† (1:02:55)
 56. ♜h2 (0:38:08) ♜g5 (1:00:31)



57. ♖g8† (0:37:35) ♜f4 (0:59:18)
 58. ♖c8 (0:31:01) ♜e3! (0:59:01)

Now the shortcomings of White's 50th move become apparent. With the white king cornered, Black gets additional tactical chances as his own king can penetrate deeply into the enemy camp. Magnus is willing to sacrifice his second queenside pawn in order to achieve this: a committal decision, although not exactly a risky one as Black is in no danger of losing.

59. ♖xc4 (0:28:17) ♠f4 (0:58:43)



Black's plan becomes crystal clear: he wants to play ...h3 and create a passed f-pawn. White's defence is difficult because his own pawns prevent his rook from checking the black king from the side.

60. ♖a4?? (0:42:23)

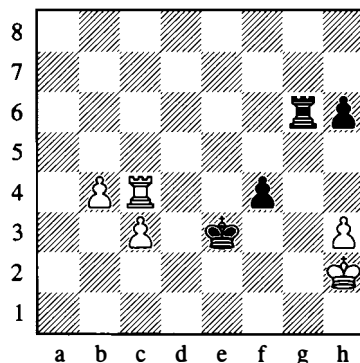
The tragedy of a champion.

60.b4!

This was the only move to save the game, but Vishy must have missed something.

60...h3 61.gxh3 ♖g6

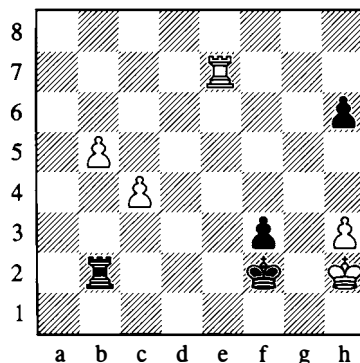
61...♖g5 62.♖c6 f3 63.♖e6† ♜f2 64.c4 ♖g2† 65.♜h1 ♖g1† 66.♜h2 ♖e1 67.♖xh6 ♜e2 68.♖e6† ♜f1 69.♖f6 f2 70.♜g3= is also a draw.



62.♖c7 f3 63.♖e7† ♜f2 64.b5

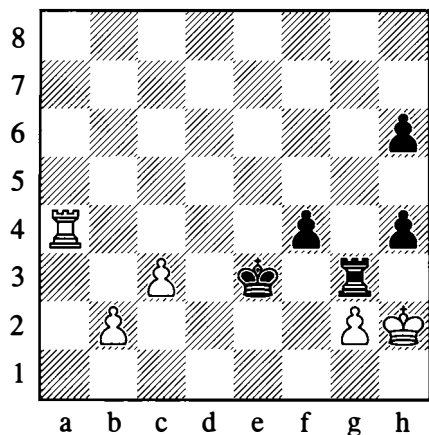
The energetic push of the queenside pawns proves just enough to distract the black rook and force a draw.

64.b5 ♖g2† 65.♜h1 ♖g1† 66.♜h2 ♖b1 67.c4 ♖b2



68.c5! ♖xb5 69.c6 ♖c5 70.♙a7=

The rook can finally start checking, and the draw is a virtual certainty.



60... h3! (1:13:38)

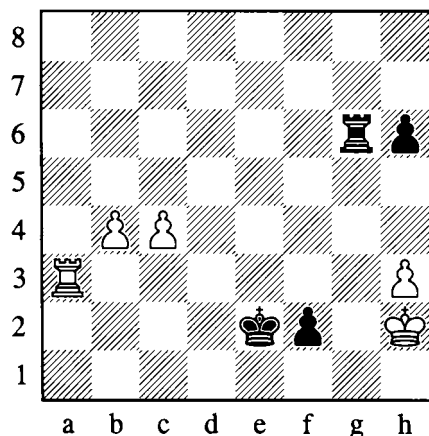
Suddenly White is dead lost. Compared to the above note, his pawns are too far back and his rook is awkwardly placed.

61.gxh3 (0:42:40) ♖g6 (1:11:54)

62.c4 (0:37:09) ♜f3 (1:11:36)

63.♙a3† (0:37:10) ♜e2 (1:07:47)

64.b4 (0:36:54) ♜f2 (1:07:17)



65.♙a2† (0:37:18) ♜f3 (1:07:37)

66.♙a3† (0:37:41) ♜f4 (1:07:54)

White has no more checks and finds himself facing the deadly threat of ...♙g1.

67.♙a8 (0:38:01)

67.♙a1 ♖e6 also wins easily.

67... ♙g1 (1:07:30)
0-1

A heartbreaking loss for Anand, and further proof that Magnus is the best endgame player on the planet. The world champion now finds himself in a desperate situation, trailing by two points, and apparently lacking any effective opening preparation with White. Most significantly, Anand has showed no signs of the sharp and pointed play that has characterized the brightest moments of his career. He goes on to admit the precariousness of the situation and promises to do his best in the second half of the match. Seeing him rather pessimistic and out of form, one can't help but wonder what his best, at this particular moment, will look like. Meanwhile, the rain continues to wash Chennai's streets incessantly.

Game Seven



The Calm after the Storm

Sachin Tendulkar's retirement has marked the end of an era for Indian cricket, and Anand's two consecutive defeats create the unpleasant premonition that their other top sportsman is about to be dethroned as well. The seventh game, coming after the third rest day, is expected to see Anand trying to hit back with all his might, especially since he is again playing with White; in the middle of the match the colours are reversed, so that neither player will have a marked advantage by always playing White after the rest days. I guess the point of this consideration is that the rest day allows one to better prepare his offensive and recharge the batteries, though whether this actually matters can be debated.

Anyway, the information at hand allows us to establish that Anand has selected 1.e4 as his main opening move and Carlsen has chosen the Berlin as his primary defence, and everyone is curious to see how the World Champion intends to try and break Black's defensive lines in this opening. Considering that, apart from contesting the endgame typical of this system, White hardly has any really ambitious scheme at his disposal, a switch to the greener pastures of 1.d4 appears a distinct possibility.

And yet, all such assumptions are cast aside as Anand goes for the Berlin and 4.d3 once again, this time selecting an even slower approach. Once again, the merits of his opening choice are hotly debated, both on site and on the internet; does he really believe he can outplay Carlsen in such a closed and slow position? Has Anand already mentally resigned the match, or is he just looking for a respite after two losses in a row, trying to rebuild his self-confidence?

Whatever his motives might have been, his opening and moves hardly betray a man in the competitively desperate situation he arguably is. The slow pace of the game prompts the fans to explore the other facilities of the event more often than usual. There are plenty of things to keep them occupied, such as problem-solving

competitions and of course the live commentary on the first floor. It is precisely in these areas, where one can also engage in conversation without fear of disturbing the players, where the enthusiasm and emotional outbursts of the public are best displayed; the atmosphere is very lively and pleasant, analysis is taking place on several boards scattered around the place, interviews are being given to Indian and Norwegian television channels, and so on. Considering the high cost of admission to the dark and silent playing hall, where one is denied access to the various sources of live coverage, the entire set-up raises questions. My mind runs all the way back to London and the full-blown experience that was offered to the spectators there, regardless of the occasional glitch, and a feeling of nostalgia overcomes me.

Back to the reality of the seventh game, Anand follows an extremely restrained strategy that cannot possibly worry his opponent. His play feels rather automated, uninspired, and when he discards the natural plan of f2-f4 in favour of an advance of his h-pawn, which leads to rook exchanges, no doubt remains as to the outcome of the game. Indeed, further exchanges follow, and when Carlsen gets to push ...f5 and eliminate the bastion of White's centre, the game is as good as over.



Viswanathan Anand – Magnus Carlsen

Game 7, 18th November 2013

Trailing by two points and with just six match games remaining to be played, World Champion Vishy Anand knew he was in dire need of a miracle in order to retain his title against the wonder boy from Norway. That miracle didn't happen in the 7th round as the Champion steered the game towards one of the calmest variations of Magnus's pet Berlin Defence, allowing Black to equalize comfortably, but this time, no more than that. After 32 moves this rather uneventful game ended in a draw by repetition.

Anand's decision to stay clear of forceful opening play seems to be quite rational as, first of all, he needed to stop the bleeding and secondly readjust his strategy for his remaining white games. Coming to this match he had probably only prepared 1.e4, but this had turned out to be a fruitless expedition into Magnus's solid world of the Berlin. Clearly, the Champion needed something more complicated than that, but the switch to 1.d4 would have to wait till the preparations for it were complete.

1.e4 (1:59:57)	e5 (1:59:51)
2.♟f3 (1:59:51)	♞c6 (1:59:47)
3.♙b5 (1:59:44)	♟f6 (1:59:40)
4.d3 (1:59:39)	♙c5 (1:59:07)
5.♙xc6 (1:59:28)	

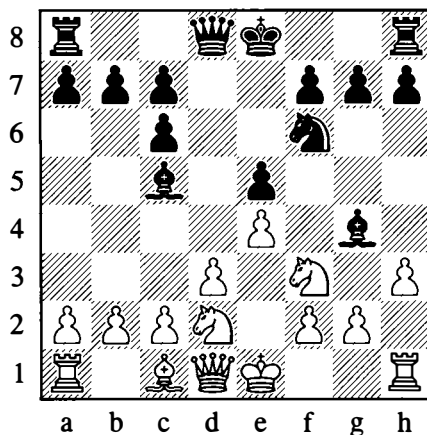
Vishy chooses the calmer of the two main possibilities available to him, deviating from the 5.c3 continuation of the 6th game. He certainly knew that Magnus's team would not have been sitting on their hands on the free day, and that a remedy to his interesting novelty in that game would have been found.

5... dxc6 (1:58:56)
6.♞bd2 (1:59:21) ♙g4 (1:54:17)

This bishop sortie is perfectly feasible against 6.♞bd2.

Instead, 6...0-0 7.0-0 ♞d7 leads to more trodden paths. A typical example of what may follow is 8.♞c4 ♖e8 9.♙e1! f6 10.b4 ♙e7 11.♙e3 ♟f8 12.♙c3 ♙g4 13.♞fd2 b6 14.f3 ♙h5 15.♞b3 ♟e6 with complicated play, as in Kotronias – Alekseev, Baku 2013. At this point I should have opted for 16.♙fd1! a5! 17.bxa5 b5 18.♞cd2 ♙d7 19.♞c5 ♙xc5 20.♙xc5 ♞xc5 21.♙xc5 ♖xa5 22.♞b3 ♖a4 23.♙c3 ♖a3 24.d4 ♙e6 25.dxe5 fxe5 26.♙d3 when the computer's evaluation of flat equality is far from obvious in practical play and both sides have interesting chances.

7.h3 (1:57:48)



It is only natural that when Black's bishop goes out to g4 so early it will be attacked, but in this position it can flee to h5 without consequences.

7... ♙h5! (1:52:14)

The correct choice.

7...♙xf3?! seems to be playing into White's hands as after 8.♞xf3 ♘d7 9.♞g3 ♞f6 10.♘c4 the white knight is much more conveniently placed than in the game. A model game of how to handle the position from White's point of view unfolded after 10.♘c4 as follows: 10...0-0 11.0-0 ♜fe8 12.a4 ♘f8 13.♙g5 ♞e6 14.♙d2 ♘g6 15.b4 ♙f8 16.♞g4 b6 17.g3! f6 18.♙c3 ♙d6 19.♘e3 ♘h8 20.♘g2 a6 21.♞f3 ♘e7 22.h4! b5 23.♞fb1 ♞d7 24.h5 h6 25.♞g4 ♞xg4 26.♘g4 and White had excellent chances in the ending in Adams – Fressinet, Bremen 2012; Britain's Number 1 went on to win.

8.♘f1 (1:53:38)

8.g4 ♙g6 does not seem to have so much point if White cannot take on e5, as Black will unravel by ...♘d7 and ...f6 in due course.

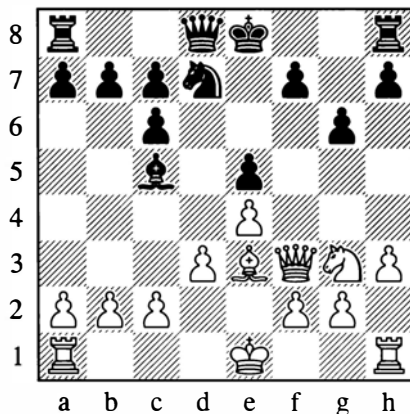
8... ♘d7 (1:50:44)

9.♘g3 (1:52:24) ♙xf3 (1:47:16)

The right moment to take on f3, as now White's knight stands much less impressively on g3 and Black's next move can contain it.

10.♞xf3 (1:52:15) g6 (1:47:08)

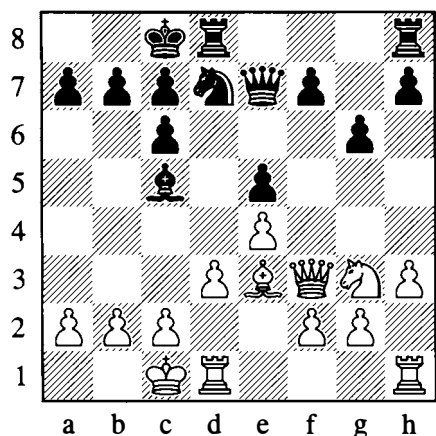
11.♙e3 (1:48:35)



This exchange does not feel right to me. I think that whatever chances existed in the position evaporate after the exchange of bishops.

