

Cyrus Lakdawala

Larsen

move by move



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Larsen: Move by Move

by Cyrus Lakdawala



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Larsen: Move by Move

Bent Larsen was one of the most influential chess players of the 20th century. He was a four-time Candidate for the World Championship and the first westerner to seriously challenge the Soviet Union's post-war dominance of the game. Larsen was admired by fans for his creative and combative style. He was a risk-taker who always sought complex positions. He felt completely at home in defence and was an opportunistic attacker. While other grandmasters would shy away from offbeat openings, Larsen would embrace and develop them. In this book, former American Open Champion Cyrus Lakdawala studies his favourite Larsen games and examines Larsen's skills in the key areas of attack and defence, initiative, exploiting imbalances, accumulating advantages and endgame play. He demonstrates clearly how we can all improve by learning from Larsen's play.

Move by Move provides an ideal platform to study chess. By continually challenging the reader to answer probing questions throughout the book, the Move by Move format greatly encourages the learning and practising of vital skills just as much as the traditional assimilation of knowledge. Carefully selected questions and answers are designed to keep you actively involved and allow you to monitor your progress as you learn. This is an excellent way to improve your chess skills and knowledge.

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

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by Cyrus Lakdawala

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Foreword

The *Move by Move* format is designed to be interactive, and is based on questions asked by both teachers and students. It aims - as much as possible - to replicate chess lessons. All the way through, readers will be challenged to answer searching questions and to complete exercises, to test their skills in key aspects of the game. It's our firm belief that practising your skills like this is an excellent way to study chess.

Many thanks go to all those who have been kind enough to offer inspiration, advice and assistance in the creation of *Move by Move*. We're really excited by this series and hope that readers will share our enthusiasm.

John Emms
Everyman Chess

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"Think left and think right and think low and think high. Oh, the things you can think up if only you try!" – Theodor Geisel, aka Dr. Seuss.

When a writer annotates a collection of games of a legendary player, he or she becomes by default a curator of the legacy. The book, like a portrait, should strive to encapsulate essential truths about its subject - in this case, the mind and chess games of Grandmaster Bent Larsen, one of the most creative, unorthodox and influential chess forces of the 20th century.

Jørgen Bent Larsen was born on March 4th 1935, in Tilsted, Denmark. He was a sickly child and took up chess as a pastime for his sickbed (chess was a disease he caught young but could never shake). Larsen was the first Western player to seriously challenge the domination of the Soviet machine, who regarded the World Champion's title as a national treasure, jealously guarded from the West. He was also the strongest Scandinavian player until current World Champion, Magnus Carlsen, arrived on the scene.

Larsen came to prominence in the late 1950s/early 1960s, collecting six Danish Championships. He qualified for the Candidates' cycle for the World Championship no less than four times. Although I don't believe Larsen was ever the strongest player in the world during his lifetime, he was one who on a given day could beat any world champion. He racked up multiple wins against every World Champion from 1948-1985. A list of his elite tournament victims included Botvinnik, Smyslov, Tal, Petrosian, Spassky, Fischer and Karpov.

From the mid '60s to the early '70s, Larsen was in effect the unofficial "World Tournament Champion", collecting a monumental number of victories, only later surpassed by Karpov and Kasparov. In 1970, Larsen played on top board in the USSR vs. the Rest of the World match (Fischer surprisingly agreed to play board two - many conjecturing it was because he feared Spassky!). Larsen scored 1½-1½, holding off the reigning champion, Boris Spassky. In the final game, Spassky fell ill, so super-GM Leonid Stein was substituted. Larsen's victory (the ending to which is examined in [Game 56](#)) gave him a personal victory over the Soviet machine on board one! Larsen was also a "people's GM". He participated in open tournaments, which was unusual for a world-class player, winning both the Canadian (I was there to watch the legend!) and US Opens, among others.

Larsen's Opening Contributions

Larsen was a jack of all trades in the opening, playing anything and everything. He heavily influenced the theory of numerous opening systems. As White: Bird's Opening (1 f4 - which should really be called Larsen's Reversed Dutch), Nimzo-Larsen Attack (1 b3), and Anti-Sicilian lines such the Grand Prix Attack (1 e4 c5 2 f4). As Black, he dabbled in the Semi-Slav, Grünfeld, Dutch, Philidor, Alekhine's Defence, Scandinavian, and the 5...gxf6 Bronstein-Larsen variation of the Caro-Kann. It is generally believed that Larsen's influence prompted Bobby Fischer to take up both 1 b3 and Alekhine's Defence (1 e4 Nf6).

Here's an example of Larsen's shockingly nonconformist approach to the opening:



The diagrammed position is B.Ivkov-B.Larsen, Candidates' match, Bled 1965. It arose from a now very fashionable line of the Semi Slav. Here, rather than follow the then automatic continuation 12...Nxc5 13 dxc5 Qa5, Larsen came up with the shocking (now quite routine!) theoretical novelty 12...Bxc5!!, allowing 13 dxc5 Nxc5! 14 Bb5+ Kf8!.

up with the shocking (now quite routine!) theoretical novelty 12...Bxc5!!, allowing 13 dxc5 Nxc5! 14 Bb5+ Kf8!. Kasparov writes: "As it turns out, with such a powerful knight at d5, Black can permit himself certain liberties."

Larsen's Style: Never Allow a Crisis to go to Waste

World Champion Magnus Carlsen represents a shocking new paradigm for modern chess. The high priest of the arcane fails to give the same weight to the opening stage as his colleagues, and is okay with an equal position with White and a slightly inferior one with Black, trusting in his innate chess skills to twist the game slowly his way - although later, he would tend to snap an opponent's crutch with either a novelty or a rarely played byway. Larsen was the precursor to and possible influence of Carlsen's strategy, always quick to mongrelize an opening with themes from another. Larsen was never interested in a theoretical arms race in the opening, with each side striving to outspend and out-book the other. His motto: Open softly, then adulterate the position with some zany, contaminating idea. For example:



The diagram is from [Game 31](#) (Botvinnik-Larsen, Leiden 1970). Have you ever seen a Dutch like this one? As we can surmise, Larsen did his very best to provoke and annoy the old man, developing his rook to the somewhat non-traditional a7-square!

My yoga teacher, Brenda, is also a fire-fighter whose life is one of leisure and work-outs, while waiting for a crisis to occur. Only when a fire breaks out does she spring into action and put her life at risk. Larsen's opening style follows the fire-fighter's rest/crisis pattern. As White he played so quietly that he didn't even expect an edge (which is rather strange when you consider that Larsen enjoyed dull positions the way Charles Manson loved the police!); with Black, he didn't mind a slightly inferior position, as long as some dynamism remained within its residue.

Larsen's games tended to follow this calm to crisis narrative, with the crisis nearly always instigated by him. He tended to avoid topical theoretical duels, lulling the opponent with restful tranquillity. Then, later in the game, he would always disturb the stillness by contaminating the position's logic with some crazy, atonal idea, burdening the opponent with original problems (and also messing with his head!). Nimzowitsch laid the formulaic foundations, while Larsen, his spiritual heir, continued the work by placing his bizarre games on display.

Dogma has a way of fossilizing our minds, if backed up by authorities in the field. Larsen, deeply influenced by Nimzowitsch's theories as a child, strove to prove them, both in his writings and, even more so, through the artistic medium of his games. He loved to lead opponents into landscapes devoid of familiar landmarks, and his prime directive was: Make opponents think for themselves. He shrugged off classical beliefs to embrace the hypermodern. So the Nimzowitsch/Larsen theories progressed: a centaur, fused with Nimzowitsch's body and Larsen's head.

If a criminal continues to get away with minor crimes, he soon believes he can break any law with impunity. Larsen - like Korchnoi, Tal and Lasker - played this way and fit this *modus operandi*. Studying Larsen's games, it feels to me as if he *deliberately* made ugly moves - even outright dubious ones - to provoke an opponent and, perversely, to flaunt the law. His goal was to curdle theory at its outset and put his opponents on their own resources, forcing them to think for themselves, rather than parrot theory.

Unlike classical giants, such as Botvinnik and Spassky, Larsen was not a good citizen. He refused to show iron-bound respect for authority or trend. Above all he was a lawless exhibitionist who delighted in shocking the establishment with unorthodoxy and then laughing about it by transforming the impossible into a reality. So reality-altered were Larsen's games, that to compare them with those of, say, Portisch or Spassky is like analysing an alien race by human standards.

The question arises: Was Larsen an original, or was he a logical extension of Nimzowitsch? My feeling is that the answer is a little of both!



Larsen's uniqueness lay in his perception of externally ugly, geometric anomalies which, when examined deeper, were proven sound. For example, in the above position from [Game 34](#) (Jimenez Zerquera-Larsen, Palma de Mallorca 1967), Larsen shockingly traded away his fianchettoed, holy grail, dark-squared bishop for a white knight on e5, and then followed with his last move ...d5-d4!, accepting doubled isolated e-pawns. He committed these seemingly egregious violations all in the name of the light squares, which he soon dominated, justifying his decisions. His radical ideas linger on in our imaginations, long after we finish playing over his games.

"Dear Grandmaster 0-6:"

Your slightly hot-headed, possibly unstable writer once got a tad peeved with the hero of this book because of an article Larsen wrote, and began a letter to *Chess Life* magazine with the rather rude salutation: "Dear Grandmaster 0-6:" When I cooled off, I deleted the email and instead, more politely, sent Larsen an unprintable, expletive-laced message via my old friend IM Tony Saidy!

Kasparov made an astute observation about Larsen's legendary "Bogoljubow-like optimism": "He (Larsen) apparently thought that any favourable position should win itself! Until the early '70s he got away with such ultra-optimism and it was a plus for him. But then it turned into a catastrophic loss of objectivity, which was demonstrated especially clearly by his match with Fischer." I remember the year well, 1971 Anno Domini. In his match with Bobby Fischer - who played chess as if he merely recollected something he already knew - Larsen came face to face with his greatest fears. Larsen, still in his prime, was somehow tailor-made for Fischer, in much the same way that Capablanca brushed aside Nimzowitsch's strategic contortions with disarming ease.

The lopsided 0-6 result was a macabre affair, which appeared to a stunned, gaping chess world as a match between a flawed mortal and an angry god, descended from the heavens to teach humanity a lesson. In a fight to the death one expects inevitable war wounds on both sides. In this case Larsen was routed in the most humiliating possible manner, while Fischer walked away without a scratch. Reasonable acts of compromise are not to be found very often in Larsen's games and, after a very close first game loss, Larsen's confidence sagged noticeably. His play seemed to grow more and more erratic as the match proceeded. Caution comes naturally if you are aware of another's power. Larsen's caution didn't increase. His inexhaustible supply of pluck and fighting spirit failed to bring benefit, since he was simply outmatched.

Larsen later blamed his loss on a heat wave which hit Denver the week of the match but, to me, this appears to be an ego-salving excuse. Maybe if the weather were cooler it may have made the match closer but I can't see anyone defeating Fischer in 1971. If the causal agent of a problem is external, then we have hopes of finding a solution; when the causal agent is internal, then we deal with a problem of epic proportions, because it is our own inner demons we face. I don't believe Larsen was capable of defeating Fischer in 1971. But as the 3rd/4th highest ranked player in the world, the match should have been closer. Normally, Larsen's temperament was one of a man who saw even the sunny side of a disaster - but not this time. I believe Larsen collapsed psychologically after the first game, his self-image somehow a casualty of Fischer's legend.

Larsen's Pathological Will to Win

"You see things; and you say, 'Why?' But I dream things that never were; and I say, 'Why not?'"- George Bernard Shaw.

Quantum physics nurtures a term called "decoherence", which is an upper limit to a computation, until a random error occurs. Larsen, a serial, fiendish violator of the lawful and the natural, utilized this physics principle to his benefit over the board, by constantly stepping outside of the accepted code. When he couldn't extract a win by outplaying an opponent, he relied on this principle by embracing the irrational (at least to the limited understanding of this annotator and most of his opponents!). He had a masterful knack for discovering a geometric incongruity and

of this annotator and most of his opponents!). He had a masterful knack for discovering a geometric incongruity and then tweaking it into some bizarre idea. He willingly climbed dangerous promontories in his risk taking, and his process of evolution existed outside the boundaries of "normal" logic. Creative whims, which he loved to indulge and coddle at the cost of pragmatic necessity, mixed with his near pathological will to win. Where other players saw reason for fear or concern, Larsen sensed opportunity. He won (and lost!) many games which shouldn't have taken that route.

The great Mikhail Botvinnik, the crown prince of the proper, frowned upon Larsen's impulsive, almost irrational style. There is a story of Botvinnik lecturing the young Garry Kasparov, after the prodigy made a quick move and only then thought about its consequences. "Watch out!" warned Botvinnik to his student, adding, "if you go on like this you'll become a Taimanov or a Larsen!"

Dr. Jekyll represented the rational mind, while his alter ego, Mr. Hyde, was the scary unconscious, which wanted what it wanted, no matter the cost or consequence. In the diagrammed position below from [Game 12](#) (Larsen-Bronstein, Moscow 1962), we see an example of Larsen's Mr. Hyde-like will to win, even when the rational mind said it can't be done.



How to navigate this Cyclopean maze? It seems that Black has more than enough compensation for two pawns. When I showed this to IMs John Watson and Keaton Kiewra, over at my house for an analysis session, they both preferred Black's position. I asked them: "How would you play for a win as White?" Now if you placed me in front of a chess board, granted me immortality, and then commanded me: "How can White play for a win?" I couldn't solve this enigma in a trillion years. Both John and Keaton agreed there was zero potential for White to play for the win. In fact, John added as a joke: "Hey! Maybe Larsen should play 42 g4! Ha ha ha ha ha ha!"

Well, John's joke move was exactly what Larsen played in the position, a stunning creative leap of faith, and one which appeared to be the decision of an abject lunatic! He confused the living daylights out of Bronstein and went on to win after sac'ing three (!) pawns.

Now a charitable reading of 42 g4!?!? (certainly not the move of an impoverished imagination, after which we must man-up and woman-up, placing squeamishness aside, and look without averting our eyes) is "eccentric". An uncharitable one would be: A symptom of the onset of mental illness! He couldn't help himself. Larsen would create a maze of confusion and abnormality across the board, which at times it feels futile to attempt to fathom. He pursued his objective - absconding with the full point - with the compulsive, Vertigo-like obsession of Jimmy Stewart with Kim Novak. Larsen, much like Dr. Frankenstein, seemed to delight in defying nature. There is something admirable, yet willingly dystopian about such defiance to the inexorable laws of authority. For a player who willingly goes for 42 g4!?!? it is next to impossible to code and file away the obverse logic and bizarre motivations behind his moves.

Of course this crazy will to win also cost Larsen games he should otherwise have drawn. Of all the cardinal sins, Franz Kafka considered impatience to be the most grievous. "Because of impatience we were driven out of Paradise; because of impatience we cannot return." If Kafka was right, then Larsen was one of the all-time greatest sinners of the chessboard. His thoughts existed in a perpetual state of agitation and he longed to disturb the position's peace. Larsen was inherently opposed to routine, the way the evangelistic fervour of a religious person opposes sin.

Here's an example of Larsen's will to win, which some might say borders on psychosis:

[1: M.Taimanov-B.Larsen, Vinkovci 1970](#)
Queen's Gambit Declined

Dedication

Many thanks as always to editor GM John Emms, to CC-SIM Jonathan Tait for the final edit; and to proof-reading czar Nancy for not bossing me around so much this book (although I'm sorry to report she did make me delete multiple jokes which I'm certain the reader would have found delightful!). May our minds discard routine and

multiple jokes which I'm certain the reader would have found delightful!). May our minds discard routine and Larsenize, with our moves convulsing our opponents with baffling innovations and offensive unorthodoxies.

Cyrus Lakdawala,
San Diego, October 2014

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6

D37

 Taimanov,M

 Larsen,B

1: Vinkovci

1970

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♖c2
c5 5.dxc5 0-0 6.♗f4 ♗xc5 7.♘f3
♘c6 8.e3 d5 9.a3 ♖a5 10.♙c1

Via a Nimzo-Indian the game has
transposed to a main line (with 5 Bf4)
of the Queen's Gambit Declined.
White's last move is considered
inaccurate by today's standards.

[Normal here are: 10.0-0-0!?

– Kasparov's favourite.]

[10.♙d1 – Korchnoi's favourite.]

[10.♘d2 – my favourite (which I
realize isn't much of an
endorsement!), threatening Nb3 and
also discouraging ...d5xc4, since
Nxc4 gains White a tempo.]

10...♗e7

[Today, we know that 10...d4!

11.exd4 ♘xd4 12.♘xd4 ♗xd4
is an easy equalizer.]

11.♗e2 dxc4 The correct time to
capture on c4, since White has now
wasted a tempo with his last move.

12.♗xc4 ♘d5

[QUESTION: Why not 12...♘h5
and pick off the bishop pair?

ANSWER: Your suggestion is a new
move in the position, but it may not
be a straightforward equalizer. After
13.0-0 ♘xf4 14.exf4 ♖d8 15.♙cd1
, for instance, I still prefer White
since Black experiences difficulty
bringing out his queenside pieces. If
♗d7, White has the tricky 16.♘d5!
, when acceptance leads Black into
difficulties: exd5?! 17.♙xd5 ♖b6
18.♙h5! g6 (18...h6?? is met by the
crushing 19.♙xh6! gxh6 20.♖g6+
etc) 19.♗xf7+! ♘f8 (19...♗g7??

walks into 20.♙xh7+! and mates)
20.♙xh7 with a nasty attack. Black
must find a succession of 'only'
moves just to survive the first wave:
♗f5 21.♖c3 ♘d4 22.♗c4 ♖ac8
23.♙e1 ♖xc4 24.♖xc4 ♗e6
and even then he isn't out of the
woods.]

13.♗xd5 exd5 14.♖b3 g5!?

The key requirement to the foundation
of any building is that it shouldn't
move! Once again, my inadequate
ChessBase annotation palette lacks the
more accurate "!?!?" annotation button,
necessary for Black's seemingly
preposterous move. From Larsen's
mysterious mind convulses forth an
aberrant yet potent idea, which I would
be afraid to try against a category d-
player, much less a top grandmaster.
Well, we can at least state with
confidence that Larsen chooses a non-
mechanistic approach to a problem!
When we first conceive the seed of an
idea, we must be adept in
differentiating between reality and
delusional fantasy. Here we see
Larsen's hidden genius: 14...g5 is
sound! This shocking move – akin to a
soaking spray of ice water in the face –
irrefutably proves that free will
supersedes a predestination model of
the universe. Larsen simply wasn't
designed to embrace safe havens, and
it's depressingly difficult to attempt to
understand the atonal outflow of his
arcane motivations.

QUESTION: Does Larsen believe the
earth is flat? Why isn't his last move,
which looks more like a declaration
than a request, given a double question
mark?

ANSWER: Larsen delighted in
flagrantly violating logic – our logic, not
his! Of course, such vulgar Larsonian

outbursts may aesthetically offend the more strategically minded Botvinnikian empiricists among us, who demand mathematical exactitude. I agree with you that such a move can't be accurately described as frictionless, but it isn't so bad. In fact, I was startled to discover that Houdini, after heavy analytical labours, was unable to come up with anything more substantial than an assessment of "equal" for White – and this only after being granted the leisure of a ten-minute think (the equivalent for a human would be one week of analysis)! Brain researchers recently claimed that a person who is constantly interrupted loses coherence of thought and requires 50% greater time to complete a mental task, while committing 50% more errors than someone allowed full concentration. I suspect Larsen was aware of this theory even in 1970! Here he tosses in his signature opening anomaly, which throws Taimanov totally off balance by making him multi-task his distractions. Larsen was a virtuoso at manipulating an opponent's mental state during a game. His last move was obviously designed to raise the blood pressure of even a Zen Master, so how could Taimanov's not rise after such a provocation?

I don't deny that Larsen's move is a blatant violation of sacred edicts, namely: don't weaken the pawn front around your king without a good reason.

QUESTION: Well, what is his "good reason"?

ANSWER: The nature of creativity is the blending of discordant ideas. In this case Larsen willingly swaps structural integrity and king safety for possession of the initiative. It turns out

that his anomalous move works, since the all-knowing, all-seeing computers back him up.

15.♟g3

[The g5-pawn is taboo: **15.♟xg5??** ♟xg5 16.♞xg5 d4! and the double attack wins a piece.]

[**15.♞xg5??** d4! is the same trick.]

15...g4 16.♞d4?! In any stock market transaction, there is a winner and a loser. The fact that Taimanov goes astray is not the work of mere chance. Larsen seized control over his own destiny through his high-stakes psychological gamble and emerged the lucky one.

[Correct was **16.♞e5!** d4 17.exd4 ♞xd4 18.♞c4 ♞c6 19.♞xg4 (19.♞xc6 bxc6 20.0-0 ♟a6 21.♞xg4+ ♞g5! wins the exchange, even if White is okay after 22.♞d7 ♟xf1 23.♞xf1 with a pawn and structural compensation) 19...♟e6 20.♞e4 ♞ad8 21.0-0 ♞d4 and now 22.♟e5!! ♞xe5! (22...♞xe4 23.♞h6# is a dream too beautiful to come true in the real world) 23.♞h6+ ♟g7 24.♞xd4 ♞d8 25.♞e4 ♞c6 26.♞xf7! ♟xf7 27.♞cd1 ♟g6 28.♞g4 and I'm not sure who stands better here; the verdict of dynamic equality is probably a fair one. If given a choice, I actually prefer Black, due to those nasty-looking bishops.]

16...♞xd4 17.exd4 ♟g5 18.0-0?!

[Taimanov is not one to back down from a challenge, chickening out with a line like **18.♞d1** ♞e8+ 19.♟f1 ♞a6+ 20.♟g1 ♞c4 21.♞xc4 dxc4 22.♞b5 ♟d8 and Black stands no worse, since the h1-rook remains out of play for a while at least.

Kasparov writes: "The exchange sacrifice appears tempting (the opponent is deprived of his

important bishop – the only defender of the dark squares), but in fact it turns out to be dubious." Larsen's true genius is to understand that Taimanov's thematic exchange sacrifice was not to be feared.]

18...♗xc1 19.♖xc1 ♕e6! Fear is kind of self-preservatory intelligence. Bravery, while considered a virtue in almost every human culture, can easily morph into foolhardiness which, in battle, is synonymous with abject stupidity. "The exchange ahead, Black does not begrudge giving up his b7-pawn," writes Kasparov.

[After **19...♖d8?!** **20.♕e5!**, White seizes control over f6 with full attacking compensation for the exchange.]

20.h3?! The prelude to an incorrect combination. Taimanov, just itching to punish Larsen's strategic extravagance, decides upon a tempting yet faulty attacking idea.

[**20.♔c2?!**, intending Qd2, is too slow due to f6! **21.♔d2 ♖ac8** and White has no obvious method of strengthening his attack.]

[Correct was **20.♔xb7! ♖b6!** **21.♔xb6** (White grudgingly acquiesces to Black's terms, half petulantly, half obediently) **axb6**, when Black stands a microbe better with his material edge, but my feeling is that White should be able to hold the ending. Of course, such a decision is virtually psychologically impossible for Taimanov, who is driven by an urge to punish, not grovel!]

20...gxf3 21.♕e5?

[Once again, Taimanov is disinclined to admit that his exchange sac was dubious and enter the grovelling line

21.♔xb7 ♖b6 22.♔xb6 axb6

23.gxf3 .]

21...f6 22.♕e4? This compensatory lunge turns out to be a fruitless tangent. With every addiction, comes a steep price. The disjunction between intent and implementation widens, as Taimanov throws material into his attack, the way a teenager running out of money plays the ring toss at the county fair, hoping to win the stuffed animal prize to impress his date. Taimanov's move looks like a brilliant shot, where the rhythm of White's initiative continues with the regularity of a beating heart, but the computers tell us this isn't so, and that the combination is flawed.

Petrosian and Bronstein observed this game. Petrosian asked: "What can he (Larsen) do? Take the bishop? But then a queen check on g3 and White wins." Bronstein, who displayed deeper insight into the position, replied: "Larsen is winning."

fxe5! Not fearing ghosts. Larsen has seen that White's "win" is no win at all.

[Declining the piece sac wasn't an option: after **22...dxe4?? 23.♔xe6+ ♕g7 24.♖c7+**, Black loses miserably.]

23.♔g3+ "As reward for your impertinence, you shall reap a harvest rich in pain," gloats White's queen in anticipation of her coming glory. Apparently she is mistaken. A locust swarm descends upon Black's king and it feels as if the time required to organize a coherent defence is a luxury Black woefully lacks. EXERCISE (combination alert/critical decision): Find Larsen's brilliant defensive idea, and it is White who is losing.

ANSWER: Interference/Deflection.

White's entire concept is short-

circuited when his queen gets knocked off her dark-squared track.

♙g4!! Oh, the sweet bliss of serendipity. Impossibly, every variation works out in Larsen's favour. "God's love does not shine upon the undeserving," intones the bishop, as he martyrs himself before White's startled queen. The mad cleric, bereft of reason, goes on a suicide mission, the tricky point of which is to deflect the white queen away from e5.

[Other moves lose for Black:
23...♔h8?? (the king tactfully attempts to steer the conversation away from the unpleasant subject of his upcoming execution, but without success) 24.♖xe5+ ♔g8 25.♖xe6+ ♔h8 26.♖e5+ ♔g8 27.♖c3! (there is no defence once the final white attacker enters) ♖xc3 28.♖xd5+ and Black can resign.]
[**23...♔f7??** 24.♕g5+ ♔e7 25.♖xe5 ♖f6 26.♖c7+ ♖xc7 (after 26...♔e8? 27.♖xh7 , Black is unable to avoid mate) 27.♖xc7+ ♕d7 28.♖e5+ ♕e6 29.♕xe6 ♖xe6 30.♖g7+ ♔d6 31.♖xb7 and White will win in the long run.]

24.♖xg4+ The queen partakes in foul curses and vulgar language (Everyman forbids me to reprint the transcripts!), considered indelicate for a person of her upbringing.

♔h8 Regaining control over the dark squares is the indemnity for which Larsen paid with his bishop sacrifice.

[Note that 24...♔h8 **25.♖g5** fails to dxe4 and the black queen covers e5 along the fifth rank.]

25.♕g5 EXERCISE (combination alert): Matters still don't look so easy for Black, since his king remains dangerously exposed. Find one powerful move and you end White's illusion of attack.

ANSWER: The double attack on White's rook and the f2-pawn seizes the initiative.

♚d2! 26.♖c7

[**26.♖f1** hxc2 27.♔xg2 h6 28.♕f3 ♖g8 is curtains for White as well.]

26...♖xf2+ 27.♔h2 ♖xg2+

Queens come off the board – and with them, White's hopes. **28.♖xg2 hxc2 29.dxe5 ♖ac8!** The only black pawn which matters is the one on g2.

30.♖xb7

[**30.♖xh7+** ♔g8 31.♖xb7 ♖f5 32.♕h3 ♖c2 is similarly conclusive.]

30...♖c2 31.♕f7+ ♔g7 There is no good discovery for White. **32.e6 ♔f6 33.e7** EXERCISE (combination alert): Black to play and force the win.

ANSWER #1: Deflection/Zwischenzug. **g1♚+!**

[ANSWER #2: **33...♖g8!** is even stronger, since 34.e8♕+ ♖xe8 doesn't change anything.]

34.♔xg1 ♖g8+ . White's knight falls next move.

0-1

Chapter One

Larsen on the Attack

When dealing with a cancerous tumour, a surgeon must choose between two strategies - one hot, the other cold:

1. Burn away the tumour with radiation.
2. Cut out the tumour with a cold scalpel.

In Larsen's case, he nearly always went with choice #2, since he rarely began a game thinking to attack, the way Alekhine or Tal did. Larsen would generally open a game quietly, and if he sensed that his intransigence to "normal" moves befuddled an opponent, he would strike, switching to attack mode.

Most of us don't view Larsen as a natural attacker, which in fact he was. Perhaps the reason for the misperception was Larsen didn't see himself as one. He considered himself to be a strategist and often played openings which weren't conducive to attacks, such as the Réti and 1 b3 with White or the Caro-Kann and Accelerated Dragons as Black. Larsen played so strangely that it sometimes seemed as if his games had mimicked an attack, yet missed the mark!

Larsen was an opportunistic attacker, who did so when a flash of inspiration struck him, like his stunning queen sacrifice versus Petrosian (see [Game 6](#)). Larsen, with his gambler's instinct, would sometimes attack against weaker players, even when its promise seemed disproportionately low to the risks involved. An example is his bizarrely brilliant reversed Dutch win versus Van Scheltinga (see [Game 4](#)).

The single trait which sticks out in Larsen's attacking games is that they require imagination even more than analytical persistence. It almost feels as if he was gifted by fate with a serendipitous stroke of good fortune: from nothing, something suddenly appears, while his opponent's king tries to enunciate his final statement but passes away with an incoherent gurgle.

[2: B.Larsen-E.Geller, Nimzowitsch Memorial, Copenhagen 1960](#)

Reversed Modern Defence

[3: K.Robatsch-B.Larsen, Halle Zonal 1963](#)

Sicilian Defence

[4: B.Larsen-T.Van Scheltinga, Beverwijk 1964](#)

Bird's Opening

[5: B.Larsen-L.Portisch, Amsterdam Interzonal 1964](#)

French Defence

[6: B.Larsen-T.V.Petrosian, Piatigorsky Cup, Santa Monica 1966](#)

Sicilian Defence

[7: B.Larsen-B.Ivkov, Palma de Mallorca 1967](#)

English Opening

[8: S.Gligoric-B.Larsen, Capablanca Memorial, Havana 1967](#)

Nimzo-Indian Defence

[9: B.Larsen-D.Byrne, San Antonio 1972](#)

English Opening

[10: B.Larsen-U.Andersson, Bugojno 1982](#)

English Opening

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8

A09

 **Larsen,B**
 **Geller,E**

2: Nimzowitsch Memorial, Copenhagen
[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.g3 The other Larsen's Opening.

Larsen was never a big fan of mainstream variations and often gave them up, only when they became popular!

[QUESTION: Isn't **1.b3** Larsen's Opening?

ANSWER: Yes, 1 b3 is the Nimzo-Larsen Attack, where he scored an unbelievable 81% with a FIDE performance rating just over 2700 – which by today's inflated standards would probably be 2800+! But did you know that Larsen opened with 1 g3 in over a hundred games in his career? So perhaps this move, too, should bear his name.]

1...d5 2.♗g2 e5 So we reach a Modern Defence in reverse. A rather different one appears in Game 28, while Game 50 features a reversed King's Indian. **3.♗f3!?** Aren't we all shackled by the inertia of our own nature? Larsen, an innate troublemaker on the board, decides to weird it up at the outset by inviting Geller into a reversed Alekhine's Defence.

♗c6 No thanks.

[QUESTION: Can Black equalize by booting the knight with **3...e4 4.♗d4** - ?

ANSWER: Larsen was a specialist in the Alekhine's as Black, so he was happy to play into a position he already grasped – with an extra tempo, which mattered. He scored 3½/4 from the reversed Alekhine's, with only Bronstein escaping loss.

A) 4...♗f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.d3 c5

7.♗b3 exd3 8.cxd3 and then:

A1) 8...♗c6 9.♗c3 h6 10.e4 d4 11.♗d5! ♗xd5? (Black is probably better off leaving this knight alone) 12.exd5 ♗b4 13.♖e1 0-0 (B.Larsen-K.Ojanen, Berg en Dal 1960), and here 14.a3 ♗a6 15.♗a5! seizes the initiative.;

A2) 8...0-0 9.♗g5 ♗bd7 10.♗c3 h6 11.♗f4 ♗b6 (11...d4 can lead to a mess: 12.♗a4 g5 13.♗d2 ♖b8 14.f4 b5 15.♗a5 bxa4 16.♗c6 with balanced chances in the complex middlegame) 12.d4 c4 13.♗c5 with favourable-looking Alekhine-type position for White, B.Larsen-T.Van Scheltinga, Beverwijk 1960.;

A3) 8...--;

B) 4...c5 5.♗b3 c4!? (a reversed Chase Variation, a little huffy but playable) **6.♗d4 ♗c5 7.c3 ♗c6 8.♗xc6 bxc6 9.0-0 ♗e7 10.b3 ♗a6 11.♗a3 ♖b6 12.bxc4 ♗xc4 13.♗xc5 ♖xc5 14.d3 exd3 15.exd3 ♗a6 16.♖e1 0-0 17.d4 ♖d6 18.♗d2 c5? 19.♖a4** was good for White in B.Larsen-J.H. Donner, Zürich 1959;

(but the computer prefers **19.dxc5 ♖xc5 20.♖a4** , when Black is thrown on the defensive and loses material; e.g. **♗b5 21.♗b3! ♖b6 22.♖a3 ♗f5 23.♖ad1** and the d5-pawn falls.);

C) 4...♗c5 5.♗b3 ♗b6 6.0-0 ♗f6 7.d3 exd3 8.cxd3 0-0 9.♗c3 c6 10.♗f4 ♖e8 11.♖c1 ♗a6 12.♗a4 ♗c7 13.a3 ♗e6 14.♗d2 d4 led to a draw in B.Larsen-D. Bronstein, Vinkovci 1970. Instead, I might consider 9 d4 or 10 d4, switching the structure and playing

for an eventual queenside minority attack, while Black's b6-bishop looks out of play.;

D) 4...--]

4.0-0 ♖f6 5.c4 d4 I think this is Black's best move in the position.

[**5...dxc4** 6.♖a4 leads to a kind of reversed Dragon, which Larsen also specialized in as Black, so Geller wisely avoided it.]

6.d3 The game now evolves into a Schmid Benoni, the most famous example (which arose via a Classical Pirc) being Karpov's final win against Korchnoi in their 1978 World Championship match in Baguio. In the reversed position White is a tempo up, having already castled; on the other hand, Black has not yet committed his f8-bishop.

♙d6!

[The routine **6...♙e7** is met by the clever **7.b4!** ♖xb4 (or **7...♙xb4** 8.♗xe5! ♗xe5 9.♖a4+ ♗ed7 10.♖xb4 c5 11.♖b3 and I like White due to the bishop pair and the potential for Benko Gambit-style pressure down the b-file, and a potential minority attack with a2-a4-a5, if Black can be induced into playing ...b7-b6 later on) 8.♗xe5 0-0 9.♗d2 ♙d6 10.a3 ♗a6 with an edge for White in V.Kramnik-V.Topalov, Monte Carlo (blindfold rapid) 2011, since he managed to swap a wing pawn for a central pawn.]

7.♗a3 QUESTION: Why did Larsen post his knight on the edge?

ANSWER: White often plays for b2-b4 in such positions, preparing it with Nc2, Rb1, a2-a3 (or b2-b3 first if Black plays ...a7-a5) and Bd2.

[Alternatively, White can opt for a more direct central challenge with

7.e3 0-0 (**7...dxe3** 8.♙xe3

is also probably playable for Black) 8.exd4 ♗xd4 9.♗xd4 (creating an imbalance) exd4 10.♙g5 h6 11.♙xf6 ♖xf6 12.♗d2 , as in H.Danielsen-S. Lund, Koge 2013. Without knights, I don't fear Black's kingside prospects, while White may yet generate something on the queenside.]

7...0-0

[Kasparov indicates that it is okay for Black to chop with **7...♙xa3** 8.bxa3 , handing over the bishop pair and opening the b-file in exchange for inflicting structural damage. Larsen in fact played this way himself (albeit without success) in M. Quinteros-B.Larsen, Mar del Plata 1981.]

8.♖b1 ♖e8 9.♗c2 a5 10.b3 h6

This allows White's b-pawn to begin rolling forward.

[Larsen suggested **10...♗b4** as an improvement, taking some of White's fun away. S.Shivaji-G.Meier, Freemont 2012, continued 11.a3 ♗xc2 (**11...♗a2!?** is risky but possible; e.g. 12.♙b2 ♗c3 13.♙xc3 dxc3 14.♗g5 h6 15.♗e4 ♗xe4 16.♙xe4 and although the c3-pawn may fall, it feels like Black should generate enough compensation with the bishop pair and central initiative) 12.♖xc2 ♖e7 13.b4 axb4 14.axb4 ♙xb4 15.♗xe5 ♙c5 (**15...♖xe5** 16.♖xb4 ♖xe2 17.♖xe2 ♖xe2 18.c5 c6 19.♖xd4 ♙f5 also looks okay) , and now White should be content with 16.♗f3 ♖xe2 17.♖xe2 ♖xe2 18.♙b2 , regaining the pawn on d4, after which the game looks balanced.]

11.a3 ♙f5 Geller thematically plays for an ...e5-e4 break, ignoring White's thrust on the queenside. **12.b4 axb4 13.axb4 ♖d7 14.b5 ♗d8** The knight

has more prospects retreating since it may later head for the hole on c5.

15.e3! A well-thought out decision.

Black's big centre must be challenged before Black is allowed time to bring his knight to c5.

QUESTION: Doesn't this create a backward and weak d3-pawn?

ANSWER: The pawn may be backward on d3, but its weakness is counterbalanced by White's play against e5, which is also made vulnerable by the swap.

dxe3 16.♟xe3 ♟h7 In a way this move is perfectly logical, since Black's bishop retains a bead on the d3-target.

[Nevertheless, I think **16...♟h3!** is simpler. Larsen gives **17.d4** and writes: "White has a slight edge", but Kasparov disputes this claim, as do I. In fact, after **exd4 18.♟xd4 ♟e4 19.♟b2 ♟c5**, as in D.Müller-R. Erkens, correspondence 1993, I quite like Black's position.]

17.♟b2 c6 18.♟a1! Triple purpose:

1. White's rook challenges the a-file.
2. The rook vacates b1, which means the d3-d4 break is now in the air.
3. If Black trades rooks, White's queen takes up a Rétiesque post on a1, where she adds pressure to e5.

♟xa1 This only helps his opponent.

[Black may have been better off playing **18...♟c8 19.d4 exd4 20.♟xd4 ♟e5**.]

19.♟xa1! The fulfilment of Réti's dream. The queen makes her presence felt along the a1-h8 diagonal. Yes, d3 and b5 hang, but White finds counterattacking opportunities on e5 and, soon afterwards, f6 and g7.

cxb5

[Taking the other pawn with **19...♟xd3** would be answered by **20.♟d1 ♟e2 21.♟xe5** and White looks a shade

better; e.g. **♟c7 22.♟d2 ♟xe5**

23.♟xe5 ♟xe5 24.♟xe2 ♟e8

25.bxc6 bxc6 26.♟a2 with superior piece activity.]

20.♟xe5 ♟c7 21.♟f3! Uncovering an attack on f6. Kasparov called this "fresh, dynamic play". Larsen continues to find powerful, yet innocuous moves, whose meek outer appearance would excite little comment from the tournament observer.

♟e7?!

[Black could minimize his disadvantage with **21...♟xe3! 22.fxe3 ♟xd3 23.♟xf6 gxf6 24.cxb5 ♟xf1 25.♟xf1 ♟e7 26.♟f2 ♟c5 27.♟d4 ♟e5 28.♟d3**, when White has only a slight edge.]

[But not **21...♟xd3? 22.♟xf6 ♟xf1 23.♟xf1 gxf6 24.♟d5** and wins.]

22.♟c1 Larsen said this was his most difficult move of the game to find, yet I don't think it's the best.

[Kasparov preferred **22.♟e1** here]

[while **22.♟d4!** also puts Black under tremendous pressure. White's attack begins to shift, discarding its old liquefied form, which Black once found difficult to pinpoint, and comes out into the open. Now Nxb5 is in the air, as well as Ndf5, taking aim at e7, f6 and g7 squares.]

22...bxc4?! This only makes things worse.

[**22...♟xd3 23.♟d5! ♟d6 24.♟xe7+! ♟xe7 25.♟e1 ♟d6 26.♟xf6 ♟xe1+ 27.♟xe1 gxf6 28.♟xd3 ♟xd3 29.♟f1 ♟f5 30.♟a8 ♟d7 31.cxb5 ♟g7** is a difficult ending for Black, yet well within drawing range.]

23.dxc4 ♟b6 24.♟d5 Relentlessly pursuing Black along the a1-h8 diagonal. **♟xd5**

[**24...♟a6?** drops a pawn to **25.♟xa6 bxa6 26.♟c7 ♟f8 27.♟xa6**]

25.cxd5 ♖f8 Now g7 appears secure, but Larsen finds creative avenues to go after the square later on. **26.♗d4 ♜b3 27.♘e5!** Targeting g7! – White intends Nd7 and Nxf8, eliminating the key defender. **b5?** If you travel down an incorrect path, realize it's incorrect and yet continue anyway, you compound your initial mistake tenfold by the refusal to retract. Here, after an anxious interval, Black seems to have stabilized his king-safety issues and can now fight for the initiative, but this is an illusion. His tempting move weakens too many defensive squares.

[I suspect Geller knew his move had to be bad but just couldn't get himself to play a passive line like **27...f6** 28.♘d7 ♖a3 29.♞c3 ♖b2 30.♞xb3 ♖xa1 31.♖e3 , when Black still retains chances to survive.]

[Another possibility was **27...♜b5** , covering the critical d7-square]
[but not **27...♗f5?** due to 28.g4! , driving the bishop away again.]

28.♘d7! Via surreptitious channels the knight goes after the defender of g7, which creates fatal weakness around Black's king. **♖a3** Great players can't be easily stereotyped. One associates an open, pure piece-play game with Geller, and tortured strategic manoeuvrings with Larsen – yet here we see Larsen completely outplay his great opponent – in Kasparov's words: "almost out of nothing" – in a wide open position.

EXERCISE (critical decision): Geller's last move was a desperate lunge in severe time pressure. Analyse the sacrifice 29 Bxg7. Does it work? Or would 29 Rc3 be preferable? Which would you play?

[Now **28...f6** 29.♘xf8 ♜xf8 30.♖c5+ ♘g8 31.d6 ♖f5 32.♜d4 ♜f7 33.♖b4

is hopeless for Black, who is hogtied by advanced d-pawn.]

ANSWER: "Excuse me, while I kiss the sky." There is no need to move the rook since the sacrifice is crushing. Geller's inviting the white bishop and queen battery to g7 is the equivalent of a family bringing home an adorable puppy and then discovering it is rabid, as it begins to snarl and show its teeth in a threatening manner.

29.♖xg7! For so long, the queen/ bishop duo harboured grievances against Black's king, which they refused to forgive or forget. Larsen's will is unbending in the cause of breaking down every obstacle along the a1-h8 diagonal, and he is willing to pay heavily in material for the privilege.

♗xc1 What use are riches if we are unable to defend them later on? The greedy bishop now wishes he hadn't taken the vows of poverty which came with his ordination.

30.♘f6+ ♜xg7 The king, once so haughty and distant, is forced to socialize with those below his social standing, while wandering disconsolately in his netherworld. Now Black sustains grievous and irreparable injury on the dark squares.

31.♘xe8+ ♜f8 32.♜h8+ The room clears quickly as everyone, to their universal consternation, recognizes the tell-tale signs of one of the queen's torrential rants coming on.

♗e7 33.d6+ ♘d7 34.♘f6+!

[**34.♖h3+??** would allow Black to escape after ♘e6 35.♘f6+ ♜xd6 36.♜xh7 ♘g5 37.♘e4+ ♗e7 (the king remains alive, miraculously drawing strength from a hidden source, as his attempt to sneak away in the watches of the night succeeds) 38.♘xg5 ♖xg5 with an almost certain

draw.]

34...♙c8 35.♚h3+! The market crashes and Black, to his horror, watches his profits dissolve to zero. This was Larsen's deep point: he regains the lost piece while maintaining a decisive attack.

♙b7 36.♖xd8 ♖d1+ 37.♙g2

How annoying: ...Be4+ is covered by White's knight. **♚d3** EXERCISE (combination alert): White to play and force mate in four.

ANSWER: **38.♚c8+** Queen checks on c7 or c8 are, respectively, one or two moves slower. **♙a8** Nobody is fooled by the king's counterfeit smile. **39.♖a5+**

[The queen's eyes blaze and sparkle with anger like Fourth of July fireworks, as she envisions a world without Black's king: **39.♖a5+ ♙b8 40.♖b6+ ♙xc8 41.d7#** and the dead king glares at his killer with unseeing, accusatory eyes. Getting mated with a pawn permanently damages the psyche of the victim.

As it happened Geller lost on time instead. A deliberate time loss is a kind of chess euthanasia, which makes death less painful for the terminally ill of the board. In this instance, Larsen wrote that Geller stretched his hand out in resignation, just as his flag fell, and right before he was mated! Does this mean White gets more than one point by winning? Larsen asked: "...but one point is the minimum, isn't it?"

QUESTION: Shouldn't this game have been placed in the Accumulating Advantages chapter of the book? After all, Larsen's attack came as a result of his earlier brilliant strategic play.

ANSWER: Well, maybe so. I realize the book is segmented into neat

chapters, yet the games don't always come with one, neatly packaged theme. So the annotator must often choose between two or three themes. I do agree with you. Larsen's strategic play was the dominant theme of this game. But I plead extenuating circumstances: I had an overflow of games already in the Accumulating Advantages chapter and not enough in the Attack chapter, so I thought I would sneak it in here!]

1-0

9

B33



Robatsch,K



Larsen,B

3: Halle Zonal

1963

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4

4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 The ghost of Pelikan past. This is an example of a very early Pelikan Sicilian, which is all the rage today but was a rare guest in 1963. Larsen said he played it as a surprise weapon, "and if it was not 100 per cent correct I didn't mind." Of course today, the Pelikan, adopted by even world-class players, is considered completely legit.

6.♘db5 d6

[I tearfully pleaded with Everyman to allow me to write a book on the rarely-played pseudo-Pelikan **6...h6!?**, which I call The Ulfie, since GM Ulf Andersson has zillions of online games with it and has convinced me it is absolutely playable for Black.]

7.♚g5 a6 8.♘a3 ♚e6 Perhaps a bit shady by modern standards.

[The Chelyabinsk Variation, **8...b5**, is nearly always preferred nowadays.]

9.♠c4 The knight hurries to c4 before Black plays ...b7-b5 after all. **♚c8**
This move was unusual at the time and perhaps a surprise for Robatsch, who spent almost an hour on his response.

[**9...♠d4** was the main theoretical continuation in 1963.]

10.♠d5

[A more reliable way might be

10.♙xf6! ♚xf6 (or **10...gxf6** **11.♙d3** ♜e7 **12.♙e3**) **11.♠b6** ♚b8 **12.♠cd5** ♚d8 **13.c3** ♙e7 **14.♙c4**

, when White's domination of d5 gave him a slight yet enduring edge, A.

Karpov-J.Nunn, London 1982.]

10...♙xd5 **11.♙xf6** gxf6 **12.exd5?!**

I wouldn't recapture with the pawn.

QUESTION: Why criticize White's last move when it gained a tempo?

ANSWER: Black's Pelikan dream is to plug d5 with a pawn; and I question the tempo gain, since Black wants the knight on e7 anyway to bolster the f5-square.

[White should probably go for

12.♚xd5 ♠d4 **13.♙d3** (**13.0-0-0** b5 **14.♙e3** ♙h6 equalizes; e.g. **15.♙b1** ♙xe3 **16.fxex3** ♚c5 **17.♚b7** ♜xc2 **18.♚xa6** ♙e7 **19.♙d3** ♚c7 **20.♙xc2** ♚xc2 **21.♚xd6+** ♚xd6 **22.♚xd6** ♚xb2+ **23.♙xb2** ♙xd6 **24.♚d1+** and the players agreed a draw, T. Luther-G.Kern, German League 1997) **13...♚e7** (now ...Rc5 is a threat) **14.♚a5!?** (after **14.b4** ♚e6 **15.♙e3** ♚xd5 **16.♙xd5** ♜xc2+ **17.♙xc2** ♚xc2 **18.0-0** ♙h6

, Black looks okay since his infiltrating rook compensates for White's monster d5-knight, P.Leko-I. Morovic Fernandez, Leon 1993)

14...♚c5 (or **14...f5** **15.♚a4+!**)

15.♚d2 ♚c7 **16.c3** ♜e6 **17.♙e3** ♙h6 **18.0-0** with a slight advantage, V.Varavin-A.Kharlov, Russian

Championship, Elista 1994.]

12...♜e7 I feel like Black stands at least even here and actually prefer his position.

QUESTION: What is it about his game which appeals to you?

ANSWER: Black's position, although contorted for now, contains a coiled spring mechanism once he achieves ...f6-f5, ...Bg7 and ...e5-e4; while his rooks can use the open g-file for a potential attack against White's king.

13.♙d3?! This move leads to a future ...e5-e4 tempo loss.

[Kasparov criticized it, suggesting

13.b4!? f5 **14.a4** ♙g7 **15.a5**

, which does look rather better than what White gets in the game, though even here I prefer Black after e4

16.♚a3 0-0 .]

13...f5! Larsen first establishes the correct path then later walks it, tossing in ...f6-f5 before White has time to blockade the square.

QUESTION: Isn't it a bit of a stretch to give this obvious move an exclamation mark?

ANSWER: Over-familiarity can make us indifferent to something we should otherwise hold in wonder. That which is obvious today was a mystery in the past. This position was completely new to both sides, who had to work out the correct plans for themselves – or not, as the case may be, since no one seems to have played **13 Bd3?!** again.

14.0-0 ♙g7 **15.♚h5!?** This looks like a misguided attempt to stir up trouble.

Either White is under the impression that he is the one attacking, or else he isn't satisfied with his position and is attempting to complicate because the d5-pawn is chronically weak and ...Rc5 may arrive soon. Sometimes the exertion of will under trying

circumstances isn't enough to lift us out of our difficulties.

[On the other hand, it's not clear what he might do instead; for example, **15.c3** e4 16.♙e2 ♖c5 doesn't look very appealing for White. It's understandable that Robatsch didn't want to go voluntarily on the defensive – that would be like a six-year-old writing a letter to Santa requesting him to withhold gifts this year and instead purchase mutual funds, stocks and dividends to be cashed out on the child's 21st birthday.]

15...e4 16.♙e2 0-0 17.c3 f4!

Larsen sketches out his harsh new doctrine, as his swarm proceeds to infest the kingside. This may be the first known example of this now standard attacking plan for Black in the Pelikan. Back in 1963, it was a new concept.

18.♖g5 b5 19.♘d2 f5 20.a4

Robatsch seeks compensatory play on the other side of the board.

[**20.♖xf4?** ♗xd5 21.♖g3 ♔h8 would just give Black a decisive attack, since ...Be5, ...Rg8, and ...Nf4 loom over White's king.]

20...♔h8! "A move of historic importance," writes GM Evgeny Sveshnikov, the modern day godfather of the Pelikan. Black clears g8 for his rook. **21.♗b3?** EXERCISE (combination alert): White's last move represents attraction to a subsidiary idea, while ignoring the position's core need. Black has access to a devastating combination. Where?

[**21.♔h1** was forced, when White's king avoids a fatal explosion yet still ends up with shrapnel wounds. Now weeds run riot in White's garden, choking all attempts at counterplay.

His useless "defenders" witness the kingside proceedings with a strange sense of detachment, as if somewhere else, looking on from a great distance.]

ANSWER: Step 1: Force open the g-file, putting White's queen at risk.

21...f3! What White once presumed was an embrace is now seen as an ensnarement. After this move White's king appears with dark rings around his eyes and has the air of a someone who wishes to be elsewhere.

22.gxf3 Sometimes we can be thankful for pain – at least then we know that paralysis hasn't set in yet.

[QUESTION: Why did White co-operate when he can play **22.♙d1** - ? ANSWER: White has no choice but to comply with ill-concealed, grudging acquiescence, since 22 Bd1 loses to ♖g8 23.♖d2 (23.g3 ♙xc3 is hopeless for White) 23...fxg2 24.♖e1 b4 25.cxb4 ♙e5 26.♗d4 ♗xd5 and Black's attack is unstoppable.]

22...♙xc3! Step 2: Clearance. The bishop remains immune since White must deal with the threat of ...Rg8. This is why he needed to play Kh1 two moves earlier.

23.♔h1 ♙xb2 24.♖a2 ♙e5

White's position soon collapses, since he can't adequately defend the dark squares around his king. **25.axb5 ♖g8 26.♖h5**

[**26.♖h4** would discourage ...Nxd5 due to the exchange of queens, but simply ♖f8! 27.fxe4 ♖g7 28.♖h3 ♖c3 29.f3 ♖xb3 wins.]

26...♗xd5 27.fxe4 ♗f4 28.♖xf5 ♖h4 Target: h2. Everyone knows that the queen's chin-tilting is a sign of danger and that it would be wise to keep a minimum of 25 metres distance.

29.♔d1 EXERCISE (combination alert): There is no question that Larsen has his opponent in a dark square half-nelson. We sense that a forced mate lies within measurable distance of completion. Find it.

ANSWER: Clearance.

♖e2! 30.♖xe5+

[30.f4 is met by the startling deflection shot ♖f2!! (rather than the humdrum 30...Ng3+ etc). The queen's dark reach extends endlessly in every direction as she forces mate in two moves. Meanwhile, White's king ages at the equivalent rate of Moses, immediately after his job interview with God on the summit.]

30...dxe5 31.♖xe2

[Robatsch resigned, since Black forces mate with 31.♖xe2 ♖h3 32.♖g1 ♖f3+ etc. "I see that it becomes necessary to produce the rod of chastisement for your repeated acts of defiance," Black's queen tells the king, who bears his unpleasantly altered circumstances with as much fortitude as his dignity is able to muster.

This game became the attacking template for countless Pelikans to come.]

0-1

10

A03



Larsen,B



Van Scheltinga,T

4: Beverwijk

1964

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.f4 Larsen's Opening, Part III? My database has Larsen on the White side of 1 f4!? fifty times, scoring a hefty 62% with it. ♖f6 Of course, Black can play almost any first move against

Bird's Opening;

[even 1...g5!? isn't entirely without merit.]

2.♖f3 d5 3.e3

[Here 3.g3 would be a reversed Leningrad Dutch.]

3...g6 4.♔e2 Going for a Classical Dutch set-up.

[Other playable moves include 4.b3]

[4.d3]

[and 4.d4]

[while Larsen specialized in the funky,

Orangutanish 4.b4!? . For instance,

B.Larsen-B.Spasky, Amsterdam

Interzonal 1964, continued ♔g7

5.♔b2 0-0 6.♔e2 ♔g4 7.0-0 c6

8.a4 ♖bd7 9.♖a3 ♔xf3 10.♔xf3

♖e8 11.d4!? ♖e4 12.♔xe4 dxe4

13.♖c4 ♖b6 14.♖a5 ♖d5 15.♖e1

♖d7 16.c4 ♖f6 17.b5 , when I like

White's queenside space, and Larsen went on to win.]

4...♔g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.d3 b6

QUESTION: I realize that White got an extra move in a Dutch, but big deal! Isn't the position still even?

ANSWER: Probably so. Still, a numeric advantage is not what he is after in such cases. White simply wants a position he feels comfortable in, expecting to outplay the opponent later on, rather than in the opening. I do this all the time, with openings like the London System, Torre Attack and Colle – all, in essence, Slav positions a move up for White. I don't expect a "+-" out of the opening either!

[Here is an example of a GM playing Bird's with the white pieces. K.Lie-B. Ostenstad, Norwegian Team

Championship 2010, saw 6...c5

7.♖e1 b6 8.a4 ♖c6 9.♖a3 ♔b7

10.c3 e6 11.♖b1 ♖c8 12.b4 cxb4

13.cxb4 ♖e7 14.♖b5 ♖f5 15.♖fd4

♖xd4 16.♖xd4 ♖e8 17.♔b2 ♖d6

18.♙g4 ♖e8 19.b5 a6 20.♘b4 a5
21.♘d2 ♜f5 22.♙xf5 exf5 23.♖fe1
♘d6 24.♜f3! and I already prefer
White, who threatens to swap
bishops and then plant his remaining
knight on d4.]

7.a4 QUESTION: Why does White
push on the queenside? I thought the
thematic plan was to go after Black's
king.

ANSWER: He can do a little of both.
White isn't forced to attack on the
kingside in such Dutch structures.
Larsen absolutely loved to push both a-
and h-pawns in his games. In this case,
the move makes sense, curbing
Black's future queenside expansion
and staking out some territory on that
wing as well.

♙b7 8.♖e1 c5 9.♜bd2?! This move
isn't such a great fit with a2-a4 already
tossed in.

[White should probably go for a
queenside expansion plan involving
9.♜a3 , followed by c2-c3, Rb1 and
b2-b4, as in Lie-Ostenstad above (to
which ♜c6 would transpose).]

[Alternatively, White might play **9.♖h4**
straight away. From this position S.
Le Floch-Y.Berthelot, Bretagne 1999,
continued ♜c6 10.♜a3 ♜d7
11.♖h3 e6 12.♖b1 ♖e7 13.c3 e5
14.e4 dxe4 , and here White should
go for 15.dxe4 exf4 16.♙xf4 ♜ce5
17.♖bd1 , when his piece activity and
chances against Black's king make
up for his inferior structure.]

9...♜c6 10.♖h4 e6 11.♖f2 ♜b4!
12.♜e1 A retreat at the start of an
intended attack isn't a good sign.

[Now White stands clearly worse, as
he does after **12.♙d1** c4 13.d4
, since how does he eject the b4-
knight?]

12...♜e8! QUESTION: Why is this

retreat strong?

ANSWER: Two reasons:

1. An ending favours Black, who
already made space gains on the
queenside. So White must retreat his
queen to h3.

2. Black intends ...f7-f5, gaining space
in the centre and on the kingside, while
giving his king more breathing room.

13.♖h3 The white queen originally
planned to utter an indignant protest
aimed at her sister. Thinking better of it,
she backs off and decides to keep her
mouth shut.

♜d6 14.g4!? Clearly, the opening has
not gone so well for our hero, who
lashes out with a rather clumsy attack.
I'm starting to think this game belongs
in the Defence chapter!

f5?! The loaf is formed and placed in
the oven, yet we sense it may emerge
unleavened. After this inaccuracy,
White's structure creaks under the
fearful strain, yet manages to retain
integrity. Black is now unlikely to get
mated, since his defenders have more
room to manoeuvre, yet he had so
much better.

[His best plan is to angle for an
opening of the centre by playing for ...
e6-e5, starting with **14...♜c6!**

15.♜ef3 ♖e8 16.c3 e5! – principle:
Counter in the centre when attacked
on the wing. After this move, White's
dreams are cruelly stifled and his
past unremitting attacking toil goes
unrewarded. The loss of a promising
attack (or even one which we
mistakenly believe is promising!)
always leaves an aching void in our
hearts.

QUESTION: Why can't White bypass
with 17.f5 and continue attacking?

ANSWER: His attack dies in its
infancy. Black blasts open the centre

all the same with e4 and the tumult gradually fades to silence. White's attack wanes, while he remains strategically busted.]

15.gxf5 exf5 16.♟df3 ♟f7

Covering e5 and g5. **17.c3 ♟c6**

Threatening a devastating central counter with ...d5-d4. **18.d4!**

Larsen deftly switches to a Stonewall structure, after which his position begins to perk up: the coming Ne5 effectively clogs Black's central play.

♟a5 Targeting c4 and b3. **19.♟d1**

Sad, but necessary to cover b3. The clueless bishop believes his ignorance of worldly affairs is just another sign of purity of spirit. As Larsen said, in this position "it would be better to have the pawn on a2."

c4 20.♟e5 At this point, Black was perhaps regretting his earlier 14...f5?!, which now allows the squatter to perch on e5, unchallenged by pawns. Nevertheless, I still prefer his position slightly.

♟xe5?! I would avoid this move.

[Instead, Black could centralize his own knight by **20...♟d6** 21.♟1f3 ♟e4 22.♞g2 , when White's queen looks misplaced, since she blocks the thematic h2-h4-h5 prying mechanism.]

21.fxe5 ♟b3 22.♟xb3

[**22.♞b1?! is** a waste of time, since ♞d7 forces 23.♟xb3 cxb3 24.♞a1 or White drops the a-pawn.]

22...cxb3 Normally, the Stonewall side is in trouble when their good bishop gets swapped away. This case is an exception since the centre remains completely frozen, limiting Black's counterplay. Meanwhile, White can play for a kingside attack, either with a sacrificial theme on g6, or the h2-h4-h5 plan.

23.♟g2 ♞g5 24.♞f4

[The natural-looking **24.e4** would be met simply by ♞g4 .]

24...♞e7 25.♟d2

[Larsen, who always somehow felt his fair share was no less than 100%, wrote that he didn't even consider the repetition draw offer **25.♞f2 ♞g5 26.♞f4 .**]

25...♟a6 26.♞h4! Larsen attempts to sabotage the system with a deliberate violation of principle: Rooks, when lifted in middlegames, are clumsy pieces if the attack doesn't come off as planned. In this case, White must do something radical, otherwise Black will greatly improve his position by transferring his light-squared bishop to e4.

g5! Black is up for the challenge and lures the rook into dangerous territory.

[In any case, the attempt to defend h7 laterally with **26...♟h8** runs into 27.♟f4 , threatening to take on both d5 and g6; for example, ♞ad8 28.♟xg6 ♞g7 29.♟f2! hxg6 30.♞g1 ♟d3 31.♞xh8+! ♞xh8 32.♞xg6+ ♟f7 33.♞h6 ♞g8 34.♞h7+ ♟e8 35.♞h5+ ♞f7 36.♞h8 and White is clearly better.]

27.♞xh7 ♟e2! Now ...Bg4 becomes a serious threat. **28.c4!? ♟xc4?**

A blunder in a position of excruciatingly difficult choices.

EXERCISE (combination alert): Larsen found an amazing idea which earned him a decisive attack. Do you see it?

[Black had three superior options: **28...♟g4** 29.♞h6 ♞f7 30.♞xg7+ ♞xg7 31.♞xg7+ ♟xg7 32.cxd5 ♟f3 33.d6 , when White's snaking central passers offer loads of compensation for the exchange.]

[**28...dxc4** 29.♟f2 ♟g4 30.♞h6 ♞f7 31.♞xg7+ ♞xg7 32.♞xg7+ ♟xg7]

33.h4! gxh4 34.d5 and White's pieces will soon breathe fire with Bc3 and Nf4, where they escort the central passers. I don't believe White stands worse here, despite Black's material advantage.]

[Larsen gave 28...Bac8 29.cxd5 Bc2 as good for Black, but as he said, "there are many variations, and White has very impressive centre pawns." Best play seems to be 30.Bxg7+ (not 30.Bc3? Bg4! 31.Bh6 f4! and Black should win) 30...Kxg7 (or 30...Bxg7 31.Bb4) 31.Bc3 Bxc3 32.bxc3 , when the passed b3-pawn will White cost a rook, but it's not clear how Black might then consolidate; for example, Bd3 (32...b2 33.Bb1 Ba3 34.Bg3! Ba2 35.Bxg5+ is perpetual check) 33.Bg3! b2 34.Be1 b1B 35.Bxb1 Bxb1 36.d6! Be8 (or 36...Be6 37.f4 Bh6 38.e6) 37.f4 Bg8 38.e6 Ba2 39.d7 Be7 40.d5 and here Houdini claims a draw by repetition with Kh7 41.Bh3+ Kg7 42.Bg3 etc.

Returning to 28...Bxc4? as played in the game, in order to cure our suffering, it is critical that we first identify its causes and its true nature. White's disease is a curable ailment. It is up to us to ingest the correct antidote.]

ANSWER: Line opening. The seed planted on White's 26th move flowers and bears fruit. For White's knight, this is not the end, but a glorious new beginning.

29.f4!! gxf4

[Attempts to deviate from point A to point B are immediately fatal: 29...Bf7? is met by 30.fh5 and wins, since Kh7 31.f6+ Kg6 32.Bh5# is mate.]

[29...Be8? 30.fh5 Bh8 (or 30...Bf7 31.fxg7 Bxg7 32.Bh8+ forces mate.) 31.Bxh8+ Kh8 32.f6+ Kg7 33.Bh7# .]

30.Kf2! Larsen's beautiful point: the king clears the way for Rg1, after which Black is unable to withstand the force of the attack. The sac on the previous move is inextricably interlaced with this clearance idea, one requiring the other. White's king says out loud what everyone in the room was thinking: "Black's king is toast." fxe3+ 31.Bxe3 f4 32.Bd2 Kf7 [32...Bg5 33.Bg1 Bxg1+ 34.Kxg1 is equally without hope.]

33.Bh5+ Ke6 You may have noticed that Black's king hasn't exactly exhibited effervescent joy upon his sister's unexpected visit. "You will never have my obedience," he roars, as he shakes a defiant fist at White's queen. She responds: "Never is a long, long time, Your Grace."

34.Bg4+

[The finish could be 34.Bg4+ Bf5 35.Bg6+ Bf6 36.exf6 Bxf6 37.Be1+ Kd6 38.Bxf6+ Bxf6 39.Bb4+ Kc6 (the king's convulsive, gulping sobs make matters even more awkward for all those involved with his execution) 40.Be6# .]

1-0

11

C01

□ Larsen,B

■ Portisch,L

5: Amsterdam Interzonal

1964

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.f4 c3 Bb4 4.exd5

In my book on the Classical French, I throw a massive tantrum aimed at those who are low enough to play

Exchange variations against the French (Unfortunately, this includes your semi-cowardly writer, who also sometimes plays the Exchange variations against the French!).

QUESTION: So why let Larsen off your tantrum/hook?

ANSWER: Because Larsen clearly demonstrates with his next few moves that he plays for the win. One curious trait I noticed about Larsen was his marked preference for quiet opening lines – rather strange when you consider the fact that he consistently embraced chaos in the subsequent two stages of the game!

exd5 5.♖f3!? A new move at the time. Clearly, Larsen is looking for trouble, rather than a draw!

QUESTION: What is the idea behind the move?

ANSWER: It appears to be multi-purpose:

1. White covers c3 with his queen.
2. White clears the path for queenside castling.
3. Black, in Exchange French lines, tends to meet Bd3 with the simplifying ...Nge7 and ...Bf5. White's move covers f5.

Saying all that, in today's fun-ruining computer world, 5 Qf3 deserves a "?!" mark.

QUESTION: What's wrong with it?

♠c6 ANSWER: Portisch thought for twenty minutes and didn't come up with a viable solution to the original problems Larsen threw at him.

[Today, we know that Black has **5...♖e7+!** 6.♠ge2 ♠c6 and the trouble is that 7.♠e3 is met by ♠f6 8.h3 (to prevent ...Bg4) ♠xc3+! 9.bxc3 ♠e4, when White looks contorted and stands worse. Perhaps the feeble,

time-wasting 7 Qd3 is the best option, and even then White is fighting for equality.]

6.♠b5 Now White develops smoothly and achieves his opening aim. **♠ge7**

7.♠f4 0-0!? 8.0-0-0 Well, that wasn't hard to predict. In my research for this book, the one trait I could never find in Larsen's games was his backing down from a challenge.

♠a5 Larsen criticized this move, calling Black's attack "premature", adding: "But afterwards we are all so very wise." **9.♠ge2 c6 10.♠d3 b5 11.h4!** Ah, yes, Larsen and his lifelong love affair with his rooks' pawns.

QUESTION: What is the purpose? It looks like a random pawn stab.

ANSWER: Larsen intends to push it to h6, inducing dark square weaknesses around Black's king.

♠c4 When I asked students the question: "Whose attack looks faster?", nearly all of them incorrectly answered "Black".

QUESTION: It looks that way to me too, since Black's pawn storm is well under way. Why isn't this the case?

ANSWER: Black's b4-bishop and a5-knight are hindrances, blocking the path for ...a7-a5 and ...b5-b4. This means his attack is slower than it appears.

12.h5 f6 Black must remain vigilant to White's intent.

[**12...♖a5??** 13.h6 g6 14.♠c7! (clearance) ♖xc7 15.♖f6 forces mate.]

13.g4 Cutting off f5 for Black's knight and bishop. **♖a5?!** Portisch, the master of initiative, is up for a fight and dares Larsen to go opposite wings. It's difficult for younger readers to know of Portisch's towering strength in the '60s and '70s, when he remained

consistently in the top ten players in the world. In a recent New in Chess article, GM Mihail Marin described Portisch's style: "When given a chance, Portisch would change the character of the fight, striving for the initiative by means of unexpected moves and relying on hidden defects in his opponent's set-up."

We tend to tolerate impersonal suffering, like a miserably cold, rainy week or a headache. But when our potential suffering arises from another's malice, we tend to fight back. Black's queen feels exactly this way toward her pestilential brother on c1. Unfortunately, a pure piece attack looks like the wrong plan.

[Instead: **13...a5?!** was suggested here, but then I like **14.a3!** d6 (**14...dxc3?** **15.bxa3** xa3+ **16.d2** **a4** leads to a dead end after **17.g3** **b4** **18.d2!**; while **14...dxc3** **15.dxc3** **b4** **16.d2!** also favours White) **15.dxc4** **bxc4** (or **15...dxc4** **16.d5!** xf4+ **17.dxf4**) **16.Rde1** and White stands clearly better, with Na4 in the air, while Black suffers weakened dark squares after a swap on d6.]

[**13...h6!** seems better; e.g. **14.d2** e6 **15.g3** d7 **16.Rhg1** fe8 looks okay.]

14.dxc4! dxc4

[QUESTION: Why not open the b-file with **14...bxc4** - ?

ANSWER: Opening the b-file doesn't make much sense when White controls b8, denying the black rooks that square.]

[EXERCISE (calculation/critical decision): Calculate the forcing line **14...dxc4** **15.a3** xa3 **16.bxa3** xa3+ **17.d2** **b4** , regaining the piece. Does Black's combination

work?]

15.a3! dxc3

[ANSWER to EXERCISE: No, because **15...dxa3?** **16.bxa3** xa3+ **17.d2** **b4?** , which appears to regain the lost piece, fails to **18.Ra1!** **bxc3+** **19.dxc3** b4 **20.Rhb1** and Black's queen is trapped.]

16.dxc3 A new imbalance arises

(besides opposite wing castling): opposite-coloured bishops, which in this instance favour White, the player with the more promising attack.

d8 Can a soldier who takes a sacred oath of non-violence still be useful to her army? The queen had hoped to return to a hero's welcome, with parade, confetti and a cheering crowd, but her expectations were not met. This move acts as a mirror which clearly reflects Black's defects. In fact, if this is Black's best move, then it's a very bad sign that matters have gone awry.

[Note that the direct **16...b4?** is ineffective: **17.axb4** xb4 **18.g3!** f7 **19.d6** a5 **20.Rhe1** d8 **21.ex7** e7 **22.Rxe7** xe7 **23.d5** and White dominates.]

17.Rhe1 a5?! Portisch still has hopes for his attack,

[but trying to defend an inferior endgame after **17...d5** **18.dxd5** xd5 **19.g3** xd5+ **cx5** **20.f3** d7 was objectively the correct decision.]

18.g3!? Kasparov awarded this an exclamation,

[whereas I don't see any reason to avoid **18.dxb5!** . On the previous move, **17.Nxb5?!** would have failed to **17...Qd5!**, but here d5 can be met simply by **19.g3** since the e7-knight is also en prise, so White is clearly better or even winning with a healthy extra pawn.]

18...Ra7?!

[Here **18...b4** would have been more consistent, and if **19.♙d6** then **♖e8** , when Black might still put up some defence.]

19.h6 As long intended, White weakens the dark squares around Black's king. **g6 20.♙d6 ♖e8 21.♜f4!** Black's onlookers cheer and wave their hats at White's queen, motivated by fear more than admiration. **♔f7** The king attempts to hide in a nook but the shadow he casts soon betrays him to the enemy.

[Against **21...♙d5** , Larsen had planned **22.♙xd5 cxd5 23.♜xf6! ♜xf6?** (**23...♜f7** is necessary, though hopeless in the long run) **24.♖xe8+ ♔f7 25.♖f8+ ♔e6 26.♖e1+** and wins.]

22.♙e5! White continually induces further concession along the dark squares. This move tears off a chunk of Black's structural integrity from its main body.

f5 Blowing a hole on his own dark squares.

[**22...♙d5** was no longer any good, in view of **23.♙xd5 cxd5 24.♙xf6!** , overloading Black's defenders of **e8**.]

23.♙b8! The tempo-gaining bishop climbs the diagonal as effortlessly as a chimpanzee up a tree. **♖b7 24.♜e5!** Threatening mate on the move on **g7**.

[The computers prefer **24.♙e4!** **♙d5 25.♙d6+ ♔f8 26.♖xe8+ ♜xe8** and now the calm retreat **27.♜h2!** and wins.]

24...♖g8 25.g5! Larsen chips away at the dark squares with the dogged determination of the dentist's drill. Material remains even, yet the Houdini evaluation sits at +25.27!. Black can only gaze mournfully at the vista of his deformities. If there is such a thing as

dark square hell, then Black has entered it. This game could easily have been placed in the Exploiting Imbalances section of the book.

b4 26.♜f6+

[Here Houdini suggests the impossible-to-see line **26.d5!! bxc3 27.♜f6+ ♔e8 28.dxc6 ♜b6 29.b4!! cxb3 30.♙d7!** (interference) **♙xd7 31.cxd7+ ♔xd7 32.♖xe7+ ♔d8 33.♖e6+ ♔d7 34.♜e7#** .]

26...♔e8 27.♜xc6+ A Vietnam veteran friend told me that the initial sensation felt when a bullet rips into your body is merely one of dull confusion, without the expected accompanying pain. Unfortunately for Black, **27...Nxc6!** is an illegal move.

♔f7 The king walks about with the mournful air of a man who has done things which would have been better left undone.

[Black's dismal alternatives: **27...♙d7 28.♙d5 ♔f7 29.♜f6+ ♔e8 30.♙d6!** is a massacre.]

[**27...♜d7 28.♖xe7+! ♔xe7 29.♖e1+ ♔d8** (or **29...♔f8 30.♜f6+ ♜f7 31.♜d8+**) **30.♜f6+** forces mate. The queen, sorely inconvenienced, wishes her brother had the good grace to die a little more quickly.]

28.♜f6+ ♔e8 Good fortune beams lovingly upon Larsen's position. His attack reaches peak strength and any unnecessary alteration only serves to diminish potency.

EXERCISE (combination alert): White's bishop and knight both hang. How would you continue the attack? ANSWER #1: Ignore the hanging pieces and add another attacker into the mix.

29.d5!! Perhaps the strongest of White's multiple wins. Eight eyes glare intently upon Black's embarrassed king

[ANSWER #2: 29.♖b5! ♖xb5 30.d5! also works; for example, ♖f8 31.♗g7 ♖f7 (31...♖xb8 32.d6 ♖b7 33.♗xh7 leaves Black helpless) 32.♗g8+ ♖f8 33.♗xh7 ♖f7 34.♗g8+ ♖f8 (rook and queen revolve in a geosynchronous orbit, until White breaks the pattern with his next move) 35.h7! is decisive.]

29...♖f8

[After 29...bxc3 30.d6 cxb2+ 31.♔b1 , White's king remains perfectly safe, while ♖f8 32.♗e5 forces mate.]

30.♗c6+ ♗d7

[30...♖d7 31.♕b5 ♖f7 32.d6 ♔b7 33.dxe7 is a game-ender.]

31.♔d6 ♖f7 32.♔xe7! bxc3

Black's king is firmly in the camp of those who would disapprove of young-loafers-who-idle-away-their-lives. Unfortunately, his useless defenders, who lend only moral support, fall into the Y-L-W-I-A-T-L category themselves.

EXERCISE (combination alert): White has access to many tempting discovered checks with his bishop. Which bishop move is the strongest of the lot?

ANSWER: The evil this bishop has committed, or wanted to commit, is a list too long for the limited space available in this book.

33.♔b4+!

[Forcing mate in seven moves:

33.♔b4+! ♖e7 (or 33...♔d8 34.♔xa5+ ♖c7 35.♔xc7+ ♗xc7 36.♖e8#) 34.♖xe7+ ♔d8 (the king walks a gauntlet through a shower of taunts) 35.♖e8+! ♗xe8 (or 35...♔xe8 36.♖e1+ ♔d8 37.♔xa5+ etc) 36.♔xa5+ ♖b6 37.♔xb6+ ♔e7 (Black's king, once unchallenged ruler of a powerful empire, must

adjust to his new circumstances as a shoe shiner on a street corner)

38.♖e1+ ♔e6 39.♗xe6+ ♔f8

40.♗xe8# . The queen uses her beauty as a weapon against Black's tongue-tied king.

After this game the Soviet players – accustomed to domination since the 1940s – discovered that Larsen, a relative unknown on the world's chess stage, was shockingly in a tie for first at the Interzonal with Boris Spassky, their heir apparent to the world championship.]

1-0

12

B39



Larsen,B



Petrosian,TV

6: Piatigorsky Cup, Santa Monica 1966
[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.e4 c5 2.♕f3 ♕c6 3.d4 cxd4

4.♕xd4 g6 The Accelerated Dragon, a system which Larsen championed as Black.

QUESTION: In that case, why on earth would Petrosian pick this line against Larsen?

ANSWER: Possibly as a psychological ploy. I play the French Defence as Black, and the strange thing is that, even though I know how to play White, I'm still uncomfortable on White's side, perhaps for no rational reason. Still, Petrosian plays a dangerous game, since Larsen probably understood the subtleties of the Accelerated Dragon better than he did.

5.♔e3

[5.c4 is the more common move order to the Maróczy Bind. Larsen plays almost as if he didn't care whether the game took on the form of

a Bind or not.]

[The main alternative is **5.♘c3** ♙g7
6.♙e3 ♘f6 7.♙c4 0-0

A) QUESTION: Why not transpose to the sharper Dragon lines with 8.f3 at once?

ANSWER: Black's move order prevents this path. 8 f3?! walks into a known Accelerated Dragon trap: ♖b6! (8...d6 9.♙d2) 9.♙b3 ♘g4! (this would be my choice over 9...♘xe4! 10.♘d5 ♙a5+ 11.c3 ♘c5 12.♘xc6 dxc6 13.♘xe7+ ♙h8 14.♘xc8 ♖axc8 15.0-0 with an equal position, R.J.Fischer-O.Panno, Portoroz Interzonal 1958) 10.fxc4 ♙xd4 11.♙xd4 ♖xd4 slightly favours Black with the superior structure, Y.Sakharov-L. Stein, USSR Championship, Kiev 1964.;

B) 8.♙b3 , intending f2-f3.]

5...♙g7 Petrosian offers to enter the strategic complexity of the Maróczy Bind, which Larsen now accepts.

[Instead, **5...♘f6** 6.♘c3 would revert to the non-Maróczy positions reached by the 5 Nc3 move order in the previous note.]

6.c4 ♘f6 7.♘c3 ♘g4 **QUESTION:** I have seen this tricky idea from Black but I don't really understand the point, since all it achieves is an even swap. Why play it then?

[**ANSWER:** Black follows the principle: Exchanges benefit the cramped side. Larsen played this himself as Black, though in later years he mostly opted for **7...0-0** 8.♙e2 d6 9.0-0 ♙d7 10.♖d2 ♘xd4 (applying the same principle) 11.♙xd4 ♙c6 12.f3 a5 13.b3 ♘d7 , when it isn't easy to do anything concrete with White's space since Black's position remains weakness

free.]

8.♖xg4 ♘xd4 9.♖d1 ♘e6

"Still like playing against myself," wrote Larsen.

QUESTION: Why block the c8-bishop's diagonal when the knight can retreat to c6.

ANSWER: The knight stands better on e6, since it keeps an eye out on key dark squares such as c5, d4, f4 and g5. In fact, in some of his own games from this position, Larsen would later toss in the radical ...g6-g5!?, marking out even more dark square territory. Meanwhile the c8-bishop will generally go to the long diagonal, either directly on b7 or via ...Bd7-c6.

10.♖d2

[As an example of the ...g6-g5 plan: A.Karpov-B.Larsen, Brussels 1987, saw **10.♖c1** ♙a5 11.♖d2

A) 11...b6 12.♙e2 ♙b7 13.f3 h5! 14.0-0 g5! 15.♖fd1 d6 16.♘d5 ♖xd2 17.♖xd2 ♙e5 18.b4 ♖c8 19.a4 h4 20.♙f1 f6 21.♖a2 ♙d4 22.♙f2 ♙f7 with an equal ending, later drawn.;

B) . Black has even tried 11...g5!? , though after 12.♙e2 b6 13.♖d5 ♖b8 14.♖xa5 bxa5 15.b3 ♙b7 16.f3 , White remained with a nagging space edge in J.Kleiman-H. Nakamura, US Championship, San Diego 2006. I watched this game live. Nakamura could only draw (with difficulty!) against his much lower-rated opponent. The Accelerated Dragon isn't such a great choice for Black if you're after the full point, since it's hard to come up with an active plan if White just sits on the space and does nothing. (16.--);

C) 11...--]

10...d6 11.♙e2 ♙d7 12.0-0 0-0

13. ♖ad1

[Aggressive and probably superior to **13. ♖ac1** which is the more common posting, with the f-rook going to d1 – as in the famous game P.Keres-T.V. Petrosian, Bled/Zagreb/Belgrade Candidates 1959 (which Petrosian won).

QUESTION: What is so aggressive about White's last move?

ANSWER: By posting the a-rook to d1, Larsen signals that he is all in for a kingside attack with f2-f4 and maybe even f4-f5, leaving the f1-rook where it sits.]

13... ♗c6 14. ♘d5 Black's dilemma: If he exchanges on d5, he hands over the bishop pair and allows White pressure down the e-file after e4xd5, whereas a plan with ...e7-e6 involves weakening the d6-pawn.

♗e8? A passive reaction which does nothing to discourage White's coming kingside build-up. Petrosian, at his best, had a wonderfully deceptive way of accomplishing something by doing nothing. In this instance, he really is accomplishing nothing!

[Black should go for **14... ♘c5 15. f3 a5** and then sit tight, as in Y.Porat-B. Larsen, Amsterdam Interzonal 1964. Once again, it isn't so easy to accomplish anything with White's space, since Black's position remains weakness free. As it happened, Porat later misplayed the endgame and lost.]

15. f4! Even more tempting now, since the e-pawn can be covered with Bf3 and f7 has been slightly weakened by the black rook moving away. **♘c7** Kasparov called this "a serious mistake". But is it really so? I think Black is in trouble, no matter how he responds.

[For instance, Black also suffers after **15... ♘c5 16. e5! ♘d7 17. ♘b4! ♗e4** (or **17... ♖c7 18. ♗g4**) **18. ♗g4!** , since White continues to exert nagging central pressure. The real mistake was Petrosian's 14th move. This is the trouble with his psychological ploy of using Larsen's opening against him: Larsen understood its subtleties to a greater degree.]

16. f5 Sound judgment: Larsen gives up e5 in order to pursue his kingside attacking dream. It's riskier playing f4-f5 when a black knight can reach e5, but that isn't a problem here.

♘a6!? The knight continues to cavort about, with the ambitious idea of reaching e5 after all via b8 and d7, but Petrosian plays like he has all day. In this game he grossly underestimates Larsen's kingside potential.

[Maybe he should just dig in with **16... ♘xd5 17. exd5 ♗d7 18. ♗d3** and pray he doesn't get mated]
[but if he really wanted to reroute his knight, then **16... ♖f8** , followed by ... Ne8-f6, might have been a better plan.]

17. ♗g4!?

[Larsen didn't like this move and suggested **17. b4!** as an improvement, keeping the knight out of c5. White doesn't have to play for mate. He can just try and squeeze Black across the board. If the knight continues round with **♘b8?** , then **18. b5! ♗xd5** (or **18... ♗d7 19. c5!**) **19. ♖xd5** is very strong.]

17... ♘c5

[Again **17... ♘b8?** is too slow, due to **18. c5! dxc5** (or **18... ♗b5 19. cxd6 ♖xd6 20. f6!**) **19. fxc6 hxc6 20. ♖xf7! ♗xf7 21. ♖f2+** and wins.]

18. fxc6 hxc6 19. ♖f2 Double attack

on f7 and c5. ♖f8 20.e5! A brilliant decision. Kasparov writes: "No machine would play this!" We sense a spirit of unrest fermenting around Black's king.

[Larsen isn't satisfied with a mere pawn after 20.♙xc5 dxc5 21.♔xc5 ♙xd5 22.b4! , as Black can play ♙e6! 23.♖xd8 ♖axd8 (with dual threats of ...Bxg4 and ...Bd4+) 24.♔g5 ♙xc4 and suddenly generates a lot of counterplay. Houdini rates this at nearly even.]

20... ♖xe5 21. ♔h4 The queen swims closer to her target, with dagger in teeth. Suddenly, White's forces swarm over Black's relatively unprotected king. ♗xd5 22. ♗xd5 Threatening Bxc5. ♖e6 23. ♖f3! Threatening to lift to h3. ♗f6? "Peace, sister, peace! Beat your sword into a ploughshare!" implores the pacifist bishop as he attempts to soothe his aggressor. White's queen, regrettably subscribes to quite a different philosophy. Sometimes we inadvertently initiate a sequence of cause and effect which we believe predicts and controls the future. Of course it rarely turns out that way, since a chaos factor inevitably messes up our orderly dreams.

[Larsen later found a solution for Black in **23...f5!** 24. ♖h3 ♕f7 (in this line 24... ♜g7 was also possible, and if 25. ♕f3 ♕f7 26. ♖b5 ♜h8 27. ♕d5+ ♜e6 28. ♖g5 (Larsen), then ♜d7! (Kasparov) defends, since 29. ♖xb7??? loses to ♜xb7) 25. ♕xf5 gxf5 26. ♖h5+ ♕f6 27. g4 and now ♜g7! 28. ♕g5+ ♕e6 29. ♖g6+ ♕f6 30. gxf5+ ♕d7 31. ♕xf6 ♖xf6 32. ♖xg7 ♖g8! , when queens come off the board and Black retains reasonable drawing chances.

24. ♔h6 Threatening Rh3 again, which forces Black's next move. Over the last few moves Black achieved many things, yet all feel unessential to his survival.

gg7 "Ego te absolvo," murmurs the bishop, as he absolves the future killer of his beloved monarch. Black's king believes himself miraculously protected from his enemies and is overwhelmed with a feeling of gratitude toward a kindly and benevolent universe. In this instance he may have given premature thanks. As it turns out, the universe is a lot meaner than he imagined.

EXERCISE (combination alert): How did Larsen rudely yank Black's king from his sweet daydream of security into the unpleasant present?

ANSWER: Queen sacrifice/Mating net.

25. ♔xg6!! White's haughty queen – to describe her as "mean spirited", somehow feels grossly inadequate – pushes sniffily past her brother's guards, claiming she "doesn't need an appointment", and barges in unannounced. She visits Black's king with yet more unwanted advice and through the art of not-so-veiled threat.

[Larsen avoids his opponent's hoped-for 25. ♔h4?? f5! , when Black suddenly stands better. When we botch a promising attack, it's as if we enter a magical kingdom brimming with treasures, there for the taking, yet inexplicably decide to return home empty handed, and with our savings account now down to a depressing \$7.60.]

25... 2f4 Complete desperation, but it's too late for such gestures of remorse. This is the stage where a once uneasy suspicion suddenly solidifies into a hard fact: Black is completely busted.

[Other knight moves lose to 26

Qxg7+! **Kxg7** 27 **Rg5+** etc, while **25...fxg6** 26.**♙xe6+** is basically the same as the game.]

26.♖xf4 fxg6 Petrosian finally accepts the unwanted gift with a spirit of depressed futility.

[The tricky **26...e5** is met by the counter-tricky **27.♖xf7!** **♖xf7** 28.**♙e6** **♗f6** 29.**♗xf6** **♙xf6** 30.**♖xd6** **♖e8** 31.**♙xf7+** **♗xf7** 32.**♖d7+** with a completely resignable ending for Black.]

27.♙e6+ **♖f7**

[After **27...♗h7** (the king's outwardly brave front is betrayed by his quaking knees) **28.♖h4+** **♙h6** 29.**♙xh6** **♖f5** 30.**♖xf5!** **gxf5** 31.**♙f7!** (or 31.**♙xf5+** **♗g8** 32.**♙e6+** **♗h7** first) 31...**♗b6+** 32.**♗f1** , only the futile **♗d4** prevents the threatened discovery **33.♙f8+** and mates.]

28.♖xf7

[**28.♙xf7+** **♗f8** (the king runs with the mad flight of a hunted animal) **29.♙xg6+** **♙f6** 30.**♖h5!** is just as good, when Black must hand over his own queen to avoid mate.]

28...♗h8 EXERCISE (combination alert): Black's king applied the ice, yet the swelling remains and his eyes blur over with tears of frustration. This is more an execution than an attack. Find one key idea and Black goes belly up.

[**28...♙e5** can be answered by **29.♖d4!!** and the rook transfers into the attack all the same, since **♙xd4** 30.**♙xd4** is quickly decisive.]

ANSWER: Transfer the rook to h3.

29.♖g5! **b5** 30.**♖g3!** . Nothing can be done about the coming **Rh3+**.

[The finish could be **30.♖g3!** **♗a5** 31.**♖h3+** **♙h6** 32.**♖xh6+** **♗g8** 33.**♖xg6+** **♗h8** (the exhausted king, left wheezing from the chase, is now

put out of his misery) 34.**♙d4#** .]

1-0

13

A38

 **Larsen,B**

 **Ivkov,B**

7: Palma de Mallorca

1967

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.c4 c5 2.♘c3 ♘c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 g6 5.♙g2 ♙g7 6.0-0 0-0 7.a3

This is one of White's most quiet responses in an already placid position.

QUESTION: Why would Larsen play this way with the white pieces?

ANSWER: I'm not certain of his motivation but he rarely played topical lines – not because he feared a theoretical battle, but more because he (much like your writer) loathed the tyranny of modern opening theory, which demands that you memorize reams of variations. I think Larsen just wanted a fight with the opponent, with theory out of the equation.

[**7.d4** is White's main move and probably the best try for an edge; for example, **cx d4** 8.**♘xd4 ♘xd4** 9.**♗xd4 d6** 10.**♗d3 a6** 11.**♙g5 ♖b8** 12.**♖fd1** (**12.c5!?** is an interesting pawn sac: **dxc5?!** 13.**♗xd8 ♖xd8** 14.**♙f4 ♖a8** 15.**♖fd1 ♖e8** 16.**♖ac1** , intending **Na4**, with loads of compensation for the pawn) 12...**♙f5** 13.**e4 ♙e6** 14.**b3 ♘d7** 15.**♖ac1** , C.Lakdawala-A.Wooten, San Diego 2012, and White must try and do something with his extra space – not such an easy task considering Black's fortress-like position.]

7...a6 Ivkov was kind of the Carl Schlechter (very difficult to beat) of the 1960s and was happy with the continued symmetry.

[Otherwise Black should be equal after **7...d5!** 8.cxd5 ♖xd5 9.♗xd5 ♜xd5 . U.Andersson-R. Dzindzichashvili, Geneva 1977, continued 10.d3 ♜d6 (10...♜h5 11.♖b1 ♗h3 12.♗e3 ♗xg2 13.♔xg2 ♜d5 was also fine in B.Larsen-E. Bukic, Ljubljana/Portoroz 1977) 11.♖b1 c4! 12.b4!? (12.dxc4?! is virtually superimposable to the Lakdawala-Wooten note from above; i.e. ♜xd1 13.♞xd1 ♗f5 14.♞a1 ♞fd8 15.♞e1 ♞ac8 16.c5 ♗a5 with massive compensation for the pawn) 12...cxd3 13.b5 dxe2 14.♜xe2 ♗d4 15.♗xd4 ♗xd4 16.♗h6 ♞d8 17.♞bd1 e5 and I don't believe in White's compensation here.]

8.♞b1 ♞b8 9.b4 cxb4 10.axb4 b5 11.cxb5 axb5 12.d4 d5 QUESTION: Wow, this looks deadly dull and drawish. Do you agree?

ANSWER: I'm sorry. Did you say something? I wasn't paying attention. Agreed. The position is pretty dull and drawish but still, in positions of 100% symmetry, who wouldn't take White here, who is on the move?

13.♗f4 ♞b6 This is an awkward square for the rook.

[QUESTION: What if Black pushes the symmetry to crazy lengths with **13...♗f5** - ?

ANSWER: After 14.♗xb8 ♗xb1 15.♗f4 ♗f5 (15...♗e4 is met by 16.♗xb5 ♜b6 17.♜a4 and if Black regains the lost pawn with ♗xf3 18.♗xf3 ♗xd4 19.♗xd4 ♜xd4 20.♗e3 ♜c3 21.b5 , White stands clearly better with the bishop pair and a dangerous passed b-pawn) 16.♗e5! , Black must finally break the symmetry with an inferior position, since he is under assault at c6, b5

and d5.]

14.♜b3 e6 The symmetry has now been broken in one respect: White's dark-squared bishop sits outside its pawn chain, while Black's c8-bishop is stuck inside.

[Perhaps Ivkov worried about a line like **14...♗f5** 15.♞bc1 e6 16.♗xb5 , but here Black can get the pawn back after ♜d7 17.♜a4 ♗e7 18.♞c7 ♜xb5 19.♜xb5 ♞xb5 20.♞xe7 ♞xb4 with a near-certain draw.]

15.♞fc1 ♗b7 16.e3 h6 17.♗e5!

QUESTION: Why did Larsen offer to hand over the bishop pair?

ANSWER: Several reasons:

1. The dark-squared bishop is officially White's bad bishop, so it's no tragedy if it is swapped away.

2. The position for now is blocked, so knights are at least as valuable a commodity as bishops.

3. Larsen, like Chigorin and Nimzowitsch before him, was a lifelong knight lover who lived in a strange bishop-loving world.

I fit in this knight-loving category as well. I don't know why, but many of my openings are set up to hand my opponent the bishop pair. For example, the Trompowsky, 1 d4 Nf6 2 Bg5, is one of my main lines as White, and now if 2...d5, I often chop the knight with 3 Bxf6.

♗h7

[After **17...♗xe5** 18.♗xe5 ♗e8 19.♗d3 ♗d6 20.♞a1 ♜e7 21.♞a2 , the position may still be equal, but I prefer White anyway, mainly because he owns the knight pair in a blocked position.]

18.♗f1 Target: b5. ♗xe5 19.♗xe5 ♗e4! Threatening a cheap knight fork on d2. **20.♜d1 ♗d6 21.♗d3 h5?!** Perhaps the beginning of an ambitious

yet incorrect plan. Desire, by its very nature, contains a property which agitates our minds. Black believes he can get something going against White's king, but in doing so only manages to weaken his own king, and his little move turns out to be one of great consequence.

22.♖c5 h4 23.♙d3 hxg3 24.hxg3 ♖h8 This "attack" is way too clunky to succeed. **25.♞a1 ♙c6 26.♞g4**

A feeling of growing ambition ferments in White's camp, starting with the queen targeting g6, and threatening a knight sac on e6. Larsen – like a bar drunk – revelled in his reputation for picking arguments over the board upon the slightest pretext.

♞e7 27.♖e2! Since Black has overprotected e6, the knight heads for f4 to add pressure on g6. **♙c4?**

QUESTION: Why would you criticize Black's moving his knight to a beautiful outpost in White's territory?

ANSWER: The knight may look pretty on c4 but essentially does nothing there – like a sexy extra in a James Bond film, who enhances the atmosphere but adds nothing to the plot. The main reason the move is weak is that it moves a crucial defender away from Black's king, which is in far greater danger than first appearances indicate.

[The computers recognize the urgency of reinforcing g6, first of all with **27...♙g8** 28.♖f4 ♖h6 , and if 29.♙g2 ♖c4 30.♞h1 ♞xh1 31.♞xh1 then ♙e8 , although Black's position is still very difficult since he is without counterplay.]

28.♖f4 Now an explosion is imminent on e6 or g6. **e5** EXERCISE (critical decision): Black's last move is based on the principle: Counter in the centre

when attacked on the wing. Is 29 Bxg6+ now sound?

ANSWER: It sure is. Following principle doesn't always save us. In fact, Black can't even accept the sacrifice.

29.♙xg6+! "Ask and ye shall receive," recites the bishop, who sees the devil hiding within everyone's spirit but his own. **♙g8!** The desperate tend to put etiquette aside. The king cuts his losses with a stance of full deniability in the sordid g6 affair.

[**29...fxg6?** loses to 30.♖xg6 ♞f7 31.♖xh8 ♙xh8 (31...♙xh8 32.♖e6 ♞f6 33.♙g2! , intending to swing the rook to h1, is crushing) 32.♞xc4! dxc4 33.♞h4+ ♙g8 34.♞d8+ (double attack) ♙h7 35.♞xb6 and if ♙f3 (threatening ...Qh5) then 36.g4! .]

30.dxe5 ♖xe5

[**30...d4** was given an exclamation mark by Kasparov, but it's not really any better than Ivkov's move since 31.♞c8+! ♙f8 (not 31...♞f8?? 32.♙xf7+! ♙xf7 33.♞e6#) 32.♙h5! ♖xe5 (32...dxe3 fails to 33.♞g4+ ♙g7 34.e6! fxe6 35.♞a7! ♞xa7 36.♞xe6+ etc) 33.e4! transposes to the game anyway.]

31.♞c8+! ♙f8

[**31...♞f8** 32.♞xf8+ ♙xf8 33.♙f5 just leaves White a clean pawn up with a winning position.]

32.♙h5! Covering f3. **d4** Black's attack along the a8-h1 diagonal looks scary, but Larsen is in control. **33.e4!**

Clogging the diagonal. **♞g5?**

The two queens, twin sisters, have matching temperaments – both evil. This death before surrender stance doesn't work out well for Black. White's dazzled pieces marvel at the glory around them, like a family of country yokels on their first visit to the sstouring.com

metropolis.

EXERCISE (combination alert):

Endurance is a limited commodity and Black just blundered in a losing position.

How did Larsen pursue his attack?

ANSWER: Annihilation of the king's defences. Now Black's previous discomfort morphs into outright pain.

34.♔ce6!! Bloodhounds relentlessly trail Black's king and queen. I hope this is a lesson to the bishop worshippers among us to stop coddling their clerics, like doting parents.

fxe6

[After **34...♞e7** 35.♔xf8 ♞xf8 36.♞f5 ♞d6 37.♞c5! , the defender of f7 collapses.]

35.♞xe6+ ♕h7 36.♞a7+ ♕g7

[**36...♞b7** 37.♞xb7+ ♕xb7 38.♞c7+ ♕g7 39.♞h3 ♕g8 40.♞xb7 is game over.]

37.♞c5! Black is subject to a deluge of biblical proportions. Every white piece participates (except for White's overpaid king, who as upper management, remains in an exclusively supervisory role). Compare the current explosion with the intense boredom of White's opening play! This pattern was a typical Larsonian progression to a chess game.

♕e8

[This time **37...♞b7** loses to 38.♞xb7 ♕xb7 39.♕g6+ ♞xg6 (or 39...♕h6 40.♞h3+) 40.♔xg6 ♔xg6 41.♞h5+ ♕h6 42.♞f7# (Larsen).]

38.♞xe5

[Or **38.♞xb6** ♕xh5 39.♔e6 ♔f3+ 40.♕f1 ♔h2+ 41.♕g2 ♕f3+ 42.♕g1 and Black's spite checks soon run out.]

38...♞xf4 39.♞xg7+! White's rook, desperate to be the centre of attention, gesticulates wildly. ♕xg7 Black's nervous king sleeps with one

eye open and a Colt 45 under his pillow. **40.♞e7+** The prize is within reach. **♞f7 41.♞g5+** . Oh, the humanity! I suggest that the more sensitive among the readers avert their eyes!

1-0

14

E43

□ **Gligoric,S**

■ **Larsen,B**

8: Capablanca Memorial, Havana 1967
[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.d4 ♔f6 2.c4 e6 3.♔c3 ♕b4 4.e3

b6 I sometimes reach this Nimzo-

Indian position with an extra tempo, with colours reversed, starting with 1 b3!, the Nimzo-Larsen Attack.

5.♕d3 ♕b7 6.♔f3 ♔e4 7.0-0 f5

Black thematically fights for e4 rather than go off on a pawn-grabbing adventure on c3.

QUESTION: Why isn't c3 hanging?

[ANSWER: It is, but it's a known pawn sac, where White gets decent compensation. For example: **7...♔xc3** 8.bxc3 ♕xc3 9.♞b1 ♕a5 10.♕a3 d6 11.c5 and White's huge development lead and attacking chances offer full compensation for the pawn, A. Denker-R.Fine, US Championship, New York 1944.]

[**7...♕xc3** 8.bxc3 ♔xc3 9.♞c2 ♕xf3 10.gxf3 ♞g5+ 11.♕h1 ♞h5 12.♞g1! (12.♞xc3 ♞xf3+ is perpetual check) 12...♞xf3+ 13.♞g2 f5 14.♕a3! Keres' idea, playing for the win; (14.♞xc3 ♞d1+ 15.♞g1 ♞f3+ is perpetual check again) 14...♔e4 15.♞f1 g6 16.♕e2 ♞h3 17.f3 ♔f6 18.d5 and White's massive lead in development and two bishops in the open position easily compensate for

the missing pawns, H.Neto-T.Wilczek, correspondence 2010.]

8.♟xe4 At the time this was thought to be one of White's best continuations. Today, it may even sink to the level of a "?! " assessment, mainly due to Larsen's convincing play in this game.
fxe4 9.♞d2 ♟xc3 10.bxc3 0-0!

