JUDIT POLGAR

How I beat Fischer's record



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JUDIT POLGAR

How I beat Fischer's record



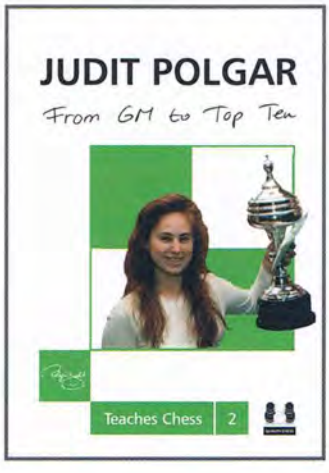
"Notions of chess have been shattered by a teen-age Hungarian girl – some call her modest and soft-spoken, but many opponents know her as a ferocious tiger over the board – who after years of steady progress began breathing down the necks of the top men and now has broken the barrier of one of the world's most exclusive clubs: she has earned the rank of grandmaster at 15 years, 5 months, one month younger than Bobby Fischer when he did it 34 years ago." – New York Times, 1992

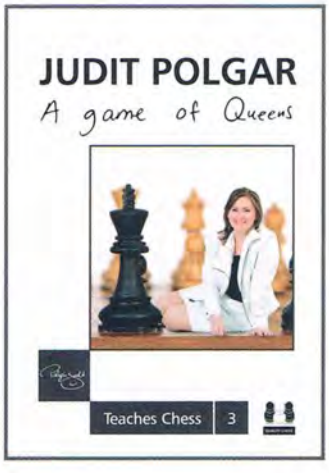
Great achievements often take a lifetime of preparation, but when these achievements are becoming the World Number 1 at the age of 12 and the youngest ever grandmaster at the age of 15 you have to start early! In this very personal book **Judit Polgar** describes her early moments of success and the chess ideas she needed to master to achieve them.

This exceptional book is the beginning of a unique project where one of the greatest players of our time transforms her personal journey to the top into a roadmap for everyone who ever wanted to better themselves in the game of chess.

Judit Polgar has been ranked 1st on the Women's rating list from 1989 to this day. In 2005 she became the first woman in chess history to participate in the World Championship final.

Judit Polgar Teaches Chess continues in...





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How I Beat Fischer's Record

by

Judit Polgar

with invaluable help from Mihail Marin



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Judit Polgar Teaches Chess 1 – How I Beat Fischer's Record

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Key to symbols used

⩲	White is slightly better
⩱	Black is slightly better
±	White is better
∓	Black is better
+–	White has a decisive advantage
–+	Black has a decisive advantage
=	equality
⯹	with compensation
⇄	with counterplay
∞	unclear
?	a weak move
??	a blunder
!	a good move
!!	an excellent move
!?	a move worth considering
?!	a move of doubtful value
#	mate

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Preface

I started flirting with the idea of publishing a collection of my best games a long time ago.

For years, I was aware that the moment when I could fulfil my dream was far away. As a professional player, I spent most of my time and energy playing in tournaments and training, so each time the idea of my book popped up, I had to say to myself "Later, later..."

By coincidence, several publishers approached me during this period. And although I was not prepared to embark on any definite project yet, I could feel that the whole idea was, little by little, starting to take shape.

The critical moment

The 2009 World Cup proved to be a decisive moment in the birth of my book. In the third round I played Boris Gelfand, a very strong opponent who eventually went on to win the event. I lost the first match game with Black, and during my preparations for the second one, I found myself with no clue about how to break down his favourite Petroff Defence.

I decided to improvise with the Bishop's Opening, and in the early middlegame started a sacrificial attack in the best spirit of the King's Gambit, my favourite opening as a kid. This turned out to be Gelfand's only defeat in a classical game in the whole tournament. I eventually lost the play-off, but this did not spoil the magic: it felt like for a moment the Judit from 1988, who many (including myself) had forgotten, had come back to deliver her trademark brilliancies.

With this nostalgic feeling, I decided that the time had finally come to write my book, in which the little girl from the past would play an important role. On the way back home, while waiting to embark at Moscow airport, I made it "official" by sharing my thoughts with my husband Gusztav. He was delighted with the idea and I appreciate very much his enthusiasm, support and encouragement ever since.

Preliminary details

There were a few technical details to be worked out before starting to work. Most of my best games have been published worldwide, in countless magazines and even in a few books about my chess career written by other authors. Therefore, I aimed for a different approach than *just* "Judit's selected games".

After much hesitation, I chose to structure the material as a manual rather than an autobiography. This way, it would be instructive for young players or amateurs aspiring to progress, but also offer a guideline to their parents or trainers. True, there would be a wealth of autobiographical stories, but they would pop up without respecting a chronological order.

Without any false modesty, I can say that I played entertainingly and quite well from an early age, and it soon became clear that one book would not be enough to cover my whole career.

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To make this rather unusual project come true, I needed a publisher who would allow me the freedom of action I needed. I decided to work with Quality Chess after I met their Creative Director, Jacob Aagaard.

I was captivated by Jacob's enthusiasm, optimism and his acceptance of making the book the way I wanted it. We soon reached an agreement and he offered his invaluable feedback during the complex writing process.

Since I had no experience as a book writer, I also needed the help of a close collaborator.

Even before the project had taken shape, I had shared my ideas with my old friend Bob (Mihail Marin). I have known Bob since 1990, when he stayed with my family in Budapest on several occasions. We were playing chess, training and having lots of fun. Many years later we worked together regularly and he even accompanied me as a second to a few tournaments, including the World Championship in San Luis 2005.

I knew that Bob has lots of knowledge and broad experience in many areas of chess. He is a successful author who has written many good books. But even more importantly, I appreciate his love and enthusiasm for chess.

Bob gladly joined my project and now that this book is finished, I can say that he has been a great adviser and helper throughout. In addition, working as a pair proved joyful and entertaining.



Novi Sad 1990: (l. to r.) My Mother, Pal Benko, Susan, Marin, Hazai, Me!, Morvay & Sofia

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Sources of information

Many of the games in this volume have not been published before. Some of them were played against my coaches or sparring partners for training purposes. I have input them all from my dusty archive of scoresheets.

From my early years as a chess player, my coaches taught me to regularly write down the time taken both by my opponent and myself. This was meant to provide the coaches with information about my way of thinking, my possible superficiality at critical moments or, on the contrary, my hesitations.

This information also proved useful for this book. In my comments, I have frequently referred to the situation on the clock, in order to draw interesting conclusions of a psychological nature. And, as a curiosity, I would add that I have not given up the habit of writing down the time even today...

The old scoresheets helped me to spot a few input mistakes in the official databases.

I also drew a wealth of information from my old opening notes and game annotations. Luckily, my whole archive has survived several changes of apartments over the years!

It was refreshing to learn that some of my original analysis stands up to severe computer scrutiny even today.

The structure

This first volume covers the period from my early years until 1991, when at the age of 15 years, 4 months and 28 days, I broke Fischer's record by roughly one month and became the youngest ever grandmaster.

The chapters are arranged according to their complexity, starting with the simpler ones. The aim is to increase the educational value of the book, but it also evokes the rapid progress I made at that young age.

The first five chapters focus on simple tactical elements, and the next three on notions of positional play. Chapters 9 to 12 highlight the subtleties of the transition phases, from the opening to the middlegame, and from the middlegame to the endgame.

The first twelve chapters have mainly game fragments. Things become more complex in Chapters 13 and 14 which feature complete games (with just one exception). In Chapter 15 (the final one) we take a step further by examining the multifaceted universe of a chess tournament.

A nostalgic journey to the past

One of the most rewarding aspects of my work on this book was the possibility of revisiting the past. Looking at my old games brought back unique memories, but I was also surprised by my strength as a player at that young age. I gained the distinct feeling that to me playing chess used to be as natural as breathing.

Every now and then I could not stop smiling when noting my ingenuity in certain situations. Now, I could surely teach that young girl a thing or two!

Although I have changed a lot as a person since then, I am glad that I did not lose any of my love for chess or my pleasure in playing beautiful games.

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Many times people have asked me about the reasons for my early successes.

Talent and ambition must have played a significant part, but my family environment was the most important factor. Both my parents were teachers by profession and by inclination. My sisters and I are grateful to them not only because they dedicated their lives to our success, but even more so because they raised us with a positive set of values.

I was fortunate to be the youngest of three sisters, so my parents already had a lot of experience when they started bringing me up as a chess player.

Moreover, growing up around my elder sisters Susan and Sofia was very stimulating and they offered their help whenever I needed it. No words are rich enough to describe my feelings towards Susan and Sofia. And I am happy that after all these years we are still very close friends, despite the huge geographical distances between us.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my thanks to:

All my trainers, coaches and sparring partners.
The organizers, sponsors, opponents and arbiters, without whom chess life could not exist.
My enemies, who stimulated me to improve myself.

Last but not least, thanks to my chess fans. I hope you will enjoy this book.

Judit Polgar
Budapest, July 2012



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Chapter 1

Tricks



Showing my game against Chilingirova
(see page 19)

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When an adult loses to a very young player, the most common excuse he comes up with is "He (or she) tricked me!" The usual meaning of this cliché is that the baby opponent somehow undeservedly managed to change the logical course of the game in a radical way. In order to understand this association of ideas, we should try to give a proper definition of a "trick" in a chess game.

I see the trick as a basically simple (maximum two or three moves), but very well masked, tactical operation. It requires imagination, alertness, lack of preconceptions, and the ability to intuitively perceive the intimate dynamic nuances of the position. These qualities allow spotting, foreseeing or aiming to deliver a trick.

Most of these qualities are characteristic of the very young. For a kid, there is nothing more rewarding than tricking the opponent! As the years pass, one tends to rely mainly on knowledge and experience, losing part of the aforementioned qualities.

My favourite way of highlighting the artistic impression created by tricks on the chess board and their unexpected character is by comparing them with a magician pulling a rabbit out of his hat. Again, this is a field that captivates kids. Adults may smile while watching a magician's show, but they will not believe in the "miracles" even if they cannot explain them by logical means.

I was labelled as a tricky player early on and have been regarded as tricky throughout my whole career. It was said that I was able to pull out tricks from nowhere. While admitting that this is one important thread of my play, I hope this book will show that my general style as a girl was more rounded.

I must confess that whenever I examine a position, my train of thought tends to go in a tactical direction. Many times I have planned tricks well in advance, but I tried to look as innocent as possible, in order to avoid giving a hint to my opponent.

It is interesting to mention that the highest authorities have different opinions about this latter aspect. I felt deeply honoured when Vassily Smyslov called me "Tal in a skirt", comparing me with arguably the most brilliant World Champion ever. I was less pleased when Korchnoi described me as a "coffee house player"!

Handling tricks is a useful weapon, but does not exclude strategic vision or basic chess knowledge. On the contrary, it can be an excellent complement to them! Besides, tricks continued to occur frequently in my games despite my opponents being more and more aware of the danger with the passing years.

How to become tricky

Under the guidance of my father I spent many hours each day solving studies, problems and tactical positions. My father considered solving to be very important because it requires concentration and accurate calculation, precisely what you need most during a practical game. We had many books which my father had collected over the years. On many occasions I studied together with Sofia and later on I had the opportunity to go into Susan's workroom too! (Susan is seven years older and had done some serious training already). In our apartment there was a wall with 30 small chess boards with the positions meant to be our homework.

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Another common method of preparing was playing blitz games and different kind of rapid games. My father was always looking for opportunities for us to practise and so he invited many different sparring partners to come to our place. This intense practice developed our skills of rapid orientation in unknown positions and a feel for tactical nuances, which we could describe as intuition. It also helped us to memorize the opening moves better and to become acquainted with typical middlegame and endgame positions. Another positive effect was that I felt less pressure or tension during tournaments.

Of course, there also was a lot of bluffing in our countless blitz games, but even in a scientific game like chess learning how to take one's chances is important. While the usefulness of training games at different time controls is relevant to most of the themes covered in the forthcoming chapters, blitz games are most closely related to the trick sections.

Blindfold games also played an important part and I remember there were times when I played against Sofia (or other opponents) at least ten times a day! After a while, analyzing and exchanging ideas with other players without needing a chess board became natural. There is a lot of fun involved in this kind of activity, as you can speak about a certain game or position with the same ease with which you comment on a movie you have watched the night before. Also, you can read chess magazines and books while travelling or before going to sleep.

I would like to add that opening preparation was not at all important at that time. This may be a reason why, even today, my strongest area remains the middlegame. The only chapter in this book tangentially related with the opening is that dedicated to a lead in development, but even there we will mainly focus on decisions taken over the board and not on applying concrete knowledge.

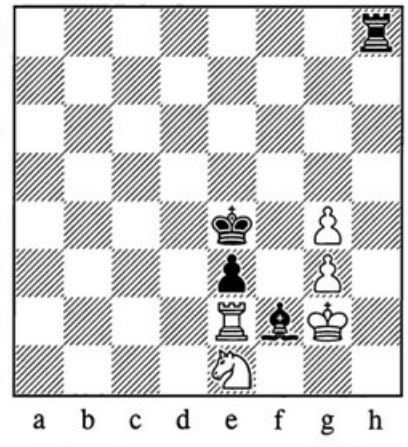
The present chapter will examine some typical situations in which tricks may pop up. Later, we will divide them into subchapters, according to their aim.

Players are especially vulnerable to falling for tricks when they relax prematurely or find themselves in time trouble. The next example illustrates both aspects perfectly. It was a blitz game (implying that we both were in time trouble from the very first move) and features a strongly simplified and apparently dull position.

Jozsef Palkovi – Judit Polgar

Training game, Budapest (blitz) 1989

Jozsef came to our apartment for many years. He was a professional player for a long time, but nowadays he works mainly as a kid's coach. We used to tease each other during the blitz games, comment on certain good or bad moves, or make fun of each other.



White is under some pressure, but due to the reduced amount of material left on the board he should manage to draw. When playing his next move, Jozsef asked: "What are we playing for here?"

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1.♖xf2?

Indeed, this looks like the simplest solution. After 1...exf2, White would have little trouble holding a draw, but Jozsef's mistake was taking for granted that I have to take the rook. His unawareness of the danger can be explained by the fact that in the initial position I had no tactical threat. His last move made the trick possible, though.

1...♖h2†!

Oops! After 2.♔xh2 exf2 the pawn promotes. The unfortunate position of the knight is the decisive factor, as White cannot prevent ...f1=♕ and ...fxe1=♕ at the same time.

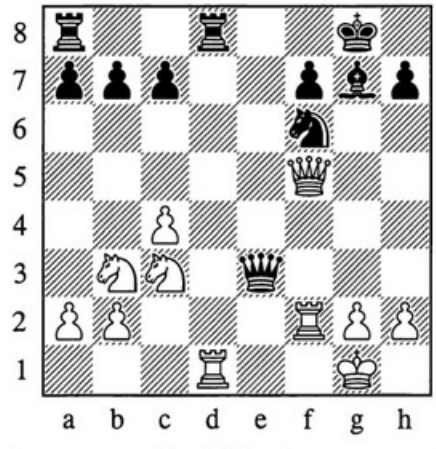
I always enjoy when I can do something unusual which turns out to be good!

0–1

I will now show a typical case of objective details, related strictly to the position, which allowed me to carry out a simple but quite nice tactical operation.

Dr N.N. – Judit Polgar

Budapest 1984



It may seem that White has some attacking chances in view of the weakened black kingside, but his poor coordination is the deciding feature. The f2-rook is pinned, which creates back rank problems, while his b3-knight does not take part in the fight. These factors gave me the possibility to get an advantage with a slightly paradoxical move.

19...♘e4!

Attacking the pinned rook and the overloaded c3-knight, which is tasked with keeping the back rank defended. My opponent did not suspect that I might even consider allowing his next move.

20.♕xf7†

The back rank problems are illustrated by: 20.♖xd8† ♖xd8 21.♕xe4 ♖d1!†



White loses his queen.

20...♔h8

The check has not improved White's position at all, as my king is safe in the corner.

21.♘d5

What else? 21.♘xe4 leads to mate in one after 21...♖xd1.

21...♕xf2† 22.♕xf2 ♘xf2 23.♔xf2 c6

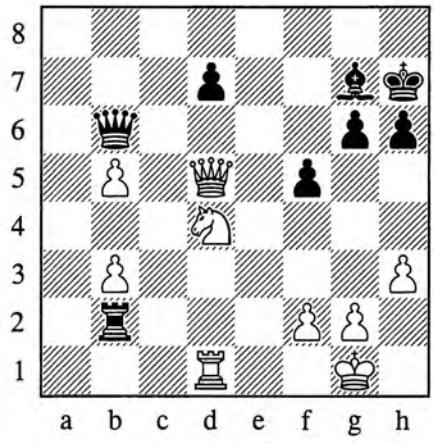
I eventually converted my material advantage.

...0–1

This was a rather simple example. It should not take too much effort to notice the lack of harmony reigning in White's camp and

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find the right punishment. More typically, the organic defects of the opponent's position and the ensuing tricks are better masked. Let's examine such a situation.



Alon Greenfeld – Judit Polgar

European Team Championship, Haifa 1989

This was the first time that I played for Hungary in a men's team event. Some of Hungary's strongest players were absent and I played on the second board after Pinter and ahead of Susan.



The way we prepared back then

Things had not gone the way I wanted so far. I had played the Benko Gambit, my main weapon against 1.d4 at that time, but failed to get the desired compensation.

White is a pawn up, has a centralized position and safer king. In many endings, the presence of an outside passed pawn could be the decisive factor. And yet, White's stability in the centre is not absolute. The knight is attacked by the bishop and not defended by a pawn. Moreover, it breaks the communication between the queen and rook.

While looking for practical chances, I found a hidden trick.

28...♕c7

This seems to release the pressure against d4, which makes my opponent's lack of alertness excusable, especially as he was in time trouble.

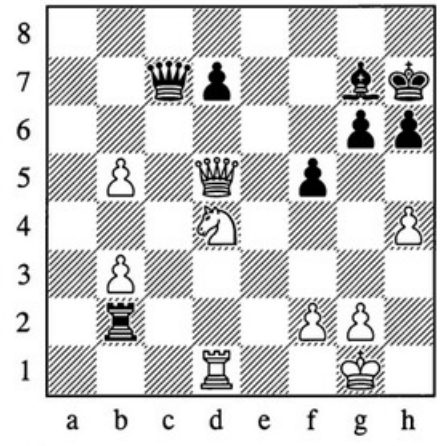
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He may have thought that I planned to activate my queen with ...♕c3 and correctly evaluated that after his answer I would have no time for that.

29.h4?

With the strong threat of demolishing my king's position with h4-h5.

The best answer would have been 29.♕c4, avoiding the trick, and planning to proceed with h4-h5.



29...♖d2!

My opponent realized immediately that something serious had happened. Unfortunately, his promising position had already turned into a lost one. Black wins the knight and, after a few defensive moves, the game.

30.♖e1

Looking for practical chances.

White cannot save the pinned knight after: 30.♖xd2 ♕c1† 31.♔h2 ♕xd2

30...♖xd4 31.♕f7

I assume that White played on partly because he was short of time, but mainly because he was in shock. The threat of ♖e7 is strong, but the white king is exposed now and I have simple ways of counterattacking.

31...♖xh4

Not only grabbing a pawn, but also preventing the rook lift because of ...♕c1†.

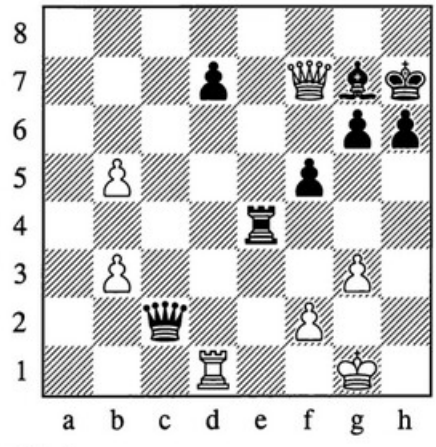
32.g3 ♖e4

Defending the e-file against the intrusion.

33.♖d1

Persisting with the idea of doubling the major pieces on the seventh rank.

33...♕c2



34.♕xd7

Once again, the rook could not abandon the back rank, because of mate in a few moves: 34.♖xd7 ♖e1† 35.♔g2 ♕e4† 36.f3 ♕e2† 37.♔h3 ♖h1 mate. White is just one tempo too slow.

34...♕xb3

After having given up the possibility of attacking, White saw no point in playing on a piece down.

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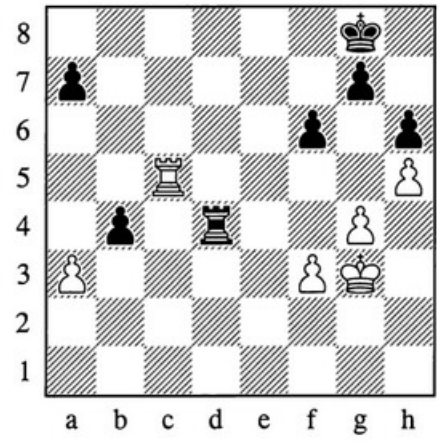
In some games, I had to build up the trick gradually, encouraged by the feeling that my

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opponent would not be aware of my hidden intentions. Here is such an example in which a simple but well masked tactical nuance was available despite the reduced amount of material.

Rob Bertholee – Judit Polgar

OHRA-B, Amsterdam 1990



I knew that my winning chances were not very high, despite my extra pawn. White's kingside space advantage would offer him strong counterplay should I bring out my king to support the passed pawn. When the next move was played, I thought that there may still be some way to trick my opponent.

34.♖a5

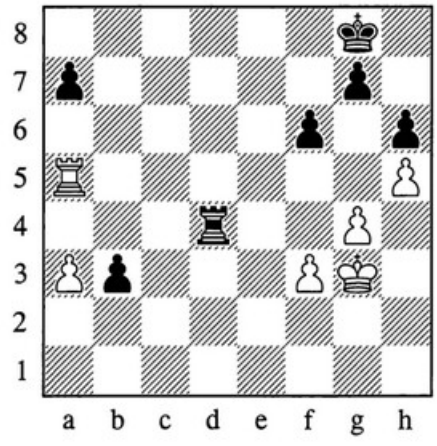
This is not a mistake, but keeping the tension is hardly a good idea, especially since he only had two minutes to reach move 40. I believe that Bertholee was convinced he could control the position completely.

After 34.axb4 ♖xb4 35.♖a5 ♖b7 my position would be too passive to hope for a win.

My opponent probably thought that after 34.♖a5 bxa3 35.♖xa7 his rook would be even more active, but he failed to notice that I can keep things messy.

34...b3

I played this after only one minute of thinking, without displaying any shadow of excitement, despite having planned the trick already. This way, I avoided raising any suspicions in my opponent.



35.♖xa7?

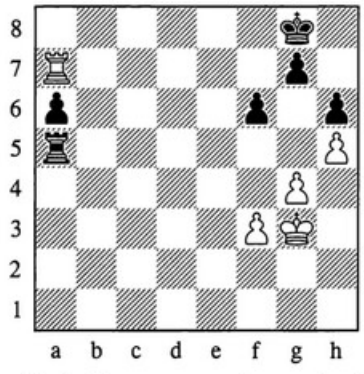
Bertholee probably trusted that the passed pawns would be exchanged with an inevitable draw. When the opponent has such an advanced pawn, one should check things twice, though.

Of course it is psychologically very difficult to admit that you have started using the wrong plan, but this is something a chess player has to deal with all the time – keeping a self-critical approach and the sense of danger alive. It is always better to cancel a bad plan in time rather than blindly follow it.

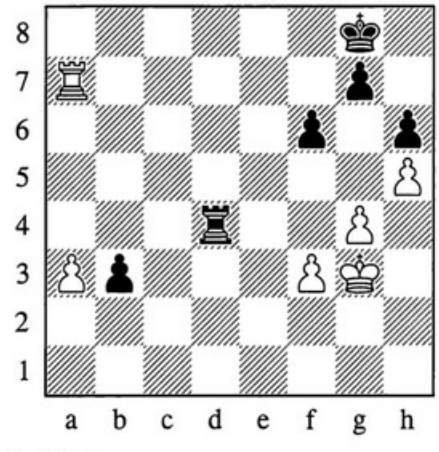
The only saving move was 35.♖b5!, taking the b-file under control before it is too late. The following line is not as simple as it would have been after taking on b4 on the 34th move, but Black would still not be able to achieve much: 35...♖d3 36.a4 ♔f7 Black is several tempos away from threatening anything concrete, which allows White to slowly improve his position. 37.a5 Aiming to create a dangerous candidate for promotion with ♖b7xa7 at the

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right moment. 37...a6 38.♖b6 ♖d5 The only way to maintain the material advantage. 39.♖xb3 ♖xa5 40.♖b7† White hurries to place his rook behind the passed pawn, putting the enemy kingside under pressure at the same time. 40...♔g8 41.♖a7



The black king cannot leave the kingside pawns unprotected, because that would allow White a dangerous majority. Since the a-pawn cannot be promoted with the help of the rook alone, the position is drawn.

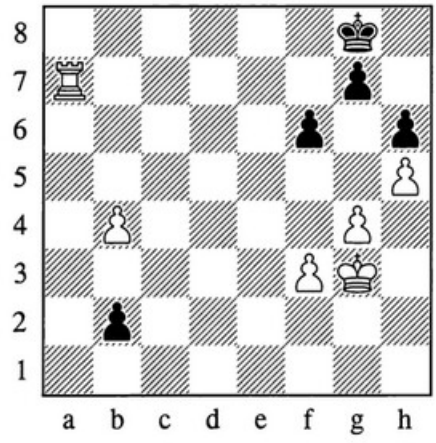


35...♖b4!

Suddenly, the black pawn is unstoppable. After playing this move for a moment I feared my opponent would have a heart attack, so strong was his shock. One minute earlier he was counting on a draw, now the position is lost...

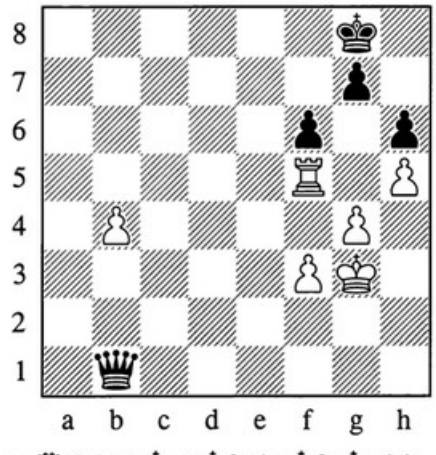
36.axb4 b2

Remarkably, the mighty rook has no way of controlling the b1-square. The b-file has just been blocked and the a1-square is unavailable.



37.♖a5 b1=♕ 38.♖f5

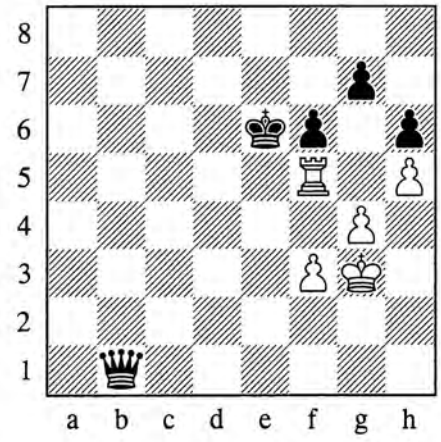
Since White could not prevent the pawn's promotion, he has to live with it by trying to build a fortress. The rook is not that solidly placed, though.



38...♕xb4 39.♔g2 ♔f7 40.♔f2 ♔e6 41.♔g2 ♕b2† 42.♔g3 ♕b1!

Threatening to simplify to a winning pawn ending with ...♕xf5. This idea would not have been available had White been allowed to keep a passed pawn on b5.

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Moving the rook to a5 or c5 would lose it to ...♕e1† or ...♕g1†, respectively, so there is just one last chance left.

43.♖f4 ♕b8!

Creating a deadly pin. White is in zugzwang.

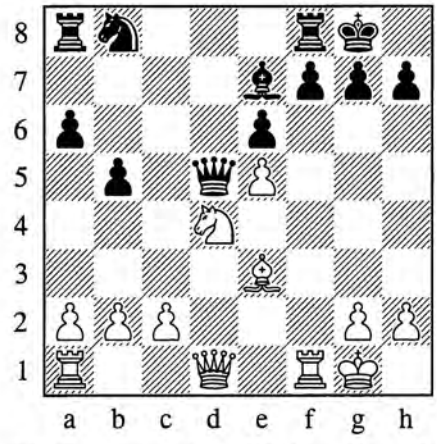
0–1

It is interesting to mention that players sometimes fail to anticipate the danger even if given a hint about it. In the next game, my opponent remained unsuspecting even after I delivered my first, not yet decisive, trick.

Judit Polgar – Szilvia Szalay

Gyongyos 1985

Gyongyos is my dad's old hometown, one hour away from Budapest where we lived. During the tournament, we stayed at his sister's home, which allowed us to spend some fun time with our cousins.



Black seems to be solid, but she is slightly underdeveloped. Her pieces are less safe than they may seem at first sight. If given the chance to play ...♘c6 Black would be absolutely fine,



Playing blitz with Sofia, Gyongyos 1985

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so I had to take advantage of the favourable moment.

My next move was planned in advance. I knew the theme and wanted to give my opponent the opportunity of falling into a second, this time deadly, trick.

15.♘f5!

This gives White an advantage, but Black is still in the game. The knight is taboo because the queen would be hanging and Black has no time for 15...♕xd1? because of 16.♘xe7†.

15...♕b7?

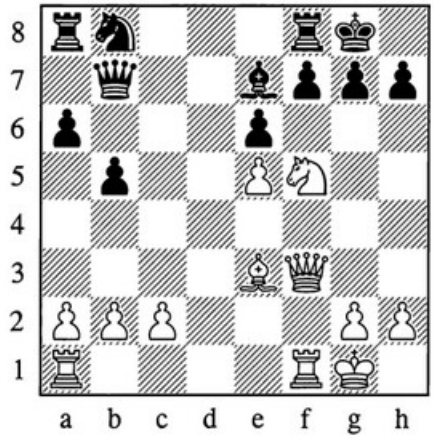
Curiously, after having been warned about tricks being available in the position and her very young opponent seeing them, Black does not feel the danger yet. Or maybe she simply panicked and lost concentration after the unexpected previous move?! In chess as in life, the best thing when you receive a shock is to remain calm and objective.

15...♘c6 would be the calm and correct reaction. White has nothing more than an edge after: 16.♕xd5 exd5 17.♖ad1±



16.♕f3!

A strong zwischenzug – we will have a special section dedicated to this theme. The move reiterates the same theme: overloading the black queen, but this time she is not defended (as she was on d5). Besides, the a8-rook is hanging and all these elements cause Black to lose material.



16...♖a7

16...♘c6 allows another elementary trick: 17.♕xc6!

17.♘xe7†

Possibly a more technical continuation would have been 17.♕xb7 ♖xb7 18.♘xe7† ♖xe7 19.♗c5, which also wins the exchange, but after having simplified the position.

But at that time I almost always chose to keep the queens on the board, even when I had a material advantage – with queens on the board I felt more "at home". It is curious that in a later chapter we will find out that I did not hesitate to exchange queens if this was obviously the best way to consolidate the advantage, though.

17...♕xe7 18.♗xa7 ♕xa7† 19.♔h1

And I soon won.

...1–0

In the examples examined so far, I prepared well masked tricks, which my opponents failed to foresee. I also had many games in which my

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opponent made a trick possible without really being pushed to. We will have a look at a few instructive fragments on this theme.

Thessaloniki Olympiad 1988

This was my first ever participation in an Olympiad and also the first major success of the Polgar sisters. Susan played on the top board, I was second and Sofia a reserve; Ildiko Madl played on the third board. The gold medals we achieved proved to the world that we did not obtain our previous results by chance.

I remember that on our way to Greece we were evaluating our chances. My sisters and I decided that we should go for the gold medals, while Ildiko was more modest and said she would be happy with a medal in general.

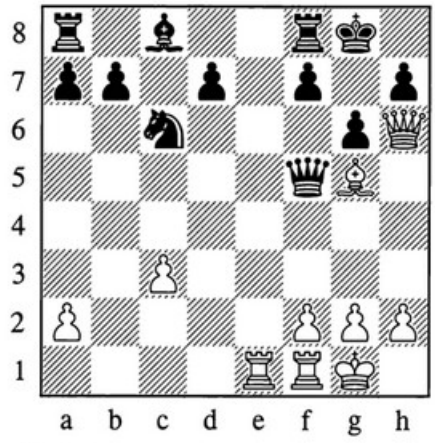
The team was unusually young, with an average age of 16. I was 12, Sofia had just turned 14, and Susan and Ildiko were 19 years old. Even by today's standards, this is not a bad record. When journalists first saw us in the press centre, they thought that our participation might add some colour to the general story. While the tournament was advancing, it was becoming clear that we *were* the story of the Olympiad.

I only took one day off throughout the 14 rounds, obtaining a fabulous score of 12½ out of 13! My teammates, who played at my left and right, confessed that the convincing manner in which I won most of my games gave them confidence. It is not bad to start a match on three boards with the score at 1–0, they said.

I was pleasantly surprised to learn that even Kasparov had remarked on my play. I was told that he was standing behind me when I delivered the following combination, in my tenth round game in our match against Bulgaria:

Judit Polgar – Pavlina Chilingirova

Thessaloniki Olympiad 1988



17.♕xf8†!

Black resigned in view of mate in two: 17...♔xf8 18.♗h6† ♔g8 19.♖e8 mate.

The fight for first place turned out to be a close and highly dramatic affair. Our only rival was the Soviet Union, which at that time was surrounded by an aura of invincibility. Indeed, they had won all the previous Olympiads, with the exception of Haifa 1976, where they had not participated!

On the day off after the tenth round, the Soviet team suffered an irreparable loss. Their second board player, Elena Akhmylovskaya, who was then their main scorer with 8½ out of 9, married the captain of the American men's team, John Donaldson. Those who have spent part of their lives in the communist era, will understand that this operation had to be carried out with the strictest secrecy and that Elena needed to leave for the US immediately afterwards. The Soviet team was weakened and had to play the remaining four rounds without a reserve.

During a casual walk that same day, we had a long conversation with Garry Kasparov. Actually, he was chatting with Susan mainly, while the rest of the family followed them at

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a close distance, wondering whether this was really happening – to be in the company of the great champion. At that point we had 23½ points and were trailing by 1½ points with 4 rounds to go. Garry estimated that 10 points out of 12 would be enough to win the gold medals.

His prophecy proved correct: we scored half a point less than his target, with a total of 33 points. The Soviets finished just half a point behind us, with a big margin between them and the rest of the teams.

For my individual result, I was awarded the gold medal on the second board and the medal for the best rating performance of the Women's Olympiad.

Back in Hungary, I was voted second in the sportswoman of the year vote, while the team won third prize in the women's team section. One could hardly dream of more...

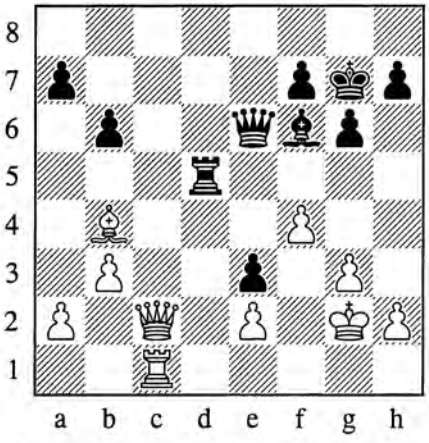


Gligoric presenting me with the gold medal for Board 2

This was the position I had as Black against Borisova after my 32nd move:

Borislava Borisova – Judit Polgar

Thessaloniki Olympiad 1988



This game was played in the last round and the tension was huge. We shared first place with the Soviets and everything was going to be decided by the last matches. Our rivals played against the Netherlands while we faced Sweden.

Recently, I discovered a video with sequences from this dramatic match. I am surprised to see how calm I was in this critical situation. On the contrary, Susan looked very nervous during her game with Pia Cramling, the last game to finish in our match.

Black's position is more active, with all the pieces on dominating squares. Besides, the white king is exposed.

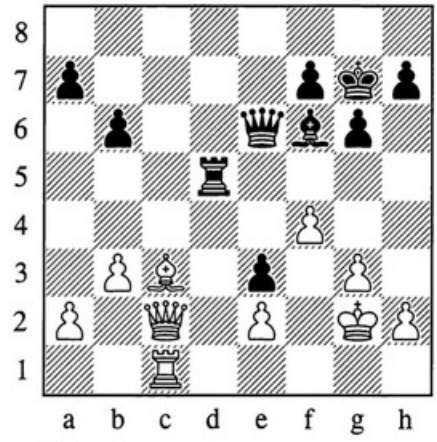
My opponent, who had only six minutes left to reach move 40, felt the urge to provoke some simplifications in order to ease her defence.

33.♗c3?

The possibility of capturing on f6 with check seems to make the last move viable, but the white king also is exposed...

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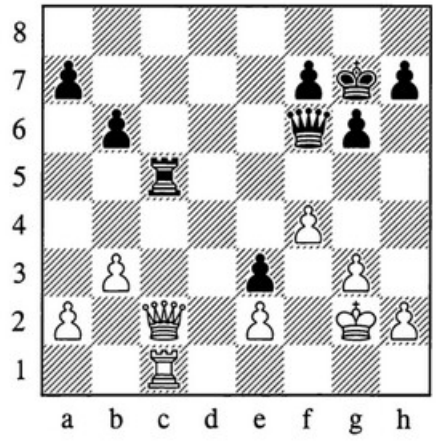
I must confess that I had anticipated 33.♗c3 when playing my previous move (32...♕f5-e6). This was a bit more than a speculative policy. I just wanted to prevent White's most natural freeing move and ensure that I would maintain my domination for as long as possible.



33...♖c5

Of course, she had seen this, but relied on the fact that the next move removes the pin with check.

34.♗xf6† ♕xf6



Suddenly, White must lose material. If she retreats the queen to b1 or d1, then ...♕c6† would create a double attack, winning the rook. It is instructive to see the way the queen arrives behind the rook with gain of time, adding force to the attack against c1. The exposed position of the white king is as important as the vulnerability of White's pieces in my game against Greenfeld (page 13).

The same video mentioned above revealed an amusing episode I had forgotten. Being short of time, my opponent played 35.♕xf6†!!. I immediately pointed out that the queen was on c2, but she needed a few seconds to understand what was going on. Then she nervously shook her head in disbelief...

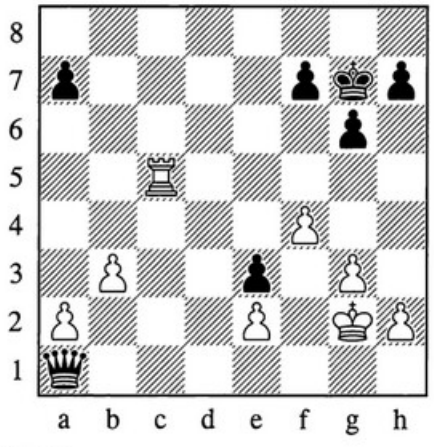
Despite the shock, she found the best practical chance.

35.♕xc5

From a practical point of view this was the only way to fight on, at least for a few moves. Just as in the game against Bertholee, there is some feeble hope of constructing a fortress.

35...bxc5 36.♖xc5 ♕a1

Attacking a2 and threatening ...♕e1 at the same time. This kind of queen infiltration is typical when breaking a fortress.



37.♖e5

The attempt to keep the second rank defended would leave the rook trapped after 37.♖c2 ♕d1 38.♖b2 ♕c1!.

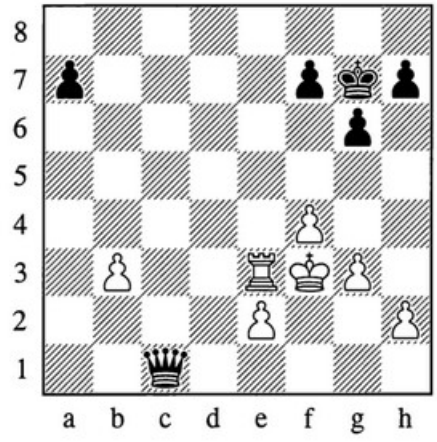
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37...♕xa2 38.♖xe3 ♕d2 39.♔f3

It is essential to keep the rook on e3, defending both b3 and e2.

39...♕c1

Continuing the attacking operations along the first rank.



40.h4

40.♔f2 would lead to similar play after 40...♕h1 41.h4 ♕h2† 42.♔f3 ♕g1.

40...♕f1†

Forcing the king to step out of the fortress is another typical method in such positions. The availability of several checks creates additional tactical motifs.

41.♔e4 f5† 42.♔d3 ♕d1† 43.♔c3 a5

There are many ways to seal the victory. The last move takes an important square away from the king, putting White in zugzwang. The rook cannot move along the e-file because of ...♕e1†, winning the g3-pawn. Therefore, the king has to advance, leaving the second rank vulnerable.

44.♔c4 ♕d2 45.♖e7† ♔f6

Threatening ...♕c2† followed by ...♕xb3 and ...♕xg3.

46.♖b7 ♕c2†

White has to allow either ...♕xb3† or ...♕e4†, winning the rook. Therefore, she resigned.

0–1

The blunder that allowed the decisive trick in this game was provoked by White's natural desire to release the pressure. In the next game, a similar mistake was committed by a player who is famous for being extremely tricky himself!

Judit Polgar – Viswanathan Anand

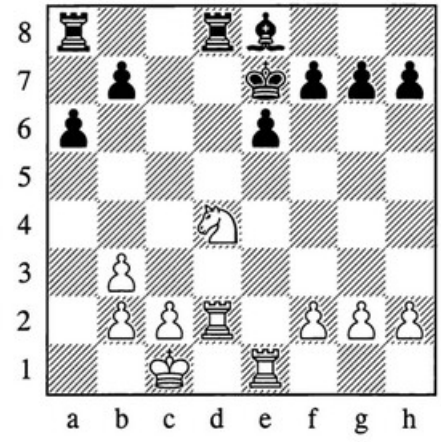
New Delhi 1990

This game was my first ever victory against a player who became World Champion at some point of his career.

I first met Anand slightly earlier, during the 1988 Olympiad when Frederic Friedel, the co-founder of ChessBase, who was supporting him and knew my family as well, suggested that Vishy could pay us a visit in Budapest. This idea came true in the beginning of 1989 and I remember it as an unbelievable experience. We played many blitz games and I could barely make a draw or two. My sisters and I were comparatively strong as blitz players, but he seemed to be from another planet. He was just so good, so tricky(!), it was clear to me that he was a genius. His outstanding talent made everything come naturally to him, based on rapid and accurate calculating.

For some reason the present game took an entirely different course from our friendly encounters.

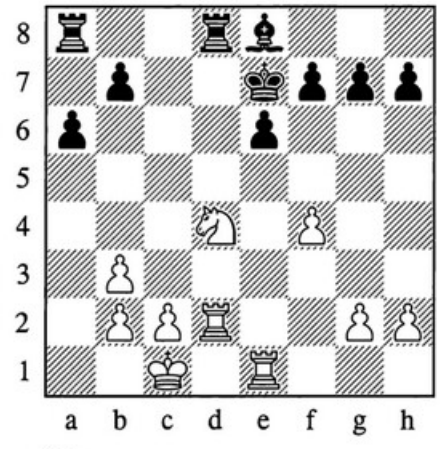
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White's position is a bit more active, but it is not very likely that I can force an advantage. I noticed that Black cannot activate his play with ...♖d5 followed by ...♖ad8 yet and so I decided to strengthen my position with a generally useful move.

19.f4

With the unpleasant threat of disrupting Black's central structure with f4-f5. This is probably the best way of fighting for the initiative, since against neutral moves Black could gain space with ...a5 or ...g5, reaching a dream position.



19...♖d5?

Just as in the previous game, the opponent sets up a trick against himself, in a rushed attempt to release the pressure. Vishy committed this, for him, atypical blunder because he wanted to combine defence (meeting f4-f5 with ...e5) with rapid piece activation.

I found some interesting information by checking my scoresheet: up to this point, Anand had spent 11 minutes and played his last move after just two minutes. He was famous for being the fastest player on earth, even when playing top players. As a rule, he rarely spent more than half an hour for the whole game. I was pretty fast myself, but had spent "as much as" 18 minutes so far.

The best defence would have been 19...♔f6, getting out of the pin. A possible continuation would be 20.g4 h6 21.h4 ♖d6 22.g5† hxg5 23.hxg5† ♔g6 when White has gained even more space and the king has been driven away from the centre, but things are not entirely clear. The far advanced pawns may become vulnerable, especially if the knight moves away, allowing ...♔f5.

Maybe I should refrain from the whole attacking operation, but then Black's position would have been entirely viable.



20.♘xe6!

Winning a pawn.

20...♖xd2

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20...fxe6 loses even more material after 21.♖xd5.

21.♘d4†!

My two-move trick is the kind of idea that either comes to your mind instantly or you miss it entirely. This is why it is important to know such patterns by heart, so that it all comes naturally.

The knight could have jumped to other squares, but on d4 it is best placed, enjoying stability in view of c2-c3 and creating a barrier in front of the black king together with the f4-pawn.

21...♔f6 22.♔xd2

Apart from the material gain, I gained the more active position and domination of the knight over the bishop. It should be noted that the move f2-f4 proves useful, because the pawn limits the black king's options.



22...♖d8 23.c3 ♗c6?!

I think that Black should not have allowed me to gain even more kingside space with the next move, so 23...h5 would have been a better try to put up resistance.

It is interesting to observe how people react after blundering. Some strong players even lose interest after such nasty surprises, becoming unable to show their full fighting strength during the rest of the game.