11.♔d2 a5 12.♖f1, as indicated by some engines, is quite unclear and would have led to less straightforward play than in the game. But Vishy was probably solely intent on making clear-cut decisions in this particular round, in order to stabilize his nerves.

11... ♖e7 (1:42:05)
12.0-0-0 (1:45:37) 0-0-0 (1:40:01)



Both kings have castled into safety and White's only plan is to prepare f2-f4, but this makes him very predictable. It's very hard to beat Magnus when he knows what you're up to.

13.♖e2 (1:43:26)

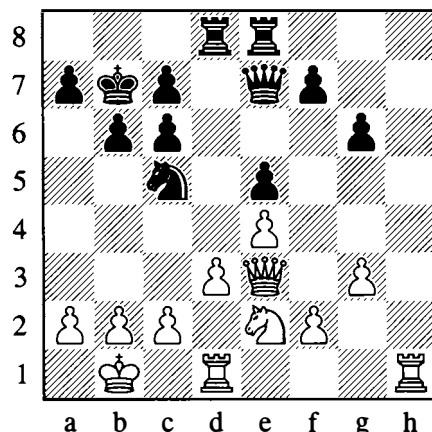
This knight had to regroup as it was doing nothing on g3.

13... ♜h8 (1:31:51)
14.♔b1 (1:39:53) ♞b6 (1:26:49)
15.h4 (1:35:07)

15.g4 was the other option, but Vishy wanted to keep the possibility of g2-g3 and f2-f4,

which is what he eventually goes for in the game. In either case White has very little.

15... ♔b7 (1:24:40)
16.h5 (1:34:26) ♙xe3 (1:23:26)
17.♙xe3 (1:33:17) ♖c5 (1:23:17)
18.hxg6 (1:32:56) hxg6 (1:23:02)
19.g3 (1:25:30)



19... a5! (1:08:41)

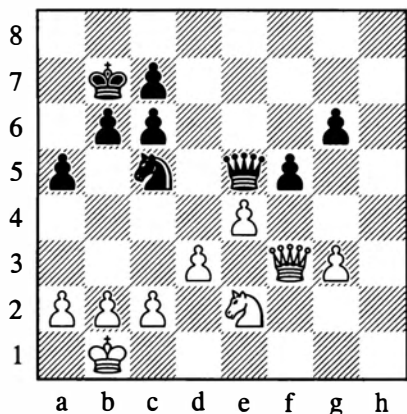
Stabilizing the knight's fine position on c5; Black has completely equalized.

20.♜h7 (1:20:46)

This leads to exchanges and an inevitable draw but it is hard to suggest anything else.

20... ♜h8 (1:07:29)
21.♜dh1 (1:20:02) ♜xh7 (1:06:05)
22.♜xh7 (1:19:53) ♙f6 (1:04:46)
23.f4 (1:12:17) ♜h8 (1:02:49)
24.♜xh8 (1:10:58) ♙xh8 (1:02:47)
25.fxe5 (1:08:29) ♙xe5 (1:02:36)
26.♙f3 (1:05:39) f5 (0:58:43)

Black gets rid of his only weakness and the game is shortly drawn.



27. exf5 (1:03:36)	gxf5 (0:58:35)
28. c3 (1:03:13)	de6 (0:56:16)
29. cc2 (1:01:09)	g5 (0:55:19)
30. f2 (0:59:38)	de6 (0:55:06)
31. f3 (0:59:00)	g5 (0:54:59)
32. f2 (0:58:54)	de6 (0:54:53)

½–½

Not much of a struggle, but sometimes in chess, like in life, you have to take things easy.

With this draw Magnus inched half a point closer to the World Championship title, but at least Anand showed he is still there, waiting to exploit a slip by the challenger.

After the draw is agreed, the two rivals move on to the press conference, where Magnus confidently explains what an easy draw this was for him – not in so many words, but the gist of his comments is pretty clear. Anand seems relaxed and, though this could be relief at interrupting his losing streak, he fails to sound convincing when he says that he will continue trying. Carlsen emphasizes the psychological impact of the fifth game on the sixth, perhaps wishing not to let his opponent put the two losses behind him, and overall gives the impression of an already-crowned champion who is just taking care of some procedural obligations. The general consensus is that, with Carlsen showing no signs of the nervous breakdown he suffered in London, the match is practically decided.



Game Eight



**If you can't beat them,
join them**

“I played 1.e4, he played the Berlin, I chose the most solid line, yada yada yada, let’s do the doping test.” – Magnus Carlsen.

Editors are sneaky creatures. First they entice you with promises of fame, fortune and front row seats at NBA matches; and then, once you have been hooked, they force you to work like a slave against your will and survival instincts. Using the legally binding contract they have tricked you into signing, they make you do the most horrible things – writing commentary for the eighth game is one of them.

The long version of the story is that Carlsen, leading by two wins and having overcome the trial of playing two Blacks in a row, opens with 1.e4. This is interpreted as a show of aggression and desire to finish his opponent off, though Anand’s supporters also rejoice in the prospect of a Sicilian Najdorf that may offer their hero winning chances. This is of course wishful thinking, primarily because Magnus is unlikely to enter the Open Sicilian anyway, but we don’t even get that far; after a couple of minutes’ contemplation, probably prompted by the unexpected occurrence of Carlsen’s first move, Anand replies 1...e5 and reverses the roles by playing the Berlin himself. This strategy of the contestants employing each other’s openings was prevalent in the Karpov – Kasparov matches, especially the first one, with both players trying to decipher the other’s views and feelings in the debated positions. However, under the present circumstances and with only a few games remaining, such notions can be immediately dismissed; in all probability Anand, perhaps caught by surprise, just decides to play it safe and postpone his last-ditch attempt until the next game. By now hardly a doubt remains in everyone’s mind that the World Champion has not managed to overcome his disappointment and has effectively conceded the match. If that is indeed so, playing the remaining games and especially in front of his home crowd must be excruciating.

As if in an act of solidarity, Carlsen makes the ordeal (of Anand, not your authors) as painless as possible. Most likely surprised by the complacency displayed by his opponent, he loses all desire to play chess on this day; he goes down a solid and uninspiring line that was also seen in the very first world championship match, between Steinitz and Zukertort in 1886. The parallels with those chivalrous times unfortunately end there; Magnus makes simple and obvious moves very quickly, with zero ambition, Anand is careful enough and soon all the pieces have been swept off the board. The players make a few more moves, locking the pawn structure in the process, and agree a boring draw, with Carlsen having played the entire game almost a tempo.



Magnus Carlsen – Viswanathan Anand

Game 8, 19th November 2013

In a remarkable reversal of roles, the 8th round game in Chennai saw Magnus Carlsen employ 1.e4 for the first time in the match and World Champion Vishy Anand answer with the Challenger's pet defence, the Berlin Variation of the Ruy Lopez.

Magnus's choice of 1.e4 for this game is hardly surprising. Having a considerable advantage of two points over his opponent he deemed it right to play an opening that would be appropriate for maintaining his lead and indeed, 1.e4 suits this purpose better than 1.d4 or other first moves nowadays; there are a lot of forcing theoretical lines in it, petering out to a draw in one way or another, and the pace of the struggle is quicker, involving more clear-cut plans and ideas.

As for Vishy's response, it must have come as a surprise to his fans and commentators, and perhaps even his opponent. Trailing by two points with only five games to go puts you in an emergency situation as you know that every half point brings your opponent closer to victory, so it is not unreasonable to consider going all out, even with Black. Vishy chose instead the pragmatic attitude of trying to draw with Black and press in his White games, a strategy that might have worked if he was better prepared both mentally and physically.

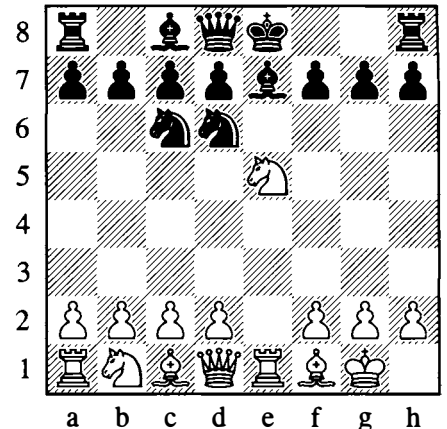
In this game he held his ground easily, a fact that gives him a glimmer of hope for a positive outcome in the match. But a two-point deficit against Magnus is very hard to cope with, even for the Indian magician.

1.e4 (1:59:57)	e5 (1:58:27)
2.♢f3 (1:59:49)	♢c6 (1:58:20)
3.♠b5 (1:59:43)	♢f6 (1:58:13)
4.0-0 (1:59:36)	♢xe4 (1:58:07)
5.♠e1 (1:59:33)	

This is probably the only game in the match that Magnus plays with no ambition in the opening. The text move has long been known as a drawing device.

5...	♢d6 (1:57:53)
6.♢xe5 (1:59:25)	♠e7 (1:57:44)
7.♠f1 (1:59:20)	

Carlsen is an expert in this position with both colours.



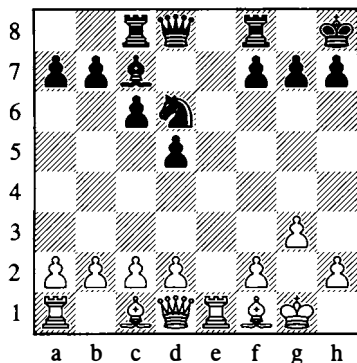
7...	♢xe5 (1:57:04)

Vishy chooses to chop off some wood.

The other main idea is: 7...♢f5 as played between the two players in Nanjing 2010. See page 166.

8.♠xe5 (1:59:18)	0-0 (1:56:49)
9.d4 (1:59:12)	

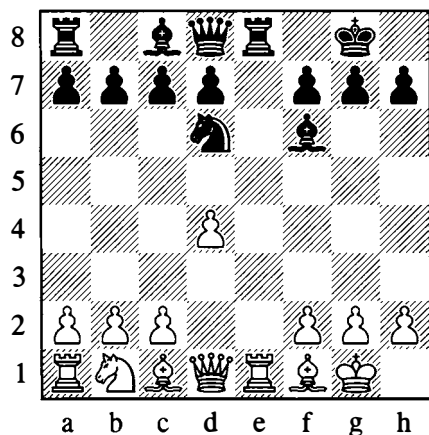
9.♢c3 was recently played by Nakamura against Carlsen at the Sinquefeld Cup, but Magnus showed that it does not offer White anything special either: 9...♢e8 10.♢d5 ♠d6 11.♠e1 c6 12.♢e3 ♠c7 13.♢f5 d5 14.♢e7† ♖h8 15.♢xc8 ♠xc8 16.g3 ♢d6



17.♔h3 (17.d3!? ♖f6 18.♗g4!? ♜ce8! 19.♔f4 ♘b5! 20.♙xc7 ♘xc7 21.♗d7 ♘e6! 22.♗xb7 ♘d4 23.♜xe8 ♜xe8 gives Black dangerous compensation for the pawn.) 17...f5 18.d3 ♗f6 19.c3 ♜ce8 20.♙d2 ♘f7! 21.♜xe8 ♜xe8 22.♗f1 f4 23.♜e1 ♜f8! 24.♗e2 h6 25.♘h1 ♘g5 26.♙g4 ♙d6 27.h4 ♘h7 28.♘g2 ♗g6! 29.♙h5 ♗f5 30.♙g4 ♗g6 31.♙h5 ♗f5 32.♙g4 ♗g6 ½–½ Nakamura – Carlsen, Saint Louis 2013.

9... ♙f6 (1:55:19)
10.♜e1 (1:59:05) ♜e8 (1:53:48)

Vishy continues with his policy of exchanges.



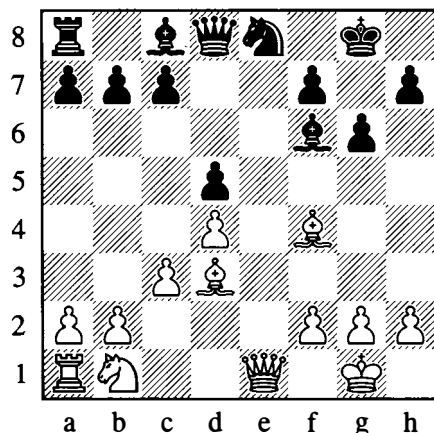
11.c3 (1:58:34)

Magnus too, wants to keep things as simple as possible.

A more complicated form of equality arose after 11.♙f4!? ♜xe1 12.♗xe1 ♘e8 13.♘c3 ♙xd4 14.♘d5 c6! 15.♘e7+ ♘f8 16.♘xc8 ♗f6! 17.♗b4+ c5 18.♗d2 ♜xc8 19.♜e1 g5! 20.♙xg5 ♙xf2+ 21.♗xf2 ♗xg5 22.♙b5 ♘d6 23.♙xd7 ♜d8 24.h4 ♗g7 in Guseinov – Sargissian, Warsaw 2013.

11... ♜xe1 (1:50:59)
12.♗xe1 (1:58:33) ♘e8 (1:48:24)
13.♙f4 (1:57:43) d5 (1:47:25)
14.♙d3 (1:57:36) g6! (1:46:19)

An accurate move by Vishy. His knight will be excellently placed on g7, supporting the exchange of light-squared bishops.



