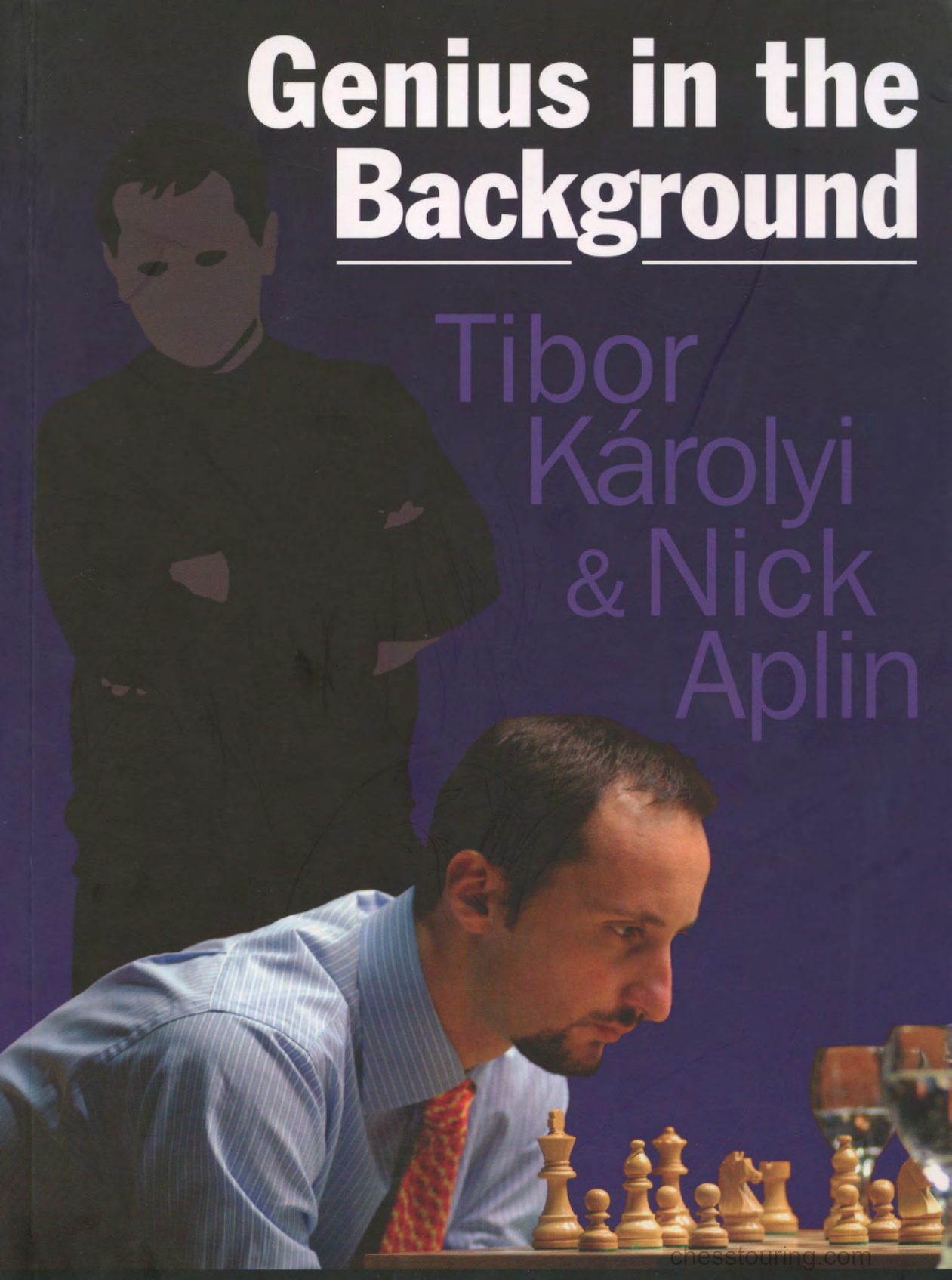
Genius in the Background

Tibor Károlyi & Nick Aplin



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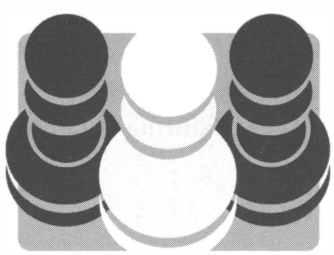
QUALITY CHESS

Genius in the Background

By

Tibor Károlyi

with Nick Aplin



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Genius in the Background

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Key to symbols used

?	a weak move
??	a blunder
!	a good move
!!	an excellent move
!?	a move worth considering
?!	a move of doubtful value
#	mate
(n)	n^{th} match game
→	with an attack
↑	with an initiative
N	new move
⩲	White is slightly better
⩱	Black is slightly better
±	White is better
∓	Black is better
+–	White has a decisive advantage
–+	Black has a decisive advantage
=	equality
⯹	with compensation
⇄	with counterplay
∞	unclear

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Preface by Tibor Károlyi

Attila József, who died in 1937, was one of Hungary's greatest ever poets, but while he was alive he received very little appreciation for his art. Andor Nemeth was one of his few close friends; he understood the high level of his art, but never expressed this to the poet. Years later, when József's poems had become part of Hungarian culture and were taught in every Hungarian school, and many streets had been named after him, Nemeth was asked why he had not expressed his appreciation (József was longing for it). He answered, "I am sorry, but when I beat somebody three times out of five at chess, I can't consider him a genius."

Chess society has a similar problem; we only value the winners over the board. Yes, champions have the greatest impact on the game, and they deserve enormous respect for their legacy, but the personalities who did not score so well should also enjoy our respect.

I am fortunate in that I have already had the chance to write about Judit Polgar, Garry Kasparov, and Anatoly Karpov – altogether five books, four of them with Nick Aplin. The chance to analyse and portray the creations of these chess giants naturally made me appreciate their play very much. Although I will always remain proud of these books, there have of course been countless other articles and publications devoted to the achievements of these and other famous chess players. At the same time, I know of several other chess personalities who have accomplished a great deal, yet remain unknown to the great majority of chess fans. Therefore the idea occurred to me to write a book devoted to these unknown talents. By doing so, I hoped to create a book that would be truly unique in its subject matter, and would enable the chess public to become acquainted with a selection of lesser known but still outstanding personalities. I was happy that when I mentioned the idea to my co-author Nick Aplin, he was immediately enthusiastic about it.

Most of the people featured in this book have recorded significant achievements, yet they remain virtually anonymous to the great majority of chess fans. A few of them are known amongst certain segments of the chess world, but none are known as widely as I believe they deserve to be. Some are still alive, while others, I am sorry to say, are no longer with us. Some I know or knew well, and others I have never met. All have made their unique contributions to the world of chess, and all have their own – sometimes very moving – stories.

Instead of simply writing about each individual in a routine way, I took a couple of additional steps that I believe have added significantly to the value of each chapter. Wherever possible, I conducted interviews (some in person, and others by e-mail) with the featured individuals, which have subsequently been reproduced within the text. I hope that after reading them the reader will feel as though he has got to know the person at least a little better than before. Secondly, I asked a number of strong players, some of whom are simply legendary in chess, to write a short appraisal of the individuals included here. I never expected to receive so many contributions from so many great players! I found this response tremendously gratifying, and believe it underlines the value of the book.

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Your author, who is first of all a junior trainer who desires to pass on knowledge, believes that getting acquainted with these remarkable chess personalities will deepen anyone's understanding of our game.

I knew from the outset it would be difficult to decide which individuals to feature in the book. There are doubtlessly a great number of worthy candidates – including plenty that remain unknown to this author. I wanted to include people who excelled in different areas of chess. Thus over the course of the book the reader will become acquainted with outstanding chess players, junior trainers, study composers, as well as a few individuals who made significant achievements in more than one of these categories. There were a few candidates who, through no fault of their own, did not make the final cut. For instance, I considered the possibility of devoting chapters to the great Nona Gaprindashvili and the late incomparable Tony Miles, but eventually decided that the inclusion of such well known players would be inconsistent with the overall scheme of the book.

Naturally, the choice was influenced by my personal relationships with some of the featured players. A different author may, quite legitimately, have presented a very different selection of subjects. But thinking in terms of the value that I can offer as an author, it is obvious that I can write a far more fitting tribute to a person whom I know extremely well, as opposed to a total stranger. Of course, there were certain individuals whose accomplishments were so impressive that I felt compelled to include them in the book, despite never having met them in person. In the end, the final choice of player selection was always going to rely on a certain amount of subjective judgement. I am happy with the choices I made, and I hope that the reader will agree.

All that remains is to thank you for reading this book. I hope by the time you reach the end, you will agree that these people are indeed remarkable and enduring chess personalities.

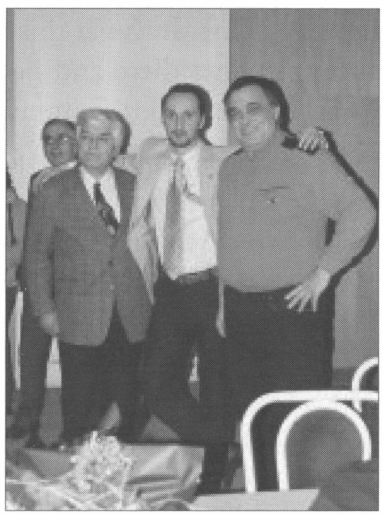
Tibor Károlyi
Soltvadkert, Hungary
October 2009



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Chapter 1 Petko Atanasov

Topalov's Junior Trainer



Veselin Topalov in the middle, Petko Atanasov on the right

In 2005, Veselin Topalov dominated top-level chess in a way that very few have done before. Not many world champions have had a year like he did. Topalov went from being a strong contender to an undisputed star, and the same happened to his manager for many years, Silvio Danailov. And yet, of all the chess people I have asked, there has not been a single one who knew the name of his junior trainer. Actually, I think hardly anybody knows who Petko Atanasov is and what he has contributed to chess, while everybody has heard of Danailov, and knows the successes he has achieved together with Topalov.

This is not only unfair to Atanasov, but damaging for chess in general. We cannot expect the high level of junior coaching we have seen in the 20th Century to continue, when we do not reward or recognize the effort of the trainers. (It is therefore pleasing to see the very positive words of acknowledgement from both Topalov and Danailov about Atanasov at the end of this chapter.)

It is no laughing matter that Hungary, with a long tradition of great players – Maroczy, Szabo, Portisch, Ribli, the Polgar sisters and most recently Peter Leko, does not currently have a world top twenty player in the under-20 age group in either the boys or the girls section. At the latest World Youth Championships, played in twelve different age groups, Hungary only achieved a single tenth place. And the years before were no better. The lack of dedicated and motivated trainers is creating this crisis.

Obviously the Hungarian situation is worse than most, but my travels have confirmed that the situation is deteriorating in many other countries as well. For example, the Bulgarian juniors are not doing well at these championships either.

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Undoubtedly Veselin Topalov is a rare talent with a number of special qualities required to become a great player. (Actually I think he has the most professional attitude of all the world champions. Kasparov sometimes wasted energy on politics, whereas Topalov has been able to focus on chess continuously.) But the career of a champion does not start with his victories, but with his first moves as a junior; in the case of Topalov, in the Bulgarian city Ruse. This was where he met Atanasov.

Atanasov was born in the village of Karan Varbovka, outside Ruse, in 1948. In 1955 his family moved to Ruse to look for a better quality of life. It was at this point that he learned to play chess in school. There were many chess tournaments there and back then chess was a very popular 'sport' (sport for the masses, as it was known under Communism). Thus he encountered our ancient game and took his first lessons.

Who was your own trainer?

"There were no professional trainers at that time. All studies and competitions were amateur. My first trainer was an ambitious amateur chess player – Nikola Chervenovodski. He advised me how and what I must learn from chess theory. He also gave me chess books that were very hard to find during those times."

I checked the database – you were a good junior player. How many times did you represent Bulgaria?

"During the period 1963-66, I was the national junior champion (under 20 years) of Bulgaria 3 times. For some reason, most probably political, I did not take part in world junior events. As a student I participated in three world championships. The first was in Austria in 1968 – the team took the fourth place. I won the board prize on third board with 9½/12 points. (*See the game against Marangunic in the games section on page 17.*) At my second Student Olympiad in Dresden in 1969 the Bulgarian team finished third. I was the second best on second board with 9½/14. (*See the game against Lombard in the games section, page 19.*) Finally, I played for the Bulgarian national team at the Under-26 team World Championships in Graz, Austria, in 1972. We took fifth place. On board three I scored 9 points from 14 games."

Who was your trainer when you were a junior?

"Unfortunately in this period there wasn't any particular player around to have a big influence over my maturation as a chess player. My opponents took on this role. First of all I raised my chess level with self-training – learning from the games of popular chess players."

Who are your favourite players – do you have any particular chess icon?

"My favourite player is Mikhail Tal. He is an exceptional fighter and a distinctive chess talent. As a person and a professional, Tal is unique right up to the present day!"

Were you a chess professional?

"From 1976-1991 I was professional chess trainer at the 'Dunav' (Danube) chess club in Ruse."

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Do you have a 'best' game? Which was your best tournament?

"I like my Dueball game from Dresden. (*It can be found on page 20 in the games section.*) There was a regular 'Kamen Piskov' Memorial in Ruse. In 1983 I was the winner and maybe this was my best tournament."

What do you think is the best part of your chess?

"My strong point in chess is the middlegame. This is because the books that I read were mostly about chess combinations." (*The games against Ilivski and Peev from the games section show this excellently.*)

How did you develop your endgame play?

"For several years I devoted my time very intensively to the endgame. From my long experience in chess, I have come to the conclusion that young players must learn the endgame in detail in order to absorb fundamental knowledge about chess." (*The games against Lalic and Gazis in the games section show the benefits of this approach.*)

When did you start working with Topalov?

"I started to work with Veselin in 1986. I did not know him personally until his mother came to me and entrusted me to take him into my group. At that time I was teaching a group of advanced children between 12-14 years old. He was about ten years old.

For a ten-year-old boy he had the necessary basic chess knowledge. But he did not know the higher chess rules: observing the basic principles and laws, building a strong strategy in a given game. In the beginning Veselin wasn't so different from the rest of the children in the group. But after two years of work with him, he had changed a lot.

In order to become a very good chess player you need to acquire two things: chess knowledge and chess thought. The second characteristic is very important and it's hard to perfect someone's level of expertise in this area. The chess thought factor demands many hours at the chessboard, many hours analysing specific positions.

I then realized that this boy had enormous potential and that his future was in professional chess. With much effort I persuaded his mother to agree to send him to a sport school rather than to a school for foreign languages. This gave him a much better chance to develop himself as chess player."

In what ways did you work with him? How many sessions did you have with him per week, and how long did the sessions last?

"Veselin undertook exercises lasting 2 hours three times a week in the beginning. Gradually his training time was increased. When he started to learn in sport school, I trained him individually. We had exercises every day and weekly we had to have about 30-36 hours."

Any memorable game he played when you were coaching him?

"Vesko participated for the first time in an international tournament 'Albena' when he was 11 years old. He produced a very good result."

Here is one of his victories in the tournament:

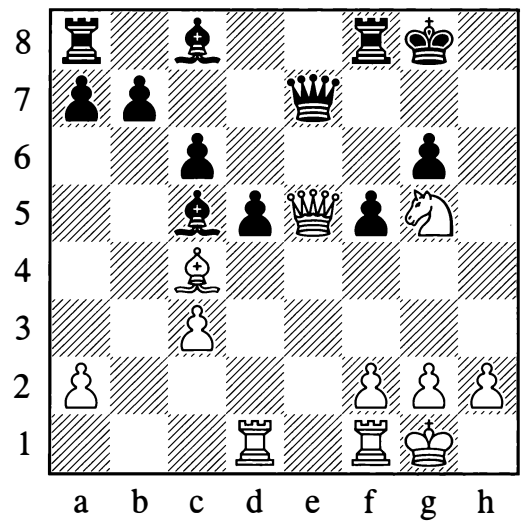
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Veselin Topalov – Dimitar Marholev

Albena 1986

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♗c5 4.0-0 ♘f6 5.c3 ♘xe4 6.d4 exd4 7.cxd4 ♗b6 8.d5 ♘e7 9.♕e2 f5 10.♘c3 ♘xc3 11.bxc3 0-0 12.♗g5 ♗c5 13.♖ad1 h6 14.d6! hxg5 15.♘xg5 g6 16.♕e5 c6 17.dxe7 ♕xe7 18.♗c4† d5

(diagram)



19.♖xd5! ♕xe5 20.♖xe5† ♔g7 21.♖xc5 1-0

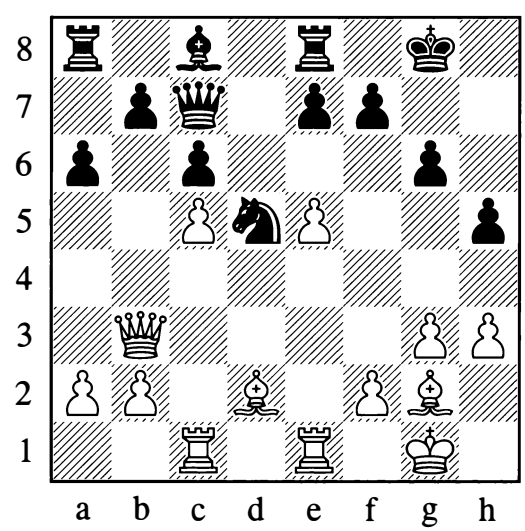
What openings did you teach him?

"In the beginning his opening repertoire was very modest. With White we trained with 1.d4 and had various schemes to meet Black's defences. With Black against 1.d4 we practised the Old Indian Defence. We practised the French Defence against 1.e4, but later he refused to play it and started to play the Sicilian Defence instead. When his rating increased Vesko started to play 1.e4 and 1.♘f3 and many more openings."

Did you notice you often sacrifice the exchange? He is known for that as well. Did you work on it together?

"The sacrifice of material (a pawn or even a piece) is a basic part of any chess combination. Of course I have in my practice many such examples. From the beginning Veselin coordinated the interaction between queen and minor pieces perfectly. A sacrifice of the exchange was his basic tactical approach."

As you will see in the games section, Atanasov is fond of sacrificing the exchange, something that has become a trademark tool of Topalov's. The following example is remarkable:



Veselin Topalov – Gata Kamsky

Sofia 2006

(diagram)

26.e6! ♗xe6 27.♖xe6!! fxe6 28.♖e1 ♕d7 29.♕d3 ♔h7 30.♖e5 ♘f6 31.♕e3 ♔g7 32.♗e4 ♔f7 33.♗c2 ♖ad8 34.♕h6 ♖g8 35.♗a5 ♕d4 36.♗c3 ♕c4 37.♗b3 ♕d3 38.♗xe6† ♔e8 39.♔g2 ♖f8 40.♕g7 ♖d5 41.♗f5 ♖f7 42.♖xe7† 1–0

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What was he like as a boy?

"As a boy Vesko made an impression with his modesty and friendly behaviour with his contemporaries. He was polite and I never saw him argue except about chess questions – we argued about those every day!"

When you look at Topalov's games, do you see motifs you taught him when he was young? Does he still use some of your weapons?

"His style of chess has changed itself a lot lately. Strong chess programs give enormous possibilities for professional players. Looking back 20 years I see that our knowledge from that time looks too primitive now. But I still see even now part of my work realized in games of Veselin."

Can you recall any interesting stories about him?

"Every year in Varna there was a national championship for children under 12, 14 and 16 years. Trainers were not allowed into the hall where the children were playing, so one day I sent one of my youngest students to see how Vesko's game was going. After a short time he came back, out of breath, and said: 'Pesko has one extra veshka!'"*

*To understand the joke, a brief translation is required. In Bulgarian "Vesko" (a friendly, informal version of the name Veselin) and "peshka" (the word for "pawn") are very similar in pronunciation. In his excitement, the young student changed the first letters of these two words. Thus the meaning of the new sentence is: The pawn has one extra Vesko!

Is there any word or saying he specially liked to use?

"Veselin was extremely staid as a young chess player and often took his losses very philosophically. Sometimes I was extremely angry about a loss because of a gross error or some not very well considered move. I said, 'How can you play this move? How can you lose this winning game?' He looked at me and said, seemingly calmly, 'What can we do? This is what happens!'"

What is your favourite Topalov game?

"For some time I have been out of touch with chess. I do not have an idea about all Veselin's games. From the games I have seen, his victory over Kasparov in the Sicilian Defence is the best."

The game is indeed majestic!

Topalov – Kasparov

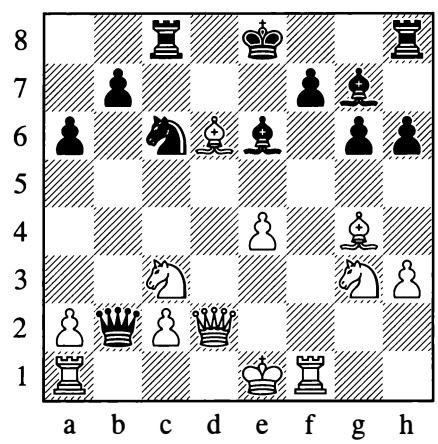
Amsterdam 1996

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

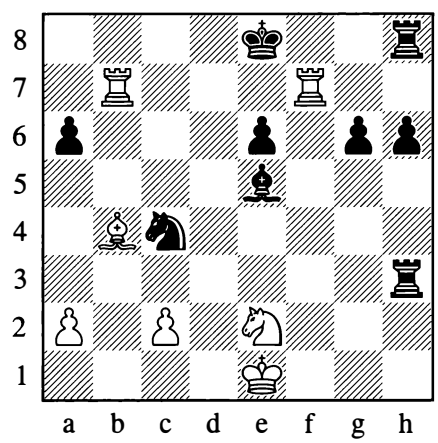
Topalov played the Sozin attack rarely – just in three games in 1996. He uses 6.♗e3 most often. Interestingly he has won more than half of his games with the English Attack, losing only a few times. He also enjoyed many successes on the black side of this system (much like Kasparov, in fact).

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Two years earlier Topalov won a nice game against none other than Kasparov in this complicated, highly tactical, line: 6.♗e3 e6 7.g4 h6 8.f4 ♘c6 9.♗e2 e5 10.♘f5 g6 11.♘g3 exf4 12.♗xf4 ♗e6 13.♖f1 ♖c8 14.h3 ♕b6 15.♕d2 ♗g7 16.♗xd6 ♘xg4 17.♗xg4 ♕xb2



18.e5! ♘xe5 19.♖b1 ♕xc3 20.♕xc3 ♖xc3 21.♗xe6 fxe6 22.♖xb7 ♘c4 23.♗b4 ♖e3† 24.♘e2 ♗e5 25.♖ff7 ♖xh3

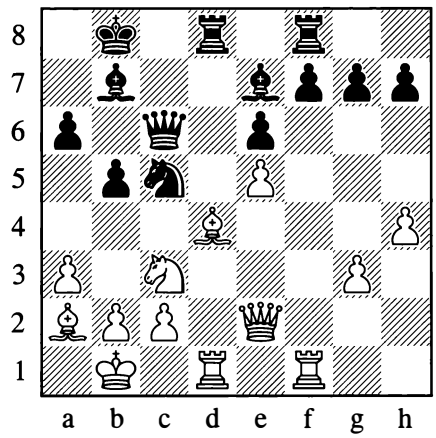


26.♘d4 ♖e3† 27.♔f1 ♖e4 28.♖fe7† ♔d8 29.♘c6† 1–0, Topalov – Kasparov, Moscow (ol) 1994.

6...e6 7.♗b3 ♘bd7 8.f4 ♘c5 9.0–0

This move is well-known, although 9.f5, 9.♕f3 and 9.e5 are all more popular.

Earlier the same year Veselin beat Anand with 9.e5. That game went: 9...dxe5 10.fxe5 ♘fd7 11.♗f4 b5 12.♕e2 ♗b7 13.0–0–0 ♕b6 14.♔b1 ♗e7 15.h4 0–0–0 16.a3 ♘b8 17.♗e3 ♘c6 18.♗a2 ♘xd4 19.♗xd4 ♕c6 20.♖hf1 ♖hf8 21.g3 ♔b8



22.♖f4! f5 23.exf6 gxf6 24.b4 e5 25.bxc5 ♖xd4? 26.♖fxd4 exd4 27.♕xe7 ♖e8 28.♕f7 1–0, Topalov – Anand, Wijk aan Zee 1996.

9...♘cxe4

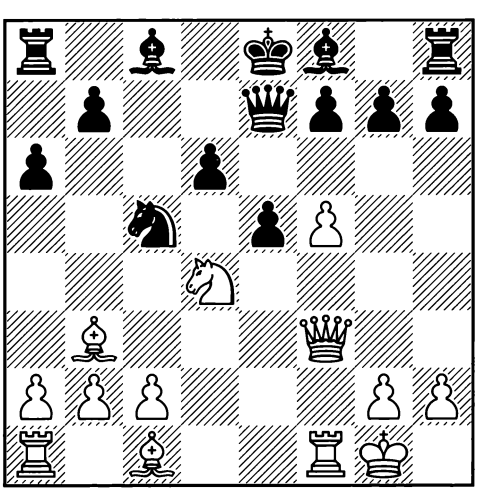
Kasparov goes for the pawn, not the bishop.

10.♘xe4 ♘xe4 11.f5 e5 12.♕h5 ♕e7?!

Kasparov played this move earlier in an exhibition game.

Two rounds later Nigel Short deviated from this game with 12...d5!. There followed 13.♖e1 ♗c5 14.♖xe4 ♗xd4† 15.♗e3 (15.♔h1 was the later trend. White has scored well by stepping out of the check.) 15...0–0 16.♖xd4 exd4 17.♗xd4 f6. In this position Topalov was not able to find enough play for the exchange he had sacrificed, Topalov – Short, Amsterdam 1996.

13.♕f3 ♘c5



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14.♘c6!!

The knight starts its tango, and Kasparov never manages to tame it. Apart from being pleasing to the eye, the fact that the knight can aim at two or three different invasion squares makes this move all the more stunning.

Opening the position with 14.f6? would not work for White: 14...gxf6 15.♘c6 ♕c7 16.♕xf6 ♘xb3 17.axb3 (17.♕xh8 ♘xc1!) 17...♖g8 18.♘d8 ♗h3 Black wins.

14...♕c7 15.♗d5!

Topalov saves his bishop. Chess is a beautiful game – here White's ultimate goal is to transfer his knight to d5, and yet first he puts his bishop on that very same square!

15.♘b4?! ♘xb3 Unfortunately for White the knight on b4 is unprotected. White must take back with the queen, giving up the long diagonal. 16.♕xb3 b5! 17.♘d5 ♕c6 18.♗e3 White has some compensation, but not enough for an advantage.

15...a5?!

In such positions, involving a pawn sacrifice for the initiative, Kasparov is used to being on the other side of the board. Now he chooses an artificial defensive plan on the edge of the board. The idea is to cut off the knight's line of retreat, but it is risky not to develop when he is already lagging behind in that department.

15...♗d7 16.♘b4 ♗e7! (16...♕b6? 17.♗xf7†!! wins with ♘d5 and ♕h5 to follow) 17.♗c4 (17.♗xf7†? ♔xf7 18.♘d5 ♕d8 19.♕h5† ♔g8) 17...♗c6 18.♘d5 White's control over the light squares gives him decent compensation, but everything is still to play for.

16.♗g5!!

This is the result of excellent preparation. Now it will be hard for Black to develop his kingside.

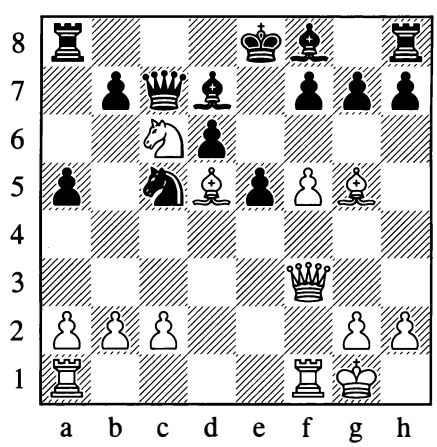
The theory up to this point went like this: 16.♗e3 ♖a6 17.♘d4 exd4 18.♗xd4 with an unclear position in Spanish TV – Kasparov, 1990.

16...♖a6?

Garry, who is such a brilliant attacker, fails to find the best defence in this very complicated and unusual position. In his book *My Great Predecessors* Kasparov wrote on Fischer: "...once again confirming that such irrational positions were not his forte."

Interestingly Garry did not, as far as I can see, make a similar remark about any other former champion. But who does play these types of positions as well as the more rational ones? All humans learn from previous experience.

Kasparov could have stayed in the game by trying to catch up in development by 16...♗d7!, which still gives a playable position:



a) 17.♘d4? f6 18.♕h5† ♔d8 19.♘e6† ♘xe6! 20.fxe6 ♗e8 Black wins according to Topalov.

b) 17.f6?! Inserting this pawn move gave up the e6-square. 17...g6 18.♘e7 ♘e6! Black gets himself together.

c) 17.♘e7!! The future world champion demonstrated an amazing continuation. Probably this was his prepared move. Topalov's knight move is magical yet Black can stay in the game.

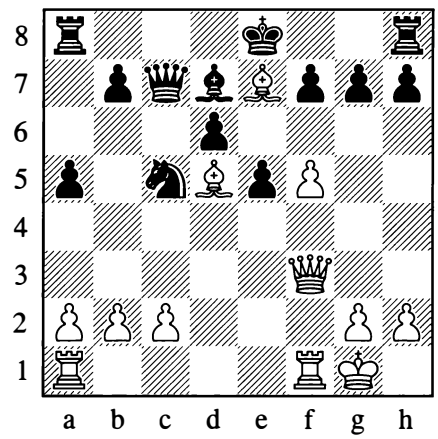
c1) 17...f6 18.♕h5† ♔xe7 (18...♔d8?! 19.♘g6) 19.♗xf6†! gxf6 (19...♔xf6?? 20.♕h4†) 20.♕f7† ♔d8 21.♕xf6† ♔c8 22.♕xh8 ♕d8 23.f6 h6 Black objectively may not be worse, but it is not easy to live with the f6-pawn.

c2) 17...♗xe7!

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The winner of the game gave a question mark to this move, but it provides a reasonable defence.

18.♗xe7



18...f6!!

This move, in conjunction with Black's next, is a stunning resource. After 18...♔xe7? 19.f6† ♔d8 20.fxg7 ♖e8 21.♗xf7 wins. And in the case of 18...♕b6 19.f6! g6 20.♔h1 White is better because of his strong e7-bishop.

19.♕g4 ♗e6!!

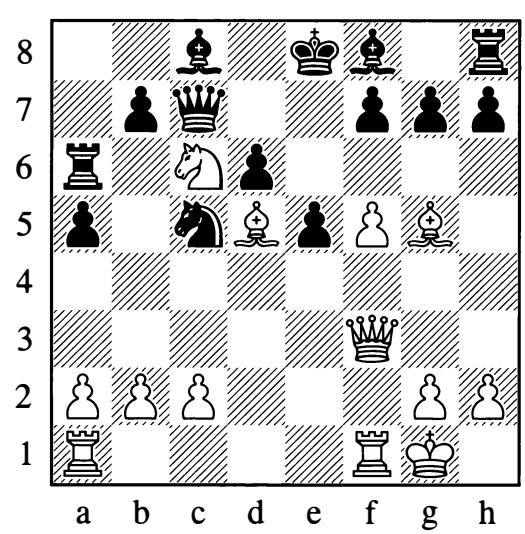
It is hard to criticize even Kasparov for failing to spot this astonishing defence.

20.♗xe6

20.♗xd6 ♕xd6 21.♗xe6 ♘xe6 22.fxe6 ♕d4† The endgame is equal.

20...♕xe7 21.♗d5

It is a matter of taste who prefers White and who Black in this position. The chances are roughly balanced.



17.♘d8!!

What an unexpected way to attack the f7-pawn in the opening! In addition to the obvious route to d5 via b4, and the more spectacular lunge to e7 as seen in the above note, we now see that White's brilliant 14th move prepared a third, most deadly knight move. As a result of Topalov's spectacular and imaginative play in the opening Kasparov is already lost.

17...f6 18.♘f7 ♖g8 19.♗e3 g6 20.♘g5!

The sixth move by the knight not only wins material, but also breaks apart the enemy pawn chain. Kasparov was probably hoping for 20.♘xe5 dxe5 21.♗xg8 ♗xf5 when Black has good chances to consolidate his position.

20...♖g7

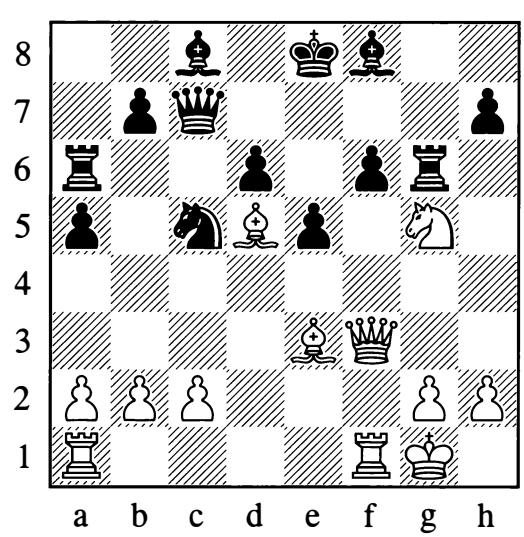
20...fxg5 21.f6! ♖h8 22.f7† ♔d8 23.♗xg5† wins.

21.fxg6

21.♘xh7 ♖xh7 22.fxg6 ♖g7 23.♕xf6 was winning as well.

21...♖xg6

21...hxg6 22.♕xf6 ♕e7 23.♕f2 Topalov's suggestion is not the only win but it is probably the simplest. 23...♗f5 24.♖ae1 wins.



22.♗f7†

This wins the queen, after which the game is effectively over. Topalov may not have forced resignation in the most efficient way possible, but the result was never in doubt.

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22...♕xf7 23.♘xf7 ♔xf7 24.♗xc5 dxc5 25.♖ad1 ♗e7 26.♖d5 ♗g4 27.♕e4 ♔g7 28.♖fd1 ♗xd1 29.♖xd1 ♖e6 30.♕f5 ♔f7 31.♖e1 b6 32.h4 ♖g7 33.♔f1 ♗d6 34.♔f2 ♗c7 35.♔f3 ♔e7 36.♖e4 ♔f7 37.♖g4! ♖e7 38.♔e4 ♖xg4† 39.♕xg4 ♗d8 40.a4 ♔f8 41.c3 ♖g7 42.♕c8 ♔e8 43.♕e6† ♔f8 44.g4 ♖f7 45.h5 ♖g7 46.h6 ♖g6 47.♕d5 ♗e7 48.♔f5 ♖xh6 49.♕b7 e4 50.♕b8† ♔f7 51.♕xb6 e3 52.♕e6† ♔e8 53.♕xe3 ♖g6 54.♕e4 ♖g5† 55.♔f4 ♔d7 56.♕b7† ♔e6 57.♕c8† ♔f7 58.♕c7 h5 59.gxh5 ♖xh5 60.♕xa5 ♗d6† 61.♔e4 f5† 62.♔d5 ♗e7 63.♕c7 ♖h6 64.a5 ♖d6† 65.♔e5 ♖f6 66.♕c8 1–0

In this game Topalov demonstrated courage, imagination and terrific preparation against the strongest opening specialist of all time. Incidentally there were only two players who were able to trouble Kasparov's Najdorf on a consistent basis: Topalov and later Leko, who was able to put the world number one in difficult situations several times. But against Leko, unlike against Veselin, Garry survived those troublesome games. While I was working on the book *Kasparov's Fighting Chess 1993-1998*, I noticed that after the above game Garry kept exchanging queens and playing very safe against the Bulgarian grandmaster, after which he started to score very well. Maybe it is symbolic that in their last game in Linares 2005, Topalov beat him in an endgame. After that game Kasparov retired and Topalov started to fly and completed a journey to the top, which was magical even by the standards of his fellow world champions.

For a player to accomplish so much, everything must have fallen into place. Reflecting on Leko's career, it was important that I had played Kasparov at the 1980 World Junior Championship and discovered first-hand how incredible he was. I understood the might of the adversary Leko would eventually have to face, and forced both myself and Peter to work extremely hard. Silvio Danailov also took part in that event and he was tremendously fascinated by Kasparov. I suspect that this experience may have also contributed to Topalov's development.

How is your relationship with Topalov since he moved to Spain?

"In 1991 there were big changes in Bulgaria and in my life too. Sport societies were cleared away and I was thrown out of work. At the same time I built my own apartment and the problems grew every day. Exactly at this critical moment Silvio Danailov made an offer to Vesko to leave for Spain. From this moment it was clear that there was no future for our partnership. Although we have met over the years there has not been any room for speaking about further teamwork."

Do people know you in Bulgaria and especially in Ruse?

"I cannot say that I'm very well-known, but still there are people that know me as a chess player and respect me as a trainer. I have many students that aren't world champions like Vesko, but thanks to chess they have had a chance to become excellent specialists in other fields – diplomats, computer specialists, scientists etc."

Are you a still a chess coach or do you have an ordinary job? Do you have any good students these days?

"Unfortunately I have not been a coach for a long time. In 1993 the sport society 'Dunav' was closed. Since that I have had many jobs of various types in different places. Now I'm unemployed."

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How many children do you have? Any of them play chess?

"I have two children – a son and a daughter. My son played chess in his early years, but after that he started to learn about computers and chess has remained in second place."

Does Bulgaria have any special under-14 players?

"During the big changes in Bulgaria the foundation for chess development were annihilated. From time to time there are children who wish to learn chess as private students. But they give up very fast because they must pay for this themselves and usually they don't have enough money."

Do they invest money into junior chess or just the big Sofia event?

"No one gives money for junior chess in Bulgaria! Only some people with bigger financial opportunities try to support chess, but this is unprofitable for them and they give up very soon. There is a boy in Ruse – Marian Boichev, who was second in the World Under-14 Championship some years ago. Now he is going to give up chess."

How do you judge the big changes Bulgaria went through?

"I personally evaluate the big changes – economic and political – as negative. Thousands of Bulgarians, most of them young people, left the country. There is widespread unemployment, small salaries, corruption and criminality. This is what we have after the changes up to now."

Any regrets for the past and dreams for the future?

"I'm already 61 years old. Looking back and considering my life, I see that there are many things to regret. But most tragic is that my future promises to be very hard."

The downward spiral of chess training

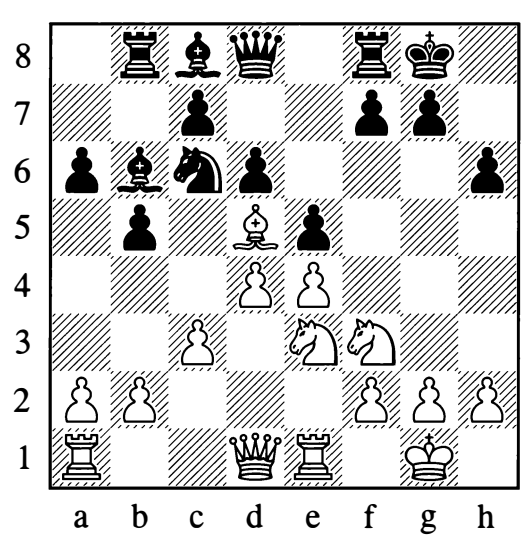
Let me begin by showing a game between two of the world's most brilliant players.

Judit Polgar – Veselin Topalov

World Cup (blindfold) 2007

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0–0 b5 6.♗b3 ♗c5 7.c3 d6 8.d4 ♗b6 9.♗e3 0–0 10.♘bd2 h6 11.♖e1 ♘g4 12.♘f1 ♘xe3 13.♘xe3 ♖b8 14.♗d5

(diagram)



14...♗g4?? 15.♘xg4 1–0

This is quite incredible and desperately disappointing.

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In chess there is money for senseless things like blindfold chess if the stars are playing. I do not understand why sponsors give money for things like blindfold events when superb trainers like Atanasov are not able to continue nurturing the next generation of champions. Kasparov's junior trainer also no longer trains juniors. The number of books Dvoretsky writes suggests that he also does not work much as a trainer. Maybe he gives a few lectures here and there, but I have not seen him at any world junior championship with a pupil in the last 15 years. Giving a lecture for a few hours is not the same as training. I do not know whether Kramnik or Anand had a junior trainer. If they did, do they still train pupils?

Simon Agdestein, who was Carlsen's junior trainer, excelled in both football and dancing. Most other trainers, who have helped to develop a current world-class player, are probably not as versatile as the Norwegian grandmaster. How many of them are unemployed like Atanasov and how many of them are struggling to make ends meet? I certainly know at least two such people who are concerned about their existence.

I think that the present situation in chess does not serve the best interests of many players, whether they are male or female. In Judit's case, her achievements have been unique partly because she is a lady, but conceivably she could have reached an even higher level against her male rivals. She has the talent and the opportunity as well. Earning money by playing blindfold chess is understandable, but this form does not provide her with the sort of preparation that is necessary for competing at world championship level.

The saddest thing is that no matter how successful a chess player becomes, the person who trained them as a junior will always find it difficult to earn enough to be able to continue coaching. I would like to stress that the other players I have mentioned are all amazing talents, they deserve a lot of appreciation and respect, as well as the financial rewards that come with success.

Returning to the case of Topalov, one can only speculate as to how much his fantastic career has to do with the training he received as a junior. But it seems to me that, at the very least, the identity of his trainer should be known in the chess world.

Games Section

Petko Atanasov – Srdjan Marangunic

World Student Championship, Ybbs 1968

1.e4 c6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.♗g5 d6 5.♕d2

This is a dangerous system.

5...b5 6.♗d3 ♗g7 7.f4 a6 8.♘f3 ♕c7

Black is employing a set-up that can be used against almost anything White plays.

9.0–0 0–0

This is a necessary precaution; otherwise the king might be caught in the centre.

10.e5 ♘d5

10...b4!? is also a standard answer in a position like this.

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11.♖ae1! ♘xc3 12.bxc3!

Strengthens the centre.

12...f6

12...♖a7!? looks a bit funny but maybe it is still a reasonable move.

13.exf6 exf6 14.♗h4 ♗h6 15.♗g3!?

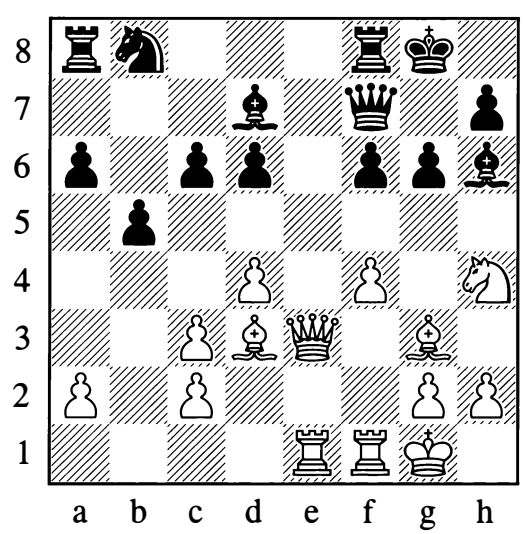
This is an interesting response to Black's somewhat unusual way of holding back White.

15...♗g4 16.♘h4!?

The knight move looks a bit weird, but the move has a witty idea. It prevents the b8-knight from going to d7, as the bishop on g4 would be short of squares.

16...♕f7 17.♕e3 ♗d7

17...♘d7 18.h3 ♖fe8 19.♕f2 ♗h5 and the bishop is awkward at the edge of the board.



18.♕e7!

This is another original decision. White exchanges queens because he is better developed and wants to invade.

18...♕xe7 19.♖xe7 f5?!

Black is being too optimistic – it was safer to develop the queenside as quickly as possible. 19...♖e8 20.♖fe1 ♖xe7 21.♖xe7 ♗f8 and Black can improve his queenside a move earlier than in the game.

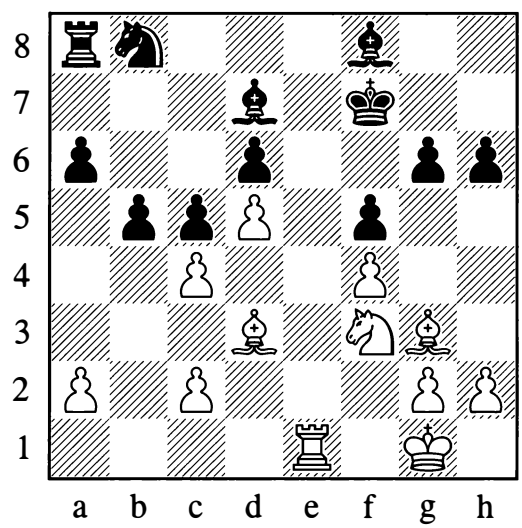
20.♘f3 ♖e8 21.♖fe1 ♖xe7 22.♖xe7 ♗f8 23.♖e1 h6?!

23...c5 or 23...a5 were more attractive.

24.c4 ♔f7 25.d5 c5

Black makes another pawn move. White has a huge lead in development, but Black is banking on his ability to keep the position closed.

It was worth considering 25...cxd5!? 26.cxd5 ♗c8 27.♗f2 ♘d7. White is better developed but it is not easy to improve his position.



26.♘e5†!!

This is a brilliant sacrifice. White gets two connected passed pawns for the piece, and enhances the scope of his pieces, especially the bishop on g3.

26...dxe5 27.fxe5 b4?

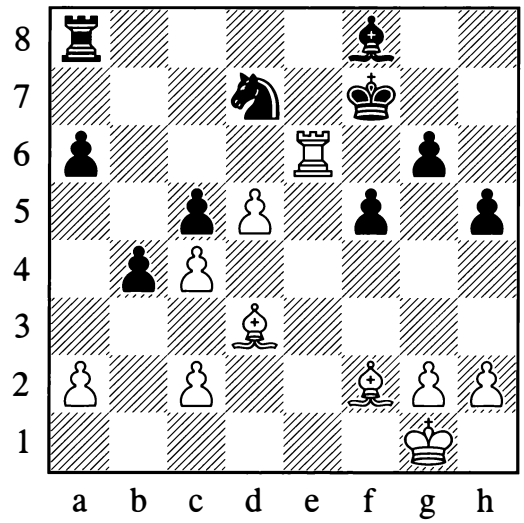
Black gives back the piece, hoping to be able to keep the position closed. 27...♔g8 was the better option; Black is suffering in any case, so he may as well keep an extra piece for the time being. After 28.e6 ♗e8 29.d6 ♖a7 30.a3!? White has tremendous compensation and is about to start playing against the b5-pawn. Nevertheless Black still has some chances to survive.

28.e6† ♗xe6 29.♖xe6 ♘d7 30.♗f2!

White prepares g2-g4, a move that would significantly open the position. Therefore Black feels obliged to make the following weakening pawn move.

30...h5

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31.♗h4!

Now Black is almost completely paralysed.

31...a5 32.h3 ♖e8 33.♖a6 ♗e7

Black is ready to give up a pawn.

34.♗f2!

But White dictates the terms of capture.

34...♗d8??

A blunder in a bad position.

35.♖a7!

This kills the game instantly.

35...♔e7 36.♗xc5† ♔f6 37.♖xd7

1–0

The next game could easily be an illustrative example in the "Do not leave your king in the centre" section of a beginners' book.

Andre Lombard – Petko Atanasov

European Junior Ch., Groningen 1969

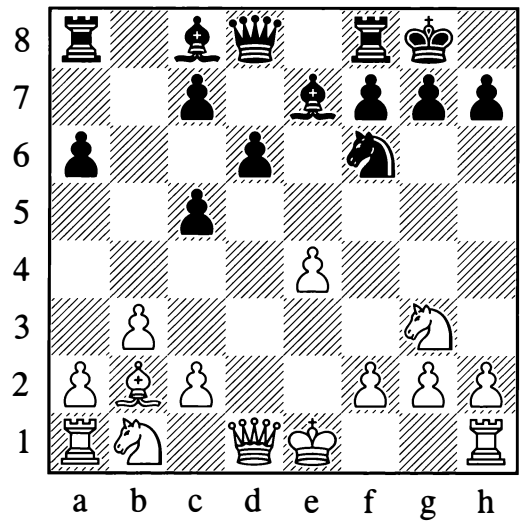
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 d6 5.♗xc6† bxc6 6.d4 exd4 7.♘xd4

7.♕xd4 is arguably a more critical move, although White has a plus score with both options.

7...c5 8.♘e2 ♘f6 9.♘g3?!

There is no compelling reason to delay the development of the queen's knight.

9...♗e7 10.b3 0–0 11.♗b2



11...♘g4!

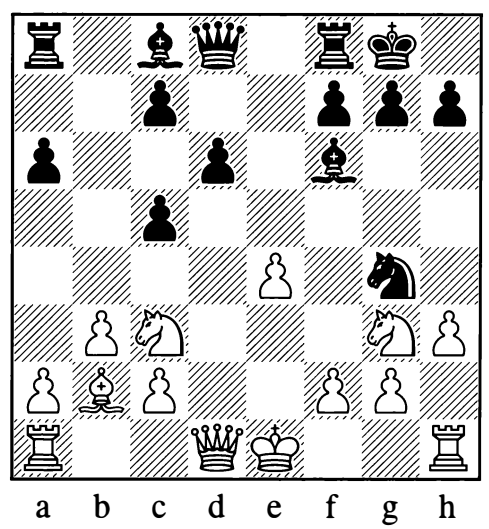
Black tries to exchange the dark-squared bishops, thus eliminating White's best piece.

12.h3?

White probably did not anticipate the coming piece sacrifice.

12...♗f6 13.♘c3

The ugly 13.♗c3! was the only move to keep White in the game.



13...♘xf2!!

Black's pieces are far away from White's camp, yet the white pieces stand so awkwardly that the sacrifice still works.

14.♔xf2 ♗d4† 15.♔f1

After 15.♔e2 ♕g5 16.♕d3 ♗e5 17.♔f2 ♕f4† 18.♕f3 ♕h4 White is too tied up with

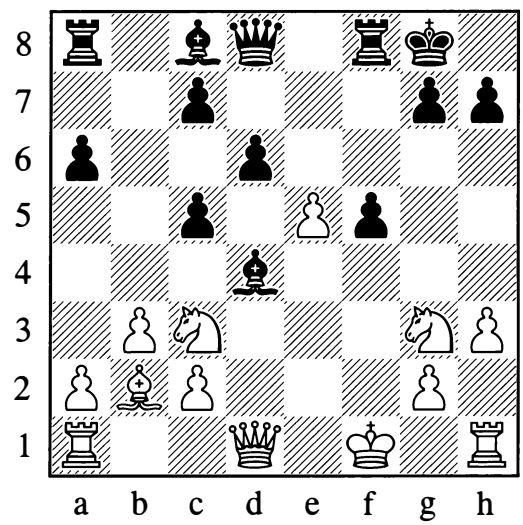
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defending the g3-knight. 19.♖hf1 f5! Black wins back the piece with a huge initiative.

15...f5!

Opening the position.

16.e5!?



16...♗b7!

White's last move kept the f-file closed but it also opened this diagonal.

17.♕d3 ♗e4

17...♕g5! Bringing the queen up at once would also inflict pain.

18.♕d2?

Controlling the h5-square with 18.♕e2 was a bit better, although it is doubtful that it would be enough to save the game. 18...♕g5 (Or 18...♕h4!? 19.♘h5 dxe5 – Black gets tremendous play here as well.) 19.♘h5 ♗xe5 White is in huge trouble.

18...♕h4!

After this White is simply lost.

19.♕e1 ♕f4† 20.♔e2 ♗xg2 21.♖f1 ♗xf1† 22.♘xf1 ♖ae8

0–1

The end of the game was just a rout.

Here is a game where Atanasov attacks successfully from an innocent-looking position, in a manner reminiscent of Tal.

Petko Atanasov – Juergen Dueball

Dresden 1969

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.g3

This is a rare combination of variations.

5...♗g7 6.♗g2 ♗e6

Masters more often take on c3: 6...♘xc3 7.bxc3 c5, with typical play against the enemy centre.

7.♘f3 0–0 8.0–0 c5

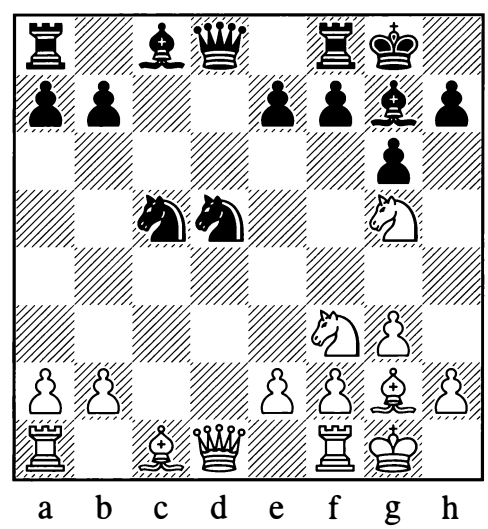
8...♘c6!? is possible.

9.♘e4 ♘a6 10.♘eg5 ♗c8

It was worth considering 10...♕b6!? 11.♘xe6 fxe6 with a very active position.

11.dxc5 ♘xc5?

After 11...e6! Black should have a playable position.



12.♘xh7!

This surprising tactical shot wins a pawn.

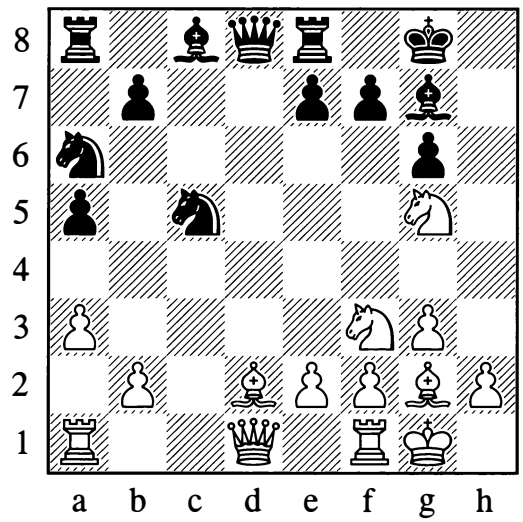
12...♖e8 13.♘hg5 ♘b4?

Looking for counterplay on the queenside, but he leaves the kingside vulnerable. Instead Black should just develop with 13...e6. His pieces stand quite well, so it would still take a lot of effort for White to convert his extra pawn. When something goes wrong in a game one often does better to act like a hedgehog and let the opponent try to win the position.

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14.♗d2 a5 15.a3 ♘ba6

The knight is out of the game here.



16.♕c2!

If 16.♖c1!? ♗xb2? 17.♖xc5 ♘xc5 18.♕c2 ♗xa3 19.♕a2 wins, but 16...♗f5! keeps Black in the game.

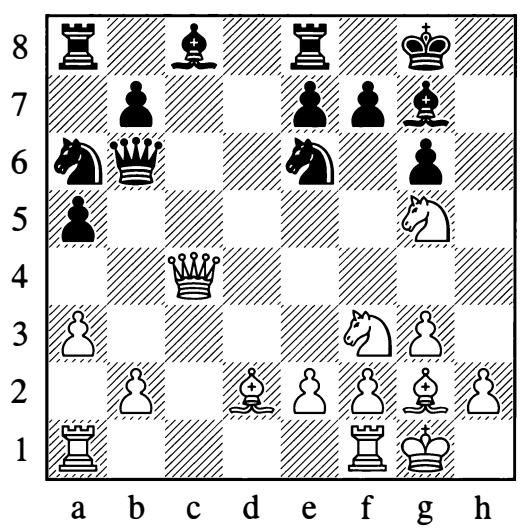
16...♕b6?

The lesser evil was 16...♗e6! 17.♘xe6 ♘xe6 18.♖ac1 when White still wins, but it would take some work.

17.♕c4!!

Many people would just try to win with the extra pawn, but Atanasov makes the effort to find the best move and goes straight for the kill.

17...♘e6



18.♕h4!

Quite a remarkable queen manoeuvre. In two moves, from a quiet Catalan-esque positional game, Atanasov turns it into a strong attack against the opponent's king.

18...♕xb2 19.♖ac1

Even more clinical was 19.♕h7† ♔f8 20.♖ab1!, e.g. 20...♕f6 21.♘e4 ♕f5 22.♗h6 f6 23.♘d4 and it is all over.

19...♕xa3?

After 19...♘xg5 20.♗xg5 ♕xa3 21.♗f4! White has a strong attack with ♘g5 the next move.

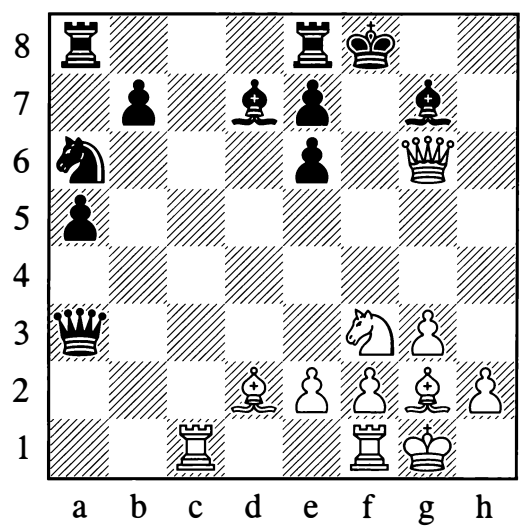
20.♕h7†!

Now Atanasov checkmates his German opponent.

20...♔f8 21.♘xe6† fxe6

After 21...♗xe6 22.♗h6 wins immediately.

22.♕xg6 ♗d7



23.♘g5 ♔g8 24.♖c4!

1-0

It was a very well conducted attack.

Here is a nice attacking game played by Atanasov some time later. This was his first game to be published in *Chess Informant*, although it was not annotated by either of the contestants. Grandmaster Bukic analysed it, meaning that the quality of the game was recognized by an independent expert.

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Petko Atanasov – Atanas Kolarov

Bulgaria 1970

1.e4 c6 2.♘f3 d5 3.♘c3 ♗g4 4.h3 ♗xf3 5.♕xf3 ♘f6 6.d3 e6 7.a3 ♘bd7 8.g4

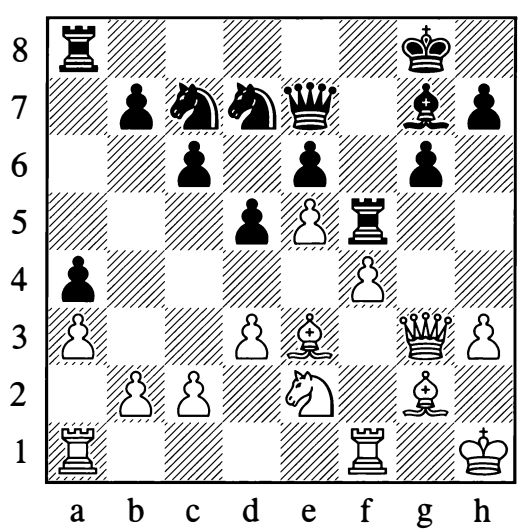
White's system is still often played.

8...g6 9.♗g2 ♗g7

Despite Black's previous move, some players have still preferred to develop the bishop on c5, viz. 9...♗c5 10.♕g3 dxe4 11.dxe4 e5.

10.0–0 0–0 11.♕g3 ♘e8 12.f4 f5 13.e5 ♘c7 14.♘e2 ♕e7 15.♔h1 a5 16.♗e3 a4 17.gxf5 ♖xf5?

17...exf5!? would have kept things more solid while clearing an inviting square on e6 for the knight. 18.h4 ♘e6 Black can resist on the kingside. 19.h5 (19.♖g1 ♔h8; 19.♗f3 ♗h6) 19...g5!? and Black is in the game.



18.♘d4!

Improving the knight. Atanasov builds up the attack very effectively.

18...♖f7 19.♘f3 ♗f8 20.h4 ♖g7 21.♗h3! c5 22.♕f2 d4 23.♗d2 b5 24.♖g1 ♘b6 25.♘g5 ♘bd5 26.♕f3!

White keeps improving his pieces for the attack.

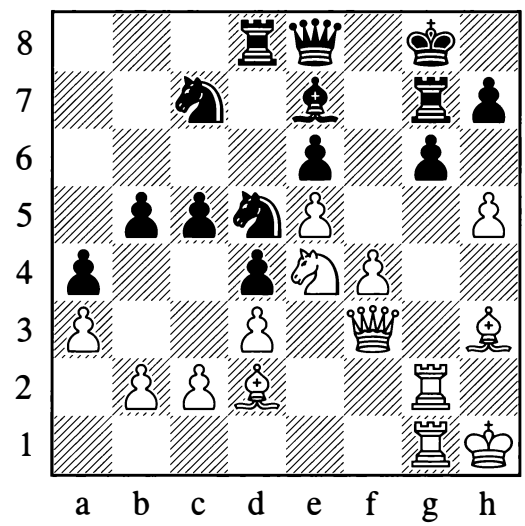
26...♖d8 27.h5 ♕e8

If 27...♕d7 28.♖g2 ♗e7 29.♘e4! maintains the pressure.

28.♖g2! ♕c6?!

The queen on c6 stands worse than it did on e8, but Black's position is bad anyway.

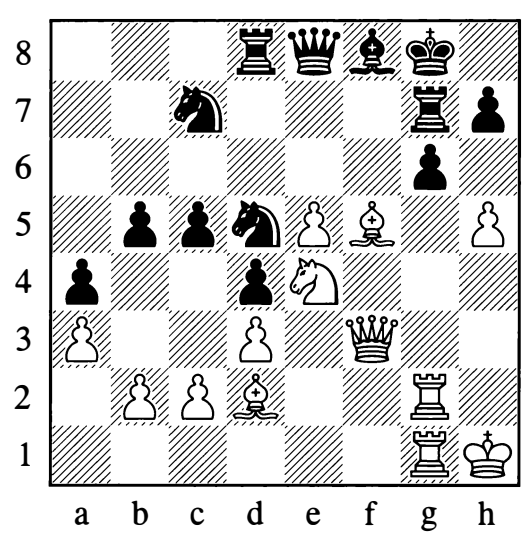
29.♘e4 ♗e7 30.♖ag1 ♕e8



31.f5!

White has improved his pieces as much as possible, and now he simply bulldozes his way through Black's kingside defences.

31...exf5 32.♗xf5 ♗f8



33.♗xg6!

A cute continuation, but White is dominating so much, there are several different wins here.

33...♕xe5

If 33...hxg6, then 34.h6 ♖f7 35.♖xg6† and the end is nigh.

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34.♗f7†
1–0

Black resigned. After 34...♔h8 35.h6 wins. Atanasov patiently and effectively demolished Black's kingside.

Petko Atanasov – Agop Merdinjan

Bulgarian Championship, Sofia 1972

1.♘f3 c5 2.g3 ♘c6 3.♗g2 g6 4.0–0 ♗g7 5.d3 e6 6.♘bd2 ♘ge7 7.♘e4 d6 8.c4 h6 9.♖b1 b6 10.a3 d5 11.cxd5 ♘xd5 12.♕a4 ♗b7 13.♗d2 0–0 14.♖fc1 f5

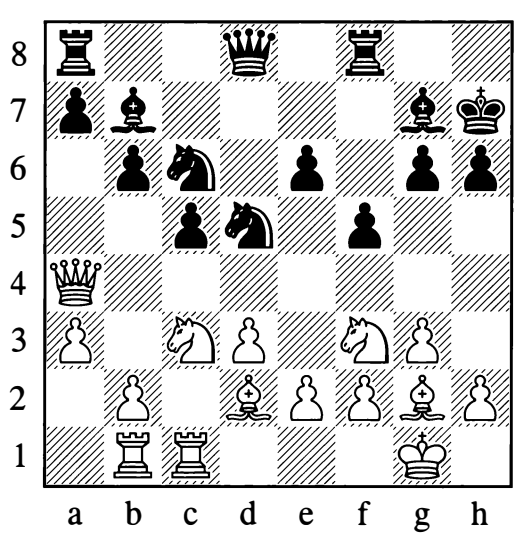
14...a5!? is an alternative.

15.♘c3 ♔h7?

Instead of this sloppy move, Black had to do something about his opponent's impending queenside initiative. There were two sensible options:

After 15...a5 Black would have a fully playable position.

Another reasonable idea was 15...a6, e.g. 16.♘xd5 exd5 17.b4 b5 with a good position.



16.♘xd5! exd5 17.b4!

Now White exerts serious pressure against his opponent's queenside. Black has little choice but to accept the following pawn weakening.

17...♘d4 18.♘xd4 cxd4

Black's d-pawns may look ugly, but they are not at all easy to attack. However, their real weakness lies in their immobility and the way they restrict the two black bishops.

19.♖c2 ♖f7

If 19...♕e8 20.♕xe8 (White is also better if he keeps the queens on the board with 20.b5!?) 20...♖fxe8 21.♖c7 ♖xe2 (21...♖ab8 22.♔f1) 22.♗f4 g5 23.♗f3 ♖ee8 24.♖xb7 gxf4 25.gxf4 and Black is very passive in this endgame.

20.♖bc1 ♗e5

Black has prevented invasion along the c-file. However, all his pieces are tied down to defensive duties.

21.b5 g5?

Black is moving forward but he just weakens his pawn structure. There is no chance of carrying out a successful attack while all his pieces are so tied up. Just waiting with 21...♕d6 was much more promising, e.g. 22.♕b3 ♖d8 when White still has to find a way to break through.

22.♕b3 f4?!

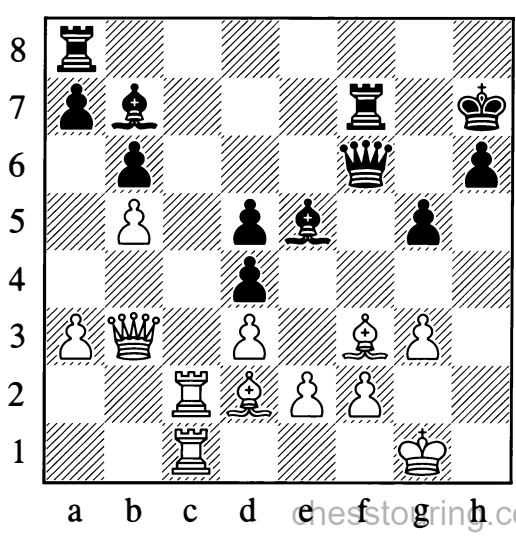
Black continues his mistaken strategy. Probably both players were aiming for the same position.

23.♗f3 fxg3

Better was 23...♕d7!.

24.hxg3 ♕f6?

Once again Black still had reasonable chances to hold the position together with 24...♕d7!.

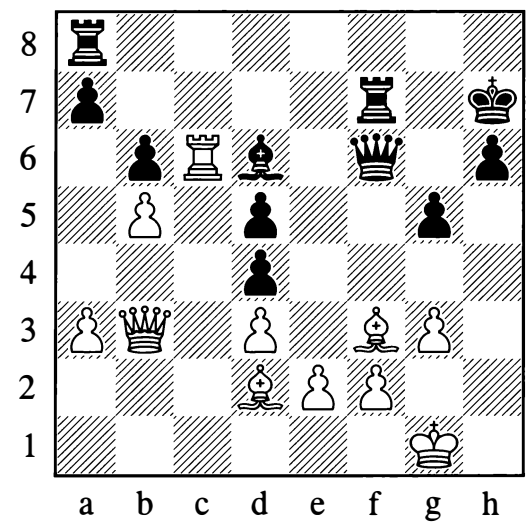


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25.♖c6!!

After this exchange sacrifice Black's position falls apart. This type of sacrifice does not come easily for many players. Black must surely have overlooked it.

25...♗xc6 26.♖xc6 ♗d6



27.♕xd5

Black's pieces are hopelessly uncoordinated, so he has no chance to resist.

27...♖d8 28.♗b4 ♖fd7 29.♗g4

1–0

At that time players typically made the transition to the status of a mature adult player during their mid-twenties. Here is one of Atanasov's games from that stage of his development, against a very experienced grandmaster.

Ivan Radulov – Petko Atanasov

Bulgarian Championship, Sofia 1973

1.e4 c6

These two met each other regularly. Atanasov kept changing his lines though. The Caro utilized here was not his main defence.

2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♘d7 5.♗c4

Radulov was a strong GM and selected the line considered most dangerous at the time.

5...♘gf6 6.♘g5 e6 7.♕e2 ♘b6 8.♗d3 h6 9.♘5f3 ♗e7?!

Atanasov was not an expert in the Caro-Kann, and it shows on this rather slow move. Experts almost always prefer the more active 9...c5.

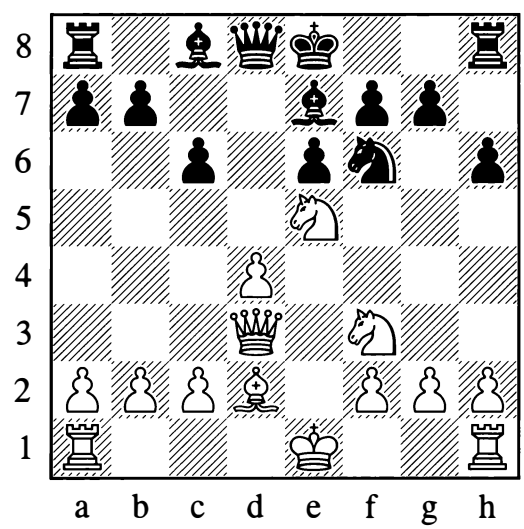
10.♗d2 ♘bd5 11.♘e5

White gives up the two bishops in return for fluid development.

11.0–0–0 ♘b4 12.♗c4 b5 13.♗b3 a5 would give Black decent attacking chances.

11.a3!? was worth considering though.

11...♘b4 12.♘gf3 ♘xd3† 13.♕xd3



13...♕d5!

Atanasov prevents long castling and threatens to exchange queens.

14.0–0 0–0 15.c4 ♕e4 16.♕b3 c5!?

Black is underdeveloped, but he decides to play in the most principled way.

17.♖fe1 ♕f5 18.♖ad1

White brings his last piece into play. Another promising possibility was:

18.dxc5 ♗xc5 19.♗b4

Exchanging bishops was a critical try, intending to exploit the weakened dark squares.

19...♗xb4 20.♕xb4 b6 21.♕e7

21.♘d4 ♕g5 22.♕e7 ♘d7! keeps Black alive.

21...♕c2 22.♖ad1

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Alternatively 22.♕a3 ♗b7 23.♘d4 ♕d2 24.♖ad1 ♕g5 25.f3 and White is somewhat better.

22...♕xb2 23.♘xf7 ♘g4 24.♖d2 ♕f6 25.♕xf6 ♘xf6 26.♘d6

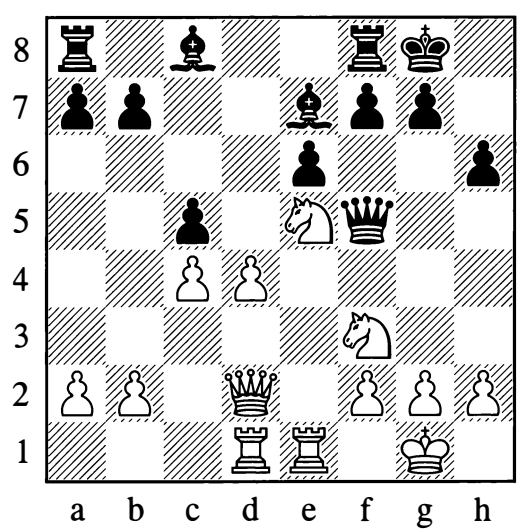
White has pressure against e6, although even if he wins the pawn Black still has some chances.

18...♘e4 19.♕e3

Radulov increases his development advantage, but he has to be content with two knights against two bishops.

He was probably not happy with 19.♗e3 b6 20.♘c6 ♗f6 21.♘fe5 cxd4 22.♗xd4 ♗b7 when Black survives.

19...♘xd2 20.♕xd2



20...a5!?

Black finds a most original way to develop his rook.

Instead after 20...♖d8 21.♕e3 cxd4 22.♘xd4 Black is living dangerously.

21.d5

It was worth giving serious attention to 21.♕e3!?, when the pressure against c5 gives Black no time to introduce the rook. 21...cxd4 22.♘xd4 ♕g5 23.♕e4 White's superior development gives him an edge, even though Black has the two bishops.

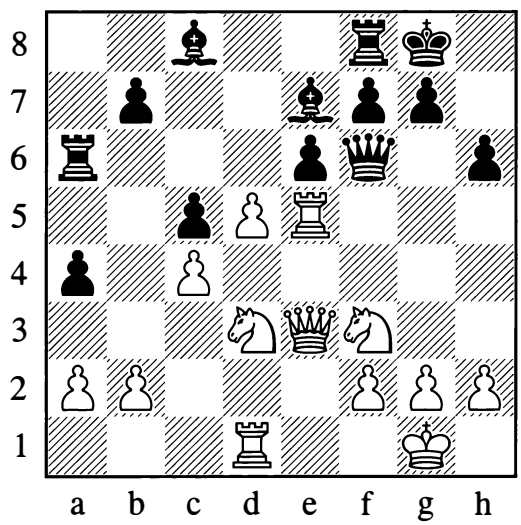
21...♖a6! 22.♕e3 a4

Slowly bringing the other rook into the game with 22...♖e8!? would have been a safer way to equalize. 22...♗d6 is another sensible move.

23.♘d3!?

White decides to force matters with an exchange sacrifice.

23...♖a5 24.♕d2 ♖a6 25.♖e5 ♕f6 26.♕e3



26...♗d6

Black must accept the offer.

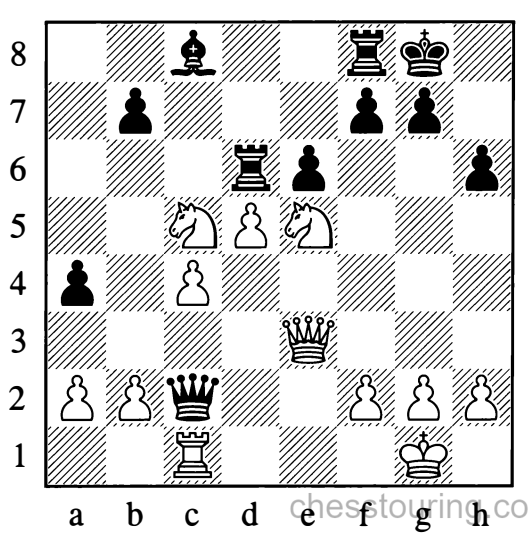
27.♘xc5 ♗xe5 28.♘xe5 ♖d6 29.♘g4

After 29.f4 exd5 30.cxd5 ♕f5 the position is roughly balanced; White has compensation, but not more.

29...♕g6 30.♘e5 ♕c2!

Black bravely spurns the draw and challenges his opponent to justify his sacrifice.

31.♖c1



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31...♕xb2

The queen cannot be trapped, so it is useful for Black to get another enemy pawn in the bank.

32.♘ed3?

White stakes everything on a kingside attack – an understandable decision, but a flawed one. He should have played for a draw with 32.♘xa4 ♕xa2 33.♘c3 ♕b2 (if 33...♕a6 34.c5 ♖xd5 35.♘xd5 exd5 36.♕d4 White should not lose, despite the pawn deficit) 34.♖b1 ♕c2 35.♖c1 ♕f5 (35...♕b2!?) 36.c5 ♖a6 37.d6 f6 38.♘c4 ♗d7 In the final position White does not have quite enough compensation for the exchange, but there is still a lot of play left in the position.

32...♕xa2

Black is happy to grab another pawn.

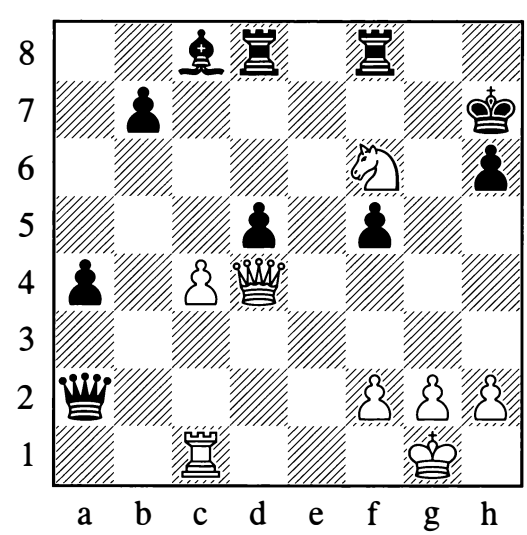
33.♘e4 ♖dd8 34.♘f4 exd5

Atanasov has correctly judged that White's attack is not strong enough.

35.♘f6†!?

This is a desperate attempt, but perhaps the best practical try. He had to try something before Black could exploit his extra material.

35...gxf6 36.♘h5 ♔h7! 37.♕d3† f5 38.♕d4 f6 39.♘xf6†



39...♔g6

Black's king is somewhat exposed, but he wins because of his extra rook. White is not helped by his weak back rank, which prevents him from activating his rook along the third rank.

40.♘xd5 ♗e6 41.♕b6 ♔f7 42.♖e1 ♖fe8 43.♕c7† ♖d7 44.♕e5 ♖xd5!

The only winning move, but fortunately it was not too hard to find.

0–1

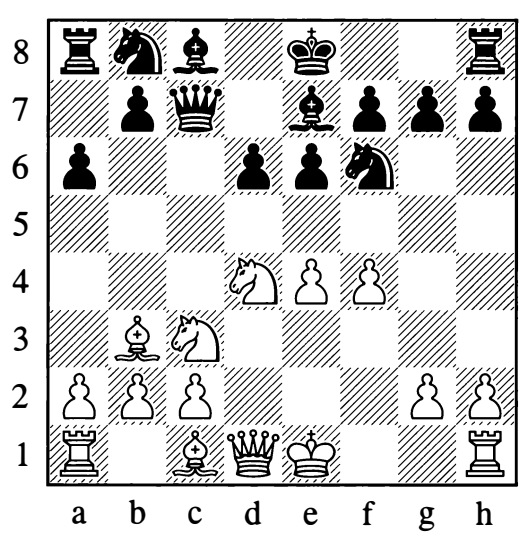
In the next game Atanasov starts out aggressively, but then executes a masterful positional crush.

Petko Atanasov – Dimitar Ilievski

Ruse 1978

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗c4 e6 7.♗b3 ♗e7 8.f4 ♕c7?!

This is a bit too slow here.



9.f5!

Atanasov wastes no time in commencing the attack.

9...e5

This weakens d5, but there was not much else to do.

10.♘f3!?

In the vast majority of the games from this position, White has retreated with the knight to e2, intending to come to c3 and d5 later.

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This plan has scored very well, but Atanasov has a different idea in mind. He wants to launch an attack on the kingside and decides that the knight will be more useful on f3.

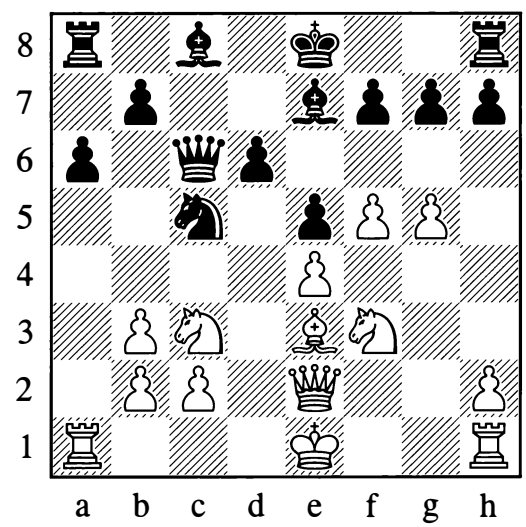
10...♘bd7 11.g4 ♕c6

With hindsight, it was probably better to play 11...h6!, preventing White from gaining further space on the kingside.

12.♕e2 ♘c5 13.g5! ♘xb3 14.axb3

The alternative 14.cxb3!?, intending to play on the c-file, was interesting as well.

14...♘d7 15.♗e3 ♘c5



16.♗xc5!

By exchanging pieces, White eliminates another potential defender of the d5-square.

16...♕xc5 17.0–0–0 ♗d7 18.♘d5

White has clearly gained the upper hand in the opening. At the same time Black's position is still solid and certainly will not fall apart on its own.

18...♗d8 19.h4!

White plans to increase his advantage by gaining space on the kingside.

19...h5 20.♔b1

Black can hardly contemplate castling short, so now Petko plans to build up his position on the queenside.

Opening the kingside with 20.gxh6 was also very promising: 20...♖xh6 21.b4 ♕c6 22.♖hg1 ♖h7 23.h5 and White has terrific play.

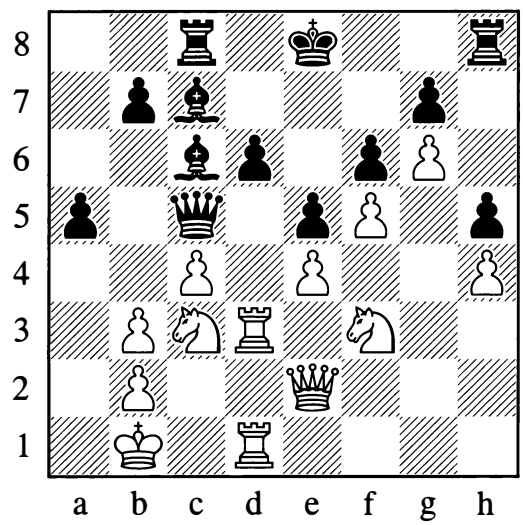
20...♖c8 21.♖d3 ♗b5 22.c4 ♗d7 23.♖c1! a5

Black has to try to keep the queenside closed. If 23...♕c6 24.c5!, while 23...♗c6 could be met by 24.b4!.

24.♘c3 ♗c6 25.♖cd1 ♗c7 26.g6!

This weakens the black king and isolates the h5-pawn.

26...f6



27.♖d5!!

This is another lovely exchange sacrifice. White needs to play like this in order to invade.

27...♗xd5

In the long term Black cannot avoid taking the rook. For instance: 27...♕b4 28.♔c2 (White is also better after 28.♕c2 ♗b8 29.♘e1) 28...♗b8 (28...a4 29.bxa4) 29.♖a1 Black cannot avoid the type of position he gets in the game.

28.♖xd5!

Taking back this way really chokes Black.

28...♕c6 29.♘e1!

Atanasov improves all his pieces.

29...♗b6 30.♕d1 ♔e7 31.♖b5

Forcing Black to decide where to put the bishop.

31...♗c5 32.♘d3! ♗d4

Black gives up a pawn. Holding onto it with 32...b6 was not possible: 33.♘xc5 bxc5 34.♖b6! ♕d7 35.♕d5 wins.

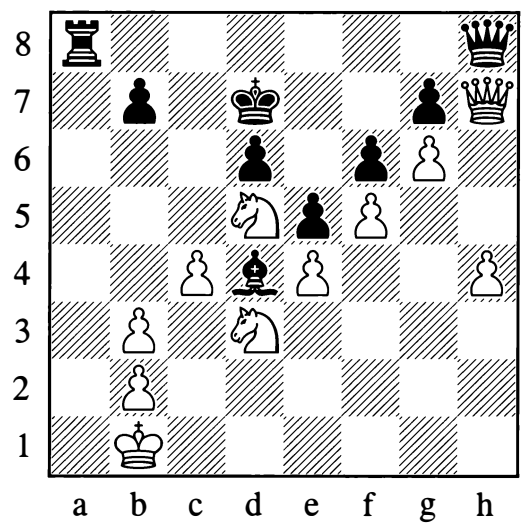
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33.♘d5† ♔d7 34.♖xa5 ♖a8

Black hopes to get some air. Waiting passively with 34...♔d8 was a gloomy fate as well. 35.♘3f4! exf4 36.♕xd4 ♖e8 37.♕d3 Black is horribly passive, so White has time to collect the f4-pawn. 37...♖b8 38.♖b5 ♖a8 39.♕f3 ♖e5 (39...♕a6 40.♕xf4) 40.♕xf4 ♕a6 41.♔c2 ♕a1 42.♖xb7 and White wins.

35.♖xa8 ♖xa8 36.♕xh5 ♕c8 37.♕h7 ♕h8

Black pinned his hopes on swapping queens, but Petko played for this position as well.



38.♘xf6†!

Perhaps Black had missed this move when calculating in advance.

38...♔c6 39.♘b4† ♔c5 40.♘d3† ♔c6 41.♕xh8 ♖xh8 42.♘h7 ♗e3 43.h5

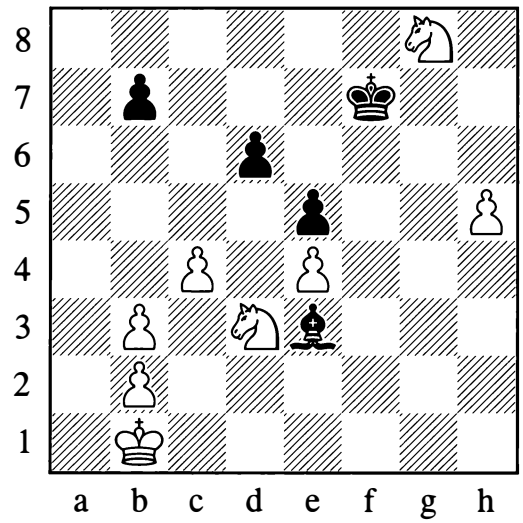
White has too many pawns for the exchange, and in addition his pawns are close to promotion.

43...♔d7 44.f6

White could also win by improving either the d3-knight or the king.

44...gxf6 45.♘xf6† ♔e6 46.g7 ♖a8 47.g8=♕† ♖xg8 48.♘xg8 ♔f7

Black finds this witty riposte but it is all in vain. White abandons the knight but still has two extra pawns, which is easily enough to win.



49.c5 dxc5 50.♘xe5† ♔xg8 51.♔c2 ♗d4 52.♘f3 ♗g7 53.e5 ♗h6 54.♔d3 b5 55.♔e4 ♗c1 56.e6 ♗xb2 57.♘e5

1–0

The next example also showcases Atanasov's ability to switch from a direct attack to a technical endgame.

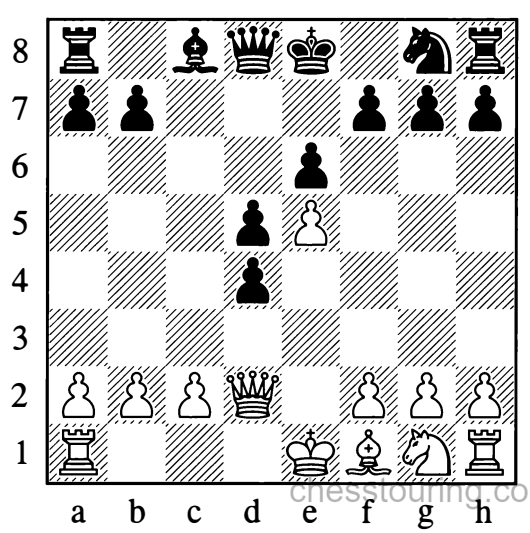
Petko Atanasov – Bogdan Lalic

Varna 1985

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.♗d2 ♘c6

5...♘e7 is the main line, while the more dynamic 5...♘h6!? also promises Black good chances.

6.♘b5 ♗xd2† 7.♕xd2 ♘xd4 8.♘xd4 cxd4



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The exchanges have left White with the makings of a positional advantage.

9.♘f3 ♘e7 10.♕xd4

Taking with the knight is also possible.

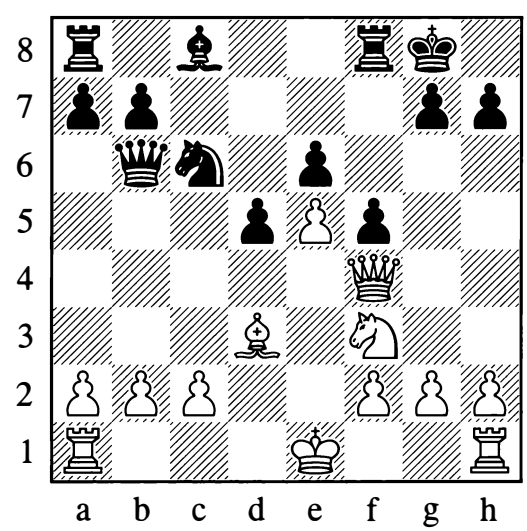
10...0–0 11.♗d3 ♘c6 12.♕g4

My own preference would be for 12.♕e3 as it controls the queenside. Also, the move ...f7-f5 would not come with gain of tempo. On the other hand, it means less danger for the black king.

12...f5

Lalic is far too strong a player to allow a ♗xh7† sacrifice in such an archetypal position.

13.♕f4 ♕b6



14.0–0–0!?

This is a brave decision. White certainly has some play if Black takes the f2-pawn, but still not everyone would feel comfortable allowing it.

14...♗d7

There is one relatively recent game with this position: 14...♕xf2 15.♔b1 ♗d7 16.c3 ♗e8! 17.♖d2 ♕b6 18.♖e1 ♗g6 19.♘h4 ♘e7 20.♗c2 ♖ac8 21.♗b3 ♕c5 22.♘f3 ♗f7 23.h4 b5 24.♗c2 ♕b6 25.♕g5 ♖c7 26.h5 h6 27.♕h4 b4 Black's attack grew too strong on the queenside and he went on to win in Meister – Ionov, Sochi 2004.

15.c3 ♖ac8?!

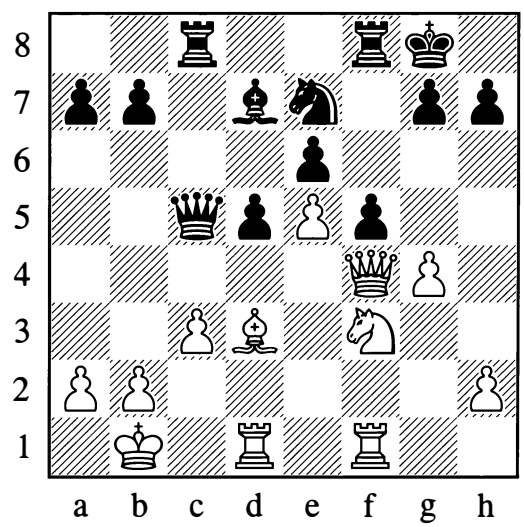
It turns out that this rook soon has to move further along the 8th rank.

16.♔b1 ♕xf2 17.♖hf1 ♕c5

Taking the second pawn with 17...♕xg2 leads to a position with White having nothing 'concrete', yet still retaining a strong initiative for the two pawns. 18.♖g1 ♕f2 19.♖d2 ♕c5 20.h4 White has strong play on the kingside.

18.g4 ♘e7

Ionov used the bishop, but Lalic transfers the knight to the kingside.



19.♘d4 ♘g6 20.♕g3 ♖ce8

Black could also keep the position more closed with 20...f4, e.g. 21.♕h3 b5 22.♘f3 ♕e7 23.♕h5 ♗e8 when White has decent play but no direct breakthrough.

21.♖de1 fxg4

Black opens up the position. Both sides must be careful from now on as any mistake can be expensive.

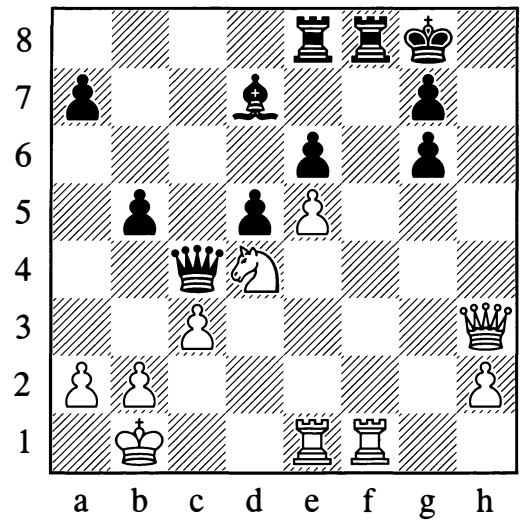
22.♗xg6 hxg6 23.♕xg4

It would be interesting to attack with 23.♖g1!? without allowing Black to swap rooks. 23...♕c4 24.♖d1 ♕c7 25.♕e3 White will have strong play on the g-file.

23...♕c4 24.♕h3 b5?

Black should have got rid of a pair of rooks to ease the attack. Better was 24...♖xf1! 25.♖xf1 ♖f8 26.♖g1 ♖f2 with a decent position.

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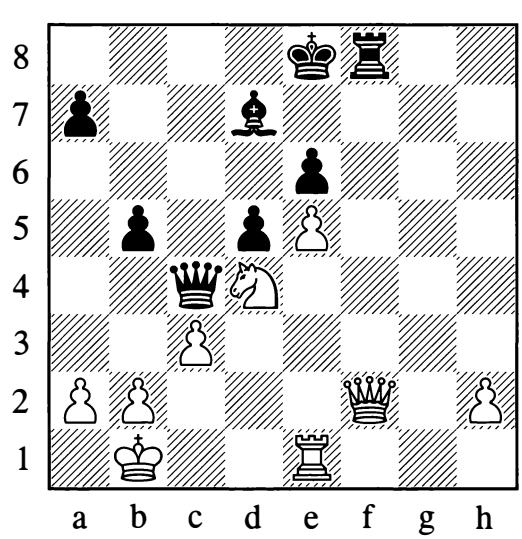
25.♖g1! ♖f2 26.♖xg6 ♖ef8

Intending either to penetrate to f1, or at the very least to guard the kingside by putting the rear rook on f7. Therefore White must not delay his attack.

27.♖xg7† ♔xg7 28.♕g3† ♔f7

28...♔h7!? Interestingly bringing White's rook to the open file gives a better opportunity to resist. 29.♕h4† ♔g7 30.♖g1† ♔f7 31.♕xf2† ♔e8 32.♕d2 b4!! White is of course much better, but the openness of his king means that the win is not automatic. 33.cxb4 ♖f1† 34.♖xf1 ♕xf1† 35.♔c2 ♕c4† 36.♕c3 ♕xa2 Black still has some drawing chances.

29.♕xf2† ♔e8



30.♕e2!

Exchanging the opponent's strong queen. Here one can see the advantage of positioning the rook on the e-file.

30...♕xe2 31.♖xe2

Such an endgame, involving the classic 'good knight versus bad bishop', is difficult to defend at the best of times. In the present position White's extra h-pawn leaves the final evaluation of the position in no doubt, although he will still need to display good technique in order to ensure the victory.

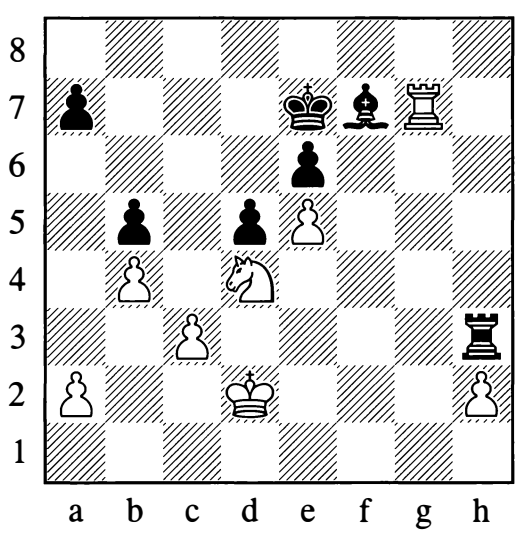
31...♖f4 32.b4

Fixing the b5-pawn. On the other hand, the white king now has less chance to invade on the queenside.

32...♔e7 33.♔c2 ♗e8 34.♔d2 ♖h4 35.♖g2 ♖h3

35...♖h7!? would have been more stubborn.

36.♖g7† ♗f7



37.♘xb5

A cleaner route to victory was:

37.♘c6†! ♔f8

37...♔d7 38.♘xa7 ♖xh2† 39.♔d3 ♔e7 40.♘xb5 ♔f8 41.♖g1 ♖xa2 42.♘d6 wins.

38.♖g2 ♗e8

38...a6 39.♘b8 d4 40.cxd4 ♖a3 41.♔c1 wins.

39.♖f2†! ♔g8 40.♘d4

40.♘xa7 is more complicated. 40...♗d7 41.a4 bxa4 42.b5 d4 43.cxd4 ♖b3 44.♖g2†

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♔f7 45.♖g3 White has good winning chances.

40...♗d7 41.♘f3

The win is no longer in doubt.

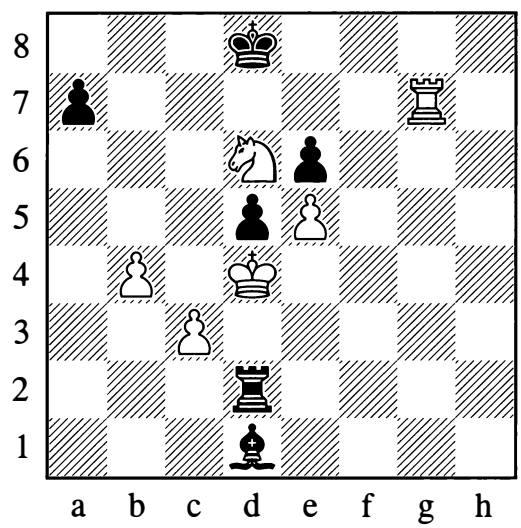
37...♖xh2† 38.♔e3 ♔f8 39.♖g1 ♖xa2 40.♘d6 ♗e8

After 40...♗h5 41.♖h1 ♗g6 42.♖f1† ♔e7 43.♖g1 ♗e8 (43...♗h5 44.♖g5) 44.♖g7† ♔f8 45.♖c7, although Black has no material disadvantage, his position is very difficult.

41.♖h1 ♗g6 42.♖h8† ♔e7

In the game the king comes under heavy fire; 42...♔g7!? was troublesome positionally but the king would not have been caught. 43.♖a8 (or 43.♖c8) 43...♗h5 44.♔d4 White is much better.

43.♖g8 ♗h5 44.♖g5 ♗d1 45.♖g7† ♔d8 46.♔d4 ♖d2†



47.♔c5

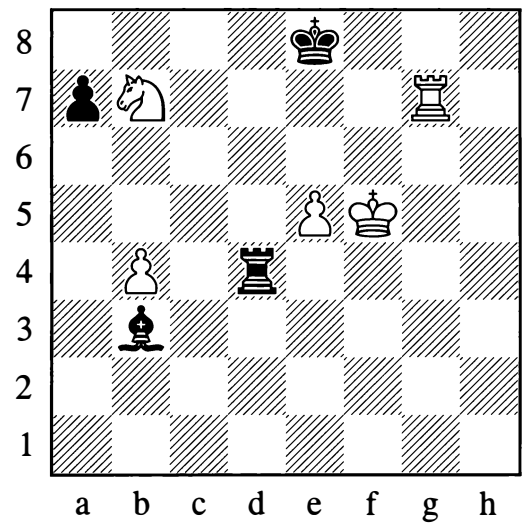
The active king decides the outcome.

47...d4 48.♘b7†!

Taking the pawn while keeping mating chances is the best practical decision.

White could also allow the d-pawn to become passed with 48.c4!? ♗f3 (48...d3 49.♘e4 ♖a2 50.♘c3 ♖d2 51.♔d6 wins) 49.♘b5 d3 50.♔d6 ♔c8 (50...♔e8 51.♘c7† ♔f8 52.♘xe6† ♔e8 53.♖e7#) 51.♘xa7† ♔b8 52.♘c6† and White checkmates.

48...♔e8 49.cxd4 ♖c2† 50.♔d6 ♖d2 51.♔xe6 ♗b3† 52.♔f5 ♖xd4



53.b5

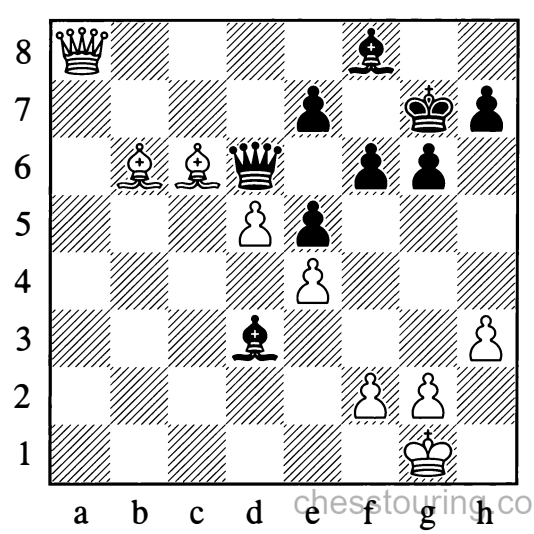
There are few pawns left on the board, but Black's king is still in big trouble. In the end the mating threats combined with the advancing e-pawn prove too much for him.

53...♗c2† 54.♔g5 ♔f8 55.♖c7 ♗b3 56.♘d6 ♖a4 57.♔f6 ♖f4† 58.♘f5 ♔g8 59.e6 ♖e4 60.♘h6† ♔h8 61.♘f7† ♔g8 62.♖c8† 1–0

The next game, taken from the following year, features some attractive endgame ideas.

Petko Atanasov – Efstathios Gazis

Greece 1986



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The position is rather simplified, but White retains an obvious advantage as his opponent's pieces are rather tied up. Still, it will not be easy to break through, since all the pawns are on one flank and the black position contains no serious weaknesses.

44.♕a5!

White threatens to trap the queen, forcing her to retreat.

44...♕b8 45.f3 h5?

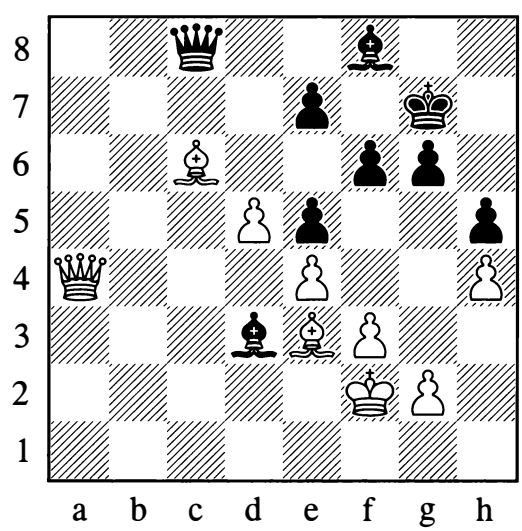
Black hopes to cage in White's king and then make a perpetual. The problem is that this move weakens his own king. It may not seem like much, but later on we will see the effects.

Instead after 45...f5!? Black's position remains tough, but I think he can live with it after 46.exf5 gxf5 or 46...♗xf5.

46.♔h2 ♕c8 47.♗c5 ♗f1 48.♔g1 ♗a6 49.♕a3 ♔f7 50.♔f2 ♗c4 51.♕a4 ♗a6 52.♗e3 ♔g7 53.h4

Black has just waited during the last few moves, but now White varies a bit.

53...♗d3



54.d6!!

With this beautiful sacrifice White aims to get closer to the enemy king.

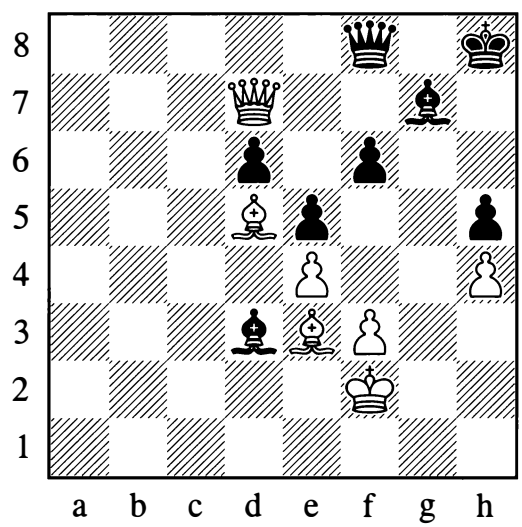
54...exd6 55.♕a7† ♔h8 56.♕f7 ♗g7 57.♗d5 ♔h7 58.g4! ♕f8

Black keeps making 'only' moves. Hopeless was 58...hxg4 59.h5 f5 60.♕xg6† ♔h8 61.fxg4 (61.h6? ♕c2†) 61...f4 62.♗b6 ♕c2† 63.♔g1 and wins.

59.♕d7 ♔h8

Black decides to wait passively. The alternative was 59...f5 60.gxh5! (after 60.exf5 gxf5 61.g5 f4 62.♗d2 ♗f5 63.♗e6 ♗xe6 64.♕xe6 ♕d8 65.♔g2 ♕c7 Black gets himself together) 60...gxh5 61.♗f7 f4 62.♕f5† ♔h8 63.♗b6 ♗h6 64.♕e6 ♕g7 65.♔e1 ♗b5 66.♗xh5 White has decent winning chances.

60.gxh5 gxh5



61.♗e6 ♗a6 62.♗f5?

White goes after the h-pawn. However, it was better to collect the d-pawn first:

62.♗d2 ♗d3 63.♗b4 ♗h6 64.♗xd6 ♗b5!!

The only move to stay in the game.

65.♕xb5

Alternatively, after 65.♕c7 ♕e8 66.♗f7 (66.♗e7!?) 66...♕a8 67.♗e7 ♗g7 68.♕b6 ♗e8 69.♗xe8 ♕xe8 70.♗xf6 White has decent winning chances with the extra pawn.

65...♕xd6 66.♕e8† ♕f8 67.♕xh5

I think White can win. At the very least it is extremely unpleasant for Black to defend.

62...♗c4 63.♗g6 ♔g8 64.♗xh5

After 64.♗h6 ♗b3 65.♔e1 ♔h8 Black is hanging on.

64...♗f7

Better was:

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64...♗h6!

Black misses a difficult route to free his position. In a long line he seems to survive.

65.♗b6

White achieves nothing with 65.♗xh6 ♕xh6 66.♕c8† ♔h7 67.♕c7† ♔h8.

65...♗f7 66.♗xf7† ♕xf7 67.♕xd6 ♕a2† 68.♔g3

68.♔g1?! ♕b1† draws, e.g. 69.♔g2 ♕c2† 70.♔h3 ♕c8† etc.

68...♗f4† 69.♔g4 ♕g2† 70.♔f5 ♕h3† 71.♔g6 ♕g3† 72.♔xf6 ♕xh4† 73.♔e6 ♕h3†

Black will have to suffer for a while, but he should be able to hold.

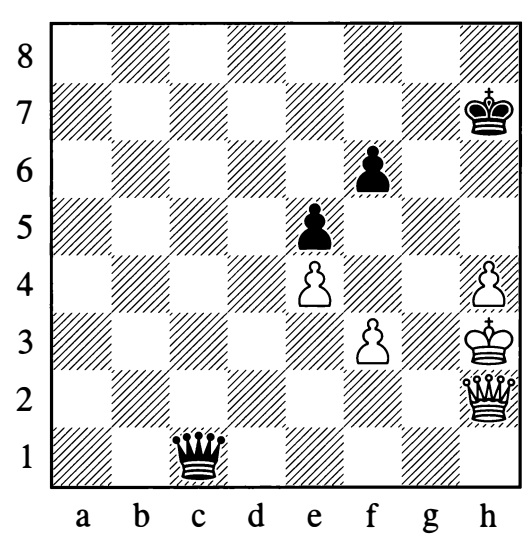
65.♗xf7† ♕xf7 66.♕xd6

After 66.♕xf7† ♔xf7 67.♔g3 f5! (67...♔g6? 68.♔g4 ♗h6 69.♗xh6 ♔xh6 70.♔f5 wins) 68.exf5 d5 Black should be able to hold the position.

66...♔h7 67.♕d2 ♕h5 68.♔g3 ♕g6† 69.♔h3 ♕h5

After 69...f5!? 70.♕d5 (70.♕g2 ♗f6) 70...f4 71.♗f2 ♕h5 Black has drawing chances.

70.♕g2 ♗h6 71.♗xh6 ♕xh6 72.♕g3 ♕c1



73.h5 ♕h1†?

With 73...♔h8! Black puts the ball into White's court. By stepping away with the king, Black avoids any nasty checks and ensures the draw, as White cannot make progress without allowing a perpetual.

74.♔g4 ♕c1 75.♔f5 ♕c8† 76.♔xf6 ♕d8† 77.♔f5 ♕d7† 78.♔g5 ♕e7† 79.♔g4 ♔h6 80.f4?

White could have won quite easily with 80.♔h3! ♔xh5 (80...♕g5 81.♕xg5† ♔xg5 is hopeless after 82.♔g3 ♔xh5 83.f4, or 82.h6 ♔xh6 83.♔h4) 81.♕g4† ♔h6 82.♕h4† exchanging down to a trivial pawn endgame.

80...♕f7! 81.♕h2

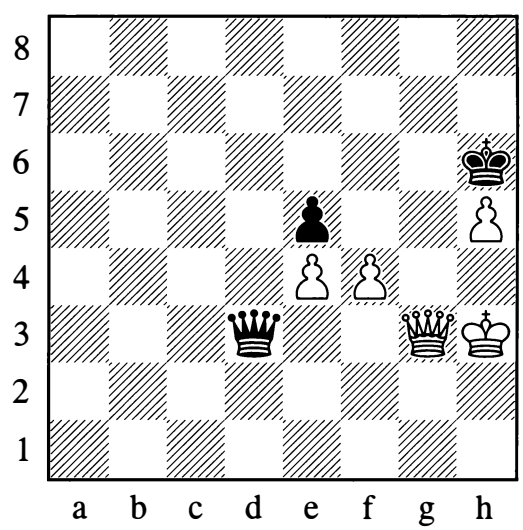
After 81.fxe5 ♕xh5† it is only a draw.

81...♕g8† 82.♔h4

After 82.♔h3 exf4 83.♕xf4† ♔xh5 Black survives.

82...♕d8† 83.♔h3 ♕d3†?

Black misses a final chance with 83...exf4 84.♕xf4† ♔xh5, when the tablebase confirms that White cannot win against correct defence.



84.♕g3 ♕f1†

On 84...♕xe4 85.♕g5† ♔h7 86.♕xe5! wins, but 86.fxe5? would spoil the win. Interestingly, in San Luis Topalov had a queen ending with h- and f-pawns against Anand's queen and king. He was winning but the Indian star escaped with the draw.

After the game continuation Black resigned, as 85.♕g2 ♕d3† 86.♔h4 wins easily.

1–0

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Finally, here is a game from the later part of his career, played in 1991.

Peicho Chonev Peev – Petko Atanasov

Bulgarian Championship, Pazardzik 1991

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 d6 3.♘f3 ♘bd7 4.♘c3 e5 5.e4 ♗e7 6.♗e2 0–0 7.0–0 c6 8.♖e1

This is the most popular line, although 8.♗e3 and 8.♕c2 are common alternatives.

8...h6

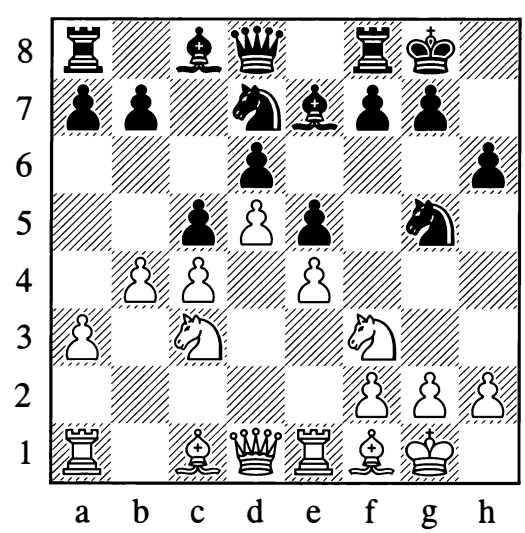
This is a sideline – more usual is 8...a6 – but Petko leaves the queenside alone, at least for the moment.

9.♗f1 ♘h7 10.d5

It was interesting for White to avoid his opponent's intended exchanging manoeuvre with 10.♗e3!? ♘g5 11.♘d2, e.g. 11...♘e6 12.♘b3 and White is somewhat better.

10...c5 11.a3 ♘g5 12.b4

Peev, who was a strong international master, does not mind that Black is exchanging pieces. He just carries out his own plan on the queenside.



12...♘xf3† 13.♕xf3 ♗g5!

One of the advantages of the Old Indian over the King's Indian is that Black has more chances to exchange this disadvantaged piece.

14.♖b1 a5!

Black effectively slows down White's play on the queenside.

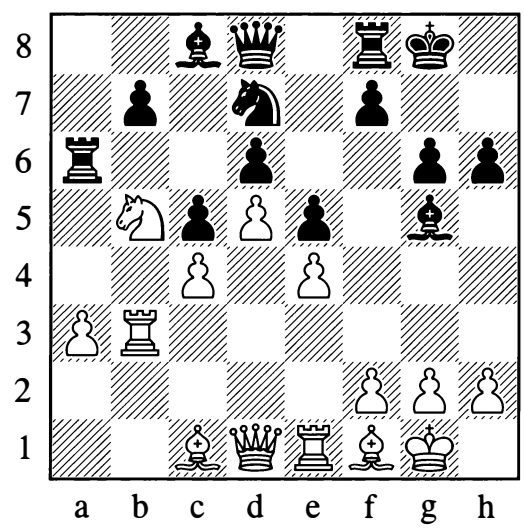
15.bxa5

From a structural point of view White would prefer to take on c5, but he was clearly reluctant to present such a fine outpost to the enemy knight.

15...♖xa5 16.♘b5 ♖a6

Usually the rook is not great in the role of defending a pawn, but in this case it keeps an eye on the a3-pawn as well.

17.♖b3 g6 18.♕d1



18...♔g7!

The standard 18...f5 looks rather loosening, but it can be played. 19.♗xg5 hxg5 (19...♕xg5? 20.♘c7 wins an exchange) 20.exf5 gxf5 21.♕h5 This appears frightening, but Black's position is resilient enough. 21...♔g7 22.♖g3 g4 23.h3 ♘f6 24.♕g5† ♔f7 and Black holds his kingside together.

At the same time, I prefer the more patient move played in the game. Black plays safe, making sure he keeps his kingside compact before revealing his intentions.

19.g3 ♗xc1 20.♕xc1 ♘f6 21.f4 ♖e8 22.♗g2

White seems to have chances to develop an initiative, so let us see how Atanasov handles the black position.

22...♖e7!

This is a good defensive move. It defends the

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f7-square in advance. Black can do this because he has room and because he has exchanged some pieces.

23.♖f3 ♗g4! 24.♖f2 ♗d7!

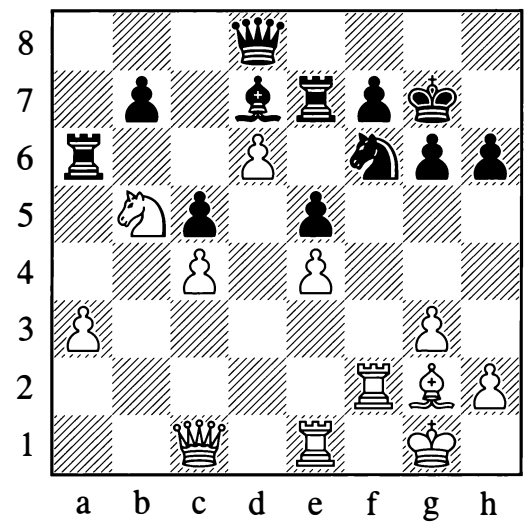
This is a trademark exchange sacrifice.

25.fxe5

After 25.f5 g5 26.h4 gxh4 27.gxh4 ♔h7 Black is very solid and can look to take over the g-file.

25...dxe5 26.d6

26.♖ef1 ♘e8! is fine for Black. White would face the unpleasant prospect of a timely exchange on b5, followed by installing the knight on its dream home of d6.



26...♖e6! 27.♘c7?!

White chooses the wrong way to win the exchange. Instead he should have got rid of his passive light-squared bishop with 27.♗h3! There follows 27...♖exd6 28.♘xd6 ♖xd6 29.♗xd7 ♖xd7 when the position is balanced. In return for the exchange Black has one pawn and a sounder structure, and his rook will find an excellent outpost on d4.

27...♖axd6 28.♘xe6† ♗xe6

Black has gained a pawn for the exchange and he controls the d-file. In addition White's c4-pawn is weak. Essentially the position is the same as that reached in the previous note, except for the presence of light-squared bishops, which clearly favours Black.

29.♖ef1?

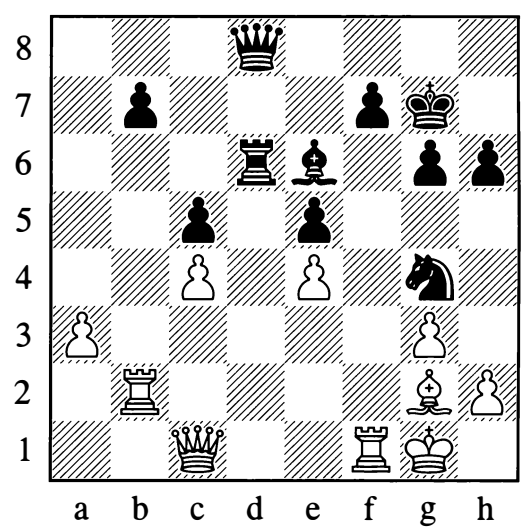
Peev was a player who thrived on the initiative, and was not so happy in defensive situations. With this move he misses Black's threat, although it must be said that White's position was already very difficult.

29.♖b2 ♖d3! This is Black's main threat, intending to install the queen on d4. 30.♔h1 ♕d4 31.♗f1 ♗xc4! 32.♖c2 (after 32.♗xd3 ♗xd3 33.h3 c4 Black wins despite being two exchanges down) 32...♗a6 33.♖xc5 ♘xe4 Black is better.

29.♗f1 ♖d4 30.♕b1 ♘g4 31.♖f3 (31.♖c2 ♖d2) 31...♖d2 32.♖d3 ♘xh2!! 33.♔h1 (White can't take the queen – 33.♖xd8?? ♘f3†) 33...♖xd3 34.♕xd3 ♕f6 Black is clearly better.

Finally, after 29.♕c3 ♖d4 30.♖b2 b6 White is in trouble as he loses a second pawn.

29...♘g4 30.♖b2



30...♖d3!

Black executes his main idea. It comes with even more force when combined with the knight on g4.

31.h3 ♕d4†

Black is simply winning. His pieces are so dominant.

32.♔h1 ♘e3 33.♖e1 ♘xc4 34.♖be2

Hopeless is 34.♖xb7 ♖xg3.

34...b5

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Petko goes for the positional win. 34...♖xg3 did the job as well.

35.♔h2 ♖xa3

By now not only are his pieces overwhelmingly powerful, but he is ahead in material as well.

36.♖d1 ♕c3

Transposing into an endgame is the simplest way.

37.♕xc3 ♖xc3

Black easily converted his advantage. The remaining moves were:

38.♖d8 b4 39.♖f2 b3 40.♗f3 ♘a3 41.♖b8 c4 42.♗g4 ♗xg4 43.hxg4 ♘b1 44.♔g2 ♖c2 0-1

Testimonials

Attila Groszpeter
Former Hungarian champion and three-time Olympiad team member:

"I played Petko Atanasov 25 years ago, but I remember that our game was very exciting from the beginning and the tension remained even in the endgame. It is nice to hear that he managed to bring up such an exceptionally strong player, the 2005 world champion Veselin Topalov. All I can say is one does not have a pupil of the highest calibre accidentally; for me it is clear that not only does Veselin have a huge talent, but Atanasov is a very, very good trainer as well."

IM Silvio Danailov
Manager of Veselin Topalov and other top players, past and present:

"Petko Atanasov was a very strong player with a very original style and way of thinking. His contribution to the career of Veselin Topalov was enormous. Together with his first coach Dimitar Sinabov, they built the base of his chess education, which was extremely important for his future success."

Veselin Topalov
World Champion and Chess Oscar winner in 2005:

"Atanasov started to train me when I was 11 years old. He was then the strongest player in Ruse, the city's only international master, so for me it was a big honour and good fortune to be included in his group. Not every child had the possibility to be trained by such a strong player at an early age. I believe I really learned a lot from him and my play reached another level of positional understanding. He taught me many plans for the opening and the middlegame. I also started to play 1.d4, a move I had never played before in tournaments. Petko Atanasov was considered to be a very talented and original player, with a very high understanding for chess. He would probably have reached the GM title easily if he had devoted more time to chess. During the time he trained me I improved my results considerably and of course the greatest success of his work was that I became the World under-14 Champion in Puerto Rico 1989 and the under-16 bronze medallist in Singapore 1990.

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There does not appear to be a direct influence of Petko Atanasov on my games from San Luis, as we stopped working together in 1991. But there is one game I believe was very characteristic of the style of play and openings that he taught me. That game is Kosic – Topalov, played in Crete 1989. Also, I would like to mention that Petko Atanasov convinced my mother that I had a future in chess, as she wanted me to continue with my education and go to some respected institute. Finally I entered the Sport School in Ruse and had more time to dedicate to chess."

Here is the game to which Topalov was referring.

Dragan Kosic – Veselin Topalov

Balkaniad Chania 1989

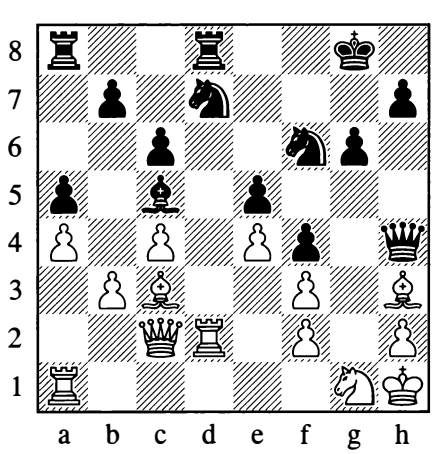
1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 d6 3.d4 ♗g4

The bishop move aims to weaken the dark squares in the centre. Topalov manages to obtain control beautifully.

4.♘c3

Topalov had another interesting win in this line the same year:

4.b3 ♘bd7 5.♗b2 ♗xf3 6.gxf3 e5 7.♘c3 g6 8.e3 ♗g7 9.♗h3 0–0 10.♕d2 ♕e7 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.0–0 ♖fd8 13.♕c2 c6 14.a4 ♘h5 15.♖fd1 f5 16.♘e2 ♕g5† 17.♗g2 f4 18.e4 ♗f8 19.♗c3 a5 20.♔h1 ♕h4 21.♘g1 ♗c5 22.♗h3 ♘hf6 23.♖d2



23...♗d4! 24.♗xd4 exd4 25.♖xd4 ♘e5

Black has lovely compensation for the pawn and went on to win in Popov – Topalov, Sofia 1989.

4...♘bd7 5.e4 e5 6.d5?!

This is premature. White should play 6.♗e2 ♗e7 7.♗e3 and only then d4-d5.

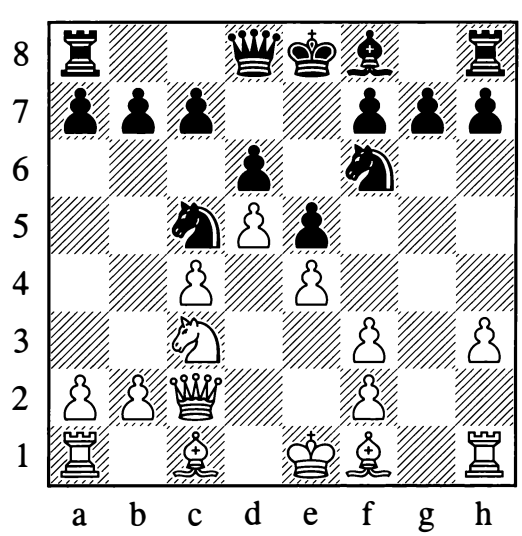
6...♘c5!

Black has serious pressure against the e4-pawn, which forces White to make a concession.

7.h3 ♗h5 8.♕c2?!

White has to undertake something unpleasant. Kosic prefers to accept double pawns rather than give up his light-squared bishop. If he was going to allow doubling the f-pawns anyway, it was better to do so without h2-h3, so as to have the h3-square for the bishop. My own preference would have been to give up the light-squared bishop by 8.♗d3.

8...♗xf3 9.gxf3



9...♘h5!

Preventing White from exchanging one of his doubled pawns.

10.♖g1

White decides to play on the kingside, although a plan involving b2-b4 was also possible.

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10...♗e7 11.♘e2

After 11.f4 ♘xf4 12.♗xf4 exf4 13.♖xg7 ♗f6 Black's domination on the dark squares is obvious.

11...c6

Many players would stabilize the queenside with a5. Instead Topalov looks for the initiative right away.

12.♘g3?!

It never looked like the f1-bishop would play a great role in the game but now it becomes pitiful. Probably 12.h4 was better, giving up the pawn for the h3-square.

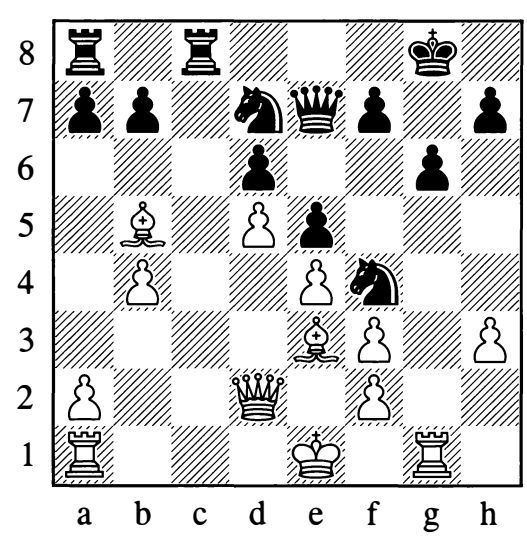
12...♘f4!

Topalov does not allow his opponent to get rid of the doubled pawns. In the next few moves he brings his remaining pieces into play.

13.♘f5 g6 14.♘xe7 ♕xe7 15.♗e3 cxd5 16.cxd5 0–0 17.b4?!

It is very difficult to recommend anything promising for White, although 17.0–0–0 at least puts the king in a safe place.

17...♘d7 18.♕d2 ♖fc8! 19.♗b5



19...♘b6!

After finishing his development, Topalov starts hurting White with energetic moves. He is not only trying to grind down the opponent on his structural weakness. Taking on h3 was fine, but the text is even more difficult to meet.

20.♗xf4 exf4 21.♖d1

21.♕xf4 ♘xd5 22.♕d2 ♕f6! wins.

21...♕e5 22.♖g4?!

White's position is miserable anyway, but this gives away two tempos.

22...h5!

This is a simple yet witty way to embarrass the rook.

23.♖g1

23.♖xf4 ♘xd5! was Black's idea.

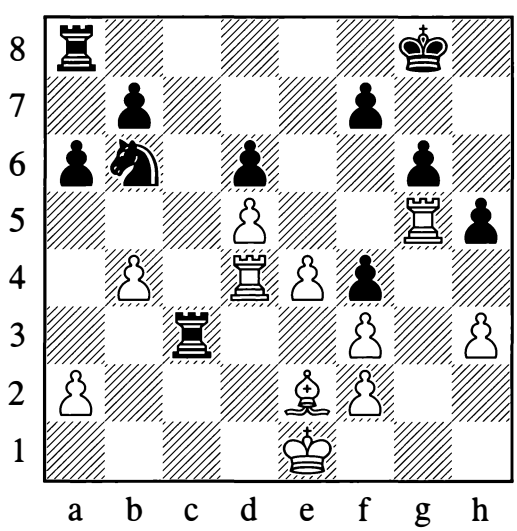
23...♖c3

23...a5!? 24.bxa5 ♖c5 was also decisive.

24.♖g5 ♕f6 25.♕d4 ♕xd4 26.♖xd4 a6!

Taking the pawn on f3 was winning as well, but White would have gained some activity.

27.♗e2



27...♘d7!

This is a textbook example of a mighty knight's domination over a feeble bishop.

28.♖c4 ♖xc4 29.♗xc4 ♖c8 30.♗e2 ♖c1† 31.♗d1 ♘e5 32.♔e2 ♖c3

0–1

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Chapter 2 Yochanan Afek

Versatility



Yochanan Afek surrounded by young chess lovers

Chess players are an intelligent and somewhat versatile group of people. Many not only play chess over the board, they also write about chess, play correspondence chess and compose chess studies. Moreover, it is not uncommon for even very strong players to become arbiters later in life.

Keres, Bronstein and Smyslov were, apart from being outstanding grandmasters, also both writers and composers. Today the best examples of this versatility among the prominent players are probably Timman and Nunn, both very strong grandmasters at their peak, but equally fine chess writers. Timman has besides this also composed a number of studies, while Nunn was the first to conduct a systematic investigation of the four-, five-, and six-man endings with tablebases, and has now started a further chapter in his career, twice being the problem-solving world champion.

While these are all famous grandmasters, fewer have heard the name of an equally fascinating player, who has made a considerable contribution to chess: Yochanan Afek. The Israeli is the only person to possess an international title at four different facets of chess, being an International Master of both classical chess and chess composition, as well as an international arbiter for both of these.

However, his versatility does not stop there. His exact range is hard to establish. Nowadays his main income comes from coaching, but for six years he was also a full time director of a municipal chess club in Israel. He has organized hundreds of tournaments of almost every kind, for players of all ages and abilities. He regularly writes articles, sells chess books, accompanies chess delegations as a coach, and gives lectures.

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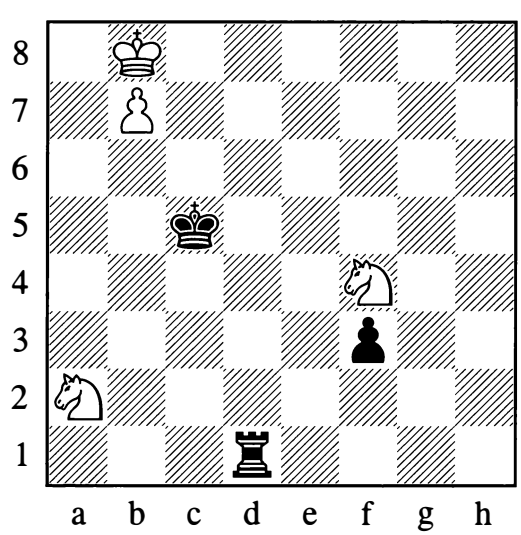
In his (presumably very limited!) spare time, he plays blitz and bullet on ICC or looks after his large collection of chess stamps.

Over the roughly twenty years I have known Yochanan, I have often witnessed the joy he gives to others during chess tournaments, especially younger players. His main way of doing this is by demonstrating studies, both his own and those composed by others.

I should probably quickly say that I am not an expert in endgame studies, and can thus only judge their (in my opinion, immense) artistic quality from the perspective of a fan of the game. I will thus leave the task of assessing Yochanan in the hierarchy of chess composers to the experts, limiting myself to sharing with the reader my respect for the man and my excitement about his work.

The majority of the studies can be found at the end of this chapter, where the reader can attempt to solve them. But before we come to that, or even get acquainted with the man, I want to present you with his first ever published study.

Shahmat 1967



White to play and win

White must save his last pawn, which he can do with a subtle king move, looking ahead to the moment of promotion.

1.♔c8! ♖b1 2.♘b4! ♖xb4

The subtleties of the king move are starting to become apparent. 2...♖h1 3.♘e6† wins for White, and 2...f2 3.b8=♕ f1=♕ 4.♘fd3† ♔c4 5.♕c7† leads to mate.

3.♘d3† ♔d4 4.♘xb4 f2 5.♘c2†! ♔e4 6.b8=♕ f1=♕ 7.♕b7†

After this forced sequence it is clear that Black cannot avoid losing the queen.

7...♔e5 8.♕e7† ♔d5 9.♘e3†

White wins.

Yochanan's parents were among the few Jews that survived World War II in Eastern Europe. They later escaped before the Iron Curtain fell down across the continent. They emigrated illegally to Israel in 1947, were expelled to Cyprus by the British mandate, married there, were later released to return to settle in Israel at the creation of this nation in 1949, and lived there for the rest of their lives. Yochanan and his sister were both born in Tel Aviv.

How did you start playing chess?

"I studied the rules at the age of seven or eight from the father of a childhood friend who is still proud of this almost fifty years later. However, I only started to play seriously when I was fourteen, in school and in a Tel Aviv youth centre. Around the same time I started to compose some rather naïve chess problems. My first compositions were published when I was fifteen."

When did you decide to become a chess professional?

"I started to make some living out of chess as a teenager giving chess lessons in the Municipal club of Tel Aviv (directed by my own chess mentor, Moshe Czerniak), and in

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elementary schools. I was involved with the Municipal club for a total of 43 years. I decided to become a chess professional (not necessarily as a player) when I was a student and ever since it has been my only occupation. Unlike all other examples I was a chess organizer and writer first and became a professional player only in my late thirties."

Would you like to have invested more time on your chess education as a teenager?

"If I had to start my career once again I would certainly invest more time on my chess education and less time playing blitz in the Emanuel Lasker chess club. However in the Israel of the late 1960s there was hardly any serious chess education and terms such as prophylaxis or pawn islands I only heard for the first time much later. I would define my style in those days as 'improved coffee house'. In fact the two dominant qualities of my generation were great fighting spirit (a common Israeli trait in general) and an unconditional love for the game."

Yochanan stayed in my apartment in Kecskemet a few times and he kept showing his studies to my pupils. He never gets tired or bored if someone thinks for a very long time, he always waits patiently. He found an ideal audience in (later) Grandmaster Zoltan Gyimesi. Zoltan was deeply fascinated by the studies and the two of them became good friends, so that not only my family but also Zoltan used to wait impatiently for Yochanan's next visit.

Who inspired you most as a composer?

"My love of the game I owe to the late IM Moshe Czerniak (1910-1984) with whom I was in close contact for almost two decades. He also was a great enthusiast of endgame studies and several of his pupils, my friends in the youth centre in Tel Aviv such as Amatzia Avni, Gady Costeff and Ofer Comay, became famous composers. The latter was also a three-time world champion for solving.

Actually I was fortunate to have the Israeli composer Hillel Aloni watching my first steps and patiently explaining (like he did with many others) in numerous lengthy letters how a decent study should look. His identical twin brother Yoel did the same with my checkmating problems. A few years ago we all celebrated their seventieth birthday in Israel."

Tell me a bit about the status of chess composition in Israel.

"Israel is actually a superpower in chess composition. There are excellent and experienced composers there for almost any genre, winning numerous prizes everywhere. The Israeli top solvers have won the world team championship five or six times. Unlike in 'real' chess they are mainly Israeli-born, but they have always been reinforced by newcomers from Europe - mainly from the Eastern Bloc. Israel's great new hope is a teenager named Evgeny Bourd, a rising mega-star of mate problems."

Going through Yochanan's studies I got the impression that he is like a music composer who creates many lovely songs with charming melodies, but rarely composes operas. This could perhaps be a result of his working methods.

"Usually I do not plan my studies. It is more like spontaneous bursts of inspiration. If I plan it, usually nothing comes out of it. I get ideas from over-the-board games but am also stimulated

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by looking at other studies. It is often the trigger. Occasionally I compose a study while playing a tournament, especially after a particularly painful defeat. That is my way to keep sane. GM Alon Greenfeld recently said: 'I wish you would lose more often...'"

Computers have changed competitive chess hugely in the last fifteen years. They have also changed the job of teaching chess or writing about it. But computers have no sense of aesthetics, so you might wonder how much they have changed the process of chess composition and chess composition in general. Afek explains:

"Computers have changed composing thoroughly, mainly in four ways:

1) Powerful playing programs are extremely efficient in checking the soundness of endgame studies and solving programs check in seconds most of the other genres (mate problems) for correctness.

2) The database of 70,000 studies (the majority of what has ever been published) edited and currently updated by the Dutch composer Harold van der Heijden is a great instrument to check originality and to prepare articles by any key one desires, be it by period, theme, composer etc.

3) The tablebase that can tell the result of all five- and six-piece positions is also very helpful, however it can also be misused for composing 'instant studies' that are actually created by the silicon monster.

4) The Internet helps to organize composing tourneys and to publish their results and awards much faster."

How do you take it, if they cook one of your studies?

"If they cook one of my studies I immediately hope that it is still repairable, and mostly I am lucky to save it sooner or later. In some cases I have to compromise with a lesser version, while in others it might dramatically be improved. In the process of the correction I might discover a new idea so the old study might even have a newborn brother.

In a few cases, not too many though, I have to kiss the hopeless study goodbye and farewells, as you know, are usually sad, a small death, as the poet says."

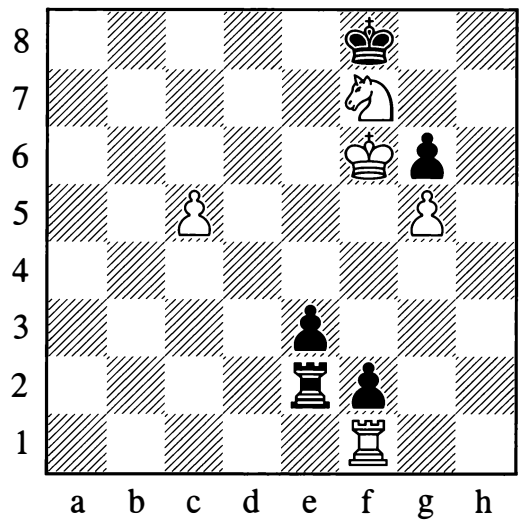
Afek is an example of an artist who is not relying on his artistic sensitivity alone, but has to put in a great amount of work as well. The following study from Martin 1994/5 was cooked, but the aesthetic content was saved by changing the initial moves of the study, as well as a slight tweak to the starting position.

It can be hard and laborious work to make the most out of a study. Many additional opportunities need to be checked and long variations worked out with clockwork precision, to ensure that the studies are correct and that no additional solutions exist. Often the study will need to be elaborated or slightly altered.

The following study is a good example of how computers can put hard questions to an otherwise sensational study.

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1st Prize, Martin 1994/5



White to play and draw (almost!)

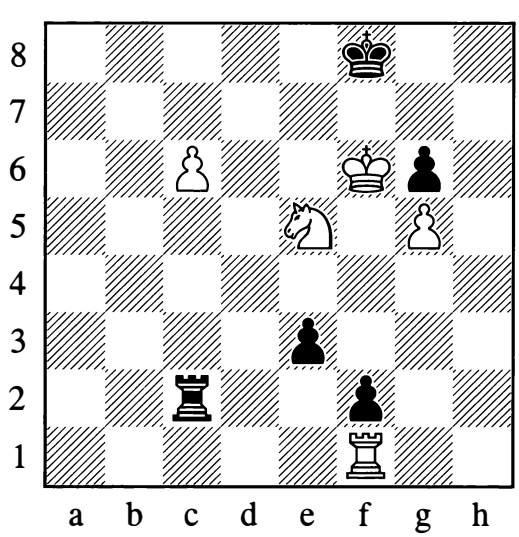
White fights against the soon-to-be promoted queen by combining several motifs. Unfortunately there is a sensational winning move for Black on move 2.

1.c6

Not 1.♖h1? f1=♕† 2.♖xf1 ♖f2† winning.

1...♖c2 2.♘e5

And not 2.♘d6? e2 3.♖xf2 e1=♕ 4.♖xc2 ♕e7† 5.♔xg6 ♕xd6†. To save you deciding whether the position is a positional draw or not, I will let you know that White's rook falls to a check on the next move.



2...e2?

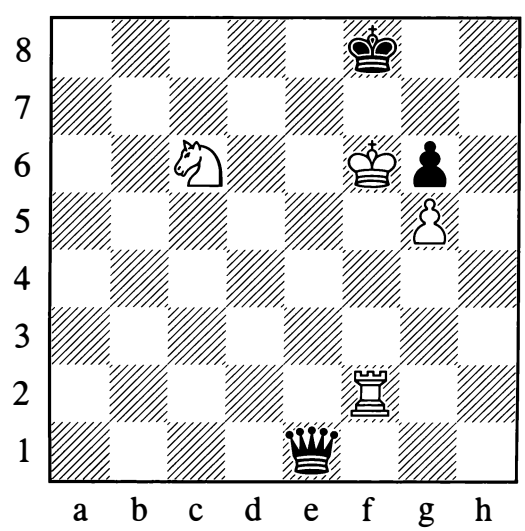
2...♖c1!! It looks like this wonderful move refutes the study, but I will still show the remainder of the piece as I like the finish very much.

3.♖xf2 ♖xc6†

Another possibility is 3...e1=♕ 4.♘xg6† ♔e8 (after 4...♔g8 5.♘e7† ♔h8?? 6.♖xc2 White wins) 5.♖xc2 ♕e4 6.♖c5 ♕d5. These moves are my own. They are not forced, but they are not weaker than others and they lead to a nice stalemate.

4.♘xc6 e1=♕

Now the rook has so many squares to move to, but only one will do.



5.♖f3!!

This is the only move which, at least temporarily, saves the rook.

5.♖b2? ♕c3† wins the rook, as does 5.♖f4? ♕e3 6.♖c4 (6.♖f1 ♕d3) 6...♕d3. Also unsatisfactory is 5.♖h2? ♕f1† 6.♔xg6 ♕f7† 7.♔h6 ♕g7† 8.♔h5 ♕h7†.

Slightly more resilient, but still ultimately insufficient, would be:

5.♖a2? ♕e8!

This enables Black to win the rook. Alternatively, after 5...♕f1† 6.♔e5 ♕f5† 7.♔d4 ♕f4† 8.♔c5 ♕xg5† Black wins as the white pieces are far from the kingside. However, please note that if the white pieces

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could gather in front of the g-pawn it would be a draw. Miles once drew against Portisch like this, in Tilburg 1981.

6.♘e5

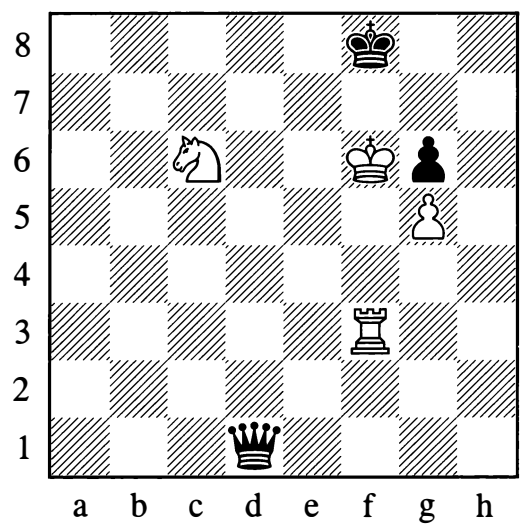
6.♖a6 ♕c8! attacks the rook while threatening mate on f5.

6...♕e7† 7.♔xg6 ♕e6†

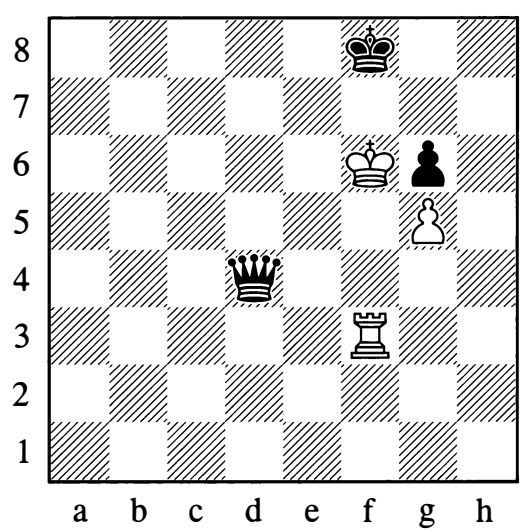
Once again, the rook is lost.

5...♕d1

Black threatens a checkmate in addition to capturing the rook.



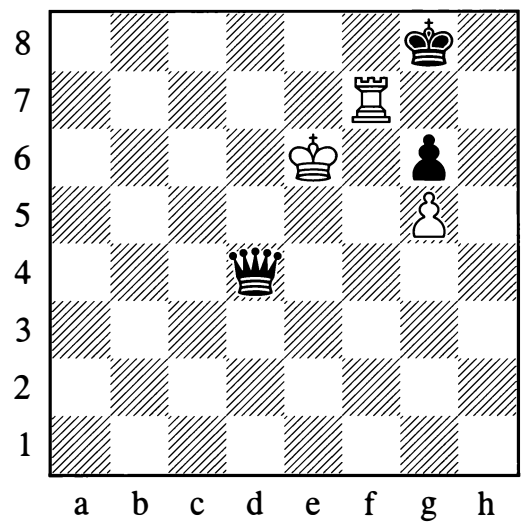
6.♘d4!! ♕xd4†



7.♔e6†!!

7.♔xg6† gives practical chances, but can ultimately be refuted by 7...♔g8!. Going to the e-file, on the other hand, would squander the win. If the attacking king is cut off, against b- and g- pawns with the defending king in front of the pawn, only with the pawn on the third rank can the attacking side win.

7...♔g7 8.♖f7† ♔g8



It looks like this is the end for White.

9.♖f8†!

The lovely check forces a perpetual or a stalemate.

In this study we can see the effect of the new age of computer programs, as the final position can be checked by the Nalimov tablebase (although it did not exist at the time of composition). Also the computer recommended the refutation.

Afek's new and improved version can be found in the 'Selected Studies' section on page 62 (study No. 6).

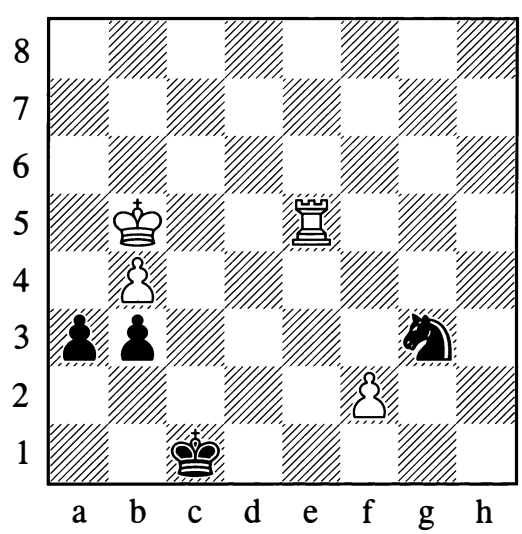
Yochanan composed a neat study for the special tourney celebrating the 1100 year anniversary of the Hungarian tribes arriving at the Carpathians basin (see page 63, study No. 7). His father belonged to the Hungarian-speaking Jewish community of Transylvania, but unlike his father, Yochanan does not speak the language. Nevertheless he managed to build many friendships in Hungary with the limited vocabulary he does possess, including with my sons who could only speak Hungarian

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at the time (they now speak English as well).

Whenever he has visited Hungary he has taken the time to visit other composers, such as Gyorgy Bakcsi and Laszlo Lindner (featured in another chapter of this book, beginning on page 260). Talking about his study for *Koranyi MT 1999*, he says: "I would like to add a study to the article with a similar motif, which shows similar elements but is much more original (the subtle prophylactic king moves to the corner to avoid future forks). It is also an opportunity to commemorate my dear friend and fine composer Attila Koranyi whom I used to visit whenever I came to Budapest."

2nd Prize, Koranyi MT 1999



White to play and win

1.♔a4

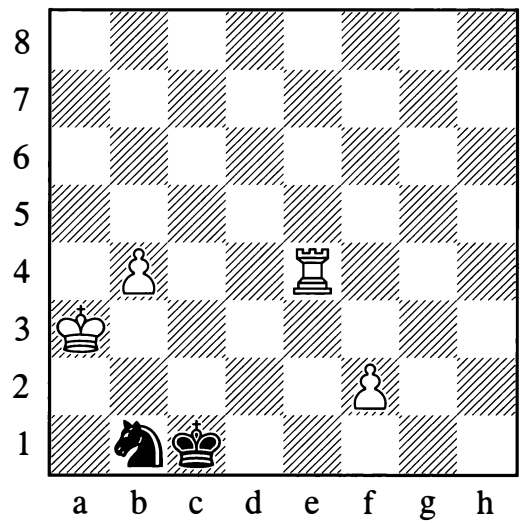
White goes after Black's pawns – he has no choice.

1...b2 2.♔xa3! ♘e4!!

A great effort, but to no avail. This is a sweet way to block the e-file and force the rook to an unfortunate square. Bad luck for Black though, as even this is not enough.

3.♖xe4 b1=♘†!

The knight promotion wins the rook.



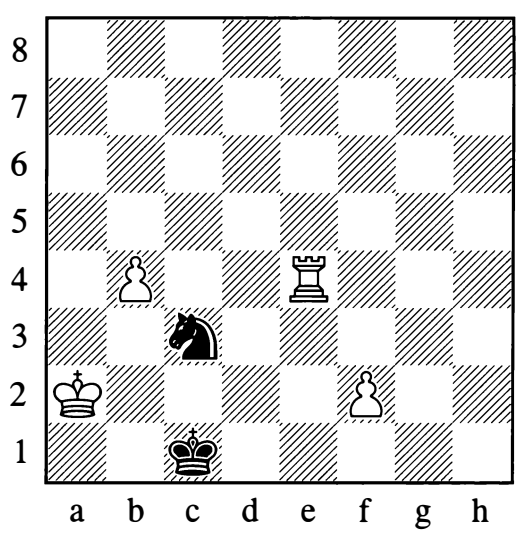
4.♔a2!

The only square which avoids harmful knight checks.

Black draws after 4.♔b3? ♘d2† 5.♔a4 (5.♔c3 is also not good enough after 5...♘xe4† 6.♔d4 ♘xf2 7.b5 ♘g4 8.b6 ♘f6) 5...♘xe4 6.f4 (6.b5 ♘xf2!) 6...♔d2 7.b5 ♔e3 8.f5 ♔f4.

Also insufficient is 4.♔a4? ♘c3† 5.♔a5 ♘xe4 6.f4 (6.b5 ♘xf2! Black has to take the pawn but he has time for it, and holds the draw after 7.b6 ♘d3 8.b7 ♘e5) 6...♔d2 7.f5 ♔e3 8.b5 ♔f4 9.b6 ♘d6 10.f6 ♔g5 (the king could have gone back to the d5-square as well) 11.f7 ♘xf7 12.b7 ♘d8! when Black draws.

4...♘c3†



5.♔a1!!

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The king has to hide in the corner to avoid the nasty knight.

5...♘xe4 6.b5!

Not 6.f4? ♘d6.

6...♘d6 7.b6 ♔d2 8.f4 ♔e3 9.f5

One of the pawns promotes.

Afek's mother was born in Poland, but spent the time of the war in Kazakhstan. Yochanan speaks neither Polish nor Russian. His parents studied Hebrew in Cyprus in order to facilitate their communication. It is a personal regret to him that he does not speak Russian, considering its usefulness in the chess world.

What are your strong and relatively weak points as a composer?

"As a composer I probably used to have many weak points which I managed to fix more or less successfully over the years. I am even curing my tendency of not being so prolific. I am more active than ever right now."

You became very active after moving to Amsterdam; did you think of composing more when you made this decision?

"I moved to Holland mainly because I consider this country to be the leading chess country in the continent. Not necessarily by the number of chess events, clubs and enthusiasts (and it's huge compared to its size) but mainly in terms of chess culture, the approach to the game and to the players. No doubt this general atmosphere inspires me too. Curiously I received my permission to stay based and conditional on my 'profession' as a study composer. For a while I wondered if it would be considered legal for me to create novelties in the openings or perhaps I might risk going to jail! Seriously, probably my best chess move ever was to move to Amsterdam. Nevertheless I still keep close daily ties with my numerous friends in Israel."

Who is your favourite composer?

"My favourite endgame study composer of all time is the Russian Mark Liburkin. I was influenced by his unique style in many ways, but I also sympathize with the great romanticist who passed away prematurely (at the age of forty-three). My current favourite composers are the Czech Mario Matous and the Russian Yuri Bazlov, who follows the same way of expressing beauty through simplicity, purity and economy but with much more precision."

Do you know how many endgame studies you have composed and have you made other kinds of compositions as well?

"Besides my approximately 200 studies, I composed, mainly in the seventies and eighties, about 100 problems in various genres including direct mates. I especially did well in self-mates and frequently I even used to transfer those suicidal tendencies to my own games..."

Do you keep a record of how many prizes you have won?

"I counted them especially for you. To date I have won 58 prizes, 19 were first prizes. This figure does not include honourable mentions and commendations, nor other genres."

When I asked him to send me his studies, he sent around 120. I find it interesting that maybe he felt in some way he did not reach the required level. This is something that I myself am not qualified to judge, although I would certainly find it difficult to criticize his compositions.

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How useful is it for an over-the-board players to spend time with endgame studies?

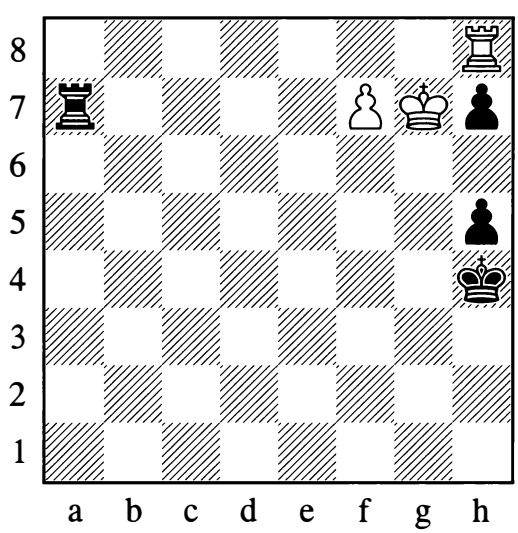
"A player can profit from knowing endgame studies in many ways, but in my opinion the most significant one is about creativity. It will certainly help him to find unusual solutions to unusual problems. Chess is full of such exceptional situations, and therein lies its charm. How else would you explain how it has survived for so long?"

How much does the difficulty of solving your studies matter?

"Difficulty is just one criterion to evaluate an endgame study, which perhaps is crucial for the solver but not necessarily for the artist. No less important are the variety of ideas, the originality, Black's counterplay, the economy and the flowing of the moves up to the highlight. The harmony between all these components makes the general impression. As the late great Israeli problemist Shlomo Seider once told me: A study should not be just a collection of strong or difficult moves. There must be an underlying motif that brings an overall harmony, so that the solution as a whole is greater than the sum of its individual constituent moves."

The following is one of Afek's finest studies.

4th Prize, Themes 64 TT 1976



White to play and win

1.♖g8!!

This remarkable move has a function, which is not easy to spot. It is quite incredible that Black is actually in zugzwang.

1.♖b8? ♔g3 2.♔g8 ♖xf7 3.♔xf7 h4 is a draw.

Going out with the king would be premature: 1.♔f6 ♖a6† 2.♔e5 ♖a5† 3.♔d4 ♖a4† 4.♔c3 ♖a3† 5.♔b2 ♖f3 6.f8=♕ ♖xf8 7.♖xf8 when Black draws thanks to the h7-pawn.

1...h6

White's initial move stopped Black's king from coming out to the g-file. So, not 1...♔g5 because 2.♔h8†! wins.

After 1...♔h3, aiming to push his pawns, Black loses quickly. 2.♔f6 ♖a6† 3.♔g5 ♖a5† 4.♔h6 ♖a6† 5.♔xh5 wins.

Finally, looking at 1...♖b7 helps us appreciate what a concept White's first move initiated. Moving a bit with the rook is not the right remedy against the zugzwang. The rook on the b-file looks far enough away, but it is still too close. 2.♔f6 ♖b6† 3.♔e5 ♖b5† 4.♔d4 ♖b4† 5.♔c3 ♖f4 6.f8=♕ ♖xf8 7.♖xf8 ♔g3 8.♔d3 (the king approaches just in time) 8...h4 9.♔e2 h3 10.♖g8† and wins.

2.♔f6!

White must find the right way to lose a tempo after Black's waiting move.

2.♔g6?

The most common way to lose a tempo – triangulation – does not work here, as it allows the black king to leave the h-file.

2...♖a6† 3.♔h7? ♖f6!

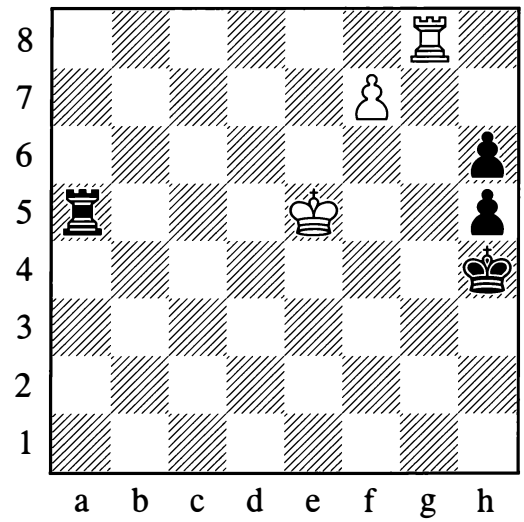
3...♖a7? fails to 4. ♔g7!.

4.♔g7 ♔g5 5.♖a8 ♖xf7† 6.♔xf7 h4

Black escapes with a draw.

2...♖a6† 3.♔e5 ♖a5†

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4.♔e4!

White continues his remarkable journey. Approaching the rook on the a-file would drive White's king too far away.

4...♖a4† 5.♔f3 ♖a3† 6.♔g2 ♖a2†

Playing for a stalemate with 6...♖g3† would not help, as 7.♔f2! wins.

7.♔h1 ♖a1† 8.♔h2!

White must block the check properly. After 8.♖g1? ♖a8 9.♖g7 ♔h3! 10.♔g1 h4 Black holds.

8...♖a2† 9.♖g2 ♖a8 10.♖g7 ♖a2†

Once again the stalemating attempt 10...♖g8!? does not work, thanks to 11.♖g4†! winning.

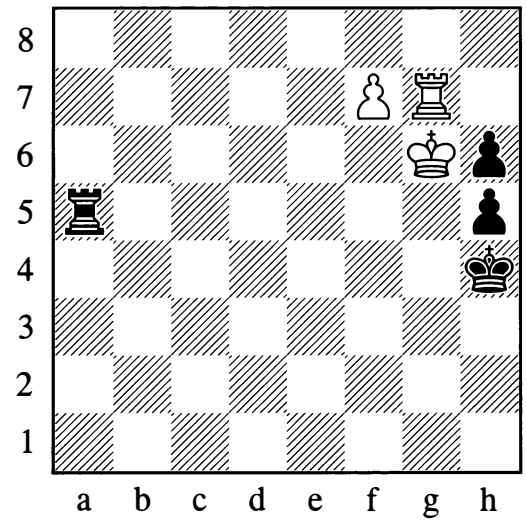
Also insufficient is 10...♖f8 11.♔g2 (not 11.♔g1? ♔h3) 11...♖g8 12.♔f3 (12.♖g4†!? is also good enough: 12...♖xg4† 13.♔f3 ♖g1 14.♔e2 ♖g2† 15.♔f1 with a winning ending) 12...♖xg7 13.f8=♕. Black's pawn would need to be two ranks further advanced to secure a draw.

11.♔g1 ♖a1†

If 11...♖a8 then White wins with 12.♔g2 ♖a2† 13.♔f3 ♖a8 14.♔f4.

12.♔f2 ♖a2† 13.♔f3 ♖a3† 14.♔f4 ♖a4† 15.♔f5 ♖a5†

No better is 15...♖a1 16.♔g6 ♖g1† 17.♔h7 ♖f1 18.♔g8 ♔h3 19.f8=♕ ♖xf8† 20.♔xf8 and White wins.



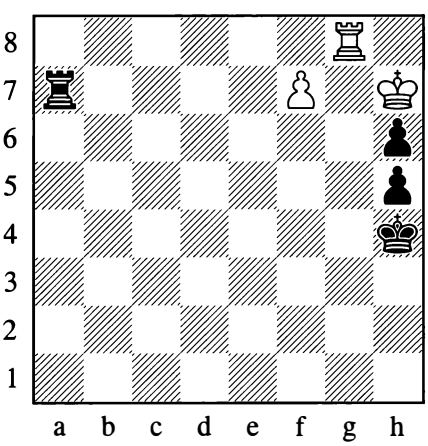
16.♔g6 ♖a8

We should also consider:

16...♖a6† 17.♔h7 ♖a8 18.♖g8

White can also take on h6 and transpose to the main line.

18...♖a7



19.♔g7!!

White can win by setting up a zugzwang. Quite remarkably the position is the same as after Black's first move, except that now it is Black's turn to move. It took 18 moves to lose the tempo!

19...♖b7 20.♔f6 ♖b6† 21.♔e5 ♖b5† 22.♔d4 ♖b4† 23.♔c3 ♖f4 24.f8=♕ ♖xf8 25.♖xf8

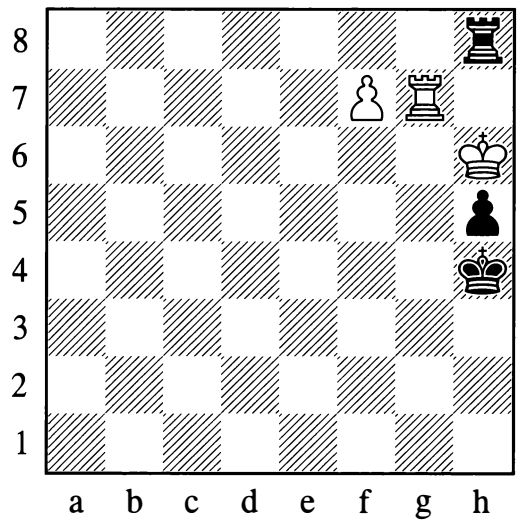
Regardless of Black having both h-pawns, White wins as his king is close enough.

17.♔xh6

17.♖g8? ♖a6† 18.♔h7 ♖f6 draws.

17...♖h8†

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18.♔g6!

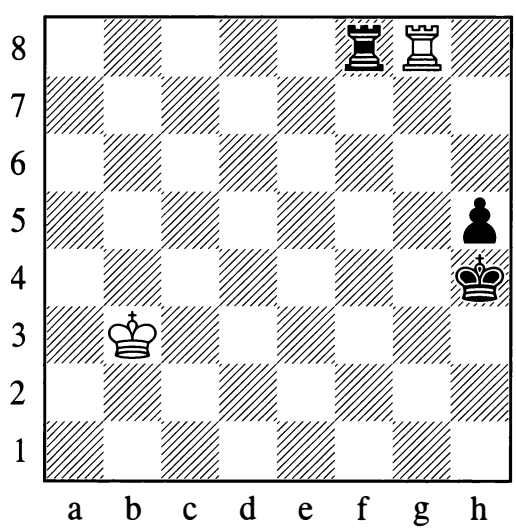
Accuracy is still required! Instead 18.♖h7? leaves us with the following interesting lines:

a) 18...♖f8? 19.♖g7! wins. (But not 19.♔g6 ♔g4 20.♖xh5 ♖xf7, or 19.♔g7 ♖xf7† 20.♔xf7 ♔g4!.)

b) 18...♖c8? loses as well. The rook is not as far away as it needs to be. 19.♔g6 ♖c6† (19...♔g4 20.♖xh5) 20.♔g7 ♖c7 21.♔f6 ♖c6† 22.♔e5 ♖c5† 23.♔d6 ♖c8 24.♖g7 wins.

c) 18...♖b8! The rook has to go at least this far (18...♖a8! would draw in a similar way). Now after 19.♔g6 ♖b6† 20.♔g7 ♖b7 21.♔f6 ♖b6† 22.♔e5 ♖b5† 23.♔d4 ♖f5 Black holds.

18...♖a8 19.♖g8 ♖a6† 20.♔f5 ♖a5† 21.♔e4 ♖a4† 22.♔d3 ♖a3† 23.♔c2 ♖a2† 24.♔b3 ♖f2 25.f8=♕ ♖xf8



26.♖xf8

White now wins, because the h7-pawn does not exist anymore.

26...♔g3 27.♔c2 h4 28.♔d2 h3 29.♔e2 h2 30.♖g8†

White wins, as there will be no pawn to cover the lethal check along the h-file.

I rate this study very highly, one of the best I have ever seen.

"Thanks. GM David Gurgenidze (former world champion for composing studies) called this one 'Etyud Veka' – Study of the Century; but perhaps he exaggerated a bit just to make me, his good friend, happy."

I remember roughly 15 years ago Yochanan brought a Richard Clayderman cassette for my wife. She started to like the melodies. Yochanan found it funny that those pieces captivated her so much. Now going through quite a number of his studies reminds me of that music a bit. However there is one big difference. By now I can remember none of those melodies, but his most artistic masterpieces stay with me forever.

Can you talk about your solving career?

"I am actually a retired solver with a FIDE master title so I rarely take part in such competitions. It has never been much more than an occasional pastime."

Which were your best results as a solver?

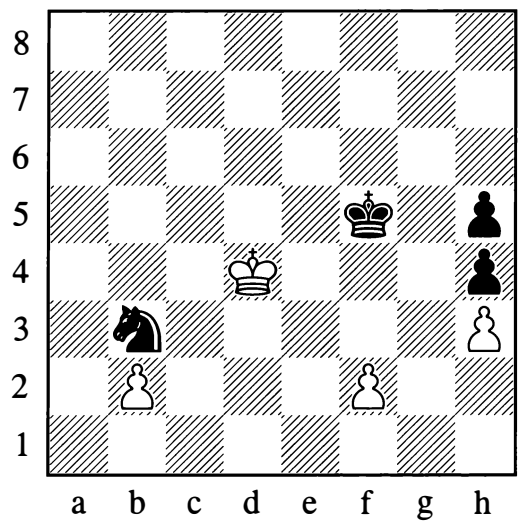
"I won a couple of solving contests over the years, but the highlights of this short-term 'career' were the silver and the bronze medals in the world team championships in Krk (Croatia) 1977 and Canterbury (England) 1978 respectively, together with my team mate Uri Avner who was in fact the main force behind those successes."

Let me show a very nice endgame! Yochanan had a role in it.

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Rozentalis – Afek

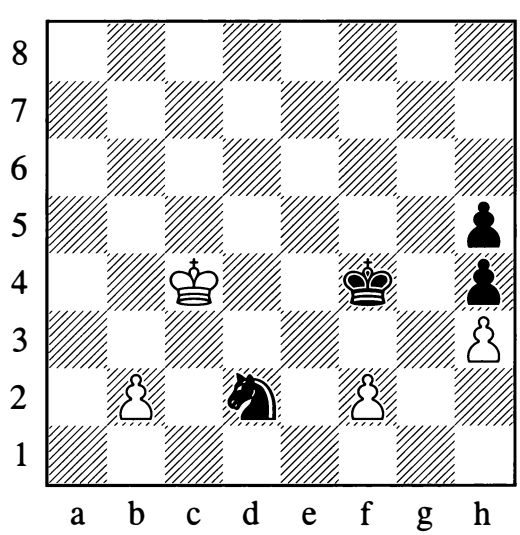
Tel Aviv 1989



1.♔d5!

Not 1.♔c4? ♘d2† 2.♔d5 ♘e4 and Black wins. And if 1.♔e3 then 1...♘c5 2.b4 ♘a6 3.b5 ♘c7 4.b6 ♘d5† decides the game.

1...♔f4 2.♔c4 ♘d2†



3.♔d4!!

This is a very nice move. Black cannot sacrifice the knight for the b-pawn. Insufficient would be:

3.♔d5? ♘e4 4.b4 ♔f3!

White is in zugzwang.

5.♔d4 ♘f6 6.b5

After 6.♔e5 ♘d7† 7.♔d6 ♘b6 Black wins easily.

6...♘d7!

Now Black can sacrifice the knight for the b-pawn. Instead after 6...♔xf2? 7.b6 ♘d7 8.b7 ♔g3 9.♔e3 ♔xh3 10.♔f3 White holds. The pawn has to be blockaded on b6 in order for Black to win.

7.♔d5 ♘b6† 8.♔c5

Or 8.♔c6 ♘a4.

8...♘c8!

And Black wins.

3...♘f3†

Alternatively 3...♘b1 only draws after 4.♔d3 ♔f3 5.♔c2 ♔xf2 6.♔xb1 ♔g3 7.b4 ♔xh3 8.b5 ♔g4 9.b6 h3 10.b7 h2 11.b8=♕ h1=♕† 12.♔c2!. This is the only move, but it is good enough to secure half a point.

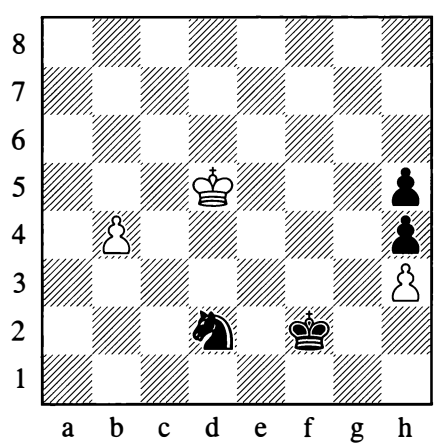
However, Black could have achieved a truly study-like win with:

3...♔f3!

Here we have two main lines. Less important is 4.♔d3 ♘e4 5.b4 ♘xf2† 6.♔d4 ♘xh3 7.b5 ♘f4 8.b6 ♘e6† 9.♔d5 ♘d8, and Black wins.

a) 4.♔d5 gives Black two routes to victory:

a1) 4...♔xf2 5.b4



5...♘b1!! 6.♔c4 ♔g3 7.♔b3 ♔xh3 wins.

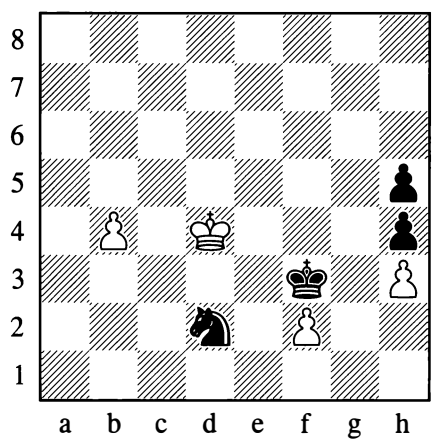
a2) Alternatively, there is:

4...♘b3 5.♔c4 ♘a5† 6.♔d5

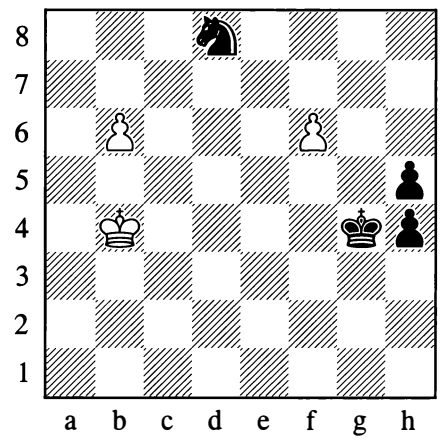
6.♔b5 ♔g2 7.f4 ♔xh3 8.f5 ♘b7 9.♔c6 ♔g4 10.f6 ♔f5 wins.

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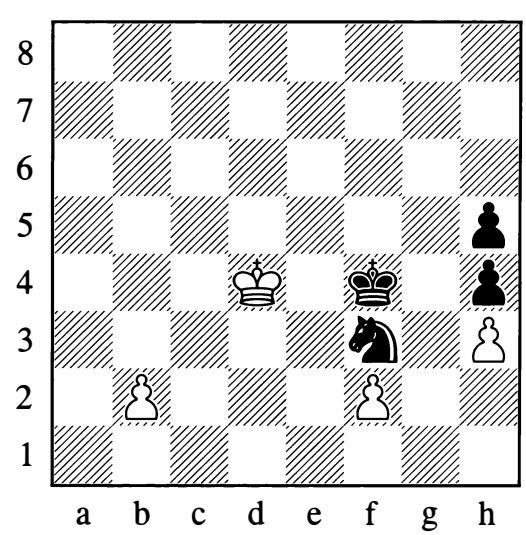
6...♔g2 7.b4 ♘b7 8.♔c6
8.f4 ♔xh3 9.f5 ♔g4 10.f6 ♘d8 11.♔d6 h3 12.♔e7 ♔f5 wins.
8...♔xh3 9.♔xb7 ♔g4 10.b5 h3 11.b6 h2
Black wins.
b) 4.b4



This is the more resilient defence.
4...♔g2!!
The alternatives both lead to a draw:
4...♘e4 5.b5 ♘d6 6.b6 ♔g2 7.♔c5 holds easily.
4...♔xf2 5.b5 ♘b3† 6.♔d5 ♘a5 7.b6 ♔g3 8.♔c5 (but not 8.♔e4? ♔xh3 9.♔f3 ♔h2, when Black wins) 8...♔xh3 9.♔b5 ♘b7 10.♔c6 ♔g4 (or 10...♘d8† 11.♔c7) 11.♔xb7 h3 12.♔c8! h2 13.b7 h1=♕ 14.b8=♕ The queen ending is a theoretical draw.
5.b5
The alternatives are no better:
5.♔d3 ♘f3 6.b5 ♔xh3 7.b6 ♘e5† 8.♔d4 ♘d7 9.b7 ♔g4–+
5.f4 ♔xh3 6.f5 (Black also wins after 6.b5 ♘b3† 7.♔e3 ♔g3 8.f5 h3 9.f6 h2 10.f7 h1=♕ 11.f8=♕ ♕c1†) 6...♘f3† 7.♔d5 ♔g4 8.f6 (8.b5 ♔xf5) 8...♘g5 9.b5 h3 Black promotes with a check and wins.
5...♘b3† 6.♔c4
Or 6.♔d5 ♔xh3 7.b6 ♘a5 8.♔c5 ♔g4 9.♔b5 ♘b7 10.♔c6 h3 11.♔xb7 h2 12.♔c8 h1=♕ when White can resign.
6...♘a5† 7.♔b4 ♘b7 8.f4 ♔xh3 9.f5 ♔g4
An equally good alternative is 9...♔g2 10.f6 ♘d8 11.b6 h3 12.b7 h2 13.f7 h1=♕ 14.f8=♕ ♕b1† 15.♔c3 ♘xb7 winning.
10.f6 ♘d8 11.b6



The unfortunate placement of the white king will be his undoing.
11...♔f5 12.f7
Or 12.b7 ♔xf6 13.b8=♕ ♘c6†.
12...♘xf7 13.b7 ♘d8
Black wins.
Let us now return to the game continuation of 3...♘f3†:



Unfortunately for Black, this is not quite good enough to achieve the desired result.
4.♔d5 ♔f5
After 4...♘g5 Black can promote at the same time and have the extra piece, but this is still not enough to win. 5.b4 ♘xh3 (5...♘e4 6.b5

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♘c3† 7.♔c4 ♘xb5 8.♔xb5 ♔f3 9.♔c4 ♔g2 10.f4 ♔xh3 11.f5 ♔g4 12.f6 h3 13.f7 h2 14.f8=♕ h1=♕ is a draw) 6.b5 ♔f5 7.b6 ♘f4† 8.♔d6 h3 9.b7 h2 10.b8=♕ h1=♕ 11.♕f8† ♔g4 (or 11...♔g5 12. ♕d8†) 12.♕g8† and White draws.

5.b4

White's b-pawn is strong enough to hold.

5...♔f6 6.b5 ♔e7 7.♔c6

It is not too late for White to blunder with 7.b6?? ♔d7.

7...♘d4†

After 7...♔d8 8.♔b7 the position is equal.

8.♔c5 ♘e6† 9.♔c6 ♘d4† 10.♔c5

½–½

This endgame could almost have been a study, but of course it was a real competitive game, played in the tournament in which Yochanan scored his first IM norm.

Let's talk about your over-the-board career. Can you spot some milestones in it and talk about the tournament of your life?

"I became an International Master in 1993 at the age of 41. In that year I also scored my best tournament result in Israel when I won the Dov Porath Memorial ahead of almost all the top players in my native country at that time. The Paris Championship 2002 was no doubt the highlight of my entire chess career. It was a special present for my personal golden jubilee. I scored 7½/9 (+6 =3) after playing six grandmasters in a row. I still see it as a kind of a miracle that apart from the 8th round I was never in a worse position and everything eventually went my way. To judge by the thunderous applause I received at the prize giving, I guess I gave fresh hope to many veterans who were still seeking their own highlight. It was Bastille Day on the Avenue Vagram and while I was lifting the huge eight kilogram trophy (accompanied by the largest cheque I have ever held), some lunatic tried to assassinate President Jacques Chirac in the neighbouring Champs-Élysées during the traditional parade. Two rather unusual events at the very same time."

Do you know anybody else who made his first grandmaster norm after his 50th birthday?