[Larsen prepared this surprise, which was a huge improvement over **10...♞g5?! 11.♟a3 ♞a6?! 12.c5 h5 13.♞e2 ♞g4 14.f3 exf3 15.♞xf3 0-0-0 16.h3 ♞g3 17.♞e5** , when Black was already busted, S. Gligoric-Bor.Andersen, Copenhagen 1965. Larsen said that Gligoric had discovered 10...0-0! (and Black's next move) independently, but then forgot about it and allowed it in the game! If a top GM is capable of this mistake, then shouldn't we forgive ourselves when we bungle our opening prep as well?]

11.♞g4 QUESTION: Does Black get enough for the pawn, seeing as e4 is about to fall?

ANSWER: Actually, e4 may fall, but Black doesn't lose a pawn. Larsen's next move is the point of his 10...0-0! novelty.

♞f5!

[Larsen's clever idea is that **11...♞f5 12.♞xe4??** is met by **h5** , which wins a piece.]

12.d5!? Passive defence is anathema to a player with an active style, as it is for a restless person to remain inert in a sickbed for weeks on end. White hopes to activate the sleeping c1-bishop,

[whereas Black looks a shade better after **12.f3 exf3 13.♞xf3** .]

12...♞g5 13.♞f4 Still hoping to take on e4 with the knight. **exd5 14.cxd5 ♟xd5 15.c4 ♟c6!** QUESTION: This

move blocks ...Nc6. Doesn't it deserve a question mark rather than an exclamation mark?
ANSWER: The exclamation mark stands for the following reasons:

1. Both bishop and d7-pawn keep each other secure.
2. The knight was never going to c6, so the bishop blocks nothing. Black's knight intends to emerge via a6.

16.♞xe4 ♞g6 17.♟b2 The once-awful bishop asserts himself along the a1-h8 diagonal. **♞a6 18.f3 ♞b4!**

The knight's eyes shine ominously in the direction of d3, which isn't so easy to cover. **19.♟c3** A difficult choice in a nest of tricky variations.

[The alternative was **19.♞ad1 ♞e7 20.♞xc7 (20.a3?! ♞c2 21.♞f2 ♞xa3 22.♞c1 ♞f8 23.♞xc7 ♟xe4 24.fxe4 ♞xf2 25.♞xf2 h6** leaves White struggling) **20...♟xe4 21.fxe4 (21.♞xd7 ♞g5 22.♞f2! ♟c6 23.h4!** should also be okay) **21...♞xe4 22.g3 ♞xe3+ 23.♞h1** and although the white king is quite exposed, Black doesn't seem to have anything more than perpetual check.]

[Kasparov gave **19.♞fd1 ♞e7 20.♞g3 ♞f8 21.♞e5** , but perhaps he meant the other rook since **♞e6!** is strong here; for example, **22.♞xc7 ♞xe3 23.♞d2 ♞d3! 24.♟d4 ♞f4 25.♞xa7 ♞e1+ 26.♞xe1 ♞xe1+ 27.♞f1 ♞e2+** wins the exchange.]

19...♞d3 20.♞f5 ♞h4! The queen decides to hold court on the kingside, which soon turns into a seething caldron of suspicion and paranoia. Triple purpose:

1. Black adds another attacker into the mix.
2. Black threatens structural damage on e4.
3. If the white knight moves, then c4

hangs.

21. ♖f6+!? Success and failure have their gradations. Kasparov thought this move was a blunder; whereas Houdini disagrees, considering that the real mistake came later.

[Gligoric probably feared the line **21. ♖ad1** ♘c5 (21... ♜f8 22. ♖f6+! gxf6 23. ♙xd3 is similar to the game, with the useful Rad1 thrown in for White) 22. ♘xc5 ♜f8! (Larsen), though after 23. ♙c2 ♜xf3 24. ♖xd7 ♜xf1+ 25. ♜xf1 (not 25. ♖xf1?? ♙xg2+ and wins) 25... ♙xd7 (and not 25... ♜xg2+?? 26. ♙xg2 ♙xg2 27. ♜f8#) 26. ♜f4 , White should be hanging on despite his inferior pawn structure.]

21...gxf6 22. ♙xd3 Gligoric's idea: White is just one move away from playing e3-e4, after which his king is safe. Amazingly, Larsen never gave him the breather he needed to play it. **♜h6 23.h3 ♖f7!** The passage of time fails to wither the power of Black's attack. Larsen clears g8 for his last undeveloped piece. **24. ♜f2?** The rook numbly obeys his king's command. After this move, the white fortress, built on porous plaster, begins to crumble.

[Amazingly, White has access to a relief fund in a time of famine: **24. ♙e1!** ♙h5 25.h4!! only a computer could come up with such an unnatural defence; (instead, 25. ♖h1? ♜g8 26. ♙e2 ♜hg6 27. ♜f2 is met by the crushing ♜xg2!) 25... ♜g8 26. ♜d1 ♜hg6 (not 26... ♙xf3?? due to 27. ♙xd7+) 27. ♜d2 and e3-e4 follows with a playable game for White. Surprisingly, Black's amalgam proves to be inert and devoid of force. A combination seems simultaneously near and yet

inaccessible. Houdini doesn't see anything concrete, and it feels as if Black chases after an essenceless entity in White's king.]

24...♜g8 25. ♖f1?! Running doesn't help. White's king hopes to emerge from his not-so-secure lair, based on the philosophy that it's better to live on the outskirts of a ghetto than in the middle of one. He realizes his defenders are useless objects, like paintings of ancestors in a mansion, people who are meaningless to their current, living descendants.

EXERCISE (combination alert): The position is suited for a surgical strike, rather than indiscriminate fire. How would you conduct Black's attack?

[The text loses quickly, but White wouldn't last after **25. ♙f5** ♜h5 26. ♙f4 ♙xf4 27. exf4 ♜xh3 either; for example, 28. ♖f1 ♜h1+ 29. ♖e2 ♜h2 30. ♖f1 h5 31. ♖g1 ♜h4 32. ♙d2 ♜h3 33. ♜af1 ♖e6 34. ♜e1+ ♖f5 35. ♜e3 h4 and White's king is trapped and in agony, the way a moth flies into hot candle wax: trapped, suffering, yet unable to die.]

ANSWER: Demolition of king's cover.

25...♜xg2! White is jarred rudely awake from his somnolent musings. Black's rook feels restored, thinking to himself: "There is nothing like making good on an old vendetta to soothe a troubled spirit."

[Gligoric may have counted on **25...♜hg6?** 26. ♙d4! ♙g3 27. ♜e1 ♙h2 28. ♙f4 and White survives.]

26. ♜xg2 Not much choice, [since **26. ♖xg2** walks into ♙xh3+ 27. ♖g1 ♙h1# .]

26...♙xh3 27.e4 ♜g6

[The defence collapses after **27...♜g6** 28. ♙e2 (the dreaming queen is

present in body, yet absent in mind and spirit in her given task of protecting her king) ♔h1+ 29.♔f2 (White's king, knocked down and prone, looks up at Black's queen, an armoured mass of bone and sinew, towering over him) ♖xg2+ etc.]

0-1

15

 Larsen,B

 Byrne,D

9: San Antonio

A16

1972

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.c4 ♘f6 2.♘c3 d5 3.cxd5 ♘xd5
4.♘f3 g6 5.e4 ♘xc3 6.bxc3

[Your not-so-brave writer has accrued a decent lifetime score with the Ulf Anderssonish opening/ending line

6.dxc3 ♔xd1+ 7.♔xd1

, when Black's best move is f6!

. My friend IM Levon Altounian once theorized: "Cyrus, the reason you so desperately want to trade queens is the fact that you can't hang your queen once it is removed from the board!" Well, this isn't entirely accurate since I can promote a pawn to a queen and then hang my queen!]

6...♙g7 7.♔a4+!? A new move at the time, which steers the game from a Grünfeld, to some hybrid.

QUESTION: Is there some point to Larsen's move, other than just being weird and taking the opponent out of known theory? And isn't this simply a violation of principle: Don't bring your queen out early in the game without good reason?

ANSWER: Whenever we wilfully violate principle, we in a sense plead guilty to the crime but with extenuating

circumstances. The ideas behind the move may be:

1. Black may have a harder time than normal playing the thematic Grünfeld ... c7-c5.

2. If Black blocks with ...Nd7, the knight is unable to pressure d4.

3. If White holds back on d4, Black is denied his normal Grünfeld target.

[7.d4 transposes to Grünfeld lines.]

7...♘d7

[The only other game in my database to feature 7 Qa4+!?, F.Zeller-M.Bauer, Möglingen 1989, saw 7...♙d7

A) another possibility is 8.♔b3!? , intending c5 (or 8...b6 9.d4) 9.♔xb7;

B) 8.♔c2 c5 9.♖b1 ♔c7 10.♙e2 0-0 11.0-0 b6 with a similar (and similarly equal) sort of position.

Play continued 12.♖e1 ♘c6 13.d4 cxd4 14.cxd4 ♖ac8 15.♔d1 ♙g4 16.d5 ♘e5 17.♘d4 ♙xe2 18.♖xe2 and Black was still fine, though

White ended up winning anyway.]

8.♙e2 0-0 9.0-0 c5 10.♔c2

The queen, having disrupted Black's normal development slightly, retreats to c2. ♔c7 11.d3 QUESTION: White hasn't even achieved d2-d4. Isn't this far too meek to extract an advantage? ANSWER: I agree, but keep in mind that Larsen isn't as interested in a theoretical duel as he is in generating a new position with original problems for both sides to solve – in other words, a situation in which he excelled!

b6 12.a4 At some stage White may be looking for a minority attack based on a4-a5, that is if Black can't respond with ...b6-b5. ♙b7 13.♘d2 ♙c6

14.♙b2 e6 15.d4?! So Larsen goes for a "proper" Grünfeld set-up after all and only manages to get an inferior version – perhaps an admission that

his opening experiment ended in failure. Sometimes Larsen's opening experiments backfired and it was he who appeared the more confused of the two!

[Instead, **15.f4** would be weirdly Larsonian, with a strange-looking reversed Dutch-type position.]

15...a6

[I like Black's chances if he continues in typical fashion, pressuring White's centre with **15...Bac8!** **16.Bfd1 Bfd8** **17.Bb1 Bb7** **18.e5** (**18.Bd3?!** can be met by **cx d4** **19.cxd4 Bc5!** with advantage) **18...cx d4** **19.cxd4 Bc2** , when Black looks slightly better in the ending.]

16.Bf3! Preparing d4-d5. **Bb7!?**

[I would have played **16...cx d4** **17.cxd4 Bb8** **18.Bfc1 Bb8** **19.Bb3 Bfd8** with a double edged position.]

17.d5! ex d5 **18.ex d5 Be5**

[QUESTION: Why can't Black artificially isolate d5 with **18...c4** - ?
ANSWER: Black would like to play that but he can't get away with it. White wins a pawn by deflecting Black's queen with **19.d6!** **Bc8** **20.Bxb7 Bxb7** **21.Bxc4** .]

19.c4! Now Larsen is getting somewhere. White has obtained a connected, passed d-pawn, with potential to pressure b6. **b5!** Black quickly liquidates a potential weakness.

[**19...Bxf3+?** **20.Bxf3 Bxb2** **21.Bxb2** is much weaker, since b6 becomes a serious target.]

20.Be2 Bxc4?! A violation of the principle: Don't be the one to break the tension, unless you see a concrete advantage in doing so.

[Simply **20...Bfe8** was better.]

21.Bxc4 bxc4 **22.Bxg7 Bxg7** **23.d6!** Larsen rarely missed such short-range

tactics. White's passed pawn gets a free jump to d6. **Bd7**

[Of course **23...Bxd6??**

hangs a piece to **24.Bb2+** .]

24.Bfd1 Bfe8 **25.Bxc4 Bg8** **26.Bc3!**

Bits and pieces of evidence filter through, with the conclusion that White has made significant progress:

1. The d6-passer chokes Black.
2. The a6- and c5-pawns are potential targets for White.
3. Black's king doesn't look that safe, with punctured dark squares and few defenders.

Bad8 **27.Bf6?** Fear of reprisals is eminently well founded.

EXERCISE (combination alert): Larsen, after building up a strategically won game, got careless and blundered. Do you see a shot for Black which allows him to escape?

[**27.f3!** would be a wise, precautionary amendment, after which White retains his bind. Fear may be a necessary self-preserving mechanism. If you are perpetually unafraid, you may also be blissfully unaware of the dangers around you. This trait, mixed with a perpetually overoptimistic outlook was one of Larsen's lifelong psychological weaknesses in his play.]

ANSWER: Piece sac/Double attack/Perpetual check. Suddenly White must cut his losses and take the draw.

27...Bxg2! Byrne exhibits a dogged refusal to bow to his opponent's blows by applying one himself. **28.Ba3?**

QUESTION: Didn't you just say "White must cut his losses and take the draw"?

ANSWER: What I should have said was: "A sane player would cut his losses and take the draw!"

This looks like a clear-cut case of loss

of concentration. This looks like a clear-cut case of loss of... Oh, wait, I already said that. Well, you see what I mean? Concentration loss can happen to anyone at any time. It's unbearable for Larsen to throw away the half point from a previously winning position, so he gambles with what is (objectively) a bad move, based on Byrne's time pressure. Larsen would often push past rational limits – as he does here – and his slippery tactical ability allowed him to get away with his crimes much more than he should have! Let's do an exercise:

EXERCISE (combination alert): Larsen simmers with an overoptimistic attempt to win at all costs, which nearly costs him. How can Black exploit White's last move?

[Now **28. ♖xf7+!** ♖xf7 29. ♔xf7+ ♔xf7 30. ♔xg2 ♖d7 31. ♖ac1 ♖e5 is probably drawn.]

[Only Black has winning chances after **28. ♔xg2?! ♖g4+** 29. ♔h1 ♖xc4 30. d7 ♖f8 .]

28... ♔a8? This mistake creates a serious impediment to Black's flow and his goldmine runs dry.

[ANSWER: Byrne missed the beautiful resource **28... ♔d5!!** , running interference, when ...Qg4+ becomes a dreadful threat. Indeed, White has nothing better than to allow 29. ♖xd5 ♖g4+ 30. ♔f1 (30. ♖g3 is no better) 30... ♖xc4+ 31. ♖ad3 ♖d7 and hope to draw a pawn down.]

29. ♖g3! Out of the blue, Black's king is threatened with terrible consequences. ♖f8? In the confusion of time pressure, our astigmatic brains tend to hallucinate, perceiving the unreal for the real. Black's last move is a bit like placing your hand over an open candle

flame, hoping that with time, it will get cooler.

EXERCISE (combination alert): Find one powerful shot and you scatter Black's hopes to the wind in four directions.

[Stiffer resistance was possible with **29... ♔e4!** (it's easy to face minor transient suffering if we simultaneously endure an existential threat) 30. h4! ♖f8 31. f3 ♖xa4 32. ♖c1 , when Black loses material but can yet play on; for example, ♔d3!? 33. ♔xd3 (or 33. h5 ♖e8!) 33... ♖b3! .]

ANSWER: Demolition of king's position.

30. ♖xg6+! It is rumoured the future holds no mysteries to Black's clairvoyant king. The strange thing is that, after White's last move, he mutters to himself: "Wow! I did not see that coming!" This is one of those situations which, when we think back on it, is funny. Yet not so funny in the present, when we undergo the ordeal. **hxg6 31. ♖xg6+ ♔h8** The king, although born to royalty, looks more and more proletarian with each move, as beads of perspiration run down his brow. **32. ♖h6+ ♔g8 33. ♖d3!**

The nasty point. Rg3 arrives with devastating consequences. ♖g4+ The only move. Black's frustrated queen shakes her fist in a malignantly futile gesture in the direction of White's king. **34. ♖g3** The rook intercepts the intruder. ♖xg3+ **35. fxg3** Now Bd3 is threatened. ♔e4 EXERCISE

(combination alert): Black is forced to present yet more tribute on a silver tray. How does White pick up material?

ANSWER: "We would zigzag our way, through the boredom and pain..." The queen achieves an eventual fork, picking off the loose e4-bishop, with an

artful zig here and a crafty zag there.

36. ♖g5+ ♕h7 **37.** ♗h4+

Double attack. The queen's influence is so dominant, there appears to be two of her. ♕g7 **38.** ♗xe4 ♖xd6

EXERCISE (combination alert): Yet more material falls on Black's side. How?

ANSWER: Step 1: Double attack. The queen always regarded her relatives on d6 and g7 as congenital idiots, and now she finally musters the courage to tell them so to their faces.

39. ♗e5+ ♖f6 Step 2: Exploit the f6-pin. **40.g4!** The impatient g-pawn refuses to wait his turn in line. This is an armed hold-up more than a pawn push.

[There is no good defence to g4-g5, since **40.g4!** ♕g6 is met by 41. ♕d3+ ♕g7 42.g5 .]

1-0

16

□ **Larsen,B**

■ **Andersson,U**

10: Bugojno

A30

1982

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.c4 ♘f6 **2.** ♘c3 **c5** **3.g3** **e6** **4.** ♘f3

[**4. ♕g2?!** is inaccurate due to d5 5.cxd5 exd5 6.d3 (6.d4 would be met by cxd4 7. ♗xd4 ♘c6 and Black gains a tempo on a Queen's Gambit Tarrasch) 6...d4 7. ♘e4 ♘xe4 8. ♕xe4 ♕e7 9. ♕g2 0-0 , when Black already looks slightly better, since he leads in development and may later generate pressure down the e-file.]

4...b6 **5. ♕g2** ♕b7 **6.0-0** ♕e7 **7.d3!?** Larsen's signature opening wimpiness manifests itself once again.

QUESTION: What is normal for White

here?

[ANSWER: I usually head for a hedgehog formation with **7.d4** cxd4 8. ♗xd4 . For example: d6 9. ♖d1 a6 10. ♕g5 (10. ♘g5 , as in C. Lakdawala-W.Browne, Los Angeles 1998; and 10.b3 are also played) 10...♘bd7 11. ♗d2 ♗c7?! (11...0-0 is correct here; 11...♖c8?! 12. ♕f4! ♖xc4 13. ♕xd6 left Black struggling in C.Lakdawala-J.Ehlvest, Los Angeles rapid 2000) 12. ♕f4! e5 (12... ♗xc4 13. ♕xd6 is clearly better for White) 13. ♕g5 h6 (13... ♗xc4?? runs into 14. ♘xe5! dxe5 15. ♕xb7 with a strategically won game) 14. ♕xf6 ♘xf6 15.b3 0-0 16. ♘h4! ♖fd8 17. ♘f5 ♕xg2 18. ♕xg2 b5 19. ♘d5 ♘xd5 20. ♗xd5 and White has a huge advantage with domination of the light squares, pressure on d6, and good knight versus a bad bishop, C.Lakdawala-A.Yermolinsky, Los Angeles 1996.]

7...d5 Now Black equalizes without breaking a sweat. **8.cxd5**

[Black is fine after **8. ♘e5** 0-0 9. ♕f4 ♘c6 10. ♗a4 ♗c8 .]

8...♘d5!? Andersson wavers between a conflict of opposite impulses and displays his stylistic bias, refusing to take on structural weaknesses in exchange for dynamism.

[**8...exd5!** would have been more ambitious, when 9.d4 effectively gives Black the "white pieces" due to the wasted tempo over d2-d3-d4, (but perhaps Larsen would have played 9. ♗a4+!/? here too.)]

9. ♗a4+!? ♘d7

[QUESTION: Why would Larsen agree to a completely even ending – i. e. after **9...♗d7** 10. ♗xd7+ (10. ♗g4 can be met by h5! since 11. ♗xg7?? loses the queen to ♕f6) 10...♘xd7

– versus an endgame specialist like Andersson?

ANSWER: Because Larsen was an endgame specialist himself. Please refer to the final chapter of this book to see why! Of course White has nothing here, but Larsen, unlike most chess players today, never really cared about extracting a "+=" from White, as long as he entered positions in which he felt comfortable.]

[Really, Black has a free choice as to how he wants to block the check.

9...♙c6 looks okay too.]

10.e4!? ♖xc3! The correct decision.

[Larsen would have loved to enter the murk of 10...♖b4?! 11.d4

(Principle: Open the position when leading in development) and if b5!? then 12.♙xb5! ♙a6 13.♙a4 ♙xf1 14.♙xf1 with advantage to White, who gets the bishop pair and a pawn for the exchange, as well as a shaky b4-knight and the potential to dominate the light squares.

The Buddha warned us of the numerous problems associated with:

1. The risk in acquiring.
2. Once acquired, our precious possession must be guarded diligently.
3. If we lose our precious possession, we suffer psychologically.]

11.bxc3 QUESTION: Why did Black agree to strengthen White's centre?

ANSWER: Andersson's last move is not so bad and increases the position's dynamism. If White later plays d3-d4, he enters a kind of delayed Semi-Tarrasch, but again a move down, since he took two moves to advance his d-pawn.

0-0 12.♙e1 a6 13.♙f4 b5 14.♙c2

♖b6 Both sides now have what they wanted from the opening. Andersson achieved dynamic equality, while Larsen got a strange, non-book position.

15.h4! Principle: Generate focus on your strong wing. All of White's minor pieces are on the kingside, so Larsen begins to create confrontation on that side of the board. The coming h4-h5 and possible h5-h6 either create kingside weakness or sac targets.

♙c8 16.♙ac1 ♙e8 17.♙e2 ♖a4

Andersson focuses on his own strengths on the queenside, targeting c3. 18.h5 ♙a5

[With hindsight, perhaps Black would have been better off with 18...h6.]

19.h6!? This move ensures a rupture in the once tightly sealed defensive barrier around Black's king. When the mood was upon him, Larsen's play came across as that from a graceless barbarian. In irrational positions, intuition fulfils the function of eyes. When we encounter such a stylistic clash, there can be no reconciliation – the way two fanatical devotees of different sects, each believe the other to be an ignorant and misguided heathen: there simply isn't a lowest common denominator of agreement between the pair.

g6 The safe route. Your writer is essentially a weak model of Ulf Andersson, one of my all-time favourite players, whose games I studied heavily in the '80s and '90s, until I got to the point where I could predict around 90% of his moves (unfortunately for me, that missing 10% makes all the difference!).

[I even based my entire White repertoire around Andersson, who intuitively avoids such Larsenesque

messes as: 19...c4!? 20.♖e5 cxd3 21.♗xd3 ♘c5 22.♗f3 .]

[19...♘xc3!? 20.♗b2 ♕f6 21.e5 ♘a4 22.♗c2 ♕e7 23.hxg7 .

Both lines look pretty unclear, but I have a feeling Larsen would have outplayed the more strategically minded Ulfie in either one.]

20.c4 b4? This "permanent" advantage of the queenside pawn majority is overridden by the fact that Black needs to keep the queenside fluid while under attack.

[At this moment he should opt for something less ambitious, like 20...♗d8 .]

21.a3!! A shocker, which drains the harmony out of Black's position, no matter how he responds. The depressing part of it is, the computers spot the move instantaneously, albeit grossly misassessing it as giving White only a tiny edge. In his notes in Informator, Larsen appends the "+-" symbol – and when I played it out, that was true: White ended up with a winning position in every variation.

bxa3 Andersson attempts to digest the implications of Larsen's mysterious last move. The trouble is that if Black allows a3xb4 and then responds with ...c5xb4, it unleashes the once-dormant power of White's centre.

[Unbelievably, a saving line for Black doesn't seem to exist. For instance: 21...♘c3 22.♗b2 ♕f6 (or 22...♕c6 23.♖a1! ♗b6 24.axb4 cxb4 25.♕e5 ♕c5 26.d4 ♕f8 27.d5 and Black's game soon collapses) 23.♖e5 (threatening Rxc3, followed by Qxb7) ♕a8 24.axb4 cxb4 25.♖a1 ♘a4 (the only move) 26.♗c2 ♕xe5 27.♖xa4 ♗c5 28.♕xe5 ♗xe5 29.♖xa6 , when Black is a pawn down for nothing.]

[21...♗b6 22.♗d1 ♕c6 23.axb4 cxb4 24.d4 a5 25.d5 ♖ed8 26.♖e5! ♘c5 27.♖g4! , threatening Qd4 with a winning attack.]

22.♗c2

[22.♖b1! looks even stronger; for example, ♕c6 23.♖b3 ♗d8 24.♖e5 ♘b6 25.♘xc6 ♖xc6 26.e5 ♖c8 27.♕d2 (threatening Ba5) ♘d7 28.♖xa3 and Black is busted since a6 falls, while his misaligned pieces tumble over each other.]

22...♕c6 23.♕d2 ♗b6 24.♖b1 ♗a7 25.♖b3

[Here White might insert 25.♖e5! ♕d7 before 26.♖b3 ♘b6 27.♕a5 ♘a8 28.♖xa3 , when Black's tangled position is hard to look at.]

25...♘b6 26.♗c3 Threatening mate on the move. **f6!?**

[26...♕f8 doesn't really help Black after 27.♖xa3 ♘d7 28.♖ea1 ♕b7 29.♖e5 ♘xe5 30.♗xe5 (threatening Bc3) ♗b8 31.♗b2 ♗c7 32.♖b3 ♕c6 33.♖xa6 .]

27.♕h3 ♕d8?!

[27...♕d7 28.♖xa3 e5 might offer more resistance, fixing the white d-pawn as backward.]

28.♖xa3 ♘d7 29.♗a1!

Another enigma, when our brains still hurt from the first one. The outraged harriidan knows in her heart that her irrational demands will result in compliance by her terrified servants. White's threats magnify telescopically. If only Réti were alive to see this diagram. Why is it that Morphy never attacked this way!? Material is even but Black's position is hopelessly uncoordinated and riddled with weaknesses. Sometimes a defendant is convicted, not due to forensic or eyewitness evidence, but simply from a preponderance of circumstantial

"coincidences" which, when added up, weight the case towards a guilty verdict:

1. The a6-pawn is on life support.
2. The black king isn't so secure with his entire protective pawn front loosened. Ideas like Ng5 and g3-g4-g5 are in the air. So the defender's actions are constricted by the tight noose of weakness around their vulnerable leader.

3. All Black's pieces seem to sit meditatively in swami-like contortion. Conclusion: Black's defensive task feels overwhelming: an under-nourished, clinically depressed David, before a steroid-popping, sociopathic Goliath. One glance at Black's dismal expanse tells us he won't survive.

♟b7 30.g4! A move of sinister intent: g4-g5, further eroding the dark squares around Black's king.

[The immediate **30.d4!** cxd4 31.♟xd4 ♟f8 32.♟e3 looks strong too, and if ♟a8 then 33.c5! ♞xc5 34.♟xe6 ♞e5 35.♟c5 ♟xe4 36.♞xa6 ♟d5 37.♞d1 ♟f7 38.♟xe4 ♞xe4 39.♟g2 and Black collapses.]

30...♞c6 31.g5 The stately infantry parade marches in formation. Now both e6- and f6-pawns fall under dire assault. **♟c8 32.d4!** This central shot violates the principle: Don't create a disturbance in the centre while you are attacking on the wing. However, this is an exception, as White's knight enters the attack with deadly effect.

cx d4

[QUESTION: Why co-operate and allow White's knight into the attack? Can't Black practice civil disobedience with something like **32...e5** - ?

ANSWER: Black's position collapses all the same after 33.d5 ♞d6 34.♞b1

♟b6 35.♟xc8 ♟xc8 36.gxf6 ♟xf6 37.♟e3 , followed by Ra5, when the c5-pawn falls and Black can resign.]

33.♟xd4 ♞b6 34.♟a5

[Computers find this sort of position almost trivial. Here Houdini suggests **34.c5!** ♟xc5 35.♞c3 and White wins a piece; for example, ♞b7 36.♟c6 ♟b6 37.♟e3 ♟xc6 38.♞xc5 ♟d7 39.♞d1! etc.]

34...♟c5

[Objectively, **34...♞d6** was more tenacious, but Black is still busted after 35.c5! ♟xc5 36.♟xe6! ♞dxe6 37.♟xe6+ ♞xe6 38.♟xd8 ♟xg5+ 39.♞g3 . So when Plan A flops, we make shift to Plan B. Andersson tries a desperate offer of the exchange to seize some measure of control over the dark squares...]

35.♞f3! ...which is declined! An enemy's indifference is in a way more insulting to our pride than an overt attempt to destroy us. Larsen recognizes that f6 is the gateway to Black's king and declines the b6-gift. Now follows a battery of sequential assaults.

♞f8 36.gxf6 ♞xf6 37.♟xb6

Fine. I gratefully accept your hospitality. **♟xb6** EXERCISE (combination alert): If a balloon and a rock collide, you would be wise to bet on the rock. Find one crushing shot and Black's defences evaporate.

ANSWER: Annihilation of the defensive barrier/Overloaded pieces.

38.♟xe6!! Credulity can only ingest so much of an opponent's deceit in a single bite. The attackers meet stiff resistance in every direction bar one. Black has four defenders on e6 (as well as a free rook on f3!) and they are not enough!

[**38.♟xe6**

A) 38...♖xe6 39.♔g7# . Displaying her macabre sense of humour, the queen instructs her musicians to play God Save the King on his final march to the gallows. (39.--);

B) 38...♙xe6 ("Bless me Father, for I have not sinned" – the bishop mistakenly believes he can camouflage his sins, even from God, and be granted undeserved grace when his life eventually comes to an end) 39.♖xf6 ♙xf6 40.♔xf6 ♔b7 41.♖d1! leads to mate.;

C) 38...♘xe6 39.♖xf6 also forces a quick mate.;

D) 38...♔xe6 39.♙xe6+ ♘xe6 40.♖xf6 is clearly hopeless.;

E) 38...♖xf3 (the rook effects the transaction but fails to receive the expected payment) 39.♔g7# . "Past is past," Black's nervous king says soothingly to the queen, adding "I envision a golden era of peace between our two great nations." The queen envisions another future which doesn't include Black's king in the equation.;

F) 38...--]

1-0

Chapter Two

Larsen on Defence and Counterattack

Larsen, the ultimate risk-taker/provocateur, felt completely at home on the defence. His skill in this region is a river with many tributaries. In fact, after study of his games, I believe he actually preferred a slightly inferior but complex position to an equal one in a drably flat landscape.

Some psychologists claim that lack of emotion doesn't lead to Mr. Spock-like rational tranquillity, as some of us suppose. Brain researchers, labelling this the "Somatic Marker" hypothesis, claim that lack of emotion actually leads us to make foolish decisions and may be the driver behind most sociopathic behaviour. Larsen may have disagreed with this assessment, since his provocations, like Lasker's and Korchnoi's, were designed to provoke and even enrage opponents, the way Captain Kirk constantly provoked Spock, until he lost his Vulcan cool. In this chapter we find Larsen's psychotic (I stick by this characterization) attempt to win what clearly appears to be a position of absolute stasis against Bronstein from their Moscow 1962 game (which we discussed at length in the introduction of this book). In case you skipped the intro, I'm bunging in the same diagram again, because you won't want to miss this one:

Larsen's atonal inclinations rarely merged in harmony, and the ABCs of his ideas were nearly impossible to fathom (at least fathom rationally!). If I had White versus an 1800-level player, I would almost certainly offer a draw, not seeing any possibility for progress.



Now I ask you once more: Who in his right mind plays for a win as White here, and against a man who tied a World Championship match? As related in [Game 12](#) below, Larsen instigated a jaw-dropping triple pawn sac, starting with 42 g4!!?? (somehow this move feels as if White seeks to open a gun shop next to a Zen centre), and when Bronstein replied 42...Rxc4, followed with 43 c4+! bxc4 and then 44 Ra3!, after which Larsen's pieces awakened as if suddenly sentient with an intelligence and will of their own. He went on to confuse, provoke and win with one of the most astounding counterattacks I have ever seen, after surviving multiple near-death experiences in the adventures ahead.

[11: B.Larsen-T.V.Petrosian, Portoroz Interzonal 1958](#)

Bird's Opening

[12: B.Larsen-D.Bronstein, Moscow 1962](#)

Sicilian Defence

[13: D.Bronstein-B.Larsen, Amsterdam Interzonal 1964](#)

King's Indian Defence

[14: R.J.Fischer-B.Larsen, Piatigorsky Cup, Santa Monica 1966](#)

Ruy Lopez

[15: B.Larsen-M.Tal, Candidates \(3rd matchgame\), Eersel 1969](#)

Tarrasch Defence

[16: B.Larsen-M.Botvinnik, Leiden 1970](#)

English Opening

[17: R.J.Fischer-B.Larsen, Palma de Mallorca Interzonal 1970](#)

Sicilian Defence

[18: L.M.Evans-B.Larsen, San Antonio 1972](#)

Queen's Indian Defence

[19: G.Kasparov-B.Larsen, Tilburg 1981](#)

Old Indian Defence

[20: L.Ljubojevic-B.Larsen, Bugojno 1984](#)

Caro-Kann Defence

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18

A03

□ **Larsen,B**
 ■ **Petrosian,TV**

11: Portoroz Interzonal

1958

*[Cyrus Lakdawala]***1.f4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5 3.e3 ♗g4**

Petrosian logically seeks to swap away his light-squared bishop.

QUESTION: Why is this swap beneficial for Black?

ANSWER: Black intends to follow up with ...e7-e6, creating a pawn chain on the opposite colour squares to his remaining bishop.

QUESTION: But doesn't trading on f3 hand White the bishop pair?

ANSWER: It does but the position remains blocked for now, so it isn't clear whether this constitutes a real advantage, while Black's knights and remaining good bishop offer him a harmonious set-up.

4.♗e2 ♘bd7 5.♘e5!? Sometimes we get the feeling that Larsen plays certain moves just for show. I don't see any point to this time-wasting idea.

[Instead: **5.0-0** ♗xf3 6.♗xf3 e5 7.fxe5 ♘xe5 and Black equalizes without breaking a sweat, going back (by transposition) even as far as I. Kolisch-L.Paulsen, London (12th matchgame) 1861.]

[**5.b3** ♗xf3 6.♗xf3 e5 7.fxe5 ♘xe5 8.♗b2 ♗d6 9.♘c3 c6 10.♖e2 ♖e7 11.0-0-0! 0-0 12.♕b1 b5

and I already prefer Black, who owns more space and has the smoother-looking attack, K.Chernyshov-P. Svidler, Voronezh (rapid) 2003.]

[**5.d4** (a reversed Stonewall set-up is perhaps White's best choice in the position, since allowing ...Bxf3 and ...e7-e5 gives Black equality at a minimum) e6 6.0-0 c5 7.♘c3!?

(7.c3 is a more normal set-up)

7...♗d6 8.a4 0-0 9.h3 ♗xf3 10.♗xf3 a6 was S.Conquest-T.Luther, Olot 1994. I don't believe Black stands worse, since his extra space and potential for queenside expansion easily compensate for the bishop pair.]

5...♗xe2 6.♖xe2 e6 7.0-0

[Here **7.b3** ♘xe5 8.fxe5 ♘d7 9.♗b2 ♖h4+ 10.♖f2 (not 10.g3? ♖e4! and Black wins material) 10...♖xf2+ 11.♕xf2 ♗e7 looks equal.]

7...♗d6 8.d4? IM Craig Pritchett, in Great Chess Romantics, gives this eyesore move a mere "!" mark. I believe he was being far too kind to Larsen.

QUESTION: Isn't this just an awful reversed Stonewall Dutch for White, since he swapped off his good bishop and remained with the lemon on c1?

ANSWER: Absolutely correct. White gets a drab Stonewall and greatly diminished attacking chances with his good bishop missing. So far Larsen seems to be giving a lesson on how not to play a Stonewall Dutch!

[White should settle for the miserably passive **8.♘xd7** with equality.]

8...0-0 9.♘d2 c5 10.c3 ♖c8 11.g4!? Fortune's sudden pout fails to fluster Larsen. White must generate something – anything – on the kingside, before Black floods the queenside with a pawn storm.

♘e8 A good reaction, preparing ...f7-f6. **12.♘df3 ♘df6!?**

[I would go for the more direct **12...f6** 13.♘d3 (I'm almost positive Larsen would play this way, rather than swap on d7) c4 14.♘de1 f5 this is merely a temporary compromise to a continually festering dispute in the centre; (14...e5!? 15.fxe5 fxe5

allows White to muck it up a little with 16.e4 , although Houdini still prefers Black) 15.gxf5 exf5 16.♘e5 ♘ef6 17.♘1f3 ♘e4 , when I prefer Black's chances if he simply expands on the queenside. I don't think White's coming kingside attack (after 18.♙h1) is as potent.]

13.♙d2 ♘e4 14.♙e1 The bad bishop dreams of reforming and one day re-entering as a productive member of society. **f6** Black's focus begins to scatter between multiple tempting ideas.

[He has better chances to retain his advantage with **14...c4!** – a theme which seems to be the salient flow in Black's position, and which Petrosian repeatedly avoided through the game; ...f7-f6 is now a serious threat, trapping the e5-knight. Then 15.g5 ♙xe5 looks good for Black, no matter how White responds, as his bishop remains an awful piece.]

15.♘d3 ♙e7 Retaining possibilities of a future ...N8d6. **16.f5!** White's position, whose drab existence for so long was cloaked in shades of grey, experiences an intoxicating starburst of bright colours. The ever-resourceful Larsen realizes that there are no second or third chances for him if he fails to generate counterplay. He must gather it now or risk a slow death by Petrosian's strategic squeeze.

This multi-purpose move greatly increases the complexity level and hands Petrosian difficult strategic problems:

1. White undermines and applies pressure to Black's central light squares.
2. White clears the way for Nf4.
3. White creates potential for Bg3, when his bad bishop pokes his nose

tentatively over the fence.

♙d7

[I still like Black's position after **16...exf5!** 17.gxf5 ♙d7 18.dxc5 ♙xc5 19.♘xc5 ♘xc5 20.♘d4 ♘d6 21.♙g3 ♘c4 . White's e3-isolani is weaker than Black's on d5.]

17.♘h4!? ♘c7

[And here **17...c4!** 18.♘f4 ♘c7 looks clearly better for Black.]

18.♙g3 ♙d6!? According to Houdini, Black's advantage continues to dissipate.

QUESTION: Why did Black agree to swap off White's bad bishop?

[ANSWER: Because it is no longer bad. Nevertheless, **18...c4!** 19.♘f2 ♘xg3 20.hxg3 ♙fe8 was better; for example, 21.♘h3 ♙d6 22.♙g2 e5 23.♘f3 e4 24.♘e1 b5 , when both sides suffer but we must factor in the matter of degree. If we list White's and Black's woes, we see that White's side of the ledger remains considerably longer, since Black can leisurely expand on the queenside, whereas White's kingside attack may have reached a dead end.]

19.♙xd6 ♙xd6 20.♙ad1 ♙ce8?!

[Once again Petrosian avoids the **20...c4!** plan. When we make excuses and procrastinate to avoid undertaking a difficult action (which we suspect intuitively is in our best interest), it has a way of pushing us in the wrong direction. After 21.♘f2 ♘g5 , Black still has the better game, since he can expand on the queenside and play down the e-file.]

21.dxc5! ♘xc5 22.♘f4?! Now it's Larsen's turn to go astray. White stakes out targets on e6 and d5 as potential ore-producing claims. The second century Indian philosopher/

monk Nagarjuna wrote: "There is pleasure when an itch is scratched. But to be without an itch is more pleasurable still."

[White could extricate himself from most of his difficulties by liquidating the centre with **22.c4!** dxc4 23.♟b4 ♖b6 24.♚xc4 .]

22...b5?!

[Petrosian may have avoided the correct **22...e5!** , being worried about 23.♟xd5 . But Black emerges with the advantage after ♟xd5 24.♚d2 (or 24.c4? ♟c3! 25.bxc3 ♖c6 and White's queenside structure is a wreck) 24...♞d8 25.c4 ♚a6! 26.cxd5 ♚xa2 , when White is in trouble with no great answer to the strategic threat of ...e5-e4!, followed by ...Nd3.]

23.♚g2! Targeting d5. Of all the contributory causes to Black's demise, the viral outbreak of weakness of his central light squares ranks first on the list and to the furthest reaches of his empire.

♞d8?! Petrosian continues to lose the thread.

[He should offer a pawn with **23...♚b6!** 24.♟h1 a5 25.fxe6 ♟5xe6 26.♟xd5 ♟xd5 27.♞xd5 g6 , when Black seems to have full compensation.]

24.b4! A brilliant decision, destabilizing Black's knight, before capturing on e6. The bizarre, nearly impossible-to-predict ideas which assail Petrosian are too startling to be assimilated instantly. Now Black begins to reel. ♟e4 Believe it or not, e4 proves to be an unstable square for the knight.

25.fxe6 g6?! EXERCISE (combination alert): Black prevents Nf5, followed by e6-e7, but at a high a cost. How did Larsen seize a substantial advantage?

[Black was already in trouble; for example, **25...♟xc3??** loses to 26.♟f5! ♚xb4 27.♞d4 ♚c5 28.e7 .]

[He should have played **25...♞fe8** 26.♟f5 ♚e5 27.e7 ♞xe7 28.♟xe7+ ♚xe7 , when Black still has chances to survive.]

ANSWER: Undermining. As mentioned before, Black's e4-knight isn't as secure as first appearances indicate.

26.♟xd5! A sudden gloom envelops Black's centre. The obnoxious knight has a personality which is impossible to accurately describe, since

Everyman's contracts tie your writer's hands to the use of polite language.

♟xd5 27.♚xe4 ♟xc3 No choice.

28.♞xd6 ♟xe4 29.♚a6 Targeting a7 and the seventh rank. Petrosian's fall from grace in this game is a nightmare similar to when the roulette ball lands on your number and then, thinking better of it, settles into the slot next door, while you watch your would-be winning bet go up in smoke.

♞d3

[Black probably can't save himself after **29...♞fe8** 30.♟f3 ♞d3 31.♞e1 ♞d6 32.♞xa7 ♞dxe6 33.♞c1 ♞6e7 34.♞xe7 ♞xe7 35.♟d4 either.]

30.♞xa7 ♞e8

[**30...♞xe3** 31.♟g2 ♞e2 32.♟f4 ♞d2 33.♞d7! is also very tough on Black.]

31.♟g2! g5 The e6-pawn remains covered,

[since **31...♞xe6??** gets forked by 32.♟f4 .]

32.♞c1 ♞d6?!

[**32...♟c3!** is the only way to prolong the game, since White's rook must be kept on the seventh.]

[Of course **32...♞xe6??** walks into a back rank mate after 33.♞c8+ .]

33.h4! This gives White's king some space, enabling him to double rooks on

the seventh. **♖dxe6 34.♖cc7 ♜d6**

[Nor can Black save himself with **34...h6** , even if that probably puts up slightly more resistance, as after
 35.♖g7+ ♜h8 36.♖h7+ ♜g8
 37.♖ag7+ ♜f8 38.♖b7 ♖6e7
 39.♖hxe7 ♖xe7 40.♖xb5 ♖a7
 41.♖a5! , White should take the full point.]

35.♖xh7 ♖c8 36.♖hg7+ ♜h8

Clarity begins to emerge from the once-confused amalgam. There is something vaguely familiar here, the way you view a movie based on a book you read decades ago.

EXERCISE (planning): Work out White's winning plan.

ANSWER: Add another attacker by pushing the h-pawn to the sixth rank to create a mating net.

37.h5! ♜e8 38.♖gf7 Threatening mate on the move. **♜d6 39.♖h7+ ♜g8**

40.h6 "There are consequences for those who choose wilfully to disobey their betters," the snobby h-pawn reminds Black's king. The threat is **Rg7+** and **Rh8** mate. There is universal sentiment among White's pieces: everyone wants the black king dead.

♜e8 EXERCISE (combination alert): Black's king remains bottled up, while White's rooks guard the escape routes. Work out a forcing sequence which wins at once.

ANSWER: Clearance/Mating net.

41.♖hf7!

[Black is forced to hand over his knight to prevent **h6-h7+**, followed by **Rf8** mate; and **41.♖hf7 ♖c7** Black's rook and knight, insufferable butt kissers, laugh at the white rook's unfunny witticisms; (**41...♜d6 42.♖g7+ ♜f8 43.h7** forces mate)
42.♖axc7 ♜xc7 43.♖xc7

leaves White a piece up.]

1-0

19

B51

 **Larsen,B**

 **Bronstein,D**

12: Moscow

1962

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.e4 c5 2.♜f3 d6 3.♙b5+

The Moscow Variation. As usual, Larsen dodges a theoretical fight in an Open Sicilian and heads for a more sedate byway, postponing the battle for a later date in the game.

♜c6 4.0-0 Today, this is White's main continuation. The positions may lead to either Closed Ruy Lopez or Advance French-type structures.

[As a known bishop hater, I jump at the chance to unload one with

4.♙xc6+ bxc6 5.0-0 g6 (either **5...♙g4**; or **5...e5** is more normal; e.g. **6.c3 ♜f6 7.♖e1 ♙g4 8.d4 ♜d7 9.♙e3 cxd4 10.cxd4 ♙e7 11.♜bd2 exd4 12.♙xd4 0-0 13.♜c4 ♜b6 14.♜e3 ♙e6** , when I prefer White's

piece activity and potential against the opposing c- and d-pawns over Black's bishop pair, A.Shirov-V. Malakhov, Villarrobleto rapid 2008)

6.e5!? d5 (Black feared doubled, isolated c-pawns, though his piece activity and bishop pair may

compensate after **6...♙g7 7.♖e1 ♜h6 8.exd6 ♖xd6**) **7.d3 ♙g7 8.♖e1 ♙g4 9.h3 ♙xf3 10.♖xf3** and White stood better with more space and a superior structure, C.Lakdawala-C. Milton, San Diego (rapid) 2012.]

4...♙g4 5.h3 ♙xf3 QUESTION: Why hand White the bishop pair and solve his problems with the f3-pin?

[ANSWER: I don't like this move <http://www.chessbase.com>

either. I would prefer **5...♗h5** 6.c3 a6!? (and here 6...e6) 7.♗xc6+ bxc6 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 e6 (9...♘f6?! 10.♗g5 h6?! is too provocative: after 11.♗xf6 exf6 12.♖c2 ♗d7 13.♘h4 , White was clearly better, J.Van der Wiel-B. Larsen, Brussels 1987) 10.♘bd2 ♘f6 11.b3 d5 12.e5 ♘d7 , as in S. Kalinitschew-S.Movsesian, German League 1996. Black has nothing to fear on the kingside with White's dangerous light-squared bishop removed from the board, while the backward c-pawn is merely a temporary issue, since a future ...c6-c5 can be tossed in at Black's convenience.]

6.♗xf3 e6 7.d3

[My tendency would be to go for something like **7.♗xc6+** bxc6 8.e5!? , as in Lakdawala-Milton above.]

7...♘ge7 8.♗g5 "Threatening" Bxc6+; but if this is so, I would logically ask why Larsen didn't chop the c6-knight on his seventh move. **♗d7** Dual purpose: Unpinning and covering c6. **9.c3 a6 10.♗a4 ♘g6 11.♘d2 b5** Black gains Lopez-like queenside space. **12.♗c2**

[QUESTION: Isn't this more passive than **12.♗b3** - ?

ANSWER: Larsen may have feared a future loss of time after ...d6-d5 and ...c5-c4, so he tucks his bishop away on c2, where it aims (indirectly for now) at Black's kingside.]

12...♗e7! A tempo gain of sorts. **13.♗e3** QUESTION: Why did White agree to the tempo loss rather than simply swap on e7?

ANSWER: Larsen followed the principle: The side with the bishop pair should strive to avoid trading one of them away. The trouble is that White sets himself up for further tempo loss

by ...d6-d5-d4. I rather like Black's position here, since he holds the potential to increase central and queenside space. Meanwhile, White's bishop pair looks rather unimpressive and his kingside attack is for now just a faraway dream.

0-0 14.♗h5 Perhaps contemplating a future f2-f4-f5. **d5!?** Principle: Counter in the centre when menaced on the wing. On the other hand, it violates the principle: Don't allow an opening of the game when the opponent has the bishop pair. I suspect this move may be the seed of Black's future kingside troubles.

[Instead, he might have tried **14...♗ab8** with queenside expansion in mind.]

15.exd5 Following the counter-principle from the previous note: The side with the bishop pair should open the position when given a chance. **exd5**

[QUESTION: Isn't it in Black's best interest to offer a queen swap with **15...♗xd5** - ?

ANSWER: I would probably have played that way as Black. I'm not (yet!) afraid of White's bishop pair in the ending after **16.♗xd5 exd5 17.♘f3** , mainly due to Black's extra central and queenside space.]

16.d4 Larsen fights back in the centre and clears the b1-h7 diagonal for his once out-of-play light-squared bishop.

c4? This move is the culprit that allows White huge attacking chances.

[Black should go for **16...cxd4 17.cxd4 f5!** with a dynamically balanced game.]

17.f4! Now ideas of Nf3-e5 and/or f4-f5-f6 are in the air. Magically (and with his opponent's help), Larsen has transformed a sluggish opening into a dangerous attack, which he soon

proceeds to botch!

♖fe8 18.♟f3 f6? Bronstein comes up with an original solution: Sac a pawn to eliminate the bishop pair, and stick White with a bad bishop and light square weakness. Unfortunately, however well intended, it doesn't work!

[Black can't get cute with tricks like **18...♙a3??** either, since **19.♟g5 h6 20.♟xf7!** gives White a withering attack.]

[The admittedly unpleasant **18...♙f6 19.♟e5 ♖d6** was probably best.]

19.♙f5 ♖d6 EXERCISE (planning/critical decision): White has a choice between the materialistic **20 Bxg6**, or attempting to drum up an attack with **20 Nh4**. Both lead to White's advantage, yet one is clearly superior to the other. Which would you play?

20.♙xg6?! Larsen allows himself to be bought off cheaply. Now Black gets some compensation for the pawn.

[ANSWER: It was far stronger to pursue an attack with **20.♟h4! ♟f8 21.♖f3! ♖ed8 22.♖g3** (threatening **23 Bxh7+! Nxh7 24 Nf5** etc) **♖c7 23.♖f1 ♖a7 24.♖ff3!** everyone gets into the act; (**24.♖ff3** now the threat is -- **25.♖xg7+! ♟xg7 26.♖g3+ ♟h8 27.♙xh7! ♟xh7 28.♖f7** and mates) **24...♙d6** (no choice) **25.♙xh7+! ♟xh7 26.♖xd5+** , when Black must block with his queen, handing back the piece with a busted position, since he gets slaughtered after **♟f8? 27.♟g6+ ♟e8 28.♖h5! ♟f8 29.d5 .**]

20...hxg6 21.♖xg6 ♙f8 22.♖ae1 ♖e4 23.♙d2 ♟e7! 24.♖g4 g6! Bronstein begins to assert himself on the light squares. **25.h4 ♙h6 26.h5 f5 27.♖h4 g5!!** Bronstein out-Nimzos Larsen. A brilliant blockading idea which even fools Houdini. Bronstein stakes out his

light squares, no matter what the cost. **28.♟xg5?**

[On **28.♖h2 g4 29.♟g5** , Black would offer an exchange with **♟g7!** , when **30.♟xe4 dxe4 31.g3 ♟d5** wouldn't be easy to convert, though it's better than the way Larsen played in the game.]

28...♙xg5 29.♖xg5+ ♟f7 30.♖h4 ♖g8 31.♖f3 ♖g4 32.♖f2 ♟g8!

Planning to reroute the knight with ... **Nf6** or ... **Nh6** next.

QUESTION: Do you believe Black has full compensation for the pawn?

ANSWER: Houdini doesn't think so, but let's add up the factors in Black's favour:

1. White's forces, statues of frustrated immobility, remain where they stand, while Black's expansion stems with growth.
2. White's eyesore of a bishop is an embarrassment to bishops everywhere.
3. Bronstein is the supreme universal ruler of the light squares.

Conclusion: I don't believe White stands even a shade better, despite his two extra pawns and Houdini's rosy assessment declarations. I think chances are dead level.

33.♖xe4 Our sense of pride always revolts at the thought of ignominious concession, but otherwise I don't see a plan for White. And when our ambition is at stake, the risk factor takes a subservient role.

dxe4 Opening the d5-square for either knight or queen. **34.♖h3 ♟h6**

Keeping White's h-pawn in check.

35.♖e2 ♖g8 36.b3 The only conceivable way for White to play for the win, but the move doesn't come without danger. **cx b3 37.axb3 ♖d5!** Pretty much forcing White's next move.

38.b4 Now all of White's queenside

pawns have been fixed on the wrong colour for his remaining bishop. ♖a2
39.♔f1 ♕e6! Larsen isn't the only one with grand aspirations. Black's king may yet enter via c4 if queens come off the board. **40.g3 ♕d5** The king's ambition reaches higher and higher.
41.♕e1 ♖b1 White is utterly unable to make progress and if Black just shifts around, a draw seems inevitable. However, Larsen now gets what the Grinch who stole Christmas would describe as "a wonderful, terrible idea!"
42.g4!? Maybe the correct evaluation of this move is the rarely used ChessBase symbol "!!??". As desperation (for a win) mounts, Larsen appears to grow more and more unbalanced, until he considers an idea which under normal circumstances would be unthinkable. This sac is similar to a man asking a woman he just met to marry him and then asking her if she would mind telling him her name.

QUESTION: This looks insane, as if Larsen has gone mad and just gives away pawns for no reason. What is his "wonderful, terrible idea"?

ANSWER: This is the beginning of a triple (!) pawn sac. Larsen plans to activate his rook and go after Bronstein's king. Please see White's next move!

♖xg4 43.c4+! Larsen consigns yet another pawn to the gallows. White clears a lateral path for his rook to a3. Somehow Larsen's line-opening sacs are not evocative of Paul Morphy's day!
bxc4

[**43...♕xd4??** is not so wise, as **44.♖e3+ ♕xc4 45.♖c5#** is mate. Black's nearby queen winces sadly at her imbecile husband. After the séance it turns out Black's king never

got a chance to speak, and remains just as dead as he was before.]

44.♖a3! Larsen's crazy point. He plans to initiate an attack with Ra5+. Lateral rook motion is the rocket fuel which propels White's counterattack. This rook, much like your writer, clearly read too many science fiction novels and now believes himself a crew member of the USS Enterprise, with the ability of teleportation.

♖xf4+ Black has gone from being two pawns down to one pawn up! The cold, algorithmic non-mind of a computer can sometimes come up with aching beautiful equations through its mysterious churnings. Yet, no comp would ever consider Larsen's triple pawn sac, mainly because computers are programmed to be sane, while we humans are capable of generating revelation in our unique madness. When busted, even the rule-bound among us momentarily forget deference to laws and principles, and may go crazy. The remarkable thing is that Larsen wasn't even busted when he went berserk.

45.♕g2 ♖g4+

[**45...♕g4??** loses to **46.♖a5+** (a malevolent wave hits Black's king, courtesy of White's normally sweet-natured rook) **♕d6 47.♕g3 ♖c1 48.♖xf5 ♕e3+ 49.♖xe3! .**]

46.♕h3 Houdini's evaluation is 0.00, as indeed it was before Larsen sacrificed three pawns. However, Bronstein, outraged by Larsen's gall, must surely have harboured dreams of a win here to punish his opponent's creative indulgences.

♖f4!? Bronstein plays for the full point.

[The path to a draw lay in **46...f4 47.♖a5+ ♕xd4 48.♖a3 ♖c1** (or **48...e3 49.♕c3+ ♔e4 50.♖xc4+**

♔f3 51. ♖d5+ ♔f2 52. ♖a2+ ♖xa2
 53. ♖xa2+ e2 54. ♗d4+ ♔f1
 55. ♖a1+! e1 ♖ 56. ♖xa6+ ♖e2
 57. ♖a1+ with perpetual check)
 49. ♗c3+ ♖xc3+ 50. ♖xc3 ♔xc3
 51. ♖xe4 ♖g3+ 52. ♔h4 ♔xb4
 , and at this point Houdini
 recommends 53. ♖xc4+! ♔xc4
 stalemate! The long awaited
 counterattack leads to a
 monumental anticlimax!]

47. ♖a5+ ♔xd4! Threatening ...Qd3+.
 The recent upheavals have the effect
 of severely straining the high strung
 black king's nerves.

[Retreating with **47... ♔d6??** 48. ♖xc4
 (White not-so-subtly accentuates his
 former request into outright threats)
 ♖d3+ (the queen is forced to
 intervene against her will, otherwise
 Black gets mated) 49. ♖xd3 exd3
 50. ♗g3 is curtains for Black.]

48. ♗f2+! The bishop believes his soul
 is predestined for hell and therefore he
 doesn't need to worry about issues of
 right and wrong. ♖xf2 Again no choice,
 [since **48... ♔c3??** 49. ♖e3+ ♔c2
 50. ♖xf4 wins.]

49. ♖xf2+ e3 50. ♖f4+ ♖e4

51. ♖xe4+!? It takes unbelievable
 courage or foolhardiness to continue
 playing for the win.

[Every other player in the world would
 have settled for **51. ♖xh6 ♖h1+**
 52. ♔g3 ♖g1+ 53. ♔h3 ♖h1+
 with perpetual check.]

51... ♔xe4 52. ♖xa6 EXERCISE (critical
 decision): Black has a choice of
 pushing his e-pawn or pushing his c-
 pawn. Only one of the moves draws.
 Which one would you play?

e2? The wrong one!

[ANSWER: Correct was **52... c3!**
 53. ♖xh6 e2 54. ♖a6 f4 55. ♔g2 c2
 56. ♖a1 ♔e3 57. h6 f3+ 58. ♔h2

♔d2 (or 58...f2 59.h7 f1 ♖ 60.h8 ♖
 ♖f2+ 61. ♔h3 ♖f3+ 62. ♔h4 ♖f4+
 and White must accede to the draw
 with 63. ♔h3 etc) 59.h7 e1 ♖
 60. ♖xe1 ♔xe1 61.h8 ♖ c1 ♖
 with a drawn ending (as verified by
 the endgame tablebases); for
 instance, 62. ♔g3 f2 63. ♖e5+ ♔f1
 64. ♖e4 ♖a3+ 65. ♔h2 . Black can
 even lose if he tries too hard to win:
 ♖c3 66. ♖g2+ ♔e1 67. ♖e4+ ♔d1!?
 68. ♔g2! and if ♖e1?? then 69. ♖d3+!
 ♔c1 70. ♖f1! and Black is helpless
 against the advance of the b-pawn.]

53. ♔g2 ♔d3

[**53... ♔g4** is similar to the game
 continuation: 54. ♖e6+ ♔d3 55. ♔f3
 ♔h2+ 56. ♔f2 ♔g4+ 57. ♔e1
 (if you are chased by a mob, you
 have manoeuvring space to run like
 the wind, while the overcrowded
 mass behind can impede itself
 through its own weight in numbers) f4
 58. ♖xe2 f3 59. ♖a2 c3 60. b5 c2
 61. ♖xc2 ♔xc2 62. b6 ♔d3 63. b7
 ♔e3 64. b8 ♖ f2+ 65. ♔f1 and White
 wins, since the new queen denies
 Black's knight the use of h2.]

54. ♔f2 ♔g4+ 55. ♔e1 ♔e5

EXERCISE (combination alert): White's
 stock of leeway may be dwindling, yet
 proves sufficient to close the deal and
 score the full point. How did Larsen
 deal with the deadly threat of ...Nf3+,
 etc?

ANSWER: Pin.

56. ♖d6+! This forces Black's king
 where he doesn't want to go, after
 which White paralyses him with a pin
 on the e-file. ♔e3 **57. ♖e6! ♔d4**
58. h6! ♔d3+ The knight looks up to
 White's rook with the reverential
 respect of the novice to the master.

59. ♔xe2 ♔f4+ Not all knight forks win.
60. ♔d1 ♔xe6 61. h7 . The h-pawn

promotes.

What an adventure! It's critically important to understand a position for what it is, rather than a fantasy version of what we want it to be. Yet here we saw Larsen just make stuff up and then be richly rewarded for it!

1-0

20

E75

□ Bronstein,D

■ Larsen,B

13: Amsterdam Interzonal

1964

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♙g7 4.e4 d6 5.♙e2 0-0 6.♙g5 The Averbakh Variation of the King's Indian. c5

[Other moves include 6...h6]

[6...♘a6]

[6...♘bd7]

[and 6...c6 .]

[QUESTION: What about 6...e5 here?

ANSWER: It's a trap! One of the dangerous points of the Averbakh is that it prevents Black's immediate ... e7-e5, a move thematic to most KID lines. White exploits the pin with 7.dxe5 dxe5 8.♙xd8 ♖xd8 9.♘d5 and Black loses material, either an exchange or a pawn.]

7.d5 We now arrive at a Benoni structure. e6 Today, most players throw in 7...h6 or even 7...a6 8 a4 h6.

[For example: 7...h6 8.♙f4 (discouraging ...e7-e6 or ...e7-e5) e6 (anyway!) 9.dxe6 ♙xe6 10.♙xd6 ♖e8 11.♘f3 ♘c6 12.0-0 (the greedy 12.♙xc5? walks into ♙a5 13.♙e3 ♘xe4 , when Black regains the sac'ed pawn with both activity and structural advantages) 12...♘d4! and, according to theory,

Black obtains full compensation for the pawn.]

[The immediate 7...b5!? 8.cxb5 a6 9.a4 looks like a slightly inferior Benko Gambit for Black.]

[7...a6 intending ...b7-b5; 8.a4 ♙a5 (this has the same effect as 8...h6 , in encouraging the g5-bishop to withdraw) 9.♙d2 e6 10.♘f3

(White doesn't have a useful discovery with his c3-knight) exd5 11.exd5 (11.cxd5 ♙g4 seems fine for Black, who has achieved a nice-looking Benoni) 11...♙g4 12.0-0 ♘bd7 13.h3 ♙xf3 14.♙xf3 ♙c7 15.♙c2 ♘e8 16.♖ae1 ♙e5 17.♙d1 , B.Gelfand-H.Nakamura, London (rapid) 2013. White has a slight advantage due to his bishop pair and greater space, though it's not so easy to exploit it here.

QUESTION: Why did Black hand over the bishop pair voluntarily on move 14?

ANSWER: Black's light-squared bishop is generally a problem piece in these structures. I played a Sämisch-style Benoni versus GM Yasser Seirawan in the early '80s and I never forgot his advice: "If Black manages a few swaps, he equalizes or stands better."]

8.♘f3 This move is considered milquetoast nowadays,

[supplanted by the superior 8.♙d2 exd5

A) 9.exd5! ♙b6 10.♘f3 ♙f5 (if 10...♙g4 11.0-0 ♖e8 12.h3 ♙xf3 13.♙xf3 ♘bd7 14.♖fe1 ♙b4 15.♘b5! ♙xd2 16.♙xd2 and Black suffers in a slightly unpleasant ending, Se.Ivanov-J. Norberg, Swedish Team Championship 2007) 11.♘h4 ♘e4 12.♘xe4 ♙xe4 13.f3 ♙xb2?!

(Black looks okay after 13...h6!
 14.♙xh6 ♙xh6 15.♖xh6 ♖xb2
 ; e.g. 16.0-0 ♗c2 17.♖d2 ♖d4+
 18.♖xd4 cxd4 19.♖ac1 d3
 20.♗d1 ♗xd1 21.♖fxd1 ♖e8
 22.♖xd3 ♗d7 with compensation
 for the pawn) 14.♖c1 ♗f5 15.♗xf5
 gxf5 16.♖xb2 ♗xb2 17.♖b1 ♗c3+
 18.♗d1 and White regains his lost
 pawn (on b7, d6 or f5) with the
 bishop pair and a clear structural
 advantage, Ma.Carlsen-L.Van Wely,
 Wijk aan Zee 2013.;

B) . QUESTION: Wasn't it more
 thematic to capture in the direction
 of the centre with 9.cxd5 - ?
 ANSWER: Not in this case. After
 ♖e8 10.f3 , White reaches an
 inferior Sämisch Benoni, where the
 e2-bishop gets in the way of the
 g1-knight's natural development.;

C) 9.--]

8...h6 9.♗f4 Kasparov criticized this
 move but alternatives don't seem
 much better.

[For example: 9.♗d2 exd5 10.exd5
 ♗f5 (or 10...♗a6 11.0-0 ♗c7 and if
 12.a4 then ♗a6! and the b4-hole
 ensures Black future counterplay)
 11.♗h4 ♗d7 12.0-0 ♗a6 13.♗f3
 ♖e8 was roughly equal in L.Szabo-B.
 Larsen, Dallas 1957.]

[9.♗e3 exd5 10.exd5 ♗g4 11.♗d2
 f5!? and White's position may be too
 passive to claim an edge.]

[9.♗h4 exd5 10.cxd5 g5 11.♗g3
 ♗h5 12.♗d2 ♗xg3 13.hxg3 ♗d7
 14.♗c4 ♖e7 and Black's dark square
 power easily makes up for the
 weakened light squares on his
 kingside, B.Larsen-R.J.Fischer,
 Piatigorsky Cup, Santa Monica
 1966.]

9...exd5 10.exd5

[This time 10.cxd5 can be met by b5!

11.♗d2 (either 11.♗xb5 ♗xe4; or
 11.♗xb5 ♗xe4 12.♗xe4 ♖a5+
 13.♖d2 ♖xb5 14.♗xd6 ♖xb2
 also looks okay for Black) 11...a6
 and Black achieved a nice-looking
 Benoni, S.Gligoric-B.Malich,
 Munich Olympiad 1958.]

10...♖e8 Seeing that ...Ne4 would free
 Black's game further, Bronstein
 prevents it with his next move.

11.♗d2?! I'm not so crazy about this
 idea.

[White should settle for equality after
 11.0-0 ♗e4 (a freeing move from a
 cramped position always comes with
 that "Aaah!" feeling of release of a
 once tightly spasmed muscle, now
 supple and loose) 12.♗xe4 ♖xe4
 13.♗e3 ♖f6 (or 13...♗g4) 14.♖b1
 , as in F.Levin-R.Polzin, German
 League 2013.]

11...♗h5! Principle: If you lead in
 development, create immediate
 confrontation. **12.♗g3** This looks like
 an overreaction.

[Bronstein undoubtedly attempted to
 dodge the line 12.♗e3 ♖xe3! 13.fxe3
 ♖h4+ 14.♗f1 (14.g3? ♗xg3
 15.♗f3 ♖h5 16.♖g1 ♗xe2 17.♖xe2
 ♗g4 18.♖f1 ♗d7 19.♖f2 ♗xc3+
 20.bxc3 ♖e8 looks depressing for
 White despite being the exchange up,
 since his structure is a shambles)
 14...♗g3+ 15.hxg3 ♖xh1+ 16.♗f2
 ♖xd1 17.♖xd1 , when Black stands
 slightly better due to the bishop pair
 and control over e5. Still, this is
 better than the game's continuation.]

12...♗g4 This gives Black an edge,

[but 12...♖e7! was even more
 awkward for White, who can't castle.
 After 13.♗f1 ♗xg3+ 14.hxg3 ♗d7
 , Black has a clear advantage, due to
 his domination of the dark squares
 and White's clumsy king placement.]

13.0-0 ♖xg3 14.hxg3 ♙xe2 15.♖xe2 ♙xb2!? QUESTION: Why would Larsen activate White's rook by opening the b-file?

ANSWER: Kasparov calls this move "an audacious venture". Larsen gambles, reasoning that the damage to White's structure balances his increased piece activity.

[Otherwise, Black stands pleasantly better after **15...♖d7 16.♖b1 a6** , when he can play for ...b7-b5.]

16.♖b1 ♙g7

[QUESTION: Can't Black hang on to his extra pawn with **16...♙f6 17.♖f4 b6 - ?**

ANSWER: Black wins a pawn but loses the initiative. For instance, after **18.♙a4 ♖f8 19.♖fe1 ♖xe1+ 20.♖xe1 ♙d8 21.♖e6! (target: g6) ♙e5 22.♖xg6+ fxg6 23.♙c2 ♖d7 24.♖f3 ♙g7 25.♖h4** , White has a dangerous attack brewing which is easily worth the piece investment.]

17.♖xb7 ♖d7 Threatening ...Nb6 and ...Qc8 – which Bronstein totally ignores! Which Bronstein totally ignores!

18.♖f4! Bronstein stakes all on a wild and unlikely lunge. A move like this is akin to running at full speed in the forest on a pitch-dark, moonless night. White's last move amounts to a sort of mission statement of a wonderfully imaginative attacking scheme, the rather outrageous premise of which is: White's trapped b7-rook is a strength, not a weakness! The rook's lateral power will be seen over and over in the coming variations.

[Larsen probably expected **18.♖b3 ♙a5** with a structural edge for Black.]

18...♖b6 Larsen continues to harbour misapprehensions about his king's safety. To be fair, what human would refuse the offer? The nature of desire

is an unquenchable craving for better and more. Mick Jagger understood: "I can't get no satisfaction." If we make a million dollars, we begin to dream of a billion.

[Amazingly, Houdini gives great respect to Bronstein's idea and prefers the meek **18...♙c8!** , after which Black really does stand slightly better, and without much risk; whereas after Bronstein's next move, Houdini wants to return the knight to d7.]

19.♖e1! ♙c3!? Larsen energetically plays for the win, generating all sorts of threats – but at a cost.

[On the other hand, **19...♖e5** fails to solve Black's problems, due to **20.♖xe5 dxe5** (it looks as if Black is consolidating, but...) **21.♖xg6!! fxg6 22.♖e4** , when Houdini claims full compensation for the piece, thanks to White's activity, domination and passed d-pawn; for example, **♙c8 23.♖e7 ♙f5 24.♙d3 ♙f8 25.♖b7 h5 26.f3 ♖e8 27.♖c7 ♙e7 28.d6 ♙d8 29.♖xa7** and I think Black is the one fighting for the draw.]

20.♖e4!! Bronstein realizes a glorious moment of revelation, the discovery of a deeply hidden idea, where former abstractions begin to crystallize into a luminous pattern. The time has arrived to tax the greedy and feed the needy. White's attack, now a living organism, is in constant flux. Had Bronstein drawn (or even won) this game, which was well within his grasp, it would rank as one of the most remarkable counterattacking achievements in the history of chess, and would probably have ended up in the unwritten (for now) book: Bronstein: Move by Move. **♙xe1?** Optimists tend to push past their natural limits. Bronstein called

this move "recklessly bold", whereas Kasparov praised the move. I tend to agree with Bronstein and feel the move is an error. Now White actually stands better!

[Black should play **20...♙g7!** and if 21.♖c1 (21.♜d2 would repeat the position at once) 21...♞e7 22.♞xe7 ♗xe7 23.♜xc5 then ♖c7 24.♜e4 ♗xc4 25.♜xd6 ♗xc1 26.♞xc1 ♙e5 27.♞c6 ♞d8 28.♜b7 ♞b8 29.♜d6 ♞d8 30.♜b7 with a draw.]

21.♜e6! What a mind-blowing idea. An "invitation" from a person of power is in reality a command. Here we witness Bronstein's luminous genius at its explosive height. After this staggering shot, Black's king steels himself by taking on the grim air of a man sitting in the waiting room of a dentist's office before a root canal.

[Not **21.♗xe1??** ♜xc4 and White's attack is at a dead end]

[while the tempting: **21.♜xg6??** fails to ♞xe4 22.♗f3 ♗e8 23.♗f6 ♙xf2+! 24.♙xf2 (or 24.♙h2 ♙d4) 24...♞e2+ 25.♙g1 ♞xg2+! 26.♙h1 ♗e1+! (I insist!) 27.♙xg2 ♗e4+ 28.♙f2 ♗xg6 and wins.]

21...♙xf2+! Larsen finds the only path to remain alive in a nest of fatal variations.

[**21...♞xe6??** 22.dxe6 and if fxe6?? then 23.♗g4 ♙xf2+ 24.♙h1 forces mate.]

[**21...fxe6??** 22.♗g4 ♙xf2+ 23.♙h2 g5 (what was once a holy temple is now a ruin) 24.♗h5 (threatening mate in two) ♞e7 25.♗g6+ ♙h8 (or 25...♙f8 26.♜f6! ♞xb7 27.♗g8+ ♙e7 28.♗g7#) 26.♜f6! (threatening Qh7+!) ♙xg3+ 27.♙xg3 ♞xb7 28.♗xh6+ ♞h7 29.♗xh7#

. White's queen, a stickler for details, rejects her brother's pleas for

clemency, citing: "All applications are required in triplicate."]

22.♙xf2?! This makes things more difficult.

[Instead, **22.♙h2!** would force Black to find a series of accurate moves in order to survive: ♙d4! 23.♜xd8 ♞axd8 24.♗f1! f5! (24...♞f8?! 25.♗c1! leaves Black struggling for his life, since his pawns are vulnerable and his king is nowhere near safe) 25.♗f4! ♞d7! Kasparov; (not 25...♞xe4?! 26.♗xh6 ♜d7 27.♗xg6+ ♙g7 28.♗g5! ♞ee8 29.♞xa7 ♞f8 30.a4 , when the passed a-pawn is very dangerous) 26.♜xd6 (or 26.♞xd7 ♜xd7 27.♗xd6 fxe4 28.♗xd7 ♞e5! and the threat of ...Rh5 mate gains the tempo Black needs to win any pawn race) 26...♞xb7! (26...♞e1?! fails to 27.♞b8+ ♙g7 28.♞e8!) 27.♜xe8 (or 27.♜xb7 ♜d7 , followed by ...Ne5 or ...Nf6 etc) 27...♜xc4 28.♜d6 (or 28.♜f6+ ♙f7) 28...♜e3! 29.♜xb7 ♜g4+ and Black draws by perpetual check.]

22...fxe6! Now Larsen gets away with this move, mainly because the position of the white king allows Black a crucial defensive tempo. **23.♗g4** "I will restore that which has been lost and reclaim that which is mine," declares White's queen. ♞f8+!

[Larsen avoids **23...g5??** 24.♗h5 ♞f8+ 25.♙g1 ♞f6 26.dxe6! (this cool recapture is decisive) ♗f8 27.e7 ♞f1+ 28.♙h2 ♗e8 29.♗xh6 ♜xc4 30.♜xg5 ♞f7 31.♜xf7 ♙xf7 (31...♗xf7? 32.♗g5+ ♙h7 33.e8♗! forces mate) 32.♗f4+ ♙g6 and now 33.♗g4+ ♙f6 34.♞d7! wins. For example: ♙e5 (or 34...♞b8 35.♗h4+ ♙e6 36.♞d8!) 35.♗g5+g.com

♔e6 36.♞d8 ♞xe7 37.♞xe7+ ♔xe7
 38.♞xa8 (Black's two connected
 passers won't save him; Black's
 fauna, once home to fierce predators,
 now merely harbours a harmless
 knight, who quivers at the sight of
 even an approaching chihuahua) d5
 39.♞xa7+ ♔d6 40.g4 d4 41.♔g3
 d3 42.♔f2 ♕e5 43.♔e3 c4
 44.♞a6+! ♔e7 (after 44...♔d5
 45.♞a5+ ♔d6 46.♞xe5! , White's
 split passers take the day) 45.♔d2
 ♕xg4 46.♞a4! ♕e5 47.♞b4!
 and Black's passers have been
 halted, leaving him with no defence to
 the advance of White's remaining
 pawns.]

24.♔g1 ♞f6! EXERCISE (critical
 decision): We become highly alert
 when forces conspire against our
 beloved king. Should White play 25
 dxe6, or further weaken Black's
 kingside with 25 Qh3 first? One
 variation draws, the other loses. What
 is your diagnosis?

25.♞h3?? How bitter the sting when
 capricious fate (or is it the ill-tempered,
 Old Testament God, who just had a
 bad day and took out His frustrations
 on the innocent) decides to withhold
 our dreams.

Having written a book on Korchnoi,
 who shared many chess traits with
 both Larsen and Bronstein, I realize it's
 possible to outplay the opponent,
 create a masterpiece, and still manage
 to lose the game! Larsen, as always,
 loved to salt the wound in his
 annotations: "Nerves, nerves, nerves (...
) Somewhere in his nervous system,
 little scars from these defeats still
 remain." Clearly, sympathy was not
 Larsen's strong suit in life. Now you
 may be getting an idea of why he once
 got under your writer's skin (it's

explained in the introduction to this
 book!).

Larsen rubbed it in by referring to two
 failures in Bronstein's career which
 may have altered chess history: a
 defeat in the 23rd game of his 1951
 World Championship match with
 Botvinnik, allowing the latter to level
 the score and retain the crown; and an
 unexpected final round loss in the
 1958 Interzonal to Filipino IM Radolfo
 Cardoso (who placed 19th out of 21
 players in the tournament), which
 meant that Bronstein finished 7th, and
 there were only six qualification slots
 for the Candidates cycle. I wonder how
 Larsen would have reacted if Fischer,
 after crushing him 6-0, had annotated
 the games, writing: "Nerves, nerves,
 nerves! Somewhere in Larsen's
 nervous system..."

[ANSWER: **25.dxe6!** saves the game,
 due to the threat of e6-e7.

A) . For example: 25...♞f8 26.e7
 ♞f1+ 27.♔h2 ♞f5 28.♞xf5!
 (amazingly, White's passed e-pawn
 allows him to draw, down a full rook
 in the ending) ♞xf5 29.♞xa7!
 (the move Bronstein had
 overlooked) ♞b8 (only White has
 winning chances after 29...♞e8?
 30.♕xd6 ♞xe7 31.♞xe7; or
 29...♞e5?! 30.♕f6+ ♔g7 31.e8♞+
 ♞xa7 32.♞b8 ♞f7 33.♕e8+ ♔h7
 34.♞xb6 ♞xe8 35.♞xd6) 30.♞b7!
 ♞a8 31.♞a7! with a crazy repetition
 of moves.;

B) . And Larsen's later
 "improvement" 25...♕xc4?
 actually loses: 26.e7 ♞f1+ 27.♔h2
 ♞e8 28.♞e2! ♞f5 29.g4! ♞f7
 (Kasparov's 29...♞c6 30.gxf5
 ♞xb7 fails to 31.♕xc5!) 30.gxf5
 ♞e8 31.fxg6 ♞e6 (Larsen) 32.♞f1!
 and Black has no defence

(Kasparov).;

C) 25...--]

25...♖f8! White's queen suffers because she has too much feeling; whereas Black's queen is happy and well adjusted, mainly since she has no feelings. A powerful counter-current emerges, to challenge White's kingside wave.

[Now Black consolidates. There's no need to touch the kingside pawns, even if **25...h5** 26.dxe6 ♖f8 27.e7 ♖f7! 28.e8♖+ ♗xe8 29.♖xf7 ♗xf7 would have been good for Black as well, given that 30 Qxg6+ is now impossible, while 30.♗xd6? loses to ♗e1+ 31.♕h2 ♖ff1 etc.]

26.♗g5

[Unfortunately, after **26.♗xf6+** ♖xf6 27.♖xh6 ♖a1+! (the exclam is purely for aesthetic value) 28.♕h2 (28.♗f2 ♗f8+ 29.♗e2 ♖f1+ leads to mate in two) 28...♖h8 , queens come off the board and White can resign.]

26...♖f1+ 27.♕h2 ♖f5!

[It isn't too late to blow it with **27...♖f2??** 28.♖xe6+ and it's Black who gets mated.]

28.♗xe6 EXERCISE (combination alert): What is the easiest way to finish things?

ANSWER: Simplification. Once queens leave the board, White can resign.

♖h5! 29.♖xh5 gxh5 30.♗xf8 ♖xf8 0-1

21

□ Fischer,RJ

■ Larsen,B

14: Piatigorsky Cup, Santa Monica
[Cyrus Lakdawala]

C82

1.e4 e5 A minor surprise, coming from Larsen. The King of the Hypermoderns

meets the premiere Classicist on his own turf. **2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♗b5**

Fischer, having played the White side of the Lopez all his life, understood the terrain like his own backyard. **a6 4.♗a4 ♗f6 5.0-0 ♗xe4** I'm not sure if this was a surprise for Fischer, since Larsen had just written a pamphlet on the Open Ruy Lopez at the time this game was played. Larsen writes: "I thought that ordinary chessplayers ought to play such openings instead of following the latest fashion by playing, for instance, the slow positional manoeuvres of the Closed Variation." I completely agree with Larsen's sentiment. I involuntarily wince when some of my students frantically attempt to memorize some Komodo/Houdini-checked incomprehensible yet super-fashionable opening variation played by Carlsen and Nakamura (which only they understand!); I'm reminded of zoo chimps who imitate human behaviour (I say this out of love, at the grave risk of facing the reader's wrath: the truth will set us free!), without understanding what it means to be human. I just wonder why the Open Lopez isn't played more often today, since it isn't so easy for White to extract an edge against it, and it feels every bit as sound as the Closed lines and offshoots such as the Marshall Gambit.

6.d4 b5

[QUESTION: Does Black get slaughtered if he opens the e-file with **6...exd4** - ?

ANSWER: Not slaughtered, but perhaps led into a superior (for White) ending, after the forcing sequence **7.♖e1 d5 8.♗xd4 ♗d6 9.♗xc6 ♗xh2+ 10.♕h1! ♖h4 11.♖xe4+! dxe4 12.♖d8+ ♖xd8 13.♗xd8+ ♗xd8 14.♕xh2**

, as in J.R.Capablanca-Ed. Lasker, New York 1915. White's two pieces are worth more than Black's rook and two pawns for the following reasons:

1. White leads in development.
2. Black's e-pawn sits on e4, which is critical since it will be exceedingly difficult for Black to roll his majority forward, given White's grip on the dark squares.

The position may yet be defensible, but Black's 37% score in practice isn't very encouraging.]

7.♖b3 d5 8.dxe5 QUESTION: Why not take on e5 with the knight, which frees White's queen to swoop into the kingside later on?

[ANSWER: The problem with **8.♞xe5** is that it activates Black's queenside pawn majority and allows his c-pawn to support d5, normally a source of worry; i.e. after ♞xe5 9.dxe5 c6 10.c3 ♙c5 11.♞d2 ♞xd2 12.♙xd2 ♙f5 with a comfortable game for Black, and soon drawn in V.Hort-A. Karpov, Bugojno 1980.]

8...♙e6 9.c3 ♙c5

[The more conservative option is to post the bishop on e7, reserving c5 for the knight, which Unzicker adopted against Fischer a couple of rounds later: **9...♙e7** 10.♙c2 0-0 11.♞bd2 f5 12.♞b3 ♞d7 13.♞bd4 ♞xd4 14.♞xd4 c5 15.♞e2!? ♞ad8 16.♞f4 ♞c6 17.a4 ♙c8 18.axb5 axb5 19.♞h5 g6 20.♞h6 ♞f7 21.f3 ♙f8 22.♞h3 ♞g5 23.♞g3 ♞e6 24.h4 , and now Black looks fine after the thematic central counter d4 .]

10.♞bd2 0-0 11.♙c2 ♙f5!?

Larsen plays the move he advocates in his book.

[At the time this was less well studied than the main alternatives: **11...f5** 12.♞b3 ♙b6 13.♞fd4 ♞xd4

14.♞xd4 ♙xd4 15.cxd4 c5 (15...f4 16.f3 ♞g3! is regarded as critical) 16.f3 cxd4 17.♞xd4 ♞c8 18.♙d3 ♞c5 and White stood a shade better, due to Black's weakness on the dark squares and d4 in particular, C. Lakdawala-E.Sevillano, Calexico (blitz playoff) 2006.]

[**11...♞xf2** (the Dilworth Variation) 12.♞xf2 f6 13.exf6 ♙xf2+ 14.♞xf2 ♞xf6 , when Black gets rook, pawn and a lead in development for the two minor pieces. White has struggled to show any advantage here and, in fact, only manages a 44% score in my databases.]

12.♞b3 ♙g4

[Current theory regards this move as dubious (on account of 13 h3! – see the next note) and everyone plays **12...♙g6** instead. But that is now and this was then.]

13.♞xc5

[The critical line runs **13.h3!** ♙h5 14.g4! ♙g6 15.♙xe4 dxe4 16.♞xc5 exf3 17.♙f4 with advantage to White, A.Karpov-V.Korchnoi, Baguio City (14th matchgame) 1978.]

13...♞xc5 14.♞e1 ♞e8 15.♙e3 ♞e6

[Larsen claimed equality after **15...♞d7** 16.♞xd5 ♞dxe5 , but I don't see why. After 17.♞xd8 ♞axd8 18.♞xe5 ♞xe5 19.♙f4 f6 20.a4 , White looks slightly better in the ending, due to his bishop pair.]

16.♞d3 g6!? Sometimes a move need not be strong (or what a computer considers strong), if it contains the property of agitating the opponent's mind with false dreams.

QUESTION: This looks suicidal. Why did Larsen puncture all the dark squares around his king?

ANSWER: It does indeed appear as if the leaking dark squares will prove to

be the genesis of Black's future misery. Larsen's move is made even more radical by the fact that he doesn't own a dark-squared bishop! I think he played 16...g6 for two reasons:

1. The alternative, 16...Nf8, entails a retreat, which isn't in Larsen's never-back-down chess character.
2. Larsen wasn't yet terrified of Fischer (remember, this game was played well before the 0-6 drubbing) and decided to provoke him into an attack.

17.♗h6 "I don't place faith in a post-death paradise," muses the bishop, who decides to retool and dedicate his life to selfish, temporal happiness.

♜e7!? More weirdness.

[Most players would have gone for the simplifying sequence **17...♗f5** 18.♖e2 ♗xc2 19.♗xc2 ♜e7 .]

18.♜d4 ♗f5! The only move.

[Larsen avoids the strategically sour line **18...♜xd4?** 19.♗xd4 ♜f5 (not 19...♗f5?? as 20.e6! forces mate) 20.♗xf5 ♗xf5 21.e6 f6 22.e7! ♗d6 23.♖ad1 ♜f7 (or 23...c6 24.♗f4) 24.♗f8 , when White dominates.]

19.♜xf5 ♜xf5 20.♗d2 ♗h4!?

[I would have activated the queenside pawn majority with **20...c5!** , after which Black remains only slightly worse.]

21.♗f1 QUESTION: Why back up to f1?

ANSWER: It's a strange move. Fischer wants to play g2-g3 without allowing ...Qh3.

[More natural is **21.♗f3** ♜fg7 (or 21...♜g5!? 22.♗e2) 22.a4 c6 23.b4 and White has a pleasant edge, due to his two bishops and the fact that Black must stay on the lookout for an untimely a4xb5.]

[But not **21.♗xd5??** due to ♖ad8 22.♗c6 (White's clever point: d2

doesn't hang) ♜e7! (Oops! My mistake. Yes it does!).]

21...♜c5 22.g3

[Fischer prefers to hang on to both bishops since **22.♗xf5** gxf5 looks like merely abstract damage. Despite Houdini's rosy assessment after 23.♗e3 ♜e6 24.f4 c6 25.a4 , the position seems balanced to me, since I don't see any way for White to exploit the doubled pawns.]

22...♗c4 23.♗g2?! Fischer may be overestimating his chances. We sense counterfeit enthusiasm and by this point I'm not so certain Fischer retained 100% faith in his attack.

[He was better off heading for a slightly favourable ending after **23.b3** ♗xf1+ 24.♜xf1 ♜g7 , when White's bishops still offer him an edge, whereas now he loses one of them.]

23...♜d3 24.♗xd3 ♗xd3 25.♗g5 c6 26.g4 ♜g7 27.♖e3 This looks really ominous. Three white attackers encircle Black's king. The reality, according to the computers (and Larsen!) is that Black has adequate resources to defend.

♗d2! Very annoying. The queen pins the e3-rook and attacks b2. **28.b3**

[Fischer isn't interested in a dynamically balanced ending after **28.f3** ♗xg2+ 29.♜xg2 ♜e6 30.♗f6 .]

[However, he might have abandoned the queenside in favour of the attack with **28.♗h3!?** ♗xb2 29.♖ae1 and if ♗xa2 (29...d4 30.cxd4 ♗xd4 31.♗f6) 30.♗h6 ♜e6? then 31.♗f6 g5 (or 31...♗d2 32.g5 , followed by -- 33.♗xh7+! ♜xh7 34.♖h3+ etc) 32.♖f3! , intending Rf5, Rxcg5+ and wins (as suggested by GM Mednis), although Black's defence can certainly be improved: for example,

30...Qc4 or 29...d4 both seem to end in a draw with best play.]

28...b4! Attack and counterattack mutually develop along distinctly separate evolutionary tracks. Larsen plays like a White House press secretary, declaring a public position while all the time realizing that secret measures are in the works, hidden from the public's view.

EXERCISE (critical decision): How should White meet Black's last move? We must condense, into a single choice, the plots and schemes of the last dozen moves. Pick carefully from the following options:

a) 29 Qh3, going for the king, intending Qh6, Bf6 and (after forcing ...Ne6) mate by Qxh7+, Rh3+ and Rh8. b) 29 cxb4, simply liquidating the problem. c) 29 f3, agreeing to an ending, having decided that lines 'a' and 'b' both fail.

29.♔h3?? Fiery élan fails to make up for a move's fundamental unsoundness. Sometimes we place faith in things whose nature is unstable and ultimately unreliable. If White's attack is a banquet, then Fischer's last move is the dish of steamed kale. Externally, it appears as if Black's king is barely alive, as his watchful hospital nurses continue to ply him with oxygen, morphine and lime Jello, but the injection of 28 b3 b4! has reinvigorated him completely.

Fischer normally possessed a deadly accurate pattern recognition algorithm in complex positions, but not this time! When the devil very cleverly disguised as a serpent in the Garden of Eden, encouraged the not-terribly-bright Eve to defy God and eat an apple – I would be tempted by a mango or a slice of watermelon. But an apple? Big deal! – a realization should have struck her:

"Hey! This could be a con job: Snakes don't talk!" Here we see a rare example of Fischer, in Eve-like fashion, falling for the devil's tricks by failing to read the fine print in the contract.

[Line 'b' is no better: **29.cxb4??** d4 and White drops a piece due to the pin on the rook.]

[ANSWER: White's best is (the admittedly depressing) line 'c' with **29.f3!** bxc3 30.♔xd2 cxd2 , when 31.♕f6 a5 32.♖e2 ♖eb8 33.♗xd2 a4 34.♗c1 axb3 35.axb3 ♗xb3 36.♗xc6 ♗xf3 37.♗xd5 is a probable draw.]

29...bxc3 30.♔h6 The queen, believing herself a great seductress, prances about in the attitude of Salome dancing before Black's King Herod. The h6-square is merely a rest stop on the way to greater glory. Or so she dreams. The reality of the white queen's ambitions is closer to tossing a handful of seeds into a sealed, airless glass jar and then hoping they sprout.

♕e6! Contrary to popular belief, Larsen didn't always lose to Fischer.

[Here the game came to an abrupt and unscheduled conclusion, since **30...♕e6!** 31.♕f6 d4 (Fischer finds himself in seriously straitened financial circumstances, with a bank balance of \$7.33, whereas Larsen's bankroll is in the millions – now the intended mating combination falls slightly short of brilliant) 32.♔xh7+ (Played with an air of finality, but is it really so? "I stand on the threshold of unending greatness," declares the queen, who was a little off on her prediction. This isn't a mystery novel, so I will let the reader know beforehand: The queen is not the murderer she hoped to be!) ♔xh7

33.♖h3+ (it appears as if powerful hands grab Black's king, toss him into the cold darkness, and slam shut the dungeon door; unfortunately, this is a complete illusion) ♔h6 wins for Black.

Yes, sometimes Santa can be a complete bugger, bringing us only coal. The queen isn't the absentee spouse everyone believes her to be. A geometric gremlin peers forth, completely messing up Fischer's intention. Unbelievably, it seems Fischer hallucinated and missed this trick, when any hopes White may have entertained about a glorious mate go up in a puff of smoke. White finds himself a full rook down and his constantly devolving attack reminds us of one of those left to right displays in a natural history museum, of apes gradually morphing into the Homo Sapiens we are today – but in reverse!]

0-1

22

D32

□ Larsen,B

■ Tal,M

15: Candidates (3rd matchgame), Eersel
[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.♟f3

[In the standard Queen's Gambit Tarrasch ...c7-c5 is tossed in without an early ...Nf6; i.e. 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟c3 c5, when 4.cxd5 (4.e3 ♟f6 5.♟f3 ♟c6 transposes below - and Game 23 took this route) 4...exd5 5.♟f3 ♟c6 6.g3 ♟f6 7.♟g2 ♟e7 8.0-0 0-0 is the main line (as reached in Game 57).]

1...♟f6 2.c4 e6 3.♟c3 d5 4.d4 c5 5.e3 As usual, Larsen picks the most

sedate choice in the opening.

QUESTION: Is there any way to punish Black's move order?

[ANSWER: Only in the sense that 5.cxd5 avoids the Tarrasch main lines and obliges Black to recapture with the knight (as in Game 35), since exd5 6.♟g5! leads to an inferior variation; for example, ♟e7 7.dxc5 0-0 8.e3 h6 9.♟h4 ♟bd7 10.♟c1 ♟xc5 11.♟xf6 ♟xf6 12.♟xd5 ♟e4 13.♟xf6+ ♟xf6 14.♟d4 and Black's slight lead in development fails to compensate for the missing pawn, A.Riazantsev-A.Gabrielian, European Blitz Championship, Warsaw 2011.]

[The immediate 5.♟g5 is less effective, due to cxd4 6.♟xd4 e5 and Black has a good position already; for example, 7.♟f3 d4 8.♟d5 (8.♟xf6 gxf6 9.♟d5 ♟e6 also looks fine for Black) 8...♟c6 9.g3 ♟e6 10.♟xf6 gxf6 11.♟g2 f5 12.0-0 ♟g7 13.♟b3 ♟b8 and Black's big centre and bishop pair make up for White's d5-outpost, D.Swiercz-I.Lysyj, European Championship, Rijeka 2010.]

5...♟c6 6.cxd5 exd5 This type of position also arises in the Panov-Botvinnik variation of the Caro-Kann. In this reversed instance, White gets to play it a move up.

7.♟e2

[The main alternative, 7.♟b5, is seen in Game 23 with Larsen on the Black side.]

7...cxd4 The most common continuation at master level,

[although 7...a6]

[7...♟e7]

[and 7...♟d6 are played as well.]

8.♟xd4 We reach a classical isolani position – a tricky business when it's Mikhail Tal who sits on the attacking

side. **♙d6** The bishop takes aim at h2.
9.0-0 0-0 10.♘f3 QUESTION: Why did White retreat a well-posted, centralized piece?

ANSWER: His king feels more comfortable with an extra defender on f3, while the d4-square may be occupied by the other knight.

[Alternatives: **10.b3** **♙e5**! (Principle: Apply pressure to the blockade square in front of your isolani)

11.♘xc6 bxc6 (reaching a hanging pawns structure) 12.♙b2 ♖c7 13.h3 ♖e7 14.♙f3 ♙a6 15.♖e1 ♖fd8 16.♖c2 ♖ac8 17.♖ad1 g6 18.♘a4 ♙xb2 19.♖xb2 ♙b5 , Cu.Hansen-B. Gulko, Groningen 1993, and it may just be stylistic bias but I prefer White's position after 20.♘c5 .]

[**10.♙f3** (this is the most common plan from the Panov-Botvinnik) **♙e5** 11.♘ce2 ♖d6 12.g3 ♙h3 13.♖e1 ♖fe8 14.♙d2 ♘e4 15.♙c3 and, again, whose side you prefer probably depends upon your style, J.Speelman-J.Pinter, Hastings 1980/81.]

10...♙e6

[I would toss in **10...a6** here to prevent the knight manoeuvre Nb5-d4. Black has an active position after 11.b3 ♖e8 12.♙b2 ♙c7! , followed by ...Qd6, whereas White can run into difficulties if not careful; for example, 13.♖d3 ♖d6 14.♖fd1? (14.g3 is necessary) 14...d4! 15.exd4 ♙g4 16.g3 ♘b4 17.♙a3 (17.♖d2 runs into ♖xe2! 18.♖xe2 ♖e8) 17...♘xd3 18.♙xd6 ♙xd6 19.♖xd3 ♙b4 20.♙f1 ♙f5 , winning the exchange, M.Tal-G. Agzamov, Sochi 1984.]

11.b3 ♖e7 12.♘b5 ♙c5 The same principle as above: fighting for control of the square in front of the isolani.

[QUESTION: If Black's plan is to utilize the isolani to go after White's king, then why not play **12...♙b8** , continuing to take aim at h2?

ANSWER: Your suggestion is possible but I don't like it for two reasons:

- 1 ...Bb8 is a somewhat unnatural contortion, which temporarily blocks in the a8-rook.
2. White can create strategic concessions by playing upon the pin on the a3-f8 diagonal after 13.♙a3 ♘b4 14.♖d2! (this creates a hole on b5) a5 15.♙b2 ♘e4 16.♖d1 ♖d8 17.a3 ♘c6 18.♖c1 and here I definitely prefer White, due to the numerous holes in Black's position.]

13.♙b2 ♖ac8

[Another option is to jump to e4 at once: **13...♘e4** 14.♘bd4 ♖ac8 15.♘xc6 (15.a3 would transpose to the game) 15...bxc6 16.♖c1 f6 and chances are objectively level, though I still prefer White, K. Spraggett-O.Rodriguez Vargas, Terrassa 1990.]

14.a3 A useful, multi-purpose move:

1. White eliminates any future ...Ba3 ideas.
2. White may expand with b3-b4.
3. White can play Re1 without fear of ...Bb4.

♘e4 15.♘bd4 ♙g4 16.♖e1

QUESTION: What's the purpose of placing the rook on e1?

ANSWER: It's not clear exactly what Larsen had in mind.

[Given a couple of tempi Black might play 16.-- **♖fe8** and 17.-- **♙xf3** 18.♙xf3 ♘xf2 19.♖xf2 ♖xe3 etc, which is now prevented; but with the f1-rook missing, White has to watch out for a direct ...Nxf2 followed by ...Qxe3+ instead. The **Nxf2** trick

is an inherent trait of this variation and not mentioning it is a bit like discussing the French Revolution without bringing up the guillotine.]
 [In Informator Larsen actually gave his move two question marks, suggesting **16.b4** ♖b6 17.♟xc6 bxc6 18.♞d4 as equal. Of course 16 Re1 is not really so bad, so whether "??" was Larsonian hyperbole or just a typo for "?!", I'm not entirely sure.]

16...♞fe8 17.♟xc6 Converting an isolani position into a hanging pawns position. The drawback is that ...Nxf2 is now even more of a threat, while Black has an open b-file for his rooks as well.

bxc6 18.♞a6?! This just chases Black's rook to a superior square.

[I would have played **18.♞d3** a5 19.♞c2 , not fearing ♟xf3?! 20.gxf3 ♟g5 (or 20...♞g5+ 21.♞h1) 21.♞g2 , since Black has no good follow up.]

[Unfortunately, the otherwise desirable **18.♞d4?** runs into ♟xf2! (18...♞xe2? 19.♞xe2 would justify White's 16th move) 19.♞xf2 ♞xe3+ 20.♞f1 ♞f4+! 21.♞f3 (21.♞g1? ♞xe2 22.♞xe2 ♞xd4+ is even worse) 21...♞xe1+ 22.♞xe1 ♞e8+ 23.♞f1 ♞e4 and Black regains the piece with a decisive advantage, since 24.♞c2? fails to ♞xh2 .]

18...♞cd8 Perhaps contemplating a rook lift to the kingside via d6,

[but it was stronger to play more positionally with **18...♞b8!** , when White doesn't have a good move.

A) . It is too late for 19.♞d3? due to ♟xf3 20.gxf3 (or 20.♞xf3 ♞xb3) 20...♞g5+ 21.♞f1 ♟xf2! and wins;
B) , while 19.b4 ♞b6 20.♞f1 a5 also favours Black, who should

soon pick up a pawn (note that 21.b5? fails to ♟xf2! again).;

C) . Finally, 19.♞c2 is met by ♟xf3 20.gxf3 ♟g5 21.♞g2 ♞e6!

, creating problems on the kingside light squares; for instance, 22.♞g1 ♟f8! 23.♞f1 (giving up a pawn with 23.♞h1 ♟xf3 24.♞g3 may be necessary) 23...♞h3+ 24.♞h1 ♞xf3+ 25.♞g2 ♞h5 26.♞f5 h6! , and White can't get away with 27.f4? ♞xe3 28.fxg5 because ♞d6 29.h3 ♞bxb3 gives Black a winning attack.;

D) 19.--]

19.h3 ♞h5 20.♞c2!? If you wish to regain a sense of calm with a 30-minute meditation, don't do it sitting on a rollercoaster. Larsen, possibly overestimating his defensive resources, goads ...Bxf3, unafraid of Tal's attacking skills!

♟xf3 Tal can't resist.

[**20...♞d6** is a slower alternative, and if 21.♞e2 then ♞b6 , threatening ... Nxf2 once more.]

21.gxf3 ♞g5+?!

[Larsen gives this move two questions marks as well, recommending **21...♟g5!**

, after which White seems to be in trouble. For example: 22.♞f5 (here 22.♞g2 d4! 23.exd4 ♞d7 24.♞xe8+ ♞xe8 25.♞h1 ♞e1! 26.♞f1 ♞b6! leaves White's pieces utterly disorganized) 22...g6 23.♞g4 d4! 24.e4 it feels as if White's suffering perpetuates yet more suffering, in an endless loop; (this is strategically awful, but after 24.exd4 ♞xe1+ 25.♞xe1 ♞xe1+ 26.♞f1 ♞e6! 27.dxc5 ♞dd1 28.♞c4 ♟f4! 29.♞f6 ♞xf1+ 30.♞xf1 ♟xh3+ 31.♞g2 ♟f4+ 32.♞g1 ♞xf1+ 33.♞xf1 ♟d5 , White is struggling to survive

the ending, due to his inferior structure and Black's passed h-pawn) 24...♞f6 25.♔g2 h5 26.♞g3 ♘e6 27.♔h1 ♘f4 , when Black dominates strategically and on the dark squares.]