15.♘d2 (1:57:09) ♘g7 (1:44:34)

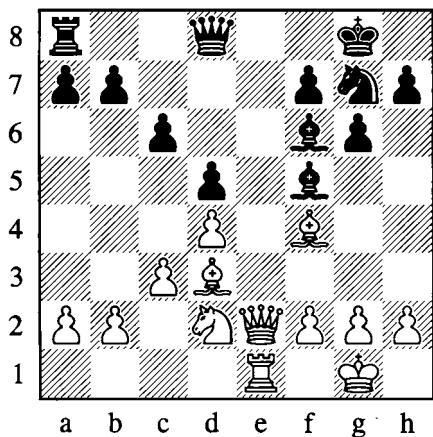
Black has played a good opening and White cannot achieve anything of substance on the e-file. The chances are balanced.

16.♗e2 (1:54:45)

16.♘f3 c6 17.h3 ♙f5 18.♙xf5 ♘xf5 19.♗d2 ♗f8 20.g4 ♘d6 21.♙xd6 ♗xd6 22.♜e1 ♜f8 is another boring type of equality.

16... c6 (1:40:16)
17.♜e1 (1:54:12) ♙f5 (1:33:17)

Black didn't have to wait too long to make this favourable exchange of bishops. Now White's only trump is control of the open e-file, but as an axiom of chess says, an open file alone is not enough to win a game.



18. ♖xf5 (1:54:03) ♖xf5 (1:33:04)

19. ♘f3 (1:53:55) ♘g7 (1:30:34)

20. ♗e5 (1:50:00)

White hurries to exchange the remaining bishops as he does not want to be left with the potentially inferior one.

20... ♘e6 (1:25:02)

21. ♗xf6 (1:49:49) ♗xf6 (1:24:46)

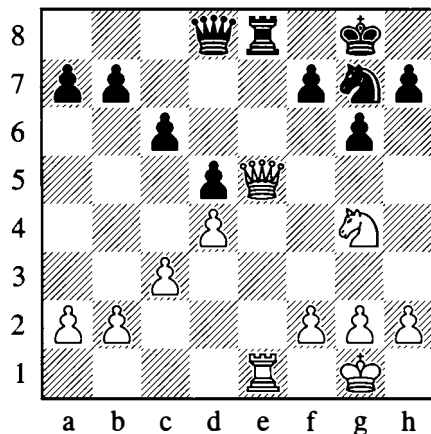
22. ♘e5 (1:49:43) ♗e8! (1:07:55)

Vishy has taken his time for the last few moves, making sure he doesn't blunder anything. This last move is very accurate, effectively killing the game.

23. ♘g4 (1:44:13) ♗d8 (1:07:13)

24. ♖e5 (1:42:26) ♘g7 (1:06:58)

The point, forcing a drawn king and pawn ending. This had to be seen in advance as it is the only move in the position.



25. ♖xe8† (1:42:19)

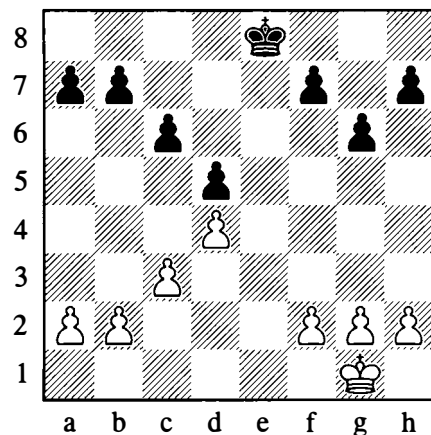
It would have been naive to expect 25. ♘f6?? ♖xf6! from Carlsen. The mass exchanges on e8 will now reduce the game to an elementary draw.

25... ♘xe8 (1:06:53)

26. ♗xe8† (1:42:07) ♖xe8 (1:06:49)

27. ♘f6† (1:42:00) ♗f8 (1:06:44)

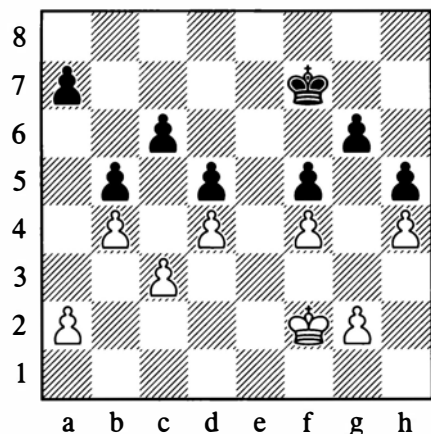
28. ♘xe8 (1:41:56) ♗xe8 (1:06:38)



It's down to skin and bones. The final moves of the game are slightly comical, reminiscent of amateurs imitating each other's moves.

29. f4 (1:41:45)

f5 (1:06:06)

30.♖f2 (1:41:38)**b5** (1:05:48)**31.b4** (1:41:25)**♖f7** (1:05:40)**32.h3** (1:40:48)**h6** (1:05:16)**33.h4** (1:40:39)**h5** (1:05:08)

Anand offered a draw before Magnus could play 34.g3 to reach a rare picture of complete symmetry.

½–½

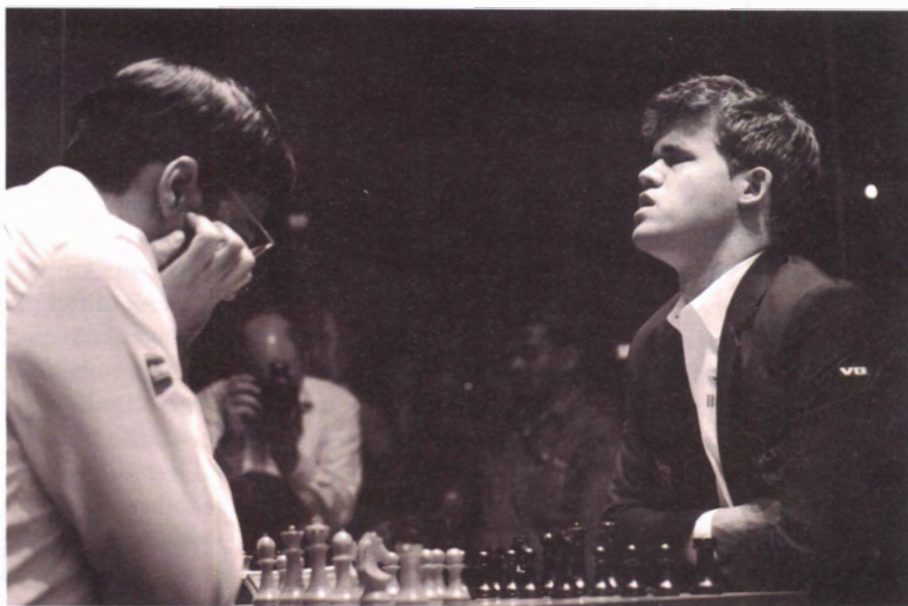
The press conference, though nothing special, surpasses the game in terms of excitement. Anand defends his opening choice, at the same time admitting that 1.e4 was not at the top of his list of priorities, and gives the signal for an

all-out attack in Game Nine, his penultimate White in the match and arguably his last chance to change its course. Carlsen delivers an eloquent and pretty accurate description of the game with the words quoted above, adding that he was in no mood to think, he just wanted to set a few traps and then curtail the game. These words cannot be doubted by anyone who has watched the live feed of the game, which has shown Carlsen looking extremely bored at the board, even half-asleep at times. It can only be assumed that he is just cruising to the inevitable end of the match and has no interest in fighting further. The always-erudite Nigel Short compares the current match to that of 1921 between Emanuel Lasker and Jose Raul Capablanca, which the young challenger also confidently won after Lasker appeared unable and unwilling to put up any fight.

Ironically, a doping test has been scheduled after this particular game; the goddess of chess, Caïssa, seems to be making good use of the occasion to highlight the absurdity of the procedure. Another well-deserved rest day follows, with Anand gearing up for the last-chance Game Nine and Carlsen working himself up for this final challenge.



Game Nine



A Tale of Ice and Fire

Comebacks are not a rare phenomenon in world championship matches, though they are usually restricted to occasions where the opponent's lead is no larger than one point. The dizzying changes of fortunes in matches like Alekhine – Euwe and Botvinnik – Smyslov are hardly ever repeated nowadays, but modern chess history does encompass certain exquisite feats by players trying their best to catch up. Bobby Fischer lost the first game of his match against Spassky and then went on to forfeit the second one, but quickly rebounded to score a convincing victory; and Viktor Korchnoi managed to equalize his 1978 match against Anatoly Karpov from being down 2–5. Particularly memorable is the second half of the 1986 Kasparov – Karpov match, where Karpov rebounded with three consecutive wins in Games 17–19 to extinguish his opponent's lead. This occasion was marred by its surrounding circumstances, with Kasparov accusing one of his seconds of treachery, and the comeback wasn't successfully carried to its conclusion by Karpov, who eventually lost the match. And now, in 2013, Magnus Carlsen would have to avert such a turning of the tables in order to ensure his ascent to the world champion's throne.

Game 9 represents Anand's last chance to change the course of the match; otherwise, with only three games remaining, two of them with Black, his chances of scoring plus two are virtually extinct. His strategy for this critical game is easy to identify: obtain a position with lots of play, as unbalanced as possible, preferably involving an attack on Carlsen's king – Magnus particularly dislikes such positions. The means to pursue this strategy are less obvious; Anand's 1.e4 has been effectively neutralized, and while the Berlin Wall did once fall in 1989, the second time around it stood its ground and has been in place ever since – and therefore an emergency switch to 1.d4 is to be expected. As for Carlsen, there is no doubt he realizes the importance of this particular game, and he probably views it as the last real test in his world champion's examination – like everyone else does. The venue is, as always, almost full and the internet spectators are there in huge numbers to witness what is expected to be a titanic struggle. The two rivals arrive at the board with the full sense of the burden on their shoulders, the arbiter starts the clock and we're off: 1.d4.

Magnus trots out an expected Nimzo-Indian, which is met with yet another of Fritz Sämisch's inventions involving the move f2-f3; no surprises here, as Anand has played it at this level before (in 2008 versus Kramnik), and also in tournament games – a creative win against Wang Hao prominent among them. The next few moves come quickly, until Magnus pauses to consider the possible recaptures on d5 – and selects the less popular and riskier one with the pawn. This unexpected decision may have been prompted by a wish to avoid Anand's undoubtedly deep preparation in the main line (but then again, there are other, more solid ways to do this), or perhaps a mixture of self-confidence and the cushion afforded him by his two-point lead. On the next move he sharpens the situation further by pushing ...c4, removing all pressure from White's centre and turning the game into a race between flank attacks. It has been 75 years since the great Capablanca played this move, in this same structure but in a somewhat different situation, against the upcoming Mikhail Botvinnik, and went on to lose a truly spectacular game; since then, this push has been unequivocally condemned in all such positions. Carlsen's interpretation does have the obvious merit of preventing the development of the white bishop on d3, but the general character of the position doesn't change much: White has obvious and very dangerous play in the centre and on the kingside. For the very first time in the match, when playing White, Anand enjoys a promising position, full of play.



In fact, White's play is so obvious and easy that, up to a certain point, one doesn't even need to think much; Anand speeds through the early middlegame, while Carlsen spends oceans of time on his decisions, falling seriously behind on the clock. The storm clouds are gathering over his king, slowly but steadily, but there's not much he can do about it; so he simply sets his queenside pawns in motion, hoping that they prove enough of a distraction to slow down White's kingside play. He clearly feels uncomfortable in the position, as is evident both on the clock and in his body language, and I really wish I had Manuel the poker player around to offer me his insights. Black's main practical problem is that there is nothing else he can do, no preventive measures to take, no manoeuvres in preparation for the coming assault; he just has to wait until Anand commences action. By this time he must be regretting his opening choice, regardless of its objective merits, and I imagine that with a different match score he would be feeling extremely nervous right now. Still, he remains consistent and plunges ahead on the queenside; when his pawn reaches b4, the first critical moment of the game has arrived. Jon Ludvig Hammer, normally an optimist, feels that his good friend is as good as busted at this point.

Unfortunately for the local fans, yet another instance of psychological weakness on Anand's part occurs. Having a pleasant choice between a direct attacking move (20.f5) and a clever restraining of Black's queenside play (20.a4), with both moves appearing promising, Anand opts for a third, safer possibility, exchanging pawns and a pair of rooks. This in itself is not bad, but it strongly hints that Anand is psychologically not ready to immerse himself in complications, and is trying to play for a win without risking much. Several moves down the road he will greatly miss his exchanged rook, which could have swung to the kingside with decisive effect; though at this early stage one may well argue that his exchanging operation deprives Black of the defensive duties of the rook on a6. All in all, the lack of a clear-cut continuation of the attack prompts Anand into pursuing the simplest means possible; but this also means that Carlsen's defensive task becomes just that little bit simpler.

With a couple of forced moves out of the way, another critical moment comes: Anand must now choose the optimal way of continuing his attack. There is one obvious plan, but the issue is confused by the variety of possible move orders; Anand sits there for 45 minutes, trying to work things out as far as possible, with his mind understandably stuck on this direct attacking try. In fact, there are other options as well, less forcing but also promising; the knight's transfer to the more purposeful f4-square being the most obvious of them, immediately or in the next couple of moves, as later suggested by Kasparov and Svidler. A positionally-minded player would have probably focussed on this idea before anything else, and I suppose Anand would also have considered it seriously under any less pressing circumstances, but in the end he decides to opt for the forcing line and hope for the best. Carlsen bashes out his next few moves without thinking, as they are clearly forced. The situation looks terribly dangerous for him, but no clear mate is discernible on the horizon, he has a protected passed pawn on b3 and, after all, he is leading by two points – a loss will not be the end of the world. I assume his main concern is precisely the multitude of possibilities available to White; all it takes is to overlook one idea – and it will be all over. Another set of moves is executed on the board, with the black pawn now reaching b2, and everyone is holding their breath in anticipation.

