

CHESS MIDDLEGAME STRATEGIES

OPENING MEETS MIDDLEGAME

IVAN SOKOLOV



VOLUME 2



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CHESS MIDDLEGAME STRATEGIES

Volume 2
Opening meets Middlegame

by

Ivan Sokolov



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KEY TO SYMBOLS

!	a good move
?	a weak move
!!	an excellent move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
□	only move
=	equality
∞	unclear position
∞̄	with compensation for the sacrificed material
±	White stands slightly better
∓	Black stands slightly better
±	White has a serious advantage
∓	Black has a serious advantage
+-	White has a decisive advantage
-+	Black has a decisive advantage
→	with an attack
↑	with initiative
↔	with counterplay
△	with the idea of
▷	better is
◁	worse is
N	novelty
+	check
#	mate

PREFACE

In modern chess practice, the theory of the opening often stretches into the middlegame, sometimes quite deeply. When players choose particular opening variations, they are in essence deciding on the type of middlegame in which they would like to fight their opponents.

In this second volume of my “Chess Middlegame Strategies” series I have decided to focus on this connection between the opening and the middlegame. I have selected different themes from popular openings and examined the resulting middlegames, trying to offer a sort of user manual to guide readers through these middlegames. I have also offered some ideas on the theory of the different openings. The 30 games in this book cover a wide range of different middlegame types, so I hope there is something for everyone and that studying this book will enhance readers’ understanding of middlegame strategies.

Only one chapter in this book, “Knight Tales”, is not related to a particular opening. It concentrates on the middlegame theme of knights versus bishops. Originally I had planned to present much more pure middlegame material, but sometimes in the work process we adjust the original plan and, well... this book is the product!

Naturally I still have this pure middlegame material in my work database and I do not exclude the possibility that volume three may arrive around the end of 2018. Meanwhile, I hope you enjoy this book and the game selection.

Ivan Sokolov
November 2017

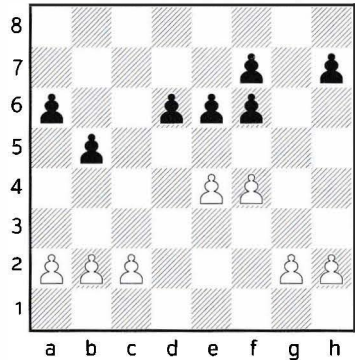
CHAPTER I. SICILIAN STRATEGIES

In modern chess, opening theory meets the middlegame. When choosing specific opening variations, players aim for particular types of middlegame positions in the hope of understanding these positions better than their opponents.

Opening preparation will not usually lead to a clear advantage for either side. If the computer evaluation of the early middlegame is not "0.00" then it will usually be no more than plus or minus "0.30" and the computer will say "=". So knowing and understanding the typical plans and motifs in the chosen type of middlegame comes to the fore and will prove crucial in over-the-board play.

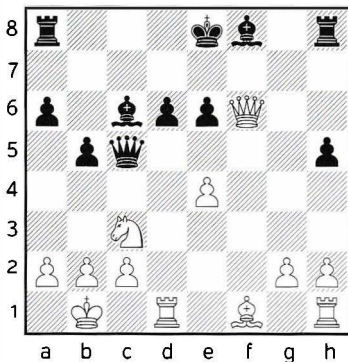
In this chapter I have selected a number of popular opening positions, hoping to help readers improve their understanding of such positions and ultimately become better players.

1.1. RAUZER IDEAS



Understanding this typical Sicilian Richter-Rauzer position is a must for any 1.e4 player, any Sicilian player and also any player keen to improve his or her general level. I have focused on dynamic decisions, in positions with an undefined or mobile pawn centre. Black has doubled f-pawns and potentially the more exposed king, but as compensation he has the advantage of the bishop pair.

I have selected five games trying to delve into the concepts involved in this complex position. Different ideas often combine with one another here. The material is divided into two parts. chesstouring.com



The first three games of this Sicilian subchapter examine the ideas related to Black having his f6-pawn removed — in games one and three even by the means of a pawn sacrifice — so that Black's dark-squared bishop can take over the a1-h8 diagonal. In games one and two Black has a mobile pawn centre, with the dark-squared bishop well placed on the long diagonal, and he castles queenside. Tal achieved this position by sacrificing a pawn, while in Anand-Kramnik the material is equal.

Advice for White: exchange one of the black bishops! Black's two bishops are superior to White's knight plus bishop but once one of the black bishops is traded, Black's initiative will diminish or vanish altogether.

Once the black king is safe (here on the queenside) Black is fine! White needs to be energetic and catch the black king in the centre, as in Kasparov-Hracek or Sengupta-Edouard. If White cannot embarrass the black

king, then opening up the position will only benefit the black bishop pair. In the Baron-Kozul game we see Black dominating in a pawn-down endgame! Endgames are generally good for Black here.

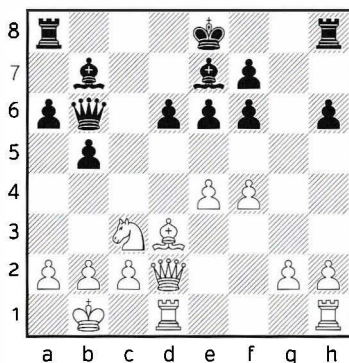
1

► J. Klovans

► M. Tal

Riga [9], 1981

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4
 ♜f6 5.♜c3 ♜c6 6.♙g5 e6 7.♚d2 a6
 8.o-o-o h6 9.♙e3 ♜xd4 10.♙xd4
 b5 11.f3 ♙b7 12.♚b1 ♙e7 13.♙xf6
 gxf6 14.♙d3 ♚b6 15.f4

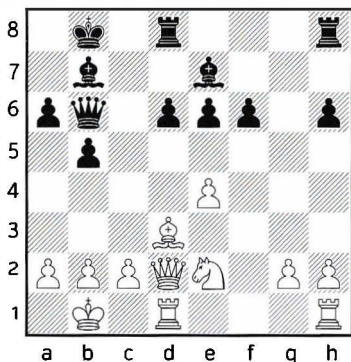


Through a slightly unusual move order we have reached a typical Richter-Rauzer Sicilian pawn structure. Opening theory is not our concern here so I will just mention that Black often keeps his king in the centre in these positions. Tal decides to castle queenside.

15...0-0-0 16.f5

White challenges Black to push ...e6-e5 and surrender the d5-square, a transaction which in this line is often less beneficial for White than may initially appear the case. Tal decides to keep his pawn structure flexible.

16...♖b8 17.fxe6 fxe6 18.♗e2



White plan's is clear. He wants to jump ♗e2-♗f4, hitting e6 and hoping to provoke ...e6-e5. Then he would aim to dominate the light squares, while the black bishop e7 would be badly placed in such a scenario. Tal decides to sacrifice a pawn in order to activate his dark-squared bishop and get his central pawns rolling forward. In a matter of just a couple of moves Black is to unleash the dynamic power of his bishop pair and his central rolling pawns, obtaining a winning attack. Tal's method is highly instructive and can be used in a number of similar positions.

18...f5!

The logical 18...d5, which is also the first choice of the computer engines, leads to a balanced game after 19.exd5 ♗xd5 20.♗he1. White threatens 21.♗f4.

(20.♗hf1 also looks about equal)

20...♗g5 21.g3 e5 22.♗c3 with unclear play. White will exchange the light-squared bishops, making the black king potentially vulnerable.

19.exf5 e5

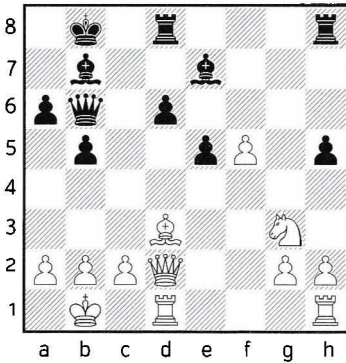
For the small price of just one pawn, Black has gained a rolling pawn centre and opened the h8-a1 diagonal for his dark-squared bishop. In such positions, for the defensive side (in this case White) it is clever to exchange one of the opponent's bishops as quickly as possible, as Anand did against Kramnik in our next game.

20.♗g3

The f6-square is a perfect spot for Black's bishop that is now on e7, so White hopes to prevent that move by placing his knight on h5.

20...h5!

White here underestimates the danger, losing a couple of important tempi to grab the irrelevant h-pawn.

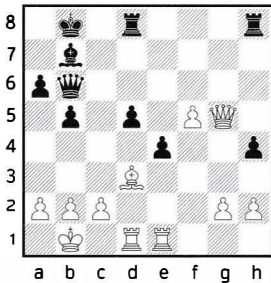


21. ♔e4?

As mentioned earlier, White needed to exchange one of Black's bishops, reducing the power of the enemy's initiative. For example: 21. ♖he1! h4 22. ♗e4 d5 23. ♗g5 Black is now forced to part with his bishop pair: 23... ♕xg5

(23...e4?! does keep the bishop pair, but also sacrifices an exchange: 24. ♗f7 ♖hg8 25. ♗xd8 ♕xd8 26. ♔f1 ♔f6 27. ♗h6 and Black does not have enough compensation for the sacrificed material.)

24. ♗xg5 e4



25. ♕e2

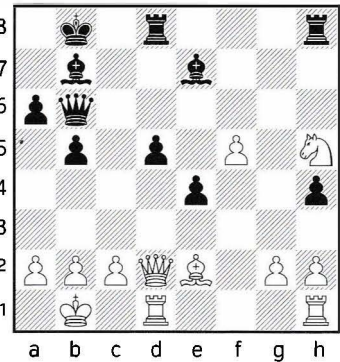
[25. ♕f1 ♖df8 (25...d4?! 26. ♖xe4! ♕xe4 27. ♗f4±)]

25... ♖hg8

(25... ♖df8 26. ♕g4±)

26. ♗xh4 ♖xg2 Black definitely has enough for his minimal material deficit, however the position is starting to simplify and a draw is becoming the likely result.

21...d5 22. ♕f3 h4 23. ♗h5 e4 24. ♕e2



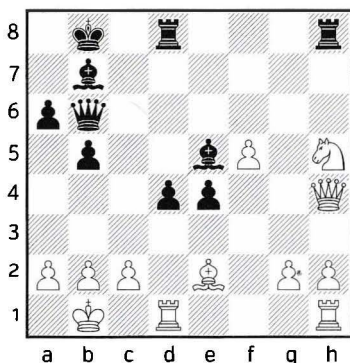
24...d4!

Black is getting a huge number of tempi for the price of that little pawn on h4!

25. ♗f4+ ♕d6 26. ♗xh4 ♕e5

It seems both sides got what they wanted. White has collected his pawn and is now two pawns up, Black has advanced his central pawns and placed his dark-squared

bishop on a perfect position. By grabbing the h-pawn White has placed his knight totally out of play and it will take quite some time and effort for the knight on h5 to enter the fray. White's king has been left without defenders. The attackers-defenders ratio favours Black, who is ready to push ...d3 opening the h8-a1 diagonal for his queen-and-bishop battery to deliver a deadly blow.



27. ♖hf1?!

White keeps neglecting his king position and gives Black a relatively easy kill. However, Black has too many attacking motifs and White simply does not have a good defence. For example, 27. ♗e7, trying to bring the queen to the aid of its king, does not help either: 27... ♜he8 28. ♗b4

(28. ♗a3 d3! 29. cxd3 ♗f2! 30. ♙g4 ♜xd3 31. ♜xd3 exd3-- and Black wins in a few moves while white's knight on h5, bishop on g4 and

rook on h1 are all perfectly misplaced)

28...d3! 29.cxd3 a5! 30. ♗d2

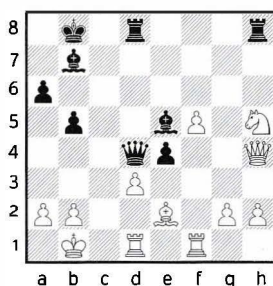
(30. ♗e1 exd3 31. ♙xd3 ♙xb2--)

30...e3 31. ♗e1 ♜d4! and Black wins with a mating attack. Again, pay attention to the misplaced knight on h5.

27... ♗c5--+

Sensing that his opponent has no counter-play Tal takes his time in finishing things off. The threat is 28...d3 29.cxd3 ♗b4.

The immediate 27...d3 28.cxd3 ♗d4



was also winning as after 29. ♜d2 Black has plenty of time to bring his remaining forces into the attack: 29... ♜c8 30. ♜fd1 ♙d5 31. a3 ♜c7 32.dxe4

(32.f6 ♜hc8 33.dxe4 ♗xd2--)

32... ♙xe4+ 33. ♙a1

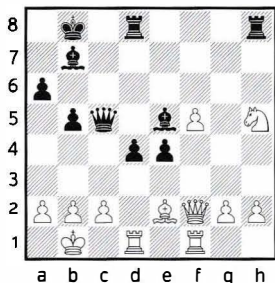
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(33. ♖a2 ♙d5+-+)

33... ♜c1+-+.

28. ♜c1

28. ♖f2



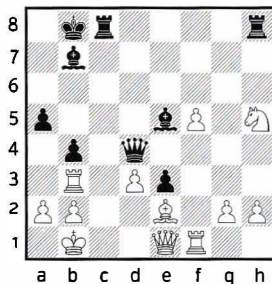
loses to 28...e3! 29. ♖e1. Black probably has several ways to win this, but the following line nicely illustrates the domination of the black bishop pair and White's helplessness.

(29. ♖h4 d3! 30. ♜xd3 ♜xd3 31. ♙xd3 — or 31.cxd3 ♜c8 — 31... ♜xh5 32. ♖xh5 ♖d4-+)

29...d3 30.cxd3

(30. ♜xd3 ♜xd3 31. ♙xd3 and the greedy knight on h5 comes to a sticky end: 31... ♜xh5-+)

30... ♜c8 31. ♜c1 ♖d4 32. ♜c3 b4 33. ♜b3 a5! The full triumph of Black's strategy that started with 18...f5! and made maximum use of the h8-a1 diagonal. Not having any counter-play, White is tied to an electric chair waiting for the execution!



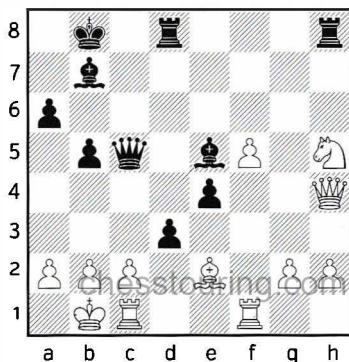
34.a3

(or 34. ♙f3 ♜xh5! Black keeps his bishops pair! 35. ♙xh5 ♙d5 36. ♖e2 a4-+)

34... ♙d5 35. ♖d1 and now Black has enough time to bring his rook into the attack and decide the battle. 35... ♜h7-+ Black's queen-bishop battery is still operating at full force. 36.f6 Pushing the f-pawn is White only counter-play. 36... ♜hc7 37.f7 ♙xb3 38. ♖xb3 ♜c2 39. ♖xc2 ♜xc2 40.f8 ♖+ ♜c8 41. ♖xc8+ ♙xc8 42. ♜c1+ ♙d8 43. ♜c2 b3 44. ♜c3 ♖h4-+.

28...d3!

The queen-bishop battery decides.



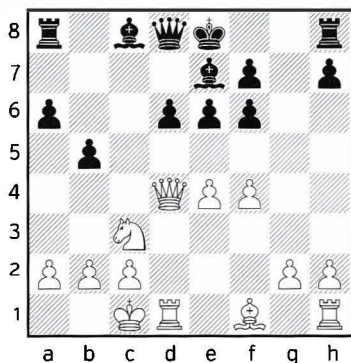
29.cxd3 ♖d4 30.♖c3 b4 31.♖b3 ♗d5
0-1

2

▷ V. Anand
▷ V. Kramnik

Wijk aan Zee (4), 2000

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4
♗f6 5.♗c3 ♗c6 6.♗g5 e6 7.♖d2 a6
8.o-o-o ♗xd4 9.♖xd4 ♗e7 10.f4
b5 11.♗xf6 gxf6



A typical Richter-Rauzer pawn structure. Once upon a time, this was a pet-line of Kramnik when playing Black. Understanding the dynamics of these positions helps players to understand other similar Sicilian positions. White is ahead in development and eager to open files towards the black king. To execute this strategy White often has to be ready to sacrifice material. Black is banking on his bishop pair, should the position open up.

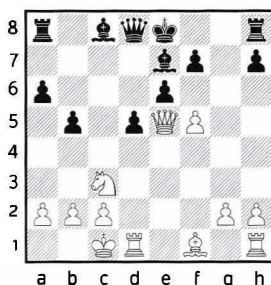
12.e5!?

Direct and radical! We will see a similar decision in Geller-Larsen later in this chapter.

12...d5 13.♖b1

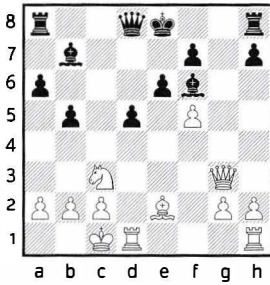
This feels a bit timid...

a) 13.f5 looks more consequent, leading to a dynamic balance: 13...fxe5 14.♖xe5

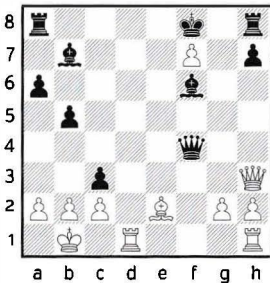


14...o-o (Black cannot play 14...♗f6 15.♖g3 ♗b7 because White did not waste time on 13.♖b1 and is now faster: 16.fxe6 fxe6 17.♗e2→.) 15.♗e4 f6 16.♖g3+ ♖h8 17.fxe6 ♗xe6∞.

b) Improving the bishop with 13.♗e2 before opening the centre is probably a critical idea for assessing this position: 13...♗b7 14.f5! fxe5 15.♖xe5 ♗f6 16.♖g3. Now with the white bishop already developed on e2, Black cannot allow fxe6 so easily as in Kramnik's game, as ♗h5+ will be coming.



16... ♖b8 17. ♗h3! Keeping the queens on the board is here a consequent decision, involving a piece sacrifice. For such decisions a player needs a brave heart and a good feeling for the initiative, or superb preparation! (17. fxe6 leads to an ending that is fine for Black: 17... ♖xg3 18. exf7+ ♔f8 19. hxg3 d4 20. ♖b1 ♔xg2=) Now 17...d4 effectively forces White to sacrifice a piece. [After 17...b4 Black probably did not like 18. ♖a4 (The piece sacrifice played in the game, 18. fxe6, is now less effective for White because the d-file is not open: 18... ♖f4+ 19. ♔b1 bxc3.) 18... ♔c6 19. ♖c5 and White has good attacking prospects.] 18. fxe6! ♖f4+ 19. ♔b1 dxc3 20. exf7+ ♔f8

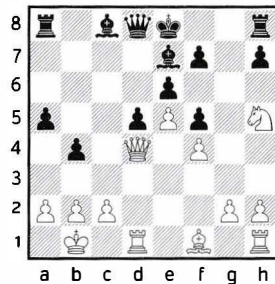


21.a3! A surprisingly calm move, eliminating the ... ♖b4 threat. The black monarch cannot find shelter, while White develops a winning attack. Computer engines support this evaluation. It is interesting that even without knights on the board Black still does not have a suitable defence! 21...h5 22. ♖hf1 ♖e5 23. ♔d3 ♖g5 24. ♖d7+ ♔xg2 25. ♖de1 ♔e7 26. ♖f5 ♖h4 (26... ♔h3 27. ♖e8+ ♔xe8 28. fxe8 ♖+ ♔xe8 29. ♖xg5+) 27. ♖fe5 ♖d8 28. ♖c7 ♖xd3 29. cxd3 1-0 Sengupta,D (2558)-Edouard,R (2636) Hastings 2011.

13... ♔b7

As in Sengupta-Edouard above, Black is in a hurry to catch up in development.

13...b4 actually chases the white knight away to a good square: 14. ♖e2 a5 15. ♖g3 f5 16. ♖h5

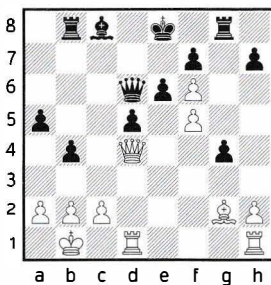


A white knight is almost always well placed on h5 in those positions! Kasparov,G (2785)-Hracek,Z (2625), Yerevan 1996, continued 16... ♖b8

17.g4! As usual the 13th World Champion displays energetic play. This is a standard white plan to open routes to the black king in such positions. 17...fxg4 18.f5 ♖g8

(18...exf5 loses to the simple 19.e6 ♖g8 20.exf7+ ♔xf7 21.♔g2 and the black position soon collapses.)

19.♗f6+ ♔xf6 20.exf6 ♖d6 21.♔g2



21... ♖g5

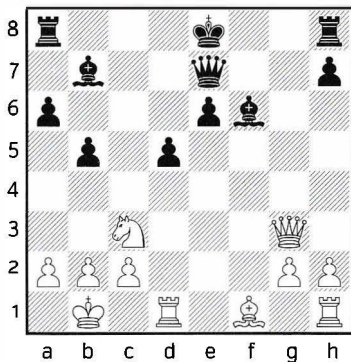
(21... ♖b5! 22. ♖he1 ♔d8 was the only way for Black to struggle on.)

22. ♔xd5+- ♔d7

(22...exd5 23. ♖e3+ ♔d7 24. ♖xg5+-)

23. ♖he1 h6 24.fxe6 fxe6 25. ♖a7 1-0.

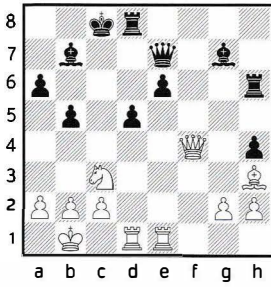
14.f5 fxe5 15. ♖xe5 ♔f6 16. ♖g3 ♖e7 17.fxe6 fxe6



We have a situation similar to Klovans-Tal in terms of pawn structure and Black's bishop pair, with the difference that Black did not sacrifice anything. Anand will quickly understand the danger and will focus on exchanging one of the black bishops! For the side fighting the bishop pair in similar positions, it is usually very advisable to trade off one of the opponent's bishops. Such a trade usually causes the opponent's initiative to diminish, which is exactly what Anand is trying to do!

18. ♔e2 h5!

Preventing the white bishop from occupying the h3-c8 diagonal. After 18...o-o-o 19. ♔g4! was unpleasant for Black in Kasparov,G (2825)-Ivanchuk,V (2740) Frankfurt 1998, as the position of his king on c8 allowed White to pin the e6-pawn and develop strong pressure against it. 19...h5 20. ♔h3 h4 21. ♖f4 ♔g7 22. ♖he1 ♖h6

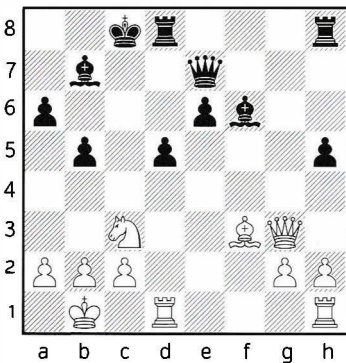


23.a3! White prepares his tactical blow.

(An immediate 23. ♔xe6+? does not work for White due to 23... ♖xe6 24. ♗g4 ♜dd6 25. ♖xe6 ♗xe6 26. ♗xg7 d4+.)

23... ♜g6 24. ♔xe6+! ♖xe6 25. ♗g4 ♜dd6 26. ♖xe6 ♗xe6 27. ♗xg7 ♗f6 28. ♗g4+ ♔b8 29. ♜d4+- 1-0.

19. ♔f3 0-0-0

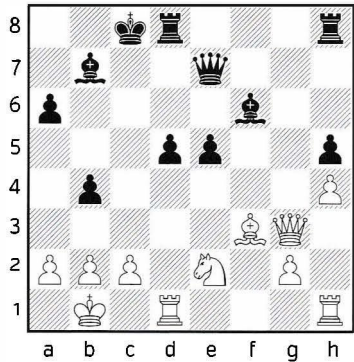


20.h4

White had the option of changing the run of play with 20. ♖he1!? leading to a positional exchange sacri-

fice after 20... ♔h4 21. ♖xe6 ♗xe6 22. ♗xh4. It is quite possible that after 22...d4 Anand judged his compensation would have been of the “fighting to keep the balance” type and decided that the time had not yet come to take such a committal step.

20...b4 21. ♖e2 e5



Black has the initiative and the position very much resembles the Tal game. Exchanging one of the black bishops is crucial for White’s defence.

22. ♖c1

White’s knight is heading to b3, either to jump to a5 and trade off the black bishop on b7 or to control the d4 square and prevent the black pawn centre from rolling forward. Anand’s knight is in much better shape than Klován’s was—stranded and pinned on h5—and this factor proves quite important.

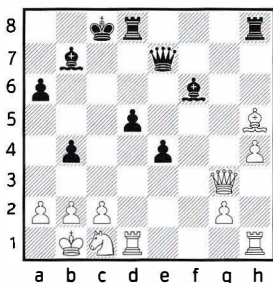
22. ♖xh5? ♜b8 23. ♖g6 ♖xh4

22... ♜b8

Kramnik wants first to improve his king's position.

The immediate 22...e4, sacrificing a pawn, was definitely an option:

23. ♖xh5



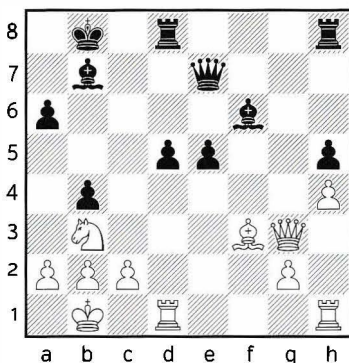
Black cannot achieve a queen plus bishop battery on the long dark diagonal, as Tal did, so he has to settle for “excellent compensation” but perhaps no more than that: 23... ♖e5 24. ♜g5 ♜d6

(24... ♜xg5 25. hxg5 ♜dg8 26. g6 ♖c7=

Black has excellent play, though he would have preferred to keep the queens on the board.)

25. ♖g6 ♖f6 26. ♜e3∞ Black keeps everything on the board, but since Anand's knight on c1 is much better placed than Klovans' stranded knight on h5 it is difficult for Black to successfully play as Tal did against Klovans. The engines evaluate the position as 0.00.

23. ♖b3



23... ♜c7

23... ♖a8 allows White to eliminate one of the black bishops with 24. ♖a5! e4 25. ♖xb7 ♖xb7 26. ♖e2=

24. ♖xh5

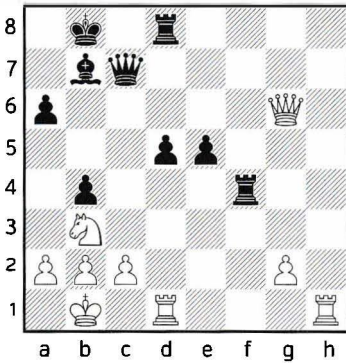
Now Kramnik is not in a mood to sacrifice a pawn, so he parts with his “killer” bishop.

24... ♜xh5

24...a5, keeping more pieces on the board) was perhaps more principled, but the game remains unclear after 25. ♜hf1 ♖e7 26. ♜f5 a4 27. ♖c1. White has a pawn, Black has a bishop pair and mobile pawn centre; the engines' evaluation is around 0.00 but there are many possibilities for both sides and a sharp fight lies ahead.

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25. ♜g6 ♖xh4 26. ♜xf6 ♜f4 27. ♜g6



White has enough counter-play to keep the balance.

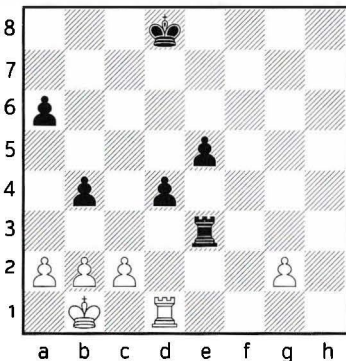
27...d4

27... $\text{f}2$ can lead to a nice draw by repetition: 28. $\text{h}7$ $\text{xg}2$ 29. $\text{xg}2$ $\text{xh}7$ 30. $\text{g}5$ $\text{c}7$ 31. $\text{c}5$ $\text{d}6$ 32. $\text{e}4$ $\text{c}7$ 33. $\text{c}5$ =.

28. $\text{h}7$ $\text{e}4$ 29. $\text{x}e4$!

Forcing a drawn rook endgame.

29... $\text{x}e4$ 30. $\text{x}c7$ $\text{x}c7$ 31. $\text{c}5$ $\text{e}3$ 32. $\text{e}6+$ $\text{d}7$ 33. $\text{d}8$ $\text{x}d8$



Black has the more active rook, but the black king is far from the action and the remaining material is too limited to offer any winning chances.

34. $\text{c}1$ $\text{e}7$ 35. $\text{d}3$ $\text{e}2$ 36. $\text{d}2$ $\text{e}1+$ 37. $\text{d}1$ $\text{e}2$ 38. $\text{d}2$ $\text{e}4$ 39. $\text{d}3$ $\text{e}6$ 40. $\text{c}3$ 1/2

3

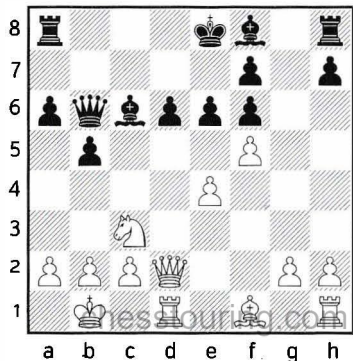
► T. Baron

► Z. Kozul

Rijeka (4), 2010

1. $\text{e}4$ $\text{c}5$ 2. $\text{f}3$ $\text{c}6$ 3. $\text{d}4$ $\text{cxd}4$ 4. $\text{dxd}4$ $\text{f}6$ 5. $\text{c}3$ $\text{d}6$ 6. $\text{g}5$ $\text{e}6$ 7. $\text{d}2$ $\text{a}6$ 8. o-o-o $\text{d}7$ 9. $\text{f}4$ $\text{b}5$ 10. $\text{x}f6$ $\text{gxf}6$ 11. $\text{b}1$ $\text{b}6$ 12. $\text{c}6$ $\text{xc}6$ 13. $\text{f}5$

This is the position of our interest. Black will decide to sacrifice a pawn in order to open diagonals for his bishops, especially the dark squared one. The idea has some similarity to the Klovans-Tal game.



13...h5

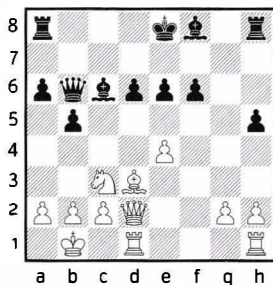
A standard move in those Rauzer positions, taking space on the king-side, preparing ... $\text{g}6$, and also preventing White from placing his bishop on h5. Black's king in the middle of the board is less vulnerable than it may seem.

13... $\text{c}5$ keeping the structure flexible is also a standard Rauzer move.

14.fxe6 fxe6 15. $\text{c}f4$

The critical position. Black now sacrifices his f6-pawn in order to open diagonal(s) for his dark-squared bishop. It is important to note that Black, though being a pawn down, does not mind a queen exchange since his strong bishop pair ensures long-term compensation.

Another main move for White is 15. $\text{d}3$,

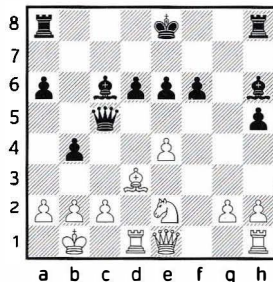


advancing his development and not being tempted by the f6-pawn. Sharp play follows, as White tries

make tactical use of the d-, e- and f-files: 15...b4

[15... o-o-o 16. $\text{h}f1$ $\text{e}7$ 17. $\text{d}e2$ $\text{d}e8$ 18. $\text{d}f4$ $\text{d}8$ Now White is happy to jettison his e4-pawn in order to open the e-file. 19. $\text{e}2!$ $\text{xe}4$ 20. $\text{g}h5$ $\text{e}7$ 21. $\text{f}3$ $\text{xf}3$ Here a strong move for White, and more in the spirit of the position, was 22. $\text{xf}3!$ (22. $\text{gxf}3$ $\text{hh}7\pm$ 1-0 Ivanchuk, V (2735)-Piket, J (2570) Monte Carlo 1996) 22... $\text{hx}2$ 23. $\text{e}1$ $\text{d}5$ 24. $\text{fe}3\pm$]

16. $\text{d}e2$ $\text{g}6$ 17. $\text{e}1$ $\text{c}5$ has been played in a little known open tournament game with interesting tactical motifs:

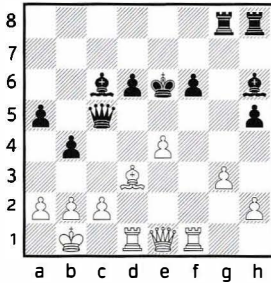
**18.g3**

(More direct is 18. $\text{f}1$ $\text{a}5$ 19. $\text{b}3!$ in the spirit of Karjakin-Caruana, Candidates 2016 — see Game 4, note to White's 17th move. This looks good for White.)

18... $\text{a}5$ 19. $\text{d}f4$ $\text{f}7$ 20. $\text{f}1$ $\text{ag}8$ Here White produced an interesting sacrifice. 21. $\text{d}xe6!$

(A calmer option is *21.b3* planning to place his bishop on *c4* as in Karjakin-Caruana.)

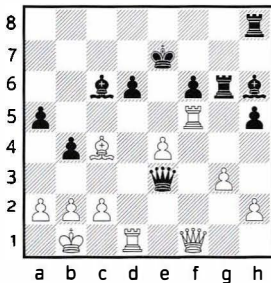
21...♖xe6



22.♞f5 A knight has been sacrificed to open routes to the black king and the position is dynamically balanced. 22...♞e3 23.♙c4+ ♖e7 24.♞f1

(The game Collins,S (2448)-Vovk, A (2637) Escaldes 2016 continued 24.♙xg8? ♞xe1 25.♞xe1 ♞xg8 26.♞xh5 ♙d2! The white rook is forced to abandon its protection of the back rank. 27.♞e2 ♙g5! 28.h4 ♙f4+ and Black went on to win.)

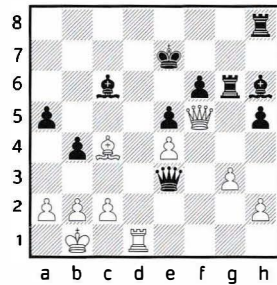
24...♞g6



Here the engines give a 0.00 assessment. White has various moves here but I like the idea of sacrificing a rook to further open files and diagonals! 25.♞e5+! dxex5

(25...fxex5 seems to lead to a forced draw: 26.♞f7+ ♖d8 27.♞xg6 ♖c7 28.♞xd6+ ♖b6 29.♙d5 ♞c8 30.♙xc6 ♞xc6 31.♞b8+ ♖a6 32.♞a8+ ♖b6 33.♞b8+=.)

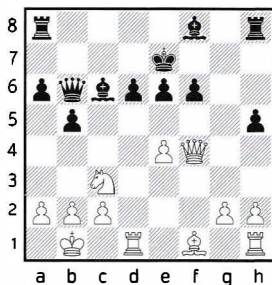
26.♞f5



Black now needs to find the only defence: 26...♞a7!! 27.♞e6+ ♖f8 28.♞xc6 ♙d2! 29.b3 ♖g7 30.♞xd2 ♖h6∞ where White has at least good compensation.

15...♞c5

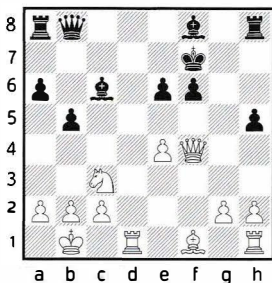
Another way to sacrifice a pawn, with similar ideas in mind, is the slightly paradoxical 15...♖e7!? which is actually a computer idea! Artificial intelligence has definitely been improving the engines' understanding of positional compensation concepts! chesstouring.com



16. ♖xd6+

(16. ♔e2 ♖c5 17. ♜hf1 ♔g7 is fine for Black.)

16... ♔f7 Black gave away a pawn with check, but gained in return dark-squared diagonals for his bishop. 17. ♖f4 ♖b8

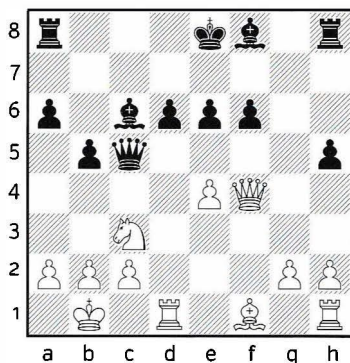


18. ♖d2

(A queen swap leads to excellent play for Black: 18. ♖xb8 ♜xb8 It is interesting that the engines' evaluations immediately start with a minus!)

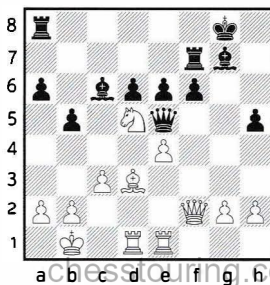
18... ♖e5 Black has compensation for sacrificed pawn, with a sharp fight ahead.

Black was by no means forced to sacrifice a pawn, as he could have had an unclear game after 15... ♔e7∞ since 16. ♜xd6? ♔xd6 17. ♖xf6? ♔d7 18. ♖g7+ ♔e7 19. ♔xb5 does not work for White due to the simple 19... ♜ag8 20. ♜d1+ ♔e8-+.



16. ♖xf6

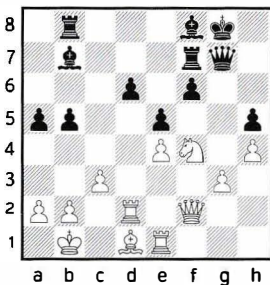
In one interesting game, White understood the dangers behind Black's positional pawn sacrifice and refrained from grabbing the pawn, opting instead for 16. ♔d3 ♖e5 17. ♖f2 ♔g7 18. ♜he1 o-o The black queen on e5 is well placed but also exposed, enabling White to use tactical motifs. 19. ♔d5! ♜f7 20. c3



An important moment! 20...♖b8 now White shows a nice idea.

[Better was 20...f5! not giving White the time to execute the plan he used in the game. 21.♖b6 ♖c8 Here the most consequent idea for White looks to be a piece sacrifice. 22.exf5 (22.♖b4 leads to a sharp, probably balanced ending 22...♙xe4 23.♙xe4 fxe4 24.♖xd6 ♖xd6 25.♙xd6∞.) 22...♖xd5 23.fxe6 ♖b7 24.♖e3 ♖c5 25.♖g3 ♙e8∞. The engines give 0.00, but this position is difficult for a human to assess.]

21.♖b4! ♙b7 22.♙c2!± White is coming with ♖d3 kicking out the black queen and gaining a large advantage as all the black pawns suddenly become weak, 22...a5 23.♖d3 ♖g5 24.h4 ♖g4 25.♖f4 ♙h6 26.g3 Black is in terrible shape. 26...♙f8 27.♙d2 e5 28.♙d1 ♖g7



Even strong players often miss long moves, and here White missed the nice 29.♙b3!

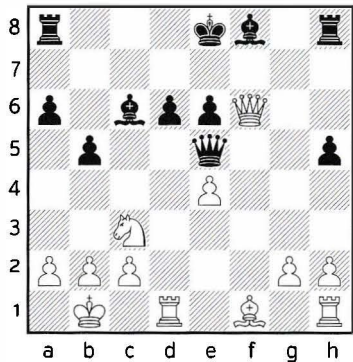
(The game itself went 29.♖e6 ♖h7 30.♙c2± 1-0 Tiviakov,S

(2640)-Galliamova,A (2505) Elista 1998)

29...exf4 30.♖a7!+- winning on the spot.

16...♖e5

Black is happy to trade the queens, believing in his bishop-pair power!



Common sense usually advises a queen swap for the side with a material advantage, as it normally helps neutralize the opponent's initiative. In this particular case, however, because of Black's centralized king a queen swap does not relieve White from Black's pressure. A centralized king can become exposed in the middlegame but is an asset in an endgame. This is not the first time Kozul opted for this pawn sacrifice.

Four years prior to this game, he went for 16...♙h6 17.♖d4?!
chess.com

(White was better advised to keep the queens 17. ♖f4! ♜a7 with an unclear game.)

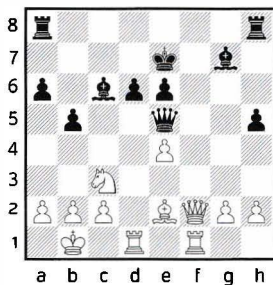
17... ♖xd4 18. ♜xd4 ♘e7. Black was already slightly better and went on to win in Svetushkin,D (2557)-Kozul,Z (2600) Kusadasi 2006.

17. ♖xe5

Again, keeping the queens on the board would have led to an unclear game. 17. ♖f2 The black king can also be vulnerable and the game looks balanced. 17... ♙g7 18. ♙e2 ♘e7

[In the event of 18...b4? White has tactics of his own: 19. ♜hf1 ♜f8 (19...bxc3? loses to 20. ♖f7+ ♘d8 21. ♜xd6+ ♖xd6 22. ♖xg7 ♜e8 23. ♜d1 ♙d5 24. ♖xc3+-) 20. ♖b6±]

19. ♜hf1



Hmm... which rook should Black place on the f-file? 19... ♜af8

[19... ♜hf8 looks perhaps more logical, allowing the other rook to cov-

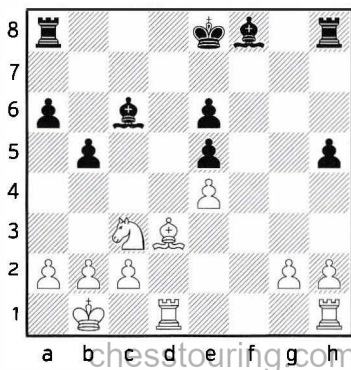
er the a7-square, but now the pawn on h5 hangs. 20. ♖b6 ♙d7 (20... ♖c5 now leads to White's advantage 21. ♖c7+ ♙d7 22. ♖xc5 dxc5 23. ♙xh5 ♙e5 24. h3 b4 25. ♘e2 ♙b5±) 21. ♜xf8 ♜xf8 White has tactical opportunities because of the vulnerable black king. 22. ♙xh5 (22. ♖xa6?? b4-+) 22... ♖xh2 23. ♖xa6 Black is fighting for a draw.]

20. ♖a7+

[Entering an ending with 20. ♖b6 ♖c5 21. ♖c7+ ♙d7 22. ♖xc5 dxc5 again turns out to be fine for Black. 23. ♜xf8 ♜xf8! 24. ♙xh5 ♜h8! White needs to worry about keeping the balance here. 25. ♙g4 (25. g4 ♜f8) 25... ♜xh2 26. ♙h3 ♙e5]

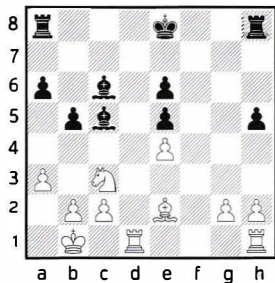
20... ♙d7 21. ♖xa6 b4 The vulnerable black king allows White a perpetual check 22. ♙b5 bxc3 23. ♙xd7 ♘xd7 24. ♖b7+=.

17...dxe5 18. ♙d3



Baron here might have thought, "I am a pawn up, Black also has doubled e-pawns and the queens are off! If Black has sufficient compensation, it should be a 'drawing compensation' max!" A logical line of thought but in reality the position is rather tense. Black does have sufficient compensation. Perhaps a draw would objectively be a suitable outcome, but the play remains sharp. Black skilfully keeps the tension, not being in any hurry to level the material! Black's bishops will become monsters. Black can penetrate along the g- and h-files, while White has a-pawn weakness on e4. Baron cracks under pressure and Kozul beautifully demonstrates the power of the bishop pair!

This ending is no stranger to Kozul. He had a less pleasant experience in Volokitin, A (2679)-Kozul, Z (2591) Sarajevo 2005: 18.a3 ♖c5 19. ♕e2



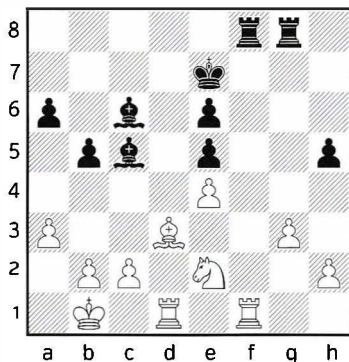
Probably a critical moment. It is advisable here for Black to take space with 19...h4!

(The game itself went 19...♖e7 20.h4! ♕d4 21. ♕f3 ♕xc3 22.bxc3

when White created a passed pawn on the queenside and Black did not manage to hold.)

20. ♖hf1 ♖e7

18... ♖c5 19. ♖e2 ♖g8 20.g3 ♖e7
21. ♖hf1 ♖af8 22.a3



Now Kozul uses a motif often seen when a player is fighting to dominate a file. Useful to remember!

22... ♕f2!

Black plans to double his rooks on the f-file and then move this bishop when he is ready to achieve domination of the file.

23. ♖c1 h4 24.gxh4 ♖g4

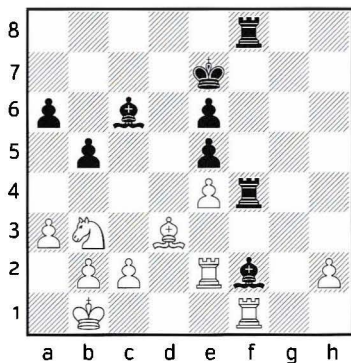
24... ♕xh4

25. ♖b3?!

White had to keep Black busy and a draw would have been a likely result. 25.h5! At some stage Black

will be forced to lose time collecting this pawn. 25...♖h4 (25...♗gf4 26.♗e2 ♗xe4 27.♘d3 ♗xd3 28.♗xd3 e4 29.♗h3 e3=) 26.♗d2 ♗b6 27.♗xf8 ♗xf8 28.♗e2 ♗e7 29.♗f3 ♗xe4 30.♗xe4 ♗xe4=

25...♖xh4 26.♗d2 ♗hf4 27.♗e2



Now Black skilfully uses his bishops! oops!

27... ♗e8! 28.c4 ♗b6

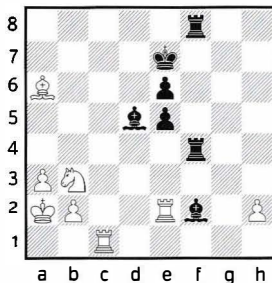
White is in trouble here, the black bishops are dominating.

29. ♖h1

29. ♗fe1 also does not equalize for White: 29...bxc4 30. ♗xc4 ♗g6 31. ♗xa6

(31. ♗d3 also does not save the white e4-pawn: 31...♗d8 32. ♗xa6 ♗f2 33. ♗f1 ♗h4=)

31... ♗f2 32. ♖c1 ♗xe4+ 33. ♗a2 ♗d5!



The pin on the a2-g8 diagonal will cost White an exchange. 34. ♗xe5 ♗b8 35. ♖c3 ♗d6 36. ♗xd5+

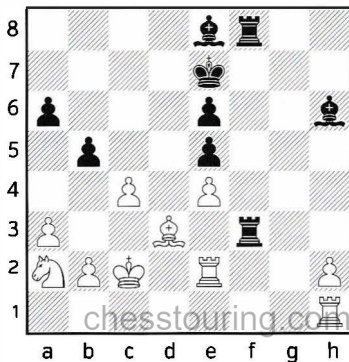
(or 36. ♗h5 ♗h4! Bishops dominate! 37. ♗d3 ♗f6 38. ♗hxd5+ exd5=)

36...exd5=

29... ♗f3

Also strong was 29...bxc4= winning the e4-pawn by force: 30. ♗xc4 ♗h5 31. ♗ee1 ♗f3 32. ♗hf1 ♗xe4+ Black's passed e-pawn becomes a force! 33. ♗a2 ♗b7 with a large, probably winning, advantage for Black.

30. ♗c1 ♗e3 31. ♗a2 ♗h6 32. ♗c2



32... ♖h5

Black's bishops are swinging from one side of the board to the other, terrorizing White!

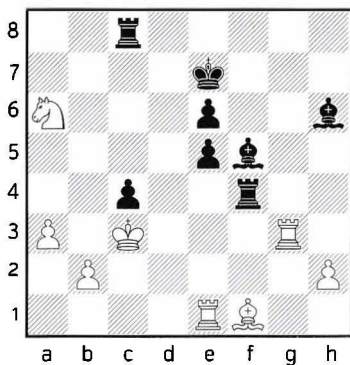
33. ♜he1 ♜d8-+ 34. ♘b4 ♜c8

More precise was 34... ♖e8!-+ winning a piece (The threat is 35...a5.)
35. ♜d1bxc4 36. ♖xc4 ♜c8 37. b3 ♜xc4+!
38. bxc4 ♖a4+ 39. ♖b2 ♖xd1-+.

35. ♜g2

35.c5! ♜xc5+ 36. ♖b1-+ was the only way to struggle.

35...bxc4-+ 36. ♖f1 ♜f4 37. ♘xa6
♖f3 38. ♜g3 ♖xe4+ 39. ♖c3 ♖f5



White simply cannot neutralize the black bishop pair and his king finds itself in a mating net.

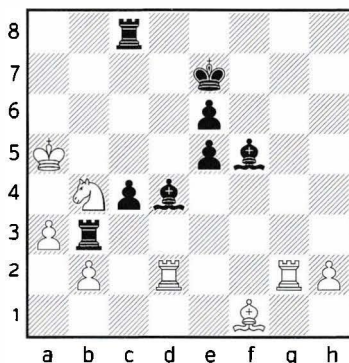
40. ♜d1 ♜f2 41. ♜g2 ♜f3+ 42. ♖b4
♜b3+ 43. ♖a5

Or 43. ♖a4 ♖e4 44. ♖xc4 ♜b7-+

43... ♖e3 44. ♘b4 ♖d4

Weaving the final part of the mating net. 44...c3 45. ♜g7+ ♖f6 46. ♜dd7 e4-+ was also winning.

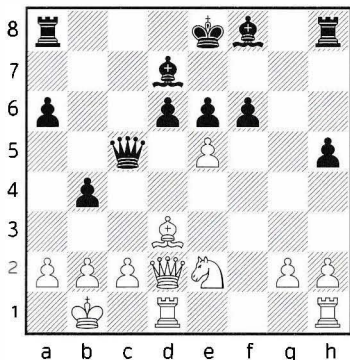
45. ♜dd2



45...c3! 46. bxc3 ♜xa3+ 47. ♖b5 ♜b8+

Kozul played an interesting pawn sacrifice in the transition from the opening to the middlegame and followed it up with a beautiful illustration of bishop-pair power. An impressive game!

0-1



In the two games in the second part of this subchapter we see the power of White's pieces being unleashed by means of the e4-e5 central pawn break (see diagram above). The lines leading to open up the position of Black's king and White develops a powerful attack.

In the notes to Prandstetter-Kozul please pay attention to the comments regarding the Karjakin-Caruana game. It is important for White to remember that there is no need to fear ghosts along the a1-h8 diagonal. Very often White's best plan will be the b2-b3 pawn push, followed by ♙c4!

4

▷ **E. Prandstetter**

▷ **Z. Kozul**

Tbilisi [6], 1988

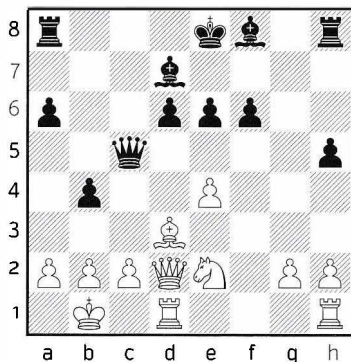
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4
 ♗f6 5.♘c3 ♗c6 6.♙g5 e6 7.♙d2 a6

8.0-0-0 ♙d7 9.f4 b5 10.♙xf6 gxf6
 11.f5 h5 12.♙b1 ♙b6 13.♘xc6 ♙xc6

13... ♙xc6 transposes to T. Baron-
 Z. Kozul (Game 3).

14.♙d3 b4 15.♘e2 ♙c5 16.fxe6 fxe6

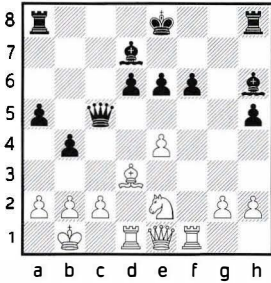
Opening routes to the black king by clearing away central pawns again proves to be the correct decision! In a practical game the biggest problem in working out these central breaks is the timing. Now the time is ripe and the break was well executed by a little known Czech IM in the pre-computer era.



17.e5!

In the 21st century a higher-profile game, indeed one that decided the 2016 Candidates tournament, saw tournament winner Sergei Karjakin get his timing wrong. Karjakin,S (2760)-Caruana,F (2794), Moscow 2016, continued with the logical-seeming 17.♙hf1. In his comments

afterwards Karjakin does give 17.e5! as being stronger, but fails to mention that it actually had been played in 1988 by a 2400 Czech IM! Karjakin-Caruana is, I believe, very instructive for understanding these positions and we will follow it here. 17... ♔h6 Just like in our Baron -Kozul game, Black does not mind sacrificing his f6-pawn. 18. ♖e1 a5



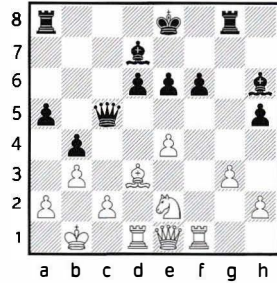
What should White do? To grab or not to grab the pawn? Karjakin chooses a strategy similar to Geller-Larsen (Game 5). Not being afraid of any ghosts on the h8-a1 diagonal, Karjakin follows Geller's example and places his bishop on c4. 19.b3

a) 19. ♖xf6, grabbing a pawn, leads to good compensation for Black after 19... ♗e5 20. ♖f3 ♔g7 21.c3 ♖b8.

b) 19. ♗f4 forces Black to give up his bishop pair: 19... ♔xf4 (The active 19... a4? loses to 20. ♗g6 ♖g8 and now our standard pawn break, again opening routes to the black king, 21.e5!+- dxex — or 21... fxe5 22. ♗h4 — 22. ♖xf6 ♔e3 23. ♖f3 ♔d4 24. ♗h4 b3 and White gets

there first with 25. ♖df1+-.) 20. ♖xf4 ♗e5. Given the absence of the white knight, the black queen cannot be easily chased away from this dominant position.

19... ♖g8 20.g3

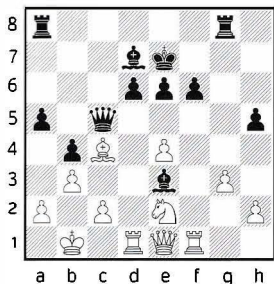


20... ♔e7

[An immediate 20... a4, not bothering to protect the f6-pawn, was also possible for Black: 21. ♔c4 axb3 (21... ♔e3 can lead to an interesting line ending with a repetition of moves: 22. ♖xf6 ♗e5 23. ♗f4 ♖xf6 24. ♗xe3 a3 25. ♗d3 ♖c3! 26. ♗h6 ♗h8 27. ♗e3=) 22. ♔xb3 Just like in our main game the white bishop is well placed on b3, where it helps protect the white king and compensates for the damaged white queenside pawn structure. 22... ♔e7 23. ♗d4 ♖gc8 24. ♖d3 This position looks to me better for White, as the knight on d4 provides White with a number of sacrificial possibilities, but my computer engines disagree, evaluating it as 0.00.]

chesstouring.com

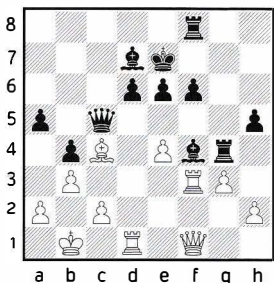
21. ♔c4 ♔e3



Caruana was probably worried about White moving his knight to either f4, restricting the h6-bishop, or d4. 22. ♖f3

(22. ♘f4! looks better for White, forcing Black to either allow unpleasant knight jumps or part with his bishop, which would enable White to change the pawn structure by recapturing gxf4.)

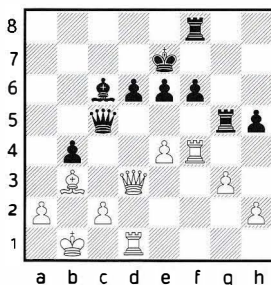
22... ♗g4 23. ♖f1 ♗f8 24. ♘f4 This knight gives White many tactical options, so Caruana decides to remove it. 24... ♕xf4



25. ♗xf4

(In the case of 25. gxf4 Black is quick with g-file counter-play. 25... ♗fg8 26. e5 d5 27. exf6+ ♔f8!∞.)

25...a4 Worried about threats of ...a3 or ...♖e5, White removes the black a-pawn. 26. bxa4 ♕xa4 27. ♖d3 Black is doing well, especially considering that he needed to win this game. After the exchange of the white knight there are not many tactical motifs and the black king feels safe in the middle of the board. Black also has a good pawn structure which will be to his advantage in the case of a queen swap and an endgame. 27... ♕c6 28. ♕b3 ♗g5

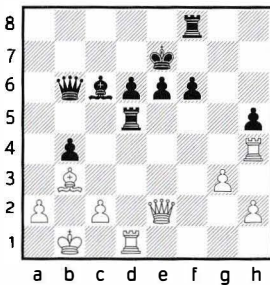


An interesting moment. Neither side has deadly threats. Black wants to place his rook on e5 and, at least for the time being, remove White's option of the e4-e5 break. 29. e5! A brilliant psychological decision! Your computer engines are probably not going to show you the merits of this decision, but in a practical man-vs-man play this decision is nothing short of brilliant! Yes, Karjakin did mention, in his comments on various media sites, that in this crucial game he tried to make decisions based on the needs of the position rather than the fact that he needed only a draw to win the tour-

nament and qualify for a World Championship match with Magnus Carlsen. But this is easier said than done. The character of the position changes and White gets not only counter-play but also a psychological edge. Practice shows that the side initiating such a crisis usually plays better for the rest of the game, and this game will prove no exception. Strong nerves are needed to play like this. 29... ♖xe5 30. ♖c4 ♘d5 31. ♖e2!

(31. ♖xd5 ♖xd5 32. ♖xd5 ♘xd5 33. ♖xb4 ♘f3 leads to a pawn race, with Black certainly not being an underdog.)

31... ♖b6 32. ♖h4



With his e4-e5 pawn break White has created tactical play against the black king. White gets his sacrificed pawn back, but Black has a fine game. 32... ♖e5

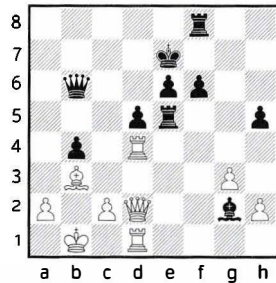
(32... ♖xd1+ 33. ♖xd1 ♖e3 34. ♖xb4 ♘e4 looks okay for Black since with fewer pieces are on the board, the black king is more difficult to attack. In any ending Black

will probably be favourite to win a pawn race.)

33. ♖d3 ♘g2 Caruana is planning ...d5 but does not want his bishop to be shut in.

(An immediate 33... d5 was an option with a position not easy to assess: 34. ♖d2 ♖c5 35. ♖xb4∞.)

34. ♖d4 d5 35. ♖d2



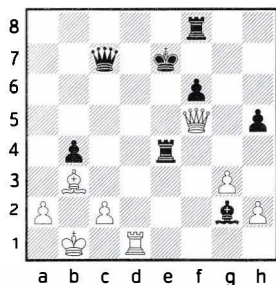
35... ♖e4?? A blunder that decides the Candidates tournament.

(35... ♘e4 36. ♖xb4 ♖c6 and the Candidates outcome would still have remained open!)

36. ♖xd5!! Caruana must have thought that with the limited number of white pieces left on the board such tactics would not work. It turns out that the black pieces are coordinating horribly, and his king is weak. 36... exd5 37. ♖xd5 ♖c7

(37... ♖d4 38. ♖xd4 ♖xd4 39. ♖xd4 ♖b8± hoping to salvage a draw was Black's best hope)

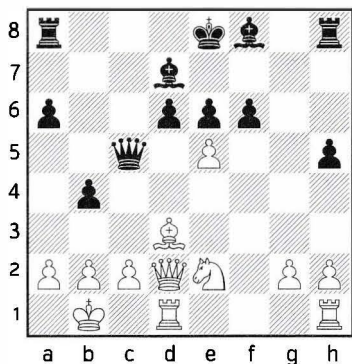
38. ♖f5+-



All the black pieces are now loose and he cannot defend against the multiple threats. 38... ♜f7

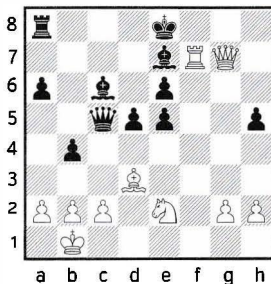
(38... ♜c6 39. ♖h7+ ♜e8 40. ♖xh5+ ♜f8 41. ♜d5 ♜d6 42. ♜xe4+-)

39. ♜xf7 ♖e5 40. ♜d7+ ♜f8 41. ♜d8+ and Black resigns.



17... ♖xe5?!

Black's best was 17...fxe5 when White gets a small but safe advantage. 18. ♖g5 ♜e7 19. ♖g7 ♜f8 20. ♜hf1 ♜xf1 21. ♜xf1 ♜c6 22. ♜f7 d5



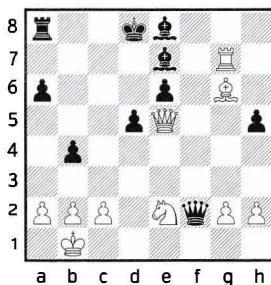
23. ♜g6

(23. ♖xe5 ♜xf7 24. ♖xh5+ ♜f8 25. ♖h8+ ♜f7 26. ♖h5+ ♜f8=)

And now a line given by Karjakin goes 23... ♜d8

(23... ♜d7 24. ♖xe5 ♜f8 25. ♜d4± or 24... ♜g8 25. ♖xh5)

24. ♖xe5 ♜e8 25. ♜g7 ♖f2

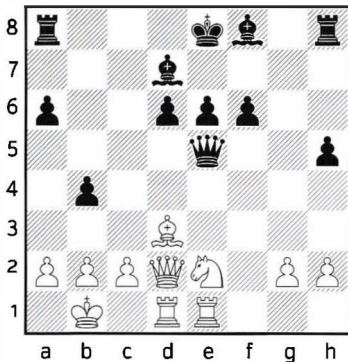


26. a3! ♖f6 27. ♖d4

(27. ♖xf6 ♜xf6 28. ♜g8 ♜e7 29. axb4±)

27... ♖xd4 28. ♜xd4 ♜d7 29. axb4 ♜xg6 30. ♜xg6 e5 31. ♜f3 e4 32. ♜e5+ ♜c7 33. c3 with an advantageous endgame.

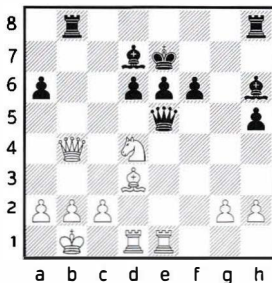
18. ♖he1



White has got what he wanted. Jet-tisoning his e-pawn has opened routes to the black king. ♖d4 or ♖f4 are terrible threats.

18... ♗h6 19. ♖xb4 ♖e7 20. ♖d4 ♗e3

20... ♖ab8! was the only way for Black, leading to a pawn-down end-game.

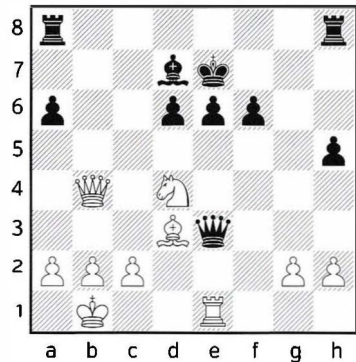


21. ♖xe5

(21. ♖f5+ wins an exchange, but is less clear: 21... ♖xf5 22. ♖xb8 ♖xb8 23. ♗xf5 ♗f4 24. ♗d3 ♗e5±)

21... ♖xb4 22. ♖xe6+ ♗xe6 23. ♖c6+ ♖d7 24. ♖xb4±

21. ♖xe3! ♖xe3 22. ♖e1+-



Now White has a winning attack. I assume both players were in terrible time pressure, as serious mistakes now start to occur.

22... ♖hb8 23. ♖c3

23. ♖f5+! ♖f7 24. ♖xd6+ ♖g7 25. ♖b7+-

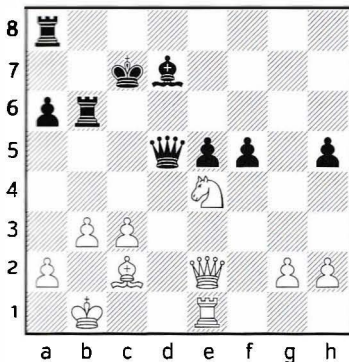
23... ♖f2 24. ♖f5+ ♖d8 25. ♖xd6 e5?

25... ♖xb2+ 26. ♖xb2 ♖b6+ 27. ♖a1 ♖xd6 28. ♖xf6+ ♖c7±

26. b3?

26. ♖f7+ ♖e8 27. ♖xe5+-

26... ♖b6 27. ♖e4 ♖d4 28. ♖d2 ♖c7 29. ♖e2 f5∞ 30. c3 ♖d5 31. ♗c2



31... ♖g8?

31... ♗d8∞

32.c4?

32. ♗d1 ♖c6 33. ♘f6 ♖xf6 34. ♖c4±

32... ♖c6

32... ♖a5±

33. ♘c3 ♗xg2 34. ♖xe5+ ♘b7 35. ♘d5

35.c5 ♗b4 36. ♗d1+-

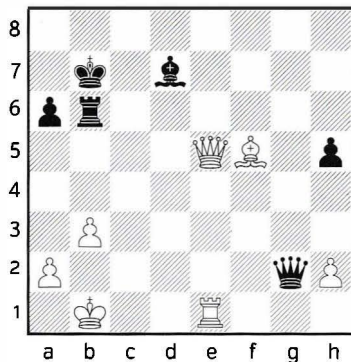
35... ♖xc4?

35... ♗b5±

36. ♘e3+- ♖c6 37. ♘xg2 ♖xg2

38. ♗xf5?

38. ♖e7+-



38... ♗xf5+ 39. ♖xf5 ♗c6±

Black lost on time.

1-0

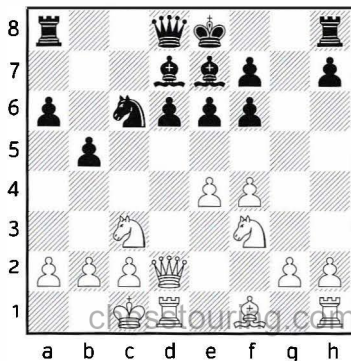
5

▷ E. Geller

▷ B. Larsen

Copenhagen [2], 1966

1.e4 c5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4
4. ♘xd4 ♘f6 5. ♘c3 d6 6. ♗g5 e6
7. ♖d2 a6 8.o-o-o ♗d7 9.f4 ♗e7
10. ♘f3 b5 11. ♗xf6 gxf6



An old main-line Rauzer. Personally I've always thought it was more logical to keep the bishop on f8, as Kozul does, because (a) then the black bishop can be placed on h6 and (b) if White pushes f4-f5 Black does not need to worry about ♖h6 by White.

12. ♖d3

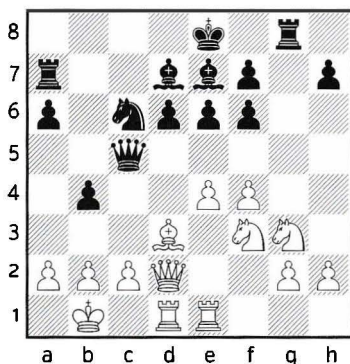
12.f5 and 12.♖b1 are also being played.

12... ♖a5 13. ♖b1 b4 14. ♗e2 ♖g8?

Larsen will come to regret this attempt at activity, as now the black h7-pawn is not being defended and this factor will prove important.

14... ♖c5 15.f5 a5 16.♗f4 was seen in an old classic: 16...a4 17.♖c1 ♖b8 18.c3 b3 19.a3 ♗e5 20.♖hf1± 1/2-1/2 Fischer,R (2785)-Spassky,B (2660) Reykjavik 1972.

15. ♗g3 ♖c5 16. ♖he1 ♖a7



An important moment. White's pieces are ready for action, while the black king is stuck in the middle of the board, deprived of both castling possibilities. If White hesitates, Black will push ...a5 and ...a4 creating queenside threats. Geller temporarily sacrifices a pawn in order to open routes to the black king.

17.e5!

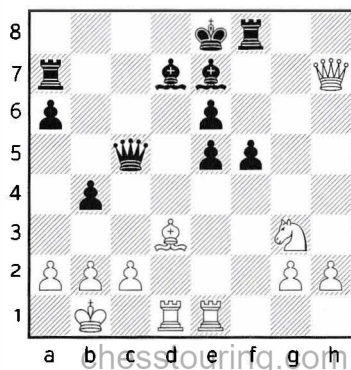
An instructive (temporary) pawn sacrifice typical for those positions.

Your computer engine will like 17.f5± with ♖h6 to follow, collecting the pawn on h7.

17... dxex5 18.fxe5 ♗xe5 19. ♗xe5 fxe5 20. ♖h6!

White gets his pawn back, the black monarch is still mired in the centre. Larsen pushes his central pawns.

20...f5 21. ♖xh7 ♖f8



Now, as in Karjakin-Caruana (seen in the comments to Game 4, Prandstetter-Kozul), Geller improves the position of his bishop.

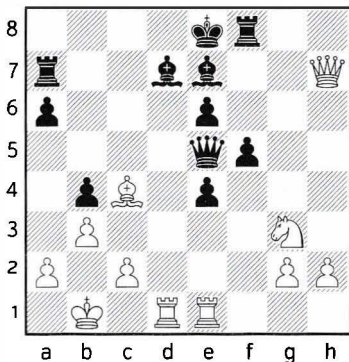
22.b3!!

There is a general human tendency in such positions to be afraid of ghosts on the h8-a1 diagonal and, lacking a dark-squared bishop, refuse to touch such a pawn! In reality the white bishop comes to the excellent c4 square, while tactical factors prevent Larsen from establishing a queen-bishop battery on the long diagonal of the dark squares.

22...e4

The king run 22...♔d8 23. ♕c4 ♖c8 was arguably a better choice, though it does not solve all the problems after 24. ♜xe5! ♜xe5 25. ♜xe7± and White will also collect the pawn on b4, achieving a superior game.

23. ♕c4 ♜e5



Black is not in time to set up the queen-bishop battery with ... ♕f6 because of some simple tactics.

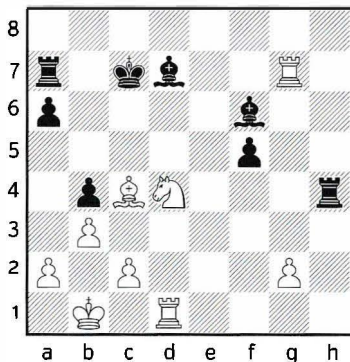
24. ♜h5+ ♖d8 25. ♜xe4+- ♜c3 26. ♖e2

Black is now forced into a hopeless endgame.

26... ♜h8 27. ♜xh8 ♜xh8 28. ♜xe6 ♜xh2 29. ♜g6

White is a pawn up with a better position. The rest is easy. I assume there was serious time-trouble here.

29... ♜h4 30. ♖d4 ♖c7 31. ♜g7 ♕f6

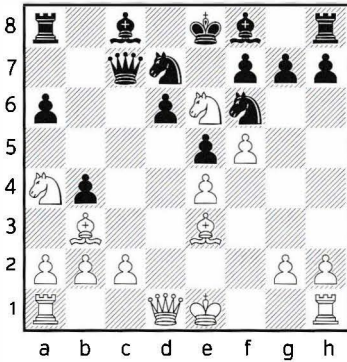


32. ♖e6+?!

32. ♜xd7+ ♖xd7 33. ♖b5+-

32... ♖b6 33. ♜g6 ♕c3 34. ♖c5+ ♕c6 35. ♖a4+ ♖c7 36. ♖xc3 bxc3 37. ♜g3+- ♖b6 38. ♜xc3 ♕xg2 39. ♜d6+ ♖c5 40. ♜d2 ♖b4 41. ♖b2 ♕e4 42. a3+ ♖a5 43. ♜d6 1-0

1.2. VELIMIROVIC PIECE SACRIFICE



I met Dragoljub Velimirovic in 1986, when I was the new Yugoslav junior champion and he was a fearless grandmaster famous for his attacking style. Bosna, my club at that time, had arranged a training weekend in my hometown of Sarajevo, so that Velimirovic could evaluate whether it was worth organizing further training for me. At that time Velimirovic was already famous for his knight sacrifices on f5 or d5 in the Sicilian, especially in his own system which became known as the Velimirovic Attack.

Our first workday was an interesting experience for me. Velimirovic placed on the board one of the positions from his system, with the white knight being sacrificed on f5, and said: "Let's play a few games. I will attack and you will defend!"

This position was extremely dangerous for Black and there I was without any theoretical knowledge playing against an expert. No wonder I got mated in all the games!

I was extremely worried that I had failed the test and Velimirovic would return to Belgrade, where he lived, and tell my club, "Sorry, your boy is not worth the time after all." To my utter surprise the famous grandmaster told me at the end our session: "Ivan, we have established excellent bases for our further work!"

Confused, I asked: "What kind of bases, sir?" Dragoljub cheerfully responded: "Well, you got mated in all the games so it is safe to say that you know nothing! So now we can start doing some work." Velimirovic told my club, "Your boy does not know anything but is somehow making good moves, so next month send him to me in Belgrade!" It was the start of four beautiful years.

Velimirovic, nicknamed "Gazda" ("Boss" in Serbian), loved chess immensely and generously shared his own knowledge, and also knowledge acquired through working with Gligoric (Gazda was Gligo's long-term second) and a few training sessions with Kortschnoj.

Velimirovic was an excellent story-teller and I will share one of his tales with you here. At the Palma de Mallorca Interzonal in 1970, Bobby Fischer played the Velimirovic Attack with White against Larsen and lost. One year later, against Bukal, Velimirovic instead of Fischer's 12.h4 sacrificed his knight with 12.♖f5! — a novelty at the time and an amazing concept! I advise readers to dig in a database and find those two games.

Gligoric, a good friend of Fischer's, played in the same tournament. Seeing Bobby losing to Larsen, Gligo told Fischer: "My second Velimirovic has many ideas in that line, so maybe you should analyze with him." Fischer apparently agreed and the two started to analyze, having entered into a rather special agreement: when one player gets into a losing position, the other player has the right to slap him hard on the wrist! Larsen noticed this, went to Gligo and said: "I have seen something unbelievable! Fischer is analyzing with some unknown man and this man keeps slapping Fischer on his hands. Bobby's hands are red all over!"

In 1987 Velimirovic was preparing for the Interzonal and was analyzing a rather unusual (at least for me) knight sacrifice on e6. Of course computer engines did not

exist at the time. I was rather sceptical about the sacrifice and when Velimirovic played it against Portisch and lost, I was not at all surprised. The idea was certainly interesting but pioneering efforts often fail at first. Undaunted, Gazda found an improvement and shortly afterwards beat Gutman and Suba with his sacrifice.