22.♔f1 The king takes a deep breath and proceeds to bombard Black's queen with a litany of complaints. What to do when the chaos level rises in direct proportion to a position's uninterpretability? Black attackers loom. This has turned into one of those sci-fi/horror stories of machines taking over the world, where humanity is enslaved by mindless yet sentient automata. ♞h4? The worst of his choices. Larsen's provocations pay off and the pendulum swings violently against Black.

[The thematic 22...♘xf2!? still comes close and certainly puts White through an ordeal, but computer analysis shows that Black's attack fails after 23.f4! ♞h5 24.♞xf2 ; for example, ♞d6 25.♙d3 ♞xh3+ 26.♞g2 ♞h6 27.♙e5 ♞de6 28.♞f3 ♞xe5 29.fxe5 ♞xe5 30.♞f4 ♞g5 31.♔e2! ♙d6 32.♞a4 ♞g3 33.♞xa7 ♞h2+ 34.♔d1 ♞b2 35.♞c1 ♞g2 36.♞a5 ♞xb3+ 37.♙c2 and White consolidates.]

[Instead, the correct attacking path lies in 22...d4! 23.fxe4 (23.exd4?? ♘d2+ forces White to give up the queen) 23...dxe3 24.fxe3 ♙xe3 (threatening mate in two) 25.♞xe3 ♞xe3 26.♞c3 ♞f4+ 27.♔g1 ♞e5 (27...f6!? 28.e5! is unclear and assessed as 0.00 by Houdini) 28.♞xe5 ♞e3+ 29.♔h1 (the white king is a mere cog in a great machine) ♞f3+ 30.♔g1 ♞e3+ 31.♔f1 ♞f3+ 32.♔e1 ♞e3+ and the game ends in perpetual

check.]

23.fxe4 ♞xh3+ Black's queen decides to drive White's king out into the open with sweet words or, failing that, with a pitchfork. **24.♔e2** His nervous majesty takes centre stage with the air of a third grader about to recite a piece of memorized poetry in front of the grinning class, who delight in his discomfort.

[Of course not 24.♔g1?? (this is like lying down in your own coffin while still alive) ♞d6 and Black mates quickly.]

24...♞h5+ 25.♔d2! White's king, apologetically pleading another engagement, tells Black's queen: "Well, look at the time! I really must be running!"

[Larsen correctly refuses the draw in the line 25.♔f1 ♞xe4! (25...♞h3+? 26.♔e2 ♞h5+ would give White a second chance) 26.♙d3 ♞h4 27.♙xh7+ ♔h8 28.♞f5 ♞h1+ 29.♔g2 ♞h2+ 30.♔g1 ♞h1+ etc.]

25...d4

[25...dxe4+ 26.♔c1 is no improvement for Black.]

26.♔c1!

[More accurate than 26.exd4 ♙xd4 27.♙xd4 ♞xd4+ 28.♙d3 ♞ed8 29.♞e3 , though White should be winning here too.]

26...dxe3 27.fxe3 ♙xe3+

White's pawns continue to suffer a distressingly high infant mortality rate. Black's move may be clever, yet he remains busted after White's calm reply.

28.♔b1

[28.♞xe3?? walks into mate after ♞h1+ .]

28...♙d4 29.♙c4! Even when under heavy fire, Larsen's thoughts are on the opposing king! The bishop goes to

its best diagonal, covering b3 and targeting f2. We sense that Black's once-fierce initiative wanes and grows faint, like a steadily weakening radio signal as you drive further away from the city.

Re7

[29...♙xb2 30.♖xb2 only helps White unravel.]

30.♖a2 ♙xb2 31.♗xb2 Re7

32.♖ac1 Re2 33.♖c2 ♖xc2 34.♗xc2

Every piece removed from the board is a small victory for White. ♗e5 35.a4

g6 36.♗f2 The enemy attack has been neutralized and Larsen proceeds to go on the offensive. Re7 Black's queen and rook are allies in affliction, as their most awful apprehensions are realized.

37.♖f1 ♖g7

[37...♗e7 would be met by 38.e5! , intending e5-e6.]

38.♙xf7! ♗c3 Black's queen seeks out White's king with the grim determination of a lost dog, desperately searching for the familiar face of her beloved owner.

EXERCISE (combination alert): What now? White has no checks and Black threatens to win with ...Rd2+. Find one tricky move and you solve all of White's problems and destroy Black's remaining scintilla of hope.

ANSWER: Interference. Now it is Black's king who faces mate, first of all by 40 Qf8.

39.♙d5! The bishop decides to spread the gospel through the use of armed force. Clearly, the black attackers feel duped. Re8 40.♗xa7+ ♖h8

EXERCISE (combination alert): Corporate funding for Black's attacking project seems to have dried up, yet White's troubles are not over. Once again he has no checks, his bishop hangs, and if it moves away then ...

Rd2+ follows. How did Larsen escape? ANSWER: Double attack. White threatens both the d8-rook and Rf8+, mating.

41.♗e7! . The position is no democracy, where every citizen has his say. The white queen alone rules with an iron fist.

[After 41.♗e7! ♗d2+ 42.♖a3

, Black runs out of checks and has no way to prevent White's deadly dual threats.]

1-0

23

A28



Larsen,B



Botvinnik,M

16: Leiden

1970

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.c4 e5 2.♘c3 ♘c6 3.a3 ♘f6

[QUESTION: I realize a2-a3 can be a useful move if Black plays in pure reversed Sicilian style. But is the move as relevant if Black opts for 3...g6 in Closed Sicilian fashion?

ANSWER: I think you may be right and Black's best bet would be to go for a reversed Closed Sicilian set-up, since in many of them White just plays Rb1 and b2-b4, dispensing with a2-a3. For example:

A) 4.g3 ♙g7 (Black should avoid tossing in 4...a5 5.♖b1

, when White's a2-a3 becomes

useful again) 5.♙g2 d6 6.e3 f5

7.♘ge2 ♘ge7 8.0-0 0-0 9.d3 ♙e6

10.♘d5 ♗d7 and Black is slightly

better off than normal since a2-a3

is a rather wasted move. In fact, in

S.Cicak-S.Ovsejevitsch, Gau

Algesheim 2011, White couldn't see

anything better than to play 11.♖b1

anyway;

chesstouring.com

B) 4.e3 ♘g7 5.♟f3 d6 6.♙e2 f5 7.0-0!? (after the natural 7.d3 ♟f6 8.b4 , White would prefer Rb1 to a2-a3) 7...♟f6 8.b4 e4 9.♟e1 0-0 10.♙b2 ♙e6 11.♚b3 ♟e5 and Black was certainly not worse, L.Mukhtarov-S.Yuferov, Katowice 1993.;

C) 4.--]

4.♟f3 d5 Botvinnik decides upon the more direct Open Sicilian course.

5.cxd5 ♟xd5 6.d3 ♙e7

[QUESTION: Can Black adopt a more aggressive formation, such as an English Attack with **6...f6** and ...g7-g5 - ?

ANSWER: Although Black is a move down in a Sicilian, the quiet variations are still very playable; whereas the sharper the line, the more the extra move counts, so I think Botvinnik made the correct decision.]

7.e3 0-0 8.♙e2 So we arrive in a Scheveningen Sicilian a tempo up for White. **♙e6 9.♙d2 f6**

[QUESTION: Surely Black can risk **9...f5** , can't he?

ANSWER: 9...f6 may look passive but such a decision fits well into the societal ethos of this line. 9...f5 is certainly playable but as mentioned before, when a move down in a Sicilian, the more solid the better. I would play Botvinnik's move too. Instead, after 10.0-0 ♚e8 11.b4 a6 12.♟xd5 ♙xd5 13.♙c3 ♙d6 14.♚d2 ♚e7 15.♟ad1 ♟ad8 16.♚b2 ♟f6 17.♟fe1 ♟df8 18.e4! (Principle: Meet a wing attack with a central counter) fxe4 19.dxe4 ♙e6 , G.Topchy-A.E. Popov, correspondence 1994, and now 20.♙d2 h6 21.♙e3 , White looks a shade better with prospects on the queenside, while

Black's kingside attack lacks fire power.]

10.b4 ♟xc3 11.♙xc3 ♙d6

Clearing e7 for the knight, in case White plays b4-b5. **12.0-0 ♚d7**

13.♚c2 a6 14.♟fd1 ♚f7 Threatening a cheapo on b3; but Black's real intention is to remove his queen from the d-file, now that White's rook has taken up its post on d1. **15.♟ab1 ♟fd8 16.a4** Larsen hopes to induce some kind of confrontation in Botvinnik's impregnable structure by disturbing the queenside. This is a standard advance in these positions, except that here the a2-a3-a4 two-step has cost White a tempo.

♟e7 17.e4

[QUESTION: Can't White take over the initiative with **17.d4** and then recapture with his knight?

ANSWER: This is based upon the assumption that Black plans to exchange on d4. Instead, he can utilize a small tactic and play e4! , when the pawn can't be touched without loss of material: 18.♚xe4? (the counter-tactic 18.♟e5! is best) 18...♙f5 and White doesn't get enough for the exchange, since 19.♚xb7?? loses the queen to ♟db8 .]

17...♟c6! The knight nimbly returns to c6, now that White has lost control over the d4-square. **18.g3**

[The immediate **18.b5** would be met by axb5 19.axb5 ♟d4 20.♟xd4 exd4 21.♙xd4 ♙xh2+ 22.♟xh2 ♟xd4 23.♟dc1 ♟d7 and I don't think White has anything, despite his central pawn superiority.]

18...♙f8 19.b5!?

[Larsen isn't interested in bland equality after **19.d4** exd4 20.♟xd4 ♟xd4 21.♙xd4 ♟d7 .] chesstouring.com

19...axb5 20.axb5 Houdini frowns upon this move, which every human would play.

[Houdini frowns upon this move, which every human would play, preferring **20...Rxb5** b6 21.d4 Qxd4 22.Qxd4 exd4 23.Rxd4 Rxd4 24.Qxd4 Qd6 25.Rb1 with an even game.]

20...Qd4 21.Qxd4? Sometimes Larsen was guilty of wilful irrationality, and here his desire for an imbalance at any cost gets him in trouble. White soon stands worse, not because of the bishop pair but because Black rules unchallenged on the dark squares.

[He should have settled for **21.Qxd4** exd4 22.Qd2 Ra2 23.Rb2 Rda8 24.Rdb1 Qd6 . Actually I prefer Black here as well, but White's position is far better than the one he gets in the game.]

21...exd4 22.Qd2 Ra2 23.Rb2 Ra3! Targeting the weakened c3-square.

24.Qc4

[White remains tangled after **24.Qb1** Qb3 25.Wd2 Ra1 .]

24...Rc3 25.Wd2 Qc5 26.Qf1 Qh8 27.Rbb1 We7! Botvinnik continues to make imperceptible inroads along the dark squares. **28.Wf4 Qxc4! 29.dxc4 d3!?** Refusing to allow White the time to blockade d3 with 30 Bd3. **30.Qd2 Qxc4 31.Qxd3?**

[Larsen had to go into Maginot line mode (hopefully with better results than the WWII outcome of the strategy!), deliberately enter a pin with **31.Qxd3** Rcd4 32.Wf3 Wd6 33.Rb3 , followed by 34 Rd1, and then simply wait to see how Black makes progress.]

31...Rc2! Target: f2. 32.Rf3 Rdd2 The white king's ordeal takes on the nature of a college frat-house hazing

ritual. **33.Ra1?** Larsen has been outplayed strategically by the king of iron logic, and his last move is yet another mistake in a rapidly declining position. Communication between Larsen's pieces and f2 comes slowly and deliberately, like a foreigner attempting to converse with a country's native speaker.

EXERCISE (combination alert): In this position Botvinnik can convert his strategic death grip into something more substantial. Black to play and win.

Wd8? There are two types of barriers in life:

1. One based in reality, which requires a concrete solution.
2. An imagined barrier, where all that's required to pass it is the realization that passing it is possible.

It feels as if Botvinnik grapples with barrier number two. He doesn't believe he has a combination, whereas reality says otherwise.

[**33...Rxf2?? 34.Ra8+**]

[and **33...Qxf2+?? 34.Rxf2 Rxf2?**

35.Ra8+ are a pair of false starts, where Black suffers on the back rank.]

[**ANSWER:** He could have won the game with **33...g5!** (clearing all back rank tricks for good, and with tempo, thus allowing Black to pick off f2)

34.Wxf6+ (34.Wf5 Qxf2 35.Qxf2 Qxf2 36.Wxf2 Qxf2+ 37.Qxf2 We4 is equally hopeless for White)

34...Wxf6 35.Qxf6 Qxf2+ (one glance at the bulging muscle of Black's rooks and the white king's distressingly flaccid form predicts the outcome of the fight even before it begins)

36.Qh1? (but White wouldn't survive the exchange down after 36.Qxf2

Qxf2 either) 36...Qd4 and Black slices through the barrier as if it

were morning mist, threatening both rooks as well as mate on h2.]

34.♔h1 ♕xf2?! Botvinnik agrees to a skimmed milk version, too quick in prosecuting his campaign against f2.

[He should have played **34...h6!** (creating luft) **35.♖f5 ♕xf2 36.♗d3! ♕d4! 37.♗xd2 ♗xd2 38.♗a3 ♕e5**, when White continues to fight for his life.]

35.♗d3! A glimmer of potential silver lining appears before Larsen, who finds a tricky defensive shot, based once again upon Black's unstable back rank. The elusive target pursued by Botvinnik is there and then gone in a flash – like a fly landing on your arm, deciding the spot may be a place of danger, and flying to some other random location.

♗xd3 36.♕xd3 ♖b2?? When short on time and lacking a tangible plan, the danger is that we may concoct one purely from imagination, without any connection to the position before us. Have you ever had a dream in which you are a child, then an adult, and finally an old person, before awakening to realize the duration of the dream may have only been ten minutes?

Botvinnik experiences a similar rapid change, going from better, to winning, to losing in a short span of time. EXERCISE (combination alert): Black's last move has the effect of decontextualizing the idea from its original context. Actually, Botvinnik just blundered in time pressure. How did Larsen exploit it?

[Here **36...♕d4** was correct, when **37.♕xc2 ♕xa1 38.♖f1** retains drawing chances for White due to the opposite-coloured bishops.]

ANSWER: Weak back rank/Queen sacrifice.

37.♖xc7! As we all understand, chess can be a cruel, Darwinian environment. A malicious smile curves the white queen's lips as she warns her sister: "It would be prudent of you to revise your former threats." A simmering conviction that all is not well steals over Black's now embarrassed queen who, after her obnoxious sister's outburst, plops down on a chair and begins fanning herself.

♗g8

[Of course the queen is immune due to **37...♖xc7?? 38.♗a8+** and mates.]

38.♖xb7 Suddenly, Black goes from a pawn up with the initiative, to a pawn down and hopelessly busted!

[The preliminary **38.♕c4!** would have been even stronger, when Black has no kind of defence at all.]

38...♗a2 39.♗c1?! This allows Black to stop the b-pawn with more chances to hold the game,

[whereas after **39.♗xa2! ♖xa2 40.b6**, the passed pawn will cost him a piece.]

39...♗a8 40.♗c7 ♖b8 41.♖d5 ♕b6 42.♗c6 ♖f8 43.♖f5 Threatening e4-e5!, though in fact he could have played that at once. **♗g8 44.♔g2 ♕d4 45.♖d5** Black can't afford to swap queens on d5, since this would give White a second passer. **♕b6 46.h4 ♖f8?!**

[**46...♖d8** was necessary.]

47.e5! QUESTION: It appears to me that Black may be drawing. Why did he resign?

[ANSWER: Let's turn this into an exercise: **47.e5!** fxe5 (**47...f5 48.e6** is clearly hopeless for Black) **48.♖e4 ♗g8** .

EXERCISE (combination alert): White to play and win.

ANSWER: 49.♖h6! (deflection) gxh6
 50.♙xe5+ ♖g7 51.♙xb8+ ♖g8
 52.♙xb6 (the tornado sweeps the
 densely populated city, levelling
 every standing structure in its wake)
 ♖d5+ 53.♙h2 ♙xd3 and the queen
 ending is totally lost for Black; for
 instance: 54.♙f2 (threatening mate
 on f8) ♙g8 55.♙a2+ ♙f8 56.♙b2
 ♙d6 57.b6 (when there is but a
 single entrant in a race, it isn't a race)
 ♙f7 58.b7 ♙b8 59.♙a2+ ♙e7
 60.♙a8 ♙e5 61.b8♙ ♙e2+ 62.♙g2
 (sorry, no perpetual check for you,
 buddy!).]

1-0

24 **B89**

♖ Fischer,RJ

♜ Larsen,B

17: Palma de Mallorca Interzonal 1970
 [Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4
 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♙c4 e6 7.♙b3
 ♙e7 8.♙e3 0-0 9.♙e2 The ultra-sharp
 Velimirovic Attack.

[Eight months later, Fischer returned
 to his safer favourite by castling:

9.0-0 ♙d7 10.f4 ♙c8

(an improvement on the third game
 debacle: 10...a6?! 11.f5! ♙c8?

12.fxe6 ♙xe6?! 13.♘xe6 fxe6

14.♘a4! ♖b8 15.♘b6 ♙e8

16.♙xe6+ ♙h8 17.♙f5 and Fischer
 won easily) 11.f5 ♘xd4 12.♙xd4

exf5 13.♙d3! fxe4 14.♘xe4 ♘xe4

15.♙xe4 ♙e6 16.♖f3! ♙c6 17.♖e1

♙xe4 18.♖xe4 d5 19.♖g3 g6

20.♙xd5! ♙d6 21.♖xe6 ♙xg3

22.♖e7 ♙d6 23.♖xb7 , R.J.Fischer-B.

Larsen, Candidates (5th matchgame),
 Denver 1971, where Black struggled
 in an already difficult ending – the

result of which we all can guess,
 since Fischer won every game of the
 match!]

9...a6 10.0-0-0 ♙c7 11.g4

[Another crazy byway lies in 11.♖hg1

b5 12.g4 b4 13.♘xc6 ♙xc6

14.♘d5! exd5 15.g5 ♘xe4! 16.♙xd5

♙a4 17.♙xa8 (or 17.♙xe4 ♙e6)

17...♘c3! 18.bxc3 ♙e6 (18...bxc3?

is met by 19.♖d3! ♙xa2 20.♙d1

and White defends successfully; or

18...♙a3+ 19.♙b1 ♙e6 20.♙d5!

♙xd5 21.c4 ♙e6 22.♙d4

with an edge – note that ♖c8?

loses to 23.g6! etc) 19.♙d4

(in this line Houdini favours White

after 19.cxb4 ♖xa8 20.c3 a5 21.b5

♙c4 22.♖g4 , but I'm not sure a

human would!) 19...bxc3 20.♙xc3

♖xa8 21.g6 hxg6 22.♖xg6 ♙f4+

23.♖d2 fxg6 24.♙xe6+ ♙f7

½-½ Har.Wagner-C.Clemens, West
 German Championship, Bad Pyrmont
 1976.]

11...♘d7 12.h4?! This move scores
 badly for White and doesn't quite fit
 with the needs of the position.

QUESTION: Why not? It feels thematic
 for White to begin a pawn storm.

[ANSWER: Black is well equipped to
 deal with a pure pawn attack, which
 isn't the normal plan in the

Velimirovic Attack. White generally
 goes for a Rg1, g4-g5, Qh5, Rg3
 piece attack, directed against h7,

often supplemented with sacs on f5
 and d5! For example: 12.♖hg1

(or 12 g5 first) ♘c5 13.g5 b5

14.♙b1 (the immediate 14.♙h5

is met by b4) 14...♙b7 (not now

14...b4? 15.♘xc6 , intending ♙xc6?

16.♘d5 ♙d8 17.♘f6+!

with a winning attack; but 14...♙d7

is probably stronger) 15.♙h5 ♘xd4

(still not 15...b4? due to 16.♘xe6!;

but 15... ♖xb3 16.axb3 b4 is possible) 16.♖xd4 ♖fc8 17.e5! (planning to swing the rook over to h4) g6 18.♗h6 ♕f8 19.exd6 ♕xh6 20.dxc7 ♖xb3 21.♖d7 , J.Hjartarson-B.Thorfinnsson, Icelandic Team Championship 2000; and after ♕c6 22.♖gd1 ♕xd7 23.♖xd7 ♕xg5 24.♕xg5 ♖c5 25.♖d8+ ♔g7 26.♕e7 , it's anybody's game.]

[12. ♖f5!? exf5 the computers' choice, which scores badly for Black in the human realm; (12... ♖c5 is relatively safer, as in V.Anand-V. Salov, Dos Hermanas 1997, which continued 13. ♖xe7+ ♖xe7 14. ♗d2 ♖d8 15. ♕f4 and here Black could play ♗c6 16. ♕xd6 e5 17.h3 ♕e6 18.f4 ♕xb3 19.axb3 exf4 20. ♗xf4 ♖g6 , regaining the pawn with even chances) 13. ♖d5 ♗d8 14.gxf5 ♖f6 15.♖hg1 (15. ♕b6 ♗d7 16.♖hg1 ♖xd5 17.exd5 ♕f6 18.dxc6 ♗xc6 19. ♕d4 ♕xd4 20. ♖xd4 ♕xf5 was level in J.Nunn-V.Liberzon, Hastings 1979/80) 15... ♖xd5 16. ♕xd5 ♕f6 17. ♗h5 ♖e7 18. ♕b3 ♗a5 19. ♖xd6 ♗e5?? (19... ♕e6! still leaves everything to play for) 20. ♗xf7+! 1-0 Y.Yakovich-L.Yudasin, Leipzig 1986.]

12... ♖c5 13.g5 b5 14.f3?!

After this move White's kingside influence grows more diffused and delocalized from its original intent. QUESTION: Why would you question f2-f3, given that it covers e4 and is common to the English Attack? ANSWER: White's last move is like calling the police with an emergency 911 and, when they arrive with sirens howling, asking them what they thought of yesterday's NBA finals game. The move is too slow! In opposite wing attacks, speed is more important than

an e-pawn. Kasparov answers your question: "The paradoxical thing is that today 14 h5! would be played by any club player. But for Fischer this position was a new one and, more important, too ragged, too unclear. He did not like ragged positions, and therefore he simply defended the pawn. However, from this moment Black's attack begins developing more quickly than his opponent's."

Kasparov's opinion reminds me of the old joke about the patient who tells his doctor: "Doc, my arm hurts when I make this motion." The doctor responds: "Then stop moving your arm that way." If Fischer didn't feel comfortable in unclear positions, then he would have been a lot better off playing the London System rather than the Velimirovic Attack!

[After 14.h5 , A.Planinec-I.Subasic, Yugoslavia 1971, continued b4 15. ♖a4 ♖xe4!? (I would try 15... ♖a5 16.g6 ♖axb3+ 17.axb3 ♖xe4 18.gxh7+ ♔h8 19.♖hg1 e5 , when Black's chances look slightly better) 16.g6 (Kasparov suggests 16. ♗c4! ♖c5 17. ♖xc6 ♗xc6 18. ♖xc5 dxc5 19.g6 as stronger) 16...d5? (after the correct 16... ♖a5 17.gxf7+ ♖xf7 18. ♕xe6 ♕xe6 19. ♖xe6 ♗c4! 20. ♗xc4 ♖xc4 , chances remain even) 17. ♖xc6 ♗xc6 18. ♖b6 d4!? (18... ♖b8? is met by 19.h6! fxg6 20. ♖xd5 with a decisive attack) 19. ♕xd4 ♕g5+ 20. ♔b1 ♖d2+ 21. ♖xd2 ♗xh1+ 22. ♖d1 ♗c6 23. ♖xa8 ♗xa8 and here 24.f4! ♕xf4 25. ♕c5 was the quickest way to win.]

14... ♕d7 QUESTION: Why post to d7? Isn't b7 more thematic?

ANSWER: For now the bishop feigns docility. Black's defence is buoyed by

the bishop's presence on d7 for several reasons:

1. Black keeps the b-file open for his rooks.
2. The e6-pawn needs protection.
3. If Black later plays ...e6-e5, his bishop covers both f5- and g4-squares.
4. Black's bishop covers a4, which can be important after ...b5-b4, since it discourages White from playing Na4.

15. ♖g2

[Houdini prefers 15. ♜xc6 ♜xc6 16. ♖h2 , but then ♜xb3+ 17. axb3 a5 gives Black an easy attack, whereas White's isn't going anywhere.]

15...b4

[15... ♜xd4 16. ♜xd4 a5 was good too; e.g. 17. h5 b4 18. ♜f6 ♜d8 19. ♜e2 ♜xb3+ 20. axb3 e5 , when ...a5-a4 is coming and Black's attack is clearly stronger than White's.]

16. ♜ce2 ♜xb3+ 17. axb3 a5 18. g6

With Black's queenside attack gaining pace, Fischer attempts to accelerate his own assault with a kingside, line-opening pawn sacrifice. **fxg6**

Now we see one reason why d7 is the proper outpost for Black's light-squared bishop: e6 remains covered, while the bishop exerts latent control over further squares on the c8-h3 diagonal, the importance of which will be made clear in a few moves.

19. h5 ♜xd4 20. ♜xd4 A critical moment. White's kingside initiative proceeds at a dangerous pace. Black must choose carefully between:

- a) 20...Bf6, intending 21 hxg6 h6, gumming up the works.
- b) 20...gxh5, daring White by accepting the pawn sac.
- c) 20...g5, the middle path, which allows White an open g-file, based on

the premise that g7 can be defended. **EXERCISE** (critical decision): Two of the above choices allow White a winning attack, while Black takes over with the correct defence. Which one would you pick?

ANSWER: It appears as if White's attack is growing out of control, but Larsen's next move alters this misperception dramatically.

g5!! The valet's grovelly, deferential manner is simply a ruse.

In a chess game we are bombarded with basic decisions: true or false; yes or no; line 'a', line 'b', neither, or both! We are in a clash of interactive forces which can only end decisively when one side overcomes the other. In this case Larsen somehow discovers the single path to dominance in a nest of lines which could easily go against him. The nature of intuition is that it is a modeless insight, which doesn't necessarily rely on external data to formulate a decision. Here, Larsen concocts a brilliant defensive road-blocking mechanism designed to frustrate White's kingside progress. His last move appears counter intuitive, since it allows White an open g-file. Yet when we check the variations, we discover that White can't accomplish anything concrete with it.

["After this counter pawn sacrifice White's offensive becomes completely bogged down," writes Kasparov. Instead, Fischer may have counted on: 20... ♜f6? 21. hxg6 h6 22. ♜xh6! (smashing through Black's attempt to clog) gxh6 23. ♜xh6 ♜g7 24. ♜h7 , when White has a strong attack for the piece.]

[20...gxh5? 21. ♜xh5 a4 22. ♜dh1 axb3 23. ♜xb3 and suddenly Black's attack is nowhere to be found, while

White's now rages.]

21.♙xg5

[After **21.h6** g6 22.♙xg5 ♙xg5+ 23.♙xg5 a4 , Black's attack is faster.]

21...♙xg5+ 22.♙xg5 h6! Ruling out any possibilities of h5-h6. **23.♙g4 ♖f7!**

24.♖hg1

[**24.♙xe6??** drops a piece to ♙c8 25.♖xd6 ♖e7 .]

24...a4! "Larsen's play is a model of precision in attack and defence," wrote GM Edmar Mednis.

[The tempting **24...e5** would be premature due to 25.♙e6! , when ♙c8? 26.♖xd6 ♖e7?? (as in the previous note) fails to 27.♙xg7+! (White's queen hopes to renew her old friendship with Black's king, who desires the exact opposite) ♖xg7 28.♖xg7+ ♙h8 29.♖dxd7 and Black can resign.]

25.bxa4 e5! Perfect timing.

Impediments to White's goal continue to materialize from nowhere, as if by magic. **26.♙e6!?** The knight wanders about with an air of baffled hope. Fischer's games normally exude an utter absence of effort on his part – but certainly not here!

EXERCISE (combination alert): Fischer decides to confuse matters by deliberately placing his knight in harm's way, attempting to turn a limitation into a resource. How would you respond?

[When we have a choice of two lines with equal probability of failure, we tend to go with the one which feels right. Presumably Fischer didn't like the look of **26.♙f5** b3! (better than 26...♙xf5 27.exf5 ♖xa4 28.♖g2) 27.c3 ♖xa4 and White's attack comes to nothing; for example, 28.♙xh6+ ♙f8 29.♙g6 gxh6

30.♙xh6+ ♙e7 31.♙g5+ ♙e8

32.♙g8+ ♖f8 33.♙xb3 (or 33.♙g6+ ♙d8 34.♙h6 ♖e8) 33...♙a7 34.♖g2 ♖a6 35.♙c4 ♖a1+ 36.♙d2 ♖xd1+ 37.♙xd1 ♙e3 and Black wins.]

ANSWER #1: Exploit the pin.

26...♙c4! The human move is good enough for the win. Larsen is a willing recipient of Fischer's generosity.

[ANSWER #2: Houdini found the impossible-to-find **26...♙a7!!** 27.♖xd6 (27.b3 ♖e8 wins easily; while 27.♙g6 leads to a long forcing variation: ♙e3+! 28.♙b1 ♙xa4 29.♙xg7 ♙xc2+! 30.♙xc2 b3+ 31.♙b1 ♖a1+! 32.♙xa1 ♙a7+ 33.♙b1 ♙a2+ 34.♙c1 ♖c7+ 35.♙d2 ♖c2+ 36.♙e1 ♙a5+ 37.♙f1 ♙b5+ and mates) 27...♙xe6 28.♖xe6 b3! 29.cxb3 ♙e3+ 30.♙b1 ♙d3+ 31.♙a2 ♖b8 32.b4 ♖a7 33.a5 ♖xa5+! 34.bxa5 ♙b3+ 35.♙b1 ♙xb2# .]

27.b3! White's best chance.

[Spassky suggested **27.♖xd6** , which the computer refutes with b3! 28.c3 ♖xa4 (threatening ...Qe2!) 29.♙g2 ♖a1+ 30.♙d2 ♖xg1 31.♙xg1 ♙xe6 and Black wins.]

27...♙xe6 The queen gloats over her grieving, fallen foe. **28.♙xe6 ♙xe6 29.♖xd6 ♖e8 30.♖b6 ♖xf3 31.♖xb4**

QUESTION: Those three queenside passed pawns look dangerous! Does White have compensation for the piece?

ANSWER: In the world of grandmasters (and computers), Black is clearly winning. But I see your point. Fischer hoped to whip up practical chances in this ending, and I can easily envision Black losing this game at club level. One might argue that a state of wealth isn't determined by external riches, as much as a mental

state of satisfaction.

♠c8 32.♙b2

[Mednis suggested **32.c4** , when the winning technique could go like this: ♙f7 33.♙b2 ♜f4 34.a5 ♞a8 35.♞b5 ♞xe4 36.♞a1 ♙xh5 (now Black has three passed pawns too) 37.a6 ♙f3 38.a7 ♜f4 39.♞b8+ ♜f8 40.♞xa8 ♙xa8 41.b4 h5 42.b5 h4 43.c5 ♙f7! (Endgame principle: The king is a fighting piece in an ending – use it) 44.c6 (or 44.♞f1+ ♙e7 45.♞xf8 ♙xf8 46.c6 ♙e7 halts White's armada.) 44...♙e6 45.♙b3 h3 46.♞c1 ♞c8 47.♙b4 g5 and White's armada is halted, while Black's continue to flow.]

32...♞f2 Tying one of White's rooks to passivity. **33.♞c1 ♙f7 34.a5 ♞a8 35.♞b5 ♙xh5** And then there were two.

The bishop performs an amputation of h5 which results in a pair of passed pawns of his own. **36.♞xe5**

Fischer continues to plunder pawns, which would warm the heart of any pirate. White achieves his fourth passer, yet it isn't enough. **♙e2 37.♞c5 h5**

The queening race is on. **38.e5 ♙f3!**

Dual purpose: Black reinforces the critical a8-square in front of the white pawn and takes control over his own promotion square at h1. **39.♙c3 h4 40.♙d3** With the cheap threat of Ke3.

♞e2 41.♞f1 ♞d8+! 42.♙c3 ♙e4 43.♙b4 ♞b8+! 44.♙a3

[**44.♞b5** ♞xb5+ 45.♙xb5 h3 46.c4 h2 47.b4 h1♞ 48.♞xh1 ♙xh1 isn't even close. White might get a piece – or even two – for his passed pawns, but meanwhile the black g-pawn will queen.]

44...h3 45.e6 ♙xc2 46.b4 ♞e3+ 47.♙b2 ♙d3 48.♞a1 ♙a6 49.♞c6 ♞xb4+ 50.♙c2 ♙b7 All becomes clear and Black passes, beyond uncertainty,

into that strange yet potent realm of absolute faith. **51.♞c3 ♞e2+ 52.♙d1 ♞g2** . Threatening both ...Rg1+ and ...h3-h2. Fischer at last decided to resign. **0-1**

25

E17

 **Evans,LM**

 **Larsen,B**

18: San Antonio

1972

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.c4 e6 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 b6 4.♙g2 ♙b7 5.0-0 d5 QUESTION: Black doesn't normally occupy the centre early like this, correct?

ANSWER: Correct.

[More common is **5...♙e7** 6.♘c3 0-0 7.d4 (today, Kramnik's favourite 7.♞e1 is thought to be White's best shot at an advantage) 7...♘e4 . Larsen said he avoided this tamer line of the Queen's Indian because it made it "more difficult to play sharply for the win."]

[Or **5...c5** , usually followed by ...Be7, leading to Hedgehog or Réti formations.]

6.cxd5 exd5 Larsen happily accepts the riskier structure, which usually leads to hanging pawns on d5 and c5 later on.

[QUESTION: Can Black play in Grünfeld style with **6...♘xd5** - ?

ANSWER: In most Grünfeld positions, Black gets the option of ...Nxc3 which is denied him here; for example, 7.d4 ♙e7 8.♞e1! ♘f6 9.♘c3 0-0 10.e4 c5 11.d5 and White has a definite edge, H.Ree-A.Miles, Amsterdam 1977.]

7.d4 ♘bd7 8.♘c3 ♙e7 9.b3

This set-up is too meek to give White anything.

[At least after **9.♟f4** 0-0 10.♞c1 c6 11.♞e5 , White exerts some pressure on c6, though the position is acceptable for Black; for example, ♞xe5 12.♞xe5 ♞d7 13.♟f4 ♞f6 14.♞d3 ♞e8 15.♞fe1 ♟f8 was A.Karpov-L.Ljubojevic, World Team Championship, Lucerne 1989 (by transposition), where Black drew fairly easily.]

9...0-0 10.♞b2 ♞e8 11.♞e5!?

The beginning of a risky plan.

QUESTION: How will White support the e5-knight?

ANSWER: White must back up the knight with f2-f4 or else back off to d3, admitting he has nothing.

QUESTION: But isn't the f2-f4 plan weakening for White?

ANSWER: It is, but to attack one must often hand over some kind of strategic concession.

[Evans isn't interested in a milquetoast waiting strategy like **11.♞c1** c6 12.e3 ♟d6 , when Black can build slowly for a kingside attack, while White waits around. Mikhail Botvinnik was perhaps the greatest expert on isolani and hanging pawn positions. Throughout his career, he unearthed dynamic secrets, previously unknown in such formations.]

11...♟f8 QUESTION: Why would Larsen avoid posting the bishop more aggressively to d6?

ANSWER: He probably didn't want to worry about a future Nb5 by wasting a tempo on ...c7-c6 or ...a7-a6.

[Nevertheless, **11...♟d6** was playable too. For instance, 12.f4 a6 13.♞c1 would transpose to a later game in which Larsen, as White, failed to achieve anything after b5 14.e3 c5 15.♞xd7 ♞xd7 16.dxc5 ♟xc5

17.♞xd5 ♟xd5 18.♞xc5 ♟xg2 19.♟xf6 ♞xd1 20.♞xd1 gxf6 21.♟xg2 ♞xe3 , since Black's slight structural weakness proved insignificant, B.Larsen-B.Gulko, Biel Interzonal 1976.]

12.f4!? The one thing a war hawk fears the most is peace.

[Evans avoids the safe route with **12.♞d3** c6 13.♞c1 ♟d6 14.e3 and crosses an invisible barrier, after which his position can no longer be considered secure.]

12...c5 Well timed. Principle: Meet a coming wing attack with a central counter. **13.e3 cxd4** Larsen chooses to dissolve the central tension immediately. **14.exd4 ♞e4!?**

This is potentially a pawn sacrifice. Larsen immediately occupies the weakened e4-square and creates the option of ...f7-f6 to expel the white knight.

[**14...♟b4** 15.♞c1 ♟xc3 16.♟xc3 ♞e4 was a safer alternative.]

15.♞xe4 dxe4 Now White is saddled with a isolani on d4, while d5 is a potential blockading square for Black. Evans must react with vigour or risk losing the initiative.

16.♞e2 ♞f6

[**16...f6??** would be a mega-error which walks into mate after 17.♞c4+ ♟h8 18.♞f7+ etc.]

17.g4 Threatening to undermine a key defender of e4, at the cost of further loosening his pawn structure. Such a frantic pace feels unsustainable unless White is able to pull off a quick knockout, which Evans almost succeeds in doing – almost!

♞d5!? Larsen offers the e-pawn.

[**17...♞d5** 18.g5 ♞d7 is safer, when the e4-pawn remains alive for the moment since 19.♞ae1 can be met

by f5 20.gxf6 ♖xf6 , though White's weakened structure is compensated by the monster outpost on e5.]

18.♗xe4! A piece sac. Evans accepts the challenge. **f6 19.♖d3!**

[Not much choice, since the attempt to extricate the knight ends in disaster after **19.♗c4??** f5! (clearance) 20.gxf5 ♖f6 .]

19...g6! The only move. Black's kingside is a pressure cooker, seconds from exploding.

[**19...fxe5??** 20.♗xh7+ ♖h8 21.♖h3 ♖f6 22.g5! is game over, since ♖xh7 23.g6 forces mate.]

20.♗xg6 The bishop pokes his head through the barrier, while Black's king walks around as if nobody loves him – and he may be correct in his assumption.

Larsen asks: "Is the Black position not all ruins? No, not quite. Two white pieces are hanging, the white QB (b2-bishop) is not very active and there are possibilities to get a counterattack. But of course, Black is two pawns down at the moment."

EXERCISE (critical decision): Black has three choices: 20...fxe5 (capturing the knight), 20...hxg6 (capturing White's bishop), and 20...Re7 (postponing recapture for a more favourable moment). Only one line is correct. But which one?

ANSWER: Postpone recapture. White's hanging pieces aren't going anywhere. Sometimes instead of choosing between lines 'a' and 'b', we pick "None of the above!"

Re7! When we can't possibly control a hidden and unknown force, our best bet is simply to flow with it. Black's position, for so long oppressed with a sense of imminent failure, is unexpectedly presented with an opportunity for

survival. Evans learns around here that he may need to revise his initial, fundamental assumptions.

[Instead: **20...fxe5??** 21.♗xh7+ ♖h8 22.♖h3 again gives White a crushing attack.]

[**20...hxg6?** 21.♖xg6+ ♗g7 22.♖f7+ ♖h8 23.♖f3! ♖xf4 (otherwise 24.Rh3+ wins at once) 24.♖xf4 ♖d5 25.♖xd5 ♗xd5 26.♗d3 and Black's activity isn't enough to make up for the two pawn deficit.]

21.♗f7

[After the game Evans claimed a win for White with **21.♗e4** , but Larsen refuted the claim, pointing out his planned defence: fxe5 22.dxe5 ♖b4! 23.♖c4+ (a queen swap leaves Black's pieces super-active in the ending) ♗d5! and if 24.♖xb4 then ♖xe5! (discovered attack) 25.♗xd5+ ♖xd5 26.♖c3 ♗c5+ 27.♖f2 ♗xf2+ 28.♖xf2 ♖e2+! 29.♖xe2 ♖g2+ 30.♖d1 ♖d8+ 31.♖c1 ♖h1+ 32.♖c2 ♖e4+ 33.♖c1 ♖h1+ with perpetual check.]

21...♖xf7 22.♗xf7+ ♖xf7 23.♖xh7+ ♗g7 QUESTION: White has picked up

a rook and three pawns for two minor pieces. Isn't Black in deep trouble?

ANSWER: Houdini rates the game at even. I don't believe Black stands worse, for the following reasons:

1. White's remaining bishop displays an aptitude for sullen silence, remaining inactive and with little influence or relevance.

2. Black dominates the light squares with his unopposed b7-bishop.

3. The logical result of #2 is that White's king will never feel secure.

Larsen writes: "As to my own feelings during the game, I can say that I already believed I had very good chances, and I don't mean drawing

chances."

24.g5 ♖d6!? Larsen covers against Ba3.

[His last move is an indicator that he is playing for the full point, avoiding drawing variations like **24...♟b4** 25.♞ae1 ♖d5 26.♞e7+ ♕xe7 27.♞xg7+ ♕d6 28.♞xf6+ ♕d7 29.♞g7+ ♕d6 30.♞f6+ with perpetual check; it would be foolhardy to try ♞e6? , as after 31.♞xe6+ ♕xe6 32.f5+ , White's surging passed pawns are worth more than Black's extra piece.]

25.g6+

[Houdini found the tricky line **25.♞ae1!** ♟e7 26.d5 , when Black is the one fighting for the draw; for instance, ♞h8 (26...♞c5+ 27.♞f2 ♞h8 28.♞e4 ♟xd5 is another possibility) 27.♞e4 ♞h4 28.♞e6+ ♞xe6 29.dxe6+ ♕g6 30.♞e3 fxe6 31.♟xg7 gxf4 32.♞c3 ♟a6 33.♟f8! ♟xf1 34.♕xf1 ♕f6 35.♞c4! .]

25...♕f8 26.♞ae1 ♟b4! Clearing the path for ...Qd5. Larsen rejected a draw offer here, even though he was ill during the game, explaining: "I decided that so close to the Alamo I could not allow myself to be a coward."

27.♞h3 ♖d5 28.♞e3 Evans sets up to nullify the effects of a queen check on h1, but White's game already looks suspiciously contorted. **♞c8 29.♞fe1!** Setting up a cheapo. **f5!**

Larsen immediately vetoes the proposal.

[**29...♟c2??** runs into 30.♞xc8+! (the queen is the architect of Black's coming holocaust) ♟xc8 31.♞e8# . The king's lips part, as if to make a statement, yet no words come to him.]

30.♞1e2 a5 31.♕f2! Some positions defy rationality so much, that if you

believe you understand it, then you don't! The stream of unforeseen contingencies continue to assail both parties.

[Now it's Evans' turn to avoid a trap: **31.♞e7??** (infiltration attempts are foolhardy) ♟xd4+ 32.♟xd4 ♞xd4+ 33.♞e3 ♞c1+ 34.♕f2 ♟d3+ 35.♕g3 ♞xe3+ 36.♞2xe3 ♞g1+ 37.♕h4 ♞g4+ 38.♕h5 ♟xf4+ 39.♕h6 ♞xg6+ 40.♕h7 ♟e4! and Black wins.]

31...♟a6! Alert.

[The a2-pawn is taboo: **31...♟xa2?** 32.♕g3! (so bizarre and so anomalous are some positions that they simply transcend explanation and can only be shown in variations, computer-style) ♟b4 33.♞h5! (threatening Re7, followed by Rxe7!) ♟c6 34.♞g5 ♟a6 35.♟a3+ ♟b4 36.♞e5! ♟xe5 37.♞xe5 ♞c3+ 38.♕h4 and White wins. Positions like this are not conducive to generalized data-gathering and are better suited to pure mathematics.]

32.♞e5?? A jittery hum of static runs through White's position. His last move stridently contradicts his previous excellent play and his world begins to spin off its axis. In a position of this level of complexity, with time running short, the danger is that our variations and assessments may begin to break down into gibberish, without cohesive guidelines. Evans' move looks like panic: he must have misassessed the position, believing himself busted.

[Houdini points out the correct path with **32.♞d2!** ♞c6! 33.a3 ♟c2 34.♞e5 ♞h1! (34...♟xe5 is met by 35.♞xf5+ and 36.Qxe5) 35.♞de2! ♟xe2 36.♞xf5+ ♟f6 37.♞xe2 ♞h2+ 38.♕f3 ♞h1+ 39.♕f2 ♞h2+ with perpetual check again.]

32...♟xe5 33.♞xe5

[After **33. ♖xf5+** ♔g8 34.dxe5 ♖c7!
 , White's rook has no place to go.]
33... ♖d3+ 34. ♔g3 ♖xe5 35.fxe5
♙b7 White's position looks like the
 remnants of trees, blackened and dead
 in the aftermath of a raging forest fire.
 We reach an inescapable conclusion:
 White is an entire rook down and can
 resign, since his pawns are not
 dangerous and he has no perpetual
 check. Evans, realizing the world won't
 stop for his sorrows, continues
 hopelessly on.

36. ♖h8+ ♔e7 37. ♖f6+
 [Or **37. ♙a3+** ♔d7 38. ♖g7+ ♔c6
 39. ♖f6+ ♔b5 and the checks run
 out.]

37... ♔d7 38. ♖xf5+ ♔c7 39. ♖f7+
 A futile, last ditch effort. Black easily
 handles the passers. ♖xf7 **40.gxf7**
♙d5 41. ♔f4 ♔d7 The king shifts
 direction once again, lending a hand to
 the task of halting the enemy pawns.
42.h4 ♔e7 43.h5 ♔xf7
0-1

26 **A54**
 **Kasparov,G**
 **Larsen,B**
 19: Tilburg 1981
[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.d4 ♖f6

[In my book on 1...d6, I advocate the
 move order **1...d6** 2.c4 e5
 . This way Black's f-pawn is free to
 push forward to f5.]

2.c4 d6 3. ♖c3 e5 4. ♖f3

[QUESTION: Why wouldn't Kasparov
 go for **4.dxe5** dxe5 5. ♖xd8+ ♔xd8
 , disrupting Black's castling?
 ANSWER: The loss of castling rights
 isn't such a big deal with queens off
 the board; the black king will be

happy on c7 after ...c7-c6, while
 White's c2-c4 subtly weakens some
 dark squares and isn't desirable. I
 actually prefer Black here – and,
 believe it or not, Black scores over
 50% in my database from this
 position.

Here's an example of how White can
 get into trouble: 6. ♙g5 ♙e6 7.0-0-0+
 ♔c8 8. ♖f3 ♙c5 9. ♙xf6 (Black isn't
 bothered by this unbalancing move,
 weakening his kingside pawns slightly,
 since he has picked up the bishop
 pair and strengthened his centre)
 gxf6 10.e3 ♖d7 11.g3 a5 12. ♖h4
 ♙b4 13. ♔c2 ♖c5 (threatening to
 take on c3) 14.f3 c6 15. ♙e2 ♔c7
 16. ♖hf1 , T.Roussel Roozmon-E.
 Bacrot, Montreal 2009. Black already
 stood better and could now have
 gone for ♙xc3! 17. ♔xc3 b5!
 18.cxb5 (18.b3 b4+ 19. ♔b2 a4
 doesn't look like much fun for White
 either) 18...cxb5 19. ♙xb5 ♙xa2
 20. ♖a1 ♙e6 , when ...Rh8 is coming
 and White is in serious difficulties.]

4... ♖bd7 5. ♙g5

[The following year Kasparov opted
 for White's main set-up with **5.e4**
 ♙e7 6. ♙e2 0-0 7.0-0 c6 , and now
 G.Kasparov-B.Larsen, Bugojno 1982,
 continued 8.d5!? rather unusual;
 (8. ♖c2; 8. ♖e1; and 8. ♙e3
 are the main moves here) 8... ♖c5
 9. ♖c2 cxd5 10.cxd5 ♖c7 11. ♖d2
 ♙d7 12.a4 ♖ac8 13. ♖a3 ♖e8
 14. ♖d1 ♙g5 15.b4? – I'm not sure
 what Kasparov's idea was after
 ♖xa4! (which Larsen didn't play!)
 16. ♖c4 ♙xc1 17. ♖xc1 ♖xc3
 18. ♖xc3 ♖f6 19.f3 ♖b8 , since I
 don't see compensation for White's
 missing pawn.]

5... ♙e7 Why go high-tech when a low-
 tech solution suffices? Now it's

officially an Old Indian Defence, which is sort of a queen's pawn Philidor – solid but perhaps passive.

6.e3 0-0 7.♖c2 c6 8.♗d3

[More aggressive than **8.♗e2** ♖e8 9.0-0 h6 10.♗h4 a6 11.♞ad1 ♖c7 12.a3 ♗f8 13.b4 , when White looks slightly better due to his queenside space advantage, N.Vitiugov-G.Milos, FIDE World Cup, Khanty-Mansiysk 2009.]

8...h6 9.h4 b5!? An impetuous move tends to bring suffering, more than good fortune – but not this time. Larsen was the carnival trickster who asked his opponents to "pick a card, any card!" Even against the (then) heir-apparent to the world championship, Larsen remains unintimidated and immediately introduces his signature trait: an anomaly of the normal flow of events, this time by offering a gambit. Larsen's idea was new in the position and deemed a "showy, reckless move", by Kasparov.

QUESTION: Do you agree with Kasparov's assessment of the sac?

ANSWER: I don't think Larsen's idea deserved the "?! " mark Kasparov handed it, because this was the way Larsen played chess! Even if it is slightly unsound, the practical aspects of the move – the fact that Kasparov is thrown from his theoretical base and is forced to solve original problems – easily make up for its alleged unsoundness.

[The standard continuation is **9...♞e8** 10.dxe5 ♗xe5 11.♗xe5 dxe5 12.0-0-0 ♖a5 , as in C.Lakdawala-R. Bruno, San Diego (rapid) 2012, when 13.♗xf6 ♗xf6 14.♗h7+ ♗f8 15.♗f5 ♗xf5 16.♖xf5 ♞ad8 is just equal.]

[QUESTION: Can Black accept the piece offer and then immediately

return it with **9...hxcg5** 10.hxcg5 ♞e8 - ?

ANSWER: White isn't obliged to recapture on f6. Opening the h-file is suicide due to 11.♗h7+ ♗f8 12.g6! fxcg6 13.♗g5 ♗xh7 (13...♗b6?? 14.♖xcg6 is mate next move) 14.♗e6+ and wins.]

10.dxe5 Kasparov declines the offer and decides to play for an opposite wings attack position – but if this is the case, then why does he think Larsen's move is so dubious?

[QUESTION: Does Black get compensation after **10.cxb5** cxb5 11.♗xb5 ♗b7 - ?

ANSWER: I think he does and wouldn't mind playing Black's position. For example: 12.♗xf6 ♗xf6 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.♗xe5 (Kasparov gave 14.♞d1 ♖c7 , after which Houdini claims full compensation for the pawn) 14...♖c7 15.♗f3 ♞ab8 16.♗d3 ♞fc8 17.♗f5 ♞d8 18.0-0 ♗xf3 19.gxf3 ♖b7 (Black regains one of his sacrificed pawns) 20.f4 g6 21.♗h3 (not 21.♗xcg6? fxcg6 22.♖xcg6+ ♗h8 23.♖xh6+ ♗h7 and Black's king is completely safe, while White's looks pretty nervous) 21...♖xb2 22.♞fc1 ♞d2 and Black manages to pull off a neat accounting trick by being a pawn down yet standing no worse, since his grip on the seventh rank and super piece activity offer more than enough compensation.]

10...♗xe5 The correct recapture, after which Black frees his position. **11.♗xe5 dxe5 12.0-0-0!?**

[After the safer **12.cxb5** cxb5 13.♗xf6 ♗xf6 14.♗xb5 ♗b7 15.♞d1 ♖b6 16.0-0 ♗xh4 17.♗c4 ♞ac8 18.♗d5 ♗a6 19.♞fe1 , I don't believe that White's grip on d5 gives him

anything, since Black has the bishop pair and excellent piece activity.]

12...♖a5 13.♔b1

[Spassky suggested the kamikaze **13.g4!?** (this lunge doesn't quite reach the level of an event horizon, better known as the point of no return) b4 (13...♙xg4 14.♖dg1 h5 15.♙xf6 ♙xf6 16.♖xg4! hxg4 17.♙h7+ ♔h8 18.♖f5 , followed by 19 Qh5, looks better for White)

14.♙xf6 ♙xf6 15.♔e4 ♖xa2 16.g5 ♙e7 17.gxh6 g6 18.h5 ♔h8 19.hxg6 fxg6 20.♔d2

with a complete mess, in which White may have the more dangerous attack. For instance: ♖a5 21.b3 ♙g4 22.♖a1 ♖c7 23.♔c1 a5 and although this position may objectively be about even, I would prefer to be White since he looks better equipped to deal with the complications given his grip on the light squares.]

13...♙e6

[Kasparov suggested **13...♖b8!?** , which was later tried out in a postal game: 14.♙xf6 ♙xf6 15.♔e4 ♙e7 16.♔g5?! (this sacrifice looks pretty shady) bxc4 17.♙xc4 (17.♙e4 g6 18.♙xg6 gets nowhere after hxg5 19.hxg5 ♙a3 20.b3 cxb3 21.axb3 ♖xb3+! 22.♖xb3 ♙e6 and White can resign) 17...hxg5 18.hxg5 e4! 19.g6?! (or 19.f4 ♙g4 with advantage to Black) 19...♙e6 20.gxf7+ ♙xf7 21.♖xe4? ♖xb2+! 22.♔xb2 ♙f6+ and Black won in Y. Gouat-Y.Bouillod, correspondence 1995.]

14.♙xf6 Playing for control of the central light squares. ♙xf6 **15.♔e4 ♙e7**

[**15...♖fd8** would prevent Kasparov's reply, but Larsen's move is perfectly

playable.]

16.♔g5!? Flashy and intimidating but everything is under control. Black just ignores it. **bxc4**

[Acceptance would be a death wish: **16...hxg5??** 17.♙h7+ ♔h8 18.hxg5 forces mate.]

17.♙h7+ ♔h8 18.♙f5 ♙xf5?!

This is the first real error, after which White achieves a clear edge.

[Instead, Black easily holds his own by offering a piece with **18...♙d5!**

19.e4 ♖ab8! (threatening ...Ba3)

20.exd5 cxd5 21.♙e6! threatening mate on the move; (alternatives are even worse, e.g. 21.♔f3? ♖b6!; or 21.♔a1? e4! followed by 22...g6) 21...♙xg5 22.♖xd5 ♖b6 23.hxg5 ♖xe6 24.♖a5 ♖b7 25.gxh6 g6 with advantage to Black, since his king looks safer and he may be able to pick up h6 should queens come off the board.]

19.♖xf5 ♙xg5 20.hxg5 ♖ab8

Threatening a shot on b2, as we saw after 13...Rb8 above. **21.♖c1!**

[Not **21.gxh6??** ♖xb2+! 22.♔xb2 (the white king's look of utter betrayal is one of a doting father who received a left uppercut to the jaw from his beloved, only daughter) ♖b8+ 23.♔c1 (the king's bodyguards interpret his raised eyebrows as signals for help, yet are too far away to reach him in time) ♖c3+ 24.♖c2 ♖a3+ 25.♔d2 ♖b2 and Black wins.]

21...♖d2

[This time **21...♖xb2+??** fails miserably to 22.♔xb2 ♖b8+ 23.♔a1 ♖b4 24.♖xe5 , when Black's attack hits a dead end.]

22.♖c2 ♖d3 23.g4! An irritating glare emanates from Black's out-of-synch position, like a computer screen with

the contrast set too high. Advantage White, who may be one pawn down at the moment, yet stands better since several black pawns are at risk.

♖xf5 There is no question Black is in for a siege. Larsen prepares for a long, cold winter of privation, agreeing to a difficult ending where his queenside pawns are damaged goods, decreasing in value as the game goes on.

24.gxf5 ♖b4 25.♖h4

[Another continuation was **25.f6** ♖d8 26.a3 ♖b3 27.fxg7+ ♕xg7 28.gxh6+ ♕h7 29.♖xc4 ♖db8 30.♖c2 ♖xa3 31.♖h5 ♖a5 32.♖f5 ♕xh6 33.♖xf7 and White still has all the winning chances due to Black's weak pawns.]

25...♖d8 26.a3 ♖a4 27.gxh6 g6?!

[**27...♖d6** was a better defence; for example, 28.hxg7+ ♕xg7 29.♕c1 ♖f6 30.♖g4+ ♕f8 31.♕d1 ♖xf5 32.♕e2 ♖f6 33.♖gxc4 ♖xc4 34.♖xc4 ♖d6 35.♖c5 f6 36.♖a5 ♖d7 37.♖a6 ♖c7 38.b4 and although White has a clear advantage due to Black's passive rook, proving a win from this point won't be so easy.]

28.fxg6

[After simply **28.♖hxc4!** ♖xc4 29.♖xc4 ♖d6 (or 29...gxf5 30.♖xc6 ♖d1+ 31.♕a2 ♖f1 32.♖f6 ♖xf2 33.♖xf7 a5 34.♕b3 – Kasparov) 30.fxg6 fxg6 31.♖c5 e4 32.♖a5 ♖d7 33.♖e5 ♕h7 34.♖xe4 ♕xh6 35.♖e6 , I don't think Black can save himself.]

28...fxg6 29.♖hxc4 ♖xc4 30.♖xc4 ♖d6 31.♖c5 ♖e6 32.♖a5 ♖e7 33.♖a6 Kasparov's rook weaves its way to dominance, forcing Larsen's rook into maximum passivity. Black's prison is a borderless gulag, being the entire board. Larsen's brittle pawns creak, strain and threaten to crumble, having

been pushed past tolerable physiological limits. Every remaining black pawn is an isolani, every one a potential target.

♖c7?! Now Black is unable to account for the power discrepancy between the two rooks.

[**33...♕h7!** might yet hold on; for example, 34.♖xc6 ♖f7 35.♖c2 ♕xh6 36.b4 ♕h5 37.♕b2 ♕g4 38.♕b3 ♕f3 39.b5 g5 40.a4 g4 41.a5 g3 42.fxg3 ♕xe3 43.g4 e4 44.g5 ♕d3 45.g6 ♖d7 46.♖c3+ ♕d2 47.♖g3 ♖g7 48.♖g2+ ♕d3 49.♕b4 e3 50.b6 axb6 51.axb6 e2 with a draw.]

34.♕c2 ♕h7 35.♕d3 ♖f7! "A brilliant move!" declared Kasparov, and certainly Black's best practical chance, but it still shouldn't be enough to save him. We reach a pivotal point where White's next move may decide the game's result.

[Not **35...♕xh6?** 36.♕e4 ♖f7 37.f3 and Black is busted.]

36.♕e4? This is where Kasparov tosses away the full point.

[He had two stronger possibilities:

36.f3! should eke out the win; for example, ♖xf3 37.♖xa7+ ♕xh6 38.♖c7 ♖f2 39.b4 ♖a2 40.♖xc6 ♖xa3+ 41.♖c3! ♖a7 (not 41...♖xc3+? 42.♕xc3 g5 43.b5 g4 44.b6 g3 45.b7 g2 46.b8♖ g1♖ 47.♖h8+ ♕g5 48.♖g8+ , picking off Black's newly promoted queen) 42.b5 ♖b7 43.♖b3 g5 44.b6 ♕h5 45.♕e4 g4 46.♖b1 ♕h4 (or 46...g3 47.♕f5!) 47.♕xe5 g3 48.♕d6 g2 49.♕c6 etc.]

[**36.♕e2!** also gets the job done; for example, c5! 37.♖c6 ♖b7 38.♖xc5 ♖xb2+ 39.♕f3 e4+ 40.♕g3 ♕xh6 41.♖c7 (Kasparov) a5 42.♖c5 a4 43.♖c4 ♖a2 44.♖xa4 ♕g5 45.♖a5+

♔f6 46.a4 ♕e6 47.♖a8 ♔d5 48.a5
 ♕c5 49.a6 ♖a4 50.♔f4 ♔b5
 51.♔g5 ♖a2 52.♗e8! ♖xa6 53.♗xe4
 ♖a2 54.♗f4 with an easy win.]

36...♖xf2 37.♖xa7+ ♔xh6 38.b4 g5

Now Black's g-pawn generates just enough play to hold the draw. **39.♖a6 ♔h5 40.♖xc6 ♖a2?** This time Larsen goes wrong and the restorative effects of Kasparov's 36th move mistake drain away.

[Black should have played **40...g4!**
 41.b5 ♖b2 42.a4 g3 43.♖c8 ♔g4
 44.♗g8+ ♔h3 45.a5 ♖xb5 46.a6
 ♖a5 47.♔f3 e4+ 48.♔f4 ♖xa6
 49.♖xg3+ ♔h2! (not 49...♔h4??
 50.♗g8 ♔h5 51.♔xe4

, when Black's king is cut off and

White wins) 50.♗g5 ♖e6 51.♖e5
 ♖f6+ 52.♔xe4 ♔g3 53.♔d5 ♔f3
 54.e4 ♖a6 55.♖f5+ ♔g4

and the position is drawn. In general,
 the defending king needs to be cut off
 two clear files away from the pawn;
 one file isn't always enough.]

41.♖c1? After this move the scales
 shift back to an uneasy balance: Black
 is again able to draw, albeit with great
 difficulty.

[But Kasparov missed a hidden
 opportunity here with **41.♔f5!** ♖xa3
 (41...g4 42.♖c8 ♔h4 43.b5 ♖xa3
 44.♖c4 is similar) 42.♗g6 ♖xe3
 43.♖xg5+ ♔h6 (or 43...♔h4
 44.♗g4+ ♔h5 45.♖e4) 44.♗g4 ♖b3
 45.♔xe5 ♔h5 46.♖d4 ♔g5 47.♔d5
 ♔f5 48.♔c5 ♔e5 49.♖d1

and Black's king is cut off by two files
 so he can resign.]

41...g4! Larsen elegantly braids
 disparate elements together into a
 unified defensive plan. Now Black has
 just enough play to hold the draw.

[Not **41...♖xa3??** 42.♖b1 g4 (or
 42...♖a6 43.b5 ♖b6 44.♔xe5

– Kasparov) 43.b5 g3 44.b6 ♖a8
 45.b7 ♖b8 46.♔f3 ♔h4 47.♔g2
 ♔g4 48.♖b4+ ♔f5 49.♔xg3
 and White wins.]

42.♔xe5

[**42.b5** is a better practical chance
 but is still drawn after g3 43.♖c8 (or
 43.♖b1 g2 44.b6 ♖b2!) 43...♖xa3
 44.b6 ♖b3 45.♔f5 ♖xb6 46.♗g8 e4
 47.♖xg3 ♖b5+ 48.♔xe4 ♖b8!

, despite Black's locked-out king.

The point is that White can't maintain
 his two-file cut-off, since his king and
 pawn are insufficiently advanced to
 deal with Black's rook on their own;
 for example, 49.♗g1 ♖e8+ 50.♔f3
 (or 50.♔f5 ♖f8+ 51.♔e6 ♖e8+)
 50...♖f8+ 51.♔e2 ♖e8 and White is
 unable to make any progress.]

42...♖xa3 43.♔f4 ♖b3 44.♖c5+ ♔h4

45.♖c8 ♖xb4+ 46.e4 Black's king

peers nervously at two paths before
 him, one offering salvation, the other
 damnation. Deadly accuracy is
 required.

EXERCISE (critical decision): Should
 Black play 46...Kh5 or the counter-
 intuitive 46...Kh3 - ? In which direction
 should Black's king travel? Only one
 choice draws.

ANSWER: The counter-intuitive move
 holds the draw.

♔h3! Black's harried king snorts in
 belligerence, a wounded yet still
 dangerous bull in the ring.

[Instead, **46...♔h5??** loses to

47.♗g8! ♖a4 48.♗g5+! ♔h6 49.♖xg4

, cutting off the king, and this time

Black's rook checks won't save him:

♖a8 50.♗g1 ♖f8+ 51.♔e5 ♖e8+

52.♔f6! (threatening Rh1 mate) ♖f8+

(or 52...♔h5 53.e5) 53.♔e7 ♖a8

54.e5 and wins.]

47.♖h8+ ♔g2 48.♗g8 EXERCISE

(combination alert): How to chain the

f4 Prometheus to the rock of e4? One more accurate move is required to seal the draw. What should Black play?

ANSWER: Deflection. White's king is yoked to e4, reminding us of Conan the Barbarian's unfortunate youth on the wheel of pain.

♠h3!

[As 48...♠h3! 49.♖xg4 ♖xe4+ (this deflection saves the day)

50.♠xe4 ♠xg4 is a near-certain draw!]

½-½

27

□ Ljubojevic,L

■ Larsen,B

20: Bugojno

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

B19

1984

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 dxe4

4.♘xe4 ♙f5

[The Smyslov Variation with 4...♘d7 is a solid alternative]

[while Larsen sometimes toyed with 4...♘f6 5.♘xf6+ gxf6 (see Game 38).]

5.♘g3 ♙g6 6.h4 h6 7.♘f3 ♘d7 8.h5

♙h7 9.♙d3 ♘gf6!? QUESTION: This

move looks a tad outside the scope of the normal Caro-Kann covenant! Why would Black allow his f6-knight to be displaced to h7?

ANSWER: I'm not a big fan of Black's line either. The move appears to be designed more for spectacle than efficiency. It's just another typically Larsonian attempt to disorient an opponent from the comfort of theoretical familiarity.

The only reasons I can think of for Black's last move are:

1. Black refuses to give White's queen a free jump to d3 by exchanging

bishops. Of course there is a steep price with his knight soon perching on the goofy h7-square.

2. If Black's knight sits on h7, the d7-knight can later be posted to f6, with a well-protected king, in case Black should decide to castle kingside.

But saying this, I still don't like Black's line and it may actually deserve a "?!" mark.

10.♙xh7 ♘xh7 I can say that Black's wacky position isn't well suited for towering aspirations. 11.♖e2

[An earlier game, R.Kholmov-D.

Bronstein, USSR Team

Championship 1962, saw 11.♙f4

♖a5+ (the idea is to discourage

White from queenside castling) 12.c3

e6 13.0-0 ♙e7 14.c4 0-0 15.a3

♖fc8!?, when Black looks okay,

despite his lack of space, mainly

because White must keep constant

vigil over his extended h5-pawn.]

11...e6 12.♙d2 ♙e7 13.0-0-0 ♖b6!?

This allows White a minor tactical shot.

[13...0-0 is the natural move, which

would transpose (almost) to the main

line 9...Bxd3 10 Qxd3 e6 11 Bd2 Ngf6

12 0-0-0 Be7 13 Qe2 0-0, the only

difference being that Black's knight is

on h7 rather than f6. White has tried:

A) 14.♘e4 doesn't achieve much:

♘df6 15.♘xf6+ ♘xf6 16.♙b1 ♖d5

17.♘e5 ♖e4! equalizes with a

standard queen-removing ploy in

the Caro, as in (via this move order)

A.Drei-B.Belotti, Forli 1988.;

B) 14.♙b1 a5!? 15.♘e5 ♘df6

16.♘g6!? ♖e8 17.♘xe7+ ♖xe7

18.♙c1 ♖d7 19.c3 b5 and Black

took over the initiative, V.Anceschi-

B.Belotti, Reggio Emilia 1987/88.;

C) 14.♘e5 ♘df6 15.c3 ♖e8

16.♘e4 ♖d5 17.♘xf6+ ♘xf6

18.g4! ♖e4! (18...♙xa2? chessstouring.com

is too greedy: White has a wicked attack after 19.g5 hxg5 20.h6 g6 21.h7+ ♔g7 22.♙xg5 ♘xh7 23.♙xe7 ♖xe7 24.♚dg1 ♖h8 25.♚h5 and Black won't survive) 19.♚f1 was J.Mittermeier-Ri. Schneider, German League 2005, and now c5 20.f3 ♚h7! offers even chances.;

D) 14.--]

14.♘f5! This trick gives White a superior structure, since he retains a healthy queenside majority versus Black's crippled kingside version.

[Instead, 14.♘e5 ♖d8 15.♖he1 0-0 16.♘g6! ♖fe8 17.♘xe7+ ♖xe7 18.♘f5 ♖ee8 19.♘d6 ♖f8?! (but Black looks only a shade worse after 19...♖e7) 20.♙f4 ♘df6 21.♙e5 ♖d7 22.♖d3! ♚a5 23.♖g3 ♖fd8? 24.♖a3! gave White a strong position in A.Beliavsky-B.Larsen, USSR vs. Rest of the World, London 1984.]

14...exf5! The correct decision.

[White's advantage is greater after 14...♙f8 15.♖he1 0-0-0 16.♘e3 ♘hf6 17.♘c4 ♚c7 18.g3! , when Bf4 is threatened and h5 can't be touched, since if ♘xh5?? 19.♘fe5 ♘xe5 20.dxe5 g6 21.♙a5! ♖xd1+ 22.♖xd1 b6 23.♘xb6+! axb6 24.♚a6+ ♚b7 25.♖d8+ ♘xd8 26.♚xb7 bxa5 27.♚xf7 and Black is busted as his pieces are hopelessly disorganized.]

15.♖he1 0-0

[QUESTION: Can Black try and hang on to his extra piece with 15...♚d8 - ?

ANSWER: That would be suicidal, akin to Morphy versus the Count and Duke! After 16.♙b4 c5 17.dxc5 ♘f8 18.♚b5 ♘hf6 19.♖xe7! , Black is crushed.]

16.♚xe7 ♘df6? The wrong knight. In

this game Larsen seems to be obsessed with permanently posting a knight on the cherished h7-square!

[Black could minimize his disadvantage after 16...♘hf6 ; for example, 17.♚d6 ♖fe8 18.♘h4 ♚b5 19.b3 f4 20.♚xf4 ♚xh5 21.♘f5 ♘d5 22.♚f3 ♚xf3 23.gxf3 ♘f8 24.c4 ♘c7 25.♖e4 ♖ad8 26.♙b4 with a slight edge for White, whose central piece pressure means more than his doubled, isolated f-pawns.]

17.♚e5 ♚a6

[QUESTION: Doesn't 17...♚b5 hang on to everything?

ANSWER: Black loses a pawn after 18.♚xb5 cxb5 19.♖e5 .]

18.♘b1 ♖fd8 19.♚xf5 ♖d5

Larsen has mishandled the opening and is now just a pawn down with the inferior position. **20.♚f4?!** This is a mistake only a GM could make.

[The average club player would play 20.♖e5! without thinking – and be right! Ljubo gets fancy when simple would probably win the game. A strange kind of hallucination afflicts GMs from time to time, as they look upon a combinationally arid position and their minds mistakenly superimpose "Potential combination!" upon it. The straightforward 20 Re5! hangs on to everything, with a dominating position.]

20...♘f8! Larsen refuses to co-operate and redeploys the useless h7-knight to a powerful square on e6.

QUESTION: Why can't Black take on h5?

ANSWER: I think this was Ljubo's deep idea.

[Both captures leave White in total control. For example: 20...♘xh5? 21.♚c7 ♚b6 22.♖e7 ♚xc7 23.♖xc7

♖b8 24.♞e1 and White dominates.]
 [20...♞xh5? 21.♘e5 (Black's
 dangling h5-rook is cut off from
 friends) ♖b5 22.g4 ♞h3 23.c4 ♖b6
 24.♞f5! (threatening a discovery on
 the rook) ♞c7 25.g5 (if pawns are
 the serfs of the chessboard, then the
 g-pawn is certainly an upscale serf)
 ♞h5 26.f4 ♞d8 27.♙c1 ♞d6 28.d5!
 and Black is busted.]

21.g4 Covering the h5-straggler, while
 worrying Black with g4-g5 line-opening
 tricks. ♞ad8!? A familiar theme in this
 book: Larsen overpresses! His
 incurable optimism was both a blessing
 and a curse in his career. In this
 instance we see a version of the
 blessed side.

[Objectively, Black had two superior
 options: 21...c5 22.dxc5 ♘e6
 23.♖b4 ♞c8 24.c4 ♞dxc5 25.♘e5
 b5! with good play for the pawn.]
 [21...♘e6 22.♞g3 ♘xd4 23.♘xd4
 ♞xd4 24.g5 hxg5 25.♞xg5 ♞d5
 26.♞g1 ♘xh5 27.♙c3 ♞xd1+
 28.♞xd1 ♞e8 and White has strong
 compensation; on the other hand,
 Black has gone from being down a
 pawn to up a pawn.]

22.♞g3! Between the poles of
 aggression and passivity, there is an
 intermediate setting of watchful
 awareness, where we refuse to commit
 to either extreme. Such is the case
 with Ljubo's last move.

[Perhaps Larsen expected 22.c3?
 ♘e6 23.♞g3 ♞a5! 24.a3 ♘e4
 with a dangerous attack; for instance,
 25.♞g2 ♞d3+ 26.♙a1 ♘xd4!
 27.♘xd4 (27.cxd4?? ♞xa3+
 is deadly for White: 28.bxa3 ♞xa3+
 29.♙b1 ♞b3+ 30.♙c1 ♞c4+
 31.♙b1 ♞d5 32.♙c1 ♞b5+ 33.♙b2
 ♞b3 and wins) 27...♘xd2
 (threatening ...Rxd4, followed by ...

Rxa3+, mating) 28.♞g3 ♞xg3
 29.fxg3 ♘c4 and Black is back in the
 game.]

22...c5 23.c3? The blurred din of
 White's frantic piece activity abruptly
 comes to a standstill and now
 foreshadows his fall from grace. This
 move critically weakens the light
 squares around White's king.

[He should go for 23.g5! hxg5
 24.♙xg5, when h5-h6 is in the air
 and Black is in deep trouble.]

23...♘e4! Ever tactically alert, Larsen
 finds a trick. The impetus of this move
 propels Black's position onto an
 upward trajectory. **24.♞g2**

[White has to move the queen since
 24.♞xe4? is met by ♞d3+]

[but he might have preferred 24.♞f4!
 , when ♘xf2 25.♞e7 f5 26.♘h4!
 leads to a draw after ♘xd1 27.♘xf5
 ♘e6 28.♘h6+ ♙h8 29.♘f7+ ♙g8
 30.♘h6+ etc.]

24...cxd4 25.cxd4

[No choice now, as 25.♘xd4??
 runs into ♞d3+ 26.♙c1 ♞xd4!
 and White is losing after 27.♙e3
 ♞xd1+ 28.♞xd1 ♞xd1+ 29.♙c2 ♘f6
 .]

25...♘e6 Larsen's counterattack is in
 full swing. White is thrown onto the
 defensive and Black gets loads of
 compensation for the pawn. **26.♙e3??**
 White's last move, which doesn't
 exactly strike us as being part of a
 cunningly constructed plan, is similar to
 a doctor accepting his hefty fee and
 then informing his patient: "There is no
 cure to your disease." The obstinate
 bishop, when commanded by his king
 to perform the basic task of guarding
 him, just sits there, continuing not to
 do what he is told. I wish medical
 science would stop goofing around,
 looking for cures to major diseases

and concentrate on a vaccine which forever prevents us chess players from committing god-awful blunders. I dream of the glorious day when we can all be inoculated against our own incompetence.

Here we see a case of a top-level GM committing a mega-blunder. We reach that sweet spot, that perfect moment, when we sense in our hearts that a combination is there for us, hidden but awaiting discovery.

EXERCISE (combination alert): White's last move was a monster error and now comes a brutal turnaround. Find one crushing move and Black's threats, like cancer cells, replicate in vast malevolent excess.

[Ljubo should have played **26.♕b4** ♖a4 27.b3 ♜xb4 28.♞xe4 a5 29.♞f1 , which leaves him defending but was infinitely better than the game's continuation.]

ANSWER: Annihilation of the defensive barrier.

26...♜c3+! This shot tears the natural fabric of White's position to shreds, unleashing every drop of latent power in Black's position. **27.bxc3**

About here Ljubojevic probably dreamed wistfully of his pre-blunder days and of the joys of a happy childhood.

[**27.♕c2** is no better: ♜a4+! (the murderous queen makes yet another hefty deposit into the savings account of her negative karma) 28.♕d3 ♞c8! 29.♞c1 ♜b5+ 30.♕d2 ♜xb2+ 31.♞c2 (are you really in a war if your side has absolutely no hope of winning?) ♜b1+ forces mate.]

27...♞b5+

[Ljubojevic resigned on account of **27...♞b5+** 28.♕c2 (or 28.♕a1 ♜a3

and White can't simultaneously defend b2 and c3 – the queen is not only more powerful than her brother imagined, she is in actuality more powerful than he can imagine)

28...♜xa2+ ("Some bygones are best left as bygones," says the queen to White's king, but then adds: "and there are others which one never forgets.") 29.♕d3 and now what? EXERCISE (checkmate alert): The white king's troubled mind is too preoccupied with his burning realm to take notice of his own imminent death. What is Black's best move?

ANSWER: Mate on the move with ♜c5# . White's king is jumped in a dark alley and then brutally beaten into stunned submission. The demonstration board with this position must have been a painful sight for Ljubojevic.]

0-1

Chapter Three

Larsen on the Dynamic Element

In this, the largest chapter of the book, we look at Larsen's treatment of the initiative. Many of the games herein culminate in violent attacks. The only reason they are in this chapter, rather than earlier one on the Attack, is that Larsen's handling of initiative created the roots from which the attacks grew.

Take a look at [Game 30](#), Larsen-Kavalek, Lugano 1970:



In what was a typical English Opening position, Larsen radicalized the position by tossing in 11 h4!?, a move which violates gospel in the most offensive manner, yet when Larsen plays such a move, is he not following his own inner gospel?



Larsen's approach to the initiative appeared simultaneously identical, yet unique. What I mean is that he didn't always play in unconventional fashion. Sometimes he replicated classical principles - almost like identical twins with opposite personalities, one a good little boy, who does what he is told to please his parents, by imitating their behaviour.

The above diagram is from Evans-Larsen, Dallas 1957. Earlier in the game, Larsen offered one of those pawn sacrifices for the initiative, which may look suspicious (in the abstract!), yet few of us actually renounce it when we find ourselves with a similar temptation. In this position Larsen found shot after shot to force the win. What would you play here as Black?

For the answer, please see [Game 23](#) in this chapter. When you go over this game, you would swear a great classicist, like Botvinnik or Smyslov, was playing Black - most certainly not Larsen! But Larsen was perfectly capable of playing like Botvinnik. He just didn't want to!

[21: O.Bernstein-B.Larsen, Amsterdam Olympiad 1954](#)
Sicilian Defence

[22: F.Olafsson-B.Larsen, Reykjavik \(8th matchgame\) 1955](#)
Sicilian Defence

[23: L.M.Evans-B.Larsen, Dallas 1957](#)
Tarrasch Defence

[24: B.Ivkov-B.Larsen, Beverwijk 1964](#)
Sicilian Defence

[25: D.Bronstein-B.Larsen, Belgrade 1964](#)

Benoni Defence

[26: B.Larsen-M.Tal, Candidates \(5th matchgame\), Bled 1965](#)

Grünfeld Defence

[27: S.Flohr-B.Larsen, Copenhagen 1966](#)

Benoni Defence

[28: B.Larsen-V.Korchnoi, Palma de Mallorca 1969](#)

Reversed Modern Defence

[29: M.Bobotsov-B.Larsen, Büsum 1969](#)

English Opening

[30: B.Larsen-L.Kavalek, Lugano 1970](#)

Nimzo-Larsen Attack

[31: M.Botvinnik-B.Larsen, Leiden 1970](#)

Dutch Defence

[32: A.Karpov-B.Larsen, Tilburg 1980](#)

Petroff's Defence

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29

B50

 Bernstein, O

 Larsen, B

21: Amsterdam Olympiad

1954

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

A young Larsen played GM Ossip Bernstein on his 72nd birthday, and added with malicious glee: "A present was not what he got from me."

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.c4 QUESTION: Does this move order force Black into a Maróczy Bind-style position?

ANSWER: No. Larsen's next move contaminates White's version of the bind. Black can also avoid it all together with 3...e5 (see the next note).

♙g4

[Alternatively, 3...e5 is tempting, since the structure favours Black due to White's knight on f3.

QUESTION: How does the f3-knight affect anything?

ANSWER: Black can set up with ...Nc6, ...g7-g6, ...Bg7, ...Nge7, ...0-0 and ...f7-f5. The point is that the f3-knight is in the way of White's thematic f2-f4 break, so Black is equal at a minimum and may actually stand better here.]

4.d4!? Bernstein insists on the Maróczy but gets a rather lousy one, having to recapture d4 with his queen, with loss of time.

[It is safer to play d2-d3, though Black's grip on d4 offers him easy equality; for example, **4.♘c3** ♙xf3 5.♙xf3 ♘c6 6.d3 g6 7.g3 ♙g7 8.♙g2 e6 9.0-0 ♘ge7 10.♙e3 0-0 , V.Korchnoi-V.Topalov, Vienna 1996 (via 1 Nf3 d6).]

[Or **4.♙e2** ♘c6 5.♘c3 g6 6.d3 ♙g7 .]

4...cxd4 5.♙xd4 ♘f6

[The three grandmasters to have

reached this position all chose **5...♙xf3** 6.gxf3 ♘c6 , whereas Larsen opts simply to develop – perhaps because, as a young untitled player facing a venerable old grandmaster, he preferred to keep the game in structurally familiar territory.]

6.♘c3 g6 7.b3?! "A little risky but not a mistake," wrote Larsen. I disagree and consider 7 b3 to be a leisurely reckless decision, where a shadow of developmental privation looms. White feels secure and believes he has all day, so he uses more time in posting the c1-bishop to challenge its dark-squared counterpart on the a1-h8 diagonal. In fact this time-waster may be the tipping point, after which White's position becomes almost unmanageable.

[Instead, **7.♙e3** looks correct, when ♙g7 8.♙e2 ♘c6 9.♙d2 0-0 10.0-0 is almost a standard Maróczy formation, except that the atypical inclusion of Nf3 and ...Bg4 makes it quite harmless for Black.]

7...♙g7 8.♙b2 ♙a5 9.♘d2?!

White hopes to pick the least inhospitable option to minimize his suffering.

[QUESTION: Why is White wasting more time when he can simply develop with **9.♙e2** - ?

ANSWER: 9 Be2? walks into the trick ♘c6 10.♙e3 ♘xe4! , winning a pawn.]

[Houdini goes into panic mode and wants **9.a3!** ♘c6 10.♙e3 , when White manages to consolidate his rather depressing position. If Black goes for ♘xe4 anyway, White has the zwischenzug 11.b4! ♘xb4 12.axb4 ♙xb4 13.♙c1! ♙xf3 14.gxf3 ♙xb2 15.♘xe4 . Even then, I like

Black's position with three pawns for the piece, but at least White's extra knight provides some measure of comfort for his numerous strategic miseries.]

9...♖c6 10.♔e3?! A two dimensional solution won't do in a 3D world. Principle: Create confrontation when leading in development comes to mind. EXERCISE (combination alert): White's serene indifference is about to end. How can Black utilize his lead in development and win material?

[White can avoid the coming combination with **10.♔d3** , but still ends up in an inferior position after ♖d7 11.♔g3 0-0 12.♖c1 ♕e6 .]

ANSWER: Deflection. Black forces the white rook to leave its guard over a2.

10...♖b4! Now White's troubles progress to a tighter arc, spinning from one crisis to another without end.

11.♖c1 The only move.

[**11.♕d3??** loses instantly to another deflection: ♕h6! (a bishop addressing a queen as an equal is an unheard of presumption) 12.♔xh6 (12.♔g3 ♕f4! is crushing; mysterious stigmata appear and vanish on the holy bishop's body) 12...♖xd3+ 13.♔f1 g5!! (even stronger than 13...♖xb2 14.♔e3) 14.b4 ♔e5 and everything hangs on White's side.]

11...♖xa2! Black seizes jurisdiction over a2 with no fear of an a-file pin.

12.♖xa2

[The optimistic **12.♖a1?** (the rook takes the bit in his teeth and decides to be led) ♖b4! 13.♖xa5?? walks into ♖c2# .]

12...♔xa2 13.♕d4 e5 14.♕c3 h5! Worrying White with ...Bh6 tricks.

15.♔d3 Threatening Ra1.

[Not **15.♕d3??** with the same idea, because of ♕h6! 16.f4 (not

16.♔g3?? h4 and the queen is trapped) 16...♕xf4 17.♔f2 ♕e6 18.g3 ♕g5 19.♖a1 ♕xd2+ 20.♔xd2 ♔xd2+ 21.♔xd2 and Black is just two pawns up in the ending.]

15...♔a3 16.♖a1 ♔c5 17.♖a5 ♔c7 18.♕b4 White's initiative is a purely temporary phenomenon. ♕f8

This innocent move actually contains a devious threat. White's position reaches the edge of the abyss, with absolutely zero room for error or even inaccuracy.

19.♖b1? Gulp! I just said "White's position reaches the edge of the abyss, with absolutely zero room for error or even inaccuracy!" Principle: Don't play an open position as if it's closed – unless you want to look like one of Paul Morphy's inept opponents! White is stuck in a rut, his inactive pieces victims of systematic neglect. His ill-advised project is born of frustration at an inability to generate piece activity. Bernstein feels his position is slightly B12 deficient and in need of an energy boost. So he wastes yet more time redeploying his knight, chasing phantoms. Unfortunately, the Steinitzian philosophy of redeploy-and-retreat-whenever-possible, tends to flop if the position opens.

EXERCISE (combination alert): Bernstein's last move overlooked Black's intent. How did Larsen win more material?

[The precautionary **19.♖a2** should have been played.]

ANSWER: Discovered attack/Double attack.

19...♖xe4! There is no sense of affront as righteous as when an opponent upends your exquisitely subtle idea with a vulgar, lowbrow counter – which works! White must hand over another

pawn in already economically precarious circumstances.

20. ♖xe4

[**20.f3** ♖b6! is equally disastrous for White.]

20...d5! When an enemy has an identifiable face, they can be defeated; when the enemy is hidden, it is we who are doomed. Now b4 and e4 hang simultaneously. Larsen, a just man, decides to divide the spoils fairly: 99.99 % for him and 0.01% for Bernstein, who isn't convinced that his share represents a truly fair cut of the profits.

[Perhaps Bernstein anticipated **20...♙f5?** 21. ♖f3 ♙xb1 22.c5! ♙f5 23. ♙b5+ ♙d7 24. ♙xd7+ ♖xd7 25.0-0 , when White's considerable lead in development lead may offer full compensation for the pawns.]

21. ♙xd5 ♙xb4+ 22. ♘d2 0-0

White's game is a smoking ruin:

1. He is down a pawn.
 2. He grossly lags in development.
 3. The d2-knight remains in a nasty pin.
- Conclusion: The position is resignable.

23. ♙d3

[If **23. ♙e2** ♖fd8 24. ♙xg4 , then ♙xd5 25. ♖xd5 (or 25.cxd5 ♖c1+) 25...♖d8 is a game ender.]

23...♖ad8 The d2-albatross just won't allow White to castle away from his pain. **24. ♖b5 ♙xd2+** Larsen adds to his spoils with a pin and a skewer.

[**24...♙f5** was just as good.]

25. ♙xd2 ♙f5 26. ♖xb7 The queen eats like a woman who realizes this will be her last meal in several days. ♙xd3+

27. ♙c1 White, by now driven to desperate penury, has little choice other than to continue borrowing, increasing his material debt. ♖d6 Threatening ...Qa3+. One look at the queen's jutting jaw line tells us trouble lies ahead. **28. ♖xa7 ♖c3+ 29. ♙b2**

EXERCISE (combination alert): Of course everything wins. But can you find a forced mate?

♖d2+

[ANSWER: The solution was **29...♖c2+!** , denying White's king access to a3. Then 30. ♙a1 (or 30. ♙b1 ♖e2+ 31. ♙a1 ♖d4+! 32. ♖xd4 ♖a8+ etc) 30...♖d2 (threatening ...Qc3+) 31. ♖a5 ♖d4+ forces mate in two.]

30. ♙a3 ♖c2 Threatening ...Ra2 mate.

31. ♖a1 ♙e4 32. ♖b6

[Or **32. ♖a5** ♖xc4! intending 33.bxc4 ♖c3+ 34. ♙a4 ♙c6+ 35. ♖b5 ♖xa1+ 36. ♙b4 ♖xa7 .]

32...♖a8 33. ♖b8+ ♖xb8 34. ♖xb8+

♙h7 35. ♖xe5 ♙xg2 . This was Larsen's first win against a GM. He wrote: "Of course, Bernstein was not as strong in 1954 as he had been, but he was not senile either." What a compliment. High praise indeed!

0-1

30

B95

□ **Olafsson,F**

■ **Larsen,B**

22: Reykjavik (8th matchgame) 1955

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

GM Fridrik Olafsson was a national hero in Iceland, where this match for the Scandinavian championship took place. Larsen, heavily the underdog, shockingly took a two point lead but then lost two in a row. He appeared to be on the verge of psychological collapse in the match. The Icelandic public watched with frantic interest as their hero Olafsson, with momentum on his side, looked to be on the cusp of a great victory with the white pieces in the eighth and final game. Hidden from

view was Larsen's unshakeable faith in his own, vast ability. This was the decisive game where Larsen regained equanimity and won the match.

1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♟xd4 ♟f6 5.♟c3 a6 No goofing around; no experimentation. Larsen repeats the opening from the second game of the match, which he had only lost due to a blunder. Indeed, Olafsson had ducked the challenge himself with 4 Qxd4 and 1 c4 as White, but now returns to the theoretical fray – albeit in a different variation, having played 6 Bc4 in their previous game.

6.♟g5 e6 7.♞f3!? QUESTION: This isn't theory, is it?

ANSWER: Actually, 7 Qf3 was quite common in the early '50s, even the main line. Today it has been universally replaced by 7 f4.

QUESTION: What's the point of playing the queen to f3, given that it blocks White's thematic f2-f4 push?

ANSWER: The queen usually shifts across to g3 or h3. One point is to keep Black guessing whether White will play f2-f4 or else f2-f3, backing up e4.

♟e7 The beginning of a home-made set-up from Larsen, developing the b8-knight to c6, whereas in the Najdorf it more often goes to d7.

[For instance, D.Bronstein-M.Najdorf, Buenos Aires 1954, saw **7...♟bd7** 8.0-0-0 ♞c7 9.♞g3 b5 10.♟xb5!? axb5 11.♟dxb5 ♞b8 12.♟xd6+ ♟xd6 13.♞xd6 ♞xd6 14.♞xd6 h6 15.♟d2 ♟b7 16.f3 and White three healthy pawns for the piece in the ending, which is objectively about even, though Bronstein went on to win. I remember when I was about 13 years old, I upset a 1700 player in this position. (Your gifted writer was a child prodigy, with a towering

1150 rating at age 13!) Even as a child, I had the good sense to remove queens as quickly as I could from the board!]

8.0-0-0 ♞c7 9.♞g1!? A sort of a weird Keres Attack, where Rg1 is played before g2-g4. Larsen had in fact faced this move before (see Paoli-Larsen in the note to White's 13th move), but it doesn't seem all that logical to me to play for g2-g4-g5 when White's bishop already sits on g5.

[**9.♞g3** is normal.]

9...♟c6 10.g4 ♟e5!? A rather strange idea.

[Having prepared ...Nc6, the continuation **10...♟xd4** 11.♞xd4 b5 seems more consistent, when Black already stands well; whereas the knight will soon be driven back again from e5. But Larsen was familiar with this position and had been successful with 10...Ne5 in previous games.]

11.♞e2 b5 12.f4 b4!

[Not **12...♟c4?** due to 13.♟dxb5! etc.]

13.♟b1

[The earlier game E.Paoli-B.Larsen, Amsterdam Olympiad 1954, saw **13.fxe5** dxe5 (regaining the piece immediately) 14.♟b1?! this loses the initiative; (White should try something like 14.♟xf6 ♟xf6 15.♟d5 ♟g5+ 16.♟b1 exd5 17.exd5 ♞d6 18.♟f5 ♟xf5 19.gxf5 , when he may have a slight edge) 14...exd4 15.e5 ♟d5 (15...♞c5! was another option) 16.♟xe7 ♞xe7 17.♞xd4 a5 18.g5 a4 (or 18...♟a6 19.♞g4 0-0) 19.♞g3 ♟a6 20.♞d1 ♟xf1 21.♞xf1 0-0 and Black looks clearly better.]

13...♟ed7 So the knight goes to d7 after all, and it's unclear who has gained from the various wasted tempi, but Black probably does not stand

worse.

14.♖h4 QUESTION: Why did White move the bishop unprovoked?

ANSWER: To clear the way for the g-pawn.

♖b7 15.♖g2 ♜c5 Pressuring e4 and clearing d7 for the f6-knight, in case of a future g4-g5. Meanwhile he refuses to commit his king by castling, as that would just give White a target to attack.

16.♜d2 ♞c8 17.♞b1 Avoiding any later ...b4-b3 shenanigans. **♞a4** Larsen clears the c-file and searches for tricks on b2 and c3. **18.♜2b3 h6!?**

[Larsen still doesn't want to castle, and **18...e5** is poorly timed, due to 19.fxe5 dxe5 20.g5! with advantage to White, (rather than 20.♜f5?! , which is met by the shocking ♜c3! 21.bxc3 ♜xc3+ 22.♞b2 ♜xe2 23.♞ge1 ♜c3 and is quite unclear.)]

19.♖e1

[Alternatively, White might take the chance to play **19.e5!** dxe5 20.fxe5 ♜d5 (threatening a knight fork cheapo on c3) 21.♖xd5 ♖xd5 22.♖xe7 ♖c4 23.♞e4 ♞xe7 24.♞d2 , when Black's king looks slightly less secure than White's.]

19...♜c5 20.♜d2?! I can't see why, having just played Be1, Olafsson decided not to take on b4.

[After **20.♖xb4 ♜fxe4** (not 20...♜cxe4? 21.g5 ♜d5 22.g6!) 21.f5 , he might still hope to achieve something against the black king in the centre; for example, e5 22.♖xc5 dxc5 (or similarly 22...♜xc5 23.f6! ♖xf6 24.♜xc5 dxc5 25.♖xb7 ♞xb7 26.♜f5) 23.f6! ♜xf6 (or 23...exd4 24.♖xe4 ♖xe4 25.fxg7) 24.♖xb7 ♞xb7 25.♜f5 g6 26.♜d6+ ♖xd6 27.♞xd6 ♜e4 28.♞e1 ♞e7! 29.♞xa6 f6 30.♞a4 with a continuing initiative.]

20...♜fd7 21.h4 g6 22.g5?

A strategic error, on which Larsen pounces.

[Instead, **22.f5** looks right, and if e5 23.♜4b3 ♜xb3 24.♜xb3 a5 , "Black's position is quite satisfactory – but after the text move it is much more so!"]

22...e5! This shot shreds the integrity of White's central and kingside pawns.

23.fxe5 dxe5 24.♜4f3 ♜e6!

Multi-purpose:

1. Black clears the c-file, menacing c2.
2. The knight pressures g5, as well as threatening to invade f4 with an attack on White's queen.

25.♞c1

[Other tries lose material: **25.♜b3** ♜f4 26.♞f2 ♖xe4]

[or **25.♞c4** ♞xc4 26.♜xc4 hxg5 27.hxg5 (27.♜cxe5 ♜xe5 28.♜xe5 gxh4 leaves Black two pawns up) 27...♞xc4 28.♞xd7 ♖xe4! 29.♜xe5 ♖c5! ultimately wins the exchange.]

25...♜f4 26.♞f1 A crime has been committed and the perpetrator carelessly left fingerprints. A possibly unintended but very welcome anomaly alters the game in Black's favour.

EXERCISE (combination alert): Larsen noticed a tricky continuation which wins material. Find Black's deep idea and you bring about unprecedented upheaval in White's camp.

ANSWER: Black's next move is the prelude to a queen sacrifice.

♞c6!! Larsen reformulates the old set-up with a new, synthetically devious one. The bishop lies in wait, in anticipation of handing White's queen a nasty stymie. This is no minor plot twist. As it turns out, there's no good defence to ...Bb5!.

27.c4 QUESTION: Why can't White halt the threat simply by grabbing on

a6?

[ANSWER: White trades one problem for another by opening the a-file:

27. ♖xa6? ♖a8 28. ♖c4 ♜b6 29. ♖f1 (29. ♖b3? ♙a4 30. ♖e3 ♙c5 traps the queen mid-board) 29... ♖a7 30. a3 bxa3 31. b3 a2+ 32. ♙a1 ♙a3 (with the terrible threats of ...Bxc1 and ...Bb2+, followed by ...a1Q+) 33. ♙f2 ♖a5 34. c3 ♙b5 35. ♙xb6 ♖xb6 36. c4 ♙c5 is hopeless for White.]

[Other moves are no better: **27. ♖f2??** ♙c5 28. ♖g3 ♜e2 is crushing]

[while **27. ♜xe5** ♖xe5 28. ♙g3 fails to hxg5 29. hxg5 ♙xg5 30. ♜f3 ♖e7 31. ♜xg5 ♜xg2 (Larsen).]

27... bxc3 28. ♖xc3 Preventing ...Bb5, since the c6-bishop is pinned. This move appears to jam Black's combination, like an incorrect key into a lock. At a cursory glance all appears well for White. However, looking deeper, we see this just isn't the case.

♙b5! Anyway! The bishop rushes to b5 to greet White's queen, the way a shipwrecked mariner spots a beautiful young woman in a bikini (just like in the beer commercials) running towards him with a frosty mug of his favourite beer and a twinkle in her eye.

QUESTION: Hey! You just said "Preventing ...Bb5, since the c6-bishop is pinned", didn't you?

ANSWER: Oops! My mistake! When we get swindled or fall victim to a diabolical combination, it strains our faith in the supposed inherent goodness of human nature. Larsen gives up his queen and then immediately regains it with interest. "It was sad for the Icelanders to see their hero lose," wrote Larsen who, as we know, loved to rub it in!

[The computer finds an even stronger

line: **28... ♙b4!** 29. ♖c4 ♙xe4+!

(a pretty overload shot) 30. ♙a1 (if 30. ♜xe4 ♖xc4; or 30. ♖xe4? ♖c1#) 30... ♙d3! 31. ♖xc7 ♖xc7 and Black's combination produces rich dividends, since ...Rc1+ (which mates) and ... Bxf1 can't both be met.]

29. ♖xc7 ♖xc7 30. ♙g3?!

On the surface White's now lost queen smiles politely, yet the involuntary clenching and unclenching of her fists betrays her true feelings about the irritating enemy light-squared bishop. Long insulated from harsh scrutiny, she must now adapt to a new life in the spotlight.

[The white queen can't be saved:

30. ♖f2?? (the rapturous lady, accustomed to dancing on fleecy clouds of joy, suddenly soon comes face to face with a new, joyless reality, not to her liking) ♙d3+ (one gets the feeling that this bishop is not the type to knock politely before he barges into a room) 31. ♙a1 ♖c1+ 32. ♜b1 ♖xb1# . The rook signs the white king's death warrant in an absent manner, all the while humming a show tune.]

[White's best shot at resistance lay in **30. ♜b3!** ♙xf1 31. ♙xf1 , though he would still be the exchange down.]

30... ♙xf1 31. ♙xf1 Here White is a full exchange down in the ending and without counterplay. **hxg5 32. hxg5?**

White's position creaks as if a burglar has entered the premises at night.

EXERCISE (combination alert): Black's victory isn't chiselled into a granite monument quite yet. How did Larsen win more material?

[**32. ♜xg5** was forced.]

ANSWER: **32... ♙c5!** White's remaining rook has no place to hide. **33. ♜xe5**

Olafsson's fruitless attempt to

complicate is a worthless adjunct, similar to an aspiring author who gets his rejected novel returned with high editorial praise – which doesn't get him an iota closer to getting his manuscript published.

♟xg1 A second exchange falls and White finds himself in sorely reduced financial circumstances. **34.♟xf4 ♟h2!** Principle: Swap pieces when ahead in material. **35.♟xh2 ♞xh2 36.♞ef3 ♞h1 37.a3 ♞c5 38.♞a2 ♞xf1**

Larsen decides to simplify into an easily won one exchange up ending. **39.♞xf1 ♞xe4 40.♞e3 ♞c5!** A shabby pawn structure is an accusing mirror of our past strategic indiscretions. Big brother arrives to help out, eyeing the g5-pawn and its allies menacingly.

[The pawn falls since **40...♞c5!** 41.b4? only makes matters worse after ♞c3 .]

0-1

31
 **Evans,LM**
 **Larsen,B**

23: Dallas

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

D32

1957

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♞c3 c5 4.e3 ♞f6 5.♞f3 ♞c6 6.cxd5 exd5 7.♟b5

QUESTION: In such potential isolani/hanging pawn positions, is it better to get aggressive with Bb5, or should White play it safe with Be2, covering against Black's potential ...Bg4 pin? ANSWER: It depends on the individual isolani position. In this case, Bb5 is fully justified since White is the side with the potential isolani or hanging pawns, and he can get away with a lot more with the extra tempo.

[On the other hand, if you remember,

we saw Larsen win with **7.♟e2** back in Game 15.]

7...a6!? The nuclear option. Black invests a tempo to immediately resolve the pin.