And then it happens that the soothing light Anand sees at the end of the tunnel is just a freight train coming his way. Having one more time gone over the lines calculated earlier, he plunges ahead with a rook move that allows Black to queen his pawn with check; it sounds too good to be true, and it is. Allowing the promotion is not bad in itself, but after a long forcing line where Black hardly has any opportunity to go wrong, a drawish position will come about – this is equivalent to failure for the World Champion. In fact, Anand has his mind set on a somewhat different idea, the futility of which he suddenly realizes; confused by the complex calculations he quickly decides to block the check not with the bishop, but with the knight, which introduces some subtle but very favourable adjustments to the evaluation of the forcing line in question. Unfortunately for him, things don't get that far: the knight move has opened up a different defensive option to Carlsen, one that is immediately decisive; Magnus makes the move and Anand resigns.



Viswanathan Anand – Magnus Carlsen

Game 9, 21st November 2013

The ninth game of the World Championship match in Chennai saw defending champion Vishy Anand launch an all-out attack against young Magnus's king, and for a while it seemed that its huge flames would swallow his challenger's ice castle. Magnus, believing firmly in the strength of his defence, didn't panic, but sent instead a special envoy to White's camp to negotiate a peace truce. It was a humble pawn though, so no one paid attention to it; after all, everyone (with the exception of the white king) was occupied launching fireballs at the ice castle. To attract the white king's attention the little pawn transformed into a queen and said it was prepared to sacrifice itself to bring peace. But even so, it was treated disrespectfully and its plea was ignored. "An insult to my face is an insult to the great black king," said the queen, taking its sword out. The members of the white court started laughing at it; they hadn't realized it had the power to influence chess history...

1.d4 (1:59:57)

I am sure most chess fans around the world started to cheer at the appearance of this move on the board as it promised a pitched battle; and indeed, so it was destined to be.

1...	♟f6 (1:59:54)
2.c4 (1:59:52)	e6 (1:59:49)
3.♟c3 (1:59:46)	♙b4 (1:59:40)

Magnus goes for his pet Nimzo-Indian. The fact that this is territory where Anand has scored impressive victories with the white pieces was not enough to put Magnus off choosing it in one of the most important games of his life.

4.f3 (1:59:39)

Vishy chooses an attacking line that previously helped him score one of the most beautiful wins of his career.

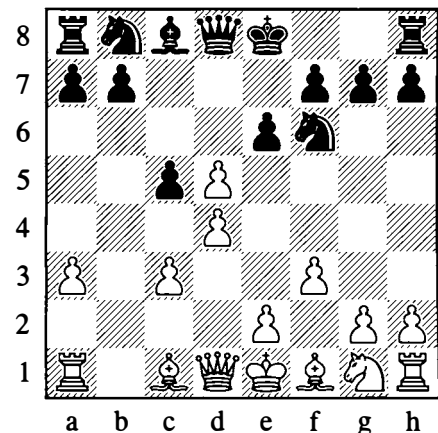
4...**d5** (1:59:04)

Black deems it right contest the e4-square, but now White will get the bishop pair in a rather fluid position; I guess this is the main reason this line is considered attractive by many players.

4...c5 is another possibility, but then White has the extra option of 5.d5, when it's a different story.

5.a3 (1:59:28)**♙xc3†** (1:57:31)**6.bxc3** (1:59:20)**c5** (1:57:22)

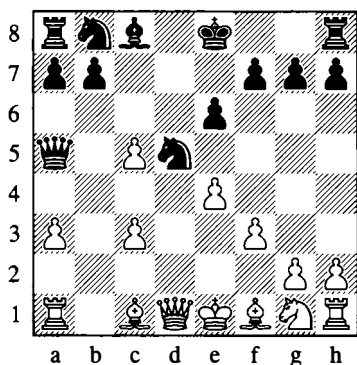
Black's compensation for losing the bishop pair consists of a slight lead in development and an increased influence over the light squares.

7.cxd5 (1:59:12)**7...****exd5** (1:53:39)**7...♟xd5**

This is considered to be the more reliable

recapture, but Magnus wants to avoid mainstream theory. Besides, Vishy had pleasant memories of this variation as the one in which he scored the brilliant victory referred to above.

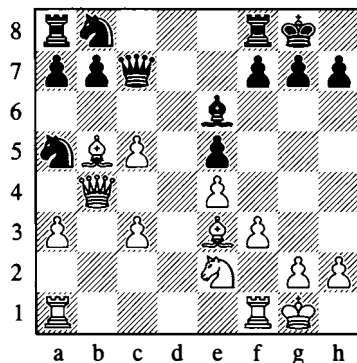
8.dxc5 ♖a5 9.e4



9...♗e7

Magnus's own experience with this line has been: 9...♗f6 10.♙e3 0-0 11.♖b3 ♗fd7 12.a4 ♖c7 13.♗a3 ♗a6 14.♙xa6 bxa6 15.♗e2 a5 16.0-0 ♙a6 17.♗fe1 ♗fc8 18.♗d4 ♗xc5 19.♗b5 ♙xb5 20.axb5 ♗d3 21.♗e2 ♖c4 22.♗d2 h6 23.♖xa5 ♗c5 24.♙xc5 ♖xc5† 25.♗h1 ♗ab8 26.♖xa7 ♖xc3 27.♗d4 ♖xd4 28.♗xd4 ♗xb5 ½-½ Krush – Carlsen, Gausdal 2007.

10.♙e3 0-0 11.♖b3 ♖c7 12.♙b5 ♗ec6 13.♗e2 ♗a5 14.♖b4 e5 15.0-0 ♙e6?



16.♗d4!! exd4 17.cxd4 ♗bc6 18.♖c3 ♗e7 19.♗fd1 ♗ad8 20.♙f2 a6 21.♙g3 ♖c8 22.♙f1

b6 23.♗ab1! ♗b3 24.♗xb3 ♙xb3 25.♖xb3 bxc5 26.d5 ♗g6 27.♖b6 f5 28.♙xa6 ♖d7 29.♙b5 ♖f7 30.exf5 ♖xf5 31.♖xc5 ♗c8 32.♖d4 ♗fd8 33.a4

1-0 Anand – Wang Hao, Wijk aan Zee 2011.

8.e3 (1:58:12)

c4! (1:53:32)

This move looks anti-positional, but it's the first choice of the engines. It has the merit of preventing the white bishop from occupying the d3-square.

9.♗e2 (1:54:01)

♗c6 (1:52:19)

10.g4! (1:52:35)

An aggressive, multipurpose move. It stops the black bishop from coming out to f5 and prepares to harmoniously complete the development of the kingside by ♙g2 and ♗g3.

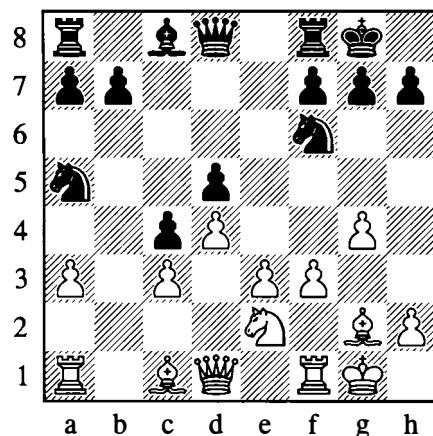
10...

0-0 (1:39:50)

11.♙g2 (1:51:27)

♗a5 (1:33:48)

12.0-0 (1:50:51)



A very interesting position, and one that computers don't seem to understand. They assess Black's prospects as better, probably underestimating White's central pawn mass and his kingside attacking potential. The truth

is that things are very complicated, and in practice I would prefer to be White as he is playing for higher stakes.

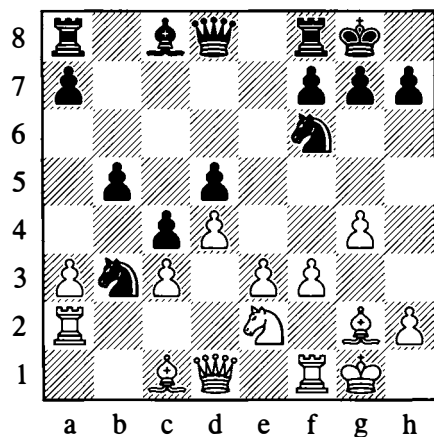
12... ♖b3 (1:31:25)

13. ♖a2! (1:50:23)

This move has been tested mainly in correspondence chess and seems to me more logical than the alternative 13. ♖b1. The rook may switch from a2 across to the kingside to help with the attack.

13... b5 (1:27:33)

The race is on. In anticipation of White's attack, Black rushes to prepare ...a5 and ...b4, generating queenside counterplay. But now another merit of having the rook on a2 is seen in that it slows down the aforementioned plan, as Black will have to spend a tempo moving the a8-rook first in order to carry it out.



14. ♖g3 (1:45:19)

Vishy focuses on the attack, and this is probably the right thing to do.

Having said that, an important alternative is: 14. a4! bxa4 15. e4 dxe4 16. fxe4 ♖xc1 17. ♖xc1 ♖xcg4 18. h3 ♖h6 Koskinen – Pesonen,

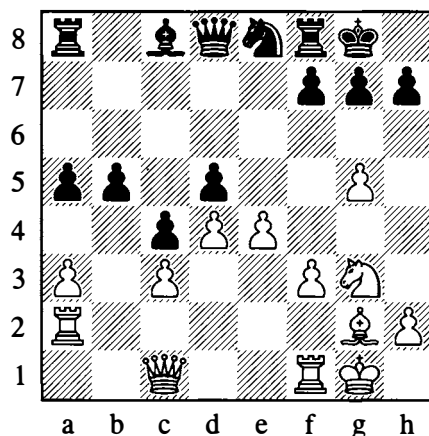
corr. 2012. After 19. ♖xa4 a5, White has serious compensation for his pawn, but I don't believe that Black can be worse.

14... a5 (1:23:16)

15. g5 (1:37:40) ♖e8 (1:21:47)

16. e4 (1:36:21) ♖xc1 (1:14:51)

17. ♖xc1 (1:36:12)



As a result of excellent opening preparation, Vishy is already significantly ahead on the clock here and has the more pleasant position. White has managed to carry out the central advance e3-e4, enjoys attacking chances on the kingside and has the better piece coordination, and all this has been achieved at no material cost. Things look very promising for the champion and many predicted that Black would be mated.

17... ♖a6! (1:14:38)

Magnus goes methodically about preparing ...b4 as that is his only trump.

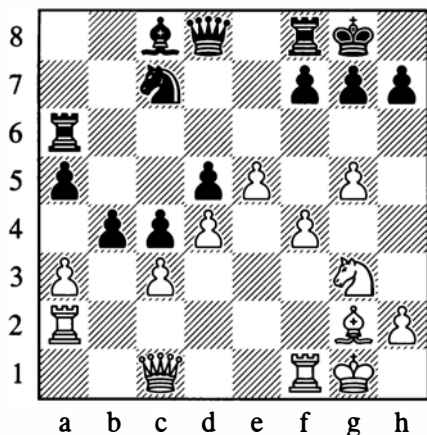
18. e5! (1:25:29)

White needs to attack at all costs.

Vishy does not get distracted by such ideas as 18. ♖b2 ♖c7 19. f4?! dxe4 20. ♖xe4 ♖b6

21. ♖c5 ♜e8=, which would only allow Black to activate his pieces.

18... ♖c7 (0:53:09)
19. ♜f4 (1:22:07) ♜b4 (0:52:59)



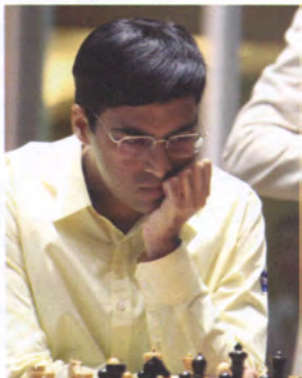
20. ♜xb4 (1:10:06)

20. a4!?

This has been suggested by various commentators, the general idea being that the a2-rook can be more useful for the attack than the a6-rook is for the defence. In principle I agree, but I would like to add that the position is perhaps not as clear as might have been thought.

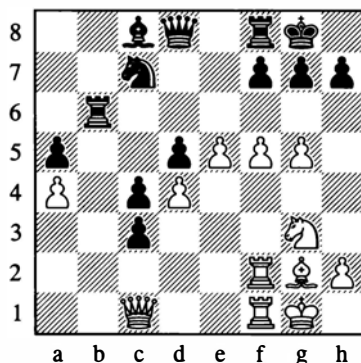
20... ♜b6

20... b3 21. ♜af2 ♙d7 22. f5 ♙xa4 23. f6 looks very scary for the second player, and I wouldn't be surprised if White is winning here.



21. f5 bxc3 22. ♜af2

22. f6 looks premature for White after 22... g6, intending ... ♜b3 or ... ♖e6.



22... c2!?

22... ♖a6? 23. f6 g6 24. ♜f4! is almost winning for White, as 24... ♜d7 25. ♜h4 h5 26. h3! (threatening ♖xh5) is very hard to cope with.

23. ♜xc2

23. ♜xc2?! ♜xg5 and 23. f6 g6 are both fine for Black.