"I know some players who were awarded the GM title when they were even older after winning the World Seniors Championship. Klovans and Petkevitch to name two. I think that Mark Tseitlin also became a GM after fifty but I cannot tell when he scored his first norm. In my case the norm is just a pleasant souvenir unless they plan to send me another one for my 60th birthday."

Here is the game that secured him his first grandmaster norm!

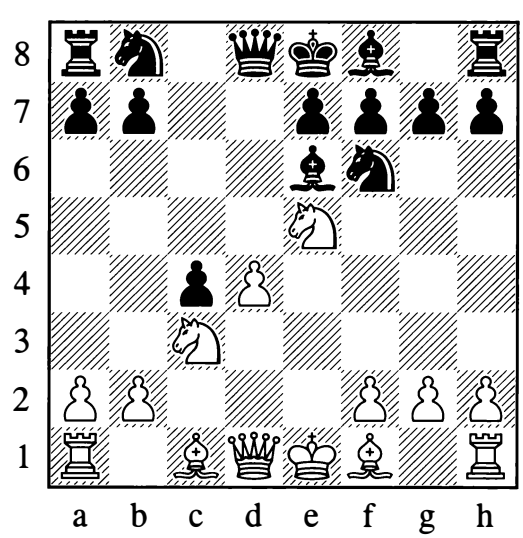
Ziaur Rahman – Yochanan Afek

Paris 2002

1.♘f3 d5 2.d4 c5 3.c4 dxc4

Zsuzsa Polgar, Gabor Kallai and I have spent some time together analysing this side variation of the Queen's Gambit Accepted.

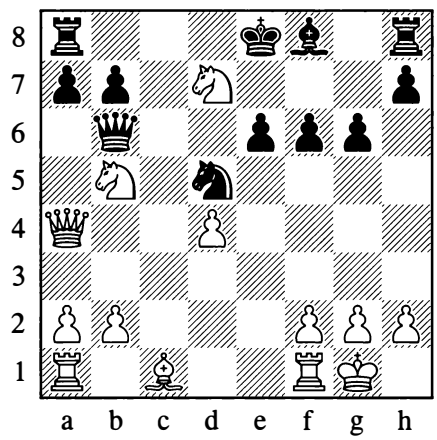
4.e3 cxd4 5.exd4 ♗e6 6.♘c3 ♘f6 7.♘e5



7...♘c6

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Interestingly, when he needed to draw to achieve his final IM norm, Yochanan also employed this variation. On that occasion the continuation was 7...g6 8.♕a4† ♘bd7 9.♗xc4 ♗xc4 10.♕xc4 e6 11.0–0 ♗g7 12.♕b4 ♕b6 13.♘b5 ♗f8 14.♕c4 ♘d5 15.♕a4 f6 16.♘xd7



16...♔xd7 Not everyone would have the confidence to play in such an original fashion when needing a draw for a final norm! 17.♗d2 ♕a6 18.♕b3 ♗b4 19.♘c3 ♗xc3 20.bxc3 ♖ac8 21.a4 ♖c7 22.♖fe1 ♖hc8 23.♕b1 ♔e7 24.♕e4 ♔f7 25.♖ab1 ♖e7 26.♖b3 ♖c4 27.♕h4 ♔g8 28.♕g3 b6 29.♖b5 ♕b7 30.♕d6 ♔f7 31.h4 ♕c6 32.♕b8 ♕c8 33.♕d6 ♕c6 34.♕b8 ♕c8 35.♕d6 ½–½ Martin – Afek, Oakham 1993.

8.♘xc6 bxc6 9.♕a4 ♕d7 10.♗xc4 ♗xc4 11.♕xc4 g6

Kallai had a difficult draw with 11...e6, which was our solution to the problem then.

12.0–0 ♗g7 13.b3 0–0 14.♗b2 ♖fd8

In this type of position I would prefer to move the knight as it opens the diagonal. For instance, after 14...♘e8!? 15.♘e4 ♘c7 (15...♕d5) 16.♖ac1 ♘e6 Black is doing alright. But Yochanan decides to leave it on f6 for a while.

15.♘a4 ♕d6 16.g3 ♕d5

Also interesting was 16...♘g4!? 17.♖fd1 ♘h6.

17.♖ac1 ♖ac8 18.♖fe1 e6 19.♕e2 ♕f5 20.♖c4 h5 21.♖ec1 h4 22.♘c5 hxg3 23.hxg3 ♘d5

23...♕h3 is an alternative.

24.♘e4 ♘f6 25.♘d2 ♗h6?!

Black forces matters. It is rather risky as he has just a narrow path to follow. 25...♕b5!? may have been more promising.

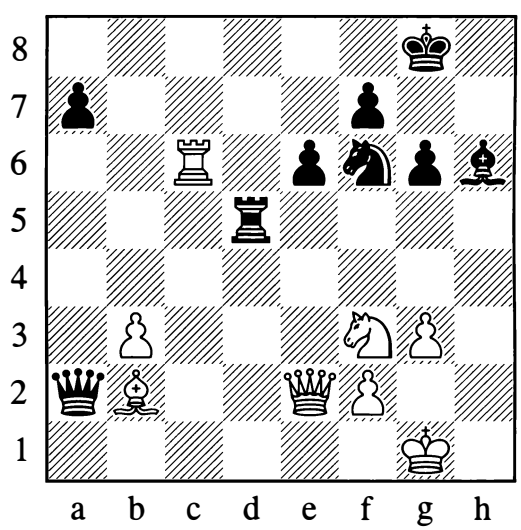
26.♖xc6 ♖xc6 27.♖xc6 ♕a5

This decentralization of the queen is rather risky.

28.♘f3

In the case of 28.♖xe6 fxe6 (there is also 28...♕xa2 29.♖xf6 ♕xb2 30.♕e7 ♖f8, when Black has chances to survive) 29.♕xe6† ♔h7 30.♘c4 ♕xa2 31.♕e7† ♗g7 32.♕xd8 ♕b1† Black escapes with a perpetual check.

28...♕xa2 29.d5 ♖xd5



30.♖xe6!?

Black needs to have good nerves to allow such a move with so much riding on the result.

30...♕xb3!

Such a cool-headed move! White seems to be able to take a piece in two different ways, but Yochanan just takes a pawn. The move brings the queen into play as well.

31.♔g2?

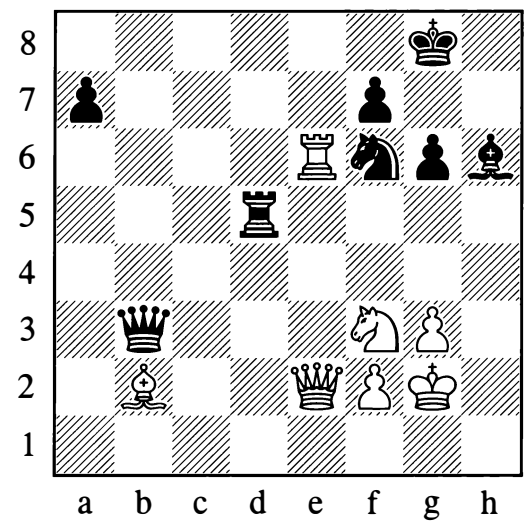
After 31.♖a6 ♘d7 Black holds.

If 31.♖xf6 ♕d1† 32.♕xd1 ♖xd1† 33.♔g2 ♗g7 is a study-like equal position.

Alternatively after 31.♗xf6? ♖d1† 32.♔h2 (a different king move is met by a different

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capture, just like in a study: 32.♔g2 fxe6!) 32...♕xe6 (32...fxe6 33.♘d4) 33.♕xd1 ♕xf6 Black even wins.



31...♖d2!

This is a nice counterpunch. Many players would settle for consolidation with 31...♘d7.

32.♖e8†?!

The best chance was 32.♘xd2! ♕xe6 33.♕xe6 fxe6 34.♘c4. White has decent drawing chances as there are so few pawns on the board. He can aim to reduce the total even further by subsequently carrying out g4 and f4-f5.

32...♘xe8 33.♕xe8† ♗f8 34.♗c1?

This loses without resistance. Relatively best would have been 34.♘xd2 ♕xb2 35.♘e4 ♕d4, although even here I think that Black has enough to win.

34...♖d1 35.♗e3

Equally hopeless was 35.♗h6 ♕b4 36.♘g5 ♕e7.

Having achieved a winning position, Yochanan concludes the game efficiently.

35...♕c4 36.♘g5 ♕d5† 37.♘e4 ♖e1 38.g4 ♕e6!

It is practical to exchange queens. It is all over now.

39.♔f3 ♕xe8 40.♘f6† ♔h8 41.♘xe8 f5 42.♗d4† ♔g8 43.♘f6† ♔f7

0–1

What are your strong and weak points in over-the-board chess?

"My strong points as a player are perhaps my fighting spirit and my imagination. This can partly cover up the big holes in my opening knowledge and unpolished positional sense."

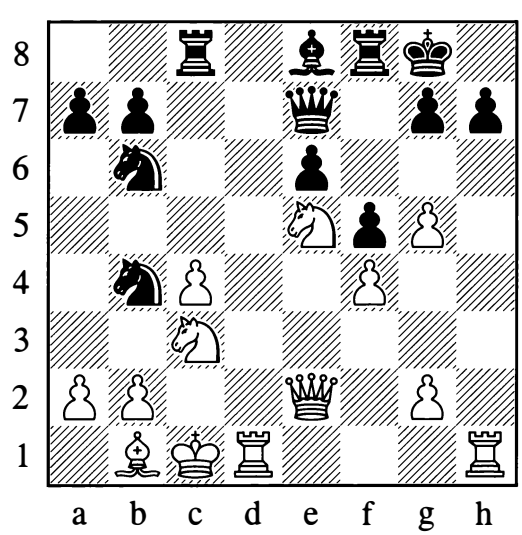
Whom did you find to be the most impressive player among your opponents?

"As the most active Israeli player ever I met numerous impressive opponents. But, if I have to name just one, it is perhaps the Lithuanian GM Eduardas Rozentalis for the inventive and creative defence he displayed, being a piece down, in our endgame from the Maccabia tournament 1989 (*see page 50*). Incredible!"

Here are two of Afek's combinations:

Yochanan Afek – Merijn van Delft

Apeldoorn (rapid) 1999

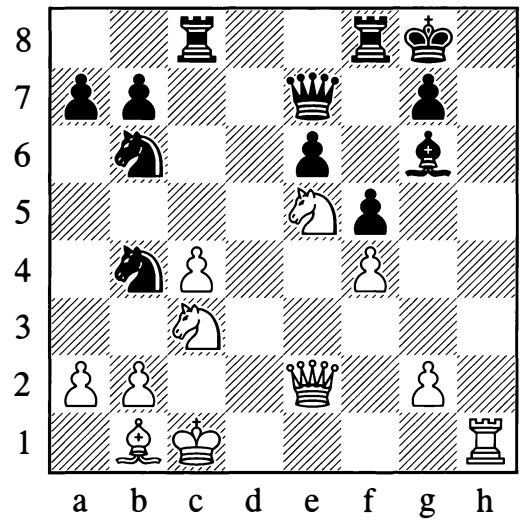


1.♖xh7!

This is a lovely sacrifice. Black allowed it because White cannot double on the h-file. Actually the queen cannot reach the h-file. But White can win without the queen.

1...♔xh7 2.g6†! ♗xg6 3.♖h1† ♔g8

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4.♖h8†! 1-0

The second rook sacrifice brings down Black.

Very few players have won a world championship tournament ahead of Kasparov. In 1993 Afek defeated one of the rare few to have accomplished this feat. Would the reader care to guess the identity of this mystery player?

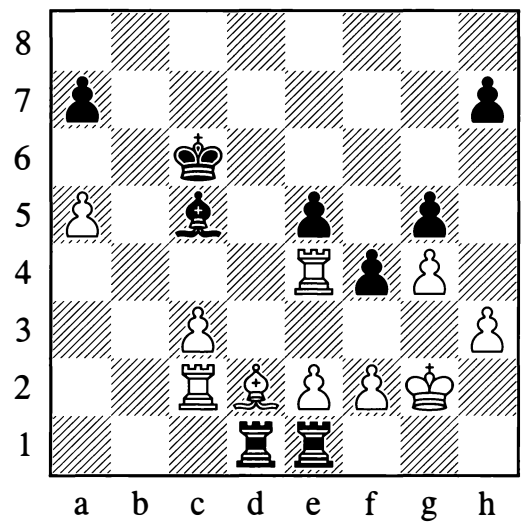
You may think Yochanan managed to beat Tal, who won the 1988 world blitz championship. In fact he almost did, in a blitz tournament in Tel Aviv 1992. He obtained a winning position against the great wizard from Riga, but being a rook up he got so excited that he lost concentration and blundered a whole queen. Besides, the player who was beaten by Yochanan won the world title in a competition with classical time limits.

So could his victim in the game have been the young Kramnik? Actually Yochanan's opponent was already 35 years old when he lost to him, and besides, Kramnik only plays incredibly strong super-tournaments.

I can reveal who it actually was: the world cadet (under-16) champion in Wattignies (France) in 1976. The Israeli player, Nir Grinberg, won this event ahead of a dozen future GMs, including Garry the great. As for Grinberg himself, he virtually retired from chess very early, before even obtaining the Master title.

Nir Grinberg – Yochanan Afek

Dov Erlich Memorial 1993



It is easy to see that Black has compensation for his pawn, but how can he exploit it?

1...♖g1†! 2.♔f3

2.♔h2? ♖h1† 3.♔g2 ♖dg1† 4.♔f3 ♖xh3 is mate.

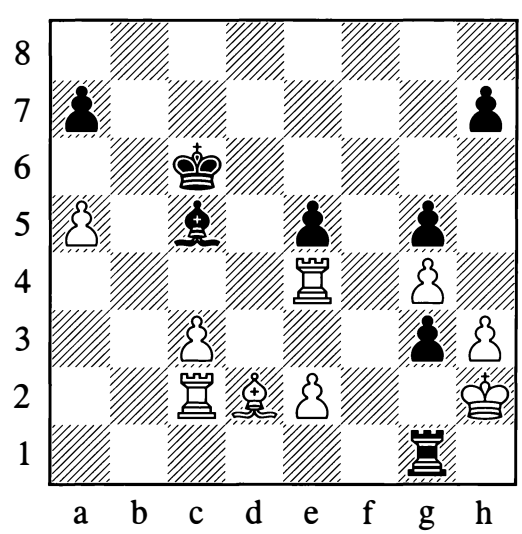
2...♖g3†!!

This forces checkmate.

3.fxg3 ♖f1† 4.♔g2 ♖g1†! 5.♔h2

5.♔f3 ♖xg3 is also mate.

5...fxg3#



It is not often that one is able to deliver checkmate with a pawn!

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Let's see another highly imaginative game.

Yochanan Afek – Arthur Kogan

Israel Cup (rapid) 1999

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3

Yochanan usually plays the Alapin.

2...d6 3.d4

Against Black's other second moves, he usually transposes to the Alapin with 3.c3.

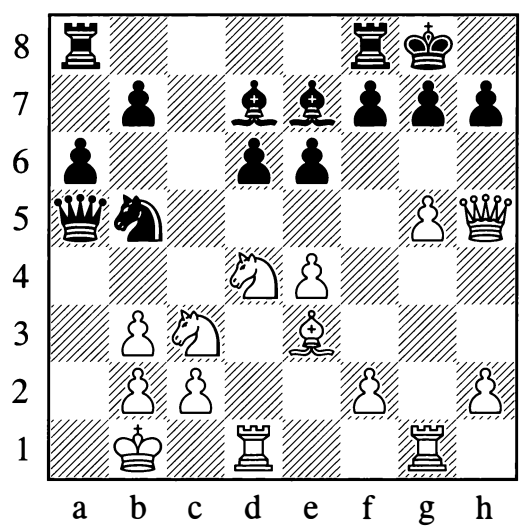
3...cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e6 6.♗c4

He likes to play the Sozin.

6...♗e7 7.♗e3 0–0 8.♗b3 ♘c6 9.♕e2 a6 10.0–0–0 ♗d7 11.♖hg1 ♘a5 12.g4 ♘xb3† 13.axb3 ♕a5 14.g5 ♘e8 15.♔b1 ♘c7

Up to this point both players had made standard moves. Black's last is not common, although one can easily see its purpose.

16.♕h5 ♘b5



17.♗d2!?

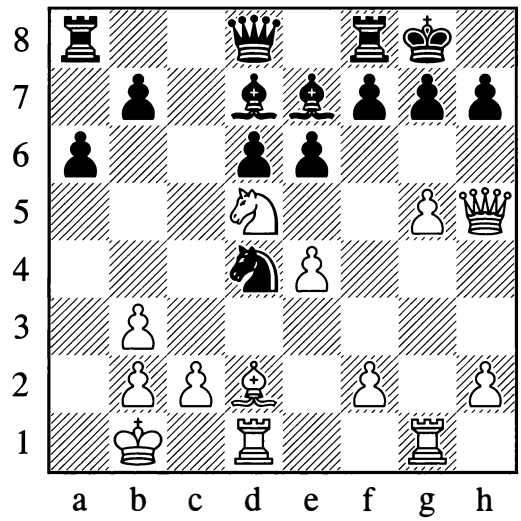
Setting up batteries can be useful not only in endgames.

17...♘xd4?

Black is too optimistic. Better was 17...♕c7!?.

18.♘d5 ♕d8

Alternatively, after 18...♕b5 19.g6! fxg6 20.♘xe7† ♔f7 21.♕xh7 White is much better.

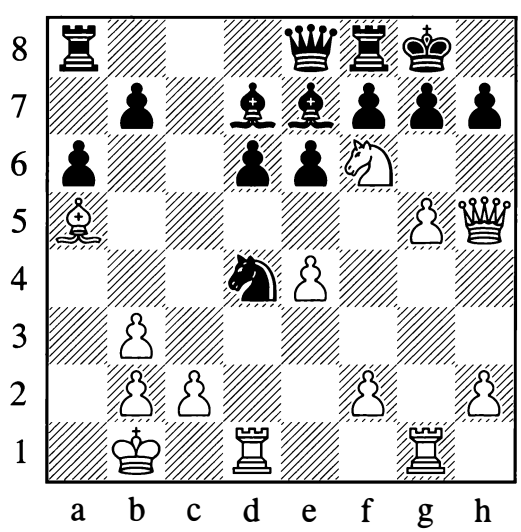


19.♗a5!! ♕e8

I suspect it was only at this point that the young Israeli Grandmaster noticed that 19...♕xa5 could be refuted by 20.g6!!, opening the fifth rank and threatening to win the queen on a5 with a knight check.

Instead Kogan was probably banking on 20.♘xe7†?, which would have led to an unclear position after 20...♔h8 21.♖xd4 ♕d8 (21...♖ae8!?) 22.e5 (22.g6? h6–+) 22...♕xe7 23.exd6 ♕d8 24.♖h4 h6.

20.♘f6†!



1–0

White checkmates in a maximum of four more moves.

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Who is your favourite player?

"My favourite active players are currently the Israeli grandmasters Emil Sutovsky and Artur Kogan. I admire their uncompromising styles and their courageous approaches to the game that have yielded numerous brilliancies and tournament victories. I am happy to be personal friends with both of them and proud they once belonged to the Israeli youth squad, which I was in charge of for years. They also like endgame studies but in that they are hardly unique among titleholders."

Afek's strongest victim was Vaganian, who made it to the World Championship Candidates matches.

Yochanan Afek – Rafael Vaganian

Netherlands Team Ch (playoff), Breda 2001

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5

Interestingly, Afek's opening repertoire can be divided into systems that he picked up from his trainer, Czerniak, and those which he chose for himself. The Advance variation is his usual choice against the French, and falls into the second of the above categories.

3...c5 4.c3 ♘c6 5.♘f3 ♘h6

He also beat the young Stellwagen after 5...♘ge7 in this line. That game was also very interesting, and resembled study positions at some moments.

6.♗xh6

This leads to double-edged positions, and seldom results in a draw.

6...gxh6 7.♗d3

White scores best with 7.dxc5.

7...f6

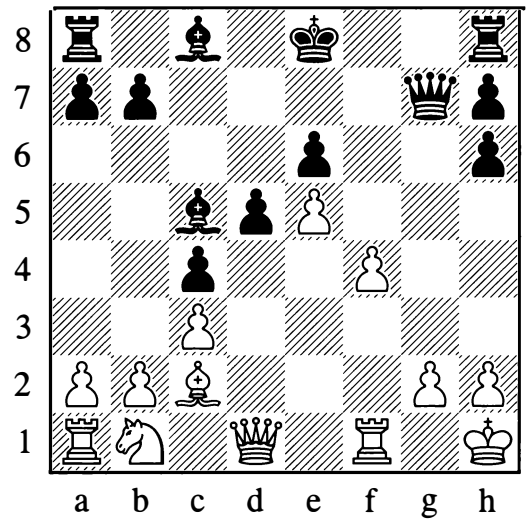
Interesting would be 7...♕b6!?.

8.0–0 fxe5

Alternatively 8...♗d7!? could be tried.

9.♘xe5 ♘xe5 10.dxe5 c4 11.♗c2 ♕g5 12.f4 ♗c5† 13.♔h1 ♕g7

The Armenian grandmaster plays in original fashion.



14.b4 cxb3?!

White is better developed and Black's king does not have the most reliable shelter, so it would probably have been wiser to keep the position closed.

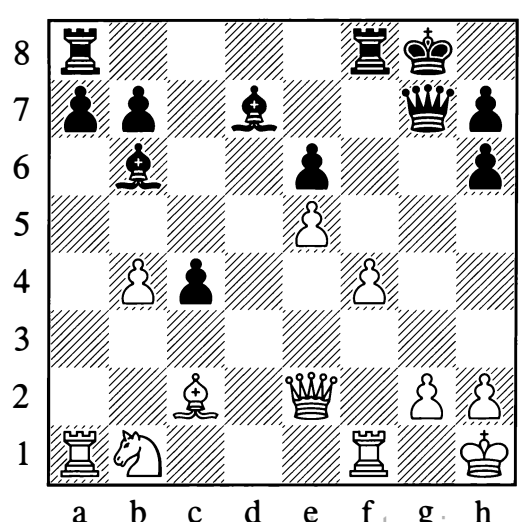
15.axb3 0–0 16.♕e2

This improves the queen while preventing ...♗e3.

16...♗d7 17.b4! ♗b6 18.c4!

Black's king is not as safe as he would like it to be. That is why White should strive to open the position, without regard for the opponent's bishop pair.

18...dxc4



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19.♖a3!

Imaginative play here as well.

19...♔h8 20.♘d2 ♖f7

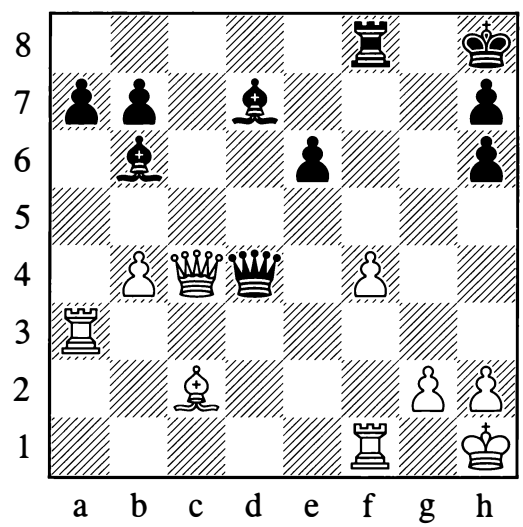
White is better, so Vaganian decides to ease the pressure with an exchange sacrifice. 20...♗b5!? or 20...♖g8 were alternatives.

21.♘e4 ♖af8

21...♗c6!? could also be considered.

22.♘f6 ♖xf6 23.exf6 ♕xf6 24.♕xc4 ♕d4!

The white rooks have no open files and White has only one pawn on the queenside, so it is not an easy task to win this game. The weaker 24...♗c6? 25.♗e4 would have been almost hopeless for Black.



25.♕xd4†

Please note this was a team event with the Dutch national title at stake. Maybe this had something to do with Afek's decision to enter an endgame where he could not lose! 25.♕e2 was a decent alternative, retaining some advantage in a more complex position.

25...♗xd4 26.♗e4

26.♗a4 b5 27.♗d1 was interesting, but also not fully convincing.

26...♗b5 27.♖d1

27.♗d3 ♗c6 28.♗c4 was attractive as well.

27...♖xf4 28.♗xb7 ♗b6 29.♖b1 ♖f7

It is hard to recommend anything for Black – it is really a matter of choosing the least of the evils. He would certainly not be helped by 29...♔g7?! 30.♖g3†.

30.♗a6 ♗xa6

Likewise 30...♗c6 31.♖f1 is no fun for Black.

31.♖xa6 e5 32.♖a2 e4 33.g3 h5 34.♔g2 h4

The former world championship candidate wants to reduce the number of pawns. Another strategy was to push the e-pawn as far as possible and try to keep the rook in order to cause problems, as seen after 34...♖d7 35.♖e1 e3.

35.gxh4 ♖f4 36.♖f1 ♖xh4 37.♖f7!

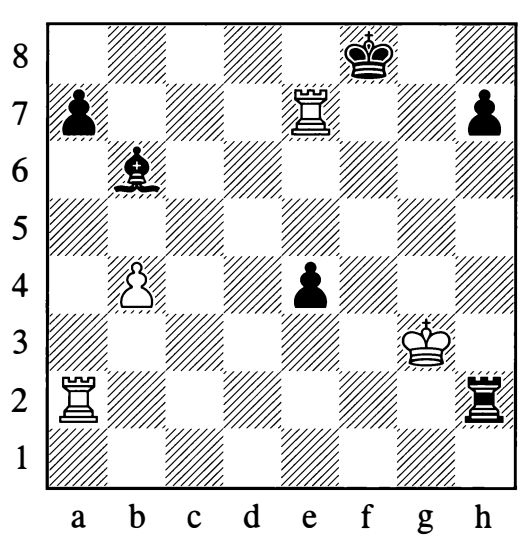
Classical stuff, but the rook will have an unexpected function on the seventh rank.

37...♔g8 38.♖e7 ♔f8 39.♔g3

39.♖b7 ♖g4† 40.♔h3 ♖g7 41.♖xg7 ♔xg7 42.♔g4 was also promising. But this whole game is about White having to choose between different moves and plans, which have very similar strength. Yochanan brings down a very strong grandmaster and so that justifies his play.

39...♖xh2

The ensuing endgame loses, so he should have tried the alternative 39...♔xe7.



40.♖exa7!

Yochanan is very professional – when he plays for a prize or for a team, I know he works very hard and gives it everything he has. He is an artist when he composes but a true fighter

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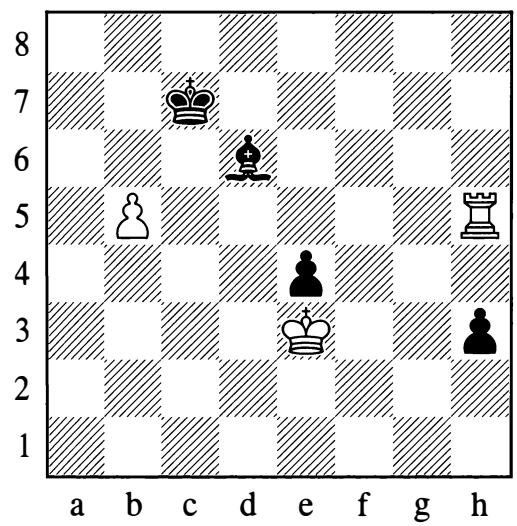
over the board. Actually sometimes he gets overexcited. I am sure here he wanted to win and compose something afterward.

40...♗xa7 41.♔xh2 ♗b8† 42.♔g2 ♔e7 43.♖d2

43.♖e2 was also good enough, when play continues 43...♗d6 44.♖xe4† ♔d7. There are several ways to conclude the game from here, with one of the notable ones being 45.♖h4 ♔c6, even though this is not the most exact one, as it forces White to find 46.♖h6!!. This is the only winning move, but good enough.

43...♗d6 44.b5 ♔d7 45.♔f2 h5 46.♖d5 h4 47.♖h5 ♔c7 48.♔e3 h3

Black also fails to hold after 48...♗g3 49.♔xe4, and 48...♔b6 49.♖h6! ♔c7 50.b6† ♔c6 51.b7.



49.♖xh3

Taking the other pawn would spoil everything: 49.♔xe4? h2 50.♔d5 ♗g3 51.♔c5 (no better is 51.♖h6 ♔b7 52.♔c5 ♗f4 53.♖h3 ♗g3) 51...♔b7 52.♖h7† ♗c7 and Black holds. It is a mutual zugzwang but White is unable to lose a tempo.

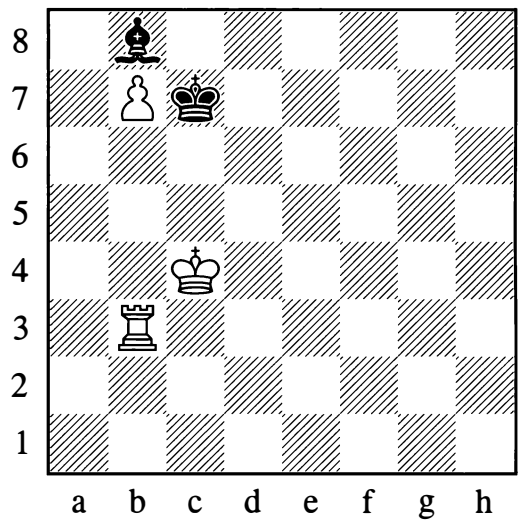
49...♗f8 50.♔xe4

Now White wins easily.

50...♔b6 51.♖b3 ♔c5 52.b6 ♗d6 53.b7 ♗b8 54.♔d3

This is a zugzwang. It is easy to spot.

54...♔c6 55.♔c4 ♔c7



56.♖b5

1–0

White will take the long march with the king to a6, freeing the rook to break the blockade.

What hobbies do you have apart from chess?

"In my limited free time I like to read Israeli literature, listen to music of various kinds, watch quality movies and surf on the internet, especially for Israeli news."

Do you have any regrets or dreams in chess?

"I achieved more than I could dream of in chess and in chess composing. Regrets, if any, belong to some other aspects of life that might have developed differently had chess not interfered so extensively."

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Testimonials

Jan Timman
Former World Championship finalist; previously ranked number two in the world:

"Yochanan is a very warm and friendly person. He has a very good and serious attitude towards chess. He excels as an endgame study composer and as a judge.

In a way composition is the most interesting part of chess as it involves no competition, simply art. It is impressive how he expresses himself by creating studies. I wrote about him in *New in Chess* magazine. His study (No.2 below) is simple and brilliant."

Emil Sutovsky
1996 World Junior Champion; 2001 European Champion:

"When I was asked to write a few words about Yochanan, I agreed to it immediately, but then I was struck with a dilemma.

Who is the person I am supposed to write about? Yochanan, a strong chessplayer; or Yochanan, the great chess composer; or Yochanan, the personality? Indeed, Yochanan is larger than chess, and I don't mean his spatial dimensions!

Yochanan is a rare kind of person to whom you can talk for hours. Of course, chess is the main part of his life – he remembers a lot of interesting stories from the past and follows all the news related to modern chess. But he also possesses great knowledge of history, culture, music... everything.

His marvellous studies have already ensured him of a place among the greatest chess composers of all time. However, it's Yochanan's amicable personality that makes him a popular figure everywhere he goes – Israel or France, Holland or Russia. Should he travel to Africa, to some obscure village where chess was never heard of – I bet, the very next week we'd see the same picture we've already seen at countless chess events: Yochanan sitting, circled by dozens of young and not so young people, and showing the gems brought to light by his imaginative mind!

Yochanan, on behalf of all the players of planet Earth, I wish you a lot of health and creative energy; and personally I look forward to having the pleasure of discussing with you again all these countless topics we usually talk about, and to having the honour of being one of the first solvers of your magnificent studies!"

Alon Greenfeld
1981 European Junior silver medallist; five-time member of the Israeli Olympiad team:

"I have known Yochanan for nearly thirty years and I can't remember even a single dull moment in his presence. We have found a common language in so many fields and his brilliant linguistic skill is a permanent source of pleasure for me. But it is obviously chess where Yochanan is at his best. For me, Yochanan represents the true chess lover. No matter how many games he played and how many defeats he suffered, you can always find a genuine passion for chess in his games

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and analysis. And as the case is with many other artists, his competitive results must have suffered from his creative tendencies. But all these probable misses are fully compensated for by Yochanan's achievements in chess composition and in study composition in particular.

I am indebted to him for presenting to me the fascinating world of chess studies, first and foremost through his own works. I always looked at chess studies through the eyes of a player and even now, after many years of acquaintance with that wonderful realm, I still don't know many of the professional notions and nuances. But with Yochanan's studies this hardly matters because he never composed just for the knowledgeable ones. Every chess lover at almost every level can enjoy his masterpieces since his brilliant ideas invariably derive from a practical perspective. That is why I love his studies so much and that is why I am looking forward with a child-like passion to every new study of his."

Michael Bezold
German grandmaster:

"The first time I heard the name Yochanan Afek was when I played in the French league years ago. We played for the same club, although unfortunately never in the same team. The other Israeli team members, GMs Gad Rechlis and Leon Gofshtein, spoke about Afek's versatility with great respect. I met him personally for the first time at the Pyramiden-Franken-Cup in Nuernberg in 1999. If you are an organizer you are surely interested in inviting interesting personalities. One evening Afek introduced his audience to the art of composing. I was deeply impressed by how Afek succeeded in putting the audience under his spell. With his highly entertaining style, his knowledge and inexhaustible repertoire, he knew how to evoke enthusiasm for his world amongst the listeners, no matter if they were amateurs, young talents or GMs.

I have always liked this aspect of chess. The royal game conveys deep fascination here. And Afek is, so to speak, its great ambassador. Right from the start I loved Afek's studies, which showed elegant and surprising moments, although not far from practical play, and which belong to the gems of the art of chess studies.

Not only have I encountered him as a chess player, a composer of studies and a humorous storyteller. No – I have seen him acting as a trainer too! At various occasions the best German talents had the opportunity to experience his deep understanding and objectivity. Behind all this stands his deep appreciation and love for chess. And seldom has the well-known saying better fitted a person than Yochanan:

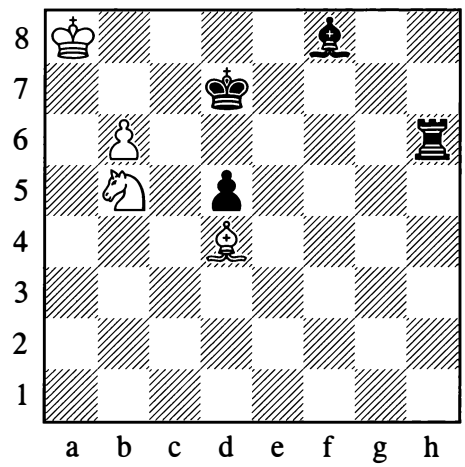
Chess is his life... or maybe his wife!"

Selected Studies

Here is a brief explanation of some of the common abbreviations used in the world of chess studies: HM = Honourable Mention; JT = Jubilee Tourney; MT = Memorial Tourney.

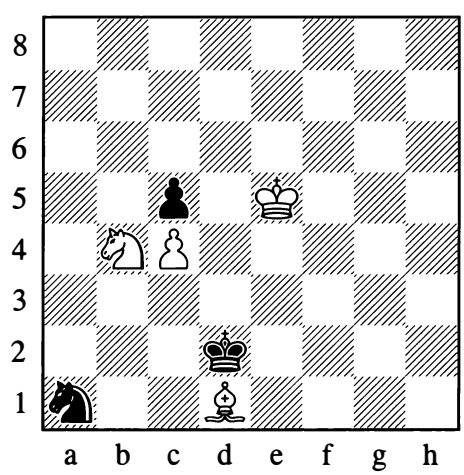
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1. 1st Prize, Israel Ring Tourney 1975



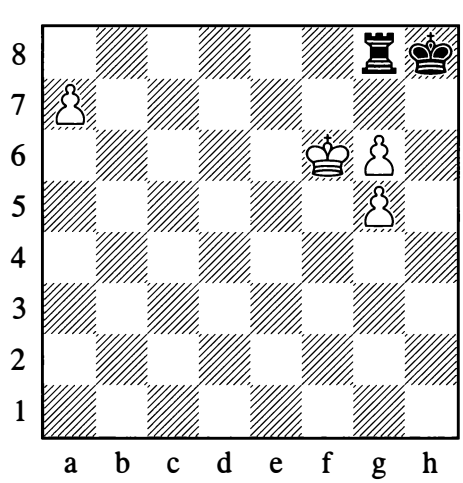
White to play and win

2. 2nd Commendation, Themes 64 1977



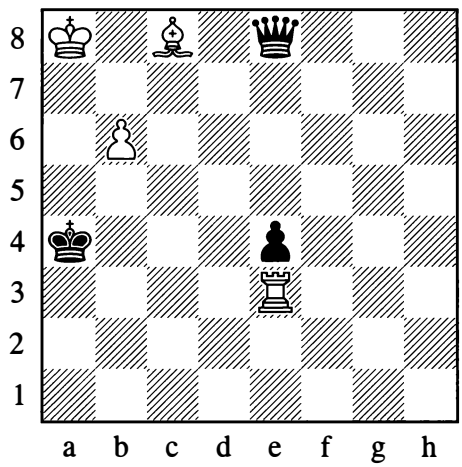
White to play and win

3. HM, Israel Ring Tourney 1981



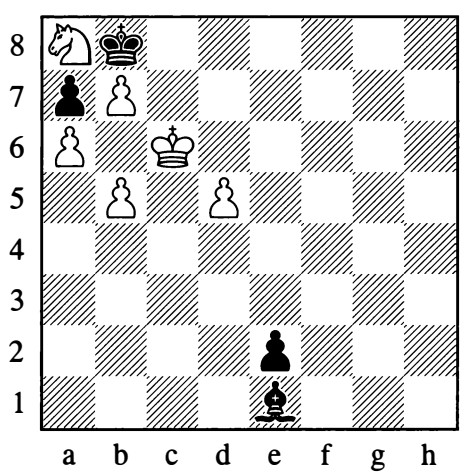
White to play and draw

4. 1st-2nd prize, Kralin-55 JT 2000



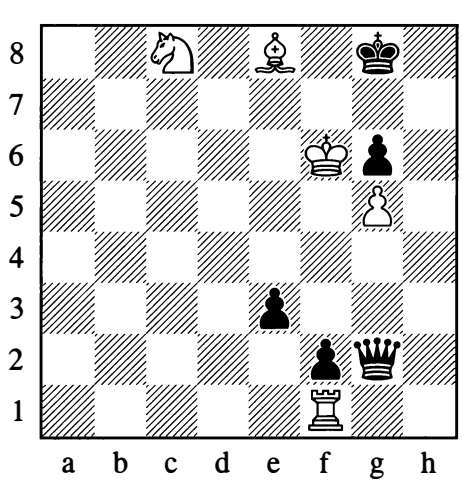
White to play and win

5. 2nd Comm., Andre Cheron MT 1982



White to play and draw

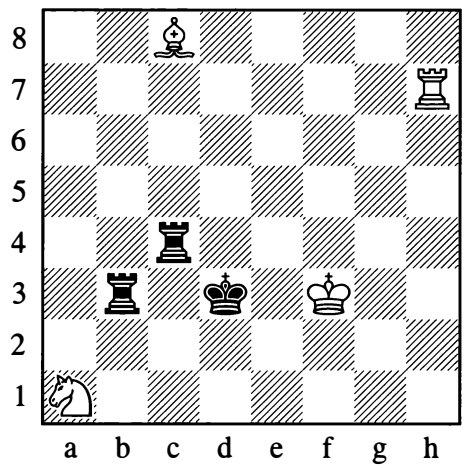
6. 1st Prize, Martin 1994/5 (correction)



White to play and draw

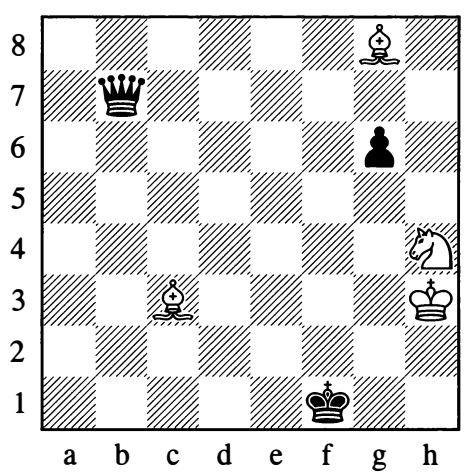
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7. Hungary 1100, 1996



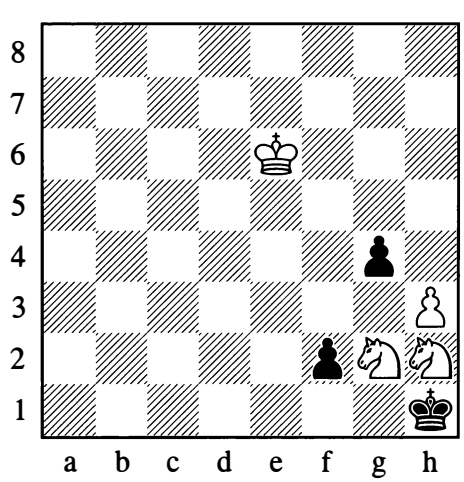
White to play and win

8. 2nd Prize, Israel Problem As.-50 JT 1995



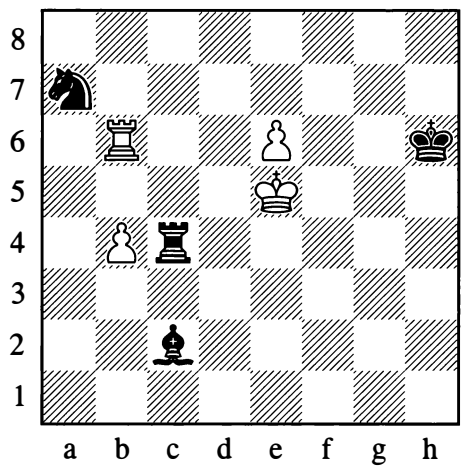
White to play and draw

9. New in Chess 1997



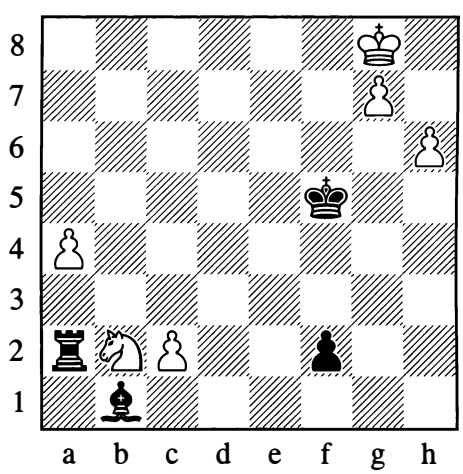
White to play and win

10. 1st Prize, Tidsskrift for Schack 2001



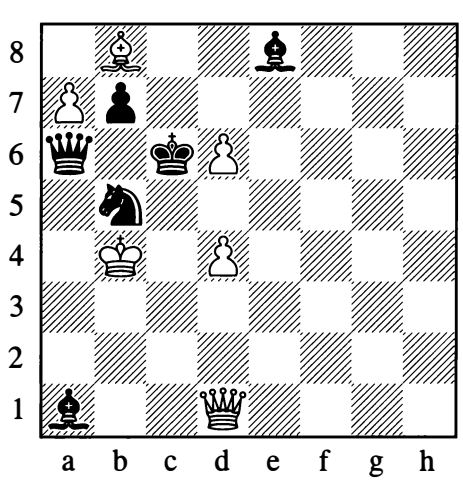
White to play and draw

11. Israel Ring Tourney, 1991



White to play and draw

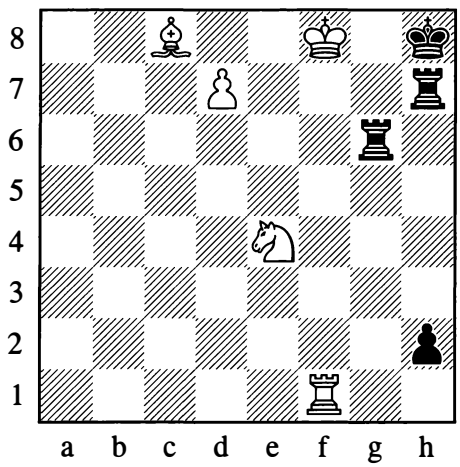
12. 2nd Comm., The Problemist 2005



White to play and win

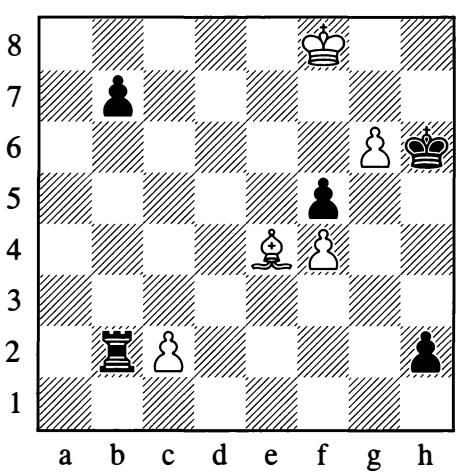
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13. 3rd-4th Prize, Israel Ring Tourney 1984



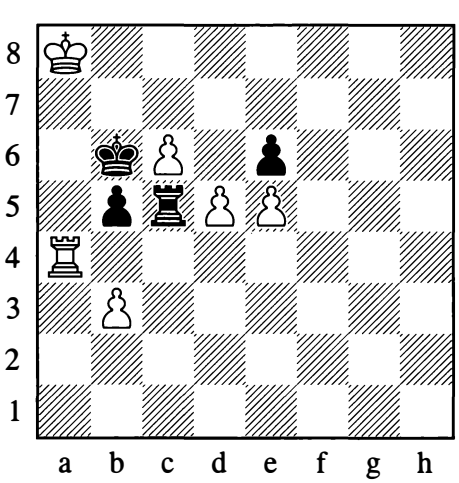
White to play and draw

14. HM, Israel Ring Tourney 1997



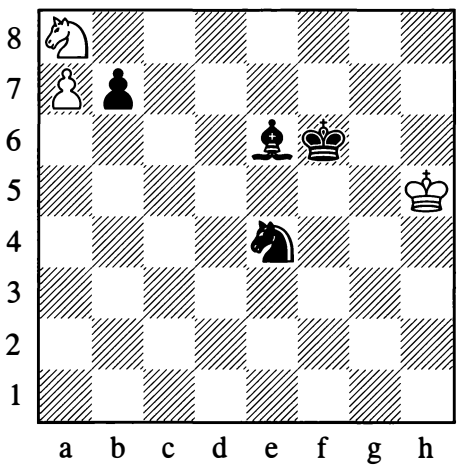
White to play and win

15. 1st Prize, Israel Ring Tourney 1998



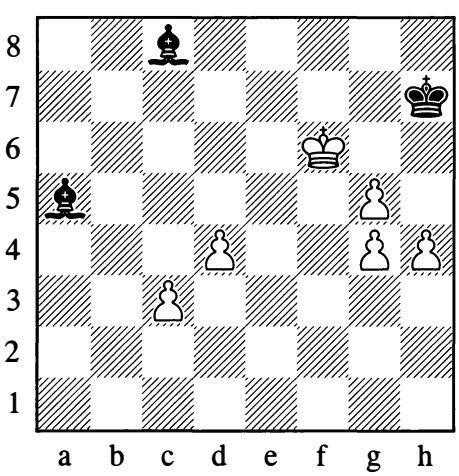
White to play and win

16. 1st Commendation, Nunn-50 JT 2005



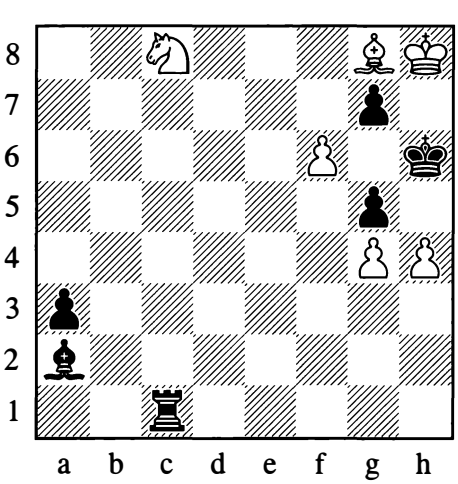
Black to play, White draws

17. 1st HM, The Problemist 2004



White to play and draw

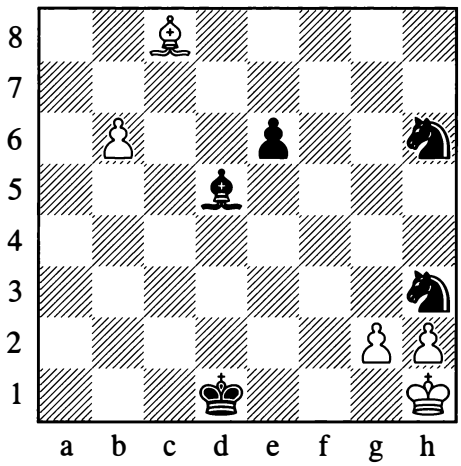
18. 1st Prize, Milescu MT 1982



White to play and draw

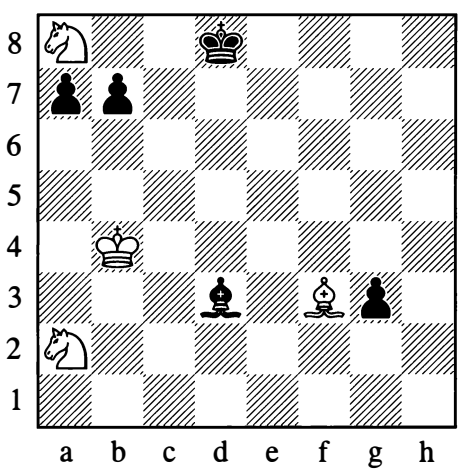
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19. 3rd Prize, Hildebrand-80 JT 2001



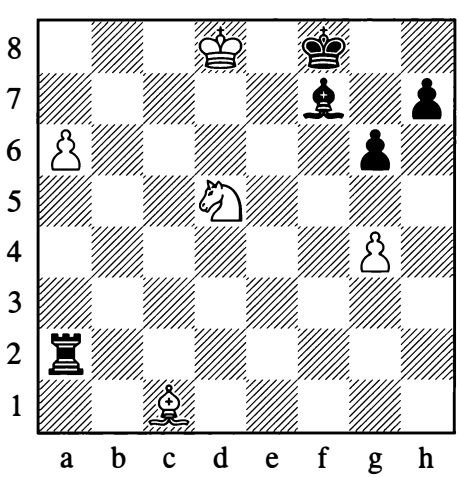
White to play and draw

20. Journal 2004



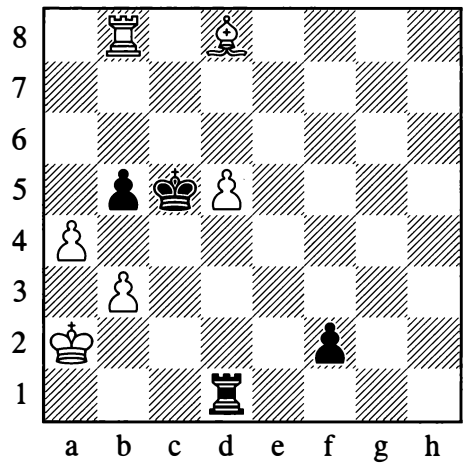
White to play and win

21. 1st HM, Polasek-50 & Vlasak-50 JT 2007



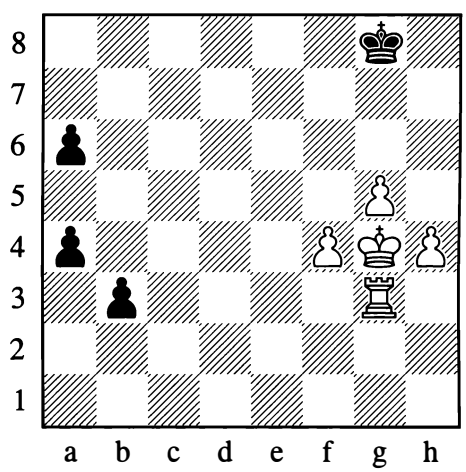
White to play and win

22. 1st-2nd Prize, Uralsky Problemist 2005



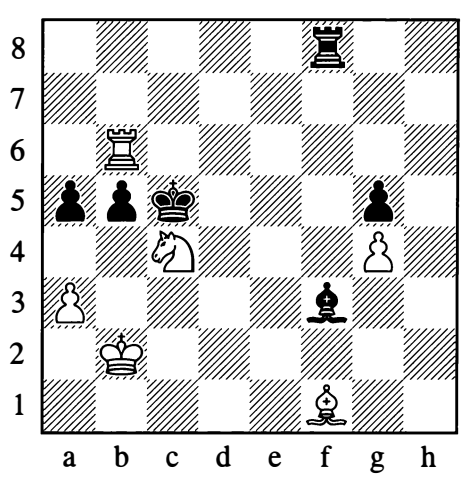
White to play and win

23. 3rd-4th Prize, Nona Tourney 2007



White to play and win

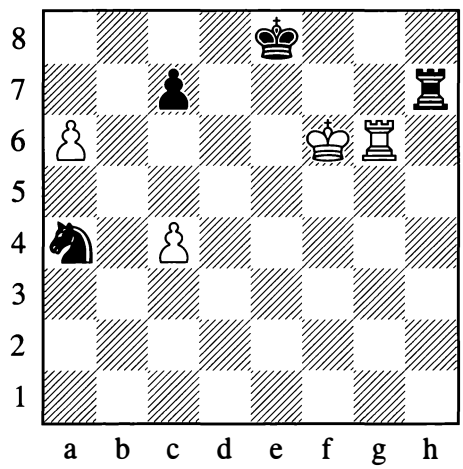
24. 2nd Prize, Tidsskrift for Schack 1972



White to play and win

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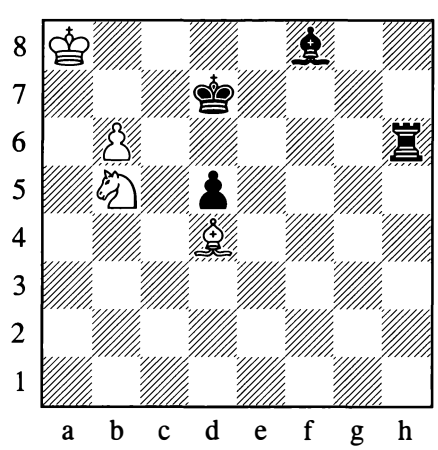
25. 2nd HM, Endgame Studies Quarterly 2004



White to play and win

Solutions

1. 1st Prize, Israel Ring Tourney 1975



This study shows the fruits of youthful passion.

1.b7 ♗c5!

Black opens the eighth rank. The attempt to get to the eighth with 1...♖e6 fails to 2.♘c7!.

1...♖c6 does not work either after 2.b8=♘†! (2.♘c7? ♖xc7) 2...♔e8 3.♘xc6. White takes the d-pawn and wins. (Two knights and a bishop can force a win against a lone bishop, regardless of whether the bishops are of the same or the opposite colour.)

2.♗xc5

2.b8=♕? would be a mistake; White can promote to a queen, but he cannot keep it after 2...♖a6†.

Alternatively, if 2.b8=♘†? ♔c8 3.♗xc5 d4, the two knights and a bishop – unlike two bishops and a knight – would fail to defeat a rook.

Finally, 2.♘c7? ♗xd4 3.b8=♕ ♖h8 draws.

2...♖h8† 3.♔a7

Winning the rook with 3.b8=♕? is not enough, as seen after 3...♖xb8† 4.♔xb8 ♔c6.

3...♔c6 4.♗d4!

Of the solvers who have made it this far, only a select few have avoided the trap of 4.♘d6? ♔xc5 5.♘c8 ♖h7.

4...♖h7

It looks like Black wins the b-pawn and gets a draw. White wins after 4...♖f8 5.♔a6 or 4...♖h2 5.♔a8.

5.♗g7!!

A superb bishop move comes out of the blue to block the seventh rank.

5...♖xg7 6.♘d4†

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Wherever Black's king moves, he loses.

6...♔d6

6...♔c5 7.♘e6† comes to the same result, while the other two possibilities allow the b-pawn to promote.

7.♘f5†

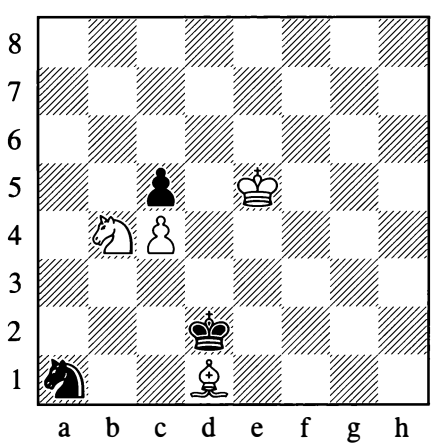
And White wins.

Afek added a brief anecdote:

> "I dedicated this study to a girl who studied with me at Tel Aviv University. It eventually won the first prize in the Israeli Ring Tourney, but apparently did not win her heart. Next life I will try poetry..."

If only she had known how to play chess, and had understood the beauty of this endgame, things might have worked out differently...

2. 2nd Commendation, Themes 64 1977



White is a piece up, but both of his pieces are under attack. Would it be an advantage for White to have less material? Even if the answer is in the affirmative, it still has to be decided how best to part company.

1.♘c2

Not 1.♘a6? ♔xd1 2.♘xc5 ♘c2 (or 2...♔c2) when Black holds. On the other hand, 2...♔d2? can be refuted by 3.♘e4† winning.

Also insufficient is 1.♗a4? cxb4 2.c5 b3 3.♗xb3 ♘xb3. White has no chance to queen, as seen after 4.c6 ♘a5 (or 4...♘c5 5.c7 ♘d7†) 5.c7 ♘c6† when Black stops the pawn.

1...♘b3 2.♘a1!!

Not 2.♘e3? ♘a5 3.♔e4 ♘xc4.

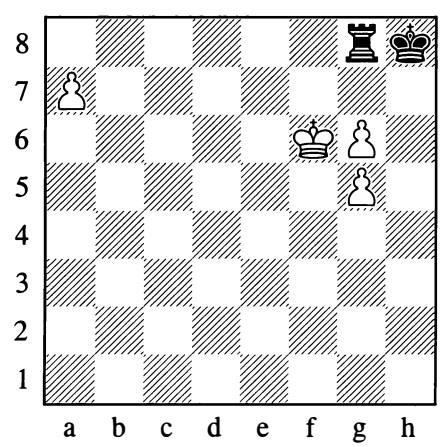
2...♘xa1

A remarkable vision: White obtains the initial position, minus his own knight! 2...♘a5 3.♘b3†! wins (but not 3.♗b3?, because of 3...♔c3).

3.♗a4 ♔c3 4.♔d5 ♔b4 5.♗d1

White wins.

3. HM, Israel Ring Tourney 1981



1.g7†

Had it occurred in a real game, one might think that White was giving a farewell check before resigning.

1...♔h7 2.g6† ♔h6

Now this really looks like the end.

3.a8=♕! ♖xa8 4.♔f7 ♖a7† 5.♔g8!!

White sacrifices a second pawn in order to get into the corner.

5...♖xg7†

5...♔xg6 6.♔h8 draws immediately.

6.♔h8

The stalemating theme becomes apparent.

6...♖a7 7.g7!

The third pawn sacrifice forces the draw.

7...♖xg7

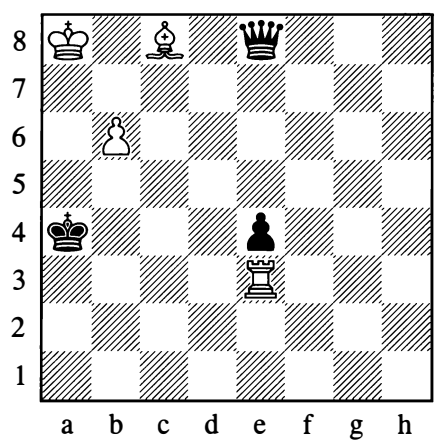
It is a stalemate. The solution is rather short, but from experience it causes problems when solving or at least it takes time, because White's

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play is surprising. Yochanan told me something interesting about this study:

> "Several composers later introduced versions (offering me partnership of course) of this idea but in my opinion the original still overshadows them all. They maybe prolong the foreplay, but lack the element of surprise as here."

4. 1st-2nd prize, Kralin-55 JT 2000



White has only one active man: the b-pawn. Is that enough to force a win?

1.b7 ♕c6

Black pins the pawn.

2.♗d7!

White releases it in a radical way.

2...♕xd7 3.♖xe4†!

After the hasty 3.b8=♕? ♕d5† 4.♕b7 ♕d8† 5.♔a7 ♕d4† 6.♕b6 ♕d7† 7.♔b8 ♕c8†! (7...♕e8† is also good enough) 8.♔xc8 Black has succeeded in forcing a spectacular stalemate.

3...♔a5!

3...♔a3 4.b8=♕ ♕d5† 5.♕b7 ♕d8† 6.♔a7 and White wins.

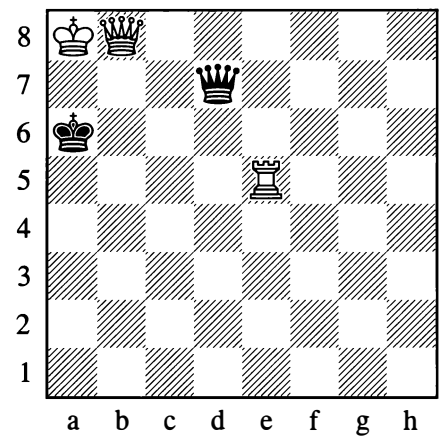
4.♖e5†!

Once again 4.b8=♕? ♕d5† 5.♕b7 ♕d8† 6.♔a7 ♕b8†! forces a similar stalemate, but a rank higher!

4...♔b6

4...♔a6 fails to 5.b8=♘†!. The trademark signature is there...

5.b8=♕† ♔a6



6.♖b5!!

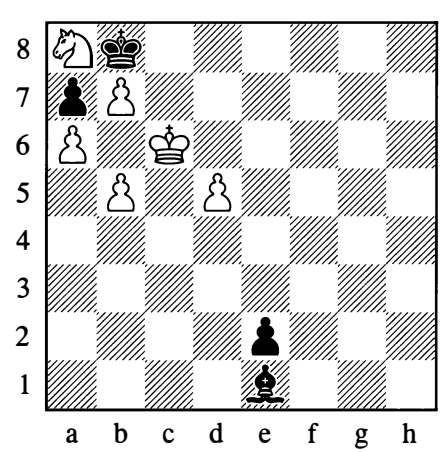
This brilliant move is the last of the string of 'only' moves. 6.♖c5? would not work because of 6...♕d5†! and another stalemate, even higher. The three echoing stalemates might be referred to as 'echo-chameleon' stalemates since the squares almost change colours!

6...♕xb5 7.♕a7

The study ends in a checkmate.

According to its title the above study was published in 2000, but I clearly remember Yochanan showing this beauty to me earlier. He had already mentioned those three similar stalemate attempts on three different ranks.

5. 2nd Commendation, Andre Cheron MT 1982



In this study we will see a common motif in

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Yochanan's studies. Black's pawn is so close to promotion.

1.♘b6!

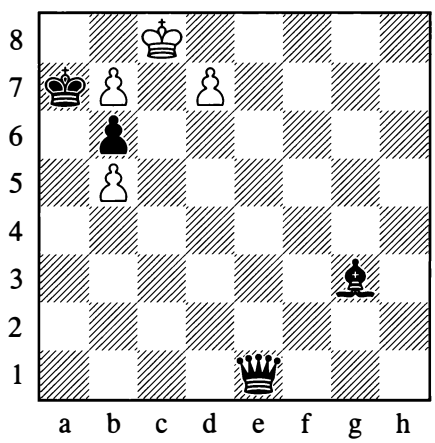
White creates counterplay. It still looks like he is too slow though.

1...axb6 2.d6! ♗g3

Black had to do something against a7† and ♔c7.

3.d7 ♗h4 4.a7†! ♔xa7 5.♔c7 ♗g3† 6.♔c8 e1=♕

Black can also try an under-promotion; it often occurs in Yochanan's works! 6...e1=♖!? 7.b8=♕†! ♗xb8 8.d8=♕ ♖c1† 9.♔d7 ♖d1† 10.♔c6! ♖xd8 and the stalemate net saves White.



7.d8=♘!!

The surprising under-promotion does the trick, as the knight covers the checks by the queen and threatens a checkmate. Instead 7.d8=♕? ♕e6† wins for Black.

7...♕e8

If Black does not pin the knight then he will lose.

8.b8=♕†

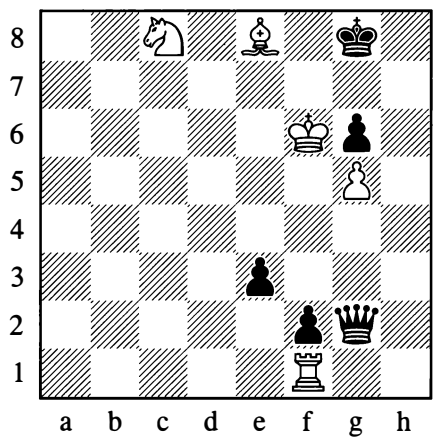
This move is not hard to find, as none of White's other pieces could even move! The difficulty comes from seeing it in advance.

8...♗xb8

This is quite an unusual stalemate.

By the way, Yochanan is not only an artist, but a hard worker too. The following study had been cooked, as detailed on page 43, but he was able to save it by implementing different introductory play.

6. 1st Prize, Martin 1994/5 (correction)



On page 43 we saw the original version of this study, which contained a beautiful yet ultimately flawed solution.

1.♘e7† ♔f8

1...♔h8 2.♘xg6† ♔h7 (2...♔g8 3.♗f7† ♔h7 4.♘f8† and Black's king has no escape from the checks) 3.♘h4 ♕d5 4.g6† ♔h8 5.♘f5 ♕d8† 6.♔f7 ♕d5† draws.

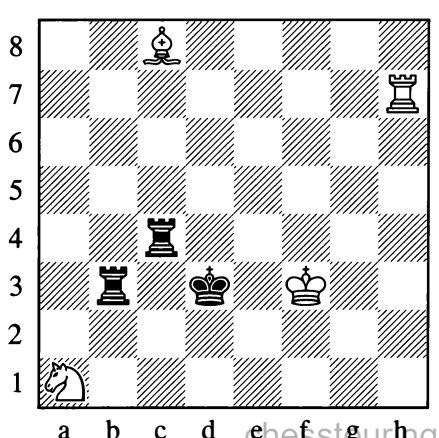
2.♗c6! ♕xc6†

2...♕xf1 leads to a perpetual check after 3.♘xg6† ♔g8 4.♗d5† ♔h7 5.♘f8† ♔h8 6.♘g6†.

3.♘xc6 e2 4.♖xf2 e1=♕

The remainder is the same as in the previous version on page 43.

7. Hungary 1100, 1996



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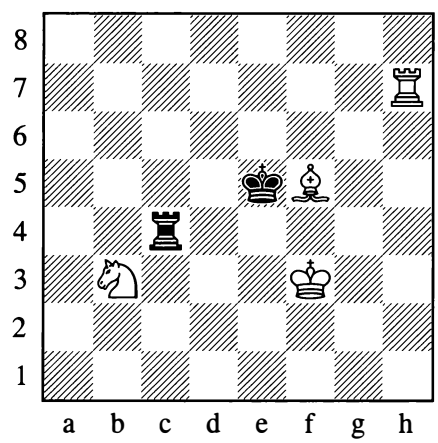
In this study we will see an example of another of Yochanan's favourite motifs: trapping a major piece.

1.♗f5†

White needs to end up with more than one extra piece to win.

1...♔d4†! 2.♘xb3† ♔e5!

It is interesting that, during his playing career, Yochanan was able to win the endgame with rook and bishop against rook a total of three times out of six attempts. But in studies like this he still has to avoid this outcome, as it is usually just a draw.



3.♗d3!!

White plays for something surprising.

3...♖c3 4.♖h5†! ♔d6

Black must cover the c5-square.

5.♘d4!!

In general rook and bishop gives better chances than rook and knight, but not this time.

5...♖xd3† 6.♔e4

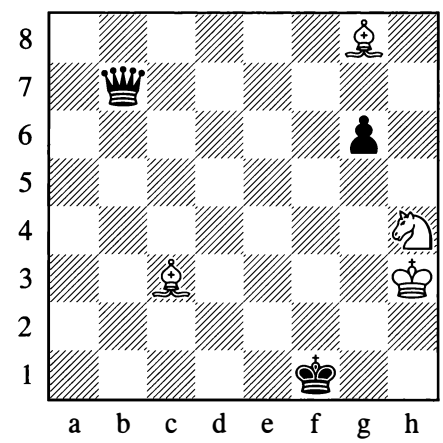
It is remarkable that White wins, as Black's rook has no useful square. The rook is dominated even though it appears to have considerable freedom!

6...♖d1 7.♖d5†!

This wins the rook on the next move. Like the rook, Black's king was in an open area, yet now he also finds himself without a safe retreat square.

In an earlier study Yochanan trapped a knight on a1, and in the latest example he managed to trap a rook out of the blue. Can he do that to a queen, the most mobile of all the pieces?

8. 2nd Prize, Israel Problem Association-50
JT 1995



1.♗c4†

The three pieces would normally be sufficient against a queen, but in this starting position they are tactically vulnerable and will find it difficult to defend each other.

1...♔g1!

After 1...♔f2 2.♗d4† ♔e1 3.♘g2† ♔d1 4.♘e3† ♔d2 5.♔g3 ♕e4 6.♗b6 White holds.

2.♗d4†

This is the only way to avoid losing a piece at once. 2.♗e6? ♕e4 loses after 3.♗g4 ♕h1† 4.♔g3 ♕h2† winning the knight, or 3.♗d4† ♔h1 4.♗c8 ♕d3†! winning the bishop.

2...♔h1 3.♗e2!

Not 3.♗f1? ♕b3† 4.♔g4 ♕d1† when Black again wins one of the pieces.

3...♕d7† 4.♘f5!!

White sacrifices the knight beautifully to save the d4-bishop.

4...♕xf5†

4...gxf5?? 5.♗f3 is checkmate, and 4...♕h7† 5.♘h4! ♕d7† repeats the position.

6.♔g3 ♕g5† 7.♗g4!

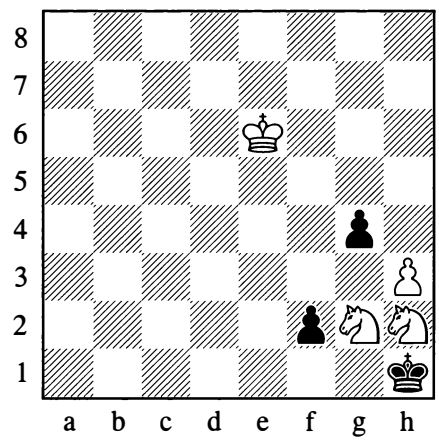
With an amazing idea: White reveals that Black's queen also has no useful move! The

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position is a mutual zugzwang, and Black has no way to avoid the loss of his queen.

Here is another beautiful example on the same theme.

9. New in Chess 1997



1.♘e3! g3!

Black cleverly refuses to take the h-pawn. Yes, the pawn has passed the h4-square, which would normally be the last losing one for him, but Black still fails to save the game as his king is caught in the corner.

1...gxh3? leads to mate after 2.♘ef1 ♔g2 3.♔f5 ♔h1 4.♔g4 ♔g2 5.♔h4 ♔g1 6.♔xh3 ♔h1 7.♘g3† ♔g1 8.♘f3#.

Also interesting is:

1...f1=♕!?

This finesse postpones the loss, but does not avoid it.

2.♘exf1 gxh3 3.♔f5 ♔g2 4.♔e4! ♔f2 5.♔d3 ♔e1 6.♘g3 ♔f2

6...♔d1 7.♘e2 ♔e1 8.♘c3 ♔f2 9.♔d2 transposes.

7.♘e4† ♔e1 8.♘c3 ♔f2 9.♔d2!

White can win only by using the possibility of checkmating Black in the corner with one knight after sacrificing the other one on h2.

9...♔g2 10.♔e2! ♔g3 11.♔e3! ♔h4 12.♔f4!

White must ensure that the enemy king does not escape from the edge of the board.

12...♔h513.♔f5! ♔h6 14.♔f6 ♔h5 15.♘e4

White soon forces a checkmate in one of the corners on the h-file.

2.♘hf1!

Not 2.♘hg4? f1=♕! 3.♘xf1 ♔g2 4.h4 (4.♔f5 might lead to a checkmate, but only if both sides put an effort into it: 4...♔xh3 5.♔g5 ♔g2! [5...g2?? 6.♘f2 – oops, a checkmate!] 6.♘d2 ♔g1 and Black draws) 4...♔xf1 5.h5 ♔e2! 6.h6 g2 and Black draws.

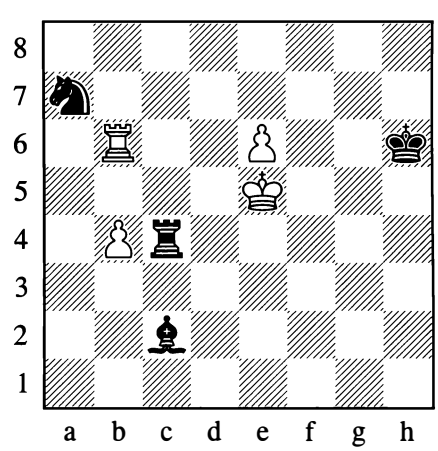
2...g2 3.h4!!

White does not mind his opponent promoting.

3...g1=♕ 4.♔f7!!

This time the queen is not blocked on the g-file. In fact, all seven moves along this file are legal, yet White wins as Black's queen still has no safe square. Yochanan explains with the aid of a proper endgame composition expression: *the queen is dominated*. Again it is a mutual zugzwang. Finding the solution to this study causes a lot of problems for my pupils!

10. 1st Prize, Tidskrift for Schack 2001



In this study, I found the move 2...♘b5. It does not refute the solution, but I hope it adds a little to the idea. At least it took a while to make it work. What is the percentage of unrealizable motifs in your composing?

"I am not sure. It doesn't happen to me too often since I come from the realm of over-the-board chess and I usually transfer this realistic approach also to composing.

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Besides, over forty years of composing one sharpens the sense for what is possible and what is not. And on top of all that I am very stubborn – that sometimes turns the impossible into something else."

1.e7† ♔g5!

If 1...♔g7 2.e8=♘†! the under-promotion with check saves White.

2.♖e6!

Not 2.♖b8? ♗g6!.

2...♖e4†

Black also has the subtle move:

2...♘b5!

This creates serious obstacles. White can try:

a) 3.e8=♕ ♖e4† 4.♔d5 ♘c7† leads to a black victory after 5.♔d6 ♘xe8† 6.♔e7 ♘c7 or 5.♔c6 ♘xe8 6.♖xe4 ♗xe4† or 5.♔c5 ♘xe8 6.♖xe4 ♗xe4.

b) 3.e8=♘ Unfortunately the promotion to a knight brings no miracle on this occasion, and Black wins after 3...♗f5! 4.♘d6 (4.♖e7 ♖e4†) 4...♗xe6 5.♘xc4 ♗xc4.

c) The only saving move is:

3.♔d5!! ♖c8

After 3...♗b3 4.e8=♕ Black can win the queen, but that is not decisive. The rook has no winning discovered check from the battery.

4.♖c6!

4.e8=♕? loses after 4...♘c7† 5.♔d6 ♘xe8† 6.♔d7 ♖b8.

4...♖xc6

4...♗b3† 5.♔c5 ♖xc6† 6. ♔xc6 transposes.

5.♔xc6 ♗a4 6.♔c5!! ♘c7 7.b5

This would also be the response to alternative knight moves on the previous turn.

7...♔f6

7...♘e8 8.b6 also draws.

8.e8=♕!

8.b6?? loses to 8...♘a6†, but 8.♔b6! is another way to draw.

8...♘xe8 9.b6

Now it is Black who must play carefully to draw!

9...♔e7

9...♗c2 10.b7 ♘c7 11.♔b6 ♘d5†! is also a draw.

10.b7 ♘f6

A draw could now be agreed. Note that Black must avoid 10...♘c7?? 11.♔b6 ♘d5† 12.♔a5! when the b-pawn cannot be stopped.

Let us now return to the main line of 2...♖e4†:

3.♔d5

Not 3.♔d6? ♘c8† 4.♔d7 ♗a4† and Black wins.

3...♖xe6 4. ♔xe6 ♗b3†

After 4...♗a4 5.♔f7 ♘c8 6.e8=♘! White saves the game.

5.♔d7 ♗a4† 6.b5!!

This is a fantastic way to confuse the black pieces. Well, it may not confuse them much, but it is enough!

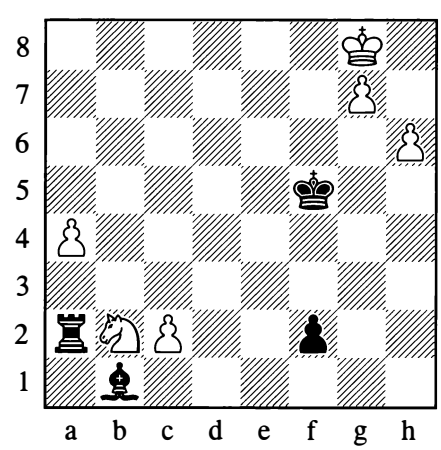
6...♗xb5† 7.♔c7!

Out of the blue White goes after the knight.

7...♗a4 8.♔b7 ♘b5 9.e8=♘!

Another knight promotion saves White. In this case, its purpose was to stop a knight check.

11. Israel Ring Tourney, 1991



1.♘d1!

Not 1.h7? f1=♕ 2.h8=♕ ♖xb2 when Black wins easily.

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Also poor is 1.♘c4? ♖xa4 2.♔h8! (2.h7 f1=♕! 3. ♘e3† ♔e6 and Black wins) 2...♖a8† 3.g8=♕ ♖xg8† 4.♔xg8 ♗a2 5.♔g7 ♗xc4 6.h7 f1=♕ 7.h8=♕ ♕a1† 8.♔h7 ♕h1† 9.♔g7 ♕b7† 10.♔h6 ♕c6†, and checkmate is inevitable.

Another inferior option is 1.♔h7? ♖xb2! 2.g8=♕ ♖b7† 3.♔h8 f1=♕! 4.♕d5† (after 4.♕f8† ♔g6! 5.♕e8† ♖f7 White will inevitably be mated) 4...♔g6 5.♕g8† ♔xh6 6.♕e6† (White wins the rook but gets checkmated) 6...♔g5 7.♕g8† ♔h4 8.♕d8† ♔h3 9.♕c8† ♔h2 10.♕xb7 ♕f8† 11.♔h7 ♗xc2† and wins.

Finally, there is 1.♔h8? f1=♕ 2.g8=♕ ♕f4! 3.♕f7† ♔g5 4.♕xf4† ♔xf4 5.♔g7 (5.♘d3† ♔g5 6.h7 ♖xc2 wins for Black) 5...♗xc2 6.♘c4 ♖xa4 7.♘d6 ♖a7† 8.♘f7! ♗d3! (8...♗b3? enables White to escape after 9.h7 ♖xf7† 10.♔g6) 9.♔g8 (or 9.♔f6 ♖a6†) 9...♗g6 10.♔g7 ♔f5 and wins.

1...f1=♕!

After 1...♖xa4 2.♔h8! ♗a2 3.h7 ♖h4! 4.♘xf2! ♔g6 5.g8=♕† ♗xg8 6.♔xg8 ♖xh7 7.♘d3! White saves his knight.

1...♔g6 2.♘xf2 ♖xa4 3.♔h8 ♗a2 4.h7 also draws.

2.♘e3† ♔g6 3.♘xf1 ♖xa4 4.♔h8 ♗a2 5.c4!!

White sacrifices the pawn on the crossroads to interfere with the diagonal and the fourth rank simultaneously. In chess composition this is called the Novotny theme. Instead 5.h7? loses to 5...♖h4! (this is why White sacrificed the pawn) 6.g8=♕† ♗xg8 7.♔xg8 ♖xh7 8.♘g3 (8.c3 ♖g7† wins the knight) 8...♖e7 and the knight falls.

5...♗xc4 6.h7 ♗g8!

A magical winning attempt.

7.hxg8=♘!

The piece will be lost anyway, so the value does not matter – the important thing is the square on which the piece will be taken. The last time we saw a knight promotion, it was aimed against a knight check, and on this occasion it is directed against a rook check.

7.hxg8=♕? ♖h4† 8.♕h7† allows Black to pick up the g-pawn with gain of tempo after 8...♖xh7† 9.♔g8 ♖xg7† and wins.

7...♖h4† 8.♘h6 ♖xh6† 9.♔g8

Compared with the previous note, the black rook is misplaced.

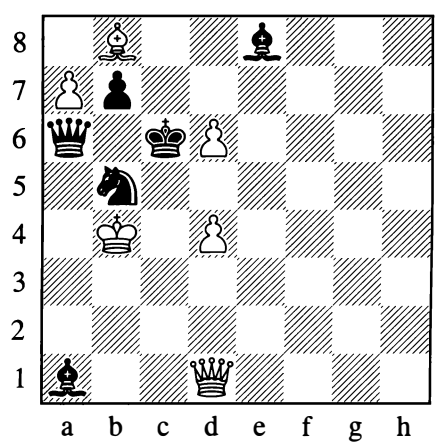
9...♖h3 10.♘d2!

Not 10.♔f8? ♖f3† 11.♔e7 ♔xg7 12.♘d2 ♖e3† when Black wins the knight.

10...♖d3 11.♔h8 ♖h3† 12.♔g8 ♖h7 13.♔f8 ♖xg7 14.♘e4

The draw is now secure.

12. 2nd Commendation, The Problemist 2005



1.d5† ♔b6

After 1...♔d7 White wins with 2.♕g4† ♔d8 3.♕h4† ♔c8 4.♕c4† ♔d7 5.a8=♕ ♗c3† 6.♔b3. Black soon runs out of checks and gets checkmated.

2.a8=♘†!

The knight promotion gains a tempo. This time the under-promotion succeeds in diverting the queen because it gives a check. By contrast, 2.a8=♕? does not work on account of 2...♗c3†!.

2...♕xa8 3.♗c7†!

Now White diverts the knight as well.

3...♘xc7 4.♕g1† ♔a6 5.♕xa1† ♗a4!

Now it is Black's turn to divert; this very nice move renders the win much more problematic.

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Instead 5...♔b6 6.♕d4† ♔a6 7.dxc7! wins quite easily.

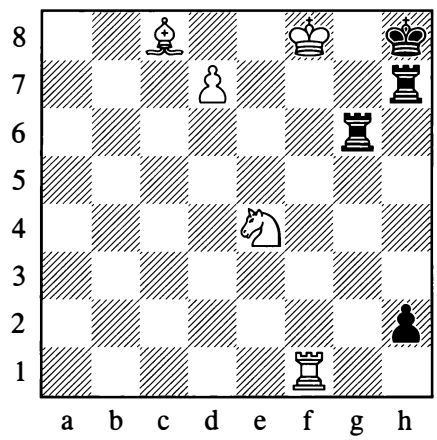
6.♕xa4† ♔b6 7.♕xa8! ♘xa8 8.♔b3!!

The king steps away from the knight check, while setting up a zugzwang. If 8.♔a3 or 8.♔c3 then 8...♘c7! draws.

8...♘c7 9.d7!

And White wins.

13. 3rd-4th Prize, Israel Ring Tourney 1984



1.♘f6!

White must prevent the checkmate on g8. After 1.♔e8? ♖g8† 2.♖f8 ♖xf8† 3.♔xf8 h1=♕ Black wins easily.

1...h1=♕

After so many under-promotions, we must remind ourselves that pawns can transform into queens as well! The alternatives are less problematic:

After 1...♖xf6† 2.♖xf6 h1=♕ 3.d8=♕ Black has no checks.

1...♖g1 only leads to a draw after 2.♖xg1 hxg1=♕ 3.♘xh7 ♕g8† 4.♔e7 ♕xh7† 5.♔d6, e.g. 5...♕h6† 6.♔c7 ♕f4† 7.♔c6 ♕f6† 8.♔c7 ♕e5† 9.♔b6! etc.

2.♖xh1 ♖xf6† 3.♔e8 ♖e6† 4.♔f8 ♖xh1 5.d8=♘!

This is essential, in order to meet the mating threat. 5.d8=♕? is easily refuted by 5...♖f1† 6.♕f6† ♖fxf6#.

5...♖f6†

After 5...♖g6 6.♘f7† ♔h7 7.♗f5 ♖f1 8.♗d3! Black cannot get rid of the pin.

6.♘f7†

The knight first defends, and then attacks.

6...♔h7 7.♗b7!

White's mating net saves him.

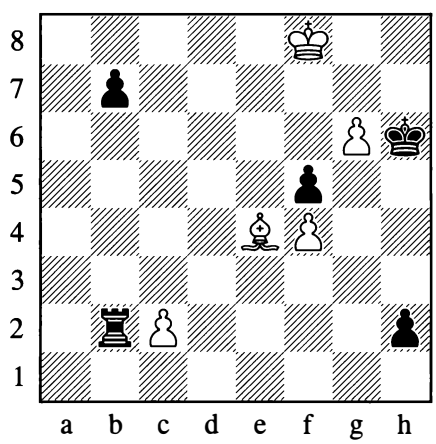
7...♖e1

7...♖h4 would be dealt with in exactly the same way.

8.♗e4†! ♖xe4

The game ends in stalemate.

14. HM, Israel Ring Tourney 1997



1.g7 ♖a2!

Feeble are 1...h1=♕ 2.♗xh1, or 1...♖xc2 2.♗xc2 h1=♕ 3.g8=♕ when White checkmates in three, e.g. 3...♕h4 4.♕g7† ♔h5 5.♗d1† ♕g4 6.♕h7#.

2.♗xb7 h1=♕ 3.♗xh1

Not 3.g8=♕? ♖a8†.

3...♖xc2 4.♗b7

White prevents the check. Once again 4.g8=♕? would be premature, in view of 4...♖c8† 5.♔f7 ♖xg8 6.♔xg8 ♔h5 when White loses his last pawn.

4...♖d2

It looks like the bishop can no longer prevent the all-important check.

5.♗d5!! ♖xd5

5...♖b2 does not work, as after 6.g8=♕ ♖b8† 7.♔e7 ♖xg8 8.♗xg8 the assistance from the bishop has enabled the king to stay close enough to the f4-pawn.

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6.g8=♘†!

This time the knight aggressively attacks first. Black's king has three squares, but all are tainted.

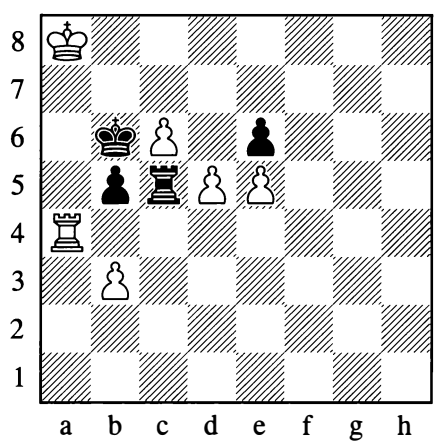
6...♔h5

The result would be the same after 6...♔h7 7.♘f6† or 6...♔g6 7.♘e7†.

7.♘f6† ♔h4 8.♘xd5

White wins, as the knight has landed on the perfect square from which to safeguard the f4-pawn.

15. 1st Prize, Israel Ring Tourney 1998



1.♖a6†!!

With this pretty move White drags the enemy king away from the passed pawns.

1...♔xa6 2.b4!

White needs to have the pawn here for several purposes. After 2.d6? ♔b6! 3.c7 ♖xc7! 4.dxc7 ♔xc7 5.b4 ♔c6 6.♔a7 ♔d5 7.♔b6 ♔xe5 Black holds.

2...♖c1 3.d6 ♖xc6!

After 3...♔b6 4.c7 ♖xc7 5.dxc7 ♔xc7 6.♔a7 ♔c6 7.♔a6 White now wins because of the position of the b-pawn on the fourth rank, a crucial tempo closer to promotion, as seen after 7...♔d5 8.♔xb5 ♔xe5 9.♔c6 when Black loses the race.

Another nice variation is 3...♖a1 4.c7 ♔b6† 5.♔b8 .♖a7!? Black attempts a stalemate defence, aiming to highlight a potential disadvantage of the pawn on b4. 6.c8=♘†! and White wins. Other promotions spoil the advantage, for example 6.c8=♗? ♖b7†! leads to either a repetition or a stalemate.

4.d7 ♖b6!

4...♖c7 is a less effective stalemating defence, e.g. 5.d8=♕ ♖a7† 6.♔b8 ♖b7† 7.♔c8 ♖b8† and even if White missed the stalemate it is not too late as 8.♔c7! still wins.

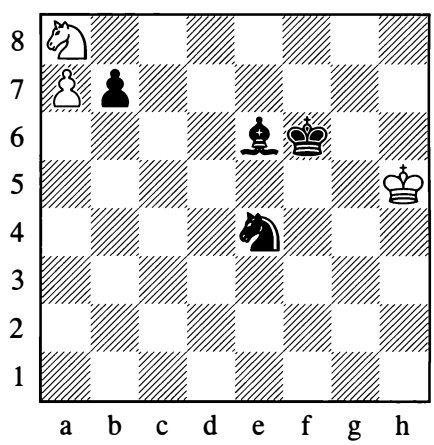
5.d8=♘!!

This time White really has to be vigilant when promoting. Instead 5.d8=♕? allows the stalemate trick 5...♖b8†!, while 5.d8=♖? gives room for Black's rook, enabling him to draw with 5...♖c6 6.♔b8 ♔b6.

The knight, on the other hand, does not defend and does not attack, but simply suffocates Black!

In the next study there is no knight promotion – just a knight which looks like a newly born one. When Black tries to trap it, it requires a huge effort for White to save the game!

16. 1st Commendation, Nunn-50 JT 2005



1...♘g3† 2.♔h6!

After 2.♔h4? ♘f5† 3.♔h5 ♗f7† 4.♔g4 ♘e3† 5.♔f3 ♘d5 Black traps the knight.

2...♘f5† 3.♔h7! ♗g8†!

This is an elegant way to lure the king to g8.

4.♔xg8

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4.♔h8? loses to 4...♘e7 5.♘c7 ♔f7 with mate on the next move.

4...♘e7† 5.♔f8! ♘d5!

Black traps the knight... or does he?

6.♔e8 ♔e6

The black king must shadow his opposite number if he is to keep the enemy knight boxed in.

7.♔d8 ♔d6 8.♔c8 ♔c6 9.♘b6!!

White has to prevent ...b5, and what a way he finds to do it! How did such a move come to Yochanan's mind?

9...♘xb6† 10.♔b8!

Would you believe that this is a reciprocal zugzwang?

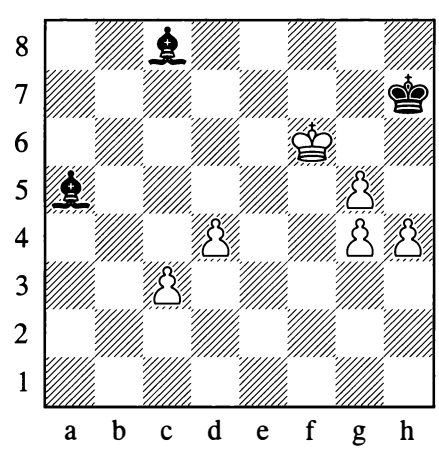
10...♘d7† 11.♔c8!

And yet another one! 11.♔a8? ♘c5! 12.♔b8 ♘a6† wins.

11...♘b6† 12.♔b8

We have reached a positional draw.

17. 1st HM, The Problemist 2004



1.♔f7! ♗xg4! 2.g6† ♔h6 3.g7 ♗h5† 4.♔f8 ♗xc3! 5.g8=♘†!

Other promotions would allow mate in one.

5...♔g6

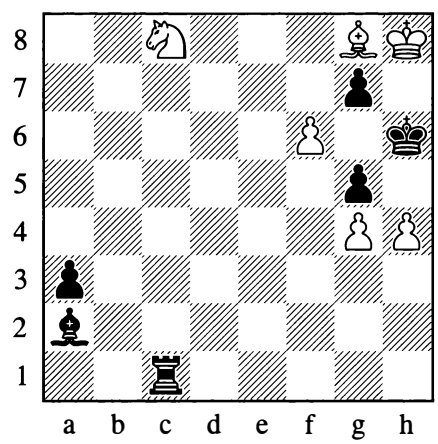
For a long time it was thought the knight could hold the two bishops by putting it on g7 (or an equivalent square, depending on the starting position). But computer analysis proved that the bishops could in fact force a win. Therefore White needs to exchange a bishop.

6.♘e7† ♔h6 7.♘g8† ♔g6 8.♘e7† ♔h7 9.♘d5!! ♗xd4 10.♘f6†! ♗xf6

This is a lovely stalemate.

Naturally Afek has also composed studies in which bishop promotions occur.

18. 1st Prize, Milescu MT 1982



1.♘e7! ♗xg8

After 1...♖c8 2.h5! ♖xg8† 3.♘xg8† ♗xg8 4.f7 ♗xf7 is a nice stalemate.

2.h5!!

White reduces Black's king moves, at the same time reducing his own possible moves.

2...♗e6

Black stops two checkmates with one move!

3.♘g8†!! ♗xg8 4.f7! ♖c8!

Black continues to create the most difficult problems.

Now White appears to be in trouble. Let us check all the possible promotions:

5.f8=♕? ♗e6! and Black wins.

5.f8=♖? ♗e6 is the same story.

5.f8=♘? We already know what a tricky piece the knight can be, but this time it does not help, as Black can simply play 5...a2.

So the solution is the fourth and final promotion:

5.f8=♗!

This creates a threat.

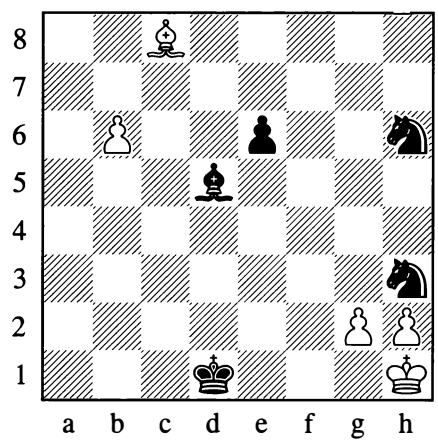
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5...♗b3

Or 5...♖a7 6.♗xg7†! ♖xg7 stalemate.

Black has prevented the checkmate, but created a stalemate.

19. 3rd Prize, Hildebrand-80 JT 2001



1.♗xe6!

Not 1.b7? ♘g4 and Black checkmates on the next move.

1...♘g4!!

With this great tactical idea Black causes surprisingly big problems for his adversary. After 1...♗xe6 2.b7 ♗d5 3.b8=♕ ♘g4 4.♕b1† White holds.

2.♗xg4† ♔e1! 3.♗c8!!

This is the only move to save the game.

3.♗xh3? fails to 3...♔f1 4.b7 ♗xb7 with mate on the next turn.

3.b7?! contains a trap: 3...♗xb7? 4. ♗f5! (4.♗xh3?? ♔f2 5.♗g4 ♗xg2 is mate) 4...♔f1 5.♗d3† ♔f2 6.♗e4! and White draws.

However, Black can improve with 3...♔f2! 4.♗f3 (4.♗xh3 ♗xb7 creates a lethal zugzwang) 4...♗xf3 5.gxf3 ♔f1 6.b8=♕ ♘f2#.

3...♔f1 4.♗a6† ♔f2 5.♗b7!

This stalemate possibility is the reason why White's third move was so crucial.

5...♔f1 6.♗a6† ♔e1 7.♗c8!

White has to keep playing with precision.

7.b7? loses to 7...♔f2!.

7.♗c4? allows 7...♗xc4! 8.gxh3 ♔f2 followed by mate.

7.♗b7? allows 7...♘f2† 8.♔g1 ♗xb7. For this reason, the stalemating idea only works when the black king is on f2.

7...♔e2 8.♗a6† ♔f2 9.♗b7!

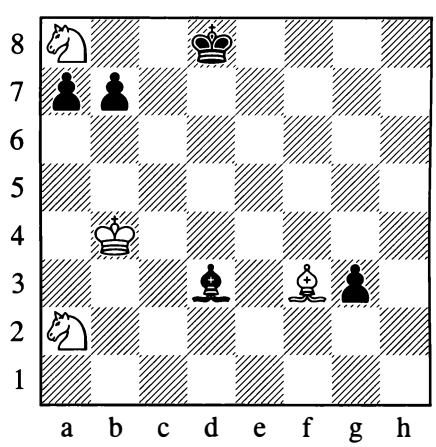
Black has no more winning tries.

Afek explains:

"This study was composed to honour the late Swedish composer Alexander Hildebrand (when he was still alive – for his 80th birthday). His contribution to chess in general and to chess composition in particular was huge."

Let me show an example to demonstrate how Yochanan really makes the most out of an idea.

20. Journal 2004



1.♗g2!

White has to block the g-pawn.

1...♔c8

After 1...b6 2.♔c3 ♗a6 3.♘b4 ♗b5 4.♘d5 White saves the knight.

2.♔c5! ♔b8 3.♔d6!!

The white king moves closer to the knight and to the vulnerable b7-square.

3.♘b4 ♗e2!

This draws simply. A more complicated, but still sufficient, option was 3...♗h7 4.♔d6 a5! 5.♘d5! ♔xa8 6.♔c7 ♗d3! (but not 6...♔a7? 7.♘e7 ♔a6 8.♗f1† b5 9.♗g2 when White

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forces a checkmate) 7.♘b6† ♔a7 8.♗xb7 ♗f5 and Black survives.

4.♔d6 a5 5.♘d5 ♔xa8 6.♔c7 ♔a7 7.♘e7 ♗a6

Black holds easily.

3...♔xa8

If 3...♗c4 4.♘b4! a5 5.♘b6 saves the knight.

4.♘b4! ♗b5

After 4...♗e2 5.♔c7 a5 6.♗xb7† ♔a7 7.♘c6 is checkmate.

5.♘a6!!

This is a stunning way to block the a-pawn.

5...♗xa6

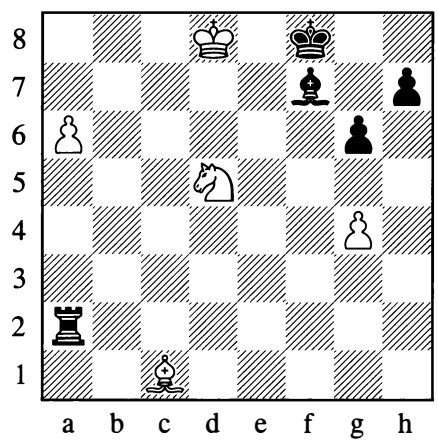
After 5...♗c4 6.♔c7 ♗xa6 7.♔c8 places Black in zugzwang.

Alternatively, there is 5...♗c6 6.♗xc6 bxc6 7.♔c7 g2 8.♔c8 followed by mate with the knight.

6.♔c7!

And mate next move.

21. 1st HM, Polasek-50 & Vlasak-50 JT 2007



1.♗h6†

With opposite-coloured bishops the one who attacks has decent chances, even with limited material.

1...♔g8 2.♘f6† ♔h8 3.♔e7 ♖xa6 4.♔f8!

4.♔xf7? Taking the bishop helps Black as it gives him time to defend the g7-square. Play continues 4...♖a7† 5.♔f8 g5! 6.♗xg5 h5!? (6...♖a8† 7.♔e7 ♔g7 also draws) 7.♘xh5 (or 7.gxh5 ♖f7†) 7...♔h7 and Black holds.

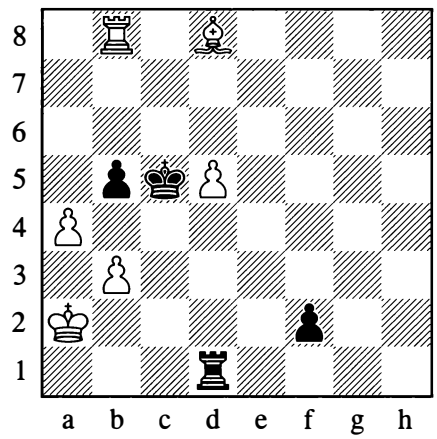
4...♖a8† 5.♘e8!!

A stunning move indeed! White gives away the knight to keep the threat of mate on g7.

5...♖xe8† 6.♔xf7 ♖g8 7.g5!

Black is in zugzwang. He is obliged to leave the g7-square unprotected.

22. 1st-2nd Prize, Uralsky Problemist 2005



1.♗b6†!

White has to be careful as his pawns might evaporate, e.g. 1.♗e7†? ♔d4 2.♖f8 bxa4 3.bxa4 f1=♕ 4.♖xf1 ♖xf1 5.d6 ♔c4 6.d7 ♖d1 drawing, as the remaining a-pawn will never be able to promote.

1...♔b4! 2.♗xf2 ♖d2† 3.♔b1 ♔xb3! 4.♗e3!

After 4.♔c1? ♖xf2 5.d6 ♖c2†! 6.♔d1 ♖c6 Black once again liquidates all the pawns.

4...♖d1† 5.♗c1 ♔xa4! 6.♔b2!!

Keeping the d-pawn with 6.♖d8 leaves White tied up after 6...♔b3 7.d6 b4 when White is unable to make progress.

Also insufficient is 6.♔c2? ♖xd5 7.♗d2 (or 7.♖a8† ♔b4 8. ♗a3† ♔c4 9.♖c8† ♔d4=) 7...♖c5†! (This check brings the rook closer and makes the battery ineffective. Instead 7...b4? 8.♖xb4† ♔a3 9.♖c4 wins.) 8.♗c3 (8.♔b2 b4) 8...b4 9.♖xb4† ♔a5, and Black runs away.

6...♖xd5 7.♗d2!!

White only has this winning move because the b5-pawn is on the board.

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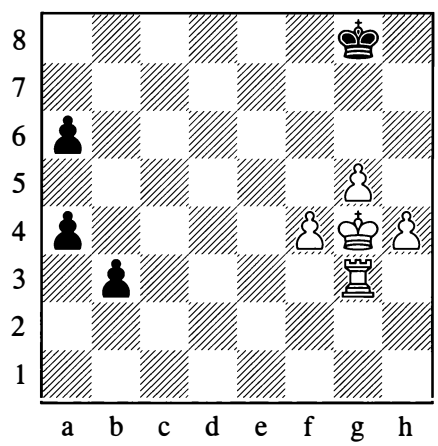
7...♖xd2†

After 7...b4 8.♖xb4† White wins as the black rook is too far from the king.

8.♔c3

White wins the rook. The end of the study could have easily occurred in an over-the-board game and, as Yochanan confirmed, it was indeed inspired by an actual game in the Dutch team championship.

23. 3rd-4th Prize, Nona Tourney 2007



1.♖e3!!

The rook must use the e-file. Other avenues of attack do not guarantee a win.

In the case of 1.♖d3? b2 2.♖d8† ♔g7 3.♖b8 a3 4.f5 a2 White has no more than a draw.

And after 1.♔f5? b2 2.♖g1 a3 3.♖b1 a2 4.♖xb2 a1=♕ the outcome is the same.

1...b2 2.♖e8†! ♔f7

After 2...♔g7 3.♖e1 a3 4.f5 a2 5.f6† ♔f8 6.g6! we transpose to the main line.

3.♖e1!

This paradoxical choice provides the greatest difficulty, since any educated player would automatically prefer to put this piece on b8. A rook should be positioned behind a passed pawn, shouldn't it? Apparently there can be exceptions to every rule.

3...a3 4.f5!

4.♔f5? is insufficient after 4...♔g7!! 5.g6 ♔h6! 6.♔f6 (6.♖e7? allows 6...b1=♕† with check) 6...a2 7.♖e8 ♔h5 8.♖h8† ♔g4 9.g7 a1=♕ 10.g8=♕† ♔h3 and Black is certainly not worse.

4...a2 5.g6† ♔f8

This offers the stiffest resistance, as White will not have time to include his king in the attack. This plan would win easily against the other moves:

5...♔f6 6.♖e6† ♔g7 7.♔g5! b1=♕ 8.f6† ♔f8 9.g7† ♔f7 10.♖e7† followed by mate in two.

5...♔g7 6.♔g5! b1=♕ 7.f6† ♔f8 8.g7† ♔f7 9.♖e7† leads to the same checkmate.

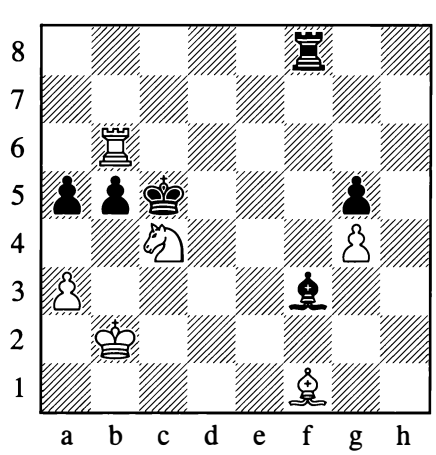
6.f6! b1=♕ 7.g7† ♔f7 8.♖e7†! ♔xf6 9.g8=♘†! ♔g6 10.h5!

It is another checkmate and this time with a rook pawn! Maybe it is symbolic; there is a knight promotion here as well.

In the final two examples we see Yochanan's characteristic feature – carrying out an attractive winning attack with hardly any material on the board. About the next study Yochanan says:

> "This is my best-known study, which was published worldwide and is still often quoted by some leading GMs."

24. 2nd Prize, Tidsskrift for Schack 1972



White is about to lose his extra piece and he can barely retain his pawns. The black king seems free as a bird. Nevertheless, White can launch an attack.

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1.♖xb5†!

White sacrifices a rook and in return drives Black's king into the line of fire of a battery. But since there is merely a bishop in support, it looks like a harmless manoeuvre.

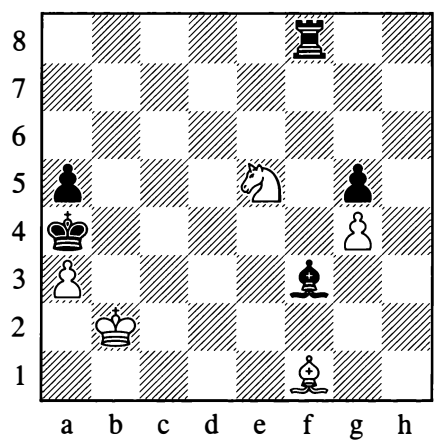
Keeping the piece with 1.♘e5? would allow Black to swap all the white pawns: 1...♔xb6 2.♘d7† ♔c6 3.♘xf8 ♗xg4 4.♘h7 ♗d1 5.♘xg5 b4 with a draw.

1...♔xb5 2.♘e5†

The discovered check is not a double check, but it still carries tremendous power.

2...♔a4

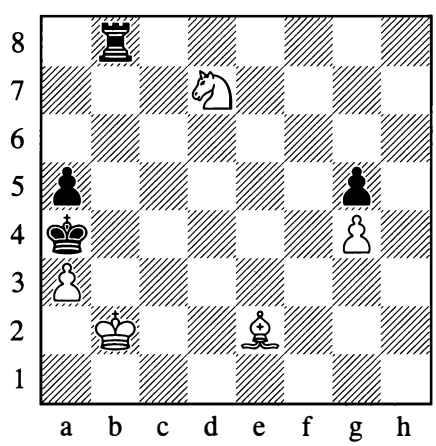
This is the only available square.



3.♘d7!

White's threat is nasty, no doubt about it, but Black can try a witty defence.

3...♗e2! 4.♗xe2 ♖b8†!

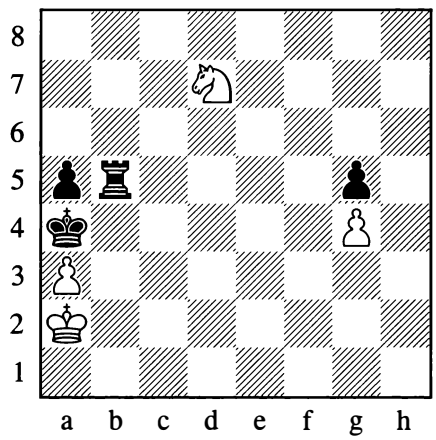


It looks like the rook forces either a stalemate or a perpetual.

5.♗b5†!!

This is a magical move indeed. The best computer programs in 1972 were unable to produce it, although the modern ones will of course find it instantly.

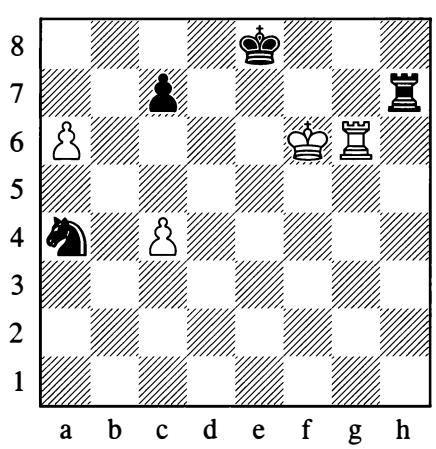
5...♖xb5† 6.♔a2!!



The move is simple, but to bring the opponent into zugzwang like this is truly exceptional. To make it even nicer, it is a mutual zugzwang. Wherever Black moves the rook, he loses it.

I expressed my disappointment to Yochanan that, despite this beauty being one of his earlier studies, he had never shown it to me. The end is just as breathtaking in the following one, which concludes the section devoted to Afek's studies.

25. 2nd HM, Endgame Studies Quarterly 2004



1.a7!

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The exclamation mark is for the precision of the order of the first 3 moves.

White can win the rook with 1.♖g8†? but it costs him all his pawns: 1...♔d7 2.a7 ♖h6† 3.♔g5 ♖a6 4.a8=♕ ♖xa8 5.♖xa8 ♘b6 and Black draws.

Cutting off the knight with 1.c5? allows the rook into the play. There follows 1...♖f7†! 2.♔e5 ♘xc5 3.a7 ♘d7† 4.♔e4! (4.♔d5 ♖f5† 5.♔c6 ♖a5) 4...♖e7†! 5.♔f4 ♔f7! and Black escapes.

1...♘b6

The rook check 1...♖f7†? allows the sixth rank to be opened, so 2.♔g5 ♘b6 3.♖xb6 wins.

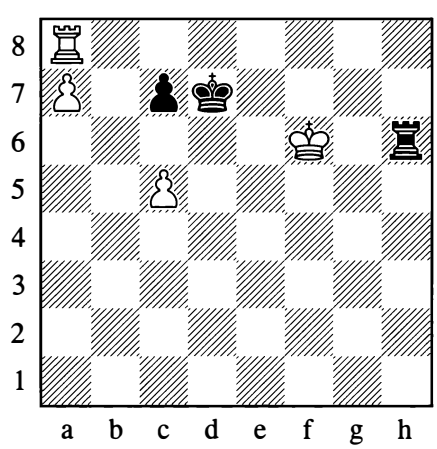
2.♖g8†

Not 2.c5? ♖f7†! 3.♔e5 ♘a8 4.♖g8† ♖f8 5.♖xf8† ♔xf8 6.♔d5 ♔e7 7.♔c6 ♔d8 8.♔b7 c6!, and although White wins the knight, there will be no way out of the corner.

2...♔d7 3.c5 ♘a8!

A great defence. This is a very clever idea, dragging the rook in front of the pawn and into a passive position.

4.♖xa8 ♖h6†



5.♔f7!!

It looks completely counter-intuitive that White is moving away from his own pawns.

5.♔e5? does not work after 5...♖a6 6.♔d5 ♖a5 7.♖h8 ♖xa7 8.♖h7† ♔c8! 9.c6 (9.♔c6 ♖a6† 10.♔b5 ♔b7) 9...♖a5† 10.♔e6 ♔b8 11.♖h8† ♔a7 12.♔d7 ♖g5 when Black draws easily by checking from the side.

5...♖a6 6.♖e8!!

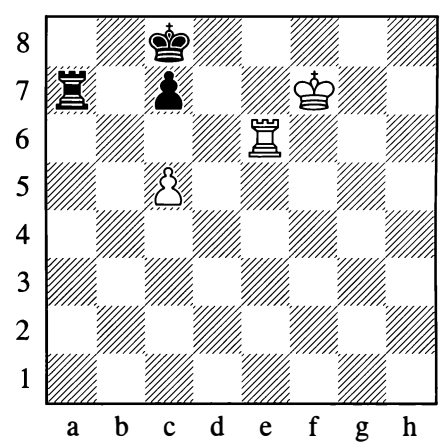
Yochanan can perform magic with little material.

6...♖xa7 7.♖e6!!

Black's king is in the centre, White hardly has any material and yet still he manages to weave a mating net.

7...♔c8

7...c6 8.♖e7† wins the rook. It is known to be dangerous to put the queen out of play even with little material. But to do that with a rook can generate heavy punishment, too.



8.c6

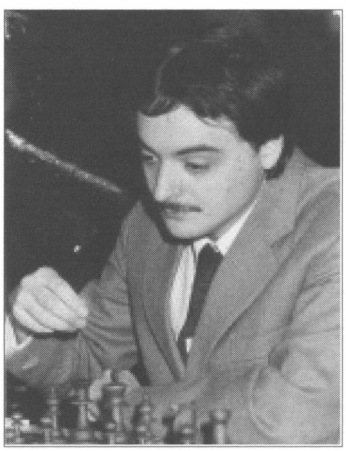
White will checkmate on the next move, regardless of what Black plays.

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Chapter 3 Gerardo Barbero

A Gentleman

highly respected and fondly remembered



The next player I introduce was a good grandmaster, but when I think of him I cannot forget about the fact that he passed away tragically early, shortly before his 40th birthday.

The player I would like to introduce was born in Argentina and moved to Hungary. He was not the only Latin American chess professional to do so, as Granda Zuniga and Julian Estrada did the same. But grandmaster Gerardo Barbero was the one who did not do so as a temporary measure. Because professional chess involves so much travelling outside one's home country, it is relatively common that a player moves to another land. Political and economic factors can trigger a decision, but it is even easier to fall in love with a lady from another nation.

Barbero took up the game relatively late (compared to the European and American players), at the age of 11. Though he was born in Lanus, Greater Buenos Aires, he grew up in the somewhat smaller city of Rosario. Had he lived in the capital it would have been even more beneficial for his chess.

I met Gerardo for the first time at the 1978 World Junior Championship in Graz, Austria. He was only 17 years old and came fifth, which is an exceptionally impressive achievement. Until the 1990s, the event was stronger, as unlike today, almost all the best juniors participated in those events. I think only Kasparov, who by then was already a powerhouse, did not participate in the Austrian tournament.

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I must admit that at the time I did not fully appreciate how good Gerardo's result was, as I was really impressed by Dolmatov (the champion that year) and Yusupov. In third place was Jens

Ove Fries Nielsen from Denmark, who later gave up the game. Gerardo lost to the mighty Soviets and the bronze medal winner, yet still finished fifth in a field that included many future grandmasters. As his wife later told me: His opinion was that his weakness in openings was the main reason he 'only' finished fifth.

He may have lost to the Soviets but he defeated the American representative, Yasser Seirawan. The American was far from his peak at the time, but he already must have been very strong, as the following year he captured the coveted title by winning the same event. Gerardo's game against the future World Championship Candidate and US champion was very interesting.

Gerardo Barbero – Yasser Seirawan

World Junior Championship, Graz 1978

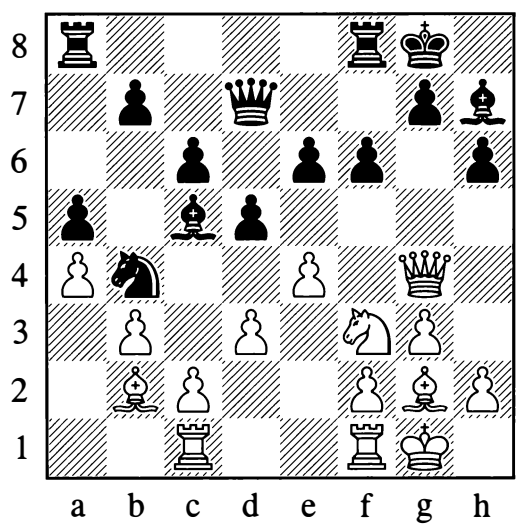
1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 c6 4.0–0 h6 5.b3 ♗f5 6.♗b2 e6 7.d3 ♗e7 8.♘bd2 0–0

Black can play without castling, but it would allow e2-e4 in one move as the g7-pawn would hang.

9.e3 a5 10.a4 ♘a6 11.♕e2 ♘b4 12.♖ac1 ♗h7 13.♘e5 ♘d7

13...♘e8 14.c3 ♘a6 is also playable.

14.♘xd7 ♕xd7 15.♕g4 f6 16.e4 ♗c5 17.♘f3



17...♕f7

Seirawan plays with great subtlety. It is not easy to see what he is intending.

18.♔h1?!

It looks like Gerardo underestimated Black's next move. It is a bit of a surprising one, so he might have missed it completely. 18.e5 was better.

18...h5! 19.♕h4 g5!?

The young American decides to win the piece. Black is also better after 19...dxe4!? 20.dxe4 e5. Here White is passive, although he is not behind in material.

20.♘xg5 fxg5 21.♕xg5†

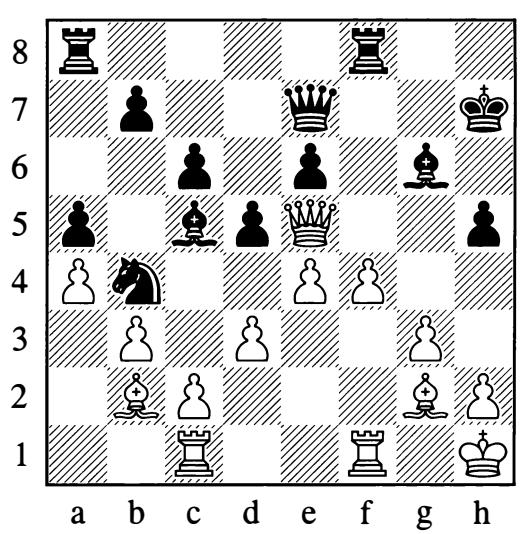
In return for the lost piece, White has obtained two pawns and some initiative. In addition, his pawns can start rolling. Nevertheless, Black is still better because of the material advantage.

21...♗g6

After 21...♕g6 22.♕e5 ♖ae8 23.f4 ♗e7 24.♕c7 I prefer Black.

22.♕e5 ♔h7 23.f4 ♕e7?

Seirawan hopes to chase the queen away, but he should have simply brought another piece into play with 23...♖ae8!.

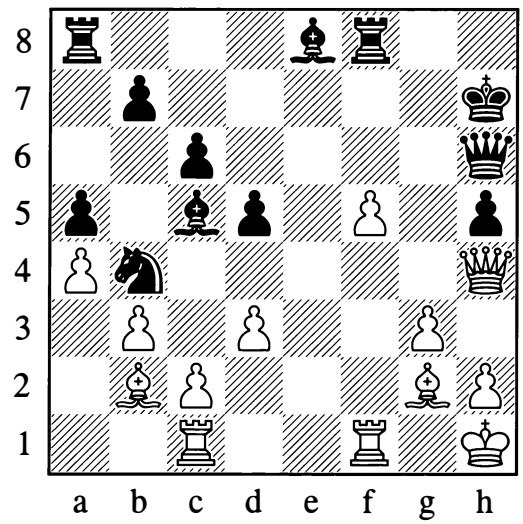


24.f5! exf5 25.exf5 ♗e8 26.♕f4 ♕e3

Black badly wants to swap queens, but does not achieve his aim. One of his problems is, if he blocks off the b2-bishop with ...d5-d4, then White gets the e4-square for his other bishop.

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27.♕h4 ♕h6



28.♖ce1!

Bringing the passive rook into play, while also making space on c1 for the bishop. White's attack is becoming very dangerous, although the result is not yet a foregone conclusion.

28...♗f7

After 28...♘xc2 29.♖e6! wins.

29.♗c1 ♕g7 30.♗h3!

Improving another piece.

30...♖fe8

30...♕d4 can be strongly met by 31.♖f4! ♕c3 (after 31...♖ae8 32.♖ef1 White's attack is too dangerous) 32.♖ef1 when Black is in trouble – but not 32.♖e6? because of 32...♕a1!.

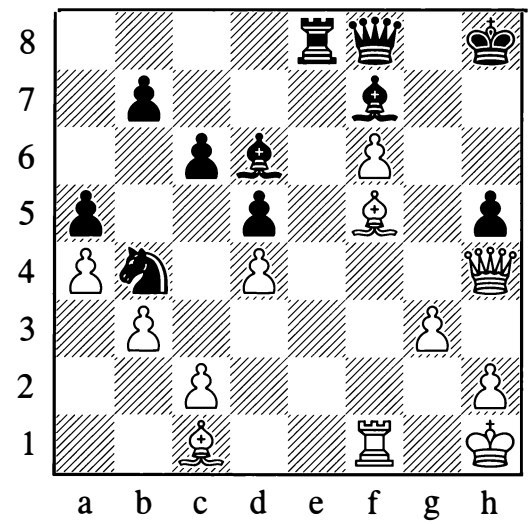
31.♖xe8 ♖xe8 32.f6! ♕f8?

Under pressure, Seirawan commits the decisive error. The problem is that the queen now occupies a square which is needed for the bishop. Black could have defended with 32...♕g8! 33.♗f5† (33.d4 ♗f8 34.g4 ♖e4) 33...♔h8 34.♕f4 (34.g4 ♘xc2 35.♗h6 ♗f8 36.♗xf8 ♕xf8 37.g5 ♕g8) 34...♗f8 35.d4 ♗g6 36.♕g5 ♗f7 37.♕f4 It looks like the position is balanced.

33.d4 ♗d6 34.♗f5†

34.c3 ♘a6 35.♗g4 ♖e4 36.♗f5† ♔h8 37.♗xe4 dxe4 38.♖f5 ♕e8 39.♖xa5 wins as well.

34...♔h8



35.♕g5!

This excellent move paralyses the enemy queen while preparing a serious threat.

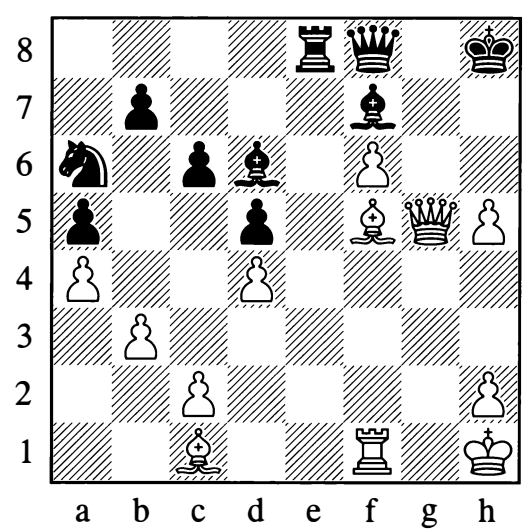
35...♖d8

This is directed against ♗g6, which would win against most other moves.

36.g4!!

This is the start of a very imaginative plan. Instead 36.♗g6 allows Black to reveal the point of his last move, as after 36...♗xg6 37.♕xg6 ♕g8! 38.♕xh5† ♕h7 the rook is not hanging on e8. White would retain the better chances here, but the fight continues.

36...♘a6 37.gxh5 ♖e8



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38.h6!
1–0

Black resigned, as he is utterly powerless to prevent White's main threat. For instance, 38...♖e2 39.♕g7†! This was of course the point behind pushing the h-pawn. 39...♕xg7 40.fxg7† ♔g8 41.♗f4 ♗xf4 42.♖xf4 ♖e8 43.♖g4 etc.

The game shows Gerardo's strong side and his relative weakness. If he had known better openings, maybe he could have matched the mighty Soviets. In the next world junior championship, he did not do so well. Interestingly, he did not participate when he was 20, even though the event took place in nearby Mexico.

Gerardo did not return to Europe for a long time. He played in the 1978 Olympiad, but he probably only managed it because the event was held in Buenos Aires and the host country could nominate several teams. In 1984, however, he won the Argentinean championship and was selected for the national team. In 1985, he obtained the silver medal in the national championship, finishing behind Grandmaster Panno. We will look at one of his games from this year, which demonstrated his attacking prowess.

Gerardo Barbero – Claudio Aguerreberry

Argentina 1985

1.♘f3

In the majority of his games Gerardo opened with 1.d4. The Achilles' heel of his white repertoire was the Grünfeld defence. According to my database, he only scored 50% against it. When he anticipated the Grünfeld would be played, he often sidestepped it like this.

1...♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.♕a4†

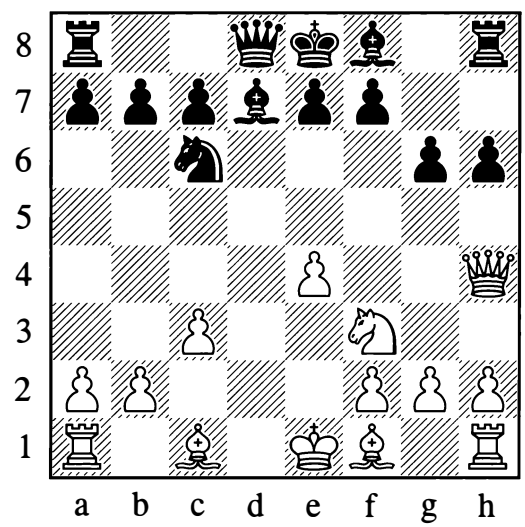
This particular anti-Grünfeld variation remains quite topical to this day.

5...♗d7 6.♕h4 ♘xc3 7.dxc3 ♘c6

After 7...♗g7 8.♗h6 is unpleasant.

8.e4 h6?

8...e5 is the main line here, when play may continue 9.♗g5 ♗e7 10.♗c4 h6 (10...h5!?) 11.♗xe7 ♕xe7 12.♕g3 0–0–0.



9.♗f4!

This is a very strong move, improving on Tukmakov – Gutman, USSR 1977, in which 9.♗e3 was played.

9...♗g7 10.♕g3! ♖c8 11.h4 e6!

This is the most resilient defence. Riskier was:

11...0–0 12.h5

Gerardo recommended continuing like this, but 12.0–0–0, as in the game, is promising as well.

12...e5

12...g5 is refuted by 13.♘xg5! (13.♗xg5 is less convincing: 13...hxg5 14.h6 ♗f6 15.e5 ♗f5 Black is still alive) 13...e5 (13...hxg5 14.h6 wins) 14.♗e3 hxg5 15.♗xg5 f6 16.♗e3 and Black is lost.

13.♗xh6!!

This beautiful and surprising shot was given by Gerardo in his *Chess Informant* annotations, which I have reproduced here.

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In some variations, there are alternative solutions. Nevertheless, his ideas are certainly very entertaining.

13...♗xh6 14.hxg6 ♗f4

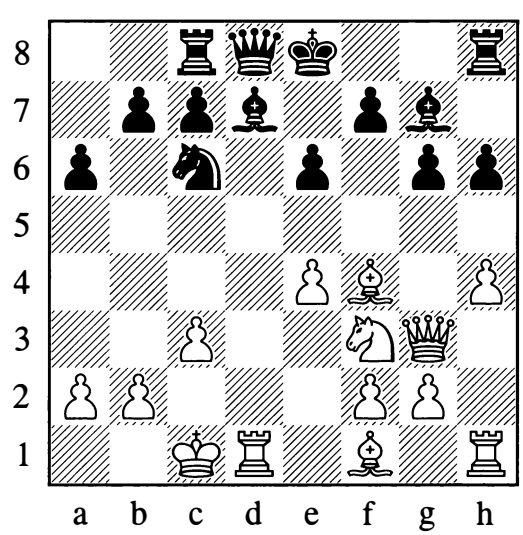
14...♗g7 15.♕h2 ♖e8 (15...fxg6 16.♕h7† ♔f7 17.♗c4† wins for White) 16.♕h7† ♔f8 17.gxf7 ♔xf7 18.♗c4† ♗e6 (18...♖e6 19.0–0–0) 19.♕f5† ♕f6 20.♘g5† It is all over for Black.

15.gxf7† ♔xf7 16.♗c4† ♔f6 17.♕h4† ♔g7 18.♕h7† ♔f6 19.♖h6† ♗xh6 20.♕xh6† ♔e7 21.♕g7† ♔d6 22.0–0–0† ♔c5 23.♖xd7 ♕f6 24.♖d5†! ♔b6 25.♖b5† ♔a6 26.♖xe5†

Black has managed to avoid the checkmate, but has paid too heavy a price in material.

12.0–0–0 a6!

12...0–0 was still too dangerous: 13.h5 g5 14.♘xg5! This is how Gerardo planned to raid Black's king. 14...hxg5 15.h6 ♗f6 16.e5 ♗e7 17.♖h5 ♔h8 18.♖xg5! This is a cute capture. 18...♕e8 (18...♗xg5 19.♗xg5 f6 20.♗xf6† ♖xf6 21.♕g7 is mate, while if 18...f5 then 19.♖g7 and ♖h7† is coming) 19.♖g7 ♖g8 20.♖xd7! ♕xd7 21.♗d3 f5 22.♕g6 and White checkmates on the next move.



13.♘e5!

White does not mind exchanging pieces if it means he can prevent his opponent from getting better organized. Gerardo indicates White had an advantage with 13.♖d2 as well.

13...♘xe5 14.♗xe5 ♗xe5

After 14...0–0 15.h5! g5 16.♗xg7 ♔xg7 17.f4 f6 18.e5! White breaks through.

15.♕xe5 f6

This does not solve Black's problems, but it is difficult to offer him any advice.

15...0–0 is unsatisfactory: 16.♕f4 ♔g7 17.e5! c5 (17...♕e7 18.♕f6† and 17...f6 18.exf6† ♖xf6 19.♕d4 both win for White) 18.♖h3 ♖c7 19.♖hd3 Black is desperately passive, although this may have been preferable to the game.

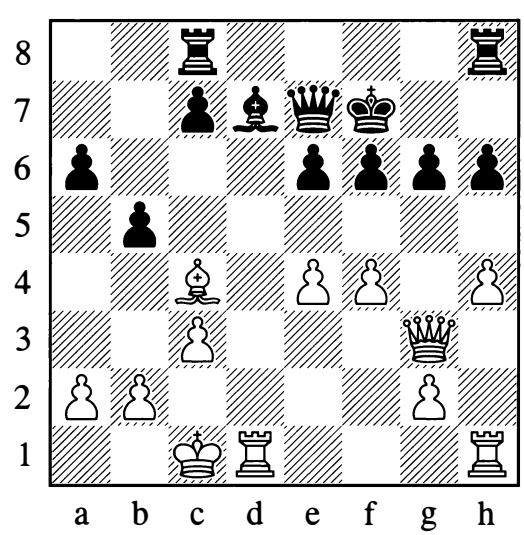
It may be that 15...♖g8, an ugly move, was the most resilient. But even here, Black's king would still come under pressure later on.

16.♕g3 ♔f7 17.f4 ♕e7

If 17...b5, taking the c4-square away from White, then trouble comes on the other side: 18.h5 g5 19.e5 f5 20.fxg5 hxg5 21.h6 ♕e7 22.♕h2 Black has serious problems.

18.♗c4 b5?!

Overlooking White's next move, although the threat was not easy to prevent. Black would certainly not be helped by 18...♔g7? 19.h5.



19.f5!!

Barbero finally opens up the king, and the black position falls apart.

19...gxf5

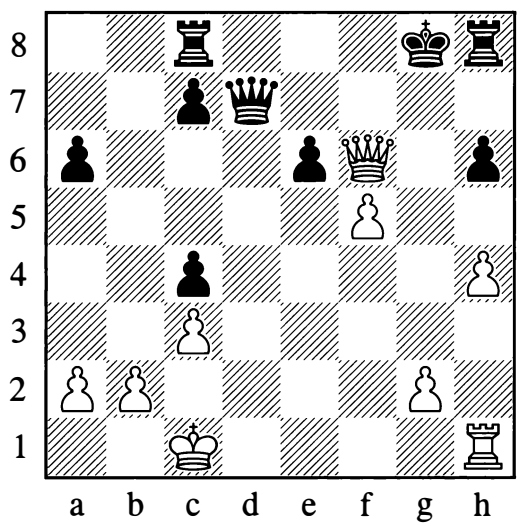
19...bxc4 is refuted by 20.♕xg6† ♔f8 21.♖xd7 ♕xd7 22.♕xf6† ♔g8 23.♖h3 ♕g7 24.♕xe6† ♔h7 25.f6 and wins.

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20.exf5 bxc4

20...♖cg8 allows 21.♕xc7, while 20...♖hg8 runs into the attractive line 21.♖xd7!! ♖xg3 (21...♕xd7 22.fxe6† ♔e7 23.exd7) 22.♗xe6†! ♔f8 23.♖xe7 ♔xe7 24.♗xc8 and White wins with the extra piece.

21.♕g6† ♔f8 22.♖xd7 ♕xd7 23.♕xf6† ♔g8

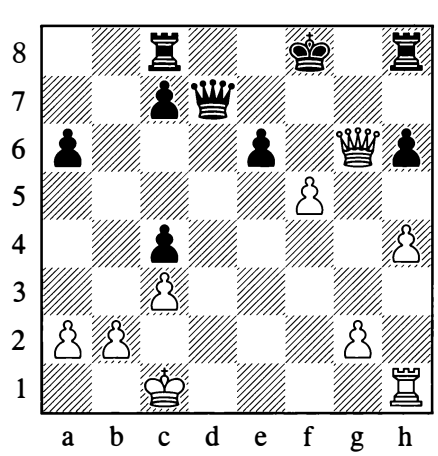


24.♕g6†!

Gerardo plays with great accuracy until the end. The tempting 24.♖h3? wins after 24...♖h7? 25.♖g3† ♖g7 26.fxe6, but Black can defend with 24...♕d6! when White can achieve no more than a perpetual check.

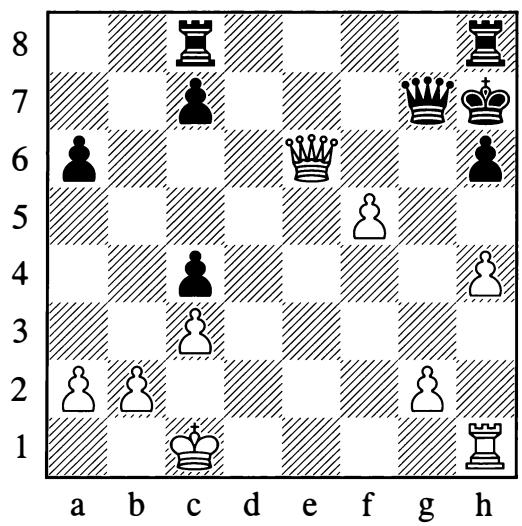
24...♕g7

24...♔f8 Moving away from the check was no remedy either:



25.fxe6 Gerardo got a little carried away in his *Chess Informant* annotations, awarding this obvious move two exclamation marks. 25...♕h7 (Black loses after 25...♕e7 26.♖f1† or 25...♕g7 26.e7†! or 25...♕e8 26.♖f1† ♔e7 27.♕f6† when the checks soon end in a checkmate) 26.♖f1† ♔e7 27.♖f7† White wins easily.

25.♕xe6† ♔h7



26.f6

It is interesting that White is able to conduct his attack without any help from the rook on h1.

26...♕xg2?

With little time on his clock, Black chooses what can politely be called 'the path of least resistance'. But even with perfect defence, the best that he can achieve is an ultimately losing rook ending. The following options can quickly be discarded:

26...♕g6 27.♕d7†

26...♕f8 27.♕f5† ♔g8 28.♕g6†

26...♕g8 27.♕f5† (27.♕e7† wins as well) 27...♕g6 28.♕d7†, winning easily in all cases.

26...♖he8 avoids immediate disaster, but 27.♕xc8! ♖xc8 28.fxg7 ♔xg7 29.♖f1 gives Black no counterplay at all in what should be a fairly trivial rook ending.

26...♖ce8!

This is the only move that poses any problems. White will have to demonstrate

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some good endgame technique:

a) In his annotations, Gerardo gives

27.♕xe8 ♖xe8 28.fxg7 ♖e2!

28...♔xg7? 29.♖d1 wins comfortably.

29.♖g1 ♔xg7 30.a3!

30.a4 ♖e5! is not so easy.

30...♔g6

30...♔f6 31.g4 intending g5 wins, while 30...a5 31.a4 also does not help Black.

31.g3 ♔h5 32.♖d1 ♔g4 33.♖d4†

Gerardo evaluates this as winning for White, but I am not altogether sure about this.

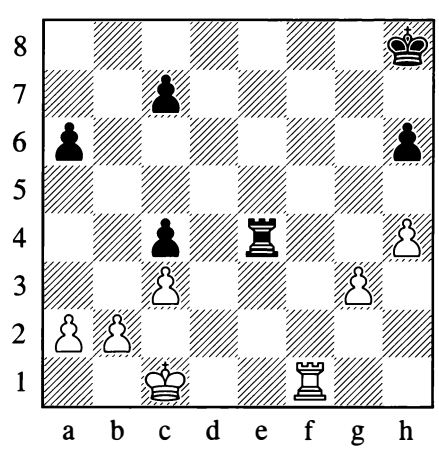
33...♔xg3 34.♖xc4 h5

Maybe White wins the race, but it will be a close one.

b) 27.fxg7!

This is even stronger than Gerardo's move, and leaves the result in no doubt.

27...♖xe6 28.gxh8=♕† ♔xh8 29.♖f1 ♖e4 30.g3



30...♔g7

30...♖g4 31.♖f8†! ♔h7 (31...♔g7 32.♖c8 ♖xg3 33.♖xc7† comes to the same thing) 32.♖f7† ♔g6 33.♖xc7 ♔g6 34.♖xc4 Black is two pawns down, and has no chance of holding.

31.♖f4

31.♔d2 is also good enough, but the pawn ending is a win.

31...♖xf4 32.gxf4 ♔f6 33.♔d2 ♔f5 34.♔e3 h5 35.♔f3 a5

Worse is 35...c5 36.a3 a5 37.a4 with a simple zugzwang.

36.b3 cxb3 37.axb3 c6 38.♔e3 ♔g4 39.♔e4 ♔xh4 40.♔f3!

And White wins.

After the move played in the game, it is all over.

27.♕f7†

1–0

Gerardo's next Olympiad was in Dubai. He played in a total of six Olympiads, the final one being Moscow 1994.

The next game is a nice example of how to position the king in a closed position when one has a space advantage. Analysing the game with modern tools reveals some fantastic resources. Gerardo controlled the game well when it was closed, but also when the position opened.

Gerardo Barbero – Charles Partos

Dubai Olympiad 1986

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 e5 4.♘c3 d6 5.e4 ♗e7 6.♗d3 0–0

Nowadays Czech Benoni experts prefer to delay castling in favour of 6...♘bd7, with the possible idea of ...♘f8-g6 combined with ...h5-h4 to secure some squares for the knights without revealing the king's position.

7.h3 ♘e8 8.♘f3!

White had better not delay the development of this piece any longer, as Black was threatening to exchange his poor bishop.

8...♘d7 9.g4 g6 10.♗h6

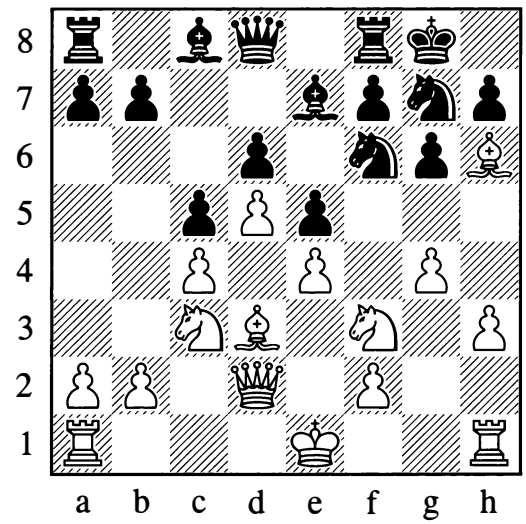
Alternatively 10.h4 ♘df6 11.♘h2 h5 12.g5 ♘h7 and Black can play for ...f6, ...fxg5 and perhaps a ...♖f4 exchange sacrifice.

10...♘g7 11.♕d2!?

The queen often goes to e2 in this line, but Gerardo's move is also quite reasonable.

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11...♘f6



12.♔e2!

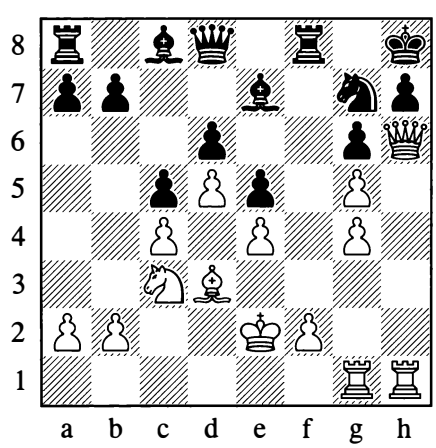
This strong move was a novelty at the time. In the present position the king is ideally placed in the centre. For the time being, it will not be in any danger as the position is so blocked. It would not be as good to position the old man on the queenside, as Black could aspire to open that area with ...b5, perhaps sacrificing a pawn if necessary. Furthermore, it may even be possible for White to switch between playing on both flanks and conduct his own queenside attack. Therefore the king should stay in the centre, while vacating the first rank in order to connect the rooks.

12...♔h8 13.♖ag1 ♘g8 14.h4

The more patient 14.♗e3 was also possible.

14...f6

In his analysis, Barbero considers 14...♘xh6 to be bad, but Black has an amazing defence. 15.♕xh6 f6 16.♘g5 fxg5 17.hxg5



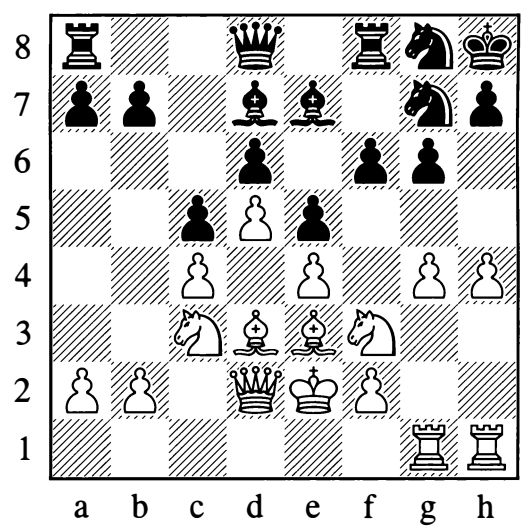
Black's position looks dangerous, but if he reacts precisely he should be fine:

a) Gerardo only considers 17...♔g8, which he refutes convincingly: 18.♕xh7† ♔f7 19.♖h6 ♖g8 (after 19...♗xg5 20.♖xg6 ♖g8 21.♘b5 White invades) 20.♖xg6 ♕f8 21.♖g3 ♔e8 22.♘b5 ♔d8 (22...♔d7 23.♖f3) 23.♘xd6! ♗xd6 24.♖f6 and White wins. However, Black has two other tries.

b) 17...♘h5?! This is very witty, but ultimately insufficient. 18.gxh5 ♖xf2†! 19.♔xf2 ♗f8 Black traps the queen, but his problems remain. 20.hxg6 ♗xh6 21.♖xh6 ♕f8† 22.♔e1 ♕f3 23.♗e2 (alternatively 23.♔d2 ♕f4† 24.♔c2 ♗g4 25.♖xh7† and Black will struggle) 23...♕e3 24.♖gh1 and Black is in trouble.

c) 17...♗xg4†!! This wonderful move is the solution to Black's problems. It is the best way to play against the h6-queen: 18.♖xg4 ♘h5 19.♖xh5 gxh5 20.♕xh5 ♖g8 21.g6 ♖g7 and Black is not worse.

15.♗e3 ♗d7



16.♘h2

Gerardo prepares f2-f4. Improving his rook with 16.♖g2 was possible too.

16...a6?!

In a blocked position, it is easy to forget about the importance of every tempo. In this case, Black's plan of preparing ...b5 is just too slow. 16...f5!? was somewhat better than the

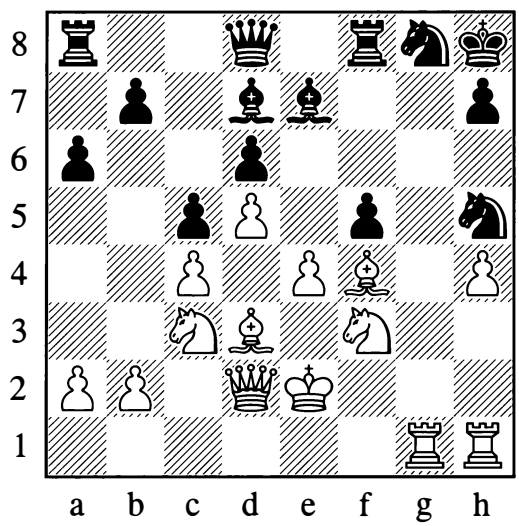
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game continuation, although White would still have had the upper hand after 17.gxf5 gxf5 18.f4.

17.f4 exf4 18.♗xf4 f5 19.gxf5 gxf5 20.♘f3!

The knight had no function on h2 any more.

20...♘h5



21.e5

Obviously White avoids 21.exf5 ♗xf5 22.♗xf5 ♖xf5 23.♗e3 b5. The pawn on f5 blocks the path of two of Black's pieces, so it would be senseless to exchange it.

21...dxe5

Black decides not to eliminate one of his opponent's powerful bishops. 21...♘xf4† certainly looks like the obvious move, but Partos was obviously not happy with the position after 22.♕xf4 dxe5 23.♘xe5, when possible continuations include:

a) 23...♗f6 24.♖xg8†! ♔xg8 25.♖g1† ♗g7 (25...♔h8 26.♘g6†!+–) 26.♕h6 ♕e7 27.♖xg7†! ♕xg7 28.♕xg7† ♔xg7 29.♘xd7 The three pieces easily defeat the two rooks in this case.

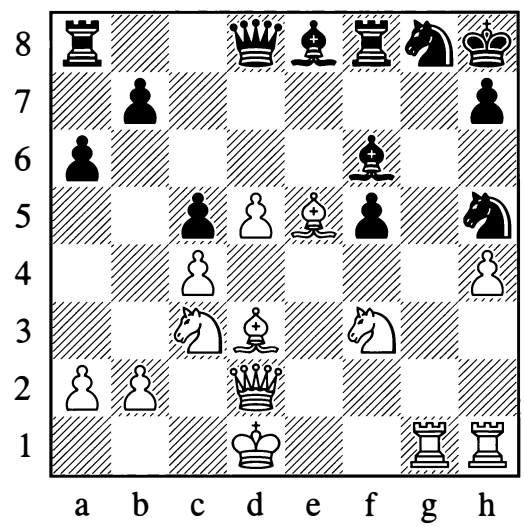
b) 23...♗e8 24.h5 ♗d6 25.♘g6† ♗xg6 (25...hxg6 26.hxg6† ♔g7 27.♖h7† ♔f6 28.♘e4#) 26.hxg6 ♕e7† 27.♕e3 and White breaks in.

c) 23...♕e8! looks relatively best, although even here Black's problems remain after 24.♔d1! (24.♖h3!?) 24...♗d6 25.♖e1. Black's king is in danger and White dominates the e-file.

22.♗xe5† ♗f6 23.♔d1!

This is a good prophylactic move, removing the king from the open file.

23...♗e8



24.♖g5 ♘g7 25.♖hg1?!

A slight inaccuracy; instead 25.♗xf6 would have reduced Black's options and led to a very promising position after 25...♘xf6 26.♖hg1.

25...♗h5?

Black should have rolled the dice with the risky-looking 25...♗xg5! 26.♗xg7†! ♔xg7 27.♘xg5. White certainly has a dangerous-looking attack, but no clear win. In the game White gets the best of both worlds: a powerful attack, with no material investment.

26.♗xf6 ♗xf3† 27.♔c2 ♕xf6 28.♖xg7 b5

28...♕xg7 29.♖xg7 ♔xg7 30.♕g5† ♔h8 31.♗xf5! and White wins.

29.b3!?

White strengthens his centre. After 29.♕f4? bxc4 30.♕xc4 (30.♗xc4 ♗g4!) 30...♕d4 Black is still in the game.

29...bxc4 30.bxc4 ♕xh4! 31.♕e3 ♗e4?

This is a losing move. After the superior 31...♕h2† 32.♔c1 ♗h5 33.♕xc5 ♕e5 34.♔c2 White has an advantage with the strong central pawns, but the game is far from over.

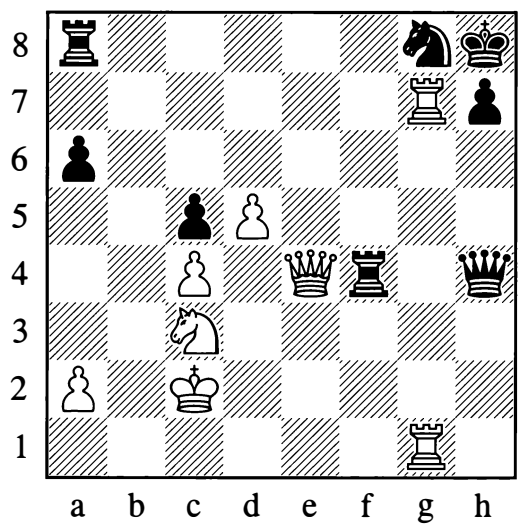
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32.♗xe4 fxe4 33.♕xe4

At this point both players were short of time. 33.♘xe4 ♘f6 34.♘d2! also favours White.

33...♖f4

33...♕f2† 34.♘e2 ♘f6 allows a beautiful finish with 35.♕e5!! ♖g8 (35...♖ae8 36.♖xh7†! leads to a checkmate) 36.♖f7! ♖af8 37.♖gg7! and wins.



34.♕e5!

It is all over now for Black.

34...♘f6 35.♖b7! ♖e8 36.♖b8 ♕h2† 37.♔b3 ♕xg1 38.♖xe8† ♔g7 39.♖e7† ♔f8 40.♖b7 1–0

Let me relate my memories about Barbero. I played him for the first time in Kecskemet in 1986. He was visibly in love with Katalin, whom he later married. As Katalin told me, they actually got acquainted at the 1986 Balatonbereny Open. In Kecskemet at that time he did not play well – I suspect that his concentration was not fully on the chess.

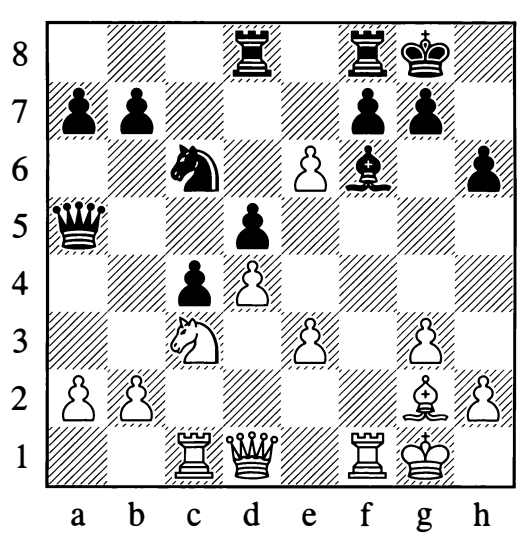
As I recall, he immigrated to Hungary at roughly this time. A year later, he defeated me in the national team championship. He went for safety in the opening and punished me for my overly aggressive reaction. I made a mistake that was not usual for a player at my level. I remember that he felt for me in the post mortem and consoled me a bit. I found him a friendly although somewhat closed person. He did have some close friends though, including Miklos Orso who was also present at Balatonbereny in 1986. Miklos spoke both English and Spanish fluently. He was initially Gerardo's partner in chess analysis, but later became a family friend who kept in close touch with the family in Budapest.

A chess player has such a long career, perhaps spanning 30 years or more. Despite occasional rumours to the contrary, they are all human, and most will be involved in some controversy of one kind or another. But I have never seen or heard of any such thing with regard to Gerardo.

The next game shows once again how well he attacked. Gerardo uses his tactical flair to outplay a strong East German grandmaster.

Gerardo Barbero – Lutz Espig

Kecskemet 1987



17.♕g4!

Barbero takes advantage of the fact that Black's queen is misplaced. With several powerful moves he shows that White is not just better, but winning.

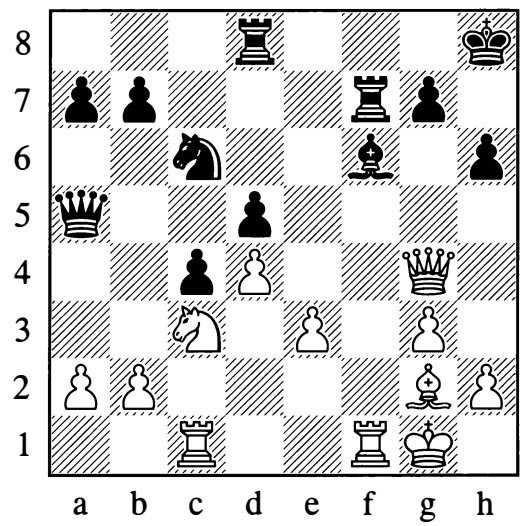
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17...♔h8

17...♗g5 fails to 18.exf7† winning.

18.exf7 ♖xf7

18...♘e7 is destroyed by 19.♖xf6! gxf6 20.♕e6. Gerardo shows a lovely win here: 20...♕c7 21.♕xf6† ♔h7 22.♘xd5! ♖xd5 23.♗e4†



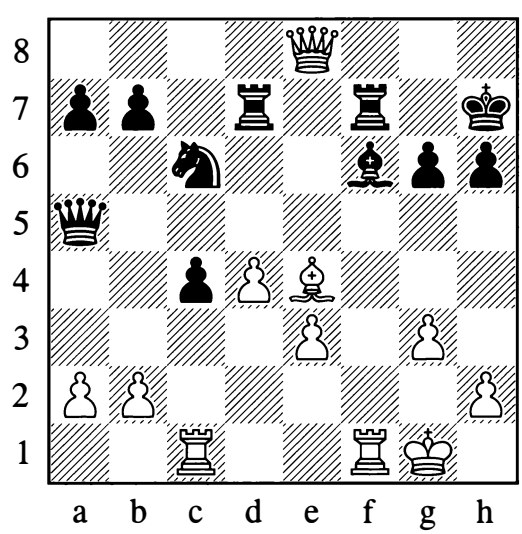
19.♘xd5!!

This is a crushing tactical shot.

19...♖xd5 20.♕e6 ♖dd7

After 20...♖fd7 21.♕e8† ♔h7 22.♗e4† White checkmates in a few more moves.

21.♕e8† ♔h7 22.♗e4† g6



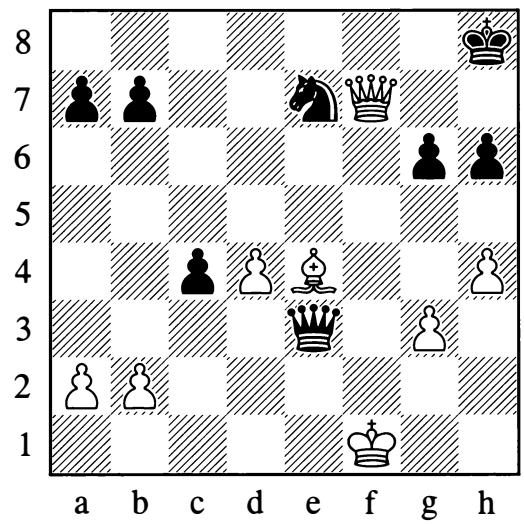
23.♖xf6

White wins back the piece while keeping his attacking options.

23...♖xf6 24.♕xd7† ♔h8 25.♖f1!

Removing the only defending piece.

25...♖xf1† 26.♔xf1 ♕g5 27.♕f7! ♘e7 28.h4 ♕xe3



29.♕e8†!

1–0

Black resigned in view of 29...♘g8 30.♕e5† ♔h7 31.♗xg6† winning the queen. It is amazing to see how quickly Gerardo was able to destroy his opponent's position, which did not appear too bad in the initial diagram.

Barbero was not an opening specialist, yet he was able to play the opening superbly. He may not have known the most theory, but he had a knack for steering the game towards positions that suited him. Judging someone's best game is a rather subjective matter, but I rate the following as his undisputed masterpiece.

Gerardo Barbero – John Fedorowicz

Montpellier 1987

To quote Katalin:

> "Montpellier had pleasant memories for Gerardo, for this was the tournament where he had achieved his first International Grandmaster norm just a year before."

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1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.bxa6 g6 6.♘c3 ♗xa6 7.♘f3 d6 8.g3 ♗g7 9.♗g2 0–0

For a long time 9...♘bd7 was considered the precise move order. Grandmaster Fedorowicz chose a different sequence, not because he was unaware of the conventional wisdom, but because he had devised a new plan. Fedorowicz is actually a true expert on the Benko, and has written books on this particular opening. I used his first one when I was helping the young Peter Leko to prepare this opening. I like that book very much, and consider it a very fine work.

10.0–0 ♘bd7 11.♕c2 ♖a7

This was the start of John's new set-up.

12.♖d1 ♕a8!

From here the queen increases the pressure against the pawns on a2 and d5, while also making room for the other rook to join in the action from b8.

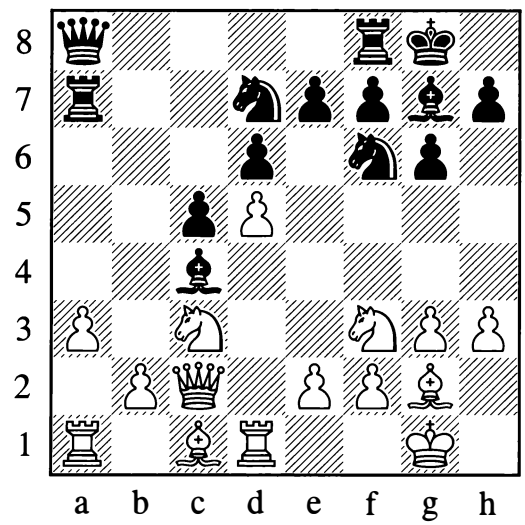
13.h3

Against the Benko, when White takes the pawn, he should proceed slowly and carefully. One common plan is to play a4 and later plant a knight to b5. If White can execute this plan successfully then Black's position can become paralysed. An example of what not to do would be 13.e4? ♘g4! followed by ...♘ge5 and ...c4, when Black gains a huge outpost on d3. This may explain Gerardo's choice in the game. Another sensible alternative would have been 13.a4!?.

13...♗c4?!

Black hopes to create weaknesses by provoking the opponent's queenside pawns into moving, but in the end these moves turn out to be useful for White. 13...♖b8 would have been a better way to improve his position, but perhaps the most purposeful move would have been 13...♘b6!. The plan is ...♘a4, exchanging the c3-knight, a valuable defender of the white queenside, while also helping to clear the diagonal for the g7-bishop.

14.a3!



Over the following phase of the game Gerardo makes a number of small improving moves that are exactly in the spirit of White's overall strategy. Each of them helps him to consolidate his queenside while gradually gaining space.

14...♖b8

Black had better not touch the d5-pawn: 14...♘xd5? 15.♘d2 wins for White, while after 14...♗xd5? 15.♘xd5 ♘xd5 16.♘d2! the pin is more than unpleasant for Black, with ♘c4 on the way.

15.♘d2 ♗a6 16.b3! ♘e8 17.♗b2 ♘c7

Black is a pawn down, yet he wants to exchange pieces with ...♘b5. Actually this makes perfect sense; not only would an exchange of minor pieces help the side with less space, it would also remove a valuable defender of the white queenside.

18.a4!

Of course Gerardo prevents his opponent's plan. Still, this move does carry a couple of drawbacks. White gives away the b4-square as an outpost for his opponent's pieces, while also sacrificing the flexibility of his pawns. However, we will soon see that the benefits far outweigh the costs.

18...♕b7 19.♖ab1 ♕c8 20.♗a1 ♖ab7 21.♔h2!?

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The Benko can be dangerous even when White has an advantage, so there is no harm in being extra-cautious.

21...♘e5

Black already has no active plan, but it seems that the text just loses time. It may be that Fedorowicz was hoping to lure his opponent into seizing too much space, in the hope of provoking a weakness somewhere.

22.f4 ♘d7 23.e3!

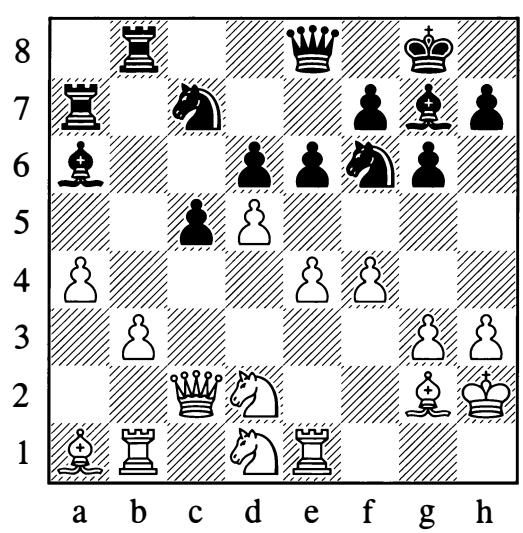
Still playing small moves.

23...♕e8 24.♖e1 ♖a7 25.♘d1!

An annoying move for Black, who would ideally prefer to avoid the exchange of his prized 'Benko bishop'.

25...♘f6 26.e4 e6

Waiting passively leads to a very gloomy future as well. White would play ♘e3 and e5 with a huge advantage.



27.e5!

One of the most difficult aspects of chess is being able to switch between different strategies in the blink of an eye. For several moves White has been manoeuvring in a patient and methodical manner, but now the time has come for direct action. Gerardo rises to the challenge.

27...dxe5 28.♕xc5

The winner judges it a win. He is right, but against the Benko one must be alert right until the opponent signs the score sheet. It is a really tricky opening.

28...♖ab7 29.d6 ♘cd5 30.fxe5 ♘d7 31.♕f2 ♖b4 32.♘e3 ♘7b6 33.♖bc1!?

White elects to play actively. He is not bothered about collecting material with 33.♘c2, which would win as well.

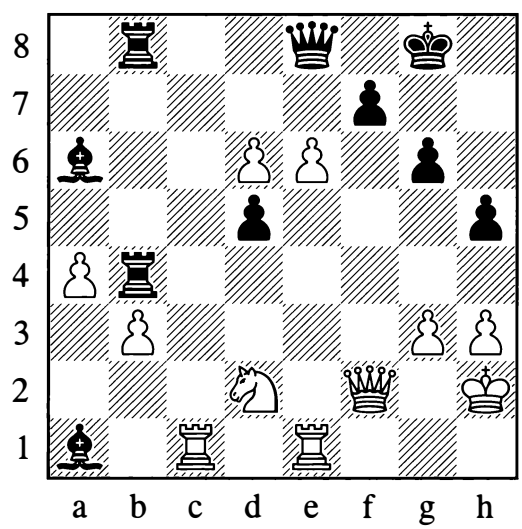
33...h5!? 34.♘xd5!?

Once again 34.♘c2 is fine.

34...♘xd5 35.♗xd5 exd5 36.e6!

Just because Gerardo has a material advantage, it does not mean he is any less intent on attacking.

36...♗xa1



37.♖xa1

A practical decision, although the flashy continuation 37.d7! ♕e7 38.♖c7! would have finished the game instantly.

37...fxe6 38.♕f6 ♗c8 39.♖ac1 ♖4b7 40.♖f1 ♖g7 41.♖c7 ♗d7 42.♘f3!

42.a5 was fine, but the knight is simply itching to be let loose on the dark squares.

42...♖b6 43.♘e5 ♖xd6 44.♖fc1 d4?

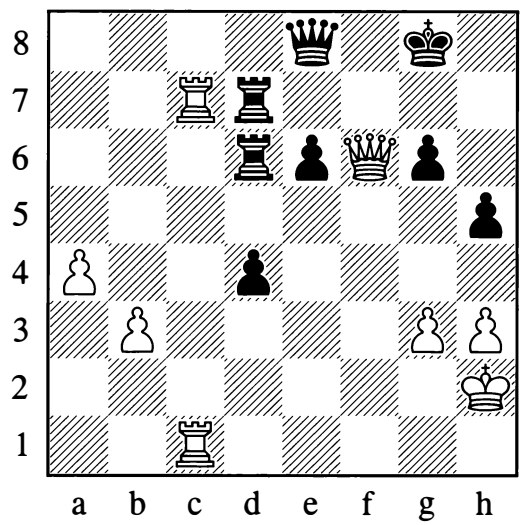
It is not surprising that Black collapses under such pressure. The more resilient 44...♕e7 would also not have saved the game after 45.♕xe7 ♖xe7 46.b4!?. This is not the only win, but it is the simplest. White will exchange on d7, after which his connected passed pawns will be much faster.

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45.♘xd7!

With precise moves, White now catches Black's king in time.

45...♖gxd7



46.♖c8! ♖d8 47.♖1c7!

1–0

This was an exemplary game. White played superbly during the build-up phase and proved equally capable when the position sharpened up.

In the next game, we look at Barbero's victory over his greatest ever victim: the Danish legend, Bent Larsen.

I quote Katalin again:

> "Miguel Najdorf's invitation to the tournament came with very attractive terms. It meant that Gerardo would be returning to Argentina with his wife and his son Janos, who was born in 1988, and he could finally show his parents and brother their new grandchild and nephew. Janos was barely three, but he already spoke Spanish beautifully, as that was his father's native language. Naturally, all this made the grandparents very happy. Gerardo only arrived in the capital a day before the tournament. The uncle's house was quite a distance from the tournament venue, so Gerardo, tired from the long trip, was not very thrilled with the pairing, which pitted him in the very first round against Grandmaster Larsen. He had to take a 2-hour bus ride from the uncle's house to the tournament, but despite all of this, his great joy at playing in Buenos Aires, at having Kati and Janos with him, at being able to see his parents and introduce Janos to them soon – all these gave him strength and brought out his best play."

In many ways this was a typical Barbero game: solid, not a really ambitious opening, but when the chance to attack comes, he does it so well.

Gerardo Barbero – Bent Larsen

Buenos Aires 1991

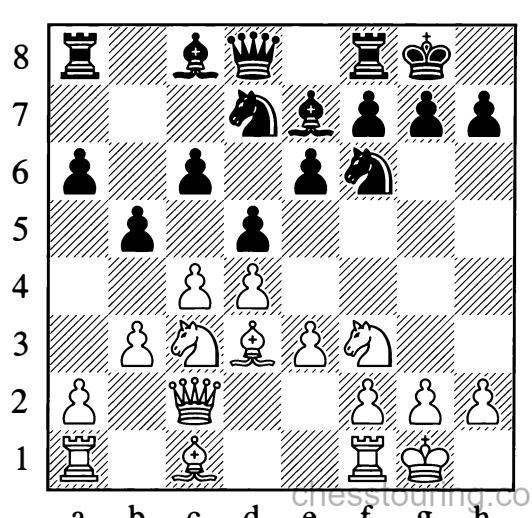
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.♘c3 c6 5.e3

It was not Gerardo's style to go for long theoretical lines with moves like 5.♗g5, inviting the notorious Botvinnik system.

5...♘bd7 6.♕c2 ♗e7?! 7.b3 a6?! 8.♗d3 b5

Larsen was always known for his original treatment of the opening, but on this occasion he played it too optimistically. The c8-bishop has been neglected and White will never really let it into the game. The exploitation will be stylish.

9.0–0 0–0



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10.e4! b4?!

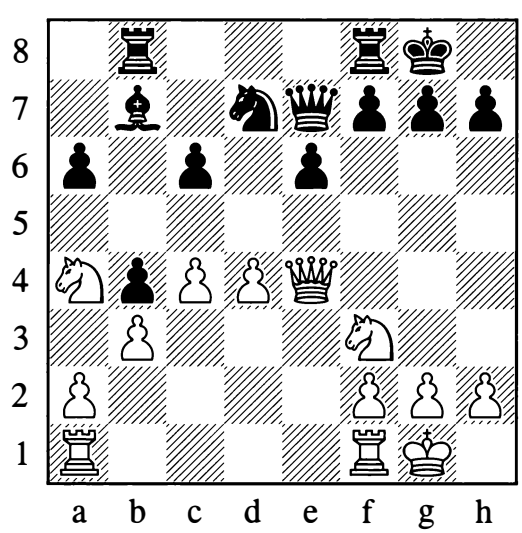
The lesser evil was to open the position with: 10...bxc4!? Although White still keeps his initiative: 11.bxc4 dxe4 12.♘xe4 c5 13.♖d1! This brings another piece into the game, while Black's development is somewhat lagging. (less promising is 13.dxc5 ♗b7 14.♘xf6† ♘xf6 15.♘g5 g6 16.♘e4 ♘xe4 17.♗xe4 ♗xe4 18.♕xe4 ♗xc5=) Now Black fails to equalize after 13...♕c7 14.♘xf6† ♘xf6 15.d5 ♖d8 16.♗b2, or 13...cxd4 14.♘xd4 ♗b7 (14...♕c7 15.c5) 15.♖b1 ♕c7 16.♗f4.

11.♘a4!

This slightly counter-intuitive move shows Gerardo's deep understanding of the position. A knight is usually best placed in the centre, but in this specific position the main priority is to stop Black from freeing his position with ...c6-c5, which would exchange the weak c-pawn while also liberating the light-squared bishop.

Compare the line 11.♘e2 dxe4 12.♗xe4 ♗b7 13.♗f4 (13.c5 ♘xe4 14.♕xe4 a5=) 13...♘xe4 14.♕xe4 ♘f6 15.♕c2 c5. Black should be okay here as the b7-bishop has been freed.

11...dxe4 12.♗xe4 ♗b7 13.♗g5 ♘xe4 14.♗xe7 ♕xe7 15.♕xe4 ♖ab8



Black is ready to free his position with ...c5, so...

16.c5! a5 17.♖fe1 ♖bd8 18.a3!

This creates a second weakness, which will enable White to stretch his opponent's defences later.

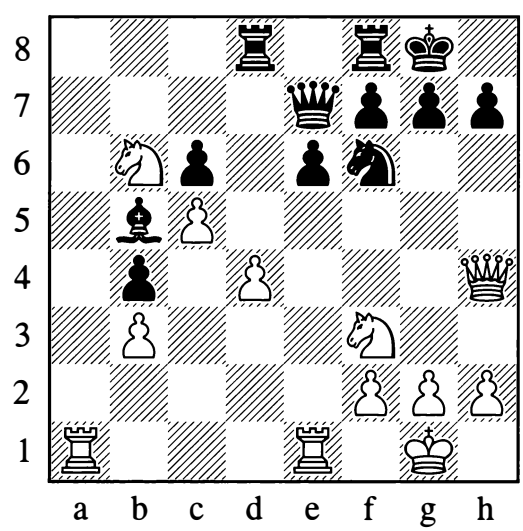
18...♘f6 19.♕h4!

This gives Black a difficult choice. He would like to position his knight on d5, but in that case he will have to worry about a potentially unpleasant endgame. On the other hand, if he does not exchange queens then White may be able to organize an attack against his king.

19...♗a6 20.axb4 axb4 21.♘b6

This is subtle play; one always has to think twice before posting a knight on a square like this. It hardly attacks anything. Still, it prevents Black's rooks from getting any activity on the a-file, and it stops the f6-knight from taking the d5-square. This is independent and unprejudiced thinking indeed.

21...♗b5



22.♕f4!

Playing on both wings. The text reminds Black that his b4-pawn is vulnerable.

22...♖b8

Defending the pawn indirectly.

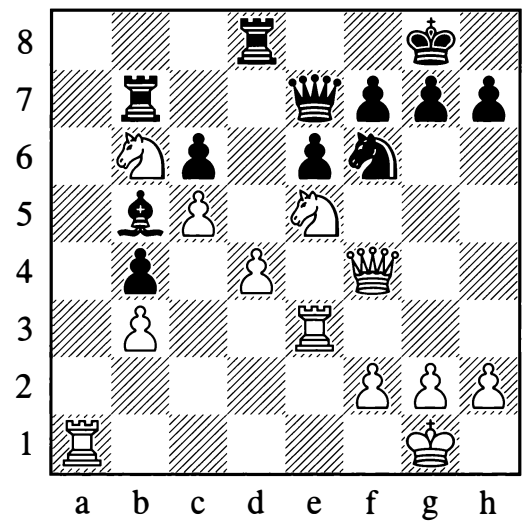
23.♘e5 ♖fd8 24.♖e3!

Gerardo improves the last – not already perfectly placed – piece, before he starts the onslaught.

24...♖b7

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Black must avoid 24...♘d5? 25.♘xd5 ♖xd5 26.♘xc6 winning. Of course, it will take much more than simple tricks to topple a player of Larsen's calibre. Let us see how Gerardo plans to increase his advantage.



25.g4!

Back to the kingside again! The attack is really unpleasant to meet.

25...♖a7 26.♖ae1

A good rule of thumb is: try not to exchange pieces when you have a space advantage! In this position it is especially important for White to retain another attacking piece.

26...♘e8 27.g5 f6

Black has no interest in simply waiting to see how his opponent builds the attack. In case of a neutral move such as 27...♖c7, White would probably start by moving the e3-rook to one of the three squares to its right. I would like to know how Gerardo was planning to continue the attack. Not long ago we could have just asked him. Alas, fate can be cruel. Now we will never find out.

28.♘f3 ♘c7 29.gxf6 gxf6

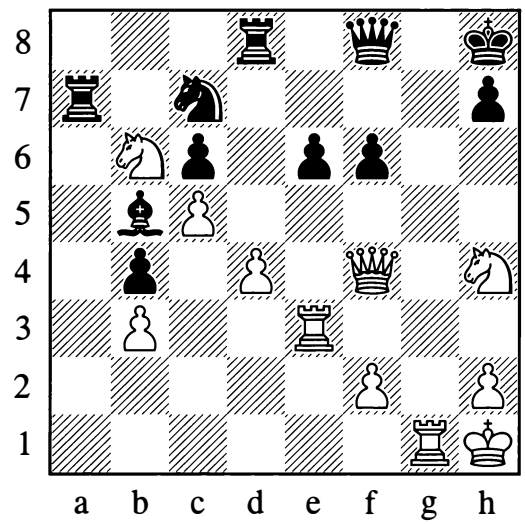
No better is 29...♕xf6 30.♕e4±.

30.♘h4!

The former world championship candidate is given no time to arrange a defence by bringing his queenside pieces closer to the scene of the action.

30...♕f7 31.♔h1 ♔h8 32.♖g1 ♕f8

After 32...♖g8 33.♖xg8† ♔xg8 34.♖g3† ♔h8 35.♘g6† White wins.



33.♘g6†!

This precisely calculated combination is the fruit of a very well played game. The victim, a legend of the game, was made to look quite ordinary.

33...hxg6 34.♖h3†

1-0

The Danish GM resigned here. The proof can be seen after 34...♔g7 35.♕h6† ♔f7 36.♕xg6† ♔e7 37.♖h7†, or 34...♔g8 35.♖xg6† ♔f7 36.♖xf6† and wins.

Najdorf understood the problem arising from the travelling distance, so the very next day Gerardo and his family moved to the hotel where the rest of the chess players were living. At this tournament, Gerardo won the prize for the Best Argentine Player. It happened to be a flexible Europe – Argentina round-trip ticket.

The next game shows two things. First, that he was not always averse to entering sharp positions in the opening, and second, that he played well positionally. I especially like the way in which he converted his advantage.

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Gerardo Barbero – Lars Schandorff

Copenhagen 1991

Incidentally, Gerardo really liked playing in Denmark. It was one of his favourite countries according to Katalin.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.f3 0–0 6.♗e3 e5 7.♕d2 c6 8.♘ge2 ♘bd7 9.0–0–0

The other main line is 9.d5.