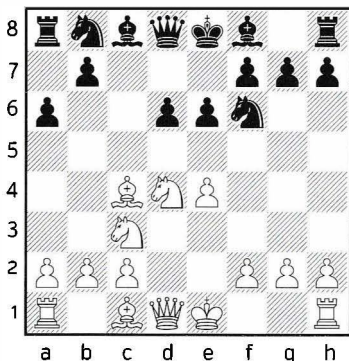
From my database research, it appears that the ♖e6 sacrificial idea first appeared in Igor Zaitsev-Dementiev, played in 1970 (diagrammed here at the top and included in the Velimirovic-Gutman comments). A renowned theoretician, Zaitsev also pioneered a major branch in the Spanish, which is now named after him. I have no idea whether the Zaitsev game was known to Velimirovic. White's sacrificial concept is based on keeping the black king in the centre while Black cannot coordinate his pieces. In Velimirovic-Gutman we see this concept working even in the ending!

I hope readers will derive some inspiration from this sacrificial concept. In Velimirovic-Andersson I also give some theoretical observations about the opening.

6

▷ **D. Velimirovic**
 ▷ **U. Andersson**
 Moscow, 1982

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4
 ♗f6 5.♗c3 a6 6.♙c4 e6

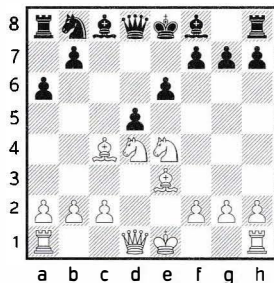


7. ♙b3

This is the main White move here and 7...b5 was for many decades Black's main theoretical line. Due to Garry Kasparov's efforts 7...♗bd7 became an alternative main line for Black in the early 1990s.

White can start with 7. ♙e3!? aiming to sidestep 7...♗bd7 lines or at least get fresh positions. 7...♗bd7

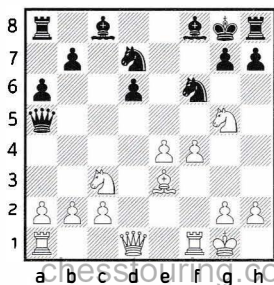
(Trying to take advantage of White's move order with 7...♗xe4? is a blunder and can lead to an opening disaster for Black: 8.♗xe4 d5



9.♙h5! dxc4 10.o-o-o Black is too far behind in development and his position soon collapses, for example 10...♙c7 11.♗he1 ♗c6 12.♗xc6 ♙xc6 13.♙g5 ♙d7 14.♙f6! ♙b5 15.♗g5 g6 16.♙f3+; 7...b5 8.♙b3 transposes to our main line and is considered a drawback of 7. ♙e3, as after 7. ♙b3 b5 8. ♙e3!? is definitely not considered to be one of the White's best choices by opening theory.)

8.o-o This leads to new positions.

(8.f4 was played by Fischer: 8...b5 9.♙b3 transposing to lines analyzed below; 8. ♙xe6 is one of the computer's top choices, leading to messy positions. One logical line may go 8...fxe6 9.♗xe6 ♙a5 10.o-o ♗f7 11.♗g5+ ♗g8 12.f4



White probably has compensation, but no more than that. 12... **h6** 13. $\text{d}e6$ $\text{d}xe4$ 14. $\text{d}xe4$ $\text{f}f5$ 15. $\text{d}c7$ $\text{f}xe4$ 16. $\text{e}e1$ $\text{e}b8$ 17. $\text{e}a7$ $\text{c}c6!$ 18. $\text{e}e3$ $\text{f}xc7$ 19. $\text{d}d5+$ $\text{c}h7$ 20. $\text{f}f5+=$ and a draw with perpetual check.)

8... $\text{d}c5$

(Here 8... $\text{b}5??$ obviously blunders into 9. $\text{e}xe6$.)

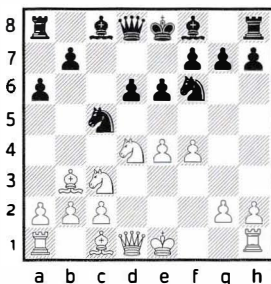
9. $\text{f}f3!$ and it seems to me that White has some advantage. 9... $\text{b}5$

(9... $\text{c}c7$ 10. $\text{a}a4\pm$)

10. $\text{b}4!\pm$

7... $\text{b}5$

The alternative 7... $\text{d}bd7$ gained popularity after it became Garry Kasparov's trusted weapon in his 1993 World Championship match against Nigel Short in London. In one of the games the challenger displayed some nice Sicilian sacrificial ideas and came close to a brilliant victory: 8. $\text{f}f4$ $\text{d}c5$

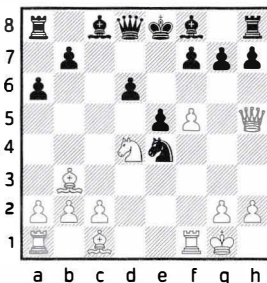


9.e5! Direct and critical!

a) 9.0-0!? is a standard sacrificial idea that, three years after the London match, brought Topalov a flashing victory against the famous champion. 9... $\text{c}cxe4$ Kasparov takes up the challenge!

(9... $\text{e}e7$ 10. $\text{e}e5$ $\text{d}xe5$ 11. $\text{f}fxe5$ $\text{d}fd7$ was a calmer, definitely playable option for Black.)

10. $\text{d}xe4$ $\text{d}xe4$ 11. $\text{f}f5$ $\text{e}e5$ 12. $\text{f}fh5$

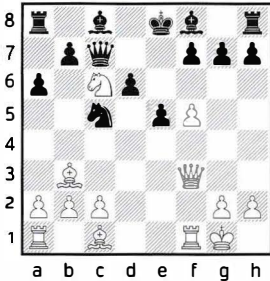


A critical position! Black has a pawn, White obvious leads in development. Such positions are not easy to play. White does not really have any deadly threats but has compensation "everywhere". 12... $\text{f}fe7$ This allows White to execute a beautiful light-squares bind.

(Topalov definitely trusted his 9.0-0!? pawn sacrifice and repeated it two days later against Nigel Short in the same tournament! That game continued 12... $\text{d}d5!$ 13. $\text{e}e1$ $\text{e}e5$ 14. $\text{e}xe4$ $\text{e}xd4+$ 15. $\text{e}e3!$ leading to a positional ex-

change sacrifice: 15...0-0 16. ♖xd4 exd4 17. ♗xd4 f6. Though White later lost the game, at this stage he had adequate compensation for the sacrificed exchange in Topalov, V (2700)-Short, N (2665) Amsterdam 1996

13. ♖f3 ♗c5 14. ♗c6! ♖c7



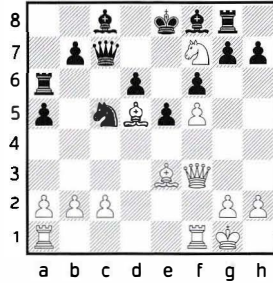
15. ♗d5! Though White still needs a move or two to threaten a devastating blow, his knight on c6 is intimidating. In practical play in such positions a knight like this usually gets on the defender's nerves and whether you are an amateur or a World Champion it is difficult to keep calm in these situations! 15...a5

(The strength of White's attacking potential is nicely illustrated in the following line. 15... ♗d7 16. ♗b4 ♖a5? 17. ♗xf7+! ♗xf7 18. ♗d5 ♖d8 19. ♖h5+ ♗g8 20. f6+-)

16. ♗g5 Here Black commits a crucial mistake. 16... ♖a6?

(16... ♗d7! was the best defence, with an unclear game.)

17. ♗d8 f6 18. ♗f7 ♖g8 19. ♗e3

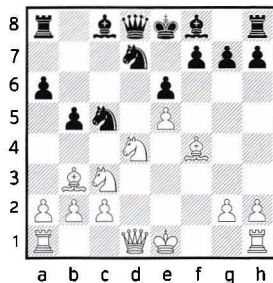


The visual effect of the white d5-bishop's domination is tremendous! 19...g6 20. ♗g5! Black now suffers decisive material losses 20... ♖g7 21. fxg6 ♖xg6 22. ♗f7+ ♖xf7 23. ♗xf7 ♗xf7 24. ♗xc5 dxc5 25. ♖ad1+- and White went on to win in 1-0 Topalov, V (2700)-Kasparov, G (2775) Amsterdam 1996.

b) 9. f5 ♗e7 is fine for Black;

c) 9. ♖f3 was another try in the mentioned match, Black being okay after 9...b5 10. f5 ♗d7= in Short, N (2655)-Kasparov, G (2805) London 1993.

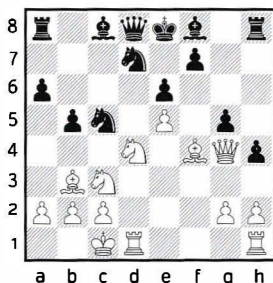
9...dxe5 10. fxe5 ♗fd7 11. ♗f4 b5



12. ♖g4!? This aggressive move leads to a sacrifice. Black takes up the challenge!

(12. ♖e2 ♗b7 13. 0-0-0 brought White success in 1-0 Topalov, V (2700)-Anand, V (2725) Wijk aan Zee 1996.)

12...h5 13. ♖g3 h4 14. ♖g4 Black, having a number of options at his disposal, chooses the move that pushes White to the limit! 14...g5! Just because a piece is attacked, that does not mean it has to be moved! 15. 0-0-0!

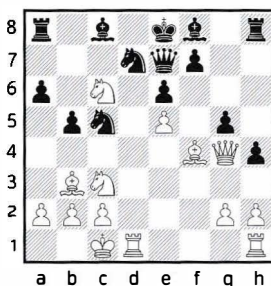


Black faces a difficult decision: whether or not to grab the bishop on f4? After playing ...g5, it would be consequent to take ...gxf4... but Kasparov trembles! 15... ♖e7? This mistake could have cost Kasparov dearly as White now seizes this opportunity to display his attacking skills!

[15...gxf4! was indeed Black's best and the following computer line looks almost forced: 16. ♗xe6! ♗xe6 17. ♗xe6 ♖e7 18. ♗xd7+

♗xd7 19. ♖f3 ♗a7 And here, I assume, Kasparov simply could not evaluate the position after 20. ♗he1. My computer engine gives 0.00, but in over-the-board play it seems to me easier to be White here. (20. ♗d5 looks like leading to a draw: 20... ♗c6 21. ♗f6+ ♖xf6 22. exf6 ♗xf3 23. ♗he1+ ♗e7 24. fxe7 ♗xd1 25. exf8 ♖+ ♗xf8 26. ♗xd1=.)]

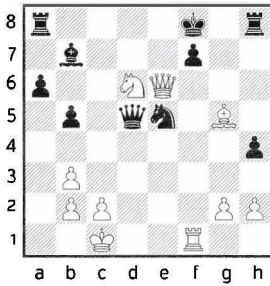
16. ♗c6!!



A brilliant piece sacrifice, definitely overlooked by his opponent! Playing such a move, White needed to fully foresee and understand the power of his 20. ♗d6! idea. 16... ♗xb3+ 17. axb3 ♖c5 18. ♗e4! ♖xc6 19. ♗xg5 The black king is in a mating net, 20. ♗d6 being a terrible threat. 19... ♗b7 20. ♗d6! ♗xd6

(20... ♗xe5? runs into a mating variation: 21. ♗f6+ ♗e7 22. ♗hd1! ♗xg4 23. ♗d7+ ♖xd7 24. ♗xd7#)

21. ♗xd6+ ♗f8 22. ♗fi ♗xe5 23. ♖xe6 ♖d5



Here White missed the chance to crown his excellent performance with 24. ♖f6!

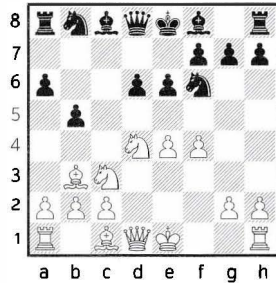
(The actual game saw 24. ♖xf7+ ♗xf7 25. ♙e7+ ♜g7 26. ♖f6+ ♜h7 27. ♗xf7 ♖h5± and Black escaped with a draw in 1/2-1/2 Short,N (2655)-Kasparov,G (2805) London 1993.)

24... ♖h7 25. ♖f5! and Black cannot save the game by perpetual check, since the white king happily runs away: 25... ♖xg2 26. ♖xe5 ♖g1+ 27. ♜d2 ♖g2+ 28. ♜c3 ♖c6+ 29. ♜b4+-.

8.0-0

This is a Velimirovic game featuring our knight sacrifice theme, so I would like to start with Velimirovic's "darling" 8. ♙e3!? Later in this chapter I will examine his games against Gutman and Suba. For the theoretically-minded reader I will here also shed a light on some other White options here.

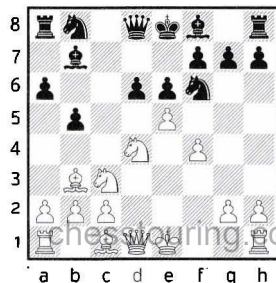
8.f4



This was the old main line, where it could be profitable to undertake some new investigative work. 8... ♙b7 is the old main line here, Bobby Fischer being a great expert with both colours!

[An immediate pawn grab 8...b4?! 9. ♗a4 ♗xe4 has been seen in a famous classic: 10.0-0 g6 11.f5! gxf5 12. ♗xf5 ♖g8 (12...exf5? 13. ♖d5 ♖a7 14. ♖d4+-) 13. ♙d5! ♖a7 14. ♙xe4 exf5 15. ♙xf5± with a clear White advantage, though Tal managed to turn the tables and eventually even win the game in Fischer,R-Tal,M Candidates Bled-Zagreb-Belgrade 1959.]

The reason I am mentioning 8.f4 is the following idea: 9.e5!?



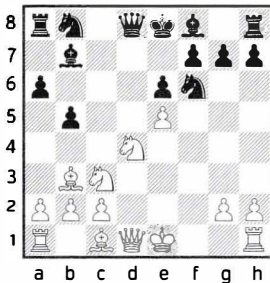
This is a rarely-played move, tried by Nakamura some years ago, where I think some serious investigation could change current verdicts.

[9.f5 e5 10.♘d2 ♘bd7 11.♙g5 ♙e7 12.♘g3 (12.♙xf6 ♘xf6 13.♖d3 ♗c8 14.0-0 0-0 15.♘g3 ♗c5 16.♘d5 ♙xd5 17.exd5 a5 18.a4 b4 19.♘e4 ♘xe4 20.♖xe4 ♖b6= 1-0 Fischer, R-Zuckerman, B New York 1965) 12...♗c8 13.0-0 h5! ♗ o-1 Byrne, R-Fischer, R Soussie 1967. After Fischer's brilliant win in this game, the whole 8.f4 line slowly disappeared from the top level.]

9...dxе5

[9...b4? 10.exf6 (10.♘a4? ♘e4= 1/2-1/2 Minic, D-Bertok, M Zagreb 1961) 10...bxc3 11.0-0 ♖xf6 12.bxc3±]

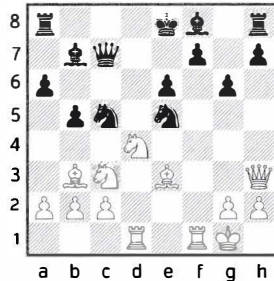
10.fxe5



10...♙c5

[This move is favoured by theory but theoretical attention may turn to 10...♘fd7! which is prob-

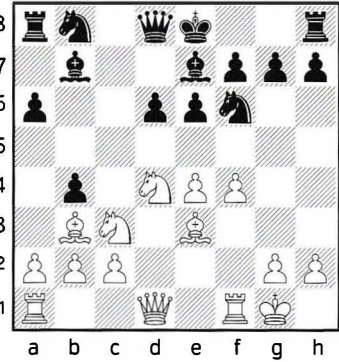
ably better. 11.♖h5! (11.0-0 ♙c5 12.♘h1 0-0 13.♙f4 ♘b6! ♗) 11...g6 12.♖h3 ♘c5 13.♙e3 ♘bd7 The position is rather complicated, with many possibilities. The following variation illustrates some of the tactical resources: 14.0-0 ♘xe5 15.♗ad1 ♖c7



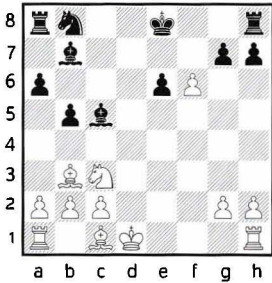
White has compensation, but probably not more. Computer engines give a number of 0.00 lines, but I have tried to replicate the most human play: 16.♙xe6! (16.♙f4 ♘xb3! 17.♘xe6 ♖b6+ 18.♘h1 ♖xe6 19.♖xe6+ ♗xe6 20.♙xe5 ♗g8 21.axb3 ♗d8=) 16...♘xe6 17.♘xe6 ♗xe6 18.♖xe6+ ♖e7 19.♘d5 ♙xd5! 20.♖xd5 ♗d8 and a draw is the most likely outcome of this mess, e.g. 21.♖e4 ♙g7 (21...♗xd1 22.♗xd1 ♙g7 23.♖a8+ ♘f7 24.♖d5+ ♖e6 25.♖b7+ ♖e7=) 22.♗xd8+ ♖xd8 23.♙c5 ♖c8 24.♙d4 ♖c7 25.♙xe5 ♙xe5 26.♗e1 0-0 27.♖xe5 ♖xc2=].

11.♘xe6! This could be an improvement as it seems to lead to a better endgame for White.

[A Nakamura game went 11. ♖e3 ♗xd4 12. ♖xd4 ♖xd4 13. ♗xd4 Black is fine in this ending. 13... ♖fd7 (13... ♖c6 14. 0-0-0 ♖xd4 15. ♗xd4 ♖d7) 14. 0-0-0 0-0 15. ♗he1 ♗xg2 16. ♗f2 ♖c8 and White won, though not because of the opening, in 1-0 Nakamura,H (2686)-Felecan,F (2377) Chicago 2008.]



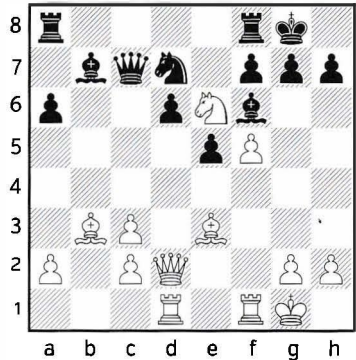
11... ♖xd4+ 12. ♗xd1 fxe6 13. exf6



11.e5! bxc3 12.exf6 ♗xf6 13.bxc3 0-0 14. ♖d2 ♖c7 15. ♗ad1 ♖d7

This allows Velimirovic to go for his favorite knight jump! Black had a reasonable option in 15...d5 16.f5 e5 17.♖e2 ♖d8 18.♖g3 ♖d7 19.♖h5∞.

16.f5! e5 17.♖e6!



The white king may look exposed, but there is no real way for Black to take advantage of it. 13...gxf6

(13... ♗xg2 14.fxg7 ♖g8 15. ♖e1 ♗f3+ 16. ♗d2 ♖c6 17. ♖xe6+ ♗d7 18. ♖e4 ♗xe4 19. ♖xe4 ♖xg7 20. ♗c3±)

14. ♖e1 e5 15. ♖d5 ♗xd5 16. ♗xd5 ♖a7 17. ♗e2±;

The main line from move eight is currently considered to be 8. ♖f3 ♖c7 9. 0-0 ♗e7 10. ♖g3 0-0 11. ♗h6, with many top level games.

8... ♗e7 9.f4 ♗b7 10. ♗e3!?! b4

17...fxe6 18.fxe6

A cool head is needed here. At the time this game was played by Ulf Andersson, who was at the peak of his career and widely recognized as one of the best defensive players in

the history of chess, but he loses his way!

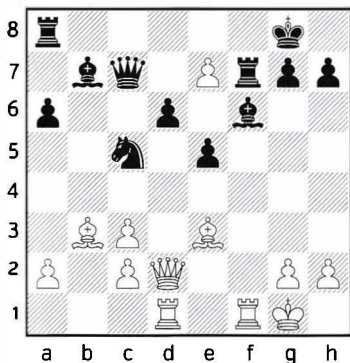
18...♘c5?

18...d5! was the way for Black to go, leading to a drawish endgame after 19.exd7

(19.♙xd5? is a blunder due to 19...♙xd5 20.♖xd5 ♜b6+ and now if White takes the knight, Black recaptures with check.)

19...♖xd7 20.♙xd5+ ♖xd5 21.♖xd5+ ♙xd5 22.♞xd5 ♞fc8=

19.e7+ ♞f7



Now Velimirovic carries out another favorite sacrifice, one which we see in a number of his games in this chapter.

20.♞xf6! ♜xb3!

20...gxf6 loses to 21.♖xd6 ♖xd6 22.♞xd6 ♘g7 23.♙xf7 ♘xf7

24.♙xc5. White should win this opposite colour bishops endgame.

21.♞xf7!

21.♖xd6 ♞xe7 22.♙b6 ♖xd6 23.♞fxd6 ♜a1± looks drawish.

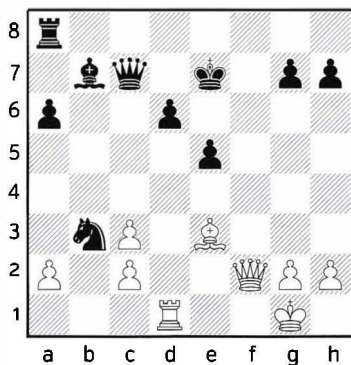
21...♘xf7

21...♜xd2 22.e8♖+ ♞xe8 23.♞xc7+-

22.♖f2+

Where to go with the black king? White actually keeps an advantage in both cases.

22...♘xe7



And here White lets Black escape into a draw.

22...♘g8 23.♙g5! h6

(23...♜c5?? 24.♞f1+-)

24. ♖f1 ♘c6 25. ♙xh6 ♘xg2+
26. ♘xg2 ♙xg2 27. ♜xg2 ♝c5 28. ♙e3
♞e8 29. ♞d1±

23.cxb3

23. ♖h4+! would have kept the at-
tack and made life difficult for Black:
23... ♜e8 24.cxb3 ♘xc3 25. ♖h5+ g6
26. ♖h3→.

23... ♞f8 24. ♖h4+ ♜e8 25. ♖xh7
♘xc3 26. ♖h5+ ♞f7 27. ♖h8+ 1/2

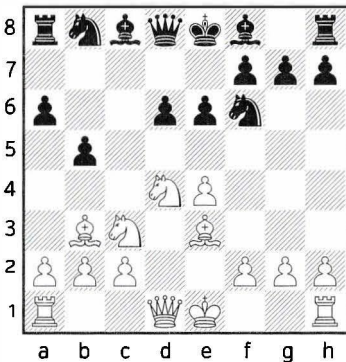
7

▷ D. Velimirovic

▷ L. Gutman

Metz, 1988

1.e4 c5 2. ♜f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4. ♜xd4
♜f6 5. ♜c3 a6 6. ♙c4 e6 7. ♙b3 b5
8. ♙e3!?



To the best of my knowledge
Dragoljub Velimirovic was the only
strong GM who steadfastly sup-

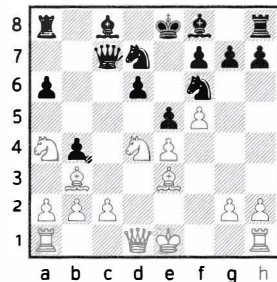
ported this line. In most of the vari-
ations White sacrifices his pawn on
e4 and I guess this is not to every-
one's taste...

8... ♙b7

8... ♘c7 9.f4!? Now we follow what
is probably the first game where the
unusual knight sacrifice on e6 hap-
pened, Zaitsev,I-Dementiev,O Riga
1970. It would have been interest-
ing to know whether this game was
known to Velimirovic and whether
he derived an inspiration from it!
9...b4 10. ♜a4 ♜bd7 (in the case of
10... ♜xe4 White may play familiar
tunes with 11.f5 e5

[11...exf5 12. ♜xf5 ♙xf5 13. ♖d5±)
12. ♜e6! (The “boring” 12. ♜f3 also
leads to an advantage: 12... ♙b7
13. ♜b6 ♜d7 14. ♜xa8 ♙xa8 15.a3±.)
12...fxe6 13.fxe6 ♜f6 14.o-o The sit-
uation looks difficult for Black.]

11.f5 e5

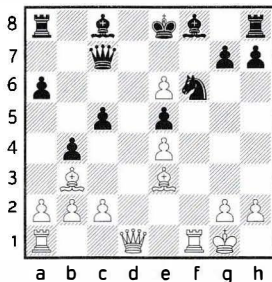


Now comes “our” piece sacrifice!
12. ♜e6! The main theme of this
chapter. 12...fxe6 13.fxe6 Just as in

the Velimirovic games in this chapter, Black has terrible development problems. 13... ♖c5

(13... ♖b8 14. exd7+ ♔xd7 15. 0-0 ♕e7 16. a3±)

14. ♘c5 dxc5 15. 0-0



An amazing situation! White has only one pawn for his sacrificed piece and no immediate deadly threats, as 16. ♖xf6 can be parried. White's pawn on e6 is causing Black terrible problems coordinating his pieces, while also providing White with a number of sacrificial ideas like ♖xf6. This piece sacrifice is a positional idea! What White gets, in most of the cases we will see in this chapter, is domination! In the actual game Black tried to close one of the diagonals, but there is a tactical refutation!

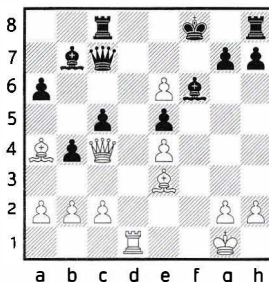
15...c4? Now comes our standard exchange sacrifice in this line.

a) 15... ♕e7 was probably Black's best, leading to a dynamic balance. 16. ♕a4+ ♖f8 Now comes the sac-

rifice Velimirovic loved! 17. ♖xf6+! After the removal of the f6-knight, Black finds it difficult to control the squares around his king — the knight on f6 was an important defender. 17... ♕xf6 18. ♖d5 ♕b7 19. ♖c4 White is a full rook down, but Black cannot coordinate his pieces. 19... ♖c8!

(19... ♕e7 20. ♖f1+! ♖g8 21. ♖d1! ♖a5 22. ♖d7 ♖xa4 23. ♖xe7 ♖b5 24. ♖xb5 axb5 25. ♖xb7±)

20. ♖d1

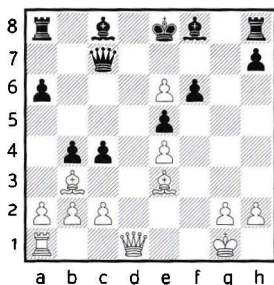


White threatens a seventh-rank penetration, so Black is forced to give back part of his material advantage. 20... ♕c6 21. ♖d7! ♕xd7 22. exd7 ♖e7 23. dxc8 ♖ ♖xc8 The storm has cleared, White has light-squares dominance and good compensation for the sacrificed exchange.

b) in the case of 15... ♕d6 White goes for his standard sacrifice and gets a strong attack: 16. ♖xf6! gxf6 17. ♖h5+ ♖d8 18. ♖d1 → Again White dominates — Black is a full

rook up, but remains completely uncoordinated and pinned.

16. ♖xf6! Removing Black's important defender! 16...gxf6



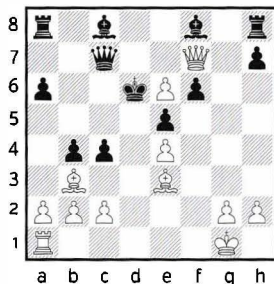
17. ♖h5+

(More precise was 17. ♖a4+! ♖e7 18. ♖d5 and Black loses his extra rook, while White emerges a sound pawn up. 18... ♖xe6 19. ♖xa8 ♖g7 20. ♖xa6±)

17... ♖e7? This error brought the game to an abrupt end.

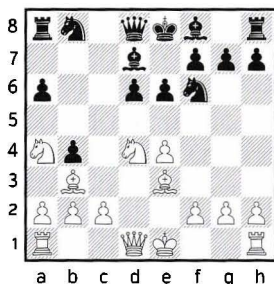
[17... ♖d8 was the correct defence and after 18. ♖d1+ ♖d6 19. ♖h6 cxb3! 20. ♖xf6+ ♖e8 21. ♖xh8+ ♖f8 22. ♖h6 ♖c5+ 23. ♖h1 ♖xe6! (23... bxc2?? 24. ♖f1+-) 24. ♖f1 ♖d7 25. cxb3 ♖xh6 26. ♖xa8 White is better, but it looks to me as though Black should survive.]

18. ♖f7+ ♖d6



19.e7! ♖xe7 20. ♖xc4 and the black king in the centre cannot escape from the mating net so Black resigned.

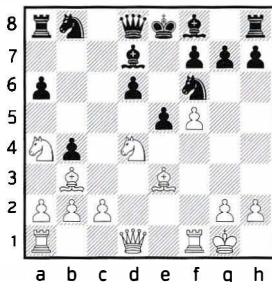
The continuation 8...b4 9. ♖a4 ♖d7



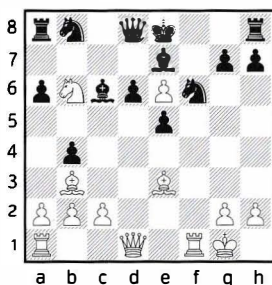
was seen in one of Velimirovic's games and interests us because of the sacrificial theme we are dealing with in this chapter. From the theoretical perspective Black's idea to develop his bishop to d7, in order to menace the white knight on a4 while at the same time protecting the e6-square, somehow looks clumsy. 10.0-0 ♖xe4? This pawn grab looks really optimistic here as Black is terribly behind in development. Velimirovic goes for his standard sacrificial idea! 11.f4

[The “boring” 11. ♖e1 does the job here too, as Black cannot develop. 11...d5 (11...♖c6 12.♗xe6 fxe6 13.♗b6±; 11...♗f6 12.♗f5± or 12.♗b6) 12.♗b6! ♖xb6 13.♗xe6 ♖xe6 14.♗xd5+]

11. ♗f6 12. f5 e5



And now, of course, comes Velimirovic’s standard sacrifice! 13. ♗e6! fxe6 14. ♗b6! ♗c6 15. fxe6 The same story again — domination! White is not interested at all in the black rook on a8, as Black simply cannot coordinate his pieces. 15... ♗e7

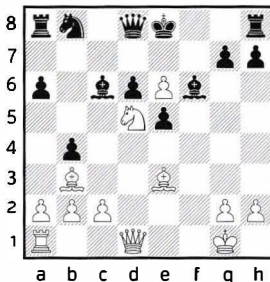


How does White break Black? Well, he uses a standard theme.

[In the case of 15... ♖c7 White uses the c-file. 16. ♖c1! ♗e7 17. c3 o-o 18. cxb4 ♖b7 19. ♗c4! Again,

White is not interested in the black rook, as Black lacks any coordination here. 19... ♖xb4 (19... ♖d8? 20. ♗xe5+-; 19... ♗xg2? 20. ♗xd6+-) 20. a3 ♖b7 21. ♗xd6 ♗xd6 22. e7+ ♖f7 23. ♖xf6 gxf6 24. ♖g4+++]

16. ♖xf6! ♗xf6 17. ♗d5



17... ♗xd5?

(17... o-o! Sacrificing the queen was the only way for Black to continue to fight. 18. e7 ♗xe7 19. ♗b6 ♖d7 20. ♗f6+ ♗h8 21. ♗xd7 ♗xd7 22. ♗a5!±.)

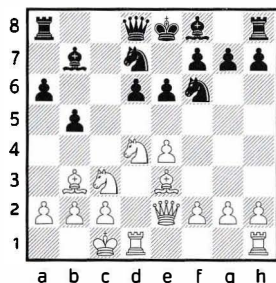
18. ♖xd5 Black now loses a full rook, while none of his problems have been solved. 18... ♖c7 19. ♖xa8 ♗e7 20. ♖f1 The language of our computer engine provides a perhaps surprising reckoning of the terrible shape Black is in. Though material is equal and White does not have an immediate threat the computer evaluation is around +4.00! White won soon in Velimirovic, D-Ilicic, Z Cetinje 1991.

chesstouring.com

9.f4

In the following old game of Albur's we had a slightly unusual situation.

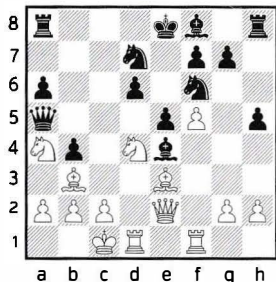
9. ♖e2!? ♝bd7 10. 0-0-0



10... ♖a5

(10... b4 11. ♘a4 ♙xe4 12. ♖he1)

11. f4 b4 12. ♘a4 ♙xe4 13. ♖hf1 h5
White goes for our standard sacrifice. 14. f5 e5

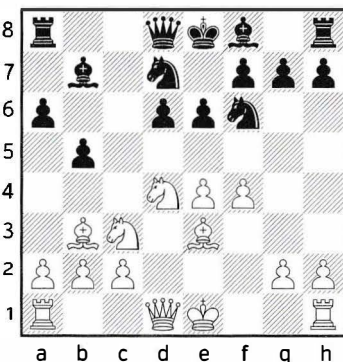


15. ♘e6! Black, however, has the rare luxury of not being forced to take the knight! 15... d5! 16. ♘g5 ♙e7 17. ♘xe4 dxex4 18. ♙g5 ♖b5 19. ♖e1 0-0 20. h3 ♖fd8 1/2-1/2 Albur, L-Shmit, A Moscow 1970.

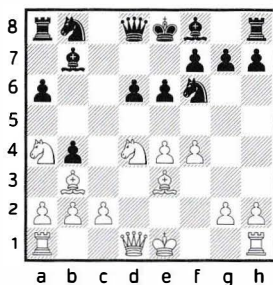
9... ♝bd7

Quite a number of very strong players have opted for this knight de-

velopment, but it might not be the most precise for Black here.



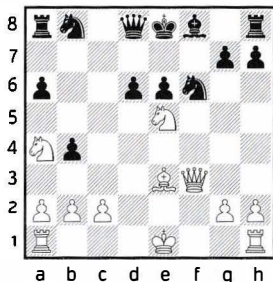
For me the critical line looks to be 9... b4! and this perhaps just refutes the 7. ♙e3 concept! 10. ♘a4



Here White has actually two problems. 10... ♙e7 That's one of them! White enjoyed success in one grandmaster's game, but actually the position is probably better for Black!

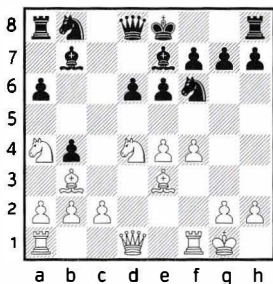
[10... ♙xe4 is another problem — even though the actual game was a smashing success — as after 11. f5 Black made the mistake playing 11... e5! (The computer is quick to point out *u exf5!* and after the forced looking 12. 0-0 g6 13. ♘b6

♖xb6 14. ♗xf5 ♕d8 15. ♗g3 ♗c6
 16. ♖xf6 ♖xf6 17. ♗d4 ♖f4 Black is
 a pawn up, and White's compensa-
 tion looks definitely not sufficient
 for more than a draw.) 12. ♗f3!±
 ♗xf5 (12... ♗xf3 13. ♖xf3 ♗bd7
 14. 0-0-0 ♗e7 15. g4±) 13. ♗xe5 ♗e6
 14. ♗xe6 fxe6 15. ♖f3!+-



All the black pieces are on the
 wrong squares. 15... ♗bd7 (15... d5
 16. ♗b6 ♖a7 17. ♗xd5+-) 16. ♗xd7
 ♗xd7 17. 0-0 ♗f6 18. ♗b6 ♖b8
 19. ♖ae1 e5 20. ♖c6+ ♗f7 21. ♖c4+
 ♗e7 22. ♖xe5+! dxe5 23. ♗c5+ ♗d8
 24. ♖d1+ ♗d7 25. ♖e6 1-0 Lie,K
 (2472)-Cheparinov,I (2634) Goth-
 enburg 2005.]

11.0-0



(The typical sacrifice 11. ♗xe6 fxe6
 12. ♗xe6 in this case, after the rel-

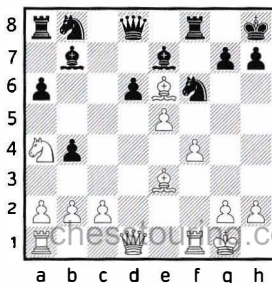
atively forced sequence 12... ♖c8
 13. ♗xg7+ ♗f7 14. ♗b6 ♖c6 15. ♗f5
 ♖xe4 16. ♖d3, leads to a position
 where only Black can be better: 16...
 ♗g4 17. ♗xa8 ♗xa8±.)

11...0-0?! This move did not go well
 for Black as White has a slightly un-
 usual knight sacrifice on e6 (usually
 the white bishop is sacrificed there).
 I promoted this line since the po-
 sitions are still very interesting for
 our topic.

(Shirov, playing Black, opted
 for a simple solution: 11... ♗xe4!
 and this looks like a problem for
 White as Black easily gets a better
 game: 12. f5 e5 13. ♗f3 0-0 14. ♗g5
 ♗c6 15. ♗b6 ♗bd7! 16. ♗xa8 ♖xa8
 17. ♖f2 d5± 0-1 Casares Cabanas,C
 (2188)-Shirov,A (2726) Leon 2008.)

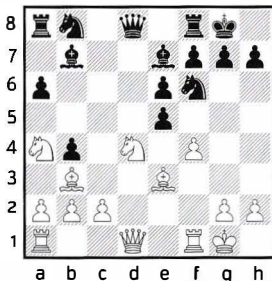
12.e5!

[The immediate 12. ♗xe6!? is also
 possible here for White since, as in
 the Kobese-Georgiev game below,
 a queen exchange does not dimin-
 ish White's compensation 12... fxe6
 13. ♗xe6+ ♗h8 14. e5



14...♖fd7 (14...dxe5 opting for a queen trade was probably Black's best, but even with limited material White keeps up the pressure! 15.♙xd8 ♔xd8 16.fxe5 ♘fd7 17.♞ad1 ♞xf1+ 18.♗xf1 ♕c6 19.♘b6! ♔xb6 20.♔xb6 White has only two pawns for a piece, but Black has difficulties in untangling his position. Computer engines support White.) 15.exd6 ♔f6 16.a3 Now we have material equality and White quickly gains a clear advantage; his white e6-bishop paralyzes Black. 16...♞e8 17.f5 ♔e5 18.♔f4 ♙a5 19.axb4 ♙xb4 20.c3 ♙e4 21.♙d2 ♙c6 22.b3 ♞d8 23.♞ae1 ♔xf4 24.♞xf4 ♘f8 25.♞d4± and White soon won in Grandelius,N (2515)-Van Kampen,R (2475) Wijk aan Zee 2010].

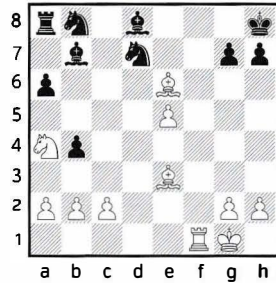
12...dxe5



13.♘xe6! White opts for a piece sacrifice, not fearing a queen swap! Interestingly enough, it works and the computer engines agree! With relatively limited material on the board Black, though a piece up, is dominated! I will give a number of varia-

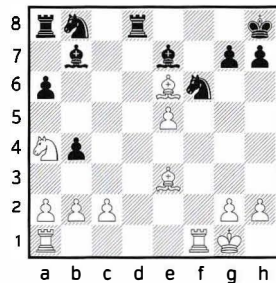
tions to support this assessment. 13...fxe6 14.♔xe6+ ♗h8 15.♙xd8 ♞xd8 happened in the actual game.

[15...♔xd8 16.fxe5 ♘fd7 17.♞ad1 ♞xf1+ 18.♞xf1



18...h6 (18...♔c6? 19.♘b6! ♔xb6 20.♔xb6 a5 21.♞f7+-) 19.♞f7 ♔c6 20.♔b3 ♗h7 21.♔d4 ♔xa4 22.♔xa4 (22.e6 Now we have a nice draw by perpetual check: 22...♔b6 23.♞xg7+ ♗h8 24.♞g8+ ♗h7=.) 22...♔b6 23.♔xb6 ♘xb6 24.♔e8 a5 25.e6± Black is fighting for survival. Computer engines rate this position around +0.65. Interesting examples of domination with a limited number of pieces.]

16.fxe5



16...♞g8

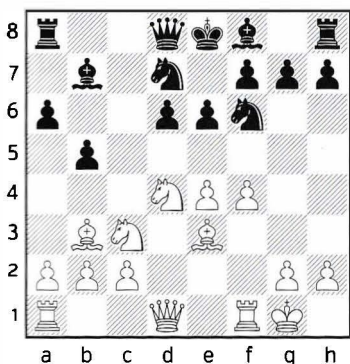
16. ♖e4 looks active, but the central knight proves to be a liability for Black: 17. ♖b6 ♖a7 18. ♖ad1 ♖xd1 19. ♖xd1 ♖c6 20. ♗f5 ♗c5 (20... ♖xe5? 21. ♖d5± ♗c5 22. ♗xe4 ♗xe3+ 23. ♖xe3+-) 21. ♗xc5 ♖xc5 22. ♖d5 g6 23. ♗h3 ♖e4 24. ♖d7 ♖xe5 25. ♖e7±]

17. ♖b6 Black decides to give up an exchange hoping to simplify his play. 17... ♖c6

(17... ♖a7 18. ♖ad1 ♖c6 19. ♖xd8 ♖xd8 20. ♗b3± White still has great compensation, despite the limited number of pieces left on the board.)

18. ♖xa8 ♖xa8 19. ♗d5± Black managed a draw in Kobese,W (2397) -Georgiev,K (2645), Gibraltar 2006.

10.0-0

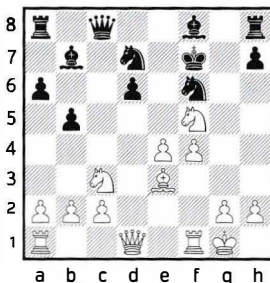


Now White is, I think, in good shape; anyway it looks to me that Black is the one fighting to keep the

balance. Let's explore a number of typical white sacrifices here.

10... ♖c8

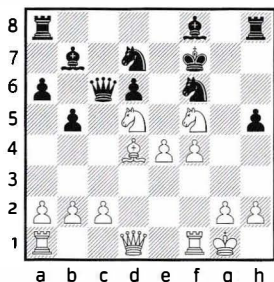
10... ♗e7 has been played by the great Najdorf expert Boris Gelfand, a former World Championship challenger. It is not a great decision by Black as it allows the most standard Sicilian sacrifice, ♗xe6, to work excellently for White! 11. ♗xe6! ♖xe6 12. ♖xe6 ♖c8 13. ♖xg7+ ♖f7 14. ♖f5 ♗f8



And now Boris got lucky! 15. ♗d4! would have caused Black serious problems.

(Gelfand's opponent blundered with 15.e5? opening the a1-h8 diagonal for the black bishop on b7. Gelfand did not need a second invitation! 15... ♖g8! 16. ♖g3 ♖c6! 17. ♖e2 ♖e8 18. ♖ad1 dxе5 19. ♖xe5 ♖xe5+- Black is a piece up and White is under a devastating attack! Black won soon in Kobese,W (2400)-Gelfand,B (2717) Khanty-Mansiysk 2005.)

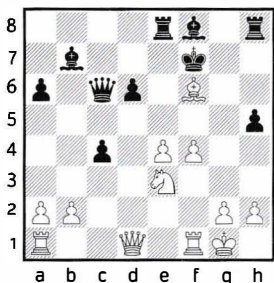
15... ♖c6 16. ♘d5! The knight cannot be taken due to ♖h5+. 16... h5 It is interesting to note how in many cases White uses the c-file to great effect.



17.c4! bxc4 18. ♘fe3 Black is forced to give back a full piece because of White's devastating threat of ♖c1 and ♖xc4. 18... ♖e8 19. ♘xf6!

(19. ♖c1 leads to a queen sacrifice 19... ♖xe4! 20. ♖xc4 ♖xc4 21. ♘xc4 ♘xd5 22. ♘e3 ♘xa2♘.)

19... ♘xf6 20. ♘xf6



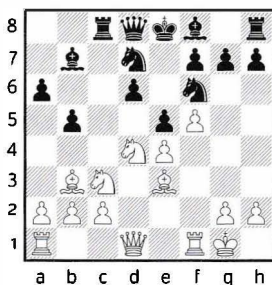
20... ♖h6

(20... ♖xe4?? 21. ♘xh8 ♖xe3 22. ♖xh5+-)

21. ♘g5 ♖h7 22.e5 dxe5 23. ♖c2 ♔g8 24.f5± White is a sound pawn up as well as having an excellent position!

11. ♖e2

Pioneering attempts often go wrong, and enthusiasm for a fresh “genius idea” can sometimes blind people to its possible defects. Velimirovic was no exception — his first outing with the ♘e6 idea finished horribly! 11.f5 e5

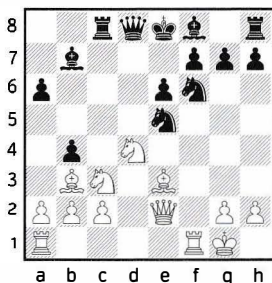


12. ♘e6? Black will be quick to castle and this sacrifice does not work for White here at all! 12... fxe6 13. fxe6 ♘c5 14. ♘d5 ♘xd5 15. ♘xd5 ♘e7 White's best move here would be g2-g5... if only pawns could jump that far! 16.g4 0–0 17.g5 ♘xd5 18. ♖xd5 ♖c7 19. ♖f5 ♖b7-+ and Black won in Velimirovic,D (2520)-Portisch,L (2615) Szirak 1987.

11...b4 12. ♘a4

This will ultimately lead to our standard sacrifice.

For players interested in theoretical research, here is another Velimirovic idea — a pawn sacrifice. 12.e5!? dxe5 13.fxe5 ♖xe5



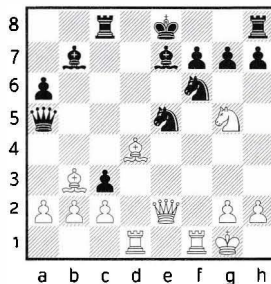
This idea definitely deserves attention as White looks like having great compensation for his minimal material investment. 14.♖ad1?! This was played in the stem game, but unfortunately it has a tactical flaw.

(14.♖a4! was the right way. 14... ♗e7 15.♖ad1→ White's compensation here is worth more than a pawn.)

14...bxc3! This is the problem, as Black fights off the attack!

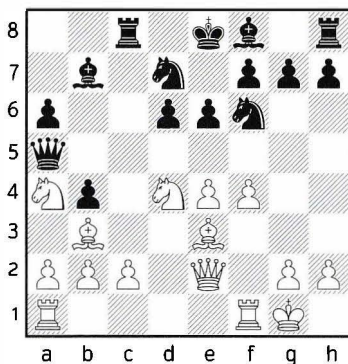
[14...♗ed7?! was played in the stem game and could have suffered a direct tactical refutation: 15.♗xe6! (15.♗a4 ♖a5 16.♗xe6 fxe6 0-1 Velimirovic, D (2510)-Vaulin, A (2515) Belgrade 1993) 15... fxe6 16.♗xe6 bxc3 17.♖xd7 ♖xd7 18.♗xd7+±]

15.♗xe6 ♖a5 16.♗g5 ♗e7 17.♗d4



17...h6! 18.♖f5 hxg5 19.♖xe5 ♖c7 20.♗c5 ♖xc5+ 21.♖xc5 ♖xc5 22.♗a4+ ♗f8-+ Black simply has too much material for the white queen and went on to win in Ivanisevic, I (2641)-Brunner, N (2462) Germany 2017.

12...♖a5



The situation does not look great for White: his e4-pawn is hanging, while the ♗e6 sacrifice does not seem to work this time.

13.a3

13.f5?! e5 14.♘e6?! now our sacrifice does not bring White the desired effect. 14...fxe6

(14...♖b5 also looks good for Black.)

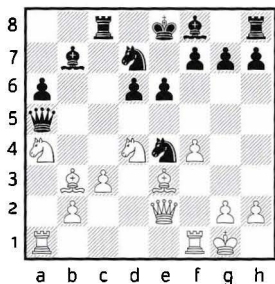
15.fxe6 ♘c5 16.♘xc5 ♖xc5 The white attack soon runs out of steam: 17.a3

(17.♖xf6 now does not work, as the black king has the vacant d8 square available. 17...gxf6 18.♖h5+ ♘d8-+)

17...♙e7 18.axb4 ♖xb4♠.

13...bxa3

13...♘xe4?! does not look like a clever recommendation for Black because of 14.axb4 ♖xb4 15.c3 ♖a5



16.♘e6! fxe6 17.♙e6 ♖c7 18.♙d4→ and Black's king remains stuck in the centre.

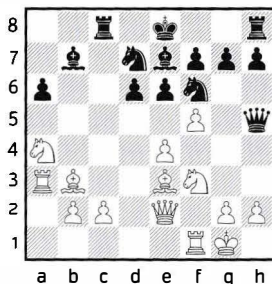
14.♖xa3 ♖h5

Most likely this is the crucial part of Gutman's opening idea: White does

not have a convenient way to avoid an exchange of queens.

15.♖xh5

In the case of 15.♘f3 Black gets an excellent game after 15...♙e7 16.f5

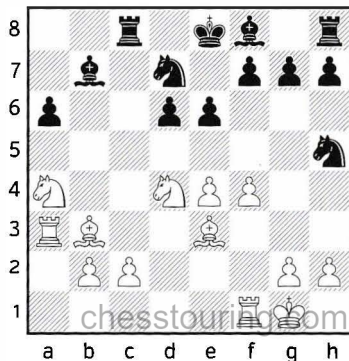


16...exf5!

(After the mutual exchange sacrifices 16...e5 17.♘c3 ♖xc3 18.bxc3 0-0 19.♖xa6! ♙xa6 20.♖xa6 ♘xe4 I would say the position somewhat favours White.)

17.exf5 0-0 If someone is better here, it is definitely Black.

15...♘xh5



With queens off, the sacrifices should be finished, right? So Gutman evidently thought. Time for White to face harsh reality defending an inferior endgame?... No! Even without queens on the board, Velimirovic goes for his favourite sacrifice! And guess what? It works! Computer engine support the concept once you give them enough time.

16.f5! e5 17.♖e6!

I assume Gutman simply could not believe his eyes!

17...fxe6

17...♗hf6 leading to approximate equality was perhaps something for Black to consider: 18.♗xf8 ♜xf8 19.♖c3 ♗xe4 20.♗xe4 ♕xe4 21.♜xa6 ♖e7=.

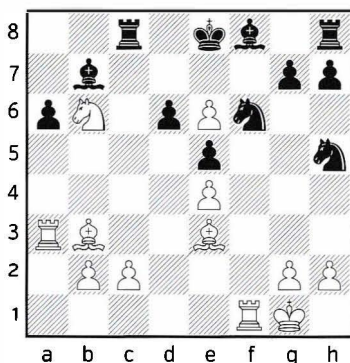
18.fxe6 ♗df6

In the case of 18...♗c5?! White immediately gets his piece back and has a better game after 19.♗xc5 dxc5 20.e7! ±.

19.♗b6

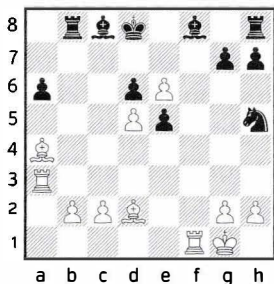
Even without queens, the situation is similar to our previous examples. Black has problems to coordinate his pieces; in particular, he has terrible difficulties in connecting his

rooks. White has long-term positional compensation in the form of domination. I have checked this position thoroughly with computer engines and will give variations that illustrate best the nature of White's compensation. With perfect play, the position looks balanced. White has pressure, but apparently nothing conclusive. In a practical game it is definitely not easy for Black to understand that, despite his material advantage, he is in serious danger. The first practical question for Black is: "Where to go with the rook"? It seems Black picked the best move.



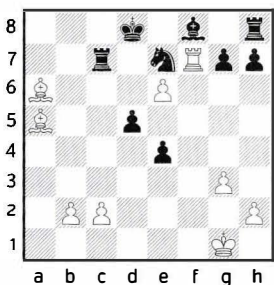
19...♞c7

In the case of 19...♞b8 White has a number of promising plans, for example 20.♗d5 ♕c8 21.♕a4+ ♖d8 22.♕d2! ♗xd5 23.exd5 The white pawn chain kills any black counterplay here.



23...♖f6 Now White has a choice between two promising plans. 24.♞af3

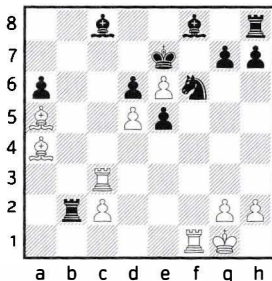
(or 24.♙a5+ ♖e7 25.♞c3! White is to sacrifice an exchange and be a full rook down! 25...♗xd5 26.♞xc8 ♞xc8 27.♙d7 ♞c7 28.♞f7+ ♖d8 though Black is a rook up and we have limited number of pieces left on the board White uses pins to dominate Black. The black bishop on f8 and rook on h8 take ages to get into the game. Play could continue as follows. 29.g3 e4 30.♙c6 ♗e7 31.♙b7! d5 32.♙xa6



The white b-pawn can now march forward, while Black remains tied down by pins. 32...d4 33.b4 d3 34.cxd3 exd3 35.♖f1 g6 36.♖e1 ♙h6 37.♙xd3 ♖c8 38.♙xc7 ♖xc7 39.♞xe7+ ♖d6±)

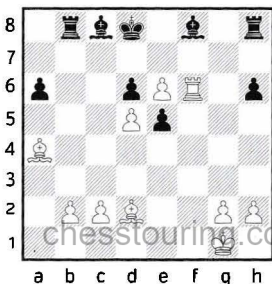
24...h6

(24...♖e7?? 25.♙g5+-; 24...♞xb2 is perhaps Black's best 25.♙a5+ ♖e7 26.♞c3



Black now gives back his piece. 26...♙xe6! Removing the white pawn chain. 27.dxe6 ♖xe6 28.♞c8= The computer engine says 0.00; Black is still suffering under pins and White definitely has sufficient compensation.; 24...a5? Luring the bishop away is the computer's initial proposal, but after 25.♙a5+ ♖e7 26.♞c3! ♗xd5 27.♞xc8 ♞xc8 28.♙d7 ♞c7 29.♞f7+ ♖d8 30.g3± it is obvious that we have the 24.♙a5+ line with the difference that Black does not have his a-pawn.)

Now White should go for 25.♞xf6! gxf6 26.♞xf6



Black has a rook for only two pawns but he simply cannot connect his pieces. White definitely has the advantage here! White can for example build up with 26... ♖b5 27.c4 ♙e7 28. ♜f7 ♜c5 29. ♙e3 a5 30.b3 h5 and now Black's problem is that he cannot move!

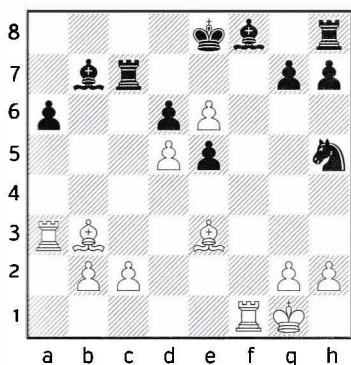
(30... ♜f8 31. ♜h7±)

31.g3 ♜f8 32. ♙g5! ♜e8

(32... ♙xg5 33. ♜xf8+ ♙e7 34. ♜e8+ ♙f6 35. ♙c6 ♙a6 36.h4+-)

33. ♙xe8 ♙xg5 34. ♙a4 ♜c7 35. ♜f8+ ♙e7 36. ♜f5±

20. ♖d5 ♖xd5 21.exd5



21... ♖f6

21. ♖f4 looks more active and probably leads to equality. 22.c4

(White has an alternative in 22. ♙b6 in order to prevent Black from "locking out" the bishop with

the ... ♖e2-d4 jump. 22... ♜c8 23.c4 ♙e7 24. ♙a2 g5 25.g3 ♖xe6 26.dxe6 ♙xe6 27.b4 White has enough compensation.)

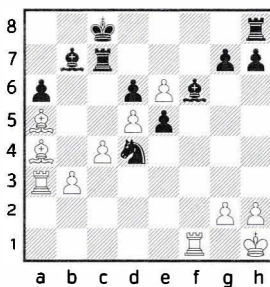
22... ♖e2+ 23. ♙h1 ♖d4 24. ♙a4+ ♙d8 25.b3 This position is probably about equal. 25... ♙e7

(25...g6 26. ♜a2↑)

26. ♙d2 ♙f6!

[26... ♜c5 allows White to dominate the black rook in the middle of the board! 27. ♜f7 ♙xd5 28.cxd5 ♜xd5 29.b4! ♖xe6 30. ♙e3 ♖d4 (30... ♜f8? 31. ♙b6+-) 31. ♜xg7 ♜f8 32. ♜a1 h5 33. ♜h7±]

27. ♙a5 ♙c8

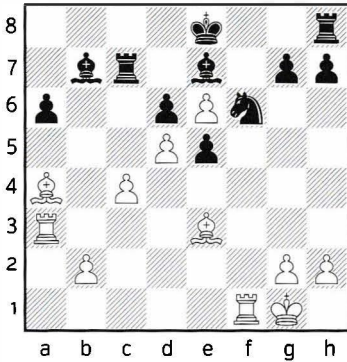


28. ♜a2!?

(28. ♙xc7 leads to a drawish rook endgame. 28... ♙xc7 29. ♜xf6 gxf6 30.e7 ♙c6 31. ♙xc6 ♖xc6 32.dxc6 ♙xc6 33. ♜xa6+ ♙c5=)

28... ♜f8 29. ♜af2 ♜e7 And it looks like a positional draw: 30. ♙b4 ♜d8 — not 30... ♙c7? 31.c5± — 31. ♙a5=.

22.c4 ♖e7 23. ♖a4+



A tough call for Black! Where to go with his king?

23... ♖f8?

Better was 23... ♖d8! Giving up an exchange is not bad for Black here, as this removes one of White's devastating bishops. 24. ♖b6 ♖c8 25. ♖xc7 ♖xc7 26. ♖g3 ♖g8 It does not look as though White can break in with his rooks, so objectively a draw should be an outcome here.

24. ♖b3 ♖g8?

This runs into a mating net!

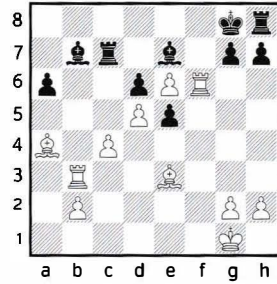
24...h6 taking away the h6-square was necessary, though White is already better. 25.c5! dxc5 26. ♖b6 c4 27. ♖f5!

(27.d6 ♖xd6 28. ♖xd6 ♖e7∞)

27... ♖c8 28. ♖xe5 ♖c5 29. ♖xc5+ ♖xc5 30.e7+ ♖f7 31. ♖d6±

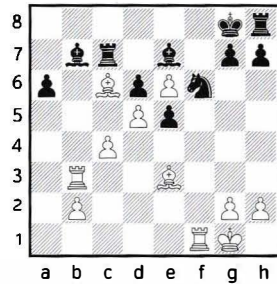
25. ♖a7?

a) It is a pity Velimirovic did not execute one of his favorite moves, which would have won on the spot! 25. ♖xf6!!

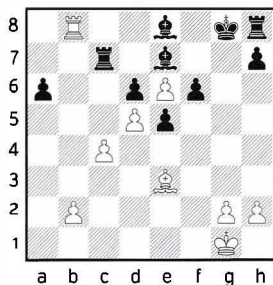


25... ♖xf6 (25...gxf6 runs into a pretty mate: 26. ♖h6 ♖f8 27. ♖g3+ ♖g7 28. ♖e8 ♖xg3 29. ♖f7#) 26.c5 ♖e7 27.c6 and Black loses the house. 27... ♖c8 28. ♖b8 g6 29. ♖b6+-

b) 25. ♖c6



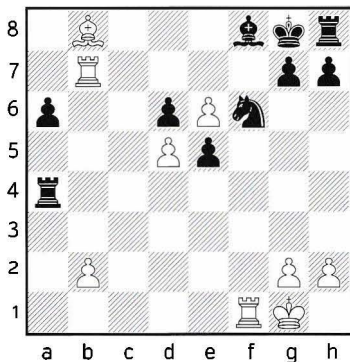
also looks to be winning, with another pretty mating net in the case of 25... ♖xc6? (Better is 25... ♖c8 although that does not hold either: 26. ♖b8 g5 27.b4! ♖g7 28.b5 axb5 29.cxb5+-) 26. ♖b8+ ♖e8 27. ♖xf6 gxf6



27... ♖xc4 28. ♙b3 ♜b4 29. ♜xc8+ ♝g7 30. ♜c7 ♜xb3 31. ♜xe7+ ♝g6 32. ♜f7 ♜xd5 33. e7 ♜xe7 34. ♜1f6+ ♝h5 35. ♙f2 ♜g6 36. ♜xd6 ♜xb2 37. h3 a5 38. g4+ ♝h6 39. ♜a6=.

26. ♙b8! ♜xc4 27. ♜xb7 ♜xa4

28. ♙h6!! A beautiful picture! A rook and a piece up, Black cannot prevent mate. The end position resembles a study! 28... ♙f8 29. ♜xe8 ♜g7 White could here claim an immediate win by 30. ♜a8 followed by e6-e7, or simply tease Black till he runs out of moves with something like 30.b4.

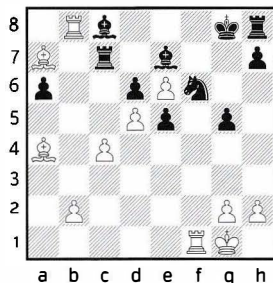


25... ♙f8?

25... ♙c8! could have saved the game! 26. ♜b8 g5!

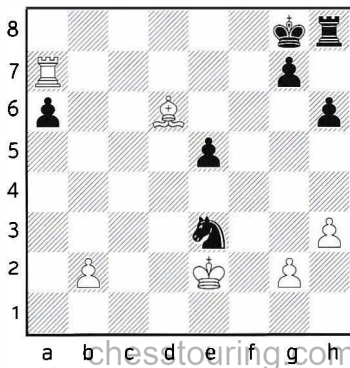
28. e7 ♙xe7 29. ♜xe7

Now Black's h8-rook is still in the box and White is firmly in control.



29... h6 30. ♙xd6 ♜xd5 31. ♜a7 ♜e3 32. ♜f3 ♜g4 33. h3 ♜a1+ 34. ♜f1 ♜xf1+ 35. ♝xf1 ♜e3+ 36. ♝e2

with ...♝g7 to follow, Black finally gets out of the box! Play may continue 27. ♙b6



(27.c5 ♝g7 28. ♙b6 ♜xc5 29. ♙xc5 dxc5 30. ♙c6 ♙d6 31. ♜a8 ♝g6∞)

The limited number of pieces does not stop White from dominating! The rook on h8 is out of play, the knight on e3 is almost trapped!

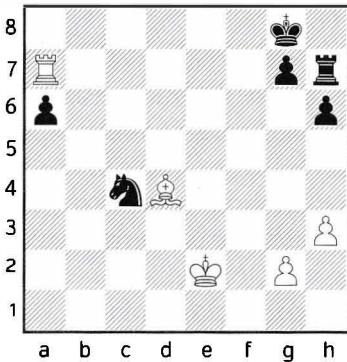
36...♖c4 37.♙c7 ♜xb2

37...♗h7 38.b3 ♘a3 39.♙xe5 ♖g8
40.♗d3+-

38.♙xe5 ♘c4 39.♙d4

39.♙c3+-

39...♖h7



40.♖a8+

The last move before the time control is a mistake that prolongs the game for a while.

40.♖xa6! was an easy win. 40...g6 41.♗d3 ♖c7 Black's knight on c4 is trapped "forever". 42.g4 and Black loses his kingside pawns as in the case of

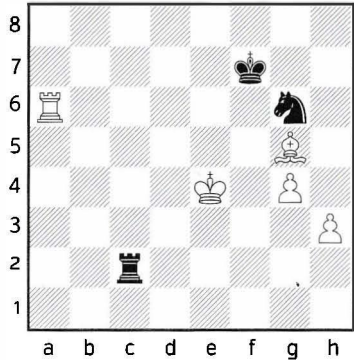
(The simple 42.♖xg6+ ♗h7 43.♖a6 also wins.)

42...♗h7 43.h4 White threatens 44.♖a8 with a mating net.

40...♗f7 41.♖xa6

White now has to work again. The rest of the game does not need comments. Towards the end Black played on for too long.

41...♖h8 42.♗d3 ♖c8 43.♖a7+ ♗e6 44.♖xg7 ♘e5+ 45.♗e4 ♘f7 46.♖g6+ ♗e7 47.♙e3 ♘d6+ 48.♗d5 ♘f5 49.♙xh6 ♗f7 50.♖a6 ♖c2 51.g4 ♘e7+ 52.♗e4 ♘g6 53.♙g5+-



53...♖c4+ 54.♗d5 ♖b4 55.♖a7+ ♗g8 56.♙h6 ♘h4 57.♖g7+ ♗h8 58.♖e7 ♖b3 59.♙e3 ♗g8 60.♗e4 ♗f8 61.♖d7 ♗g8 62.♖d3 ♖b4+ 63.♙d4 ♘g2 64.♖d2 ♘h4 65.♖b2 ♖a4 66.♖b6 ♗h7 67.g5 ♗g8 68.♖f6 ♖b4 69.♖f4 ♘g6 70.♖f5 ♖a4 71.♖f6 ♘h4 72.♖b6 ♗f7 73.g6+ ♘xg6 74.♖f6+ ♗g7 75.♖a6+ ♖xd4+

76. ♖xd4 ♜h6 77. ♜e4 ♜h5 78. ♚a5+
 ♜h4 79. ♜f5 ♜e7+ 80. ♜f6 1-0

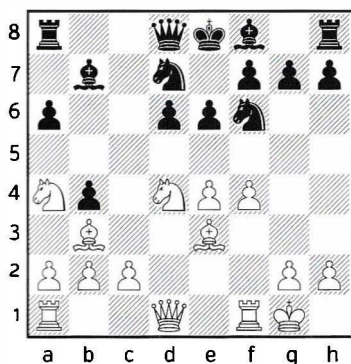
8

► D. Velimirovic

► M. Suba

Pinerolo, 1987

1.e4 c5 2.♖f3 d6 3.d4 ♖f6 4.♜c3
 ♜xd4 5.♜xd4 e6 6.♙e3 a6 7.♙c4
 ♖b5 8.♙b3 ♙b7 9.f4 ♜bd7 10.o-o
 ♖4 11.♜a4

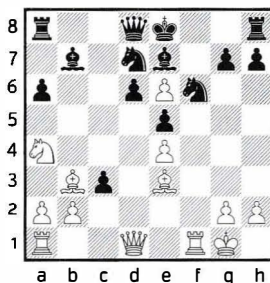


11... ♙xe4

Velimirovic now proceeds according to a prepared recipe.

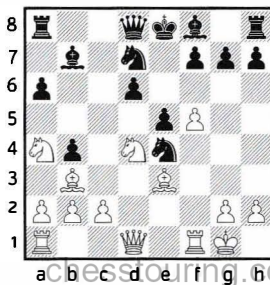
a) 11... ♙e7 can lead after 12.c3 bxc3 to a situation where Velimirovic went again for his favourite sacrifice 13.f5!? (13.♜xc3 is perfectly playable for White as 13...♜xe4? is a blunder due to 14.f5 e5 — 14...♜xc3 15.fxe6+- — 15.♜e6! and White wins: 15...fxe6 16.♙h5+ g6

17.fxg6 ♜df6 18.g7+ ♜xh5 19.♙a4+ with mate to follow.) 13...e5 14.♜e6! fxe6 15.fxe6



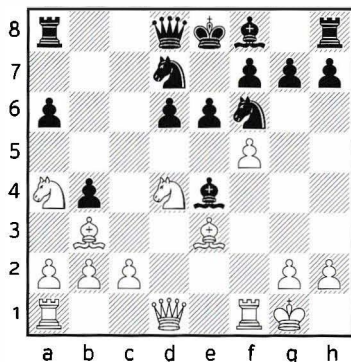
Black decides to give his piece back in order to bring his king to safety. 15...o-o (15...♜f8 leads to messy positions where White has full compensation for his sacrificed piece after 16.♜xc3 ♜g6 17.♙a4+ ♜f8 18.♜d5 ♜g8 19.♚c1 ♙xd5 20.exd5. Again, it will take Black quite some time to coordinate his pieces here.) 16.exd7+ ♜h8 17.♜xc3 ♙xd7 18.♙d3± The smoke has cleared, White probably had a very small advantage in Velimirovic,D (2520)-Cvetkovic,S (2470) Vrnjacka Banja 1991.

b) The pawn grab 11...♜xe4?! leads to a standard response: 12.f5 e5



13. ♖e6! Now, as in the Alburth game given earlier in the comments, Black is in the rare situation of not being forced to take the intrusive knight. 13... ♖a5 (13... fxe6?? 14. ♖h5+ g6 15. fxc6+-) 14. ♖xf8 ♜xf8 15. a3→. White's initiative is worth more than a pawn.

12.f5!



12...e5

And now, of course...

13. ♖e6!

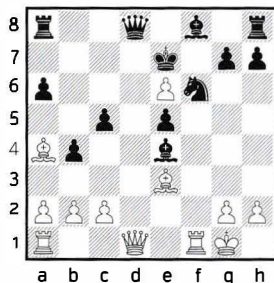
What else?

13...fxe6 14.fxe6

As usual, Black cannot coordinate his pieces. He opted for

14... ♖b8

In the event of 14... ♖c5 15. ♖xc5 dxc5 16. ♗a4+! ♖e7



Black's king in the middle of the board remains a problem and yes, Black's pieces fail to coordinate! 17. ♖e2! and Black faces unsurmountable problems.

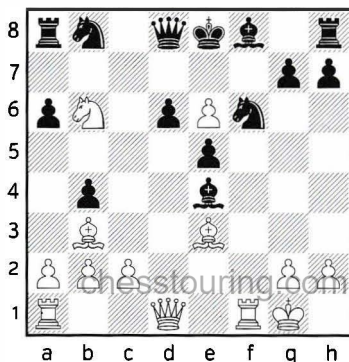
(But not 17. ♗xc5+? ♖xe6 18. ♗b3+ ♗d5-+.)

17... ♖b6

(17... ♖xe6 18. ♜ad1+-)

18. ♜xf6! Again the standard exchange sacrifice, removing the strong defender, decides the game. 18... gxf6 19. ♖c4 ♖xe6 20. ♖xe4 ♜c8 21. ♖b7+-

15. ♖b6



As in the previous examples, White is essentially improving his knight rather than chasing after the rook on a8. Black does not have a good defence, since his kingside development problems cannot be solved. In the actual game Black hoped to castle and played

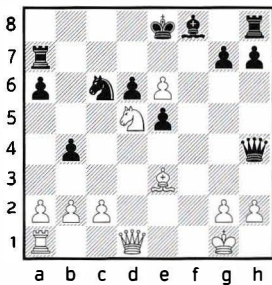
15... ♖e7

15... ♖a7 16. ♖a4+ ♖c6 17. ♖xf6! ♖xf6 18. ♖d5 ♖xe6 19. ♖xa7 ♖d7 20. ♖xc6 ♖xc6 21. ♖b6 leads to a large White advantage.

15... ♖c6 covers the a4-e8 diagonal but does not solve Black's problems either. White continues as usual! 16. ♖xf6! ♖xf6 17. ♖d5 ♖a7

(17... ♖xd5? 18. ♖xd5+-)

18. ♖xc6+ ♖xc6 19. ♖d5 ♖h4



Despite his large material advantage, Black cannot save the game as he cannot stop the white queen from penetrating — Black's light squares are weak. 20. ♖f2! The most

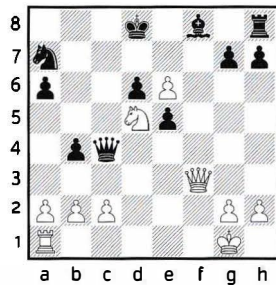
precise, throwing the black queen off balance.

(20. ♖xa7 ♖xa7 21.c3! bxc3 22. ♖f3 ♖d8 23.bxc3±)

20... ♖c4

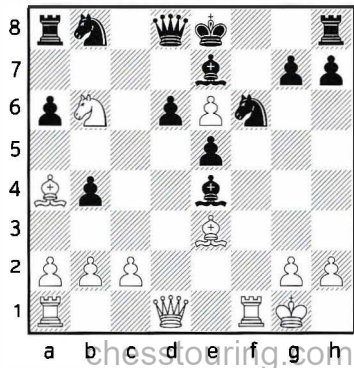
(20... ♖g5 21. ♖xa7 ♖xa7 22.c4!+-; 20... ♖e4 21. ♖xa7 ♖xa7 22. ♖f1!+-)

21. ♖xa7 ♖xa7 22. ♖f3 ♖d8



23. ♖f1! An immediate mating threat like 24. ♖xf8+ is always good! 23... ♖e7 24. ♖xe7 ♖xe6 25. ♖a8+ ♖c8 26. ♖c6+ ♖c7 27. ♖xb4+-

16. ♖a4+



16... ♖c6

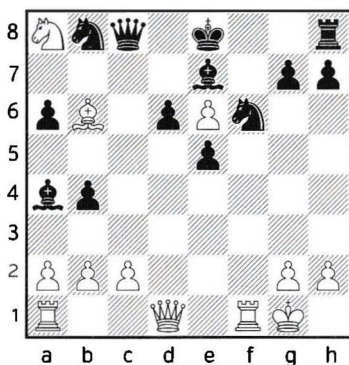
Forced. White aims to get his knight to c7, and earn the bonus of a rook along the way.

16... ♖f8 loses to 17. ♖h5 ♗g6
18. ♖h4 ♖a7 19. ♗d5 ♖g8 20. ♖xf6
♗xf6 21. ♗xf6+ ♖xf6 22. ♖xf6 gxf6
23. ♗xa7 ♖g7 24. ♖d1+.

17. ♗xa8 ♗xa4

If 17... 0-0 White wins through material advantage after 18. ♗xc6 ♗xc6
19. ♗b6+.

18. ♗b6 ♖c8



And naturally our standard sacrifice just needed the right moment to make its appearance!

19. ♖xf6!

An elegant finish!

19... ♗xc2

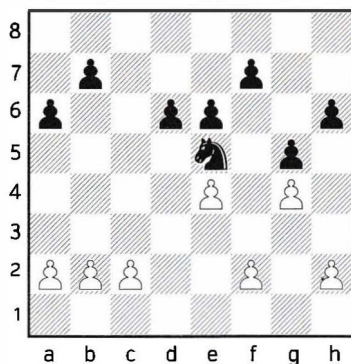
19... ♗xf6 20. ♖xd6+- with ♗c7+ to follow.

20. ♖c1 ♗xf6 21. ♖xc2 ♖b7 22. ♖xd6
♗e7 23. ♗c7+ ♖f8 24. ♖f2+

Mihai Suba was one of the world's leading experts on the black side of the Sicilian at the time and not many people have trounced him like this!

1-0

1.3. FORTIFIED KNIGHT ON E5



This diagrammed position, usually arising from the Scheveningen or Najdorf variations, illustrates one of the common strategic themes in the Sicilian. Black has arguably weakened his kingside by the ...g7-g5 pawn push but on the other hand he has safeguarded the dominant posi-

tion of his knight on e5 by preventing White from expelling it with f2-f4. I have given three games in this subchapter, and a few extra games in the comments. I think these games are instructive and will help the reader to understand this type of position and the strategic aims of the two sides.