24.g4 h6 25.♖e5

My rook is very strong on this square, harmoniously cooperating with the knight and the f4-pawn and keeping both wings under control. The main plan consists of a massive kingside pawn attack.



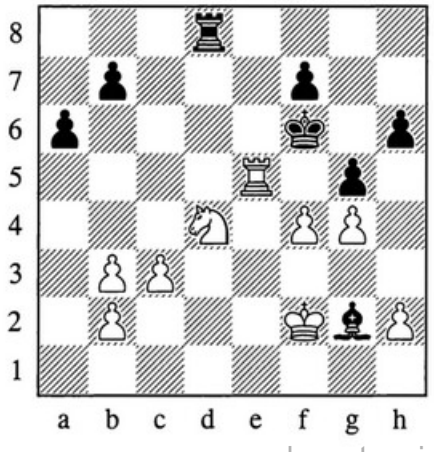
25...♗g2

Black cannot find any counterplay and is confined to playing neutral moves.

26.♔e3 g5

Anand finally loses patience. His last move tries to cross my general plan based on h2-h4 and g4-g5, but just adds force to my attack, as we will see.

27.♔f2



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27...♗d5

The zwischenzug 27...gxf4? would be answered by another zwischenzug: 28.♖f5!†, winning the bishop.

28.h4!

Since further improvement of my piece placement was not available, I decided to clear the fifth rank at the price of a temporary pawn sacrifice.

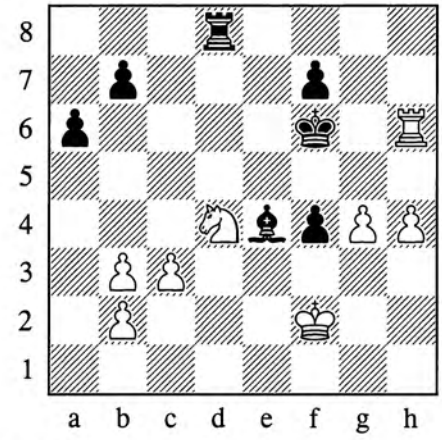
It is worth mentioning that even in simplified positions it is possible to play attacking chess.

28...gxf4 29.♖h5

Things are getting serious for Black. He cannot defend his h6-pawn because after 29...♔g6 30.♘f5 ♖h8?! the bishop would be lost to 31.♘e7†.

With his next move, Vishy will dig a hole into which he will eventually fall himself!

29...♗e4 30.♖xh6†



30...♗g6

In the vain hope of caging the rook, but little could be done to save the game. If 30...♔g7 then 31.g5 followed by ♖h6-f6xf4, with a decisive material and positional advantage.

31.h5!



With Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi at the closing ceremony

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It appears that my trick was stronger than his! After 31...♔g7 (or g5) 32.♖xg6† fxg6 33.♘e6† I would be a piece up.
1–0

In these last two examples, my opponents were induced to set the trap for themselves because of the general pressure they were experiencing. In the next game, we will see a slightly more subtle version of this kind of situation.

Tamas Erdelyi – Judit Polgar

Bagneux 1988



In the summer of 1988 my sisters and I played in a couple of events in France, which was a very nice experience from every point of view. In such periods, one cannot help thinking what a gift it is to be a chess player and have the possibility of travelling all over the world!

At the tournament where this game was played, I achieved my third and final International Master norm and soon received the title. In the previous phase of the game, I had accumulated a huge kingside space advantage, but in order to win, I had to make some progress on the queenside as well.

39...♗d8!

I planned to open the queenside with ...a6 and ...b5, to create a passed pawn and offer new horizons to my bishop. It is easy to understand that my last move is generally useful, because after ...a6 the b6-pawn would become vulnerable. The more hidden aspect, which my opponent overlooked completely, is that the tactical threat of ...b5 followed by ...♗a5† strongly restricts White's possibilities.

Anticipating a bit, I can say that my last, generally constructive, move gave White the possibility of creating the trick against himself.

40.♖d1?

Besides creating an aesthetically poor image, this move allows a huge queenside advance.

It is interesting to note that 40.♖b1? loses to a similar blow as that from the game: 40...b5! 41.♖xb5 It may appear that White is out of danger because he controls the a5-square. 41...♔d6! This dispels all the illusions. After defending the c5-pawn, Black will push the rook back with ...a6, followed by ...♗a5†, winning.

In principle, any king move would have been playable, although Black's queenside plan based on ...♔e6-d7-c6, ...a6 and ...b5 would have remained dangerous anyway.

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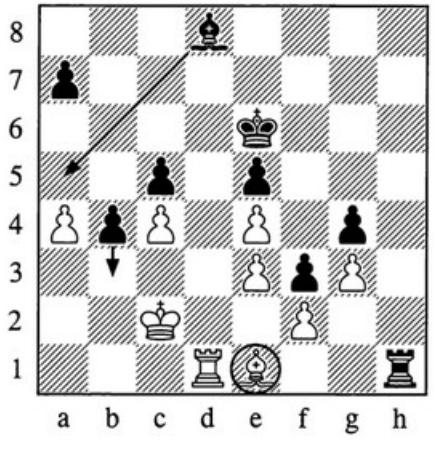


40...b5!

In the event of careful defence by White, I could have advanced this pawn after a laborious phase of preparation, but after White's mistake I was spared a lot of effort. The pawn is taboo because of ...♗a5†, winning the bishop.

41.♔c2 b4

Advancing the b-pawn without allowing pawn exchanges (as after ...a6 and ...b5) yielded me important benefits. White does not have the possibility of controlling the a5-square and the passed b-pawn is more dangerous than the c-pawn would have been, because of the possibility of dismantling the enemy defensive system with a well-timed ...b4-b3.



42.♔b3

42.♖xd8 ♖xe1 leads to a winning rook ending, due to the chronic weakness of the f2- and a4-pawns.

In principle, trading rooks would simplify the defence of the fortress, but 42.♗d2 is flawed tactically: 42...b3† 43.♔c1 b2† wins the rook.



42...♗g5

Preparing a sacrifice on e3.

Another way of undermining the enemy kingside structure would have been 42...♗h4, threatening ...♗xg3, for instance: 43.gxh4 g3 44.fxg3 f2, winning the exchange.

43.♔c2



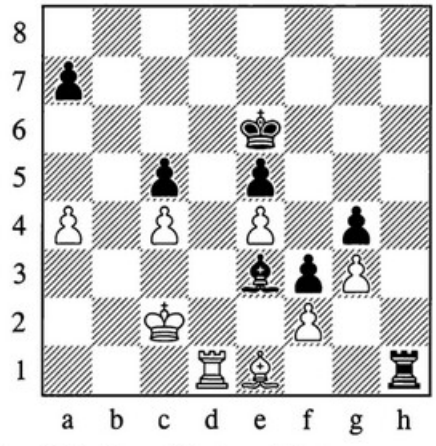
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43...b3†

This is good enough to win, but a more precise move order would have been: 43...♗xe3 44.fxe3 b3† 45.♔c1 (or 45.♔d2 b2 followed by ...f2 when one of the pawns promotes) 45...f2 46.♗xf2 b2† White loses his rook and soon the caged bishop too.

44.♔xb3 ♗xe3 45.♔c2

White deviates from the line above, prolonging his suffering a bit.



45...♗d4 46.a5 ♖f1 47.a6 ♗xf2

And I soon won.

...0–1

Tricks sometimes come in pairs, thus complicating the opponent's task. In the next example, my position was critical and all my opponent needed to do in order to win was to anticipate the threatened sequence, which would have allowed him to find the right move order.

Starting from 1984 I frequently visited Bulgaria and played in many tournaments. Before 1990, there were strong restrictions regarding travelling to western countries. Individuals could occasionally obtain an exit visa, but the rule was stricter when several members of the same family travelled together. So in order to practise our chess, we had to look for tournaments in the communist countries.

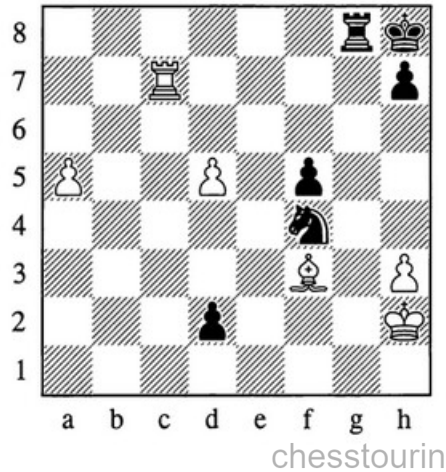
In Bulgaria there were many events with different sections, so that Susan could play in the stronger closed group and Sofia and I participated in the open sections. Playing a lot helped me deal with occasional losses better. Whatever happened, I knew there would be another game the next day!

I cannot hide the fact that for a while I had a small psychological advantage over my sisters. Even when things went completely wrong in my tournament, I could always count on collecting the prize for the youngest participant at the festival!

Varna '88 was a very memorable event for me and actually 1988 was one of the best years in my career! I won many international events and raised my rating from 2365 to 2555. 190 points in just half a year (at that time FIDE published the lists every six months) is quite something. A common way of describing the strength of young players is: "You never know how strong they are, they may improve day by day, so anything can happen in a one-off game!"

Dirk Poldauf – Judit Polgar

Varna 1988



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We reached this position during the sixth hour of play, after a tense middlegame. At such a stage of the game, many subjective aspects tend to interfere, such as nervousness, time trouble, and lack of concentration. Besides, at this point I was leading the event with 7 points out of 8 games. When you play against the 12-year-old leader of the tournament and have to calculate complex variations, you may well suffer from hallucinations.

My coaches were always telling me that until the result is written on the scoresheet it is not really over, no matter how bad it may look. They meant that you might get chances until the very last moment. If you remain focused until the end, then you could catch them out! It also happens in life that we get plenty of chances, but we pass by without noticing them...

The position is sharp, but White's pawns are easier to advance. Apparently, there is no big difference between advancing either of the pawns, as they are both on the fourth rank. He could have chosen the right move only by foreseeing a cascade of tricks.

49.d6?

I had the feeling that my opponent considered that it made no difference at all which pawn he pushed. Even when several moves seem to be winning, one should choose the one that allows the opponent the least counterplay.

For reasons that will be revealed soon, the correct move was:

49.a6! ♖g2†

The same tactical idea as in the game is not effective here.

50.♗xg2! d1=♕ 51.a7

White threatens to queen with mate and I would have no saving checks.



51...♕a1 52.♖c8†

White will soon be a rook up.

49...♖g2†! 50.♔h1

The difference compared with the line above is that 50.♗xg2 d1=♕ 51.d7 does not threaten mate (the newborn queen controls the d8-square) thus allowing Black to build up an attack with 51...♘e2.

True, White can still promote with 52.♖c8† ♔g7 53.d8=♕, but I would be in time to deliver mate with 53...♕g1#.



50...♖e2!

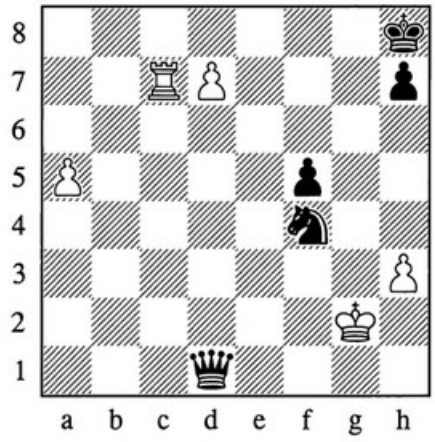
I am pretty sure that my opponent had only noticed the first trick (49...♖g2!†) but missed this second one, clearing the path for the d-pawn. White is just lost now.

51.♗xe2 ♘xe2

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White cannot stop my pawn, but can at least try to get some practical chances.

52.d7 d1=♕† 53.♔g2 ♘f4!†



Clarifying the position. Black has a decisive material advantage and after a series of accurate checks White will either be mated or lose the rook.

0–1

There is a risk that the examples presented so far create the false impression that tricks tend to be the main purpose in my games. Actually, I prefer those situations in which a well-masked trick is an important auxiliary to a strategically consistent plan. Here is a good illustration of this:

Matthias Wahls – Judit Polgar

Munich 1991

One round earlier I had defeated Anand in fine style. That game, together with some general impressions from the tournament, can be found in Chapter 14.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♕b6 5.♘b3 ♘f6 6.♘c3 e6 7.♗d3 a6 8.f4 d5 9.e5 ♘d7 10.♕g4



White's last move was played after 14 minutes of thought. In fact, we both played rather slowly in the initial part of the game. I already had a lot of experience with the Sicilian, but the situation on the board was not so familiar to me. My main problem was that it was not easy to develop the f8-bishop without weakening the kingside with, say, ...g6.

On the other hand, I kept thinking that the prolonged presence of the white king in the centre should offer me some tactical ideas. I made my decision after I realized that on g4 the queen would be hanging in certain lines.

10...a5!

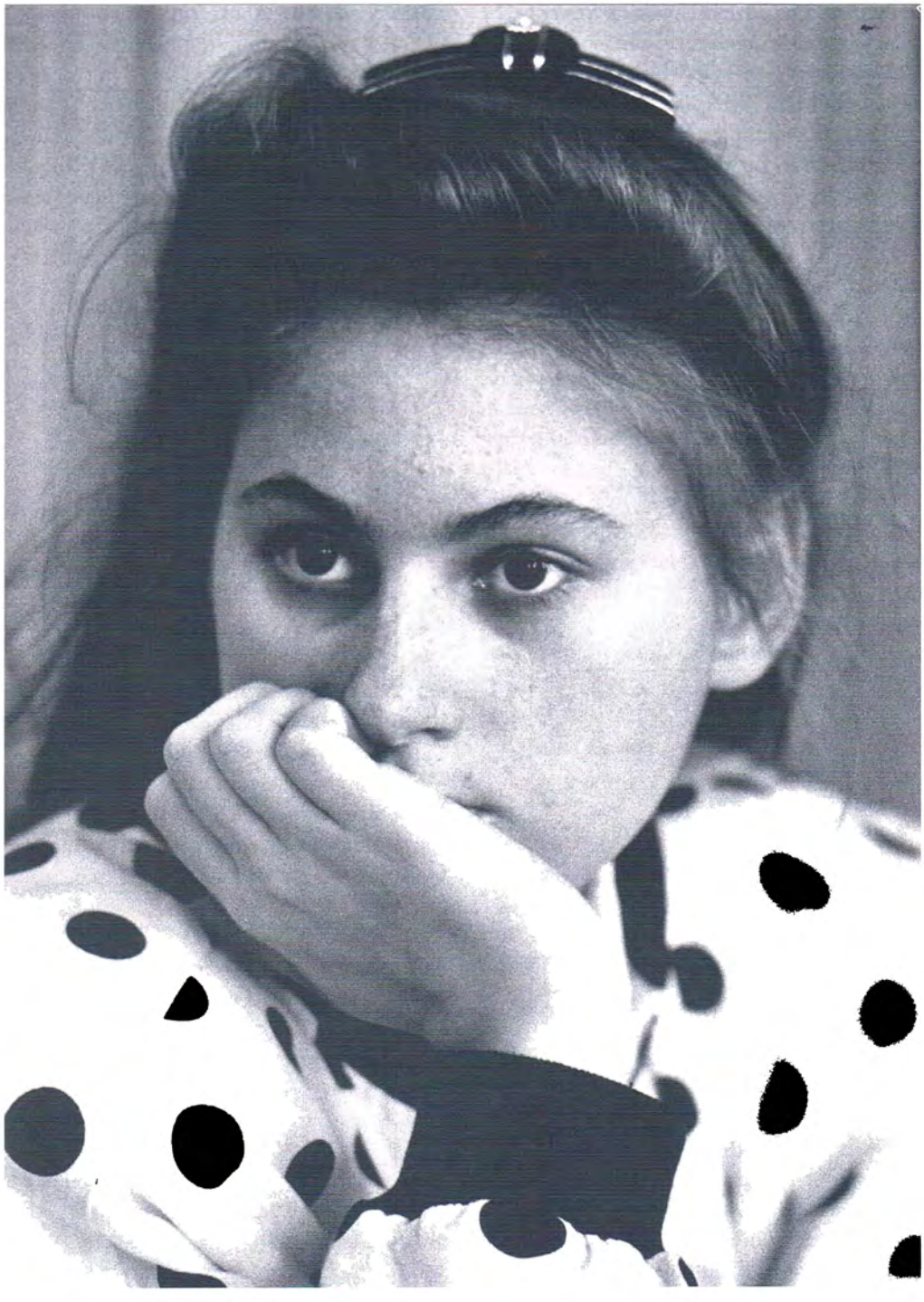
Many experienced players might have rejected this move at once, because it chronically weakens the b5-square. During my four-minute think (!) I discovered a tactical nuance that makes the move not only playable, but also very strong!

The main threat is ...a4, gaining queenside space, but White's answer seems to keep things under control.

11.a4?!

This move, taking control of the b5-square, looks the most logical; it is played almost automatically against ...a5 in many similar positions. Curiously, my opponent hesitated for 10 minutes before playing it, although he

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did not suspect any of what happened in the game. Could he have been asking himself why I had decided to commit such a positionally weak move as ...a5? In this case, a natural answer would be "Well, she is a kid after all."

It should also be mentioned that White's position would have remained difficult after other answers, too.

Trying to prevent ...a4 with 11.♗b5 would force White to give up his bishop and strengthen Black's centre after 11...d4 12.♗xc6 bxc6 13.♘e4 ♗a6. Black has the bishop pair, an active position and a mobile pawn centre. Besides, the white king still cannot escape from the centre.

White is not in time to take control of the d4-square with 11.♕g3, planning an eventual ♗e3: 11...a4 12.♘d2 ♘c5 With very active play for Black.



11...♕b4!

Unexpectedly, I create a double threat: taking on e5 with either knight, taking advantage of the undefended position of the enemy queen, and winning a piece with ...d4, based on the pin of the c3-knight. Amusingly, both members of the white Royal Family are exposed...

When setting up this trick, I had initially noticed that 10...♕b4 is not effective because of 11.♕g3, planning to meet 11...d4 with the intermediate move 12.a3, pushing my queen away from the e1-a5 diagonal. I would also underline the fact that carrying out the trick was not my main purpose. If we agree that 11.a4 is wrong because of these tactical nuances, we can conclude that 11...a5 was an objectively strong move, with the 11...♕b4 trick as an essential auxiliary element.



12.0–0

It must have been awful for Matthias to admit that he had lost a pawn at such an early stage, without having done anything that looked obviously wrong.

10...♘cxe5 13.♕e2 ♘xd3 14.♕xd3

In order to stay in the game, White must look for compensation based on the fact that I need a couple of tempos to develop and get castled. Still, my strong pawn centre and the fact that White's development is also not complete ensure an objective advantage.

Under different circumstances, I could well end the example at this moment, but there are a lot of interesting tactical nuances on the way, many of them tightly related to our trick theme. Instead of presenting them separately

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in three or four individual examples, I find it more natural to give the rest of the game in one piece.



14...♘c5

An important move, planning to make the c5-square available for the bishop. This will gain time for castling.

15.♕g3

Desperately fighting for the initiative, at the cost of weakening his queenside structure. If 15.♘xc5 ♗xc5† 16.♔h1 0–0 White would not have any compensation for the pawn.

15...♘xb3 16.cxb3



16...♗c5†!

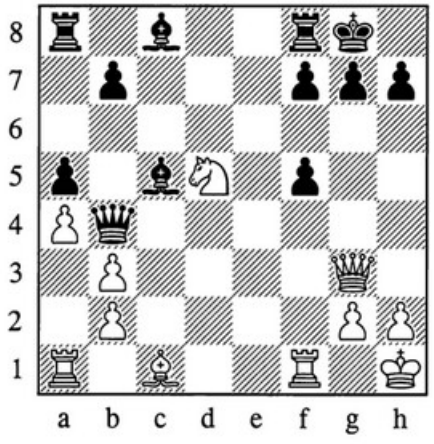
Not letting myself be distracted from the highest priority of getting castled. After the greedy 16...♕xb3?! White would gain excellent practical chances with the calm developing move 17.♗e3!. The black king would be stuck in the centre and White's pressure on the dark squares would soon become unpleasant.

17.♔h1 0–0 18.f5

Trying to mix things up.

18...exf5 19.♘xd5

With such a strong knight, White has some chances to unbalance the position. Black is better, but has to play accurately.



19...♕g4!

Annihilating the attacking possibilities based on ♗h6.

20.♕c7 ♕d4

The fight for the central squares becomes the main theme now, with some tactical nuances soon to be involved.

21.♗e3 ♕xd5 22.♗xc5

The position transforms continuously. White has achieved a small lead in development and we have opposite-coloured bishops.

The extra pawn ensures me of an advantage

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in a somewhat indirect way, by offering better protection to my king. In the next phase of the game, the player who first creates threats along either long diagonal will have the initiative. From this point of view, I am in a favourable situation, because I can play ...f6 if absolutely necessary, restricting the enemy bishop.

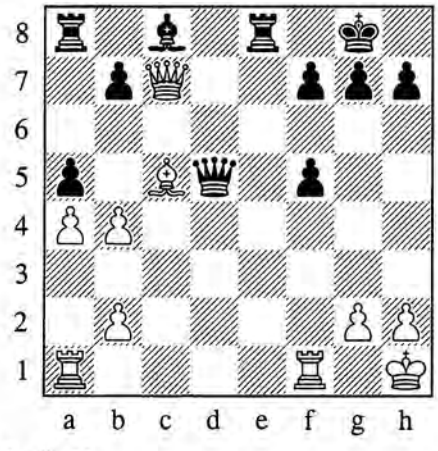
22...♖e8

This not only parries a threat, but is an essential step in the developing process: rooks belong on the open files!

23.b4?!

Trying to make the most out of his queenside majority.

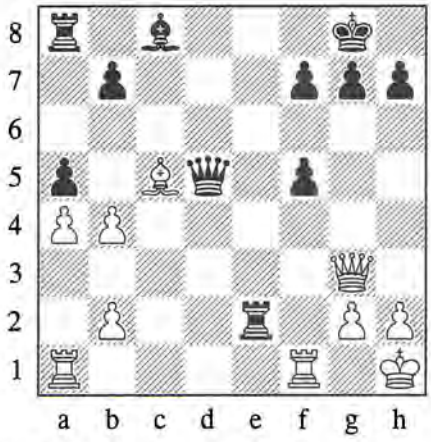
For me, piece activity has always been the most important factor, so I would have considered 23.♖ad1, forcing my queen to abandon its dominant position and although after 23...♕xb3 Black should be much better, some accuracy would still be needed. I was prepared to give up a pawn with ...b6 soon, in order to get my bishop onto the long diagonal and create deadly threats against the g2-pawn.



23...♖e2!

Immediately taking advantage of White's hesitation on the previous move; I attack g2 without needing to give up the b-pawn.

24.♕g3



24...♗e6!

After the rook's activation, I do not need to keep the e-file open anymore, so I can develop the bishop on this stable square.

The exclamation mark refers to the fact that I instinctively refrained from pawn grabbing, once again putting my faith in piece activity. It is pleasing that later analysis proves my decision was correct:

24...♖xb2 25.♖ad1 ♖d2

Apparently, Black has everything under control. I am one move away from avoiding back rank problems with ...♗e6, when my material advantage would be decisive.



26.♗d4!!

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Of course, I did not see this move during the game, but I am not surprised that such a possibility exists. Being better developed in an open position with opposite-coloured bishops, White should expect to have tricks at his disposal. Black has to capture the bishop, but this would release the pressure against g2, thus freeing the white queen from her defensive task and allowing her to deliver a strong double attack.

26...♕xd4

26...♖xd4 27.♕e3! is a nice echo-variation.

27.♕e1!

Threatening mate in one and attacking the rook. Black's chances should be preferred after:

27...♗e6 28.♖xd2 ♕xb4

This looks promising, but why give up the exchange when you do not need to?

25.♖ad1

White eventually managed to attack my queen, but the time spent on avoiding the loss of the b3-pawn allowed me to activate my play considerably, creating the possibility of maintaining the initiative with a tactical flourish.

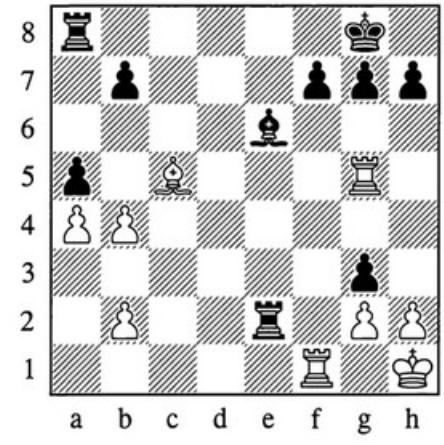


25...f4!

I was pleased to play this intermediate move, based on the fact that any of the possible pawn captures would allow mate. I cannot keep my queen in the centre and would not like to retreat either, so I preferred to force an exchange of queens, leading to a practically winning ending.

26.♖xd5 fxg3 27.♖g5

Due to the multiple pawn contacts, the position retains its dynamic character. Objectively, this should favour the stronger side, by offering a choice of ways of increasing or at least consolidating the advantage. Subjectively, it is precisely the moment of choice that can create practical problems. Sometimes, it is not at all easy to find the way that offers to the opponent the fewest possibilities for counterplay.



27...axb4?!

This is not the best move order. 27...g6! would have been more restrictive. By eliminating the danger surrounding the g7-square, Black creates the threat of ...♖xb2, without fearing ♗d4 anymore. Play would possibly transpose to the game after 28.♗d4 axb4 29.♖xg3.

28.♖xg3?!

Missing his chance. He could have taken advantage of the vulnerability of the g7-square with 28.♗xb4, when 28...♖xb2 is not appealing yet because of 29.♗c3.

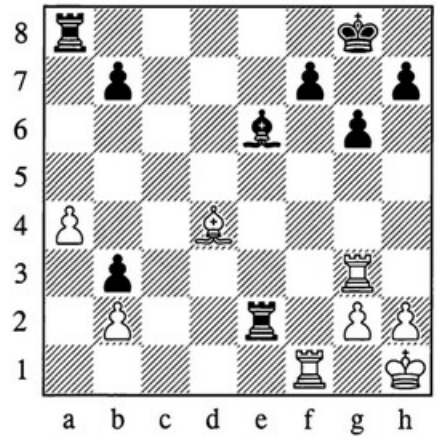
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I would have continued with 28...♖xa4 29.♗c3 f6 30.♖xg3 ♗d5 with an extra pawn, the safer king position and the more active bishop. Still, the technical problems would have been bigger than in the game.

28...b3

This far advanced and solidly defended pawn is a dangerous candidate for promotion. In the line from the last comment to the game, it will become an unstoppable force.

29.♗d4 g6



30.h3

White cannot do much to improve his position; his last move is useful for avoiding back rank problems. Had he advanced the pawn to h4, the g4-square would have become alarmingly weak.

30...h6

I was careful for no reason; I could just have taken on a4 first. On the other hand, ...h6 certainly is more constructive than ...h5, as will be revealed soon. For the time being, I would just note that both players advanced their h-pawns in such a way that the enemy bishop is restricted, at least a bit.

31.♗f6

White tries to remain active and keep some threats against my king.

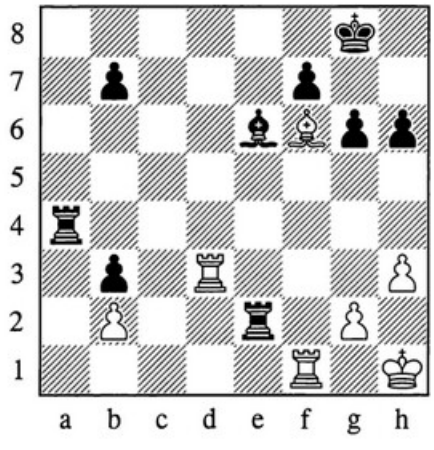
The passive 31.♖a1, defending the pawn, would have been answered with 31...♖c8 followed by doubling rooks on the second rank and spicing up the pressure with ...♗d5.

31...♖xa4

Despite the two extra pawns, the win cannot be achieved by purely technical means, because it is not easy to create a passed pawn. I will have to rely on middlegame elements instead, such as creating decisive threats against the enemy king.

32.♖d3

For the first time in a long sequence, White creates a serious threat: mate in two!



32...g5!

Retaining this possibility of clearing the path for my king is one of the reasons why I had played ...h6 rather than ...h5. Otherwise, I would have had to retreat with my rook in order to defend my back rank.

33.♖d8† ♔h7

It appears that White does not have enough resources to make his attack effective.

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34.♖h8†

This will only lead to the radical activation of the king. The attempt to keep the king caged with 34.g4 could have been answered in two ways.



The simple continuation is 34...♖f4, after which the white bishop would lose its stability.

The nicest line though is: 34...♖a8!? A deflecting trick, aiming to make the d5-square available for the bishop. 35.♖xa8 ♗d5† In order to avoid the *windmill*-mechanism after 36.♔g1 ♖g2† 37.♔h1 ♖xg4† followed by ...♖g2xb2-g2-a2xa8, White has to give up a rook with 36.♖f3 when after 36...♗xf3† 37.♔g1 h5 the black king would escape anyway, while the white kingside would remain very weak.

34...♔g6 35.♖g8†

Cutting off the king's advance is impossible, since 35.g4? allows a decisive attack after 35...♗d5†.

35...♔h5

The king's advanced position does not endanger it, but rather makes it a dangerous attacking piece – a typical situation in queenless middlegames.



36.♖d8 g4

Weakening the light squares surrounding the enemy king.

37.♖d3

Maintaining the tension in order to avoid the further activation of my king.

37...♖ae4

Rooks are usually connected along the back rank, somewhere around the 15th move. In this game, it took me a bit longer to accomplish this, but the effect is almost decisive.

38.♔g1 gxh3 39.gxh3 ♖4e3

There probably are many ways of deciding the game. By exchanging one pair of rooks, I challenge White's stability and clear the way for my king towards the centre.

40.♖f3 ♖xd3 41.♖xd3 ♔g6

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There was now not much to do on h5, so I switched away from my initial intentions.

42.♗c3 ♔f5 43.♖d4

Still hoping to create barriers in the way of my king.

43...b5

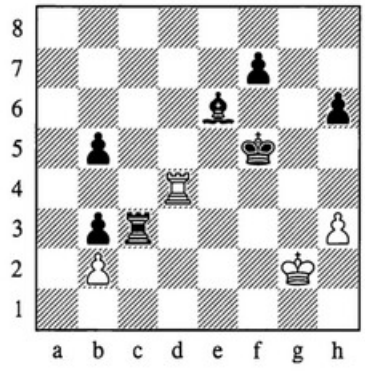
Strengthening the position before switching to the final plan. In the variation given below, the part played by this pawn will be quite important.

44.♔f1 ♖e3



White's decision to resign is justified objectively, but maybe a bit premature from the spectator's point of view. Here is an illustrative winning line:

45.♔g2 ♖xc3!



There is no other way of creating a dangerous passed pawn.

46.bxc3 ♗c4

Threatening 47...b2 48.♖d1 ♗a2.

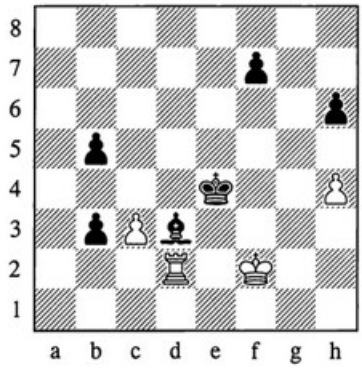
47.♖d2 ♔e4

With the threat of ...♔e3.

48.♔f2 ♗d3

Getting ready for ...♗c2 followed by ...b2, although some more preparation is needed.

49.h4



Since 49...♗c2 can be answered by 50.♖d4† followed by 51.♖b4, with chances to defend, it is important to remove the defence of the d4-square.

49...b4!

Optically, this is similar to ...♖b4 from the game against Bertholee above, but the basic idea is different. The fact that the b-file is obstructed has little relevance here.

50.cxb4 ♗c2

White would have to give up his rook for the b-pawn.

0–1

Alekhine once wrote that, as a negative consequence of his great tactical talent, he reached the point when he believed that he could save any desperate position by means of tricks and combinations.

The following game gives a hint that such optimism must be moderated. Tricks do not

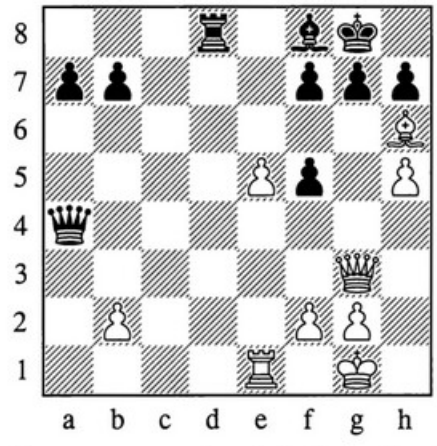
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work if the position is bad and the opponent remains alert until the end.

Judit Polgar – Juan Mario Gomez Esteban

Salamanca 1989

I travelled to this tournament with my father, and Susan was also playing. I was very unsuccessful in this event and chess players tend to have nice memories only about places where they obtained good results. However, I remember Salamanca as a beautiful university city. We lived in the main square which was an amazing experience. I remember getting a superb chess set which I still have in my personal collection.



Three moves earlier I had sacrificed the a2-pawn, getting overoptimistic about my attacking chances on the opposite wing. Who knows, maybe I underestimated my opponent?! I believe that it is a common psychological mistake among young high-rated players to think that an advantage of, say, one hundred rating points over the opponent gives them the *right* to play riskily.

25.f3

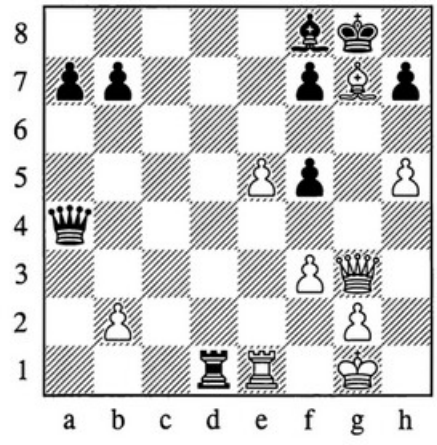
By this point, I was looking for tricks at any cost, but it happened that I was caught by my own trick! The last move aims to prevent ...♕g4, threatening ♗xg7 followed by h5-h6.

25...♖d1!

A very well calculated simplifying operation.

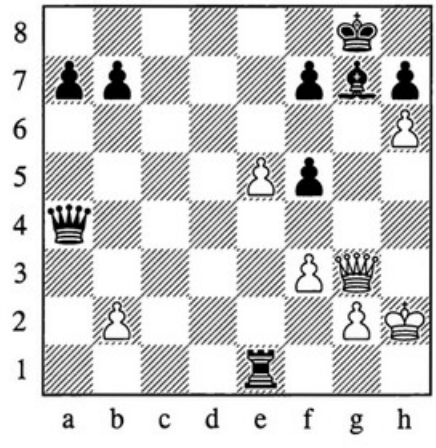
26.♗xg7?

At this point exchanging rooks would still give some saving chances, but I went for it all the way.



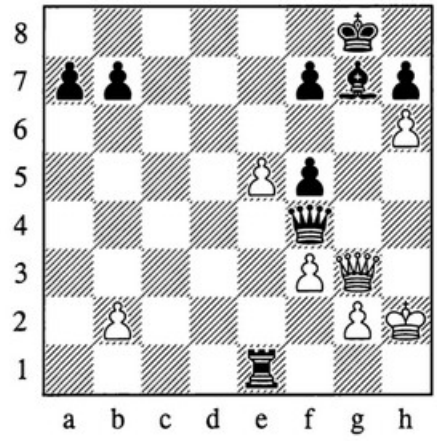
26...♖xe1† 27.♔h2 ♗xg7 28.h6

I thought that in view of the threatened mate my opponent has to play 28...♔f8, when I would have gained an advantage with 29.hxg7† ♔g8 30.♕xe1, but Black had seen deeper.



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28...♕f4!!



What a shock! The queen is pinned, making ♕xg7 mate impossible and after 29.♕xf4 she steps into a new pin with 29...♗xe5.

The even more painful thing is that there was a second flaw in my attacking "plan": 28...♕g4! would have been no less elegant and just as good as the game continuation. If 29.fxg4 then 29...♗xe5 with an extra rook for Black.
0–1

We end here the presentation of tricks classified by psychological and other general criteria. In the next four sections, we will examine them grouped according to their main concrete purpose on the chess board: mating net, trapping the queen, zwischenzug and tales with an unexpected end.

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Chapter 2

Mating Net



Sofia and I in front of the wall with 30 positions for our homework

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The game of chess was initially intended as an imitation of a then highly popular method of social interaction – war. For medieval people, the final aim of a chess player, the mate, must have looked rather natural. Indeed, any war would come to a sudden end if the king was captured or killed, no matter how things had been developing before and how many human losses the belligerent sides had suffered.

The perspective of modern players is slightly different. Fortunately, war has ceased to be a day-to-day reality for most of us and nowadays most western nations' destinies are led by Parliaments or Councils rather than by just one person. This change of perspective explains why, for modern chess players, the mate can sometimes look like an unexpected or even illogical outcome of the game. Imagine the following situation: you develop your pieces harmoniously, dominate the board, even win some material and start its systematic conversion and then suddenly you play one careless move and get mated! Would you not feel frustrated by the fact that blundering away the weakest piece on the board (the king) has cost you the whole (otherwise fully deserved) point? In modern times, this can be compared with a football match in which one of the teams is in possession of the ball for most of the time, but one unfortunate minute could seal an unfavourable result.



Playing blindfold games was one of the ways we improved our tactical abilities

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This slight paradox fascinated me when I was a kid. I used to treasure beauty in chess and felt inspired by the thought that I could sacrifice large amounts of material for the sake of delivering mate. Or, if things went badly for a long time, it was a refreshing feeling that everything could still change if I was tricky enough to set up and carry out a hidden mating plan. Maybe here is the best place to say that I consider myself fortunate because my early approach to chess was focused on its artistic aspects, thanks to my father's and first trainers' deep feeling for beauty in chess. I also must confess that I used to greatly enjoy my opponents' instant reactions when they were mated in what they thought was a favourable position. This was reliable proof that I had just managed to create something original!

Despite its limited mobility compared with other pieces, the king frequently gives the impression of a slippery fish escaping through your fingers. I once heard a very strong player say that winning material is a safer method than playing for a mate, because the latter may well prove illusory. The technical problem consists of the necessity of controlling the whole area surrounding the king, meaning six squares if His Majesty is on the edge of the board, or nine if away from it. When calculating long lines, a player may well get an incomplete overview of the king's available or denied squares.

Given the structure of my day-to-day training as mentioned in the introduction to the previous chapter, with lots of problem solving, I had little problem in spotting mating nets in practical games, even if they had to be foreseen several moves in advance. For this reason, I usually preferred to go all the way for the enemy king, rather than win material, contrary to the opinion expressed above. After all, delivering mate really meant that the game was over, while winning material would always leave some uncertainty.

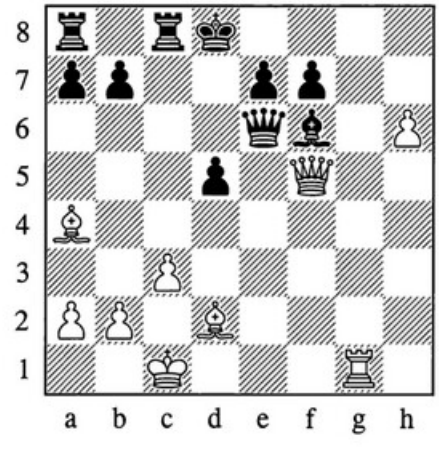
As mentioned above, a mating net is easier to build around a king that is placed on the edge of the board; we will start by examining this situation. We should also note that practical games rarely end with a mate in the middle of the board.

Judit Polgar – Tamas Halasz

Budapest (training game) 1985

Tamas Halasz was one of the main trainers for Sofia and me at the time this game was played. He was a good International Master who also loved mathematics, and so he was also giving private math lessons. Towards the end of the working day, he frequently played training games against Sofia and me at the same time, in a mini-simultaneous display.

It was not without nostalgia that I saw him establishing a similar relationship with the next generation of my family. Two years ago, during a visit to Budapest, my sister Sofia took her sons Alon and Yoav to a chess camp where Tamas worked as a trainer.



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Black is an exchange up, but his coordination is poor and the king feels uncomfortable. His chances of survival are connected with the fact that the white queen is attacked, which seems to give Black the time needed to get the king out of danger. A natural impulse is to look for an effective way of retreating with the queen, but not if one focuses on the right order of priorities. The queen definitely is the strongest piece, but the king remains the most important.

37.♗f4!

I was always pleased when playing such moves. Over the years, I have noticed that my family, friends, the audience and fans also became enthusiastic when nice and unusual things happened in my games.

Black's main plan was to escape with the king via c7, but the text move closes the trap. Mate in one is threatened and Black can avoid it only at the cost of heavy material losses.

37...♖c6

The only way to create some breathing space for the king.

38.♕xe6 fxe6 39.♖g8†

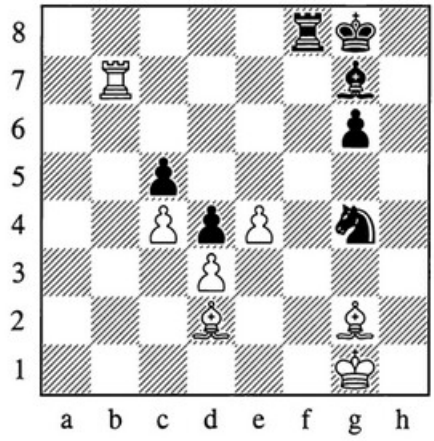
Black resigned in view of the line 39...♔d7 40.♗xc6† followed by 41.♖xa8 with an extra rook for White.

1–0

This was a simple example, in which I only had to find one good move. Taking into account that I was only nine years old, it was not such a bad effort, though. In the next game, played one year later, creating the mating net was a gradual process that was completely overlooked by my more experienced opponent. Another element of increased complexity was the enemy king's possibility of moving from the back rank to the h-file, thus slightly changing the mating patterns.

V. Nikolova – Judit Polgar

Teteven 1986



The position is strategically unbalanced, but probably offers chances to both sides. Black has a space advantage in the centre and good control over the dark squares, but White's structure is more compact and she has the bishop pair.

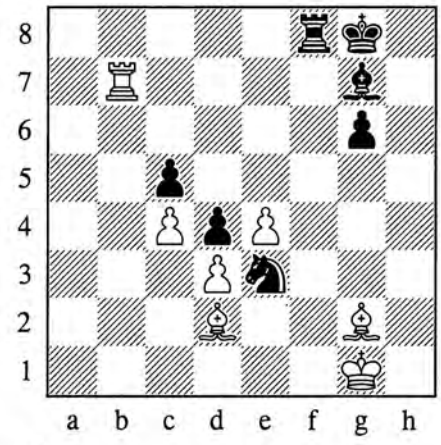
31...♘e3

I was as usual looking for ways of activating my pieces in order to get tactical chances. The knight is active on e3 and an exchange with ♗xe3 would create a very dangerous passed pawn after ...dxe3, possibly followed by ...♗d4.

Objectively, 31...♖a8 would have been better, though. Apart from preparing the rook's activation along the a-file, it also would have prevented White's dark-squared bishop from becoming active with ♗a5. 32.♗h3 could have been comfortably met with 32...♘e5, maintaining stability in the centre.

To be honest, back in 1986 I was spending most of my time during the game walking, checking out other games, and I was playing pretty fast anyway. Patience was definitely not my strongest quality, which of course is normal for kids.

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32.♗h3?

White's desire to show some activity is understandable, but leaving the f3-square unprotected is a bad idea. This is a typical case when a seemingly constructive move offers new opportunities to the opponent.

Instead, she should have activated the other bishop, thus taking advantage of my previous inaccuracy.

32.♗a5

Not only threatening to attack the c5-pawn, but also preparing to defend the h2-b8 diagonal if necessary. To be honest, I feel this move is quite difficult to find.



32...♗e5

Improving the bishop's position and waiting for White to commit herself.

32...♖a8 is ineffective in view of 33.♖b5!. After this key move, I would make no progress, while the c5-pawn would be in trouble.

Activating the rook along the f-file would be less effective than in the game: 32...♖f4 33.♗c7 ♖g4 34.♖b2 and neither side can make further progress, which makes a draw quite probable. As a result of the manoeuvre ♗d2-a5-c7, the bishop has become active, while also fulfilling defensive tasks.

33.♗c7 ♖a8! 34.♗f3

34.♗xe5 ♖a1† followed by ...♘g4† and ...♘xe5 would help me improve my position.



This time Sofia has gone for a walk to look at my game

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34...♖a1† 35.♔f2 ♖a2†

The game would have been likely to end in a draw by repetition.

32...♖f3!

Using the offered opportunity to get closer to the king and forcing the bishop to move away and leave the f1-square unprotected.

33.♗e6†

White may have overestimated the strength of this nicely placed bishop.

33...♔h8

Suddenly, White faces the threat of mate in three: 34...♖f1† 35.♔h2 ♗e5† 36.♔h3 ♖h1 mate! In this sequence, we see an optimal cooperation between my minor pieces. It is known that a bishop and a knight, when placed on squares of the same colour a small distance apart, create a long barrier in front of the enemy king. Combined with the white king's closeness to the h-file, this is enough to create deadly danger.

33...♔h7? would have been bad because the bishop would have remained pinned, but the centralizing 33...♔f8 would also have been quite strong. I preferred the text move because I thought that I would be able to deliver mate without the help of my king.



34.♖f7?

White probably thought that this would force me to dismantle the mating mechanism by either exchanging rooks or placing my rook on a more passive square.