9...a6 10.♔b1 b5 11.♘c1 ♖e8?

If Black wants to place his rook on this square, then he should first insert the move 11...exd4 to ensure that the rook will fulfil a useful role. After the further 12.♗xd4 ♖e8 (another option is 12...♖b8) 13.♘b3 ♗f8 Black has scored quite well.

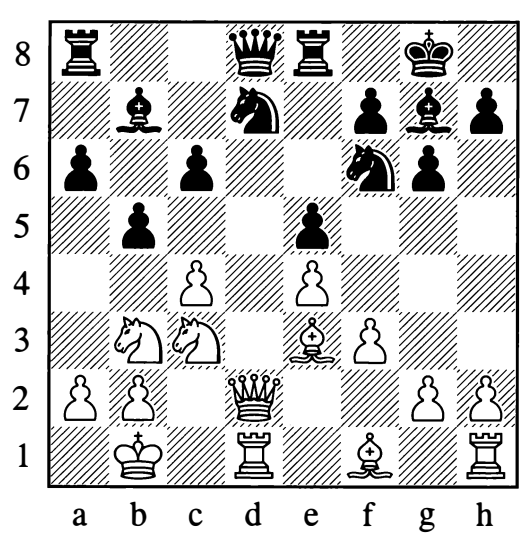
12.dxe5!

Preventing Black from carrying out his plan. It was also possible to play the blocked position with 12.d5!. In both cases the rook on e8 is misplaced.

12...dxe5

12...♘xe5 is met by 13.♕xd6.

13.♘b3 ♗b7



14.♕f2!

This is a nice square for the queen. It is important to have control over the g1-a7 diagonal.

14...♕c7 15.♗e2 ♘h5

I would prefer to improve the bishop with 15...♗f8.

16.g3 ♖ad8

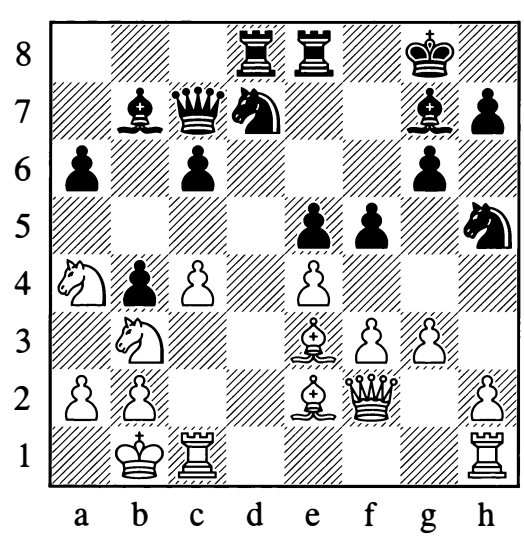
After 16...f5 17.♘c5! Black is under serious pressure.

17.♖c1!? b4?!

Though this may appear a logical answer to White's last move, the subsequent course of the game shows that the drawbacks outweigh the benefits. Still, even after the superior 17...♕b8 18.♖hd1 it is difficult to extinguish White's initiative, e.g. 18...♘f8 19.♗b6, or 18...♗f8 19.♖d2 with problems for Black in both cases.

18.♘a4 f5

It is understandable that Black wishes to generate some activity, although there is always a danger that such a policy will lead to further weaknesses in the position. Thinking back to Black's 11th move, which was arguably the root of all his problems, the present position provides another illustration of why his rook should not have vacated the f-file so early.



19.c5!

A well-judged decision. True, White limits the scope of his dark-squared bishop, while also forgoing the possibility of using the c5-square for his knights. Still, it is more important the give the other bishop a square on c4.

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Furthermore, the d6-square could become an important outpost later in the game.

19...♘df6 20.♕g2

The queen is passive here for a while, but White's other pieces can be improved considerably.

20...♗c8

Black intends to exchange on e4. 20...f4 21.♗d2 would not really achieve anything.

21.♗c4† ♔h8 22.♘b6 fxe4 23.fxe4 ♘g4

Not 23...♘xe4? 24.♘xc8 winning for White.

24.♗g5 ♗h6

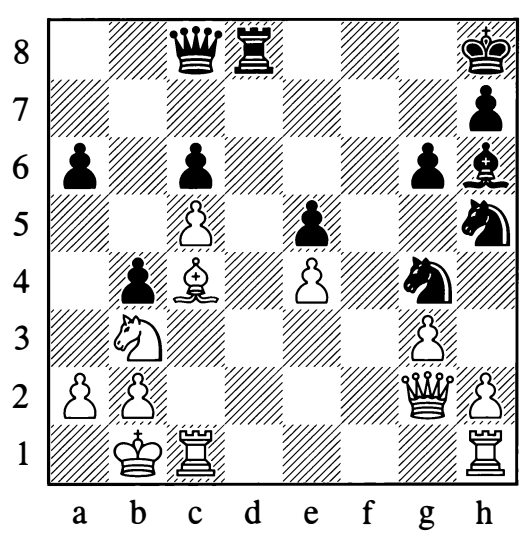
Black cannot exchange his bad bishop with 24...♗f6 because of 25.♗d2!.

25.♗xd8 ♖xd8 26.♘xc8!

26.♖ce1?! would be a mistake in view of 26...♘e3.

26...♕xc8

After 26...♗xc1 27.♘d6 White wins.



27.♕e2!?

An interesting decision; White prefers to be a pawn up rather than an exchange up. 27.♖ce1 ♘e3 28.♕e2 should also win eventually, but Gerardo preferred not to allow Black to become active.

27...♗xc1 28.♗xa6 ♕d7 29.♖xc1 ♘gf6 30.♖e1?!

This is rather an awkward move. Gerardo overprotects the e-pawn, when it is in no particular danger. (Perhaps he had been reading too much of Nimzowitsch!) Better was 30.♗c4! ♕a7 31.♕e3 ♖a8 32.♘d2 and White wins easily with the extra pawn.

30...♕a7 31.♗c4 ♖a8 32.♔c2! ♕e7 33.♕d2 ♖xa2 34.♕xb4 ♖a8 35.♕b6 ♕e8

After 35...♕d7 36.♗a6 ♕e6 37.♕b7 ♖e8 38.♔b1 White has consolidated his advantage again.

36.♕c7

For the moment White is only moving his queen, but she is doing good work.

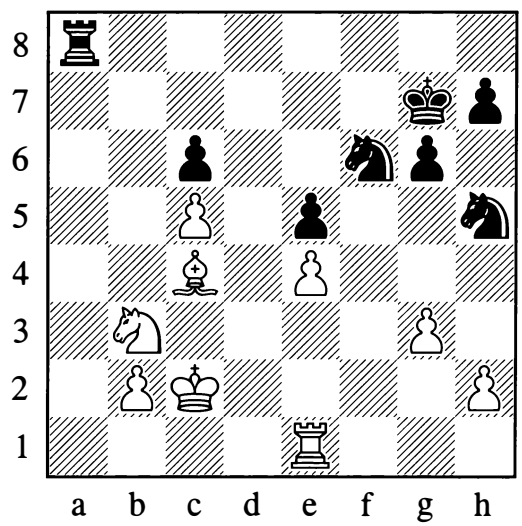
36...♖d8

If 36...♖c8 37.♕f7 ♕d8 38.♕e6 the queen dominates on e6.

37.♕f7!

Classic strategy – to swap with a material advantage.

37...♕xf7 38.♗xf7 ♔g7 39.♗c4 ♖a8



40.♘c1!

The way in which Gerardo converts his advantage is simply a joy to watch. His first job is to improve his knight, which was not doing much on b3.

40...♖a1 41.♖e2 ♖a8 42.b4 ♔h6 43.♘d3 ♖e8 44.♔c3

Next he improves the king slightly.

44...♘g7 45.♗b3 ♔g5 46.♗a4

He treats his bishop nicely too.

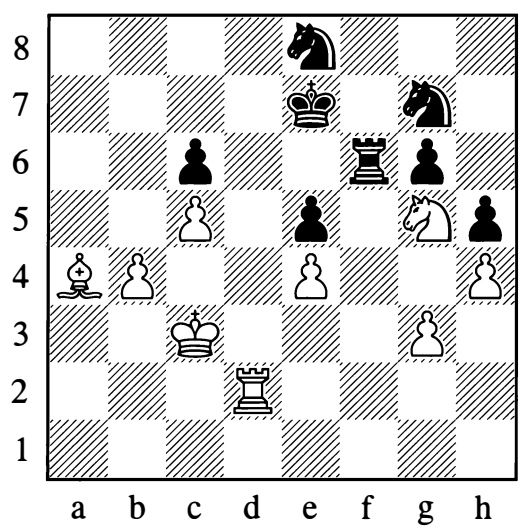
46...♖e6 47.♘f2 ♘fe8 48.♖d2

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After spending many moves in a defensive role, the rook finally gets a full view of the board.

48...h5 49.h4† ♔f6 50.♘h3 ♔e7 51.♘g5 ♖f6

Just compare the present position with that from move 39. Many players would have hurried to play b4-b5 and create a passed pawn, but Gerardo's strategy was so much more effective. Only now, when his pieces are stationed on their best possible squares, does he force the issue.



52.b5!

With his pieces stuck in a defensive huddle, Black is now powerless to resist.

52...♘e6

After 52...cxb5 53.♗xb5 and the rook would appear on d7.

53.♘xe6 ♖xe6 54.b6

1–0

Though I would not count myself as a close friend of Gerardo, we would often share a short but friendly conversation at chess events. We always conversed in English, though I also heard him speaking Hungarian. He spoke the language well, though of course he had a Spanish accent.

We both played at Benasque, Spain, in 1998. He started the tournament badly – I remember him dropping two draws to weaker players. But later on he started to play really well – it was almost as if he was a different player. Around the time of round 7 or 8, he explained why his mind had not been completely focused on the chess during the early rounds. Like most Argentineans, Gerardo was a keen football supporter, especially when it came to his national team. And it just so happened that the Benasque tournament coincided with the 1998 World Cup in France. The Argentinean team was one of the pre-tournament favourites, so expectations were high. Still, the competition was very tough. They qualified from the group stages and then narrowly defeated England on penalties, before losing a very close quarter-final match against the Netherlands. Gerardo became so filled with nervous tension that he was simply not able to concentrate properly during the tournament! It was only after his team was eliminated that he finally stopped worrying about the football and started to play his best chess.

I finished my own final game quite early, and took the opportunity to peruse the top games. I noticed that Gerardo was fighting for the first prize against GM Granda. Before we look at that game I quote Katalin again:

> "Gerardo really wanted to return to this beautifully situated little village in the Pyrenees for a tournament, where he had won convincingly in 1990. In 1998 he did a circuit of several open tournaments across Europe during a three-month period, and many of the same grandmasters played and met at the tournaments, which made them all the more exciting. Gerardo began his tour in Andorra, where his performance was mediocre. But after that he scored a hat trick by winning three opens in a row; two in Spain and one in Sicily. Next was Greece, where he collected a second prize in Corfu.

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But this Benasque tournament was plagued with problems. Gerardo had to undergo a minor operation on his gum. And the small operation on the gum was sadly the herald of cancer, of which Gerardo had no idea at the time. It was especially shocking at his age, as he led a very clean lifestyle, for instance he never smoked."

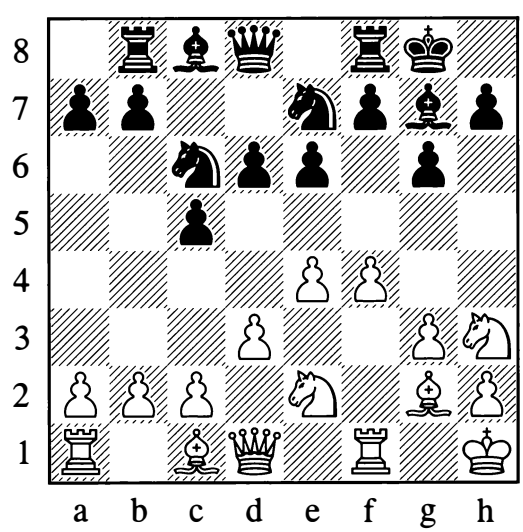
Julio Granda Zuniga – Gerardo Barbero

Benasque 1998

1.e4 c5 2.♘c3 ♘c6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.d3 d6 6.f4 e6 7.♘h3 ♘ge7 8.0–0 0–0 9.♔h1 ♖b8

Black prepares to gain space on the queenside and also removes his rook from the x-ray vision of the bishop on g2.

10.♘e2



10...f5!

I like this move, which shows the flexibility of Barbero's thinking. The enemy knight moved away from the centre, so Black changes his plan and fights for the initiative there.

11.a4 b6

This modest move fits in well with the central strategy. It is useful to reinforce the c5-pawn.

12.c3 ♕d7 13.♗e3 d5 14.♗g1 ♗a6

Here we see another advantage of having the pawn on b6. It is really instructive to observe how Gerardo develops all of his pieces harmoniously. It is textbook material.

15.e5 d4!

This is a principled move, which more or less implies a pawn sacrifice. The d4-pawn will fall, but Black rightly judges that he will gain many squares for his pieces, as well as the use of the c-file. Even if the pawn deficit remains, it is hard to see the d3-pawn playing any meaningful role in the foreseeable future.

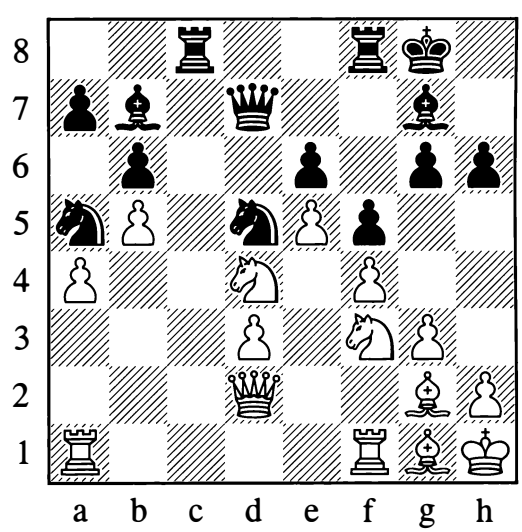
16.cxd4 cxd4 17.♘g5 h6 18.♘f3 ♗b7!

Another fine change of play.

19.♕d2 ♖bc8

I would prefer 19...♖fc8, in order to have the option of activating the g7-bishop via f8 more quickly, but this is just a minor difference.

20.b4 ♘d5 21.b5 ♘a5 22.♘exd4



Finally White eliminates the doomed pawn. By way of compensation, Black has a generally very harmonious position, and can look to build pressure along the c- and/or d-files. The white queenside also looks rather airy thanks to his pawn advances. This does not mean that Black stands objectively better, although one could argue that his position is somewhat easier to play.

22...♖c3!

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Black takes the opportunity to occupy one of the weakened queenside squares, while preparing to double rooks.

23.♗f2?

It is too dangerous to allow Black to double his rooks. White should have taken the opportunity to exchange the invader with 23.♖fc1. There might follow 23...♖fc8 24.♖xc3 ♘xc3 (or 24...♖xc3 25.♖c1 ♖a3 26.♕c2 ♔f7 27.♗f2 ♗f8 28.♗e1 ♗e7 with sufficient compensation) 25.♗e3 ♔f7 26.♔g1 ♗f8. Black has ongoing compensation for the pawn, but there is a tough fight ahead.

23...♖fc8 24.♗e1 ♘b3!

After impressing with a stellar positional performance up to this point, Gerardo now ups the ante with a tactical strike.

25.♘xb3

25.♕f2 was not attractive either; after 25...♖xd3 26.♘xb3 ♖xb3 27.♖d1 ♗f8 Black is clearly better.

25...♖c2!

This is much stronger than the routine recapture on b3. White is now forced to give up his queen, but the victory is still a long way off. Besides, the tension that comes with playing for first prize adds an extra dimension of difficulty.

26.♖c1

There was no point in trying to save the queen, as 26.♕d1? ♘e3 27.♕b1 ♖xg2 would have been crushing.

26...♖xd2 27.♗xd2

White's situation is still far from hopeless. Technically speaking, he is not behind on material. Most of his pieces are on reasonably stable squares, and the black queen is not in a position to inflict any serious damage at the present time. Let us see how Gerardo sets about increasing his advantage.

27...♗f8

He begins by improving the only redundant piece.

28.♖xc8 ♕xc8 29.♖c1 ♕d7 30.♘bd4?!

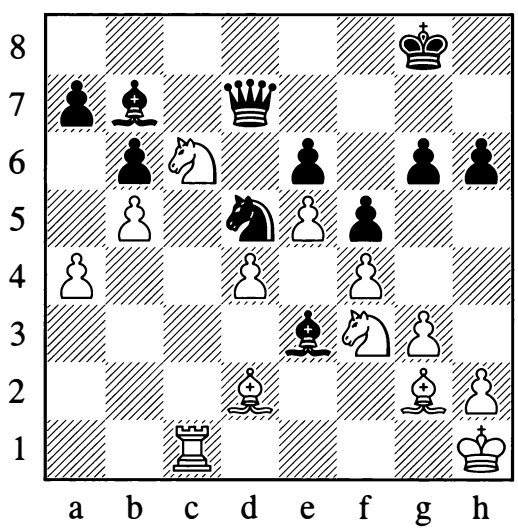
The superior 30.♘fd4! would have prevented Black's next move.

30...♗c5! 31.♘c6 ♗e3!

It was very important to make this move before White could prevent it with d3-d4. Once the bishops are exchanged, it will be harder for White to defend his weaknesses from the enemy queen.

32.d4

How can Black increase the pressure?



32..g5!

This opens the position to invade with the queen.

33.fxg5 hxg5 34.♗xe3 ♘xe3 35.d5

This is a sure sign that the white position is becoming desperate.

35...♘xg2 36.d6 ♘e3 37.♔g1 ♘d5 38.♘xg5 ♕g7 39.♘f3

White has only a rook for the queen, although the d-pawn is still a threat, so Black must remain vigilant.

39...♕h6 40.♖e1 ♗c8 41.♘xa7 ♗d7 42.♘c6 ♕h5 43.♘cd4 ♔f8

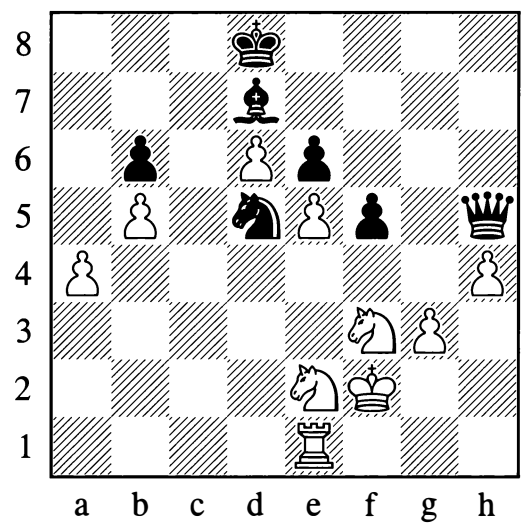
This is a good patient move, which minimizes the risk of falling into a swindle. The king will guard against any queenside breakthrough attempts.

44.♔f2 ♔e8 45.♖c1 ♕h6 46.♖e1 ♔d8 47.h4

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White wants to defend like a hedgehog, but sadly for him, he is in zugzwang. Any move frees a square for the queen or the knight. 47.♘c6† ♔c8 48.♘cd4 ♔b7 and White cannot hold the fortress any longer.

47...♕h5 48.♘e2



48...♕g4

The queen invades with decisive force.

49.♘f4 ♘xf4 50.gxf4 ♕xf4 51.♖g1 ♕xa4 52.♖g8† ♗e8 53.♔g3 ♕e4

0–1

White resigned. The finish might have been 54.h5 f4† 55.♔f2 (or 55.♔g4 ♕f5† and mate next move) 55...♕e3† 56.♔g2 ♕e2† etc.

Unfortunately I had already departed for Hungary when the game finished, and it was only later that I heard the good news of his success in this event. I would estimate that this was one of the most impressive tournament victories of his chess career, especially in view of his slow start.

When I informed Katalin that I would be writing a chapter on Gerardo, I asked if she had any files belonging to him with his own analyses. Their son Janos found the following interesting game accompanied by some of Gerardo's personal thoughts.

Ahmed Zuhair – Gerardo Barbero

Abu Dhabi 1995

1.d4 c5 2.dxc5

This is not usually considered a critical continuation, although it makes a certain amount of sense when seen in the light of White's next couple of moves.

2...e6 3.♘c3 ♗xc5 4.♘e4

This is the idea; he wants to eliminate one of the enemy bishops.

4...♘a6?!

There is no good reason to misplace the knight here. The most principled response is 4...♗b4!?† 5.c3 d5!, leading to an interesting queenless position with chances for both sides.

5.♘xc5 ♕a5†

Black could not play 5...♘xc5? because of 6.♕d4. But if he was going to have to resort to the text move to recapture on c5, there was little point in placing the knight on a6. Perhaps Gerardo had overlooked the queen fork when contemplating his fourth move, but then noticed it just in time.

6.c3 ♕xc5 7.♕d4?!

White hopes to make his bishop pair count in a position without queens. It costs some time though, so he would have been better off completing development in a normal fashion, after which his two bishops would guarantee a slight edge.

7...♕xd4 8.cxd4 ♘b4!

Black is happy for the opportunity to inconvenience the enemy king while correcting the position of his wayward steed.

9.♔d1 ♘f6 10.a3

White needs to evict this piece, but in doing so he creates a hole, which Gerardo exploits ruthlessly later in the game. 10.♗d2 would have been a better route to the same goal.

10...♘c6 11.♘f3 ♘e4 12.♔e1 d6

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13.♗e3?!

As White is no longer allowed to castle, it was better to make room for the king on e2 by playing 13.e3! followed by ♗d3.

13...♗d7 14.♘d2?

White has chosen an exceedingly clumsy way of exchanging the enemy knight, which was not even threatening him in any significant way. He could still have kept a share of the chances with one of the following options:

14.g3 ♘a5 15.♗g2 ♖c8 16.♘d2 ♘xd2 17.♗xd2 ♘b3 18.♖d1 with a safe position.

Riskier, but perhaps still playable, was 14.♖c1 ♘a5 15.♘g5! (better than 15.♘d2 ♘xd2 16.♗xd2 ♘b3 17.♖c3 ♘xd4 when White drops a pawn) 15...♘xg5 16.♗xg5 ♘b3 17.♖c7 with a very unclear position.

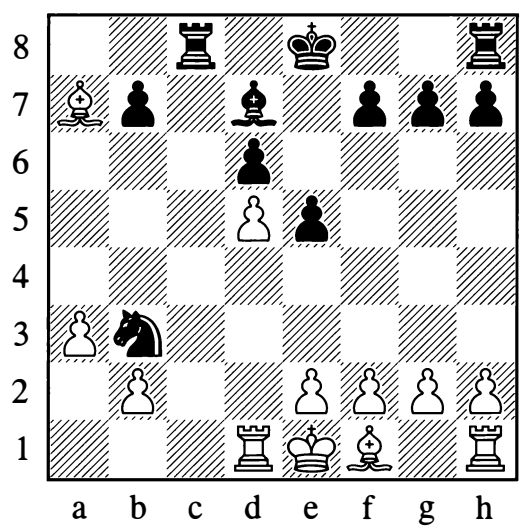
14...♘xd2 15.♔xd2 ♘a5 16.♔e1 ♖c8

For the moment Black can increase his initiative simply by playing natural moves.

17.d5

No better is 17.♗f4 ♘b3 18.♖b1 ♔e7 19.e3 a6 20.♗d3 ♗b5 when White is in trouble.

17...♘b3 18.♖d1 e5 19.♗xa7



19...♖c2!

The power of a rook on the seventh rank is well known, and the present position is a particularly striking example. White finds himself choked by the power of this piece.

20.♖b1 ♔e7 21.e4 ♖hc8 22.♗e3

22.♗e2 ♘d2 23.♖d1 runs into 23...♘xe4! 24.♗d3 ♖xb2 25.♗xe4 b6. Black traps the bishop and wins back the piece with a clear advantage.

22...f5 23.♗d3

After 23.g3 fxe4 24.♗g2 (24.♗e2 ♘d4) 24...♗f5!? Black dominates the position and can increase his advantage with a timely ...♘c5-d3.

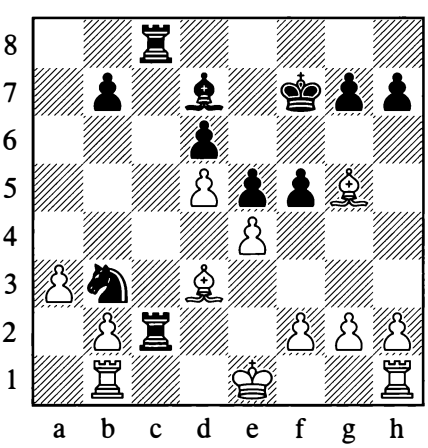
Relatively best would have been:

23.♗g5† ♔f7

23...♔e8 is also enough for an advantage. 24.exf5 (24.♗d3 f4 25.♗h4 ♖c1† 26.♔e2 ♖8c2† 27.♗xc2 ♖xc2† Black is winning, as 28.♔d3 ♘d4 checkmates) 24...♗xf5 25.♗b5† ♔f7 26.♗a4 ♖2c7! White is in trouble, e.g. 27.♖d1 ♘c5 28.♗b5 ♗c2.

24.♗d3

This forces Black to demonstrate some creativity.



24...f4!! 25.♗xc2 ♖xc2 26.h4!

The best chance, but it is still insufficient. Remember that White cannot castle, because he has already moved his king! And 26.♗d8 loses to 26...♗b5.

26...♗b5 27.♖h3 ♖e2† 28.♔d1 ♘d2! 29.♖c1 ♘xe4 30.♖c7† ♔g6

White is lost.

23...f4!

Gerardo does not hesitate to sacrifice material in order to maintain his domination.

24.♗xc2 ♖xc2 25.♗c1?

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Another passive move seals White's fate.

Also insufficient was 25.♗a7 ♗a4 26.h4 ♘d2 27.♖d1 ♘xe4 28.♖b1 ♗b3 when I doubt that White can survive.

The best chance was:

25.♔d1 ♖c8!? 26.♗b6!

26.♗a7 ♗b5

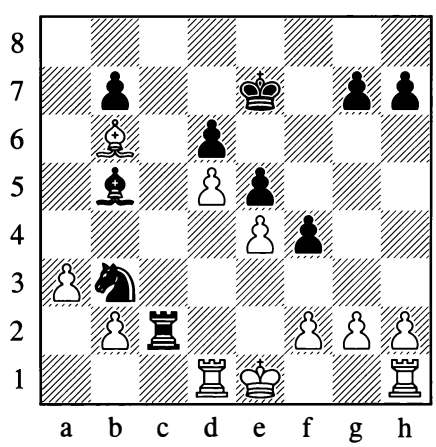
26...♗b5!!

26...♗a4!? 27.h4!

27.♔e1 ♗d3!

The tempting 27...♖c2 looks decisive, but White can in fact mobilize his forces. There are two options:

a) 28.♖d1 looks plausible, since Black will not have any decisive discovered checks. We will see that he has other resources though...

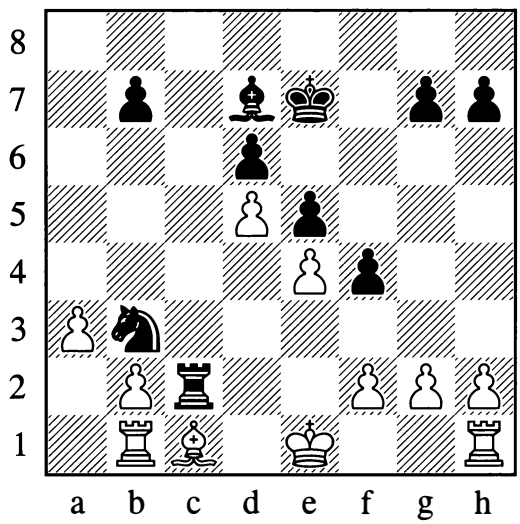


28...♗e2!! (This is the 'concrete' route to victory, although in his notes Gerardo showed his ingenuity with the astonishing 28...g5!! "with a possible zugzwang to come". It would take too long to analyse every possible defence, but he may well be right!) 29.♖b1 f3! (29...♘c1! 30.♖xc1 ♖xc1† 31.♔xe2 ♖xh1 also wins, albeit in a more prosaic fashion) 30.gxf3 (30.♖g1 ♘c1!) 30...♗xf3 31.♖g1 ♖e2† and Black checkmates in two.

b) 28.h4! is the correct defence, enabling the rook to develop along the third rank. 28...♖e2† 29.♔d1 ♗d3 30.♖h3!! This great intermediate move saves White. (30.♖c1 ♖xb2 wins for Black) 30...♖d2† 31.♔e1 White surprisingly survives.

28.♖d1 ♗xe4 29.f3 ♗c2 30.♖d2 ♘xd2 31.♔xd2 ♗b3 32.♖c1 ♖xc1 33.♔xc1 ♗xd5

Black has excellent winning chances.



25...♗b5!

White was clearly hoping to tempt his opponent into snatching the bishop, but of course Gerardo is having none of it. After the text, a massacre will soon take place on the second rank.

26.f3 ♖xg2 27.♖f1 ♗d3! 28.♗xf4 exf4 29.♖d1

In a hopeless position, White stumbles into an immediate mate.

29...♖e2#

0–1

Of course, to win like this requires a certain contribution from the opponent, but it takes a great deal of skilful play as well.

Gerardo was only 39 years old when we learned the tragic news about his illness. Gradually the news spread amongst his fellow players in Hungary. Everyone felt for him; Gerardo was not the type of person who made enemies. Katalin told me that even the great Bobby Fischer had his own way of trying to save Gerardo – he invited him to visit him in Japan, where he was living at the time.

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Despite his increasingly serious illness, Gerardo continued to take part in both individual and team competitions. He was understandably not able to reproduce his very best form, but he still won plenty of games and always kept his fighting spirit. In his final tournament he won the following game against a rapidly improving Hungarian junior.

Gergely Antal – Gerardo Barbero

Budapest 2000

1.e4 c5

The Sicilian was Gerardo's most common answer against 1.e4. He fared especially well with the classical system, although in this game we see him trying something different.

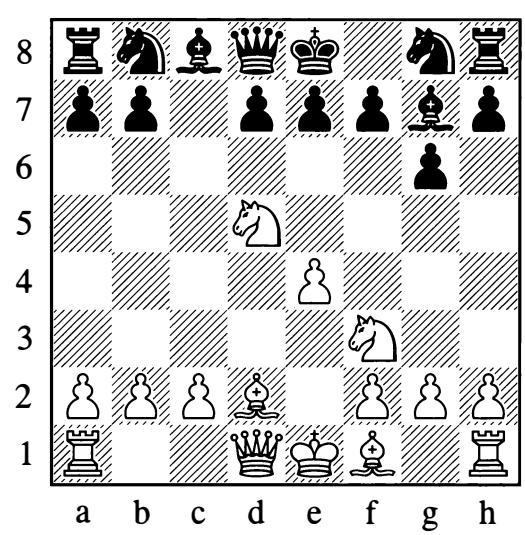
2.♘f3 g6 3.d4 ♗g7 4.dxc5 ♕a5† 5.♘c3!? ♕xc5?

Objectively the correct decision had to be to accept the pawn sacrifice by taking on c3. Gerardo preferred to hang on to his strong bishop, but in doing so he allows White to bring all his pieces to their ideal squares.

6.♘d5

White already has a powerful attacking position.

6...♕a5† 7.♗d2 ♕d8



8.♗c3!

Neutralizing Black's best, in fact only developed piece.

8...f6 9.♘d4?!

This looks like the start of a dubious plan. Far more challenging would have been 9.h4!?, or alternatively the straightforward 9.♗c4 followed by ♕e2 and long castling.

9...♘c6 10.♘b5

White plays in a rather straightforward fashion, by creating direct threats. On the other hand, if this brings nothing concrete, it will only help Black to develop.

10. ♖b8 11.b4?

White insists on posting the knight on c7, but that is not such an achievement. Playing positionally with 11.a4 is more attractive here, e.g. 11...a6 12.♘a3 and White has an initiative on the queenside.

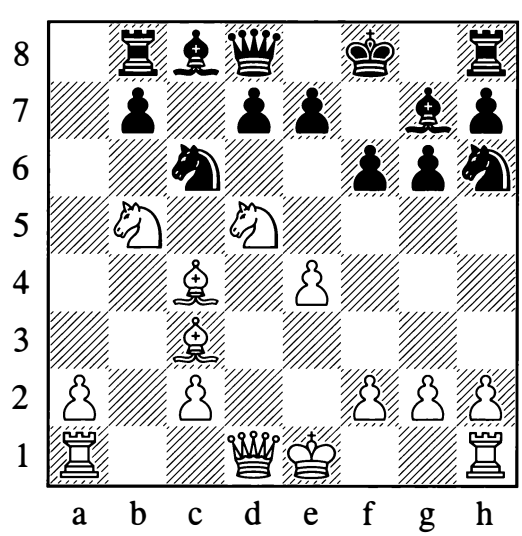
11...a6 12.♘bc7† ♔f8 13.b5

This was clearly the idea behind White's 11th move, but it does not have the desired effect.

13...axb5 14.♘xb5 ♘h6

Black is slowly but surely catching up on development.

15.♗c4



White's queenside demonstration has achieved very little. His pieces may appear quite active, but they are not doing anything special and will soon be driven backwards. Having survived a dubious opening, the next phase of

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the game sees Gerardo steadily improving his position while White seems lost for ideas.

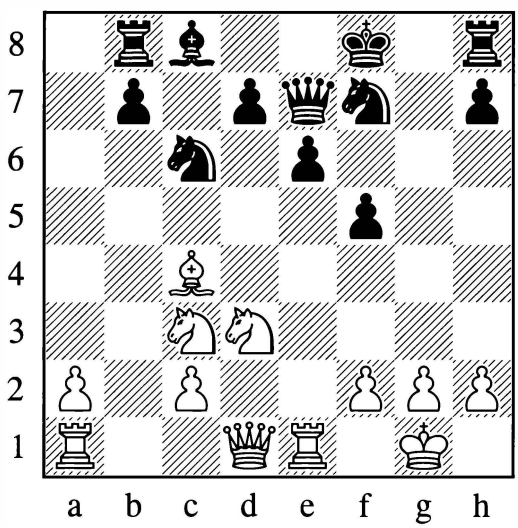
15...♘f7

The knight does not often arrive at this square in the Sicilian, but it turns out to be ideally placed.

16.0–0 e6 17.♘b4 ♕e7! 18.♘d3 f5!

Suddenly the black position is working quite harmoniously.

19.exf5 gxf5 20.♖e1 ♗xc3 21.♘xc3



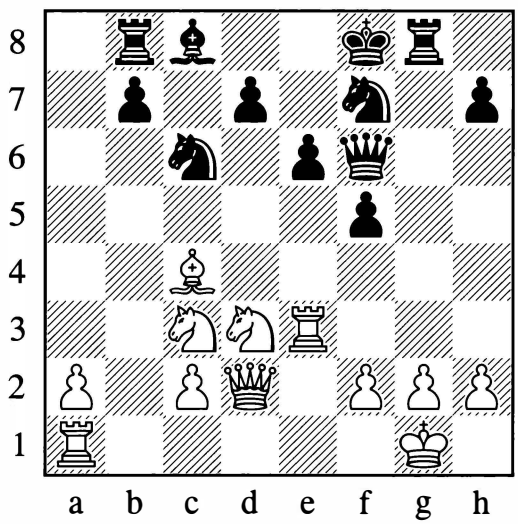
Although White has clearly failed to make the most out of his early advantage, his position is not all doom and gloom. He still enjoys a considerable lead in development, and can try to generate tactical threats. Black's chances are more long-term. His central pawn majority could become a potent force later in the game, but for the time being he needs to catch up on development while guarding against his opponent's attacking ideas.

21...♕f6!

This is a good start; it was not safe for the queen to remain under the x-ray vision of the unfriendly rook. Meanwhile she annoys White by threatening a knight.

22.♕d2 ♖g8 23.♖e3??

This is a horrible blunder, perhaps born of frustration at his failure to punish Black for his questionable opening play. After a normal continuation such as 23.♖ab1 ♘d4 24.♔h1 d6, Black stands quite well, although a tough fight would lie ahead.



23...d5!

Gerardo is not one to miss such an opportunity.

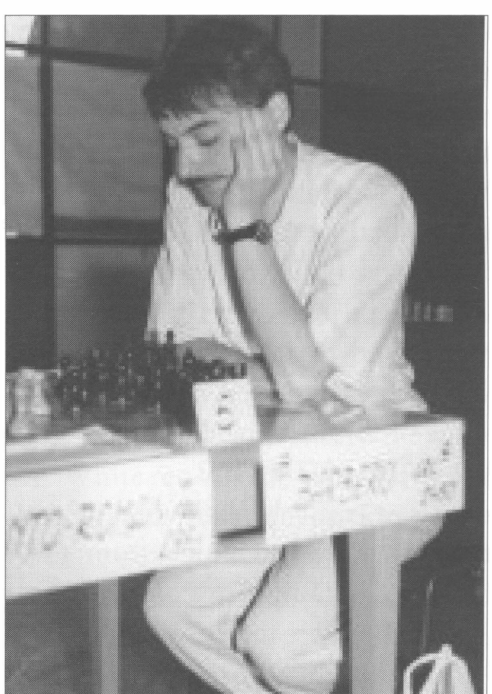
24.♗b3

White cannot even take twice on d5, since the rook on a1 would hang.

24...d4

0–1

White is losing a piece, so he saw no reason to prolong the suffering.



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The following was Gerardo's last serious game. Always a fighter, he asked the team captain to refuse a combined draw offer that had been made before the match.

Gerardo Barbero – Evarth Kahn

Hungarian Team Championship 2001

Gerardo played in several foreign team championships, aside from the Hungarian one. He played for teams in Austria and Switzerland for roughly one and a half decades. He was also a regular competitor for teams in Italy and – quite naturally, given his native language – Spain. He made many friends in all of these countries.

Let me give one example of how well he could perform. When he played for Salzburg in the Austrian league, which has many strong grandmasters, he achieved the highest performance rating of any player. He was not only a very fine player, but a fair and honest competitor as well. Once he even won a fair-play prize in Switzerland!

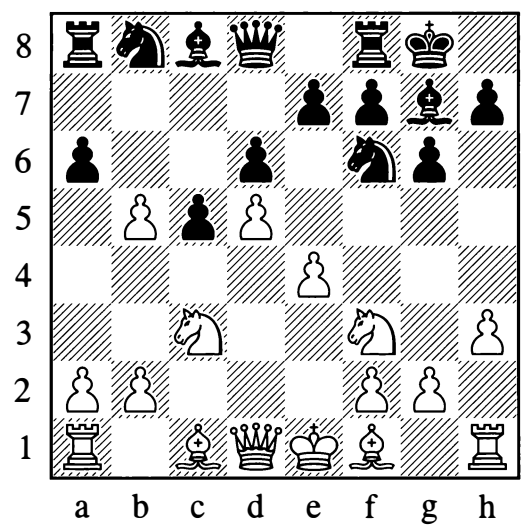
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.h3

This was one of Barbero's pet opening variations. It leads to complex positions without demanding too much theoretical knowledge, so it suited him ideally. I was able to find a total of 16 of Gerardo's games in which he played this position with White. His results were an incredible 13 wins with three draws and no defeats. I should add that he also enjoyed plenty of success with the traditional main line of ♘f3, ♗e2 and 0–0.

5...0–0 6.♘f3 c5 7.d5 b5?

Kahn is a really imaginative player, but the text is asking too much from the black position. It is enough to compare the main line of the Benko gambit: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.bxa6 ♗xa6. From this point, if White wishes to place his pawn on e4 then he will have to forgo his right to castle, viz. 6.♘c3 d6 7.e4 ♗xf1 8.♔xf1 g6. In the present position White gets everything his own way, without having to make any concessions.

8.cxb5 a6



9.a4!

There is nothing especially wrong with taking on a6, but why help the black pieces to develop? At the same time, White should refrain from developing the f1-bishop for the moment, as the reply ...axb5 would force him to lose a tempo. A high quality waiting move is called for, and the move played in the game is the ideal solution.

9...e6 10.♗e2

According to Gerardo, White had another way to keep an advantage with 10.dxe6 fxe6 11.e5! dxe5 12.♕xd8, reaching a favourable ending.

10...exd5 11.exd5 axb5

After 11...♖e8 12.0–0 ♘e4 13.♘xe4 ♖xe4 14.♗g5 ♕c7 (14...♗f6 15.♗xf6 ♕xf6 16.b3±) 15.♖e1! White can ignore the weak pawn on b2. Gerardo pointed out the following variation himself: 15...♖b4 16.♖b1 ♗d7 17.♗d2 ♖xb2 18.♖xb2 ♗xb2 19.♕b3 ♗g7 20.b6 with an overwhelming advantage.

12.♗xb5 ♕e7† 13.♕e2 ♕b7

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14.♗f4

14.0–0 only leads to a move order difference after 14...♗d7 15.♗f4, reaching the game. Instead, if Black tries to be too clever with 14...♘xd5?, he loses after 15.♘xd5 ♕xd5 16.♖d1 ♕b3 17.♖xd6.

14...♗d7!

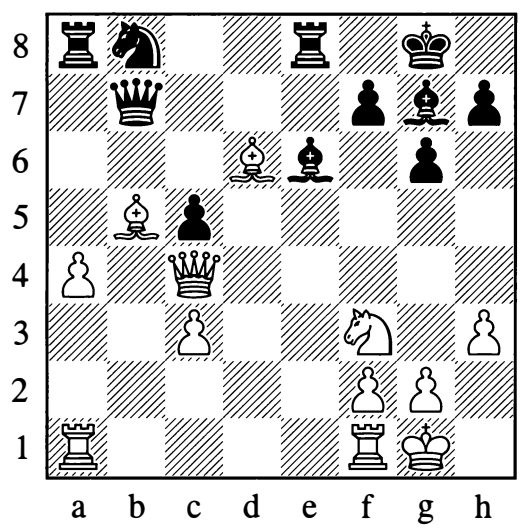
Black finds a good way to stir up complications.

15.0–0 ♘xd5 16.♗xd6 ♖e8 17.♕c4 ♘xc3 18.bxc3 ♗e6

The alternative is 18...♖e4, which gives White two tempting options:

Gerardo gave 19.♕xc5 ♘a6 20.♗xa6 ♕xa6 21.♗e5! ♗f8 22.♕c7 ♖a7 23.♕d8 ♗xa4 24.♖fe1 ♖a8 25.♕g5 h6 26.♕g3, evaluating the position as winning for White. I am not completely sure about this, and Black would certainly have some practical chances to resist.

Therefore I would prefer the simpler 19.♕d3! ♗xb5 20.axb5 and in this case White really is very close to winning.



19.♕h4!

With this accurate move, White prepares to eliminate one of his opponent's bishops. Combined with his extra pawn, this should be enough to decide the game.

19...♘d7 20.♘g5 h6

In his notes, Gerardo mentions that 20...h5 would be best met by 21.♕g3!, safeguarding the c3-pawn and stopping all counterplay. After the further 21...♗d5 22.♖fb1 ♕a7 23.a5 White should win comfortably.

21.♘xe6 ♖xe6 22.♖ad1 ♖e4?

Black goes after the a-pawn in the wrong manner. He could still have kept some fight in the position with 22...♘b6! when White faces a tricky choice:

a) One obvious try is

23.♗xc5 ♖e4 24.♕g3

Gerardo evaluated the position after 24.♖d8† ♔h7 25.♕xe4 ♕xe4 26.♗xb6 ♖xd8 27.♗xd8 ♗xc3 28.♗b6 as slightly better for White, but I think it is closer to equal.

24...♘xa4 25.♗xa4 ♖axa4

25...♖exa4 26.♗d4±

26.♖d8† ♔h7 27.♖fd1 ♕b3 28.♖8d7 ♕e6 29.♗e3±

The evaluations are my own, reflecting the fact that a white win would still require a good deal of effort and solid technique. Interestingly though, Gerardo was much more confident and annotated both lines as 'plus minus', indicating a definite win.

b) 23.f3!? ♘xa4!

Interestingly, Gerardo does not consider this tactical strike in his annotations, only mentioning 23...♕c8 24.♗g3 h5 25.♗e1 when White keeps the advantage.

Also unsatisfactory for Black is 23...♗xc3 24.♗xc5 ♕c7 25.♗f2 ♗f6 26.♕b4 ♗e7 27.♕b3.

24.♗xa4 c4 25.♕xc4 ♕a7† 26.♗c5 ♕xa4

I think that Black has at least as good a chance of drawing as White has of winning.

c) 23.♖fe1!

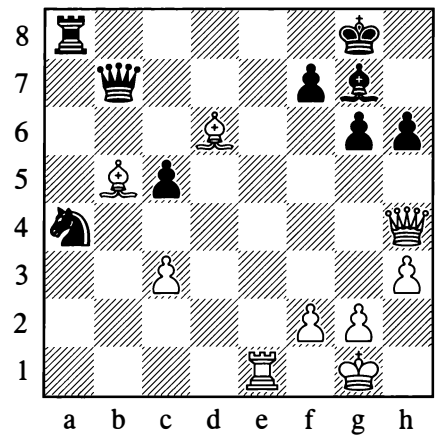
I think that this is objectively the strongest move. White returns the extra pawn in order to aim his guns at the enemy kingside.

23...♖xe1†

After 23...♘xa4 24.♖xe6 ♘xc3 25.♗c4 fxe6 26.♖e1 Black's king is rather vulnerable.

24.♖xe1 ♘xa4

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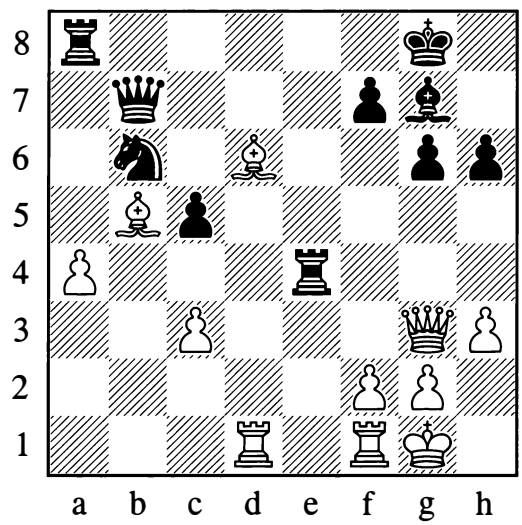


25.♗c4!

Threatening to penetrate with the rook to e7.
25...♕d7 26.♕e4!

Black is unable to hold his position together.

23.♕g3 ♘b6



24.♖b1!

This neat tactical solution indirectly guards the a-pawn against all of Black's efforts. White is simply winning.

24...c4 25.♖fd1 ♘c8 26.♗xc4 ♘xd6

This queen sacrifice just prolongs the agony.

27.♖xb7 ♘xc4 28.♖xf7!

Evart really should have resigned here, but he limped on for a few more moves.

28...♘e5 29.♖e7 ♖f8 30.♖xe5 ♖xe5 31.♕xg6 ♖g5 32.♕e6† ♔h8 33.♕c6 ♖e5 34.g3 ♖e2 35.♕c5 ♖c2 36.♖d3 ♖c1† 37.♔g2

1-0

Finally!

This win helped Gerardo's team to victory in the match, which they all celebrated together in a nearby pub afterwards. Gerardo garnered great respect amongst his team-mates; in part for his status as the top board player, but also as a human being.

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Testimonials

Eugenio Torre
Asia's first International Grandmaster; one of the Phillipines' strongest ever players.

I asked Eugenio about Bobby Fischer's relationship with Barbero. Torre, who was Fischer's second during his 1992 rematch with Spassky, said that Bobby liked Barbero. He found him amiable. Torre indicated that when Barbero was sick, Bobby wanted to help him.

> "I am not sure if he was able. Actually there was a time when Bobby, Barbero and I met together in Budapest through the invitation of Bobby. That was when I was with Bobby keeping him company. I can't tell much about Fischer's opinion of Gerardo's standard of chess though."

Yasser Seirawan
1979 World Junior Champion; four-time US Champion; former World Championship Candidate:

> "In the late seventies and early eighties I met Gerardo Barbero, over the board as a gladiator and off the board as a friend. He was an exceptionally kind person and I enjoyed meeting him at the various tournaments I played while in Argentina. In those days the coveted grandmaster title was very difficult to achieve, but I felt that Gerardo would succeed. His talent was self-evident and his ability to analyse long tactical sequences was more than impressive. I joked with him that he was not the junior champion of Argentina but the absolute Champion! 'One day!' he would say, and then add, 'Perhaps.' It was his stock response for looking at an alternative move."

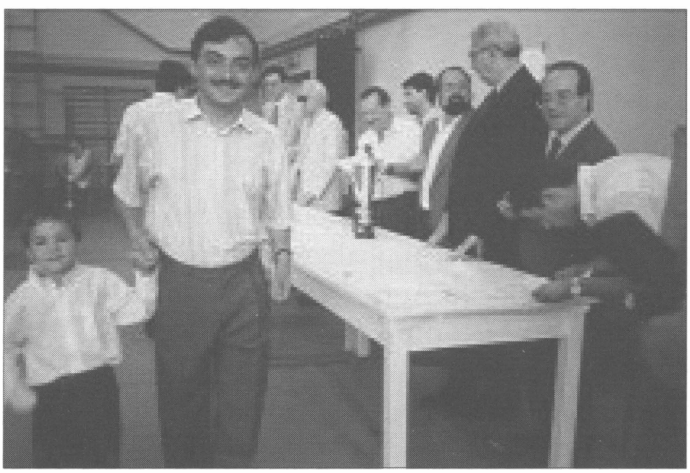
> "When he moved to Hungary I rather lost touch with him but one day I received a telephone call. He was trying to help Bobby Fischer arrange a chess event and was looking for advice for a suitable host country. At that time Fischer feared extradition to the United States. I recommended that they consider an island, many of which are beyond the reach of American law. Gerardo became enthusiastic and we had several phone conversations thereafter. Then they stopped. It was a pity but it seemed that another possible Fischer event fell through. That is the way I will remember Gerardo as a person – willingly reaching out to help others."

Gabor Kallai
Rapid World Championship 7th place, member of national championship-winning teams in several countries:

> "I got to know Gerardo in 1986 during our tournament in Balatonbereny. He didn't play the style of chess we had learned at the time in Hungary. In Eastern and Central Europe at that time a positional, conservative style was dominant, due to the Soviet school of chess. In contrast, Gerardo played interesting openings, bold ideas, constructions little or not at all known to us. He aimed for exciting chess and real battles."

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"We became closer in the second half of the 1990s, when we played together in the Berne team for several years. In 1998, to our great surprise, we won the Swiss team championship too, under Gerardo's leadership. We talked during many train rides from Budapest to Berne and from Berne to Budapest. Gerardo was a very interesting person, with wide-ranging and varied interests. He was informed in subjects from theology, politics, history, linguistics, and many other cultural topics. For him, the world was interesting and colourful. Kati, Gerardo and Janos formed their own special world. Gerardo loved Katalin and adored Janos, of whom he was very proud. He put a lot of energy into showing Janos the world as he saw it. They lived in their own separate dimension. After Gerardo's death, I felt that that special inside world of theirs did not come to an end. Kati and Janos, with their memories and their own private life continued to preserve Gerardo and the special fascination of their little family."

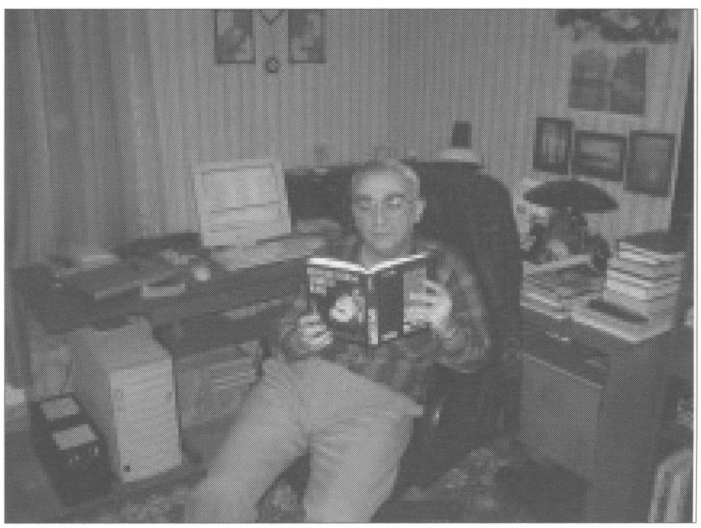


Barbero with his son Janos at a prize-giving in Switzerland

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Chapter 4 Alexander Shakarov

Kasparov's Junior Trainer



The name of Garry Kasparov is known all over the world, even by people who know nothing about chess in general. And yet it seems there are very few chess players and fans who know the name of Alexander Shakarov, one of his foremost trainers as a junior. Maybe in the Soviet Union he was known, but certainly hardly anybody knows about him in the West. I must admit that I myself have been far from perfect in this regard; when Nick Aplin and I wrote our two books: *Kasparov's Fighting Chess* (1993-1998 and 1999-2005), we did not fully realize who Alexander Shakarov was and what he meant for Kasparov's career.

Looking in the editions of *Chess Informant* from the late 1970s, one can regularly see the games of both Kasparov and Shakarov jointly annotated by both players (in total there are 22 mutual analyses, 13 of which were Kasparov games). For a rising superstar like Kasparov to share so many analyses tells us that he must have thought very highly of Shakarov.

While I was working in Singapore, Ashot Nadanian (featured in Chapter 6, beginning on page 196) came to work for Intchess as well. During tournaments we helped Singaporean juniors together. We talked a lot and he praised his junior trainer often and very sincerely. I was amazed to find out that he had the same junior trainer as Kasparov! Among other interesting snippets, he told me Shakarov is the nicest man he ever met. The more time I spent with Ashot, the more I got interested in Shakarov.

Now it is my pleasure to introduce to the reader the junior trainer who has had the privilege of tutoring the best pupil of all time. I contacted Shakarov recently, asking for guidance on how to write about him. He sent me four of his analysed games and later I found roughly another 60. Here are the first four games in the order he chose them. His annotations provided a foundation for the present chapter.

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Alexander Shakarov – Alexander Balaev

Correspondence 1964

1.d4

Shakarov opened with 1.e4 in 28 of the 31 published 'White' games that I have in my database.

1...d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 e6 4.e4

He very often went for sharp attacking lines, especially with White.

4...dxe4 5.♘xe4 ♗b4† 6.♗d2 ♕xd4 7.♗xb4 ♕xe4† 8.♗e2

This is the main continuation after the pawn sacrifice. 8.♘e2 ♘a6 9.♗f8 ♘e7 10.♗xg7 ♖g8 is not dangerous for Black.

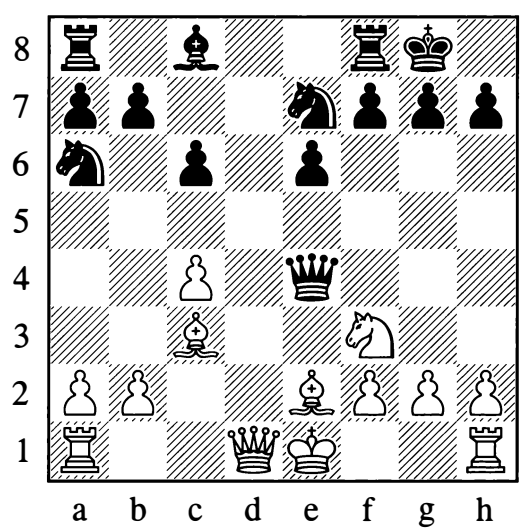
8...♘a6 9.♗c3

Many players look for compensation with 9.♗a5.

9...♘e7 10.♘f3

This is a rare line; White does not try to regain the pawn, but plays for activity.

10...0–0



11.♔f1!?

According to my database this was the only time this extravagant move occurred. Shakarov attaches a question mark to it. It seems to me that he was rather harsh on himself, as after 11.0–0 f6 12.♖e1 e5 it is also not easy for White to find enough compensation for the pawn.

11...♘g6

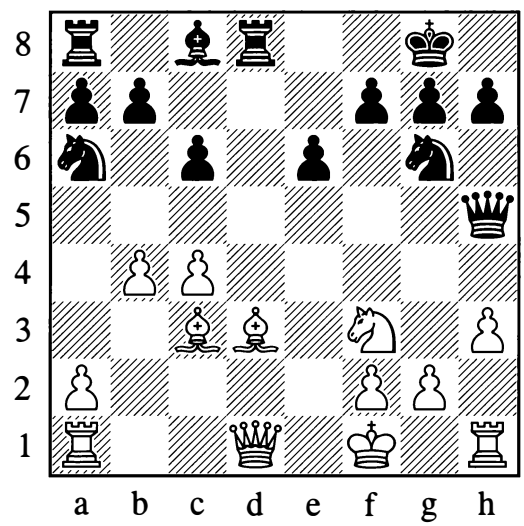
Black could also consider 11...f6!? with the idea of restricting the c3-bishop and maybe later play ...e5.

12.♗d3 ♕g4 13.h3 ♕h5 14.b4!?

14.g4 ♕c5 is safe, so White takes away the retreat square.

14...♖d8?

Black's aggression is not justified, because he is underdeveloped. According to Shakarov he had to play 14...f6! with good chances, e.g. 15.g4?! ♕h6 16.♗d2 ♘f4 with an advantage for Black.



15.♗xg6!!

This is a wonderful queen sacrifice, based on the weak back rank and on the fact Black has no really functional pieces, as well as his queen having little room.

15...♖xd1† 16.♖xd1 hxg6

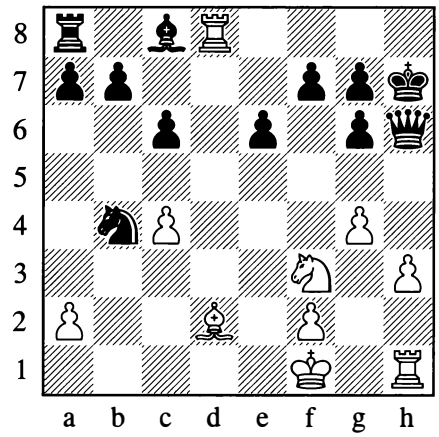
This is the better way to capture. After 16...fxg6?! 17.g4 ♕h6 18.♗d2 ♘xb4 (18...g5 19.♗xg5 wins the queen because 19...♕g6? allows mate after 20.♖d8† ♔f7 21.♘e5#) 19.♗g5 ♕xg5 20.♘xg5 ♔f8 21.♖d8† ♔e7 22.♖g8! White wins.

17.g4 ♕h6 18.♖d8† ♔h7 19.♗d2 g5

Black makes room for the king and queen, but it is too little, too late.

The counter-sacrifice 19...♘xb4!? was a better try:

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White must show great ingenuity to achieve the desired result.

20.h4!!

A beautiful move! Instead of capturing the queen White prepares a mating attack.

20...f6

20...♕xd2? of course loses to 21.♘g5† when checkmate will be delivered by either one of the two rooks, depending on Black's response. Thus we have 21...♔h6 22.♖h8# or 21...♕xg5 22.hxg5#.

21.♗xh6!

Now it is time to take the queen. We will see that the insertion of the two pawn moves will be useful for White. 21.♗xb4? e5! (21...♕f4? 22.♘g5†!) 22.♗d2 ♗xg4 23.♖xa8 ♕h5 is not what White wants.

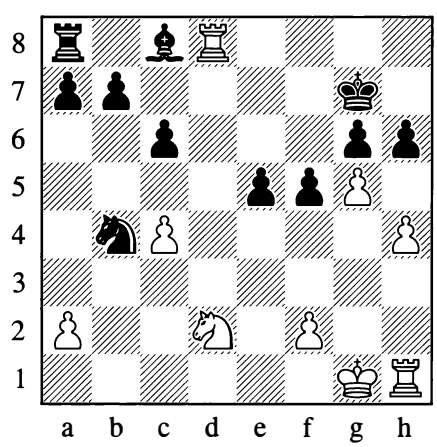
21...gxh6 22.g5 e5

22...♔g7 23.♖e8 ♔f7 24.gxh6! wins for White, as the h-pawn will promote.

23.♔g1 ♔g7

23...fxg5 24.hxg5 h5 25.♘xe5 and White wins.

24.♘d2 f5



25.h5!

White breaks through on the h-file.

25...gxh5

After 25...hxg5? 26.h6† it is all over.

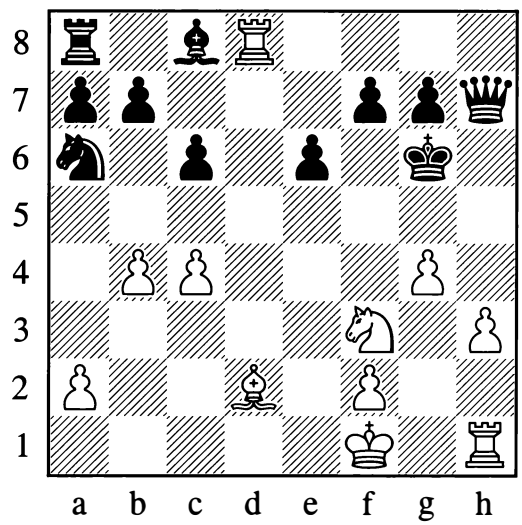
26.♖xh5

Now the rook invades on the h-file.

26...hxg5 27.♖xg5† ♔f6 28.♖gg8

And White wins.

20.♘xg5† ♔g6 21.♘f3! ♕h7



22.h4!!

White does not hurry to force the issue, but notices there is time for this pawn move on the edge, which cages in Black's king.

22...f6

After 22...e5 23.♖d6†! ♗e6 (or 23...f6 24.♘xe5#) 24.h5† White checkmates on the next move.

And 22...f5 can be refuted by 23.♖f8!? (There is also 23.h5† ♔f7 24.♗g5 e5 25.♘xe5† ♔e6 26.♘g6. Black's queen is in a pitiful state before it falls.) 23...fxg4 24.h5† ♕xh5 25.♖xh5 ♔xh5 26.♘e5 and Black will be mated.

23.♖f8!

1–0

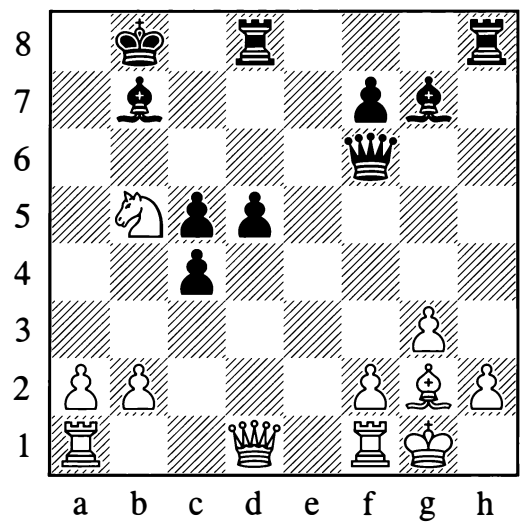
Black's king is caught. What a ferocious game! Already we can begin to see how Shakarov's attacking style may have influenced his star pupil. More specifically, this game reminded me of one of Kasparov's games in which he found amazing functions for his rook's pawn.

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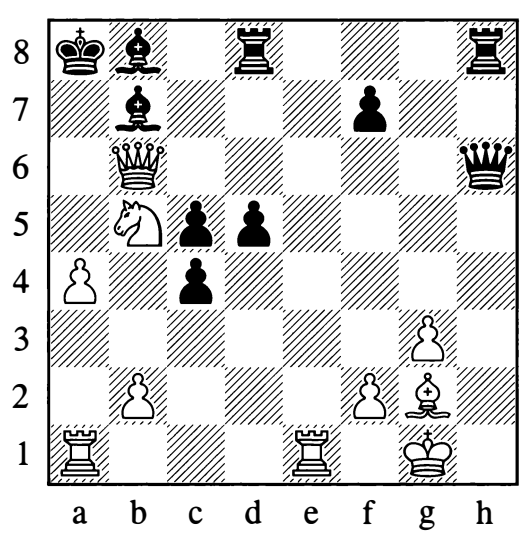
Garry Kasparov – Vassily Ivanchuk

Linares 1994

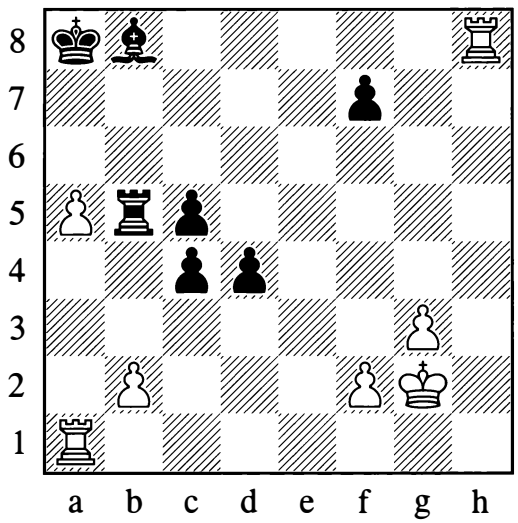
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 d5 4.♘f3 e6 5.♗g5 dxc4 6.e4 b5 7.e5 h6 8.♗h4 g5 9.♘xg5 hxg5 10.♗xg5 ♘bd7 11.exf6 ♗b7 12.g3 c5 13.d5 ♘xf6 14.♗g2 ♗h6 15.♗xf6 ♕xf6 16.0–0 0–0–0 17.♘xb5 exd5 18.♘xa7† ♔b8 19.♘b5 ♗g7



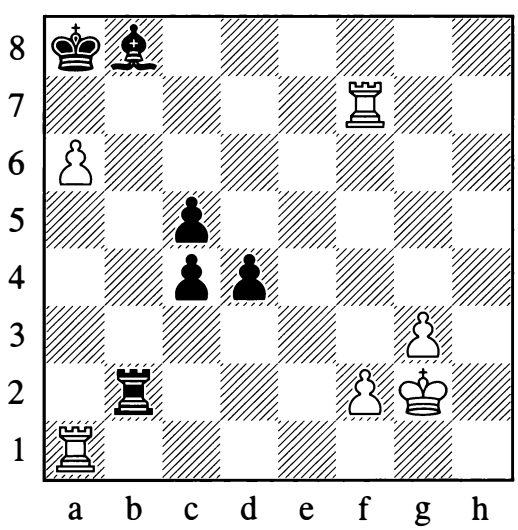
20.a4! ♕h6 21.h4! ♗f6 22.♕e1 ♗xh4 23.♕a5 ♗e7 24.♕c7† ♔a8 25.♕a5† ♔b8 26.♕c7† ♔a8 27.♖fe1 ♗d6 28.♕b6 ♗b8



29.a5! ♖d7 30.♖e8!! ♕h2† 31.♔f1 ♕xg2† 32.♔xg2 d4† 33.♕xb7† ♖xb7 34.♖xh8 ♖xb5



35.a6 ♔a7 36.♖f8 ♖xb2 37.♖xf7† ♔a8



38.a7 c3 39.♖f8
1–0

After researching the two volumes of *Kasparov's Fighting Chess* (1993-98 and 1999-2005) that I co-authored with Nick Aplin, I found it remarkable how often the 13th World Champion was able to execute brilliant attacking ideas on the edge of the board. The above game is just one of numerous such examples. I have a hunch that Shakarov may have been especially influential in the

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development of this particular skill, since he seemed to have a knack for playing on the flanks. I will allow the reader to judge for himself after reviewing the many brilliant examples shown in this chapter!

P. Rubin – Alexander Shakarov

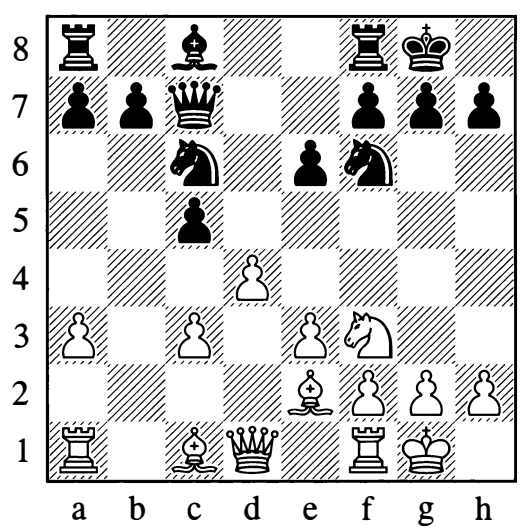
Correspondence 1975

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4

It seems Shakarov always plays the Nimzo-Indian and related defences – according to the database he always responded to 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 with 2...e6.

4.e3 0–0 5.♗d3 d5 6.♘f3 c5 7.0–0 ♘c6 8.a3 ♗xc3 9.bxc3 dxc4 10.♗xc4 ♕c7 11.♗e2

This is relatively seldom played. Garry played 11.♗a2 in this position against Kramnik, when he beat him in their decisive last round game in Linares 1997.



11...e5!?

Many players start with 11...♖d8 in order to stop 12.d5. As we see later Alexander knows what he is doing, and there is a reason why he holds it back.

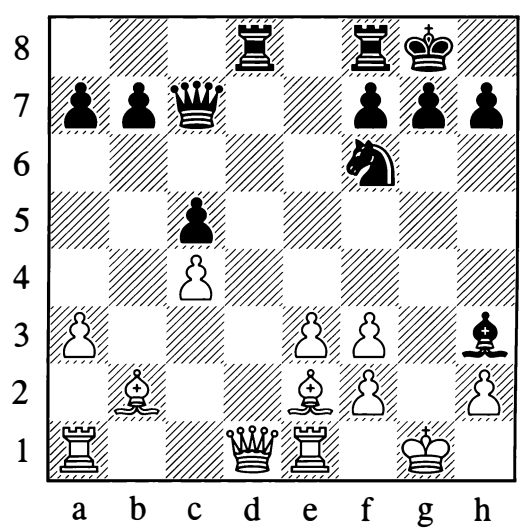
12.♗b2

On 12.d5 Shakarov would have played 12...e4 (12...♖d8 13.e4 ♘e7 14.♕c2 ♘g6 Black does all right in this position as well) 13.♘e1 (13.dxc6 ♘g4!) 13...♘e5 He published a whole article in the *Shakmatni Bulletin* No.2/1983 about the position after 10...♕c7.

12...♗g4 13.dxe5 ♘xe5 14.c4 ♘xf3† 15.gxf3

After 15.♗xf3 ♗xf3 (15...♖ad8 16.♕e2 ♗xf3 17.♕xf3 ♘e8=) 16.♕xf3 Black carried out a cunning plan in the following game: 16...♘d7 17.♖ad1?! ♘b6 18.♕e4 f5 19.♕h4?! ♖ae8 20.f3 ♕f7 21.♖fe1 ♘xc4 Black went on to win with the extra pawn, Netusil – Prandstetter, Czech Republic 2002.

15...♗h3 16.♖e1 ♖ad8!



The point behind his 11th move is revealed: Shakarov held back ...♖fd8 in order to bring the queen's rook to the d-file. But it is still not obvious why this should make a big difference.

17.♕c2 ♕c6 18.♕c3?

White attacks when he should defend himself. The punishment is extremely harsh. The way Black carries it out reveals the hand of a superb attacking player.

Safer were 18.♗e5 and 18.♖ad1, both of which lead to a roughly balanced position.

The following very interesting line demonstrates why it might be useful for Black to have a rook on f8 instead of a8.

18.♔h1

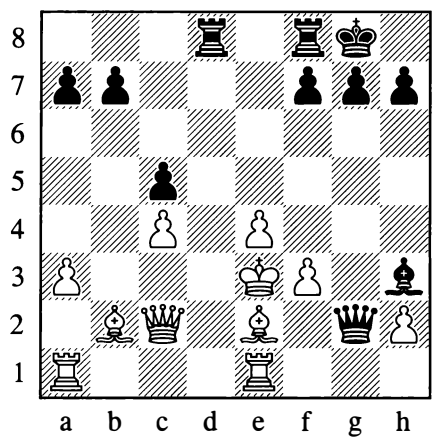
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With the rook on a8 instead of f8 this would ensure a safe position, but thanks to Shakarov's finesse White is still not out of the woods. We will soon see how the position of the rook makes a significant difference.

18...♘g4 19.e4 ♘xf2†!

19...♖d2?! 20.♕xd2 ♘xf2† 21.♔g1 ♘xe4 22.fxe4 ♕g6† 23.♗g4=

20.♔g1 ♕g6† 21.♔xf2 ♕g2† 22.♔e3



22...f5!

The rook on f8 makes its presence felt. White must walk a tightrope, although he may just be able to survive.

23.f4!

Now Black has a couple of options:

a) 23...♖fe8 24.e5 ♗g4

Black's initiative is enough for a balanced position, but no more.

25.♗d3

After 25.♖g1?! ♕xh2 26.♖ac1 g5 27.♗xg4 ♕xf4† 28.♔e2 ♕h2† 29.♔e3 ♖xe5† 30.♗xe5 ♕xe5† 31.♔f2 ♕f4† 32.♗f3 ♖d2† 33.♕xd2 ♕xd2† Black can press.

25...♕h3†

25...♖xd3† 26.♕xd3 ♕xb2 27.h3 ♖xe5† 28.fxe5 ♕xe5† 29.♔d2 is a perpetual.

25...♕f3† 26.♔d2 ♕xf4† 27.♔c3 ♕d4† 28.♔d2 also leaves Black with no more than a draw.

26.♔d2 ♕xh2† 27.♔c3 ♕xf4

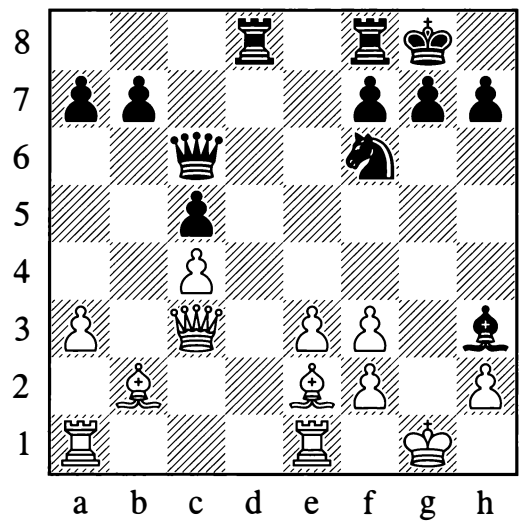
It is hard to tell, but I think the position is balanced.

b) 23...♕xh2 24.♖g1 ♗g4 25.♖ac1

Shakarov analysed 25.♖af1 g5 26.♗e5 ♖fe8, evaluating the position as winning for Black.

25...♕h3† 26.♔f2 fxe4 27.♖xg4 ♖xf4† 28.♖xf4 e3† 29.♔g1 ♕g3† 30.♔h1

Black has no more than a perpetual.



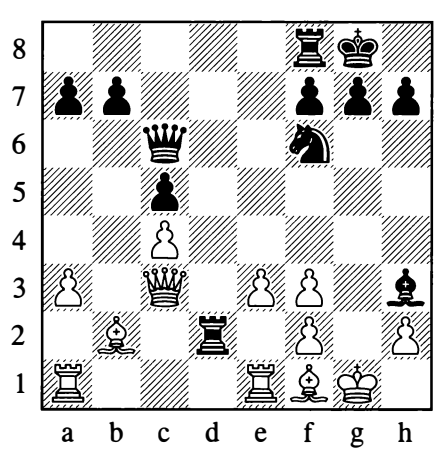
18...♖d2!!

It is thematic to get to the opponent's second rank; however it is extraordinary to achieve it so early, especially with Black. The text also creates a strong aesthetic impression by placing the rook en prise.

19.e4

The rook is immune because of 19.♕xd2 ♘e4!, with terrible mating threats along the g-file. And if 19.♖ad1 ♖xe2 20.♖xe2 ♕xf3 Black forces mate.

Alternatively there is 19.♗f1:



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19...♖fd8!! (after 19...♕xf3? 20.♕xd2 ♕g4† 21.♔h1 Black has no more than a perpetual) 20.♗g2 (20.♗xh3 ♕xf3–+) 20...♘h5! 21.♔h1 ♖xf2 and Black wins.

19...♖fd8!

19...♖xb2?! is nice, but not decisive because of 20.♕xb2 ♘xe4! 21.♔h1! ♘xf2† 22.♔g1 ♘g4 23.♗d1 and White is still alive.

20.♔h1 ♘h5 21.♖ab1

There are many alternatives, but Black prevails in all lines:

a) 21.♖ad1 ♕g6 22.♖g1 ♖xd1 wins.

b) 21.♖g1 f6 22.♖ad1 ♕d7 23.♕b3 ♘f4 24.♖xd2 ♕xd2 25.♕xb7 (25.♗xf6 ♕xe2) 25...♘g6 wins.

c) 21.♕e5 ♖xe2! 22.♕xh5 (22.♖xe2 ♕g6 23.♖g1 ♕xg1† and White gets checkmated) 22...♖xb2 23.♕xh3 ♖xf2 White is lost.

According to Shakarov the most resilient defence was:

d) 21.f4!

However this also leads to a loss.

21...♘f6!

21...♕xe4†? gives White time to get himself together. 22.♗f3 ♕xf4 23.♗c1 ♘f6 24.♗xd2 ♖xd2 25.♖ad1 ♖xd1 26.♖xd1 h5 27.♕e3 White is still in the game.

22.f3 ♘h5! 23.♕e5

23.♖ad1 ♕g6 24.♖g1 ♖xd1 leads to a checkmate.

23...♕h6 24.♖ed1

24.♖ad1 ♕g6 25.♕g5 ♕xg5 26.fxg5 ♘f4 and Black wins.

24...♕g6

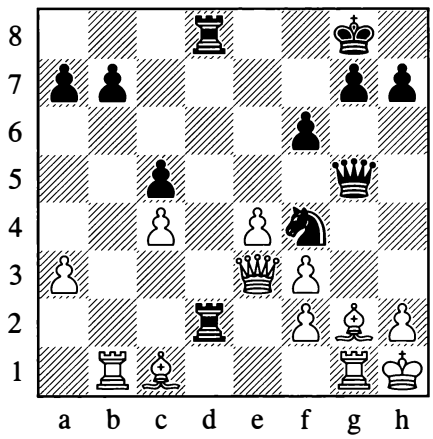
24...♘g3† 25.hxg3 ♗d7† 26.♔g1 ♖xe2 also does the job.

25.♖g1 f6 26.♕xc5 ♕h6 27.♕e7 ♖f8

And Black wins.

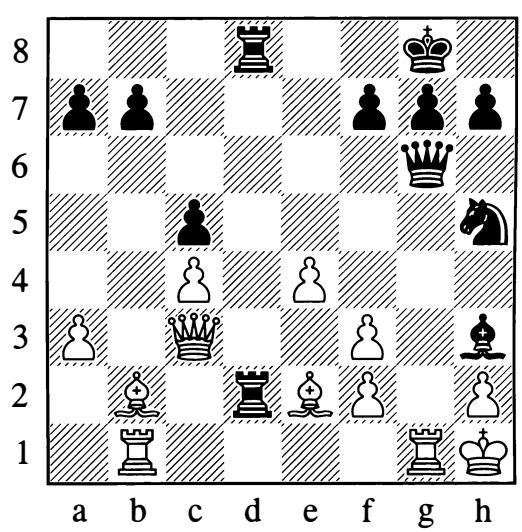
21...♕g6

Attacking with 21...♕h6! was even more convincing. 22.♕e3 (22.♗c1? ♕g5 23.♖g1 ♕xg1†) 22...♘f4 23.♖g1 f6 24.♗c1 (24.♗f1 ♗xf1 25.♖gxf1 ♕g5 26.♖g1 ♖d1 wins for Black) Now the most convincing win is 24...♕g5! (24...♗g2† would also be good enough, but the text ends the game in style!) 25.♗f1 (25.♖xg5 ♖d1† forces mate) 25...♗g2†! 26.♗xg2



26...♕xg2†! with mate to follow.

22.♖g1



22...♖xe2!

Black keeps playing on the second rank. The loss of the queen is a small price to pay for the wonderful attack he obtains.

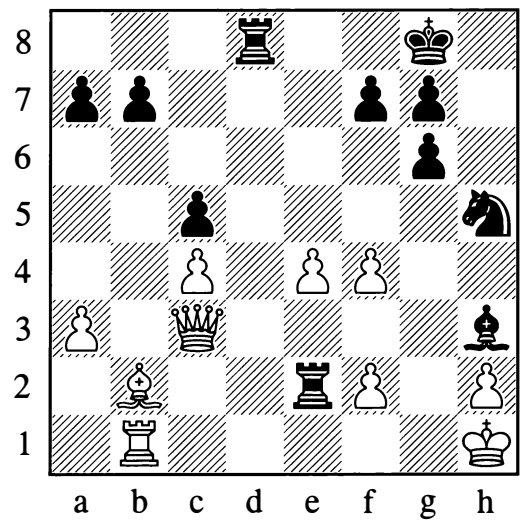
23.♖xg6 hxg6 24.f4

After 24.♖g1 ♖dd2 25.♗c1 ♖c2 26.♕e5 ♖xf2 27.♗e3 ♗g2† 28.♖xg2 ♖xg2 29.♗xc5 ♖gd2 White's king is caught.

If 24.♖e1 ♖ed2 25.♖g1 (25.♗c1 ♖d1 26.♗e3 [26.♕e3 ♘f4 and ...♘g2 follows] 26...b6 27.a4 ♖8d3 wins) 25...♖8d3 26.♕e5 ♖xf3 Black invades.

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Finally, in the event of 24.♕b3 ♖xf2 25.♗e5 b6 26.a4 ♖dd2 27.a5 ♗g2† 28.♔g1 ♖xf3 Black simply has too many pieces around the enemy king.



24...♖ed2!

This clever switchback with the rook was tough to anticipate; it looks more natural to look for a way to double on the second rank.

However, upon closer inspection, White's position is bleeding as the back rank is so weak. The damage is irreparable. It takes a little preparation but Black invariably succeeds in every variation.

25.♖g1

After 25.♖e1 ♖8d3 26.♕c1 ♘xf4 27.♗e5 ♘e2 28.♕a1 ♖f3 Black wins, as Shakarov pointed out.

25.♕xh3!? avoids getting mated, but it is still absolutely hopeless for White after 25...♖d1† 26.♕f1 ♖xf1† 27.♖xf1 ♘xf4.

25...♖8d3 26.♕e5

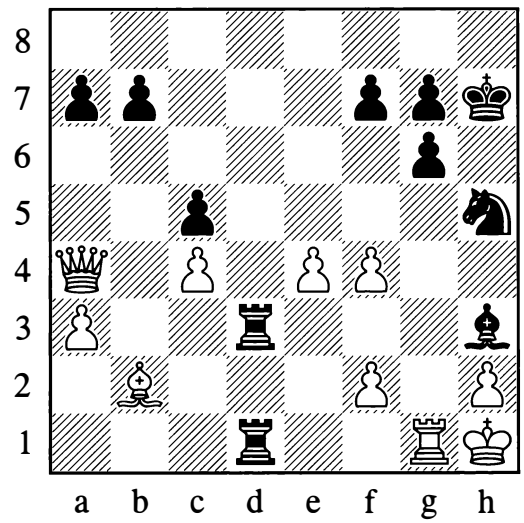
If 26.♕c1 ♘xf4 27.♗c3 ♗g2† 28.♖xg2 ♖d1† and Black wins.

26...♖d1 27.♕e8†

Or 27.♕g5 ♘xf4.

27...♔h7 28.♕a4

Now Shakarov crowns his achievement with an attractive finish.



28...♗g4!

0–1

This game is also reminiscent of Kasparov's play. To begin with, we saw excellent preparation based on the finesse of postponing the rook's arrival on the d-file, justified by a hidden resource that the rook promised on f8. When the opponent committed an inaccuracy, Shakarov exploited it with very powerful, fluent and imaginative attacking and sacrificial moves. He showed the same killer instinct as his protégé, and never allowed his opponent back into the game.

Alexander Shakarov – Nikolai Monin

Correspondence 1983

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♗g5 ♗b4 5.e5 h6 6.♗d2 ♗xc3 7.bxc3 ♘e4 8.♕g4 ♔f8 9.h4!

9.♗d3 would have allowed 9...♘xd2 10.♔xd2 ♕g5†. In his analysis Shakarov suggests that the queen exchange solves Black's problems. 11.♕xg5 hxg5 12.♘h3 (more testing is 12.g4! which has scored well for White) 12...g4! (12...f6?! 13.f4) 13.♘f4 g5! 14.♘e2 c5 looks fine for Black.

9...c5

Black begins his usual counterplay. An alternative was

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9...f5 10.exf6

10.♕f4!?

10...♕xf6 11.♘f3 ♘c6 12.♕f4 ♘xd2 13.♕xd2 e5 14.0–0–0 ♗g4!?

After 14...exd4 15.cxd4 ♗g4?! 16.♘e5! ♗f5?! 17.g4 White had a dominating advantage, Tringov – Sliwa, Marianske Lazne 1962.

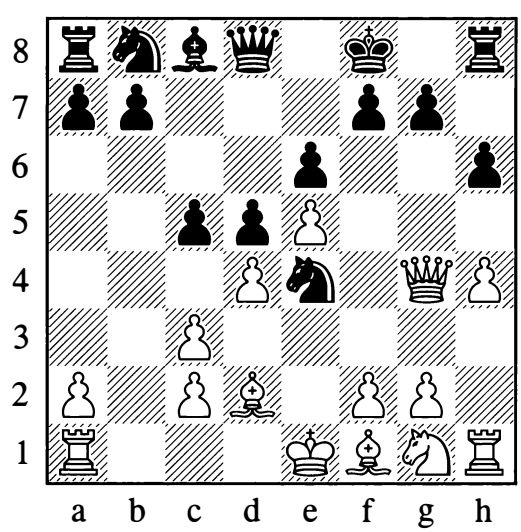
14...e4!? 15.♘e5 ♗e6 seems to be the critical position of the variation.

15.♘xe5 ♘xe5 16.dxe5 ♕xe5 17.♖e1! ♕d6

17...♕f6 18.♕xd5 ♕xc3 19.♗c4 ♕a1† 20.♔d2 ♕f6 21.♕c5† ♕d6† 22.♕xd6† cxd6 23.♗d5 White is much better according to Shakarov.

18.h5

White was somewhat better in the 'rematch' encounter Shakarov – Monin, corr. 1986, which took place a few years after the present game.



10.♖h3

To play like this on the h-file in typical of Shakarov. However in this variation it is not an original concept, but a standard manoeuvre.

10...♘c6 11.♗d3 ♘xd2

After 11...cxd4 12.♗xe4 dxe4 (the intermediate move 12...h5!? deserves consideration) 13.♖g3 g6 14.♕xe4 ♕d5 15.♕f4! ♕xe5† 16.♕xe5 ♘xe5 17.cxd4 White is somewhat better according to Shakarov.

12.♔xd2 c4

If 12...♕a5 13.♖g3 or 12...cxd4 13.cxd4 ♕b6 14.♖g3 g6 15.♘e2 White gains the initiative on the kingside.

13.♗e2 b5 14.♕f4! ♗d7 15.♗h5!?

The way White attacks shows he is an educated player.

15...♕e7?!

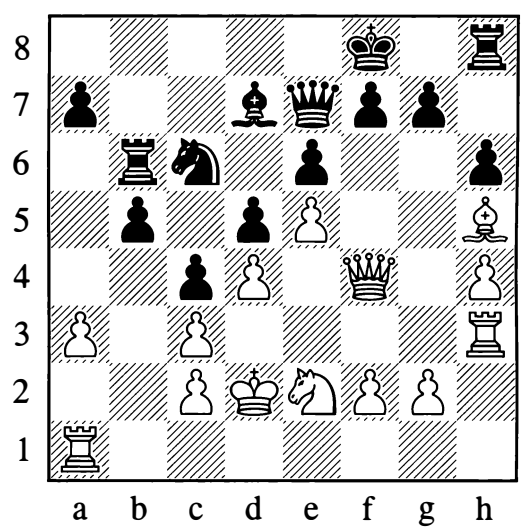
This is a bit of luxury. The queen is too powerful a piece to allocate for defensive duties. It is more usual to defend f7 with the bishop. Black actually scores well with it.

16.♘e2

Here Alexander evaluated the position as somewhat better for White.

16...♖b8 17.a3 ♖b6?

The position is very closed. Nevertheless Black does not have enough time available to play this slowly. 17...a5 is better.



18.g4!

In the previous games Shakarov displayed fast piece play, but the present position requires a pawn onslaught. He makes the appropriate adjustment.

18...♖a6

Black is optimistic but his position is troublesome anyway. For instance:

18...♔g8

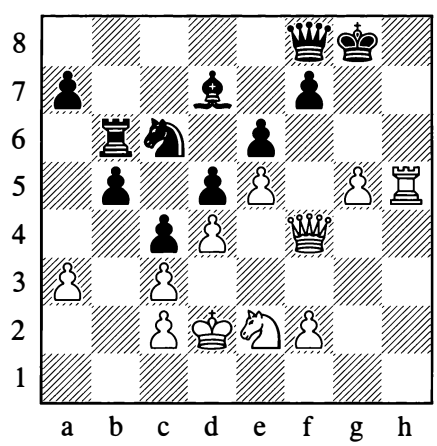
Black has time to trap the bishop, but it opens up the position in White's favour.

19.g5 hxg5 20.hxg5 g6 21.♖ah1! gxh5

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21...♖b8 22.♕h2! ♔f8 (Shakarov gives the nice line 22...♔g7 23.♗xg6! – 23.♗g4! is also good enough – 23...♖xh3 24.♕xh3 ♕xg5† 25.f4 ♕xg6 26.♖g1 and wins) 23.♗xg6 ♖xh3 24.♕xh3 ♕xg5† 25.f4 ♕xg6 26.♖g1 ♕e4 27.♕h6† ♔e7 28.♕f6† ♔f8 29.♖g4! White has time to transfer the rook to the h-file. To see that in advance requires true attacking skill, even in correspondence chess. Please note that 29.♖g5? would not be good enough due to 29...♕h7!.

22.♖xh5 ♖xh5 23.♖xh5 ♕f8



24.g6!

White nicely changes the point of attack.

24...♕g7 25.gxf7† ♔f8 26.♕h4

Black's king does not have long to live.

It is interesting to consider another possibility as well:

18...g5!?

I think this surprising move is the best practical chance; it wins a tempo and creates some breathing space. However, one feels that White should be able to obtain an advantage. Some of the variations are simply beautiful.

19.♕e3!

19.hxg5 ♕xg5 is okay for Black, but 19.♕f3!? is interesting. Now there are two moves to consider.

a) 19...♖a6 20.hxg5 hxg5 21.♖ah1! ♘d8

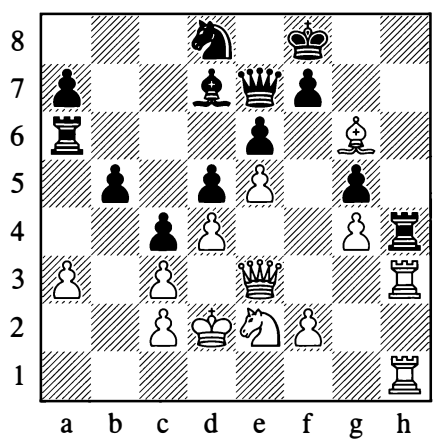
21...♖g8 22.♗xf7!

21...♖xa3 22.♗xf7! ♖h4 23.♗h5 Black's king is in trouble

21...♗e8 22.♗g6! ♖g8 23.♖h7 ♘d8 24.♖1h5 ♗c6 25.♖xg5 Black is again in trouble.

22.♗g6! ♖h4

22...♖g8 23.♗h7 ♖h8 24.♗e4 ♖h4 (24...♖g8 25.♖h8) 25.♖xh4 gxh4 26.♕h6† ♔e8 27.♗xd5 and White wins.



23.♘f4!!

What a way to bring the knight into the attack! A piece is hanging, but instead of moving it away, White puts another piece en prise as well.

23...♗c6 24.♖xh4 gxh4 25.♘h5

White invades.

b) 19...gxh4!?

Black is living dangerously; it took me some time to find how to continue the attack. Here are some possible lines:

b1) 20.♘g1 ♖a6 21.♘f3 ♖xa3 22.♖xa3 ♕xa3 23.♘xh4 b4

23...♖h7 24.g5 hxg5 25.♕xg5 ♕e7 26.♕f4 ♔e8 27.♘f3 ♖g7 28.♖g3 White has compensation.

24.♕f4 ♖h7 25.♗g6 ♖g7 26.♕xh6 ♘xd4

This leads to hair-raising complications!

27.♗xf7

27.♕h8† ♖g8 28.♕h6† ♖g7

27...bxc3† 28.♖xc3 ♘b3†!

It looks like Black just escapes.

29.cxb3

29.♖xb3 cxb3 30.♕f6 ♕b4†

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29.♔e2 ♘d4† 30.♔d2
29...♕b2†

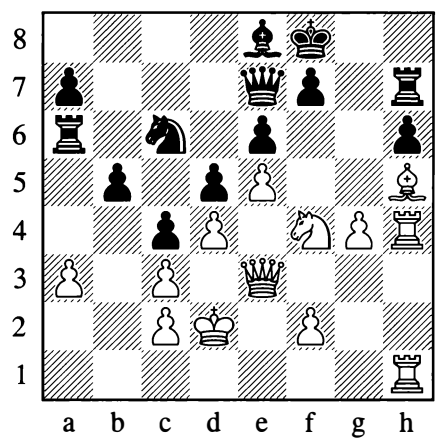
The game ends in a perpetual.

b2) Shakarov's preference was 20.♖f3! ♖h7 (20...♗e8 21.♖f6) 21.♗g6 ♖g7 22.♕xh6 ♔g8. And now, according to Shakarov, White can win with either 23.♗h5 or 23.♘f4.

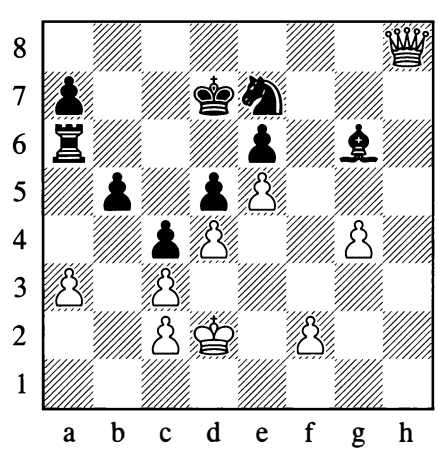
b3) 20.♖ah1!

According to my analysis, this is another way to break the defence.

20...♖h7 21.♖xh4 ♖a6 22.♘f4 ♗e8



23.♗g6!! fxg6 24.♖xh6 ♖xh6 25.♖xh6 ♕f7 26.♖xg6 ♕xg6 27.♘xg6† ♗xg6 28.♕f4† ♔e8 29.♕f6 ♘e7 30.♕h8† ♔d7



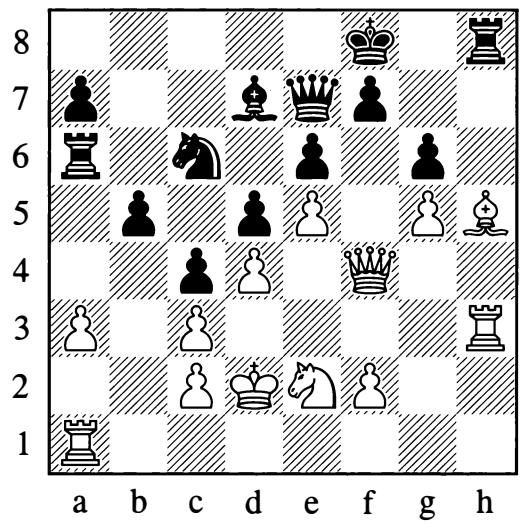
31.♕b8!

It is amazing, but Black finally loses on the queenside.

19.g5 hxg5

Shakarov pointed out the line 19...g6 20.gxh6! (20.♗xg6? hxg5) 20...gxh5 21.♖g1 ♔e8 22.♖hg3 ♕f8 23.h7 ♘e7 24.♖g7 ♖xa3 25.♕f6 and White wins.

20.hxg5 g6

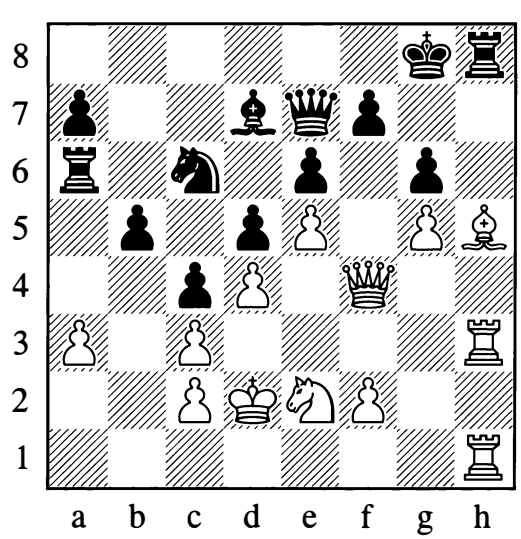


21.♖ah1!!

White sacrifices the bishop in order to open the kingside.

21...♔g8

Black probably wants the transfer the queen to g7. Generally he cannot do much against the opening of the h-file. After 21...gxh5 22.♖xh5 ♖g8 23.♖h8 the checkmate is just a matter of time.



22.♕h2!

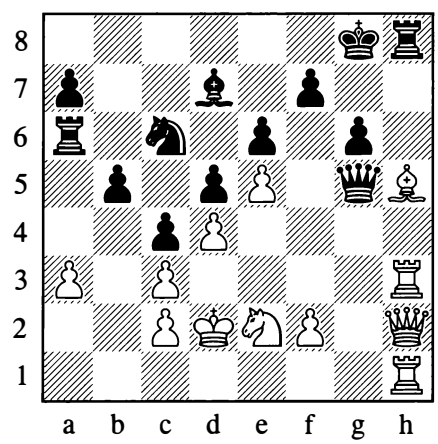
Shakarov brings all possible force to bear on the h-file.

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22...♔f8

Black does not really know what to do and indeed he has no effective defence. For example, 22...♕f8 23.♗xg6! wins for White.

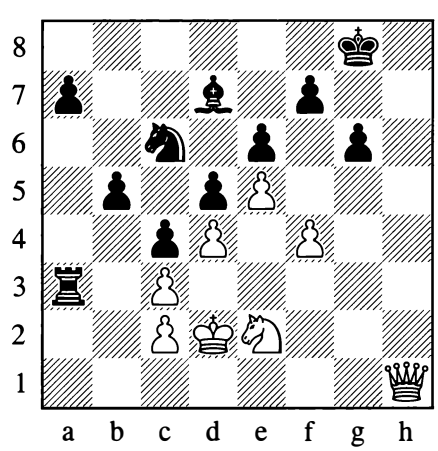
The best practical chance was probably 22...♕xg5†



Even here White has two promising routes.

a) First there is:

23.f4 ♕xh5 24.♖xh5 ♖xh5 25.♕g2 ♖xh1 26.♕xh1 ♖xa3



27.f5!!

This attractive line was pointed out by Shakarov.

27...gxf5 28.♕h6

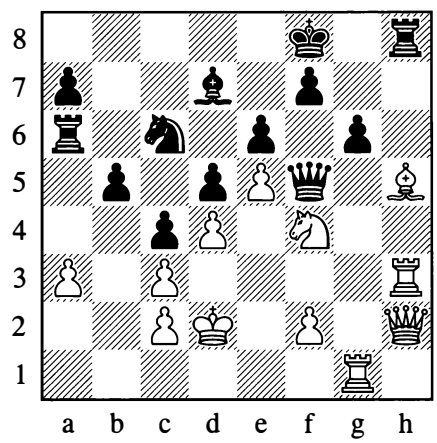
The knight will join in the attack, with fatal consequences for Black.

b) Another promising way to develop the attack is:

23.♘f4!? ♔f8

23...♘xe5 24.♖g1 ♘f3† (24...♖xh5 25.♖xg5 ♘f3† 26.♔c1 ♘xh2 27.♘xh5 ♘g4 28.f3 wins for White) 25.♖xf3 ♖xh5 26.♕xh5 ♕xg1 27.♕e5 White invades with the queen.

24.♖g1 ♕f5

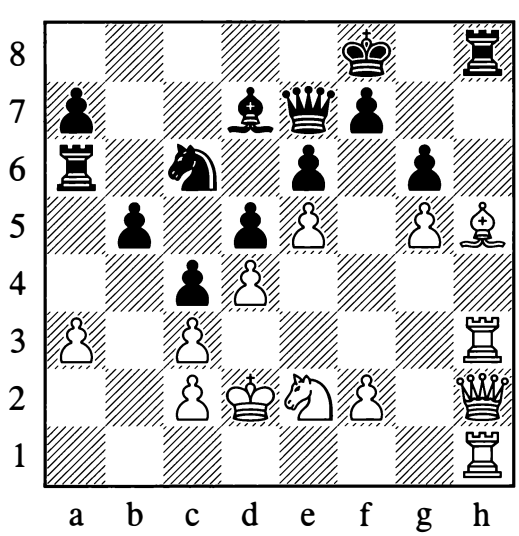


25.♖xg6!!

25.♗g4 ♖xh3 26.♘xh3 ♘xd4 27.cxd4 c3† 28.♔d1 ♕e4 Black survives.

25...♘xd4 26.cxd4 c3† 27.♖xc3 fxg6 28.♘xg6† ♕xg6 29.♖f3†! ♔g7 30.♕f4! ♕h6 31.♖g3† ♔h7 32.♗g6† ♕xg6 33.♖xg6 ♔xg6 34.♕f6† ♔h7 35.♕f7† ♔h6 36.♕xd7

White should win, as the queen is stronger than the rooks.



23.♗xg6!

After this very pretty move it is all over for Black. White conducted his attack with great skill and force.

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23...♕xg5†

23...♖g8 24.♖h8 ♕xg5† 25.f4 ♕xg6 26.♖g1 wins for White.

24.f4 ♖xh3 25.♕xh3 ♕xg6 26.♖g1

1–0

This was another fantastic attacking game.

The next game is against a very strong grandmaster, who plays very safely. Let's see how Rozentalis tries to withstand the ferocious attack!

Alexander Shakarov – Eduardas Rozentalis

Correspondence 1986

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♘xe5 d6 4.♘f3 ♘xe4 5.d4 d5 6.♗d3 ♗d6 7.0–0 0–0 8.c4 c6

Kasparov also faced this variation twice against Shirov. The first time he won only because Alexei blundered badly.

9.♕c2

This was Garry's choice in the second of the aforementioned encounters.

9...♘a6! 10.a3

One year earlier Rozentalis had faced 10.♗xe4. That game continued 10...dxe4 11.♕xe4 ♖e8 12.♕d3 ♗g4 (Black has compensation according to Shakarov) 13.♗g5 ♕d7 14.♘bd2 h6 15.♗e3 f5 16.♘b3 ♗xf3 17.gxf3 ♕f7 18.f4 ♘b4 19.♕c3 ♕h5 20.♘d2 g5 21.♔h1 ♘d5 22.cxd5 gxf4 23.♘c4 ♕f3† Kruppa – Rozentalis, Lviv 1985, soon ended in a draw.

10...♗g4 11.c5

11.♘e5 This move is by far the most common. Here are a couple of examples:

Kasparov – Shirov, Wijk aan Zee 2001, continued 11...♗h5 12.cxd5 cxd5 13.♘c3 ♘xc3 14.bxc3 ♔h8?! 15.f4 ♗xe5? 16.fxe5 ♗g6 17.a4 ♕d7 18.♗a3 ♖fe8 19.♗xg6 fxg6 20.♕b3 b6 21.♗d6 ♘c7 22.♖f3 ♖ac8 23.♖af1 h6 24.♕c2 Black was in serious trouble.

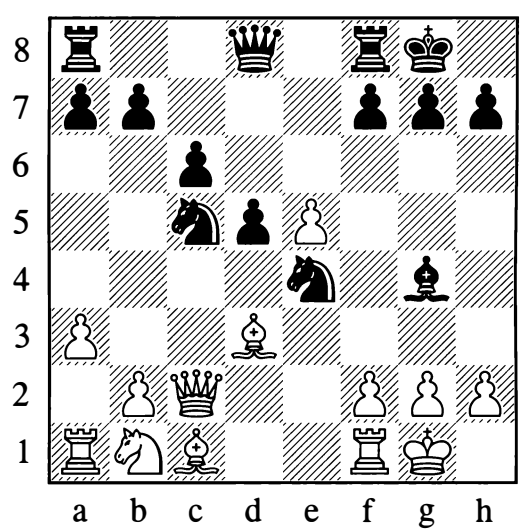
In Timofeev – Kosteniuk, Russia 2006, Black preferred: 11...♗xe5 12.dxe5 ♘ac5 13.f3 ♘xd3 14.♕xd3 ♘c5 15.♕d4 ♘b3 16.♕xg4 ♘xa1 17.♗h6 g6 18.♘c3 ♕b6† 19.♖f2 ♖fe8 20.♕f4 ♕c7 21.♖e2 ♖e6 22.♗g5 f5 23.♔f1 d4 24.♕xd4 ♘b3 25.♕d1 ♘c5 26.b4 ♘d7 27.f4 The position was balanced and later ended in a draw.

11...♗c7 12.♘e5 ♗xe5

Shakarov mentions the possibility of 12...♗h5!?. It remains just an idea, as there is no example in the database.

13.dxe5 ♘axc5!?

Taking with the other knight, 13...♘exc5! is better. Black gets a comfortable position with it: 14.♗xh7† ♔h8 15.b4 ♕h4 16.♗d3 ♘xd3 17.♕xd3 Black drew all three games in which this position occurred.



14.f3!

After the inferior 14.♗xe4?! ♘xe4 15.f3 ♕b6† 16.♔h1 f5! 17.fxe4 fxe4 Black is slightly better according to Shakarov.

14...♕b6 15.♗e3 d4 16.♗xd4 ♖fd8!

After 16...♖ad8? the analysis by Shakarov goes like this: 17.♗xe4 ♖xd4 18.♗xh7† ♔h8 19.fxg4 ♘b3 (19...♖xg4 20.♔h1 g6 21.♗xg6) 20.♔h1 ♘xa1 21.♕f5 c5 22.♗g6! White wins thanks to the vulnerable position of the rook on f8.

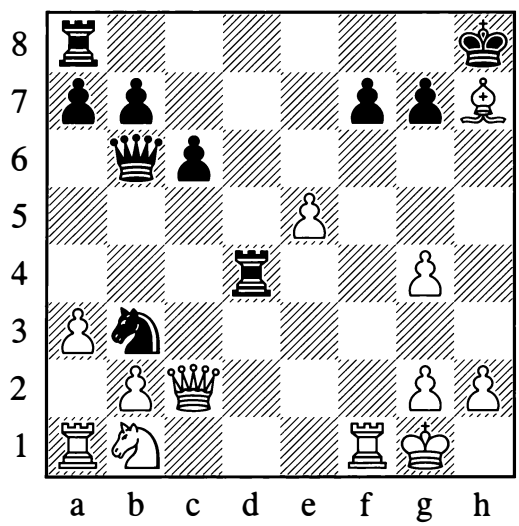
17.♗xe4!

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Shakarov points out that after 17.♗e3 ♖xd3 18.♕xd3 ♘xd3 19.♗xb6 axb6 20.fxg4 ♘xb2 Black has a decent position despite being the exchange down.

17...♖xd4 18.♗xh7† ♔h8 19.fxg4 ♘b3

The position looks messy, but it has all been seen before.



20.♔h1 ♘xa1 21.♕f5 c5

Black has no time for 21...♕a6? because of 22.♘c3 ♖xg4 (22...♘c2 23.♖f3) 23.♖xa1 ♖h4 24.♘e4 ♖xh7 25.♘g5 and White cracks open the black kingside.

22.♕xf7!

If 22.♘c3 ♕h6! (22...♘b3? 23.♕xf7) 23.♕xf7 (23.♖xa1 ♖f4 Black is active) 23...♔xh7 24.e6? (after 24.♖xa1 the position is balanced) 24...♕g6 25.♕xb7 ♖f8 26.♖xa1 ♕xg4 27.h3 ♕xe6 White's king is naked. 28.♕xa7 Shakarov thinks Black is doing well here; in fact he is just winning. Let me show you how! 28...♖f3!! 29.♕c7 ♖d2 and Black wins.

22...♔xh7 23.e6 ♖d5?

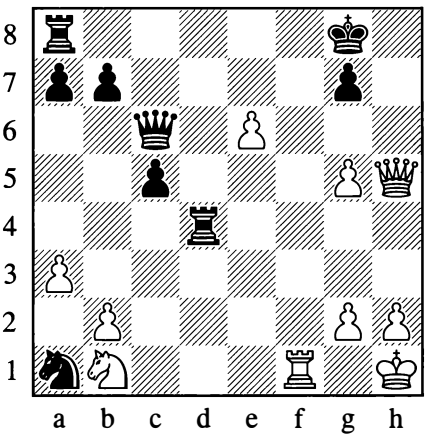
After 23...♕b5 24.♕f5† ♔g8 25.♘c3 ♕e8 26.♖xa1 Shakarov prefers White here.

The correct continuation was

23...♕c6!

Black tries to include the most powerful piece in the defence.

24.♕h5† ♔g8 25.g5



Black now has a choice.

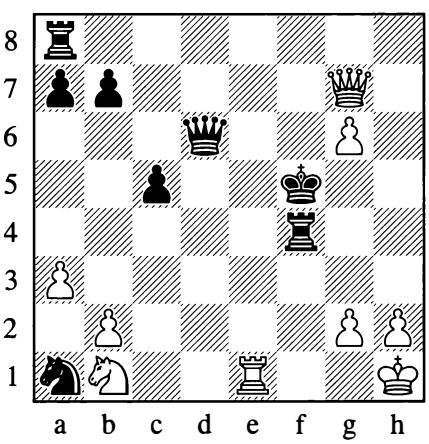
a) 25...♕d6?!

This allows a king-hunt in the style of the nineteenth century!

26.g6 ♖f4 27.♕h7† ♔f8 28.♕h8† ♔e7 29.♕xg7† ♔xe6

29...♔d8 30.♖g1 ♕xe6 31.♕h8† ♕e8 32.♕h7 wins for White.

30.♖e1† ♔f5



31.♘d2!! ♕xd2

31...♘c2 32.g4† ♔g5 33.♖e5† ♔xg4 34.h3† ♔xh3 35.♕h6† ♖h4 36.♕g5 White wins.

31...♖d8 32.♘c4 ♖xc4 33.♕f7† ♔g5 34.♕xc4 with good winning chances.

32.♕f7† ♔g4 33.♕e6† ♖f5 34.g7

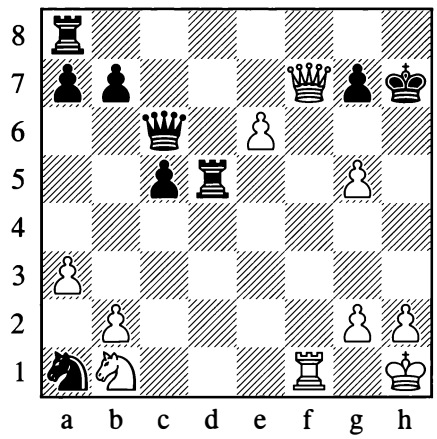
White is winning according to Alexander.

b) 25...♖d5! 26.♕f7† ♔h7

26...♔h8? 27.g6 wins for White.

After the text move, it is obvious that White has a draw if he wants it, but is there a way to pose further problems to the defence?

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27.h4!

Time and again Shakarov spots relaxed attack-building moves after he has sacrificed heavy material. The position is fascinating, although as far as I can see it ought to be a draw with best play.

Let us briefly note that after 27.g6†?! ♔h6 White definitely has no more than a perpetual.

27...♖e8!

Nothing else will do:

27...♕e8? 28.g6† ♔h6 (28...♔h8 29.e7 ♕g8 30.♖f5) 29.♕f4† ♔xg6 30.♕e4† ♔h6 31.♕xd5 and it is doubtful that Black can survive.

27...♘c2? 28.♘c3 (28.♖f6 ♖d1† 29.♔h2 ♕d6† 30.g3 also wins) 28...♘e3 (28...♘d4 29.♖f6) 29.♘xd5 ♕xd5 30.g6† ♔h6 31.♕f4† and White captures the knight and wins.

27...♘b3? 28.♘c3 (Shakarov pointed out that 28.♖f6 wins here as well) 28...♖d2 29.g6† ♔h6 30.♕f4† ♔xg6 31.♕g4† ♔h6 32.♘e4 (32.♖f7!?) 32...♖xg2 (32...♖d5 33.♖f3! The rook joins the attack from the third rank and brings Black down.) 33.♕xg2 ♕xe6 34.♕g5† ♔h7 35.♕h5† ♔g8 36.♘g5 ♕d5† 37.♔g1 ♕d4† 38.♖f2 and White's queen on h5 will deliver checkmate.

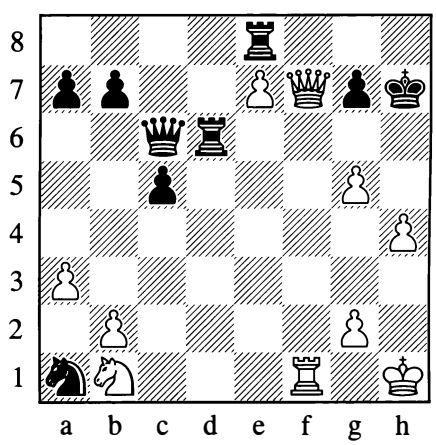
28.e7

There is also 28.♘c3 ♖xe6 29.♘xd5 ♕xd5. Now White had better take the draw, since 30.g6†?! ♔h6 31.♖xa1 ♕e4 can only be good for Black, and after 30.♕h5† ♔g8 31.♖xa1 ♖e4! Black is very active and White is tied to the defence of the h4-pawn, so there is no way he can hope to exploit his extra pawn.

28.♖f6 This looks dangerous, but Black just manages to defend. 28...♖d1† 29.♔h2 ♔h8 (29...♕d6†? 30.g3+–) 30. ♖h6† gxh6 31.g6 (31.♕f6† ♔g8 32.♕g6† ♔h8 33.♕xh6† ♔g8 34.♕g6† ♔h8 35.♕f6† ♔g8 White has no more than a draw; the missing black h-pawn does not give any extra attacking possibilities.) 31...♕d6†! 32.g3 ♖h1†! 33.♔xh1 ♕d1† 34.♔g2 ♕e2† Black secures a perpetual.

28...♖e5!

28...♖d6 is not in Alexander's notes, however I have no doubt he saw this move and found the solution to it.



29.♘c3!! Another 'quiet' move in the middle of an attack with a considerable material deficit. 29...♘c2 30.♕h5† ♔g8 31.♘e4 ♘e3 32.♕xe8† ♕xe8 33.♖f8† ♕xf8 34.exf8=♕† ♔xf8 35.♘xd6 c4 36.h5! Another function for the h-pawn. 36...♔e7 37.♔g1 White wins with the extra pawn.

Instead the text move enables Black to hold the balance.

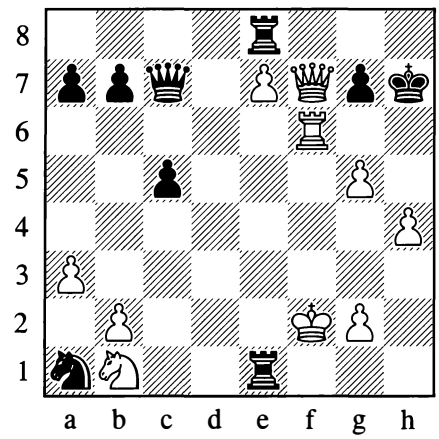
29.♖f6 ♖e1† 30.♔h2 ♕c7† 31.♔h3 ♕d7†

31...♖h1† leads to the same position in a simpler way, viz. 32.♔g4 ♖xh4† 33.♔xh4 ♕h2†.

32.♔g3 ♖e3† 33.♔h2 ♕c7† 34.♔g1 ♖e1†

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35.♔f2



35...♖e2†! 36.♔f3 ♖e3† 37.♔g4 ♖e4†

There is also 37...♖g3†!? 38.♔h5 ♖xg5†! 39.♔xg5 ♕xe7 when Black is not worse.

38.♔h5 ♖xh4† 39.♔xh4 ♕h2† 40.♔g4 ♕xg2† 41.♔f5 ♕c2†

41...♕h3† reaches the same position after 42.♔e5 ♕g3† 43.♔e6 ♕b3† 44.♔d7.

42.♔e6 ♕b3† 43.♔d7 ♕b5† 44.♔c7

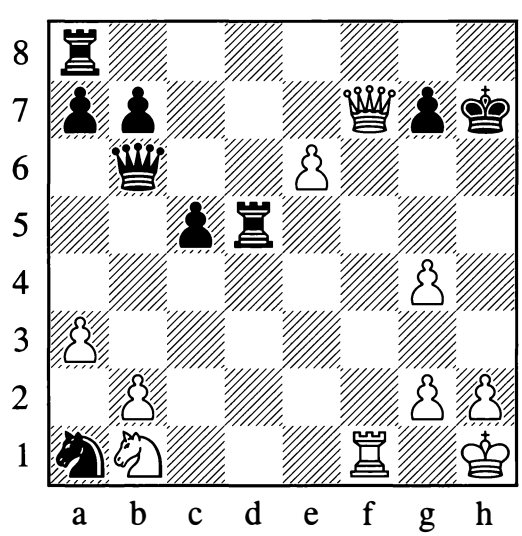
44.♔d6 ♕b6† 45.♔e5 ♕xb2† and White can't hide or run away from the checks.

44...♕a5† 45.♔xb7 ♕b5† 46.♔c7 ♕b8†!

After 46...♕a5† 47.♔d7 ♕b5† 48.♖c6 Black will soon run out of checks.

47.♔c6 ♕b6† 48.♔d5 ♕b3†

White cannot escape the checks. The position contains amazing resources for both sides!



The move played by Rozentalis in the game (23...♖d5? in case you had forgotten after the lengthy detour!) is not quite good enough to hold the balance, although it takes some special moves by Shakarov to prove it.

24.♘c3!

In accordance with the well-known principle of attacking play, White includes his last piece in the action. The knight attacks the rook and, by preventing a potentially lethal check on d1, enables the white rook to join in the attack. After the inferior 24.g5? ♖xg5 25.♖f3 ♖g6! saves Black.

24...♖e5

Black must avoid 24...♖g5? 25.♖f3! when the existence of the g-pawn makes a huge difference: 25...♖g6 26.♖h3† ♖h6 27.♖xh6† ♔xh6 28.♕h5 is checkmate.

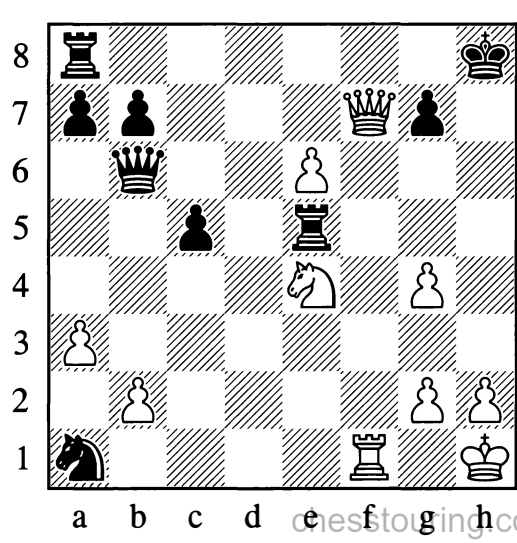
25.♘e4!

This is another very attractive and fluent attacking move, which combines beauty with deadly effectiveness. Apart from improving the knight, White also blocks the e-file thus enabling the rook to aid the attack when needed.

25...♔h8

25...♖xe4 26.♕f5† ♔g8 27.♕xe4 wins for White.

Black also loses after: 25...♕xb2 26.♘f6† ♔h6 (26...♔h8 27.e7) 27.h4! White wins with another h-pawn move. 27...♕d2 28.♘h5 ♖g5 29.hxg5† ♕xg5 30.♘xg7 Checkmate is around the corner.



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26.♘g5!!

White still has to be accurate. It was not too late to throw everything away with 26.♖f6?? ♕d8! or 26.♖f3?? ♖xe6 27.g5 ♖d8, both of which win for Black (analysis by Shakarov).

The idea of the text is that the knight simultaneously attacks while solving the problem of the back rank, by diverting the enemy rook from the e-file.

After this final hammer-blow Rozentalis resigned.

1–0

The proof is seen after 26...♖xg5 (26...♖xe6 27.♕f8† forces mate) 27.♖f3! ♕b3. Otherwise mate will come on the h-file. 28.♖xb3 ♘xb3 29.e7! ♖e5 30.♕f8† ♔h7 31.h4, when Black is defenceless.

This was a brilliant attacking game. I have no doubt that Shakarov's great pupil would have been proud to have played a game like this.

On a related subject, I am sure that many chess trainers would envy Shakarov for seeing his pupil play and calculate as magically as he did. In a way he is lucky, because of the exceptional talent of his pupil. On the other hand, they both worked extremely hard along the way. To begin with Shakarov needed to develop his own attacking skill for years, and he certainly must have worked with special diligence and dedication with his young and, at that time, unknown pupil. He fully deserves the majestic reward of witnessing Kasparov's incredible performances over the board.

It is interesting that all four of Shakarov's selected games were correspondence games. He is of course a strong player over the board as well. It seems he was most active in the 1970s. The next game is from the time when he was still training Garry.

Akif Velibekov – Alexander Shakarov

Baku 1975

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 d6 6.♗c4 e6 7.♗e3 ♗e7

The alternative is 7...a6. Garry also used the Sozin, rarely though, including it just a few times against Karpov in his matches. 8.♕e2 ♕c7 9.♗b3 ♘a5 10.g4 b5 11.g5 ♘d7 12.f4 b4 13.♘a4 ♗b7 14.f5 e5 15.♘f3 ♘xb3 16.cxb3 ♗xe4 17.0–0 ♕b7 18.♘d2 ♗c6 19.♖f2 ♕b5 20.♕xb5 axb5 21.♖c1 ♖c8 22.♘b6 ♘xb6 23.♗xb6 Black went on to win, Roth – Kasparov, Malta (ol) 1980.

8.♕e2 a6 9.0–0–0 ♕c7 10.♗b3 0–0 11.g4 ♘xd4 12.♖xd4 b5 13.g5 ♘d7 14.♖g1

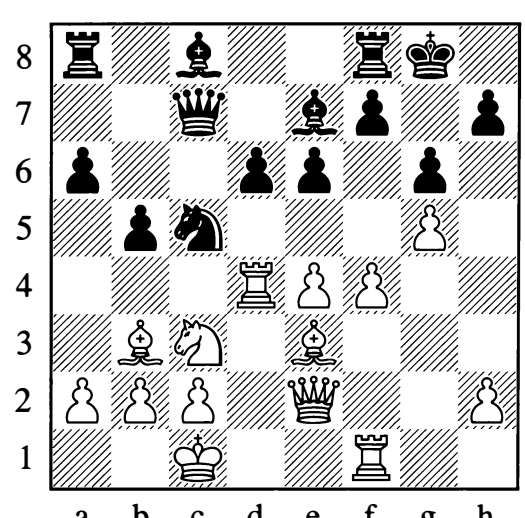
After 14.♕h5 ♖d8 15.♘d5 exd5 16.♗xd5 ♘e5 17.f4 g6 18.♕h4 ♘f3 19.♗xf7† ♔g7 20.♕h6† ♔xf7 21.♕xh7† ♔e8 22.♕xg6† ♔d7 23.♕f5† ♔e8 24.♕g6† ♔d7 25.♖d3 ♕c4 This complicated position led to a draw in Dvoirys – Kasparov, Vilnius 1975.

14...g6

So far they have played the main line. The text was not so common though.

15.f4 ♘c5 16.♖f1

White's intention is clear – he plans to push his f-pawn and start an attack.



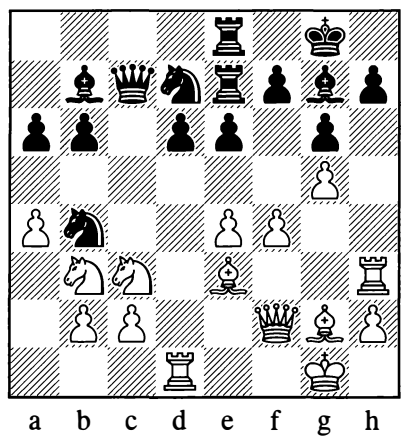
16...f5!

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This move stops White's activity on the kingside. Perhaps by coincidence (or perhaps not...) Kasparov utilized the exact same idea in the crucial 24th game of his second match against Karpov.

Anatoly Karpov – Garry Kasparov

World Championship, Moscow (24), 1985



25...f5! 26.gxf6 ♘xf6 27.♖g3 ♖f7 28.♗xb6 ♕b8 29.♗e3 ♘h5 30.♖g4 ♘f6 31.♖h4 g5 32.fxg5 ♘g4 33.♕d2 ♘xe3 34.♕xe3 ♘xc2 35.♕b6 ♗a8 36.♖xd6 ♖b7 37.♕xa6 ♖xb3 38.♖xe6 ♖xb2 39.♕c4 ♔h8 40.e5 ♕a7† 41.♔h1 ♗xg2† 42.♔xg2 ♘d4† 0–1

17.exf5 ♖xf5 18.♘e4?!

18.♔b1 is wiser.

18...a5!

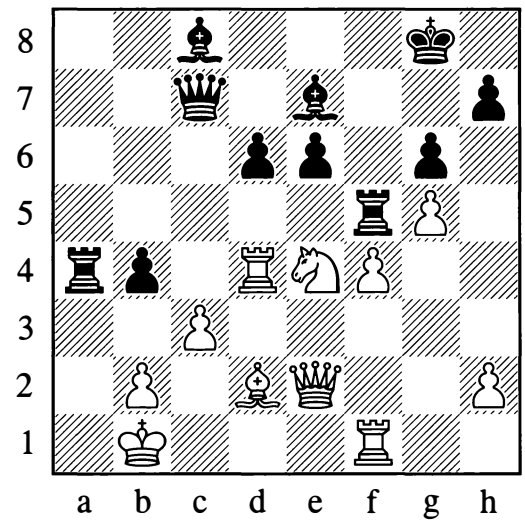
Both Shakarov and Kasparov had a special knack for playing on the edge of the board.

19.c3 ♘xb3† 20.axb3 b4 21.♗d2?

Again 21.♔b1 should have been preferred.

21...a4 22.bxa4 ♖xa4 23.♔b1?

Now this move brings unfortunate consequences for White. 23.♖c4 was relatively best, although Black can feel confident about his chances regardless, e.g. 23...♕d7 24.♖xb4 ♗a6 25.c4 d5 26.♖xa4 ♕xa4 27.♘c3 ♕d7 28.♖e1 ♔f7 Black wins back the pawn with nice play.



23...♗a6!

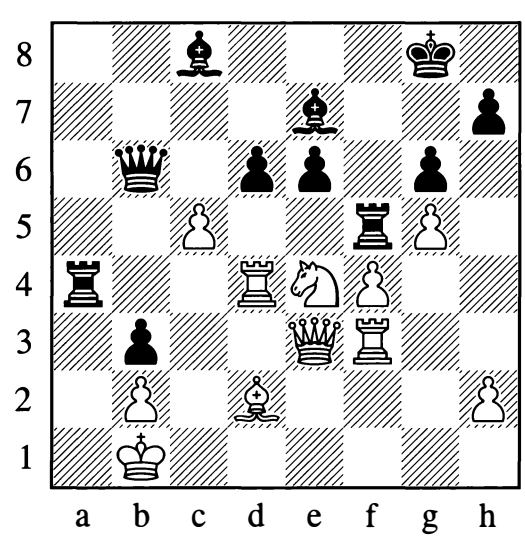
Another move on the edge increases the pressure.

24.c4 ♗c8!

It was useful for Black to force the c-pawn to advance. The bishop has done its work, so it returns to the defence of e6. Now White will have to worry about various checkmating motifs.

25.♖f3 ♕b6 26.♕e3 b3! 27.c5

After 27.♖xd6 ♕b7 28.♘c3 ♖a1† 29.♔xa1 ♖a5† 30.♔b1 ♕a8 Black wins.

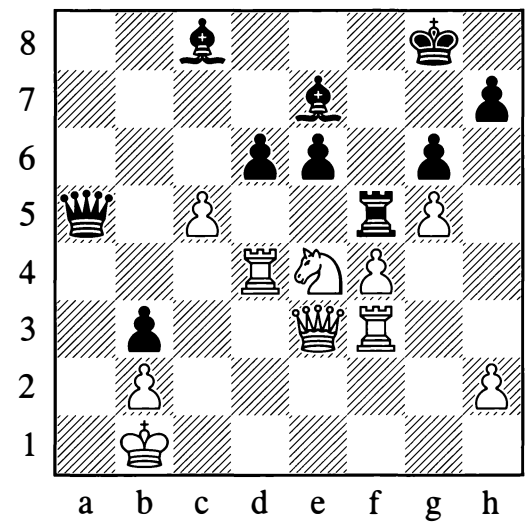


27...♖a1†!

This is a well-known and attractive attacking idea, although it is not often that one gets the opportunity to use it at the board.

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28.♔xa1 ♕a6† 29.♗a5 ♕xa5† 30.♔b1



30...dxc5!

Black makes a relatively quiet move in the middle of the storm, before launching the knockout punch. This shows a good understanding of how to attack.

31.♖d1 ♕a2† 32.♔c1 ♕a1† 33.♔d2 ♖d5† 0–1

Trainers and pupils usually play against each other sooner or later, and Shakarov and Kasparov were no exceptions. It is worth seeing how they handled each other's imagination and attack. Naturally there were sacrifices.

Alexander Shakarov – Garry Kasparov

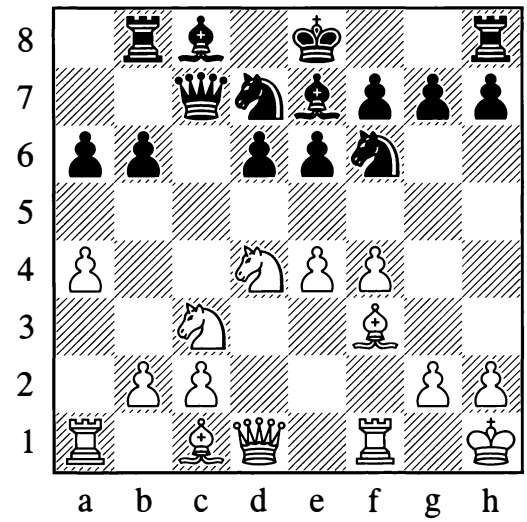
Baku 1976

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 d6 6.♗e2 a6 7.f4 ♘bd7

Most experts consider it risky to develop this knight on d7. Kasparov beat Short in a most instructive way when the Englishman tried it in the 1994 Moscow Olympiad.

8.♗f3 ♕c7 9.0–0 ♗e7 10.♔h1 ♖b8 11.a4 b6

Garry played g4 and g5, but in that position Black had already castled.



12.e5!

Alexander plays aggressively. He sacrifices a pawn.

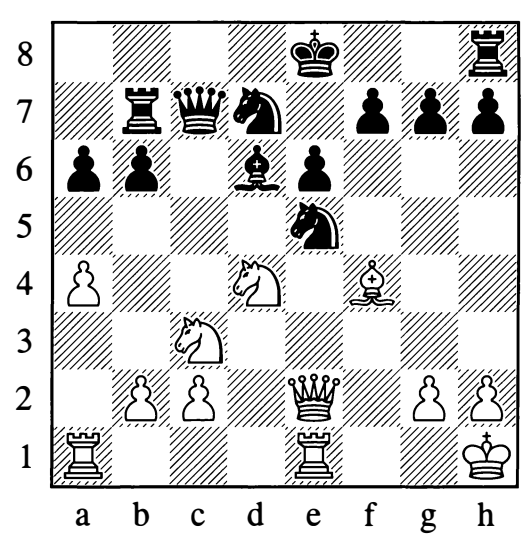
12...dxe5 13.fxe5 ♘xe5 14.♗f4 ♗b7 15.♗xb7 ♖xb7 16.♖e1

16.♕e2! is more precise as it limits Black's options.

16...♘fd7

After 16...♘d3!? 17.♕xd3 ♕xf4 18.♕xa6 ♖d7 the position is unclear. There is also 16...♘eg4!? 17.♕f3 ♕c8 18.h3 h5 when White has compensation for the pawn, but nothing concrete. Had White played 16.♕e2!, neither of these options would have been available to Black.

17.♕e2 ♗d6



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18.♘db5?

This is a cute idea, but not the best as it only leads to an equal endgame.

Instead 18.♕xa6! would have put Black in a very difficult situation. 18...♕c8 (18...0–0? 19.♘db5 ♕c4 20.♖e4 wins for White) 19.♘db5 ♗b8 20.♘e4 Black is in trouble.

18...axb5 19.♘xb5 ♕c6 20.♘xd6† ♕xd6 21.♗xe5 ♘xe5 22.♕xe5

½–½

Alexander Semeniuk – Alexander Shakarov

USSR 1981

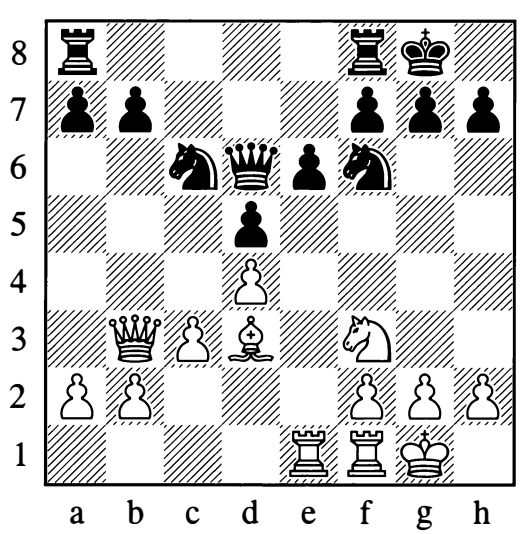
1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.♗d3 ♘c6 5.c3 ♘f6 6.♗f4 ♗g4 7.♕b3 ♕d7!?

Shakarov plays a well-known line here as well.

8.♘d2 e6 9.♘gf3 ♗xf3 10.♘xf3 ♗d6!? 11.♗xd6 ♕xd6 12.0–0

12.♕xb7 ♖b8 13.♕a6 0–0 Black has nice compensation for the pawn.

12...0–0 13.♖ae1



13...♖ab8

Black plans the standard minority attack. He has little choice but to treat the position positionally.

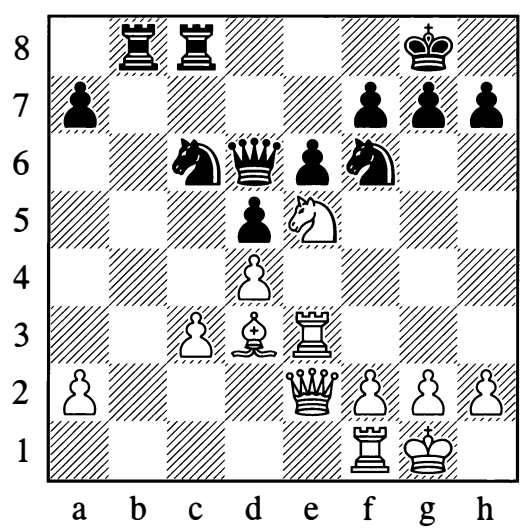
14.♘e5 b5 15.♖e3

15.a3 is seen much more frequently, but Semeniuk elects to leave the a-pawns on the board. It means that Black will have another target, but in its favour the move prevents Black from using the a-file to invade. White hopes he will be able to do something with the time he gains while Black gobbles the pawn.

15...b4 16.♕c2 ♖fc8 17.♕e2

Not 17.♗xh7†? ♘xh7 18.♘xf7, when 18...♕f4! wins easily. Interestingly this was missed in Shakarov and Kasparov's (pre-computer) *Chess Informant* analysis.

17...bxc3 18.bxc3



18...♕d8!?

A mysterious move. Probably the aim is to defend the king and to have the chance to get to the queenside via a5 as well.

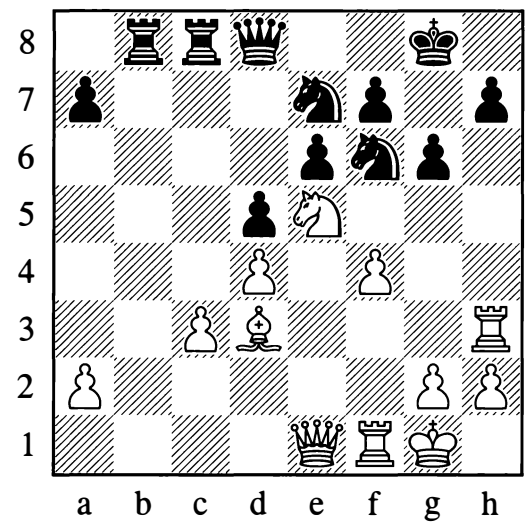
19.♖h3 g6

Now White must consider the possibility of ...♘xe5, followed by dxe5 ...♘d7. Therefore he bolsters the knight.

20.f4 ♘e7 21.♕e1?

Sometimes one slow move is all it takes to ruin the momentum of an attack. The critical continuation was 21.g4!, leaving the c-pawn to its fate. After 21...♖xc3 White can choose between 22.f5 and 22.♕e1, both of which give him quite real attacking chances.

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21...h5!

This stops the attack dead in its tracks. Instead after 21...♖b2 22.g4! any result would be possible. After the text it is very hard for White to do anything on the kingside, while there is no doubting who controls the opposite flank.

22.♔h1 ♖b2 23.a4 ♔g7!

This ensures that no 'accidents' will happen on the kingside.

24.♖g1?!

White was already short of time.

24...♘f5

Black is in total control.

25.♕a1 ♕b6

Having constructed a bombproof fortress on the kingside, Black prepares to infiltrate on the opposite flank.

26.a5 ♕b3 27.♗xf5

27.c4 is met by 27...♘g4!.

27...exf5 28.♘d3

28.c4 ♘e4 wins for Black.

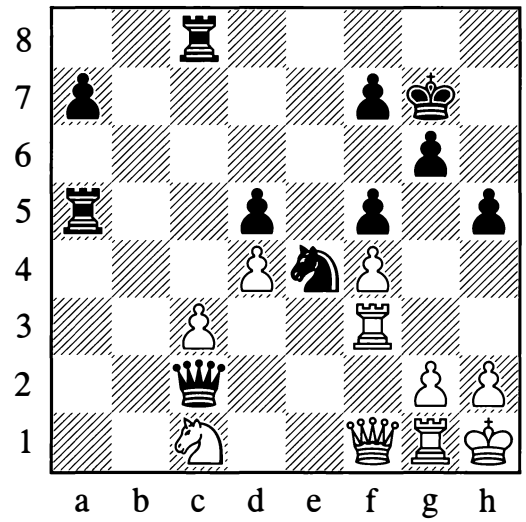
28...♖a2 29.♕f1

After 29.♘c1 ♘e4 does the trick, although there is an even better and prettier solution as well: 29...♘g4! 30.♖f3 ♖xg2!!

29...♘e4

Now White's king is under pressure as well.

30.♘c1 ♕c2 31.♖f3 ♖xa5



Black wins a pawn, but that is almost incidental. Far more important are his dominating pieces, which enable him to end his opponent's resistance with minimal fuss.

32.♕e1 ♖a1

White's position is painful. Shakarov at least gives him the mercy of a quick death.

33.h3 ♖xc3 34.♖xc3 ♕xc3 35.♕xc3 ♘xc3 36.♔h2 a5 37.♖e1 a4

0–1

Shakarov calls this game "funny"!

Alexander Shakarov – Arif Mekhtiev

USSR 1982

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘f5!?

This move has virtually disappeared from high-level games. Probably there is no connection, but during the latter part of his career Garry avoided the main line Sveshnikov, even though he achieved some grandiose wins like the ones against Kramnik (Novgorod 1994) and Shirov (Horgen 1994).

6...d5 7.exd5 ♗xf5 8.dxc6 bxc6!

Black does better without exchanging the queens on d1.

9.♕f3 ♕c8

9...♕d7! is rightly more popular here.

10.♗a6!

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The players attached these marks.

10...♕xa6?!

Safer was 10...♗g4! 11.♗xc8 ♗xf3 12.♗h3 ♗h5 13.0–0, when Black is only a little worse.

11.♕xf5 ♗d6??

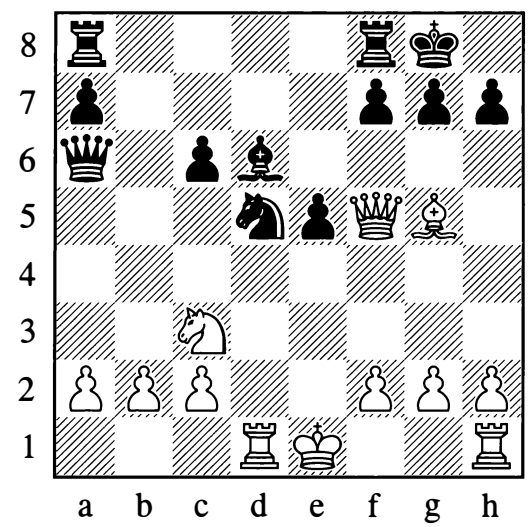
11...♘d7

12.♗g5?

This move looks perfectly normal, but White could already have decided the game with 12.♗h6! when Black's position simply falls apart.

12...♘d5 13.♖d1 0–0

Not 13...♘xc3? 14.bxc3 ♕a3 15.♕d3 with a huge advantage.



14.♖d3!?

True to his style, Shakarov chooses an aggressive continuation.

Shakarov and Kasparov give 14.♘xd5 cxd5 15.♖xd5 ♗b4† as clearly better for Black, although after 16.c3 ♕xa2 17.♖d7 ♗c5 18.0–0 ♕xb2 19.♕xe5 the position is equal.

14...♖ae8

This not a bad move, although it is slightly risky to cut off the king's route to the centre. Black's position now requires very precise handling. The two annotators suggest 14...♖fe8 and 14...g6.

14...♗b4!? 15.0–0 ♗xc3 16.bxc3 ♕xa2 White does not seem to have a knockout blow.

15.♘xd5 cxd5 16.♖h3!?

Shakarov chooses the most tempting attacking move. It is dangerous, but not decisive. Now, looking back, he prefers 16.♖xd5, after which 16...e4 is roughly equal; Black has enough play for the pawn. The text is objectively a mistake, although in the game Black was unable to find the right path.

16...g6!

Not 16...h6? 17.♗xh6 ♗b4† 18.♗d2 and White consolidates the pawn advantage.

17.♗f6 ♗e7??

Black overlooks the picturesque reply.

Also bad was 17...♕c8?? 18.♕g5 ♕xc2 19.0–0 and Black gets checkmated.

The correct continuation was:

17...♕c4! 18.♕g5

18.♖xh7? ♗b4† 19.c3 (19.♔d1 ♕d4† 20.♔c1 ♕d2† 21.♔b1 ♔xh7) 19...♗xc3† 20.bxc3 ♕xc3† 21.♔e2 ♕b2† 22.♔d1 ♕a1† 23.♔d2 ♕xa2† 24.♔d1 ♕b3† 25.♔e2 ♔xh7 wins for Black.

18...♕e4†!

Stronger than 18...♕f4 19.♕xf4 exf4† 20.♔d2±, as given by Kasparov and Shakarov in *Chess Informant*.

19.♔d2

19.♔d1 ♖c8 20.c3 ♖b8 21.b4 ♗xb4 22.♕h6 ♕b1† 23.♔e2 ♕c2† 24.♔f3 ♕xc3† 25.♔g4 ♕d4† 26.♔g3 ♕f4† Black has decent winning chances.

19.♔f1 ♕c4† 20.♔g1 (20.♔e1 ♕xc2) 20...♕xc2 21.g4 ♖c8 22.♕h6 ♕c1† Black neutralizes the attack by exchanging the queens. 23.♕xc1 ♖xc1† 24.♔g2 ♖c2 Black is better.

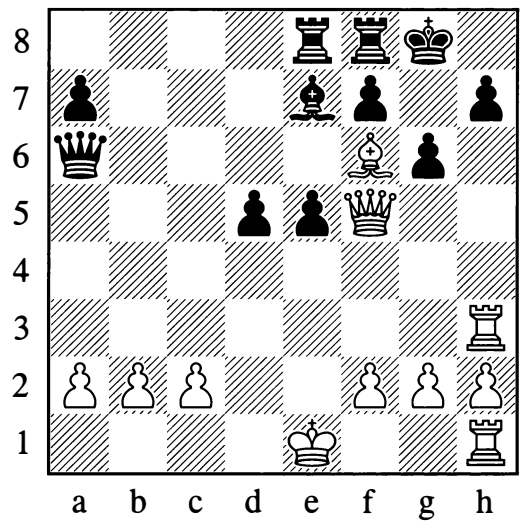
19...♗b4†

A good alternative is 19...♕d4† 20.♔c1 ♖b8 21.♕h6 (21.c3? ♕xf2) 21...♕xb2† Black has at least a perpetual, and quite possibly more.

20.c3 ♖b8!

This is winning according to Shakarov. White certainly faces a difficult defence.

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With the move played in the game, Black has placed his neck well and truly under the guillotine. Unfortunately for him, his opponent was not feeling merciful.

18.♕h5!!

1–0

The final move was not too hard to find, but it is beautiful nonetheless.

Here is another trademark attacking game.

Alexander Shakarov – E. Lucker

Correspondence 1982

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗g5 e6 7.f4 b5

Garry once said in one of his DVDs that the Polugaevsky variation is sound. However he never played it with Black.

8.e5 dxe5 9.fxe5 ♕c7 10.♕e2

Nowadays 11.exf6 has taken over as the main line.

10...♘fd7 11.0–0–0 ♗b7

Another line is 11...b4 12.♘e4 ♘xe5!?. I tried this novelty in a friendly e-mail match between Hungary and Estonia. 13.♘f3 (13.♕h5!?) 13...♘bd7 14.♘xe5 ♕xe5 15.♕f3 ♗b7 16.♖xd7 ♕xg5† 17.♘xg5 ♗xf3 18.♖xf7 ♗d5 19.♖f4 ♗c5 20.♔d2 ♖d8 21.♗d3 ♗e7 22.♘f3 e5 23.♘xe5 ♗g5 Black went on to win, Tarmak – Károlyi, e-mail 2000.

12.♕g4

Shakarov once again goes for a sharp main line.

12...♕xe5?!

After the more reliable 12...♕b6 Black has scored reasonably.

13.♗e2

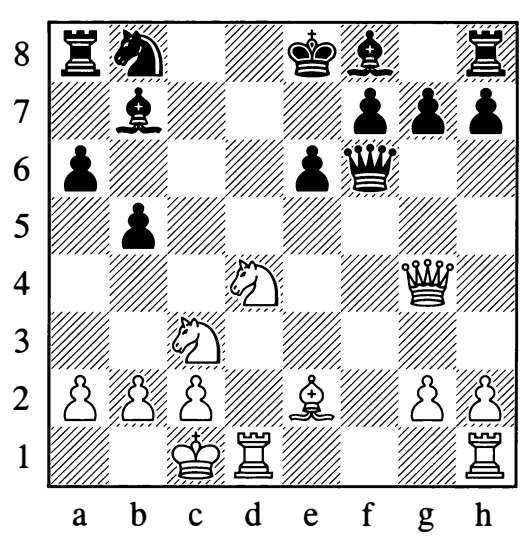
13.♗xb5 is the main line. Wahls – Brunner, Berne 1990, continued 13...axb5 14.♖he1 h5 15.♕h4 ♕c5 16.♕g3 ♗c6 17.♗f4 ♗e7 18.♖xe6 0–0 19.♘b3 ♕xc3 20.♕xc3 fxe6 ½–½.

13...♘f6?

If 13...h5 14.♕h4 g6 15.♗f3 is strong. And after 13...♗c5 then 14.♘f3!, as recommended by Alexander and Garry.

14.♗xf6 ♕xf6

Black introduced this novelty. 14...gxf6 15.♖he1 ♕g5† (15...h5 16.♕h3 ♘d7 17.♗xb5 ♕f4† 18.♔b1 0–0–0 19.♗c6 f5?! Black commits a losing mistake in a difficult position. 20.♗xb7† ♔xb7 21.g3 ♕c7 22.♕g2† ♔b6 23.♘a4† and Black resigned, Torre – Sigurjonsson, Geneva 1977.) 16.♕xg5 fxg5 17.♗h5 ♔e7 18.♖f1 f5 19.♖fe1 Black's king was caught in the centre in Balinas – Tarjan, Odessa 1976.



15.♘cxb5!

White has to hurry, for if Black manages to castle, his two bishops will simply overpower White.

15...♕e5

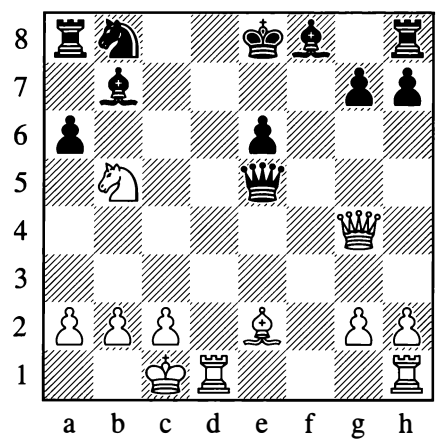
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After 15...axb5 16.♗xb5† ♔e7 17.♕g3! e5 18.♖hf1 wins for White.

16.♖he1!

This is natural and strong. However White has another powerful continuation:

16.♘xe6!! fxe6



17.♘c7†!! ♕xc7

17...♔e7 18.♕b4† ♔f6 19.♖hf1† ♔g6 20.♗d3† ♔h6 21.♕xb7 and White wins.

18.♕xe6† ♕e7

18...♗e7 19.♗h5† g6 20.♗xg6† hxg6 21.♕xg6† ♔f8 22.♖hf1† leads to a checkmate.

19.♗h5†

White lights a firework which ends in a checkmate.

19...g6 20.♗xg6† hxg6 21.♕xg6† ♕f7 22.♖he1† ♗e4 23.♖xe4† ♗e7 24.♖xe7†! ♔xe7 25.♕d6† ♔e8 26.♕d8#

The d8-square was the soft spot.

16...♗e7 17.♘c7†!

White could also have taken a more positional approach with 17.♗f3!? ♕g5† 18.♕xg5 ♗xg5† 19.♔b1. The exchange of queens does not solve all of Black's problems. Alexander's move is even stronger though – and it is certainly more representative of his style!

17...♕xc7 18.♘xe6 fxe6

This is relatively best. 18...♕e5 leads to an impressive checkmate: 19.♗b5†! ♕xb5 20.♘c7† ♔f8 21.♘xb5 axb5 22.♖d8†! ♗xd8 23.♕b4† and Black will be killed on the back rank.

19.♕xg7

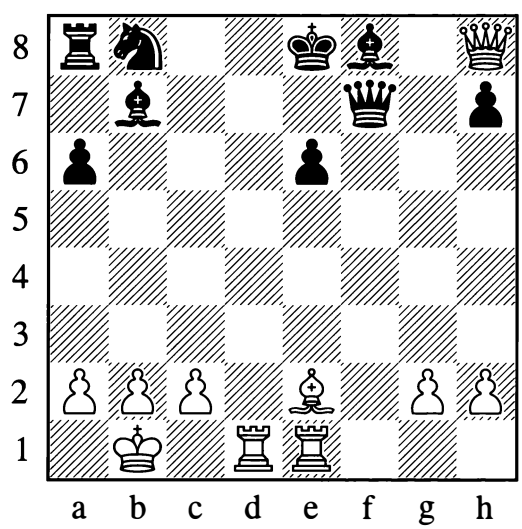
Black is two pieces up but suffers from a chronic lag in development – a typical nightmare scenario for the Polugaevsky variation.

19...♕f4† 20.♔b1 ♕f7

20...♘d7 21.♗h5† ♔d8 22.♖xe6 is crushing.

21.♕xh8† ♗f8

The moment of truth has arisen, and once again Shakarov finds a way to end the game in style.



22.♗h5!

1–0

This is not the only win, but it is the most elegant and effective. Mate follows shortly, e.g. 22...♕xh5 (22...♘d7 23.♗xf7† ♔e7 24.♗xe6) 23.♖xe6† ♔f7 24.♖f6† etc.

The next game is again typical for Alexander's style, featuring opposite-sided castling and mutual king-hunting.

Alexander Shakarov – Konstantin Grivainis

Correspondence 1987

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♘d7 5.♗c4 ♘gf6 6.♘g5 e6 7.♕e2 ♘b6 8.♗d3 h6 9.♘5f3 c5 10.dxc5 ♗xc5 11.♘e5 ♘bd7

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12.♘gf3 ♘xe5

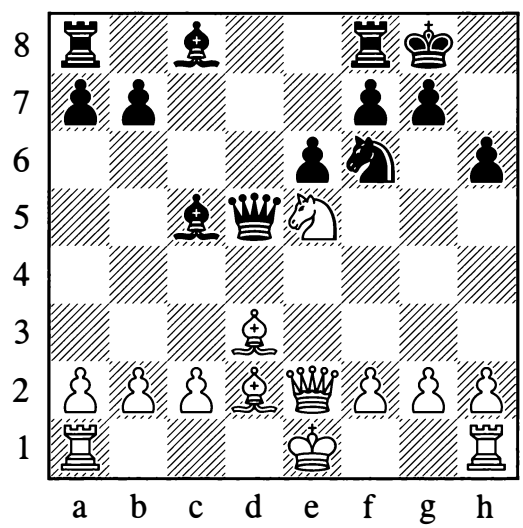
12...♕c7 is the main line. Then 13.♗f4 ♗b4† leads to an interesting variation.

13.♘xe5 0–0 14.♗d2

Castling long naturally leads to a sharper game than short castling.

14...♕d5

Black wants to stop long castling by attacking a2.



15.0–0–0!?

He could have castled short, but then Black would have nothing much to fear. The text is much more aggressive and leads to positions that are difficult and risky for both players. I should add that the position was already well-known, so it was not an original decision.

15...♕xa2 16.c3 b5

If 16...♗a3 then 17.♗e3 defends.

17.♗xh6 ♗b7

The daring 17...b4!? 18.♘g4 ♕a1† 19.♗b1 ♘xg4 20.♕xg4 g6 21.♕f3 ♖e8 led to an interesting fight in Reinert – Cu. Hansen, Politiken Cup 1981. The game later ended in a draw after White made a perpetual check.

18.♗g5

This was a new move. One previous game had continued 18.♘d7 ♘xd7 19.♕g4 ♕a1† 20.♗b1 g6 21.♖xd7 ♗a3 22.bxa3 ♕xc3† 23.♔d1 ♖fd8 24.♖d2 ♕a1 25.♔e2 ♕e5† 26.♔d1 ½–½ Chandler – Speelman, Brighton 1984.

18...♗e7

Also critical was:

18...♘d5 19.♕h5

19.♘d7 ♘xc3 20.♕c2 ♖fc8

19...f5

Another possibility is 19...♕a1† 20.♔c2 (20.♗b1 f5 transposes) 20...♕a4† 21.♔d2 f5 22.♘g6 ♗d6. It is a wild middlegame!

20.♗b1 ♕a1 21.♘g4

21.♘g6 ♗d6! stops the threat of 22.♕h8 and 23.♘e5†.

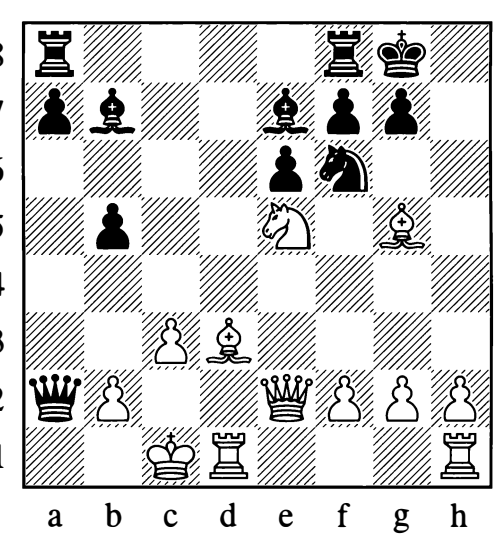
Alternatively, there is: 21.♖d3 ♗a3 22.bxa3 ♘xc3 23.♘g6 ♕xb1† 24.♔d2 ♕b2† 25.♔e3 f4† 26.♗xf4 ♘d5† 27.♖xd5 ♖xf4 28.♘e7† (28.f3 exd5) 28...♔f8 29.♔xf4 ♕xf2† 30.♕f3 ♕xf3† 31.gxf3 exd5 Black is not worse.

21...♗a3

21...fxg4 22.♕h7† ♔f7 23.♕g6† ♔g8 24.♕xe6† ♖f7 25.♖xd5 ♗xd5 26.♕xd5 ♖c8 27.♕e4 White's attack is dangerous.

22.♘h6† gxh6 23.♕g6† ♔h8 24.♕xh6† ♔g8 25.♕g6† ♔h8

I see no more than a perpetual for White.



19.♘d7! ♖fd8?

Black's queen is out of play and Shakarov's opponent leaves it on the worst square. 19...♕a1† 20.♔c2 (20.♗b1 Now the queen pins the bishop, making 20...♖fd8! more favourable than in the game.) 20...♕a4† From

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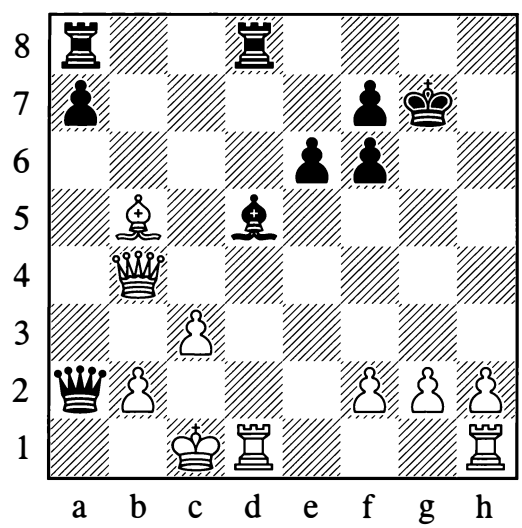
here it defends the fourth rank. 21.♔b1 ♖fc8 22.♗xf6 ♗xf6 White's position is preferable, but it is nothing serious.

20.♗xf6 ♗xf6 21.♘xf6† gxf6 22.♕g4† ♔f8 23.♕b4†! ♔g7 24.♗xb5

White improved both his queen and the bishop thanks to the 'spectator' queen on a2.

24...♗d5?

Maybe the fact that White's last two moves brought something to the queenside made Black forget about the other wing. Relatively best was 24...f5 25.f3 ♗d5 26.♕a4, although White is still a pawn up.



25.♖d3!

Black has closed the d-file, thus allowing Alexander to bring his rook into the attack. He exploits it with remarkable precision, finding the best moves all the way to the end.

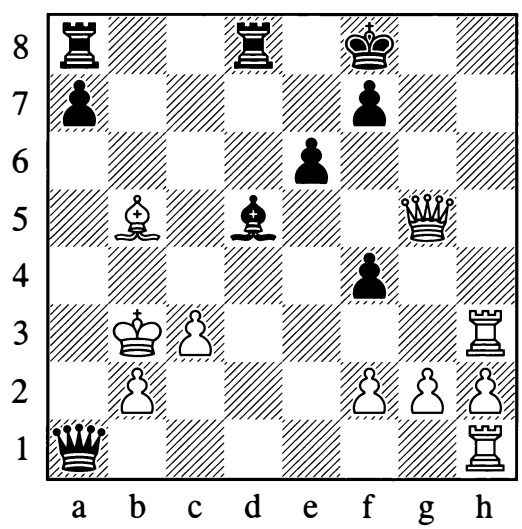
25...f5 26.♕e7! f4 27.♕g5† ♔f8 28.♖h3

Black is on the verge of being mated, so he must try to counterattack.

28...♕a1† 29.♔c2 ♗e4† 30.♔b3

Do not be alarmed by the position of the king – the winner has it all worked out!

30...♗d5†



31.c4! ♗xc4† 32.♗xc4 ♖ab8† 33.♗b5!

The queen was playing her role in the defence as well as the attack!

1–0

This was a very skilful attacking display.

I would say that these examples prove beyond any doubt that Shakarov is a superb attacking player. There is no denying that Kasparov possessed a rare combination of qualities that make a champion: immense talent, the desire to work hard when training at home, and a phenomenal competitive determination to fight when at the board. In addition the Soviet Union provided a superb environment for chess. At the same time, I doubt it is a coincidence that he was at his best in dynamic attacking positions, just like his mentor at an early age.

I was able to ask Shakarov some questions, and was extremely happy to receive his answers.

I checked my database, and the facts contradict one another. It says you were born in 1940, but the title of your Karpov game says you played Karpov at the under-18 championship of the USSR in 1966. Can you clarify please?

"I was born in 1948 in Baku."

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Could you talk a bit about your family?

"My mother was an accountant; my father was a machinist and my brother as well."

How did you start playing chess?

"I became interested in chess after the 1961 Botvinnik–Tal match, and the 1961 USSR Championship, which was held in Baku. I was a fanatical follower of Tal. I started to play only in 1962, very late."

Who was your trainer?

"My trainer was Rafael Sarkisov, who was the trainer of the Spartak Club in Baku."

What is your profession, did you go to university?

"I graduated from the State University of Physics of Azerbaijan; my profession is chess trainer."

Were you a professional player and trainer?

"I have never been a professional player, but started work as a trainer in 1971."

I have heard interesting stories about your 1966 Karpov game; I was told after your game you predicted he would become a world champion. Please talk about this game!

"In the 1966 game I squeezed, squeezed and squeezed, but by the time of the adjournment it became a draw. After the game Alexander Roshal came to me and told me: Don't be upset, he will become a world champion!"

Can you show that game?

"Unfortunately the score sheet is lost, and the database only gives 22 moves."

What does chess mean to you?

"Chess for a long time was the most important thing for me. I was a fanatic, then it became my profession."

Can you recall when you first met Garry?

"The first time was in January 1972 when he played at the schoolboys' championship where I was an arbiter."

When did you start training him and how long did you train him?

"Officially in September 1976, unofficially from 1973."

Could you explain it in a more detailed way?

"In the years 1973-1975 I worked with Garry unofficially, and it was not that regular. There were even some weeks when we did not do anything. There were two groups and Garry officially was in the other one. The trainer of the other section was Oleg Privorotsky who was his first trainer. However, from 1973 onwards Garry was selected for the national teams of Azerbaijan (schoolboys, juniors and youngsters). I was the senior trainer of these national teams."

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1977 – N.N., Klara Kasparova, N.N., Garry Kasparov and Shakarov

Did you follow any plan when you trained him?

"The main plan was constructed by Botvinnik."

Could you please say a few words about what a session was like?

"I no longer remember well what themes we worked on – you know, three decades have passed. In our sessions we usually followed Botvinnik's and Alexander Nikitin's plan. And in addition sometimes we analysed very tough and complicated opening positions. I recognized the 'tracks' of our work in Garry's play only in the openings."

What are his best qualities as a player?

"His best qualities as a player are that he handles pressure intrepidly and he calculates a lot..."

Was there a point when you realized he was stronger than you?

"Garik became stronger than me roughly in 1978 or 1979."

Were you in the tournament hall during the last game of the second Karpov–Kasparov match when he obtained the title?

"No, I was not in the tournament hall during that game."

In one of his interviews after retirement Garry estimated that he had played 250 good games, no other player produced as many. I agree with that; maybe it is worth pointing out that the number he mentions is only his winning games. Some draws must have been great too, and players had to come up with something spectacular to beat him. What is your favourite Kasparov game?

"Garry has so many very effective games. It is almost impossible to select his 1-3 best games. Maybe for me his most unusual and spectacular was the 16th game of his second World Championship match with Karpov."

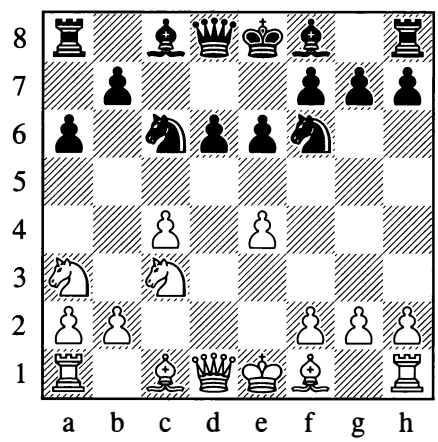
I was wondering which one it was. A quick search brings a bit of a surprise, the Dely gambit game. Let me show that masterpiece!

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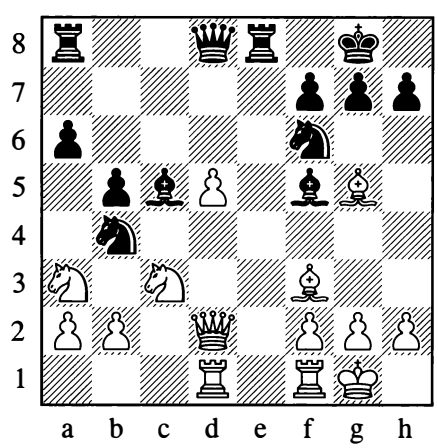
Anatoly Karpov – Garry Kasparov

World Ch. (16), Moscow 1985

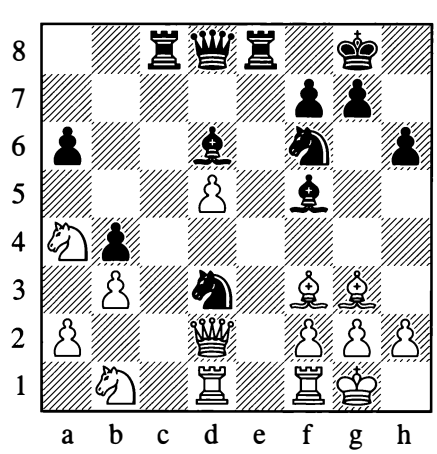
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘b5 d6 6.c4 ♘f6 7.♘1c3 a6 8.♘a3



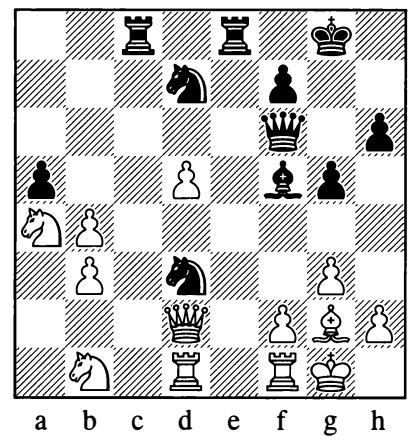
8...d5 9.cxd5 exd5 10.exd5 ♘b4 11.♗e2 ♗c5 12.0–0 0–0 13.♗f3 ♗f5 14.♗g5 ♖e8 15.♕d2 b5 16.♖ad1



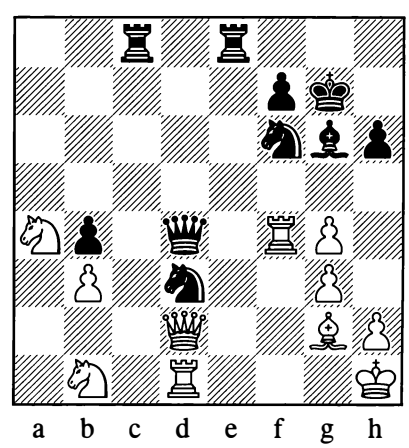
16...♘d3 17.♘ab1 h6 18.♗h4 b4 19.♘a4 ♗d6 20.♗g3 ♖c8 21.b3



21...g5 22.♗xd6 ♕xd6 23.g3 ♘d7 24.♗g2 ♕f6 25.a3 a5 26.axb4



26...axb4 27.♕a2 ♗g6 28.d6 g4 29.♕d2 ♔g7 30.f3 ♕xd6 31.fxg4 ♕d4† 32.♔h1 ♘f6 33.♖f4



33...♘e4 34.♕xd3 ♘f2† 35.♖xf2 ♗xd3 36.♖fd2 ♕e3 37.♖xd3 ♖c1 38.♘b2 ♕f2 39.♘d2 ♖xd1† 40.♘xd1 ♖e1†

0–1

Kasparov subsequently referred to this game as his "supreme creative achievement".

Do you have pupils nowadays?

"Since 1990 I only worked with Garry, nowadays I help him to write books."

Have you ever experienced difficult times with him?

"We had bad relations only for a few days, because of politics."

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What are your hobbies, what do you do in your spare time?

"I like to read books, and to watch films and DVDs."

Were you worried when he entered politics?

"I do not like politics."

How do you judge the changes in Russia and in the former Soviet Union?

"Communism is unreal, it is a utopia; capitalism is real, but it is a bad system."

Thank you very much indeed.

He only answered about half of the questions – it seems to me he is a very private person. Anyway I am very glad to present this interview.

After we had conducted the interview, he told me about one more game that he believed might be of interest to the readers. It provides another excellent illustration of his superb attacking play, so it is a good thing the game came to his mind! His analysis is also great material. By the way Alexander reminded me that this game was from the same tournament in which he had played Garry.

Alexander Shakarov – Fikret Sideif Sade

Baku 1976

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗xc6 dxc6 5.0–0 ♕d6 6.d4

Later the alternative 6.♘a3 became the most frequently played move in the position.

6...exd4 7.♘xd4 ♗d7 8.♗e3 0–0–0

Shakarov thinks going for the endgame with 8...c5! is the simplest for Black. After 9.♘b3 (9.♘e2!?) 9...♕xd1 10.♖xd1 b6 he evaluates the position as equal.

9.♘d2 ♕g6

The strong Azeri international master plays a well-known move, yet he follows up with a risky, unknown plan. An alternative is 9...♘h6 10.f3 g5!? (Or 10...f5. Opening the position is in Black's interest; in this case he wants to get at the c2-pawn.) 11.♘c4 ♕g6 12.♘e5?! ♕g7 with a balanced position.

10.♕e2 h5?!

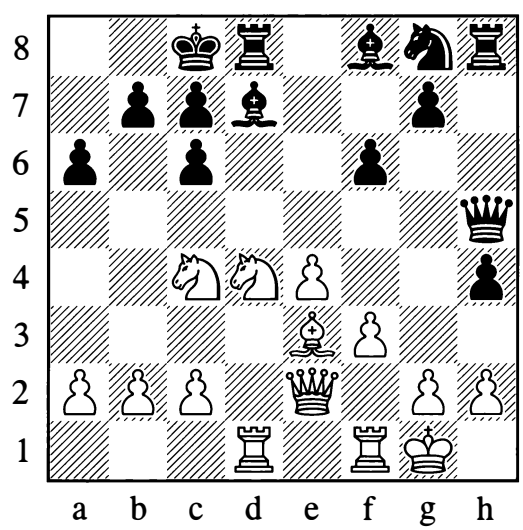
This is a novelty, the main line is 10...♘h6 11.f3 f5.

11.f3 h4 12.♘c4 ♕h5?

The queen does very little here.

13.♖ad1 f6

I quote Shakarov: "After the game I saw the not very smart 13...g6 in two different books."



14.♘b3!

In the previous moves Shakarov has played well, although all the moves were quite natural. This fine attack-building move is automatic.

14...♘h6

It is difficult to identify a particular one of Black's moves, from this point on, that deserves a question mark. It seems to me that his overall strategy is simply too slow. Yet the touch of a special attacker is required to reveal it.

15.♕f2 ♔b8

It is also interesting to consider:

15...♘f7

According to Shakarov bringing the knight back into the picture at once was better. Here is his very instructive analysis.

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16.♗f4!

16.♗c5 White can play for a slightly favourable endgame. 16...♔b8 (16...b6? 17.♗xb6!) 17.♗xf8 ♖hxf8 18.♕c5 (18.♘c5!?) 18...♕xc5† 19.♘xc5 White has exchanged enough to play for a better endgame.

16...c5?!

16...♔b8 would transpose to the following note.

17.♖d5! g5 18.♘xc5

18.♖xc5!? is also very promising.

18...♗b5 19.♗xc7! ♗xc4

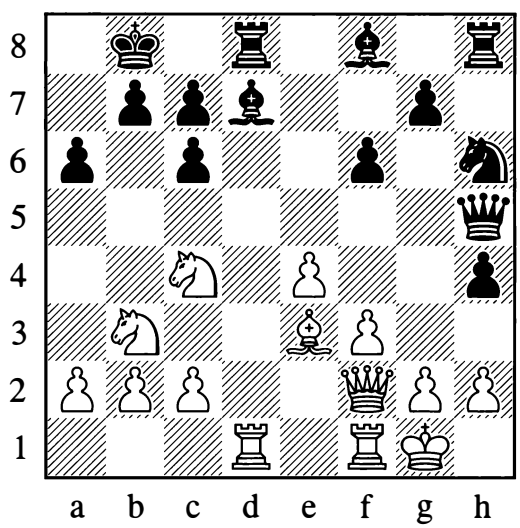
19...♖xd5? 20.♘b6† ♔xc7 21.♘xd5† ♔b8 22.♘xb7! demolishes Black's king.

20.♗xd8 ♗xd5 21.♗xf6 ♖h6

21...♗c6 22.♗xh8 ♕xh8 White should be better having rook and three pawns against the two bishops.

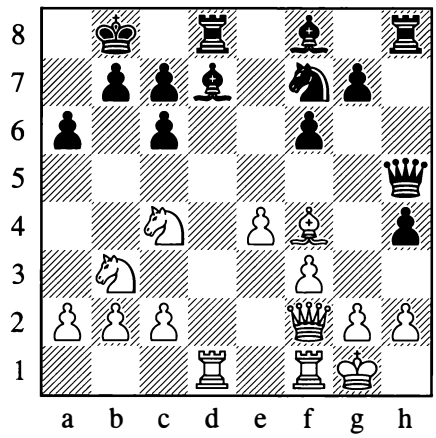
22.exd5 ♖xf6 23.♘e4

White has three pawns and an attack for the piece. Shakarov evaluates it plus/minus.



16.♗a7†!?

The way he conducts his play against the king leads to a quick win; it is indeed very dangerous and Black would have had to play well to stay in the game. It was possible to work against the c7-pawn with 16.♗f4!?. Then 16...♘f7 gives White a choice.



a) 17.♖d3

This is a natural and strong move.

17...♗e7 18.♖fd1 ♗e6 19.♖xd8†

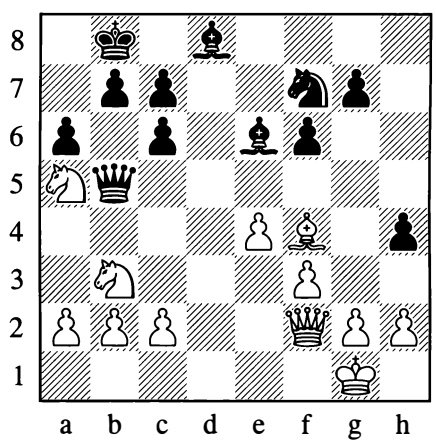
After 19.♕b6 ♘e5! Black has got himself together (but not 19...♘d6? 20.♖xd6! ♗xd6 21.♖xd6! and White wins with the battery).

19...♖xd8 20.♖xd8† ♗xd8

20...♘xd8? 21.♕b6!

21.♘ca5 ♕b5

21...g5?? 22.♕b6!



22.a4!

Another remarkable move on the flank.

22...♕b4

22...♕xa4 23.♕b6 ♕b5 (23...♗c8 24.♘xb7 ♗xb7 25.♕xb7†) 24.♕xb7† ♕xb7 25.♘xb7 ♗xb3 26.♘xd8 ♘xd8 27.cxb3 The endgame is better for White.