[The normal (and safer) line is

7...♟d6 8.0-0 0-0 9.dxc5 ♟xc5 10.b3 ♟g4 11.♟b2 a6 12.♟xc6 bxc6 , which theory regards as dynamically equal, although White's position is perhaps easier to play. Ma.Carlsen-T.Radjabov, Stavanger 2013, continued 13.♞c1 ♟a7 14.♞e2 ♞d6 (White is unafraid of 14...♟xf3 15.gxf3 , since his king is quite safe and he may later benefit from the opening of the g-file) 15.♟e5 ♞e7 16.♞ed4! ♟xf3?! (16...c5 17.♞c6 ♞e6 would have been more active) 17.♞xf3 ♞fc8 18.♞d3 a5 19.♟xf6 (every exchange helps White because of his sounder structure) ♞xf6 20.♞c2 ♞d8 21.♞fc1 c5 22.e4 ♞g6 23.♞e1 dxe4 24.♞xe4 ♞xe4 25.♞xe4 ♞d1+ 26.♞e1 ♞xe1+ 27.♞xe1 ♞d8 28.♞f1 , when Black faced a difficult endgame, with the inferior minor piece, against the greatest technical player of his generation.]

8.♟xc6+ bxc6 9.0-0 ♟d6 10.dxc5 ♟xc5 11.e4!? QUESTION: Is Evans following principle or violating it?

ANSWER: One of each! White follows the principle: Create confrontation when leading in development, while violating: Don't open the game if the opponent owns the bishop pair.

0-0

[Eric Brøndum writes: "Of course not **11...♞xe4** " and gives the move a question mark, but it may be okay: 12.♞xe4 dxe4 13.♞xd8+ ♞xd8 14.♞g5 and now ♞e7 (rather than 14...♞e8? 15.♞xf7+ ♞c7 16.♟f4+]

♠b7 17.♖ac1 ♕f8 18.♗fd1
and White is clearly better, B.Adhiban-
S.Shyam, Indian Championship, New
Delhi 2010) 15.♘xe4 ♕d4 16.♖e1
♕e6 looks fine for Black.]

12.♙g5 ♕e7

[Better than 12...h6 13.♙xf6! (not
13.♙h4?! g5! 14.♙g3 dxe4 15.♘e5
♗xd1 16.♗axd1 ♕e6 17.♘xc6 ♗ac8
18.♘d4 ♕c4 and Black's bishop pair
offers him an edge) 13...♗xf6
14.exd5 ♖d8 15.♘e4 ♗e7 16.♘xc5
♗xc5 17.♖c1 ♗xd5 18.♗xd5 ♖xd5!
(18...cxd5?! 19.♘d4 would be
another tough ending for Black, since
he has landed in a classical good
knight versus bad bishop scenario)
19.♖xc6 ♕b7 20.♖c2 ♖ad8
, when Black may have enough
activity to hold the draw, but I would
still rather be the pawn up.]

13.♘d4 ♗d6! A casual outward
manner can be the perfect disguise for
one's craftiness.

[Larsen allows a mini-combination,
not liking the line 13...♕d7 14.exd5
♘xd5 15.♕xe7 ♗xe7 16.♘xd5 cxd5
, which once again gives White a
good knight versus a so-so bishop.]

14.e5 This isn't as strong as it looks;

[but if 14.exd5 , then ♘g4! 15.♘f3
♕xg5 16.♘e4 ♗xd5 17.♘exg5 h6
and Black has no problems at all.]

14...♗xe5 15.♘xc6 ♗xg5 16.♘xe7+
♕h8 17.♘xc8!? White is still okay
after this move, but it doesn't make
much sense to me. Why eliminate the
opponent's potentially problem piece?

[Then again, 17.♘c6 , intending to
blockade with Nd4 next, is well met
by ♕h3 (or even 17...d4!? 18.♘xd4
♕b7) 18.♗f3 ♕d7 19.♘d4 ♗d2 .]

[Perhaps White should just take the d-
pawn at once with 17.♘cxd5
, since the piece can be saved after

♖d8 (or 17...♕b7 18.f4! ♗h6
19.♘e3) 18.f4! ♗h6 19.♗e1 ♘xd5
20.♘xd5 ♕b7 (not 20...♖xd5??
21.♗e8#) 21.♘c3 , although Black's
activity clearly compensates for the
missing pawn.]

17...♗axc8 The position remains
roughly even. Black's isolani is more a
strength than a weakness, since it
remains unblocked.

QUESTION: Which rook is the correct
recapture for Black?

ANSWER: I like the way Larsen played,
since his f8-rook was slated for d8,
following the principle: Rooks belong
behind passed pawns.

18.♗d3 Attacking a6. ♖fd8!

Errm, I said "Attacking a6"! Rather
than try and defend it, Larsen offers it
up. In exchange his d-pawn surges,
disrupting White's position more and
more the deeper it digs down the d-file.
Larsen's mind wasn't simply just some
cold, mechanical calculating device.
Like Lasker before him, Larsen always
injected the human factor in his
decisions. In this case he read Evans
correctly, and probably realized the
self-proclaimed materialist couldn't
resist the a6-pawn.

19.♗xa6?! The stars look misaligned
and White's queen never moves for the
rest of the game! It's a terrible feeling
when, out on a walk three miles from
your house, you feel a fat raindrop plop
down on your head, and you realize
that your fate is to be soaked to the
bone by the time you reach home.

Larry Evans, the first GM I ever played,
was a notorious pawn grabber, firmly in
the Lasker/Korchnoi/Fischer "a-pawn-
is-worth-a-little-trouble" camp. But this
time the reach of his ambition may
outstrip the reality of the position.
Black gets a ferocious initiative for a

relatively meaningless pawn.

QUESTION: Why meaningless?

ANSWER: Taking on a6 gives White two connected passed pawns, but they never have time to advance even one square! In this case dynamic factors clearly supersede static indicators.

[It was much wiser was to decline the pawn with **19.♖ad1** d4 20.♞fe1 h6 (most certainly not 20...dxc3?? 21.♞xd8+ ♞xd8 22.♞xd8+ ♟g8 23.♞xg8+ ♜xg8 24.♞e8# Mate!) 21.♞e2 ♞c6 22.♞g3 , when the game remains approximately even.]

19...d4 20.♞e2 ♞c2 Invading the seventh rank.

[This looks stronger than **20...d3** 21.♞c3 ♞b8 22.♞ab1 d2 23.♞fd1 ♞f5 , although Black holds an edge here too.]

21.♖ad1 ♞e5 22.♞g3

[The Danish magazine Skakbladet recommended **22.♞c1??** , when ♞g4! 23.g3 ♞h5 24.h4 ♞xf2! (overload – this is the move the annotator must have missed) 25.♞xd4 ♞h3+ 26.♜h1 ♞e8 gives Black a crushing attack. In the pre-computer era, annotators would sometimes stab out crazy suggestions. One time in my chess column for The San Diego Union-Tribune and Copley News Service, I suggested a move for either Karpov or Kasparov in their first World Championship match which allowed a mate in three moves! To my humiliation, the move appeared in approximately 300 newspapers. I got a lot of mail from readers the following week!]

22...h5!? A typical Larsonian decision, preferring initiative over material,

[and rejecting the obvious **22...♞xb2** 23.♞c4 ♜g8 24.a4 . Larsen's pawn

move creates luft for his own king, while White must now worry about ... h5-h4-h3 disruptions.]

23.♞fe1 ♞d5 24.♞e2??

When a problem of overwhelming proportions enters our life, the worst thing we can do is to ignore it.

[White might yet have defended:

24.♞d3 (returning the pawn in order to simplify) ♞xb2 25.♞f5 ♞c5 (or 25...♞xa2 26.♞xd4) 26.♞xd4 ♞g4 27.♞f5! ♞xf5 28.♞xf5 ♞xd1 29.♞xd1 ♞xf2 30.h3 ♞xf5 31.hxg4 hxg4 32.♞f1! ♞a5 33.♞xf7 ♞xa2 34.♜h2 with a certain draw.]

[24.♞b6! (protecting b2, pressing d4 and indirectly covering f2, all key squares from White's perspective) d3 25.♞f1 ♞g4 26.♞d2 and although Black still has the initiative, we sense a withdrawal of the previous menace which faced White.]

24...d3! Suddenly, White has no good response. **25.♞e3** EXERCISE

(combination alert): Black's domination glares malevolently at White's king, the way a wild animal displays bared teeth to a startled hiker. Our instincts tell us there must be a combination here for Black and indeed there is. Where?

[**25.♞xc2** dxc2 26.♞f1 (or 26.♞xd5 c1♞+) 26...♞d1 27.♞c4 ♞b1 , followed by ...Rd1, is game over.]

[**25.♞ed2** ♞xd2 26.♞xd2 h4 27.♞f1 ♞e4 28.♞e3 (or 28.♞d1 ♞d4 29.♞e3 ♞xf2!) 28...♞d4 29.♞d1 ♞xf2! 30.♜xf2 ♞f4+ 31.♜g1 ♞xe3+ 32.♜h1 d2 33.♞f1 ♞c8 and there is no defence to the back rank pile-up.]

ANSWER: Annihilation of the defensive barrier/Knight fork.

25...♞xf2! Separate ideas mesh and intertwine into perfect inseparability.

26.♞e4! This desperate attempt to confuse the issue is White's best

practical chance;

[whereas **26.♔xf2** (the king jumps about and prances painfully, as if barefoot on a bed of glowing hot coals) ♖g4+ (the fork is crushing) 27.♔g1 ♖xe3 28.♞d2 ♞c5! 29.♞xd3 ♖d1+ forces mate. The knight, having inflicted its damage, spirals down the board.]

26...♖xe4? Larsen goes wrong, spoiling his conception somewhat.

[The correct knight move was still **26...♖g4!**, when 27.♞dxd3 (or 27.♞xd3 ♞xg2+! 28.♔xg2 ♖xe3+ 29.♞xe3 ♞xd1 etc) 27...♞xb2! 28.♞xd5 ♞b1+ 29.♞f1 ♞xf1+ 30.♔xf1 ♖xe3+ leaves Black with a decisive material advantage.]

27.♞exd3? Returning the favour with a case of the wrong rook.

EXERCISE (combination alert): Evans had counted on this trick, but Larsen had envisaged his coming shot. Black to play and force mate.

[After **27.♞dxd3!** ♞g5 (or 27...♞xg2+ 28.♔xg2 ♞g5+ 29.♞g3 ♖xg3 30.♞xd8+ ♞xd8 31.hxg3) 28.♞xd8+ ♞xd8 29.♞xe4 ♞xb2 , White could have survived.]

ANSWER: Clearance/Attraction.

27...♞f1+!! What a picturesque shot! The rook views White's sickly king the way a veterinarian inspects a sick cow, which needs to be put down to end its suffering.

28.♞xf1

[If **28.♔xf1**, then ♞f5+ (White's king isn't dying quickly enough for the black queen's purposes, so she poisons him to expedite matters)

A) after 29.♞f3 ♞xd1+ 30.♔e2 , the line-clearing shot ♖c3+! ends the game: 31.bxc3 (or 31.♞xc3 ♞f1+ 32.♔e3 ♞xa6 and wins) 31...♞c2+ 32.♔e3

♞d2+ 33.♔e4 ♞e1+ 34.♔f5 ♞d5+ 35.♔f4 ♞e5#;

B) 29.♔g1 ♞c5+! forces mate, since 30.♞d4 (White's rook nervously licks his lips upon entering the black queen's abode of sin) ♞xd4! 31.♞a8+ (some mysteries are best left unsolved, since solving them involves facing a truth we may not care to see) ♞d8+ is check, and White's shocked queen collapses dizzily in a faint.]

28...♞c5+ "We all die sooner or later," lectures Black's queen to White's king, adding, "the only difference is yours will arrive sooner."

[And **28...♞c5+** 29.♔h1 (White's king plods along with the enthusiasm of a convicted murderer on his final walk to the execution chamber, where lethal injection awaits) ♖f2+ 30.♔g1 (30.♞xf2 ♞c1+ forces mate on the back rank) 30...♖h3+ 31.♔h1 ♞g1+ 32.♞xg1 ♖f2# is the famous old smothered mate.

Do you get the feeling that Larsen could play in great romantic style, like Alekhine or Spielmann, but simply chose not to in most of his games?]

0-1

32

□ Ivkov,B

■ Larsen,B

24: Beverwijk

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

B77

1964

1.e4 c5 2.♖f3 ♖c6 3.d4 cxd4

4.♖xd4 g6 Larsen returns to his favourite Accelerated Dragon, while declaring his aversion to popular theoretical lines: "I would play the

Dragon Variation much more if it hadn't been analysed so thoroughly in recent years!"

5.♘c3 ♕g7 6.♗e3 ♘f6 7.♗c4

An aggressive set-up.

[Alternatively, White can play the quieter 7.♗e2]

[or 7.♘xc6 bxc6 8.e5 ; for example, ♘g8 (8...♘d5!? 9.♘xd5 cxd5

10.♖xd5 ♖b8 is also played, where Black gets open file pressure for the pawn) 9.f4 f6 (in such crucial

positions, if we fail to memorize we risk getting swallowed alive by a booked-up opponent) 10.♗d4 ♖a5

11.♖d2 fxe5 12.fxe5 c5

(12...♗xe5?! is met by 13.♖g5! d6

14.♗xe5 ♖xe5+ 15.♖xe5 dxe5

16.♗e2 , when White's vastly superior structure and lead in development

more than make up for Black's not-so-valuable extra e-pawn, A.Sitnikov-

T.Zinovjev, Ukrainian Team

Championship 2011) 13.♗e3 ♗xe5

14.♗c4 ♘f6 15.0-0 ♗a6 16.♗xa6

♖xa6 17.♗xc5 was G.Kasparov-V.

Ivanchuk, Prague (rapid) 2002.

White regained his lost pawn but stands worse after ♖c4 , since Black has the stronger centre and can apply pressure later down the open b- and c-files.]

7...d6!?

[This move order allows White to transpose to pure Dragon lines with opposite wings castling, which 7...0-0 prevents, since 8.f3?! is met by ♖b6!

9.♗b3 ♘xe4! (or 9...♘g4!

, both of which are at least equal for Black.)]

8.f3 Ivkov accepts the challenge and enters a Yugoslav Dragon – or so he thinks. ♘d7!? Larsen tosses in a bizarre move to complicate.

QUESTION: What is the idea behind

the knight move, besides just being weird?

ANSWER: Larsen's idea is that he stalls castling, keeping White guessing where his king will reside, an idea common to both the Pirc and Modern Defences today.

[Instead, 8...0-0 9.♖d2 would reach the main lines of the Yugoslav Dragon, where theory often begins at move twenty, though ♘d7!? 10.0-0-0 ♘b6 11.♗b3 ♘a5 12.♖d3 would actually transpose to the game.]

[QUESTION: Why can't Black play for Accelerated Dragon tricks with 8...♖b6 - ?

ANSWER: Your move is possible but then ...d7-d6 is in essence a wasted tempo. White can sac a pawn with 9.♘f5 ♖xb2 10.♘xg7+ ♗f8 11.♘d5 ♘xd5 12.♗xd5 ♗xg7 13.0-0 ♖c3 14.♖c1 h5 15.♖b1 , when his unopposed dark-squared bishop and lead in development offer excellent attacking chances for the pawn.]

9.♗b3

[Against the immediate 9.♖d2 , Larsen's idea was h5!? , which also features in some Dragodorf variations. Then 10.0-0-0 was seen in Ra. Zimmermann-P.Kirschner, German League 1995, and at this point Black can try ♘b6 11.♗b3 ♘a5 12.♖d3 ♗d7 13.♗b1 ♖c8 , intending to transfer one of the knights to c4 with approximately even chances. I would avoid castling long as White and switch plans, castling kingside, followed by f3-f4.]

[Larsen himself suggested 9.♗b5!? as best, which he intended to meet by ♘db8!? , but that would be a completely different game.]

9...♘b6 10.♖d2!? This loses a tempo

after Larsen's next move.

QUESTION: True, but what do you suggest in its place?

[ANSWER: How about castling kingside, since Black lacks an f6-knight as a defender. For example, **10.0-0** 0-0 11.f4 ♖a5 12.♖d3 and White may profit on the kingside by the fact that Black is short one defender, his f6-knight.]

10...♖a5! How annoying. White must waste a move to defend against ...Nc4.

11.♖d3 0-0 **12.0-0-0** The text transposes to the more well-known Dragon line with 9...Nd7!?, indicated in the note to Black's 8th move.

[The direct **12.h4** h5 13.g4!? appears quite dangerous, but the computers insist that Black is okay after hxg4 14.h5!? ♖xb3 15.axb3 gxf3 16.♖xf3 ♖g4 17.h6 ♖f6 18.♖d4 ♖d7 19.♖d5 a6 20.0-0-0 ♖c8 .]

12...♖xb3+!

[Black's attack looks quicker here than in the alternative plan where he posts a knight on c4: **12...♖d7** 13.h4 ♖c8 14.h5 ♖bc4 15.hxg6 fxg6 , and now I prefer White's chances after 16.♖f2!? e6 17.♔b1 .]

13.axb3 a5! **14.♖a4!?** Ivkov gets inextricably drawn into a queenside fight of his own choosing. This was a new move at the time, which Larsen called "probably the correct continuation". I disagree and think the move is too positional for an opposite wings Dragon.

[White should avoid the waste of time and begin his own assault with **14.h4** a4 15.h5 axb3 16.♖xb3 ♖e6 (or **16...♖a4** 17.hxg6 hxg6 18.♖xa4 ♖xa4 19.♖h6 ♖e6 20.♖xg7 ♔xg7 21.♖c3+ f6 22.♖d4 with approximately even chances.)

17.hxg6 fxg6 18.♖d4 ♖xb3 19.cxb3 ♖xd4 20.♖xd4 with approximately even chances, H.Glauser-V.Milvydas, correspondence 1963.]

14...♖xa4 **15.bxa4** ♖d7 **16.♖b5** ♖c8 **17.h4** This seems a bit slow now.

[I would have slid my king off the c-file with **17.♔b1** .]

17...♖xb5

[Another option was **17...h5!?** , when 18.g4!? hxg4 19.h5 gxf3 20.hxg6 ♖xb5 21.gxf7+ ♖xf7 22.axb5 ♖c7 23.e5! ♖c4! 24.♖g6 f2 25.♖df1 ♖a2 26.♖xf2! ♖a1+ 27.♔d2 ♖xf2+ 28.♖xf2 ♖xc2+! 29.♔xc2 ♖xh1 30.♖e6+ ends in a draw.]

18.♖xb5 ♖c6! Larsen offers the b7-pawn, which Ivkov declines. **19.c4?!** When attending a San Diego State University football or basketball game, my wife and son howl like offended wolves when they disagree with a ref's call. I feel the same way about Ivkov's last move, which treats an ultra-sharp position a bit too positionally. This move is terribly risky to his king.

[White's best option is to take up the offer, despite Larsen's claim of "an overwhelming attack": **19.♖xb7** ♖c7 20.♖b3 ♖d7! (or **20...♖b8!** 21.♖xb8 ♖xb8 22.♖d4 ♖c4 23.♖xg7 ♔xg7 and Black regains the pawn with a shade better ending) 21.♖d5 ♖fc8 22.♖b5 ♖xc2+ 23.♖xc2 ♖xc2+ 24.♔xc2 f5 25.exf5 gxf5 and Houdini says dead even, though I would favour Black's chances in practice, since the queen has access to tempting targets, including White's king.]

19...♖c7 **20.b3** Black seems to be at an impasse. His attack looks dead ended, while White's is just beginning on the other side of the board. The truth is that Black's attack can be

turned on with the right switch.

EXERCISE (planning): Roiling underneath the placid exterior are dark plans to unleash forces of anarchy upon White's universe. How did Larsen take over the initiative?

ANSWER: Strategic exchange sac for domination of the dark squares. Such sacs are almost routine today in Dragons and King's Indians, but at the time the game was played, only Larsen and Petrosian – both Nimzowitsch disciples – dabbled with them.

♠c5!! **QUESTION:** How do we calculate the ramifications of such a sac?

ANSWER: We don't! Such abstract positions require imagination even more than analytical persistence. An abstraction sometimes defies logic and wins the argument. To understand a position, one must first learn to describe it schematically, without analytical variations which only come later. Larsen utilizes a simple model to deal with a complex problem. With such instinctual leaps of faith, we basically agree to live in the chaotic present while trusting that the uncertain future will somehow take care of itself.

21.♠xc5 dxc5 22.♠d5?! Preventing ... Qe5 but at too high a cost. When a general calls up reserves, it is often a sign that the battle is going badly.

[White should offer the exchange right back and settle for **22.♠d2 ♠h6** (after **22... ♞e5 23.♠hd1** , the queen checks are only enough for perpetual check) **23.♠hd1 ♠d8 24.♠c2 ♠xd2+ 25.♠xd2 ♠xd2 26.♠xd2** and White should draw.]

22...e6? This is unnecessary.

[Black could seize control with **22... ♞g3!** , when White is in deep

trouble, since he drops pawns left and right; for example, after **23.♠hd1 ♞xg2 24.♠1d3 ♞f1+ 25.♠c2 ♠h6 26.♠d1 ♞e2+ 27.♠b1 ♠g7 .**]

23.♞xc5 ♞g3 24.♠g5 ♞f4+

[Of course Larsen isn't interested in trying to defend a pawn down ending after **24... ♠h6?!** **25.♠c2 ♠xg5 26.♞xg5 ♞f2+ 27.♞d2 .**]

25.♠c2 f5! Larsen opens lines while shackling the awkward g5-rook, excluding it from the discussion. The machines count the pieces and like White here, but for a human it is pretty tough to handle over the board.

26.exf5 exf5 27.♠d1

[**27. ♞xa5!** was stronger for several reasons: it picks off a pawn, cuts off ...Rd8, and reduces Black's dark square power.]

27...b6! A tricky sideswipe in Ivkov's time trouble;

[whereas the immediate **27... ♞xh4?!** would make things easy for him: **28. ♞e3! ♠f6 29.f4 ♠xg5 30.fxg5 ♞e4+** (otherwise the black king is in danger) **31. ♞xe4 fxe4 32.♠d5!** and White takes the initiative in the ending.]

28. ♞e7

[Taking the b-pawn leads to a draw after **28. ♞xb6 ♞e5! 29.♠d8 ♠f6 30.♠xf8+ ♠xf8 31.♠d1 ♞a1+ 32.♠c2 ♞b2+ etc.**]

28... ♞xh4 The correct moment to capture, endangering the g-rook by severing one of its lifelines. **29.♠d7??** The missile flies past its intended target and blows to smithereens an adjacent structure, worthless to White's war effort. It bodes ill for us when we fail to understand a position. Even worse is when we are convinced we understand and then apply a false solution. Ambition holds sway and gets

the better of White's judgment.

EXERCISE (combination alert): With his last move Ivkov overpresses, going for the full point. How did Larsen punish it?

[If White plays as before with **29.♖e3** ♗f6 30.f4 ♗xg5 31.fxg5 ♖e4+ 32.♖xe4 fxe4 , the extra move ...b7-b6 proves very useful for Black, who no longer has any problems in the endgame, whereas White still has his time trouble to contend with.]

[Ivkov should probably have settled for the draw by repetition after **29.♞d8** ♖f2+ 30.♞d2 ♖h4 31.♞d8 , but it's not easy to be so cool-headed in a hurry.]

ANSWER: Trapped piece. White's rook has no place to hide and can no longer be defended.

29...♗f6! 30.♖e6+ ♔h8 31.♖d6

This move, counterattacking f6 and f8, appears to save the day, but Black isn't obliged to defend. ♖f2+

Unfortunately, the white king can't help straying onto the dark squares, allowing Black to take the rook with check – or worse. **32.♔d1 ♖f1+**

33.♔c2 ♖e2+ 34.♔c1

[Not **34.♔b1?** ♖b2#]

[while **34.♖d2** ♖xd2+ 35.♞xd2 ♗xg5 leaves White a piece down in the ending. After the text move, Black could just take the rook as intended, but there's no harm in trying for more.]

34...♖b2+ The queenside, once part of White's great empire, is now virtually an autonomous region, out of the empire's ruling authority. **35.♔d1**

♖b1+ The queen counts the days until her meeting with her hated enemy, like a five-year-old, the week before her birthday. **36.♔e2** Stepping back to the e-file has fatal consequences.

[If instead **36.♔d2** , Larsen intended to take the rook after all; alternatively, he could go another round with ♖b2+ 37.♔d1 ♖a1+! 38.♔c2 ♖c3+ 39.♔d1 ♞e8 , bringing the rook into the attack, and if 40.♖d2 then ♖a1+ 41.♔c2 ♖b2+ 42.♔d1 ♖b1+! 43.♖c1 ♞e1+ etc.]

36...♞e8+ 37.♔f2 ♖e1# . White's queen sighs forlornly at her bumbling, halfwit husband on f2, thinking, "At least his heart was in the right place."

0-1

33

A65

♐ **Bronstein,D**

♜ **Larsen,B**

25: Belgrade

1964

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 d6

Slightly unusual, even for the time.

[**3...e6** is the modern Benoni continuation, but Larsen nearly always preferred to delay ...e7-e6 (until move seven here) or renounce it altogether in favour of ...e7-e5, as in the Czech Benoni (see Game 27).]

4.♘c3 g6 5.e4 ♗g7 6.f3

The Sämisch Benoni.

[Nowadays, top GMs tend to favour set-ups with h2-h3. For example: **6.h3** 0-0 7.♘f3 e6 8.♗d3 exd5 9.exd5 an annoying recapture which takes most of the fun out of Black's Benoni: White simply grabs space without altering the pawn symmetry; (more common is 9.cxd5 , when Black can try b5!? 10.♗xb5 ♘xe4 11.♘xe4 ♖a5+ 12.♘fd2 ♖xb5 13.♘xd6 ♖a6 14.♘2c4 ♘d7 15.0-0 ♘b6 16.♘xb6 ♖xb6 17.♘xc8 ♞axc8 and it isn't so easy for White to make use of his extra

pawn, since he lags in development and is likely to drop d5) 9...♖e8+ 10.♙e3 ♖xe3+?! this looks borderline unsound since White's extra exchange is worth more than Black's domination of the dark squares; (instead, White stands slightly better after 10...♙h6! 11.0-0 ♙xe3 12.fxe3 , when Black should decline the e3-pawn with ♗bd7) 11.fxe3 ♗e7 12.0-0 ♗bd7 13.♖d2 ♗e5 14.♗xe5 ♗xe5 15.♖f3 ♙d7 16.♖af1 ♖f8 17.♖f2 and White owns both extra material and the initiative, B.Gelfand-A.Morozevich, Moscow 2013.]

6...0-0 7.♙g5 QUESTION: Isn't e3 the normal square in the Sämisch? ANSWER: It is, but not in the Benoni version; here g5 is the preferred post, pre-pinning the f6-knight in advance of Black's inevitable ...e7-e6.

e6 [**7...h6** is met by 8.♙e3 and the coming Qd2 will gain a tempo by targeting h6.]

8.♖d2 exd5 9.cxd5 QUESTION: Why don't players recapture with the knight on d5, which creates a backward d6-pawn and reinforces the f6-pin? ANSWER: Mainly because the move leads to exchanges, which White, who owns more space, seeks to avoid – and he doesn't achieve what you suggest in any case.

[After **9.♗xd5** ♙e6 10.♗e2 ♙xd5 11.cxd5 ♗bd7 , Black has eliminated the pressure on f6, blocked the d-file, and has found a way to dump his problem light-squared bishop in the process.]

9...a6 10.a4 ♗a5 Planning to activate the queenside majority with ...b7-b5. **11.♖a3** Preventing Black's intention. ♗bd7 **12.♗ge2** This knight tends to be White's problem piece and gets in the

way on either c1 or g3.

[**12.♗h3** would be my choice, intending to park the knight on f2, where it supports both e4 and the g4-square, in case White later plays for f3-f4. For instance, c4!? 13.♗f2 (13.♙xc4?! isn't worth it: after ♗e5 14.♙e2 ♙xh3 15.gxh3 ♖ac8 , Black gets loads of play for the pawn) 13...♖c7 14.♙e2 ♖b8 15.0-0!? (15.a5 b5 16.axb6 ♗xb6 is less clear) 15...♖e8 16.♖c1 b5 17.axb5 axb5 18.b4! ♗e5 19.♙e3 and I prefer White a shade since Black lacks counterplay, C.Ionescu-K. Klundt, Urcuit 1989.]

12...♖e8 13.♗c1 QUESTION: This looks pretty clunky. Why not go to g3?

[ANSWER: Posting the knight to g3 does appear more harmonious. The trouble is Black often whips up counterplay with ...h7-h5, ...Nh7 and ...h5-h4, gaining time on the White's pieces. For example, after **13.♗g3** h5 14.♙e2 ♗h7 15.♙f4 ♗e5 16.0-0 h4 17.♗h1 f5 18.♗f2 , as in Bu Xiangzhi-Zhao Jun, Chinese Team Championship 2011, the knight has merely taken a circuitous route to f2, and he might as well have played 12 Nh3! as in the previous note.]

13...♗e5 Larsen is happy to provoke f3-f4, which weakens e4. **14.♙e2**

[**14.f4?** is premature: ♗ed7 15.♙d3 c4! 16.♙b1 ♗c5 17.♙xf6 (White must part with his dark squares to hang on to the e-pawn) ♙xf6 leaves Black with a strategically won position.]

14...h5

[Another option is **14...c4** 15.0-0 ♙d7 , as in M.Tal-M.Quinteros, Santiago del Estero (blitz match) 1987. Now if White tries 16.h3 , intending f3-f4 to trap the e5-knight,

Black can play h6! 17.♔e3 (17.♔xh6?! ♔xh6 18.♖xh6 runs into ♖b6+ 19.♔h2 ♖xb2) 17...g5 , preserving the e5-outpost at the cost of weakening his kingside pawns.]

15.0-0 ♔h7 With the idea of ...f7-f5, chipping away at White's centre. What's remarkable is that these strange-looking manoeuvres are now almost standard for Black, whereas Larsen was pretty much making it up himself at the time.

16.♔e3

[**16.♔h6** looks more logical, going after Black's most powerful piece. For example, f5 17.♔xg7 ♔xg7 18.exf5 ♔xf5 19.h3 h4 20.f4 ♔f7 , J.Tisdall-I.Rupf, London 1982, though even here Black stands no worse.]

16...f5 Black achieves dynamic equality with this thematic central break.

17.♔b3 ♖c7 18.♖e1 Clearing d2 for the now out-of-play b3-knight.

[**18.exf5** is often tossed in in such positions, but Black looks fine after ♔xf5 19.a5 ♔f7 20.♔f2 ♖e7 .]

18...fxe4 19.♔xe4

[**19.fxe4?! would** allows a black piece to perch eternally on e5.]

19...♔f5 20.♔bd2 ♔f7 Threatening b2. **21.♖b3!?** The rook looks awkward here.

[I would play **21.♖c1** .]

21...♔f6 Larsen fights for control of e4, White's stronghold. **22.♔xf6+ ♔xf6**

23.♔e4 Tactically possible since f6 hangs if Black chops on e4. **♔e5**

[There is no need to get involved in **23...♔xe4** 24.fxe4 ♔g7 25.♖g3 ♔e5 (or 25...♔h7 26.♖h3) 26.♔f4 ♔h7 27.♖h4 with threats to sac on h5, even if Black is probably fine after c4 28.♖h3 ♖d8! 29.♔g5 (or 29.♖xd8

♖axd8 30.g4 ♔d3!) 29...♖b6+ 30.♔h1 ♖f8! 31.♖e1 ♖f2! .]

24.a5 Hoping to create a target on b7.

♔xe4 25.fxe4 White gets the bishop pair and central space in exchange for a backward e-pawn and Black's grip on e5. The position remains in balance.

♖e7 26.♖d2 ♖ac8 27.♔f3 ♔f6

28.♖d1 ♖c7 This game, unlike a novel's plot, has a beginning, a middle, but apparently no conclusion. Neither side is willing to commit to anything radical and the players continue to sit on the position.

29.g3 ♔e5 30.♔e2 ♖f8 31.♔f4 ♔f7

32.♖c2 ♔d4+ 33.♔g2 ♔e5 34.h4

♖f7 35.♖a3 ♖e8 36.♖aa1 ♖e7

37.♖ae1 ♖d7 38.b3 Discouraging ...

c5-c4. The game is still even! **♔h7**

39.♖d2 ♔g4 40.♔d3 ♖c8 41.b4!?

The nature of ambition is that it can never be sated. The part of us which veers toward intellect tends to urge caution, while our emotional side begs us to take risks. Up until now, the shocking part of this game isn't its wizardry and magic from two of the most creative players in chess history. The shocking part is the apparent lack of magic. So Bronstein begins to itch for a fight and shatters the stasis, indicating that he isn't satisfied with a draw.

Objectively, I'm not convinced this is a good idea for White, since Black may benefit more from the opening of the queenside. It would be interesting to know whether 41 b4!? was the sealed move, enabling Bronstein (but not Larsen) to analyse this exclusively during the adjournment. If so, he didn't find anything.

♖cf8

[I prefer Black's position after

41...♖c7 ; for example, 42.♔b1 ♔e5

43.bxc5 ♖xc5 44.♖c1 ♖xc1 45.♖xc1
(or 45.♗xc1 b5! 46.axb6 ♗b5)
45...♗d8! , threatening 46.-- ♕xf4
(as well as 46...b5 , creating a
passed pawn) 47.gxf4 ♗xh4 .]

42.bxc5 ♕xc5 43.♕e2 ♜e5 44.♖a1
♜g4 45.♖ac1 ♕a7 46.♕f3 ♜g8

47.♗e2? EXERCISE (planning):

Bronstein's innocent-looking shuffle
was actually a provocation. A
seductive opportunity opens the door
for Black just a few inches but will
soon slam shut if he refuses to take
action. How did Larsen pounce?

ANSWER: Exchange sacrifice.

♖xf4! 48.gxf4 ♖xf4! Overextension,
like cancer, is a chess disease of
overproduction and unrestrained
growth, while its twin, inaction, kills the
patient by doing nothing about the
exhibiting symptoms. In the latter, the
patient basically refuses to go to the
hospital even while deathly ill. We get
the feeling that Bronstein was
becoming restless and began to
overextend, fearing to do nothing,
which may have been the most sound
strategy. Now Black stands better. For
the exchange Black receives:

1. A pawn.
 2. Domination of e5.
 3. A grip on the dark squares – a
systematic ill for White which can't be
fixed by implementation of a local
solution.
 4. Attacking chances against White's
now exposed king.
 5. White must deal with a bad bishop
which can't get a seat at the table.
- Conclusion: White is on the cusp of
overextension, if not already there.

[Bronstein probably expected
48...♜e3+ 49.♜g3 ♜xf1+ 50.♖xf1
♕d4 , regaining the lost material
with approximately even chances.

Instead, Larsen knocks over the next
dark square domino.]

49.♜g3? EXERCISE (combination
alert): Larsen reached a critical
junction – the Grand Central Station –
of his attack. How did he exploit
White's last move?

[White had to play 49.♖c3
, hoping to offload the bad bishop
with 50 Bxg4. After ♜e5 (or
49...♗g7 50.♕xg4 ♖xf1 51.♗xf1
♗xc3 52.♕e6+ etc) 50.♕xh5! ♖xf1
(or 50...♖xh4 51.♖g3!) 51.♜xf1
gxh5 52.♗xh5 ♗b5+! 53.♗e2 ♕c5
, White could still fight for a draw.]

[The immediate 49.♕xg4?? ♖xg4+
would be disastrous.]

ANSWER: Ignore the hanging rook by
transferring his bishop to e5.

49...♕d4! Attackers merge on e5 and
f4, welding the squares into a single
unit of force. The bishop erupts
volcanically, thrust into the forefront of
Black's attack, realizing that the game
hinges upon transfer to e5, in his
otherwise mundane life.

50.♗d2

[50.♜xf4?? is based on the
philosophy: If you encounter a
monster still in its infancy, you would
be wise to terminate its existence,
before it grows up and terminates
yours. Unfortunately, f4 proves to be
a toxic square, radioactive to White's
king: ♕e5+ 51.♜g5 ♗e7+ 52.♜xg6
♗f7+ 53.♜g5 ♕f4#. A mailed fist
comes crashing into the white king's
now broken jaw.]

50...♕e5 51.♗xf4 White's loudmouth
queen falls atypically quiet, too
shocked for words.

[Retreating the king again with
51.♜g2? would be met by ♜h2!
and if 52.♖f2 then ♖xf3 53.♖xf3
♗g4+ wins.]

51...♙xf4+ 52.♗xf4 ♘e5 53.♗g3

Who are we to judge a captain who shoves aside children and the elderly, to grab the final seat on the lifeboat, when his own ship is sinking?

In the aftermath, material is almost level with White's two rooks and bishop versus Black's queen, knight and pawn. The trouble is the difference in activity. Black's knight towers over White's embarrassed bishop, while the queen/knight combination, like Batman and Robin, make a formidable fighting team against White's nervous king.

EXERCISE (combination alert): Our ambition sits here while the goal is over there. How can we unite the two? What would you play here as Black?

[There is nothing better in any case; if **53.♙e2 ♖h3 54.♖h1 ♗g2 55.♖ce1 then ♗f2+ 56.♗g5 ♗g7** forces mate.]

ANSWER: Principles are sometimes overridden. Black trades a good piece for a bad one in order to pick off White's loose pawns.

53...♘xf3! White's lock isn't strong enough to keep out the intruder. This move doesn't create a new weakness in White's camp; rather, it unveils one which previously existed, yet remained hidden to the eye.

QUESTION: Wait a minute! You said "the queen/knight combination ... make a formidable fighting team", and now Larsen exchanges his powerful knight for the bad bishop. Why?

ANSWER: Larsen is above prejudice and swaps a powerful piece away for a not-so-great one, because this enables him to cash out and win.

54.♗xf3 ♖h3+ Black's queen engages in a Hunger Games strategy, striving to be the only one alive at the end. **55.♗e2 ♖xh4** Black achieves

connected kingside passers, which advance decisively down the board.

56.♗e3 ♖d8 Eyeing a5 for another pair of passed pawns. White's king is left to decant on e3 for a while. **57.e5?!**

Sometimes a deep understanding of underlying causes only serves to amplify the losing side's sense of hopelessness.

EXERCISE (combination alert): White's last move is an attempt to create counterplay with a passed d-pawn. How would you respond?

ANSWER: Double attack.

♗g5+ . "You would do well to turn to me for guidance," Black's queen suggests to White's king, who at this stage views the queen with the equivalent mistrust Winston Churchill accorded Hitler. White's hope filters through, the way the sun's rays sneak past the interstices of leaves in a tree, but after dropping his e-pawn there is no hope left.

0-1

34

D93



Larsen,B



Tal,M

26: Candidates (5th matchgame), Bled
[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.♙f4

I like this London-like byway too.

Maybe I'm biased due to my fundamentalist London System religious beliefs, but I think this is one of White's best ways to meet the Grünfeld.

♗g7 5.e3 I prefer to hold off on e2-e3, just in case I need to drop the f4-bishop back to d2.

[For instance, after **5.♘f3 0-0 6.♖c1 c5 7.dxc5 dxc4 8.♖xd8 ♖xd8 9.e3**

♠a6 10.c6 bxc6 11.♙xc4 ♘d5 12.♙e5 , White perhaps holds a microbe of an edge, since his superior structure outweighs Black's increased piece activity, C. Lakdawala-J.Bryant, San Diego (rapid) 2011 – or, more significantly, V.Korchnoi-L.Stein, USSR Championship, Yerevan 1962.]

5...c5 6.dxc5 QUESTION: Why does White rush to liquidate the centre? ANSWER: It costs Black time to regain the lost pawn – and his queen won't feel comfortable on c5 with White's rook staring at her from c1.

♙a5 7.♞c1 dxc4 Freedom generally comes with a cost. We must ask ourselves: Is it too high? This move may be a borderline "?! " and I don't believe Black equalizes, since White retains a nagging lead in development.

[I would go for **7...♞e4** 8.cxd5 ♙xc3 9.♙d2 ♙xa2 10.bxc3 ♙a5 11.♙c4 ♘d7 12.♘f3 ♙xc5 13.0-0 0-0 14.♙e5 ♙xe5 15.♘xe5 f6 , as in V.Kramnik-Ma.Carlsen, Nice (rapid) 2009, which continued 16.♞a1 ♙b6 17.d6+ ♙g7 18.dxe7 ♞e8 19.♘f3 ♞xe7 20.♞fb1 ♙c7 21.♘d4 ♘e4 22.♙d3 ♘c5 23.♙c2 ♘e4 , when Black's slightly superior structure and White's activity balance each other out.]

8.♙xc4 0-0 9.♘f3 ♘c6

[In an earlier game Tal equalized with **9...♙xc5** 10.♙e2?! (but 10.♙b3 ♘c6 11.0-0 would simply transpose to the main line) 10...♙g4 11.0-0 ♘c6 12.♙b3 ♘h5 13.♙c7 (if 13.♘d5 then ♘xf4!) 13...♙f5 14.♘d5 ♙xf3 15.♙xf3 ♙xf3 16.gxf3 e6 , I.Kan-M.Tal, USSR Team Championship 1954.]

[**9...♘bd7** 10.c6 bxc6 inflicts a touch of damage on Black's structure

by handing him two queenside isolanis.]

10.0-0 ♙xc5 Black regains the pawn but falls slightly behind in development – no small matter in an open position.

11.♙b3 ♙h5?! This doesn't appear to be a great spot for Black's queen, since Black lands in an inferior ending if she is swapped off after a future move with the f3-knight.

[Not now **11...♙g4?** due to 12.♘d5 ♙a5 13.♙c7! ♙a6 14.♙c4 b5 15.♘xf6+ ♙xf6 16.♙d5 ♙d7 17.♙xf7+ ♞xf7 18.♙xd7

with a decisive advantage for White; but h5 doesn't appear to be a great spot for the queen since she risks running out of squares, and Black lands in an inferior ending if the queens are swapped off after a future move with the f3-knight.]

[A better plan is **11...♙a5** 12.h3 ♙f5 13.♙e2 ♘e4 , though I personally prefer White after 14.♘d5 e5 15.♞xc6! bxc6 (or 15...exf4?! 16.♞c7 ♙e6 17.♘e7+ ♙h8 18.♞fc1) 16.♘e7+ ♙h8 17.♘xc6 ♙b6 18.♘cxe5 with two healthy pawns for the exchange, even if theory regards this position as equal.]

12.h3 Preventing ...Bg4 and giving White's f4-bishop a retreat square on h2. **e5!?** Such a move – morphine to us all, in that it may temporarily reduce pain by mimicking an initiative, yet fails to heal the cause – tends to be banged out instantaneously, since it gains a tempo, chasing the bishop to h2. On the downside, it weakens d5, d6 and even f6 and f7, since Black now lacks ... e7-e6 options.

[The alternative was **12...♞d8** 13.♙e2 e5 (I know this is weakening, but what else is there?) 14.♙h2

(the attempted refutation with 14.♔xf7+!? seems okay for Black after ♔xf7! 15.♖g5+ ♔f8 16.♖c4 ♖d7 17.g4 ♖h4! 18.♗e6+ ♔e8) 14...e4 15.♗d4 ♗xd4 16.♖xh5 ♗xh5 (if 16...♗f3+?! , as in D.Barlov-Z.Nikolic, Bor 1986, then 17.gxf3! ♗xh5 18.♗xe4 ♔xh3 19.♖c7! ♔xf1 20.♔xf1 with strong play for the exchange) 17.exd4 ♔xd4 18.♗xe4 and Black is under pressure, despite his temporary extra pawn; again Rc7 is in the air. All the same, this may be better than Tal's choice.]

13.♔h2 ♖d8 Gaining a tempo but leaving f7 weak. The trouble is I don't see another useful move. **14.♗d2!**

[**14.♖e2** would transpose to the note with 12...Rd8 above.]

14...♖h6! As already indicated, and as we'll see in the game, exchanging queens leads to a bad endgame for Black, who has severe difficulties defending his e-pawn.

[QUESTION: Why did Tal play his queen into the corner when he had **14...♖g5** - ?

ANSWER: White responds with the shocking unpin 15.♖f3! intending Nde4

A) , or 15...♔f5 16.♖fd1 with advantage;

B) , since 15...♖xd2? runs into 16.♗e4! ♔g4 (the only move; the knight on e4 is immune due to the mate threat on f7) 17.♗xg5 ♔xf3 18.♗xf3 ♖xb2 19.♗xe5 ♗xe5 20.♔xe5 ♖d2 21.♔xf6 ♔xf6 22.♖c7 with a winning endgame. (22.--);

C) 15...--]

15.♖e2 ♔f5 Threatening a cheapo on d3. **16.♖fd1 ♔d3 17.♖f3**

White's queen isn't really inconvenienced. Now Nde4 is in the air

again. **♖h4 18.♔g3 ♖h5?!**

A leap of faith, by its very nature, is a venture fraught with peril. Black is in deep trouble in the ending.

[He should try and hang on with **18...♖b4** 19.a3 ♖e7 20.♔h4 e4 , as in N.Ioseliani-Kanying Qin, Women's Interzonal, Subotica 1991. Black remains under pressure after 21.♖g3! ♖e8 22.♔g5 , but this is better than what Tal achieved in the game.]

19.♖xh5 ♗xh5 20.♔h2 ♗f6

EXERCISE (combination alert): How did Larsen exploit his lead in development?

21.♗f3! ANSWER: Target both e5 and f7. The elusive knight remains just out of reach of his would-be assailants.

e4? The fight or flight mechanism is that primitive vestige within us all. A systematic ill can't be fixed by the implementation of a local solution. Once this plan is set into effect, there is no way to disassociate from its effects. Tal makes matters worse by trying to hang on to all his material which only inflames the original complaint.

[He was actually better off handing over a pawn with **21...♔a6** 22.♗xe5 ♗xe5 23.♔xe5 ♖ac8 .]

22.♗g5 Both dark and light squares leak through multiple pores in Black's position, the way sap seeps through the limbs of a tree. **♖f8**

[The point of Larsen's play is seen in the line **22...♖d7** 23.♗cxe4! ♔xe4 24.♖xd7 (deflection) ♗xd7 25.♔xf7+ ♔f8 26.♖xc6! (more and more pieces of the puzzle begin to fit) ♔f6 (not 26...♔xc6?? 27.♔d6# ; the bishop is outsourced to assassinate Black's king) 27.♖c7 ♔xg5 28.♔e6! , regaining the piece with two extra

pawns, since if Black attempts to hang on to his knight, he gets mated after ♖b6?? 29.♙d6+ ♜e8 30.♞g7! followed by 31 Rg8.]

23.♙d6 Black's position is a Petri dish of bacterial growth and weak squares. The f7-weakness is merely a symptom of a more deep-seated overall dysfunction.

Point number two: This move costs Tal a full exchange in the ending. I mentioned in Larsen's game against Geller (see Game 2) that we shouldn't stereotype great players. Who would have believed that Tal, unchallenged overlord of open positions, could be so badly outplayed in such a position by Larsen the strategic contortionist?

h6 24.♙xf8 ♞xf8 QUESTION: You said White would pick up the exchange, but his g5-knight is trapped and Larsen must return material after 25 Nxf7, correct?

ANSWER: Incorrect. In fact, let's turn this into an exercise:

EXERCISE (combination alert): White to play and not lose material.

ANSWER: Overload. Black's e-pawn can't simultaneously take White's f3-knight and protect the d3-bishop. If two sides fight over a simple resource, King Solomon's solution never works out well, since both demand 100% of the baby.

25.♖f3! "The undisciplined thrusts of a beginning fencer fail to fluster a master of the rapier, who merely dances aside with a bemused tolerance," declares the cocky knight. Caissa can be a cruel and unjust goddess, inflicting pain capriciously without supplying her victims alternative compensation to sooth our hurt. When we walk into the fangs of such a geometric anomaly, it feels as if fate has just given us the

finger.

♞e8

[**25...exf3** 26.♞xd3 only helps White.]

26.♖e1 Black's position seems to get more unmanageable with each passing move. **♙a6**

[**26...♖e5?!** is met by the tricky 27.f4! , playing on the same overload theme.]

27.♖a4! ♙b5 28.♖c5 ♖a5

[**28...b6??** walks into 29.♖b7 (threatening Nd6) ♙f8 30.a4 ♙e2 31.♞d2 , winning more material.]

29.♙a4! Principle: If your opponent has the bishop pair, remove one of them if a swap is possible. **♙xa4 30.♖xa4 ♞e7** Black's pieces, rodents fearful of the predator above ground, continue to dig in, burrowing deeper into their hole.

[Tal couldn't stomach a white rook planting itself on c7, and **30...♖c6** fails to 31.♖c5 ♞e7 32.♖xb7! , undermining and invading Black's position.]

31.♞c8+ ♜h7 32.♖c5 ♖c4 33.b3

♖b6 34.♞b8 Rounding up the b7-pawn. **♞c7 35.b4 ♖fd5 36.a3 ♖c3 37.♞dd8 ♖c4 38.♞xb7 ♞xb7**

39.♖xb7 ♖xa3 If you offer cream to a stray cat, chances are she will return when she gets hungry again. **40.♞d7 ♙f8**

[**40...♜g8** 41.♖d6 ♙f8 (or 41...f5 42.♞xa7) 42.♖xf7 ♖cb5 43.f3 ♙xb4 44.♖xh6+ ♜f8 45.♜f2 is equally hopeless for Black.]

41.♞xf7+ ♜g8 42.♞f6 ♜g7 43.♞a6 ♙xb4 44.♜f1!

[Avoiding the trap **44.♞xa7??** ♖cb5 .]

44...♖ab5 45.♖c2 ♙e7 46.♖d4

Heading for c6. **♖xd4 47.exd4 ♖b5**

48.♞a4 ♜f6 49.♖c5 ♜f5 EXERCISE (combination alert): Black's position is

a candle flame reaching the end of its wick. How did Larsen pick off Black's a7-pawn, without dropping his own d4-pawn?

ANSWER: Discovered attack. When I played Monopoly as a kid, I realized that the game is over when one player owns all the money.

50. ♖a5! My terrier, Kahless, gives the impression that he is master of the realm and that I am only allowed to live with him due to his generous and compassionate nature. Larsen's rook seems to possess Kahless-like forbearance concerning Black's minor pieces.

[White wins the a7-pawn for free, since **50. ♖a5!** ♖xd4? would drop the knight to 51. ♖b3+ .]

1-0

35

□ Flohr, S

■ Larsen, B

27: Copenhagen

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

A56

1966

1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 e5

The Czech Benoni, which has a reputation for passivity, though not the way Larsen handled it! **4. ♖c3 d6 5.e4 g6** QUESTION: Doesn't Black usually develop the bishop to e7 here, hoping to swap it off on g5 later on?

ANSWER: Correct.

[**5... ♗e7** is far more common, when Black conducts complex reorganizing manoeuvres behind the solid centre, such as (after ...0-0) ... Ne8, ...g7-g6 (...Bg5 if allowed), ... Ng7 and ...f7-f5, sometimes with ... Nb8-d7-f6, ...Kh8 and ...Ng8 thrown in as well.

However, Larsen nearly always opted

for 5...g6 (as did Petrosian), which leads to a King's Indian type position, albeit one where Black is already committed to both ...e7-e5 and ...c7-c5.]

6. ♗d3 White logically gears his forces against Black's thematic ...f7-f5-break. **♗g7**

[Petrosian was capable of yet more abstruse shufflings: **6... ♖a6!?**

(this move doesn't fit well with Black's structure) **7. ♖ge2 ♖b4!?**

8. ♗b1 ♗g7 9.h3 ♗d7 10. ♗e3 0-0 11. ♖d2 ♖a6!? **12. ♗d3 ♖b4 13. ♗b1 ♖a6 14.a3 ♖c7 15. ♗d3 ♖b8 16.b4 b6 17.g4 h5! 18.g5 ♖h7 19.h4 f6 20.0-0-0 (if 20.f4 then exf4 21. ♖xf4 ♖e8) 20...fxg5 21.hxg5 ♗g4**

and Black was fine in B.Spasky-T. V.Petrosian, Moscow (9th matchgame) 1969.]

7. ♖ge2 ♖bd7 8.h3 a6 QUESTION: Why does Larsen delay castling?

[ANSWER: He wanted to avoid **8...0-0?! 9.g4!**, when **h5 10.f3!** gives White a kingside clamp.]

9. ♗e3

[Here **9.g4** would be premature due to **h5! 10.g5 (not now 10.f3? hxg4 11.fxcg4 ♖xcg4) 10... ♖h7 11. ♖g1 0-0 12.h4 f6** (as we've just seen, a similar kingside configuration occurred in Spassky-Petrosian above), intending **13.gxf6?! ♖dxf6! 14. ♖xcg6?! ♖g4** (attacking f2) **15. ♗e3 ♖f7!** and the rook is trapped.]

[Instead, **9. ♗g5!** looks like White's best shot at an advantage; for example, **h6 (or 9... ♖b8 10.a4 h6 11. ♗e3 h5 12. ♖d2 ♖g8 13.0-0 ♗h6 14. ♗xh6 ♖xh6 15.a5**, L.Portisch-T.V.Petrosian, Bled 1961) **10. ♗e3 h5 (now if 10... ♖h5?! then 11. ♖d2 and Black lacks a useful move) 11. ♖d2 ♖e7 12.a4 h4**

13.♙g5 ♖f8 14.a5 ♗h6 15.♙xh6 ♖xh6?! (15...♗xh6 was preferable)
 16.♘a4 ♘h5 17.0-0 ♖g7 18.b4
 and White's queenside initiative
 proved to be far more potent than
 anything Black could muster on the
 other wing, P.H.Nielsen-V.Epishin,
 Reykjavik (rapid) 2004.]

9...♘h5!? Preparing a speculative
 pawn sacrifice. **10.♖d2 0-0 11.g4!?**
 Flohr wants the pawn, even if taking it
 gives Black dark square compensation.

[White may be better off declining
 with **11.0-0** and if f5 12.exf5 gxf5
 , as in F.Maurer-B.Huss, Flims 2012,
 then 13.f3! ♘df6 14.♖c2 f4 15.♙f2
 , when White's grip on e4 and
 possibilities of queenside play with b2-
 b4 mean more than Black's attacking
 chances down the open g-file.]

11...♘f4 I read recently that Princeton
 University psychologists claim we form
 a first impression, upon meeting
 another person, in approximately one
 tenth of a second. If this is the case,
 Black's brash knight left an
 unfavourable one on pretty much all of
 White's pieces who thought f4 was
 covered! This kind of line/square-
 clearing pawn sac is one of the
 idiosyncrasies of King's Indian
 structures.

[Anyway, Larsen obviously wasn't
 going to play **11...♘hf6?** , which just
 hands White two free tempi.]

12.♘xf4 exf4 13.♙xf4 ♘e5
 Black gains time and utilizes the newly
 opened e5-square. **14.♙e2 b5!**
 With this move Larsen tosses a lit
 match into a barrel of gunpowder.
 Black's position is that of a clenched
 fist, seeking a target to unleash latent
 energy. A second pawn is offered,
 increasing Black's dangerously
 growing piece activity.

15.cxb5 axb5 16.♘xb5 ♖a4!

"Now the rook comes rushing in
 through the back door," writes Eric
 Brøndum. **17.♘c3**

[Other ways of defending e4 are
 worse: **17.f3?! ♖b4!** 18.♖b1 (or
 18.a4 ♖xb2!) 18...♙a6

A) White can't play 19.♘c3??
 due to ♘xf3+! 20.♙xf3 ♖h4+
 21.♙d1 (or 21.♖f2 ♙xc3+
 and wins) 21...♖d4;

B) 19.a4 ♖h4+! (19...♖xa4
 20.0-0 ♖b4 21.♘c3 is just equal)
 20.♙f1 f5! and White is in deep
 trouble.]

[**17.♖c2 ♖b4 18.♘c3 ♖f6! 19.♙e3**
 ♘f3+ 20.♙f1 ♘d4 (Black already
 has good compensation for the
 pawns) 21.♖d2 ♙d7 22.♙g2 ♖fb8
 23.♖ab1 ♖e7 24.g5?? (24.♙d3
 was necessary) 24...♘xe2 25.♘xe2
 (or 25.♖xe2 ♙xc3) 25...♖xe4+
 26.f3 ♙xh3+! 27.♖xh3 ♖xb1
 and Black won, V.Sandic-P.Mitrovic,
 Belgrade 1989.]

17...♖d4! 18.♖e3 ♖e8 19.♖g3

Clearing the way for Be3. Flohr
 performs a kind of exploratory surgery,
 hoping to find a cure for his king's
 safety ailment. Larsen gave this move a
 "?" without comment.

[I find it hard to criticize Flohr for
 avoiding the line **19.0-0 ♘c4**
 20.♙xc4 ♖xc4 21.♖fe1 ♖b4 22.b3
 f5! , which gives Black a scary
 initiative, probably worth more than
 the two pawns he is down.]

19...g5! 20.♙e3 ♘g6!?

Another strategic exchange sac, this
 time played with two pawns added! In
 such positions, fear and ambition tend
 to intersect, while conscience loosens
 its hold over us, whispering in our ear:
 "The ends justify the means. Go for it!"
 The handling of such abstract

sacrifices requires art more than science. The empiricists among us may wince involuntarily at Larsen's interpretation: He continues material generosity to the brink of impossibility, yet miraculously manages to avoid plunging into the abyss of excess.

[20...♖b4 21.♙c1 ♘g6 is a safer, though less forceful, path for Black.]

21.♙b5 QUESTION: Is accepting the sacrifice suicide?

ANSWER: "White can hardly take the exchange," writes Larsen.

[The greedy computers of course say it's playable: 21.♙xd4!? (White and Black drive down the same road but in different cars; White has a massive material surplus, while Black enjoys a vicious initiative) cxd4 22.♘b5 ♖xe4 23.♚f3! (not 23.♘xd6? ♖xe2+! 24.♙xe2 ♘f4+ and 25...Qxd6 – Larsen) 23...♚a5+ 24.♙d1 ♖f4 25.♚a3 ♚xa3! – a shocking swap, down so much material in an ending, but Black's initiative endures; for example, 26.♘xa3 ♘e5 27.♖c1 ♙b7 28.♙c4 ♖xf2 29.♙b3 ♘d3 30.♖c7 ♘xb2+ 31.♙c1 (or 31.♙e1 ♘d3+ 32.♙d1 ♘b2+ etc) 31...♘d3+ 32.♙b1!? ♘c5 33.♖d1 h6 (creating luft) 34.♘b5 ♘xb3 35.♖xb7 d3 36.axb3 ♖b2+ 37.♙c1 ♖c2+ with a draw.]

21...♖xe4! Larsen insists on an exchange sac this game. **22.♘xe4 ♖xe4** I discovered the following fact from reading hundreds of sci-fi novels: If your enemy is formless yet pervasive, you will lose the battle. Black doesn't actually threaten anything, yet White feels threatened – and with good reason!

23.0-0?! A person can speak the absolute truth, and yet a false intonation in the delivery can still make

them out a liar. Flohr panics prematurely, like an oversensitive smoke detector. White's last move looks right but just isn't, since his king is no safer on the wing than in the centre.

["Psychologically easy to understand. In such a position everybody wants to get the king out of danger," wrote Larsen, who recommended the superior **23.♙d3!** ♚a5+ 24.♙f1 ♘f4! and now:

A) 25.♙xe4?! ♚b5+ (I prefer this to 25...♙a6+) 26.♙g1 ♘e2+ 27.♙h2 ♘xg3 28.♙xg3 ♚xb2 and I have a feeling Black's passed c-pawn in conjunction with queen and bishops will be decisive.;

B) 25.♙xf4 ♖xf4 (Larsen thought that White couldn't survive this line – and indeed his position is very difficult) 26.♖e1 ♙d4 27.f3 (or 27.♖h2 ♚d2 28.♖e2 ♚c1+ 29.♖e1 ♚xb2) 27...♙g7! (not yet 27...♚d2 due to 28.♖e8+ ♙g7 29.♙e2 ♙b7 30.h4!) 28.♖h2 ♚xa2 with a continuing attack.;

C) 25.♚f3! (attacking the rook a second time) ♖b4 (or 25...♙a6 26.♙xa6 ♚xa6+ 27.♙g1) 26.♙xf4! (the correct moment) ♖xf4 27.♚e2 ♙d4 28.f3 ♙b7 29.♙c4 ♚a8 30.a4 ♙xd5 31.♙xd5 ♚xd5 32.♖a3 and White should survive.

I would venture to guess that we have discovered more about chess since the advent of computers, from the late '80s to the present, than in all of preceding chess history.;

D) 25.--]

23...♖b4! 24.♙d3 ♙e5 25.♚f3 ♘h4 26.♚d1 ♚f6! 27.a3?

[This makes things easier, but it is very difficult to see a viable defence for White in any case. For example,

after 27.f4 gxf4 28.♔d2 ♖xb2
29.♖b1 ♔d4+ 30.♕h1 ♔b7 31.♖xb2
♔xd5+ 32.♕h2 ♔xb2 33.♔xf4 ♔e5
34.♗d2 ♕f3+ 35.♖xf3 ♔xf3 36.♕g3
♔c6 , Black has regained the
sacrificed material plus a pawn and
still has the initiative.]

[27.♔e2 is well met by ♔b7!
, increasing the pressure.]

27...♕f3+ 28.♕g2 EXERCISE

(combination alert): One senses the
white defenders' rapidly diminishing
influence. How should Larsen pursue
his attack?

ANSWER: Annihilation of the
defensive barrier/Discovery.

♔xg4! 29.axb4

[The bishop is immune: 29.hxg4??
♖xg4+ 30.♕h3 ♖h4+ 31.♕g2 ♖h2#
.]

29...♕h4+ The discovered check wins
White's queen. 30.♕g1 ♔xd1

Vengeance obtained is the most
therapeutic of cures. Blood spilled on
both sides reaches a haematological
stasis, with neither side risking further
casualties from here on.

31.♖fxd1 cxb4 32.♔e4 ♔xb2

33.♖a8+ ♕g7 34.♖b8 ♔c3

EXERCISE (combination alert): White
may be lost, but if you find a little
combinational trick he becomes
slightly less lost. What should White
play?

ANSWER: Pin. White picks off Black's
prize b-pawn.

35.♖xb4! When busted, sometimes the
best shot at generating confusion is to
embrace a reversed strategy, moving
from a logical normal to the illogical
abnormal – and it's especially effective
when the math works in its favour as it
does for White.

♕f3+

[35...♔xb4?? walks into 36.♔d4 .]

36.♔xf3 ♗xf3 37.♖d3

Again safeguarding his colleague,
since 37...Bxb4?? drops the queen to
38 Bd4+. ♔e5 38.♖g4?! Dropping the
h-pawn.

[But White can't save himself after
38.h4 f6 39.♕f1 h5 either, as his
clumsy rooks have no chance against
Black's coordinated queen, bishop
and kingside pawns.]

38...h6 39.♖d2 ♗xh3 40.♖g2

Réti and the Hypermoderns warned us
not to fianchetto our rooks! The
panting rook, unable to continue his
sweaty labours, flops down moistly,
revelling in his new found indolence on
g2.

f6 QUESTION: I realize Black is
winning, but if I had this position in a
tournament game, I'm not sure I'd know
how to continue. What is the winning
plan?

ANSWER: An excellent question, which
we should turn into an exercise:

EXERCISE (planning): Black's queen
sits with chin on fist, striking Rodin's
Thinker's pose, contemplating which
method of execution would be a just
punishment for the g2-rook. Find a
clear plan for Black to convert his
advantage.

[ANSWER: White is helpless against
the plan of ...Qf3!, followed by push
of the h-pawn to h3. For example:

40...f6 41.♖d1 ♗f3 42.♖d2 h5

(the h-pawn, longing to be
emancipated from the restraints of its
chrysalis, emerges from its
adolescence as a formidable force)

43.♕f1 (43.♔d4 is met by ♗e4!

, threatening mate with 44...Qb1+, or
the d2-rook with 44...Qe1+) 43...h4

44.♖g1 h3 and there is no defence to
...h3-h2 etc.]

0-1

36

A11

 **Larsen,B**
 **Korchnoi,V**

28: Palma de Mallorca

1969

*[Cyrus Lakdawala]***1.g3 d5 2.♗g2 c6 3.c4 g6 4.♖a4!?**

Here we go. Larsen is the first to weird it up with a little joke. A psychologist would view the erratic queen's action with deep suspicion, concerning her sanity. The strange part of it is, Korchnoi was the one who invented the move, not Larsen!

QUESTION: This almost appears to be a random move. What is the idea behind it?

ANSWER: White intends c4xd5 without Black being able to recapture with the c6-pawn.

d4 Korchnoi seizes space with the most ambitious continuation, playing it in Schmid Benoni fashion.

[Instead, V.Korchnoi-P.Trifunovic, USSR vs. Yugoslavia, Rijeka 1963, saw **4...e6!?** 5.cxd5 exd5 6.d4 (another option is 6.d3 , intending to play e2-e4 later on, though White must watch out for ...Nd7 and ...Nc5 tricks) 6...♗g7 7.♗f3 ♖e7 8.0-0 0-0 9.♗f4 ♗d7 10.♗c3 ♗b6 11.♖d1 ♗f5 12.b3 ♗e8 13.♖d2 ♗d6 14.♗xd6 ♖xd6 15.e3 ♗f5 and Black equalized.]

5.♗f3 ♗g7 6.0-0 e5 7.d3

[In this reversed Benoni, **7.e3** would be a thematic move. Perhaps Larsen felt he had nothing after 7... dxe3 8 dxe3, but I like White due to his slight lead in development. Anyway, having written a book on Korchnoi, I am almost certain he would have played the ultra-ambitious d3!?, which pushes Black to the cusp of overextension. Then 8.♗c3 f5

9.b4 e4 10.♗d4 sees Black with a gigantic central space advantage, though I would still favour White's development myself. Note that winning a pawn would be far too risky: after ♗xd4?! 11.exd4 ♖xd4 12.♗b2 ♗f6 13.♖b3 (threatening Nxe4) ♖d6 14.f3 , Black is in terrible trouble.]

7...♗e7 8.♗bd2 0-0 9.b4

Seizing queenside territory, another typical Benoni strategy. ♗d7 **10.♖b1 a5!?** QUESTION: Is this move in violation of the principle: Avoid confrontation on your opponent's strong wing - ?

ANSWER: No, since the intention behind the move is actually to clog the queenside.

11.b5 c5 12.e3 dxe3!? Korchnoi, hungry for a fight, creates an imbalance in the structure.

[If **12...♖a7** at once, then 13.exd4 exd4 14.♖e1 b6 15.♗e4 , intending Nd6, and I prefer White's position since I don't see an active plan for Black; for example, ♗f6 16.♗xf6+ ♗xf6 17.♗g5 ♗g7 18.♗e4 , with ideas of Rb2-e2 or Ba3 and Nxc5!?.]

13.fxe3 ♖a7 14.♖c2 A careful retreat, covering d3.

[The immediate **14.♗e4** would be met by f5! and the knight has to go back, since 15.♗d6?? loses to ♗b6 .]

14...b6 15.♗e4 With the ideas of Nd6xc8, taking full control of the light squares, or Nc3, e3-e4 and Nd5. ♗f6 **16.♗xf6+**

[Larsen now rejected his plan of **16.♗c3** , due to ♗h5 (the tempting 16...e4? works out nicely for White after 17.dxe4 ♗e6 18.♗e5! ♖c7 19.♗c6! ♗xc6 20.bxc6 ♗xc4

21. ♖d1 with a strategically won game, since Black doesn't have a good answer to the coming Nd5) 17.e4 f5! , when 18. ♖d5?! would simply be answered by ♖xd5 and 19...f4, taking over the initiative.]

16... ♖xf6 17. ♖b2 ♖f5 18. ♖be1 ♖e8 19.e4 ♖g7!?

[Korchnoi isn't interested in plugging up d4 with a pawn after 19... ♖d4 20. ♖xd4 exd4 21. ♖c1 , which looks pretty even since White owns the open f-file and Black controls e5.]

20. ♖d2! QUESTION: Where is the knight headed?

ANSWER: Larsen plans to occupy d5 with the Steinitzian Nb1-c3-d5.

h5! Now the disruptive ...h5-h4 is coming.

[QUESTION: What was wrong with 20... ♖d7 , hammering away at d3?

ANSWER: White responds with 21. ♖b1! anyway and d3 remains immune, since

A) while after 21... ♖e6 22. ♖c3 ♖b7 (or 22... ♖d4 23. ♖f2) 23. ♖f2 ♖g7 24. ♖h3 , White looks slightly better to me;

B) 21... ♖xd3?? 22. ♖xf6 overloads Black's queen.]

21. ♖b1 h4 22. ♖c3 hxc3 23. hxc3 ♖h5 24. ♖d5 ♖g5 25. ♖f2 f6 26. ♖c1! Logically chipping away at a defender of f6. ♖xc1 27. ♖xc1 f5!?

When sentiment and reason argue, it is generally the former who holds sway. Intuition is merely the subconscious mind making a decision, even when provided with incomplete data. In this instance it feels as if Korchnoi's intuition betrays him, pushing to the brink of overextension, overestimating his position while underestimating his opponent's. Korchnoi operates under a fundamental reasoning error,

considering White's king to be less safe than his own, whereas the variations indicate that the opposite tends to be true.

[Rather than this truculent response, the calmer 27... ♖f8 28. ♖e3 ♖e6 was quite sufficient.]

28. ♖e3! Clearing the f-file and preventing ...Qg5, while eyeing an invasion square of her own at h6. ♖h7 29. ♖ce1 ♖h8 30. exf5 Larsen opens the centre, activating both his bishop and e1-rook, while exposing Korchnoi's king further. gxf5 31. g4!

This disruption shot seizes the initiative and puts heavy pressure on Black to come up with a correct defensive solution. ♖f6!? Continuing his high-risk policy.

[Much safer was 31... ♖g7! bolstering f5; 32. ♖f2 f4 33. ♖e2 ♖g5 34. ♖b2 , when ♖xg4 is met by 35. ♖xf4! ♖h6 (not 35... exf4?? 36. ♖xe8#) 36. ♖ee4 ♖c8 37. ♖f3 ♖h7 and the position remains in an unsettled balance.]

[Not 31... fxc4?? 32. ♖e4! and the rook can't leave h7 because of 33 Qh6+.]

32. ♖xf6

[I will bet that both sides misassessed the position after 32. gxf5 .

A) . In Informator Larsen gave just " 32... ♖g4? unclear" but, as happens so often, the computers make fools of us all and Houdini assesses 33. ♖g3 ♖g8 concluding it favoured Black. Houdini assesses this at a winning position for White after 34. f6! ♖e6 35. ♖e4! ♖xd5 36. ♖xg4 ♖xg4 37. ♖xg4 as winning for White.;

B) . Instead, after 32... ♖b7 33. ♖xf6 ♖xf6 34. ♖f2 ♖g7 35. ♖f1 ♖xg2+ 36. ♖xg2 ♖xf5+ 37. ♖f2

♖h5 38.♚f3 ♚xf3 39.♗xf3
 , White is only a microbe better and
 Black should defend without
 difficulty. (39.--);

C) 32...--]

32...♚xf6 33.gxf5 ♔xf5!? Korchnoi's intellectual GPS, while perhaps not malfunctioning, recommends mysteriously circuitous routes. Why is it that our nature compels us to carry unnecessary burdens? For example, my wife, Nancy, carries a purse so cumbersome that she could easily fit twelve items and maybe even a fully grown Rottweiler inside it. GM Nigel Davies writes: "It could well be that Korchnoi's habitual time trouble was intervening at this point, especially since Larsen had him thinking from the outset!"

[Here **33...♗h5!** looks better. For example: 34.♚f3 (or 34.♗f3 ♔xf5)
 34...♚h4 35.f6 ♗f8 36.♗e3 ♚h2+
 37.♔f2 ♚h4+ 38.♗g3 ♗xf6+
 39.♔e2 ♔g4+ 40.♔d2 ♗xf1 41.♔xf1
 ♗g5 42.♔e2 ♔xe2 43.♗xg5 ♗xg5
 44.♗xe2 ♔g7 45.♔e3 ♔f6 46.♗h2
 ♗g6 47.♔e4 ♔e6 48.♗h4 ♗f6
 and White can't make progress.]

34.♚f3 ♗f7? For a long time, the mutual attacks represented an unstable chimera, somewhere between matter and non-matter, still in the stages of thought, rather than action. But with Black's last move, the balance of power shifts dramatically. The rook, acting more like a startled pony, runs in the wrong direction. Korchnoi's attack, which previously took bold leaps forward, is about to take a timid step back. After Olympian exertion he fails even to medal.

EXERCISE (combination alert): Find a forcing variation which wins material for White.

[**34...♗f8!** was correct, when Black should hold, supposing he didn't make a time-trouble blunder somewhere else.]

ANSWER: Black gets tangled up defending the pin on the bishop.

35.♚h5+ Smiles can be interpreted in so many ways. The queen's smile manifests as a distinctly evil one. ♔g7

36.♔d5! The bishop gives his invisible benediction to the f7-rook. ♗ff8 **37.♗f2!**

The reason high-ranking church leaders of the Inquisition loathed Galileo was that he had the colossal gall to demote the earth from its exalted position of God's glory at the centre of the universe, to an unimportant planet in an unspectacular solar system. With this move, Larsen, like Galileo, dissolves all pretences about Black's grand attack and points it out for what it is: a-not-so-exalted illusion. Black lacks an adequate defence to the coming ♗f1 and drops a key pawn trying to extricate himself from the pin.

[Note that the other rook wouldn't have done the trick, as after **37.♗e2?** ♔g6! , Black survives.]

37...♔g6

[No choice, since **37...♗e7??** 38.♗ef1 drops heavy material, ♗g6+ being met by 39.♗g2 , when White's rook seethes with unrequited, guilty love for Black's queen, who happens to be his sister.]

38.♗xf6 ♔xh5 39.♗xb6

Chaos coheres into rationality. When a would-be attack goes up in smoke, the attacker gets the resentful feeling of a gallant knight of old, who endures perilous tasks in service of a beautiful maiden – only to receive, upon completion, absolutely zero gratitude for his labours, on top of which to

discover she has married his best friend. Not only is White up a pawn, Black's remaining pawns are in tatters, all isolanis and potential targets.

40.♖d6 ♖f4 41.♙xf3 ♖xf3 42.♖d5 ♙f6 43.♙g2 ♖f5!

Very sneaky! **44.♖e3!** Virtually the only move but a good one. Sometimes we are forced to make a choice, and sometimes the choice makes us. White's king shudders involuntarily from the closeness of death at the hands of Black's devious rooks.

[Larsen covers himself against the vulgar cheapo: **44.♖xc5??** (in a single instance the evaluation swings from "+-" to "-+" and the slate of Black's past indiscretions is wiped clean – how many times in our life have we casually tossed away winning positions through careless overconfidence?) **♖g8+** **45.♙h2** (White's king begins to understand what it's like to plunge down Niagara Falls in a barrel) **♖h5#**. The rook pulls off longitudinal acrobatics.]
[**44.♖e4?** prevents the mate but allows Black to deliver perpetual check after **♖g8+** **45.♙h3 ♖f3+** **46.♙h2 ♖f2+**.]

44...♖c8 45.♖f3! Now Black's misery grows more manifest with each passing move. The single rook ending is an easy win for White. **a4 46.♖xf5+ ♙xf5 47.♙f3 a3** Korchnoi prays for last-ditch counterplay with ...Rh8-h2xa2, but it's too slow. **48.♙e3 ♖h8** Anything else and the white king would just walk over and pick up a3. **49.♖xc5 ♖h2 50.b6 ♖xa2** EXERCISE (combination alert): Find White's cleanest winning line. ANSWER: Pin. White picks off e5. **51.d4!**

[Far superior to **51.♖b5?** **♖b2!** **52.b7 ♖xb5 53.cxb5 a2 54.b8♗ a1♗**

and White has an arduous task ahead.]

51...♙e6 52.♖xe5+ ♙d7 53.♖a5

Ensuring that Black's passed a-pawn isn't going anywhere. **♙c6 54.c5 ♖h2 55.♙e4**

[Since **55.♙e4** **♖h4+** **56.♙d3 ♙d5 57.♙c3!** is easy for White.]

1-0

37

A17

 **Bobotsov,M**

 **Larsen,B**

29: Büsum

1969

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.c4 ♘f6 2.♘c3 e6 3.♘f3 ♙b4 4.g3

[**4.♙c2** is more common. There are some slight drawbacks to combining g2-g3 with an early Nc3 here.

QUESTION: What are those?

ANSWER: There are several:

1. In the Catalan positions that arise if White plays d2-d4, the b1-knight isn't generally brought out so soon. In effect White is answering 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 d5 4 Nf3 Bb4+ with 5 Nc3 (after which 5...dxc4 6 0-0 0-0 transposes to 6 d4 dxc4 in the notes below), whereas 5 Bd2 is overwhelmingly preferred.

2. If White declines to play d2-d4, the c3-knight may be vulnerable to a quick ...d7-d5-d4.

3. Whichever way, if Black grabs the c4-pawn with ...d5xc4, White may find it harder to regain the lost pawn since he lacks Na3 or Nd2 ideas.

That's not to say 4 g3 is a bad move of course; in fact Kramnik has played it quite often.]

[Others include **4.d4**, transposing to the Nimzo-Indian]

[and the aggressive punt **4.g4!**]

, which is currently quite popular.]

4...0-0 5.♟g2 d5

[QUESTION: Why not weaken

White's structure with **5...♟xc3** - ?

ANSWER: White's structure isn't so weak, since he holds back d2-d4.

For example, after **6.bxc3 d6 7.0-0 e5 8.d3 ♘c6 9.e4**, as in V.Kramnik-A.Vyzmanavin, London (rapid) 1994, White's **b2xc3** actually benefits him, since the doubled pawn covers the d4-square.]

6.0-0?! What a nightmarish feeling: we diligently study a line, then bungle the move order over the board, realizing that the knowledge we so laboriously acquired is no more than an agitated void in our mind. After this automatic move White already stands worse, and it's only move six!

[Instead, **6.a3**]

[and **6.♞b3** are the main continuations here, albeit offering White no tangible advantage.]

[Alternatively, as mentioned above, **6.d4** is a Catalan; for example, **dxc4 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.a3 (8.♞e1; and 8.♟g5** are also played) **8...♟xc3 9.bxc3 ♞b8** (now it's a real gambit) **10.♟g5 b5 11.e4 h6 12.♟h4! e5** (returning the pawn to achieve an at least equal ending) **13.♘xe5 ♘xe5 14.dxe5 ♞xd1 15.♞fxd1 ♘d7 16.f4 ♞e8 17.e6!? ♘c5! (rather than 17...fxe6? 18.e5 ♘xe5 19.♟d8 ♘d3 20.♟xc7 ♞b7 21.♟xb7 ♟xb7 22.a4 bxa4 23.♞db1**, when White was clearly better, Ma.Carlsen-MiAdams, Turin Olympiad 2006) **18.exf7+ ♔xf7 19.e5 ♟b7 20.♟h3 ♟c6** and I prefer Black's chances, even if the computers rate it as even.]

6...dxc4! White soon discovers that it isn't so easy to regain the pawn.

[It is also tempting to gain a tempo

with **6...d4**. For example, **7.♘b5 (or 7.♘a4 ♟e7 8.d3 c5 9.e4 ♘c6 10.e5 ♘d7 11.♞e1 ♞c7 12.♟f4 b6**, shutting the a4-knight out of the game, V.Korchnoi-O.Romanishin, Barcelona 1992) **7...♘c6 8.d3 e5 9.♘a3 ♞e8 10.♘c2 ♟f8**, M.Cebalo-M.Drasko, Cetinje 2009, when Black stands better, mainly because White took four moves to get his knight to c2.]

7.♞a4

[The typical Catalan move, **7.♘e5**, is no good in the absence of d2-d4, since Black can just play **♞d4**.]

7...♘a6

[Another possibility is **7...a5 8.♞b5** (or if **8.a3 ♟d7 9.♞c2 Qc2**, as in A. Mikhalchishin-J.Speelman, Baku 1983, Black can try **♟d6 10.♘d1 b5**, since White has no good discovery on the a8-rook) **8...b6 9.♞xc4 ♟a6 10.♞h4 ♟xc3 11.dxc3 ♟xe2 12.♞e1 ♟xf3 13.♟xf3 ♞a7 14.♟g5 c5** and White struggled to prove compensation for the pawn, despite the two bishops, A.Miles-V.Korchnoi, European Club Cup 1984.]

8.a3

[If **8.♞b5** here, then **♟xc3 9.dxc3 ♞d5 10.♘d4 ♘e4!** – to a materialist "sac" is a four-letter word, even though technically it adds up to three. White's main intention to regain his lost pawn somehow parenthesized into a "someday" project, which is destined to never come to fruition, since regaining it with **11.♟xe4? ♞xe4 12.♞xc4** gives Black a dominating position after **e5 13.f3 ♞g6 14.♘b3 ♟h3 15.♞e1 ♞b6+ 16.e3 ♞ad8**.]

8...♟d7 This zwischenzug retains the extra pawn. **9.♘b5!?** Bobotsov is hell-bent on repossession of the lost c-

pawn.

[If instead **9.♖c2** then ♔d6 and Black hangs on to c4. 10.♘d1 b5 again and Black hangs on to c4.]
9...♗e8! 10.♘fd4? When faced with a conflicted choice between a pair of moral imperatives such as kill or be killed, in most cases we tend to opt for the former. White's lunge is so awkward and so unnatural, that it's a bit like beginning a mystery novel by fast forwarding to the final chapter to discover the murderer's identity. Not regaining the lost Catalan pawn is unbearable to Bobotsov who strains with unnatural moves in the effort to regain it. Now b7 is hanging to the uncovered g2-bishop, but the white knights dangle precariously.

[The other way of regaining the pawn, **10.♘xc7** , also leaves White in desperate straits after ♔xa4 11.♘xe8 ♔e7 12.♘xf6+ ♔xf6 .]

[It would have been better to admit failure and allow Black to keep his bounty with **10.axb4** ♔xb5 11.♗a3 ♗e7 12.♘d4 c6 13.♘b5 cxb5 14.d3 ♘d5 15.dxc4 bxc4 16.b5 ♗xa3 17.♗xa3 ♘ac7 18.♗a4 ♘xb5 19.♗xc4 , when White's bishops give him some hope of saving the game.]

10...e5! A powerful undermining shot. The loss of b7 proves to be irrelevant.

11.♔xb7 exd4 12.♔xa6 EXERCISE (combination alert): Larsen found a devastating combination here. What would you play?

[It is too late for **12.axb4** , due to ♔xb5 13.♗a5 c6! 14.♔xa6 ♗xe2 15.♔xb5 cxb5 16.♗xb5 ♘g4 (threatening ...Nxh2!) 17.♗h5 g6 18.♗h4 ♘e5 and Black is winning.]

ANSWER: Annihilation of the king's defences. Larsen ignores the hanging b4-bishop and goes directly after

White's under-protected king.

12...♔h3!! Very few of us shine at both ends of the spectrum, equally proficient in tactics and strategy. Larsen was one of the few who displayed the magic on both sides. The bishop autonomously declares war, seemingly uncaring whether his teammates join him in the venture, with a smooth transition from spectator to active participant.

13.axb4

[Others: **13.♗e1** ♗c6 14.f3 ♔c5 15.♗xc4 d3+ 16.♔h1 (or 16.♘d4 ♗ad8 17.e3 ♗xd4! 18.exd4 ♗xf3) 16...♗ae8 17.e4 ♘xe4! 18.fxe4 ♗f6 19.♗xd3 ♗f2 and mates (Larsen).]

[**13.♘c3** (relatively best) ♗e6 14.axb4 ♔xf1 15.♔xf1 ♗h3+ 16.♔e1 (not 16.♔g1? ♘g4) 16...dxc3 17.bxc3 ♗xh2

leaves Black a full exchange up with a completely winning position.]

13...♗e4! This move removes a key plank in White's defensive platform. The queen keeps busy these days with her hobbies of painting, writing poetry, and hatching schemes which involve the enemy king's murder. Through her meaningful glances at g2, she continues to cast aspersions as to the alleged safety of White's king.

14.♔b7 A desperate deflection.

[The once-harmonious associative network of defenders falls completely out of synch after **14.f3?** ♗xe2 ("Bring forth the pretender," whispers Black's queen with dangerous vocal inflection) 15.♗f2 ♗e1+ 16.♗f1 ♗xf1# . The king collapses, speechless and spent, like a marathon runner at the finish line. He endures his sister's lecture with enormous self-discipline, sitting respectfully rather than pounding his fists on the table and telling her to

shut her big mouth, which is what he really wants to do.]

14...♖xb7 15.f3 White escapes with what he believes is merely a flesh wound, not realizing is that the blade's tip was dipped in poison, which causes an agonizing death in its victims upon entry into the bloodstream.

EXERCISE (combination alert): Simply chopping the rook on f1 would win.

Larsen found something even better...

ANSWER #1: Pin. Black wins a piece for zero compensation.

♙d7! How does one defeat a GM in 15 moves with Black!? To the white queen's eternal frustration, Black's insufferable bishop matches her own deviousness pound for pound, always tying the score between them.

[ANSWER #2: Of course the computers have to upstage us, throwing out the inhuman **15...d3!!**

16.♖a3 (or **16.♘d4 dxe2 17.♖e1 ♗b6** etc) **16...dxe2 17.♖e1 ♙d7!**

which not only wins a piece, it also erodes the white king's safety even further. White's queen freezes in midstride for two reasons:

1. In a flash of intuition she conceives the idea that her beloved knight is lost.

2. She stubbed her right toe on the sofa.]

0-1

38

□ **Larsen,B**
 ■ **Kavalek,L**

30: Lugano

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

A36

1970

A book on Larsen wouldn't be complete without the inclusion of his own favourite opening.

1.b3 c5 2.♙b2 ♘c6 3.c4 e5 4.g3

Larsen quite often fianchettoed both bishops in the NLA; see Game 36 (Larsen-Tringov) for another example.

d6 5.♙g2 ♘ge7 6.e3!? Provocation! Larsen allows Black the freeing ...d6-d5 break.

[**6.♘c3** is White's natural move, as Larsen played against Hecht (see the note to Black's 11th move), transposing after **g6 7.e3 ♙g7 8.d3 0-0 9.♘ge2** .]

6...g6 Kavalek refuses to get sucked into Larsenworld and responds with a reversed Botvinnik English "V" formation.

[QUESTION: What would Larsen have played after the thematic **6...d5** - ?

ANSWER: I'm not sure but I strongly suspect he planned to weird it up further with something bizarro like **7.♘f3!?** .]

7.♘e2 Allowing ...d6-d5 once again. **♙g7**

[After **7...d5** , Larsen may well have planned **8.♘bc3!?** (or even **8.cxd5 ♘xd5 9.0-0 ♙g7 10.♘bc3!?** **♘db4 11.♘e4 ♗e7 12.d4!**) **8...d4** (**8...♙e6** is met by **9.♘a4 b6 10.♘f4!**) **9.♘e4 ♘f5** with an odd position which would suit Larsen perfectly.]

8.♘bc3 0-0 9.d3 ♙e6 10.♘d5

Black stands equal or better if he is allowed ...d6-d5 now.

[For instance, **10.♗d2?! d5 11.♖d1 d4 12.♘e4 b6 13.♘g5 ♙d7 14.e4 h6 15.♘f3 f5 16.exf5** , G.Kamsky-E. Alekseev, Moscow (blitz) 2008, and here **♙xf5! 17.♘h4** (if **17.0-0 ♗d7**; or **17.h3?! ♘b4! 18.♘c1 e4**) **17...♙d7** is good for Black.]

10...♗d7 11.h4! Here we go – Larsen's signature contamination of an

otherwise book position. As explained in the introduction to this book, the push of the h-pawn (or the a-pawn, whether warranted or not!) was Larsen's favourite move on the chess board. The quiet Symmetrical English enters the atomic age with his interpretation. Telling Larsen to remain calm and play harmonious chess is a little like suggesting to the president of the NRA to hand over all his assault rifles and study the writings of Gandhi and Martin Luther King. I'm pretty sure he would respond by telling you to "try and pry the guns from his cold, dead hands!"

QUESTION: Is 11 h4 played to prevent ...Bh3 or to generate a kingside attack with h4-h5?

[ANSWER: The move addresses both issues and confronts Black with serious problems. Larsen's main motivation was probably just to get his opponent out of theory and thinking on his own. In any case, it is far more enterprising than the expected **11.0-0** ♖g4 (or just **11...♗h3** with equality) 12.♞d2 h5!? Larsonian, but in reverse! (instead, after 12...♗xd5 13.cxd5 ♗b4 14.a3 ♗a6 15.f3 ♗h3 16.e4 ♗xg2 17.♙xg2 f5 18.f4 , the computers say even but I prefer White) 13.♙h1!? ♙h7 14.♗g1!? (I don't claim to understand White's last two moves) ♞ae8 15.b4 cxb4 16.♗xb4 ♗xb4 17.♞xb4 d5 18.cxd5 ♗xd5 19.♞a5 ♗e6 and Black achieved equality at a minimum, since d3 may be a concern for White, A.Sitnikov-M.Melnichuk, Alushta 2008. Note that a7 is covered tactically, Note that 20.♞xa7?? being a self-trapping mechanism after ♞a8 21.♞c5 ♞fc8 .]

11...f5 Brave, bordering on foolhardy. Kavalek allows the opening of the h-file, an idea clearly in danger of an angry backlash, should matters veer from his initial plans. Black's alternatives are to pause with either ...h7-h6 or ...h7-h5.

[Let's take a look at both: **11...h6?!**

(this fails to achieve its intent of closing kingside lines) 12.♞d2 ♞ab8 13.h5! g5 (maybe Black should just play 13...b5 and allow 14.hxg6 fxg6) 14.f4! (now lines begin to open on the kingside)

A) but I also prefer White's position after 14...g4 15.e4! f5 16.0-0-0 b5 17.♞hf1 and if bxc4 then 18.♗xe7+! ♞xe7 (or 18...♗xe7 19.dxc4) 19.exf5!;

B) 14...♗xd5?! handing over the light squares can't be a great solution to Black's strategic difficulties; 15.cxd5 ♗b4 16.fxg5 ♞b5 17.♗c1 f5 (17...♗bxd5? is strongly met by 18.e4! ♗b4 19.gxh6 ♗h8 20.♞g5+ ♙h7 21.♞xe7 winning. ♗c2+ 22.♙e2 ♗xa1 23.♗h3 and wins) 18.e4! f4 19.a3 ♗a6 20.gxf4 ♞xf4 21.♗e2 ♞g4 , Y.Balashov-A.Zubarev, Moscow 2002, and now simply 22.gxh6 ♞xg2 (or 22...♗f6 23.♗h3) 23.hxg7 and 24 0-0-0 leaves Black in deep trouble with his king.]

[**11...h5!** (this may be Black's best bet, since White can't profit from the slight weakening of g5) 12.♞d2 ♞ab8 13.♗ec3 a6 14.0-0-0 (or 14.0-0 b5 15.f4 f5 16.♞ae1 bxc4 17.bxc4 ♗f7 and the game looks even, K.Bischoff-H.Hermesmann, Hamburg 1995) 14...b5 15.f4 ♗g4 16.♞df1 ♗xd5 17.♗xd5 ♗e7 18.fxe5 ♗xd5 19.♗xd5 dxe5 20.♞f2 ♗e6 was B.Larsen-H.Hecht, Büsum 1969,]

where Black never seemed to be in any trouble. I can't see what Larsen might have done differently had Kavalek gone down this path as well, but it's clear he had something in mind since he allowed ...h7-h5 on the next move as well.]

12.♔d2

[I would jump at the chance to toss in **12.h5!** and if **g5?! ,** White generates a dangerous attack with **13.h6! ♕h8 14.♖ec3** (threatening Qh5) **g4 15.♔d2** , followed by **16 0-0-0**, after which e3-e4 is in the air.]

12...♖ae8?! QUESTION: What do you have against this very natural move?

ANSWER: I foresee two problems:

1. White is almost certainly going to castle queenside. So then we must ask: why place the rook on e8, rather than the logical attacking square b8?
2. Black continues to allow h4-h5, which opens lines.

[Again Kavalek should have played **12...h5** , when it isn't so easy for White to generate an attack.]

13.h5 Hooray! The long-lost correct plan emerges and an artificial boundary collapses. **b5!**

Kavalek wisely hurries to start counterplay on the queenside.

[I don't think Black survives the attack if he just attempts to defend **13...g5?! 14.h6! ♕h8 15.♖h5! g4 16.♖ec3 ♕f7 17.♖g5+!** (don't you hate it when a rook gets above its natural station and inserts itself into a crowded middlegame – and then, even worse, gets away with it?) **♕g6 18.0-0-0** and White has all sorts of ideas to chip away at the kingside, such as **f2-f3** or **e3-e4**.]

14.hxg6 hxg6N 15.♖ec3

[Not **15.cxb5?! which** gives the initiative away: **♕xd5 16.♕xd5+**

♖xd5 17.bxc6 ♔xc6 with superior chances for Black.]

15...bxc4 16.dxc4! The correct recapture. Larsen recognizes that he covers d3 adequately.

[QUESTION: Should White consider capturing towards the centre with **16.bxc4** - ?

ANSWER: The trouble in that case is that White can't really consider castling long. Black looks okay after **e4! 17.dxe4 ♖e5 18.♔e2 fxe4 19.♕xe4 ♕g4** with strong light-squared play.]

16...e4 QUESTION: Isn't this move strong? Black engages in the principle: Counter in the centre when attacked on the wing, and goes after the d3-square as well.

ANSWER: I think this position is an exception to the general principle. Let's take a look at the pluses and minuses of this move:

1. Black cleared e5 for his pieces.
 2. But in doing so, he also opened the a1-h8 diagonal, which further endangered his king.
 3. Black allows Nf4 (see White's 18th move), which covers d3, pressures e6, g6 and d5, and opens the d-file, leaving Black's d6-pawn in danger.
- Conclusion: The negatives may outweigh the pluses of Black's last move.

[On the other hand, if not **16...e4**, then what else? I don't see a better move, and simply waiting for White to attack doesn't feel right with the position opening up. For instance, I don't think Black would survive after **16...♕xd5?! 17.♕xd5+ ♖xd5 18.♖xd5 e4 19.0-0-0 ♕xb2+ 20.♔xb2 ♖e5 21.♖h3** , when a decisive attack brews for White.]

17.0-0-0 Here we go (again). Opposite

wing attacks.

QUESTION: Why not put this game in the Attack chapter?

ANSWER: I almost did, but I was so awestruck by Larsen's combinational wizardry and handling of the initiative that I impulsively placed it into this already overloaded chapter instead!

♟e5 18.♟f4 ♞d8

[If **18...g5** then 19.♟xe6 ♞xe6 (note that Black can't insert 19...♟d3+?? since White has 20.♞xd3! exd3 21.♟xg7 ♟xg7 22.♟d5+ ♟g6 23.♟f3!

with a withering attack; Houdini's assessment is +18.94!) 20.♟f1 , followed by Be2, covering the light squares.]

19.♟b1? EXERCISE (combination alert): Larsen's last move was a serious misjudgement which gives his opponent an unexpected chance. What should Black play here?

[The immediate **19.g4!** was correct, and if ♟xg4 , then play follows as in the game.]

19...♟f7? Kavalek allows a shining opportunity to slip by and finds himself swept away by a current of events too powerful to fight.

[ANSWER: Correct was **19...♟xc4!** and White can't accept the piece sacrifice, since 20.bxc4?? ♟xc4 21.♞e2 ♟xb2 22.♟xb2 (White can't play 22.♞xb2 with the king on the b-file) 22...♞a4! 23.♞d2 d5! gives Black a blistering attack; for example, 24.♟e6?? fails to ♞b4+ 25.♟c2 d4 26.♟xd8 d3+ 27.♟c1 ♟xc3 and wins.]

20.g4! Back on track! Larsen hurries to seize the initiative. **♟xg4** EXERCISE (planning): Find a clear plan for White to engineer an attack.

[Now **20...♟xc4** would be ignored

with 21.gxf5! gxf5 22.♞hg1 and if ♟d3+ 23.♟xd3 ♟xd3 then 24.♟f1! ♟xb2 25.♞xb2 ♞f7 26.♟c4 is decisive.]

ANSWER: Line opening.

21.f3! Clearing the queen's path to h2, as well as reactivating the dormant light-squared bishop, which craves release from his confined quarters and to taste freedom on the outside.

exf3 22.♟xf3 ♟e5 The knight, a startled crab on the beach, scuttles about in an attempt to dodge an oncoming wave.

[**22...♟f6** is no better, since 23.♞h2 ♞fe8 24.♟b5! and if ♟c8 then 25.♟xf6! ♟xf6 26.♞h7+ ♟f8 27.♟d5! is game over.]

23.♞h2! Threatening mate on the move. Nobody has the nerve to go near the gorgon-like queen while she is in this state of mind. **♟xc4** Right idea; wrong timing! The idea which was so powerful four moves ago now falls flat.

[But Black was losing anyway; for instance, **23...♞fe8** is crushed by 24.♟b5! .]

24.bxc4 ♟xf3

[**24...♟xc4?** loses quickly to 25.♟d5+ ♟xd5 26.♞h7+ ♟f7 27.♞xg6+ ♟g8 ("A house divided against itself cannot stand!" declares Black's frustrated king, stating the obvious) 28.♟cxd5 , forcing mate.]

25.♞h7+ ♟f7 26.♟cd5! Uncovering against g7 and going after a key defender of g6.

[A student of mine suggested the fancy **26.♟e4?!** which is quite good but not as powerful as Larsen's move: after ♞g8 27.♟xd6+ ♞xd6! 28.♞xd6 ♞xd6 29.♟xg7 ♟d2+ 30.♟a1 ♞xg7 31.♞h8 ♟xc4 , Black can still mount resistance.]

26...♞g8

[If 26...♗e5 then 27.♙xe5! dxe5 28.♗xe7 (systematically eliminating all defenders of g6) ♖xe7 29.♖xg6+ ♕g8 30.♖h7+ ♕f7 31.♙dg1 ♙g8 32.♖g6+ ♕f8 33.♗e6+ wins the house.]

27.♗xe7 A commotion soon breaks out on g6, Larsen's holy grail in this game.

♖b8 EXERCISE (combination alert):

How did Larsen fan his attack?

[27...♖b7 28.♖xg6+ (the all-powerful queen is an imposing spectacle, perched on her g6-throne) ♕f8 (or 28...♗xe7 29.♖e6+ ♕f8 30.♗g6#) 29.♖xf5+ ♕e8 30.♖g6+ ♕f8 31.♗e6+ ♗xe7 32.♗xg7 is effectively the end.]

ANSWER #1: Unpinning.

28.♗a1! The king, long considered the village idiot, suddenly displays astonishing, long-hidden abilities. He observes his would-be attackers with the bemused tolerance of Jane Goodall studying belligerent chimpanzees in the wild. After this visual shocker of an attacking move, Larsen precipitates a devastating chemical chain reaction and Black's attempted counterplay becomes a caricature of itself.

[ANSWER #2: 28.♕c1! is much the same.]

[But not 28.♖xg6+?? (suggested by another student) ♗xe7 29.♗d5+ ♗d8 and Black wins; for example, 30.♗b4!? threatening Rxd6; (30.♗f6? ♖e6 31.♙h6 ♖e5 is hopeless) 30...♗e5 31.♗c6+ ♕c7! 32.♗xe5 ♙xe5 33.♖xg8 ♙xg8 34.♙xe5 ♖b8+ 35.♕c1 ♖b6 36.♙xd6 ♙xd6 37.♙h6 can be met simply by ♕c6! 38.♙xd6+ ♖xd6 39.♙xd6 ♕xd6 40.♕d2 ♕e5 41.♕d3 f4 42.exf4+ ♕xf4 with a winning pawn endgame, since the c4-pawn will

fall.]

28...♖xe7

[After 28...♙xb2 29.♖xg8+ ♕f6 (29...♗xe7 30.♗d5# is already mate) 30.♗fd5+ ♕g5 31.♖xg7 ♙xa2+ 32.♕xa2 ♖a4+ 33.♕b2 , Black's checks run out.]

29.♖xg6+ ♕f8 30.♗e6+ ♖xe6

White wins by not taking Black's queen!

White wins by NOT taking Black's

queen offer! **31.♙xg7+!**

[Kavalek may have counted on the greedy 31.♖xe6?? , which allows ♙xb2+ 32.♕b1 ♙a3+ with perpetual check, when Black's formally straitened financial circumstances experience a reversal of fortune from down to up, since 33.♕c2?? even loses to ♙g2+ 34.♕d3 ♗e5+ 35.♕c3 ♙b2# .]

31...♗e7 EXERCISE (combination alert): Black's king believes that all his thoughts and actions are motivated by an innate selfless nobility. Everyone else just thinks he is trying to save his own skin. White to play and force mate.

ANSWER: Clearance/Deflection.

White's rook enters at h7 with deadly effect.

32.♙f8+! ♙bxf8

[32...♕xf8 33.♖xe6 is clearly hopeless]

[while 32...♙gxf8 is much the same as the game: 33.♙h7+ ♖f7 34.♙xf7+ (Black's queen is deflected from coverage of d6 with deadly consequences) ♖xf7 35.♖xd6+ (everyone has relatives who we love in the abstract, yet at family gatherings we do everything in our power to maximize distance between us and them; I'm pretty sure Black's king feels exactly this way about his obnoxious d6-sister, who continues to violate his personal space) ♕e8

, except that White has to throw in
36.♖xb8+ ♕e7 37.♖d6+ ♕e8
before 38.♖d8# .]