Black tries to maintain his strong knight's position on e5, pushes ...b7-b5 and gets queenside play as White always castles queenside in these lines. Black castles queenside or keeps his King in the centre, depending the situation. Keeping his King in the centre is a risky strategy for Black. White often has a Knight sacrifice on f5, opening the e-file after Black takes with ...exf5 and getting a direct attack on the black King. Several examples of this sacrifice are given in the game comments.

How is White supposed to break Black? I will give a number of "rules" for White, illustrated in the three games and the comments.

- White plays f2-f4 and after the ...gxf4 exchange White's knight travels to h5, usually a good posting for the knight in these lines.
- White should keep an eye on the ♖f5 sacrificial motifs as this sacrifice is often very strong.

- Opening the h-file is usually good for White, as he can then often disturb Black by placing his rook on h6 or h7.
- The transaction ♖xe5 dxе5 (if Black has to take back with the pawn) can be advantageous for White, as seen in my loss to Adams.
- White should open the position in the centre and keep playing actively. If the central position is static, Black finishes his development and the black knight on e5 becomes a powerhouse!

In general, I am under the impression that White is better in the resulting positions. It often turns out that Black's knight on e5 is outweighed by White's having the initiative, better-coordinated pieces and many attacking motifs. These positions are sharp and it is not surprising that many great players have opted for this combative strategy as Black.

9

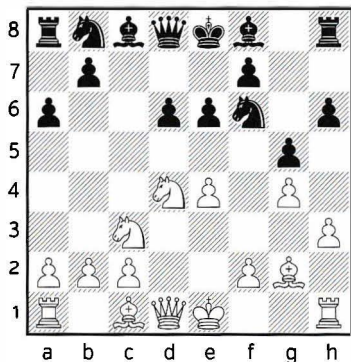
▷ J. Polgar

▷ V. Topalov

Hoogeveen Essent Crown, 2006

1.e4 c5 2.♖f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♖xd4
 ♖f6 5.♖c3 a6 6.h3 e6 7.g4 h6 8.♗g2
 g5!?

chesstouring.com



A well known Sicilian strategy. Black is creating a central e5-square outpost for his knight. This strategy in this particular position brings back painful memories for me, as I once lost an instructive game to Michael Adams. I will give that game here later — see the notes to 11...♙d7?! instead of the text 11...♞fd7. Strategically the White players have been using different methods as they aim to push f2-f4, trade their f-pawn for Black's pawn on g5 and then bring a knight to h5. A white knight on h5 is usually well-placed in the resulting positions. Sometimes White can break through Black's defences by a knight sacrifice on f5, as shown in the notes after White's 15th move in the next game, Ghizdavu-Spassky.

The key for White is to be active! The f2-f4 pawn push usually needs to be played. The h2-h4 pawn push, followed by the hxg5 hxg5 trade, should give White control of the h-file since Black will be forced to play ...♞g8, and this is also favora-

ble for White. A knight exchange on e5 — White plays ♞xe5 and Black recaptures dx5 as my game against Adams — is normally good for White too (again, see the comment on 11...♙xd7?!). However if Black has counter-play as in Ghizdavu-Spassky then the same transaction is not clear and might even be in Black's favour. White definitely must be active and not a sitting duck as he was in Dominguez-Kasparov (see the comment on 12.h4, instead the text 12.f4) which, even in a blitz game, clearly shows what happens if White is not active!

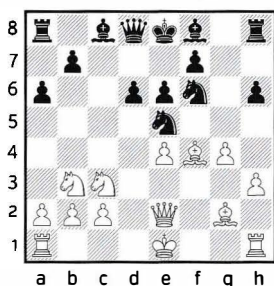
9. ♙e3

Polgar develops her pieces the most natural way. White players have also tried different plans and here are two interesting examples I would like to show. In both of those examples White aimed, like Polgar, to trade his f-pawn for the black g5-pawn and then transfer his knight to the h5-square. Let's see how it went.

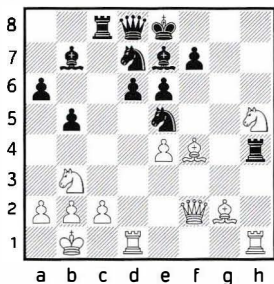
a) 9. ♖e2 ♞bd7 10. ♞b3 I am personally not in favour of moving White's centralized knight to b3 here, as White loses some tactical possibilities. However an immediate 10.f2-f4? is not possible because of 10...exf4 11. ♙xf4 e5 forking two pieces. chesstouring.com

(A solution for White could be 10. ♙d2! ? ♜e5 11. f4! gxf4 12. ♙xf4 with more tactical possibilities since the knight is still on d4.)

10... ♜e5 In Leko, P (2625)-Ivanchuk, V (2735) Wijk aan Zee 1996, White now accomplished the first part of the plan: 11. f4 gxf4 12. ♙xf4



The white f-pawn has been successfully traded for the black pawn on g5. 12... ♜f7 13. o-o-o b5 Now comes the second part of the plan — the white knight travels to h5. 14. ♞f2 ♙b7 15. ♞b1 ♞c8 16. ♜e2! h5 17. gxf5 ♞xf5 To bring his knight to h5 here, White needs to sacrifice his h-pawn. 18. h4! ♙e7 19. ♜g3 ♞xf4 20. ♜h5



Mission accomplished! White's knight is excellently placed on h5! Black has his knight on e5 and

pretty much nothing else. White, on the other hand, has a safe king — unlike his black counterpart — and harmonious pieces. The weak position of the black king provides White with excellent compensation for the sacrificed pawn. 20... ♞xf4

(20... ♞g4 21. ♜d4)

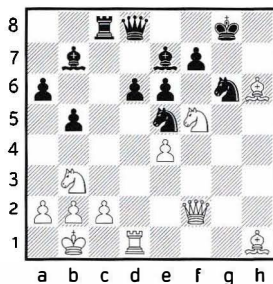
21. ♙xh1 ♜g6 22. ♜g7+

(22. ♙xd6 ♙xd6 23. e5 ♙xe5 24. ♙xb7 ♞c7 25. ♙xa6 ♞g5 26. ♞f3 ±)

22... ♞f8 23. ♙h6

(23. ♜xe6+ looks promising but fails to deliver a fatal blow. 23... fxe6 24. ♜d4 ♞g8 25. ♜xe6 ♞e8 26. ♞g3 ♜de5 This position is difficult for me to evaluate, but the computer engine has no trouble declaring 0.00.)

23... ♞g8 24. ♜f5 ♜de5



25. ♜xe7+ chesstouring.com

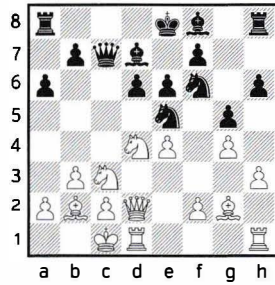
[25. ♖g1 also looks promising for White: 25...exf5 (25...f6? now loses to 26. ♗f4.) 26.exf5 ♗xh1 27.fxg6 fxg6 28. ♖xh1 and Black's position has many holes so White has excellent attacking chances here.]

25... ♜xe7 26. ♖g1 f6 27. ♘d4

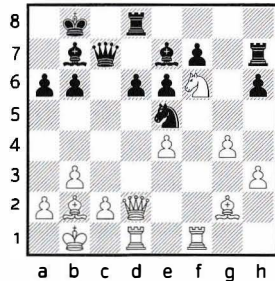
(27. ♘a5! would have led to a substantial white advantage. 27... ♗f7 28. ♗d2! ♜c7 29. ♗b4 ♗a8 30. a3 Black is a pawn up and has his apparently "monster" knight on e5, but he does not have any real play. Black's king is vulnerable and he has pawn weaknesses on f6 and d6. Computer programs evaluate White's advantage as high as +1.00!)

27... ♗f7 28. ♗g5 ♖h8 29. ♖f1 ♘d7
In this unclear position Leko and Ivanchuk agreed a draw.

b) A plan to fianchetto White's queenside bishop may look strange here, but the white king will be safe, while White will try to achieve similar strategic objectives to those already mentioned. This plan was introduced by Shirov. 9.b3 ♘bd7 10. ♗b2 ♘e5 11. ♜d2 ♗d7 12.0-0-0 ♜c7 Now White is going for the strategic objectives already outlined.



13.f4! gxf4 14. ♘ce2 ♗e7 15. ♘xf4 0-0-0 16. ♖b1 ♖b8 17. ♖hf1 ♗c8
Now comes the second part of the plan — the white knight goes to h5. 18. ♘de2! ♖h7 19. ♘g3 b6 20. ♘gh5 ♘fd7 21. ♘d3 ♗b7 22. ♘xe5 ♘xe5 23. ♘f6



Now Black hopes to get some play by sacrificing a pawn. 23... ♖g7

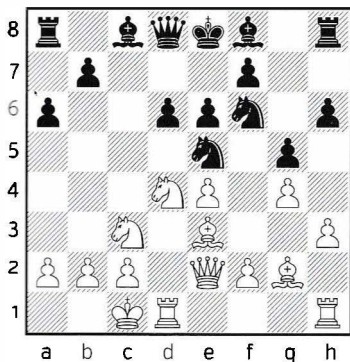
(After 23... ♖hh8 24. ♜f2 White has pressure.)

24. ♜xh6

(24. ♘d7+! is a nice move-missed by both players. White comes out a sound pawn up after 24... ♖a8 25. ♘xe5 dxe5 26. ♜xh6±.)

24... ♖g6 25. ♔h4 ♖c8 26. ♖d2 ♗a7
27.g5 Black did not have enough
compensation for his pawn and
White went on to win in Shirov,A
(2700) -Akopian,V (2660) Gronin-
gen 1997.

9... ♖bd7 10. ♗e2 ♗e5 11. 0-0-0



Let's take strategic stock again.
Black should be careful not to allow
the central pawn-structure trans-
formation where White plays ♗f3
followed by ♗xe5 forcing Black to
recapture with his d-pawn. Such po-
sitions are difficult for Black, as my
loss to Adams (see analysis of the
move 11... ♗d7?!) excellently illus-
trates!

Though a number of great play-
ers — better than me — have trust-
ed the black position, I would opine
that White is better there because
(a) Black will end with the pawn
structure I got against Adams, or
(b) White would push f4 aiming
to bring his knight to h5 as in this
game.

I think that Black should try to es-
cape with his king to the queen-
side with 15... ♖h7 (instead of 15...
♖f8?!), but nevertheless those posi-
tions look to me easier to play with
White.

11... ♗fd7

This move aims to maintain
a knight on e5 and prevent the pawn
structure transformation seen in
my game with Adams.

My mentioned game with Adams
went as follows: 11... ♗d7?! 12. ♗f3
♗a5?

(12... ♗g6 preventing the game
transaction was, for better or
worse, necessary for Black here.)

13. ♗b1

(The immediate 13. ♗xe5 dxe5
14.h4± similar to Adams' play was
also possible.)

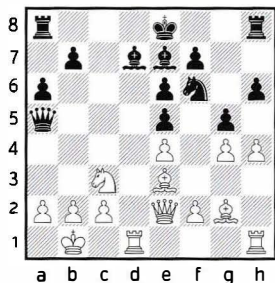
13... ♗e7

(13... ♗g6 now does not produce the
same result: 14. ♗d2 ♗c7 15. ♗c4±.)

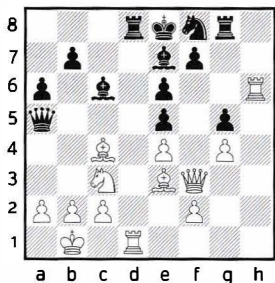
14. ♗xe5! dxe5

(14... ♗xe5? loses as the position
opens up in White's favour: 15. ♗d4
♗a5 16.e5+.)

15.h4!



One of our rules is that the open h-file will clearly favour White here! 15... ♖g8 16. hxg5 hxg5 17. ♖h6± Black is boxed in without any counter-play; he should definitely avoid such positions! 17... ♗c6 18. ♗f3 ♖d7 19. ♖h7 ♖f6 20. ♖h6 ♖d7 Now White improves his bishop. 21. ♗f1! ♖d8 22. ♗c4 ♖f8



Black's king is stuck in the middle of the board, which allows a tactical execution. 23. ♖d5!+- exd5 24. exd5 ♗b4

(24... ♗b5 25. ♗xb5+ ♗xb5 26. d6+-)

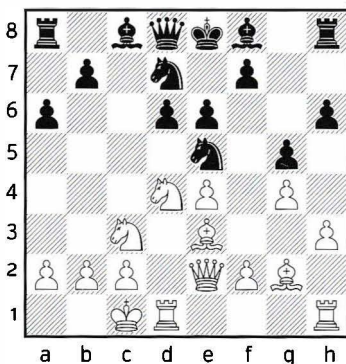
25. dxc6 ♖xd1+ 26. ♗xd1 ♗xc4 27. b3! The black queen runs out of good squares. 27... ♗b4

(or 27... ♗b5 28. c4 ♗a5 29. cxb7 ♗c7 30. ♗d5+-)

28. a3 ♗a5 29. cxb7 ♖d7

(29... ♗c7 does not change anything; 30. ♗d5 ♖d7 31. ♖xa6+-.)

30. ♖c6 ♗d8 31. ♖c8 ♖e7 32. ♗c5+ 1-0 Adams, M (2716)-Sokolov, I (2624) Sarajevo 1999. Now Polgar follows the strategy outlined earlier.

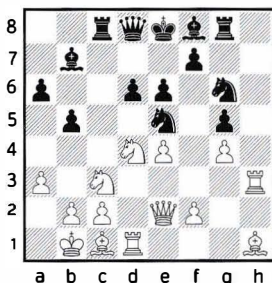


12. f4!

12. h4 was played in the blitz game Dominguez-Kasparov, Saint Louis 2017. 12... ♖g8 13. hxg5 hxg5 The h-file control is definitely in White's favour, but he still needs to continue with active play. 14. ♖b1 b5 It is perhaps not fair to investigate much this blitz game, but it is instructive to see what happens if White does not play actively. Kasparov will steadily improve his position and simply outplay White. 15. a3

(White needed to play 15.f4 gxf4
16. ♖xf4 ♗b7 17.g5 obtaining an ac-
tive game.)

15... ♗b7 16. ♖c1 ♜c8 17. ♞h3 ♖g6
18. ♗h1 ♗de5



Black is getting a grip on the posi-
tion, his knight controlling impor-
tant squares. 19. ♞g3

(19. ♗f3! trading one of the black
knights made sense here.)

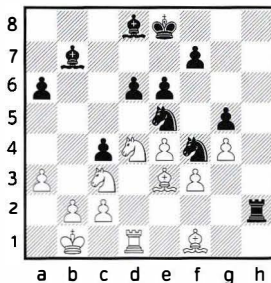
19... ♗e7 20. ♗a2 ♞h8 Black is al-
ready better. 21. ♞c3 ♞xc3

(21... ♗f4 22. ♖xf4 gxf4)

22. ♗xc3 ♞c7 23. ♗g2 ♞c4 24. ♞xc4?
In a higher sense this is a losing mis-
take as the endgame will be very
bad for White.

(24. ♞e3 keeping the queens on was
a must.)

24... bxc4 25. f3 ♞h2 26. ♗f1 ♗f4
27. ♗e3 ♗d8



28. ♞d2? A blunder in a difficult po-
sition. Now White loses material.

(28. ♗a4 ♗c8+ Now Black will
play ... ♗d7 chasing the a4 knight
back to c3 and then proceed with
a ... ♗b6 plan.)

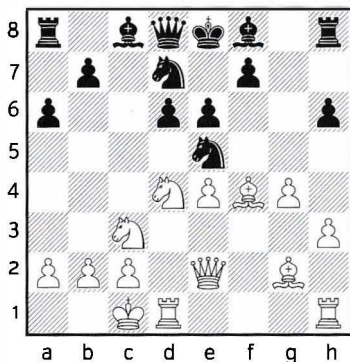
28... ♞xd2 29. ♗xd2 ♗b6+ In order
to prevent an immediate pawn(s)
loss, White has to part with his
bishop pair. 30. ♖xf4 gxf4 31. ♗ce2
d5 32. exd5 ♗xd5 33. ♗g2 ♗xg4

(33... ♗xd4 also wins 34. ♗xd4
♗xg4+)

34. ♗xf4 ♗e3 White cannot keep
his f-pawn. 35. ♗de2 ♗xg2 36. ♗xg2
♗xf3 and Black soon won.

12... gxf4 13. ♖xf4

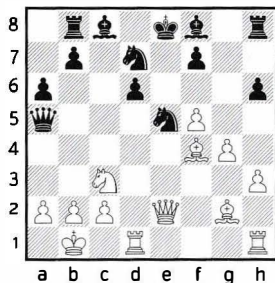
Polgar has accomplished the first
part of the plan — she has traded
her f-pawn for the black g5-pawn.
Yes, Black does have a dominant
knight on e5, but roads to the black
king are now beginning to open.



13...b5

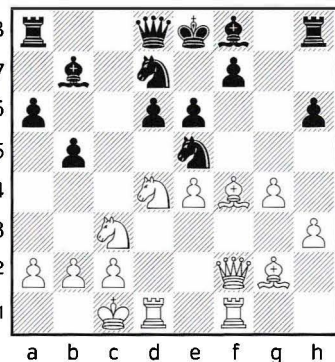
13...♔a5? allowed a nice piece sacrifice, similar in a way to the ♖f5! possibility missed by White in Ghizdavu-Spassky or Karpov-Spassky, the two next games in this section.

14. ♖f5! exf5 15. exf5 ♖b8 16. ♖b1



Black cannot complete his development. 16...b5 17. ♖c6 ♖c7 18. ♖xd7+ ♖xd7 19. ♖d5 ♖c4 20. ♖e3 ♖g7 21. ♖xe5 ♖xe5 22. ♖f6+ ♖d8 23. ♖xd7 ♖f4 24. ♖a7 ♖c8 25. ♖b6 ♖xc2+ 26. ♖a1 1-0 Bruzon Batista, L (2641)-Suba, M (2451) La Roda 2010.

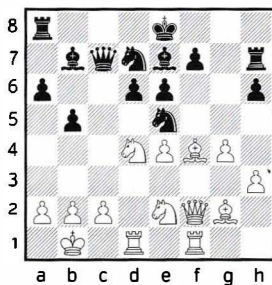
14. ♖hf1 ♖b7 15. ♖f2



15...♖c8?

Probably, in a higher sense, a losing mistake! White's knight now travels to h5, while the black king remains stuck in the centre. Polgar plays an excellent and instructive game!

Black needed to run with his king to the queenside. 15...♖h7! 16. ♖b1 ♖e7 17. ♖ce2 ♖c7



18. ♖c1

(The white knight's mission to h5 18. ♖g3 0-0-0 19. ♖h5 ♖b8 leads now to unclear consequences while the black king has escaped to the other side of the board.)

18...0-0-0∞ with sharp play resulting in a draw in Zhigalko,S (2562)-Sasikiran,K (2661) Khanty-Mansiysk 2007.

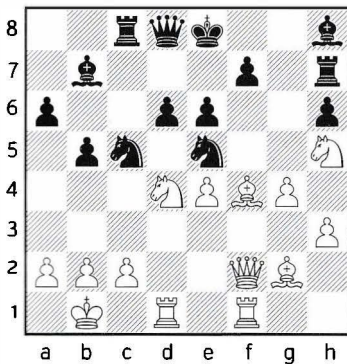
16. ♖ce2!

Judit now goes for the second part of the plan, moving her knight to h5.

16... ♗g7 17. ♖g3! ♜h7 18. ♖h5

Mission accomplished. Black is in deep trouble! Black has his knight on e5, White has everything else! But the e5-knight, however strong in itself, simply cannot keep the black position together on its own.

18... ♗h8 19. ♖b1 ♖c5



20. ♗g3

Polgar improves her position and gains a winning advantage. White will place her bishop on f6, trade the dark-squared bishops off, and then the dark-square holes around the black king will prove crucial.

However, White here also had an immediate tactical resource in 20. ♖f5! and the black position, just as in a few other examples of such sacrifices in this chapter, quickly collapses. 20...exf5

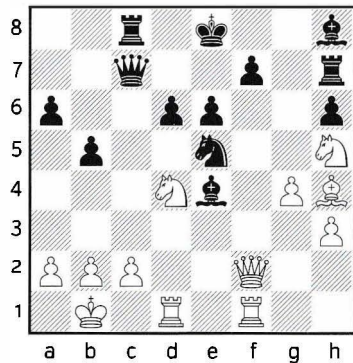
(Ignoring White's knight with 20... ♗c6 loses to 21. ♖hg7+ ♗xg7 22. ♖xg7+ ♜xg7 23. ♗xe5+.)

21. ♗xe5 ♗xe5 22. ♜xf5+

20... ♖xe4 21. ♗xe4 ♗xe4

This extra pawn that Black has gained is not much of a value here.

22. ♗h4 ♜c7

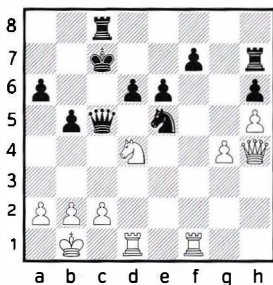


23. ♗f6

Plan accomplished. The dark-squared bishops are getting exchanged and the white knight will leap from h5 to f6 with devastating consequences. It is interesting to notice how little the black knight on e5 is really worth here!

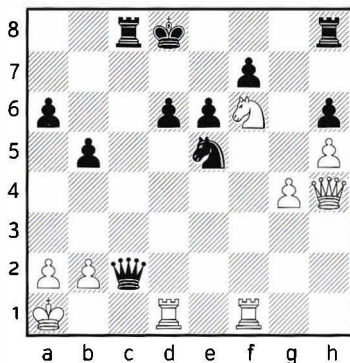
23... ♖g6 24. ♖xh8 ♜xh8 25. ♗f6+
 ♘d8 26. h4 ♚c5 27. h5 ♖h7 28. ♚h4
 ♙xc2+

Black cannot run with his king: 28...
 ♘c7 due to 29. ♗xh7 ♜xh7



30. ♜xf7+! ♜xf7 31. ♗xe6++.

29. ♗xc2 ♚xc2+ 30. ♘a1



The game has been decided. White
 has a winning king-chase attack.

30... ♜c4 31. ♗e4+ ♘c7 32. ♗xd6
 ♜f4 33. ♚e7+ ♘b6 34. ♚b7+ ♘a5
 35. ♚a7! b4 36. ♜fe1 ♗f3 37. ♜c1
 ♗xe1 38. ♜xc2 ♗xc2+ 39. ♘b1 1-0

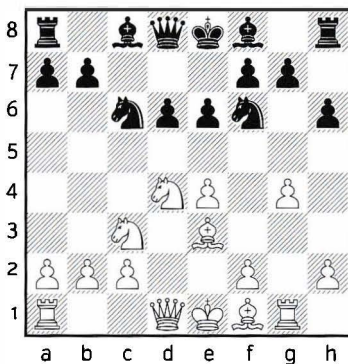
10

▷ D. Ghizdavu

▷ B. Spassky

Nice [8], 1974

1. e4 c5 2. ♗f3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♗xd4
 ♗f6 5. ♗c3 e6 6. g4 h6 7. ♜g1 ♗c6
 8. ♖e3



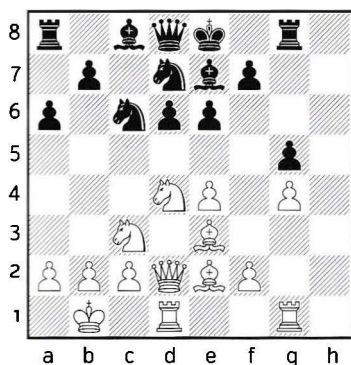
In a span of eight years Spassky had
 two interesting games where he
 chose the Sicilian knight on e5 set-
 up, so I give both of them in this
 chapter. In this game he delayed for
 two moves, the ...g5 pawn push, while
 in the later game against Karpov he
 went for an immediate ...g5 pawn
 push. In the first game in this chap-
 ter, Polgar-Topalov, and in the chap-
 ter's introductory text, I delved into
 strategic explanations, while in this
 game and the next one with Karpov
 I would like to more focus on White's
 tactical possibilities to break through
 the black defences. Although missed
 by White in both the games given,

these motifs are relatively standard and knowing them should prove useful in practical play.

8... ♖e7

A few years later, Spassky went for the move 8...g5 against Karpov — see the next game of this subchapter.

9. ♖e2 a6 10. ♖d2 g5 11. o-o-o ♗d7
12. h4 ♖g8 13. hxg5 hxg5 14. ♖b1



Black has to place his knight to e5. Which one?

14... ♗ce5

14... ♗de5? loses to 15. ♗f5! exf5 16. gxf5 with 17. f4 to follow and White breaks through the black defences.

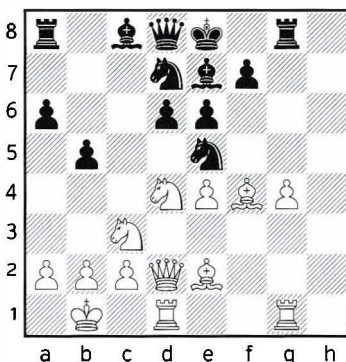
15. f4!

These f2-f4 pawn pushes usually work for White here — as the posi-

tion opens up and Black is behind in development.

However, White had at his disposal another good move in 15. ♗f5! This knight sacrifice works here too. For his sacrificed piece White will get a rolling pawn-mass and a large advantage. 15...exf5 16. gxf5 b5 17. f4 ♖c4 18. ♖xc4 bxc4 19. ♗d5 (19. fxc5 is also good.) 19... ♖b7 20. fxc5+

15... gxf4 16. ♖xf4 b5



17. ♗f3?

This timid move gives Black the break he needed.

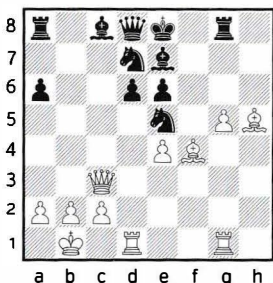
White should have continued 17. g5! opening the corridor for his bishop to come from e2 to h5. Black simply does not get the time to evacuate his king, and falls under a devastating attack. White has a large advantage and a number of good options, so long as he pursues a direct, aggressive approach. 17...b4

(17... ♖b7 18. ♗h5+-)

18. ♗xe6! Direct and effective.

[18. ♗a4 should also win for White. 18... ♖a5 19. b3 ♗b7 20. ♗h5 ♗g6 (20... 0-0-0 21. a3+-) 21. ♗xd6 ♗xd6 22. ♗xe6 ♖e5 23. ♗c7+ ♖e7 24. ♗xa8 ♗xa8 Black's problem here is that routes to his king will open up. 25. ♗b2!+-]

18... bxc3 19. ♖xc3 fxe6 20. ♗h5+



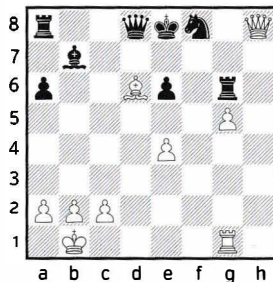
20... ♗g6

(20... ♖f8? runs into mate: 21. ♗xe5 ♗xe5 22. ♖gf1+ ♖g7 23. ♖f7+-)

21. ♖xd6 ♗xd6 22. ♗xd6 Black has a large material advantage but his king has no place to hide. 22... ♗b7

(or 22... ♗df8 23. ♗xf8+- ♖xf8 24. ♖f1+ ♖e8 25. ♗xg6+ and Black loses everything: 25... ♖xg6 26. ♖h8+ ♖e7 27. ♖h7+.)

23. ♗xg6+ ♖xg6 24. ♖h8+ ♗f8

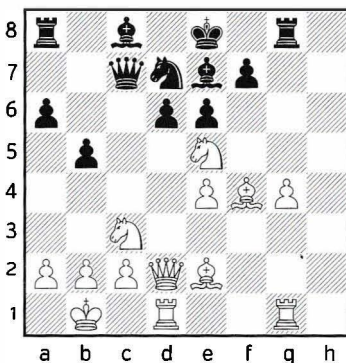


25. ♗c5!

(Precision is always important: 25. ♗a3? allows 25... ♖f6.)

25... ♖xg5 26. ♖xf8+ and White gets a won endgame: 26... ♖d7 27. ♖d6+ ♖c8 28. ♖xe6+ ♖b8 29. ♖d6+-.

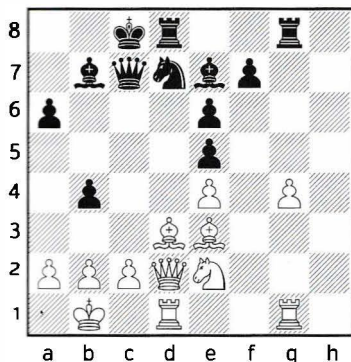
17... ♖c7 18. ♗xe5



18... dxe5!

18... ♗xe5? leaves the black king exposed: 19. ♗xb5! axb5 20. ♗xe5 dxe5 21. ♗xb5+ ♖f8 22. ♖h6+ ♖g7 23. g5!+-

19. ♖e3 ♜b7 20. ♜d3 b4 21. ♗e2
0-0-0



Spassky has consolidated his position and he now quickly outplays his opponent.

22. ♜g5 ♗c5 23. ♗g3 ♖b8

White has weak pawns on e4 and g5 to worry about, and an inferior position.

24. ♞f2

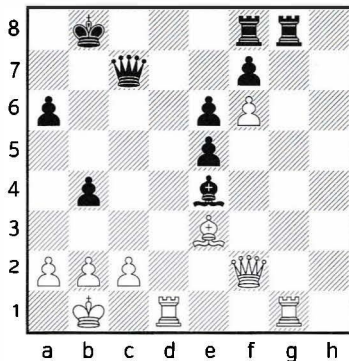
24. ♜gf1 ♜g7

24... ♜df8 25. ♗h5

White's knight has made it to h5 but this time it is not really effective there.

25. ♞d2

25... ♗xe4 26. ♜xe4 ♜xe4 27. ♗f6 ♜xf6 28. gxf6



28...b3!

Spassky executes with precision! The immediate 28...♜c8 leads to no more than equality: 29. ♜xg8 ♜xc2+ 30. ♖a1 ♜xg8 31. ♜c1 b3 32. ♞d2! =.

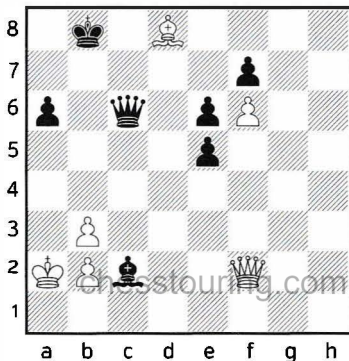
29. axb3 ♜c8 30. ♜b6 ♜xc2+ 31. ♖a2 ♞c6

Black has a material advantage and the better game.

32. ♜xg8 ♜xg8 33. ♜d8+?

33. ♜d2

33... ♜xd8 34. ♜xd8



34... ♖xb3+! 35. ♗xb3 ♜d5+ 36. ♗a3
 ♜d6+ 37. b4 ♜xd8 38. ♜c5 ♜c7
 39. ♜e3 ♜d6 40. ♜e2 a5!

And White resigned as the pawn ending is lost after 40...a5 41. ♜b5+ ♗a7 42. ♜xa5+ ♜a6--.

0-1

11

▷ **A. Karpov**

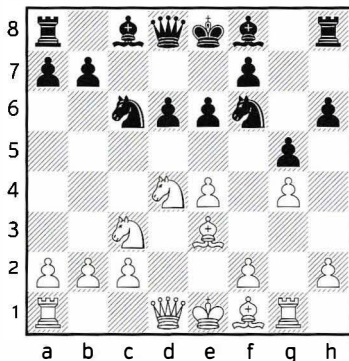
▷ **B. Spassky**

Turin (4), 1982

1. e4 c5 2. ♖f3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♖xd4
 ♗f6 5. ♗c3 d6 6. g4 h6 7. ♖g1 ♗c6
 8. ♗e3

Probably aware of the opportunity that Ghizdavu had missed eight years earlier (our previous game in this chapter), Spassky now opts for an immediate g-pawn push.

8...g5



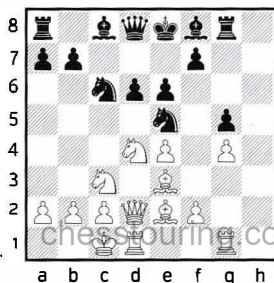
Black wants to immediately secure his knight's central outpost and later decide on further development. It is interesting to see that — at the peak of his career — Karpov simply could not “feel the position” and instead of taking forceful measures he adopted a timid positional approach and landed up in a worse position.

9. ♜d2

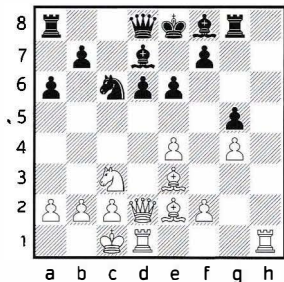
9.h4 immediately starting action was played a year later by the famous theoretician Igor Zaitsev, Karpov's second at the time. Zaitsev handles the opening better than his boss! 9...♗d7

(9...gxf4 is the kind of a move rarely played by humans, but frequently suggested by computers in these positions. Yes, Black temporarily grabs a pawn, but surrenders his strategic aim of a strong knight on e5. After the logical 10. ♜d2 ♗xd4 11. ♗xd4 e5 12. ♗e3 a6 13. f3 White has a better game.)

10.hxg5 hxg5 11. ♜d2 ♗de5 12. 0-0-0
 ♖g8 13. ♗e2



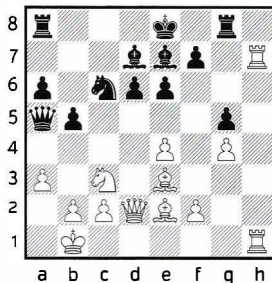
White has opened the h-file and is **now** protecting his g4 pawn in order to penetrate along the h-file with his rook. As already mentioned a number of times in this chapter, h-file penetration is a regular plan for White in these positions. 13...♖xd4 14. ♗xd4 ♜c6 15. ♙e3 a6 16. ♖h1 ♙d7



And now White could have played the killing 17. ♖h7! which is White's standard plan here. Indeed Black then finds it difficult to develop and coordinate his pieces, for example

(17. ♖a4 probably leads to a queen swap and a better ending for White: 17... ♗a5 18. ♗xa5 ♜xa5 19. ♖b6 ♖d8 20. a4 ♜c6 21. ♜c4 ♙c8 22. c3 White has a risk-free advantage; in the Zaitsev game 17. ♖h5 ♙e7 led to a white advantage, though Black later handled the complications better and won in Zaitsev, I (2445) -Sokolov, A (2435) Moscow 1983.)

17... ♙e7 18. ♖dh1 ♗a5 19. a3 b5 20. ♖b1 White has a large advantage here — Black can easily lose on the spot.



20...b4

(20... ♖b8 21. ♖h8 wins since now Black cannot castle queenside; while 20... ♜e5 runs into a tactical refutation: 21. ♖g7! o-o-o 22. ♙xg5 ♖xg7 23. ♙xe7 ♖dg8 24. ♙xd6 ♜xg4 25. f3 ♜f2 26. ♖h5+-.)

21. axb4 ♜xb4

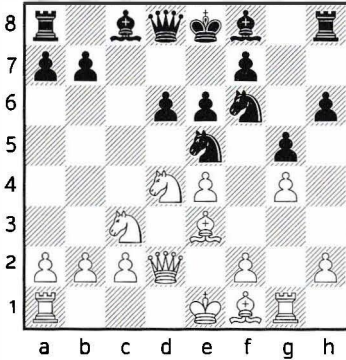
(21... ♗xb4 22. ♖h8 and now the pawn on a6 hangs, so again Black cannot castle queenside.)

and with the black knight away from control of the e7-square White again has 22. ♖g7! and again (as in 20... ♜e5 21. ♖g7!) the white rook cannot be taken. 22... ♖xg7 23. ♖h8+ ♙f8 24. ♗xd6 o-o-o 25. ♖xf8 Black will lose tons of material.

9... ♜e5

Now White first finishes his development, a correct decision. However White had an interesting tactical option to immediately open files and diagonals using a stand-

ard method, this time connected to a temporary pawn sacrifice.

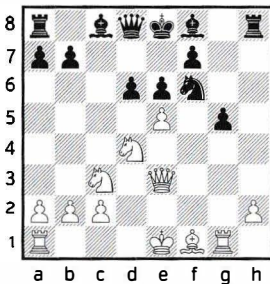


10. ♙e2

10.f4!? ♜xg4

(10...gxf4 11. ♙xf4 ♜fxg4? is bad for Black due to 12. ♙e2 ♜f6 13. ♞db5 a6 14. 0-0-0! and White wins: 14...axb5 15. ♙xe5 b4 16. ♞b5 ♞xa2 17. b3! Black has run out of counter-play and now White wins in a few moves.)

11.fxg5 ♜xe3 12. ♖xe3 hxg5 13.e5

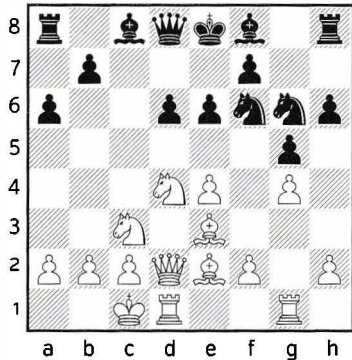


13...dxе5!

(13...♞d7 14.exd6 ♙xd6 15. ♞xg5 ♙e7 16.h4 is excellent for White: 16... ♙xg5? 17.hxg5 ♞g8 18. ♞e4+..)

14. ♙b5+ ♙d7 15. ♖xe5 White will castle queenside and his attack looks devastating, but actually Black can defend: 15... ♞h4! 16.0-0-0 ♖e7 17. ♞gf1 ♞f4! 18. ♖xg5 ♞xf1 19. ♞xf1 a6 20. ♙d3 ♞d5 21. ♖h5 0-0-0 Thanks to his bishop pair, Black has enough counter-play to hold the game.

10...♞g6 11.0-0-0 a6



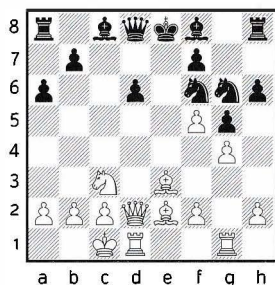
Here we have the critical position. Reigning World Champion Karpov misses, just like Ghizdavu in our previous game, the standard tactical motif here!

12.a3?!

This move is the start of Karpov's timid play that ultimately lands him in trouble. Just like Dominguez in his blitz game with Kasparov (given in the Polgar-Topalov comments),

White gets nowhere here with slow play. White needs to open the position and routes to the black king, which often requires him to sacrifice material. Then Black's centralized knight alone will prove not to be able to hold the black position together.

12. ♖f5!! would have broken the black defences and decided the game in White's favour. It is interesting how often this knight sacrifice works for White in these positions — and also how often white players miss these opportunities! 12...exf5 13.exf5



Black has terrible problems with his king stuck in the middle of the board. White gets his piece back and keeps his attack. White has a large advantage here. I will give a few sample lines: 13...♖e5

(13...♖f4 14. ♔xf4 gxf4 15.h4 ♔g7 16. ♖xf4 White first collects on f4 and protects his f5-pawn, before pushing 17.g5 with a winning game, while 16...♖d7 loses to 17.♖e4.)

14.h4 gxh4

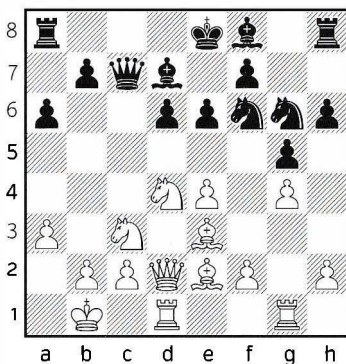
(14...♞g8 15.hxg5 hxg5 16. ♔xg5+-)

15.f4 ♖c6 16.g5 looks the most human and should be sufficient to win

(16. ♔f2 is what computer engines give as the strongest: 16... ♔e7 17.g5 with a winning advantage.)

16...hxg5 17.fxg5 ♔xf5 18.gxf6 h3 19. ♔f4 ♔e6 20. ♔f3 The extra pawn on h3 is not enough compensation for the trouble Black has got himself into!

12... ♔d7 13. ♖b1 ♖c7



It is high time for White to unleash an immediate attack, but again Karpov is not interested in direct play.

14. ♖b3?

Another timid move, taking White further from his goals.

14.h4! would have given White excellent attacking possibilities. 14...
 ♖xh4 15.f4 gxf4 16.♙xf4 ♖g6

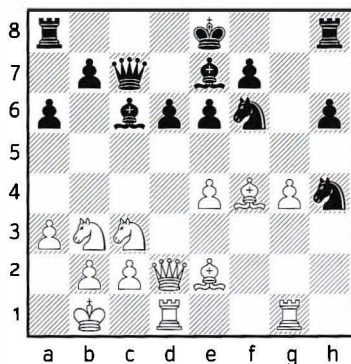
(16...e5?? 17.♙g3+-; 16...0-0-0?
 17.g5 ♖g8 18.♙g3! with the terrible
 threat of 19.♖d5 18...♗b8 19.♖d5!
 exd5 20.♙c3 and White wins — 20...
 ♗b6 21.♙b3 ♗a7 22.♙e3)

17.g5 White's initiative is probably
 worth more than a pawn.

14...♙e7 15.h4?!

15.f4 was a better choice.

15...♖xh4 16.f4 gxf4 17.♙xf4 ♙c6

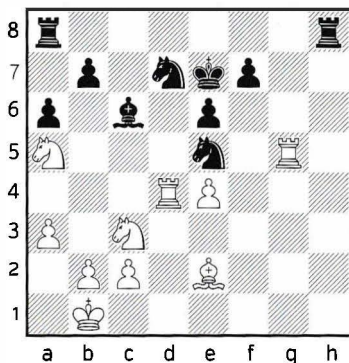


White now gets his pawn back but
 lands in a worse ending

18.♙xd6 ♙xd6 19.♗xd6 ♗xd6
 20.♙xd6 ♖e7

Black is better.

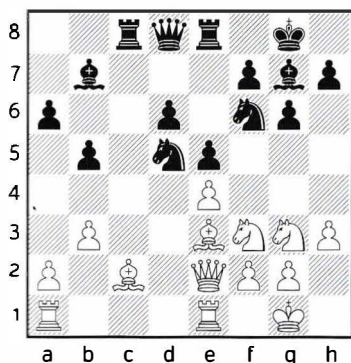
21.♙d4 ♖g6 22.♖a5 ♖e5 23.g5 hxg5
 24.♙xg5 ♖fd7



In this position with a risk-free advantage for Black, the players agreed to a draw.

½-½

CHAPTER II. SPANISH PIECE SACRIFICE



In Budapest in 1993 the 10th World Champion, Boris Spassky, and the Hungarian rising star Judit Polgar — only 16 at the time! — played a 10-game friendly match, won by Polgar. In the final game of the match Spassky, playing Black, went for a piece sacrifice that had a strong influence on me and I would like to share his idea in this book.

I immediately liked the Spassky sacrifice and did not hesitate to follow his strategy, so two games in the chapter (games three and four) are from my own practice — one even against Judit! Game two in this chapter, Nakamura-Golod, deviates at move 22(!) when White chooses 22. ♖ac1 instead of Polgar's 22.b4. We see this game, and Shirov-Tarjan, in the comments, as the mod-

ern treatment of this complex mid-game benefits from computer analysis.

Black's piece sacrifice has a strategic basis. In sacrificing the knight Black removes White's two central pawns and most often collects a third pawn somewhere along the way as well. The resulting positions are usually materially balanced, with Black having three pawns for a knight, and strategically complicated.

The featured piece sacrifice can come from one of the critical lines in the Breyer variation of the Spanish, as in Polgar-Spassky, Nakamura-Golod and Rasmussen-Sokolov, so analyzing and understanding this also has theoretical value. The fourth game, Polgar-Sokolov, has no theoretical value as I left the theoretical paths quite early, but it is instructive for understanding the resulting complex positions.

As with the other chapters, I will try to give a set of rules or guidelines:

- ♦ Collecting the white bishop pair is good for Black.

- ◆ Pawns are there to be pushed! If possible Black should push them and seize space.
- ◆ Black's main problem is usually his king position, so White should use his extra piece as an attacking force against the black king.

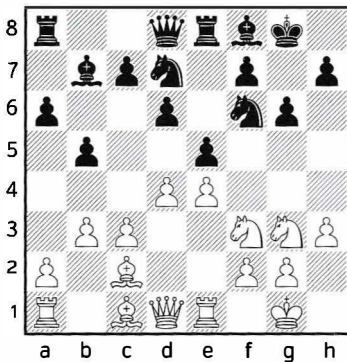
12

▷ J. Polgar

▷ B. Spassky

Budapest, 1993

1.e4 e5 2.♟f3 ♞c6 3.♞b5 a6 4.♞a4
 ♟f6 5.o-o ♞e7 6.♞e1 b5 7.♞b3
 o-o 8.c3 d6 9.h3 ♟b8 10.d4 ♟bd7
 11.♟bd2 ♞b7 12.♞c2 ♞e8 13.♟f1
 ♞f8 14.♟g3 g6 15.b3



White's idea is clear — she wants to push d4-d5 and then c3-c4, so the pawn on b3 will support her central pawn chain.

15... ♞g7

Black's main move here.

15...a5!? is an interesting alternative for Black, which I will deal with in my coming book on the Classical Spanish. In this chapter we are aiming to explore the thematic central piece sacrifice.

16.d5

For readers interested in a bit of opening information, we have an important move order situation here!

16... ♟b6

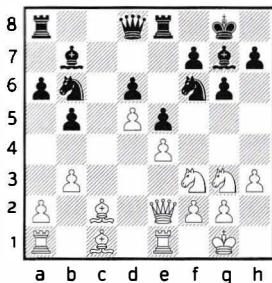
This was the move order for Spassky and Tal while 16... ♞c8 has been seen in more recent games, so I will give some opening information here.

16... ♞c8 is the modern move order for Black and after 17. ♞e3 c6 18.c4 ♟b6 19. ♞e2 cxd5 20.cxd5 ♟bxd5 21.exd5 ♟xd5 we reach our game position.

17. ♞e3

This allows Black an important extra option!

a) 17. ♞e2?! c6 18.c4 is not a good way for White to build the central pawn chain and it led to a quick victory in an old Tal game; 18... cxd5 19.cxd5

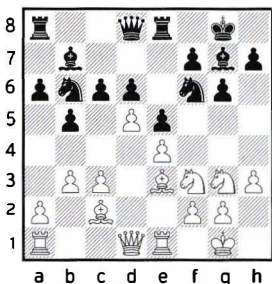


19...fxd5! 20.exd5 e4 21.fxe4
 ♖xa1 22.♙g5 f6 23.♙e3? (23.♙d1!
 would have kept practical chances
 in an exchange-down position.)
 23...♗xd5 24.♖xa1 ♗xe3 25.♙xe3
 ♙xe4 26.♙xe4 d5 0-1, Unzicker-
 Tal, FRG-USSR match 1960.

b) The way for White to exploit
 Black's move order is 17.♖b1! c6
 18.c4± White has had excellent
 practical results from this position,
 though there are not that many
 games here and verdicts could be
 re-examined.

17...♖c8

Here Black has an important alter-
 native in 17...c6!



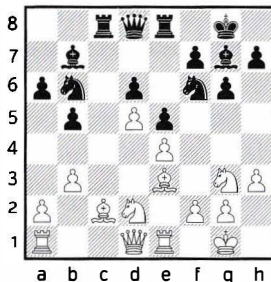
and White does not get to form the
 pawn chain! Arguably the most log-
 ical course for White now is to grab
 a pawn with 18.dxc6 ♙xc6 19.♙xb6

(19.♙d2 d5 is definitely fine for
 Black.)

19...♙xb6 20.♙xd6 ♖ad8 Black's
 bishop pair provides sufficient com-
 pensation here; computer analysis
 agrees with this verdict.

18.♙e2

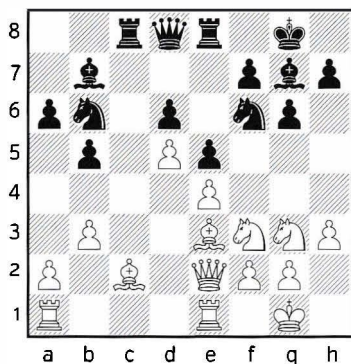
18.♗d2?! does not change much,
 apart from the fact that Black now
 sacrifices under better circumstanc-
 es! 18...c6 19.c4 cxd5 20.cxd5



20...♗bxd5! 21.exd5 ♗xd5 White's
 pieces are rather uncoordinated
 here. One high-level rapid game
 went 22.♗f3 ♗xe3! Black correct-
 ly takes the bishop pair — one of
 our rules here! 23.fxe3 d5 Although
 Black has only two pawns for
 a piece, the white pieces are poorly
 coordinated and Black has a strong
 centre supported by his powerful
 bishop pair. Black has the advan-

tage here and went on to win in McShane,L (2671)-Adams,M (2744) London 2016.

18...c6 19.c4 cxd5 20.cxd5



Now Black goes for our standard Breyer piece sacrifice.

20...♖bxd5! 21.exd5 ♘xd5

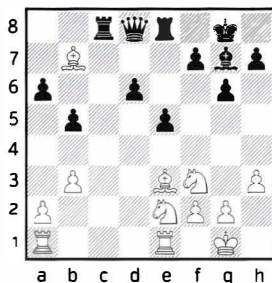
Compared to Game 14, Rasmussen-Sokolov, one may argue that White is in much better shape here, because (a) Black has, for the moment anyway, only two pawns for a piece instead of three, and (b) the white knight is not stranded on a5; it is here on g3. Still, Black has a powerful pawn centre, supported by a strong pair of bishops. Our rules apply here: (a) trading the knight for one of the white bishops is good for Black, (b) Black should push his central pawns, the further the better, and (c) Black should be careful about his king's position, as an attack by White can quickly become danger-

ous. Computer engines evaluate the position around 0.00. We have quite a number of top games in this position, so let's go through them. In a more recent game Nakamura continued 22. ♖ac1. We will look into it separately in Game 14 because of the density of the analysis.

22.b4!?

Young Judit Polgar senses that activity and piece coordination are the key here and does not hesitate to give up a pawn to achieve that aim!

Former World Championship challenger Gata Kamsky decided to further alter the material imbalance by playing 22. ♗e4?! and after 22...♖c3 23. ♗xb7 ♖xe2+ 24. ♖xe2

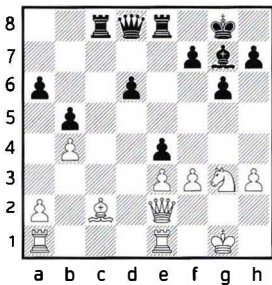


we have a kind of situation I described in volume one of this "Chess Middlegame Strategies" series, the chapter on material imbalance. As described there, a queen often fights better against a rook and two knights than against two knights and a bishop. This applies especially if the side with the queen can

take space by pushing his central pawns, limiting the activity of the opponent's knights. This is exactly what Paul van der Sterren does here! He happily gives up an exchange in order to take space with his central pawns. 24...d5! 25. ♖xc8 ♜xc8 Black was better and went on to win in Kamsky,G (2695)-Van der Sterren,P (2605) Wijk aan Zee 1994.

22... ♖xb4

22... ♖xe3! would again be interesting for Black, this time with plenty of direct tactical possibilities. 23.fxe3 ♖xf3 24.gxf3 e4!



25. ♖xe4 Black can now force a draw with 25... ♖xa1

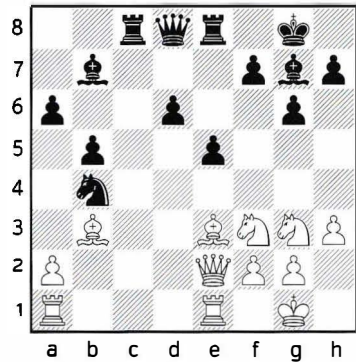
(If unhappy with a draw, Black should explore 25...d5 or 25...f5.)

26. ♜xa1 d5 27. ♜d1 ♜h4 28. ♜xd5 ♜xe4 29. ♖xe4

(or 29.fxe4 ♜g3+=)

29... ♜g3+ 30. ♖f1 ♜xh3+ 31. ♖g1 ♜g3+=.

23. ♖b3



23... ♖d5

In general Black should not complain about an exchange of light-squared bishops here. When he considered 23...d5 Spassky probably did not like positions like those arising after 24. ♜d2 e4. In this particular situation, this pawn push surrenders an important square. 25. ♖d4 ♖d3 26. ♜e1 White looks better here.

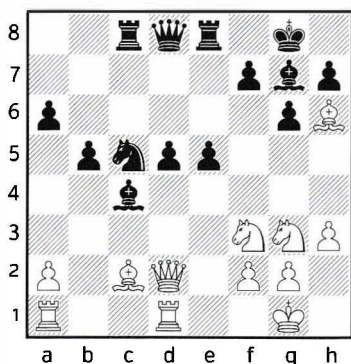
24. ♜e1

24.a3!? ♖xb3 25.axb4 was an interesting tactical solution.

24... ♖c4 25. ♜d2 ♖d3 26. ♖h6

26. ♖c2! would have presented Black with a difficult choice, as after 26...d5 27. ♖xd3 ♖xd3 28. ♜xd3 e4 29. ♜e2 ♖xa1 30. ♜xa1 exf3 31. ♜xf3 White has the advantage because of the weakened black king.

26...d5 27. ♖c2 ♜c5



An important moment! Attacking the black king is White's main aim here and for that reason an important defender, the bishop on g7, had to be eliminated!

28. ♖e1?

Correct was 28. ♕xg7 ♜xg7 29.a4. White missed her chance for an advantage with 26. ♖c2! but the position is still balanced as Black cannot push the central pawns without surrendering squares.

28... ♕h8!

Polgar now tries to develop an attack, but with Black's dark-squared bishop still alive, it does not work well.

29. ♖ad1 ♜b6 30. ♜g5 e4! ♣ 31. ♜e3

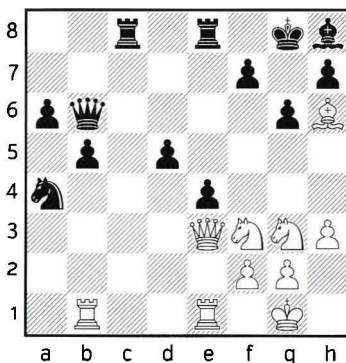
Seeing no immediate threats on his king, Spassky grabs another pawn.

31. ♜h2 ♜e6 32. ♜h4

(32. ♜d2 f5! ♣)

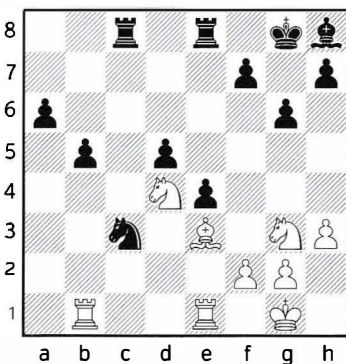
32... ♜d8! ♣

31... ♕xa2 32. ♕b1 ♕xb1 33. ♖xb1 ♜a4!



Forcing a queen exchange decides the battle.

34. ♜xb6 ♜xb6 35. ♕e3 ♜a4 36. ♜d4 ♜c3



The smoke has cleared. Black has a material advantage and Spassky

ultimately brings it home. The rest of the game is not interesting for our chapter theme, so I have left it without comments.

37. ♖bc1 ♜c4 38. ♗ge2 ♗xe2+
 39. ♗xe2 ♞d8 40. g4 d4 41. ♞cd1
 d3 42. ♗g3 ♙c3 43. ♙d2 ♙xd2
 44. ♞xd2 ♞dd4 45. f3 exf3 46. ♖f2
 b4 47. ♖xf3 ♞d8 48. ♞e7 ♞b8
 49. ♞d7 b3 50. R7xd3 a5 51. ♞b2 a4
 52. ♗e2 ♖g7 53. ♖e3 ♞a8 54. ♗c3
 ♞b4 55. ♗xa4 ♞axa4 56. ♞xb3 ♞f4
 57. ♖e2 ♖h6 58. ♞f3 ♖g5 59. ♖f2
 ♞xf3+ 60. ♖xf3 ♖h4 61. ♖g2 ♞a2+
 62. ♖g1 h5 63. gxh5 ♖xh5 64. ♞f3
 f5 65. ♞f4 ♞e2 66. ♖h1 ♞e4 67. ♞f2
 ♖h4 68. ♖g2 ♞b4 69. ♖h2 ♞e4
 70. ♖g2 f4 71. ♖f3 ♞e5 72. ♞g2 g5
 73. ♞g4+ ♖xh3 74. ♞g3+ ♖h4 0-1

13

▷ H. Nakamura

▷ V. Golod

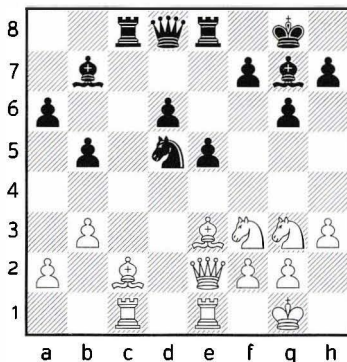
Gibraltar (8.5), 2009

1.e4 e5 2. ♗f3 ♗c6 3. ♙b5 a6 4. ♙a4
 ♗f6 5. o-o ♙e7 6. ♞e1 b5 7. ♙b3 d6
 8. ♙c3 o-o 9. h3 ♗b8 10. d4 ♗bd7
 11. ♗bd2 ♙b7 12. ♙c2 ♞e8 13. ♗f1
 ♙f8 14. ♗g3 g6 15. b3 ♙g7 16. d5 ♞c8
 17. ♙e3 c6 18. c4 ♗b6 19. ♞e2 cxd5
 20. cxd5 ♗bxd5 21. exd5 ♗xd5

Two great players Nakamura and Shirov, both now opted for the com-

puter's top choice and this became the modern main line here.

22. ♞ac1



A critical position. Black is facing a difficult choice here! Trading his knight for the white bishop on e3 is recommended by one of our general rules and is in itself definitely advisable. However, as in this game, Black can also go for 22... ♗c3 in order to collect a third pawn, the one on a2, which also make perfect sense! Most Black players deciding between collecting the bishop pair or a pawn allowed material greed to get the better of them...

22... ♗c3

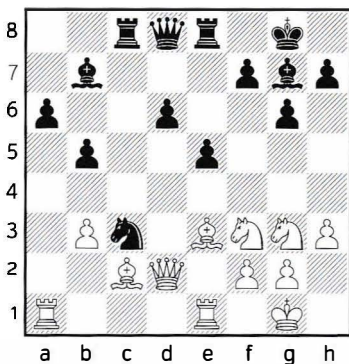
It is interesting to analyze what happens if Black suppresses his greed and goes for the bishop pair: 22... ♗xe3! 23. ♞xe3

(23. fxex3!? can be a problem for Black, as White gets an option to

break the black pawn centre with an e3-e4 pawn push and get an attack on the black king. One nice line goes as follows: 23...d5 24.b4 ♖e7 25. ♙b3! ♗xb4?! 26.e4! Roads to the black king are now opening up! 26...dxe4? 27. ♘g5 ♙d5 28. ♙xd5 ♗d4+ 29. ♖h2 ♗xd5 30. ♜ed1 ♗b7 31. ♜xc8 ♜xc8 32. ♗g4 White has a winning attack.)

23...d5 White's main plan should be an attack on the black king, which is easier said than done. To me the position looks dynamically balanced.

23. ♖d2 ♘xa2 24. ♙a1 ♘c3



Nakamura goes for a similar idea to Polgar's, shifting the bishop from c2 to the a2-g8 diagonal.

25.b4

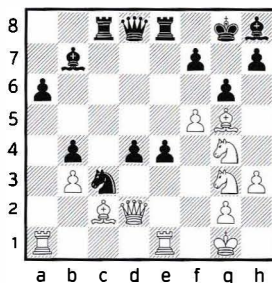
White takes some space.

25. ♙h6 was Shirov's choice. Again White aims for a direct attack on

the black king! The position is very complicated and the better calculator is likely to win. 25... ♙h8

[In the event of 25... ♗f6!? 26. ♙xg7 (26. ♘h2? is not good due to 26... ♙xh6 27. ♗xh6 ♗f4±; 26.b4 similar to the play by Nakamura or Polgar is an option.) 26... ♘xg7 27. ♜e3 b4 28. ♜ae1 White may get an attack here.]

26. ♘h2 b4 27. ♘g4 d5 Shirov now pushes his f-pawn aiming to weaken the black king's defences. 28.f4!? e4 29.f5 Black takes the correct decision to push his pawns. 29...d4 30. ♙g5



The critical moment! 30... ♗d5? Shirov now displays his famous attacking skills

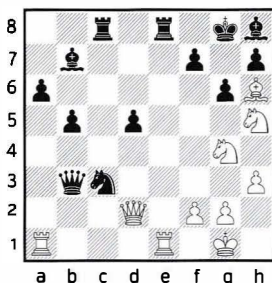
[30...f6! was needed and actually White has unpleasant choices to make as 31. ♘h6+ (The alternative 31. ♙h6 e3! 32. ♗d3 ♘e4 is bad for White.) 31... ♖f8 looks okay for Black: 32. ♙xe4 (32.fxg6? e3±) 32... ♘xe4 33. ♘xe4 ♜xe4 34. ♜xe4 ♙xe4 35. ♗xb4+ ♗e7 36. ♗xd4 ♗c5±.]

31. ♖xe4! ♜xe4 32. ♙xe4 ♘xe4
33. ♖xe4 h5

I can easily imagine that Vitali Golod was not in the mood to calculate 28... ♖xb4 29. ♘g4 ♖xb3 30. ♘h5.

[33... ♖xe4 runs into a nice mate:
34. ♙e1 ♖d5 35. ♙e8+! ♜xe8 36. ♘h6+
♙g7 (or 36... ♙f8 37. ♖xb4+) 37. f6+
♙f8 38. ♖xb4+]

34. ♘h6+ ♙h7 35. ♙e7 gxf5 36. ♘xf7
1-0 Shirov, A (2674)-Tarjan, J (2447)
Helsingor 2016.

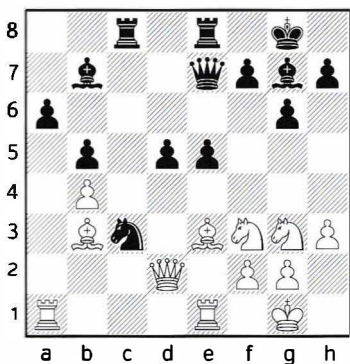


25... d5 26. ♙b3

26. ♙c5!? can also be considered.

26... ♖e7

Though the white attack looks menacing there is apparently no devastating blow available. 30... ♜xe1+ 31. ♙xe1 ♘e4 32. ♙xe4 dxe4 33. ♘hf6+ ♙xf6 34. ♘xf6+ ♙h8 35. ♘e8



(35. ♖d7 e3! 36. ♙xe3 ♙g7 37. ♙d4 ♖e6 38. ♘d5+ ♙h6=)

Nakamura goes for an attack on the black king, following one of our rules here!

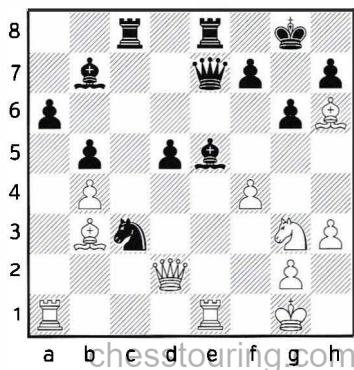
27. ♙h6!

35... ♖c3 36. ♖xc3+ ♙xc3 37. ♙g7+ ♙g8 38. ♙xc3 should be a draw.

27. ♙c5?! ♜xc5 28. bxc5 ♖xc5 was something Black was hoping to see.

29. f4

27... ♙h8 28. ♘xe5! ♙xe5

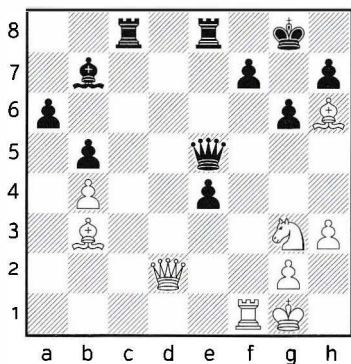


Another critical moment!

29...♖e4?

29...♖h4! was holding the balance: 30.fxe5 ♖xg3 31.♖d4 (31.♙e3? ♖h4⚡) 31...♙e6 White, though two pawns down, should now simplify to a likely draw with 32.♙e3 ♖e2+ 33.♙xe2 ♖xb3 34.♖a7! ♖c3 35.♙c1 ♖xc1+ 36.♙xc1 ♙xc1+ 37.♖h2 ♙c6 38.♖xa6=.

30.♙xe4 dxe4 31.fxe5 ♖xe5
32.♙f1+-



Black's problem is his king! White has a devastating attack.

32...♙e7 33.♙xf7 ♙xf7 34.♖d7 ♖e8 35.♖xb7 ♙c4 36.♙xc4 bxc4 37.♖xa6 ♙c7 38.♖d6 ♙d7 39.♖c5 c3 40.♖c4+ ♙f7 41.♖xe4+-

And White soon won:

41...♖d8 42.♖xc3 ♖b6+ 43.♖c5 ♖xc5+ 44.bxc5 ♙e7 45.♖d6 ♙e5 46.c6 ♙c5 47.♖c8 ♖f7 48.♖a7 1-0

14

▷ A. Rasmussen

▷ I. Sokolov

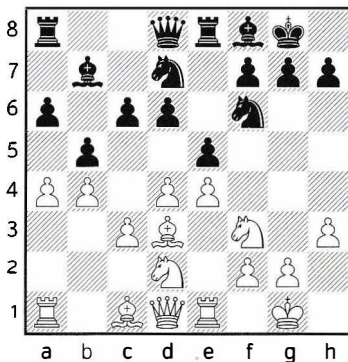
Helsingor [7.7], 2017

1.e4 e5 2.♖f3 ♖c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♖f6 5.o-o ♙e7 6.♙e1 b5 7.♙b3 d6 8.c3 o-o 9.h3 ♖b8 10.d4 ♖bd7 11.♖bd2 ♙b7 12.♙c2 ♙e8 13.a4

White aims to take space on the queenside and later decides on the future of his d2-knight.

Another option is a standard Spanish knight transfer via f1 to g3. For 13.♖f1 see Polgar-Spassky.

13...♙f8 14.♙d3 c6 15.b4

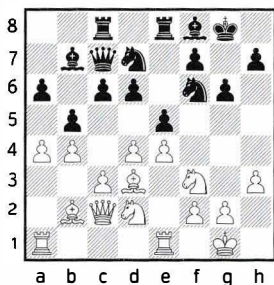


15.b3 has been seen in many top games.

15... ♖b6!

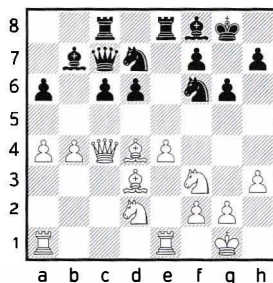
A good positional move, pressing White to determine his queenside pawn structure. Once that structure has been set, Black will more easily adjust his plans. Here 15... ♖c8 or 15... g6 are typical flexible Breyer moves similar to 15... ♗c7 and have been tried in practice by strong players.

In my previous game where I reached this position, three years earlier in the Spanish league, I allowed White to keep his queenside pawn structure flexible and could have got into trouble. I think analyzing this game will help readers understand the pros and cons of the position, so I will give it here. 15... ♗c7 16. ♗c2 ♖ac8 17. ♖b2 g6



The last three moves I made are standard Breyer moves. -Black keeps flexibility and is ready to open the centre. However White, not being pressed to define the queenside pawn structure, has an easier time making his plans. White could continue to keep his options open but he decides that the time is right to

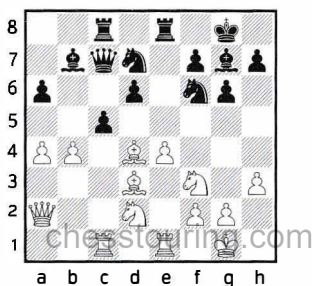
push on the queenside. 18.c4 White is taking space, so Black has to counter with a pawn break. 18...bxc4 19. ♗xc4 exd4 20. ♖xd4



20... ♖g7 this move counters the white bishop on the a1-h8 diagonal and aims for the ...c6-c5 pawn break

(Another possibility was going for another pawn break with 20...d5!? 21.exd5 ♖xd5. During the game I did not feel comfortable about this position, but in reality White cannot really profit from the weakness of the a1-h8 diagonal. The white pawn on b4 is a target and Black retains the possibility of the ...c6-c5 pawn break. The position is balanced.)

21. ♖ac1 Now it's time for Black to make a pawn break. 21...c5 22. ♗a2

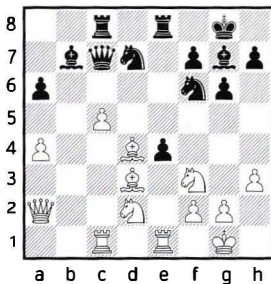


(22. ♖b3 was another option. There is a dynamic balance but the position looks easier to play for White.)

Not being able to work out the consequences of 22... ♖d5, I went for the central pawn break 22... d5? This pawn break is wrong and should have got Black in serious trouble! I terribly underestimated the tactics related to the a2-g8 diagonal.

[The placement of the white queen on a2 has a tactical drawback and I could have equalized with 22... ♖d5! (23... ♖xb4-is a big threat, gaining tempi.) 23. ♖c4 ♖xd4 (23... cxd4 24. ♖xd5 ♖xd5 25. ♖xd5 ♖xc1 26. ♖xc1 ♖xc1+ 27. ♖h2 ♖e5 to me looks risky for Black, but the silicon brain pronounces 0.00.) 24. ♖xd4 ♖7b6! 25. ♖xd5 ♖xd5 26. exd5 ♖xe1+ 27. ♖xe1 cxd4 and a draw is the most likely result.]

23. bxc5 dxe4



24. ♖g5?

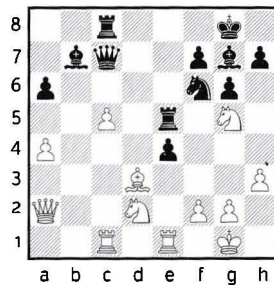
[24. ♖c4! was the way for White to continue and Black is in bad shape.

24... ♖e7 25. ♖g5 ♖f8 The only move for Black to stay in the game. (If 25... ♖f8 White has some different options, but a nice win is 26. ♖xf7+ ♖xf7 27. c6! ♖a8 28. ♖xf7 ♖xf7 29. ♖xf7+ ♖xf7 30. ♖c4! and Black will lose a piece and the game. 30... ♖g8 31. ♖b6+-) 26. c6 (26. ♖b2±) 26... ♖xc6 27. ♖ed1 Black is under multiple pins and should collapse here.]

24... ♖e5 now White is forced to part with one of his bishops and Black is back in the game 25. ♖xe5

(25. ♖c4 would still have kept some advantage for White. 25... ♖xc4 26. ♖xc4 ♖d5 27. ♖d2 ♖xc4 28. ♖xc4±)

25... ♖xe5



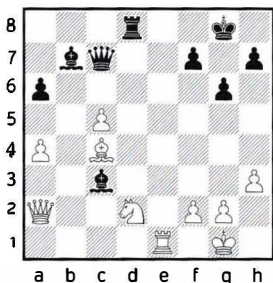
White is now at risk of getting tangled in different pins and the tactics are starting to work for Black. 26. ♖gxe4 ♖d8 27. ♖xf6+

(27. ♖c2! ♖e7 28. ♖xf6+ ♖xf6 29. ♖xe5 ♖xe5 30. c6 ♖xc6 31. ♖xc6 ♖xd3 32. ♖f3=)

27...♙xf6 28.♙c4? This blunders into deadly pins.

(28.♖c2 was necessary, though White is now on the defensive.)

28...♗xe1+ 29.♗xe1 ♙c3-+



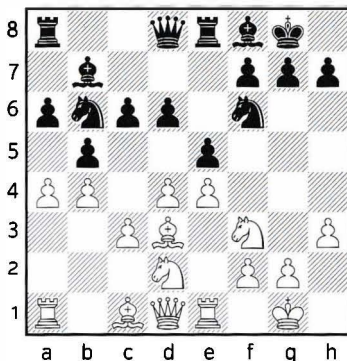
The power of the black bishop pair now rules! White will either get mated or suffer decisive material losses. 30.♗e2 ♖c6! 31.♗e4

(31.f3 loses a piece: 31...♖xc5+ 32.♙h1 ♗xd2 33.♙xf7+ ♙g7 34.♗xd2 ♙xd2-+; 31.♙xf7+ ♙g7-+ only transposes to the line above.)

31...♗d1+ 32.♙h2 ♙e5+ 33.f4

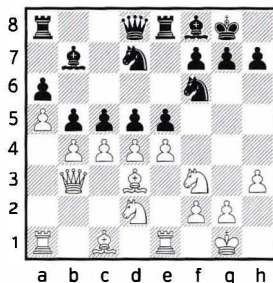
(33.g3 ♖xe4! 34.♗xe4 ♙xe4-+)

33...♙xf4+ 34.g3 ♖xc5! 35.♙xf7+ ♗f8 36.♗g2 ♙xe4 37.♙g8 ♙xg3+ 0-1 Perez Candelario, M (2575)-Sokolov, I (2646) Linares 2014.



16.axb5

In the event of 16.a5 ♗bd7 Black's tempo loss is well compensated for by the creation of a strong base to the a6/b5 pawn chain. This positional idea — often see it in similar positions and well worth remembering — is the essential idea behind the 15...♗b6 move. With the black pawn on a6 firmly supporting its colleague on b5, Black pushes ...c5 next and gaining good play. 17.♖b3 c5 18.c4 d5!



How often do you see a position like this? Many pawn captures to calculate and many crazy lines, the silicon brain going as usual for 0.00

evaluations. One wild line might go 19.cxb5

(19.exd5 cxd4 can be only better for Black.)

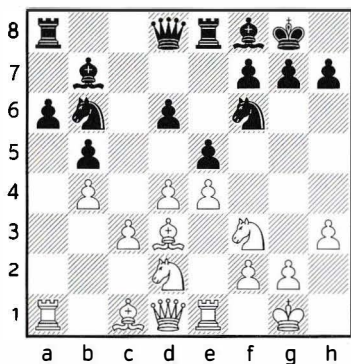
19...c4 20.♖xc4 dxe4 21.bxa6 ♔d5
22.dxe5 exd3

(22...exf3 23.♗b2→ looks promising for White.)

23.♙xd3 ♙c7 24.♘b6 ♗xf3 25.♗f4=.

Only a silicon brain can calculate those complications to a 0.00. In a human fight some huge swindle is likely to happen in such positions!

16...cxb5!?



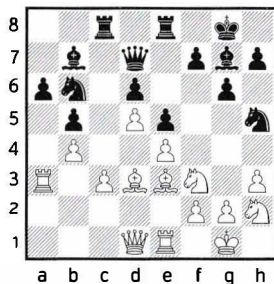
This positional decision sets the stage for the sacrificial theme we are exploring in this chapter.