23.♘xb7! ♕xb7 24.♘c5 ♕xb2

24...♕c8 25.♕d4! ♗a2 26.♗e3 Black is in trouble.

25.♘xe6 g5 26.♗e3

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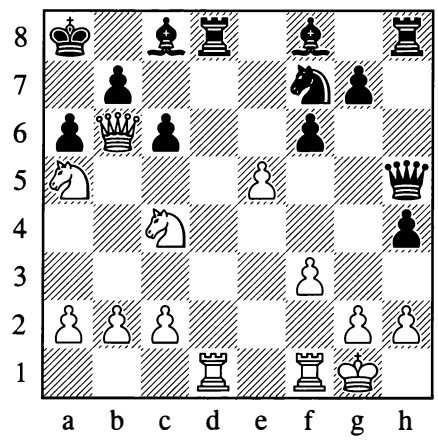
White is better according to Shakarov.

b) 17.♗xc7†!!

A lovely shot with which to open up Black's king efficiently.

17...♔xc7 18.♕b6† ♔c8

18...♔b8 19.e5! Closing the fifth rank. 19...♗c8 20.♘ba5 ♔a8



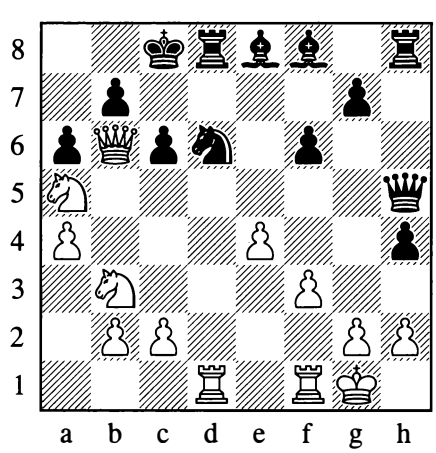
21.b4!! White wins, as there is no good defence against ♕c7 with mate to follow.

19.a4!

Preventing the black queen from occupying the b5-square to aid the defence. Once again Alexander shows his talent for finding strong quiet moves after sacrificing material.

Nevertheless, there was another strong continuation in 19.e5!? ♘xe5 20.♘ca5 ♘xf3† 21.♖xf3 ♕b5 22.♕a7! ♖h5! 23.♖e3! with the initiative, as Shakarov points out.

19...♗e8 20.♘ca5 ♘d6



21.♘c5!

The hasty 21.♖xd6? is playable, but does not appear to lead to a forced mate. Instead White simply brings another piece into play, and the defence collapses.

21...♕f7

21...♖d7 22.♘xc6 bxc6 23.♕xc6† ♔d8 24.♖d5 wins for White.

22.♕a7

White wins. Shakarov attacks fluently, both when playing and analysing – it is beautiful to watch.

16...♔a8?

Black misses White's superb shot. Alexander demonstrates a narrow path to survive the attack exists with: 16...♔c8! 17.♗c5! Now there are three lines to consider:

a) 17...h3?

Black has no time to insert this pawn move.

18.♗e7!!

This lovely move clears the diagonal for the invasion of the queen.

18.g3? ♗xc5 19.♘xc5 b6 20.♘xd7 ♖xd7 21.♖xd7 ♔xd7 Thanks to the h3-pawn, Black survives. 22.♘xb6† cxb6 23.♕xb6 ♕b5! 24.♕a7† ♔c8 25.♕a8† ♔c7 26.♕xh8 ♕e2! Black forces a perpetual at the end of Shakarov's line.

18...hxg2 19.♕a7 gxf1♕† 20.♖xf1

White wins.

b) 17...♗xc5?! 18.♘xc5 b6 19.♘xd7 ♖xd7 20.♖xd7 ♔xd7 21.♖d1†

21.♘xb6† cxb6 22.♕xb6!?

21...♔c8 22.♕d4 ♘f7

22...♕f7? 23.♘a5! ♕e6 24.♕d3! wins for White.

23.♕d7† ♔b7 24.♕e7 ♘e5 25.♘xe5 ♕xe5 26.♕xe5 fxe5 27.♖d7

The rook ending is very tough for Black.

c) The correct path is:

17...♔b8!

This move avoids the mine blowing up in his face.

18.♖d3 ♘f7 19.♖fd1

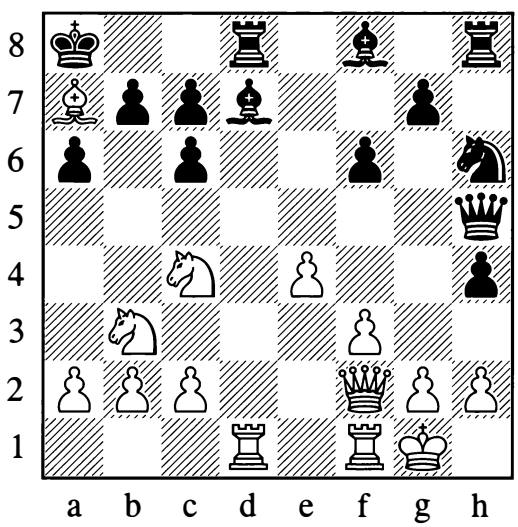
19.♗xf8 Going after the king now leads to

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no more than a draw. 19...♖hxf8 20.♘c5 ♗c8 21.♖b3 ♔a8 22.♘xa6 bxa6 23.♘b6† cxb6 24.♕xb6 ♕e5 White has no more than a perpetual.

19...♗xc5 20.♕xc5 ♕xc5† 21.♘xc5 ♗c8 22.♔f2

The endgame is no fun at all for Black with the 'half a point' disadvantage.



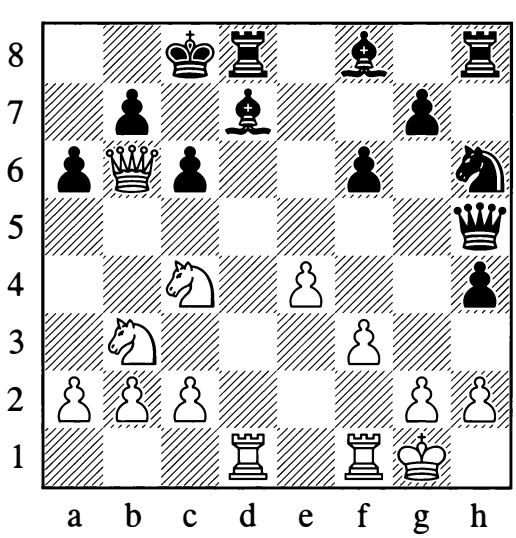
17.♗b6!

A superb finesse.

17...♔b8 18.♗xc7†!

This sacrifice wins as Black has insufficient defenders around his king.

18...♔xc7 19.♕b6† ♔c8



20.e5!

This cuts the queen off from the queenside. Black resigned, as he has no way to defend the b7-pawn.

1–0

I decided to search the Internet for Alexander's name. All I found was that he published a book with Belov in English, entitled *Anthology of Chess Beauty*. There was one page about his book with Garry on the 4...♗f5 Caro-Kann, and that he was a head of delegation at the 1990 world championship.

Incredibly, I could barely find a single word about his work in Kasparov's youth, which I consider a serious contribution to chess culture. He laid the foundation for the player who achieved so much more in chess than anybody. This ignorance of chess society I feel is undeserved.

To be fair, I was pleased to learn that Kasparov himself had continued to treat his former trainer well, for instance by continuing to employ him during world championship matches, as well as later enlisting him to help with the writing of his books. Though he has occasionally courted controversy, Garry's personality has some very good aspects, which are not always fully appreciated by the chess community and media. Employing Shakarov such a long time after his teenage years, at a world championship final, is proof that Garry treated him well. Shakarov must have helped him there too and his presence certainly was beneficial, as revealed in the testimonials below.

I hope that the present chapter will enable people to get to know Shakarov better, and perhaps even to earn a bit of desperately needed respect for junior trainers in general.

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Testimonials

Garry Kasparov
Thirteenth World Champion

"The name of Alexander Shakarov might not be world famous, but hardly anyone has lived a life more dedicated to chess. He is one of the most dedicated workers I've ever met. Alexander has always had more interest in analysing than playing, though he was quite a good player, if an impractical one. Later he found a natural fit with correspondence chess.

I began working with Alexander one-on-one in 1976 – I had already had sessions with him as part of the Azerbaijani youth team starting in 1973. We did a lot of work on the openings, at least the ones he enjoyed! What he didn't like, he didn't spend time on. He loved the Caro-Kann with 4...♗f5, even getting me to play it myself. I was quite successful with it in 1977/78. The USSR Championship in December 1978 was my last try with it, drawing with Geller and Sveshnikov and losing to Tseshkovsky. Then I came back to my first love, the Sicilian.

I was reminded of the quality of Shakarov's work after my loss to Ivan Sokolov at Wijk aan Zee in 1999. After seven consecutive wins and victory in the blitz tournament, I was in an almost dreamlike state at the board. And I paid the price for forgetting Shakarov's analysis – analysis that was in his students' notebooks from 1974! Classmate Ragik Tavadian had played that Nimzo-Indian line in the 1974 Spartakiad and instead of my poor 21...♖xh7? Alexander's suggestion was 21...♔f8! 22.♕e4 f5! 23.♕h4 ♖xh7 24.♕xf6† ♔e8 and the black king escapes to c8. A pity I could not recall this analysis, which despite its ancient vintage was superior to Timman's and Sokolov's!

In 1988 I brought back an early laptop computer for Alexander to work on; a Compaq, built like a tank with a 40 megabyte hard drive. He loved it! His equipment has advanced a dozen generations since then and he's still with me, still working harder than anyone. He organizes and archives, assists with my work on the *Great Predecessors* and now *Modern Chess* series, and inspires everyone with his limitless passion for chess."

Iossif Dorfman
Joint Soviet champion 1978; French champion 1998; trainer of Bacrot:

"Alexander is a very kind and friendly person. He is also very sincere. In Kasparov's team during the Karpov matches, he was more protected than other trainers, because he was also from Azerbaijan and he was not a player.

Alexander says what he thinks. Once I had a game with Kasparov where he offered me a draw. I refused and went on lose. Years later when Garry did not remember this particular occurrence, Alexander corrected him and told him that he indeed had offered me a draw.

His role in the team was to summarize the analyses of the other seconds and then prepare them for Garry. Sometimes he came up with very good questions. He was a very modest person who rarely showed streaks of individualism. So I can't tell much on his style in chess as the point of our work was to help Garry, therefore I focused on that, not on other trainers.

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1986 – Dorfman, Vladimirov, Kasparov, Shakarov and Timoshschenko

He had great theoretical knowledge, which was valued more in the pre-computer age. I also played the 4...♗f5 Caro so I can tell he understood its subtleties. In Baku they became specialists in that variation and the 4...♗f5 Caro had a great tradition as many players played it, including Bagirov. I can recall Garry playing it only once against Geller. *According to the database Kasparov had 17 Caro-Kanns winning eight games, drawing seven and losing two; in the ten games he played with 4...♗f5: four wins, four draws and two losses.*

I sometimes felt he deserved even more respect than he got, as during these matches, apart from eating and sleeping, he did nothing but work for Garry all day long."

Sideif Sade

International Master; Five-time champion of Azerbaijan:

"Shakarov had a soft-spoken character for a chessplayer with a great work ethic. He is a punctual person. He stopped playing tournaments early, and became a chess trainer. Kasparov's successes are in many ways related to Alexander's help. Shakarov's work was invisible but extremely important: selecting material, classification and finding new ideas. Unfortunately his name is not well-known within chess circles, since his work was done behind the scenes, and did not receive public appreciation. I witnessed how Shakarov worked eight or nine hours every day – I am certain Kasparov would attest to his tremendous contribution.

As a person Shakarov has a wonderful character: intelligent, non-combative, and I remember him in an especially warm way. Of course it is such a pity he had to leave Baku and can no longer help Azeri chess players."

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Chapter 5 Karoly Honfi

In Love with Chess until the End



Karoly Honfi (right) receiving an award from the Hungarian Federation

Just over eleven years ago, on the 14th of August 1998, I arrived home after an enjoyable game of tennis, still sweating. My wife asked me:

"Tibi, what is your mood like?"

"I feel good."

"Because your mood will be broken."

And she immediately told me the devastating news.

"Uncle Karcsi has died."

People cannot always control their emotions and thoughts. Unconsciously, the words of *I open the door* by the great Hungarian poet Attila József came to my mind. Many of József's masterpieces have been translated, but I have found no translation of the following. Here is my own amateurish attempt:

It is not aching, but I was not able to touch
I have not seen my mother in her death
I did not even cry, and it is incomprehensible
It always will be like that

The last two lines are the ones that I could relate to.

As soon as I heard the news about Karoly Honfi, to give Uncle Karcsi his proper name, I understood that I would always miss him. When he died, Hungarian chess lost one of its strongest and most versatile players, who represented his country in two Olympiads. I knew him as one of my childhood trainers, an adult training partner, and most importantly, a trusted friend.

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With the exception of my immediate family members, he was one of the closest people to me. I would like to remember the outstanding person that I think he was. One of the most remarkable things about him was his rare ability to judge people in an unprejudiced way. I admire this very much, and have only known a few people who possessed that quality. He was ready to admit the worse side of his friend's character, and even treated his close family in the same way. Conversely, if he did not like someone on a personal level, he was still quite willing to acknowledge his or her good qualities.

Honfi did not learn chess until he was almost an adult, and was 17 years old when he first started playing at a club. This put him at an automatic disadvantage compared with many of his contemporaries, especially in the area of calculation, which most top players develop in childhood by solving endless tactical exercises. According to his lifelong friend, IM Ervin Haag, Honfi really missed out from not having a decent trainer in his youth.

Despite his late start, he proved to be a quick learner, and obtained the National Master title in 1950, at the age of around 20. Honfi went on to achieve the level of International Master, although one could definitely make the argument that he would have made a worthy grandmaster. He was at his peak in the mid- to late 1960s when there were no world rankings, so it is hard to judge his level exactly. I would estimate that he was roughly the 50th strongest player in the world.

Those days it was much harder to obtain the grandmaster title, one of the reasons being that there were far fewer high-class tournaments. And unlike many of the top Soviet players of that era, Honfi achieved his high playing standard while maintaining a full time job, only becoming a chess professional in the mid-1960s. To reach this level as a part-time player, having learnt the game at such a late age, shows quite an impressive level of talent, I would say.

Honfi was finally awarded the title of International Grandmaster posthumously, shortly after his death.

Our first game is taken from Honfi's first participation in the final of the Hungarian Championship. This was in 1950, the same year in which he achieved the National Master title.

Karoly Honfi – Tibor Florian

Hungarian Championship, Budapest 1950

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 d6 6.♗e3

This move is modern, but the follow-up is not so highly regarded nowadays.

6...a6 7.♗e2 ♕c7 8.0–0 b5 9.f3

Honfi was an attacking player but, as he explained to me, he did not like to sacrifice material unless he saw the compensation right away. And like Bobby Fischer, he often took pawns if he saw no direct punishment for it.

In the present position he was evidently concerned about losing his e-pawn, but the combination of a bishop on e2 and a pawn on f3 would hardly worry a modern Sicilian player.

9...♗b7

Nowadays many Najdorf/Scheveningen specialists will often try to delay the development of this piece. In this position it would have been interesting for Black to try 9...♘bd7, e.g. 10.a4 b4 11.♘a2 d5 12.c3 ♗d6 13.e5 ♘xe5. Maybe it is slightly better than the game.

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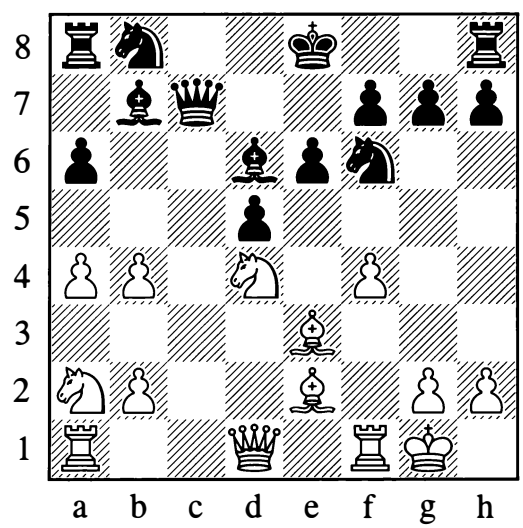
10.a4

For decades after this game White players almost always attacked on the kingside, but then they rediscovered the plan of undermining the b5-pawn.

10...b4 11.♘a2 d5 12.c3 ♗d6

After 12...bxc3 13.♘xc3 dxe4 14.♖c1 White's development advantage is clear.

13.e5 ♗xe5 14.f4 ♗d6 15.cxb4



As so many times in Honfi's games, a very complex and somewhat unusual position has been reached.

15...0–0 16.♖c1 ♕d7?!

This blocks the development of the knight on b8. Instead 16...♕e7 17.b5 axb5 18.♘xb5 ♘bd7 would at least have been better for Black than the game.

17.b5!

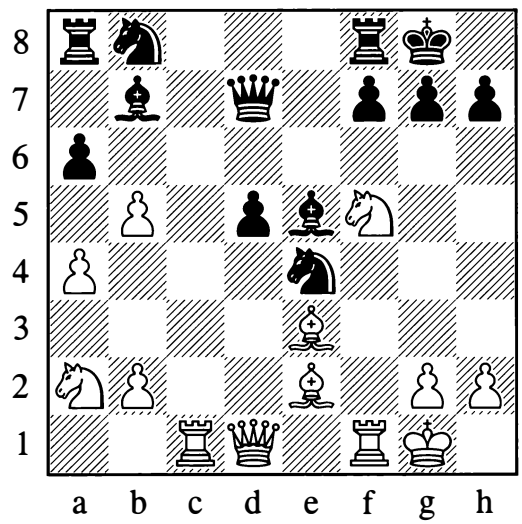
Immediately highlighting the drawback of Black's last move.

17...e5!?

Black decides to open the centre in a bid for counterplay.

18.fxe5 ♗xe5 19.♘f5 ♘e4

After 19...♗xb2 20.♖c2 ♗e5 21.♘b4 White has promising compensation for the pawn. Of course, Honfi's apparent willingness to give up material would appear to contradict the statement given in the note to move 9. But we should remember that the present game was played in his youth. As time went on, he probably developed a more conservative attitude towards material sacrifices.



20.♗d4!

Exchanging Black's strongest piece.

20...♕e6 21.♗xe5 ♕xe5 22.♘b4 axb5 23.♗xb5 g6

23...♕xb2? 24.♘xd5 ♘a6 25.♖c2 ♕e5 26.♘b6 wins for White.

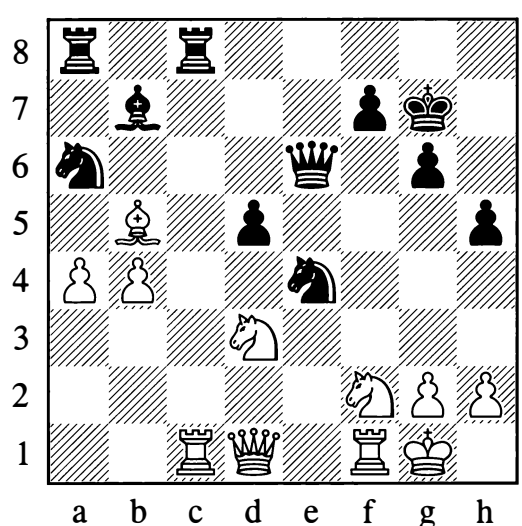
24.♘d3

Also promising was 24.♘h6† ♔g7 25.♘g4 ♕xb2 26.♘xd5 and White is better.

24...♕e6 25.♘h6† ♔g7 26.♘g4 ♘a6

After 26...♕b6† 27.♘c5 ♘a6 28.♕d4† f6 29.♘b3 White keeps an edge.

27.b4 h5 28.♘gf2 ♖fc8



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29.♘c5!

White keeps going forward. It is important to play energetically, as Black was starting to coordinate his position and was threatening to invade on c3.

29...♘axc5 30.bxc5 ♗c6 31.♕d4† ♕f6

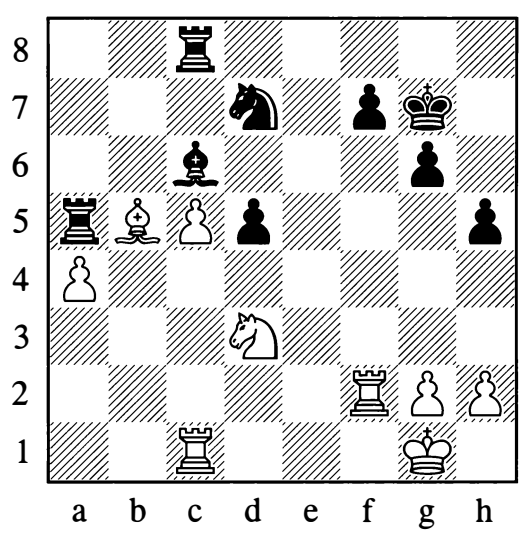
Florian probably knew of Honfi's attacking prowess, and thus decided to simplify. An understandable ploy, although it may have been objectively better to avoid the endgame with 31...f6, e.g. 32.♘d3 ♖a5 33.♖b1 ♖b8 with an unclear position.

32.♕xf6† ♘xf6 33.♘d3 ♘d7?

The plan of capturing the c-pawn is doomed to fail, and the knight will be left in a miserable defensive position.

Better was 33...♖a5, when White can claim no more than a small advantage after 34.♖b1 ♘e4 35.♘e5! ♗xb5 (35...♗e8 36.♗xe8 ♖xe8 37.♖xf7† ♔h6 38.h4 ♘xc5 39.g4 wins for White) 36.axb5 ♖e8 37.♘xf7±.

34.♖f2 ♖a5



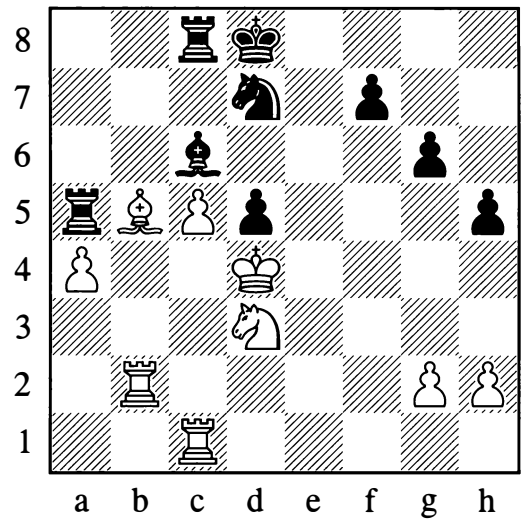
35.♖b2!

This quiet move kills Black's play on the queenside.

35...♔f8 36.♔f2!

All of White's pieces are ideally placed, except for one. Not for much longer though...

36...♔e7 37.♔e3 ♔d8



38.♔d4

White's domination is now complete, and it is not long before material gains follow.

38...♖c7 39.♖f1 ♘b8 40.♘e5 ♔e8 41.♘xc6 ♘xc6† 42.♔xd5

1–0

Honfi played for the Hungarian team at two Olympiads. In the 1958 Munich Olympiad he scored a total of three wins, with five draws and two losses. He also participated 16 times in the final of the national championship. His best result in this event was the silver medal, which he achieved twice. I must stress that in those years the line-up was much stronger than it is today, as all of Hungary's top players used to enter. Portisch, Szabo, Barcza and everyone else who mattered, played. If we compare the modern era, it is enough to point out that Peter Leko has never been the 'official' Hungarian Champion, having not participated for more than a decade, while Judit Polgar's last appearance was back in 1991.

Honfi's first silver medal came just a bit after the revolution, in 1958. He finished with 12½ points from 18 games; a full point ahead of jointly third placed Barcza and Forintos, and just half a point behind Lajos Portisch, who won the first of his eight Hungarian titles.

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Here is one of Honfi's best games from the tournament, played against one of his main rivals.

Gyozo Forintos – Karoly Honfi

Hungarian Championship, Budapest 1958

1.c4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.d4 e6 4.♗g2 ♗b4† 5.♗d2 ♗e7 6.♕b3 d5

Honfi rarely played the Stonewall, although at this stage in his career he seemed happy experimenting with several different systems. Later the Grünfeld became his main weapon against queen's pawn openings.

7.♘c3 c6 8.♘f3 0–0

White has not chosen an especially critical set-up, and the position is roughly equal.

9.♘e5 ♔h8 10.♗g5 ♘bd7 11.♘xd7 ♘xd7 12.♗xe7 ♕xe7

Up to here both sides have played quite sensibly, but now White goes astray.

13.f4? ♘b6!

Forcing White to make a difficult decision.

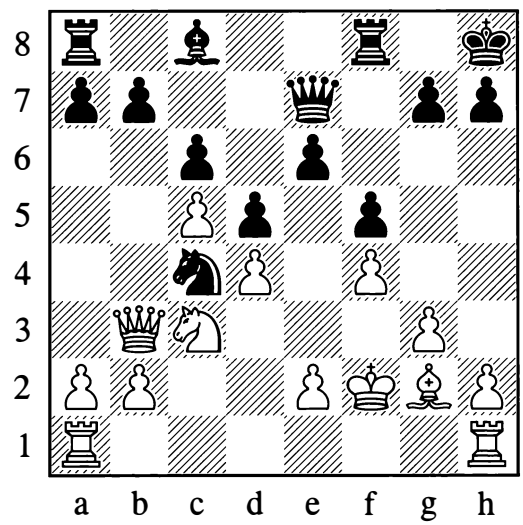
14.c5

14.cxd5 exd5 was also not great for White. Such an exchange is usually helpful for Black in the Stonewall, since it helps to improve his problem bishop. In the present position White's backward e-pawn, combined with the possibility of an invasion on the e3-square, would only add to his troubles.

14...♘c4 15.♔f2?

This is asking too much of the white position, although the positional threat of ...b6 was tough to meet in any case.

Grandmaster Forintos was a very strong player, but he was known for being very optimistic. Let me share with you one famous story about him. His opponent could have checkmated in two, so Forintos – rather cheekily one might think – offered a draw. His opponent declined, but missed the mate and went on to lose. After the game the Hungarian grandmaster remarked, "Next time I should not be so pessimistic..."



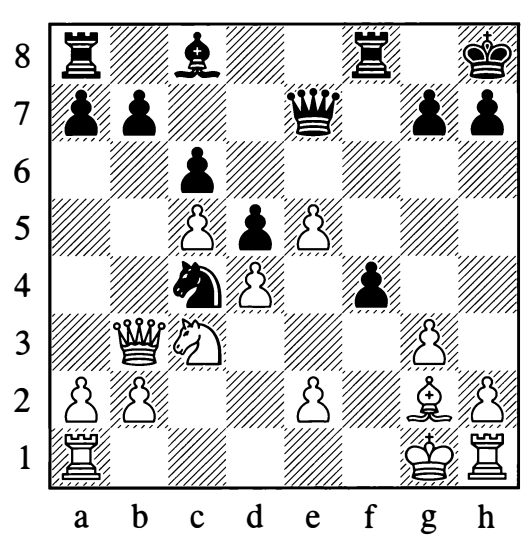
15...e5!!

This very nice breakthrough exploits the unfortunate placement of White's king.

16.fxe5?

White chooses the weaker capture. Relatively best would have been 16.dxe5, although following 16...♕xc5† 17.♔e1 ♘e3 18.♗f3 b5 Black is clearly better.

16...f4! 17.♔g1



17...♘xe5!!

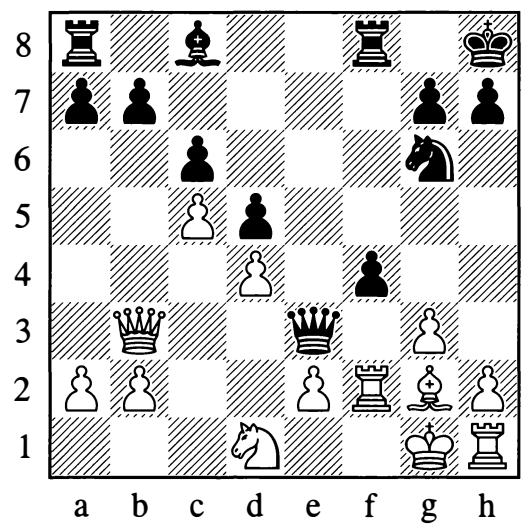
Black makes a second sacrifice on the same square. This is an example of a sacrifice that can be justified by pure calculation, rather than intuition.

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18.♖f1

It was not hard to see that after 18.dxe5? ♕xc5† 19.♔f1 fxg3† 20.♔e1 Black could, at the very least, regain his piece with 20...♕f2†, although the alternatives 20...gxh2 and 20...♖f2 are probably even stronger.

18...♘g6 19.♖f2 ♕e3 20.♘d1



20...♕xd4

White is material down, and his position is a mess. The game is virtually over.

21.gxf4 ♕xc5 22.e3 ♗g4 23.♖c2 ♘xf4! 24.♘f2 ♘e2† 25.♔f1 ♕e7 26.♖xe2 ♗xe2† 27.♔xe2 ♕h4 28.♖f1 ♕h5† 29.♔e1 ♕xh2 30.♗h3 ♖ae8 31.♗d7 ♖e7 32.♕a3 ♖ef7 33.e4 ♕h4

Avoiding the final banana skin: 33...♖xf2?? 34.♕xf8† and mate.

34.♔d1 ♕d8

0–1

Honfi represented his country in the 1961 European team championship, scoring four wins, with two draws and four losses. He was close to beating Geller, but the game ended in a draw.

The following year he achieved an excellent total of six wins, three draws and three losses at the Varna Olympiad. It was the second and, as it turned out, the last time he would take part in this most prestigious of team competitions.

The following game, played in round 6, featured an attractive combination.

Karoly Honfi – Josef Lokvenc

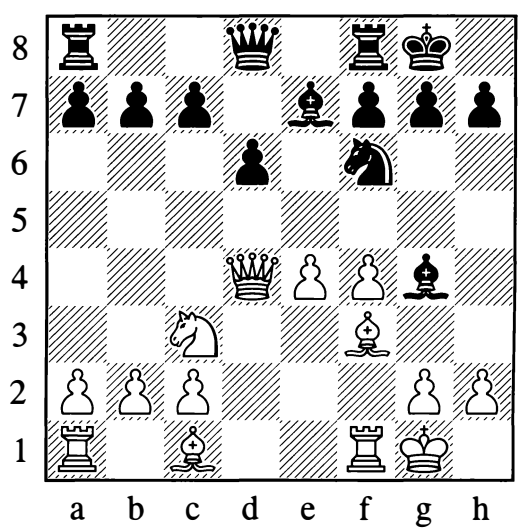
Varna (ol) 1962

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.d4 exd4 5.♘xd4 d6 6.♗e2

Honfi settles for a modest scheme of development. He could also have placed the bishop on b5, transposing to the Steinitz variation of the Ruy Lopez.

6...♗e7 7.0–0 0–0 8.f4 ♗d7 9.♗f3 ♘xd4 10.♕xd4 ♗g4

Black decides to force the exchange of a minor piece in order to make his position less cramped.



11.b3!

The bishop will be ideally placed on the long diagonal.

11...♗xf3 12.♖xf3 ♘d7 13.♗b2 ♗f6 14.♕d5!

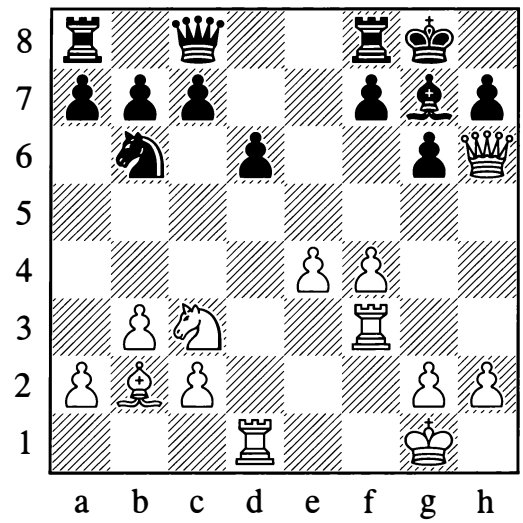
With this non-stereotypical move Honfi transfers his heavy artillery to Black's danger zone.

14...♕c8 15.♖d1 ♘b6 16.♕h5 g6?

This weakens the kingside too much. 16...♕e6 was necessary.

17.♕h6 ♗g7

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18.♘d5!!

This is not such a difficult move to find, but it makes a wonderful impression nonetheless.

18...f6

Taking the queen allows mate in one, and 18...♗xb2 19.♘e7† ♔h8 20.♘xc8 leaves Black with only two pieces for the queen.

19.♘e7† ♔f7 20.♕xh7

As Ervin Haag told me, Honfi quite frequently achieved winning positions within a small number of moves. A lot of his opponents were not able to stand the pressure in the opening. In this game Black limps on for another ten moves, but the game is over as a contest.

20...♕g4 21.f5 ♘d7 22.h3 ♕xe4 23.fxg6† ♔xe7 24.♕xg7† ♔e6 25.♖dd3 ♕e1† 26.♔h2 ♕a5 27.♖de3† ♘e5 28.♗xe5 dxe5 29.♖d3 f5 30.♕d7†

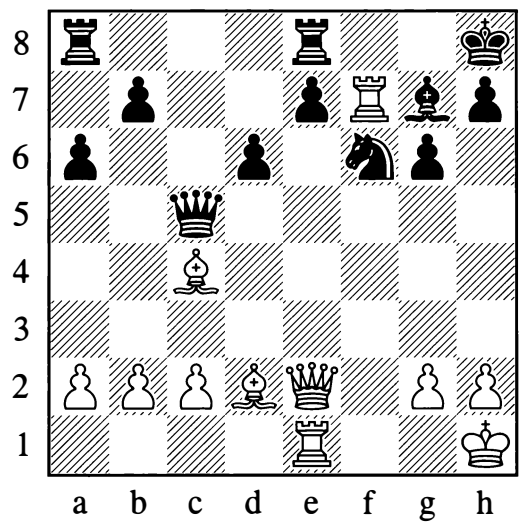
1–0

The following was his most impressive victory in Varna.

Karoly Honfi – Edmar Mednis

Varna (ol) 1962

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 d6 6.♗c4 ♗d7 7.0–0 g6 8.♗g5 ♗g7 9.♘xc6 ♗xc6 10.♘d5 ♗xd5 11.exd5 0–0 12.♕e2 a6 13.♖ae1 ♖e8 14.f4 ♕a5 15.f5 ♔h8 16.fxg6 fxg6 17.♔h1 ♘xd5 18.♖f7 ♘f6 19.♗d2 ♕c5



20.♗e6

White has recently sacrificed a pawn for a strong grip on the light squares. His active rook also gives Black cause for concern.

20...d5 21.♗e3 d4?!

This allows the light-squared bishop to become very powerful. 21...♕d6 should have been preferred.

22.♗g1 ♖ad8?!

Black should have taken the opportunity to escape the pin with 22...♕b4!?. In that case White certainly has compensation for the pawn, but it is hard to say whether it is enough to claim an advantage.

23.c3! d3?!

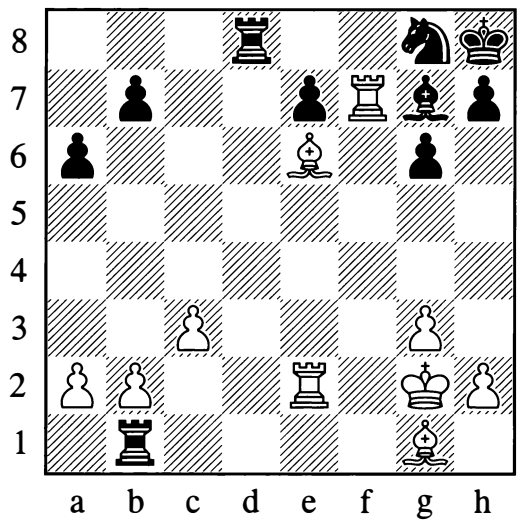
Mednis continues his downward spiral. The endgame offers no relief, so 23...♘h5 should have been preferred, although White would still be better after 24.♕e4!.

24.♗xc5 dxe2 25.♖xe2 ♖d1† 26.♗g1 ♖b1 27.g3

White will soon escape the pin and have a very pleasant endgame. With the benefit of hindsight, 27.g4!? may have been even better.

27...♘g8 28.♔g2 ♖d8

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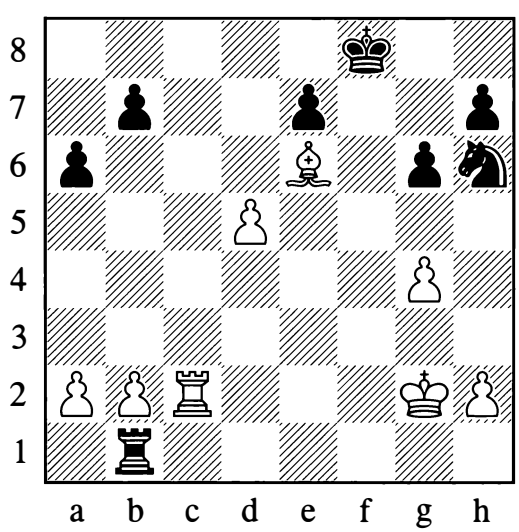
29.♗d4!?

Honfi decides to exchange the valuable bishop that was defending Black's king. He could have made some preparatory pawn moves like 29.a4!? or 29.g4!?, but he preferred to force matters.

29...♗xd4 30.cxd4 ♖e8 31.g4 ♘h6 32.♖f3 ♖d8 33.d5 ♔g7 34.♖c2

The rook invades.

34...♖f8 35.♖xf8 ♔xf8



36.g5!

Mednis must have overlooked this move. Out of nowhere, White has cleverly trapped the knight.

36...♔g7

Moving the knight to f5 would have allowed mate. The text is barely an improvement.

37.gxh6† ♔xh6 38.♔f3 ♔g5 39.♔e4 ♔h4 40.♔d4 b6 41.♔c3 h5 42.♔b3 ♔g5

1–0

Later that same year (1962), Honfi achieved the International Master title.

During most of Honfi's career, Lajos Portisch was the Hungarian number one. According to his scoresheets, his personal score in decisive games was three wins and ten losses. The following game was the last of *Karcsi Bacsi's* (Uncle Karcsi's) wins. At the time of the game Portisch was about to become a world championship candidate for the eighth time – more than any other player in chess history.

Lajos Portisch – Karoly Honfi

Hungarian Championship, Budapest 1963

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.♘f3 0–0 6.♗g5

This is not in fashion anymore.

6...c5

One natural and critical continuation is 6...h6!? 7.♗h4 (7.♗e3 ♘g4) 7...g5 8.♗g3 ♘h5, eliminating a valuable bishop. I think this is why White's sixth move fell out of favour.

7.d5 ♕a5 8.♘d2

8.♗d3!? looks more natural to me, as it brings a new piece into play.

8...a6 9.a4 e5

Now the game resembles a Czech Benoni. Honfi used to play this system from time to time.

10.♗e2 ♘bd7 11.♕c2

I would prefer 11.g4!?, gaining space on the kingside. If Black ever plays ...f5, the e4-square would fall under White's control. And if Black refrains from the pawn break, he risks being choked by his opponent's space advantage.

11...♕c7 12.a5 ♔h8!

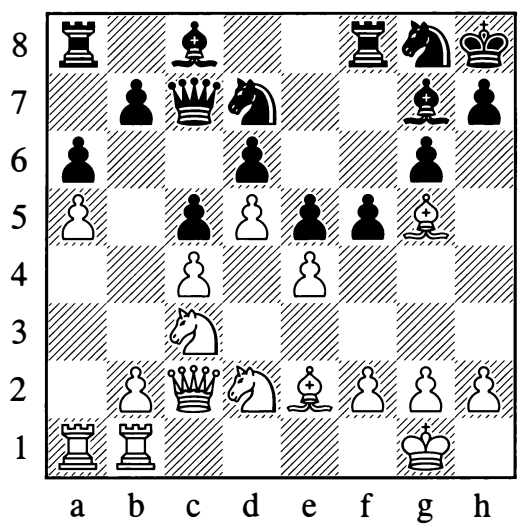
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This is a square-clearance. The g8-square will be utilized by several pieces.

13.0–0 ♘g8 14.♖fb1 f5

Allow me to quote Portisch himself:

"I remember that I used to play this line at that time, but later – certainly not because of this game – I gave it up. This is really a nice game from Honfi, although I think that I was better from the beginning but then I started to make a few weak moves. Perhaps he surprised me by avoiding his favourite Grünfeld! Honfi was really born for that opening. His intuition is flowing in his opening repertoire. Many of his ideas have become popular after his death!"



15.exf5

White does not want to allow ...f4 followed by the traditional pawn onslaught. On the other hand, Black will now enjoy improved central control, not to mention the open g-file.

15...gxf5 16.♘d1 ♗h6! 17.♗xh6 ♘xh6 18.♖a3 ♘f6 19.♕c3

19.♖h3 ♖g8!?

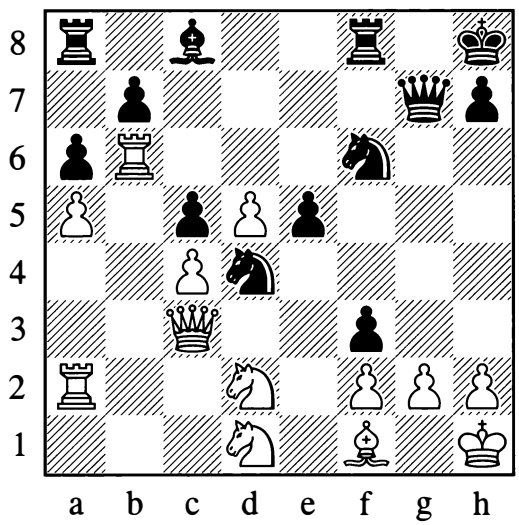
19...f4!

It is easy to overlook "anti-positional" moves like this when one visualizes a position far in advance.

20.b4 ♘f5 21.bxc5 ♘d4

The f6-knight arrives at a wonderful outpost after a long journey.

22.♗f1 dxc5 23.♖b6 ♕g7 24.♖a2 f3 25.♔h1



25...♗h3!?

It is remarkable, Black did not move his queenside rook and bishop for 25 moves, but now he makes an impressive move. However, the straightforward 25...fxg2†! was objectively stronger. After 26.♗xg2 ♘e2! White is in trouble.

26.♘xf3 ♘e4 27.♕e3 ♘xf3 28.♕xe4?

Under pressure, White commits an error. He had to try one of the alternatives:

28.♕h6 ♕xh6 29.♖xh6 ♘fd2 (29...♗g4 30.♗e2) 30.♗e2 ♗xg2† 31.♔xg2 ♖g8† 32.♔h1 ♖g5 33.h3 ♖ag8 34.♗g4 ♘xc4 35.♖c2 ♘cd6 Black is a pawn up, however White has chances as well.

28.♖ab2 ♖f4 29.♖xb7 ♕g5 30.♖b8† ♖xb8 31.♖xb8† ♔g7 32.♖b7† ♔h6 33.♖b6† ♔h5 Black's pieces are menacing.

28...♖f4 29.♕b1

29.♕d3 ♖g8 30.g3 e4 wins for Black.

29...♖h4

Threatening mate in two. This is good enough to win the game, although 29...♖g8! 30.g3 ♗xf1 31.♘e3 ♗xc4! would have been even clearer.

30.♖g6!?

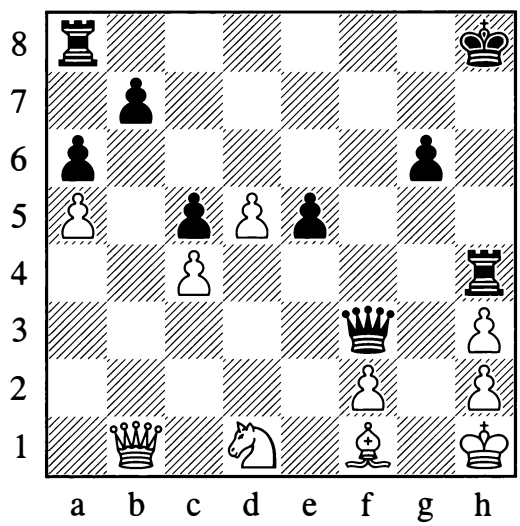
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This imaginative sacrifice postpones the end, but does not really change anything. 30.gxf3 ♖g8 was pretty hopeless.

30...hxg6

Black could have ended the game in style with 30...♗f5!.

31.gxh3 ♕f7! 32.♖a3 ♕f4 33.♖xf3 ♕xf3†



Portisch has staved off the attack for the time being, but the two lost exchanges are too high a price. Black is completely winning, and Honfi makes no further mistakes.

34.♗g2 ♕e2 35.♘e3 ♕xf2 36.♘g4 ♕f4 37.♕b2 ♖e8 38.d6 ♖h7 39.♔g1 ♖d7 40.♗d5 ♖xd6 41.♕xb7 ♖f8 42.♔g2 ♕f1†

0–1

In 1965 Honfi obtained his second runner-up place in the Hungarian Championship final. Here is one of his wins, which I always show to any of my pupils who play the Open Spanish.

Joszef Szily – Karoly Honfi

Hungarian Championship, Budapest 1965

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0–0 ♘xe4

Honfi's most frequent answer to 1.e4 was the Accelerated Dragon, but the second was the Open Spanish; at least, until 1976 when he lost two games and gave it up forever.

6.d4 b5 7.♗b3 d5 8.dxe5 ♗e6 9.c3 ♗c5 10.♕e2

The position has become a hybrid of the 9.c3 line and the Keres variation. By the way, I think the great Estonian player was *Karcsi Bacsi's* favourite, judging by the way in which he spoke about his games. Kasparov's magic also touched him.

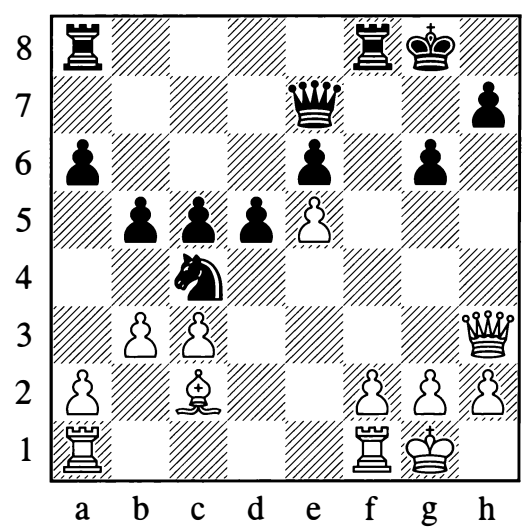
10...0–0 11.♗e3 ♕e7!?

Black develops naturally.

12.♘bd2 ♘xd2 13.♕xd2 ♗xe3 14.♕xe3 ♘a5 15.♘d4 c5 16.♘xe6 fxe6 17.♗c2 ♘c4 18.♕h3 g6

By placing his pawns on light squares, Black restricts his opponent's bishop.

19.b3



19...♘a3!

On this occasion the knight stands well on the edge.

20.♗d1 a5

It seems that Black is gaining space on the queenside, although the move turns out to have more than one purpose.

21.♗g4 ♖a6!

Honfi shows his originality; now another piece finds a good home on the a-file.

22.f4 b4 23.♖ac1 c4

The queenside pawns advance steadily.

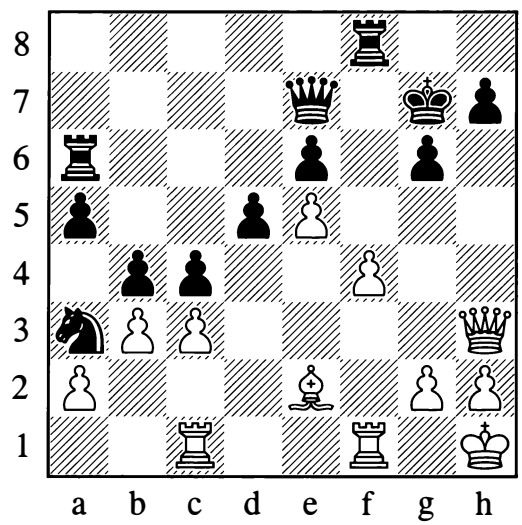
24.♔h1 ♔g7

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This Karpovian style of preparatory king move was not his favourite way of playing, but he was able to adapt quite well to the requirements of the position.

25.♗e2

Bringing back the queen to the centre by 25.♕e3! was the right move.



25...♖c6! 26.cxb4

White cannot stand the tension any longer. 26.♕e3 also does not help after 26...♕c5! (26...♖fc8 27.cxb4 axb4 28.g4 and Black must pay much more attention to the kingside than in the game) 27.♕xc5 ♖xc5 28.bxc4 dxc4 29.cxb4 axb4. The endgame is nice for Black.

26...axb4 27.g4

Waiting passively was nasty for White too.

27...♕c7 28.♕g3 ♔h8 29.bxc4 dxc4 30.♕e1

Maybe 30.♖fd1 gave better chances than the game, but White is struggling either way.

30...c3 31.♗d3 ♘c4!

For many moves the knight did a fine job in supporting the advancing pawns. Now that this objective has been fulfilled, the pawns will return the favour by controlling a wonderful outpost square for the knight.

32.♖f2

Exchanging on c4 would have left White facing a miserable major piece endgame.

32...♘d2 33.f5

This is a bit of desperation, but White did not wish to wait for a slow but certain death.

33...gxf5 34.gxf5 ♖c5

34...exf5 35.♖xf5 ♖xf5 36.♗xf5 ♖c5 also wins.

35.fxe6 ♖xf2!?

This gives extremely good practical winning chances, and Honfi deserves some credit for finding it as he would have had to foresee his excellent 39th move. Objectively speaking, however, the strongest continuation would have been:

35...♖g8!

My analysis continues:

36.♗e4 ♘xe4 37.♕xe4 ♖xe5 38.♖f7 ♖xe4 39.♖xc7 ♖xe6 40.a3

If 40.♖c4 ♖ge8 41.♖xb4 ♖e1† 42.♖xe1 ♖xe1† 43.♔g2 c2 Black wins.

40...b3! 41.♖7xc3 b2 42.♖b1

No better is 42.♖f1 ♖e2 43.♖c7 ♖b8 44.♖b1 ♖be8.

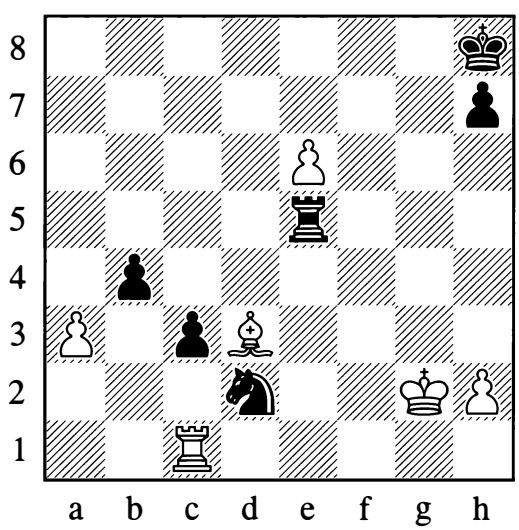
42...♖e2 43.♖b3

43.a4 ♖gg2 44.a5 ♖xh2† 45.♔g1 ♖eg2† 46.♔f1 ♖c2 47.♔g1 ♖hd2 wins for Black.

43...♖gg2 44.a4 ♖c2 45.a5 ♖gd2

White cannot survive.

36.♕xf2 ♕b7† 37.♕g2 ♕xg2† 38.♔xg2 ♖xe5 39.a3



39...♘b3!!

The tempting 39...♖e3 is not good enough,

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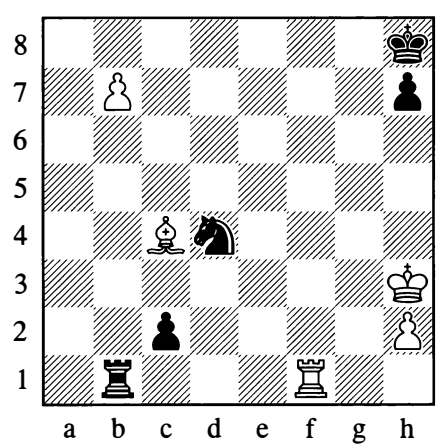
as shown by 40.e7! b3 41.♖xc3 ♖xe7 42.♔f2 and White holds.

40.♖c2?

This loses a vital tempo. 40.♖f1! combined with extremely accurate follow-up play, may just enable White to save the game. All Black's moves are close to winning, but I have not been able to find anything conclusive:

40...bxa3 41.♖f8† ♔g7 42.♖f7† ♔g8 43.♖a7 ♘d4 (43...♘c5 44.♗xh7† ♔h8 45.e7 a2 46.♗c2 and White draws) 44.♖xa3 c2 45.♖c3 ♖e1 46.e7 ♔f7 47.♗xc2 ♖e2† 48.♔f1 ♖xc2 49.♖h3 and White holds.

40...♖xe6 41.axb4 ♖d6 42.♗c4 ♖d2† 43.♔h3 ♘d4 (43...c2 44.♗xb3 ♖d3† 45.♔g2 ♖xb3 46.♖c1 and White is safe) 44.b5 c2 45.b6 ♖d1 46.b7 ♖b1 (46...♘c6 47.♖f8† ♔g7 48.♖f7† ♔g6 49.♖c7 and I think it is a draw)



47.♖g1!! h5 48.♖g8† ♔h7 49.♖c8 ♔h6 50.♗d5 Black cannot win.

Finally there is 40...♘c5, when White seems to have two routes to half a point:

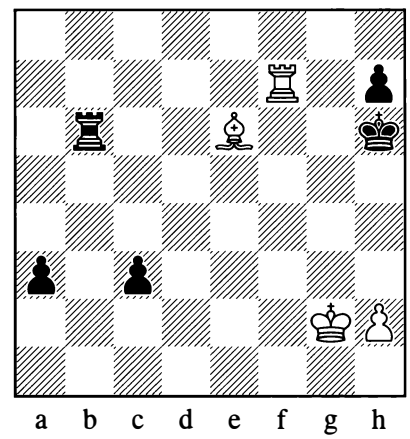
a) 41.♖f8† ♔g7 42.♖f7† ♔h6 43.♗f5!

43.♖xh7†? ♔g5 44.♖g7† ♔f4 45.♖f7† ♔e3 46.♖f5 ♖xf5 47.♗xf5 ♘xe6!! 48.axb4 ♘f4† 49.♔g3 ♘d3 wins for Black.

43...♘xe6

43...b3 44.e7 ♔g5 (after 44...c2?? 45.h4! White sets up a mating net out of the blue) 45.♗xh7 c2 46.♖f5† ♖xf5 47.e8=♕ c1=♕ 48.♕g6† ♔h4 49.♕g3† ♔h5 50.♕g6† It is a perpetual.

44.♗xe6 bxa3 45.♗b3 ♖b5 46.♗e6 ♖b6



47.♗f5

Alternatively 47.♗d5 ♖d6 48.♗b3 c2 (48...♖d2† 49.♔g3 c2) 49.♗xc2 ♖d2† 50.♔g3 ♖xc2 51.♖a7 a2 and I think White holds.

47...a2 48.♖a7 c2 49.♗xc2 ♖b2 50.♖xh7† ♔g5 51.♖a7 ♔f4 52.h4 ♖xc2† 53.♔h3

At the end of my analysis White survives, although it is quite possible that somewhere along the way Black had a finesse.

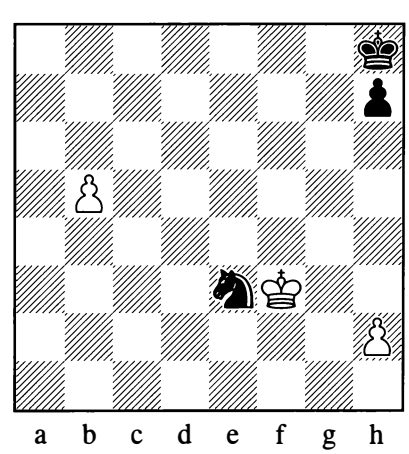
b) 41.♖f5

This should also suffice for a draw, as far as I can see.

41...♖xf5 42.♗xf5 ♘xe6 43.axb4 ♘d4 44.♗e4 c2

44...♔g7 45.♔f2 c2 46.♗xc2 ♘xc2 47.b5 and White survives.

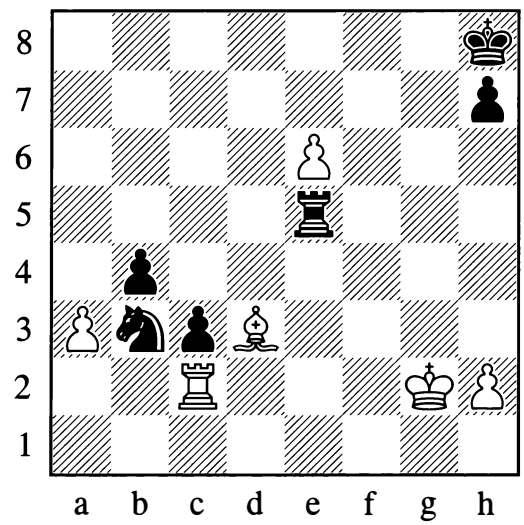
45.♗xc2 ♘xc2 46.b5 ♘e3† 47.♔f3



It seems that White is really pushing his

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luck, but in fact the ending is a theoretical draw. Interestingly, if White's h-pawn stood on any square ahead of the second rank, he would no longer be able to save the game.



40...♘d4 41.♖f2

The rook arrives on the f-file one tempo too late.

41...b3

Black's mighty pawns easily decide the game. It is a fitting conclusion to the strategy which began all the way back on move 19, when the knight came to a3 to support the queenside advance.

42.♖f8† ♔g7 43.♖f7† ♔g8 44.♗xh7† ♔h8 0–1

After obtaining his second silver medal in the Hungarian Championship, Honfi was awarded the title of Hungarian Grandmaster. As I mentioned before, he never officially became an International Grandmaster until after his death.

Towards the end of the 1960s Honfi reached his peak as a player. The following game was perhaps his finest win from that era. Incidentally, this game was featured in the very first *Chess Informant*, which was published later in the same year.

His opponent was the world class Yugoslav Grandmaster Ivkov.

Karoly Honfi – Borislav Ivkov

Sarajevo 1966

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.♗d2

This was Honfi's pet line against the Winawer variation of the French. It is still seen regularly today, although it is not considered to be the most theoretically challenging line at White's disposal.

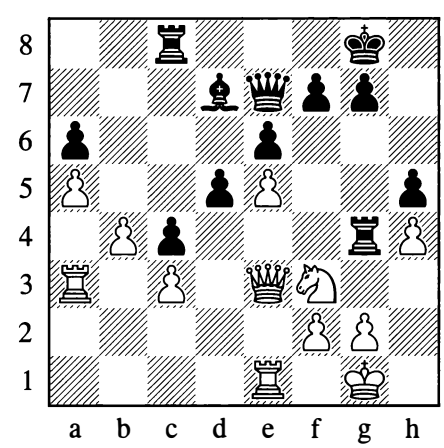
5...♘e7 6.a3 ♗xc3 7.♗xc3 b6

7...♘bc6 8.♘f3 cxd4 9.♘xd4 ♘xe5 10.♘xe6 ♗xe6 11.♗xe5 is a well known equalizing line. Despite the isolated pawn Black has little to fear, as his pieces have great freedom.

8.♕g4 ♘f5

According to the database, he had already won nice games against both of the sensible alternatives. I will just give the moves.

a) 8...♘g6 9.♘f3 ♘c6 10.h4 h5 11.♕g3 ♗d7 12.♗d3 ♘ce7 13.dxc5 bxc5 14.0–0 ♕c7 15.b4 c4 16.♗xg6 ♘xg6 17.a4 a6 18.♗d4 ♔f8 19.♖fe1 ♕d8 20.♗e3 ♕e8 21.a5 ♖c8 22.♖a3 ♔g8 23.♗c5 ♘e7 24.♗xe7 ♕xe7 25.c3 ♖h6 26.♕f4 ♖g6 27.♕e3 ♖g4

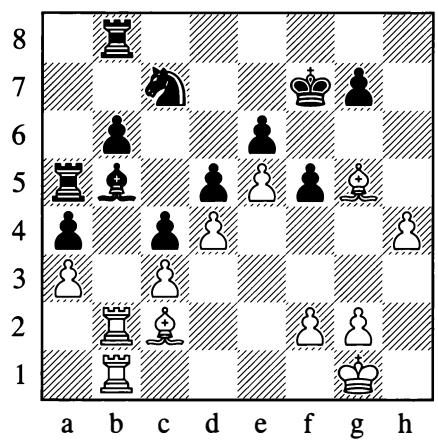


28.♕a7! f6 29.♕xa6 ♕f7 30.♕b7 ♖f8 31.♖a2 ♕e8 32.g3 ♗c6 33.♕c7 d4 34.♘xd4 ♗d5 35.exf6 ♖xf6 36.a6 ♕g6 37.a7 ♖f8 38.a8=♕ ♗xa8 39.♘xe6 ♖e8 40.♖xa8 ♖xa8 41.b5 ♕e8 42.b6 ♖c8 43.♕e5 ♕c6 44.♘g5 ♖xg5 45.♕xg5 ♕xb6 46.♕d5† ♔f8 47.♕f5†

1–0 Honfi – Ozsvath, Hungary 1965.

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b) 8...0–0 9.b4 ♘d7 10.♘f3 f5 11.♕h3 ♘g6 12.♗d2 ♕e7 13.c3 a5 14.b5 a4 15.♗d3 c4 16.♗c2 ♘b8 17.♕h5 ♗d7 18.♘g5 h6 19.♕xg6 hxg5 20.♗xg5 ♕f7 21.♕xf7† ♔xf7 22.♖b1 ♖a5 23.0–0 ♗xb5 24.♖b2 ♘a6 25.♖fb1 ♘c7 26.h4 ♖b8



27.g4 fxg4 28.♔g2 g6 29.♔g3 ♗e8 30.♔xg4 ♘b5 31.♖a1 ♖aa8 32.♗d2 ♔g7 33.♖bb1 ♖b7 34.♔f3 ♔f8 35.♖g1 ♖h7 36.♖g4 ♔g7 37.♔e2 ♘a7 38.♖ag1 ♘b5 39.♗xg6 ♗xg6 40.♖xg6† ♔f7 41.♖f6† ♔e7 42.♖gg6

1–0 Honfi – F. Portisch, Budapest 1965.

9.♗d3

White develops quickly.

9...h5

This wins a pawn, but weakens the kingside a bit.

10.♕h3 cxd4

10...♘xd4!? was worth considering. White would still have the d4-square and the better light-squared bishop, and would also of course not have had to spend a tempo retreating the bishop from c3. Still, it may have been worth it for Black, because in the game the dark-squared bishop has tremendous potential.

11.♗d2

Black has won a pawn, but the doubled d-pawns are not doing much and his typical bad French bishop will remain passive for some time (at the moment it cannot come to a6 because of ♗xf5). In the game Honfi builds up White's position skilfully.

11...♘c6 12.♘f3 ♕c7 13.0–0 ♔f8

Black threatens to take the e5-pawn. The immediate 13...♘xe5?? loses material after 14.♘xe5 ♕xe5 15.♖ae1.

14.♖fe1 ♔g8

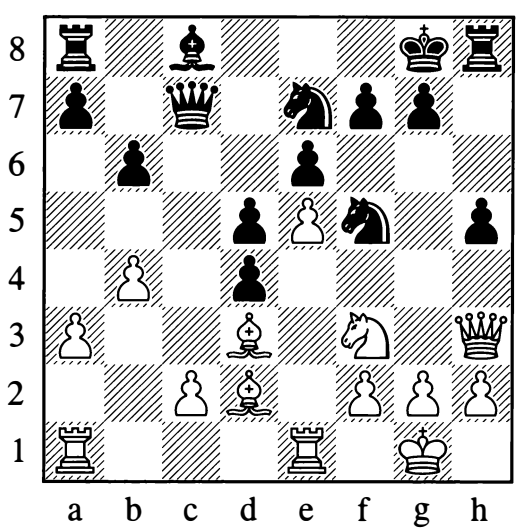
Or 14...♘a5 15.♗xf5 exf5 16.♘xd4 and White is much better.

15.b4!

White gains space and restricts Black's movement.

15...♘ce7

15...h4!? This stops the plan used by White in the game, but costs time and weakens the kingside. Interestingly, White exploits it by opening up the queenside with 16.♖ac1! intending c2-c3.



16.g3!

White prepares to regroup by centralizing the queen.

16...♗d7 17.a4 ♖e8 18.♕f1! f6 19.b5

Continuing to squeeze the black position.

19...♔f7 20.♖e2! ♘h6 21.♕e1

21.h3!? was also good.

21...♘ef5

Perhaps Black should have taken the opportunity to play 21...h4, although the pawn sacrifice 22.c3!? looks quite promising.

22.h3

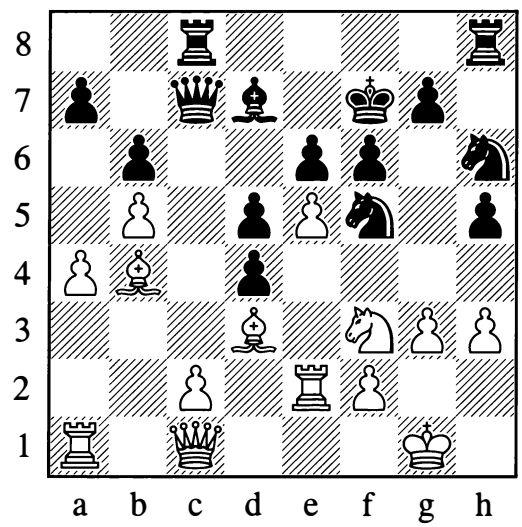
Honfi improves his position step by step. Now ...h4 can always be met by g4.

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22...♕c5

Black has no active plan.

23.♗b4 ♕c7 24.♕c1 ♖c8



25.♕b2

White's queen has completed a very effective transfer to the queenside.

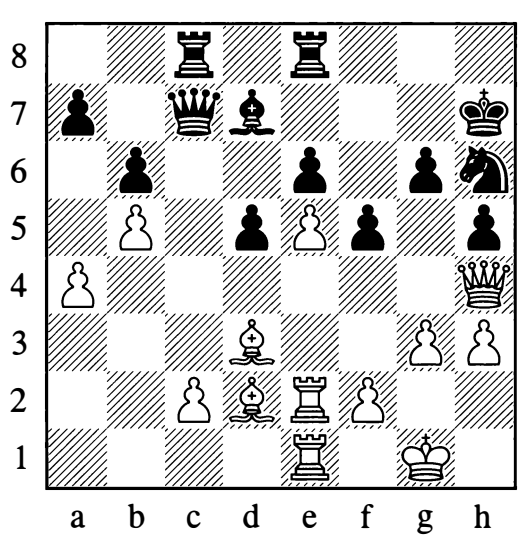
25...♖he8 26.♖ae1 ♔g8 27.♘xd4 ♘xd4 28.♕xd4

Finally White has regained the pawn and strategically outplayed his opponent. Still, to complete the victory against a player of Ivkov's calibre is no easy task.

28...f5 29.♕h4!

The queen swings back to the kingside.

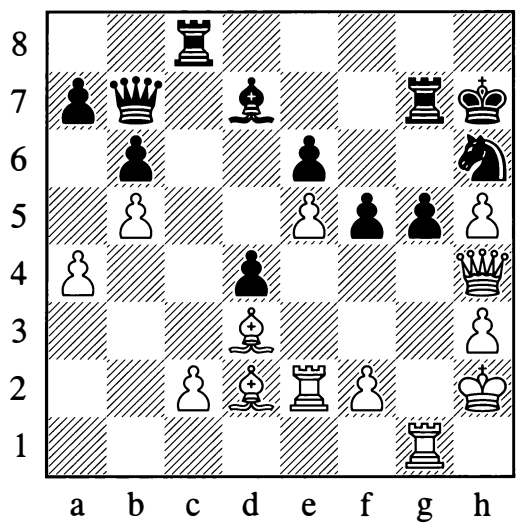
29...g6 30.♗d2 ♔h7



31.g4!

White requires no more preparations, and begins the decisive assault.

31...♖g8 32.♔h1! d4 33.♖g1 ♕b7† 34.♔h2 ♖g7 35.gxh5 g5



36.♖xg5

It is all over now.

36...♖cg8 37.f4 ♘f7 38.♖eg2 ♘xg5 39.fxg5 ♕f3 40.g6† ♔h8 41.♕g5

1–0

This was an extremely impressive strategic game, capped off by a well executed attack. The white queen played a remarkable role in this game, so it is quite fitting that this piece made the final move to force Black's resignation.

I remember *Karcsi Bacsi* telling me that he worked hard on his endgames, but it was in vain because the positions he studied never seemed to occur over the board. He told me he was generally not happy with his endgame play. After he died I went through his games and came to the conclusion that he was much too harsh on himself. He may not have been an endgame maestro like Karpov, but he was definitely not shabby either. Before writing this chapter I mentioned this subject to Haag, who told me Honfi had told the same thing to him as well, saying that he generally tried to avoid endgames. Haag tried to reassure him

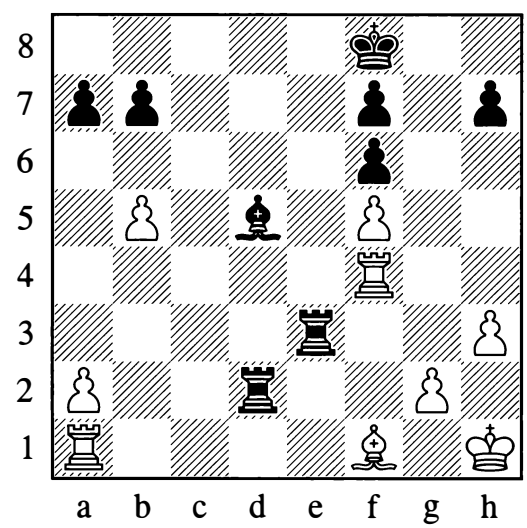
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that his endings were really not so bad, but to no avail.

I feel that the next game vindicates the opinion held by both Haag and myself. Honfi outplays one of the world's most brilliant endgame players from a worse position. This is something which almost never happened to Ulf Andersson, even when he played Karpov or Kasparov.

Karoly Honfi – Ulf Andersson

Hoogovens (B), Wijk aan Zee 1970



Black's kingside structure has been compromised slightly, but his pieces are tremendously active. It is definitely not the kind of position that one would generally wish to defend against Andersson.

32.♔g1

White steps out of the pin (Black was threatening to take on h3), and starts improving his king.

32...♖a3 33.♖f2 ♖xf2 34.♔xf2

It is still hard to anticipate that White's king would become the decisive piece of this game...

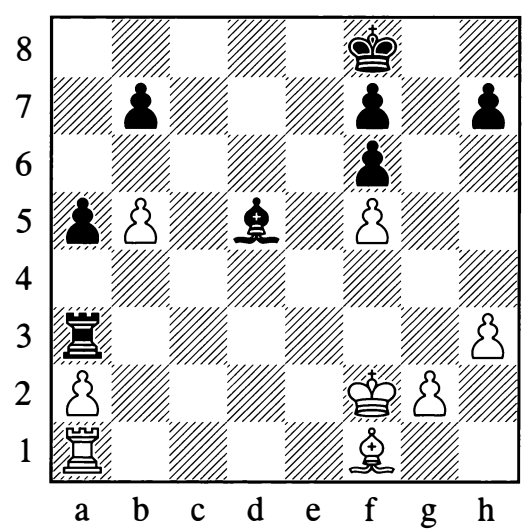
34...a5?

This is a natural move; however it is a serious mistake as it squanders a win.

The obvious continuation was 34...♖xa2† 35.♖xa2 ♗xa2 36.♔e3 ♔e7 37.♔d4 ♔d6. Andersson must have rejected this on the basis that it would be hard to create a passed pawn on the queenside. Indeed, if White simply marks time and keeps his bishop on the f1-c4 diagonal, it is hard to suggest a way for Black to make progress.

Andersson was clearly hoping to obtain an improved version of the same ending, but he must have overlooked Honfi's next move.

Instead 34...♔e7! was the right way, centralizing the king and preventing the enemy rook from becoming active. For instance, after 35.♖d1 ♖xa2† 36.♔g3 ♗b3 37.♖d3 ♗c2 38.♖c3 ♔d6 Black is very likely to win.



35.♖d1!!

White allows his opponent to take a pawn with a check, in order to activate the rook.

35...♖xa2† 36.♔e3 ♖a3†?!

The Swedish player still plays for a win, rather than settle for 36...♗xg2 37.♗xg2 ♖xg2 38.♖d7 when White draws easily, even if he loses the h-pawn.

37.♔d4! ♗b3 38.♖c1!

Rooks belong on open files.

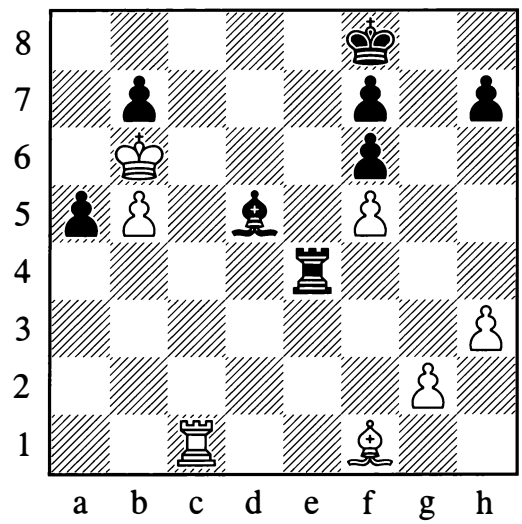
38...♖a4† 39.♔c5

White's king is becoming dangerous.

39...♖e4 40.♔b6 ♗d5

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Alternatively after 40...a4 41.♔xb7 ♗d5† 42.♔c7 a3 43.b6 a2 44.♔d6 White is not worse.



41.♔xa5

It is a relief to get rid of this passed pawn.

41...♔e7?

This is not a useful centralization. 41...h5 would have been a more constructive improvement of the position.

42.♔b6

The white king is easily the best-performing piece on the board.

42...♖e3

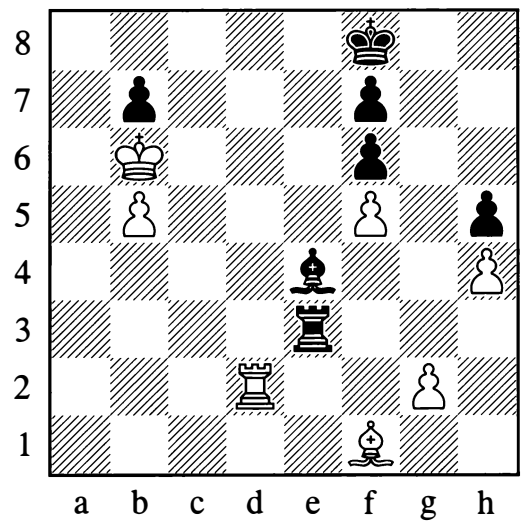
After 42...h5 43.g4 hxg4 44.♗g2 Black is in trouble. Not much better was 42...♔d6 43.♖d1 ♖a4 44.g4 ♔e5 45.♖d2, when White has decent winning chances as he will exchange the bishops from g2.

43.♖d1 ♗e4 44.♖d2! h5 45.h4!?

Honfi fixes Black's h-pawn. Maybe 45.♗c4!? was even more to the point, as after the exchange of the bishops on d5, the b7-pawn will fall.

45...♔f8

Andersson has no choice but to retreat the king – I told you it was not helpful to put it on e7! The point is that 45...♗xf5 allows 46.♖e2! (even clearer than 46.♔xb7) 46...♖xe2 47.♗xe2 ♗e4 48.g3 f5 49.♗xh5 ♔e6 50.♔c5 and White wins.



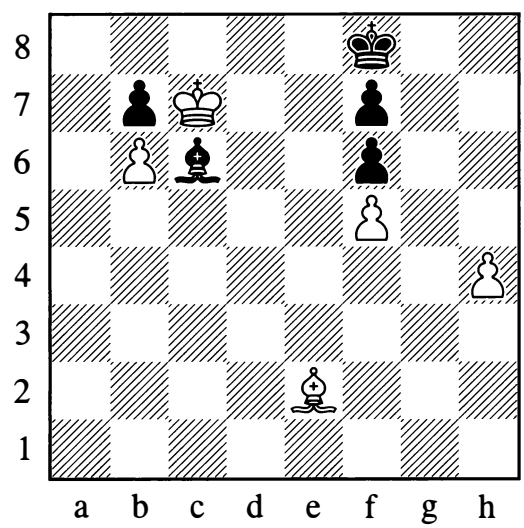
46.♖e2!

In bishop endings the weaker side seldom succeeds in defending a bad position.

46...♖xe2 47.♗xe2 ♗xg2 48.♗xh5 ♔e7

48...♗e4 49.♗g4 ♔g7 50.♔c7 ♔h6 51.b6 ♗d5 (51...♔g7 52.♗e2) 52.♗e2 ♗e4 53.♗b5 wins for White.

49.♔c7! ♗e4 50.♗g4 ♗d5 51.b6 ♗c6 52.♗e2 ♔f8



53.♗a6!

1–0

This simple but nonetheless cute move forces Black to throw in the towel. Despite this reversal Andersson, to his credit, eventually won the tournament, with Honfi finishing third.

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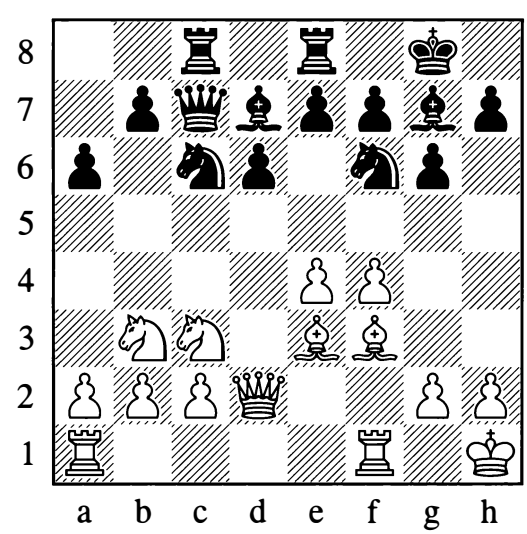
During the 1970s, when Honfi was in his forties, he started to obtain more opportunities to play in tournaments. Unfortunately, as I mentioned before, he never managed to obtain the coveted Grandmaster title. He actually made several norms, but at that time a player had to get all three norms within a three-year window. If the rules were as they are today, he would easily have got the title.

Let's see some more victories against other very special players.

Karoly Honfi – Alexander Beliavsky

Sukhumi 1972

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f4 g6 7.♗e2 ♗g7 8.♗e3 ♘c6 9.♘b3 0–0 10.0–0 ♗d7 11.♔h1 ♖c8 12.♗f3 ♕c7 13.♕d2 ♖fe8



14.♘d5!

This is a typical move in such positions, and in this particular case it comes at an especially awkward moment for Black.

14...♘xd5

Black is not forced to make this exchange, although after 14...♕b8 15.c3 White has a pleasant position with more space.

15.exd5 ♘b8

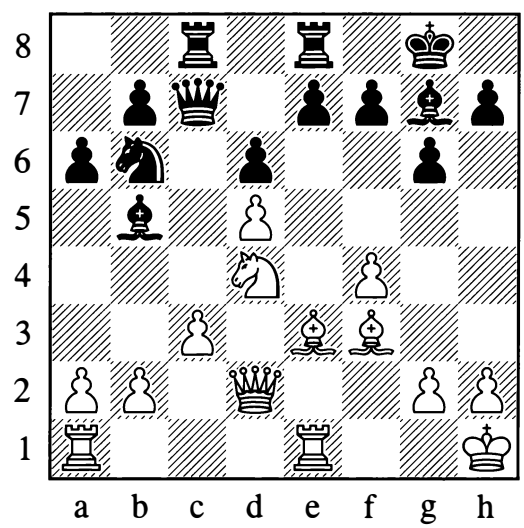
The knight is forced into this awkward retreat. Moving to d8 would be even worse, as the knight would have a harder time relocating to a purposeful square.

16.c3 ♗b5

The future world championship candidate makes room for the knight. He hopes that the impending queenside counterplay will offset the long-term weakness of the e7-pawn.

17.♖fe1 ♘d7 18.♘d4 ♘b6

It looks like Black's play on the queenside has come in time.



19.b3!

A well-calculated sacrifice, albeit just a temporary one. If Black does not accept then he would lose several tempos and his position would just be miserable in general.

19...♕xc3 20.♕xc3 ♖xc3 21.♘xb5

The fireworks begin.

21...♖xe3! 22.♖xe3 ♗xa1 23.♘xd6

Though I cannot be sure, I suspect that Honfi calculated at least to this point when he played 14.♘d5.

23...♖d8 24.♘xb7 ♖c8 25.g3 ♖c1† 26.♔g2 ♖c2† 27.♔h3 ♗f6

The position has settled down after the previous fireworks. White has won a pawn, but Black's rook is active and the opposite-coloured bishops offer him some chances to save the game.

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28.a4

Honfi chooses a safe and solid approach. He could also have increased his advantage with 28.♖d3 ♘c8 29.d6 exd6 30.♘xd6 ♘e7, or 28.d6 exd6 29.♖e8† ♔g7 30.♖e2! ♖c3 31.♘xd6, and in both cases Black has nothing for the pawn.

28...♖d2 29.♘c5 a5 30.♖d3!

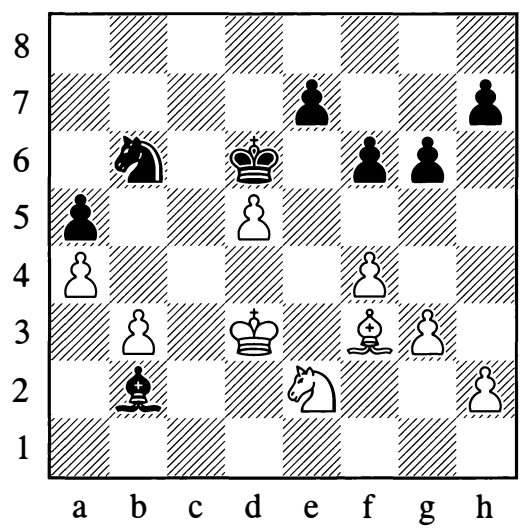
White exchanges the opponent's active rook. The opposite bishop ending is not a problem, due to the presence of the knights.

30...♖xd3 31.♘xd3 ♗d4 32.♔g2!

Before undertaking anything active, White should first improve his king.

32...♔f8 33.♔f1 ♔e8 34.♔e2 f6 35.♘c1 ♔d7 36.♔d3 ♗b2 37.♘e2 ♔d6

Beliavsky is a top Grandmaster, and is capable of stubborn resistance in difficult situations. Here it looks like he has achieved real drawing chances.

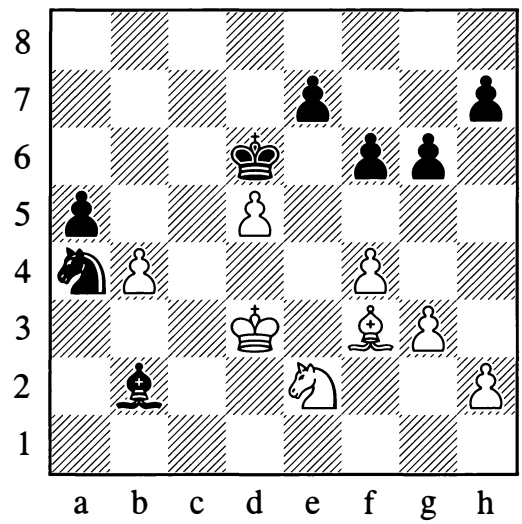


38.b4!!

This is a wonderful breakthrough.

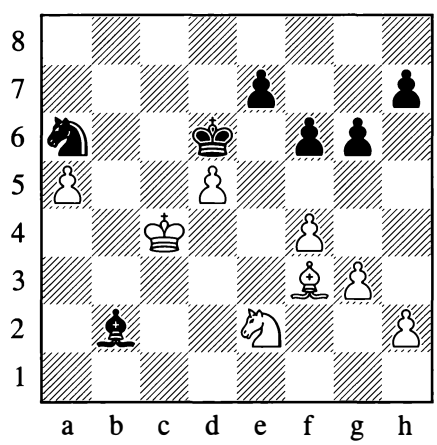
38...♘xa4

The other capture is no better: 38...axb4 39.a5 ♘xd5 40.a6 ♘c7 41.a7 ♔c5 42.♔c2!? ♗c3 (42...♗a3 43.♔b3 wins for White) 43.♔b3 (43.a8=♕ ♘xa8 44.♗xa8 ♔c4 is less convincing) 43...♗d2 44.a8=♕ ♘xa8 45.♗xa8 and White wins with the extra piece.



39.♔c4!!?

This is a very attractive, almost study-like idea, however it allows an escape. I suspect that *Karcsi Bacsi* was short of time. Instead the simpler 39.bxa5 was winning, e.g. 39...♘c5† (after 39...♔c5 40.♔c2 ♔b5 41.a6! ♔xa6 42.d6! exd6 43.♗c6 White wins a piece) 40.♔c4 ♘a6 (40...f5 41.♘c3 wins)



41.♔b3! White traps the bishop in a very unusual way. 41...♗a1 42.♔a2 and Black can resign.

39...axb4 40.♔b3 ♔c5?

According to my analysis Black could have drawn with:

40...♘c3!

Black will only obtain two pawns for a piece, but his king is more active and White has the wrong combination of bishop and rook's pawn.

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41.♔xb2 ♘xe2 42.♗xe2 ♔xd5 43.♔b3

43.♔c2 ♔e4 44.♔d2 b3 45.♗d1 (45.♗c4 b2) 45...b2 46.♔c2 ♔e3 47.♔xb2 ♔f2 48.g4 f5! and Black exchanges enough pawns.

43...♔e4 44.♔xb4 ♔e3 45.♗c4

45.♗d1 ♔f2 46.♔c4 ♔g2 47.g4 ♔xh2 48.♔d5 ♔g3 49.f5 (49.♔e4 e6) 49...♔f4 50.♔e6 ♔g5 is drawing.

45...♔f2 46.♗g8

Or 46.g4 ♔f3.

46...♔g2 47.g4 ♔xh2

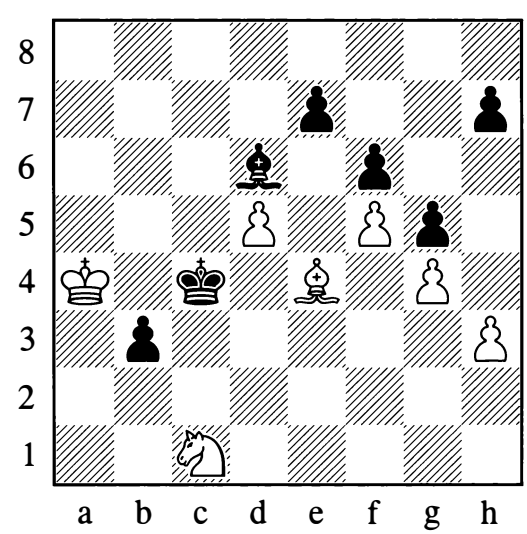
White's last pawns will soon leave the board.

41.♔xa4 ♔c4 42.♗e4 b3 43.f5 g5 44.g4

It was also possible to play 44.d6 exd6 45.♗b7 ♗e5 46.♗a6† ♔d5 47.♔xb3 ♔e4 48.♔c2 ♔f3 49.♘c3 ♔g2 50.g4 ♗xh2 and I think White should win.

44...♗e5 45.h3 ♗d6 46.♘c1

It is probable that the game had been adjourned at some point over the past few moves (remember, adjournments were commonplace in the 1970s). Thus the players would have had plenty of time to analyse the endgame at home.



46...♔d4

The obvious move is 46...b2!? although White should be winning after 47.♘b3 or 47.♘e2!?. Beliavsky's home analysis probably convinced him that the text would be a better practical try. Or perhaps he simply guessed that Honfi would devote most of his analysis to 46...b2, and thought that a less obvious move might unsettle his opponent. Whatever the reasoning, the plan does not quite succeed.

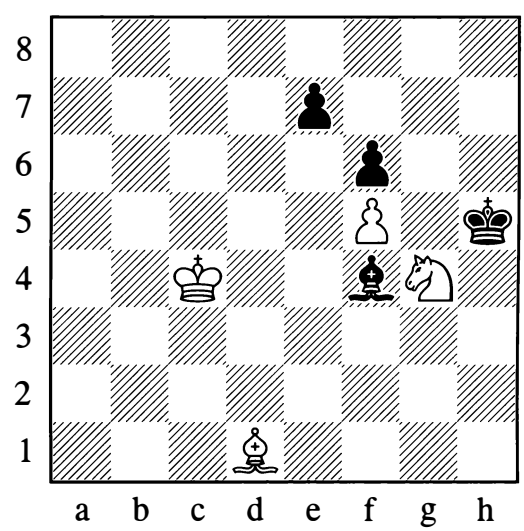
47.♗b1 ♔xd5 48.♔xb3 ♔d4 49.♘e2† ♔e3 50.♘c3 ♔f3 51.♗c2 ♔g2 52.♘e4 ♔xh3 53.♗d1

White has managed to consolidate the kingside.

53...♗f4 54.♔c4 h5!

Black is doing a good job of exchanging the pawns, but ultimately White will only need one to decide the game.

55.gxh5 g4 56.♘f2† ♔h4 57.♘xg4 ♔xh5



58.♔d5

The rest is simple.

58...♔g5 59.♔e6 ♗c1 60.♘f2 ♗b2 61.♘h3† ♔h4 62.♘f4 ♔g5 63.♘d5 ♔h6 64.♔xe7 ♔g7 65.♔e6 ♗e5 66.♗a4 ♗b2 67.♘c7 ♔f8 68.♘e8

1–0

Some players would have continued a little longer, in the hope of giving up the bishop for the f-pawn and testing the opponent's technique with knight and bishop against the lone king, but it seems that Beliavsky did not consider this worthwhile.

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In the very same tournament Honfi beat another exceptional player in Robert Hübner, Germany's foremost Grandmaster for many years. He, unlike Beliavsky at that time, was already a world championship candidate.

Robert Hübner – Karoly Honfi

Sukhumi 1972

1.e4 e5 2.f4

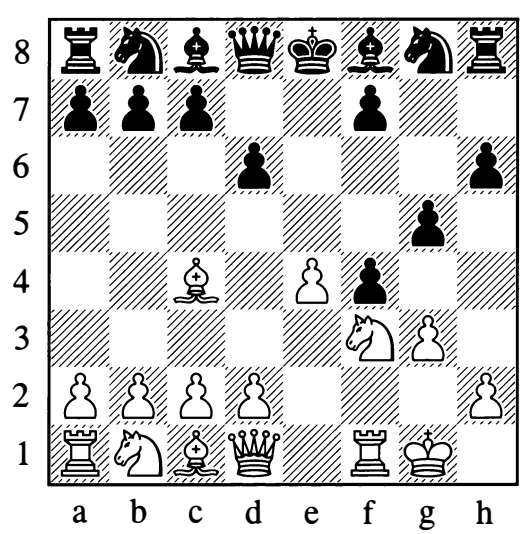
This was the first and last time that Hübner tried the King's Gambit.

2...exf4 3.♘f3 d6

Hübner has played the same line when meeting the King's Gambit from the other side of the board.

4.♗c4 h6 5.0–0 g5 6.g3?!

It is unusual to try to break like this before d4 is played.



6...♗h3! 7.♖f2?

Hübner was a great player, but on this occasion he seems to be showing his lack of familiarity with his chosen opening. The thematic continuation was 7.gxf4!, sacrificing the exchange in the hope of seizing the initiative. I would like to have talked to *Karcsi Bacsi* about this matter, to find out whether he planned to capture the exchange, recapture on f4 or push the g-pawn.

7...♘f6!

Black does not take the pawn but concentrates on developing the kingside pieces.

8.gxf4 gxf4 9.♘c3 ♖g8† 10.♔h1 ♘g4! 11.♖e2 ♘e5!

Honfi liked to solve his problems with active piece play.

12.♘g1

This loses a piece, but already there was no good defence, e.g. 12.♘xe5 dxe5 with a huge advantage for Black.

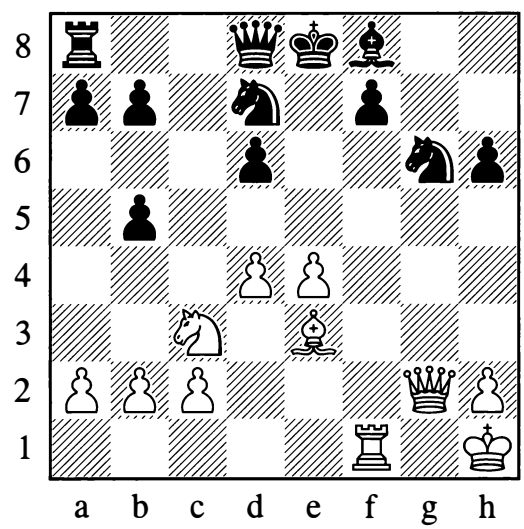
12...♖xg1† 13.♕xg1 f3 14.♗b5†

This is relatively best – with the emphasis on "relatively"!

14...c6 15.♖f2 ♗g2† 16.♖xg2 fxg2† 17.♕xg2 cxb5

Thus Black emerges with an extra piece in return for nebulous compensation.

18.d4 ♘g6 19.♗e3 ♘d7 20.♖f1



20...♘b6

Black sensibly gives back one pawn in order to prevent White's knight from reaching the d5-square.

21.♘xb5

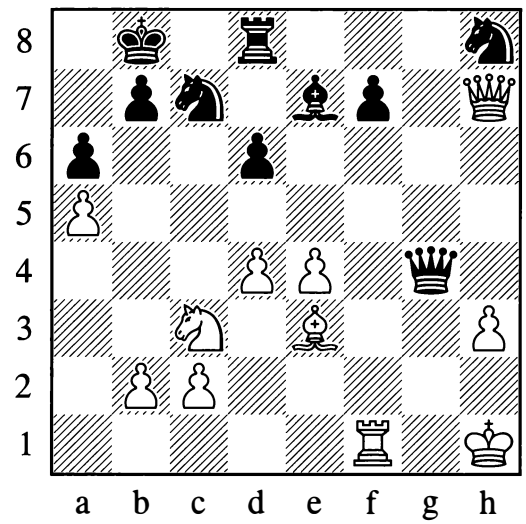
White has no real attacking chances, so he settles for regaining a pawn.

21...♕d7 22.♕e2 a6 23.♘c3 0–0–0 24.a4 ♔b8 25.a5 ♘a8 26.♕f3 ♘h8

The last two knight moves are unusual, but both of them have their own purpose.

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27.♕f6 ♗e7 28.♕xh6 ♘c7 29.♕h7 ♕g4 30.h3



30...♕g6

It is a practical decision to swap queens. White is left with no drawing chances.

31.♕xg6 fxg6 32.♗h6 ♖g8 33.♔g2 ♔c8 34.♔g3 ♔d7 35.♗e3 ♖f8 36.♖a1 ♘f7 37.♔g4 ♖h8 38.♖f1 ♔e8 39.♔g3 ♖h5 40.♖a1 ♘g5

0–1

There was no point in adjourning this position. Interestingly, in a subsequent game between the same players, the German grandmaster once again failed to survive the opening with the white pieces. But that was simply due to a freakish blunder in an equal position.

I know that Honfi and Hübner were on good personal terms. *Karcsi Bacsi* spoke some German although I cannot comment on his level.

I first got acquainted with *Karcsi Bacsi* early in 1976, when I started to play for the team 'Spartacus'. Soon after I joined this prestigious club, there was a training camp with many very strong players; he was one of them. It was a great experience to analyse with them. I received a superb piece of advice from him at this time, as well as many more in the future. I will pass on this advice now – "Take some time to consider what you want to get from the game of chess, and treat it accordingly." Unfortunately many parents who have a talented child do not know this. They make their children suffer many failures because of this.

In addition to his accomplishments as a player, Honfi possessed the desire to teach and was an excellent trainer. He had a subtle way of giving advice. Instead of simply telling a person what to do, his approach was to help them understand what the right way was, empowering them to make the decision for themselves. I should have followed more of his advice, but only realized this much later. Of course it was an important feature of our relationship that he was 31 years older than me. It became natural and almost automatic that when we made a journey or had a club dinner we would sit next to each other.

One of the many ways of classifying chess players involves the question of whether they tend to work harder during pre-game preparation or during the game itself. Almost all fit into one category or the other. Among Hungary's top players, perhaps only Lajos Portisch was equally good in both departments. Honfi was similar, but sometimes he took more risks than professionalism required. He was always looking for a fight. He was usually happy when he drew against a stronger player than himself, but only if the draw came after a long hard battle – he was not interested in the so-called "grandmaster draw".

Here is a game from 1976, in which Honfi defeated a very strong Soviet grandmaster and famous chess author.

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Karoly Honfi – Alexey Suetin

Budapest 1976

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.♗d3 g6 6.0–0 ♗g7 7.♗e3 ♘e7 8.c4 0–0 9.♘c3 d6

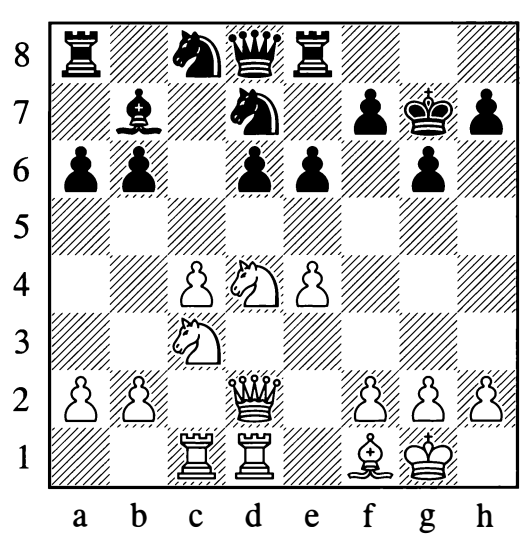
This is a normal-looking move, but Honfi did not rate Black's set-up very highly. Instead he mentioned 9...♘bc6 and 9...d5 as superior alternatives.

10.♕d2 ♘d7 11.♖ac1 b6 12.♖fd1 ♗b7 13.♗f1 ♘c8

Perhaps Black should have moved his rook immediately to avoid the following bishop exchange.

14.♗h6 ♖e8 15.♗xg7 ♔xg7

Black's position is rather passive – just look at the knight on c8. At the same time, it is not by accident that the Hedgehog has earned a reputation as an extremely robust set-up. White needs to formulate a strategy if he is to make the most of his advantages before Black gradually regroups his forces.

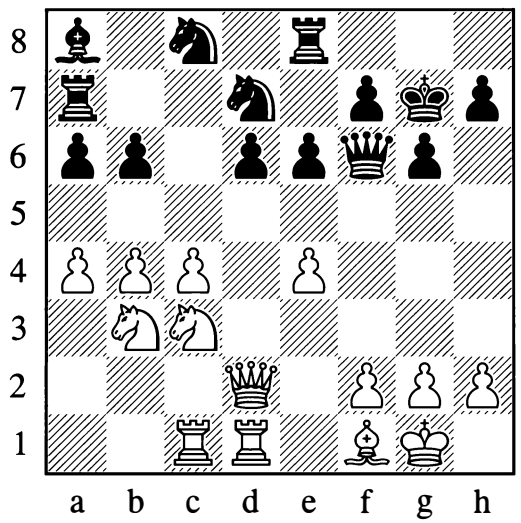


16.b4!

This is the start of a well-conceived plan to dismantle the enemy queenside.

16...♖a7?! 17.♘b3! ♕f6 18.a4 ♗a8

18...a5? 19.♘b5 is no good for Black.



19.a5!

White isolates the a6-pawn and gets the a5-square for his knight.

19...♖c7?!

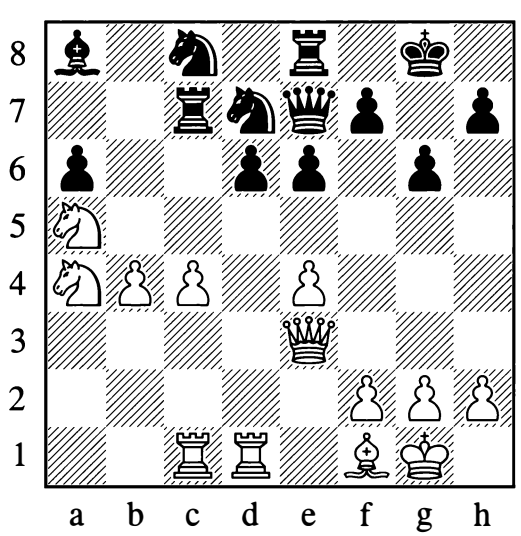
19...♖b7 would at least have forced White to keep an eye on his b-pawn.

20.♕e3

Maybe 20.axb6!? was even stronger: 20...♘dxb6 21.c5 dxc5 22.♘xc5 Black is in trouble.

20...bxa5 21.♘xa5 ♕e7 22.♘a4! ♔g8

After 22...d5? 23.c5! White is happy to trade the e4-pawn for the one on a6. Black will be crushed on the queenside.



23.c5!

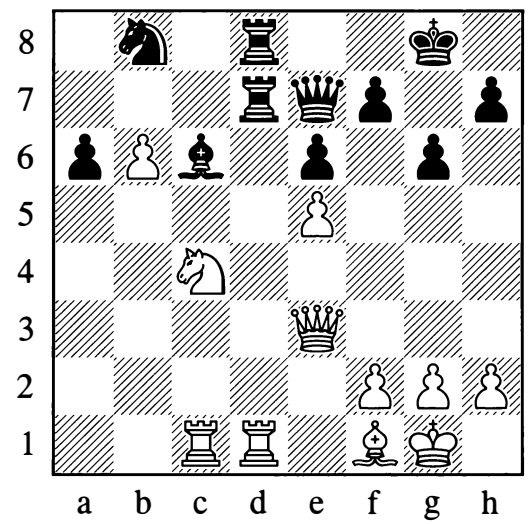
White requires no more preparation.

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23...dxc5 24.bxc5 ♗c6 25.♘b6

Honfi increases his advantage with rather simple moves.

25...♘b8 26.♘ac4 ♖d8 27.e5! ♘xb6 28.cxb6 ♖cd7



29.♘d6

What a knight, and what a position. The game is already practically over as a contest.

29...f6 30.f4 fxe5 31.fxe5 ♗d5 32.♗c4!

White exchanges Black's only active piece.

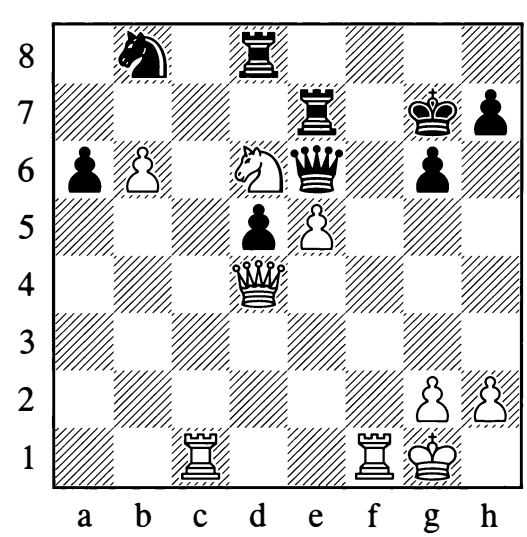
32...♔g7

32...♗xc4 33.♖xc4 ♖f8 34.♖dc1+–

33.♗xd5 exd5 34.♕d4

34.♖xd5 was also winning, e.g. 34...♖xd6? 35.♕a3!.

34...♕e6 35.♖f1 ♖e7



36.♖c7! ♘d7

Or 36...♖dd7 37.♕f4 threatening a deadly incursion on f8.

37.b7 ♖b8 38.♘c8! ♖f7

38...♖e8 39.♖xd7† wins for White.

39.♖xf7† ♔xf7 40.♘b6 ♖d8 41.♘xd7 1–0

This was a very skilfully conducted and instructive positional game against the Hedgehog. The a4-a5 plan is well worth remembering.

Here is another Hedgehog game from the same year.

Karoly Honfi – Ulf Andersson

Cienfuegos 1976

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 e6 5.c4 ♘c6 6.♘c3 ♗e7

The Swedish grandmaster is an expert in Hedgehog positions. His only win against Karpov came in such a position, when he freed his game with a thematic ...d5 pawn sacrifice.

7.g3!?

This is not the usual set-up.

7...♗d7 8.♗g2 a6 9.0–0 ♘f6 10.♘de2 0–0 11.b3 ♕b8 12.♗f4!? ♖d8

Black must avoid 12...b5? 13.c5.

13.♖c1 ♘h5 14.♗e3 b5!

As a rule of thumb, if Black can achieve this freeing break in a Hedgehog position then he can count on a comfortable game.

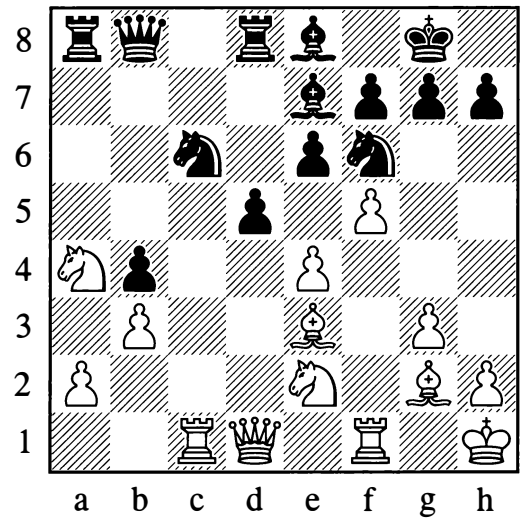
15.cxb5 axb5 16.f4 ♘f6

Black has equalized.

17.♔h1 ♗e8 18.f5 b4 19.♘a4 d5!?

This aggressive continuation was by no means forced, but it seems Andersson could not resist opening the centre to exploit the opposition of his rook with the enemy queen.

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20.♗b6!

Without this White would have problems.

20...♘xe4!?

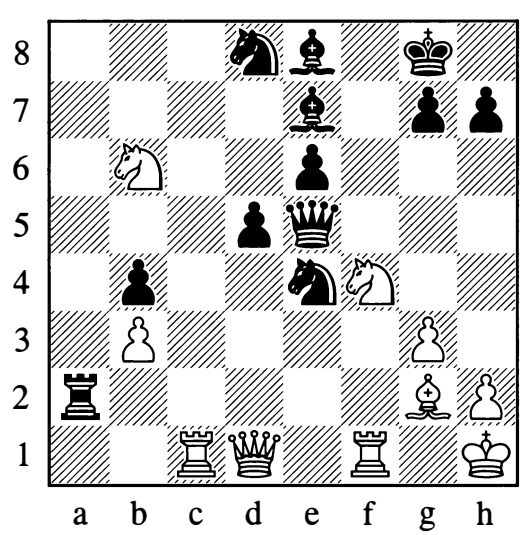
The Swede sacrifices an exchange. Also possible was 20...♖c8, e.g. 21.exd5 exd5 22.♗g1 (Black was threatening to take on a4) 22...♗d8 23.♘f4 ♘e7 and Black has a playable game.

21.♗xd8 ♘xd8 22.fxe6 fxe6

Black has one pawn for the exchange, with active pieces and two connected central passed pawns. He may not be better, but he definitely has full compensation.

23.♘f4 ♕e5 24.♘b6! ♖xa2?

This is too optimistic. I can only speculate that Andersson overlooked White's next move. Correct was 24...♖a5 25.♖c8 ♖b5 26.♘c4 dxc4 27.♖xd8 ♗xd8 28.♕xd8 ♖b8 29.♕e7 (29.♘xe6 ♘f6) 29...♗f7. The position is equal.



25.♘bxd5!

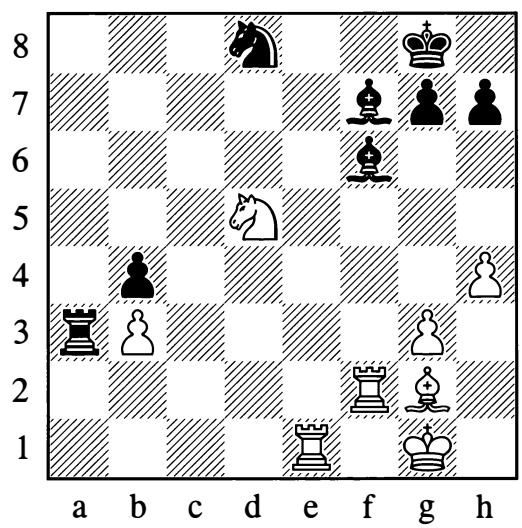
Now Black's position falls apart.

25...exd5 26.♕xd5† ♕xd5 27.♘xd5 ♘f2† 28.♔g1 ♗g5 29.♖ce1 ♗f7 30.♖xf2

At the end of the tactical confrontation, White keeps an extra exchange.

30...♖a3 31.h4 ♗f6

31...♗h6? leads to a cute checkmate: 32.♖e8†! ♗xe8 33.♘e7† ♔h8 34.♖f8#



White clearly has a winning position. The remaining moves are not so important, but here they are anyway:

32.♘xf6† gxf6 33.♖d1 ♘e6 34.♗d5 ♔g7 35.♗c4 ♘c5 36.♖f5 ♗xc4 37.♖xc5 ♗xb3 38.♖d4 ♗f7 39.♖c7 b3 40.♖b4 ♖a1† 41.♔f2 ♖a2† 42.♔e3 b2 43.♖bb7 ♔g8 44.♖b8† ♔g7 45.h5 h6 46.g4 f5 47.g5 hxg5 48.h6† ♔f6 49.♖b6† ♗e6 50.h7 ♖a3† 51.♔d4 ♖a8 52.♖xb2 g4 53.♖h2 ♖d8† 54.♔e3 ♖h8 55.♖h6† ♔e5 56.♖e7

1–0

Andersson is a brilliant endgame technician and he managed to put up stiff resistance, but Honfi eventually converted his advantage.

Honfi was an honourable man, and it is rather ironic that his honesty may have contributed to his failure to become a grandmaster. Other players have told me of a tournament where he needed to win his last game to secure the

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title. His Yugoslav opponent offered to make an 'arrangement' but Honfi refused. In the game he was close to winning, but he spoiled the position in time trouble.

On another occasion his club called him back for an important team championship game in the middle of a tournament where he was doing very well. The trip back to Hungary lasted three days. Honfi's presence was good for the team, and they went on to win the championship. Unfortunately it cost him a lot of energy and once again he missed the grandmaster norm. Life can be cruel: the request from the club was made by his closest lifelong friend Ervin Haag. Ervin told me recently: "I could not have known the consequences".

In the 1976 Budapest tournament (where I was a demonstration board boy) he started well, but on his way to a later game he had a car accident. Despite the obvious stress caused by such an event, he was too proud to request that the game be postponed. He went on to lose, and hardly scored any points in the tournament afterwards. According to Haag, if when he had chances for the norm he had inserted a few quick draws to save energy, he would almost certainly have made it. But instead he wanted to fight in every single game.

Apart from these reasons, I have one more theory about why he never became a grandmaster. Most high-ranking players are concerned with maximizing their results. But Honfi enjoyed playing chess so much, for him it was all about playing an interesting game. It happened several times that I told him this move or variation has to be played against particular openings. His answer was always the same:

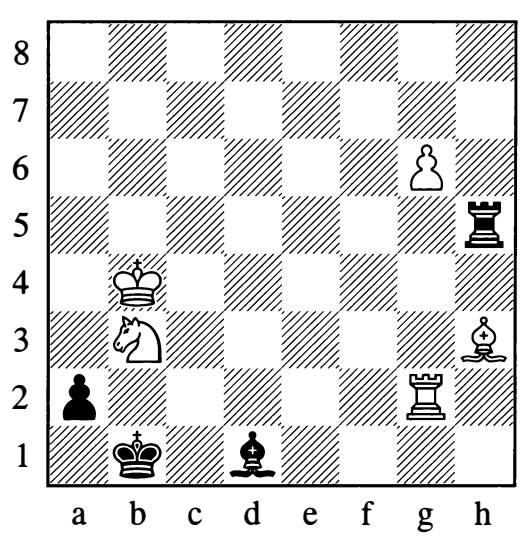
> "Tibi, I believe you when you say this is the best line, but even if you prove that this holds the draw against all the moves, I would not play it."

In other words, he preferred to play what he knew to be an inferior move, just to reach an interesting position, rather than a stronger move leading to relatively dry equality.

I do not know what he would do now in his favourite Grünfeld, since so many long theoretical lines have been analysed all the way to the endgame. Somehow I doubt he would ever have played those. The other problem was that he always wanted to maximize his chances with the white pieces. True, he won a lot of games, but he also suffered some defeats. Compared with most top players, he allowed too many targets. But he wanted to win his games...

Karcsi Bacsi was an occasional composer of endgame studies. I only found two, which he created in 1975 and 1976. They are nice.

Magyar Sakkelet, 1975



White to play and win

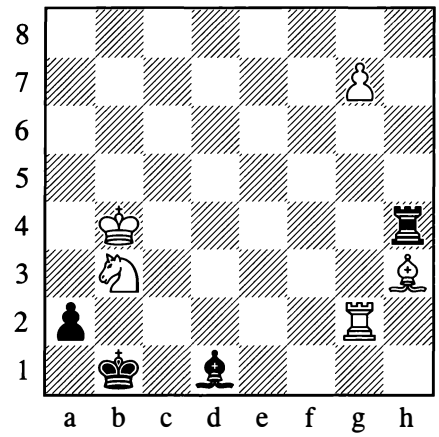
1.g7 ♗xb3

There is an important alternative in:

1...♖h4†!?

Black tries to divert the king.

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2.♗g4!

White cannot keep defending the knight with 2.♔a3?? because of 2...a1=♕†! 3.♘xa1 ♖a4#.

2...♗xg4 3.♔a3 a1=♕† 4.♘xa1

Black can now prevent the promotion in two different ways, but in both cases he gets checkmated.

4...♗e6

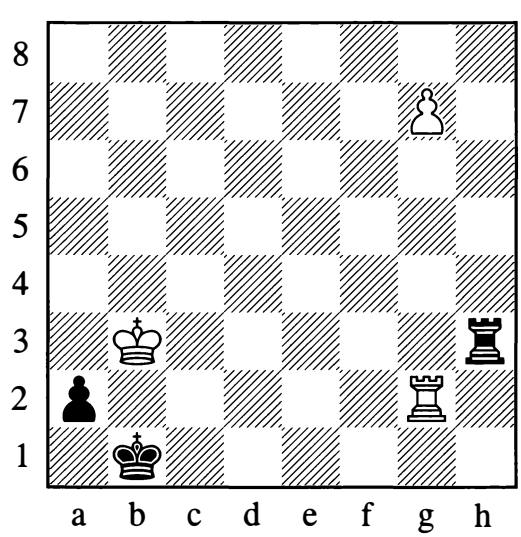
4...♖h3† loses to 5.♘b3, e.g. 5...♗e6 6.♖b2#. This checkmating pattern often occurs in tournament games.

5.♖g1#!

But this configuration is a rarity indeed!

2.♔xb3 ♖xh3†

When a player has a pawn on the seventh rank in such a position, he or she rarely loses.



3.♔b4!

White must carefully run away from the check. 3.♔c4? In this case not all roads lead to Rome: 3...♖c3†! 4.♔xc3 a1=♕† 5.♔b3 ♕d4 6.g8=♕ ♕e3† 7.♔b4 and now Black must avoid 7...♕b6†? 8.♔c4, but instead play 7...♕e1†! when White cannot escape from the checks. Computer programs confirm that *Karcsi Bacsi* worked it out correctly.

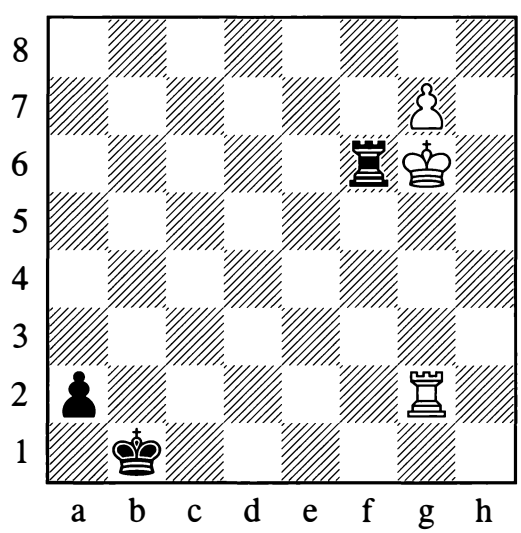
3...♖h4†

3...a1=♕ 4.♖g1† ♔c2 5.♖xa1 ♖g3 6.♖a7 wins as Black's king cannot play to the third rank.

4.♔c5 ♖h5† 5.♔d6 ♖h6† 6.♔d5 ♖h5† 7.♔e6 ♖e5†

7...♖h6† 8.♔f5 ♖f6† 9.♔g5 escapes from the checks. The text is a nice, but ultimately ineffective try.

8.♔f7 ♖f5† 9.♔g6 ♖f6†



10.♔g5!

Finally, after a long king journey, White has achieved a position where Black has no sensible rook check.

10...♖f1

This enables Black to promote his pawn, but allows the king to be checkmated.

11.g8=♕ a1=♕ 12.♕g6† ♔c1 13.♕c2#

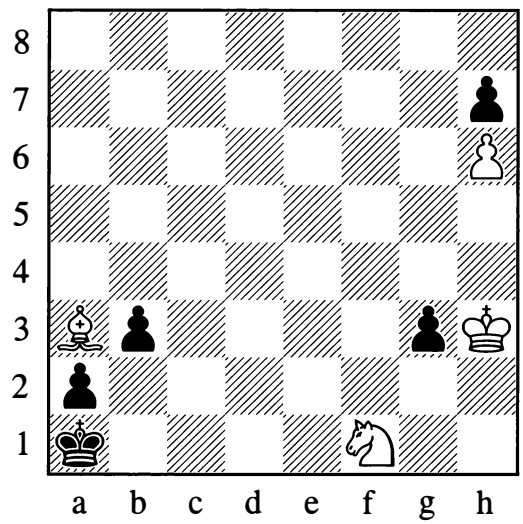
Finally the study ends in a checkmate.

His next study won third prize in the Hungarian Chess magazine competition. Had he devoted

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more of his time to composing, maybe he would have become a noted composer. But competing over the board was his first love.

3rd Prize, Magyar Sakkelet, 1976



White to play and win

1.♘d2

White has a difficult task fighting against the numerous black pawns that are close to promotion.

1...b2

1...g2 2.♘xb3† ♔b1 3.♔xg2 a1=♕ 4.♘xa1 ♔xa1 5.♔g3 and Black is many tempos short of being able to reach the g8-square.

2.♗c5! g2!

This is the most challenging defence. White's main idea is revealed after 2...b1=♕ 3.♗d4† ♕b2 4.♗g7!.

3.♗d4!

3.♔xg2? The king cannot step onto the second rank. Black has two options:

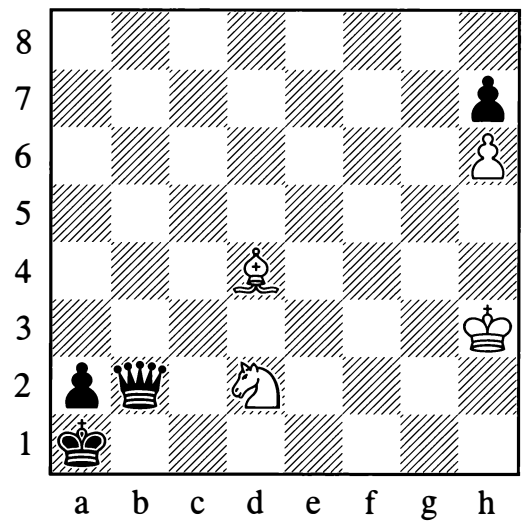
a) 3...b1=♕? 4.♗d4† ♕b2 5.♗g7! ♕xg7† 6.hxg7 ♔b2 7.g8=♕ a1=♕ Usually such a material balance would lead to a draw, but here Black's pieces are very unfortunately placed. 8.♕g7† ♔a2 9.♕f7† ♔b2 10.♕f6† ♔a2 11.♕e6† ♔b2 12.♕e5† ♔a2 13.♕d5† ♔b2 14.♕d4† ♔a2 15.♕a4† ♔b2 16.♘c4† wins.

b) 3...b1=♖!! Black has to promote to a rook. 4.♗d4† ♖b2 Black holds because the knight is pinned. Now all of White's sensible moves result in an instant stalemate.

3...g1=♕ 4.♗xg1 b1=♕

This time after 4...b1=♖ 5.♗d4† ♖b2 the knight is not pinned, so 6.♘c4 wins.

5.♗d4† ♕b2



6.♗g7!

Black is forced to let White have a passed pawn. The game Alterman – Karpov, Tyniste 1995, is a nice, although admittedly less spectacular, example in which the stronger side forced the opponent to exchange a piece, after which taking back with the pawn improved his position and resulted in a win.

6...♕xg7 7.hxg7 ♔b2 8.♘b3!

This is the nicest win, although 8.g8=♕ is also good enough.

8...♔xb3 9.g8=♕† ♔b2

White wins because Black's h-pawn rules out the usual stalemate-based defence.

Both *Karcsi Bacsi* and I left Spartacus during the 1970s, but we continued to see each other from time to time at tournaments, although we still had never faced each other over the board at that time. Over the next few years we only once attended a training camp together. He was training the Hungarian women's team, while I was with the junior squad. Of course we shared many long walks and conversations.

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He wanted to obtain the GM title so much, but at some point he must have understood he would never make it. I think it must have been around the time when I first faced him over the board, at a master tournament in 1977. I was 16 at the time, and he beat me. As in almost all his games, a complex position occurred. I eventually lost on time – something that has only happened twice in my life. I must admit that my position was lost anyway.

In the next game he beat my club-mate Laszlo Cserna. After this tournament Laszlo and I frequently worked together. He tragically died of cancer in his mid-thirties. During his short life Laszlo remarkably beat Smyslov and drew with Petrosian. It is so sad that he left us, and especially tragic for his daughter Jutka.

In this encounter Honfi and Cserna produced a remarkably exciting game.

Karoly Honfi – Laszlo Cserna

Budapest 1977

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f4 ♕c7 7.♗d3 g6 8.0–0 ♘bd7 9.♘f3 ♗g7 10.♕e1 e5 11.a4 b6

I recall that Laszlo and I worked out this line based on a game of Walter Browne.

12.♕h4 ♗b7 13.fxe5 dxe5 14.♗h6 0–0 15.♘g5 ♕d6!?

15...♘h5?? 16.♗xg7 ♔xg7 17.♖xf7† wins for White.

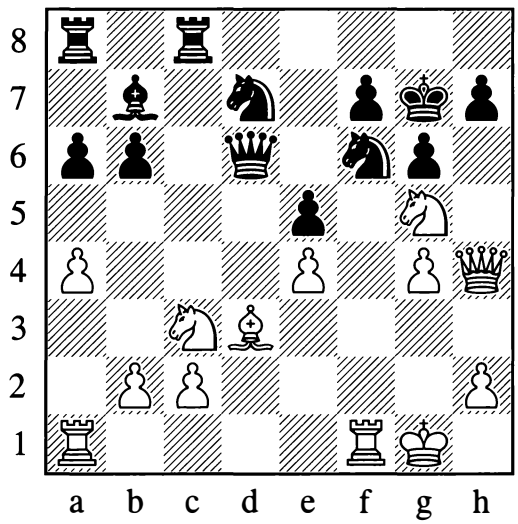
16.g4 ♖fc8!?

Laszlo wants to ease the pressure against his king. After 16...♖ac8 I think *Karcsi Bacsi* would have continued his attack with 17.♖f3.

17.♗xg7

The point of Black's last move was to meet 17.♖f3 with 17...♗xh6 18.♕xh6 ♕f8.

17...♔xg7



18.♘xf7!?

This leads to a very exciting game, but it seems to me it was not objectively best. I would prefer:

18.♕h6†!? ♔g8 19.♖ad1 ♕e7

19...♕f8? 20.♕xf8† ♔xf8 21.♗e2 gives White too much play on the f- file: 21...♔e7 (21...♗c6 22.♖xd7 ♘xd7 23.♖xf7† and Black is in trouble) 22.♘xh7 or 22.♘xf7 and White is better.

20.♖f3

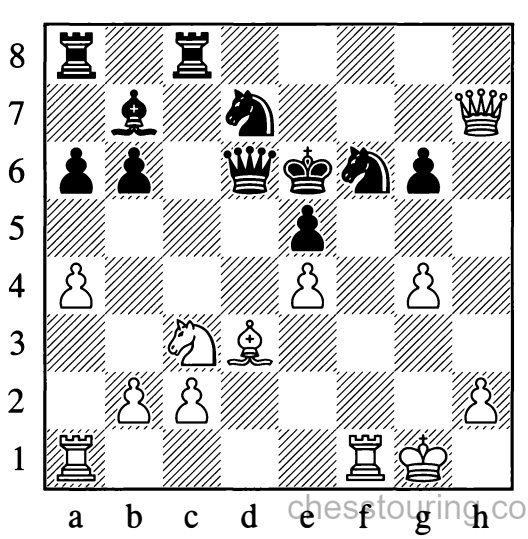
White has an attack.

18...♔xf7 19.♕xh7†!?

19.g5 ♔g7 is safe enough for Black.

19...♔e6

19...♔e8 20.♕xg6† ♔d8 21.g5 White has compensation for the piece; the position is roughly balanced.



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20.♖xf6†!

Not 20.♕xg6? ♖g8 21.♕f5† ♔e7 22.h3 ♖af8 and Black takes over.

20...♘xf6 21.♕xb7 ♕c5†

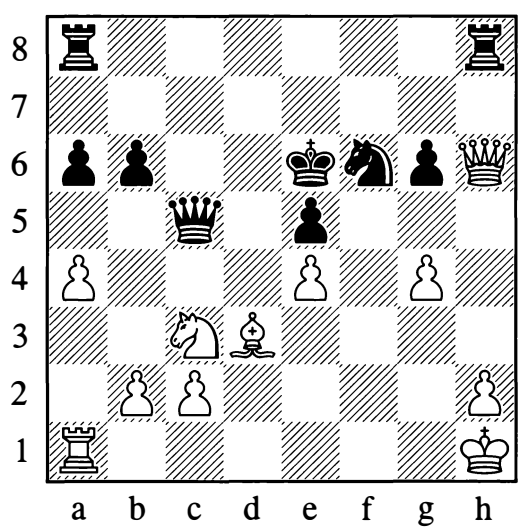
21...♕c7?! 22.♕xc7 ♖xc7 23.g5! ♘h7 24.♘d5 White has a promising position.

22.♔h1 ♖cb8 23.♕g7 ♖g8 24.♕h6

Honfi keeps on pressing. The text commits White to further material sacrifices. 24.♕b7 ♖gb8 would lead to a repetition, as 24...♘xg4 25.♗e2! would be too risky for Black.

24...♖h8

White looks to be in trouble. How can he continue the attack? Remember that there are ...♖xh2† sacrifices to worry about!



25.♗c4†!!

This is a brilliant idea, although the game is still far from being decided.

25...♕xc4

Also deserving of attention was 25...♔d6!? 26.♖d1† ♔c6 27.♗b5†! (27.♕xg6?? ♖xh2† leads to a checkmate; 27.♗d5†?? ♘xd5 28.exd5† ♕xd5†! is also no good for White) 27...axb5 28.axb5† ♔b7 29.♕g7† ♕c7 30.♕xf6 ♖af8 31.♕e6 ♖f2 Black will force perpetual check.

26.♕xg6

The point of White's idea was to divert the enemy queen so that the ...♖xh2† sacrifice no longer works.

26...♖ag8 27.♕f5† ♔e7 28.g5 ♘d7

Black could also have gone for the following hair-raising line:

28...♘h5!?

White has no more than a draw.

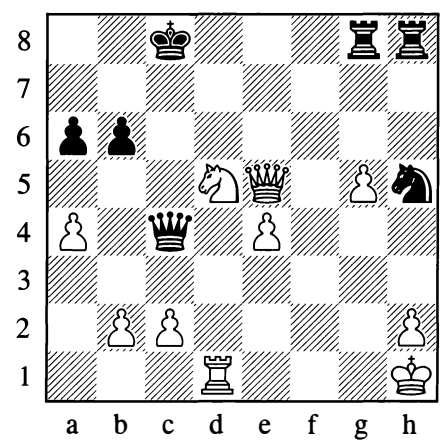
29.♕xe5†

And not 29.♘d5†? ♕xd5!.

29...♔d7

Also possible is 29...♕e6 30.♘d5† (30.♕c7† ♕d7 31.♕e5† ♕e6=) 30...♔d7 31.♕c7† ♔e8 32.♕b8† ♔f7 33.♕c7† with a perpetual check.

30.♖d1† ♔c8 31.♘d5



31...♕xe4†! 32.♕xe4 ♘g3† 33.♔g2 ♘xe4 34.♘e7† ♔c7 35.♘xg8 ♖xg8

The ending should be a draw.

29.♘d5† ♔e8 30.♕xd7†

30.♖a3 ♕e2 31.♕e6† ♔d8 32.♕e7† ♔c8 33.♖c3† ♔b8 34.♕d6† ♔a8 White has no win and must keep giving checks.

30...♔xd7 31.♘xb6† ♔e6?!

The king is not so well placed here. Better was 31...♔c6 32.♘xc4 ♖xg5 with a roughly equal position.

32.♘xc4 ♖xg5

After the dust settled they reached an approximately equal ending. However, Black has to be more careful as White has three pawns for the exchange.

33.♖d1 ♖hg8 34.♘e3 ♖f8?

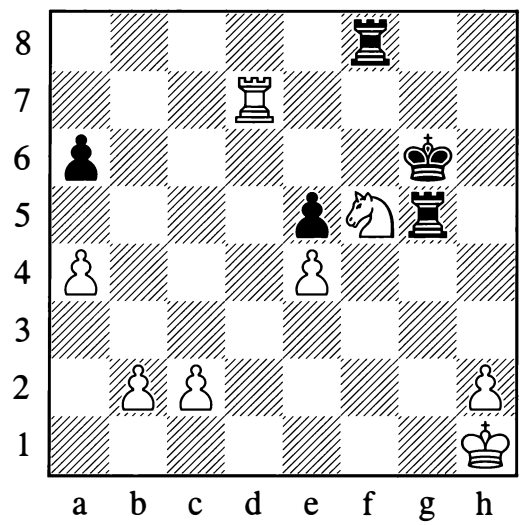
After this the black rooks lose their activity. I remember they both were in time trouble. 34...♖c8 was clearly better than the text move.

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35.♘f5 ♔f7?

Black's position continues to slide downhill. 35...♖g6 was best, although Black is still struggling.

36.♖d7† ♔g6



Just compare this position with that from four moves ago. White's pieces have improved dramatically, and his material advantage should be enough to decide the game.

37.h3

White improves his king while taking away the g4-square from the enemy rook. This would be the choice of most strong players, although it was also possible to win with 37.h4!? ♖g4 (37...♖gxf5 38.exf5† ♔xf5 39.♔g2 ♔e4 40.♖d6 a5 41.h5 is winning) 38.♖g7† ♔h5 39.♖h7† ♔g6 40.♖h6† ♔f7 41.♖xa6 with a winning ending, as Black still cannot capture the e4-pawn.

37...♖h8?

37...♖b8 was relatively best, although the ending was still lost.

38.♔h2 ♖gh5 39.♖d3 ♖b8 40.b3 ♔g5 41.♔g3 ♖hh8

1–0

In this hopeless position Laszlo resigned. He lost the endgame because he did not use his rooks actively. He probably used up most of his time and energy defending against the imaginative attack.

In 1979 Honfi was awarded the title of honoured trainer of Hungary. He was twice the captain of the Hungarian women's team at chess Olympiads, and both times the team finished with a silver medal.

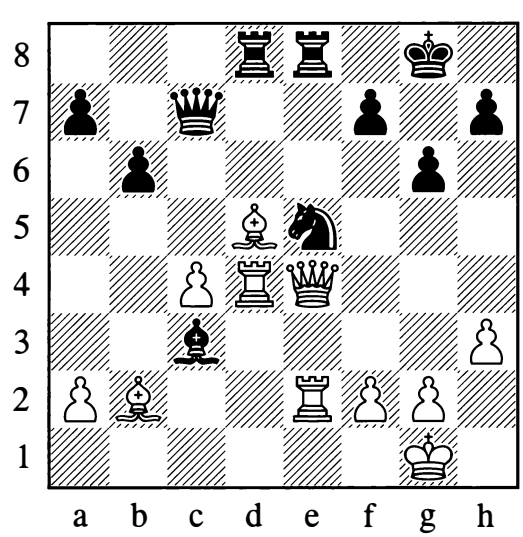
WGM Zsuzsa Veroczi made her best result under his coaching – she reached the world championship candidate match stage in 1979. But their relation ended before her match with Ioseliani.

Once they stopped working together her results deteriorated noticeably.

My second meeting with *Karcsi Bacsi* over the board was in the last round of the qualification tournament of the Hungarian championship. I was 19 and had already won the group. I played the opening well and obtained a considerable advantage, then my concentration slipped and I made a big mistake. Here is how he punished me.

Tibor Károlyi – Karoly Honfi

Budapest 1980



1...♗xb2 2.♖xb2 ♘f3†!

Thanks to the weak back rank, Black wins the queen. The consequences were unfortunate for me, and I quickly collapsed.

3.gxf3 ♖xe4 4.♖xe4?

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I completely missed the second shot, but the position was lost anyway.

4...♖xd5!

0–1

After the post mortem he told me: "I had thought you were lucky in the tournament – I did not think you were this strong." Does a junior need a more gentle encouragement?

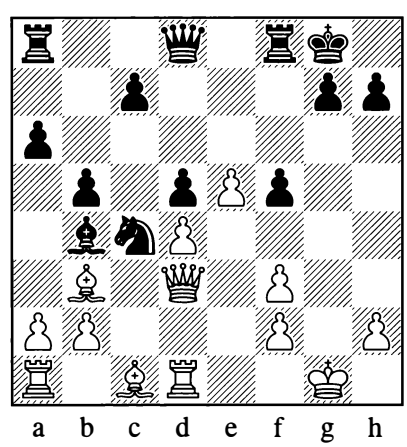
Honfi continued to play tournaments regularly in the 1980s. Here is a win using a slightly unusual opening line which he prepared himself, and which suited his style perfectly. Later we analysed it together a lot and I also played it. If my memory serves me well, I managed to improve the variation he was worried about. In this game he beat a very strong grandmaster, who represented Germany on top board ten times. Grandmaster Unzicker even won a tournament in the Soviet Union in the sixties.

Wolfgang Unzicker – Karoly Honfi

Baden-Baden 1981

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0–0 ♗e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.c3 0–0 9.h3

He also faced 9.d4 many times, including the following game which was quite a memorable one for me. I really like the complicated way he handled the middlegame. Such play was typical for him. 9...♗g4 10.♗e3 exd4 11.cxd4 d5 12.e5 ♘e4 13.♘bd2 ♘xd2 14.♕xd2 ♗xf3 15.gxf3 ♗b4 16.♕c2 ♘a5 17.♖ed1 f5 18.♕d3 ♘c4 19.♗c1



19...♖b8! 20.a3 ♗e7 21.♗c2 ♖b6! Imaginative utilization of his rook. 22.b3 ♘a5 23.♔h1 ♕e8 24.♖g1 ♕h5 25.♗d1 f4 26.♖g2 ♘b7 27.a4 b4 28.♗d2 a5 29.♖c1 c6 Now he blocks the path of the rook – it is unprejudiced play. 30.♖g4 ♕h6 31.♗e2 ♘d8 This was Mortensen – Honfi, Budapest 1987. Unfortunately I do not have the rest of the moves of this game. As I recall, he went on to win against his strong Danish opponent.

9...♘a5 10.♗c2 c5 11.d4 ♕c7 12.♘bd2 cxd4 13.cxd4 ♗b7 14.d5!

White should play against the bishop on b7. Instead 14.♘f1 ♖ac8 15.♖e2 d5 sees Black becoming quite active. *Karcsi Bacsi* won a few nice games playing this way.

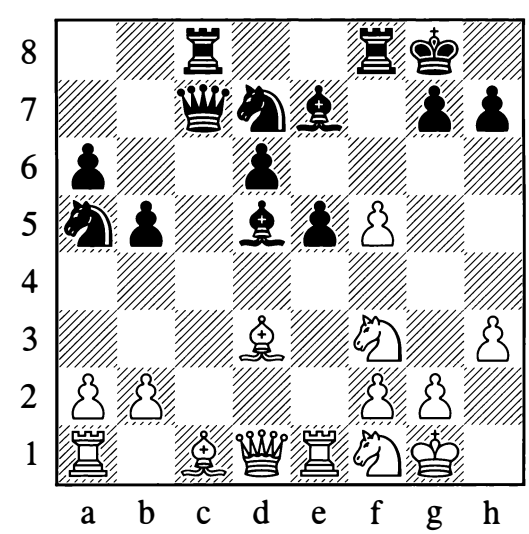
14...♖ac8

14...♗c8 has been tested, but I knew he would never play such a line.

15.♗d3 ♘d7 16.♘f1 f5 17.exf5

The most critical move is 17.♘g3! when Black can choose between 17...fxe4 and the exchange sacrifice 17...f4 18.♘f5 ♖xf5 19.exf5. I am not fully convinced about Black's chances, although the game is quite complicated.

17...♗xd5



18.♘g3

In the case of 18.♘g5 ♗xg5 19.♗xg5 we had prepared 19...♗a8!. Later I played this move myself. According to my database Magerramov

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played it a year earlier, but we did not know about that game.

18...♕b7 19.♗e4 ♘f6 20.♗xd5† ♕xd5 21.♕e2 ♖c7 22.♖d1 ♕b7 23.♗g5 ♘c4 24.♖ac1 h6 25.♗xf6 ♗xf6 26.♘e4 ♗e7 27.f6?!

This sacrifice is unnecessary and uncalled for.

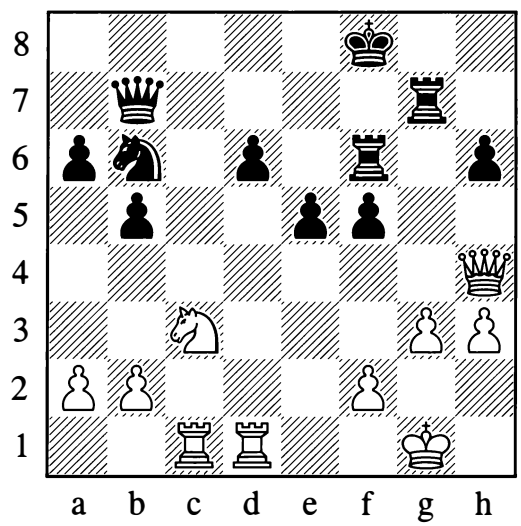
27...gxf6 28.♘c3 ♘b6 29.♘h4 f5 30.♘g6 ♖f6 31.♕h5 ♗f8 32.♘xf8 ♖g7

Black is a pawn up but his king is a bit airy, so White has realistic drawing chances.

33.g3

33.f3!? might be a bit better.

33...♔xf8 34.♕h4



34...♖gg6! 35.♕b4?

White still could resist, but he forgets about his king and makes an instantly losing move. 35.♖d3 was better.

35...♕f3!

White simply has no pieces around to defend the king.

36.♖c2 ♘c4 37.♖e2

37.♘e2 ♖xg3† 38.fxg3 ♘e3 wins for Black.

37...f4

0–1

In this event Ribli finished equal first with Miles on the score-table, but – presumably thanks to a favourable tie-break – he received the special prize of a big Mercedes! Unfortunately the car was subsequently written off in an accident in Bulgaria. Honfi helped Ribli to analyse the *car-decisive* adjourned position. Ribli went on to draw the position against Korchnoi. It seems *Karcsi Bacsi* found a subtle way to win for Black. Luckily for Ribli, Korchnoi missed it and thus Ribli ended up with the car. Ribli had two cars with him at the end of the tournament, and *Karcsi Bacsi* drove one of them back to Hungary.

During the mid-1980s *Karcsi Bacsi* and I became closer. I cannot remember precisely when I first started to visit him regularly to analyse variations. I would say we met on average once per week. The relationship slowly deepened into a friendship. He helped me in other ways too, not only in chess. We talked about many things, quite often about politics. His vision was sharp there too.

It was always a special joy investigating positions with him, not only because he was a strong player, but the way he looked at chess was so different from mine – probably the most different out of any player with whom I have worked. It is interesting to compare him with Leko, who was the strongest player I ever worked with. Peter's moves were stronger; of course I cannot compete with the overall quality of his analysis.

However, I always understand what he is doing and what he is playing for. But the way *Karcsi Bacsi* analysed, he had such deep and imaginative ideas that it often took me a lot of time to fathom the point behind his moves. It felt like I was watching a magician's show, and suddenly he shows us a rabbit! One moment I had no idea what he was doing, and then out of the blue he was winning!

When I was travelling to his house I had butterflies in my stomach, almost in a similar

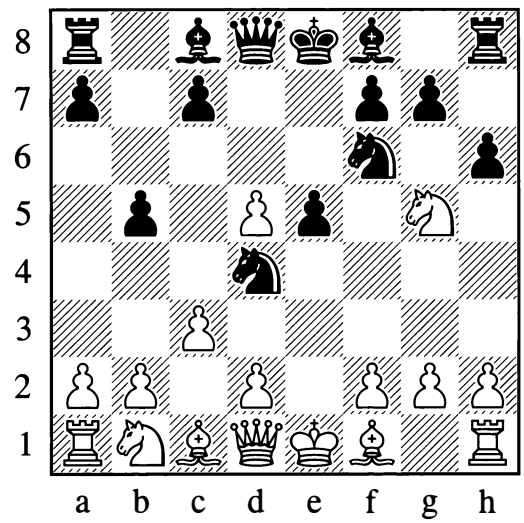
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way to when I had a date with a girl. What was his new idea in the variation we looked at last time? How will he like my latest analysis? How many lines will he destroy and how many will he approve? Since we had such different ways of approaching a position, we made a good analysis team, each of us benefiting from the other's input. We constantly spotted mistakes and found improvements, gradually refining our analysis. It happened sometimes that he had a problem in one of his lines and I managed to improve a critical position of a key variation. It was so nice to see him being happy because of it. It is remarkable, but I do not recall ever playing a single blitz game with him. Probably because there were always so many positions to analyse.

Although *Karcsi Bacsi* was a gentle person, he was also steadfast and resolute when the situation demanded it. When he thought he was right, he always stuck to his principles under any conditions. His approach to life was very strongly influenced by his Catholic religion. Once he told me he found it difficult at times to maintain his faith while many of those around him were non-believers.

Many really strong chessplayers have difficulties dealing with the problems of everyday life, but that was not the case with Honfi. He did not look down upon ordinary people, and he respected less successful chess players as well.

In his middlegames it is striking that he so often got an irregular position. He was strong in the openings, although, given his creative approach, it is hardly surprising that some of his ideas have been busted by computers. His wife gave me a lot of his opening preparations, and even now, whenever I work on a line I always check his notes. Often very nice ideas can be found. Here is an example.



8.♘h3!

I found this excellent move in his notes with a novelty sign. Later I found games with it in the database, however I am certain he did know not about these and found the move on his own.

8...♘f5

8...♗xh3 9.cxd4 ♗d7 10.dxe5±

9.♗xb5† ♗d7 10. ♗xd7† ♕xd7 11.0–0

White stands better.

Honfi played a few correspondence events until the mid-1960s, although these were more like a hobby compared with over-the-board tournaments. During the 1970s he gave up correspondence play altogether, apart from helping his wife with her games. He did start playing again in 1981, and continued to do so into the 1990s. The next game we analysed a lot together. I will share the analysis we did together, although in some places I have added some of my own refinements that I found later on.

Bartolome Marcussi – Karoly Honfi

Correspondence 1990

1.e4 ♘f6 2.e5 ♘d5 3.d4 d6 4.♘f3 ♘b6

This was his pet line in the Alekhine; the point of it is that on 4...g6 5.♗c4 was a good move, and the text avoids it.

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5.♘c3 g6 6.♗f4

If White manages to preserve the e5-pawn without allowing Black to exchange a lot of pieces, he will have a considerable advantage

6...♗g7 7.♕d2 ♗g4 8.♗h6 ♗xh6

The alternative is:

8...0–0

The theory at the time judged this line as inferior for Black.

9.h4 ♗xf3 10.h5 ♗xh5

10...♗h8 was played in Zaitsev – Zinser, Moscow 1968, in which White obtained an advantage.

11.♖xh5 ♗xh6

Honfi told me Black has a reasonable position here despite the theoretical verdict. However he never tried it in a competitive game.

12.♖xh6 dxe5 13.♖h4 f5 14.♕h6 ♖f7 15.dxe5 ♘c6

15...e6 can also be considered.

16.e6 ♖g7

Black is okay.

9.♕xh6 ♗xf3 10.gxf3

10.♕g7 ♔d7 11.gxf3 ♕f8 Black is somewhat better.

10...dxe5 11.dxe5

White gains no advantage with 11.♕g7 ♖f8 12.0–0–0 e6, e.g. 13.♘e4 (after 13.dxe5 ♕g5† 14.♔b1 ♘8d7 15.♘b5 0–0–0 16.♘xa7† ♔b8 17.♘b5 ♕f4! 18.♗e2 ♖g8 19.♖d4 ♕xd4 20.♕xg8 Black has a pleasant endgame) 13...♘8d7 14.♗b5 ♕h4 (14...c6!?) and Black is safe.

11...e6 12.♘e4

It is a feature of the Alekhine that White will often attack in the early stages. However, if his attack runs out of steam, he will frequently be left with a worse position.

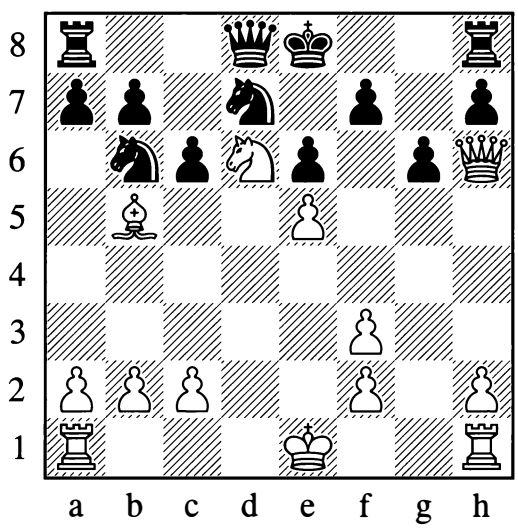
12...♘8d7 13.♗b5

13.0–0–0 ♕e7 14.♕f4 0–0–0 is safe enough for Black.

13.♕g7 ♖f8 14.♗b5 is also not dangerous: 14...♕h4 15.♘f6† ♔e7 16.♘xd7 ♘xd7 17.♗xd7 ♔xd7 18.0–0–0† ♔e7 19.♖d2 ♖g8 Black takes over. For instance, after 20.♖d7†? (20.♕f6†! is necessary) 20...♔xd7 21.♕xf7† ♔c6 22.♕xe6† ♔b5 there is no perpetual, so the extra rook is decisive.

13...c6 14.♘d6†

14.♗e2 ♕e7 15.♘d6† (15.♕g7 ♕f8 16.♘d6† ♔e7) 15...♔d8 16.♕g7 ♔c7 17.♕xf7 ♕xf7 18.♘xf7 ♖he8! 19.f4 ♖e7 20.♘g5 ♘d5 Black is slightly better with the powerful knights.



14...♔e7

He liked to call such a position an 'egg dance'. Black's play is hair-raising, and one mistake could lead to disaster.

15.♕h4† f6 16.♘e4

In this extremely complex position, we analysed several possibilities:

16.♕b4? ♘d5 17.♕a3 cxb5 18.♘xb7† b4 wins for Black.

16.♘xb7 ♕c7 17.exf6† (17.♕b4† ♔f7) 17...♔f7 18.♗a6 (18.♕b4 ♘d5) 18...♖ab8 is good for Black.

16.0–0–0!? is much more dangerous. Now Black may try:

a) 16...♘d5?! 17.♘e4 with a further division:

a1) 17...♘xe5?? 18.♖xd5 wins for White.

a2) 17...cxb5? 18.exf6† ♘7xf6 19.♖xd5 (19.♘xf6 ♔f7) 19...exd5 20.♕xf6† ♔d7 21.♘c5† ♔c8 22.♕g7 ♖b8 23.♘e6 and White wins.

a3) 17...♔f7 is relatively best, but after

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18.exf6 ♘7xf6 19.♘g5† ♔g8 20.♗c4 ♕d6 White is somewhat better.

b) 16...cxb5!

Black should bravely take the piece and challenge White to do his worst!

17.exf6† ♘xf6 18.♖he1

18.♘f5†? exf5 is nothing.

18...♘bd7 19.♘e4

19.♖xe6†? ♔xe6 20.♖e1† ♘e5 does not work for White.

19...♕b6 20.♖xd7† ♔xd7 21.♘xf6†

21.♕xf6 ♖ad8 defends.

21...♔c7

21...♔c8 22.♖e3 is dangerous.

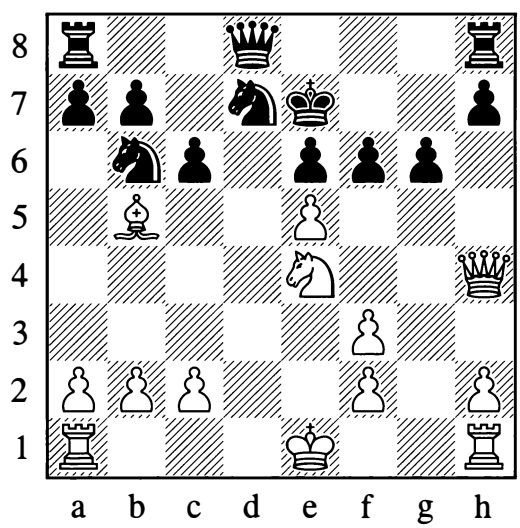
22.♘d5† exd5 23.♖e7† ♔c8!

23...♔d6? 24.♕f6† ♔c5 25.♕c3† ♔d6 26.♕e5† ♔c5 27.♖d7!! ♕c6 28.♕e3† White forces checkmate.

24.♕g4† ♔b8 25.♕f4† ♔c8

The game ends in perpetual check.

The move played in the game is also quite dangerous. Black must react precisely.



16...♔f7!!

16...cxb5? is too risky here. 17.exf6† ♔f7 18.♘g5† ♔e8 (18...♔xf6 19.♕f4† ♔e7 20.♕f7† ♔d6 21.0–0–0† ♔c6 22.♕xe6† ♔c7 23.♕d6† ♔c8 24.♘e6 ♘c4 25.♕d4 ♕e8 26.♖he1 wins for White) 19.f7† ♔e7 20.0–0–0 White has a dangerous initiative for the piece.

17.exf6 ♘xf6 18.♘g5†

18.♖d1? ♘fd5 19.♘g5† ♔g8 20.♗e2 h6 defends.

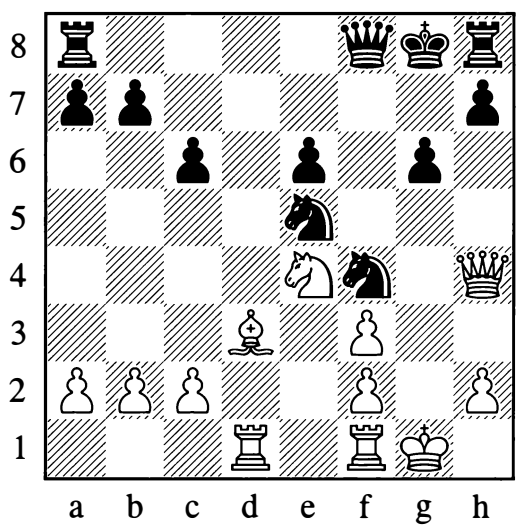
18...♔g8 19.♖d1

19.♗d3! was a better try.

19...♘fd5 20.♕g4 ♕f6

20...cxb5!? was another candidate.

21.♗d3 ♘d7 22.0–0 ♘f4 23.♘e4 ♕f8 24.♕h4 ♘e5



After surviving the delicate dance, without breaking any eggs, Black has been rewarded with a distinct advantage in the middlegame. Unfortunately I was not able to locate the rest of the game, although I am fairly certain that Black went on to win.

It is interesting to note the difference between our attitudes towards the opening used by Black. My opinion was it would be well worth learning the line thoroughly, as it would be very easy for White to misplay his attack in an over-the-board game with the clock ticking. But Honfi never tried it again, despite having opportunities to play it.

As time went on, Honfi's standard of play began to dwindle, although he still produced plenty of good games. The following was perhaps the best example from the later part of his career. He was able to defeat the Canadian Grandmaster Kevin Spraggett, who had previously been a

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world championship candidate. Honfi told me his opponent was very unhappy after the game. He probably did not realize he had faced a decent opponent, but only looked at his fading Elo points. The Canadian grandmaster was comprehensively beaten.

Karoly Honfi – Kevin Spraggett

Vienna 1990

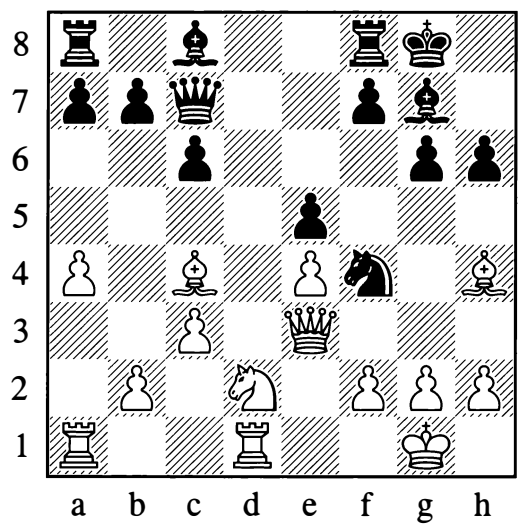
1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.c3 d6 4.♘f3 ♘c6 5.♗c4 ♘f6 6.♕e2 e5 7.dxe5 ♘xe5 8.♘xe5 dxe5 9.♗g5

White has a very small advantage.

9...h6 10.♗h4 c6 11.♘d2 ♕c7

11...♕e7 was safer, intending ...♗e6.

12.0–0 ♘h5 13.♖fd1 ♘f4 14.♕e3 0–0 15.a4



15...♔h8?

The Canadian grandmaster plays too ambitiously. Instead Black should try to equalize with 15...♗e6!? 16.a5 a6.

16.a5 f5?! 17.f3 ♘e6

Alternatively, after 17...♗e6 18.♗xe6 ♘xe6 19.exf5 gxf5 20.♘c4 White has a clear advantage.

18.b4

A good move, although 18.exf5!? gxf5 19.♘b3 may have been even better.

18...f4 19.♕e2 g5 20.♗f2 ♖f6?

Black is still trying to attack when he should be catching up on development.

21.♗b3 ♖g6

The same comment applies here, although by this stage I will refrain from criticizing his individual moves – it is the overall strategy that is flawed.

22.♘c4 g4

By now it was too late for 22...♗d7? as 23.♘b6! axb6 24.axb6 ♕c8 25.♖xa8 ♕xa8 26.♖xd7 wins.

Attempting to prepare the text move with 22...h5 is too slow: 23.♘d6 ♗d7 (23...g4 24.♘f5) 24.♘f5 (24.♕d3!?) 24...g4 25.♖d2 and Black cannot keep his position together.

23.fxg4 ♘g5 24.♔h1

24.♘b6! was even stronger.

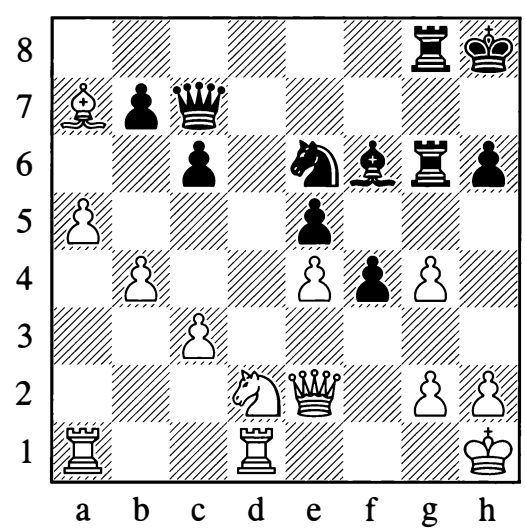
24...♗e6 25.♘d2 ♖g8!?

Black sacrifices a pawn. 25...a6 26.♗xe6 ♘xe6 27.♘c4 was also uninspiring for him.

26.♗xe6 ♘xe6 27.♗xa7

As I mentioned earlier, Honfi liked to take pawns if he saw no compensation for it. Here he was quite correct.

27...♗f6



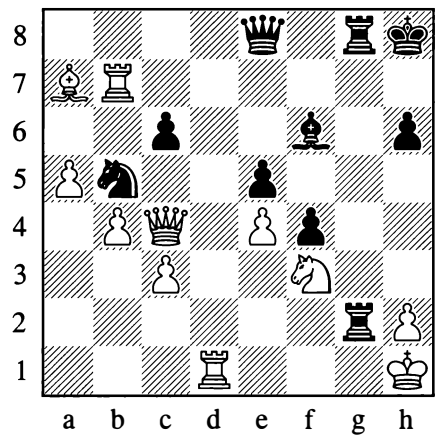
28.♕c4! ♕e7 29.♘f3 ♖xg4 30.♖a2!

White easily defends his weakness without disrupting the harmony of his position.

30...♘c7 31.♖ad2 ♘b5 32.♗c5?!

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I suspect that *Karcsi Bacsi* was in time trouble, as he plays a few uncharacteristic moves. Instead he could have killed the game with 32.♖d7!, e.g. 32...♕e8 33.♖xb7 ♖xg2

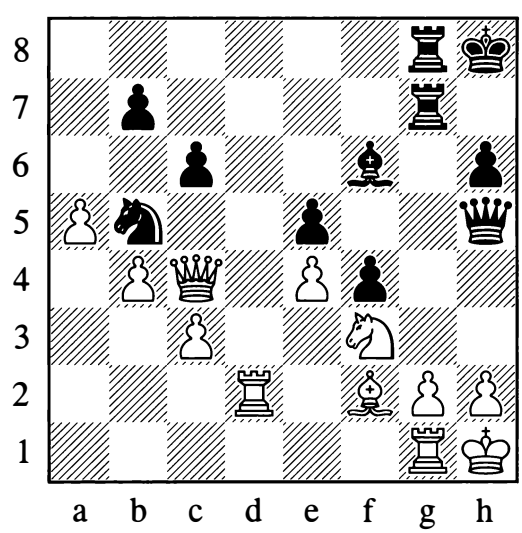


34.♖dd7! ♖2g7 35.♖xg7 ♖xg7 36.♖b8 winning easily.

32...♕e8 33.♖g1 ♖4g7

33...♕h5 34.♖d7 is strong.

34.♗f2 ♕h5



35.♕e6? ♖g6?

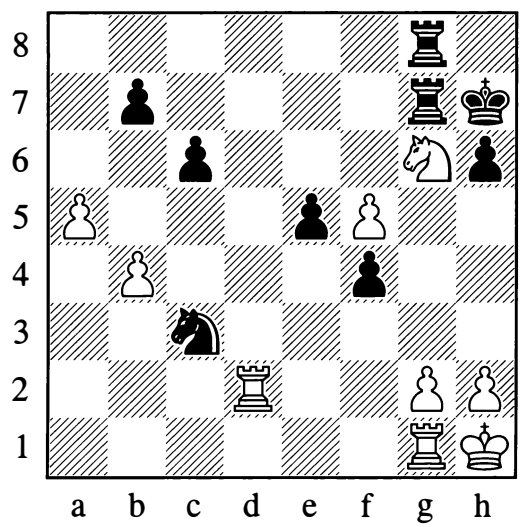
Spraggett misses his chance. 35...♘xc3!! This nice tactical shot would have kept Black in the game. 36.♕xf6 ♘xe4 37.♕h4! (37.♕e6 ♕xf3 38.♕xh6† ♖h7 39.gxf3 ♘xf2† 40.♖xf2 ♖xh6 and Black survives) 37...♕xh4 38.♗xh4 ♘xd2 39.♘xd2 ♖d7 40.♘b3 ♖d5 Black is worse but it is not over yet.

36.♕f5 ♕xf5 37.exf5 ♖6g7 38.♗h4

Again White misses a more clinical continuation: 38.c4! ♘a3 (38...♘c3 39.♗h4) 39.♖d6 ♖f7 40.♖c1 e4 41.♗d4 ♔g7 42.♘e5 wins.

38...♗xh4 39.♘xh4 ♘xc3 40.♘g6† ♔h7

Finally the players have reached move 40. Honfi has not made the most of his position, but he is still in control of the game. White has to work for the win again, but he has enough. Honfi conducts the technical phase of the game well.



41.♖e1! e4 42.♖c2

White restores his material advantage.

42...♘d5 43.♖xe4 ♘e3

43...♖f7 44.♘xf4 ♖xf5 45.g3 does not help.

44.♖d2 ♘xf5 45.♘xf4 ♖f7 46.♔g1

And not 46.g3? ♖xg3!.

46...♖a8 47.♘e6 ♔g8 48.♘d8 ♖g7 49.♔f2 ♔h7 50.♖f4 ♘e7 51.♘e6!

Honfi of course avoids 51.♘xb7?? ♘g6.

51...♘g6 52.♘xg7 ♘xf4 53.♘f5 ♘d5 54.♖d4 ♔g6 55.♘d6 ♖f8† 56.♔e2 b6 57.axb6 ♘xb6 58.♘c4 ♖e8† 59.♔d3 ♘d5 60.♘a5 ♖e3†

60...♖e6 61.♘xc6

61.♔d2 ♖a3 62.♘xc6

1–0

It seems rather early to resign, but Spraggett was evidently of the opinion that further resistance would be futile.

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The following is one of his most interesting correspondence games, which showcases his great resilience and defensive technique in a seemingly hopeless situation.

Karoly Honfi – Oskar Kallinger

Correspondence 1991

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3

Interestingly Honfi had already played the same opponent – just 31 years earlier! On that occasion he tried 2.♘c3 and the game ended in a draw. I always felt that it was a mistake for him never to learn the main lines of the Ruy Lopez with White. When I asked him why he never played them, he simply replied "White has no advantage there as well". By the way, he had quite a good score against 1...e5.

2...♘c6 3.♘c3

This was quite a rare choice for him.

3...♘f6 4.d4 ♗b4!?

And this is rather uncommon.

5.d5 ♘e7 6.♘xe5 0–0 7.♕d4 ♗xc3† 8.bxc3 ♖e8 9.♗g5 ♘f5

9...♘exd5 is well met by 10.0–0–0.

10.exf5 d6 11.f4

11.0–0–0!? deserves attention.

11...dxe5 12.fxe5 ♕xd5 13.0–0–0 ♕xa2

We have reached a critical position. White is better developed, but his king is weak. The text is stronger than 13...♕xd4? 14.♖xd4 c5, when 15.♖d1 ♘e4 16.♗b5 ♖f8 17.♗e7 is very strong, e.g. 17...♘xc3 18.♗xf8 ♘xd1 19.♖xd1 ♔xf8 20.♖d8† ♔e7 21.♖e8#.

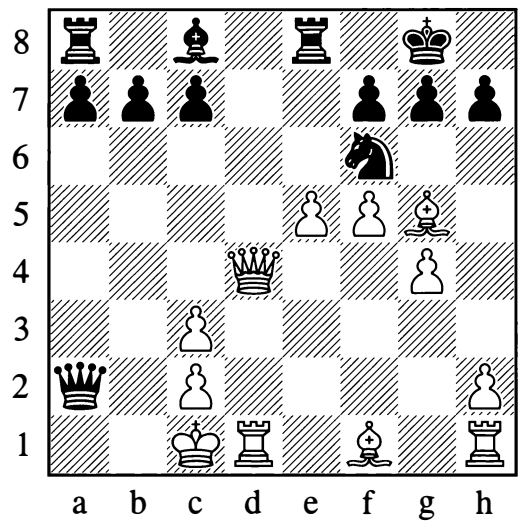
14.g4?

This move is tempting, but bad.

14.exf6? There is no time for this. 14...♗xf5 15.♕f2 (15.♗d3 ♖e2 16.♕b4 ♖xc2†–+) 15...♕a1† 16.♔d2 ♖ad8† leads to a checkmate.

14.♗c4!? is more interesting, when 14...♕a3† 15.♔b1 b5 is unclear.

14.♗d3! This improvement was suggested in *Karcsi Bacsi's* notes to the game. His analysis continued 14...c5 (14...♘d7 15.♖he1 ♕a3† 16.♔b1) 15.♕xc5 ♘d7 16.♕d4 ♘xe5 17.♖he1 and White is a bit better.



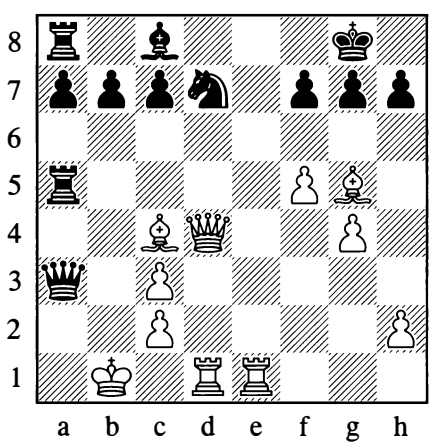
14...♗xf5!!

This is a most beautiful piece sacrifice, after which White is in big trouble. Honfi had been expecting the weaker alternative:

14...♘d7? 15.♗c4 ♕a3† 16.♔b1 ♖xe5?

16...♘b6! has to be played. 17.♗c1 ♕a5 and the fight continues.

17.♖he1 ♖a5



18.♗xf7†!! ♔xf7

18...♔h8 19.c4 ♘f8 20.♗f6!

19.♕c4† ♔f8 20.♖e8†!! ♔xe8 21.♕g8† ♘f8 22.♖d8#

15.gxf5 ♖ad8 16.♕xd8 ♕a1† 17.♔d2 ♖xd8† 18.♗d3 ♖xd3† 19.♔xd3 ♕a6†

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20.♔d2 ♘g4

Black could have won with 20...♘e4† 21.♔e3 h6, or also with 20...♘d5.

21.♖he1 h6 22.♗f4 ♕a4 23.♗g3 ♕d7† 24.♔c1 ♕xf5

White is lost here, however in his notes he started to analyse this position in more detail than the earlier part. He may have anticipated his chances.

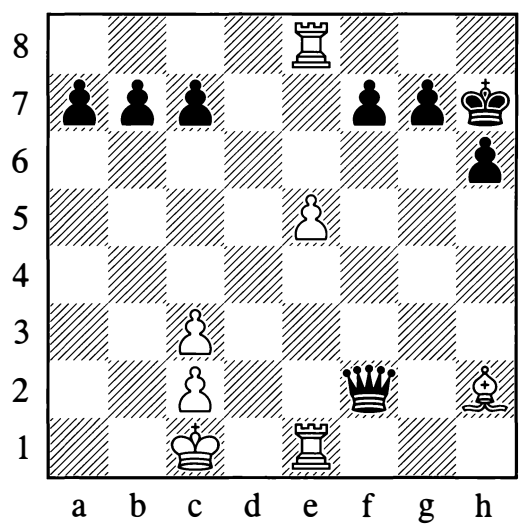
25.♖d8†

25.h3 ♕g5† 26.♔b1 ♘e3 wins for Black, while 25.♖d2 ♕g5 26.♖e4 ♘e3 is also hopeless.

25...♔h7 26.♖e8 ♘xh2?

This needlessly helps White to get rid of his bad minor piece. 26...♕g5† was the simplest, e.g. 27.♔b2 ♘e3 winning.

27.♗xh2 ♕f2



28.♖d1!

In most of the endings when one player has two rooks it is the right idea to double them on the opponent's second rank. When the opponent has five pawns plus his king situated on that rank, then it becomes all the more obvious.

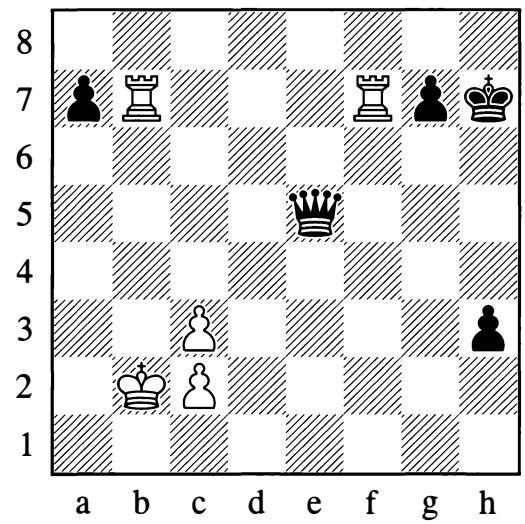
28...♕xh2 29.♖d7 ♕f2?

Black could have won comfortably with 29...♕f4† 30.♔b2 h5 31.♖ee7! ♕g5!, preventing e5-e6 by defending the g7 pawn. (But 31...♔g6? 32.e6! gives White counterplay.)

30.♖ee7 h5 31.♖xf7 ♕e1† 32.♔b2 ♕xe5

It looks like White is hopelessly lost.

33.♖xc7 h4 34.♖xb7 h3



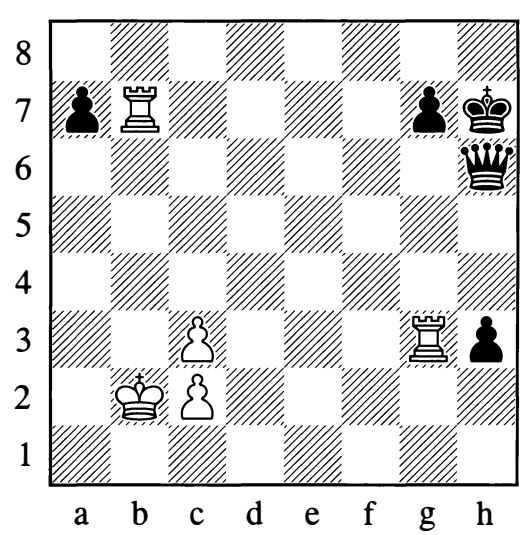
35.♖f3!

White plans to sacrifice one of the rooks for Black's kingside pawns and build a fortress.

35...♕h5

35...h2 36.♖h3† ♔g8 37.♖b4 g5 38.♖d4 threatens ♖d2. 38...♕e8 39.♖b4 (39.♖d2? ♕b5† 40.♔a2 ♕a6† 41.♔b2 ♕b7† wins for Black) 39...♕e2 (39...♕e5 40.♖d4) 40.♖b8† ♔g7 41.♖bh8 White escapes.

36.♖g3 ♕h6



37.♖bxg7†!

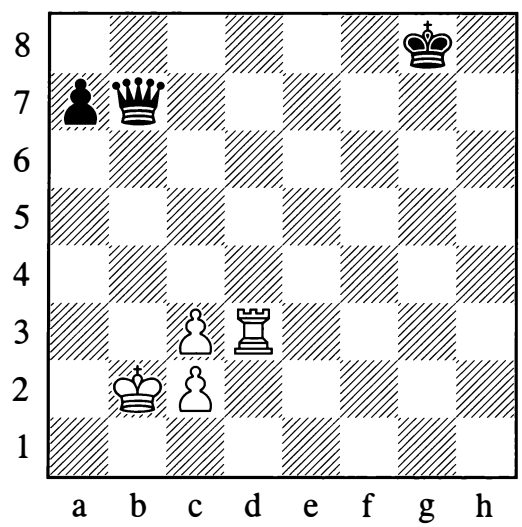
White fulfils his dream, and eliminates the opponent's dangerous pawns.

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37...♕xg7 38.♖xh3† ♔g8 39.♖d3

White has good chances to build a fortress, but he still has to be careful. The slightly paradoxical key to success is that he must lose his own c3-pawn. The reason is that this pawn is currently limiting the mobility of his rook.

39...♕b7†



40.♔c1!

White should prevent the enemy queen from reaching the c4-square. The inferior 40.♔a2? allows 40...♕a6† 41.♔b2 ♕b5† 42.♔a2 (42.♔a1 ♕c4 43.♖d8† White cannot take the a7-pawn. 43...♔g7 44.♖d7† ♔f6 45.♖xa7? ♕xc3† 46.♔b1 ♕e1† wins the rook soon.) 42...♕c4† 43.♔b2 a5 44.♖d4 ♕b5† 45.♔a2 a4 It is hard to tell whether White can draw – it is certainly not an easy defence.

40...a5

The best try. Instead after 40...♕a6 41.c4 ♕a1† 42.♔d2 a5 43.c5 a4 44.c6 ♕e5 45.♔c1 ♕a1† 46.♔d2 Black cannot make progress.

41.c4 ♕b4

Black has nothing to gain from allowing the c4-pawn to live. For instance, after 41...a4 42.c5 ♕b4 (42...♕b5 43.c6) 43.c6 a3 44.c7 ♕e1† 45.♖d1 ♕e3† 46.♖d2 White holds.

42.♖b3 ♕xc4 43.♔b2 a4 44.♖d3

½–½

One would have expected Black to play on for a while, but Kallinger evidently trusted his opponent's defensive technique.

Let's take a few moments to consider the final position. Over the board such a strong grandmaster as Nunn has lost the same endgame to Timman, so holding the draw is certainly not a trivial matter. The rook must move between a3 and d3, and the king must always prevent the enemy queen from infiltrating to c1. For an example of successful defence, I recommend the reader investigates the game Averbakh – Bondarevsky, Moscow 1948.

It is interesting that *Karcsi Bacsi* told me that as a young player he spent so much time on theoretical endgames and it was not worth it as they did not occur in his games. My own experience has been the opposite of his. In my opinion it always pays off. And even if a certain endgame never actually arises, it can still be useful to know it, as this can help you to determine whether or not to exchange certain pieces at an earlier stage. My pupils often reached theoretical positions. Zoltan Gyimesi checkmated with a lone knight against an a-pawn and the king. Leko reached theoretical positions in his matches against two world champions, Khalifman and Kramnik. I taught him those particular positions when he was very young. All in all, *Karcsi Bacsi* was a decent endgame player even if he did not know it himself.

He had a quality as a trainer that I would like to have as well. He was not openly in love with the game of chess, but he was able to make his pupils love chess. I was very successful in teaching my pupils how to play many aspects of chess, but I cannot claim to have made my pupils fall in love with the game. *Karcsi Bacsi* could do that.

I did not use all of the knowledge I obtained from him in my own games, but I have passed

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much of it on to my pupils. He contributed a lot to my own success as a trainer. One of my attributes as a trainer is that I know many openings, therefore I can teach a repertoire according to the style of each individual pupil. To take one example, my most famous pupil Peter Leko became a grandmaster using the Grünfeld, which I worked on so much with Honfi.

I would like to show another instructive correspondence game.

Rolf Ertl – Karoly Honfi

Correspondence 1991

1.e4 ♘f6 2.e5 ♘d5 3.d4 d6 4.♘f3 ♘b6 5.a4

The point of this move, in conjunction with White's next, is to take away the c6-square from the knight. On the other hand it fixes White's queenside structure.

5...a5 6.♗b5† c6

6...♗d7?! 7.e6! is problematic for Black.

7.♗e2

One of his previous games had continued 7.♗d3 ♗g4 8.h3 (8.exd6!) 8...♗xf3 9.♕xf3 dxe5 10.dxe5 e6 11.0–0 ♘8d7 12.♕g3 ♕c7 13.♖e1 g6 14.♘c3 ♗g7 15.f4 0–0 16.♗e3 ♘d5 17.♘xd5 cxd5 18.♕f2 b6 Black was a bit better and went on to win, Sabel – Honfi, corr. 1987.