The passive 34.♖b1 was absolutely necessary, although after 34...♗e5 Black would have a dominating position.



34...♗f6!!

This self-pinning move, overlooked by my opponent, renews the threat.



35.♗xe3

This hardly is a good moment to make this kind of concession, since the white rook will

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not be in time to stop the pawn. There was no saving line available for White, though.

35.♔h2 would have allowed me to create the mating threat in a third form, though it is closely related with the previous ones: 35...♗e5† 36.♔g1



Black is not forced to repeat moves by returning with the bishop to f6: 36...♗f4! In this position, the barrier is horizontal (h2, g2, f2) and the threat is ...♖f1 mate. White has to give up the exchange one way or another, for instance 37.♗h3 ♗h2† 38.♔xh2 ♖xf7 winning.

35.♗h3, defending f1, leads to a similar result after 35...♔g8!, which leaves White's pieces hanging.

35...dxe3 36.♖b7 e2

In view of the simple line 37.♖b1 ♗d4† 38.♔g2 ♖f2† 39.♔g3 ♖f1 followed by the pawn's promotion, White resigned.

0–1

This example proves that setting up a mating net against a poorly defended king can be done even with just a few pieces, if they are well coordinated. It took a few moves to build it up, but I was helped by the fact that my unsuspecting opponent probably thought that I was mainly concerned with positional manoeuvres.

We will now see a game in which the thematic line had a more forcing character, although the process of assembling the mating puzzle remains difficult to foresee.

Judit Polgar – N.N.

Hungary 1984



At the age of eight I was very much in the mood to sacrifice and the fact that it usually worked gave me confidence. True, I sometimes felt that I became overoptimistic, but while the overall results were positive, I felt no urge to change my playing style.

The exposed position of the black king offers White ample compensation, but I knew that I had to act quickly, before my own king got into danger too.

21.♖hf1†!

There is no other way to get close to the king.

21...♗xf1 22.♖xf1†

Despite my big material disadvantage, the attack is very powerful, with all the remaining pieces taking an active part in it.

22...♔g7

22...♔e8 would save the king, but lose the queen instead: 23.♗f7† ♔f8 24.♘c6 ♕d7 25.♗e6† White would soon be a piece up.

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23.♖f7†

So far, the play was forced, but now Black has to make an important decision.



23...♔h8?!

My opponent probably thought that his king would be in relative safety in the corner. Indeed, there is no way of delivering check without giving up more material.

Had he foreseen my small combination, he would have searched for saving chances with 23...♔h6. True, after 24.♘g4† White's attack would be very powerful and likely to lead to major material gain.

I did not calculate the consequences of this line, but intuition told me that Black should be in trouble. I also will refrain from giving a detailed analysis here, because the variation tree would be difficult to follow and the ensuing positions are not directly connected with our main theme.

Here is just an illustrative line: 24...♔g6 The relatively safest square. 25.♗xc7 The queen faces problems finding a good square, away from all kind of double attacks. 25...♕e8 26.♖f6† ♔g7 27.♗e5! Creating a deadly battery. Black cannot take advantage of the slightly hanging position of my pieces with 27...♕xe5 because of the zwischenzug 28.♖f7!† winning.

We will now focus on the somewhat unexpected outcome of the game.

24.♘g6†!!

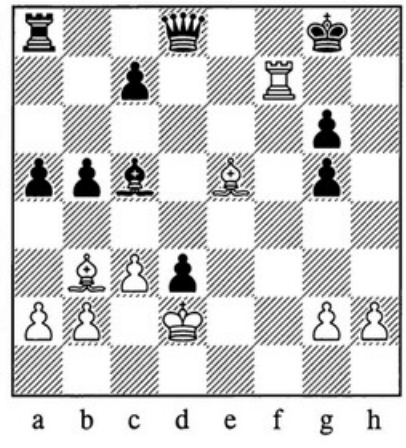
I had seen this in advance. Although perhaps not simple to spot, the game continuation is easy to calculate once you get the idea; the line has no branches at all (which was not the case after 23...♔h6).

Concretely, the text move has two main aims. The h-file is opened, offering new attacking prospects for my rook, and the e5-square is cleared for the g3-bishop. The way my pieces make room for each other in the next sequence is quite instructive.

24...hxg6 25.♗e5†

Not only taking some squares away from the king and forcing him onto an exposed square, but also clearing the third rank for the rook.

25...♔g8



26.♖f3†

The point. After the forced 26...♔h7, White mates with 27.♖h3. An example of perfect piece coordination and the kind of game that would make my dad very happy and proud of me.

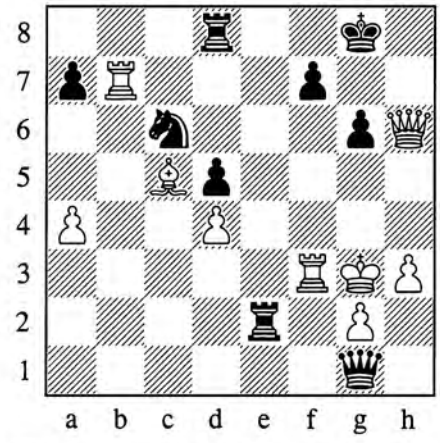
1–0

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Sometimes, the deadly mechanism has to be speeded up with a spectacular queen sacrifice. In such cases, even strong opponents can be caught unaware, as was the case in the following two fragments.

Judit Polgar – Lars Bo Hansen

Vejstrup 1989



This is a position with mutual attacks, in which both sides have reached advanced stages of their aggressive operations. Although it is White to move, Black's attack looks to be developing faster, because either capture on g2 would be with check, unlike my ♖xf7 (either of them).

We both had roughly five minutes left and I considered that in such a sharp situation it would be difficult to play the best moves until the time control. I remember the inner excitement provoked by noticing the tactical idea carried out below, but also that I did my best not to show it. It is not a good idea to give the opponent hints about the surprise you have prepared for him...

32.♔h4!?

An apparently innocuous move, as if I am closing my eyes and running due to the fear of the check on g2, without really being able to prevent the capture. In fact, my far from obvious intention was to take the g5-square under control, in order to create the threat of mate.

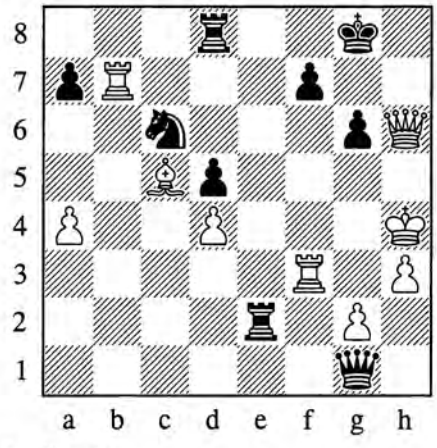
Can you see the idea?



Analyzing with Lars Bo Hansen after the game

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After the more natural:
32.♖bxf7
The game should also end in a draw if Black plays accurately:
32...♖xg2† 33.♔h4 ♕e1† 34.♖f2 ♕e4† 35.♖7f4 g5†
Leading to simplifications just when it seemed as if Black's king was getting into trouble.
36.♕xg5† ♖xg5 37.♖xe4 dxe4 38.♔xg5 ♘xd4
With so little material left on the board, neither player has realistic chances of playing for a win.



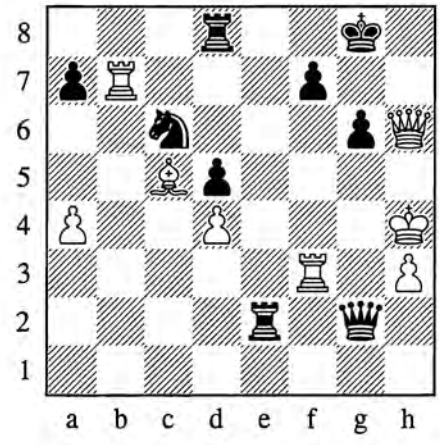
32...♕xg2?

My opponent failed to understand my true intentions and may have thought that capturing on g2 would just lead to some transposition. Instead of falling into my trap, he could have forced a draw in many ways.

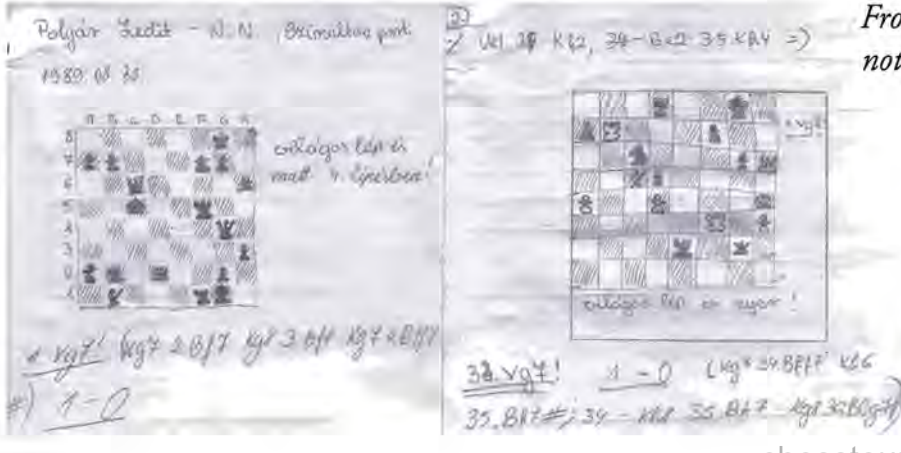
32...♖e4† would lead to a draw by repetition: 33.♔g3 ♖e2=

The more ambitious 32...♕e1† (32...♘e7!? may transpose) fails to put White in real danger: 33.g3 ♖e4† 34.♖f4 ♘e7 35.♗xe7 ♖xe7 36.♖xe7 ♕xe7† 37.♕g5 with a probable draw.

Since I was in no danger of getting the worse of it, my decision to set up the trick should not be criticized. I could have forced a draw immediately, or given my opponent a chance to go wrong. From a practical point of view, I chose the more promising alternative.



From my notebook



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33.♕g7†!

Oops... My opponent's face turned red instantly. After a few moments of double-checking the gravity of the situation, he resigned. There was no need to go for the whole line: 33...♔xg7 34.♖fxf7† If the king retreats to the back rank, a series of checks will lead to mate. The difference induced by my tricky king move is that after 34...♔h6 35.♖h7 the black king has no escape and it is mate!

Of course, 33.♕h7†! would have won in the same way.

1–0

Foreseeing the combination was less easy for Black, especially under the time pressure. First of all, it did not work one move earlier. Secondly, he may have simply overlooked the possibility of the queen sacrifice. Who would think that the attack could remain dangerous once the strongest piece surrounding the enemy king disappears?

It may well be that when playing 32.♔h4, I subconsciously was helped by the memories of a game played in a simul a few weeks earlier.

Judit Polgar – N.N.

Gothenburg (simul) 1989



On that occasion, 1.♕xg7†! also caused an immediate resignation. The mechanism is set up vertically, but is otherwise similar with that from the previous game and with the participation of the same white pieces.

By coincidence, this game was played on the birthday of a very dear person I had not yet met – my husband!

1–0

In all these examples the king's restricted mobility close to the edge of the board is a telling factor. In practical games, the back rank mate is the most common pattern related to this issue, but from a geometric point of view, the rook files can serve the same purpose perfectly well.

A combined operation is possible, too. In the next game the tactical attack against the white king starts along the a-file, then ends with a mate on the first rank.

Jonathan Tisdall – Judit Polgar

Reykjavik 1988



Due to the centralized knight and the absolute control of the h-file, my position is clearly better.

Having previously cleared the a2-square for his king, White may have thought that he had

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avoided back rank problems for the rest of the game. As we will see, one can never be sure...

The main danger for White in this position is a mate along the a-file, which explains my next move, as well as my secret hopes I placed in it.

29...♕d7

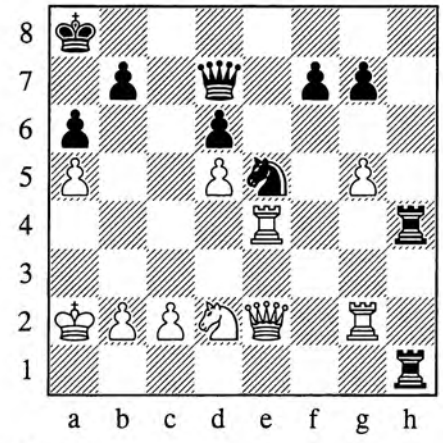
There is no immediate threat, but I intended to build up the trick step by step.

30.♘d2

Probably intended as a multipurpose move. White clears the b3-square and prepares to exchange my active knight, hoping to get some activity along the e-file.

30...♖8h4

When I played this, I was already hoping for the game continuation. Besides setting up the trap, the move is objectively strong because it takes measures against White's aforementioned plan.



31.♘f3?

Since 31.♘c4? ♕a4† wins the e4-rook, White chooses the alternate way of offering the knight exchange, failing to notice my hidden idea.

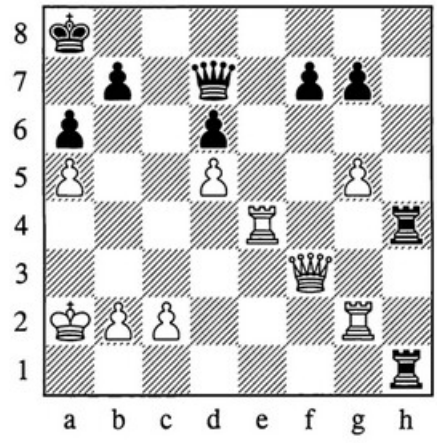
31...♘xf3 32.♕xf3

White has accomplished his plan, but suffers from a momentary lack of coordination.



Sitting at the Fischer – Spassky table in Reykjavik

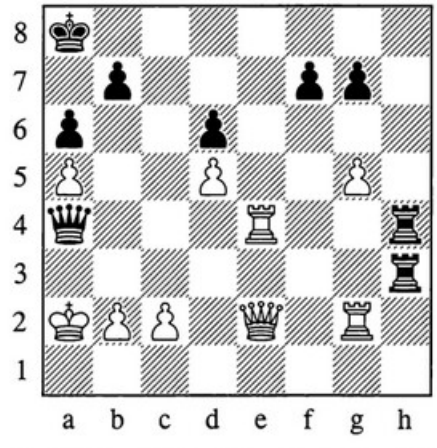
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32...♖1h3!

This rook will play an important part in the final sequence. First, it cuts off the white king along the third rank. And as we will see, it gives up the control of the back rank only temporarily.

33.♕e2 ♕a4†!



Ouch! After 34.♖xa4 ♖xa4† the king is forced to step back with 35.♔b1 when 35...♖h1† closes the deadly net around His Majesty.

The rook manoeuvre ...♖h1-h3-h1 and my piece cooperation in the final part of the game are unusual, making this example instructive and, I hope, quite enjoyable.

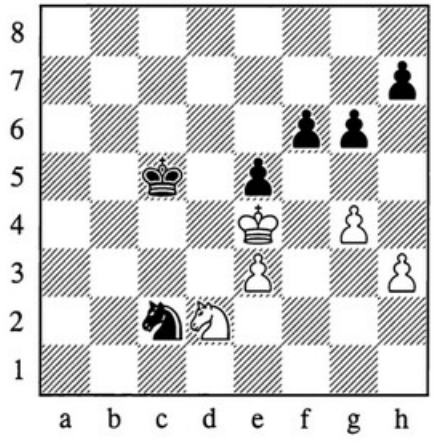
0–1

The target king being in the neighbourhood of the back rank or rook files usually helps the attacker, but it is not essential for building up a mating net. The next example features an extreme case, in which a well centralized king will get mated in a very simplified position.

Ivalinov – Judit Polgar

Targoviste 1984

This game was played right after my eighth birthday. As you will see, I was very tricky from a very young age.

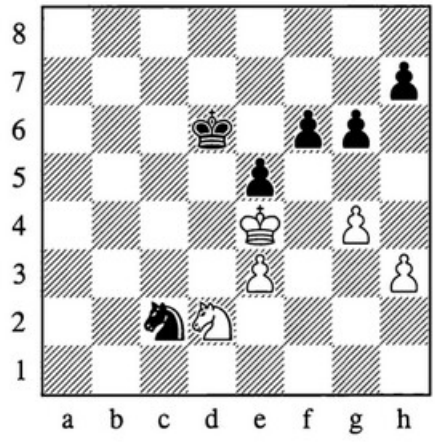


Knight endings with an extra pawn offer good winning chances, although great accuracy is usually needed. My next move looks like a simple retreat by the king in order to regroup for the technical phase of the game. My e5-pawn needed protection in view of the threat of g4-g5.

43...♔d6

Generally speaking it was definitely not my habit to move backwards. Over the years, some of my opponents started getting more and more suspicious whenever I played such a *solid* move. That definitely was *not* the case in 1984.

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44.h4?

A generally constructive move, gaining space, but also a blunder! 44.♔d3 would have avoided immediate disaster and forced me to resort to purely technical methods.

44...♘e1!

I had the feeling that even after this move my opponent failed to understand what kind of trouble he was in.

This also was the kind of move that caused me some *technical* problems. I was not big enough to reach the back rank when seated, so I had to stand up and make some effort whenever promoting my pawns, delivering eighth rank mates or simply placing any of my pieces on the opponent's back rank, as was the case now.

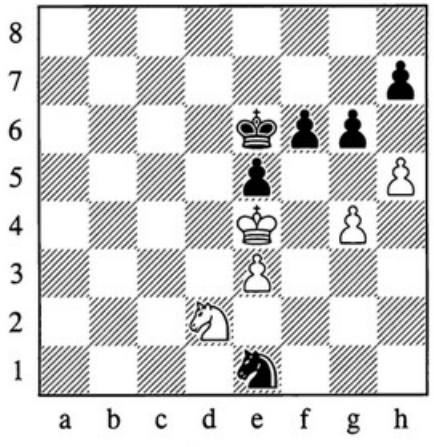


45.h5

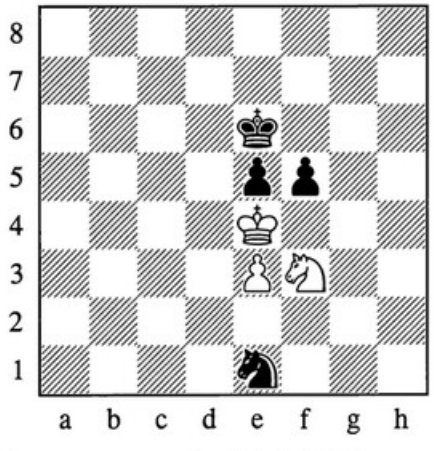
Calmly carrying out his plan. Mate could still have been avoided, but only at the cost of giving up the knight, for instance 45.♘f3 f5†!.

45...♔e6!

A nice symmetrical alignment of pieces and critical squares around the e-file, with the white king's potential refuges well controlled or blocked! White has no defence against ...f5 followed by mate.



46.hxg6 hxg6 47.♘f3 f5† 48.gxf5† gxf5#



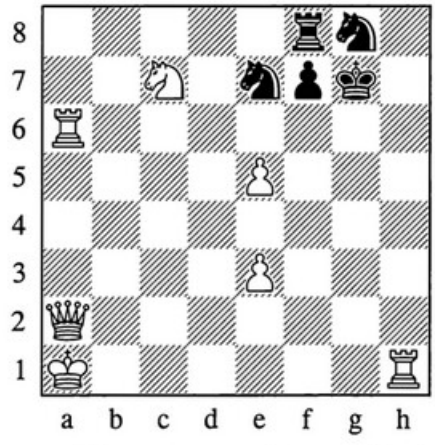
I am pretty sure that I had a big happy smile on my face after finishing this game...

0–1

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While collecting the material for the present book, I came across the following position that had impressed me deeply when I saw it in my early childhood.

Aron Nimzowitsch



White to move and mate in three!

White has a crushing material advantage, but his problem is that the composer has set the task of delivering mate in three.

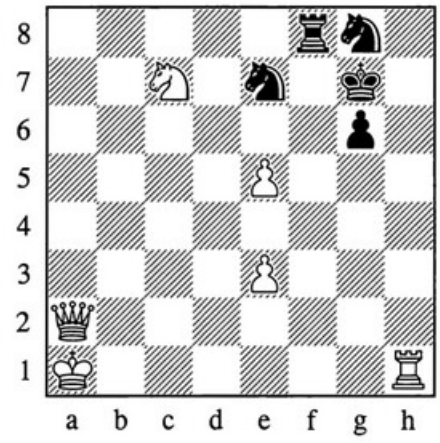
1.♖g6†!!

A paradoxical move, which seems to give the enemy king some additional freedom. Its purpose is to provoke an unfavourable set-up of Black's forces, speeding up the mating process.

1...fxg6

1...♔xg6 exposes the king to frontal attacks, leading to a sideline that is less spectacular than the main continuation: 2.♕g2† The e7-knight cannot cover the king, as could have happened in case of an immediate check on g2. 2...♔f5 3.♖h5# mate

1...♘xg6 would be answered with the same moves as in the main variation.

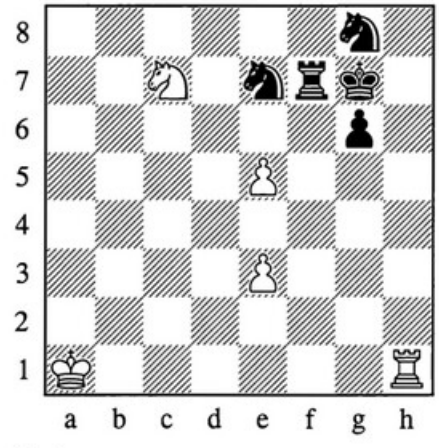


2.♕f7†!

A rather unusual idea. Black is given a choice between two different mating patterns.

2...♖xf7

A self-blocking move. Alternatively, 2...♔xf7 would leave the h7-square undefended, allowing 3.♖h7 mate!



3.♘e6#

The rook and knight switch roles in these two final lines. One delivers the deadly check, while the other one cuts off the king's retreats.

Once you become familiar with lots of such surprising setups, by solving thousands of specific exercises, spotting mating combinations like those examined in this chapter becomes much easier.

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Chapter 3

Trapping the Queen



Prizegiving at the 1988 World U12 "Boys" Championship in Timisoara

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As mentioned in the previous chapter, I used to regard trapping the queen as the second-best method of winning the game. For kids, winning the strongest piece is like getting a big scoop of ice-cream, but I must confess that some sad experiences made me more sceptical about this matter. I repeatedly underestimated the power of the enemy minor pieces after "winning" the queen and this led to some painful defeats, which made me determined to be more cautious on later occasions.

We know already that setting a mating net in order to "trap the king" requires subtlety and well-masked manoeuvres. When it comes to such a mobile and long-ranged piece as the queen, the network of controlled squares must be much greater and it usually takes more time to build the net, which sometimes makes the opponent underestimate the danger. Here is a typical case:

Judit Polgar – G. Shikov

Alen Mak 1984

This game was played before I had turned eight. My rating was already around 2000 and, looking back, it is kind of funny that at such an early age I was so optimistic and had lots of self-confidence.



My opponent decided that the b2-pawn was edible:

18...♕xb2?

Before the computer age, experienced players would not consider taking such a pawn as a serious option. Most likely, the pawn would prove to be "poisoned". Nowadays even professionals may give it serious thought and definitely would spend at least a few minutes checking such lines with their engines. In this concrete case, the intuition of a seven-year-old girl proved more realistic than the engines' initial optimism.

19.♖d3!

At this time I was mainly a concrete player, but I knew how to alternate active moves with quiet ones. In fact, we can state that the game move has the concrete, although long-term, aim of gradually creating a spider's web around the courageous queen. Since the retreats along the b-file are denied, I started by taking the third rank under control. The second and first rank will complete the narrow cage in which the queen will inevitably be caught.



19...♕xa3

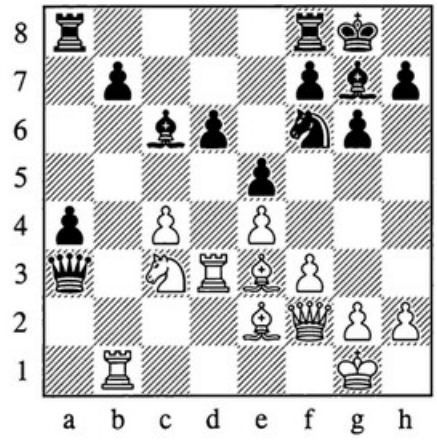
The attempt to get some kingside counterplay with 19...♘h5 can be neutralized by 20.♖b1.

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If 20...♕xa3 then play would transpose to the line from the next comment, while 20...♕c2 could be answered with 21.g3 followed by ♕f1 and ♗d1.

20.♖b1

The queen should not be allowed to escape through b4.



20...♘d7

My opponent failed to anticipate my intentions and decided to play positional moves. The decision to prepare ...f5 while transferring the knight closer to the c5-square is generally correct, but after my answer he will simply not have enough time to achieve his aim!

The engines recommend 20...♘h5 as the best practical chance, but I should win with accurate play anyway. 21.g3 It is important to prevent ...♘f4 in order to proceed with my main plan. 21...f5 This is less effective than it seems at first sight. 22.♗f1! Clearing the second rank and threatening several discovered attacks, winning the queen. For instance 22...fxe4 23.♘xe4, maintaining the integrity of the kingside.



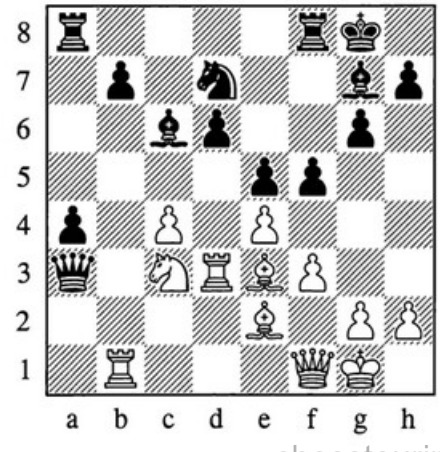
21.♕f1!!

The final link of the initial plan; I am now ready to trap the lady. By defending the b1-rook, I threaten 21.♘d5 (or 21.♘b5) 21...♕a2 22.♖d2.

To be honest, while looking at this game now, I am wondering how I could make such moves at that age. It can probably be explained by the fact that, from the start, these things were as natural to me as having breakfast after waking up.

21...f5

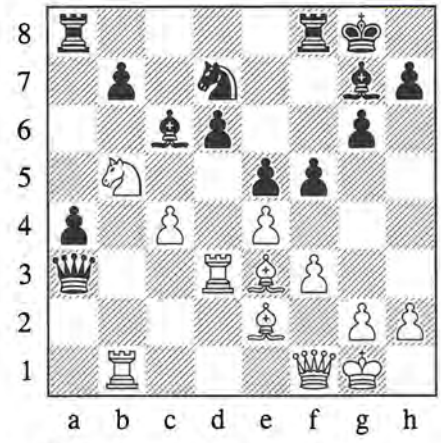
Up to this point I have played the best moves, but here I failed to notice the difference between the two possible knight jumps, probably thinking that the game was practically over already.



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22.♘b5?!

Offering Black an unexpected chance. The correct way of trapping the queen would have been 22.♘d5. With the c6-bishop's pressure neutralized, 22...♕xd3 23.♗xd3 leaves Black without any counterplay in the centre.



22...♕a2?

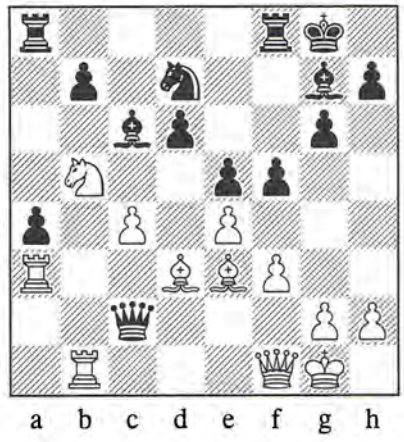
Failing to offer any resistance. Black could have made my life more difficult with 22...♕xd3! 23.♗xd3 fxe4. This important gain of time allows Black to weaken the enemy kingside, while the a-pawn is not easy to keep under control. 24.♗c2 exf3 25.gxf3 White would have to display some technique and patience to win the game.

Even when the game had finished, I had no idea at all about the difficulties I could have created for myself. This is a great example of why, no matter how good your position is, you have to remain alert until the end. This also is why I always preferred to deliver mate, because after that nothing bad could happen!

23.♖a3

23.♖d2 was good enough, but the text move has the merit of keeping the a-pawn blocked.

23...♕c2 24.♗d3



The queen is finally trapped and Black has no compensation at all. Therefore, he resigned.

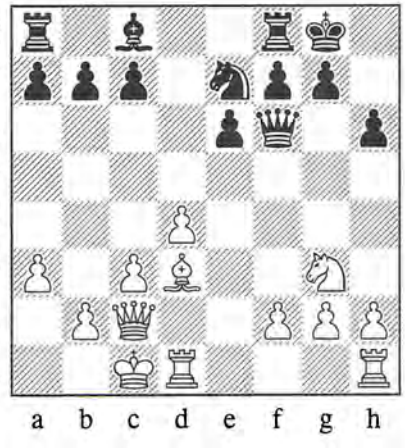
1–0

There is some similarity between this game and that against Nikolova, from the previous chapter. In both cases, the net around the enemy's key piece was built up gradually, but in this game my opponent could not do much to prevent my plan once he captured the pawn.

In the next game, played later that same year, my opponent's attention was distracted to other matters for just one move, which proved fatal for her queen.

Judit Polgar – Velichka Frangova

Teteven 1984



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Black is behind in development and she decided to speed up her queenside counterattack.

14...b5

The pawn is taboo because of the check on g5, but there is a small finesse.

15.h4!

Threatening to capture the pawn, but not only that!

15...♗d7?

Noticing only the secondary threat. She should have played 15...♕f4† and only then thought about defending the b-pawn.

16.♘h5!



Suddenly, it appears that taking the g5-square under control added the missing link to the net, something Black completely overlooked. The queen is trapped and the game is over.
1–0

Sometimes, *almost* trapping the queen is almost as good as the real thing, if the opponent has to make important concessions while making efforts to save her.

Judit Polgar – Tamas Halasz

Budapest (training game) 1985

This is another training game from '85, when we were practising the Scandinavian opening.



Black is a pawn up, but is behind in development. Moreover (and maybe not so easy to spot) his queen feels somewhat uncomfortable.

14...♗b4†

The best practical chance.

14...♗e4 would save the bishop for one move only: 15.♘e5 The queen has to leave the bishop unprotected.

15.♔f1!

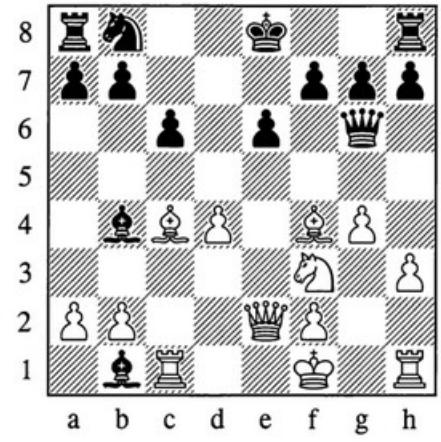
At the age of eight I already knew that I should castle in every game, but also that exceptions prove the rule! In this concrete situation I decided to focus on winning material.

15...♗b1

It may seem that this slightly artificial manoeuvre will allow Black to maintain his stability.

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The zwischenzug 15...b5 deserves to be mentioned, although after 16.♗xb5 cxb5 17.♖xc2 my huge lead in development, control over the open c-file, and Black's lack of coordination would soon bring material gains.



16.♖xb1!

The key move. At the cost of an exchange, I destroy Black's defence along the b1-h7 diagonal, after which the queen gets into real trouble.

16.♔g2? would be ineffective because of 16...♗e4! pinning the knight.

16...♕xb1† 17.♔g2 ♕g6 18.♗d3

This forcing sequence of moves has placed Black in a critical position.



18...f5

If one has to make such a move in order to save the queen, then things really are grim. 18...♕f6 would lose the queen immediately to 19.♗g5.

19.♗xf5

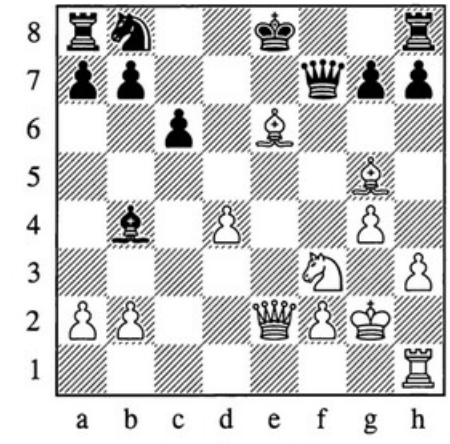
After the inevitable capture on e6, White will have a pawn for the exchange and an overwhelming attack. The game is practically decided.

19...♕f6

This loses a tempo, but at least avoids 19...♕f7 20.♘g5 followed by ♘xe6, with decisive threats.

20.♗g5 ♕f7 21.♗xe6

Black's king is exposed and he has no time to proceed with his development yet, because this is the fifth move in a row that I have attacked his queen.



21...♕c7 22.♗b3† ♔f8 23.♘e5

It is always nice to bring the knight into the attack in such an imposing way, but 23.♖e1 may have won even faster.

23...♘d7 24.♕f3† ♘f6 25.♗xf6 gxf6 26.♕xf6†

In view of inevitable mate, Black resigned.

1–0

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Chapter 4

Zwischenzug



Often our trainers would play a mini-simul against Sofia and me

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Players who have accumulated years of experience tend to develop a series of automatic reflexes for different types of situation. In positions with a concrete or forcing character, one learns that in most cases threats and captures have to be dealt with at once. If we attack an important enemy piece, we expect the opponent to move it or defend it, or if we capture a piece, we kind of expect him to capture back.

While this way of thinking may save us time and energy in the long run, it should never affect our alertness. When facing a threat, we should always take into account the possibility of answering with a stronger threat of our own. Sequences of piece captures do not necessarily have to take a fluent course, either. On every move, the available possibilities have to be checked carefully in order to avoid nasty surprises.

I would define a *zwischenzug* (the German word for an intermediate move) as a move deviating from the intuitively natural course of events (such as attack-defend or take-take). In order to describe the kind of mental flexibility you need to maintain during a game to anticipate or prepare zwischenzugs, I will resort to a comparison with a situation from real life.

A few days ago, I felt like treating myself with a new pair of shoes. I entered a nice shoe shop and started comparing models, colours and prices. I knew that I would get the desired result after a couple of hours of "work", but then by chance I looked through the window and noticed that there was a huge sale on hats next door. I immediately adjusted my initial plan and five minutes later I was on my way back home in a very happy mood with three superb hats. The basic plan of the day was accomplished, although not in the way I initially anticipated.

Looking back, I must confess that I have tried to keep this kind of open-minded approach throughout the entire process of working on the present book. There was more than just one zwischenzug on the way, and I did not hesitate to change the structure if sudden inspiration revealed that things could be improved.

We have seen a few examples of zwischenzugs in the previous chapters, but there we had other main themes in view. In my game against Szalay (page 17), the threat of capturing the knight with ...exf5 could be ignored for an instant, because ♕f3! attacked a more important piece, her queen.

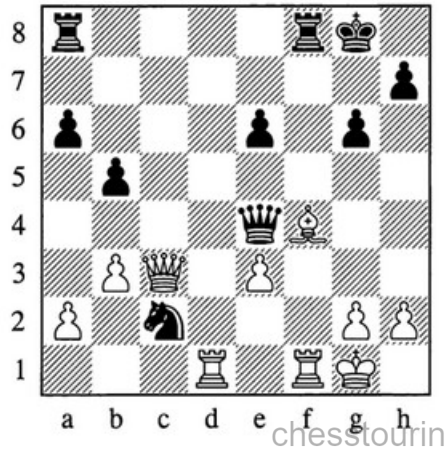
In another game from the same tricks chapter (page 22), Anand overlooked that ...♖xd2 could be answered with the intermediate knight retreat ♘e6-d4†. There were also several zwischenzugs in the notes to the game against Wahls (page 30).

The general picture is familiar to us already and the purpose of this small additional chapter is just to underline some details about this kind of trick, the zwischenzug.

I will start with an example in which a strong threat was met with an even stronger one.

Judit Polgar – Tamas Halasz

Budapest (training game) 1986

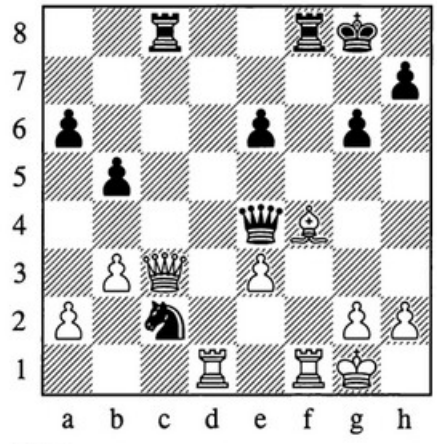


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Black's knight is vulnerable and his king is a bit exposed. When aiming for this position, Black probably thought that he could hold the balance because his queen is very active and stable. He also may have relied on the following move, which apparently consolidates.

23...♖ac8

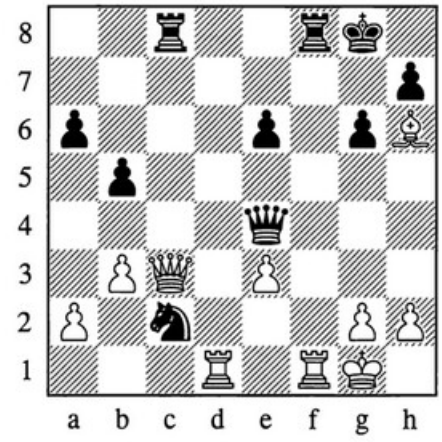
It is hard to criticize this move, because otherwise the knight would be in great danger. Without noticing it, Tamas slipped into "the opponent makes a trick possible with his last move" category, which was discussed in the first chapter. Apparently, there is nothing for Black to worry about while the white queen is under attack.



24.♗h6!!

It took me many years before I could really appreciate long positional manoeuvres, but such tricky moves I could spot in a fraction of a second. I was always very happy when given a chance to deliver them, and many times I had a broad smile on my face during that phase of the game.

What makes the text move so unexpected? The vulnerability of the black king is obvious, but one would think that the main threat of ♗h6 is ♕g7 mate. With the queen *en prise*, White does not seem to have the time for tricks, though. A closer look reveals that there may be some back rank problems, too. While the main threat remains 25.♕g7 mate, my trick is based on the fact that 24...♖xc3 allows 25.♖xf8 mate! An intermediate rook exchange on f1 would make matters even worse, by leaving the c8-rook undefended, with mate to follow soon.



24...e5

The only way to stay alive, but not for long.

25.♖xf8† ♖xf8 26.♗xf8 ♘xe3

Black gets some activity, but I managed to calm things down with a sequence of accurate moves.

27.♖d2 ♘g4 28.♖b2

Preventing a rather undesirable back rank mate in one.

28...♔xf8 29.h3

And I soon converted my extra exchange into a victory.

...1–0

Let's switch to the other situation, involving successive piece captures, in which zwischenzugs tend to pop up.

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Judit Polgar – Tamas Szendeff

Budapest 1984



My opponent had openly aimed for simplifications, judging that he would be doing fine. In doing so, he had failed to notice a small tactical nuance.

16.♘xg5 ♗xe2

Black has captured a bishop and is attacking the enemy queen. He certainly did not consider that there was an alternative to 17.♕xe2 ♕xg5 with equality.



17.♘xf7!

White continues the series of captures, but not in the way Black expected! Instead of attending to the problem of my attacked queen, I attack the black one instead, grabbing a pawn on the way.

Had my opponent seen this kind of idea before, he would definitely not have entered this line. If you do not study such tactical patterns by means of systematic training, you may well overlook this kind of simple blow.

17...♗xd1 18.♘xd8 ♖cxd8 19.♖axd1

The position has calmed down and I managed to win the ending with an extra pawn rather confidently.

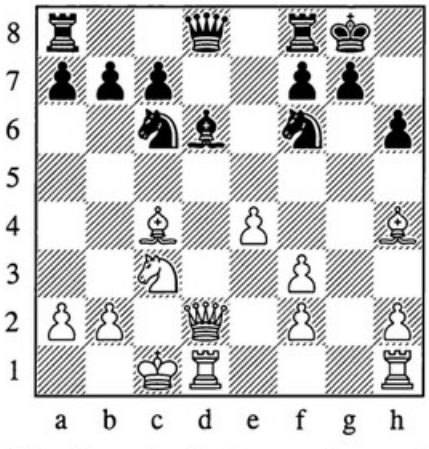
...1–0

For those who consider that my *kamikaze* zwischenzug above was rather simple, the next game illustrates the same theme in a more subtle and extremely elegant form.

Anthony Miles – Deep Thought

Long Beach 1989

Computers were not so strong at that time and this was in fact one of the very first major upsets they caused against a grandmaster.



Miles has played the opening carelessly, allowing a well-known tactical blow.

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12...♘xe4!

Black eliminates an important pawn, unleashing a double attack and a discovered attack at the same time. If White wants to avoid being a pawn down after 13.fxe4 ♕xh4, he has to embark on a series of successive captures.

13.♗xd8?!

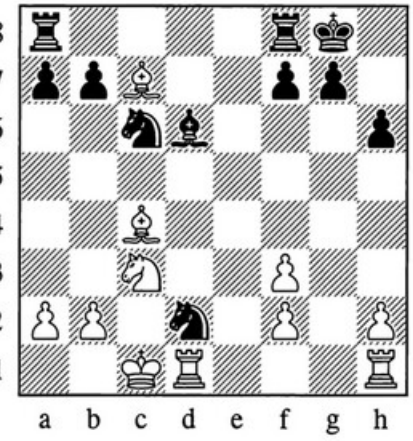
Caught by surprise, Miles fails to react properly. Black's last move should have been answered with the equally surprising 13.♕xh6!,



which offers better chances of maintaining the balance.

13...♘xd2 14.♗xc7!?

Miles may have relied on this zwischenzug to regain the pawn he had lost at the beginning of the line, with a slightly worse but defensible position. Bitter disappointment was awaiting him, though.



14...♗xh2!!

This is a rare situation when a zwischenzug is answered with another one! But the even more unusual feature is that the black bishop moves along the diagonal controlled by its rival from c7, maintaining the mutual tension. Imagine if there had been a white pawn on a3, then 14...♗xa3 would just have lost a piece to 15.♖xd2, because the c7-bishop would remain alive. White does not have this possibility in the game.

15.♗xh2 ♘xc4

White's kingside was weak anyway, but after winning the h-pawn, Black is simply winning. His main plan is to support the gradual advance of the h-pawn, which proved easy to carry out even for a computer from 1989.

...0–1

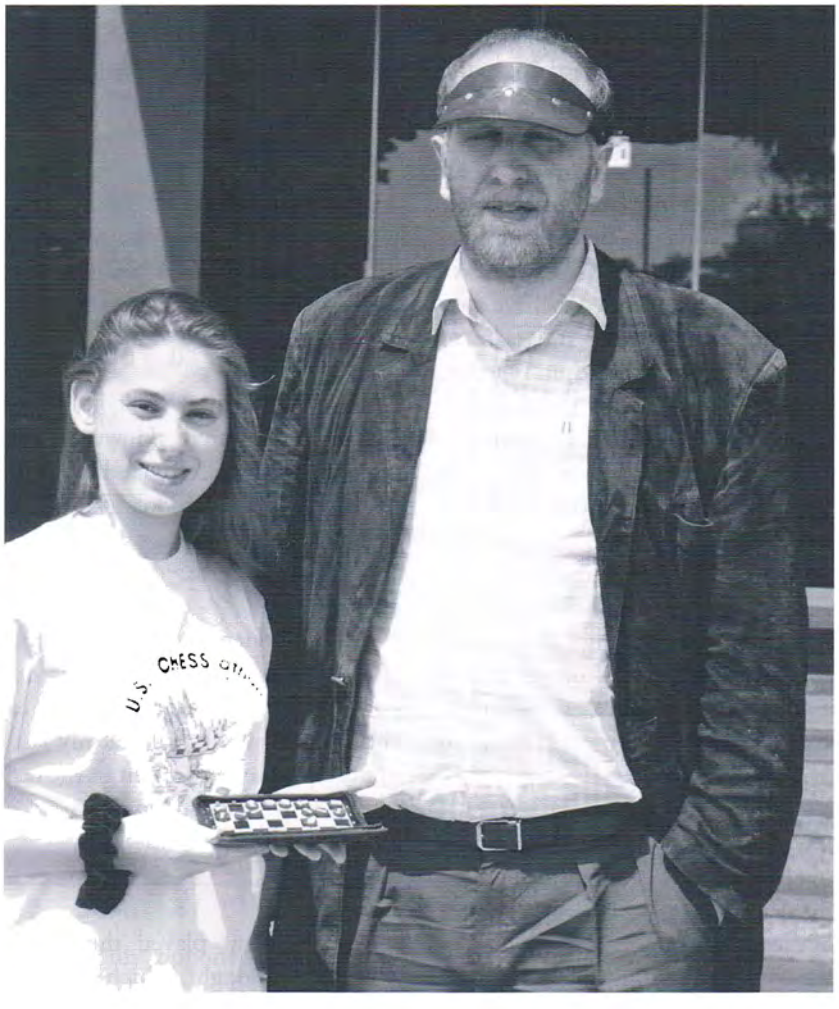
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Chapter 5

Tales with an Unexpected End



The first time I met Bobby Fischer –
after his rematch with Spassky in 1992

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The hidden nature of the tricks examined in the previous chapters was ensured by the unusual situation they created on the board. However, having plenty of alertness and imagination would have kept the opponents out of trouble in many cases, since the concrete calculation of just a few moves should be trivial once the main idea is spotted.