16...axb5 is the main theoretical move, played by many famous players, Magnus Carlsen included. Black held his own in the majority of the

games. 16...cxb5 appealed to me because it had been less played. It sets the stage for our thematic piece sacrifice, which will soon appear, and it demands more “outside the box” decisions, a helpful scenario if one is trying to win with Black. Make no mistake — 16...cxb5 is a positionally sound idea, having received the Carlsen seal of approval on at least two occasions!

17.d5 ♖c8 18.♗b2

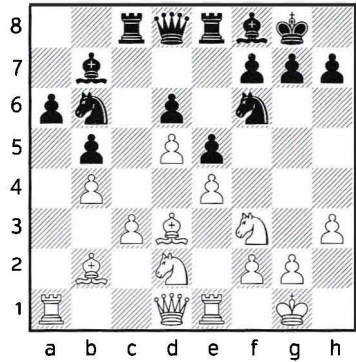
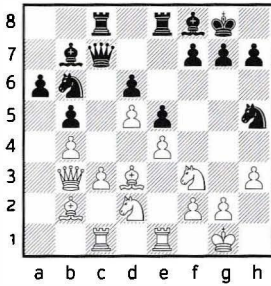
a) 18.♖a3 has been seen on the very top level. 18...♘h5 19.♘f1 g6
20.♘1h2 ♗g7 21.♗g5 ♙d7 22.♗e3



22...♘c4 (It is a bit puzzling that Magnus refrained from 22...♘xd5 23.exd5 e4 when Black has excellent play.) 23.♗xc4 ♖xc4 24.♘d2 ♖c7=

1/2–1/2 Anand,V (2800)–Carlsen,M (2826) Bilbao 2010.

b) 18.♙b3 ♙c7 19.♗b2 has been tried by Shirov. Black now gets active play based on the f7-f5 thrust, which helps to activate his bishop on b7. 19...♘h5 20.♖ac1

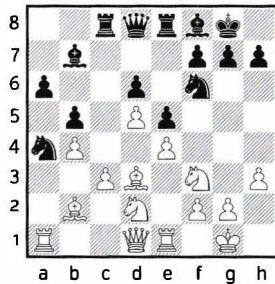
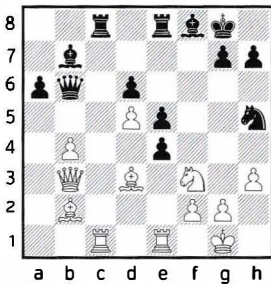


20...f5 [20...♖f4! was the right move order! 21. ♖f1 f5! Black is probably better now. 22.c4 bxc4 23. ♖xc4 fxe4 and now 24. ♖xb6 (24. ♖cxe5 leads to complications that are good for Black: 24... ♖xd5 25. ♖e3 ♖xg2 26. ♖xg2 ♖b7 and White is fighting for survival.) 24... ♖xb6 25. ♖c6 simply does not work due to 25... ♖xc6 26.dxc6+ d5-]. 21.c4! fxe4 (21...bxc4 22. ♖xc4 fxe4 now is not good for Black on account of 23. ♖xb6 ♖xb6

18... ♖c7!?

This was my idea, novel at the time. Black keeps his knight on f6 in order to maintain central sacrificial ideas.

a) The type of play I definitely did not want to enter was 18... ♖a4?

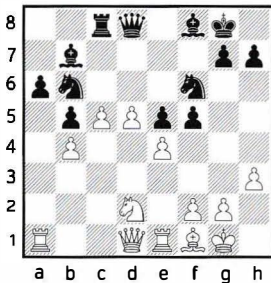


24. ♖c6! ♖xc6 25.dxc6+ ♖h8 26. ♖g5 g6 27. ♖xe4-). 22.cxb5 ♖d7 23. ♖xe4 ♖xd5 (23...axb5 24. ♖c6!↑) 24. ♖d1 ♖xc1 25. ♖xc1 axb5 26. ♖fg5 with a messy game. White eventually won in Shirov,A (2730)-Baramidze,D (2532) Germany 2010.

A serious positional mistake. 19. ♖xa4! bxa4 20. ♖xa4 For a minimal material investment White is ready to roll his queenside pawns, while Black has no counter in sight!

b) A standard Breyer-Zaitsev idea is to push ...f7-f5 in order to activate the bishop on b7, as in Shirov-Baramidze above. 18... ♖h5 with

...f5 to follow had been played some years earlier by Carlsen against Shirov, resulting in a tactical fireworks display. 19. ♖f1 (19. ♖b3±) 19...f5 20. ♗xe5 ♞xe5 Now we get a nice strategic lecture about the importance of the central pawn chain, and its destruction! 21.c4! ♗f6 22. ♖xe5 dxe5 23.c5

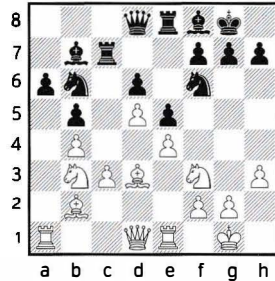


The white pawn chain needs to be destroyed! 23...fxe4! 24.d6! (24.cxb6 ♖xb4±) 24...♗a4 (The other way was 24...♗xd6!? 25.cxd6 ♞xd6∞) 25.♗c4 (25.♞xa4!? bxa4 26.♗c4 would have maintained White's pawn chain, but perhaps sacrificed too much for the luxury!) 25...♗xc5! removing the pawn chain after all! 26.bxc5 ♞xc5∞ and this sharp game ended as a draw after a long battle in Shirov,A (2749)-Carlsen,M (2826) Bilbao 2010.

19. ♖f1

White moves his bishop away from central tactical tricks in order to enable his knight to transfer from d2 to a5.

In the case of the immediate 19. ♗b3



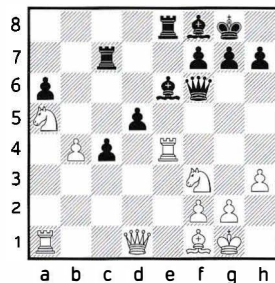
Black can apply standard tactics for these positions. 19...♗bxd5! 20.exd5

(20.♗a5 ♗f4 21.♗xb7 ♞xb7
22.♞xa6 d5±)

20...e4 21.♗a5!? White resorts to tactical play, but Black has enough resources

(In the event of 21. ♖e2 Black has different solutions, one being 21...exf3 22. ♖xf3 ♞xe1+ 23. ♞xe1 ♖xd5 24. ♖xd5 ♗xd5 25. ♞xa6 ♞c8 26. ♞a1 ♗xc3±.)

21... ♖xd5 22.c4 bxc4 23. ♖xf6 ♞xf6
24. ♖f1 ♖e6 25. ♞xe4 d5



26. ♞e1 chesstouring.com

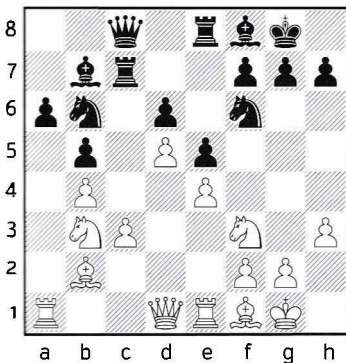
(26. ♖e2 leaves the a1-rook unprotected: 26... ♗xb4 27. ♖a4 ♖ec8)

26... ♖b8!

(26... ♗xb4? now does not work well: 27. ♖a4± ♖b8 28. ♖ab1 ♖e7 29. ♖c6 ♖e8 30. ♗xb4 ♖xb4 31. ♖xb4 ♖xc6 32. ♖d4 and the wonderfully placed knight on d4 ensures White a clear advantage here.)

27. ♖d4 ♗xb4 The future of White's knight on a5 — whether or not it gets to jump to c6 — is crucial to assess this position. Now this knight remains stranded on a5. 28. ♖e2 ♖b6

29... ♖c8 20. ♖b3



20... ♗a8

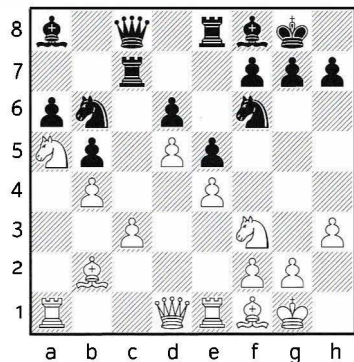
Preparing a central piece sacrifice “on my terms” — with the white knight placed on a5. If the white knight were still on b3 it could jump immediately to c5 when Black later advances his d-pawn (see the com-

ment on move 31. ♖c7 below). Compared to the 20... ♖a4? line below, the black bishop is no longer hanging on b7, so White now also needs to reckon with 21... ♖a4, should he refrain from 21. ♖a5.

a) The immediate sacrifice 20... ♖xe4 21. ♖xe4 ♖xd5∞ was definitely possible and I seriously considered it, but finally I decided I would be in a better situation with the white knight on a5.

b) 20... ♖a4? still runs into 21. ♖xa4 bxa4 22. ♖a5± and the black bishop hanging on b7 does not allow 22... a3 23. ♗a1 ♖xc3 because of the simple 24. ♖xb7 ♖xf3 25. ♖xf3 ♖xb7 26. ♖xa3 with a large White advantage.

21. ♖a5



21... ♖xe4! 22. ♖xe4 ♖xd5

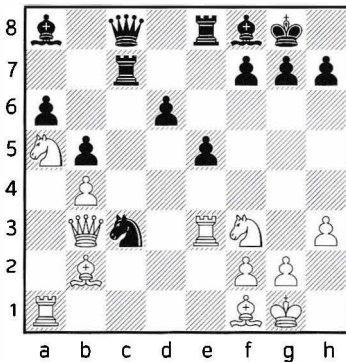
The position I was aiming for. Black gets three pawns for the piece. Fac-

tors in Black's favour include: Black hopes that White's a5-knight will remain out of play; Black's bishop on a8 should be strong; Black hopes to roll his central pawns; and the White b-pawn will also be a weakness, after the pawn on c3 gets eliminated next move. The future of White's knight on a5 — whether or not it enters the battle in time — will be an important factor.

23. ♖b3

23. ♖d2 ♘xc3 24. ♜e3 ♘d5 25. ♜b3 was also possible, but it seems less logical to me than the text since the white knight on a5 now really looks stranded.

23... ♘xc3 24. ♜e3



Let's take stock here. We have a material balance. It is important for Black to advance his d-pawn to d4, as it will take space and unveil the bishop on f8 to attack the white pawn weakness on b4. Again, it is

crucial for White to get his knight on a5 back into play and create tactical threats — tactical threats by the side with the extra piece are dangerous, one of our guiding rules here. If White gets to coordinate his pieces, Black may run into problems with his king safety, another of the general rules in those positions. In general it is a good idea for Black to trade his knight for one of the white bishops, if he can conveniently do so. Let's see how it goes.

24... ♘d5

The knight is heading for f4, creating threats on the h1-a8 diagonal and also getting ready to roll the central pawns.

a) 24... ♘d5?! 25. ♖a3 (25. ♖xc3 ♜xc3 26. ♜xc3 ♖d7) 25... ♘a4 26. ♜d1± will strand the black knight on a4, after White moves his bishop from b2 to a1, for no obvious reason.

b) 24... ♘a4 wanting to exchange the black knight for the white bishop is a good idea, but the position after 25. ♜xa4 bxa4 26. ♖xa4 was not clear to me, as I did not see how to conveniently roll my central pawns.

25. ♜ee1

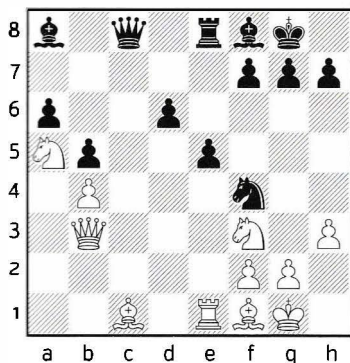
During the game I was optimistic here but actually the ensuing posi-

tions seem dynamically balanced, the computer yet again saying 0.00.

25... ♖f4 26. ♖ac1 ♖xc1

26... ♜e7 was definitely possible, but it looked a bit clumsy to me at the time.

27. ♙xc1



Forcing Black to move his knight from its active position.

27... ♘g6

27... ♖f5? is the kind of mistake Black should avoid as the white pieces now connect nicely with one another. 28. ♘d4! ♖f6 29. ♘dc6! A white knight on c6 is bad news for Black here. 29... ♜c8 30. ♙xf4 ♖xf4

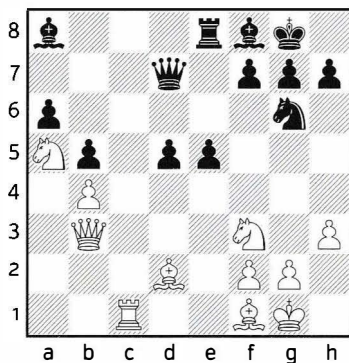
(30... exf4 31. ♜c1±)

31. g3± with ♙g2 to follow and Black can forget about rolling his central pawns.

28. ♙d2 d5

Part of the mission has been accomplished — the black central pawns are on the move! However, it came at a cost: White took over the c-file!

29. ♜c1 ♖d7

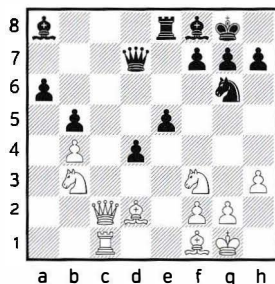


30. ♖c2

30.h4!? was an interesting option to disturb the black knight on g6. I would have played 30...h5, which is also the computer's suggestion, when it would not be clear who was going to profit from the inclusion of 30.h4 h5. In general it does fit into White's strategy to weaken the black king position.

30...d4 31. ♖c7

31. ♘b3 bringing the knight to c5 (and the reason why I included 20... ♙a8 before sacrificing) was perhaps the best, leading to a dynamically balanced position.



31...d3 32. ♖c5! ♙xc5 33. ♖xc5 e4

(33... ♙xf3? 34. gxf3 ♖h4 favors White: 35. ♙g2 ♖f5 36. ♖c6±.)

34. ♖d4! ♖e7 35. ♙c3

35...f5

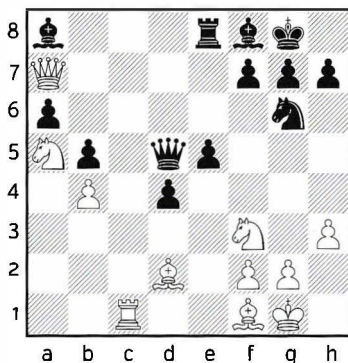
(35...f6 36. ♖d2 with ♙e1 to follow and Black will need to push ...f5 anyway.)

36. ♖d2 ♖f4 with an unclear game, both sides having something to hope for — Black has advanced his pawns far and, for the time being at least, “killed” White’s bishop on f1. White has a monster dark-squared bishop, a rook on the c-file, and control of the dark squares...

31... ♖d5

31... ♖e6!± was a good move. Tempo-gaining moves like 32. ♖g5?! made me nervous, but that knight would soon be forced to retreat: 32... ♖d5 33. ♖c6 h6 34. ♖f3 ♙e6±.

32. ♖a7!



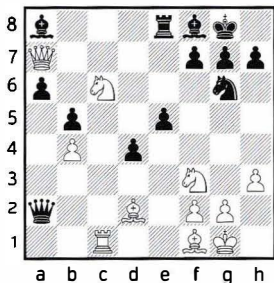
32... ♖a2?

Being worried about losing the a6-pawn and then having b5 hanging as well, I decided to create a direct threat. 32...d3! was the way to go. 33. ♖xa6 (33. ♙e3 ♙xb4 34. ♖xa6 ♙f8±) 33...e4 34. ♖e1 ♖e5 Although Black lost a pawn in the process, and now has only two for his sacrificed piece, he has domination here. The white knight on a5 is locked out, along with other pieces.

33. ♙e1?

Believing in Black’s threat will cost White the game!

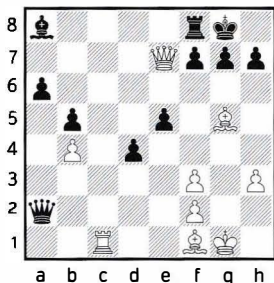
What was the drawback of Black’s last move? His potentially weak king’s position! White could have turned the tables with 33. ♖c6!



33...d4! is Black's best, and difficult to find in such a sudden turn of events! Black is still not out of the woods, as his weak king's position again plays the crucial role!

(33...xc6? 34. Bxc6 e4? 35. Bxa6 Bc2 36. Ba2+-; while my planned 33...e4? would have been hit by a thunderbolt: 34. xc5!! exf3 35. xc4 and Black gets mated!)

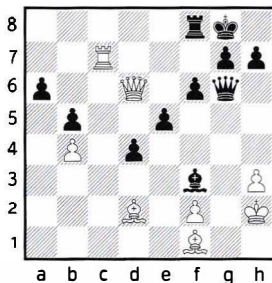
34. e7+! xe7 35. Bxe7 xf3+ 36. gxf3 Bf8 37. g5!



Mate in two — Bxf8 followed by Bc8 — is generally a good threat! 37...f6 38. d2! White has threats against the weak black king along the seventh and eighth ranks. 38...xf3

(38...xd2? 39. Bxe6+ Kh8 40. Bc8 Bxb4 41. Bxa6 Kxf3 42. Bxb5 Be7 43. Bb8+-)

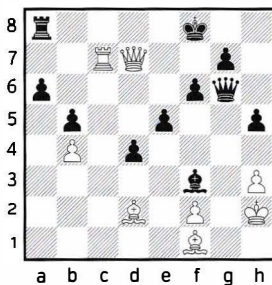
39. Bc7 Bf7 40. Bd6 Bg6+ 41. Kh2



White's king is safer than his black counterpart. A line that illustrates the black king's weakness here can go 41...Ba8?

(41...h5 42. Bxa6±)

42. Bxe6+ Kh8 43. Bd7 h5

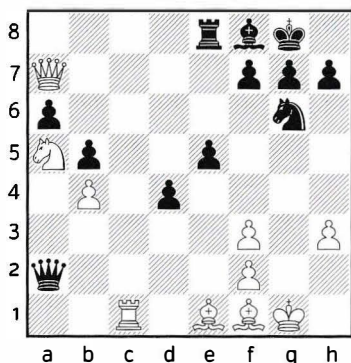


44. h4! The bishop enters the fray from f1. 44...Kg8 45. h3 Bf8 46. h6+ Kh8

(46... Bxe6 47. Bxe6+ Kh7 48. Bh3 should ultimately win for White.)

47. g5! g4 48. Bc8+-

33... ♖xf3 34.gxf3



34... ♖h4-+

Now all the white pieces are bad, the white king weak and in order to prevent mate White has to lose tons of pawns.

35. ♖d7

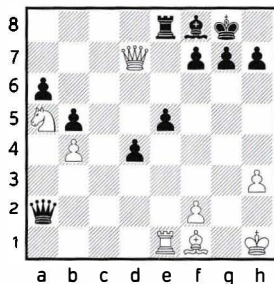
35. ♗g2 ♖e6-+

35... ♖xf3+

Black still needs to remain focused — avoiding some back-rank tricks — but the game has been decided. White's knight on a5 never managed to enter the battle.

36. ♗g2

36. ♗h1 ♖xe1 37. ♖xe1

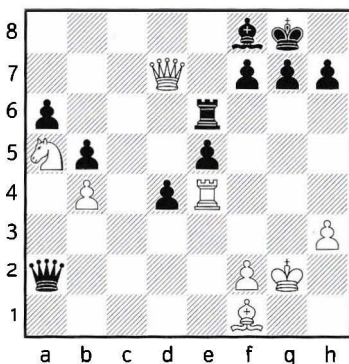


37... ♖xf2 is the way I would have played

(37... ♖e7 is the computer way. 38. ♖f5 ♖e6 39. ♖xe5 To a human it is not immediately obvious that this position is totally won for Black 39... ♖a1!-+ 40. ♖xe6 ♖xf1+ 41. ♗h2 fxe6 42. ♖xe6+ ♗h8 and White cannot make use of Black's weak back rank. 43. ♖f7 ♗d6+)

38. ♖c1 ♖e6 39. ♗g2 ♖g6 40. ♖d5 e4!
41. ♖xe4 ♖e6 42. ♖f3 ♖e1+ 43. ♖xe1
♖xe1+ 44. ♗f1 ♖xb4 45. ♖c6 ♖c3-+

36... ♖xe1+ 37. ♖xe1 ♖e6 38. ♖e4



38... ♖g6+ 39. ♖g4 ♜f6 40. ♔h1
 ♜xf2

40... ♜xf2-+ also wins.

41. ♖g1 ♜d6 42. ♗b7 d3 43. ♜c6 ♗f6
 44. ♙g2 d2 45. ♜d1 e4! 46. ♙xe4
 ♜c6 47. ♙g2 ♗e1+ 48. ♔h2 ♜e6 0-1

15

▷ J. Polgar

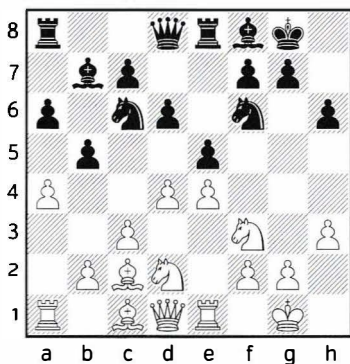
▷ I. Sokolov

Hoogeveen [3], 2003

1.e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♙b5 a6 4. ♙a4
 ♘f6 5. 0-0 ♙e7 6. ♜e1 b5 7. ♙b3
 ♘6 8. c3 0-0 9. h3 ♙b7 10. d4 ♜e8
 11. ♘bd2 ♙f8 12. a4 h6

In recent years 12... ♘a5 has estab-
 lished itself as an alternative main
 line here.

13. ♙c2



13...b4!?

A novel idea of mine, not previously
 seen in grandmaster practice, to get
 the game off well-trodden paths. My
 idea had not found any followers by
 the time of writing, though. I guess
 the positions coming after 15. d5 ♘e7
 16. c4 (see the comment on 15. ♙a4
 below) are a bit passive and there-
 fore do not appeal to Black players.
 Now looking back from some dis-
 tance, I do admit that a reasonable
 amount of wishful thinking had
 come into my preparation! Fortu-
 nately for me, Judit did not react in
 the best way and I secured good dy-
 namic play.

The main line 13... exd4 14. cxd4 ♘b4
 15. ♙b1 c5 16. d5 ♘d7 was the subject
 of a fierce debate in the epic Kasparov-Karpov World Championship
 matches.

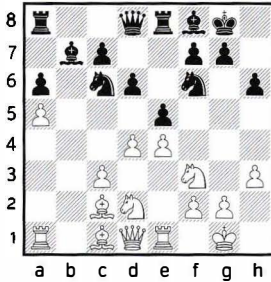
14. a5

One of the logical White responses.
 White takes the a5 square from the
 black knight on c6, gains the option
 of ♙a4 (which actually happened on
 the next move) and in general takes
 space on the queenside.

In the event of 14. d5 bxc3 15. bxc3
 ♘a5 16. c4 c6 was my idea at the
 time, hoping to get a good version
 of known positions.

14... ♜b8 chesstouring.com

A standard Spanish developing move, with prophylactic elements. Black is not really ready to open the centre. 14...bxc3 15.bxc3



15...exd4

(15...d5 16.♖b1! ♜xa5 17.♜xe5 dxe4 18.♖xb7! ♜xb7 19.♜xe4 ♜d6 20.♜c5→ The white knights are dominating, Black is passive, White has here considerably more than just compensation.)

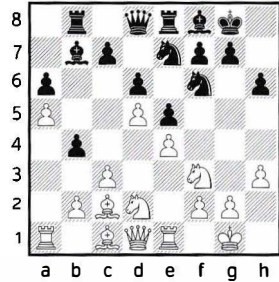
16.cxd4 ♜b4 17.♙a4 ♖e7 18.♖b1 c5 19.d5 Black's pieces are not well coordinated and if he decides to grab a pawn by 19...♜d3 20.♖e3 ♜xc1 21.♙xc1 ♙xa5 22.♙c2 with ♜c4 to follow, White has easy play and, again, more than just compensation.

15. ♙a4

A logical move, though probably not White's best. Black's rook on e7 will be placed less clumsily than it appears. In this position it is crucial for White to take space by pushing d4-d5; c3-c4 and then maintaining

the central e4-d5-c4 pawn chain, which dooms Black to passive play!

15.d5 ♜e7



(15...bxc3 16.bxc3 ♜a7 17.c4 c5 is passive for Black.)

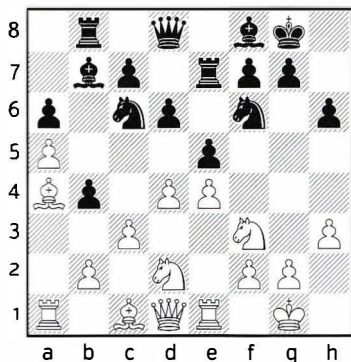
16.c4! was White's best. Black does not have a dynamic way to deal with White's central e4-d5-c4 pawn chain and will have to endure passive defence. I guess this is the reason my idea did not find followers: White has the space advantage, Black is passive.

a) 16.♜c4 c6 opens up the position, giving Black active play.

b) 16.cxb4 leads to fine, dynamic play for Black. 16...c6 17.♙a4 (17.dxc6 ♜xc6 18.♙a4 d5 Only Black can be better here.) 17...cxd5 18.♙xe8 ♙xe8 leads to great play for the sacrificed exchange and actually is the type of play my wishful-thinking preparation had been based on!

chesstouring.com

15...♖e7



White's a5-pawn is now hanging, and she does not have a convenient way to close the centre.

The passive 15...♖d7? 16.d5 ♜e7 17.c4 leads to a clear White advantage.

16. ♙b3

16.d5 bxc3 17.dxc6

(If 17.bxc3 Black grabs the white a-pawn with 17...♜xa5.)

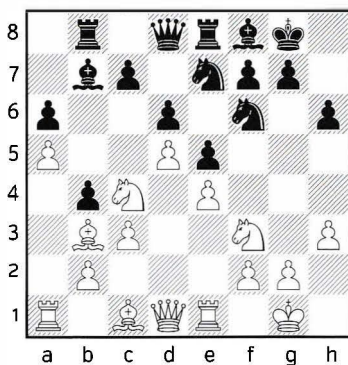
17...cxd2 18. ♙xd2 ♙c8 leads to the sort of sharp positions I was hoping to get.

16... ♞e8

This allows White to conveniently close the centre.

Black's best was to open up the centre. 16...bxc3 17.bxc3 exd4 18.cxd4 ♜b4 Black has active counter-play. 19.e5 dxe5 20.dxe5 ♜fd5 21.♜e4 ♞e8 (or 21... ♞e6∞) The game is unclear.

17.d5 ♜e7 18.♜c4

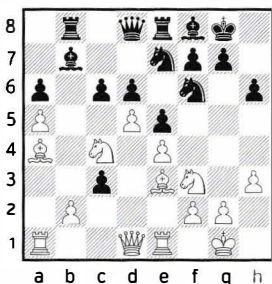


This allows Black to open up the centre, obtaining active play. I now became very enthusiastic and went for the thematic piece sacrifice we are dealing with in this chapter! However, Black here has at his disposal other ways to open up the centre and generate active play. It is interesting that Judit refrained from 18.c4 with advantage to White, along the lines of the 15.d5 ♜e7 16.c4 analysis above.

18...bxc3

Preparing the stage for the thematic central piece sacrifice. The white pawn on c3 will be hanging and the b-file will be open. The traditional way for Black to open up the centre in similar Spanish positions is 18...c6. The centre now becomes open, play is rather dynamic with many tactical possibilities, and the chances are probably balanced. I will give some possible lines. 19.dxc6

[19. ♖a4?! gives Black encouragement to sacrifice an exchange, the kind of wishful-thinking positions I had envisaged in my preparation. Now 19...cxd5! leads to an advantage for Black. (19...bxc3 is not a precise move order as White is not forced to recapture and can just play 20. ♖e3!



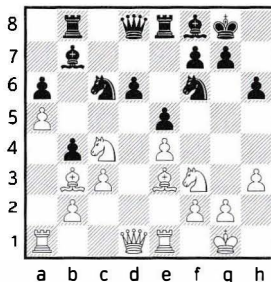
Now Black can choose between different material imbalances, but White's chances are probably to be preferred. 20...cxd5! Sacrificing the queen is probably Black's best (20...cxb2 21. ♖b1 ♗xe4 (21...cxd5 sacrifices the queen in an inferior version to 20...cxd5: 22. ♖b6 dxc4 23. ♖xd8 ♖exd8 24. ♖xb2±.) 22. ♖b6 ♖c8 23. ♖xe4 ♗xd5 24. ♖b3 it is not going to be easy for Black to move his pawns, so White has better chances here.) 21. ♖b6 dxc4 22. ♖xd8 ♖exd8 23. bxc3 ♗xe4 It is not easy to assess this material imbalance, but probably it is a bit better for White.]

20. exd5 bxc3 21. ♖xe8 ♗xe8
22. ♗b6

(22. bxc3 ♗xd5?)

22...cxb2 23. ♖xb2 ♗c8! After exchanging the white knight on b6, Black will play ♗e8-f6 and collect the white pawn on d5)

19... ♗xc6 20. ♖e3



This leads to sharp play, with Black not being worse. 20...d5! This type of liberating move, when it is possible to play it, normally solves Black's problems in similar positions.

(20...bxc3 21. ♖b6 ♖e7 22. bxc3±)

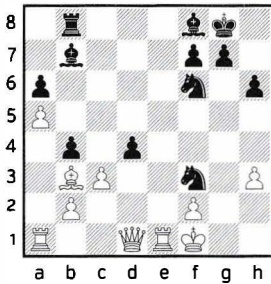
21. exd5

(21. ♖b6? loses too much material for a queen: 21...dxc4 22. ♖xd8 ♖exd8 23. ♖c2 cxb3?)

21... ♗xd5 leads to complications and ultimately a likely draw.

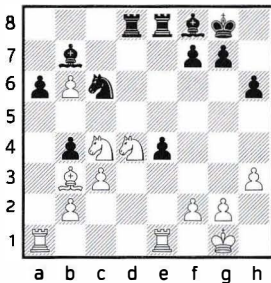
[If 21... ♖xd5 White needs to exploit tactical opportunities using the a2-g8 diagonal, but Black has resources. 22. ♗cxe5 (22. ♖d4! is an interesting idea leading to nice

complications. 22...*exd4* 23.*♖ce5*
♗xe5 24.*♗xe5* ♜*xg2+* 25.*♔xg2*
♗xe5+ 26.*♕f1* *♗f3*



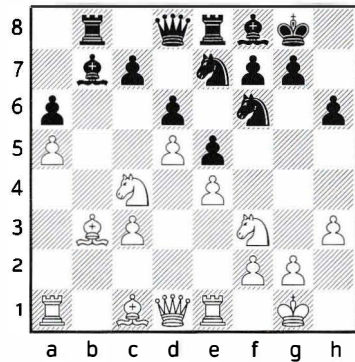
and the computer evaluation of
 this crazy position is “equal”!)
 22...♜*xd1* 23.*♔xf7+* ♕*h7* 24.*♔g6+*
♕g8 25.*♗exd1* ♗*xe5* 26.*♗xe5* ♗*xe5*
 27.*♔f4* ♗*be8* 28.*cxb4* ♗*b5* 29.*♔xe8*
♗xe8 30.*♗d8* ♗*xb4* 31.*♔e5* ♕*f7*
 A draw looks like the probable out-
 come here.]

22.*♔b6* ♗*xb6* 23.*axb6* *e4* 24.*♜xd8*
 ♗*bx8* 25.*♗d4*



25...*bxc3!* The b4-square is needed
 for the black rook. 26.*♗xc6* *cx2!*
 and again tactics using the a2-g8
 diagonal do not promise White
 more than equality. 27.*♗4e5* *bx-*
a1 ♜ 28.*♔xf7+* ♕*h7* 29.*♗xa1* ♔*c5=*
 30.*♔g6+* ♕*g8* 31.*♔f7+=.*

19.*bxc3*

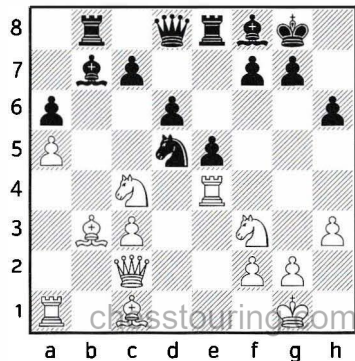


19...♗*xe4!*

The consequent follow up to the
 previous move.

19...*c6* now does not achieve the
 same aim as it did a move earli-
 er because of 20.*♔a3!* ♗*g6* 21.*♗b6*
 and White has a grip on the posi-
 tion. (The pawn grab 21.*♔d6* ♔*xd6*
 22.*dxc6* ♔*xc6* 23.*♗xd6* is not really
 clear, as after 23...♗*f8* Black plays
 ...♜*c7* with ...♗*bd8* to follow.)

20.*♗xe4* ♗*xd5* 21.*♜c2*

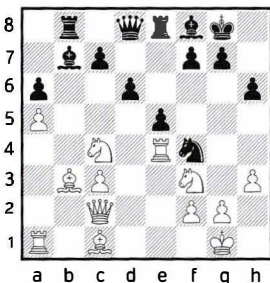


This is the position I was aiming for with the sacrifice, so it's a good moment to take stock. As in our previous two examples Black has a formidable pawn centre and a strong bishop on b7 as compensation for his sacrificed knight.

White's chances will be related to the potential weakness of the black king, as outlined in our rules. Black at this particular moment is facing a serious practical dilemma — should he (a) grab the pawn on c3, establishing material equality and potentially three connected rolling pawns in the centre, or (b) focus on active play and maximum piece coordination. Unable to figure out the consequences of 21...♖f4, I decided to play it safe and establish material equality by snatching the third pawn.

21...♖xc3

Taking the third pawn was definitely not a mistake, but in practical terms White would have been facing tougher decisions should Black have gone for 21...♖f4!



Black's king is now much safer, compared to the game. Play is very sharp and in human over-the-board play it is very easy for both sides to err here. I will give some lines to illustrate the immense complications. 22.♖e3 This is probably White's best. Black now has a choice between expanding his pawn centre, a good thing to do according to our set of rules here, or going for wild complications.

[22.♖xf4 exf4 23.♙xf4 leads to Black's advantage, as he conveniently wins a pawn while damaging the white pawn structure. 23...♗f6 (After 23...♙xf3 24.gxf3 ♗h4 25.♙g3 ♗xh3 26.♙a4 ♖e7 27.♙c6 h5 the engines give 0.00, but Black looks better.) 24.♙g3 ♙e4! 25.♗d1 ♙xf3 26.gxf3 ♗xc3]

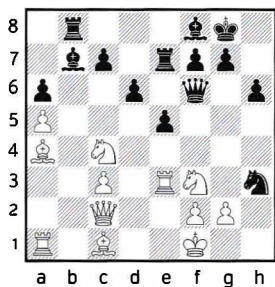
22...♗f6 this leads to some sharp computer-type lines where it is easy for humans to blunder.

(Expanding the pawn centre by pushing his pawns 22...e4 23.♖d4 d5 is fine for Black as he gains space. 24.♖b2 c5 25.♖e2 ♖e6 It is not easy for White to deal with Black's rolling pawn centre here.)

23.♙a4 is probably White's best, likely to lead to complications resulting in move repetitions.

[23. ♖cd2 e4! 24. ♖xe4 (24. ♖e1 d5) 24... ♖xh3+ 25. ♖h2 (25.gxh3 ♖xe4) 25... ♖xe4 26. ♖xe4 ♖xe4 27. ♖xe4 Now Black grabs the third pawn and is at least okay. 27... ♖xb3 (27... ♖xf2 also looks fine.) 28. ♖xh3 ♖xc3 29. ♖a4 The only move for White avoid losing material; only Black can be better here.]

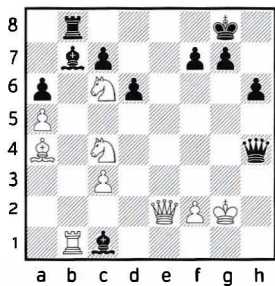
23... ♖xh3+ 24. ♖f1 ♖e7



25. ♖fxe5! ♖f4 26. ♖c6 ♖h4 27. ♖g1 Now we have many hanging pieces and many tricks. 27... ♖xg2! 28. ♖xe7 ♖xe7 29. ♖e2

(29. ♖b1 ♖f8 30. ♖xg2 ♖xc4)

29... ♖g5! 30. ♖xg2 ♖xc1 31. ♖b1

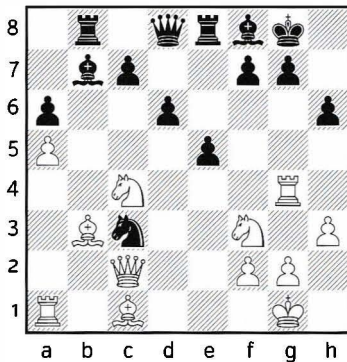


31... ♖e3!?

(31... ♖g5+ 32. ♖f1 ♖h4=)

32. ♖b4 ♖c5 33. ♖xb7 and now Black has to force a draw: 33... ♖g5+ 34. ♖f1 ♖c1+=.

22. ♖g4!



Judit correctly senses that her focus should be on the black king. The position is razor-sharp, probably dynamically balanced, but I would say that in practical play it is easier to be White here. White is developing tactical threats against the black king, and Black needs to neutralize them by pushing his central pawns and taking space.

22. ♖e1 ♖b5 would not target the black king so Black has easy play.

22... ♖xf3!

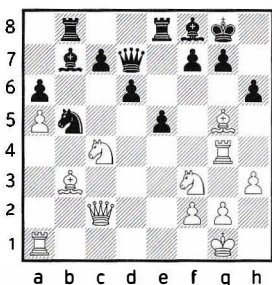
White is starting to get too many attackers on the kingside — ♖xe5 ideas are starting to surface — and this knight needs to be eliminated.

22...♖b5 I did consider, but once I saw that White had at his disposal moves like 23. ♕g5! it instantly killed any consideration of letting the white knight on f3 live. Actually, though, Black's situation is less dramatic than I thought at the time.

a) 23. ♕b2 is also possible, as now 23...c5? hoping to jump the knight to d4 (23...♕xf3 24.gxf3± is Black's only defence — but then why not eliminate the white knight on f3 at once?) loses to 24.♖cxe5! 25...♕d5 26.♖xf7!+-.

b) 23. ♕xh6?? is a blunder due to 23...♕xf3 24.gxf3 ♖d4 and Black has a large advantage.

23...♞d7!



The only defence!

[23...♞c8? loses to 24.♖cxe5! White has typical Spanish attacking themes here. 24...dxex5 (24...♞xe5 25.♖xe5 dxex5 26.♕xh6 ♖d4 27.♕xf7+ ♗xf7 28.♞g6+ ♗g8 29.♕xg7 ♞f5 30.♞h6+-)

25. ♕xh6+- and Black soon gets mated.]

24. ♕xh6!

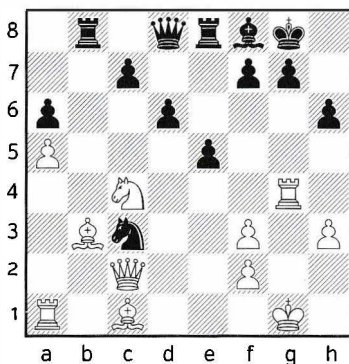
(24.♖cxe5?! is now not effective as the crucial f7-square is protected by the black queen. 24...♞xe5 25.♖xe5 dxex5 26.♕xh6 ♖d4 f7 27.♞a2 ♕xg2 28.♕xf7+ ♞xf7 29.♗xg2 ♞b3 30.♕e3 ♞d5+ Now Black is the one having the attack..)

24...♕xf3 25.♖xe5! (This is the drawback of 23...♞d7!) 25... ♕xg4

(25...♞xe5?? allows standard mating theme 26.♞xg7+ ♕xg7 27.♞g6+-)

26.♖xd7 ♕xd7 27.♕e3 Technically speaking, material is equal. White probably has better chances as the black king might be weak.

23.gxf3



White's bishop pair is strong and one of the bishops needs to be re-

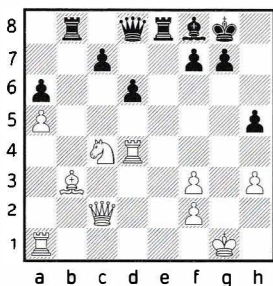
moved! Again, following our rule: trade a black knight for a white bishop if you can.

23... ♖e2+!

23... ♖b5 24. ♗b2 looks rather unpleasant for Black. He will still need to eliminate the white bishop pair, but under worse circumstances than a move earlier. 24...h5 is Black's best, though nobody is really happy to make such a pawn moves here. 25. ♖e4!

(25. ♖g3 ♖d4 26. ♗xd4 exd4 leads to positions that the computer defends successfully, showing many 0.00 lines, but in human play is definitely desirable to be White.)

White will bring his rook from a1 to the g-file, while also pushing f3-f4 to open diagonals for his bishops. Black is forced to give up a pawn in order to eliminate the white bishop pair. 25... ♖d4 26. ♗xd4 exd4 27. ♖xd4

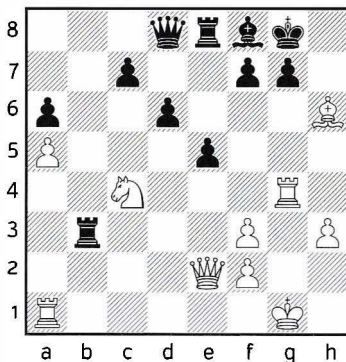


Now Black is able, thanks to the hanging white bishop on b2, to seize

the moment for 27...d5! 28. ♖e3 c6! This restricts the white bishop on b3, but still White has the material advantage and better chances here. 29.f4± In the event of 23...h5, trying to follow the game plan but keep the h-pawn, I did not like the positions after 24. ♖g2 ♖e2+ 25. ♗xe2 ♖xb3∞ 26. ♗g5 ♗d7 27. ♖d2! ♖b5 28. ♖e4 when White has an unpleasant attack.

24. ♗xe2 ♖xb3 25. ♗xh6

Black's pawn on h6 has been lost, but White's monster light-squared bishop has been destroyed. However White's attack is far from over and Black must be in hurry to use his only asset — his central pawns! So, Black should hurry to push the central pawns and seize space.



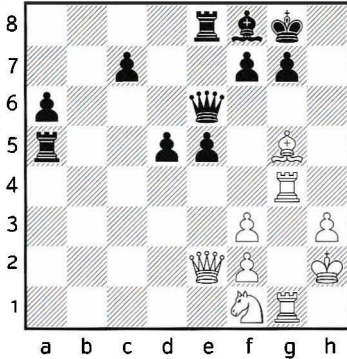
25... ♗f6

The immediate 25...d5 does not work that well after 26. ♖e3 ♖b4 27. ♖g3 with White on the attack.

26. ♖d2 ♜b5 27. ♙g5 ♚e6 28. ♖h2

Now Black is just in time to push his central pawns!

28...d5! 29. ♜ag1 ♜xa5 30. ♗f1

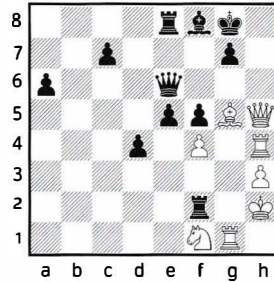


A critical moment — which pawn to push? It seemed to me obvious that the d-pawn needs to be advanced, creating the ... ♜a2 threat. About the f-pawn I was not so sure, being reluctant to touch pawns around my king.

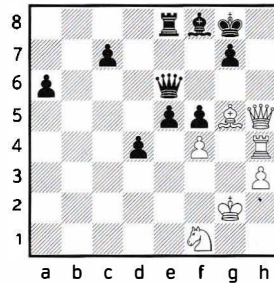
30...d4

a) Actually Black's best was probably 30...f5! with dynamic balance and chances for both sides. 31. ♜h4 (31. ♜ag2 f4! shows the point behind 30...f5! — the white knight on f1 is now well controlled, and it takes White extra time to bring his knight into the attack. 32. ♙h4 ♚d6!∞ Black is preparing ... ♜e6 33. ♚c2 ♜e6∞.) 31...d4 32.f4 ♜a2 33. ♚h5 During the game I reject-

ed such lines, assuming that Black gets mated and not trying to calculate further. However, the position is probably equal. 33... ♜xf2+



34. ♜g2 [34. ♖g3? is a losing blunder: 34...exf4+! and Black wins 35. ♙xf4 (35. ♖xf2 runs into mate: 35... ♚a2+ 36. ♖f3 ♚e2+ 37. ♖xf4 ♙d6+ 38. ♖xf5 ♚e6 mate.) 35... ♜xf4! 36. ♜xf4 ♙d6-+ and White is the one getting mated here.] 34... ♜xg2+ 35. ♖xg2

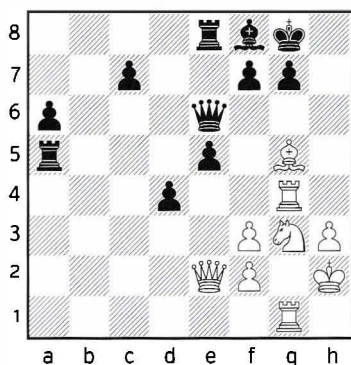


According to computer assessment this is an easy draw, with more than one safe line. The human line is 35... ♙c5! bringing his bishop into play. Black now threatens perpetual check (35...exf4 36. ♚h7+ ♖f7 37. ♜xf4 ♚d5+ 38. ♖g1 ♜e5 should also lead to equality.) 36. ♙f6 (36. ♚h7+ ♖f7 37. ♜h6 ♚d5+ 38. ♖h2

♖a2+=) 36...♗d5+ 37.♘h2 ♖a2+
38.♘h1 ♗d5+=;

b) 30...c5? is not a great pawn to push because it does not restrict the white knight and does not threaten ...♖a2. 31.♗d2 (31.♖g3!? f5 32.♖h4 also looks promising for White.) 31...♖a1 32.♗h6 g6 33.♗xf8 ♘xf8 34.♗c3 ♖a2 35.♗xc5±.

31.♖g3

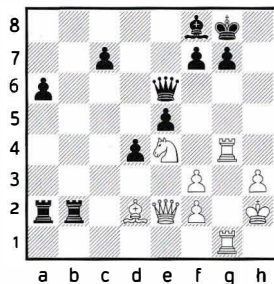


Another critical moment. Being worried by the white pieces concentrating on the kingside, I finally decided to push my f-pawn — but now is the wrong moment!

31...f5?

The first real black mistake, missing White's reply.

Correct was focusing on second-rank counter-play and the game could have been saved. 31...♖a2 32.♗d2 ♖b8! 33.♖e4 ♖bb2



White apparently does not have more than a draw. 34.f4 exf4 35.♗d3 c5! 36.♖g5 ♗g6 37.♖e4 ♖e6= Such a cold-blooded defence is not easy for humans!

32.♗d2!

In such positions Judit Polgar does not need too many chances to score — one defensive slip was usually enough! Now White secures a winning advantage.

32...fxg4

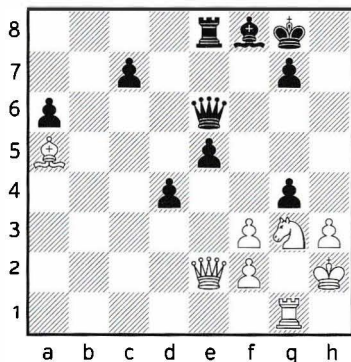
Trying second-rank counter-play no longer works for Black. 32...♖a2 33.♖g5 ♗b4 34.♖xf5 and White wins: 34...♗xd2 35.♖xg7+ ♘h8

(or 35...♘f8 36.♖g8+ ♗xg8 37.♖xg8+ ♘xg8 38.♗c4+-)

36.♖g4+-.

32...d3 33.♗e1 fxg4 34.♗xa5 gxf3 35.♖e4±

33.♗xa5±



White has light-square control, and the g-file attack continues. Black could have offered better resistance, but White's advantage is becoming decisive.

33... ♖d5

33... gxf3 34. ♕e4±

34. ♘e4 ♙e6 35. ♗xg4 c5 36. ♘d2 e4?

Panic in time trouble and a difficult position.

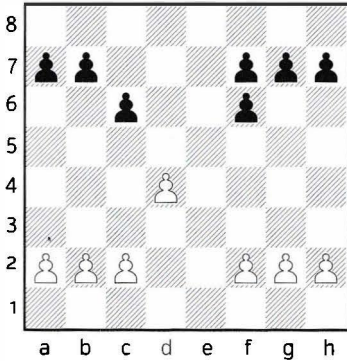
36... ♖a2±

37. fxe4+- d3 38. exd5

38. ♖e3+- also wins.

38... ♗xe2 39. ♖g2 ♙e5 40. ♘e4 ♖f7
41. ♗f4+ ♖e8 42. d6 ♙d5 43. ♙c3
♙xd6 44. ♗f5 1-0

CHAPTER III. THE CARO-KANN DOUBLED F-PAWN



Understanding the strategic ideas of the Caro-Kann lines with 4... ♖f6 5. ♗xf6 exf6, when Black has doubled f-pawns, was rather a lengthy process for me. I remember walking around the tables at the Wijk aan Zee A tournament in 1991, and being surprised when I saw Yasser Serirawan playing this line as Black against Alexander Khalifman.

“What is Black doing?” I wondered. “Who wants to voluntarily damage his pawn structure as early as on move four, and not even get the Bishop pair for it?” The game itself was a smashing success for Khalifman, winning in a mere 20 moves. “Not entirely surprising against such an opening line,” I thought at the time. My general opinion had been formed and I did not think of this line again for the next 25 years.

In the 2014-2016 period I lived in Dubai, UAE, working as a national coach, mainly being busy with Salem AR Saleh, their best player. He won the Asian continental individual championship during my tenure.

At the Baku Olympiad, just after concluding my UAE job, I met Salem again and he showed me his game against Bologan, played the previous day. Salem played Black and the game was an interesting draw featuring the Caro-Kann 4... ♖f6 5. ♗xf6 exf6 line we are considering here. Salem AR Saleh is a dynamic player and any kind of passive opening choice is a no go for him, so I was rather surprised by his opening decision. Discussing his opening choice, Salem mentioned that the line had been used by the great fighter Viktor Kortschnoj at the peak of his career!

This information made me research the case and to my surprise I found one of my favorite World Champions, Alexander Alekhine, defending the Black side too! Studying Kortschnoj’s games and the way he handled the resulting middlegames

in this line forced me to change my opinion. The resulting middlegame positions are complex and a viable alternative to the regular lines for Black.

Giving a set of rules is never an easy job, but I will try to give some guidelines here to help the reader assess the pros and cons:

- Black has an extra pawn on the kingside, but nevertheless the position of the black king is not always safe.
- White can aim at the position of the black king by setting up the ♖d3 and ♜c2 battery, in an attempt to provoke a weakness, or following Khalifman's play.
- White finds difficulties to advance his queenside majority in a convenient way.
- Exchanging Black's c6-pawn for White's d4-pawn, when Black pushes ...c6-c5, is in general fine for Black as he gets extra counter-play options.
- If the position allows it, Black can start advancing his kingside pawn majority against the white king, as carried out by Kortschnoj.

I hope the two illustrative games in this chapter will help the reader to understand these plans and strategies.

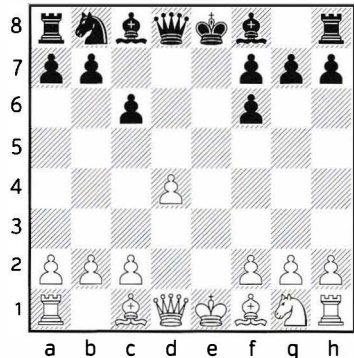
16

▷ A. Khalifman

▷ Y. Seirawan

Wijk aan Zee [9], 1991

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♗xe4
♗f6 5.♗xf6+ exf6



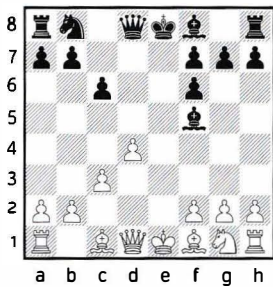
White has here three main plans: (a) c3, ♗d3, ♗e2 development, (b) ♗c4 or (c) ♗f3, ♗e2. In this game we will deal with the (a) lines, while for (b) and (c) please see Torre-Kortschnoj, the second game in the chapter.

6.c3

White aims for a quick ♗d3, ♗e2, ♜c2 hitting the black h7-pawn and asking Black to decide between the ...h6 and ...g6 pawn pushes.

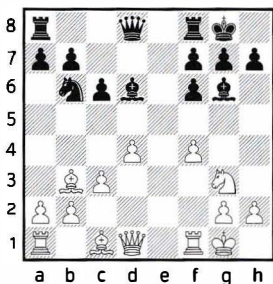
6... ♗d6

Black can stop the white plan by playing 6... ♗f5!?



and it has been tried at a high level. It looks to me that White has a plus but Black has had good practical results. I will give here two recent top-level examples. 7. $\text{d}3$

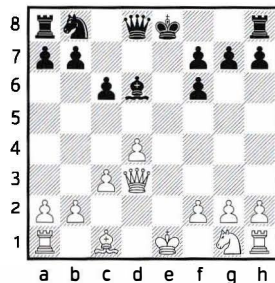
(The following line at first glance clearly looks like causing problems for Black. 7. $\text{d}e2$ $\text{d}d6$ 8. $\text{d}g3$ Chasing the black bishop looks logical for White and after 8... $\text{d}g6$ 9. $\text{d}c4$ 0-0 10. 0-0 $\text{d}d7$ 11. $f4$ the black bishop seems to be locked up, but following 11... $\text{d}b6$ 12. $\text{d}b3$



Black has a computer-type solution in 12... $f5$! It looks a bit strange but the computer engines say it's about equal. I guess White's problem is that his knight on g3 is not great either. One grandmaster-level example went well for Black: 13. $\text{d}f3$

$\text{d}e8$ 14. $\text{d}d2$ $\text{d}c7$ 15. $\text{d}ae1$ $\text{d}xe1$ 16. $\text{d}xe1$ $\text{d}d5$ 17. $\text{d}c2$ $\text{d}d7$ 18. $h3$ $\text{d}f6$! Aiming for the e4 square. 19. $\text{d}h2$ $h5$! The white knight on g3 can be disturbed at any moment and then the black knight jumps to e4. Black's chances are better here and he went on to win in Alsina Leal,D (2531)-Salgado Lopez,I (2615) Lin-ares 2015)

7... $\text{d}xd3$ 8. $\text{d}xd3$ $\text{d}d6$

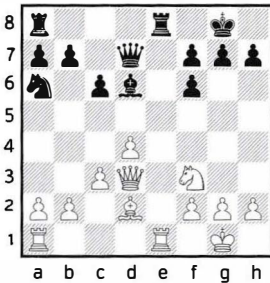


9. $\text{d}f3$

[In a recent top-level example White went for the queen swap: 9. $\text{d}e3+$ $\text{d}e7$ (I do not like the way White handled this position and think that he should have gone for a dark-squared bishop trade, for example 10. $\text{d}xe7$ with 11. $\text{d}e2$ and 12. $\text{d}f4$ to follow.) 10. $\text{d}f3$ $\text{d}d7$ 11. $\text{d}xe7+$ $\text{d}xe7$ 12. $\text{d}e3$ $\text{d}b6$ 13. 0-0 $\text{d}d7$ 14. $\text{d}he1$ Black will now secure his knight on the central d5 post. 14... $\text{d}d5$ The threat is 15... $\text{d}xe3$, changing the pawn structure in Black's favour. 15. $\text{d}c2$ White gets away from a possible pin on the h6-c1 diagonal, so

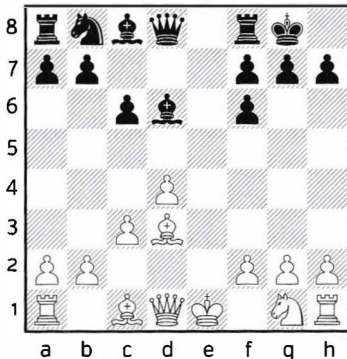
that he can recapture on e3 with his rook. 15...b5! Now the black knight is safely ensconced on d5. 16. ♖c1 a5 17.g3 a4! 18.a3 h5 Black's dominant knight on d5 is safely secured, while White's queenside pawn majority is as good as dead and Black's kingside pawn majority is on the move. Black was better in 1/2-1/2 Wei Yi (2707)-Rapport,R (2717) Yancheng 2016.]

9...0-0 10.0-0 ♖a6 11. ♔d2 ♜e8
12. ♜fe1 ♜d7



This type of position is, I think, critical to assess for players willing to try 6...♔f5. White has a small plus.

7. ♔d3 0-0



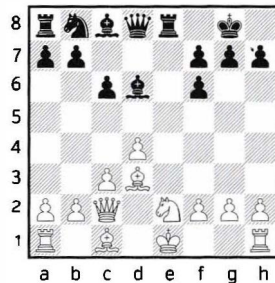
8. ♖e2!

A sneaky move order by White and Black already has to be careful!

8. ♜c2 is the more common move order for White but it does not offer Black the possibility to go astray, as Seirawan did in this game. 8... ♜e8+

(If Black is worried about the 11. ♖g3 line below, he could try 8... h6! 9. ♖e2 ♜c7. The white knight cannot move to g3 here because of 10... ♜e8+ interfering with White's regular development, while 10.0-0 loses the h2-pawn with check. So White has to play 10.h3 and this is probably the best move order for Black as it more or less forces h3 and so avoids lines where White's knight moves to g3 with the pawn still on h2.)

9. ♖e2

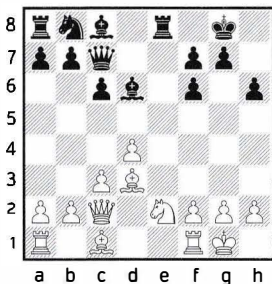


How should Black react? 9...h6

(9...g6?! looks logical for Black, but is actually rather risky as White is quick with his h-pawn push,

followed by castling queenside. White's attack then looks faster, while the white king is safer than Black's. *10.h4!* Black's problem here is that *10...h5?* blunders into the simple *11. ♖xg6* so Black cannot stop White from pushing *h4-h5* next and opening the h-file. In the subsequent attacks on opposite wings White's chances are better.)

10.0-0 ♖c7

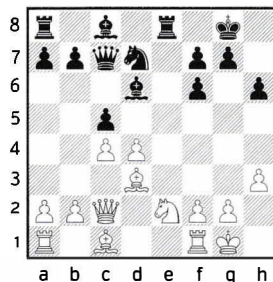


11.h3 This is actually the most common move here and we get to the move order suggested by *8...h6!* for Black above. I recently had a game of my own here

[*11. ♖g3!*? can be unpleasant for Black here. Black can play *11...c5* trying to follow the rule that it is good for Black in these positions to exchange his c-pawn for White's pawn on d4, but with *12.d5!* White avoids the exchange. (*12.dxc5 ♗xc5* is indeed okay for Black, for example *13. ♖h5 ♗g4 14. ♗f4 ♗d6 15. ♗xd6 ♖xd6 16. ♖g3 ♖c6* looks about equal.) *12...♗d7* (*12...c4?* unfortunately fails tactically to

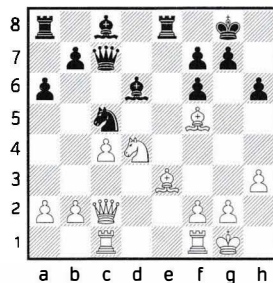
13. ♖a4.) *13.c4* The position looks better for White.]

11...♗d7 12.c4 c5!



Again Black is following the rule that exchanging the black c-pawn for the white d-pawn is fine for Black. *13.d5* now leads to more dynamic play for Black, compared to the line with *11. ♖g3*, since the white pawn on *h3* offers Black tactical ideas

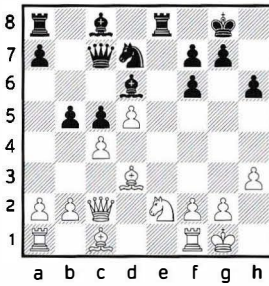
[*13. ♗e3 a6* (*13...cxd4 14. ♖xd4 a6 15. ♗e4 ♖c5* with an equal game is probably more precise for Black.) *14. ♖ac1 cxd4 15. ♖xd4 ♖c5 16. ♗f5*



16... ♗h2+! *17. ♖h1 ♗f4* with an approximately equal game in Idani-Sokolov, Iran Stars 2017.]

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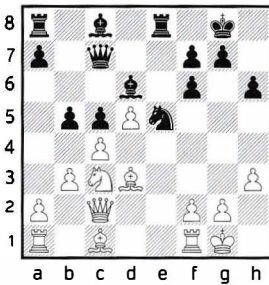
13...b5!



(The inclusion of the moves 13...b5 14.b3 will prove very important in the subsequent tactical lines!) 14.b3

(14.cxb5 ♖b6 leads here to unclear play 15.♗c3 ♙b7 16.♙h7+ ♜h8 17.♙e4 ♙h2+ 18.♜h1 ♙e5.)

14...♗e5 15.♗c3



Here Black has a nice tactical motif!
15...♙xh3! 16.f4

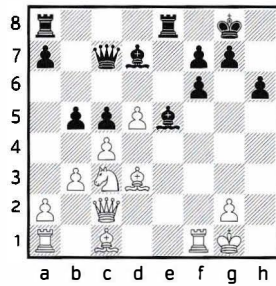
(16.gxh3 leads to Black's advantage: 16...♗f3+ 17.♜g2 ♗h4+ 18.♜g1 ♗d7 and White has to play 19.♙h7+ ♜h8 20.♗d3 ♙e5 21.♙d2 g6 Black gets his piece back with better play; or 16.♙h7+ ♜h8 17.f4 ♙d7! 18.fxe5 ♙xe5 and again the inclusion of 13...b5 14.b3 proves crucial as the white knight on c3 is pinned and

hangs. Black gets his material back with a large advantage)

16...♙d7!? is an interesting piece sacrifice

(The "boring" 16...♗xd3 17.♗xb5 ♗d7 18.♗xd3 ♙g4 is also playable for Black.)

17.fxe5 ♙xe5



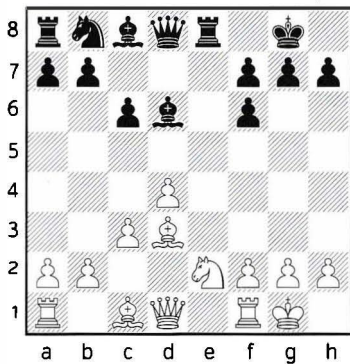
Again the inclusion of the 13...b5 14.b3 moves proves important! Black has good compensation here.

8...♗e8

Strange enough this logical move spells the beginning of trouble for Black in this game!

8...♗c7! 9.♗c2 h6 10.h3 transposing to the lines above was the correct move order for Black. Now White gets an extra possibility!

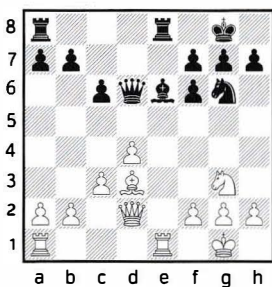
9.0-0



9...♖c7?

This is already definitely a mistake! Black hopes for 10.h3 leading to the positions we discussed above, but Khalifman shows us different ideas for White!

9...♘d7! needed to be played and after 10.♙f4 ♘f8 it looks perhaps a bit passive, but Black gradually equalizes. 11.♚d2 ♘g6 12.♙xd6 ♚xd6 13.♞fe1 ♙e6 14.♘g3



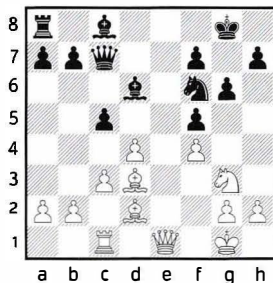
Black goes for our equalizing rule here — trading the black c-pawn for the white d-pawn is fine for Black. 14...b6 15.♚c2 c5! 16.♘e4 ♖c7 17.dxc5 bxc5 with approximate equality in 1–0 Inarkiev,E

(2688)-Tomashevsky,E (2714) Sochi 2014.

10.♘g3!

The situation is already very unpleasant for Black. White gets tactical possibilities on the kingside, the white queen quickly joins the attack and different sacrifices become possible, all of which leads us back to one of our rules here: Black beware! An extra pawn around your king does not mean that your king is always safe!

10.f4? is a positional mistake for White and an old game of Alekhine's illustrates it well. 10...f5! 11.♘g3 g6 12.♙d2 Alekhine now goes for our standard plan for Black here. 12...c5! White is already in serious trouble. 13.♞c1 (13.dxc5 ♙xc5+ 14.♙h1 ♙e6+) 13...♘d7 14.♞e1 ♞xe1+ 15.♚xe1 ♘f6



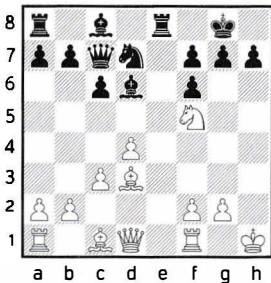
Please compare this position to the lines arising after 6...♙f5!? 7.♘e2 in the Alsina-Salgado game above. Instead of his bishop on g6 Black has a pawn, with Black's light-

squared bishop here getting developed to e6. The rest of the position is more or less the same! 16. ♖f2 ♙e6 and Black soon won in Perez-Alekhine, A Caracas 1939.

10... ♙e6?

This will prove a crucial mistake, allowing White to demonstrate an instructive attacking plan here!

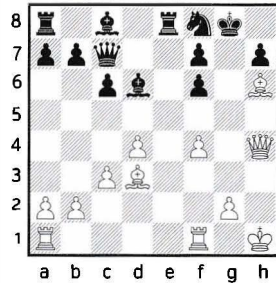
a) On 10... ♘d7 Seirawan probably feared the thematic pawn sacrifice 11. ♘f5! and he was right as White would obtain a strong attack! 11... ♙xh2+ 12. ♖h1 ♙d6



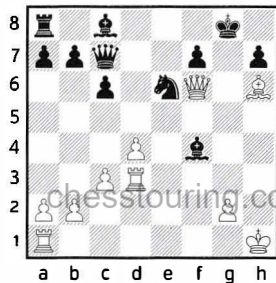
Black's king is without defenders and White has numerous dangerous-looking options. 13. ♙h6! probably causes Black the biggest headache here, for example

a1) 13. ♖g4 is probably not more than a draw. 13... ♗g6 14. ♘h6+ ♖g7 (14... ♖f8? 15. ♖h4 and ♘xf7 is a terrible threat.) 15. ♘f5+= (15. ♖h4 here does not work for White due to the simple 15... ♘f8).

a2) 13. ♘g7!? looks terribly dangerous, but Black seems to be able to defend. 13... ♖xg7 14. ♖g4+ ♖h8 15. ♖h4 It takes Black a long time to develop his queenside, but it looks as though White just does not have enough attacking potential to finish Black off. 15... ♘f8 (15... ♗f5? 16. ♙g5+-) 16. ♙h6 ♖g8 17. ♗f4

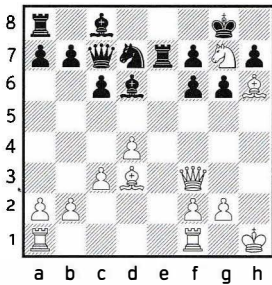


Black needs to find what is probably the only defence here. (17. ♖xf6? ♘e6 18. ♗f4 ♖e7+-) 17... ♙e3! (17... ♘g6 18. ♖xf6 ♙f8 19. ♙xf8 ♘xf8 20. ♗f5± Black's pieces remain terribly boxed in.) 18. ♙f3 ♙xd3! (18... ♙xf3? Giving White an open g-file is a suicide mission. 19. ♗xf3 ♘g6 20. ♖xf6 ♙f8 21. ♙xg6! and White wins in a few moves. 21... ♗hxg6 — or 21... ♙xg6 22. ♙d3 — 22. ♙xf8 ♖xf8 23. ♙e1 ♙e6 24. ♙xe6+-) 19. ♖xf6 ♘e6 20. ♙xd3 ♙xf4



And Black survives. 21.d5 cxd5
 22.♖xd5 ♕xh6 23.♗xh6 Black
 has many moves here and the po-
 sition looks balanced.;

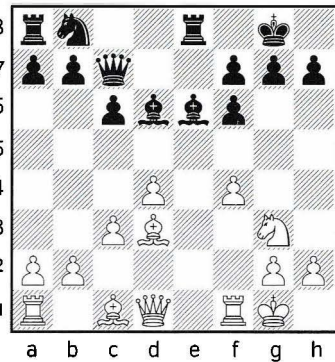
13...g6 14.♘g7 ♖e7 15.♗f3



Black has terrible development
 problems. 15...♗d8! Black is trying
 to use the fact that the white king
 is on h1, so in some lines ...♗h4+
 will prove crucial. 16.g4! (16.♖ae1
 f5 17.♘xf5 leads to a draw: 17...♖xe1
 18.♖xe1 gxf5 19.♗h5 ♕f8 20.♖e8
 ♗xe8 21.♗g5+ ♖h8 22.♗xf5 ♘f6
 23.♗xf6+ ♖g8 24.♗g5+=.) 16...♘f8
 17.♖g1 with ideas of ♘f5 or ♘h5.
 White's attack is worth more than
 a pawn.

b) One of the standard recom-
 mendations for Black, 10...c5! was
 probably the best way to struggle
 on: 11.dxc5 ♕xc5 12.♗h5 g6 13.♗h4
 ♘d7. Black has yet to develop his
 queenside, so the situation looks
 dangerous for him... but I do not
 see anything direct for White.

11.f4!



We now see the benefit White
 gained by keeping his queen on d1.
 White's attacking plan is actually
 rather simple: push the f-pawn to
 f5, jump ♘h5, move the queen to
 g4 and... mate! It's only move 11 and
 seemingly Black has made no obvi-
 ous mistakes but his position is al-
 ready totally lost!

11...c5

This common advice for Black no
 longer works here, because the black
 king is too vulnerable.

12.d5

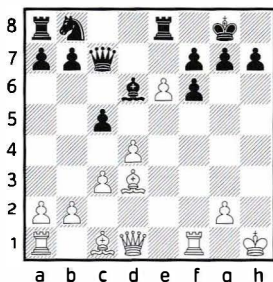
Khalifman takes definitely the best
 practical decision, playing it safe.

12.f5 was also good but required
 more calculation. 12... ♕xg3

(12... ♕d7 loses to the prosaic
 13.♘h5 ♖h8 14.♗g4 ♖g8 15.♖f3 and
 White wins with a mating attack:
 15...cxd4 16.♖h3 and White has dif-

ferent ways to win here, 17.♖xf6 being one of the deadly threats.)

13.fxe6 ♙xh2+ 14.♖h1 ♙d6



I assume Khalifman did not want to bother calculating all those lines, but in fact the tactics are working for White. 15.d5 is perhaps the most human move here and it simply looks good for White.

(But 15.♖xf6! is the most direct. 15...♖xe6 16.♖xe6 fxe6 17.♖h5 g6 18.♙xg6 hxg6 19.♖xg6+ ♖h8 20.♖e8+ ♖g7 21.♖xe6 The open position of the black king should lead to his defeat.

12... ♙d7 13.c4

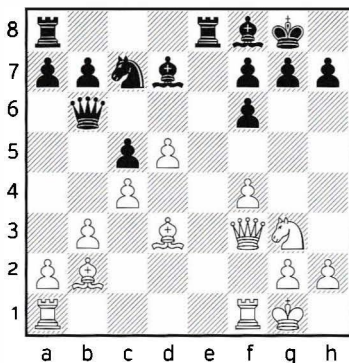
Khalifman has kept all the threats mentioned in the 12.f5 lines without giving Black any counter-play.

13...♖a6 14.♖f3

14.♖h5 should be winning for White too. White's knight on h5 is simply a tremendous attacking piece here, for example 14...♖b4 15.♙b1 ♖d8

16.a3 ♖a6 17.♙d2 with ♙c3 to follow and soon a mating attack.

14...♖b6 15.b3 ♙f8 16.♙b2 ♖c7



Black has no counter-play and White can take his time to execute the mating attack. White certainly has different roads to Rome here.

17. ♙f5

a) White has to be a bit careful here not to allow counter-play based on tactics utilizing the b6-g1 diagonal, for example 17.f5?? ♖xd5!! since 18.♖xd5?? ♙c6 and the white queen is trapped, while 18.cxd5 loses to 18...c4+.

b) 17.♖h5 ♖b5 would have also offered Black a glimpse of hope.

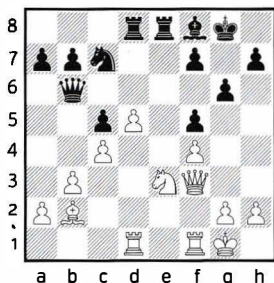
c) 17.♙c2 with ♖h5 to follow looks like an easy win for White too.

17... ♙xf5 18.♖xf5 ♖ed8

18...g6 19.♖e3 f5

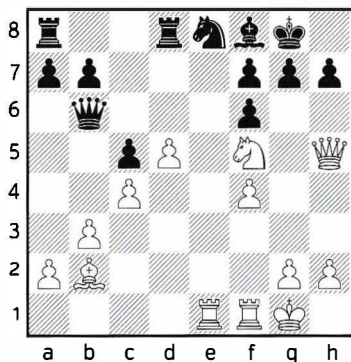
(19...♔g7 20.f5 is terrible for Black.)

20.♖ad1 ♖ad8



loses to 21.g4!+- and White gets his mating attack.

19.♖ae1 ♖e8 20.♖h5



20...♖a5

This allows a nice end, but 20...g6 does not help either: 21.♗h6+ ♔xh6

(21...♔g7 22.♖h4+- with 23. f5 to follow.)

22.♖xh6 ♖d6 23.♖e3 ♖f8 24.♖h4+-

21.♖xe8! ♖xe8 22.♗h6+! gxh6

22...♔h8 was allowing even a nicer finish: 23.♖xf7 ♔d6 24.♖g8+! ♖xg8 25.♗f7 mate.

23.♖g4+

And Black resigned, not being in the mood to wait for 24. ♔xf6. Great play by White, clearly showing the nuances in the position, the importance of move order, and the typical plans involved!

17

▷ E. Torre

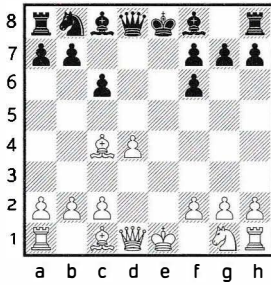
▷ V. Kortschnoj

Buenos Aires [11], 1978

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♗c3 dxe4 4.♗xe4
♗f6 5.♗xf6+ exf6 6.♗f3

The text move is probably the least played by White of the three main plans.

6. ♔c4 is often White's line of preference, and Karpov played it in his 1978 World Championship match against Kortschnoj. White's main idea here is to place his bishop in an active position while keeping the option of ♖e2+ to disrupt Black's development if Black plays 6...♔d6.



6...♞d7 Kortschnoj waits for White to develop his knight to e2, making ♖e2+ impossible, so that he can develop his dark-squared bishop to d6. He does not mind trading dark-squared bishops in the process because then he would obtain satisfactory play. I will give two of his games.

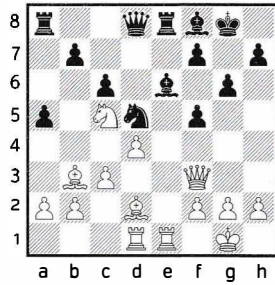
a) 6...♙e7 looks modest but actually is quite playable for Black. 7.♞e2

(In the event of 7.♞f3 0-0 8.0-0 Black can go for the standard strategic recipe 8...c5! equalizing the game.)