7...dxe5 8.♘xe5 g6

This was a novelty at the time.

9.0–0 ♗g7 10.♗f4 0–0 11.c3

Now the disadvantage of White's fifth move can be seen; 11.c4 would give up the b4-square.

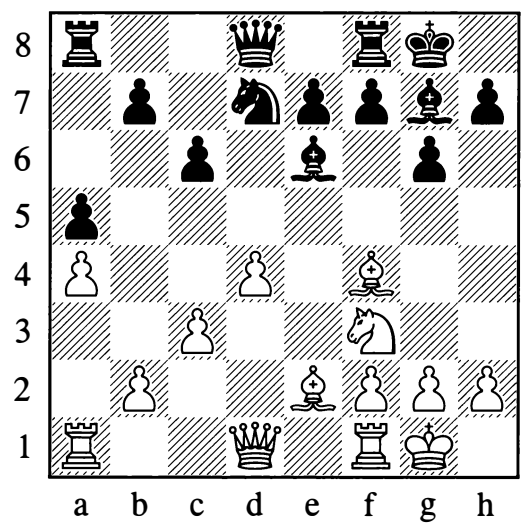
11...♗e6 12.♘d2 ♘8d7 13.♘xd7

13.♘ef3 ♗g4 followed by ...♖e8 and ...e5 gives Black a pleasant game.

13...♘xd7!

This is the right recapture. Black gives up the idea of putting on pressure on the a4-pawn, and seemingly retreats the knight to a passive position. However, it is important to control the e5-square, as it could become a strong outpost for the white pieces. And we will see that Honfi has planned an interesting regrouping of the other pieces.

14.♘f3



14...♗d5!

This is a very deep move. I thought about it quite a few times, and I admit that for a long time I did not understand Black's plan. The magician was at work...

15.♕d2 ♕b6! 16.♗e3 ♖fd8

The plan gradually unfolds. Black wants to attack the pawn on d4. That is why the bishop went to d5 – to eliminate an important defender at the right moment.

17.c4?

White completely misses the point of his opponent's play. It is true that ...c5 was coming anyway, with a comfortable game for Black. In that case the reply dxc5 would give up the centre, while attempting to maintain the pawn on d4 could result in an isolani.

17...♗xf3 18.♗xf3 c5! 19.dxc5?

19.d5 was necessary, but White probably believed that he had to "open the game for his bishops". Such principles are undoubtedly useful as a general guide, but should not be followed blindly.

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19...♘xc5

By this time the rabbit has been well and truly pulled out of the hat. Five moves after the mysterious bishop move, Black's strategy has paid off more handsomely than he could have wished for.

20.♕c2?

20.♗xc5 was essential, when White could still hope to grovel for a draw in a clearly worse position.

20...♗d4!

The game is virtually decided; the c5-knight completely dominates the feeble light-squared bishop.

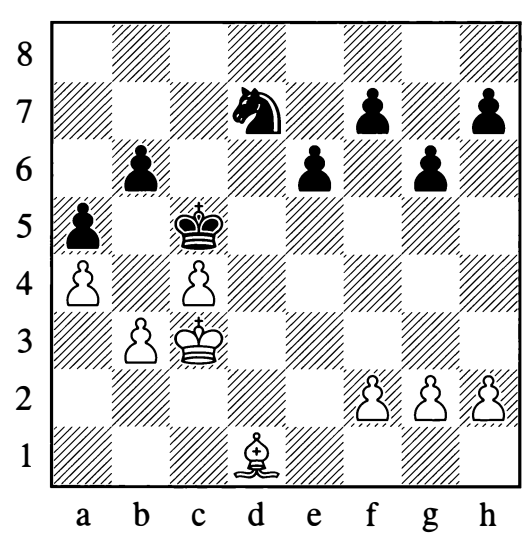
21.♗xd4 ♖xd4 22.♖ad1 ♖ad8 23.♗d5 ♖xd1 24.♖xd1 e6 25.♗f3 ♖xd1† 26.♗xd1 ♕d6

Black is happy to continue exchanging pieces, knowing that the minor piece endgame should be a comfortable win.

27.♗f3 ♕d3 28.♕xd3 ♘xd3 29.b3

29.♗xb7 ♔f8! prevents the c-pawn from becoming dangerous, while the b-pawn will not run away.

29...b6 30.♗e4 ♘c5 31.♗c2 ♔f8 32.♔f1 ♔e7 33.♔e2 ♔d6 34.♔d2 ♘d7 35.♔c3 ♔c5 36.♗d1



36...e5

Black's king is optimally placed, so the time has come to advance his pawn majority.

37.♗f3 f5 38.♗b7 ♘f6 39.h3 h5 40.g3 g5

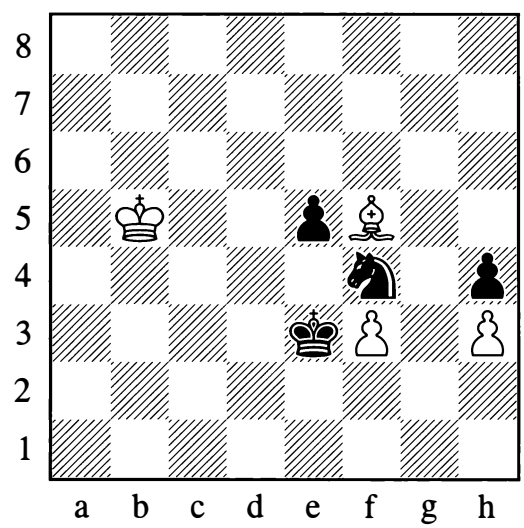
41.♔d3

41.♗c8 ♘e4† 42.♔c2 f4 43.gxf4 exf4 44.f3 ♘d6 45.♗e6 ♔d4 wins for Black.

41...♔b4 42.♗c8 ♔xb3 43.♗xf5 h4 44.gxh4 gxh4 45.f3 ♔xa4 46.c5

46.♔c3 ♔a3 47.c5 bxc5 48.♔c4 ♔b2 49.♔xc5 a4 50.♔d6 a3 51.♗e6 e4 wins.

46...♔b5 47.cxb6 ♔xb6 48.♔c4 ♔c6 49.♗c2 ♘h5 50.♗e4† ♔d6 51.♔b5 ♘f4 52.♗f5 ♔d5 53.♔xa5 ♔d4 54.♔b5 ♔e3



0–1

White resigned here. The finish might have been 55.♗g4 ♘xh3! 56.♗xh3 ♔xf3 57.♔c4 e4 58.♔d4 e3 59.♔d3 e2 60.♗g4† ♔f2 61.♗xe2 h3 and Black promotes.

This was far from the most difficult game of his career, but the way he achieved and exploited his positional advantage was very instructive.

The next game is one that we also analysed quite a lot. It is strange, but when we were analysing at the time of the game, it appeared to me to be less spectacular then when I look at it now. I remember we thought for a while that it would be a draw. *Karcsi Bacsi* did not mention at the time, but according to the database he introduced an important novelty which, at the time of writing, has been repeated approximately 50 times. I wonder whether he anticipated that it would catch on.

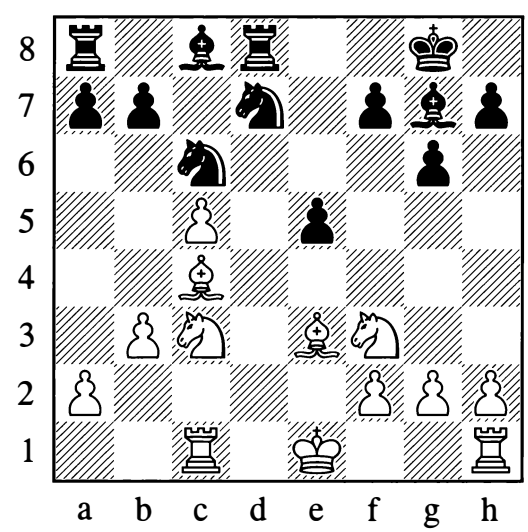
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Interestingly, he never mentioned that his opponent, won the 1985-92 World Correspondence Championship. According to my understanding, he was thus the reigning champion at the time this game was played.

Grigory Sanakoev – Karoly Honfi

Correspondence 1993-1995

1.e4 ♘f6 2.e5 ♘d5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 ♘b6 5.exd6 cxd6 6.♘c3 g6 7.♗e3 ♗g7 8.♖c1 0–0 9.b3 e5 10.dxe5 dxe5 11.♕xd8 ♖xd8 12.c5 ♘6d7 13.♗c4 ♘c6 14.♘f3



14...♘a5!?

According to my database this is Honfi's novelty.

15.♗g5

After 15.♗e2 the safest reply is probably 15...♘c6. I wonder whether against the reigning world champion he would have settled for a draw with Black. Champions however take risks. Sanakoev explains this in his book *World Champion at the third Attempt*. He is very much right.

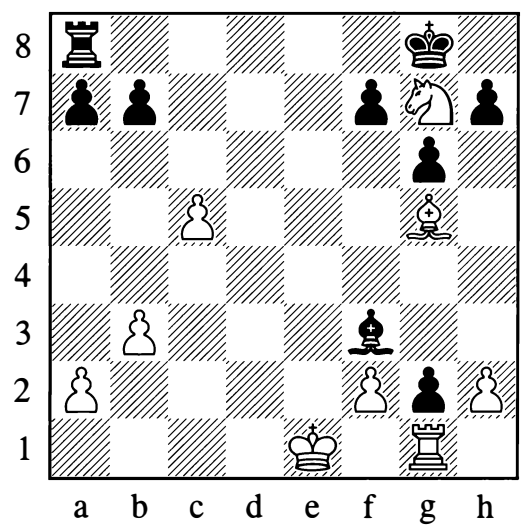
15...♖e8

15...♖f8!? In 1995 Zoltan Varga tried this move against Honfi with Black. I suppose he independently also found the 'novelty' on the previous move. The game continued 16.♗e7 ♘xc4 17.♗xf8 (Sanakoev suggested 17.bxc4!? with a small advantage for White) 17...♔xf8 18.bxc4 ♘xc5 19.0–0 e4 20.♘g5 ♘d3 Here *Karcsi Bacsi* typically (but incorrectly) spurned the repetition and on this occasion went on to lose, Honfi – Varga, Budapest 1995.

16.♘b5

This leads to a very sharp, forcing sequence.

16...e4 17.♘c7 exf3† 18.♘xe8 fxg2 19.♖g1 ♘xc4 20.♖xc4 ♘e5 21.♖c3 ♗g4 22.♘xg7 ♘f3† 23.♖xf3 ♗xf3



24.♗f6

According to Sanakoev they both anticipated this position as far back as move 15! A remarkable position has occurred. White is a piece up. His extra piece is the trapped, but securely defended, knight on g7, while Black has a very powerful defended pawn on g2. Both are potential match-winners, yet both are also in danger of falling.

24...♖c8 25.♔d2 ♖xc5 26.♗d4 ♖d5 27.♔e3 ♔f8 28.h4 h5 29.b4

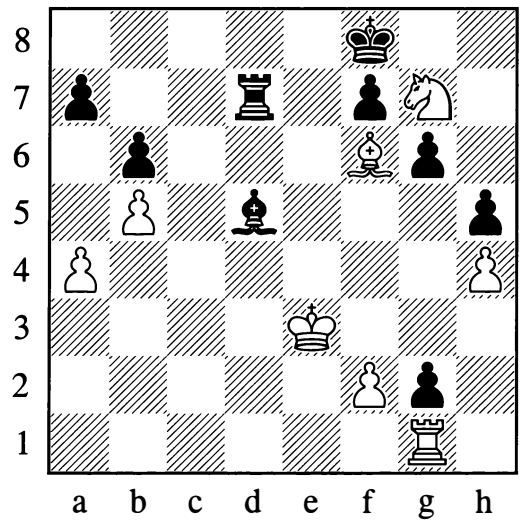
29.♗c3 would have been met by 29...a5 – but not 29...♖d1? because 30.♗e1! wins.

29...b6 30.a4

30.♖c1 ♖xd4 31.♔xd4 ♗e2 32.♖g1 ♗f1 33.♘xh5 gxh5 34.♔e5 ♔g7 35.♔f5 f6 36.f4 (36.♔e6 ♔g6) 36...♔f7 The position is equal according to Sanakoev.

30...♖d7 31.b5 ♗d5 32.♗f6

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32...♖d6!

This is the safest way to hold the position.

32...♖c7

This should also be sufficient, although the variations are a bit more complicated. Sanakoev shows an amazing line, which he must have analysed during the game. My impression is that Black can deviate and stay in the game.

33.♖d1 ♖c8 34.♔f4

Black now has a choice:

a) 34...♗b3!? is an interesting move which could be considered.

b) 34...♖c4†

Sanakoev looks at this move only. He analyses the following pretty line.

35.♔g5 ♖g4†

35...g1=♕† 36.♖xg1 ♖g4† 37.♖xg4 hxg4 38.♔xg4 wins for White.

36.♔h6 g1=♕

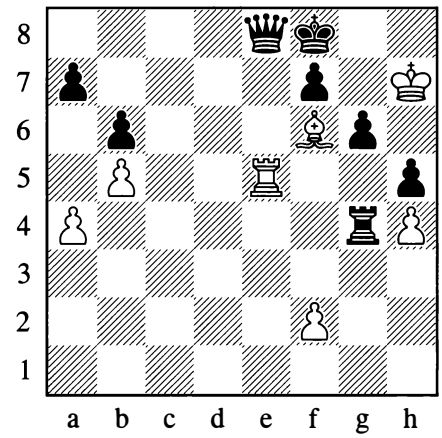
36...♖f4 37.♖xd5 ♖xf6 38.♖e5 g5† 39.♔h7 White wins with this spectacular mating net.

37.♖xd5 ♕c1† 38.♔h7 ♕c8?!

Better is 38...♕c7 39.♗e5 ♕e7 40.♗d6 ♕xd6 41.♖xd6 ♖xh4 42.♖d3 and White can still press.

39.♖e5 ♕d7 40.♘e8 ♕xe8?

This allows a pretty mate, although even after the superior 40...♕e6 41.♖xe6 fxe6 42.♘d6 White has excellent winning chances.



41.♗g7#

c) 34...♖c2!

This should enable Black to survive.

35.f3

After 35.♔g3 ♖a2 36.♔h2 ♖xf2 Black is safe.

35...♔g8

35...♖d2?? 36.♖e1 ♔g8 37.♖e8† ♔h7 38.♘e6 g5† 39.hxg5 fxe6 (39...g1=♕ 40.♖h8† ♔g6 41.♘f8#) 40.♖e7† ♔g8 41.g6 e5† 42.♔f5 and White wins.

36.♔g3 ♖d2 37.♖g1

I think Black can hold after either 37...♖d3 or 37...♗b3.

33.♗b2 ♖d7

½–½

Here they agreed a draw. Despite his material advantage White cannot make any real progress, e.g. 34.f4 would be met by 34...f6! when Black has no problems at all. It is curious that neither of the 'prisoners' on g7 and g2 have moved yet, but at the same time they were the key pieces!

When I bought and read Sanakoev's very interesting book, I noticed he selected only a very small number of draws that he considered worthy of inclusion. This game was one of them.

Karcsi Bacsi's approach to correspondence play was exactly the same as to the over-the-board game: he was an uncompromising player who always aimed for active piece play. He paid less attention to his pawn structure, although, as I

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have already mentioned, he did not like to sacrifice material unless he saw certain compensation. He liked that time trouble does not exist in correspondence chess.

Although he was a respectable correspondence player, he never achieved the grandmaster title in this domain either. In fact he never even came close to achieving a norm. Perhaps it is even harder to do it in correspondence than in over-the-board games. Maybe his style was also a problem. Over the board, his special fighting spirit could be a real asset, and his opponents were often unable to cope with the unusual problems caused by his creative attacking style. But in correspondence, the opponents had enough time to work everything out and find the small hole in his idea.

Ivan Bottlik helped me to find his correspondence results; he found 17 correspondence tournaments where he played. These included three Olympiad finals and one individual world championship semi-final. According to his son Gyorgy, he stopped playing correspondence chess because of the impact of computers.

Honfi was quite careful with money, as was true of almost everyone of his generation, who were roughly ten years old at the start of World War II. However, he was willing to spend money on a good television set, a tape recorder, and other such technological items that would last for many years. Despite this, he would probably not have liked the way that computers have changed the game of chess. For example, towards the end of his career he told me he suspected that some of his opponents were cheating.

The endgame of life

Having known *Karcsi Bacsi* as well as I did, my memories are strongly influenced by the last six months of his life. In the end the dreadful illness of stomach cancer defeated him. He took the painful blows of hardship with exceptional decorum and dignity.

During the last team championship of 1995, he had to go to a hospital for an investigation, due to stomach pains. Soon after, they diagnosed him with stomach cancer. He endured the everyday suffering with no complaints. I travelled from Kecskemet to Budapest every week to visit him. I hope it helped in some small way to ease the pain of what he had to go through. He was treated in three different hospitals. In the first one somebody from the same room jumped out the window from the fourth floor to commit suicide because he was unable to stand the pain. After the first operation, when the doctor told him he could eat whatever he wished, he understood that the doctors were unable to help him. He did not give up hope, and tried alternative therapies. During the first few months he was allowed to go home from time to time. In an Austrian team championship he still beat an international master. But he was rapidly losing weight.

According to Ervin Haag, his exceptional spiritual power – not only his strong religious belief, but also yoga – helped him to survive as long as he did. The moment I understood he had given up hope of recovering was when I told him we were going to look at a particular line, and he said, "Tibi, we are never going to look at this."

Something like two weeks before his death I visited him in the hospital. I took a magnetic set with me to play some chess. But because of all the medical tubes, he was unable to lie in a position

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that would allow him to see the board. "Tibi, can't you come back later in the afternoon, by that time they take out these pipes from my body?"

I was already there at the first minute of the visiting hours. We started to analyse a very sharp position of the Two Knights Defence. He was already very thin and physically weak. He had not played any chess for a good while, and I was worried that the analysis session would be embarrassing because of his weak moves. And indeed the beginning was really embarrassing, for a different reason: he kept tricking me, he still analysed with great strength! I really had to get myself together to elevate myself to his level. I told him about a line of the Spanish, 3...♘f6 4.0–0 ♗c5, which I expected to become fashionable. "I brought this variation into fashion quite a few times!" he answered. Sadly he did not live long enough to see Leko using his line in Linares – he would have been very happy to see his variations working there as well. Later I played this line a few times in correspondence chess. If by a miracle we should meet again we could talk for days only about developments that occurred in the lines we looked at together.

His last non-chess advice to me was: "Tibi, take care of yourself – it is very bad to die like this!"

Even in his terminal condition, he still thought about helping.

Testimonials

Lajos Portisch
Eight-time World Championship Candidate; Olympiad winner, Buenos Aires 1978; eight-time Hungarian champion:

> "I cannot say that we were friends, but I think we respected each other. When we were abroad, very often we went together to a Catholic church on Sunday, even if there was a game in the afternoon. He's been buried in a grave close to my parents. When I go to that cemetery to visit my parents' grave, I also stop sometimes for a while to say 'hello' to him with a short prayer."

Ferenc Portisch
Silver medallist in Hungarian Championship:

> "Honfi was not only a strong player but also a very nice person as well. He always fought for a win and never compromised over the board. I have played him many times and I liked him very much, both as a chess player and a friend."

Robert Hübner
Three-time World Championship candidate:

> "I first met Karoly Honfi in 1965, when I was just a lad, with no experience of life. In spite of that, he received my immature utterances with friendliness and attentiveness. He had a good command of German. Thereafter, when I encountered him at tournaments, he demonstrated the same friendly and balanced nature, and he discussed everything with interest. Once, when

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I visited Budapest, he invited me to his home; it was warm and unpretentious. He made every effort to ensure that I felt at home in this foreign city. He had a simple and modest nature; he never imposed and his company was never burdensome. Moreover, he was very generous. It is with warmth and gratitude that I reflect on the many pleasant occasions that I spent with Karoly Honfi."

Ervin Haag

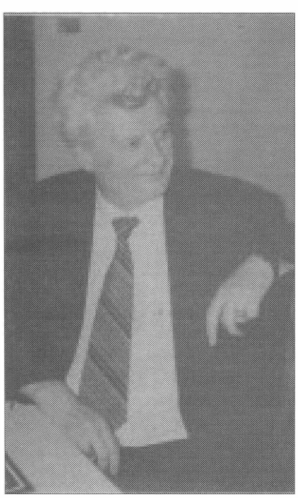
International Master, Hungarian Championship silver and bronze medallist, co-winner (with Boleslavsky) of the strong Asztalos Memorial tournament in 1961, and Honfi's closest friend:

"I had a 35-year long friendship with Karoly Honfi. During that time I experienced both his superlative human qualities and his exceptional characteristics as a chessplayer. He adopted the morals of a knight in his private life and also in his chess career. He looked like a knight as well! He was stable psychologically; he was cheerful and free of vengeful behaviour unless he was faced with extremely rude behaviour.

On one occasion he was promised a place in the Olympic team and yet eventually he was not included. On another occasion, as captain of his club, one of my decisions affected his tournament performance when he was close to becoming a grandmaster. In both cases he demonstrated his forgiving nature.

Honfi was a fighter and an attacking player, and in some openings he had his own pet lines; he worked hard on them. In the first 66 volumes of *Informant* nearly 200 of his analyses were published. That speaks for itself.

He was a very fair competitor – organizers liked to invite him to participate. During the 10 year period that we were rivals over the board our friendship remained firm, in fact we often prepared together for some events. We also played together for the national correspondence team.



Honfi was a decent player but he was an even better trainer; I can't imagine anyone better. He was a witty lecturer who presented exemplary games, showed studies and played blitz as well. He prepared seriously for every occasion – maybe he even invested too much effort on his lectures. Perhaps he should have directed that energy into his own chess.

Karoly Honfi was one of the few people one could rightfully look up to."

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Chapter 6 Ashot Nadanian

Kasparov's 'Half-Brother'



The Author (left) with Ashot Nadanian

Do not misinterpret the chapter title – I am not referring to a long-lost relative of the 13th World Champion, although the personality featured in the present chapter was also raised in Baku. Both his parents were Armenian, whereas Garry is half Armenian. But the reason I call them half-brothers in chess is different: they both had the same junior trainer in Alexander Shakarov. I will say no more about Shakarov here, as the whole of Chapter 4 was devoted to him (beginning on page 113). Instead, without further ado, let me introduce his second best pupil: Ashot Nadanian.

I first met Ashot in Singapore when we were both working as trainers for the company 'Intchess Asia'. We had long walks in Singapore and we got closer to each other. His first language is Russian, but he speaks to me in a special dialect. He calls it Hungarian-Russian, and sometimes we talked so long he had difficulty in returning to his normal Russian...

Ashot reads a lot of chess books and he gave me some very useful advice. After I stopped working in Singapore, we still talked on the internet. Slowly our relationship has grown, I believe into a friendship. I wanted to interview him in the same way I had managed with other personalities in this book, but he said he would not enjoy the experience.

Before introducing his chess, here are a few general words about him. He was born in 1972 and is now married with one small beloved daughter. By the way, even my children know him just a little, but that came about by an amusing coincidence. From time to time I have to travel for several months to work, and I am away from my family. My children, without knowing who I was

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with, selected a picture with Ashot and myself to hang on the wall. So even they can recognize him quite well...

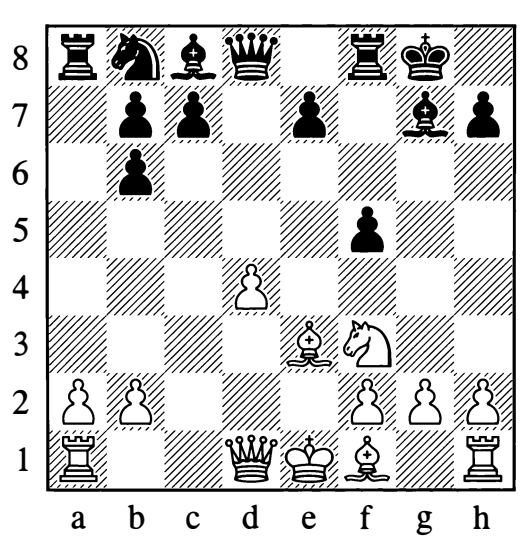
My choice of the expression 'half-brother' was not merely a joke. A trainer always leaves his imprint on his pupils, and one of the central themes of this book has been to pay the proper respect and recognition to the trainers who have been responsible for developing some of the world's best players. In the case of Nadanian, one can see definite parallels between his own playing style and that of Kasparov. I believe that these similarities can at least partially be traced back to Shakarov's influence.

Let me begin with a particularly striking example to showcase Ashot's brilliant attacking play. I must stress that this was only an informal blitz game, and should be treated as such. At the same time, in a way it makes the achievement even more impressive, as he was able to find such wonderful ideas in very little time. His opponent is a former Russian champion.

Ashot Nadanian – Konstantin Sakaev

Internet (blitz) 2005

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.♘a4 ♗g7 6.e4 ♘b6 7.♗e3 0–0 8.♘f3 f5 9.exf5 gxf5 10.♘xb6 axb6



11.♗c4†

This is a natural developing move.

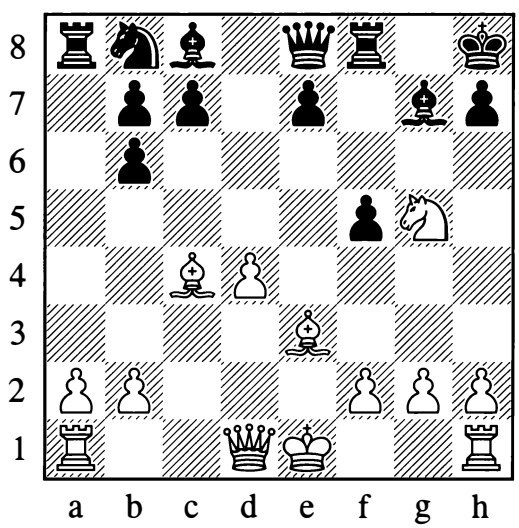
11...♔h8?

The check should have been blocked by the pawn. The punishment is swift and deadly.

12.♘g5!

This opens the way for the queen to reach the Mecca of such positions – the beloved h-file!

12...♕e8



13.♗f7!!

Black may have thought that he had prevented the queen from reaching h5.

13...♖xf7 14.♕h5

When we wrote the *Kasparov's Fighting Chess* books (1993–1998 and 1999–2005), I realized how often Garry moved his rook's pawns and how often he played on the a- and h-files. We will see the same traits again and again in Ashot's games. Here it is not the pawns, but the pieces that perform amazing feats on the edge of the board. So far White has played 5.♘a4!? in the opening, and now his queen joins the action on the h-file.

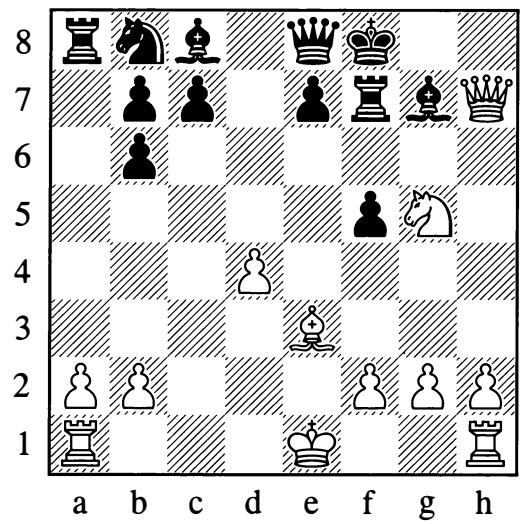
14...♔g8

14...♗f6 was objectively best, but it just leads to a losing endgame: 15.♘xf7† ♔g7 16.♕h6† ♔g8 17.♘g5 ♕g6 18.♕xg6† hxg6 and Black has nothing for the exchange. The text loses more quickly, but it was the more pragmatic

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decision, as it forced White to find some great moves. Fortunately for us, Ashot rose to the challenge and created a real gem.

15.♕xh7† ♔f8



16.♘e6†!!

This is a truly ferocious shot.

16...♗xe6 17.♗h6!

1–0

Black resigned, as mate is unavoidable. And, of course, it occurs on the h-file!

As it happens, the Russian grandmaster has authored a book entitled *How to get an Edge against the Grünfeld*. Thus the above game reveals that Ashot is a kind person. He likes to help people, and here he helped Sakaev. If Konstantin decides to update his book and produce a second edition, he will now be able to include an excellent illustrative game!

My favourite adage is that everything has a good and a bad side...

After reviewing the above game, some readers are probably thinking, "Okay, it was a beautiful attack, but this was still just a blitz game. It is quite another matter to succeed with this 'hacking' style against a strong Grandmaster, when playing at classical time limits."

That is a perfectly valid point, which can be best answered by the following game, played at a classical time limit against a member of China's Olympiad team.

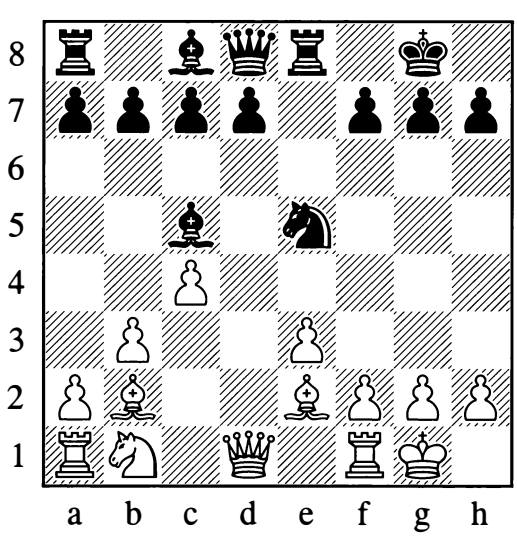
Wu Shaobin – Ashot Nadanian

Singapore 2006

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e5

Nadanian received a similar chess education to that of Kasparov, although he did not become the same awesome power in the opening (or other phases of the game). Garry never played any openings with a questionable reputation, such as the Budapest Gambit. Ashot is different, in that he likes to go against the conventional wisdom. Later we will see some of the highly imaginative ideas that he has invented.

3.dxe5 ♘g4 4.♘f3 ♗c5 5.e3 ♘c6 6.♗e2 ♘cxe5 7.♘xe5 ♘xe5 8.0–0 0–0 9.b3 ♖e8 10.♗b2



10...a5!?

Once again we see Nadanian playing on the edge of the board. I should emphasize that the plan is well-known in this position, rather than being his own concept.

11.♘c3 ♖a6!

This is the idea; Black wants to swing the rook into an attacking position before moving his d-pawn.

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12.♘e4 ♗a7 13.♘g3 ♕h4

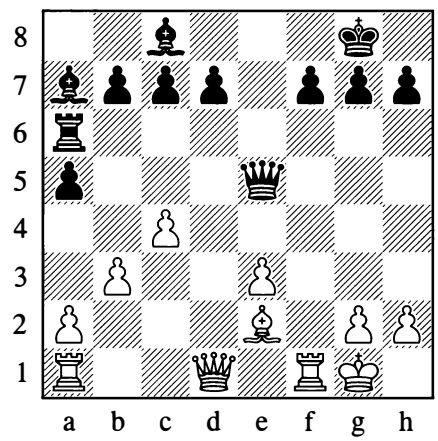
The queen goes to the edge as well.

14.♘f5 ♕g5!?

This was a novelty. 14...♕e4 had been played in other games.

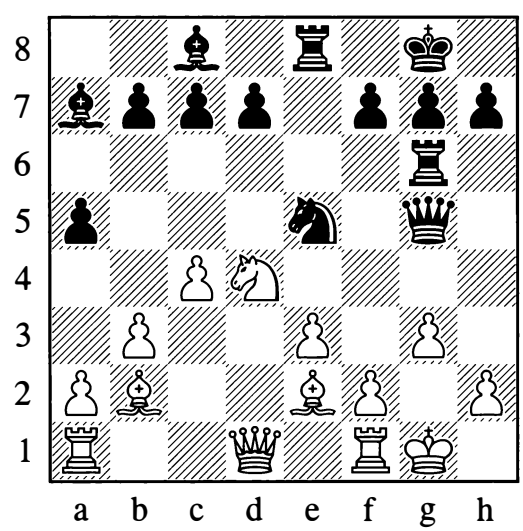
15.♘d4

Ashot's last move offered a Petrosian-like exchange sacrifice, which White quite rightly declined. After 15.♗xe5 ♖xe5 (15...♕xf5? 16.♗xc7) 16.f4 ♕xf5 17.fxe5 ♕xe5



Black has lovely play for the exchange.

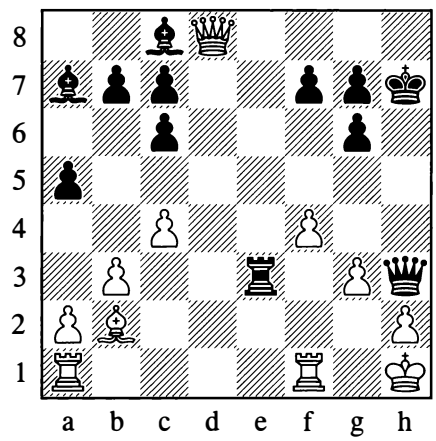
15...♖g6 16.g3



16...d5?!

This is a highly imaginative move, although objectively it is flawed. Black is playing extremely ambitiously and aggressively, not unlike Kasparov himself.

16...♕h6!? was objectively stronger, when play might continue as follows: 17.f4 ♘c6 18.♗d3 (18.♕d2!?) 18...♖xe3! 19.♗xg6 hxg6 (Black can get compensation for the exchange with 19...♕xg6!? as well) 20.♔h1 ♕h3 21.♘xc6 dxc6 22.♕d8† ♔h7

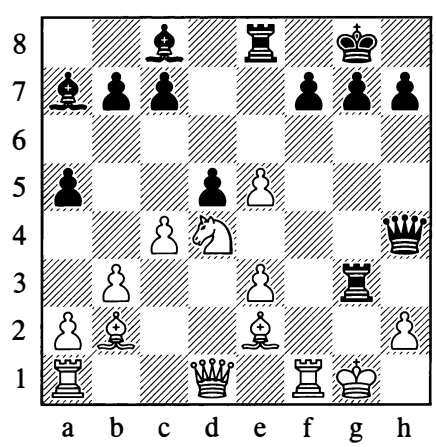


23.♕f8! f6 24.♗xf6! White forces a perpetual check. 24...gxf6 25.♕f7† ♔h6 26.♕f8† The game ends in a draw.

17.cxd5?

This loses time. Better was 17.♘b5! White can take the d5-pawn under better circumstances than in the game. 17...♗b6 18.c5! ♗xc5 19.♘xc7 ♖e7 20.♘xd5 ♖d7 21.e4 Black does not have full compensation for the pawn.

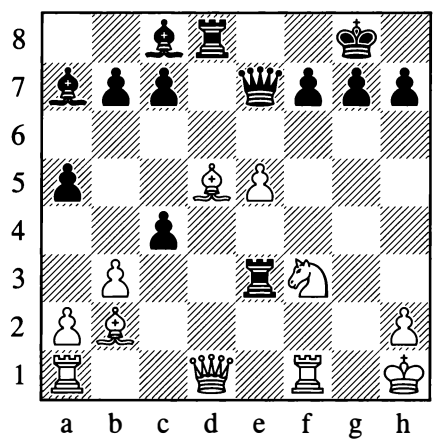
White could also have obtained an advantage with the combative 17.f4!? ♕h4 18.fxe5 ♖xg3†.



19.♔h1! White wants more than a perpetual, and his desire is justified. 19...♖xe3 (19...♖xe5?

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20.♘f3) 20.♗f3! It is very hard to find the coming sequence of five precise moves. (20.♘f3? ♕e4 21.♖f2 ♗g4 22.♔g2 d4! 23.♗c1 d3! 24.♗xe3 ♕xe3 25.♕e1 dxe2 26.♕xe2 ♕h6 and Black wins) 20...dxc4 21.♗d5! ♖d8 22.♘f3! ♕e7



23.♗a3!! This spectacular move is the hardest to find in the sequence. 23...c5 24.♕c1! White started to attack the f7-pawn, followed by the queen and finally hits the e3-rook. 24...♖xd5 25.♕xe3 ♖d3 26.♕e2 Black has insufficient play for a rook.

17...♗h3!

Black brings his last dormant piece into action.

18.♖e1

Not 18.♘b5? ♗xe3! (18...♗xf1? 19.♕xf1+–) 19.fxe3 ♕xe3† 20.♔h1 ♘g4 and Black wins.

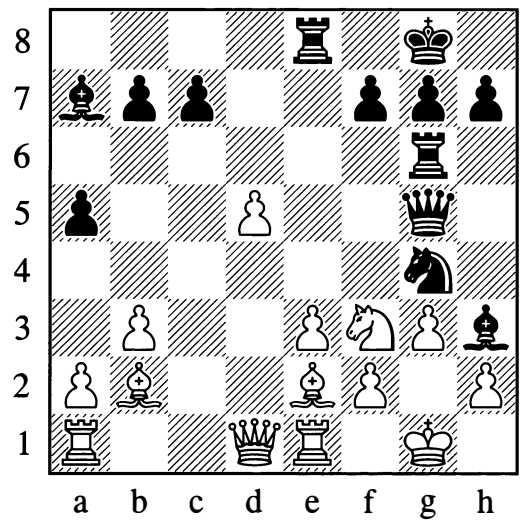
18...♘g4

It is remarkable how much Black likes to play with pieces; after 18 moves he has six remaining pawns, and only the a-pawn has left his second rank.

19.♘f3?

White feels he needs to bring a minor piece closer to his king, but unfortunately for him he chooses the wrong one.

Better was 19.♗f3! h5 when Black has compensation for the pawn, but any result would be possible.

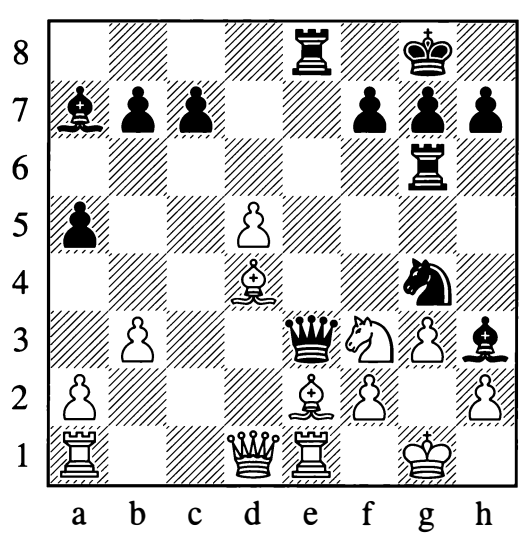


19...♕xe3!

This shows Kasparov-like aggression and ingenuity. 19...♘xf2!? is nice as well, but is enough only for an equal endgame. 20.♘xg5 ♘xd1 21.♗d4 ♗xd4 22.exd4 ♖xg5 23.♖axd1 ♔f8 (and not 23...♖xd5? 24.♗g4!+–) 24.♗f3 The position is balanced.

20.♗d4!

White finds the only move. He may well have anticipated Black's last move, thinking that the text would enable him to ease the pressure through exchanges. But we will see that the excitement is only just beginning...



20...♕xf2†!!

This is a really brilliant idea.

21.♗xf2 ♗xf2†

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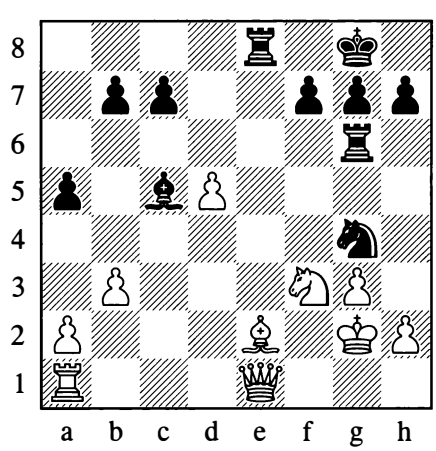
This looks like the natural way to take. In reality, neither option is objectively better than the other. 21...♘xf2!? 22.♕d4 ♗xd4 23.♘xd4 ♘e4 (23...♖f6? 24.♗f3) 24.♖ac1 ♘d6 25.♖xc7 ♖g5 26.♖d1 ♖xd5 27.♗f3 ♖de5 Neither player can claim an advantage.

22.♔h1 ♗b6?!

This is an inaccuracy, although in this game both players already had to calculate so much that something inevitably had to give way.

It is so tempting to attack the queen with 22...♘e3? and set up a threat of mate in one, yet it is a mistake. White has the sweet riposte 23.♗f1!, exploiting Black's weak back rank.

The best option was 22...♗c5! It is hard to see the difference compared with the game. 23.♖f1 ♗xf1 24.♕xf1 ♘f2† 25.♔g2 ♘g4! Black has only a rook for the queen, but in this position it is enough to hold the position. 26.♕e1 (26.♔h1 ♘f2†)



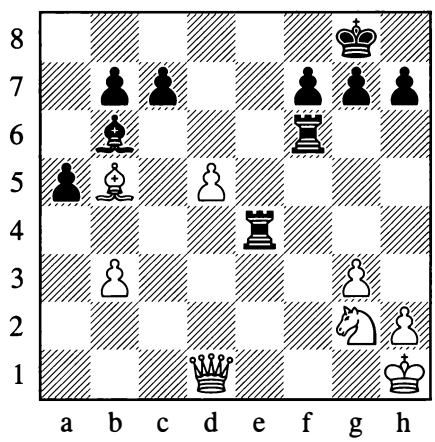
26...♗b4! The tremendous activity of the black pieces provides full compensation for the material deficit.

23.♕b1?

White steps out of the potential fork, but walks into an even bigger problem. Among the heavy threats, White had a narrow path to keep an advantage. He should have defended with:

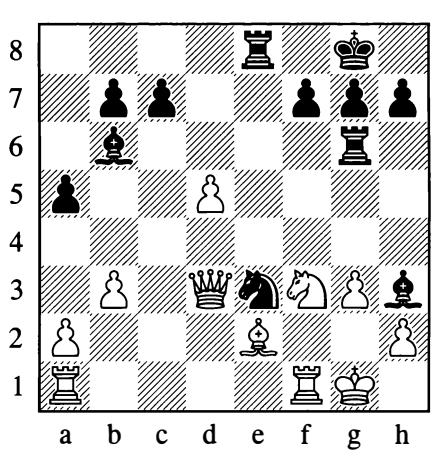
23.♖f1! ♘e3

23...♗xf1 24.♕xf1 ♘f2† 25.♔g2 ♘g4 26.♕e1! ♘e3† Now the drawback of the somewhat imprecise bishop retreat on move 22 can be seen, as Black has no ...♗b4 this time. 27.♔h1 ♘c2 28.♕d1 ♘xa1 29.♗b5 ♖e3 (29...c6 30.dxc6 bxc6 31.♗c4 ♖f6 32.♔g2 ♖e3 33.♘g5 and White wins) 30.♘h4 ♘xb3 31.axb3 (31.♘xg6 ♘d4) 31...♖f6 32.♘g2 ♖e4



Black keeps a certain amount of compensation; his pieces are active, his structure is solid and White has problems mobilizing his forces. Nevertheless White should still be better because of the material advantage.

24.♕d3 ♗g2† 25.♔g1 ♗h3



Now if White is not satisfied with a repetition, he can choose between two main moves (26.♖fe1?! ♖d6! does not help him).

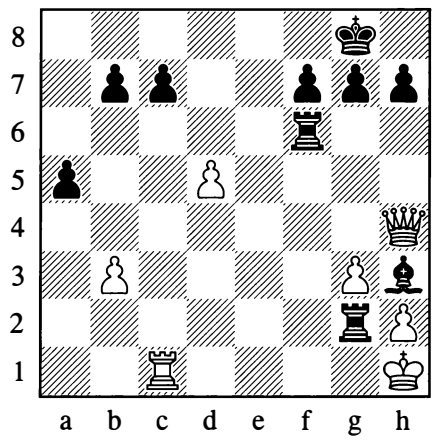
a) 26.♖f2?! ♘g4 27.♘d4 ♘xf2 28.♔xf2 ♖f6†

White must be careful here.

29.♗f3!

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29.♔g1? ♗xd4† 30.♕xd4 ♖xe2! The rook decides the outcome on the second rank. 31.♕h4 ♖xa2! 32.♖c1 (32.♖e1 ♖g2† 33.♔h1 ♖e2 wins) 32...♖g2† 33.♔h1



33...♖c2! 34.♖e1 ♖e2! 35.♖c1 ♗g2† 36.♔g1 ♗xd5 White is out and gone.

29...♗g4 30.♔g2 ♗xd4 31.♖f1!

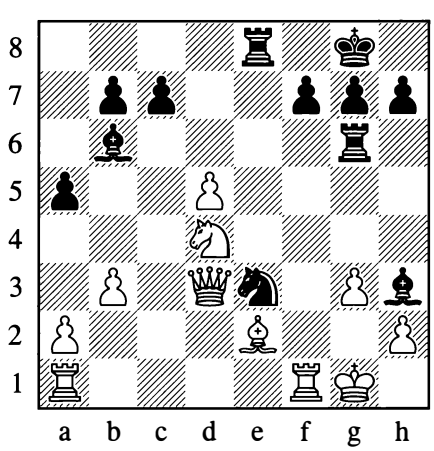
The rook needs to help in the defence. 31.♕xd4? ♗xf3† 32.♔g1 ♖e2 wins.

31...♖e3 32.♕xd4 ♗xf3† 33.♔g1 ♖e2 34.♖f2 ♖e1† 35.♖f1

White holds the draw.

b) 26.♘d4!

White can get rid of most of the pressure by returning some material.



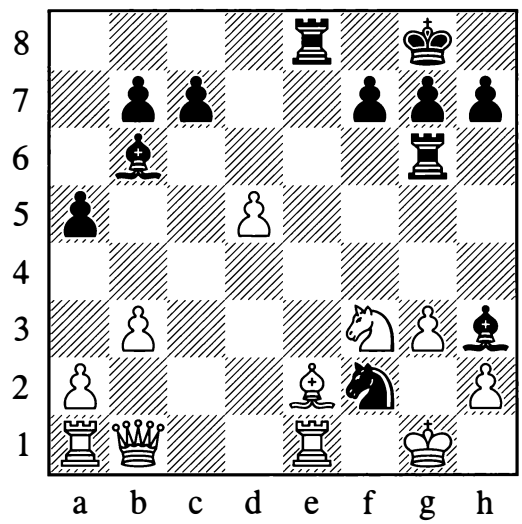
26...♗xf1

26...♖d6 27.♖f4 ♖xd5 28.♗f3 ♖xd4 29.♖xd4 ♘f5 30.♔h1 ♘xd4 31.♗xb7 and White is better.

27.♖xf1 ♖d6! 28.♔h1! ♘xf1 29.♘f5 ♘xg3† 30.hxg3 ♖f6

Black's active piece play does not fully compensate for the material he has invested.

23...♘f2† 24.♔g1



24...♖f6!

This is a coolly calculated move. It shows that Black has time to build the attack.

25.b4!

White endeavours to free his pieces. If he tries 25.♕c2? then 25...♘g4† 26.♔h1 ♗g2†! wins the queen in a very cute way.

25...a4!

It is amazing that, having sacrificed his queen, Black is able to play so calmly. The text ensures the stability of the bishop on b6, while also keeping the enemy pieces locked in.

Instead the hasty 25...♖xf3? would squander the advantage in what has so far been a wonderful game. 26.bxa5 ♗d4 (26...♗a7 27.♕xb7) 27.♕b4 White is not worse.

26.♘g5

This leads to a nice forced checkmate.

26.a3 would have allowed Black to carry out his threat: 26...♖xf3 27.♗xf3 ♘d1†! and checkmate follows soon.

The other main option was:

26.♕c2 ♘d3†!

Black has several wins but this one is most in the spirit of his previous play. The following alternatives are also quite entertaining.

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26...♖xf3 27.♕xc7! ♗xc7 28.♗xf3 ♖e5!! Black is better.

26...♘d1†!? This wins as well. 27.♕c5 (27.♔h1 ♗g2†!) 27...♗xc5† 28.bxc5 ♖xf3 29.♖axd1 ♖fe3 30.♔f2 ♖xe2† 31.♖xe2 ♖xe2† 32.♔xe2 ♗g4† 33.♔d2 ♗xd1 34.♔xd1 f5 The pawn ending is easily winning for Black.

27.♔h1 ♘xe1 28.♘xe1

Or 28.♖xe1 ♖xf3.

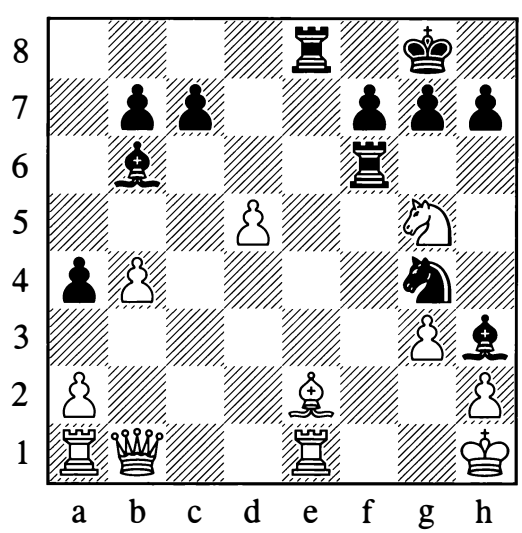
28...♖f2

White is hopelessly lost.

26...♘g4†!

Ashot, like a computer, does not miss the forced mate. It was not too late to ruin the previous work with 26...♘e4† 27.♔h1 ♘xg5? 28.♗g4!.

27.♔h1



27...♗g2†!!

This is a marvellous move, and it must have been such a thrill to play it on the board.

28.♔xg2 ♖f2† 29.♔h3

The feeble 29.♔g1 loses trivially after 29...♖fxe2† 30.♔f1 ♘xh2#, or 30.♔h1 ♖xh2#.

29...♖xh2† 30.♔xg4 h5† 31.♔f4 ♗e3†

0–1

White resigned two moves before the checkmate. After the opening, Black's exceptionally skilful attacking play suggests that this could easily have been one of Garry's masterpieces as well.

Next we will see another example of his creativity, this time against a future FIDE World Champion.

Ashot Nadanian – Ruslan Ponomariov

Kiev 1997

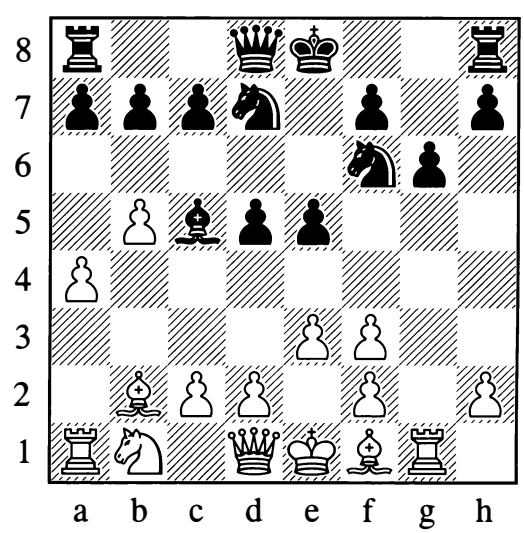
1.♘f3 d5 2.b4

Ashot quickly aims for an original position.

2...♗g4 3.♗b2 ♘d7 4.b5 ♘gf6 5.a4!?

This is a very early start to a remarkable handling of the wing pawns.

5...♗xf3 6.gxf3 e5 7.♖g1 g6 8.e3 ♗c5



9.a5!?

This is a remarkable way to utilize the flank pawns.

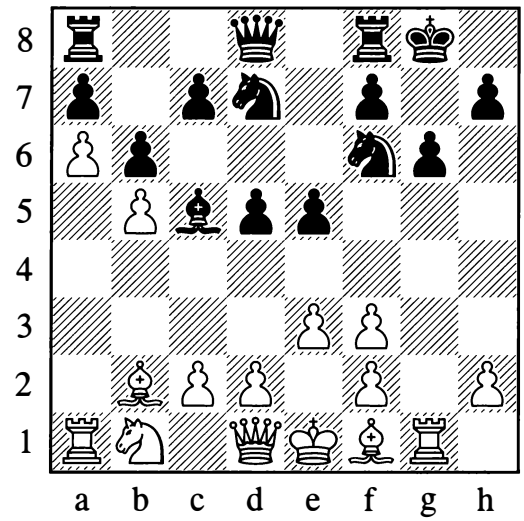
9...0–0 10.a6!?

By now you were probably not expecting anything else!

10...b6

It is remarkable that White has already expended three tempos in order to plant a pawn on a6. What did he get in exchange? He gained some space and secured some potential light-squared outposts. Finally, the a6-pawn might eventually become dangerous in the endgame.

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11.♖a4!?

And here is a fourth reason! White activates his rook in a highly original way.

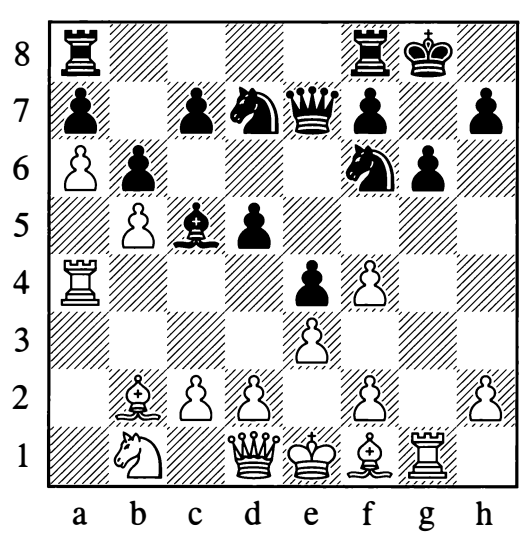
11...♕e7

11...d4!? was an interesting and principled alternative.

12.f4!?

Ashot tries to get rid of the doubled pawns.

12...e4



13.h4!?

Now he pushes the other rook-pawn as well! It is extraordinary that nine of White's first 13 moves have been pawn moves, and only one of those has been with a central pawn. Black's position is not at all easy; White's last move shows his intention to soften up the kingside.

13...♘e8 14.♕h5!?

Another piece goes to the edge.

14...f5 15.♕h6 ♘df6 16.♗e2 ♖f7 17.♘c3?

Chess can be a paradoxical game. White brings another piece into the game, but it turns out to be a mistake. Instead the much stronger 17.h5! would have put Ponomariov on the brink of a loss. 17...♕f8 18.♕g5 ♖g7 19.♖h1 White's pressure on the g- and h-files is very unpleasant for Black.

17...♕e6 18.h5

Despite the previous inaccuracy, Black's position is still not easy.

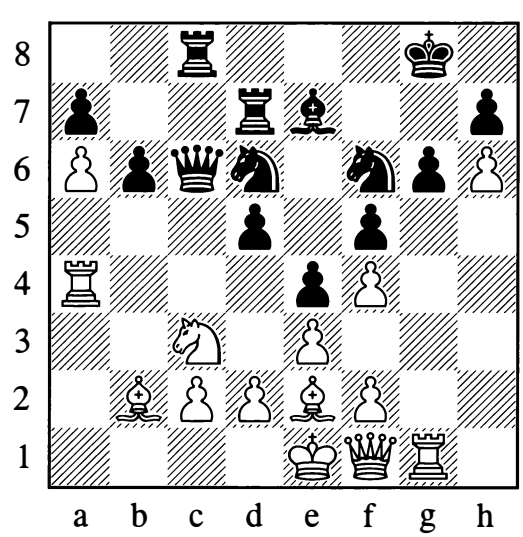
18...♗f8 19.♕g5 ♖g7 20.h6?!

White closes the other wing as well. I do not like this idea even though it wins a tempo and gains further space. From now on the play takes place in the centre, the area that was previously ignored by White. 20.♕h4! would have maintained the tension on the kingside.

20...♖d7 21.♘a2

This places one more piece on the edge, but in my opinion White has now gone over-the-edge with his unorthodox manoeuvres. Over the next few moves Ponomariov gradually assumes control of the game.

21...♗e7 22.♕g2 c5! 23.bxc6 ♕xc6 24.♘c3 ♘d6 25.♕f1 ♖c8



26.♖d4?!

The rook occupies an original outpost but

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it gets wrapped up. Even Ashot's mistakes contain elements of creativity.

26...♘c4 27.♗a1 b5! 28.♗xc4 bxc4

The rook has become incarcerated, while the rest of White's pieces are hopelessly uncoordinated

29.♕h3 ♔f7 30.♘e2 ♖b8!

Black has achieved total control, and he went on to convert his advantage easily.

31.♔f1 ♖b1† 32.♔g2 ♖xg1† 33.♔xg1 ♕xa6 34.♗c3 ♗c5 35.♕h4 ♘g4 36.♘g3 ♕e6 37.♔g2 ♗xd4 38.♗xd4 ♕e7

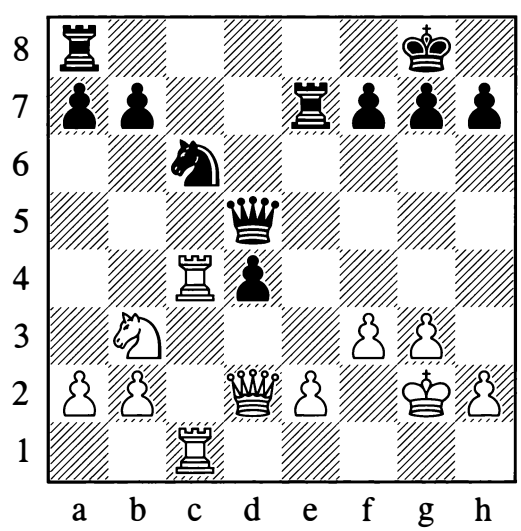
0–1

On this occasion Ashot's highly imaginative play did not quite bring him the desired result. Nevertheless it was fascinating to see how he achieved what could easily have become a dominating position, against one of the rising stars of world chess, by playing in such an outlandish manner.

Let me show you another game in which his imagination sparkled.

Roman Akopov – Ashot Nadanian

Yerevan 1998

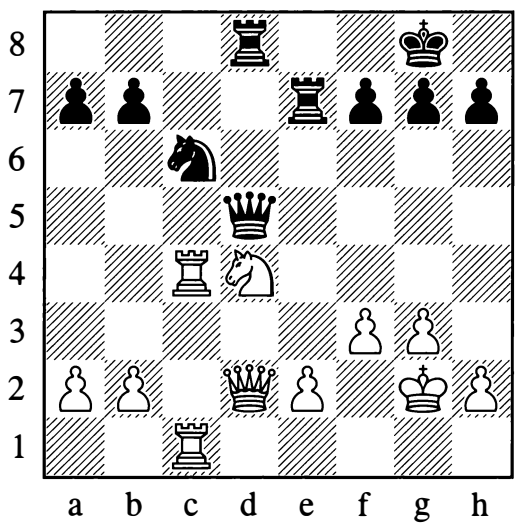


23...♖d8

Black brings the rook into play – in a more conventional way than we saw in the previous game. Note that 23...♖ae8?! would be a mistake, as after 24.e4! White gets a small edge.

24.♘xd4?!

White probably expected a peaceful end with this finesse, made possible by Black's weak back rank. The position is objectively still not worse for White, but Black obtains very dangerous play. Instead White could have obtained a reasonable position with 24.♖1c2.



24...g5!!

What a way to avoid the back rank tricks! The move also has an attacking function.

Instead 24...♘xd4?! would lead to a draw. 25.♖xd4 (25.e4 ♖xe4 26.fxe4 ♕xe4† 27.♔h3 ♕f5† 28.♔g2 ♕e4† Black gives a perpetual) 25...♖xe2† 26.♕xe2 ♕xd4 The position has simplified into a dead equal ending.

25.e3!

25.e4? ♕e5 26.♖d1 ♖ed7 and Black wins.

Playing for a fortress with 25.♘xc6 also did not work. 25...♕xd2 26.♘xe7† ♔g7 27.♘f5† ♔f6 28.♖1c2 (28.♖4c2 ♕a5) 28...♕a5 White loses the a-pawn, and eventually the game.

25...g4 26.♕f2

There was an interesting alternative in 26.♔g1!? (but not 26.♖c5? ♕xf3†!) 26...gxf3 (26...♘e5 27.♖c8 ♖ee8 28.♖xd8 ♖xd8 29.fxg4 ♘xg4 and Black has compensation, but he is certainly not better) 27.♕f2 ♘e5 28.♖4c3 ♖de8 29.a3 White can live with the f3-pawn.

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26...♘e5 27.e4!?

This causes a change in the material balance, without changing the overall equilibrium.

Despite the dangerous appearance, White has several ways to stay in the game. However, it is much easier when you have a computer to assist the analysis. Over the board, under the pressure of the ticking clock, the task is not so enviable

One nice defence is 27.♖c8 ♘d3 28.♘f5!! White is not worse.

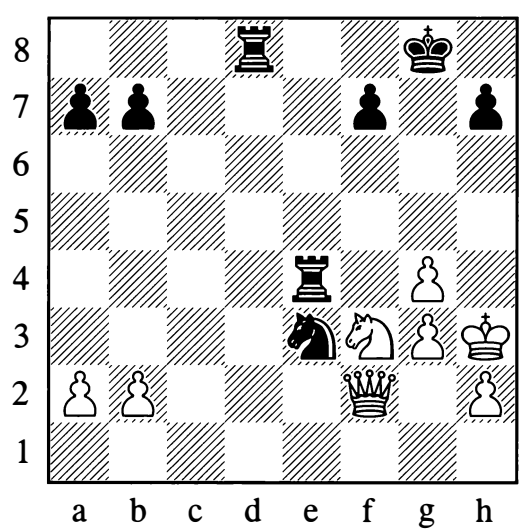
There is also 27.♖c5!?. This holds narrowly. 27...gxf3† 28.♔g1! (28.♘xf3? ♕e4!) 28...♕e4 (28...♕xa2 29.♕c2) 29.♖f1! ♘g4 30.♕xf3 ♘xe3 31.♘f5!! Benjamin Galstian's lovely move saves White. 31...♘xf5 (31...♘xf1? 32.♕c3!) 32.♕xe4 There is not much left to play for.

27...♕xc4 28.♖xc4 ♘xc4 29.fxg4

29.♘f5? ♖ed7 wins for Black.

However, 29.b3 was possible. 29...♖ed7! 30.♘e2! (30.bxc4? ♖xd4 wins) 30...♘e5 31.fxg4 ♖d2 Now 32.♔h3? ♖8d3! followed by ...♘f3 wins for Black, but 32.♕f6! enables White to survive.

29...♖xe4 30.♘f3 ♘e3† 31.♔h3



31...♖d5!

This creates unpleasant threats. For a human it is very hard to defend White's position, although objectively he can still survive.

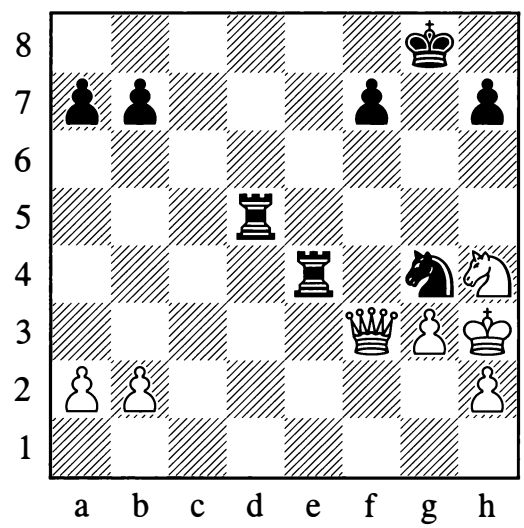
Please note that 31...♘xg4?! would allow White to free the queen with 32.♕xa7.

32.♘h4

Other moves were possible as well, but they also did not get rid of Black's grip. Possible lines include 32.♕e2 ♘xg4 33.♕c2 ♔g7 or 32.g5 ♖f5 33.♕e2 ♘g4 34.♕g2.

32...♘xg4 33.♕f3??

The pressure finally took its toll on White's concentration.



33...♖d2!

0–1

Ashot's creativity has helped him to invent some surprising novelties in very well-known openings.

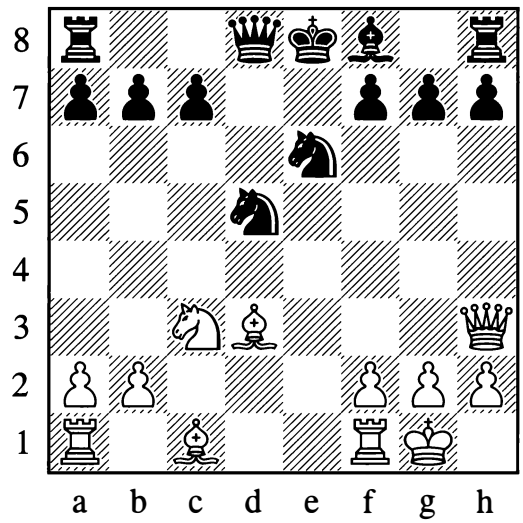
Let's have a closer look at some of his spectacular ideas!

Ashot Nadanian – D. Sharbatov

Correspondence 1992

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♘xe5 d6 4.♘f3 ♘xe4 5.d4 d5 6.♗d3 ♘c6 7.0–0 ♗g4 8.c4 ♘f6 9.♘c3 ♗xf3 10.♕xf3 ♘xd4 11.♕h3 ♘e6 12.cxd5 ♘xd5

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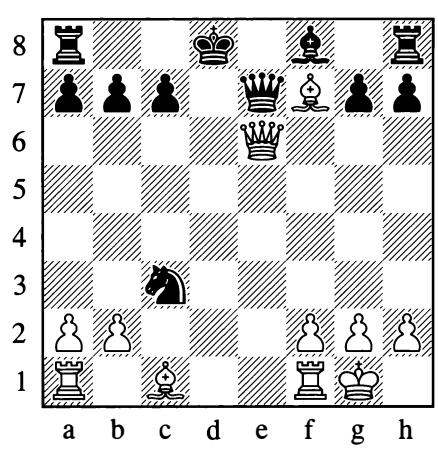
13.♗g6!!

This beautiful move was a novelty at the time. The bishop exploits one pin while creating another. By the way it is not only aesthetic, but highly effective as well. Since this game was played, the same position has occurred only once more in the database. *Chess Informant* has a competition for the best novelty of each volume. This one finished 7th. Both Anand and Ftacnik awarded it a maximum of 10 points.

13...♕d7!?

Black is walking on a tightrope and he can easily fall. For the moment he avoids losing in the complications, but not for long. Let's check a few of the alternatives.

After 13...♘xc3? 14.♕xe6† ♕e7 15.♗xf7† ♔d8



16.♗g5! wins nicely.

No better is 13...♕f6? 14.♗xf7†! ♕xf7 (14...♔xf7 15.♘xd5) 15.♘xd5 and Black is caught.

After 13...♘df4 14.♗xf4 ♘xf4 15.♕e3† ♗e7 16.♗xf7† ♔xf7 17.♕xf4† Black is unlikely to finish his development.

With 13...♘e7 he avoids losing material but blocks his own development and produces a joyless position. 14.♖d1 ♕c8 15.♗e4! White has tremendous compensation. (15.♗c2!? is also good.)

After 13...hxg6!? Black can stay in the game for some time, however White should win with the material advantage. 14.♕xh8 ♘xc3 15.bxc3 ♕d7 (15...♕f6 16.♖d1) 16.♗e3 0–0–0 17.♕h4

Black does not have enough for the exchange.

14.♖e1! 0–0–0

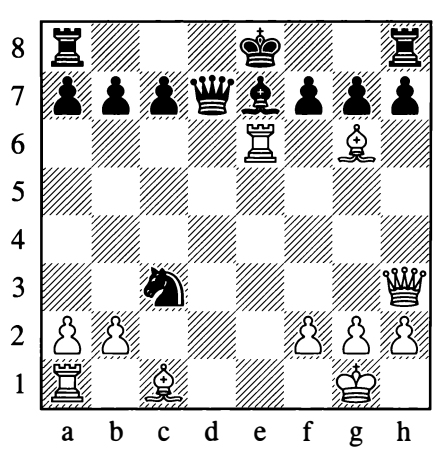
Black castles long, which is so natural, yet this was not the only way to bring the king to safety. An interesting alternative was:

14...♗e7!? 15.♖xe6

15.♖d1 fxg6 16.♘xd5 ♗d6 is okay for Black.

15...fxg6!

Black has no time for 15...♘xc3?:



16.♗g5!! This superb finesse fluently destroys Black's position. 16...♘d5 (16...0–0–0 17.♖xe7 wins) 17.♗xf7†! Black is lost.

16.♗g5 0–0!

This keeps Black in the game.

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17.♖xe7

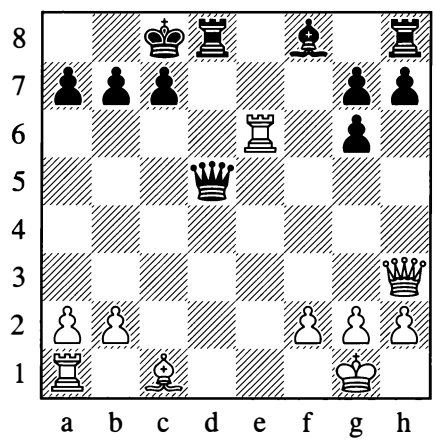
17.♗xe7 ♘f4 18.♕f3 ♕xe6 19.♗xf8 ♖xf8 20.♕xb7 ♘d3 All Black's pieces work well.

17...♕xh3 18.gxh3 ♘xe7 19.♗xe7 ♖f7

White has no more than a small advantage.

15.♘xd5 hxg6

Other moves lose, e.g. 15...♕xd5? 16.♗xf7, or 15...fxg6? 16.♖xe6 ♕xd5:

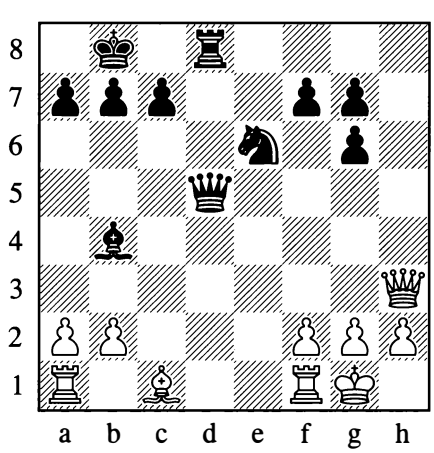


17.♗g5! This is another graceful winning move.

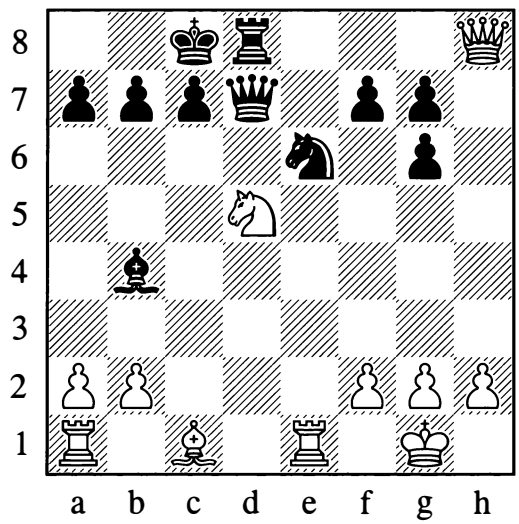
16.♕xh8 ♗b4?

This mistake wins the queen, but loses the game without any resistance. I think the number of calculations Ashot forced Black to make had something to do with it.

Relatively best was: 16...♕xd5 17.♕h3 ♗b4 18.♖f1 ♔b8



Black has a pawn for the exchange, and White's pieces are less than ideally placed. Nevertheless White has decent chances to win thanks to his extra material.



17.♕xd8†! ♕xd8 18.♘xb4

White has won too much material for the queen. The remainder of the game requires no further comment.

18...a5 19.♘c2 ♕d3 20.♘a3 b5 21.♗e3 b4 22.♖ed1 ♕a6 23.♘c2

1–0

White introduced a visually pleasing and very strong novelty. Black could have survived and stayed in the game with a worse position. But the pressure Ashot built was too much for him and I believe it would have done the trick against most other players as well.

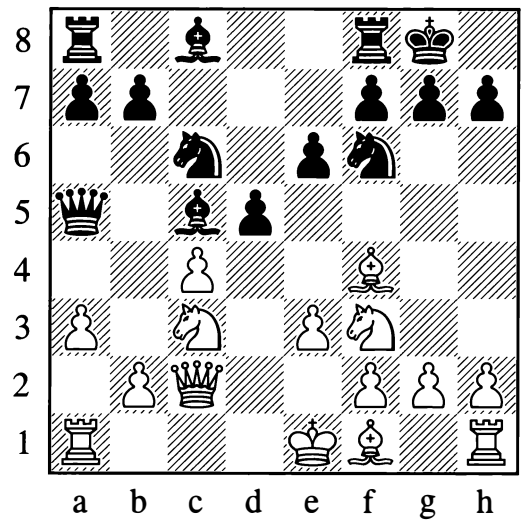
Kasparov is probably the greatest opening player of all time. He introduced so many novelties, and scored convincingly with them. Ashot has some similarities, but also some differences. Most obviously, he is also an innovator who produces new ideas. On the other hand his novelties are less frequent and not as deeply analysed.

Ashot Nadanian – A. Mpenza

Correspondence 2000

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗e7 4.♘f3 ♘f6 5.♗f4 0–0 6.e3 c5 7.dxc5 ♗xc5 8.♕c2 ♘c6 9.a3 ♕a5

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This is such a well-known position that it is hard to produce a novelty here. Hard – but not impossible!

10.♖a2!?

A truly inspired move. The rook refrains from moving to the open file as it is supposed to do. And of course the novelty occurs on the edge of the board!

10...♘e4 11.cxd5! ♘xc3 12.bxc3 exd5 13.♗d3 h6 14.0–0

White has obtained a small edge from the opening.

14...♖e8 15.a4!? ♗f8 16.♖d1

Interesting is 16.♖b2!?.

16...g5! 17.♗g3 ♗g7 18.♘d4 ♘xd4 19.cxd4 ♗g4 20.♖b1

After 20.f3!? ♗d7 21.♗e1 ♕d8 22.♗d2 White is somewhat better.

20...♖ac8 21.♕b2! ♕c3

After 21...b6 22.♕b5 White has a small but persistent advantage; it is never an easy task to defend such a position.

22.h3! ♕xd3 23.hxg4 b6

23...♖e7!? could have been considered.

24.♕b5 ♕e4 25.a5 bxa5?!

25...♖e6 was a better option.

26.♖xa5 ♖ed8 27.♖xa7 ♕xg4

White retains an edge in the simplified position, thanks to his single pawn island versus Black's two. The d5-pawn is particularly vulnerable.

28.♕b7 ♕f5 29.♖ba1! ♖c2 30.♖a8

This is classical stuff – White exchanges a defender of the d-pawn, while also preparing to invade along the eighth rank.

30...♖xa8 31.♖xa8† ♔h7 32.♕b8 ♖c1† 33.♔h2

The rules allow no choice on this move, but do not worry – some remarkable tactics are looming ahead!

33...g4

This is the most stubborn move. It is interesting to consider the alternatives.

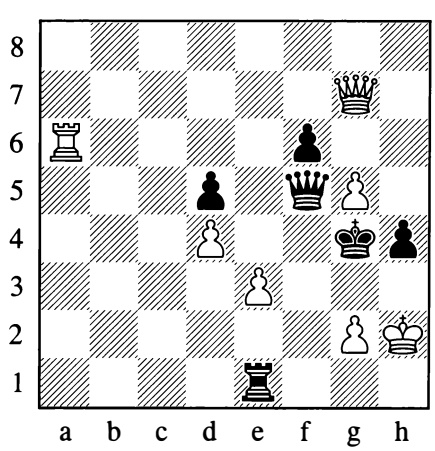
Firstly, there is the weak 33...♕g4? 34.♕g8† ♔g6 35.♖a6† f6. Now White wins in spectacular style with 36.♖xf6†!! ♔xf6 37.♕e8!.

Also insufficient is:

33...h5? 34.♗e5!

Precision is required to weave the proper mating net.

34.♕g8†? would allow Black to escape. 34...♔h6 35.♖a6† f6 36.f4 (36.♖a7 ♕h7) 36...h4! 37.fxg5† ♔h5 38.♕f7† ♔g4 39.♗e1! (and not 39.♗b8?? ♕f1 40.♕e6† f5 when White gets checkmated) 39...♖xe1 40.♕xg7



40...♖h1†! 41.♔xh1 ♕b1† 42.♔h2 ♕b8† With a perpetual.

34...♗xe5†

34...f6 35.♕g8† ♔h6 36.♖a7 ♕g6 37.♗d6 wins for White.

35.dxe5 ♕e6 36.♕g8† ♔h6 37.♖e8

Black's king is caught.

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Finally there is:

33...♔g6?!

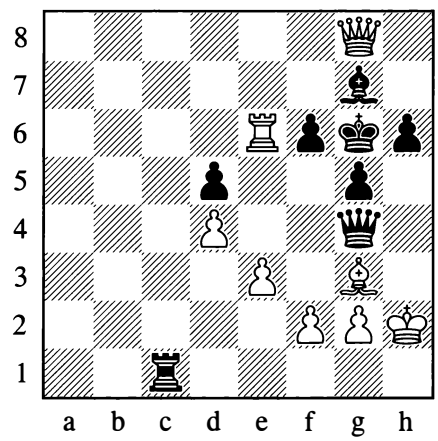
This leads to some nice variations.

34.♕g8 ♕d7

34...♕b1 is met by 35.♗e5.

35.♖d8 ♕f5 36.♖d6† f6 37.♖e6! ♕g4

37...♕b1 38.♗e5 wins for White.



38.♖xf6†!!

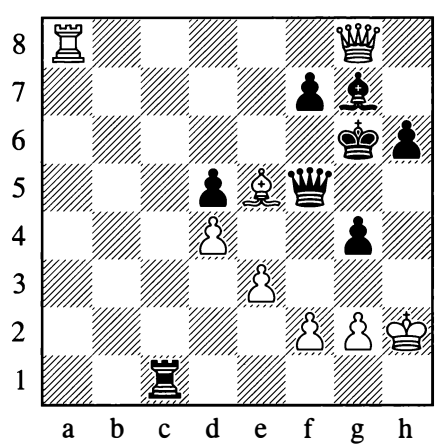
Nicely demolishing the pawn chain in front of the king

38...♔xf6 39.♕e8!

And White wins, just as in the earlier variation with 33...♕g4?.

34.♕g8† ♔g6 35.♖a6†!

Nadanian conducts the attack with precision. Not 35.♗e5??



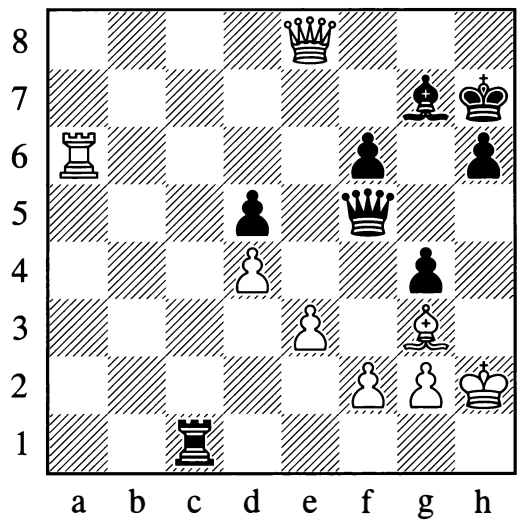
35...♕xf2!! 36.♕xg7† ♔h5 White will soon be mated.

Also unsatisfactory was 35.♗f4?! ♕f6 when Black is still in the game.

35...f6 36.♕e8†

The check is directed against the idea of ...♖c8.

36...♔h7



37.♗h4!!

This is another great move on the h-file, which plays a big part in White's eventual victory. The main point is to attack f6 and give room for the king in case Black doubles his major pieces on the first rank. The potential danger of the counterattack can be seen after:

37.♖a8?! ♕b1 38.♕g8†

38.♗f4 may be objectively better, but is also insufficient to win. 38...♖h1† 39.♔g3 h5 (39...♕f1? 40.♕g8† ♔g6 41.♕xd5 ♖h3† 42.♔xg4 wins for White) 40.♕e6 ♕e4 (40...h4†? 41.♔xg4 ♕g6† 42.♔f3 and White can parry the check on h5) 41.♕xe4† dxe4 42.♖a6 (after 42.d5? ♔g6 43.f3 h4† 44.♔f2 g3† White has to give up his bishop) 42...♔g6 Black is a bit worse but should be able to hold.

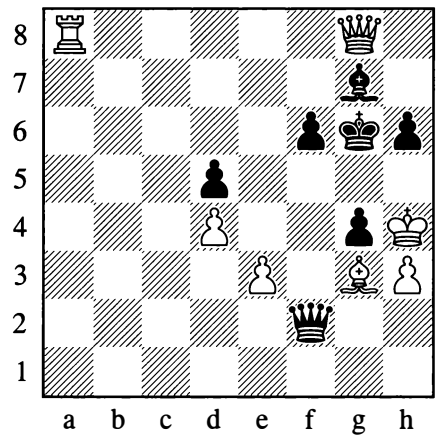
38...♔g6 39.♗d6 ♖h1† 40.♔g3 ♖h3†!

With this lovely shot Black forces White to take a draw.

Black can force a perpetual himself with 40...♕f5!? 41.♖a7 ♖h3†! 42.gxh3 ♕f3† 43.♔h2 ♕xf2†.

41.gxh3 ♕g1† 42.♔h4 ♕xf2† 43.♗g3

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43...♕f1!

This leaves White with no choice. He must keep checking the king, otherwise he will be mated.

44.♕e8† ♔h7 45.♕g8†

The game ends in perpetual check.

37...♖c7

Black decides to defend. The counterattack would lose as well:

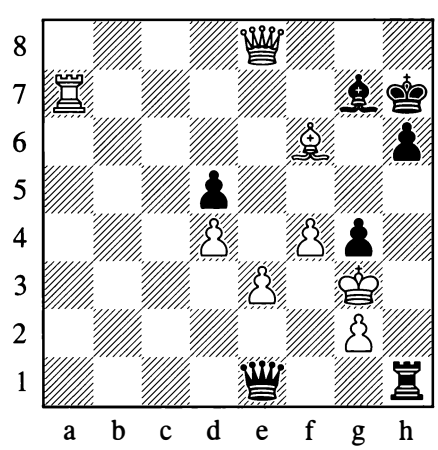
37...♕b1 38.♗xf6 ♖h1† 39.♔g3 ♕f5 40.f4!

After 40.♗xg7?? ♖h3†! Black escapes with a perpetual.

40...♕b1

No better is 40...gxf3 41.♕f7.

41.♖a7 ♕e1†



42.♔xg4

The king can run forwards, using his pawns as a shield. The checks will soon run out.

42...♕d1†

42...♕e2† 43.♔f5 ♖h5† 44.♔e6 ♕xe3† (44...♕g4† 45.♔d6) 45.♗e5 White wins.

43.♔f5 ♕b1† 44.♔e5 ♕e4† 45.♔d6 ♕xe8 46.♖xg7† ♔h8 47.♖e7†

It is all over.

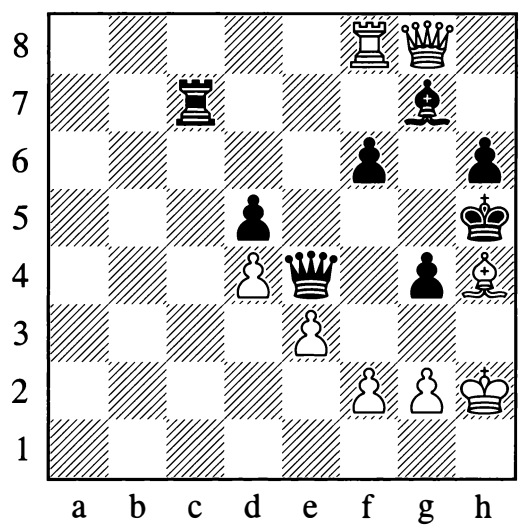
38.♖a8 ♕e4

38...♖d7 39.♗xf6!! wins, while after 38...♕d7 39.♕g8† ♔g6 40.♖a5 Black is in trouble.

39.♕g8† ♔g6 40.♖f8!

The threat to take on f6 forces the king to a more vulnerable position.

40...♔h5



41.♖e8

Now it is just a matter of time for White to catch Black's king.

41...♕f5 42.♗g3 ♖d7

42...♖a7 43.♖d8 is winning for White.

43.♖e6! ♕g6

After 43...♖d8 44.♕f7† ♕g6 45.♕c7 White wins.

44.♕c8! ♖f7

Or 44...♕f7 45.♖d6 ♖xd6 46.♕f5#.

45.♕d8 ♕f5 46.♕e8 ♕g6 47.♖d6

1–0

The novelty on move 10 was an imaginative one, played on the edge of the board. Of course, a novelty is only truly satisfying if it leads to a favourable end result, and Ashot showed no mercy with his ruthless attacking play.

Nowadays very few players manage to have a variation named after themselves. Ashot is one

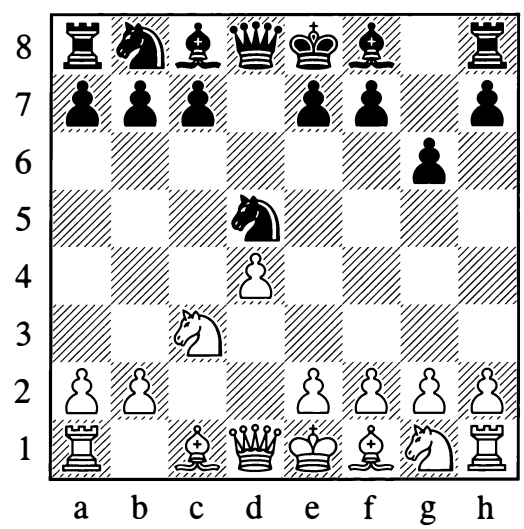
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of the rare few to have achieved this feat, and he achieved it against an opening as reliable and thoroughly researched as the Grünfeld. The novelty came at a very early stage, and by now it has become an established variation.

Ashot Nadanian – Varuzhan Akobian

Yerevan (training game) 1996

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5



5.♘a4!?

This move has become known as the Nadanian variation. Needless to say, it uses the edge of the board!

5...e5!?

This was played at the birth of the variation. Akobian, who was playing Black, was Nadanian's pupil in Armenia and now lives in the United States.

6.dxe5! ♗b4† 7.♗d2 ♘e3! 8.fxe3

This is quite possibly a world record in the history of competitive chess: as early as move eight White has tripled pawns! Chess is reaching new heights – I wonder how long it will be before we see quadrupled pawns in a theoretical position. I have already seen an example in one of Bela Molnar's games, but it happened well beyond the opening phase.

8...♗xd2†

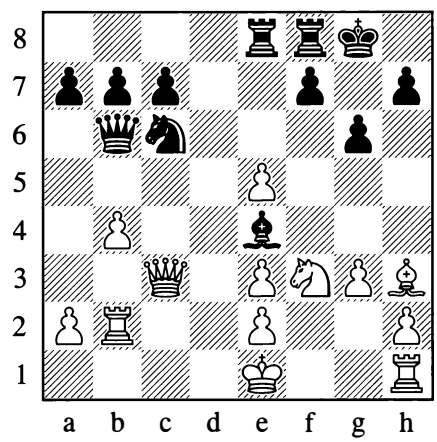
Not 8...♕h4†? 9.g3 ♗xd2† 10.♔xd2! ♕b4† 11.♔c1 and White ends up with an extra piece.

9.♕xd2 ♕h4†

Thanks to this tactical point Black regains the sacrificed piece.

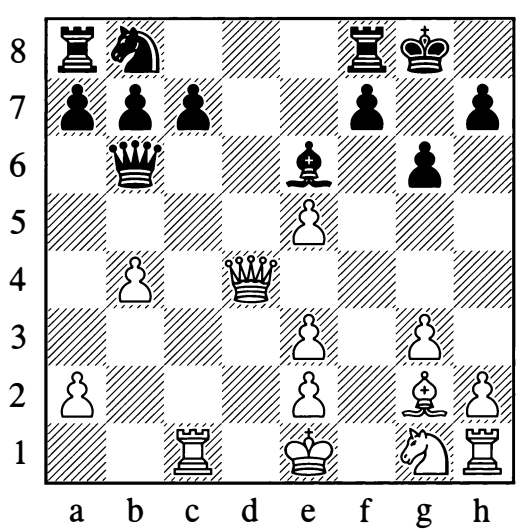
10.g3 ♕xa4 11.♕d4! ♕a5† 12.b4 ♕b6 13.♗g2!

Also interesting is: 13.♖b1!? ♘c6 14.♕c3 ♗f5 15.♖b2 ♗e4 16.♘f3 0–0 17.♗h3! ♖ae8



18.♔f2! Bareev said that when you play Kasparov the pieces move differently. In this variation given by Nadanian, one gets a similar impression. I like the game continuation even better though.

13...0–0 14.♖c1 ♗e6



The position is rather double-edged. The tripled pawns are potentially weak, but they also control several key squares.

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15.a4!

White should not forget that the pawn was hanging. Once again, Ashot has advanced his a- and b-pawns while his king, g1-knight and h1-rook remain on their original squares!

15...c6?! 16.♘f3

I would have been tempted to consider 16.♘h3!?. Going through Ashot's games makes one consider such moves on the edge of the board!

16...♖d8 17.♕f4!

After several earlier moves on the left flank, White turns his attention to checkmating Black on the h-file.

17...♘a6 18.♖b1!

White makes a prosaic but strong move on the queenside to defend the b4-pawn. 18.♕h6? ♕xb4† 19.♔f2 ♕f8 defends.

18...c5 19.b5

Also interesting was 19.♕h6!? ♘xb4 20.0–0! (and not 20.♘g5? ♘d3†!!). Having witnessed so many creative moves, one must not forget that the orthodox ones can also prove highly effective. 20...f6 21.exf6 ♖d7 22.♘e5 and White wins.

19...♘b4

This does not help, although 19...♔g7 20.♘g5 ♖d7 21.0–0 ♘c7 22.♖bd1 wins for White as well.

20.♕h6!

The black king suffers from a lack of defenders, so White goes straight for the throat.

20...♘c2† 21.♔f2 c4

The following is a nice variation:

21...♖d7 22.♖bd1! ♖xd1

22...♖c7 23.♖d6

22...♖ad8 23.♘g5 f6 24.♖d6! ♖xd6 25.♕xh7† ♔f8 26.exf6 ♖6d7 27.♕h6† ♔g8 28.♕xg6† ♔f8 29.♕h6† ♔g8 30.♗e4 and wins.

23.♖xd1

23.♘g5? ♘xe3!

23...♕c7

23...♖d8 24.♘g5! ♖xd1 25.♘xh7 f5 26.♕xg6† ♔h8 27.♘f6 and White wins.

24.♖d6!

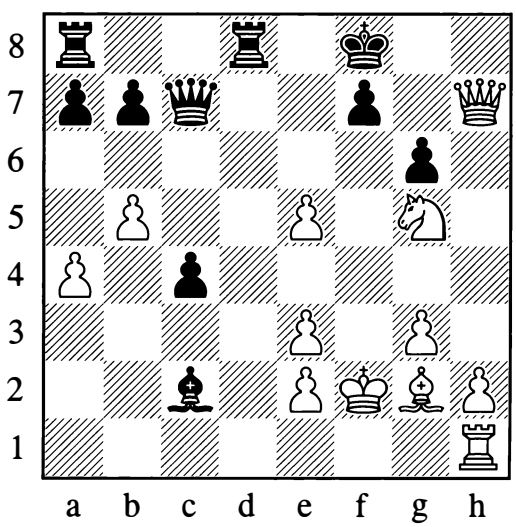
24.♘g5 ♕xe5 25.♕xh7† ♔f8 26.♘xe6† wins as well, but the text is even nicer.

24...♖d8 25.♘g5 ♖xd6 26.♘xh7!

This leads to a checkmate in a maximum of five moves. 26.♘e4 also does the job.

26...f5 27.♕xg6† ♔h8 28.♘f6 ♖d7 29.♕h6† ♖h7 30.♕f8† ♗g8 31.♕xg8#

22.♖bc1 ♗f5 23.♖xc2! ♗xc2 24.♘g5 ♕c7 25.♕xh7† ♔f8



26.♘e6†!

1–0

A nice tactical shot by Ashot finishes the demolition.

In the 2005 Singapore Masters, playing against my friend Rico Mascarinas of the Philippines, Ashot stunned his opponent with the bizarre-looking opening: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 h6!?. The move had been played before, but Nadanian was the first to employ it regularly with the intention of playing ...g5. I wrote an article on this unusual variation for the *New in Chess* publication *SOS 5*. Since then he has played it several times. I shall proceed to demonstrate two blitz wins played on the *Internet Chess Club*. Of course they should not be taken too seriously, but they provide great entertainment!

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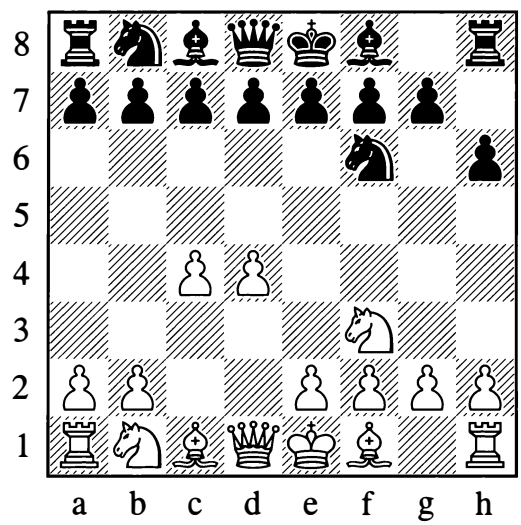
Olivier Renet – Ashot Nadanian

Internet (blitz) 2006

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 h6!?

Once again Nadanian finds a way to play creatively on the edge of the board.

3.c4



3...g5!?

This is the new conception, the 'Nadanian Attack'. Black gains space on the kingside rather than seemingly weakening it. Later he can position his central pawns according to White's play, which is also a good side of the line. In my *SOS* article I analysed all the set-ups White has tried so far and I tried to anticipate some attempts to refute it as well. I found no more than a small edge for White – there is no clear best line for him.

4.♘c3 g4!?

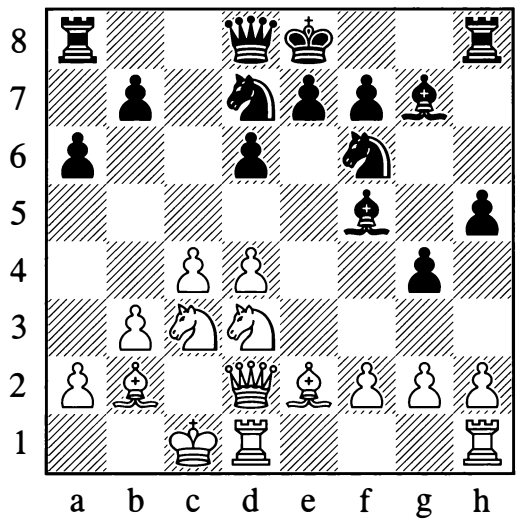
Sometimes Ashot delays this move in favour of 4...d6, but on this occasion the g-pawn feels more energetic.

5.♘e5 d6 6.♘d3 h5 7.b3 ♗g7 8.♗b2 ♗f5 9.e3 ♘bd7 10.♕d2 c5 11.♗e2

Possible was 11.d5!?.

11...a6 12.0–0–0? cxd4 13.exd4??

He had to play 13.♘d5 ♘xd5 14.cxd5 ♕b6 when Black is doing well, but the game is far from over.



13...♗h6

This wins on the spot.

14.♘f4 e5 15.dxe5 dxe5 16.♘cd5 ♘xd5 0–1

Of course it is only a three-minute blitz game, yet a decent grandmaster would almost never lose like that in a well-known line. Even without the blunder, White's seemingly logical moves did not achieve anything special for him.

Einar Gausel – Ashot Nadanian

Internet (blitz) 2006

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 h6 3.c4 g5 4.♘c3 g4 5.♘d2 h5

Black makes two moves with his h-pawn during the first five moves – in addition to the two with the g-pawn. It is quite extraordinary.

6.e4 d6 7.♗e2 ♘c6 8.♘b3 a5!?

And now he pushes the rook's pawn on the other flank!

9.d5 a4!

Well, what else were you expecting?

10.dxc6 axb3 11.♕xb3 bxc6 12.♗e3 c5 13.♕c2 ♗h6 14.♗xh6 ♖xh6 15.♖d1 e5

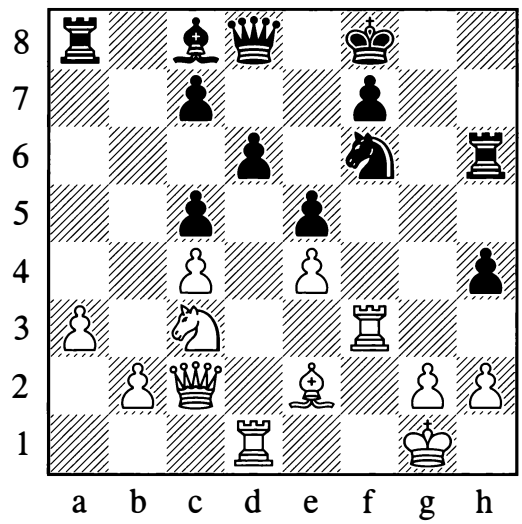
Black has achieved a perfectly decent position.

16.0–0 ♔f8 17.a3 h4

The h-pawn goes further.

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18.f4 gxf3 19.♖xf3



19...h3!

Now it goes further still. Later this pawn will prove quite troublesome for White.

20.g3 ♔g7 21.♖df1 ♗e6 22.♕d2 ♖g6 23.♕e3 ♖b8 24.♕d2 ♕h8 25.b4 cxb4 26.axb4 ♖xb4 27.♘d5 ♗xd5 28.♕xb4 ♗xe4 29.♖3f2 ♕h6 30.♕a3 ♗c6 31.♕a7?

After 31.♕c1! the position would be balanced.

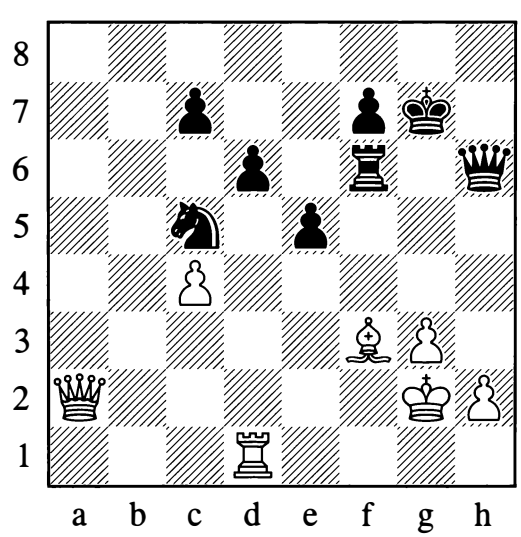
31...♗g2

Finally Black makes use of the outpost created by the adventurous h-pawn.

32.♖d1 ♘e4 33.♖xg2?!

33.♖f5 was better.

33...hxg2 34.♔xg2 ♖f6 35.♗f3 ♘c5 36.♕a2



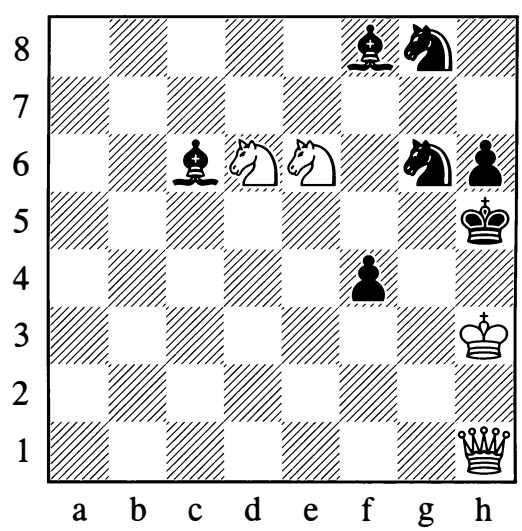
36...♖xf3! 37.♔xf3 ♕h5† 38.g4 ♕h3† 0–1

Once at the Kuala Lumpur open, I happened to overhear two Australian juniors speaking to each other. I heard one saying to the other, "Today I played the reversed Nadanian." I can only wonder what they meant...

Let me illustrate Nadanian's imagination with one of his problems. My experience is that most elite composers do not really appreciate his work. I still dare to venture my opinion that they are very much worth looking at.

Here is a problem that he showed me himself.

Shakhmatnaya Nedelya 2003



White to play and mate in three

1.♕e4!!

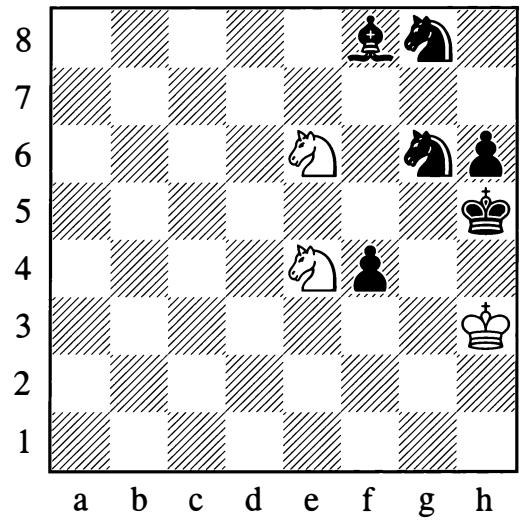
The composition also works with the bishop on a8. I think it is more aesthetic with a c6-bishop as it covers more squares.

1...♗xe4

Other possibilities include 1...♘6e7 2.♕e5† ♔g6 3.♘xf8#, 1...♗e7 2.♕f5† ♗g5 3.♘g7# and 1...♘8e7 2.♘e8!!, where White checkmates on the next move.

2.♘xe4

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It is a beautiful mutual zugzwang. White has no threat, but fortunately it is Black to move – and all of his possible moves allow a mate in one!

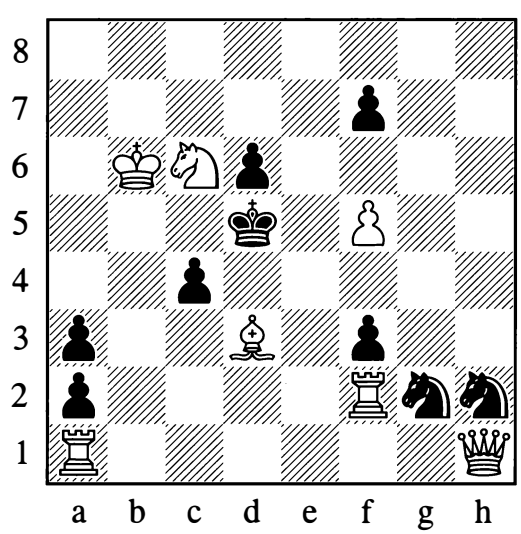
2...f3

Other possible finishes include 2...♘8e7 3.♘f6#, 2...♘6e7 3.♘xf4# or 2...♗e7 3.♘g7#.

3.♘g3#

The next problem is very beautiful, but with more pieces.

Shakhmatnaya Nedelya, 2004



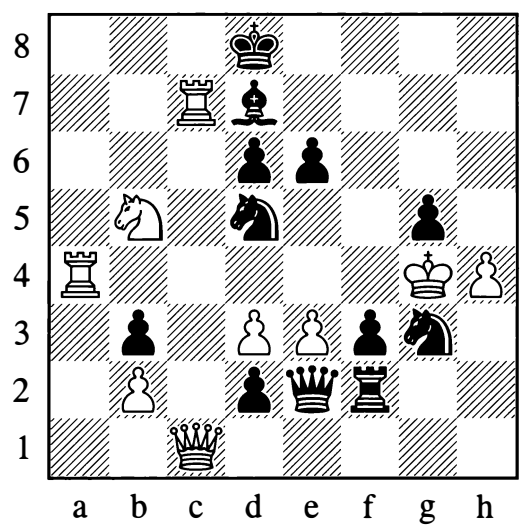
White to play and mate in three

1.♖b2!! axb2 2.♕b1!!

Black has eighteen legal moves, but all of them allow mate on the next move.

There are many criteria including originality, artistry, thematic consistency and difficulty, which need to be considered when judging the overall quality of a chess composition. The following study certainly ranks highly on the last category, as Ashot told me that so far nobody has ever solved it! I wonder, dear reader, if you might be the first?

Shakhmatnaya Nedelya 2004



White to play and win

White has many pieces threatening the king, yet it is not easy to keep on attacking.

1.♖a8†!

1.♖xd7† only leads to a draw – and even that requires very accurate play from White. Play continues: 1...♔xd7 2.♖a7† ♔d8 3.♖a8† ♔e7 4.♖e8†! (White loses after 4.♖a7†? ♔f6) 4...♔f6 (after 4...♔xe8 5.♕c6† White makes a perpetual) 5.hxg5† ♔g7 6.♖g8†! Black cannot avoid a perpetual check.

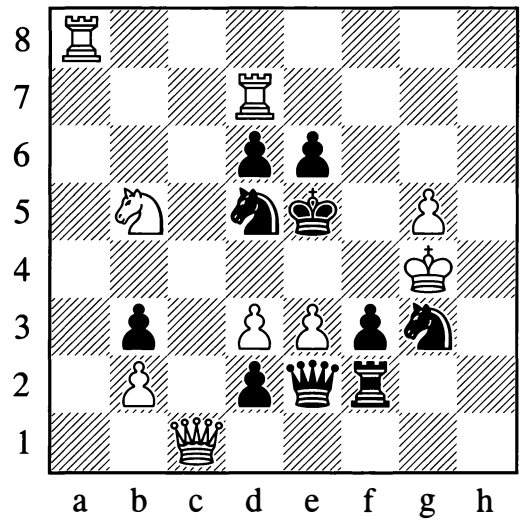
1...♔e7 2.♖xd7† ♔f6

Or 2...♔xd7 3.♕c8† ♔e7 4.♕f8† ♔d7 5.♕xd6#.

3.hxg5† ♔e5

Not 3...♔g6?? 4.♖g8#.

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4.♕c5!!

I find this move astonishing – in 35 years of playing chess, it is one of the moves which has amazed me most.

Oddly, when I show it to my friends, not all of them like this move.

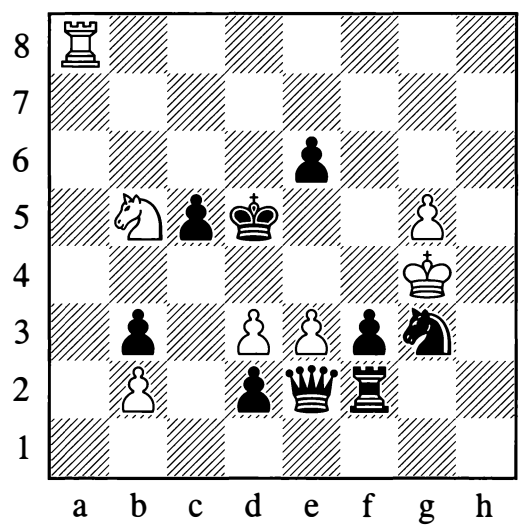
4...dxc5

4...♘f5 5.♕d4† ♘xd4 6.exd4#

4...♕xd3 5.♕xd6† ♔e4 6.♕xe6#

5.♖xd5†! ♔xd5

5...exd5 6.♖e8#



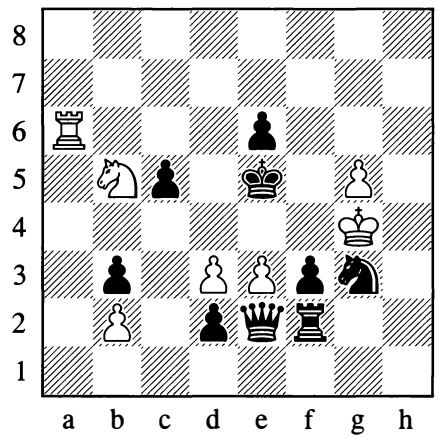
6.♖a6!!

White has time to keep the king in the centre, where it will be hunted down.

6...♕xe3

6...♕xd3 7.♘c7† ♔c4 8.♖a4#; 6...c4 7.♘c3† ♔c5 8.d4† ♔b4 9.♖a4#

6...♔e5

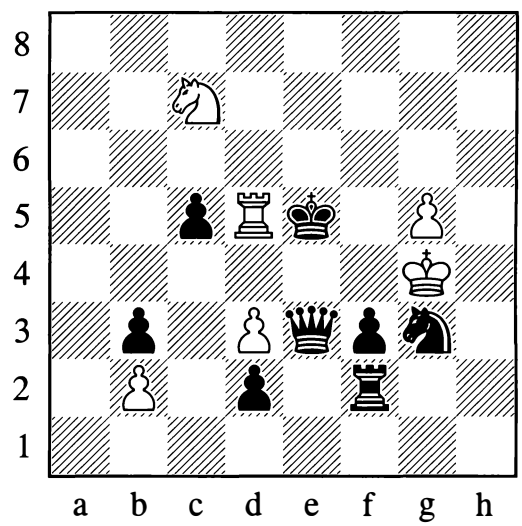


7.♘c7! White has time! 7...♕xe3 8.♖xe6† ♔d4 9.♖d6† ♔e5 10.♖d5#

7.♘c7† ♔d4 8.♖d6†

The fish in the net is still jumping a bit, but not much.

8...♔e5 9.♖xe6† ♔d4 10.♖d6† ♔e5 11.♖d5#



Black's pieces did not contribute much, but the checkmating combination makes a wonderful impression.

At the time of writing Ashot has two grandmaster norms, and I hope he will go on to achieve the title in the future. He works full-time as a trainer in Singapore, so he can seldom play. I think the best player he ever defeated was Bologan in the Aeroflot open in 2002.

When he plays he is an artist. If he had

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trained as hard as his 'half-brother' then who knows how strong he might have become? But when he is inspired, he is capable of producing magic.

Testimonials

Levon Aronian
World Cup winner 2005, Winner of Linares 2006 and Wijk aan Zee 2007 super-tournaments:

"I was lucky to meet Ashot Nadanian in 1994. Ashot used to come to our place, as he and my first trainer Melikset Khachiyan were friends. I was too young to appreciate his personality; however, knowing his chess skills and culture was enough to admire him.

His passion for beauty, his devotion to the romantic chess school has always been inspiring. Due to the situation in our home country, however, he was not able to display even one tenth of his playing talent. Two or three tournaments per year cannot contribute sufficiently to one's growth, when you are young and willing to demonstrate your strength. That's why Ashot became a coach when he was still pretty young.

I will not comment on his teaching concepts here. After having been present at his amusing lessons just once, I will always feel envious of his students. Gabriel Sargissian is one brilliant player infected by Ashot's 'virus'. One may call it an inspired attitude.

I could keep talking for hours about Ashot as a chess player, composer, theoretician, or a trainer; however I would rather write about him as a person. If I were asked, which of my close friends is the most honest and kind, I would not hesitate to name Ashot. You can talk with him about any subject – Ashot is well-educated and polite to such an extent that, no matter how ignorant one may be, you are never made to feel stupid and, at the same time, you learn a lot from him.

He is quite an interesting and benevolent person. Ashot would always be the first to greet you in a time of success, or find proper words at other times.

I am very pleased that, since I am successful in what I am doing, I've got a chance to praise this man, one of my dearest, in public. I hope you enjoy the part devoted to Ashot, and the book as a whole. I feel I must thank Tibor Károlyi for not only sharing my vision of my friend, but for writing about him!"

Varuzhan Akobian
World Open Champion, 2004 and 2007:

"I know Ashot very well – he was my coach from 1993-1999. A lot of the chess knowledge that I have right now has come from studying with Ashot, who was a great teacher and very good friend. He was always interested in doing new research and finding opening novelties. He found many interesting ones, but the most memorable and famous is in the Grünfeld Defence: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.♘a4!?. This idea became known worldwide and surprised many chess players and fans. I credit a lot of my success to Ashot and thank him for training me for many years."

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Valeri Chekhov
Grandmaster; 1975 World Junior Champion:

"International master Ashot Nadanian sadly is a typical example of a chessplayer not realizing his potential. He possesses enormous chess potential, but he was not able to find enough time to work professionally on his chess.

Therefore, along with his positive qualities like very subtle understanding of dynamic positions, very good sense of the initiative and quick thinking, Ashot's play has a few negative facets like a weak opening repertoire, bad defence, and the psychological element of the game as well. So far he has not been able to erase these – this is why he has not been able to achieve what he deserves.

Apart from the above, Ashot became a trainer too early; this naturally had a bad effect on his creativity. It is not possible to be a good player and a good trainer at the same time. Achieving the grandmaster title is a target for the near future, but it will be practically impossible to move higher from there: too much time has been wasted."

Gabriel Sargissian
Member of the Gold-Medal Olympiad team (Turin 2006 & Dresden 2008); Twice Armenian champion:

"Every time I read what someone writes about celebrated people in glowing terms, it make me think, 'Are they really sincere?' Anybody who knows Ashot would not doubt even for a moment the genuineness of what is written about him. Ashot played an important role in shaping me as a chess player – and not only in that.

The level of my play had fallen back considerably when I started to train with him in 1997. I think back with a smile on my face about how impatiently after the first lesson I waited for the next session. I got the impression that I had rediscovered our game. Ashot is a born trainer.

Love for chess gets planted into his pupils. During the three years Ashot worked with me I sincerely enjoyed chess very much. For him the beauty of the ideas is the most important thing in chess. This must have had the effect of preventing him from achieving great successes over the board. If he sees a lovely idea he can't help reproducing it over the board. As is known, it is very hard to be successful when one plays competitive chess in this spirit.

Ashot has not lived in Armenia for eight years; luckily we can communicate on the net. He is my older friend; I respect his opinion very much and his advice helps me in life a lot. Of course I would like to see him more regularly, but what can you do – things do not always happen as you would like them to."

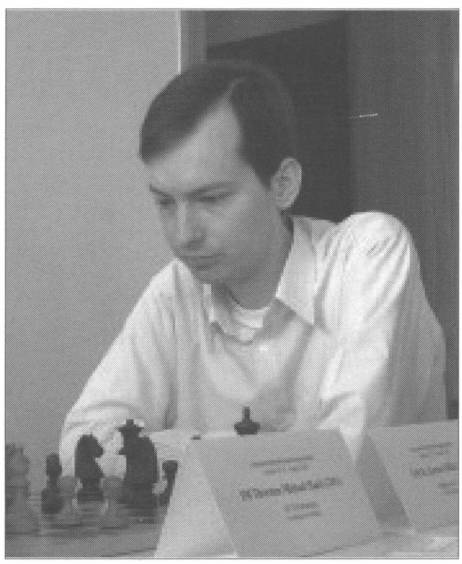


Ashot Nadanian ready to play 2...h6!?.

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Chapter 7 Karsten Müller

The Endgame Expert



The personality featured in the present chapter is the last one I decided to write about. I had previously thought about finding a German player to appear in the collection, as I spent quite a lot of time in Germany and have fond memories. I played for a small team in Griesheim, where there were several nice people. However what they had achieved in chess did not reach the levels I was considering. I thought of other people as well, but in the end I dropped the idea.

The genesis of the present chapter came at the 2007 World Junior championships in Turkey. My former team-mate Tamas Erdelyi was selling chess books there, and I decided to pick up two endgame books, both co-authored by Karsten Müller and Frank Lamprecht: *Fundamental Chess Endings* and *Secrets of Pawn Endings*.

The German language has an expression I like very much: 'alte fuchs' (it literally means 'old fox' or in other words, 'old experienced fellow'). I considered myself an *alte fuchs* when it comes to the endgame – I have learned a lot from playing, teaching students, and also from my love of endgame studies. Nevertheless, there were many parts of these books that caused me to think about endgames in completely new ways.

There were several nice examples that caught my imagination, including quite a few that I had never seen before. I spent quite some time reading, mainly examining positions that were new to me. After a while I realized the structure and the teaching system adopted in the books were completely different from mine. I came to the conclusion that there are several effective ways to teach these endings to students.

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Anyway this experience triggered the idea of learning more about one of the authors, and I thought the wider chess public would be interested to know more about Grandmaster Karsten Müller, the endgame expert.

I knew him from some years back. I thought I had spoiled his fortress idea in my Karpov book, but as you will see in a later part of the chapter (beginning on page 247), it turned out I had just found a different angle of attack. From that time on, we have regularly exchanged opinions about endgames via e-mail. When I asked about an interview, for a long time he simply did not answer. He normally responds very quickly. I felt I must have mistakenly offended him in some way. As it turned out, he simply did not receive that particular e-mail of mine.

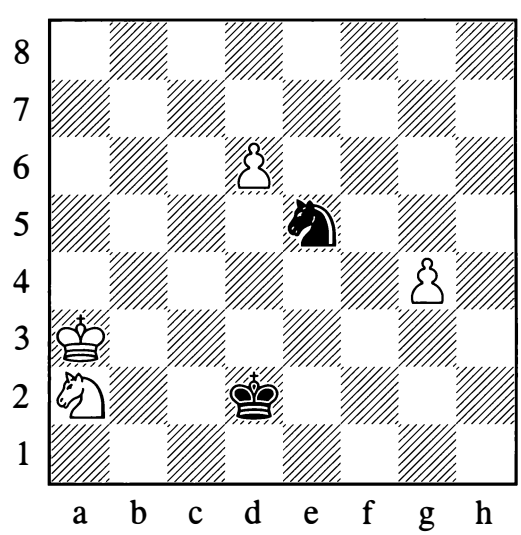
Without further ado, let's get to know him a little better.

When did you start playing?

"I learned the rules at the age of six or seven from my father (his German rating is 1795, which means roughly 1850 international Elo), who played in the team competition for Hamburg companies and not for a particular club. He joined HSK only later in 1996. My father defeated me every time until I reached the fifth class at school and joined a chess club, SC Diogenes Hamburg, at the age of eleven in 1981. There was a simul by one of the trainers to greet the newcomers and I won my game, which proved to be a promising start."

I found a position in one of Karsten's *ChessCafe* articles. He and his father reached the position after analysing a game. It could almost have been a short study.

W. Müller & K. Müller



White to play and win

1.♔b3!

White has to move to this square to avoid nasty checks. 1.♔b4? is wrong, as 1...♔e3! 2.g5 ♔f4 3.g6 ♘xg6 4.d7 ♘e5 nets White's second pawn.

1...♔e3 2.g5 ♔f4 3.g6 ♘xg6 4.d7

And White wins.

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Can you say a few words on your family background?

"My father worked for a large insurance company and my mother cared for my brother, who is two years younger, and me."

Why did you stick with chess?

"As with mathematics, I was fascinated from the beginning by the inner beauty and logic of the game. Last but not least, I liked the fight. And so despite losing all those games against my father, I still believed firmly that matters would change some day – and they did. Then later in the club we had a good team spirit, which also helped a lot."

Who was your trainer in your junior years?

"The trainer of the so-called Hamburger Stuetzpunkt, Gisbert Jacoby, by the way one of the founders of the ChessBase company, had a large influence on me in my junior years. Later Claus Dieter Meyer took over. We still work together today, but more on book projects or articles for publication."

I read that you have played over 150 games in the Bundesliga and you have an overall plus score. When did you start playing in the highest league of Germany?

"I think what you read is somewhat old – it is not up to date. I have already passed the 200 games barrier, and I still have the plus score. Answering your question, I joined Hamburger SK in 1988 to play in the Bundesliga."

How important is the team championship for you?

"Very important. Already in my junior years I preferred playing for a team and in the last few years I have played almost exclusively in team competitions. I also played in the Austrian Staatsliga on first board for Gleisdorf for several years (we had a very good team spirit and always managed to avoid relegation) and one game in the third division of the French league for Marseille Duchamps, which was also a very pleasant experience. Important for me was that both clubs do a lot of junior training – like the two German clubs I have played for so far: Hamburger SK and SC Diogenes Hamburg."

What is your most memorable game from the event? Could you explain a bit about how the German league is played?

"As a member of a team, the biggest success was no doubt the sensational second place of Hamburger SK behind Baden-Baden in the 2006/07 Bundesliga season. The Elo average of the best eight players of Baden-Baden was 2709, Köln Porz had 2625 and we had only 2551. My win with Black against Sakaev helped us to defeat Köln Porz. The league is played over seven weekends with 16 teams, each consisting of eight players. You travel together with another team which is nearby, your so-called Reisepartner, (journey partner) and the extra round against the Reisepartner is attached to one of the first three weekends and played on the Friday evening. For example we travelled together with the other team from northern Germany, Werder Bremen. So four teams meet at four places each weekend and each team has a list of 14 players, plus two juniors, for the whole season."

Here is the Sakaev game.

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Konstantin Sakaev – Karsten Müller

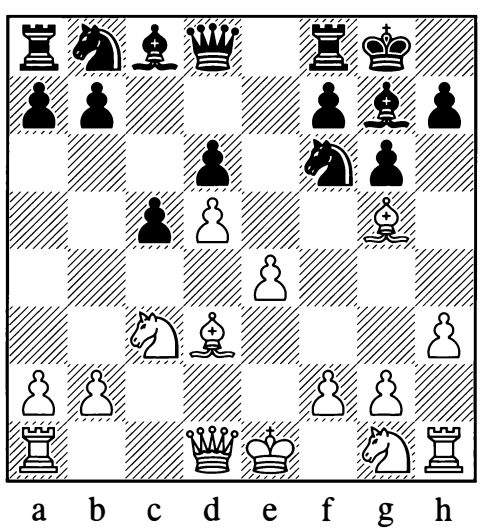
Bundesliga 2006/07

1.d4 ♘f6

Karsten almost always plays 1...d5, following up with the Meran- or Botvinnik-variations.

2.c4 c5 3.d5 e6 4.♘c3 exd5 5.cxd5 d6 6.e4 g6 7.h3 ♗g7 8.♗d3 0–0 9.♗g5

During preparation, Karsten mainly focused on the transposition to a main Benoni line with 9.♘f3. He considers that move to be stronger, and had planned to play the sacrificial line with 9...b5, which remains a hot theoretical topic today.



9...♗d7!

Karsten thinks this bishop move is the best in the position – although I should add that grandmasters have played it only rarely. Black must play fluently, as once his activity stops his position will become tough because of the pawn structure. By the way, this position has occurred more frequently through a King's Indian move order.

10.♘f3?!

Sakaev rejected the natural 10.a4 as it would allow the knight to occupy the b4-square, which is something of an achievement for Black. After 10...♘a6 11.♘f3 ♘b4 12.♗b1 the position is unclear.

10...b5 11.0–0

Taking on b5 would cost White his e-pawn – not a useful exchange for him.

11...c4 12.♗c2 ♖e8!

Black ties the c3-knight to the defence of the e-pawn. Instead after the hasty 12...b4?! 13.♘e2 the knight might resume its defensive duties from the more stable g3-square.

13.a3 a5 14.♘d4

14.♖e1 ♘a6 15.e5 dxe5 16.♘xe5 (16.♖xe5 h6 17.♗e3 b4) 16...b4 17.axb4 axb4 18.♘a4 b3 19.♗b1 ♘b8 Black gets good play. Interestingly, Karsten has won a couple of times by winning an isolated d-pawn in similar positions.

14...♕b6 15.♗e3 ♕b7 16.♗f4?

After this move Black obtains a very nice position. The 1999 Russian champion might have had a blind spot and overlooked Black's witty reply. Other options included:

16.♕f3 ♘a6 17.♗g5 Now 17...♘h5 is fine for Black, but I think he can do even better with 17...♘g4! with the initiative.

The critical move was

16.a4! b4

Worse is 16...bxa4?! 17.f3. White's position is preferable. Black cannot hurt White's pawn-chain and sooner or later his own pawn weaknesses will tell against him.

17.♘cb5

It would be interesting to know how Karsten would have reacted here. A possible continuation is:

17...♘xe4

17...♗xb5 18.♘xb5 ♖a6 19.♖e1 is rather unclear.

The evaluation is similar after 17...b3 18.♗b1 ♗xb5 19.♘xb5 ♖a6 20.♖e1.

18.♗xe4 ♖xe4 19.♘xd6 ♕xd5 20.♘xe4 ♕xe4 21.♖c1

The position is double-edged.

16...♘a6!

This is a fluent move in the true spirit of the Benoni.

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17.♕f3?

Konstantin misses Black's attractive and decisive tactical shot on the 22nd move.

Undermining the Black pawn-chain with the a-pawn is no longer possible. 17.a4? b4 18.♘cb5 ♘xe4 19.♗xe4 ♖xe4 20.♘xd6 ♕xd5 21.♘xe4 ♕xe4 Black has tremendous compensation, as Karsten pointed out.

Instead White should simplify the position with 17.♗xd6! b4. This was the point behind Black's last move. The threat to the e-pawn appears very troublesome, but White can stay in the game. 18.axb4 axb4 19.e5 bxc3 20.bxc3 ♕xd5 21.exf6 ♗xf6 22.♘e2 White may keep his position together.

17...b4 18.axb4 axb4 19.♘ce2

In view of the problems encountered by White during the game, he might have done well to consider the sacrificial 19.♗xd6!? to induce complications, e.g. 19...♕b6!? 20.e5 ♕xd4 21.♖fd1.

19...b3!

I suspect Karsten already smelled blood.

The alternative 19...♘c5!? 20.♖xa8 ♕xa8 21.♗xd6 ♘fxe4 22.♗xe4 ♘xe4 23.♗xb4 ♕xd5 did not satisfy him. Black no doubt has the upper hand, but White's position does not collapse automatically, and if White gets rid of the c4-pawn, he can almost certainly survive. As an endgame expert he has an acute awareness of the use of fortresses, and he knows that if the pawns are reduced to one side of the board then it sharply increases the defender's chances to hold.

20.♗b1?

White could have made Black work harder for the point with:

20.♗g5!

Black has several strong continuations, but over the board it would not be easy to determine the correct choice.

20...♘xd5

This leads to an advantage, although even with home analysis it is hard to say if it is objectively best.

After 20...♘g4!? 21.hxg4 bxc2 22.♘xc2 ♘c5 23.♖xa8 ♕xa8 24.♘c3 ♗xc3 25.bxc3 ♘xe4 26.♗f6 White is on the ropes, but I see no clear win for Black.

Another reasonable continuation is: 20...bxc2 21.♗xf6 ♕xb2 22.♖fc1 ♘b4 23.♘xc2 ♕xf6 24.♖xa8 ♖xa8 25.♕xf6 ♗xf6 26.♘xb4 ♖c8 White is struggling.

21.♗xb3 ♘b6

Alternatively, after 21...cxb3 22.exd5 ♘c5 23.♖xa8 ♕xa8 24.♗f4 ♕a6 White's position is unattractive.

22.♗c2 ♘b4 23.♖xa8 ♕xa8 24.♗b1 d5!

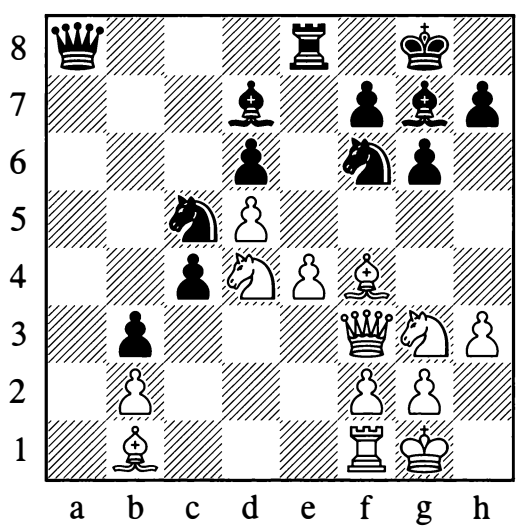
Karsten evaluated Black's advantage as decisive, although one could argue that this might be a little over the top. It is clear, however, that White will have to defend an unpleasant position.

20...♘c5 21.♖xa8 ♕xa8 22.♘g3

If 22.♖c1 ♕a6 23.♘c3 ♘fxe4 Black wins.

Not much better is 22.♗xd6 ♘fxe4 23.♗f4 ♕xd5 when White needs a miracle to escape.

Finally, after 22.♕c3 ♕a6 23.♖c1 ♘xd5! 24.♕xc4 ♕xc4 25.♖xc4 ♘xf4 26.♘xf4 ♖a8! 27.♘fe2 ♘e6 White's position falls apart.



22...♘fxe4!

White's position falls apart after this thematic blow.

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23.♗xe4

After 23.♘xe4 ♘xe4 24.♘xb3 f5 25.♘d2 ♘xd2 26.♗xd2 ♗xb2 White is lost.

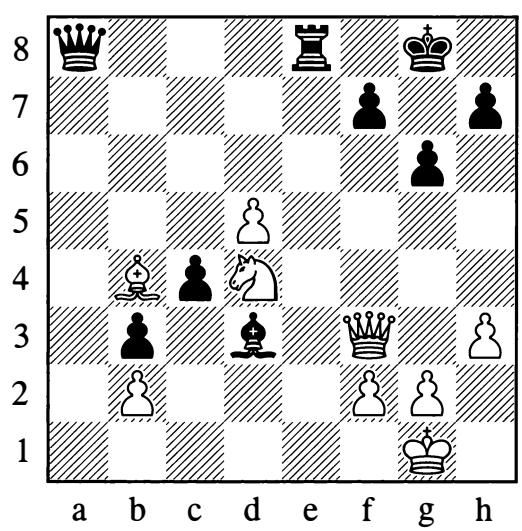
23...♗xd4 24.♗xd6 ♘xe4 25.♘xe4 ♗f5 26.♘c3 ♗d3 27.♘b5

Another nice line is 27.♖c1 ♗xc3! 28.♖xc3 (28.bxc3 b2) 28...♕a1† 29.♔h2 ♕xb2 30.♕f6 ♕e2! 31.♗a3 ♕e5†!. After this move White is desperately lost. Karsten enjoys himself by showing a very attractive win: 32.♕xe5 ♖xe5 33.d6 ♖a5 34.♗b2 ♖d5 35.♗a3 ♖xd6 and if White takes the rook, the b-pawn promotes.

27...♗xf1?!

This is neither the strongest nor the most pragmatic decision. Instead 27...♗xb2! would finish the game in no time: 28.♘c7 ♕d8 29.♘xe8 ♕xe8 30.♖d1 ♗g7 31.♖xd3 cxd3 32.♕xd3 ♕e1† 33.♔h2 b2 wins.

28.♘xd4 ♗d3 29.♗b4!



Sakaev is a world class player, and even in a bad position he continues to create problems. The text prepares to place the bishop on a stable square from which it blockades the queenside pawns and eyes the weak dark squares on the kingside.

29...♗e4

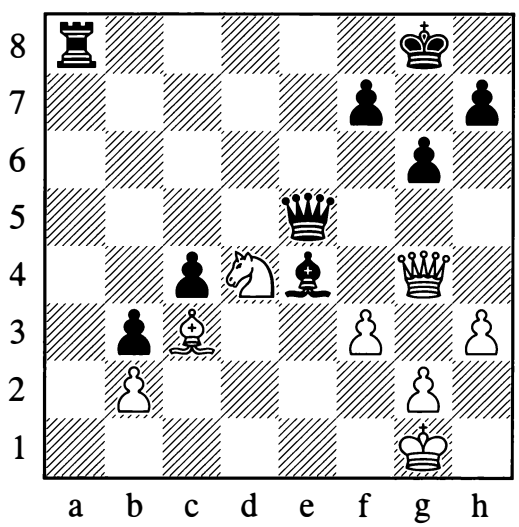
This is a reasonable decision. Taking the pawn would require a very precise follow up: 29...♕a1†!? 30.♔h2 ♕xb2 31.♘c6 ♗e4 (31...♗e2 32.♕f4) 32.♕f4 g5! 33.♘e7† ♖xe7 34.♕b8† ♔g7 35.♗xe7 ♗xd5 and Black should win. Such a variation may be easy for a computer to find, but one cannot blame a human for choosing an alternative path.

30.♕f4 ♕xd5 31.♗c3 ♕e5

Not 31...♗xg2? 32.♕f6 ♗xh3 33.♘f3 ♔f8 34.♗b4† ♔g8 35.♗c3, when Black must take a repetition.

32.♕g4 ♖a8 33.f3

33.♘xb3 ♕f5



White's pieces are quite well coordinated, and the weakened kingside means that Black will still have to play carefully.

33...♗d3 34.♔f2 h5! 35.♕d7 ♕c5?

Karsten was in time trouble, which helps to explain this and other errors. I suspect that the competitive stakes may also have had something to do with it. Let me add that Sakaev has also done a good job in stabilizing his position and creating threats – or at least the illusion of threats – on the kingside.

Instead of the game continuation, 35...h4! would have been winning at once.

36.♔g3?

Karsten indicates that 36.h4! was required.

36...♕g5†?

Better was 36...♕e5† 37.f4 (37.♔f2 h4) 37...h4† 38.♔f3 ♕e4† 39.♔g4 ♕xg2†

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40.♔xh4 ♕f2† 41.♔g4 ♗c2 and White cannot resist.

37.♔f2 ♕h4† 38.g3 ♕d8

Black must reorganize his position. It takes Karsten some time to get coordinated and begin the final assault.

39.♕c6 ♖c8 40.♕a6 ♖a8 41.♕b7 ♖b8 42.♕a7 h4!

This weakens White's king.

43.♔g2 ♕b6 44.♕e7 hxg3 45.♔xg3 ♖d8 46.♔g2 ♕d6 47.♕e3

If 47.♕h4 g5.

47...♕c5 48.h4 ♖a8

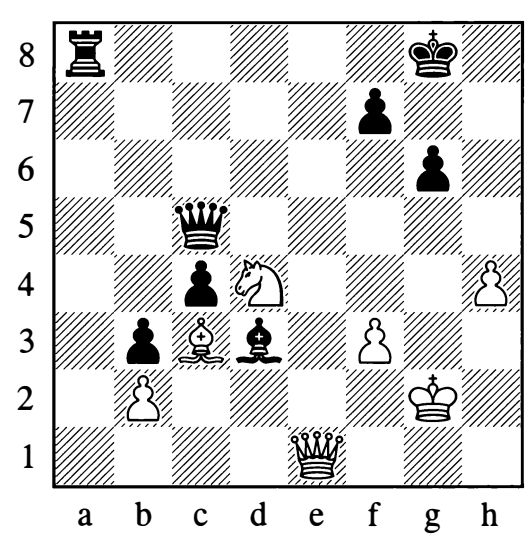
Black has to activate his rook to win.

Karsten shows the best way of doing it: 48...♖d5! 49.♕e8† ♕f8 50.♕e3 ♕c8 51.♕f4 ♕e8 would have been decisive according to the winner.

49.♕e1 ♕d6 50.♕e3

White's fortress is not easy to undermine, although according to Karsten it should not stand up in the long run. 50.♘b5 ♕c5 51.♘d4 ♖d8 52.♕e3 ♖d5 53.♕e8† ♕f8 54.♕e3 ♕c8 55.♕f4 ♕e8 56.♘xb3 ♖f5 57.♕d4 ♕e2† 58.♔g1 f6 59.♘d2 ♖e5 and Black wins.

50...♕c5 51.♕e1



51...♕f8!

The queen provides the possibility of ...♖e8, and after that it might move to h6.

52.♘e6!?

Karsten admits that this move was as shocking as a lightning bolt for him, but fortunately it is not good enough to save the game.

52...fxe6!

Not 52...♕h6? 53.♘c7 ♖d8 54.♘e8! and White draws.

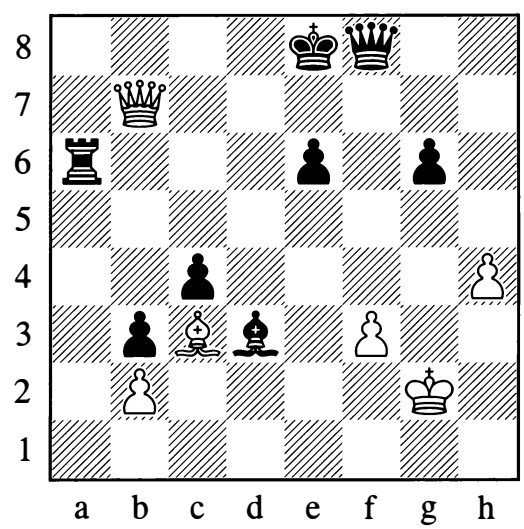
53.♕e5

After 53.♕xe6† ♕f7 54.♕e5 ♔h7 White's attack runs out of steam.

53...♖a6

53...♖e8?? 54.♕h8† ♔f7 55.♕h7† would be embarrassing.

54.♕h8† ♔f7 55.♕h7† ♔e8 56.♕b7



56...♖d6!

A precisely calculated move. He finally gets the rook active.

57.♗b4 ♕e7!

Black has so much material he can afford to give some of it back. All White has are some farewell checks.

58.♕b5† ♔f7 59.♕b8 ♖d8 60.♕f4† ♕f6 61.♕c7† ♔e8 62.♕c6† ♖d7

He has finally escaped the checks, so the game is almost over.

63.♗c3 ♕e7 64.♗e5 ♔f7 65.♕a8 ♕xh4 0–1

This was an excellent scalp for Karsten, and the fact that it helped his team to earn an important victory would have made it all the more gratifying.

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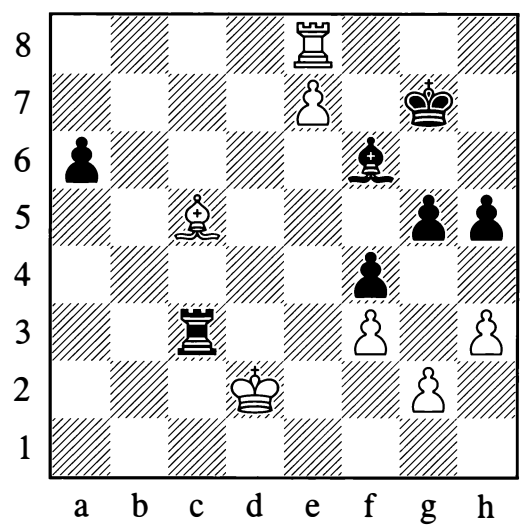
Incidentally, I think the best players Karsten has beaten are Khalifman and Vaganian.

One of the themes of the previous game was that Karsten had to thwart his opponent's attempts to salvage the game by obtaining a fortress.

In the following game, he was able to utilize the fortress idea himself, to save what would otherwise have been a hopeless endgame.

Leonid Kritz – Karsten Müller

German Championship, Saarbruecken 2002



Black's position is rather gloomy. Karsten finds a way to resist.

46...♖xc5! 47.♖g8† ♔xg8 48.e8=♕† ♔g7 49.♕xh5 ♖d5† 50.♔c2 ♖d4 51.♕g4 ♔f7 52.♕c8 a5 53.♕c7† ♔e6 54.♕xa5 ♔e7

White tried for nearly fifty moves, but Karsten held the position.

At first I thought your opponent was careless and woke up too late, which can easily happen. However when I spent a little time on it, I got the impression the fortress may have been good enough. What do think about it?

"I have not analysed the Kritz game in detail yet. During the game I saw no way to break it."

What was your best individual result?

"This is a difficult question. Probably the fourth place in Lippstadt 2000, where the computer PConners won and Luke McShane finished last. Other candidates are the third places in the German Championships in 1996 and 1997."

I would like to show the readers some games of yours, which one do you recommend?

"I like my game against Peter Acs."

Karsten Müller – Peter Acs

Rethymnon 2003

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

The Sozin has served Karsten really well.

6...e6 7.♗b3 ♘c6 8.♗e3 ♗e7 9.0–0 0–0 10.f4 ♘xd4 11.♗xd4 b5 12.e5 dxe5 13.fxe5 ♘d7 14.♘e4 ♗b7 15.♘d6 ♗xd6 16.exd6 ♕g5

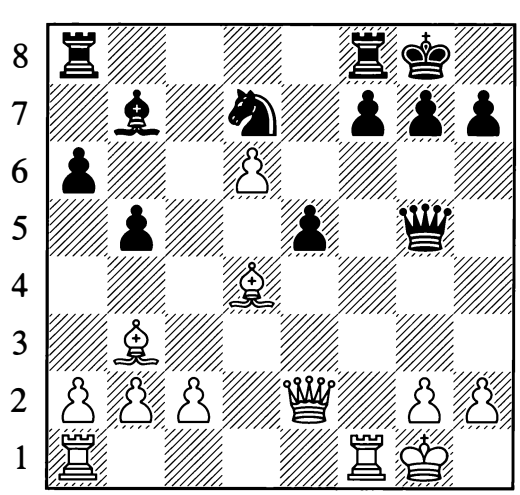
This position has been seen in many games, and both players had confidence in their respective positions.

17.♕e2

17.♖f2 is equally popular here.

17...e5

A year earlier Peter had played 17...♖ac8, and ever since this game Black has shifted to 17...♔h8 and 17...a5.



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18.♖f2!

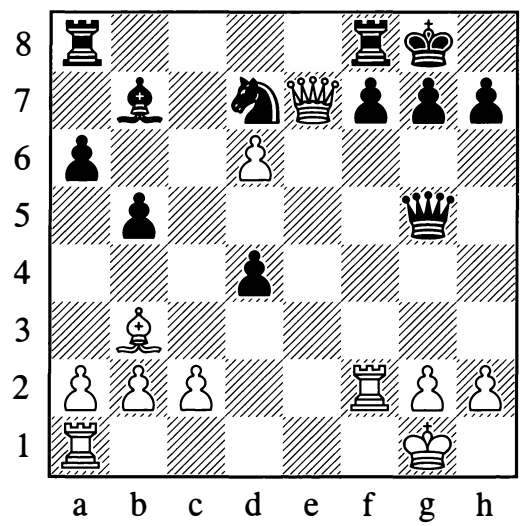
This is a strong novelty. It may not kill off the variation entirely, but it is certainly an unpleasant surprise to contend with over the board. Though Zap Rybka played a blitz game with Croenne Rybka, strong humans do not go for this position.

Karsten even improved on a world championship game! In Short – Kasparov, London (14) 1993, the challenger played 18.♗c3 and drew.

18...exd4

After 18...♕g6 19.♖af1 White takes the f7-pawn and has some advantage.

19.♕e7



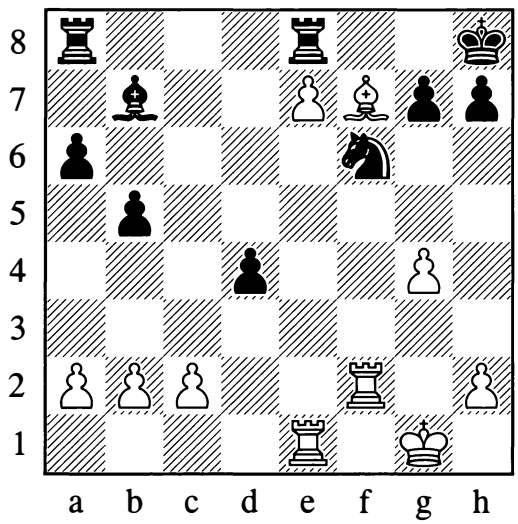
19...♕xe7?

Acs fails to find the best defence. Peter Wells' suggestion 19...♘f6 looks more promising. If one wants to try the line with Black, one should play this move. 20.♕xb7 ♕e3 21.♕f3! ♕xf3! Peter showed the right follow-up. (21...♖ad8 22.♕xe3 dxe3 23.♖e2 ♖xd6 24.♖xe3 White's bishop is stronger than Black's knight. White is going to play a4 soon.) 22.♖xf3 ♖ad8 Now White will have to accept an isolated pawn in order to regain the pawn. The position is balanced.

20.dxe7 ♖fe8

20...♖fc8 21.♖xf7 ♔h8 22.e8=♕† (22.♗e6 ♗c6 23.♖af1 h6 24.♖1f4 ♖g8 25.♖xd4 ♘f6 is not fully convincing for White) 22...♖xe8 23.♖xd7 ♗c6 24.♖d6! ♗b7 25.♖b6 ♖e7 (25...♗e4 26.♖e1) 26.♖xb7 ♖xb7 27.♗d5 White has decent winning chances.

21.♗xf7† ♔h8 22.♖e1 ♘f6 23.g4!



This strong thrust gives Black no time to get organized. The aim is to divert the f6-knight. It is likely that this was still home preparation.

23...♗d5?

Also unsatisfactory is 23...h6 24.h4! ♖ec8 25.♖f4 ♗c6 26.g5 and regardless of the extra piece, the e7-pawn is rather unpleasant to live with.

23...♖ec8! Wells again found Black's best move. 24.g5 (24.♗e6 ♖c7 25.♗f7) 24...♘e4 25.♖fe2 ♘d6 White probably has to settle for the equal ending after winning the knight with the promotion.

24.♗xe8 ♖xe8 25.g5 ♘d7 26.♖f4

Black's pieces are not organized – it will take too much energy to remove the e7-pawn.

26...♔g8 27.♖xd4 ♘b6 28.♖e5

According to Ftacnik 28.b3 was even better, but I think it is a matter of taste. Karsten's move is also very strong.

28...♗f7 29.♖d8 ♘c8 30.c3 g6 31.♔f2!

Utilizing the king effectively is extremely important in endgames.

31...♔g7 32.♖e2!

This is a nice waiting move. It makes the

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opponent guess what is coming next.

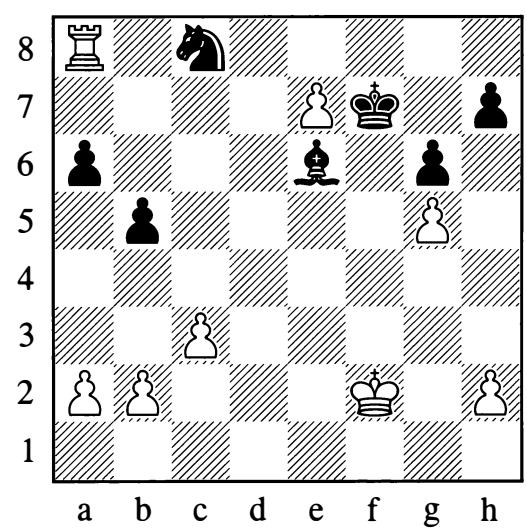
32...♘a7

Black is almost in zugzwang.

33.♖e6

Karsten forces matters and is happy with the ensuing ending. I think he played the whole game very well, and what he plays here is not bad at all. Nevertheless, this is more or less the only time during the game when I preferred an alternative. I think 33.b3!? was even stronger. Karpov almost always started to improve his pieces before he launched his play during his endgames. To improve the position by activating the king was even stronger. 33...♘c6 34.♖d7 a5 35.♖c7 ♗d5 36.♖e3 and White threatens c4.

33...♗xe6 34.♖xe8 ♔f7 35.♖a8 ♘c8

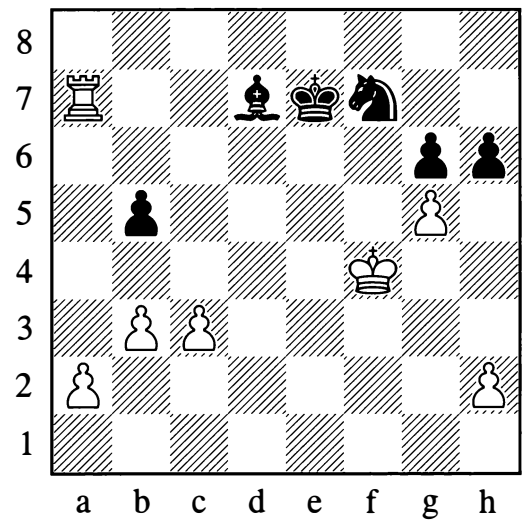


36.♖xa6

White has some material advantage, but has no passed pawn yet. The win is still far from a foregone conclusion.

36...♔xe7 37.♔e3 ♘d6 38.♖a7† ♗d7 39.♔f4 ♘f7 40.b3 h6?

Peter is impatient; he allows a beautiful simplification. Black should have just waited with 40...♘d8. Then 41.h4 ♔d6 42.a4 bxa4 43.bxa4 ♘c6 44.♖a8 and White is probably winning, as Black has problems guarding the a-pawn. In addition White can always switch his attention to the kingside pawns.



41.♖xd7†!!

He sacrifices the exchange to reach an ending with three pawns versus a piece. It is important that he will be able to obtain passed pawns on both of the rooks' files: a dream scenario when playing against a knight.

41...♔xd7 42.gxh6 ♘xh6

Black is forced to allow a king invasion on one side or the other. 42...♔e7 43.h7 ♔f6 44.a4 bxa4 45.bxa4 ♔g7 46.a5 ♘d8 47.a6 ♘c6 48.♔e4 White's king decides the outcome of the game on the queenside.

43.♔g5 ♘f5 44.♔xg6 ♘e7†

Peter goes after the c-pawn. After 44...♘h4† Grandmaster Hecht shows how White wins if Black just waits: 45.♔f6 ♘f3 46.h3 ♔d6 47.♔f5 ♔d5 48.a4 bxa4 49.bxa4 ♔c4 50.♔g4 ♘d2 51.h4 ♘e4 52.h5 ♘xc3 53.h6 ♘d5 54.♔g5+–

45.♔f7 ♘d5 46.h4!

Keeping the pawn with 46.c4 would spoil the win. 46...bxc4 (46...♘c7? 47.cxb5 ♘xb5 48.h4 wins for White) 47.bxc4 ♘b6 48.c5 ♘a4 Black holds, as his knight will make it back to the kingside in time.

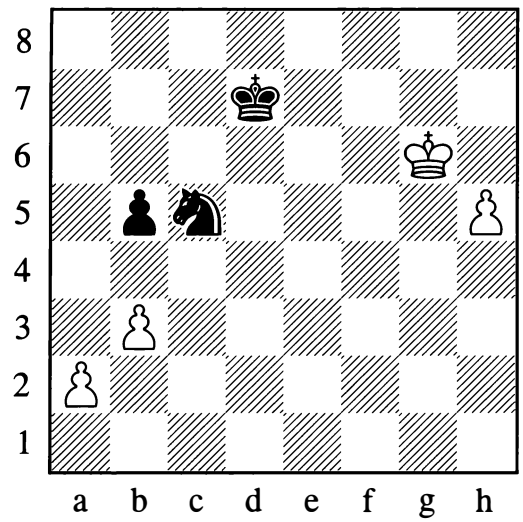
46...♘xc3 47.h5 ♘e4 48.♔g6

White has to prevent Black from sacrificing the knight for the h-pawn. After 48.h6? ♘g5† 49.♔g6 ♘e6 the knight stops the pawn.

48...♘c5

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48...♔e7 49.h6 ♘f6 50.a4! bxa4 51.bxa4 ♘d7 52.a5 White wins.



49.♔f6!!

This is a nice move, especially as Karsten had to foresee it several moves in advance. The king may yet go to the queenside – it is an amazing possibility.

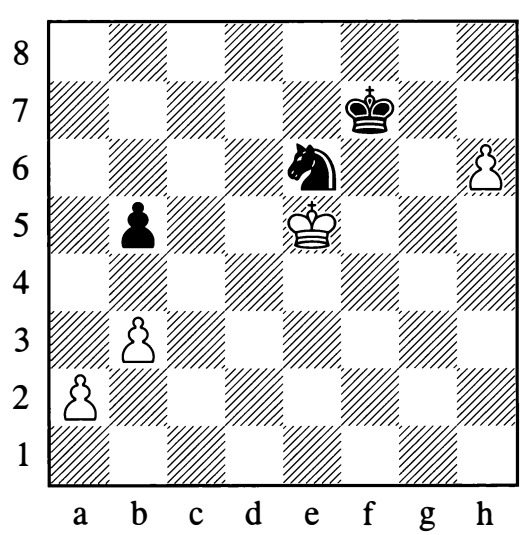
49...♘e6

After 49...♘e4† 50.♔e5! ♘g5 51.♔d5! ♔e7 (51...♔c7 52.♔c5 ♘f7 53.♔xb5) 52.♔c5 ♔f6 53.♔xb5 Black cannot stop the pawns.

50.♔e5! ♔e7 51.h6

Not 51.♔d5?? ♘f4†.

51...♔f7



52.b4!

The practical decision, White keeps both queenside pawns and, as Black's king is miles away, he wins. The rest is trivial. 52.♔d5? ♘f4† 53.♔c5 ♘d3† 54.♔xb5 ♘c1 Black survives as he takes a queenside pawn.

Technically it was also possible to win with 52.♔d6

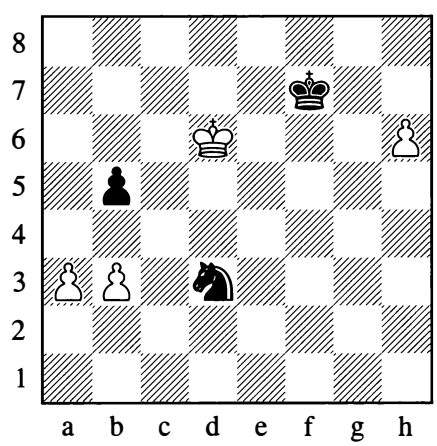
The variations are not so trivial, but we will follow the analysis of GM Hecht who demonstrated the win.

52...♘f4

52...♘d4 53.♔c5 ♘e2 54.a3 ♘c1 55.b4 and White wins.

53.a3! ♘d3

53...♘e2 54.♔c5 ♘c3 55.♔b4 ♘b1 Now the knight is too far away to stop the a-pawn. 56.a4 bxa4 57.bxa4 ♘d2 58.a5 ♘f3 If Black had one extra move then ...♘d4 would hold. (58...♘e4 59.a6) 59.a6 ♘d4 (59...♘e5 60.♔b5) 60.♔c5 and wins.



54.h7!!

Hecht was Karsten's predecessor as the endgame expert in Germany. This amazing finesse shows his skill.

54...♔g7 55.♔c6 b4 56.a4 ♘c1 57.a5 ♘xb3 58.h8=♕†!

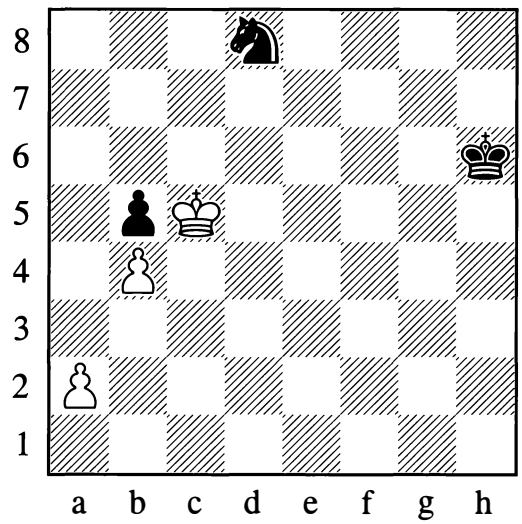
White could also begin by pushing the a-pawn, but at some point over the next few moves he will need to play this move in order to draw the enemy king to a worse position.

58...♔xh8 59.a6 ♘d4† 60.♔b6 b3 61.a7

White wins, as he will promote with check.

52...♘d8 53.♔d6 ♔g6 54.♔c5 ♔xh6

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55.♔xb5

Black's king is too far away, so the rest is trivial.

55...♔g6 56.a4 ♔f6 57.a5 ♔e6 58.a6 ♔d7 59.a7 ♘e6 60.♔b6

1–0

A very well played game!

Are you making a living out of chess?

"Yes, in part. On the one hand, I have worked at Hamburg University as a mathematician for three years and since 2006 I have worked part-time for a Hamburg lawyer. On the other hand, I have coached juniors, written books and articles and made DVDs and videos for ChessBase."

Many openings you play rather positionally, but a small proportion, in contrast, you play really sharply? What is the explanation for this?

"In general I like to attack and to play sharply, but of course I had to broaden my approach here and become more well-rounded as a player."

Also while you play main lines in most cases, how come you never enter the Ruy Lopez with White?

"This is a very good question, especially as I have told many of my students to play the Ruy Lopez. Maybe I should start to play it myself some day."

Did you realize that in some variations you score extremely well, in some below par?

"Yes. This probably also has to do with my style."

You are a 1.e4 player; have you thought of playing 1.d4 as well?

"Not really and I have played 1.d4 only very rarely. I consider that switching over to 1.d4 would be too radical. I think that 1.e4 fits better my style."

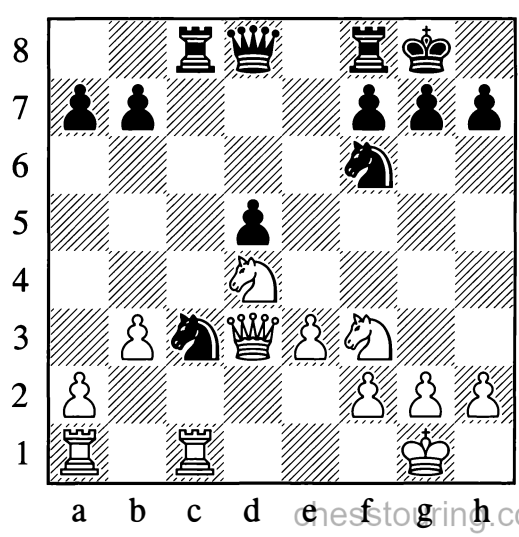
I did not mean to change, but to pick it up as well. I think that in 1.d4 there are also some lines which suit you. Then it would be much harder for opponents to escape from your favourite lines? What do you think?

"It would have definitely been better to learn 1.d4 as well – especially as flexibility in the opening is very important nowadays, due to excessive computer-aided preparation. But if having only one starting move, I think 1.e4 is better for me as it fits my style more. I think that I will stick to it and only rarely choose another first move in special situations."

Let me show a well-played game. I think it illustrates his style very well.

Can Arduman – Karsten Müller

Rethymnon 2003



chessstorming.com

17...♕a5

Black wants to make sure the tension stays in the game and preserves the c3-knight.

18.♖c2

White would do better to exchange a pair of knights.

18.♘e2 seems to me the simplest solution, in order to get rid of Black's pressure on the queenside. 18...♘fe4 19.♘xc3 ♘xc3 20.♘d4 ♖c7 21.♖c2 (alternatively there is 21.a4 ♖fc8 22.♖c2 ♘e4 23.♖xc7 ♕xc7 – 23...♖xc7 24.♕b5! – 24.f3 and White has fully equalized) 21...♖fc8 22.♖ac1 (22.a4) White intends to meet 22...♘xa2?! with 23.♕f5! and White gets two rooks for the queen.

18...♖c7

After 18...♘fe4 19.♘e2 ♘xe2† 20.♕xe2 ♖c3 21.♘d4 Black probably cannot achieve much with his domination on the c-file, since all the important entry points are covered.

19.h3

If 19.♘e2 ♖fc8 20.♘xc3 ♖xc3 21.♖ac1 White holds.

19...♖fc8 20.♕f5?!

White hopes to get play on the kingside.

20...♕a6!

He makes sure the queen cannot return to the centre.

21.♔h1

With 21.a4!? White protects the b3-pawn very securely.

21...b5!

Karsten improves his queenside during the next couple of moves.

22.♘e5 b4 23.♘d3 ♕b6 24.♕f4 a5 25.♘f5 ♕a6 26.♘e5

26.♕g5 is safely met by 26...g6.

26...g6

This simple move brings White's play on the kingside to a halt.

27.♘d4 ♘fe4

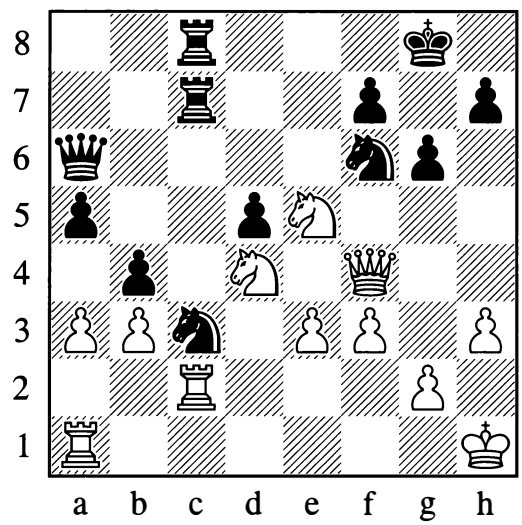
Provoking a weakness.

28.f3

After 28.♘ef3 a4 29.bxa4 ♕xa4 Black has the upper hand on the queenside.

28...♘f6 29.a3?

For a long time White has paid no attention to the queenside. Now he chooses a very unfortunate moment to ease the pressure there.



29...♘h5!!

This is a nice zwischenzug. Arduman was probably counting on 29...bxa3 30.♘g4! (30.♖xa3? ♘h5; 30.g4 a2) 30...♘h5 31.♕e5 f6 32.♕e6† ♕xe6 33.♘xe6 ♖e7 34.♘d4 and White gets away with it.

30.♕h4

If 30.♕h2 bxa3 31.g4 ♘g7 32.♘c4 dxc4 33.♖xc3 ♘e6.

30...bxa3 31.♖xa3

Allowing the pawn to reach a2 was dreadful as well. 31.♘c4 dxc4 32.♖xc3 cxb3!! 33.♖xc7 b2 and Black promotes to a queen in no time.

31...♕f1†! 32.♔h2 ♘e2!

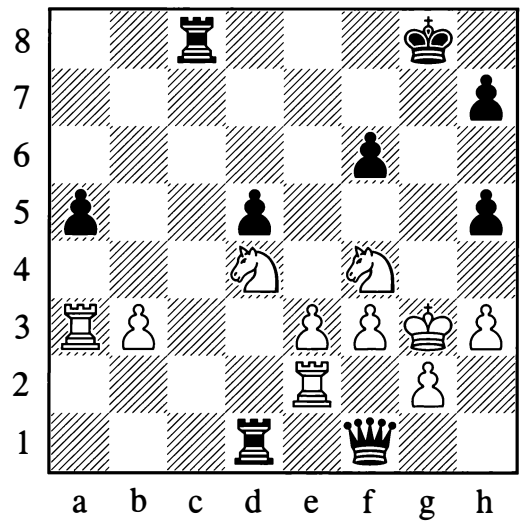
This is a highly unusual way to checkmate on the back rank.

33.♖xe2 ♖c1 34.♕xh5

White sacrifices the queen to avoid checkmate, or should I say to postpone it.

34...gxh5 35.♔g3 f6 36.♘d3 ♖d1 37.♘f4

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37...h4†!

Black has such a material advantage he would win anyway, but Karsten finds a neat tactical solution.

38.♔g4

The pawn is poisoned, as seen after 38.♔xh4 ♖xd4! 39.exd4 ♕c1.

38...h5†! 39.♔f5 ♖xd4 40.exd4 ♕b1† 41.♖e4

41.♔xf6 ♖f8† soon leads to mate.

41...dxe4 42.fxe4 ♖e8

0–1

I like this game because of the somewhat original play on the c-file and the queenside and because of the sharp tactical vision that came into play at the critical moments. I think the game shows he is a true attacking player and not only an endgame specialist.

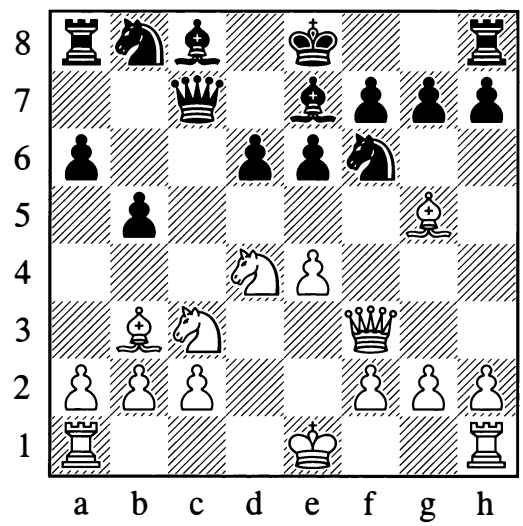
What opening novelty of yours do you consider the best of Karsten Müller?

"10.e5!? in the Sozin variation of the Najdorf from Müller vs Wahls, German Championship, Gladenbach 2007."

Karsten Müller – Matthias Wahls

German Championship, Gladenbach 1997

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗c4 e6 7.♗b3 b5 8.♗g5 ♗e7 9.♕f3 ♕c7



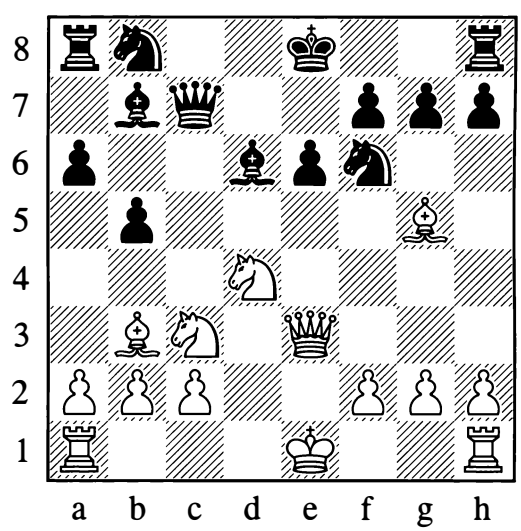
10.e5!

Karsten's big novelty has been popular ever since. However, long castling remains a common move as well.

10...♗b7

10...dxe5 11.♘dxb5 axb5 12.♕xa8 0–0 is still an option tried by some players. It achieves reasonable results.

11.exd6 ♗xd6 12.♕e3!



This comes naturally. However assessing it beforehand is not easy, as Black has no weakness in his pawn chain. It is just that he is underdeveloped, including the king.

12...♗c5

This move remains the most popular. Karsten

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has had two other games with this line:

12...h6 13.♗xf6 ♗f4 14.♘xe6 fxe6 15.♕xe6† ♔f8 16.♖d1 1–0, Müller – Trisic, Hamburg 1999.

12...♗e7 13.0–0–0 0–0 14.♗xe6 fxe6 15.♘xe6 ♕c6 16.♘xf8 ♗xf8 17.♗xf6 ♕xf6 18.♘d5 ♗xd5 19.♖xd5 ♘c6 20.♕e4 ♘b4 21.a3 ♖e8 This game ended in a draw, Müller – Woekler, Heringsdorf 2000.

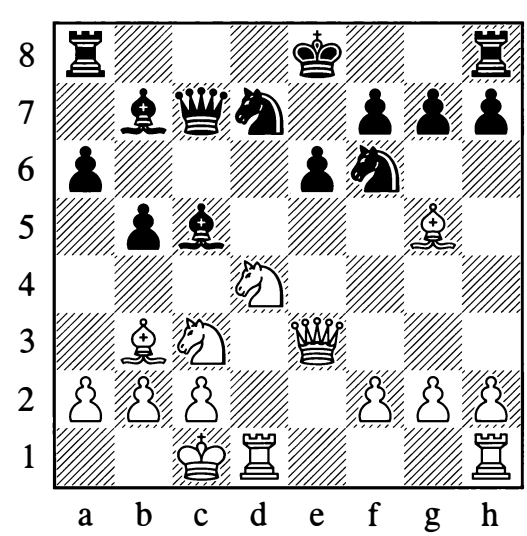
13.0–0–0 ♘bd7

As Wahls said later on, this was a pragmatic decision.

The line beginning with 13...♘c6!? is still played at high levels. It looks hard for White to obtain an advantage.

14.♗xf6 gxf6 15.♘e4 ♗xd4 16.♖xd4 ♘xd4 17.♘xf6† ♔f8 18.♕xd4 ♖d8 19.♕h4 h6 20.c3 ♕e5 21.♘h7† ♔e8 22.♘f6† Kogan – Sutovsky, Ashdod 2006, ended in a repetition.

Later Karjakin won a game in this line, where White went to d5 with the knight instead of e4. However, this inspired Ivanchuk to surprise him in a rapid game with: 14.♕xe6†!! fxe6 15.♘xe6 ♕e5 (15...♕e7! 16.♖he1 ♕xe6 17.♖xe6† ♘e7 is the critical test. No one seems to think that White is okay here, and Black has 2/2 so far.) 16.♘xg7† ♔f8 17.♘e6† ♔f7 18.♖he1 ♕xe1? (after something like 18...♕xg5† Black would still be in the game) 19.♘xc5† ♔g6 20.♖xe1 ♔xg5 21.♘xb7 White eventually won the game, but the ball remains in White's court.



14.♗xe6! 0–0

14...fxe6? 15.♕xe6† ♔f8 (15...♗e7 16.♘f5; 15...♔d8 16.♗xf6† gxf6 17.♘dxb5) 16.♕xf6† (16.♗xf6? ♕f4†) 16...gxf6 17.♘e6† ♔e7 18.♘xc7 White went on to win in Naiditsch – Grünfeld, Corsica (Rapid) 2004.

15.♗b3 ♖ae8 16.♕h3

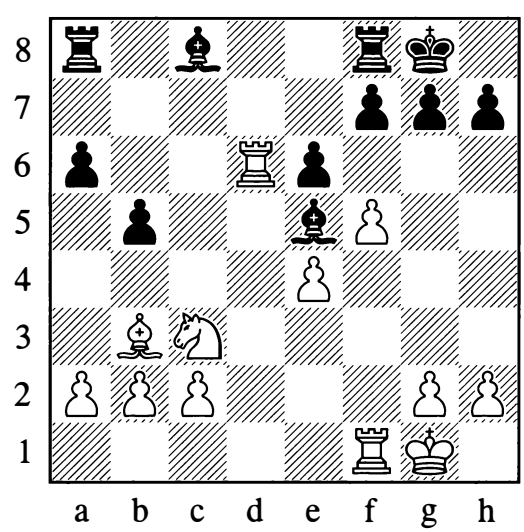
Wahls has obtained some compensation for the pawn, yet White's chances should be better. Unfortunately Karsten later went wrong and lost. Nevertheless, with this game the Müller variation was born. It was a significant contribution to opening theory.

Which is the most memorable endgame you played?

"A difficult question. One candidate is Müller – Heinemann, Altenkirchen 1999."

Karsten Müller – Thies Heinemann

German Championship, Altenkirchen 1999



In various Sicilians, Black often sacrifices a pawn for domination of the dark squares. On this occasion it has not been a total success, as the weak e6-pawn is a bigger problem for Black than it may appear at first sight.

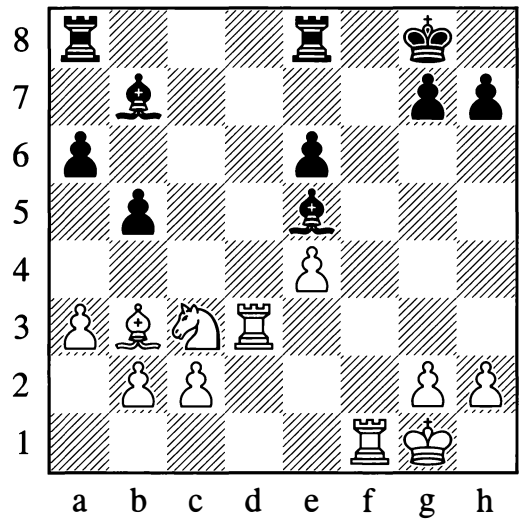
17.♖d3 ♖e8

17...b4 does not solve Black's problem after 18.fxe6! fxe6 (18...bxc3? 19.e7) 19.♘a4.

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18.a3! ♗b7 19.fxe6 fxe6

It looks like White will have difficulties improving his position.



20.♖f5!!

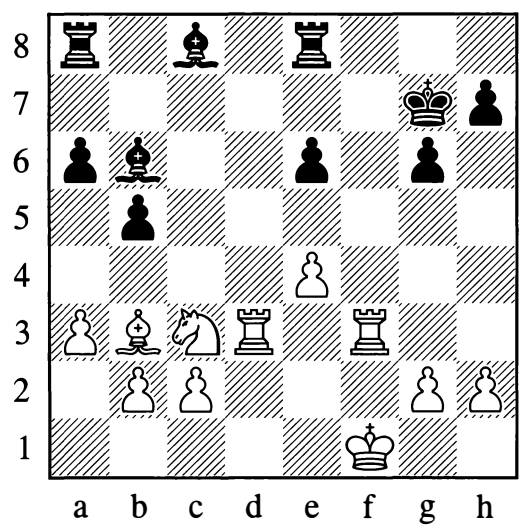
This is flashy no doubt, but useful as well as it disturbs Black's best piece.

20...♗c7 21.♖d7 ♗b6† 22.♔f1

There can be such a fine line between a good and bad king when there are so many pieces on the board. Karsten is not worried.

22...♗c8 23.♖d3 g6 24.♖ff3 ♔g7

I would prefer 24...♖a7 to improve the rook.



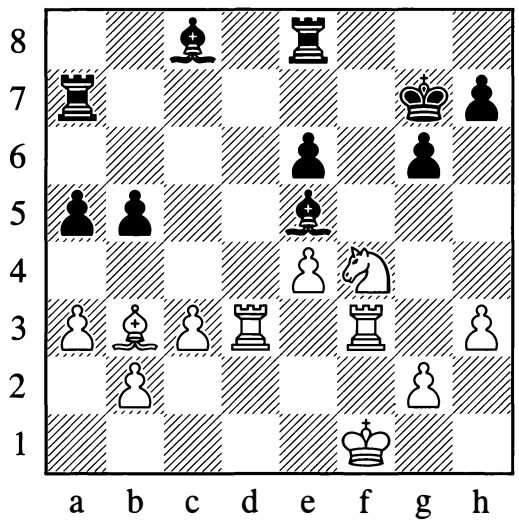
25.♘e2!

Karsten improves the knight.

25...♖a7 26.♘f4! ♗c7 27.c3 ♗e5 28.h3!

The knight can move now!

28...a5



29.♖d1

After several sweet little improving moves, he moves the rook away from the diagonal. With 29.♔f2!? he could move out of range as well.

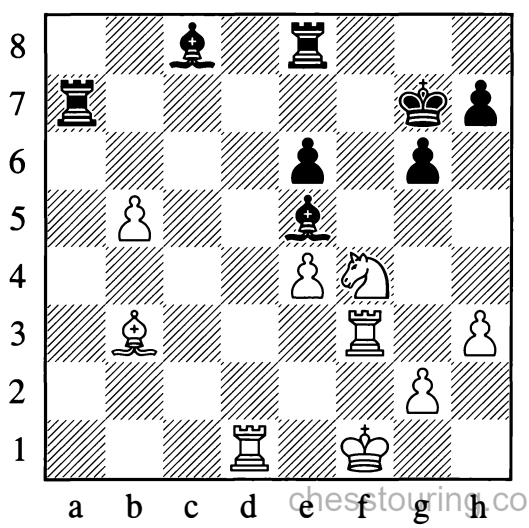
29...b4

Black hopes to open the position and obtain play against the b-pawn. Had he been content to wait and see with 29...a4, White would still be able to improve his pieces. 30.♗a2 ♖d7 31.♘d3 ♗b7 (31...♗c7 32.♔e2) 32.♔e2 ♗h2 33.♘c5.

30.axb4 axb4 31.cxb4 ♗xb2 32.b5!

On b5 the pawn can safely be protected.

32...♗e5



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33.♘d3!!

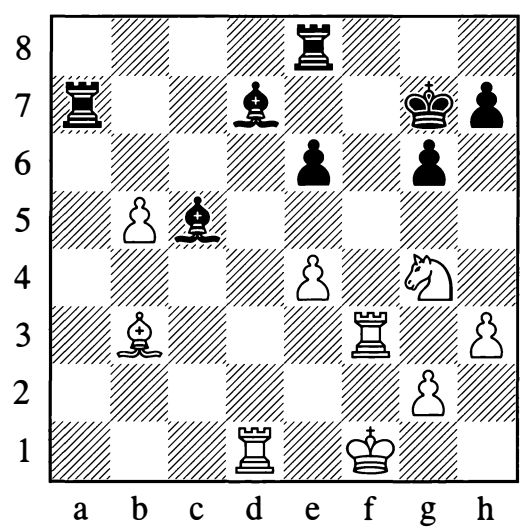
In this endgame Karsten's play reminds me of that of Karpov. He keeps improving slowly and very effectively. What makes the knight move attractive is that although the knight already stands well, there is an even better square.