33.♖h7+ The king's defenders,
nowhere to be seen, are unwilling or
unable to render assistance, as
jackbooted soldiers break down the
door and drag him away into the night,
kicking and screaming.

[Here again **33.♖h7+** ♖f7 34.♖xf7+
♖xf7 (the black queen's once-lissom
body takes on a frumpier form in dire
need of gym membership) 35.♖xd6+
♕e8 (the king, realizing the time of
final parting has arrived, tenderly
caresses his queen's hand, in the
way Bogart held Bergman's hand at
the end of Casablanca) 36.♖d8#
is mate.

Playing through the game again, I sit
here wondering just what possessed
me in leaving it out of the Attack
chapter.]

1-0

39
□ **Botvinnik,M**

■ **Larsen,B**

31: Leiden

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

A90

1970

1.c4 f5 2.d4 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♙g2
♙b4+!? The Bogo-Dutch Indian!?

QUESTION: This check isn't normal
here, is it?

ANSWER: Larsen's move is a little
offbeat but still played. The idea is the
same as in the Bogo-Indian (1 d4 Nf6 2
c4 e6 3 Nf3 Bb4+): giving White a
"free" tempo in order to lure a knight or
bishop to the inferior d2-square, or
else concede a Nimzo-Indian position
with Nc3.

[The usual moves, in order of

popularity are **4...♙e7**]

[**4...d5**]

[and **4...c6** (postponing a decision
about the d-pawn).]

5.♙d2 Botvinnik is willing to hand over
some control of e4, in exchange for the
bishop pair.

QUESTION: How does the inclusion of
...f7-f5 affect this Bogo-Indian idea?

[ANSWER: If White responds with
5.♙d2, Black is happy to swap off
dark-squared bishops and then
switch the structure to the other
colour like this: ♙xd2+ 6.♖xd2 0-0
7.♙c3 d6 8.♙f3 ♙c6 9.0-0 (or
9.d5 ♙e5 10.♙xe5 dxe5) 9...e5
10.dxe5 dxe5 11.♖xd8 ♖xd8 12.e4
fxe4 13.♙g5 ♙d4 14.♙gxe4 ♙xe4
15.♙xe4 c6 and Black achieved

equality, K.Sundararajan-L.D.

Nisipeanu, Pardubice (rapid) 2013.

That's one way to play it anyway.

Larsen used just to retreat the bishop
to e7 and then continue as if nothing
had happened.]

5...0-0 6.♙gf3 a5 Designed to
discourage White's queenside
expansion with a2-a3 and b2-b4 later
on. **7.0-0 b6!?** The 15th century Dutch
scholar Erasmus intuitively conjectured
the Big Bang theory, centuries before
the scientific community embraced it.
In fact, in Erasmus' time, galaxies were
still hundreds of years away from
discovery. Larsen, in the same kind of
way, had an uncanny knack for
spotting anomalous ideas which
appeared externally crazy, yet when
examined deeper, proved sound.
QUESTION: Isn't Black going to pay for
his provocation by allowing tricks on
the queen's rook?

ANSWER: I don't really see how the
discovery harms Black after Larsen's
next move.

8.♖e5 ♖a7! Another typical Dutch! Who but Larsen would reach move eight with a rook "developed" to a7? Larsen took an almost malicious delight in shaking his booked-up opponents out of their comfortable theoretical orthodoxies, by injecting the position with original problems for both sides to solve. His paradoxical assertion: the rook is merely temporarily inconvenienced, with no actual damage inflicted upon Black's position. QUESTION: How is this rook ever going to get into play?

ANSWER: First, if White plays for a2-a3 and b2-b4, the open a-file gives the rook its freedom. Secondly, Black can contemplate swinging over to the kingside with a future ...d7-d6, ...c7-c6 and ...Rf7; or even ...g7-g5 and ...Rg7.

9.♘d3 Going after the bishop pair gives White nothing.

[Perhaps best was the paradoxical **9.♘b1!**, preparing a2-a3 and re-routing the knight to the superior c3-square. Then:

A) 9...♗b7? drops the b4-bishop after 10.♗xb7 ♖xb7 11.c5! and 12 a3.;

B) 9...♗e7 10.♘c3 ♗b7 11.d5! (threatening 12 Nb5 Ra8 13 d6 and wins) ♖c8 (if Black tries to eject the knight with 11...d6 12.♘f3 e5 , then 13.♘g5! ♗c8 14.♖c2 ♘a6 15.♘e6 ♗xe6 16.dxe6 e4 17.f3 gives White the advantage) 12.e4 fxe4 13.♘xe4 ♘a6 14.♗e3 ♖e8 15.d6! ♘xe4 16.dxe7 ♖xe7 17.♖xd7 ♖f6 18.♘c6 ♘ec5 19.♖d2 ♗xc6 20.♗xc6 and White had a clear advantage with the two bishops, B.Gelfand-R.Knaak, Halle 1987.;

C) 9...♗d6!/? (this seems like the best try, preventing d4-d5 which

would now leave the e5-knight en prise) 10.♘c3 ♗b7 11.♗g5 ♗xg2 12.♗xg2 ♗e7 13.♖d3 was P.Lukacs-E.Bricard, Montpellier 1991, and now d6 14.♘f3 c6 looks thematic, clearing the rank for the a7-rook; for example, 15.♖fe1 h6 16.♗xf6 ♗xf6 17.e4 fxe4 18.♖xe4 ♖e7 .; **D)** 9...--]

9...♗b7 Larsen doesn't bother to move the bishop, at least not yet.

[Alternatively: **9...♗xd2** 10.♖xd2 ♗b7 11.♗xb7 ♖xb7 12.b3 ♖e7 13.♗b2 d6 14.d5! e5 15.f4 e4 16.♘e1! , heading for d4, P.H.Nielsen-P. Nikolic, Barcelona 2012, and now b5! would give Black a playable game.]

[**9...♗e7** 10.b3 ♗b7 11.f3 (11.♘f3 transposes to the main game) 11...c5 12.dxc5 bxc5 13.e4 ♘a6 14.exf5 exf5 15.♖e1 ♘b4 16.♘f1 ♖a6 , finding another route to the centre, was fine for Black in A.Zajogin-R. Vaganian, German League 2008.]

10.♘f3 Hey, I said "going after the bishop pair"!

[But **10.♘xb4** isn't really very attractive for White, mainly because it improves Black's structure and frees the a7-rook after ♗xg2 11.♗xg2 axb4 12.♘f3 d6 , intending ...c7-c5 next, which looks quite comfortable for Black.]

10...♗e7 Retreating the bishop after all – it will re-emerge on f6 soon enough.

11.b3 ♘e4 12.♗b2 ♗f6 13.a3 c5!? QUESTION: Doesn't this create a hole on b5?

ANSWER: A hole in one's position isn't a worry if it can't be exploited, and here White's knights never look like reaching b5.

14.e3 ♘c6 15.♘fe5 This natural move doesn't turn out well for White,

[who should consider **15.♟f4** , though I'd give 10-1 odds that Larsen would have banged out the attacking/weakening thrust g5!? without hesitation. Then Houdini analysis runs 16.♟h5!? ♙h8 17.♟d2 ♟xd2 18.♞xd2 ♞e8 19.♞d1 a4 20.bxa4 cxd4 21.exd4 f4 , when the position may be objectively even but I prefer Black's activity over his potential for structural weakness.]

15...cxd4 16.exd4 ♟xe5! 17.dxe5

Aiming for play down the d-file at the cost of freeing the c5-square for Black's pieces. **♙e7 18.a4?!**

A rare strategic misjudgement from the maestro. Larsen's oddness of play had a mysteriously confusing effect on even experienced opponents.

QUESTION: Why did Botvinnik voluntarily create holes on b4 and c5?

ANSWER: Several reasons:

1. He wanted to eliminate ...a5-a4 tricks which undermine c4.
2. White fixed a hole on b5 which, for now, no piece has access to.
3. White fixed b6 as a potential target, which I don't really believe is weak.

[Botvinnik would be better off leaving his queenside structure fluid after **18.♟d4 ♞c7 19.♞c2 .**]

18...♞c7 19.♞c2 ♙c6 20.f3 ♟c5 21.♟f4 This leads to trouble, but I don't know what else to suggest. When I played around with the position, White ended up worse no matter what I tried. **♙g5! 22.♟e2**

[If **22.♞ad1** then ♙xf4 23.gxf4 ♞d8 24.♞c3 ♞h4 25.♞e3 g5! and Black stands better; for example, 26.fxg5 f4 27.♞d4 ♞aa8! 28.♞f2 ♞f5 29.♙a3 ♞xg5 30.♙xc5 bxc5 31.♞xc5 ♟h8! (Black's attack may seem slow but White has no clean

method of safeguarding his exposed king) 32.♞d3 ♞g6 33.♟h1 ♞h6 34.h3 ♞g6 35.♞a2 ♞g3 36.♞f2 ♞xh3+! 37.♟g1 ♞g3 38.♟f1 ♞h5 39.♞d4 ♞ag8 40.♞f2 ♞g6 41.♞dd2 ♞b1+ 42.♞d1 ♞xb3 and White can resign.]

22...♙e3+ 23.♟h1 f4! It's almost disorienting to witness Botvinnik getting outplayed strategically! White's game continues to subtly deteriorate. **24.♟d4?** This last move is a positional player's mistake. Somehow, in the back of every strategist's subconscious (including your unfortunate writer) bubbles the deluded thought: "Only the vapid bourgeois enjoy playing for mate!" Botvinnik seriously underestimates the hidden danger to his king. His plan is too simple an artwork – a stick figure in a world which requires colour and definition.

[Instead, **24.♞ad1** was necessary, intending fxg3?! (24...♞aa8 is correct) 25.♞c3! ♙g5 26.hxg3 , when White's pieces suddenly unravel with advantage.]

24...fxg3 25.♟xc6 Forced, [since **25.hxg3??** loses on the spot to ♞xe5 .]

25...dxc6 26.hxg3 ♞f7! Threatening mate by swinging the queen to h5.

27.♙h3 EXERCISE (planning): How did Larsen now firmly seize the initiative? ANSWER: By taking control of the d-file.

♞d8! The correct rook.

[**27...♞d7?!** isn't nearly as strong: 28.♞ad1 ♞h5 (or 28...♞fd8 29.♞xd7 ♞xd7 30.♙c3 , keeping the rook out of d2) 29.♟g2 ♞xd1 (if now 29...♞fd8 then 30.♞d6! ♞xd6 31.exd6 ♞xd6 32.♞d1 ♞xd1 33.♞xd1 ♞g6 34.♞d8+ ♟f7 35.♞c7+ with perpetual check)

30.♖xd1 ♖g5 31.♙a3 ♖d8 32.f4!
 ♖xd1 33.fxg5 ♖xf1 34.♙xf1 ♙f7
 35.g6+! ♙xg6 36.♙e2 ♙d4 37.♙xc5
 ♙xc5 38.♙xe6 ♙d4 39.♙d7 ♙xe5
 40.c5! bxc5 41.♙f3 and the opposite-
 coloured bishops ensure the draw.]

28.♙c3!

[QUESTION: Why can't White challenge the d-file with 28.♖ad1 again?

ANSWER: This time 28 Rad1? is dealt harshly with ♖xd1 29.♖xd1 ♖d7 (the point of Larsen's ultra-accurate 27th move: the a7-rook can seize the d-file, unlike one on f8) 30.♖e2 ♖h5! 31.♖h2 (31.♙g2?? hangs the queen to ♖d2) 31...♖g6 and Black dominates, threatening both ...Rd2 and ...Rd3.]

28...♖ad7

[28...♖ad7 threatening 29.-- ♖d2 30.♙xd2 ♖xd2 31.♖c3 ♖h5 and wins.]

29.♖a2 EXERCISE (combination alert):

It is nothing short of amazing to see Botvinnik get strategically manhandled like this! White is completely tangled up. How can Black exploit this to force the win of material.

♖d3?! A mistake is excess, while an inaccuracy is simply an indulgence. Black remains in control after this move, but he had something even stronger.

[ANSWER: Deflection. After 29...♖d1! (the threat of ...Qxf3+ gains a crucial tempo) 30.♖e2 ♖1d3! 31.♖c2 (Black has essentially achieved ...Rd3 for free) ♙d4! 32.♙xd4 ♖8xd4 , both b3 and f3 hang simultaneously and White's position is a train wreck.]

30.b4 axb4 31.♙xb4 EXERCISE

(combination alert): Black to play and win material.

ANSWER: Double attack h3 and e5.

♖h5! The human move.

[Strangely enough, Houdini, in an uncharacteristically spiritual mood, prefers to decline the pawn and improve Black's position by 31...♙b3! 32.♖h2 c5 33.♙e1 ♙d2!

with a strategically won game.]

32.♖h2 With the little threat of Bxe6+.

♖xe5 This miser's greatest joy is to spend her evenings counting her gold.

33.f4?! White's search for a cure to his terminal illness proves futile. His last move looks like a time pressure misjudgement, based upon the philosophy that, in wartime, the needs of an individual may be sacrificed for the safety of the multitude.

EXERCISE (combination alert):

Botvinnik is unable to reconcile himself to acceptance of his strategically demoted circumstances and lashes out. Black to play and win more material.

ANSWER: Another double attack.

♖e4+ 34.♖g2 ♖xc4 35.♙xc5

Botvinnik takes refuge in opposite-coloured bishops, which in this position is no cause for celebration because of the principle: Opposite-coloured bishops favour the attacker – in this case, clearly Black.

♙xc5! Black needs his e-pawn to undermine f4.

[Hence 35...♖xc5?! 36.♙xe6+ ♙h8 would be inferior.]

36.♖xc6 ♖e3

[No, the white rook is not en prise: 36...♖xa2?? is a bone-headed blunder, losing to 37.♙xe6+ .]

37.♖af2 ♙h8 38.♖g2 h6 Eliminated any back rank nonsense. 39.♙g4

[The a4-pawn isn't running away, since 39.♖a2? would be met by the overload trick ♖xg3! .]

39...♖xa4 40.♖e2 e5! 41.♖a2

White's bishop hangs if he moves the f-pawn. ♖c4 42.♖c2 ♖b4 43.♙f5

[If White plays 43.♖b2 ♖a4 44.♖a2 , then ♖e8 escapes the rook's badgering.]

43...exf4 44.gxf4 ♖e1 Larsen slowly eliminates the white king's defenders.

45.♖e2 ♖xf1+ 46.♖xf1 ♖f8

Target: f4. 47.♙e4 ♖d4 48.♙g2 ♖f6!

Forcing the pawn to f5 weakens the dark squares around the white king further. If the f-pawn goes, even the pure opposite-coloured bishop endgame won't save White.

49.f5 ♖g5+ Oh, the magic of the birds and the bees. The queen, to her shock, realizes she is hopelessly in love with White's king, who unfortunately doesn't share her feelings.

50.♙h1 ♖h4+ 51.♙g2 EXERCISE (planning): The white king's security is built upon a sandy foundation. Find one powerful idea and White's position collapses.

ANSWER: Transfer the rook to d4, intending to swing over to g4.

♖d8! Intending the crushing ...Rd4.

The über-rook, not in a mood for sentiment to interfere with day-to-day business, decides to sign the white king's death warrant. Black's attack is designed to be lean and functional, with minimum force extracting maximum benefit.

52.♙c2

[There is nothing better: 52.♖f3 is met by ♖d1 , forcing mate.]

[52.♙f3 ♖g5+ picks off f5, after which White is out of cash, in dire financial straits, to the point where the electricity and heat have been turned off, and his king stamps his feet and blows into his hands to keep warm.]

52...♖d4! A final gothic bloodletting ends resistance. Nothing escapes the rook's arc of devastation.

[Larsen is unafraid of the discovered check to his own king after 52...♖d4! (Black's queen, not wishing to dirty her hands with the ugly business of murder, tends to use her d4-cat's paw to do her dark bidding) 53.♖e8+ ♙h7 54.f6+ g6 55.♙xg6+ (the bishop's day job is as a saver of souls, while at night he moonlights as an assassin: "The devil lives within your heart and must be purged," he declares, accusingly – but the black king smiles and responds: "There is no devil in here; it's just me.") ♙xg6 56.♖b1+ ♙xf6 57.♖f1+ ♙g7 and Black wins. The king likes to end all his meetings with a joke. This one happens to be on the opposing queen and rook. White runs out of checks and his position resembles ancient Rome, moments after the barbarian horde finished their murdering, looting, raping and pillaging fest.]

0-1

40

C43

□ Karpov,A

■ Larsen,B

32: Tilburg

1980

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 The Petroff, along with the fun-killing Berlin Ruy Lopez, has taken some of the joy out of 1 e4 for many who champion that first move. However, we can be confident that Larsen isn't playing it for a draw! QUESTION: Is there an opening Larsen didn't play?

ANSWER: Unlike most GMs who specialize narrowly, Larsen played anything and everything.

QUESTION: But with such a repertoire,

it is impossible to know everything deeply. How did Larsen survive theory?

ANSWER: Larsen survived theory by poisoning theory! As we have seen throughout the book, at some point in a "book" line, Larsen tossed in some bizarre unplayed anomaly, forcing the opponent to think on their own, without support of a theoretical umbilical cord.

3.d4!?

[Back when he was a 1 e4 player, Karpov nearly always went for the **3.d4!** main line, including against Larsen at Bugojno earlier in the year (an uneventful 23-move draw)]

[but he had just beaten Hort with **3.d4!?** in Amsterdam (a tournament in which Karpov came first and Larsen came last) and so decided to try it again.]

3...dxe4

[The (less popular) alternative is **3...exd4** 4.e5 dxe4 5.Qxd4 d5 6.exd6 dxd6 7.dxc3 dxc6 8.Qf4 , as in G.Kasparov-A.Karpov, New York (10th matchgame) 1990. The computers say "even", but I would rather take White, who can castle long and apply central pressure.]

4.d3 d5 5.dxe5 d7 Black's main move.

[There is an ultra-sharp line which goes **5...d6** 6.0-0 0-0 7.c4 dxe5 8.dxe5 dxc6 9.cxd5 Qxd5 10.Qc2 db4 11.dxe4 dxc2 12.dxd5 f5 13.g4! Qxg4 14.dxe4 dxa1 15.f4 f5 16.d5+! h8 17.Bc1! c6 18.g2 f8 19.d2 with an edge to White, according to theory. My question is: why would anyone want to parrot theory halfway to the time control?!]

6.Qe2!? Rather unusual;

[**6.dxd7** dxd7 7.0-0 is the main line here.]

[However, Karpov had played **6.Qe2!?** against Hort, and Larsen had faced it himself against Timman in Bugojno; in both games Black replied with **Qe7** . This time Larsen tried something different.]

6...dxe5! 7.dxe4 The only worthwhile continuation.

[**7.dxe5** dxc5 is fine for Black.]

7...dxe4 8.Qxe4 e6 9.Qxe5

The vain queen instructs her artisans to construct multiple statues of herself, in honour of her inevitable coming victories. In the end the statues are built, but the victories never come to pass.

[So White has won a pawn, at the seemingly small cost of the bishop pair and a wasted move or two with his queen. Capturing the other way would oblige White to concede a lot more moves if he tries to keep the material: **9.dxe5?! d5 10.Qg4 h5! 11.Qh3 Qe7! 12.f4 Qe6! 13.Qxe6+ fxe6** and Black is doing well; for example, **14.0-0 (or 14.f2 g5!) 14...dxc5+ 15.h1 0-0-0 16.dxc3 dxc6 17.f5?! (trying to develop the c1-bishop) d4! 18.h3? (to prevent ... Rg4) Qg4! (anyway!) and Black wins (Larsen).]**

9...Qd7 10.0-0 0-0-0 11.e3

QUESTION: Does Black really have enough compensation here?

ANSWER: It hardly looks like it, does it? White has a solid extra central pawn and has safely castled. It only remains to safeguard the queen and develop the knight and White would seem to have consolidated already. Well, let's see what happens.

b4!! I don't know if this was pre-game prep or over-the-board inspiration. Is there such a thing as a predictable surprise? Larsen's shocking move may

appear to be almost meaningless and out of nowhere, yet subtle strategic markers hint that a solution to Black's problems was a distinct possibility. Kasparov writes that Larsen's move, "rehabilitates the entire idea associated with the pawn sacrifice." It also happens to be Houdini's top choice in the position.

QUESTION: 11...Bb4 looks very strange. What is Black's idea?

ANSWER: The point is to keep the white queen out of a5, forcing her back (after ...f7-f6) towards the kingside, where Black can exploit her vulnerability to generate a strong initiative.

[Instead, 11...♙d6 would indeed be met by 12.♚a5! , when ♙d5!

A) 13.♚xd5?? ♙xh2+;

B) , or 13.♚xa7?? ♚g4! 14.f3 ♚h4 etc;

C) , or 13.h3 b6 14.♚xa7?!

(but in that last line it's unclear whether Black has enough for the pawn if White simply withdraws his queen with 14.♚d2!) 14...♚c6! 15.f3? ♙d7! (threatening ...Ra8) 16.♚a6 ♙c4 and wins.;

D) 13.--]

12.♞c3?! A strategic error. Faced with a new idea, Karpov adopts a no-nonsense approach and just develops his knight, mistakenly assuming that White can't really be in any danger. The 16th century Swiss physician Paracelsus wrote that each drug cure was also a deadly poison when misapplied. Karpov misjudges the coming position, placing misguided faith in the opposite-coloured bishops.

[It was better to play **12.c3** f6 13.♚g3 (the queen is misplaced on the kingside, which is the entire idea behind Black's plan) ♙e7! (13...♙d6

would be met by 14.♙f4) 14.♞d2 , although after h5 15.f3 g5 16.c4 f5! 17.♚e5 ♙d6 18.♚a5

(so the queen makes it to a5 after all) ♙f4! (this undermining shot regains the lost pawn) 19.♙xf4 ♚xd4+ 20.♚f2 gxf4 21.♞b3 ♚b6 22.♚xb6 axb6 23.♚c2 ♚d6 , Black stood at least equal in the ending, Kir.Georgiev-V.Salov, Leningrad 1987.]

12...f6 13.♚g3?! Two moves after Larsen's surprise, two weak moves from Karpov.

[**13.♚f4** would have been safer, when W.Unzicker-K.Rogoff, Amsterdam 1980 (which reached this position via a different move order) concluded ♙d6 (13...♙xc3 14.bxc3 h5 is not as effective here) 14.♚f3 ♙g4 15.♚d5 ♙xh2+ 16.♙xh2 ♚xd5 17.♞xd5 ♚xd5 ½-½.]

13...♙xc3! QUESTION: Why did Black open the b-file for White's attack?

ANSWER: With the c3-knight's passing comes the extinction of White's counterplay. In short, White doesn't have an attack – but Black does, and his move follows the principle:

Opposite-coloured bishops favour the attacker. It also inflicts heavy damage to White's queenside structure.

14.bxc3 h5 Black's assault begins.

15.h4!? Hoping to discourage both ...h5-h4 and ...g7-g5. This is perhaps another inaccuracy since it grants Black a clear way to pry White's king open. All the same, it's hard to fault Karpov for taking this active course, especially as passive defence has proved no more effective.

[For example: **15.f3** h4 16.♚f2 h3 17.g3 ♚c6 18.a4 a5 19.♚fb1 ♙c4 20.♚e1 ♚he8 21.g4 ♙d5 and Black as clearly better, B.Gurgenidze-E

Rozentalis, Kharkov 1985.]

[**15.♖fd1** g5 (15...h4 16.♗f4 ♔c6 is good too) 16.♗f3 ♖h6 17.♗e2 ♗c6 18.d5 ♕xd5 19.♗d3 ♖hh8 20.♗f5+ ♖b8 21.♕d4 ♖d6

, again with a clear advantage to Black, R.Zelcic-R.Kasimdzhanov, Bosnian Team Championship 2003.]

15...g5! Adults tend to fantasize about wealth, while children dream of glory. In a sense, Larsen always retained child-like aspirations at the chess board, always in search of a masterpiece – which, in this game, he achieves. Karpov's suppressing idea didn't work out too well! Material is secondary to the attack and initiative. Neither tact nor subtlety enters Larsen's equations and a feeling of open revolt continues to rise in Black's position.

Indiscriminate carpet bombing is applied when the aggressor makes no distinction between the enemy and innocent civilians.

16.f3

[After **16.hxg5?! h4** 17.♗h2 fxg5! 18.f3 (or 18.♕xg5? ♖dg8 19.f4 h3 20.g3 ♗c6 and White's position falls apart) 18...h3 19.g3 ♖dg8 20.♖f2 ♗c6 21.♕d2 ♕d5 22.♖af1 ♖f8

, White cannot hope to save himself.]

16...♖dg8 17.♖f2 ♗c6 Targeting c3, f3 and g2. **18.♕d2** The bishop preaches courage, all the while packing his bags in preparation for his own evacuation. A defensive retreat is the chess version of flinching instinctually to threatened pain.

g4! A change of tack. With White's pieces now in defensive positions, Larsen abandons the direct assault in favour of complete control of the light squares

19.f4 ♕c4 Black has achieved total strategic domination (made all the

more astonishing when you consider that Karpov was on the other side!):

1. White's light squares bleed and are pocked with numerous holes. In particular, he can't contest the e-file because only one of his rooks can get there.

2. White has a god-awful bishop, the poster child of bad bishops.

3. White nurses multiple weaknesses, such as his a2- and c3-pawns.

4. White's Jonah-in-the-whale-like king feels enveloped and remains unsafe as long as the opposite-coloured principle applies. In fact, White's apparent security, placing drawing hopes upon the presence of opposite-coloured bishops is fleeting and unstable, with no silver lining.

Conclusion: White is strategically busted.

20.d5!? Complete desperation.

Kasparov criticized this move but it's natural for White to want to deflect the c4-bishop which is causing him so much trouble.

[I doubt White can save it after **20.f5** ♖e8 21.♕f4 ♖e7 22.a3 ♖he8 in any case, even if he does have "a pawn for his sufferings".]

20...♕xd5 21.f5 ♖e8 22.a3 ♖e4

23.♖e1 ♖he8 24.♖xe4 ♖xe4 25.♕h2 ♗c5 26.♕f4 ♖e1

[There's no need to endanger his own king by allowing **26...♗xa3?! 27.♕xc7** . The a3-pawn isn't going anywhere.]

27.♕d2 ♖a1 28.♗e3 Threatening mate on the move. **♗d6+!?** The queen emits a moan of deep satisfaction upon viewing her brother's acute discomfort.

[I would have probably cashed out with **28...♗xe3** 29.♕xe3 ♖xa3 30.♕d4 ♕e4 31.♕xf6 ♖a5 32.♕d4

♖xf5 33.♖xf5 ♕xf5 , followed by ... Bc2, when Black's two pawn

queenside majority should win despite the opposite-coloured bishops.]

29.♖f4 b6 EXERCISE (planning): Larsen's last move allows 30 Qe8+, followed by 31 Qxh5. Did he just blunder? And should Karpov pick off Black's h5-pawn?

ANSWER: White should avoid the line.

30.c4! Larsen's move was no blunder.

[Karpov avoids the devious trap after **30.♖e8+?** ♖b7 31.♖xh5?? ♕f3! , when the twin threats of 32...Qxd2 and 32...g3+ are crushing.]

30...♕xc4 31.♖d4 Karpov forces queens off the board after all, though the ending offers him little relief. White's queen regards her endangered king the way an exasperated teacher regards a particularly idiotic kindergartener. Her swap is necessary for his continued survival.

♖xd4 One pawn up, even with opposite-coloured bishops present, is enough for a black victory. **32.♖xd4 ♕b5!** Preventing a3-a4 and thus dooming White's a-pawn, after which Black's own a-pawn becomes passed.

33.♕h6 Going after f6.

[The alternative was **33.♕g5!?** fxg5 34.hxg5 , which comes close but still fails for White in the end; e.g. ♕d7 35.♖f4 (or 35.g6 ♕xf5 36.g7 ♕h7) 35...♖xa3 36.g6 g3+ 37.♖h3 ♖a5 38.g7 ♖xf5! and even though White queens with check, he loses due to a deadly discovered check!]

[**33.c4** ♕d7 34.♖d3 saves a3 but drops f5.]

33...♖xa3 34.♕g7 ♕d7 35.♖f4 ♖a5 So White doesn't get a pawn back, and his position remains completely hopeless. **36.♕xf6 ♕xf5 37.c3 ♕e6 38.♖g3 ♖d5 39.♖e4 ♖d7 40.♕e5 ♖d2!** Threatening 41...Bd5. **41.♖f4**

[After **41.c4** c5 42.♕b8 a5 43.♖e5 a4 44.♖xh5 ♕xc4 , the queenside pawns are too fast.]

41...♖xg2 42.♖g5 ♖c2 This move complicates the win slightly but isn't an error.

[Instead: **42...♖g1!** was given by Larsen, which is indeed superior to the move he played. In this case Black shepherds his g-pawn up the board. For example: 43.♖xh5 g3 44.♖d4+ ♖c6 45.♖d3 g2 46.♖g3 ♕d5 47.♕d4 ♖c1 48.♖g5 ♖b5 49.h5 c5 50.♕f2 ♖f1 51.♕e3 a5 52.h6 a4 53.h7 ♖h1 , when 54.♖g6 is met by ♕e4+ , picking off the h-pawn.]

[**42...a5!** is the computer's straightforward choice: 43.♖xh5 ♖f2 44.♖e1 a4 45.♖g6 a3 46.c4 a2 47.h5 ♕xc4 48.h6 ♕d3+ 49.♖g7 g3 50.h7 ♕xh7 51.♖xh7 g2 52.♖g1 c5 and there is no way to halt Black's queenside armada.]

43.♖xh5 g3 44.♕xg3 ♖xc3

Three against one isn't a fair fight. Karpov's desperate attempts to generate counterplay with his passed h-pawn eventually fail. **45.♕e5 ♖c4**

46.♖e3 Black wins easily if rooks come off the board. **♕d5 47.♖a3 ♖e6**

48.♕g3 ♖f5! Attempted assassination is the black king's normal method of conflict resolution. Larsen utilizes tactics to allow his king to help halt the h-pawn.

49.♖h6

[Black's devious king is a dangerous person with whom to conduct business: **49.♖xa7??** ♖c6!

forces mate. The white king's Bataan Death March ends abruptly, even before it begins. "Soon, very soon, you will submit to my degradations, Black's king informs his terrified,

boxed-in brother.]

49...a5 50.♔g7 ♔g4 It becomes abundantly clear that the h-pawn is going nowhere. 51.♔f6 a4 52.♞e3 ♕f3 53.♞e1 ♞c1 54.♞e7 ♔h3 55.♞d2 ♞c4 56.♞e3 ♔g2 57.♞e1 ♞c1 58.♞d2

[Returning to the h-pawn with 58.♔g5 allows a3! , since White's rook is overloaded.]

58...♞d1 59.♞c3 c5 60.♞e7 b5 61.♞e5 a3 62.♞h7 b4 63.h5 b3 64.h6 b2 65.♞g7+ ♔f2 66.♞g3+ ♔e3

[66...♔e3 67.h7 ♞h1 ends the discussion, as the rook spasms with silent laughter at his enemy's plight. Kasparov described this as "a memorable game, one of the best in Larsen's later career" – especially so, given the fact that by 1980 he was well past his prime.]

0-1

Chapter Four

Larsen on Exploiting Imbalances

When an annotator uses the word "space", it is nearly always followed by the word "advantage". Even Captains James Tiberius Kirk and Jean-Luc Picard endorsed space as "the final frontier." In this chapter, in his revolutionary Scandinavian game versus Karpov, Larsen, on the Black side, demonstrates its startling obverse, the dark side of unrestrained territorial grabs, where Karpov's "space advantage" morphs seamlessly into overextension, à la Alexander the Great or Napoleon.



With beautiful dreams of delivering checkmate, Karpov bravely or recklessly advanced his pawns with abandon, which turned out to be akin to leaving your kids with a babysitter who arrives dressed in Goth-style, with black lipstick and eyeliner and a Satanic pentagram tattooed on her forehead.

In the above position (from [Game 40](#)) it feels as if White dominates on both wings. Yet after Larsen's 28...f6! - which appears merely a lash-out after having reached the limits of compliance - his deadly counterattack began in earnest, proving that if you are quick, and don't get hit, your slower but bigger opponent has no way to hurt you. The remainder of the game is a degenerating display of White's once-wholesome family unit, transforming into a nest of dysfunction and overextension. I have never seen a better example of how to weaponize a lack of space, as this game demonstrates.



The second diagram is from Jimenez-Larsen ([Game 34](#)). In this position Larsen played the indescribably crazy 14...Bxe5!!, handing over his supposedly indispensable fianchettoed dark-squared bishop - and he did so in order to dominate the light squares. To see how he achieved this, you need to play over the game!

[33: B.Larsen-S.Gligoric, Moscow Olympiad 1956](#)
Sicilian Defence

[34: E.Jimenez Zerquera-B.Larsen, Palma de Mallorca 1967](#)
Alekhine's Defence

[35: B.Larsen-W.Unzicker, Lugano Olympiad 1968](#)
Semi-Tarrasch Defence

[36: B.Larsen-G.Tringov, Teesside 1972](#)
Nimzo-Larsen Attack

[37: B.Larsen-V.Hort, San Antonio 1972](#)
King's Indian Defence

King's Indian Defence

[38: J.Kaplan-B.Larsen, San Antonio 1972](#)

Caro-Kann Defence

[39: B.Larsen-L.Portisch, Biel Interzonal 1976](#)

English Opening

[40: A.Karpov-B.Larsen, Montreal 1979](#)

Scandinavian Defence

[41: I.Morovic Fernandez-B.Larsen, Buenos Aires 1992](#)

Sicilian Defence

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 **Larsen,B**
 **Gligoric,S**

33: Moscow Olympiad

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

B92

1956

1.♟f3 c5 2.e4!? Larsen generally interpreted the opening with a foggy, inverted lens, but not this early in his career. Back then, the Réti (with 1 Nf3 and 2 g3) was his usual opening as White, though he would throw in 2 e4 against 1...c5, probably because the Sicilian – and the Najdorf in particular – was his main defence as Black. This appears to be one of those internal conflicts between private inclinations and public duty. Larsen wasn't constitutionally designed to follow routine or authority, but while he was still making his way in the chess world, he mostly restrained himself to mainstream theoretical variations. Only later would he allow his creative streak free rein in the opening.

The Moscow Olympiad was in fact his breakthrough event. It was here that Larsen gained the Grandmaster title with a gold medal top board performance of 14/18, including an astonishing 8½/10 as Black. Soon afterwards he began playing 1 d4 more regularly; then 1 f4 and 1 g3 began to feature in his games, followed by a resurgence of 1 c4 and 1 e4, and at last of course 1 b3. By the late '60s trying to predict Larsen's first move would have been nearly impossible.

d6 3.d4 I remember reading that Larsen once claimed this move was an error!

QUESTION: That's an outrageous claim! What was his basis?

ANSWER: Larsen, quite logically pointed out that White's d-pawn is a

central pawn, unlike Black's c-pawn, and therefore the more valuable of the two. Of course, in exchange for this "concession" White gets freedom of movement for his remaining pieces. So in essence, Larsen argues strongly in favour of the Anti-Sicilian lines as White!

cx d4 4.♞xd4 ♞f6 5.♞c3 a6 6.♞e2

White's most positional option. **e5**

The thematic Najdorf continuation.

[Alternatively, Black can keep the structure more fluid and enter a Scheveningen with **6...e6** .]

7.♞b3 ♞e7 8.0-0 0-0 9.♞g5!?

An unusual line after all.

[The most common moves here are, respectively, **9.♞e3**]

[**9.♞h1**]

[and **9.a4** , the last of which can transpose to the game after b6 10.♞g5 ♞bd7 .]

9...♞bd7

[In a later game Gligoric introduced **9...♞e6** 10.♞xf6 ♞xf6 11.♞d5 ♞g5! and after 12.♞d3 ♞c6 13.c3 ♞e7 14.♞xe7+ ♞xe7 15.♞fd1 ♞b6 16.♞c2 ♞ad8 , Black already stood better, E.Cobo Arteaga-S.Gligoric, Havana 1962. Nowadays, 9...Be6 is generally preferred, though there's nothing especially wrong with the text move.]

10.a4 b6?! Black prevents the clamping a4-a5 and prepares to develop his bishop to b7.

[Nevertheless, as Larsen indicated, he would do better to insert **10...h6!**

11.♞h4 (11.♞xf6?! ♞xf6 12.♞c4 ♞e6! 13.♞e2 ♞c8 is fine for Black)

11...b6 . If White continues as in the game with 12.♞c4 ♞b7 13.♞e2 ♞c7 14.♞fd1 ♞fc8 15.♞d2 , he has effectively answered 14...h6 with 15 Bh4, allowing Black to play **g5!**

. For example, 16.♔g3 ♖f8 17.f3 ♖e6 18.♙f2 ♗g7 19.♗h1 ♖f4 20.♖e3 d5 21.exd5 ♙c5 22.♖e1 ♙xf2 23.♖xf2 ♖6xd5 24.♖ce4 f5 and Black stood well, R.J.Fischer-F. Olafsson, Reykjavik 1960.]

11.♙c4 Larsen continues to focus on conquest of the d5-square. **♙b7**

12.♖e2 ♖c7

[QUESTION: Did both sides miss the tactic **12...♖xe4** - ?

ANSWER: The tactic backfires after 13.♖xe4 ♙xg5 14.♖xd6 ♖c7 15.♖ad1, when Black is in deep trouble since White threatens Qg4 as well as Nxb7, followed by Bd5.]

13.♖fd1 ♖fc8 The other rook can't go to c8 as it would leave the a6-pawn en prise. Conversely, 13...Rfc8 weakens f7, which turns out to be a factor in a few moves time.

[Here **13...h6** 14.♙xf6 ♖xf6 doesn't really help, as White can choose between:

A) 15.♖d5 ♖xd5 16.♙xd5 ♙xd5 17.♖xd5 with a slight pull due to his control of d5 and superior minor piece, V.Kramnik-B.Gelfand, Cap d'Agde (rapid) 2003.;

B) 15.♖d2 ♖c5 (there may be nothing better than **15...♖fc8**, transposing to the game) 16.♖f1 b5 17.♙b3 b4 18.♖d5 ♙xd5 19.♙xd5 ♖a7 20.♙b3, again with an edge for White, V.Meijers-L. Gutman, Werther 2011.;

C) 15.--]

14.♖d2 h6 15.♙xf6 ♖xf6 16.♙b3

Larsen was happy to hand over the bishop pair to eliminate a defender of d5, and now retreats his bishop to safety, allowing the d2-knight to reposition itself via c4 or f1. White has a very high score from this position (74.4% in my database), which would seem

to indicate that Black's set-up is not the best.

♙c6 17.♖c4! Larsen allows a mini-tactic. He threatens a pair of positional ideas:

1. Ne3, followed by Ned5, taking control over a key square.

2. a4-a5 is in the air, when Black is denied the natural ...b6-b5 bypass, since Nb6 picks off the exchange.

[Alternatively, **17.♖f1** prevents tricks on e4 and also gives White an edge.

For example, ♖ab8 (or 17...♖b7 18.♖d5 b5 19.axb5 ♙xb5 20.♖f3 ♙xf1 21.♖xf1 a5 22.♖e2

, S.Ganguly-H.Nakamura, from the same event) 18.♖g3 b5 19.axb5 axb5 20.♖h5! (preparing to eliminate a key defender of d5) b4 21.♖xf6+ ♙xf6 22.♖d5 ♙xd5 23.♖xd5 with a clear advantage to White, due to the favourable opposite-coloured bishops and domination of the light squares, A.Timofeev-E.Agrest, FIDE World Cup, Khanty-Mansiysk 2005.]

17...♖xe4!? This move actually drops a pawn but at least frees Black's position.

[The unpleasant option was to play **17...b5** 18.♖e3 ♖b7 19.axb5 axb5 20.♖xa8 ♖xa8 21.♖cd5 ♖xd5 (21...♖xe4?? hangs a piece to 22.♖f5) 22.♙xd5 ♙xd5 23.♖xd5 ♙d8 and pray he can hold against White's monster knight. The bishop may later emerge on b6.]

18.♖xe4 d5 19.a5?! The second best move, where White only holds a microbe of an edge.

[Stronger was **19.♖xb6!** ♖xb6 20.♖c3 d4 21.♖d5 ♙xd5 22.♙xd5 ♖ab8 23.♖xe5 ♙f6 24.♖h5 ♖c7 25.♙b3, when White has won a pawn and retained the superior bishop.]

19...dxc4 20.♖xc4 ♖f8 Black has difficulty neutralizing White's presence

along the a2-g8 diagonal.

[Certainly not **20...♙e8??** 21.♖xc7 ♖xc7 22.axb6 ♗d7 (22...♖b7 gets skewered by 23.♙d5) 23.♖xd7 ♙xd7 24.♙d5 ♖b8 25.♖xa6 and Black can resign]

[while after **20...♙xe4** 21.♖xe4 ♙c5 22.♗d3 ♖f8 , as in G.Sigurjonsson-P. Ostermeyer, Oslo 1983, White might try 23.♖g4! , intending ♗ad8?! 24.♖g3 g5 25.h4 with a strong attack.]

[The crude **20...bxa5!** 21.♖xf7+ ♔h8 looks to be Black's best defence, aiming to utilize the open f-file; for example, 22.♖g6 ♖ab8 23.♙g3 ♖f8 24.♙f5 ♙c5 25.♙xg7 ♙xf2+ 26.♔h1 ♙xg2+! 27.♖xg2 ♖xg7 28.♖xa5 ♖xg2+ 29.♔xg2 ♖b6 30.♖xe5 ♖g6+ 31.♔h1 ♙d4 32.♗d5 ♙xb2 and the game should end in a draw.]

21.axb6 ♖xb6 22.♙d6 This looks very strong, targeting f7, but Gligoric has a handy defence ready. **♙b5!**

23.♙xb5

[Obviously **23.♖d5** ♗ad8 doesn't get White anywhere.]

23...axb5 The key imbalance of the game emerges: Opposite-coloured bishops. Watch how Larsen exploits his tiny edge from this factor. **24.♖d5 ♖xa1!?** There is no reason to concede the a-file.

[Black looks okay after **24...♖ae8!** ; for example, 25.♗d3 (or 25.♖xe5 ♙f6) 25...♙c5 26.♖f3 ♔h8 27.♖xf7 ♖xf7 28.♖xf7 ♖f8 29.♖d5 ♙a3! 30.♖f1 ♙xb2 with equality.]

25.♖xa1 ♙c5 The human move, but as it turns out picking off f2 doesn't much bother White.

[The computer preferred Euwe's suggested defence **25...♖c5** 26.♖b7 ♙d8! 27.♖a8 ♖d4 and held a draw against me after 28.g3 e4 29.c3

♖d3! (better than 29...♖d2 30.♙xf7+ ♔h8 31.♖d5 , when White still has chances – Larsen) 30.♖d5 ♖xd5 31.♙xd5 ♙b6 32.♖a6 (it's easy for Black if rooks come off the board) e3! 33.♔f1! ♖b8 34.f4!? b4 35.cxb4 ♙d4 36.b3 ♔f8 37.♙c4 ♖xb4 38.♗d6 ♙b6 39.♗d7 ♔e8 40.♖b7 ♙c5 41.♙xf7+ ♔f8 42.♗d7 ♗d4! 43.♖xd4 ♙xd4 (mission accomplished; White's extra pawn is not enough to win) 44.♙c4 ♔e7 45.♔e2 ♔d6 46.♔f3 ♙b6 47.♔e4 ♙c5 48.♔f5 ♙b4 49.♔g6 ♙c3 50.f5 ♔c5 51.g4 ♔b4 52.h4 ♙f6 53.g5 hxg5 54.hxg5 ♙e7 55.f6 gxf6 56.gxf6 ♙xf6 57.♔xf6 e2 58.♙xe2 ♔xb3 with a draw.]

26.♖a8! Threatening Qxf7+.

EXERCISE (critical decision): Black is almost out of danger – almost!

A potentially fatal peril stretches out before him. The key is to find one correct move and a draw is secured.

What would you play here?

♙xf2+?? Losing by force. Uncontrolled freedom is just another kind of slavery, where we are mastered by our erratic whims and impulses. Sometimes the most natural move on earth can be a major blunder. The inherent righteousness of a cause doesn't ensure a happy outcome. Sometimes even a sound-looking move can be upended by a geometric anomaly, as in this case.

[**ANSWER:** I don't see how White makes progress after **26...♖c7!**

27.♖xf8+ ♔xf8 28.♖a8+ ♔e7

. The victory is near, yet far away, like a distant mountain range you see while driving but still haven't reached hours later. In this case it is a horizon White never approaches, no matter how long he travels. So far

White has had it all his way, but now after any of 29.♖g8 (29.♗d5 ♔f8; 29.♗e4 or ♔f8) 29...♔f6

, Black should hold the game.]

[26...♖xa8 27.♗xa8+ ♕f8 28.♗d5 ♗a7 29.g3 is less appealing for Black, who has trouble defending b5, e5 and f7.]

27.♔f1 ♗f6 EXERCISE (combination alert): White to play and force the win.

[Black can't swap rooks due to

27...♖xa8? 28.♗xa8+ ♔h7 29.♕xf7 (threatening mate in one) h5 30.♗g8+ ♔h6 31.h4! (and again) ♕xh4 32.♗h8+ ♔g5 33.♗xh5+ ♔f6 (or 33...♔f4 34.♗xh4+) 34.♗g6+ ♔e7 35.♗xb6 .]

ANSWER: Outside passed pawn. The king and pawn ending is won, although it takes computer-like accuracy to prove it. Larsen had to calculate the coming king and pawn ending accurately to at least move 46!

28.♗xf7+!! Sociopaths expend huge energy in masking their true natures from society, yet try as they may, their actions eventually do unmask them. Black's queen begins to laugh but, upon seeing her sister enter the room, elicits a startled yelp which quickly turns to a feigned cough.

♗xf7 29.♕xf7+ ♔xf7 30.♖xf8+ ♔xf8 31.♔xf2 QUESTION: Black is the only one with a passed pawn. What factor makes him lost here?

ANSWER: White's majority is on the queenside, which means he can create a distant outside passed pawn, which in turn distracts Black's king. In the meantime, White's king strolls over and eats the kingside pawns.

♔e7 32.♔e3 ♔d6 33.♔e4 b4 34.c3 b3! Black's only prayer. Now White must watch out for black king infiltrations via c4, d3 and c2. 35.c4 g6

[Or 35...♔c5 36.♔xe5 ♔xc4 37.♔e4 g6 38.h4 h5 39.g3 (zugzwang!) ♔c5 40.♔d3 ♔d5 41.♔c3 ♔e4 42.♔xb3 ♔f3 43.♔c4 ♔xg3 44.b4 and White's b-pawn queens first.]

36.g4 h5 37.gxh5 gxh5 38.h4

Zugzwang again! The black king must give way. ♔c6

[38...♔e6 39.c5 is clearly hopeless.]

39.♔xe5 ♔c5 40.♔f5 ♔d4

Here White has a choice between:

- a) 41 c5 deflecting Black's king.
- b) 45 Kg5, winning the h5-pawn and making it a queening race.
- c) 45 Kf4, temporizing to gain the opposition.

EXERCISE (critical decision/ calculation): Two of the above win for White, whereas the other allows Black to escape with a draw. Calculate deeply and pick a line.

ANSWER: Lines 'a' and 'c' win.

41.♔f4!

[41.c5 is just as good and leads to the same position after ♔xc5 42.♔e5 ♔c4 43.♔e4 .]

[Line 'b', on the other hand, throws the win away: 41.♔g5?? ♔xc4 (for Black, the storm is nearly over; there now falls only gentle rain) 42.♔xh5 ♔d3 43.♔g5 ♔c2 44.h5 ♔xb2 45.h6 ♔c1 46.h7 b2 (are we there yet?) 47.h8♖ b1♖ with a draw. Old wounds are healed and peace is restored to the land.]

41...♔c5 Black's last try.

[41...♔xc4 42.♔e4 transposes to move 43.]

42.♔e5!

[Not 42.♔e4?? ♔xc4 43.♔e3 ♔d5 44.♔d3 ♔e5 45.♔c3 ♔f4

, when Black is just in time: 46.♔xb3 ♔g4 47.♔c3 ♔xh4 48.b4 ♔g4

49.b5 h4 and the pawns promote together.]

42...♙xc4 The spiritually beaten-down drone on c4 follows orders, as he has always done in the past. **43.♙e4** Black's king, digesting his preposterous indignity, takes on the expression of perplexed resignation of the family dog, who is forced by the six-year-old to wear her clothes. This is the position Larsen was after: Black loses by a tempo.

♙c5 44.♙d3 ♙d5 45.♙c3 ♙e4 46.♙xb3 ♙f5 47.♙c3

[There's no point in playing it out further: **47.♙c3** ♙g4 48.b4 ♙xh4 49.b5 ♙g3 50.b6 h4 51.b7 h3 52.b8♖+ (White wins because the h-pawn has only reached h3) ♙g2 53.♖g8+ ♙f2 54.♖h7 ♙g2 55.♖g6+ ♙f2 56.♖h5 ♙g2 57.♖g4+ ♙h2 58.♙d3 wins. At the surrender ceremony, Black's king offers his sword with his left hand, since his right is broken and in a sling.]

1-0

43
 **Jimenez Zerquera,E**
 **Larsen,B**

B04

34: Palma de Mallorca 1967
[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.e4 ♘f6 Larsen, along with Bagirov and Korchnoi, was one of the practitioners responsible for the revival of Alekhine's Defence, which at the time was considered somewhat shady – and hence perfect, from Larsen's standpoint!

QUESTION: When did Alekhine's Defence become mainstream?

ANSWER: I think the Alekhine gained

full legitimacy through Fischer's use of it in his world championship match versus Spassky, where he extracted a plus score and the contestants produced two incredibly rich games. It is almost certain that Fischer expanded his repertoire and took up both Alekhine's Defence and 1 b3, the Nimzo-Larsen Attack, due to Larsen's influence.

2.e5 ♘d5 3.♘f3!? An unusual move order.

[Normally White enters the main line via **3.d4** d6 4.♘f3 .]

3...d6 Larsen wants to remain within Alekhine territory.

QUESTION: How can Black escape from that here?

[ANSWER: By playing **3...c5** , transposing to Nimzowitsch's Sicilian variation, which begins 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nf6!? 3 e5 Nd5. As far as I'm aware, Larsen only ever tried this once – and lost – although the position he obtained was actually very good: 4.♘c3 e6 (4...♘xc3 5.dxc3 gives White a safe edge) 5.♘xd5 exd5 6.d4 ♘c6 7.dxc5 ♙xc5 8.♖xd5 ♖b6 (8...d6!? 9.exd6 ♖b6 is another big mess) 9.♙c4! ♙xf2+ 10.♙e2 0-0 11.♖f1 ♙c5 12.♘g5 ♘d4+ 13.♙d3?! (here 13.♙d1 ♘e6 14.♘e4 d6! 15.exd6 ♖d8 is critical) 13...♖g6+! 14.♖e4 d5! 15.♙xd5 ♙f5 16.♖xf5 ♘xf5 17.e6 ♖ad8 18.exf7+ ♙h8 19.c4 b5 20.b3 ♖f6 21.♖b1 ♙b4 22.♙f4 ♖d7 23.♘e6? ♖c3+ 24.♙e2 , S.Gligoric-B.Larsen, Zürich 1959, and now had Larsen played ♖dxf7! , intending 25.♘xf8? ♘d4+! and wins, the game might well have found its way into this book too.]

4.d4 dxe5 This move is standard today but was considered a Larsonian quirk

in the 1960s. Black invites the white knight to e5 and then gains time by undermining it or threatening to swap it off.

[Back then, virtually everyone played **4...g4**]

[or occasionally **4...g6** .]

5.dxe5 g6 The Kengis Variation, though Larsen actually played it first.

[Previously he had experimented with the odd-looking **5...e6!?**]

[as well as the ultra-sharp **5...d7!?** , inviting **6.dxf7** **e7xf7** **7.Wh5+** **e6** .]

[And in my book on the Alekhine, I cover the solid Miles Variation, **5...c6** , which is now Black's favoured set-up.]

6.e4 White's main reply.

[The alternative is to grab space with tempo: **6.c4**

A) the silly **6...b4??** is met by **7.Wa4+!** (hoping for **7.a3??** **Wxd4!** etc) **7...d4c6** **8.d5** **Wd6** **9.d3** , winning a piece;

B) **6...b6** **7.d3** **g7** **8.e3** ; for example, **0-0** **9.Ec1** (or **9.Wf3** **f6** **10.d3** **e5!** , J.Polgar-S. Agdestein, Isle of Lewis 1995) **9...c5** **10.e2** **cxd4** **11.exd4** **h6** **12.Ea1** **f6** **13.dg4** **exg4** **14.exg4** **dc6** and Black's slight lead in development may compensate for White's bishop pair, A.Grischuk-A. Baburin, Torshavn 2000.]

6...e6

[Kengis favoured **6...c6**

, which became the main line]

[way Black needs to protect the knight, since **6...g7?** **7.dxf7!** **e7xf7** **8.Wf3+** is good for White.]

7.b3

[A couple of months before Larsen had faced **7.d3** **g7** **8.e4** **xe5** **9.dxe5** **dc6** **10.d5** (**10.b3**

can be met by **db4!** **11.ex6** **fxe6** **12.b2** **Wd5** **13.We2** **xc2+!**

14.Wxc2 **b4** , when ...Nd3+ regains the piece) **10...xe5?!** (**10...f4!** was better and equal) **11.dxb7** **Wd7** **12.d5** **Wc6** **13.dxe6** **fxe6** **14.exd5** (not **14.b3?** due to **dc3!!** **15.bxc3** **Wxg2** **16.Ef1** **Ed8** , followed by ...Nf3+ and wins) **14...exd5** **15.Wd4** **df7** **16.f4** **W6+** **17.e3** **0-0** **18.0-0-0** **Efd8** **19.h4** and White had a dangerous attack, D.Yanofsky-B. Larsen, Winnipeg 1967.]

7...g7 **8.0-0** **0-0**

[QUESTION: How would White deal with the undermining **8...c5** here?

ANSWER: By simply retreating

9.d3! and White is slightly better, with ideas of **c2-c4** and **d2-d4** or **d4xc5**, while **cx4** **10.d4** doesn't solve Black's problems.]

9.We2 **a5!** Here we go again. Larsen once again proves his undying love for his a- and h-pawns by shoving one to a5. The idea is to soften up White's queenside with ...a5-a4 and maybe ...a4-a3 later.

[No one seems to have repeated Larsen's move, most preferring the immediate **9...c6** , though that looks like a weaker move to me.]

10.d3

[Larsen's idea may have been **10.c4** **db6** **11.Ed1** **a4** (undermining support of c4) **12.e2** **xe5!**

13.dxe5 **xc4** **14.We4** **Wc8** and despite Black's weakened kingside dark squares, I'm not so sure that White gets full compensation for the pawn.]

[Or **10.Ed1** **a4** .]

10...c6 Probably necessary now.

[Exchanging on c3 would activate White's pieces but may still be playable; for example, **10.dxc3**

11.bxc3 ♖a6 12.♞b1 ♘d7 13.♙f3 c5 14.♙f4 ♞c8 15.♞fe1 ♙f6 , when Black looks okay and generates some wing play against White's centre.]

11.♙xd5 This looks rather obliging. Given his extra central space, White would prefer to retain pieces on the board, but it's not so easy to achieve that.

[On **11.♙e4** , Larsen intended a4 12.♙c4 ♙c7]

[or if **11.a3** then simply ♙xc3 12.bxc3 ♙xb3 13.cxb3 , followed presumably by ♙d7 .]

11...cxd5!? Solidifying the structure.

[The alternative is to stay fluid with **11...♙xd5** . If White responds with 12.c4 , he may experience difficulties in hanging on to his pawn centre after ♙e6 13.♙e3 a4 14.♙c2 ♙d7 15.♙f3 ♙g4 16.♞fd1 (or 16.h3 ♙xf3 17.♞xf3 ♙b6) 16...♙b6 17.♙d3 f5! .]

12.a4 Larsen was severely critical of this move, a drawback to which will be seen shortly, "but in any case Black had an excellent position." ♙c6 13.c3

[**13.♙xc6?!** loses the initiative to bxc6 14.c3 ♞b6 , intending ...c6-c5 next, with strong pressure on the queenside.]

13...♞b6 Now we see a benefit to Black's 9...a5!, which induced White's a2-a4, which in turn weakened b3.

14.♙a2 ♙xe5!! QUESTION: What the hell!?

ANSWER: An adventure's outcome is often dependent upon how much you are willing to risk. No, your eyes are not playing tricks on you. This is the actual position. Larsen's games have that distinct feeling of being on the brink of the unprecedented, of treading on uninhabited territory. As always, his

decisions bristle with his own peculiar brand of optimism. He was something of an extremist as well as an exhibitionist at the board, who revelled in this reputation for strange, unpredictable gambles. Imagination is fired by blending two or more things which may or may not exist and, in the merging, coming up with an end product, which may or may not exist. This surreal move openly violates our accepted codes of dark square conduct! To booked-up players who feel secure in the knowledge that science is on their side, Larsen's 14...Bxe5!! comes as a slap across the face. This shocking move could only be played by a genius or a beginner (or a computer: Houdini likes it too!). I remember going through this game at age eight and even then my not-so-towering eight-year-old intellect understood that a fianchettoed bishop which protected your king was a thing of great value and shouldn't be tossed away so casually. Larsen's move blew my mind – as it does today, almost four and a half decades later.

QUESTION: Larsen's decision looks insane. Why on earth did he swap away a key defender of his king and weaken all the surrounding dark squares?

ANSWER: In order to dominate the light squares! A key hidden factor to Larsen's plan is that White's e5-pawn actually gums up his dark square piece play. Keep watching. Larsen's astonishing strategic decision is absolutely sound. Amazingly, Houdini agrees and evaluates microscopically in Black's favour, giving no weight to White's dark squares, bishop pair or extra space. Now events tumble forth and unfold in unpredictable fashion (to

everyone but Larsen, who most certainly saw what was coming!), continuing to elude logic's pleas.

15.dxe5 d4! Another startling choice. We normally regard an opponent's bishop pair as a form of leverage, a veiled threat, which whispers: "Open the position at your peril!" Larsen eliminates the bishop pair by taking on doubled e-pawns, recognizing that they are not a real weakness. His move is played on the principle: If your opponent owns both bishops, swap one of them off if possible.

16.♙h6 ♖fd8 17.♙xe6

[White also gets tangled up after **17.♖fe1 ♙xa2 18.♖xa2 ♖d5 19.♙f4 d3 20.♙d2 ♗b3 21.♖aa1 ♖c8** with a light-squared bind for Black, whose d3-passer badly ties White down.]

17...fxe6 18.♖fe1 ♖d5! Larsen's tiny alterations are so subtle, so nominal, that White may even fail to notice his opponent's seemingly invisible progress. Houdini's evaluation now gives Black a plus, which leads us to a logical question: Where on earth did Jimenez go wrong!? Larsen's grip on the light squares is more meaningful than White's on the dark squares. QUESTION: What about the defenderless Black's king? It looks to me as though White has a winning attack with a future h2-h4-h5 and Qg4. ANSWER: Black's king is remarkably safe, despite appearances to the contrary. White's entire centre and queenside are unstable and Black will always generate serious play there should White take a lunge on the other flank.

19.♙f4?! A position rarely drops from slightly worse to losing due to a single cause. Normally a synthesis of

negative effects is necessary for the transformation to occur. White's move is an attempt to hold his structure together, the way a person in a wobbling canoe attempts to stabilize as the rapids approach. It's already a serious concession, since it retreats an attacker and allows Black's undeveloped rook to f8. When backing down from an opponent's hostile threat, there is the humiliating feeling of obsequiously kissing the hand which recently slapped you across the face. Larsen's play so far must have had a completely disorienting effect on Jimenez, who is forced to wade through the strategic morass which bogs his piece activity down further with each step.

[Perhaps White should try and impose linearity on an otherwise abstract model with **19.♙g4! ♙xe5 20.♙e4**, just giving the e-pawn away in order to generate some play by opening lines; for example, **dx c3 21.bxc3 ♗c6 22.♖ab1 ♖ad8 23.h4 ♖8d7 24.h5 gxh5 25.♙e3 ♙g4 26.♙f4 ♖d8 27.f3 ♙xh6 28.♙xh6 ♖8d6 29.♖e4 b6 30.c4 ♖f5 31.♙h1**. But even here I am unsure whether White's activity and superior structure fully compensate for Black's two extra pawns, doubled and isolated though they may be.]

19...♖f8 20.g3 ♖f5 Black's rooks attach themselves to key light squares like barnacles on a ship's hull. **21.♖ad1 ♗b3** Applying pressure to a4 and c3.

[Black has another promising line in **21...g5 22.♙g4 ♗xb2 23.♙xg5 ♗xf2+ 24.♙h1 ♗f3+ 25.♙xf3 ♖xf3 26.cxd4 ♖b3**, when d4 and a4 are huge targets. I doubt that White can save himself here.]

22.h4 ♗xa4 Larsen calmly grabs a

pawn, realizing that White's "attack" on the other side of the board is fiction.

23.♖e4 ♜b3 Now c3 and b2 come under pressure. **24.cxd4 ♜xb2**

25.♠b1? This natural move allows Black a combination.

[The miserably passive **25.♠e3** was necessary.]

25...♜xd4 26.♠xb7 EXERCISE

(combination alert): It appears as if White has finally managed to generate some play, but this is a mirage. Try and find Larsen's combination.

ANSWER: Deflection/X-ray attack.

♠dxe5! They say criminals always return to the scene of the crime. The fruit of White's toil goes up in a blaze as two black pieces hang yet don't hang. Black's threats are no longer veiled abstractions; now they depart from the dimension of ideas into the solid realm of form.

27.♜b1 White can't take either the queen or the knight due to **27...Rxe1+**, [while **27.♠xe5??** is fried by **♜xf2+** **28.♙h1 ♠xe5** (X-raying the e1-rook) **29.♜xe5** also fails to **♙xe5** **30.♠b8+** **♙g7** **31.♠xe5 ♜xg3** **32.♠bb5 ♜xh4+**, when White's two rooks are overwhelmed by Black's queen and five pawns.]

27...♠xe1+ 28.♜xe1 ♜d5

Black remains two pawns up, while his iron grip on the light squares continues to keep his king safe. **29.♜c1 ♙d4**

Now the light squares around White's king beckon. **30.♠b8+ ♠f8 31.♠xf8+ ♙xf8 32.♠h6+ ♙e8!**

[The "safer" **32...♙f7?** would actually endanger Black's king due to **33.♜c8!**, coming round the back, and White's hopes revive; for example, after **g5** **34.♜f8+ ♙g6** **35.♠xg5 ♙f3+** **36.♙f1 ♙xg5** (or **36...♙d4 37.♙g1**) **37.♜g8+ ♙f6** **38.hxg5+ ♜xg5**

39.♜f8+ ♙g6 40.♜g8+ etc.]

33.♜c8+ ♜d8 34.♜c4 ♙f5

Ejecting the h6-intruder. **35.♠f4 ♙f7**

36.♠e5 ♜d1+ 37.♙h2 ♜d2 38.♜c5

a4 White is too tied down to defending f2 and monitoring Black's surging a-pawn to generate any threats of his own. **39.♠c3 ♜c2 40.♙g1 ♜d1+** **41.♙h2 ♜d5 42.♜b4 ♜f3**

Black's queen loves to preside over executions, as it allows her to combine business with pleasure. **43.♙g1**

EXERCISE (combination alert): The vitality in White's position continues to drain slowly away. How does Black make progress?

ANSWER: By pushing the passed a-pawn, which throws the defenders out of harmony.

a3! Black's forces work with exaggerated efficiency, the way normally lazy office workers act when the boss walks by.

[White resigned, since the a-pawn is immune: **43...a3!** **44.♜xa3? ♙d4** (threatening **...Qxc3!**) **45.♠b2 ♙e2+** (forcing mate in three moves; "Your head will look very nice, mounted on my wall," says the knight to White's king) **46.♙h2** (or **46.♙f1 ♙xg3+** and mate next move; the king's obese, pear-shaped body was not designed for hand-to-hand combat) **46...♜xf2+** **47.♙h3 ♙g1+** **48.♙g4** (the king's feeble fury attempts to assert itself, only to the black queen's mocking laughter) **♜f5#** . "Stop complaining," lectures the queen. "Constructive criticism builds character."]

0-1

44

 **Larsen, B**
 **Unzicker, W**

35: Lugano Olympiad

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

D41

1968

1.c4 f6 **2.**c3 **e6** **3.**f3

[If White wants to stay within the English, then **3.e4** d5 (or 3...c5 4.e5 g8 5.f3 c6 6.d4 cxd4 7.xd4 xe5 8.db5 and White's piece activity and initiative compensate for Black's extra pawn) 4.e5 d4 5.exf6 dxc3 6.bxc3 xf6 7.d4 is the sharp Mikenas Variation.]

3...d5 **4.d4** Larsen decides to dispense with ornament and go for an orthodox Queen's Gambit Declined model. **c5** **5.cxd5** xd5 The Semi-Tarrasch Defence.

[As we noted in Game 15, the standard Tarrasch recapture **5...exd5** is inferior here due to 6.g5 .]

6.e3 Larsen opts for a potential isolani position.

[The alternative is to grab the centre in Grünfeld-fashion with **6.e4** xc3 7.bxc3 cxd4 8.cxd4 ; for example, b4+ 9.d2 xd2+ 10.xd2 0-0 11.e2!? (11.c4 is the main line) 11...d7 (the immediate 11...b6 is more accurate) 12.0-0 b6 13.fe1 b7 14.d3 e7 15.a4 a6 16.e2 and White maintained an edge due to his space advantage, B.Larsen-O. Panno, Buenos Aires 1979.]

6...dxc6 **7.**c4

[Here **7.**d3 is more common, taking aim at Black's kingside. Seeing as Larsen retreats the bishop to this square later, Bc4 seems like a wasted tempo. However, in the 7 Bd3 line, White usually safeguards the bishop on d3 by playing a2-a3, which Larsen is able to omit, so it

balances itself out.]

7...cxd4 **8.exd4** e7 **9.0-0** **0-0**

10.e1 So we reach a classical isolani position. Larsen stood with the Hypermoderns against the classicists, in what was the deepest intellectual divide of the 20th century chess.

Nevertheless, he sometimes flirted with the other side too – the incongruity of which always came off like a concert pianist opening a recital with Chopsticks.

[QUESTION: Doesn't **10.**xd5 exd5 11.b3 just win a pawn? How can d5 be defended?

ANSWER: Black counterattacks with g4! 12.xb7 (after 12.xd5 xd5 13.xd5 d6 14.e3 xf3 15.gxf3 ad8 16.c3 f5 , Black gets loads of compensation for a pawn)

12...b4 13.f4 (or 13.e5 b8 14.xa7 a8 with a draw, Al.Zaitsev-M.Tal, Tallinn 1971) 13...xf3 14.gxf3 d6 15.g3 a6!

(Black again forces a draw by severing the queen's b5-escape route) 16.a3 b8 17.a7 a8 18.b7 b8 19.a7 ½-½ V.Bachin-A.Galkin, Russian Team Championship 2004.]

10...dxc3 Unzicker opts to play against hanging pawns.

[Alternatives include **10...a6** , intending ...b7-b5]

[or **10...f6** and if 11.e4 then b6 .]

11.bxc3 **b6** **12.**c2 Preparing to line up on the b1-h7 diagonal in order to induce a weakening of defensive pawn shield.

[Another way to do this is by **12.**d3 b7 13.e2 , intending Qe4, but Black can disrupt that plan with a5 ; for example, 14.e5 c8 15.b2 d6 16.h5 f5! 17.f3 e8

18. ♖xe8 ♜fxe8 19. ♘d2 ♕d5
and Black stood better with his
control of the queenside, B.Larsen-Z.
Ribli, Las Palmas Interzonal 1982.]

12...♗b7 13.♕d3 g6

[QUESTION: Why would Black
weaken the dark squares around his
king when he had **13...h6** - ?

ANSWER: Because 13...h6 is only a
temporary solution to the attack along
the diagonal. After White switches
his bishop and queen round, Black is
faced with the same problem, minus
the option of ...g7-g6 which hangs the
h6-pawn. For example, 14. ♖e2
(threatening Qe4) ♘a5 15. ♕c2
(here 15. ♘e5 ♜c8 16. ♘g6!?
is possible too) 15... ♖c8 16. ♖d3 f5
17. ♘e5 ♜f6 18. ♖g3 ♕d6 19. ♕f4
and White had a strong initiative, C.
Niklasson-R.Ekström, Gothenburg
1975.]

14.h4!? The h-pawn again!

[**14.♕h6** ♜e8 15. ♖d2 is the usual
method of attack here. Instead,
Larsen offers a tidbit – perhaps
dreaming of fattening his opponent
for the slaughter – in exchange for
the bishop pair and the dark squares.
If the pawn is declined, then h4-h5
loosens the black king's pawn front.]

14...♜c8

[QUESTION: Can Black survive the
pawn grab?

ANSWER: I doubt it. For example:
14...♕xh4?! 15. ♕h6 ♜e8 16. ♘xh4
♖xh4 17. ♖d2 ♘a5 (not 17... ♜ac8?
18. ♕g5 ♖g4 19. ♜e4! ♖f5 20. ♜h4
♖d5 21. ♕e4 ♖d6 22. ♕f6
with a decisive attack; and 17... ♖d8
18. ♖f4 , intending Bg5, is also
difficult for Black) 18. ♕g5 ♖g4 19. f3!
♕xf3 20. ♕f6 e5 21. ♕f1 (threatening
Qh6 at last) g5!? 22. dxe5 ♕e4
23. ♕b5 ♜f8 24. ♕d7 ♕f5 .

EXERCISE (combination alert): White
to play and win.

ANSWER: Overloaded piece/Pin.

25. ♜e4!! is a pretty winning shot.]

15. ♖d2! Heading for h6. **♕f6**

Preparing the immediate ejection of
White's queen should she have ideas
of roosting on h6.

[Actually, it may have been possible
to play **15...♕xh4!?** here, and if
16. ♖h6 ♕f6 17. ♘g5 then ♕xg5
18. ♕xg5 f6 19. ♕xg6 ♜c7
, but it would take considerable
chutzpah to go for this line without
the prospect of a definite advantage
at the end of it.]

16.h5 ♘a5 17. ♘e5 ♕xe5 "After the
previous move this must be the logical
follow-up, otherwise the black knight
stands badly," wrote Larsen. The
obvious drawback is that Black loses
control of the dark squares.

[He might try **17...♕d5** instead, but
after 18. ♘g4 ♕g7 19. ♕a3 ♜e8
20. ♘h6+ , Black has to give up his
key bishop anyway.]

18. ♜xe5 ♘c4 19. ♕xc4 ♜xc4

So we reach an opposite-coloured
bishops position. Black dominates the
light squares and White the dark. Yet
this is a false equivalency.

QUESTION: Why, if both sides

dominate their respective colours?

ANSWER: Because the weakened dark
squares surround Black's king,
whereas White's weakened light
squares are merely on the queenside.
This fact kicks in the principle:
Opposite-coloured bishops favour the
attacker. Nevertheless, Black is far
from busted.

20. ♖d3 ♜c5!? Unzicker hopes to
reduce the attacking force.

[**20...♖c7** 21. ♕d2 is the alternative.

Amazingly, Houdini assesses this

as slightly in Black's favour. I think most humans would disagree, on practical terms if nothing else.]

21. ♖xc5

[White could also insert 21. ♕g5 ♖d7 (not 21...f6?? 22. ♖xc5 bxc5 23. ♕h6 ♗f7 24. hxc6 and White has a winning attack) 22. ♖xc5 bxc5 23. ♕f6 ♖d5 24. f3 ♖xh5 25. ♕e7 ♖c8 26. ♕xc5 , when his bishop clearly remains the more potent of the two.]

21...bxc5 22.hxc6 fxc6?!

This sacrifice of structure for activity isn't a great decision. Black picks what he incorrectly believes to be the lesser of evils. In a chess game we constantly weigh the effects of long-term future pain versus present, minor inconvenience. Here the wise player goes with the latter, since a little short-lived pain is a lot better than drawn out agony to come. Black believes he is accepting structural damage in return for a safer king (which he doesn't get!), playing on the principle: If you feel your king is in danger, capture away from the centre. Unfortunately, I think the exception to the general rule applies in this case.

[Black should play 22...hxc6! (we aren't robots; sometimes principles must be deliberately violated) 23. ♕a3 (the blade's shaft lacerates the skin, yet fails to sink deep enough to inflict permanent harm) ♖g5 24. ♖h3 ♖c8 25. ♕xc5 ♕d5 , when White has chances with the extra pawn, but the presence of opposite-coloured bishops seriously complicates his task; for example, after 26. a4 a5 27. ♖b1 ♔g7 , there is nothing better than 28. ♖g3 (not 28. ♖b5?? ♖h8 29. ♖g3 ♖c1#) 28... ♖xc3 29. fxc3 ♖a8 and it is hard to see how White might make

progress here.]

23. ♕h6

[The point of 22...fxc6?! is seen after 23. ♕a3

A) Houdini even tosses out

23... ♕xc6?!? 24. ♔xc6 ♖d5+

25. ♔g1 (or 25. f3 ♖g5+) 25... ♖f5 and claims a draw.;

B) 23... ♖f5 , when White can't take the c-pawn.]

23... ♖f7 24. ♖b1 cxd4 25. cxd4 ♖d5?

What anguish we suffer when we have our goal within reach and then watch it being yanked from our grasp. Unzicker believes in his initiative with hypnotic conviction – mistakenly, since this natural move only serves to multiply the toxic effect of his weak dark squares.

[Black attacks when he should

defend carefully with 25... ♖d6!

, cutting off Qg3, which holds White's edge to a minimum.]

[Note that 25... ♖h4? , with the same

idea, fails to 26. ♖e3 ♖g4 27. d5!

♖f5 28. ♖b5 a6 29. ♖c5 , when "the invulnerable queen's pawn divides the black position in two." (Larsen)]

26. ♖g3! Defending the mate, while threatening mate himself with Qb8+ etc. White is on the cusp of a decisive attack. ♖c7 Around here, Unzicker probably realized with a sinking heart that his activity failed to make up for his chronically damaged dark squares. EXERCISE (combination alert): Black's last move cleverly grabbed the c-file, playing upon the fact that White's queen is pinned to defence of g2. How did Larsen throw this idea out of alignment?

[Other ways of shielding b8 had

problems too: 26... e5 27. dxe5 ♖e7

28. e6! ♖xe6 29. ♖b8+ ♕c8 30. ♖c1

♖e8 31. ♖xa7 gives White a strong

passed a-pawn.]

[26...♖d8 27.♗e5 ♖c8 28.♖b2!
(Black is in semi-zugzwang) ♗e7
(28...♖c7 runs into 29.♖c2!
, forcing mate) 29.d5! wins.]

ANSWER: Deflection. Now White's attack is veneered with a sheen of success.

27.♖b5! ♖c1+?!

[Black could put up more resistance with 27...♖d7 28.♗e5 a6 , though after 29.♖c5 ♖xc5 30.♗xc5 ♖d8 31.♗e5 ♗e7 32.♖b8+ ♔f7 33.♗h8 , White will soon have his attack plus an extra pawn.]
[Not 27...♖xb5?? 28.♗xc7 and Black is helpless against mate on g7.]

28.♔xc1 ♖xb5 29.♖b8+ ♔f7 30.♔a3!

Threatening Qf8 mate. Death stalks Black's king relentlessly, even with such greatly reduced material on the board. His position is a boat with a mast but no sail, hopelessly adrift and alone in a vast ocean.

[30.♔h6 was less effective due to e5 (or indeed 30...♔e7) 31.dxe5 ♖c6 , when Black retains some hope.]

30...e5

[Or 30...g5 31.♗f8+ ♔g6 32.♗g8+ ♔f6 33.♔d6! and Black can resign.]

31.♗d6! Larsen relentlessly pokes sore spots in Black's position, this time threatening mate in two. **g5**

A condemned man will agree to any condition, however unreasonable, if he believes that doing so may spare his life. **32.dxe5 ♖c6 33.e6+** Larsen isn't interested in swapping queens, even two pawns up. **♔g6**

[Or 33...♔f6 34.e7+ ♖xd6 35.e8♔+! and wins.]

34.e7+ ♔h5 EXERCISE (combination alert): Larsen now won with strong, logical moves, but can you find

Houdini's inhuman solution?

[**34...♔f7** is met by 35.e8♗+! ♖xe8 36.♖c7+ and Black's bishop falls.]

35.f3 This covers g2,

[35.f3 threatens mate by -- **36.g4+** ♔h4 37.♖h2# , and is completely decisive. A human player wouldn't even think about looking for another solution, but the relentless computer finds something even stronger.]

[ANSWER: Houdini proposes

35.♖h2+! ♔g6 36.g4! (threatening e8Q+, followed by a skewer on h5) ♔f6 37.♖h6+ ♔e5 38.♖xg5+ ♔d4 39.♖e3+ ♔c4 40.f3! (a typical silicon-based quiet move) ♗e8 41.♖b3+ ♔d4 (the king wanders aimlessly, with the sick anguish of an old man who realizes he wasted his life) 42.♖xb7 and declares mate in eight.]

35...g4

[On **35...♖xd6** , Larsen planned 36.e8♗+ ♖g6 (the queen presses her lips together in prim annoyance at her e8-sister's veiled sarcasm) 37.g4+ ♔h4 38.♗e1+ ♔h3 39.♗f1+ ♔g3 40.♗f2+ ♔f4 41.♔d6+! ♖xd6 (sometimes the person drowning takes her would-be rescuer down with her) 42.♖h2+ , picking off Black's queen in another skewer.]

36.♗e5+ . By now this looks like overkill, akin to using a thermonuclear warhead to wipe out a colony of ants.

1-0

45

A01

□ Larsen, B
 ■ Tringov, G

36: Teesside

1972

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.b3 If an opening is named after you, there is probably a strong temptation to play it a lot! ♖f6 2.♗b2 g6 3.g3 If only Larsen had had the foresight to pre-order my excellent book, The Nimzo-Larsen Attack: Move by Move.

[In this position I advocate 3.♗xf6! exf6 4.c4 , when White reaches a Trompowsky with a slightly beneficial structure.

QUESTION: Why beneficial?

ANSWER: Compared to a normal Trompowsky, White profits from having held back on d2-d4. This is important since Black often clamps down on e4 later on with ...f7-f5, ...Re8, ...d7-d6 and ...Nd7-f6. In the Nimzo-Larsen this plan isn't so effective, since the e4-square can be rendered off limits to Black.]

3...♗g7 4.♗g2 0-0 5.e4!? Yet another of our subject's clashing with authority. It's not such an easy thing to characterize the mind of a particular player, and even more difficult with one as idiosyncratic as Bent Larsen. When it comes to Larsen's opening decisions, odd ideas continually bubble up, like irrational dreams through a sleeper's mind.

[It is – and was even then – more usual to follow an Fianchetto or English Opening course with 5.c4]

[or 5.♗f3 , or a King's Indian if White decides to insert d2-d4 at any point. In an earlier game (which began with 1 g3), Larsen had himself played d6 6.d4 ♗bd7 7.0-0 ♖e8 8.♗bd2 e5 9.dxe5 dxe5 10.e4 b6 11.♖e2 ♗b7

12.♖fd1 ♖e7 13.a4 a5 14.♗a3 ♖e6 15.♗g5 ♖c6 16.♖c4 ♖xc4 17.♗xc4 and later won, although the game is pretty much equal at this stage, B. Larsen-H.Westerinen, Palma de Mallorca 1968.]

5...d6 The most common and consistent move,

[though Black has tried various others, such as: **5...c5** (turning the game into a funky Closed Sicilian) 6.♗e2 ♗c6 7.0-0 e5 8.♗bc3 d6 9.h3 ♖b8 10.f4 b5 11.d3 b4 12.♗a4 ♗h5 with equal chances, V.Bagirov-A. Kapengut, USSR Championship, Baku 1972. Play might continue 13.f5 ♗d4 14.♗xd4 cxd4 15.g4 ♗f4 16.♗xf4 exf4 17.♗b2 ♗e5 18.a3 .]

[**5...d5!?** 6.exd5 (probably better than 6.e5 , as in H.Nakamura-F. Perez Ponsa, ICC blitz 2010, when Black equalizes with ♗g4 7.d4 f6) 6...♗xd5 7.♗xg7 ♖xg7 and the game is already equal, H. Nakamura-L.Altounian, ICC (blitz) 2011.]

6.♗e2 e5 Black could again have taken play into Sicilian channels with ...c7-c5 here or on the next move. Conversely, White could throw in d2-d4 at any moment. There are constant options when each sets up quietly in their own half.

7.0-0 ♗c6 8.c4 Now the game begins to resemble a Botvinnik English. **a5**

9.♗bc3

[QUESTION: Can White turn it into a King's Indian style position with **9.d4** - ?

ANSWER: Yes, that's still a possibility, though Black seems okay after exd4 10.♗xd4 a4 ; for example, 11.♗xc6 bxc6 12.e5?! (the uninspiring 12.♗d2 looks correct) 12...♗g4 13.♗xc6 ♖a7 and Black stands better,

since 14.♟xa4 ♞xe5 15.♞c3 ♟h3 wins the exchange.]

9...♞d7 10.♞d5 ♞d4 Black plugs d4 with a pawn at the cost of surrendering control of f4, allowing White to advance his f-pawn later without fear of ...e5xf4.

[Instead: **10...♞c5** 11.d4 exd4 12.♞xd4 ♞e8 13.♞xc6 bxc6 14.♟xg7 ♞xg7 15.♞d4+ f6 16.♞c3 ♞e7 gives Black a fully playable King's Indian-type position.]

[**10...a4!?** also comes into consideration, since if White bypasses with 11.b4, Black can then play a3 12.♟c3 ♞d4, having ruled out Nxd4 for the time being.]

11.♞xd4 exd4 12.♞f4 The knight needs to get out of the way before pushing the f-pawn.

[Certainly not yet **12.f4??** c6 when the d5-knight has no place to run.]

12...c6 13.d3 ♞b6 Thinking about ...a5-a4 again, to which White immediately responds. **14.♞b1 ♞c5**

[Now **14...a4** can be met by 15.b4, and if ♞xb4 then 16.♟xd4 ♞a5 17.♟xg7 ♞xg7 18.♞c2 with an edge for White, who owns greater central influence (d3-d4 is coming) and the open b-file.]

15.♞e2 ♟g4 16.♟h1 QUESTION:

What's the point of this move?

ANSWER: It's a safety precaution, getting off the black queen's diagonal. This prevents distant ...Nxe4 and ...d4-d3+ cheapos (after White plays f2-f4) and threatens now to take on d4 after f2-f3.

[White could play **16.f3** first to avoid Black's next move, but Larsen, a great lover of imbalances of all kinds, welcomes the exchange on e2.]

16...♞xe2!? This move seems like a

concession but is actually okay if followed up correctly. **17.♞xe2**

So White gets the bishop pair, which doesn't appear so scary for Black just now, since the position is closed. However, positions have a way of opening later on.

♞ae8?! This move is ill-attuned to the position's special needs. Believe it or not, this natural rook centralization gets Black in trouble.

[If he'd foreseen Larsen's coming plan, Tringov might have found **17...♞b4!** (preventing Ba3 and preparing ...a5-a4), when White seems to have nothing better than 18.♟c1 a4 19.♟d2 ♞a3 20.♟c1 ♞b4 with a draw.]

18.♟a3! The commencement of a plan which displays deep understanding of the dynamics of the position. Ideas froth about like foam on cappuccino. QUESTION: Why is this move worthy of an exclamation mark?

ANSWER: Larsen correctly senses that after a future Bxc5, the opposite-coloured bishops position will be in his favour, for a single reason: His kingside pawn storm activates the principle: Opposite-coloured bishops favour the attacker.

f5 Otherwise White simply advances his kingside pawns and attacks.

[Meanwhile he deters **18...a4** due to 19.b4 ♞d7 20.f4, when Black has no counterplay and faces White's newly activated bishops, as well as pawn advances on both wings.]

19.f4 ♞f7

[Exchanging on e4 would give White more options; for example, **19...fxe4** 20.dxe4 ♞f7 21.♞c2 ♞fe7 22.♞be1 (but White might prefer **22.e5!** and if dxe5?! then **23.f5** with a strong attack - compare the note 'a' to

Black's 23rd move below) 22...♖e6
23.♚b1 transposes to the game.]

20.♖be1?! An inaccuracy that allows Black a shot.

[It was better to remove the queen from the e-file with **20.♚c2** first.]

20...♖fe7?!

[Here Tringov might have solved his problems with **20...fxe4** 21.dxe4 ♗xe4! 22.♙xe4 d5 , when 23.cxd5 cxd5 24.♙xd5 ♖xe2 25.♖xe2 ♙f6 , intending ...Kg7, is equal and 26.♖e6 ♚d8 27.♖d6 ♚e7 28.♖e6 ♚d8 is just a draw.]

21.♚c2 ♖e6

[The tempting **21...fxe4** 22.dxe4 d3? fails to 23.♙xc5 ♚xc5 24.♚xd3 , picking off a pawn.]

22.♚b1! With the e1-rook defended, the threat of 23 exf5 gxf5 24 Bh3 now forces Black's hand. **fxe4 23.dxe4**

♚d8?! This allows White the far more potent pawn majority,

[but simply waiting is becoming difficult for Black: **23...♖6e7** is met by the promising pawn sacrifice 24.e5! dxe5?! (24...♚c7 25.♙xc5! dxc5 26.♚d3 is similar to the game) 25.f5! gxf5 26.♚xf5 ♖f8 27.♚g4 ♖xf1+ 28.♖xf1 (threatening Qc8+ and mates) ♖e8 29.♚h5 ♖f8 30.♖xf8+ ♗xf8 31.♚xh7 a4 32.♚g6! axb3 33.♙d5! and White's pin shot wins.]

[**23...♖8e7** may be the best try, leaving the rook on the third rank, when 24.♚d1! targeting the d4-pawn; (if now 24.e5 dxe5 25.f5 then ♖d6! defends) 24...♖e8 25.e5 dxe5 26.fxe5 d3 (better than 26...♗a6 27.♙d6! ♙xe5 28.♚f3! ♚d8 29.♚f7+ ♗h8 30.♙f8!) 27.♙h3! ♖xe5 28.♖xe5 ♖xe5 (covering the knight) 29.♚f3! ♚d8 30.♚f7+ ♗h8 31.♙b2 ♚e8 32.♙xe5 ♚xe5

and the passed d-pawn provides some compensation for the exchange.]

24.♙xc5! Following through with his plan.

[Playing **24.e5!** first looks even better.]

24...dxc5 25.♚d3 Black may well be strategically lost here:

1. One can almost smell the rot of Black's cadaverous queenside. White's 4-2 kingside majority rolls and he can eventually create two connected central passed pawns, whereas Black's majority is both crippled and blockaded on d3.

2. White's majority endangers Black's king.

3. Number two is accentuated by the attacking factor of opposite-coloured bishops.

g5! The best practical chance, though still not much of one: when you have a battle between superior force and desperate fury, the latter tends to be on the inadequate side. Black is unwilling to wait and hopes to stir up kingside counterplay with ...g5xf4, ...Rh6 and ...Qh4 ideas. Nuance tends to be moot in life and death situations, and in times of desperation the lowest common denominator tends to set our agenda.

26.e5

[Another possibility is to reroute the bishop with **26.♙h3** ♖h6 27.♙f5 .]

26...gxf4 27.gxf4 These passers are the leeches who hope to feed upon Black's suffering. **♚h4** Well, a man can dream, can't he? **28.♚h3?** This is the wrong plan and in such critical positions, there isn't a second best option. Unlike Capablanca, Fischer and Carlsen, whose games emit the eerie impression of omniscience,

Larsen's victories sometimes come across as accidents of fate and he appears very human, something less than infallible. Revolutionaries tend to be idealists, and when the revolt ends in victory, pragmatists are needed to consolidate. A solution struggles to rise to reach the conscious level, fails to do so, and then sinks back into the mire of the unconscious. Larsen, in a rare example of backing down, overreacts, giving too much weight to Black's threats, and so wastes all his previous good works.

[Instead, White slowly takes control after **28.♔e4!** (this idea is an indispensable adjunct to White's dream of conversion) ♖h6 29.♖e2 ♖f8 30.♔f5! ♖h5 31.e6! (neither black rook can take the bishop, since 32 e7 would follow) ♗f6 32.♔g4 ♖h6 33.♖g2 ♔h8 34.f5 and Black's attack has been repelled. The deep white passers may be blockaded, but I don't see Black holding the game against White's ideas of Rf6g1, Qe2 and Bh5-f7.]

28...♖h6 29.♗xh4 ♖xh4 30.♖f3 ♔h6! 31.f5 ♖f4?!

[Stronger was **31...♔f7!**, followed by 32...Be3, and if anyone stands better it's Black. For example, after 32.♔f1 ♔e3 33.e6+ ♔f6, White's passers are firmly blockaded and the influence of the e3-bishop ties his pieces down.]

32.f6? A misguided winning attempt.

[Correct was **32.e6** ♖xf3 33.♔xf3 ♔g7 34.♔e4 ♔f6 35.♖g1 with a probable draw.]

32...♖xf3??

[Here again **32...♔f7** was correct, meeting 33.♖h3 with ♖xf6! 34.♔f3 (or 34.♔f1 ♖e7 35.exf6 ♖xe1 36.♔g2 ♔e3 37.♖xh7+ ♔xf6

38.♖xb7 ♖d1) 34...♔f8 35.♖e4 ♖f4 36.♖xf4+ ♔xf4 37.♖xh7 ♖xe5, when White is the one struggling to hold the game.]

33.♔xf3 ♔e3 EXERCISE (combination alert): It seems that Larsen has been outfoxed. After all, he has no way to protect his e-pawn. Find a clever shot and Black's disease, thought to be in remission, suffers a sudden relapse.

[Otherwise 33...♔e3 **34.e6** wins]

[and **33...♔g5?** fails to 34.♖g1 ♖xe5 35.h4, winning the bishop.]

ANSWER: Attraction/Skewer. I admit that White's next move looks more like a practical joke than a combination. **34.f7+!** To most of us, proximity to power often represents a danger. To an assassin, it represents opportunity. In such controlled positions, sudden geometric alterations are rarely what we anticipate.

♔xf7 35.♔h5+ "I am the perfect vessel of God's wrath," claims the spiritually conceited bishop. ♔e7 **36.♔xe8 ♔xe8 37.♔g2** Once the white king reaches e4, Black is irreparably busted. **♔h6 38.♔f3!?**

[A more cautious player, such as your writer, would take time out for **38.♖d1**, preventing Black's next move.]

38...d3 39.♖e4 ♔c1 40.♖h4 h6 41.♖g4 ♔f7 42.♖g1 ♔b2

[After **42...d2** 43.♔e2, Black has no way to prevent rook infiltration.]

43.♖d1 ♔xe5 44.h3 ♔e6 45.♔e4 ♔f6 46.♖xd3 ♔g5 Black's bishop, a worthless defender, sits forlornly on the sidelines, like some injured and benched football player, with blanket over shoulders. The game score ends here, so presumably Tringov threw in the towel.

QUESTION: How does White break through if Black played on? chesstouring.com

[ANSWER: Like this: 46...♔g5 47.♖f3 (threatening Rf8) ♕f6 48.♖g3 ♕g5 49.♖g4 (zugzwang #1) ♔f7 the black king's lips tremble in anticipation of his coming insult to his brother, but he loses his nerve and merely remarks on the weather; (49...♔f6 50.h4 ♕c1 51.♖g8 is no better) 50.♔f5 ♕d2 (the bishop feels the hot breath and snapping jaws of his pursuers) 51.♖g6 ♕c1 52.h4 (zugzwang #2) ♕e3 53.♖f6+ ♔g7 54.♖e6 and the dual threats of Rxe3 and Re7+ are decisive. ♕d4 55.♖e7+]

1-0

46

E81

 Larsen,B

 Hort,V

37: San Antonio

1972

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.c4 g6 2.♖c3 ♕g7 3.d4 d6 4.e4 ♖f6 Transposing to the King's Indian.

[I tend to play 4...e5 in this position, which I advocate in The Modern Defence: Move by Move.]

5.♕d3!? Larsen was a theoretical fugitive, always on the run from trendy lines, always quick to apply the disguise by entering oddities. This move was a complete rarity at the time. Larsen actually marked it as dubious in his annotations, writing: "I have never played this move in a tournament game and just decided to get out of the books." Hort actually lost to Korchnoi a few years earlier in this variation, but Larsen may not have been aware of that game. Hort subsequently added it to his own repertoire as White.

QUESTION: Why did Larsen consider the line dubious?

ANSWER: The bishop cuts off the queen's protection over d4, which Black can try and exploit.

0-0 6.♖ge2 e5?! This turns the game into a Sämisch-style position favourable to White.

[It is better to apply immediate piece pressure on d4 with 6...♖c6! and then:

A) 7.f3 ♖d7 (7...e5 8.d5 ♖d4 9.♕e3 ♖h5 10.♖d2 c5 11.dxc6 bxc6 12.b4 f5 13.exf5 gxf5 14.0-0 ♖xe2+ 15.♕xe2

was good for White in V.Hort-J. Kaplan, San Antonio 1972) 8.♕e3 e5 9.d5 ♖d4 (Black is about to play ...c7-c5, entrenching the d4-knight) 10.♖b5 (here 10.♖d2 c5 11.dxc6 bxc6 12.b4 can be answered by ♖b6) 10...♖xe2 11.♖xe2 a6 12.♖c3 ♕h6! and Black has at least equality, R.Hallerod-L.Degerman, Stockholm 1992. He either swaps off his bad bishop or activates it if White plays Bf2.;

B) 7.0-0

B1) 7...♖h5 has a similar idea;

B2) , whereas 7...e5 8.d5 ♖d4 (or if 8...♖e7 9.♖g3 h5 10.f3 ♖h7 11.f4!? exf4 12.♕xf4 ♖f6 , as in V.Korchnoi-V.Hort, Palma de Mallorca 1969, then 13.h3 and I like White's attacking chances) 9.♖xd4 exd4 10.♖b5 ♖e8 11.♖e1 a6 12.♖xd4 ♖xd5 13.cxd5 ♕xd4 14.♖c2 gives White a slight pull;

B3) 7...♖d7 8.♕e3 (8.♕c2 e5 9.d5 ♖d4 10.♖xd4 exd4 11.♖b5 ♖e5 12.♖xd4 ♖xc4 is fine for Black, V.Hort-Zsu. Polgar, Monte Carlo 1994) 8...e5 9.d5 ♖d4 10.♕b1 c5! 11.dxc6 bxc6 12.♖xd4 exd4 13.♕xd4

♞e5 14.♞e2 (returning the extra pawn, since 14.b3?! c5! forces White to hand over his good bishop and lose control over the dark squares after 15.♙xe5 ♙xe5 16.♞d2 ♞f6 17.♞c1 , when Black can win the exchange with ...Bf4 or just continue ♙e6 , which leaves White completely tangled up) 14...c5 15.♙c3 ♞xc4 16.♙xg7 ♞xg7 17.b3 ♞e5 with an equal position, A.Moiseenko-Ding Liren, Biel 2013.;

B4) 7...--;

C) 7.--]

7.d5 a5 A typical King's Indian thrust, securing the c5-outpost for a knight, [but 7...♞h5 may be a better plan for Black, aiming for kingside counterplay with ...f7-f5 as quickly as possible.]

8.f3 Larsen sees no reason to hurry with castling, since his king is in no imminent danger, and in fact he doesn't get round it until move 19. ♞a6 **9.♙g5** The stats are heavily in White's favour from this position: 68.4% in my database. **h6 10.♙e3 c6**

[Hort begins queenside counterplay, since playing for ...f7-f5 is no longer so appealing; for example, after 10...♞h7 11.0-0 ♙d7 12.a3 f5 13.exf5! gxf5 14.♞b1

, Black remains in an inferior Sämisch, D.Adla-A.Strikovic, Santa Cruz de Tenerife 1995.]

11.♞d2 ♞h7 12.g4 Ruling out any possibility of ...f7-f5. As a rule of thumb in King's Indian structures, it is often a bad sign for Black when this break has been suppressed, as the queenside is not his preferred battleground – unless the white king has taken up residence there. All the same, Black is nowhere

near losing yet.

♞c5 13.♙c2 cxd5 14.cxd5 ♙d7?! This move leads to complete passivity. The karmic law of chess states that when our idea is not in accordance with reality, our future suffering is assured.

[I would throw in 14...h5 15.h3 to keep the kingside fluid, when Black looks slightly better off than after the game continuation. Hort probably worried that this course might later expose his king, but the unpleasant alternative is the drab, counterplayless future he suffers in the game.]

15.♞g3 Clamping down on both ...h7-h5 and ...f7-f5 breaks. **b5 16.h4 b4 17.♞ce2 ♞e8 18.h5!** Larsen forces the closing of the kingside. His compass rarely pointed squarely in the direction of the opponent's king and mates were almost delivered as an afterthought. Instead, Larsen's attacks came about as the inevitable culmination of either a strategic build-up or a sudden and shocking tactical outburst. In other words, Larsen was no Romantic, despite being considered one by many.

QUESTION: Isn't this a strategic error, since it allows Black to clog the kingside, killing White's attacking intentions there?

ANSWER: Just the opposite, for the following reasons:

1. White actually wants the kingside closed, since it shuts down any possible counterplay there. He can then transfer his forces to the queenside, planning slowly to make headway there.
2. White's king will be completely safe on the kingside.
3. White's last move forces...g6-g5

which creates a huge light-squared gash on f5. If White sets up knights on e3 and g3, Black must keep a constant watch over that square, since a knight on f5 will attack both d6 and h6 in an ending.

4. After ...g6-g5, Black's dark-squared bishop becomes a miserably bad piece.

5. The hole on c4 becomes an ill-concealed metaphor for Black's endless pain.

Conclusion: White has a permanent advantage, whereas Black can only sit and defend.

g5 19.0-0 ♖b6 20.♗c1!

Coming round to challenge Black's c5-outpost. ♗c7 21.♗d3 ♗7a6

Once again choosing the passive route.

[Hort probably realized that

21...♗b5!? is met by the annoying

22.♕a4! , when Black's attempt at activity falls short. For example, ♖fd8

23.♖ac1 ♗d4 24.♕xd7 ♖xd7

25.♕xd4 exd4 26.♗f5 ♖c8 27.♗xc5

dxc5 (27...♖xc5 28.♗xg7

wins the d-pawn) 28.f4! ♖e8

(28...gxf4 29.♖xf4 leaves White in

complete control) 29.fxg5 ♖xe4

30.♗xh6! d3 (30...♕xh6 31.♖d3

wins the rook) 31.♖c4! ♕d4+ 32.♔h1

, followed by 33 Qxd3 with a

probably decisive advantage, since

♖b7 33.♖xd3 ♖xd5 34.♖f4 ♖de7

35.♖xe4 ♖xe4? loses at once to

36.♖xc5! .]

22.♖fc1 ♖fc8 23.♕d1

Larsen continues to pile on c5. ♖d8

24.♕e2 ♕f8 25.♔g2 ♗xd3 26.♕xd3

♗c5 EXERCISE (planning): Come up

with a plan for White which increases his advantage.

ANSWER: Give up the "good" dark-squared bishop for the knight to create weak light squares in Black's camp as well as a protected, passed d5-pawn.

White's eventual strategic goal is to swap off light-squared bishops, after which his remaining knight will dominate Black's awful dark-squared bishop.

27.♕xc5! ♖xc5 28.♖xc5 dxc5

29.♖e2 Larsen's control of the light squares increases – he now threatens Bb5 – while Black's structure depreciates in value, without a corresponding increase in piece activity.

♖b8 30.♗f1! Transferring to e3, after which the knight watches both c4 and f5. **♕d6?!** This embarrassment of a bishop attempts to make himself look useful, but it was actually safer on f8.

[Larsen suggested **30...a4**

as an improvement, aiming to keep the queenside closed. The e5-pawn can be defended by ...Qf6, and White still has to find a way in.]

31.♗e3 ♔g8 32.♗c4 ♕e8 33.♖c1

♔f8! Black's position clings to life with a slowly ebbing clutch, yet Hort comes up with the best defensive posture. He realizes his king must help out in defence of d6.

[If instead **33...♕b5** , Houdini shows

that White can break through with

The comp likes 34.♗xd6! it's

psychologically difficult for a human

to make this move, since it involves

swapping away a terrific knight for

Black's awful bishop; (Larsen may

have intended simply 34.♗e3

, repeating moves) 34...♕xd3

35.♖xd3 ♖xd6 36.♖c4 ♖c8 37.♖b5

♖c7 38.♖a6 ♔g7 39.b3 ♖d8

40.♖c2 ♖c7 41.♖d2 ♖d8 42.d6

and the d-pawn strangles Black.]

34.♖e3 Threatening Nxd6, followed by Qxc5. **♖c8 35.a3!** One great danger for White is that the position will later become too blocked to win. So Larsen

endeavours to open queenside lines.