7...♞d7 8.0-0 0-0 9.♞f4 f5

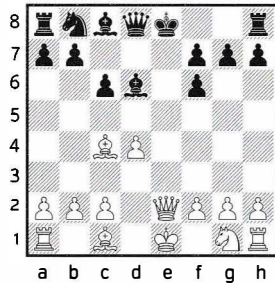
(Again 9...c5 looks equalizing.)

10.c3 ♞f6 11.♞d3 ♞d5 12.♞f4 ♞f6
Black is solid and it is not easy for White to prove an advantage.
13.♞d3 ♞d5 14.♞f3 ♙e6 15.♙e1 ♙e8
16.♙d2 ♙f8 17.♙b3 g6 18.♙ad1 a5
19.♞c5



19...♙xc5! 20.dxc5 a4 and Black equalized in Lilienthal,A-Flohr,S Stockholm 1937, as Black is fine after 21.♙c4 ♞c7 22.♙f4 ♞c8.

b) If 6...♙d6 then 7.♞e2+



White's disruptive check causes Black problems. 7...♙e7

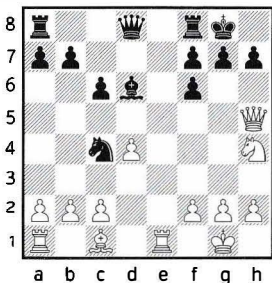
[7...♙f8?! is an original way of solving difficulties with castling, but it does not equalize as Black does not manage to push ...h5. 8.♞h5! (8.♞f3 lets the advantage slip, as Black is fine after 8...h5 9.0-0 g6 10.♙e1 ♙g7 11.♙d2 ♞a6∞.) Black is now forced to make a move he is not happy with: 8...♙e6 9.♙xe6 fxe6 10.♞e2 ♞e8 11.♞h3 ♞a6 12.0-0 ♞c7 13.♙f4 and White had

a clear advantage in Jonkman,H (2424)-Miles,A (2584) Lisbon 2000.]

8. $\text{c}3$ o-o 9. o-o $\text{d}6$ 10. $\text{e}1$ $\text{g}4$?! Another nice example of Black being negligent about his king's position. 11. $\text{e}4$ $\text{h}5$?! 12. $\text{c}4$! $\text{d}7$ White now removes an important defender of the black king. 13. $\text{f}5$!

(13. $\text{g}4$ $\text{b}6$! is less clear as 14. $\text{b}3$? runs into 14... $\text{d}7$ with the ... $\text{e}8$ threat and the tables have turned!)

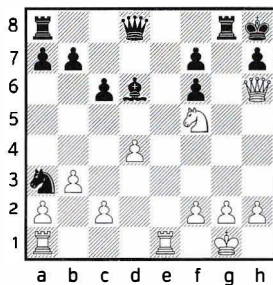
13... $\text{b}6$ 14. $\text{xh}5$ $\text{c}4$



There is a similarity to Khalifman-Seirawan, with the black king being left without defenders. 15. $\text{h}6$! Facing an unexpected onslaught Boleslavsky now panics 15... $\text{d}7$?

[15... $\text{gxh}6$ was the only defence: 16. $\text{b}3$! (The black knight needs to be kicked out of $\text{c}4$, as in the case of 16. $\text{c}5$ $\text{f}4$ 17. $\text{e}4$ $\text{g}5$ 18. $\text{h}4$ Black defends with 18... $\text{d}6$) 16... $\text{a}3$ 17. $\text{c}5$ $\text{h}8$ (17... $\text{f}4$ now

loses to 18. $\text{e}4$ $\text{g}5$ 19. $\text{h}4$ +.) 18. $\text{xh}6$ $\text{g}8$

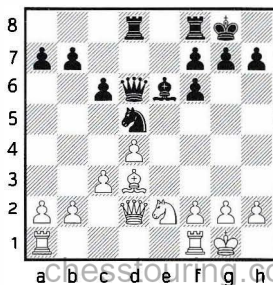


19. $\text{e}8$! $\text{f}8$! 20. $\text{xd}8$ $\text{xh}6$ 21. $\text{xg}8$ + $\text{xg}8$ 22. $\text{c}6$ $\text{xc}2$ 23. $\text{d}1$ White has a clear advantage, probably coming out a pawn up, but still needs to do some work.]

16. $\text{xg}7$! Now the game is immediately over. 16... $\text{c}7$ 17. $\text{c}5$ + $\text{h}8$ 18. $\text{e}4$ $\text{xh}2$ + 19. $\text{c}1$ 1-0 Ragozin,V-Boleslavsky,I Sverdlovsk 1942;

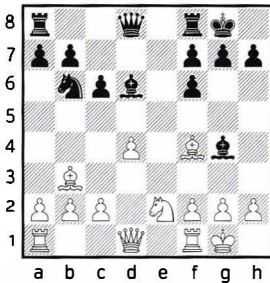
7. $\text{c}2$ $\text{d}6$ 8. $\text{f}4$

(8. o-o o-o 9. $\text{f}4$ was Karpov's choice in the World Championship match. 9... $\text{b}6$ 10. $\text{d}3$ $\text{e}6$ 11. $\text{c}3$ $\text{d}5$ 12. $\text{x}6$ $\text{x}6$ 13. $\text{d}2$ $\text{ad}8$

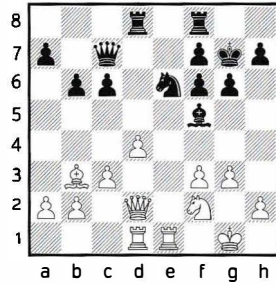


It is difficult for White to advance his queenside pawn majority in a convenient manner. 14. ♖fe1 g6 15. ♜ad1 ♗g7 16. ♙e4 ♘c7 17. b3 ♜fe8 18. ♙b1 Now, in order to make it easier to manoeuvre his pieces, Black trades his bishop for a white knight. 18... ♙g4 19. h3 ♙xe2 20. ♜xe2 and a pair of rooks too 20... ♜xe2 21. ♚xe2 ♘d5 22. ♚d2 ♘f4 23. ♙e4 f5 it is still hard for White to push his queenside pawn majority, while the black kingside pawn majority can become a major strength. The position was complex and balanced in Karpov-Kortschnoj, Baguio City 1978.)

8... ♘b6 9. ♙b3 o-o 10. o-o ♙g4



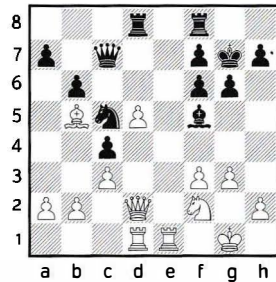
As in his game with Karpov, Kortschnoj is happy to trade his light-squared bishop for the white knight — which White now prevents, at the cost of causing some weakness to his kingside. 11. f3 ♙xf4 12. ♘xf4 ♙f5 13. c3 ♚c7 14. ♘d3 ♜ad8 15. ♜e1 g6 16. ♘c5 ♘d5 17. ♚d2 b6 18. ♘e4 ♗g7 19. ♜ad1 ♘f4 20. g3 ♘e6 21. ♘f2



Black's king is safe, while White's weak kingside offers Black plenty of tactical opportunities. 21...c5 Kortschnoj goes for our standard central solution for Black and is fine.

[21...h5! was also good for Black. 22. ♜e3 (22.g4?? is an excellent way for White to slaughter his own king: 22...♘g5+) 22... ♜h8 Thanks to his safer king, Black has easier play. 23. ♜de1? is for example wrong on account of the simple 23...c5 24.d5 c4 25. ♙a4 ♚b7 26. ♜d1 b5-+.]

22. d5 c4 23. ♙a4 ♘c5 24. ♙b5



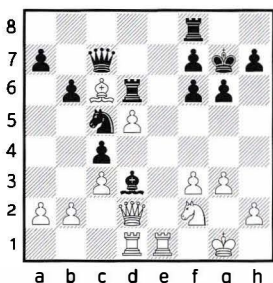
24... ♙d3? A strange mistake for Kortschnoj, in his prime years, to make.

(24...♖d3! and White is the one fighting for a draw: 25.♗xd3 ♜xd5 26.♙f4 ♙xf4 27.♗xf4 ♜xb5 with a sound pawn up.)

25. ♖c6

(The computer gives a nice line: 25.b4 a6 26.♗g4! playing against the black king, bereft of defenders! 26...g5 27.♗xf6! ♗xf6 28. ♖xc4 ♖xc4 29.♙d4+ ♗g6 30.♙xc4± and White emerges in a pawn-up end-game. 30...♗e6?? 31. ♜xe6+-)

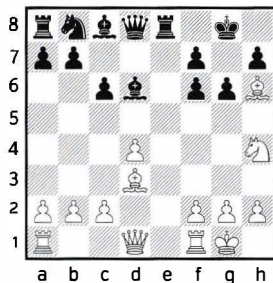
25... ♜d6



26.b4! ♗d7 27.♗xd3 cxd3 28. ♜e7 and White went on to win in Libe rzon,V (2515)-Kortschnoj,V (2695) Lone Pine 1979.

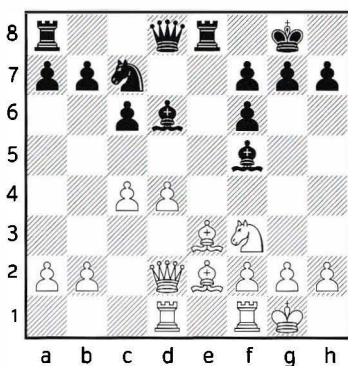
6... ♖d6 7. ♖e2

One recent example saw 7. ♖d3 o-o 8.o-o ♜e8 9.♗h4 and the white knight would end up stranded on h4. 9...g6 10. ♖h6



Here Black used our regular strategic solution. 10...c5! 11.dxc5 ♖xc5 If someone is better here, it is Black! 12. ♜e1 ♖e6 13. ♖e3 ♖xe3 14. ♜xe3 ♗c6 15. ♖e4 ♗e5 (The more ambitious 15...♙b6! would have led to advantage for Black.) 16.♙xd8 ♜axd8 with equality and later a draw in Antipov,M (2580)-Yu,Y (2738) Gibraltar 2017. Kortschnoj now prepares to manoeuvre his knight to e6.

7...♗a6 8.o-o ♗c7 9.c4 o-o 10. ♖e3 ♜e8 11.♙d2 ♖f5 12. ♜ad1



12... ♖e4!

White has taken the centre with his pawns but it is difficult for him to

push his queenside pawn majority further.

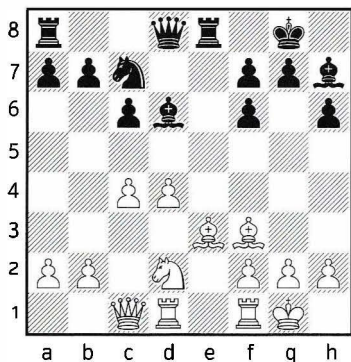
13. ♖c1

Exchanging dark-squared bishops with 13. ♕f4? gives Black a central pawn target. 13... ♖e6! 14. ♕xd6 ♗xd6 This is better for Black, because d4 is vulnerable. Kortschnoj now embarks on a very interesting and aggressive plan which will be useful to remember and put to use!

13...h6!

13... ♖e6= keeping the central dynamic balance was approximately equal.

14. ♖d2 ♕h7 15. ♕f3



15...f5!

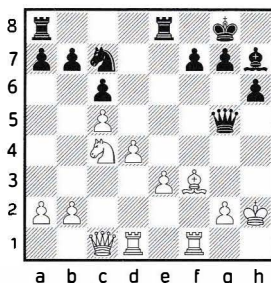
Now it is obvious that Black means business! His next move will be 16... g5! and Black rolls his pawns. Suddenly the position is razor-sharp!

16. ♖b3

In the event of 16.c5, trying to place a his knight on the inviting square of c4, Black can go for the rather direct 16... ♕xh2+

(Black also has the choice of following a relatively calm kingside pawn rolling strategy with 16... ♕f8 17. ♖c4 g5...)

17. ♕xh2 f4 18. ♖c4 fxe3 19. fxe3 ♗g5



Black has a good game. White should be concerned about his king safety and not embark on pawn grabbing efforts. 20. ♖d6?

(20. ♗d2 ♗e7=)

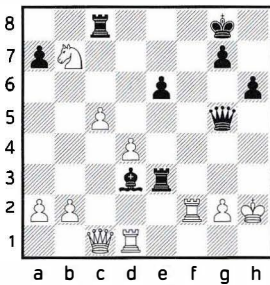
20... ♗xe3 21. ♖xb7 ♖e6 22. ♕xc6? ♗c8 Black gets winning attack. 23. ♕d5

(23. ♕f3? ♖xd4 24. ♗xd4 ♗e5+-)

23... ♕d3 24. ♕xe6

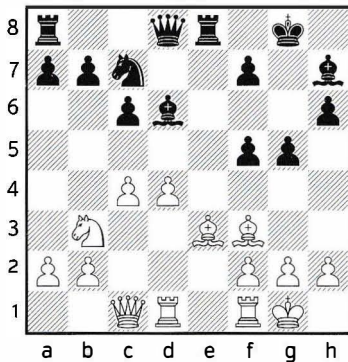
(24. ♗f2? ♗g3+ 25. ♖g1 ♖g5+-)

24...fxe6 25. ♖f2



Now Black needs to remove an important defender of the white king: 25... ♖f8! 26. ♖xf8+ ♗xf8 with ... ♖g3 and ... ♖e2 to follow and White is mated in a few moves. Kortschnoj proceeds with his plan.

16...g5!



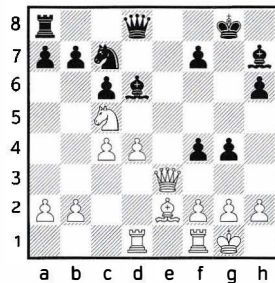
It is obvious that White must immediately create threats of his own! White's chances are on the queenside and Black's weak spot is his b7-pawn, possibly the c6-pawn as well. Should White jump with his knight to c5 or a5? Most likely White thought the a5-jump looked more logical, since (a) it hits both the

b7 and c6 weaknesses, and (b) the knight cannot be removed. There is certainly logic in all this, but going to a5 allows Black an important tactical resource!

17. ♞a5

Actually 17. ♞c5! was the way to go, with dynamically balanced sharp play. 17... ♖c8

(17...g4?! 18. ♙e2 does not work here for Black, as ♞xb7 is a threat and now there is no move like 18... ♙b4, while the exchange sacrifice 18... ♖xe3 19. ♖xe3 f4



with the white knight on c5 instead of a5 also does not work so well 20. ♖d2! f3 21. gxf3 gxf3 22. ♙xf3 ♖h4 23. ♖fe1 ♗h8 24. ♖e5 ♙xe5 25. dxe5 and the black attack is a fight for a draw.)

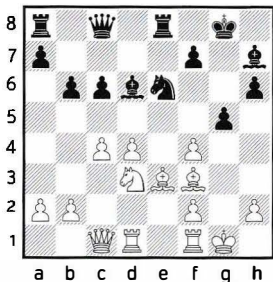
18.g3 f4

(or 18...b6 19. ♞d3 f4 transposing)

19.gxf4 b6! chesstouring.com

(If 19... ♖xc5 20.dxc5 ♜f5 21. ♔g2 ♜e6 22.fxg5 hxg5 23.b4 Black does not quite have sufficient compensation for his sacrificed pawn.)

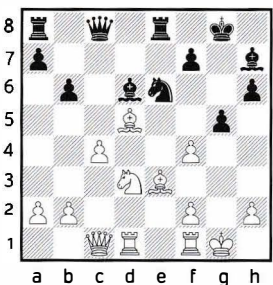
20. ♜d3 ♜e6 We have reached a sharp position where best play is likely to produce a drawn outcome.



21.d5!

[21.fxg5?! ♜xg5 (21... ♜xd4 leads to a draw: 22. ♔xd4 ♜h3 23. ♜e5 ♔xe5 — not 23... ♜xe5? because of 24. ♔g2 — 24. ♔xe5 ♜xf3 25. ♜c3 ♔e4 26. ♜xf3 ♔xf3 27. ♜de1 hxg5 28. ♜e3=) 22. ♔g2 ♔e4 Black has a strong attack. 23.f3 ♜xf3+ 24. ♜xf3 (24. ♔xf3? ♜h3--+) 24... ♔xf3 25. ♔xf3 ♜h3 26. ♜f2 ♜xh2+ 27. ♜f1 ♜e6 White is fighting to survive.]

21...cxd5 22. ♔xd5



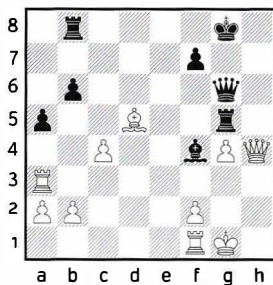
Now we get a sharp position with opposite-colour bishops. 22... ♔xd3 23. ♜xd3 ♜xf4 24. ♔xf4 ♔xf4 25. ♜d1 ♜b8 26. ♜h5 ♜f5 27. ♜a3

(27. ♜h3 ♜f6 28. ♜xh6 ♜xh6 29. ♜xh6 ♜g7=)

27...a5 28. ♜xh6 g4 29. ♜h4 ♜g6 The white king position is also not perfect. 30.h3

(30. ♜g3 ♔xg3 31.fxg3 ♜f8 White cannot improve, on account of his weak king. 32. ♜f4 ♜b1+ 33. ♜f1 ♜g6=)

30...♜e5 31.hxg4 ♜g5

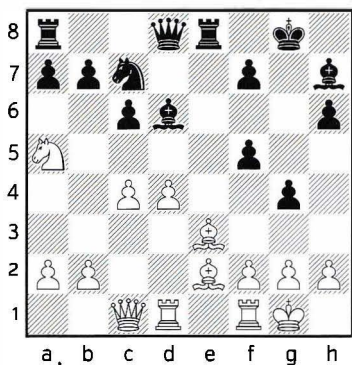


32. ♜h1!

(32.f3? is the way to lose for White as Black gets a mating attack after 32... ♜g7+)

32...♜g7 33. ♜h3 ♜xg4 34. ♜xg4 ♜xg4 35. ♜g1 ♜xg1+ 36. ♜xg1 White is technically a pawn up, but far from being able to dream of victory here. 36... ♔e5 37. ♜f3 f6 38.b3 ♜h8 This looks like an easy draw.

17...g4 18. ♖e2



18. ♘xb7? ♕xh2+ 19. ♖xh2 ♖h4+
20. ♖g1 gxf3--

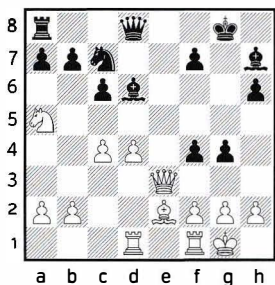
18... ♕b4!

The best move, forcing White to sacrifice a piece.

18... ♖xe3!? was an interesting exchange sacrifice leading to a material imbalance. 19. ♖xe3

(19.fxe3?? ♕xh2+--)

19...f4

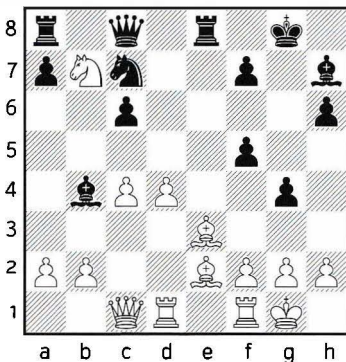


20. ♘xb7

(20. ♖c3 f3 21. ♕xf3 gxf3 22. ♖xf3 ♖b8∞; 20. ♖d2 f3 21.gxf3?? ♖h4 22.f4 and now thanks to the white knight being on a5 Black has 22... ♘e6--.)

20..fxe3 21. ♘xd8 exf2+ 22. ♖xf2 ♖xd8 23. ♕xg4∞

19. ♘xb7 ♖c8



White has different ways to be worse and he loses his way; it always hard in these situations.

20. ♘c5

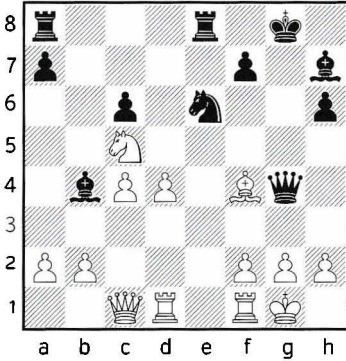
20.a3 ♖xb7 (20... ♕f8 21. ♘a5 f4 22. ♘xc6 fxe3 23.fxe3 h5∞) 21.axb4 f4

20...f4 21. ♕xg4

21. ♘d3 ♕xd3 22. ♕xd3 fxe3 23.fxe3 ♕f8! (Otherwise 24.c5 is unpleasant.) 24. ♕f5 ♘e6 25. ♕xg4 ♖c7 also looks better for Black but, as with

the 20.a3 line, better for White than what happened in the game.

21... ♖xg4 22. ♕xf4 ♖e6

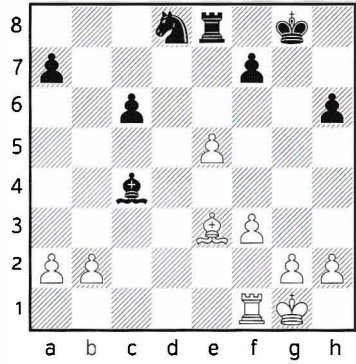


White technically still has three pawns for a piece, but Black is well coordinated and White will lose at least a pawn.

23. ♕e3 ♖ad8 24. ♖d3 ♕d6

24... ♕xd3 25. ♖xd3 ♗e4 26. ♖dd1 (26. ♖fd1? blunders an exchange to 26... ♖c5) 26... ♖xd4 should also win for Black.

25. ♖e5 ♕xe5 26. dxe5 ♕d3 27. f3 ♗xc4 28. ♗xc4 ♕xc4 29. ♖xd8 ♖xd8



The smoke has cleared, Black has a won endgame and Kortschnoj brings it home.

30. ♖d1 ♕xa2 31. ♕xa7

Or 31. ♖d6 a5 32. ♕xh6 ♕d5+.

31... ♕d5 32. f4 ♖e6 33. ♕e3 h5

White has only two pawns for a piece, Black has light-square control and White has no counter-play.

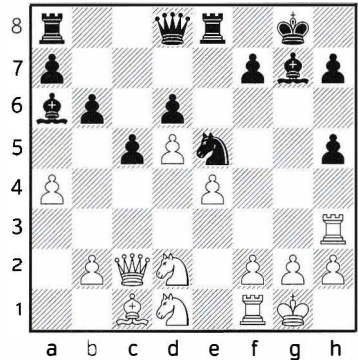
34. h3 ♖b8 35. ♖d2 ♖b3 36. ♖f2 h4 37. ♖c2 ♕xg2 0-1

CHAPTER IV. BENONI STRATEGIES

The Benoni is a dynamic opening that has been championed by many great players, and is suitable for club players and for use in open tournaments. I would like to delve into the basic ideas in one of this opening's oldest main lines, the "Pirouette Variation". This line earns its name because a white Knight dances a "pirouette" from f3 via d2 to the c4-square. The first four games in this chapter are related to this variation.

The first three games in this chapter are predominantly positional ones, while games four and five have sacrificial themes. The fourth game illustrates a sacrificial idea in the Pirouette Variation, and an important one to learn — this game you will NOT find in any commercial database! The fifth game is Kasparov's classic sacrifice in the fianchetto variation.

4.1. POSITIONAL EXCHANGE SACRIFICE

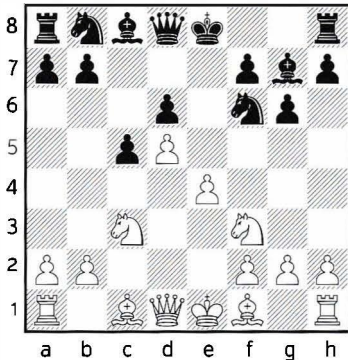


Some readers may immediately recognize the pawn structure as coming from the famous third game of the Spassky-Fischer World Championship match in 1972. Petrosian skilfully shows his visiting card, the positional exchange sacrifice. This is definitely a game to study for anyone wanting to understand this position.

18

► T. Petrosian
 ► N. Rashkovsky
 Moscow [9], 1976

1.d4 ♖f6 2.♗f3 e6 3.c4 c5 4.d5 exd5
 5.cxd5 d6 6.♗c3 g6 7.e4 ♕g7



8. ♕e2

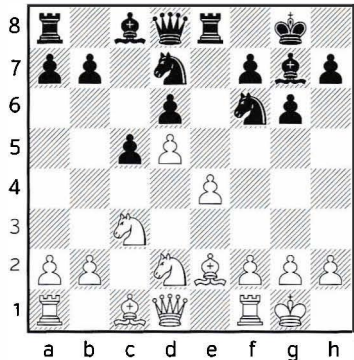
The other route, perhaps more common, for White to reach our main position is via 8.♗d2 ♗bd7 9.♕e2 o-o 10.o-o ♖e8

(10...a6?! 11.a4 has sometimes been included by Black, even some strong GMs. Given the fact that, as we are later to witness, White plans the ♖a3 rook lift as an essential part of his strategy, the inclusion of 10...a6?! 11.a4 looks to me to be favouring White.)

8...o-o 9.o-o ♖e8

Due to the fact that White started with 8.♕e2, instead 8.♗d2, Black here has an additional possibility in 9...♕g4. Exchanging the light-squared bishop for the white knight on f3 is positionally sound for Black in the Modern Benoni.

10.♗d2 ♗bd7



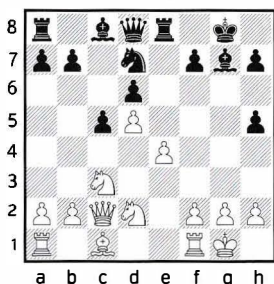
11.a4

Petrosian enables his rook lift to a3 while still keeping his queen on d1, preventing Black from immediately going for the ...♗h5 plan. In this position we have seen a number of top-level-games having different transpositions but keeping the same general plans. Black will at some stage jump ...♗h5, White will take ♕xh5 and after gxh5 White will try to take advantage of Black's damaged pawn structure. ♖a3, followed by ♗d1, will be White's main plan.

In the 1972 World Championship classic game Fischer for the first

time executed the ...♖h5 plan, allowing damage to his pawn structure. It continued 11. ♖c2 ♗h5.

At the time Fischer came up with this plan it was viewed as revolutionary. It definitely produced a shock effect on Spassky and worked excellently in practice! In reality though, Black's idea is not that great at all. Black damages his pawn structure, making his king's position vulnerable, and also trading the black knight for White's light squared bishop is not bad for White at all. White can see the weakness of the f5 square and aim to use it for his knight through the ♖d1-♗e3-♗f5 manoeuvre. In essence it's a risky strategic concept for Black! 12. ♗xh5 gxh5

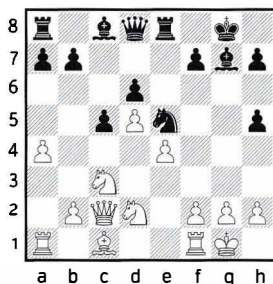


13.a4!

(The Spassky-Fischer game went 13. ♖c4. Facing the position for the first time, needing to make an over-the-board decision, Spassky did not initially grasp that the c3 knight needed to move to e3 and that activating his rook on a1 via a rook lift to a3 was essential for White here! The

white rook placed on a3, combined with the ♖d1 idea, enables White to swing his rook to the kingside, take advantage of Black's damaged pawn structure and begin an attack on the black king. The game went well for Fischer. 13...♗e5 14. ♗e3 ♖h4 15. ♗d2 ♗g4! A knight swap will improve Black's pawn structure. 16. ♗xg4 hxg4 17. ♗f4 ♖f6 18.g3 ♗d7 Black had a great game and went on to win in Spassky,B (2660)-Fischer,R (2785) Reykjavik 1972)

13...♗e5



14. ♖d1 can transpose to our main game via

(14. ♖a3 is also possible, probably leading to a transposition)

14...b6

(14... ♖h4 transposes to Gligoric-Kavalek, Skopje 1972, given below: 15. ♗e3 ♗g4 16. ♗xg4 hxg4 17. ♖c4 ♖f6 18. ♗d2)

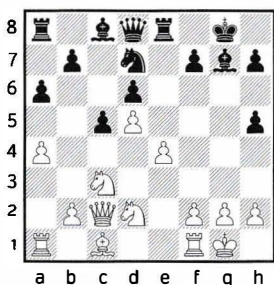
15. ♖a3 ♗a6 16. ♖h3! and we are in our main game.

11...♖e5

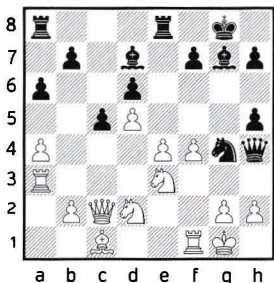
11...a6 12.♖c2 White protects his e4-pawn, aiming for ♖c4.

(Another possibility was playing a useful move—that needed to be played anyway, 12.♙a3, and then developing with ♖c2, similar to Petrosian's strategy in our main game.)

12...♗h5 13.♙xh5 gxh5

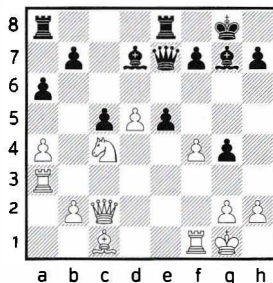


Here White needs to execute what is now established as the best plan here: 14.♗d1! The knight goes from c3 to e3, while the rook goes from a1 to a3. Black's king can easily become a target! 14...♗e5 15.♗e3 ♖h4 16.♙a3! ♙d7 17.f4 ♗g4



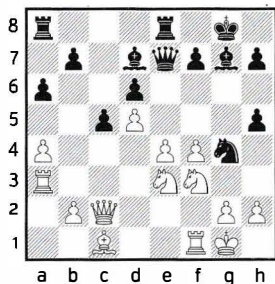
18.♗f3 This was White's best, gaining an advantage.

[18.♗xg4?! White, just as in Spassky-Fischer, corrects the black pawn structure. Yes, White is here definitely in a much better shape than Spassky as his knight is on d2 instead of c3 and can go to c4, while the f-pawn is already on f4. However, with the improved black kingside pawn structure, the game is unclear. 18...hxg4 19.♗c4 ♖e7∞ 20.e5 dxex5



21.fxe5 (An interesting pawn sacrifice here, quite a standard one, was 21.d6 ♖h4 22.f5∞.) 21...♙xe5 22.♗xe5 ♖xe5 23.♖xc5 White does not have enough pieces to exploit the black king's weakness. 23...♙ac8 24.♖f2 f5 (24...♖xd5! forces White to go for a draw. 25.♙d3 ♖xd3 26.♖xf7+ ♗h8 27.♖f6+ ♗g8=) 25.h3 ♙c4= [Gligoric-Browne, San Antonio, 1972.]

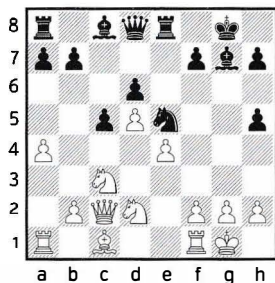
18...♖e7



19. h3! $\text{c}4 \times \text{e}3$ 20. $\text{e}3 \times \text{e}3$ Black needs to reckon with the e4-e5 pawn push. The black king is vulnerable and White has good attacking prospects.

12. $\text{B}a3$

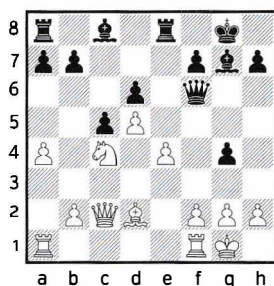
12. $\text{K}c2$ first is, again, also possible and can transpose to our main game. 12... $\text{c}4 \times \text{h}5$ 13. $\text{g}4 \times \text{h}5$ $\text{g}x\text{h}5$



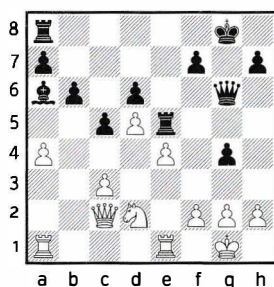
14. $\text{d}1!$ Now, thanks to the fact that the black a-pawn is still on a7, Black can move his bishop to a6. The advantage of ... $\text{a}6$ is that it hits the white rook on f1; the disadvantage is that it loses the control of the f5-square. 14... b6

[14... $\text{K}h4$ was seen in an old Gligoric game. The Yugoslav grandmaster Gligoric played many in-

structive games on the white side of the Modern Benoni. 15. $\text{c}4 \times \text{e}3$ Again, just as in his game against Browne, Gligoric does not mind correcting his opponent's pawn structure; he is banking on his future strong knight on c4 and the advance of his f-pawn. (15... $\text{B}a3 \pm$ improving the rook first was definitely possible.) 15... $\text{c}4 \times \text{g}4$ 16. $\text{c}4 \times \text{g}4$ $\text{h}x\text{g}4$ 17. $\text{c}4 \times \text{f}6$ 18. $\text{g}d2$

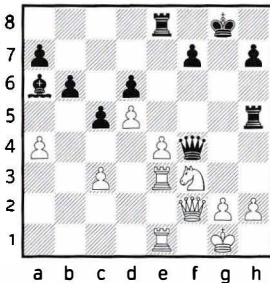


Compared with Spassky-Fischer, White — with his knight on c4 instead of c3 — is obviously in much better shape! White will trade off the dark-squared bishops and then focus on attacking the weak black king. 18... $\text{K}g6$ 19. $\text{c}3 \times \text{c}3$ 20. $\text{b}x\text{c}3$ b6 21. $\text{B}fe1$ $\text{a}a6$ 22. $\text{c}d2$ $\text{B}e5$



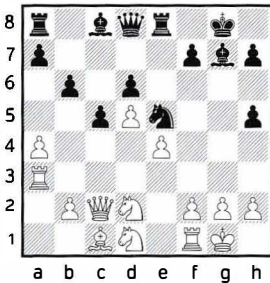
White will now prise open the black pawn structure in a similar

way to Magerramov-Kasparov, our next game, and prove that the black king is vulnerable. 23.f4! gxf3 24.♖xf3 ♜h5 25.♖f2 ♖f6 26.♞e3± The black bishop a6 is hitting empty squares and the black king is weak. White prepares a crucial central pawn break. 26...♞e8 27.♞ae1 ♖f4



28.e5! dxе5 29.♞e4 ♖f6 30.♖g3+ ♘h8 31.♗xe5+- ♞g8 32.♞g4 ♞xg4 33.♗xg4 ♖g6 34.c4! The attackers-defenders ratio favours White, the black bishop a6 not being of any use. 34...♞f5 35.♗h6! ♞f6 36.♞e8+ ♘g7 37.♞g8+ ♘xh6 38.♖h4+ 1-0 Gligoric,S (2575)-Kavalek,L (2555) Skopje 1972.]

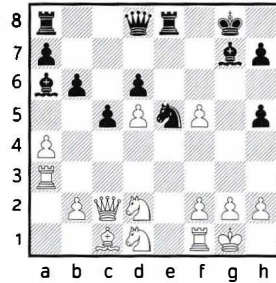
15.♞a3



15...f5

(15...♞a6 16.♞h3! transposes to our main game)

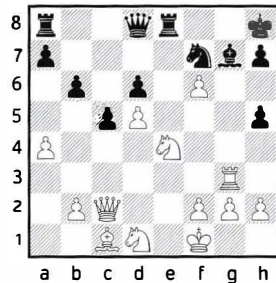
16.exf5 ♞a6 Black is using tactics to win an exchange. Should White really mind?



17.♗e4! No, White does not mind! White happily sacrifices an exchange and gets a strong kingside attack. Again, Black's damaged pawn structure resulting from the ...♗h5 plan plays a crucial role!

(17.♞e1? ♗c4?)

17...♞xf1 18.♗xf1 White has excellent attacking prospects for his small material investment. 18...♗f7 19.♞g3 ♘h8 20.f6!±



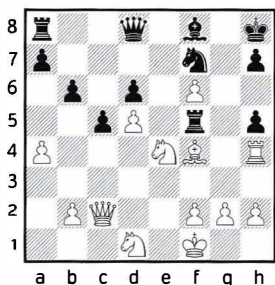
20...♞f8 chesstouring.com

(20... ♖xf6 21. ♜f3 ♜xe4 22. ♜xe4±)

21. ♜h3! Now White probably is on the way to victory.

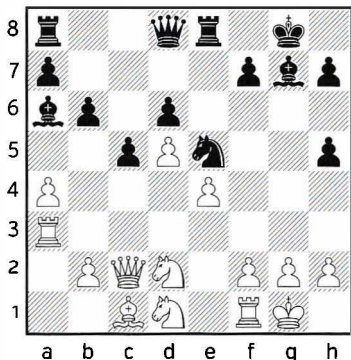
(21. ♔d2 ♜d7± with an advantage for White, though Black ultimately survived in 1/2–1/2 Gligoric,S (2595)-Taimanov,M (2595) Lenin-grad 1973.)

21... ♜e5 22. ♔f4 ♜f5 23. ♜h4+-



(White threatens 24. ♜e3.) 23... ♔h6 24. ♔xh6 ♜xh6 25. ♜e3 ♜e5 26. ♜d3 Threatening ♜c4. 26... ♜f5 27. ♜xf5 ♜xf5 28. ♜xd6 ♜xf6 29. ♜xh5+-.

12...b6 13. ♜c2 ♜h5 14. ♔xh5 gxh5 15. ♜d1 ♔a6



Black is hoping his active piece play will compensate for his kingside pawn structure damage.

16. ♜h3!

Vintage Petrosian! White happily sacrifices an exchange, getting as compensation the magnificent f5-square for his knight! Petrosian's positional concept shows the strategic risks of Fischer's ...♜h5 idea.

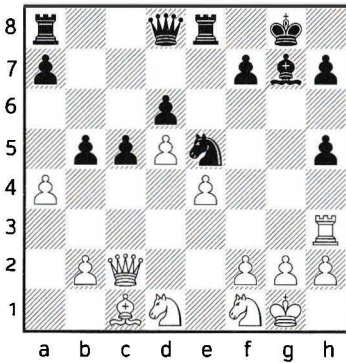
16... ♔xf1

Black could have tried to take the exchange in a smarter way, though White would still have had great compensation: 16...h4 17. ♜e3 ♔d3 18. ♜d1 ♔xf1 19. ♜xf1 (19. ♜dxf1 ♜g6 Now the e4-pawn hangs; this was the idea behind 17... ♔d3) 19... ♜g6 20. ♜f5±.

17. ♜xf1 b5

a) 17...h4 18. ♜de3 ♜g6 19. ♜f5 a6 20. ♜ie3 b5 21. ♜xg7 ♜xg7 22. ♜f5+ ♜g8 23.g3→

b) Perhaps Black should have considered that depriving the white knight of the f5-square was worth a pawn and played 17...f5!? 18.exf5 h4 White would now need to bring his knight to e4 (similar to Gligoric-Taimanov). White definitely has strong compensation.



18. ♖de3!→

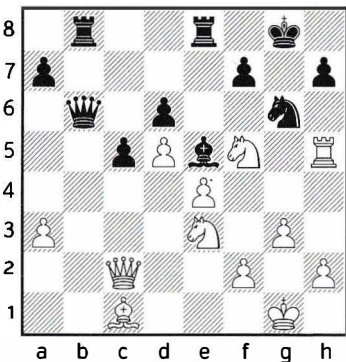
Petrosian is going for the kill!

18.axb5 was actually also possible, as after 18...a6∞ Black does not really get the desired counter-play after 19.b6 ♖xb6 20.♖de3 with ♖f5 to follow.

18...bxa4 19.♖f5 ♖g6 20. ♖xh5 ♗e5
21.g3 ♖b8

White needs his last piece in the attack, so the knight on f1 is heading to g4.

22.♖e3! a3 23.bxa3 ♖b6



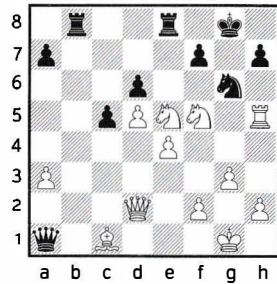
Petrosian was probably not certain whether he needed to move his knight from e3 to g4 or to c4, so he first played...

24. ♖d2

24.♖c4 was also possible. 24...♖b1

(24...♖a6 now leaves Black without any counter-play after 25.♗g2+.)

25. ♖d2 ♖a1 26.♖xe5



White is better, but he does not have a mate. 26...♖b1 27.♗g2 ♖xc1 28.♖f3 ♖h1 29.♖d3 ♖xe4 30.♖xd6 White is definitely better, but Black has chances of survival.

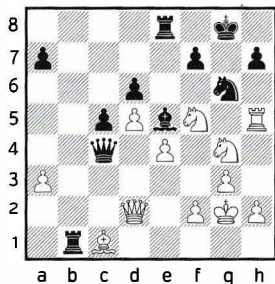
24...♖b3?

This makes White's task easier.

24...♖a6! was a better defensive resource as 25.♖g4, strangely enough, does not seem to mate:

(25.♗g2!±)

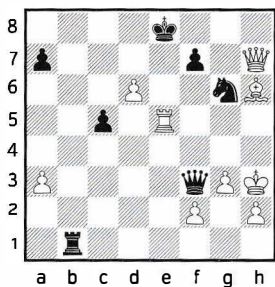
25...♖b1 26.♗g2 ♖c4



Now some fancy lines may follow, for example 27. ♖xd6 ♕xd6 28. ♖h6 ♖xe4+ 29. ♗h3 ♖f3! 30. ♗g5 ♕e5 31. d6 ♖e6! and Black seems to be defending successfully. 32. ♖xh7+

(32.d7 ♖d1 is a forced draw: 33. ♖xh7+ ♗f8 34. ♖xe5 ♖xe5 35. ♖h6+ ♗g8 36. ♖h7+.)

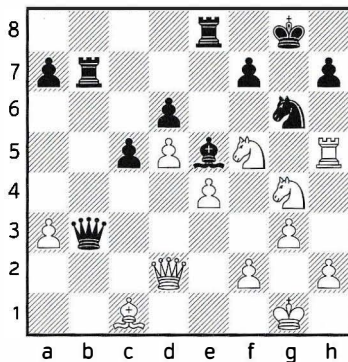
32... ♗f8 33. ♖xe5 ♖xe5 34. ♗h6+ ♗e8 35. ♖xe5+



35... ♗d7! This is a strange position; there are plenty of tactics and matters are far from clear.

(35... ♖xe5 36. ♖xb1+-)

25. ♖g4+- ♖b7



Now, not in a hurry, Petrosian first improves his king.

26. ♗g2!

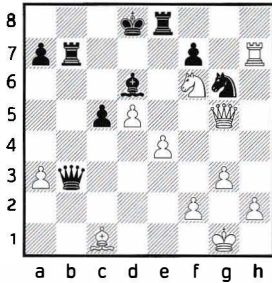
Petrosian takes by far the best practical decision! He improves his king's position, retaining all the threats and by doing so he keeps the price of the move "low"! Keeping the price of the move low means that no strong calculating ability is needed any longer; the player is cashing in while minimizing the risk. Very often people in their analyses follow the top computer line when in practice it is actually not a great line at all, because in a human fight it unnecessarily increases the price of the move! This is well illustrated in the comments to 26. ♖xd6 below.

Computer programs make 26. ♖xd6 their top choice. Tigran Petrosian definitely saw this move and yes it should win for White, but White for example needs to calculate the fol-

lowing line. 26... ♙xd6 27. ♖f6+ ♜f8
28. ♝xh7 ♜e7

(28... ♗f3 29. ♗h6+ ♜e7 30. ♗xg6+-)

29. ♗g5 and now after 29... ♜d8



White needs to find — and in fact needed to find while playing 26. ♖xd6! — that after the obvious 30. ♖xe8+ ♜xe8 the only clear-cut win is 31. ♗f5!

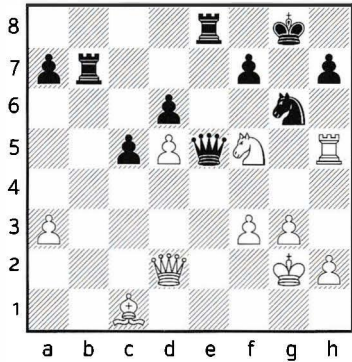
(31. ♗f6? ♝d7 for example is better for Black.)

31... ♝d7

(31... ♗b1 32. ♜g2+-)

Here White already has different solutions, the prettiest being 32. ♝xf7! ♝xf7 33. ♗c8+ ♜e7 34. ♙g5+ ♝f6 35. ♗e6+ collecting all the black pieces. Bottom line: in a practical game the Petrosian approach is way way better!

26... ♗c4 27. ♖xe5 ♗xe4+ 28. f3 ♗xe5



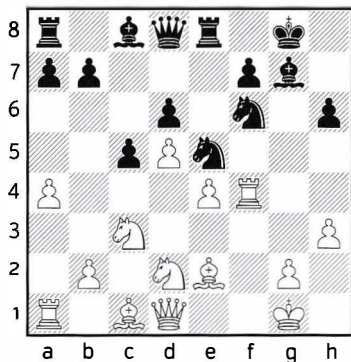
29. ♖h6+ ♜f8 30. ♝xe5 ♝xe5 31. ♖g4 ♝ee7

Petrosian's positional sacrifice masterpiece!

1-0

4.2. KINGSIDE STRUCTURE TRANSFORMATIONS

Games two and three illustrate pawn structure transformations which may occur on the kingside. Though these transformations in our particular case come from the Pirouette Variation, similar positions may come from different Benoni lines. Understanding the basic pros and cons is a necessity for anyone willing to play these positions with either colour.



This particular pawn structure is quite often seen in different Benoni lines. I think that Black's powerful knight on e5 does not sufficiently compensate for the potential weakness of the black king. Opinions differ here; I prefer White!

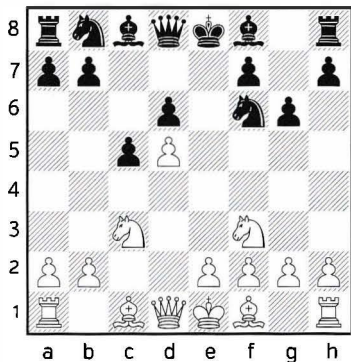
19

▷ **E. Magerramov**

▷ **G. Kasparov**

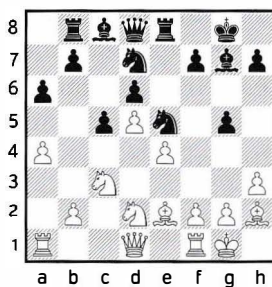
Baku, 1979

1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 e6 4.♗c3 exd5
5.cxd5 d6 6.♗f3 g6

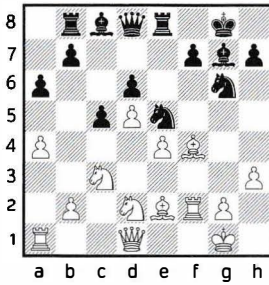


7.♗d2

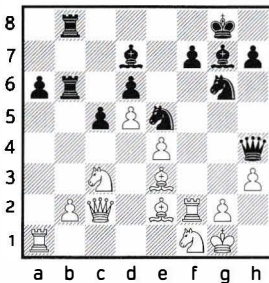
In 2009 I had a rapid game with one of the Benoni heroes, the late Vugar Gashimov. Through a different opening line we came to the pawn structure discussed here. The game was dynamic and instructive, so let's see it. 7.h3 ♗g7 8.♗f4 o-o 9.e3 ♗e8 10.♗d2 ♗bd7 11.♗e2 ♗e5 12.o-o a6 13.a4 ♗b8 14.e4 ♗fd7 15.♗h2 g5



Black plans to play ...♗f8 and ...♗g6, so White needs to push his f-pawn. 16.f4 gxf4 17.♗xf4 We have reached the pawn structure of our interest. Black controls the important e5-square and has posted a dominant knight there; White has pressure along the f-file and a potential outpost on f5, although it will not be easy to manoeuvre a knight to that square. Probably the position is dynamically balanced. I have given a number of different lines trying to support the view that the game is dynamically equal, with plenty of opportunities for both sides to go wrong! 17...♗f8 18.♗f2 ♗fg6



Black has dynamic play and White's f1-f3-e3-f5 or f1-f3-g3-f5 plan is difficult to achieve. 19. e3 d7 20. a5 b5 21. axb6 Bxb6 22. Cc2 Wh4 23. f1 The f1-square is a natural place for the white knight here, hoping to make its way to f5 via e3 or g3. Black's knight on e5 is dominant, but for the time being it cannot jump to anywhere useful. 23... Beb8



Now I played 24. Cc1 , wanting to prevent ... e6 with a bishop exchange and also threaten e5 trapping the queen.

[24. Ba2 leads to equality: 24... e6 This bishop trade is strategically good for Black here, as it underlines the strong dark-squares control he has in this position. 25. Cc1 (If 25.g3

Black gets excellent compensation for the sacrificed queen after 25... Wh3 26. exc5 dxc5 27. Bh2 e3+ 28. gh1 e4 .) 25... ex3 26. Wh3 Bxb2 27. Bxa6 Bb6= .]

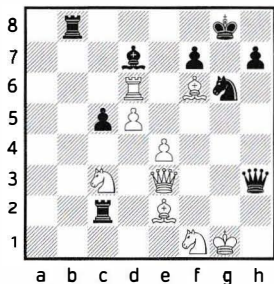
24... Bxb2 25. Bxa6



(25. e5?? Whf2+ 26. gh2 d3+-)

Black now could have made a nice exchange sacrifice, one which Benoni aficionados will love. Indeed it is a little strange that Gashimov did not go for it. 25... Bxe2 !

a) In rapid games, even the world's best tacticians make blunders. Gashimov now played 25... e6 ? after which Black soon ran out of threats and White gained a massive advantage. 26. exh6 d3 (26... Whf2+ 27. gh2 d3+ 28. gh1 xc1 29. exc1+-) 27. We3 (27.g3 was also winning for White 27... xc1 28. gxh4 Bc2 29. e4+-) 27... xf2 28. e5! fxh3+ 29. gxh3 Wh3 30. Bxd6 Bc2 31. e6+-

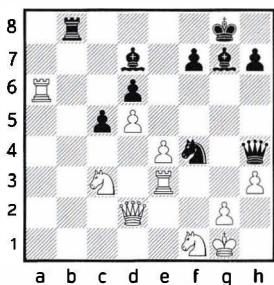


Black now has to trade queens, which results in a lost endgame.

31... ♖xe3+ 32. ♜xe3 ♖c1+ 33. ♜f2 ♙e8 34. ♜a6 ♜h1 35. ♙f3 ♖c1 36. d6 h6 37. ♜cd5 ♜h7 38. ♜a7 ♜f8 39. ♜e7 ♜a8 40. e5 ♜g6 41. ♙e4 1-0 Sokolov, I (2655)-Gashimov, V (2740) Mainz 2009.

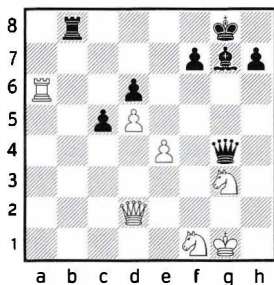
b) 25... ♜b3 26. ♜a3 ♜xa3 27. ♖xa3 is approximately equal.

Back to the exchange sacrifice: 26. ♜xe2 ♜d3 27. ♖d2 ♜gf4 28. ♙xf4 ♜xf4 29. ♜e3



With the white rook stuck on a6, Black can use his momentum for attacking ideas on the kingside. 29... ♙d4

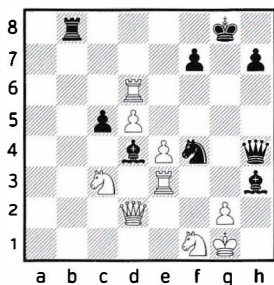
[29... ♙xh3!? can lead to a forced draw 30.gxh3 ♜xh3+ 31. ♜xh3 (31. ♜h1 ♙e5 32. ♖g2+ ♜g5+ 33. ♜g1 h6 with ... ♜h7, ... ♜g8 to follow.) 31... ♖xh3 32. ♜e2 ♖g4+ 33. ♜eg3



Now it is important for Black to take away the white knight's option of jumping to the f5-square. 33... ♜f5! (33... ♙d4+ 34. ♜h1 Black can still play ... ♜f5 here, but not 34... ♜b2?? 35. ♜a8+ ♜g7 36. ♜f5+-) 34. exf5 ♙d4+ 35. ♜h1 ♜b2 and White has to force a perpetual check 36. ♜a8+ ♜f7 37. ♜a7+ ♜g8=.]

30. ♖f2

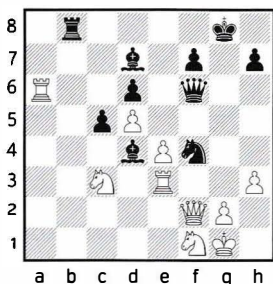
[White has no time for 30. ♜xd6? as it loses to 30... ♙xh3!



31.gxh3 ♜xh3+ 32. ♜h1 (32. ♜g2 ♜f4+ 33. ♜f3 h5-+) White is a rook

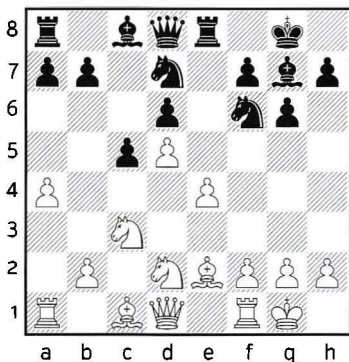
up, but his extra rook is not doing much on d6, while the white king is being overwhelmed by black attackers. 32...♔h8! 33.♖h2 ♕xe3 34.♖e5+ (34.♘xe3 ♖e1+ 35.♔g2 ♜b2+-) 34...♔g8 35.♘xe3 ♘f4+ 36.♔g1 ♖g3+ 37.♔f1 ♖f3+-]

30...♖f6



Computer engines evaluate this position around 0.00, but Black looks good to me.

7...♘bd7 8.e4 ♕g7 9.♕e2 0-0 10.0-0 ♜e8 11.a4



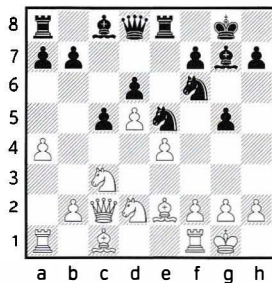
In this well-known position of the Benoni Pirouette variation, Black's main strategic plan is to push g6-

g5 in order to support his knight on e5. This strategic plan leads to pawn structures similar to those in my game with Gashimov, given above. This structure has its pros and cons for Black. Here I will give two games played as Black by famous World Champions, hoping to help readers to understand those positions better.

11...g5

This was played by the young Kasparov.

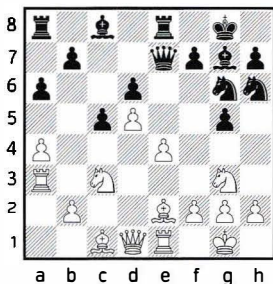
a) 11...♘e5 was Fischer's choice against Gligoric in 1970, when he was at the peak of his career. 12.♖c2 g5 Fischer supports his knight and is ready for the 'f4 gxf4 ♜xf4' transaction. Gligoric, himself an expert on the white side of this line, decides to exchange Black's knight on e5.



13.♘f3 In general, I would say that an exchange of one pair of knights should be to White's advantage here, because after the 'f4 gxf4'

transaction White's f-file pressure may become stronger.

a1) Some similar strategic play was seen in Najdorf-Timman, Bugojno 1982. 13. ♖a3! A typical Benoni rook lift. White will now focus on transferring his knight from d2 to g3, via f1. The knight will then target f5, weakened by the ...g6-g5 pawn push. 13... ♖e7 14. ♗e1 ♗fg4 15. ♗f1! ♗g6 16. ♖d1 ♗h6 17. ♗g3 a6

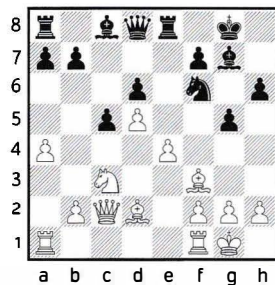


Here White had to proceed with 18.a5! White wants to send his knight deep into enemy territory, via a4 to b6. (Najdorf, who was 72 at the time, loses the thread. 18. ♗e3? Blocking the third rank hems in the rook on a3. 18... f5 19. exf5 ♗xf5 20. ♗xf5 ♗xf5 21. ♖d2 h6 22. ♗aa1 ♖f6 23. ♗d3? ♗e5 24. ♗e2 ♖g6 25. f3 g4 and Black went on to win.) 18... f5 (18... ♗d7 19. ♗a4) 19. exf5 Now it becomes obvious that 13. ♖a3! was a good move, as the white rook can easily swing across to the kingside. 19... ♗xf5 (19... ♗xf5 20. ♗ce4 ♗d4 21. ♗h5 ♗xg3 22. ♗xg3 ♗f5

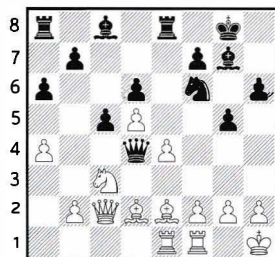
23. ♗xg5+-) 20. ♗d2± Black's kingside is weak and White has a clear advantage. I like Najdorf's 13. ♖a3 idea!

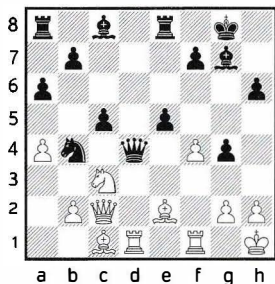
a2) 13.f4 was definitely possible and after 13...gxf4 14. ♗xf4 we have play similar to my game with Gashimov as in our main game.

13... ♗xf3+ 14. ♗xf3 h6 15. ♗d2



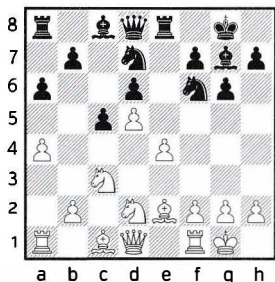
Fischer decides to move his queen to e5. 15... a6 (15... ♗d7 16. ♗e2 ♗e5 17. f4 gxf4 18. ♗xf4 leads to positions similar to our main game; personally I prefer White's chances.) 16. ♗e2 ♖e7 17. ♗ae1 ♖e5 18. ♗h1! An intelligent prophylactic move. White is ready to push f2-f4, but first removes his king from possible queen checks on d4. 18... ♖d4





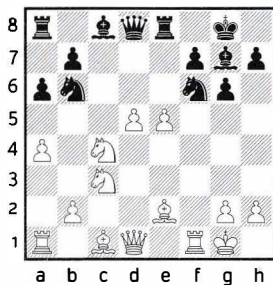
23. ♖b1 Black objectively does not get nearly enough for the sacrificed queen 23... ♙e6 24. ♖xd4 exd4 25. ♙d2! dxc3 26. ♙xc3±.

b) Another option is 11...a6

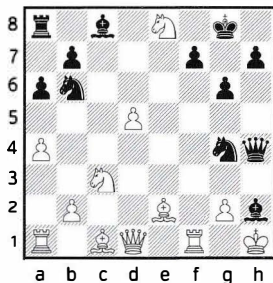


which is not often played, probably because the black players do not like Petrosian's 12. ♖a3, when White simply gets a good version of known lines. I would, however, like to show you one interesting Gligoric game, because it is entertaining and also good for calculation training. 12.f4!? An ambitious move leading to nice complications. (The typical Benoni move 12. ♖a3 was played by Petrosian, with success.) 12...c4! Now White goes for a typical Benoni reaction.

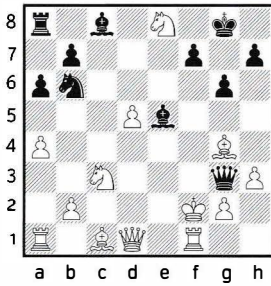
13.e5!? dx5 14. ♖xc4 ♖b6 (14...exf4 15. ♙xf4±) 15.fx5



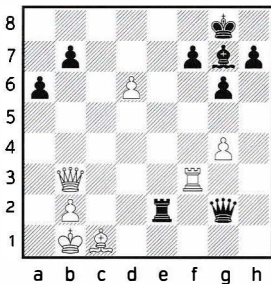
15...♖g4!? (15...♖fxd5 simplifies matters: 16. ♖xd5 ♖xd5 17. ♖xd5 ♖xd5 18. ♙f3 ♙e6 and this looks equal.) 16. ♖d6! White needs sharp calculation to make such a move! 16... ♙xe5 17. ♖xe8! Should Black take on h2 with a check? 17... ♖h4! No, he should not! [17... ♙xh2+? was played in the actual game and resulted in a quick end. 18. ♖h1 ♖h4



Now comes the defence that Black missed. 19. ♙g5! ♖xg5 20. ♙xg4 ♙e5 (20... ♙xg4? 21. ♖xg4+-) 21. ♖f3! f5 22. ♖ae1 ♙d4 23. ♖f4+- and White soon won in Gligoric, S-Nicevski, R Zagreb 1970] 18.h3 ♖g3 19. ♙xg4 ♖h2+ 20. ♖f2 ♖g3+

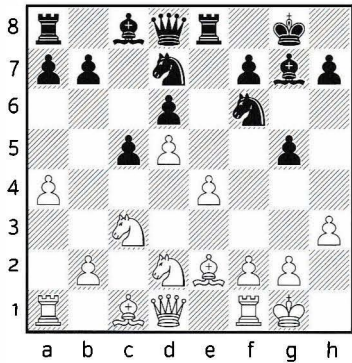


Can White play for a win? 21.♔e2! Yes, he can. (21.♔g1= and a draw by perpetual check.) 21...♙xg4+ 22.hxg4 ♖xe8 23.♔d2 ♙xc3+ 24.♔c2! (24.bxc3?? ♜xg2+-) 24...♙g7 25.♖a3! ♜xg2+ 26.♔b1 Black is the one fighting for a draw. The following line is rather entertaining: 26...♗e2 27.♖b3 ♘xa4 (27...♘xd5 28.♖ff3±) 28.d6! ♘c5 29.♖ff3 ♘xb3 30.♜xb3



30...♜h1! 31.d7 (31.♜xf7+ ♔h8 32.♖c3 ♜e4+ 33.♔a2 ♜a4+ 34.♔b1 ♜e4+=) 31...♖xb2+ 32.♜xb2 ♙xb2 33.d8♜+ ♔g7 34.♖xf7+ ♔xf7 35.♜d7+ ♔f8 36.♔xb2±.

12.h3

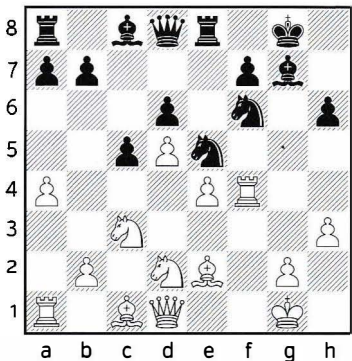


12.f4 was also possible but White is likely to play h2-h3 anyway, so Magerramov decides to do it first and only then push f2-f4.

12...h6

The immediate 12...♘e5 was also to be considered.

13.f4 gxf4 14.♖xf4 ♘e5



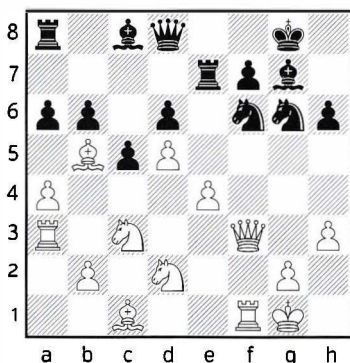
We reached to the pawn structure of our interest. White will keep pressure along the f-file and Black's king position will become endangered, while dynamic play con-

nected with the well-placed knight on e5 will prove insufficient to provide Black with equality. Magerramov improves his rook on a1, using a standard Benoni move.

15. ♖a3 ♗g6 16. ♖f1 b6 17. ♔b5 ♞e7

Kasparov refrains from 17... ♔d7 as after an exchange of the light squared bishops, Black will have problems with his weakness on f5 — the perfect square for the white knight on d2, for example.

18. ♖f3 a6

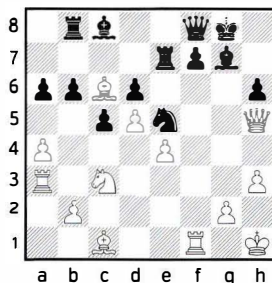


White now faces an interesting dilemma as to where to go with his bishop on b5. Placing this bishop to c6 would cripple Black's manoeuvring ability, but should the centre of action move to the kingside the bishop might become stuck on the wrong side of the board. Mageramov finally decides to retreat to e2.

19. ♔e2

19. ♔c6 was more direct. 19... ♞a7 is then arguably Black's best, enabling the rook to swing over to the e-file.

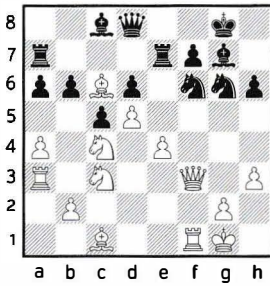
[19... ♞b8 leads to a clear white advantage: 20. ♗c4 ♗d7 (20... b5? just sacrifices a pawn for nothing 21. axb5 axb5 22. ♔xb5.) 21. ♗h1 (21. ♔xd7 ♞xd7 22. ♗e3 aiming to capitalize on the f5 weakness was also promising for White. 22... b5 23. axb5 axb5 24. ♗e2 The white knights aim for the weak f5 and h5 squares, highlighting a clear deficiency of Black's strategy with g6-g5.) White has a clear advantage, thanks to the black kingside weakness. 21... ♗de5 22. ♗xe5 ♗xe5 23. ♖h5 ♖f8



Now we see again the point behind the rook lift from a1 to a3 in these Benoni positions, as the white rook can easily swing across to the kingside to attack the black king. 24. ♗e2! ♗xc6 25. dxc6 ♞e5 (The pawn grab 25... ♞xe4? leads to disaster after 26. ♞g3+.) 26. ♖f3± The black king's position is vulnerable and White has a large advantage.]

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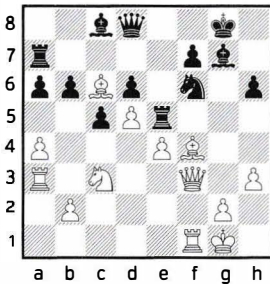
20. ♗c4



20...♘e5

(In the event of 20...♘d7 it is probably easiest for White to go for a standard strategic decision 21.♙xd7 ♖axd7 22.♘e3± and the white knights will menace the f5 and h5 squares)

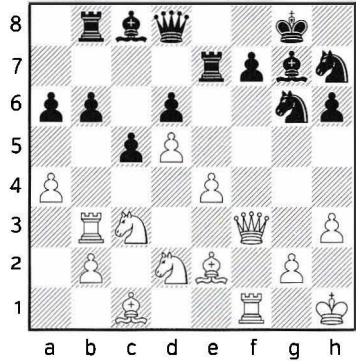
21.♘xe5 ♖xe5 22.♙f4



Now the best decision for Black is to sacrifice an exchange — otherwise his position is terribly passive. 22...♘h7! Here indeed the white bishop may get stuck on c6, while the main action moves to the kingside. Computer engines evaluate this as +1.20 which is, I think, a typical case where we should not trust computers blindly as Black in practical human play definitely has some compensation for the sacri-

ficed exchange. White should still be better, though.

19...♖b8 20.♙h1 ♘h7 21.♖b3

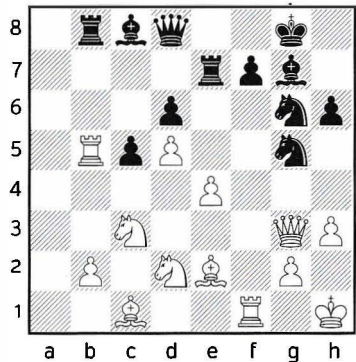


Known for his desire for active play, young Kasparov — 16 at the time — now correctly sacrifices a pawn.

21...b5!?

21...♘g5 22.♖f2± (22.♖h5±)

22.axb5 axb5 23.♖xb5 ♘g5 24.♖g3



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An important decision for Black: to exchange the rook or not?

24... ♖xb5

24... ♖a8! was probably a better decision. The position is rather messy but Black definitely has his chances.

25. ♗xb5

25. ♗xb5! was a better move, preventing ... ♗c8- ♗a6, and White would then have an advantage.

25... ♗a6

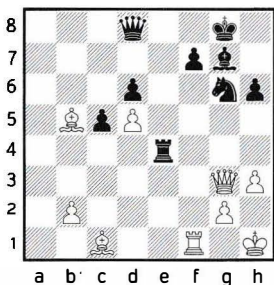
Black has adequate compensation here.

26. ♖g4

26. ♗c4 looks like a forced draw:
26... ♗xb5

(or 26... ♗xe4 27. ♗xe4 ♖xe4
28. ♖xf7 ♗xf7 29. ♖f3+ ♖f4 30. ♗xf4
♗xb5 may transpose after 31. ♗xb5
as there is no deadly discovered
check. 31. ♗h2+ ♖f6 32. ♖xf6+
♗xf6 33. ♗xb5 ♗e5=.)

27. ♗xb5 ♗xe4 28. ♗xe4 ♖xe4



with a peaceful end after 29. ♖xf7

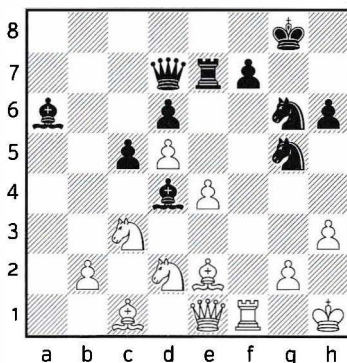
(29. ♗d3 ♖h4)

29... ♗xf7 30. ♖f3+ ♖f4 31. ♗xf4
♗xf4 32. ♖xf4+ ♖f6=

26... ♗c8 27. ♖g3 ♗a6

White decides to play on.

28. ♖f2 ♖d7 29. ♗c3 ♗d4 30. ♖e1



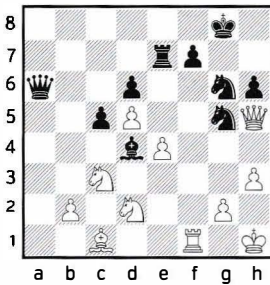
30... ♗xe2?

This releases the tension, playing into White's hands.

Much better was 30... ♖c8! keeping the tension along the a6-f1 diagonal. Then the position is dynamically balanced and it is easy for both sides to go wrong. 31. ♖d1

(31. ♗c4 ♗xc4 32. ♗xc4 ♗xh3 and Black is at least okay.)

31...♖h4 32.♙xa6 ♖xa6 33.♗h5
♗g6



34.♖xh6

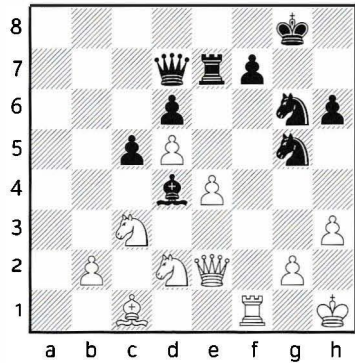
a) 34.♖d1 ♖f4 35.♖xh6 f6 36.♖h4
♗xg2 (36...♗d3!?♖) 37.♗xg2 ♙xc3
White has to be careful. 38.♖h5!
and most likely we get a draw by
perpetual check. 38...♖h7 (or 38...
♙e5 39.h4 ♖g7 40.♖e8+=.) 39.♖e8+
♗g7 40.♖d7+=.

b) 34.♖e1?! ♗d3 35.♖xh6 ♖e5 does
not look good for White as his pie-
ces are terribly uncoordinated.

34...♗xe4 35.♗cxe4 ♖xe4 36.♖g5
The white pieces do not coordinate
well. Black definitely has sufficient
compensation, perhaps more.

31.♖xe2±

Now White's life is easy, as the black
kingside weaknesses start to tell.

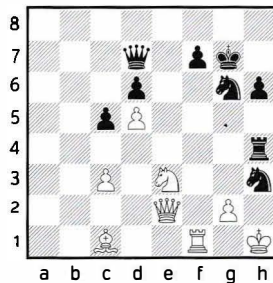


31...♗g7 32.♖h5

32.♗d3 preparing ♗d2-♗c4 would
have brought a large advantage
for White. 32...♗e5 33.♖g3 ♗g6
34.♗c4+-

32...♖e5 33.♗f3!

33.♗c4?! would have let Black off
the hook! 33...♙xc3 34.bxc3 ♖xe4
35.♗e3 ♖h4 36.♖e2 ♗xh3



Now White needs a cool head!
37.♖c2!

(37.gxh3?? ♖xh3+ 38.♗g1 ♗f4-+)

37...♗e7 38.gxh3 [chessstouring.com](http://www.chessstouring.com)

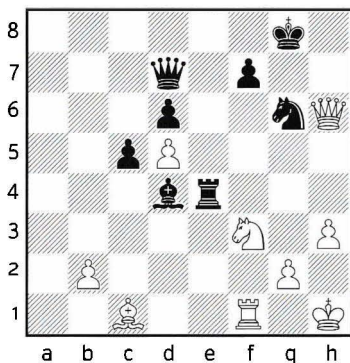
(White actually may decide to simply ignore the black knight on h3 and play for compensation with 38.c4 and unclear play.)

38... ♖xh3+ 39. ♘g1 ♖h1+ 40. ♘f2
♜h2+ 41. ♘g3 ♜h3+ 42. ♘f2=.

33... ♗xe4

33... ♙xc3 now does not work due to the simple 34. ♙xg5 hxg5 35.bxc3
♜xe4 36. ♗xg5 ♜h4 37. ♖e2 and
White is a sound pawn up.

34. ♖xh6+ ♗g8 35. ♗xe4 ♜xe4



36. ♗xd4!

White is most precise!

36. ♗g5 ♜h4 37. ♜xf7 ♖xh3+ 38.gxh3
♜xh6 39. ♜d7 ♗f8±

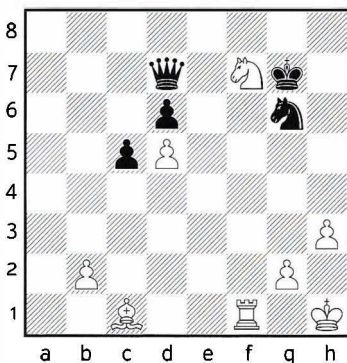
36... ♜h4

Here Magerramov could not resist an artistic urge so he went for a queen sacrifice!

37. ♗f5!?

Simply 37. ♖g5+ would have left White with a winning advantage. White is a sound pawn up, while the black king remains weak. This was the easy and practical solution... but then we would not have seen White's beautiful 50th move.

37... ♜xh6 38. ♗xh6+ ♗h8
39. ♗xf7+ ♗g7



Move 40 is often not an easy one! White decides to transfer his knight to e6.

40. ♗g5

40. ♙d2 was perhaps stronger. 40...
♗e7 41. ♙c3+ ♗g8 42. ♜f4 and Black
faces a difficult time.

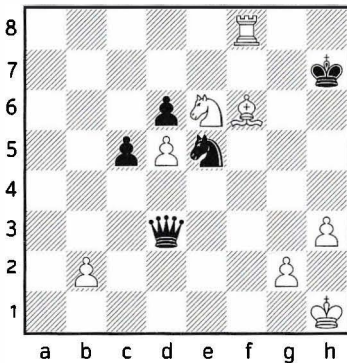
40... ♖b5!

Black activates his queen.