Things become more difficult when a trick arrives at the end of a long forced variation, in which both players embark confidently. Typically, one of them "sees" just one move farther and this is enough to change the evaluation of the line and position.

Due to my intense solving activity from an early age, I was always prepared to look for unexpected continuations at the end of long lines and I was not really surprised whenever I found such hidden resources. I believe that the ability of "knowing" when it is safe to stop calculating is intuitive, based on practice, experience, natural talent, being focused and, not least, one's love for the game.

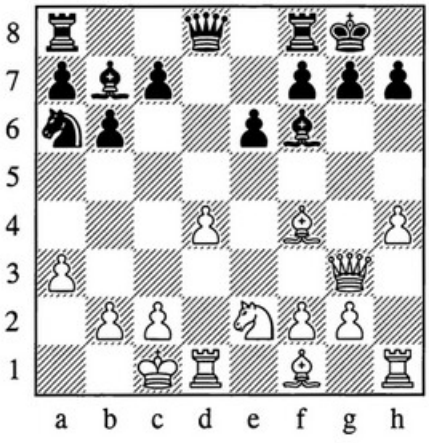
Spotting a trick many moves before it actually takes place goes well with having a poker face, but when I was a kid I had the completely opposite attitude. I used to get so enthusiastic about my discovery that I had no patience to double check the lines and started banging out the whole series of moves almost without thinking. In most cases the tricks worked anyway, but sometimes I came to regret my childish impatience.

In the following game my opponent initiated a forcing operation which seemed justified by general considerations, as well as by concrete checking of the possible lines.

Judit Polgar – Jozsef Molnar

1st Hungarian League 1988

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♘ge2 dxe4 5.a3 ♗e7 6.♘xe4 ♘f6 7.♕d3 b6 8.♗f4 ♗b7 9.♘xf6† ♗xf6 10.0–0–0 0–0 11.♕g3 ♘a6 12.h4



Strictly speaking, Black has a considerable lead in development. However, after a closer look, we can notice that his position is not so harmonious: just look at the knight on a6! White has an advantage in the centre, which also can be considered as part of the general development.

My opponent failed to notice these latter aspects and decided that opening the position should favour him. He probably was encouraged by the fact that my last move did not contribute to the fight in the centre in any way, although in the long term it could prove an effective attacking move.

12...c5?

My opponent played this after only two minutes of thought, which makes me assume that he did not go very far with his calculation. Obviously, he considered my next move impossible.

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13.dxc5!

This pawn, which until now ensured White's space advantage in a static way, initiates a glorious career. It took me five minutes to foresee the forced variation until its logical end and to double check it.

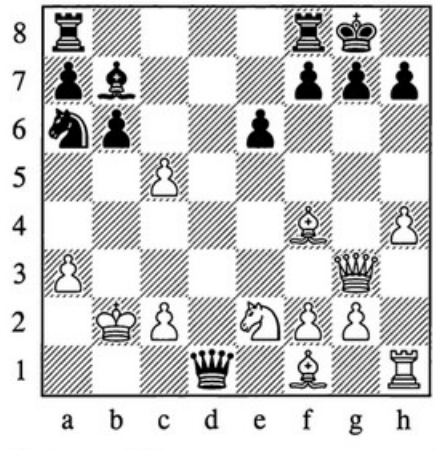
Despite the aesthetical value of the forcing sequence, it is relatively easy to establish that everything is in the right place and things work out perfectly.

13...♗xb2†?!

At this point, Black should have been more careful and taken a second look at the long forcing line.

It was not too late to deviate from the fatal sequence by sacrificing a pawn with 13...♕c8!?. After 14.cxb6 I do not entirely trust his compensation for the pawn, but I would have needed to show some accuracy to maintain my advantage.

14.♔xb2 ♕xd1



Quite possibly, my opponent stopped his calculations here, which was very unwise in a position in which I can repeatedly threaten mate in one. Although the threats will be easy to parry, the position will be modified drastically, offering me new tactical opportunities.

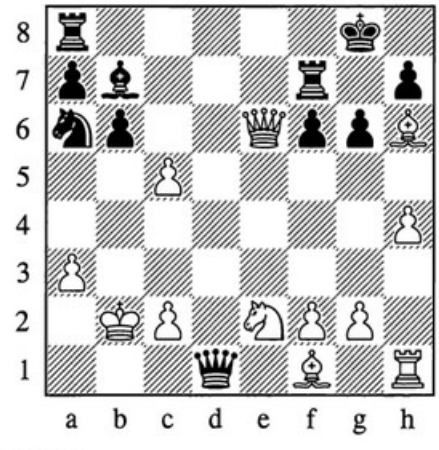
As a possible remedy to this kind of practical problem, I would suggest the following method: during solving sessions, make it a rule to calculate one more move after the moment where you initially think it is fairly safe to stop!

15.♗h6 g6 16.♕e5!

Of course, I did not embark on this variation for the sake of retrieving the exchange, which would only simplify the position, leaving me with a bad game.

16...f6 17.♕xe6† ♖f7

It may also be that he saw all the way up to here, but I cannot be sure about that. This is the kind of moment when one should have a feeling that the forced line has not ended yet and that there is some more stuff to look for.



18.♘c3!

He might have underestimated this move, which allows White to get closer to completing development with gain of time.

The tactical theme of c5-c6 was in the air already, but 18.c6?! is premature because of 18...♘c5 19.cxb7 ♘a4† 20.♔b3 ♘c5† with a draw by perpetual.

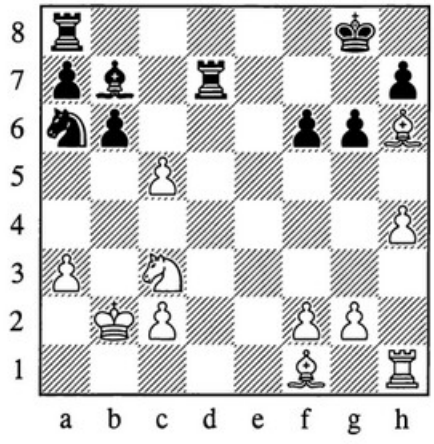
18...♕d7

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This is the only way to fight against the threat of ♗c4, but after the queen exchange the black rook will occupy a vulnerable square.

The counterattacking 18...♘xc5? fails to 19.♕xf7†!.

19.♕xd7 ♖xd7



Finally, Black has managed to parry all the kingside threats and some players may have stopped calculating when they reached this point. It requires some effort to spot in advance that little by little a favourable queenside situation was built up for White by the previous sequence.

20.c6!

This pawn has been waiting patiently on c5 for six moves, but now it delivers the decisive blow. The knight, which was Black's worst placed piece in the initial position, is lost.

20...♗xc6 21.♗xa6

White has won material and Black's attempt to trap the a6-bishop is refuted easily.

21...b5 22.♖e1 ♔f7 23.a4!

The pawn is taboo because of the deadly check on c4. After freeing my bishop, I had little trouble in winning.

...1–0

Larsen said that in every piece of long analysis there is a flaw ("Long variation, wrong variation"). He had in mind home analysis, but this applies to over-the-board calculation, too. The final sequence from this game is an exception, and also a rare case for me! I cannot remember many games of mine where pure calculation was the only way leading to the truth.

In the previous example, my generally useful 12.h4 offered the opponent the opportunity to go wrong and allow the unexpected blow at the end of the complications. The next game features a different situation. I initiated a long variation based on a far from obvious tactical nuance, as the only way of taking advantage of my better middlegame position.

Hastings 1988/89

I arrived in Hastings shortly after my first and very successful Chess Olympiad. It was nice to take part in a tournament with such a long and glorious tradition, but this was the first occasion when I travelled without my sisters. I got along with my mom very well, but I missed the post-mortem chess-related chats with Sofia, as well as our joint preparation. My mother could not replace her in these important off-board moments, since she barely knows how to move the pieces...

However, these circumstances also had a positive effect. For years, I had been listening to Susan's fluent English during tournaments, and even studied the language from books, but somehow I never had the courage to start speaking English myself. In Hastings, my need to communicate proved stronger than my shyness and I made great strides with my use of English.

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I started the tournament with an upsetting incident, which I remember very clearly even now. The playing hall was situated at the top of a hill, just 15 minutes walk from the hotel. The day before the first round, the arbiter Stewart Reuben kindly showed us the way, accompanying us from one end to the other.

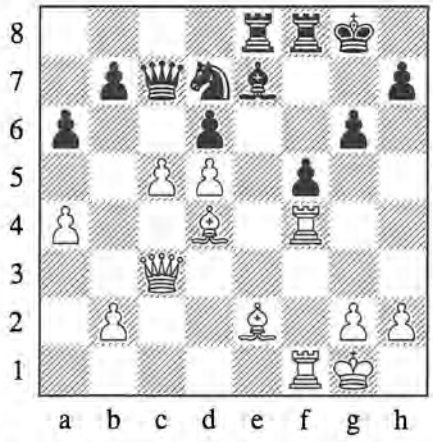
Initially, it looked as simple as a forced line, but on the next day a nasty surprise was awaiting me and my mom when we were left on our own. We walked along chatting happily, without paying too much attention to the surrounding details. When we arrived on the top of the hill, it suddenly looked as if the tournament hall had vanished completely. The game was going to start in about 15 minutes and we had no idea where we were, so you can imagine my concern. Eventually, we had to admit that we had climbed the wrong hill (they all looked the same) and found no better solution than returning all the way back down and then choosing our way up with greater care.

I cannot help thinking that something similar sometimes happens during a game. Imagine that you spend a long time analyzing a continuation that does not bring the desired results. Maybe the direction chosen for the investigation was wrong in the first place? What if we dismiss everything and reconsider the critical position anew with a fresh look?

Unlike my off-board adventures, in the next game I managed to keep a better orientation and foresee an effective tactical blow at the end of a long variation. To my opponent, this trick was as well hidden as the playing hall for someone looking for it from the base of the hill.

Judit Polgar – Sukh Dave Singh

Hastings (open) 1989



I was certain about my advantage and initiative, but less sure about the best way to continue. This is not the kind of position that one wins automatically. On the contrary, if you miss the best continuation your advantage may well vanish.

22.c6!

By coincidence, this fragment starts with the same pawn advance that concluded the fight in the previous one.

This move is an important commitment, because after the next exchange the c6-pawn will be cut off from its colleagues. Although the next sequence of moves is logical and to a certain extent forced, I cannot be sure at which moment I saw the final trick. It is reasonable to assume that at this moment I relied on my intuition, taking into account the weakened position of the enemy king, which will be vulnerable along both ranks and diagonals, as well as the strength of my light-squared bishop.

22...♗f6!

An important zwischenzug, based on the hanging position of the e2-bishop.

23.♗xf6 ♘xf6 24.♗f3

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I remember being happy about my overall piece activity. For the time being, the c6-pawn ensures that I have a considerable space advantage and the inevitable exchange on c6 will lengthen the diagonal for my bishop. Another important element is the possibility of quickly transferring the f4-rook to the queenside.

24...bxc6 25.dxc6 d5

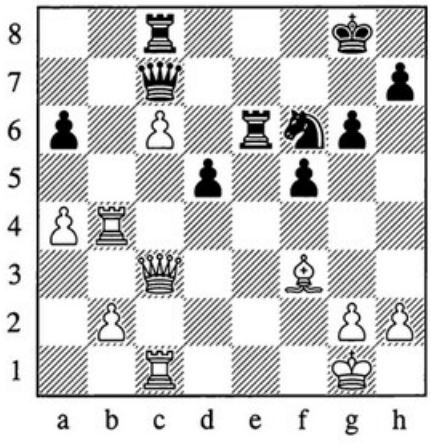
Black tries to restrict my bishop, in an attempt to isolate the far advanced pawn. The d5-pawn also becomes vulnerable now and the outcome of the game will be decided by the speed and effectiveness with which each player can attack the enemy's weakness.

26.♖b4!

By this stage of the game, I had seen the final trick. The rook is heading for b7, adding force to the c6-pawn and endangering the black king.

The fact that 26.♖d4 is a reasonable (although less strong) alternative is the main cause of my uncertainty regarding my initial train of thought when I played 22.c6.

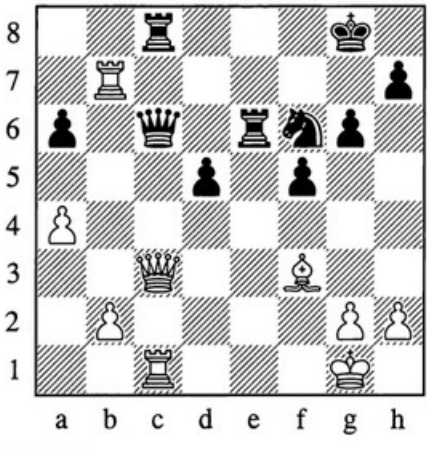
26...♖e6 27.♖c1 ♖c8



Black's major pieces have surrounded the intruder and it seems that White will be one move too slow to carry out his attack. However, the vulnerability of the black king gives me the possibility of delivering two nasty surprises in a row.

28.♖b7! ♕xc6?!

Falling right into my trick. My opponent should have smelled the danger and deviated with 28...♕d6, although in this case I could have stabilized my advantage with 29.♖b6, defending my own pawn and attacking the one on a6.



29.♗xd5!!

A spectacular move, which puts Black under three different pins at the same time (c3-c8,

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d5-g8 and c3-g7). Although my pawn perished first, it is the elimination of the apparently well defended black pawn that is decisive.

29...♕xd5

29...♕xc3 is met by the zwischenzug 30.♗xe6†, winning a rook.

30.♕xc8† ♘e8 31.♕d7

And Black resigned.

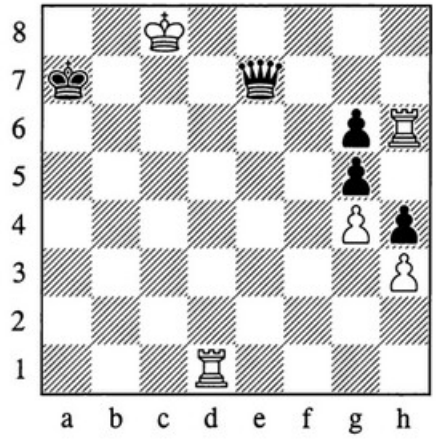
1–0

This game offers a serious warning about the importance of the king's general security. When the king is very weak, one has to be prepared for nasty surprises, sometimes coming from the opposite wing.

One of the most effective ways of developing the skill of spotting tricks in advance is to solve lots of studies. The fight in the main line of the solution usually takes place on the edge: White carries out his initial idea, Black finds an unexpected defensive resource, and then White comes up with some new and well masked idea, and so on.

Here is a study that I liked very much in those years, which illustrates this scenario:

Alexander Petrov



White to play and win

The brutal 1.♖d7† does not work because Black has the saving 1...♔a8! when 2.♖xe7 leads to stalemate. There are no possible improvements on the second move, since the queen threatens to start checking.

Therefore, White has to decoy Her Majesty onto an unfavourable square:

1.♖h7! ♕xh7

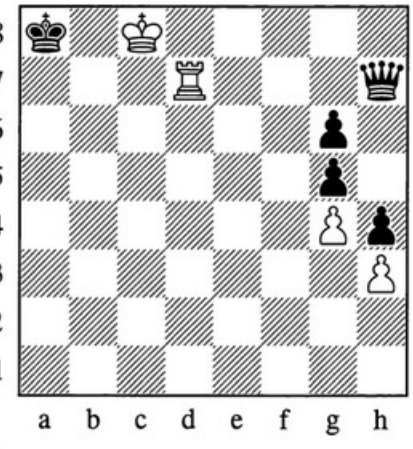
1...♔a8 does not work because of 2.♖a1† with mate on the next move.

2.♖d7†

With his first two moves, White offers the exchange of his rooks for the black queen. With the black king far from the kingside, Black cannot transpose to a pawn ending.

2...♔a8!

Black uses the same idea as above, but this time it is not over yet.



3.♔c7!!

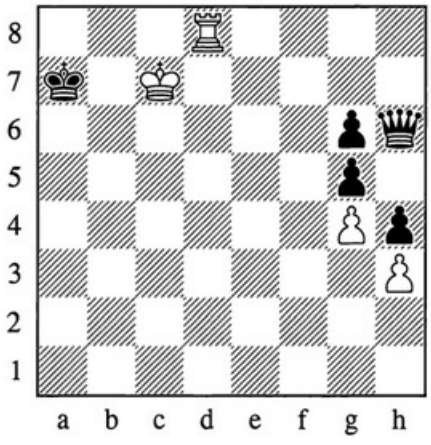
A fantastic multipurpose move. The seventh rank is obstructed in order to offer some freedom to the enemy king (no stalemates!) and thus make the threat of ♖xh7 real, while the eighth rank is cleared for future attacks.

3...♕h6

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The queen will be tragically passive here, but the eighth rank had to be avoided because of 4.♖d8†.

4.♖d8† ♔a7



Apparently, Black's problems are over.

5.♔c6!

The moves by the king in this study create a strong aesthetic impression. In the final position, the king clears the seventh rank, preparing to meet 5...♕g7 (or h7) with 6.♖d7†.

At the same time, a mating net is set up for the enemy king in reply to the only remaining move that does not put a piece en prise: 5...♔a6 6.♖a8# The game is over.

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Chapter 6

Improving Piece Placement



Watching Susan play against former World Champion Mikhail Tal in Moscow 1986

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While I hope you have enjoyed the collection of my tricks that we have examined so far, I feel an important question is looming.

Before Steinitz, the common belief was that, no matter how things had gone up to a certain point of a game, the more skilful player should always be able to pull some magic out of his hat and turn the tables in his favour. Maybe this is not entirely true, but it is how Steinitz liked to portray it.

Anyway, this attitude did not sit well with the deep analytical spirit of the first World Champion, who dedicated much of his life and career to proving that chess is a logical game. Steinitz explained the availability of winning combinations was due to small strategic accumulations during a long preparatory sequence, which were far less spectacular than the finish.

Looking back now at all these little tricks of mine, I get the feeling that they could not have occurred completely randomly. In the critical moments, my pieces used to be kind to me by displaying their hidden energy, but this happened because I used to treat them in the same way! By "being kind" to a piece I mean looking for possibilities of improving its placement and trying to figure out where would be the best attacking square for it. By the way, I see here a connection with one of my main principles in life: treat other people the same way you would like to be treated by them!

In the examples examined here, I will focus on two main aspects. Firstly, we need to understand which of our pieces needs our "kindness" most. Only after that will we be able to look for the optimal square and work out an adequate route for transfer.

The first examples are mainly static in nature, although there are some minor dynamic elements involved in the featured manoeuvre.

Sandor Farago – Judit Polgar

Budapest (45 minute training game) 1986



Both sides have good development, but White has more space and the bishop pair. With his last move, ♕d2-g2, my opponent created the threat of e4-e5, but failed to understand the importance of keeping the c3-square under control.

Black's main trump is the weakness of the d4-square, but unfortunately ...e6-e5 would leave my bishop passive. Therefore, I decided to take advantage of White's previous inaccuracy and place the bishop in front of my pawn chain before defining the structure in the centre.

23...♗c3!

More than just a clumsy attack on the rook; we will see that it also poses some concrete problems.

24.♖e2

This move has the hidden drawback of leaving the d1-rook undefended. Thus after a later e4-e5 the opening of the d-file would offer me some tactical ideas.

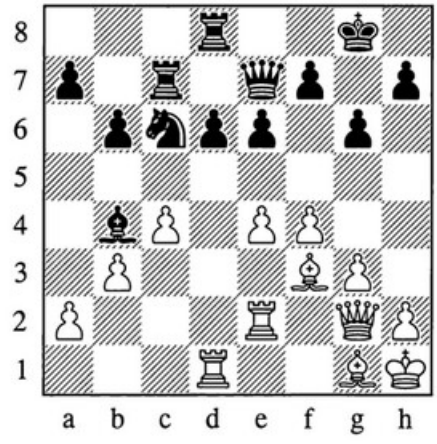
Therefore, 24.♖f1 may look like a cleverer answer, since 24...♗b4?! could be met with 25.e5!. In this case, I would have defined my

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intentions at once with 24...e5 followed by ...♗d4. Even when playing a positional game you need to take into account the smallest dynamic nuances.

24...♗b4

Frankly, there is nothing wrong with 24...e5, but I did not want to commit myself prematurely. I noticed that e4-e5 should not be a problem at this stage and so I continued to improve the position of my bishop. The main idea is to exchange the g1-bishop with ...♗c5 and only then play ...e5.



25.h4

It is interesting that White did not pay attention to my plan.

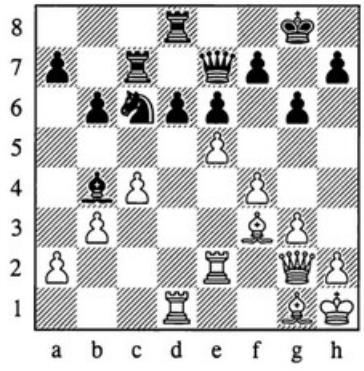
In a practical game it is a good idea to look for ways of crossing the opponent's obvious intentions, thus forcing him to start all over again with the planning process. The more often you place your opponent in a situation where he has to make important decisions, the more chance you have of pushing him into time trouble and undermining his confidence. In tournament chess, the competition is not (only) about finding the objectively best move.

Sometimes a surprise move can be much more effective than a good move that was expected.

Here is an example in our particular position:

25.e5

This would have been a logical reaction after my bishop's departure from the long diagonal and a way of avoiding my planned blockade on the dark squares.



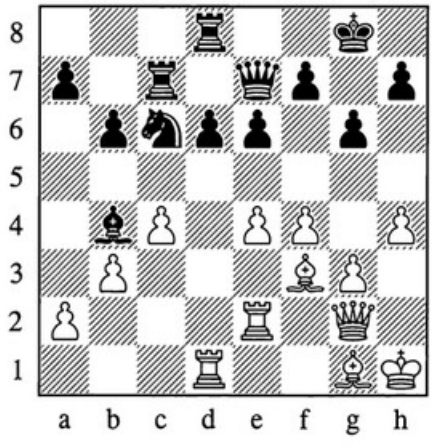
The position would have opened for the white bishops and some dynamism would have been induced. On the other hand, Black can maintain coordination and leave White with an isolated pawn on e5 after:

25...dxe5!

This is possible only because the d1-rook is hanging.

26.♖xd8† ♘xd8 27.fxe5 ♘b7

Followed by ...♗c5 or ...♘c5. The position would have remained complicated, with chances for both sides.



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25...♗c5

Continuing my little psychological game. Before weakening the d5-square, I wanted to exchange the dark-squared bishops, in order to take full advantage of the control over the d4-square.

26.♖ed2

Missing the last chance to change the course of the game with 26.e5. Once again, I had calculated that this was not dangerous for me: 26...♗xg1 27.♔xg1 dxe5! The same trick as above. 28.♖xd8† ♘xd8 29.fxe5



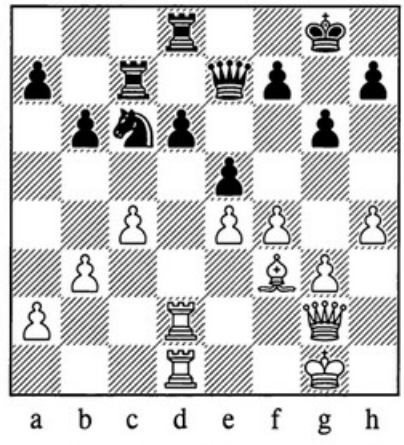
The most obvious move now is 29...♖d7 taking control of the d-file, but this would leave the knight passive.

Therefore, it would be best to give this problem the highest priority and solve it with 29...♘c6!, when after 30.♗xc6 ♕c5†:



I would regain the material with a comfortable position. This tactical nuance is available as a consequence of the bishop manoeuvre, which decoyed the king to g1 and made the c5-square available for the queen.

26...♗xg1 27.♔xg1 e5



This is the position I was aiming for when playing 23...♗c3. My knight dominates the dark squares and White's space advantage has become less relevant after I also advanced a pawn onto a central square. Black is at least not worse.

28.fxe5

White hopes to get some activity along the d-file, and also parries the threat of ...exf4, when after gxf4 the h4-pawn would be hanging.

28...dxe5

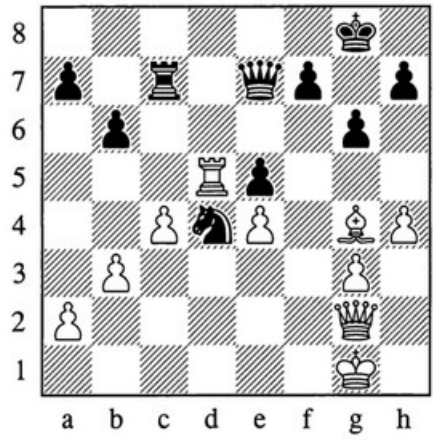
28...♘xe5 also looked tempting, since it would leave me with a dominating knight. The game move is more ambitious, though. I get rid of my weakness on d6 and retain the possibility of creating a strong outpost on d4.

29.♖xd8† ♘xd8 30.♗g4

Preventing ...♘e6, but the knight has an alternative route to d4.

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30...♘c6 31.♖d5 ♘d4



Black's position has improved a lot. I have a strong knight and a mobile kingside majority. White cannot put his queenside into motion so easily, while his bishop is struggling to find any active possibilities. The position is preferable for Black and I eventually won the game, but the rest of it is not relevant for our main theme.

...0–1

This was a typical case of thinking in abstract ideas and creating long-term plans. Sometimes you can win games (or merely gain an advantage) by just exchanging the right pieces, and then changing the structure accordingly.

The thematic manoeuvre in the next game is also connected with a blockade in the centre. The difference is that the central structure had been defined in an earlier phase and my main aim was to avoid Black's freeing attempts.

World Youth Championship 1988

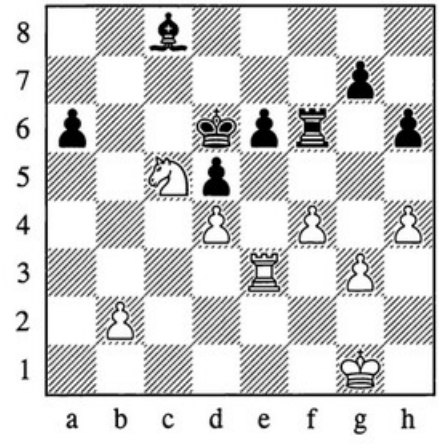
I will not hide the fact that I travelled to Timisoara hoping to win the championship. I had turned 12 just two days before the tournament started, but was already rated over 2300 and had been playing well during the first half of the year. I eventually achieved my aim and it later turned out that 1988 was one of the most successful years in my life in every respect! I lost weight and qualified for the top 32 of Budapest's under-12s in table tennis! In the second half of the year I gained no fewer than 190 chess rating points (in those years, FIDE published the new rating lists every half a year).

This rapid ascension brought me to the top of the ladies' rating list on the 1st of January 1989. I have maintained my leading position until the present day.

Looking back at this event, it is fun to note that several of the kids present in Timisoara became professional grandmasters many years later. Among them, I would mention Zoltan Almasi, who in July 2011 was ranked number one in Hungary.

Judit Polgar – Dov Zifroni

U12 World Championship, Timisoara 1988



It is easy to establish that my knight is good and his bishop is bad. My rook is more active than its rival, having the possibility of transferring instantly from one wing to the other. However, Black is not without

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counterplay and I always have to be ready for ...g5, which might undermine my stability in the centre.

I am amazed to find out that for the rest of the game I used a total of only eight minutes! Patience was not my strongest point in those days, but happily I managed to find the best moves even so.

32.♖a3

Black cannot save the a-pawn and it seems that the only saving chance is to open the kingside immediately.

32...g5?!

Psychologically, the most understandable reaction, but my 35th move will prove this counterattack is premature.

32...♔e7!



This would have been a lot trickier. The point is that after the natural and greedy:

33.♘xa6?! ♗xa6 34.♖xa6

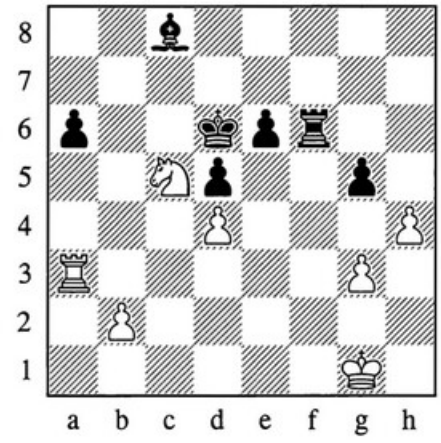
Black can activate his rook with:

34...♖f8!

Followed by occupying one of the queenside files and then the king marches in through f6-f5-e4. This plan would have given him excellent drawing chances.

This is one of those cases in which a threat can be stronger than its execution. Instead of taking the pawn (which means giving up the advantage of a good knight over a bad bishop), I could simply improve my position with 33.♔g2, leaving Black with the same problems as before. The threat of ♘xa6 remains an option, which complicates Black's planning.

33.fxg5 hxg5



34.hxg5!

If we consider only the kingside structure, isolated from the rest of the board, 34.h5!? would be worth considering, creating a passed pawn and avoiding simplifications. However, the different areas of the board communicate with each other and in this case Black could react with 34...e5, taking advantage of my weakened control over the e5-square.

34...♖g6

Black seems to have reasons to be satisfied with the recent evolution of the position. My control over the e5-square has been undermined and the threat of ...e5 is in the air. The loss of the a6-pawn will be compensated by the drastic reduction in material left on the board.

For instance, after the natural continuation 35.♘xa6 ♖xg5 36.♘b4 ♖g4 37.♘c2 e5± Black should achieve a draw without too much trouble.

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And yet, having attacked the a6-pawn a few moves earlier does not force me to capture it. In chess, like in life, you should always adapt to the changing circumstances. Premature relaxation, relying on the fact that things will go well all by themselves, can be very harmful.



35.♘d3!!

This unexpected switch of the knight to e5 is the only method of preventing the freeing break and also an effective way of supporting the advance of the newly created passed pawn on the kingside. When making this decision I had to understand that my knight was complaining about its instability, so I should heed its wish to reach a better square.

35...♖xg5 36.♘e5



It is safe to say that my position is winning. The bishop will be bad forever and Black has no counterplay at all. The gradual advance of the g-pawn will decide the game.

36...♔c7 37.♖c3†

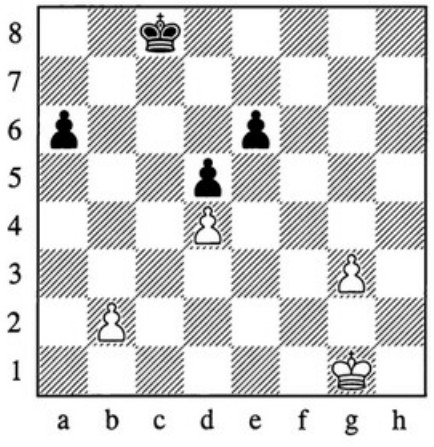
Paying attention to small details: in order to avoid the fork on f7, the king has to go even further from my passed pawn.

37...♔b7?!

Carelessly allowing me to transpose to a winning pawn ending.

37...♔b8 would have prolonged the fight, without putting the final result in doubt. I would have played 38.g4 followed by advancing the king to f4 or h4.

38.♘f7 ♖g8 39.♘d6† ♔b8 40.♘xc8 ♖xc8 41.♖xc8† ♔xc8



An outside passed pawn is usually a decisive factor in pawn endings; this position is no exception.

42.♔f2 ♔d7 43.♔e3 ♔d6 44.♔f4

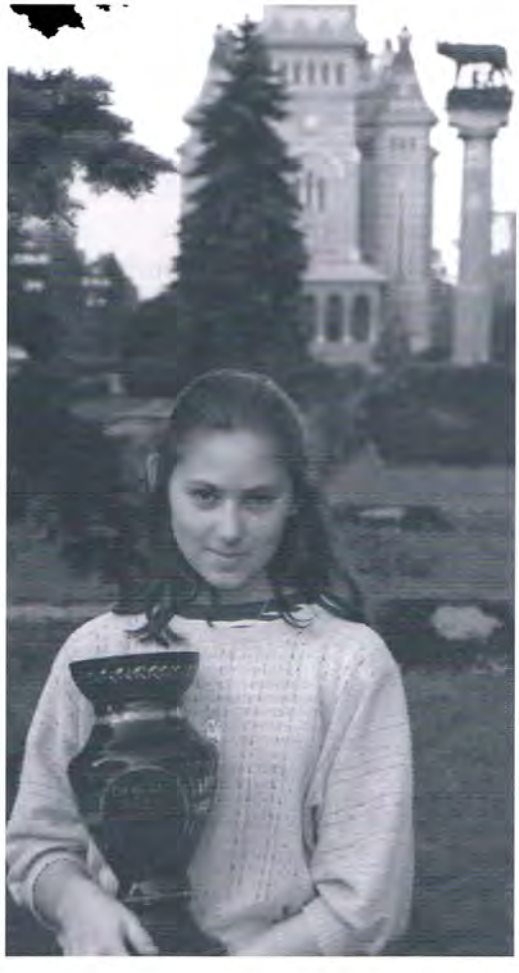
Preventing the second attempt to play ...e5, although this time this would not have saved the game. Black will soon have to abandon his central pawns in order to stop the g-pawn.

1–0

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The most important theme in this game was controlling the central dark squares and so not allowing Black to free his position.

In the previous examples, my manoeuvres pursued aims that were static in nature. We will now see a different kind of position, in which the dynamic and tactical elements prevail. This means that the following game is closely related to the chapter on tricks.



The 1988 U12 World Champion – Judit Polgar!

Biel 1987

For many years the Biel chess festival has been sponsored by Credit Suisse. The "soul" of the event is one of the greatest chess enthusiasts I have ever met, Dr. Wirth, who used to have a senior position in the company. Even now, at the age of 80, he is actively involved in organizing all kinds of chess events.

My whole family was present at Biel in 1987 and we girls played in three different tournaments. I took part in a Scheveningen match in which a World select of women players faced the best male Swiss players. (I should mention, though, that Korchnoi did not play in the Swiss team and our own team was not the strongest possible either.)

During the tournament, I celebrated my birthday, turning 11 the day after I won this game. The organizers generously invited us to a lovely restaurant which had a garden, and I soon spotted a two-meter-long table covered with all kinds of presents just for me! Never again did I see so much Swiss chocolate in one place.



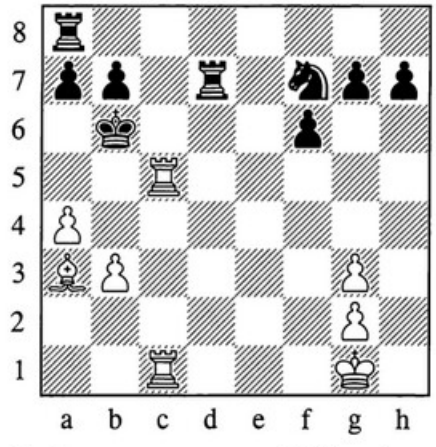
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The present that I liked most was a CD player, quite a special thing in those days. We immediately bought a few disks with my favourite Italian music, first of all Al Bano and Romina Power.

Even now, so many years later, I still have warm memories of this event and feel fortunate that I could share this experience with the most important people in my life – my family.

Judit Polgar – Jean Luc Costa

Biel 1987



Black is a pawn up and White has pawn weaknesses. In the event of simplifications, the black king's presence close to the centre would decide the game. However, there are also middlegame elements in the position, which my opponent failed to notice.

Examining the dynamic potential of my position, we can see that my rooks are actively placed, but the bishop does not have any active purpose on a3, and is failing to target the king.

28.♗b4!

Threatening a perpetual check (♖b5-a5) but, under the current circumstances, not more than that. My opponent, being a pawn up, felt obliged to avoid the draw, but he failed to spot a secondary idea behind my last move.

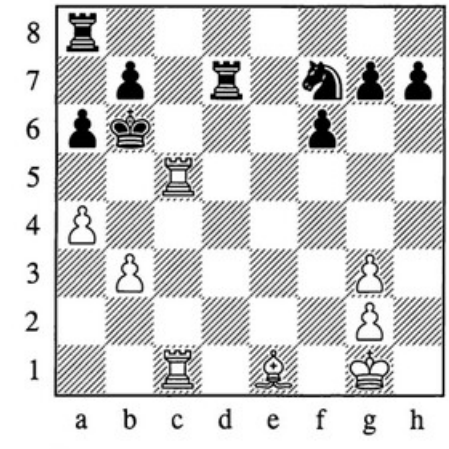
28...a6?

Curiously, this leads to a big advantage for White. Black prevents ♖b5† and even prepares the king's retreat to a7, but depriving His Majesty of the a6-square will have fatal consequences. In this case, solving one problem (the threatened draw) causes even bigger ones! Reasonable moves that activated his position (such as 28...♖e8) would have forced me to take the draw.

29.♗e1!!

A further improvement in the bishop's placement, dictated by the new circumstances, and one that was not foreseen by my opponent. The threat of ♗f2, directly targeting the king (and not indirectly, as was the case one move earlier) cannot be parried satisfactorily.

My opponent immediately realized that he had just ruined his position in one move, but it is too late to change anything.



29...♖ad8?!

This blunder is easy to understand, because the bishop has just retreated to the kingside. After a shock one may well not consider that it can also return to the queenside. The main

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idea of Black's move is to defend the rooks against discovered checks after the battery is set up, and to prepare counterplay with ...♖d1.

For instance, after 29...♖e8 30.♗f2 Black is not in time to evacuate his king from the dangerous diagonal.

29...♔a7

This does not save the king from trouble either:

30.♗f2 b6

If 30...♔b8 31.♖c8# we get a nice mating pattern, where the bishop's diagonal is opened with the move that delivers mate. We can find this kind of construction in chess problems quite frequently.

31.♖c7†

Winning the knight.

The only move to put up any resistance would have been:

29...a5

Clearing the a6-square for the king. However, after winning the a5-pawn, I could continue my attack with material equality.

30.♖b5† ♔a7 31.♗xa5



Black's biggest problem in avoiding a decisive attack is that his queen's rook is stuck in the corner, for instance:

31...♖e8?! 32.♗b6†!

Inviting the king to define his intentions, so that I know how to continue my attack.

32...♔b8

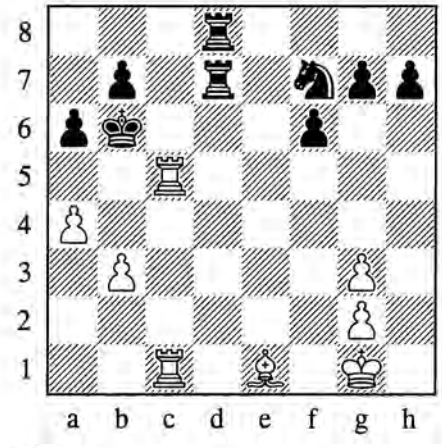
After 32...♔a6 33.♗c7 Black would need to give up at least a pawn to avoid the mate.

The text move may look better, but Black simply does not have time to consolidate with ...♘e5-c6:

33.♖bc5!



The threat of ♗c7† is killing.



30.♗a5†

Choosing the simple and reliable way.

30...♔a7 31.♗xd8 ♖xd8 32.♖c7

As a result of the apparently hesitant bishop manoeuvre, I won the exchange and maintained an active position. Black resigned a few moves later.

...1–0

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Black lost this game because he was not alert enough. The absence of queens and having reduced material left on the board does not always guarantee the king's safety.

The right rook

The same kind of moving back and forth with a piece, which eventually results into a gradual piece activation, can be seen in the next game. The only difference is that this time the protagonists are my rooks.

Judit Polgar – Miroljub Lazic

Dortmund 1990

A big chess festival was organized in Dortmund in 1990. Susan played in the A-group, while Sofia and I took part in the 9th category B-group.



I have a wonderful knight against an awful black bishop, but my rooks are not playing yet. This latter aspect could cause trouble in the centre if not dealt with correctly. The knight should not retreat under any circumstances, because of ...e4 with at least equal play for Black. This leaves me with a choice regarding which rook to place on d1.

22.♖ad1!

A very accurate move. In principle, the rooks belong on c1 and d1, but after 22.♖fd1 ♖ed7 the small trick I used in the game does not work: 23.♖dc1 ♖xd5 24.♖xc7? ♖d1† and mates.

After the game move I threaten ♖d3, followed by ♖1d1 or ♖c1, consolidating my domination.



22...♖ed7

The only way of crossing my plans.

23.♖c1!

This must have come as a nasty surprise to my opponent, who now spent nearly ten minutes. This time the pawn exchange favours me, since my back rank is safely defended.

It suddenly appears that by doubling rooks, Black has somewhat spoiled his coordination. One move earlier, the offensive and defensive jobs were harmoniously distributed between the rooks, but now the d7-rook is overloaded and cannot both take the enemy pawn and defend the black one at the same time.

23...♖f7

Trying to restore the lost coordination, but now my second rook comes into play.

23...♖xd5 may have offered better practical chances of survival, by reducing the number

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of pawns. True, after 24.♖xc7 ♖8d7 25.♖xd7 ♖xd7 26.♖c1 followed by centralizing the king, White's advantage would not be in doubt.



24.♖fd1±

I successfully achieved my initial goal of placing my rooks on their ideal squares. It all started with an apparent loss of time, but eventually I gained a tempo!

The next step is to centralize the king, which will also avoid back rank problems.

24...♖fd7

Practically admitting the complete failure of his initial plans.

25.♔f1

The pawn exchange can now only be carried out under completely unfavourable circumstances for Black, since a white rook would invade the seventh rank.

25...♔h8

A strange decision after 28 minutes of thought. Apparently, my opponent was afraid that his king could get into danger if my knight started jumping around. However, the king is badly placed in the corner. Not only will it be far from the centre in case of simplifications, but it may also face some back rank problems. Personally, I would have chosen 25...♔f7 without thinking.

26.♔e2

Psychologically, it was much easier for me to centralize my king, since the bishop cannot create even a trace of danger against it.

26...♗f8

One of the ideas behind his previous move was to make this regrouping without allowing a double attack with ♘f6†.



My position certainly looks nice, but in order to make progress I had to design a new plan to activate my rooks even more.

27.♖d3!

The third rank offers excellent possibilities of switching rooks from one wing to the other. I chose precisely this rook for the lift, because I wanted the other one to keep the c7-pawn under pressure. Besides, I had another trump hidden up my sleeve.

27...h6

Another "ugly" move, weakening the kingside structure. Black probably could not live with the permanent threat of ♘g5. But had he foreseen my 29th move, he might have looked for another solution.

28.♖b3 ♖b8

Black avoids weakening the c6-square, hoping to prevent the activation of my

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second rook. However, all Black's previous inaccuracies become relevant now. First of all, there are so many targets along the sixth rank, they practically provoke my next move.



29.♖c6!

A simple, but very effective trick. I remember that I was feeling very comfortable in this ending; I spent around ten minutes for my last ten moves. In contrast, my opponent was getting slower and slower, and by this point had two minutes left to reach the time control.

29...bxc6

My opponent did not have time to check the consequences of the following line: 29...♔g7 30.♖xa6 Taking advantage of the pin for the second time. 30...♖xd5 31.♖a7 My rooks' activity looks threatening, but Black can prevent immediate disaster.



31...♖d4! The rook gains an important tempo on its way to b4. 32.f3 ♖b4 33.♖xb4 ♗xb4 34.♔d3

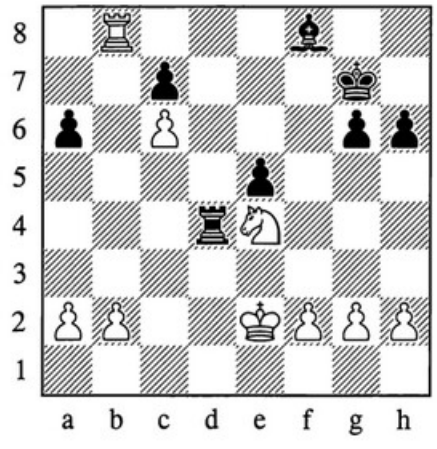


All my pieces are more active than Black's and I have such a simple plan: ♔c4 followed by advancing my queenside pawns.

30.♖xb8

The drawbacks of ...♔h8 become obvious now; White wins an important tempo.

30...♔g7 31.dxc6 ♖d4



Black hopes to restore material equality and defend the unpleasant resulting endgame.

32.♘d2!

I understood that I cannot save the c6-pawn and decided to use my knight to attack the

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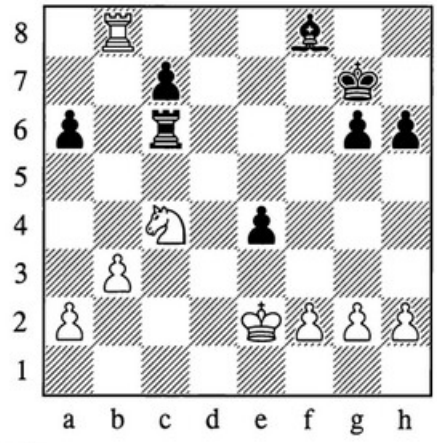
e5-pawn. Larsen once said: "Isolated pawns should be grabbed, not blocked!"

32...♖d6 33.♘c4 ♖xc6 34.b3!?

I did not want to get my knight caught in a pin after 34.♘xe5 ♖e6. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the threat is often more effective than its execution. I just defend my knight and keep the e5-pawn under attack.

34...e4?!

Probably overlooking my answer. 34...♗c5 would have been the best defence, trying to defend the pawn with ...♗d4. I would have advanced my king to e4, when winning the central pawn would have become a matter of time.



35.♖e8!