♙e7 36.♖a1 ♖a8 37.♗e2 ♕d7

38.♜e3 Clearing the f1-a6 diagonal and threatening Bb5 again, while the knight's renewed glare at f5 suggests an attitude of accusation. **♗b6**

EXERCISE (planning): How to convert White's advantage into something more tangible and thereby obtain its consequent benefits?

ANSWER: As we have already noted, an exchange of light-squared bishops accentuates Black's hopeless situation on that colour.

39.a4!! The once-amorphous landscape comes into focus as a clearly defined plan which continues to grow like a skyscraper under construction. When we catch a glimpse of an intriguing idea in an otherwise barren environment, it's like finishing a boring novel and then taking up a fascinating new one. In such controlled strategic situations, Larsen possessed the remarkable synoptic power of glancing at a position and intuitively comprehending its hidden core.

Given that Black's best shot at a draw is to block the position to a degree where White can't win, Larsen's move comes at a high risk – which he correctly gauged. Larsen asks: "Making B-N5 (Bb5) possible – but doesn't the position get too blocked? No, analysis proves that there is just enough play."

♖b8 40.♕b5! Suddenly we feel motion, the way a sailboat tacks into the ocean breeze. **♕xb5?!** "I am incorruptible," declares the bishop, as he pockets the bribe. A move may lack potency, yet still be played just to prove a point. This attempt to edit out the unhappy ending in the script fails to alter the reality on the board.

[Black could put up greater resistance

by dodging the swap with **40...♕c8!**

, attempting to sit tight. Even then, Larsen demonstrates the correct plan: 41.b3 ♗a7 42.♖c1 ♗c7 43.♖c2 ♗a7 44.♗f1 ♗c7 45.♜c4 ♗a7 46.♜b2! (the march of White's progress is relentless: the idea is to attack c5 as many times as possible) ♕b7 47.♜d3 ♖c8 48.♗c1 ♖c7 and now White breaks through with the line opening pawn sacrifice 49.♕c6! ♕xc6 (the pipsqueak nerd with the coke-bottle glasses musters up the nerve to challenge the class bully) 50.dxc6 ♖xc6 51.♜b2! with a winning position for White, whose knight dominates. For example:

A) 51...♖c7 52.♜c4 ♖d7 53.♖d2 ♕b8 54.♖xd7+ ♜xd7 55.♗d2+ ♙e7 56.♗d5 (the queen may be a bystander, but is certainly no innocent) ♗c7 57.♙f2 ♙f8 58.♙e2 ♙g7 59.♗a8 and wins, as a5 falls for starters.;

B) 51...c4!? 52.♜xc4 ♕b8 53.♗b2 ♗d4 54.♜xa5! ♖xc2+ (or 54...♖c3 55.♗xc3 ♗xc3 56.♜c6+ ♙d6 57.♖xc3 bxc3 58.♜b4 , stopping the pawn) 55.♗xc2 ♗b6 56.♜c6+ ♙d7 57.♜xb8+ ♗xb8 58.♗c5 and the queen endgame is winning for White with his passed a-pawn.;

C) 51...--]

41.♗xb5 ♗xb5 42.axb5 ♖xb5

Black, up a clear pawn in the ending, is hopelessly busted. **43.♙f1!**

QUESTION: Why wouldn't White pick off the h6-pawn?

ANSWER: There is no rush to break the light-squared blockade by grabbing on h6. Larsen prefers to strengthen his position. The king invokes the little-known parliamentary, shut-the-hell-up rule, walking over to cover c4 and

suppress any hope of ...c5-c4 counterplay.

[Okay, Houdini says that **43.♟f5+** wins, but the line looks pretty scary; one mistake and White can blow it: ♟d7 44.♟xh6 c4 45.♟xf7 c3 46.bxc3 b3 47.h6 b2 48.♞b1 a4 49.h7 ♞b8 50.h8♞ ♞xh8 51.♞xb2 (**not 51.♟xh8?? a3 and Black wins**) 51...♞b8 52.♞a2 a3 53.♟g3 ♞b2 54.♞a1 a2 55.♟xg5 ♟c7 56.♟e6 ♟a5 57.♟c5+ ♟e8 58.♟d3 ♞c2 59.♟b4 ♞xc3 60.♟xa2 ♞a3 61.♞c1! ♞xa2 62.♞c6 ♟e7 63.♞a6 and White is apparently winning, but only a computer would have the confidence (or indifference) to enter such a line! Larsen's choice is an infinitely more practical, human, over-the-board decision.]

43...b3 Complete desperation.

[But otherwise White wins as planned; for instance, **43...♟d7** 44.♟e2 ♟f8 (or 44...♟c7 45.♟d3 ♟d6 46.♟c4 ♞b7 47.♞xa5 is utterly hopeless for Black.) 45.♟c4 f6 46.♟xa5 is utterly hopeless for Black.]

44.♟e2 ♟c7 45.♞a4 Denying Black ...a5-a4 and ...Ba5 ideas. Notice how Larsen continually avoids Nf5+ until the proper moment. ♟d7

[Or **45...♞b4** 46.♞xb4 cxb4 47.♟d3 a4 48.♟c4 ♟a5 (or 48...a3 49.♟xb3 axb2 50.♟xb2 and wins, since h6 cannot be defended) 49.♟f5+ (finally the proper moment) ♟f6 50.♟xh6 ♟g7 51.♟f5+ ♟f8 52.h6 ♟g8 53.d6 and the two passed pawns spell curtains for Black.]

46.♟d3 ♞b6 47.♟c3 ♞b5 48.♟c4 ♟e8 "He did not want to look at that bad bishop any longer!" wrote Larsen.

[Had Hort not resigned, the torture would have continued with **48...♟e8**

49.♟e3 (or just 49.♞a3 and Rxb3) 49...♟d6 50.♟c4 ♞b4+ 51.♞xb4 cxb4 52.♟f5 ♟f8 (this bishop is nothing more than a glorified pawn, in lifetime indenture to h6 – wait, I take that back: a pawn is better since it can promote) 53.♟xb3 ♟d7 54.♟a4 ♟c7 55.♟xa5 ♟b7 56.♟b5 ♟c7 57.b3 f6 58.♟a6 ♟d7 59.♟b6 ♟d8 60.♟c6 ♟e8 61.d6 and so on.]

1-0

47

□ **Kaplan,J**

■ **Larsen,B**

38: San Antonio

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

B16

1972

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♟c3 dxe4

4.♟xe4 ♟f6 5.♟xf6+ gxf6

We enter the combative Bronstein/Larsen variation of the Caro-Kann, a line I played on Black's side in the 1980s, mainly due to Larsen's influence. Our styles are merely reflections of our inner nature. Larsen carried the banner of individualism to extremes with this early unbalancing move.

QUESTION: What does Black get for the potential damage to his structure?
ANSWER: The following points:

1. Black gets the open g-file for his rooks, which can lead to powerful attacks should White later castle kingside.
2. The g-pawn has been transformed into a more central f-pawn. This leads to greater central influence. Black can later play for ...e7-e5, or set up with ...e6-e6 and ...f6-f5, which takes control over the key e4-square, while if White fianchettoes on the kingside, then ...f5-f4 is available to help pry open White's

king.

6.♟f3

[Today, most players go for the flexible **6.c3** , although it often transposes; for instance, ♟f5 7.♟f3 and now e6 8.g3 scores well for White and may be the most logical continuation.

QUESTION: How does the fianchetto help White?

ANSWER: For the following reasons:

1. White's king is kept safer along the open g-file after castling kingside.
2. Black generally castles queenside, so White's light-squared bishop does double duty, both defensively and offensively, taking aim at Black's king. Play can continue ♞d5 this is how I always reacted as Black, issuing a challenge on the central light squares; (another set-up is 8...h5 9.♟g2 ♟e4 , followed by ...Be7 and ...f7-f5)

9.♟g2 and then:

A) 9...♞c4 10.♟h4 ♟d3 11.♞d2! (intending b2-b3 and c3-c4) ♟g6 12.b3 ♞d3 13.♞xd3 ♟xd3 14.♟e3 ♟d7 15.0-0-0 , when White's development lead and central space give him the edge, Z.Zhao-R. Antonio, Sydney 2008.;

B) 9...♞e4+ 10.♟e3 ♞c2 (this idea, which has been borrowed by Tiviakov in the Scandinavian, removes queens from the board but doesn't quite equalize) 11.♟h4 ♞xd1+ 12.♞xd1 ♟g4 13.f3 ♟h5 14.g4 ♟g6 15.f4 (or 15.♟xg6 hxg6 16.h4 with what looks like an edge for White in the ending due to the bishop pair) 15...♟c2 16.♞d2 ♟b1 17.b3 h5 18.g5 and White leads in both development and space in the endgame, which will be tough for Black, A.Naiditsch-W.Gradl, Fürth

2000.;

C) 9...--]

6...♟f5

[Black can play **6...♟g4** as well; for example, 7.♟e2 ♞c7 8.♟e3 ♟d7 9.♟h4!? ♟xe2 10.♞xe2 e6 11.0-0-0 0-0-0 12.c4 ♞a5 13.♟b1 ♟b6 14.♞c2 ♞h5 15.g3 ♟h6 16.f4 , when White owns more space yet Black remains solid and can be satisfied with the outcome of the opening, S.Tiviakov-N.Short, Wijk aan Zee 2010.]

7.♟e2 A passive posting for the bishop.

[At the time the fianchetto plan with **7.c3** , followed by g2-g3, wasn't known to theory.]

7...♞c7 8.0-0 ♟d7 9.c4 This move may be dynamic but it also weakens White's d-pawn slightly. **e6 10.♟d2!?** Multi-purpose: White can support d4 with Bc3 later and/or consider b2-b4 with a pawn avalanche against Black's king should it go long.

[Instead: **10.♟h4** isn't very tempting. Black can respond with ♟e4! 11.♞e1 0-0-0 12.♟f1 f5! and if 13.f3!? then ♟e7 14.g3 ♟xh4 15.gxh4 ♟e5! 16.fxe4 ♞xd4! 17.♞b3 ♞g8+ 18.♟h1 c5! 19.♟f4 ♟d3! (threatening mate on the move) 20.♞xd3 ♞xf4 21.♞e3 ♞xe4+ 22.♞xe4 fxe4 , followed by ... f7-f5 with full compensation for the piece.]

[**10.d5** is met by the bold 0-0-0! , as in B.Spassky-B.Larsen, Buenos Aires 1979. I was so taken by this game that I played this way as Black in the early '80s to beat a strong IM. Larsen's game continued 11.♟e3 c5 12.b4 ♞g8 13.bxc5 (Spassky opens lines at the cost of a great strategic gash on c5) ♟xc5 14.♟d4!? (after 14.♞d2 ♟h3 15.♟h4 ♟g4 , Black stands no worse; White's

exchange sac is probably only semi-sound, but it's not so easy to deal with when Spassky sits on White's side!) 14...♙h3 15.g3 ♙xf1 16.♙xf1 ♘e5 17.♖b1 ♘g4 18.♙c1?

a passive retreat in the middle of mutual attacks is a very bad sign; (18.♙g2 was necessary) 18...h5 (the computer finds improvements for Black in what follows, but Larsen's play is both consistent and impressive) 19.♖b3 h4 20.♙a3 hxg3 21.hxg3 f5 22.♙xc5 ♖xc5 23.♖b5 ♖d6 24.♖b3? (24.♙f3 was the only way to stay in the game) 24...f4! (the queenside isn't important: speed is of the essence) 25.♖xb7 fxg3 26.♖xa7 gxf2+ 27.♙g2 ♖h2+ 28.♙f3 ♖h1+ 29.♙g3 .

EXERCISE (combination alert): Black is presented with a dazzling array of discovered checks? Which one is the best continuation of the attack?

ANSWER: The strongest is ♘h2+! (the game ended more sedately: 29...♘f6+? 30.♙xf2 ♖h4+ 31.♙e2 ♖e4+ 32.♖e3 ♖xe3+ 33.♙xe3 ♖g3+ 34.♙d2 exd5 35.♘f5 ♙b8 36.♖xf7 dxc4+ 37.♙c2 ♖f3 38.♘g3 ♖f2+ 39.♙e2 ♖g8 0-1) 30.♙f4 (or 30.♙xf2 ♖xf1+) 30...♖g4+ 31.♙e3 ♘xf1+ 32.♙d3 ♖e4+ 33.♙c3 ♖xd4+ and mate follows shortly.

I was going to put this game in Chapter Three but ran out of room and so sneaked it into the notes to this one instead!]

10...♙d6 11.♙h1

[Larsen doesn't fear the tempo loss with 11.c5 ♙e7 since it hands him future control over d5 and weakens White's d-pawn even further.]

11...♖g8 12.c5! The most valuable commodity of our finite lives is time. Larsen gave Kaplan's ambitious move

a "?!" mark. I actually think it's a strong move, after which the position ferments with the violence of splattering oil in an overheated frying pan.

QUESTION: Isn't this a case of instant gratification? White gains a tempo at the cost of future problems with the d5-square and his d4-pawn.

ANSWER: All true, and I admit the move does yoke White to a risky undertaking. Yet there are extenuating circumstances: the move cramps Black, and possession of d6 shouldn't be underestimated. Overall, I think it represents a sound (if double-edged!) judgment on White's part.

[On the other hand, if White wants to play more safely, he could go for

12.♘h4 ♙g6 13.h3 ♙f4 14.♙c3]

[or 12.b4 ♙e4 13.♖e1 f5 14.h3 .]

12...♙e7

[Larsen rejected 12...♙f4 (and gave it a question mark) because he feared White's knight reaching c4 and d6; for example, 13.g3 ♙xd2 14.♘xd2 0-0-0 15.b4 (not yet 15.♘c4? due to ♘xc5) 15...♙h3 16.♖e1 f5 17.♘c4 , although after ♘f6 18.♘d6+ ♖xd6! 19.cxd6 ♖xd6 , Black's extra pawn and strong structure probably offer full compensation for the exchange.]

13.♖c1! Preparing Bf4. ♙e4

The bishop ponders on why his motives are continually misrepresented by those around him, who call him evil, when in reality he merely utilizes murder as a means to a holy end. This trick, taking aim at White's king and seizing control over d5, is standard operating procedure in such positions.

14.♙f4 ♖a5!? Black sets himself up for a future Nd2-c4 or b2-b4,

[but Larsen couldn't stomach the passive 14...♖d8 15.♖e3 f5]

15.♟g3 Covering g2, however temporarily, in order to free his knight.

[Against **15.a3** , Larsen perhaps intended f5 16.b4 ♖a4!? , when trapping the queen it isn't as easy as it looks.]

15...h5 Larsen hopes to sneak in a future ...h4 somehow. **16.♞g1**

[Now if **16.♜d2** then ♟xg2+! 17.♟xg2 h4 18.♜c4 ♖c7 with equality.]

16...f5 17.♜d2 h4!? A pawn sac, which is declined. Larsen spares no expense for his kingside renovation project.

[Offering a pawn sac: 17...h4 **18.♜xe4** hxg3 19.♜xg3 , which gives Black loads of compensation for the pawn, due to the open lines against White's king. Larsen spares no expense for his kingside renovation project.]

18.♟d6? Kaplan sensibly declines the pawn, but the wrong way, allowing Black to seize the initiative. "Those blind to the truth may follow me, for I provide eyes," proclaims the lunatic bishop, as he performs his devotions on d6 with messianic fervour. One can only waft for so long on an unrealistically optimistic outlook before crashing to the ground.

[Correct was **18.♜c4** ♖d8 (after 18...hxg3?! 19.♜xa5 gxf2 20.♖c3 fxg1 ♖+ 21.♞xg1 , Black doesn't have enough for the queen) 19.♜d6+ ♟xd6 20.♟xd6 ♖g5 21.f3 ♖xc1 22.♞axc1 ♟d5 23.b3 ♜f6 24.♞ge1 ♜d7 with a dynamically balanced ending. Black's pressure down the g-file and control over d5 counterbalance White's bishop pair and dark square control.]

18...♟d5!

[Not **18...♟xd6?** 19.♜c4 etc. But

now Black threatens both ...h4-h3 and the structurally damaging ... Bxd6.]

19.♟xe7 EXERCISE (combination alert): Larsen didn't make the auto-recapture on e7. What continuation is much stronger?

ANSWER: Zwischenzug. The structure around White's king is seriously compromised. This exercise shouldn't have proven too difficult if you read the previous note.

h3! White's king can't evade his commitments forever.

[Kaplan undoubtedly counted on **19...♟xe7?! 20.h3** with mutual chances.]

20.f3 Allowing Black's bishop to remain on the board.

[The alternative **20.♟f3** hxg2+ 21.♞xg2 ♜xe7 22.♟xd5 cxd5 23.♞xg8 ♞xg8 leaves Black with the safer king and superior pawn structure.]

20...hxg2+ 21.♞xg2 ♞xg2 22.♟xg2 ♜xe7 23.♜c4 It is too late to think about exchanging bishops.

[**23.♟c4??** walks into ♜xc5! 24.dxc5 (or 24.♟xd5 ♜d3 and ...Nf4+ follows) 24...♞g8+ 25.♜h3 (or 25.♜h1 ♖xd2!) 25...♖c7! with a decisive attack.]

23...♟xc4 24.♟xc4 ♜f6

[Maybe Black should take the chance to chip away at c5, while White isn't in a position to protect it; i.e. **24...b6!** 25.cxb6 axb6 .]

25.♖f4 ♞d8 Advantage Black, whose knight eyes pawn targets across the board and out-guns White's rather useless bishop. **26.a3!?** This allows Larsen to weaken White's structure after all;

[but if **26.♞d1** then ♖b4 (not here 26...b6?! due to 27.♖c7+) 27.b3

♖a3 28.♖d2 (or 28.♖d2 ♖c1)
28...b5 29.♙e2 ♜d5 and Black is
making inroads.]

26...b6! 27.b4 The only move.

[White loses after **27.♖c7+?** ♖d7
28.♖xc6 (28.b4 is met by ♖a4
, threatening a nasty check on c2)
28...♖d2+ 29.♙h1 ♖xb2 30.♖e1
♖xd4 , as 31.♙e6? fails to ♖f2 .]
[Or **27.cxb6?** ♖xb6 with a double
attack on b2 and d4.]

27...♖a4 All the queen requires is just
one safe square. **28.♖a2 bxc5?!**
We see a glitch in Larsen's calculations
– perhaps a minor one, but not one
small enough to be discounted entirely.

[The immediate **28...♖d1!**
wins at least a pawn, since 29.♖c7+
♖d7 30.♖xc6 is met by ♜h5! 31.♙f1
♜f4+ with a decisive attack. White's
king is surrounded, like water to the
lone fish in a pond.]

29.dxc5 ♖d1 30.♙f1 ♖g8+ 31.♙f2
♜d5 32.♖d2 The hunched queen's
dejected presence reminds us of
Napoleon on his return from the
Russian campaign.

[White doesn't get anywhere with
32.♖d6+? ♙f6 33.♖e2 , hoping for a
perpetual check, as Black simply
replies ♖d4+ 34.♙e1 ♖g1
(threatening ...Qa1+ etc) 35.♖d8+
♙g7 36.♖g2+ ♖xg2 37.♙xg2 ♖e3+!
(now follows between Black's queen
and White's king one of those
romantic misunderstandings, straight
from a badly written situation comedy
script) 38.♙f1 (or 38.♙d1 ♖g1+
, picking up the bishop) 38...♖d2!
39.♙g1 ♖d4+! and that's the end,
since 40.♙f1 ♜e3+ picks off White's
queen.]

32...♖b3! White is now in zugzwang!

33.♖b2 Kaplan distributes largesse with
a generous hand, mainly because he

has little choice. Powerful forces
compel White into this seemingly self-
destructive course of action.

[Trying to pass with **33.♙e2?** fails to
f4! 34.♙f1 ♖e3+ 35.♖xe3 fxe3+
36.♙e1 ♖g1 37.♖g2 ♖h1 38.♖c2
♜f4 , when there is no defence to the
coming ...e3-e2.]

33...♖xa3 34.♖a2 ♖xb4 35.♖xa7+
♙f6 Black's king remains annoyingly
safe. **36.♖xb4** An unfortunate
necessity.

[**36.♖h6+?** ♙e5 leaves White out of
checks, with a defenceless king.]

36...♜xb4 37.♖b7 ♜d5 38.♙c4 ♖c8
Black's last defensive move wasn't
necessary.

[He had **38...♜f4!** 39.♖c7 (or 39.♙f1
♖a8) 39...♖g2+ 40.♙e3? (but after
40.♙e1 ♖c2 41.♙a6 ♖xc5 42.♙b7
♜d3+ 43.♙e2 ♜e5 44.f4 ♜g6
45.♙e3 ♖c3+ 46.♙d4 ♖h3
, all of White's pawns fall) 40...♙e5
41.♖xc6 ♖c2! (41...♖c2 threatening
42.-- ♜g2+ 43.♙d3 ♜e1+ 44.♙e3
f4#) 42.♙f1 ♜d5+ (okay, the other
way then) 43.♙d3 ♜b4+ 44.♙e3
f4# . "Remove this pig's carcass from
my sight," orders Black's king, as he
takes a final look at his brother's
freshly butchered corpse on e3.]

39.♙g3 f4+! 40.♙f2 Of course g4 was
off limits. ♜e3 41.♙d3 ♖h8 42.♖c7
♜d5 43.♖xc6 ♜b4 Larsen simplifies
to an easily won rook ending. 44.♖d6
♜xd3+ 45.♖xd3 ♖xh2+ 46.♙g1 ♖c2
47.♖d4 ♖xc5 48.♙f2

[Not **48.♖xf4+** ♖f5 , when White has
the choice of entering a dead lost
king and pawn ending or a dead lost
rook and pawn ending.]

48...♖c2+ 49.♙f1 ♙g5 50.♖d8 ♙h4!
Black allows his king to be cut off since
it doesn't make a jot of difference.
White has no way to halt Black's

coming passers. **51.♖g8 f5 52.♖g6**
 [Or **52.♖e8** ♖g3! **53.♖xe6** ♖xf3
 – remove one of the f-pawn and this
 would be a draw; here Black has
 many paths to win, one of them
 being **54.♖g1 ♖c1+ 55.♖h2 ♖f2**
56.♖a6 (or **56.♖f6 ♖c8 57.♖h6 f3**
 etc) **56...♖c2 57.♖h3** (**57.♖a5 f3**
58.♖xf5 ♖e1+ 59.♖g3 f2
 and queens) **57...f3 58.♖f6 ♖e1**
59.♖e6+ ♖f1 60.♖g3 f2 61.♖f3
♖c3+ 62.♖f4 ♖g1 63.♖g6+ ♖h2
64.♖h6+ ♖h3 and Black promotes.]

52...e5 53.♖e6 e4! Reducing to a
 simple rook and pawn vs. rook
 endgame. White continues on, in futile
 pursuit of an essentially unreachable
 goal. **54.fxe4 fxe4 55.♖xe4 ♖g3**
56.♖e8

[**56.♖e1** f3 **57.♖a1 ♖h2** is similarly
 curtains.]

56...♖c1+ Kaplan finally gives up.
 [After **56...♖c1+** **57.♖e2 f3+ 58.♖d2**
 (the king's mouth is full of outraged
 words, yet all that emerges is a frog-
 like croak) **f2!** (that which went into
 the coffin and that which emerged are
 two different things) **59.♖g8+ ♖h4**
60.♖h8+ ♖g5, the black king
 weaves his way back along the g and
 h-files until White can check no
 more.]

0-1

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□ **Larsen,B**

■ **Portisch,L**

39: Biel Interzonal

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

A26

1976

1.c4 e5 2.♖c3 ♖f6

[If Black plans a future ...g7-g6, he
 may consider holding back on ...Nf6
 in order to activate his f-pawn; for

example, after **2...♖c6 3.g3 g6**
4.♖g2 ♖g7 5.d3 d6 6.♖f3
 , rather than transpose to the game
 with ♖f6 , (Black might prefer **6...f5**
 . Then again, there's no guarantee
 that White would play the same way.
 Indeed, in this reversed Closed
 Sicilian, Larsen usually went for **6**
Rb1 or, earlier, **5 e3 d6 6 Nge2.**)]

3.♖f3 ♖c6 4.d3

[White has numerous options here, of
 which **4.g3**]

[and **4.e3** are the most commonly
 played.]

[Larsen had a liking for **4 d3** at the
 time; while **4.a3** is seen (by
 transposition) in Game 16.]

4...d6

[Against **4 g3** or **4 e3** Portisch
 generally played **4...♖b4** . Perhaps
 he was less fond of Black's position
 after **4 d3 Bb4 5 Bd2** and so opted for
 a King's Indian set-up instead.]

5.g3 g6 6.♖g2 ♖g7 7.♖b1 a5 8.a3

As usual, Larsen opens quietly, almost
 deferentially, with a measured pace.
 Only later in the game would he inject
 his own brand of chaos/crisis. The
 position is a reversed Closed Sicilian,
 the only difference being that Black's
 f6-knight is in front of his f-pawn.

QUESTION: Does this mean he has an
 inferior version?

ANSWER: No. It is only inferior if Black
 plays naïvely for ...f7-f5 with something
 like ...Nh5, in which case he often
 does have a bad version.

QUESTION: What other plan is
 available?

ANSWER: Black can aim for ...c7-c6
 and an eventual ...d6-d5 after moving
 his c6-knight. either to e7 (prompted
 by White's b2-b4-b5 – see the next
 note, for example) or else to d4, as
 Portisch applies immediately in this

game, after which it is tough for White to get an edge.

d4 This swapping plan is generally considered to be an equalizer for Black, though he usually castles first. The alternative is to develop carefully within his own ranks. Ulf Andersson specialized in the Nf3 English versus KID structures.

[The following is a model example of how to handle the White side: **8...0-0** 9.0-0

A) here 9...d4 10.d2 (while 10.b4 axb4 11.axb4 c6 12.b5 g4 is similar to the next note) 10...c6 would transpose to the game;

B) 9...h6 10.b4 axb4 11.axb4 e6 12.b5 d7 13.b2 d7 (13...d7 , intending ...Bh3, is probably Black's best option) 14.d2 c6 15.a1 c7 16.c2 f5 17.fxc1 f6 18.d1 d7 19.xa8 xa8 20.a1 c8 21.xa8 xa8 22.a4! (the ending isn't so easy for Black) xa4 23.dxa4 d7? (23...e7 was necessary) 24.d6 e8 25.bxc6 xc6?! (but 25...bxc6 is met by 26.c5! dxc5 27.e5 , demolishing Black's structural integrity) 26.d3! (threatening Na5; Black must lose material) e4 27.xf6 xf6 28.xe4 d4? (Black had to try 28...xe4 29.dxe4 d4) 29.xc6 bxc6 (or 29...xc6 30.d8 e7 31.d4 f8 32.d5 e5 33.a5 etc) 30.dxd4 xd4 31.d8 c5 32.d7+ 1-0 U.Andersson-B.Gulko, Biel Interzonal 1976.]

9.d2 Larsen prefers to retain pieces on the board.

[A few years later, he went for **9.b4** axb4 10.axb4 c6 11.b5 0-0 12.bxc6

bxc6 13.dxd4 exd4 14.d4 e4 dxe4 15.xe4 a6 16.0-0 g4 (Black has equalized) 17.f4!? (provocation: Larsen deliberately allows Black a free ...g6-g5 kick) f5 18.g2 g5 19.d2 f4!? 20.b7 c8 21.b1!?

A) 21...xe2 22.e1 f3

(the attempted overload

22...xd3?? fails miserably to

23.xg7+ xg7 24.xd3)

23.xg5 is unclear;

B) 21...e5 22.gxf4 gxf4 23.h1?

(23.e1 keeps the position in

sharp balance) , B.Larsen-L.

Portisch, Montreal 1979, and here

Black could have played 23...xe2!

24.g1 h8 with a decisive

advantage, since 25.e4

is refuted by h3 26.xh7+ xh7

27.xh7 f3+! 28.g2 fa8 .]

9...0-0 10.0-0 c6 11.b4 axb4

12.axb4 g4 13.h3 d7 Keeping the e6-square free for the knight, but the bishop is slightly misplaced on d7.

[Black should play the more natural **13...e6** , intending an eventual ...d6-d5; for example, 14.e3 f5 15.b5 d5 , when White doesn't have anything.]

14.h2 d5 As I mentioned earlier, playing for ...f7-f5 in these positions risks an inferior version for Black, since White is already attacking on the queenside.

15.c5! QUESTION: Doesn't White normally play for b4-b5 in these situations?

ANSWER: Yes, but as we all understand, "normal" doesn't apply to Larsen, who spots an anomaly and his only chance at an edge, seizing upon Black's weakness at b6.

d5

[**15...e7** is met by 16.cxd6 xd6

17.e3 ♘e6 18.♟c4 ♚c7 19.b5 with advantage to White due to his a strong queenside initiative; the immediate threat is 20.Ba3, eyeing the hole on d6.]

16.e3 ♘e6 17.♟a4 White stands better, as it will be difficult to remove the pesky knight from b6. **f5?!**

Black doesn't have a realistic chance of attacking his opponent since White has access to too many central pawn breaks.

QUESTION: Isn't Black in trouble here due to the weakness of d4?

[His best shot to equalize may be **17...♟c7!** 18.♟b6 ♖a7 19.♙b2 ♙e6 20.♖a1 ♖xa1 21.♗xa1 and now d4 22.exd4 exd4 23.♗a7 ♗b8 24.♗xb8 ♖xb8 .]

ANSWER: I don't think so. In White's camp, b4 looks just as weak.

18.♟b6 A snobby clique deeply resents an attempted intrusion of an outsider – in this case, White's infiltrating knight. **♖b8** EXERCISE (planning): Come up with a clear plan to strengthen White's advantage.

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

19.e4! The real purpose of this move is to seize control over c4, after which White's knights run rampant in the hinterlands of Black's overextended position.

fxe4

[After **19...dxe4** 20.dxe4 f4 21.g4 ♟f6 22.♙b2 , Black's kingside "attack" is nowhere to be seen.]

20.dxe4 ♟c7?! Portisch straddles a hazy border between enterprising and fishy. A dozen wild surmises assail his mind, as a feeling of impending disaster looms. Unwilling to defend, he tries a desperate gamble which shouldn't have worked.

[On the other hand, Portisch probably didn't believe he could hold by going passive with **20...d4** 21.♟dc4 ♙e8 .]

21.♟xd7?! Caution, in moderation is commendable; caution, when pushed past natural limits, morphs into its evil twin: paranoia. Larsen

uncharacteristically plays it safe, merely picking up the bishop pair.

QUESTION: Wasn't d5 just hanging?

ANSWER: Well, it was a trap set up by Portisch. However, some traps are worth falling into!

[White extracts a clear advantage by "falling" for **21.exd5!** (we must dig up a ton of ore before we extract an ounce of gold) cxd5 22.♟xd5! ♙b5 . This double attack was Portisch's idea, which both players misassessed. After 23.♟b6! ♙xf1 24.♗xf1 ♙h8 25.♟e4 , White has monster compensation for the exchange and a close to decisive strategic advantage.]

21...♗xd7 22.♟c4!

[Another option was **22.exd5** (opening the game for his bishop pair) cxd5 and then 23.♟e4! .]

22...♗e6 23.♟b6 Larsen applies the pressure on d5 again. **♟f6**

[Pushing past with **23...d4** would be met by 24.h4! , intending to activate the light-squared bishop with Bh3 next.]

24.exd5 ♟cxd5

[Taking with the pawn (either now or later) gives White a target to attack as well as a dangerous majority for the endgame: **24...cxd5?!** 25.♗b3 ♖be8 26.♙b2 ♖f7 27.♖bd1 and Black's centre comes under heavy fire.]

[**24...♟fxd5** 25.♟xd5 cxd5?!

(25...♟xd5 26.♗b3 ♖be8 esstouring.com

transposes to the game) 26.b5 e4 27.♖b3 ♕d4 28.f3! with advantage to White, as c5 is effectively immune; for example, e3 (or 28...♕xc5?! 29.b6! ♜e8 30.fxe4) 29.♞e1 ♕xc5?! 30.b6! ♜e8 31.♕xe3 ♕xe3 32.♞xe3 ♖d6 33.♞be1 and White regains the pawn with a clear strategic plus, since his rooks control the e-file, Black's d-pawn may become a target, and White's bishop is potentially superior to Black's knight.]

25.♖b3 ♞be8 26.♜xd5 ♜xd5!

The correct recapture.

[Once again, **26...cxd5?! 27.♕b2** places Black's creaking centre under too great a burden. White will follow up with Rbe1 and if ...e5-e4, then f2-f3! continues to chip away.]

27.♕d2 ♜h8 28.♞be1 Advantage White:

1. Who owns the bishop pair in an open position.
2. He can make use of the e4-hole.
3. The e5-pawn is isolated and under potential pressure.

Black's powerful d5-knight and open f-file fail to compensate fully for his other strategic defects.

♖d7 29.♕c1 Transferring to b2, where it adds further pressure to e5. If the bishop had gone there straight away with 27 Bb2?!, then 27...e4! would have equalized, whereas ...e5-e4 now would just drop the pawn.

♜c7 30.♖c4 ♜b5 31.♕b2 ♖c7

[Black can also try **31...♜d4** at once, which may be met by 32.♞e4 intending f2-f4; (32.♞e3 is possible if White doesn't like ...Nf3+) 32...♜f3+ 33.♕xf3 ♞xf3 34.♖e2 ♖d3 35.♞e1 ♖xe2 36.♞1xe2 ♜g8 37.♜g2 ♞b3 38.♞d2! and Black is still under pressure in the ending but is by no means lost (while after 38.f4?! ♞a8!

39.fxe5 ♞a2 40.♕c1 ♞xb4!

, Black stands no worse at all.)]

32.♜g1 ♖f7 33.♖xf7 ♞xf7 34.♞e4

♞d8! Active defence. Portisch offers e5 in order to mobilize his rook and seize the d-file. **35.♞fe1**

[After **35.♕xe5 ♕xe5 36.♞xe5 ♞d2**, Black's activity should enable him to hold the game without difficulty.]

35...♞d2 36.♞4e2 ♞xe2 37.♞xe2 ♜d4

38.♞e4 g5?! A radical measure, after which Black's disconnected bishop lacks a sense of where he fits into the social structure. Portisch deliberately violates the principle: Don't fix your pawns on the same colour as your remaining bishop to discourage the f2-f4 break. By doing so, he greatly weakens his light squares, which Larsen later seizes upon.

[Instead, Black should be able to hold the draw if he remains cool; for example, **38...♜g8 39.♕f1!** (39.f4?! is premature and met by ♜f5!)

39...♜f3+ 40.♜g2 ♜d2 41.♞e2 ♜xf1 42.♜xf1 ♞d7 43.♕xe5 ♕xe5 44.♞xe5 ♞d4 45.b5 cxb5 46.♞e7 ♞d5 47.♞c7 h5 48.♜e2 b4 49.♜e3 b3 50.♞xb7 ♞xc5 51.♞xb3 ♜g7 with a theoretical draw.]

39.♞e3 ♞f8 40.♕e4 The bishop radiates power from e4, now that the light squares have been weakened. **♕f6 41.♜f1 h6?!]**

[I think Black is better off forcing rooks from the board with **41...♞a8 42.♞a3 ♞xa3 43.♕xa3 .]**

42.♞a3 ♞b8 43.♞a7 ♜b5 44.♞a1 ♜d4 45.♜e1 ♜g8 46.♞a7

This repetition is simply to burn up moves to get closer to the second time control – and perhaps to demonstrate to his opponent just who is boss.

♜b5 47.♞a2 ♜f7 48.♜e2 ♜e6 49.♜e3 ♜c7 50.♜d3 ♞d8+ 51.♜c2

♠b5 52.f3 ♠d4+ 53.♙xd4!

QUESTION: Isn't this now just a draw?

ANSWER: I don't think so. Black's rook and bishop are incapable of matching their counterpart's activity level. White has all sorts of infiltration ideas, exacerbated by Black's earlier ...g6-g5?! lash-out.

♙xd4 The d-file is worthless.

[In fact, Larsen soon forces the rook off. Black should try **53...exd4** 54.♠d3 ♖c8 with more drawing chances.]

54.♠b3 ♙e7

[Defending from b8 prevents the white rook's infiltration but is ultimately no better: **54...♖d8** 55.♖a7 ♖b8 56.b5 ♙e7 (after 56...cxb5 57.♠b4 , both black queenside pawns drop) 57.♠b4 (not yet 57.♠c4? cxb5+ 58.♠xb5 ♖c8 and draws) 57...♠f6 (passing) 58.♖a1 ♠f7 and now 59.♠c4! (threatening 60 bxc6) cxb5+ 60.♠xb5 ♠e6 (or 60...♙d8 61.♖a7) 61.♠b6 ♙d8+ 62.♠a7 ♖c8 63.♖c1 ♖c7 64.♙xb7 and I don't think Black can save the game, since he will soon be badly tied down by White's passed c-pawn.]

55.♖a7 ♖d7 56.g4! Threatening Bf5+.

♖c7 Black is forced into a spiral of passivity. **57.♖a8** Coming round the back. Larsen plans Rb8, followed by Ka4-a5-b6 or Bf5-c8, winning the b7-pawn. **♠f7 58.♖b8 ♙f6 59.♠a4**

[The immediate **59.♙f5** wins as well; for example, e4 60.fxe4 ♙e5 then 61.♙c8 ♠f6 62.♠a4! , followed by Ka5-b6, and Black is defenceless: ♠e7 (if 62...♙c3 then simply 63.♙xb7; 62...♖e7 63.♖xb7) , allows 63.♖xb7 (while after 62...Ke7 White inserts 63.♖a8! before Ka5-b6 and wins; but not 63.♠a5? due to ♖d7!

64.♖xb7 ♖xb7 65.♙xb7 ♠d7 and Black holds on.)]

59...♖d7 Intending to meet Ka5 with ... Bd8+. **60.♙f5 ♖e7**

[Removing the rooks wouldn't have saved Portisch either: **60...e4** (a clearance sacrifice to activate his rotten bishop) 61.fxe4 (not 61.♙xe4?! ♙e5 , ejecting the white rook, after which Black has good chances to save the game) 61...♙e5 (Black's bad bishop prays for deliverance, which heaven refuses to grant) 62.♙xd7 (62.♖a8? ♖d1 draws easily) 62...♙xb8 63.♙c8 ♠e7 64.♙xb7 ♠d7 .

EXERCISE: Black seems to have good chances to defend now, since he can hold the key dark squares c7 and e5 against passed c- and e-pawns. How can White break through?

A) . Black can indeed hold the opposite-coloured bishop endgame against two passed pawns. For example: 65.b5? cxb5+ 66.♠xb5 ♠c7 67.♙a8 ♠d7 68.♠c4 (or 68.♠b6 ♙c7+ 69.♠b7 ♙e5 70.c6+ ♠d8 71.♠b6 ♙c7+ 72.♠c5 ♠e7 73.♠d5 ♠f6) 68...♠e6 (the silences between king and king contain volumes of unspoken messages with their eyes) 69.♙d5+ ♠e7 70.♠d4 ♠f6 71.♙b3 ♙c7 72.♠d5 ♙f4 73.♠c6 ♠e7 74.♠b7 (or 74.♠d5 ♠f6) 74...♠d8 and the defenders refuse to budge in their infuriating obstinacy. What was once an abstraction, is now an entity. The position is drawn, despite White's two extra fighting units. When we are saved by a last minute miracle, our initial astonishment soon gives way to buoyant joy.; chesstouring.com

B) . ANSWER: Sacrifice the bishop to obtain three passed pawns!

White wins after, for instance,

65.♖b3 ♕e5 66.♖c4 ♖c7

67.♕xc6! (realizing that his own skills are useless here, the bishop detonates himself to create a breach in the defensive wall for the foot soldiers to march through) ♖xc6 68.b5+ ♖c7 69.♖d5 ♕g7 70.e5 ♕f8 71.b6+ ♖b7 72.♖e6! (giving up all three pawns in order to obtain two more) ♕xc5 73.♖d7 ♖xb6 74.e6 ♖b5 75.e7 ♕xe7 76.♖xe7 (it's not even a race) ♖c6 77.♖f6 ♖d6 78.♖g6 ♖e6 79.♖xh6 ♖f6 80.♖h5 etc.;

C) 65.--]

61.♕c8 The fragile ecosystem which once barely supported life, now dissolves into a wasteland where no organic life survives. **e4** Black's hunger-haunted pieces lack the strength to mount a serious resistance and lose their sense of identity, the way a factory worker may lose her humanity by becoming a part of the machine she tends.

62.fxe4 ♖xe4 63.♖xb7+ The rook rests in a happy stupor, having glutted himself on the flesh of his prey. **♕e7**
[Or **63...♖e7** 64.♕d7 , winning the c6-pawn and the game.]

64.♕d7 ♖e3 65.♕xc6 The loss of h3 is of course meaningless to White, as the two connected queenside passers win easily. **♖xh3 66.♕d5+ ♖f6 67.♖d7** . White's pawns can't be halted.

1-0

49

 **Karpov,A**

 **Larsen,B**

40: Montreal

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

B01

1979

I lived in Montreal from 1966 to late 1978. To my deep chagrin, I missed out on this tournament of all-time greats when my family moved to San Diego, California.

1.e4 d5 This mysterious game influenced me into taking up the Scandinavian, which I play to this day. The Scandi may be mainstream now, but it was considered a shady opening back then, so to play it against a reigning World Champion bordered on insulting – though I guess not as insulting as Tony Miles' 1 e4 a6!? which he used to defeat Karpov as well!

2.exd5 ♖xd5 QUESTION: How can the Scandinavian be sound for Black, which violates no less than three principles?

1. Don't fall behind in development in the opening.

2. Don't bring your queen out early in the game.

3. Don't move the same piece more than once in the opening (Black's queen).

ANSWER: Even after having written a book on the Scandinavian and playing it for over three decades, I am still at a loss to explain to students exactly what makes the opening sound, except by declaring: "It just is!" I think the main reason Black gets away with such flagrant principle violations is the fact that White lacks the single mechanism required to exploit them: Open the position when leading in development – which turns out to be very difficult to do.

3. ♖c3 ♜a5

[In my Scandinavian book, I cover the more modern **3... ♜d6** exclusively. I think d6 is a better square than a5, where Black's queen is in constant danger after White plays Bd2. Of course the queen can be targeted on d6 as well, but not so naturally, and it always just drops back to d8.]

4. d4 ♜f6 5. ♙d2 The bishop takes immediate aim at Black's wayward queen.

[Five rounds later, Spassky went for the main line **5. ♜f3 ♙f5** (**5... c6** is often preferred nowadays, safeguarding the queen straight away) **6. ♙d2 ♜bd7?!** (here Black should definitely look to his queen with **6... c6 7. ♙c4 e6 8. ♜e2 ♙b4 9. 0-0-0 ♜bd7 10. a3 ♙xc3 11. ♙xc3 ♜c7 12. ♜e5** , when it isn't so easy to prove an advantage for White; in the 1990s I knew the theory for another fifteen or so moves in this position and racked up a big plus score as Black) **7. ♙c4 c6 8. ♜e2 e6?! Gulp!** Let's give Spassky, one of the greatest attackers of all time, a lead in development in an open position! What could possibly go wrong!? (**8... ♜c7** was necessary) **9. d5! cxd5 10. ♜xd5 ♜c5 11. b4! ♜c8 12. ♜xf6+ gxf6** (**12... ♜xf6** allows **13. ♙b5+**) **13. ♜d4 ♙g6 14. h4 h5 15. f4! ♙e7 16. ♜h3!** (ensuring that Black's king will find no safe refuge on the queenside, since White's rook slides over to c3) **♜c7 17. 0-0-0 ♜b6 18. ♙e1 0-0-0?** this loses; (**18... ♜d8** had to be tried) **19. ♜b5! ♜b8** (**19... a6** is met by the crushing **20. ♙f2**) **20. ♜xd8+ ♜xd8** (**20... ♜xd8?** **21. ♙f2** wins at once) **21. ♙f2 ♜c6 22. ♙xa7 ♜d7 23. a3 ♜e4 24. ♙e3 ♙f5 25. ♜g3 ♜c6**

26. ♜d4 ♜a4 27. ♜xf5 ♜xa3+
28. ♜d1 ♜a1+ 29. ♙c1 ♙xb4 (or **29... exf5 30. ♜d3** and there is no good defence to Bb5) **30. ♙b5 ♜b6 31. ♜e4 ♜a5 32. ♜xb7**
 1-0 B. Spassky-B. Larsen, Montreal 1979.]

5... ♙g4

[QUESTION: Why not develop the bishop to the more natural f5-square?
 ANSWER: A trap! After **5... ♙f5?**

6. ♜f3! , with a double attack on f5 and b7, Black must lose two tempi with the unholy **♙c8** , (since **6... c6??** loses on the spot to **7. b4!** .)]

[If Black wants to put the bishop on f5, he needs to play **5... c6** first, though in that case White might choose to prevent it with **6. ♙d3** .]

6. ♙e2 I don't like this move since it violates the principle: Don't allow the cramped side swaps.

[Instead: **6. f3 ♙d7!?** (this move has come into fashion, avoiding the free g2-g4 tempo gain for White with the bishop on f5 or h5) **7. ♙c4** (threatening Nd5) **♜b6 8. ♜ge2 e6 9. 0-0 ♙e7 10. a4 a5 11. ♜e4 c5 12. dxc5 ♙xc5+ 13. ♜h1 ♜xe4 14. fxe4 0-0** and Black looks fine, A. Naiditsch-H. Stevic, Croatian Team Championship 2013.]

[**6. ♜f3** (this may be White's best chance at an opening advantage) **c6 7. h3 ♙h5** (after **7... ♙xf3 8. ♜xf3 ♜bd7 9. 0-0-0 e6 10. ♙c4 ♜c7 11. ♙b3 ♙d6 12. g4** , White's bishop pair and space give him the edge though Black remains solid, V. Kotronias-P. Ricardi, Buenos Aires 1997) **8. g4 ♙g6 9. ♜e5 ♜bd7 10. f4 e6 11. h4!** (threatening h4-h5) and White stands better, T. Schmitt-B. Geyer, Waldshut 2002; for example, **♜b6 12. ♙g2 ♙b4 13. h5 ♙xc3**

14.hxg6! ♔xd2+ 15.♖xd2 fxg6
16.0-0-0 (16.♗xg6?! is met by
♖xb2) 16...♗xe5 17.fxe5 ♗d5
18.♖df1 with excellent compensation
for the pawn.]

6...♔xe2 7.♗cxe2!? QUESTION: This looks unnatural. Why not recapture with the queen, planning queenside castling?

[ANSWER: Black equalizes after
7.♖xe2 ♗c6! 8.♗f3 ♖f5 (8...0-0-0?!
is met by 9.♗b5! ♖b6 10.0-0 a6
11.a4! axb5 12.axb5 ♗b8
, V.Shianovsky-A.Kislinsky, Kiev 2002,
and now 13.♗g5! with very strong
play for the piece) 9.♖b5 (if 9.0-0-0
then 0-0-0; or 9.0-0 e6) 9...♖xb5
10.♗xb5 ♖c8 11.♗e5 a6 12.♗xc6
axb5 13.♗a7 ♖d8 14.♗xb5 c6
15.♗c3 ♖xd4 , V.Okhotnik-S.Azarov,
Tallinn 2014.]

7...♖b6 8.♗f3 ♗bd7

[QUESTION: Can Black get away
with **8...♖xb2** - ?

ANSWER: It looks rather unwise. I
am firmly in the Lasker/Korchnoi/
Fischer camp of risky pawn grabs,
but not when this far behind in
development! Play may go 9.c4 e6
10.♗c3 ♔b4 11.♖b1 ♖a3
and the greedy computer says Black
is just fine, but as a fallible human,
I'm not so confident of survival.]

9.0-0 e6 10.c4 ♔e7 QUESTION:
Black has a little more development
than a couple of moves ago. Can
Larsen pick off b2 this time?

[ANSWER: Restraint may still be in
order. Even the computer doesn't
much like it now. For instance, after
10...♖xb2!? (this probably deserves a
"?!" mark, from a practical
standpoint) 11.c5 (11.♗c3
looks good too) 11...♖a3 12.♖b1 b6
13.c6 ♗b8 14.♗e5 ♗d5 15.♖b3

♖xa2 16.♗c1 ♖a6 17.♖e1 ♔e7
18.♖g4 , White threatens g7, as well
as Nxf7, and Black's two extra pawns
won't be of much comfort in the
grave.]

11.b4!? Karpov's philosophy in this
game as far as space was concerned
was "I want more!", almost as if he
sought to punish Larsen for his
insolent opening.

[The restrained **11.♖c2** is safer.]

11...0-0 12.a4 c6 13.♖c2 ♖c7
14.♖fe1 Deterring 14...e5? in view of 15
Ng3!. **b6 15.a5 ♖fb8 16.a6!?**

An ambitious and risky move. **b5!**
A brilliant strategic decision. Black
doesn't stand an iota worse, despite
external appearances.

QUESTION: Two questions:

1. Isn't Black simply getting squeezed?
2. This chapter is about Exploiting
Imbalances. What is Black's imbalance
in this game?

ANSWER: His imbalance is a lack of
space!

QUESTION: How is that an imbalance?
Isn't lack of space simply a
disadvantage?

ANSWER: Well, in this game, Larsen
gives a model performance of how to
utilize a space "disadvantage" (your
word, not mine!) as a weapon, goading
your opponent into overextension. I
can't tell you how many times I have
won Scandinavians (and other
cramped positions) by using this game
as a model, allowing White more and
more space and then counterattacking
at just the proper moment.

17.c5 Larsen's last move surrendered
even more space, giving up control of
both b6 and d6. In exchange:

1. Black took control over d5.
2. Black artificially isolated the a6-pawn,
which may fall in an ending; while in

the middlegame, a white rook must babysit the pawn from a1, another nuisance for Karpov's side.

3. Black fixed many of White's pawns on the same colour of his remaining bishop.

[Yes, **17.♕f4** would eliminate the bad bishop after **♕d6 18.♕xd6 ♖xd6**, but the swap helps Black, who feels less cramped.]

[**17.cxb5?! ♖xb5 18.♖ec1 ♖c8** would not be a good idea for White, who must nurse far more pawn weaknesses than Black.]

17...♗d5 18.♗c1! Re-routing the knight to its best square, from which it suppresses Black's freeing ...e6-e5 break. **♖e8** The rooks were useless on the now blocked queenside, so Larsen redeploys them to the central files.

19.♗d3 ♖ad8 20.g3 ♕f6 21.♖e4

QUESTION: Isn't White clearly better? After all, he gets to attack on the kingside, while Black, lacking a central counter with ...e6-e5, can do nothing but wait.

ANSWER: It looks ominous for Black, yet Larsen demonstrates he has abundant defensive resources. Karpov builds for the coming kingside attack, but it is like a street gang planning on attacking Fort Knox; and as he discovers later in the game, an attack comes with great risk of overextension, for the following reasons:

1. Black's cup runneth over with defenders around his king.
2. Black has zero inherent structural weaknesses in his position, and in order to induce one White must push his kingside pawns, at grave risk to himself.
3. Black owns several strategic trumps, such as control over d5, and potential targets at d4 and a6.

Conclusion. Black doesn't stand worse. **♗f8** Feeding his king another defender and clearing the d-file in order to apply pressure on d4 later. **22.h4 ♖d7**

23.♕g2 ♖ed8 24.g4!?

Here he comes! A move played with the philosophies: Half out and half in is a dangerous place to be in any endeavour. And: Attacks like this can't be run on a small scale. So Karpov goes all in. There is no turning back now. The paradox of excess is that we all crave it, and yet all of us realize that too much of anything can be harmful. White decides to discharge a round of broadside fire at Black's king, based upon the most arbitrary of data imaginable: he feels like it!

Of course Karpov was in no danger of a loss if he shuffled around and did nothing. But no World Champion having White's position would agree to a draw with a lower-rated player, especially one past his prime. So Karpov accepts the challenge – or the provocation. I can't imagine many other games in which he bashed his pawns down both sides of the board like this.

♖e8 Larsen is content to simply wait. **25.g5!?** Thematic and consistent doesn't necessarily equate to success in every instance. This move gains yet more space, at the cost of weakening White's kingside light squares. When it comes to a choice between moderated caution and bold (one would almost call it mad-scientist-like) experimentation, in this game Karpov was first in line with the latter.

♕d8 26.♗fe5 ♖de7 27.♕f4 ♖c8!

Black's queen is a woman who says little, yet there is great meaning in her cold stare. She is now perfectly placed to watch over a6! It seems as if White

is dominating but this simply isn't the case. The further he pushes forward, the greater the risk of his own overextension.

[Another option was **27...♟xf4+** **28.♟xf4 f6!** **29.♟f3 ♖f7** , when I don't believe Black stands worse.]

28.♙g3 f6! A move based on the philosophy: Most medicines are poisons, diluted to a dose which kills the disease, yet leaves the patient alive. We sense Black's forces crouching for the spring, while White's initiative reaches an impasse. It may look like Larsen is exposing his own king, but in fact White's king is at far greater risk. Larsen proceeds with a soft tone of quiet menace by application of the principle: Counter in the centre when attacked on the wing.

29.♟f3

[After **29.gxf6** **gxf6!?** **30.h5!?** (or **30.♟g4 h5** **31.♟e3 ♔d7**) **30...♞g7** (not **30...fxe5?** **31.♙xe5** , followed by **Rg4+** with a decisive attack) **31.h6 ♞g5** **32.♟f3 ♞g6** **33.♚d2 e5!?** it isn't so clear whose king is the more exposed.]

29...♞f7 **30.♚d2 fxg5!?** QUESTION: Doesn't this surrender the e5-square to White?

ANSWER: Larsen gives up e5 in order to take control of f5 and generate play down the f-file.

31.♟xg5?! Larsen criticized this move which, rather than gaining time on the black rook (it was going to f5 anyway), actually wastes time with the knight and makes White's kingside more difficult to defend.

[Instead, he suggested **31.hxg5** **♟g6** as unclear, and Houdini assesses this as 0.00.]

31...♞f5 **32.♞a3** This is the nuisance I mentioned earlier. White would like to

bring his rook into the middle, but it's stuck watching out for the a6-straggler, and it later proves to be misplaced on a3 as well.

♟g6 In case you still believe White is in control, Houdini now assesses the position as a slight edge for Black.

33.♟f3 ♞ef8 **34.♟fe5** With the earlier detour to g5, it has taken the knight three moves to get here – and remember, swaps help Black. **♟xe5**

35.♞xe5? Inaccurate. A thesis is devalued if in the end your concept lacks proof.

[White is now officially overextended; **35.♟xe5** would have minimized the disadvantage.]

35...♞f3! Pinning the knight to the now inconveniently placed a3-rook. Houdini's assessment nears a decisive advantage for Black. **36.♞a1?**

Retreating the rook again touches upon merely a part, rather than the fundamental body, of White's requirements, but it's hard to give any real advice here.

EXERCISE (combination alert): Karpov's lumbering position doesn't look so great anymore, and his last move allows Black a small combination. Do you see it?

ANSWER: Deflection/Knight fork.

♙xh4! The edge tends to be subservient to the centre, but not this time! **37.♞e2**

[**37.♙xh4??** is met by the crushing **♞xd3!** , when recapture is unavailable due to the knight fork on f4.]

37...♙xg3 **38.fxg3 ♚d7!**

Another excellent strategic decision. Black's queen and knight dominate in the resulting position due to multiple white targets, the biggest of which is Karpov's king! The immediate threats are **39...Qf7** or **39...Nc3!**, followed by

Qxd4.

39. ♖xf3 There is nothing better.

[**39. ♖xe6??** hangs a piece to ♖xd3 .]

39... ♖xf3 40. ♕xf3 EXERCISE

(combination alert): Larsen found another shot which sends Karpov reeling. Where is it?

ANSWER: Deflection/Triple attack.

♕xb4! **41. ♖d1** Planning to meet 41... Qxd4 with 42 Re4.

[Larsen's point was that after **41. ♕xb4** (the knight's reckless abandon earns him an arrow between his shoulder blades) ♖xd4 , Black's queen simultaneously menaces three targets.]

41... ♖xd4! Anyway! One fallen leaf may be a random event; two fallen leaves are proof of Autumn. Larsen, exquisitely attuned to the position's nuances, spots yet another anomaly in his favour.

42. ♖e4 When one of our pieces is taken prisoner (Black's knight), we become conflicted between philosophies:

1. Leave no comrade behind.
 2. Never negotiate with terrorists.
- EXERCISE (combination alert): It appears that Black is about to lose a piece, so... Black to play and not lose a piece.

ANSWER: Pin/Defensive move.

♖d5! The fog is no match for the sun. Larsen applies both numbers one and two on the list! Black's knight remains healthy, wealthy and wise, sitting on its perch, since White's pieces suffer multiple pins.

43. ♕f2 ♖h5+ Larsen prefers to shut out the d1-rook, unless Karpov should choose to force things with 44 g4 Qxc5, which he doesn't.

[Houdini finds a different way to win:

43... ♖xc5 **44. ♖d8+ ♕f7** **45. ♖d7+ ♕e8!** **46. ♖c7 ♕d8!** **47. ♖b7** (not **47. ♖xg7?** ♖c3+ , picking off the rook) **47... ♕c2!** **48. ♕e2 e5** **49. ♖xg7 ♕d4+** **50. ♕f1 ♕f5!** (forcing White's rook to free his king from 8th rank constraints) **51. ♖g8+ ♕c7** **52. ♕g2 ♕e3+** **53. ♕f3 ♕c4** and Black's b- and c-pawns will soon march forward.]

44. ♕g2 ♕d5 **45. ♖xe6 h6!** Creating useful luft.

[White can't play **45... h6** **46. ♖xc6?** due to ♕e3+ and wins.]

46. ♖d3 ♕h7! Larsen is full of dirty tricks this game.

[Now **46... ♕h7** **47. ♖xc6?** walks into ♕b4 .]

47. ♖f3 b4! Larsen continually blends tactics to achieve positional ends. He still doesn't need to protect c6, and his b-pawn's march is decisive since White's disorganized forces are in no position to halt it.

48. g4 White's dispirited rook continues to mope on e6, unable to capture on c6.

[If **48. ♖xc6?** then ♕e3+! **49. ♖xe3 ♖d5+** picks off the c6-rook.]

48... ♖g5 **49. ♕g3 ♖c1** **50. ♕h3**

Karpov tries a last ditch mating attack, without success.

[Here **50. ♖xc6?** fails to ♖g1+ **51. ♕h3 b3!** **52. ♖c8 b2** etc.]

50... ♖c4! Larsen seems to walk on water tactically this game. **51. g5**

Threatening **52 g6+** followed by back rank mate. When pushed to the brink of intolerability, there is no place to go but forward, even when it's a doomed fight. This attempt to formulate a mating net turns out to be a purely academic exercise, with no practical application in the real world.

[Of course **51. ♖xc6?** would still loses to b3 and the b-pawn is too fast.]

51...h5! 52.♖e8 To White's frustration, a mating net just doesn't exist.

[After **52.g6+** ♔h6 , White has no reasonable way to proceed]

[while **52.♖f8?** , threatening mate in two, is met by ♕g4+ , picking off the e6-rook.]

52...h4+ 53.♔g2 b3 54.♖b8

EXERCISE (combination alert): There is no respite for the damned. Black to play and win material.

ANSWER: Attraction. Black's seductive queen stretches out her hand enticingly, beckoning White's love-struck king, who fails to notice the poisoned-tipped blade she hides behind her back.

♕e2+! "You pathetically grasp for your continued existence which, rest assured, I will soon extinguish," the amused queen relates to White's shocked and now not-so-love-struck king, whose parchment-pale face tells the entire story without need of further words.

55.♘f2

[After **55.♖f2** , the simplest win is ♕g4+ 56.♔f1 (or 56.♔h2 ♕g3+ , picking up both the knight and b8-rook) 56...♘e3+ 57.♔e1 ♕d1# .]

55...♘e3+ . Larsen was well past his prime by 1979, but one would never guess it after playing over this game. **0-1**

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♐ **Morovic Fernandez,I**

♜ **Larsen,B**

41: Buenos Aires

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

B20

1992

1.e4 c5 2.g3 QUESTION: Is this some kind of a Closed Sicilian?

ANSWER: It's a bit of a hybrid, since White omitted Nc3. On the plus side,

it's possible to control the d4-square with c2-c3 and perhaps build a giant pawn centre with d4-d4 later on. On the other hand, Black has no trouble breaking with ...d7-d5 when and if desired.

g6

[The immediate **2...d5** is a way for Black to try and exploit White's move order. Play usually runs 3.exd5 ♕xd5 4.♘f3 ♕g4 5.♕g2 ♕e6+!

(this disruptive check ensures Black dynamic equality) 6.♔f1 (not 6.♕e2?! ♕xe2+ 7.♔xe2 ♘c6 , since Black stands well in the ending) 6...♘c6 7.h3 ♕h5 8.d3 ♕d7 and White's awkward king assures Black of equality.]

3.♕g2 ♕g7 4.d3

[Here **4.♘c3** ♘c6 would transpose to a Closed Sicilian.]

[QUESTION: Can White play for c2-c3 and d2-d4, as you mentioned earlier?

ANSWER: It's possible but not so effective. Black can respond **4.c3** ♘c6 5.♘e2 e5 , and if White continues 6.♘a3 ♘ge7 7.♘c2 , intending d2-d4 next move, Black arrives first with d5! , obtaining at least equality.]

4...d6 5.f4 ♘c6 6.♘f3 e5

Larsen grabs his fair share of the centre with the Botvinnik triangle structure.

[Alternatives include **6...e6**]

[and **6...♘f6** .]

7.c3

[Finally diverging for good from the Closed Sicilian, which could still arise after **7.0-0** ♘ge7 8.♘c3 . Presumably Larsen wouldn't have minded that too much, having lost on the White side to Portisch in their 1977 Candidates quarter-final

match.]

7...♘g7 8.0-0 0-0 9.♖a3?!

This is often played, though I'm not sure what the knight does here.

[A few years later Morovic had better luck with 9.♘h4 exf4 10.gxf4 f5 11.♖d2 ♖h8 12.♖df3 ♗e6 13.♖g5 ♗g8 14.exf5 ♘xf5 15.♖xf5 , I.Morovic Fernandez-Z.Franco Ocampos, Asuncion 1992, when Black should probably just go for ♗xf5 with full equality.]

[With 9.♖a3 , White hopes to improve on the gambit line 9 f5?! exf5 10 Nh4, anticipating an indifferent reply such as h6 , after which 10.f5!? has slightly more bite. Larsen scotches that hope straight away.]

9...exf4! 10.♗xf4

[10.gxf4?! d5! is even worse for White; for example, 11.♖e1 (after 11.e5 f6 12.d4 cxd4 13.cxd4 ♖b6 14.♖b3 ♖xb3 15.axb3 ♗f5 , Black stands clearly better) 11...b6 12.♖h4 ♗a6 13.f5 gxf5 14.exd5 ♘xd5 15.♖g5 h6 16.♗xf5 ♖de7 17.♗xf7 ♗xf7 18.♖xf7 ♖xf7 19.♗xh6 ♖d6 and the attack was unsuccessful, Y.Visser-L.Van Wely, Vlaardingen (rapid) 2005.]

10...d5 White already experiences some difficulty. He can't really take on d5, since ...Nxd5 arrives with tempo.

11.♖b5 Threatening Nc7, but it meets with an incisive reply. Morovic was clearly impressed with Larsen's play in this game, since he tried it himself as Black.

[M.Todorovic-I.Morovic Fernandez, Mesa 1992, saw 11.♖c1 ♗g4! 12.♗h6 ♗xf3 13.♗xf3 d4! 14.♗xg7 ♖xg7 15.♖g5?! dxc3 16.bxc3 ♖xd3 17.♖xc5 b6 18.♖c4 ♗ad8 19.♖xd3 ♗xd3 and Black had a very good endgame, on account of White's

numerous pawn weaknesses.

Perhaps 11 h3 was necessary.]

11...♗g4! 12.h3 ♗xf3 Larsen seizes upon a favourable imbalance. 13.♖xf3 d4! QUESTION: Why did Larsen hand his opponent the bishop pair?

ANSWER: Two reasons:

1. Black seizes absolute control over e5.
2. White's light-squared bishop is in danger of becoming a bad bishop, since all the central pawns will soon be fixed on its colour.

14.c4

[If White retains the pawn tension with 14.♗ad1 , Black can go for a6 15.♖d6 dxc3 (or 15...g5!? 16.♖xb7 ♖b6 17.♗d6 ♖e5! 18.♖f2 ♖xb7 19.♗xc5 dxc3 20.bxc3 ♗ac8 , when White may not have enough for the piece) 16.bxc3 ♗xc3 17.♖xb7 ♖d7 18.♗b1 ♖e5 19.♗xe5 ♗xe5 20.♖a5 ♖c6 21.♖xc6 ♖xc6 with a solid advantage, since his bishop clearly outworks its g2-counterpart.]

14...♖e5 15.♖e2 ♖7c6 White can't do anything very much now, whereas Black can make gains on the queenside. 16.♖a3 h5 A good move, inhibiting g3-g4. 17.b3 a6 White has no counterplay, while Black can make gains on the queenside. 18.♖c2 b5 19.♖e1 Intending to challenge Black's e5-supremacy, via f3. bxc4 20.bxc4 ♗b8 Meanwhile, Larsen makes dangerous headway on the queenside, seizing the open b-file and thinking about ...Qa5. 21.♖f3 ♖xf3+

[Alternatively, Black could continue his queenside play with 21...♖b6 and leave his opponent to trade knights on e5, but then White might not have been so drawn to his forthcoming mistake.] chesstouring.com

22. ♖xf3 ♜e5 23. ♙xe5?

White's actions are not in accord with his own conditions, and he appears to be attempting a generic solution to a highly specific problem. This decision – to give up the bishop in order to challenge for the b-file – proves to be the causal agent of White's future difficulties, since it decimates his already weakened dark squares. Morovic's concerns magnify exponentially as he trades in one headache for an even bigger one. The presence of the opposite-coloured bishops increases Black's advantage, since White's king and g3-pawn fall under the gaze of the monster dark-squared bishop.

[White should have abstained with 23. ♖e2 , when ♖b6 would reach the same position as after 21...Qb6 22 Nxe5 Nxe5 above.]

23... ♙xe5 Black's bishop, originally thought to be a peripheral participant in the drama, now steps in to take the leading role. 24. ♖ab1 ♖g5

The kingside is subject to the queen's cruel yoke, where she eyes c1, d2, e3 and especially g3. 25. ♖xb8 ♙xb8

26. g4

[White can't defend with 26. ♙h2 because of h4 and so is forced into this advance, further weakening the dark squares. Both parties own a bishop – but this is where the similarities end! Black's bishop stares menacingly down the b8-h2 diagonal, whereas White's is blocked by his own pawns, every one of which has been lured to the wrong colour.]

26... hxc4 27. hxc4

[27. ♖xc4?? drops the d3-pawn to ♖e3+ .]

27... ♙e5 With ideas of ...Kg7, ...f7-f6 and ...Rh8, coming down the open h-

file, if White sits still for it. 28. ♖b1 ♖d2 29. ♖b7

[If White returns to doing nothing with 29. a4 ♙g7 30. ♖f1 , Black has two possibilities. He can continue with the plan of

A) Or he can take his positional advantage into an endgame with 30... ♖e3+! 31. ♖xe3 (31. ♖f2 ♙g3 32. ♖xe3 dxe3 is no better) 31... dxe3 . For example: 32. ♖e1 ♙c3 33. ♖e2 (the newly arrived e3-pawn sits safely within White's territory, without warmth or affability from the locals; it can't be removed because of the ...Bd4 pin) ♖d8 34. e5 ♙xe5 35. ♙d5 (the freed bishop falls to his knees to make an impassioned prayer to Saint Jude, patron saint of lost causes) ♖b8 36. ♙g2 ♙d4 37. ♙f3 ♖b3 38. ♙e4 ♖a3 39. ♙c6 ♙f6! 40. ♖g2 ♙g5 41. ♙e8 f6 42. ♙d7 ♖a1 43. ♖e2 (or 43. ♙f3 ♖d1) 43... ♖f1 44. ♙d5 ♖f2 45. ♖e1 e2 and there is no defence to 46... Bc3.;

B) 30... f6 , followed by ...Rh8-h4 and ...Qg5 or even ...Kh6-g5, ganging up on the g4-pawn.]

29... ♙f4! Threatening ...Be3+, followed by ...Qxd3. The levitating bishop assumes an air of mystery over whichever diagonal he chooses, feeling confident his future sainthood is assured.

30. ♙f1 ♖c1+ 31. ♙e2 g5!

We note a seismic shift in the intensity level of the attack.

QUESTION: Why did Larsen place a pawn on the same colour as his bishop?

ANSWER: The pawn is not an obstruction here. By anchoring his bishop on f4, also blocking the f-file

Larsen frees his major pieces to roam the board in search of targets, such as White's straggling a-pawn or indeed his king.

32.a4 ♖e8 33.a5 ♔g7

Larsen continues to improve his position. There's no hurry, since White can't do anything;

[whereas **33...♞d2+** 34.♔f1 ♞xa5 35.♞d1 would allow him to prolong the game.]

34.♔f2 EXERCISE (combination alert):

White's position implodes, as black attackers maraud upon the innocent, namely the d3-pawn and white king.

How did Larsen pick off material?

ANSWER: Interference.

♞e3+ "You will atone for your sins, both in this world and the next," the bishop warns White's king. **35.♔e2**

[No choice since **35.♔g3?** walks into ♞e1+ 36.♔h2 ♖h8+ 37.♞h3 ♞g1# .]

35...♞c2+ This is clearly a one-sided love. The queen's air of outer refinement misrepresents the ruthlessness of her inner nature. Now d3, the core of White's structure, falls.

36.♔f1 ♞xd3+ 37.♞e2 ♞c3 38.e5

Morovic makes a last gasp attempt for counterplay with 39 Bd5, attacking f7.

EXERCISE (combination alert):

Defenders tumble over themselves in their frenzy to escape the black bishop and queen's wrath. Time for Black to finish off. How?

ANSWER: Deflection of a defender.

♞c1+! **39.♞e1** One senses that the white queen's stature has been greatly diminished after the failed skirmish with her powerful sister. **♞xc4+**

The queen continues to plunder with the insolent ease of one accustomed to privilege and power. **40.♞e2**

[White resigned at the same time, his

hopes lying dead and buried in a hastily constructed makeshift grave, depriving Larsen of an

underpromotion finish: **40.♞e2 d3!**

41.♞xe3 d2+ (have you ever had a nightmare where attackers swarm and savagely beat your dream body, and yet you are helplessly unable to lift a finger to fight back or even cry out?) **42.♔f2 d1♞+!** and wins. Oh, the sweet bliss of underpromotion.

The newly promoted knight coldly ignores the white king's incoherent sobs of protest. (Of course in this instance it would be a huge error to go for the materialistic **42...d1♞??**

, since it allows White to deliver perpetual check after **43.♞xg5+ .**)]

0-1

Chapter Five

Larsen on Accumulating Advantages

Larsen was something of an amphibian, being equally at home in a quiet strategic struggle and a fight to the death in a bout of tactics. If I was forced to categorize Larsen either as a tactician or a positional player, I would go with the latter. Like Nimzowitsch before him, Larsen followed a hidden, internal strategic compass (he sometimes appeared as a blundering amateur - and then 20 moves later we realize that the lack of understanding was on our part, not his!), which most of his opponents failed to comprehend. When we contemplate Larsen's strategic mind, it feels as if he tries to prove an incorrect assumption by implementing some crazy idea which has been circulating in his mind for a while, gets his proof backwards, and in doing so, accidentally stumbles upon the truth!

In my Nimzo-Larsen Attack book, I wrote the following about Larsen's strategic understanding: "Have you noticed that in many of Larsen's games, order and logic have a nasty habit of being rendered obsolete? Effect must be tied to cause, but apparently many of Larsen's games feel like exceptions to the rule. The reality: Larsen did indeed follow a hidden logic, but a logic only seen to himself."



The Black Hole of Calcutta was a roomy mansion, when compared to White's horribly cramped lodgings in the above diagram. If you guessed that the position was a typical Petrosianic squeeze by Black, you would be correct - except that it was Petrosian who was the unfortunate custodian of the white pieces! With almost infinite patience (a positional player is happy with a single base or a double, while tacticians settle for nothing less than a home run), Larsen tortured the probably blushing Petrosian, reducing him to absolute immobility (see [Game 46](#)).



In the second diagram (from [Game 48](#)), Larsen (as Black) reduced Spassky (in his prime) to this dystopian nightmare bad bishop position. I can't recall another Spassky game from this period where he lost without a fight, and appeared as a quarrelsome sheep, picking a fight with a hungry wolf.

[42: B.Larsen-G.Stahlberg, Denmark vs. Sweden, Copenhagen 1958](#)
Slav/Grünfeld Defence

[43: Z.Vranesic-B.Larsen, Amsterdam Interzonal 1964](#)
Old Indian Defence

[44: B.Larsen-M.Tal, Candidates \(1st matchgame\), Bled 1965](#)
King's Indian Defence

[45: B.Larsen-A.Matanovic, Zagreb 1965](#)
Catalan Opening

[46: T.V.Petrosian-B.Larsen, Piatigorsky Cup, Santa Monica 1966](#)

King's Indian Defence

[47: A.Gipslis-B.Larsen, Sousse Interzonal 1967](#)

Alekhine's Defence

[48: B.Spassky-B.Larsen, Candidates \(5th matchgame\), Malmö 1968](#)

Three Knights Game

[49: B.Larsen-A.Saidy, San Antonio 1972](#)

Slav/Grünfeld Defence

[50: B.Larsen-Y.Kraidman, Manila 1974](#)

Reversed King's Indian Defence

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D78

 **Larsen,B**
 **Stahlberg,G**

42: Denmark vs. Sweden, Copenhagen
[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.♠f3 ♠f6 2.g3 g6 3.♙g2 ♙g7 4.0-0
0-0 5.c4 c6 This is one of Black's
most solid (and boring!) options,
preparing ...d7-d5.

[Instead: 5...d5 enters Neo-Grünfeld
structures after 6.cxd5 ♠xd5 7.d4
.]

[5...c5 is a Symmetrical English.]

[5...d6 may reach a Fianchetto King's
Indian if White plays d2-d4, or else
continue into an English Four Knights
with 6.♠c3 e5 7.d3 ♠c6 , when
8.♞b1 a5 9.a3 was seen in Game
39.]

6.b3!? Here we go. Provocation down
the a1-h8 diagonal begins. Each
individual casts a stylistic shadow in
the secret image of his inner self.
QUESTION: Is there any way for Black
to exploit White's weakness down the
diagonal?

ANSWER: I don't think so. Houdini
doesn't see anything either.

[White's most common course runs
6.d4 d5 7.cxd5 (but 7.b3
is a recognized line too, and ...Ne4
is standard against that, so Larsen's
early b2-b3 didn't make any
difference in the end) 7...cxd5 8.♠c3
♠c6 9.♠e5 e6 , as occurred in A.
O'Kelly de Galway-G.Stahlberg,
Beverwijk 1958.]

6...♠e4 The most forcing reply, ruling
out any ideas White might have had of
playing d2-d3 instead at some point.

7.d4 d5 8.♙b2 ♠d7

[Today, the top players seem to
prefer 8...♙f5 , but there's nothing
wrong with the text, nor indeed with

other moves such as 8...a5 or 8...Be6.
As an example of 8...Bf5, H.
Nakamura-P.Leko, FIDE Grand Prix,
London 2012, saw 9.♠bd2 ♠d7
10.♠h4 ♠xd2 11.♞xd2 ♙e6 12.e4
dxe4 (not 12...dxc4? 13.d5 ♙xb2
14.♞xb2 cxd5 15.exd5 ♙g4
16.bxc4 , when White looks clearly
better) 13.♙xe4 ♙h3 14.♞fe1 ♞c7
15.♠f3 ♠f6 16.♙c2 ♞ad8 17.♞e3
♞fe8 and it isn't easy for White to do
anything worthwhile with his extra
space, though Nakamura tried until
move 73 before conceding a draw.]

9.cxd5 Caution was a trait for which
Larsen had little aptitude – except in
the opening. This tension relieving
move makes the game even duller.

[9.♠bd2]

[and 9.e3 are more common here.]

9...cxd5 10.♠c3 ♠xc3

[10...♠df6 11.♞c1 ♠xc3 12.♙xc3
♠e4 is equally equal.]

11.♙xc3 b6 12.♞c1 ♙b7

Some positions get so insanely
irrational that they become incalculable.
This, however, isn't one of them!

QUESTION: Why would a player like
Larsen, whose name is associated
with fighting chess, open a chess game
in such a milquetoast manner?

ANSWER: I'm sorry. Did you say
something? I drifted off there.

The Réti had been Larsen's usual
opening as White for several years, but
by 1958, now playing at a higher level,
he was switching to other first moves,
such as 1 d4. I suspect that Larsen's
distrust of entering a sharp theoretical
battle with Stahlberg was the guiding
factor in his quiet (some would say
overly quiet) opening choice. This
position seems headed for an almost
certain draw, made even more likely by
the fact that Stahlberg was the Ulf

Andersson of his day, who loved boring positions!

13.♖c2 ♖c8!? This robotic move looks constructed for ornament, rather than wear and tear, after which Larsen manages to squeeze something out of nothing.

[**13...a5!** may be Black's most accurate move, preventing Bb4 and intending ...Ba6.]

14.♗d3 ♗e8

[If Black tries to double rooks himself with **14...♖c7** 15.♖fc1 ♗b8, intending ...Rfc8, White responds 16.♙b4! ♖xc2 17.♖xc2 with a microbe of an edge.]

15.♖fc1 ♙f8 Perhaps thinking about ...e7-e6 and ...Ba3. **16.♙d2** Preparing to transfer to the more useful h2-b8 diagonal. **♖xc2 17.♖xc2 e6 18.♙f4** White stands a shade better, despite the symmetry, since he owns the c-file and infiltration at c7 becomes a worry for Black. **♙f6?!** The beginning of a slightly inaccurate plan.

[**18...♙b8!**, followed by ...Nc6, curbs White's edge, when 19.♙e5 (19.♖c7 is met by ♖e7) 19...f6 20.♙g4 ♙c6 sees Black's knight much better placed than in the game, and threatening ...Nb4.]

19.♙e5

[Again **19.♖c7** is easily dealt by ♖e7.]

19...♙h5 20.♙d2 f6!? At last, something tangible for White.

Psychologically, it's very difficult to allow White's knight to sit eternally on e5. So Black decides to take on a slight weakness to eject the intruder.

21.♙g4! Eyeing the tender f6- and h6-squares. Suddenly, the locus of Black's anxiety shifts to his king. **♗e7**

22.♙h6+! ♙xh6!? QUESTION: Why would Black weaken his dark squares

like this?

[ANSWER: The alternative is to allow the knight to roost dangerously on h6: **22...♙h8** 23.h4! ♗d7 24.g4! (further constraining Black's piece activity) ♙g7 25.g5 when Black is in serious strategic trouble on the kingside dark squares.]

23.♙xh6 ♖c8 24.♖xc8+ ♙xc8 25.e4!

Principle: Open the position for your bishop pair. **♙b7** Black agrees to a bad bishop.

[The problem with **25...dxe4?**

26.♗xe4 is that White's queen is given access to infiltration routes like c6 and a8.]

26.e5! Dual purpose: White hands his opponent a bad bishop, and at the same time inflicts dark-square damage around Black's king. From this point on the weakness of those squares is a disease which may (or may not) be controlled into partial remission, but never fully cured.

fxe5 27.dxe5 Black's passed d-pawn does him little good as long as he is unable to break the blockade. **♙g7**

28.h4! Powerful positional play, intending to meet ...Nf5 with Bg5.

Furthermore, Black must now watch out for h4-h5 if his knight ever vacates g7.

[The obvious **28.g4?!**, on the other hand, would be met by ♗h4! 29.♗h3 ♗xh3 30.♙xh3, when White's advantage decreases. **♙a6**]

28...♗c7 Attacking e5.

[The depressing alternative is

28...♙f5 is the depressing alternative.

29.♙g5 ♗b4 30.g4! ♙g7 (not 30...♗xg4?? 31.♗b5! and wins)

31.♗e2, when Black continues to struggle.]

29.♗b5! d4? To begin a suicidal war is to concede defeat before the first shot is even fired. Black's last move looks

like an overreaction, after which Black's position declines yet further. In seeking a doctrinaire solution Black appears to stitch two shaky theories into a single hypothesis, and the odds run pretty high on its invalidity. More concretely, with this pawn sac Stahlberg hopes to free his position and generate light square counterplay, both of which fail to happen.

[Black should play the calm **29...♙c6** 30.♖b4 a5 31.♖f4 ♘f5 32.♙g5 h5 . Then after 33.f3! ♙b5 34.g4 ♘g7 35.♖f6 hxg4 36.fxg4 ♙h7 37.♖f2 ♙d3 38.♙e3 b5 39.♖d2 ♙e4 40.♙xe4 dxe4 41.♙f4 , he may have drawing chances due to White's slightly exposed king position. At least in this version the difficulties are less painful than the tyranny Black endured in the game.]

[The greedy **29...♖xe5??** allows the white queen to infiltrate with 30.♖d7 , when Black gets a hopeless position a pawn down, as both a7 and b6 drop.]

30.♙xb7 ♖xb7 EXERCISE (planning): Black's weary position is beaten down by innumerable forms of sorrow. Find one subtle yet deadly idea and you reduce his game to inertia.

ANSWER: Threaten d4 while paralysing the knight.

31.♖b4! ♖e4 Stahlberg chases after the ghost of a perpetual check which doesn't exist, but nothing else was any better. By now it must feel to Stahlberg as if stones are piled on his chest, slowly crushing the life out of him.

[For instance, **31...♖c8** 32.g4! ♖c5 (or 32...♖d8 33.♙g5 and if ♖d7 then 34.♖d6! ♖f7 35.♙h6 ♘e8 36.♖xd4 , when Black is a pawn down and can barely move) 33.♖xc5 bxc5 34.♙c1! (there is no good

defence to the coming Ba3) h5 35.f3 ♘e8 36.♙a3 d3 37.♙f2 ♘c7 38.gxh5 gxh5 39.♙xc5 a6 40.♙e3 is an easy win for White, since his queenside majority is decisive – not to mention that he will soon be two pawns up!]

[**31...♖d7** 32.♖d6! ♖e8 33.g4 is complete paralysis for Black.]

32.♖d6 ♖e1+ 33.♙g2 ♖e4+ 34.♙h2 ♖f5 White can simply play 35 Qxd4, with an extra pawn and a dominating position.

[But take a look at the forcing line 34...♖f5 **35.♖d8+ ♖f8** 36.♖xf8+ ♙xf8 , when the coming Bxg7 forces a king and pawn ending. Does this win for White?

EXERCISE (calculation/critical decision): Calculate the ramifications of 35 Qd8+ etc and decide whether White should enter or avoid this line.]

ANSWER: Once a position's hidden core is recognized, it doesn't require further interpretation and the correct plan flows naturally from our discovery. The king and pawn ending wins by one tempo!

35.♖d8+! ♖f8 Black's queen nods with impressive tolerance at what she perceives as her sister's petty attempts to provoke. She soon discovers that the threats are not so petty.

[There was no choice anyway, since **35...♙f7??** (suicide is the ultimate way to express contempt for life) 36.♖d7+ means instant resignation. The queen believes in her own god-like powers: she merely wishes for something, and it comes to pass. In this case her fervent wish is for her brother to drop dead – and he does just that.]

36.♖xf8+ ♙xf8 37.♙g2 Principle: Avoid taking a pinned piece, until the

pinned side wastes time breaking the pin.

[The immediate **37.♗xg7+**

should still win, but why hand Black a free tempo?]

37...♕f7 38.♗xg7 ♗xg7 39.♕f3 g5!

The best practical chance. Stahlberg summons the will for a final desperado. Still, this is a strange assassination plot, where everyone except the intended victim – White's happy-go-lucky king – is killed!

[After **39...♕h6** 40.g4 g5 41.h5 , White's king waltzes over and picks off d4.]

40.hxg5

[**40.h5** g4+ 41.♗xg4 ♗h6 42.♕f4 ♗xh5 43.f3! also wins.]

40...♗g6 41.♗e4 ♗xg5 EXERCISE (calculation): Try and work out the following forcing line in your mind's eye, without moving the pieces.

[**41...♗xg5** 42.f3! (slamming the door in the black king's face) h5 43.♗xd4 h4 44.gxh4+ ♗xh4 45.f4 ♗h5 (or 45...♗g4 46.♗e4 etc) 46.f5! (Black's perfunctory spatter of counterplay isn't enough to make up for his missing pawn) exf5 47.e6 ♗g6 48.♗e5 f4 49.♗d6! (not 49.♗xf4?? ♗f6 with a draw) 49...f3 50.e7 ♗f7 51.♗d7 (the white king arrives with the patient air of a college professor explaining a mathematical paradox to a rather dull-minded first grader; White promotes with check!) f2 52.e8♖+ and wins. An impressive 22-ply if you made it to the end. White wins the race by a single tempo, while the black king's open mouth forms into a doughnut of disbelief.]

1-0

53

A53

□ **Vranesic,Z**

■ **Larsen,B**

43: Amsterdam Interzonal

1964

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 d6 3.♘c3 ♗f5!?

Larsen was in a way a rather predictable player – since in each game he played, an unpredictable opening outburst was a near certainty. This move probably deserves a "?! " mark. Larsen writes: "Probably not very good – but good enough to face an inexperienced opponent with unknown problems." I tend to agree with Larsen. The trouble with placing the bishop on f5 is that White eventually (eventually, mind) achieves e2-e4 with gain of tempo.

4.g3 This is White's highest scoring move in practice.

[QUESTION: Isn't Black's last move made ridiculous by **4.f3** , followed by 5 e4 - ?

ANSWER: If you're assuming (along with many other players, since 4 f3 is the most frequent move) that e2-e4 will therefore gain a tempo, this assumption is waylaid after e5! 5.e4 (5.d5 is met by the disruptive e4! , and if 6.g4 then ♗xg4! 7.fxg4 ♖h4+ 8.♗d2 e3+! 9.♗xe3 ♖g5+ forces a draw) 5...exd4 6.♖xd4 ♘c6 , when Black gains a tempo as well. Okay, White still has a strong centre, but Black has a slight lead in development is not without resources. For example: 7.♖d2 ♗e6 8.b3 g6 9.♗b2 ♗g7 10.♘ge2 (or 10.♗d3 a5 11.♘ge2 ♘d7 12.0-0 ♘c5 , V.Jeremic-B.Damljanovic, Yugoslav Championship, Banja Koviljaca 2002) 10...0-0 11.♘g3 h5 12.♗e2 h4 13.♘f1 a5 14.♗e3 ♗h6

15.♘cd5 ♕xd5 16.cxd5 ♘e5
with an unclear position, Z.
Azmaiparashvili-E.Vasiukov,
Volgodonsk 1981.]

4...e5 5.♘f3

[Gaining space with **5.d5** is a logical alternative]

[but White should avoid the temptation to play **5.dxe5**, since Black stands at least equal in the ending after dxe5 6.♖xd8+ ♘xd8 7.♕g2 c6 .]

5...♘bd7 6.♕g2 c6 7.0-0 h6

Giving the bishop a retreat square.

[**7...e4??** is premature in view of 8.♘h4! ♕g6 (or 8...g6 9.♘xf5 gxf5 10.♕h3 ♖a5 11.d5 and the f5-pawn falls) 9.♘xg6 hxg6 10.♘xe4 and White picks off an important central pawn with the bishop pair added as well.]

8.dxe5?! There is no reason to free Black's position like this.

[White retains a pleasant edge after either 8 d5 or 8 Nh4. For example: **8.d5** c5 (the non-committal 8...♕h7 looks better) 9.♘e1 (intending e2-e4 next, when White can play for both b2-b4 and f2-f4 pawn breaks) ♕e7 10.e4 ♕g6 11.♘d3 0-0 12.f4 ♘e8 13.♕e3 ♕f6 14.f5 ♕h7 15.h4 and Black is permanently cramped, V.Malakhatko-H.Machelett, German League 2008.]

[**8.♘h4** ♕h7 9.e4 ♕e7 (or 9...♖b6 10.d5) 10.♕e3 0-0 11.♘f5 ♕xf5 12.exf5 exd4 13.♕xd4 ♖a5 14.♖c2 ♖fe8 15.♖ab1 , intending b2-b4 with a queenside initiative as well as the two bishops, G.Ligterink-A.Miles, London Lloyds Bank 1981.]

8...dxe5 9.b3 ♕b4!? QUESTION: Isn't it better to develop the bishop to e7, since White may later gain a tempo with a2-a3 - ?

[ANSWER: I think that provoking a2-a3 was actually Larsen's wish, under the assumption that White's queenside pawns grow weaker with each push forward. Saying that, I would probably play **9...♕e7**]
[while Korchnoi (who reached this position as Black via a totally different route) temporized with **9...♖c7** and put the bishop on e7 a bit later.]

10.♕b2 0-0 11.♖e1?! The beginning of a not-so-great plan. This self-pins the c3-knight, and having already played 8 dxe5, the coming e2-e4 just weakens a lot of squares: d4, d3, d2 and even f2.

QUESTION: What do you suggest instead?

[ANSWER: Maybe just allow ourselves to fall in line with Larsen's game plan and seize space on the queenside with **11.a3** ♕e7 12.b4 .]

11...♖b6!? Eyeing the tender f2-square and threatening ...Bxc3, followed by ...Ne4. One of White's problems is that blocking the diagonal with e2-e3?! would drastically weaken his light squares, the most chronic of which is d3.

12.♘h4!? This move soon turns out to be a waste of time. If White really wants to play e2-e4 he might as well play it at once and follow up, wherever the bishop goes, with Qc2.

♕h7 13.e4 I'm not so convinced White loves the soil he tills. Consistency is not a virtue if you embark upon a dubious path. In such positions, the analytical specifics become irrelevant if the general outline is incorrect. In a rapidly changing environment, refusal to adapt can be fatal.

It's amazing how far our strategic understanding has grown since 1964.

Vranesic, an IM, makes the sort of move the present-day club player would probably avoid. Yes, White gains space and cuts off the h7-bishop but those achievements come at the high cost of weakening, as we've already noted, a whole load of central squares.

d4c5 14.♖c2 d6e6?! The d4-square beckons already, but this was rather casual by Larsen.

[It was stronger to seize the d-file with **14...♖fd8!**

A) , and if White tries to challenge with **15.♖ad1** , then **♖xd1 16.♖xd1 ♗xc3 17.♗xc3 ♜cxe4 18.♗xe4 (or 18.♗xe5 ♜xf2 19.♗xf2 ♗xf2+ 20.♗xf2 ♜g4+ and ...Nxe5) 18...♜xe4 19.♗xe5 ♖e8 20.♗b2 g5 21.♜g2 (not 21.♜f3? g4 22.♜h4 ♖xe5 23.♗xe5 ♗xf2+ 24.♗h1 ♜f6 , followed by ...Be4) 21...♜xf2! wins a pawn.;**

B) . The point of using the f8-rook is seen after **15.a3?!** **♗xc3 16.♗xc3 ♗xb3 17.♗xb3 ♜xb3 18.♖ab1 ♜c5** , when Black has avoided a potential pin with **19.♗b4 .;**

C) **15.--]**

15.♜f3 A time-wasting admission that his 12th move was incorrect.

[Then again, **15.♜f5 ♗xf5 16.exf5 ♜d4 17.♗d1 ♖fe8** doesn't look very pleasant for White, with the f5-pawn in danger and the queen sitting uncomfortably on the open d-file.]

15...♖fe8 16.♜a4?! Another wayward knight goes to the rim, which later costs White more time. If you continue to funnel resources into a flawed plan, your project simply becomes an expansion of mediocrity.

[Vranesic might yet have redeemed his position with **16.a3!** **♗xc3 (or 16...♗f8 17.b4) 17.♗xc3** (threatening

Nxe5) ♜d4 (or 17...♜c5 18.♜d2 , intending 19 b4) 18.♗xd4 exd4 19.c5 and White should equalize.]

16...♗a5 17.♖e2 b5! Black launches a cavalcade of threats, scaling from mildly irritating to strongly intimidating. It becomes abundantly clear that White is in serious strategic difficulties.

18.a3

[Inserting **18.cxb5?** **cxb5** only makes matters worse for White, as **19.a3** can then be met by **♖ac8 20.♗d3 ♗f8! 21.♜c3 b4 22.axb4 ♗xb4** and Black is clearly better after **23.♜a2 (or 23.♜xe5 ♖ed8 24.♗e3 ♗c5 25.♗a3 ♗a5) 23...♗b7 24.♜xe5 ♜c5 .]**

18...♗d6

[Here **18...♗f8** , may have been more accurate (avoiding the resource in the next note), when **19.cxb5 cxb5 20.♜c3 ♗b6 21.♖d1 ♖ac8** looks uncomfortable for White.]

19.♗c3? This loses material.

[Instead: **19.♜c3** would be met by **bx c4 20.bxc4 (after 20.b4 ♗a6 , Black hangs on to his extra pawn) 20...♜d4 21.♜xd4 exd4 22.♜d1 (or 22.♜a2 c5) 22...♗c5** and White's awful position doesn't inspire confidence.]

[White had to try **19.c5!** **♗f8 20.♜c3 b4 21.axb4 (or 21.♜a4 bxa3 22.♗xa3 ♗b5) 21...♗xb4 22.♗a3 ♗b7 23.♜a4 ♖ab8** , when he remains under some pressure but may yet survive.]

19...♗a6 20.♜b2 EXERCISE

(combination alert): Find Larsen's simple continuation to win a pawn.

[Now if **20.c5** then **♗c7 21.♜b2 ♜xc5** picks up a pawn.]

ANSWER: Pin.

20...b4! White can't take the pawn because the a1-rook would drop

21.♙e1 bxa3 22.♘a4 ♖ab8

Not only is Black now a pawn up, he also controls b4 and applies pressure to b3. **23.♙c3** EXERCISE (combination alert): Black's position contains the potential for vast energy, albeit for now frozen energy, yet to be tapped. Find Black's shot and you dramatically increase his advantage.

ANSWER: Deflection/Double attack.

♘xe4! Black's placid detachment finally ends with an outburst. Pull a single strand of wool from the sweater and eventually its entire structure unravels. Properly cultivated, this investment should yield a large profit.

24.♖xe4 ♙xe4 25.♚xe4 The queen gazes expectantly around the room for applause and is puzzled by the mocking silence which greets her ears. **♖xb3** "Please convey my thanks," says the rook, as he picks up yet another pawn for Black. Both a4 and c3 hang, so White's next move is forced.

26.c5 ♘xc5 27.♘xc5 ♙xc5

QUESTION: Did Black get enough for his minor sacrifice?

ANSWER: More than enough. In fact, Black is winning.

1. His rook and four pawns are too much for White's two minor pieces.
2. Black's a3-pawn is well guarded and close to the queening square.
3. There are further intangible factors to be considered: White's king, in particular, in far greater danger than it first appears.

28.♙xe5 White is desperate to get something back, and so willingly walks into a pin and weakens f2.

[He rejected the miserably passive

28.♙e1 ♖b2 29.♙f1 ♚b6 30.♙e2 ♙b4 31.♙xb4 ♖xb4 32.♚f5 ♖b2 33.♖e1 ♚c5, when the coming ...a3-a2 is decisive.]

28...♚d3! 29.♚xc6? EXERCISE

(combination alert): Both the e8-rook and c5-bishop hang. We reach that ill-defined cusp between discovery of a combination and a failure to find it.

What did Larsen play?

[Aggressive resistance in a hopeless cause is merely aggressively useless, but swapping queens wouldn't have saved him: **29.♚xd3 ♖xd3**

Threat: ...Rxf3, followed by ...Rxe5.

30.♙f1 (or 30.♙f4 ♖e2! 31.♙f1 ♖xf2 32.♙xd3 ♖xf3+ 33.♙g2 ♖xd3 and Black is four pawns up) **30...♖xf3 31.♙xf3 ♖xe5 32.♙xc6 ♙e7!**

wins easily since White cannot get his bishop to a2; for example, **33.♙a4 ♖a5 34.♙b3 ♙f6 35.♖a2 ♙b2**, taking the white rook out of the game.]

ANSWER: Annihilation of the king's defenders.

29...♖xe5! The rook walks away from the encounter with a petulant shrug. Now that Larsen is done dominating his opponent strategically, he turns on the tactical heat.

30.♘xe5 ♙xf2+! 31.♙xf2 Acceptance of the offer is a little like a traveller to an exotic land who eats the suspiciously serpentine local cuisine (which tastes like chicken but isn't!) without inquiry or speculation. The king seeks escape from his kingside purgatory where all exits are blocked, but to a homeless person attempting to survive winter, the great outdoors is a giant gulag.

[The alternative is an isolation chamber on h1, when **31.♙h1 ♖b1+** is curtains for White.]

31...♚d4+ Triple attack. 32.♙e2

The white king's cawing, hysterical laughter does little to reassure his followers. Now Black can take the

knight but forcing mate is so much better, isn't it?

♖b2+! White's position is decimated and his king wiped out, remaining only a memory, as if he were a dream person who never existed.

[After **32...♖b2+!** , the end comes swiftly: **33.♔e1** (the king's penitential sufferings are nearly at an end, and the delivery of checkmate is the final hurdle before his full atonement)

♕f2+ (in a mood of sadistic whimsy, the queen orders White's king to be paraded through the streets, naked and in chains, telling him "You are flanked by enemies, all of whom are your betters") **34.♔d1 ♕d2# .]**

0-1

54

□ Larsen,B

■ Tal,M

44: Candidates (1st matchgame), Bled
[Cyrus Lakdawala]

E99

This is a battle between two boxers in the ring, Tal a stationary puncher and Larsen a dancer. In this game, Larsen inflicted damage with quick-flick jabs and then stepped out of range, not allowing Tal his monumental wallop, mainly by steering the game into pure strategic channels, where Larsen held the edge.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 0-0 5.♘f3 d6 6.♗e2 e5 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.d5 ♘e7 9.♘e1 Such an embrace of the conventional wasn't Larsen's natural habitat. Here he enters pure theoretical channels, whereas he normally recused himself from such arguments.

This is the Long Variation of the King's Indian, aptly named, since the theory

now extends to around move thirty! I used to play this way as White, until I came to the realization that I prefer to play chess than engage my opponent in a contest of homework. In fact, **9 Ne1** is just one of three main moves in this position.

[**9.♘d2** has its own body of theory]
[while for a long time Kramnik made a steady living from **9.b4 .]**

9...♘d7 10.f3

[Nowadays, **10.♘d3**]

[and **10.♗e3** are more common, though in the latter case it makes no difference, since White answers **f5** with **11.f3** anyway (see the next note).]

10...f5 11.g4 If you place two scorpions in a glass jar, don't expect a peaceful outcome.

QUESTION: Doesn't this move weaken White's king?

ANSWER: Actually I think it makes White's king safer, since it halts Black's kingside pawn expansion and offers the white defenders more freedom.

[It's not too late to enter a deeply theoretical line with **11.♗e3 f4 12.♗f2 g5** ; for example, **13.♖c1 ♘g6 14.c5!?** (White sacs a pawn to distract Black from his kingside attacking schemes) **♘xc5** (if **14...dxc5?! then 15.b4!** cuts a swath through the queenside and White's play progresses at an alarming rate) **15.b4 ♘a6 16.♘b5 ♗d7 17.♘xa7 h5 18.a4 ♗h6 19.♖c4 ♖f7 20.♘d3 ♖g7 21.h3 ♘f8 22.♘b5 ♘h7 23.♗e1** (intending **Nf2** next) **g4!?** **24.fxg4 hxg4 25.♗xg4** (only this move was new, according to the database) **♗xg4 26.hxg4 ♗g5 27.♖f3 ♗h4 28.♗xh4 ♕xh4 29.♖h3 ♕xg4 30.♕xg4 ♖xg4 31.♘f2 ♖g7**

32.♖hc3 ♘f6 33.a5 ♘e8 34.♙h2
♖d8 35.g3! (eliminating White's only
weakness) fxg3+ 36.♖xg3
and Black remains under pressure on
the queenside, though the game
was eventually drawn, C.Lakdawala-
Ja.Peters, Los Angeles 2006.]

11...h5

[I think this plan is too slow for Black
and prefer the modern treatment,
keeping the kingside fluid with
11...♙h8 ; for example, 12.h4 c6
13.♙g2 ♘f6 14.♘d3 b5!
(Black creates a queenside
distraction) 15.b3 ♖b8 16.♘f2 b4
17.♘a4 ♙b7 , when the position
remains messy and approximately
balanced, P.Eljanov-T.Radjabov,
FIDE Grand Prix, Elista 2008.]

12.g5 Very annoying for Black, since it
gums up f6 for his knight. **h4**

This was actually still theory at the time,
following a game by Reshevsky (and
Kasparov played it once as well, as a
junior), but I think this version favours
White.

QUESTION: What is Black's plan
behind this move?

ANSWER: Black intends to isolate the
white g-pawn artificially with ...f5-f4,
then gang up on it with ...Rh8-h5 and,
if necessary, ...Bf8-e7 or ...Nf8-h7. The
obvious drawback to this plan is that
it's terribly slow. White may well drop
his g5-pawn, but in the time it takes
Black to win it, White should have
made serious progress on the
queenside.