23... ♖a6 24. f6

24. ♜f4 ♖b4 25. ♜c3 ♖d3 26. ♜h4 ♜h6! 27. ♜g4 ♜b6 28. ♖h5 ♜b2 29. ♖f6† ♖h8 30. ♜h4 ♙xf5!=

24... gxf6 25. gxf6!

Black manages to defend after 25. ♖h5 fxe5 26. ♖f6† ♜xf6 27. gxf6 ♖h8 28. ♜c3 e4 29. ♜g3 ♜g8 30. ♜h6 ♜xg3 31. hxxg3 ♜g8.

25... ♖h8 26. ♜c3

26. ♜f4 ♜g8 27. ♜h4 ♜g6 is unclear.

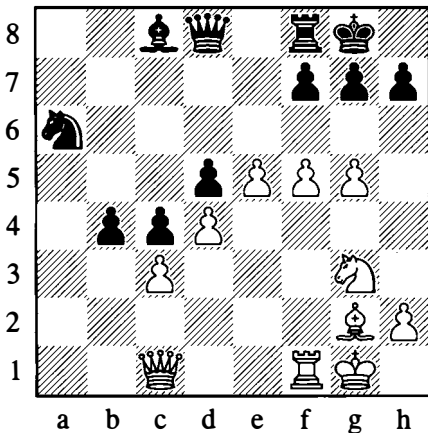
26... ♜g8

The position remains unclear.



20... **axb4** (0:52:57)
 21. **Exa6** (1:08:42) **Qxa6** (0:52:51)
 22. **f5** (1:07:05)

White's attack remains virulent even with a pair of rooks gone. As Magnus admitted in the press conference after the game, this was the first time he was scared in the match as the pressure was becoming inexorable and there was a chance he could get mated.



22... **b3!** (0:35:34)

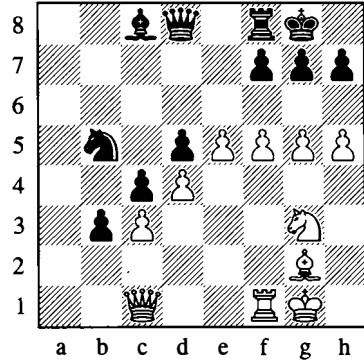
Creating a permanent source of worry for White, and as it turned out, this annoyance proved too much even for a player of Vishy's class. Being in a difficult practical situation, Magnus keeps on posing problems for his opponent on every move from now on, and is eventually rewarded with success.

23. **Wf4** (0:22:29)

Inching closer to the black king, but now there is less surveillance on Black's dangerous passer. Remarkably, Vishy spent 45 minutes on this move, an indication that the attack was far from trivial to conduct.

This is another dangerous move to face, intending h4-h5 followed by f5-f6 at some point. But it seems that Black should be able to hold his own, a sample line being:

23... **Qc7** 24. h5 **Qb5**



25. **f6**

After 25. **Qe2**, Black can go back with 25... **Qc7**.

25... **Qe6!** 26. **Qe2** **gxf6** 27. **gxf6**

27. **exf6** **Qd6** 28. **Qf4** **Qf5** 29. **Wa3** is very wild, but the final verdict should be equality.

27... **Qh8** 28. **Qf4** **Qg8** 29. **Qxe6** **fxe6** 30. **Qh2**

The position looks equal.

23... **Qc7** (0:33:25)

24. **f6** (0:21:05)

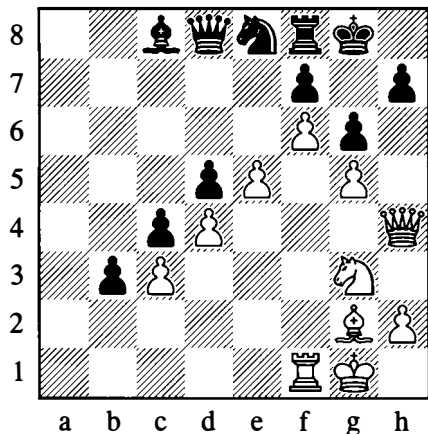
Rushing things may seem like a sign of nervousness, but the move is objectively not bad.

24. **Wh4** **Qh8** 25. **Qh5** was a more intriguing way of playing, keeping several possibilities open. Yet after 25... **Qb5** (25... **b2!**? is also possible) 26. **e6** **fxe6** 27. **f6** **gxf6** 28. **g6** **Qg8** 29. **Qxf6** **W7** 30. **Wh5** **Qf8**, the best at White's disposal is to force a perpetual: 31. **Qxh7** **Qxf1** 32. **Qxf1** **b2** 33. **W5** **Qg7** 34. **Wg5** **b1=W** 35. **Wd8** **+**

24... **g6** (0:31:28)

25. **Wh4** (0:19:53) **Qe8** (0:31:19)

23. h4!?



26. ♖h6 (0:14:13)

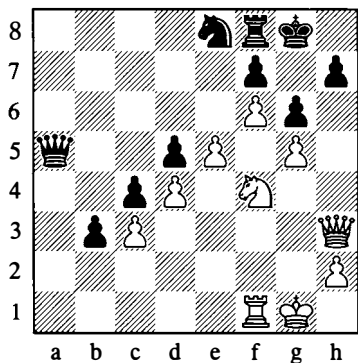
Vishy goes for the rook lift ♖f4-h4, a standard idea in such positions.

26. ♜e2!?

This less committal option was pointed out by Josh Friedel.

26... ♜e6 27. ♜f4 ♖a5 28. ♜h3! ♜xh3 29. ♖xh3

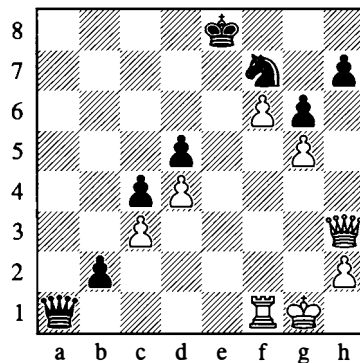
White has managed to lift the blockade on e6, but Black draws in the nick of time.



29... b2! 30. ♜e6!?

30.e6 ♜d6!! 31. ♜xg6! hxg6 32. ♖h6 ♜f5 33. ♖xf5 b1=♖† 34. ♖f1 ♖xf1† 35. ♜xf1 ♖a1†= is another perpetual check.

30... ♖a1 31. ♜xf8 ♜xf8 32.e6 ♜d6 33. ♖h6† ♜e8 34. exf7† ♜xf7 35. ♖h3



35... ♜d8!!

White has to take a perpetual check.

36. ♖f3 b1=♖ 37. ♖xd5† ♜c8 38. ♖c6† ♜d8 39. ♖d5†=

26...

b2! (0:31:12)

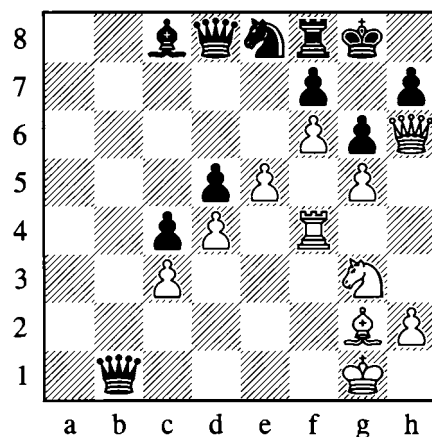
The lonely soldier marches on to distract the rook.

27. ♖f4! (0:11:41)

But no – it doesn't! In the hope of mating him, Vishy allows Magnus to be a whole queen up.

27...

b1=♖† (0:31:05)

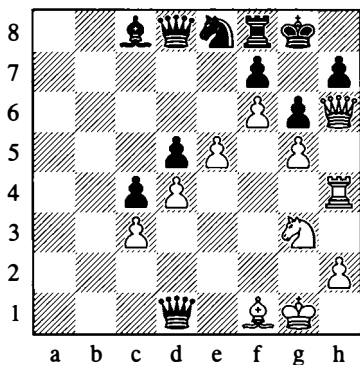


The climax of a wonderful game. It should

now end in a draw, but blinded by the spectre of a victory that is not there, Anand commits a tragic blunder.

28. ♖f1?? (0:11:11)

Incredible. 28. ♖f1 ♔d1 29. ♖h4



29... ♔h5! 30. ♖xh5 g5 31. ♖xh5 ♙f5 32. g6! ♙xg6 33. ♖g5 (intending h4-h5) 33... ♖xf6 34. exf6 ♔xf6 35. ♖xd5 ♔f3 36. ♖c5 ♔xc3 37. ♔f4 ♙d8 38. ♖xc4 ♔b2 would have been totally equal. Now Visy is in for a rude awakening.

28... ♔e1! (0:30:16)

The only move, but what a move. Black stops ♖h4, and White has no other way to continue the attack.

Visy resigned, and pandemonium broke out backstage as the Magnus team burst into celebrations; from now on, only a miracle could stop Magnus from becoming World Champion.

0-1

This sad end to such an exciting game is hardly befitting and has come as a powerful blow to both Anand and his supporters; but the Indian joins the press conference with

admirable composure and is quite talkative. In his words and demeanour one can sense, apart from the by now permanent disappointment, a feeling of relief now that this unsuccessful match is effectively finished. He is still affected by the tension of the game; this becomes most evident when he replies to a “Were you calculating variations throughout those 45 minutes?” question by Nastja with an uncharacteristic and rather rude, “No, I was thinking what to eat for dinner.” True, the question could have been worded somewhat more precisely, but it was quite obvious that she was inquiring about any possible doubts and reservations he may have been battling with while pondering his move. In any case, for the rest of the press conference he is almost the usual talkative Anand, even going on to explain the exact calculation mechanism that prompted his blunder. Carlsen admits that he had been scared of White’s attack throughout the entire game and also implies his dislike for having his king attacked; perhaps this game will go into Sergei Shipov’s next article. The title is now within Carlsen’s grasp and he surely knows this, but he remains reserved and refrains from commenting on the future. Yet.

This third win by Magnus turns the remaining games of the match into a mere formality. The local organizers, who so far have refused to even consider the possibility of their hero losing the match, certainly not without going the full distance, must now start making plans for speeding up the closing ceremony. One reporter asks Anand whether he feels he can win the last three games, but Visy’s reply, though diplomatic, does not leave any doubts. One can read all over his face that for him the match is concluded and, with the example of the thrilling eighth game still fresh in mind, another similarly epic one-hour battle is expected on the next day.



Game Ten



**The Name is Carlsen –
Magnus Carlsen**

A sense of closure dominates the atmosphere around Game Ten. There is no doubt in anyone's mind that today Carlsen will secure the half point that will make him World Champion, and it is generally accepted that Anand does not intend to delay the coronation. There's no more tension, anxiety and anticipation; all these emotions have been replaced by relaxation. A quick draw is expected, giving way to a lengthy and hopefully revealing press conference. Even Anand's 1...c5 in reply to 1.e4 is not mistaken as a show of ambition. Magnus opts for his usual 3...♟b5(†) system and soon obtains a very safe hedgehog position where nothing much is happening (though Shipov would perhaps like to argue otherwise). Black seems quite comfortable as well, and already after 22 moves the impending draw seems well on its way, with Anand offering a repetition of moves.

In a decision that evokes memories of Saint Louis, Magnus avoids the repetition and keeps the game going. This gives rise to an uproar of admiration for his audacity. Of course, this time he's not really risking anything; the position is still completely harmless for him, and there's no way he is going to lose three games in a row. But what really is amazing is his resolve to try and win the game, the fact that he finds within himself the motivation to play on when the goal has been achieved and celebration is just around the corner. Though forewarned, Anand is probably a bit disheartened by this turn of events, and over the next few moves White does gain a few inches of ground – though nothing really significant is happening. Most likely eager to get it all done with and go home, Anand loses his concentration and commits a serious mistake, allowing Magnus a strong breakthrough. In an unlucky twist of fate, the Indian has placed his queen on an unfortunate square and this will cost him a pawn – or so it seems.

But Carlsen is also affected by the general feeling of relaxation and his attentiveness is diminished today. Right on the next move, a simple miscalculation prompts him to take on d6, when a much stronger and probably decisive blow was available. Anand can now regain the pawn and breathe freely. Several exchanges follow, leading to a somewhat unbalanced knight ending, and a draw again seems on the cards. But Carlsen did not come this far to back off now, and after all there is no danger present; in fact, his king and knight are more active than his opponent's, and so he marches forward. Anand's defence is not that simple and accuracy is required, and many fear that indifference might cause an embarrassing fourth defeat. Vishy embarks on active counterplay, attacking White's kingside pawns and luring them forward. Shortly after the time control, the inevitable clash on that sector of the board takes place, with the position now rather complicated.

By this point Magnus is probably becoming aware of the danger and the disruption that a loss might cause, but he cannot resist the urge to try a little longer, and so he spurns yet another repetition. His knight manoeuvres provoke an immediate crisis, and suddenly the game is on fire. Even armed with computer engines the spectators have a difficult time figuring out what's going on, as the ensuing lines are immensely complicated. So complicated that Magnus decides enough is enough; eschewing unclear opportunities where things could easily go wrong and a miscalculation would prove costly, he instead relieves the tension with a knight sacrifice that removes all of Black's pawns except one. That one will go on to become a queen, but so does Carlsen's a-pawn, and thus the game moves closer to the draw. Instead of agreeing it immediately, the players make a few more moves, until all resources have been exhausted. With the last fighting units exchanged, a firm handshake signifies the end of the game and the match. The two combatants sign the scoresheets, and then also the chess board they fought on. Carlsen lingers a bit longer to receive a standing ovation, loud enough that it easily overcomes the obstacle posed by the soundproof glass.