I soon won the pawn, while retaining the better structure and excellent piece coordination. The rest was a matter of technique.

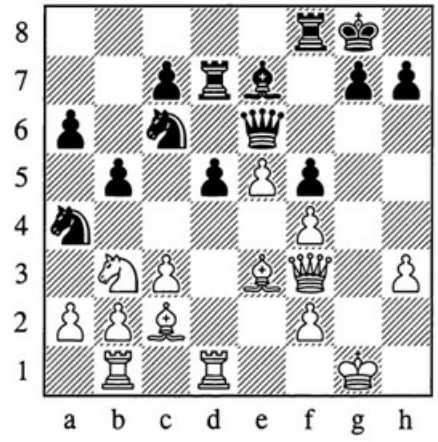
...1–0

When he played ...♔h8 and ...h6 my opponent made the opposite kind of mistake to Costa's – he was afraid of a move that was not really a threat. Even (or especially) in bad positions, you have to follow the usual chess principles: centralize the king, avoid creating weaknesses, etc.

In the examples examined so far, there were relatively few pieces on the board in the starting position. In the next game, I will carry out a thematic manoeuvre improving my bishop's position in the early middlegame. This will result in complex strategic and dynamic nuances.

Judit Polgar – Robert Hübner

Munich 1991



In the Open Spanish, there are some typical patterns one should always take into account. One of White's main ideas is proving that the d5-pawn is weak, but Black can dream about a major regrouping aimed at transforming this weakness into a strength. A knight would be welcome on e6, blockading the e5-pawn, and after over-defending the d5-pawn Black can put his whole queenside pawn mass into motion with ...a6-a5-a4, ...c7-c5 and ...d5-d4.

The situation in the diagram position is not so typical. The queen is not a good blockading piece, but how can the white minor pieces harass her? The d4- and c5-squares are well defended against knight intrusions and the light-squared bishop is strongly restricted by the enemy structure.

The a4-knight deserves a special mention.

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Apparently, it is doing a good job, by keeping the b1-rook tied to the defence of the b2-pawn. However, if something goes wrong for Black, the knight will be far from the usual routes and could become vulnerable.

20.♔h1

Placing the king on a safe square and clearing the g-file for the attack.

20...g6

Black puts another brick in his light-squared wall. It may seem that there is nothing that can shake his fortress. I could consider placing my bishop on b3 in order to increase the pressure against d5. However, this would mean retreating with my knight and giving up any hope of driving the queen away with ♘d4, thus allowing a comfortable regrouping with ...♘d8, ...c6 and, after a queen retreat, ...♘e6. Fortunately, I found a more effective, although a bit time-consuming, way of activating the bishop.



21.♗d3!

In principle, the bishop is heading for g2, but Black should not neglect the tactical threats against the b5-pawn, the other typical weakness in the Open Spanish. Suddenly, Black has only two tempos to organize his defence of the d5-pawn.

21...♗h4?!

Black clears the e7-square for the knight, but fails to foresee that the bishop can be trapped. It is frustrating when there are no good squares left for your pieces on the board.

It would have been strategically more constructive to prepare the manoeuvre ...♘d8-e6.

The straightforward 21...♘d8?! drops a pawn to 22.♘d4 ♕f7 23.♘xb5!±, based on a nasty double attack after 23...axb5 24.♗xb5.

The best defence would have been:

21...♕f7!?

Getting the queen out of the enemy knight's range and clearing the e6-square for his own knight.

While my opponent was thinking, I realized that if I continue my main plan with:

22.♗f1

Black is in time to defend:

22...♘d8 23.♗g2 c6 24.♘d4

A last attempt to prevent ...♘e6.



24...♖c7!

Maybe not an easy move to foresee, but quite an effective one. Once the c6-pawn has been defended, there is nothing that can stop the d8-knight from completing its manoeuvre.

Therefore, I planned 22.♕e2, creating the threat of ♗xb5, which also works against 22...♘d8.

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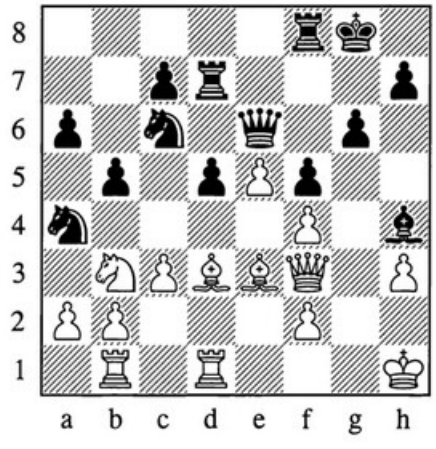
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The apparently solid 22...♖b8 unexpectedly loses material to the spectacular 23.♗a7! followed by e5-e6. We have seen this situation in the first trick chapter: the opponent makes a trick possible with his last move.

Black may have nothing better than 22...♕e6. Although this is equivalent to temporarily giving up the idea of the planned regrouping, it also leaves me with the problem of how to improve my position, since the bishop manoeuvre is not available anymore. I may have played 23.♕f1. Keeping the pressure against b5 and preparing the manoeuvre ♗e2-f3, followed by ♕g2. Still, this would have been less clear than in the game.

Choosing between different defences in an unpleasant position is not easy. One needs to display great fighting qualities in order to avoid going from bad to worse.



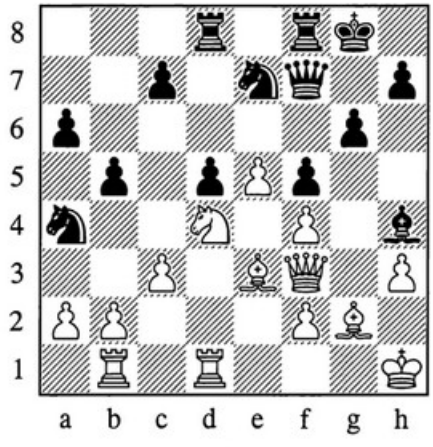
22.♗f1 ♖dd8

The more natural 22...♖fd8 would not have changed the essence of the position after 23.♗g2 followed by ♖d2 and ♖bd1.

23.♗g2

In this phase of the game I played pretty fast, being happy that my plan flows naturally and that I was threatening something all the time.

23...♘e7 24.♘d4 ♕f7



I carried out the first phase of my plan successfully: as a consequence of the bishop manoeuvre, the e6-square has been unblocked. My experienced opponent may have thought that my achievement was temporary, since he now threatens to regain the lost territory with ...c5 followed by ...♕e6.

25.♕e2!

This may have come as a cold shower for Black. The threat of trapping the bishop with ♘d4-f3 cannot be parried by retreating the e7-knight, because this would allow ♘d4-c6 followed by ♘b4, attacking two important pawns.

25...g5!?

This desperate counterattack is the only chance to complicate matters, but should not

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save the game against accurate play. Black offers some support to his bishop (...♘g6 will follow soon), but does not actually free it. Besides, his kingside is severely weakened.



26.♖g1

I played this move on general grounds, thinking that the opposition of my rook and the black king cannot do me any harm.

26...c5 27.♘f3 ♘g6

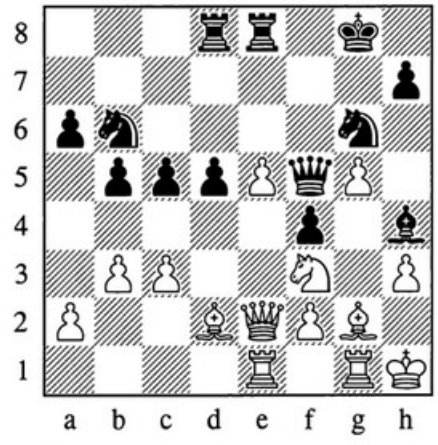


Black has improved his position a great deal over the past few moves, with one exception: his bishop will remain caged until the end of the game. Besides, I will grab an important pawn on the next move.

28.fxg5 f4 29.♗d2 ♕f5 30.b3

Finally freeing my rook from its defensive task and sending the enemy knight onto a passive square, where it will remain until the end.

30...♘b6 31.♖be1 ♖fe8



32.♗f1!

With the deadly threat of ♖g4. Black's diversion in the centre will only postpone the end for a few more moves.

32...d4 33.cxd4 cxd4 34.♗a5

Highlighting the unhappy placement of the black knight.

34...♕e6 35.♖g4

The bishop is lost, and with it the game.

35...♖d5 36.♕d2 ♘d7 37.♘xh4 ♘dxe5 38.♗g2
1–0

The essential thing in this game was identifying the far from obvious weak spots in Black's position (d5 first of all, but also b5 as an auxiliary element).

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Chapter 7

Pawn Play



In the big room

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If pawns could talk, they would most likely complain that in my early years I used to treat them with much less kindness than I did my pieces. One of my first chess teachers, Tibor Florian, kept telling me that I should think twice before pushing a pawn. This little soldier is the only piece that cannot move backwards, and mending the weaknesses left behind may be difficult, or even impossible.

I must admit that I understood the abstract concept quite clearly, but even so, for a long time I ignored Tibor's advice during my games. I did not mind creating weaknesses with my impulsive pawn moves, because I believed that I could always compensate for them with tactical ideas. In practice, this approach worked rather well for a while. I frequently had long strings of wins, and life was too nice and easy to force me to place any restrictions on my play.

The following family episode is also quite illustrative.

When I was nine years old, Susan used to have serious training sessions in her room, which Sofia and I were not allowed to join. I somehow sneaked in once and started to show a game in which I had used a setup based on ...c5 and ...e5 against the English Opening. Susan and her trainer, Laszlo Hazai (who, by the way, is one of my regular trainer now) kindly tried to explain that Black's position is strategically unsound, because of the chronic weakness on d5. White gets a comfortable advantage with the standard manoeuvre ♘e1-c2-e3, they said.

Much to their surprise, the little sister did not give in so easily. We started analyzing and I annoyed them time and again by finding dangerous attacking ideas or else tactical ideas aimed at destabilizing the situation in the centre. At the end of the day, no convincing way to an advantage for White could be proved. From that day on, I was allowed into Susan's working sanctuary on a regular basis. In some ways, I owe this early "promotion" to my carefree attitude towards pawns...

However, I later received some painful "lessons" from experienced opponents. This made me determined to improve my general understanding about chess, but I will speak more about this in the second volume. In this chapter I will try to highlight some positive aspects of my pawn play as a kid.

I mainly used my pawns to change the structure and create opportunities for my pieces. Sacrificing a pawn to open a file or a diagonal was a common pattern in my games. Those who have read Nimzowitsch's books will find in the next two games perfect illustrations of his theory about the pawns' natural tendency to advance.

Claude Landenbergue – Judit Polgar

Biel 1987

This game was played exactly on my 11th birthday.



White's last move (♗d5-c4), played after 16 minutes of thought, was a serious mistake. He probably wanted to prevent ...♘b5-c3, with

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annoying pressure on the a2-pawn. However, unblocking the d-pawn for just an instant had fatal consequences.

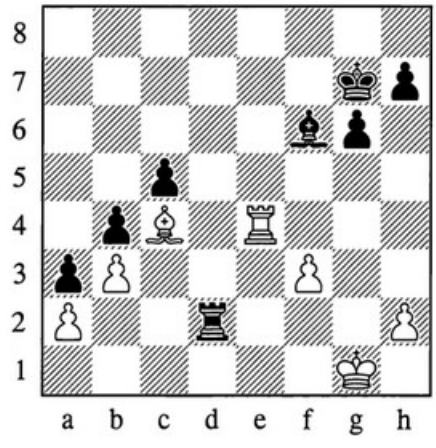
34...d5!

One can easily overlook such a move, because the d5-square seems to be well defended by the bishop. Controlling the square in front of a pawn is not as effective as blockading it, as Nimzowitsch would remark.

35.♗xd5 ♖d8!

This is the point. The d-file has been cleared with gain of time, putting the undefended d2-rook in irremediable danger. White cannot save the game by returning the extra exchange with ♖xd4 (any of them) because ...♗xd4 arrives with check, winning a second exchange as well.

36.♗c4 ♘xf3† 37.gxf3 ♖xd2

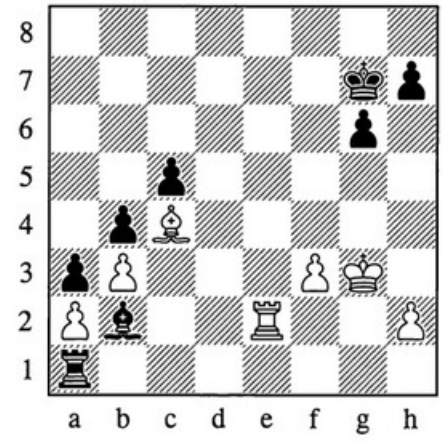


Black is a pawn up, but cannot create a passer yet. If the a3- and a2-pawns were missing, White would be entitled to hope for a draw, by holding the blockade on light squares. The way it is, the a2-pawn cannot be saved, making the position an easy win for Black.

38.♖e2

This is only a temporary defence of the pawn.

38...♖d1† 39.♔f2 ♖a1 40.♔g3 ♗b2!

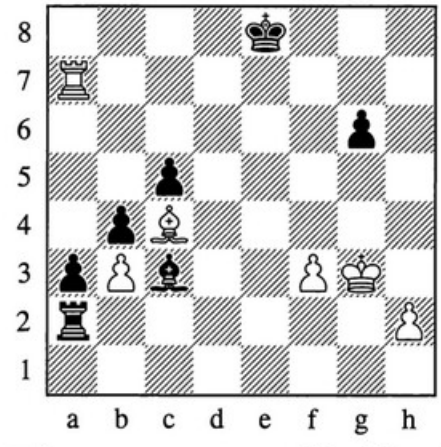


A curious picture. It seems as if the white bishop is active, but there is just one restriction that transforms it into a mere spectator: it cannot defend the main weakness.

41.♖e7† ♔f8

I did not care about giving up the h7-pawn and was only concerned about freeing my a3-pawn as soon as possible.

42.♖f7† ♔e8 43.♖xh7 ♖xa2 44.♖a7 ♗c3



White cannot prevent ...♖d2 followed by the pawn's promotion. Once again, the white bishop is completely useless.

0–1

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The essential tactical nuance in this game was the unprotected d2-rook. I remember that in 1985, Sofia and I had special training with IM Andras Meszaros which focused on unprotected pieces and controlling the whole board.

I carried out a similar pawn sacrifice aimed at clearing space for my pieces in the next example. This time, the blow was delivered as a logical conclusion of previous manoeuvring.

Judit Polgar – Matthew Sadler

Hastings (open) 1989

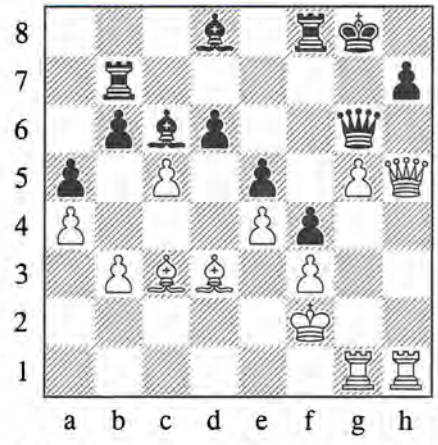


In the previous phase of the game, I had manoeuvred patiently, improving the placement of my pieces gradually. The only unsolved problem in the current position was activating the light-squared bishop.

40.c5!

I had been looking forward to this pawn break since an earlier stage of the game, but it was not easy to decide whether everything was prepared for it. I had seen many of Karpov's games in which tactics work out for him just because all his pieces are in the right places, but could I be sure that this applies to my current position?

I had only seven minutes left for this last move before the control. Some would have thought that it would be wiser to play some neutral move and only then take my time and look for a good moment to break through. However, I was confident that I had calculated and evaluated the consequences of 40.c5 accurately and saw no reason to miss this favourable moment.



40...bxc5

The only reasonable way to capture. Black has to keep the e5-pawn protected in order to avoid immediate disaster.

The game move is not without drawbacks, though. In the long run, the weakness of the a5-pawn will be an important factor.

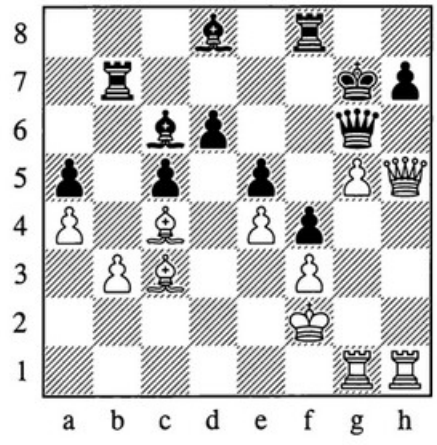
The intermediate 40...♕xh5 would not make much difference. After 41.♖xh5 bxc5 42.♗c4†



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42...♔h8 would not be possible anyway, in view of 43.g6 with a decisive attack. After the forced 42...♔g7 I could transpose to the game continuation with 43.♖gh1 ♖h8 44.♖h6 and so on.

41.♗c4† ♔g7



42.♕h6†!?

I remember that I felt very enthusiastic about continuing the attack without queens. The next phase of the game is loosely related to Chapter 12.

42.♕g4, threatening ♖h6 was a good alternative.

42...♕xh6 43.♖xh6

I am targeting two important pawns (d6 and h7) at the same time. This double trouble is more than Black's poorly coordinated army can stand.

43...♗e7

Desperately trying to patch up the position. Black could not part with his d6-pawn because then the e5-pawn would also be doomed.

44.♖gh1 ♖h8



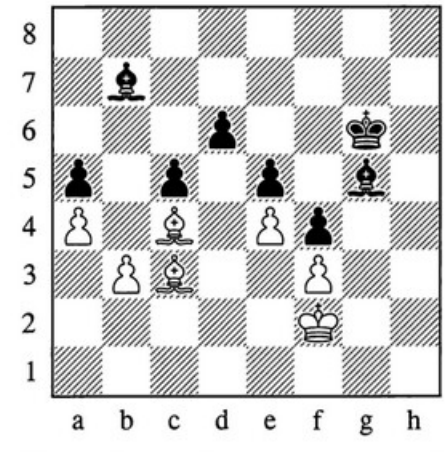
45.g6!

A second pawn advance, also aimed at opening files. It is interesting that this apparently dangerous kingside attack will result in mass simplification, when the almost unnoticed queenside weakness will decide the game.

45...♗g5

Black has to force matters, before I get to defend my g-pawn with ♗f7 (threatening ♖xh7†) or simply grab a pawn with gxh7.

46.♖xh7† ♖xh7 47.♖xh7† ♔xg6 48.♖xb7 ♗xb7



Things have calmed down, but Black's problems persist. After my next move, which

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restores material equality, the a-pawn will be unstoppable.

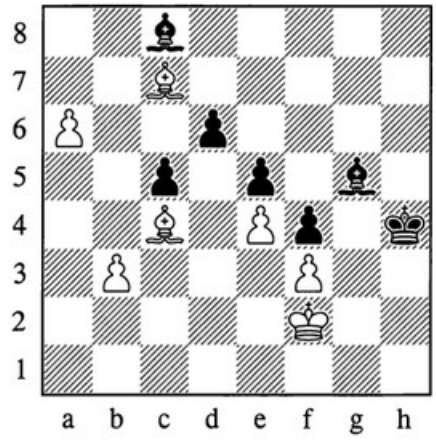
49.♗xa5 ♔h5

Black cannot even approach with his king, since 49...♔f6 is answered with 50.♗d8†!, exchanging the dark-squared bishops and allowing the unstoppable advance of the a-pawn.

50.♗c7

Clearing the path for my pawn. Attacking d6 is only a secondary aspect, and in fact I will ignore that pawn until the end of the game. Sadly, Black's dark-squared bishop cannot interfere in any way, which leaves its colleague to offer only some feeble resistance.

50...♗c8 51.a5 ♔h4 52.a6



Threatening 53.a7 ♗b7 54.♗d5. In this line, the activation of my light-squared bishop with 40.c5 pays off for the second time.

52...d5!?

A desperate attempt to confuse me.

53.a7!

The shortest way. After 53...♗b7 54.♗xd5 my pawn will promote.

1–0

I was successful in this game mainly by playing across the whole board, alternating threats on both sides. One could appreciate the importance of both the a- and h-files. The chess board may be quite wide, but there is some sort of hidden communication between the extremes.

In the next game, my approach will be closer to the classic meaning of the term "pawn play". My main goal was to get a mobile centre, which would allow me to push my opponent back to the wall. However, the method of achieving that was the same: I sacrificed no fewer than two "unimportant" pawns.

Ian Rogers – Judit Polgar

Brno 1991



My centre looks impressive, but there is no obvious way of putting it into motion. For instance, ...d4 would leave White extremely stable on the light squares after exd4, ...exd4, while the doubled pawns would become weak. Creative thinking is needed to find the best solution.

18...f4!

Unlike in the previous examples, this pawn sacrifice has a purpose that is structural. The e3-pawn is forced to step away from the centre, clearing the path for my d- and e-pawns.

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19.exf4 ♘xg3 20.hxg3 e4



I advance the pawns fully in accordance with Philidor's examples, on squares of opposite colour to those controlled by my bishop, in order to prevent a blockade. It is interesting to note that, despite being a pawn up, White has no means of stopping the avalanche. The main reason is that four of his pawns are located on just two files, leaving the centre empty. Besides, the dark squares are out of his control because of the opposite-coloured bishops.

21.♗e2

21.♗c2 would not have prevented ...d4 after 21...f5.

21...f5



The immediate advance of the d-pawn was possible, but I was only too happy to strengthen my centre first. We can see that having doubled f-pawns in the starting position came in very handy: after sacrificing one of them, the second one came to replace it.

22.cxd5 cxd5

White's position looks precarious and he should look for radical measures to change the course of the game.

23.♕c5

In this case, piece activity is not a solution for the structural problems.

I would definitely have tried 23.g4 fxg4 24.g3, which would have somewhat diminished Black's advantage in the centre. Here, too, we see the aforementioned way of making use of doubled pawns.

23...d4 24.♖fd1



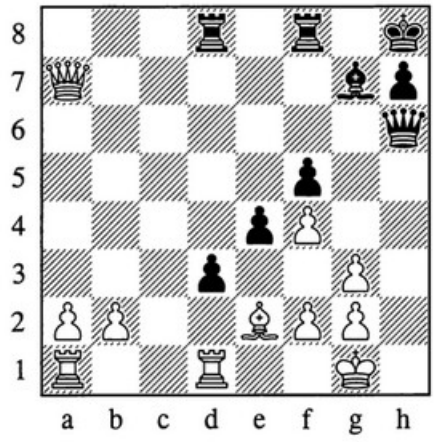
24...♖ad8!

I decided to give up a second "little guy" for the sake of carrying out my main plan under optimal circumstances.

I refrained from 24...d3, because I feared that 25.♗xd3 exd3 26.♖xd3 would have offered White better saving chances than in the game.

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25.♕xa7 d3



26.♗xd3

This sacrifice is forced, but far less effective than in the line above. The difference is that I keep a central passed pawn.

26.♗f1? would lose quickly after 26...♗d4 27.♕a5 e3, with a crushing attack.

26...exd3 27.♖d2 ♖d6 28.♖ad1



After reaching this winning position, I lost my focus and committed a series of inaccuracies, which eventually led to a draw. The simplest win would have been: 28...♕h5 29.♖xd3 ♖h6 30.f3 ♕h2† 31.♔f2 ♖g6 with decisive threats.

The lesson we should retain from this game is that the power of connected passed pawns in the centre is awesome, especially after they have crossed the central line. Usually, the only way to prevent their advance is by sacrificing a piece, but this rarely offers sufficient compensation to the defending side.

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Chapter 8

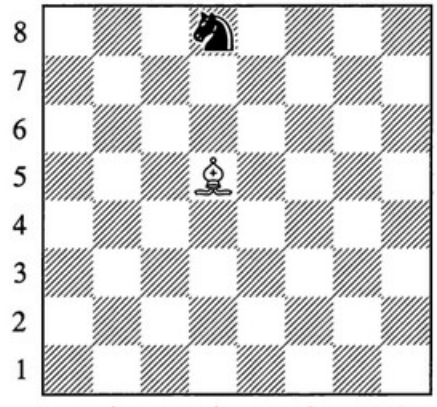
Piece Domination



Thessaloniki Olympiad 1988

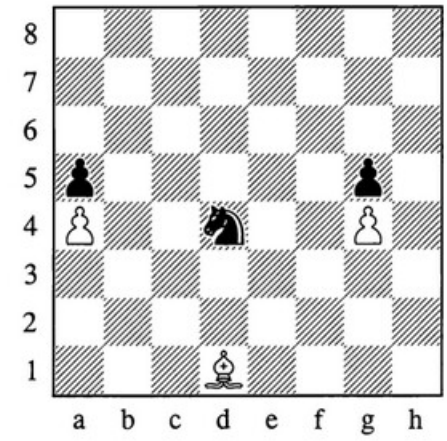
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Knowing how much damage piece activity can cause to the enemy position, it was only natural to try to fight against our opponent's potentially dangerous pieces. In the overall fight of a chess game, each piece and pawn plays an individual part, but sometimes we can identify "personal" duels between certain pieces. One interesting situation arises when the rival pieces share control over a series of squares. Let's take a simple case, with a white bishop on d5 and a black knight on d8.



The critical squares are b7, c6, e6 and f7. Neither piece can use them, but the knight has no other squares available. The bishop is dominating the knight. One could argue that both pieces are immobile, because any bishop move would free the knight. But it is White who can choose the most favourable moment to end the domination and assign other missions to the bishop. Besides, from the central d5-square, the bishop keeps many other sectors of the board under observation, while the knight is merely passive.

In order to illustrate how relative this situation is, let's shift the position four ranks downwards and add new elements. It is easy to understand that the situation is completely reversed.



In practice, such patterns do not often occur in such a pure form. However, even partial and temporary domination can prove effective. Other pieces than the knight and the bishop can be involved, but the situations illustrated above are among the most typical.

I was pleasantly surprised when I realized that most of the examples from this chapter are taken from 1986, when I was ten years old. This makes me think that domination was something I understood from a very young age.

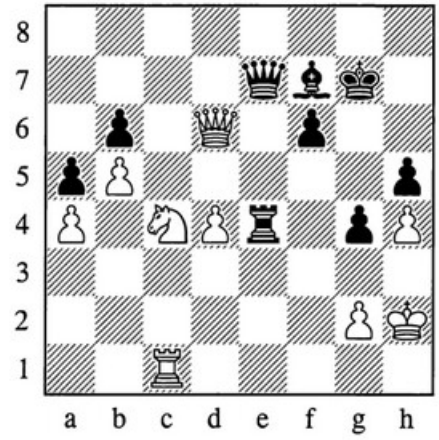
We will start with an example in which I managed to spot the pattern of the bishop's domination over the knight in what seemed a tactical position. The essential thing was putting the importance of piece activity above that of material balance.

Zirka Frometa – Judit Polgar

Thessaloniki Olympiad 1988

In the previous round we had won our toughest match of the Olympiad, against the Soviet Union. I made my only draw out of the 13 games I played. It lasted for more than seven hours with one adjournment in between. This did not affect my fighting spirit, though.

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White's king is somewhat more vulnerable, because fewer pawns are surrounding it, but the d-pawn is a potential danger. Besides, the b6-pawn is weak. The position is unclear, maybe dynamically balanced, and it is not clear yet which minor piece will dominate the other.

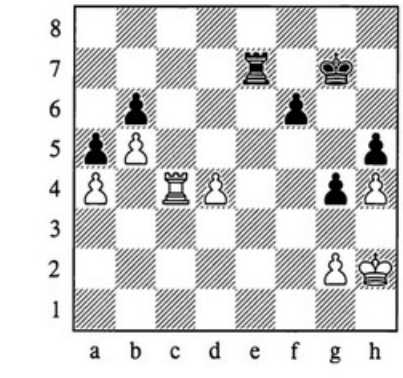
White's last move (♕f4-d6) allows two ways of simplifying the position, but neither of them suited my intentions.

42...♕b7!

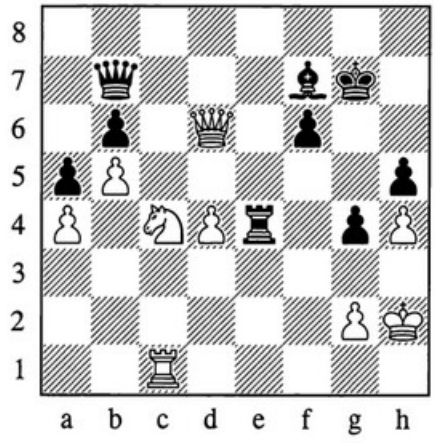
Creating the strong threat ...♖e2 and defending the b6-pawn indirectly at the same time.

After 42...♕xd6†? 43.♘xd6 the d4-pawn is taboo, because of the fork on f5, which allows White to take over the initiative with 44.♖c6.

42...♗xc4 43.♕xe7† ♖xe7 is a better way to transpose to the endgame. 44.♖xc4



My structure is more compact, but the maximum I could get is an ending with three pawns versus two, on the same wing, which is a theoretical draw.



43.♘xa5?

My opponent used 25 minutes before making this spectacular move. By clearing the c-file with gain of time, my opponent probably had great expectations of an attack.

She may have needed some time to realize that the b6-pawn is taboo. 43.♘xb6? loses the knight to 43...♖e6, while 43.♕xb6? leads to a decisive attack after: 43...g3† 44.♔g1 The only way to avoid an immediate deadly check. 44...♕e7 Threatening ...♖e1†.

Had she anticipated my answer, she might have found the best continuation: 43.♘e5!



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The same idea as in the game, but in an improved version.

43...fxe5

The same defensive idea used in the game does not promise much here: 43...♕d5 44.♘xf7! It is essential that White can eliminate the dangerous bishop and defend her queen at the same time. In order to avoid defeat, Black has to come up with 44...g3†! 45.♕xg3† ♖g4 46.♕f2 ♔xf7 with approximate equality.

The counterattack with 43...♖e2? would even lose after: 44.♖c6 fxe5



45.d5!! A calm move, blocking the long diagonal in order to free the rook for the attack. This is the kind of resource that is easier to discover during the post mortem analysis than in the game. The main threat is ♕d6-h6-g5 followed by ♖h6 or ♖d6.

44.♖c7 ♕a8 45.dxe5



With my vulnerable king and poorly coordinated pieces, I could not have avoided a draw by perpetual.



My opponent probably hoped for 43...bxa5 44.♖c7 ♕a8 45.b6. The position looks dangerous for me, but I could still have kicked back: 45...♔g6 An important move, unpinning the bishop. The game could end in a beautiful draw: 46.♖a7 ♕e8 47.b7 ♖e2 48.b8=♕



Ironically, the two white queens cannot prevent the perpetual after: 48...♖xg2† 49.♔xg2 ♕e2†

43...♕d5!!

I played this strong move after eight minutes, which makes me suspect that my opponent's tactical blow had come as a surprise.

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The point is that the lost pawn is less relevant than the relationship between the minor pieces. After the forced exchange of queens, the knight will be dominated by the bishop.

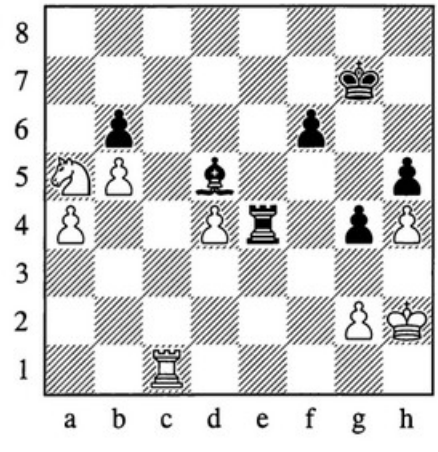


44.♕xd5

I assume that during the six minutes spent before playing this forced move, my opponent tried to adapt herself to the unexpected change in the course of the game.

She had no reasonable alternative since 44.♕xb6 was impossible due to 44...g3!† with a decisive attack.

44...♗xd5



We have a first picture of domination, with all the knight's squares controlled by the bishop. This is not too serious yet, since two of the squares are adequately defended.

45.♘c6?!

Defending d4 and placing the knight on the most stable square on the board. However, analysis proves that this is the decisive mistake. Abstractly, this can be explained by the fact that the knight is too far from the vulnerable kingside. Just imagine how safe the position would be with the knight on g3 or f4!

45.♘c4

Only this would have offered saving chances. By attacking the b6-pawn, White more or less forces the exchange of the minor pieces in the near future. In order to play such a move, one has to realize that

45...♖e2

does not lead to a decisive attack.



46.♔g3!

The king can escape on the dark squares.

46...♖xg2† 47.♔f4

The first wave of attack has been extinguished and I have nothing left other than transposing to a better, but not necessarily winning, rook ending.

47...♗xc4 48.♖xc4 ♖f2† 49.♔g3 ♖f3† 50.♔g2 ♖d3

Despite the material equality, White faces an unpleasant defence. My connected pawns are

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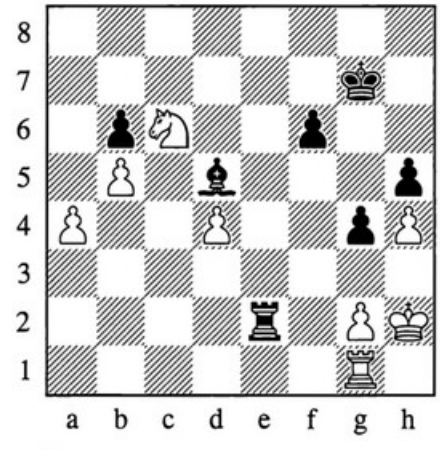
more dangerous than White's. Still, this was White's best chance.



45...♖e2 46.♖g1

Abandoning the g2-pawn with 46.♔g3 would be less effective than in the line from the previous comment. After 46...♖xg2† 47.♔f4 I would not have to give up my bishop, but could continue the attack with 47...♖f2† 48.♔e3 ♖f3† 49.♔d2 g3. The g-pawn will soon be unstoppable.

The last move certainly looks very passive for White, but if she is given the possibility to play ♔g3-f4, the position would not be entirely clear.



46...♖e3!

Only this move dots all the i's. I stop the activation of the white king and threaten to strengthen my attack with ...g3† when the king cannot advance to h3 because of ...♗e6 mate. This leaves White with the far from appealing necessity of retreating with the king to the corner.

47.♘b4

Desperately trying to bring the knight into the defence.

The counterplay based on advancing on the queenside would be too slow:
47.a5 g3† 48.♔h1 bxa5 49.♘xa5

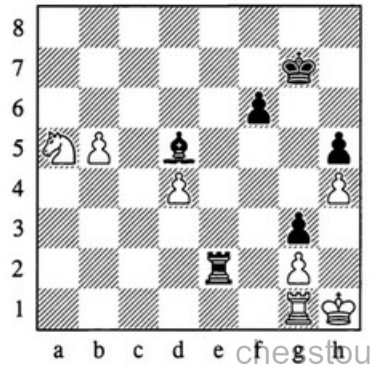


49...♖e4!

Mating threats are available from different sides. With the rook manoeuvre initiated by this move, Black gains an essential tempo.

50.♖d1 ♖e2 51.♖g1

There should be more ways of winning this position, but the most straightforward and spectacular is to advance the f-pawn, creating an elegant mating mechanism.



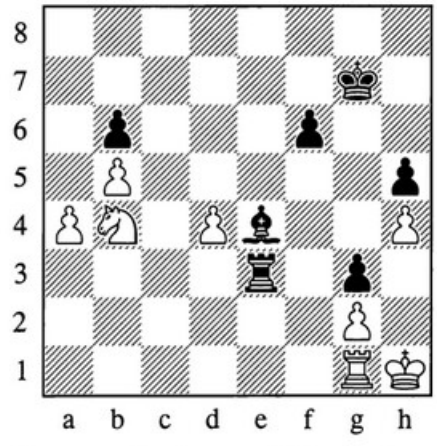
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51...f5 52.b6 f4 53.b7 f3 54.b8=♕

Once again, the queen is born too late. In a line given above, it all ended with a perpetual, but this time it is about a surprising mating picture:

54...fxg2† 55.♖xg2 ♖e1#

47...g3† 48.♔h1 ♗e4!



The second picture of domination. The process of transition from the similar pattern after 44...♗xd5 to the new one clearly favours Black. The knight needed two tempos to move from a5 to b4, while the bishop readjusted its placement in just one move!

49.♘a2

Still hoping by some miracle to reach a favourable square.

49...♖d3

I felt that there was no need to rush in with the f-pawn. It cannot hurt to keep the knight completely dominated, dooming White to absolute passivity.

50.♘c1 ♖d2 51.♘b3 ♖b2 52.♘c1

With a bit of care, I managed to immobilize all of White's pieces. Any reasonable move would create a winning zugzwang, but the one I chose is the most logical since it also prepares a decisive attack.

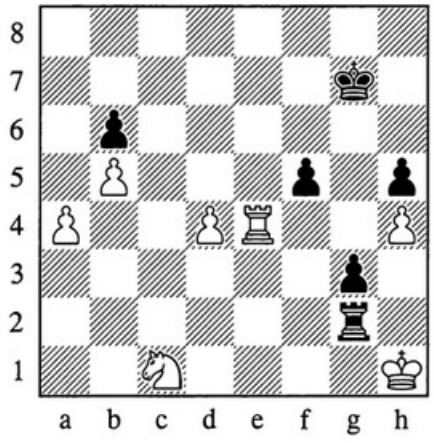
52...f5 53.♖e1

Advancing any of the pawns would only delay the inevitable end.

53...♖xg2

Threatening ...♖g2-h2-h1 mate.

54.♖xe4



54...♖h2†!

A simple zwischenzug.

55.♔g1 fxe4
0–1

A typical case of a bishop dominating a knight. Another important element was the bishop's ability to play on two wings if placed on a central square.

Domination in worse positions

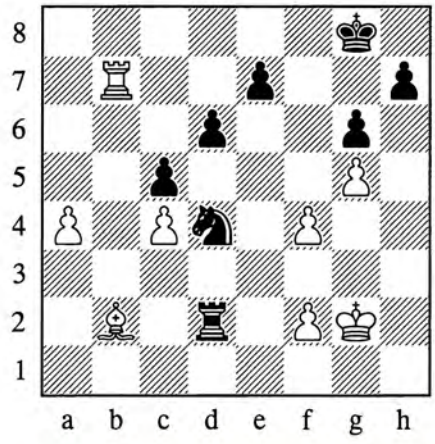
Playing for domination is important in worse positions, too, as an effective method of reducing the opponent's attacking possibilities. In the next game, my opponent failed to do that for just one tempo, which was enough for my knight to escape completely.

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Felix Izeta – Judit Polgar

Royan 1988

Royan was one of the successive tournaments we played during the summer of 1988. Susan was invited to play in the A-group, while Sofia and I played in the open.



My structure is more compact, but White has two concrete threats: to win a pawn with ♗xd4 followed by ♖xe7 or to advance his passed a-pawn. This would be enough to allow him to draw.

29...♘c6!

A multifunctional move, parrying both threats. It also takes the knight out of the bishop's range and creates the threat of ...♘a5, attacking White's weakest pawn. It is rare that a move is useful in so many ways.

My opponent, who is known for getting into time trouble quite frequently, had only seven minutes left to reach the time control and failed to notice all the aspects mentioned above. He probably judged that the knight retreat was a purely defensive move.



Three sisters at Royan Harbour 1988

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30.♔f3?

Playing a "generally useful move" does not work out well on this occasion. It actually makes White's position worse.

He should have established a partial domination of the bishop over the knight with:

30.♗c3!

This kind of move is usually played by instinct (compare with ...♗d5-e4 from the previous example).

My opponent probably did not wish to clear the second rank for my rook, but this would have been a lesser evil than what actually happened in the game. A possible continuation would be:

30...♖c2 31.♖b3

Not a very pleasant defensive move to play, especially in time trouble, but it keeps White alive.

31...♖a2



32.♖b6!

A crucial counterattacking zwischenzug.

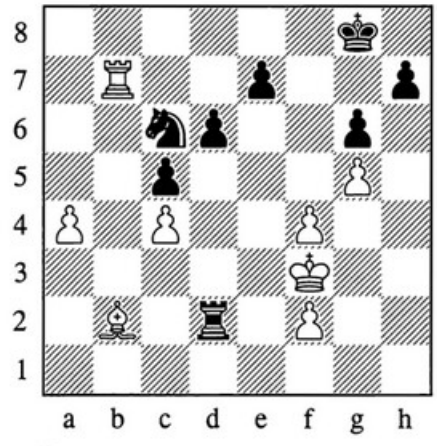
32...♘d4!

The knight returns to d4 under more favourable circumstances. The a-pawn is under the rook's surveillance, while the pressure against e7 has been released. Since 33.a5 ♘e6 wins a crucial pawn, White should play:

33.♗xd4 cxd4 34.♖a6

With chances to save the game.

Another possible reaction to my last move was 30.♖b6, preventing ...♘a5 because of ♗c3, when the white rook would not be hanging. I would probably have ignored the threat with 30...♔f7! when after the exchange of the minor pieces with 31.♖xc6?! ♖xb2, White's structure would be desperately weak.



30...♘a5!

Suddenly, White's position falls apart. Unfortunately, 31.♖b8† ♔f7 32.♗c3 does not work because of 32...♖d3† – a direct consequence of his last move. Also, the king's proximity to the centre does not help, since the intermediate 32.♔e3 is met with 32...♘xc4†.

31.♖b8† ♔f7 32.♔e4

A further (pseudo) centralization, almost placing the king in a mating net.

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32...♘xc4 33.♗c3 d5†

White resigned in view of 34.♔f3 ♖d3†.

0–1

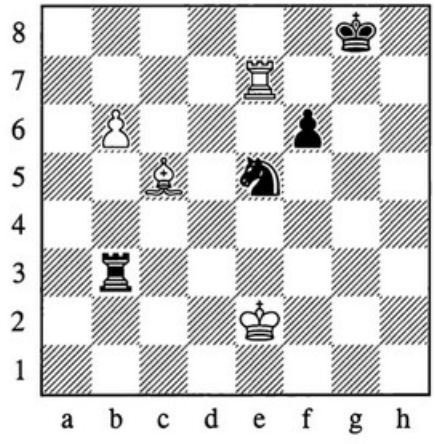
The main theme featured in this example is the incredible versatility of the knight, which attacks and defends on squares of both colours.

Domination as a collective effort

In the next game, we will see a more complex situation of domination over the knight, with the gradual involvement of my whole army.

Judit Polgar – Natasa Bojkovic

Girls U16 World Ch., Rio Gallegos 1986



This was my first ever trip to Argentina and, I must confess, not a very pleasant one. I had not anticipated the climatic differences between the opposite hemispheres and was not prepared for the very cold weather awaiting us there. Our group paid a visit to the penguins' territory and they seemed to feel quite comfortable, but this was not the case for us...

Sofia and I played in the Girls Under-16 section and Susan was our second. I had just turned ten and was up to six years younger than most of my opponents.

The day before I had played a long draw against one of my strongest rivals, Kakhiani from Georgia. She represented the Soviet Union in those days, but now plays for Germany. Natasa Bojkovic was also one of the favourites. Later, she played in several Olympiads for Yugoslavia and more recently for Serbia.

Despite the reduced material left on the board, Black's position is dangerous. The b-pawn is just two steps away from promotion and is not so easy to stop. In addition, the black king is cut off on the back rank, which offers White some tactical possibilities.

Black should have aimed to sacrifice the knight for the pawn and then defended the unpleasant, but theoretically drawn, rook and bishop versus rook ending. This is not an easy decision to take over the board. You can never be sure that you can defend for 50 moves. Besides, Natasa had little time left for the two moves to reach the control. She may have hoped to defend without giving up material. If by chance she changed her opinion later, there was unfortunately no way to reach the aforementioned ending after the 60th move.

I am not sure how I would have reacted in Black's situation in those days. I would not have liked the prospect of being tortured for 50 moves and so I might have lost the same way. Luckily, this was all hypothetical!

59.♖c7!?

The centralized knight enjoys great mobility for the time being and I need to build up the network around it step by step. Placing the rook diagonally, with a gap of one empty square, is a typical pattern of domination.

Paradoxically, I was also trying to avoid the aforementioned ending, which I could have reached with 59.b7 ♘c6 60.♖c7 ♘d8 61.♖c8. Even though this ending is a possibility for Black at this stage of the game, reaching it is not trivial and she needs some effort to find a concrete way of simplifying. Maybe the

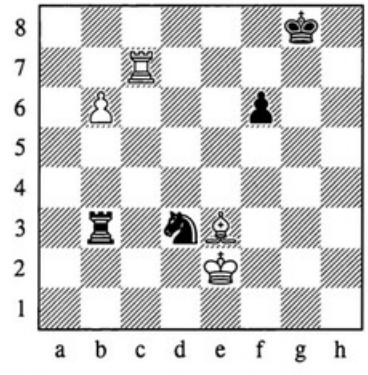
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most important thing is to decide to go for it! This complex situation creates some sort of psychological game.

59...♘f7?!

Intuitively, this looks like a safe move. Black prepares to evacuate the king from the back rank and play ...♘d8 in order to stop the pawn. However, this is too complicated and time consuming. I am familiar with the typical feeling in this kind of situation. You fear that something bad will happen, because your king is exposed. Also, you fail to understand whether it is the moment for defending or counterattacking.