13.♘d3 f4 14.♙h1 Making room for
the rook.

[The original game in this line, R.
Wade-S.Reshevsky, Buenos Aires
1960, saw **14.♖e1?! ♙f7 15.♙h1**
(realizing that **15.♖xh4 ♖h8 16.♖f2**
♖h5 is fine for Black) **15...♖h8**

16.♖g1 ♘f8 17.c5 ♙d7 18.b3 ♖h5
19.♙a3 ♘c8 20.c6 bxc6 21.dxc6
♙xc6 22.♘b4 ♙d7 23.♙c4+ ♘e6
24.♙d5 ♖b8 25.♖c1 c5! 26.♙xe6+
♙xe6 27.♘bd5? strangely, the d5-
square is almost irrelevant here;
(**27.♘a6 ♖b6 28.♖e2 ♙f7 29.b4**
would still be unclear) **27...♖xg5**
28.♖e2 ♙f7 and Black slowly
consolidated his extra pawn.]

14...♙f7 15.c5! Larsen forces the
queenside open without preparation,
following a game plan with well-defined
borders. **♖h8** QUESTION: White's last
move constitutes a gambit. Is it
possible for Black to accept this offer?

[ANSWER: Believe it or not, I can't
find a single game in my database
with the acceptance. The reason
Black declines is because
acceptance greatly accelerates
White's central and queenside
initiative. Indeed, after **15...♘xc5**
16.♘xc5 dxc5 17.♖b3! ♙e8
(forced, in view of the threatened d5-
d6+) **18.♖b5+** , White regains the
pawn already, while opening both the
centre and the queenside in his
favour.]

16.♖b3! Threatening both Nb5,
targeting d6, and c5-c6, opening lines.
b6 Creating light square weakness, but
this concession is necessary as it is
the only way for Black to defend the
queenside. **17.cxd6 cxd6 18.♖a3**
♘c5 19.♘xc5 The most direct
continuation.

[Alternatively, White could delay the
capture and play something like
19.♙d2 a6 20.♖g1 ♙d7 21.♘xc5
bxc5 22.b4 cxb4 23.♖xb4
with excellent queenside chances, Ch.
Koch-Da.Matic, correspondence
2008.]

19...bxc5 20.b4! Principle: Take the

initiative on your strong wing. **21.♖xb4 ♕h3 22.♖g1 ♖b8 23.♜b5!**

The threat to d6 overrides the effect of Black's pin. **24.♕a3**

Larsen continues to hammer away at d6. **25.♖c4**

[Houdini prefers **25.♖c3!**, followed by Nc7-e6; for example, **26.♜c7 ♖h5?! 27.♜e6! ♕xe6 28.dxe6+ ♜g7** (not **28...♜xe6?? 29.♖c4+ d5 30.exd5+ ♖xd5 31.♖c2!** and wins) **29.♖ac1 ♖xg5 30.♖xg5 ♕xg5 31.♖c7+ ♖xc7 32.♖xc7+ ♜h6** (not **32...♜f6?? 33.♖f7+! ♜xe6 34.♕c4+** and mates) **33.♕a6 ♜e7 34.♕b7!** with a very good endgame for White. This may well be the strongest plan, but Larsen had something different in mind.]

25...♕e7 26.♖c7 It's logical for White to remove queens from the board (especially against Tal!).

[There was nothing better here in any case; for instance, **26.♖ac1 ♖a5! 27.♕b4 ♖b6** looks fine for Black]
[while **26.♜c7** is defused by **♜b6!** and **27...Rc8.**]

26...♖xc7 "Your Majesty, what a pleasant and unexpected pleasure to see you," whines Black's queen, her voice soprano with apprehension, as she assents to the swap with a dubious nod of the head.

27.♜xc7 ♖h5 If a government loses its people's respect, it soon falls. Black achieves his long-standing plan as g5 finally drops, but White gets loads of compensation on the other side of the board.

28.♕f1 ♕xf1?! This isn't a position which allows latitude for even the tiniest inaccuracy. Tal's last move allows the white knight to perch on e6 unchallenged.

[I would avoid the swap of his good

bishop and scurry back to defend with **28...♕d7**, and if **29.♜e6! ♜b6** (taking the e6-knight makes White's light-squared bishop the dominant piece) **30.♖c1 ♖hh8 31.♕a6 ♕c8!**, when Black may yet hold on.]

29.♖gxf1 ♖xg5 Black's extra pawn proves absolutely useless and Larsen convincingly demonstrates that his pawn sac (instigated back on move 12) was a sound venture.

30.♜e6 ♖h5 31.♖ac1 Both c6 and c7 are inviting squares for White's rook.

♜f6 Black's king, unsure of his safety, experiences a sense of dislocation.

32.♖c7 ♖h8 33.♖fc1 g5 34.h3

Ending any ...g5-g4 ideas. White sits on the cusp of great power and by degrees his dominance grows more clear. Black, whose defenders droop with fatigue, fights for a draw, despite being a pawn up:

1. White's rooks infiltrated the queenside, tying Black down.
2. Both d6 and a7 are a source of grave concern for Black.
3. Black's king isn't all that safe either.
4. Black nurses a bad bishop and a tied down knight.

5. Black has no active plan, agony for a player of Tal's aggressive nature.

35.♖7c6 A new annoyance emerges. Once again d6 is under heavy fire. **♜f7 36.♜g2!** A great army can't be on the march with its general sitting on the sidelines. Larsen activates the only sleeping piece in his camp, his king. **♜f6 37.♜f1 ♖h8 38.♜e2 ♖g8 39.♜d3 ♖h8 40.♖c7 ♜b6?** Panic at the time control. This looks like a desperate attempt to bind a massively haemorrhaging wound.

[Black had to try **40...♖e8**]

[or **40...♖g8 41.♖1c6 ♜g6**

and pray he hangs on, though it's

hard to see how he might do that now. If he just passes, White has the winning plan of Bc1-d2, push the a-pawn to a6, and then Rb7 etc.]

41.♖1c6! Total strategic domination. Larsen focuses on d6, the heart of Black's structure with almost hypnotic intensity. ♜hc8 Endless defence tends to harden and embitter an opponent, who longs to rise up and smite the tormentor.

[Black sealed **41...♜hc8** but resigned without resuming the game due to 42.♙xd6 . We aren't accustomed to Tal losing like a lamb, without putting up any kind of a fight.]

[QUESTION: What just happened? It seems that Tal just hung the d6-pawn, when retreating again with **41...♜c8** might still save the day. It feels to me as though White has a nuclear device, yet lacks the propulsion system necessary for delivery to its target.

Am I correct in this assumption?

ANSWER: You are trying to cure a terminal illness. Black is equally lost after your suggested move. In fact, let's turn this into an exercise:

EXERCISE (combination alert): White to play and win.

ANSWER: Pin. White wins with 42.♜c5! (threatening a deadly knight fork on d7) ♜a8 (42...♜b1 is no better) 43.♜d7+ ♙f7 44.♙xd6! and then:

A) 44...♙xd6 45.♜xe5+ ♙g8 (or 45...♙f6 46.♜f7+! ♜xe5 47.♜f5#) 46.♜xc8+ ♜xc8 47.♜xc8+ ♙g7 48.♜xh8 ♙xh8 49.♜f7+ etc.;

B) 44...♜xd6 45.♜xe5+ ♙e8 46.♜g6 ♙d8 (46...♜h7 is met by 47.♜xd6) 47.♜xh8 ♙xc7 48.♜xc7 and Black will be completely crushed by the advancing d- and e-pawns.;

C) 44...--]

1-0

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E07



Larsen,B



Matanovic,A

45: Zagreb

1965

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.c4 ♜f6 2.g3 e6 3.♙g2 d5 4.♜f3 ♙e7

[**4...dxc4** is generally thought to equalize after 5.♞a4+ ♜bd7 (5...c6 6.♞xc4 b5 is another option) 6.0-0 (or 6.♞xc4 c5) 6...a6 7.♞xc4 b5 8.♞c2 ♙b7 , when one of my own games continued 9.d3!? (playing the position like a Hedgehog) ♙e7 10.♜bd2 0-0 11.b3 c5 12.♙b2 ♜c8 13.♜ac1 ♞a5 14.a3 ♜fd8 15.♜fd1 ♜f8 16.♞b1 ♜g6 17.♞a1 with a roughly equal, Rétiesque position, C.Lakdawala-D.Aldama, San Diego (rapid) 2012.]

5.0-0 0-0 6.d4 Transposing into the Catalan Opening.

[The alternative is to play **6.b3** and hold back the d-pawn.]

6...♜bd7 7.♜bd2 Slightly unusual by today's standards.

[White generally plays **7.♞c2** here, maintaining options with the b1-knight.]

7...c6 The Closed Catalan, one of Black's most solid queen's pawn opening options. **8.b3 b6 9.♙b2 ♙b7 10.♜c1** QUESTION: Isn't Larsen playing the opening too passively? Shouldn't he be playing for e2-e4 instead?

[ANSWER: Well, I can't argue with you about Larsen's habitual opening passivity, especially with the white pieces. And I agree that playing for

e2-e4 is White's only chance of an edge against this super-solid line.

For example: **10.♖c2 ♜c8 11.e4 c5 12.exd5 exd5 13.dxc5 dxc4 14.♟xc4 b5 15.♟ce5 ♟xe5 16.♟xe5 ♙xg2 17.♟xg2 ♙xc5 18.♞ad1 ♞a5**, U.Andersson-Cu. Hansen, Sweden vs. Denmark match, Hinnerup 1995, when after **19.♞c1! ♞a6** (not **19...♞xa2?? 20.♟d3** and wins) **20.♞f5**, White continues to hold a nagging edge.]

10...♞c8 11.e3 dxc4!? A violation of the principle: Don't release central tension without good reason, though doing this once is okay for Black here.

[Alternatively, he can play **11...c5 12.♞e2 ♞c7!?**, intending ...Qa8 with harmonious development, as in K. Honfi-P.Szilagyi, Budapest 1966.]

12.♟xc4

[More accurate than **12.bxc4 c5**, as White's set-up is rather passive for the coming hanging pawns.]

12...c5 13.♞e2 Clearing the d-file for the f1-rook. **cxd4!?** After violating the same principle a second time, Black needs to be careful or else run into difficulties.

[When Matanovic faced this position again five years later, he was ready with his improvement: **13...b5!** **14.♟ce5 a6 15.♟xd7 ♟xd7 16.dxc5 ♞xc5 17.♙d4 ♞xc1 18.♞xc1 ♞b8 19.♞b2 ♙f6 ½-½** L.Lengyel-A. Matanovic, Bad Pyrmon 1970.]

14.♟xd4 ♙xg2 15.♟xg2 Now the c6-square is dangerously weak and Black's queen is uncomfortably placed in the centre, which tends to be his biggest challenge in this variation.

♟c5?! A definite error.

[Houdini shows that Black might yet have solved his problems: **15...a6! 16.♞f3 b5! 17.♟c6 ♞xc6 18.♞xc6**

bxc4 19.♞fd1 ♞a5! 20.♞xd7 ♟xd7 21.♞xd7 ♞xa2 22.♙xg7 ♟xg7 23.♞xe7 ♞xb3 24.♞c7 ♞b8 25.♞xc4 ♞b7+ 26.♞xb7 ♞xb7 27.♞a4 with a probable draw.]

16.♞fd1 ♞d5+ 17.f3 Preparing to gain space and central influence with e2-e4. Looking back at this position in Informator in 1971, Matanovic considered Black to be clearly worse already.

♞fd8 18.e4 Imperceptibly, Larsen's position continues to improve without visible effort.

QUESTION: Can White invade with **18.Nb5 - ?**

[ANSWER: In this line Black's defences stretch yet fail to rupture. **18.♟b5?! is met by the surprising self-pin ♟d3!**, when **19.♞b1** (while **19.♟xa7??** fails to **♟xc1 20.♟xc8 ♞xd1 21.♟xe7+ ♟f8 22.♞xd1 ♞xd1 23.♟c8 ♟xa2 24.♟8xb6 ♞d3** and b3 falls, leaving White the exchange down) **19...♞xb5 20.♞xd3** is just equal.]

18...♞b7 19.♟e5! Targeting c6 again, and b3-b4 is in the air as well. **♙f8** Retreating the bishop before it's hit.

[Inserting **19...a5 20.a3** doesn't improve this for Black, since **♙f8 21.b4! ♟a4 22.♙a1 axb4 23.axb4 ♞xc1 24.♞xc1 ♞a8** (**24...♙xb4??** loses to **25.♟ec6 ♞c8 26.♞b5**) **25.♞d2** still leaves him on the defensive.]

20.♞c2

[**20.b4!** was stronger (as in the previous note); for example, **♟a4 21.♙a1 ♞xc1 22.♞xc1 a6 23.♟dc6 ♞d6 24.♙d4** and White's minor pieces dominate, whereas Black's a4-knight sits offside.]

20...♞e8 21.♞dc1 ♟fd7 22.♟g4!?

"He isn't from here," murmur the town's

folk, upon viewing the suspicious stranger enter g4.

QUESTION: What's the purpose of White's last move?

And isn't the knight offside on the kingside?

ANSWER: Larsen begins to eye Black's king menacingly, envisaging Nh6+ tricks to open the long diagonal, mingled with strategic threats down the c-file and on c6. Anyway, White's knight isn't so offside on g4, as it can easily return to central duty via e3.

[22.♖c4 was the more positional route; comparing the position after 18...Qb7, we see that White has doubled his rooks on the c-file, while Black hasn't really achieved anything.]

22...♗a6 23.a3 Ruling out ...Nb4.

[If White plays 23.♖c4, Black can throw in ♖xc4 24.♙xc4 ♗ac5! 25.b4 h5! 26.♗f2 (or 26.bxc5 bxc5) 26...♗e5, followed by ...Ncd7 with equality (Larsen).]

23...♗ab8 24.♖c4 Preparing to triple the heavy pieces and take over the c-file. **a6 25.♙c2 ♖xc4 26.♙xc4 b5 27.♙c3** Now the threats along the a1-h8 diagonal become a huge concern for Black, who hurries to drive the queen away.

[In contrast 27.♙c7?! doesn't get very far after ♙xc7 28.♖xc7 ♗d6.]

27...b4 28.axb4 ♗xb4 29.♙e3!

The queen's external appearance of affable innocence disguises a devious mind behind the facade. Similarly, we sense the potential for kingside mayhem behind the position's placid exterior. Larsen, who intends to fight the war on two fronts, once again turns his attention toward Black's king, hoping to jury-rig an attack out of whatever he finds lying around.

[Again 29.♙c7?! ♙xc7 30.♖xc7 ♗d6 31.♖c1 isn't very impressive for White.]

29...♗e7! Preventing the white queen from invading at g5. **30.♖c4 ♖c8??**

When we engage in trial-and-error probing, we should strive to emphasize the "trial" part! This move is like a man whose house is on fire, so he throws snowballs at it from the front yard, hoping to lower the temperature.

Matanovic's last move is psychologically quite understandable. He rushes to challenge the c-file before the white queen returns to c3. It is played under the philosophy: Leisure is a valuable commodity which Black lacks; he must act and act now or risk losing ground. Unfortunately, the fragile state of checks and balances is now shattered.

EXERCISE (combination alert):

Multiple factors allow us to sense an imminent explosion that breaks the uneasy calm. In fact White has two winning combinations. What would you play here?

[30...h5 was necessary.]

ANSWER #1: Annihilation of the king's defences/Double attack.

31.♗xe6! Larsen spots a hidden vulnerability in the position and Black's delicate planning is smashed to bits by White's savagery.

[ANSWER #2: 31.♗f5! was even better: ♖xc4 (not 31...exf5? 32.♙c3! ♗f8 33.♖xc8 fxg4 34.♙xg7#) 32.♗xe7+ ♗f8 33.♗xg7+! ♗xe7 (not 33...♗xg7? 34.♙h6+ ♗h8 35.♗e5! and mates) 34.bxc4 with an extra pawn and a continuing attack.]

31...♖xc4? Losing at once.

EXERCISE (combination alert): Black's last move provides little consolation in

his time of adversity and hope recedes deeper into the murk. White to play and force mate.

[Instead: **31...fxe6?** 32.♔c3 is the same deadly double attack on g7 and c8. The selective breeding programme produced the überqueen, efficient, deadly and without conscience.]

[**31...♙f6?** fails to 32.♜xf6+ ♜xf6 33.♔a7! , winning the queen, since ♔xa7? 34.♞xc8+ is mate next move.]

[**31...f6!** is Black's only way to prolong the game, where he remains down a pawn and under heavy pressure. Undoubtedly, his position would merely hobble to its slow demise.]

ANSWER: Annihilation of the king's defences (again).

32.♜h6+! A dissenting challenge appears from the periphery. There is dirty work afoot and the knight's smirking face is one which would provoke any jury into a swift "guilty" verdict.

[White forces mate after **32.♜h6+** gxf6 (or 32...♙h8 33.♙xg7# ; Black's king can only witness the bishop desecrate his home in mute fury) 33.♔xh6 ("I want my brother taken care of," demands the queen – and everyone is shocked by her words; not so much because she just ordered a murder, but because she ended a sentence with a preposition) ♞c2+ 34.♙h3 ♙f6 35.♙xf6 ♞xh2+ 36.♙xh2 . To inform you that Black is mated next move would be a pointless observation, since you are already aware of it!]

1-0

56

E61

□ Petrosian,TV

■ Larsen,B

46: Piatigorsky Cup, Santa Monica
[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.c4

[B.Larsen-L.Portisch, Beverwijk 1964, saw **1.f4** ♜f6 2.♜f3 g6 3.d3 d5 4.g3 ♙g7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.c3 b6 7.0-0 ♙b7 8.a4!? c5 9.♜a3 ♜c6 10.♙d2 a6 11.♔c2?! ♞c8 12.e4? ♜b4! 13.cxb4 cxb4 14.♔b3 dxe4 15.♔xb4 exf3 16.♙xf3 ♙xf3 17.♞xf3 ♔d5 18.♞af1 ♜g4! 19.h3 ♙d4+ 20.♙g2 a5! 21.♔b5 ♞c5 22.♔xb6 ♞c2 23.♜xc2 ♙xb6 24.hxg4 ♔b3 and Black was completely winning. Larsen somehow managed to draw this game, and if he learned anything, it was to be careful about putting the queen on c2.]

[**1.d4** f5 2.♜f3 ♜f6 3.g3 g6 4.♙g2 ♙g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 d6 7.♜c3 c6 8.b3 a5 9.♙b2 ♜a6 (as occurred, for instance, in R.Kasimdzhanov-G. Kamsky, FIDE Grand Prix, Thessaloniki 2013).

White has played Nf3 (rather than e2-e3 and Nge2), while Black has advanced his f-pawn. Apart from that, it's identical.

As it happens, Larsen once tried the Dutch version too. L.Ogaard-B. Larsen, Six Nations Tournament, Ribe 1973, continued 10.d5 ♙d7 11.♜d4 ♔b6 12.e3 ♜c5 13.a3 ♞ac8 14.♞b1 cxd5 15.♜xd5 ♜xd5 16.♙xd5+ e6 17.♙g2 a4 18.b4 ♜e4 19.c5 ♔d8 20.cxd6 ♜xd6 with a roughly equal position.]

1...♜f6 2.♜c3 g6 3.g3 ♙g7 4.♙g2 0-0 5.d4 d6 The players briefly enter main line theory, the Fianchetto Variation of the King's Indian, but not

for very long. **6.e3!**? Petrosian is the first to step off the tracks, trying out a quirky system he had used in his final game versus Spassky in their 1966 match. White's g1-knight is slated for e2. Actually, it had some pedigree since Botvinnik had played it against Smyslov in 1954 as well.

c6

[White's non-confrontational set-up allows Black great leeway, who can set up in virtually any way he chooses. For example, Smyslov and Spassky both played **6...♖bd7** **7.♗ge2** and then:

A) 7...e5 (here Black plays in a straightforward manner) 8.b3 ♖e8 9.♙a3 ♖b8 10.0-0 a6 11.dxe5 ♗xe5 12.c5! dxc5 13.♙xc5 b6 14.♖xd8 ♖xd8 15.♙d4 ♖e8 16.e4 ♙b7 17.f4 ♗eg4 18.h3 c5 19.♙xf6 ♗xf6 20.e5 ♙xg2 21.♙xg2 ♗d7 22.♖ad1 and White stood clearly better with the more potent majority and control over the d-file, M.Botvinnik-V.Smyslov, World Championship (16th matchgame) Moscow 1954.;

B) 7...a6 8.b3 ♖b8 9.a4 a5 10.♙a3 c6 11.0-0 ♖c7 12.♖d2 ♖e8 13.♖ac1 ♖a8 14.♖fd1 ♗b8 15.h3 ♗a6 (notice that Black has now played ...Rb8-a8, ...a7-a6-a5 and ...Nd7-b8-a6) 16.♙h2 h5 17.f4 ♗b4 18.♖f1 e5 19.fxe5 dxe5 20.d5 ♖d8 21.e4 ♗d7 22.♖b1 ♗c5, when Houdini says even, while stylistically I prefer White due to his extra space, T.V. Petrosian-B.Spassky, World Championship (24th matchgame), Moscow 1966. (22...--);

C) 7...--]

7.♗ge2 a5! This developmental scheme, now common in the Classical

and Leningrad Dutch, had hardly ever been tried before, and it is unlikely that either player was aware of the few games we can now find in the databases. It had the effect of completely unseating Petrosian's strategic stride in this game.

QUESTION: How is Black planning to set up?

ANSWER: He intends to set up fluidly with pawns on a5, c6 and d6. His b8-knight posts to a6, then sometimes to c7, after which Black can even play for queenside gains with ...b7-b5. In essence, this system keeps White off balance, guessing where and when Black will counter in the centre or on the queenside.

For Larsen, this was "an inspiration over the board", but he would at least have been familiar with this type of formation from his investigations into Bird's Opening. In three games at Beverwijk 1964, he had reached similar reversed positions as White (see the 1 f4 variation).

8.b3

[A recent game went **8.0-0** ♗a6 9.h3 e5 10.b3 ♖e8 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.♖xd8 ♖xd8 13.♙b2 ♗c5 14.g4 a4!? (14...♖d2 doesn't bother White, who responds with 15.♙a3 ♙f8 16.♖fd1) 15.♙a3 (15.b4? a3! 16.♙c1 ♗a4 gives Black a clear advantage, since White's queenside is both loose and undeveloped) 15...♙f8 (offering a pawn for the bishop pair and dark square control) 16.♙xc5 ♙xc5 17.♗xa4 ♙b4 18.♖fd1 ♙e6 19.♗g3 h6 and Black has full compensation for the pawn, E. Ghaem Maghami-C.Matamoros Franco, Beijing (rapid) 2008.]

8...♗a6! Larsen continues with his made-up set-up, which has now gone

mainstream. Compare this with the well-known line of the Leningrad Dutch: See the 1 d4 variation. **9.0-0 e5**

[A year later, Larsen tried **9...♖b8** 10.a4 (suppressing ...b7-b5 at the cost of weakening b4) ♖e8 11.♙a3 (the position is now similar to 15...Na6 in Petrosian-Spassky, with four extra tempi for Black) h5 12.h3 ♘b4 13.♙a2 c5 (Larsen hands over b5 in order to entrench his b4-knight) 14.♙ac3 e5 15.dxc5 dxc5 16.♙b5 ♙f5 17.♙xb4 cxb4! (clearing c5 for his minor pieces to use later on) 18.♙d6 ♙c2! 19.♖xc2 ♖xd6 20.♖ad1 ♖e7 21.♖d2 ♙d7 22.♙c1 ♙c5 23.♙d3 ♙e6 24.♖fd1 ♖bd8 25.♙c1 ♖xd2 26.♖xd2 h4 27.g4 ♙g5 28.♖d1 e4 29.♖d5 b6 30.♙e2 ♙e5 31.♙d4 ♖f6 32.♙f1 ♙d6! (now the bishop goes to c5 as well) 33.♙e2 ♙c5 34.♙e1 ♙h7 35.♙f1?! (35.♙e2 was a better way to pass) 35...♖d8 36.♖xd8 ♖xd8 37.♙e2 ♖d6 38.♙b5 ♖f6 39.♙d4 ♖e5 40.♙c6? ♖b2+ 41.♙f1 .

EXERCISE (combination alert): Larsen found a tactic which wins material. What would you play here? **ANSWER:** Double attack. ♙xe3! 42.fxe3 ♖f6+ (Black regains the piece with an extra pawn and the safer king) 43.♙e2 ♖xc6 and Larsen went on to convert his advantage, S.Kagan-B.Larsen, Winnipeg 1967.]

10.♙b2 QUESTION: Should White exchange central pawns and head for an ending?

[**ANSWER:** If anyone stands better there it's Black; for example, after **10.dxe5** dxe5 11.♙a3 ♘b4 12.♖xd8 ♖xd8 13.♖ad1 ♙f5 (intending ...Bc2 to seize the d-file) 14.e4 ♙g4 15.f3 ♙e6 16.♙c1 ♙f8 , White's dark

square weaknesses give Black a slight edge.]

10...♖e8

[For historical record, the earliest game (in the database) to reach this position continued **10...♙g4!?** 11.h3 ♙h6 12.♖d2 f5 (making it a Leningrad Dutch after all) 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.♖ad1 ♖c7 15.♖d6 ♙f7 16.♖xc7 ♙xc7 and Black was okay with his unusually placed knights, C. Rivera-E.Walther, Amsterdam Olympiad 1954.]

11.a3

[Surprisingly, **11.e4** exd4 12.♙xd4 ♙c5 would lead to an almost standard King's Indian position, but with an extra tempo for Black (due to e2-e3-e4), who is therefore perfectly okay.]

11...♖b8 Now ...b7-b5 will soon follow.

12.h3 h5! Suppressing g3-g4 expansion ideas. **13.♖c2 ♙e6 14.♙h2** Not strictly necessary, since Black hadn't played ...Qc8, but Petrosian had a way of guessing the opponents' plans before they even entered their heads!

[On **14.♖fd1** , Larsen said he intended ♖c8 15.♙h2 b5 .]

14...♖c7 Defending the c6-pawn as final preparation for his next move. In contrast to Larsen-Portisch (see the first note to this game), White has no tricks on the c-file because his queen sits there as well.

15.♖ac1 b5! Petrosian felt that Black already stood better in this position!

16.cxb5?! A compliant and passive response to Black's growing demands.

[**QUESTION:** Larsen's last move still looks a bit dodgy with White's major pieces loaded up on the c-file. Can't Petrosian cross him with the central strike **16.c5** - ?

ANSWER: Actually, Black is fine here as well. Larsen planned to respond with dxc5 17. dxe5 Qd7 18. f4 b4 , claiming an advantage due to the weakness of b3 , while Houdini says it's even. Let's play this out and decide: 19. Qe4 bxa3 20. Qxa3 Rxb3 21. Qxc5 Qaxc5 22. Qxc5 Qxc5 23. Wxc5 Qf8! 24. Wc2! (24. Wxc6? Wxc6 25. Qxc6 Rd8 is in Black's favour, given a passed a-pawn and White's weak e-pawn) 24... Rxe3 25. Qd4 Qa3 26. Rce1 Rxe1 27. Rxe1 Qb4 28. Rd1 $\text{c5!?$ 29. Qxe6 Rxe6 30. Qd5 Rb6 31. e6 c4 32. exf7+ Kg7 33. Rd4 c3 and in this completely unclear position, Houdini maintains a 0.00 evaluation! So your suggestion may have been White's best line after all.]

16...cxb5 17. Wd1 QUESTION: Why won't White swap on e5?

[ANSWER: By doing so, he weakens b3 . For example, 17. $\text{dxe5!?$ dxe5 18. Wb1 Wb6 19. Qa2 Qd5 (of 19... Qxb3 , then 20. Rc6! Qa7 21. Qxe5 regains the pawn) 20. Rfd1 Qe7 (now with a serious threat to take on b3) 21. b4 Qb3 22. Rd2 Rd8 , when White remains passive and under fire.]

[Larsen was expecting Petrosian to force the queens off with 17. Qe4 , though even then Wxc2 18. Qxf6+ Qxf6 19. Rxc2 Rb6 is slightly better for Black, as his threat to take on b3 still has to be answered.]

17...We7 18. Qb1 A rather introverted reaction but ... b5-b4 hung over White's head. Qd7 19. Qd2 e4!

Larsen continues to seize more and more territory, without offering his opponent even a token in return.

20. Qf4?! We sense a growing disconnect between White's moves and

his overall goal. Petrosian's position drifts in an unidentifiable direction, due solely to his failure to take action. This is slow death.

QUESTION: Even if White later drops his d-pawn?

ANSWER: Yes, even so. The move should be looked upon as a pawn sacrifice. Even if White loses d5 , he is better off than after what happened in the game.

[Petrosian should clear squares for his pieces with **20.d5!** .]

20...d5 When we compare the two armies, it becomes clear that this is an unequal contest. Overcaution and failure to act is the genetic inheritance of all pure positional players, including your unfortunate, initiative challenged writer. It becomes obvious that White must find a source of counterplay or suffer slow asphyxiation, which was Petrosian's terrible fate this game.

21. We2?! Petrosian continues to make errors of omission, following a do-nothing strategy. There are wide gradations where risk is involved, running between a sound investment to a bankrupt-inducing martingale. But to take no risk is tantamount to suicide.

[At this point White should probably play **21.f3!**, intending either 22 fxe4 or exf3 (or if 21... g5 22. Qe2 exf3 23. Qxf3 Wxe3?? then 24. Qe5! (threatening both Rf3 and Rxf6)

$\text{Qg4!?$ 25. hxg4 Qxg4+ 26. Qxg4 Wxe2 27. Qe5! Wxb2 28. Wxh5

wins) 22. Qxf3! and 23 Ne5 to block the e-file. Note that the e3-pawn is not as weak as it looks: the greedy Wxe3?? loses to 23. Re1 Wf2

24. Rxe8+ Rxe8 25. Rc2 We3 26. Re2 , trapping Black's queen.]

21...Wd6 22. Rc2 Rc8 Challenging White's c-file control. 23. Rfc1 Rxc2

24.♖xc2 h4! Weakening g3. 25.♘f1 hxg3+ 26.fxg3 Another point of Black's exchange: White is forever deprived of f2-f3 breaks. **b4!** Black's space continues to expand. He now plans to transfer his light-squared bishop to a6, after which it dominates a key diagonal. Larsen felt Black had a decisive advantage already and told GM Jan Hein Donner that he would "go and see a doctor" if he failed to win this one!

27.a4 ♖c8 28.♖xc8+ ♗xc8 29.h4!? I'm certain Petrosian made this move with a deep sense of revulsion. He agrees to a self-inflicted gash on g4 in order to suppress ...g6-g5 and activate his light-squared bishop.

♘c7 30.♗h3 Petrosian offers a swap of his good bishop, rather than wait for Black's "bad" piece to take up residence on the f1-a6 diagonal. Of course Larsen could put it there anyway but, given the choice, prefers to weaken White's light squares and leave him with an awful remaining dark-squared bishop.

♗xh3 31.♘xh3 ♗f8! Larsen begins the process of bringing his pieces to their best squares, while Petrosian can no longer do anything whether he wants to or not.

32.♔g2 ♖c6 33.♖d1 The queen returns, not with news of victory but apologies for her absence. **♗d6**

34.♘f2 If the knight returns to f4, Black can chop it and play his two knights versus White's knight and terrible bishop. **♘e6 35.♗c1 ♘g7**

[Not yet **35...♖c3 36.♗d2 ♖b2!?** , as it's debatable whether Black's queen has infiltrated or is just out of position, caught in a revolving door, since she can't re-enter the game unless White allows it.]

36.♗d2?! Another sin of omission.

[**36.g4** had to be played to keep the knight out of f5, though it would only be a temporary measure. Black would reorganize again with **♘d7 37.♗d2 ♗e7** and White can't maintain his defensive line. (**38.♔h3** is met by **♖f6**).]

36...♘f5 37.♔h3 ♖c8 38.♔g2

"Just kidding! Can't you take a joke?" asks White's king to Black's unamused queen. **♔g7 39.♘h1**

The Hypermoderns love the a1- and h1-squares, but in this instance even Réti's brow would crinkle into a worried frown. **♘h6!** Seizing absolute control over g4. Petrosian refused to play g3-g4, probably fearing to weaken his king further, so Larsen now clamps down on that square. A list of Black's numerous strategic advantages:

1. Black enjoys huge territorial gains on the queenside and in the centre, and he may soon push on the kingside to seize space there as well.
 2. Black dominates the light squares, especially g4.
 3. White's bad bishop is an embarrassment to clergy members worldwide.
 4. Numbers 1 through 3 mean that his king isn't going to remain safe forever.
- Conclusion: White is strategically busted.

40.♗e1 ♖a6

[The more direct route **40...♖f5 41.♗f2** g5 looks promising too.]

41.♘f2 ♘f5 Larsen sealed this move and analysed the position through the night until 7:00 a.m. the following morning. He only got two hours sleep after that but was confident he could squeeze out the win.

42.♖d2 ♗b8 Larsen begins to target g3. **43.♘d1 ♘g4 44.♔g1 f6!**

Preparing ...g6-g5. Larsen craves confrontation, the way a shark craves blood. No universal overlord is satisfied with only 75% control. It is in his inner nature to demand 100%. Larsen called this "the clearest winning procedure". The alternative was to exchange a pair of knights, play ...f7-f5, post a knight on f6 or g4, and then infiltrate with ...Qd3. I prefer Larsen's plan.

45.♔g2 g5 46.♟f2 ♞gh6 Principle: The cramped side shouldn't be allowed too many swaps. **47.hxg5** There was nothing better.

[**47.♟h1** (or 47 Nd1) gxh4 48.gxh4 just leaves White with a weak h-pawn and an exposed king]

[47.♞d1 gxh4 48.gxh4 ♔g6]
[while **47.h5** just loses the pawn after g4! 48.♞h2 (or 48.♞d1 ♔h7 , followed by ...Ng7) 48...♞xg3 49.♞fxg4 ♞xh5 .]

47...fxg5 48.♞d1 ♔g6 Even Larsen's king gets in on the act. **49.♞h2 g4!** The "holes" on f4 and h4 are irrelevant, since neither white knight can reach e2 or g2. **50.♚c2 ♟d6 51.♞f1 ♞g8** Man, this is getting ugly. The fact that Larsen had the strategic skill to reach such a position against one of the greatest strategists of all time, tells us a little something about his towering ability in that sphere. Black decides to load up on g3.

[An alternative attacking plan was **51...♞f7** (Step 1: transfer the knight to f3, via g5) 52.♟f2 ♞g5 (the knight, on a reconnaissance mission, engages in stealthy circular movements around White's king) 53.♟e1 ♞f3 54.♟f2 (Step 2: clear the third rank for a future ...Qh6!) ♔g5! 55.♚c1 ♟b8! (White's queen infiltration is irrelevant) 56.♚c5

(Step 3: transfer queen to h6, threatening ...Qh3 mate) ♚h6! (the queen demands instant gratification of every capricious whim, today's being the white king's head on a platter) 57.♟g1 (Step 4: annihilate the white king's defensive barrier with a sacrifice on g3) ♟xg3! 58.♞xg3 (Step 5: deliver checkmate!) ♚h3+ 59.♔f2 ♚xg3+ 60.♔f1 ♚xg1+ 61.♔e2 ♚e1# (or, if you prefer, 61...♞g3# . In the end both plans produce identical outcomes.)]

52.♞h2 ♞f6 53.♞f1 ♔h5

Larsen throws in a few dummy moves here to reach the second time control.

54.♞h2 ♔g5 55.♞f1 ♞h5 56.♟f2 ♞f6 57.♟e1 ♞h5 58.♟f2 ♚a8

59.♟e1 EXERCISE (planning/combination alert): White's king clings to his enclave, like a frightened child to his mother's hand. One glance tells us that Black dominates. But where is the breakthrough?

ANSWER: Transfer the queen to h8, where she later enters White's position via h3.

♚h8! The bored queen seeks new battles to be won and new worlds to be conquered, and it is White's unfortunate king who soon supplies the long desired want. Black can allow Qc6 and get away with it, since his attack crashes through before White can even threaten anything.

60.♚c6 When the weaker side issues threats to the stronger, it avails nothing. The white queen's absence is similar to the general who, in the middle of a battle, decides to take a break and play video games, to the utter neglect of her slowly deteriorating army.

♟xg3! Is it possible to steal something which is already yours? "Less for you

and more for me," says the greedy bishop with a sly smile.

[This is much stronger than **60...♟hxg3?!** 61.♙xg3 ♖h3+ 62.♔g1 ♟xg3! avoiding a pitfall; (amazingly, White is completely fine after 62...♙xg3? 63.♖xd5 , when Black's mistake diffuses the once-radiant energy of his attack) 63.♟xg3 ♖xg3+ 64.♔f1 ♖h3+ 65.♔e2 ♖f3+ 66.♔d2 ♙e7 67.♖xd5+ ♔h4 , when Black should still win, due to his passed g-pawn, but with rather more difficulty than in the game.]

61.♙xg3 ♟hxg3 White resigned, making it Larsen 2 Petrosian 0 in this tournament. (We saw his other win in Game 6.) "And I didn't see the doctor!" said Larsen.

[The finish could have been **61...♟hxg3** 62.♟xg3 ♖h3+ (the black queen, having indulged in too much plonk, glances seductively at White's nervous king and smiles winely at him) 63.♔f2 (the king's manner is that of a man who, although pained by his inevitable unpleasant fate, is also resigned to it) ♖xg3+ (the queen rakes in her poker chips with both hands) 64.♔e2 (when you run for your life, you don't worry about sore feet) ♖f3+ 65.♔d2 (White's king finds insufferable the patronizing air of his odious sister) ♟xe3 66.♟xe3 ♖f2+ 67.♔d1 ("Don't take it out on me. I just work here!" complains White's king) ♖xe3 68.♖xd5+ (there is no perpetual check) ♔h4 69.♖d8+ ♔g3 70.♖d6+ ♖f4 71.♖xf4+ ♔xf4 72.♔e2 g3 73.d5 e3! 74.d6 g2 75.d7 g1♖ 76.d8♖ ♖f2+ 77.♔d3 (or 77.♔d1 e2+) 77...♖d2+ 78.♔c4 ♖xd8 etc.]

0-1

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B05

♖ Gipslis,A

♜ Larsen,B

47: Sousse Interzonal

1967

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.e4 ♟f6 As mentioned before (in Game 34), Larsen was a pioneering advocate of Alekhine's Defence, a relatively rare guest in 1967. **2.e5 ♟d5 3.d4 d6 4.c4**

[The game has transposed to a position from the old **4.♟f3** main line, arising after ♙g4 (nowadays 4...dxe5 is favoured, as in Game 34) 5.♙e2 ♟c6 6.c4 ♟b6 7.exd6 exd6 8.0-0 ♙e7 9.♟c3 0-0 10.b3 ♙f6 11.♙e3 .]

4...♟b6 5.exd6 White's most solid choice. IM Tim Taylor in *Alekhine Alert!* calls this line "one of the easiest and most harmless variations of the Alekhine." IM John Watson, who used to handle the Alekhine's Defence section at ChessPublishing.com, told me that the line is rather dangerous for Black.

QUESTION: What do you think?

ANSWER: I think the line is more annoying than dangerous, in that Black can equalize but I still hate to face it! The positions are hard for Black to win if he recaptures symmetrically, as Larsen did in this game.

exd6 The rejection of one variation doesn't necessarily establish the authoritative truth of another.

[I attempt to revive the riskier Asymmetrical Exchange **5...cxd6** in my *Alekhine's Defence* book. The c-pawn recapture was actually Black's main line in 1967, due partly to Fischer's influence no doubt, but Larsen was never one to follow fashion.]

6.♘c3 ♕e7

[6...♘c6 can also be played.]

7.♕e3

[7.♕d3]

[and 7.h3 are more common here and both score higher than Gipsli's move.]

7...0-0 White owns more space, while Black remains weakness free.

QUESTION: "Weakness free" isn't an encouraging way to begin a chess game if you're playing for a win, which I assume is Larsen's intent. How does Black win from such a passive position?

ANSWER: The secret to winning is to cultivate infinite patience. Remember that every piece remains on the board and the structure is sure to shift sooner or later. Black's position is actually a rather good choice against an ambitious opponent, who attempts to seize huge tracts of territory and then risks overextension.

8.♕e2 Rather passive-looking,

[but the aggressive continuation

8.♖f3!?, intending to castle long, has largely been defanged: c6! (8...♘c6 9.0-0-0 ♕g5! is okay too) 9.0-0-0 d5

10.c5 ♘d6d7 11.g4 ♘f6 12.h3 b6!

(Black's key undermining idea)

13.cxb6 (or 13.♘ge2 ♘a6

, pretty much forcing the swap)

13...axb6 and it's that simple: Black's attack is faster due to the newly opened a-file, D.Neelotpal-E.Torre, Asian Championship, Doha 2003.

This game is annotated in The Alekhine Defence: Move by Move.]

8...♘c6 9.♘f3 ♕g4 10.b3 To cover against ...Bxf3 and ...Nxc4 tricks.

[QUESTION: Why doesn't White gain a tempo with 10.d5 - ?

ANSWER: This is short-term happiness for White, who weakens

the dark squares. Black looks at least equal after ♕xf3 11.♕xf3 ♘e5 12.b3 ♕g5! (Principle: If your opponent has the bishop pair, strive to swap one of them off) 13.♕xg5 ♖xg5, when White's queenside pawns, at least for now, are stuck on the same colour as his remaining bishop.]

10...♕f6

[Black has tried to seize the initiative with 10...f5!?, but I'm not convinced of its soundness. After 11.0-0 f4 12.♕c1 ♕f6 13.♕b2 ♖h8, M.Shukurova-S.Mamedyarov, Baku 2006, and now 14.d5 ♕xf3 15.♕xf3 ♘e5 16.♕e4, I prefer White's position due to his two bishops and grip on the light squares.]

11.0-0 See the 4 Nf3 variation. d5

The thematic counter in the centre in this line. 12.c5 ♘c8 QUESTION: Isn't this knight horribly placed?

ANSWER: Not at all. It can transfer to f5, via e7, where it increases pressure on White's d4-pawn.

13.b4!?! Larsen gave this a question mark, writing, "This move accomplishes very little here."

[White's only prayer for an edge lies in Larsen's suggested 13.h3

, which he had actually faced before:

A) 13...♕h5 14.♖d2 ♕g6 15.♘h2

b6 16.cxb6 axb6 17.♘g4 ♕e7

18.♕f3 ♕b4 19.a3 ♖xa3 20.♖xa3

♕xa3 21.♘xd5 ♘8e7 22.♘xe7+

♘xe7 23.b4 (or 23.♘e5 ♘d5

and Black looks okay) 23...♖d6

24.♕f4 ♖xb4 25.♖xb4 ♕xb4

26.♕xc7 b5 27.d5 ♘f5 with a level

endgame, M.Yudovich-B.Larsen,

Moscow 1962 (a game which began 1 e4 Nc6 2 Nf3 Nf6).;

B) 13...♕e6 (currently considered

best by theory) 14.♖d2 ♘8e7

15.g4! (preventing ...Nf5) ♖g6

16.♗h2 b6 17.♗a4 ♖b8

and whose position you prefer probably depends upon your style. I would be happy to take Black here, since White's chances for overextension are probably the same as his chances of squeezing Black with his extra space, V. Shabaev-F.Hoyneck van Papendrecht, correspondence 2013.;

C) 13...--]

13...♗e7

[Of course 13...♗xb4? plays into White's hands after 14.♖b3 , when he favourably regains the pawn.]

14.b5

[Now if 14.h3 then ♕xf3 15.♕xf3 ♗f5! 16.♗xd5 (or 16.♕xd5 ♗cxd4 17.♕xb7 ♖b8) 16...♕xd4 and Black looks fine.]

14...♗a5 Despite appearances, Black's a5-knight is quite safe and may later jump into c4. 15.h3 ♕xf3 16.♕xf3 c6 17.♖d3

[17.♕e2 allows ♗f5 and "White can't shut out both of Black's active knights," writes Taylor.]

17...♗c4 18.♕f4 ♗g6 19.♕h2 ♕g5!

Black often piles up on d4, but in this instance White can cover the pawn rather easily. So Larsen plays instead on the kingside dark squares, aiming to take control by swapping the bishops off with ...Bf4.

20.bxc6 bxc6 21.♕d1 The bishop has more prospects on this diagonal, and can take aim at any of the c6-pawn (from a4), the c4-knight (from b3), or the black king (from c2).

♕f4! Following through with his plan.

22.♕c2 An indication that Gipslis may be playing for a win.

[Larsen gives this a question mark as well, recommending 22.♕b3 to chase (or remove) Black's powerful knight from c4 with a roughly equal position.]

[White shouldn't try to dodge the exchange of dark-squared bishops first with 22.g3?! since Black takes the initiative after ♕d2! 23.♕b3 ♖g5! ; for instance, 24.♕xc4 (or 24.♗e2 ♖ae8 25.♖ad1 ♕a5 26.♕xc4 dxc4 27.♖xc4 ♖h5 , recovering the pawn with advantage; and not 24.f4?? ♗xf4 , which wins on the spot) 24...♗f4! 25.♗e4! ♗xd3 26.♗xg5 dxc4 with an edge.]

22...♕xh2+ 23.♗xh2 ♖f6 24.g3

Watching over f4.

[White can't do this with 24.f4? in view of ♖ae8 (threatening ...Re3) 25.f5 (or 25.♖f3 ♖e7 26.♖af1 ♖fe8 27.♗d1 ♖e2! 28.♖1f2 ♖2e4 and the d4-pawn falls) 25...♗h4 26.♖ae1 ♖g5 27.♖g3 ♖xg3+ 28.♗xg3 ♗e3! with a winning position for Black.]

24...♖fe8 Advantage Black, whose control of the e-file can't be challenged because White's f1-rook must babysit f2. 25.♗g2 ♖g5! Threatening a sweet cheapo on f4. We sense that White's position is souring quickly. A direct frontal charge is the one military strategy most likely to backfire and leave the attacking side exposed to a counterattack – but certainly not in this instance.

26.♗h2? Treading water is just one step away from drowning.

EXERCISE (combination alert/ planning): Gipslis somehow managed to hold his wobbly game together – until now. Find a forcing sequence where Black ends up in a strategically dominating position.

[White has to try **26.f4** ♔e7 27.♖f3 (after 27.♖ae1?! ♕xe1 28.♖xe1 ♖xe1 29.♙b3 ♖ae8 30.♙f2 ♖1e3 31.♖c2 h5! , Black has good chances) 27...♗e3+ 28.♙h2 ♗xc2 29.♖xc2 and hope he won't overextend.]

ANSWER: The weak d4-pawn is the active agent in White's recovery.

Double attack.

Step 1: Chase White's queen from coverage of d2.

26...♗b2! Larsen weaves the disorganized pattern into a combination. The knight airily dismisses White's startled queen with a casual wave of the hand, precluding further discussion on the matter.

27.♖f3

[**27.♖a6** is only marginally better, as after ♗d2 28.♙xg6 hxg6 29.♗d1 ♗c4 30.♖xc6 ♖ad8! , White's position still borders on collapse.]

Step 2: Invade d2, forking the bishop and d4-pawn.

27...♖d2 "Did you expect mercy?"

Black's queen asks White's bishop, as she cocks her head to one side inquisitively. **28.♙xg6 hxg6**

Oddly enough, White lacks a means to cover d4 and will soon be a pawn down with the inferior position. **29.♗d1**

[Or **29.♖ab1** ♖ab8 and d4 falls all the same.]

29...♗c4! The knight leads a double life, humble and kind externally, manipulative and ruthless internally. Larsen postpones taking the d4-pawn. White is completely paralysed, and there is no way to arrest the continuing growth and momentum of Black's initiative.

[This is much stronger than **29...♖xd4** 30.♗xb2 ♖xb2 , when White can play on.]

30.♖c3 White's queen fights fiercely to hang on to d4, the way a toddler throws a tantrum if a parent takes away her old, tattered blanket. **♖ab8 31.♖c1**

[After **31.♖xd2** ♗xd2 32.♖h1 ♗f3+ 33.♙g2 ♗e1+! 34.♙f1 ♗c2 35.♖c1 ♗xd4 , White remains a pawn down in an utterly hopeless ending.]

31...♖e4 How unpleasant when our past strategic sins rise up to confront us in the present. Now d4 falls and White's position collapses. This is the human move.

[Houdini displays a dazzling, impossible-to-find (for sentient life) win with **31...♖e2!** (the queen, not all that pleasant when sober, becomes even more obnoxious after a couple of drinks) 32.♙g2 (or 32.♖g1 ♗d2 33.♖h1 ♗f3+ 34.♙g2 ♗e1+ 35.♙h2 ♖e4 etc) 32...♗d2!

(White suffers excruciating pain on the light squares) 33.♖g1 ♖e4+

34.f3 ♖e2+ 35.♙h1 ♖b4!!

(stronger than 35...♗xf3 36.♖c2)

36.♗b2 otherwise 36...Rc4 wins,

(while 36.♖xb4 ♖xf3+ 37.♙h2 ♖e2+ forces mate) 36...♖e3 37.♖xb4

♖xf3+ 38.♖g2 ♖e2 (the school bully

holds White's king upside down by

his ankles and shakes him until coins

begin to fall out of his pockets)

39.♖cg1 ♖xg2 40.♖xg2 ♖f1+

41.♙h2 (or 41.♖g1 ♖xh3#)

41...♗f3# .]

32.♖c2 ♖xd4 A criminal may

rationalize her way of life with the

following thought: "If I don't seize this

opportunity, then someone else will."

33.♖xd4 ♖xd4 34.♖e1 EXERCISE

(planning): Larsen found a hidden idea

which dramatically increases his

advantage. What would you play here?

ANSWER: Push the a-pawn to a3, after

which White must be on high alert for

Rb2 tricks.

a5! 35.♗g2

[White could halt Black's plan with **35.a4** , but the pawn would be virtually guaranteed to fall eventually.]

35...a4 The a-pawn continues to hurtle inextricably down the board toward its goal. **36.♖c3 a3 37.♖a4** Preventing the threatened ...Rb2. **g5!**

Larsen throws in a useful move on the kingside, since White can't do anything.

38.♞e7 EXERCISE (planning): This is one of those rare "Who cares?" seventh rank invasions. Come up with a step-by-step, graduated path to Black's victory.

ANSWER: Engineer entry at b2. Step 1: Chase away White's a4-defender.

♞b4! 39.♖b6 ♞b2 Step 2: Invade b2. White's anti-zombie rapid response team is unable to contain the outbreak, as the undead pour into his position.

40.♞c3 Step 3: Pick off a2, after which Black is two pawns up, with one nearing the queening square. **♞xa2**

41.♖xc4 dxc4 42.♞c7

[**42.♞f3** f6 43.♞ee3 ♗f7 44.♞xa3 ♞xa3 45.♞xa3 ♗e6 46.♗f3 ♗d5 is equally hopeless.]

42...♞dd2 43.♞f3 EXERCISE

(combination alert): A magic bullet solution has no effect on a magical target. 43...f6 is still good enough, but Larsen found a stronger move. How does Black force the win?

ANSWER: Overloaded piece/ Deflection.

c3! Larsen streamlines his goals with ruthless pruning away of the unnecessary. Sometimes it is possible to make the leap from problem to solution without in-between steps.

[Here f7 no longer requires protection,

as White lacks the proper geometric apparatus to pull off a save: **43...c3!** 44.♞xf7 (44.♞cxf7 c2; and 44.♞xc3 ♞xf2+ 45.♗g1 ♞g2+ 46.♗h1 ♞h2+ 47.♗g1 ♞ag2+ 48.♗f1 a2 49.♞a7 ♞b2 are also curtains) 44...♞xf2+! (a crushing deflection) 45.♞xf2 ♞xf2+ 46.♗xf2 c2 and White, a rook up, must resign, since there is no way to halt the promotion to a new queen.]

0-1

58

C46

 **Spassky,B**

 **Larsen,B**

48: Candidates (5th matchgame), Malmö [Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.e4 e5 2.♖f3

[Both Spassky and Larsen (in his youth) were fond of **2.f4** , the King's Gambit, which Spassky famously used to defeat Fischer – or rather, he played the King's Gambit against Fischer and later won; the opening had nothing to do with it.]

2...♖c6 3.♖c3

[Compare Larsen's win to the following classic Capablanca crush of his great rival: **3.♞b5** d6 4.d4 exd4 5.♖xd4 ♞d7 6.♖c3 ♖f6 7.0-0 ♞e7 8.♖f5 ♞xf5 9.exf5 0-0 10.♞e1 ♖d7 11.♖d5 ♞f6 12.c3 ♖b6 13.♖xf6+ ♞xf6 14.♞xc6 bxc6 15.♞f3 ♞fe8 16.♞e3 c5 17.♞e2 ♞e5! 18.♞ae1 ♞ae8! .

In this position, unlike that in the main game (see move 26), exchanging all the rooks (after 19 Bf4) would probably draw. Instead, Alekhine played 19.♞b7?! ♞xf5 20.♞xc7 ♞e6 21.♞xa7 ♖d5 22.♗f1? ♖f4! 23.♞d2 ♖xg2!

(the computer points out that <http://chessprogramming.com>

23... ♖c4+! 24. ♔g1 ♜xg2!
is even stronger) 24. ♔xg2 ♖g4+
25. ♔f1 ♖h3+ 26. ♔e2 .

EXERCISE (combination alert): Black to play and win.

ANSWER: Annihilation of the defensive barrier. ♜xe3+! 27. fxe3 ♖xe3+ 28. ♔d1 ♖xe1+ 29. ♔c2 ♖e4+ 30. ♔b3? ♖c6 (30... ♜a8! won at once) 31. a4 d5 32. a5 ♖b5+ 33. ♔a3 ♖b8 34. ♔a2 h6 35. a6 ♖b3+ 0-1 A. Alekhine-J.R. Capablanca, Saint Petersburg 1914. This game is annotated in Capablanca: Move by Move.]

3...g6?! Larsen indulges in a shady set-up which contradicts convention and tends to land Black in an inferior Scotch.

[3... ♜f6 , entering the Four Knights Game, is Black's main choice here.]

4.d4 exd4 5. ♜xd4

[In my Four Knights book, I concentrate on 5. ♜d5 ♜g7 6. ♜g5 , after which ♜ce7! is Black's best move.]

5... ♜g7 6. ♜e3 ♜f6

[Black can avoid the variation in the next note by playing 6... ♜ge7 , but this brings its own problems: 7. ♖d2 0-0 8. 0-0-0 d6 9. h4! (now we see why the knight would be better off on f6, hindering both h4-h5 and g2-g4 ideas) h5 10. f3 ♜e5 11. ♜h6 b5?! (an overreaction, but Black's position is difficult in any case) 12. ♜xg7 ♔xg7 13. ♜xb5 ♖b8 14. g4! (an exclamation move for the time limit; only a computer could defend against this in a blitz game) hxg4? (14... c5! keeps Black alive) 15. h5 ♖h8 16. f4 ♜f3 17. ♜xf3 gxf3 18. ♖d4+ f6 19. h6+ ♔f7 20. ♜c4+ ♜e6 21. f5 and White had a decisive attack, M. Kobalia-S. Mamedyarov, World Blitz Championship, Khanty-

Mansiysk 2013.]

7. ♜e2?! This uncharacteristically meek move from Spassky allows Black to escape all difficulties, and certainly isn't the prelude to some bold idea. "It is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained," wrote the German philosopher Georg Hegel. Now White's initiative, like a unicorn, is a mythical entity. Harmony tends to dissolve when we place one foot in each world of safety and aggression.

[White should go for the more vigorous 7. ♜xc6! bxc6 8. e5 ♜g8 9. f4 (my book I suggested 9. ♜c4!? ♜xe5 10. 0-0 d5 11. ♜xd5! cxd5 12. ♜xd5 , threatening both Bxa8 and Bxf7+) 9... f6?! (9... ♜e7 is better) 10. ♜c4! (this pawn sacrifice offers White dangerous compensation) fxe5 11. 0-0 d5?? (the line-closing 11... e4 was necessary) 12. ♜xd5! cxd5 13. ♜xd5 ♖b8?! a blunder in a losing position; (Black can't survive 13... ♜f5 14. ♜c6+ ♔f8 15. ♜c5+ ♜e7 16. g4! either) 14. ♜f7+! 1-0 G. Haubt-Rei. Junker, German League 1989.]

7... 0-0 8. 0-0 ♜e8 9. ♜xc6 bxc6

10. ♜f3?! QUESTION: What do you have against this move, which covers e4 (and d5) without weakening? ANSWER: It turns out to be more than just a harmless indulgence. White's iron-deficient position, whose nature was once hostile, has been rendered neutral, and is well on its way to null and void. For some inexplicable reason, Spassky seems to be stuck in passivity mode and now actually stands slightly worse.

[White4 should go for the more active 10. f3 , when d5 11. ♜c5 is about equal.

Having said that, virtually everyone seems to have gone the same way.

Tarrasch, Bagirov, Spassky, Campora, they've all played 10 Bf3, for the grand score in the database of 4/18 (22.2%) as White.]

10...♟b7 11.♞d2 d6 12.♟h6 ♟xh6!

QUESTION: Why would Larsen swap off his good dark-squared bishop and allow Spassky's queen entry to h6?

ANSWER: White's position is so passive that he has no chance of an attack. And in actual fact, Black's good bishop is the one on b7, as we'll soon see, whereas White is now left with the lemon on f3. Watch how Larsen plays upon this theme for the remainder of the game.

13.♞xh6 ♞e5! Larsen prepares to pile on to e4. **14.♞ae1 c5** Freeing the bishop. **15.♞e3 ♞e7 16.♞fe1 ♞e8 17.h4!?** Spassky is unable to emerge from his long activity deprivation unscathed. This "attack" is clearly just theatre, since Black's king isn't in the slightest danger from White's dormant pieces.

♞e6 Of course the e-pawn isn't hanging, despite the 5:4 attacking ratio.

[**17...♜xe4??** hangs a piece to

18.♟xe4 ♟xe4 19.♞xe4 ♞xe4 20.♞xe4 and it's time for Black to resign. We've all committed such bone-headed math errors in our games.]

18.♞f4 ♜g7 19.b3 White's chances for peaceful co-existence continue to fall by the moment. Spassky finds himself caught in a passivity trap, with nothing to do but await Black's intention.

h6! Now White must be on constant alert for ...g6-g5-g4 tricks. **20.♞g3 ♞d7 21.♞f4 ♞8e7 22.♜d5?**

The computer fails to recognize this move as a strategic error, but it makes as much sense as the doctor who

attempts to revive a patient who died the day before. There is poverty of counterplay, and there is dire want; Spassky's dismal position reaches the level of the latter after his last move. Fearing that his game will remain in perpetual dusk, Spassky impulsively alters the landscape, and in doing so only makes matters worse. The great disease which afflicts the "active" player is their inability to wait in an unpleasant position. Larsen would have had a much more difficult time if Spassky had just sat and done nothing. QUESTION: How would Black make progress in this case?

[ANSWER: Having just played ... R8e7, I'm guessing Larsen's plan was something like **22.♞3e2** (White passes with his rook)

A) 22...♞e8 23.♞e3 ♟c6 24.♞3e2 ♞a8 25.♞e3 ♞b7 26.♞3e2 ♞b4 27.♞d2 g5 and so on.;

B) . I took Black versus Houdini and reached a similar situation straight away: 22...♞e8 23.♞d2?! (23.♞e3 would repeat) 23...g5! 24.hxg5 hxg5 25.g3 ♟a6 26.♞e3 ♜g4 27.♟xg4 ♞xg4 28.♞d1 ♞xd1 29.♞xd1 ♟b7 30.♜b5 (after 30.♞de1 g4 31.♜f1 ♞h8 32.♜e2 ♞h2 , White is almost in zugzwang, and 33.♞g1 f5! 34.exf5 ♞xf5 35.♜d1 ♟f3+ 36.♜e1 ♟xd1 37.♜xd1 ♞fxf2 38.♞c3 ♜f6 gives Black a winning rook endgame) 30...♞xe4 31.♞xe4 ♞xe4 32.♜xc7 ♞e7 33.♜d5! (not 33.♜b5?? ♟f3 34.♞c1 ♞e6 , threatening ...Rh6-h1 mate, which forces 35.♜f1 ♟e2+ and Black picks off the knight) 33...♞e2 34.♜e3 ♟f3 35.♞c1 d5 , when White remains under tremendous pressure.; chesstouring.com

C) 22...--]

22...♙xd5! "I see that you have grown above your station – at least in your own mind," says the bishop to the knight, in what is the beginning of a painfully lengthy homily. Larsen's last move ensures a good knight versus lousy bishop scenario, since White's queenside pawns are all stuck on the same colour as his remaining bishop. Now the air goes out of White's position, which begins to wobble like a punctured tyre. Spassky, a player of unparalleled ingenuity with the initiative, would normally seize upon a spark of an idea and use it to manufacture a crisis for his opponents – but certainly not in this game!

23.exd5 g5! 24.hxg5 hxg5 25.♖g3 The queen's self-conscious nonchalance doesn't fool anyone. **♗f5!** White is in deep trouble. **26.c4**

[QUESTION: Why can't White swap off the rooks and damage Black's pawns with **26.♖xe5** etc?

ANSWER: Black responds with **♗xe5 27.♖xe5 ♗xe5! 28.♗xe5 dxe5**, threatening ...e5-e4. Houdini thinks this ending is even, whereas in actuality it is lost for White! For example: **29.c4 e4 30.♙e2 ♖g6 31.a3 (31.g4 fails to keep Black's king out: ♜g8 32.♙f1 ♙f6 33.♙e1 ♙e5 34.♙d2 ♙d4 35.a3 a5 36.♙d1 ♜e7 37.♙c2 ♜g6 38.♙e2 ♜f4 39.♙f1 e3 40.fxe3+ ♙xe3 41.♙c3 ♙f3 42.b4 axb4+ 43.axb4 cxb4+ 44.♙xb4 ♙f2! 45.♙c5 ♙xf1 46.♙c6 ♙e2 47.♙xc7 ♙d3! and wins) 31...a5 32.♙f1 ♙f5 33.♙e1 ♙e5 34.♙d2 ♙d4** and there is no oasis in White's desert:

1. Black's king rules over White's.
2. Black has the superior minor piece,

as we noted on move 22.

3. Black owns a healthy kingside majority versus White's broken one on the other side.

4. White's position is degraded beyond repair through parasitic attrition on the dark squares.

Conclusion: Black is winning.]

26...♖xe3 27.fxe3

[White can't save himself in the queen ending: **27.♖xe3 ♖xe3**

28.fxe3 g4 29.♙e2 ♗c2 30.♗f4

♗xe2 31.♗g5+ ♙f8 32.♗xf6 ♗xe3+

33.♙f1 ♗e5 34.♗h6+ ♙e7

and Black is winning.]

27...♖e5 28.♙d1 ♗d3! 29.♙f3 ♗c3

30.♙h2 a5! Now the disruptive ...a5-a4 is in the air. Larsen plays logically and consistently,

[whereas the computer spots an anomalous solution: **30...g4! 31.♙d1 ♖h5+ 32.♙g1 ♗d3! 33.a3 ♗h7 34.♙f1 ♙f8** and White can barely move.]

31.♙h1 ♙f8 Oh, so we're moving out kings now, are we? Okay, there's no rush. **32.♖f1** Complete desperation.

[**32.♗f2 g4 33.♙d1 ♜e4 34.♗h4** is met by the crushing shot **♖h5!**, winning on the spot.]

32...♗xe3 Black's queen, known to be a dabbler in the dark occult arts, is blamed by the townsfolk for the unaccountable disappearance of several small children – and rightfully so!

33.♗h3 ♙g7 Oh, no you don't! Larsen returns with his king to cover g7. **34.g3 ♗d4** Threatening ...g5-g4 again. **35.g4 a4** At last, the disruptive break. **36.♙d1 ♖e3 37.♗g2 ♖d3 38.♙e2 ♖d2 39.bxa4** Black's trio of attackers are the good, the bad and the ugly, although they quibble over which one is which.

EXERCISE (accuracy): The dilapidated parapets of White's ancient castle crumble under the invaders' power. What is the quickest way to force the win.

ANSWER: Pin.

♔e5! The queen feels her noble birth places her far, far above association with the vulgar plebeians of White's remaining pieces.

[There is no defence: **39...♔e5!**
40.♖e1 (40.♖f2 ♘e4 41.♖f3 ♖xe2!
is another game-ender) 40...♘e4!
(this knight may be the übermensch
Nietzsche was so fond of writing
about) 41.♙g1 ♘g3 wins.
One can only marvel at Larsen's
strategic mastery. Have you ever
seen Spassky lose like such a lamb
at the height of his powers? This is
the man who, in the following year,
became World Champion.]

0-1

59

D94

□ **Larsen,B**

■ **Saidy,A**

49: San Antonio

1972

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.e3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 g6

The ultra-solid Schlechter Variation of the Slav, which is also a sort of Grünfeld. I've played this myself as Black and know that it's not so easy to achieve equality.

5.♘f3 ♙g7 6.♙e2

[J.Ehlvest-C.Lakdawala, San Francisco 2000, saw **6.♙d3** 0-0
7.h3!? (preventing the thematic ...Bg4
and ...Bxf3 plan, at the cost of a
tempo) b6 (another option is 7...a6
8.0-0 ♘bd7 9.a4 ♖e8 10.cxd5 cxd5
11.♙d2 b6 12.♗e2 ♙b7 13.♖fd1 e5

, when Black frees his position and equalizes, L.Aronian-V.Anand, Moscow rapid 2011) 8.0-0 ♙b7 9.e4 dxe4 10.♘xe4 ♘xe4 11.♙xe4 ♘d7 12.♖e1 ♗c7 13.♙g5 ♖ae8 14.♖c1 , and now I should just have played e5! 15.♙c2 exd4! 16.♙e7 c5 , when Black's powerfully supported d-pawn and future bishop pair offer full compensation for the exchange.]

6...0-0 7.0-0 ♙f5!? This move probably deserves a "?! " mark. My decades-long friend, Tony Saidy, perhaps in an attempt to out-Larsen Larsen, deviates sharply from prescribed lines with a not-so-great-idea. Larsen didn't like this move and gave it a question mark.
QUESTION: What do you think Larsen had against Saidy's move?
ANSWER: Developing the bishop to this square leaves the b7-pawn vulnerable without doing anything in particular.

[The most common moves are 7...Nbd7, 7...Bg4, 7...dxc4, and 7...a6. For example: **7...♙g4** (the light-squared bishop is generally Black's problem piece, so it's not such a bad idea to eliminate it and then switch the structure with ...e7-e6, but this doesn't fare much better than 7...Bf5 in practice) 8.cxd5! (after 8.b3 e6 9.♙b2 ♘bd7 10.♖c1 ♖e8 11.h3 ♙xf3 12.♙xf3 ♗e7 , it isn't so easy for White to make use of the bishop pair, since an e3-e4 plan weakens d4, C.Tanaka-C.Lakdawala, Los Angeles 2006) 8...cxd5 9.♗b3 (the problem for Black in this line is the weakness of b7) b6 10.h3 ♙xf3 11.♙xf3 e6 12.♙d2 with an edge for White due to the bishop pair and Black's weak light squares on the queenside. It may not look like much, but White

scores 68.8% from here in the database.]

[**7...a6** (this may be Black's best plan: since defence of b7 is such a big issue, it makes sense to delay the development of the c8-bishop) **8.b3** (**8.♖b3** can be met by **dxc4 9.♗xc4 b5 10.♗e2** , which Kamsky has defended successfully several times, though even here I'm not certain of Black's alleged equality unless he achieves a timely ...c6-c5 break **♗f5**) **8...♗e4 9.♗b2 ♗xc3 10.♗xc3 ♗g4 11.h3 ♗xf3 12.♗xf3 e6** , Ma.Carlsen-Bu Xiangzhi, Biel 2007, when White may have a tiny edge due to his bishops, but I would be okay with Black's position in general, if not against Carlsen.]

8.cxd5! ♗xd5!? Agreeing to a slightly inferior Grünfeld structure.

[QUESTION: What was wrong with the natural **8...cxd5** - ?

ANSWER: I assume Saidy feared **9.♖b3** . As we've already seen, the weakness of b7 is one of the distinct attributes of this line. The trouble is that b6 weakens the queenside, (while **9...♗c8** undevelops.; Black can try sac'ing with **9...♗c6!?** , but I don't really buy it after **10.♖xb7 ♖d6 11.♖a6 .;** The unpleasant **9...b6 10.♗e5** may be necessary.)]

9.♖b3 ♗b6

[Perhaps an attempted improvement on **9...♗xc3 10.bxc3 ♖b6 11.♗a3 ♖xb3 12.axb3 ♗e8 13.♗d2 g5 14.♗c4 ♗d7 15.♗a5** from two rounds earlier, which had been one long torture for Black, T.V.Petrosian-K.R.Smith, San Antonio 1972.]

10.♗d1 ♗e6 11.♖c2 ♗c4 Principle: The cramped side benefits from exchanges.

[Black can also hand over the bishop

pair with **11...♗g4 12.e4 ♗xf3**

13.♗xf3 , though his position doesn't inspire much confidence. For example: **e5?! this** looks premature with White leading slightly in development; (**13...♗a6** is relatively better) **14.d5 cxd5 15.exd5 f5 16.♖b3 ♗h8 17.♗e3** , when White's bishops and passed d-pawn give him a clear advantage, P.Ponkratov-T.L. Petrosian, Moscow 2009.]

12.e4

[Another option is for White to swap pieces himself with **12.♗xc4 ♗xc4** and then play **13.e4** , when Black continues to struggle.]

12...♗d7 13.♗e3 ♖c7 14.♗ac1

♗ac8 15.b3 Larsen tires of the intruder and forces the swap. **♗xe2 16.♖xe2** So White owns greater central space and therefore the advantage; but as we know, it isn't so easy to convert such an intangible into something concrete when facing a solid, weakness-free position, such as Black has here. Larsen conducts the rest of the game with exemplary technique.

♖b8 17.a4! Gaining more space, planning a4-a5 to drive the knight back, with the option of b2-b4 to clamp down on the ...c6-c5 break. **♗f6**

[QUESTION: Shouldn't Black challenge for the queenside with **17...a5** - ?

ANSWER: In that case White can respond with **18.e5!** , intending to build for a kingside attack with h2-h4. If he had tried that straight away, Black could just have played ...Nd5, whereas now **♗d5?** fails to **19.♗xd5 cxd5 20.♖b5** , winning material.]

18.h3 Larsen wrote that he foresaw the position to move 32 from this point in the game! **♗fd8** As we'll soon see, the rook turns out to be misplaced here.

but it's hard to find an improvement.

[If Black tries **18...a5** now, White can first target the pawn with **19.♕d2 ♖a7** (the only way to defend it) **20.♖e1**, and after **e6 21.e5 ♜fd7** (not **21...♜fd5?! 22.♜e4 ♖a8 23.♖c5**) **22.♜e4 ♖a8**, switch the play to the kingside with **23.♜d6** and **Qe4-h4**.]

19.a5! ♜bd7?! Now Black virtually gets pushed off the board.

[He had to try **19...♜a8!** and if **20.d5! cxd5** (otherwise **21 dxc6** is just good for White) **21.e5!** then **♖xc3!** (more-or-less forced, since he can't allow **Nxd5**) **22.♖xc3 ♜e4 23.♖cc1 ♜c7 24.b4** (or **24.♕xa7 ♖xa7 25.♖xc7 ♖xa5**) **24...♜e6** and White has a clear advantage, but less than what he achieves in the game.]

20.e5! ♜d5

[**20...♜e8 21.♕g5 ♜f8** (or **21...f6 22.♕f4**) **22.♕f4 h6 23.h4**, followed by **Qe3**, also looks terribly unpleasant for Black.]

21.♜xd5 cxd5 22.♕g5! f6

[Black could play **22...e6** if his rook were not on d8, whereas now he is forced to weaken, since there are no good alternatives.]

[**22...♖e8? 23.♖xc8 ♖xc8 24.♖c1 ♖d8 25.♖b5** picks off material.]

[**22...♜f8 23.♖xc8 ♖xc8 24.♖b5 ♖d8 25.♖b4! ♖e8 26.♖e1**

and the threat of **e5-e6** is difficult to meet.]

23.exf6 exf6 EXERCISE (combination alert): White has two promising forcing lines, one human and findable, the other computer-generated and impossible to see! What would you play here?

24.♕f4! ANSWER #1: Deflection. This human move is strong, but it's even

better not to play the combination.

[ANSWER #2: Houdini gives **24.♖xc8! ♖xc8 25.♖c1 ♖b8 26.♖e7 ♕f8** (or **26...fxg5 27.♖e6+ ♜h8 28.♜xg5 ♕f6 29.♜f7+ ♜g7 30.♜xd8 ♖xd8 31.♖xd5** and Black is remarkably helpless) **27.♖e6+ ♜g7 28.♜e5!!** (what a shot!) **fxg5** (or **28...fxe5 29.dxe5! d4 30.♖d5**, followed by **Bxd8**, is even worse than the **26...fxg5** line) **29.♖f7+ ♜h8 30.♜xd7 ♖f4 31.♖xf4 gxf4 32.♖c7 ♕g7 33.♜e5 ♕xe5** (after **33...♖b8 34.♜f1**, Black is hopelessly passive with no chance to save the game) **34.dxe5 d4 35.e6 d3 36.e7 ♖e8 37.♜f1** and White wins the rook and pawn ending easily.]

24...♖xf4 25.♖xc8 ♖xc8 26.♖e6+ ♜h8 27.♖xd7 ♖c7 28.♖xd5

So White won an important pawn. Nevertheless, conversion is a long way off. **♖d8 29.♖b5 a6 30.♖a4 ♕f8**

31.d5 A truce is sometimes nothing more than a mini-vacation for the combatants to recharge before a final, Armageddon battle. This is the position Larsen foresaw on his 18th move!

QUESTION: How in Caissa's name did Fischer manage to win 6-0 against an opponent who sees 27-ply ahead!?

ANSWER: I'm not so sure Fischer was all that much superior to Larsen in

calculation. The strength differential lay in Fischer's almost omniscient intuition. Only five players in the history of the game were gifted with this magical ability: Morphy, Capablanca, Fischer, Karpov and Carlsen. I think intuition is more important than number-crunching ability, the greatest of that group being, in my opinion: Lasker, Alekhine, Botvinnik, Korchnoi, Kasparov and Anand. My long-time friend IM Tony Saidy's impression was,

according to Larsen, that White "had given up a clear positional advantage for a rather worthless pawn."

QUESTION: It seems these disparate visions collide. Who do you side with here?

ANSWER: I think Tony's assessment is undermined by the power of Larsen's reasoning. It feels to me as though Black confesses his sins prematurely, like a man who asks a woman out on a first date and then spends the entire evening describing all his character flaws in great detail. I think White stands clearly better for the following reasons:

1. The d5-pawn, albeit for now controlled, has the effect of tying Black down.
2. The effect of White's strategy is particularly pronounced by the weakening of Black's kingside, which in turn means potential safety issues for his king.
3. Black must be careful not to allow the white knight entry into e6.
4. There are two messages with White's position, one explicit (he is a pawn up), the other implicit (he holds a strategic advantage).

Conclusion: Black is fighting for his life.

♖c5 32.♖f4! In a warrior's universe, courage is the highest human trait. Larsen will soon offer the a5-pawn to buy time for his attack. **♔g7 33.♖e4!** One senses that White's attack is essenceless, fuelled by emotion rather than hard data, but this just isn't the case.

[Instead, the tempting **33.♔d4!?** actually sets White up for a trap, just a stratum above a cheapo: **♖xd5 34.♔e6+ ♕f7**

A) 35.♔xc5?? ♖xd1+ 36.♔h2 ♕d6! , when Black regains the

queen with an easy win, a full exchange ahead. Up to this point in his life, the bishop has been a man of honour, the main reason being an absence of temptation – until now. What pain we endure when we opt for a flawed combination, transforming our would-be masterpiece into a mere counterfeit. (36...--);

B) . Okay, 35.♖xd5! ♖xd5 36.♔xf8 ♕xf8 37.♖xf6+ ♔g8 38.♖c3 would maintain White's extra pawn, but now in a queen endgame, which wouldn't be at all easy to win.;

C) 35.--]

33...♔h8!

[Tony, by now in his customary nightmarish time pressure, intuitively avoids **33...♖xa5?!** **34.♔d4 ♕f7 35.♔e6** (here the knight competes with bishop on unequal terms) **♖e8 36.♖h4 h5 37.♖g3** with a dominating position for White, which Black is exceedingly unlikely to save, especially when low on the clock.]

34.g4! Larsen realizes that his a5-pawn is irrelevant to the proceedings. **♖xa5** So Black regains his pawn, but this is more like slapping on a Band-Aid than a definitive cure to his troubles. **35.♖e6** The queen continues to impose her obnoxious society on Black's king, on every possible occasion she can manage. Black's king, on the other hand, attempts to avoid her, the way you would an acquaintance who constantly attempts to borrow money.

♖c3

[Trying to activate the bishop and/or remove the knight doesn't solve Black's problems; for example,

35...♔g7 36.♔d4 ♕c5 37.♔g2

and now:

A) 37...♙xd4 is met by 38.♚e7+! ♔h6 39.♞xd4, when the threat of h3-h4, g4-g5+ and mates forces Black to surrender a pawn again after ♞b6 40.♞d3 ♞d6 41.♞xb7 ;

B) 37...♞c7 38.♞c1 ♞a5 39.♞c4 ♙f8?! (39...♙xd4 40.♞e7+! ♔h6 41.♞xd4 transposes to line 'a') , is even worse: 40.♞e4 ♔g8 41.♔e6! ♞e8 (41...♞xd5?? 42.♞c8 wins instantly) 42.g5! fxg5 43.♞d4 ♞a3 44.♞c7 ♞b4 45.♞xb4 ♙xb4 46.♞g7+ ♔h8 47.♞xb7 and White's passed d-pawn will win the game.;

C) 37...--]

36.♔g2 ♞d6? Rushing to make his moves Black finally cracks. The rook should have stayed on the back rank.

[36...♔g7 37.♔d4 ♞b4 was the only way to continue the fight.]

37.♞f7 ♞c8 EXERCISE (combination alert): White's position is alive with combinational possibility. Find one shot and Black's resistance ends.

[Going back is no good either:

37...♞d8 38.♔d4 ♙g7 39.♔e6 ♞g8 40.d6 ♞c6+ 41.♔g1 ♞c2 42.♞f1 ♞xb3 43.d7 ♞d3 44.♔xg7 ♞xh3 (or 44...♞xg7 45.♞f8+ ♞g8 46.♞xf6+ ♞g7 47.d8♞+ etc) 45.♞xg8+! ends the game. The queen stares invitingly at Black's terrified king, who wishes she would take her seductions elsewhere.]

ANSWER: Deflection.

38.♞c1!

[The once-scattered aggregates of White's attack recompose into a new, terrifying form: 38.♞c1 ♞d8 (or 38...♞xc1 39.♞xf8#) 39.♞c7 finishes it. "I have dreamed of this feast day, when I have you on a

platter, ready to be carved up and served," gloats White's queen.

Black's king points an accusing finger at his tormentor, but his appeal for corroboration fails, since everyone else sees it the queen's way.]

1-0

60

A08

□ Larsen,B

■ Kraidman,Y

50: Manila

1974

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.g3 c5 2.♙g2 ♔c6 3.♔f3 d5 4.0-0 e5 5.d3 Larsen decides upon a reversed King's Indian.

[5.c4 could be met by either d4 with a reversed Benoni, (or 5...♔f6 6.cxd5 ♔xd5 with a reversed Maróczy Bind.)]

5...♙e7

[Compare Larsen's game with this one: 5...♔f6 6.e4 dxe4 7.dxe4 ♞xd1 8.♞xd1 ♙g4 9.c3 ♙e7 10.♔bd2 (in my database 10.♔a3 scores 91% for White, clearly disproving Black's assertion of a drawish position!) 10...♞d8 11.♞e1 0-0 12.♔c4 ♙xf3? (after this Black will suffer on the light squares and deal with a bad bishop for the remainder of the game) 13.♙xf3 ♞fe8 14.a4 ♙f8 15.♙g5 ♞e6 16.♞ed1 h6 17.♙xf6! (opposite-coloured bishops actually enhance White's advantage in this case) ♞xf6 18.♙g4 ♞xd1+ 19.♞xd1 a6 20.a5 ♙e7 21.♙c8 ♔d8 22.♞d7 ♔f8 23.♙xb7 ♔e8 24.♞c7 ♔xb7 25.♞xb7 and Black resigned in a few moves, C.Lakdawala-V. Krishnan, San Diego (rapid) 2011.]

6.e4 dxe4!?

[Pushing past with 6...d4 chesstouring.com

is more ambitious; for example, 7.a4 g5!? 8.♖bd2 ♕e6 9.♖c4 f6 10.h4 with an unclear position, B.Larsen-L. Ljubojevic, Bugojno 1978. Compare this with the King's Indian in Game 44, in which Larsen played 11 g4.]

7.dxe4 ♖xd1 White's haughty queen stiffens, unaccustomed to being spoken to in such a fashion by her sister, who she considers no more than a glorified menial.

8.♖xd1 QUESTION: Isn't this drawish? ANSWER: The removal of queens from the board doesn't guarantee Black a draw, since White can play on the d5-hole. It was tempting to place this game in the final chapter.

♕g4 Threatening ...Nd4, which is rather easy to deal with, but by encouraging c2-c3 Black ensures that a white knight won't reach d5 any time soon.

9.c3 ♖d8!? This artificial move hasn't been seen since this game. Is it possible to have too much of a good thing? Black is obviously in vacuum cleaner mode and seeks to remove as many pieces as possible from the board. All the same, I don't like it; Black would be better off playing 9... Nf6, which is normal here.

QUESTION: Black follows his "equalize through exchanges" strategy. What's your objection?

ANSWER: Black tries too hard to swap. In this case he loses a little time doing so. The move isn't some fatal blunder but it feels to me as if Black is trying a bit too hard for the draw, rather than just playing chess and allowing a draw to come about naturally.

10.♖xd8+ ♕xd8

[Superior to **10...♖xd8** 11.♖a3 ♖f6 12.♖c4 ♖d7 (12...♖xe4?? loses material after 13.♖fxe5)

13.♖e3 ♕e6 14.♖d5 , when White's control over d5 gives him an edge. Incidentally, this is one of only two occasions where a white knight makes it to d5 in this game; the second instance, as you'll see later on, is rather more decisive.]

11.♕e3 Developing with tempo. **b6**

12.♖a3 ♖ge7 13.♖b5! An annoyance more than an actual threat, but fears of the knight entering d6 put Black on the defensive. The trouble is that he can't tolerate the b5-knight forever and will be induced into the weakening ...a7-a6, sooner or later.

♖c8 QUESTION: Why not just castle?

[ANSWER: **13...0-0** violates the endgame principle: The king is a fighting piece in an ending. Use it.]

14.h3 ♕e6 15.♕f1 Transferring the bishop to its optimal diagonal. **f6**

[**15...a6?!** is premature, as the discovered attack from the bishop after 16.♖a3 forces the weakening a5 , creating light-squared punctures in Black's camp.]

16.♖d2 a6 17.♖a3 ♖b8 Black is in full retreat but there is no crisis just yet, since he manages to cover all entry points into his position. **18.♖c2 ♖f7 19.a4** Threatening a4-a5, breaking up Black's queenside. **♕e7** Defending c5, so that Black can answer a4-a5 with ...b6-b5. **20.h4 a5?!**

A decision of profound consequence. The long-established semi-equilibrium is violently flung aside. Black later pays for this impatient move. With the white knight having retreated to c2, Kraidman decides to free his own b8-knight from its babysitting duties, but the white knight will soon be back. Meanwhile the cost of freedom is high: a clear weakening of b5 and c4, and his light squares in general. He should

just passively await events – psychologically not such an easy thing to do.

21.♙c4 The evidence of failure in Black's strategy is incontrovertible. White's play contains a satisfying clarity, and he cements his light square dominance after the exchange of bishops.

♞d8 22.♘a3 ♘c6 23.♙xe6+ ♗xe6 24.♘dc4 h5 25.♗f1 ♞d7 26.♗e2

♘d8 Intending to challenge White's c4-knight with ...Nb7/Nf7 and ...Nd6.

27.♘b5

[White might play **27.f4** at once, just in case Black takes the f7-route, when **♗f7?? 28.f5#** would be manna from the heavens. An IM once did something similar against me in a drawn ending, short on time; and I once helpmated myself a pawn up versus another IM, which left an inerasable trauma in my now permanently damaged psyche!]

27...♘b7 28.f4 exf4!? Tempting, since his bad bishop becomes slightly less bad,

[but it might be better to play **28...♙d8** and just await events.]

29.gxf4 f5? Totally inconsistent. Black rules out his own ...Nd6 manoeuvre, while giving White a passed e-pawn as well.

[Kraidman should have continued with **29...♘bd6** as planned, although the endgame is still difficult for Black; for example **30.f5+ ♗f7 31.♘bxd6+ ♙xd6 (or 31...♘xd6 32.♞d1! ♞d8 33.♘xb6 ♞b8 34.♙xc5 ♘xe4 35.♙xe7 ♗xe7 36.♘d5+ ♗f7 37.b4!) 32.♞d1 ♗e7 33.♗f3 ♙c7 34.♞xd7+ ♗xd7 35.♙f4 ♙xf4 (if 35...♙d8 then 36.♘e3! , intending Nf1-g3) 36.♗xf4 ♗c6 37.e5 .]**

30.e5 ♘d8 This is the idea behind

Black's previous move: he hopes for an eventual ...Ne6 blockade.

[**30...♙xh4 31.♞h1 ♙e7 32.♞xh5** only benefits White.]

31.♞g1 ♗f7 White has two tempting ideas before him:

a) **32 Nbd6+**, followed by **33 exd6**, advancing the passed pawn.

b) **32 e6+**, sacrificing the pawn to clear the e5-square for the knight.

EXERCISE (combination alert/critical decision): There exists a key distinction between the choices.

Although both lead to an advantage, one is clearly stronger than the other. Which would you play?

32.♘bd6+!? The wrong combination! This looks like a case of the right plan implemented with the wrong tool.

Larsen was a master of reaching into meaningless chaos and defining meaning from it – but not in this instance. His idea skirts the periphery and avoids the underlying issue.

[ANSWER: Clearance/Double attack/ Knight fork. White's advantage is much greater after **32.e6+!**

(a martyr craves a cause to die for – when we should sacrifice and still refuse, we're like the miser who feels awkward when the collection plate is handed to him in Sunday church service: he is glad to hang on to his money, while at the same time feeling guilty for not having given anything) **♗xe6 33.♘e5** and Black must hand over the exchange, since **♞b7?! 34.♞xg7** leaves him hopelessly tied up. In fact things can go very wrong very quickly: **♙xh4?! 35.♘c7+ ♗f6?** (the king, born for domesticity, finds it difficult to adjust to the life of a vagabond) **36.♞h7 ♘d6? 37.♘d7+ ♗g6 38.♘f8+ ♗f6** (Black's king is gagged and bound, to

be tossed casually into a closet, until the ransom is paid) 39.♖d5#

. "I see that a single application of the whip was insufficient to mould your behaviour," says the knight to Black's king.]

32...♗xd6?!

[Kraidman probably felt he couldn't hold the ending after **32...♗xd6!**

33.exd6 ♔g8! (or perhaps he missed this move) 34.♖d1 ♗f7 35.b4 axb4 36.cxb4 cxb4 37.♗xb6 ♗xb6 38.♗xb6 b3 39.a5 ♗xd6 40.a6 ♖e7+ 41.♔d3 ♖e8 , when White's passed a-pawn (the lotus blossom in an otherwise mossy pond) is a huge concern. But for the record, Houdini says Black should be able to save the game here.]

33.exd6 ♗xd6 34.♖d1 ♔e6 35.♗xb6 ♖b7 36.♗c4 Now the a5- and c5-pawns are fresh targets. **♗e7?!**

The final mistake.

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

[**36...♗f7** was necessary.]

ANSWER: Overloaded piece/
Discovered check.

37.♗xc5! Larsen finds new methods of increasing his advantage, each more cryptic than its precursor. Black's bishop is overloaded, unable to cover d8 and capture on c5 simultaneously.

♗xh4

[After **37...♗xc5** 38.♖xd8 ♗e7 39.♖a8 , Black won't save the ending.]

38.♖d6+ ♔e7! Now that is what I call desperation! The king wants to do the right thing in life, yet is unsure just what the right thing is.

[Anyway, **38...♗f7?** just loses at once to 39.♖xd8! and if ♗xd8 then 40.♗d6+ etc.]

39.♗xa5! Sometimes the best

discovery is to not play your discovery.
♖d7

[Unfortunately, **39...♖xb2+??**

does bring forth the discovered check: 40.♖d2+! and wins. "The weak-willed only fall when presented with temptation," lectures White's bishop.]

40.♗c6+

[After **40.♗c6+** ♔e8 (or 40...♗xc6 41.♖xc6+ ♔e8 42.a5) 41.♖xd7 ♗xd7 42.♗xd8 ♗xd8 43.b4 , Black is unable to resist the coming surge of White's three connected passed pawns.]

1-0

Chapter Six

Larsen in the Endgame

Larsen was one of the premier endgame specialists of his era. He had to be; his openings as White were usually so tame that he ended up in many, many level - or even inferior - endings, needing to outplay his opponents to extract the full point.

Take a look at these three positions:



In the first (from Larsen-Sarapu, [Game 57](#)), Larsen stood better. He later worked out a finish from moves 48 to 76 - an unbelievable 57-ply calculation! - and extracted the win. Still, no surprise there, since he had the advantage versus a lower-rated player.



In the second, from Larsen-Polugaevsky ([Game 52](#)), he stood completely level in a very drawish position and won, this time against a top-10 player.



The third diagram is Taimanov-Larsen ([Game 59](#)), where Larsen was slightly worse entering the ending (straight from the opening). No, he didn't hold the draw. He confused the living daylights out of his opponent and won again, his deceit and cunning over the board overcoming White's raw advantage.

Larsen's trick: He had a knack for reading clarity into unreadable clutter. He also had a way of making even the most sedate endings more and more complicated, until his disoriented opponents felt like passengers being awakened in mid-flight, outfitted with a parachute and then told to jump from the plane, without money, map or passport, over a hostile country, whose language they don't comprehend.

[51: B.Larsen-O.Quinones, Amsterdam Interzonal 1964](#)

Vienna Game

Vienna Game

[52: B.Larsen-L.Polugaevsky, Le Havre 1966](#)

Réti Opening

[53: B.Larsen-V.Korchnoi, Phillips & Drew, London 1980](#)

English Opening

[54: B.Larsen-V.Smyslov, Las Palmas 1972](#)

Vienna Game

[55: B.Larsen-L.Portisch, Manila 1974](#)

Sicilian Defence

[56: B.Larsen-L.Stein, USSR vs. Rest of the World, Belgrade 1970](#)

King's Indian Defence

[57: B.Larsen-O.Sarapu, Sousse Interzonal 1967](#)

Tarrasch Defence

[58: E.Geller-B.Larsen, Monte Carlo 1967](#)

Sicilian Defence

[59: M.Taimanov-B.Larsen, Capablanca Memorial, Havana 1967](#)

Nimzo-Indian Defence

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C28

□ Larsen,B
 ■ Quinones,O

51: Amsterdam Interzonal 1964
[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.e4 e5 2.♗c4 ♘f6 3.d3 ♘c6 4.♘c3
 ♗c5 5.♗g5 h6 6.♗h4 d6 7.♘a4 ♗b6
 8.♘xb6 axb6 9.♘e2 ♗e6 10.♘c3
 ♘d4 11.0-0 c6 12.♖d2 b5 13.♗xe6
 fxe6 14.♗g3 0-0 15.♘e2 ♘xe2+
 16.♖xe2 ♖e8 17.d4 ♘h5 18.dxe5
 ♘xg3 19.hxg3 dxe5 20.a3 ♖e7
 21.♖ad1 ♖ad8 22.♖g4 ♗h7 23.c3
 ♖f6 24.f3 ♖e7 25.♗h2 ♖f6 26.♗h3
 ♗g8 27.♖h5 ♗h7 28.♗h2 ♗g8
 29.♗g1 ♗h7 30.♗h1 ♗g8 31.♗h2
 ♗h7 32.♗g1 ♗g8 33.♗f2 ♗h7
 34.♗e2 ♗g8 35.♖h4 ♖g5? 36.♖xg5

hxg5 QUESTION: I'm guessing that Black's structure, although inferior, is just a cosmetic weakness, since White's lacks any way to exploit it, correct?

ANSWER: I strongly urge you to try a second guess! White is winning, though only if he discovers the correct plan.

Let's turn this into an exercise:

EXERCISE (planning/critical decision):

White can swap away rooks, starting with 37 Rxd8 Rxd8 and 38 Rd1. Is the king and pawn ending a win or a draw?

ANSWER: The king and pawn ending is a win.

37.♖xd8! ♖xd8 38.♖d1 ♖xd1

Perversity is the imp within our minds that goads us in dangerous directions – even when we are perfectly aware of the danger. This is the equivalent of resignation.

[Black has the choice between entering the king and pawn ending by exchanging rooks, or leaving the rooks on the board after 38...♖f8 . Black is losing either way, but the

latter may be a slightly better practical chance, following the semi-principle: All rook endgames are drawn. Yet his game reeks of diminishment, reminding us of the elderly bagpipe player, running out of lung power.

A) 39.♖d7 ♖f7 40.♖xf7??

(this position may look similar to the one Larsen got in the game, but they're not interchangeable; it's like an understudy who takes over a sick lead actor's role in a play and performs it in a completely different style) ♗xf7 (White is a tempo down on the game and can no longer win) 41.♗d3 ♗e7 42.♗c2 ♗d6 43.♗b3 ♗c5 (this is the key difference: the black king reaches c5 in time, keeping the white king out of b4) 44.g4 b6 45.g3 g6 46.♗c2 (not 46.a4?? bxa4+ 47.♗xa4 ♗c4 48.♗a3 ♗d3 and it is White who loses) 46...♗d6 is drawn.;

B) 39.♖d6! ♖f6 (the rook, a suspicious presence, continues to loiter) 40.g4 ♖h6 (the king can't come to the centre with 40...♗f8? 41.♖d8+ ♗e7 42.♖b8 wins) 41.♖d7 ♖h1 (the rook steps uneasily into his new role as leader of the insurgency) 42.♖xb7 ♖g1 43.♗f2 ♖b1 44.b4 ♖b2+ 45.♗g3 ♖b3 46.♖e7! ♖xa3 (Black's rook appears as a wallowing pig next to a thoroughbred race horse, when compared to his more efficient counterpart) 47.♖xe6 ♖xc3 48.♖xe5 ♖c4 49.♖xg5 ♗f7 (or 49...♖xb4 50.♖c5 ♖b2 51.♖xc6 and White's two extra pawns are enough) 50.♗f4 ♗f6 51.♖c5! ♖xc5 52.bxc5 (the kingside pawns will win without the aid of the king)

♔e6 53.♔e3 ♔e5 54.f4+ ♔e6
55.g5 ♔e7 56.f5 ♔f7 57.♔d4
♔e7 58.e5 ♔f7 59.g6+ ♔e7
60.g4 ♔e8 61.f6 ♔f8 62.g5 ♔g8
63.e6 ♔f8 64.e7+ ♔e8 65.fxg7
and the pawn promotes.;

C) 39.--]

39.♔xd1 ♔f7 40.♔c2 White's king heads for b4, as straight as truth. ♔e7
[QUESTION: Can Black shut the king out with **40...c5** - ?

ANSWER: Unfortunately not. The wall is paper thin and collapses after 41.c4! , when White breaks in, no matter how Black responds: bxc4 42.♔c3 b5 (or 42...♔e7 43.♔xc4 ♔d6 44.♔b5 etc) 43.a4! bxa4 44.♔xc4 ♔e7 45.♔xc5 and White wins.]

41.♔b3 ♔d6 42.♔b4 As we've seen, if Black's king had reached c5, the position would be drawn. **b6**

EXERCISE (planning): Black sweeps together the fragments of remaining hope to mount a desperate final attempt at a fortress. Find Larsen's winning breakthrough.

ANSWER: Creation of an outside passed pawn.

43.b3! Larsen sees the true nature of the situation with clarity, as when a strong breeze clears the smoke from the battlefield. White's breakthrough idea, once just a gauzy construct, now begins to take its true form.

[Not now **43.c4?** bxc4 44.♔xc4 ♔c7 45.a4 ♔b7 46.b4 ♔c7 47.a5 ♔b7 48.axb6 ♔xb6 , when White can't make progress. His superior king position is merely ornamental, looking impressive yet serving no other purpose.]

43...g4 This doesn't even qualify as a distraction, since Larsen just ignores it.

[But **43...♔c7** 44.c4 bxc4 45.bxc4!

is much the same anyway.]

44.c4! bxc4 45.bxc4 There is no defence to the threat of a3-a4 followed by c4-c5!, creating a deadly outside passed pawn.

[**45.bxc4**

A) 45...♔c7 46.a4 gxf3 47.gxf3 ♔b7 48.c5 ♔c7 49.cxb6+ ♔xb6 50.a5+ ♔a6 51.♔c5 and White's king mops up on the kingside.;

B) 45...c5+ 46.♔b5 (the intrusive king delights in minding other people's business, rather than his own) ♔c7 47.fxg4 ♔b7 (the surly other king is forced to march against his will) 48.g5 g6 49.a4 ♔c7 50.a5 bxa5 51.♔xa5 ♔c6 52.g4 ♔c7 53.♔b5 ♔d6 (the dagger's jewel-encrusted hilt, which protrudes from the black king's chest, appears to onlookers as awkwardly chosen jewellery, which doesn't match his outfit) 54.♔b6 is zugzwang and White wins. (54.--);

C) 45...--]

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A07



Larsen,B



Polugaevsky,L

52: Le Havre

1966

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.♟f3 ♟f6 2.g3 d5 3.♙g2 c6 4.0-0 ♟f5 5.b3 e6 6.♙b2 h6 7.d3 ♙e7 8.e3 ♙h7 9.♞e2 a5 10.a4 ♟a6 11.♟c3 ♟c5 12.♟e5 0-0 13.f4 ♟fd7 14.♟xd7 ♞xd7 15.e4 dxe4 16.♟xe4 ♟xe4 17.dxe4 ♟fd8 18.♟ad1 ♞c7 19.♟h1 ♟xd1 20.♟xd1 ♟d8 21.♙f3 ♟xd1+ 22.♞xd1 ♞d8 23.♞xd8+ ♟xd8 QUESTION: Completely equal and drawn, right?

ANSWER: The game should be drawn, especially with a world-class player such as GM Lev Polugaevsky defending. However, Black remains just a tad shy of absolute equality because of one single factor: White owns more territory.

24.♗g2 g5!? Aggressive defence, setting up a little trick.

[I would be more inclined to play the conservative **24...f6** .]

25.h3!

[Larsen is alert to cheapos: **25.♙d4??** g4! wins a pawn.]

25...♗f8 26.♗f2 gxf4 27.gxf4 f6

This move allows Black's king freedom of movement, without fear of Bg7.

28.♗e3 ♙g6

[It isn't difficult for Black to create problems for himself with planless play. For example: **28...♙b6+** 29.♙d4 ♙xd4+ 30.♗xd4 b6 31.c3! ♗e7 32.b4 (threatening 33 bxa5 bxa5 34 Kc5 with a dominating king) axb4 33.cxb4 , when the threat to create an outside passed pawn offers some winning chances, although in truth ♗d6 34.e5+ (or 34.a5 e5+!) 34...fxe5+ 35.fxe5+ ♗c7 36.a5 is still drawn, as long as Black doesn't take the a-pawn.]

29.♙d4 ♗e7 30.♙c5+ ♗d7 31.♙f8

Inducing the h6-pawn forward. **♙b6+**

32.♗d3 h5 33.♙a3 ♙c7 34.♙c1 ♗d6

35.♙b2 ♗e7 36.♗e3 ♙b6+ 37.♙d4

♙c7 Most players would just agree to a draw here. But not Larsen, whose combination of optimism and will to win kept him playing long after most others would quit.

38.♙c5+ ♗d7 39.♙e2 b6 40.♙a3

♙d6 41.♙b2 Swapping bishops would lower White's chances of a win even further. **♙c5+ 42.♗f3 f5!?**

Polugaevsky seeks to shift the

landscape in his favour.

[Alternatively, he could just play **42...♗e7** and ask White how he proceeds.]

43.♙d3 fxe4+ 44.♙xe4 ♙f5 45.♙xf5

exf5 QUESTION: Isn't White the one now fighting for the draw?

After all, his f4-pawn is now fixed on the same square as the opposing bishop and will require constant protection.

ANSWER: According to the computers, the position is evaluated at 0.00, with neither side having any chance of winning.

46.♗g3 ♙e7 Oh, no you don't!

Infiltration via h4 is prevented. **47.♙g7**

♗e6 48.♙h6!? QUESTION: I realize

Larsen intends Bg5, allowing the king entry to h4, but isn't this madness, since Black's king enters White's territory via d5 and looks much faster?