Magnus Carlsen – Viswanathan Anand

Game 10, 22nd November 2013

Entering the 10th game of the World Championship match in Chennai, Magnus knew that all he needed was a draw in order to be crowned the 16th undisputed World Chess Champion. He was White and this meant that his task was relatively easy, all the more so as Anand was demoralized from the course of events in the previous game.

Did I just mention the words, easy, demoralized? Well, in that case forgive me dear readers, forgive me Vishy. I must be out of my mind. One can't write off a great champion like Anand so easily, and Magnus knew it much better than me, much better than all the fans and critics in the world, perhaps even better than Anand himself.

The champion was badly wounded but was still the World Champion, and Magnus would have to put up a last good performance to take from this 10th game at least half a point. And that he duly did, by being simply himself.

1.e4 (1:59:56) **c5** (1:59:53)

Vishy goes for the Sicilian in a desperate attempt to score his first win in the match. However, even in the Sicilian there are dry paths for White to choose from, and Magnus knows his way around in them.

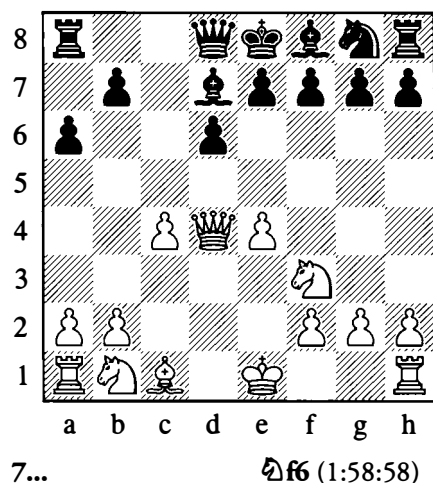
2.♫f3 (1:59:50) **d6** (1:59:48)
3.♙b5† (1:59:43)

The Moscow Variation, avoiding the Najdorf, the Dragon, and several other dangerous creatures. Magnus is its greatest exponent in the world nowadays and it suits perfectly his style as it combines good strategic features with restrained aggression.

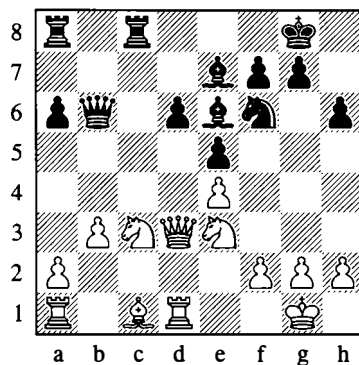
3... **♫d7** (1:59:42)

Under different circumstances Anand might have played 3...♙d7 here, trying merely to equalize. But in this win-or-die situation there was little choice but to avoid the exchange of bishops.

4.d4 (1:59:34) **cx d4** (1:59:32)
5.♙xd4 (1:59:23) **a6** (1:59:25)
6.♙xd7† (1:59:02) **♙xd7** (1:59:18)
7.c4 (1:58:57)



The two players had “discussed” the same position in a game played earlier in the year, with Anand choosing the more static: 7...e5 8.♙d3 b5 9.♫c3 bxc4 10.♙xc4 ♙e6 11.♙d3 h6 12.0–0 ♫f6 13.♙d1 ♙e7 14.♫e1 0–0 15.♫c2 ♙b6 16.♫e3 ♙fc8 17.b3

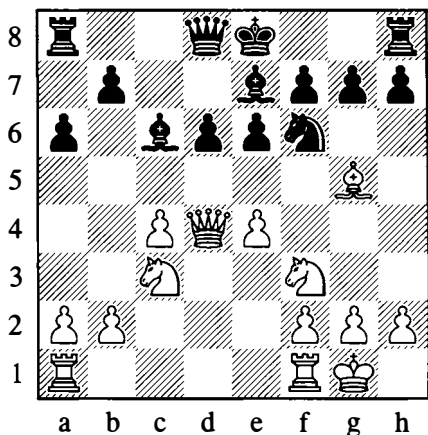


In Carlsen – Anand, Norway 2013, Black gradually got a worse position, but only because he weakened himself at this point with 17...a5?!. Instead, he should play 17...♖b7 18.♙b2 ♜c7 19.♞ac1 ♞ac8=, when it is really hard to see any way to make progress for White. Achieving equality in this way would usually be viewed as a theoretical success for Black, but it shouldn't be forgotten that on this occasion the match situation obliges Vishy to seek more than equality.

8.♙g5 (1:54:24) e6 (1:58:18)

Black has kept the position in the centre fluid and has the bishop pair. On the other hand White has the slightly better development and a space advantage, so we may consider the chances balanced.

9.♘c3 (1:54:07) ♙e7 (1:57:58)
10.0-0 (1:53:28) ♙c6 (1:56:55)



11.♞d3 (1:51:26)

A very logical retreat; the queen avoids ...e5 attacks and frees the d4-square for the knight. In this way White restrains ...b5 ideas.

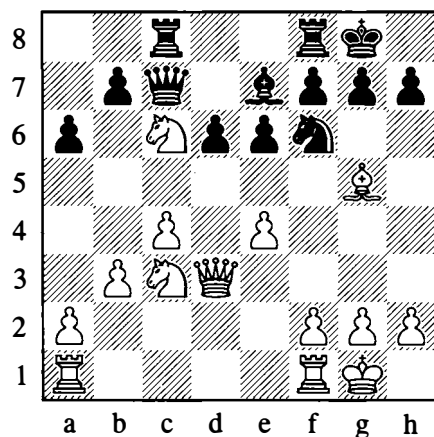
11... 0-0 (1:56:05)
12.♘d4 (1:50:59) ♞c8 (1:55:39)

13.b3 (1:49:49) ♞c7 (1:54:25)

A computer-generated line is: 13...♞a5!? 14.♙d2 ♞h5 15.♞ac1! (15.h3 ♘d7 16.♘xc6 ♞xc6 17.♞ad1 ♙f6 18.f4 ♞fc8 19.♞f3 ♙xc3 20.♙xc3 b5 with counterplay) 15...♞fd8 16.h3 ♘d7 17.f4 ♙f6 18.♘xc6 ♞c5† 19.♙e3 ♞xc6=

14.♘xc6 (1:49:04)

Now Black doesn't have two bishops anymore and Carlsen will strive to consolidate his small space advantage.



14... ♞xc6 (1:53:50)
15.♞ac1 (1:48:45) h6 (1:51:13)
16.♙e3 (1:48:24) ♘d7 (1:46:16)
17.♙d4 (1:46:00) ♞fd8 (1:44:02)

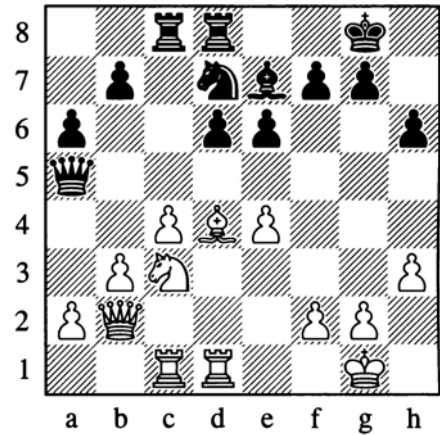
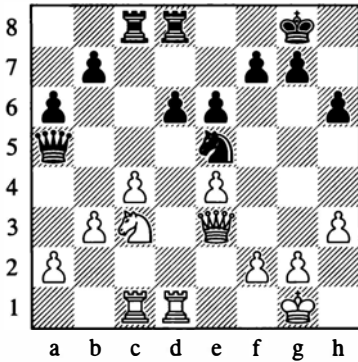
The position remains balanced, but it's very difficult for Black to play for a win if he cannot successfully carry out ...b5 at some point. Magnus makes sure he can't.

18.h3 (1:44:33) ♞c7 (1:41:11)
19.♞fd1 (1:43:19) ♞a5 (1:39:59)
20.♞d2 (1:32:03) ♙f8 (1:33:53)

I don't like this artificial move, though the computers say it's not bad.

In any case, I prefer: 20...♙g5!? 21.♙e3 (21.f4

♙f6 22.♙xf6 ♘xf6 gives Black more hopes of achieving something in the long run.)
21...♙xe3 22.♙xe3 ♘e5



22.a4!? (1:22:06)

Black is trying to prepare ...b5, but after 23.a4 ♙c5 24.♙d2 ♙b6 25.♙b1 the position is very drawish and it is hard to see how to create chances for either side.

21.♙b2 (1:28:52) ♙g8 (1:27:50)

Spurning a repetition – who knows? After all, it's not clear Vishy would have repeated. My view is plain, Magnus is just playing his own style of chess without being affected by the circumstances, and that is the best thing to do.





22... ♖h5 (1:23:58)
 23. ♖e2 (1:16:50) ♙f6 (1:23:09)
 24. ♜c3 (1:09:27) ♙xd4 (1:09:00)
 25. ♜xd4 (1:09:25)

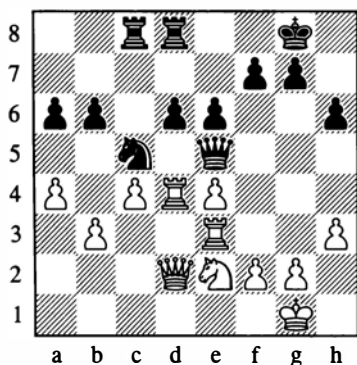
With every piece exchange White inches closer to the draw and an eventual match victory.

25... ♖e5 (1:08:09)
 26. ♖d2 (1:07:30) ♙f6?! (1:04:02)

Going in the wrong direction, the knight should head the other way to pressure White's only weakness:

26... ♖c5!? 27. ♜e3 b6!?

This is an interesting pawn sacrifice.



28.f4

28.a5 bxa5 29. ♖xa5 ♖b7! 30. ♖xa6?? ♜a8! is a nice tactical justification of Black's play.

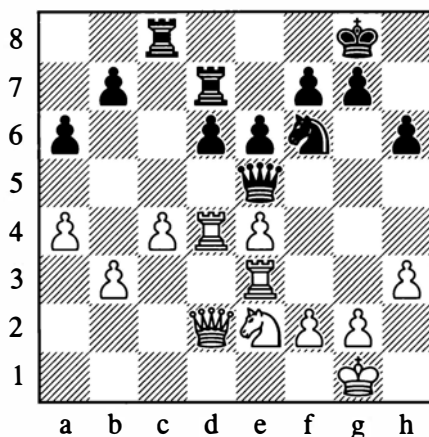
28... ♖f6 29. ♜xd6 ♖e7! 30.e5

30. ♜xd8† ♜xd8 gives Black powerful compensation in view of his d-file control and the weaknesses at b3, e4 and f4.

30... ♜xd6 31.exd6 ♖d7

The sacrificed pawn will be recovered with an equal game.

27. ♜e3 (1:06:34) ♜d7 (1:00:41)



28.a5! (0:59:57)

Magnus is not the man to miss such an opportunity; now Black's queenside has been fixed and White possesses a small long-term advantage.

28...**♖g5?** (0:53:29)

A clear mistake; in trying to extricate the queen from its precarious position Black turns his game from being slightly worse into lost.

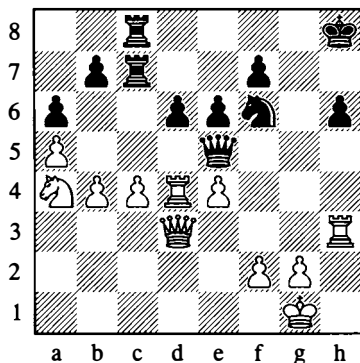
Trying to secure the queen's position by 28...g5?! would also have been bad, due to 29.♕c3 ♖xa5 30.e5! ♕e8 31.h4 with a strong attack.

28...♔h8!?

This is a better try, aiming to play the typical ...g5 under more favourable circumstances.

29.f4!

29.b4 g5! 30.♕c3 ♖dc7 31.♖d3 g4! 32.♕a4 (32.f4 gxf3 33.♖xf3 ♕h7 is also playable) 32...gxh3! 33.♖xh3



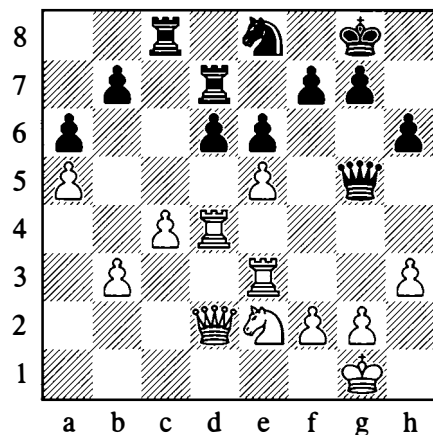
33...♖xc4!! 34.♖xc4 ♖a1+ 35.♔h2 ♕g4+ 36.♔g3 ♖g8 37.♖d4 ♕e5+ 38.♔h2 ♖f1! 39.♖xh6+ ♔g7 At the end of this fantastic line, Black is alive and kicking.

29...♖c5 30.b4 ♖c7 31.♖ed3 ♖cd8 32.♕c3 ♔g8

Black's position is passive, but he has chances to hold.

29.e5 (0:55:54)

Now it looks as though another debacle is on the way for Vishy, but Magnus fails on the next move to deliver the crusher.