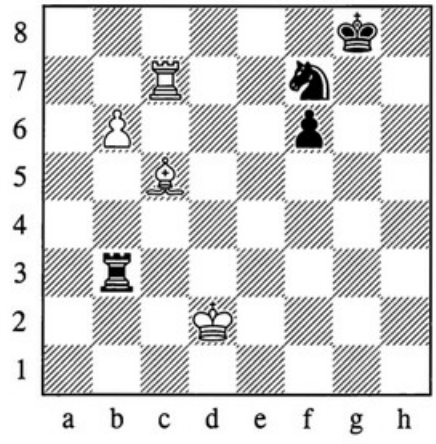
Black missed the first and simplest way of getting to the saving ending: 59...♘d3! In this situation, the counterattack would have been the best solution, but the tactical justification comes one move later. 60.♗e3 It may seem that the hanging knight prevents Black from stopping the pawn.



60...♘f4†!± It is quite probable that neither of us saw this trick. In view of the threat of ...♘d5, I would have had to simplify by giving up my pawn for her knight. Chess can be extremely concrete!

60.♔d2!

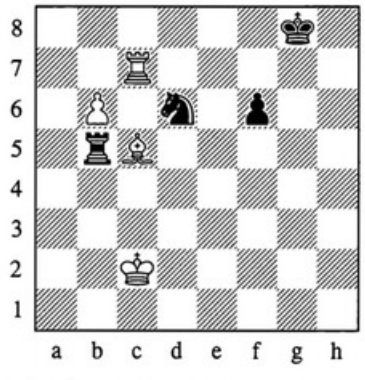
My opponent may have overlooked this quiet move. Once my king reaches the c-file, the black rook will not have enough squares along the b-file.



60...f5?

The second hesitation, this time with decisive consequences.

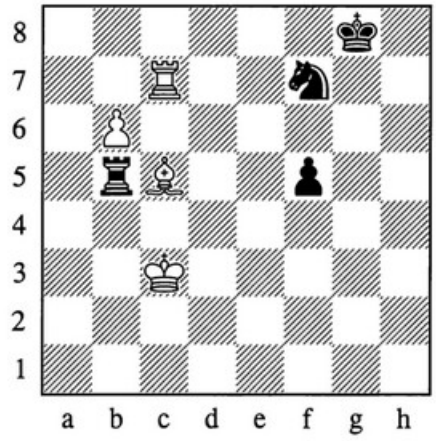
The last saving possibility was: 60...♘d6! Just as in the line starting with ...♘d3 above, the knight willingly jumps onto an attacked square. A passive sacrifice, as Rudolf Spielmann would say, since I am not forced to capture the knight yet. 61.♔c2 ♖b5



The far from obvious saving idea is that I cannot approach with the king with 62.♔c3, because of 62...♖xb6! 63.♗xb6 ♘b5† with a dead draw. 62.♔d3 is no better because of 62...♖b3†, when the king has to retreat. An elegant case of indirect domination!

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61.♔c2 ♖b5 62.♔c3



Once the king reaches c4, I will have two possible plans: either ♗b4, ensuring the advance of my pawn, or a king march to e6, with a decisive attack.

62...♘d6

With my king actively participating in events, it is now too late for this manoeuvre.

The counterplay based on 62...f4 is also too slow: 63.♔c4 ♖b1 64.♔d5 f3



There are a few ways to win, but I will mention what I consider the "human" method: 65.♔e6 Black will lose the knight for nothing rather soon. The threat is 66.♖c8† ♔g7 67.♗d4† ♔g6 68.♖g8†.

63.♖c6!

Forcing the knight to abandon the optimal defensive position.

63...♘f7

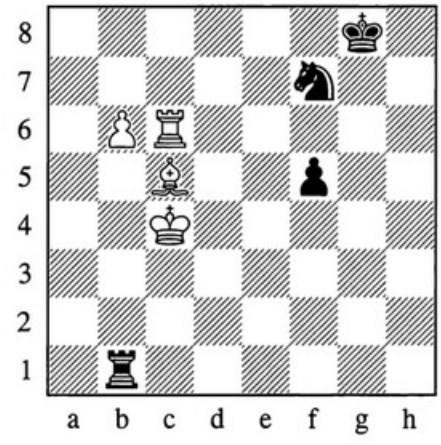
A sad necessity.

63...♘b7 64.♔c4 followed by ♖c8†, ♖c7† and ♖xb7 wins the knight.

63...♘e8 places the knight under the rook's domination. I would clear the path for my pawn with 64.♔c4 ♖b1 65.♗b4+–.

And I would answer 63...♘e4† in the same way.

64.♔c4 ♖b1



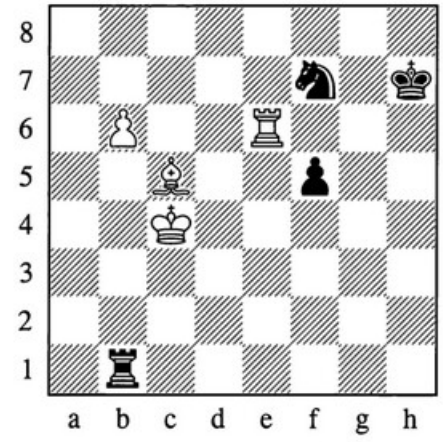
My progress over the past few moves is obvious. All my pieces are grouped together and ready to support the pawn's advance.

65.♖e6

Creating a new form of domination. 65.♔d5 was a reasonable alternative, but, just like in the game against Frometa, I did not wish to rush in.

65...♔h7

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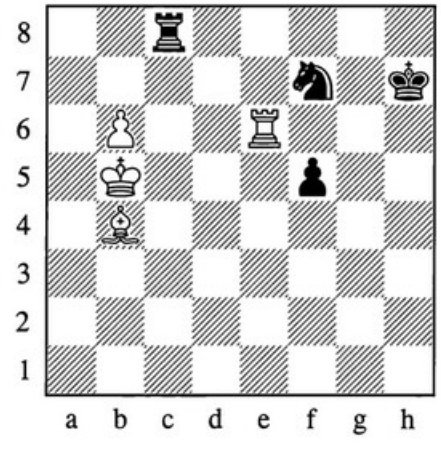
66.♗b4!

Obstructing the enemy rook. Black has to regroup in a very passive way in order to stop the pawn.

66...♖c1†

66...♘d8 67.♖e7† would lead to an interesting situation, in which the rook is indirectly controlling three different ranks at the same time, in view of the possible double attacks. Black loses the knight after 67...♔g6 68.♖d7, or else has to allow the pawn to promote.

67.♔b5 ♖c8



Black's army is completely disorganized and I only need a few accurate moves to win.

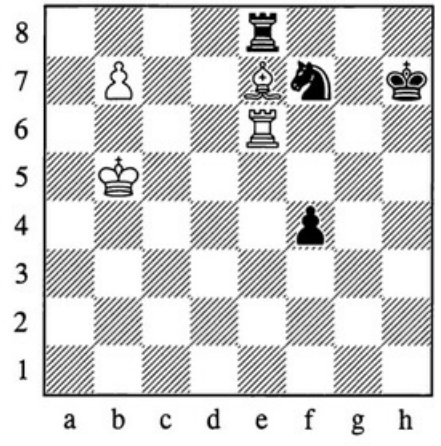
68.♗e7!

The simplest way, again based on domination. From now on the knight is out of play and the black rook is on its own in the attempt to stop the pawn.

68...f4

This feeble counterplay did not bother me.

69.b7 ♖e8

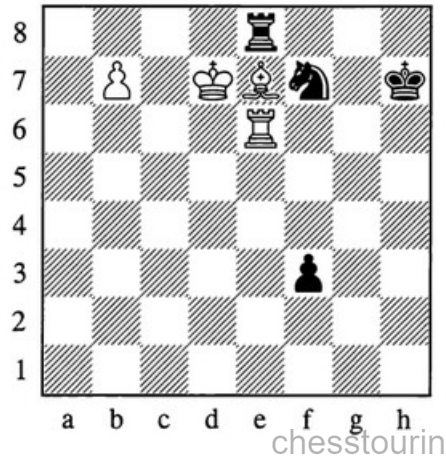


70.♔c6!

I willingly step into a double attack, having calculated the exact consequences of the line 70...♘d8† 71.♗xd8 ♖xe6† 72.♔d7, and the pawn is unstoppable.

70...f3 71.♔d7

The king is just in time with everything.



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71...♘d6

Not an easy move to explain, but 71...♖g8 72.♖f6, stopping the f-pawn, is also hopeless for Black.

72.♖xd6
1–0

The game lasted exactly six hours. At that age, being patient for so long was quite difficult for me. I strolled about a lot while my opponents were thinking and at times I had long non-chess chats with Sofia. During the 1988 Olympiad we had to refrain from this habit, in order to avoid any speculation about cheating.

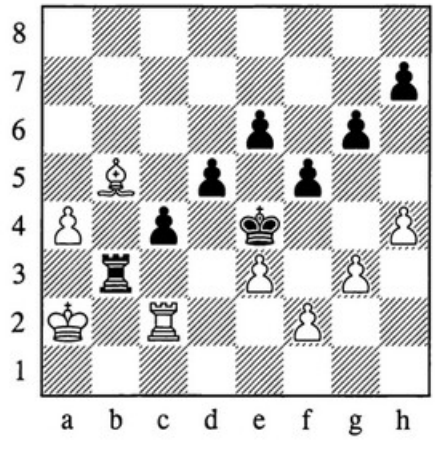
The main thing we can take from this game is the way a rook can dominate the knight, helped by the exposed position of the enemy king.

Dominating the rook

The next example proves that even the mighty rook can be dominated, a theme anticipated by Natasa's rook's problems along the b-file.

Miklos Morvay – Judit Polgar

Training game, Budapest 1986



Most of our training games against our permanent trainers and sparring partners were intended to practise certain openings. However, this did not mean that the intensity of the struggle would diminish after the opening. We fought till exhaustion – a habit that increased our general strength.

I had been a piece down for a while, and was hoping to pose some technical problems with my strong pawn centre and active pieces. On the previous move, Miklos carelessly answered the check on b3 with 39.♔b2-a2? taking the a2-square away from his rook.

39...♔d3!

Suddenly, the rook has to retreat to absolute passivity.

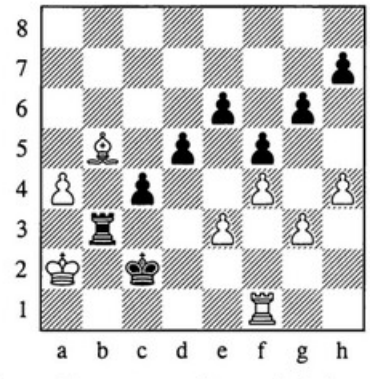
The thematic line goes:
40.♖c1 ♔d2

The rook only has the back rank at its disposal. This reduced level of activity is only sufficient for maintaining equality.

41.♖f1 ♔c2

Threatening 42...♖b2† 43.♔a1 ♖b3, when White has to repeat the position in order to avoid mate.

42.f4!?



The only way to keep fighting for an advantage. I should not take the e3-pawn because of 43.a5. Instead, I could build up a drawing mechanism:

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42...♖b2† 43.♔a1 c3 44.♖f2† ♔c1 45.♖f1† ♔c2 46.♖h1

Or any other neutral move.

46...♔b3

Threatening ...♖a2† followed by ...c2, which would even win.

47.♖b1!

The only way to save the game.

47...♔c2!

White has nothing better than repeating the position. The hyper-ambitious

48.♗d3†?

leads to similar consequences as the game continuation:

48...♔xd3 49.♖xb2 cxb2† 50.♔xb2 ♔xe3

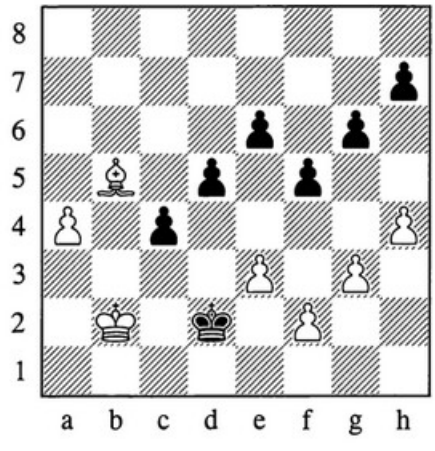
Black will soon be a pawn up in a queen ending.

Miklos probably understood that he had no winning chances after 40.♖c1 and, by the method of elimination, chose the only available alternative.

40.♖b2?

Overlooking my 41st move.

40...♖xb2† 41.♔xb2 ♔d2!

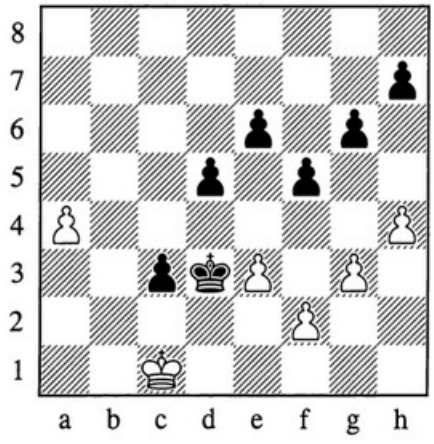


What a shock! There is no satisfactory way to stop my c-pawn, which is faster than the a4-pawn.

42.♔b1 c3 43.♗d3!?

Ironically, the only way to make use of the extra bishop is to sacrifice it for just one tempo, but this does not save White either.

43...♔xd3 44.♔c1



Forced, in view of the renewed threat of ...♔d2. I won this ending eventually, but did not find the most accurate way which was:

44...e5!

Simple calculation proves that Black is faster in the pawn race.

45.a5 d4 46.exd4 exd4 47.a6 ♔e2

The key move, clearing the path for the d-pawn.

48.a7 d3 49.a8=♕

White has promoted first, but Black's next moves arrive with check.

49...d2† 50.♔c2 d1=♕† 51.♔xc3 ♕d3† 52.♔b2 ♔xf2

I will grab the rest of the kingside pawns soon, with an easy win.

An excellent illustration of the importance of the king's activity in the ending. Remarkably, this short-ranged piece managed to dominate the mobile rook, helped by the surrounding structure.

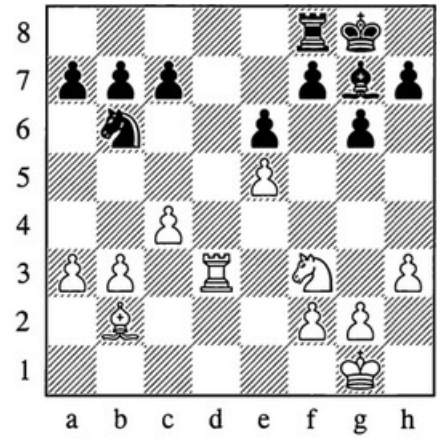
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Global domination

So far, we have seen examples of dominating individual pieces. In the next game, I managed to dominate all my opponent's pieces and push them onto passive squares.

Judit Polgar – Krasimir Hruetov

Albena 1986



I have more space and all my pieces are better placed than Black's. The most important element is the control of the only open file. However, Black's position has no important weaknesses and if he were given the time to play ...♖c8 followed by ...♔f8-e8 and ...♖d8, the position would become level. This means that I have to play energetically in order to maintain my advantage.

22.a4!

Threatening the brutal a4-a5 followed by invading the seventh rank, and preparing the bishop's activation on a3.

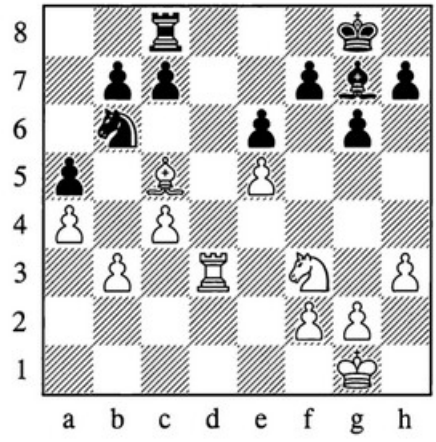
22...a5

The only reasonable answer, but the almost imperceptible weakening of the b6-square will soon become relevant.

23.♗a3 ♖c8

The only possible attempt to build up a line of resistance is to defend the c7-square.

24.♗c5



Threatening 25.♗xb6 cxb6 26.♖d7. If Black is left with such remote seventh rank weaknesses as b7 and f7, he would never be able to expel my rook and would be doomed to eternal passivity. I could prepare the gradual activation of my remaining pieces at my leisure.

24...♘a8

This is the only way to avoid the aforementioned situation, but in such cases one natural question is whether the solution is worse than the initial problem. It is not easy to find a worse square for the knight than a8.

25.♖d7

The first phase of my plan has been accomplished. The rook keeps both wings under pressure and Black has to deal with the threat of ♘g5.

We can also notice that the difference between the activity of my pieces and Black's has increased. What's worse, he cannot change the course of the game in any way. Therefore, we can already consider the advantage to be decisive.

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25...h6

Parrying the immediate threat, but creating a new weakness.

26.♔f1!

The king's centralization requires several tempos, but I have all the time I need.

26...b6?!

Making things even worse for the knight.

26...♗f8 looks like a more reasonable way to fight against my bishop. I could answer with 27.♗e3, planning ♘h2-g4. In the event of ...h5, the knight can return via f3 to g5.

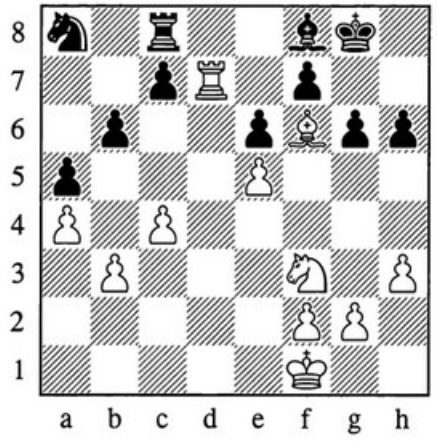


27.♗e7!

After Black has deprived himself of the possibility of ...♘b6, I do not need to keep the bishop on the g1-a7 diagonal. It is more important to prevent the enemy king's centralization with ...♔f8.

27...♗f8 28.♗f6

I could not even dream of a better place for my bishop.

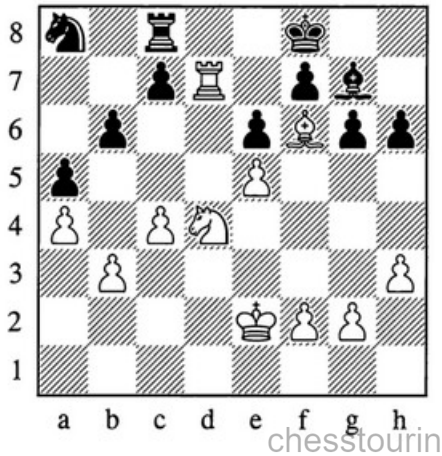


28...♗g7

Understandably, Black is really irritated by my bishop. Since I cannot avoid the exchange, I allow it to happen in the way that suits me best, clearing the e5-square for my knight.

29.♔e2 ♔f8 30.♘d4

Heading for c6, but also creating the tactical threat of ♘xe6.



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30...♗xf6

Black is forced to release the tension, which helps me to increase my space advantage. 30...♔e8 would not help because of: 31.♖e7† ♔f8 32.♘xe6†!

31.exf6 ♔e8 32.♖e7† ♔f8 33.♘c6



It is difficult to imagine a more convincing global domination. Black is tragicomically passive.

33...♖e8 34.♖d7 e5

Preventing ♘e5, but the knight can hop from the opposite side, too.

35.♘d8 ♔g8 36.♘xf7
1–0

I seem to have felt at home in this kind of position, since I had spent only 33 minutes for the whole game.

We can call the technical phase of this game "simple chess". The control of the only open file made a big difference in what may have looked like an almost "normal" position.

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Chapter 9

A Lead in Development



Standing next to the large filing system my parents made, so we could prepare specifically for our opponents or work generally on our openings. Of course nowadays we have many millions of games on a laptop!

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One of the first things we learn about chess is how to develop our pieces quickly and effectively. "Move just a couple of pawns, develop the knights, then the bishops, get castled and connect the rooks!" How many times did I hear this in my childhood...

When taking the first steps into the chess world, it is pointless to learn dozens of opening variations by heart. There is a high risk that the opponent will deviate on the way, leaving you completely unarmed. It is much better to get a clear understanding of the basic things of what should be done in the early phase of the game. This way, you can follow the thread irrespective of the variation chosen by your opponent.

Respecting the basic rules of development also seems to me to be part of the overall process of "being kind" to your pieces, a familiar issue to the reader already. The more active your position is in general, the better possibilities you will have of launching an early attack.

I believe that as a kid I had assimilated these simple basics rather deeply. Not by chance, the first three examples from this chapter are taken from 1984, when I was around eight years old.

Judit Polgar – Georgy Kralcev

Targoviste 1984

This game was played two weeks before my eighth birthday.



8...♕c7?

According to the classical rules, the queen should be the last piece to develop. There are several abstract reasons for this. First of all, this mighty piece can be quite active from its initial square. Sometimes, it can keep the balance of the whole position from d1 or d8, putting pressure along the d-file and keeping an eye on both wings using her diagonal action. Besides, a prematurely developed queen may become vulnerable to attack by less valuable enemy pieces, which would lead to loss of time and underdevelopment.

In modern opening theory, there are many exceptions to this rule, but in every case there are good concrete reasons for that. In this game ...♕d8-c7 would have made sense at such an early stage of the game only if Black had previously played ...dxc4 (met by ♗xc4, of course). This way, he would gain a tempo by attacking the bishop, whereas after the game move the threat of ...dxc4 is too feeble.

9.♘b5!

With this knight jump, I not only invite Her Majesty to look for a more reliable square, but also leave the b4-bishop aiming at nothing and even exposed, as we will see.



9...♕c6?!

Continuing to play with fire. Black's previous

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move was so bad that now the best remedy may have been retreating to d8, which would be equivalent to losing two tempos. I would have played 10.c5 followed by ♘d6 soon.

10.♘e5

Now it is too late to get out of trouble. Since ...♕a6 or ...♕e8 would be met with the decisive fork ♘c7, Black has to keep losing time with useless queen moves.

10...♕b6 11.c5

Again with gain of time.



11...♕a5?!

Desperately trying to give some meaning to the previous moves.

Once again, returning to the base would have been better. After 11...♕d8 Black would not lose material immediately. Although after 12.♗g5 White's space advantage and lead in development is so big that Black would probably not save the game in the long run.

12.a3

The bishop will only truly be threatened after White's next move, but Black cannot use the available tempo to save his piece.

12...♘bd7 13.♗g5

A developing move, unpinning the a3-pawn.

13...a6 14.axb4 ♕xb4

Evil rarely comes alone. In the search for counterplay, the queen is heading for a trap as well.



15.♖a4 ♕xb2 16.♗c1
1–0

In this game, Black's mistakes were rather obvious and he had no excuse for developing his queen so early. From this point of view, the next example is slightly more complicated.

Judit Polgar – Balazs Vandor

Hungarian League 1984



Strategically, Black's position seems to be

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sound. If I was forced to release the tension with cxb6, then after ...axb6 files would open for Black's major pieces and the c4-square would remain weak. The queen's presence on c7 is meant to prevent c5-c6.

Dynamically, things will not work out well for Black. This is quite logical as his development is incomplete and the queen is almost as exposed as in the previous example.

13.♗f4!

This kind of move is pleasant to make. I invite the queen to define her intentions and then I can choose my own plan accordingly.

13...♕c6

The only consistent move.

13...♕d8 would leave the c6-square unprotected, allowing 14.c6 ♘f8. The only move, but the knight is passive here. Now 15.h3!? would be a good prophylactic move, allowing me to keep the bishop on the h2-b8 diagonal (if attacked by a knight). This adds force to the far-advanced c-pawn, ensuring me a stable advantage.

The queen would be less exposed after 13...♕b7, but Black would not threaten 14...bxc5 in view of 15.♖ab1 ♕c6 16.♗b5, winning material.



14.♖ab1!

The best way to maintain a lead in development is to keep developing! In addition to this general point, the last move also threatens ♗b5.

14...bxc5?

Losing material by force.

Parrying the threat with 14...a6? weakens the b6-square, with decisive effect: 15.♘e5 ♘xe5 16.♖xb6.

In order to stay alive, it was absolutely necessary to develop:

14...♗b7

I would have needed to play very accurately in order to prove my advantage.



15.♖fe1!

This is the move I like the most: I simply complete my development, increasing the pressure.

15...bxc5

The critical continuation, carrying out the main plan.

Black would lose stability after 15...♘e4 16.♕b2 ♕c8 17.c4.

16.♗h6!

This kind of attacking move should not surprise us. White is perfectly developed, while Black, after giving up his bishop, is vulnerable on the dark squares.

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16...gxh6 17.♕xh6

The threats of ♘e5 or ♘g5, combined with the pressure against h7, are more than Black can cope with.

17...♘e4 18.♘e5 ♘xe5 19.dxe5

Threatening ♖e3, which justifies the developing move 15.♖fe1.

19...f5

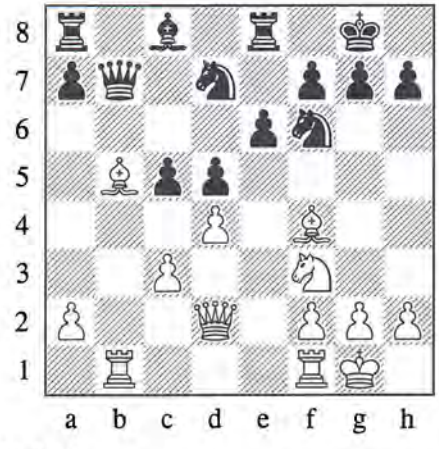
Even this desperate attempt to clear the seventh rank fails to save Black.

20.exf6 ♕c7 21.♖e3

With a decisive attack.

15.♗b5 ♕b7

The only way to avoid immediate material losses.



16.dxc5

This modest pawn helps me tighten the deadly net around the queen. Black is helpless against the threat of c5-c6. For instance, after 16...♘e4 17.♕e3 the c5-pawn is taboo in view of 17...♘exc5 18.♗xd7 winning a piece.

1–0

In this game, seizing the moment was essential. I was clearly better in the starting position, and 13.♗f4 is the only way to maintain that advantage. This is typical of positions with a lead in development, since this kind of advantage tends to be volatile.

Having a big lead in development often allows "miraculous" moves which create the feeling that our pieces are invulnerable. The following is such a case.

Judit Polgar – Vasil Spassov

Targoviste 1984



This certainly looks like an extreme case. All Black's pieces are on their initial squares, while three of my pieces are developed actively.

7...♗d7

Hoping to get out of trouble by simplifying. Indeed, if I naively cooperated with 8.♗xd7†, then after 8...♕xd7 the situation would not be so bad for Black. I would have to move the d4-knight, then the queens would be exchanged and I would lose the right to castle.

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I managed to find an effective developing move, ignoring the fact that two of my pieces are attacked.

8.♕e2!

Indirectly pinning the e5-pawn.

8...♗e7

Renewing the threat of ...exd4 and still hoping to exchange some pieces. Although Black has made two consecutive developing moves, we can notice an organic defect of his play.

There is a famous recommendation to develop knights before bishops. This is too general to be taken literally and there are even more exceptions to it than the guidelines regarding the queen's development.

Still, this is a typical case in which the bishops are hardly any more active on their new squares than on their initial ones, while the knights would do better if developed.

9.♘f5

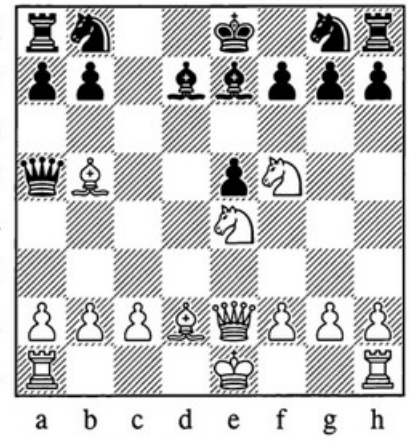
We can see a first negative effect of reversing the natural method of development. The g7-square has been weakened before Black has the possibility of defending it by castling.



9...♕a5†?

This is a final and decisive violation of the rules. Moving the queen was one of the last things Black should have worried about. 9...♔f8 would at least have allowed him to survive for longer.

10.♗d2!



This tactical resource (a developing move, after all) was probably overlooked by my opponent. Black has no favourable way of taking the b5-bishop. 10...♕xb5 loses the queen to the fork on d6.

10...♗xb5 11.♘fd6† ♗xd6

After 11...♔f8 12.♕f3 White removes the queen from the attacked square, threatening mate. Black would have to give up his queen in order to save the king.

12.♘xd6† ♔f8 13.♘xb5

Followed by ♗b4† or ♘c7† with a decisive attack.

1–0

One conclusion of this game is that, when seriously underdeveloped, one rarely can improve the situation with one-move threats.

After these relatively simple examples, we will examine a game against a strong opponent, played three years later, when I was as ancient as eleven!

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Judit Polgar – V. Kovacevic

San Bernardino 1987

There is some confusion about the identity of my opponent. Many sources consider him to be Vlado Kovacevic, a strong grandmaster who had beaten Bobby Fischer two years before he won the world title. There is also a widely spread story that Vlado Kovacevic was my first grandmaster victim.

All this confused me during my work on this book, since I was sure that my game with Gutman (Chapter 14, page 252) played a few months later, brought me my first grandmaster scalp.

I contacted Vlado Kovacevic kindly asking him to clarify the situation and he confirmed what I already suspected: he had never played in San Bernardino!



Black's opening play in this French game was not inspired. Black made some strategic concessions in order to "win" a (sacrificed) pawn: placing several pawns on light squares and giving away the dark-squared bishop. Moreover, he has somewhat neglected his development.

12.f3!

Being better developed, I have to open the game. At least this is how I would evaluate the last move now. When I was small, I may well have had less abstract thoughts. I simply played this gambit line against the French, sacrificing the e4-pawn, and knew that opening files for my rooks with f2-f3 was part of the general plan.

12...c6

12...exf3 13.gxf3 would open the g- and e-files for my rooks, with the possibility of mounting a kingside attack.

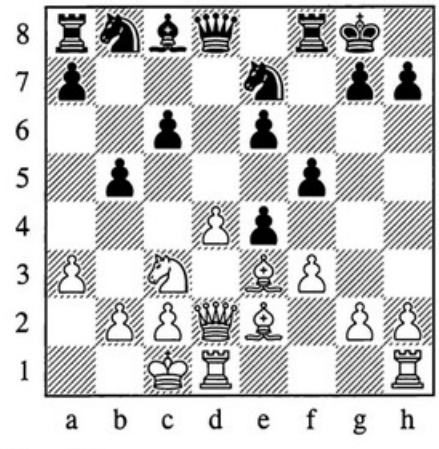
13.♗c4

Targeting the backward e6-pawn and the black king.

13...b5 14.♗e2

I have no clue what I was thinking when playing this move.

The bishop would be more active after 14.♗b3! and the curious thing is that I had initially written this move on my scoresheet! For unknown reasons, I crossed it out and played the game move instead. Possibly I thought that the bishop had done its job on the a2-g8 diagonal and was content with my strategic achievements in general.



14...exf3?!

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After this serious concession, everything fits into place for me. The bishop emerges with great effect on another active diagonal and Black is left behind in development and without any trace of counterplay.

Black should have maintained the tension with: 14...a5! This not only threatens to open the queenside, which was seriously weakened by my refusal to play ♗c4-b3, but also undermines my pressure against the crucial e4-square. 15.fxe4 b4 16.♘a4 bxa3 The play is far less one-sided than in the game.

15.♗xf3

I realized that I need to deviate slightly from my familiar plans, based on a kingside attack, since the standard 15.gxf3 would leave the bishop passive on e2. With the last move, I immediately put pressure on the enemy queenside (♘xb5 is a threat) and prepare the rook's centralization with ♖he1.

15...♘d5

The natural way of neutralizing the pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal. However, moving again an already developed piece does not improve things for him dynamically.



16.♗xd5!

By eliminating the knight and leaving opposite-coloured bishops on the board, I aimed to take advantage of the chronic weakness of the dark squares in his camp. In general, such exchanges tend to favour the player with the better development. After Black's only fully-developed piece disappears, his remaining army will be deployed on the back rank.

16...exd5?!

Black was probably happy to get rid of the backward pawn, but objectively 16...cxd5 would have been better. This would have allowed the natural development of the knight with ...♘b8-c6, while preventing a massive invasion by my rooks via the e-file.

Mathematically speaking, White has a huge advantage after the game move: three tempos in development and the right to move! However, I was aware of the fact that Black would only need to get his knight to e4 in order to solve all his problems while keeping the extra pawn. Therefore, I knew that I had to play energetically.



17.♗g5

Very well-timed. If played just one move later, ♗e3-g5 could be adequately met with ...♘d7-f6.

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After the last move, Black needs to find a safe square for the queen. It is typical for objectively bad positions that it is hard to find the so-called "optimal move".

17...♕d6

Quite logical. Black intends to prevent ♖de1-e7 by means of ...♗e6, but the queen is exposed here.

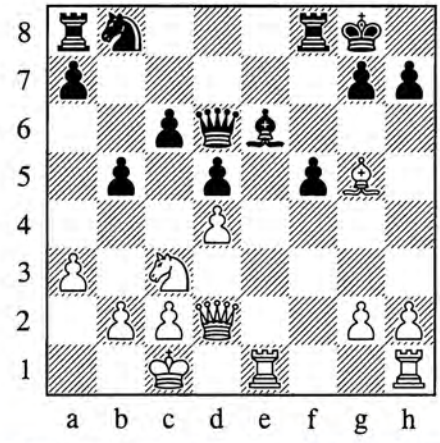
18.♖de1

With the queen on d6, there is the additional threat of ♗e7.

18...♗e6

My opponent may have been happy to parry the threat by developing a piece, but, strangely enough, it seems that the bishop stands better on c8. He should have focused on developing the knight first, in accordance with the observation I made above.

18...♕g6 would have been somewhat safer, although White's compensation is beyond doubt.





A training session with Tamas Halasz – analyzing my game against Kovacevic

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19.♗f4!

We can notice the negative effects of the previous move. The queen's mobility is reduced drastically by the need to defend the bishop.

19...♕e7

Entering into such a pin is not appealing at all, but the alternative was equally bad.

After 19...♕d7 the queen would block the knight's access to the centre, leaving the development problems unsolved. 20.♖e3 ♘a6 21.♖he1 ♖ae8 22.♘e2 Black cannot prevent me strengthening my position with ♗e5, ♘f4, and ♖g3.



There are several elements that make up White's advantage: the control over the only open file and the weak dark squares, the superior activity of all my pieces, my bishop's domination over the knight and not least the possibility of a combined attack against the g7-square. Black's extra pawn offers him scant compensation for all of this.

20.♖e3

Threatening to win material with ♖he1.

20...♕f6 21.♖he1

This kind of move is almost automatically played, but it would have made sense to weaken the enemy kingside with 21.♗e5 followed by ♖g3. After ...g6, the attack with h2-h4-h5 would have been very dangerous.

21...♖e8

Trying to put up some resistance, but getting into further trouble.

21...♗f7 might have been safer, although after 22.♖e7 my advantage would still be indisputable.



22.♕e2

The pin along the e-file is an easy feature to exploit. While I maintain the initiative, Black will not be able to use his queenside pieces. He will only manage to develop his knight eight moves later, and not precisely on the square he would have wished to. We can understand that the lead in development is not a stable advantage. If I fail to exploit it, then the advatage may rapidly dissipate

22...♔f7 23.♗e5 ♕h6

Black has to pin the e3-rook in order to prevent ♗xg7, regaining the pawn and chronically weakening the kingside.

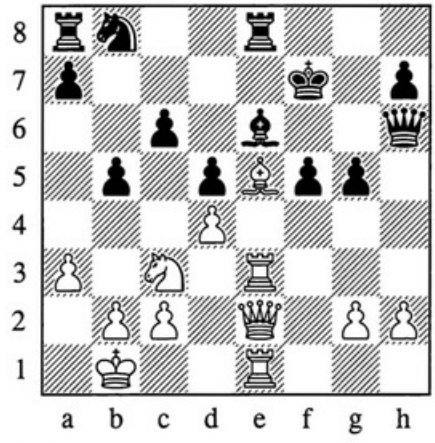
24.♔b1!

Simple, but effective! By unpinning the rook, I renew the threat.

24...g5

Still hoping to gain the essential tempo to play ...♘d7.

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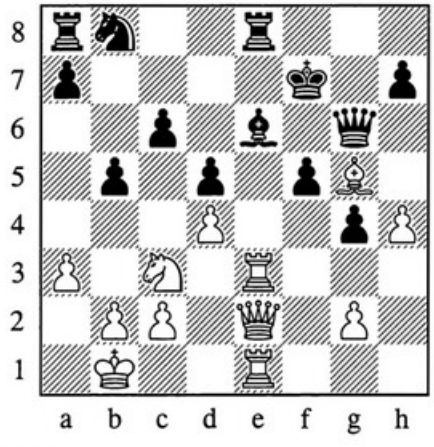
25.h4!

But I do not agree to that! The black queen will not get the desired peace.

25...g4

Aiming to keep the position closed. After 25...gxh4 I would have a choice between the move played in the game and switching to play on the h-file with 26.♖h3 followed by ♖eh1, with decisive threats.

26.♗f4 ♕f6 27.♗g5 ♕g6



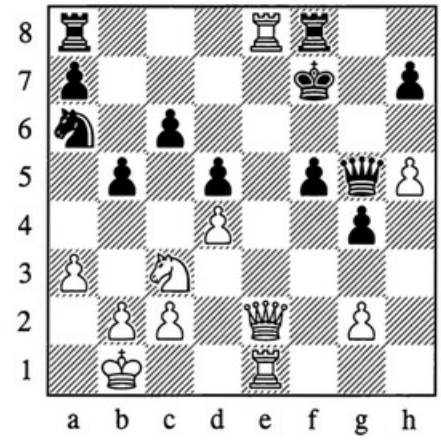
28.h5!

After a series of forced moves, I finally deflect the queen from the bishop's defence.

28...♕xg5 29.♖xe6

Black's position is completely lost, but for an adult it may be difficult to resign so early against a baby opponent.

29...♖f8 30.♖e8 ♘a6



A curious picture. Black managed to develop his knight, but can he really claim to have completed his development? His rooks are not connected yet...

31.♕e6†

This is strong, but I am ashamed that I did not realize that I had mate in ten, as immediately pointed out by modern computers. I had little doubt about the final result, though.

31...♔g7 32.♖xa8 ♖xa8 33.♕xc6

I won the newly developed knight and soon the game.

...1–0

The main lesson to learn from this game is that the transitory character of a lead in development is only theoretical. In order to retain and even increase it, the active side should aim to pose concrete problems on each move. We can state that Kovacevic's lagging development became chronic and irremediable: when he developed his knight on the 30th move, he was already lost...

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Chapter 10

Attacking the Uncastled King



In my famous winning sweater!

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In the starting position, the pieces are set up according to the usual pattern of medieval royal courts: the king and the queen *sit* in the centre, surrounded by their faithful subordinates. However, when the game starts, the similarity with historic battles is weaker.

We may expect the king to move forward, bravely leading his army in the fight against the enemy. The queen is supposed to follow the battle from a distance, limiting herself to praying for a happy outcome.

In chess, things happen the other way around compared to medieval life. One of the most important steps in the developing phase is getting the king to safety by castling. The king is supposed to stay far from the main theatre of operations until the intensity of the battle has decreased, and we reach the phase known as the *endgame*.

There are two main reasons why early castling is essential in the vast majority of cases.

In most of the classical openings, there is early tension in the centre, resulting in the probable opening of files or diagonals pointing towards the king's initial square or the neighbouring ones. This circumstance makes the presence of His Majesty in the centre very dangerous. On top of that, keeping the piece with the lowest mobility in the middle of his colleagues frequently causes problems with coordination, such as blocking the rooks' connection.

For practical reasons, the possibility of castling is a blessing. The corresponding mechanism is far more complicated than that of any other move (including pawn promotion and *en passant* captures), resulting in a gain of several tempos.

Neglecting to castle in the opening can lead to a wide range of negative effects.

We should distinguish between two basic situations. It often happens that a player clears the path for the king's transfer to either side, but delays the moment of actually castling. This sometimes proves a reasonable strategy, causing some confusion to the opponent about one's real intentions and temporarily saving one tempo for other purposes. It mostly looks like playing with fire, though.

Losing the right to castle is a more serious problem and in many cases it offers the opponent a decisive attack. In such cases, it is quite probable that one will never have the time to castle "artificially" with, say, ...♔e8-e7, ...♖h8-e8 and ...♔e7-f8-g8.

Summing up: keeping the king in the centre for too long or losing the right to castle may result in massive loss of time, immediate danger and overall disharmony.

In my early games I aimed to open the central files at an early stage of the game, even at the cost of one or more pawns, in the hope that I would get a chance to go on a king hunt. I used to practise such positions in rapid or blitz training games. This made me feel confident and comfortable despite the minor material disadvantage, knowing that the enemy king's presence in the centre would offer me plenty of play.

New York Open 1986

Susan, Sofia and my mother had already been at the New York event the year before. In the 1980s, the government was highly restrictive about letting whole families travel abroad, because of the risk that they would defect! I remember that while my sisters were away in 1985 I took my "revenge" by studying a book with 100 games by Keres, which impressed me deeply.

For unknown reasons, I was allowed to join my family in 1986 and I took part in the unrated section. The schedule was challenging, with eight games in four days. We stayed in the Penta Hotel, which was pretty far from

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the playing hall. This prevented us from going back to our rooms between the two daily games, and so we had to find some quiet place to relax.

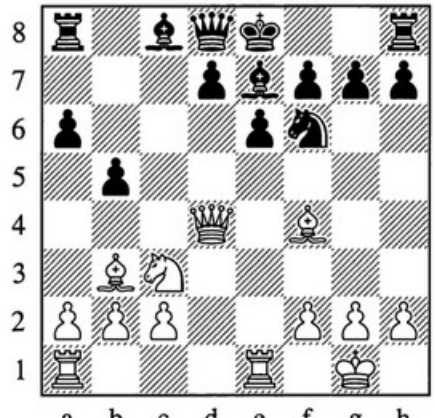
On the first day I was dressed in a new sweater, knitted by my mother. Having won both games, it became obvious to me that I should wear the same sweater again the next day. This "strategy" worked perfectly, and I had two more wins. That night, my mom "prophylactically" washed the sweater, anticipating that I would consider it vital to my continuing success.

When I sat down for the eighth, and last, game, I had a perfect score of seven wins, and was deeply convinced of the effectiveness of my "lucky sweater". I needed only a draw to win the tournament, but played in my usual active manner.

At the time, I considered succeeding in this particular game to be crucial, and even now I remember it with pleasure.

Judit Polgar – Calderon

New York Open 1986 (unrated section)



I had sacrificed a central pawn, gaining a considerable lead in development and two open files for the attack. With his last move (11...b5?), my opponent aimed to make some progress with his queenside development. He probably thought that his pawn shield would keep any trouble away from his king, thus failing to sense the danger and understand the right order of priorities.

He should have castled at once, when my compensation would have been beyond doubt, but there would have been no obvious way of developing the initiative.

12.♘d5!

It suddenly appears that my pressure was so strong that my pieces can cross the barrier set up by the pawns. The tactical justification of my last move is that 12...exd5 is met with 13.♗d6, when both 13...♘e4 and 13...♘g8 lose to both 14.♕xd5 and 14.♕xg7.

Actually, there was an alternative with equal merit: 12.♗d5!± The rook is trapped, forcing 12...♘xd5, when after 13.♘xd5 play would be similar to the game.

12...0–0



The only reasonable way to save the queen's rook from the double attack ♘c7†.

13.♘xe7† ♕xe7 14.♗d6

But this way the other rook goes off the board!

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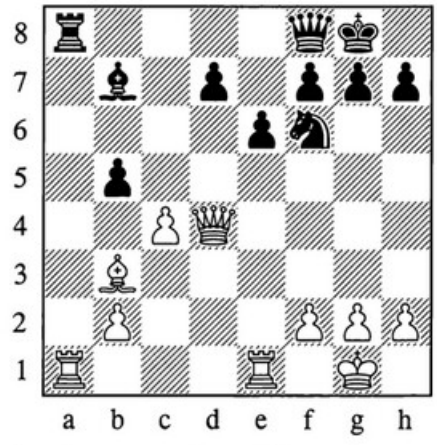
14...♕d8 15.♗xf8 ♕xf8

I was aware of the fact that winning material does not necessarily imply winning the game. With an extra exchange, it is essential to open files for the rooks.

16.a4 ♗b7

16...b4 may have been better, aiming to keep the position closed. I would have had to prepare the opening of the c-file with c2-c3.

17.axb5 axb5 18.c4



At this point, I could not contain my enthusiasm and offered a draw, which my opponent found no reason to decline.
½–½

This was my first international tournament win, which created a sensation in the media, since I was only nine years old. For instance, I was on the front page of the New York Times. I was happy with my result, but also with the 1000 dollar prize!

This game teaches us that when underdeveloped, our sense of danger must be highly sensitive. Careless play in such situations usually leads to trouble.

The next two games are among my best attacking efforts from the period covered by this volume. Facing experienced opponents, I had to display more imagination and tactical skill, resulting in rather spectacular battles.

Despite the considerable length of the games, I did not make any mistakes and did not lose the thread. From this point of view, I can compare them with my game against Chernin, from Chapter 14 (page 271).

Judit Polgar – Petar Orev

Varna 1988

1.e4 ♘f6

My opponent played the Alekhine Defence on a regular basis, which allowed me to prepare rather well.

2.e5 ♘d5 3.d4 d6 4.♘f3 ♘c6?!

This move is in accordance with Black's general strategy of setting up piece pressure against White's pawn centre, but has the drawback of allowing an immediate attack.

5.c4 ♘b6



6.e6!

The point behind this early pawn sacrifice is that the natural 6...♗xe6 is impossible with the knight on c6.