ANSWER: Black's king isn't faster and the position remains balanced, even after Larsen's risky scheme.

♗d5!? The gestation period ends with the birth of an idea. Polu goes for the full point! He hopes to eke out a tidy profit from this risky venture, sac'ing h5, without worrying too much about the opposite consequence – bankruptcy. So Black's king takes a wild gamble, putting up his throne as collateral. It is human nature that the moment one's desire is satisfied (Black easily holds a draw), another arises (Black suddenly wants to win!).

[If Polugaevsky were less ambitious, he could toss aside Larsen's winning attempt into the marginalia with

48...♗f7 49.♙g5 ♙c5 50.♗h4 ♗g6 51.♗g3 ♗f7 with an absolute draw.]

49.♙g5 Larsen's point: Kh4 can't be prevented. **♙d6!?** Temptation, as we all know, tends to lurk within easy reach.

Polugaevsky sets his sights on f4.

[Instead, **49...♙c5** pretty much forces a draw if Black wants one: 50.♔h4 ♕e3 51.♔xh5 ♕e4 52.h4 ♙xf4 53.♙xf4 ♔xf4 54.♔g6 ♕e4 55.h5 f4 56.h6 f3 57.h7 f2 58.h8♖ f1♖ and there are no chances for either side in this queen endgame.]

50.♙d8 ♕e4 51.♙xb6 ♙xf4+ 52.♔h4 ♙d2 53.♔xh5 QUESTION: White has won a pawn. Is he winning now?

ANSWER: No! Black's f-pawn is very fast and easily compensates. However, the nature of the game has changed significantly and we sense there may be a winner and a loser now, rather than a drawn result.

f4?! Sometimes we get so absorbed in our labours that we forget to check whether we are on the right track. Polugaevsky begins to lose his bearings. This move gives White chances.

[Instead, after **53...♔f3!** (denying the white king use of g4) 54.h4 f4 , it is White who has to be accurate: 55.♔g5! an anti-intuitive move, exposing the king to a future discovered check; (whereas the natural 55.♔g6? loses to ♕e3! 56.♙c7 ♕e2 57.h5 f3 58.♙g3 c5! 59.h6 f2 60.h7 ♙d4 61.♙xf2 ♔xf2 62.♔f5 ♕e3 63.♔e6 ♔d2 64.♔d5 ♔c3 65.h8♖ ♙xh8 66.♔xc5 ♙f6 67.♔b5 ♙d8 etc) 55...♔e2 56.h5 f3+ 57.♔g6 f2 (or 57...♙e3 58.♙xe3 ♔xe3 59.h6 etc) 58.♙xf2 ♔xf2 59.h6 ♙c3 60.♔f7 ♕e3 61.♔e6 ♔d2 62.♔d6 ♔xc2 63.♔xc6 ♔xb3 64.♔b5 ♔a3 65.h7 ♔b3 66.h8♖ ♙xh8 67.♔xa5 and there's nothing left.]

54.♔g4! Now blocking the black king's access to f3, while clearing the path forward for his h-pawn.

EXERCISE (critical decision): Despite his inaccuracy on the previous move, Black is not lost yet. What would you play here?

♙e1? This time the natural move for Black loses. He had two possible solutions!

[ANSWER #1: The simplest (relatively speaking) is **54...♙b4!**

55.♙f2 (if 55.h4 then c5!

cuts off the bishop, after which

56.♙c7 f3 57.♙g3 ♕e3 58.h5 f2

59.♙xf2+ ♔xf2 60.♔f4 ♕e2

61.♔e4 ♔d2 62.♔d5 ♔xc2 63.♔c4

draws) 55...f3 56.h4 ♙d2 57.h5 c5!

(preventing tricks with b3-b4) 58.♙xc5

♙e3 59.♙xe3 ♔xe3 60.h6 f2 61.h7

f1♖ 62.h8♖ ♖g2+ 63.♔f5 ♖xc2+

with a draw.]

[ANSWER #2: Houdini found a problem-like pathway to the draw by sac'ing two more pawns (!) with

54...c5!? (in dire need of cash, Black decides to pawn a precious

possession; what a delight to flaunt

an egregious violation and then get

away with the crime) 55.♙xc5 ♙e3

(gaining a crucial tempo, necessary

to hold the draw) 56.♙e7 f3 57.♔g3

(or 57.♙h4 f2 58.♙xf2 ♙xf2 59.c3!

♙e1 60.b4 axb4 etc) 57...♙b6

58.♙g5 ♙e3 59.♙d8 ♙d4!

(opening a path to e2 for Black's

king) 60.♙xa5 ♕e3 61.♙e1 ♕e2

62.♔g4! ♙c3! (the black bishop's

harassment of his brother borders on

the criminal) 63.♙g3 ♙e5 64.♙h4

♙f6 65.♙e1 ♙c3 with a draw

perpetual attack, despite White's

three extra pawns!]

55.h4 f3 EXERCISE (critical decision):

White has three choices here. One of the moves wins, one loses and other draws. Decide carefully.

The choices are:

- a) 56 h5, pushing his own passer as quickly as possible.
 b) 56 Kh3, a defensive precaution, planning to meet 56...f2 with 57 Kg2.
 c) 56 c3, intending either to slow Black down or play b3-b4, creating a second passed pawn.

ANSWER: The counter-intuitive defensive move wins.

56.♖h3!! Conscience has a rough time of it when attempting to get its way with White's coldly calculating king. What was assumed to be mere background noise turns out to be a significant occurrence, as Larsen's random shuffling suddenly morphs into precise choreography. The pattern emerges and we begin to realize that Black's campaign is built more upon good resolutions than actual merit.

[Instead: **56.h5??** loses to f2 57.♙xf2 ♙xf2 58.b4 axb4 59.h6 ♔d5 60.a5 ♙d4 61.a6 ♔d6 62.h7 ♔c7 , when both white passers are halted and Black wins.]

[**56.c3?! is** merely drawn after f2 57.♙xf2 ♙xf2 58.b4 axb4 59.cxb4 ♔d5 60.h5 ♔c4 61.b5 cxb5 (61...c5?? overpresses and loses after 62.b6 ♙d4 63.b7 ♙e5 64.h6 ♔d5 65.h7 ♔c6 66.b8♗ etc) 62.axb5 ♔xb5 .]

56...♙f4 Keeping White's passed h-pawn in check.

[**56...♙f5** makes no difference after 57.♙a7! (if 57.♙c5 at once, then ♔f4! and White has to go back with 58.♙b6! ♔f5 and try again; not 57.♔h2? ♙xh4 58.b4! ♔e6 59.bxa5 ♔d7 60.a6 ♔c8 61.a7 ♔b7 , as Black can draw by giving up the bishop for the c-pawn) 57...♙f4 58.♙c5! .]

57.♙c5! Zugzwang! ♔f5 EXERCISE (combination alert): In this position

Larsen either overlooked or rejected an immediately winning idea. Do you see it?

[If Black retreats the bishop with **57...♙b4** , then 58.♙f2 wins; for example, ♙d2 59.h5 ♔g5 (or 59...♙e3 60.♙g3+ ♔e4 61.b4! axb4 62.a5 c5 63.a6 c4 64.h6 b3 65.cxb3 cxb3 66.h7 ♙d4 67.a7 b2 68.a8♗+ etc) 60.♔g3 ♔xh5 61.♔xf3 ♔g6 62.♔e2 ♙b4 63.♙e1! (forcing the primal fear upon Black: a pawn down pawn ending) ♙xe1 64.♔xe1 ♔f5 (Black's king position doesn't save him) 65.b4! creates an outside passer and wins.]

58.♙e7?! Missing a combination and throwing away a win (as occurs next move) is much the same feeling as the person who runs panting on to the railway platform, only to witness the last car of his train vanishing into oblivion.

[ANSWER: White wins immediately with **58.b4!** (creating a second passed pawn) ♔e4 (after 58...♙xb4 59.♙xb4 axb4 60.♔g3; or 58...axb4 59.h5! ♔g5 60.♙b6! ♔xh5 61.a5 , White wins easily) 59.bxa5 ♙xa5 60.h5 ♙d2 61.♙b6 c5 62.♙xc5 ♙e3 63.♙e7 ♙d4 64.a5 ♔f5 65.a6 ♔e6 66.♙h4 ♔e5 67.h6 ♔d5 68.h7 ♔c6 69.♙f2! (deflection) ♙g7 70.♔g4 etc.]

58...♔e4 If Black has time to get his king to e2, his passed f-pawn is back in business. **59.h5?** There is no win after this move. White's position, fragile as mist, had zero leeway for error.

[He had to return to **59.♙c5** ♔f4
A) 60.♙b6! and try again after ♔f5 (or 60...♙b4 61.♙f2) 61.♙a7! ♔f4 62.♙c5! , going back to move 57.;
B) . Amazingly, no win can be

found after 60.h5? ♖g5 61.b4!
 (the best practical chance) ♖xh5
 62.b5 cxb5 63.axb5 a4 64.b6
 ♙a5 65.♖g3 a3! this move
 provides the necessary ballast to
 shore up the defences; (not
 65...♖g5?? 66.♖xf3 ♖f5 67.b7
 ♙c7 68.♖e3 ♖e6 69.♖d4 ♖d7
 70.♙a7 and White wins) 66.b7
 ♙c7+ 67.♖xf3 a2 68.♙d4
 (this looks like an easy win for
 White but isn't) ♖g6 69.♖e4
 (the king methodically threads his
 way to the target, but without
 success) ♖f7 70.♖d5 ♖e7
 71.♖c6 ♙b8 72.c4 ♖e6 73.c5
 ♙f4 74.♙a1 ♙g3 75.♖b6 ♙b8
 76.c6 ♖d6 and Black survives. "I'm
 afraid your childish dreams of
 power are invalid," Black's king
 informs his ambitious brother.
 Houdini rates this position at +1.62,
 an easy win for White, whereas in
 actuality the position is drawn,
 since the scattered parts of the
 defence merge into perfect
 defensive alignment. The crucial
 point is that White's bishop is tied
 down to the a1 queening square
 and so is unable to help break the
 blockade.;

C) 60.--]

59...♙d2 60.♙c5 ♙e3 61.♙f8 ♙d4

Aiming to enter with ...Ke3 next.

62.♙h6 ♙e5?? Had Polugaevsky
 become hypnotized by the white
 bishop's gyrations? Or was this a
 misguided attempt to go for the full
 point? Either way it was a fatal error.
 EXERCISE (combination alert):
 Polugaevsky's blunder and Larsen's
 coming shot overlap like a solar eclipse.
 White to play and win.

[Simply 62...♙e3 should be drawn.

63.♙g7 (or 63.♙f8 ♙d4) 63...♙c5

holds the draw.]

ANSWER: Overloaded piece.

63.♙d2! Black's bishop can't
 simultaneously watch over a5 and
 White's passed h-pawn. So the a5-
 pawn falls, and with it goes Black's
 chances to draw.

♙f4

[If 63...♙c7 then 64.h6 ♖f5 65.h7
 ♙e5 66.♙xa5 wins the pawn all the
 same, and after ♖g6 67.♙b6 ♖xh7
 68.a5 , Black can resign.]

64.♙xa5 ♖e3 65.♙e1! ♖e2

EXERCISE (combination alert):

Complete White's winning idea.

ANSWER: 66.♖g4!

[Maybe Polugaevsky miscalculated,
 anticipating 66.♙h4?? ♙g5!
 (Black's bishop, believing he is
 predestined to burn in hell for all
 eternity, resolves to create a bit of
 mischief while still in his earthly form)
 67.♙g3 ♙f4 with a draw.]

66...♙h6

[After 66...♖xe1 67.♖xf3 ♙d2
 68.c3! ♙xc3 69.h6 ♖d2 70.h7 ♖c2
 71.a5 , Black's overloaded bishop is
 unable to halt both passed pawns.]

67.♙h4 ♙d2 68.♙g3 c5 69.c4!

Zugzwang! f2 70.♙xf2 ♖xf2

EXERCISE (combination alert): To the
 chronically depressed bishop, life
 appears in various shades of grey.

White to play and force a new queen.

ANSWER: Overloaded piece. Again
 Black's bishop can't halt both passers.

71.h6!

[Most certainly not 71.a5?? ♙xa5
 72.h6 ♙c3 73.h7 ♖e3 74.♖f5 ♖d3
 75.♖e6 ♙h8 76.♖d5 ♙d4! 77.h8♙
 ♙xh8 78.♖xc5 with a draw.]

71...♖e3

[Or 71...♙xh6 72.a5 and Black's
 bishop can't reach b8 in time to catch
 the a-pawn.]

72.h7 ♖c3 73.a5! . The overload theme is the organizing principle upon which White's play revolves. The a- and h-pawns view the bishop's pleadings with the blank emotionless stare of insects observing their prey.

1-0

64

A37

☐ **Larsen,B**

■ **Korchnoi,V**

53: Phillips & Drew, London

1980

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.c4 c5 2.g3 g6 3.♗g2 ♗g7 4.♘c3 ♘c6 5.♙f3 e6 6.0-0 ♚ge7 7.d3 d5 8.cxd5 exd5 9.♗g5 h6 10.♗xe7 ♘xe7 11.d4 cxd4 12.♘xd4 0-0 13.e3 ♘c6 14.♘xd5 ♘xd4 15.exd4 ♗e6 16.♙f4 ♗c4 17.♞e1 ♞xd4 18.♞c2 ♞ac8 19.♗xb7 ♞xb2 20.♞xb2 ♗xb2 21.♞ab1 ♗c3 22.♞ec1 ♗d2 EXERCISE (combination alert):

Let's test our math skills:

How did Larsen steal a pawn in this position?

ANSWER: Excelsior/Attraction/Forks.

23.♘g6! The toxicology report indicates that the knight's blood alcohol level was well over the legal limit on the night of the accident. **fxg6!** Korchnoi finds the right way to lose the pawn, forcing a probably drawn opposite-coloured bishops ending.

[His choice looks more accurate than

23...♗xc1 24.♘e7+ (the knight fork regains the full rook) **♗g7 25.♘xc8 ♗g5 26.♘xa7** (or **26.a3**) **26...♗xa2 27.♞b2** , which leaves White a pawn up with better chances to win than in the game, since this way avoids the opposite-coloured bishops, while Black's kingside pawns are slightly weaker, being split.]

24.♞xc4! Attraction. **♞xc4 25.♗d5+** Bishop fork! **♗h8 26.♗xc4**

One can accurately describe Larsen's combination as a marvel of ingenuity, yet its aftermath leaves him with a meagre reward.

QUESTION: Isn't the pawn irrelevant? We have opposite-coloured bishops in what is essentially a dead drawn ending.

ANSWER: I wouldn't categorize it as dead drawn, which it would be if rooks were off the board. Although White's chances to win are low, I would still say he has a 25% shot if Black mishandles the defence.

♗a5 Transferring the bishop to its optimal post, b6, where it takes a bead on f2 and covers a7. **27.♗g2 ♗b6**

28.♞b2 g5?! The commencement of a dubious plan. Korchnoi focuses on the smoke and ignores the flames, tossing fuel onto a fire that eventually consumes him. In my opinion, Korchnoi was the second best endgame player of his generation, after Fischer. (Yes, even ahead of Karpov!) But here he makes a fatefully incorrect decision by engaging in an unprofitable venture. QUESTION: Isn't Black violating the principle: Don't allow your pawns to be fixed on the same colour as your remaining bishop?

ANSWER: Correct. Perhaps Korchnoi felt that the pawns would be easier to defend on dark squares, while any advance of the White's kingside would now lead to pawn swaps favouring the defence. I disagree and think that Black greatly increases the risk of loss with this plan.

QUESTION: What would be the scenario if Black avoided ...g6-g5 and just sat there?

[ANSWER: I think that is Black's best

idea. Let's take a look: **28...♔g7**
 29.h4 ♖d8 30.♞e2 ♖d7 31.♙b3 ♙c5
 32.♞e5 (ganging up on g6 seems impossible to achieve; for example, 32.♙c2 is met by ♖d6, when 33.♞e7+ ♔f6 34.♞h7 fails to ♖d2, attacking f2) 32...♙b6 33.f4 h5 (otherwise h4-h5 in the air, creating a passed f-pawn for White) 34.♔h3 ♙f2 (threatening ...Rd3) 35.♙c2 (threatening Rg5, followed by f4-f5) ♖d2 36.♞e7+ ♔f8 (36...♔h6?! 37.♙e4 ♙g1 38.g4 is only dangerous for Black) 37.♞c7 ♖d6 38.♙e4 ♞e6 39.♙f3 ♙b6 40.♖d7 ♞e7 41.♖d6 ♔g7 42.♙d1 (threatening Bc2) ♞f7 43.♙c2 ♞f6 44.♖d5 ♙c7 45.♙b3 ♖d6 46.♞e5 ♙d8 47.♞e8 ♖d7 48.♞e6 ♞c7 49.♙a4 ♞f7. Houdini played on and on but failed to make progress. Billy Preston would agree: "Nothing from nothing leaves nothing." How maddening when our cherished plans fail to cohere to our intent.]

29.♞e2 ♞f6

[**29...g4?! is of no benefit for Black**, since 30.♙e6 h5 31.h3 gxh3+ 32.♙xh3 gives White a passed f-pawn, while h5 remains weak.]

[But **29...h5!?** was a possibility, intending ...h5-h4 to swap off another pair of pawns, while if White exchanges on h4, the remaining h-pawn can be defended as needs be by ...Bd8.]

30.f3! Larsen frees himself of the burden tying his rook to f2. The idea now is to engineer h2-h4, after which White rids himself of worry over h2 as well.

♞c6 31.♙b3 ♔g7 32.♞e4! ♖d6
33.h4! ♙d8 EXERCISE (planning):
 How does White make progress?

[QUESTION: I realize that **33...gxh4**

gives White a passed f-pawn, but it also follows the endgame principle: The material-down side should swap off pawns. Was this move correct? ANSWER: I don't think it helped.

After 34.♞xh4, White plans Rc4, followed by f3-f4 and Kh3-g4, and Black faces long-term problems. I play-tested this position against Houdini too: ♖d4 35.♞h5 ♖d6 36.♞e5 ♖d2+ 37.♔h3 ♖d7 38.f4 ♙f2 39.♞e8 ♙d4 40.♔g4 ♞c7 41.♖d8 ♙f6 42.♞g8+ ♔h7 43.♔f5 ♙c3 44.g4 ♞c5+ 45.♔e4 ♞c7 46.♙d5 ♞e7+ 47.♔f5 ♙d4 48.♖d8 ♙b6 49.♖d6 ♔g7 50.♞g6+ ♔h7 51.a4 ♞e8 52.♞f6 ♞e7 53.♖d6 ♔g7 54.♙c4 ♞c7 55.♙d5 ♙c5 56.♞g6+ ♔h7 57.a5 ♙e7 58.♙g8+ ♔h8 59.♙a2 ♔h7 60.♙b1! ♞c1 61.♙e4 ♙b4 62.♔e5 ♙c3+ 63.♔d5 ♖d1+ 64.♔c5 ♞e1 65.♙d3 ♞a1 66.♞a6+ ♔g8 67.♔b5 ♙d4 68.♞xh6 and after a lot of probing White won a second pawn, which is decisive.]

ANSWER: Fix h6 as a target.

34.h5! White's plan:

1. Drive Black's king from the vicinity of the kingside.

2. Play Rh7.

3. Play Bg6!, cutting off the black rook's lateral protection of h6. In Informator, Larsen actually assessed this position as already winning for White.

♔f8 35.♞c4 ♔e7 36.♔h3

White's king hopes to sneak in via f5 one day. ♙b6 37.♞e4+ ♔f8 38.♞e5 **a5!?** Korchnoi continues his risky stance. His last move destabilizes his bishop. In return he hopes to generate queenside counterplay, or at least a potential distraction, with ...a5-a4, which also destabilizes White's bishop.

39.♞f5+ ♔e8

[After **39...♔g7** 40.♟f7+ ♔h8 , the king gets shut out in the corner.]

40.♙a4+ ♔e7 41.♞b5 ♙c7 42.♞e5+ ♞e6 43.♞c5 ♙d8 44.♙b3 ♞d6 45.♟f5 ♔e8 46.♙c2 ♔e7 47.♞e5+ ♞e6 48.♞c5 Get on with it, man. We don't have all day. Of course the pawn-up side luxuriates in such cat and mouse games, which is no fun for either Korchnoi, the annotator or the reader! ♞d6 49.♔g4 At last, motion. ♔f6 50.♟f5+ ♔e7 51.♞e5+ ♞e6

[White's plan, indicated back at move 34, is seen to work after **51...♔f6** 52.♞e8 ♞d4+? (52...♔g7 53.f4 gxf4 54.gxf4 ♙b6 is Black's best shot at the draw) 53.♙e4 ♞d6 54.♞h8 ♔e5 55.♔h3! (more accurate than 55.♙g6? ♞d4+ 56.♔h3 g4+! 57.fxf4 ♙g5 , when White's win of the second pawn is more theoretical than practical) 55...♙e7 56.♞h7 ♙d8 (or 56...♙f8 57.♞a7 and a5 falls) 57.♙g6 (clearly, the bishops do not share equivalent authority) ♞d2 58.♞xh6 (creating a deadly passer which is much faster) ♞xa2 59.♙f7 ♞a3 60.♞e6+ ♔f5 61.h6 ♞xf3 62.h7 g4+ 63.♔g2 ♙f6 64.♞xf6+! ♔xf6 65.h8♙+ ♔xf7 66.♙h5+ and wins.]

52.♞c5 ♞d6 53.♞c8 ♔f6 54.♙e4 ♔e5 55.♞b8 ♔d4! Obfuscation tends to be our natural first line of defence when we sense deterioration. By the late 1960s, researchers were much closer to proving a direct causal link between smoking and lung cancer. So the tobacco industry fought back. A damning internal memo read: "Doubt is our product, since it is the best means of competing with the body of fact." In other words, when we are on the wrong side of an issue, doubt can be our best weapon, which Korchnoi utilizes with

this trick. Black may well be busted here, but this is his best defence according to the computers.

QUESTION: This move is inexplicable. Why on earth did Korchnoi abandon control over f5 and allow Larsen's king entry?

[ANSWER: There wasn't much choice. If Black's king stands his ground, then h6 falls. For example, **55...♔f6?** 56.♞b7 ♔e5 57.♞h7 with a Bg6 blocking trick to follow. ♞b6 58.♞d7! (not 58.♙g6?! ♞b4+ 59.♔h3? g4+! as before) 58...♞b8 (58...♙f6 59.♞d5+ wins the a-pawn) 59.♙d3! ♞c8 (59...♙f6? runs into 60.f4+ gxf4 61.gxf4+ ♔e6 62.♙f5#) 60.f4+ gxf4 61.gxf4+ ♔f6 62.♞d6+ ♔g7 63.♞g6+ and wins.] [Or **55...♞d7?** 56.♞a8 ♞d6 57.♞a7 etc.]

56.♞b7 ♔e3 57.♔f5 ♞f6+ 58.♔e5 ♞a6 59.g4 Disallowing ...g5-g4 tricks by freezing Black's assets on the kingside. a4 60.♞d7 ♙f6+ We now go from the realm of the conjectural to one of facts. White's king can either infiltrate to f5, or sidestep to d5.

EXERCISE (critical decision/planning): This is a two part question:

1. Which direction should White's king go? 2. After you make your decision, come up with a clear winning plan for White.

ANSWER: Step 1: The king should head West.

61.♔d5! After this point, although the position remains complex, it's difficult to envision a single eventuality which works out well in Black's favour.

[Going the other way walks into a drawing trap: **61.♔f5?** (when our neural currents run feeble from fatigue, such errors are the result) ♙b2 (threatening ...Rf6 mate) 62.♞f7

a3 63.♔d5 ♕f2 64.♙e6

(White has difficulty making progress after 64.♕e4 ♖d6 as well, since any gang up on h6 allows Black to pick off f3, and possibly even g4) 64...♗xf3 65.♖h7 ♖a5+ 66.♔g6 ♖a6 67.♖e7 ♕f4 68.♔xh6 (the only thing left to try) ♕e5! 69.♔xg5 ♖xe6 70.♖xe6+ ♕xe6 71.♔g6 ♕e7 72.g5 ♙c1! (not 72...♕f8?? 73.♕h7! and White wins, as there is no defence to g5-g6, h6-h6 and g6-g7+) 73.h6 ♔d2 74.h7 ♙c3 75.♔h6 ♕f8 is drawn.]

61...a3 Step 2: Force entry to e6 by offering a rook swap. **62.♖d6!** ♖a5+ In general, a pure opposite-coloured bishops ending is drawn, even when one side is a pawn down. But not here!

[After 62...♖xd6+?? 63.♔xd6 , Black's remaining pieces are only able to provide symbolic support for h6, which falls: ♕f4 64.♔e6 ♙c3 65.♕f7 ♕e5 66.♔g6 ♕e6 67.♔xh6 ♕f6 (there is no blockade for Black) 68.♙g6 ♔d4 69.♔h7 ♙c3 70.♔g8 ♔d4 71.♙f5 and the path is cleared for White's h-pawn.]

63.♔e6 Larsen's king achieves decisive entry into the underbelly of Black's position. ♙g7 64.♕f7 ♖a7+ 65.♔g8 There is no defence to Rg6, when h6 falls. ♕f4 66.♖g6 The rook curls his lip in disgust at the black bishop, looking very much like a snarling dog. Black's sprawling empire has grown too large and he can no longer afford to prop up an economically depressed, failed client state of h6.

♙e5 67.♖xh6 ♖g7+ 68.♕f8 ♖d7!

Target: a2. 69.♖a6 ♖d2 Korchnoi, with the advantage of impetus, attempts a last stand. He found a way to pick off a2, by ruling out Bd5 defences, but it's all too slow. 70.♖a4! ♕g3 71.♕f7

♖xa2 72.♔g6 ♕h4

[72...♙f4 73.h6 ♖a1 74.h7 forces Black to surrender either the g5- or a3-pawn.]

73.h6 ♖a1 74.h7 a2 75.♕f7 ♕g3

76.♔g8 ♙f6 EXERCISE (planning):

How does White force the win?

ANSWER: He must find a way to promote the h-pawn without allowing the a2-pawn to promote as well.

77.♖a8!

[Avoiding the trap 77.h8♖?? ♔xh8 and Black draws, since 78.♕xh8 allows ♖h1+ , followed by ...a1Q.]

77...♙e5 78.♕f7 Larsen finds the right way (which was 76 Ra8!) and Black resigned.

QUESTION: That might be okay for Korchnoi, but I'm not sure how to convert this. How does White win?

[ANSWER: White plays Kg6, Bd5 (attacking a2) and then simply promotes the h-pawn. For example: 78.♕f7 ♙c3 79.♔g6 (not 79.♔d5?? ♖h1 and the h-pawn drops) 79...♕f4 80.♔d5! ♙b2 81.♖f8+ (it's worth checking the black king away from defence of g5) ♕e3 82.h8♖ ♔xh8 83.♖xh8 ♖f1 (otherwise 84 Ra8 picks up a2 anyway) 84.♙xa2 ♖xf3 85.♔xg5 and White wins easily.]

1-0

65

C42

□ Larsen,B

■ Smyslov,V

54: Las Palmas

1972

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.e4 e5 2.♙c4 ♕f6 3.♕c3 ♙b4

4.♕f3 d6 5.0-0 0-0 6.d3 ♙e6 7.♙xe6 fxe6 8.♕e2 ♕bd7 9.c3 ♙a5 10.a4 c6 11.♕g3 ♖e7 12.♖e2 h6 13.d4 ♙c7 14.b3 ♖f7 15.♙a3 ♖fe8 16.dxe5

♖xe5 17. ♖xe5 dxe5 18. ♖fd1 ♖ed8
 19. ♖c5 a6 20. h3 ♖xd1+ 21. ♖xd1
 ♖d8 22. ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 23. ♖f1 ♖d7
 24. ♖d2 ♖xd2 25. ♖xd2 QUESTION:

Can White make anything of Black's doubled, isolated e-pawns?

ANSWER: Clearly, White stands better but Larsen shouldn't be able to extract anything from it, based on the following points:

1. Black's pawns aren't really weak, since they are inaccessible to White's pieces.
 2. Even if weak, the endgame rule is: A single weakness (unless you count the set of double pawns as two weaknesses!) isn't generally enough to lose a game.
 3. Black's minor pieces are not very spectacular, but they don't have to be. All that is required of them is to hold down the defensive barrier.
 4. Smyslov, one of the greatest endgame experts of all time, has control of the black pieces!
- Conclusion: Black should hold the draw.

♖c7 26. ♖f1 ♖d7 27. ♖e3 b5

A good move, keeping White's knight out of c4 and placing pawns on the opposite colour to Black's remaining bishop. 28. ♖e2 ♖f7 29. ♖f3 ♖e7 30. ♖e1 bxa4!? Not a mistake, but I would have avoided this move since it gives White's king a path to c4 and opens new potential for his knight.

[A safer option was 30... ♖d6 31. ♖d3 ♖a5 32. b4 ♖b6 33. ♖xb6 ♖xb6 34. axb5 axb5 with a probable draw, as neither the white knight or king can force their way into Black's position by themselves, and one must always be ready to defend the weakness at c3.]

31. bxa4 ♖b6

[The forcing 31... ♖b6!? 32. ♖xb6 ♖xb6 33. ♖d3 ♖d6 should hold as well, but in that case Black is reduced to doing virtually nothing, always a potentially dangerous situation.]

32. ♖c1 White needs to keep the bishop on the board.

[After 32. ♖d3 ♖xe3 33. ♖xe3 , there are no winning chances since both sets of pawns are equally weak. If then g5 34. ♖b4 ♖d6 , White can't even play 35. ♖xa6?! in view of c5! (trapping the knight) 36. ♖d3 ♖c6 37. ♖c4 ♖b6 38. ♖b4 cxb4 39. cxb4 h5 , when I think White will be lucky to hold the draw.]

32... ♖a5 33. ♖a3+ c5!?

Smyslov continues to play actively.

[Otherwise, he might have consolidated with something like 33... ♖d8 34. ♖d3 ♖b6 35. f3 ♖c5 36. ♖b4 ♖f2 37. ♖c2 ♖c7 and if 38. ♖a3 then c5 39. ♖a5+ ♖c6 40. ♖c4 ♖h4 , when it is difficult to envisage either side achieving anything.]

34. ♖d2 ♖d6 35. ♖d3 ♖c7 36. ♖c2 ♖c6 37. ♖c1 ♖b6 38. ♖b2

[Grandmasters mostly don't fall for daft traps like 38. ♖b3?? c4+ , no matter how low they are on the clock.]

38... ♖d8 39. ♖d3 ♖e7 40. g3 ♖d6

41. ♖e2!? Having failed to make progress, Larsen retreats and invites Black's next move. c4! QUESTION: Doesn't Black's last move drop a pawn?

ANSWER: Smyslov is sacrificing his c-pawn to energize his position and I think it's completely sound. Just watch. 42. a5 ♖d7 43. ♖xc4 ♖c5 Suddenly, White could even lose this position.

Smyslov's king threatens to invade to b5, attacking Larsen's knight and a-

pawn. If a5 falls, Black will be the one with the outside passed pawn.

44. ♖a3 Keeping the king out. **♙d6!** Retreating to make way for ...Nc5 and ...Nb3, once again going after a5.

[There was no mileage in **44... ♗xa3** 45. ♗xa3 ♖b5 46. ♗b4 , as any attempt by Black to win queenside pawns will put his kingside pawns in danger.]

45. ♖c4 ♗c5 46. f3!? A decision of uncompromising resolution, as well as fearful risk. The lawless mind operates in a totally different dimension to the civilized one. Yet sometimes it's refreshing to watch barbarism attempt to stamp on civilization's mangled body. QUESTION: Isn't Larsen, by allowing Black's king into b5, getting carried away in his attempts to win?

ANSWER: I agree that Larsen's last move is in blatant contravention of the endgame's treaty: Don't allow an opponent an outside passed pawn. Yes, his move is exceedingly risky, licking honey off the razor's edge as it were, and he certainly increases chances of losing in an otherwise unlosable position. But when we want to win at all costs, we are faced with the overwhelming urge to dispense with logic and embrace raw emotion.

[Otherwise, the game could have ended **46. ♖a3 ♙d6 47. ♖c4 ♗c5** with a draw by repetition.]

46... ♗b5 47. ♗d3 ♗f2! Double attack. Black threatens to win a piece with ...Nc5+, and g3 hangs as well. **48. ♖d6+ ♗xa5** This is obviously dangerous for White, having allowed Black an outside passed a-pawn.

QUESTION: Where is his compensation?

ANSWER: Larsen raids Black's relatively undefended kingside with his

next move.

49. ♖e8

[Houdini prefers **49. g4 ♗a4 50. ♗c2** , and if a5 then **51. ♙d2** , though the subtleties of this move order are hard to fathom.]

49... g5 50. g4 Principle: Fix your opponent's pawns as stationary targets. **♗b6?!** The wrong direction.

[Black's king should go forward with **50... ♗a4!** to secure b3. After **51. ♗c2** (not yet **51. ♖d6??** due to ♗b3 and the a-pawn rolls) **51... ♖c5 52. ♖d6 a5 53. ♖f7 ♖b3 54. ♗b2 ♗g3 55. ♖xh6 ♗f4** (enabling the black knight to go after White's kingside pawns) **56. ♖f7 ♖d2 57. c4 ♖xc4** (not now **57... ♖xf3 58. ♗d3 ♖g1?? 59. ♖d6 ♗b4 60. ♗a3+!** ♗xa3 **61. c5** and the pawn cannot be stopped) **58. ♖d8 ♖e3+ 59. ♗b1 ♖f1 60. ♗c2 ♖h2 61. ♖xe6 ♖xf3** , Black stands no worse.]

51. ♖d6 Threatening Nf7, targeting h6. Black is in deep trouble. **♗c5 52. ♖f7 ♗f8 53. ♗e3+**

[Seizing king position with **53. ♗c4!** was more accurate.]

53... ♗c7?! After his earlier active and correct play, Smyslov has become unaccountably and incorrectly passive. From Ka4, Nb3 and Bf4 in the note to move 50, Black's set-up is now Kc7, Nd7 and Bf8.

[It was better to step forward with **53... ♗b5** again, and if **54. ♖d8** (which Smyslov wanted to prevent) then **♖c5+ 55. ♗xc5 ♗xc5 56. c4+** (or **56. ♖xe6 a5 57. ♖c7+ ♗c6 58. ♗c4 a4**) **56... ♗b4 57. ♖c6+ ♗b3 58. ♖xe5** (threatening Nd7) **♗d6!** (more accurate than **58... a5?!** **59. ♖d7 ♗b4 60. ♖b8 ♗b6 61. ♖a6+ ♗a4 62. ♗c3** , when White retains winning chances) **59. ♖c6 e5!**

60.f4!? (the only way to make progress) gxf4 61.h4 f3 62.g5 hxg5 63.hxg5 f2 64.♗e2 ♖xc4 65.♗xf2 ♗b5 66.g6 ♕f8 67.♜xe5 a5 and Black should draw.]

54.♕f2 a5 55.♕g3 ♕g7?!

Another passive move. The e5-pawn isn't important.

[Black should sac it with **55...a4!**

56.♕xe5+ (or 56.♜xe5 ♜c5+

57.♗c2 ♕d6 with an annoying pin)

56...♜xe5+ 57.♜xe5 ♕g7

, when his outside passer and active king and bishop should save him.]

56.c4?! The fact that two great endings specialists commit so many inaccuracies should be a warning to the rest of us: Such seemingly simple-looking endings are, in reality, not so simple. One missed nuance and we can flip a probable win into a likely draw, or a draw into a loss.

[Here **56.h4!** gxh4 57.♕xh4 a4 58.♕e7 would dramatically increase White's advantage.]

56...a4 57.♗c2

[**57.♗c3** ♜c5! 58.♗b4 ♜d3+ 59.♗xa4 is no better due to ♜d7!

(now White's knight falls and his seeds for a win should wither)

60.♗b5 ♗e7 61.c5 ♗xf7 62.c6 ♗e7 63.♗b6 ♜d8 64.♗b7 ♜c5+

65.♗b8 ♜a6+ 66.♗b7 and Black should take a perpetual check, since

♜c7?! 67.♕f2! ♜b5 68.c7+ ♜xc7 69.♕b6 ♜d7 70.♕xc7 would only

give White winning chances, even if Black should be able to keep him at bay.]

57...♗b6?! It's a scary feeling to suspect that dirty work is afoot and your opponent is up to no good, and yet remain ignorant as to just what he or she is up to, or even when the strike is planned. After Black's last move, his

defence lacks mass and drifts until it reaches a state of complete inertia.

EXERCISE (planning): Here Larsen found a way forward which remains hidden from plain view. White's winning idea lurks, more sensed than seen. But where?

[Black should shake off his listless, passive disapproval, and take action against the oppressor with **57...♜c5!**

(once more, activity trumps

materialism) 58.♜xe5 (or 58.♕xe5+

♕xe5 59.♜xe5 ♜d6 60.♜f7+ ♗e7

61.♜xh6 ♗f6 , trapping the knight

with a draw) 58...♜b3 59.♜d3+ ♗c6

60.♕f2 ♜a5 61.♜b4+ ♜d7 62.c5

♜c4 63.♕e1 ♕f8 64.♜d3 ♗c6

and again Black's activity and outside passed pawn should hold the game.]

ANSWER: 58.h4! After this shot, White's threats proliferate like mosquitoes over swamp water. Larsen deconstructs his opponent's defensive intent by spotting a contradiction in its foundation, forcing the isolation of h6, and then piling up on it.

gxf4 59.♕xh4 A new discrepancy displays itself in Black's camp: h6 is now chronically weak and White threatens simply Bf2+, Be3 and Bxh6.

♜f8! Smyslov engages in a compensatory mechanism: He plans Ng6, and if White's bishop transfers to the c1-h6 diagonal, then ...Nh4 targets f3.

60.♕f2+ ♗c6 61.♗c3 White's king sets off into the night, incognito.

[There is no reason to allow Black

counterplay after **61.♕e3?!** ♜g6

62.♜xh6 (or 62.♕xh6 ♕xh6

63.♜xh6 ♗c5) 62...♜h4 .]

61...♜g6 62.♗b4 ♜f4 63.♗xa4

The first pawn falls, after which Larsen intends to bleed his opponent white.

d3 The fate of the kingside indicates a region of uncertainty for both sides. Smyslov plans to meet Be3 with ...Ne1, raiding White's kingside in return.

64.d8+ Larsen didn't want to allow but this didn't matter.

[White can force the win right now with **64.e3!** (Black's lone kingside defender doesn't represent the impenetrable barrier that once existed) **e1 65.xh6 xh6 66.xh6 xf3 67.f7 d2** (or similarly **67...c5 68.g5 d2 69.g6 xe4 70.g7 f6 71.xe5 d6 72.c5+! xe5 73.b5** and wins) **68.b4 xe4 69.g5 g3 70.g6 f5 71.xe5+ d6 72.g4 e5 73.e3! (deflection) e7** (or **73...g7 74.c5+) 74.g7 e6 75.d5! g8 76.c3 h6** (or **76...f7 77.c5 e6 78.c6! d6 79.c7 d7 80.d3** and wins) .

EXERCISE (combination alert): Black is about to round up the advanced g-pawn and then rush across with his knight to stop the c-pawn. What is White's winning line?

ANSWER: The black knight can only stop the c-pawn promoting from d6 or e7, so those squares must be mined. The solution is **77.e3!** (**77.b4? e4!**; and **77.d3? f7** are both too slow) **77...f7** (**77...g8 78.c5 d7 79.c4** is clearly hopeless) **78.c5 xg7 79.c6 f7** (or **79...g8 80.c7 e7 81.f5+! f7 82.xe7 xe7 83.c8**) **80.c7 d6 81.f5+!** (deflection) **xf5 82.c8** wins.]

64...d7 65.h4 f8 It feels as if Black is walking through deep mud. Smyslov is driven by that indefinable unease which plagues us when we witness our position in a mysterious state of deterioration.

[**65...c5+ 66.b5 b3 67.c5**

d4+ 68.b6 is also hopeless.]
66.b5 e7 67.xe7 xe7 68.c6+ d6 69.b6 c5 70.d8

[The trick **70.xe5 a4+ 71.a5 c3 72.d3** was good too.]
70...d7+ 71.b5 "I see that simple corporal punishment fails to suffice, so perhaps We shall increase the intensity of your pain in order to induce co-operation," White's king lectures his brother.

e7 Defenders tumble forth blindly, completely ill-equipped for the coming battle to halt the white c-pawn. Black's king peers nervously at his destination c7 and c8, potential blockade squares, the way an exhausted swimmer a mile out to sea views the shoreline, fearing he lacks the stamina to reach it alive.

72.b7 f6 73.c5 h5

[The black king makes it to the c-file after **73...d7 74.b6 c8**, only to be driven away again by **75.d6+ d7 76.b7** .]

74.gxh5 xh5 75.c6 f6 76.c5 g8 77.d6 Threatening **78 c7**, which collapses the remaining core of Black's resistance.

[**77.d6 d8 78.b6 e7 79.c7+ d7 80.c4 c6** (or **80...c8+ 81.b7** and **82 Nb6+) 81.xe5+! xe5 82.b7** is the end.]

1-0

66



Larsen,B



Portisch,L

55: Manila

B99

1974

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.e4 c5 2.f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.xd4 f6 5.c3 a6 6.g5 e6 7.f4 e7

[**7...b6** is the Poisoned Pawn variation, which Larsen said was

"madness to play as Black". But then he added, that if you were White, it was "madness" to allow Fischer to play it against you!]

8.♖f3 ♖c7 9.0-0-0 ♜bd7 10.♙e2 b5 11.♙xf6 ♜xf6 12.e5 ♙b7 13.♖g3 dxe5 14.fxe5 ♜d7 15.♙f3 ♙xf3 16.gxf3 g6 17.f4 ♖b7 18.h4 0-0-0 19.♜f3 b4 20.♜e2 ♜c5 21.♜g5 ♖df8 22.♖e3 h6 23.♜f3 ♖d8 24.♜ed4 ♖d7 25.♜b3 ♜xb3+ 26.axb3 ♖hd8 27.♖xd7 ♖xd7 28.h5 gxh5 29.♖e2 ♖b5 30.♖xb5 axb5 31.♖xh5 ♙f8 QUESTION: How would you assess this ending?

ANSWER: It looks about even, but if given a choice, I would take White due to my knight bias. Still, it doesn't look as though either side can make real headway on the other's pawn weaknesses.

32.♜e1! Repositioning the knight to its optimal post at d3, where it covers f4 and applies pressure to b4. ♖d5

[The most accurate sequence for Black seems to be **32...♙c5** (threatening ...Be3+) 33.♖h3 (after 33.♜d3 ♙e3+ 34.♜b1 ♖h8 35.f5 ♜d7 36.♜xb4 exf5 37.♖xf5 ♜e6 38.♖f6+ ♜xe5 39.♖xf7 ♜e4 , the dangerous outside passer provides enough play for the pawn) 33...♖g8 34.♜d1 (or 34.♖xh6 ♙e3+ 35.♜d1 ♙xf4) 34...♖g1 35.♜e2 ♙f8 (having activated the rook, Black drops the bishop back again to defend) 36.♖h2 ♜c7 37.♜d3 ♜c6 38.♜e3 ♜d5 , when neither side has an avenue to make progress.]

33.♜d3 ♜d8 QUESTION: What's the point of this move when Black's king could play to c7, moving up the board? ANSWER: Portisch plans to transfer his king to g6 to free his bishop from defence of h6.

34.♜d2 f5! Principle: Place your pawns on the opposite colour of your remaining bishop. Portisch uses a pin theme to bypass White's en passant capture. The move also fixes f4 as a permanent target. Yet the move has a dark underside: e6 is weakened, a fact which Larsen later seizes upon. It was doubtless for this reason that he gave 34...f5 a dubious mark In Informator, though in all other respects the move is perfectly good.

35.♜e3 ♜e8 Heading for g6. **36.♖h1 ♖d7 37.c3!** QUESTION: Why free Black of his weakness on b4?

[ANSWER: Black can eliminate one weak b-pawn but he has another at b5, and White's queenside majority was useless as things stood. It was no good White trying to attack them directly, since Black's rook and passed h-pawn provide ample counterplay; for example, after **37.♖a1 ♖c7 38.♜d2 h5 39.♖a5 h4 40.♖xb5?! ♖g7! 41.♜f2 ♖g3 42.♖b7 ♙h6** , only White has problems.]

37...bxc3

[Another option was to ignore White's last move and let him have tripled b-pawns if he wants. For instance, **37...♜f7!?** 38.cxb4 ♖c7 (not 38...♜g6? 39.♜c5!) 39.♖a1 (39.♜d2 ♖c8 40.♖a1 ♙e7 41.♖a5 h5 is no better for White; nor 39.♜c5 ♙xc5+ 40.bxc5 ♖xc5 41.♖xh6 ♖c2) 39...♖c2 40.♖a5 h5 41.♖xb5 h4 42.♖a5 h3 43.♖a1 h2 44.♖h1 ♙e7 and Black defends easily.]

38.bxc3 ♖c7 39.♜d2 ♜f7 40.♜c1! Preparing to transfer the knight to d4 where it attacks both b5 and e6. **♜g6?!** Portisch allows Larsen to carry out his plan unopposed.

[It would have been simpler to prevent it with **40...b4 41.c4 ♖a7**

, activating the rook. But Black is not losing yet.]

41.b4! Larsen plaits and teases a fresh weakness in Black's camp, fixing b5 as an eternal target. **♖d7+** **42.♗c2 h5** Portisch activates his main trump: the passed h-pawn, which ties White's pieces down. **43.♘e2** Now Nd4 is a serious concern, so Black prevents it by attacking f4. **♗h6 44.♖h4!** Renewing the Nd4 threat. **♗f8 45.♖h3** Larsen's non-committal rook move sets Black a test:

Wrath, as well as its twin, fear, has a way of rousing us from complacency. Black now has a choice: He can play it cautiously by offering to repeat the position with 45...Bh6. Or he can risk all by sac'ing a pawn with 45...Rh7 (allowing the double attack 46 Nd4), followed by ...h5-h4 and ...Kh5-g4, breaking the h3-blockade, and then push his passed h-pawn down the board.

EXERCISE (critical decision): Should Black be satisfied with the status quo or should he go for the win, wilfully generating unrest with the pawn sacrifice?

[QUESTION: Why doesn't **45.♗d4** win a pawn?

ANSWER: Black answers with the undermining **♗xb4** and then **46.♗xe6 ♗e7 47.♖h2 b4!**, aiming to eliminate the queenside pawns. If White tries to avoid that with **48.c4!?**, Black responds **♗f7 49.♗g5+ ♗xg5 50.fxg5 ♗e6 51.♖xh5 ♗xe5 52.♗b3 f4 53.♗xb4 f3 54.g6+ ♗e4** and the advanced f-pawn ensures a draw.]

[Another plan is to defend b4 first with **45.♗b3**, when Black has to find **♖d3 46.♗d4 ♗h6! 47.♗xe6 (or 47.♗xb5 ♖g3! 48.♗d4 ♖g4)**

47...♖e3 48.♗d4 ♖e4 49.♗xb5 and now either

A) or 49...♗xf4 50.♗d6 ♗g3! 51.♖h3 (or 51.♖xe4 fxe4 52.♗xe4 ♗xe5) 51...♖g4 52.b5 ♗xe5 53.♗c4 ♗b8 with a probable draw in either case;

B) 49...♖xf4 50.♖h1 ♖e4 51.♗d4 ♖xe5 52.♗c4 ♗e3! 53.b5 ♖e8 54.b6 ♖b8 55.♗b5 (or 55.♖b1 h4) 55...f4 .]

45...♖h7?? Larsen wasn't the only player in the world with a monumental desire to win. Here we witness Portisch's desire in a visceral, (over)optimistic sense.

ANSWER: Absolute freedom, when misused, turns into a fetter. The only scholarly explanation of Portisch's bout of rashness is that there must have been a recent conjunction of Saturn and Neptune in his Tenth House. To deny a position's truth is to invite pain. It is a huge mistake merely to understand an enemy's words, yet miss the underlying tone. Larsen had foreseen Portisch's idea and correctly evaluated it as favourable for himself. Now Black's draw, a thing as fleeting as one's reflection glimpsed in a pond, is gone for good.

[He should have maintained the balance with **45...♗h6**. In that case Larsen had thoughts of **46.♖g3+ ♗f7 47.♖d3**, but Black has no reason to fear the exchange of rooks. After **♖xd3 48.♗xd3 ♗e7**, White needs to guard against the advancing h-pawn and the black king infiltrating via c6 and d5, while trying to hang onto f4, and it cannot be done. For example, **49.♗e3 ♗d7 50.♗f2!?** (triangulating, since **50.♗f3** is met by **h4!** **51.♗d4 h3 52.♗g3 ♗xf4+!** etc) **50...♗c6 51.♗d4+ ♗d5 52.♗f3 ♗c4 53.♗xe6**

♙xc3 54.♘c7 ♙xb4 55.e6 ♕f8
56.♘d5+ ♙c4 57.e7 ♕xe7 58.♘xe7
b4 59.♘xf5 (the knight needs to
hurry back now) b3 60.♘e3+ ♙d3
61.♘d1 ♙d2 62.♘b2 ♙c3 63.♘a4+
♙b4 64.♘b2 and White only just
manages to draw.]

46.♘d4 Double attack. Larsen was
always one to construe a crisis as an
opportunity. **h4**

[Obviously **46...♞e7** 47.♘xb5
is no improvement for Black.]

47.♘xe6 ♕e7 Optically, this might
seem promising for Black, as if White's
troubles manifest on multiple levels.
However, a magician isn't so easily
fooled by a rival's illusionary display.
Larsen assessed the position to a
deeper and more accurate degree,
understanding that his resources were
greater than optics suggest.

48.♙d3 White's king rushes over to
lend a hand. **♙h5** Here he comes.
Black gains king gains entry, albeit at
the steep price of his earlier pawn
sacrifice. **49.♙e3 ♙g4 50.♞h1 ♙g3**
The king, having gone mad, mutters
his accusatory thoughts out loud. He
interprets any challenge to his divine
rule as an act of colossal hubris on the
part of his detractors.

[Portisch may have originally
intended **50...h3** , before seeing the
dirty trick 51.♞g1+ ♙h4 52.♘g7!
(even stronger than 52.♘d4) 52...h2
53.♘xf5+ ♙h5 (not 53...♙h3??
54.♞g3#) 54.♞g2! , when White's
intent ripens into bounty. He allows
Black to promote to any piece and
still wins. (54.♞h1 seems almost
banal by comparison.)]

51.♞g1+ Up to this point, the economic
sanctions imposed upon Black have
had little effect in curbing his
enthusiasm. Now we see that both the

intensity and duration of Black's
initiative are on a steep decline.

♙h2 The passed h-pawn won't do
Black much good with his king blocking
the queening isle. **52.♙f2 ♞h6 53.♘d4**
The knight returns to its dominating
post in the centre, forking both b5 and
f5, as well as threatening to terminate
the black king's life by 54 Nf3+ Kh3 55
Rg2 and 56 Ng1 mate.

♞a6 54.♞g2+ ♙h1 55.♞g1+ ♙h2
56.♞g2+ Repeating moves to get closer
to the next time control. **♙h1**

Black's king fakes a cough to cover up
the sound of his knees knocking
together.

EXERCISE (planning): Portisch
resigned after Larsen's next move.

Work out a winning plan for White.

ANSWER: Step 1: Attack the bishop,
gaining a tempo.

57.♞g7! The rook pantomimes mock
fear at seeing the bishop, whose fear
happens to be very real. Black's
position is immersed in pure suffering.

[After **57.♞g7!** , White might win as
follows: ♘d8 58.♞h7 (Step 2: Apply
the endgame principle: Place your
rook behind your opponent's passed
pawn – now the h-pawn is unable to
advance) ♞a2+ 59.♙f3 ♙h2

60.♞h8! (Step 3: Win the h-pawn by
continuing the harassment of Black's
bishop, which is run off the d8-h4
diagonal) ♕b6 the bishop seethes,
realizing that a servant, once
dismissed, has no right to remain;
(but 60...♕e7 61.♘xf5 traps him;
while 60...♞a8 , rushing the rook to
his protection in a "Your-Honour-I-
represent-the-defence" tone, fails to
61.e6 ♞c8 62.c4! bxc4 63.e7 etc)
61.♞xh4+ (picking off Black's last
avenue of counterplay. "I revise the
parameters of my former promise to

spare your life," the rook informs Black's king) ♖g1 62.♟e2+ wins.]
1-0

67 E68

□ Larsen,B

■ Stein,L

56: USSR vs Rest of the World, Belgrade
[Cyrus Lakdawala]

In the first three games of this famous match, Larsen, playing on the top board ahead of Fischer, scored 1½-1½ against the reigning world champion, Boris Spassky. In the final round, Spassky was ill, so super-GM Leonid Stein substituted. Larsen's triumph in this game gave him a 2½-1½ victory over the Soviet machine on board one!

1.♟f3 ♟f6 2.g3 g6 3.♙g2 ♙g7 4.c4 0-0 5.0-0 d6 6.d4 ♟bd7 7.♟c3 e5 8.e4 exd4 9.♟xd4 ♞e8 10.♞e1 ♟g4 11.f3 ♟ge5 12.b3 ♟c5 13.♙e3 f5 14.♞d2 fxe4 15.♙g5 ♞d7 16.♟xe4 ♟xe4 17.♞xe4 ♟c6 18.♟xc6 ♞xe4 19.fxe4 ♞xc6 20.e5 ♞c5+ 21.♟h1 ♙e6 22.♙xb7 ♞f8 23.♙e3 ♞xe5 24.♞e1 ♞c3 25.♟g2 ♞xd2+ 26.♙xd2

QUESTION: I see that Black has an extra pawn island. How serious is this problem?

ANSWER: I would say it represents an edge for White but no more. Black should be able to hold the draw, especially after his next move.

♙d4! Aggressive defence. Black refuses to cover the hanging e6-bishop and makes a threat of his own against f2, while at the same time covering his a-pawn against Be3 ideas.

27.♙f4

[After 27.♞xe6?! ♞f2+ 28.♟h3 ♞xd2 29.♞e7 ♞xa2 30.♞xc7 ♞b2 , White has nothing.]

27...♟f7 So far so good. Stein centralizes his king, while protecting the hanging bishop. **28.♙h6 ♞b8 29.♙c6 ♙f6** QUESTION: Why did Black's bishop abandon the g1-a7 diagonal?

[ANSWER: Let's say he keeps the bishop there with **29...♙b6** , then 30.♞f1+! is a bit of a problem. Since ♟g8 is forced, after which Black is badly tied up (by the constant threat of Rf8 mate) and his king cut off again. Okay, it isn't obvious how White makes progress, so your line may be playable. Still, I think I would play the way Stein did in the game. (Since 30...♟e7?? 31.♙g5#; and 30...♙f5?? 31.g4 are not to be considered)]

30.♙e3 White's bishop seizes the just vacated diagonal, attacking Black's a-pawn. **a6 31.♙d2!** And then promptly abandons it again.

QUESTION: Why leave the diagonal?

ANSWER: Larsen continues to probe and prod, this time intending to transfer the bishop to an optimal post at a5, pressuring c7.

♞b6 32.♙f3 ♞b8 33.♙a5 ♙d8?!

Black's bishop regards his a5-counterpart's antics with stern disapproval. Such hair-trigger situations demand meticulous accuracy. After this flaccid response, Black's pieces grow ever more tangled.

[The best defence is **33...♞e8!**

34.♙c6 (**34.♙xc7?** allows **♙h3+!**

35.♟xh3 ♞xe1 36.♙xd6 ♙e7

, when Black is the one with winning chances) **34...♞e7** , minimizing

White's advantage. Note that

35.♙b7?! (now or later) is met by **c5!**

and White can't take the a-pawn because his bishops would be

skewered by **...Ra7.**]

[Not 33...♖c8?? due to 34.♞xe6! ♜xe6 35.♙g4+ and wins.]

34.♞f1 ♜g8

[Black has to go back now, since he can barely move after 34...♜e7 35.♙c6 .]

35.♙c6 ♜f7 36.g4! We tend to take little strengthening moves like this for granted, though we might not find the same idea ourselves with the white pieces.

QUESTION: It looks like a random pawn stab. What is the idea?

ANSWER: White intends to increase his space advantage on the kingside, cramping Black further with Kg3 and h2-h4.

♙e7

[Trying to prevent White's intention with 36...♙h4 37.♜h3 g5? would just shut Black's bishop out of the game, effectively leaving him a piece down.]

37.♜g3

[Not 37.♙xc7? ♞c8 and the bishops get skewered again.]

37...♞d8 38.♞d1 Ruling out any ideas of ...d6-d5 for the time being. ♙f6

39.h4 ♙e5+ 40.♜g2 ♞c8 41.g5

[Yet again, White is unable to pick off the a-pawn with 41.♙b7 ♞e8 42.♙xa6?? because of ♞a8

. Black always seems to have access to these bishop skewers.]

41...♜g7? Stein adjourns the game with a mistake.

EXERCISE (combination alert):

White's dominance permeates, like billowing smoke from a priest's incense censer. Stein's last move allows White to win a pawn. How?

[41...♙e6 was correct, when Black remains under pressure but hangs on to all his goods.]

ANSWER: Deflection of a key defender.

42.♙d7! ♞d8 43.♙g4! The white bishops have managed to organize themselves properly. Now c7 does hang, so Black's reply is forced. d5

44.♙f3! As a child, my mother always told me not to stare. This bishop refuses to abide by norms of decorum and continues his wild rant, this time aimed at d5.

h6 Black continues to apply cosmetics to a conspicuous feature which can't be covered up, the way a woman, proud of her once-trim figure, asks a tailor to alter a dress to conceal the fact that she is eight and a half months pregnant.

[Stein may have intended 44...d4 here, only to realize that White wins a pawn with 45.♞e1!

A) 45...♙d6 46.♞e4! d3 47.♞d4 .;

B) . Black can't save himself with 45...♞e8? since White has 46.♙c6 ♞e6 47.♙d7 ♞e7 48.♙xc7! ♞xd7 49.♙xe5+ , winning a pawn anyway, and will soon pick up the d-pawn too.;

C) . Or 45...♙f4 46.♞e4 . (46.--);

D) 45...--]

45.gxh6+ ♜xh6 46.♙d2+ ♜g7

47.♙g5 ♞d6 48.♙xd5 ♙xd5+ 49.♞xd5

[Not 49.cxd5? c6 and Black regains the pawn.]

49...♞xd5 50.cxd5 ♜f7 51.♜f3 ♜e8

52.♙f4! White's impious bishop gives little credence to his brother's spiritual authority. Black's soon-to-be passed pawn on the g-file will be easily halted. Meanwhile, White ensures that he eventually obtains two passers.

♙f6 The bishop retreats before his brother's power with a meek gesture of self-effacement. 53.♙xc7 ♙xh4 54.b4 ♜d7 55.♙b6 ♙f6 56.♙c5 ♙b2 57.a4 ♙a3 With the cheap threat of 58...a5.

58.a5 QUESTION: Didn't Stein just

force White's queenside pawns on the wrong colour?

ANSWER: Yes, but it doesn't matter here. From this point on Black must worry about constant b4-b5 tricks.

♟b2 59.♟f4 ♟f6 Creating a barrier against kingside infiltration. **60.♟e4 ♟c3** EXERCISE (combination alert):

Multiple dramas play out simultaneously. How did Larsen make progress?

ANSWER: Pawn sacrifice. Create a new passed pawn, with the help of tactics. The material balance is temporarily restored but the pawn race isn't. White's passers move dangerously close to their promotion squares.

61.b5! White's remaining bishop consults scripture concerning a little-known passage: "If thou stealeth a pawn, though shalt return it, in order to createth thine own passed pawn."

axb5 62.a6 ♟c8 The king heads for the corner of the room, not wishing to draw unwanted attention to himself.

63.d6 Drawing the black bishop back to stop the pawn, while opening an aperture for White's king via d5 and c6.

♟b8 64.♟d5 ♟f6 65.♟c6 Now the b5-pawn is the burning ant beneath the cruel child's magnifying glass. **g5**

66.♟xb5 There goes one black pawn. Now the white king can trot back to the kingside and pick up the other. **g4**

67.♟c4 ♟a8 Duration is immeasurable in a pitch dark cell. **68.♟d3 ♟e5**

Hoping to slip in ...Bxd6 and draws while White isn't looking. **69.d7! ♟c7**

70.♟e4 g3 71.♟f3! ♟d8!

QUESTION: Why does Black just let the g-pawn drop? Can't he just move his king?

ANSWER: Unfortunately not.

[**71...♟b8?** is met by the deflection

trick **72.♟d6!** , forcing promotion.]

72.♟xg3 ♟a5 73.♟g4 ♟d8 74.♟f5 ♟a5 75.♟e6 ♟c7 76.♟f7 ♟a5

77.♟e8 ♟c7 QUESTION: Isn't this position still drawn? If White promotes his d-pawn, he gets left with the wrong coloured bishop for his rook's pawn.

ANSWER: As you say, if White promotes the d-pawn, Black simply chops the new queen and draws. It feels as if, despite the effects of age and dilapidation, Black's fortress remains sound. It looks as if White lacks a path to a demonstrable win. This is an illusion. Let's turn it into an exercise:

EXERCISE (planning): How can White to get around his dilemma and force a win.

ANSWER: Step 1: Chase Black's bishop off the a5-d8 diagonal.

78.♟e7! ♟a5

[If **78...♟a7** then **79.♟d8 ♟f4 80.♟b6+!** forces promotion.]

79.♟d8 "Learn from your betters and you will profit," lectures the insufferable white bishop, to his more humble parishioner. **♟d2** For Black's hunted bishop, discovery is equivalent to death. "My dear, dear, friend! Can you not see that there is so much more which unites us than that which divides us?" he asks his tormentor, who sees matters from a rather different perspective.

80.♟b6 ♟g5 The bishop squirms this way and that way, completely within his evil twin's thrall.

Step 2: Prepare to block Black's bishop's coverage of d8, by swinging the bishop back to the h4-d8 diagonal, via e7.

81.♟c5! . The mad white bishop, clearly not in a praying mood, believes his grip on power extends to infinity

and perhaps even beyond. Black's bishop is rebuffed in his desperate attempts to retain control over d8 and cannot ignore his counterpart's venomous glare, since there is no defence to the coming Be7.

1-0

68

D34

□ Larsen,B

■ Sarapu,O

57: Sousse Interzonal

1967

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.♠f3 d5 2.g3 c5 3.♙g2 ♘c6 4.0-0
♘f6 5.c4 e6 6.cxd5 exd5 7.d4 ♙e7
8.♘c3 0-0 9.♙e3 ♘g4 10.♙f4 ♙e6
11.dxc5 ♙xc5 12.♚c2 h6 13.♙ad1
♙c8 14.♚b1 ♚b6 15.e3 ♙fd8 16.h3
♘f6 17.♘a4 ♚a5 18.♘xc5 ♚xc5
19.♘e5 ♘e4 20.♘xc6 ♚xc6 21.g4
♙e8 22.f3 ♘f6 23.♙e5 ♚c2 24.♚xc2
♙xc2 QUESTION: How would you

assess this position? Does White stand clearly better?

ANSWER: I believe so, for the following reasons:

1. White has the bishop pair.
2. Black must deal with a d5-isolani which, although not weak now, may become so later.
3. Black has a bad bishop.
4. White dominates the dark squares and the d4-hole. I envision his king sliding up to that square if rooks come off the board.
5. Black's control over the c-file means little, since White simply works around it.

Conclusion: White enjoys excellent winning chances.

25.♙f2 ♙ec8

[If Black tries to swap away his isolani with 25...♙xf2 26.♘xf2 d4?

, he drops a pawn after 27.♙xd4 ♙xa2 28.♙xa7 .]

26.♙xc2 ♙xc2 27.♙f1! Heading for d3 to eject Black's rook. ♘d7! 28.♙d3

[QUESTION: Doesn't 28.♙c3

, followed by Bd3, trap the rook?

ANSWER: No. Black replies ♘c5

, when White has no way to exploit the rook's position.]

28...♙c8 29.♙d4 b6 Not strictly necessary yet, but tossing this move in now saves Black having to worry about the a7-pawn later. 30.♘f2 f6 31.♙c3 ♘f7

[The attempted pawn swap 31...d4? still fails, this time to 32.♙xd4 ♙xa2 33.♙a1 .]

32.h4 Larsen gains a little kingside space, while intimidating his opponent with potential g4-g5 breaks. ♘e5

33.♙b1 ♙c4 34.♙h1! Now g4-g5 is definitely coming. ♙c8 35.g5 ♙h8

Threatening 36...hxg5. Swapping pawns at once would just give White the h-file.

36.f4! QUESTION: Why did Larsen invite the knight into his camp?

ANSWER: He regarded ...Ng4 as a mistake. The rock band the Eagles would rightfully declare: "This could be Heaven or this could be Hell." The knight infiltrates yet is immobilized if it enters g4.

[I prefer Larsen's move to 36.gxf6 gxf6 37.♙g1 h5 , which gives White an advantage but not as large as in the game.]

36...♘g4+!? This move is more than just the venting of frustration. Black's strategy may be similar to the man who beats his beloved dog with a stick to rid the dog of fleas.

[My instincts would be to play

36...♘c6 , though in that case 37.gxf6 gxf6 38.♙g1 ♘e7 (or 38...h5

39. ♖g6) 39.h5 looks good for White.]

37. ♖f3 f5?! It's not easy to pinpoint the root cause of the skew in Black's fortress attempts, but this one may be the tipping point. By playing ...f6-f5 Black greatly increases the scope and power of White's dark-squared bishop down the a1-h8-diagonal.

[I would opt for 37...h5 without fearing the possibility of f4-f5 at some moment.]

38. ♕d4 h5?! Eric Brøndum asks in Bent Larsen – the Fighter, "Closing of the king's wing, but what about his stupid knight?" I turn once again to the wisdom of the Eagles: "We are all just prisoners here, of our own device."

[The immediate 38... ♖c8 was better.]

39. ♖c1 Forcing rooks off the board, which enables the white bishops to dominate. ♖c8 40. ♖xc8 ♕xc8 41. ♕d3 Depriving Black of any activity with ... Ba6. g6 42. ♕b5 ♕b7 The sealed move. 43.a4 Another front must be opened for two reasons:
1. White seeks fresh targets and makes Black nervous about ideas like b2-b4 and a4-a5, or even b2-b4-b5, which fixes a7 and b7 as potential targets for White's unopposed dark-squared bishop.

2. White's king may require infiltration entry points on the queenside.

♕e7 44.b4 ♕f7 Black can do nothing but pass. His king must remain where it is to keep the white bishop out of e8.

45. ♖g2?! A strange slip, which gives Black an immediate chance.

EXERCISE (combination alert):

Larsen's last move was a careless blunder, after which White's laborious plans should sputter, cough and die. Black can escape his difficulties at

once. How?

[45. ♖g3 would have kept control. When you mark time to get closer to the next time limit, be sure you do it in a neutral way which doesn't alter your initial advantage.]

45... ♕e7?! I'm sorry to report that we can't accurately describe each player's last move as epitomizing attention to detail or precision.

[ANSWER: Attraction/Discovered check/Double attack/Fortress. Sarapu misses a golden chance with 45... ♖xe3+! (a person of unique qualities is by definition, irreplaceable; moves like this come as a shock to the orderly mind – it just doesn't feel like Black has a combination in such an arid defensive position – but as we all know, Caissa delights in playing dirty tricks on us) 46. ♕xe3 d4+ (the salient point is revealed) 47. ♖f2 dxe3+ 48. ♖xe3 ♕e7 and the fuse sputters and goes out, leaving White's intended win undetonated. His king cannot infiltrate: Black's king and b6-pawn block the dark squares, while the bishop will keep him out of b5 and c6 as necessary.]

46. ♖g3 Out of the danger zone! ♕f7

47. ♕e2 ♕e6 48. ♕d1 If this is a truce, then it is better described as an armed truce. White still faces monumental logistical hurdles in the implementation of his idea. At this point, Larsen worked out a variation which concludes in his breakthrough on move 76 – a 57-ply calculation!

QUESTION: Isn't that perhaps an exaggeration by Larsen? Who can calculate that far?

ANSWER: I certainly couldn't, but world-class GMs are gifted with endless sight and some might do the same as Larsen if in a controlled

position where there are few branches – much like this one. Okay, I'm not sure how much of the sequence Larsen had worked out in the adjournment, where he may have cheated a little by moving the pieces! On the other hand, Sarapu had the benefit of adjournment analysis too and hadn't foreseen any danger, presumably assuming it was safe to keep moving his king back and forth between e7 and f7 – a fatal assumption.

f7? Probably the losing move.

[Black should have taken advantage of the absent white bishop to seize the a4-e8 diagonal while it was still possible. Then after **48...c6** 49.a5 (or 49.b5 e8) 49...bxa5 50.bxa5 a6 51.e2 b7 , it is difficult to see how White might make progress.]

49.a5 Larsen decides upon his queenside breakthrough. **bxa5**

50.bxa5 a6 51.a4 e7 52.c5+ f7? The king attempts to sneak away, hoping to exempt himself from all liability in the sordid matter. Black continues his do-nothing strategy of keeping the white bishop out of e8, not realizing that it was now important to keep it out of d7 as well.

[After the more tenacious **52...d8** , White would have to find a different plan, involving bringing up his king. For example, 53.d4 e7 54.f3 a8 55.e2 b7 56.c3 a8 57.e1! b7 58.g3 (the bishop takes over the job of corralling the knight while the king goes forward) a8 59.d3 b7 60.d4 a8 (still not 60...d6? due to 61.e8) 61.e1! and now:

A) 61...h2 (the knight makes a break for freedom) 62.c5 f3 63.f2 d2 (or 63...b7 64.b6 c8 65.c7 e6 66.b7 etc)

64.b6 c4+ 65.xa6 d6 66.a7 c6 67.xc6 xc6 68.a6 c7 69.e1 xe3 70.a5+ c8 71.c3 d4 72.e5 (zugzwang) xe5 73.fxe5 d4 74.b6 d3 75.a7 and wins.;

B) 61...f7 (still waiting) 62.d2 f2 (or 62...h2 63.d1 , restricting the knight again) 63.d7 e4 (or 63...b7 64.c5) 64.b4 b7 65.e5 , followed by Be6+ and Bxd5.;

C) 61...--]

53.d7! White's bishops slowly encroach, while Black inches awfully close to zugzwang. **g7** Black's king is thrown down and pulled up, the way a dumpling tosses about in a pot of boiling water.

[There wasn't much choice, since **53...a8?** loses instantly to 54.c8 .]

54.e8! The bishops, who sing an unrecognized hymn, continue trolling for potential targets and zugzwängen. **a8**

[**54...h7** 55.d4 a8 comes to the same thing.]

55.d4+ h7 56.f7 With Black now restricted merely to bishop moves, White can manoeuvre him into a losing position by repeatedly threatening the vulnerable a6, d5, and g6-pawns. QUESTION: How? Those pawns can all be defended, can't they? I don't see the win!

ANSWER: My hands are tied. I can't tell you how, since it would give away the theme and answer of our coming combination alert!

b7 57.e6 c6 58.c8 b5

59.b7! Step 1: A crucial component of White's upcoming combination is to force Black's bishop to the a2-c4 diagonal. **c4 60.c6 g8 61.e8!**

The scheming bishops convene parliament on a resolution designed to reduce their cousin's royal power. ♖h7 62.♟f7! Step 2: White's bishop works its way back to its proper diagonal, while Black's king is again clapped into irons and chained to the wall. Larsen's combinational breakthrough is not far off.

♟d3! Black's best defence. Sarapu finally sees the combination and offers Larsen the d-pawn.

[QUESTION: Why did Black just hand over a pawn when he could play

62...♟b3 - ?

ANSWER: Ah! I was hoping you would ask! Let's turn this into an exercise:

EXERCISE (combination alert): Find White's breakthrough.

ANSWER: Pin/Deflection. White plays the crushing 63.e4! fxe4 (while 63...♟c4 64.exf5 ♟d3 65.♟xg6+ ♖g8 66.♟xh5 traps the unfortunate knight) 64.f5 gxf5 65.g6+ ♖h6 66.g7 , forcing mate in just a few moves.]

63.♟xd5 ♟e4 64.♟c4

[The silly 64.♟xe4? fxe4 dramatically increases Black's chances to draw.]

64...♟b7 65.♟e6 Actually, Larsen could have cut down on his bishop manoeuvres and won more quickly here, but I won't say how because that would spoil the next combination alert.

[You'll realize of course that 65.e4!! was the solution there too; for example, fxe4 (or 65...♟xe4 66.♟xa6) 66.f5 gxf5 67.♟f4! e3 (or 67...♖g6 68.♟e6) 68.♟xf5 ♟c8+ (otherwise 69.g6+ wins) 69.♟f4 ♖g6 70.♟xe3 ♖xe3 71.♟xe3 , followed by Kd4-c5-b6, winning easily.]

65...♟e4 66.♟c8 ♟d3 67.♟b7 ♖g8

68.♟d5+ ♖f8 69.♟c5+ ♖g7 70.♟f3 ♖h2+ 71.♟f2 ♟e4 72.♟c4

Sigh. Are we there yet? Larsen, with the patience of a monument, edges closer to his goal. ♟b7 73.♟b4 ♖h7 74.♟c3 ♖g4+ 75.♟e2 ♖h2

In my childhood I spent many summer days at our community swimming pool. The greatest danger for the sunbathing beauties was the dreaded fat kid (i.e. your writer) who drenched them with a monumental belly-flop.

EXERCISE (combination alert): Find the move which soaks Black's hopes.

ANSWER: Overloaded piece/ Deflection.

76.e4!! Black can resign. ♟xe4

Hey, I said "Black can...". Oh, never mind. Sarapu, a man with seemingly infinite capacity for pain, decides to white-knuckle it and absorb the punishment.

[If 76...fxe4 then 77.f5 gxf5 78.♟f7 and it's time for Black to resign – and this time I really mean it.]

77.♟xa6 White just earned a shiny new passed a-pawn. ♖f3 78.♟c8 ♖xh4

79.a6 Now Bb7 is an obviously unstoppable threat. ♖g2 80.♟e5 h4

EXERCISE (combination alert): Here is an easy one. (Hint: I already blurted out the answer in a previous note!) White to play and force mate.

ANSWER: Interference (sorry, no exclaim for this one!).

81.♟b7 h3 82.♟xe4 fxe4 83.a7

[The only trick is to see that White is the one who forces checkmate, despite Black's less-than-triumphant promotion to a new queen: 83.a7 h2 84.a8♚ h1♚ (84...♖xf4+ 85.♟d2 e3+ 86.♟c2 doesn't help) 85.♚h8# . "Never put off until tomorrow, that which we can achieve today," declares the queen, referring to the

black king's scheduled execution, which went off without a hitch.]

1-0

69

B38

□ Geller,E

■ Larsen,B

58: Monte Carlo

1967

[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.♟f3 c5 2.c4 g6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♟xd4
♟g7 5.e4 ♘c6 6.♟e3 d6 7.♟e2 ♘h6
8.0-0 0-0 9.♞d2 ♘g4 10.♟xg4 ♟xg4
11.♟c3 ♞a5 12.♞ac1 ♞fc8 13.b3 a6
14.♞c2 b5 15.♟d5! ♞xd2 16.♞xd2

QUESTION: White threatens Nxc6, followed by Nxe7+, as well as a knight fork on b6. Is Black in trouble?

ANSWER: Black is under some pressure but should be okay, as long as he plays his next move.

♟xd4 The compact between Black's bishops comes to an abrupt conclusion. First things first.

[Of course 16...bxc4?? hangs a piece to 17.♟xc6, due to the fork on e7.]

17.♟xd4 "Finally, that phony stained glass expression is wiped off your now not-so holy face," brags White's bishop to his late colleague. ♞ab8 Everything is covered.

[QUESTION: Can Black sac the exchange for a pawn with 17...bxc4 18.♟b6 cxb3 - ?

ANSWER: Your suggestion is possible, but matters are not so desperate. Black still seems to be the one struggling for the draw. For example: 19.axb3 ♞ab8 20.♟xc8 ♟xc8 21.♞c1 ♟d7 22.♟c3! ♞b5! (after 22...♞xb3?! 23.e5! , Black's position sours quickly) 23.♞a2 a5 24.♞a3 f6 25.♞ca1 ♟e6

26.♟xa5 ♟xb3 27.♟d2 and White has all the winning chances.]

18.♞c1 Probably not the most accurate continuation.

[White can continue to apply pressure with 18.c5! dxc5 (or if 18...♟e6 19.cxd6 ♟xd5 20.exd5 ♘xd4 , which Larsen intended, then 21.dxe7! ♘f5 22.d6 - Pritchett) 19.♟xc5 ♞b7 20.f4 .]

18...♟f8 Threatening to clip White's bishop, now that e7 is covered. Larsen claimed full equality here, whereas I suspect White still holds a nagging edge.

[Instead, after 18...♟e6! 19.♟b6 ♞c7 20.cxb5 ♟xd4! 21.♞xc7 ♘xb5 22.♞c6 ♟a7! (regaining the exchange) 23.♞dc2 (or 23.♞c7 ♘b5 , repeats) 23...♟xc6 24.♞xc6 f6 , Black should hold the draw.]

19.♟b2?! This looks like the wrong diagonal, allowing Black equality.

[After the correct 19.♟e3! , White retains nagging pressure.]

19...bxc4 20.♞xc4 ♟e8! Principle: Centralize your king in the ending.

21.♞dc2 ♟d7 Black's king offers a helping hand on the queenside. Now White must be on alert for ...a6-a5-a4 minority attack themes. 22.f3

I don't like this move.

QUESTION: Why object a tempo-gaining move?

ANSWER: The thing is, it doesn't gain a tempo since Black wanted to play ...Be6 anyway, and now White has to watch out for ...Bxd5 unbalancing ideas.

[Instead, 22.♟e3 ♟e6 23.♞a4 a5 24.♟c3 would keep the game level.]

22...♟e6 23.♞d2 a5 I already prefer Black, who initiates a minority attack, eventually hoping for ...a5-a4xb3, giving White an isolated pawn on the

queenside.

24.h4 ♖b5 25.♖a4 f6! No e4-e5 tricks, while Black's king may later seek refuge from perpetual check attempts by hiding on f7. **26.♔h2?!**

Time pressure sometimes induces strange decisions. Now the respective plans fail to progress at parallel rates. QUESTION: Why did White decentralize his king?

ANSWER: I have no clue what Geller's idea was behind this illogical move, which violates the same principle Larsen followed above: Centralize your king in the ending.

♙xd5! White's future structural difficulties are a calculated by-product of this decision, after which his lacerated pawn formation proves to be a burden for the remainder of the game.

27.♖xd5 ♖xd5 28.exd5 ♘b4

29.♖xa5 ♖c2 "Now we see the importance of 25 ... P-B3: the black king obtained the flight square KB2! Otherwise White would save himself in several variations with rook checks on R7 and R8," writes Larsen.

(Translation: 25...f6, flight square f7, checks on a7 and a8.) I remember the day I proudly switched to algebraic notation, at the age of twelve, after which I looked down on and sniffed at the backward yokels who continued with the old-style descriptive. I just felt so suave and urbane.

30.a3 Black has a choice to make: Should he go for the rook and pawn ending after 30...Rxb2 31 axb4 Rxb3, or risk allowing White two connected passed pawns with 30...Nd3, intending ...Nf4 and ...Rxb2+ - ?

EXERCISE (critical decision): One of the above lines gives Black excellent winning chances, while the other

allows White a draw. Which would you play?

[Not **30.♙d4?** ♖xa2 31.♖xa2 ♘xa2 and Black wins pawn, since there is no remedy to the coming ...Nb4 and ...Nxd5.]

30...♖xb2? Larsen stumbles upon a methodological glitch which dramatically reduces his winning chances. Now the ending should be drawn.

[ANSWER: Correct was **30...♙d3!** (the spell of comparative tranquillity terminates abruptly – the black rook and knight team rule through fear, intimidation and the insinuation of dreadful punishments to come) 31.♙d4 ♘f4 (it becomes clear just who is the ruling influence on the kingside) and now:

A) 32.♖a7+ ♔e8 33.b4 (33.♖a4 is similar to line 'b') 33...♖xg2+ 34.♔h1 ♖g3 35.b5 ♖h3+ 36.♔g1 ♖xf3 37.b6 ♖b3 (threatening ...Ne2+ and ...Nxd4) 38.♔f2 ♙xd5 and White is busted; for example, 39.a4 (or 39.b7 ♔d8! and there is no remedy to the coming ...Kc7) 39...♙xb6 40.♖b7 ♖b4 41.♙xb6 ♖xa4 42.♔g3 ♖b4 43.♖b8+ ♔f7 , when Black's four pawns and rook easily defeat White's bumbling rook and bishop.;

B) 32.♖a4! ♖xg2+ 33.♔h1 ♖g3 34.♙xf6 ♙xd5 35.♖a7+ ♔e6 36.♔g5 ♖xf3 37.b4 ♖b3 38.♔g2 ♘f6 39.♔f1 d5 and White's passers are bogged down, while Black's d-pawn is free to go forward with excellent winning chances.;

C) 32.--]

31.axb4 ♖xb3 Now White must nurse two isolanis, while Black's structure remains intact. **32.♖a7+?!** This allows Black winning chances. chesstouring.com

[I couldn't find a way to make progress after the simple **32.b5!**, the trouble being that ...Kc7 is always met by Ra7+. If Black tries ♖e8 33.♖a8+ ♕f7 34.♖b8 f5 35.b6 ♕f6, then 36.♖f8+ ♕e5 37.♖f7 ♖xb6 38.♖xe7+ ♕xd5 39.♖xh7 ♕e5 (39...♕d4?! is met by 40.♖h6 d5 41.h5 and only White has chances) 40.♖e7+ ♕f6 41.♖d7 ♕e6 42.♖g7 is drawn.]

32...♕e8 33.♖a8+ ♕f7 34.♖b8 ♖d3

35.♖b5 ♖d4! White's rook has been reduced to humiliating passivity, while Black's rook appears to be one of those people who spend their entire life doing two things at a time.

36.♕g3 g5! Opening a path for Black's king to e5 and f5. **37.hxg5 fxg5 38.♕f2 ♖d2+ 39.♕g3 h5**

40.♕h3 ♖d3 41.♕g3 ♕f6 42.♕f2 ♖d2+ The sealed move. Larsen

analysed until 3:30 a.m. and Geller to 5:00 a.m. Both players concluded that White was lost. In this case, Larsen's optimism is in inverse ratio to the quality of the position on the board. Depressingly, Houdini, after just a few minutes, casually declares the position drawn!

IM John Watson once wrote depressingly in an email: "I don't know why we humans bother to play chess with comps around!" I'm no fool, having seen all the Terminator and Matrix movies. My counter-proposal: We should strive to emulate the Terminator and Agent Smith, but in reverse, and kill all computers (or at least unplug them or remove their batteries) before they kill or enslave us! **43.♕g3 ♖d4 44.♕h3 g4+ 45.fxg4 ♖xg4 46.♖b8 ♖d4 47.♖b5 ♖e4 48.♖b8** Larsen has a choice of two plans:

A. Play 48...Ke5 49 Rh8 Kxd5 50 Rxh5+ e5, when White's b4-pawn drops.

B. Play 48...Re5, forcing 49 Rb5, and then exploit the lateral pin with 49...e6. Unfortunately for him, White's position is a bit like being harmed in a dream, in that it may be unpleasant for Geller's side, yet no real suffering can come of it. White is able to hold the draw in both cases.

♖e5 Plan A, which was Houdini's choice, is also drawn.

[I defended White and held the draw versus the computer after **48...♕e5 49.♖h8 ♕xd5 50.♖xh5+ e5 51.g4 ♖xb4 52.g5 ♖b1 53.♕g2 ♕e4 54.g6 ♖b8 55.g7 ♖g8 56.♖g5 d5 57.♕g3 d4 58.♕f2 ♕f4 59.♖g1 ♕f5** (Black can't make progress after 59...e4 60.♕e2 d3+ 61.♕d2 ♕f3 62.♖f1+ ♕g4 63.♕e3 either) 60.♕e2 ♕f6 61.♖f1+!

(White sacrifices another pawn for an unshakable light square blockade) ♕xg7 62.♖f5 ♖e8 63.♕d3 ♕g6 64.♕e4 ♖e7 (or 64...♖d8 65.♕xe5 d3 66.♖f1 and the rook arrives to blockade on d1 just in time) 65.♖f3 ♕g5 66.♖f2 ♖e8 67.♖f3 ♕g4 68.♖b3! preventing Black's king from sneaking in from behind; (not 68.♖f1? ♕g3 69.♖f3+ ♕g2 70.♖f5 ♖e7! with zugzwang) 68...♖d8 69.♖d3! and White holds the draw.]

49.♖b5 e6! Black's best practical chance. Nevertheless, this attempt to cut White out of the profits shouldn't work. **50.♖b8?** Painful emotions are virtually a luxury to the homeless man with an empty stomach. Geller abandons the weakest member of his herd, leaving his d5-pawn to fend for itself. This move gives Black practical chances to win the game. chesstouring.com

[White could still have held on after **50.g4!** (based on the endgame principle: The defending side should reduce the pawn count as much as possible) **hxg4+ 51.♔xg4 exd5** (**51...♖xd5 52.♖xd5 exd5 53.♔f4** is dead drawn) **52.♖a5! ♕e6 53.♔f3 ♖e1 54.♖a8 ♖b1 55.♖b8 ♖b3+ 56.♔e2 ♔e5** (or **56...d4 57.♖b5**) **57.♔d2 d4 58.b5 ♔d5 59.b6 ♔c6 60.♖c8+ ♔d5 61.♖b8 ♖b4 62.b7 ♖b3 63.♔c2 ♖b6 64.♔d2** and Black is unable to make progress, since his king remains frozen in place, unable to help with the promotion process.]

50...♖xd5 51.b5 ♖d4 52.♖h8 ♖b4 53.♖h6+ ♔f7 54.♖xh5 ♔g6 55.g4 d5 Cutting off the rook's communication with b5. It appears that Black's two connected passers should now win easily, but the computers are always ready to pounce on our limitations in technique. We humans are notoriously susceptible to error when navigating such positions. On the other hand, our human opponents are equally capable of stumbling and offering us another chance – even, as we have seen, world-class grandmaster opponents such as Geller.

56.♖e5 ♔f7 57.♔h4 ♖xb5 58.♖e1?! EXERCISE (planning): Come up with a simple winning plan for Black.

[Advancing the g-pawn was more tenacious, when Black needs to be cleverer with his rook and king: **58.g5 ♖b1! 59.♖e2** (bringing the white king back is no good: **59.♔g3 ♔e7 60.♔f2 ♔d6 61.♖e3 ♖b8 62.♔e2 e5 63.♖g3 ♖g8** , followed by **...Ke6-f5** etc and Black wins easily) **59...♖g1 60.♔h5 ♔e7** (stepping round to support the pawns) **61.♔g6** (after **61.♔h6 ♔d6 62.g6 e5 63.g7 e4**

64.♔h7 ♔e5 65.g8♖ ♖xg8 66.♔xg8 d4 , the rook has no chance against the king and pawns) **61...♔d6 62.♖a2** (or **62.♔f6 ♖f1+ 63.♔g7 e5 64.g6 e4 65.♖g2 ♔e5 66.♖g5+ ♔e6 67.♔h7 ♖h1+ 68.♔g8 e3 69.♖g2 d4 70.g7 ♖a1 71.♔h8 ♖a8+ 72.g8♖+ ♖xg8+ 73.♖xg8 ♔e5** and the king and pawns win again) **62...d4 63.♖a8 ♔e5 64.♖d8 ♖g3 65.♔h6 d3 66.g6 ♔f6!** (heading back to distract the white rook by attacking the g-pawn) **67.♖f8+ ♔e7 68.♖f7+ ♔e8 69.♖f1** (or **69.♖f6 d2 70.♖xe6+ ♔d7** and the d-pawn can't be stopped) **69...e5 70.g7** (or **70.♖e1 ♔e7! 71.♖xe5+ ♔f6** with a decisive double attack) **70...♔e7 71.♔h7 e4 72.g8♖ ♖xg8 73.♔xg8 e3** and this time the pawns don't need the king.]

ANSWER: Endgame principle: Rooks should be stationed behind passed pawns. Black intends **...Rd5** and **...d4-d3**, after which White is too tied down to put up any resistance.

58...d4! That which was once just a cloud of smoke, now takes a more distinct form into a malevolent entity.

59.♖a1

[It is too late for **59.g5** to do any good: **d3** (a deliberate violation of the endgame principle: Connected passed pawns should advance together) **60.♖d1 ♖d5 61.♔h5 d2 62.♔h6 ♖d3 63.g6+ ♔g8 64.♔g5 ♔g7 65.♔f4 ♔xg6 66.♔e4 ♖d5 67.♔e3 ♔f5** and now just one pawn is enough, as after **68.♖xd2 ♖xd2 69.♔xd2 ♔e4 70.♔e2 e5!**

, Black breaks the opposition and wins. White's king is the televangelist who gets caught with a hooker and feels the acute embarrassment of having his secret hypocrisy exposed

to public view.]

59...♙f6 60.♖a8 ♖d5 61.♙g3

The elderly king doesn't speak much now. But when he does, it is to complain and grumble about the "infernal pest" of a d-pawn. d3

It's all over. White's rook is forced into a submissive posture. 62.♖a1 ♙e5

63.♙f2 "I waive my past grievances against you and now declare us good friends!" announces White's king to his e5-rival, who maintains a slightly different perspective on their alleged "friend" status, and immediately lets him know by unfriending him on Facebook.

♙d4 64.♖a7 e5 65.g5 e4 66.♖a4+ ♙e5!

[Geller didn't need to see a finish like 66...♙e5! 67.♙e1 (the white king, realizing he is done for, indulges in a hollow, mirthless laugh) e3 68.♙d1 (now he hears hurried footsteps growing louder up the stairs, and realizes his remaining time on earth is a matter of seconds) ♖b5 69.♖a1 ♙e4 70.g6 ♖b2 71.g7 ♙f3! 72.g8♙ e2+ 73.♙c1 ♖c2+ 74.♙b1 e1♖# . There is no opiate as soothing and as blissful as underpromotion.]

0-1

70

E56

□ Taimanov,M

■ Larsen,B

59: Capablanca Memorial, Havana
[Cyrus Lakdawala]

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.e3 0-0 5.♙d3 c5 6.♘f3 d5 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.a3 dxc4 9.♙xc4 ♙a5 10.♙d3 a6 11.dxc5 ♙xd3 12.♙xd3 ♙xc3 13.bxc3 QUESTION: How should we assess this ending?

ANSWER: Objectively, it is probably equal; in practice, Black has to play more precisely.

1. White is temporarily a pawn up.
2. White has the bishop pair, with the potential to control the dark squares.
3. Black's pawn structure is superior; White owns three isolanis – all potential targets.
4. White has the potential to apply some pressure down the b-file.
5. Black, after regaining the c5-pawn, has the potential to erect a blockade of c4.

Conclusion: My intuition says that White's advantages outweigh his disadvantages, and might well turn into a concrete edge if Black is not careful. ♙a5! Intending ...Nb3. This inverted approach is curiously effective in Black's unravelling.

[Larsen avoids the trap 13...♘d7?! 14.a4 ♘xc5 15.♙c2 ♙a5 16.♙a3 b6 17.♘g5! h6 (or 17...f5 18.♖fb1 ♘c4 19.♖xb6!) 18.♙e4 and White wins a pawn, since ♙ab7? is met by 19.♖ab1 .]

14.♖b1 ♙d7?! This move is possible because the a5-knight covers b7, yet is inaccurate.

[Larsen subsequently found 14...♖d8! (and immediately ½-½ S.Gligoric-B. Larsen, Sousse Interzonal 1967, a month or so later), which equalizes after 15.♙e5 (or 15.♙c2 ♙d7 16.♙e5 ♖ac8) 15...♘c6! 16.♘xc6 ♖xd3 17.♙e5 ♖d5 18.c6! bxc6 19.♘xc6 ♖c5 20.♖d1 h6 21.♙b4 ♖xc3 22.♙b2 ♖b3 .]

15.c4! Threatening to destabilize Black's defence with Bd2. ♙a4 16.c6! ♙xc6 17.♙d2 Forcing Black's next move. White's bishops continue to grow in power. If you burn down the bishops' monastery and murder their entire

families, they will forgive you; but try and break up their partnership and you arouse their wrath.

18.gxf3

[In a later game, F.Gheorghiu-R. Wade, Bucharest 1968, White played **18.♟xa5** ♟c6 19.f3 ♞fc8 20.e4 and also obtained an edge.]

18...♞c6

[**18...♞fd8?!** drops a pawn to 19.♟xh7+ (zwischenzug) ♔xh7 20.♟xa5 .]

19.♟c3

[Most certainly not **19.♞xb7??** ♞fd8 20.♞b3 ♞e5 and Black's pile up on the d-file wins.]

19...♞ab8 20.♞fd1 ♞fc8 21.f4 ♔f8

22.♔g2 ♔e7 QUESTION: I realize White owns the bishop pair versus a pair of knights, but does Black's healthier structure make up for it? ANSWER: I don't think so. In fact, I'm not so sure I would categorize White's structure as being inferior. His kingside pawns control key central squares, and while his queenside pawns may be split, the open b-file ties Black down to b7. The only real issue is with the c4-pawn which remains a long-term weakness.

23.f5 e5 Larsen strives to keep the structure as rigid and as closed as possible to suppress the latent power of White's bishops. **24.♟c2** Seeking new horizons on the queenside. **♞c7 25.♔f3** Maintaining control over e4. **♞d8** White's rooks are clearly the more active, so Larsen plays to swap one of them off. **26.♞xd8 ♔xd8 27.♟a4 ♞d7 28.h4**

[Black remains under greater pressure after **28.♟xc6!** ♞xc6 (**28...bxc6??** loses instantly to 29.♟a5) 29.♞xb7 ♞xc4 30.♟a5+ ♔c8 31.♞a7 ♞c6 32.h4 , although

I'm not sure it's enough to take home the full point.]

28...g6!? Larsen's optimism isn't dampened and he attempts to make the best of an awkward situation. Opening the position further looks quite risky, but Larsen isn't interested in just waiting around. Instead, he activates his kingside pawns and rids himself of the pest on f5.

29.fxg6 hxg6 30.h5 Impatient; White's initiative ascends to its peak and then plateaus. Taimanov begins to drift, winging it – although in fairness, it is hard to suggest anything better here.

[If **30.♞h1** first, then ♞f6 prevents h4-h5, and 31.♟xc6 ♞xc6 32.♟xe5 ♞d7 is just equal.]

30...gxh5 31.♞h1 e4+!? The sparring ends and the real fight begins. Black's last move, another of Larsen's subversions, designed to confuse, indicates that he's now playing for the full point.

[Otherwise, **31...♞f6** 32.♟xc6 ♞xc6 33.♟xe5 ♞d7 should again lead to a draw.]

32.♔f4

[No GM with more than one second on his clock would fall for **32.♔xe4??** ♞c5+ , and Taimanov had eight minutes left.]

32...♞e7! Larsen counterattacks c4, threatening to ransack White's queenside pawns. **33.♟a5!?**

I'm not so sure about this move, which allows Black to swap away one of the bishops. It was accompanied by a draw offer which Larsen refused, since Taimanov was down to his last two minutes now.

b6 34.♟xd7

[After **34.♟b4** a5 , White is forced to part with his precious bishop pair

anyway.]

34...bxa5!? Still playing for the win.

[Larsen rejects the drawing line

34...♙xd7 35.♙xb6 ♖xc4 36.♖xh5
♜g6+ 37.♙f5 ♜e7+ 38.♙f4 ♜g6+
.]

35.♙a4 ♜g6+!

[Better than **35...♖xc4** 36.♙b3 ♜g6+
37.♙f5 ♖c7 38.♙xe4 h4 39.f4
, when White takes the initiative into
a draw.]

36.♙f5 QUESTION: What is the white king's attempted final destination?

ANSWER: Who knows? Taimanov's randomly wandering king begins to take on the air of a man in search of mislaid car keys.

♖c5+ 37.♙f6 ♜e5 38.♙b3?!

An overcorrection, after which the bishop languishes in eternal neglect. Now Black suddenly stands better.

[The longer retreat **38.♙d1!** ♜xc4
39.a4 minimizes Black's newly-found
advantage.]

[Not **38.♖xh5??** which hangs the
rook to ♜g4+ .]

38...♙e8! Speaking the truth has always made the black king uneasy. He plans dirty schemes while coyly evading his brother's eyes. Taimanov sees the devious mating net with ...Kf8, followed by ...Nd7 or ...Ng4, and panics.

39.♙g7?? This move pushes the diagnosis back from barely survivable to incurable. When dignity argues with need, it is generally the latter which gets the best of it.

EXERCISE (combination alert): White's king is a little too brave, deciding to take a suicidal leap off the ledge, while his out-of-synch pieces point every which way. Black to play and win.

[White had to play **39.♙f5!**
and pray he holds a draw after ♜xc4+

(or 39...♜g4+ 40.♙xe4 ♜xf2+
41.♙d4 ♖xc4+ 42.♙xc4 ♜xh1
43.♙xa6) 40.♙f4 ♜xa3 41.♖a1 ♜c2
42.♙xc2 ♖xc2 43.♖xa5 ♖xf2+
44.♙xe4 . But how many of us would
have the sangfroid to walk backwards
into a discovered check in time
trouble?]

ANSWER: Taimanov's last move thwarted Larsen's original mating net, only to fall into another one! The conjoined ideas merge into single intent, like two ends of a seesaw.

39...♜g4! When it comes to the delivery of checkmate, we all know that it is better to give than to receive. White healed one wound, only to see another flare up. Black's new mating net isn't merely a fortuitous by-product, it is a creature of Larsen's dark craft and his devilish ability to deceive upon the chess board. Strangely enough, there is no reasonable answer to ...Rg5+, ...Nf6, and ...Rg8 mate.

40.♖d1 No method exists to thwart the transmission of Black's intent.

[With **40.♙a4+** ♙e7 41.♖b1 ♖g5+
42.♙h8 ♜f6 43.♖b7+ ♙e6 44.♖b6+
♙e5 45.♖xf6 ♙xf6 , White prevents
the immediate mate but now it's time
for him to resign!]

40...♖g5+ 41.♙h8 For a person desperately in need of help, the most terrifying noise in the world is the sound of silence. ♜f6 Black's prancing rook and knight produce a contorted, jarring cadence, reminding us of cats making love on a piano keyboard.

42.♙a4+ ♙e7 The black king stands at the ready, sabre in hand, just itching to lop his brother's ugly head off. Meanwhile, the depth of the white king's denial runs deep; "I will have my revenge!" he roars. His brother responds: "Try and concentrate. You

are enslaved, chained in my dungeon.
Shouldn't you be more troubled by that
fact than with petty thoughts of
payback?"

[Even after 42...♔e7 43.♖d7+!?
♘xd7 44.♙xd7 ♔xd7 , White is soon
mated and the remainder runs too
smoothly to require an annotator's
comment.]

0-1

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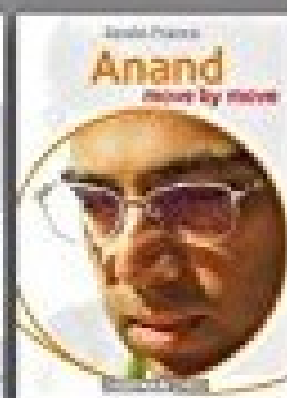
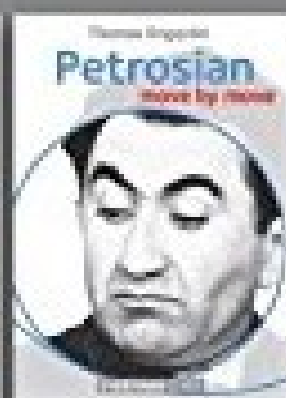
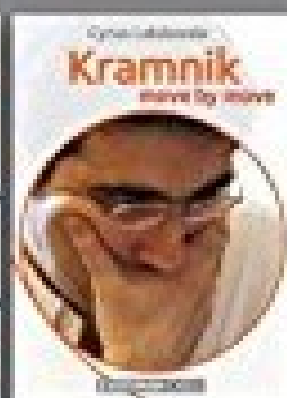
Larsen **move by move**

Bent Larsen was one of the most influential chess players of the 20th century. He was a four-time Candidate for the World Championship and the first westerner to seriously challenge the Soviet Union's post-war dominance of the game. Larsen was admired by fans for his creative and combative style. He was a risk-taker who always sought complex positions. He felt completely at home in defence and was an opportunistic attacker. While other grandmasters would shy away from offbeat openings, Larsen would embrace and develop them. In this book, former American Open Champion Cyrus Lakdawala studies his favourite Larsen games and examines Larsen's skills in the key areas of attack and defence, initiative, exploiting imbalances, accumulating advantages and endgame play. He demonstrates clearly how we can all improve by learning from Larsen's play.

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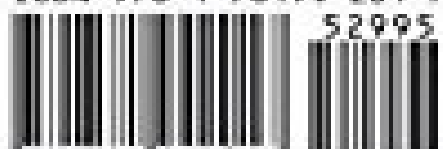


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