33...♗d6 34.♘f2! ♗c5

34...♗e7 35.♖c3

35.♘g4! ♗d7?

35...♖ee7 waiting passively gave better chances. However, White can improve on his pieces, as in the following line, which is not forced. 36.♘e5 ♖eb7 37.♗c4 ♖c7 38.♔e2 ♖a4 39.♖c3 ♗e7 40.♘c6 ♗b7 41.♖dc1 ♗xc6 42.♗d3 White has decent winning chances.



36.♖xd7†!

It looks like Karsten enjoys sacrificing the exchange on d7. He used the same idea in the Acs game.

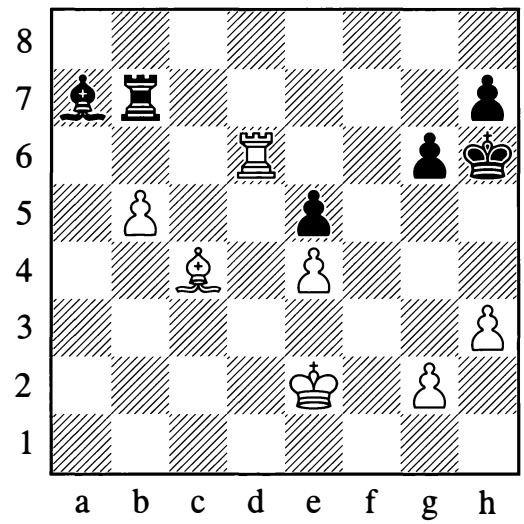
36...♖xd7 37.♘f6 ♖de7 38.♘xe8† ♖xe8 39.♖c3! ♖f8† 40.♔e2 ♗d4 41.♖c7† ♖f7 42.♖c6

The b-pawn has a special characteristic in opposite-coloured bishop endgames. The king sometimes has no room to come around from behind. Here a bishop on b6 would stop any invasion.

42...♖b7 43.♗c4 e5 44.♔d3 ♔h6 45.♖d6 ♗f2 46.♖d5 ♖e7 47.♖d8 ♖b7 48.♔e2!

Over the past few moves Karsten was just trying to wear out his opponent, but now he initiates a great idea.

48...♗a7 49.♖d5 ♖e7 50.♖d6 ♖b7 51.♖a6 ♗d4 52.♖d6 ♗a7



53.g3!!

White starts an attack on the kingside.

53...♔g5

Black simply did not understand White's intentions. Actually this move helps White carry out his plan.

Better was 53...♔g7 54.♔f3 h5!? – but then again, how many players would be happy to fix their pawns on the same colour as the opponent's bishop?

54.♔f3 ♔h6 55.h4 ♔h5 56.♔g2!

Another Karpovian move. In this game Karsten really does play like the endgame virtuoso.

56...♗c5 57.♖c6 ♗d4 58.♔h3! ♔h6 59.g4! ♔g7 60.g5!

Slowly pushing Black back.

60...♗e3

Maybe Black should have made some room for the king with 60...h5!?, although this would leave the g6-pawn as a target.

61.♗d5!

Taking the tactical opportunity to improve the bishop.

61...♖b8

If 61...♖xb5 62.♖c7† ♔f8 63.♖f7† ♔e8

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64.♖xh7 and White wins.

If Black tries 61...h6 there follows 62.h5! and the breakthrough wins.

Finally, after 61...h5 White wins a second pawn, and the game, after 62.♖xg6† ♔xg6 63.♗xb7.

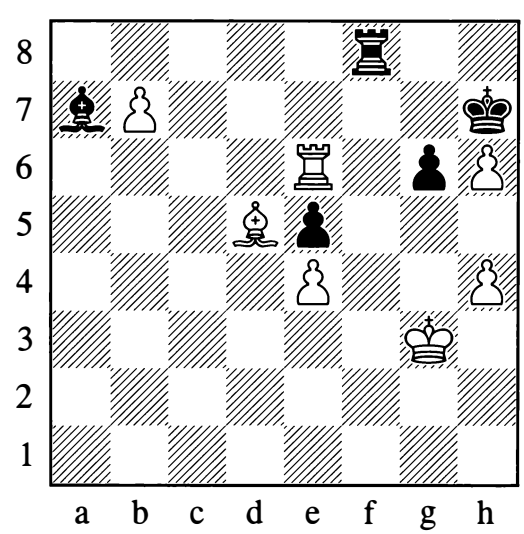
62.♖c7† ♔h8 63.♗c6! ♖f8 64.♖e7 ♗d4 65.♗d5 ♖f3† 66.♔g2 ♖f2† 67.♔g3

I was surprised when I studied the endgames of the 12th World Champion, as I had been unaware of how often he checkmated his opponents in endgames. His mating attacks were not usually in the grand style of Tal or Kasparov. But conducting a mating attack with very few pieces is an art in itself. Slowly, and with extreme effectiveness, he often caught the king. When I told grandmaster Razuvaev, who worked with Karpov for many years, what I had noticed, he confirmed it was true.

67...h6 68.gxh6

White forces his pawn through to b7. Nevertheless it was possible to crown his previous play with a lovely breakthrough leading to checkmate: 68.h5! ♗c5 69.♖d7 gxh5 70.g6 h4† 71.♔xh4

68...♖f4 69.♖e6 ♔h7 70.b6 ♖f8 71.b7 ♗a7



72.h5!

Equally good was 72.♖c6! ♔xh6 73.h5! ♔xh5 74.♖c8 winning.

72...gxh5 73.♔h4 ♖f1 74.♔xh5 ♖g1 75.♖e7† ♔h8 76.♖xe5

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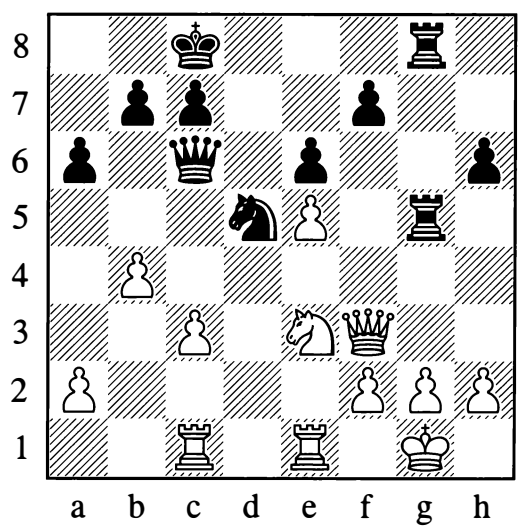
I take my hat off to you. It is a superbly played endgame at the highest level.

"Thanks for the compliment."

Here is another of his best endgames.

Karsten Müller – Georg Gross

Germany 1991



29.g3!

White is ready to return his extra pawn and move to an endgame with a positional advantage.

29...♘xb4

Black had better take the pawn now, otherwise he may not get another chance.

30.♕xc6 ♘xc6 31.f4 ♖5g7 32.♖cd1 h5

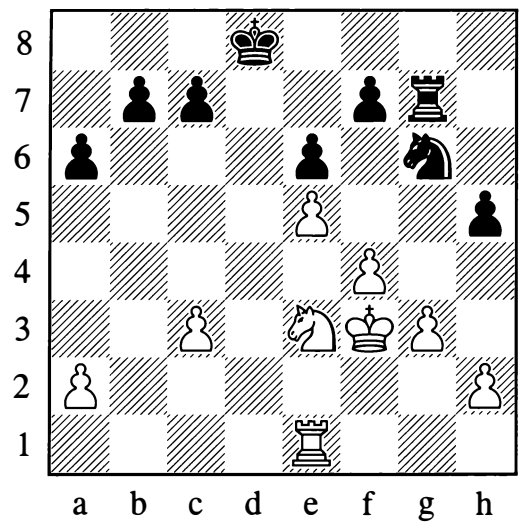
Exchanging the knight with 32...♘e7 and having a double rook ending offered little amusement either, but maybe that was the better choice. 33.♔f2 ♘f5 34.♘xf5 exf5 Black's rooks are out of play. Still, in my opinion it was a better option than the game continuation.

33.♔f2 ♘e7 34.♖d3 ♘g6?

The knight has no function on g6. Better was 34...♘f5!?. The doubled pawns would not be easy to attack.

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35.♔f3 ♖d8 36.♖xd8† ♔xd8



37.♖d1†

The rook not only occupies the open file, but more importantly forces Black to decide where to put his king. 37.h3 ♖g8 38.g4 (38.♖h1 ♔e7 39.g4) 38...hxg4† 39.hxg4 ♖h8 40.♔g3 b5 41.♘d1 c5 42.♘f2 ♔e7 43.♘e4 was an alternative approach.

37...♔c8

White is better after 37...♔e7 38.c4 ♖g8 39.c5 as well.

38.♔e4 ♘e7 39.♖d2 ♖g8 40.a4 b6 41.♖d1 ♖g7?

Black wants to stop h2-h3 by maintaining the attack on the g3-pawn, but the rook is probably better off where it was.

It was also possible to offer an exchange with 41...♖d8!?. Endgames can be very subtle. Take the present example: usually the defender tends to prefer rook endings to knight endings, but in this instance the knight ending offers better hopes of salvation for Black. The reason is that with the rooks off the board Black can start pushing his pawns on the queenside. 42.♖xd8† ♔xd8 Black will play ...c6! followed by either ...b5 or ...♘d5. This should enable him to hold the game, despite his less active king.

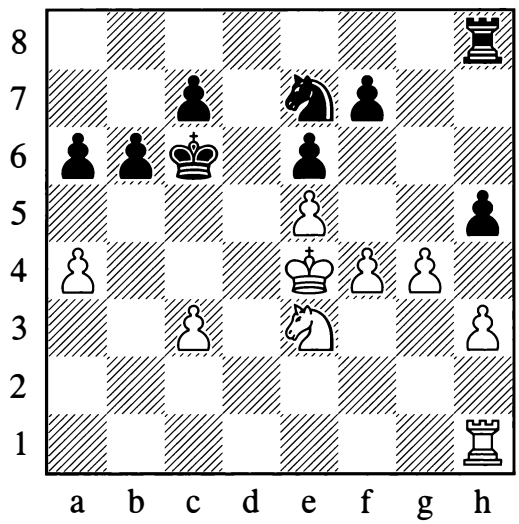
42.♖g1! ♖g8 43.h3 ♔b7 44.g4 ♔c6

Black improves the king, but with these tempos he will miss out in the race.

44...b5!? was interesting.

45.♖h1 ♖h8

Once again it was time to get moving on the queenside with 45...b5.



46.g5!

Although White has no passed pawn, his pawns are much closer to promotion than Black's.

46...♖d8 47.♖h2!

Covering the entry square on d2.

47...♔c5 48.♖f2! ♖d7?

It is quite intriguing that the drawing margin in chess is often wider than people imagine. In this endgame White has played well while Black has made some second-best moves – and yet he could save the game with 48...a5!. Play might continue: 49.f5 exf5† 50.♘xf5 ♘d5 51.♖f3 ♔c4 52.♘e3† ♘xe3 53.♖xe3 b5! 54.axb5 (54.g6? fxg6 55.e6 bxa4) 54...a4 Black does not look slower at all.

Unfortunately for Gross, after the move played his problems really do become very severe.

49.f5 exf5† 50.♘xf5 ♘d5 51.♖f3 ♔c4 52.♘e3† ♘xe3 53.♖xe3 a5?

Black enters the race unprepared, but he had no good alternative.

For instance: 53...♖e7 54.♔f5 ♖e6 55.♖g3! ♖g6 56.♖g1!! White intends to invade to d7. 56...b5 57.axb5 axb5 58.♖d1 White wins.

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54.g6!

Black was sleeping a bit in this game, but now this wakes him up!

54...fxg6 55.e6

White is so far ahead in the race, it makes the win easy.

55...♖d8 56.♔e5 b5 57.axb5 a4 58.e7 ♖e8 59.♔e6 a3 60.♔d7 a2 61.♖e1 ♖a8 62.e8=♕ ♖xe8 63.♔xe8 ♔xb5 64.♖a1 ♔c4 65.♖xa2 ♔xc3 66.♖g2 c5 67.♖xg6

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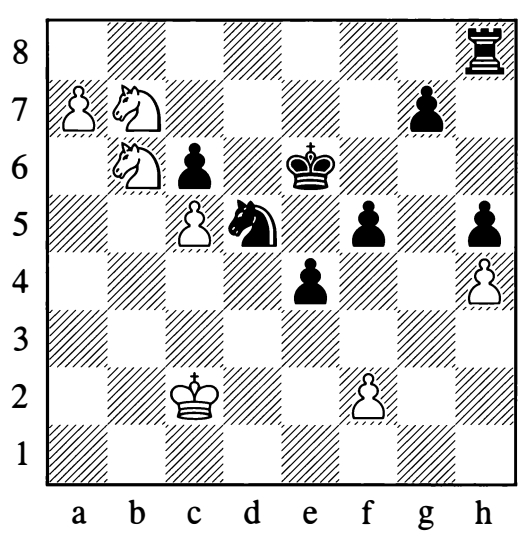
Which other endgames from your career do you recommend?

"The Breutigam one."

I was thinking of selecting it. Because of your suggestion I analysed it. I think even you will be surprised with what I found.

Martin Breutigam – Karsten Müller

Bundesliga 1996/97



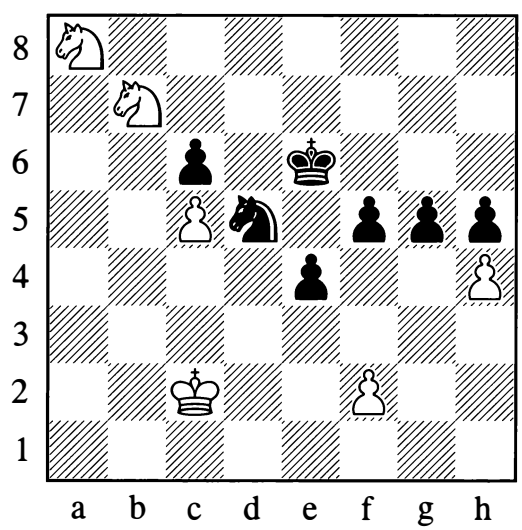
An extremely double-edged endgame has occurred. White's a-pawn will shortly cost Black his rook, thus leaving White a piece up. However, Black also possesses some powerful pawns of his own.

50.a8=♕

White gains nothing from postponing this. After 50.♘a5 g5! he finds that his knights are too far from the h-file. 51.hxg5 h4 52.♘xc6 ♘c7 53.♘d4† ♔e5 54.♘c6†! The best chance, but it is still not enough. 54...♔e6 55.♘d4† ♔f7 56.♘xf5 h3 57.♘d6† (57.♘g3 h2) 57...♔g6 58.♘xe4 h2 59.♘g3 ♖h3 60.♘h1 ♖a3 Black wins.

50...♖xa8 51.♘xa8 g5!

Black must not delay. The resultant complications are breathtaking.



52.♘d8†?

Breutigam does not want to move the h-pawn, but it costs him too many pawns. Also insufficient was 52.♔d2? gxh4 53.♔e2 h3 54.♔f1 f4. One of Black's pawns will promote.

The correct continuation was:

52.hxg5!

White probably thought that this would lose a tempo. However, we will see that White's g-pawn can become a powerful force in its own right.

52...h4 53.♘d8†!

53.♘b6? ♘b4†!! wins for Black, as all three white pieces are far away from the h-pawn. It is interesting to note that the natural 53...h3? would allow stunning counterplay. 54.♘d8† ♔e7 55.♘xd5† ♔xd8 56.g6! ♔e8 57.g7 ♔f7 58.♘e7 ♔xg7 59.♘xf5† ♔f6 60.♘g3 Would you believe it? A minute ago this knight was on the a8-square and now

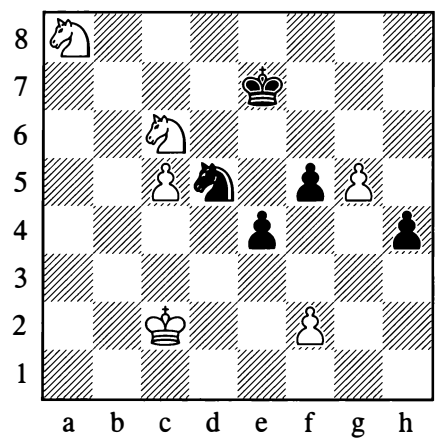
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it defends the most distant square on the board, the h1-square. They say that knights are worse than bishops at covering long distances, but every rule has its exceptions...

53...♔e7

53...♔d7!? Going away from the g-pawn leads to an instructive draw. 54.♘b6† ♔xd8 55.♘xd5 h3 56.g6 ♔e8 57.g7 ♔f7 58.♘e7 ♔xg7 59.♘xf5† ♔f6 60.♘g3 ♔e5 61.♔d2 ♔f4 The position is equal.

54.♘xc6†



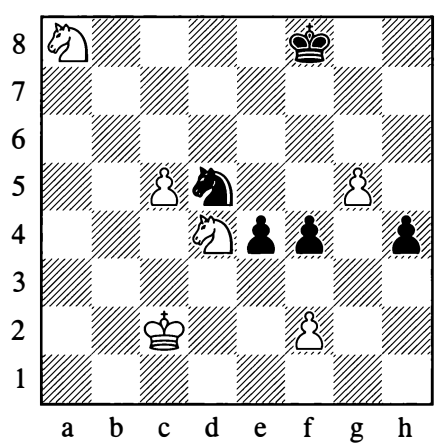
Black now faces a difficult decision: should his king retreat to f8 or e8?

a) 54...♔f8

The problem with this is that it allows an annoying knight check on e6.

55.♘d4 f4

Not 55...h3? 56.♘xf5.



56.♘b6!

This is just magic. The a8-knight fights against the passed h-pawn. And it is not simply a symbolic attempt, it actually wins the game for White.

56...h3 57.♘xd5!! h2 58.♘e6†

58.c6 is slightly less convincing, although it may still be enough to win. 58...h1=♕ 59.c7 ♕h3 60.♘xf4 ♕c8 (60...♕d7 61.♘fe6† ♔e7 62.♔d2 and White has decent winning chances) 61.♘fe6† (61.♘de6† ♔e7 62.g6) 61...♔e7 62.g6 ♕a6 63.♔b3 Despite being a queen up, Black is probably lost.

58...♔f7 59.g6† ♔xe6

59...♔xg6 60.♘dxf4† ♔f7 61.c6 ♔e7 62.c7 ♔d7 63.♘d5 h1=♕ 64.♘f8† (64.♘b6†) 64...♔c8 65.♘g6 White wins.

60.♘xf4† ♔e5

60...♔f6 61.♘h5† wins for White.

61.g7 ♔xf4 62.g8=♕ h1=♕ 63.c6

White wins the queen ending.

b) 54...♔e8!

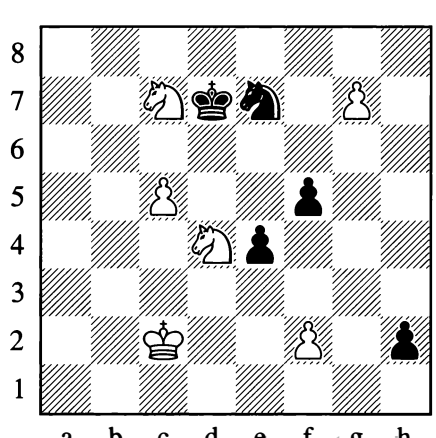
They say when an opponent has two passed pawns, your king should be right in between them. It looks to be losing but Black probably can survive – unless he has a heart attack from what he has to go through. Now White has two candidate moves.

b1) 55.♘d4

With a further division:

b11) 55...♘e7 56.g6! h3 57.♘c7† ♔d7 58.g7 h2

58...e3 59.♘d5 exf2 60.♘xe7 f1=♕ 61.g8=♕ ♕g2† (61...♔xe7 62.♕g7† ♔e8 63.♕e5† ♔f7 64.♘xf5! wins for White) 62.♕xg2 hxg2 63.♘f3 ♔xe7 64.♔c3 White wins.



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59.♘cb5!!

Astounding! Black is about to promote a queen in one move and White just makes a knight move far away from the passed pawn.

59...h1=♕ 60.c6† ♘xc6

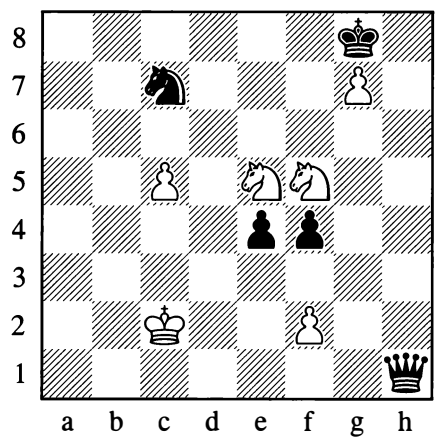
60...♔c8 61.♘xf5 wins for White.

61.g8=♕

White's extra knight is enough to win.

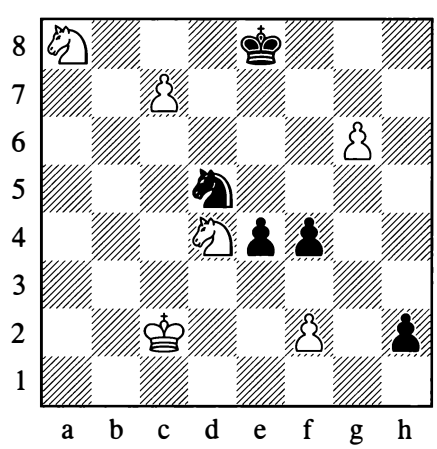
b12) 55...f4 56.g6

Here is another beautiful variation: 56.♘b6 ♘c7 57.♘f5 h3 58.g6 h2 59.g7 ♔f7 60.♘d7 h1=♕ 61.♘e5† ♔g8



62.♘g4! What a position! White has barely a knight for the queen and yet he holds on for a draw.

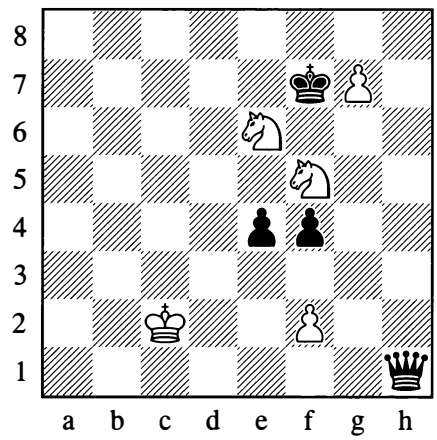
56...h3 57.c6 h2 58.c7



58...♘e7!

Black has to sacrifice under certain conditions.

58...♘xc7? 59.♘xc7† ♔f8 60.♘ce6† ♔e7 61.g7 ♔f7 62.♘f5 h1=♕



63.♘d8†!! ♔g8 64.♘c6! White wins.

59.g7 ♔f7

59...♔d7 60.♘c6 wins for White.

60.♘b6

60.♘c6?? ♘c8! would be embarrassing for White.

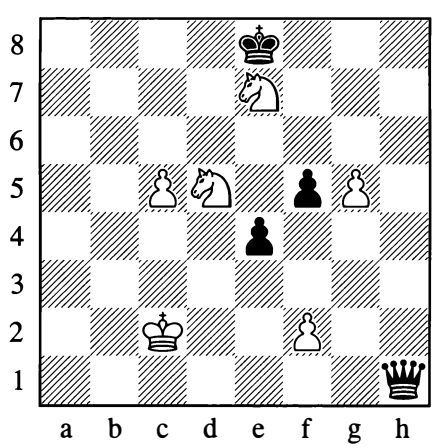
60...h1=♕ 61.g8=♕†

61.♘c6 ♕h7 62.♘xe7 e3† 63.♔b3 exf2 64.g8=♕† ♕xg8 65.♘xg8 f1=♕ The queen will take one of the knights and draw.

61...♔xg8 62.♘c6 e3 63.♘xe7† ♔f7 64.c8=♕ ♕e4†

Black holds.

b2) 55.♘b6! h3 56.♘xd5 h2 57.♘ce7! h1=♕



58.c6!

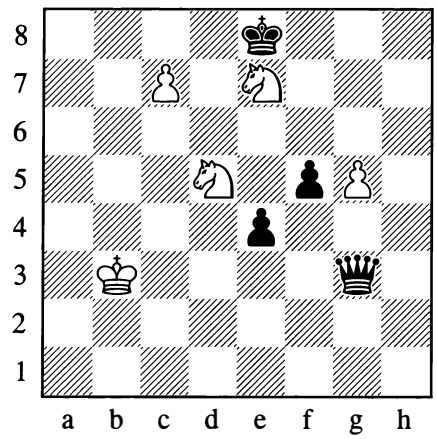
This is a remarkable position. Despite the extra queen, it is Black who is fighting to draw.

58...♕f1 59.c7 ♕xf2† 60.♔b3!

60.♔c3 ♕c5†

60...♕g3†

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61.♔c4!

This keeps the best winning chances alive.

61.♔b4 ♕d6†! The queen must send the king one square further away. (61...♕xc7?? is premature. 62.♘xc7† ♔xe7 63.♘d5†! wins.) 62.♔b5 ♕xc7! The simplest. 63.♘xc7† ♔xe7 64.♔c4 ♔f7 65.♔d4 ♔g6 66.♘e6 f4! 67.♔xe4 f3 68.♔xf3 ♔f5 Black survives.

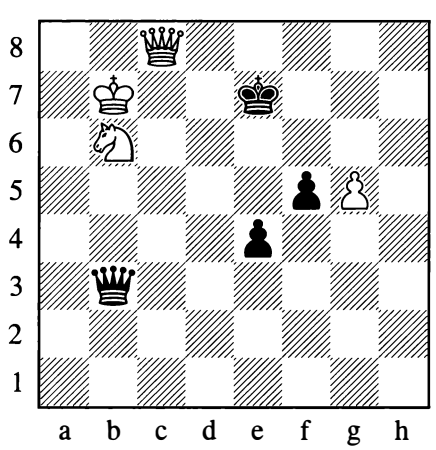
61...♕d3†

61...♕xc7† 62.♘xc7† ♔xe7 63.♘d5† and White wins.

62.♔c5 ♕a3† 63.♔b6 ♕b3† 64.♔c6 ♕c4† 65.♔b7 ♕b3†

65...♕xc7† 66.♔xc7 wins for White.

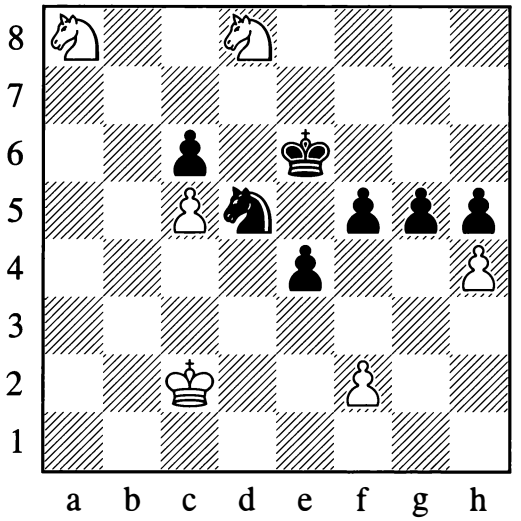
66.♘b6 ♔xe7 67.c8=♕



67...♕e6

Black can probably hold this position with precise defence.

Let's now return to the game. Fortunately for Karsten, the move played by his opponent does not pose anywhere near as many problems as the above analysis!



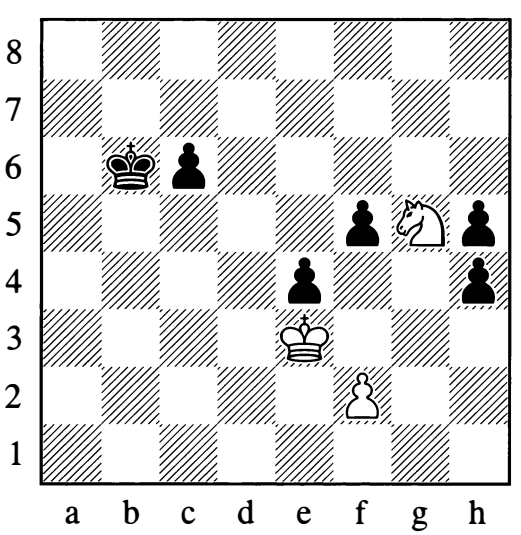
52...♔d7 53.♘b6† ♘xb6 54.cxb6 gxh4

The black pawns are too strong.

55.♘e6 ♔c8 56.♘g5

After 56.♘f4 ♔b7 57.♔c3 (57.♘xh5 h3 58.♘g3 h2 59.f4 exf3 and Black has too many pawns) 57...c5 58.♔c4 ♔xb6 59.♘h3 ♔c6 60.♘f4 ♔d6 61.♘h3 ♔e5 62.♔xc5 f4 63.♔c4 f3 Black wins.

56...♔b7 57.♔d2 ♔xb6 58.♔e3



58...c5!

The spare queenside pawn seals White's fate.

59.♘h3 ♔b5 60.♔f4 c4 61.♘g1 c3

0–1

White resigned, as he cannot handle Black's multitude of pawns.

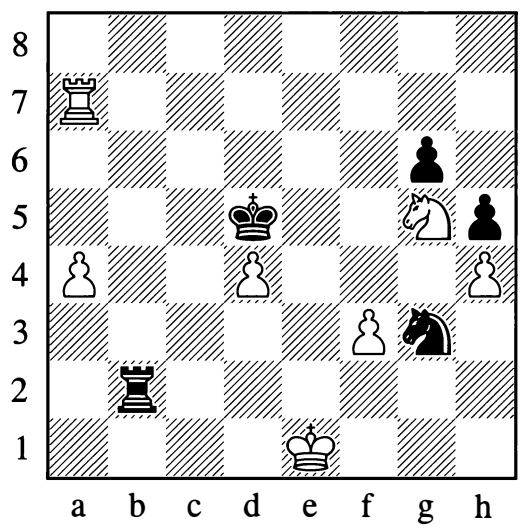
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Going through your endgames I got the impression that you are at your best when it comes to saving worse positions? Do you agree with this opinion?

"Yes, especially in rook endgames."

John Emms – Karsten Müller

Bundesliga 2001



White is two pawns up, yet Karsten is very active. An important aspect of this game was that his team was leading 3½-2½. His opponent needed to win to take a point for the team. Let's see how the game develops.

50.♖d7† ♔c4!?

Karsten activates his king, but at the same time his grip on White's d-pawn becomes weaker.

50...♔c6 51.♖d8! (51.♖g7 ♘f5 52.♖xg6† ♔d5 53.♖e6 ♔xd4 54.♖e4† ♔d3 and Black is so active, he is likely to draw despite the two-pawn deficit) 51...♘f5 52.d5† ♔b7 53.♖e8 White has decent winning chances, yet it is far from over.

51.d5 ♖e2†

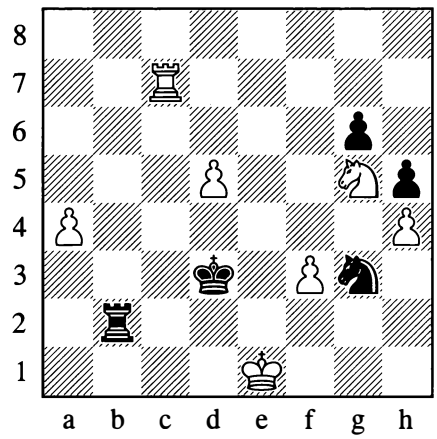
It is interesting that he rejected the consistent:

51...♔d3!

Presumably he did not believe in Black's chances of weaving a mating net, and thought that his king would be too far from the pawn.

However it turns out that he can draw using a most surprising knight manoeuvre.

52.♖c7!



This is a difficult move to find. The aim is to play ♘e4, to have a check on c3; also it clears the d-file for the pawn. Now Black has two main tries.

a) 52...♘f5

This looks natural, but it is not a complete solution to Black's problems.

53.♘e4 ♖b1†

After 53...♘xh4 54.♖c3† ♔d4 55.d6 ♘xf3† 56.♖xf3 ♔xe4 57.d7 ♖b8 (57...♖b1† 58.♔d2) 58.♖f2 ♖d8 59.♖d2 White wins by pushing the a-pawn: 59...g5 60.a5 etc.

However, it was quite possible to try 53...♔e3 54.♔d1 (54.♖c3† ♔d4) 54...♖a2 55.♘c3. White has some winning chances, but Black is far from doomed.

54.♔f2 ♖b2† 55.♔g1 ♖b1†!

Black must avoid 55...♘xh4? 56.♖c3† ♔d4 57.d6 ♖b8 (57...♘xf3† 58.♖xf3 ♔xe4 59.d7 ♖b8 60.♖f1 and White wins) 58.♔f2 ♘xf3 59.♔xf3 ♖f8† 60.♔e2 ♔xe4 61.d7 ♖d8 62.♖d3! White is faster. 62...h4 63.♖d1! g5 (63...h3 64.♔f2) 64.a5 g4 65.a6 g3 66.a7 h3 67.♖c1! h2 68.♖c8 White wins as he promotes with check.

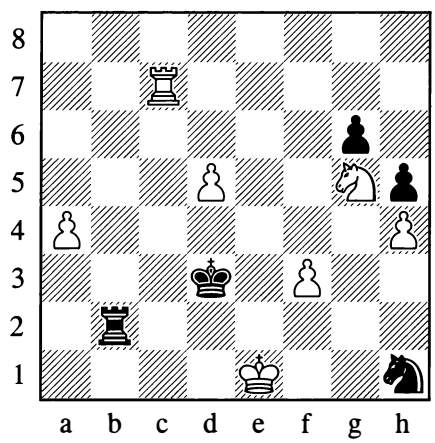
56.♔h2 ♖b2† 57.♔h3 ♘e3 58.♖c1 ♘xd5

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59.♔g3

It is difficult to say whether White's advantage is enough to win. He can certainly press for a long time though...

b) 52...♘h1!!



This is a fabulous move. Its advantage, compared to 52...♘f5, is that it stops 53.♘e4.

53.♔f1

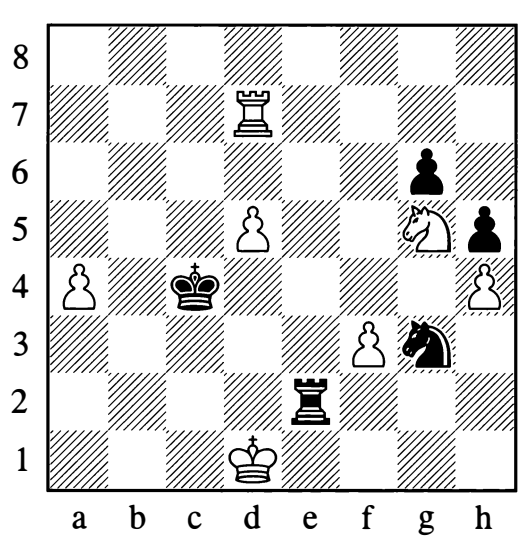
53.♘e4?? ♖b1† forces mate.

Alternatively, after 53.♖c1 ♘g3 54.♖c5 ♘f5! (54...♘h1?! 55.♖b5!) 55.♘e4 ♔d4 56.♖c1 ♘xh4 Black is still very much alive and kicking.

53...♘g3† 54.♔g1 ♘e2† 55.♔f2 ♘f4† 56.♔g3 ♘e2†

The game ends in a perpetual.

52.♔d1



Compared with the above variations, the white king now gets the opportunity to flee to the queenside.

52...♔d3 53.♔c1

After 53.♖c7 ♖d2† (53...♖h2 54.♔c1 ♖xh4 55.♔b2; 53...♖a2 54.d6) 54.♔c1 ♘e2† 55.♔b1 ♔e3 56.a5 ♖d1† 57.♔b2 ♖xd5 58.a6 ♖b5† 59.♔c2 ♖a5 60.a7 ♘d4† 61.♔b2 ♖a6 Black is likely to hold.

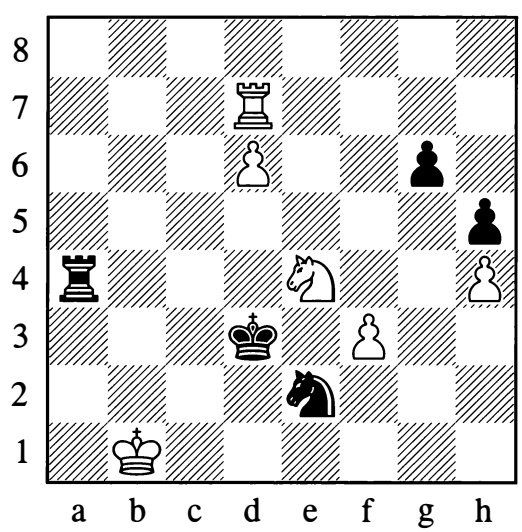
53...♖a2 54.♔b1 ♖xa4 55.d6 ♘e2

If 55...♖b4† 56.♔a2 ♘f5 57.♖d8.

56.♘e4?

Allowing Black to swap the knights lets Black off the hook.

Correct was: 56.♖b7! ♖d4 (56...♘c3† 57.♔b2 ♖a2† 58.♔b3 ♖a1 59.d7) 57.d7 ♘c3† 58.♔c1 ♘e2† 59.♔b2 ♘f4 60.♘f7 ♘e6 61.♖b8 ♔d2 62.♘e5 ♖d5 63.f4 ♔e3 64.♖e8 White wins.



56...♘c3†!

Simplifying to a rook ending saves Black.

57.♘xc3 ♔xc3 58.♖c7†

After 58.♖d8 ♖d4 59.d7 ♔d3 60.♔b2 ♖d6 61.♔b3 ♔d4 the position is a draw.

58...♔b3 59.♖b7†

59.♖e7 ♔c3 (59...♖d4 60.♖e3†) 60.♖e8 (60.d7 ♖d4 61.♔c1 ♖d6) 60...♖d4 Black gets away.

59...♔c3 60.♖c7† ♔b3 61.d7 ♖d4 62.♔c1 ♖d6 63.f4 ♖d5 64.♖b7† ♔c3 65.♖c7† ♔b3 66.♖c6 ♖xd7 67.♖xg6 ♖f7 68.♖g5 ♖xf4

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69.♖xh5 ♔c3 70.♖c5† ♔b4 71.♖c8 ♖xh4 72.♔d2
½–½

Despite the modern tools that an annotator has nowadays, sometimes one can't be certain about the evaluation of a certain position. When he says it wins or it is a draw, he must take some risk of being wrong. How brave are you in this sense?

"When the engine and I agree, then I take the risk."

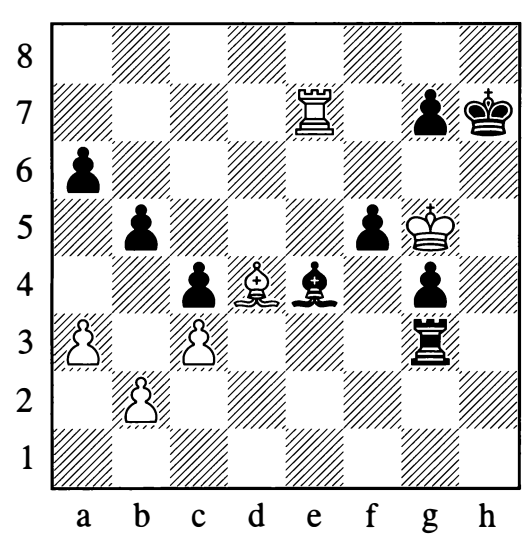
Do you have any particular endgame that you analysed for the public that gave you special satisfaction?

"I especially like the game Shirov – Lautier, Munich 1993, where I was Alexei's second and we analysed the adjourned position together. Later I made a more detailed investigation together with German chess trainer and analyst FM Claus Dieter Meyer."

It is included in Shirov's *Fire on Board*, Endgame Corner 3 in the *ChessCafe* Archives, as well as *The Magic of Chess Tactics*. But here it is once again, for good measure! Karsten's analysis and comments are given in italics.

Alexei Shirov – Joel Lautier

Munich 1993



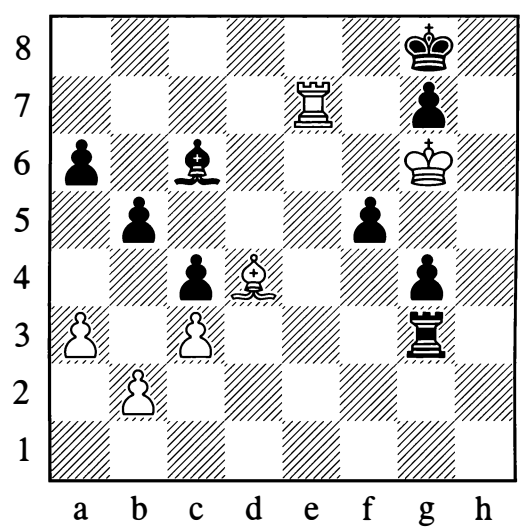
61...♔g8?

Lautier sealed the move we had expected. Their team thought this move would be a draw as well. In fact, Black has two safe ways to draw:

61...♖h3! *Joel should have activated his out-of-play rook immediately in order to hold the position.* (61...♖d3!? *is playable as well.*) 62.♖xg7† ♔h8 63.♔g6 f4† 64.♔g5 (64.♔f7? ♖h7!) 64...♗f3 (64...♖d3? *loses beautifully:* 65.♖e7† ♖xd4 66.cxd4 g3 67.♖xe4 g2 68.♖e1 f3 69.♔g6 f2 70.♖e8#) 65.♔xf4 ♗d1 66.♖xg4† ♔h7 67.♖g7† ♔h6 *Black is worse but can hold.*

The punishment for his mistake is surprisingly harsh.

62.♔g6 ♗c6



63.♗c5!!

Joel missed this fantastic move, not only when he sealed the move, but also in his adjournment analysis.

63...♖d3?

The Frenchman goes down without putting up the best resistance.

He should have been played:

63...♔h8! 64.♗d4!

Thanks to the clever defence, White is forced to repeat the position.

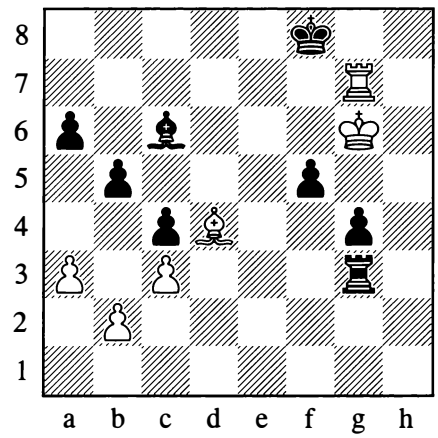
64....♔g8 65.♖xg7†

White must play this in order to keep winning chances alive. Joel would almost

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certainly have concentrated on this move in his adjournment analysis.

65...♔f8



66.♖c7

The bishop is under attack – but where to hide it?

66...♗d5?!

66...♗e8†?! 67.♔f6 ♖h3 68.♗c5† ♔g8 69.♖c8 *The pin wins the piece, and after a bit of fight the game.* 69...♖h6† 70.♔e7 ♖h7† (70...♔g7 71.♖xe8 f4 72.♗d4† ♔g6 73.♔e6 ♔g5† 74.♔e5 ♖g6 75.♖f8 f3 76.♗f2 *and White wins*) 71.♔xe8 f4 (71...g3 72.♖c6 f4 73.♖f6) 72.♗d4 g3 73.♖c5! *White wins as Black's king is again in trouble.*

66...♗g2! *is the correct move:* 67.♔f6 ♔e8 68.♔e6 ♔d8 69.♖c5 ♗b7 70.♗f6† ♔e8 71.♖c7 ♖e3† 72.♗e5 ♖xe5† 73.♔xe5 *At first C.D. Meyer believed that White is winning, but the day before the book went to press he decided that it was probably drawn, so* 63...♔h8!! *would still have saved Black.*

The point of the bishop move is to take the e6-square away from the white king. However, it is also significant that the bishop has no pawn to defend it.

67.♖c5!

This superb idea was found by Karsten after the game.

The original plan was 67.♔f6 ♔e8 68.♖c5 ♗b7! 69.♖e5† ♔d7 70.♖e7† ♔c6 71.♖e6† which leads to a draw.

67...♗e6

67...♗b7? 68.♖e5! ♗c6 69.♗c5† ♔g8 70.♖e6 ♗d7 71.♖e7 ♖d3 72.♖g7† ♔h8 73.♗d4 The battery is lethal.

67...♗f7†? 68.♔f6 ♔e8 69.♗e5 ♖g2 The rook was not only out of play but actually was a target to gain the vital tempo. 70.♖c8† ♔d7 71.♖c7† ♔e8 72.♖xf7 White wins.

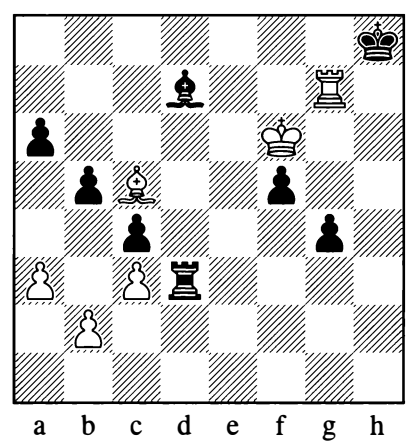
68.♔f6 ♗d7 69.♖c7 ♔e8 70.♖a7 ♔d8

70...♗c6 71.♖e7† ♔d8 (71...♔f8 72.♖c7 ♗e8 73.♖c8) 72.♗b6† ♔c8 73.♖c7† ♔b8 74.♖xc6 should be winning for White.

71.♗b6† ♔c8 72.♖c7† ♔d8 73.♖c5† ♔e8 74.♖e5† ♔f8 75.♗c5† ♔g8 76.♖e7

76.♖d5 wins as well.

76...♖d3 77.♖g7† ♔h8



78.♗d4! ♗c6 79.♖c7 ♖xd4 80.cxd4 ♗e4 81.♔g6 f4† 82.♔h6

White wins, in the manner that we will see in the game.

64.♖xg7† ♔h8 65.♗d4 ♖xd4

After 65...♗e8† 66.♔h6 ♖h3† 67.♔g5 ♖h5† 68.♔f4 White wins.

66.cxd4 f4

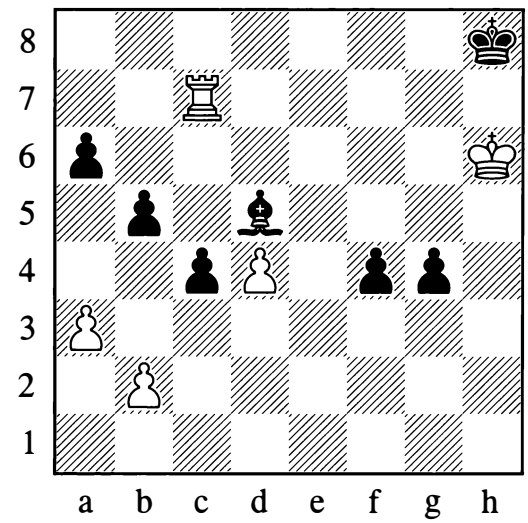
After 66...g3 67.♖h7† ♔g8 68.♖c7 ♗e8† (68...♔f8 69.♖xc6 g2 70.♔f6 ♔g8 71.♖c8† ♔h7 72.♖c7† ♔h8 73.♖g7+–) 69.♔f6 f4 70.♖g7† ♔h8 (70...♔f8 71.♖g5 ♗c6 72.d5 f3 73.dxc6 f2 74.c7 f1=♕† 75.♖f5+–) 71.♖g5 ♗c6 72.d5 ♗xd5 73.♖xd5 g2 74.♔f7! White wins, as B. Certic pointed out in his *Chess Informant* analysis.

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67.♖c7 ♗e4†

67...♗d5 68.♖c8† ♗g8 69.♖f8 f3 70.d5 g3 71.♖xf3 ♗xd5 72.♖xg3 finishes Black, according to Lautier.

68.♔h6 ♗d5



69.♖c5!

He plays on Black's problem. The bishop has no safe square.

69...♗g8 70.d5 f3 71.d6 ♗e6

71...f2 72.♖f5 g3 73.d7 g2 74.d8=♕ g1=♕ 75.♕f6† ♕g7† 76.♕xg7#

72.♖e5 ♗d7 73.♖e7 f2 74.♖xd7 ♔g8 75.♖g7† ♔f8 76.d7

1–0

I think the disappearance of the adjournment has brought down the level of play in endgames as players become dead tired with extended play. Do you have any idea how to raise the standard again?

"I agree, but the only real remedy would probably be to increase the time limits and at the moment the trend seems to be going in the opposite direction."

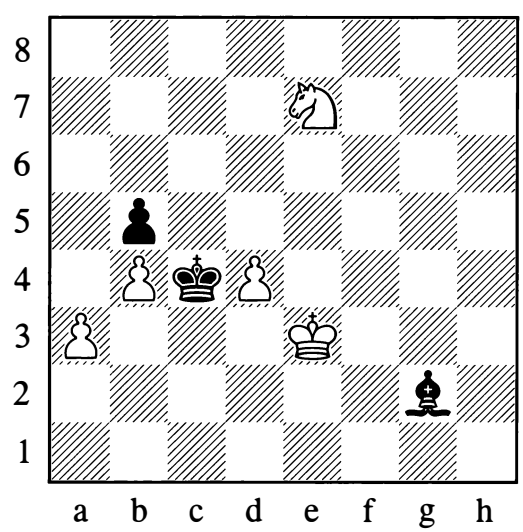
What discoveries surprised you most when you were writing?

"I want to mention two findings especially. The first is the amazing knight vs bishop endgame, which arose in the 9th game of the World Championship match Karpov vs Kasparov. At first I thought that I had found a win for White but Mihail Marin in *Learn from the Legends* and Mark Dvoretsky in his *Endgame University 2nd Edition* proved me wrong, as the resulting position of my main line from *Endgame Corner 43* is amazingly drawn, as given by the six man tablebase. Instead of 66...♗b7? Kasparov should have played 66...♗h1!"

This is probably the most analysed endgame in the history of chess. Here is some abbreviated analysis, focusing on some of the key points, to illustrate why Karsten found it so captivating.

Anatoly Karpov – Garry Kasparov

World Championship (9), Moscow 1984



66...♗b7?

Garry played this mistake, although it is hard to blame him. The right move is the study-like:

66...♗h1!!

Gipslis and Mikhalchishin came up with this remarkable move. It is hard to spot the difference between their move and Kasparov's move.

67.♘f5 ♔d5!

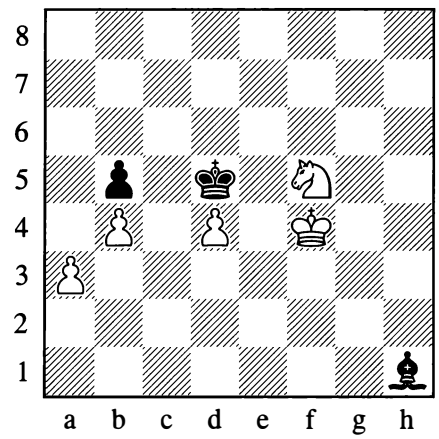
Now one can appreciate the difference the

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bishop makes on h1. It stops ♔d3 because of the check on e4.

68.♘g3

68.♔f4!? Marin came up with this witty move; it stops ...♔c4 right now.



68...♗e4! Black must stop the knight getting to e3. 69.♘d6 ♗c2! This gets back material at once. 70.♘xb5 (70.♘f5 ♗e4) 70...♔c4 71.♔e5 (71.♘c7 ♔xd4) 71...♔xb5 72.d5 ♗b3! Black holds the draw.

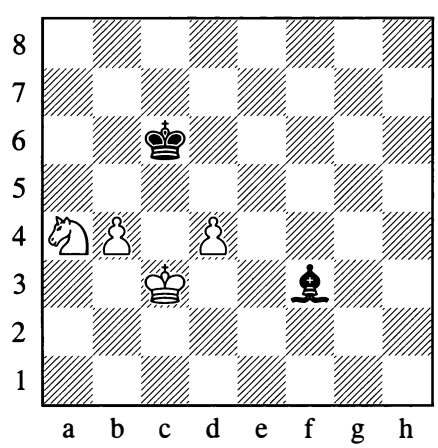
68...♗g2 69.♔d3

69.♔f2 ♗h3 70.♘e2 ♗g4! (Marin) 71.♔e3 ♗xe2 72.♔xe2 ♔xd4=

69...♗f3 70.♘f1 ♗e4† 71.♔c3 ♗f3 72.♘e3† ♔e4 73.♘c4 ♔d5

73...bxc4? 74.♔xc4 Three pawns like this defeat the bishop.

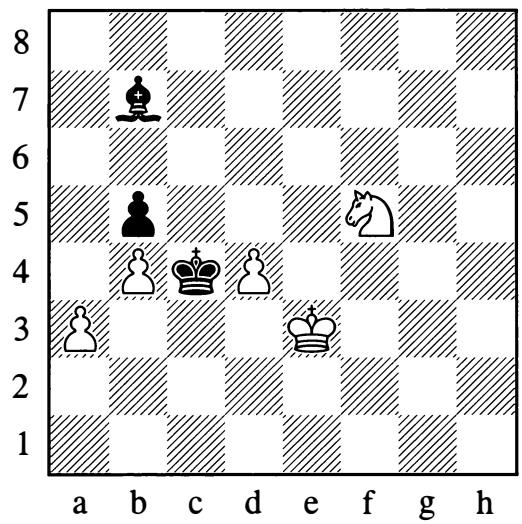
74.♘b2 ♔c6 75.a4 bxa4 76.♘xa4



This is the position that Karsten believed should result in a White win back in 2004. However, the magic of the tablebases has since revealed that Black can draw with precise play.

67.♘f5

67.d5 would not work for White as the pawn ending is drawn.

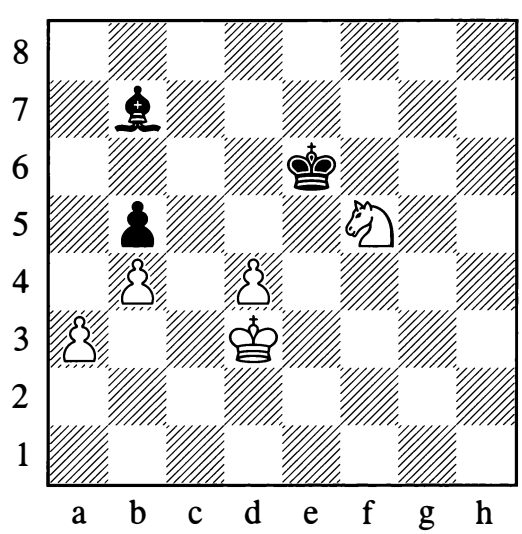


In this position Garry played 67...♗g2? and went on to lose. The following line is much more resilient.

67...♔d5!

This prevents the fork and blocks the entry square of e5 as well.

68.♔d3 ♔e6



69.♘e3

This was viewed as an automatic choice by most commentators, including Karsten.

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However, it looks as though Black narrowly escapes.

Mihail Marin found a most stylish win with:

69.♘g7†!!

The main idea behind this beautiful move is to bring the knight to a more active square.

69...♔d7

69...♔f7 70.♘h5 and the knight comes to f4.

69...♔d6 70.♘e8†! ♔e7 (70...♔d7 71.♘f6† ♔e6 72.♘e4 is winning) 71.♘c7 ♗c6 72.d5 This is the end for Black.

70.♘h5 ♗g2 71.♘f4 ♗f1† 72.♔e4 ♔d6 73.♔e3!

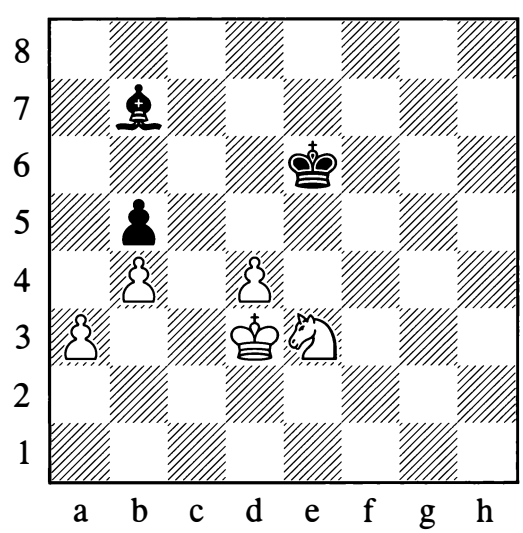
Black is in zugzwang. Instead 73.d5 only leads to a draw after 73...♗c4 74.♔d4 ♗a2=.

73...♔c6

73...♗c4 74.♘e2 ♔d5 75.♘c3† ♔d6 76.♔e4 wins for White.

74.d5† ♔d6 75.♔d4 ♗c4 76.a4

White wins.



69...♗f3!

This is Karsten's move. Dvoretsky explains in his superb analysis that Black has to stop the ♘d1-c3 manoeuvre. Black can live with it only if his king gets to c4, but that cannot be accomplished.

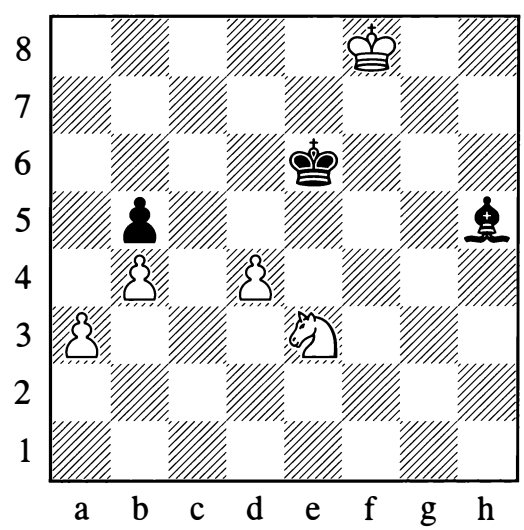
70.♔d2!

This is the best chance to create problems for the defence. For a while I thought the king march was enough to thwart Karsten's defensive plan, but it turns out that Black can still defend.

70.d5† achieves nothing after 70...♔e5! (but not 70...♗xd5? 71.♔d4 ♗f3 72.♔c5).

70.♔c3 White tries to play ♔b3 followed by a4 and taking back with the king. (We have already seen that if the knight takes back that is not enough for a win.) Unfortunately the plan is slow enough for Black to prevent, viz. 70...♔d6 71.♔b3 ♗c6! 72.d5 ♗e8 73.♔c3 ♔e5! Black holds it.

70...♔d6 71.♔e1 ♔e6 72.♔f2 ♗e4 73.♔g3 ♗a8 74.♔f4 ♗b7 75.♔g5 ♗f3! 76.♔g6 ♗e4† 77.♔g7 ♗f3 78.♔f8 ♗h5



79.♘g2!?

This was my finesse, which I thought should be enough to force the win. In reality it does not, but nevertheless it forces Black to avoid some wicked traps.

79...♗f3

Another defence is 79...♔d6 80.♘f4 ♗g4!?. According to Dvoretsky this is even simpler as it avoids the danger of zugzwang.

80.♘f4† ♔d6

Not 80...♔f5? 81.d5! ♔xf4 82.d6 ♗c6 83.♔e7 and White wins.

81.♔e8 ♗d1 82.♔d8 ♗g4 83.♘g2

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The following alternative is also insufficient to break the defence.

83.d5 ♗f5!

83...♔e5? 84.♔c7 ♔xf4 85.d6 ♔e5 86.d7 ♗xd7 87.♔xd7 ♔d5 88.♔c7 wins.

84.♘g2

84.♔e8 ♗e4! (84...♔e5? 85.♔e7) 85.♔f7 ♗h1 86.♔f6 ♗e4 White cannot make any progress.

84...♗g4

84...♗e4? 85.♘e3 ♗f3 86.♔c8

85.♘e3 ♗h3 86.♔e8 ♗c8 87.♔f7

The king tries to come back to the centre.

87...♗b7

87...♗h3!? 88.♔f6 ♗d7 is also okay.

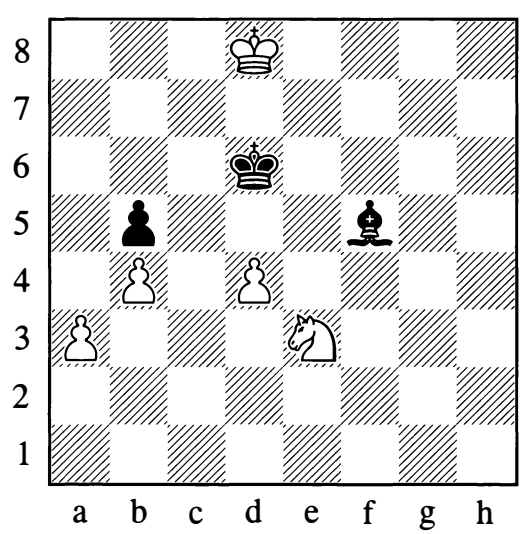
88.♔f6 ♗a8 89.♔f5 ♗xd5

But now White's king is too far away from the b5-pawn, so Black is safe.

83...♗f5!

Not 83...♗e6? 84.♘e3 when Black is in zugzwang.

84.♘e3



84...♗e6!

This places White in zugzwang. Grandmaster Pinter and I felt there should be a way to win. We tried to prove it, but Karsten's defensive idea withstood our test. Actually it is a mutual zugzwang. Originally I only looked at the position with Black to move, in which case White would win.

85.♘d1 ♔d5 86.♘c3†

After 86.♔e7 ♗g8 87.♘c3† ♔xd4 88.♘xb5† White cannot win.

86...♔xd4 87.♘xb5† ♔c4

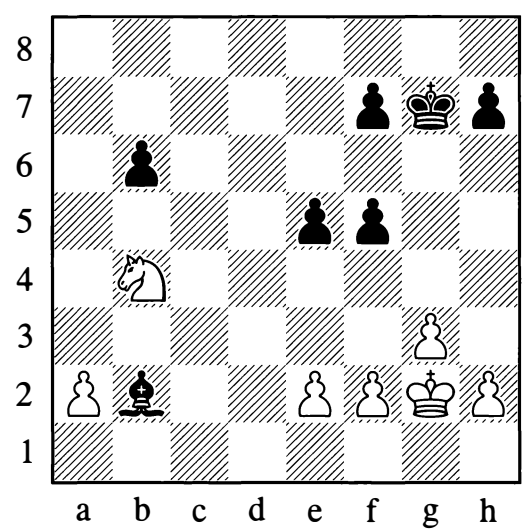
If the bishop had been on f5, White could then win with a check on d6, but now the position is a simple draw. I quote Karsten:

"The second [*of his two most surprising endgame discoveries*] is my analysis of the knight versus bishop endgame Kramnik – Deep Fritz in *ChessBase Magazine* 116. Here Kasparov proved me wrong in the 1/2007 edition of *New in Chess Magazine*. White is winning, but not in the way I had thought. I put that right in CBM 117 as follows:"

(Karsten's comments are shown in quotation marks)

Vladimir Kramnik – Deep Fritz

Bonn (1) 2006



"First I show how the game ended between Kramnik and Deep Fritz. The world champion was easily held by the computer."

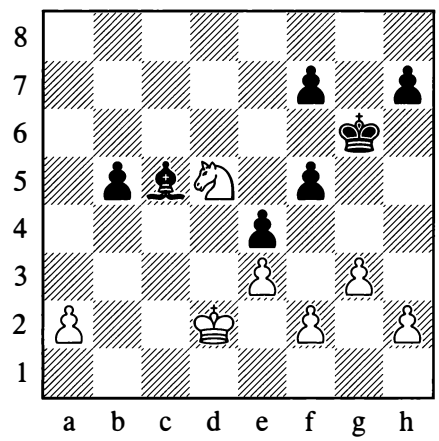
29.♘d5 ♗d4 30.a4? ♗c5 31.h3 f6 32.f3 ♔g6 33.e4 h5 34.g4 hxg4 35.hxg4 fxe4 36.fxe4 ♔g5 37.♔f3 ♔g6 38.♔e2 ♔g5 39.♔d3 ♗g1 40.♔c4 ♗f2 41.♔b5 ♔xg4 42.♘xf6† ♔f3 43.♔c6 ♗h4 44.♘d7 ♔xe4 45.♔xb6

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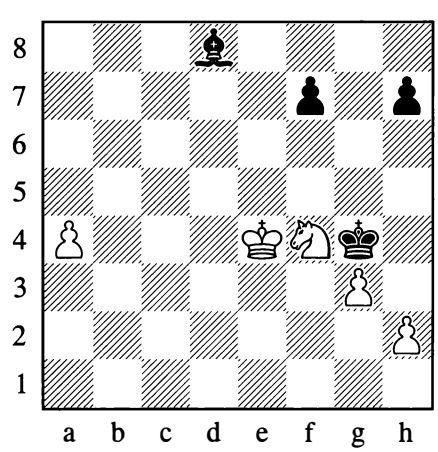
♗f2† 46.♔c6 ♗e1 47.♘xe5
½–½

"I recommended a different plan – I felt it would lead narrowly to a win."

29.♔f3 b5 30.♘d5 ♗d4 31.e3 ♗c5 32.♔e2 e4 33.♔d2 ♔g6



34.♔c3? "This wins the pawn but allows counterplay." 34...♔g5 35.♘c7 ♔g4 36.♘xb5 ♔f3 37.♔c4 ♗b6 38.♘d4† ♔xf2 39.♘xf5 ♔f3 40.♔d5 ♗xe3 41.♘h4† ♔g4 42.♔xe4 ♗b6 43.a4 ♗d8 44.♘g2 ♔h3 45.♘f4† ♔g4 (45.♔xh2 loses to 46.♔f3!. The knight will win the bishop on the queenside.)

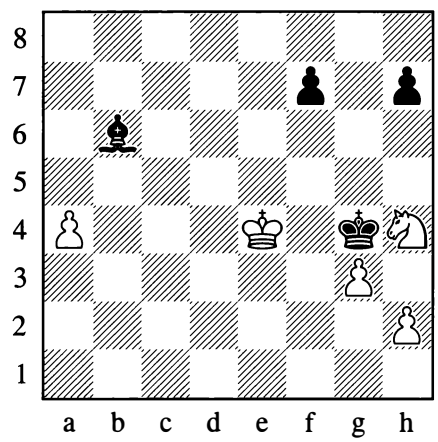


46.♔e3! ♗b6† 47.♔e2 ♗d8 48.♔f2 ♔f5 49.♔f3

"And White wins."

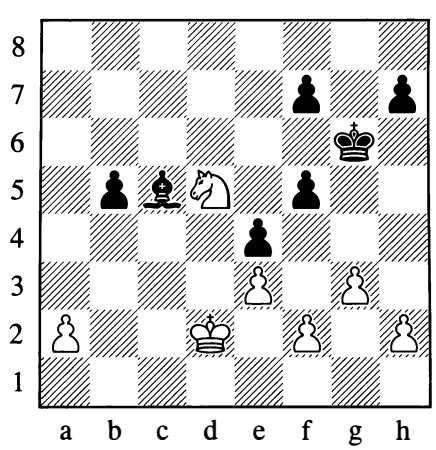
"Before publication, I asked M. Feist to check the line with Fritz; he came up with 46...h5 but White probably still wins after 47.♘g2 ♗b6† 48.♔e2 ♗a5 49.♔f2 ♗d8 50.h3† ♔xh3 51.♔f3.

However, Kasparov came up with an amazing discovery and destroyed my illusion."



43...h5! "Kasparov's subtle move stops White's king from returning to his h- and g-pawns to consolidate the kingside." 44.♘g2 f5† 45.♔e5 ♗c7† 46.♔e6 ♗b6 47.♔f6 ♗d8† 48.♔g6 ♔f3 49.♘e1† ♔g4 50.♘d3 ♗c7 51.♘f2† ♔f3 52.♔xf5 ♔xf2 53.♔g5 ♔f3 54.♔xh5 ♔e4 "Black holds. This underlines once again that the bishop is really strong in such an open fight on both wings!"

"But Kasparov showed his class and found a convincing win by closing the kingside first with some subtle moves. Here is his line."



34.♘c7! b4 35.♘d5 ♔g5 36.h3 h6 37.♘f4 ♗d6 38.♔c2 h5 39.♘g2

White wins.

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Once again we see all kinds of subtleties contained in a position with very few pieces. But so far we have only scratched the surface...

I had several questions regarding Karsten's analysis.

I can understand becoming impressed by the position. However it seems to me a bit "too forced" regarding how many possible moves there are on the board. Let me ask a few questions:

Is 29...b5 forced? Black can try 29...♗d4 or 29...♗a3, can't he?

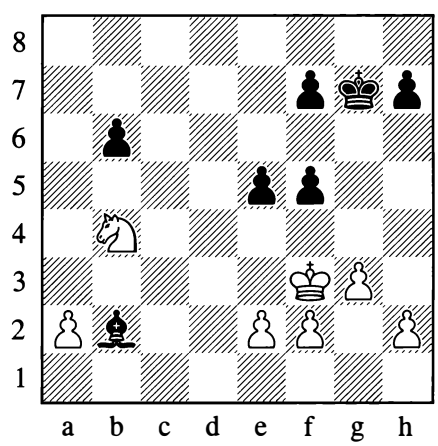
And it seems to me Black can play 32...♔g6 followed by ...♔g5 or ...♔h5, and if White plays on the queenside then ...f4 creates counter-chances. I do not claim it draws though...

Finally, in the variation involving Kasparov's 43...h5!, does it make a difference if White has the move in that position?

"Let me answer your questions one by one."

Please, go ahead as you like!

"Black can try to do without 29...b5 but he fails to hold."



Karsten demonstrated the following lines.

a) 29...♗d4 30.♘c6!

White threatens to enter into a winning pawn ending. The results can be seen after:

30...♔f6

Avoiding the pawn ending is also problematic. For instance, after 30...♗b2 31.♘e7! ♔f6 32.♘d5† White wins the b-pawn.

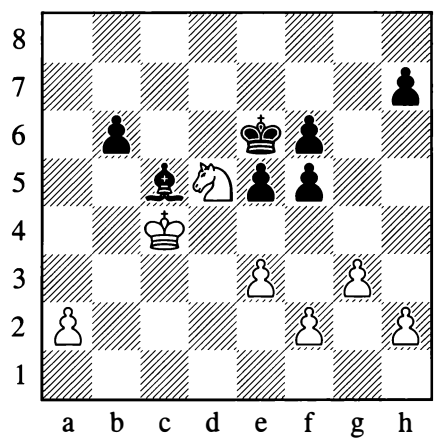
31.♘xd4 exd4 32.♔f4 b5 33.f3 b4 34.h3 h6 35.g4 fxg4 36.hxg4 ♔g6 37.♔e5

White wins.

b) 29...♗a3 30.♘d5 ♗c5 31.e3 f6

Black prepares to bring the king to the centre.

32.♔e2 ♔f7 33.♔d3 ♔e6 34.♔c4



Both Black's king and bishop are tied to the defence of a pawn, and he soon runs into a zugzwang.

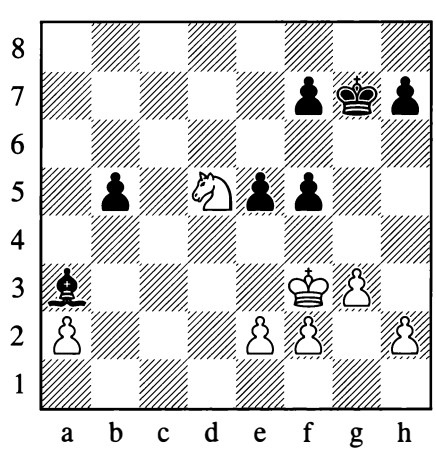
How about 30...b5 31.e3 ♗d6! (instead of 31...f6)? It intends to go to the main line without allowing Kasparov's incredible 34.♘c7!! move.

"White can play differently."

Karsten demonstrated the following line:

29...♗a3 30.♘d5 b5

This was my suggested improvement over 30...♗c5 in line b) above.



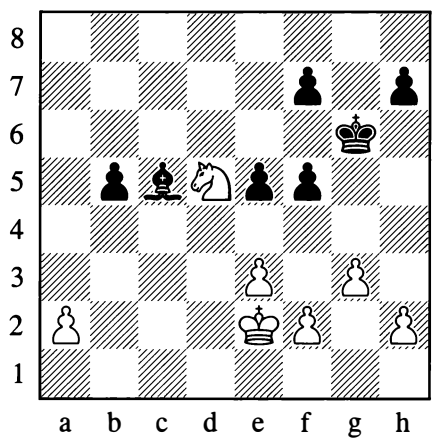
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31.e4! ♔g6 32.♘c7! b4 33.♘d5! fxe4† 34.♔xe4

White's advantage is enough to win. Black must drop something because he will soon be in zugzwang.

"Let's look at the line if Black holds back ...e4 and plays 32...♔g6."

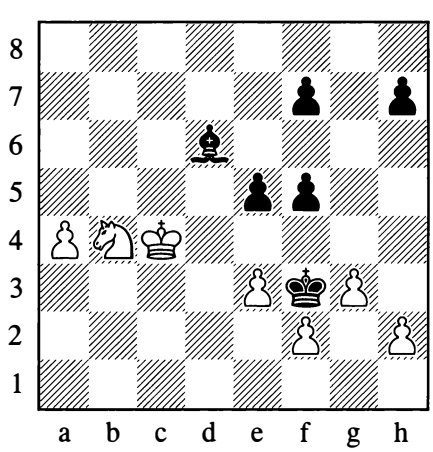
So after 29.♔f3! b5 30.♘d5 ♗d4 31.e3 ♗c5 32.♔e2, then 32...♔g6.



This leads to some fascinating variations! 33.♘c7 b4 34.♔d3 ♔g5 35.♔c4 ♗d6 36.♘e8!

The point of this move is to keep the knight closer to the kingside. White intends to prevent the infiltration via g4 with h2-h3, and only then penetrate with his own king to d5.

In fact Karsten's original suggestion had been: 36.♘d5 ♔g4 37.♘xb4 ♔f3 38.a4



38...♗c7! (this was my improvement over 38...♔xf2, after which Karsten demonstrated an easy win with 39.a5 ♗b8 40.♘c6 ♗c7 41.a6 ♗b6 42.♘xe5) 39.♘d5 ♗d8 40.♔b5 ♔xf2 41.a5 ♗xa5 42.♔xa5 ♔g2 43.♘e7 ♔xh2 44.♘xf5 ♔h3 Black's powerful king enables him to draw.

36...♗e7 37.♔d5!

The alternative 37.h3 is probably also good enough. 37...f4 (37...h5 38.f4† exf4 39.exf4† ♔g6 40.h4 must be winning as Black cannot get to g3) 38. ♔d5 f6 39.♘c7 and, although I am not completely certain, I think White wins.

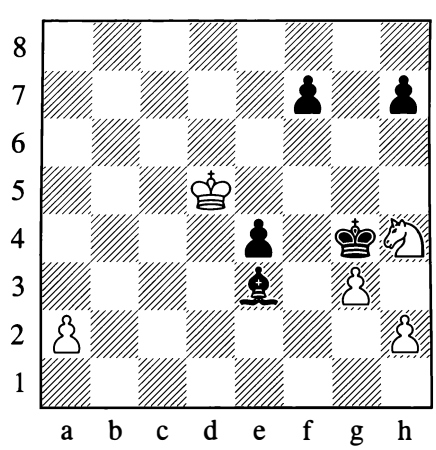
The main move is even more convincing, and leaves no room for doubt.

37...♔g4 38.♔xe5 ♔f3 39.♔xf5 ♔xf2 40.e4 ♔g2 41.g4 ♔xh2 42.g5 ♔g3 43.e5

White is ready to start capturing pawns.

Now for my third question. Instead of the variation with Garry's amazing 43...h5!, Black can also aim for the same position but with White to move. It would be interesting to see if this changes the evaluation.

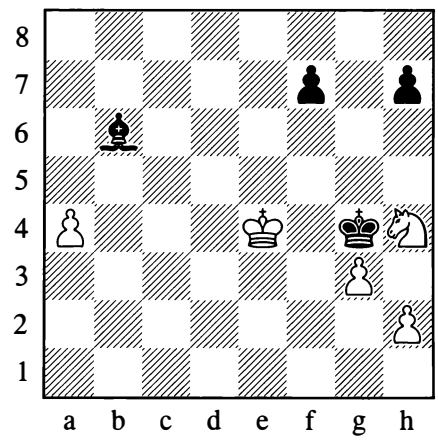
"It is a very interesting and instructive idea as one must almost always think of zugzwang in the endgame. Can we look at it together?"



The idea was worth looking at, but it turns out that it is not enough to save Black. We came up with the following joint analysis:

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42.♔xe4 ♗a7 43.a4 ♗b6



Now White even has the luxury of two routes to victory.

a) 44.♘f5 with two tries for Black:

a1) 44...h5 45.♘e3† ♔h3 46.♘d5 ♗d8 47.♔f3!

White's king helps his pawn. Interestingly Black can exchange all the pawns on the kingside, yet still he loses.

47...♔xh2

After 47...h4 48.♘f4† ♔xh2 49.gxh4 ♗xh4 50.a5 the bishop is unable to stop White's pawn.

48.♘f4 ♗c7

48...h4 49.gxh4 ♗xh4 50.a5+–

48...f5 49.♘xh5 ♗c7 50.♘g7 ♗xg3 51.a5! The pawn promotes here as well.

49.♘xh5 ♔h3 50.♘f4† ♔h2 51.♔g4 ♗d8 52.♘h5 ♗a5 53.♔f5

White wins, as he soon takes the f7-pawn as well.

a2) 44...♔h3 45.♘h6 ♔xh2 46.g4 ♔g3 47.♔f5 ♔h4 48.♘xf7 ♗a5 49.♘g5 h6 50.♘f7 ♗d2 51.♘e5

51.♘xh6?? looks winning as well, but actually throws half a point away: 51...♗xh6 52.a5 ♗e3! 53.a6 ♗d4! 54.g5 ♔h5

In this mutual zugzwang position it is White to move, therefore Black draws.

51...♔h3 52.♘c4

White wins.

b) 44.♘g2!?

It is worth looking at White's second winning move as well.

44...f5†

44...♔h3 45.♘f4† ♔xh2 46.♘h5 wins.

45.♔e5 h5

45...♔h3 46.♘f4† ♔xh2 47.♘h5 wins.

46.♔e6 ♗d8

46...h4 47.♘xh4 f4 48.gxf4 Black can take either the knight or the pawn, but loses in both cases.

47.♘e3† ♔h3 48.♔xf5!

48.♘xf5? ♔xh2 is drawing.

48...♔xh2 49.♔f4 ♔h3

49...h4 50.gxh4+–

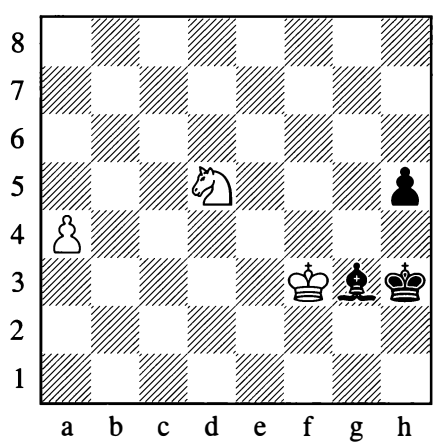
49...♗c7† 50.♔f3 ♔h3 51.♘d5 ♗xg3 52.♘f4† wins.

50.♔f3

50.♘d5 ♔g2=

50...h4

50...♗c7 51.♘d5 ♗xg3



52.♘f4†! ♔h4 53.a5 ♗h2 54.a6 ♗g1 55.♘g2†! White's knight wins the tempo to block the diagonal.

51.g4 ♔h2 52.♘d5 ♔g1

52...h3 53.♘f4 ♗g5 54.♘xh3! wins – but note that 54.a5?? would even lose because of 54...♗xf4 55.♔xf4 ♔g1.

53.♘f4 ♔h2

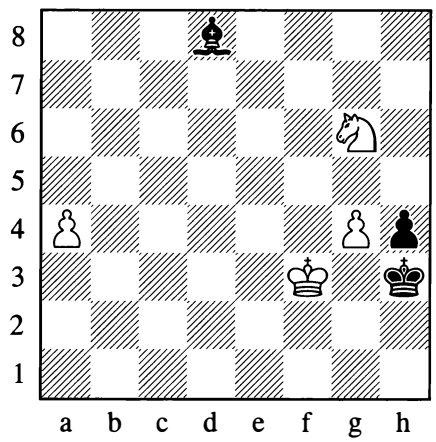
53...♗c7 54.g5 ♗xf4 55.♔xf4 h3 56.g6 h2 57.g7 h1=♕ 58.g8=♕† Black promotes first, but White achieves it with a check and can

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follow by exchanging queens.

54.♘g6 ♔h3

54...h3 55.♘f4



55.♔f4

White soon takes the black h-pawn and wins.

Do you have any favourite type of endgames?

"Rook endgames – as they often turn out to be more difficult than they look and occur relatively frequently."

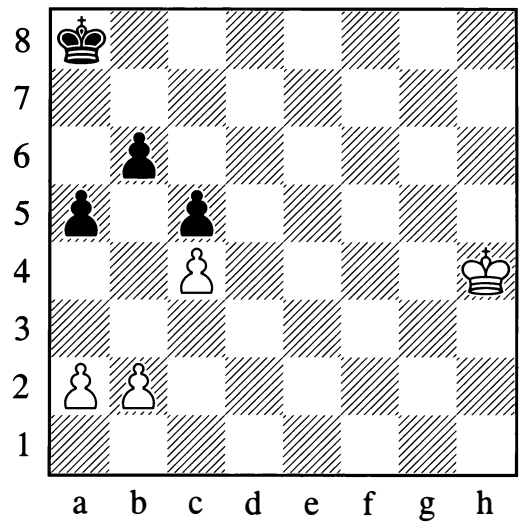
You must have done a lot of work with endgame studies; do you have a favourite composer?

"Nikolai Dmitrievich Grigoriev. His pawn endgame studies look so natural and turn out to be so magical. One story that I find particularly amazing is about a certain study Grigoriev published in 1938. To quote Averbakh:"

"*Nikolai Grigoriev died on 10th October 1938. The present study was published in the October edition of the periodical Shakhmaty v SSSR of the same year. Its solution appeared after the death of the author, in 1939.*"

"Only in 1985 (that is 47 years after Grigoriev's death!!) was the correct solution published in Shakhmaty v SSSR. This I find really amazing for such a simple looking pawn ending, one of Grigoriev's masterpieces."

Grigoriev, Shakhmaty v SSSR, 1938



White to play and win

1.a4 ♔b7 2.♔h5!!

In 1939 the Soviet chess magazine gave 2.♔g5? as the solution!

2...♔c7 3.♔g6 ♔c6 4.b3

White wins thanks to the distant opposition.

I also consider him to be a great composer, yet I know a fantastic Grigoriev study (W: ♔c2, ♙b4, ♙h6, B: ♔a8, ♙b7, ♙h7) where he gave the stipulation 'White to play and win', but Black can hold it. Do you think he was aware of the brilliant 2.♔h5!! move?

"I am convinced he knew the solution."

Computers have revolutionized endgames – what are your feelings about it?

"In general positive, but a bit ambivalent – on the one hand they are a tremendous help, when searching for the truth, and they show us how amazingly deep chess is. Just recall the tablebase results on pawnless endings, such as that rook and bishop win in general against two knights, but astonishingly in up to 222 moves, while queen versus two knights is generally drawn. But on the other hand the computers take away from some spheres of human creativity."

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Would you dare to bet serious money that you could draw with a rook against a rook and bishop against a human and a computer, with the 50-move rule implemented?

"No. Although I have often taught my students what to do and which positions to know by heart, I have never had this endgame as a defender in a tournament game so far. So betting would risk too much, especially against a human plus computer combination."

How often do they spot holes in your analyses?

"Seldom."

From whom did you learn most about endgames?

"From Mark Dvoretsky's works, especially his excellent *Endgame University*."

Who is your favourite endgame player?

"Anatoly Karpov."

And who is your favourite player overall?

"Robert James Fischer with Garry Kasparov coming in as a close second."

To play endgames well, how much do you think it is education and how much is it talent?

"With endgames, experience and training count for a lot of course, but to play as well as Kramnik or Karpov can neither be learnt nor taught – you have the special talent or you don't."

When you write, are you more a trainer, an entertainer or a scientist?

"A trainer and a scientist. After all I am a mathematician..."

Your and Frank Lamprecht's book Fundamental Chess Endings *won the British Chess Federation award for the book of the Year. What does this prestigious award mean to you?*

"It means a lot. But it should be mentioned that it was Gambit's idea to write the book and they were searching for authors to do the job. When John Nunn asked Frank and me, we did not hesitate long."

I noticed two things in your ChessCafe article; one thing I liked very much, the other one I found somewhat controversial. Which one do you want me to mention first?

"The one you liked."

You selected in your collection some games which you had lost. Not many authors come up with their disappointments. I do appreciate it very much. Was it is easy to go this direction?

"Yes, I want to learn from my mistakes."

In your articles there are many advertisements for your books. I understand it and any author, including myself, likes to see people reading his or her books, but in the ChessCafe articles there are more of them than I'd like to see. Anyway people see your level in the article and it takes them a ten-second search to find your works. Do you put in the advertisements yourself or is it not your decision?

"It is not my decision."

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In your article on the two knights versus a pawn endgame, you did not mention that the world-class grandmaster and the deservedly highly respected endgame specialist John Nunn failed to win a won position. Did you not know about this particular game of his, or as you work for Gambit, did you feel compromised and kept silent on the subject?

"I did not know about that particular endgame by John Nunn."

You have a lot of very nice examples. Where do you get the new games from? Do you specially search in the database?

"I always search the latest *The Week in Chess* for new examples for publication in *ChessBase Magazine* or *Endgame Corner* at *ChessCafe.com*. There are several ways to do this: either with the endgame key, if I need examples of a given material imbalance, or by just looking at all endgames played by players rated higher than 2400 for example. Of course I also scan books, periodicals etc, for new examples or new discoveries in old positions."

Do you work on your article according to a plan, or when you have inspiration?

"Of course it is always better to have inspiration. But sometimes I just have to deliver material on time and for this I have a database with possible examples prepared and then make a plan, what to use for *ChessBase* and what for *ChessCafe*."

Any dreams as a writer?

"Yes, but I prefer to keep them secret for the moment..."

Do you have your own family?

"No."

Composition grandmaster Gyorgy Bakcsi, who wrote several books on Russian literature, once wrote that Dostoyevsky envied Tolstoi as he was a noble and could spend as much on his novels as he wanted. On the other hand Dostoyevsky voluntarily undertook his brother's debt when he died. Bakcsi wrote it is possible he did it to force himself to write. As you have no family, I think financially you are probably not under huge pressure. Do you think your financial situation has an effect on you as a chess writer?

"You are right: I am not under huge financial pressure. The advantage is that I can sometimes realize projects which otherwise would be too time-consuming. For example Frank Lamprecht and I worked on *Secrets of Pawn Endings* for four years, which would simply not be possible if the financial pressure was very high."

Any hobbies apart from chess and mathematics?

"I used to play a lot of soccer when I was younger (in 1992/93 I even played in a team consisting only of chess players in the lowest league in Hamburg) and I am interested in mathematical games – but not poker."

You are a doctor of mathematics and a grandmaster in chess. If you had two lives, would you like to devote one only to mathematics and one only to chess? Do you have any regrets that you probably could have done better in either had you settled for just one?

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"No. I find that both are really fascinating subjects, but doing only one per life I would probably miss something. I am happy with what I have achieved in both subjects and I strongly doubt that I would have done better with one per life."

Thank you for the interview.

Testimonials

Mark Dvoretsky
Highly respected trainer and writer:

"We contacted each other often via the Internet. Karsten made a great contribution to my Endgame Manual – he carefully read the text and made a lot of valuable remarks, produced many interesting and deep pieces of analysis (which were included in the book, of course). He is working now on my new book and it certainly will help to improve the quality of the text.

In the process of our contacts via e-mail it becomes clear to me that Karsten has a wide erudition, he is very hard-working, conscientious and accurate with his analysis. He is a real connoisseur of the endgame (his excellent books and articles also confirm it).

It is significant also that Karsten (in contrast to many other players and authors) didn't consider his colleagues as rivals. He does not envy them their success – for example, he always expressed (both in his personal letters and publicly) his high opinion of my book *Dvoretsky's Endgame Manual*. He didn't consider it as a rival version of his own endgame books."

Hans Hecht
Represented Germany at ten chess Olympiads:

"In May 1988 I started working for *ChessBase* with regard to endgames. Sometimes I got feedback from different chess players, and several times it came from Karsten Müller. His comments were always well-grounded and showed deep understanding of endgames. When I finished my work for *ChessBase* in May 2004, it was logical that Karsten Müller took over this job. There is no doubt – he is doing a very good job in his own style."

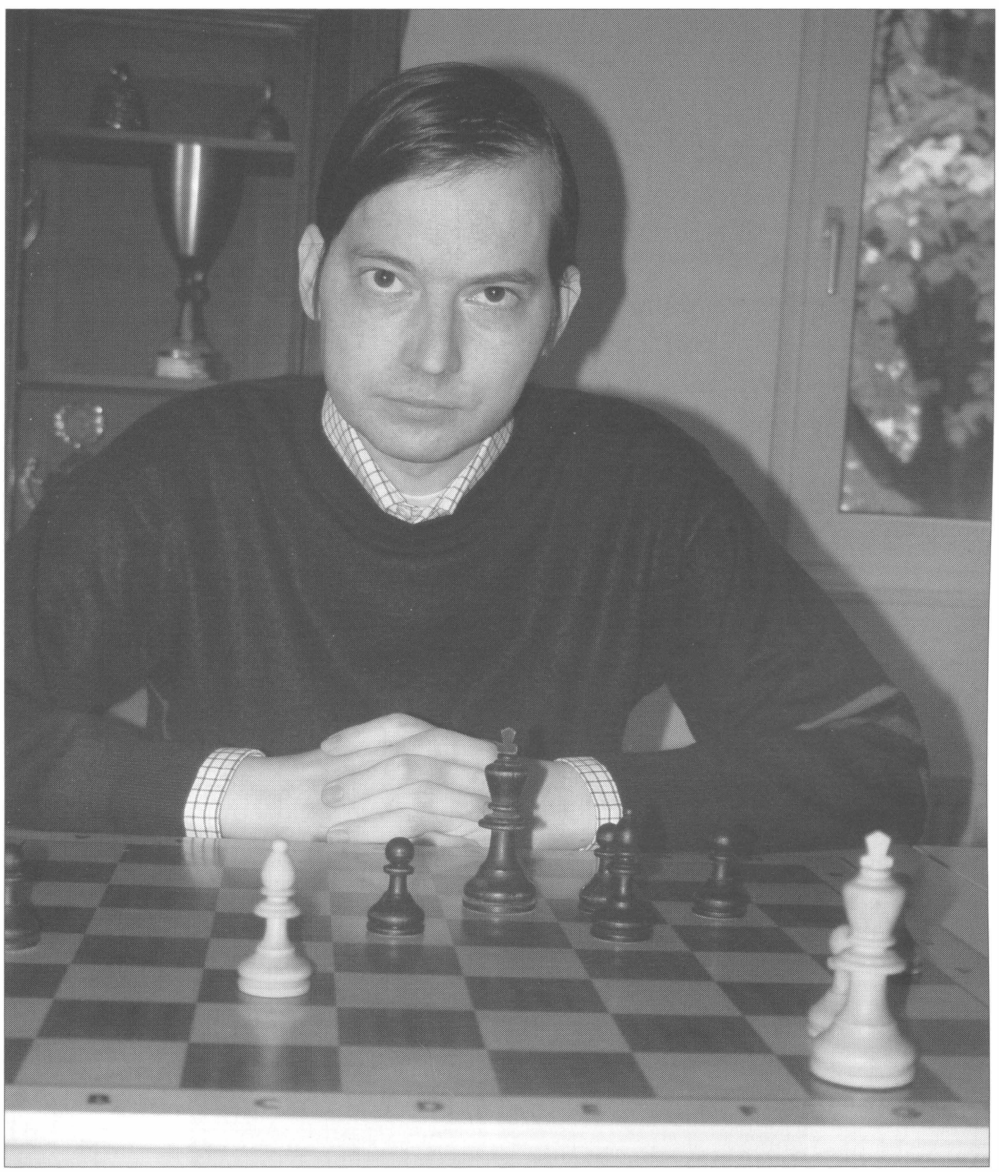
Stefan Kindermann
Represented Germany at six Olympiads:

"Besides being a very nice and correct guy, he has a reputation as an original and very strong attacking player and tactician; especially on the White side of the Sicilian, he is very dangerous. Here he obviously learned a lot from Alexei Shirov, whose second he has been for some time. Our personal score is equal if I remember correctly; I succeeded in losing two French Exchanges on the Black side to him by overambitious play. He was rather ill for some time, but it seems that he has recovered well. Moreover he is a renowned endgame specialist and has written a lot on this topic."

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Rainer Knaak
Five-time East German champion; Editor of *ChessBase Magazine*:

"I first met Karsten during encounters at the chessboard, where he proved to be a most pleasant opponent (as for the statistics, I refer you to the databases). But I have had much more contact with him in my function as an editor. Since 1997, he has regularly delivered articles for *ChessBase Magazine*, first on openings (among others the Scandinavian), and later on endgames – his true passion. He has issued countless publications in the field of endgames, and his four endgame DVDs for *ChessBase* have been a big success. Seeing how fast Karsten always delivers his work, I feel that he derives great pleasure from it and that he wouldn't mind *ChessBase Magazine* to be issued on a monthly basis (up to now it is every two months)."



Karsten Müller with the famous Topalov-Shirov, Linares 1998, position. Black to play and win...

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Chapter 8 Laszlo Lindner

The Man whose Life was Saved by Chess

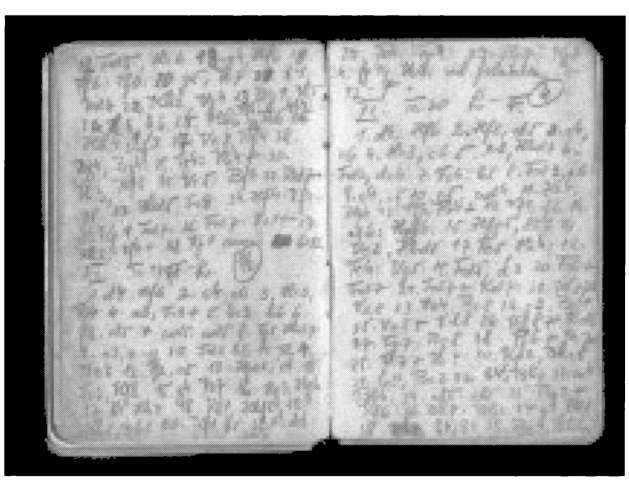


A young Lindner with the fourth World Champion, Alexander Alekhine

For many people, chess is an activity for their spare time. For others it is a profession. For Laszlo Lindner it was a lifelong love and, extraordinarily, it saved his life. How could this happen?

The history of the twentieth century contains many absurd and tragic twists. Lindner and his generation were not immune. At the end of World War II, Lindner was among the many who were taken to a concentration camp. The camp was in a town called Bor, located in the hills of Yugoslavia. He was in the same camp as Miklos Radnoti, one of the greatest Hungarian poets, as well as a strong chessplayer, Tibor Florian, who later became Hungarian champion.

Florian was able to bring a small chess set with him. He and Lindner sometimes managed to find a place to hide behind the barracks and play some chess. Laszlo recorded some games in his notebook. You can see a page of it here.



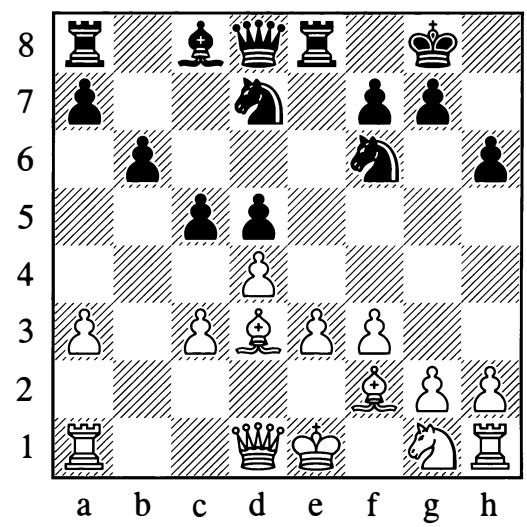
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They kept a record of 20 of their games, although they may have played more. Florian won this unusual match 12–8. Here are two of the games that Lindner won.

Tibor Florian – Laszlo Lindner

Bor 1944

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.a3 ♗xc3† 5.bxc3 b6 6.f3 d5 7.cxd5 exd5 8.♗g5 ♘bd7 9.e3 0–0 10.♗d3 h6 11.♗h4 ♖e8 12.♗f2 c5



13.♘e2

The early moves tell us that the two players were quite well educated in opening theory.

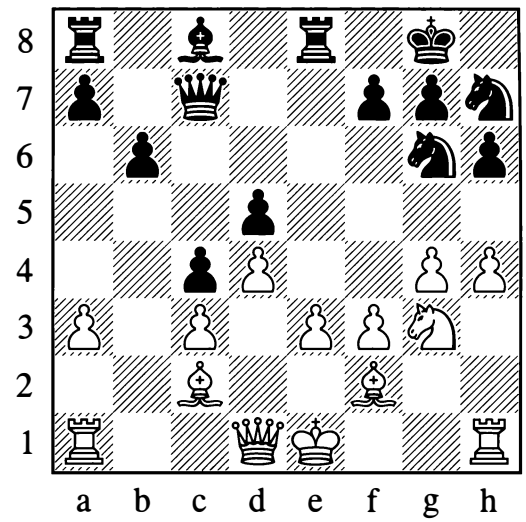
13...c4 14.♗c2 ♘f8 15.g4!

This is a modern approach. Even today world-class grandmasters use the same idea, although nowadays Black will usually have exchanged the light-squared bishops on a6. The most famous game involving this central structure was the immortal encounter Botvinnik – Capablanca, Avro 1938.

15...♕c7 16.♘g3

16.h4!? intending ♘f4 was interesting as well.

16...♘g6 17.h4 ♘h7



18.♕b1??

The presence of such a blunder indicates that our heroes were already in very bad shape.

18...♘hf8?

18...♖xe3†! wins instantly.

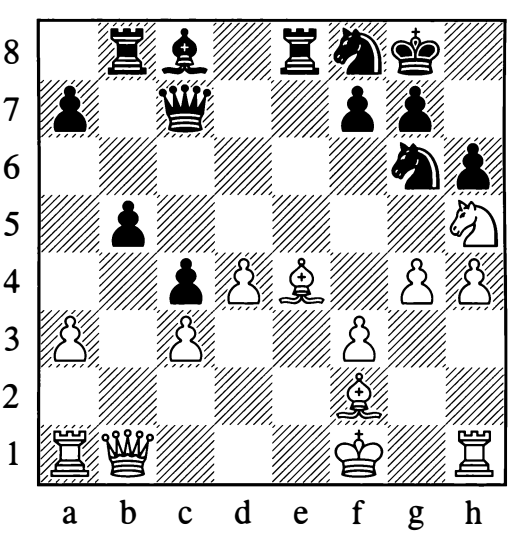
19.♘h5 ♖b8 20.♔f1!

On the other hand this is a subtle move.

20...b5? 21.e4

21.♗g3 wins an exchange.

21...dxe4 22.♗xe4



22...♗xg4??

This is a bluff, but it does the trick.

23.♘xg7?

After the simple 23.fxg4 ♕d7 24.♗f3 Black is a piece down with no compensation.

23...♔xg7 24.fxg4 ♕f4

0-1

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Though White has a reasonable position, he resigned. Probably his physical state no longer allowed him to see things clearly.

Laszlo Lindner – Tibor Florian

Bor 1944

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 e6 5.e3 ♘bd7 6.♗d3 dxc4 7.♗xc4 b5 8.♗d3 a6 9.e4 c5 10.e5 cxd4

It is remarkable that the players employed a theoretical line which remains topical to the present day.

11.♘e4

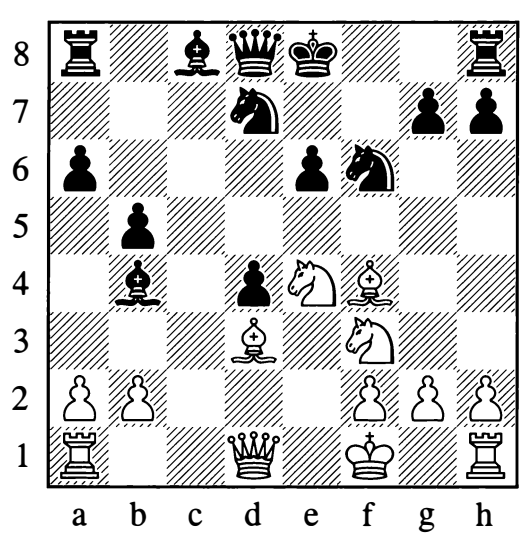
The main move is 11.♘xb5, which came under the microscope in 2008 when Anand inflicted two defeats with Black over Kramnik in their world championship match.

11...♘g4!?

Florian chooses the most ambitious continuation. Moving to d5 is fine as well.

12.♗f4 ♗b4† 13.♔f1 f6 14.exf6 ♘gxf6?!

It would have been better to take with the other knight.



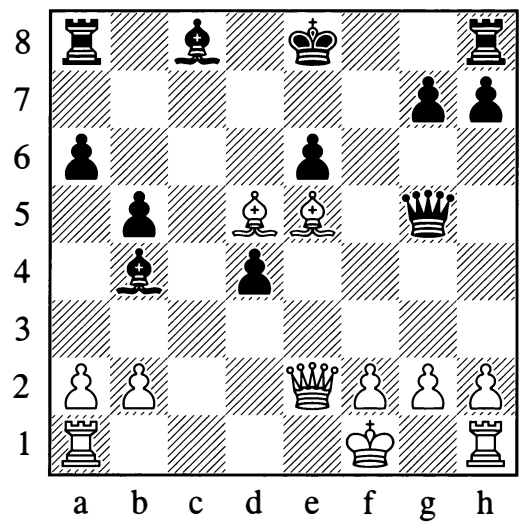
15.♘fg5!?

Lindner embarks on an attack, although the simple 15.♘xd4 was enough for a pleasant advantage.

15...♘b6 16.♕e2 ♘bd5 17.♗e5 ♘xe4

17...♗e7!? may have been a better defensive try.

18.♗xe4 ♕xg5 19.♗xd5



19...d3!

Under pressure, Florian finds one of the soundest defences. The only other playable move was 19...♖a7!, although Black's position is not enviable there either.

20.♗c6† ♗d7 21.♗xd7† ♔xd7 22.♕xd3† ♔e8 23.♕e4

White still has a clear edge, but Black has chances to survive. Of course, the real achievement for both of them was that they survived the horror of their situation.

23...♖c8 24.g3 ♖c4 25.♕a8† ♕d8 26.♕xd8† ♔xd8 27.♗xg7 ♖g8 28.♗f6† ♗e7?

After 28...♔e8! White still has to overcome some obstacles.

29.♗xe7†?

White should have taken the opportunity for 29.♖d1†! which wins a hugely important tempo.

29...♔xe7 30.♔g2

White is still a pawn up but he must work for the full point.

30...♖gc8 31.b3

I would prefer 31.♖he1!? ♖c2 32.b4.

31...♖c2 32.b4

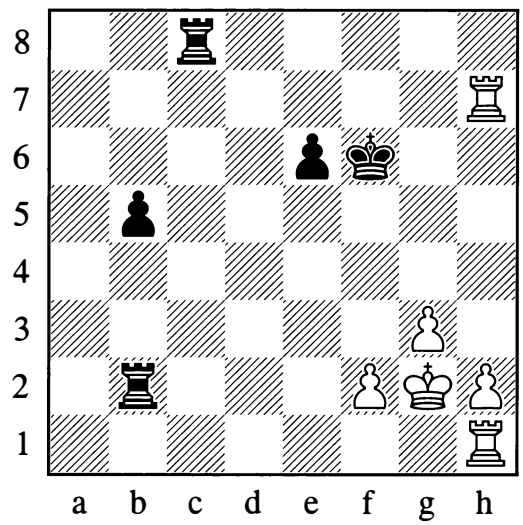
Lindner wants to open the a-file for his rook.

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32...♖b2 33.a4! ♖xb4 34.axb5 axb5

Black gives up the h-pawn, hoping that his own passed pawn will provide enough counterplay.

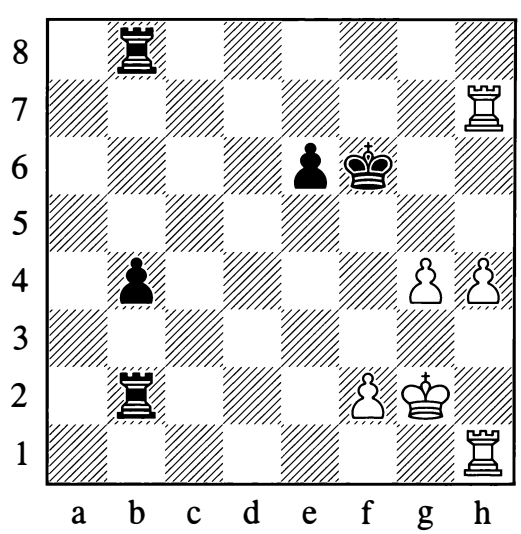
35.♖a7† ♔f6 36.♖xh7 ♖b2



37.g4! ♖b8?!

Black bases his chances on pushing the b-pawn, but this allows the second white rook to become active. With 37...♖f8 or 37...♖cc2!? Black could have tied this piece to the defence of the f2-pawn, thus obtaining some drawing chances.

38.h4 b4



39.♖e1!

White is sewing together a nice mating net.

39...♖b6 40.♔g3! b3 41.h5 ♖c2 42.f4 ♖c3† 43.♔h4

1–0

Black resigned, as his king is caught.

The way Lindner finished the second game would have made any player proud. To do it while existing under such appalling conditions makes the achievement all the more impressive.

How a game of chess saved two lives

By the end of the war the Germans no longer had the ability to keep the labour camp operating, and they decided to return the detainees to their homes.

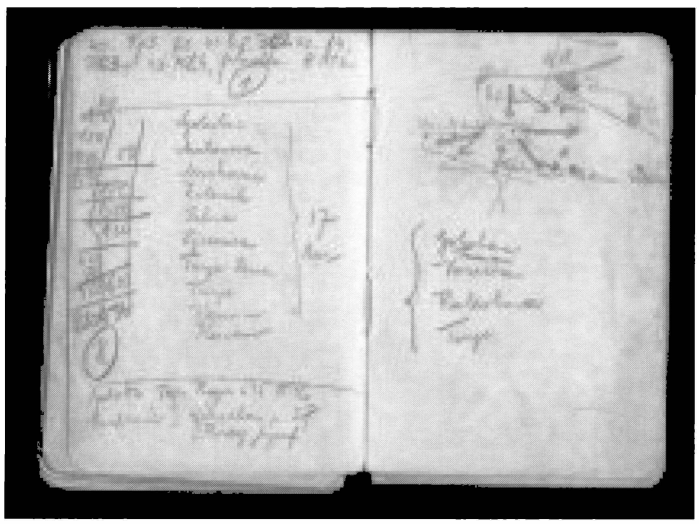
They were to be sent back to Hungary by train. Understandably, they were all eager to return. Some time before the scheduled departure, Lindner and Florian started to play a final game behind the barracks. By a quirk of fate, they became so involved with the game that they forgot all about the train! When they finished playing, both the Germans and their fellow detainees had gone. They were worried that their involvement in the game might cost them their lives, but in fact the opposite was true and their mutual obsession saved them. The train was stopped, and its occupants were forced to march back towards the Third Reich. None of them made it. Fortunately, Florian and Linder managed to reach local Serbians who helped them.

The poet Radnoti died in a small village called Abda, close to the Austrian border. He was buried in a mass grave. A few years later when authorities excavated the grave, they found a small notebook with a poem in one of the dead men's jackets. The man had been shot in the head from behind. The hardship of the concentration camp had made a good poet

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into a great one. That notebook has become a pearl of Hungarian culture. The nicest pieces from the notebook are still taught in all Hungarian schools.

Here is one page from the notebook and two poems translated into English:



Postcard 3
Translated by Francis Jones

The bullocks' mouths are drooling bloody spittle,
all the men are pissing blood,
our squadron stands in rough and stinking clumps,
a foul death blows overhead.
Mohács, 24th Oct. 1944

Forced March
Translated by A.W. Tueting

Crazy, who, from collapsing, gets up for new advance,
and moves in stumbling torture the limbs to get his chance,
and still is heading forward as if with wings he'd fly,
in vain the trench is calling, he does not dare to die.

He'd answer to your question, what for this strain's to stand,
that there's a dear wife waiting, and perhaps a wiser end.

Yet this good guy's quite crazy, through his old home behind
since long the winds are blowing, from blaze and ashes blind.

The back wall fell to pieces, the plum tree's broken down,
and gotten rough from scaring those nights so sweet at home.

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Oh, couldn't I believe yet – not kept in heart alone –
that there is still a homeland, so dear for me to roam;
if there were still the old porch, and sitting in the sun,
and peaceful bees were humming while cools the jelly plum,
the ending summer dozing o'er the garden's dreamy flair,
and midst green foliage swaying the fruit so firm and bare,
and Fanni stands there waiting, blonde, the hawthorn hedge aside,
and shadows written slowly by a slow late morning's light.

Could all this still come true yet! The moon's so round today!
Don't stride ahead, my comrade, shout at me – I can't stay!

Historians in Hungary estimate the number of dead from their Jewish community at between 400,000 and 600,000 and from the Gipsy community between 30,000 and 60,000.

Cheating death for a second time

After his ordeal, Lindner returned to Hungary, where life had started to return to normal. Sadly, when the Communist party started to gain total control, the western countries did nothing to prevent it. After the war Laszlo took a job at the Hungarian chess magazine. He was also offered a senior post in the local government. However, he turned it down in order to remain involved with chess.

Once again his love for the game saved him. Had he taken the job, it would have cost him his life. When the Communist party took over, they fabricated court cases to get rid of people in certain administrative positions. Sadly, the man who took the job that Lindner rejected was killed.

I met up with him sporadically over a period of many years. First, I spent much time with *Laci Bacsi* (Uncle Laci) in 1994. I met him when he was in Munich. He drove me back to Hungary. It was impressive that at that time, when he was roughly 80 years old, he could drive the 700 kilometres on his own.

My good relations with him and his very charming wife, Aunty Kati, really started when he was a reporter at the 1998 Karpov – Anand match in Lausanne. We talked quite a lot, and from then on I visited them whenever I had the opportunity. Those chats are very pleasant memories for me. *Laci Bacsi* was a very well-educated man. His general knowledge was very impressive, and he spoke many languages fluently.

Lindner's son, Andras, actually informed me that he occupied a high government office. He managed this without joining the ruling Communist party. This may not sound like much for people who never lived under such a regime, but it shows his high qualifications for the job.

I believe his main interest apart from his family was chess – that was what mattered to him the most. He certainly talked about it more than any other subject. He wrote a lot for chess magazines both in Hungary and abroad. He had a chess column for three decades in one of Hungary's biggest newspapers. He was a specialist on computer chess, a subject on which he often

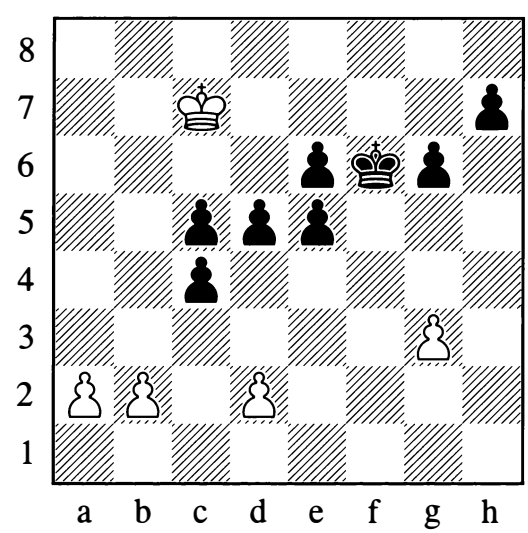
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published. He also commented on chess for a Hungarian radio station.

Let me add something about his versatility. Before taking one trip to Paris, I purchased a guidebook about the city. I only realized much later that the author was none other than *Laci Bacsi*! Andras told me he had written at least 20 tourist books on various cities and countries.

His original love, where chess is concerned, was composing, although he gradually shifted to computer chess. Even then he regularly visited composition meetings. Let me show an example I first encountered in my childhood. As a trainer I thought about it many times, but I did not realize the identity of the composer until quite a long time later. Here it is.

Lindner 1953



White to play and win

1.a4

The first move is not difficult – it is obvious that both sides will try to promote a pawn as quickly as possible. A close race is in store.

1...d4 2.a5

This is an interesting moment. Black can promote to a queen on three different files; White has to be ready for all of them.

2...c3

The alternative is:

2...e4 3.a6 e3 4.dxe3

This is a remarkable position – Black can choose between promoting on the c-, d-, and e-files. But none of the three will enable him to keep the newborn lady.

4...c3

Let's see what happens when Black promotes on e1: 4...dxe3 5.a7 e2 6.a8=♕ e1=♕ 7.♕f8† ♔e5 8.♕f4† ♔d5 9.♕d6† ♔e4 10.♕xe6† Black loses the queen.

Alternatively, there is the d-file: 4...d3 5.a7 d2 6.a8=♕ d1=♕ 7.♕f8† ♔e5 8.♕f4† ♔d5 9.♕d6† The same happens again.

5.bxc3 dxc3 6.a7 c2 7.a8=♕ c1=♕

Here Black promotes on the c-file, but this does not save him either.

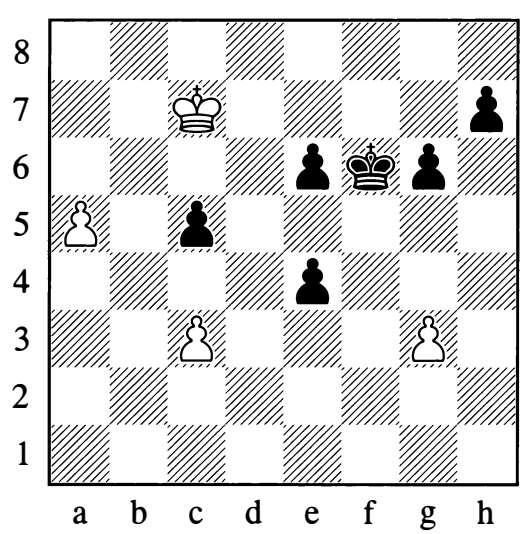
8.♕f8† ♔e5 9.♕f4† ♔d5 10.e4†

This time a different motif wins the queen.

10...♔d4 11.♕xc1

And White wins.

3.bxc3 dxc3 4.dxc3 e4



Black will create a queen on the e-file, which is blocked by a pawn. That makes White's task more complicated.

5.a6 e3 6.a7 e2 7.a8=♕ e1=♕ 8.♕f8†

Black has two ways to try to escape, but neither brings salvation.

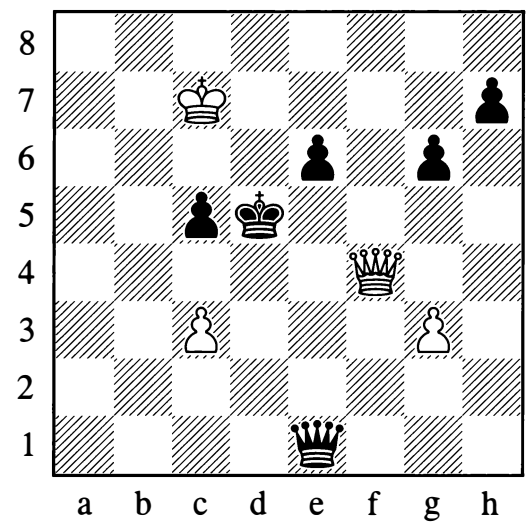
8...♔e5

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8...♔g5 9.♕f4† ♔h5 10.♕h4 is mate.

9.♕f4† ♔d5

Now the d6-check would be harmless, as Black's king can escape via c4.



10.c4#

However, now he gets checkmated in the middle of the board. It is a pretty and witty study, and an educational one as well.

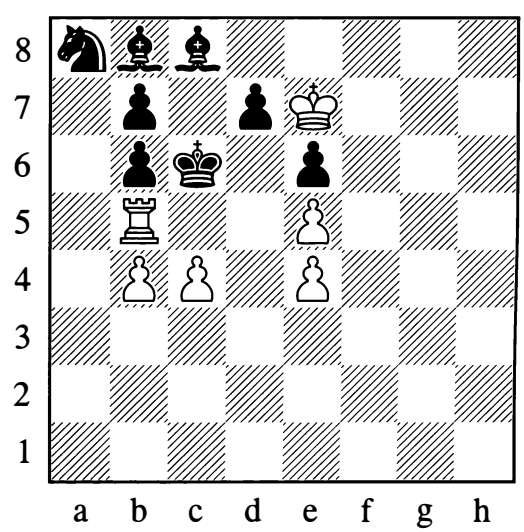
Lindner was born in 1916. From his early years, he visited some of the best tournaments and he personally met all the world champions from Lasker to Anand. He had remarkable energy. He was working in several fields, even during his late eighties. He still wrote chess articles and had other activities. The last time I went to visit Laszlo and Aunty Kati, he apologetically told me he would have no time for me because he was very busy and asked me to come back some considerable time later. I told him through the gate phone that I might not be able to do that as I was working outside of Hungary. So he invited me to come in. Then he showed me he was working on a contribution to a book, which was to be published upon the opening of the Budapest Holocaust museum. He was worried his health would not allow him to finish the work in time.

My book about Judit Polgar came out just before I left Hungary. As I live two hours away from Budapest, I did not manage to squeeze another visit into my schedule. I will always regret it, as I never had a chance to show him my book.

Being away from Hungary, I learned the sad news of his passing just a few months after it happened.

Let me show you some more of his very fine studies!

Lindner 1948



White to play and win

White is considerably behind in material, but Black's pieces can hardly move. It turns out that the study is not completely correct, but we will look at it anyway, because it demonstrates the wonderful imagination and creativity of its author.

1.♖d5!!

White sacrifices the only piece he has.

1...exd5

1...♔c7 2.b5! exd5 3.exd5 transposes to the main line, and 3.cxd5 also does the job.

There is another interesting option in:

1...♗xe5?!

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This is a creative idea, sacrificing a piece to create some breathing space. It was not considered by Laszlo, but it turns out that White can also win here, using a zugzwang motif.

2.♖xe5 ♔c7 3.b5 ♔b8

3...d6 brings no salvation for Black after 4.♖g5 ♗d7 5.♖g7 ♗c8 6.♖g3 ♔b8 (6...♗d7 7.♖a3; 6...e5 7.♖g8) 7.♔xd6 ♘c7 8.♖g8 ♘a8 9.e5 ♘c7 10.♔e7 ♘a8 11.♔d8 ♘c7 12.♖g1 and wins.

4.♔d6 ♘c7 5.♖g5 ♘e8†

5...e5 6.♖xe5 ♘e6 7.♖xe6! dxe6 8.e5+–

5...♘a6 6.bxa6 bxa6 7.e5 a5 8.♖g4 ♔b7 9.♖g1+–

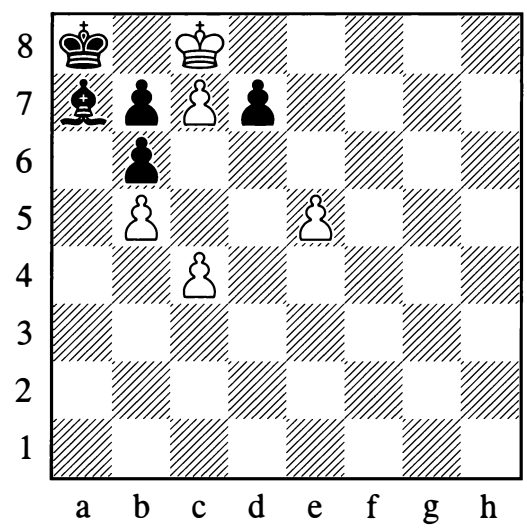
6.♔e7 ♘c7 7.e5 ♘a8 8.♔d8 ♘c7 9.♖g1 ♘a8 10.♖a1 ♘c7 11.♖a2

Finally Black has run out of moves.

2.exd5† ♔c7 3.b5

Paralysing Black even more.

3...♗a7 4.d6† ♔b8 5.♔d8 ♘c7 6.dxc7† ♔a8 7.♔xc8



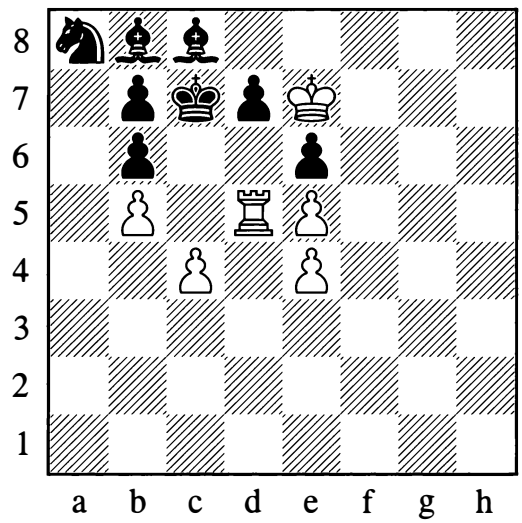
White wins, as Black will be forced into a helpmate by placing his bishop on b8, either immediately or after giving up the d-pawn. A cute finish!

Now I will show you the refutation. Actually it is hidden in the note to Black's very first move. We will start from the beginning.

1.♖d5!!

Now Black's strongest move is to get the king to safety.

1...♔c7! 2.b5!



Can you find the correct plan for Black?

The solution is:

2...♗a7!! 3.♖d1 ♔b8

The terrible 3...♗b8?? 4.♖a1 ♗a7 5.♖xa7 ♔b8 6.♔d8 wins for White.

4.♔d8 ♘c7!

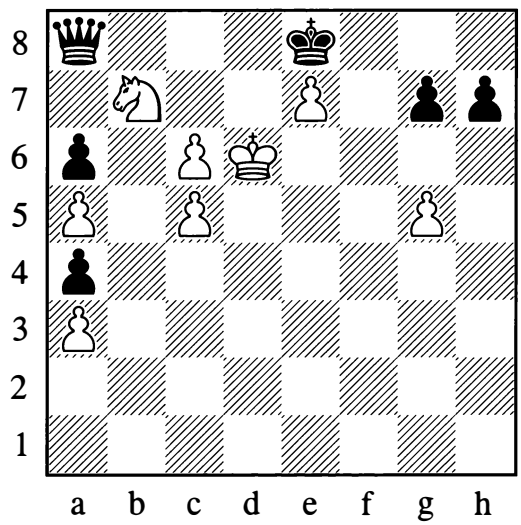
The point of this amazing regrouping is that Black will continue with ...♘a6!. He does not mind sacrificing the knight on this square in order to liberate his bishops. White should probably allow the knight to come to c5. In that case White still has some chances to draw, as the black bishops remain restricted, but of course he has absolutely no hope of winning.

It is a pity that this beautiful study contained a flaw, but Black's idea was easy to miss without a computer.

The next studies have been checked for accuracy and are flawless.

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Lindner 1948



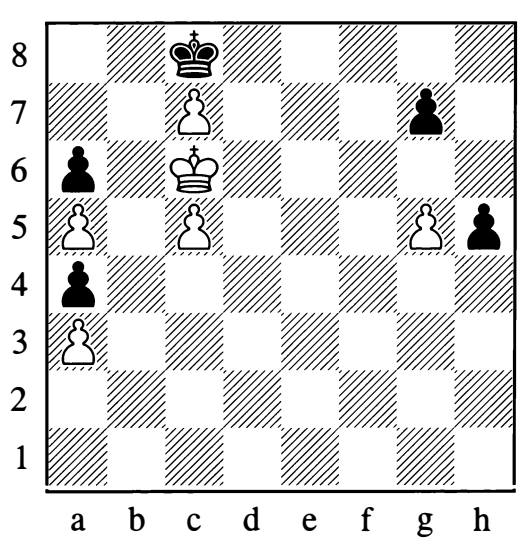
White to play and draw

Black is way ahead in material, but the queen is rather passive.

1.♘d8! ♕xd8†

1...♕b8† 2.c7 ♕c8 3.c6 g6 (3...♕f5 4.c8=♕ ♕f4† is a perpetual, but 4...♕xc8? 5.♘e6 ♔f7 6.♘c7 wins for White) 4.♘e6 ♔f7 5.♘d8† leads to a repetition.

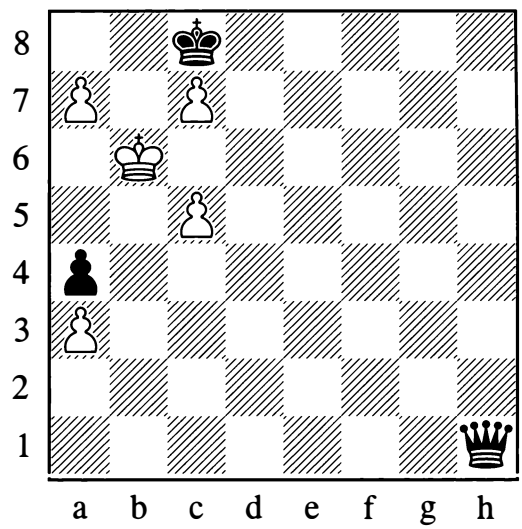
2.exd8=♕† ♔xd8 3.c7† ♔c8 4.♔c6 h5



White's situation appears hopeless, but there is an amazing twist in the story.

5.gxh6 gxh6 6.♔b6 h5 7.♔xa6 h4 8.♔b6 h3 9.a6 h2 10.a7 h1=♕

Black wins the race, and it looks like it is time to resign.

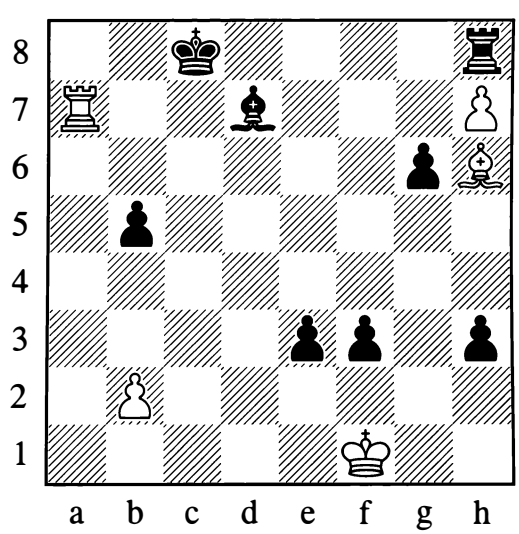


11.a8=♕†!! ♕xa8 12.c6!!

Quite incredibly, Black's queen is trapped, so the game ends in a draw.

The next one also features a battle between dangerous passed pawns.

Lindner 1951



White to play and win

1.♖a8† ♔b7 2.♖xh8 h2

Black's h-pawn is extremely dangerous. Now it requires attractive and precise play from White to avoid losing – never mind winning!

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3.♖b8†!

The theme for this study is that the rook cannot be taken on a dark square, as the bishop will then open the h-file with a check.

3...♔a6 4.♖a8† ♔b7 5.♖a7† ♔c6 6.♖c7† ♔d5 7.♖c5† ♔e4

There is no escape in the other direction either: 7...♔e6 8.♖e5† ♔f7 9.♖e7† ♔xe7 10.♗g5† and White wins.

8.♖e5† ♔d3 9.♖xe3† ♔c2 10.♖c3† ♔xb2

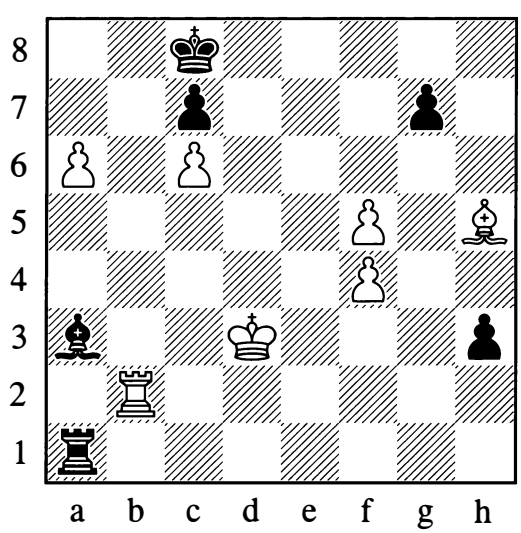
10...♔b1 11.♖c1† ♔a2 12.♔f2 wins for White.

11.♗c1†

White wins, as he has finally managed to clear the h-file with a check.

The next one features some attractive sacrifices, as well as a devastating switch from one side of the board to the other.

Lindner 1953



White to play and win

1.♖b1!

This sacrifice diverts the black rook from the a-file.

1...♖xb1

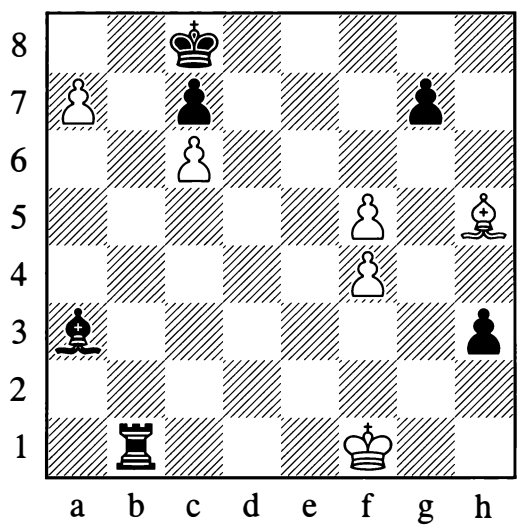
After 1...♖a2 there are many wins, of which the cleanest is 2.♗f7!.

2.a7 ♖b3† 3.♔e2!

White has to play subtly to run away from the checks. Instead 3.♔c2 ♖b2† 4.♔c3? ♖b8 5.f6?? (White should settle for a draw by taking on b8) 5...♗b2† 6.♔c2 ♖a8 wins for Black.

3...♖b2† 4.♔f1! ♖b1†

The checks soon run out after 4...♖f2† 5.♔g1 ♖g2† 6.♔h1 ♖g1† 7.♔h2 ♖g2† 8.♔xh3.

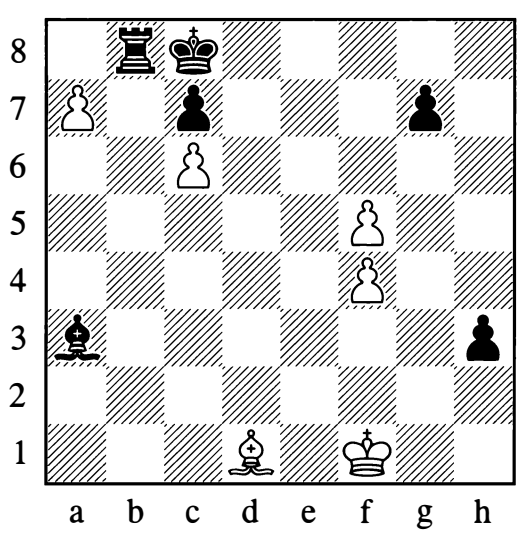


5.♗d1!

This is a beautiful way to stop the checks.

5...♖b8

5...♖xd1† 6.♔e2 wins.



6.f6!!

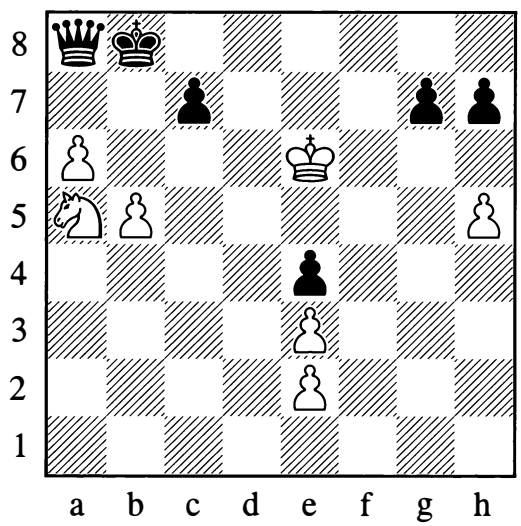
With this crushing move White opens the h3-c8 diagonal and attacks the g7-pawn. The

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dual threats are too much for Black to deal with. White wins easily after 6...gxf6 7.♗g4†, or 6...♖a8 7.fxg7.

The next study is another miracle save, featuring a knight against a queen.

Lindner 1955

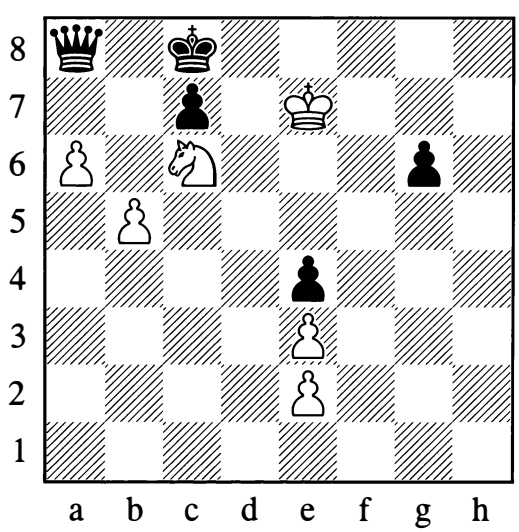


White to play and draw

1.♘c6†

White paralyses the king and the queen at the same time. But Black has another trump: the outside passed pawn.

1...♔c8 2.♔e7 g5 3.hxg6 hxg6



4.♔e8!!

White can do more with the knight and the king than merely restricting Black's king and queen.

4...g5 5.♘e7† ♔b8 6.♔d7!

White goes on the attack!

6...g4

The king cannot escape: 6...♔a7 7.♘c8†! ♔b8 8.♘e7 is a repetition.

7.♘c6†

This is an unusual way to win the queen.

7...♕xc6† 8.♔xc6

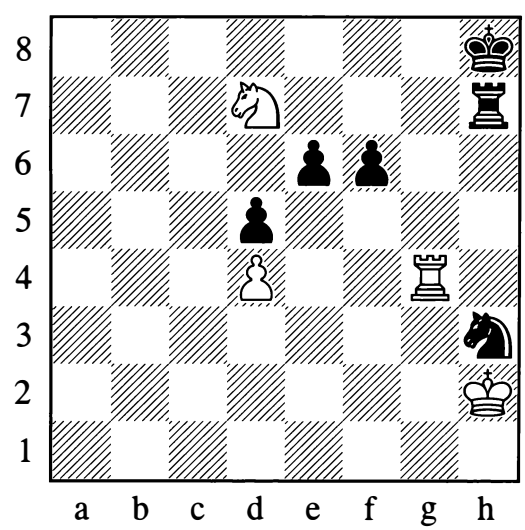
White's king's activity is just enough to hold the game.

8...g3 9.a7†! ♔xa7 10.♔xc7 g2 11.b6† ♔a6 12.b7 g1=♕ 13.b8=♕

White promotes in time to secure the draw.

The next study is an example of an unsound study, which was later adapted by Laszlo's dear friend and fellow composer, Pal Benko.

Lindner 1976



White to play and draw

1.♖g8†!

White nicely sacrifices the rook. 1.♘xf6? also reaches an ending, but Black gets the opposition. 1...♘f2† 2.♘xh7 ♘xg4† 3.♔g3 ♔xh7 4.♔xg4 ♔g6 5.♔f4 ♔f6 6.♔e3 ♔g5 and the king invades.

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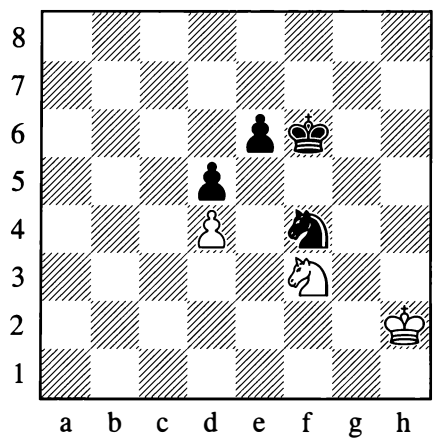
1...♔xg8 2.♘xf6† ♔h8

The problem with the study is the line:

2...♔g7! 3.♘xh7 ♘f4!

3...♔xh7 4.♔xh3 is a draw.

4.♘g5 ♔f6 5.♘f3



5...♔g6!!

Black uses the technique of triangulation to force victory. Instead 5...♔f5 6.♔g3 reaches a mutual zugzwang position. 6...♔e4 7.♘g5† ♔e3 8.♔g4 e5 9.dxe5 Black cannot win.

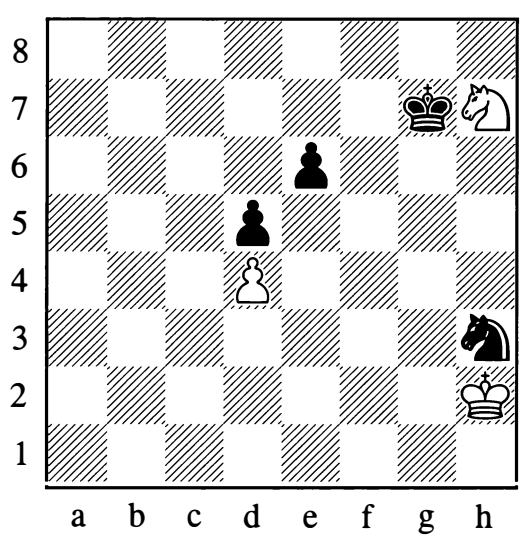
6.♔g1

Or 6.♔g3 ♔f5 7.♔f2 ♔e4 and Black penetrates.

6...♔f5 7.♔f1 ♔e4 8.♔f2 ♔d3 9.♘g5 ♔xd4

Black wins.

3.♘xh7 ♔g7!



4.♔g2!!

This is a wonderful idea. Neither player takes the knight as this would mean losing the opposition. 4.♔xh3? ♔xh7 leads to another mutual zugzwang.

4...♘f4† 5.♔f3 ♔xh7

5...♘e2 6.♔xe2 ♔xh7 7.♔f3 and White draws, and 5...♘d3 6.♘g5 ♔f6 7.♘h7† ♔f5 8.♘f8 is no better.

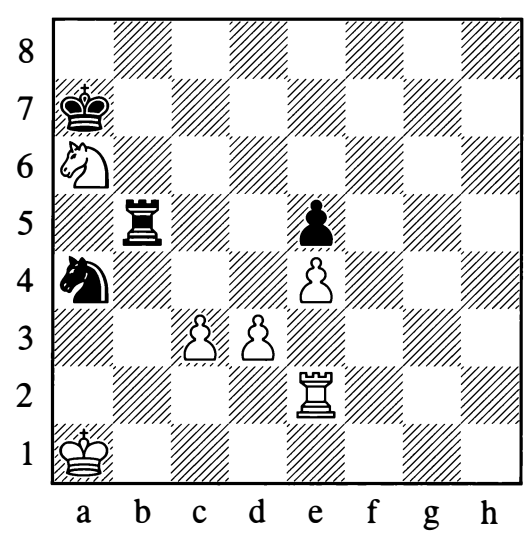
6.♔xf4 ♔g6 7.♔g4!

The only move to draw.

7...♔f6 8.♔f4

I showed the study and the flaw that I had found to grandmaster Benko, who then came up with a great solution: he incorporated *Laci Bacsi*'s idea into a sound study.

Lindner/Benko 2007



White to play and win

1.♖a2! ♖b1† 2.♔xb1 ♘xc3† 3.♔b2 ♘xa2 4.♘c5!

The win will come from the same triangulation method as before.

Lindner's first study was published in 1930. Altogether he composed 360, with 167 achieving awards. He took 25 first places. He once won the Hungarian composing championship and received the silver medal three times. Over his lifetime he authored six books on compositions.

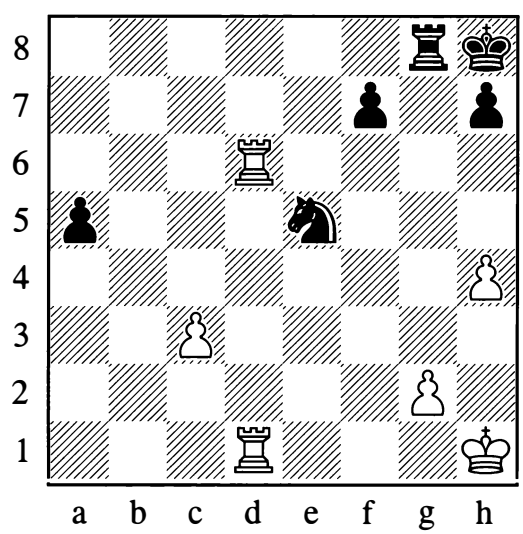
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We will now turn our attention to some of his competitive games. The first one was played against the very strong player Erno Gereben, who had faced some of the very best players in the world. Some world champions had even selected their games against Gereben to feature in game collections.

In this one his endgame skill saved him half a point.

Erno Gereben – Laszlo Lindner

Budapest 1936



36...♖g3!

Black is lost but he grabs his best chance. He wants to eliminate White's queenside pawn.

37.h5 h6!!

Black sets a very witty trap.

38.♖xh6†?

Correct was 38.♖1d5 ♘g4 39.♖d4 ♔g7 40.♖c6, when White wins with the c-pawn.

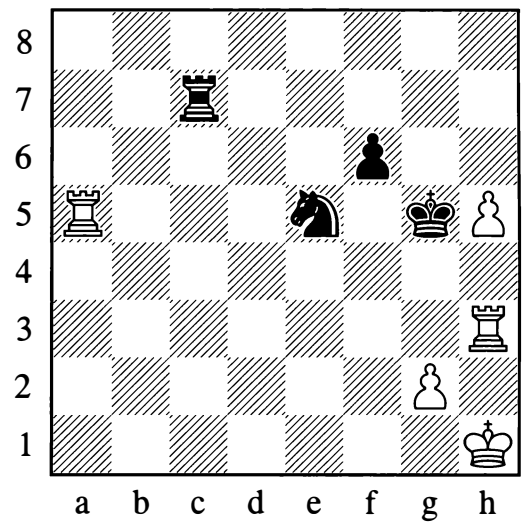
38...♔g7 39.♖a6 ♖xc3!

Black has obtained some chances to draw, as White has no queenside pawns remaining.

40.♖xa5 f6 41.♖d4

41.♖f1! ♖c7 (41...♖c4 42.♖a7† ♘f7 43.♖d1 wins for White) 42.♔h2 White probably can hold the h-pawn. He should still be winning.

41...♔h6 42.♖f4 ♔g5! 43.♖f3 ♖c6 44.♖h3 ♖c7



45.h6

White cannot activate the rook with 45.♖a8?? ♖c1† 46.♔h2 ♘g4† 47.♔g3 ♖c3 and Black checkmates.

45.♖aa3?! ♘g4 also holds no danger for Black.

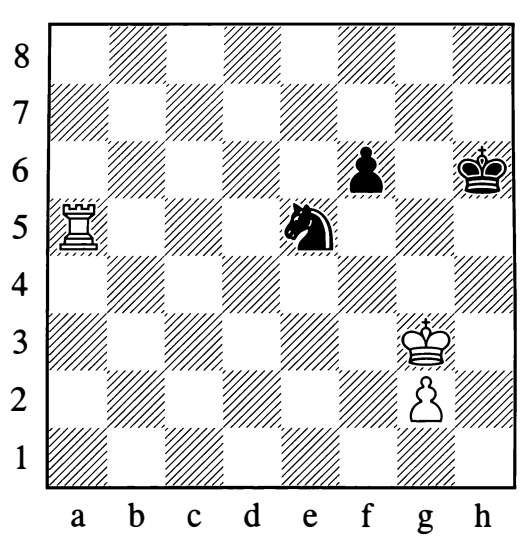
45...♖h7 46.♔h2

46.♖aa3 ♘g4 47.♖ag3 f5 48.♔g1 ♖xh6 49.♖xh6 ♔xh6 is similar to the game.

46...♖xh6 47.♖xh6 ♔xh6

Suddenly Black is in a theoretically drawn position.

48.♔g3



48...♔g5

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Keeping the enemy king out of f4. Instead the careless 48...♔h5? would allow 49.♔f4 ♔g6 50.♖a3 winning.

49.♖b5 ♔f5 50.♔h3 ♔g6!

50...♔e6? 51.♔h4! wins for White.

51.♖b8 ♔h6

Black would lose after 51...f5? 52.♔h4!.

52.♖b6 ♔g6 53.♖a6 ♘f7 54.♔g4 ♘e5† 55.♔f4 ♘d3† 56.♔e3 ♘e5 57.♔e4 ♔g5!

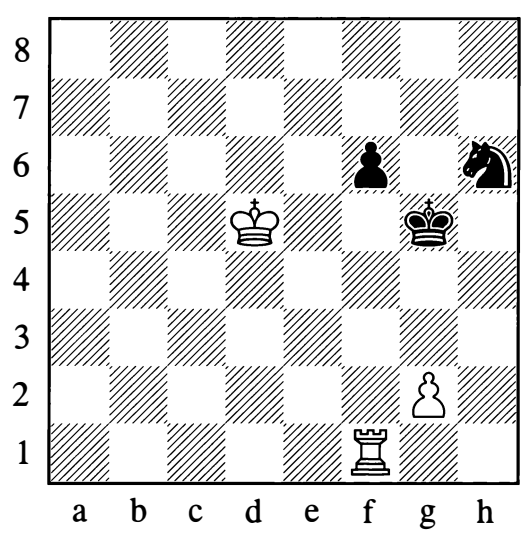
Black must keep his pieces on their optimum squares. If he deviates for a moment with 57...♘g4? then 58.♖a3!! wins.

58.♖a1 ♘g4 59.♖f1 ♘h6!

Preventing a check on f5. Instead after 59...♔g6?? 60.♖f3!! White wins.

60.♔d5

60.♖f3!? Perhaps White should have tried bringing the rook to the third. In that case 60...f5†! is the only move to draw.



60...f5!

With his pieces positioned correctly, it is okay for Black to advance this pawn.

61.♔e6 f4

It was also possible to play 61...♔g6 62.♖f3 ♔g5 63.♖g3† ♘g4! and Black holds. (But not 63...♔f4? 64.♖h3 ♘g4 65.♖f3† and White wins.)

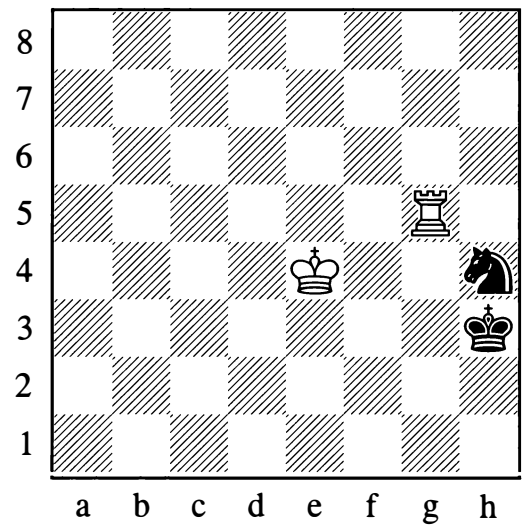
62.♖h1 ♘g4!

Lindner continues to play accurately, avoiding 62...♘f5? 63.♖h5†!.

63.♔d5 ♘e3† 64.♔e4 ♔g4

This is also an only move, but it is trivial.

65.♖h8 ♘xg2 66.♖g8† ♔h3 67.♔f3 ♘h4† 68.♔xf4 ♘g2† 69.♔e4 ♘h4 70.♖g5



70...♘g2!

After the incorrect 70...♔h2 71.♔f4 ♘g2† 72.♔g4 ♘e1 73.♖e5! ♘d3 74.♖e3! ♘f2† 75.♔f3 wins for White.

71.♔f3 ♘h4† 72.♔f2 ♔h2 73.♖g3 ♘f5 74.♖d3 ♘h4 75.♖a3 ♘f5?

After a gruelling session, Black commits an error. It is also possible that the annotators made a mistake when they entered the moves into ChessBase. The right moves are 75...♘g2! and 75...♘g6!.

76.♔f3 ♘h4† 77.♔g4 ♘g2 78.♖a1 ♘e3† 79.♔f3 ♘f5 80.♖a4

80.♖a5! wins, as in the note to Black's 70th move above.

80...♔h3

½–½

Finally the two players agreed to a peace treaty, and the position is indeed a draw.

Laszlo managed to save a very difficult endgame – it looks like an almost impossible result against a strong opponent when you look at the initial position of the ending.

If one searches for Lindner's games in the database one finds something interesting and

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possibly unique. There are some games from 1936, one from 1939, followed by a break of almost six decades! His next game is from 1998 from a regional league in Germany. (It is also noteworthy that, at the age of 77, he still had enough energy to keep travelling to Germany!)

His son Andras, who works as a regular interviewer for one of the biggest magazines, told me that he did in fact play some games during this period, but none of them made it onto ChessBase.

The following interesting game is from the early part of his career as well.

Laszlo Lindner – Geza Fuster

Budapest 1936

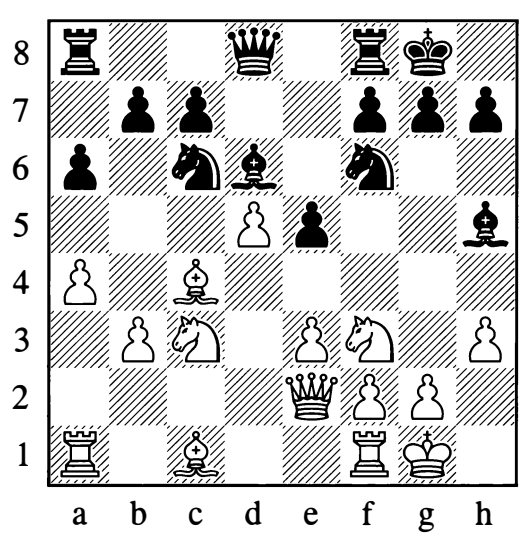
1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 a6 5.a4?!

This is now known to be unpromising for White.

5...♘c6 6.e3 ♗g4 7.♗xc4 e6 8.h3 ♗h5 9.0–0 ♗d6 10.♕e2 0–0 11.b3 e5

Black has a good game.

12.d5



12...e4!?

Black starts the action. He could also have opted for a safer approach.

13.♘xe4 ♘xe4 14.dxc6 ♘g5 15.♗d5

White is ready to enter sharp lines.

15...♗e5 16.cxb7?

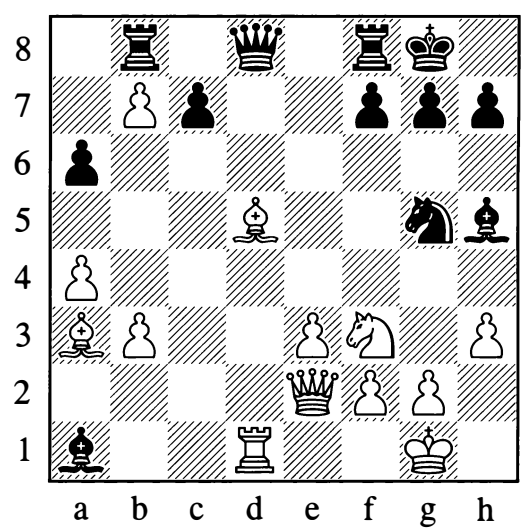
An unfortunate move order. 16.♖d1 would have been better.

16...♖b8?

Very strong would have been 16...♕xd5! 17.bxa8=♕ ♕xa8 18.e4 (18.♗b2 ♗xf3 19.gxf3 ♘xf3† wins) 18...♘xf3† 19.gxf3 ♗xa1 20.♗a3 ♗d4 21.♗xf8 ♔xf8. Black has decent winning chances.

17.♖d1 ♗xa1 18.♗a3

Now the tables are turned, and it is White who has obtained the initiative in return for a small material investment.



18...♘xf3†?

Black loses his way. After the superior 18...♕f6 19.♗xf8 ♔xf8 20.♕c2 ♘xh3† 21.gxh3 ♗xf3 22.♗xf3 ♕xf3 23.♖xa1 ♖xb7 the position is equal.

Another fascinating line is:

18...c6!? 19.♗xf7†

Or 19.♗xc6 ♕f6 20.♗xf8 ♕xc6 21.♗d6 ♖xb7 22.♗f4 ♘xh3† 23.gxh3 ♗f6 24.♔g2 ♖xb3 25.♖d6 and White holds.

19...♖xf7 20.♖xd8† ♖xd8 21.♕xa6 ♘xf3† 22.gxf3 ♗xf3?!

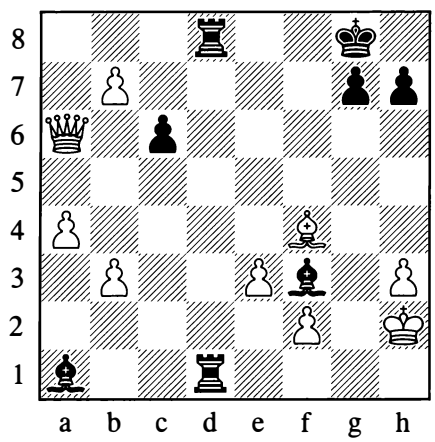
This is the most interesting move, but it

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contains a flaw. Black is by no means obliged to go for the amazing tactics. Objectively best is 22...♗e5!, when the position is balanced.

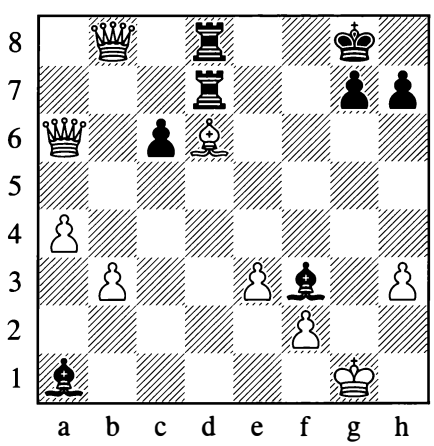
23.♗d6 ♖fd7! 24.b8=♕!

Instead after 24.♗f4 ♖d1† 25.♔h2



25...♗e4! 26.♗c7 (26.b8=♕ ♖h1† 27.♔g3 ♖g1† leads nowhere for White in view of 28.♔h4? ♗f6†) 26...g5! Black keeps a perpetual.

Unfortunately for Black, after the more accurate text move, he is unable to save the game.



24...♖xd6

At first this looks rather problematic for White.

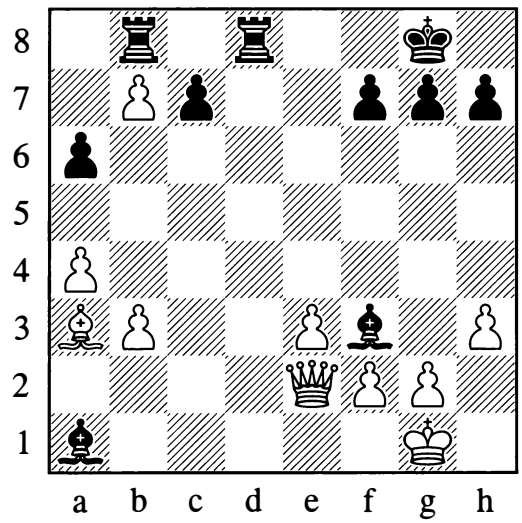
25.♕c4†! ♗d5 26.♕cb4!

But the computer spoils the fun.

26...♖g6† 27.♔f1

And White wins.

19.♗xf3 ♗xf3 20.♖xd8 ♖fxd8



21.♕xf3

The gigantic pawn on b7 is unbearable for Black, and Laszlo soon converts his advantage.

21...♗e5 22.g3 ♗d6 23.♗b2 a5 24.♗c3 ♗b4 25.♗xb4 axb4 26.a5 ♖d6 27.♕g4

1–0

Testimonials

Gyorgy Bakcsi

Grandmaster in chess composition:

"Laci was an exceptionally energetic person. He was an optimist, who tried many things. He experienced a few failures, but enjoyed much success. He was one of the best composers in Hungary. He excelled in helpmates and mate in two compositions. He was very fast at picking up new, modern things. Maybe he was the first Hungarian chessplayer to have a computer and to capitalize on the advent of the internet."

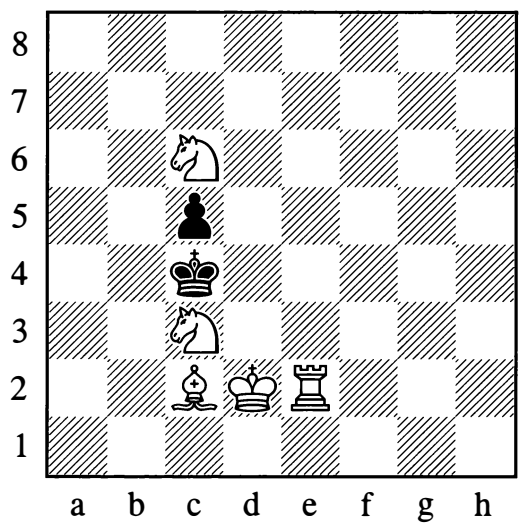
Pal Benko

Two-time world championship candidate; one of the all-time great endgame study composers:

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"We became friends from our shared interest in composing endgame studies. We celebrated his 80th birthday together. I composed two positions with the shape of the letter 'L', in tribute to my dear friend's initials."

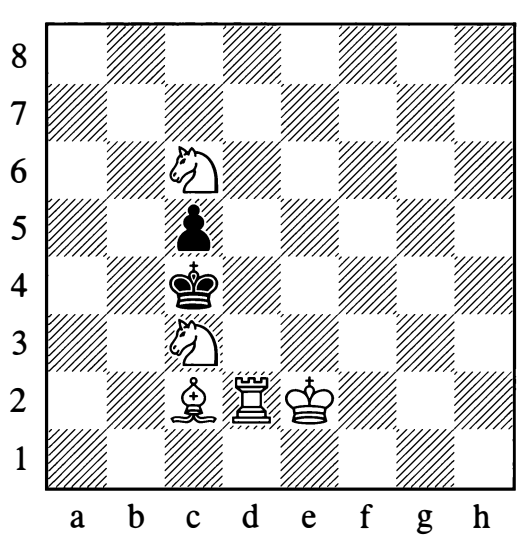
Benko 1996



White to play and mate in one

The first position is rather trivial. But the real artistry can be seen in the way Benko shuffled the pieces to create a different mate each time. Here is the second position.

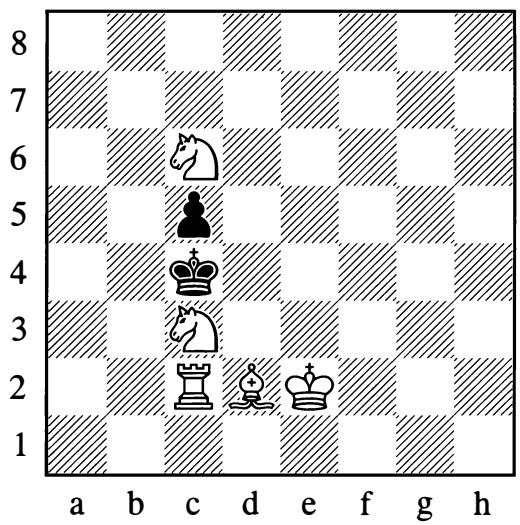
Benko 1996



White to play and mate in two

Swapping the position of White's king and rook makes things slightly trickier. Benko later came up with a third variant!

Benko 1996



White to play and mate in three

To present problems of a friend's initials is a unique and ingenious birthday gift.

Did you manage to solve them all?

First: 1.♖e4#
Second: 1.♗a4 ♔xc3 2.♖c2#
Third: 1.♖a2 ♔b3 2.♘a5† ♔b4 3.♖a4#

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Chapter 9 Elmar Magerramov

"When Garry played, I was with him"



When I asked my next personality for an interview, he seemed very happy to oblige. Actually he suggested doing the interview straightaway. I asked for some time to check his games first.

I explained to him that my aim with the book would be to introduce people who were relatively little known, yet who were deserve a wider audience. His instant reaction was:

> "When Garry mentions me, he writes about me as though people know who I am. He knows me well, but the chess public knows little. Garry seems to forget this".

I never played Magerramov over the board, but while I was working on Kasparov's games, I started to develop more and more interest in him. I played him on ICC from time to time, which was fun, as one can really sense he is a strong player. Originally I did not think of selecting him for this book, but fortunately I saw him for a fraction of a second at the World Youth Championships in Turkey, and the idea to interview him was instantly born.

I was not sure it was him, so I looked around for him in vain for one or two days. I started to think that perhaps I was mistaken. I asked some of my friends if they knew whether he was in Antalya, and they said they had seen him. After a few more days, I finally noticed him again and introduced myself.

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I found in the database that Kasparov, despite his combative style, lost to only 55 people in his career (perhaps I should correct the number to 56, as I learned that Mikhail Gurevich once beat

him when they were very young). Even fewer can boast that they have beaten the greatest player in history on multiple occasions. The person to whom I devote this chapter achieved this feat four times. Admittedly, the victories came before Kasparov had ascended to the level of a world championship contender, but he was definitely a formidable player nonetheless. Not all of these wins came in official tournaments, yet they still represent an achievement; even in training games, Kasparov was a ferocious competitor. I hope the chess public will share my opinion that it is worth learning more about him through these games.

Elmar Magerramov was raised in Baku at around the same time as Kasparov, although the former is five years older. He therefore had the opportunity to witness the growth of an exceptional chess talent. As far as I am aware, this is the first time that he has shared the experiences of his career in the public domain.

Can you talk about your family background?

"My father fought in World War II, and when he returned he decided to become a doctor. He was a tuberculosis specialist. He died in 1986. My mother was a chemist. In Baku, because of the oil industry, there was a strong need for chemists. She also passed away."

What is your mother language?

"My family was bilingual, we spoke Russian and Azerbaijani. My mother was Russian-educated, and I also studied in Russian."

Did anybody play chess in your family?

"My father knew how to play, but was not a good player, just like my only brother who is younger than me. By the way, I have no sisters."

How did you start playing chess?

"In the Soviet era there were many people playing in the squares and open areas, I always liked to watch them. But I only went to the Palace of Pioneers at the age of 14."

That is really late!

"Yes indeed late, you are right. But I played some basketball, did some wrestling and drove go-karts earlier."

I know in the Caucasus backgammon is very popular – did you play?

"I have never been a fan of it – unlike Nona Gaprindashvili. I play chess for scientific reasons, not for the result."

Who were your trainers in your junior years?

"I think the first trainer is very important; Kasparov and I were very lucky to have Oleg Privorotsky. He was a candidate master, but his understanding of chess was on a master's level. He was a very well-educated positional player. Our play was usually free from obvious positional mistakes, which was not the case with most juniors; it was because of him. He started to teach us serious openings like the Scheveningen."

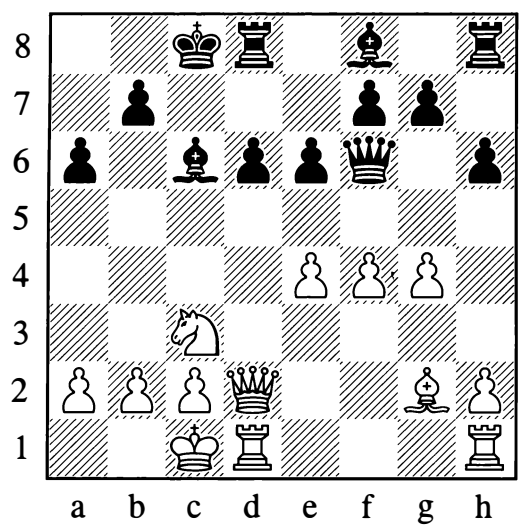
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Can you show us something from your youth?
"Please choose from these!"

S. Akopov – Elmar Magerramov

Baku 1973

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗g5 e6 7.♕d2 ♗d7 8.0–0–0 ♘c6 9.f4 h6 10.♘xc6 ♗xc6 11.♗xf6 ♕xf6 12.g4 0–0–0 13.♗g2



13...g5!

A nice positional move, taking control of the dark squares. The idea is well-known; it would be interesting to know whether Privorotsky had shown it to him specifically or if he improvised it at the board.

14.♖hf1! ♕e7 15.♕d4 ♖g8 16.f5 ♔b8 17.♖f2 ♖c8 18.♗f1 ♕d8 19.♗c4 ♗g7

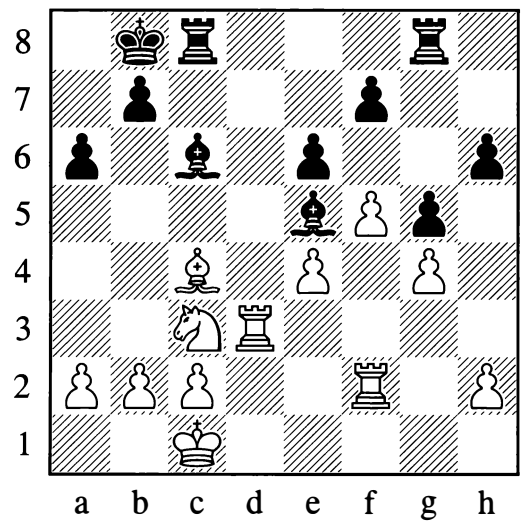
Sacrificing a pawn for free piece play.

20.♕xd6†

White should restrict the bishop with 20.f6, after which Black should respond with 20...♗f8 (I think it would be too dangerous to try and maintain the pressure against f6 by burying the bishop in the corner).

20...♕xd6 21.♖xd6 ♗e5 22.♖d3?

An unfortunate retreat square. After 22.♖d1 b5! (22...♗xe4 23.♗xe6) 23.♗d3 or 23.♗b3 b4 the position is roughly balanced.

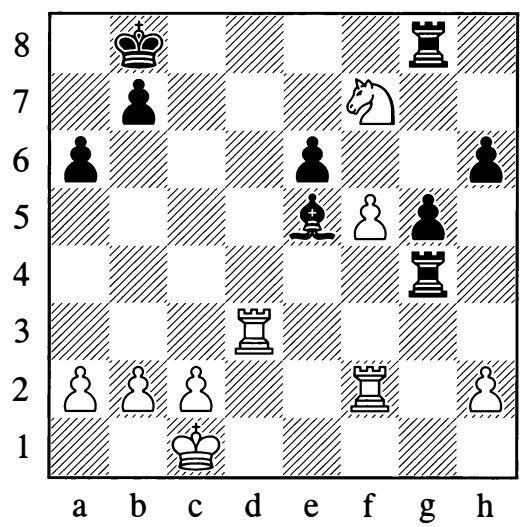


22...♗xe4! 23.♘xe4 ♖xc4 24.♘d6

24.♖e2 is also unsatisfactory after 24...exf5 25.gxf5 ♖e8 26.♔d1 ♗f4.

24...♖xg4 25.♘xf7?

Under pressure, White collapses. After 25.fxe6 fxe6 26.♖f7 he can still resist, unlike in the game.



25...♗f4†!

The move itself is not that spectacular, but the surprise is that it leads to a forced win.

26.♔d1 ♖g1† 27.♔e2 exf5 28.♘xh6 ♖e8† 29.♔f3 ♗c1 30.♘xf5?

After 30.h3 ♖e5! is the simplest, as on the next move ...g4† will win the knight.

30...g4#!

0–1

An unusual checkmating scenario.

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Do you have any information on what Privorotsky is doing nowadays?

"He moved to Israel."

How long did your trainer-pupil relationship last with Privorotsky?

"After three or four years I entered university. That is why I left the Pioneer Palace. At university, a national master, Alexander Morgulev, took over as my trainer. My luck continued; he was not only a very well-educated positional player, but an especially relaxed person. He helped me so much in learning to control myself and stay cool. We worked together for roughly two years.

In the meantime I joined the club 'Burevestnik'. Bagirov was the trainer there. Our relationship slowly turned into a mutually beneficial arrangement and, I believe, into a friendship. My good luck did not desert me in the sense of having very good trainers. He was a great defender. I learned a lot from him."

Did you also train with Alexander Shakarov?

"I met him often and he helped me a lot. He always had good information on what to play. I visited him many times. Let me emphasize: he is a very gentle person, a very nice man."

How do you compare his effect on Garry, relative to Botvinnik's?

"It is impossible to compare, especially for me, because Shakarov was my friend and was very close to me. They had very important but not comparable roles in Garry's career. Botvinnik gave him the base for his attitude towards chess in general – like how often to play, how to work and behave like a professional – but chess-wise, I think he had little effect on Garry. Nikitin implemented Botvinnik's approach and he was the one who transferred his theory into practice. Shakarov was his library. He is such an opening expert. Of course they analysed together as well."

I saw they often published together their analysis of Shakarov's correspondence games.

"Yes, Garry helped him with his correspondence games."

Can you tell us more about the living conditions and chess environment of Baku in the seventies, when you were both brought up?

"There was quite an active chess scene in Baku. Bagirov already lived there, but he had yet to become a grandmaster."

But regardless of his title, he was a very strong player.

"Yes, indeed he was. He participated in several finals of the USSR championship. Actually I helped him in two events in 1978. One was the Zonal tournament and the other was the Soviet championship. At one point in the 1978 championship, he had something like five or six adjourned games and in all of them he was pawn down. He lost only one of these; in the rest he managed to salvage a draw. This was a great education for me on how to defend."

In the following example, Elmar thinks that Bagirov's influence can be seen.

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Alexander Nenashev – Elmar Magerramov

Tashkent 1983

1.c4 c6 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.d4 d5 4.e3 e6 5.♗d3 ♘bd7 6.0–0 ♗d6 7.♘bd2 0–0 8.e4 dxe4 9.♘xe4 ♘xe4 10.♗xe4 h6 11.♗c2 e5 12.♖e1 exd4 13.♕xd4 ♘f6 14.♖d1 ♗e7 15.♕e5 ♕e8 16.♗d2 ♘g4!

Elmar looks for active play in a worse position.

17.♕g3

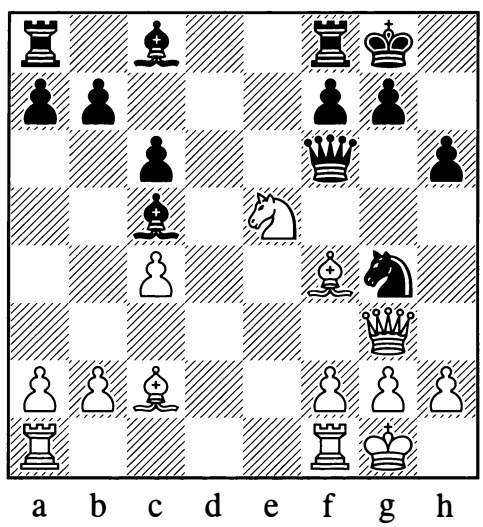
17.♕c3!? ♗f6 18.♕d3 g6 19.♖e1 ♕d8 20.♕b3 White is somewhat better.

17...♗c5! 18.♖f1 ♕d8!

Black prepares ...♗d6.

19.♗f4 ♕f6! 20.♘e5

20.h3 g5 21.♗xg5 hxg5 22.hxg4 ♕xb2 Black has counterplay.



20...♗d6!

Black keeps coming up with purposeful piece moves.

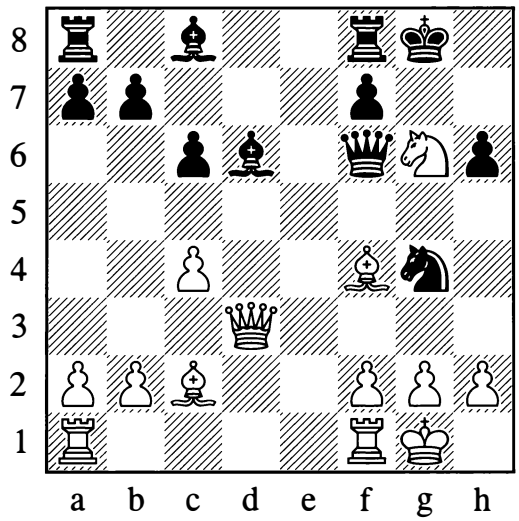
21.♕d3

21.♖fe1 ♘xe5 22.♗xe5 ♗xe5 23.♕xe5 ♕xe5 24.♖xe5 ♗e6 Black has fully equalized.

21...g6 22.♘xg6?

Nenashev still plays for a win.

Instead White should settle for the equal position that occurs after 22.♘xg4 ♕xf4 23.g3 ♕xg4 24.♕xd6.



22...♖d8!!

A great defensive move, ironically putting White on the back foot.

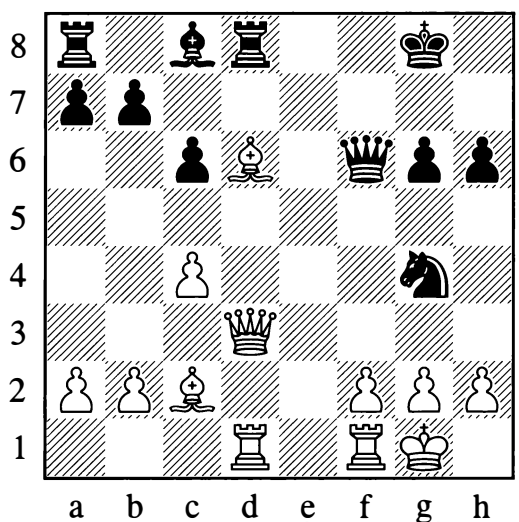
23.♖ad1?

Nenashev seems to be unable to adjust to the new situation, one in which he must defend. He loses without resistance.

Best play would have been 23.♘e7† ♔f8!! (after 23...♗xe7 24.♕h7† ♔f8 25.h3 White is not worse) 24.♘xc8 ♗xf4 25.♕a3† ♔g7 26.♘e7 ♗xh2† 27.♔h1 ♖d2 White is struggling, although his situation is not yet hopeless.

23...fxg6 24.♗xd6?

24.♕xg6† ♕xg6 25.♗xg6 ♔g7 26.♗c2 ♗e7 White's two pawns are not enough for the piece.



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24...♗f5

By now Black is winning. However, he still needs to play carefully to maintain control. Elmar is up to the challenge.

25.♕a3 ♗xc2 26.♗e7 ♕e5 27.f4 ♕e4! 28.♗xd8 ♗xd1 29.♗b6

The winner mentions the variation 29.♖xd1 ♘e3 30.♖d2 ♘xc4 31.♕b3 ♕e1#. One can see why 27...♕e4 was a strong move!

29...♗e2 30.♖e1 ♕xf4 31.g3 ♕d2 32.♕a5 ♖d8

0–1

Do you remember the particular moment you first met Garry?

"I think I do remember. Once when I went to the Palace, in a room I saw a very small boy analysing with Privorotsky. I did not know who he was. He was playing in a team championship for the republics. Garry was representing Azerbaijan. He was nine years old, but he was already a candidate master. His name was still Weinstein. Soon afterwards, our relationship became a friendship and we often analysed in the Palace and played blitz games."

What was Garry like as a child?

"He was a small boy. I mean physically he was not very strong. I remember he was often ill. He was worried about eating cold things like ice cream or icy drinks. His mother, Clara Shagenovna, took care of him and really looked after him. He was no ordinary boy, since he was so strong in chess. He always spent time with much older people. But he was not too proud – he behaved well."

Have you ever had an argument with him or did your relationship temporarily become bad?

"No, there were no problems in our relationship."

Did he have special words that he liked to use? Any examples?

(After some thinking) "When we analysed games with other people and we saw things slower than him, if he spotted something he liked to say 'pizhoni'. You know, it means 'patzers'."

I have found 13 games between you and Garry. Is this the correct number or did you play more games? Do you know your personal score against him?