When playing his fourth move, my opponent may have hoped to avoid my preparation, but

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I had in my notes that the line is risky precisely because of the last move.

This is one of those happy cases when the objectively best move also suits my personal style, leading to positions in which I felt at home.

6...fxe6

After this forced move, Black will have some trouble developing his kingside, since ...e7-e6 is not possible for the time being.

7.♘g5

Targeting e6, while also preparing ♗d3 followed by ♕h5†.

7...g6

Defending the h5-e8 diagonal in advance and trying to castle after ...♗g7.

One important alternative is:

7...e5

Justifying the early development of the queen's knight and opening the diagonal for the light-squared bishop.

8.d5 ♘d4 9.♗d3



I felt that I should have excellent compensation for the pawn, and I really enjoy this kind of position. Black is underdeveloped and the threat of ♕h5† is quite annoying. One possible continuation is:

9...♗f5 10.♗xf5 ♘xf5 11.♘e6 ♕d7 12.♗e3!±



Taking the d4-square under control indirectly stabilizes my knight on e6. Black has no obvious way of proceeding with his development.

After the game move, energetic play is needed, since Black is just two tempos away from castling.

8.d5

Immediately taking advantage of the weaknesses on the light squares.

8...exd5 9.cxd5



In such delicate positions, Black should take his time before choosing a square for his knight. But my opponent reacted almost without thinking:

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9...♘e5?!

This natural and apparently solid move fails to fight against my control of the light squares.

9...♘b4

This would have been more challenging. At first sight, Black's pieces seem a bit loose, but it is impossible to take advantage of this immediately since 10.♕d4? loses to 10...♘c2†.

After:

10.♘c3



Black should refrain from the seemingly active:

10...♗f5?

Due to:

11.g4!

Now the vulnerability of Black's pieces is real.

11...♘c2† 12.♔d2 ♘xa1 13.gxf5

The a1-knight is virtually lost and the black king cannot find the desired safety.

Instead of 10...♗f5?, Black should play 10...e6 eliminating the d5-pawn and retaining chances to defend. Still, I would prefer to be White.

10.f4

Forcing the knight to retreat, leaving the c6-square insufficiently defended.



10...♘f7

This passive retreat is forced.

After 10...♘g4? the knight would be more vulnerable than on the symmetrical b4-square in the line above: 11.♗b5† ♗d7 12.♘e6! The same zwischenzug as in the game, but with deadly effect this time: Black loses his knight.

After the game move, I had a relatively long think (12 minutes), unsure about the best way to proceed. I decided to play for a long-term initiative, focusing on developing my pieces and preventing Black from doing the same.



11.♗b5† ♗d7 12.♘e6

Winning an important tempo with a simple zwischenzug.

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12...♕c8 13.♗xd7† ♕xd7 14.♘c3



My e6-knight paralyzes Black's position. This was another important moment when my opponent had to make a decision: which is the most effective way to free himself?

14...c6

Attacking my outposts from their base is the most principled defensive method.

The attempt to exchange the knight immediately with:

14...♘d8

would only lead to additional loss of time.



15.f5!

Encouraging Black to open the h5-e8 diagonal.

15...gxf5

15...♘xe6 16.fxe6 forces Black into desperate passivity with 16...♕c8. The following forcing sequence leads to a winning attack: 17.♕d4 ♖g8 18.♕f4 with deadly pressure along the f-file.

16.♕h5† ♘f7 17.0–0

White has sacrificed a second pawn, but gained two important tempos. After the unstoppable ♖xf5, I would win the pinned knight.

15.0–0!

I take advantage of the fact that my knight's stability persists for just one more move, by getting castled. With my pawn already on f4, this results in significantly more than just taking my king to a safer place: it also brings the rook into play (preparing f4-f5).

15...♘xd5 16.♘xd5

With the king on e1, Black could have played ...♕xe6†, but after I have castled, the knight is taboo because of the fork on c7.

16...cxd5



I remember being unsure about which continuation was best, but as I was confident about my position I played almost without hesitation:

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17.f5

I thought that 17.♖e1 and 17.♕xd5 were worthy alternatives. The latter would most likely transpose to the game after 17.♕xd5 ♘d8 18.f5 gxf5.



17...gxf5

Once again, Black does not achieve anything by offering an exchange of knights.

17...♘d8 18.♕d4!

Winning an essential tempo for the queen's centralization.

18...♖g8



The engines give several winning lines here, but I will stick to the continuation I had calculated during the game:

19.♘xd8 ♖xd8 20.♕xd5 ♖g7

20...♖h8 21.fxg6, threatening ♕f7 mate, is curtains.

21.♗h6

White wins an exchange, since

21...♖f7?

loses instantly to:

22.fxg6!

With decisive threats along the f-file.

18.♕xd5 ♘d8



Finally, Black manages to exchange knights, but my position has become very active in the meantime.

19.♘xd8

The best way to maintain the initiative.

19.♘d4 would offer Black a valuable tempo for his counterplay, starting with 19...♖c8 possibly followed by ...♖c5.

19...♖xd8

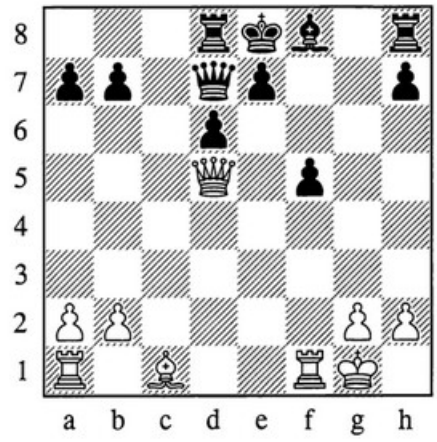
From the three possible captures, this is the most natural.

19...♕xd8? was out of question because of 20.♕xf5. Black needs to keep his f5-pawn defended.

19...♔xd8 has the idea of kicking my queen away with ...e6 without fearing a pin along the e-file, but the significant drawback is that

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it gives up the right to castle forever. I would have a choice between 20.♗g5 and 20.♕f7, both of which prevent ...e6.



20.♗g5

I did not seriously consider capturing on f5, as I aware that the best way to maintain the initiative is to develop rapidly.

20...♗g7?!

Things are different for Black, who cannot afford to make natural developing moves. Although he spent 18 minutes on his last move, my opponent failed to find the best defensive try.

20...e6? would allow me to create two successive pins: 21.♖ae1 ♔f7 22.♖xf5† with mate in view.

After having exchanged my knight, 20...♕c6! would have been consistent in the fight against White's control of the light squares. The exchange of queens would solve Black's problems immediately, as is the case after 21.♕xf5? ♕c5!†. So I would have had a choice between 21.♕d1, targeting h5, and 21.♕d3, staying closer to the centre. In either case, I would retain a dangerous initiative.

21.♖xf5



My pieces gather around the enemy king like dark clouds before the storm. Black needs a defence against the threatened mate in one.

21...e6

Relatively best. The only alternative was 21...♖f8, but then I would get a decisive attack with: 22.♖xf8† ♗xf8 23.♖f1 e6 24.♕f3 In order to avoid mate, Black would have to give up a rook.

22.♖e1

This looks like the most logical idea. I complete my development, bringing the last piece into the attack. However, I only played it after ten minutes of thought, as I needed to find the hidden idea mentioned below.

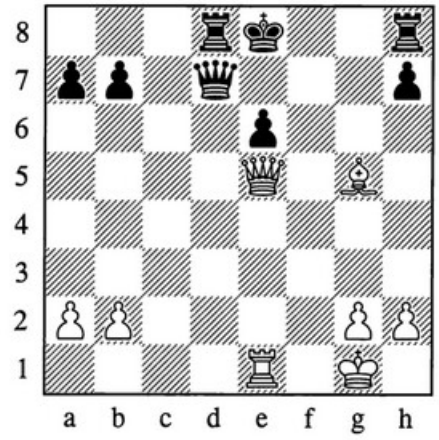
22...♗e5

Covering the e-file and forking my queen and rook. Under different circumstances, this would win material, but Black's coordination is too poor for that to work here.

23.♖fxe5 dxe5 24.♕xe5

All these moves were easy to calculate, but here it seems that Black can exchange queens with 24...♕d4†. I played my 22nd move only after noticing that 25.♕xd4 ♖xd4 26.♗f6! would win a whole rook!

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24...♖f8?!

I remember that during the game I considered this to be forced, completely forgetting that Black could castle! I have the feeling that my opponent also forgot about this basic right.

This may seem strange to the reader, but it has a psychological explanation. For more than two hours, castling had been out of the question for Black and the most his king could aspire to was not getting mated. Castling finally became available at a point when we had already discarded it for good...

It is worth mentioning that this kind of blindness has occasionally arisen in the games of great champions, who are only human after all. Here is, for instance, Tal's comment to the position after 28 moves from the last game of his 1969 match against Larsen:



"The black king had taken a walk and then returned to e8. I had calculated that, by advancing my a-pawn, I would win in a few moves, but suddenly I saw that by castling (!!) Black could set up a counterattack on f2. I therefore began taking energetic measures to prevent Black from castling..." I would add that, by a fantastic coincidence, the rare opening played on that occasion was precisely the same as in my game against Orev. (Tal played 7.h4, though).

Back in my game, Black should have tried:

24...0–0!

Objectively speaking, this would have offered better chances for a successful defence.

25.♗xd8 ♖xd8

The e6-pawn is doomed, but White needs to find the best way of taking it. For instance, 26.♕xe6? ♕xe6 27.♖xe6 allows 27...♖d2 with a draw. A better way would be:

26.♕g5† ♔h8 27.♕f6† ♔g8 28.♖xe6

With his king exposed, Black should grab his chance to exchange queens:

28...♕d1† 29.♕f1 ♕xf1† 30.♔xf1



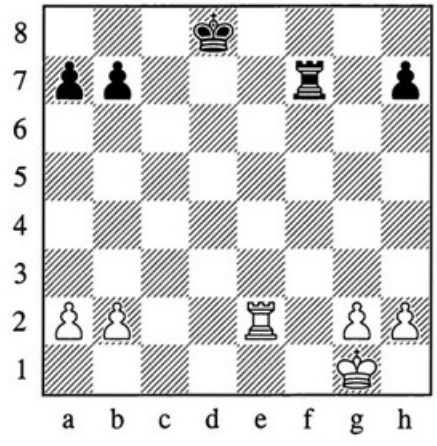
True, the counterattack based on 30...♖d2 would not bother me because of 31.♖e2. The significant difference compared to the game continuation is that the black king can defend his weaker wing, making my win more problematic.

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25.♗xd8 ♔xd8 26.♕xe6

In the previous phase of the game, it was Black who would have been interested in exchanging queens. The attacking sequence has resulted in the win of a pawn, and I happily exchanged queens in order to initiate the technical phase. The reader can learn more about my general attitude towards simplifications in the next chapter.

26...♕xe6 27.♖xe6 ♖f7 28.♖e2



A calm retreat, defending the second rank and getting ready for a slow kingside attack, consisting of the gradual advance of the pawns, supported by the king.

In many rook endings, the advantage of one pawn is not enough to win. Here, we have an additional element: the black king is cut off from the kingside, leaving my opponent helpless against the aforementioned plan. It took me 24 more moves to win, but this is not part of our main subject.

This was one of my best attacking games against an uncastled king, but it was somewhat spoiled by the fact that for a moment my opponent and I both forgot one of the basic rules of chess!

The following game brought real joy to my life. Not only did I enjoy playing it, but for the following weeks we were analyzing and talking about it.

Jean Luc Costa – Judit Polgar

Biel 1987

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.♘f3

My opponent probably wanted to avoid the complicated positions arising from my usual Benko Gambit, but I had in my repertoire an even sharper line against the open Symmetrical English.

3...cxd4 4.♘xd4 e5 5.♘b5 d5 6.cxd5 ♗c5 7.♘5c3 0–0



This gambit variation was introduced into practice by Mark Tseitlin in 1977. In the late '70s Vaganian was its most notable advocate, and in the early '80s it became part of the young Kasparov's repertoire.

It is curious that the line does not have a generally recognized name (though one author dubbed it the Vaganian Gambit), despite the fact that at some point it became one of the most common complements of such sharp openings as the Modern Benoni and Benko Gambit.

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It is not easy to understand the essence of Black's compensation, since White is a pawn up and has no weaknesses. However, the white king's position is a significant problem. It will take several moves to prepare for castling, but in view of the predictable ...e5-e4 the kingside may not prove such a safe location, either.

On top of that, White's knights are competing for only one favourable square (c3), which will cause some development problems.

Needless to say, this kind of position suited my taste and style perfectly!

8.g3

This was the recommendation of the, then current, edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Chess Openings*. Later, it was established that 8.e3 is more solid. The main tabiya arises after 8...e4.

8...♘g4

This straightforward move, preparing the brutal advance of the f-pawn, takes full advantage of the fact that White did not defend the g1-a7 diagonal on his previous move.

9.e3 f5

One has to act quickly in order to take advantage of a lead in development. After ...f5-f4, my rook will be very active.



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10.♗g2?!

After this stereotypical move, my attack develops at full steam.

The only way to cross Black's intentions is 10.♗e2, deviating from the initial plan in order to stop ...f4, as played by Korchnoi against Gilberto Hernandez in 1996.

This is the kind of decision that one has to take intuitively. It is difficult to calculate and evaluate the complications after the natural move played in the game. You either believe that White's position can hold or not.

10...f4

The most consistent continuation, hitting the enemy pawn shield in order to activate my king's bishop, knight and rook.

The solid 10...e4, cutting off the defence of the d5-pawn, was also possible, but not really to my taste. My general approach used to be more concrete and, besides, I had spotted the tactical idea of my next move.

11.h3?

This is a very provocative move. Did he not know who he was dealing with?! Just a few years later, my opponents would display more caution in such situations.

11.♗f3



This should have been preferred. This way of attacking the g4-knight has the advantage of covering the f-file and avoids weakening g3.

11...♘f6

The tempting sacrifice 11...fxe3 12.♗xg4 exf2† does not work out well, since after 13.♔f1 I would not have enough pieces on the kingside. White's control over the e4-square would allow him to consolidate and repel my attack.

12.0–0 ♗h3 13.♖e1 ♘bd7



Black is better developed and exerts strong kingside pressure, which makes my compensation for the pawn quite obvious. On the other hand, White can hope to consolidate by occupying the e4-square.

Objectively, White may be better, but his king would be surrounded by danger. Both sides would need to play very accurately in order to avoid getting the worst of it. For instance, prematurely opening the position would lead White to disaster:

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14.exf4? exf4 15.♗xf4 ♗xf2†!

A temporary sacrifice; Black soon wins the piece back with interest.

16.♔xf2 ♕b6† 17.♗e3 ♘g4† 18.♔g1 ♘xe3

With a winning attack.



11...♘xf2!

I was really hoping that White would invite me to play this thematic sacrifice, although there was no question of calculating all the lines until the happy end.

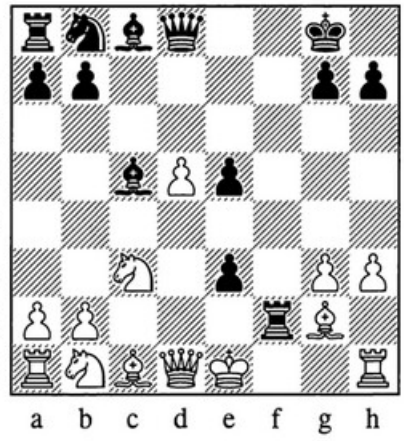
I mainly relied on my intuition, which said that White's underdeveloped army should not be able to offer adequate protection to the exposed king. Evaluating the position correctly is one thing, but the difficult part is maintaining concentration and accuracy until the attack is transformed into a convincing advantage.

12.♔xf2 fxe3† 13.♔e1

The only move, since 13.♔g1? e2† drops the queen and 13.♔e2? ♖f2† wins a tempo for Black.

With the last move, the king returns to its initial square after having lost the right to castle. This avoids such possibilities as 24...0–0! which Orev missed in the previous game. It is funny to mention that this restriction will not be relevant at all, since White will not even be able to clear the first rank on the queenside!

13...♖f2



It is not customary that a rook gets onto the second rank at such an early stage. When playing 11...♘xf2, I considered that a knight was not too high a price to pay for such an achievement.

This is a crucial moment of the game. The bishop is hanging and White's coordination problems are obvious. My opponent failed to find the best way out, despite his prolonged thought.

14.♖g1?!

This is too passive.

14.♗e4?! would not be an improvement. I would have a natural way of bringing all my pieces into the attack: 14...♕g5 15.♘e2 ♗f5 Fighting against the unstable blockade on e4. 16.♕c2 ♘a6



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I would play ...♖a8-f8 soon, with a powerful attack.

The best chance was 14.d6!, getting ready to display some activity and defending the bishop indirectly in view of the possible ♕d5†.

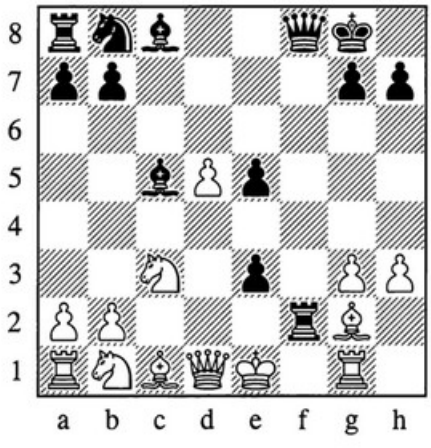


I am pretty convinced that I did not see this move during the game. Just like my opponent, I must have focused my attention on the narrow area surrounding the g2-bishop, failing to sense the communication between the opposite wings.

I would most probably have reacted with the developing move 14...♘a6, which also defends the c5-bishop.

Another reasonable possibility is 14...♔h8, renewing the threat of ...♖xg2. In both cases, Black would retain adequate compensation.

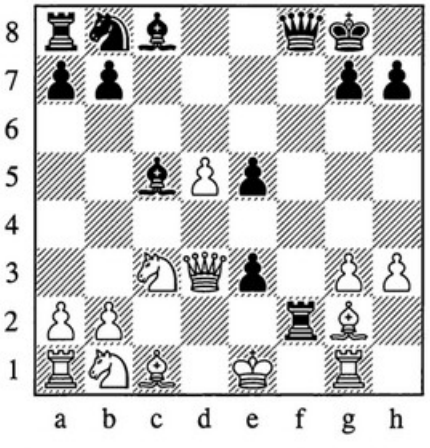
14...♕f8



Visually, this move along the back rank does not seem very impressive. And yet, it is a strong attacking move. White's practical task becomes even more complicated, since he will have to permanently watch out for little combinations based on clearing the f2-square for the queen. There are two reasons why the queen is better placed on f8 than on f6: it cannot be attacked by ♘e4 and it keeps communications open with the queenside, over-defending the c5-square, for example.

For the time being, ...♖d2 is not so dangerous because of ♕f3, but one concrete threat may be 15...e2 16.♘xe2 ♖xg2 17.♖xg2 ♗xh3 with a promising attack. However, in most cases I would just keep developing with ...♘a6 and ...♗f5, waiting for the best moment to deliver this combination.

15.♕d3



After twenty minutes of thinking, my opponent decided to clear the d1-square for the king, possibly wishing to spare the effort of calculating the consequences of all kinds of *kamikaze* rook moves threatening ...♕f2 mate. His last move threatens to eliminate my far-advanced pawn, which seems to have become vulnerable after getting cut off from its colleagues. Quick action is required from Black. Fortunately, there is a sequence of

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attacking moves available, which keeps White busy. He will manage to eliminate the pawn only when it is too late to save the game.

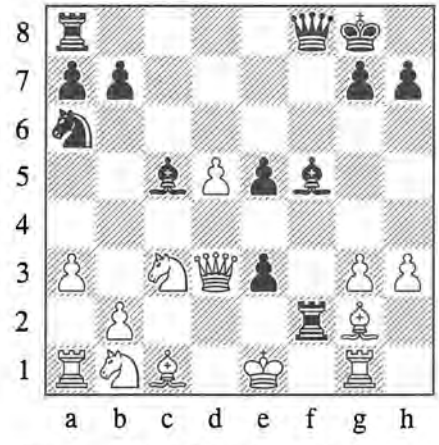
15...♘a6

This planned developing move threatens ...♘b4-c2†, thus preventing White's threat of ♗xe3.

16.a3

Absolutely forced, but by covering the b4-square, White weakens the b3-square. Besides, spending a valuable tempo on a pawn move makes my lead in development bigger and bigger.

16...♗f5



The possibility of developing in such an easy way and with such great effect is one of the main rewards for the courage displayed when sacrificing material. I always enjoyed playing this kind of chess although I could not help being a bit nervous when having a material disadvantage. One can never be sure of the final consequences of an intuitive sacrifice, but the fear and risk that everything will go wrong is more than compensated by the exceptional feeling created by a brilliant win.

If you study Mikhail Tal's games, you will find that not all his combinations were sound. In my opinion, Tal intuitively believed in the correctness of his sacrifices, although not even he could calculate everything until the end. The important thing was that he could express himself freely and had a lot of self-confidence that his perseverance would reward him even if there was a *bug* in the combination.

17.♗e4

White's hopes of maintaining a blockade on e4 will soon vanish.

17.♘e4 would be answered similarly with 17...♗d4!. As in the game line, the bishop clears the c5-square for the knight, placing White in a critical situation.

17...♗xe4



It appears that each way of recapturing has its drawbacks.

18.♕xe4

The queen is the worse blockading piece, but the more natural

18.♘xe4

has the drawback of allowing:

18...e2!

Threatening ...♖f1†. In other words, White needed to keep two pawns under control

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at the same time; a difficult task when underdeveloped.

19.♘bd2 ♖h2

Trapping the enemy rook.

20.♘f3

The only way to keep fighting.

20...♗xg1 21.♘xh2



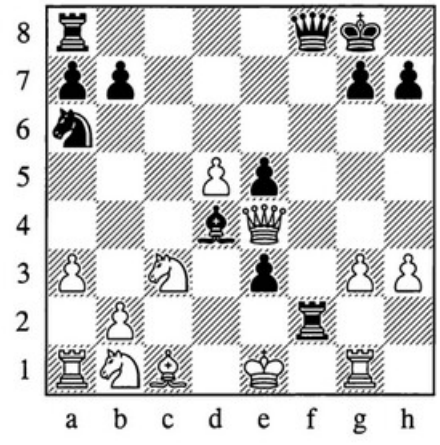
21...♘c5!

Knights can be well placed on the edge of the board if they can get into play at the right moment! White cannot play 22.♘xc5? because of 22...♕f2† followed by mate.

22.♕xe2 ♗xh2 23.♕xh2 ♘xe4

After having restored material equality, I would have had little trouble converting my far superior development into a win.

18...♗d4!



A familiar motif: the bishop prepares the knight's centralization.

19.♗xe3

Finally eliminating the disruptive pawn, but allowing the decisive opening of the centre.

White did not have a satisfactory defence. The dynamism of my position is so high that engines suggest that 19.b4 does not even prevent 19...♘c5 because after 20.bxc5 ♕xc5 White's pieces are hanging.

I confess that I intended to play the simple 19...♖c8, completing my development and leaving White with the unsolvable task of defending his knight. Since my f2-rook also looks to be hanging, it is useful to prolong the line a few more moves. 20.♗xe3 ♖xc3 21.♘xc3 ♗xc3† 22.♔d1 ♗xa1 23.♗xf2 ♕xf2



Black now has a material advantage. Black's coordination is not perfect yet, but with the white king so vulnerable, White cannot hope to get much counterplay.

19...♘c5

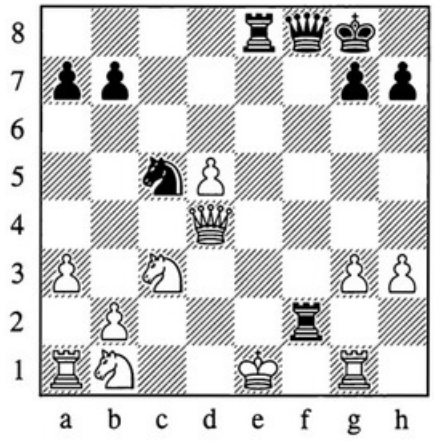
Apart from his existing problems (uncastled king, incomplete development), White now experiences severe problems with his coordination. The attacked queen can no longer defend the bishop.

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20.♗xd4

Desperation. I could simply take the queen, getting a material advantage, but I preferred to end the game with a direct attack.

20...exd4 21.♕xd4 ♖e8†



The triumph of the regrouping initiated by the modest-looking 14...♕f8. The queen defends the f2-rook and the knight, having allowed the rapid centralization of the other rook, and is also ready to intervene along the f-file. The game is over.

22.♔d1 ♕f3†

Not wishing to get mated after 23.♔c1 ♘b3, my opponent resigned.

For this win, I was awarded the festival's best game prize, which was a gold bar provided courtesy of SKA Credit Suisse. You can imagine the strong impression holding a piece of pure gold in her hands made on an eleven-year old girl...

I remember that I spent the next few weeks analyzing the game with my sisters and trainers. Every time we found a new defensive idea, some spectacular tactical line popped up, and so on. I also could not stop showing the game again and again to anybody who was willing to see it.

Even now, I believe that this remains one of my most memorable games from the period covered in this volume.

By now, we have a clear picture about the dangers connected with the king's presence in the centre. Everything is relative, though, as the next two examples will show. There are several concrete details which can change the evaluation of the king's situation.

In the next game, both kings are in the centre at a relatively advanced stage of the game, but only Black's will be in real danger.

Judit Polgar – Rainer Knaak

TV Exhibition, Cologne 1990

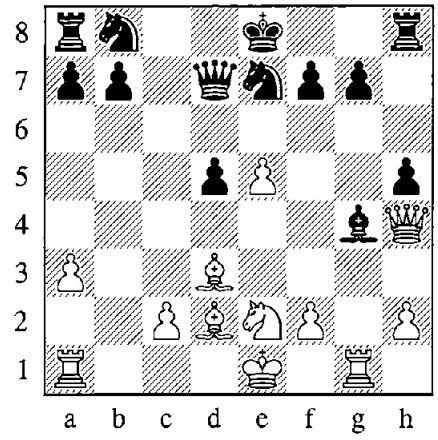
This was an interesting and rather unusual game. It was broadcast on TV and we had one hour each. In order to make things more entertaining for the spectators, there was a lot of commenting and kibitzing among the special guests and big audience. This atmosphere did not disturb us at all, since we played in a huge soundproof glass box. While writing these lines, it comes to my mind that 17 years later I played in similar circumstances in Vitoria, Spain. Who knows, maybe this is the most attractive way of presenting chess to a wider audience and it may revolutionize the public status of our favourite game? I know it sounds a bit surprising, but one has to keep an open mind when looking for ways of improving things.

Let's think, for instance, of the digital clock with increments, as suggested by Fischer in the late '80s. Many thought it was just another eccentricity of the American chess genius, but over 20 years later this has become the standard way.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 ♘e7 7.♕g4 ♕c7 8.♗d3 cxd4 9.♘e2 ♕xe5 10.♗f4 ♕f6 11.♗g5 ♕e5 12.cxd4 h5

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13.♕h4 ♕c7 14.♗f4 ♕a5† 15.♗d2 ♕d8 16.g4 e5 17.dxe5 ♗xg4 18.♖g1 ♕d7



My opponent, a renowned specialist in the French Defence, probably hoped to build up a strong position on the light squares. My energetic play in the next phase of the game prevented him from achieving that.

Both kings are in the centre (without having lost the right to castle). However only the black one is in some danger, because of White's much better development and the mighty bishop pair.

This latter positional element has two main implications. First of all, Black is quite vulnerable on the dark squares, and I will be able to threaten mate on e7 later. Secondly, two bishops placed next to each other control a lot of important squares, which is useful for defensive as well as attacking purposes. It is obvious that Black's extra pawn has little relevance at this stage.

19.f3!

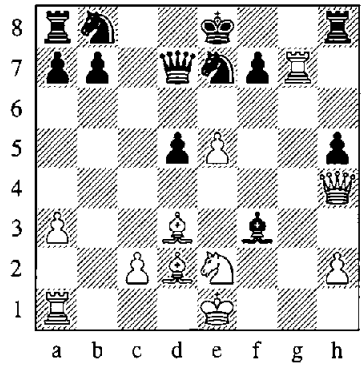
Strictly speaking, development is completed only after connecting the rooks. My situation is slightly different here. Although the king obstructs the communication along my back rank, the rooks can be activated along the half-open b- and g-files. My last move aims to start active operations before Black manages to play ...♘bc6 and ...0–0–0.

It is interesting to note that, by a curious coincidence, I also used f2-f3 to open files for my rooks in the French game against Kovacevic, from the previous chapter.

19...♗e6?!

After seven minutes of thought, my opponent decides to play solidly. By over-protecting the f7-pawn, he plans to meet the natural 20.♖xg7 with 20...♘bc6, inevitably followed by ...0–0–0. He most probably overlooked my next move.

This is one of those situations when having said "A", Black should also have said "B". The critical continuation was:
19...♗xf3 20.♖xg7



20...♗xe2

A useful exchange, since the bishop is vulnerable, while my knight threatens to jump to d4, taking up a dominant post in the centre.

Against 20...♘f5 I planned the temporary exchange sacrifice 21.♕g5 ♘xg7 22.♕xg7, when after 22...♖f8 23.♗b4 the rook would be trapped.

21.♗xe2

After giving up his second bishop, Black is vulnerable on both the dark and light

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squares. There is little wonder that Knaak avoided this line. However, while preferring White, I believe that Black has chances to consolidate his position with:

21...♕e6

Followed by ...♘bc6, when his extra pawn offers some consolation for his overall problems. I may have played

22.♕f6, exchanging Black's key piece in the blockading plan, the queen.

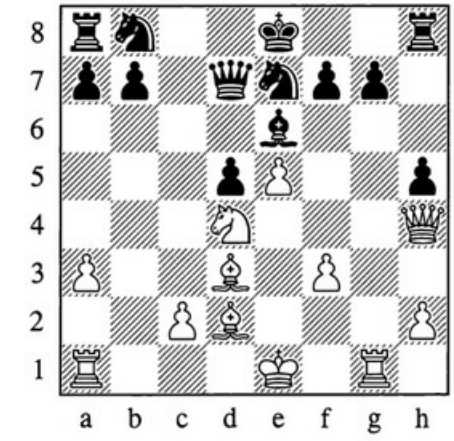


20.♘d4!

This is one of the typical cases when the threat (♖xg7) is stronger than its execution. In fact, my last move creates a new threat (♘b5-d6†), not giving Black the time to defend his g7-pawn with, say, ...g6.

When I played my last move, I felt that my decision was based on some subjective considerations. I thought that, psychologically, it would be the most unpleasant move for my opponent, who was aiming for stability. Besides, this was just a TV event, and not a "serious" game with rating points on the line.

This latter aspect is quite interesting. I believe now that my last move is the strongest, and the friendly or unofficial circumstances helped me to choose it. It is remarkable how much easier it is to express our creativity in the absence of the pressure caused by the tournament situation or the importance of the final result.

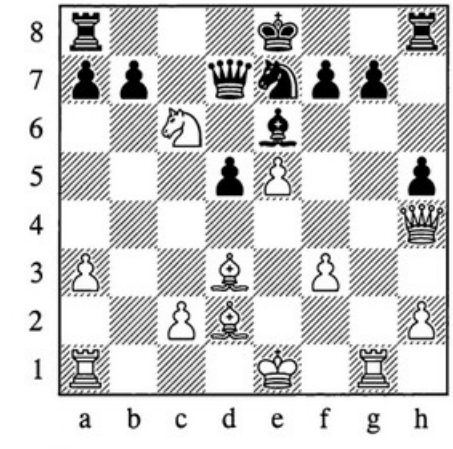


20...♘bc6

The only reasonable defence, planning to meet 21.♘b5 with 21...0–0–0 followed by ...♔b8.

21.♘xc6!

The point behind my dynamic approach. Despite his apparently wide choice, Black has no comfortable way of recapturing. To a certain extent, the situation is similar to that after 17...♗xe4 from the previous game. In certain cases, exchanges tend to increase the problems for the player with incomplete development.



21...♘xc6

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Strategically, this is the most desirable move, maintaining the pressure against the d4- and e5-squares. The only problem is that castling long is not threatened anymore.

21...bxc6? was out of the question, because the queenside would cease to be a safe location for the king. I would regain the pawn with 22.♖xg7, while maintaining the strategic pluses of my position.

21...♕xc6

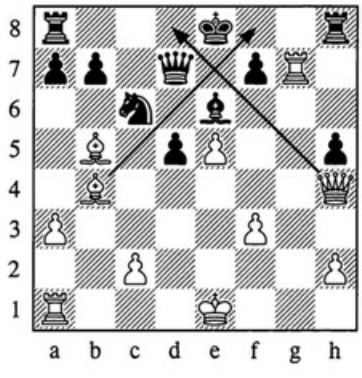


This leaves the knight insufficiently defended, resulting in a delay in castling, just as after the game continuation. 22.♖xg7 may be a good move, but I planned to create some mating threats before taking the pawn:

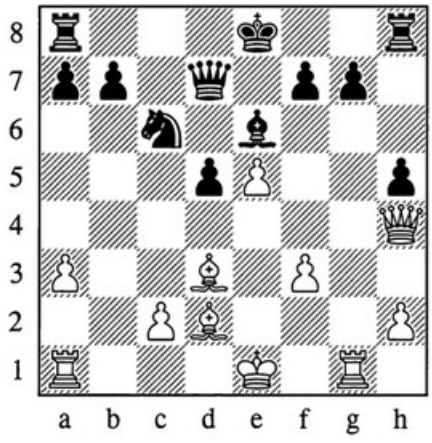
22.♗b4 ♕d7 23.♗b5 ♘c6

And now, finally:

24.♖xg7

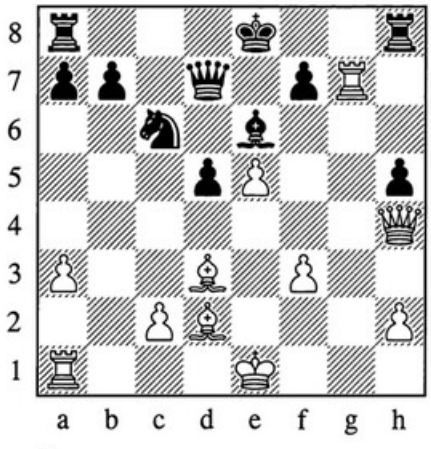


The material is equal, and White has crushing pressure.



22.♖xg7

The situation has changed radically over the past few moves. Material is even, and Black's dark squares have become even weaker after the loss of the g7-pawn. It is now Black who needs to fight for the initiative, since stabilizing the situation would favour me. Unfortunately for him, the unfavourable position of his king makes the success of any active operations improbable.



22...♕c7

This came as a small surprise for me. I expected 22...♘xe5, which did not bother me at all. By taking the pawn, Black opens the

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long diagonal and the e-file for my pieces. I intended to play 23.♔f2 and did not mind giving up the bishop pair. The exchange on d3 would lead to a favourable (for White) position with opposite bishops in which the black king is caught in the centre and likely to fall under a strong attack.

23.f4

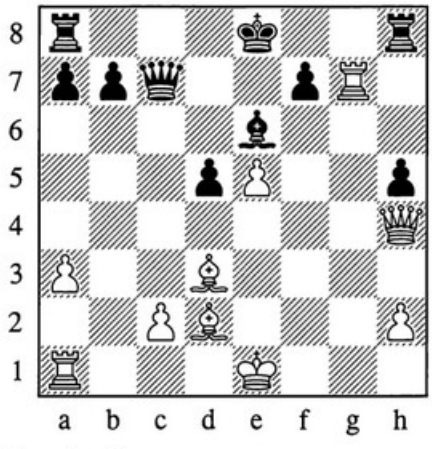
Before deciding upon this move, I had to calculate and evaluate the ensuing complications. I spent only three minutes on it!

This is one of those cases when you feel that everything should work your way, since all your pieces are placed on the best squares.

23...♘xe5

This is the only way of giving meaning to the previous move, but Black will soon find out that he has fallen into his own trap.

24.fxe5!



Played after two more minutes, spent double-checking everything.

I must say that the glass box we were playing in was not 100% soundproof. At times, we could hear some vague noises (coming from enthusiastic loud comments or mere laughs). Usually, this was a sign that something really interesting had happened on the board. After making my last move, I received this form of indirect feedback from the audience.

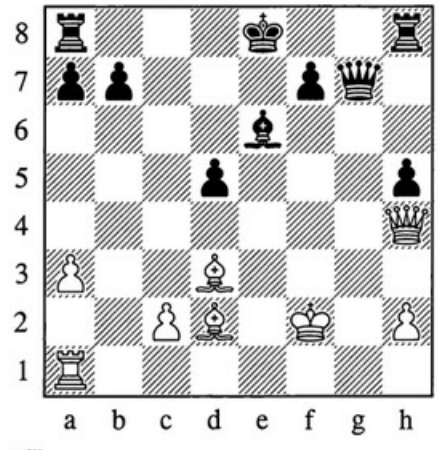
24...♕xe5†

It is not often that the rooks are forked without the possibility of defending each other, but this is the second case of it from this chapter. Compare with 26.♗f6 from the comment to 24.♕xe5 (by coincidence, the same move as now, only the queen's colour differs) in the game against Orev, page 136. In the current position, the new element is that the king is in check, too.

25.♔f2 ♕xg7

Relatively best: Black needs to eliminate the more active rook.

25...♕xa1 would lose quickly after 26.♗b4, threatening mate in one. 26...f6 would only clear the path for the rook.



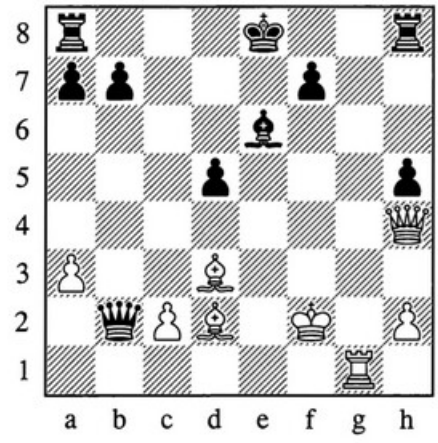
26.♖g1!

An important intermediate move, completing development. It was prepared by ♔e1-f2, which cleared the first rank and took g1 under control.

The hurried 26.♗b4? would allow Black to resist with 26...f6 27.♖e1 ♔f7.

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26...♕b2



The long diagonal does not offer many squares to the queen. The purpose of the last move is to prevent both ♗b5† and ♕f6.

27.♗b4

This mating threat is much more effective than one move earlier.

27...f6 28.♖e1 0–0–0

A sad necessity. With his queen far from the main area of conflict,

28...♔f7

would not provide adequate defence to the bishop.



29.♖xe6!

A relatively simple sacrifice, starting a combined attack of the queen and bishop pair against the naked king. A possible continuation is:

29...♔xe6 30.♕h3† ♔f7 31.♕d7† ♔g8 32.♕xd5†

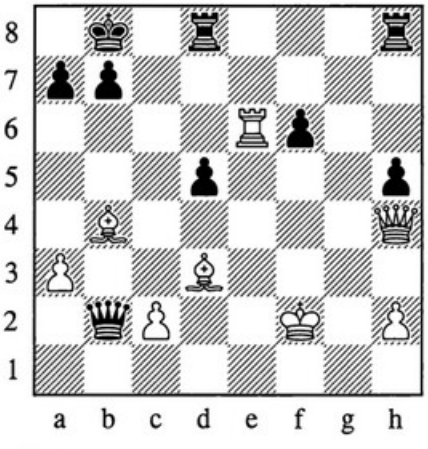
Clearing the a2-g8 diagonal without giving Black a break.

32...♔g7 33.♕d7†



Black can choose between two equally nice mating positions, with my bishops acting in full harmony: 33...♔g8 34.♗c4 mate, or 33...♔h6 34.♗d2 mate.

29.♖xe6 ♔b8



30.♕xf6

Although the attacking phase is over, the bishops remain very useful for securing their own king from trouble. The c2-pawn is defended, creating a barrier between the black

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queen and the king, while the f8-square is controlled, preventing a decisive pin on my queen.

30...♕a2 31.♕d4

After this re-centralizing move, the fight is basically over. I have a material advantage and a dominant position. It took Rainer several moves before he accepted the inevitable.

...1–0

This was a typical Winawer French attacking game, in which the absence of Black's dark-squared bishop made itself felt.

Although this was an exhibition game, it also had a competitive meaning: the winner would qualify for next year's event. In the case of a draw, Black would qualify. This was how I qualified from the 1989 edition, when I had faced Eric Lobron, who was then a member of the German Olympiad team. In 1990, against Knaak, I needed a win in order to qualify for the next year's event.

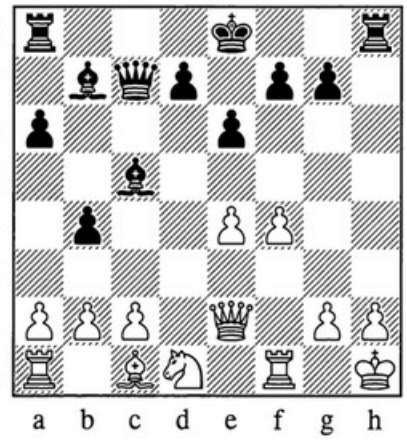
All the games examined so far have illustrated the problems an uncastled king can cause. There are no rules without exceptions, though, and we will finish the chapter with a game in which the situation is reversed. My king will be absolutely safe in the centre, while my opponent's castled king will face a strong attack.

Xie Jun – Judit Polgar

Thessaloniki Olympiad 1988

This game was played in the fourth round. My opponent later became women's World Champion, but at that time she was unrated. She played well enough already, but had had little chance to play outside her country and gain rating points.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 ♕c7 6.♗e2 a6 7.0–0 ♘f6 8.♔h1 ♘xd4 9.♕xd4 ♗c5 10.♕d3 h5 11.f4 ♘g4 12.♕g3 b5 13.♗xg4 hxg4 14.♕xg4 ♗b7 15.♕e2 b4 16.♘d1



A few moves earlier I sacrificed a pawn, in order to open the h-file for my rooks and create unchallenged pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal. Most of my pieces are quite active, but in order to start an effective kingside attack, I needed to connect my rooks first. Queenside castling did not appeal to me, because White could open the queenside with either a2-a3 or c2-c3, when my king would feel insecure. I spent 15 minutes evaluating the alternatives, and, more importantly, fighting against the preconceived idea that one should always castle.

16...♔e7!

There are several factors justifying this radical decision. The king is safely defended by a solid pawn shield, and my opponent's development is not good enough to allow her to breach this shield tactically with, for instance, the thematic Sicilian sacrifice ♘d5†. Using the central phalanx (e4 and f4) for attacking purposes is also problematic, because it would open diagonals for my pieces, leaving g2 and h2 vulnerable.

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17.♗e3

Hurrying to exchange one of my active bishops while it is still possible.

Delaying this operation with a natural move such as 17.♘f2 would cause some problems after 17...♖h4, when ♗e3 would lose the f4-pawn.

It makes sense to open the c-file with 17.c3, but after 17...a5 I would not only retain my queenside space advantage, but also create the additional threat of ...♗a6.

17...♗xe3

At this point I had already started looking for a good moment to weaken White's kingside with ...g5. After some hesitation, I decided to double my rooks on the h-file first, so that all my pieces would be working "as a team". There was nothing wrong with 17...g5, though.

18.♕xe3

White has to delay activating her knight, since 18.♘xe3 would lose the important e4-pawn.

18...♖h4

The best square for the rook. It prepares ...♖ah8, while keeping the f4-pawn under pressure, in order to prevent the consolidating ♘f2.

I did not seriously consider 18...♕xc2, because after 19.♘f2 defending e4, followed by ♖ac1 and ♕c5† or ♕b6, White would grab the initiative.

The eight minutes I used before playing my last move were spent working out some tactical details. I did not mind losing a tempo after g2-g3, since this would weaken the long diagonal even more, but I needed to calculate and evaluate the line given in the next comment.

19.h3

Played solidly, in anticipation of my next move. My feeling is that Xie trusted her position, relying on parrying my threats and then enjoying her extra pawn. I was also optimistic, and even now find Black's position quite attractive. I would think that White should look for a way of simplifying and reaching a draw.

She could have forced matters with:
19.♕e1

The possibility of this double attack is an immediate consequence of my previous move. White wins a second pawn with check, but that is not the end of it!

19...♖ah8 20.♕xb4†



Had she played this way, the game might have become part of Chapter 12 after:
20...♕d6!

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The simplest way to maintain the initiative is exchanging queens. My king will suddenly become very active, without risking anything in the centre of the board.

21.♕xd6†

21.♕xb7? leads to mate: 21...♖xh2† 22.♔g1 ♕d4† 23.♘(or ♖)f2 ♖h1 mate.

21...♔xd6



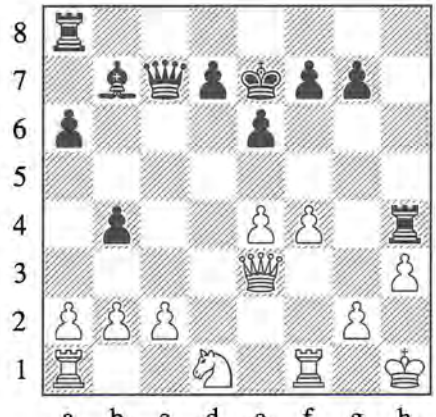
My pressure is so strong that I would regain both missing pawns by force.

22.♘c3

Or 22.h3 ♗xe4 threatening both ...♖xh3† and ...♗xc2.

22...♖xh2† 23.♔g1 ♖8h4!

A nice and far from obvious move, threatening ...♖h1† followed by ...♖xf4. White cannot keep her extra pawn; she can merely choose which one to give away.