29...**♕e8** (0:53:21)**30.exd6?** (0:55:21)

Relaxation or simply a blind spot? Whatever it was, it lets Black off the hook.

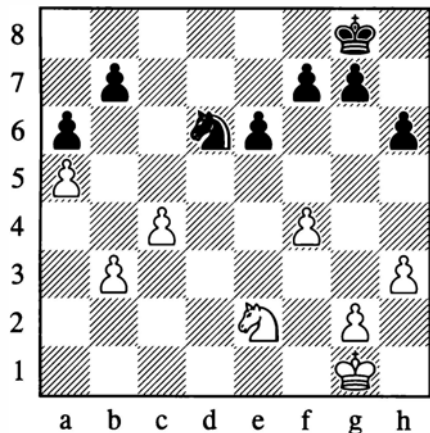
30.♕c3! was simple and strong and would have finished the match quickly. The jumps of the knight to a4 or e4 (the latter preceded by f2-f4) would have been impossible to parry.

30...**♖c6** (0:50:36)

Now Black rounds up and wins the d6-pawn, leaving White with just a modest advantage.

31.f4 (0:45:04)**♖d8** (0:50:12)**32.♖ed3** (0:44:53)**♖xd6** (0:49:27)**33.♖xd6** (0:44:45)**♖xd6** (0:49:21)**34.♖xd6** (0:44:38)**♖xd6** (0:49:17)**35.♖xd6** (0:44:30)**♕xd6** (0:49:14)

Black can breathe a sigh of relief as the worst is over. Even so, his static queenside and less active king yield some grounds for concern.



36.♔f2 (0:43:41) ♖f8 (0:48:42)
 37.♔e3 (0:41:16) ♖e7 (0:37:57)
 38.♔d4 (0:37:28) ♖d7 (0:36:18)
 39.♔c5! (0:35:54) ♖c7 (0:35:33)
 40.♛c3 (1:34:46) ♛f5?! (1:33:33)

Avoiding 40...g5? 41.fxg5 hxg5 42.♔d4, when White would have the threat of creating outside passed pawns on both flanks after a possible exchange of knights on e4.

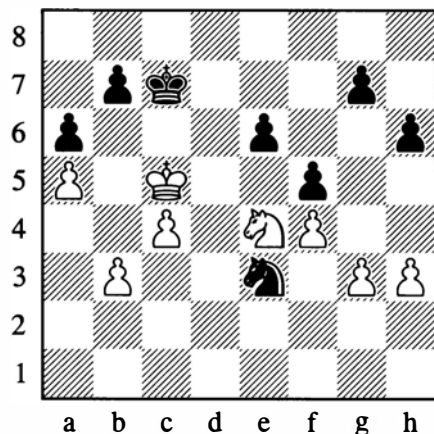
In general, in this ending Black has to sit still and hope that White cannot improve his position. It seems to me that the right way of "sitting" was 40...h5!? but I cannot guarantee that Black would save the ending, even in that case. After something like 41.g4 hxg4 42.hxg4 f6 43.b4 ♖f7 44.f5 exf5 45.♛d5† ♔b8

46.gxf5 ♛e5 47.♛f4 ♔a7 there are chances to hold, but the position is extremely difficult.

41.♛e4! (1:25:37)

Now Magnus is in the driver's seat once more.

41... ♛e3 (1:11:04)
 42.g3 (1:25:18) f5 (1:10:00)



43.♛d6?! (1:04:42)

43.♛d2!

This would have gradually contained all counterplay and led to a win. I have not much to add to the following wonderful analysis published on the ChessBase site by Albert Silver and Alejandro Ramirez.



43...d1

43...g5 44.fxg5 hxg5 45.d4 d2+ 46.e5 d7 47.f6 g4 48.h4 e8 49.f1 d4 (49...xf8 50.h5!) 50.b4 f8 51.c5 f4 52.e5 d6+ 53.fxf4 dxb4 54.d2 d3+ 55.fg4 dxc5 56.g5 and wins.

44.d4 d2 45.h4 d1 46.f1 d2 47.b4 d4

47...d4 48.d2 d6 49.b5 d6 50.c5+ d7 51.c6+ bxc6 52.bxa6 c7 53.d3 d5 54.e5 b8 55.d4 a7 56.dxc6+ xa6 57.d8 xa5 58.dxe6 g6 59.d8 d3 60.d3g6 and wins.

48.g4 d6

The only remark I have to make is that 48...d6 49.g5 should lose as well, for example 49...d4 50.dh2! and the white knight is set to penetrate into the black camp.

49.gxf5 exf5 50.d3 e6 51.h5 d6 52.b5 d7 53.d5 d8 54.bxa6 bxa6 55.d4 g6 56.dxa6 d7 57.d5+ c6 58.a6 b6 59.e5

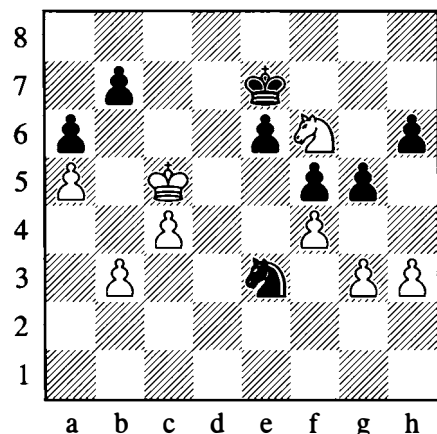
White wins.

43... g5! (1:08:05)

Vishy alertly utilizes his chance to stay in the game. Now Black has real counterplay.

44.d8+ (1:02:02) d7 (1:04:38)

45.d6+ (1:01:15) e7 (1:03:06)



46.dg8! (0:34:26)

Seeing nothing better, Magnus initiates a drawing operation.

46.dh5!? is liked by some engines, but it would be too much to ask from a human to place his knight in such a position when a World Championship title is at stake.

46... f8 (1:01:24)

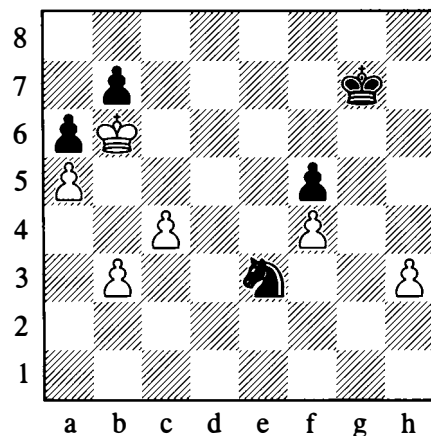
47.dxb6 (0:33:03) gxf4 (1:00:23)

48.gxf4 (0:32:56) g7 (0:59:10)

49.dxf5+ (0:32:44) exf5 (0:59:01)

50.eb6 (0:32:39)

White has sacrificed his knight for the sake of annihilating Black's queenside pawns, but Vishy has calculated that he is on time to save the game by pushing his f-pawn.



50... dg2 (0:58:25)

51.fxb7 (0:32:26) dxf4 (0:57:54)

52.fxa6 (0:32:12) d6 (0:56:26)

53.f6 (0:32:01) f4 (0:56:12)

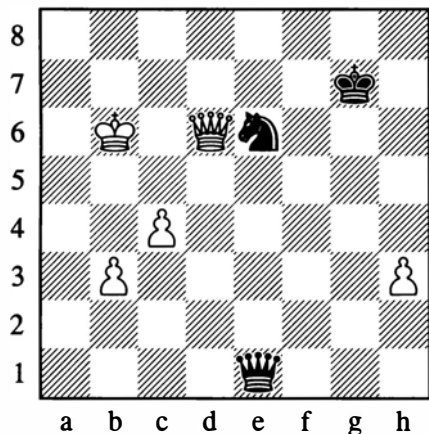
54.a6 (0:31:55) f3 (0:56:07)

55.a7 (0:31:48) f2 (0:56:03)

56.a8= (0:31:35) f1= (0:55:56)

57.d5 (0:31:19) e1 (0:54:00)

58.d6 (0:26:53)



The game would be drawn even if White lost all his pawns, though of course Black cannot achieve that.

58...

59.♔a6 (0:26:19)

60.♕b5 (0:41:41)

61.♖c7† (0:42:00)

62.♜b6† (0:42:24)

♜e3† (0:49:46)

♞c5† (0:49:33)

♞xb3 (1:04:52)

♞h6 (1:05:00)

This must have been a very pleasing moment for Magnus. The rest is clear.

62...

63.♕xb6 (0:42:49)

64.h4 (0:43:14)

65.c5 (0:43:41)

♜xb6† (1:05:23)

♞h5 (1:05:39)

♞xh4 (1:06:04)

♞xc5 (1:06:27)

½–½

Magnus the Magnificent is the new World Champion!



The atmosphere in the press centre is jubilant and courteous. Magnus receives congratulations from his opponent and his staff, and appears fully appreciative of the significance of this gesture. In turn, he speaks highly of his opponent and the feats he has accomplished in his career, while also reserving kind words for the organizers and the Indian public in general. This goes down very well with the locals, and his appreciation is later extolled on the internet. Not much is said about this last game; Carlsen explains that he kept on playing because he felt his opponent was drifting, but changed his mind when the position became too complicated. Anand uses this game as an example to sum up the entire match: he was playing okay but then a few careless mistakes crept into his play, mistakes that could have (today) and did (in general) cause his downfall. He goes on to point out that he came to the match fully aware of the size of the challenge he was facing, and also of his erratic form this year. He had intended to fight against his recent tendency to make silly mistakes at critical moments, and had worked hard in that direction, but in the end he just didn't manage – and he awards full credit to Carlsen for pushing him to make these mistakes. He singles out the fateful fifth game as a turning point and the one that undermined his mood and psychological stability, and depicts it as a serious blow after his encouraging heroic defence in the previous one. Overall he feels disappointed at his performance, but is not too pessimistic. He leaves open the possibility of his participation in the next Candidates tournament and eventually gets up and leaves, loudly applauded by the journalists, spectators and – most significantly – his rival.

Carlsen clearly enjoys his moment of glory; he is now the World Champion. In a retrospective analysis of the match, he admits that he was feeling quite nervous in the first couple of games, but the fourth one finally made it clear to him that there was nothing to be afraid of. After that he was finally free to play his usual chess, applying pressure for as long as possible and hoping to extract some mistakes – which he did. He refuses to reveal the names of his seconds after all, mentioning only Hammer by name, but expresses his gratitude towards them. Having summed up the essence of these two weeks in Chennai, he leaves the press centre for the final time.

Shortly afterwards the celebrations are in full swing and the Norwegian group is in a state of euphoria. The culmination sees Magnus thrown into the swimming pool with his clothes on and, reportedly, a new smartphone in his pocket.



Epilogue

Match Conclusions



The triumphant conclusion of the 2013 Chennai match is a fitting end to the latest chapter of Magnus Carlsen's chess career, an end that sees him take his place on the World Champion's throne eight days before his twenty-third birthday. It is also the end of a world championship cycle that aroused astonishing levels of interest and excitement among chess fans, with Carlsen's participation and eventual domination playing a major role in this burst of popularity. One could hardly have imagined the twists and turns that would occur along his journey when Magnus sat down at the board, under a sea of camera flashes, to play his first London Candidates game against Levon Aronian back in March 2013. The crowning of a new World Champion is always something memorable, especially when he has already established himself beyond doubt as the world's best player. It is, however, the journey, rather than the destination, that lends a touch of immortality to the achievement.

The Match

For the Indian public, Anand's loss in the match could not have come at a worse moment: within a single week they saw their two greatest sportsmen dethroned. For Sachin Tendulkar, this was his own decision and, barring a Paul Scholes-like change of mind, his abdication will not be reversed. It wasn't a rival that dethroned him, but rather the relentless passing of time and age. Vishy Anand's case is different: he was convincingly defeated on the battlefield by a superior rival, but the saga doesn't necessarily end there, as he has the option of entering the next championship cycle in less than four months. Whether he will do so is still uncertain; spending much of the



last six years preparing for matches and defending his title must surely have taken a toll on him, and it would not be surprising if he opted for a change of scene. After spending more than two decades in the world's elite, Anand's legacy is secure, and there is nothing left for him to prove.

There is no denying that Anand's showing in this match was rather disappointing, and he was clearly dominated by his adversary. Carlsen didn't do anything out of the ordinary; there were not many flashy novelties or aggressive opening choices. Instead he simply played the better chess and won, just as he usually does. Anand had little to show in terms of opening preparation, particularly with White, which is rather surprising considering his past successes in this domain. He failed to rid himself of the occasional careless errors that had marred his play in the last year or so. He made several mistakes in calculation, culminating in the blunder of game nine. He didn't manage to impose his will and preferences on the play, and had to struggle in unpleasant positions as a result. And when it really mattered, when he was down and needed to strike back, he was unable to summon the inner strength and willpower to oppose his opponent's inexorable march towards the title.

Many had wondered how Magnus would fare in the novel challenge of a world championship match, how and if he would adapt his style to the needs of the situation, and whether he would handle the tension better than he did in London. It turned out that he had strong faith and confidence in his abilities, enough to rely on them to carry him through this final test. He didn't seek changes for the sake of them, but rather worked to eliminate his few weaknesses and hone his skills to the maximum. He stayed true to his style and interpretation of the chess battle, as any aspiring champion should, and successfully imposed his game on Anand. This world championship cycle, combined with Carlsen's domination of the world rankings, can be considered the ultimate vindication of his approach to chess – as well as the just reward of his efforts and his undeniably huge talent.