41. ♖e6+ ♔g8 42. ♜f6 ♞d3 43. ♙g5
♜e5

For the time being the black king is fighting alone, but it is difficult for White to weave the mating net.

44. ♜f8+ ♔h7 45. ♙f6



To computer engines this position is an easy one offering many 0.00 options. For a human in over-the-board play it is something different, even if your name is Kasparov!

45... ♞f1+

Kasparov's play is logical, but allows White a nice king run!

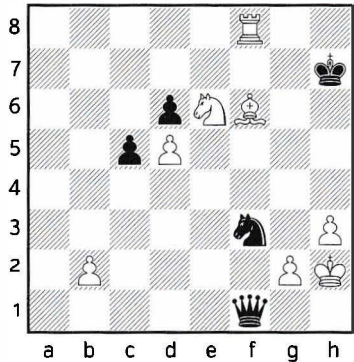
45... ♞d1+ was one of the 0.00 options 46. ♖h2 ♞d2 47. ♙g7

(47.b3 leads to perpetual check: 47... ♜g4+ 48.hxg4 ♞h6+ 49.♖g1 ♞e3+

50. ♖f1 ♞d3+ 51. ♖f2 ♞d2+ 52. ♖g3 ♞e3+=.)

47... ♞xb2 and White has nothing better than to force a draw: 48. ♜h8+ ♖g6 49. ♜h6+ ♖f7 50. ♜f6+ ♖g8 51. ♜f8+=.

46. ♖h2 ♜f3+



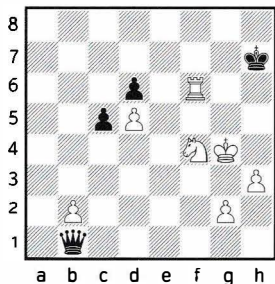
Should White grab the knight with 47.gxf3 and settle for a draw by perpetual check after 47... ♞f2+? No way!

47. ♖g3! ♜d2

Magerramov plays, it seems to me, the most logical human move.

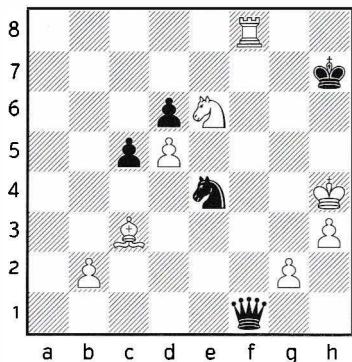
48. ♙c3

Mutual best play was the following computer line 48. ♜f4 ♜e4+ 49. ♖g4 ♞d1+ 50. ♖f5 ♜xf6 51. ♜xf6 ♞b1+ 52. ♖g4



White's knight on f4 is well placed, preventing the perpetual check. 52... ♖xb2 53. ♖xd6 c4 Both sides have their passed pawns. 54. ♖d7+ ♖h6 55. ♖c7 c3 56. ♖c6+ ♖h7 57.d6 c2 58.d7 ♖g7+ 59.♖f3 ♖xd7 60.♖xc2 Computer engines think that Black should survive this. In practical human play, I would definitely put my money on White winning it.

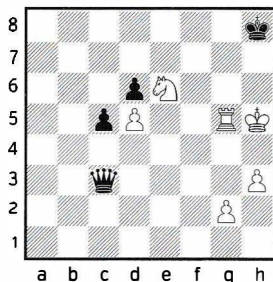
48... ♖e4+ 49. ♖h4



49... ♖g1

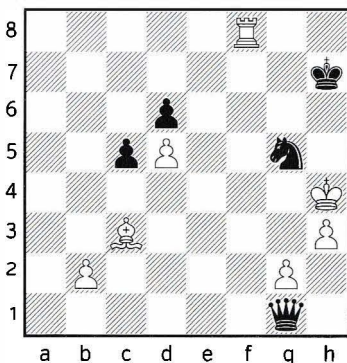
This allows Elmar Magerramov a beautiful finish.

49... ♖d1! could have saved the game for Black: 50. ♖f7+ ♖g8 51. ♖g7+ ♖h8 52. ♖g5+ ♖xc3 53.bxc3 ♖e1+ 54. ♖h5 ♖xc3



White is not in time to mate Black, as the black c-pawn starts to run. 55. ♖g6 ♖d3+ 56. ♖f6 c4 57. ♖h5+ ♖g8 58. ♖g5+ ♖h8 59.g4 c3 and White has to force a draw 60. ♖h5+=.

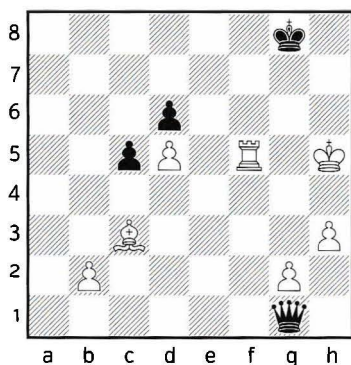
50. ♖g5+!! ♖xg5



51. ♖h5

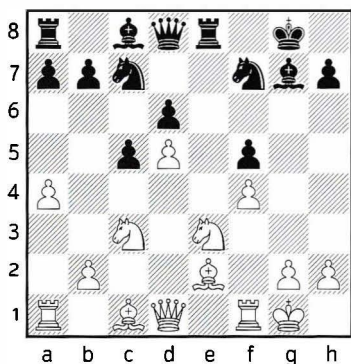
The black knight is protecting the white king (after 51... ♖d1 52.g4), and now to avoid mate, Black is forced to return his extra piece

51...♖f7 52.♜xf7+ ♔g8 53.♜f5



White will push his kingside pawns and ultimately win. Black is passive with no counter-play, so we can perfectly understand Garry not being in the mood to continue. In those days games were adjourned, so the torture would have continued into another day!

1-0



This particular pawn structure is nowadays less often seen in the

Benoni, as the opinion has developed that Black simply has kingside weaknesses and a passive position. White is better here and the black players have generally stopped entering this structure. Tal's loss here is, to my knowledge, the only loss he ever suffered in the Benoni in his entire career!

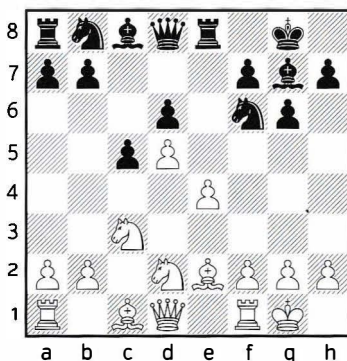
20

▷ E. Bukic

▶ M. Tal

Budva [9], 1967

1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 e6 4.♖c3 exd5
5.cxd5 d6 6.♖f3 g6 7.e4 ♔g7 8.♕e2
o-o 9.o-o ♜e8 10.♖d2



Should Black not like his b8-knight development to d7, than he opts for

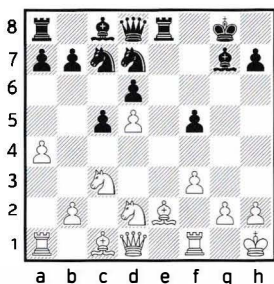
10...♖a6 11.f3 ♖c7 12.a4 ♖d7

12...b6 is not precise for Black because of 13.♖c4± stopping ...♖d7.

13. ♖c4

13. ♖h1 was played in another high profile game where Fischer went for the same pawn structure as Tal, and almost got into trouble! Here we will examine two options:

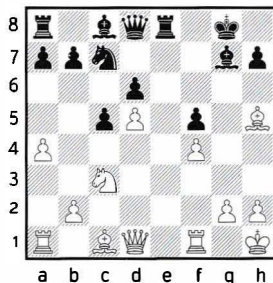
a) The famous Hungarian grandmaster Lajos Portisch here played 13...f5 but things did not end well for him. 14:exf5 gxf5



So, we have reached the pawn structure we are dealing with in this game. Black's basic problem is his weak king as White can use a rook lift to attack along the g-file, while the black f5-pawn is also weak. 15. ♖c4 ♖e5 16. ♖xe5

(16. ♗f4 also looks better for White, but Gligoric sticks to the traditional plan — he will advance his f-pawn to f4, carry out a rook lift to move his rook to the g-file and transfer his bishop on c1 via d2 to c3, thus increasing the pressure against the black king.)

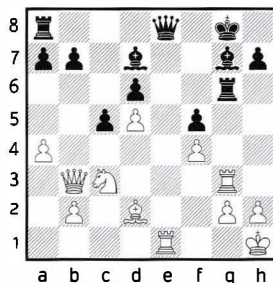
16... ♗xe5 17.f4 ♗g7 18. ♗h5



18... ♗f8

(18... ♗e7 was probably a better move, as 19. ♗f3 ♖e8 is definitely better for Black than what happened in the game.)

19. ♗f3 ♖e8 20. ♗xe8 ♗xe8 21. ♗g3 ♗d7 22. ♗d2 ♗f6 23. ♗b3 ♗g6 24. ♗e1



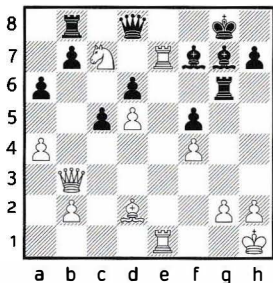
24... ♗d8

[24... ♗f8 25. ♗ge3 (25. ♗xb7? ♗xg3 26.hxg3? ♗d4+) 25... ♗c8 is computer play, but looks better for White as Black remains passive while White can regroup with the backwards knight move 26. ♖b1 followed by ♗c3 and ♖a3-♖c4 to follow.]

25. ♖b5 ♗e8? This loses quickly.

(25...b6! was a better defence, though White is better after the simple 26. ♔c3 because the black king is still weak and his position is passive.)

26. ♖ge3 ♕f7 27. ♖e7 a6 28. ♖c7 ♖b8



White has a winning attack, and Gligoric plays it well: 29. ♖h3!+-

(29. ♖d3 ♕f6 30. ♖xf7 ♖xf7 31. ♖e6±)

29... ♖g4

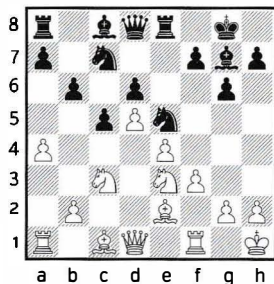
(29... ♕f6 30. ♖xf7 ♖xf7 31. ♖xh7+--)

30. ♖d3

(30. ♖xf7 also wins for White: 30... ♖xf7 31. ♖h5+ ♖g6 32. ♖e6 ♖f6 33. ♕c3.)

30... ♕f6 31. ♖xf5 ♖g6 32. ♖d7 1-0 Gligoric,S (2585)-Portisch,L (2645) Manila 1974.

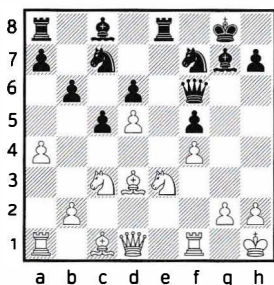
b) 13...b6 was Fischer's choice. 14. ♖c4 ♖e5 15. ♖e3 Now Fischer goes for the same pawn structure that got Tal and Portisch into trouble.



15...f5!)

(15...h5! is a better move, played in Le Quang-Salem, seen later in this chapter under "Two Typical Sacrifices".)

16.f4 ♖f7 17.exf5 gxf5 18. ♕d3 ♖f6

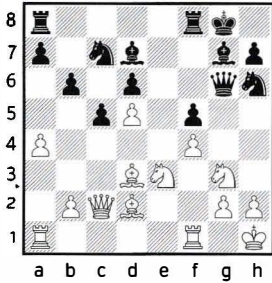


Just like other players entering this pawn structure as Black, Fischer is also suffering from a weakened king position, the f5-pawn weakness and in general a passive position. Najdorf transfers his knight to g3 to target the black f5-pawn. 19. ♖e2

(19. ♖c2 ♖h6 20. ♕d2 This plan, keeping the g-file for the white rook, also looks good for White. 20... ♕d7 21. ♖f3 ♖e7 22. ♖af1 ♖h8 and now White can go for the

standard manoeuvre 23. ♖cd1 with ♜g3 and ♙c3 to follow, seizing the initiative.)

19... ♖h6 20. ♖g3 ♜g6 21. ♜c2 ♜f8
22. ♙d2 ♙d7

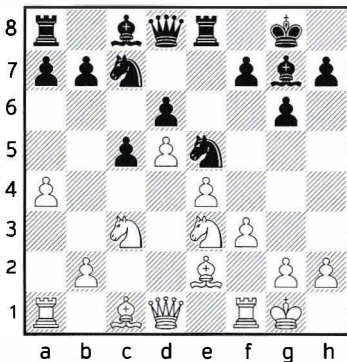


Here White has a nice possibility in 23. ♙e2!

(The actual game went 23. ♜ae1 ♜ae8 and White later lost his way and the game in Najdorf, M-Fischer, R Havana 1966.)

23... ♙d4 24. ♙c3 seizing the advantage, as 24... ♙xe3?? blunders the queen to 25. ♙h5.

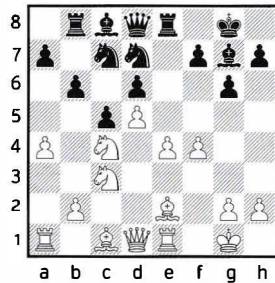
13... ♖e5 14. ♖e3



14...f5

This strategy again does not work for Black.

Interestingly, playing the same position two years later, Fischer was not in a hurry to push ...f5, not in a hurry at all, and opted for 14...b6! 15. ♜e1 ♜b8 16.f4 ♖d7 with complicated play. 17. ♖c4



17... ♖f6

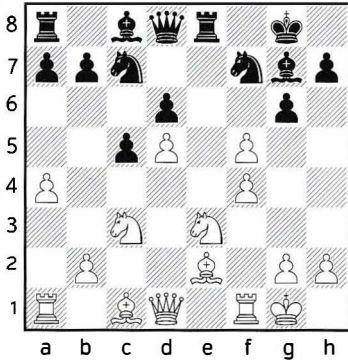
[For readers interested in this opening line, Fischer's play can be improved on with 17... ♙d4+! 18. ♖h1 (18. ♙e3? ♙xc3 19. bxc3 ♜xe4+) 18... ♖f6∞]

18. ♙f3 ♙a6 19. ♖a3 ♖d7 20. ♖ab5 ♙xb5 21. axb5 ♜a8 White now carries out the typical Benoni central pawn break. 22.e5! dxе5 23.d6 ♖e6 24. ♙xa8 ♜xa8 25.fxе5 (25. ♖d5±) 25... ♖xe5± 1/2-1/2 Kraidman, Y-Fischer, R Netanya 1968.

15.f4

Here 15.exf5! was the precise move order for White, as now Black will get tactical possibilities on move 16. 15...gxf5 16.f4 ♖g6 17.♔h1±.

15...♘f7 16.exf5

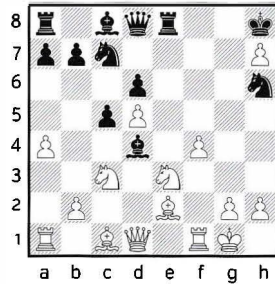


16...gxf5?!

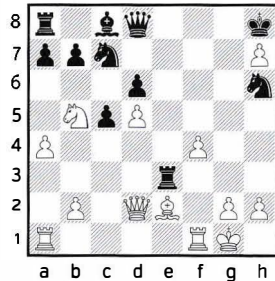
Tal makes an unusual mistake and goes for this pawn structure that favours White. White now executes his typical plan here: g-file pressure, play against the black f-pawn, attacking the weak black king.

This is one of the rare games where Mikhail Tal missed a tactical opportunity to send the game into wild complications. He could have achieved that with 16...♔d4! Black uses the a7-g1 diagonal pin, and the game quickly spirals out of control: 17.fxg6 ♘h6 18.gxh7+ ♔h8 Black has lost all his kingside pawns, but will collect a piece. The position looks mind-bogglingly complicat-

ed, though the engines give many 0.00 lines.



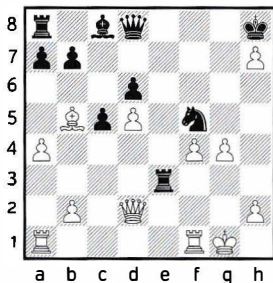
19.♖b5 This is the best move for White, according to the computer, but would not immediately spring to a human mind. 19...♔xe3+ 20.♔xe3 ♜xe3 21.♞d2



From this complicated position, play could develop as follows. 21...♘f5

[21...♞e7 22.f5!? sacrificing a pawn to open routes to the black king 22...♘b5! (If 22...♘xf5 23.♘xc7 ♜xc7 24.♔d3 ♘d4 25.♞f2 White gets a serious attack on the black king.) 23.f6 (23.axb5 ♞f8 is fine for Black 24.f6 ♞e5.) 23...♞xh7 24.axb5∞]

22.g4 ♘b5 23.♔xb5



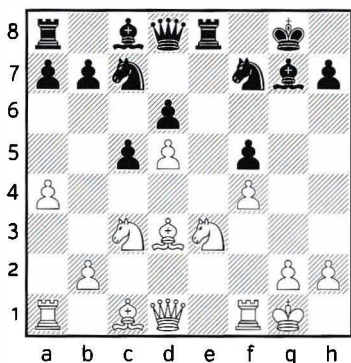
23... ♖f6! 24. ♜ae1

(24.gxf5 ♜b3 25. ♜ae1 ♔xf5)

24... ♜xe1 25. ♜xe1 ♖g7 26.h3 a6
27. ♔d3 ♔d7 I do not know if Black
is better, but at least to me he does
not look worse.

The other way was 16... ♖h6 17.fxg6
♔d4 transposing to the above.

17. ♔d3



Now Black is in trouble. White is
well acquainted with the secrets of
the position and Tal does not escape
his grip!

17... ♖f6

White first carries out the standard
rook lift.

18. ♜f3 ♔d7

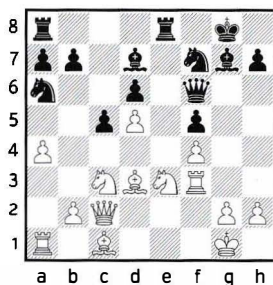
Now he targets the black f-pawn.

19. ♖c2

19. ♜g3 also looks good for White:
19... ♖h8 20. ♔d2→.

19... ♖h6

The tactical attempt 19... ♖a6!?

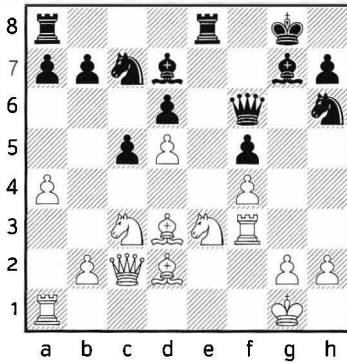


does not really work for Black after
20. ♔xa6!

(20. ♔xf5 gives Black what he
wants: 20... ♔xf5 21. ♖xf5 ♜xe3!
22. ♖xf6 ♜xf3 23. ♖xg7+ ♖xg7
24.gxf3 ♖b4.)

20... bxa6 21. ♔d2± and White fol-
lows up with the standard plan of
♖cd1 and ♔c3.

20. ♔d2



20... ♖e7

In the event of 20... ♖a6 comes the familiar story: 21. ♗xa6 bxa6 22. h3 ♙ab8 23. ♖cd1!±. Now White makes the move we have already seen countless times in this chapter!

21. ♖cd1! ♖e8

White has a rather direct idea in mind and goes for

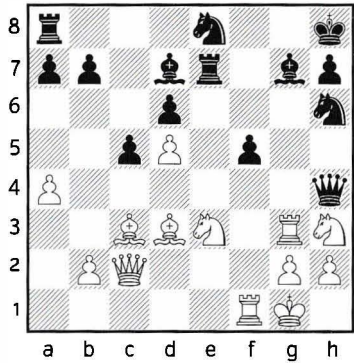
22. ♙g3

White had a good alternative in 22. ♖c4 ♙f8 23. ♖de3±.

22... ♙d4 23. ♖f2 ♗h8 24. ♗c3!

White follows the plan that started with 22. ♙g3. He temporarily sacrifices a pawn to open the f-file as an extra route to the black king.

24... ♙xf4 25. ♖h3 ♙h4 26. ♙f1



26... ♗d4?

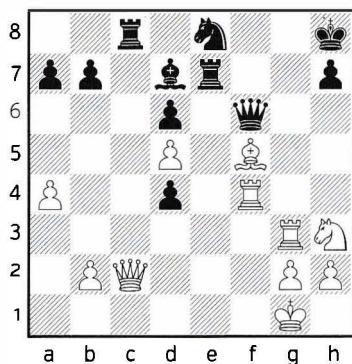
Tal hopes to stir up complications, but now he falls under the kind of attack he usually inflicted upon other people.

Black's best defence was to go for an inferior endgame with 26... ♗xc3 27. ♙xc3+ ♙d4 28. ♙xd4+ cxd4 29. ♖xf5 ♖xf5 30. ♗xf5 ♗xf5 31. ♙xf5 ♖g7±.

27. ♙f4!± ♙f6 28. ♗xd4 cxd4 29. ♖xf5 ♖xf5

29... ♗xf5 loses to 30. ♗xf5 ♙e1+ 31. ♖f2 ♙e7 32. ♗e4 ♙e3 33. ♙xe3 dxe3+ 34. ♖e2 White's king is perfectly safe, but his black counterpart is under a mating attack. 34... ♖f6 35. ♙c3 ♖hg8 36. ♖g5+-

30. ♗xf5 ♙c8



31. ♖xc8!+-

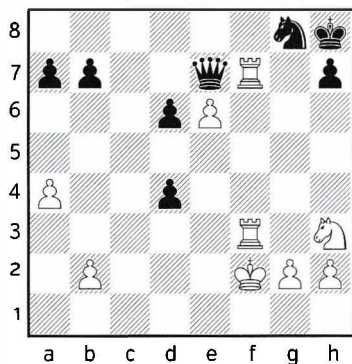
White trusts his calculation.

31. ♗e6 wins too: 31... ♜xe6 (31... ♗xe6 32. ♝xf6 ♞xf6 33. ♖d2+-) 32. ♖d2+-.

31... ♗xc8 32. ♗xc8 ♝e1+ 33. ♖f2 ♖e7 34. ♗e6

Black's problem is that his king is in a mating net, while the white king is safer than it may appear at first sight.

34... ♝xe6 35. dxe6 ♞f6 36. ♝gf3 ♞g8 37. ♝f7



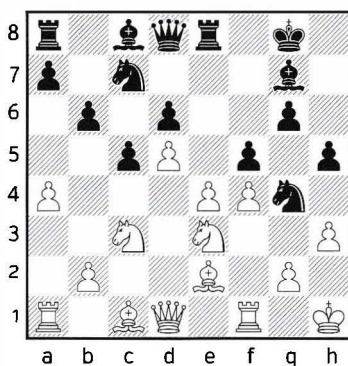
The battle has been decided, all Black has left are few checks before the inevitable end.

37... ♖h4+

37... ♖xe6?? 38. ♝xh7+

38. ♝g3 d3 39. ♝f8 ♖d4+ 40. ♖f1 1-0

4.3. TWO TYPICAL SACRIFICES



This is an important sacrificial motif and indeed an important game for the theoretical assessment of the variation. This game is not in any commercial database; I have this game, because I have worked as Salem's coach in the UAE. The positions are razor-sharp. White should look for an improvement along the lines given in my comments.

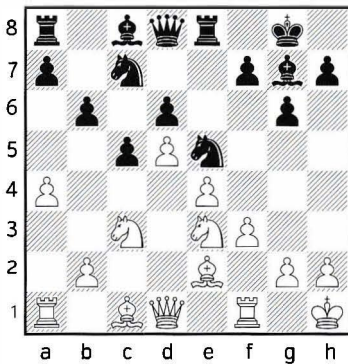
21

▶ L. Le Quang

▶ Saleh Salem

Asian Nations Rapid, 2015

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗f3 c5 4.d5 d6
 5.♗c3 exd5 6.cxd5 g6 7.e4 ♔g7
 8.♙e2 o-o 9.♗d2 ♘a6! 10.o-o
 ♚e8 11.f3 ♗c7 12.a4 ♗d7 13.♙h1 b6
 14.♗c4 ♗e5 15.♗e3

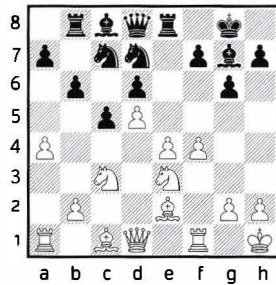


Here Black gets the interesting and novel idea of trying to avoid the inferior pawn structures we have seen in Bukic-Tal. Black keeps the king-side tension, often being ready for a thematic piece sacrifice in the process. Though this was a rapid game, Black's play has importance for the theory and also for the general understanding of the dynamic possibilities in the position.

15...h5!

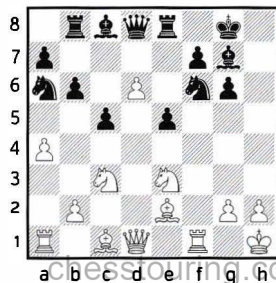
A novelty at the time! Black's main counter-play idea is that after his knight on e5 is hit by f3-f4 he may be able — often as a piece sacrifice — to move his knight to g4.

15...♙b8?! allows White's typical Benoni central pawn break: 16.f4 ♗d7

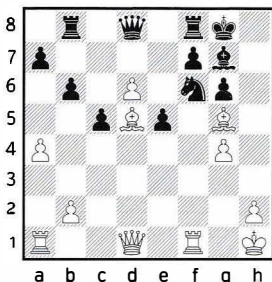


17.e5! dxе5 18.f5! A typical pawn sacrifice in such positions. White sacrifices his e-pawn in order to get a passed d-pawn and take space by advancing his f-pawn, while Black's e-pawn is blocking the activity of his own pieces. 18...♙f8! is arguably black's best, but White is better. Play may continue

[18...♗f6 does not hold for Black:
 19.d6 ♗a6 20.fxg6 hxg6

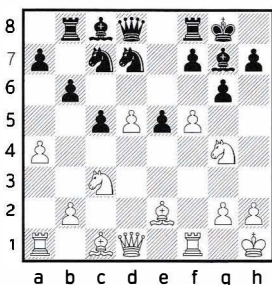


21. ♖ed5! Black will be tied up by multiple pins. I will give some lines to showcase some standard tactical motifs here. 21... ♖b4 (21... ♖xd5 22. ♖xd5 ♖b4 loses to 23. ♖e7+ ♖xe7 24. ♖g5! f6 25. ♖xf6 ♖f7 26. ♖xf7 ♖xg5 27. ♖b3 ♖h7 28. d7 ♖b7 29. ♖h3+ ♖h6 Now a white rook lift — so often seen in this Benoni chapter — decides: 30. ♖a3! ♖xh3 31. ♖xh3+ ♖g8 32. d8 ♖+ ♖xd8 33. ♖xb7+.) 22. ♖g5 ♖bx5 23. ♖xd5 The pin on the h4-d8 diagonal proves deadly for Black. 23... ♖f5 24. g4! ♖e4+ 25. ♖f3 ♖xd5 26. ♖xd5 ♖f8



And once again the white rook on a1 executes a rook lift, and its entry into the fray decides the battle: 27. ♖a3! e4 28. ♖d2 b5 29. ♖xf6 ♖xf6 30. ♖h6 ♖g7 31. ♖xg6+-.]

19. ♖g4



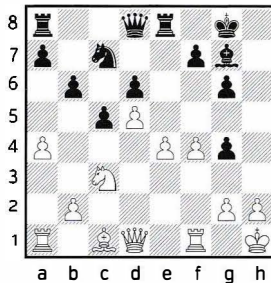
19... ♖f6 20. d6 ♖ce8 21. ♖xe5 ♖xd6 22. ♖f4 ♖xd1 23. ♖axd1 ♖b7 24. ♖a6 ♖c7 25. ♖xc8 ♖xc8 26. g4! White gets his material back, while keeping the advantage.

15...f5 leads to the pawn structure analyzed in Bukic-Tal in this chapter. 16.f4 ♖f7 17.exf5 gxf5 18. ♖d3± Najdorf, M-Fischer, R Havana 1966, explained in the notes to Bukic-Tal.

16. h3

White makes a logical move, aiming to renew his threat of the f3-f4 pawn push to force the black knight on e5 into retreat.

In the case of 16.f4 ♖g4 17. ♖xg4 ♖xg4 18. ♖xg4 hxg4



The position is sharp, probably dynamically balanced. There is plenty of central tension and it's easy for both sides to go wrong. 19.e5

(19.f5 can lead to a temporary pawn sacrifice: 19... ♖xc3 20. bxc3 ♖xe4 21. fxg6 fxxg6 22. ♖c2 White has some compensation for the

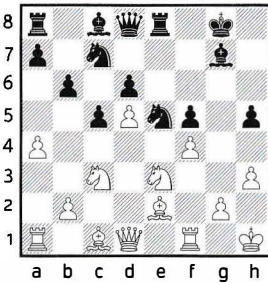
sacrificed pawn, but it looks to me like enough compensation to keep the balance and no more. 22... ♖e8 23. c4 ♜e2 24. ♔d2 ♖e4 25. ♗xe4 ♜xe4 26. ♝f6∞.)

19... ♗d7∞ with unclear play.

(Taking on e5 19... dxe5? is again a mistake, as White continues 20. f5± getting a strong attack; 19... f5!?∞).

16... f5 17. f4

The other way for White was 17. exf5 gxf5 18. f4



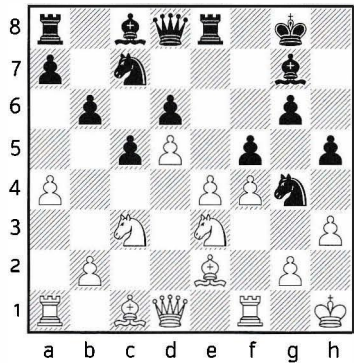
The pawn structure is now similar to Bukic-Tal, but Black can achieve a dynamic balance by using tactical motifs: 18... ♖g4! and the position is unclear since the piece grab 19. hxg4?? is a blunder — as it often is in these lines — and loses to

(19. ♖c2 ♗h4∞; 19. ♖c4 ♔a6∞)

19... ♗h4+ 20. ♖g1 In this position it is important for Black to enable his light-squared bishop to make

a sortie along the c8-h3 diagonal so the correct recapture is 20... fxc4! and the white king cannot escape the mating net, for example 21. ♔b5 ♖xb5 22. ♖xb5 g3 23. ♝f3 ♗h2+ 24. ♖f1 ♗h1+ (or 24... ♔g4-+) 25. ♖e2 ♗xg2+ 26. ♖d3 ♜xe3+ 27. ♖xe3 ♔f5 (threatening 28... ♜e8) 28. ♖xd6 ♔d4+.

17... ♖g4

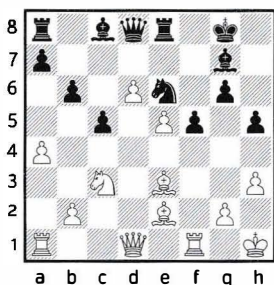


18. hxg4?

This piece grabbing will again send the white king into a mating net. White is clearly underestimating the pins he is going to be tied up with!

The only way for White was 18. e5! with sharp play. Readers interested in theoretical verdicts should analyze the resulting positions. I will give here a couple of critical lines: 18... ♗h4 is probably Black's best. The resulting positions are razor-sharp.

[18...♖h7 19.d6 ♜xe3 20.♙xe3 ♜e6
21.fxex5



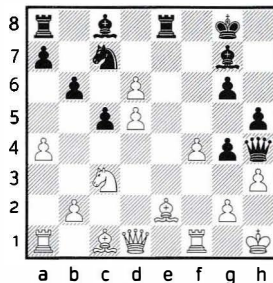
21...♖h7 (21...♙b7? allows White to develop a mating attack. 22.d7 ♖e7 23.♙c4 ♖h7 Now is the time for White to storm the barricades! Tearing apart the enemy king's pawn defences is a good start. 24.♖xf5! gxf5 25.♗xh5+ ♔g8 26.♖d1! and Black finds himself under deadly pins. 26...♗f8 27.♙g5+-.) 22.♙b5 ♙b7 23.♜d5 leads to White's advantage: 23...♗h4 24.♗f3±]

19.♜xg4

a) 19.♜b5!? is the computer's top proposal: 19...♜xb5 20.♙xb5 ♖d8 (20...♙b7 21.a5!) 21.e6 ♙b7 with unclear play.

b) 19.♜c4 leads to unclear complications: 19...dxe5 20.♗e1 ♗xe1 21.♖xe1 ♜f2+ (or 21...exf4 22.hxg4 ♙xc3 23.bxc3 ♜xd5 24.♜d6 ♙a6∞.) 22.♖g1 ♜e4 23.♜xe4 fxe4∞

19...fxg4 20.exd6

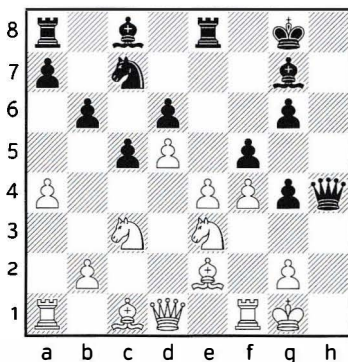


Now the game looks like heading to a forced draw: 20...gxh3 21.g3 ♗xg3 22.♖g1 ♗f2 23.dxc7 ♙xc3! 24.♙f3 ♙a6 25.d6!

(25.bxc3?? ♙e2 26.♙xe2 ♖xe2--)

25...♖e2 26.♗xe2 ♙xe2 27.♙xa8 ♙f3+ 28.♙xf3 ♗xf3+ 29.♖h2 ♗f2+ 30.♖xh3 ♗f3+ 31.♖h2 ♗f2+=.

18...♗h4+ 19.♖g1 hxg4



White has definitely underestimated the seriousness of his situation. Black does not have an immediate mating threat — it takes Black a move or two, but White's king simply cannot get out of the trap.

Pins along the files and diagonals prevent any attempt at escape by the white king. Black has a winning advantage here, and in most cases more than one road to victory. I will give some analysis to support this conclusion. White is to suffer a terrible rout!

20. ♖e1 g3 21. ♙d3

21. ♙b5 ♙d4 22. ♙xe8 fxe4 23. ♖f1

(23. ♙b5 ♙g4+-)

23... ♙a6+ 24. ♙b5 ♙xb5+ 25. axb5

(25. ♘xb5 ♖xf4+ 26. ♖g1 ♘xb5 27. axb5 ♖f8!+- The threat is ... ♖h4 and ... ♗h2 mate.)

25... ♖xf4+ 26. ♖g1 ♖f8! Again there is no way of countering the mating threat of ... ♖h4 and ... ♗h2. 27. ♘xe4

(27. ♖f1 ♙xe3+-)

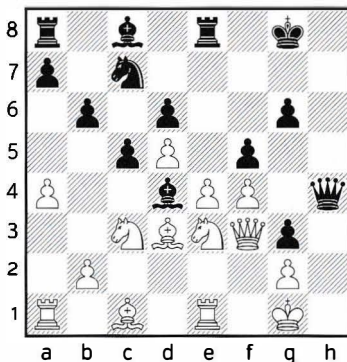
27... ♖xe4+-

21... ♙d4 22. ♖f3

22. ♖c2 fxe4 23. ♙xe4 ♙g4

(23... ♙a6 24. ♙d3 ♖f8+- also wins.)

24. ♙f3 ♖h2+ 25. ♖f1 ♖h1+ 26. ♖e2 ♖xg2+-



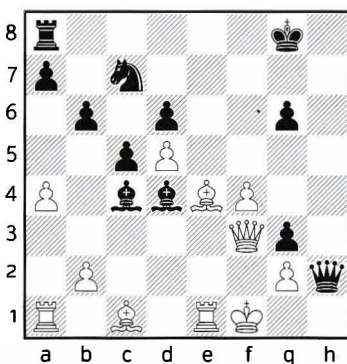
22... fxe4 23. ♘xe4 ♖xe4 24. ♙xe4

Or 24. ♖xe4 ♙f5+-.

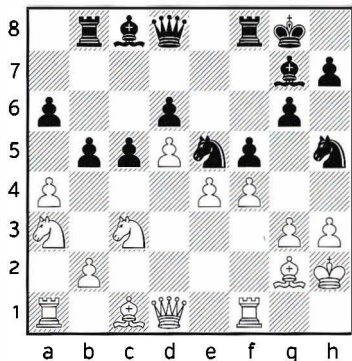
24... ♖h2+

Black here also had the option of 24... ♙a6, when White can stave off mate only by giving up a full queen with 25. ♖xg3.

25. ♖f1 ♙a6+ 26. ♘c4 ♙xc4+



27. ♙d3 ♖g1+ 28. ♖e2 ♖e8+ 0-1



A nice sacrificial motif in a renowned game — a classic!

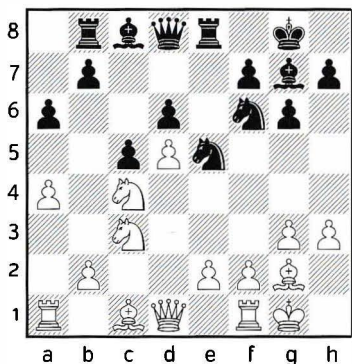
22

▷ V. Kortschnoj

▷ G. Kasparov

Luzern [10], 1982

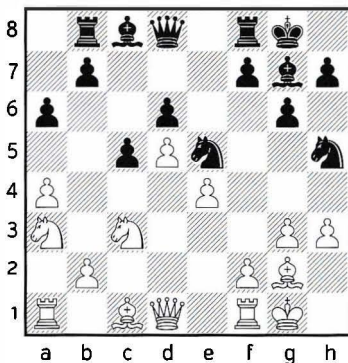
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.g3 ♔g7 4. ♘g2
c5 5.d5 d6 6. ♘c3 o-o 7. ♘f3 e6 8.o-
o exd5 9.cxd5 a6 10.a4 ♖e8 11. ♘d2
♘bd7 12.h3 ♜b8 13. ♘c4 ♘e5



14. ♘a3

White refrains from a knight exchange, planning to kick Black's e5-knight out of the centre by pushing f2-f4. The point of Black's play is that his e5-knight is not going to move back, it will be sacrificed! Black sacrifices one of his knights — sometimes even both of them — in order to open files and diagonals towards the white king. White's temporarily out-of-play knight on a3 and the lack of defenders around the white monarch give Black a favourable attackers-versus-defenders ratio and allow him to give free rein to his attacking imagination!

14... ♘h5 15.e4 ♜f8!?



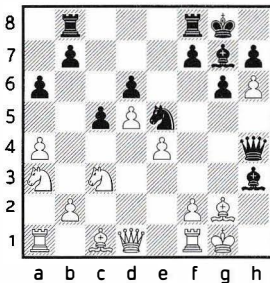
With this slightly unusual looking move Black prepares to open the f-file and is happy to make sacrifices in the process. If my database is correct, the author of this dynamic idea was Hungarian IM Tamas Horvath in 1980 and in the same year Jan Timman, who was in the world's top 10 at the time, also adopted it. Our

main game was played two years later and it is reasonable to assume that Kortschnoj was familiar with the sacrificial idea, but did not believe Black had enough compensation. It was definitely a daring decision by Kortschnoj, 51 at the time, to enter this line against a very strong player 32 years younger than himself. Readers interested in the theory of this line should be informed that modern top players prefer 15... ♙d7 , with which Black has had good practical results.

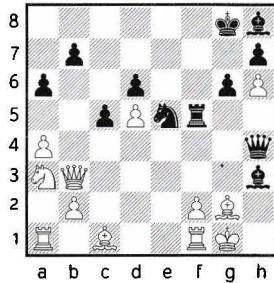
16. ♖h2

White defends his g3-pawn in order to push f2-f4, hitting Black's knight on e5.

a) Scheeren played 16.g4 against Timman, Leeuwarden 1980, and now the best for Black is the dashing piece sacrifice 16... ♗h4! 17.gxh5 ♙xh3 . At the moment Black has only a pawn for his sacrificed knight and he does not have any killer threats. But the white king has just a few defenders, the f-file will open and Black will get a strong attack. 18.h6



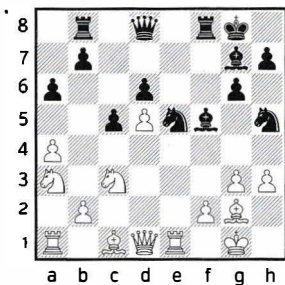
Now Black faces a dilemma: should he collect a pawn, which would allow an exchange of the dark-squared bishops, or forget about the pawn and keep the bishop? 18... ♙h8! (18... ♙xh6? leads to a better game for White: 19. ♙xh6 ♗xh6 20. ♗c1 g5 21. ♗e3± .) 19. ♖e2? White is in a hurry to bring more defenders around his king, but here it was a better idea to bring the other white knight into play! (19. ♖c2 leads to a sharp game, Black having compensation for his sacrificed piece: 19...f5 20. ♗e2 ♗be8 .) 19...f5 20. exf5 ♗xf5 21. ♖g3 ♗bf8! Black is happy to sacrifice an exchange in order to eliminate one of the white king's defenders. 22. ♖xf5 ♗xf5 Though White is a full rook up, he cannot defend his king's position 23. ♗b3



Here Black missed a beautiful win with: 23... ♖f3+!! (The actual game saw 23... ♙xg2 24. ♖xg2 ♗e4+ 25. f3 ♖xf3 26. ♗xf3 ♗xf3 — though White got enough material for his queen, his pieces are poorly coordinated. Black is better here and Timman went on to win.) 24. ♙xf3 ♙d4 Now 25... ♗g3+ is

a deadly threat, while the white bishop cannot move away from f3 because the f2-pawn hangs. Black mates in a few moves here, for example 25. ♖c2 ♜g3+ 26. ♔h1 ♙g2+ 27. ♙xg2 ♜h5+ 28. ♔g1 ♜h2 mate.

b) The stem game saw 16. ♜e1?! Now Black follows up on his plan to open the f-file, and White quickly gets massacred: 16...f5 17. exf5 ♙xf5

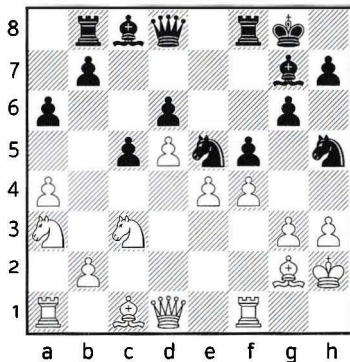


Not liking his position, White now gets the idea of collecting some more material: 18. ♜xe5? ♙xe5 19. g4 b5! 20. axb5 axb5 21. ♖e2? White insists on collecting his piece. (The lesser evil was 21. ♖axb5 ♙d7.) 21... ♙xg4! 22. hxg4 ♜h4 23. ♙e3 ♙h2+ 24. ♔f1 ♜xf2+! 25. ♙xf2 ♜f8 26. ♜e1 ♖g3+ 27. ♖xg3 ♙xg3 28. ♖xb5 ♜xf2+ 29. ♜xf2 ♙xf2 and Black soon won in Kovacevic, V (2510)-Horvath, T Virovitica 1980.

16...f5 17.f4

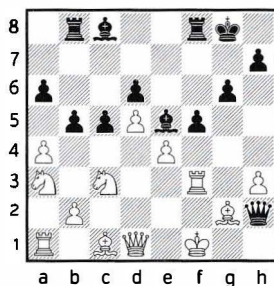
Now comes the point behind Black's 15... ♜f8 idea — Black's e5-knight does not move anywhere! Black

happily sacrifices his knight in order to open the b8-h2 diagonal towards the white king.



17...b5! 18.axb5

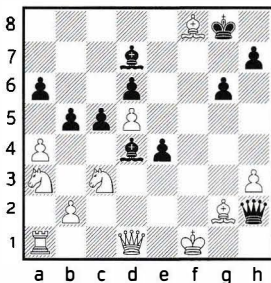
In the event of 18. fxe5 Black can go for a double knight sacrifice! 18... ♖xg3! 19. ♔xg3 ♙xe5+ 20. ♔f2 ♜h4+ 21. ♔g1 White is two knights up, but his king has no defenders! Black has full compensation. 21... ♜g3 22. ♜f3 ♜h2+ 23. ♔f1 Black is two knights down and does not have a killer blow. So, what should he do? Black should play a calm developing move connecting his rooks!



23...♙d7! After this the only way for White to stay in the game was 24.♙h6!

(24.♘c4? White sacrifices one of his knights in order to bring his rook from a1 to defend the third rank, but this will not save him: 24...bxc4 25.♖a3 fxe4 26.♘xe4 ♙xh3 27.♙xh3 ♖xh3+ 28.♚e2 ♖g2+ 29.♘f2 Now with a small move Black breaks the coordination of the white rooks: 29...c3! and Black soon won in Birnboim,N (2460)-Arnason,J (2445) Randers 1982.)

24...fxe4 25.♖xf8+ ♖xf8+ 26.♙xf8 ♙d4=

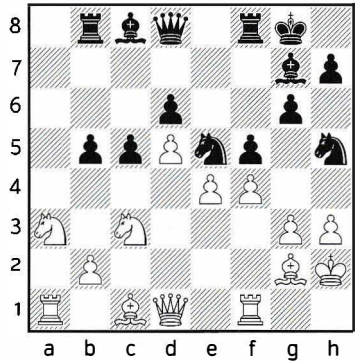


At the moment White is a rook and two pieces up but Black has full compensation, on account of the exposed white king and its lack of defenders. There are many possibilities here, one example being 27.♘xe4 ♖g1+ 28.♚e2 ♖xg2+ 29.♚d3 ♖xb2 30.♘c2 30...♙f5! The white king is in grave peril but manages to survive into a perpetual-check draw.

(30...♚xf8? is not a good idea: 31.♖b1 ♖a2 32.♘xd4+-.)

31.♙xd6 ♖c3+ 32.♚e2 ♙xe4 33.♘xd4 cxd4 34.♖c1! ♖f3+ 35.♚e1 ♖h1+ 36.♚e2 ♖g2+ 37.♚e1 ♖h1+=.

18...axb5

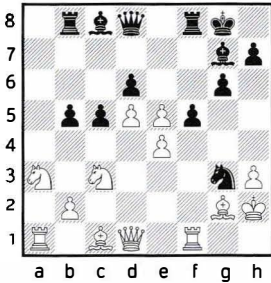


19.♘axb5!

A clever move! It not only eliminates Black's ...b5-b4 pawn-fork threat, but also brings back to life the knight that been languishing on a3. After this move 20.♘a7 is an unpleasant move for Black to meet, but meanwhile White has to hope that his defences on the kingside can hold.

It pays to know the classics! In the Wijk aan Zee super tournament 20 years after our main game, Loek Van Wely, playing White, did not know this sacrificial idea for Black, got caught off guard and suffered a massacre playing Timman!

Let's see this more recent example. 19.fxe5 Black now thematically sacrifices his second knight in order to open the b8-h2 diagonal towards the white king. 19...♖xg3!



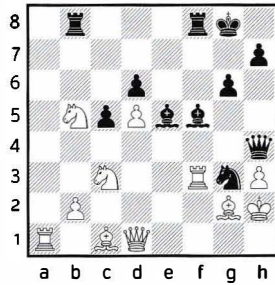
White now decides to ignore Black's g3-knight. 20.♖f3?

[I would say that if White is to suffer anyway, it's better to collect one more knight, just like Birnboim-Arnason above, with 20.♖xg3 ♕xe5+ 21.♖f2 b4 (21...♗h4+ following lines similar to Birnboim-Arnason above is definitely an option.) 22.♖c4 bxc3 23.bxc3 ♕xc3 Black definitely has enough compensation, but perhaps not more.]

20... ♕xe5 21.♖axb5

(21.♖xg3 h5±)

21... ♗h4 22.exf5 ♕xf5 White is ignoring Black's g3-knight and all the discovered checks it can deliver. It takes quite some nerve to go for such a strategy!



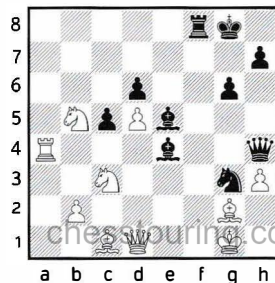
23.♖a4 ♕e4?

(Similar to Birnboim-Arnason, given above, cutting the white rook's kingside influence with 23... c4+ was a relatively easy win for Black; White's position collapses under the threats.)

Now Van Wely has an unexpected chance to get back into the game. 24.♖xf8+? No, this was definitely not Loek's day!

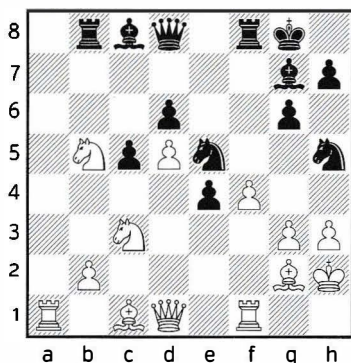
(24.♖xe4! could have led to an unclear material imbalance: 24... ♖xe4+ 25.♖g1 ♖xf3 26.♗xf3 ♗e1+ 27.♗f1 ♗g3 28.♖xe4 ♗h2+ 29.♖f2 ♖f8+ 30.♖e2 ♖xf1 31.♖xf1 ♗g3∞.)

24... ♖xf8 Now Black has a mating attack. 25.♖g1



Most likely Van Wely missed Black's next move. 25...♖e2+! 26.♚xe2 ♚g3 Two extra knights stranded on the queenside do not help the white king in this situation! 27.♙f4 ♚xf4 28.♙xe4 ♚g3+! 29.♗h1 ♜fi+! 30.♚xf1 ♚h2 mate in Van Wely,L (2697)-Timman,J (2605) Wijk aan Zee 2002.

19...fxe4



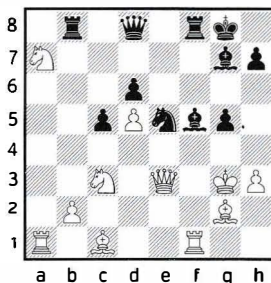
20. ♙xe4

A new move at the time.

A couple of months prior to this game White had played 20.♖a7! in Alburst,L (2550)-Olafsson,H (2430) Reykjavik 1982. White obtained a clear advantage and carried on to win. Now comes the interesting part! Kasparov (and probably Kortschnoj too) definitely knew this game! We had no computer engines at the time, but Kasparov's opening analyses were way way ahead of his time! So, the question

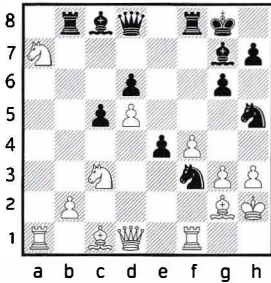
remained: what did Kasparov have in mind for 20.♖xa7? This question kept puzzling me and I discussed it with the editor of this book, Romain Edouard. Our conclusion was that Kasparov planned the following: 20...♖f3+! The next couple of moves are reasonably forced.

[Alburst's game continued 20...e3 21.♚e2 (21.♖c6! looks like a big advantage for White without any real complications: 21...♖xc6 22.dxc6 Black does not have any meaningful counter-play. 22...♜b4 23.♜a8+-) Now Black goes for a thematic knight sacrifice creating counter-play 21...♖xg3 22.♙xg3 g5 23.f5 (The computer engines suggest 23.♚xe3 and are rather confident that White can beat off the attack and bring home his material advantage.) 23...♙xf5 24.♚xe3



Black had many interesting possibilities here, but he did not choose the most fortunate one 24...♚d7? (24...h5, 24...♙h8 or 24...♙d3 were all better moves, with a complicated coffee-house game ahead.) 25.♖c6! The white knight

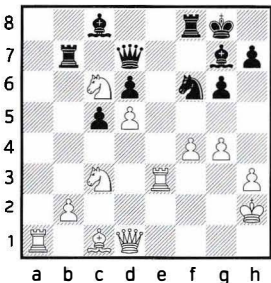
is now back in play! (If Black captures ... dxc6 , White recaptures dxc6 with tempo and this is the drawback of $24... \text{d7?}$) $25... \text{be8}$
 $26. \text{xg5+}$ Black did not have nearly enough for the sacrificed piece and Alburst went on to win.]



$21. \text{xf3 exf3}$ $22. \text{c6 d7}$ $23. \text{g4 b7}$
 $24. \text{xf3 d6!}$

($24... \text{xf4?}$ loses to $25. \text{xf4 Bxb2+}$
 $26. \text{g3 xc3}$ $27. \text{h6! Bxf3+}$
 $28. \text{xf3}$ Black is now forced to trade queens and will lose a bishop from the resulting position: $28... \text{f7}$ $29. \text{xf7+ gxf7}$ $30. \text{a7+-}$)

$25. \text{e3}$

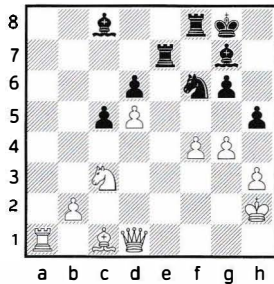


($25. \text{a8 f7}$)

we were convinced that Kasparov's preparation was based on the following queen sacrifice. $25... \text{h5!}$

[$25... \text{e8}$ leads to White's advantage and in general also easy play for White: $26. \text{xe8+ xe8}$ $27. \text{a8}$ White is a pawn up and has a powerfully placed rook, so the situation is difficult for Black. $27... \text{f8}$
 $28. \text{e2 xe2+}$ ($28... \text{d7?!}$ $29. \text{f5 gxf5}$ $30. \text{e6+ xe6}$ $31. \text{dxe6 xf6}$
 $32. \text{d8 e7}$ $33. \text{g5+-}$) $29. \text{xe2}$
 d7 $30. \text{c3 h5}$ ($30... \text{xd5??}$
 $31. \text{a5+-}$) Black does not get the desired counter-play here due to $31. \text{g5 e8}$ $32. \text{f5! gxf5}$ $33. \text{d8 g7}$
 $34. \text{g3}$. Black is boxed in and White has a large advantage.]

$26. \text{e7 xe7}$ $27. \text{xe7+ xe7}$.

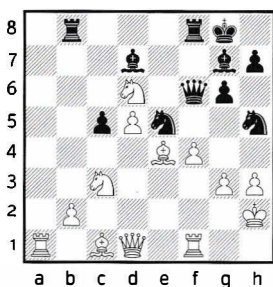


Computer engines somewhat prefer White, but in human over-the-board play, this position looks to us to be quite double edged.

$20... \text{d7}$ $21. \text{e2}$

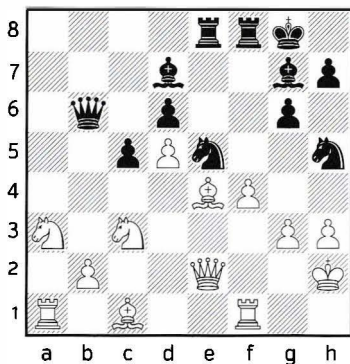
$21. \text{a7!?}$ was again a move to consider; while in the case of $21. \text{xd6}$

Black has compensation for the sacrificed pawn after 21... ♖f6



22. ♖g2 (22. ♖a6 ♜c4) 22... ♜xg3!
23. ♜xg3 ♖xd6 and because of the white weak king, Black's knight e5 is taboo. 24. ♜e4 ♖b6♞.

21... ♖b6 22. ♜a3 ♖be8



23. ♖d2

a) 23. ♖g2, getting off the e-file pin, made sense for White.

b) 23. fxе5? does not look like a good idea for White after 23... ♖xe5 24. ♜c4 ♖xg3+ 25. ♜g2 ♖d8-+.

c) After 23.g4? ♖d8! the black queen swings over to the kingside and White is in trouble: 24. ♜g2 ♜xg4 25. hxg4 ♖xc3-+ 26. bxc3 (26. gxh5 ♖f5-+) 26... ♖h4-+.

23... ♖xb2

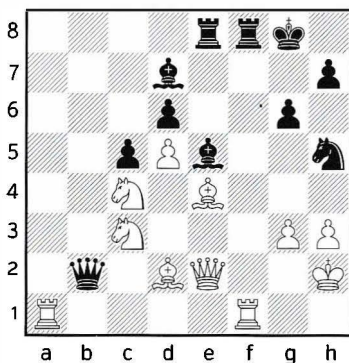
White has had enough and now he finally collects Black's hanging knight on e5!

24. fxе5?

This should have been the crucial mistake as White now comes under deadly threats.

24. ♖g2!∞ Running away from the e-file pin would have led to an unclear game.

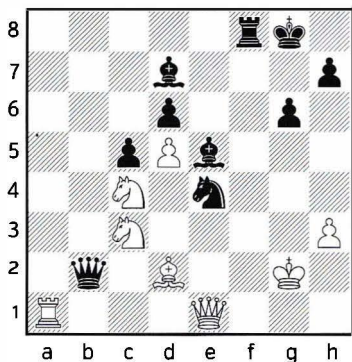
24... ♖xe5 25. ♜c4



White is temporarily still a piece up, but will be forced to give it back and Black ultimately gains a decisive material advantage. Most likely

with all those hanging pieces Kortschnoj simply missed something important when he grabbed the knight.

25... ♖xg3! 26. ♜xf8+ ♜xf8 27. ♖e1 ♗xe4+ 28. ♔g2



28. ♗xe5 ♗xd2--+

28... ♖c2

Black is two pawns up for the moment and still has his attack. Having obtained a winning advantage, though, Kasparov now starts to let it slip.

A nice win for Black was 28... ♜f2+! 29. ♖xf2 ♔xh3+! 30. ♔f3

(30. ♔g1? ♖xa1--+)

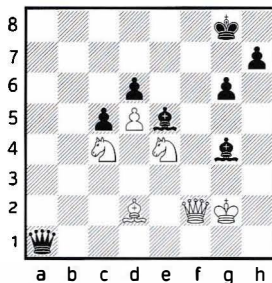
30... ♔g4+!

(30... ♖xa1 also wins.)

31. ♔g2

(31. ♔xe4 ♖c2+ 32. ♔e3 ♔d4--+)

31... ♖xa1 32. ♗xe4

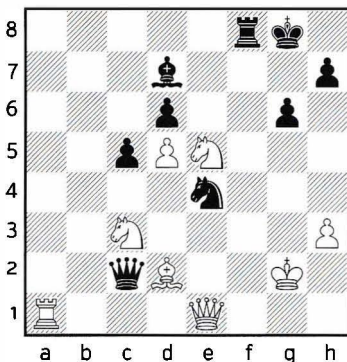


Now White either gets mated or loses his queen. 32... ♔h3+! 33. ♔f3

(33. ♔xh3 ♖h1+ 34. ♔g4 ♖h5 mate)

33... ♖d1+ 34. ♔e3 ♔d4--+ It is quite easy to understand that in a practical game Kasparov did not want to bother calculating 28... ♜f2 and opted for the simple, easily winning 28... ♖c2.

29. ♗xe5



29. ♖xe4 ♖xe4+ 30. ♗xe4 ♔xa1--+

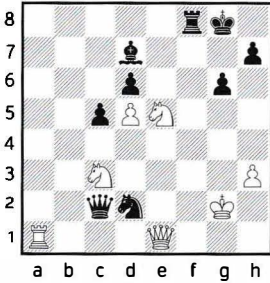
29... ♜f2+?

This is a step in the wrong direction. Going for the queen, Black allows White to get counter-chances.

A relatively easy win was 29...♖xd2 and the game gets decided in a few moves. 30.♖xd7

(30.♖a2 ♖f3+ 31.♖xc2 ♖xe1+-)

30...♖f3+ 31.♖e2 The only explanation for Kasparov refraining from 29...♖xd2 is that he missed the following check:



31...♖h4! and the white king does not have a good square. 32.♖g1

(32.♖g3 ♖xc3+ 33.♖xh4 ♖f4+-)

32...♖xc3 33.♖xf8 ♖xa1+-

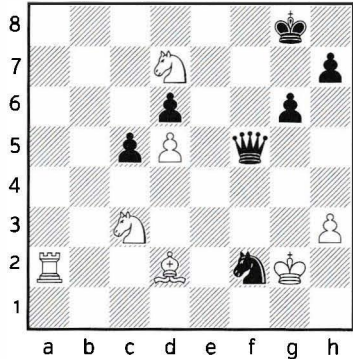
30.♖xf2

If 30.♖g1 Black gets a won endgame after 30...♖xd2 31.♖xe4 dxе5!

(31...♖xc3 is not precise, since after 32.♖a8+ ♖g7 33.♖f3 ♖d1+ 34.♖h2 the black king proves vulnerable too.)

32.♖xe5 ♖f5 33.♖a8+ ♖f7 34.♖xf5+ ♖xf5 Black could have taken more out of the position, but nevertheless this ending is still won.

30...♖xf2 31.♖a2 ♖f5 32.♖xd7



After missing a couple of direct wins, Black now needs precision as (a) White has threats on the black king and (b) a material imbalance usually brings some tactical tricks.

32...♖d3?

Correct was 32...♖xh3! and after 33.♖a8+ ♖g7 34.♖a7 g5 35.♖xc5+ ♖g6 Black's connected passed pawns and the weak white king should decide the battle in Black's favour.

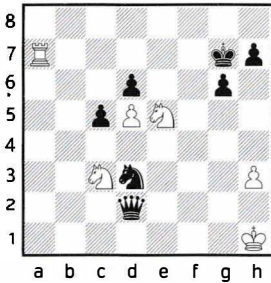
33.♖h6??

A terrible time-pressure blunder! Kortschnoj fails to grab a sudden opportunity to save the game!

33. ♖a8+! was the way to go and this wild game could have resulted in a draw by perpetual check after 33... ♗g7 34. ♖a7 ♜f2+

(34...g5 leads to an unclear game: 35. ♗xc5+ ♗g6 36. ♗5e4∞.)

35. ♗h1 ♜xd2 36. ♗e5+!



and due to the poor position of his queen on d2, Black cannot escape perpetual check without getting his queen forked: 36... ♗f8 37. ♖a8+ ♗e7 38. ♖a7+ ♗d8 39. ♖a8+= with a draw as 39... ♗c7?? blunders horribly into 40. ♗b5+ ♗b7 41. ♖a7+ ♗b6 42. ♗c4+.

33... ♜xd7

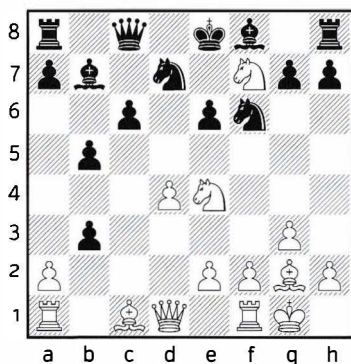
White lost his d7-knight for nothing, bringing an abrupt end to this dynamic game.

34. ♖a8+ ♗f7 35. ♖h8 ♗f6 36. ♗f3 ♜xh3+ 0-1

CHAPTER V. CATALAN SACRIFICES

I have divided this chapter into two subchapters: 5.1, Knight Sacrifice on f7; and 5.2, Pawn Chain Break with the b2-b3 Push.

5.1. KNIGHT SACRIFICE ON F7



White's concept of sacrificing his Knight on f7 in the Catalan first caught my attention in the late 1990s as Israeli GM Viktor Mikhailevski — known for his daring style — won a couple of games using that idea. This sacrifice definitely has a sound basis: the black king remains stuck in the centre, while White usually gets two pawns for his sacrificed piece and the other

white knight usually lands on e6. Most of the time White does not have immediate deadly threats, but Black has problems finishing his development while White is ready to roll his central pawns. White has achieved good practical results with this sacrificial idea.

For theoretically minded players, please pay attention to the comments on 7.♘e5! in Lysyj-Lupulescu, instead of 7.a4 as played in the game. White does not seem to need to waste time on the a-pawn push but can immediately get down to “sacrificing business”. I like the 9.b3! idea in this game, opening the a2-g8-diagonal before sacrificing with 11.♘xf7!

In our second game in this chapter Giri's play is in a way similar to Lysyj-Lupulescu. Giri first opens the a2-g8 diagonal and then sacrifices his knight on f7. Complications favour White, but in such positions it is easy to err. Missed opportunities by both sides (White's 19th move and Black's 20th move) can serve as an excellent calculation exercise. Tacticaly gifted players should get their inspiration here and see if they can use

it when fighting other set-ups such as the Triangle.

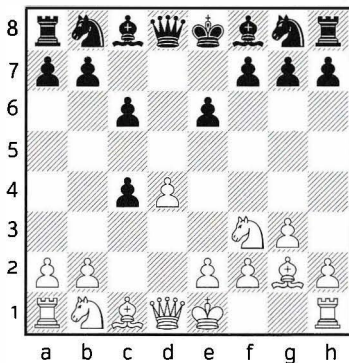
23

▷ V. Mikhalevski

▷ A. Rabinovich

Antwerp, 1999

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 c6 4.g3 dxc4
5.♙g2



5...b5

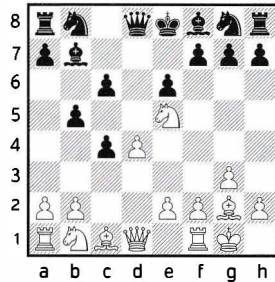
Black is delaying his g8-knight development, in the spirit of the Triangle System.

5...♘f6 — see the next game.

6.o-o ♙b7 7.a4

7.b3 leads to Spassky-Zinn, Game 25, and for the positional ideas related to the b3 idea, please have a look at that game.

For readers interested in opening theory, I would recommend you to analyze 7.♘e5!



7...♘d7 White wants to speed up his plans, unwilling to waste time with playing 7.a4. In one recent top-level game we saw our thematic knight sacrifice on f7 working well for White.

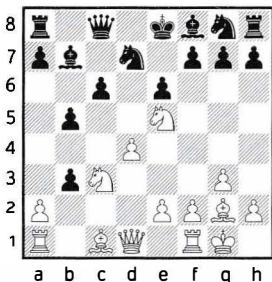
(7...f6 8.♘f3 forces the white knight to retreat but cannot really be considered a gain for Black, because his pawn on f6 stands in the way of the natural development of his g8-knight and the e6-square also usually proves a weak spot in the black camp.)

8.♘c3 ♖c8 Now White (as in Giri-Morozevich, our next game) first opens the a2-g8 diagonal, anticipating his coming knight sacrifice on f7!

[8...♘xe5 9.dxe5 is arguably safer for Black, but still leads to White's advantage as Black has problems finishing his development. Play could continue 9...♖c7 10.a4 ♘d8 11.♖c2

a6 12. ♖e4 and now if Black tries to be inventive with 12... ♜d5?! (12... b4 13. ♘d1 with ♘e3 and ♘xc4 to follow should be better for White.) White will take the exchange on d5 on his own terms: 13. axb5 axb5 14. b3!±.]

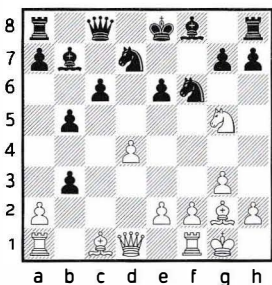
9. b3! cxb3



Now with the a2-g8 diagonal open, White goes for the kill! 10. ♘e4! ♘g6 and now the sacrificial moment has come

[10... ♘xe5 11. dxex5 does not help Black here, as White has a huge lead in development. 11... bxa2 (11... c5 12. axb3±) 12. ♖d3 a6 13. ♜xa2 c5 14. ♜d1 ♙d5 15. ♜ad2 and White will soon penetrate along the d-file with devastating consequences for Black.]

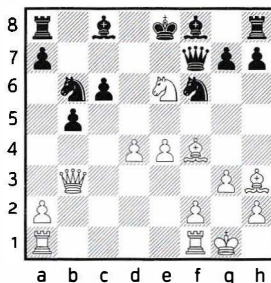
11. ♘xf7! ♙xf7 12. ♘g5+ ♙e8



Now the reason for including 9. b3! axb3 becomes obvious. 13. ♖xb3 White will soon take ♘xe6 and though he has only one pawn for the sacrificed piece, his knight on e6 has devastating power and as White's mobile pawn centre advances Black will have problems with his king stuck in the middle of the board. Computer engines also support White. 13... ♘b6 14. ♙h3

(14. ♘xe6 ♖d7 15. e4→ is also good for White)

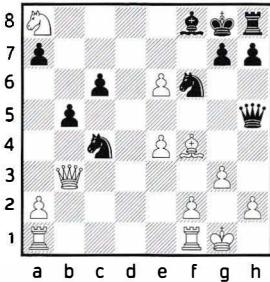
14... ♖c7 15. ♘xe6 ♖f7 16. e4 ♙c8 17. ♙f4



Not an easy situation for Black. The white knight on e6 threatens to jump with check to c7 so Black takes the logical and human decision to eliminate the nightmare knight. 17... ♙xe6

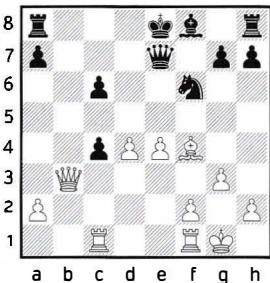
[17... ♘c4 is a computer-like defence but cannot really save Black. 18. d5 ♖h5 19. ♘c7+ Now sacrificing the rook on a8 is Black's best chance. 19... ♙f7! (19... ♙d8 loses as the black king remains stuck in the middle

of the board. 20. ♔g2 g5 21.g4! ♔xg4
22. ♔g3 ♖c8 23.dxc6 And White
soon wins. 23... ♖xc7 24. ♖xb5
♗f7 25. ♖ad1+ ♕e8 26. ♔xc7 ♖xc7
27. ♖xc4 The black king's weakness
proves simply decisive. 27... ♔d6!
28. ♖xd6 ♖xd6 29. ♖c3+-) 20. ♔e6+
♔xe6 21.dxe6+ ♕g8 22. ♖xa8



White is now the one with the
material advantage, Black the one
with some immediate threats. 22...
g5 23. ♔c1 ♖g4 24. h4 gxh4 25. ♔f4
♔e7 In this coffee-house battle
Black has practical chances.]

18. ♔xe6 ♖e7 19. ♖ac1 Again the
black king weakness proves fatal.
19... ♖c4 20. ♔xc4 bxc4



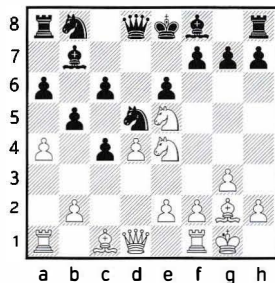
Now White decides to play it safe.
21. ♖xc4?

(21. ♖xc4! killing Black in a violent
attack would have been a worthy
finish to this well-played game!
21... ♖c8 22.d5+- and Black will have
to throw in the towel.)

21... ♖d7 22. ♖xc6 ♖xc6 23. ♖xc6
White was better in the end-
game and went on to win in
Lysyj,I (2671)-Lupulescu,C (2626)
Baku 2015.

7... ♖d7

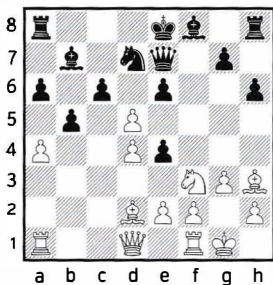
7...a6 8. ♖c3 ♖f6 can lead to interest-
ing positions involving our standard
two themes here: (a) the ♖xf7 sacri-
fice or (b) White's voluntary loss of
time with ♖e5 f6, knight back to f3.
Let's see: 9. ♖e5 ♖d5 10. ♖e4!



10... ♖d7 This can lead to our stand-
ard knight sacrifice on f7 and a draw
by repetition.

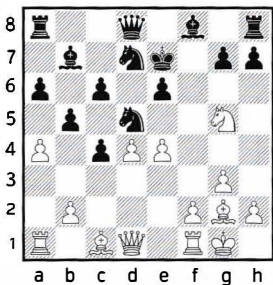
[10...f6 11. ♖f3 As this Shimanov
game shows, White's loss of time is
more than compensated for by the
damage to the black pawn struc-
ture which makes the e6-square
weak. 11... ♖d7 12. ♔h3! Attacking

the new weakness. 12...♖e7 13.♔d2 h6 14.b3 f5 15.bxc4 fxe4 16.cxd5



16...exf3 (In the event of 16...cxd5 White opens lines with 17.♗h4 ♘f7 18.f3±.) And now White should have played 17.exf3! when the open e- and c-files combined with the light-square-weaknesses in the black camp will prove decisive. (17.dxe6 ♗b6∞ led to a sharp game with White emerging victorious in Shimanov,A (2664)-Hudjakov, A (2371) Pardubice 2013.) 17...♖d6 (17...cxd5 18.♙e1+-) 18.♖c2+- Our silicon friend's assessment of this position is +4.70!]

11.♗xf7! ♘xf7 12.♗g5+ ♘e7 13.e4 White has compensation, but probably not more than enough for equality.



13...♗c7 14.♖f3 ♖e8 15.axb5! How should Black recapture?

[15.♖f4 ♙c8! 16.♖h4 ♗f6 leads to sharp play. 17.axb5 (If 17e5? ♗fd5! White has plenty of discovered checks that do not achieve anything.) 17...cxb5 18.d5! h6 with a coffee-house game.]

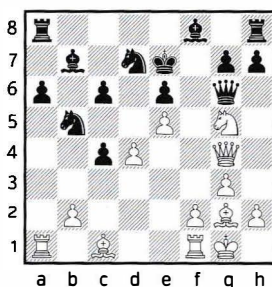
15...♗xb5!

(15...axb5? 16.♙xa8 ♔xa8 17.♖f4 wins for White: 17...e5 18.dxe5 h6 19.♙d1 hxc5 20.♖xc5+ ♗f6 21.♖f5 ♙h5 22.♔g5+-; but 15...cxb5 16.d5 looks bad for Black too.)

16.♖g4

(16.♗xe6? ♖f7±)

16...♖g6 17.e5



Now 18.♔e4 is the threat. 17...h5 18.♖f4

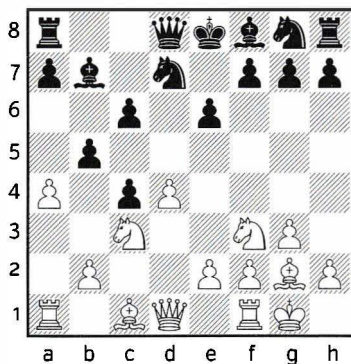
(18.♖h4 ♗b6 19.♔e4 ♖e8 and it is not easy to find a follow-up for White. Again, discovered checks lead nowhere.)

And now Black saves himself by move repetition: 18... ♖f5!

(18... ♖b6 19. ♗e4 ♜e8 20. ♖xe6! ♖d5 21. ♜f3 ♜f7 22. ♖f4 looks promising for White.)

19. ♜d2 ♜d3! 20. ♜f4 ♜f5=.

8. ♖c3



8...a6

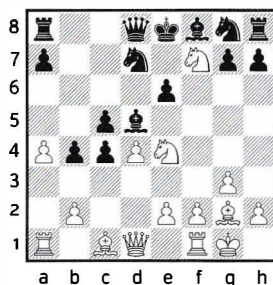
As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, one of the pioneers of the thematic knight sacrifice on f7 in these Catalan positions is Israeli GM Mikhalevski. Another of his games in 1999 — also against Rabinovich, but a couple of months earlier — continued 8...b4?! 9. ♖e4 c5

(9... ♖gf6 10. ♖xf6+ gxf6 11. ♖d2 ♗a6 12. ♜c2 with advantage to White was seen in Shimanov, A-Yudin, S Khanty-Mansiysk 2012.)

10. ♖e5 ♗d5? This allows our thematic sacrifice.