"Please wait, I have to work it out! Our first match was drawn 2–2. I think altogether he is plus four – but funnily enough, in official games, it is plus two for me. I think we played 15 games and he is plus four. Hang on... we played two more, so altogether 17! Wait a minute, I need to check on the computer!"

Did you check your games with him since you played them? It looks like in your very first game, when you resigned he had just made a huge mistake and you could have played on.

"I have not looked at these yet. It is possible. I looked back at some of my games from the past, but not these yet."

(When we checked the game on the database, Elmar explained that one of the moves had been entered incorrectly, so Garry did not really throw away the win.)

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Do you have all your games against Garry in your computer?

(He starts looking at the computer) "I have all the games on the computer, I even have the date we played. (*The way he speaks about those games clearly shows they are precious to him.*) I think it is plus four for him. Two officially, I won two in the match."

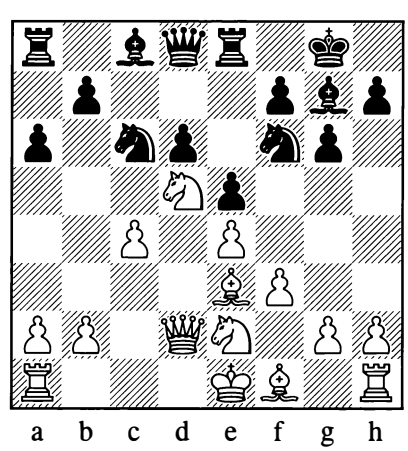
I asked him to show me the unknown games:

Elmar Magerramov – Garry Kasparov

Baku 1975

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.f3 ♘c6

5...0–0 6.♗e3 ♘c6 7.♕d2 a6 8.♘ge2 ♖e8 9.♘c1 e5 10.d5 ♘d4 11.♘1e2 c5 12.dxc6 ♘xc6! 13.♘d5!



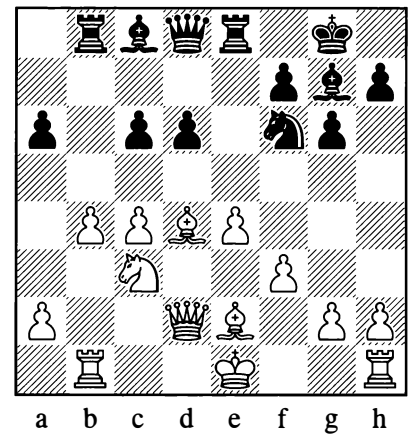
13...b5! 14.♗b6 ♕d7 15.♘c7 ♖b8 16.♘xe8 ♕xe8 17.♗e3?! bxc4 18.♘c3 ♗e6 19.♗e2 ♘d4 20.0–0 d5 21.exd5 ♘xd5 Black went on to win in Beliavsky – Kasparov, Moscow 1981.

6.♗e3 a6

At the age of twelve and a half, Garry already played quite sophisticated openings.

7.♘ge2

Lputian – Kasparov, Tbilisi 1976, was another remarkable game: 7.♕d2 ♖b8 8.♖b1 0–0 9.b4 e5 10.d5 ♘d4 11.♘ge2 c5 12.dxc6 bxc6 13.♘xd4 exd4 14.♗xd4 ♖e8 15.♗e2



15...c5! 16.bxc5 ♘xe4! 17.fxe4 ♕h4† 18.g3 ♖xb1† 19.♔f2 ♖b2 20.gxh4 ♖xd2 21.♗xg7 ♔xg7 Garry went on to win.

One can already see the signs of a future great player.

7...♖b8 8.♖b1

This time, Elmar is not interested in playing very sharp lines with long castling.

8...♗d7?!

Garry never gets active play in this game. Black does much better if he undermines the centre with 8...♘d7.

9.b4 b5 10.cxb5 axb5 11.d5 ♘e5 12.♘d4 ♘c4 13.♗xc4 bxc4 14.0–0 e6

Looking for dynamic compensation for the likely pawn loss. 14...e5 15.♘c6 ♗xc6 16.dxc6 is also tough for Black.

15.♕d2

Stronger would have been 15.♕e2! ♕e7 16.♖fe1 e5 17.♘c6 ♗xc6 18.dxc6 ♕e6 19.b5 and Black is in trouble.

15...0–0?!

Garry looks for play against the d5-pawn, but never really gets it.

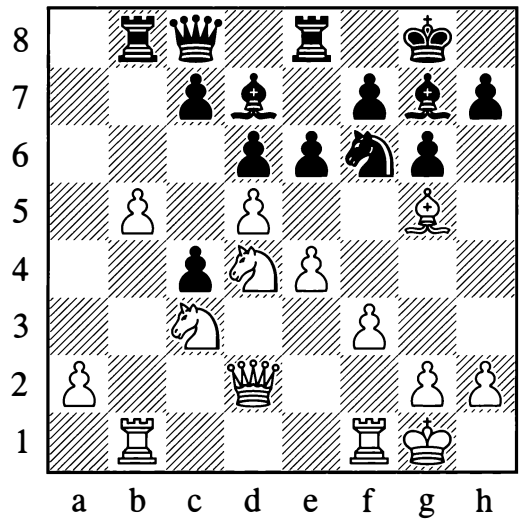
It was better to open the position with 15...exd5 16.♘xd5 (16.exd5 0–0 17.b5 ♖e8 18.♗g5 ♕e7 19.♖b4 h6 is unclear) 16...c6 17.♘xf6† ♗xf6. Black's position is quite playable.

16.♗g5 ♕c8?

Again, taking on d5 was the lesser evil.

17.b5 ♖e8

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18.♖b4 ♕b7 19.♘c6

The knight is very powerful here.

19...♖a8 20.a4 ♗xc6 21.dxc6

The pawn is choking Black.

21...♕b6† 22.♔h1?!

Stronger was 22.♗e3!. Elmar was probably concerned about 22...♗h6, but after 23.♗xb6 ♗xd2 24.♗xc7 ♗xc3 25.♖xc4 ♗d2 26.♗xd6 I think White wins.

22...♕c5?!

Black had more chances to free his position with 22...d5! 23.e5 ♗f8 (23...♘h5!?) 24.♗e3 ♗c5 25.♗xc5 ♕xc5 26.♖fb1 ♘h5. He may still be worse here, but it is a big improvement on the game.

23.♖fb1 d5

23...♘g4 24.fxg4 ♗xc3 25.♕xc3 ♕xg5 26.♖xc4 White is clearly better due to his more advanced pawns.

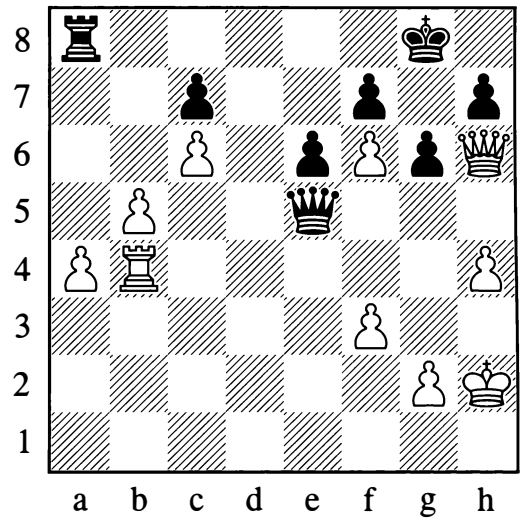
24.e5 d4?

After this, Black has no chance to survive. Relatively best was 24...♘h5 25.g4 ♗xe5 26.gxh5 ♗xc3 27.♕xc3 d4 28.♕xc4 (28.♕c1 c3) 28...♕xg5 29.hxg6 hxg6 30.♕xd4, although White's extra pawn should be enough to decide the game.

25.♗xf6 dxc3 26.♕xc3

White is completely winning.

26...♗xf6 27.exf6 ♖ed8 28.♕xc4 ♕f5 29.♕f4 ♕c2 30.h4 ♖d1† 31.♖xd1 ♕xd1† 32.♔h2 ♕e1 33.♕h6 ♕e5†



34.♖f4

1–0

Though the main fight was decided on the queenside, in the end Elmar won with a mating attack.

Do you know that with your number of wins against Garry, you are ahead of many great players? Only Karpov and Kramnik have done better than you and Ivanchuk is just equal with you. You did better than Anand, Gulko and Topalov; they each won three games. (I was referring to games played at a classical time limit)

"Really?" (visibly very pleasantly surprised) "I did not realize that. It is great for me. Garry did badly against Gulko."

Can you tell me how many of your games were tournament games and how many were training games?

"Altogether ten of our games were training. The rest were official games. Hang on, I may have one game with him when his name was Weinstein. I'll make a search. Here it is, he beat me then as well; so altogether, we played eighteen games. Let me correct myself: in total, we had eleven training games."

Let me show Elmar's second 'official' win over Kasparov.

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Garry Kasparov – Elmar Magerramov

Moscow 1976

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0–0 ♘xe4 6.d4 b5 7.♗b3 d5 8.dxe5 ♗e6 9.c3 ♗e7 10.♘bd2 0–0 11.♗c2 f5 12.♘b3 ♕d7 13.♘bd4 ♘xd4 14.♘xd4 c5 15.♘xe6 ♕xe6 16.f3 ♘g5 17.♗xg5

White aims for a slight edge in a position with opposite-coloured bishops. The plan was known, as Spassky had played like this against Chekhov in a game in Moscow 1972.

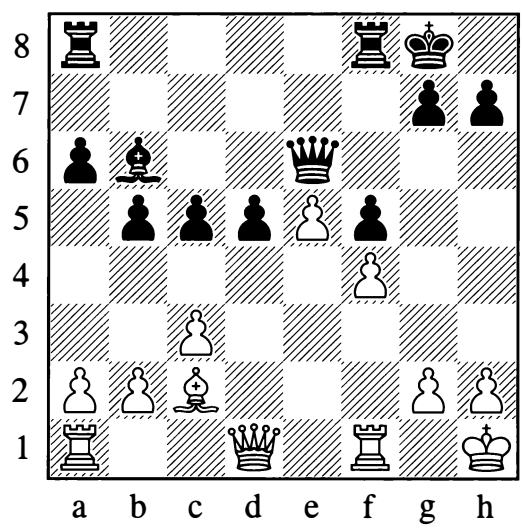
17...♗xg5 18.f4

White has a slightly more comfortable position, with a strong passed pawn on e5 and the more stable pawn structure. Black is quite solid though.

18...♗d8

In the aforementioned game, the bishop retreated to e7.

19.♔h1 ♗b6



20.a4 c4?

Better was 20...b4!? 21.cxb4 c4 with some compensation for the pawn.

21.axb5 a5

Elmar sacrifices a pawn in a less desirable way. He may only now have noticed that 21...axb5? was unplayable in view of 22.♖xa8 ♖xa8 23.♗xf5!.

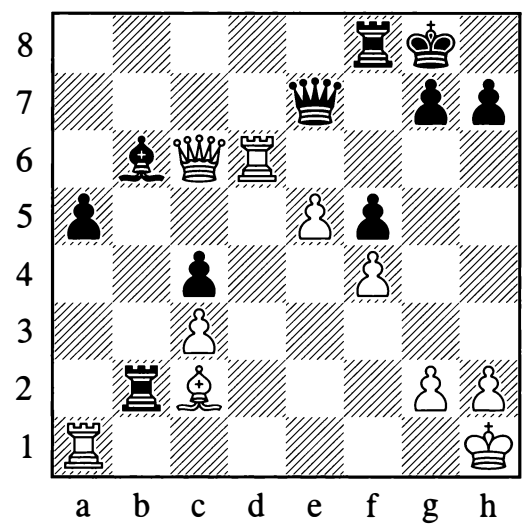
22.♕f3 ♖ac8 23.b3 ♖c5 24.bxc4 dxc4 25.♖fd1

Elmar comments: "I felt there was no need to waste time by defending the pawn; 25.♖ab1is also strong."

25...♖xb5 26.♖d6 ♕e7 27.♕c6

White is on the verge of winning.

27...♖b2

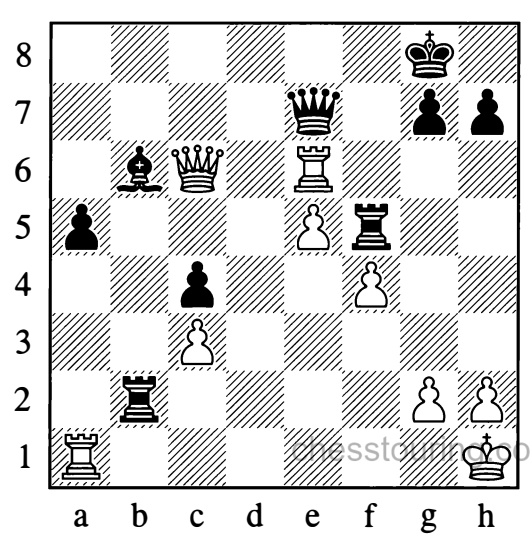


28.♗xf5?

This is a serious mistake. White should just divert the queen first with 28.♖d7!. That would win, e.g. 28...♕e8 29.♗xf5! ♖xf5 30.♖xg7†. Kasparov must have miscalculated – perhaps he overlooked Black's 29th move.

28...♖xf5 29.♖e6?

As so often happens, one mistake is followed by another. White could still have stayed in the game with 29.♖d7 ♕f8 30.♕e6† ♖f7 31.♖b7!.


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29...♕a3!!

This attractive back rank finesse gains time for the defence.

30.♖d1

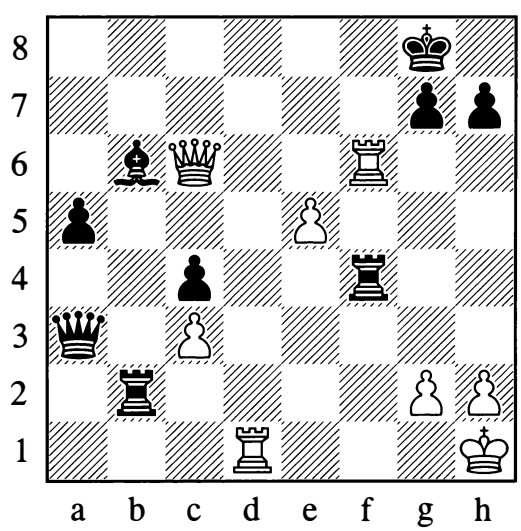
30.♖e8† was losing as well. 30...♖f8 31.♕xc4† ♔h8 32.♕a4 ♗c5 The bishop defends two pieces with one move. 33.♕xa3 ♗xa3 34.♖xf8† ♗xf8 35.g3 ♖b5 and Black wins.

30...♖xf4

Black can even afford to take this pawn.

31.♖f6!?

Spectators love moves like this, but it is not effective.



31...gxf6!

Magerramov quite rightly calls his opponent's bluff. White soon runs out of checks.

32.♕e6† ♔f8 33.♕c8† ♔g7 34.exf6† ♖xf6 35.♕g4† ♔h8

0–1

White is left with no compensation for the lost material. Elmar remarks:

"We always practised variations which were in fashion."

Can you talk about your training games? For example, where were the games played? How did you decide who would be White?

"Both of our training matches were played in his flat. In the first match, I was White in all the games, as he wanted to practise the Benoni."

How was the idea born to make a match between the two of you, after he already had such remarkable results for a 15-year-old player?

"He wanted to try variations, and we both wanted to check ideas. He suggested the match. We agreed on the conditions in no time."

Did you have time to prepare, and were you told which line to play?

"I had time to prepare. We agreed that we would play the Benoni, but I could choose any variation against it."

What was your strategy for this match?

"This match was for training; I certainly did not feel like it was a sporting event and I think his approach was the same."

Do you have any interesting stories related to these games?

"These matches were very tense and we both took it seriously. Maybe that is the reason I have no special stories."

Let me show Elmar's two wins from their 1979 training match.

Elmar Magerramov – Garry Kasparov

Baku 1979

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 e6 4.♘c3 exd5 5.cxd5 d6 6.♘f3

Because Elmar rarely allowed the Nimzo-Indian, he must know a ♘f3 system against the Benoni. According to my database, he has scored an impressive 6/7 against this defence, which he also employs as Black. Despite his wins in this match, he later showed his flexibility by switching to the line with ♗f4

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and h3. He won all his games with it against decent grandmasters.

6...g6 7.e4 ♗g7 8.♗e2 0–0 9.0–0 a6 10.a4 ♗g4!

In the same year Garry lost to Beliavsky with 10...♖e8 here.

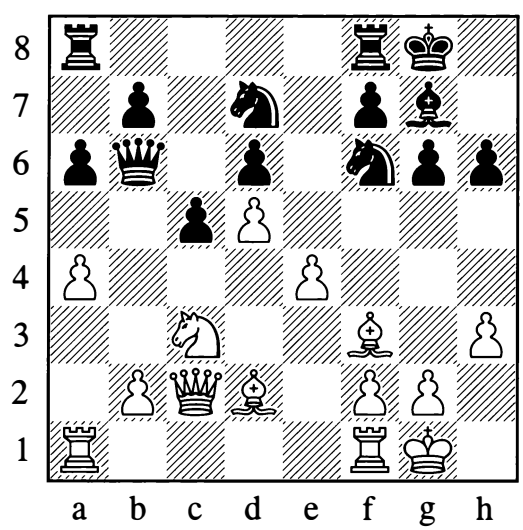
11.♗f4 ♘h5

Suba played 11...♕e7 against Kasparov in the 1982 Olympiad. Garry scored a very nice victory.

12.♗g5 ♕b6 13.♕c2

Zaid lost to Garry with this move in 1977 in Leningrad, so there is a good chance that Elmar would have prepared for this position.

13...♘d7 14.h3 ♗xf3 15.♗xf3 h6 16.♗d2 ♘hf6



17.♗e2!

This is directed against Black's play on the queenside. It is curious that Garry went for this position. To my eyes it looks unhealthy without the light-squared bishop.

17...♖fe8 18.b3! ♘e5 19.a5?!

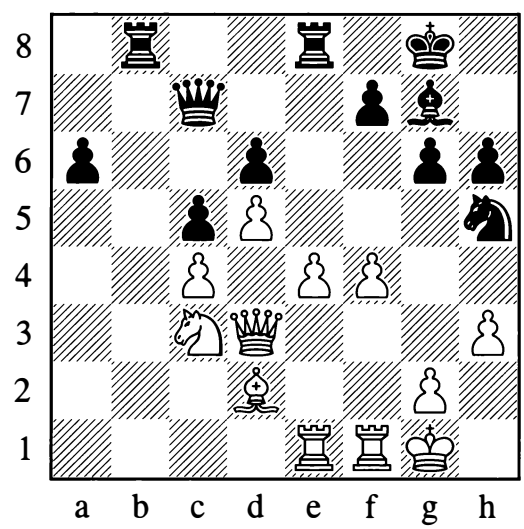
Elmar mentions that Garry did not like this pawn move because it enables Black to open the b-file and create some counterplay. It was worth considering a patient improving move such as 19.♔h2!?.

19...♕c7 20.f4 ♘ed7 21.♗c4 b5 22.axb6 ♘xb6 23.♕d3?!

Elmar forces Black to take on c4, but it costs time and the queen may well be placed slightly worse on d3. After the natural 23.♖xa6 ♖xa6 24.♗xa6 c4 25.♔h2 cxb3 26.♕xb3 ♘xe4 27.♘xe4 ♖xe4 28.♗a5 (28.♖c1!?) 28...♗d4 29.♖d1 White has a small advantage.

Also deserving of attention was 23.♔h2!?. Had Garry chosen the same plan as in the game, this move would have been quite useful.

23...♘xc4 24.bxc4 ♘h5 25.♖ae1 ♖ab8



26.♔h1

After 26.g4 ♗d4† 27.♔g2 ♘f6 28.e5 dxe5 29.fxe5 ♗xe5 30.♗xh6 ♖b2† Black is kicking.

26...♖b2 27.♖f3 ♕b8

27...♗d4!?

28.♘d1 ♖b1 29.♘f2

29.g4 ♘f6 30.e5 dxe5 31.fxe5 ♘d7 32.e6 fxe6 33.♗c3 ♘f8 34.♗xg7 ♔xg7 35.♖ef1 ♖b7 36.♘c3 White has compensation for the pawn.

29...♖xe1† 30.♗xe1 ♕b2 31.♗d2

Elmar plays carefully and tries to neutralize Black's activity, as he is well aware of his opponent's tactical prowess.

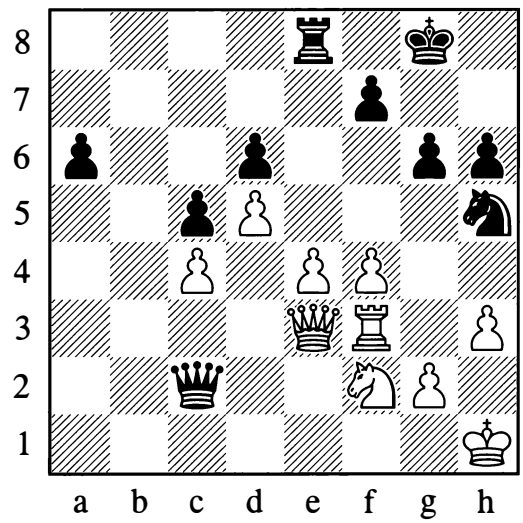
31...♗d4 32.♗e3 ♗xe3

32...♔g7!? or 32...a5!? look to be worth considering.

33.♕xe3 ♕c2

This is ambitious, yet also risky and provocative.

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34.f5!

Black's king is not well defended.

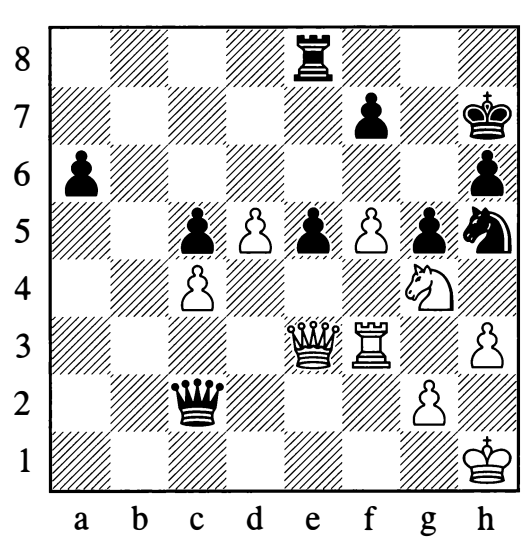
34...g5 35.♘g4 ♔h7!?

Garry plays for the win. Instead 35...♕xe4 would have led to a perpetual after 36.♘xh6† ♔f8 37.♕xg5 ♕e1† 38.♔h2 ♕e5†.

The best winning try was probably 35...♔f8!?. Such a subtle move would be typical of Garry (compare, for instance, his great game against Jobava, Rethymnom 2003). Play might continue: 36.♘xh6 (36.♕b3 ♕xb3 37.♖xb3 ♔g7; 36.e5 ♕xc4 37.♘xh6 ♘f4 38.e6 f6) 36...♘f4 37.♖xf4 gxf4 38.♕xf4 ♖xe4 It seems Black is a little better in all these lines.

36.e5 dxe5?

A mistake like this is a very rare occurrence in Kasparov's games. It was necessary to play 36...♕xc4. Against this White obtains a perpetual after 37.e6 ♕xd5 38.exf7 ♖xe3 39.f8=♕ ♖xf3 40.♕e7† ♔h8 41.♕f8†.

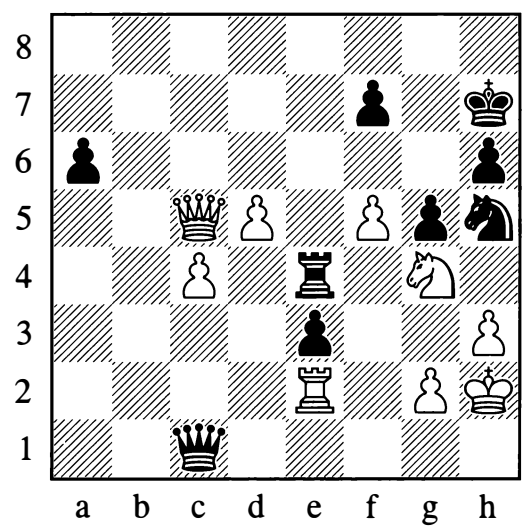


37.♕xc5!

Now Elmar's queen will wreak havoc on the kingside, as the h6-pawn is extremely vulnerable. It is unfortunate for Black that his king recently moved to h7.

37...e4 38.♖f2 ♕c1† 39.♔h2 e3 40.♖e2 ♖e4

Alternatively, 40...♕f1 41.♕c6 ♕f4† 42.♔g1 ♖b8 43.♕xh6† ♔g8 44.♖e1 is the end for Black.



41.♕f8

1–0

Here is the second win from the same match.

Elmar Magerramov – Garry Kasparov

Baku 1979

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 e6 4.♘c3 exd5 5.cxd5 d6 6.♘f3 g6 7.♘d2

Elmar deviates from the first game of this match.

7...♘bd7 8.e4 ♗g7 9.♗e2 0–0 10.0–0 ♖e8 11.a4 g5!?

In typically uncompromising style, Kasparov secures the e5-square for his knight, hoping to generate dynamic piece play.

12.h3

Petrosian liked to develop the rook to a3

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here. Also Pinter beat Suba impressively with 12.♖e1, causing the Romanian Grandmaster to give up what had been his favourite line.

12...h6 13.f4 gxf4 14.♖xf4 ♘e5 15.♖f1 ♘g6

A complicated middlegame has been reached.

16.♖a3 b6 17.♗b5 ♖e7 18.♕f3 a6 19.♗e2 ♖b8 20.♔h1 ♘h7 21.♖b3 b5 22.axb5 axb5 23.♖xb5 ♘g5 24.♕g3 ♖xb5 25.♘xb5 ♗a6 26.♕g4 ♗c8 27.♕g3 ♗a6 28.♕f2

Elmar avoids the repetition.

28...♕d7 29.♘c3 ♗d4

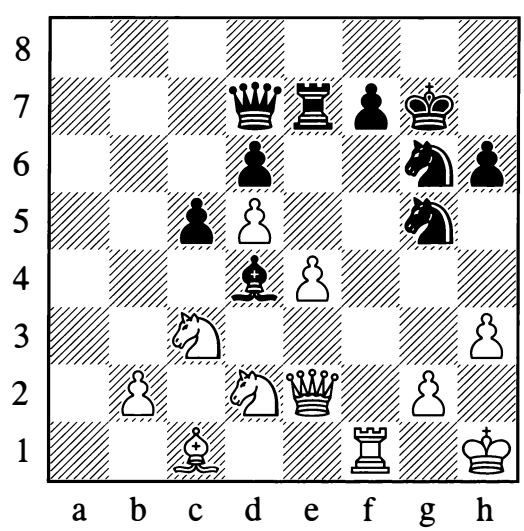
Again Garry leaves the h6-pawn unguarded.

30.♕e1 ♗xe2?!

I would prefer 30...♕b7.

31.♕xe2 ♔g7?

31...♗g7 was safer.



32.♕h5!

Elmar takes his chances against Garry's king.

32...♖e5 33.♘f3!

Removing the important knight from the defence.

33...♘xe4

After 33...♘xf3 34.♕xh6† ♔g8 35.♖xf3 Black is a pawn down for nothing.

34.♕xh6† ♔g8 35.♘xe4 ♖xe4 36.♘xd4 ♖h4 37.♘f5?

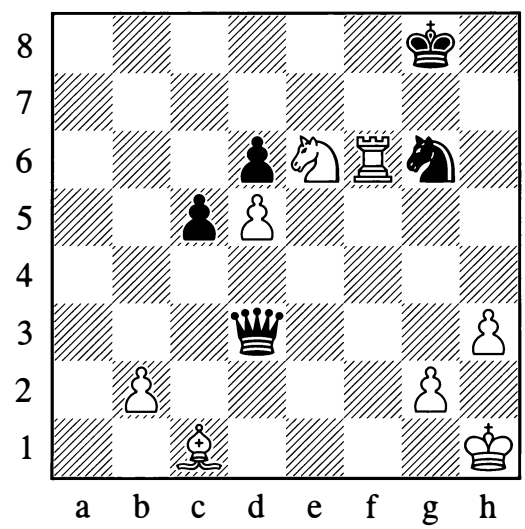
Perhaps Elmar tried to be a bit too clever.

After the straightforward 37.♕g5 ♖xd4 38.♖e1 White should not have too many problems converting his advantage. He is a pawn up and the black king is weak.

37...♖xh6 38.♘xh6† ♔h8 39.♘xf7†

After 39.♖xf7 ♕e8 40.♗d2 ♕e2 41.♗c3† ♘e5 Black is still alive.

39...♔g7 40.♘g5 ♕b5 41.♘e6† ♔g8 42.♖f6 ♕d3



The endgame is rather unclear; all three results are still possible.

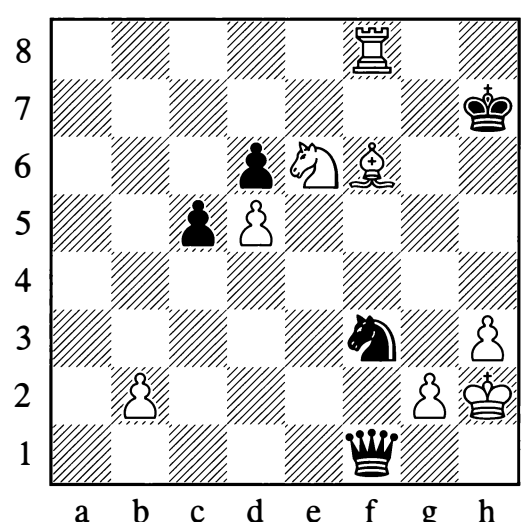
43.♗g5 ♘e5

43...♕e4 looks safer.

44.♖f8† ♔h7 45.♗f6 ♕f1†

45...♕d2!?

46.♔h2 ♘f3†



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47.♔g3!?

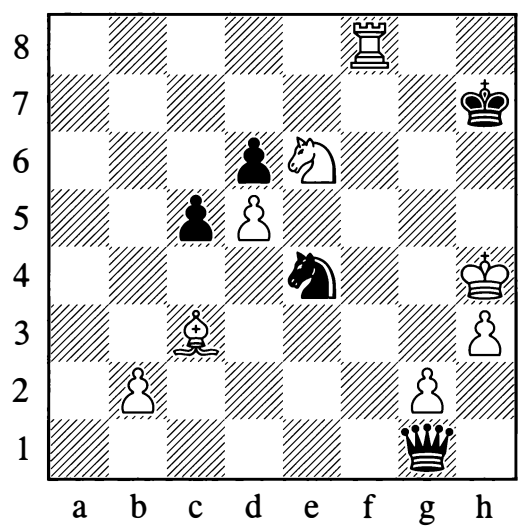
Elmar does not want a perpetual.

47...♘d2 48.♗c3 ♘e4†

48...♕e1†!? 49.♔g4 ♕d1† 50.♔f5 ♕c2† 51.♔f6 ♘e4† 52.♔e7 ♕b3 Black probably holds.

49.♔h4 ♕g1?

Elmar comments: "This puts the queen out of play just for a second. After 49...♕c1!?, or 49...♕d1 50.♘g5† ♘xg5 51.♔xg5 ♕xd5†, Black is safe."



50.♘g5†! ♘xg5 51.♔h5!!

This is a brilliant tactical shot. To be fair to Kasparov, it was an easy move to overlook.

51...♘f7 52.♖xf7† ♔g8 53.♖f5

1–0

There was going to be an adjournment, as Elmar had to leave. Garry analysed for a while and decided to resign. The position should be winning for White, although most players would surely have continued for a while longer.

How often did you play blitz with him?

"We did not play much blitz. We analysed much more. We both liked to analyse a lot. We both liked to find new moves. I did not understand this at the time, but as an adult I realized that the difference between us and other players was that we did not only look for new moves but new concepts. Garry writes about this when he analyses his Korchnoi Benoni game (*Lucerne 1982*). We had already analysed Benoni positions in 1973 or 1974 where the knight is under attack and Black doesn't remove it for a while. We already understood then that taking the knight on e5 leads to an immense attack for Black. It was planted in his brain. I think Garry also mentioned it against Nikolic in a Benko – instead of the bishop taking on a6, to play ...♗f5 and ...♘e4."

Whose idea was it, his or yours?

"Actually it was my idea. Regardless of how good an idea it is; he used it roughly 15 years later."

When did you realize his enormous talent?

"There must have been a moment, but looking back it seems I always thought he would become a very, very special player. In those days, unlike now, no young player played so amazingly well."

Fischer, Spassky and Karpov did, didn't they?

"Okay, yes, but it was still such a rarity then."

I think he was destined to become the best in the world. Do you agree that he had to become World Champion at some point because of his level?

"It is hard to say. Had he lost to Karpov 6-0 it might have broken him or diverted him from chess. But on the other hand it is true, his level was so exceptionally high."

Interestingly, you outplayed and beat him every time by catching his king, have you noticed that?

"Did I? Actually once he beat himself, not me."

In the Ruy Lopez you tricked him with a lovely back rank combination (we have already looked

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at that game). He contributed, yet you did well and checkmated him in the end. (He did not say a word, but his body language showed he agreed.)

"No, I have not noticed that my attacks brought me the wins."

Out of the seven decisive games I found between the two of you, apart from the one where you blundered a queen, all were decided with a successful direct raid on the king.

Did you intentionally go for an attack against his king, was it a part of your game plan spotting that it was his relative weakness?

"No it just happened like that, but it is interesting. We are both attacking players. Maybe the openings we decided to play helped this to happen. I always considered Garry to be tactically better than me, but I tried my best to fight. Of course he is exceptional in tactics, but I am also not weak in that department."

Sorry for being hypothetical, but if you were to play a match with him, what plan would you follow?

"I think Garry is such an exceptional player. I would require a lot of time to work out a plan. Petrosian's case comes to my mind. He needed a long time to work out a match plan against Botvinnik."

Did he solve many combinations to develop his calculation skill or is it more inborn?

"I think it mainly comes from his amazing talent, but of course he developed it as well. Let me share an example. During a blitz game I was going to make a move, but before I made it, he told me not to do it – he saw a long variation up to the end in advance."

How did you finish in the tournaments you played together with him?

"At the Halilbeili Memorial in 1976, when I became a master, I finished ahead of him. In Leningrad 1977, I am almost certain he was ahead of me. I will check it for you. In Baku 1980, he won the grandmaster tournament and I made an IM norm."

Did Baku organize such an event to help him and provide him with the chance to become a grandmaster?

"It was one of the reasons for sure. I think Geidar Aliyev helped him while he lived in Baku. It seems to me he also supported him when the Korchnoi match was cancelled. While other powerful people wanted to give up on it, he pressed for the match to take place. If I remember well, Garry wrote about it."

Were you surprised by his astonishing results in his youth? Winning the Soviet Junior championship with 8½/9, winning the huge qualification tournament and his result in Banja Luka where he won the tournament two points ahead of Smejkal and scored two and a half points more than Petrosian and Andersson...

"It was no surprise as his talent was clear to me. Maybe the margin was more than I expected, but his wins I anticipated. It was already clear in his childhood that he was special. When he was roughly 18, he became very strong physically, from doing a lot of sport. He fought very hard over the board, yet as I remember he always behaved excellently, although of course nobody likes to lose.

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For example, I do not think he wanted to cheat in the Polgar incident. He is not an easy person to approach, but he is a correct person."

Your first international tournament was the Baku 1980 grandmaster tournament where he won so impressively. Did you prepare together for the event?

"No, we prepared separately."

Was the level of the participants different than what you expected?

"I had no expectations. I did not know them. I met them there for the first time in my life. The tournament's aim was to help Garry make a GM norm or title. It was a tough time for me. I was about to finish university, had just got married, and was playing in this huge event. In the beginning I had problems, but I got used to it and in the end I achieved my goal – an IM norm."

What is Garry's best quality as a chess player?

"That is a very difficult question to answer. (*He thinks for a minute.*) Understanding. But it is very hard to explain. For example, the first strong player in Baku was not that famous but understood chess very well: Vladimir Makogonov."

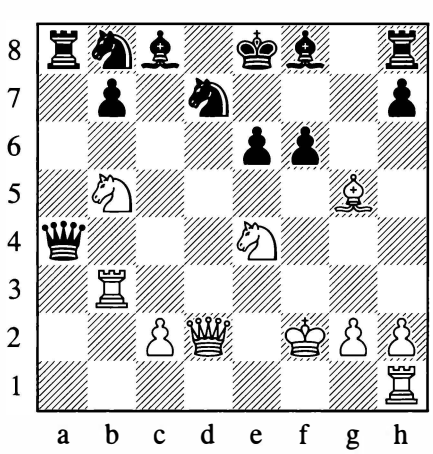
I know his name well; in the Orthodox Queen's Gambit there is the Tartakower-Bondarevsky-Makogonov system.

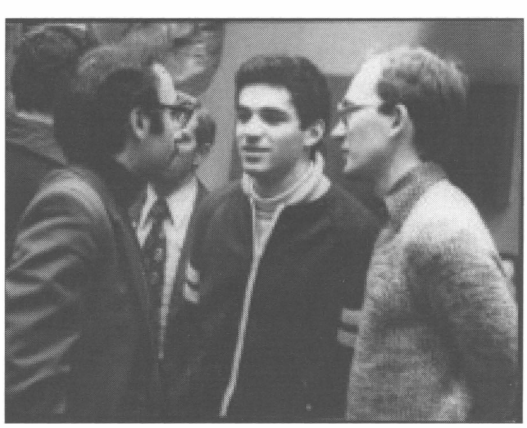
"Botvinnik mentioned his understanding. I think he made the base for strong chess in Baku. Another example is Tal's special understanding, which for instance shines through in his Tolush game analysis. In a very complicated position, he writes ♖e1 and White is of out danger. Tal gave no variation but his remark shows how well he understood the position. I think I have got it – Garry feels the hidden dynamic elements that other people don't sense. Actually, he talks about it in his DVD with Plaskett, where he explains this kind of dynamism."

Here is the position Elmar refers to:

Mikhail Tal – Alexander Tolush

Leningrad 1956





Magerramov, Kasparov and Mikhalchisin

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18.♖e1!

Tal went on to win this game on move 31.

You mentioned you had two training matches with Garry. One cannot really work out from the database when the second match took place.

"I must check. I think in 1982."

By then he was already incredibly strong, probably the second best player in the world.

(He checks it.) "Yes, it was in 1982 for sure. He beat me very convincingly, 5½–½." (When we check, it turns out that he made two draws out of six.)

When did you decide to become a professional player?

"In the same year that I decided, I finished university where I studied mathematics. I could have gone on to specialize in mathematics, but I decided on chess. I do not know whether I would choose the same now. Of course, it was in the Soviet Union – there it was the right decision."

In the 1986 Baku grandmaster tournament you finished second (Mikhail Gurevich won), and you just missed the GM norm. Was it disappointing to miss the norm so narrowly?

"It was not disappointing. I knew I was not in top gear because I had not recovered from working as a trainer. I had worked three years in Tunis. My result was still very fine."

We were used to the fact that if a local player from a Russian republic had a chance for a grandmaster norm, he beat all or almost all the local people (even very strong players). What is striking in your case is that you made a minus score against Azeri players. Did you not yet have the level, or was it just unfortunate?

(He laughs a bit, understanding the hint) "I lost to Sideif Zade and drew against Guseinov as I remember." (He checks the crosstable and says happily...) "I took the second place, it was really good."

Did you still have any relationship with Garry in the eighties? Did you talk on the phone or meet?

"When I returned we still met, of course not too often as he was a busy world champion, who was at the time preparing to defend his title against Karpov. He invited me to help him in the Leningrad part of his 1986 match and I was one of his seconds in that match."

From 1990, you started to play in the West – was it a big change in your life?

"It was very nice to have the chance to see the world, though in 1985 I had already been to Italy. It was also nice to play many tournaments. It was great for us – especially for me, as I did not live in Moscow and therefore had fewer chances."

Who is your favourite player?

"I do not have one particular player; I like the way Tal and Kasparov played, but I also like many others. By the way, above all I like logic in chess."

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Which is your best game?

"I cannot choose one single game out. What is best? I consider most important what other people can learn from it."

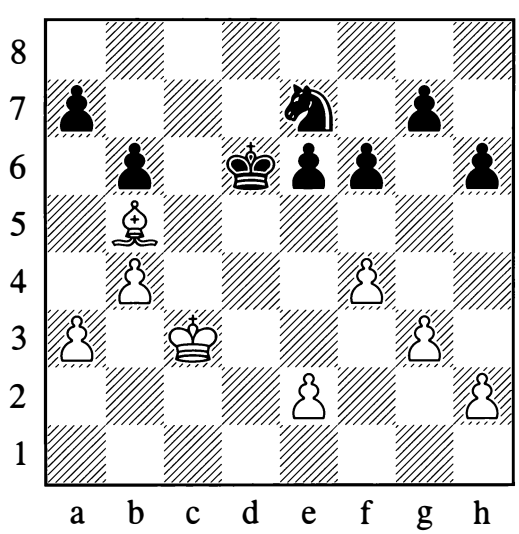
What do you think about learning from Kasparov?

"Yes, you are right; it is very hard to learn from him – he understands dynamism so well, it is hard to follow." (With a smile on his face he says...) "I play simpler chess."

Let me show two examples. Speaking as a trainer, I think that one can learn quite a lot from them.

Elmar Magerramov – Sergey Makarichev

Pavlodar 1987



34.e4!

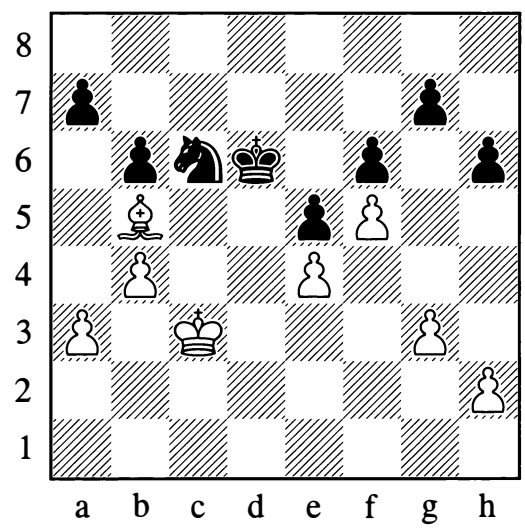
White prevents the transfer of the knight to c7. From there it would cover all the important invasion squares.

34...e5

With 34...g6!? Black could prepare the move he played in the game. It is interesting as it puts the pawn on the same colour square as the bishop. 35.♗e8 (35.g4 g5!; 35.♔d4 e5† 36.fxe5† fxe5† 37.♔d3 ♘c6 Black is safe here.) 35...e5 36.♔c4 exf4 37.gxf4 g5 Black's counterplay is enough to draw.

35.f5 ♘c6?

Black wants to improve the knight by transferring it to d4, but he has misevaluated the pawn ending. Better was 35...♔c7. White has only the c4-b5 route to invade, and Black has decent chances to cope with that.



36.♗xc6!

The zebra tries to cross the river but the lurking crocodile snaps him up!

36...♔xc6 37.g4?

This is a wonderful example of how complicated pawn endings can be. I present Elmar's wonderful and, as far as I can see, flawless analysis. (I have added a few extra peripheral lines where I consider them relevant.)

To begin, let's examine another substandard continuation.

37.♔c4?

White threatens to win with b5†, but allows Black to close the queenside as he has the spare pawn on a7, which gives a vital tempo against zugzwang.

37...b5†!

This is the only move.

38.♔d3

Now Black must make a very important choice.

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a) 38...h5?

This move fails to prevent the white king from penetrating.

39.♔e3 ♔d6 40.g4!?

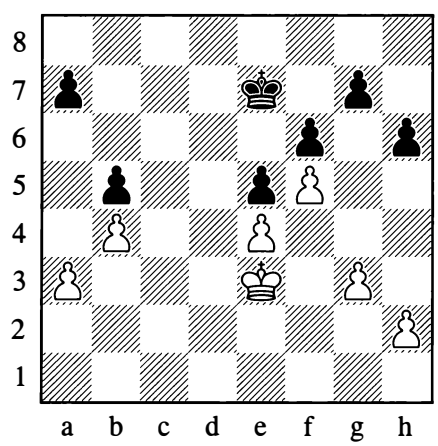
The king is close enough to g4 for White to open the route like this.

Another route was 40.♔f3 ♔e7 41.♔g2 ♔f7 42.♔h3 g5 43.fxg6† ♔xg6 44.g4! and wins – but not 44.♔h4? f5! when Black has no problems.

40...hxg4 41.♔f2 ♔e7 42.♔g3 ♔f7 43.♔xg4 ♔g8 44.♔h5

White invades.

b) 38...♔d6! 39.♔e3 ♔e7

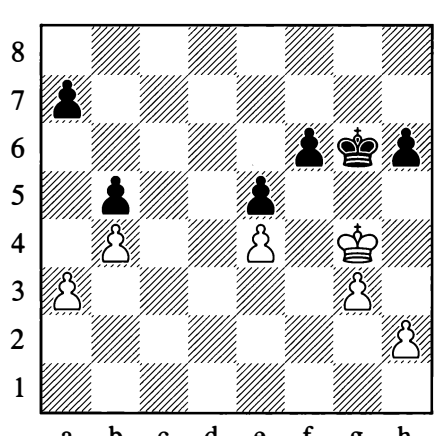


Black should improve his king before making any committal pawn moves. Now White has two main ideas.

b1) 40.♔f3 ♔f7

40...h5? 41.g4 ♔f7 42.♔g3! and White wins.

41.♔g4 g5 42.fxg6† ♔xg6



As Elmar pointed out, this is a mutual zugzwang. After 43.h3 Black can utilize his spare queenside tempo with 43...a6! when White gets nowhere. Now, not 44.h4?? h5† 45.♔f3 f5 when Black even wins, but instead 44.♔f3 is a simple draw.

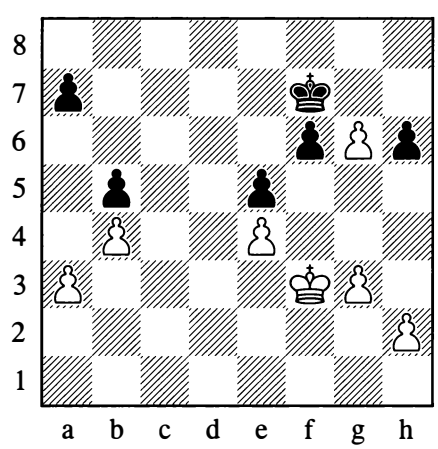
b2) 40.♔f2!

This is more dangerous. White aims for the well-known technique of triangulation. This forces Black to defend with great care.

40...♔f7 41.♔f3 g5!

41...h5? is not good enough: 42.♔g2! (after 42.g4 h4! 43.♔g2 g5 44.fxg6† ♔xg6 Black draws) 42...g5 43.fxg6† ♔xg6 44.♔f3 f5 (44...♔g5 45.h4† ♔h6 46.g4 ♔g6 47.gxh5† ♔xh5 48.♔g3 wins) 45.h3 ♔f6 (45...fxe4† 46.♔xe4 ♔f6 47.g4 hxg4 48.hxg4 wins) 46.exf5 ♔xf5 47.♔e3 ♔f6 48.g4 hxg4 49.hxg4 White wins.

42.fxg6†



42...♔g7!!

Elmar shows that Black can also triangulate. Instead after 42...♔xg6 43.♔g4 it seems doubtful that he can defend, e.g. 43...h5† 44.♔f3 Now king moves lose to 45.h4(†) followed by g4, when the outside passed pawn will decide the game. And after 44...a6 White has the spare tempo move 45.h3!.

43.♔g4 ♔xg6 44.h3

44.h4?? h5† 45.♔f3 f5 wins for Black.

44...a6

44...h5† 45.♔f3 a6! is also good enough.

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The key for Black is that when the white king comes to f3, his own king must move to (or in this case remain on) the g6-square, so that the otherwise deadly h3-h4 (threatening g3-g4 to create an outside passed pawn) can be refuted by ...f6-f5.

45.♔f3 h5 46.♔e3 ♔g5 47.♔f2 ♔h6!

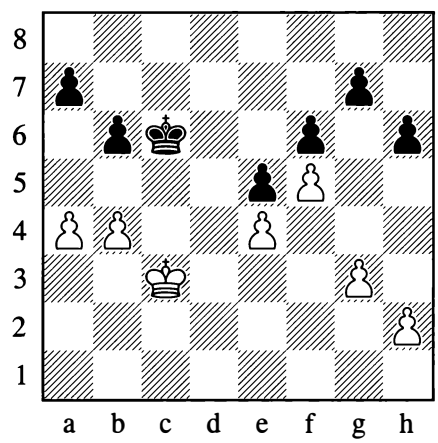
But not 47...♔g6? 48.♔f3 and wins as in the note to move 42 above.

48.♔f3 ♔g6

White can make no progress.

Returning to the position reached in the game, it turns out that White can in fact force victory with:

37.a4!!



This very subtle move is the only route to victory. White also threatens to invade. The difference it makes is that Black has to close the queenside, thus losing the spare move of ...a7-a6.

37...b5

This is the most challenging move.

37...a6 38.♔c4 b5† 39.axb5† axb5† 40.♔d3 Compared with the previous variation, the missing a-pawns take away Black's spare tempo. Thus he succumbs to zugzwang after 40...♔d6 41.♔e3 ♔e7 42.♔f3 ♔f7 43.♔g4 g5 44.fxg6† ♔xg6 45.h3 h5† 46.♔f3!. Black has to leave the g6-square. If he had a spare move on the queenside then he would draw, as we saw previously. 46...♔h6 47.h4 ♔g6 48.g4 and White wins.

38.a5! ♔d6 39.♔d3 ♔e7 40.♔e3 ♔f7 41.♔f3

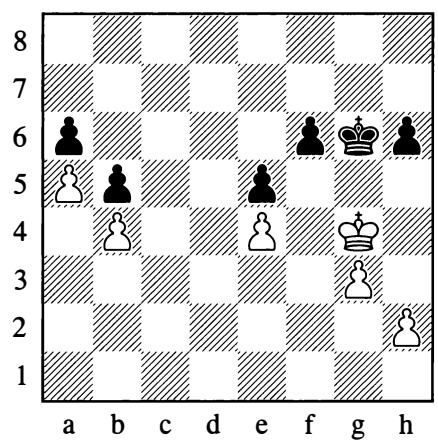
Now there are two moves for Black.

a) 41...g5 42.fxg6† ♔xg6 43.♔g4

Black will lose in a similar fashion to that seen in the note to move 37.

43...a6

43...h5† 44.♔f3! (but not 44.♔h4? f5) 44...a6 (44...♔g5 45.h4† ♔g6 46.g4 wins) 45.h3! puts Black in zugzwang.



44.h3!

This is another zugzwang.

44...f5†

This is Black's only chance, otherwise he loses in what should by now be a familiar way.

45.exf5† ♔f6 46.♔f3!

This is clearer than 46.h4 h5† 47.♔xh5 ♔xf5 48.g4† ♔f4 49.g5 e4 50.g6 e3 51.g7 e2 52.g8=♕ e1=♕ 53.♕g4† ♔e5 54.♔g6. White is probably winning here, but there is still some work to do.

46...♔xf5 47.g4† ♔g5 48.♔g3 ♔f6 49.h4

White will soon decide the game by creating an outside passed pawn.

b) 41...h5!?

This is Black's best chance to avoid the zugzwang situation we have already encountered. But it is still not enough to save the game against accurate play from White.

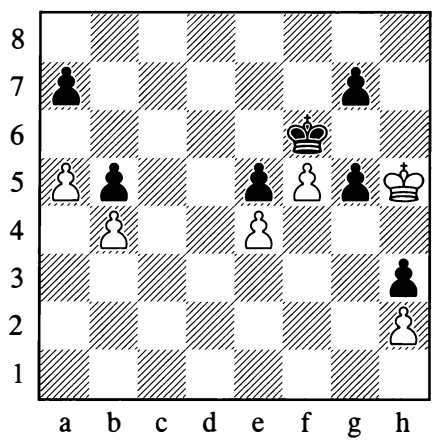
42.g4! h4

42...♔g8 43.♔g3! ♔h7 44.♔h4 ♔h6 45.a6! wins. This time it is a one-sided zugzwang.

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43.g5! fxg5 44.♔g4 ♔f6 45.♔h5! h3

Or 45...a6 46.h3. Of course, if the white pawn was already on h3 then White would be in zugzwang and the result would be reversed.



46.a6!

Black is in a lethal zugzwang.

37...b5?

Sealing up the queenside, but Black has overlooked a clever resource. There were two routes to a draw, both relying on an amazing sacrificial motif.

a) 37...h5!!

This is a breathtaking move. With this perfectly timed pawn sacrifice, Black can keep both wings closed.

38.♔c4!?

This counter-sacrifice is the only way to try and stop Black from closing everything at once.

38.gxh5 b5 draws easily, as does 38.h3 hxg4 39.hxg4 b5. Black's king will go to f7, followed by ...g5.

Now there are two possibilities:

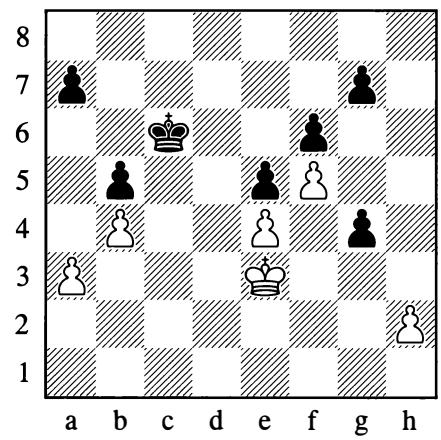
a) 38...b5†?

Closing the queenside is a serious error. It may look as though Black can block the invasion on the opposite flank, but in fact White penetrates after some remarkable play.

39.♔d3 hxg4!

39...h4 40.♔e3 ♔d6 41.♔f3 ♔e7 42.♔g2 ♔f7 43.♔h3 and White wins.

40.♔e3



40...g3!

The best chance, although it still does not achieve the draw. The function of this move is well hidden. It forces White's h-pawn to the third rank, preventing him from having a spare move later. Compare the line 40...♔d6 41.♔f2 ♔e7 42.♔g3 ♔f7 43.♔xg4 ♔g8 44.♔h5 ♔h7 45.h3! and White achieves a zugzwang.

41.hxg3!

41.h3? gives up the possibility of gaining a tempo with the h-pawn. 41...♔d6 42.♔f3 ♔e7 43.♔xg3 ♔f7 44.♔g4 ♔g8 45.♔h5 (45.♔h4 ♔h8! – but not 45...♔h7?? 46.♔h5) 45...♔h7 46.h4 a6! White cannot penetrate.

41...♔d6 42.♔f3 ♔e7 43.♔g4 ♔f8

43...♔f7 44.♔h5 a6 45.g4 is winning.

44.♔h5 ♔g8 45.♔g6 ♔f8 46.g4 ♔g8 47.g5 fxg5 48.♔xg5 ♔f7 49.♔g4! ♔e7

Or 49...♔f6 50.♔h5.

50.♔h4!

Finally a triangulation seals the victory.

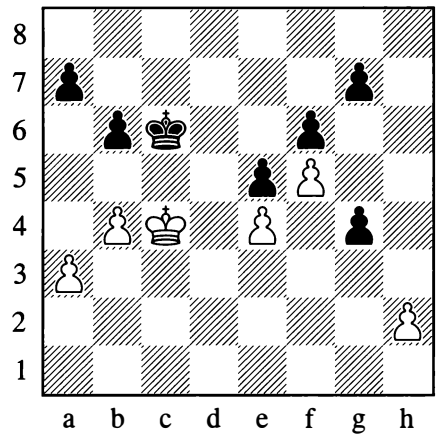
50...♔f6 51.♔h5

White wins.

b) 38...hxg4!

With the queenside open, Black has to take the pawn. This forces White to spend time worrying about that side of the board, instead of just rushing over to recapture the g-pawn.

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39.♔c3!

It is even possible for White to go wrong and lose, e.g. 39.b5†?? ♔d6 40.a4 ♔e7! (not 40...♔d7 when White has 41.♔d3) Black can create a passed pawn: 41.♔d3 (41.♔d5 ♔f7 wins) 41...g6! 42.fxg6 ♔f8 and Black wins.

39...♔d6 40.♔d3 ♔e7 41.♔e3 ♔f7

41...a5 42.♔f2 axb4 43.axb4 ♔d6 44.♔g3 White is not slower in the race.

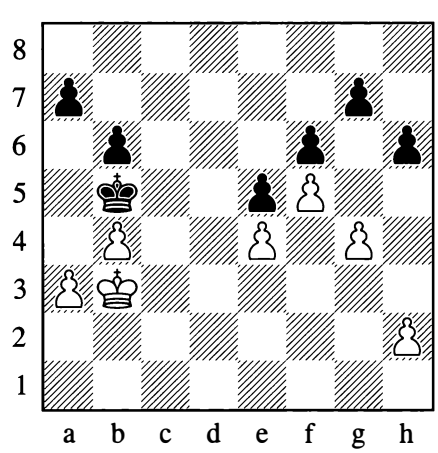
42.♔f2 g6 43.♔g3

The ending is a draw.

There was also a second drawing line, although it relies upon the same clever sacrifice.

b) 37...♔b5!? 38.♔b3

38.h3? ♔a4 39.♔b2 b5 40.♔a2 a5 and Black holds easily.



38...h5!!

Elmar's stunning idea works here as well. The alternatives are not good enough:

38...a5? 39.a4† ♔c6 40.b5† White invades effortlessly, as the reader can quickly ascertain for himself.

38...♔c6? 39.♔c4 a6 40.a4 transposes to the following variation with 38...a6.

38...a6? 39.a4† ♔c6 40.♔c4 b5† Black blocks the penetration on the queenside, but his chances to defend on the other side are worse than in the game, as he no longer has the spare move ...a7-a6. (40...h5 41.b5† axb5† 42.axb5† ♔d6 43.gxh5 wins for White) 41.axb5† axb5† 42.♔d3 White wins, using the familiar tactics of kingside penetration combined with zugzwang.

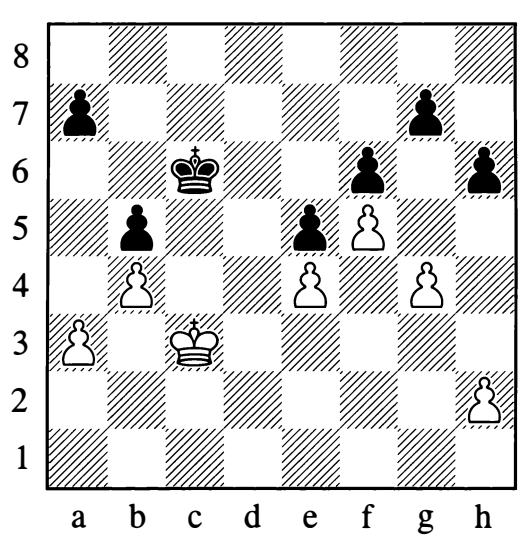
39.a4† ♔c6 40.gxh5

And not 40.♔c4 hxg4.

40...a6!

This is the right move, leading to a perfect fortress. Note that 40...b5? is inferior, e.g. 41.axb5†! ♔xb5 42.♔c3 a6 (42...♔c6 43.♔c4 ♔d6 44.b5 or 43...♔b6 44.♔d5) 43.♔b3 ♔c6 44.♔a4 ♔b6 45.h3 White invades.

Let's now return to the game.

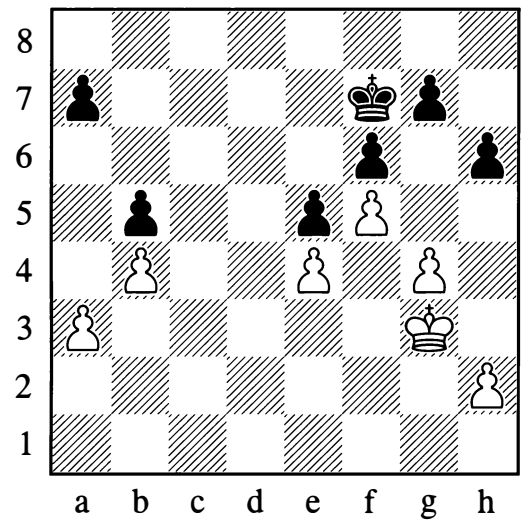


38.♔d3 ♔d6 39.♔e3 ♔e7 40.♔f3 ♔f8

After 40...♔f7 41.♔g3 g5 42.fxg6† ♔xg6 43.♔h4 ♔g7 44.♔h5 ♔h7 45.h4 ♔g7 46.g5 White invades.

41.♔g3 ♔f7

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42.♔h3!!

Magerramov intentionally loses a tempo in order to reach the h5-square at the right time. Makarichev must have missed this triangulation and was presumably counting on 42.♔h4? g5†!. Now Black can block the invasion. 43.fxg6† ♔xg6 44.h3 a6 45.♔g3 ♔g5 Black holds.

42...♔g8

42...g5 43.fxg6† ♔xg6 44.♔h4 a6 45.h3 reaches a mutual zugzwang. Thanks to White's subtle play, it is Black's turn to move.

43.♔h4 ♔f8 44.♔h5 ♔f7 45.h3!?

It is a practical decision to keep an extra tempo for the sake of security.

45...♔f8!

Black gives up guarding g6 early, but keeps the possibility of moving the a-pawn, thus keeping a defence against zugzwang.

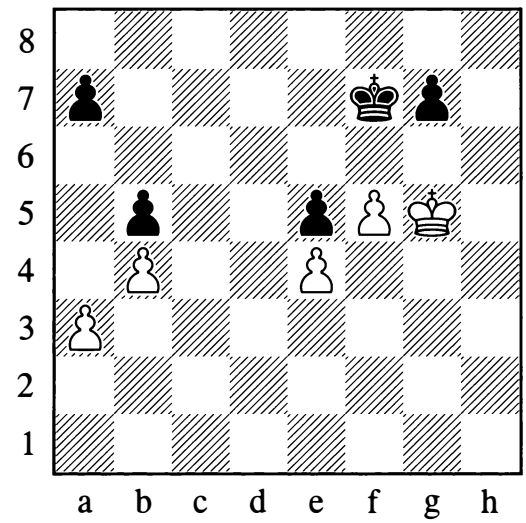
46.♔g6

There is nothing to be gained by delaying this, e.g. 46.h4 ♔g8 (46...♔f7?! 47.g5 wins) 47.g5? (White can still correct the mistake with 47.♔g6!) 47...hxg5 48.hxg5 ♔h7! drawing.

46...♔g8 47.h4 ♔f8 48.g5

White wins this position regardless of the position of the opponent's a-pawn. However, the spare tempo does bring a few nuances to the ending.

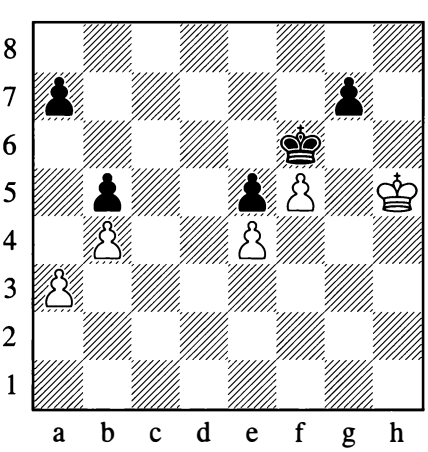
48...hxg5 49.hxg5 fxg5 50.♔xg5 ♔f7



51.♔g4!

Elmar wants to go forwards (and will), yet he starts the invasion by going backwards. It is a nice idea – these are the things we love about chess. White spots the mutual zugzwang position and starts a triangulation in order to avoid having the move in the critical position. Makarichev is a decent GM, yet maybe he missed the winning idea.

Inferior was 51.♔h5?? ♔f6:



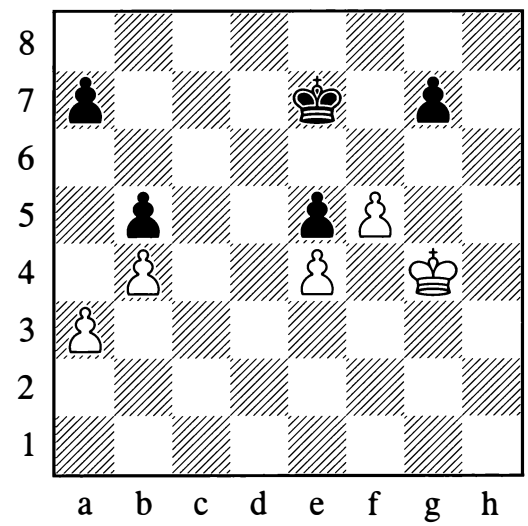
This is another mutual zugzwang. 52.♔h4 (52.♔g4 g6 53.fxg6 ♔xg6 54.♔h4 ♔h6 and Black draws easily) 52...g6 53.fxg6 ♔xg6 54.♔g4 a6! Thanks to the spare move, Black keeps the opposition and draws.

It should be mentioned that 51.♔h4! was an equally valid method of achieving the triangulation.

51...♔e7

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Alternatively, after 51...♔f6 52.♔h5! a6 53.♔h4! g6 54.fxg6 ♔xg6 55.♔g4 the king will penetrate.



52.♔h4! ♔f6

52...♔f7 53.♔g5 wins.

53.♔h5

Black is again in zugzwang.

53...a6 54.♔h4!

And in view of the inevitable king penetration, Black resigned.

1–0

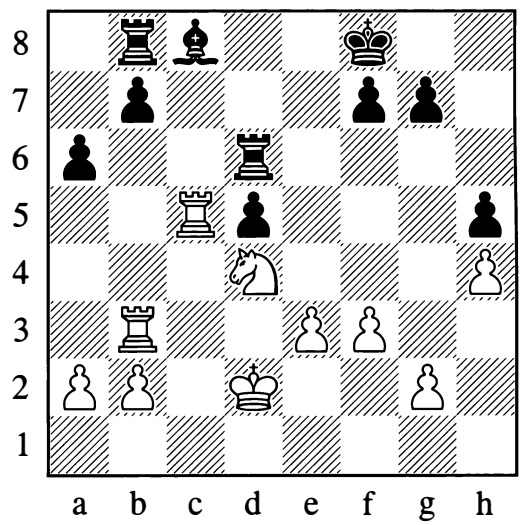
I find the next ending very instructive as well.

Elmar Magerramov – Vladimir Goldin

Moscow 1991

When I played through Elmar's games, I got the impression that he has a split personality in chess. In most of his games he is a tactician, but he can also turn into an extremely fine positional player. It is hard to predict which way he will handle a position. It is curious that most of his positional games seemed to come with the white pieces. He thinks it is because there are certain defences, such as the Queen's Indian, that demand a patient approach.

In the present example, it is obvious that White has a clear advantage. At the same time, to win such a position is not completely trivial. Elmar conducts the ending in model fashion.



24.♖c6!

White exchanges one pair of rooks in order to have chances to invade later on. This is an important point: if both pairs of rooks were exchanged, then Black's drawing chances would improve considerably. He could follow the defensive plan demonstrated in the model game Flohr – Capablanca, Moscow 1935, in which the brilliant Cuban positioned his king on d6, bishop on d7, and pawns on b6, a5 and f6.

24...♖xc6

24...♔e7 25.♖xc8! ♖xc8 26.♘f5† wins a pawn.

25.♘xc6 ♖a8 26.♘d4 ♔e7 27.♘e2 b5 28.♘f4 ♗b7 29.♖c3 ♔d6 30.♔d3!

The knight was very well placed on d4, but the king will be even better there.

30...g6 31.♔d4

Now his king is beautifully centralized. In addition he keeps control over the c-file.

31...♖e8 32.a3 ♗c6 33.♖c5

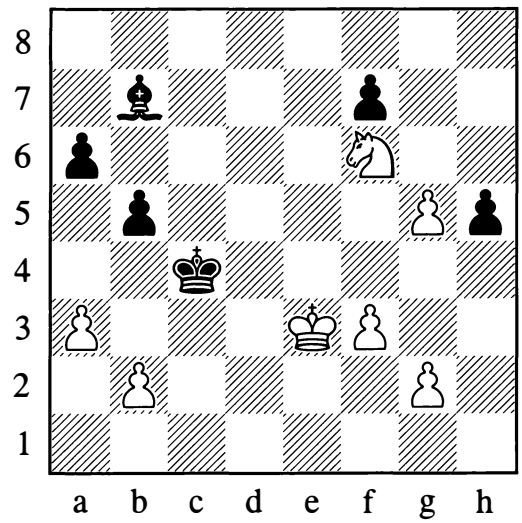
Winning the d5-pawn.

33...♗b7 34.♘xd5 g5

Maybe going for the rook ending with 34...♗xd5!? would have given slightly better chances of survival.

35.♘f6 ♖xe3 36.♔xe3 ♔xc5 37.hxg5 ♔c4

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38.♘e4!

Magerramov nicely blends positional play with simple tactics. The king cannot go to b3 because of the knight fork. The remainder of the game is quite trivial.

38...♗d5 39.♘d2† ♔c5 40.b4† ♔d6 41.♔f4 ♗e6 42.♔e4 h4 43.♘f1 ♗c8 44.♘e3 h3 45.gxh3 ♗xh3 46.f4 ♗c8 47.f5 ♗b7† 48.♔f4 ♗c8 49.♘g4 ♔e7 50.♔e5 ♗b7 51.g6 fxg6 52.fxg6

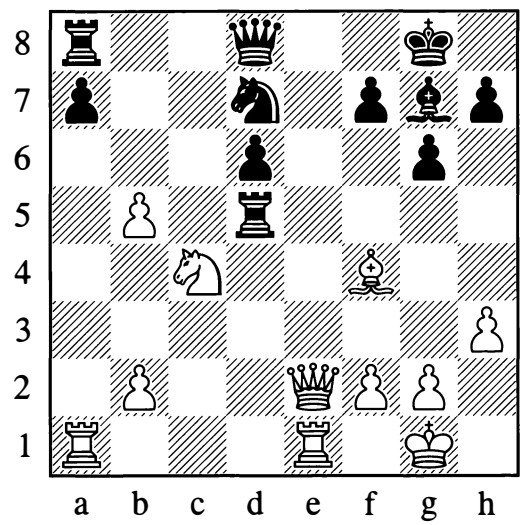
1–0

The next game, played in Andorra 1993, is another interesting example. In a bad position, it is well known that reducing the opponent's pawns to one flank increases one's chances of drawing, although the following game shows that it is by no means a guarantee...

Elmar Magerramov – Tom Wedberg

Andorra 1993

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 c5 4.d5 d6 5.♘c3 exd5 6.cxd5 g6 7.h3 ♗g7 8.e4 0–0 9.♗d3 ♖e8 10.0–0 c4 11.♗c2 b5 12.♘xb5 ♘xe4 13.♗xe4 ♖xe4 14.♘d2 ♖h4 15.♖e1 ♗a6 16.a4 ♗xb5 17.axb5 ♖d4 18.♕e2 ♘d7 19.♘xc4 ♖xd5 20.♗f4



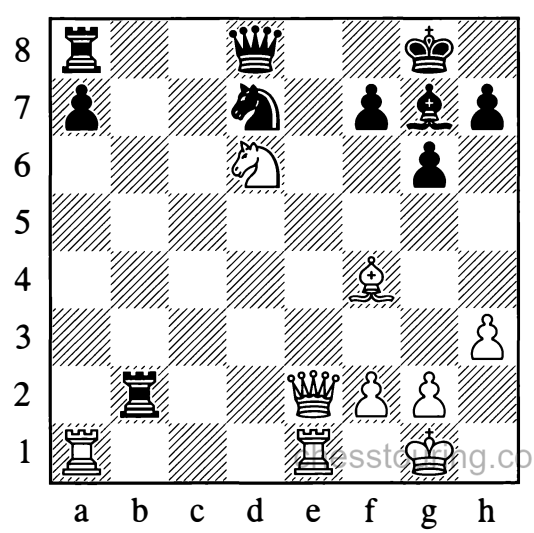
20...♖xb5?

This looks like such a natural move. Black destroys all the queenside pawns and it really looks like he will get away with it. He should have preferred 20...♗f8! to defend d6, thus stopping White's knight from getting to a dominating place in the centre. Play might continue 21.♕f3 ♖xb5 22.♘xd6 ♗xd6 23.♗xd6 ♖f5 (but not 23...♖xb2?? because of 24.♖e7). Black is somewhat worse, but has decent chances to defend.

21.♘xd6 ♖xb2?

Black takes White's last queenside pawn and has no obvious weaknesses – or so it seems.

Best was 21...♖b6 22.♕f3 ♕f8 23.♖ad1 ♘f6 (23...♖d8 24.♘c4 ♖f6 25.♗d6 ♖xf3 26.♗xf8 wins an exchange) 24.♘c4 ♖e6 25.♖xe6 fxe6 26.♗d6 ♕e8 27.♗c5. Black's position is really very unpleasant, but he can resist.

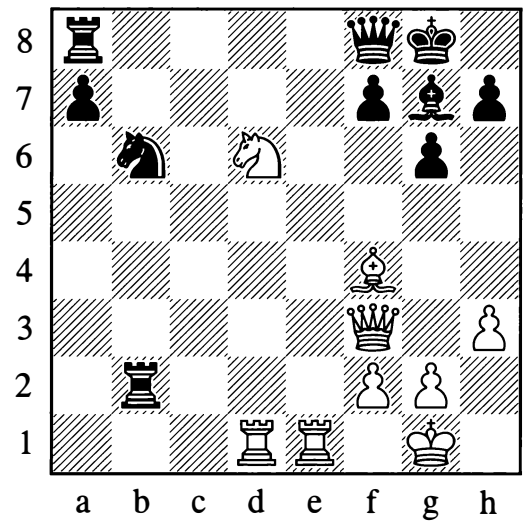

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22.♕f3!

Elmar needed very fine vision to notice that his central domination can force a win. He also finds the required strong moves to achieve the desired result.

22...♕f8 23.♖ad1 ♘b6

23...♖d8 24.♘c4 wins, while after 23...♖c2 24.♘xf7 ♘b6 25.♘d6 Black is in huge trouble.



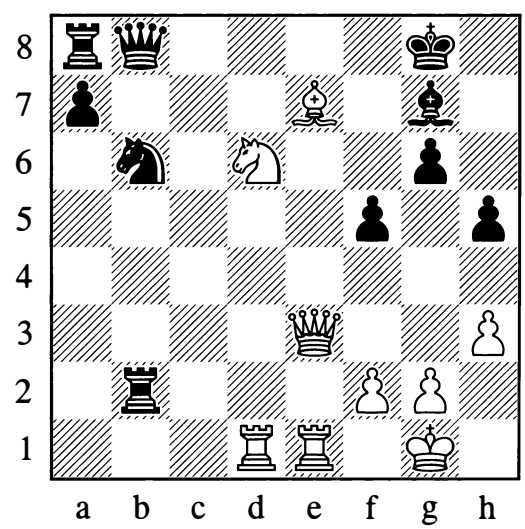
24.♗g5!!

Now this strong move is perhaps not too hard to spot, but to notice it in advance is remarkable. The threat of ♗e7 is really nasty.

24...f5

24...f6 25.♗c1! ♖b1 26.♕d3 wins as well.

25.♗e7 ♕b8 26.♕e3 h5



27.♗f6!!

1–0

There were other ways to win, but I awarded the exclamation marks for the efficiency of the text move, as well as its terrific aesthetic appeal.

The following game features a nice blend of technical endgame play followed by a tactical explosion at the critical moment.

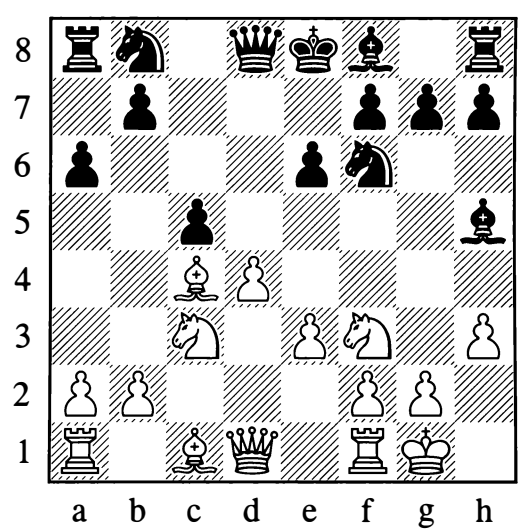
Elmar Magerramov – Vladislav Vorotnikov

Beltsy 1979

1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.♘f3 a6 4.e3 ♗g4 5.♗xc4 e6 6.♘c3 ♘f6 7.0–0 c5?!

This is an unusual combination of plans. When the bishop goes to g4, it is more natural to play for ...e5 rather than ...c5. It is somewhat risky to open the queenside as he may experience some problems on the light squares, now that the bishop is committed to the opposite flank.

8.h3 ♗h5



9.dxc5!

Many players only appreciated how effective this exchange could be after the second Fischer – Spassky match. Elmar made the right judgement much earlier than 1992.

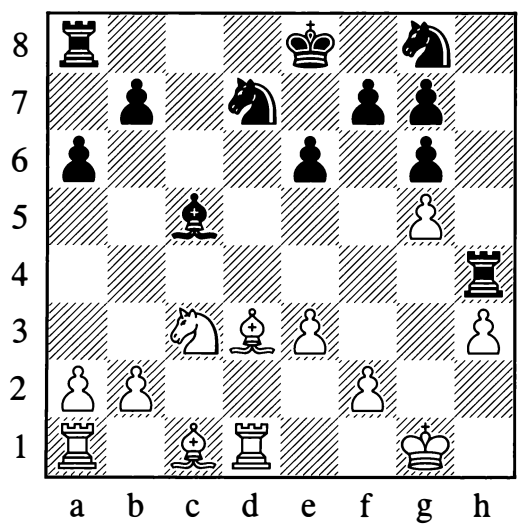
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9...♕xd1 10.♖xd1 ♗xc5 11.g4 ♗g6 12.♘e5 ♘bd7 13.♘xg6 hxg6 14.g5! ♖h4 15.♗d3!

Elmar explains the reason for this move was that, unlike 15.♗f1, it works well against 15...♘h7.

15...♘g8

15...♘h7 could be met by 16.♘e4!, sacrificing the h3-pawn for very strong compensation.



16.♗f1!

Rerouting the bishop to a better diagonal, while conveniently defending the h-pawn. Two years later in Tilburg, Kasparov played in a similar way after Petrosian put the bishop on g4 in a Queen's Gambit.

16...♖c8

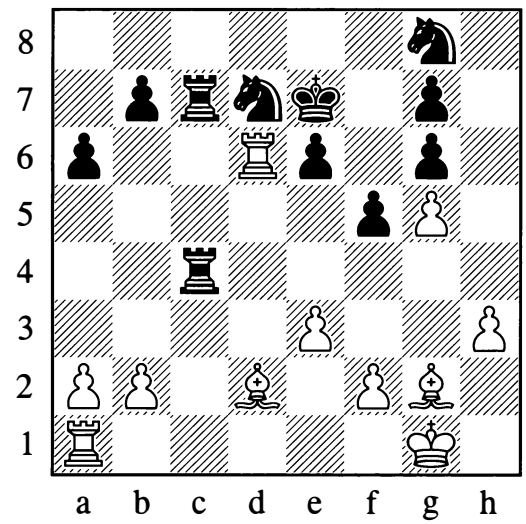
16...0–0–0!? deserved consideration, using the king to support the sensitive queenside pawns.

17.♗g2 ♖c7 18.♘e4 f5 19.♘d6† ♗xd6 20.♖xd6 ♖hc4?!

It was better to chase the rook with 20...♔e7. Then 21.♖d1 ♔f7 22.♗d2 retains a nice edge for White, but a long fight lies ahead.

21.♗d2 ♔e7?

Relatively best was 21...♘e7, sacrificing a pawn to free the position. Following 22.♖xe6 ♘c5 23.♖d6 ♘e4 Black at least has some activity.



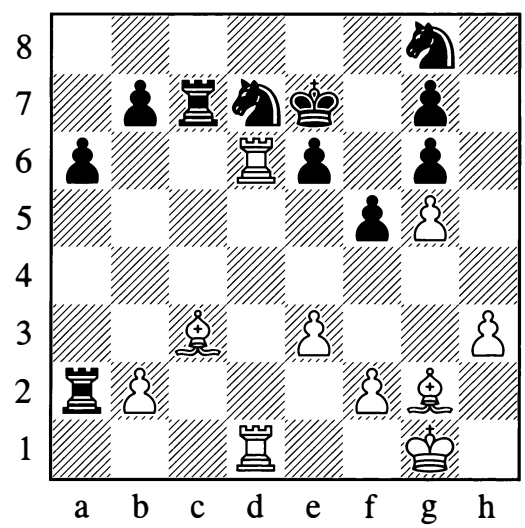
22.♖d1!!

This sets up a wonderful battery. This rarely happens in competitive chess, especially at such an early stage of a game. It is almost as if we are witnessing one of Oleg Pervakov's magical studies! (See Chapter 11)

22...♖a4

Taking the rook allows mate in two, and if 22...♘c5 23.♗a5 ♖c8 24.♗xb7 wins.

23.♗c3 ♖xa2



24.♖xe6†! ♔d8

After 24...♔xe6 25.♗d5† ♔e7 26.♗xa2 ♔f8 27.♖c1! White wins with a second battery!

25.♗xg7 ♖a5 26.♗f6† ♘gxf6 27.gxf6 1–0

Black resigned in this desperately lost position.

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Are there any players you had a very good or very bad score against?

"I do not know of anybody. I do not think I have people like that. Maybe, wait... I know that Mikhail Gurevich complained about it. One moment, I'll check my personal score against him – yes, it is plus four for me out of five games, and even the draw was prearranged."

(By the way, my impression is that Magerramov is a fighter and he has very few short draws in the database.)

It looks like your biggest tournament success was becoming USSR champion with Minasian in 1991. Do you consider it like that as well?

"Yes, there is no doubt that this was my best achievement."

You must be proud of it, aren't you?

"We were the last players to get the title of Grandmaster of the USSR. Conditions were extremely tough – one either had to become a champion of the USSR, or to make a very respectable result at the final of the USSR championship in two consecutive years. There were some legendary names on this list."

I selected your last win in the Soviet championship. (He drew the last game)

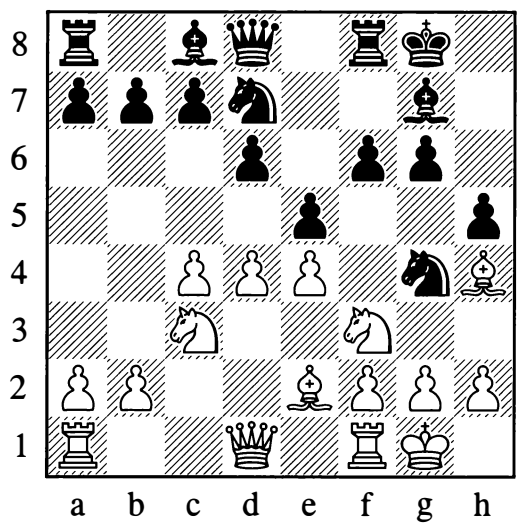
"Do you mean the Bologan one? I think that was a decent game. By the way, it was the last of a five-game winning run. They say it is the longest winning streak in a Soviet championship."

I later checked and found that he was right – although Kupreichik has also achieved the same feat. In Magerramov's case, he had already defeated Makarichev, Aseev, Minasian and Shabalov when he faced Bologan.

Elmar Magerramov – Victor Bologan

USSR 1991

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.♗e2 0–0 6.♘f3 e5 7.♗e3 ♘g4 8.♗g5 f6 9.♗h4 ♘d7 10.0–0 h5



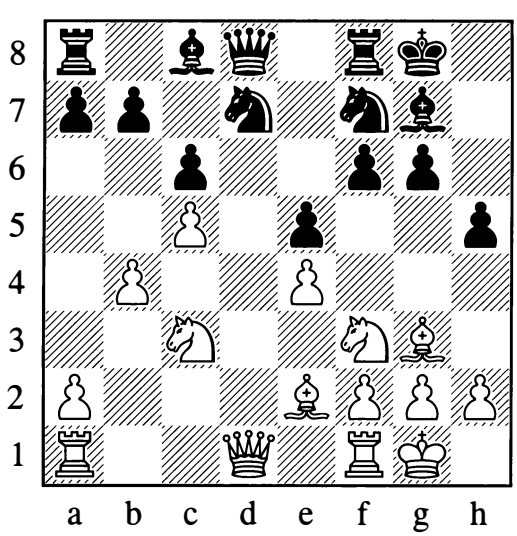
11.dxe5!?

Taking at this point was a novelty at that time. White has scored well with it ever since.

11...dxe5 12.b4

However, masters do not play this move any more.

12...♘h6 13.♗g3 c6 14.c5 ♘f7



15.♕b3

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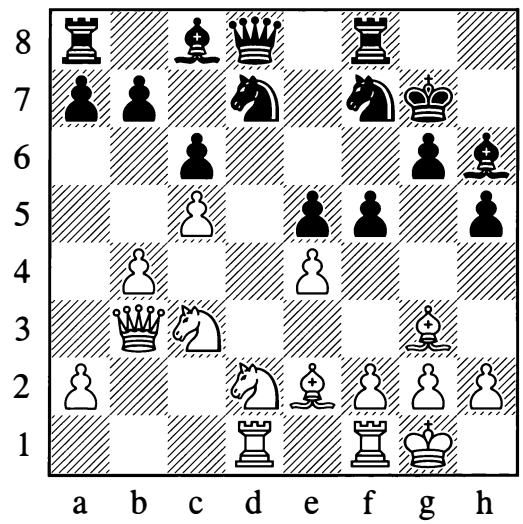
White has obtained a somewhat favourable position with his queenside expansion.

15...♗h6!

Black improves what is traditionally a bad piece in this opening.

16.♖ad1 ♔g7 17.♘d2!? f5

Allowing the knight to move to d6, or alternatively taking it on d2 before it gets there, was not fun for Black either.



18.f4!!

A beautiful move. As White has more pieces in play, it is favourable for him to open the position. Nevertheless, to play such a move required excellent judgement and calculation.

I should mention that the alternative 18.exf5?! h4 19.fxg6 is an interesting and creative piece sacrifice, but it leads to no more than unclear complications.

18...h4

After 18...exf4 19.♗xf4 ♗xf4 20.♖xf4 ♕c7 21.♖df1 White has the upper hand. All of his pieces have good prospects, while Black has yet to finish developing.

19.♗f2 ♗xf4

If 19...h3!? 20.exf5 gxf5 21.fxe5 hxg2 22.♔xg2 ♘dxe5 23.♘c4 Black is under some pressure.

20.♘f3!

Changing the direction of the knight.

20...♘g5!

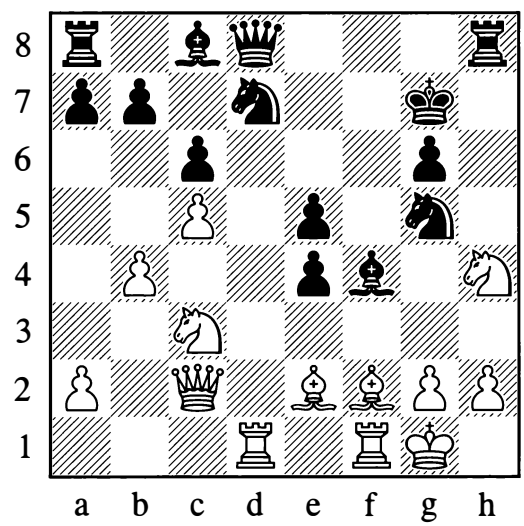
If 20...♖h8?! 21.exf5 gxf5 22.♗c4 ♕f6 23.♘e2 Black's position falls apart.

21.♘xh4 fxe4

21...♘xe4!?

22.♕c2 ♖h8?

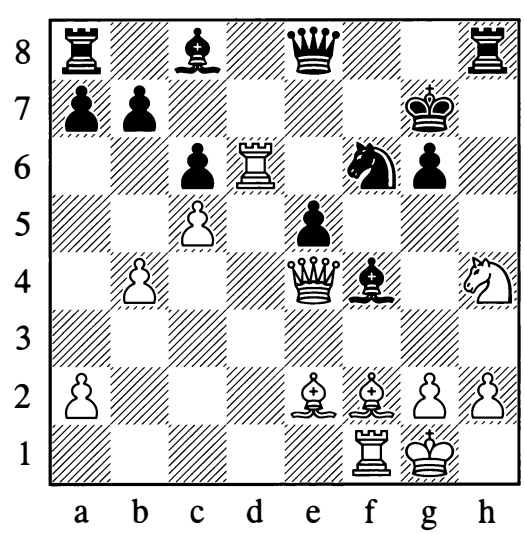
The rook becomes out of play here. Better was 22...♕e8 23.♘xe4 ♘xe4 24.♕xe4 ♘f6. The position is rather murky, but Black is certainly in the game.



23.♖d6! ♕e8 24.♘xe4!

If 24.♖xg6†?! ♕xg6 25.♘xg6 ♗xh2† 26.♔h1 ♔xg6 and Black is not worse.

24...♘xe4 25.♕xe4 ♘f6



26.♕c2!

It is too early for 26.♖xf6?! ♔xf6. Despite it's dubious appearance, Black's defence hold firm,

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e.g. 27.♗d4 ♖xh4 28.♖xf4† ♖xf4 29.♕xf4† ♗f5!.

26...g5?

Under pressure, Black commits what was perhaps the fatal error. After 26...♖h6! he would stand worse, but would still not be out of the game.

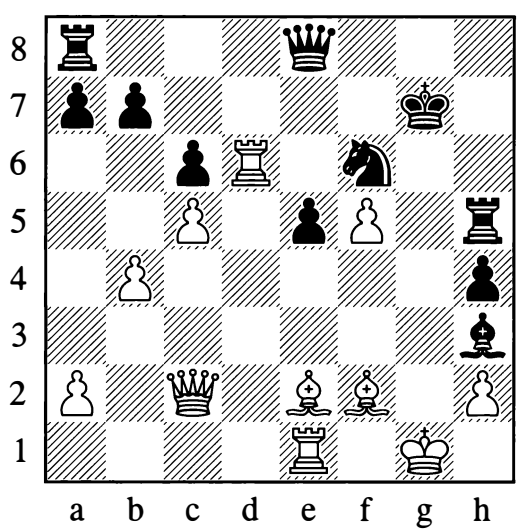
27.g3! gxh4 28.gxf4 ♗h3 29.♖e1

Both kings are somewhat exposed, but the difference in the quality of the pieces should decide the game. The rook on a8 is doing nothing, and White's bishop pair has the potential to slice through the enemy position like a hot knife through butter.

29...♖h6 30.f5?!

Better was 30.♗d3!. Closing the centre gives Black some hope for survival.

30...♖h5!?



31.♔h1!

After a slight error, Elmar gets back to playing good moves. Taking on h5 would leave him horribly exposed on the light squares.

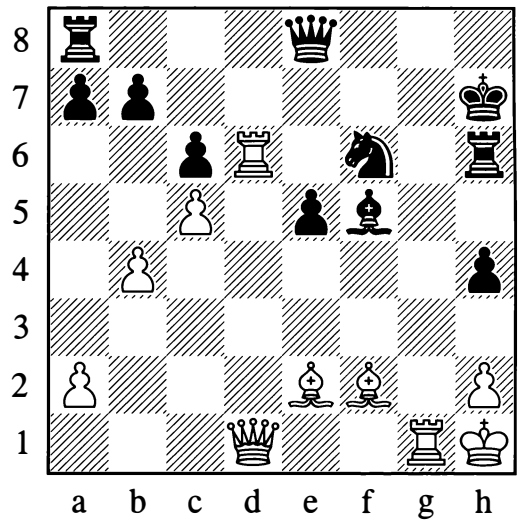
31...♗xf5 32.♖g1†!

Also after 32.♕d1! ♘e4 33.♗xh5 ♘xf2† 34.♔g2 ♘xd1 35.♗xe8 White wins.

32...♔h7 33.♕d1! ♖h6

The alternatives were no better, e.g. 33...♗e4† 34.♗f3 ♖f5 35.♗xe4 ♘xe4 36.♖d7† ♔h8 37.♗xh4 wins for White.

Also after 33...♘e4 34.♗xh5 ♘xf2† 35.♔g2 ♘xd1 36.♗xe8 ♖xe8 37.♖gxd1 White's advantage should be enough to decide the game.



34.♖g5!

White has been playing with an extra rook for some time, and finally he is able to make it count.

34...♗e4† 35.♗f3 ♗d5 36.♗xd5 cxd5

36...♘xd5 37.♖xh6† ♔xh6 38.♕g4 is the end.

37.♕f3 ♕e7

Bologan desperately tries to defend, but his resistance is crushed by a final tactical blow.

38.♗xh4! ♖xh4 39.♖xf6 ♔h8 40.♖h5†

1–0

How much did your life change with the end of the Soviet Union?

"Of course it has changed, but people are free now. There are disadvantages but these things were inevitable."

While the Soviet Union existed you often played there with some nice successes, like winning the St Petersburg tournament in 1992. However, from 1992, you completely stopped playing in Russia. Was it your decision or did it just happen that way?

"I decided to go to work in the Emirates and was also the second of Ioseliani against Xie Jun."

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When were you last in Russia?

"A long time ago. I think I haven't been in Russia for 13 years."

What were your best novelties?

"I had some against the Botvinnik Variation and the Dutch Defence."

Here I shall show some games with Magerramov novelties.

Elmar Magerramov – Lembit Oll

Klaipeda 1988

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 e6 5.♗g5 dxc4 6.e4 b5 7.e5 h6 8.♗h4 g5 9.♘xg5 hxg5 10.♗xg5

According to the database, Elmar has scored 4½/6 in the Botvinnik variation.

10...♘bd7 11.g3!? ♕a5

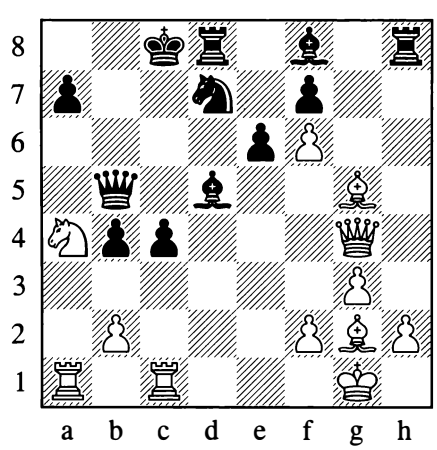
He also had some remarkable wins in the main line:

11...♗b7

For instance...

12.♗g2 ♕b6 13.exf6 0–0–0 14.0–0 c5 15.d5 b4 16.♘a4 ♕b5 17.a3 ♘b8 18.axb4 cxb4 19.♕g4 ♗xd5 20.♖fc1 ♘d7

20...♗xg2 21.♔xg2 c3 22.♘xc3 bxc3 23.♖xa7 ♕d5† 24.♔g1 ♗c5 25.♖xc3 ♘c6 26.♖a8† ♔d7 27.♖xd8† ♖xd8 28.♕h5 ♘d4 29.b4 ♗e7 30.fxe7 ♖a8 31.♕d1 ♖a2 32.e8=♕† ♔xe8 33.♖c8† ♔d7 34.♖d8† 1–0 Magerramov – Komljenovic, Andorra 1990.



21.♕f4!!

Elmar considers this to be his best ever novelty. Interestingly, there were two subsequent games that reached this position, but neither White player repeated the text.

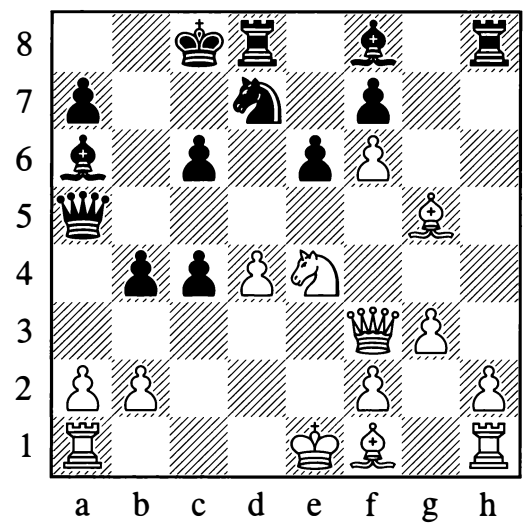
21...♘c5 22.♘xc5 ♗xc5 23.♗f1 ♔b7 24.♗xc4 ♗xc4 25.♖xc4 ♖d5 26.♕e4 a5 27.♖ac1 ♕c6 28.h4 ♖hd8 29.♔g2 1–0 Magerramov – Savchenko, St Petersburg 1992.

12.exf6 b4?! 13.♘e4 ♗a6 14.♕f3

Elmar mentions that this move was not his invention, yet he found new ways to continue after this queen move.

14...0–0–0

After 14...♕d5 15.♖d1 0–0–0 16.b3 ♘b6 17.bxc4 ♘xc4 18.♗e2 ♗b5 19.0–0 ♘a3 20.♗f4 ♔b7 21.♖d2 a5 22.♖c1 ♗xe2 23.♕xe2 White obtained a clear advantage, Károlyi – Wells, Hungary 2000.



15.♗e2

Worse is 15.♗g2? c3! 16.♘xc3 ♘b8 17.♘e4 ♖xd4 18.♗e3 b3† 19.♘c3, Timman – Pinter, Mexico 1985, 19...♖d7! 20.♗f1 ♗b7 21.♕e2 ♗b4 22.♕c4 c5 and White is lost.

However, it is also interesting to try 15.♗e3!?, a Károlyi novelty that was created a good 15 years ago. It is a strong move – modesty aside!

15...♘b6!?

This was Lembit's prepared novelty.

16.♗e3!?

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Nowadays the regular response is 16.♘c5.

16...♗b7

After 16...b3†? 17.♗d2 ♗b4 18.0–0!! ♗xd2 19.axb3 White wins.

17.0–0 c5?

The Estonian grandmaster opens the position, but White is ready for it.

Correct was 17...c3!? 18.bxc3 bxc3 19.♖fc1 ♘d5.

18.dxc5 ♘a4

18...♘d7?! is strongly met by 19.♕f4!. Alternatively, after 18...♗xc5 19.♗xc5 ♗xe4 20.♕xe4 ♕xc5 21.♗xc4 White wins.

19.♗xc4 ♘xb2 20.c6!

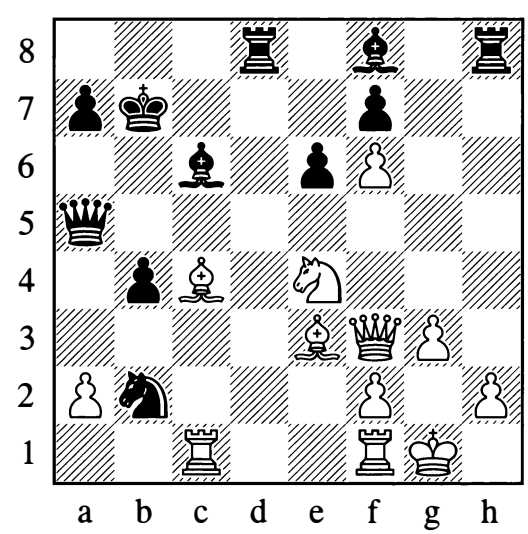
Elmar plays a fancy move. White is also much better after the more mundane 20.♗b3.

20...♗xc6 21.♖ac1

Black's king is simply under too much fire.

21...♔b7

After 21...♘xc4 22.♖xc4 ♔b7 23.♖xc6 White wins.



22.♗xe6!

When the f7-pawn disappears in the Botvinnik, it often spells the end for Black. In this case sacrifices are required to get the job done, but Elmar has calculated everything.

Had it not been for the text move, the calm 22.♗e2!? ♗d5 23.♗f4 would have been enough to decide the game as well.

22...fxe6

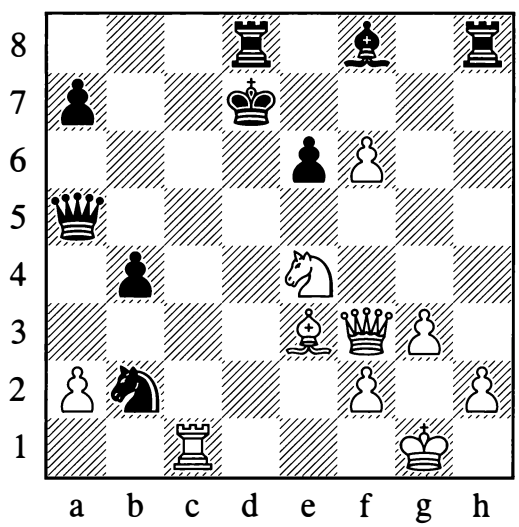
If 22...♘d3 23.♖xc6 ♘e5 24.♘d6† ♖xd6 25.♖b6†. A nice double check leads to a quick kill after 25...♔c7 26.♕b7† ♔d8 27.♕c8#.

23.♖xc6!

White has a decisive attack. The missing rook is not even an issue.

23...♔xc6 24.♖c1† ♔d7

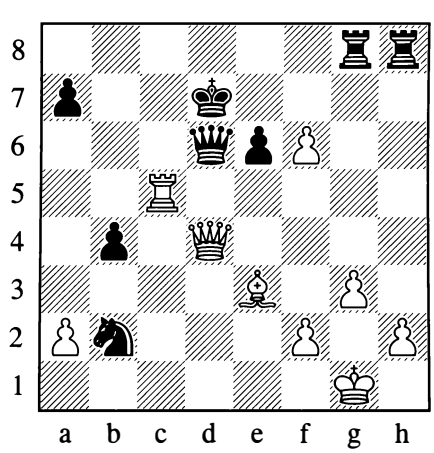
24...♔b5 25.♘g5 ♔a4 26.♘f7 wins.



25.f7!!

We are being treated to a barrage of beautiful moves. The point of this one is to clear the f6-square and open the h4-d8 diagonal.

I should mention in passing that 25.♘c5† was also good enough: 25...♗xc5 26.♖xc5 ♕a6 27.♕g4 ♖dg8 28.♕d4† ♕d6



29.♖c7†!! Another superb tactical shot brings Black down.

25...♘d3?

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Black fails to offer the stiffest resistance. 25...♗g7? 26.♘c5† was losing instantly, but there were two other candidate moves:

25...♗e7 26.♘f6† ♗xf6 27.♕b7†! ♔d6 28.♗f4† A rook check follows, with devastating consequences.

The best chance was:

25...♕f5 26.♗f4

Elmar gave this move, although it seems to me that 26.♕e2! is simpler, e.g. 26...♗d6 (26...e5 27.♕c2) 27.♘xd6 ♔xd6 28.♕xb2 White wins.

26...e5!

26...♖c8? 27.♖xc8 ♔xc8 28.♘d6† wins easily.

27.♘g5 ♔e7! 28.♖c7† ♔f6

28...♖d7 29.♖xd7† ♕xd7 30.♗xe5 wins.

29.♖c6† ♗d6

29...♔g7 fails to 30.♕g4!! – what a lovely deflection!

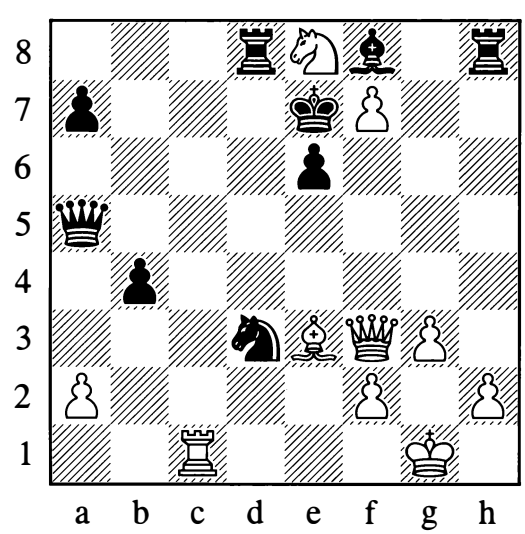
30.♘e4† ♔e6 31.♕b3† ♔e7 32.♕d5 ♕e6 33.♗g5† ♔xf7 34.♘xd6†

White overpowers his adversary in the centre.

26.♘f6† ♔d6

26...♔e7 27.♘g8† ♔d6 28.♗f4† wins.

27.♘e8† ♔e7



28.♗g5†!

Elmar obliterates his opponent's resistance with an animalistic power, in a manner reminiscent of Kasparov himself.

28...♕xg5 29.♖c7†

1–0

Mate is inevitable: 29...♖d7 30.♖xd7† ♔xd7 31.♕b7† ♔d8 32.♕c7#.

Your author was indirectly also a victim of his novelty in the Leningrad Dutch. Elmar has some openings where he scores incredibly well. The Dutch Defence is a nice example of that. Many strong players can testify to this...

Elmar Magerramov – Vladimir Malaniuk

Warsaw 1989

1.d4 f5

Malaniuk is a real specialist in the Leningrad Dutch. He told me he lost only three games out of the first fifty in which he employed this double-edged opening. Even Kasparov did not achieve anything, despite having plenty of time to prepare against it.

2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3 0–0 6.♘f3 d6 7.0–0 ♕e8

This is Chernin's move, which was popularized by Malaniuk. Elmar has also scored well against the old main line:

7...c6

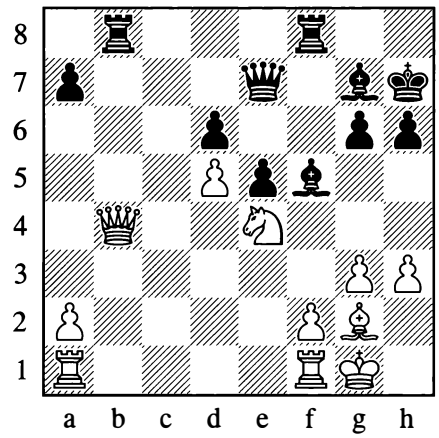
We shall look at a couple of his highlight games.

8.d5 e5 9.e4 cxd5 10.cxd5 ♘a6 11.exf5 ♗xf5 12.♘g5 ♕e7

12...♘c5 13.b4 ♘d3 14.♘e6 ♗xe6 (Elmar opines that Black must try the exchange sacrifice 14...♕b6!?) 15.dxe6 e4 16.♗g5 d5 17.♕b3 ♔h8 18.♘xd5! ♕xd5 19.♗xf6 ♕f5 20.♗xg7† ♔xg7 21.♕c4 1–0 Magerramov – Renner, Bad Woerishofen 1993.

13.h3 h6 14.♘ge4 ♘xe4 15.♘xe4 ♔h7 16.♗e3 b6 17.♕d2 ♘c5 18.♗xc5 bxc5 19.b4 cxb4 20.♕xb4 ♖ab8

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21.♕a3! ♖b6 22.♖ac1 ♖c8 23.♖xc8 ♗xc8 24.♖c1

White achieves a clear advantage with nice, simple positional play.

24...♖a6 25.♕d3 ♗b7 26.h4 ♖a4? 27.h5 ♖d4 28.hxg6† ♔h8 29.♕b3 ♗xd5 30.♕b8† ♗g8 31.♗h3 ♗f8 32.♖c7 ♕xc7 33.♕xc7 ♖xe4 34.♗e6 ♖e1† 35.♔g2 ♖c1 36.g7†

1–0 Magerramov –Vaiser, Nimes 1991.

8.b3 e5!

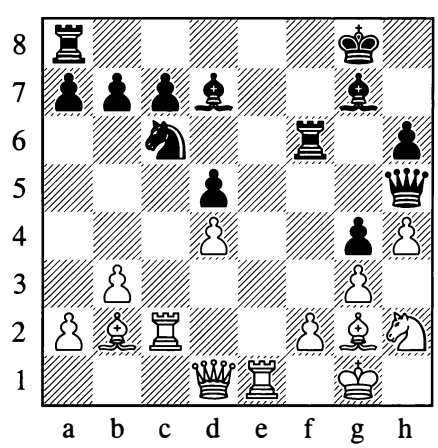
I believe this thematic move is the right choice, and that Black's subsequent demolition was the result of later errors. A few of his opponents tried the less well known:

8...h6

However, avoiding a direct confrontation also brought them no joy.

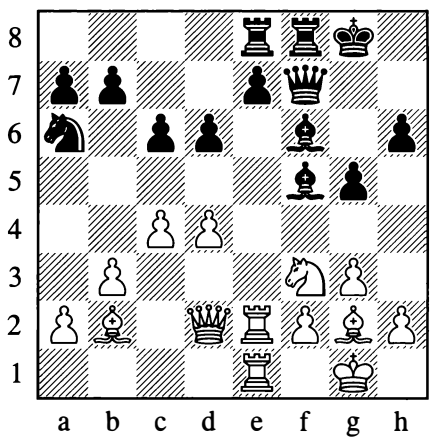
9.♖e1 g5 10.♗b2 ♕f7 11.e4 fxe4 12.♘xe4 c6

12...♘xe4 13.♖xe4 ♘c6 14.♕d2 e6 15.♖ae1 d5 16.♖4e2 ♗d7 17.h4 g4 18.♘h2 ♕h5 19.♕d1 ♖f7 20.cxd5 exd5 21.♖c2 ♖f6



22.♖e5 ♘xe5?! 23.dxe5 ♖b6 24.♖xc7 ♕f5 25.♗xd5† White went on to win in Magerramov – Vyzhmanavin, Balatonbereny 1989.

13.♕d2 ♘a6 14.♘xf6† ♗xf6 15.♖e2 ♗f5 16.♖ae1 ♖ae8



17.h3!

He likes his move, which prepares the improvement of the knight. It is a sly idea.

17...♕h7 18.♘h2! h5 19.♗e4

Possibly it was even stronger to start with 19.d5!?.

19...♗xe4 20.♖xe4 d5 21.♖4e3 dxc4 22.bxc4 ♖d8 23.♕e2 ♘b4 24.♖e4 c5 25.♘f3 ♕g7 26.♘e5 cxd4 27.♗xd4 ♕h7 28.♗a1

Elmar considers this position to be winning for White, and in the game he soon converted his advantage. The remaining moves were:

28...♘a6 29.c5 ♖d5 30.c6 ♘c5 31.♖e3 b6 32.♖d1 e6 33.♖xd5 exd5 34.♕d1 ♖d8 35.♖f3 ♕g7 36.c7 ♖c8 37.♕xd5† ♔h7 38.♘f7 ♖xc7 39.♖xf6

1–0 Magerramov – Galdunts, Bad Woerishofen 1994. All of these were very nice positional games. Elmar likes them and I think he has good reason to.

9.dxe5 dxe5 10.e4 ♘c6 11.♘d5 ♕d7

Another game continued: 11...♖f7 12.♘g5 ♖d7 13.exf5 gxf5 14.♗b2 h6 15.♘f3 ♘xd5 16.cxd5 e4 17.♗xg7 ♔xg7 18.♘h4 ♕f7 (18...♕e5!?) 19.♗xe4 fxe4 20.♕g4† ♔h8 21.dxc6 ♖d6 22.♕xe4. White went on to win

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in Magerramov – Klostermann, Budapest 1989.

12.♗a3! ♖e8?!

This is already a mistake. The rook should have gone to d8, which has scored quite well for Black.

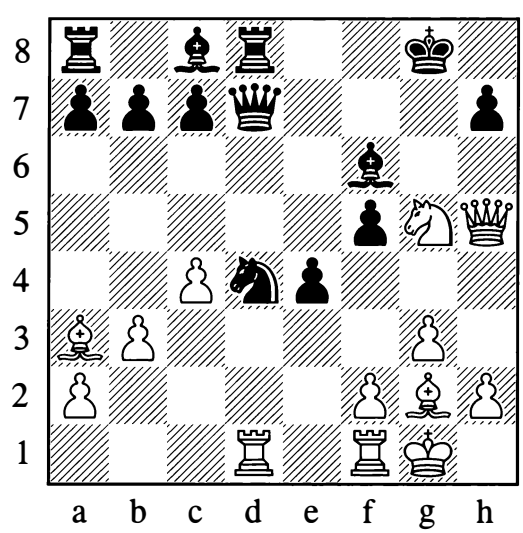
13.exf5 e4

This is the principled continuation, but the lesser evil looks to be 13...gxf5.

14.♘g5! gxf5 15.♘xf6† ♗xf6 16.♕h5! ♖d8?

I lasted a bit longer after 16...♗xa1, although clearly Black should avoid the whole variation at all costs. Pinter – Károlyi, Budapest 1989, finished 17.♖xa1 ♖d8 18.♗b2 ♕e7 19.♖e1 ♘d4 (19...a5 20.♘xe4) 20.♗xe4 fxe4 21.♖xe4 ♘f3† 22.♔g2 ♗h3† 23.♔xf3 1–0.

17.♖ad1 ♘d4



18.♖xd4!!

1–0

Malaniuk, a very strong player and a true specialist of this line, was forced to resign after a mere 18 moves.

The finish might have been 18...♗xd4 19.♖d1 c5 20.♗xc5 ♗xc5 21.♖xd7 ♖xd7 22.♘e6.

Magerramov lost games in the poisoned pawn line in the 1982 Kasparov training match, yet overall he scores well in this line as well. Here is another new idea.

Kenneth Harman – Elmar Magerramov

Correspondence 1992

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗g5 e6 7.f4 ♕b6 8.♗xf6 gxf6 9.♗e2 ♖g8!

This was a novelty at the time. A few years earlier, he took on b2 against Kengis and drew. He told me his novelties were usually the fruit of home preparation rather than over-the-board improvisation.

10.♗f3

10.♕d3 is now considered to be relatively best, although Black is okay here as well.

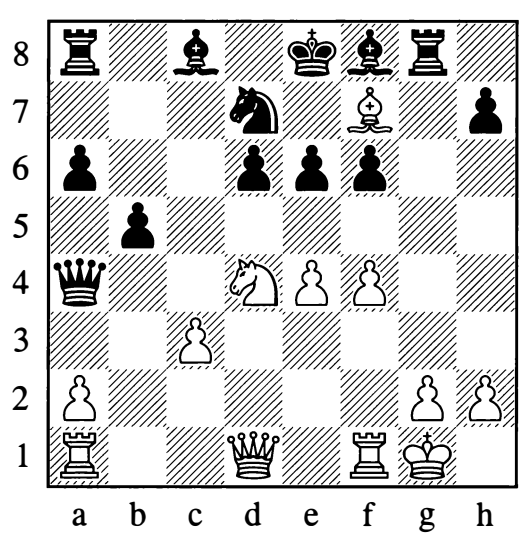
10...♕xb2 11.♘a4 ♕a3 12.c3 ♘d7 13.0–0?

After 13.♕c2 b5 14.♘b2 ♗b7 15.0–0 ♖c8, or 13.♕b3 ♕xb3 14.axb3 b5 15.♘b2 ♗b7 16.b4, White has little for the pawn.

The text is even worse though.

13...b5! 14.♗h5 ♕xa4 15.♗xf7†

The second piece sacrifice provides no lasting attack.



15...♔xf7 16.♕h5† ♔g7 17.♘xe6† ♔h8

The king finds a shelter. With two extra pieces, the game is as good as over.

18.♘d8 ♕c4 19.♔h1 ♖g7

0–1

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Did you prepare this novelty with Garry?

"No, but I showed it to him afterwards."

Can you recall some more novelties?

"In the Queen's Gambit Accepted, I took back on d4 with the rook after White played e5. Others started to play that way after me. In the main line with 3.♘f3, e3 and a4 I developed a line with ♗b3, later it was employed at the highest level. Kramnik used it against Kasparov. I had an interesting idea in the ♗f4 Grünfeld against Odeev and Khenkin."

Why did you never play in any Olympiads?

"There is a simple explanation for this. When I lived in Baku, it was in the USSR and I had no chance to make it into the team. After Azerbaijan became an independent country, they asked me once. But now I cannot make it into the team as there are so many strong players."

Since the year 2000, you have only played in Arab countries – not an accident, right?

"I am living in the Emirates."

Is there any other game of yours you would like to share? (He thinks for a while; in the meantime I remind him of some of the wins that impressed me.)

"I really like the Lerner win."

Elmar Magerramov – Konstantin Lerner

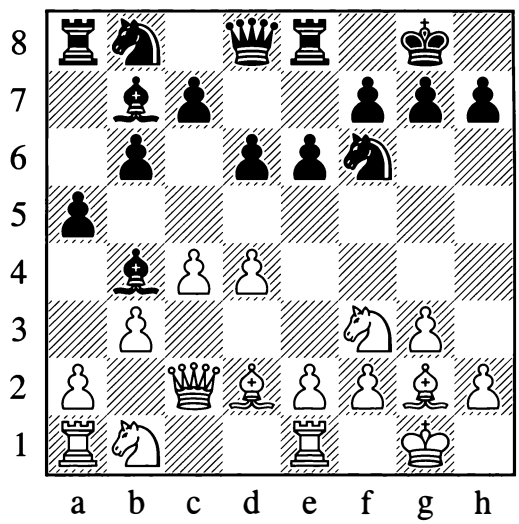
Palma de Mallorca 1989

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 b6 4.g3 ♗a6

He wins roughly half of his games and draws the other half when his opponents play 4...♗b7 here. A very satisfying record!

5.b3 ♗b7 6.♗g2 ♗b4† 7.♗d2 a5 8.0–0 0–0 9.♕c2 d6 10.♖e1!? ♖e8?!

This is a puzzling choice. 10...♗e4 looks obvious, preventing White's next move. Alternatively, if Black wants to prepare ...e6-e5, then 10...♘bd7 looks like a more natural and flexible way of doing it.



11.e4

Achieving the e4-advance is almost always an achievement for White in the 4.g3 line (as well as in several other variations) of the Queen's Indian.

11...e5 12.♘c3 ♘bd7 13.♖e2!?

Firmly defending the e4-pawn.

13...a4!

Black tries to create some counterplay.

14.♖ae1! axb3 15.axb3 c6

After 15...exd4 16.♘xd4 ♘c5 17.e5 ♗xg2 18.♔xg2 ♗xc3 19.♗xc3 dxe5 20.♖xe5 White is somewhat better.

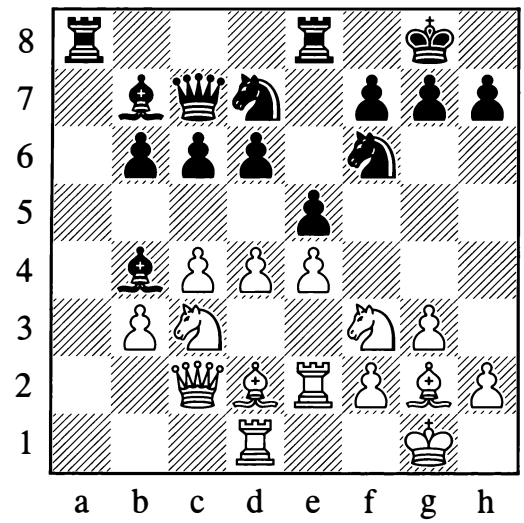
16.♖d1 ♕c7?!

This runs into a strong tactical riposte.

After 16...♕e7 White may be tempted to try 17.♘d5!? (17.h3 and 17.♗e1 are sensible alternatives) 17...♘xd5 (17...cxd5 18.♗xb4 dxe4 19.♘xe5 ♘f8 20.♘f3 White's two bishops are not achieving much at present, but potentially they could become rather troublesome.) 18.exd5 ♗xd2 19.dxc6 ♗xc6 20.♕xd2 and White is a bit better.

The safest continuation would have been 16...♕b8, when Black is only slightly worse.

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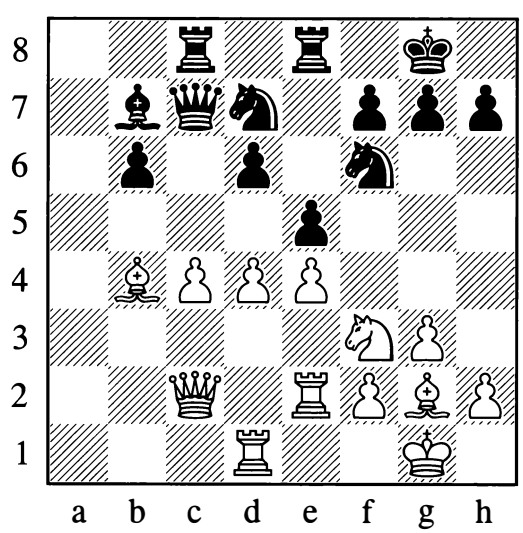


17.♘b5! cxb5 18.♗xb4 bxc4 19.bxc4 ♖ac8!

Lerner makes the best decision in a difficult situation.

After 19...♗a6?! 20.♗xd6! ♕xc4 (20...♕xd6 21.dxe5±) 21.♕xc4 ♗xc4 22.♖ee1 White has a pleasant advantage, despite having no queenside pawns.

Attacking the c4-pawn with 19...♖ec8 leads to interesting motifs. 20.♗xd6 ♕xd6 21.dxe5 ♕b4 (21...♕e6?! 22.exf6 ♖xc4 23.♕d3 ♘c5 24.♕d8†! Suddenly the weak back rank becomes an issue. 24...♕e8 25.♕xb6 Black is in trouble.) 22.exf6 ♖xc4 23.♕d3 ♘xf6 24.e5 Black still has plenty of problems to solve.



20.♗xd6! ♕xd6 21.dxe5 ♕e6?

Under pressure, Black falters. He wants to take the c4-pawn but he steps into some unpleasant tactical shots.

21...♕b4?! Taking c4 the other way was not correct either. Here I borrow the winner's annotations. 22.exf6 ♖xc4 23.♕d3 ♘c5 (23...♘xf6? 24.e5 ♘e4 25.e6!! f6 [25...♖xe6? 26.♕xc4+–; 25...fxe6 26.♘e5+–] 26.♕d7 ♗c6 27.♕f7† ♔h8 28.e7! wins) 24.♕d8! And once again Black faces difficulties due to his back rank.

21...♕c5! A defensive sacrifice was required. 22.exf6 ♘xf6 White is a pawn up, but he is tied to the defence of his weaknesses. I find it doubtful that he can achieve much from this position.

22.exf6 ♖xc4

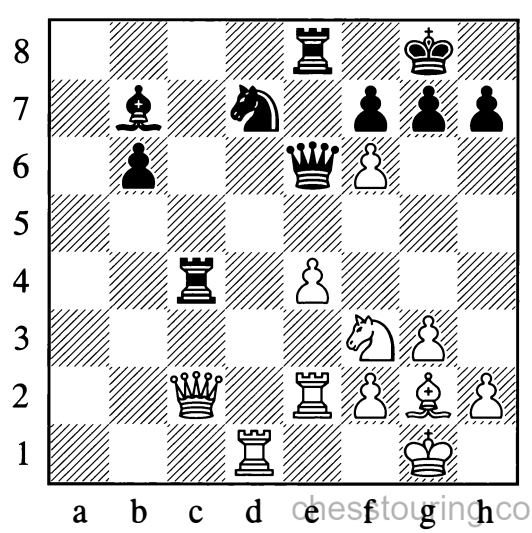
It is also interesting to consider:

22...♘xf6 23.e5!

23.♘d4?! ♕xc4 24.♕xc4 ♖xc4 25.♘f5? Elmar gives this as advantageous for White. However, this time he seems to be mistaken (25.f3± is correct). 25...♘xe4! It is surprising, but Black can get away with this cheeky pawn grab. (But not 25...♗xe4? 26.♘d6 ♗c2 27.♖a1! ♖xe2 28.♖a8† ♘e8 29.♘xe8 and White wins with this unusual back rank battery.) 26.♖de1?! ♖e6 and by now it is White who must try to equalize.

23...♖xc4 24.♕d3! ♗e4 25.♕d2! ♖c2 26.exf6 ♖xd2 27.♘xd2

With a rook and two pieces for the queen, White is winning.



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23.♗h3!!

This lovely intermediate move exerts pressure against the knight on d7.

23...♕c6

23...♕xh3 24.♕xc4 ♘xf6 25.♕xf7†! wins for White.

Another nice line is: 23...♖xc2 24.♗xe6 ♖xe2 25.♖xd7 ♗c6 (25...♖f8 26.fxg7 ♔xg7 27.♖xb7 ♖xe4 28.♗xf7 wins) 26.♗xf7† ♔f8 27.fxg7† ♔xg7 28.♖c7 This time the battery this occurs on the seventh.

24.♕b2!

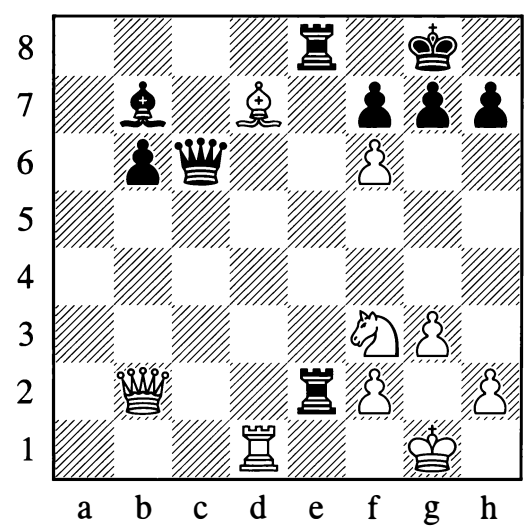
24.♗xd7? ♖xc2 25.♗xc6 ♖xc6 26.fxg7 ♖ce6 allows Black to escape more or less intact.

24...♖cxe4?

This allows White a relatively simple forced win. Alternatively 24...♕xf6 25.♖xd7! wins, while 24...♘xf6 25.♘e5 ♕a4 26.♖a1 is not much better.

The best chance was 24...♘c5!, which would at least have forced White to find a few more accurate moves in order to seal the victory. This could be achieved by 25.♘e5! ♕a4 26.♖a1! ♖b4! 27.♕c1! when Black must give up his queen as 27...♕b3 and 27...♕b5 both lose instantly to 28.♕g5.

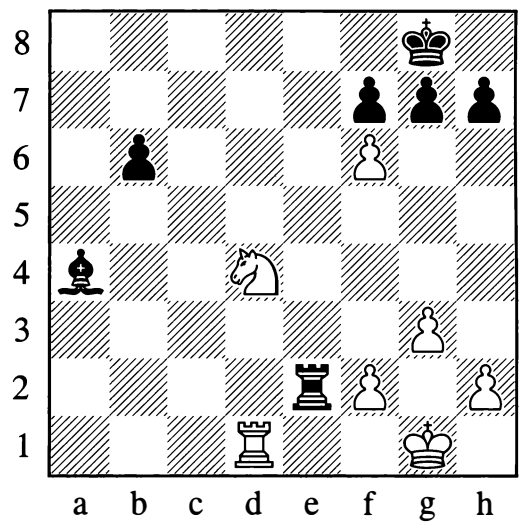
25.♗xd7 ♖xe2



26.♕xe2!

Not 26.♗xc6? when after 26...♖xb2 it is not over yet.

26...♖xe2 27.♗xc6 ♗xc6 28.♘d4 ♗a4



29.♖a1!

1–0

Finally Black goes down – he has two hanging pieces, and a weak back rank to boot.

Elmar says he likes this game as it reminds him of the famous encounter Reti – Alekhine, Baden-Baden 1925, which ended with a ...♗d5 fork, winning the game for Black. He does not consider his own game to be anywhere near as grand as Alekhine's masterpiece, but the theme of mass exchanges followed by a quick exploitation of the opponent's unstable pieces was present in both games.

I still had a few more questions to ask him.

Are you married?

"My wife and my younger son are with me in the Emirates and my older son is in the States."

How often do you visit Baku?

"Once a year, usually in the summer."

What are your hobbies apart from chess?

"Mathematics and music."

What do you think of the prospects of Radjabov and Mamedyarov?

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"They are very strong with great prospects in the near future."

Do you have any particularly good pupils?

"The most remarkable is the first grandmaster from the Emirates, Taleb Moussa."

When was the last time you met Garry? (His speech slows down; I get the impression that he is fighting his emotions.)

"A very long time ago. Maybe before I went to live abroad. I estimate 15 years."

Do you talk to one another on the phone?

"We have not talked on the phone. I always watch him online when he plays. I am with him then as well."

What is your opinion of him going into politics?

"It *(meaning his retirement)* is bad for chess – that much is clear. I can't judge it for the politics."

Do you know how many tournaments you have won?

"I have never counted, but I think I achieved many more second places."

What is your favourite country?

"From Europe, it is France. From the Arab countries, the Emirates."

What is your favourite place in Russia and in the former Soviet Union?

"Easy to answer: St Petersburg."

Do you have any idea which of your games you will be most remembered for?

"I know – when Garry paralysed me. It was a separate training game, not a part of a match.

By the way, that was not among the games I counted. So we played 19 games altogether."

Are you sure that is the final number?

"I think so, I am almost certain."

What is your final score against him?

"I won four games, drew seven and lost eight."

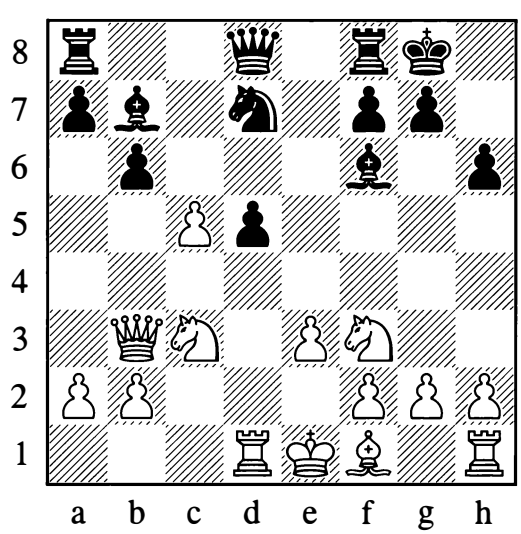
Thank you for the interview.

We will finally take a look at the game to which he was referring. You can see that Garry's genius was already shining through, even as a very young player.

Elmar Magerramov – Garry Kasparov

Baku 1977

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.d4 e6 3.c4 d5 4.♘c3 ♗e7 5.♗g5 0–0 6.e3 h6 7.♗h4 b6 8.♕b3 ♗b7 9.♗xf6 ♗xf6 10.cxd5 exd5 11.♖d1 c5! 12.dxc5 ♘d7



13.c6!?

Elmar remarks: "11...c5 was Garry's prepared idea. Facing it over the board, I came up with a rational reply. Later Kasparov used the same idea in similar circumstances to beat Beliavsky in the USSR final in 1978 in Tbilisi."

13...♗xc6 14.♘d4 ♗xd4! 15.♖xd4?!

Better was 15.exd4 ♕g5 16.g3 ♖fe8† 17.♗e2

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♕g4, although even here Black has annoying play against the king.

15...♘c5! 16.♕d1 ♘e6! 17.♖d2 d4!

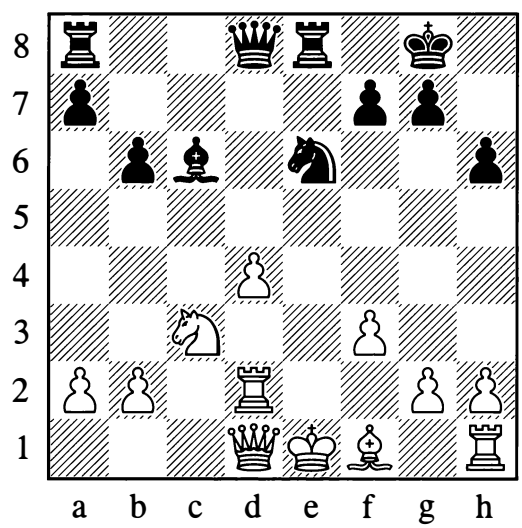
This sacrifice is natural and strong. The white king will have a hard time reaching a safe haven.

18.exd4

Also after 18.♘e2 ♕e7 19.♘xd4 ♘xd4 20.♖xd4 ♖ad8 White is dangerously undeveloped.

18...♖e8 19.f3?!

Under considerable pressure, White fails to offer the sternest resistance. Relatively best was: 19.d5 ♘f4† 20.♗e2 ♘xg2† 21.♔f1 ♗d7! 22.h4 (22.♔xg2? ♕g5† 23.♔f1 ♗h3† 24.♔e1 ♕g2 wins) 22...♘f4 23.♗g4 ♗xg4 24.♕xg4 ♕f6 White is struggling, according to the analysis of Nikitin.



19...♗xf3!!

Elmar saw that he could defend against the immediate discovered checks, but Garry finds a way to postpone it, sacrificing the bishop along the way.

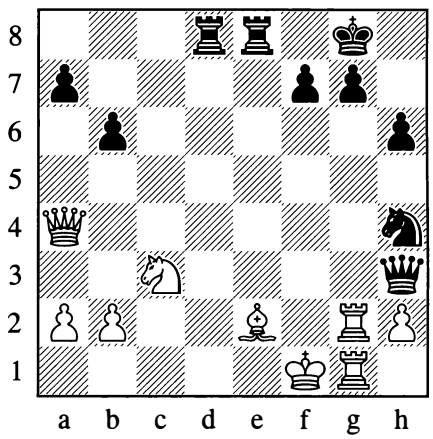
20.gxf3 ♕h4† 21.♖f2 ♘xd4† 22.♗e2 ♘xf3† 23.♔f1 ♕h3† 24.♖g2 ♘h4

24...♖ad8 looks to be winning as well, e.g. 25.♗xf3 ♖xd1† 26.♗xd1 f5 27.♖hg1 g5 28.♗e2 f4.

25.♖hg1 ♖ad8 26.♕e1

The other possibility was:

26.♕a4!?



26...♘f5!

After 26...♘xg2 27.♖xg2 it is hard to find a knockout blow.

27.♕f4

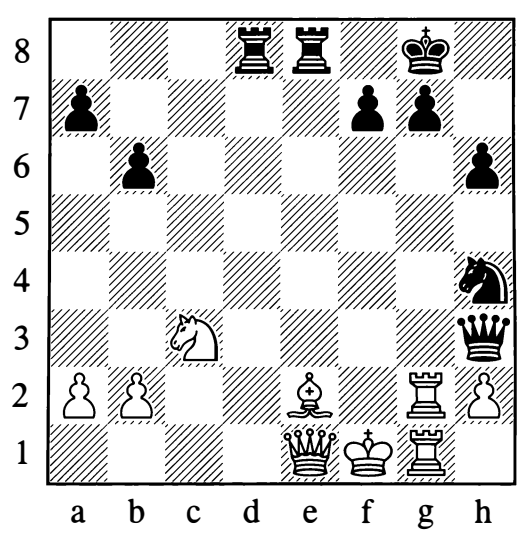
27.♔e1!? Maybe this was the best practical chance. 27...♕e3 28.♕c2 ♖e5 29.♘d1 ♕f4 30.♖f2 ♕h4 Black has two pawns and tremendous play for the piece.

27...♖d4! 28.♕f3

28.♕f2 ♖d2!

28...♘e3† 29.♔f2 ♕h4† 30.♕g3 ♕f6† 31.♗f3 ♖d2† 32.♔e1 ♖xg2! 33.♖xg2 ♘f5†

Black wins, according to analysis by Nikitin.



26...♖d3! 27.♕f2 ♘f3!

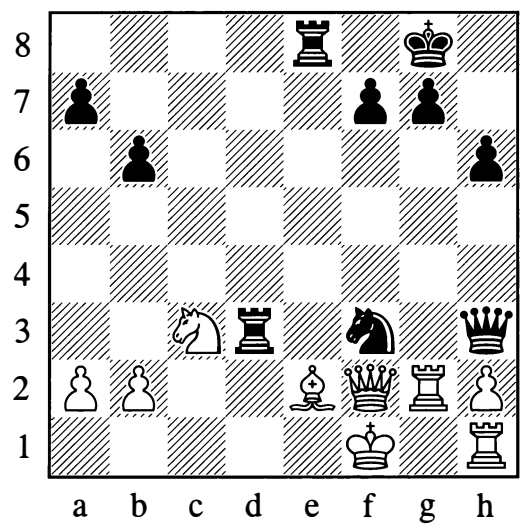
Kasparov's play makes a wonderful artistic impression. The black pieces just seem to be

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'floating' along the third rank, yet none of them can be touched!

28.♖h1

Taking the rook allows mate in one. Black exploits a similar theme after 28.♘d5 (or 28.♘b5) 28...♖d1†!! 29.♗xd1 ♘xh2#, while 28.♕g3 ♘d2†! 29.♔e1 ♖xg3 wins in a more prosaic fashion.

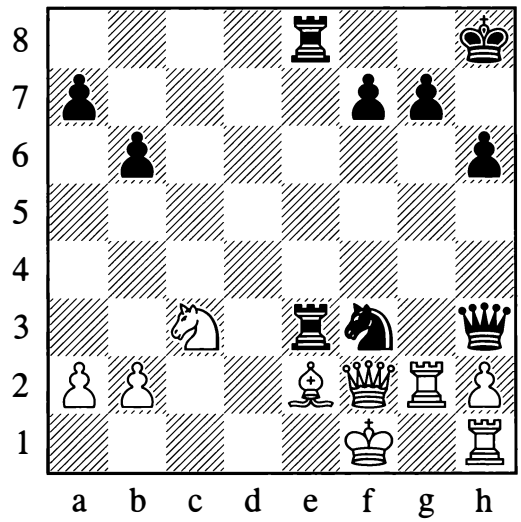


28...♖de3! 29.♖hg1 ♔h8

Black does not want to take on h2, as this would enable the king to run away.

30.♖h1

White is completely tied up, but for the moment he seems to be defending everything.



How can Black break through?

30...b5!!

0–1

Elmar resigned, as he is powerless to prevent the removal of the knight from c3, after which the bishop on e2 will fall – along with any last hopes of saving the game. This was a beautiful win from Garry against his teenage sparring partner.

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Testimonials

Garry Kasparov
Thirteenth World Champion

"Elmar Magerramov and I were part of the same cohort at the Pioneer Palace in Baku under Privorotsky in 1972. I won with Black in our very first game, but he made his Master norm before I did, in 1976, after a big jump in strength. Elmar was incredibly devoted to the openings he excelled with. The Najdorf Sicilian was one, and we worked on it together extensively. He also instructed me in the Benoni, which I employed quite successfully until 1982. Magerramov's early advocacy of ...♗g4 has been confirmed in modern praxis. From the early days we both played the Scheveningen, one of Privorotsky's favorites. We played many training games and worked together regularly. In 1986 and 1993 he assisted with my World Championship matches and his keen eye for analysis was invaluable.

Much of the development of the 7...♕b6 Najdorf Poisoned Pawn stems from Magerramov's work in the 1980s. We updated it substantially in 1993 in preparation for Nigel Short. This work was revisited in Linares 2009 in the game Grischuk – Anand, where Vishy played an incorrect move order and should have lost. Our analysis gave 19...♔h8, avoiding Grischuk's ♗d3 idea, and I used it to add good effect in a draw with Vallejo in 2004. Using a computer today you can find some improvements in our old research, but Magerramov's evaluations stand firm.

I recently met up with Elmar again in the Arab Emirates, where he's been working as a trainer for many years. He has also been spending a lot of time working with seven-piece tablebases and the fantastical sequences they produce. He pointed out that if there are winning positions with just seven pieces that require hundreds of moves with perfect play, that must say something about our so-called perfect games that last forty moves or even fewer!"

Artur Yusupov
Former world championship candidate; World Junior Champion 1977:

"I did not play much against Elmar; if I'm correct, we only played three games as juniors in 1977. He was already very well-known for his dangerous attacking play. Later I found many nice positional games played by Elmar. He certainly developed his chess later and became a more universal player. We kept meeting during big tournaments like the chess Olympiads and it was always pleasant to talk to him. He is a nice person, very friendly and with a warm sense of humour. He works as a trainer now and shares his deep knowledge of chess with the younger players, as he was doing many years ago by helping Kasparov."

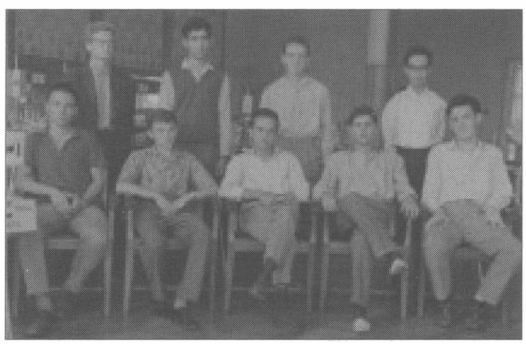
Mikhail Gurevich
Soviet champion 1985; Formerly ranked world number five:

"Elmar was the last Soviet champion and a man with a nice personality. He was known to be a hard worker when he was part of Kasparov's team. It was always a pleasure to work with him because of his diligence, magnificent understanding of the game, and most of all – his personality."

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Chapter 10 Singapore

The Stars of a developing Chess Nation



An early Singapore team, Tan Lian Ann is at the top right

From 2002 until 2006 I worked in Singapore, spending roughly seven months there each year. Naturally that experience led to a lot of memories, friendships and emotional ties being created. Before working there, I hardly knew anything about chess in the small island state that lies just south of Malaysia. Thanks to my experience, I now feel qualified to write about Singaporean chess, as a means of paying tribute to the best players that the country has produced.

The players I encountered never became, and indeed never even contemplated becoming, chess professionals. That mindset may have created limitations, but the level of talent there is still remarkable. It was tempting for me to select one of Singapore's chess personalities and discuss that player's career in the same way as I have done in the other chapters; but I eventually decided it would be more appropriate to pay tribute to a number of different players, as they are all equally deserving in their own way.

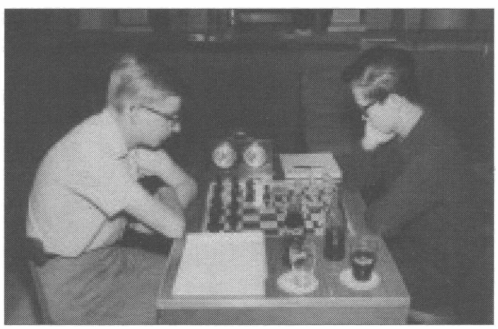
Let me share some information about the country. Sir Thomas Stamford Bingley Raffles arrived on the small 42x25 kilometre island in 1819, and with him he brought British culture. Ever since, the British have left their mark on the society. Singapore has a short history as an independent nation. Between the years of 1963 and 1965 it merged with Malaysia, and only achieved full independence later in 1965. The word Singapore means 'Lion City'. It is one of the four so-called 'Little Tigers' (the others being Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan). These countries have been noted for their exceptional levels of economic growth since the 1960s. It is a multi-ethnic society. The Chinese make up 78% of the population of five million, Malays comprise 14%, and Indians account for roughly 7%.

Chess was being played in Singapore by the end of the 19th century, and the first correspondence chess matches against Australia are from the same period. Similar matches were played against India, Surabaya, Batavia (Jakarta) and Hong Kong . Matches that Singapore won were due to the contribution of British colonists who had sufficient chess expertise.

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In 1925 Boris Kostic visited Singapore and in 1933 Alekhine, who was the reigning world champion at the time, toured the island and gave two simultaneous exhibitions. Both world-class masters were impressed with the local chess landscape and its cosmopolitanism. However, the efforts of the local Chess Federation began to bear fruit only in the late 1950s, when Singapore achieved self-government. (For these facts I thank the Romanian-born chess historian Olimpiu Urcan, who is now based in Singapore.)

Tan Lian Ann



Hübner vs Tan Lian Ann

The first notable player of international standard that Singapore produced was Tan Lian Ann, who was born in 1947 and went on to become an International Master. I became acquainted with him at the Singaporean national rapid championship in 2004. The event was held in a beautiful botanic garden called the Chinese Garden. A pupil of mine, Evan Yeo, was playing a game against an older player whom I had never seen before. I noticed Evan's opponent played decent positional chess, although Evan was able to maintain a slight edge. But later in the endgame he did not take the opportunity to improve his rook and lost. After the game I talked to Evan's opponent, and noticed that he cared about the juniors.

I only found out who this player was a few days later. I was amazed to learn that he had won the national championship at the age of just eleven! The only other player I know with similar accomplishments is the legendary Jose Raul Capablanca. Tan Lian Ann came from a chess-playing family. Three of his brothers played chess. His amazing victory came at the 1958 Singapore Championship. Incidentally, during the 1950s there were roughly 50 chessplayers in the country. He participated in two world junior events and tied for fourth place in 1963, behind the winner Gheorghiu and two others. Tan told me the following about the event.

> "I drew with Gheorghiu, playing the Najdorf with Black. I walked into a well-known prepared sacrificial line (which was unknown to me) and at the board I innovated with ...♔e8-d8. I never kept the score of this game. Later I again walked into a prepared variation in the Najdorf (I was again Black) with a knight sacrifice by the Russian Zakharov (Averbakh was his second). I again innovated and drew."

Lian Ann never turned professional, but he still made respectable results. He played first board for the Olympiad team at Lugano in 1968 – the first time that Singapore participated in the event. Tan also played at the 1970 event in Siegen. It was here that the heavily out-rated Singapore

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team achieved a remarkable 2–2 draw against Czechoslovakia. The 23-year-old Tan, rated 2340 at the time, faced the future world championship candidate Vlastimil Hort and defeated him. He finished with a superb 'plus four' score in the tournament (6½/9).

Lian Ann played again at the Skopje 1972 Olympiad. Surprisingly, his fourth and last appearance in the biggest event of the chess calendar was 20 years later in Manila 1992. He never had a fixed time for chess practice. Sometimes he would study for a couple of hours, followed by nothing for several days. He never trained at chess seriously – for instance, he usually got his opening ideas by playing through a few games from the latest *Chess Informant*. I quote him:

> "This explains why I was always in time trouble. I had to find the best moves (or what I thought was best) at the board."

The Serbian Grandmaster Nikola Karaklajic went to train him in Singapore from time to time. He helped with openings that Lian Ann found problematic, such as the Scandinavian. Lian Ann talks about Karaklajic with affection. Because of his busy professional life as an accountant, Tan played barely one important tournament per year. With characteristic humility, he explains:

> "I never thought I was much of a player. I never thought of being a professional at any time."

Despite his limited study time, he still qualified for and competed in two Interzonal tournaments, where he made even world-class players work hard for a win. To demonstrate the diminutive status of chess in Singapore, it should be noted that he had to cover all of his personal expenses at these events.

His first Interzonal was the 1973 Petropolis event. On the way to the tournament, he played in the US Open and finished third behind Browne and Benko. He won $3,000, which was a great deal of money to him, as he had come from a humble family. Many countries would have paid for a second to help their representative, but Lian Ann achieved it all by himself.

Here is a game from his second Interzonal, against one of America's best ever players.

Tan Lian Ann – Walter Browne

Manila Interzonal 1976

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4

It shows courage to go for a main line against a full-time grandmaster.

3...cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗e2

Tan is primarily a positional player, and chooses his variation accordingly.

6...♘bd7

In this high-profile game, Black got into trouble using a similar set-up: 6...e6 7.f4 ♗e7 8.0–0 ♕c7 9.♕e1 ♘bd7 10.♗f3 0–0 11.♔h1 ♔h8 12.a4 ♖b8 13.g4 b6 14.g5 ♘e8 15.♗g2 ♗b7 16.b3 ♕d8 17.h4 g6 18.♗b2 ♘g7 19.♖d1 ♖c8 20.f5 e5 21.f6 exd4 22.fxe7 ♕xe7 23.♖xd4 White had a huge advantage and went on to win, Kasparov – Short, Moscow (ol) 1994.

7.0–0 e6 8.a4

The moves ...♘bd7 and ...e6 tend not to work well together in this variation. If anyone needs proof they should play through Kasparov's exemplary win over Short from the previous note.

8...b6 9.f4 ♗b7 10.♗f3 ♕c7 11.♔h1 ♗e7 12.♕e2

Quite a natural move. Of course one can also put the queen on e1 as Kasparov did. Actually that is the most common move in the position.

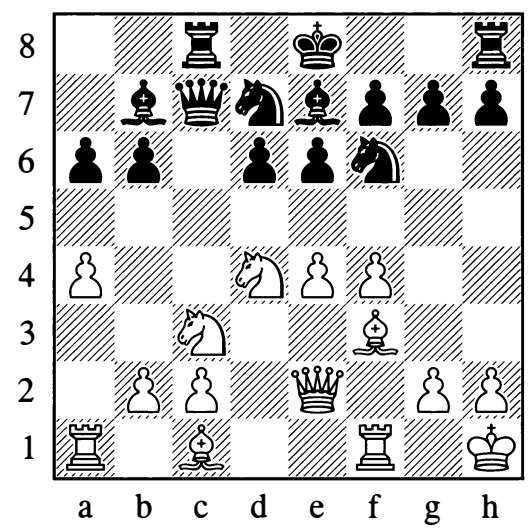
12...♖c8?!

This is a very optimistic move. Instead 12...0–0! should have been preferred. Its main function is not to bring the king to safety, nor

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to bring the rook into the game, although those things are of course important. In fact, the primary motivation is to vacate the e8-square for the knight! After 13.e5 ♗xf3 14.♘xf3 ♘e8 Black is alright, as he can later coordinate his pieces with ...♕b7 and ...♘c7.

A second drawback of the text is that the rook has abandoned its defence of the pawn on a6. When we consider the aforementioned points together, White's next move becomes obvious.



13.e5!

White does not let this chance slip away.

13...♗xf3 14.♘xf3 dxe5 15.fxe5 ♘g4 16.h3

White can also capture on a6 immediately.

16...h5?

This is a witty way to defend the knight, but in the long run a drawback will become apparent. Instead Black should have taken the pawn with 16...♘gxe5. The game Marjanovic – Jacimovic, Novi Sad 1985, continued: 17.♗f4 f6 18.♕xa6 (18.♗xe5 ♘xe5 19.♘xe5 ♕xe5 20.♕xa6 0–0 21.♖ae1 ♕d6 and Black is in the game) 18...♕c4 19.♕xc4 ♘xc4 20.♗c1 f5 21.♘d4 ♔f7 22.♘cb5 White went on to win the game, but Black's position is not yet critical.

17.♕xa6 ♕c4

After 17...♘gxe5 18.♘xe5 ♘xe5 19.♗f4 0–0 20.♕e2 White wins the h5-pawn.

18.♕xc4 ♖xc4 19.a5!

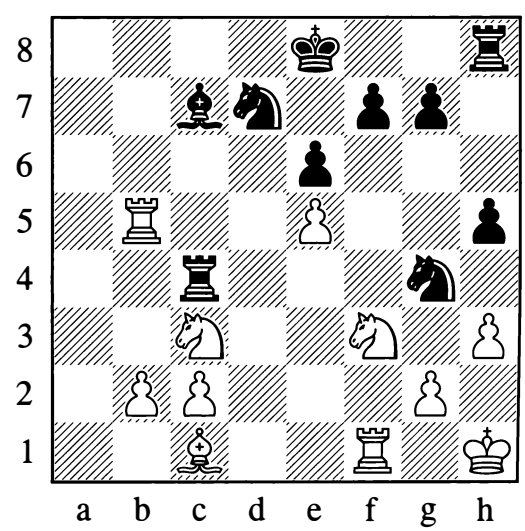
This advance opens the a-file for the rook, creates two passed pawns, and facilitates the defence of the e5-pawn. Could one ask for more from a single move?

19...bxa5 20.♖xa5 ♗d8

In principle Black would like to castle, but of course the rook must remain on h8 in order to maintain the indirect defence of the knight on g4.

21.♖b5 ♗c7?

This loses further material. Relatively best was 21...♗b6, although even here after 22.g3 ♘f2† 23.♔g2 ♘e4 24.♘xe4 ♖xe4 25.♖e1 White is a healthy pawn up.



22.♘d2!

This intermediate move draws the sting out of the check after hxg4.

22...♖c6?

22...♖xc3 gave better practical chances, as it loses less material than the game continuation. After 23.bxc3 ♘gxe5 White still has to overcome some obstacles, although there is no doubt that his position is winning.

23.hxg4

White takes the free piece, and the rest is a matter of simple technique.

23...hxg4† 24.♔g1 ♗b6† 25.♖xb6 ♘xb6 26.♘de4 ♘c4 27.b4 ♖h5 28.b5 ♖b6 29.♗f4 ♔e7 30.♖b1 ♖f5 31.♗g3 ♘xe5 32.♘a4

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♖b8 33.b6 ♔d7 34.♘ec5† ♔c6 35.♖e1 f6 36.♘xe6 ♖a8?

In an absolutely hopeless position, Black *blunders* another rook.

37.♘d4† ♔d5 38.♘xf5 ♖xa4

Black resigned. This was a nice win against a top class opponent.

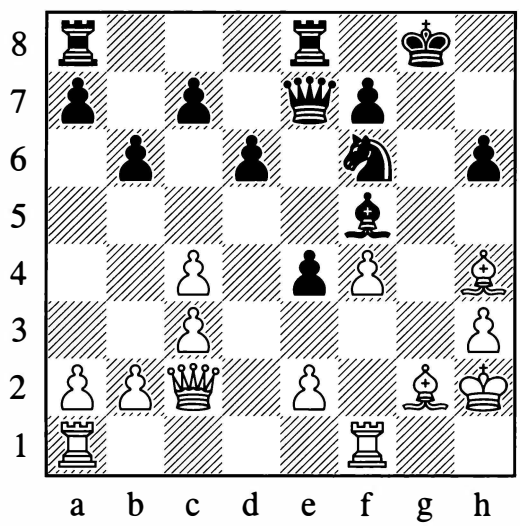
1–0

This next game, taken from the same event, was against Uhlmann, who had been a world championship candidate in the 1960s.

Wolfgang Uhlmann – Tan Lian Ann

Manila Interzonal 1976

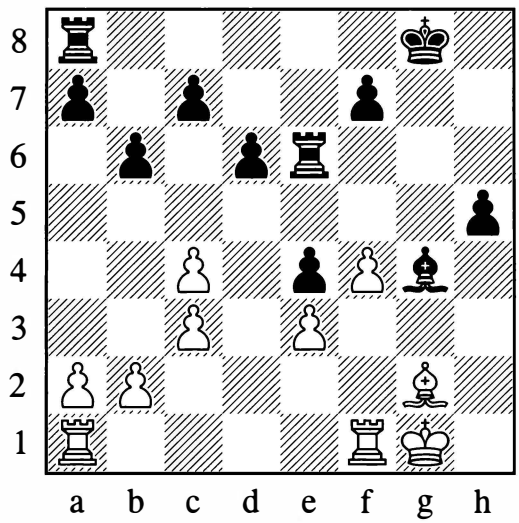
White's last move was 21.♔h2?, vacating the g-file for the rook. He must have noticed the following tactical shot, but evidently misjudged something.



21...♘g4†! 22.hxg4

I suppose the East German grandmaster had planned 22.♔g3, but only now noticed the riposte 22...♘e3! 23.♕d2 ♘xf1† 24.♖xf1 ♕e6 when White has no play for the exchange.

22...♕xh4† 23.♔g1 ♕xg4 24.e3 ♖e6 25.♕d1 h5 26.♕xg4† ♗xg4



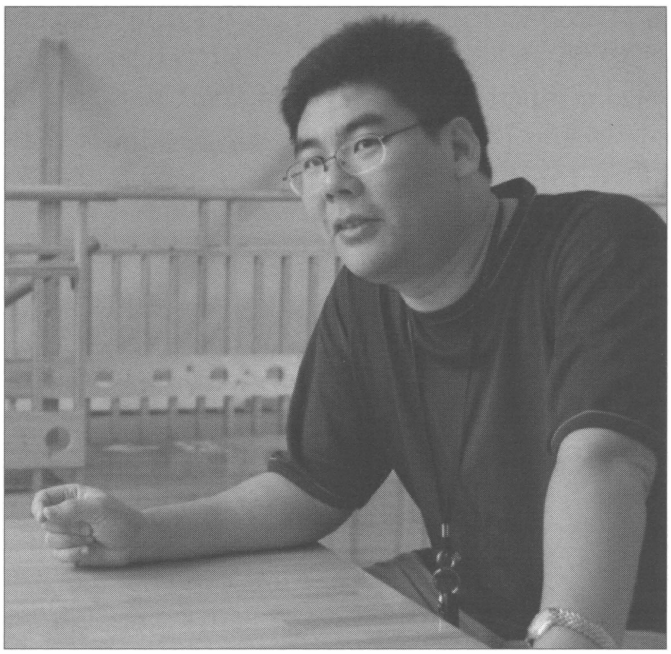
Black went on to win on move 54. He never let White have any drawing chances.

Tan Lian Ann is predominantly a positional player. He said that he likes to add small plusses to his positions. He once built up a winning attack against Smyslov, but lost after failing to make the most of his tactical opportunities. Tan Lian Ann went on to become a very successful businessman. He has sponsored a number of events and helped to reward juniors who have achieved titles. He has now retired from business.



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Wong Meng Kong



The second strong Singapore player I would like to introduce is Wong Meng Kong. I know this individual very well as I trained with him, and we spent a lot of time together walking and talking during tournaments. He provided me with some exceptional hospitality at his Hong Kong house.

Wong Meng Kong also comes from a chess family. His father was a decent player and his sister participated in tournaments as well. The unofficial title of Singapore's top player was passed to Wong Meng Kong from Tan Lian Ann in the 1980s. Meng Kong won the Asian Junior championships in 1978 and he became the first Singaporean grandmaster. Since the early 1990s he has been based in Hong Kong, but he still plays for Singapore. He is a psychiatrist by profession.

He has played in a record number of Olympiads. Between 1982 and 2006, he was selected eleven times for the Singapore team. He only missed out in 1994 and 1998. He was the member of the Olympic team when the country achieved its best place (33rd out of 108 teams) in 1986.

Konstantin Lerner – Wong Meng Kong

Beijing 1991

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗e7 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗f4 c6 6.e3 ♗f5 7.♘ge2 ♘d7 8.♘g3 ♗g6 9.♗e2 ♘f8 10.h4!?

This risky pawn sacrifice was first played by Portisch in a 1979 Interzonal game against Ivkov.

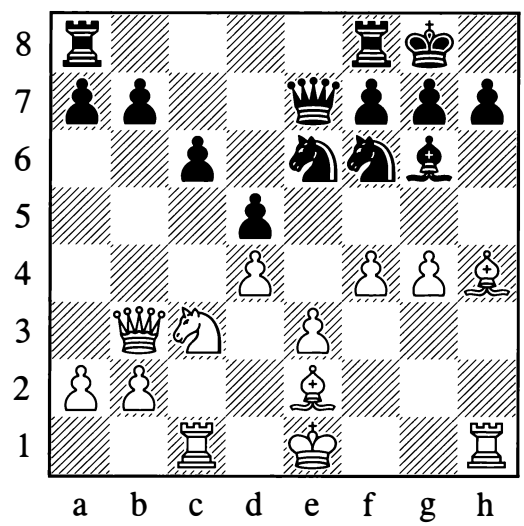
10...♗xh4 11.♕b3 ♗xg3 12.♗xg3 ♕e7

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The stem game continued: 12...♕b6 13.♕a3 ♘e7 14.♘a4 ♕d8 15.♘c5 ♕b6 16.♘a4 ♕d8 17.♘c5 ♕b6 18.♗e5 f6 19.♗h2 (19.♗f4!?) 19...♗f7 20.♗d6 ♘fg6 21.♗d3 ♘c8 22.♗g3 a5 23.0–0 ♘ge7 24.♖fe1 ♖a7 25.♕c3 a4 26.♖ab1 ♕d8 27.♗b8! White had a superior position, Portisch – Ivkov, Rio de Janeiro 1979.

13.♖c1 ♘f6 14.♗h4 ♘e6 15.g4 0–0 16.f4

White has built up a nice pawn chain, and Black needs to do something before it chokes him.



16...♘xf4!!

Here is the solution to the problem, Black already has an extra pawn and now he sacrifices a piece for two more. This should ensure a good game.

17.exf4 ♕e3 18.♕d1

Alternatively, after 18.♖d1 ♘xg4 19.♖d2 (19.♕xb7? ♖ab8 20.♕xc6 ♖xb2 and Black breaks in) 19...♖fe8 20.♕xb7 ♘h2 Black has lovely play for the piece.

18...♘xg4 19.♕d2 ♕e6 20.♔f1

White has to decide how he should organize his defence. Black has decent compensation in all cases, for instance:

20.♘d1 ♖fe8 21.♖c3 ♘h6 22.♖e3 ♗e4 23.♖g1 ♘f5 Black stands well.

Or 20.♘a4 ♕e4 (20...b6!?) 21.0–0 ♘e3 22.♖f2 ♘f5 23.♘c5 ♕xd4 24.♕xd4 ♘xd4 25.♘xb7 ♖ab8 26.♗a6 ♖fe8 White is tied up.

20...♖fe8 21.♗f2 ♕f5!

This keeps an eye on the weak f-pawn and opens the e-file for the rooks.

22.♖e1 ♘f6 23.♗f3 ♖xe1†

Black exchanges a defensive piece.

24.♗xe1 ♖e8 25.♖h2 ♗h5!

He continues the same strategy. This will create more holes for his queen to exploit.

26.♗xh5 ♘xh5 27.♖e2 ♕h3† 28.♔g1 ♕g4† 29.♔h2

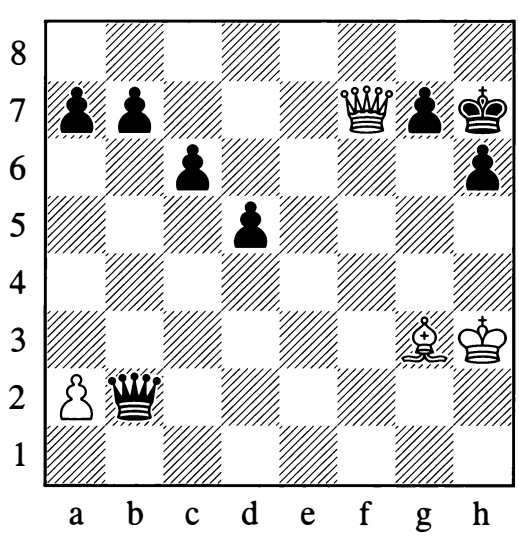
After 29.♔f1 ♖b8 Black gets a fourth pawn for the piece.

29...♖xe2† 30.♘xe2 ♕f3 31.♗h4 h6 32.♕e1?

White is likely to run out of moves at some point, and so he decides to give up a pawn at once. Unfortunately he loses several more in due course.

Better was 32.b3, e.g. 32...a5 33.♗e1 ♘f6 34.♘c3 b5. White can only watch how Black makes progress. Still, he would have had better defensive prospects than in the game.

32...♘xf4 33.♘xf4 ♕xf4† 34.♗g3 ♕xd4 35.♕e8† ♔h7 36.♕xf7 ♕xb2† 37.♔h3



37...♕b1!

With five(!) pawns for the piece, Black has a decisive material advantage. The only thing that remains is to guard against checks. The outcome is practically decided, and the remaining moves need no explanation.

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38.a4 a5 39.♕d7 ♕h1† 40.♔g4 ♕e4† 41.♔h3 b5 42.axb5 cxb5 43.♕xb5 a4 44.♕a6 ♕h1† 45.♔g4 h5† 46.♔g5 ♕e4 47.♔xh5 g6† 48.♔g5 ♕f5† 0–1

Meng Kong is unusual in that he is very close to being a 'universal' player, who is more or less equally comfortable adapting to any type of position. (He is probably best at positional play, but only to a very small degree.) He also has a versatile approach to openings.

Often he avoids theory completely, yet on the other hand he occasionally prepares a very sharp line, as seen in the next game.

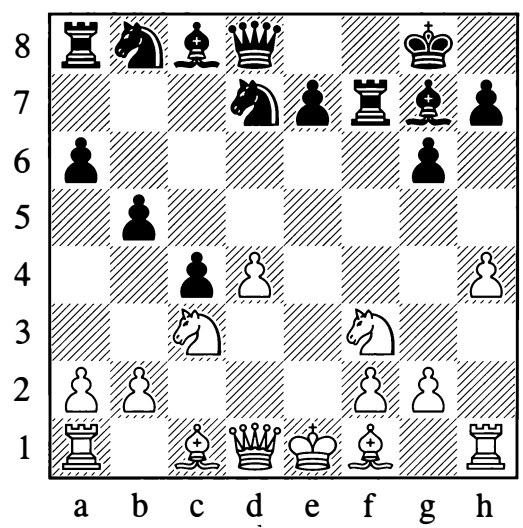
Chan Peng Kong – Wong Meng Kong

Singapore Championship 2003

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.♕b3 dxc4 6.♕xc4 0–0 7.e4 a6 8.e5 b5 9.♕b3 ♘fd7 10.h4?!

Chan Peng Kong is usually well-prepared in the opening. Along with Goh Weiming, I would rate him as one of the most educated players in Singapore at present.

10...c5 11.e6 c4 12.exf7†?! ♖xf7 13.♕d1



13...e5!

Black plays fluently. This novelty is fully in accordance with the spirit of the opening.

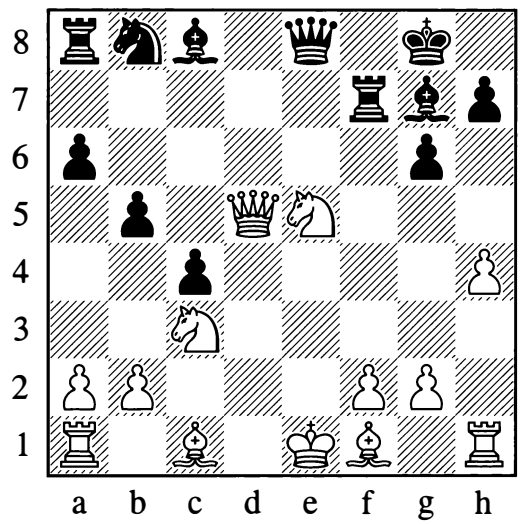
14.dxe5?!

It was safer to keep the position closed with 14.d5.

14...♕e8 15.♕d5??

This is a bad blunder. Relatively best was 15.e6 ♘c5 16.♗e3 ♘xe6 17.h5 ♗b7, and although Black has a nice position, White can probably survive.

15...♘xe5! 16.♘xe5



16...♗xe5

Naturally Black avoids the queen exchange. His lead in development is overwhelming, and his active pieces soon swarm all over the enemy position.

17.♗e3 ♗b7 18.♕d2 ♘c6 19.♗e2 ♖d8 20.♕c1 ♘d4 21.h5

White desperately tries to conjure up some attacking chances, but the opponent's pieces are too strong.

21...♗xg2 22.hxg6 hxg6 23.♖g1 ♕c6 24.f4 ♗f6 25.♕d2 ♗h4† 26.♗f2 ♘xe2 27.♕xe2 ♖e7 28.♗xh4 ♖xe2† 29.♘xe2 ♖e8 30.♖d1 ♕e4

0–1

Chan Peng Kong certainly had a bad day – he normally plays much better than this. Incidentally he is the one who, apart from Wong Meng Kong, has represented Singapore most often, with nine appearances at Olympiads.

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The next game gave me special joy, as Meng Kong beat the outstanding Chinese GM Bu Xiangzhi, a former child prodigy who was once the youngest grandmaster of all time. I found it especially gratifying, since the opening was one that we had worked on together.

Wong Meng Kong – Bu Xiangzhi

Macau (rapid) 2007

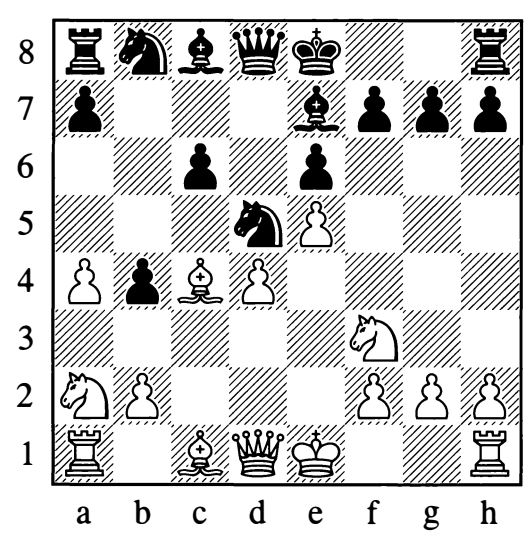
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6

The Slav was hurriedly taught to Wong by Tan Lian Ann. History had repeated itself. In 1978 Professor Lim Kok Ann had discovered that Lian Ann was hopelessly unprepared for the Zonal in Ito, and so introduced him to this opening.

3.♘c3 dxc4 4.e4 b5 5.a4 b4 6.♘a2

We had looked at 6.♘b1 as well.

6...♘f6 7.e5 ♘d5 8.♗xc4 e6 9.♘f3 ♗e7



10.♕e2

Though we analysed Meng Kong's repertoire lines closely for some time, he would often forget them. I quote him:

> "It was a surprise to learn this natural move was a theoretical novelty, despite 85 games appearing from a search of an updated database."

The main alternative was 10.♗d2. Bu also suffered a defeat against this move, in the following exciting game. 10...a5 11.♘c1 ♘d7 12.♘b3 ♗b7 13.♕e2 0–0 14.♗d3 c5 15.♕e4 (15.0–0 ♕b6 transposes to the main game) 15...f5 16.exf6 ♘7xf6 17.♕xe6† ♔h8 18.♘e5 ♗c8 19.♕c6 ♖b8 20.0–0 ♗b7 21.♕e6 ♗c8 22.♘f7† ♖xf7 23.♕xf7 ♖b7 24.♗g5 ♗d6 25.♕h5 c4 26.♗xc4 ♕c7 27.♕e2 ♗xh2† 28.♔h1 ♘f4 29.♕e5 ♕xc4 30.♖ac1 ♕g8 31.♗xf4 ♘g4 32.♕e4 ♗xf4 33.♕xf4 ♖f7 34.♕xf7 1–0 Avrukh – Bu, Biel 2007.

10...a5 11.♗d2 ♘d7 12.♘c1

White improves the passive knight in anticipation of the ...c5 break.

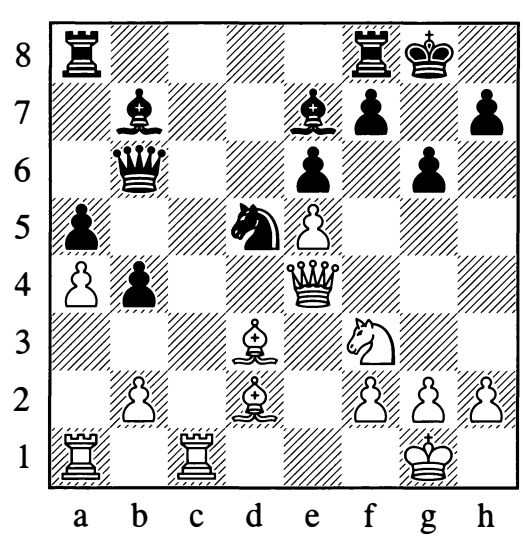
12...♗b7 13.♘b3 c5 14.0–0

If 14.♗d3 ♕b6.

14...0–0 15.♗d3 ♕b6 16.dxc5

White has to accept that he has achieved no advantage. Now he keeps things simple, as it is a rapid game.

16...♘xc5 17.♘xc5 ♕xc5 18.♕e4 g6 19.♖fc1 ♕b6



20.♗g5!

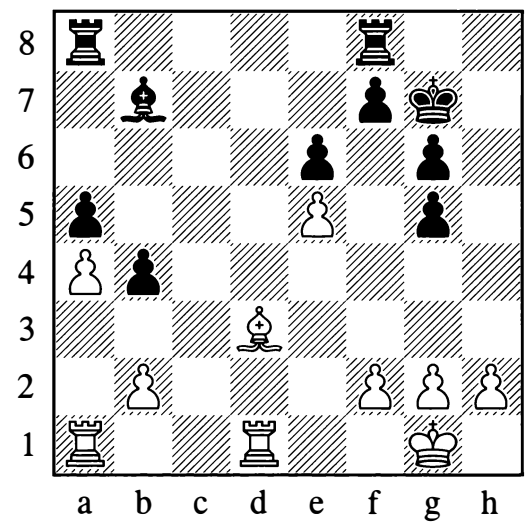
Most of White's pieces are pointing towards the kingside, so it is logical for him to focus his attention there. Black is not in any serious danger, but he should remain vigilant, as he does not have too many defenders in that area.

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20...♗xg5 21.♘xg5 h6 22.♘h3 ♔g7!

Of course the very strong Chinese grandmaster defends carefully.

23.♘f4 ♘xf4 24.♕xf4 ♕d8 25.♖d1 ♕g5 26.♕xg5 hxg5



27.♗c4!

White must organize his pieces in the proper way. There is no time for 27.f3? ♖ac8 28.h3 ♖c5 29.♖e1 ♖d8 30.♗b5 ♖c2 when Black invades.

27...♖fd8 28.f3 ♖ac8 29.♗b3

Meng Kong avoids 29.b3 which would place another pawn on a light square.

29...♔f8 30.♔f2 ♔e7 31.♖xd8

With the king centralized, Black was already threatening ...♗d5 followed by a rook invasion on c2.

31...♖xd8 32.♖d1 ♖c8 33.♔e3!

This enables White to meet ...♖c5 with ♔d4, instead of having to put his rook on the passive square e1.

33...g4!

Bu played this without hesitation. It forces a structural weakening because the white king no longer defends g2. If White decides to take on g4, then both his h- and e-pawns may become weak. One way or another, he is going to end up with an inferior structure, so he should look for compensation in other areas.

34.♖d6!

The white rook becomes active. Dr Wong's strategy was first and foremost to play for safety in this game – but that does not mean he intended to do it passively.

34...gxf3 35.gxf3 ♖c1

Black could have won a pawn with 35...♖h8!, but according to my analysis White can still hold the endgame. After 36.♖b6 ♗xf3! is a pretty shot, but too many pawns are disappearing. Play continues 37.♗xe6 fxe6 38.♔xf3 ♖xh2 39.♖b5 ♖xb2 40.♖xa5 b3 (40...♔d7 41.♖a6) 41.♖b5 White reaches the draw.

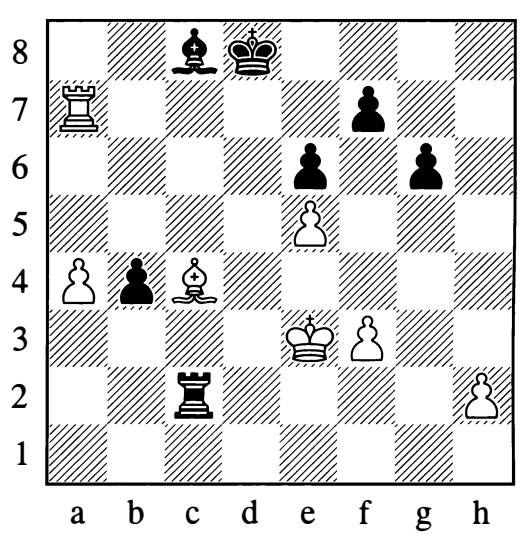
One can only speculate as to whether Bu calculated this and rejected it in an effort to keep more winning chances alive.

36.♖b6 ♗c8 37.♖b5 ♖b1 38.♖xa5 ♖xb2 39.♗c4 ♖c2?

Black should have taken the opportunity to grab a pawn with 39...♖xh2.

40.♖a7† ♔d8?

It was better to defend the f-pawn with 40...♔e8. Then after 41.♔d4 ♖xh2 Black is worse, but the game is far from over.



41.♔d4!

The centralized king can be useful for both attacking and defensive purposes. It can help to neutralize the passed b-pawn, and might also head for b6 to support the a-pawn, or d6 to threaten the black king.

41...♖c3

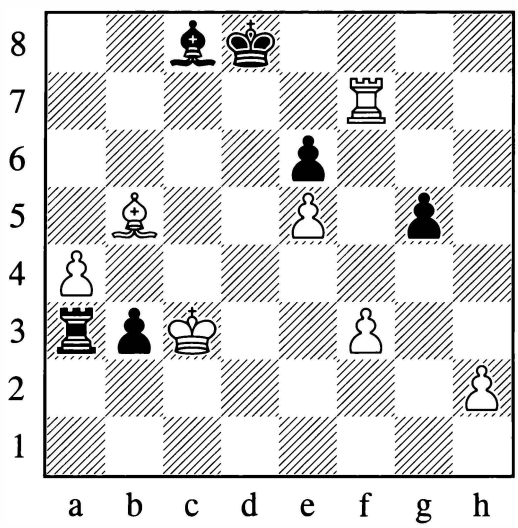
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After 41...♗d7 42.a5 ♖xh2 43.a6 ♖h1 44.♔c5 ♖a1 45.♖b7 Black is unlikely to survive against such an a-pawn.