The start of the match certainly did not foreshadow the events that were to follow. Carlsen was visibly nervous and played well below par in Games 1 and 3; he may well have been intimidated, both by the circumstances and by Anand's proven effectiveness in world championship matches. Magnus probably felt that he had to do something extraordinary this time around, to outdo himself in all respects in order to break down the Indian's resistance. Perhaps he was expecting a task much more difficult than it actually turned out to be. Such uncertainty clearly played a role in the first three games of the match, to the detriment of Magnus's usually high standard of play. In retrospect, perhaps Anand should have launched an all-out offensive right then at the start, when Magnus wasn't yet standing confidently on his feet, hoping to deliver a strong blow to his self-confidence. He might, for instance, have done well to play on in Game 1, even if just to demonstrate a level of ambition that may have elicited further doubts in his challenger. Game 3, in particular, provided a golden opportunity for Anand. Had he managed to draw first blood, with the black pieces no less, there is no telling how the rest of the match may have unfolded.

With that game relegated to what-might-have-been status, Game 4 proved to be a turning point. It is telling that both players considered this game encouraging, each for his own reasons. Anand was pleased to have defended well from a worse position, without making any serious errors in

the long and demanding struggle, while Carlsen realized that his opponent was not infallible after all.

Overall though, the fourth game highlighted several worrying aspects for Anand. He showed up unprepared for what should have been a predictable opening, he played without energy in the early middlegame and then misevaluated the position resulting from the black bishop's daring raid on a2. True, when the chips were down he acquitted himself excellently, showing his trademark inventiveness and creativity, but the overall picture was of a man focused more on surviving than on exterminating his challenger. In short, the fourth game made it clear to Magnus that the world champion was afraid of him, and this realization proved enough to turn the tide.

From that game on, the match became an unequal struggle between the usual Carlsen that dominates most of the tournaments he plays in and an opponent who was trying – and failing – to be his match. The psychological initiative was firmly in the challenger's hands and he made perfect use of it, simply by playing in his usual style. Magnus's characteristic win in Game 5 broke Anand's resolve completely. As the champion himself explained, he had been hoping to withstand the pressure of such long games without suffering defeat – presumably with the intention of striking at a later stage, when the tension could have affected his inexperienced opponent. When this defeat came, all such hopes were squashed; it was not only the result, but the way it came about, which was precisely what Anand was trying to avoid. There is no better evidence of how much this loss affected Vishy than his truly unrecognizable performance in Game 6. After this second, even more devastating loss, the match was as good as over.

Nonetheless, one could have reasonably expected the world champion to go down fighting; after all, he had overcome adversity several times in the past. However, the effect of Anand's collapse in Game 6 was so severe that, rather than going all-out for a victory, he was content to take two placid draws in Games 7 and 8. Carlsen needed no further evidence of his psychological advantage, and he unpretentiously coasted along to two half-points that brought him closer to his goal. Many pundits berated Anand for a supposed lack of fighting spirit, but it is clear that the reason for his timidity was different: having spent months tuning himself up for this battle, he needed more than the single scheduled rest day to adjust to the disastrous reality. He desperately needed a respite: some time to calm down and gather his strength. After two successive defeats, he couldn't possibly summon the resolve to display any ambition in the next two games.

Game 9 was an indication of how things might have been if the middle part of the match had not been so disheartening for Vishy. It was clear that this game would see a determined effort on his part to achieve a win. He evidently hadn't fully recovered from the earlier setbacks but, playing in front of his home crowd, he came determined to try his best. One wonders about the thoughts going through his mind before and during the game. Did he really believe he could fight his way back, or was he merely trying to show the world that the Anand who won all those matches and tournaments in the last two decades was still there, lurking somewhere?

The way Carlsen handled this critical game is also intriguing. He could have opted for solidity, carefully trying to extinguish White's initiative and steering the game towards the drawing haven, effectively showing his opponent that it was impossible to beat him – but what if Anand actually succeeded in beating him? Instead, he chose to meet the challenge head-on, showing that he has full belief in his powers. It is not clear if this approach actually heartened Anand or plunged him

into deeper bouts of uncertainty; in any case, when it came to the crunch he started burning a lot of time before blundering horribly at the end. The match was effectively over, although credit must go to Anand for holding the unpleasant endgame in Game 10.

Anand's sub-par performance in no way detracts from Carlsen's strong showing in the match. For most of its duration he gave the impression of an impenetrable rock. With the possible exception of Game 3, he never looked to be in real danger even in the games where Anand was in the ascendency. Carlsen's opening preparation turned out well, too. Instead of going out of his way to surprise Anand, he mostly stuck with familiar, sound and solid openings with Black, which could hardly be breached by computer-assisted preparation. His approach with White was interesting, as he seemed to believe that flank openings, with their propensity to postpone the clash until the middlegame, would offer him both insurance against his opponent's preparation and sufficient resources to outplay his opponent in that stage of the game. It is interesting that late in the match, when he no longer needed to score wins, he switched to 1.e4, staying within more familiar channels and thus reducing the risk of losing his way.

What mattered most in the match, from a technical chess viewpoint, was the accuracy of Magnus's calculation. His errors were marginal, and did not seriously affect the objective evaluation of the position; by stark contrast, Anand committed quite a few meaningful mistakes. Overall, what we saw was Magnus being Magnus: a fierce, combative player who keeps fighting until the end; who snatches every opportunity presented to him and exploits his opponents' mistakes with ruthless efficiency.



Carlsen's Appeal

It is said that every new world champion contributes something new to our understanding of the game, and Carlsen is no exception. There is a reason why Magnus is so popular among chess amateurs, apart from his obvious charisma and charm: for an elite player, his chess is unusually accessible. His games seldom feature deeply analysed opening lines or surreal tactical melees; instead, he plays normal, down-to-earth openings and then starts fighting for whatever may come his way. True, he sports a superbly developed positional feeling and computer-like accuracy in technical positions; amateurs can hardly relate to these attributes. But at least his games are understandable, making people think "I could have played like that myself." Magnus is a fighter and he plays for a win in almost every game, but not in the supercharged, frenetic way that Kasparov used to. Carlsen's opening play is not much different to that of the average player – not in quality, of course, but stylistically. His wins exude a sense of determination and grit, rather than that of an otherworldly genius at the height of its powers. As such, Magnus doesn't give the impression of a champion performing unattainable feats, but rather of a champion who does what everybody else can do, only much better. While this may not show him in the same light as a Kasparov or a Tal, it does make him more endearing and accessible to the majority of players.

It is not unreasonable to assume that Carlsen's pragmatic approach to the game will slowly spread at all levels of chess; indeed, it has started doing so already. Even top players renowned for their achievements in the field of opening research, such as Kramnik, have begun implementing a gradual switch to less concrete opening systems. Moreover, taking the same Kramnik as an example, one can notice a shift from his formerly scientific and objective approach to a more practical stance that places greater emphasis on other aspects of competitive play, such as human fallibility and psychology. People are slowly realizing that the time and energy spent on deep opening analysis can be more productively invested otherwise, especially during the game and not before it. Even more importantly, Carlsen's chess style is a strong and clear message against the overreliance on computer-assisted analysis: Magnus wins games thanks to the strength of his brain, his energy and his fighting qualities, rather than his memory. In the battle of minds that a chess game is, he has reminded everyone that computers are not of much help while at the board – barring their illegal use, of course. This emphasis on the analytical qualities of the brain is all the more refreshing in the present era, when the influence of the machine is at an all-time high.

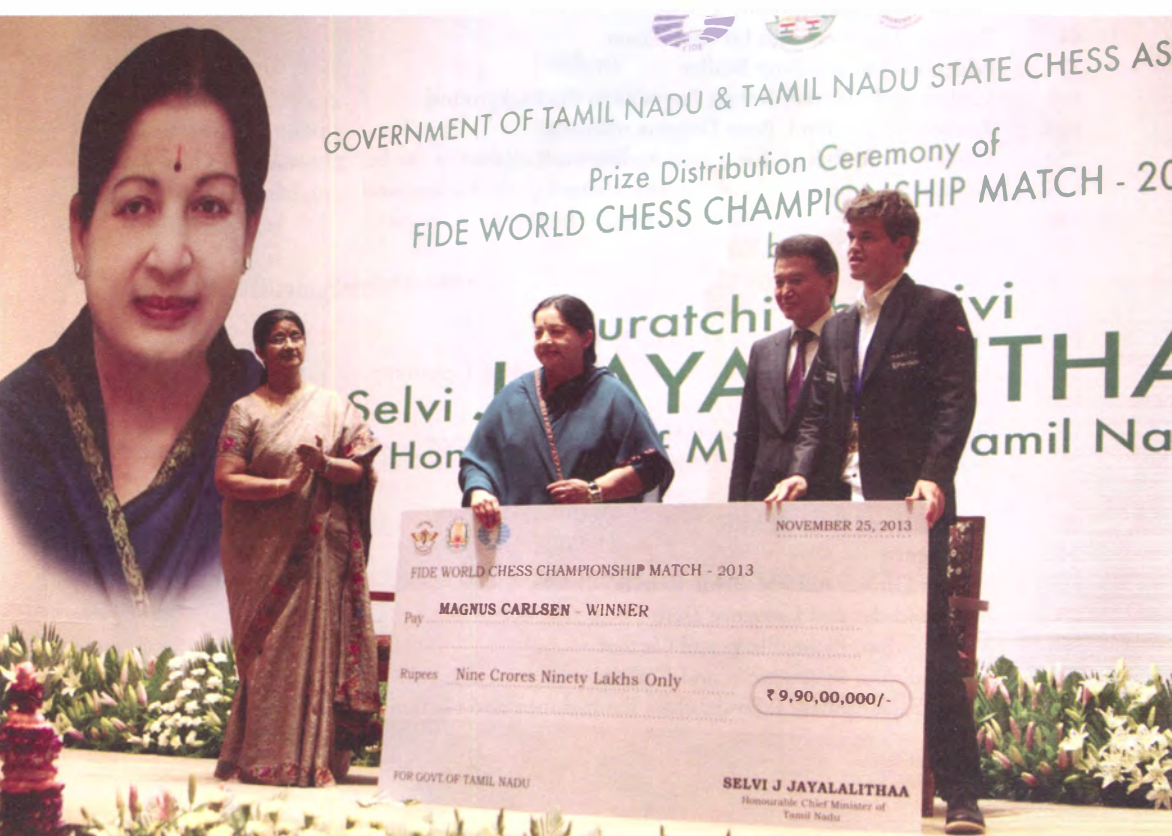
The Future

After the celebrations have died down and Magnus has spent his first birthday as World Champion, the time for new challenges will be nigh. History reminds us of players like Vassily Smyslov, who held on to the title for just a little over a year; others, like Mikhail Tal, had an even shorter reign. Who can forget the trials of Garry Kasparov, who had to defend his title against Karpov twice in the two years after capturing it? For Carlsen the next test at this level will come just twelve months later: in November 2014 he will face the winner of the Candidates Tournament of the same year, in the remote destination of Khanty-Mansiysk. The identity of his challenger will be known on the 1st of April 2014. Victory in that match will buy the champion two years of peace, until the end of 2016 when the process will repeat. Becoming World Champion is an important

step towards chess immortality, but it is the future years that will determine whether Carlsen will indeed live up to his demanding first name.

The 2011-13 world championship cycle will be forever etched into the memories of everyone who followed it. Its final stages contributed immensely to the popularization of chess and its presentation in the media: it even led to a game being analysed on Twitter, and to the new World Champion receiving more than 150,000 'likes' on his Facebook page shortly after his coronation. The match was followed by a television audience numbering in the tens of millions, with many more followers in cyberspace. It spawned the advent of a new era and gave the chess world a champion beloved by the media, featured in mainstream television shows and fashion campaigns. A champion with a seemingly unstoppable style who, having just reached the tender age of twenty-three, looks ready to rule the chess world for years to come.

This, dear reader, was the story of how Magnus Carlsen conquered the chess Olympus.



Who is in the photographs?

Not all readers will know everyone in this book, but rather than breaking the flow of the book by adding captions to all the photos, we have decided to give the names of the people in the photographs available to us. We have omitted obvious repetitions.

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The World Champions

Undisputed World Champions 1886-1993

1 Wilhelm Steinitz	1886-94
2 Emanuel Lasker	1894-1921
3 Jose Raul Capablanca	1921-27
4 Alexander Alekhine	1927-35 & 1937-46
5 Max Euwe	1935-37
6 Mikhail Botvinnik	1948-57, 1958-60 & 1961-63
7 Vassily Smyslov	1957-58
8 Mikhail Tal	1960-61
9 Tigran Petrosian	1963-69
10 Boris Spassky	1969-72
11 Robert Fischer	1972-75
12 Anatoly Karpov	1975-85
13 Garry Kasparov	1985-93

FIDE World Champions 1993-2006

Anatoly Karpov	1993-99
Alexander Khalifman	1999-2000
Viswanathan Anand	2000-02
Ruslan Ponomarev	2002-04
Rustam Kasimdzhanov	2004-05
Veselin Topalov	2005-06

Classical (PCA/Braingames) World Champions 1993-2006

Garry Kasparov	1993-2000
Vladimir Kramnik	2000-06

Undisputed World Champions 2006-

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In 2013 chess returned to world headlines. The energetic Norwegian prodigy Magnus Carlsen was front page news and his fans were not disappointed: the World Number 1 won the World Championship.

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