(Black's situation was, however, already difficult and an attempted queen-trade escape with 10... ♖xe5 11. dxe5 ♜xd1 12. ♜xd1 does not quite work for him here: 12... ♗d5 13. ♗e3 ♜c8 14. ♜ac1± with ♖d2-♖xc4 to follow.)

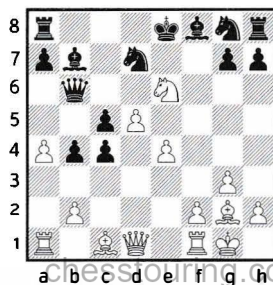
11. ♖xf7!



11... ♖xf7 12. ♖g5+ ♖e8

(If 12... ♖e7 White simply rolls his central pawns: 13. e4 ♗b7 14. d5 e5 15. f4 ♖gf6 16. fxe5 ♖xe5 17. ♜f5 ♖d3 18. e5+-.)

13. e4 ♗b7 14. ♖xe6 ♜b6 15. d5



Again White has a big advantage — computer evaluations are more than +3.00 here though White has only one pawn for his sacrificed piece and no immediate threats. White's knight on e6 is a monster, and White's rolling pawns will simply run Black over. 15...a5 16.e5 ♖e7

(16...♗xe5? 17.♙e1+-)

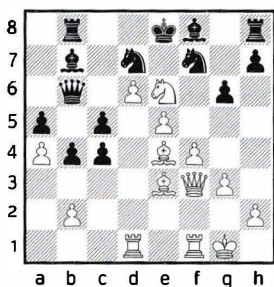
17.f4 .

(17.♙e1+-)

17...♗f5

(17...c3 18.bxc3 c4+ hoping to create some counter-play was the only way to struggle for Black.)

18.♗e4 ♗h6 19.♗e3 g6 20.♙f3 ♗f7
21.♙ad1 ♙b8 22.d6

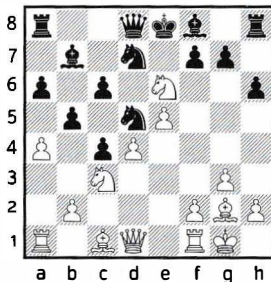


Black's situation is painful to see!
22...♗h6 23.♗d5 ♗d8 24.♗c7+ ♗f8
25.f5 ♗xe3+ 26.♙xe3 h6 27.fxg6+
♗g7 28.♙f7+ ♗xf7 29.♗e6+ ♗g8
30.gxf7+ ♗xf7 31.♙f3+ 1-0 Mikha

levski,V (2531)-Rabinovich,A (2437)
Israel 1999.

9.♗e5

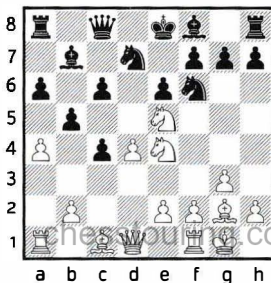
9.e4 can transpose to known sharp lines. 9...♗gf6 10.e5 ♗d5 11.♗g5 h6
12.♗xe6



The computer initially likes White, but things are very unclear. 12...fxe6 13.♙h5+ ♗e7 14.♗e4 ♙e8 15.♗g5+ hxg5 16.♙xh8 ♗d8∞ These positions are in a way similar to those arising in one line of the Slav Botvinnik variation.

9...♗e7

a) 9...♙c8!? occurred in a game in which Alexander Grischuk played our thematic ♗xf7 sacrifice. 10.♗e4 ♗g6



11. ♖xf7!? Grischuk is brave and principled!

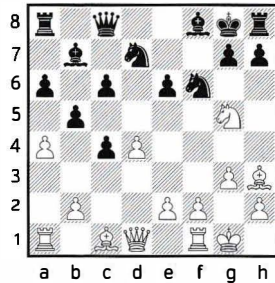
a1) 11. ♖g5 ♜xe5 12.dxe5 ♜d5 leads to messy positions.

a2) 11. ♖xd7 ♜xd7 (11... ♜xd7? allows a transaction that is good for White: 12. ♖f4 ♜f6 13. ♜d6+ ♖xd6 14. ♖xd6±.) 12. ♖xf6+ gxf6 13.e4 Black's damaged pawn structure (doubled f-pawns) gives White sufficient compensation for the sacrificed pawn, but probably not more: 13...h5 14.h4 ♖e7 15. ♖e3 e5 16.dxe5 ♜xd1 17. ♜fxd1 fxe5 18. ♖h3 ♖c8 19. ♖xc8 ♜xc8 20.axb5 axb5 21. ♜a7 ♜d8=.

11... ♜xf7 12. ♖g5+ There is however a considerable difference here compared to the favourable position of White such as the Lysyj-Lupulescu sacrifice, because Black can get counter-play by pushing ...c6-c5. 12... ♜g8

[12... ♜e7! aiming for a quick ...c6-c5 push, counter-play looks fine for Black: 13. ♖h3 c5! 14. ♖xe6 cxd4! 15. ♖xd4 (15. ♜xd4 allows a queen's exchange: 15... ♜c6 16.f3 ♜b6±.) 15... ♜f7! Black aims to develop the f8-bishop and stop the white rook-lift. (15... ♜c5 16. ♜a3!→) 16.e4 ♖c5± Black has a material advantage and — more importantly! — counter-play.]

13. ♖h3



13...g6? A losing mistake.

(13... ♖b4! Developing the bishop from f8 was necessary. 14. ♖xe6+ ♜f8 White will not have an easy task to prove sufficient compensation here.)

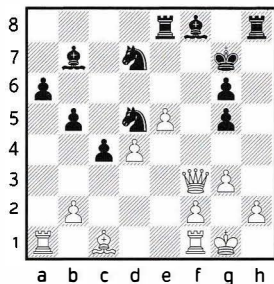
14.e4

(The immediate 14. ♖xe6+, probably transposing to the game, was also possible.)

14...h6 15. ♖xe6+ ♜g7 Now Grischuk is in the driving seat and he wraps up the game with a steady hand. 16.e5! ♜d5 17. ♜f3 ♜e8 18. ♖f7 Black now hopes the material imbalance of queen against light pieces will save him. 18...hxg5

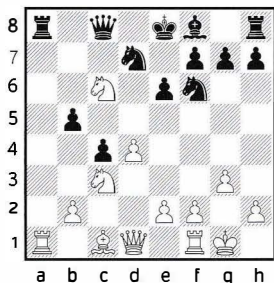
(18... ♖xe5 loses to 19.dxe5 ♜xe5 20. ♖e6+ ♜h7 21. ♖e3 and Black will start losing material.)

19. ♖xe8 ♜xe8 20.axb5 cxb5



White now goes for small tactics disconnecting the black pieces and collecting most of the enemy pawns. 21. Bxa6! Qxa6 22. Wxd5 Qc8 23. Qxg5 Qe7 24. f4 Bhf8 25. Wxb5 Qxg5 26. fxg5 Bxf1+ 27. Qxf1 Qe6 28. Qg1 Qf7 29. Wxc4 And with his army of pawns White soon won in Grischuk, A (2716)-Timofeev, A (2664) Dagomys 2008.

b) In similar positions, Black sometimes happily gives back his extra pawn on c6 in order to speed up his development. In this particular position, however, it is a bad idea! 9... Qgf6?? 10. Qxc6 Qxc6 11. Qxc6 Wc8 The white knights will now turn Black's life into a true nightmare. 12. axb5 axb5

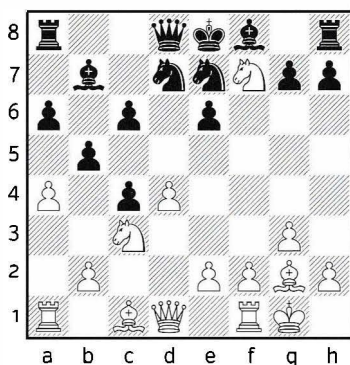


13. Qa7! Wb7 14. Qcxb5 Qb6

(or 14... Qe7 15. Qc7+! Wxc7 16. Qb5+-)

15. Qf4 Qfd5 16. Qe5 f6 17. e4! fxe5 18. exd5 exd5 19. Wh5+ g6 20. Wxe5+ Qf7 21. Wxh8 1-0 Fominyh, A (2535) -Filippov, V (2565) Elista 1996. Now we again have our knight sacrifice theme we are dealing with in this chapter.

10. Qxf7!?

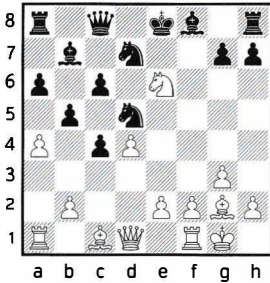


10... Qxf7 11. Qe4

Computer engines' evaluations of these positions are around 0.00, with a number of optional lines receiving similar evaluations, so to enter this sacrifice as White, a player has to believe in his compensation, while to allow it as Black a player should not be nervous about his exposed king! I will give three games, two of them being Mikhalevski's, and show some typical ideas in this position. chesstouring.com

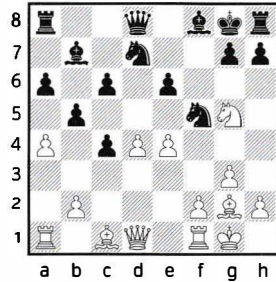
11...♖g8

a) 11...♖d5 12.♗g5+ ♕e8 (12...♖e7 can lead to lines similar to those given above under 7...a6, instead of the text 7...♖d7, and then 10...♖d7. Quite often we have move transposition in these lines. 13.e4 ♖c7 14.♣f3 ♣e8 15.axb5 ♖xb5 16.♣g4 ♣g6 And now we have reached the move repetition mentioned earlier: 17.e5 h5 18.♣f4 ♣f5 19.♣d2 ♣d3 20.♣f4 ♣f5=.) 13.♖xe6 ♣c8



White has probably more than sufficient compensation here as his standard trumps feature in the position: the strong knight on e6, rolling pawns, the weakened position of Black's monarch, etc. 14.e4 (14.♣c2 ♖7f6 15.♗h3 ♣d7 16.e4 ♖b4 17.♣e2♖ also looks promising for White.) 14...♖c7 15.♖f4 g6 16.h4 (16.d5 cxd5 17.exd5 ♖f7 18.♗h3→) 16...♗e7 (16...♗g7 was to be considered.) 17.d5 White went on to win with an attack in Miton,K (2604)-Berzina, I (2320) Warsaw 2008.

b) A game of Mikhalevski from 2008 saw an interesting and rather original idea for Black to give his extra piece back in order to trade queens and simplify the position. 11...♖f5!? Black voluntarily places his knight where it can be hit by e2-e4. 12.♗g5+ ♖g8 13.e4



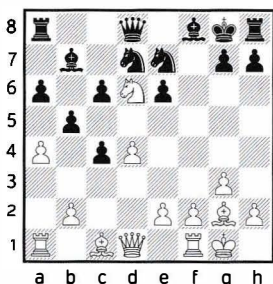
13...♖xd4! The point behind 11...♖f5 is revealed. 14.♣xd4 ♖c5 15.♣xd8 ♖xd8 After the tactical exchanges we come to a tactical ending that is not easy to evaluate; computer engines give around 0.00. 16.♗e3 h6 (16...♖xa4 leads to a positional exchange sacrifice by White: 17.♖xe6 ♖e8 18.♖xf8 ♖xf8 19.♖xa4! bxa4 20.♖c1 and due to Black's broken queenside pawn structure, White definitely has sufficient compensation here.) 17.♗xc5 hxg5 18.♗b6 ♖b8 19.♖fd1♖ For his sacrificed pawn White had good compensation and went on to win in Mikhalevski,V-Vydeslaver,A Haifa 2008.

c) After 11...♖g8 we have reached a critical position for assessing the

value of the ♜xf7 sacrifice. White has to decide whether to jump to g5, aiming directly at the black e6-pawn, or jump to d6 removing the black bishop on b7 and preparing to attack the black e6-pawn with ♙h3 .

12. ♖g5

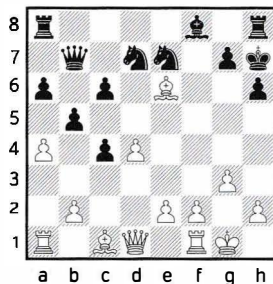
Most probably better for White was 12. ♖d6!



when White seems to have enough compensation, though not more. This is a good training position to test calculation abilities. Computer engines will give you a number of 0.00 lines, some of which hardly look logical to play or even find for a human. I will give a few “human” computer-assisted lines to show how play might develop. 12... ♖c7 13. ♖xb7 ♖xb7 14. ♙h3 h6

(Black cannot protect his e6-pawn in a good way as 14... ♗f7 15.e4 with ♖f3 to follow is good for White — Black is tied up.)

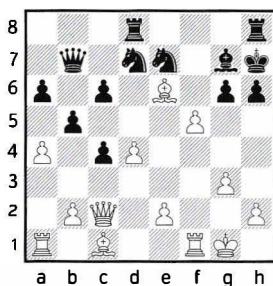
15. ♙e6+ ♗h7



Black prepares ...g6 with ...♙g7 to follow, so White needs to open a route to the black king. 16.f4! ♖d8

[16...g6 17.f5 gxf5 (17... ♙g7? loses to 18.fxg6+ ♖xg6 19.♖f7 as the white rook now — unlike the 16... ♖d8 lines — arrives on the seventh rank with tempo gain and after 19... ♖ad8 White has the winning 20.♖d2! with ♖xh6 to follow.) 18.♖xf5 ♖xf5 19.♖c2 looks dangerous for Black.]

17. ♖c2+ g6 18.f5 ♙g7



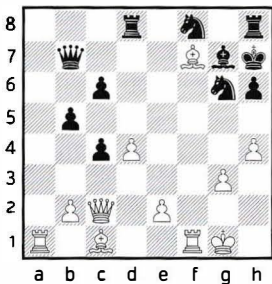
The open a-file is important for White here, as we will see. 19.axb5

[The immediate 19.fxg6+ ♖xg6 20. ♙f7 ♖d8 21.h4 h5 22.♖f5 ♙xd4+ 23.e3 (23. ♗h2 earns a 0.00

evaluation by the engines and can lead to a draw by perpetual check: 23...♖g7 24.♔g5 ♖d6 25.♖d1 ♗d7 26.♖xd4 ♖xd4 27.♔f6+ ♖h6 28.♔g5+=.) 23...♔g7 24.♖xh5+ ♔h6 25.♔xg6+ ♖xg6 26.e4 With a closed a-file this idea does not work for White as Black here saves his bishop on h6 and wins after 26...♗b6+! 27.♖g2 ♖g7 28.♗c3+ ♗d4-+.]

19...cxb5! This leads to a spectacular draw!

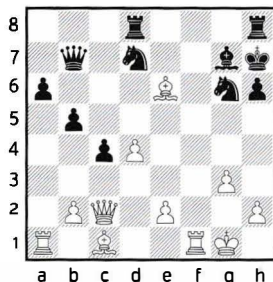
[If 19...axb5 White, using the now open a-file, regains his sacrificed piece and has some advantage after 20.fxg6+ ♖xg6 21.♔f7 (21.♖f7? here does not work as it is not a tempo-gaining move and Black has 21...♖hf8.) 21...♖df8 22.h4



22...♖d7 (In the case of 22...h5 23.♖f5! ♔xd4+ 24.e3 ♔g7 25.♖xh5+ ♔h6 26.♔xg6+ ♖xg6 27.e4 now — with the open a-file — White wins: 27...♗b6+ 28.♖g2 ♖g7 29.♗c3+ ♗d4 30.♖a7+-) 23.♔xg6+ ♖xg6 24.h5 ♖d6 25.♔f4 ♖e6 26.e3 The smoke has cleared a little, White regains

his sacrificed material and has some advantage.]

20.fxg6+ ♖xg6



21.♗xg6+! ♖xg6 22.♔f5+ The black c6-pawn has been removed so the king cannot cross the f-file, on account of ♔e4+ collecting the black queen on b7. 22...♖h5 23.♖f4 Mate in one is always a powerful threat! 23...♖g5!

(23...♔f6?? 24.♖h4+ ♔xh4 25.g4 mate)

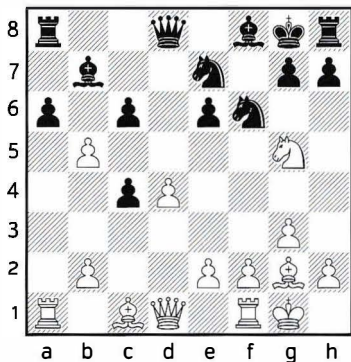
24.h4+ ♖h5 25.♔g4+ ♖g6 26.♔f5+= and this adventure comes to a peaceful end.

12...♖f6

12...♖f5 13.e4 ♖xd4 14.♗xd4 ♖c5 transposes to 11...♖f5!?

13.axb5

Probably pressured by White's inventive play, Black will not find the best defences and his situation will now quickly go downhill.

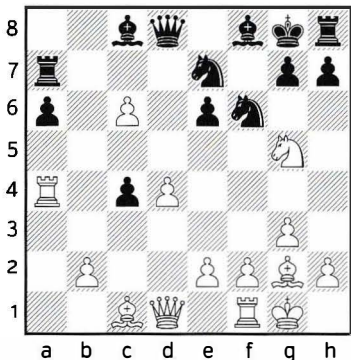


13... ♖c8?

A strange move.

Logical was 13... ♗d7! and Black is better: 14. ♖h3 ♘f5 15. bxa6 ♜xa6 16. ♞xa6 ♙xa6 17. e4 h6! 18. ♘xe6 ♗xe6 19. ♙xf5 ♗e8.

14. bxc6 ♜a7 15. ♞a4!

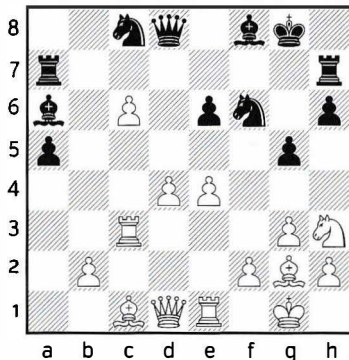


White is now definitely in the driving seat! White gets material equality (three pawns for a piece) and a better position. The rest of the game does not need many comments.

15...h6 16. ♘h3 g5 17. ♞xc4 ♜h7 18. e4

18. f4 g4 19. ♘f2 with e4 to follow was also good for White.

18...a5 19. ♞e1 ♙a6 20. ♞c3 ♘c8



White simply rolls his pawns, Black is powerless.

21. ♗b3

21. f4 looks to be winning: 21...g4 22. ♘f2 ♙b4

(22...h5 23. ♗b3 ♞he7 24. d5 exd5 25. e5+)

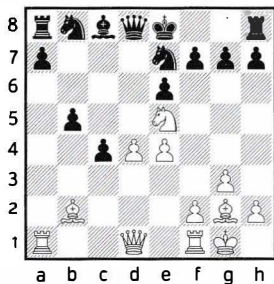
23. ♘g4+-.

21... ♙b4?

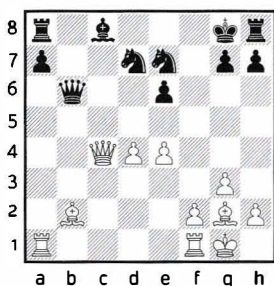
21... ♞he7±

22. ♗xe6+ ♙h8 23. ♘g5!+-

White gets an impressive army of pawns!



13. $\text{d}1\text{xf}7!$ $\text{c}6\text{xf}7$ 14. $\text{b}5\text{h}5+$ $\text{c}8\text{g}8$ 15. $\text{b}5\text{xb}5$
 Excellent judgment by White! At this moment Black is a full piece up with no immediate lethal threats in sight! However, White's powerful bishops and mobile pawn centre plus the weak black king provide White with ample compensation for his sacrificed piece! Computer engines support the white cause too. 15... $\text{d}7$ 16. $\text{c}4\text{xc}4$ $\text{b}6$



And here strong for White was 17. $\text{f}b1!$ \pm

(The game itself went 17. $\text{c}3$ $\text{a}5$ 18. $\text{f}b1$ $\text{c}6$ 19. $\text{d}3$ when White had strong compensation but the game ended in a draw in Georgiev,K (2662)-Ninov,N (2524) Albena 2010.)

Black does not have a suitable way to keep his position together, the white bishop pair being a devastating force. 17... $\text{c}6$

(17.. $\text{b}8$ loses to 18. $\text{d}5$ $\text{h}5$ 19. $\text{d}3!$ $\text{exd}5$ 20. $\text{xg}7+-$.)

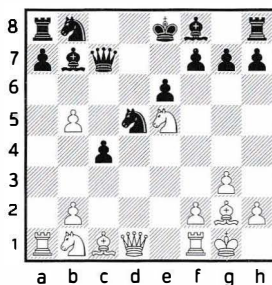
18. $\text{b}4$ $\text{g}6$ 19. $\text{d}5$ and White obtains a winning advantage.

7... $\text{d}5$ 8. o-o $\text{a}6$

In the event of 8... $\text{b}7$ 9. $\text{e}4$ $\text{f}6$ White has a thematic central pawn break, often seen in similar positions: 10. $\text{d}5!$ $\text{cxd}5$

(10... $\text{e}7$ 11. $\text{axb}5$ $\text{cxb}5$ 12. $\text{d}c3$ $\text{a}6$ now White has a typical tactical motif in 13. $\text{f}4!$ o-o 14. $\text{xc}4$ $\text{bxc}4$ 15. $\text{d}6$ with a better game.)

11. $\text{exd}5$ $\text{dxd}5$ 12. $\text{axb}5$ $\text{c}7$

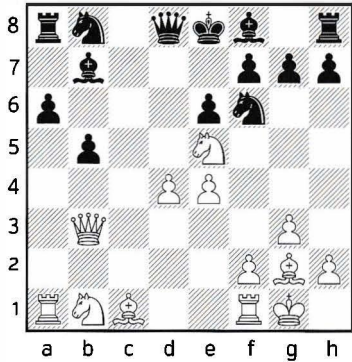


The best for White now is to overcome his conviction that he should keep the Catalan bishop and steel himself to play 13. $\text{x}d5!$ Such decisions are not easy for humans in over-the-board play! 13... $\text{x}d5$

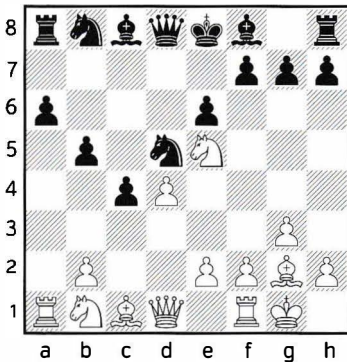
14. ♔f4 ♖b7 15. ♘c3 and White is clearly better due to his advantage in development. 15... ♗g2 16. ♝e1

(16. ♖h5!? ♗xf1 17. ♝xf1 also looks promising for White.)

16... ♗b4 17. ♖a4 ♗xc3 18. ♘xc4 0-0
19. ♘d6 ♖f3 20. bxc3 ♗h3 21. ♖e4±.



9. axb5 cxb5



It is interesting to compare this position to some seen in the 7. ♘e5! line, analyzed in Lysyj-Lupulescu as part of the comments in Mikahlevski-Rabinovich above, as White goes for a similar plan!

10. b3!

White opens the a2-g8 diagonal, already anticipating the 14. ♘xf7! sacrifice.

10... cxb3 11. ♖xb3 ♗b7 12. e4 ♘f6

First comes a standard central break.

13. d5! ♗d6

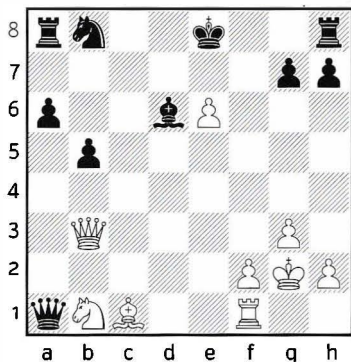
Grabbing a pawn with 13...exd5? 14. exd5 ♗xd5 loses for Black as he does not get to finish his development: 15. ♖e3 ♖e7 16. ♗a3 ♖e6 17. ♝e1 b4 18. ♗xd5 ♘xd5 19. ♖c1 ♗e7 20. ♘xf7 and Black either gets mated or suffers decisive material losses. Having diagonals open and his forces ready, Giri now goes for a standard knight sacrifice on f7!

14. ♘xf7! ♗xf7 15. dxe6+ ♗e8 16. e5 ♗xg2 17. exf6 ♖xf6 18. ♗xg2

Black's only chance now is to grab the white rook on a1.

18... ♖xa1

Black is a rook up but his pieces are totally disconnected and his king comes under attack...

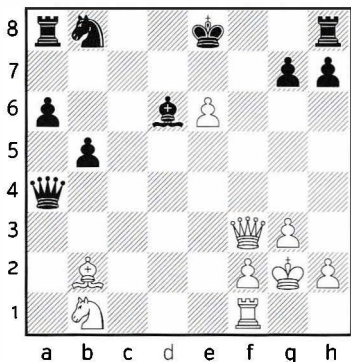


19. ♖b2

Curiously, this apparently logical move throws away the advantage.

19. ♜c3! Preventing the black queen from coming to a4 was stronger, leading to a winning advantage: 19... ♜c6 20. ♖b2 ♗a5 21. ♜e4 ♗c7 22. ♗d5 ♖d8 23. ♗h5+ ♜f8 24. ♖c1 and Black collapses under multiple pins.

19... ♗a4 20. ♗f3



20... ♖a7

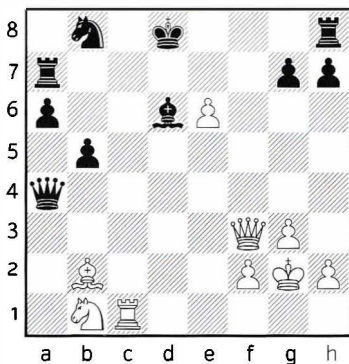
Now Giri wraps it up with a nice finish.

But 20... ♗c2!! would have saved Black! Needless to say, this is a computer defence, the main line going 21. ♗f7+ ♜d8 22. ♖xg7 ♗c6+ 23. f3 ♖e8 24. ♖d1 ♜c8 25. ♖xd6 ♗xd6 26. ♗xe8+ ♜b7 27. ♗f7+

(27.e7?? loses 27... ♗e6 28. ♜c3 ♜c6-+)

27... ♗c7 28.e7 ♜c6 29. ♖f6 ♜xe7 30. ♖xe7 ♖c8 and the assessment of this position is the familiar 0.00.

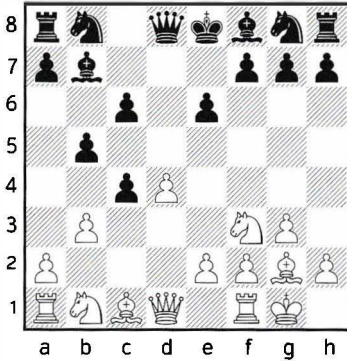
21. ♖c1 ♜d8



22. ♖f6+! ♖e7 23. ♗d5+ ♜d7 24. ♖d4 ♖c7 25. ♗a8+ 1-0

This position can also be used as a good calculation exercise!

5.2. PAWN CHAIN BREAK WITH THE B2-B3 PUSH



White's idea of breaking a black pawn chain on the queenside by means of the b2-b3 pawn push is a positional concept. In return for his sacrificed pawn White gets pressure along the d-, c- and b-files and a long-term initiative.

A few guidelines here could be:

- Entering these positions with the white knight still on b1 should in general be favourable to White (compared to Ding Liren-So) as Black does not have a ...b5-b4 pawn push hitting a white knight on c3. That means Black has to capture 7...cxb3, as for example in our Spassky game.
- In general it is advisable for White to keep up the pressure and not be in a hurry to regain material.

- Black is well advised, if he can, to (a) exchange the knights and (b) push the liberating ...c6-c5 even if it means returning the extra pawn in the process.

Spassky-Zinn from 1962 is a classic, while Ding Liren-So from 2016 is a modern example on the topic.

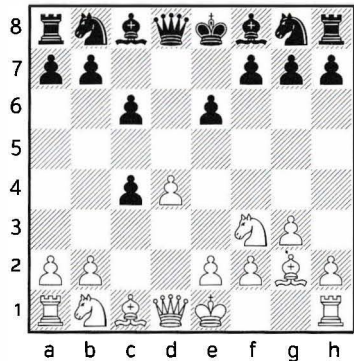
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▷ B. Spassky

▷ L. Zinn

Marianske Lazne [8.1], 1962

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♞f3 e6 4.g3 dxc4
5.♙g2



We have many different possible move orders here for both sides. For the sake of theoretically-minded readers I will try to address move orders and provide some guidelines. In the first three games in this subchapter White is delaying the development of his b1-knight

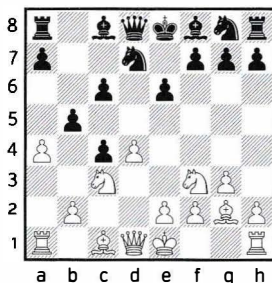
so that when he later plays 7.b3 he will force Black to capture 7...bxc3. With the white knight still being on b1, Black does not have the tempo-gaining 7...b4, which did happen in Ding Liren-So, the fourth game in this section, after White had already played ♖c3. In the first three games of this subchapter, where the development of White's b1-knight is initially delayed, move orders can cross one another. For readers interested in theoretical knowledge, I would suggest that you study these three games very carefully, compare and draw conclusions about the move orders. In the move order in the fourth game in this section, Ding Liren-So, has the white knight developed early to c3, so it is rather different and does not interfere with the move order of the first three games.

5...b5

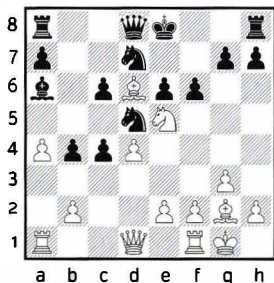
a) 5...♗d7 is another, probably imprecise, Black move, where White — it seems to me — has a good option in 6.a4! to secure a safe advantage. 6.♗c3 can transpose, after 6...♗gf6, -s with the early development of the knight to c3. The famous Ukrainian grandmaster Oleg Romanishin, who devoted his lifetime to g3 systems, had an instructive quick win here. 6.a4! This simple idea, which I gleaned from Timman, prevents Black's ...b5 and

looks like leading to an easy positional advantage for White — he will get his pawn back on c4 and enjoy a space advantage.

[6.♗c3 Black now commits an instructive opening mistake. 6...b5?! (6...♗gf6 transposes to regular lines.) 7.a4!



Black now does not have a convenient way to keep his pawn chain intact so has to push his b-pawn. 7...b4 8.♗e4 ♗e7 (8...♗a6 was arguably better, but 9.♗f4 ♗gf6 10.♗d6+ ♗xd6 11.♗xd6 ♗a5 12.♗d2 with ♗c1 and ♗xc4 to follow leads to White's advantage.) 9.o-o (9.♗f4 is also good for White: 9...♗gf6 10.♗d6+ ♗xd6 11.♗xd6 ♗d5 12.♗e5±) 9...♗a6 (on 9...♗gf6 there follows 10.♗xf6+ and Black does not have a good way to recapture as White will move either ♗f3-e5 or ♗f3-d2, collect ♗xc4 and be better.) 10.♗f4 ♗gf6 11.♗d6+ ♗xd6 12.♗xd6 ♗d5 13.♗e5± The black king is stuck in the middle of the board and Romanishin finishes off nicely. 13...f6



pawn back and keeps the advantage.)

8. ♞c2 ♖b6

(or 8...b5 9. ♖e5 ♖xe5 10. dxe5 ♖d5 11. axb5 cxb5 12. ♖c3 is again better for White.)

14.e4! fxe5 15.exd5 exd5 16.dxe5 ♖g5 17. ♗xd5! cxd5 18. ♞xd5 ♜c8 19. ♞e6+ ♔d8 20. ♗xb4 ♞g6 21. ♞e7+ ♜c7 22.e6 1-0 Romanishin, O (2570)-Zaja, I (2450) Bled 1998.]

9. ♖bd2 ♗e7 10. ♖xc4 ♖xc4 11. ♞xc4 The pawn structure is like the Alapin Slav, except that Black's light-squared bishop is still on c8 instead of on f5, and White had a pleasant advantage in 1-0 Timman, J (2620)-Kuijf, M (2470) Amsterdam 1996.

6... ♖gf6

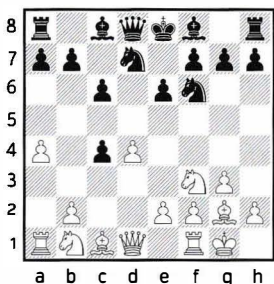
b) 5... ♖f6 can transpose to positions analyzed in the second game of this section, and 6.a4 b5 7. ♖e5 ♖d5 8.0-0 leads to Game 24 in this book, Giri-Morozevich.

(6... ♗b4+ 7. ♗d2 ♞e7 8. ♖a3 leads to White's advantage: 8... ♖gf6 9.0-0 c3 10. ♗xc3 ♗xc3 11.bxc3 e5 12. ♖c4 exd4 13.cxd4± and White won in Postny, E (2674)-Shvidler, E (2413) Israel 2009.)

6.0-0

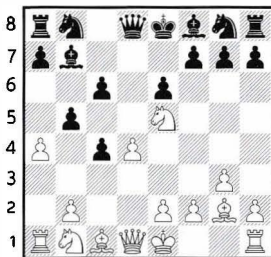
7.0-0

White can also choose a different move order to obtain similar positions, with 6. ♖e5 ♗b7 7.a4



7...a5

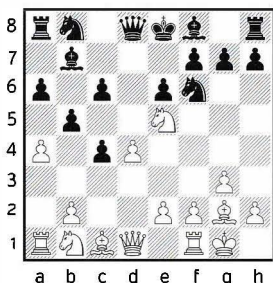
(If 7...b5 8. ♖e5 ♖xe5 9. dxe5 ♖d5 10. axb5 cxb5 11. ♖c3 White gets his



7...a6

[It is advisable to mention that exchanging the dark-squared bishops with 7... ♖b4+? 8. ♗d2 ♗xd2+ 9. ♗xd2 ♞c7, aiming to speed up Black's kingside development, is a bad idea because it weakens crucial dark squares in the black camp: 10. ♗e4 f6? (10... ♗f6 11. ♗c5±) 11. axb5!+- fxe5 (11... cxb5 12. ♗d6+ wins an exchange.) 12. dxe5 followed by 13. ♗d6 and a winning advantage for White.]

8.0-0 ♗f6



9.b3! takes advantage of the white knight still being on b1 and leads to positions similar to our main game

(9. axb5 axb5 10. ♞xa8 ♗xa8 11. ♗c3 transposes to one of the main lines with early ♗c3 development. Black returns his extra pawn and obtains an approximately equal game. 11... ♗e7 12. ♗xb5 cxb5 13. ♗xa8 0-0∞. A number of top games have been played here, with Black holding his own.)

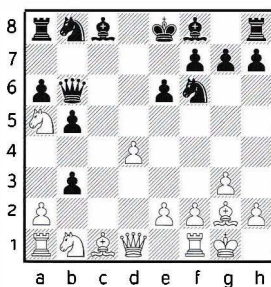
9...cxb3 10. ♗b2 ♗d5 11. ♞xb3 ♗d7 In general it is clever for White to keep the knights on the board in these positions. 12. ♗d3! ♗e7 13. ♗d2 0-0 14. ♞fc1♖ It is difficult for Black to liberate himself with ...c5 so White's pressure, as in our main game, compensates for the sacrificed pawn 1/2–1/2 Kaidanov,G (2629)-Galkin,A (2568) Moscow 2003.

6... ♗b7

I would like to show here one opening trap, which I have encountered a few times already in my games: 6... ♗f6 7. ♗e5 a6

(7... ♗b7 8.a4 a6 9.b3 cxb3 10. ♗b2♖ transposes to Kaidanov-Galkin above.)

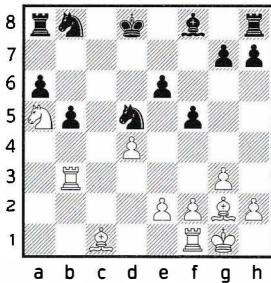
8.b3 cxb3 9. ♗xc6 ♞b6 10. ♗a5



Now Black can try to be smart with 10...bx a2 but White has the unexpected — unexpected to a number of my opponents, anyway — little queen move. www.esstouring.com

(10...♖a7 11.♜xb3±)

11.♞c2! and Black is in trouble, as after the more less forced 11...axb1♞ 12.♞xc8+ ♞d8 13.♞xd8+ ♜xd8 14.♞xb1 White has considerably more than “just compensation” for his sacrificed pawn. 14...♜d5 15.♞b3 f5



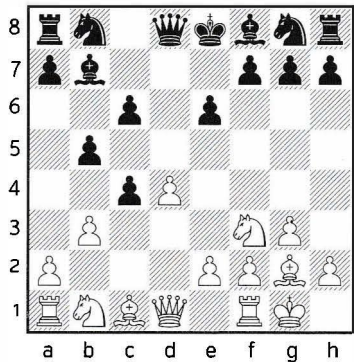
A critical moment! In similar fianchetto positions White players often have a psychological problem parting with their proud Catalan bishop, but here the c-file is the key! 16.♙xd5!

[My first classical time-limit game in this position went 16.e4 fxe4 17.♙xe4 ♜d7 and it turns out that with the black king already on d7, the time for White to penetrate along the c-file has passed! That game finished as an entertaining draw, probably with some missed opportunities: 18.♙f4 ♙e7 19.♙xd5 exd5 20.♞c1 ♙d8 (20...♞c8! was a move to consider, as the eighth-rank pin after 21.♞xc8 ♜xc8 22.♞c3+ ♜d7 23.♞c7+ ♜e6 24.♞c8 ♙d6 is less dangerous than it

looks, on account of Black’s passed pawns.) 21.♜b7 ♜c6 22.♜c5+ (22.♞e3! was a better move.) 22...♜e7 23.♞f3 ♜xd4 24.♙g5+ ♜d6 and it ends peacefully after 25.♙f4+ ♜e7 draw, I.Sokolov-Hovshanisian, Belgium tt, 2017.]

16...exd5 17.♙f4 I had considered this line but somehow failed to correctly estimate the size of the advantage to be gained by penetrating along the c-file. Subsequent analyses brought me a few free points in rapid games as after 17...♜d7 18.♞c1 ♙d6 19.♙xd6 ♜xd6 20.♜b7+ ♜d7 21.♞bc3 White has a large advantage.

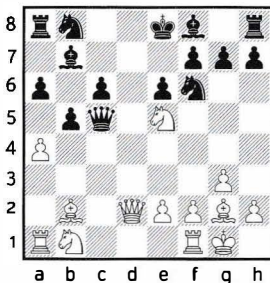
7.b3



If White wants to play the b2-b3 push here he might as well do it at once, since Black will probably play ...a6 later anyway. However one game that I came across had some interesting tactical ideas after 7.a4

a6 8.b3 and I decided to include it here.

7.a4 a6 8.b3 cxb3 9.♖xb3 ♜f6 Now White comes up with an interesting idea. 10.♜e5!? The pawn sacrifice is an intuitive one, since it is difficult to calculate so many possibilities. 10...♖xd4 11.♙b2 White reckons that Black will not manage to castle without incurring serious damage. 11...♖b4 12.♖c2 ♖c5 13.♖d2



13... ♙e7? A losing mistake

(13...b4! Keeping things closed will make it hard for White to prove the correctness of his idea.)

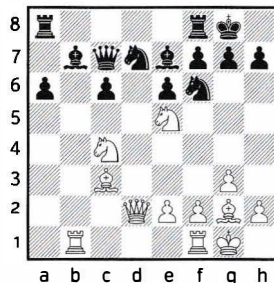
14.axb5!+- Files and diagonals are now open, and White already has a winning advantage! 14...♖xb5 White plays with energy and keeps the momentum of the initiative going well. Instructive play by White!

(14...axb5? loses to the prosaic 15.♜xa8 ♙xa8 16.♖a5 ♙b7 17.♖c7 winning a piece.)

15.♜a3! ♖b6

(15... ♙xa3 16. ♙xa3! ♖xe5 17. ♙d6 An extra piece does not help Black here as he cannot connect his pieces and his king is horribly stuck in the middle of the board, for example 17...♖h5 18. ♜fb1 ♙c8 19. ♖c3 ♙d7 20. ♜b7 with ♜ab1 to follow wins in a few moves.)

16.♜ac4 ♖c7 White has tremendous piece play and Black is simply lost here. 17. ♙c3 ♜bd7 18. ♜ab1 0-0



19. ♜b7! ♖xb7 20. ♜xc6 ♜c5 21. ♜a5 ♖c7 22. ♙e5 Black now suffers decisive material losses. 22... ♜ad8 23. ♖g5 ♜d6 24. ♜c1 ♜b7 25. ♜xe7+ ♖xe7 26. ♜xb7 ♜b6 27.h3 h6 28. ♖f4 ♜d5 29. ♙xd5 exd5 30. ♙d6! ♜xd6 31. ♜xd6 1-0 Panchenko, A-Bednarski, J Lublin 1975.

7...cxb3 8.♖xb3

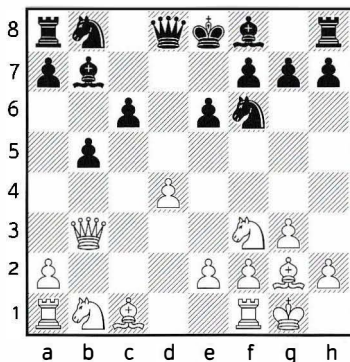
Recapturing with the pawn 8.axb3 has been less frequently played, but some very strong players have done it in similar positions (like Kramnik-Giri, Qatar Masters 2015). It is also possible here, as in the case of

immediate “liberation” with 8...c5 White seem to have some advantage after 9.dxc5 ♖xd1 10.♙xd1 ♕xc5 11.♗c3 a6 12.♗e5 ♕xg2 13.♖xg2 Now Black has to hurry to castle. 13...♗f6

(13...♙a7?? leads to disaster after 14.♗e4 ♕e7 15.♕e3 ♙c7 16.♙ac1+-.)

14.♗xb5 0–0±.

8...♗f6



9.♗c3

This is the position Spassky was aiming for with his 7.b3 idea. White judges that his pressure on the h1-a8 diagonal and Black's inability to free himself with ...c6-c5 are worth at least a pawn. It is a long-term compensation judgment and Spassky was right — top modern top GMs like Nakamura and computer engines alike confirm his judgement. For a price of only one pawn, White gets long-term pressure — simply

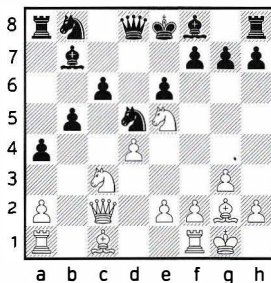
a sound positional sacrifice. Needless to say this white concept can be used in similar Catalan-like positions.

9...♕e7

During my coaching years in Dubai UAE, I showed this Spassky game to my student GM Salem Abdulrahman Saleh, he liked the idea and soon put it to work at the Dubai Open! His game went as follows: 9...a5 10.♗e5 a4

(10...♖xd4 11.♕f4 will lead to play similar to that in the Panchenko-Bednarski game above, with Black having difficulties in finishing his development.)

11.♖c2 ♗d5



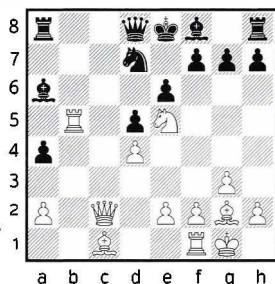
12.♗xd5 cxd5

(In the case of 12...exd5 13.e4 ♕e7 14.exd5 cxd5 15.♙b1 White gets his pawn back with a superior position.)

13.♙b1 ♗d7

(13...b4 14. ♖d2 b3 15.axb3 a3 16.b4 and White will round up the black pawn on a3.)

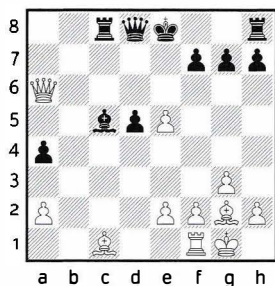
14. ♜xb5 ♖a6



Black now gets tied down by pins and will not be able to castle without damage! 15. ♜xd5! exd5 16. ♖c6 ♜c8

(16... ♜a7 17. ♖h3±)

17. ♖xa6 ♘e5 18.dxe5 ♖c5



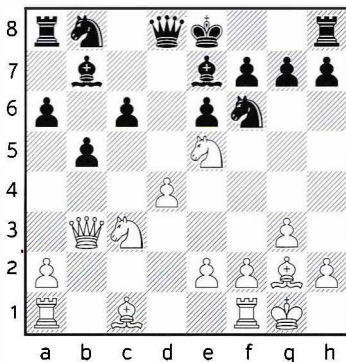
19. ♖xd5

(19. ♖h3! was even stronger: 19... ♜c7 20. ♖xa4+ ♖f8 21.e6+-.)

19...0-0 20.e4 ♖h8 21. ♖xa4± With his dominant bishop and three pawns for the exchange White is obviously better and went on to win

in Salem,A (2621)-Gusain,H (2429) Dubai 2016.

10. ♘e5 a6



10... ♖xd4? blunders to 11. ♘xb5 ♖xe5

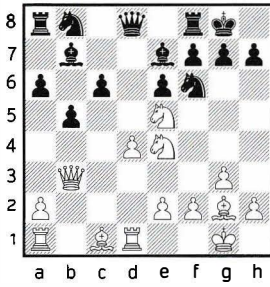
(11... ♖b6? 12. ♖e3+-)

12. ♖b2 ♖xb5 13. ♖xb5 cxb5 14. ♖xb7 and White ends an exchange up.

11. ♖e3

Spassky wants to bring his f1-rook to the c-file, but the text is perhaps not White's best.

More than 50 years later, Hikaru Nakamura arrived at the identical position via a different move order — it would be interesting to know whether Naka knew the Spassky game! — and here followed up with 11. ♜d1 which is probably best. 11...0-0 12. ♘e4



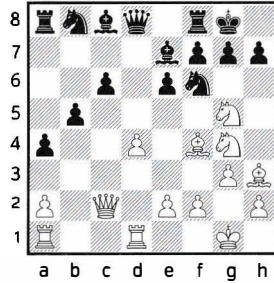
12...♖c7

(In general, as already mentioned, it is useful for Black to trade a pair of knights — or all four of them if possible! — in these positions to reduce White's firepower, so Black could have considered 12...♞xe4 13. ♙xe4 a5 when White would probably continue 14. ♙f4 with ideas to exert c-file pressure after ♖ac1, while building up a kingside attack by means of h4-h5 or g4 and ♗h3. Black's general problem is that he is doomed to passive play. White is by no means in a hurry to get his pawn back and will take on c6 in his own good time, or possibly never.)

13. ♞g5 a5 14. ♙h3! Following Spassky's lead, Nakamura increases kingside pressure in a similar fashion and Black has to deal with immediate threats. 14...a4

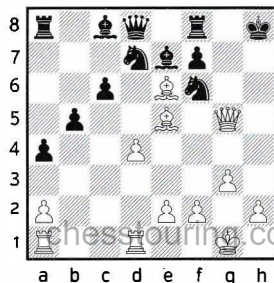
(14...♙c8 is a computer-type proposal, which raises the question: what on earth would Black do next?)

15. ♖c2 ♙c8 16. ♙f4 ♗d8 17. ♞g4



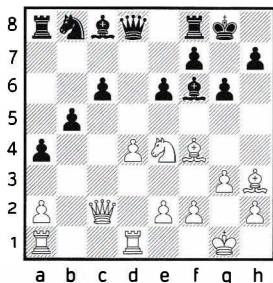
Now Black has a difficult choice to make! 17...g6?! this radical step weakens Black's dark squares

[17...♞bd7! was Black's best. Most likely Black feared the following forced line, 18. ♙e5! (White could also choose 18. ♞e5 when Black is forced to take back his move with 18...♞b8 and now White can try something else. However, being in a hurry to regain his pawn is not a good idea here — and usually also not in similar situations — as it loses time and helps Black to coordinate his pieces, for example 18. ♖xc6? ♗a6 and suddenly only Black can be better.) 18...h6 19. ♞xh6+ gxh6 20. ♙xe6 hxg5 21. ♖g6+ ♙h8 22. ♖h6+ ♙g8 23. ♖xg5+ ♙h8



No player likes to enter lines where the opponent has a perpetual check, while keeping the option of playing for mate, and neither did Lenderman! However mate does not seem to be in the picture; in fact White has to look for his winning chances in 24. ♔f5 ♖xe5 (24... ♗e8?? runs into a mating rook lift after 25.g4 with ♗d3 to follow.) 25.dxe5 ♖h7 26. ♗h5 ♔xf5 27. ♗xd8 ♗axd8 28. ♗xf5 coming to a position with a material imbalance. White has the safer king and should be better, however the fight is still ahead and both sides should have their chances.]

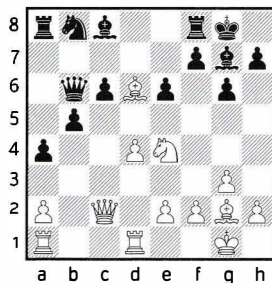
18. ♖xf6+ ♔xf6 19. ♖e4



19... ♔g7 Now Nakamura correctly judges that his light-squared bishop has to return to the long diagonal.

[19... ♔xd4? feels wrong and quickly ends wrong after 20. ♔h6 ♔xa1 21. ♗xd8 ♗xd8 22. ♗c1 and the black king is left without any defenders. 22... ♔g7 (22... ♔h8 23. ♗g5+-) 23. ♔xg7 ♖xg7 24. ♗c3+-]

20. ♔g2! ♗b6 21. ♔d6

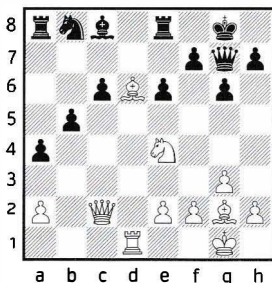


Black's general problem here is that he is very passive and has no counter-play, while White can increase his pressure at his ease without being in any hurry to get his sacrificed pawn back. 21... ♗e8

(For example, in the case of 21... ♖d7 White will take an exchange on f8 on his own terms: 22. ♗ac1 ♔b7 23. ♖c5! ♖xc5 24. ♔xc5 ♗c7 25. ♔xf8 ♔xf8 26. ♔xc6 ♗c8 27. ♔e4+-.)

22. ♗ac1 ♗d8

(22... ♔xd4? again ends badly for Black: 23. ♗xd4! ♗xd4 24. ♗d1 ♗g7



Black's undeveloped queenside coupled with the disastrous dark-

square weaknesses around his king unsurprisingly bring him disaster. 25. ♖e7! ♜d7 26. ♝xd7 ♙xd7 27. ♙f6 ♜f8 28. ♙e5 f5 29. ♜f6+ ♜f7 30. ♜xd7 ♜e7 31. ♜d2! ♝ed8 32. ♜h6 ♝xd7 33. ♜xh7+ Black might ultimately lose all his pawns. 33... ♜e8 34. ♜g8+ ♜f8 35. ♜xe6+ ♜e7 36. ♜g8+ ♜f8 37. ♜xg6+ ♜f7 38. ♜xc6 ♝ad8 39. ♙f3 Black cannot escape the deadly pins.)

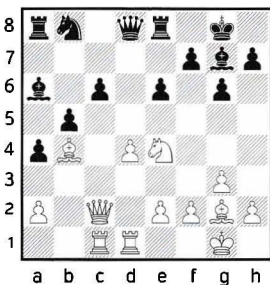
23. ♙c5!

(23. ♙b4? 23... ♜a6)

23... ♙a6

(23... ♜a6 24. ♜d6±)

24. ♙b4



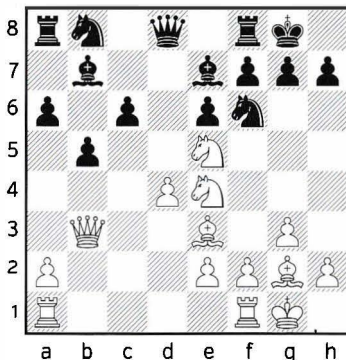
White's compensation is worth way more than a pawn here. Furthermore, playing such a position as Black in a practical game is very difficult and it is not surprising that now the game quickly comes to an end. 24... ♜c7 Nakamura now plays with energy and precision. 25. d5!+- exd5 26. ♜d6 ♜d7

(26... ♝d8 27. ♙xd5+-)

27. ♜xe8 ♜xe8 The black pieces are still sleeping on the queenside. 28. e4! d4 29. e5! h5 30. f4 f6 31. ♝xd4 fxe5 32. fxe5 ♙c8 33. ♝cd1 ♙d7 34. ♝d6 ♜xe5 35. ♜xg6 ♜f5 36. ♙c3 ♜f7 37. ♝f1 ♜xg6 38. ♝xg6 1-0, Nakamura, H-Lenderman, A USA Ch 2016.

11... 0-0 12. ♜e4

An important moment! As we have established, trading a pair of knights — or all four if possible! — helps Black in these positions.

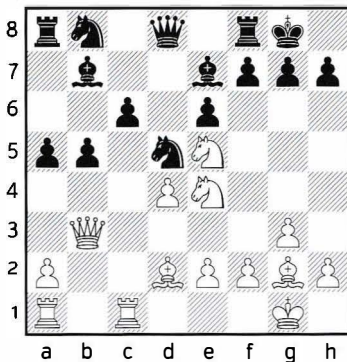
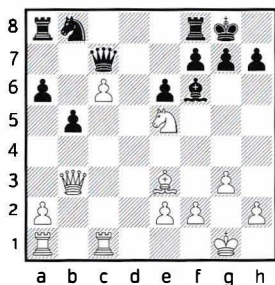


12... ♜d5

12... ♜xe4! was the way to go and with a pair of knights traded, Black gets to liberate himself with ...c5 and equalize the game! 13. ♙xe4 ♜c8 14. ♝f1 c5! 15. ♙xb7 ♜xb7 16. dxc5 ♙f6 17. c6

chesstouring.com
(17. ♙d4 ♙xe5 18. ♙xe5 ♜c6=)

17... ♖c7



18.a4! White however does not have enough pieces to increase his “initiative momentum” so the game quickly becomes drawish. 18... ♗xc6

Now Spassky has the kind of compensation he wanted. White’s knight on e4 is preventing any liberating ...c6-c5 pawn push, so Black has to remain passive.

a) Greed here is not good as 18... ♗xe5? loses to 19.axb5 ♗xa1 20.b6 ♖d6 21.c7+- and finally White comes out with a decisive material advantage.

14... ♖b6

The positions arising after 14...b4 15.♗c5 ♗xc5 16.♖xc5 ♗d7 17.♗xd7 ♖xd7 18.♖ac1 might be o.o.o according to the computer engines, but to me they look easier to play as White in a game between humans.

b) 18...b4 also does not solve Black’s problems. 19.♖xb4 ♖xe5 (19... ♗xe5 20.♖b7 ♗xc6 21.♖xc7 ♗xc7 22.♖xc6±) 20.♖ab1 Black has to return the piece and his a-pawn is a weakness.

14... ♖c7 with ...♖c8 to follow in hindsight would have been a better move, as the black queen will prove not well placed on b6.

c) 18...bxa4 also leads to a draw. 19.♖b7 ♗xe5 20.♖xa4 ♗xc6 21.♖xc7 ♗xc7 22.♖xc6 ♗e5 23.♖cx6=.

15. ♖b2 ♖c8 16. ♗c5 ♖a7?

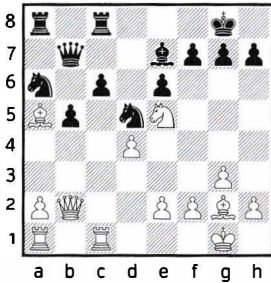
19.axb5 ♗a5 20.♖d3 ♖xe5 21.♖xa5 ♖ad8 22.♖b3 axb5=.

This is a tactical oversight in a difficult position.

13. ♖fc1 a5 14. ♗d2

16... ♗a6 challenging white’s well placed c5-knight was an option, though White gets his pawn back

and keeps up the pressure with
17. ♖xb7 ♜xb7 18. ♗xa5

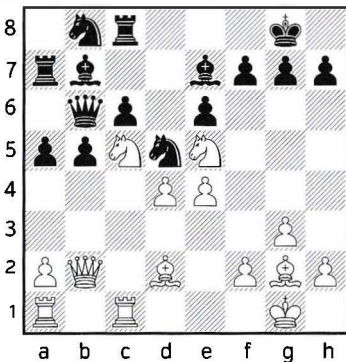


Black's life is not easy here, for example 18... ♗c5

(18... ♗b8 19. ♜d2! b4 20. ♖c4 and Black cannot take advantage of the seemingly vulnerable white bishop on a5.)

19. dxc5 ♜xa5 20. e4 ♗f6 21. ♖c4 ♜a7
22. ♗d6 ♗xd6 23. cxd6 White is better here.

17. e4



Now White can play ♖c4 with gain of tempo, utilizing the pin along the b-file.

17... ♗f6

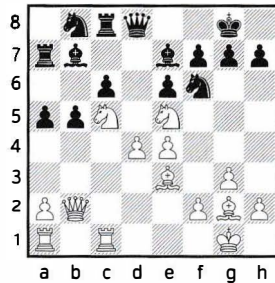
Or 17... ♗b4 18. a3 ♗4a6 19. ♖c4 ♜d8
20. ♖xb7 ♜xb7 21. ♗xa5±.

18. ♗e3

The text move keeps White's advantage, but more direct was 18. ♖c4! ♜d8 19. ♗xa5 ♜e8 20. ♗b6 ♜a8 21. ♖xb7 and White has a clear advantage: 21... bxc4 22. a4 (22. ♗c5±) 22... ♗bd7 23. a5±.

18... ♗xc5

In the event of a "pass move" like 18... ♜d8 White already has, among other options, some standard tactical motifs that are often seen in these positions.



19. ♖xf7! ♜xf7 20. ♗xe6 ♜xe6

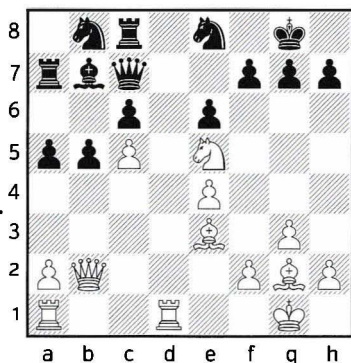
(20... ♜e8 21. a4! All the black pieces are somehow wrong. 21... ♜g8 22. axb5 cxb5 23. d5 ♜a6 24. ♜xc8 ♜xc8 25. ♜c1 ♜e8 26. ♗c7+.)

21. d5+ ♜f7 22. ♗xa7 ♗bd7 23. ♜d1 ♜c7

(23...cxd5 24.e5+-)

24. ♖ac1 c5 25. ♗xb5±.

19.dxc5 ♖c7 20. ♖d1 ♘e8



21. ♙h3!

We have seen Nakamura (against Lenderman above) improving his bishop in a similar way.

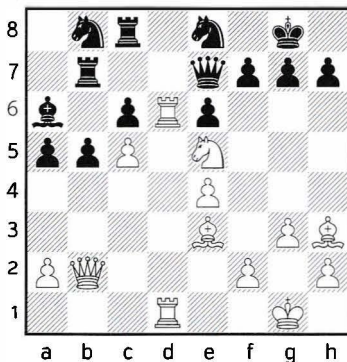
21... ♗e7 22. ♖d6!

22. ♖d2 with ♖ad1 to follow looks less flashy, but is actually quite effective.

22... ♙a6

22... ♖a8! was Black's best, but White would still keep Black tied up with 23. ♖d2↑ and ♖ad1 to follow. Of course not 22... ♗xd6 23.cxd6 when Black's queen and rook are both attacked.

23. ♖ad1 ♖b7?



This runs into a relatively easy tactical refutation.

Still, Black's best try, 23... ♗f6, would probably have only prolonged his agony: 24. ♖d2 b4 25. ♙g4 Black remains terribly passive. 25... ♗e7 26. ♙h5 f7 27. ♗f3 White's attack will prove decisive.

24. ♗xf7!+- ♖xf7

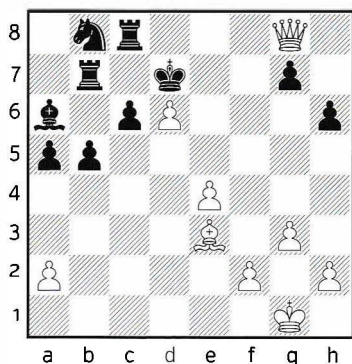
a) 24... ♗xd6 ultimately loses tons of material while Black remains tied up, for example 25. ♗xd6 ♖d7 26. ♗e5 ♖e8 27. ♙g5 ♗f8 28. ♙xe6+ ♖h8 29. ♖d2+-.

b) Or 24... ♗xf7 25. ♙xe6 ♗xd6 26. ♖xd6+-.

25. ♙xe6+ ♗xe6 26. ♖xe6 ♖xe6 27. ♗b3+ ♖e7 28. ♗g8 h6

White has a winning advantage and different ways of sealing the victory. Spassky finds a nice one.

29. ♖d6! ♞xd6 30. cxd6+ ♔d7



A funny picture, all the black pieces are behind their king; the black monarch is advancing alone into the first line of fire!

31. ♖xg7+ ♔xd6 32. ♖xh6+ ♔d7
33. ♖g7+ ♔d6 34. ♖f6+ ♔c7

White now collects the black rook on c8, bringing game to an end.

35. ♖e5+ ♔d7 36. ♖f5+ ♔c7 37. ♔f4+
♔b6 38. ♖xc8 ♔a7 39. e5

1-0

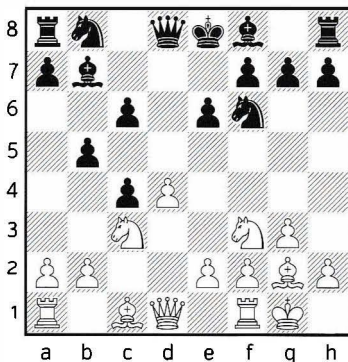
26

▷ Ding Liren

▷ W. So

Shanghai, 2016

1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. ♘c3 ♞f6 4. ♞f3 c6
5. g3 dxc4 6. ♔g2 b5 7. 0-0 ♔b7



8. ♞e5

It should be pointed out here that 8.b3? was the actual move order in Nakamura-Lenderman given in the Spassky-Zinn comments. This move order is not precise for White, since 8...b4! looks to me like a problem for White since without the inclusion of 8. ♞e5 a6, White would anyhow need to jump ♞e5, while Black could then play ...a7-a5 in one go instead of two and Nakamura would be simply a tempo down on our main lines! (The Nakamura game actually went 8...cxb3 9. ♖xb3 ♔e7 10. ♞e5 a6, transposing to Spassky-Zinn.)

8...a6

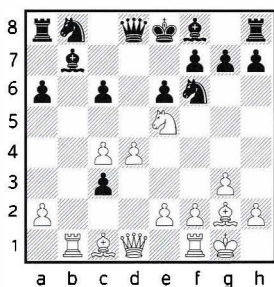
White now goes for a standard b2-b3 plan, but the position of the white knight on c3 gives Black different possibilities here.

9. b3 b4 chesstouring.com

White here is at crossroads. I believe the move he plays now to be the strongest, while two other possibilities might lead to crazy positions.

10. ♖e4

One option for White is the rather original piece sacrifice played by the Chinese grandmaster Li Chao: 10.bxc4!? It is difficult to evaluate the objective merits of this inspired sacrifice and I am giving his game here in order to show readers an original idea and to encourage out-of-the-box thinking. 10...bxc3 11. ♖b1



For his sacrificed piece White has not even a single pawn but he does have b-file pressure combined with tactical possibilities using the h1–a8 diagonal and the computer engines' evaluation is around 0.00. I will not show too many lines here, though I did delve deep and the conclusion is that White has compensation in a dynamic balance, but not more. 11... ♖a7 Perhaps Black's best.

(11... ♖c7 is another move.)

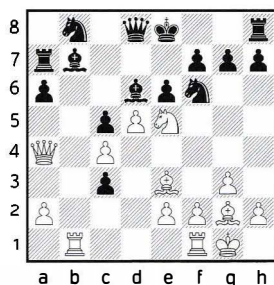
12. ♗e3

(12.d5!? ♗d6! 13. ♘xf7 ♖xf7 14.dxe6+ ♖xe6 looks flashy but after 15. ♗e3 c5 16. ♗xb7 ♖c7 17. ♗d5+ ♖e7 the sober reality is that White is fighting for a draw.)

12... ♗d6!

(12... ♗bd7 13.d5 c5 14. ♗c6 ♗xc6 15.dxc6± ♗e5 16. ♖a4 ♖c7 17. ♖fd1 ♖c8 18. ♗f4 ♗fg4 19.h3+)

13.d5 c5 14. ♖a4+

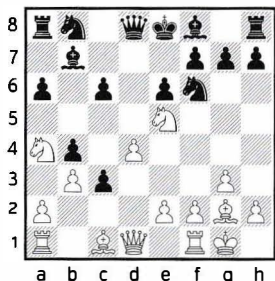


14... ♗bd7

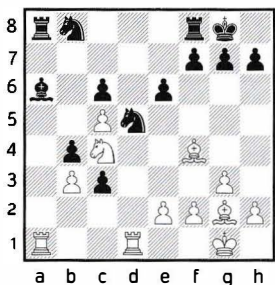
(14... ♖e7±)

15.dxe6 fxe6 16. ♗xb7 ♗xe5 An unusual material imbalance. 17. ♗xc5 ♖xb7 18. ♖xb7 ♖c8 19. ♖a7 ♖xc5 20. ♖a8+ ♖e7 21. ♖xh8 ♗e4 22. ♖xh7 ♗d2 This inventive and entertaining game ultimately ended in a draw by perpetual check, Li Chao (2697)-Ankit,R (2455) Graz 2014.

10. ♖a4 is an option that I do not like for White, because it allows Black a monster pawn chain. 10...c3



leads to good play for Black; the game Gupta-Shirov here is a good illustration. 11. ♖c4 a5 12. a3 ♗a6 13. axb4 axb4 We can now get a study-like endgame. The resulting positions are full of tactical solutions, but it seems to me that the game is easier play with Black. 14. ♖c5 ♗xc5 15. dxc5 ♔xd1! 16. ♖xd1 o-o 17. ♗f4 ♖d5



A razor-sharp position, where it is easy for both sides to go wrong. White is material up, but Black's b4-c3 pawn chain is a huge trump! 18. ♗xd5?

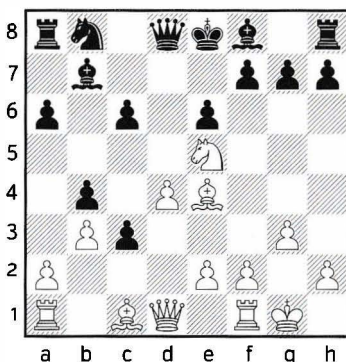
(18. ♗d6!∞)

18...exd5! was winning by force as, after a tactical sequence, the black pawns will decide.

(The actual game went 18... cxd5 19. ♖b6 ♖c6 20. ♖xa8 ♖xa8 and Black went on to win in Gupta,A (2613)-Shirov,A (2676) Al-Ain 2015.)

19. ♖b6 ♗xe2! 20. ♖xa8 ♗xd1 21. ♖xd1 ♖d7 22. ♖c7 ♖xc5-+ and the black pawns cannot be stopped.

10... ♖xe4 11. ♗xe4 c3



Black here also has a pawn chain, but things are different from the 10. ♖a4 lines as White has considerably better tactical solutions, and can challenge the black pawn chain.

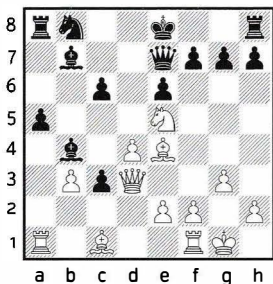
12. a3 a5 13. axb4

How should Black recapture? It looks logical to take with the pawn and maintain the pawn chain—right? In fact no! Recap-

turing with the pawn on b4 indeed keeps the black pawn chain intact, but unfortunately for Black it opens the a-file! In similar Catalan positions a-file penetration by the white queen or rook often causes Black problems, and that will prove to be the case here.

13...axb4

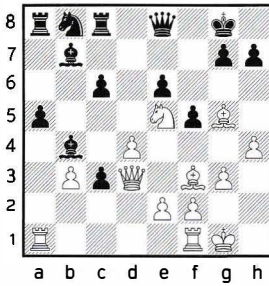
13... ♗xb4! is the way for Black to go! The bishop becomes part of the pawn chain, but rather than becoming just “one big pawn” it still preserves its function as a bishop. Meanwhile — and this is very important! — the a-file remains closed and White cannot penetrate. This original strategic decision was seen in a very important game from the 2016 Baku Olympiad, in the match Azerbaijan-India. The game continued 14. ♖d3 ♜e7



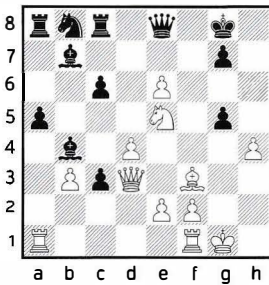
A very interesting position, both strategically and for pure theoretical research in a topical variation! Strangely enough, after Mamedyarov lost this game, White play-

ers did not want to give it another try! This surprised me a lot because the position is dynamic, with rich possibilities, and it definitely offers scope for original ideas and improvements. I will not share my full analyses here as this is not an opening book. However, I will give one interesting line illustrating White’s attacking possibilities. White’s development is definitely more important here than snatching a pawn on h7! 15. ♗xh7?! Shakhriyar Mamedyarov is famous for sacrificing pawns, rather than taking them, and this decision came as a big surprise to me. The game remains tense, and Harikrishna plays excellently.

[15. ♗f4! f5! Surrenders the e5-square but enables Black to castle. (Computer engines initially suggest for Black 15...g5 16. ♗e3 but soon change their mind). 16. ♗f3 This bishop retreat prepares the g3-g4 advance. (16. ♗g2 is another possibility and I will leave it to readers interested in opening theory to do their homework and figure out which bishop retreat offers White more chances for an opening advantage.) 16...0-0 17.h4 ♖c8 (17... ♗a6!? releasing the b8-knight from its pawn-protection duties and covering the sixth rank in general is a plan worth nothing here.) 18. ♗g5 ♜e8



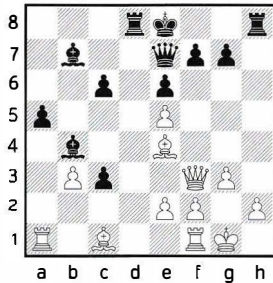
Now White goes ahead with his g-pawn push idea 19.g4 h6 and carry on with a thematic piece sacrifice. 20.gxf5! (The calm 20.♙f4 is definitely an alternative to consider.) 20...hxg5 (Including 20...♙a6 21.♖e4 also looks like leading to a draw by repetition: 21...hxg5 22.fxg6 ♖xe6 23.♙g4 ♗d6! The white queen cannot be allowed to enter g6. 24.♘g6 ♖f7 and White has to force a peaceful end 25.♘e5+ ♖g8=.) 21.fxg6



Now Black needs to understand that he needs his rook for sixth-rank defence. 21...♖d8! 22.♘f7 ♘a6! Black threatens either ...♗xe6 or ...♘c5. (22...♖d6 23.♘xd6 ♙xd6 24.♗f5 looks better for White.) 23.♗g6 Now Black needs to remove the white e6-pawn. 23...♖d6!

(23...♖xd4? 24.h5+- with h6 to follow wins.) 24.♙g4 White has here the luxury that he can delay making a draw with the ♘h6+ perpetual, but ultimately this position should see a peaceful end: 24...♘c7 25.♘h6+ ♖h8 26.♘f7+ ♖g8 27.f4 gxf4 28.♖xf4 ♖xe6 29.♘h6+ ♖h8 30.♘f7+=.]

15...♘d7 16.♙e4 ♘xe5 17.dxe5 ♖d8 18.♗f3 Now Black goes for a thematic positional exchange sacrifice to improve his pawn structure.



18...♖d5! 19.♗g4

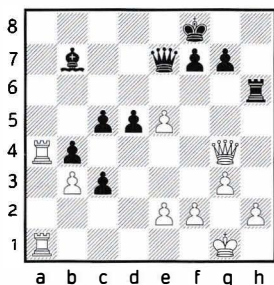
(19.h4 ♖xe5 20.♙xc6+ ♙xc6 21.♗xc6+ ♗d7 22.♗a8+ ♗d8 23.♗c6+ ♖e7=)

19...♖f8 In the heat of the battle Mamedyarov, not seeing a way to create threats, decides to take the exchange and hopes to cause Black problems through subsequent penetration along the a-file. 20.♙xd5

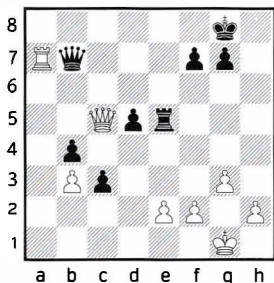
(20.♙g5 is suggested as a 0.00 solution by the computer engines. Mamedyarov's decision is, however-

er, very understandable from a human prospective.)

20...exd5 The problem for White now is that the black queenside pawns become too powerful, while White's a-file penetration delivers less than Mamedyarov had hoped for. 21. ♖a4 c5 22. ♙a3 ♖h6 23. ♙xb4 axb4 24. ♖fa1 White's rooks on the a-file are not going to bring him the desired result.



24... ♖e8! 25. ♖a7 ♖c6 26. ♖g5 ♖e6 27. ♖d8+ ♖e8 28. ♖d6+ ♙g8 Worried about ...d4 with ...♖d5 to follow, White now hopes to escape into a heavy-piece ending. 29. ♖xb7?! ♖xb7 30. ♖xc5 Harikrishna now displays excellent calculation. 30... ♖xe5 31. ♖a7



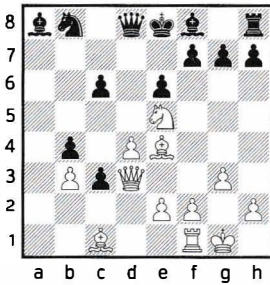
31...d4! 32. ♖xd4 ♖d5! 33. ♖xb7 ♖xd4 34. ♙g2 ♖d1 and White resigned in Mamedyarov,S (2761)-Harikrishna,P (2752) Baku 2016, as stopping the black promotion will cost him a rook, for example 35. ♖c7 ♖b1 36. ♙f3 ♖xb3 37. ♙e3 ♖b1 38. ♙d3 b3 39. ♖xc3 ♖d1+ 40. ♙e4 b2-+.

14. ♙f4

This move threatens 15. ♖xa8 ♙xa8 16. ♖a1 with ♖a7 to follow, forcing Black to move his knight from b8 and surrender his extra pawn on c6. The text move, from the theoretical prospective, leads to White's advantage. However, there are interesting ideas I would like to show here. At the time the Ding Liren-So game was played when I was living and working in Dubai, UAE, as their national team coach. Their second-best player at the time, IM Omar Noaman, got fascinated by the position and combining his ideas with calculation by a silicon monster produced fascinating variations, some of which I will share here. The variations are nice and also can be used as calculation training or developing one's imagination.

14. ♖xa8 ♙xa8 15. ♖d3! was a novel idea that Omar had. White wants to play ♖f3 hitting directly on f7. Most of the time White sacrifices a piece or more to remove the black pawn's

defences. Best play seems to lead to entertaining draws.



(15. $\text{♔g5}?!$ is a nice idea for White, but unfortunately it does not work: 15... ♝xg5 16. ♞a1 ♕d6 17. ♜c4 o-o 18. ♜xd6 ♞d8 19. ♜xf7 ♝xf7 20. ♞xa8 ♞xd4 and Black is better.)