42.♖xf7 ♖a3

42...♔e8 43.♖f6 ♔e7 44.♖xg6 ♖xf3 45.a5 and White wins.

43.♗b5 b3 44.♔c3 g5



45.h3!

Black is stuck in a fatal zugzwang.

45...♖a1 46.♔xb3 ♖e1 47.a5

This particular passed pawn should definitely be pushed.

47...♖xe5 48.♔b4 ♖e1 49.♔c5 e5 50.♔b6 ♗xh3 51.a6 g4

Bu tries his best, but it is too little, too late.

52.a7 ♖a1 53.♗a6 ♖b1† 54.♔c5 ♖c1† 55.♔d6 ♖d1† 56.♔xe5 ♔e8 57.♖h7

1–0

With an Elo of 2692, the Chinese grandmaster was Meng Kong's highest rated victim.

Meng Kong played on top board for the Olympiad team for a long time. But later Grandmaster Wu Shaobin took over. He came from China and since the mid-1990s he has been working as a coach in Singapore. He says he has many more Olympiads to come.

Ignatius Leong



The Singapore team at the start of the Turin Olympiad in 2006. Wong Meng Kong on board 1 is furthest away. Ignatius Leong is standing behind him. On board 2-4, IM Chan Peng Kong, FM Lo Kin Mun Dominic and Tay Li-Jin Jeslin. The team beat Rwanda 4-0.

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When one writes about Singapore's remarkable chess personalities, one cannot omit Ignatius Leong, the General Secretary of FIDE. He is not the first highly ranked Singaporean chess politician as Lim Kok Ann was previously the General Secretary as well, but he has unquestionably done the most for the game out of anyone from their island nation. He did this by establishing the Asian Chess Academy during the mid-1990s, in order to provide training for promising young players. The academy is best known for sending trainers to schools to give lectures.

Leong is a natural leader. He has great vision and he is very good at setting goals and targets. In the Asian Chess Academy (the name of the company) pupils not only learn chess but also a lot about discipline. He has managed to introduce the game of chess to many young boys and girls. The ones who are talented and interested have a chance to stick with chess. He has fulfilled his first aim, as many of those he has taught now play in school chess and participate in tournaments.

His other goal, to have several world-class juniors, is a slower process, but Singapore is on the right track. At the 2007 world youth championships, going into the final round they had four juniors fighting to finish in the top ten, although between them they managed only a single draw. On average the standard is much better than it was 5 years ago, and I expect them to raise the bar further in the future.

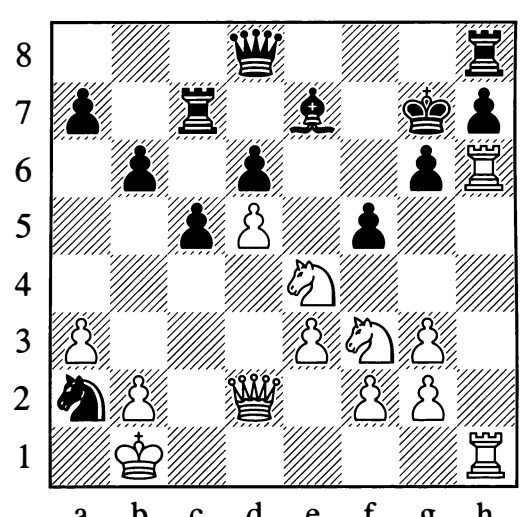
Leong can often be found at the world junior championships, and even if he cannot make it he always follows the progress of the Singaporean representatives. After one of my pupils, Chan Weng Chee, lost two consecutive games, Leong called me instantly to offer his support. He is not only passionate about his native country, but cares about the whole of the south-east Asian region. This is something I had not observed amongst Europeans, especially those in central Europe. I never experienced this in Hungary; sadly it was more the contrary. It would be nice if some of my fellow Hungarians learned to be happier when our neighbours experience success. In this sense, I learned a valuable lesson from the Singaporeans.

As a chess professional, and later as a trainer, I never had a 'boss'. Leong was my first, and still the only such person I ever had during the five-year period I worked there. In my home nation of Hungary, despite having pupils like Leko and working a lot with the Polgars, I cannot make a living as a trainer, so I am sincerely grateful to Leong for providing me with steady work and helping me to feed my family as a result. In Hungary I generally receive little recognition for my efforts in chess, while in Singapore I was always treated well. I am sincerely grateful for that.

Ignatius Leong is not only a fan of chess – he is also a fine player, as shown by the following lovely excerpt.

Ignatius Leong – Jonathan Grant

Elista Olympiad 1998



23.♘d4!!

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This is a crushing exploitation of the weak king.

23...cxd4 24.♕xd4† ♗f6 25.♘xf6 ♖c1†!?

Black tries a final roll of the dice. In the case of 25...♕xf6? White wins easily with 26.♖xh7†.

26.♖xc1 ♘xc1 27.♘e8†!

There are other ways to win, but the text is nicest.

27...♔xh6 28.♕g7† ♔g5 29.♘f6!

This final finesse leaves the victory in no doubt.

29...f4 30.gxf4†

1–0

Jason Goh Koon Jong

Teaching chess in schools has brought me many new pupils. Without a doubt, the best among them has been Jason Goh. My very first lesson in Singapore was with him, and I ended up working with him more than any other player.

In nearly two decades of coaching, I have taught a lot of pupils and worked with quite a number of players. If I had to say who was the most talented, Jason would be rivalled only by Peter Leko. Peter has obviously gone on to achieve much more in chess, but the comparison is not entirely fair, since he has been a full time professional since he was a kid, while Jason has always attended school. Although their respective styles are contrasting – Jason is predominantly a tactician – there are also many similarities, such as their calculation skills, determination and ability to orientate themselves quickly at the board.

It is interesting that Jason's talent was not immediately obvious. In the beginning, we all – including his parents – tried very hard, but during the first couple of months there was no special improvement. It was only about six months after we started to work together that his results began to take off.

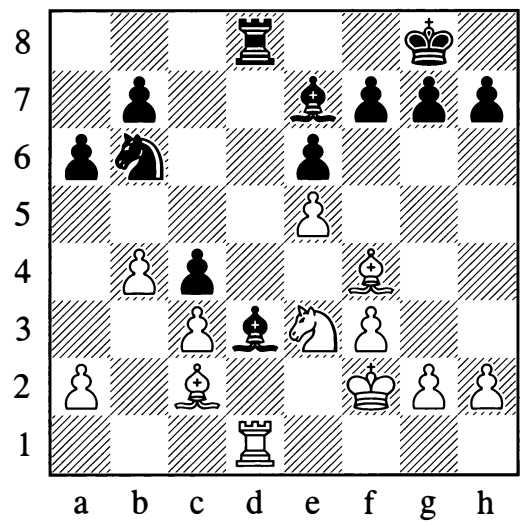
At the World Under-14 in 2002, Jason played four or five of the players in the top ten in that age group. He scored about 50% against them and did not look weaker than them at all – despite being a year younger than his rivals.

The following year he met the Russian representative who, in 2008, won the strongest open tournament in the world: Moscow's Aeroflot Open. After a quiet opening, Jason outplayed his opponent to reach the following position.

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Ian Nepomniachtchi – Jason Goh Koon Jong

World Championship U-14, Halkidiki 2003



Black is obviously comfortable, but how should he capitalize?

28...g5!

This surprising move wins material by force.

29.♗g3 ♗xc2! 30.♖xd8† ♗xd8 31.♘xc2 ♘d5

Thanks to Jason's clever 28th move the bishop cannot retreat to d2, so White has no way to defend his c-pawn.

32.♘a3 ♘xc3

Black wins a pawn and the outcome is more or less decided. 32...b5!? 33.♘b1 f5 was also good enough.

33.♘xc4 ♘xa2

Now the young Russian is forced to jettison a second pawn.

34.b5 axb5 35.♘d6 b4 36.♔e2 b3 37.♔d3 ♗a5

White has the better king, but he is too far behind in material.

38.♘c4 ♘c1† 39.♔e4 ♗c3 40.♗f2 b2 41.♘a3 ♘b3 42.♗e3 ♘d2† 43.♗xd2 ♗xd2 44.♘b1 ♗c1 45.g3 ♔f8!

By improving his king, Black ends his opponent's resistance. The game is soon over.

46.♘c3 ♔e7 47.♘b1 ♔d7 48.♔d4 ♔c6 49.♘a3 b6 50.♘b1 ♔b5 51.♔d3 ♔b4 52.♔c2 ♔c4 53.♘c3 ♔d4 54.♘e4 ♔xe5 55.♘f2 f5 56.h3 ♔d4 57.♘d1 h5 58.g4 hxg4 59.hxg4 fxg4 60.fxg4 ♔e4 61.♔b1 ♔f3

0–1

After six rounds Jason occupied sole first place with 5½ points. Unfortunately he was not quite able to maintain his form, and finished in equal fourth place, along with four others, and ahead of a certain Magnus Carlsen. I think he was as strong as anybody in the tournament.

Right after the aforementioned event, the South East Asian games were held. It is something like the Olympiad, but only including the countries of that region. First there was an individual rapid elimination event, in which Jason defeated Zaw Win Lay (2495) from Myanmar. Then he faced the toughest challenge against Grandmaster Adianto, who was the number one player in the region at the time.

Jason lost the first game with Black, but was able to beat his opponent with White when the Indonesian grandmaster needed only a draw. The next games, which were at a shorter time limit, followed the exact same pattern. In the final 'Armageddon' playoff game, Jason drew the white pieces. He had six minutes against five, but if the game ended in a draw he would be eliminated. Fortunately the white pieces once again brought victory, so he advanced to the next round.

In the semi-final he met another formidable opponent: his team-mate, Wu Shaobin. Here is one of the decisive games.

Wu Shaobin – Jason Goh Koon Jong

Ho Chi Minh City 2003

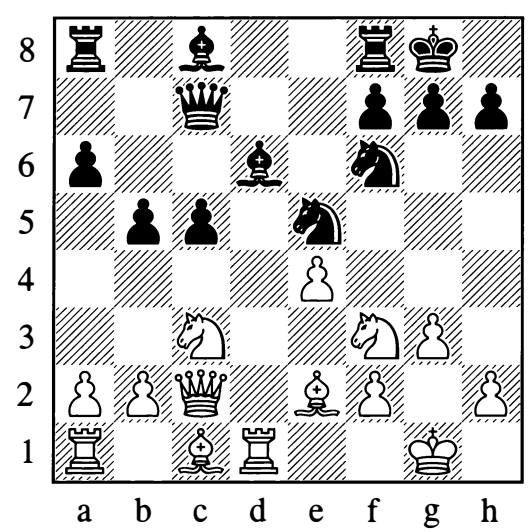
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 e6 5.e3 ♘bd7 6.♕c2 ♗d6 7.♗e2 dxc4 8.♗xc4 0–0

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9.0–0 a6 10.♖d1 ♕c7 11.e4 e5 12.g3 b5 13.♗e2 c5?

This a bit premature. Maybe the Chinese Grandmaster wanted to follow a Karpov game, which went as follows: 13..♖e8 14.a3 ♗b7 15.dxe5 (15.♗g5 exd4 16.♘xd4 h6 17.♗e3 ♗f8 18.♘f5 c5 19.♘d5 ♕c6 20.♗f4 ♘xd5 21.exd5 ♕f6 Black was a bit better in Av. Bykhovsky – Károlyi, Tel Aviv 1999) 15...♘xe5 16.♗g5 ♘xf3† 17.♗xf3 ♗e5 18.♗xf6 gxf6 19.♗g4 ♖ad8 20.♗f5 ♗c8 21.♗xc8 ♕xc8 22.♖ac1 ♕e6 23.♖xd8 ♖xd8 24.♘d1 c5 25.♕xc5 ♕b3 26.♘e3 ♕xb2 27.♕c8 ♖f8 28.♕g4† ♔h8 29.♖c8 1–0 Karpov – Kramnik, Monte Carlo (rapid) 1998.

14.dxe5 ♘xe5



15.♗g5! ♘fd7?!

Relatively best was 15...♘xf3† 16.♗xf3 ♗e5 17.♗xf6 gxf6! when White has an edge, but nothing too serious.

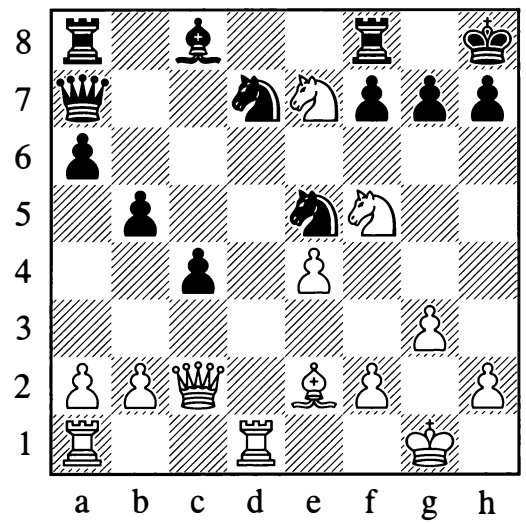
16.♘d5 ♕a7 17.♘h4?!

It was better to combine play on both flanks with 17.a4!, when Black has real problems.

17...c4 18.♗e7?

White continues to play on the kingside. Instead he should have played against his opponent's queenside pawns. One way of doing so is 18.b4!?.

18...♗xe7 19.♘xe7† ♔h8 20.♘hf5



20...♘c5

This is simple and strong.

21.♘xc8 ♖axc8 22.♘d6?

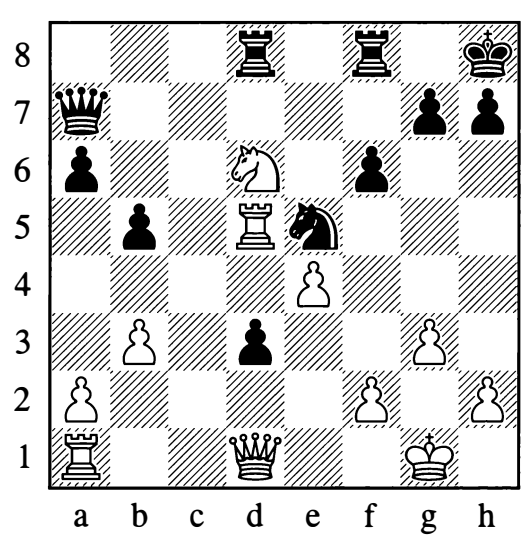
22.♖d5!? was better. The knight seems to have occupied a nice outpost, but it lacks the proper support. This turns out to be a crucial mistake.

22...♖cd8 23.♖d5 f6 24.b3

Playing on this side comes too late.

24...♘cd3 25.♗xd3 cxd3 26.♕d1

Sacrificing the exchange with 26.♖xd3!? would have forced Black to find some witty moves: 26...♘xd3 27.♕xd3 ♕e7 28.♖d1 ♖d7 29.♕d5 g5! 30.f3 ♖fd8! 31.♘f7† ♔g7! 32.♘xd8 ♖xd5 33.♖xd5 ♕a3 and Black wins.



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26...g6!

This is a wicked idea.

27.♖c1 ♕b6!

Black traps the knight on d6. The lack of support proved costly indeed!

28.♘c4 bxc4 29.bxc4 ♖xd5 30.cxd5 ♕d4 0–1

Jason eventually eliminated Wu Shaobin in the decider as well.

In the final he faced Grandmaster Mark Paragua of the Philippines. In the first game he succumbed, after failing to draw a rook and bishop versus rook ending, and in the second game he drew. Despite the eventual disappointment, to achieve the silver medal before his 14th birthday was a remarkable result.

In the slow-play event, he achieved an IM norm.

In 2004 Jason continued his rapid ascent, and won the Singapore national adult championship.

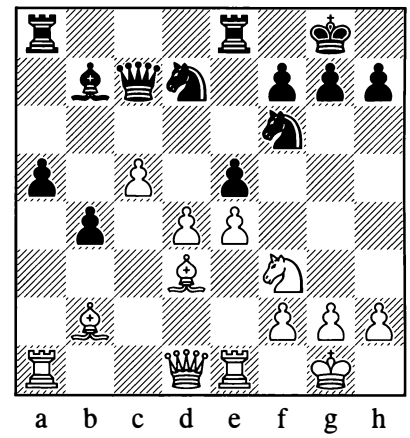
Perhaps spurred on by Jason's achievements, other Singaporean juniors also began to raise their level. One such case was Goh Weiming, who is a few years older than Jason. They went on to have several close fights at the national championships, including the following game.

Jason Goh Koon Jong – Goh Weiming

Singaporean Championship 2005

1.d4 e6 2.c4 d5 3.♘f3

A gifted tactician, Jason tends to be quite happy in sharp theoretical lines. Here is another example: 3.♘c3 c6 4.♘f3 dxc4 5.e3 b5 6.a4 ♗b4 7.♗d2 ♗b7 8.axb5 ♗xc3 9.♗xc3 cxb5 10.b3 a5 11.bxc4 b4 12.♗b2 ♘f6 13.♗d3 ♘bd7 14.0–0 0–0 15.♖e1 ♕c7 16.e4 e5 17.c5 ♖fe8



18.♖c1! exd4 19.c6! ♗xc6 20.♘xd4 ♘e5 21.♗b5 ♖ad8 22.♕c2 b3 23.♕xb3 a4 24.♕g3 ♕b6 25.♘xc6

1–0 Goh Koon Jong – Bui Vinh, Ho Chi Minh City 2003.

This game was preparation almost all the way. This secured him an IM norm.

3...♘f6 4.♘c3 c6 5.♗g5

This is the most ambitious move.

5...dxc4

Goh takes up the challenge, and enters the notoriously complicated Botvinnik Variation. These days 5...h6, the Moscow Variation, is in fashion.

6.e4 b5 7.e5 h6 8.♗h4 g5 9.♘xg5 hxg5 10.♗xg5 ♘bd7 11.g3

This move order was advocated by Lilienthal.

The alternative was 11.exf6 ♗b7 12.g3. Now after 12...c5 White has no choice but to push his d-pawn, whereas in the game he gets the chance to do something different.

11...♗b7

A potential drawback of Lilienthal's move order is that Black has the interesting option of 11...♖g8!?.

12.♗g2 ♕c7?!

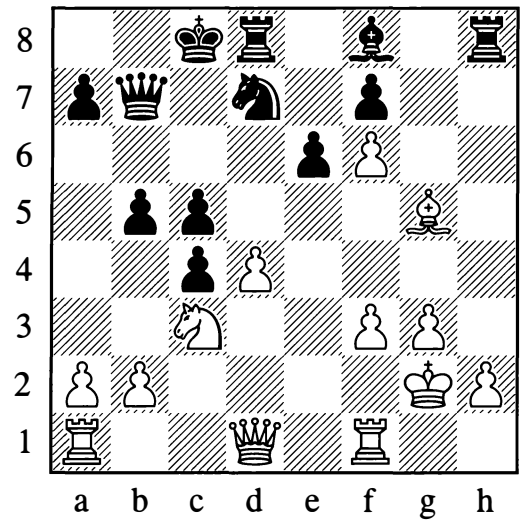
I do not rate this move too highly here. The queen usually goes to b6.

13.exf6 c5 14.0–0!

I think this is the strongest line for White. 14.d5 would reach a standard position.

14...♗xg2 15.♔xg2 ♕b7† 16.f3 0–0–0

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17.dxc5!

In this line Black temporarily becomes very active, but he cannot achieve anything substantial. His position loses life and White can undermine his queenside.

17...♘xc5 18.♕e2 ♘d3 19.♘e4 ♕d5

Previously I believe only 19...♕c6 had been played. But I think the variation is troublesome for Black.

20.♕e3!?

This is an interesting move. Weiming did not consider it when preparing for this game. It stops ...♗h6 and attacks the a7-pawn.

Even stronger would have been:

20.a4!? b4 21.b3!

The knight on d3 is Black's pride and joy, but it can be undermined.

21...c3

21...cxb3 22.♖ad1 ♔b7 23.♖d2 b2 24.♖fd1 ♕a2 25.♘f2 White wins.

22.♖ad1

Weiming said after the game that he had feared this while at the board, although he had not considered it in his preparation. Indeed, Black does seem to be in some difficulties, as shown in the following sample variation.

22...♗h6 23.♗xh6 ♖xh6 24.♕e3 ♖hh8 25.♕xa7 c2 26.♕a6† ♔b8 27.♖d2 ♕xb3 28.♘d6

White wins.

20...♔b8 21.b3

White starts undermining the queenside.

21...♗a3

This takes away the c1-square from the rooks. It is also useful to block the a2-pawn for the time being.

22.bxc4 ♕xc4

Alternatively, there is 22...bxc4 23.♖ab1† ♔a8 24.♖fd1. It is difficult to find a plan for Black, while White can play h4 or slowly get closer to the c-pawn.

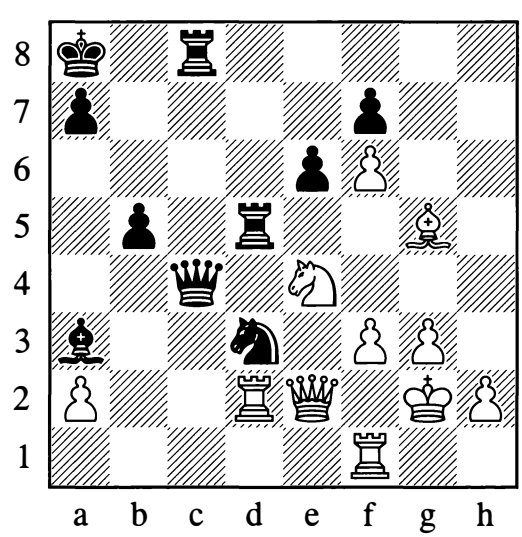
23.♖ad1 ♖d5 24.♕e2

Another possibility was: 24.♖d2 ♗b4 (after 24...♗c1? 25.♖xc1 ♘xc1 26.♘d6 White takes the f7-pawn, which is usually bad news for Black) 25.♖e2 ♖c8 26.h4 The position is complicated.

24...♔a8?

Stepping aside makes ...♘f4† into a threat, but this is not really a useful move. Better was 24...♖c8! and after 25.h4 ♗b4 Black's chances are not worse.

25.♖d2 ♖c8



26.♖b1!

This is a very strong move, as it not only threatens to fork Black's pieces on the third rank, but also restricts the enemy bishop. Now Black cannot play against the a2-pawn by putting the bishop on b4.

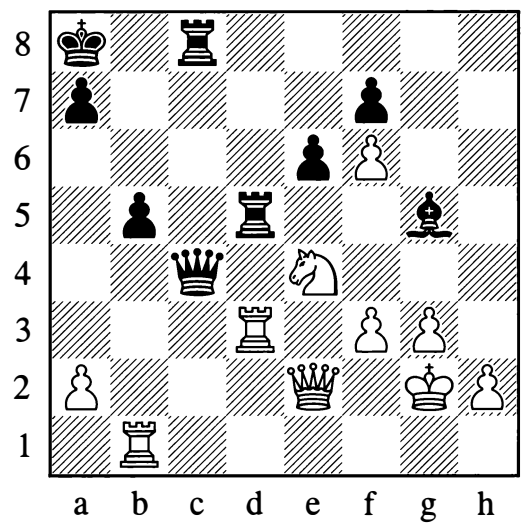
26...♗c1?

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Not 26...♗b4?? when 27.♖xd3 wins.

Instead it was necessary to wait with 26...♗f8!. This may not look like much fun, but nevertheless it would have kept Black in the game, e.g. 27.h4 a5 or 27.♖b3 ♘b4.

27.♖xd3 ♗xg5



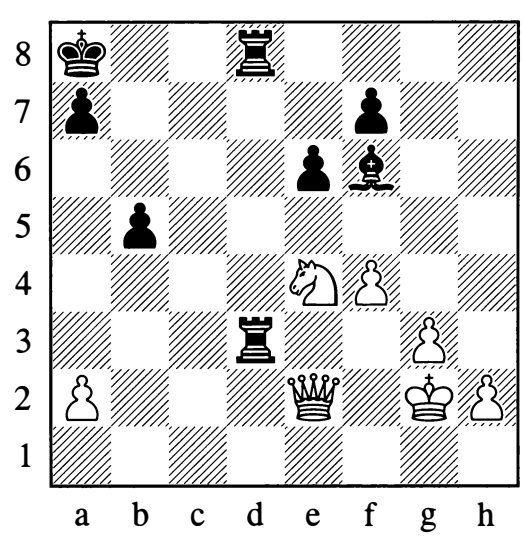
28.♖bb3!

This precise move is forced, but strong.

28...♖cd8 29.♖bc3 ♕xd3?

29...♖xd3 Taking with the rook would have given White a much bigger chance to go wrong. 30.♖xc4 bxc4 31.f4! (31.♘f2 ♖3d4 32.♕e5 ♖4d5 33.♕c7 ♗xf6 is less convincing) 31...♗xf6 32.♕h5 c3 (32...♗d4 33.♕xf7) 33.♕xf7! (after 33.♘xf6? c2 34.♕c5 ♖d1 Black survives) 33...c2 34.♕c7 And White wins.

30.♖xd3 ♖xd3 31.f4! ♗xf6



32.♕h5!

The f7-pawn is so often the target in the Botvinnik Variation. The present game is a case in point; once this pawn disappears, the same thing happens to Black's chances of saving the game.

32...♗d4 33.♕xf7 ♗b6 34.♕xe6 ♔b7 35.f5 ♖d1 36.h4

1–0

Black is powerless against the passed pawns.

Jason was the youngest of the 56 players to have represented Singapore at chess Olympiads – when he played at Bled 2002 he had not even reached his thirteenth birthday! Here I show his most impressive win from the three Olympiads in which he has participated.

Jason Goh Koon Jong – Hichem Hamdouchi

Calvia Olympiad 2004

1.d4 e6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 exd5 4.cxd5 d6 5.♘c3 g6 6.♘f3 ♗g7 7.♗f4 ♘f6

Masters usually return to the main Benoni against White's chosen set-up, rather than trying the more eccentric development of the knight on e7.

8.♕a4†!?

This is a very testing variation, which is designed to disrupt the harmony of the black pieces. According to the database, it was first played by Wolfgang Uhlmann in 1955.

8...♗d7 9.♕b3 ♕c7 10.e4 0–0 11.♗e2

11.♘d2 is the other main line.

11...b5

11...♘h5 is more often played, while alternatives such as 11...♖e8 and 11...a6 are also well known.

12.♗xb5 ♘xe4 13.♘xe4 ♕a5† 14.♗d2 ♕xb5 15.♕xb5 ♗xb5 16.♘xd6 ♗a6

The interesting 16...♗a4!? prevents castling queenside, but has never been played here according to my database.

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17.0–0–0 ♖d8?

Overlooking White's next move. It was safer to develop with 17...♘d7.

18.♖he1!

White develops with a significant tempo gain, exploiting the weakness of the eighth rank.

18...♘d7 19.♗e3?

White risks losing his advantage. Instead 19.♗g5! was much better, e.g. 19...♖db8 (19...f6 20.♗e3) 20.♖e7 (20.b3!?) 20...♗xb2† 21.♔c2 ♘f6 22.♘xf7. White has a clear advantage.

19...♘b6?

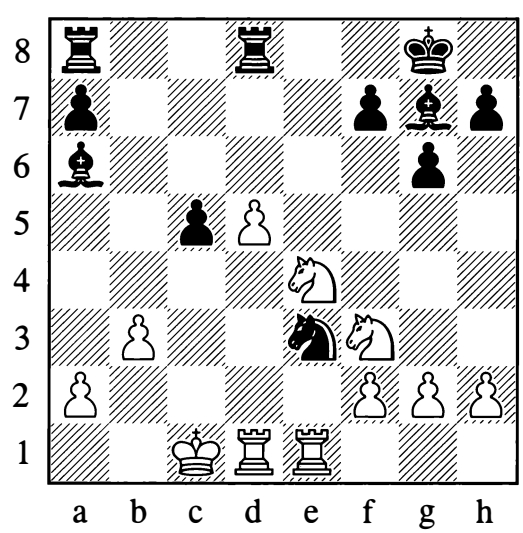
Black could have equalized instantly with 19...♘f6!.

20.♘e4 ♘c4?!

Better was 20...♘xd5 21.♗g5 f6 22.♘xc5 ♖ac8 23.♗e3 ♗f8 24.b4. Black wins back his pawn with an equal game.

21.b3 ♘xe3?!

21...♘b2 Probably it is better to win the exchange for the knight rather than the bishop. 22.d6 ♘xd1 23.♖xd1 ♗e2 24.♖d5 The position is equal.



22.♖xe3!

White sacrifices an exchange. In return he eliminates Black's best piece and a pawn.

22...c4 23.b4 ♗b7 24.♘c3 ♗h6?!

Black cannot resist the bait. He should have preferred 24...♗xc3 25.♖xc3 ♗xd5 with decent chances to hold.

25.♔c2 ♗xe3 26.fxe3

Black has won a tiny amount of material, but suddenly he has no active piece. In particular, the b7-bishop has no bright prospects whatsoever.

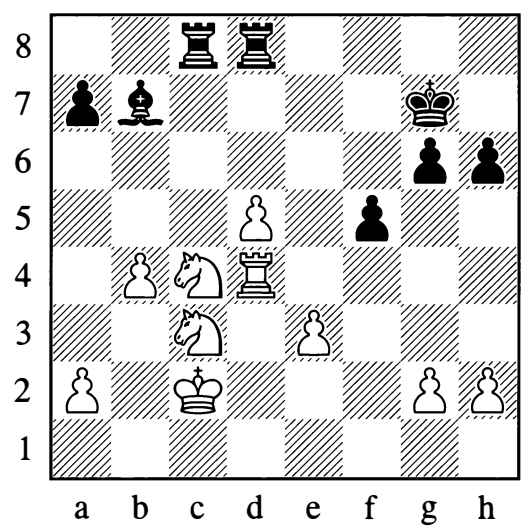
26...f5 27.♖d4 h6?

The position was already bad, but wasting time with pawns moves was not the way to improve it.

28.♘e5 ♔g7 29.♘xc4

White has the second pawn in the bag. His winning chances are good.

29...♖ac8



30.♔b3!

White plays the next eleven moves with impressive power.

30...g5 31.g3 ♖c7 32.d6! ♖f7 33.b5 ♗c8 34.♔b4!

In addition to his other trumps, White's king has now become a real force as well.

34...♖e8 35.a4 ♗e6 36.♘e5!

Jason improves his good knight so it becomes an even better one.

36...♖b7 37.♘d3 ♖f7 38.♘c5!

This is an ideal square for the knight.

38...♗d7 39.♘d5!

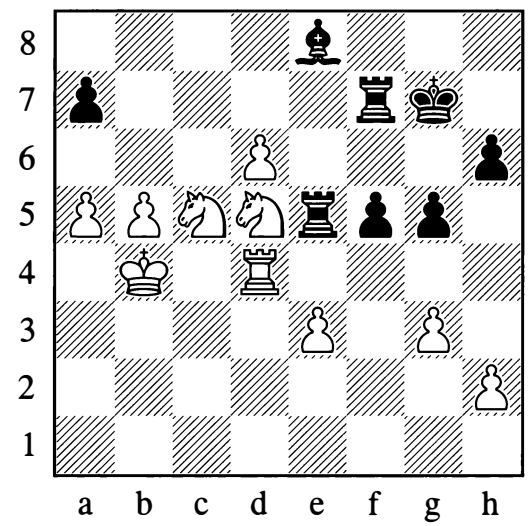
White's domination in the centre is unbearable for the Moroccan grandmaster.

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39...♖e5 40.a5!

White's queenside pawns decide.

40...♗e8



41.a6!

White is winning – his pawns are simply too powerful. Black tries a desperate sacrifice, but it is all in vain.

41...f4 42.gxf4 gxf4 43.exf4 ♖e2 44.♘c3 ♖b2† 45.♔a3 ♖xh2 46.d7 ♗xd7 47.♘xd7 ♖h5 48.♔b4 ♖hf5 49.b6 axb6 50.♘b5 ♖xf4 51.a7 ♖xd4† 52.♘xd4 ♖xd7 53.♘f5†

1–0

After this event Jason went on to win the National Championship of Singapore. However, the school system is so demanding that after this tournament he virtually stopped playing chess. He came back from this 'retirement' to make a grandmaster norm. He was 14 when he achieved the norm, and even attended school during the event. To score a grandmaster norm at this age may even be a record for a player who has always attended school. In a way it is sad; had he stopped school for a year he would have clearly made the highest title, possibly a medal at the World Youth, but he virtually stopped playing chess because of school. Still, there is no doubt that he has left his mark on Singaporean chess.

Since this pioneering effort, the average standard of Singaporean juniors has improved significantly. However, at the present time nobody has reached Jason Goh's level. Maybe it is more important that he has proved that one can be a world-class under-14 player, even though he or she attends school. My own opinion as a coach is that it can be done if one can devote one and a half or two hours to chess on weekdays and five hours on both Saturday and Sunday.

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Testimonials

Tan Lian Ann

Eugenio Torre
World championship candidate; First Asian to achieve the title of International Grandmaster:

"He is a man for whom players have a high regard, because he is a great and very accomplished man outside of chess. He is a great tactician, very good during complications! The only suspect element of his game was his opening play, maybe because he had little time to study. His talent is natural."

Nikola Karaklajic
Strong International Master; Participant in many finals of the Yugoslav championship:

"I first met the promising 15-year-old Tan Lian Ann in 1963. In that year, he was crucial in deciding the outcome of the World Junior Championship by beating the tournament favourite, USSR player Zakharov.

Subsequently, Tan Lian Ann played in many tournaments (he played twice in Interzonals) and met players such as Smyslov, Keres, Bronstein, Geller, Polugaevsky, Panno, Pachman, Torre, Hort etc.

Having captained the Singapore Olympiad Team four times, I helped him to pick up some openings.

He was a model chess player – smart, polite, obedient, imaginative, orderly, persistent, courageous... Naturally, it was my pleasure to be in his company."

Jason Goh Koon Jong

Utut Adianto
Best ever Indonesian player, who was number one player in his country for more than 25 years:

"Jason Goh is the player I met in the second round of Rapid Chess in SEA Games 2003, which took place in Saigon – now Ho Chi Minh City. The tournament consisted of 16 players, using the knockout system. In the first match, I met Brunei's Hirawan, whom I beat 2–0. In the first game against Goh I won easily, confirming my view that it would be another 'rest day' before battling in the semi-final and final! Things changed when I lost to this young player (at the time I was unaware just how young!) in the second game. Then matters went from bad to worse, and I was eliminated after the tie-break!

Soon after losing, I realized this boy is a genuine product of Ignatius Leong's School of Chess. He has everything that it takes to be a strong Grandmaster. Only the culture and environment are not in his favour – it is difficult to make a living by playing chess in Singapore, where 'time really is money!' I hope that one day soon there is a Singaporean who can bravely choose chess as a profession, with all the difficulties that entails! Surely if that happens it will give more colour to South East Asian Chess."

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Wong Meng Kong

Paul Motwani
Scotland's first grandmaster; World Under-17 champion 1978; Seven-time Scottish champion:

"Wong Meng Kong really became a good friend when my family and I started visiting and staying at his home in Hong Kong. My wife's family live in Shenzhen, not far from Hong Kong, and it has become a special treat for us to visit Wong Meng Kong and his family.

On the chess side, I can only report that Wong Meng Kong and I have faced each other in two proper games: at the 1978-79 World Under-17 Championship in Sas Van Gent, Holland, and in the 2000 Istanbul Olympiad. We talked a lot after our draw in Istanbul, and the next year we started meeting up in Hong Kong! Our very first game, way back 30 years ago, was much tougher though... I recall feeling that I really had to struggle for a draw as Black in a Ruy Lopez. True Spanish torture! However, I finally hung on for a vital half-point (in round 8 of the 11-round event) and went on to win that World Championship.

The other main thought I have about Kong's chess is that he's extremely creative and unpredictable! So, if you ever have to face Kong over the board... expect the unexpected!!"

Wu Shaobin
Played for China and Singapore at several Olympiads:

"I met Wong Meng Kong for the first time during the second Singapore Pool's Invitational GM Tournament in 1997. In this particular tournament, Meng Kong missed the GM norm by half a point but his performance did enough to leave a lasting impression on me. Through this tournament, I obtained a greater understanding of the standards of Singaporean Chess.

Meng Kong is one of the country's best players. Together, we participated in the 2000, 2002 and 2006 World Chess Olympiads. However, I assumed the captain's role during the 2006 Olympiad, which allowed me to have more time and opportunities to assist him in both analysis and preparation. This inevitably gave me a greater understanding of his chess playing style and capabilities. Meng Kong is a classic example of a strategic player. Perhaps due to his busy working schedule as a psychiatrist, Meng Kong does not have the time for serious theoretical opening preparation. As a result, his openings tend to be less complicated and his theoretical preparation tends to be lacking in depth. However, his middlegame and endgame abilities are tremendous. I noticed that whenever he achieved a slight advantage in the middlegame, he would, more often then not, progress seamlessly into the endgame, maintaining that slight advantage and converting the win by slowly increasing his minute advantage."

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Chapter 11 Oleg Pervakov

The Moscow Magician



Oleg Pervakov in Bled 2002, visiting the Chess Olympiad

I have been fortunate enough to play against some of the truly great icons of the chess world, including Kasparov, Tal and Anand. Peter Leko was my pupil, and I also worked frequently with the Polgar sisters. I have played against all the excellent Hungarians, even the older grandmasters like Barcza and Szabo. I have written books about exceptional players like Judit, Kasparov and Karpov, and wrote a long article on Fischer. They are all special individuals who are known by chess fans around the world.

However, if I have to select whom I consider the greatest of the less well-known personalities in chess society, without any hesitation, I would vote for Oleg Pervakov.

Pervakov is not famous, but he is a special talent whose artistry deserves a wider audience. Some Russian chess fans may know of his name, but few are acquainted with his masterpieces. When I ask chess followers from other parts of the world whether they know who Oleg Pervakov is, they almost always shake their heads in response. But when I show them one of his beautiful studies, they shake their heads in disbelief! These people are chess lovers and would go to a simul by a famous player, but they would not have attended a Pervakov lecture, where he would reveal his finest achievements.

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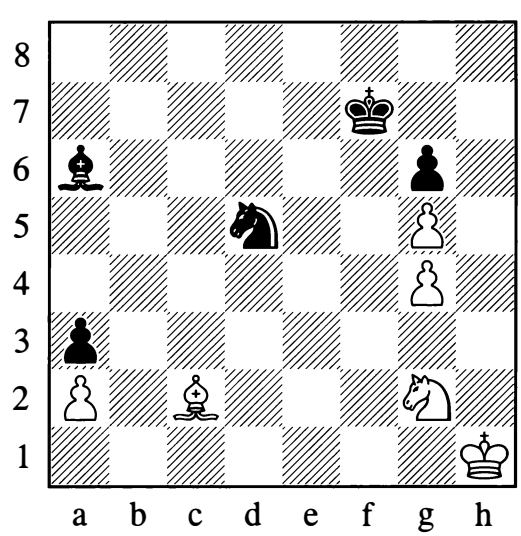
I met him only for five minutes, completely by chance, in a travel agency in Turin during the Olympiad of 2006. I was queueing up for a ticket when I noticed there were some Russian people in front of me in the line. As they were speaking, I listened to see whether I could understand at all. I do not remember what they were talking about. Perhaps I did not understand or I may have just found their conversation uninteresting. But then one of the ladies at the agency asked for one of the customer's names, and to my overwhelming surprise, I heard the man state the name of my very favourite composer! I could not help myself, and told him in Russian that I respected his work. I obtained his e-mail address, although we never corresponded. More recently, after starting work on the present book, I contacted Oleg and explained that I wished to devote a chapter to my favourite composer. Happily, both for myself and for the reader, he agreed.

If I may digress slightly, I will mention that my own passion for compositions, and particularly endgame studies, was sparked as a junior by reading *The Tactics of Endgames*, a superb book by Jeno Ban. Later, I played for one year in the Budapest Club, Tipografia, where IM Laszlo Navarovszky was the captain. A keen composer himself, Laszlo was keen to encourage others and so there was even a dedicated composition section of the club.

Years later, Peter Gyarmati (another excellent composer) passed on to me a fairly big composition database. I went through it for the sheer joy, but also I wanted to add some instructive examples to endgames I already knew and used for teaching my pupils. I was already looking for Pervakov's studies.

I had so much pleasure looking at Pervakov's endgame studies, I feel compelled to share them with the readers of this book. As a result, I hope that more people will come to know of him and his works, and that those already acquainted will gain an even deeper appreciation for the man and his studies. The world deserves to hear about this little-known genius and his masterpieces!

I remember Yochanan Afek (featured in Chapter 2), another highly regarded composer and a good friend of mine, once telling me that Oleg Pervakov was the best composer of our time. It is fitting that we begin with a study that Yochanan showed me when staying with me in Kecskemet.



White to play and win

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1.♗b3

This looks like a simple win, but Black has some resources.

1...♔e6 2.♘f4† ♔d6!

After 2...♔e5 3.♘xg6† ♔d4 4.♔g2 the extra g-pawns ensure White's victory.

3.♗xd5

Taking the pawn is ineffective now:

3.♘xg6 ♘e3! 4.♘f4 ♔e5 5.g6 ♘xg4 6.g7 ♘h6 7.♘g2 ♗b7 8.g8=♕ ♘xg8 9.♗xg8 ♗d5!

After this simplification Black will take the a2-pawn, and luckily for Black the knight is too far away to catch Black's king in the corner.

10.♗xd5 ♔xd5 11.♔g1 ♔d4 12.♔f2 ♔c3 13.♔e2 ♔b2 14.♔d2 ♔xa2 15.♔c2 ♔a1

Followed by 16...a2 and a stalemate. If the knight stood on e2 then 16.♘c1 would win. If the knight was on d2, it would be a mutual zugzwang.

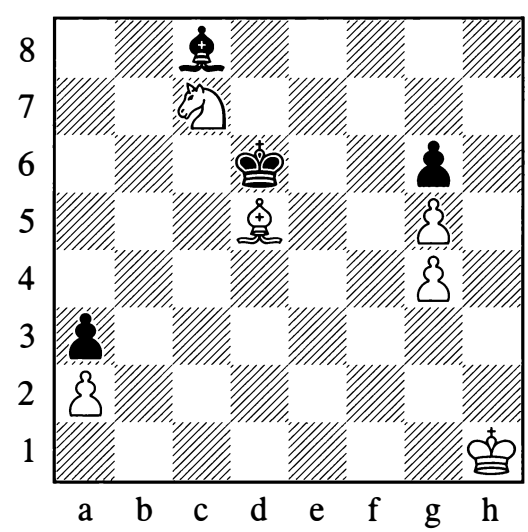
3...♔e5!

Black threatens to win back a piece and then draw because of his dominating king.

4.♘e6! ♗c8

Black obviously has to try and regain the lost piece, and 4...♔xd5 5.♘c7† will not do.

5.♘c7 ♔d6



6.♘a8!

This is a stunning way in which to hang on to the piece. A great composer can utilize all 64 squares on the chessboard!

6...♗xg4

This is the most resilient move. Black regains a small unit of material while, more importantly, placing his bishop well away from any troublesome knight checks.

Other moves offer little resistance, one example being 6...♗a6 7.♔h2! and the approach of the king is decisive, while Black still cannot take the bishop.

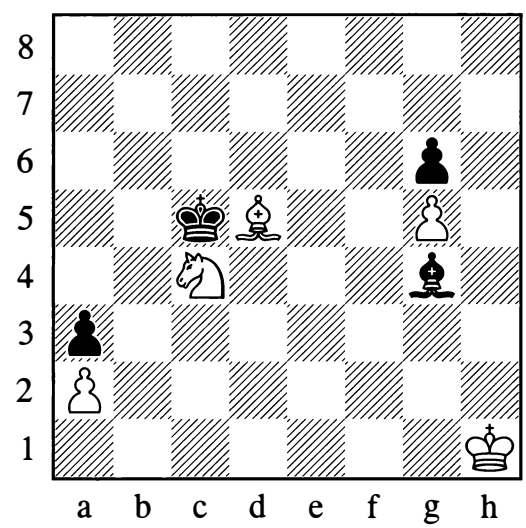
7.♘b6

White's task is still far from trivial. If his bishop moves along the h1-a8 diagonal, then the a2-pawn will be lost.

7.♗f7 allows 7...♗f3†, followed by 8.♔h2 ♗xa8 9.♗xg6 ♗d5, when White has no chance to win.

7...♔c5 8.♘c4!

It seemed as though the black bishop had escaped, but it turns out that it is still within forking distance!



8...♗e2!

Black is not ready to give up yet!

If instead 8...♗f5, then 9.♗f7 would win easily.

The text leaves both of White's pieces en prise, so his next move is forced.

9.♘e3 ♔d4

Once again White must find a clever way to retain his extra piece.

10.♘g2!

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After an amazing journey, White's knight returns to the square where it was at the start of the study.

10...♔xd5 11.♘f4†

And White wins. The knight has just made its eighth(!) consecutive move (soon to be followed by another: 12.♘xe2).

In this pearl of a composition, Pervakov was a co-author with Kuznetsov. They won the first prize in the October Anniversary competition in 1987. The individual moves are not too hard to find, but when you put them all together, the solution is a thing of beauty.

After I decided to write this chapter, I sent Pervakov an e-mail explaining what I was doing and asking if he would be happy to answer some questions. He agreed, so I sent him my questions a few days later. A month went by, and I heard nothing. One month later I sent him a polite reminder, to which he wrote "sorry" and said that he would send his answers. Another month passed, and I asked him again. But he never replied.

It seems that exceptional people can sometimes be hard for mere mortals to understand. I trust that he was so busy that he had no time, because he composed some more magical studies. So although I very much wished to introduce not only his studies, but the man himself, I thought that I would not be able to do it. I have always thought that especially talented artists should be judged by what they have accomplished, achieved and what they leave behind, rather than by any personal eccentricities. To readers who love to read Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment* and the other masterpieces are what really matter.

Time passed, and I finished writing the chapter. I was quite happy with it, as Pervakov's studies by themselves made for a wonderful addition to the book. But then, out of the blue, I suddenly received an e-mail with his responses! I was of course delighted to learn about the man himself, and to be able to share this information with the readers. Pervakov's English is good, although he answered my questions in Russian. Here are my questions along with his responses, translated of course!

Could you introduce yourself? When and where were you born?

"I was born on the 8th of April 1960 in Kirov. It is a city approximately 1000 kilometres north-east of Moscow."

What is your profession?

"In 1983 I graduated from the Bauman Moscow State Technical University. My speciality was plasma physics. From 1983 to 1995 I worked in the Kurchatov Institute of Atomic Energy, in the department of plasma physics. I have invented a few patents in the technology of pulse welding. In 1995 I started working for *64* magazine under the supervision of Alexander Roshal. During the last years of his life I occupied the position of deputy editor. Currently I continue to do this job. Frankly speaking, my first profession did not give me as much satisfaction as the current one does."

Do you have family?

"I am married, I have no children."

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How did you start playing chess and when did you start composing?

"When I was six years old my parents took me to the chess club at Kirov's Pioneers' Palace. After that I had several spare-time activities like gymnastics, football and boxing. Finally at the age of around twelve I returned to chess. I became the Kirov's children's chess champion and later the junior champion. My first steps in endgame composition were triggered by Kasparian's book *Studies* in 1972. My mother randomly bought that book for me. She tried to buy all the newly published chess books for me. My first study was published in the chess magazine *Chess in the USSR* in 1977. During my studies at the institute, I met Anatoly Kuznetsov, who was the chief of the study department of the magazine.

I created only two studies before my graduation in 1983. Finally I became irrevocably attracted to endgame studies in 1984 after meeting a lot of the other Moscow composers like Kralin, Sumbatyan, Banny, Chepizhny, Umnov and Kofman. I consider Anatoly Kuznetsov to be my mentor in studies."

How do you usually compose? Do you use computer programs to check your ideas?

"I find the essence of my ideas without computer involvement. It is quite a tough question. It is like composing music. Sometimes an idea comes when I am asleep and dreaming, such as starting positions of some endgame studies. Thus, to check the correctness of the starting position is not a necessity – they were already checked up there, above! I think they come from God. Nevertheless, nowadays it is a sin not to use the computer to verify studies. At times computers spot interesting holes in our ideas. Not long ago I wrote an article on one case like that in *64* magazine."

How much are you an inspirational composer and how much are you a hard worker?

You work as an editor for the chess magazine 64. If it were financially feasible, would you like to be a full-time composer?

"I think if composition was my profession (let's say it was well-paid), I would have never achieved such successes in it. Inevitably it would have become a routine – like a boring job. For me composition always was and always will be my beloved hobby. When I compose studies I simply create, and I do not think about how I could earn money with it. When I manage to finish an excellent study – it is an indescribable feeling, it gives a huge charge of energy for other matters."

Do you have more and less productive periods of your career, or has it been evenly balanced?

"I think my most successful years were between 1987 and 1997."

Which of your studies gave you most satisfaction?

"Most of my studies have brought me great gratification."

Do you judge differently the same study now compared with the way you did a long time ago? Do you ever change your judgement?

"My affection and judgement do not change with time."

I am not an expert in composition, so please forgive me if I ask something amateurish! I get the

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impression you often use batteries in your work, do you agree with that? If yes, is it intentional, or does it just happen like that?

"Yes, play with batteries often occurs in my studies, but my favourite themes in my studies are: logical ideas, thematic strategy and systematic movements."

How was your playing career?

"I was a reasonably active player until 1983, when I became a candidate master."

Do you still play sometimes?

"Nowadays I sometimes play blitz tournaments, blitz on the internet and rapid tournaments."

What style do you have?

"I usually play positionally."

Who are your favourite composers and players?

"Who are my favourite composers? Maybe Troitzky, Kasparian, Liburkin, Wotawa. Who are my favourite players? There are many. Best of the best are Alekhine, Smyslov, Bronstein, Tal, Fischer, Karpov and Kasparov."

Did any particular composer strongly influence you?

"As I already mentioned, Kasparian's book *Studies* and Anatoly Kuznetsov."

Some great over-the-board players were also composers. Whom do you consider to be the best of them?

"Without a doubt the seventh World Champion, Vassily Smyslov. He has virtually lost his sight, but he still composes interesting studies! In recent years I helped him to publish the book *My Studies* (there are 114 studies in its last edition). We often keep in touch, especially on the phone. We inform each other about news in chess and about new studies. Also I like Benko's studies."

Sorry for not being properly educated in other parts of composition; do you compose things like checkmate in two?

"Sometimes it is interesting for me to put together something in another genre of composition. I have checkmates in two, checkmates in many moves, as well as helpmates, selfmates and retro types of composition. Some of them won awards."

To me it is clear that Karpov and Kasparov became so great first of all because of their special qualities, but also because of the Soviet system, which supported chess and created a special chess environment. Did the changes in Russia have a strong effect on composition in the country?

"Sadly people's interest in composition – especially among youngsters – has fallen compared with Soviet times. After all chess had a special status in the USSR, which inevitable affected me as well. Now there are many other possibilities for young people."

Do you know exactly how many studies you have composed?

"I did not count them exactly – it must be around 250."

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How many of your works have been 'cooked' by computers?

"Not so many. Taking into account the complexities and the difficulties of my studies, the number is not too high."

How do you see the future of composition?

"Concerning problems, I do not make any prediction. Concerning studies in the future, it looks as though composition is becoming more like over-the-board play: logical ideas of equal forces with interesting ideas on both sides. I categorically refuse to do deep 'computer studies' with solutions even world-class players do not understand."

How many prizes have you won in competitions?

"I have achieved nearly 50 first prizes."

I was told there are only six endgame study grandmasters in the world, and that you obtained that rare title two years ago. What does that mean to you?

"For me, the grandmaster title means acknowledgement of my talent and my contribution, both to composition and to chess as a whole."

How well known are you and your work amongst chess players in Russia?

"As I work in the editorial office of a chess magazine, I have the opportunity to promote both my own and other composers' creations among grandmasters. For example if Kasparov, Kramnik, Karpov, Anand or Topalov visits the office I show them new studies."

How strong is Russia in this particular part of chess?

"At the moment Russia is unquestionably the leading country in the composition department. We missed out on the gold medal at the world team championship only once to Ukraine."

Did they use endgame studies to improve players' strength in the USSR? How much do you think it improves one's endgame-playing strength?

"I know that many famous grandmasters and trainers regularly employ them during their preparation."

Do you have any recommendation for people who are at the early stages in their composition career to develop their skill?

"My main suggestion: look for new, interesting, sometimes paradoxical ideas. Do not try to repeat or improve beautiful, but already known ideas. And of course, do not lose touch with practical games: some ideas are born during games."

Can you recommend endgame study books to improve over-the-board players' proficiency in endgames?

"Without a doubt I can suggest G. Nadareishvili's *Studies through Grandmasters' Eyes*, G. Kasparian's *Studies, Articles, Analysis* and Gurevich's book with the preface *Chess Poetry: Critical essays.*"

How would you like to be remembered in chess composition?

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"At the moment I am writing a book on studies (not only my own ones) and their relation to tournament games and study examples, which can help players who play games with limited time, even if they are in time trouble. I think such a book would be the best memorial of my contribution to chess as a whole."

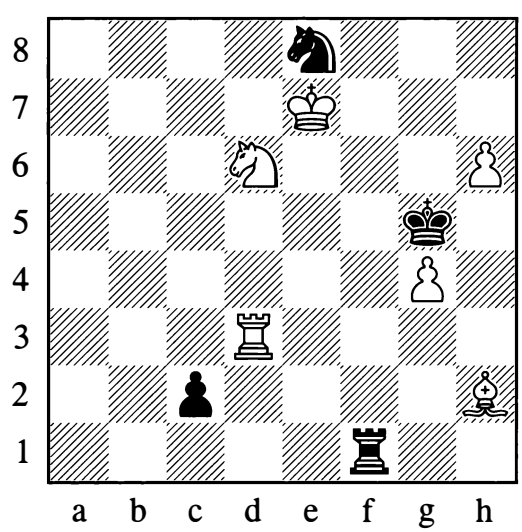
What hobbies do you have apart from chess?

"Travelling, fishing, swimming, football and several intellectual games."

Thank you very much indeed.

Out of all of Pervakov's studies, the next one is my favourite. It ends in a way that gives one of the strongest artistic impressions of any composition. Its startling finale will never desert me.

1st prize Ranok 1986



White to play and win

1.h7

White is about to promote, but so is Black. In many of Pervakov's studies there is one passed pawn close to promotion, but usually no connected passed pawns.

1...♖e1† 2.♘e4†!

White sacrifices the knight to keep the 8th rank closed. 2.♔d8? ♘xd6 3.♖xd6 ♖a1! (The open eighth rank saves Black. Instead after 3...c1=♕? 4.h8=♕ ♔xg4 5.♖d4† White forces a checkmate.) 4.♖c6 ♖a8† 5.♔d7 ♖h8 Black escapes into a theoretically drawn position.

2...♖xe4† 3.♔d8 ♘d6

Black opens the rank anyway.

4.♗xd6

White can also take with the rook:

4.♖xd6

This also wins, as White can prevent the perpetual.

4...♖a4 5.♖b6 ♖a8† 6.♗b8 c1=♕ 7.h8=♕ ♕d2† 8.♔c8 ♕c2† 9.♔b7 ♕e4† 10.♖c6 ♖xb8† 11.♕xb8!

11.♔xb8? ♕xc6 12.♕h5† ♔f4 13.♕f5† ♔g3 14.g5 is a draw. In order for White to win his g-pawn would need to be one square further forwards.

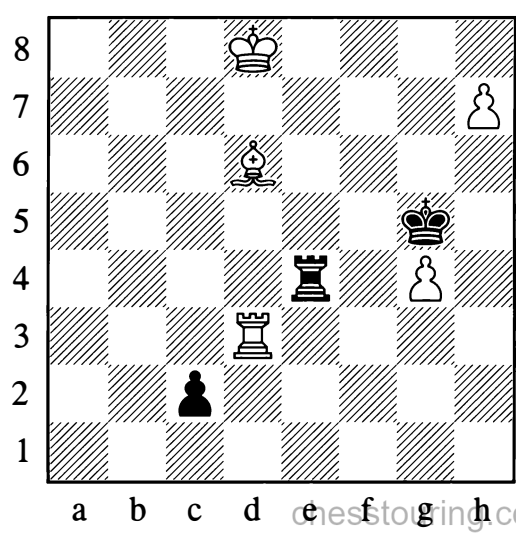
11...♕b4† 12.♔a7 ♕a4† 13.♖a6 ♕d4† 14.♕b6 ♕d7† 15.♔b8 ♕e8† 16.♔b7 ♕f7†

16...♕e4† 17.♔c7 ♕c4† (17...♕e7† 18.♔c8) 18.♕c6 ♕f7† 19.♔b6 Black runs out of checks; by the way, if Black's king stood on h4 it would not help either.

17.♕c7 ♕f3† 18.♔c8 ♕xg4† 19.♕d7 ♕c4† 20.♖c6

And White wins.

It is a pity, as a really perfect study should only have a single solution. At the same time, this slight blemish does not detract from the extraordinary beauty of the finish.



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4...♖e8†!

Black sacrifices his rook to keep the eighth rank closed.

Instead, if 4...c1=♕ 5.h8=♕ White wins easily as Black has no checks and his king will soon perish.

And after 4...♖a4 5.♖a3! White checkmates with the new queen (but not 5.♗b8? ♖a8 when things are not clear).

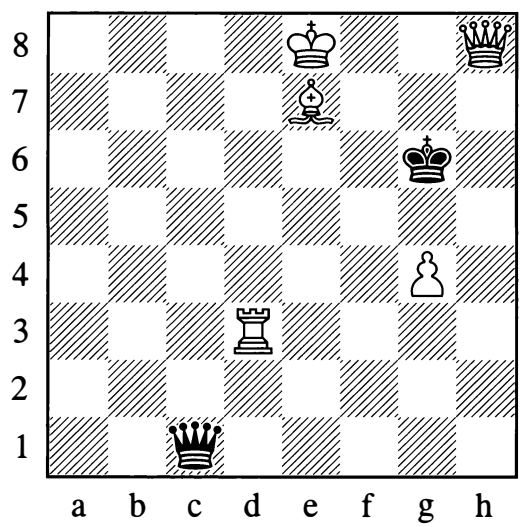
5.♔xe8 c1=♕ 6.♗e7†!

After 6.♗c5 ♕b2 (6...♕xc5? 7.h8=♕) 7.♖h3 ♕b8† (not 7...♕h8†? 8.♔f7! – 8.♗f8 ♔xg4 – 8...♔xg4 9.♖h6 and White wins) 8.♔d7 ♕b5† 9.♔d6 ♕a6† 10.♔e5 ♕f6† 11.♔d5 ♕f7† 12.♔c6 ♕e6† Black seems to hold a draw.

6...♔g6

Black plays for a perpetual – his chances appear quite good.

7.h8=♕



The white queen is out of play, which is why Black can hope for a perpetual. However, we will see that the queen on h8 still has a role to play.

7...♕c8† 8.♖d8 ♕c6† 9.♖d7

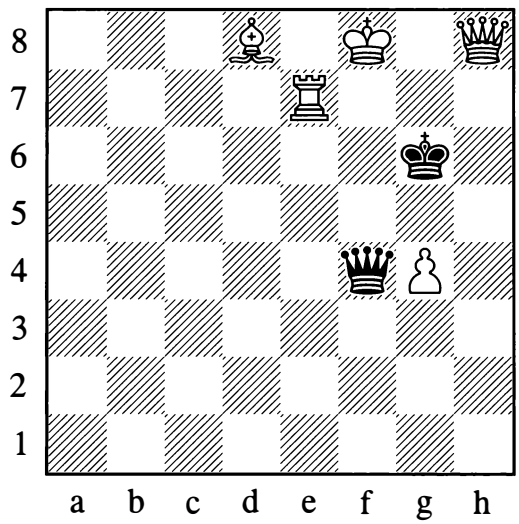
Not 9.♔f8? ♕e8†! and Black forces a stalemate.

9...♕a8† 10.♗d8 ♕e4† 11.♖e7 ♕a4† 12.♔f8

White cannot halt the checks by blocking with his pieces, so the king must move.

12...♕f4†

It looks like Black keeps a perpetual.



13.♕f6†!!

This is just an incredible move by the seemingly redundant queen on h8. The point is to force the black queen into a battery.

13...♕xf6† 14.♔g8

It looks like a mutual zugzwang. In a way it is, although if it were White's move he could still draw by advancing his g-pawn. But with Black to move, he loses quickly.

14...♕d6

The queen must guard against mate on e6.

15.♖g7† ♔h6 16.♗g5#

What an unbelievable finish!

The second part of this chapter will present a selection of what I believe to be Pervakov's finest studies. Before that, I leave you with the testimonials of several prominent chess personalities, beginning with the greatest of all time:

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Testimonials

Garry Kasparov
Thirteenth World Champion

"The remarkable works of Oleg Pervakov are an eloquent testimony to the idea of chess and chess composition as a true art. I have passed many enjoyable hours with his conceptions. Pervakov's compositions are more than merely creative and complex; they contain elements of tragedy and comedy fit for a Greek play. Let's see a computer do that!"

Vassily Smyslov
Seventh World Champion

"Endgame studies represent the poetry of chess. In them, the prosaic sporting result becomes merely secondary to the stimulating profundity of the expressed ideas, which is precisely what makes chess an art. In an endgame study, the creative, artistic source of chess manifests itself, which not many chess players – even the greatest among them – have been able to express. Since the pioneering work by Kling and Horwitz, published in 1851, endgame study composition has come a very long way from the initially somewhat naive and sometimes single-variation studies of the early composers to the profound works of our time, featuring a wealth of ideas.

The computer has undoubtedly been instrumental to this advance by enabling a composer immediately to have a solution to a position with up to six pieces, as well as to check the uniqueness of the solution. Equally important is the fact that the computer enables a composer to make use of the vast archives of endgame studies to find out to what extent the composed work is original and whether it has a predecessor. Composing endgame studies is becoming increasingly more difficult – it is hard to unearth a novel idea!

The studies composed by the outstanding chess composer of our time, Oleg Pervakov, strike one with their fresh, beautiful, profound and paradoxical ideas, which are hard to find. Oleg Pervakov can without a doubt be called one of the great, perhaps the greatest endgame study composer of modern times. I will conclude this note by wishing him new successes – and not only in the field of chess composition, but also in journalism (as the editor responsible for the publication of the *64* journal) and his life in general. Good luck to you, Oleg!"

Sergei Dolmatov
Former World Championship Candidate and World Junior Champion 1979:

"Oleg Pervakov is a wonderful endgame study composer who creates great studies; possibly he is the best of our time. I hope chess players will learn who he is and more importantly, they will become acquainted with his masterpieces. People who devote time to his endgames will have a lot of enjoyable hours. I have no doubts that many will fall in love with his endgame studies."

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Yuri Razuvaev
Grandmaster; participant in many USSR championship finals; Karpov's longtime second:

> "Pervakov is the contemporary artist who doesn't require words to introduce his ideas. The harmony of struggle in Pervakov's studies is particularly impressive. The black pieces are never just spectators. They are always on equal terms with the white ones, right up to the end of the battle. They create the atmosphere of being present at the battle. His studies do not contain any artificiality and falseness.
>
> Pervakov assigns great energy to his pieces. They almost literally fly across the board. The rarefied interaction between his pieces is striking. This is rarely achieved in over-the-board games. With Pervakov we get a rare opportunity to experience such things."

Igor Zaitsev
Grandmaster; inventor of the Zaitsev variation against the Ruy Lopez; Karpov's trainer in the late 1970s:

> "As an admirer of Oleg Pervakov's enormous talent, I always felt that besides his unique ability to subordinated material to the will of the artist, in Pervakov's creativity the love of the devoted composer for hard labour below the surface has a role. I think this is not because I am not familiar enough with the subtleties of composing studies, but because I am fascinated by the unprecedented originality. I have not been able to work out where the composer gets his first impulse when he starts to accomplish his fabulous battle plans. For me it remains an incomprehensible secret what triggers Oleg Pervakov to faultlessly choose a position from non-existence – just a position, which is seemingly unremarkable – later to make the ugly duckling a beautiful swan. By doing so he gives us another reason to rate him among the best endgame composers of the world.
>
> Pervakov's themes are far from conventional. This is why it is so hard to imitate his pieces. To create 'murals' which do well in competitions has a requirement: an inexhaustible author's imagination. But at the same time it is not an artificial intellectual puzzle like the well-known Rubic's cube. The amazing geometrical properties of chess-space, which the author's message conveys to us, ensures that Oleg Pervakov's studies do not dry out when they independently continue their journey after having been published, but by the versatility of their planted ideas still enchant people."

When I finished the file on Pervakov I was still under his artistic spell. I felt like showing his studies to a rising star who may not know who Pervakov is. I asked the following player, who was impressed. Later the idea came to ask him to write about Pervakov. Here is what he said.

David Smerdon
Australia's newest grandmaster:

> "Pervakov's studies encompass an array of styles, ranging from the technical, to the creative, to the simply unbelievable! Quite often, the central pattern is entirely unique, invoking patterns never seen before on the board. This makes them particularly difficult to solve, and all the more

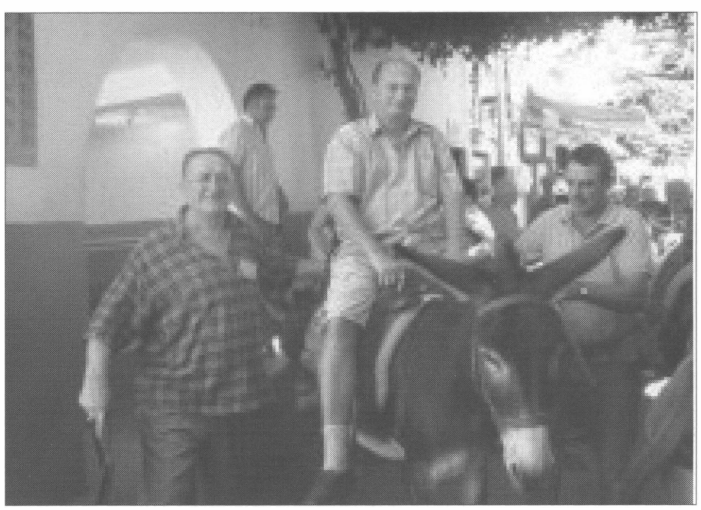
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incredible to behold. Very often, the key move would never even cross a player's mind, and the overall effect is thus visually dazzling."

One of the most impressive things for me about Pervakov's studies is their range of fantastic possibilities for both sides. Each study is exhaustive and thorough, and quite often the defensive resources of the 'losing' side are just as, if not more, fantastic than those of the 'solving' side! Very often, I have believed myself to have solved a Pervakov study after spotting White's beautiful idea... only to realize that Black has an even more powerful and aesthetic retort!

"It's very difficult to choose a favourite Pervakov study, much as it is to choose a favourite meal, or a wine: it all depends on the mood, and the palate! But I must admit a sweet spot for his study that received the second prize in Schakend Nederland 1996 No. 7. Such a fight over castling so late in the game is almost impossible to imagine in an over-the-board encounter, making the solution all the more surprising!

There have been many great composers in chess history, but to me, none can rival the enjoyment and sheer fascination I have for Oleg Pervakov. Like chess competition, it is very hard to compare champions across generations and styles. The endless debate over who was the greatest player of all time will probably never be answered, and it is the same for composers. However, there is something almost magical about a Pervakov study, as if the solution could only have arisen by some form of witchcraft or illusion. While Genrik Kasparyan has been termed the Kasparov of studies, I like to think of Pervakov as the Tal. Certainly, one gets a similar feeling when playing through the respective masterpieces of both players: the pieces perform inexplicable feats in extraordinary ways, leaving the spectator simply spellbound. I hope you enjoy his work as much as I have."



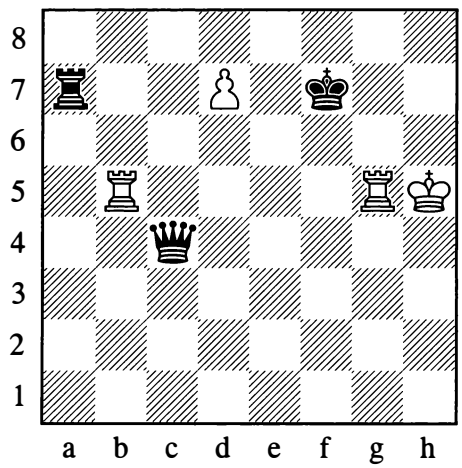
Pervakov on a donkey assisted by friends

Selected Studies

Here is a brief explanation of some of the common abbreviations used in the world of chess studies: HM = Honourable Mention; JT = Jubilee Tourney; MT = Memorial Tourney.

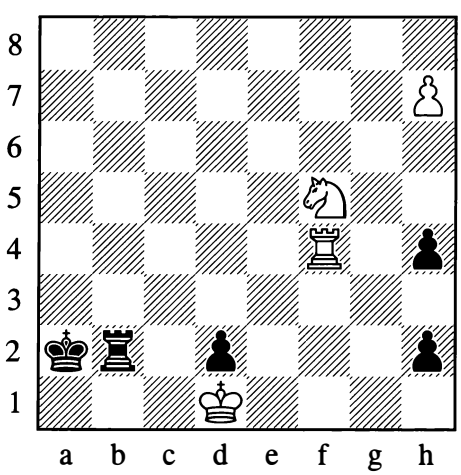
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1. 1st HM "Schakend Nederland" 1995



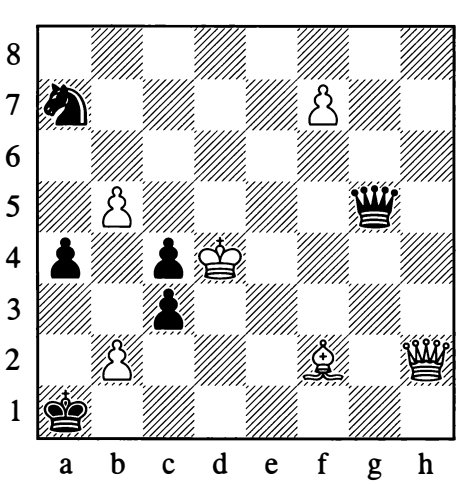
White to play and win

2. Pervakov & Grin, 2nd Prize "64" 1988



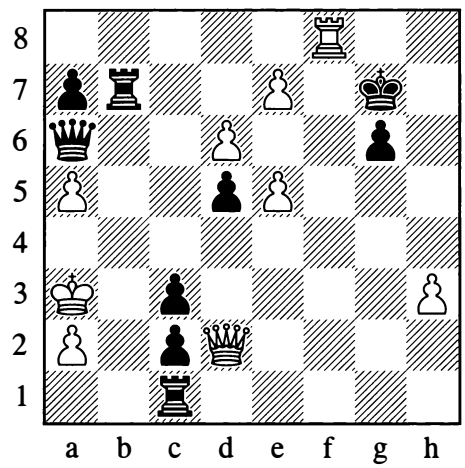
White to play and win

3. Pervakov & Kralin 1994



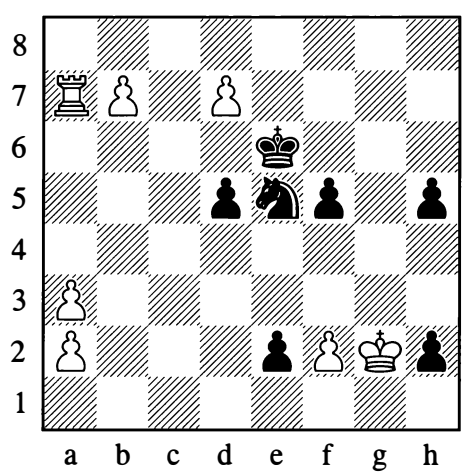
White to play and win

4. 1st Prize "Problemist Yuga" 1996



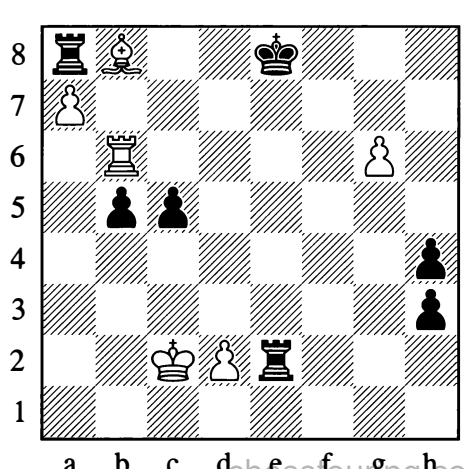
White to play and win

5. 1st Prize "Sachy" 1987



White to play and win

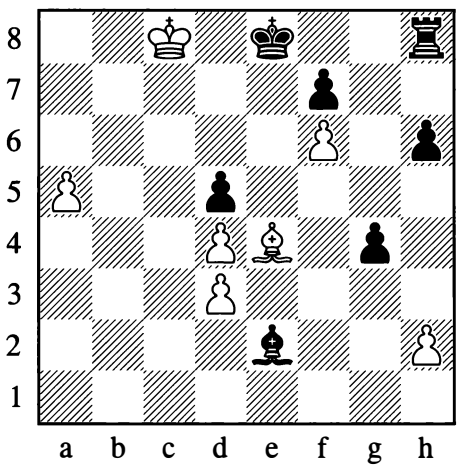
6. Katsnelson & Pervakov, 2nd HM "Communist" 1985



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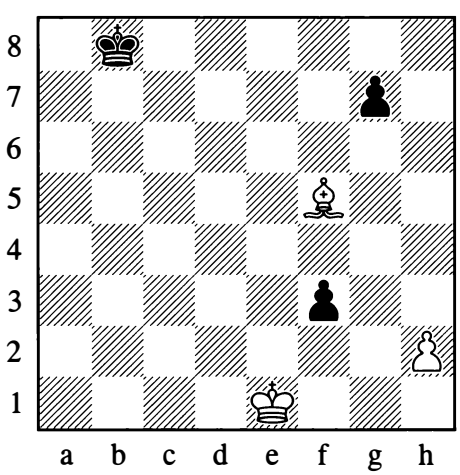
White to play and win

7. 2nd Prize "Schakend Nederland" 1996



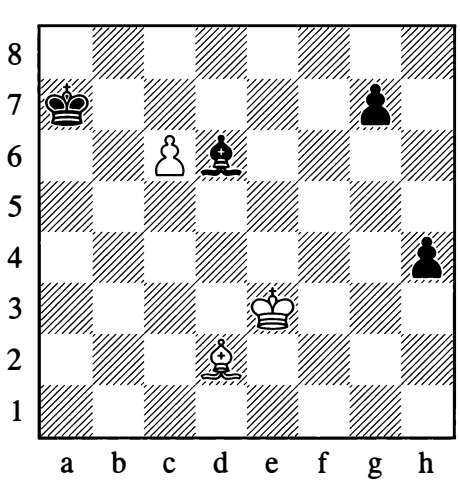
White to play and win

8. 1st Prize "Bulletin Central Chess Club of USSR" 1989



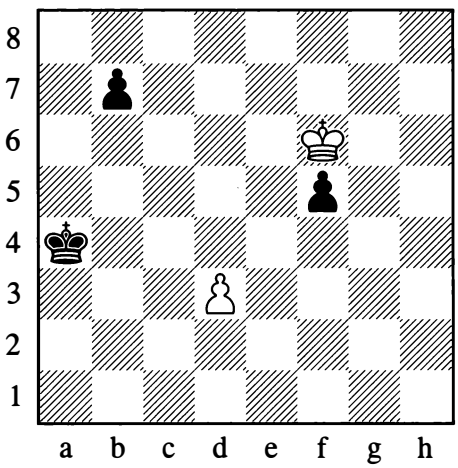
White to play and win

9. 4th Prize Moscow tourney 1986



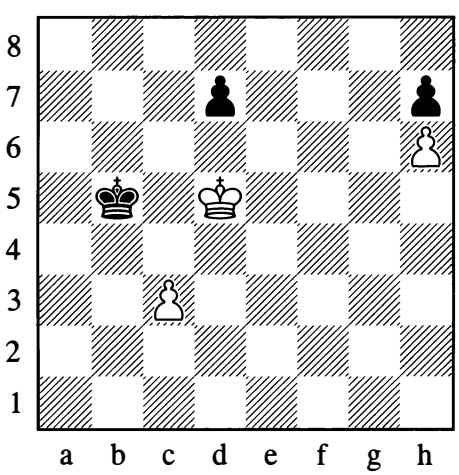
White to play and draw

10. 1st Prize "64" 2000



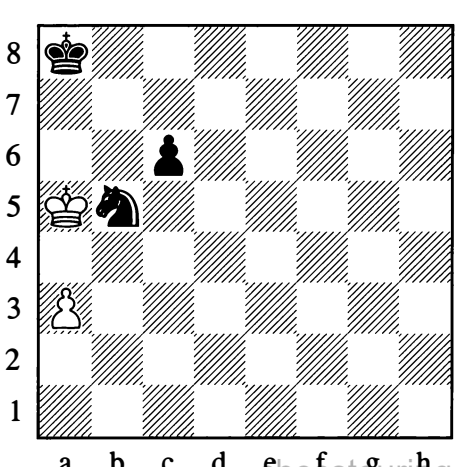
White to play and draw

11. 2nd Comm. "Narodny Obrazovanie" 1988



White to play and win

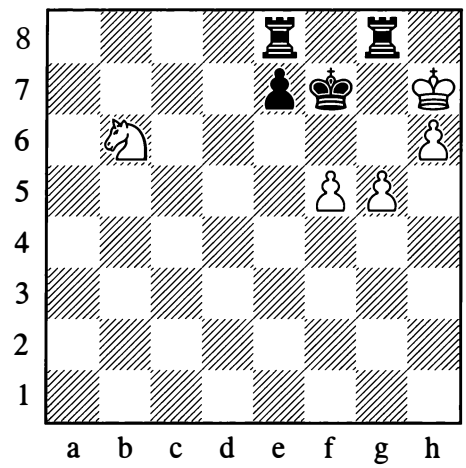
12. 1st Prize Serov-100 JT 1994



White to play and draw

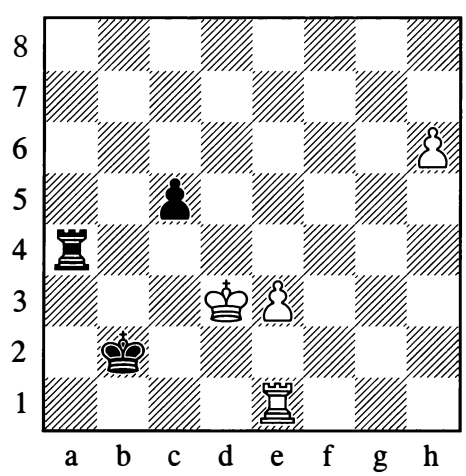
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13. 1st Prize Moscow tourney 1989



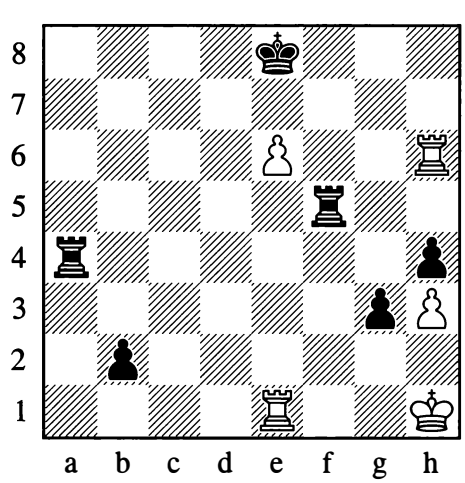
White to play and draw

14. Comm. "Magyar Sakkelet" 1986



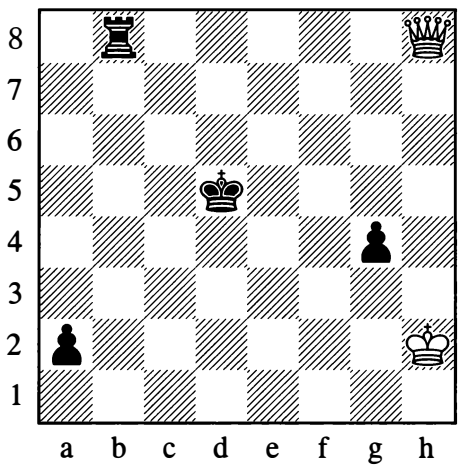
White to play and win

15. Pervakov & Sumbatyan
1st Prize, Nunn-50 JT 2005



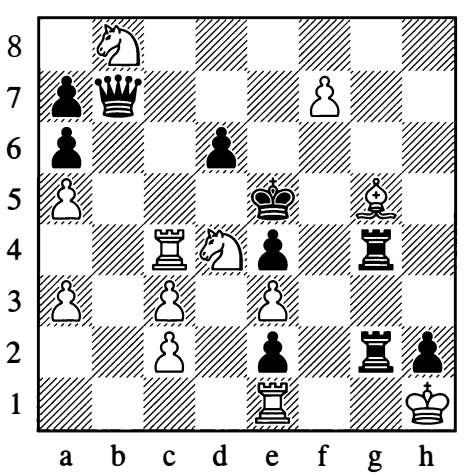
White to play and draw

16. 1st-2nd Prize Nona Tourney 2005



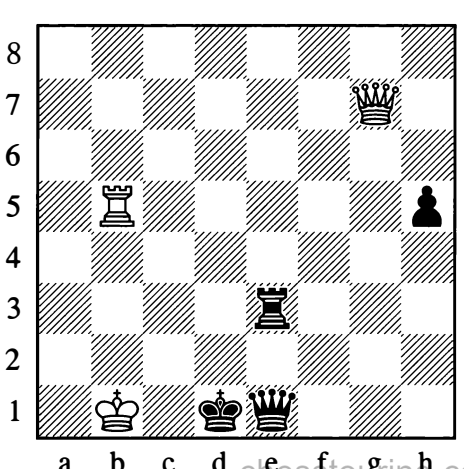
White to play and win

17. Pervakov & Sumbatyan, 1989



White to play and win

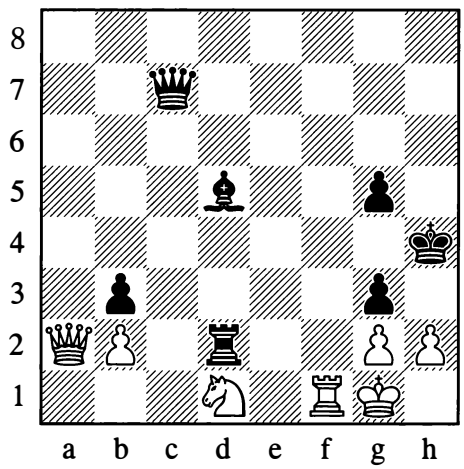
18. 2nd Prize "Shakhmaty v SSSR" 1986



White to play and win

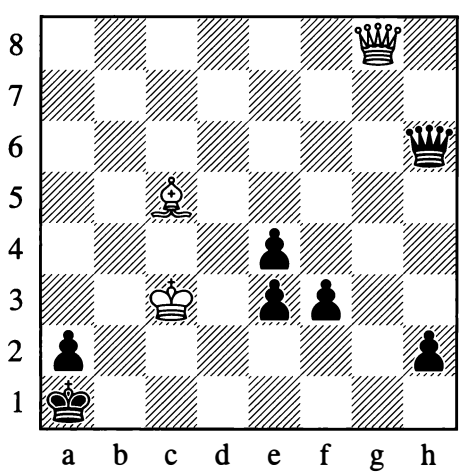
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19. Pervakov, after L.Katsnelson
1st Prize Marwitz Memorial 1992



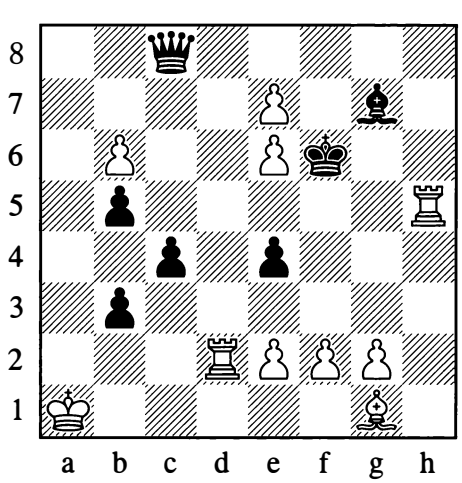
White to play and draw

20. 1st Prize Union Team Ch. 1986



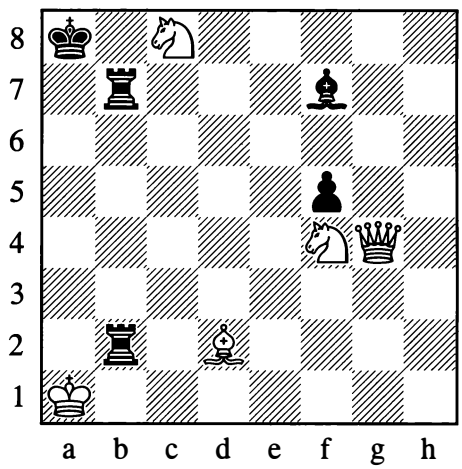
White to play and win

21. Special Prize Rezvov-80 JT 2002



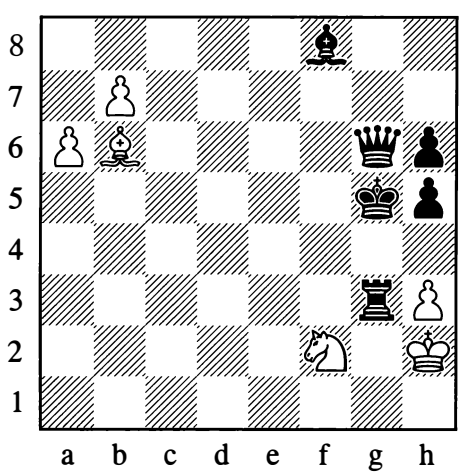
White to play and win

22. 1st Prize "Ceskoslovensky Sach"
1993



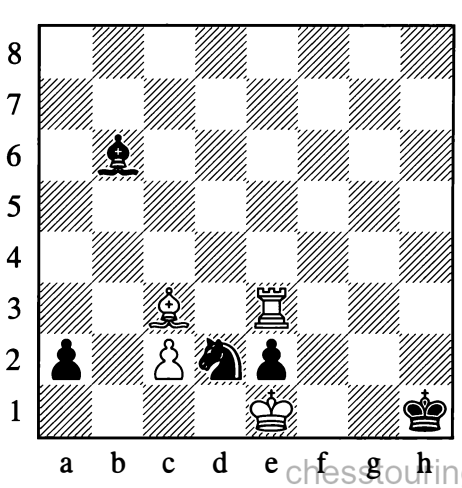
White to play and draw

23. 2nd-3rd Prize Hero Cities match 1995



White to play and win

24. 1st Prize Gusev JT 1994



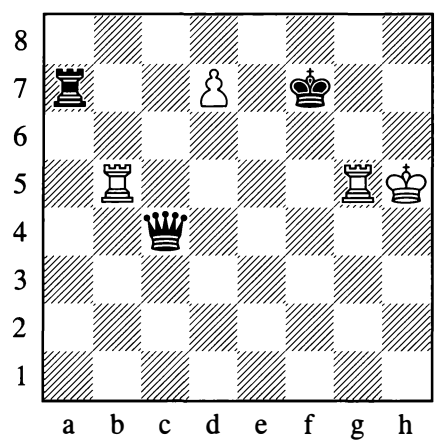
White to play and win

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Solutions

1. The last study we saw featured an amazing queen sacrifice on f6. In this one he manages to repeat the same trick in equally spectacular fashion.

1st HM "Schakend Nederland" 1995



1.d8=♕

Not 1.♖bf5†? ♔e6! 2.d8=♕ ♖h7†! 3.♔g6 ♖h6† 4.♔g7 ♖h7† 5.♔xh7 ♕c7† 6.♔h6 ♕h7† 7.♔xh7 with a stalemate.

1...♕e2†! 2.♔h6!

Useless is 2.♖g4? ♕xb5† 3.♔h4 ♖a4!.

2...♖a6† 3.♔h7 ♖h6†!

Black plays for a stalemate.

4.♔xh6 ♕e6† 5.♕f6†!!

This is another stunning queen sacrifice. 5.♔h5?? ♕h3 checkmates, while 5.♔h7? ♕g6†! forces a stalemate.

5...♕xf6† 6.♔h7 ♕c3

Black must stay on the diagonal. If he tries 6...♔e8 then 7.♖b8† ♔e7 8.♖g7† wins immediately for White.

7.♖be5!!

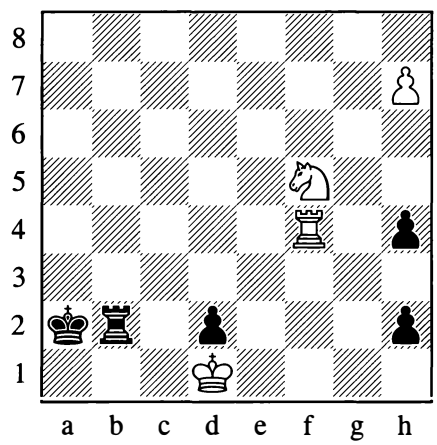
The white rooks cage in Black's king. There is no escaping them.

7...♕h3† 8.♖h5

And White wins.

2. The next study also features an attractive queen sacrifice.

Pervakov & Grin, 2nd Prize "64" 1988



1.♘g3!

Neither 1.♖f1? ♖b1† nor 1.♖xh4? h1=♕† 2.♖xh1 ♖b1† are good enough.

1...hxg3 2.h8=♕ h1=♕†!

After 2...♖b1† 3.♔xd2 h1=♕ 4.♕g8† ♖b3 5.♖a4† ♔b1 6.♕g6† ♔b2 7.♕f6† White wins.

3.♕xh1 g2!

3...♖b1† 4.♔c2 ♖xh1 5.♖a4 is mate.

4.♕h2!!

There are three black pieces posted along the second rank. However, White's amazing queen still manages to force a win along this rank!

4.♕xg2? ♖b1† 5.♔c2 ♖b2† 6.♔c3 fails to 6...d1=♘†!.

And after 4.♖a4† ♔b3 5.♕h3† ♔xa4 6.♕d7† ♔a3 7.♕d6† ♔a2 8.♕a6† ♔b3! Black's king stays close to the rook and holds. (But not 8...♔b1? 9.♕a7 when Black is in zugzwang.)

4...♖b1† 5.♔xd2 g1=♕

Black promotes to a queen, but sets up a battery for White.

6.♔c3†

The queen is unprotected, yet the battery works.

6...♔a3!

6...♕xh2 7.♖a4 is mate.

7.♕a2†!!

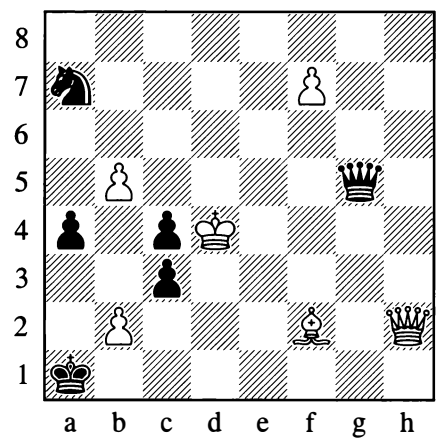
This is a simple yet elegant queen sacrifice.

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7...♔xa2 8.♖a4#

3. In the next study we see that Pervakov sacrifices queens for other purposes as well.

Pervakov & Kralin, 1994



1.f8=♕ ♘xb5†!

This is the best chance. Others are not so challenging:

1...c2 2.♗e3 ♘b5† 3.♔e4 wins easily.

1...cxb2 2.♕a3† ♔b1 3.♕h7† forces mate in a maximum of four more moves.

The computer suggests 1...♕d2† 2.♔xc4 c2 3.♕a3† ♔b1 4.♕h7 ♕xf2 as the strongest line for Black, but after 5.♕ad3 White wins easily enough.

2.♔xc4!

White must not play 2.♔e4? cxb2 3.♗d4 c3! when the tables are turned.

2...c2!

2...cxb2 3.♗d4! ♘xd4 4.♕a3† wins.

3.♗e3! ♕xe3 4.♕xc2 ♘a3†!

Black plays for stalemate.

5.♕xa3†

Not 5.bxa3? ♕c5†! drawing.

5...♕xa3 6.♕c1†!

Not 6.♕b1†? ♔xb1 7.bxa3 ♔c2 8.♔b4 ♔d3 9.♔xa4 ♔c4 drawing.

6...♔a2 7.♕a1†!!

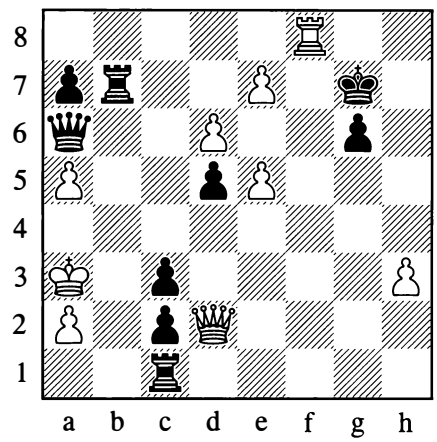
He avoids the stalemate and sends the king far enough away. 7.bxa3? would be stalemate.

7...♔xa1 8.bxa3 ♔b2 9.♔b4

And White wins.

4. On this occasion we will see mutual queen sacrifices.

1st Prize "Problemist Yuga" 1996



1.♖f7†!

White must give up the rook in order to gain a tempo. However, he must do it in the correct way. Instead the tempting 1.♖g8†? is no good after 1...♔xg8 2.e8=♕† ♔h7! 3.♕xd5? (White has to play 3.♕h8†!, forcing a perpetual) 3...♕xa5†!! 4.♕xa5 ♖f1! 5.♕xc3 ♖f3! and Black wins.

1...♔xf7 2.♕xd5† ♔g7 3.e8=♕ ♕xa5†!

Black creates a serious problem by sacrificing the queen.

4.♕xa5

Black has to get to the third rank to divert the queen after it takes on c3. White has to be ready for four different diversions. It is not an easy task.

4...♖h1

Black has three alternatives, each of which can be refuted by a beautiful queen sacrifice!

4...♖d1 5.♕xc3 ♖d3 6.♕xg6†!! wins.

4...♖f1 5.♕xc3 ♖f3 6.♕f8†!! This time the sacrifice takes place on the eighth rank.

4...♖g1 5.♕xc3 ♖g3! Promoting to a queen would give no hope at all, but it looks like Black with this sacrifice paves the way for the new queen. 6.♕xg6†!! Here White's bomb explodes on g6 again, destroying Black's defences.

5.♕xc3 ♖xh3!

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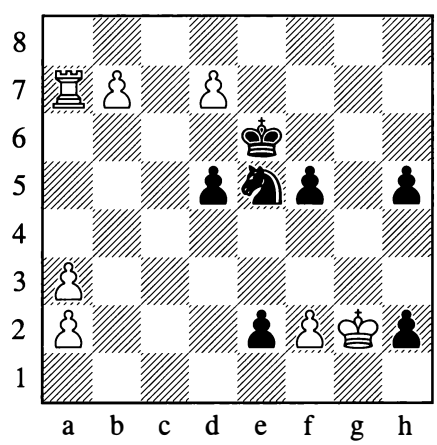
This time the sacrifice on g6 does not work. So what is White to do?

6.♕h8†!!

White wins. The theme of a 'weak back rank' is well-known, but this is a most extraordinary exploitation of it! It is not only unusual and surprising, but marvellous as well.

5. In the following example Pervakov created a composition in which there is sometimes an antidote to such a queen check. To Peter Gyarmati this is the 'perfect' endgame study. It is certainly a special one.

1st Prize "Sachy" 1987



1.d8=♘†

This under-promotion is the start of the play. White has to give a check as Black threatens to make new queens.

1...♔f6 2.♖a6† ♔g5 3.♘f7†!

Not 3.♘e6†? ♔h4 4.♖a4† ♘g4 and Black holds.

3...♔h4

If 3...♘xf7 4.♖e6 holds the e-pawn.

4.♖a4† d4!

Black is aiming for stalemate, so he gets rid of a movable pawn.

5.♖xd4† ♘g4 6.♖xg4†!

White has to give checks.

6...fxg4 7.b8=♗!!

Under-promotion is a possible weapon against such a check, which sacrifices the queen. In seven moves White makes two different under-promotions, which is quite an achievement. The main idea is to avoid the stalemate defence that occurs after 7.b8=♕? h1=♕† 8.♔xh1 e1=♕† 9.♔g2 ♕e4† 10.♔h2 ♕f4†!! With this shocking queen sacrifice Black forces a stalemate.

7...h1=♕† 8.♔xh1 e1=♕†

There is an important alternative in:

8...♔h3 9.♘g5† ♔h4 10.♗g3† ♔xg5 11.f4†!

White still has to play subtly. Worse is 11.f3? h4 12.♗f2 ♔f4 13.fxg4 ♔xg4 14.a4 ♔f3 15.♗xh4 ♔e4 16.a5 ♔d5 17.a6 ♔c6 18.♗f2 e1=♕† 19.♗xe1 ♔b6 and Black safely reaches the corner.

11...gxf3 12.a4 ♔f5 13.a5 ♔e4

Black cannot catch the a-pawn, but he still has counterplay with his own pawns.

14.a6 ♔e3 15.♔g1 ♔d2 16.a7 e1=♕† 17.♗xe1† ♔xe1 18.a8=♕ f2† 19.♔h2 f1=♕ 20.♕h1!

Black can take and get back into the 'square' of the a2-pawn, but the pawn from the starting position can move two squares, so Black still cannot get back in time.

20...♕xh1† 21.♔xh1 ♔e2 22.a4

And White wins.

9.♔g2 ♕e4†

Black can try to make room for his king at once with 9...g3, but after 10.♗xg3† ♔g4 11.f3† he loses his queen.

10.♔h2 g3†

It looks as though Black frees his king and can even think of winning the game.

11.♗xg3† ♔g4 12.f3†!

But this lovely move brings Black down to earth, and makes him realize that a win is not possible. A draw still seems to be on the cards though.

12...♔xf3 13.♘g5† ♔e3 14.♗f2†!!

This superb intermediate move brings the bishop to the required diagonal with gain of tempo. Insufficient is 14.♘xe4? ♔xe4 15.a4 ♔d5 16.a5 ♔c6 when the king gets back in time.

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14...♔d3 15.♘xe4 ♔xe4 16.a4 ♔d5 17.a5 ♔c6 18.a6

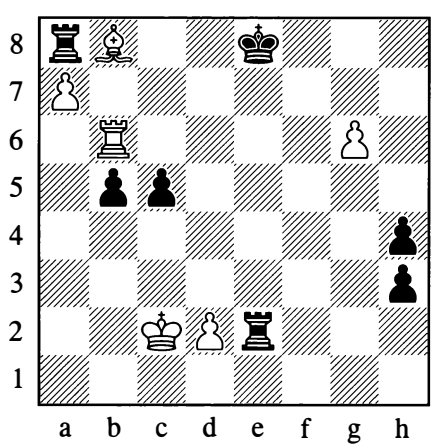
Thanks to the bishop on f2, the king cannot get in front of the pawn.

18...♔c7 19.♗a7! ♔c6 20.a4!

The rear a-pawn also plays its part! The pawns and the bishop have succeeded in creating a barrier against the black king, and White's king will soon wander over and force his opposite number away from the a-pawns. This is a real masterpiece.

6. In Pervakov's studies it is not only queens that can throw themselves in front of a check. Rooks can do it as well...

Katsnelson & Pervakov, 2nd HM
"Communist" 1985



1.♖b7!

As in many of Pervakov's studies, both sides have a very dangerous passed pawn. The text move seems to set Black very difficult problems, but we will see that the defender has some wonderful resources.

1...h2 2.g7 ♖g2 3.♗xh2 ♖xd2†!

First Black surprisingly takes the pawn.

4.♔c3!!

The point behind this incredibly subtle move will become clear at the end of the study.

4...♖d3†!

Black hopes for a perpetual.

5.♔xd3 0–0–0†!

It is easy to forget that long castling is possible. They say even Korchnoi once asked the arbiter whether he was allowed to castle when his rook was attacked. On the general subject of castling in studies, it should be noted that, when a king and rook are standing on their original positions, it should always be assumed that castling is possible, unless we are told otherwise. The exception would be the so-called 'retrograde' problems, in which the solver must play the role of detective, studying the position of the pieces on the board in order to deduce the events of the past.

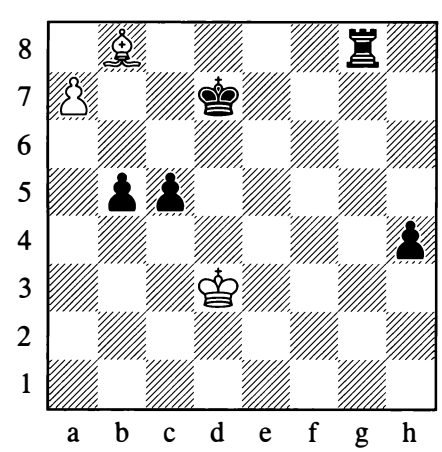
6.♖d7!!

This time the rook becomes a super suicide shield in front of a check.

6...♔xd7 7.g8=♕!

White must draw the rook away from the d-file in order to prevent the king from going to c6 with gain of tempo.

7...♖xg8 8.♗b8



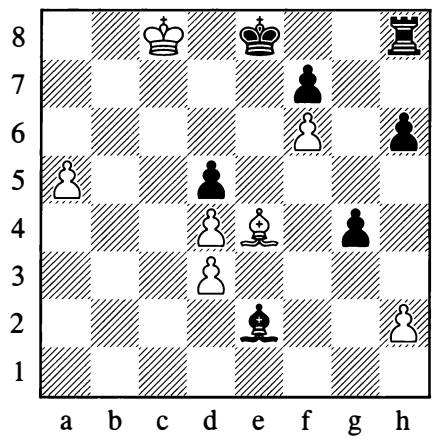
White wins. Now it is clear why White took the rook on the third rank, not the second. The bishop now stops the check on g3, and thus prevents the rook from reaching the a-file! Beautiful, isn't it?

7. In endgames, castling is not the most common manoeuvre. The Russian composer, however, has another sweet study in which castling – or more precisely, the prevention thereof – is of paramount importance. This

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was the study that Imentioned as my favourite in the testimonial section.

2nd Prize "Schakend Nederland" 1996



1.♗h7!

White has to stop Black castling at virtually any cost. This move is just the beginning of the fight for castling.

Not 1.♗xd5? 0–0† 2.♔b7 ♗xd3 and Black wins.

Also insufficient is 1.♗f5? 0–0† 2.♔b7 h5 3.a6 h4 4.a7 g3 and once again Black wins, as he is not slower in the race.

1...g3

Taking the bishop is insufficient: 1...♖xh7 2.a6 ♖h8 (2...♔f8 3.a7 ♔g8 4.a8=♕ ♖h8 5.♔d7† ♔h7 6.♕xd5 wins easily; or 2...h5 3.a7 ♖h6 4.a8=♕ ♖xf6 5.♔c7† ♔e7 6.♕d8† ♔e6 7.♕d7#) 3.a7 White wins just because Black's rook has moved (he cannot castle now).

The alternative is 1...♗xd3 2.♗xd3 0–0† 3.♔b7 h5 4.a6! (White has to hurry. 4.♗f5? ♖e8 5.a6 ♖e2 6.a7 ♖b2† 7.♔c8 ♖a2 and Black holds.) 4...h4 5.a7 g3 6.hxg3 hxg3 7.♗f1 and White wins.

2.hxg3

2.a6? would allow Black to win after 2...♗xd3! 3.♗xd3 0–0† 4.♔b7 gxh2 etc.

2...♗h5! 3.a6!

White must bear in mind that it is a race. 3.♗g8? fails after 3...♔f8!.

3...♗g6 4.♗g8!!

What a sweet self-sacrifice again! This time the bishop does it. In the second study the knight did it, so now we have had all the pieces doing it. A complete Grand Slam! Your author is not an expert on composition, just a chess player, trainer and writer who loves compositions, so I cannot judge how subtle it is. I just love it. 4.a7? ♗xh7 5.a8=♕ 0–0† would once again be losing for White.

4...♔f8 5.♗h7!!

The bishop keeps sacrificing himself to block the way.

5...♗xh7 6.a7 ♗f5† 7.♔c7!

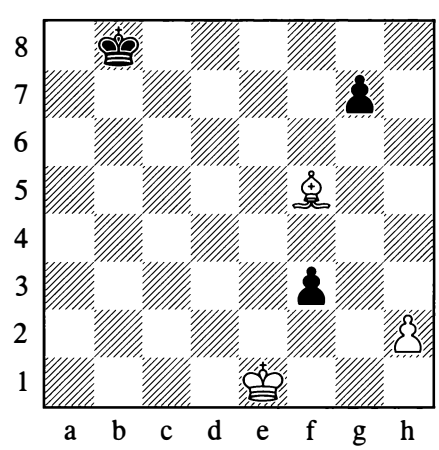
White will take the d-pawn and finally topple Black's resistance. Accuracy is still required, as 7.♔b7? ♔g8 8.a8=♕† ♔h7 9.♕a5 ♗e6! would enable Black to defend.

7...♔g8 8.a8=♕† ♔h7 9.♕xd5

White wins.

8. The next study features what may be an even more stunning ♗h7 move. Here you can see it. Judge for yourself!

1st Prize "Bulletin Central Chess Club of USSR" 1989



1.♔f2!

White has to start by going after the pawn. 1.♗h7? g5 2.♔f2 g4 3.♔g3 ♔c7 4.♔xg4 ♔d6 5.♔g5 ♔e7 6.♔h6 ♔f8 Black will soon divert the bishop from h7, opening the way to the corner.

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1...♔c7

Getting rid of the pawn with 1...g6 does not bring salvation. 2.♗xg6 ♔c7 3.h4 ♔d6 4.h5 ♔e7 5.h6 ♔f8 (5...♔f6 6.♗h5 wins) 6.♗h7 ♔f7 7.♔xf3 ♔f6 8.♔f4 wins.

2.♗h7!!

This is just an incredible move. It has several functions. It blocks the g8-square; it moves the bishop away, thus preventing the black king from winning a tempo by attacking it. That is not all. It stops Black from giving up the g6-pawn with a gain of tempo. It is breathtaking indeed.

The need for this move becomes clear when we examine the alternative:

2.♔xf3? g6!!

Black opens the way by getting rid of the pawn, which represents an obstacle.

3.♔f4

3.♗xg6 ♔d7 4.♔f4 (4.h4 ♔e7 5.h5 ♔f8 and Black is safe) 4...♔e7 5.♔g5 ♔f8 The king reaches the corner.

3...♔d6!

3...♔d8? 4.♗e6 ♔e7 5.♔g5!! The king, on his own, does the job.

4.♔g5 gxf5

And Black holds.

Blocking the pawn is also not good enough: 2.♗g6 ♔d6 3.h4 ♔e7 4.h5 ♔f8 5.♗h7 g5! 6.h6 (6.hxg6 ♔g7 and the theoretical draw occurs again) 6...g4 White's king cannot help.

And finally, after 2.h4 ♔d6 3.h5 ♔e5 Black wins a vital tempo: 4.♗g6 ♔f4 and White cannot win.

2...♔d6

2...g6 does not come with a tempo now. 3.♔xf3 ♔d6 4.♔f4 ♔e7 5.♔g5 ♔f7 6.♔h6 and White wins.

3.♔xf3 ♔e6 4.♔g4 ♔f7!

Black prepares a trick. Instead after:

4...♔f6

Black reaches the starting position of a known study by Kosek. White wins as follows:

5.♔h5! g5

5...g6† 6.♔h6 ♔f7 7.h4 This is a mutual zugzwang, but it is not White to move...

6.♔h6 g4 7.♗d3!?

Pervakov demonstrates his own route to victory, although it is similar to the one Kosek presented. Kosek's solution was 7.♗g6 ♔e6 8.♗e8 ♔f5 9.♗c6 ♔e5 10.♔g6 ♔e6 11.♗e4 ♔e5 12.♗b7 ♔e6 13.♗c8† .The pawn is gone, and the corner is not reached.

7...♔f7

7...♔e5 8.♔g5 ♔e6 9.♗c4† ♔e5 10.♗b3 Black loses to zugzwang.

8.♗c4† ♔f6 9.♗d5 ♔e5 10.♗c6 ♔f5

10...♔f6 11.♗d7 wins.

11.♗b7 ♔e5 12.♔g6 ♔e6 13.♗c8†

All roads lead to Rome! They both arrived at this trivially won position.

5.♔g5!

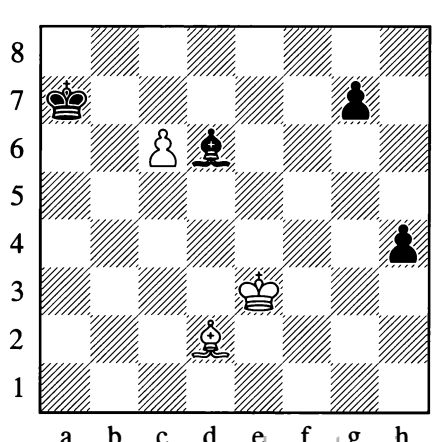
Copying the same play against 5...♔f6 with 5.♔h5 would squander the win. Now 5...g5! 6.♔h6 g4 and we reach a position of reciprocal zugzwang, but this time it is White to move.

5...g6 6.♔h6 g5 7.h3

White soon can freely take the pawn.

9. All of these studies reflect sheer beauty, but at the same time one can learn a lot from them. So speaks a trainer! In the next few examples of Pervakov's studies the educational value is apparent. Here is a miraculous save from a seemingly hopeless bishop endgame.

4th Prize Moscow tourney 1986



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1.♔f2!

White goes after the h-pawn, trying to force it to h2, which would allow him to get to the corner.

1...h3 2.♗h6!!

This is a brilliant move. He forces the g-pawn to a white square, so that later Black's bishop will not be able to defend it. Instead after 2.♗e3†? ♔a6 3.♔f3 ♔b5 4.♗g1 ♔xc6 Black wins.

2...g6 3.♗e3†!

White keeps Black's king away from his pawn for one more move. 3.♔f3? Allowing it to approach at once would lead to disaster. 3...♔b6 4.♗e3† ♔xc6 5.♗g1 ♔d5 6.♔g4 ♔e4! 7.♔xh3 ♔f3 Black is winning. The finish might be 8.♗d4 (8.♔h4 ♗f4) 8...g5 9.♗f6 g4† 10.♔h4 g3 11.♗d4 g2 12.♔h3 (12.♗g1 ♗f4 13.♔h5 ♗g3 14.♔g5 ♔e2 15.♔g4 ♔f1) 12...♗g3 13.♗g1 ♗f2 14.♗h2 ♗e1 15.♗g1 ♗g3 and White has run out of moves.

3...♔a6

The alternative is:

3...♔b8

This gives White time to force the h-pawn to h2, enabling his king to get to the corner.

4.♔f3 h2 5.♔g2 ♔c7 6.♗g5 ♔xc6 7.♗e3 ♔d5 8.♗g5 ♔e4 9.♗d8 g5 10.♗a5!?

Just to demonstrate that White can draw even without taking the pawn.

10...g4 11.♗d8 ♔e3 12.♗h4 ♔e2 13.♗g5

13.♗f2! is prettier, but the end result is the same.

13...h1=♕† 14.♔xh1 ♔f3

14...♔f1 15.♗f4 White draws with the help of the stalemate motif, or 15.♗h4 ♗e5 16.♗g3 here as well.

15.♗h4 ♗e5 16.♗f2

The draw is secure. 16.♗e1 was also good enough, although 16.♔g1?? ♗g3 was to be avoided.

4.♔f3 ♔b5 5.♗g1!

After 5.♗f4? ♔xc6 6.♗xd6 ♔xd6 7.♔g3 ♔e5 8.♔xh3 ♔f4 Black wins.

5...♔xc6

If 5...h2 6.♗xh2 ♗xh2 7.♔g4 draws.

6.♔g4!

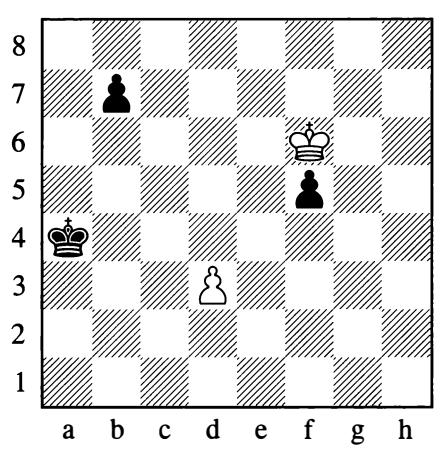
White draws because of his very subtle second move, which forced the enemy pawn to g6.

6...♗c5 7.♗h2

With an easy draw. (But please note that it would be disastrous to take the h-pawn, as seen after 7.♔xh3?? ♗xg1 8.♔g4 ♗e3 and wins!)

10. The following position looks as though it could easily have arisen in a practical game. It takes a special composer to create something so deep and subtle using just kings and three pawns!

1st Prize "64" 2000



1.♔g5!

This is a subtle move. It is not only holding the f-pawn, but the king steps away from nasty tactical motifs.

It is not that hard to see the pawn cannot be taken because b1 is on the same diagonal as f5. 1.♔xf5? b5 2.d4 b4 3.d5 b3 4.d6 b2 5.d7 b1=♕† and Black wins, after promoting with a check.

1.♔e5 also loses in a trivial manner after 1...b5 2.d4 b4 3.d5 b3 4.d6 b2 5.d7 b1=♕ 6.d8=♕ ♕e4†. Black wins as he can force the exchange of queens.

1...b5

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Black begins the race. 1...♔b3 Please do not forget about the possibility of attacking the opponent's pawns! 2.♔xf5 ♔c3 3.♔e5! Threatening to advance his own pawn, while also approaching the enemy foot soldier. Please note that moving to e4 would not be any good, as Black would queen with check. 3...♔xd3 4.♔d5 and White draws.

2.d4 b4 3.d5 ♔b5!

White is not the only one who can use his king effectively. The text seems to create big problems.

4.d6!

Not 4.♔f6? ♔c5! 5.♔e6 b3 6.d6 b2 7.d7 b1=♕ 8.d8=♕ ♕e4† and once again Black forces an exchange.

4...♔c6 5.♔xf5

White is not in the square of the pawn, but the threat of ♔e6 accelerates his speed.

5...♔xd6

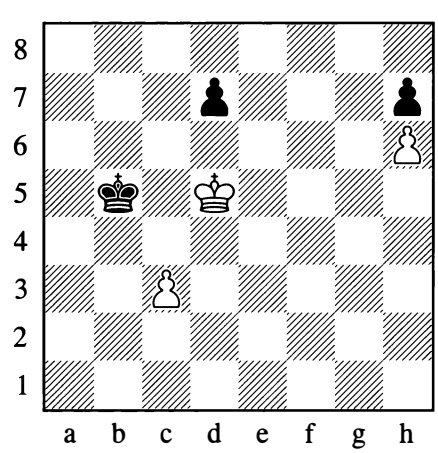
After 5...b3 6.♔e6 White promotes in time to draw.

6.♔e4

The king gets back just in time, and the ending is an easy draw.

11. The previous study was very nice and cute. In the next example Pervakov created another deeper pawn endgame study.

2nd Comm. "Narodny Obrazovanie" 1988

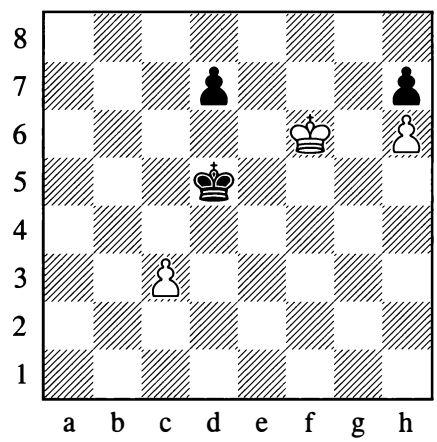


1.♔e5!

To begin with, White must threaten the h7-pawn.

After 1.♔d6 ♔c4 Black's counterattack is successful.

1...♔c4 2.♔f6 ♔d5



3.♔e7!!

White changes direction and attacks the d7-pawn. He either forces ...d6 or pushes the enemy king away from its nice square.

3.♔f7? ♔e5! enables Black to hold.

Technically 3.♔f5 would not spoil the win, although after 3...♔d6 White would have to repeat the position by returning to f6, and then follow up with ♔e7.

3...♔c6

If 3...d6 White wins by changing direction with 4.♔f6! (4.♔f7! would do the trick as well). When the pawn is on d6 Black will end up in zugzwang after 4...♔e5 5.♔g7 ♔e6 6.♔xh7 ♔f7 7.c4.

4.♔f7 ♔d5

After 4...♔d6 5.c4 ♔e5 6.♔g7 ♔e6 7.♔xh7 ♔f7 8.c5 Black is in zugzwang.

5.♔f6!

White must not rush to capture the h7-pawn, as his king would be stalemated in the corner. The text move completes a triangulation, so now Black has to move.

5...d6 6.♔g7

Now that the black pawn has been enticed forwards, White can win.

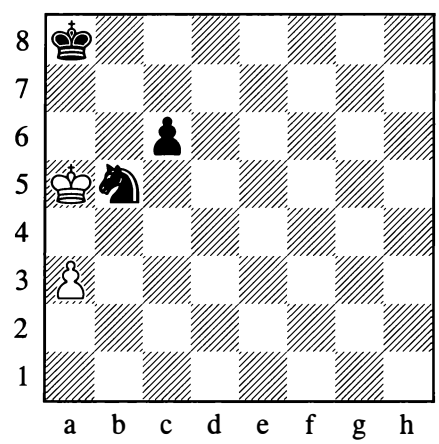
6...♔e6 7.♔xh7 ♔f7 8.c4

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White's efforts have been rewarded. He has reached the same mutual zugzwang position, but this time it is Black to move.

12. Here is another instructive study, this time with a pawn against a knight.

1st Prize Serov-100 JT 1994



1.♔a6!

In positions where a knight is the last piece and defends his last pawn, mutual zugzwangs often occur. This position is no exception. Other moves are insufficient:

1.♔b6? ♘a7! 2.a4 ♔b8 3.a5 ♔a8 4.a6 ♔b8 This is a reciprocal zugzwang and now it is White to move. 5.♔c5 ♔c7 Black wins.

1.a4? ♘a7! 2.♔a6 c5! (But not 2...♘c8? 3.a5 ♘e7 – 3...♔b8 would be an immediate stalemate – 4.♔b6 ♔b8 5.a6 ♔a8 6.a7. The mutual zugzwang favours White this time.) 3.♔a5! ♔b8! Black avoids the stalemate and wins.

1...♘a7

The only move that hangs on the pawn.

2.♔b6

The king arrives on b6 with perfect timing.

2...♔b8 3.a4 ♔c8! 4.a5!

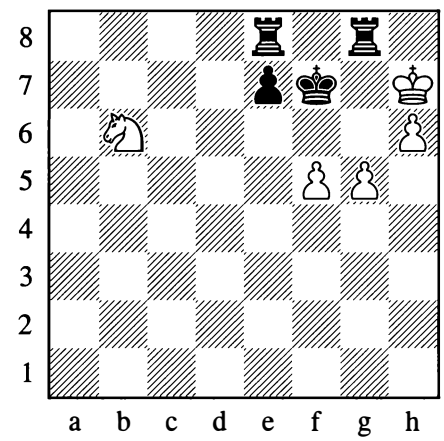
The tempting 4.♔xa7? is no good after 4...c5 5.a5 c4 6.a6 c3 7.♔a8 c2 8.a7 ♔d7! Black avoids the stalemate and checkmates in this well-known position.

4...♔b8 5.a6 ♔a8 6.♔c5 ♔b8 7.♔b6

Now White gets it right – it is Black's turn to move, so the game is a draw.

13. Here is another study, with a position that might occur in a real game.

1st Prize Moscow tourney 1989



White is badly behind in material, but he has two connected passed pawns close to promotion and his king is well placed to help.

1.g6† ♔f6 2.♘d5† ♔xf5

There is another dangerous move:

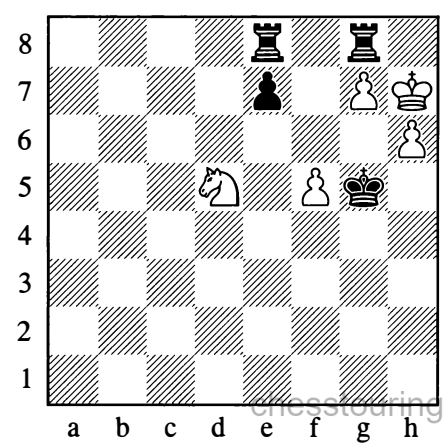
2...♔g5

Here is my analysis.

3.g7

Worse is 3.♘xe7? ♖xe7† 4.♔xg8 (4.g7 ♖f8 5.f6 ♖xf6 wins) 4...♔xh6 5.f6 ♖e8† 6.♔f7 ♖a8 and White drops his pawns.

After the text move, it makes a crucial difference how far the e8-rook goes. Slightly different rook moves require completely different answers!



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a) 3...♖a8 with a choice for White:

a1) 4.f6? exf6 5.♘xf6 ♖gb8!

Black's previous rook move made room for its brother. I think this wins.

6.♘e4†

6.♘e8 ♖a7 7.♘c7 ♔f5 8.♘d5 ♖e8 wins.

Or 6.♘d7 ♖b7 7.♘f8 ♖f7 8.♔g8 ♔f6 9.♔h7 ♖d8 10.♘d7†!? (This stalemate defence is imaginative, but not sufficient here. 10.♔g8 ♖b8 is also hopeless.) 10...♖dxd7 11.♔h8 ♖d8† 12.♔h7 ♖d4! 13.♔h8 ♖h4 14.h7 ♖xh7† and wins.

6...♔f5 7.♘d6† ♔e6 8.♘e4 ♔e5 9.♘g5 ♖a7 10.♔g6 ♖a6† 11.♔h7 ♔f5 12.g8=♕

12.♘f3 ♖b7 13.♘d2 ♔f4 14.♘b3 ♔g5 wins.

12...♖xg8 13.♔xg8 ♔xg5

Black wins easily.

a2) 4.♘xe7! ♖gd8

4...♖ge8 5.f6! ♔xf6 (5...♖a6 allows White to choose between a simple drawing line, 6.g8=♕† ♖xg8 7.♔xg8 ♔xf6 8.♘d5† ♔g6 9.♔f8, and a more elegant one, 6.♘g8!? ♖a7 7.♔h8 ♖b8 8.h7 ♔g6 9.f7 when Black can only choose between stalemates.) 6.♘d5† ♔g5 7.♘c7 and we see the disadvantage of putting the rook on a8. White is safe.

5.f6!

5.g8=♕†? ♖xg8 6.♘xg8 ♖a7† 7.♔h8 ♔xf5 is losing for White, due to the unfavourable position of his knight.

5...♔xf6 6.g8=♕ ♖xg8 7.♘xg8† ♔f7

Now White can hold with either 8.♘f6 or 8.♘e7.

b) 3...♖b8

Again White has a choice. Curiously, the slight change in the position of the black rook causes a complete re-evaluation of the two candidate moves.

b1) 4.♘xe7?

Here this move loses.

4...♖ge8!!

4...♖gd8 5.♘c6 draws.

5.f6

5.♘g6 ♖b7!

5...♔xf6 6.g8=♕

6.♘g6 ♖b7 7.♘f8 ♖ee7 (Also good enough is 7...♖c7 8.♘g6 ♖f7 9.♘f8 ♖d8 10.♘g6 ♖d2 11.♘e5 – or 11.♔h8 ♖h2 – 11...♔xe5 and wins.) 8.♔h8 ♖xg7 9.hxg7 ♖xg7 and Black wins.

6...♖xe7† 7.♕g7† ♖xg7† 8.hxg7 ♔f7

Black will take the g-pawn.

b2) 4.f6!

The previously losing move becomes White's saviour.

4...exf6 5.♘xf6

Now we should consider two rook moves:

b21) 5...♖gc8 6.♘e8!

Learning from Pervakov's studies, moves like this come relatively easily! Instead the tempting 6.♘d7 ♖b7 7.♘f8 fails after 7...♖f7!! 8.♘e6† (8.♔g8 ♔f6) 8...♔h5 9.♘f8 ♖fxf8 10.gxf8=♕ ♖xf8 and Black wins.

6...♖b7

6...♖xe8 is met by 7.g8=♕†.

7.♘d6

And White survives.

b22) 5...♖gd8 6.♘d7!

The different placement of the rooks necessitates an alternative dive by the knight. Instead 6.♘e8 ♖b7 7.♘c7 ♔f5 8.♘e8 ♖e7 9.♘c7 ♔g5 10.♘e8 ♖dd7 wins.

6...♖b7 7.♘f8 ♔f6

Black is not helped by 7...♖e8 8.♔h8 when the pawn promotes, although Black can still draw.

8.♔h8 ♖f7 9.g8=♕

White loses the queen but stalemate saves him.

9...♖fxf8

9...♖dxf8 10.h7

10.♔h7 ♖d7† 11.♕g7†

And it turns out that White got it right.

3.♘xe7†!

Having witnessed the above analysis, the reader will not be surprised to see the knight sacrificing itself.

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3...♖xe7† 4.g7!

This leaves Black with several stalemate options, but no more than a draw.

4...♖gxg7†

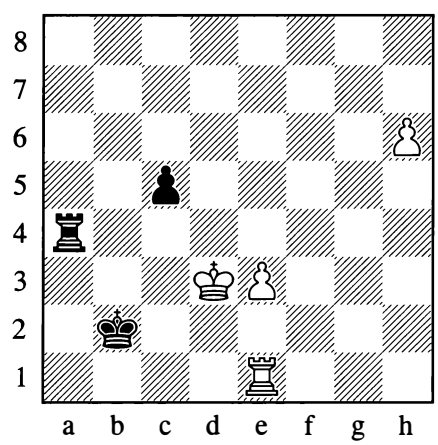
After 4...♔g5 5.♔xg8 ♔xh6 6.♔h8 ♖xg7 or 4...♔f6 5.♔xg8 ♖e8† 6.♔h7 ♔f7 7.g8=♕† ♖xg8 it is another stalemate.

5.hxg7 ♔f6 6.♔h8 ♖xg7

Another pearl ends in a stalemate.

14. Next we see a rook ending, which looks as though it could easily have arisen in a real game.

Comm. "Magyar Sakkelet" 1986



1.h7

The tempting 1.♖h1? is not good enough: 1...c4† (1...♖a8? 2.h7 ♖h8 3.♔c4+–) 2.♔e4 c3† 3.♔f5 and now Black must make the right choice:

a) He should avoid

3...c2? 4.e4!

When one has two passed pawns it is usually better to push them together and not separate them too much.

4.h7? ♖a5† (4...♖a8 5.e4 c1=♕ 6.♖xc1 ♔xc1 7.e5 and White is fast enough) 5.♔f6 ♖a6†

The checks keep Black alive.

4...♖a8 5.h7 c1=♕ 6.♖xc1 ♔xc1 7.e5

And White wins.

b) Instead Black can draw comfortably with 3...♖a5†!. White has no shield, nor a good shelter from the checks.

However, it looks as though White can also win with 1.e4!?, e.g. 1...c4† 2.♔e3 c3 3.♔f4 c2 4.h7 ♖a8 5.♔f5 c1=♕ (5...♖f8† 6.♔g6 ♖e8 7.e5 ♖e6† 8.♔f7 ♖h6 9.♔g7 wins) 6.♖xc1 ♔xc1 7.e5 ♔d2 8.e6 ♔d3 9.♔f6 ♔d4 10.e7 ♔d5 11.♔f7 and wins.

1...c4†

Not 1...♖h4? 2.♖e2†.

2.♔e2

Not 2.♔e4? c3† 3.♔f5 when Black has two routes to equality:

a) 3...♖h4

This is just sufficient, although Black will have to follow it up correctly.

4.♔g6 c2 5.e4 ♖h3!!

It is important to have the rook at least a rank further from the king. Putting it on h2 was equally good.

5...c1=♕? 6.♖xc1 ♔xc1 7.e5 ♖g4† 8.♔h5 ♖g1 9.e6 ♖h1† 10.♔g6 ♖g1† 11.♔f6 ♖f1† 12.♔e5 ♖e1† 13.♔d5 ♖d1† 14.♔c5 wins.

6.♖g1

6.e5 ♖g3† 7.♔f7 ♖h3 8.♔g7 ♖g3† 9.♔h8 ♖e3 10.♖xe3 c1=♕ is a draw.

6...c1=♕ 7.♖xc1 ♔xc1 8.e5 ♖g3† 9.♔f6 ♖h3

Black holds.

b) 3...♖a5†! is a far simpler draw. Black's easiest method is to harass the king. 4.♔g4 (4.♔f6 ♖a6†) 4...♖a8 5.e4 ♖h8 6.♖h1 c2 7.♔f5 ♖xh7 8.♖g1 It is a draw.

2...♖a8 3.♖g1!

This time the rook is stronger, not from behind, but from the side of the pawn.

3...♖h8 4.♖g7 c3 5.♖b7† ♔c1 6.e4 c2 7.e5 ♖e8 8.♔f3 ♖c8

After 8...♔d2 9.♖d7† ♔c3 10.♖c7† ♔d2 (10...♔d4 11.♖xc2) 11.e6 c1=♕ 12.♖xc1 ♔xc1 13.♔f4 wins.

Also possible is:

8...♖f8†

Diverting the king uncovers new motifs.

9.♔e4 ♖c8 10.e6!

The simplest. 10.♖c7 ♖xc7 (10...♖h8 11.♔f5) 11.h8=♕ ♖c3 12.e6! ♔b2 13.e7!

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c1=♕ 14.e8=♕ And Black has no perpetual.

10...♔d1

10...♔d2 11.♖b2! and White stops the pawn.

11.♖g7!!

And again the rook catches the pawn. But please note that 11.♖d7†? would be wrong because of 11...♔e2.

9.e6 ♔d2 10.♖d7†!

It is important to insert this check, for reasons that will become apparent.

10...♔e1 11.♖c7!!

This is a lovely intermediate move. It would be hard to see it in advance over the board.

11...♖xc7

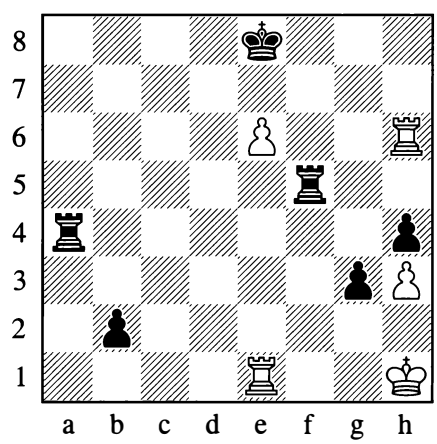
11...♖f8† 12.♔g4 ♔d2 13.♔g5 wins.

12.h8=♕ c1=♕ 13.♕h1† ♔d2 14.♕h2†! ♔d3 15.♕d6†

White wins.

15. The next study features a more complex double-rook endgame.

Pervakov & Sumbatyan, 1st Prize,
Nunn-50 JT 2005



1.e7 ♖f1†!

The more we see of Pervakov, the more we get used to moves like this, yet it is still very attractive. Black does not get anywhere with the alternatives:

1...♖e4 2.♖h8† ♔d7 3.e8=♕† ♖xe8 4.♖hxe8 b1=♕ 5.♖xb1 ♔xe8 6.♖b2 draws.

1...♖e5 2.♖h8† ♔d7 3.e8=♕† ♖xe8 4.♖hxe8 b1=♕ 5.♖xb1 ♔xe8 6.♖b2 is another easy draw. (6.♔g2 ♖a2† 7.♔g1 ♖h2 8.♖b4 ♖xh3 9.♖b2 is good enough as well.)

2.♖xf1 ♖a1

Now that the e7-pawn has lost its protection, this move gains in strength.

3.♖hf6!

The following is not good enough:

3.♖h8† ♔xe7 4.♖h7†

4.♖hf8 b1=♕ wins for Black here, because the f8-rook is under attack and so White cannot take on b1. Continuing to check fails because the black queen controls f5: 5.♖8f7† ♔e6 6.♖7f6† ♔e5 and Black escapes from the checks.

4...♔e6!

The king does not leave the e-file, in order to control the f-file in case White's h-rook moves there.

5.♖h6† ♔e5! 6.♖h5† ♔e4! 7.♖xh4†

7.♖hf5 b1=♕ 8.♖5f4† ♔e5 9.♖xb1 ♖xb1† wins.

7...♔e3 8.♖hf4 ♖c1!

Black promotes to a queen and wins. (But not 8...b1=♕ 9.♖4f3†! ♔e2 10.♖xb1 ♖xb1† 11.♔g2 when White draws.)

3...♖c1!

This is the most challenging move. Instead if 3...b1=♕ 4.♖xb1 ♖xb1† 5.♔g2 draws because the rook is not attacked on f6 and the continuation 5...♖b2† 6.♔g1 ♖h2 7.♖e6! ♖xh3 8.♖e2! leaves the black rook trapped again.

4.♖f8† ♔xe7 5.♖8f7†

White must continue checking.

5...♔e6 6.♖7f6† ♔e5

If the king goes to b4 or b3 then the reply ♖f8 would draw. The pawn ending with h4 and g3 versus h3 would hold no winning chances for Black.

7.♖6f5† ♔e4!

Black's king does not have to stay on the e-file in this line, but the result is the same whether he ends up on c3, d3 or e3. However, the text sets a trap.

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8.♖5f4†!

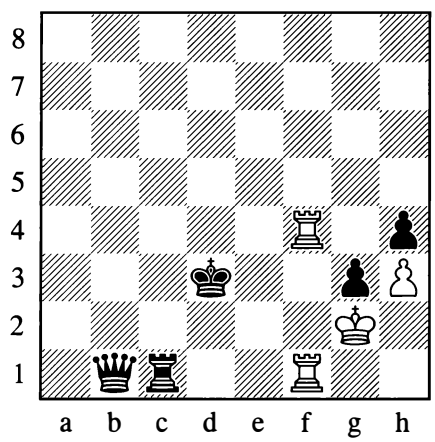
8.♖b5 ♖xf1† 9.♔g2 ♖f2†! wins for Black, but not 9...b1=♕? 10.♖xb1.

It is too early for 8.♔g2?, as seen after 8...b1=♕ 9.♖1f4† ♔e3 10.♖f3† ♔d4 11.♖3f4† ♔c3 12.♖f3† ♔b4! 13.♖3f4† ♖c4. The checks are over.

8...♔d3 9.♔g2!

Setting up a wonderful saving finale.

9...b1=♕



10.♖1f3†!

The same idea can be utilized with the black king on any square on the third rank, except b3 (in that case ♖1f3† can be met by ...♖c3!), but then White would have drawn by playing his rook to f8, as explained in the note to Black's sixth move.

10...♔c2 11.♖c4† ♔d2

After 11...♔d1 12.♖xc1† draws.

12.♖d4† ♔e2

But not 12...♔e1?? because 13.♖e3 is checkmate.

13.♖e4†!

And White is saved by the stalemate.

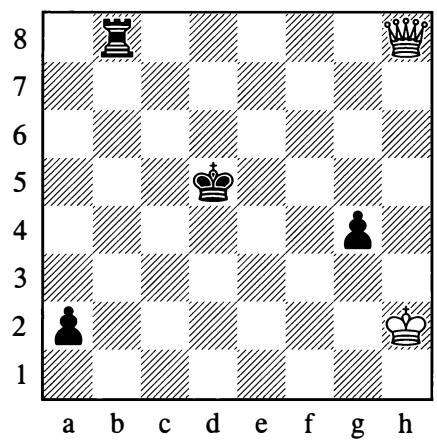
13...♕xe4

The game ends in a draw. Black had nothing to gain by running in the opposite direction, as there was no good way to escape the checks.

Compared with the note to White's third move, we can now see why it was so important for him not to take the h4-pawn!

16. In the next study there are only a few pieces, which makes the solution especially sweet.

Pervakov & Sumbatyan,
1st-2nd Prize Nona Tourney 2005



White is a queen for a rook up, but his opponent has two pawns, including a dangerous one that is just a single move away from promoting.

1.♕a1

White must begin by halting the a-pawn. However, this forces his queen to take up a passive position.

1...g3†! 2.♔h3!

2.♔xg3? ♖b3† 3.♔f4 ♖a3! is a theoretical draw. In order for White to win, the a-pawn would need to be one square further back.

2...♖a8 3.♕h1†

The queen visits the third corner as well.

3...g2 4.♕xg2† ♔c4 5.♕xa8

This queen loves the corners!

5...♔b3 6.♕h8

I told you she does!

6...♔c2 7.♕a1

The final corner-to-corner move seals the victory.

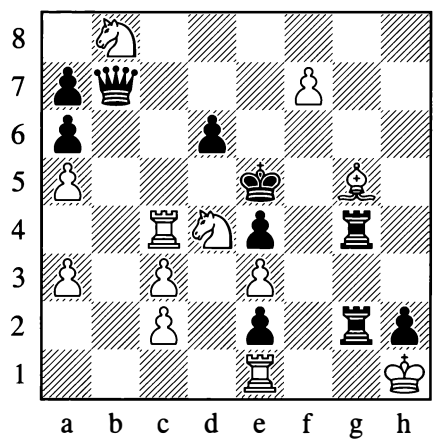
17. From this point on the studies have less educational value. On the other hand, in my opinion, the artistic value becomes greater. Some of the ideas are stunning, miracles keep happening! The first one is a special example,

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in which he manages to reproduce the trick of visiting all four corners of the board using the same piece. Except that this time, he does it with the king!

This study is a million miles away from anything one is likely to encounter in a tournament game, but this is more than compensated by the amazing artistry on display.

Pervakov & Sumbatyan, 1989



It is hard to work out what is happening on the board. Black threatens to give a check on g1.

1.♗f4†!

1.♘dc6†? Trying to get rid of the knight is not effective. 1...♔d5 2.♖d4† ♔c5 3.♘xa6† ♕xa6 4.f8=♕ ♖g1† 5.♔xh2 ♖4g2† 6.♔h3 ♖g3† 7.♔h4 ♖g4† 8.♔h5 ♖xg5† 9.♔h6 ♕xc6 10.♖xg1 ♖xg1 11.♕e7 ♖h1† 12.♔g6 ♖g1† 13.♔f6 ♖f1† 14.♔g6 ♖g1† and Black has a perpetual (but not 14...e1=♕?? 15.♕xa7† ♔b5 16.♖b4#).

1...♔d5 2.♖c6!

Threatening mate with the front c-pawn. No good is 2.♘xe2?? when 2...♖xe2 3.♖xe2 ♕b1† 4.♔xh2 ♕f1 wins for Black.

2...♖g1†

After 2...♖xf4 3.c4† ♔e5 4.exf4† ♔xd4 5.f8=♕ ♖g1† 6.♔xh2 there is no perpetual, e.g. 6...♕h7† 7.♔xg1 ♕g6† 8.♔f2 e3† 9.♔f3 ♕h5† 10.♔g3 ♕g6† 11.♔h4 ♕h7† 12.♔g5 and Black has run out of checks.

3.♔xh2 ♖4g2†

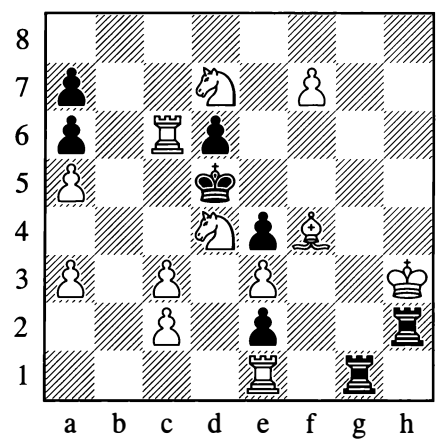
If 3...♖1g2† 4.♔h3 wins.

4.♔h3 ♕d7†!

Black plays for stalemate.

5.♘xd7 ♖h2†!

If 5...♖g3† 6.♔h4 ♖g4† 7.♔h5 ♖g5† (7...♖h4† 8.♔xh4 ♖h1† 9.♔g5 ♖h5† 10.♔g6 ♖h6† 11.♔f5 ♖h5† 12.♔f6 ♖h6† 13.♔e7 ♖e6† 14.♔f8 ♖e8† 15.♔g7 wins) 8.♗xg5 ♖xg5† 9.♔h6 ♖g6† 10.♔h7 ♖g7† 11.♔h8 ♖h7† 12.♔g8 ♖g7† 13.♔f8 ♖xf7† 14.♔e8 ♖e7† 15.♔d8 ♖e8† 16.♔c7 ♖c8† 17.♔b7 ♖c7† 18.♔xa6 wins.



6.♗xh2!!

Taking with the king would allow a perpetual. The difference will be seen 27(!) moves from now...

6...♖g3†

This rook will continue checking for many moves indeed.

7.♔h4

The king starts a long journey to avoid the stalemate; he uses all the available squares along the edge of the board.

7...♖g4† 8.♔h5 ♖g5† 9.♔h6 ♖g6† 10.♔h7 ♖g7† 11.♔h8 ♖h7†

And not 11...♖g8†?? 12.fxg8=♕#.

12.♔g8 ♖g7† 13.♔f8 ♖xf7† 14.♔e8 ♖e7†

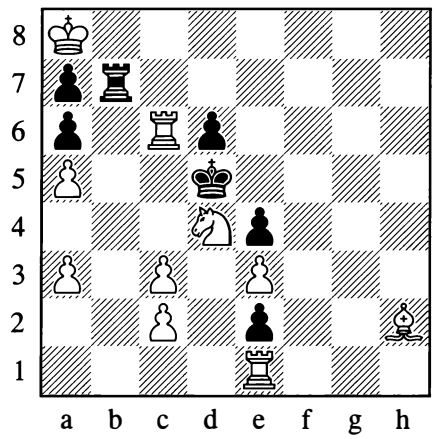
14...♖f8† is less challenging: 15.♔e7 ♖e8† 16.♔f6 ♖f8† 17.♔g6 ♖g8† 18.♔f5 ♖g5† 19.♔f6 ♖g6† 20.♔e7 ♖g7† 21.♔d8 wins.

15.♔d8 ♖xd7† 16.♔c8 ♖c7†

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Both captures lead to stalemate, so the king must continue to run.

17.♔b8 ♖b7† 18.♔a8!



Finally he reaches the corner! Black has no more checks on the second rank, so he switches to the first.

18...♖b8† 19.♔xa7 ♖a8†

19...♖b7† 20.♔xa6 ♖a7† 21.♔b5 ♖xa5 reaches the main line, one move more quickly.

20.♔b6! ♖b8† 21.♔xa6

Not 21.♔c7? ♖b7†!.

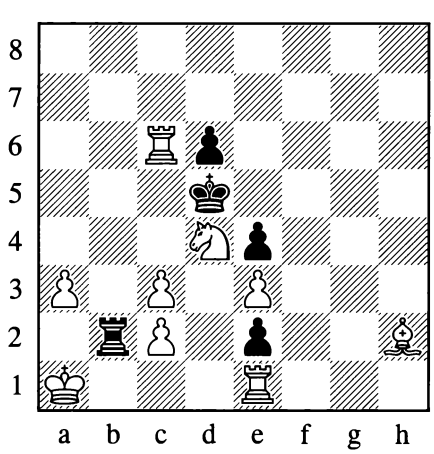
21...♖a8†

If 21...♖b6†? 22.♖xb6! avoids the stalemate.

22.♔b5 ♖xa5† 23.♔b4 ♖a4†!

And not 23...♖b5†? 24.♘xb5.

24.♔b3 ♖b4† 25.♔a2 ♖b2† 26.♔a1



26...♖a2†

If 26...♖b1†? 27.♖xb1 wins.

27.♔b1 ♖b2† 28.♔c1 ♖b1†

And if 28...♖xc2† 29.♘xc2.

29.♔d2 ♖d1† 30.♔xe2 ♖d2†

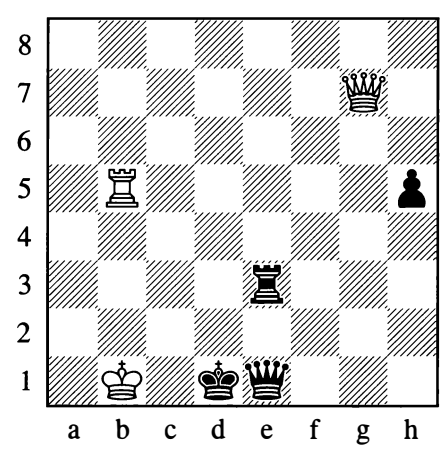
After 30...♖xe1† 31.♔f2 ♖f1† 32.♔g3 wins.

31.♔f1 ♖f2† 32.♔g1 ♖g2† 33.♔h1

The king reaches the destination after a very long march: 27 consecutive moves, to be precise. Finally Black has run out of useful checks. This is the point at which we see the value of White's sixth move, when he captured on h2 with the bishop. If he had instead taken with the king, White's bishop would stand on f4, and a further check on h2 would force a draw.

18. The next one looks like a more normal position, but it contains some amazing nuances.

2nd Prize "Shakhmaty v SSSR" 1986



1.♕g2!

White begins by blocking the discovered check of the battery. 1.♖d5†? looks frightening, but Black survives. 1...♔e2† 2.♔c2 ♕g3! This 'only' move saves Black. 3.♖d2† ♔f1 4.♕f6† ♔g1 and White cannot win.

1...♖e2!

The only move to resist. Other defensive tries are easily thwarted:

1...♕e2 2.♖d5† ♖d3 3.♕g1† wins.

1...♕g3 2.♕f1† ♔d2 3.♖d5† ♖d3 (3...♔c3 4.♖c5† ♔b4 5.♕c4† ♔a3 6.♖a5 is mate) 4.♕c1† ♔e2 5.♕c2† wins the rook.

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2.♖d5† ♖d2 3.♖d8!!

This is a very hard move to understand. Of course, it is trivial to see that Black cannot take the rook because of mate on c2, but why it is so important for the rook to move to the eighth rank? The point will become apparent eight moves later. For now, we will check a few of the alternatives:

3.♖d6? ♕e2 4.♕h1† ♕e1 5.♕f3† (5.♕xh5† ♕e2 is also a draw) 5...♕e2 6.♕c6 (6.♕b3† ♔e1 7.♖e6?? ♖d1† would be embarrassing) 6...♕e3 and Black holds.

Also poor is:

3.♖d4? h4!

3...♕e2? 4.♕c6 ♕e3 5.♕a4† ♔e2 6.♖e4 wins.

4.♕f3†

4.♕g4† ♕e2 5.♕g1† ♕e1 6.♕g2 h3! holds.

4...♕e2 5.♕c6 ♔e1 6.♕h1† ♕f1 7.♕xf1†

And not the suicidal 7.♕xh4†?? ♔e2† when suddenly Black wins.

After 7.♖e4† ♖e2 Black draws because his king threatens to step aside with a check.

7...♔xf1 8.♖xd2 ♔g1

Black draws, as the h-pawn will cost White his rook.

3...h4

3...♕e2 is less challenging: 4.♕h1† ♕e1 5.♕xh5† (this is the most practical decision, although 5.♕f3† is also good enough) 5...♕e2 6.♕h1† ♕e1 7.♕f3† (7.♕g2 ♕e3 8.♕f1† ♕e1 9.♕c4 also wins) 7...♕e2 8.♕c6 ♕e3 9.♕a4† and White wins the opponent's queen.

There is also 3...♕e3 4.♕f1† (4.♕h1† ♔e2 5.♕xh5† ♔f1 Black can hold) 4...♕e1 5.♕c4 ♕e3 6.♕a4† ♔e1. And now 7.♖e8 wins the queen.

4.♕g4† ♕e2 5.♕a4† ♔e1 6.♕xh4†

...♖d1† was a serious threat, so White must continue checking. It is useful to remove the enemy pawn anyway.

6...♔d1

If 6...♔f1 7.♕h1† ♔f2 8.♖f8† wins.

7.♕h1† ♕e1 8.♕f3† ♕e2 9.♕c6! ♕e3

After 9...♔e1 10.♕h1† ♔f2 11.♖f8† wins.

10.♕a4† ♔e2 11.♖e8!

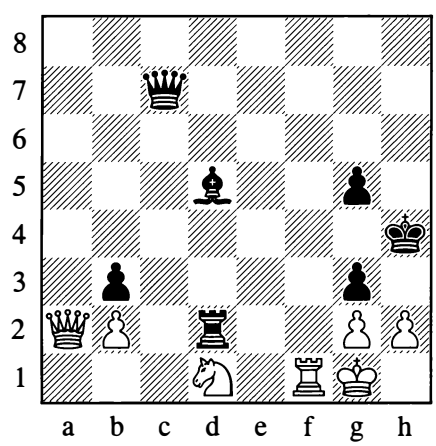
Finally, White is able to demonstrate the point behind his incredible third move. Fantastic stuff isn't it?

11...♖d1† 12.♕xd1† ♔xd1 13.♖xe3

And White wins. Judging by the date of the study (1986) Pervakov must have created it without any computer assistance, which makes it even more impressive.

19. The next study features some astonishing stalemating motifs.

Pervakov, after L.Katsnelson,
1st Prize Marwitz Memorial 1992



1.♕a4†

White must begin by bringing the queen into play.

1...g4

This seems to be the most challenging move, although in view of the remarkable defence at White's disposal, perhaps 1...♕c4!? is not such a bad alternative. Play then continues 2.♕xc4† ♗xc4 3.hxg3† ♔h5 4.g4† and now:

a) The unassuming 4...♔g6 may be best. Following 5.♖e1 Black is somewhat better, although it is hard to say if he has serious winning chances.

b) The more ambitious 4...♔h4 allows White to draw in nice style: 5.♘f2!? ♖xb2 (5...♗xf1 6.g3†! draws with this highly unusual motif)

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6.♔h2 ♖xf2 7.♖xf2 ♗d3 8.♖d2! b2 (8...♗c2? 9.♖d4 wins) 9.♖xb2 ♔xg4 and it is still a draw.

2.♘e3! gxh2† 3.♔h1 ♖xg2!

After this powerful blow, all the tactics appear to be working in Black's favour.

4.♘xg2†

After 4.♘xd5 ♖g1† 5.♖xg1 hxg1=♕† 6.♔xg1 ♕c1† 7.♔f2 ♕xb2† 8.♔g1 (8.♔e3 ♕e5†) 8...♕c1† 9.♔f2 ♕d2† Black wins.

4...♔h3

White seems to be in big trouble; Black dominates along the long diagonal and White's back rank is weak. However, his defensive resources are far from exhausted.

5.♖f3†!

White plays for a stalemate. In order to achieve it he must lose his last two pieces. Here is a useful tip: when there is a need to sacrifice more than one piece to achieve a stalemate, the master usually starts by giving away the weaker one.

5...♗xf3

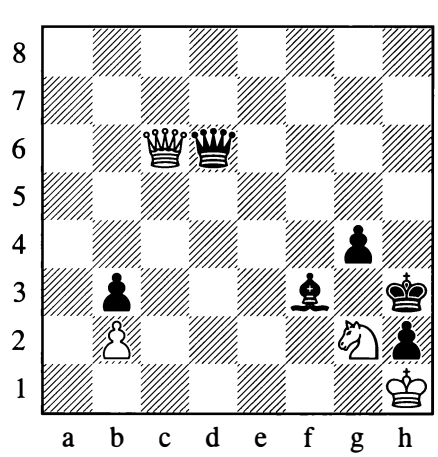
This leaves White with his queen, but getting rid of her is easier said than done.

6.♕c6!

White defends both the knight on g2 and the back rank with this marvellous move.

6...♕d6!

If 6...♗xg2† 7.♕xg2† ♔h4 8.♕g3†! and the stalemate saves White.



7.♕d5!!

The queen keeps achieving miracles on the diagonal.

7...♕e5!

Black responds in kind, defending against the h5-check by putting the queen en prise.

8.♕e4! ♕f5!

Black again defends with style. This time he stops ♕h7†.

9.♕d3!!

This blocks the way to the back rank, and maintains the defence of g2 by pinning the bishop.

9...♕g6! 10.♕e4! ♕h6!

Black is not ready to agree a draw yet! The text is another try to get to the first rank.

11.♕e3!

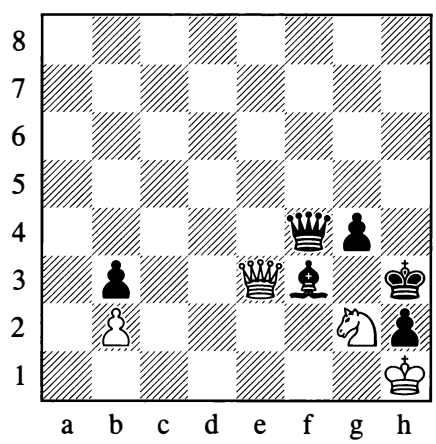
White can meet the invasion on this diagonal as well. Has Black finally exhausted his resources?

11...♕f4!

Setting a trap.

Instead, the attempt to infiltrate along another diagonal with 11...♕h4 can be blocked in a relatively 'easy' way with 12.♕f2!.

Somewhat more challenging, however, is 11...♕g5!?. Now it looks like White is in zugzwang as he cannot maintain the pin on the bishop. 12.♕d2!! But it turns out that he can defend the g2-knight, of course, by leaving the queen en prise. 12...♕f4 13.♕e3! ♕g5! 14.♕d2! and Black can make no further progress.



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12.♕xf3†!

White has to change his approach. With the black queen on f4 instead of g5, he would encounter difficulties after 12.♕d2?! ♗xg2†! 13.♕xg2† ♔h4, although he may just be able to draw with accurate defence:

a) The tempting stalemate attempt:

14.♕g3†?

is thwarted by

14...♔g5! 15.♕xb3 g3

Black is winning this endgame. The point is that, having captured the b3-pawn, White can no longer play for stalemate.

16.♕d5†

After 16.♕g8† ♔f5 17.♕f7† ♔g4 18.♕g6† ♔f3 19.♕c2 ♕e4! the battery is decisive.

16...♔g4 17.♕d7† ♔f3 18.♕d1† ♔f2 19.♕c2† ♔e1 20.♕c3† ♔e2 21.♕c2† ♕d2 22.♕e4† ♕e3 23.♕c2† ♔e1 24.♕b1† ♔d2

The checks run out, so Black wins.

b) However, White can utilize the stalemate motif more effectively with

14.♕f2†! ♔g5 15.♕c5†

According to my analysis White just manages to hold on.

15...♔g6

After 15...♕f5 16.♕e3† ♔f6 17.♕xb3 White survives.

16.♕c6† ♕f6 17.♕c4 ♔h5

17...♕f3† 18.♔xh2 ♔g5 19.♕g8† ♔f4 20.♕f7† ♔e4 21.♕e6† ♔d4 22.♕b6† Black's king cannot get the b2-pawn.

18.♕c5† ♕g5 19.♕c3

And White draws. Of course it would be hard to defend against this in a real game, so the main line can be seen as the more 'practice-oriented' solution.

12...gxf3 13.♘xf4† ♔g4! 14.♘h3!

This is very nice indeed, although the prosaic 14.♘d3 holds as well.

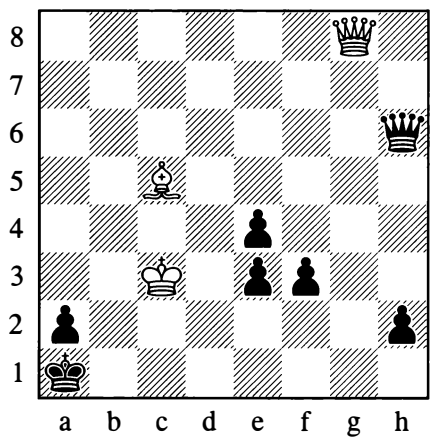
14...♔g3 15.♘g5 f2 16.♘e4† ♔f3

One more accurate move is required.

17.♘g3!! ♔xg3

White employed the stalemate so many times, so it is fitting that the study ends in this way.

20. 1st Prize, Union Team Ch. 1986



1.♗d4!

White sets up a battery. This motif often occurs in Pervakov's studies.

1...♕b6!

Black has to divert the bishop, and he does it nicely. Instead after 1...♕c6† 2.♔b4† ♔b1 3.♕b3† ♔c1 4.♗xe3 White checkmates.

2.♗xb6 h1=♕ 3.♗d4 ♕d1!

If 3...♕c1† 4.♔b4†! wins.

4.♕g1!

White can also try to divert the queen, or at least paralyse it temporarily. 4.♔c4† would lead to a draw after 4...♕xd4† (4...♔b1? 5.♕b8† leads to mate) 5.♔xd4 e2 6.♕g3 ♔b2 7.♔xe4 a1=♕ 8.♕g7† with perpetual check, as the black king must maintain the defence of the queen.

4...e2!

But Black has this strong retort. It is not easy to find a good reply for White. In fact, one could be forgiven for thinking that his situation is becoming desperate. But the magician has an ace up his sleeve...

5.♗h8!!

Again Pervakov utilizes the full dimensions of the chessboard. Instead after the premature 5.♔c4†? ♔b1 it is Black who wins.

5...f2

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5...♔b1 6.♕b6† ♔c1 7.♕b2 is mate, and 5...e1=♕† 6.♕xe1 ♕xe1† 7.♔c2† is equally decisive.

6.♕g7!!

Now we can understand why the bishop made such a long move. Black cannot avoid being checkmated.

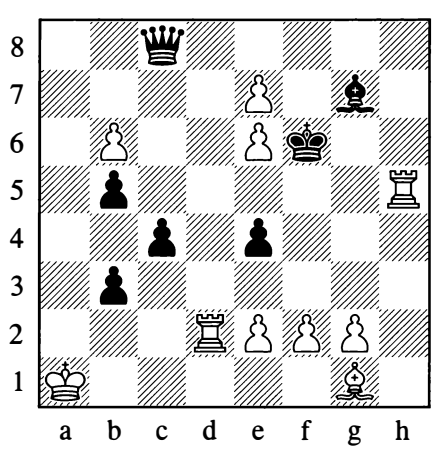
6...♕c1†

Other moves would also be met by a lethal check.

7.♔b3† ♔b1 8.♕a1#

21. In the previous study the winner had his king in the centre but was able to win with the aid of a battery using his bishop against his opponent's cornered king. In the next example, it is the opposite; Black's king looks exposed, but he is ready to give a nasty discovered check while the white king must watch out for mating threats. White's own bishop seems to be buried, and it is amazing to see how Pervakov brings it to life.

Special Prize, Rezvov-80 JT 2002



1.b7!

White begins by pushing the passed pawn, while also preventing any mating threats involving a queen on a8 and the bishop on g7.

1...♕b8

This is the most resilient attempt.

1...♔xe7†

To release the discovered check early eases White's task.

2.♔b1 ♕b8 3.♖d7† ♔xe6 4.♖xg7 ♕a7

Bad luck for Black as White delivers checkmate first.

5.♖h6† ♔d5

Or 5...♔f5 6.g4†.

6.♖d7† ♔c5 7.f4†!

The buried bishop decides the outcome! It is very unusual for a pawn to unleash a discovered check on its very first move – especially when the checking piece is a bishop. (Of course, we should remember that this was a composition and not a real game...)

Also interesting is:

1...♕e8

The queen can also try to hurt White from g6.

2.♗h2 e3 3.fxe3 ♔xe7†

3...♕xh5 4.b8=♕ ♔xe6† 5.♖d4 wins.

4.♖e5!

This is a nice way to block the diagonal.

4...♗xe5† 5.♗xe5 c3 6.b8=♕ ♕xb8 7.♖d7†!

White gives up the rook under the circumstances that he wants; Black's c-pawn will not transform into a d-pawn (the ugly duckling stays an ugly duckling!).

7...♔xe6 8.♗xb8

And White wins.

2.♔b1 c3 3.♖d7!

White must defend the e7-pawn. Without it, Black's play grows too strong. For instance:

3.♖d8?? c2† 4.♔c1 b2†! and out of the blue Black wins.

Or 3.♖dd5?? ♕a7 4.e8=♘† ♔e7 5.♖d7† ♔xe6 6.♘xg7† ♔xd7 7.♖d5† ♔e7 8.♘f5† ♔f7 and Black wins again.

3...♕a7

Black's mating threats appear rather menacing. White has some serious firepower around the black king, but his forces are not connected.

3...c2† 4.♔c1 ♕a7 is refuted in a similar fashion to that seen in the main line; the slight

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change in the queenside configuration does not help Black.

4.♖f5†!!

It turns out that the pieces do not need to be connected, at least in the conventional way. This is a wonderful shot. Black has to take in order to avoid the e-pawn promoting with check.

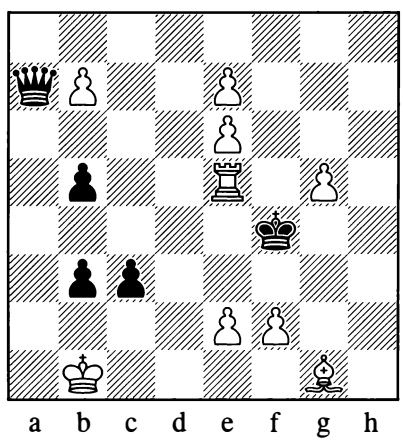
4...♔xf5 5.g4†! ♔f6

Black's king only has one square to enable his escape. If 5...♔f4 6.b8=♕†!! ♕xb8 7.♗h2† wins.

6.g5† ♔f5 7.♖d5† ♗e5 8.♖xe5† ♔f4

Black can put his king here safely now, since the rook blocks the diagonal. There is only one thing for it.

9.♖xe4†! ♔f5 10.♖e5†! ♔f4



11.♖f5†!!

White keeps using the rook in grand style.

11...♔xf5 12.e4†! ♔xe4

12...♔f4 loses to 13.b8=♕†!, now that White has eliminated the unhelpful rook.

13.f3† ♔d3 14.♗xa7

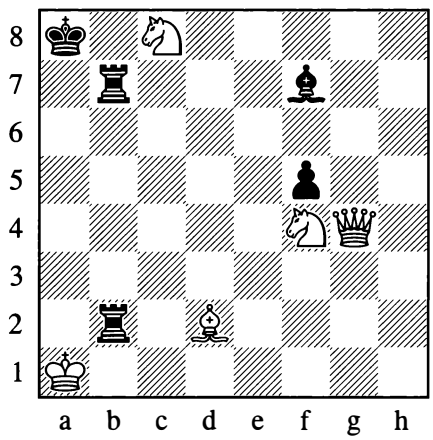
Finally the buried bishop moves.

14...♔d2 15.♗e3†!!

In the final act, the bishop sacrifices himself as well, to divert the king and win.

22. Pervakov's studies also contain stunning 'quiet' moves, as seen in both the present and following example.

1st Prize "Ceskoslovensky Sach" 1993



1.♘b6†!

Black has very powerful threats. In fact this is the only move that escapes a direct checkmate.

1...♖7xb6!

After 1...♖2xb6 2.♕xf5 ♖a6† 3.♗a5 White is fine.

2.♕f3† ♔b8!

Otherwise White gives a check on the a-file.

3.♘d5 ♖b1† 4.♔a2 ♖1b5! 5.♕g3† f4!

After 5...♔a8 there is 6.♕a3† ♔b7 7.♕e7†.

6.♕xf4†

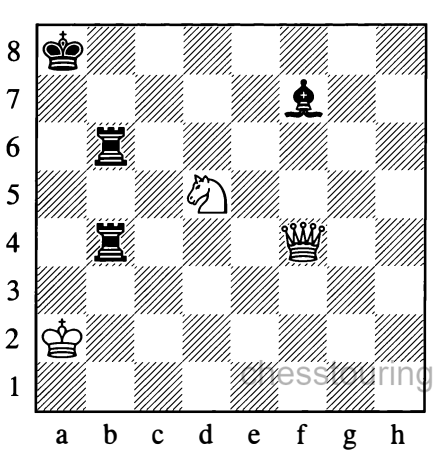
White's moves are forced every time.

6...♔a8! 7.♗b4!

This temporarily blocks the b-file and gets rid of the bishop. 7.♕a4†? does not work as 7...♔b7 wins.

7...♖xb4

7...♗xd5† 8.♔a3 ♖a6† 9.♔b2 ♖a4 10.♔c3 is no good, but the text looks like the end for White. A checkmate is threatened and the queen is hanging.



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8.♕c4!!

What an incredible move! White stops two rook checkmates and blocks the diagonal. The queen is en prise time and time again!

8...♖b7

8...♖xc4 9.♘xb6† is an obvious point, but 8...♔a7 also needs to be considered. In that case White holds the balance with: 9.♕c7† ♔a6 10.♕c8† ♔a5 11.♕c5† ♔a4 12.♕c2† ♔b5 13.♕d3† ♔c5 14.♔a3!! (14.♕c2†? ♔xd5 15.♔a3 ♖4b5! wins) 14...♗xd5 15.♕d4†! With the help of a stalemate White forces a draw.

9.♕c8† ♔a7 10.♕c5†

Not 10.♔a3? ♖4b5! 11.♘b4 ♖a5† 12.♔b2 ♖xb4† 13.♔c3 ♖c4† and Black wins.

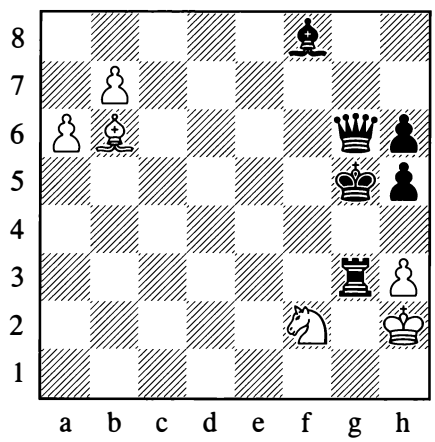
10...♖4b6 11.♔a1!!

White goes into a stalemate shelter.

11...♗xd5 12.♕a5†! ♖a6 13.♕xa6†! ♔xa6

The study ends in a stalemate.

23. 2nd-3rd Prize, Hero Cities match 1995



1.b8=♕ ♗d6!

This is the only move to offer serious resistance. If 1...h4 2.♕e5† ♕f5 3.♘e4† ♔g6 4.♕xf5† ♔xf5 5.♘xg3† wins.

2.♕xd6! ♖g2†!

This is a beautiful drawing attempt which relies on a discovered check. What makes it so special is that the checking piece can be taken. After the lame 2...♕xd6? 3.♘e4† ♔f4 4.♘xd6 ♖a3 5.a7 ♖a2† 6.♔h1 ♔g3 7.♘b5 White soon wins the rook.

3.♔xg2

3.♔h1? would of course be met by 3...♖g1† when Black holds.

3...♔h4†!

Black sets up a stalemate position out of the blue.

4.♘g4!

White avoids the draw, but this is not just driven by the inertia of desperation. 4.♕xg6? would be a stalemate.

4...♕xd6 5.♘e5!!

After this magical move Black is simply defenceless against the white pieces... not forgetting the a-pawn.

5...♕xe5

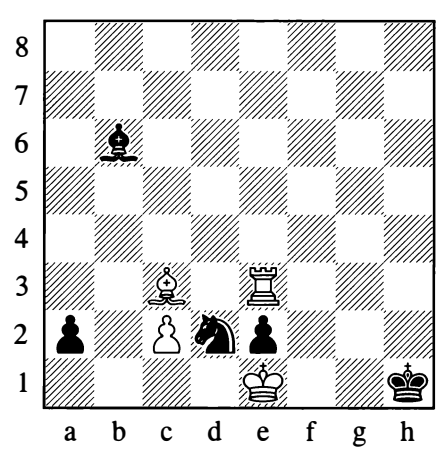
Alternatives are no better, e.g. 5...♕xb6 6.♘f3#, 5...♔g5 6.♘f7†, 5...♕d5† 6.♘f3†, or 5...♕d2† 6.♗f2† ♔g5 7.♘f3† winning the queen.

6.♗d8† ♕g5† 7.♗xg5† hxg5 8.a7

And the a-pawn decides the game.

Now we have reached the final study from Pervakov. I want to make the farewell an attractive one. Here is a pearl involving just a small number of pieces. With the board almost empty, he still manages to set up his favourite battery.

24. 1st Prize, Gusev JT 1994



1.♖e7!

The rook has many available squares, but most of the other options are not good.

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1.♖g3?? ♘e4 2.♖h3† ♔g2 even loses for White.

1.♖e6? ♘f3† 2.♔xe2 ♘d4†! forces a draw.

1.♖d3? allows the sneaky 1...♗a5!, e.g. 2.♗g7 ♘b3† 3.♔xe2 ♘c1† and Black draws.

1.♖h3†? ♔g2 2.♖h6 ♗d4! (2...♘f3†? loses after 3.♔xe2 ♗d4 4.♖g6† ♔h2 5.♗xd4 ♘xd4† 6.♔f2, but 2...♘e4! is also good enough to hold) 3.♖g6† (3.♗xd4 ♘f3†) 3...♔h3 4.♔xe2 The game ends in a draw.

However, according to my analysis there is a second winning continuation in:

1.♖e8! ♗a5 2.♗g7!!

White keeps the h8-square free.

Instead after 2.♗h8? ♘e4† 3.♔xe2 ♘c3† Black draws effortlessly.

2...a1=♕†

2...♘b3† 3.♔xe2 a1=♕ 4.♗xa1 ♘xa1 5.♖a8 is an alternative route to the same position.

The other possibility is 2...♘e4†!? 3.♔xe2 ♘c3† 4.♔f3 ♘b5 (4...a1=♕ 5.♖h8† ♔g1 6.♗d4† ♔f1 7.♖h1 and a checkmate) 5.c4 ♗c3 6.♗xc3 ♘xc3 7.♖e1† ♔h2 8.♖a1 White wins.

3.♗xa1 ♘b3† 4.♔xe2 ♘xa1 5.♖a8 ♗c3 6.♔d3!

This wins in a similar manner to the move 6.♔d3! in the note to move 6 in the main line below (after 1.♖e7 ♗a5 2.♗h8 a1=♕† 3.♗xa1 ♘b3† 4.♔xe2 ♘xa1 5.♖a7 ♗c3, when the main solution is 6.♔f1!).

It is important to note that in the present position 6.♔f1? does not work. In Pervakov's solution, with the rook on a7, this move was winning. But in the present position Black can draw easily with 6...♘xc2. Because of the position of the rook on a8 rather than a7, there is no mate on the h-file as the black bishop controls h8.

6...♘xc2

Bishop moves lose in a similar manner to that seen in the note to move 6 in the main line below. The text is also not quite good enough.

7.♔xc3 ♘e3 8.♔d3

Tablebases confirm that Black is lost. You can find some sample variations in the note to move 6 in the main line (the position of the white rook on a7 or a8 makes no practical difference).

To summarize, the presence of an additional solution must count as a small blemish on Pervakov's creation, but the study is still a magnificent one.

1...♗a5 2.♗h8!

If 2.♗g7 this square is not a fortunate one for the bishop. 2...♘e4† 3.♔xe2 ♘c3† It is an easy draw.

If 2.♗a1 there are no particular problems. 2...♘b3† 3.♔xe2 ♘xa1 4.♔f1 (4.♖a7?? ♘b3) 4...♔h2 5.♖e2† ♔h3 6.♖e3† ♔g4 7.♖a3 is a draw.

2...a1=♕†

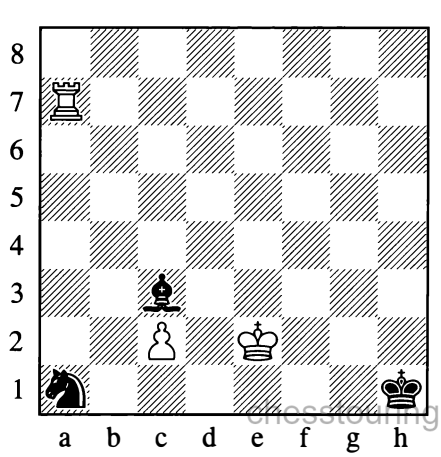
Of course Black can also begin with 2...♘b3†; it makes no practical difference.

Instead after the less resilient 2...♘e4†?! 3.♔xe2, Black can try putting either piece on c3, but both options lead to a swift demise:

3...♗c3 4.♗xc3 ♘xc3† 5.♔f2 ♘d1† 6.♔g3! ♘e3 7.♖a7 wins easily (in the case of 7...♘xc2 he can finish the game in style with 8.♔f2! with mate next move, even though taking the a-pawn is perfectly adequate as well).

3...♘c3† 4.♔f3! Once again White checkmates, e.g. 4...a1=♕ (or 4...♘b5 5.c4 ♗c3 6.♔f2 and mate) 5.♖h7† ♔g1 6.♗d4† ♔f1 7.♖h1#.

3.♗xa1 ♘b3† 4.♔xe2 ♘xa1 5.♖a7! ♗c3



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6.♔f1!!

This is the composer's breathtaking idea, which wins in a surprising way.

However, as I mentioned in the note to the first move, there is an alternative solution in 6.♔d3! ♘xc2

This looks like a good drawing attempt, but the unfavourable position of Black's king and knight tells against him.

Another option is 6...♗e5 7.♖a5!!. The long diagonal is not long enough for the bishop to stay safe! If the black king were on g2 it would be a draw. 7...♗f6 (7...♗g7 8.♖h5† ♔g2 9.♖g5† wins) 8.♖f5! ♗b2 9.c4! ♘b3 10.♖b5 ♘c1† 11.♔c2 ♗a3 12.♖a5 ♗b4 13.♖a4 White wins.

7.♔xc3 ♘e3 8.♔d3!

The only winning move. Instead 8.♔d4? ♘f1! draws.

8...♘f1

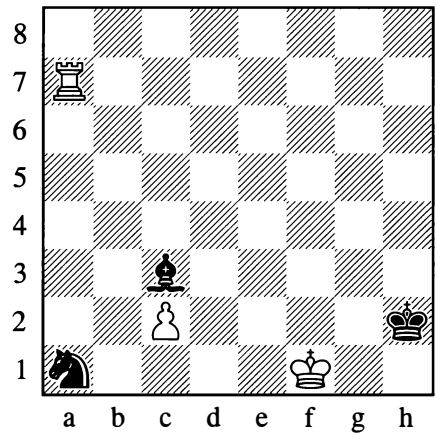
8...♘g2 9.♔e2 ♔h2 10.♔f3! ♘h4† 11.♔g4 ♘g2 12.♖e7! wins.

9.♖g7! ♔h2 10.♔e2 ♘g3† 11.♔f3 ♘f5 12.♖d7!

White is winning.

6...♔h2

6...♗e5 7.♖a5 ♘xc2 8.♖xe5 ♔h2 9.♖e2† ♔h1 is a powerless stalemate attempt. After 10.♔f2 ♘d4 11.♖e5 Black gets checkmated.



7.♖a2!!

This is just unbelievable! The rook moves away from the centre and sets up a battery on the second rank against the black king on h2.

7...♗e5!

This is the most resilient defence. The king dare not step onto the third rank, and if 7...♔h1 8.♖a3 ♗e5 9.♖a5 wins.

8.c3†

This wins the knight.

8...♔g3

After 8...♔h1 White changes his plan and wins with 9.♖a5!.

9.♖xa1

And White wins, since 9...♗xc3 runs into 10.♖a3.

I hope this selection of Pervakov's masterpieces brought you as much pleasure as it did for me. Please do not forget that Pervakov has many more endgames studies!

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