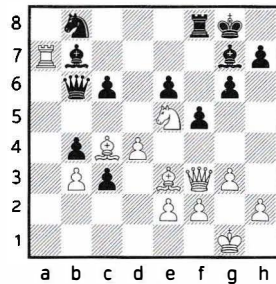
15... $\text{♕d6}!$ Another good training line for calculation and imagination!

a) 15... $\text{♜d7}?!$ leads to pawn-up positions for White since after the c6-pawn falls, the b4-pawn will follow soon. 16. ♕xc6 ♕xc6 17. ♜xc6 The benefit of having the white queen already on d3 is easy to see, as the queen goes to c4 and the black b4-pawn is lost. 17... ♞c7 (17... ♞b6 18. ♞c4 ♕d6 19. ♕f4 ♕xf4 20. $\text{gxf4}\pm$) 18. ♞b5 (18. d5 , similar to the game, is also possible.) 18... ♕d6 19. ♜xb4 o-o 20. ♜c2 Black does not have enough for the pawn.

b) 15... $\text{f5}?!$ 16. ♕f3 ♕b7 17. $\text{d5}!$ White has a large advantage as Black does

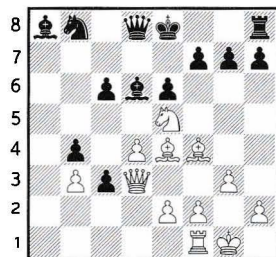
not have a clever way to capture on d5.

c) 15... ♕b7 16. ♞f3 f5 leads to one of the roller-coaster drawing lines: 17. ♕e3 White wants to play ♞a1-♞a7 . 17... g6 18. ♞a1 ♕g7 19. $\text{♕d3}!$ (The immediate 19. $\text{♞a7}?$ is a mistake due to the simple 19... ♞b6 20. d5 c5 .) 19... o-o 20. ♞a7 ♞b6 21. $\text{♕c4}!$



21... $\text{♞e8}!$ (21... $\text{♕c8}?$ loses to 22. d5 c5 23. ♞xg7+ ♝xg7 24. ♞f4+- ; 21... $\text{♞xa7}??$ runs into the simple mate 22. ♕xe6+ ♝h8 23. ♜xg6+ hxf6 24. ♞f4+- .) 22. d5 c5 23. dxe6 ♕xf3 and it all ends in friendly fashion. 24. e7+ ♝h8 25. ♜f7+ ♝g8 26. ♜h6+= .

16. ♕f4



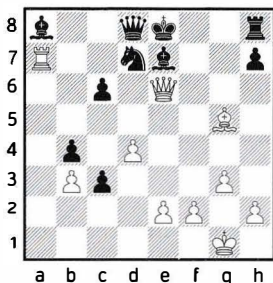
16...g5! 17.♙e3 ♙xe5 18.♞a1! This move challenges Black to find the only defence.

(18.dxe5 ♞xd3 19.♙xd3 ♜d7 looks like a balanced endgame.)

18...f5!

(18...♙b7 19.dxe5 ♞xd3 20.♙xd3±)

19.♙xf5 exf5 20.♞xf5 Now we have a number of drawing lines, I will give what I thought were the nicest ones! 20...♙f6 21.♞a7! ♜d7 22.♞e6+ ♙e7 23.♙xg5



23...c2! Black queens just in time.
24.e4 White prevents ...c5+.

[24.♙xe7 c1♞+ 25.♜g2 c5+ 26.f3 ♙xf3+ 27.exf3 ♞c2+ is a draw: 28.♜g1 (White must not try to escape the perpetual check: 28.♜h3?? loses to ♞g6+ because 29.♞xg6 hxg6 is check.) 28...♞c1+=]

24...♞f8! 25.♙xe7 c1♞+ 26.♜g2 ♞xf2+ 27.♜xf2 ♞d2+ 28.♜g1 ♞d1+

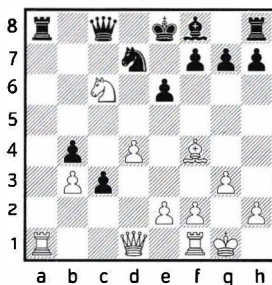
(28...♞xd4+?? 29.♜g2 ♞d2+ 30.♜h3+-)

29.♜g2 ♞e2+ 30.♜h3 ♞f1+ 31.♜g4 ♞d1+ 32.♜h3=.

14...♜d7

14...♙e7? is bad due to 15.♞xa8 ♙xa8 16.♞a1 ♙b7 17.♞a7±.

15.♙xc6 ♙xc6 16.♜xc6 ♞c8



17.♞xa8!

A novelty at the time, based on the strength of the next move.

17.♜a5? led to a quick White demise in an earlier game: 17...♙e7 18.d5 o-o 19.e4 exd5 20.exd5 ♙c5 21.♞d3 ♜f6± o-1 Baron, T (2524)-Shirov, A (2702) Riga 2015.

17...♞xa8 18.d5

White has regained his pawn and the black is king still in the centre. To evacuate his king, Black will need to lose another pawn and then

struggle on in a pawn-down position.

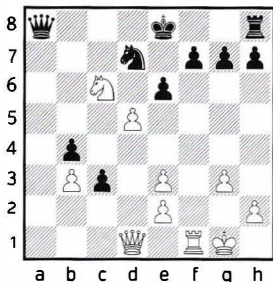
18... ♖c5

Forced.

18... ♖f6? 19.e4! ♖c5 20. ♖d3 and, as in some previously seen positions, c4 will prove to be an excellent post for the white queen. 20...0-0 21. ♖c4+.

19. ♖d3

19. ♖e3!? is a computer proposal based, of course, on tactics. Ding Liren's play is way more logical. 19... ♖xe3 20.fxe3



20...0-0

[20... ♖f6 21. ♖d4! leads to a clear White advantage as Black has problems with his king: 21...exd5 (21... ♖xd5 22. ♖c5 f5 23.e4 fxe4 24. ♖b5+-) 22. ♖xf6 (22. ♖e5+) 22... gxf6 23. ♖xf6±.]

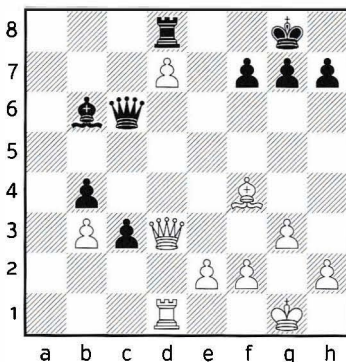
21. ♖d4 may not initially look dangerous for Black, but actually Black

will end up a pawn down because after 21...exd5?! 22. ♖e7+ ♖h8 23. ♖f5 his king is weak: 23... ♖g8

(23...f6 24. ♖xb4±)

24. ♖xg7±.

19...0-0 20.dxe6 ♖xc6 21.exd7 ♖d8
22. ♖d1 ♖b6



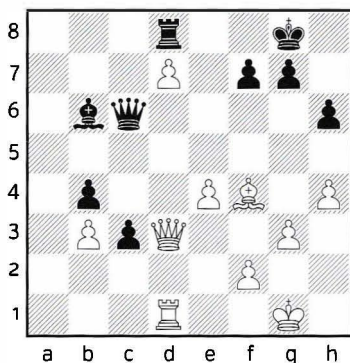
The smoke has cleared a bit. White is a pawn up, but clinching victory is not easy because of Black's strong defended passed pawn on c3. We have here an unusual situation where a logical-looking central pawn advance by White will prove to be a mistake, because it provides for Black important squares to occupy and he can generate counterplay.

23.e4

23.h4! Omar proposed this improvement in the same session. The idea is to keep the white pawn on e2, so

that later on a white rook on d3 will be defended. This way it becomes difficult for Black to create counterplay. White is risk free better. The following line illustrates the merits of keeping the white pawn still on e2. 23...h6 (23...h5 is Black's best, but Black's opening line is obviously not going to find many followers...) 24.h5 ♖e6? 25.♗b5± ♗xb3? 26.♞d3+- The white pawn is still on e2 and the rook on d3 is defended.

23...h6 24.h4



24...♗e6!

Now Black is disturbing the white rook and should save the game!

25.♗d5

One nice line is 25.♗b5 ♗xb3 26.♞d3 ♙c5! when White's undefended rook is his problem. 27.♖g2 ♗c2 28.♞f3 ♗xe4 29.♗xc5 ♞xd7 30.♗c8+ ♖h7 31.♗xd7 b3 32.♙xh6 ♖xh6 33.♗c8 b2 34.♗h8+ ♗h7 35.♗b8 ♗e4=.

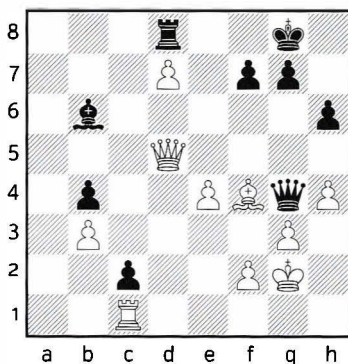
25...♗g4

25...c2! was drawing: 26.♞d3

(26.♞c1 ♗xd5 27.exd5 ♞xd7 28.d6 g5 29.hxg5 hxg5 30.♙xg5 ♞xd6 31.♞xc2 ♞d3=)

26...♗f6 27.♗c4 ♗b2! The absence of the white e2-pawn enables Black to attack the f2-square. 28.♙d2 ♗f6 29.♙f4 ♗b2= Here White is asking for trouble if he goes for 30.♖g2 ♙xf2!

26.♖g2 c2 27.♞c1

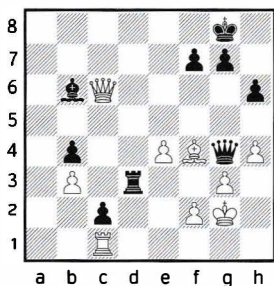


27...♗e2?

27...♞xd7! would have kept the balance. 28.♗c6

(If 28.♗c4 g5! White is the one having to force a draw by 29.♗c8+ ♖g7 30.♙e5+ f6 31.♙xf6+! ♖xf6 32.♗h8+ ♖f7 33.♗h7+ ♖e8 34.♗g8+ ♖e7 35.♗g7+.)

Now Black has to find the only move! 28... ♖d3!



Now White has to be careful because of the threats of ... ♗f3+ and ... ♖d1. 29.e5! g5! 30.hxg5 hxg5 31.e6!

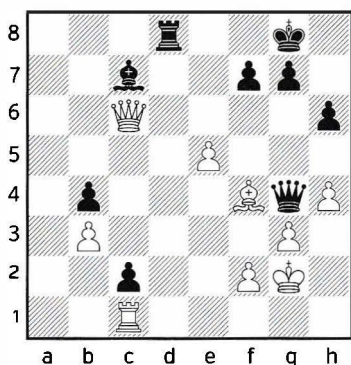
(31.f3 ♗e6 is better for Black.)

31... ♗xe6 32. ♗xe6 fxe6 33. ♔xg5 ♖xb3 34. ♖xc2 ♔f7=.

28. ♖f1

Now Black runs out of threats and counter-play.

28... ♔c7 29.e5 ♗g4 30. ♖c1 ♖xd7 31. ♗a8+ ♖d8 32. ♗c6



White is a pawn up with a better position. So he tries one last attempt at counter-play.

32...g5 33.e6!

It is always possible in chess to do something stupid and throw away a win with something like 33. ♗xc7?? ♖c8=.

33...gxf4 34. ♗xc7

Now it is over as Black ends up two full pawns down with no counter-play.

34...f3+ 35. ♔h2 ♖d2 36. ♖xc2 ♖xc2 37.exf7+ ♔g7 38. ♗xc2

Black resigned because of 38. ♗xc2 ♔xf7 39. ♗h7+ which simply kills Black's hopes of survival.

1-0

CHAPTER VI. KNIGHT TALES

In chess we have bishop lovers and knight lovers — as a rule each player has his or her own natural preference for a knight or a bishop. Bishop lovers like to joke that even the worst bishop is still better than the best knight. The legendary 11th World Champion, Robert James Fischer, once said that a knight is worth three pawns while a bishop is worth three and a quarter pawns, and he was indeed a bishop lover.

Another big bishop lover is the 12th World Champion. Anatoly Karpov loved bishops so much that it sometimes clouded his usually excellent positional feeling! I will give here three games where Karpov clearly overestimated his bishops' power, not realizing that in the actual position the opponent's knight was clearly dominant. I personally also belong to the bishop lovers group and my loss given in this chapter clearly shows my judgment being clouded by my embedded bishop preference.

We all know that, in general, open positions suit bishops better, while closed positions are more suitable for the knights, though judgment should always be made based on the specific situation. What we see in the games in this chapter and what I would like to give as strategic guidelines are the following:

- ◆ A bishop pair versus either two knights or a knight plus bishop usually favours the side with the bishops.
- ◆ Bishop plus knight versus two knights again usually favours the side with the bishop.
- ◆ Assessing a pure bishop versus knight situation, with no other light pieces on the board, depends much more on the pawn structure. If the knight is dominant then the defence for the side with the bishop can become a true (k)nightmare as there is usually no counter-play to create. Karpov-Timman is an excellent example.

27

▷ **A. Karpov**

▷ **J. Timman**

Mar del Plata, 1982

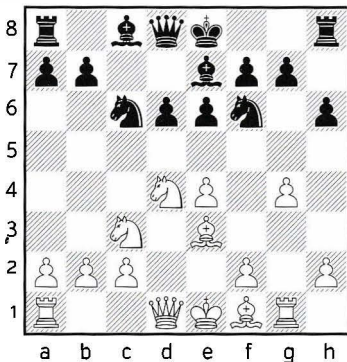
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4
♘f6 5.♘c3 d6 6.g4 h6 7.♖g1

Karpov's favorite move in this line. Nowadays 7.♖g2 or 7.h4 are more often played.

7...♙e7

A year later Timman chose 7...♘c6 in Karpov,A (2710)-Timman,J (2605) Plovdiv 1983 and the game finished in a draw after Karpov had pressure throughout the game.

8.♙e3 ♘c6



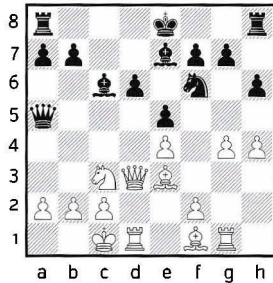
9.♙e2

Karpov goes for a slightly unnatural set-up, which he is going to regret

and will not repeat after this game. In later games the 12th World Champion chose 9.♙e2 and the following game is a nice example of the practical decision-making for which Karpov was famous. 9...♙d7

(9...♘xd4 10.♙xd4 e5 11.♙e3 ♙e6 as in 1/2-1/2 Karpov,A (2720)-Andersson,U (2605) Turin 1982 is objectively Black's best here.)

10.h4 ♘xd4 11.♙xd4 e5 12.♙e3 ♙c6
13.♚d3 ♙a5 14.0-0-0

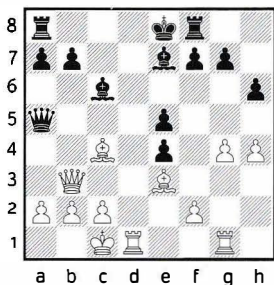


Black does not have any targets while White has the 15.g5 threat. To create counter-play Gyula Sax goes for a speculative piece sacrifice. 14...♘xe4!? 15.♘xe4 d5 Black's piece sacrifice has given him some dynamic possibilities. White knight is attacked, and so is the a2-pawn, while Black's central pawns might be able to roll forward. It all looks rather suspicious for Black, but what should White do?? Karpov reacts in a very practical way! 16.♙b3

(Your computer engine will easily refute Sax's sacrifice and give the

following line: 16. ♞d2! d4 17. ♞b3
 ♞xa2 18. ♞f5! dxe3 19. ♞c4 0-0
 20. g5 and White wins with a mat-
 ing attack!

16... dxe4 17. ♞c4 ♞f8



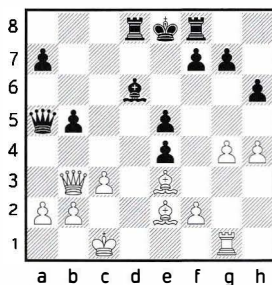
Karpov now takes an interesting practical decision. After sacrificing a pawn with 16. ♞b3 he now sacrifices an exchange, altering the psychological run of play! Black is going to be the one with extra material and under attack. 18. ♞d5!

(18.g5 is preferred by computer engines, which credits White with a sizeable advantage.)

18... ♞xd5 19. ♞xd5 Black is temporarily an exchange and a pawn up, but his king is stuck in the middle of the board and White's light-squared bishop is a monster. 19... ♞d8

(19... ♞b4 20. ♞xb7 ♞xb3 21. axb3 ♞b8 22. ♞c6+ is not the type of ending Black would like to land in — White will get the exchange back and have a better game.)

20. ♞c4 ♞b4 21. c3 b5 22. ♞e2 ♞d6



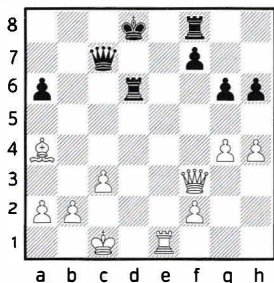
23. ♞d5! ♞e7

(23... ♞c7 24. g5± and Black does not have a good defence as 24... hxg5?? runs into mate after 25. ♞xb5+ ♞e7 26. ♞xg5+ f6 27. ♞c4 .)

24. ♞c5 ♞xc5 25. ♞xe5+ ♞d7
 26. ♞xc5 ♞c7 27. ♞f5+ Black is still in the game, but his situation is difficult to handle for a human and with his king open to checks he quickly collapses. 27... ♞e7

[27... ♞c6! was the way to go for Black: 28. ♞xb5+ ♞d6 White misses his dark-squared bishop here. Without it he cannot mate the black king. 29. ♞b4+ (29.g5 is another option.) 29... ♞c5 30. ♞xe4 g5! Covering the dark squares, Black keeps fighting.]

28. ♞xe4+ ♞d7 29. ♞f5+ ♞e7 30. ♞e1
 The black king still runs using the dark squares, so there is still no mate. 30... ♞d6 31. ♞c4+! ♞d8
 32. ♞xb5 a6 33. ♞a4 g6 34. ♞f3



Worn out by difficult defence, Black now collapses. 34...♖c8

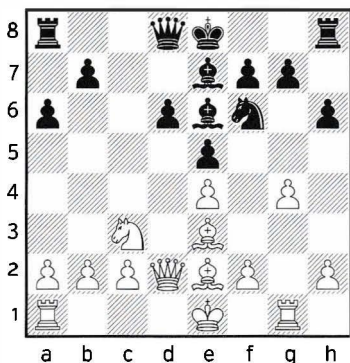
(34...♖c5!±)

35.♔e7!+- ♖d1+

(35...♖xe7 36.♖a8+ ♖c7 37.♖a7+ ♖d8 38.♖b8 mate.)

36.♖xd1 ♖xe7 37.♖a8+ ♖c7 38.♖a7+ ♖d6 39.♖b6+ and Black is to get mated after all, 1-o Karpov,A (2710)-Sax,G (2560) Linares 1983.

9...a6 10.♖d2 ♖xd4 11.♖xd4 e5 12.♖d2 ♗e6



13. ♗f3

White wants to prevent Black's liberating move 13...d5, while getting ready to push 14.h4 himself, but this bishop will prove awkwardly placed.

Perhaps it would have been practical for White to admit that he had not gained an opening advantage and opt for 13.h4 d5 14.exd5 ♖xd5 15.♖xd5 ♖xd5 16.♖xd5 ♗xd5 17.0-0 0-0 0-0=.

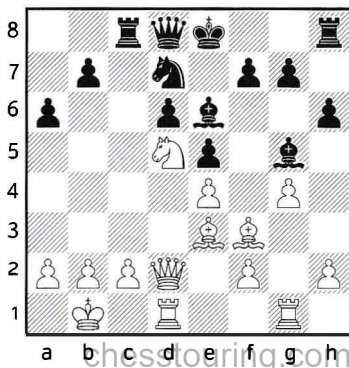
13...♗d7!

Black prevents the h4 move.

14.♗d5

The coming transformation of the central pawn structure is not going to make White happy, but 14.0-0-0 ♖c8∞ is fine for Black. Now Black correctly gets ready to trade the "right" bishops.

14... ♗g5! 15.0-0-0 ♖c8 16.♖b1



And now Black rightly judges his knight to be superior to White's light-squared bishop in the ensuing positions.

16... ♖xd5

White is here presented with a difficult choice.

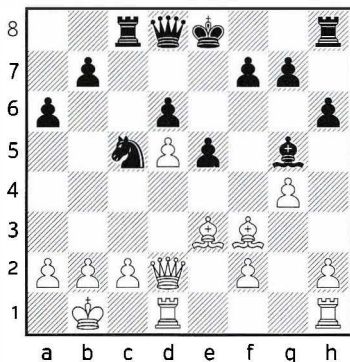
17.exd5

17.♞xd5 also leads to a better game for Black: 17... ♖xe3

(or 17... ♖c6 18.♞b3 ♞c7)

18.fxe3 ♖c6

17... ♖c5 18.♖h1



18... ♞f6

Timman wants the best possible version of the coming positions. 18... ♖xe3 19.fxe3 ♞h4 20.♖dg1 b5 was fine for Black, but less favourable than the game.

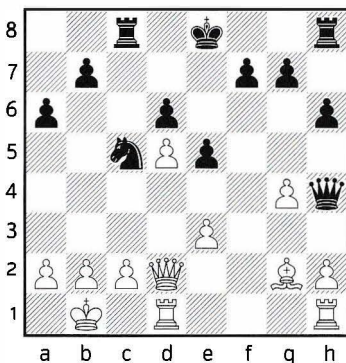
19. ♖g2?!

19.h4 was probably White's best: 19... ♖xe3 20.♞xe3 ♖e7! in the absence of the dark-squared bishops, and with the closed pawn structure, the black king is safe in the centre. 21.g5 hxg5 22.hxg5 ♞f5 The black knight is clearly stronger than the white bishop here and though my computer engine gives only -0.08, to me as a human this looks more favourable for Black than that.

19... ♖xe3! 20.fxe3

20.♞xe3 ♞f4

20... ♞h4!



Now Timman gets a much better version compared to 18... ♖xe3, as he will be a full tempo ahead.

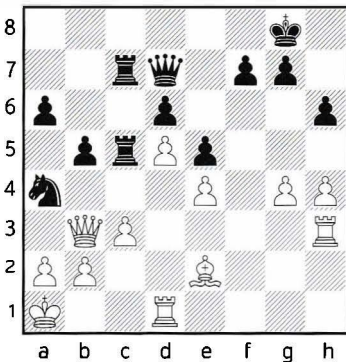
21. ♖f3 0-0

Or 21...b5 with ... ♖b8 to follow.

22. ♖e1

Not believing in his kingside attacking chances, Karpov is offering a queen swap. The problem for White is that after a queen trade he is actually worse in the ending because the black knight dominates the white bishop in this pawn structure. Timman, however, judges his attacking chances on the queenside to be superior to his opponent's on the kingside and decides to keep the queens on.

22... ♖d8 23.e4 ♖b6 24. ♖e3 ♖b5
25.h4 ♖a4 26. ♖b3 ♖c5 27. ♖h3 ♖fc8
28.c3 ♖8c7 29. ♖a1 ♖d7! 30. ♖e2 b5



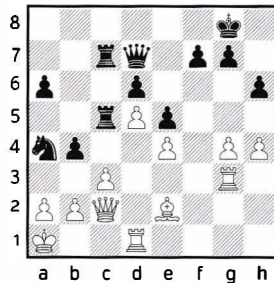
Engines initially give close to 0.00, but this is definitely easier to play with Black. Black's knight is a great attacking piece here, while the white bishop is not doing much. White is clearly on the defensive.

31.a3

White could have — and perhaps should have — played for an immediate kingside g4-g5 push to generate counter-play. 31. ♖g3 Karpov was probably worried about 31...b4

(31...g6!? was an option, as Timman played later in the game.)

but White seems to have a satisfactory defence. 32. ♖c2!!



(32.c4 ♖b6 33. ♖xb4 ♖xc4?)

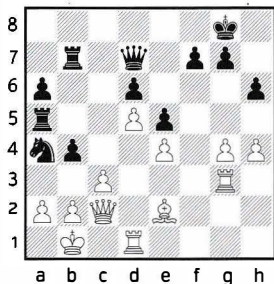
32... ♖a5!

[32...bxc3?? would be a terrible mistake as after 33.b3! (33.b4 ♖c4 is also good for White) 33... ♖b2 (33... ♖b6 34.g5 and White's attack now crashes through.) 34. ♖f1 g6 35.h5 g5 36. ♖ff3 with ♖xc3 to follow and Black loses his b2-knight.]

33. ♖b1!

(33.g5?? b3 34. ♖xb3 ♖b7-+)

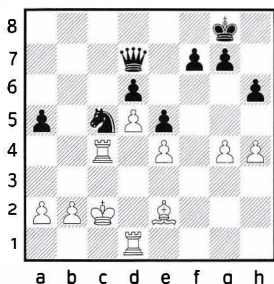
33... ♖b7 chesstouring.com



34. cxb4

(34.c4? ♖c3+! 35.bxc3 bxc3+ 36.♔c1 ♜b2! 37.♞xc3 ♜bxa2 38.♞e3 ♞c7-- with 39...♞c5 and 40...♞5a3 to follow. Just to show the “size” of Black’s attack, the computer evaluation is -5.10!)

34... ♜xb4 35. ♞b3 ♞c5 36. ♜xb4! ♞xc2
37. ♔xc2 ♖c5 38. ♞c4 a5



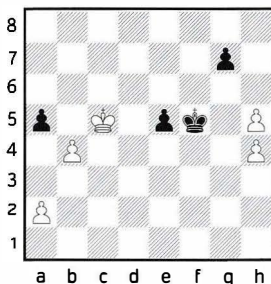
and here White could and should force a drawn endgame: 39. ♞xc5! dxc5 40.d6 ♔f8 41. ♔b5 ♞xb5 42.d7 ♞e2+ 43. ♞d2 ♞xd2+

(43... ♞xe4+ 44. ♔d1 ♞xg4+ 45. ♔c1 ♞c4+ 46. ♔d1=)

44. ♔xd2 ♔e7 45. ♔c3 ♔xd7 46. ♔c4 and despite Black’s extra pawn, the ending is drawn: 46...h5

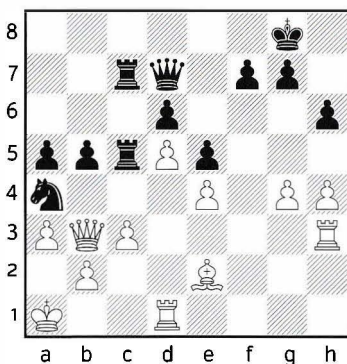
(Not 46... ♔c6 47.h5! = g6?? blundering into a known trick 48.g5+-.)

47.gxh5 ♔e6 48. ♔xc5 f5 49.exf5+ ♔xf5 50.b4



Now the pawn race ends peacefully. 50...axb4 51. ♔xb4 ♔f4 52. ♔c3 ♔f3 53. ♔d2 ♔f2 54. ♔d3 ♔f3=.

31...a5



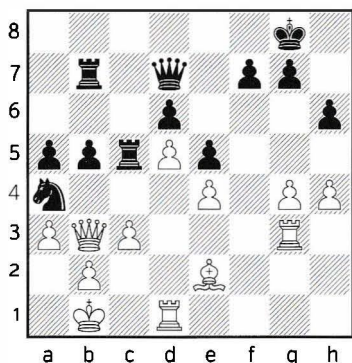
32. ♔b1

On 32. ♞g3? b4-- is now bad news for White.

32... ♖b7!

Preparing the deadly ...b5-b4 break.

33. ♖g3



33...g6!

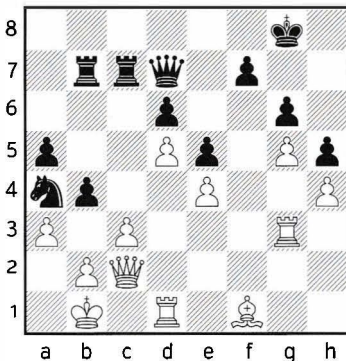
A classy move by Timman, and one worth remembering. White can now never make a break on the kingside, so to win the game Black no longer needs to calculate any sharp lines.

Still, calculating the sharp lines was also winning for Black as after 33... ♜cc7 34.g5 h5 35.g6

(35. ♙xh5 ♜c5 36. ♖c2 b4 and Black's attack is clearly faster: 37. ♙g4 ♖e8 38.c4 bxa3 39. ♙xa3 ♙b4 with 40... ♜a4 to follow and Black wins.)

35...fxc6 36. ♙xc6 ♜c5 37. ♖c2 b4 and Black wins.

34.g5 h5 35. ♙f1 ♜cc7 36. ♖c2 b4



Black has a devastating attack while White does not have a single threat. His bishop is totally useless!

37.axb4 axb4 38.c4 b3 39. ♖g2

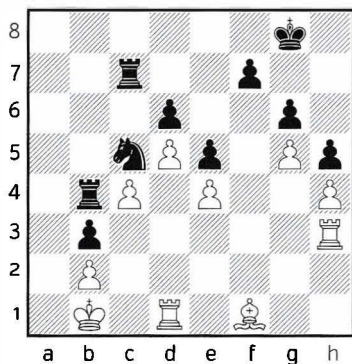
In the event of 39. ♙xb3 ♙xb3 40. ♖xb3 ♜c5 with ...♖b7 coming is the easiest win for Black, White will probably lose all his pawns and get mated on top of that — the black knight is a monster.

39... ♖b4?!

It is a pity that Black decided to win in the endgame. 39... ♖e8! 40. ♙c1 ♖a8 was much more effective and would have finished the game in style.

40. ♖h3 ♖xh3 41. ♙xh3 ♜c5

Black's knight dominance speaks for itself and this ending is more a case of when rather than if. White has no counter-play and cannot cover all his pawn weaknesses. The game lasts a few more moves.



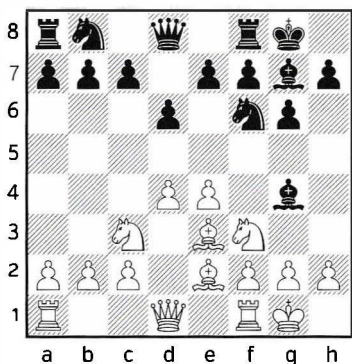
42. ♖c1 ♗xe4 43. ♖e3 ♘c5 44. ♖d2
 ♗a4 45. ♖c1 ♗xb2 46. c5 ♖d4+
 47. ♖e2 ♖xc5 48. ♖xc5 dxc5 49. ♖xb3
 ♗c4 50. ♖c3 ♖xh4 51. ♖e1 ♖e4+ 0-1

The following two games show strategically wrong exchanges that leave the bishop in trouble.

28

▷ A. Karpov
 ▶ Z. Azmaiparashvili
 Moscow, 1983

1. e4 d6 2. d4 g6 3. ♖f3 ♗f6 4. ♗c3
 ♗g7 5. ♗e2 0-0 6. 0-0 ♗g4 7. ♗e3



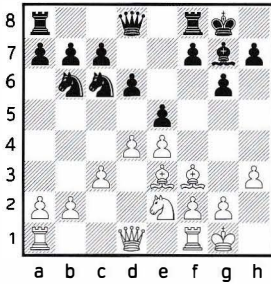
Anatoly Karpov loved this variation as White and at the peak of his career it was his favourite weapon against the Pirc. I will give here a few observations on this line and the resulting middlegame play. In this line the middlegame positions resemble the King's Indian Defence (KID), but with the white c3-knight standing in front of his pawn, which in the KID is already on c4. Black often gets favourable versions of KID positions.

7... ♗c6 8. ♗d2

a) 8.h3, forcing Black to immediately part with his bishop, for some reason has been rarely played here, but it looks rather logical to me as after 8... ♗xf3 9. ♗xf3 ♗d7 has been played by Botvinnik.

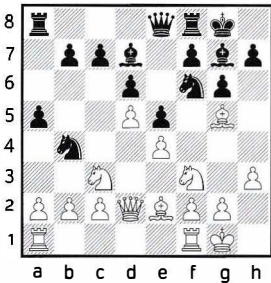
[9...e5 10.d5! (10.dxe5 dxe5 gets White nowhere.) 10... ♗e7 (10... ♗d4?! 11. ♗xd4 exd4 12. ♗xd4 looks like a rather speculative pawn sacrifice for Black.) 11. ♗e2 ♗d7 12.c4 f5 13. ♗c3 Yes, compared to KID positions, White lost some time (♗e2 and back to c3) but he has grabbed Black's important light squared bishop and has reasonable prospects for an advantage. As a rule of a thumb, without his light-squared bishop Black's classic KID pawn-roll attack on the king-side should not work.]

White should, in my opinion, react with 10. ♖e2! e5 11.c3 ♖b6



12.d5! ♖e7 13. ♖c2 f5 14.c4 and again we have the KID pawn structure, without the black light-squared bishop. White has better prospects.

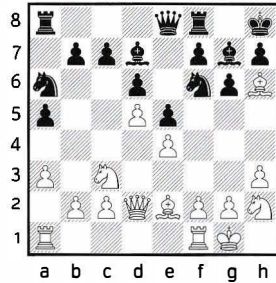
b) 8. ♖d3 was played by Karpov in his 1978 World Championship match against Kortschnoj. In this game he saw reasons to trade “the wrong bishop”, so let’s see that game. 8...e5 9.d5 ♖b4 10. ♖d2 a5 11.h3 ♗d4 12. ♗g5 ♖e8



Black is getting ready to move his f6-knight and go for the KID-style ...f7-f5 pawn push. White is getting ready to counter this plan by pushing f2-f4 himself. 13. ♖h2 ♗h8 14.a3

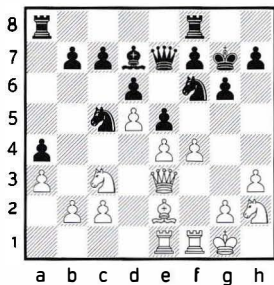
(White could have continued with his f2-f4 pawn-push plan: 14.f4!? exf4 15.a3 ♖a6 16. ♗xa6 ♖xa6 17. ♖xf4 ♖g8 18. ♖f2 b5 19. ♗e3 with ♗d4 to follow, and this looks like some advantage for White.)

14... ♖a6 Here Karpov deliberately trades “the wrong bishop” by playing 15. ♗h6!?

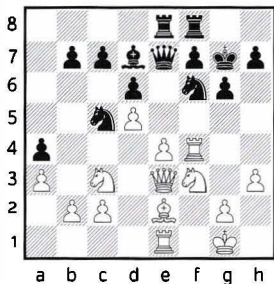


In KID-type positions, where the centre is closed as it is here, such a trade is always considered fine for Black, but here Karpov has a deep strategic plan as he banks on his f2-f4 pawn push after which the black king will be weaker as the result of the dark-squared bishops trade! 15... ♗xh6

[15... ♖c5!?! 16. ♗xg7+ ♖xg7 17. ♖e3 a4 was an interesting alternative for Black, as White needs to prepare his f2-f4 pawn push: 18. ♖ae1! (In the case of an immediate 18.f4 Black has 18... ♖cxe4! 19. ♖xe4 ♖xd5 20. ♖d2 ♖xf4 with three pawns for a piece and Black is at least okay here.) 18... ♖e7 19.f4



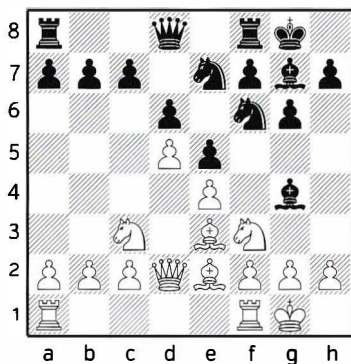
19...exf4 (19...♖cxe4? now does not work for Black: 20.fxe5! ♖xe5 21.♗f3 ♖e8 and with the white rook on e1, Black is losing material. 22.♗d1 ♖xc3 23.♖xc3 ♖d8 24.♗g5 and White wins.) 20.♖xf4 ♖ae8 21.♗f3



I assume this is the type of position Karpov wanted to enter when he decided on 15.♗h6!? as now it is obvious that the dark-squared bishops trade did weaken the black king position. The game is complicated, but Black's weakened king position offers White some tactical opportunities. 21...♗h5 (21...♖cxe4? is again wrong due to 22.♗c4+; 21...h6 would allow 22.e5!) 22.♖h4 with preferable chances for White.]

16.♖xh6 with a complicated game. Karpov will get an opportunity to play the f2-f4 pawn push under favourable circumstances, obtaining some advantage. This game ultimately finished in a draw 1/2-1/2 Karpov,A (2725)-Kortschnoj,V (2665) Baguio City 1978.

8...e5 9.d5 ♖e7



10.♖ad1

One may wonder what happens if we get typical KID opposite-sides pawn rolls here? Yes, compared to a regular KID the white pawn is still on c2 instead of c4, but Black needs to spend time retreating his bishop from g4 before he can start advancing his kingside pawns. Efim Geller, even though he was a big expert on the black side of the KID, once terribly underestimated the power of Black's kingside attack here! 10.a4 ♗d7 11.a5 a6 12.♗e1 ♗h5

(12...♖e8 13.f4)

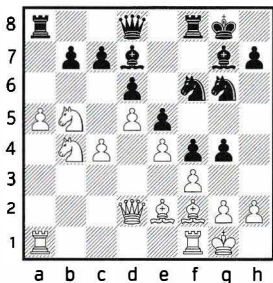
13.♖d3

(13.♗xh5! gxh5 14.f4! was needed.)

13...f5 14.f3?

(14.f4! definitely had to be played!)

14...♖f6 15.b4 f4 16.♗f2 g5 White has terribly misjudged the situation and, just as often happens in the KID, Black simply runs over him on the kingside! 17.b5 axb5 18.♖b4 ♖g6 19.♖xb5 Black's attack is impossible to stop, while White is miles away from any queenside counter-play. 20.c4



20...g3! 21.hxg3 ♖h5 22.♖e1

(22.g4 ♖g3-+)

22...♗h6

(22...fxg3 23.♗xg3 ♖xg3 24.♖xg3 ♖f4 25.♗f2 ♖f6-+)

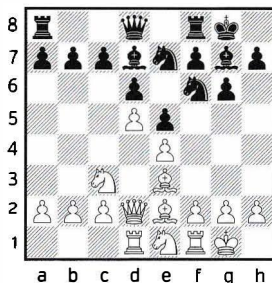
23.g4 ♖g3 24.♗xg3 fxg3 25.♖xg3 ♗e3+ 26.♗h1 ♖f4 27.♗d1 ♗c5

28.♖c2 ♖g5 29.♖h2 ♖f6 30.g3 ♖h6 31.gxf4 ♖xh2+ 32.♗xh2 ♖h4+ 33.♗g2 ♗xb5 0-1 Geller,E-Vasiukov,E Kislovodsk 1968.

10...b5?!

A speculative pawn sacrifice!

An interesting idea for Black is to play, in similar fashion to Geller-Vasiukov above, 10...♗d7 11.♖e1



11...♖h5!?

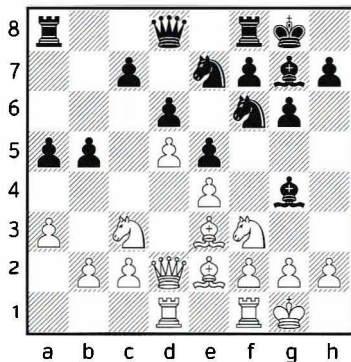
(The common continuation 11...♖g4 12.♗xg4 ♗xg4 13.f3 ♗d7 14.f4 has been seen in a number of Karpov games.)

Now if White does not want to end up like Geller, he probably has to go for 12.♗xh5 gxh5 13.f4

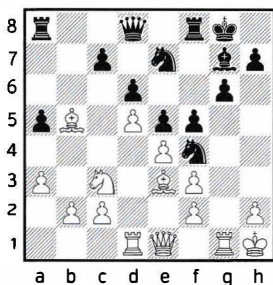
(13.♖e2 f5!? does not look clear.)

13...exf4 14.♗xf4 f5 and the position looks balanced.

11.a3 a5 chesstouring.com

**12.b4**

Karpov had to challenge Black and grab a pawn (!) as after 12. ♖xb5! ♙xf3 What else for Black? 13.gxf3 ♜h5 14.♜h1 f5 15.♞e1 ♝f4 16.♞g1



it is difficult for Black to prove adequate compensation for the sacrificed pawn. One grandmaster-level example continued 16...h6?

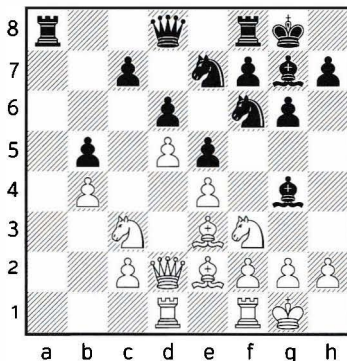
(16...♜h3 is arguably better, though after 17.♞g3 ♜f4 18.♙d2 it still does not look like Black has enough for his sacrificed pawn.)

17. ♙xf4! exf4 18.exf5 g5

(or 18...♞xf5 19.♞e6+ ♜h8 20.♞de1±.)

19. ♙d3 White had a large advantage and subsequently won in 1-0 Liberzon,V (2470)-Quinteros,M (2515) Netanya 1983.

12...axb4 13.axb4



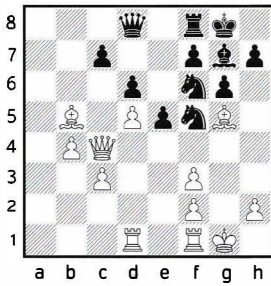
13...♞a3!

Active defence!

14. ♙g5!

Typical Karpov! He removes the tactical threats making a positional game out of it.

14. ♙xb5 leads to an exchange sacrifice that is okay for Black. 14...♞xc3! 15.♞xc3 ♜xe4 16.♞c4 ♜f6 Black has a good game here, e.g. 17. ♙g5 ♙xf3 18.gxf3 ♜f5 19.c3



19... ♔h6! 20. ♔xh6 ♚xh6= Due to the weak white king, and the dominant black knights, Black has enough compensation. 21.f4 ♚h5 22.fxe5 ♖g5+ 23. ♗h1 dxе5 with sharp play.

14. ♔d3 can cause trouble only for White. 14... ♗d7 Black has a good game.

(14... ♔xf3 15.gxf3 ♚h5 is also possible as compared to the 12. ♔xb5! line above, the black b5-pawn is still alive.)

15. ♔xb5? is a blunder: 15... ♚xe4.

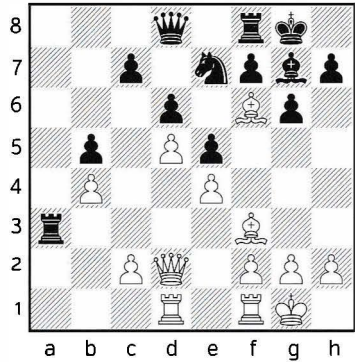
14... ♗xc3 15. ♔xf6!

Again, it is not clever for White to win the exchange as after 15. ♗xc3 ♚xe4 16. ♗d3 ♚xg5 17. ♚xg5 ♔d7 Black has an excellent game.

15... ♔xf3

15... ♗a3 16. ♔h4 ♔d7! keeping the light-squared bishop was something for Black to consider.

16. ♔xf3 ♗a3

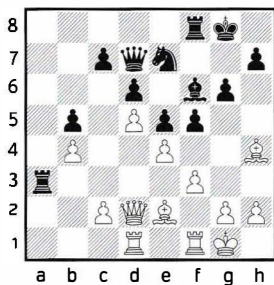


Now comes a rare strategic blunder by Karpov!

17. ♔xg7?

It is definitely not a thankful job to criticize the 12th World Champion for making a strategic blunder, but this blunder is rather instructive. In most pawn structures the bishop pair is stronger than a bishop plus knight, while in a straight one-on-one contest the relative strengths of the bishop and knight is very much related to the pawn structure. Black's strong c7-d6-e5 pawn chain is simply going to make the black knight dominate White's light-squared bishop in the resulting positions. Compared to Karpov-Kortschnoj above, White's position here is worse because he will not be able to open the position by pushing f2-f4, so the exchange of the dark-squared bishops in this game was just wrong — a positional blunder!

a) 17. ♖h4 Keeping the bishops would have led to White's advantage. 17... ♣d7 [17... f5 Going for a KID-style kingside pawn roll without a light-squared bishop does not quite work for Black: 18. ♖a1 ♖xa1 19. ♖xa1 h6 and now White can choose between 20. ♖xe7 (Or a computer-like solution 20. h3!? as engines are not afraid of 20... g5 21. ♖g3 f4 22. ♖h2 White's dark-squared bishop will get back into play via g1 and be stronger than its counterpart on g7 while the white light-squared bishop will become a monster on e6.) 20... ♣xe7 21. ♖a5±] 18. ♖e2 f5 19. f3 ♖f6

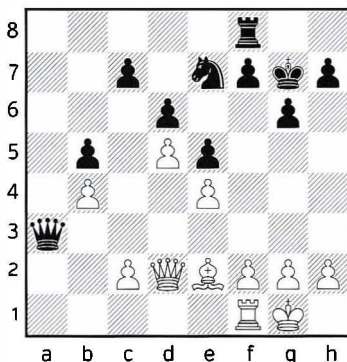


and now we... keep the bishops!
20. ♖f2! ♖fa8 21. ♖d3 The black rooks on the a-file are not worth much here and the b5-pawn will prove to be a weakness. White is better.

b) 17. ♖xe7 ♣xe7 18. ♖a1 ♖fa8 19. ♖xa3 ♖xa3 20. ♖e2 leads to a likely draw as the black b5-pawn weakness is not enough to give White anything close to win-

ning chances. 20... ♣d7 21. ♖d3 c6!
22. dxc6 ♣xc6 23. ♣e2 ♣c3=.

17... ♖xg7 18. ♖a1 ♣a8 19. ♖xa3
♣xa3 20. ♖e2



20... ♣b2!

It is a good idea now for White to start thinking about a draw.

21. ♖d1

21. ♖xb5 ♖b8 22. ♖d3 ♖xb4 23. f4!
creates counter-play, and the game could continue 23... exf4 24. ♣xf4 f6 25. ♣g4! ♣d4+ 26. ♖h1 ♣xd5 27. ♣d7 ♣e5 28. ♣xc7=.

21... f5 22. exf5 ♖xf5

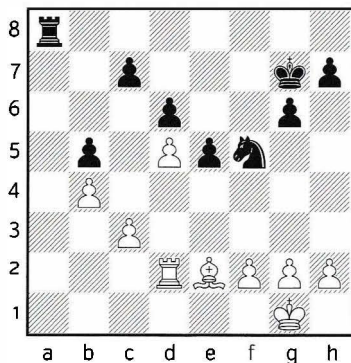
Karpov is too focused on the black b5-pawn weakness, completely dismissing the powers of the black knight!

23. c3? chesstouring.com

a) 23. ♔d3! aiming to trade the bishop for the knight and make a draw.

b) 23. ♔xb5 ♖b8 24.c4 ♔xd2 25. ♖xd2 ♜d4 leads to a drawish rook ending, but only Black might have winning chances.

23... ♔xd2 24. ♖xd2 ♖a8!



25. ♔xb5

The execution is always tactical — Black now uses White's weak back rank to collect the crucial pawn on d5!

A better defence was 25.g3 ♖a1+ 26. ♖d1 ♖a3 27. ♖c1 ♜e7 28. ♔f3 ♜c8 with ... ♜b6 to follow. Black still has the better chances but this is much better for White than the game.

25... ♖a3! 26. ♖c2 ♜e7!

White's d5-pawn will fall... and soon after some more. White's bishop is

totally useless, not being able to attack any of the black pawns — a total knight over bishop domination!

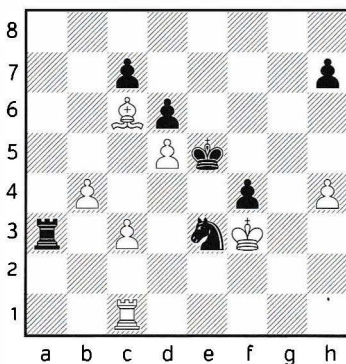
27.f4

27.c4?? runs into mate after 27... ♖a1+.

27...exf4 28. ♔c6 ♜f5 29. ♖f2 ♜e3 30. ♖c1

Black now improves his king, while the white bishop on c6 is just one big pawn.

30... ♖f6 31.g3 ♖e5 32. ♖f3 g5 33.gxf4+ gxf4 34.h4



Black now correctly judges that the resulting rook ending will be easily won.

34... ♜xd5! 35. ♔xd5 ♖xd5 36. ♖xf4 ♖c4 37. ♖e1 ♖xc3 38. ♖e7 ♖xb4 39. ♖xh7 d5 40. ♖e5 c6 41. ♖d4 ♖c4+ 0-1 chesstouring.com

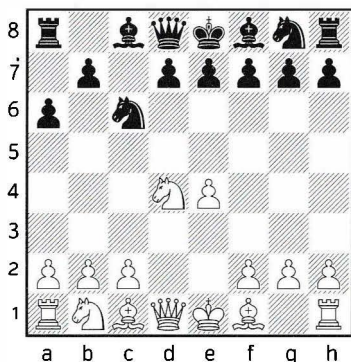
29

▷ A. Karpov

▷ M. Taimanov

Leningrad [1], 1977

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4
4.♗xd4 a6



A rare line. Its purpose could be (a) to confuse matters a bit but still follow with e6 and move to Taimanov set-ups, (b) to play the Kalashnikov (so 5...e5 next) without White being able to jump to b5, or (c) to avoid the 4...e6 5.♗b5 lines, which were a popular white choice at the time.

5.c4

Karpov wants either a Hedgehog-type structure (in the case of ...d6) or the game set-up (after 5...e5).

a) 5.♗e2 probably allows Black a good Kalashnikov after 5...♗f6 6.♗c3 e5.

b) 5.♗c3 is likely to transpose to Taimanov lines after 5...e6, which Taimanov did play in 1984, since 5...e5 6.♗xc6 leads to White's advantage. After 6...bxc6 (6...dxc6 leads to an inferior endgame for Black: 7.♖xd8+ ♗xd8 8.♗e3 or 8.♗a4 b5 9.♗b6 taking the bishop pair) the computer engines are happy with 7.♖h5 (the more human 7.f4 looks interesting too) 7...d6 8.♗c4.

5...e5

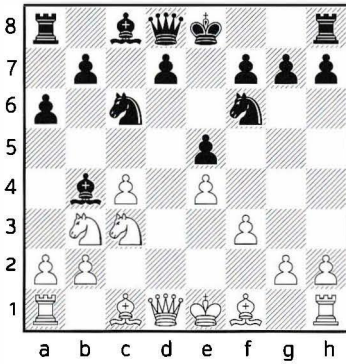
Taimanov shows he is not interested in Hedgehog-type positions.

6.♗b3

The text allows Black to equalize. Boris Spassky once said, "A knight on b3 never stands well." Naturally Boris did not mean to apply this to 100 percent of these positions, but here indeed a jump to f5 looks to me more logical for White.

6.♗f5 d6 7.♗c3 g6 8.♗e3 ♗g7 9.♗ed5 looks to be giving White some opening advantage.

6...♗f6 7.♗c3 ♗b4 8.f3

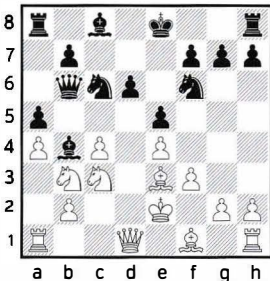


8...0-0

Black had an interesting option: either to get approximate equality, or to push White to go for a pawn sacrifice with 8...a5!? 9.a4 ♖b6 10.♔e2

(10.♖d3 ♘d4 is good for Black; 10.c5!? is an interesting and principled pawn sacrifice: 10...♙xc5 11.♘xc5 ♖xc5 12.♙g5 It is safe to say that White obtains enough for the sacrificed pawn, whether he gets more is not easy to say.)

10...d6 11.♙e3



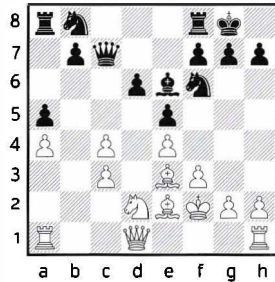
11...♖c7

(11...♗d8 12.♔f2 b6 with a later ...♙c5 to follow gives Black an improved version of the game.)

12.♔f2 ♙xc3 13.bxc3 ♙e6 14.♙e2 ♘b8 15.♘d2

(15.c5? d5?)

15...0-0 The position is balanced. It looks logical for White to try to improve his knight.



16.♘b1 ♘bd7

(16...♙xc4? is wrong, as after 17.♙xc4 ♖xc4 18.♖xd6 ♘bd7 19.♘d2! ♖xc3 20.♙hc1 ♖b4 21.♖xb4 axb4 22.♙cb1 White gets his pawn back with a clear advantage; the black b-pawn is a terrible weakness.)

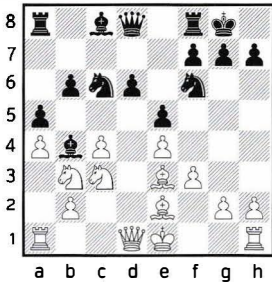
17.♘a3 ♖c6 Both sides have their weaknesses, but Black is definitely not worse here.

9.♙e3 d6

9...a5 was again an option and could have earned Black a favorable version of the game. 10.a4

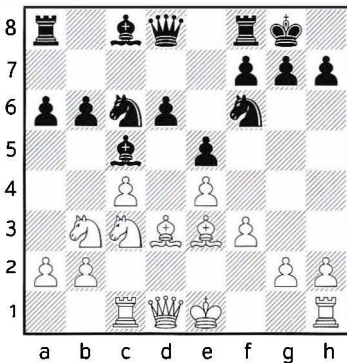
(10.a3 ♖xc3+ 11.bxc3 a4=)

10...d6 11. ♖e2 b6



12. o-o Black will at some stage place his bishop on c5 and we will probably get game-type positions that are favourable to Black since his b-file counter-play — should White follow the game plan — would be stronger.

10. ♖c1 b6 11. ♖d3 ♖c5



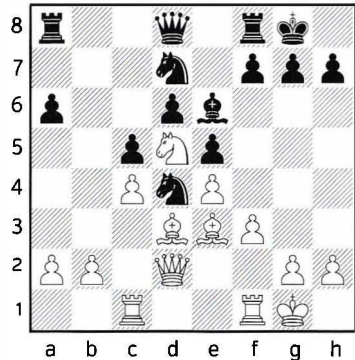
12. ♗d2

I am not sure that White needed this move.

The immediate 12. ♗xc5 bxc5 13. o-o is perhaps more natural as it is not

yet obvious which is the best square for the white queen.

12... ♖e6 13. ♗xc5 bxc5 14. o-o ♗d4
15. ♗d5 ♗d7



It is obvious that White needs to roll his pawns in order to (a) open the position for his bishops, should Black capture, or (b) take space, should Black refrain from capturing. The question is: on which side is it better to push? Not an easy question. White should be a bit better in both cases. Karpov decides to push on the kingside.

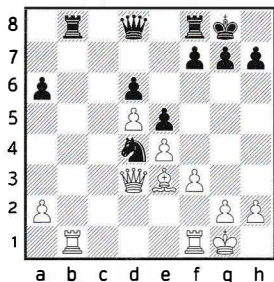
16.f4

16.b4 could lead to some safe advantage for White. 16... ♖b8 17.bxc5 ♗xc5

[17...dxc5, buttressing the knight, actually leads to a clear White plus after 18.f4! as the position now either (a) opens up to favour White's bishop pair or (b) sees White de-

veloping an attack by rolling his pawns on the kingside. 18...exf4 (18...f6 19.f5 ♔f7 20.g4±) 19. ♔xf4 Black's dominant d4-knight cannot do much damage on its own, while White's dark-squared bishop becomes a strong piece. The e4-e5 pawn push, opening lines for the white bishop on d3, is in the air, and the white pieces are starting to coordinate nicely. 19...♖b7 20. ♖e3 The white queen will be well placed on g3. 20...f6 21. ♖g3 ♔h8 (21...♖a5? 22.e5 f5 23. ♔e3+- with ♜f4 to follow.) 22. ♔c7 ♖c8 23. ♔d6 White is better. 23...♗f7 (23...♗e8 24. ♜c7±; 23...♗d8 24.e5±) 24. ♗b1±.]

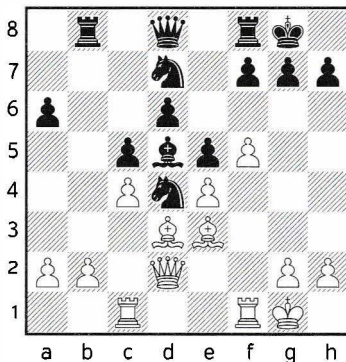
18. ♗b1 ♜xd3 19. ♖xd3 ♔xd5 20.cxd5



20...♖a5! 21. ♔xd4 exd4 22. ♖xd4 ♖xa2 23. ♗a1 ♖e2 24. ♗f2 ♖b5 25. ♗fa2 ♗a8 White definitely has some pressure, though likely not enough for the full point.

16...♗b8 17.f5 ♔xd5

How to recapture?

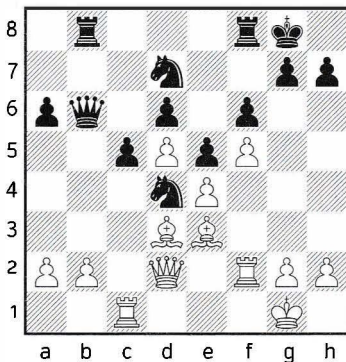


18.cxd5!

The correct decision.

18.exd5 was also possible, though after 18...♗e8 Black does have ...e5-e4 pawn-break motifs, preventing White from having a free hand for his kingside attack.

18...♖b6 19. ♗f2 f6



This looks like a good moment to assess the position and take stock. Two bishops versus two knights! In a way we have here a situation similar to our previous two games.

A pair of bishops should be superior to the pair of knights here, but if Black manages to trade one of his knights for a white bishop and we get to a one-on-one bishop versus knight then such an assessment may change! Black's counter-play chances are obviously related to the b-file and he hopes that some of his forces might come to back up his centralized d4-knight. The question is where should White play? Should White (a) focus on the potentially weak black a-pawn, or should he (b) try to build a kingside attack? Karpov goes for (a) and that was likely not the best decision as collecting the black a-pawn will prove elusive, and Black gets counter-play in the process. As in his game with Azmaiparashvili, Karpov will focus on the pawn collection (there it was the b5-pawn, here it's the a6-pawn) and underestimates the power of a knight in the process.

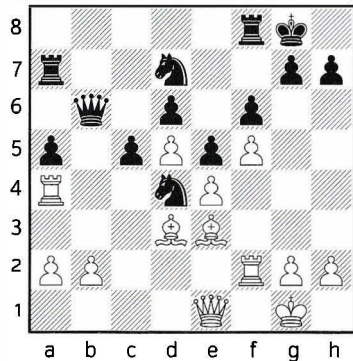
20. ♖c4

White had to focus on attacking the kingside, pushing his g-pawn at some stage. One possible start was 20. ♖d1 a5 21. ♖c3 followed by ♔f1, ♔c1 and a rook swing to the kingside supported a by g-pawn push; another was the immediate 20.g4 a5 21. ♔h1 ♖b7 22. ♖d1 ♖fb8 23. ♖g2 ♖c7

(23...a4 24.g5)

24.b3 White wants to play 25.g5, while Black's counter-play with 24...a4 does not seem to achieve the desired result after 25.bxa4 ♖b2 26. ♔d2 ♖a7 27. ♔c3 and White is better.

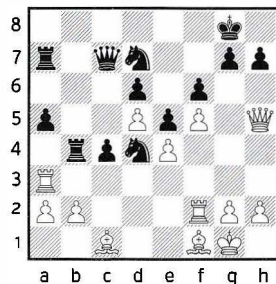
20...a5 21. ♖a4 ♖a8 22. ♖e1 ♖a7



23.b3?!

By pursuing the black a-pawn Karpov is locking his rook out of a possible transfer to the kingside. It was still not too late for a change of plan.

23. ♔f1 ♖b8 24. ♔c1 ♖c7 25. ♖d1 ♖b4 26. ♖a3 c4 27. ♖h5



White gains a kingside attack. 27... ♔f8 28.g4 ♖f7 29. ♖h3 h6 30. ♖g2

with 31.h4 and 32.g5 to follow and good attacking prospects.

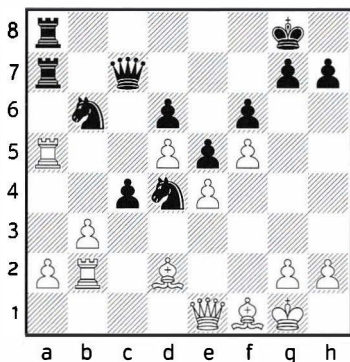
23... ♖fa8

Black now obtains excellent play and soon it's a one-on-one knight versus bishop.

24. ♖b2 ♜c7 25. ♙d2 ♘b6! 26. ♖xa5

26. ♙xa5?? is a blunder: 26... ♘xa4
27. ♙xc7 ♘xb2-+.

26...c4 27. ♙f1



27... ♖xa5

Black understands that the removal of the white dark-squared bishop is favourable to him and he forces this exchange, even at the price of a pawn!

27... ♘d7 28. ♖xa7 ♜xa7 was also possible, with approximately equal play: 29. ♖h1 ♜a3 30. ♙c3

(30. ♖b1 ♜xa2 31. ♙xc4 ♘c5=)

30...cxb3 31.axb3 ♘c5 32. ♙c4 The black knights are strong and actually White is the one who has to be careful. 32... ♖c8

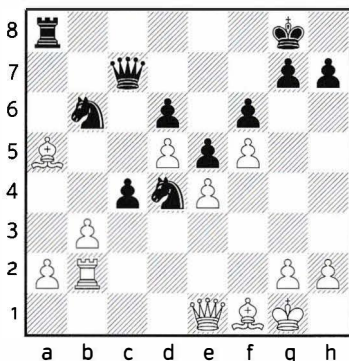
(32... ♜a1 forces a draw with 33. ♖b1 ♜a2=)

33. ♖b1 ♘dxb3 34. ♙b4 ♜a7 This is at least okay for Black as he does not need to worry about his b3-knight. 35. ♙xb3

(35. ♖xb3? is a mistake as after 35... ♘xb3 36. ♙xb3 ♜d4-+ White will start losing material on account of his weak king.)

35... ♘d3 36. ♜e2 and now Black can decide whether to play for a win with 36... ♘xb4 or settle for a draw (with 36... ♘f2+ 37. ♖g1 ♘h3+).

28. ♙xa5



28... ♜c5

Taimanov does not mind being a pawn down, as long as he achieves his aim of fielding his d4-knight against the white f1-bishop.

28...♖xb3 was possible, likely leading to a draw or a complex endgame. 29. ♔xb6

(Or 29. axb3 ♖c5+ 30. ♖f2 ♖xa5 31. ♖xa5 ♖xa5 32. ♔xc4 ♖xc4 33. bxc4 ♖a1+ 34. ♖f1 ♖a2 with a drawn rook endgame.)

29...♖xb6+ 30. ♔h1

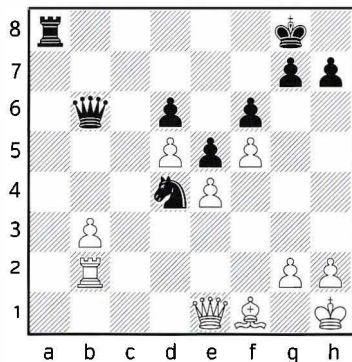
(30. ♖f2 ♖xf2+ 31. ♔xf2 ♖c5 32. ♔xc4 ♖xe4+ 33. ♔e3 ♖c5 is easy for computer engines to assess as 0.00, but in a game between humans this is still a complex endgame.)

30...♖d4 31. ♖b1 ♖c5 32. ♖b8+ ♖xb8 33. ♖xb8+ ♔f7 34. ♖c7+ ♔e8 35. ♖xd6 and now Black has to allow a draw by perpetual check: 35... ♖xe4 36. ♖b8+=.

29. ♔xb6 ♖xb6 30. ♔h1 cxb3 31. axb3

Black has got what he wanted! Black's dominant d4-knight coordinates well with the queen and rook. White's bishop on f1 is a useless piece as the battle is clearly not being fought on the light squares!

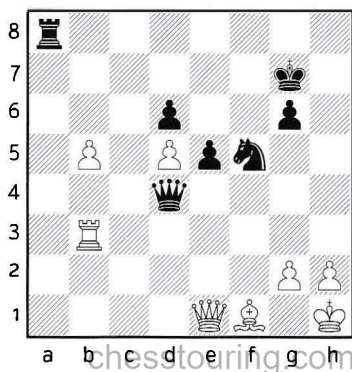
White's only counter-play is his passed b-pawn but that is still a long way off from becoming a force. Black has full compensation for his sacrificed pawn. Taimanov opens up the situation on the kingside, aiming to create threats against the white king.



31...g6! 32. fxc6 hxc6 33. b4 ♔g7 34. b5 f5! 35. exf5 ♖xf5

Black's dark-square control is striking. White has to be careful.

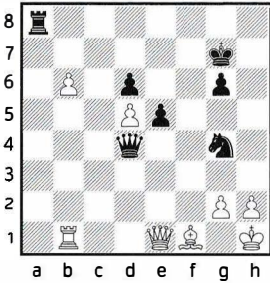
36. ♖b3 ♖d4



Karpov here must have thought that Black does not have a threat, and he commits a terrible blunder.

37.b6??

a) 37. ♖b1 was one of the ways for White to prevent the game motif. Black can either force a draw or prolong play. 37... ♗e3 (37... ♔xd5 is a winning attempt: 38.b6 ♖b8 39. ♔c3 ♖f6 with an unclear game.) 38.b6 ♗g4



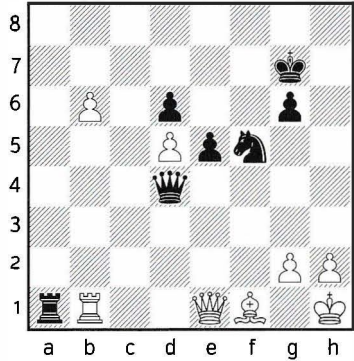
Now it's a draw by perpetual check: 39.b7 ♖h8 (39... ♖b8 40.h3 ♗f2+ 41. ♖h2 ♗g4+=) 40.h3 ♗f2+=.

b) 37.h3 would also eliminate the game motif and lead to a draw: 37... ♖a1 38. ♖b1 ♗g3+ 39. ♖h2 ♖xb1 40. ♔xb1 ♔f4 41. ♖g1 ♔e3+=.

c) 37. ♖c3 is a slightly "inhuman" computer proposal 37... ♖a2 The computer gives 0.00, but really White is asking for trouble here.

37... ♖a1! 38. ♖b1

Now the white queen is busy defending b1, so...



38... ♗g3+!!

39. hxg3 is now forced leading to the h-file mate after 39... ♖a8 with 40... ♖h8 to follow.

0-1

I will finish the chapter with my own nightmare.

30

▷ I. Sokolov

▷ A. Miles

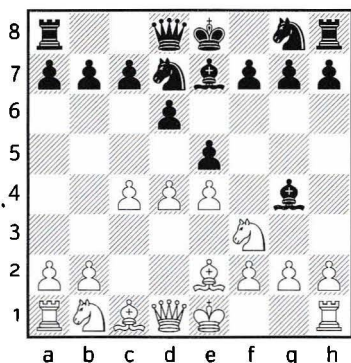
Biel, 1989

1.d4 d6 2. ♗f3 ♗g4 3.c4 ♗d7

At the time this was a popular "side opening" for the English players. Miles, Adams, Hodgson and even, on a few occasions, Short were championing this line in the late

1980s and early 1990s. This system is no longer in fashion, so I will not bother with many opening remarks.

4.e4 e5 5. ♖e2 ♖e7



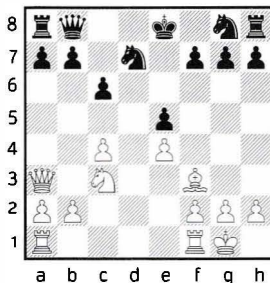
6.d5

Fixing the central pawn structure gives Black more clarity regarding which plans to choose.

In the same position that clever guy Kramnik was not in a hurry to determine the central pawn structure and kept his pawn on d4 for a while: 6. ♘c3 ♗xf3 7. ♗xf3 Black is following the Miles plan from our game. 7... ♗g5 8. ♗xg5 ♖xg5 9. o-o ♖d8 and here Kramnik decided that he is better off with a different pawn structure so 10.dxe5! dxe5

(10... ♘xe5 surrenders the centre to White: 11. ♗e2 with f4 to follow.)

11. ♖b3 ♖b8 12. ♖a3 c6

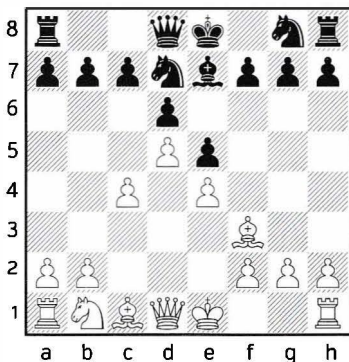


13. ♗g4

[13. ♘d1! is stronger as Black has problems castling! 13... ♘gf6 14. ♘e3 g6 15. ♗fd1 Black has serious problems here. 15... ♖d8 16. ♗d6 ♖e7 (16... o-o 17. ♗ad1 ♖c7 18.g4+-) 17. ♗ad1 with a large white advantage.]

13... ♘gf6 14. ♗h3 ♖d8 15. ♗ad1 ♖e7 16. ♗d6 with a better game for White in 1-0 Kramnik, V (2725)-Mokry, K (2530) Germany 1994.

6... ♗xf3! 7. ♗xf3



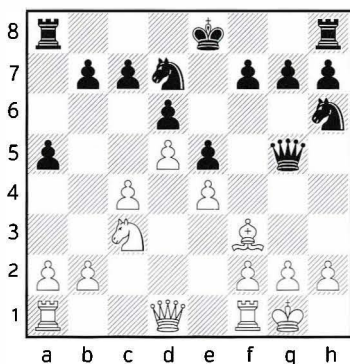
7... ♗g5! chesstouring.com

Black wants to trade the “right bishops” and aim for a knight-versus-bishop game in a structure which is similar in a way to that in Karpov-Azmaiparashvili.

8. ♖c3

It was not necessary for me to help Black achieve his strategic objectives; 8. ♖d2, keeping the dark-squared bishops on the board with g3 and h4 to follow, would have prevented Black from establishing the game set-up.

8... a5 9. ♗xg5 ♖xg5 10. o-o ♘h6



11. ♖b3?

This is already the beginning of a wrong plan! Similar to Karpov-Azmaiparashvili, where the bishop pair versus bishop plus knight was more favorable to White than bare bishop versus knight, here we have the situation that bishop plus knight against two knights is more favour-

able to White than one-on-one “naked” bishop versus knight. So what do I do? I trade the knights and help Black!

11. ♘b5! Keeping my knight! 11... ♖d8 12. b3 o-o 13. a3 was the obvious way to go, actually still keeping some prospects of an advantage.

11... ♘c5! 12. ♖b5+

I guess — the game was a long time ago, if that’s any excuse — that I had pinned my hopes on this check “dislocating” the black king, but with the white queen fighting alone and the white bishop utterly useless, the black king is actually rather safe in the middle of the board!

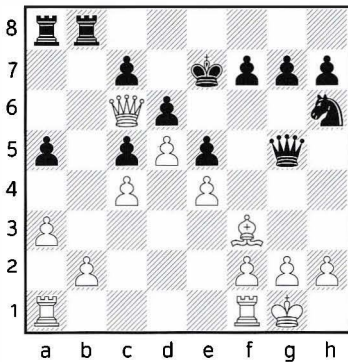
12... ♖e7! 13. ♘a4 b6

13...c6?? 14. ♖b6! was definitely somewhere in the domain of my wishful thinking.

14. ♘xc5 bxc5

All Black’s central pawns are on dark squares; White’s central pawns are, sadly, on light squares. The black knight is still stranded on h6 but obviously the position of that knight will soon improve, while White has an idiotic bishop, which is not easy to improve, and his only strategic hope now is to quickly open up the position.

15.a3 ♖hb8 16. ♖c6



16... ♖d8!

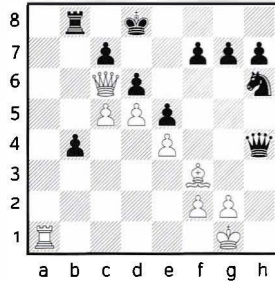
16... ♖a7 17.b4 would probably lead to a forced equality: 17... ♖b6 18. ♖a4 cxb4 19.axb4 ♖xb4 20. ♖xb4 axb4 21. ♖xa7 ♖d8 22. ♖b7 ♖d2 23. ♖b1 f5 White is the one needing to be careful, but a draw is the likely result. 24.h3 ♖d3 25. ♖7xb4 fxe4 26. ♖4b3 ♖d4 27. ♖e2 ♖f5 28. ♖g4 g6 29. ♖xf5 gxf5 30. ♖g3 Now it is a draw. 30... ♖xc4 31. ♖g7 ♖c8 32. ♖g8+ ♖d7 33. ♖g7+=. I definitely did not understand the gravity of the situation!

17.h4?!

It was absolutely necessary to try to force a draw with 17.b4! axb4 18.axb4 ♖xa1 19. ♖xa1 19... ♖d2! 20.bxc5 ♖a5! 21. ♖d1 ♖xc5 22. ♖xc5 dxc5 The white bishop is still rather stupid, but a draw should be the outcome here.

17... ♖d2!

My wishful-thinking hopes were pinned on 17... ♖hx4 18.b4! axb4 19.axb4 ♖xa1 20. ♖xa1 cxb4 21.c5



where Black is the one needing to find a defence: 21... ♖g4!

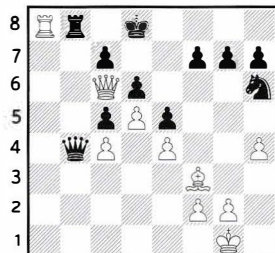
(21... ♖e7?? 22. ♖b7+-)

22. ♖xg4 ♖xg4 23.cxd6 ♖d7 24. ♖a8 ♖c8=

18. ♖d1?

This “active” move, trying to justify the bishop’s existence, proves a crucial mistake.

It was the last call for 18.b4! axb4 19.axb4 ♖xa1 20. ♖xa1 ♖xb4 21. ♖a8



IVAN SOKOLOV
CHESS MIDDLEGAME
STRATEGIES

OPENING MEETS MIDDLEGAME



Ivan Sokolov was one of the most feared attacking players of his time, reaching several times the World top 12 ranking over a 13 years time span. His dynamic style brought him numerous tournaments victories including, with a classical time control, wins versus no fewer than six World Champions. During the last couple of years Ivan focused on coaching and writing. On the 'Middlegame' theme Ivan already wrote 3 acclaimed bestsellers being "Winning Chess Middlegames", "Sacrifice and Initiative" and "Chess Middlegame Strategies" Vol. 1 (Thinkers Publishing 2017). In his second volume he explores middlegame strategies and ideas related to prospective opening set-ups.

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