19...♖ah8 20.♔g1

The king has evacuated the dangerous h1-square, where pressure along the h-file and the long diagonal meets. If allowed, White would start active queenside play, but I had not yet exhausted my resources.



20...g5!

After nine minutes of thought, I decided that now was the right moment to carry out this pawn break. My main idea was to clear the fourth rank and the h2-b8 diagonal for my queen. I also had to evaluate the consequences of opening the f-file, which might allow White to threaten my king.

This is the right place to say that g2-g4 and ...g7-g5 have been my favourite pawn moves throughout my whole career. We will have a special chapter about this in the second volume.

21.fxg5

The most natural answer, but there is an important alternative:

21.f5

Keeping the g5-square available for the queen.

21...g4!

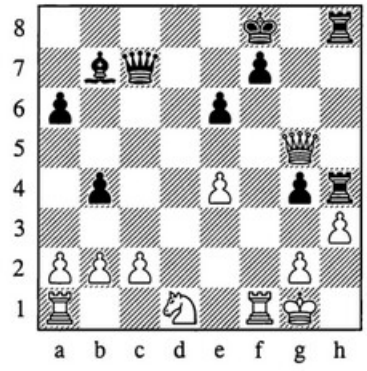
Since she did not take this pawn, I can use it for attacking purposes.

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22.fxe6 dxe6 23.♕g5†

Or 23.♖f4 ♕e5 with a nice centralized position.

23...♔f8

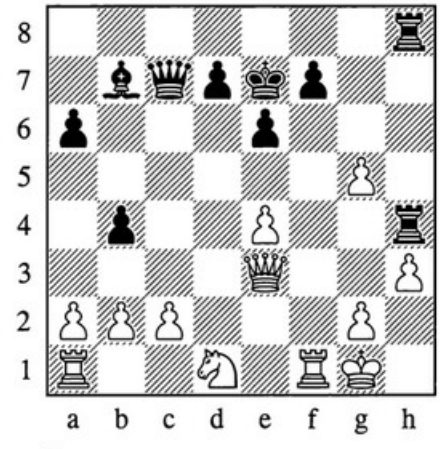


Due to her incomplete development, White's attack has run out of steam. The best she can do is:

24.♖f4

Hoping to slow down my attack, but the following forced line maintains the initiative: 24...♖4h5 25.♕xg4 ♖h4 26.♕xh4 ♖xh4 27.♖xh4 ♕g3 28.♖g4 ♕e1† 29.♔h2 ♗xe4

Materially, White is more than OK, but her coordination is rather poor; Black is simply winning.



21...♗xe4?

I made this mistake after only two minutes of thought! My train of thought was curious. Initially, I had planned 21...♖xe4! getting enthusiastic about the fantastic idea that after 22.♕f3 I could parry the threats with 22...f5! 23.gxf6† ♔f7, with similar ideas as in the game. But then I thought that it would be even nicer to have the bishop on e4 rather than the rook, forgetting that the game move fails to attack the queen, thus giving my opponent a choice.

22.♕f2?

My opponent's temptation to create threats after a long defensive phase was too strong, and she missed her chance to get coordinated with 22.♘f2! followed by ♖ad1 or ♖ae1. In this case, I would have retained some compensation, but White would objectively have had an advantage.



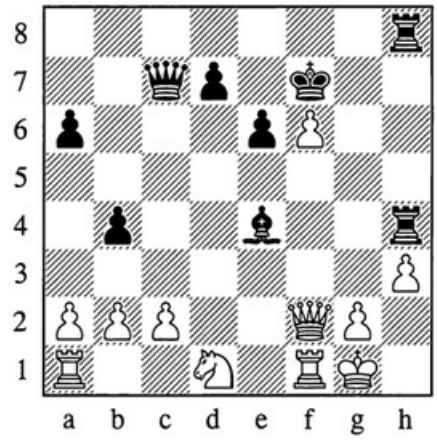
22...f5!!

I have no words capable of describing my happiness after being allowed to carry out my idea.

My sisters were not entirely sure what was going on, because they were busy with their own games, and the white pawn on f6 looks a bit threatening, but somehow they trusted that I knew what I was doing.

23.gxf6† ♔f7

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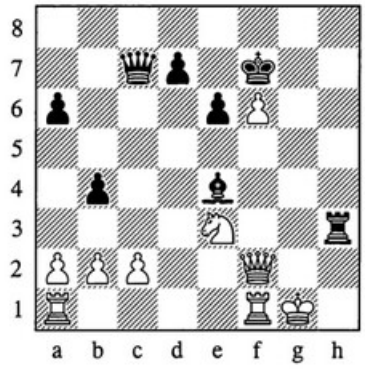
This is the position I had in mind. My king is safer than ever, and all my other pieces are extremely active. There are immediate threats such as ...♖xh3 or ...♗xg2; White is lost despite her two extra pawns.

You may say that chess is not fair. Had my opponent played better two moves earlier, the result of the game and of the Olympiad may have been different. While remaining self-critical, I would add that mistakes are part of the game...

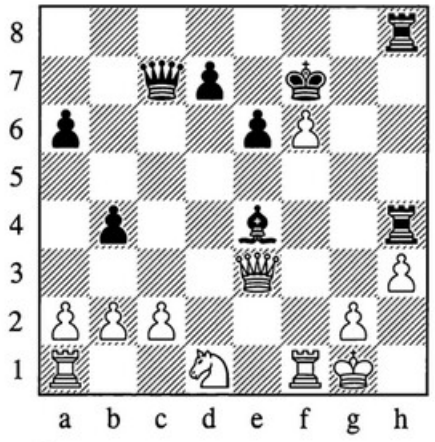
24.♕e3

Xie Jun probably understood the seriousness of her situation, since she spent 20 minutes on this move.

24.♘e3 fails to consolidate: 24...♖xh3 25.gxh3 ♖xh3



White has no adequate way of parrying ...♖h1 mate.



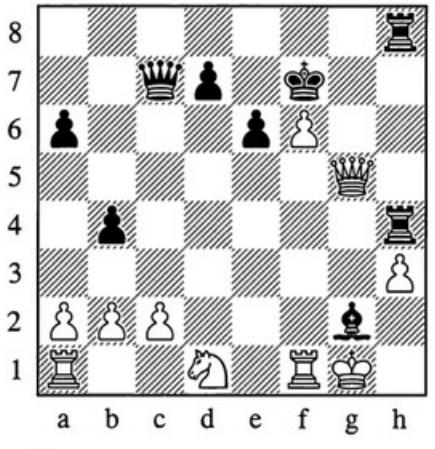
24...♗xg2!

A simple but decisive combination, blowing apart the white barricades.

25.♕g5

A desperate attempt to complicate matters.

25.♔xg2 would lose the queen under even more unfavourable circumstances than in the game: 25...♖g8† 26.♔f2 ♕xc2† And now 27.♕e2 ♖g2† and 27.♔e1 ♖e4 are equally bad.



25...♖4h7?!

For the second time in this game, I played too quickly. I was now pretty sure about

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my win, which made me extremely happy. Chinese players were quite strong already (they missed the bronze medals by only one point), which was only the beginning of their rise to prominence. As I write these lines, China has already had four women's World Champions.

With more patience, I may have discovered that 25...♖g8! would have won more quickly: 26.♕xh4 ♗d5† The king is dragged on a long fatal journey. 27.♔f2 ♖g2† 28.♔e3 ♕e5† 29.♔d3 ♕e2† 30.♔d4 ♕c4† 31.♔e5 ♖e2† 32.♘e3 ♖xe3† 33.♔d6 ♕c6 mate



Even only for the sake of killing such a far-advanced king, it would have been worth taking one or two more minutes for my previous move.

Over the years, I have learned that it is important to find the shortest or simplest route to victory. That drop of extra energy you have unnecessarily spent in the first part of the tournament may count in the last round, especially in long events.

26.♔xg2 ♖g8 27.♕xg8† ♔xg8

Black is winning, but it took me 26 more moves to cash the point.

The most unusual thing in this game was the way my king made a shelter using an enemy pawn. This idea is not so common and certainly came as a surprise to my opponent. This game also offers us an exception to the acknowledged rule that kings are vulnerable in the centre!

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Chapter 11

The Art of Simplifying & Elements of Endgame Technique



With Pal Benko and his wife Ziki in our summer house

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Mastering the art of simplifying the position under favourable circumstances usually comes after many years of experience. There are several ways in which kids tend to mishandle this phase of the game. Most typically, insufficient endgame knowledge causes them to instinctively avoid positions with little material left, even in those cases where the objective situation on the board strongly requires simplifying. Or else, those wishing to release the tension trade pieces at any cost, without noticing that they are making one concession after another in the process.

Early endgame study

I consider myself quite fortunate in having started studying endgames very early, around the age of eight. Sofia and I studied and solved a lot of positions from Smyslov and Levenfish's book *Rook Endings*, under the guidance of our first endgame coach Gyula Zenta. We also worked with two excellent books written by a great Hungarian player from the past, Jeno Ban: *Vegjatekok iskolaja* (The School of Endgames) and Vegjatekok taktikaja (*Endgame Tactics*). In later years I studied Yuri Averbakh's five-volume endgame Encyclopaedia.

When I became strong enough, I joined Susan during her endgame lessons with grandmaster Gedeon Barcza, one of Hungary's strongest players from the époque of Laszlo Szabo and Jeno Ban, and also a renowned writer and teacher. Although we had respect for our trainers and the authors of our books, we used to study the available material with a critical eye. I remember how great I felt whenever I discovered a mistake in the author's analysis! Therefore, I invite you to go ahead and search for mistakes in this book!

Solving problems and studies

One closely related method of training, which I greatly enjoyed, was solving studies. My father always treasured beauty in chess and had a huge chess library (more than 10,000 books!). He would often pick out a collection of studies and give it to us for training purposes. One of my favourites was the book of Kubbel's compositions, but I also liked Reti's studies very much.

International Master Tibor Florian, whom I remember as a really great coach when I was around the age of ten, always brought a few studies for our regular four-hour meetings, but also other different types of chess puzzles, such as mate in two, three or more and even selfmates! He firmly believed that becoming familiar with various patterns from "artistic chess" helps one to improve in over-the-board chess.

Later, former World Championship Candidate and renowned composer Pal Benko had a special influence on me. He had a perfect technique of composing studies so that they would seem to have been picked up from a practical game. I found most of his studies unsolvable, but also purely beautiful.

Working with theoretical and artistic endgames can be very interesting, but one may ask whether one will ever reach these known endgame positions in practice. My personal experience refutes these doubts: I had many games where concrete knowledge accumulated over the years allowed me to win or save endgames.

In endings, alertness and precise calculation are important ingredients for success. Although the main approach usually consists of long-term planning and regrouping, matters inevitably become concrete at some point, when everything depends on a single

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tempo. The immense amount of time I spent studying the final phase of the game gave me the confidence to play any type of endgame and, equally importantly, not shy away from simplifying if the position required it.

Good and bad bishop – paths for the king's centralization

"Exchange material if this brings some positive changes in the position" is a piece of advice I heard time and again from different trainers. The following game, played when I was ten, is a good illustration of the extent to which I had assimilated this guideline.

Isolina Majul – Judit Polgar

Girls U16 World Ch., Rio Gallegos 1986

This tournament was one of the very few all-female competitions I ever participated in. I finished second, despite being about six years younger than my main rivals. Still, I was quite disappointed as I was very close to winning the event.



I am better mainly because my bishop is more active, but the blocked character of the position offers White hopes of building a fortress. In order to win, I must open lines and create entry points for my pieces. With no favourable pawn breaks in view, I chose a different way of provoking structural modifications.

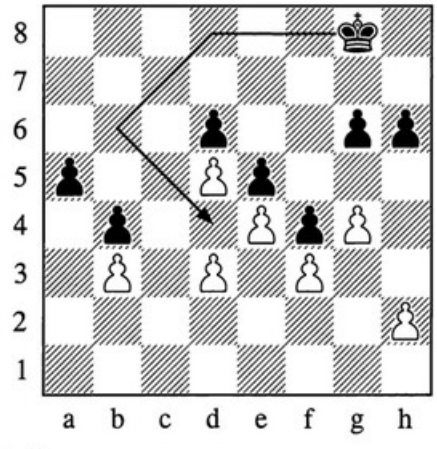
46...♕b4!

When I offered the queen swap, I had already foreseen the consequences of opening the c-file and clearing the road for my king towards the dominant d4-square. I have little doubt that this kind of long (though elementary) strategic vision had been developed precisely because of the training methods mentioned in the introduction. Without it, I probably would have looked for a tactical solution, which may well not have worked.

47.♕xb4?!

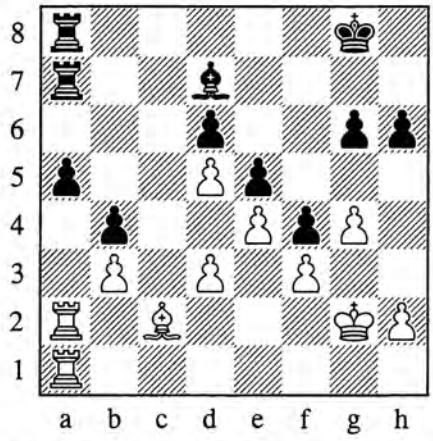
White fails to anticipate the danger. She could not avoid the exchange with 47.♕b2? because this would allow the black queen too much activity after 47...♕d2†. The best defence would have been 47.♕e1!?, maintaining the tension, but my opponent missed the importance of the c5-square in the next phase of the game.

47...cxb4



48.♖3a2

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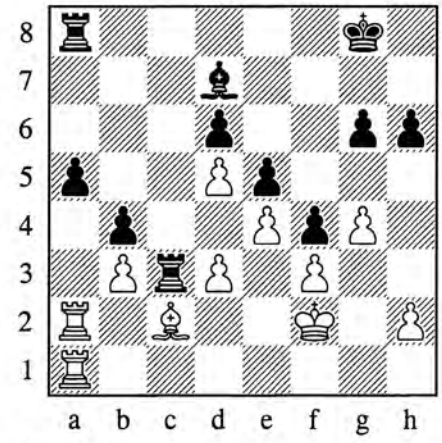


Another important aspect which I had in mind when offering the exchange was Black's queenside space advantage and pawn majority on that wing. When confronted with threats in other sectors of the board, White will not be able to prevent ...a4 forever. If we add that most of White's pawns are on squares of the same colour as her bishop, we can evaluate that Black should be winning. This was also what I felt when reaching this position.

48...♖c7

Starting the first phase of the general plan – occupying the c-file. This is useful because it ties down White to the defence. The black king's march is much more time-consuming and will be the concluding part of the plan.

49.♔f2 ♖c3



50.♔e2?



Playing blitz with Sofia – 1986

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White does not spot the threat created by the last move. Unlike her younger opponent, she brings the king closer to the critical area, whereas it would have been best to correct the a2-rook's position with 50.♖b2. This would not have saved the game, but at least it would have put up some resistance. I would have played 50...♔f8! followed by gradually activating the king.

50...a4!

An effective pawn break, based on the simple trick 51.bxa4? b3, winning a piece.

51.♔d2 ♖ac8

By protecting my rook, I make sure the aforementioned trick still works.

52.♖b2 a3

After having created a far-advanced passed pawn, my advantage is obviously decisive.

53.♖ba2

White has been reduced to absolute passivity; it was such a pleasure to execute my plan and let my king tour the centre of the board!

53...♔f8 54.♖g1

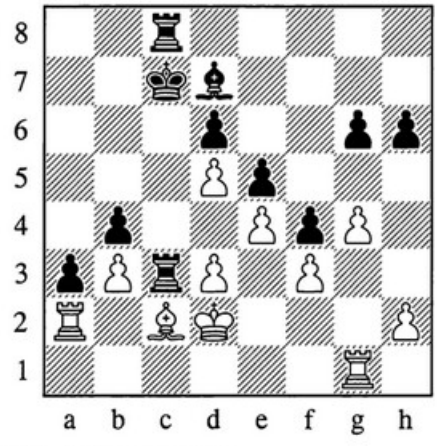


54...♔e8

Since there are light-squared bishops on the board, 54...♔e7 would be a more elegant way of reaching the destination by tiptoeing on the black squares. In some endings this may make a difference but, with White's bishop restricted by its own pawns, White has no way of taking advantage of my "aesthetical imperfection".

55.♖b1 ♔d8 56.♖g1 ♔c7!

Black chooses the fastest way of implementing the plan, based on a small tactical finesse. With the white bishop on b1, 57.♖xa3 would be an unexpected saving move, requiring Black to prepare the further advance of the king with ...♖8c5. In the game, this trick does not work because of the intermediate 57...♖xc2!†.



57.♔c1 ♔b6 58.♔d2

White can only sit and wait.

58...♔c5 59.♖b1 ♔d4

The king has reached his final destination. It was hugely satisfying for me to design a nice long plan and execute it without my opponent being able to stop me.

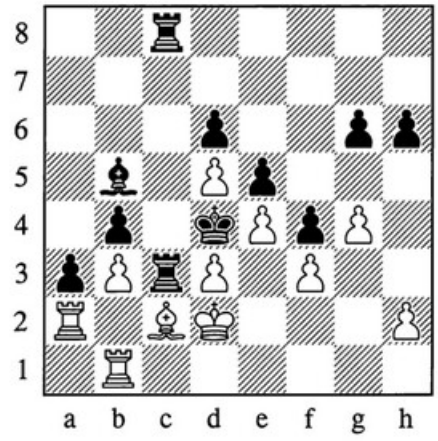
60.♖d1 ♗b5

Black brings in the last reserves; the d3-pawn is impossible to defend.

61.♖b1?!

This makes things even easier for Black, by allowing a simplifying combination.

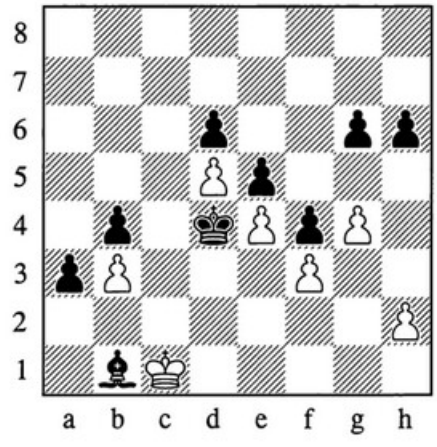
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61...♖xc2†!

The final touch.

62.♖xc2 ♖xc2† 63.♔xc2 ♗xd3† 64.♔c1 ♗xb1



The position has simplified down to a completely lost pawn ending, so White resigned.

0–1

In this game the consequences of the queen exchange clearly favoured Black, from every point of view. This makes the unforced 47.♕xb4 an obvious concession, caused by White's failure to anticipate the long-term dangers.

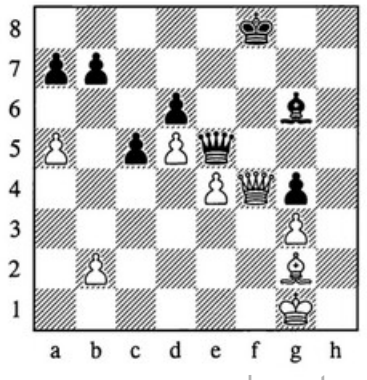
Playing only on squares of one colour was not uncommon in my early games, especially if my opponent had a bad bishop. Two years later I managed to clear a path on the dark squares for my king using a more complex simplifying operation.

Dadi Sigurdur – Judit Polgar

Reykjavik 1988



Black's structure is more compact and flexible, but I face problems maintaining control over the dark squares. For instance, after 31...♕e7 the following simplifying sequence solves all White's strategic problems: 32.♖xf8 ♔xf8 33.hxg4 Under different circumstances this would mean giving up the tension. In this concrete case, the last exchange is justified by the next strong move. 33...hxg4 34.♗xe5 ♕xe5 35.♕f4†



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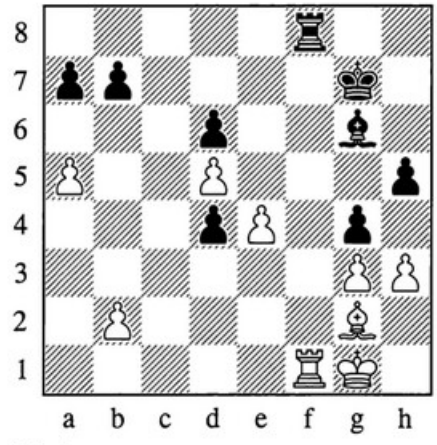
After losing control over e5 Black has no advantage at all.

31...♗d4!

A strong intermediate move, after which most of the exchanges will take place on d4 rather than e5. As a consequence, the e5-square will be available for the king and Black will get a dangerous passed pawn.

32.♗xd4 ♕xd4 33.♕xd4† cxd4

We have reached a second critical moment. With White, I would look for some tricks, trying to destabilize the position, in order to gain some counterplay and complicate Black's technical task.



34.♖xf8?!

After this exchange the fight is practically over. I do not know if my opponent failed to find a reasonable alternative or simply thought that the bishop ending was safe for him. White had several other continuations, but only one promised some chances.

34.hxg4?! does not change anything significantly: 34...♖xf1† 35.♗xf1 hxg4 36.♗e2 ♗h5 This is an ugly square for the bishop, but its passivity is temporary. 37.♔f2 ♔f6 After ...♔e5, White will have to defend the e4-pawn, thus releasing the enemy bishop from its uncomfortable defensive job.

Playing for counterplay along the c-file is ineffective: 34.♖c1?! gxh3 35.♗xh3 ♗xe4 36.♖c4 White needs to eliminate the dangerous pawn, but this gives Black time to centralize the king. 36...♔f6 37.♖xd4 ♔e5 As usual, the difference in the kings' activity is a decisive element. 38.♖b4 ♗xd5 Black has centralized her pieces, eliminating the enemy centre on the way and also defending her queenside.

In order for White to stay in the game, it was essential to attack his biggest enemy at once with:

34.♖d1

Black should reply:

34...gxh3 35.♗xh3 ♖f3!

Although this line was not actually played in the game, I feel that the last move illustrates the main thread of my style: for me, piece activity always was the most important thing!

Instead if 35...♗xe4 36.♖xd4 then White has no problems.



36.♖xd4 ♖xg3† 37.♔h2

It is essential to gain a tempo by attacking the black rook, in order to retain the possibility of breaking through with e4-e5.

37.♗g2 allows Black to stabilize the position in a funny way: 37...♔f6 38.♖b4 It may seem that the b7-pawn is in danger, but ♖xb7 is not a real threat yet due to ...♗xe4. This gives Black the time needed to clear the seventh rank with

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the slightly unusual 38...♗h7!. Black will reach her dream position with the king on e5 and the b7-pawn safely defended by the rook. The contrast between the strength of the bishops and the outside passed h-pawn should suffice for a win. This last move is very difficult to find; as is typical, if you miss it then your assessment of the whole variation is different. Once again we can see the importance of accurate calculation in the endgame.

37...♖b3

In order to stabilize the position, I would need to get my king to e5.



38.e5!

This is the only way of changing the otherwise unfavourable course of the game. With the black rook in an advanced position, the d-pawn is not easy to stop.

38...dxe5 39.d6!

This resource is somewhat unexpected and definitely hard to foresee when pondering on the 34th move. The idea is similar to 35...♖b4! in my game against Bertholee, from the tricks chapter on page 15.

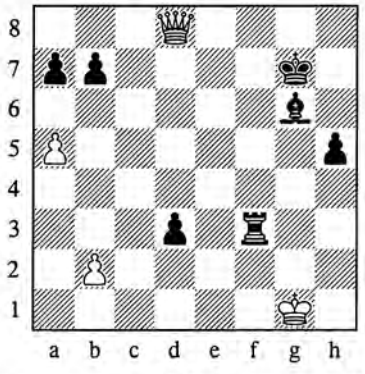
39...♖xh3†!

Black also has tactical resources. The rook cannot be captured because of 40...♗f5† followed by 41...exd4.

40.♔g1 exd4

Only this move, which is equivalent to a queen sacrifice, offers Black chances of retaining an edge.

41.d7 d3 42.d8=♕ ♖f3



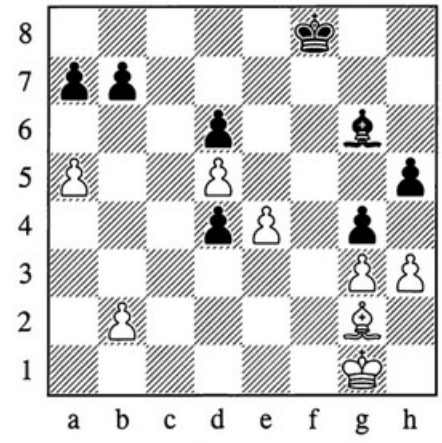
I am not sure if Black can win this, but White would certainly suffer for a while.

34...♔xf8

The king has been forced to retreat and perhaps my opponent underestimated the speed of the recentralizing manoeuvre.



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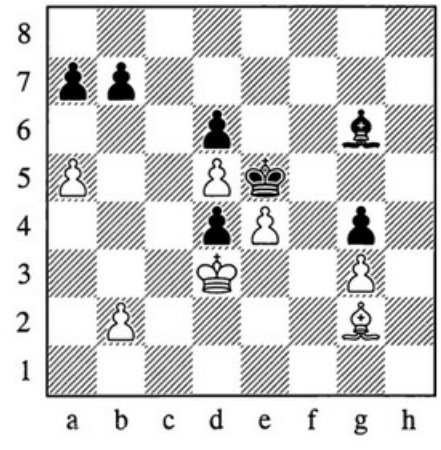
35.hxg4 hxg4 36.♔f2

The kings start to race towards the centre; they both aim for a blockade, on d3 and e5 respectively.

36...♔e7 37.♔e2 ♔f6 38.♔d3 ♔e5

Obviously, I was very happy to reach this position, with its distinctly one-sided character. Even if the suffering side could save the game (which is not the case here, as we shall see) accurate calculation is needed. From a practical point of view, this offers Black an extra advantage, because players tend to get tired after 40 moves, which affects their accuracy in the critical moments.

With the current piece set-up, White can resist rather well. The e4-pawn is well defended and the bishop has two squares available for waiting moves, thus avoiding any zugzwang.



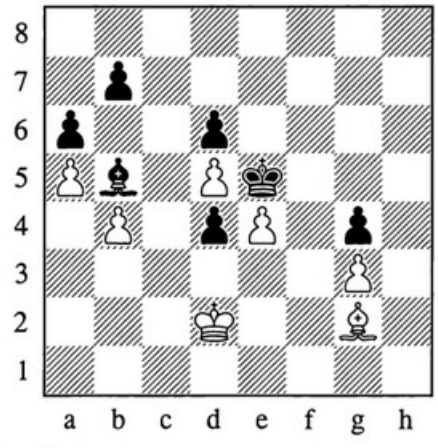
39.b4 ♗e8

In order to make progress, I have to send my bishop on a mission behind enemy lines. It is interesting to note that with an additional pair of pawns on c4/c5, this manoeuvre would have been harder to carry out and White would have retained excellent chances of defending his fortress.

40.♔c4 a6

Black probably could do without this move by playing 40...♗a4, but stabilizing the queenside seems like a good idea. After the text move I have more pawns on light squares than my opponent, but it is the central structure that decides which of the bishops is bad. Besides, the dangerous passed pawn and active king secures Black's advantage.

41.♔d3 ♗b5† 42.♔d2



42...♗c4

Played in accordance with the widely recommended endgame principle "Do not hurry". Before undertaking anything concrete, it is usually useful to strengthen the position slowly, while maintaining complete control. Black could also win with 42...d3 43.♔e3 d2, as in the game. However, I could not resist the temptation of trapping the enemy bishop.

After the text move White has to worsen

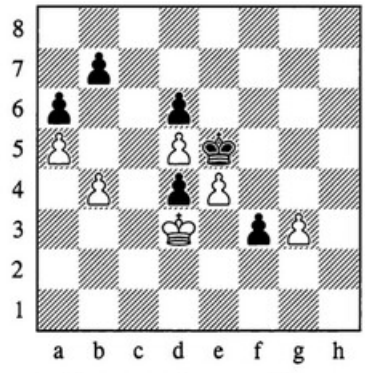
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his position one way or another. It would be improper to call it a zugzwang, because Black could win anyway with the ...d3-d2 idea.

43.♗h1

43.♔e1 loses the central pawns to 43...♗d3.

If 43.♔c2 then Black can also win after 43...♗e2 44.♔d2 ♗f3 45.♗xf3 gxf3 46.♔d3.



Despite his outside passed pawn, White cannot save the game; Black's position is too active to allow that. 46...f2 47.♔e2 ♔xe4 48.♔xf2 d3 49.♔e1 ♔f3 It is essential to eliminate the outside passed pawn. In pawn endings one frequently has to make such key decisions about which pawn is more important. 50.♔d2 ♔xg3 51.♔xd3 ♔f4 White will soon fall into zugzwang and lose the d5-pawn.

43...♗f1 44.♔c2 d3†

44...♗e2 would also have won. I spent only nine minutes for the rest of the game, which makes me think that I had foreseen the finish. At that age I always went for the nicer win and I remember how happy I was after winning with a study-like manoeuvre.

45.♔c3 d2!

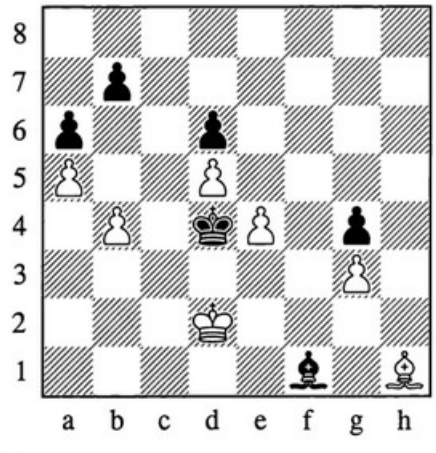
This temporary pawn sacrifice allows the further activation of my king. From my early childhood I was aware of the importance of having my king in the centre. In simplified positions inexperienced players typically just move around with their pieces, forgetting that the king has to be centralized.

46.♔xd2 ♔d4

This really is zugzwang. If it was Black's turn to move, 47...♗d3 would not work because of 48.e5!.



White creates a strong passed pawn, with at least equal chances. Unfortunately for him, White cannot maintain this defensive mechanism.



47.e5

Desperation. 47.♔e1 ♗d3 or 47.♔c2 ♗d3† are both hopeless.

47...♔xe5 48.♔e3

Or 48.♔c3 ♗e2 followed by ...♗f3.

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48...♗c4 49.♗e4 ♗xd5

It is funny that in this and the previous game, the final phase involves an exchange of bishops, thus allowing White to get rid of his worst piece. "Bad bishops defend good pawns" is an old saying. Indeed, the exchange took place only as an indispensable way of winning the key pawn – d5 here and d3 in the Majul game.

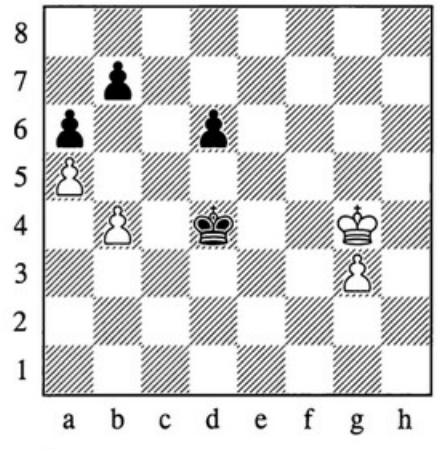
50.♗xd5

The only practical chance. White cannot resist for long with 50.♗d3 ♗c6 51.♗e2 ♗d7 followed by ...d5-d4 and ...♗b5, ensuring the advance of the pawn.

50...♔xd5 51.♔f4

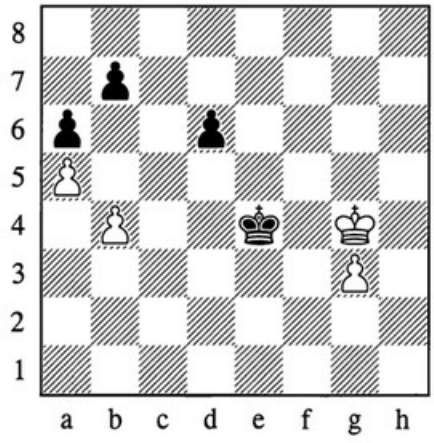
White also gets a passed pawn but Black is faster by one tempo. One essential element will be the centralized position of the king, which allows Black to dictate matters.

51...♔d4 52.♔xg4



52...♔e4!

This move has a double function – it gains space and also clears the path for the d-pawn. The white king should not be allowed to get close to the d-pawn. It is interesting to see that in the next phase of the game Black is more interested in dominating the enemy king rather than advancing the pawn. The main idea is to force the white king to occupy an unfavourable square before the pawn race.



53.♔h3

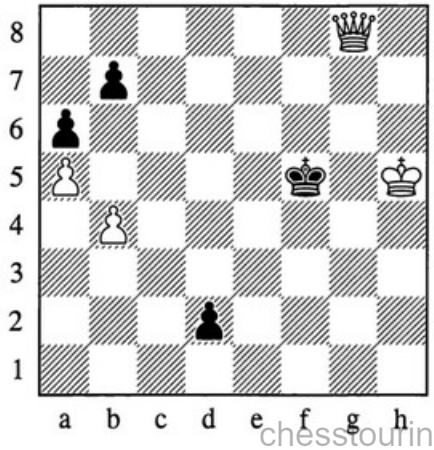
Hoping to block the enemy pawn from the back rank.

53...♔f3 54.g4 ♔f4 55.♔h4 d5 56.g5 ♔f5

I used a common method in this type of ending: forcing the enemy king to occupy an unfavourable square. In our case, the "wrong" square is h5 as it allows my pawn to promote with check.

57.♔h5 d4 58.g6 d3 59.g7 d2 60.g8=♕

Despite being first to promote his pawn, White cannot avoid a transition to a new pawn ending. This time, trivially lost.



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60...d1=♕†

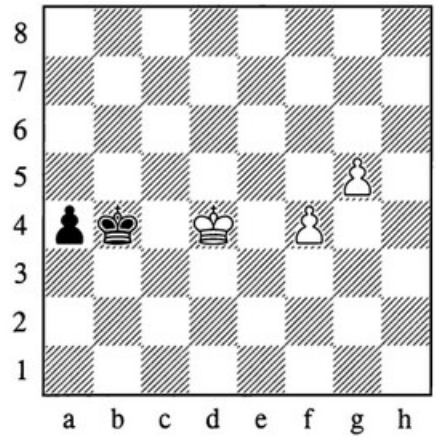
Gaining a decisive tempo. White cannot avoid the queen exchange.

61.♔h6 ♕h1† 62.♔g7 ♕g2† 63.♔f8 ♕xg8† 64.♔xg8 ♔e6 65.♔f8 ♔d5 66.♔e7 ♔c4 0–1

The method used in the final part of this game had been familiar to me for some time already and came to my mind almost automatically. Recently, I discovered in my archives a training game played a few years earlier, which ended in a similar way:

Judit Polgar – Tamas Halasz

Budapest (training game) 1986



The clue to winning the pawn race is the same: decoying the enemy king onto an unfavourable square.

45.♔d3!

The only winning move. White threatens ♔c2, which forces 45...♔b3, but then White's pawn will promote with check.

1–0

Once again, the simplifying operation in the game against Sigurdur was rather one-sided. Unlike Majul, White could not avoid the exchanges, but he missed his only chance at a slightly later moment, when some exchanges had already been carried out. The essence was the same, though: he did not anticipate the problems after the king's centralization or simply failed to find an antidote.

Opposite-coloured bishop endgames are not always drawn

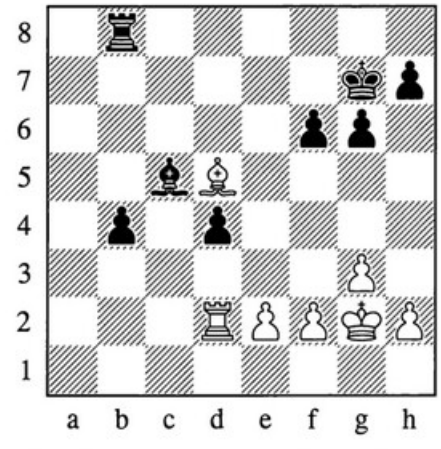
We will now move on to more complex examples, in which the exchange of certain pieces can favour either side, depending on the circumstances.

It is well known that in endings with rooks and opposite-coloured bishops, the defending side usually improves his saving chances by exchanging rooks. However, this largely depends on the concrete circumstances under which this kind of operation takes place. The next game is an excellent illustration.

Dov Zifroni – Judit Polgar

Boys U14 World Ch., Fond du Lac 1990

This was an important game on my way to winning the championship.



Black has an extra pawn that is also passed, and a considerable space advantage, but I

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remember being aware that I may well not be objectively winning, because of White's chances of setting up a blockade on the light squares. This did not affect my overall optimism and self-confidence, and I trusted I would be able to keep my opponent under pressure for a long time. I knew that in this kind of one-sided position, patience can bring unexpected results. If the active side simply keeps the tension for a long time, the defender is likely to commit minor inaccuracies or even serious mistakes.

If the rooks were simply removed from the board, the position would be completely drawn. The open queenside files make such an exchange quite probable, but Black can look for ways of improving her structure in the process (as with ...cxb4 in the Majul game). This can happen in many ways, and it is not easy to anticipate the final consequences of this kind of operation. This complicates White's defensive task, repeatedly placing him in the psychologically unpleasant situation of choosing between two evils.

I was surprised when my opponent offered a draw with his last move (♖d3-d2), but encouraged that he apparently thought there were no dangers in the position. I intensified my efforts in looking for hidden opportunities and eventually found some!

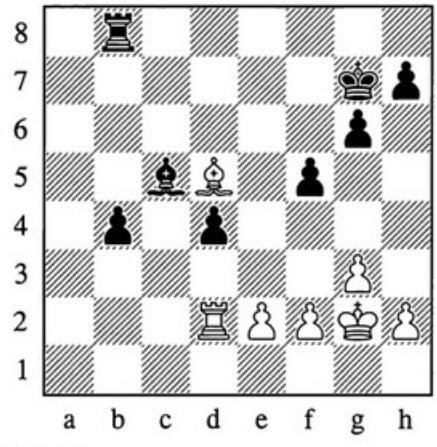
32...f5

This natural move fits well into Black's short- and long-term plans. The f6-square is cleared, allowing the black king to centralize rapidly, while the e4-square is denied to his rival.

In the long run, 32...f5 prepares massive kingside space-gaining. Blocking the enemy pawns on dark squares with ...g5-g4 would keep the king tied down to defending them, generating winning chances even in the case of a rook exchange.

Last, but not least, it has been known since Philidor's times that pawn chains should be arranged on squares of the opposite colour to one's bishop. This fully applies for the active side, but for the defender this policy is risky and he usually has to place his pawns so that they can be defended by his bishop.

From a psychological point of view such a neutral move, which does not threaten anything concrete, is an optimal way of declining a draw offer. White does not get any hint about the possible dangers and will have to reveal his general defensive plan.

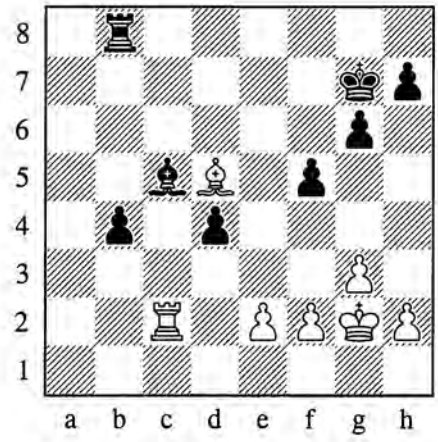


33.♖c2?!

My opponent spent only one minute on this move, probably thinking that activity and counterattack would achieve a draw without too much difficulty. He correctly spotted that the bishop's lack of stability is one of Black's main problems, which would be solved once the king reaches d6. The main drawback of the last move is that it fails to generate a long-term plan and instead aims to quickly liquidate the tension. In such positions if this is not achieved, then one has to be ready to be tortured for a long time before reaching a draw.

The most constructive move would have been 33.♖a2! (occupying the truly open file) with the idea of blocking the passed pawn with ♗b3 and only then starting to harass the king and bishop with rook moves along the a-file.

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33...♖b5

My opponent probably underestimated the strength of this move when playing 33.♖c2, since he now took ten minutes before making his next move. The rook not only defends the black bishop, but also gets ready to prove that the white one can become vulnerable on its apparently dominant position.

34.♗c4?!

Continuing the same policy of creating one-move threats. Now was the last moment when White could occupy the a-file under favourable circumstances, although accurate calculation was needed before deciding to play:

34.♖a2!

Now 34...♗d6 would allow the white rook to become active: 35.♖a7† ♔f8 36.♗b3 White's piece activity and optimal coordination would obviously suffice to save the game. Black has a hidden tactical resource, though, which provokes radical changes in the position.

34...b3 35.♖b2

It seems that the pawn is doomed, since the discovered attack 35...♗a3 is ineffective due to 36.♖xb3, when the black bishop is hanging as well.



35...d3!

In positions with undefended pieces one should always look for unexpected moves! Black clears the d4-square in order to allow a more effective discovered attack than in the line above.

36.exd3 ♗d4



It may seem that Black is winning, but:

37.♗c4!

An important intermediate move.

37...♗xb2 38.♗xb5 ♗d4

The bishop occupies the best square, blocking the d3-pawn and keeping both wings under observation.

39.♗c4 b2 40.♗a2

I assume that my opponent did not get so far with his calculation. He may have stopped when feeling that things get complicated after 34...b3 or 35...d3. He also must have considered the game continuation as completely safe, missing or underestimating my 35th move.

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The first impression is that, despite having retrieved the pawn, things have gone wrong for White. The passed pawn has reached the second rank, tying the bishop to the defence of the b1-square. The d3-pawn isolates the bishop from the kingside, allowing Black to carry out ...g5-g4 without fearing the weakening of the f5-pawn. This is likely to allow a decisive king march to the queenside, since the white king has to protect the kingside pawns.

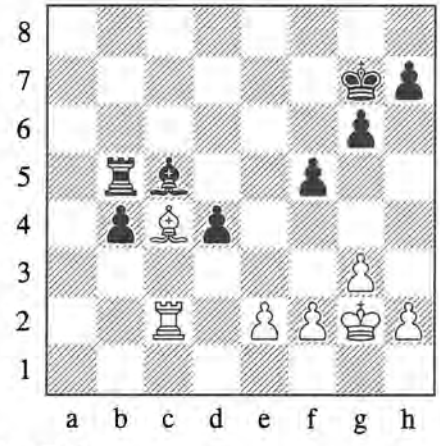
The saving idea is allowed by the relatively small distance between the points of tension on the opposite wings (b1 and f2). By keeping his king on e1-e2 and the bishop on b1, White can create a reliable fortress. The fact that his position would look ridiculously passive does not affect the objective evaluation.

Here is the maximum that Black can achieve:



There is no way of placing White in zugzwang. Another important element is the "narrow" queenside space, with the pawn just one file away from the edge of the board. Compare this with the final position from my game against Karpov later in this chapter, page 183.

We can conclude that the game continuation let slip another (and, as we will see, the last) chance of reaching a clear draw. The calculating and evaluating process was far from easy and having good intuition would have been quite helpful when discerning the real dangers from the illusory ones, in order to choose the safest continuation. Intuition usually is developed by sustained homework, which in our concrete case would mean becoming familiar with many similar endings.



34...♖a5

I played this after seven minutes of thought, during which I foresaw the game continuation. I have made significant progress; after having stabilized my bishop, I was the first to occupy the a-file.

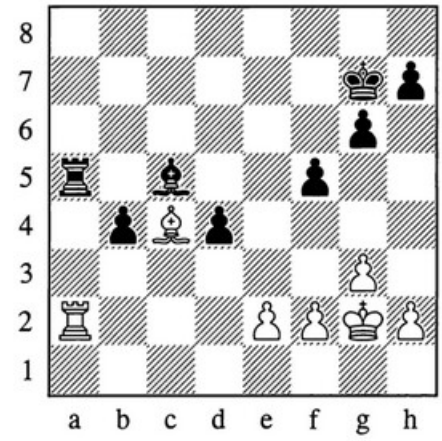
35.♖a2

Played confidently. Will there be any danger left with the rooks off the board?

In the event of the more passive 35.♗b3 I would slowly have increased the pressure, starting with 35...g5. This would not have ensured a win, but the essential thing is that White will be doomed to a long defence, without

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any prospect of activity or any warranty of reaching a draw. This kind of situation offers Black a huge psychological advantage.



35...♖a3!

Having occupied the open file first, Black can dictate the circumstances under which the exchange of rooks will be carried out. Capturing on a2 would lead to a draw, with a fortress that is even easier to defend than that examined above. Instead, I invite my opponent to carry out the exchange himself and improve my structure in the process.

This is the right moment to reveal a small secret. One of my favourite methods when I am better but unsure about if and how I am going to win is to continuously improve my position, at least a little bit on every move. This way, I put psychological pressure on my opponent and get ready for the moment he eventually drops his guard and makes the first mistake.

I played the last move after only a minute and my opponent might have thought that I just want to play on for a few moves before agreeing to a draw. He was quite wrong, as we shall see.

36.♖xa3?–+

Remarkably, White made this decisive mistake without thinking! He correctly assumed that the alternatives were anything but fun, but failed to realize that the bishop ending is just lost.

36.♖b2 allows Black to regroup optimally with 36...♖c3 37.♗d5 g5!. Once again, there are no immediate threats in view, but White will have to endure lasting pain. The best practical chance would be 38.♖a2, aiming to activate the rook.

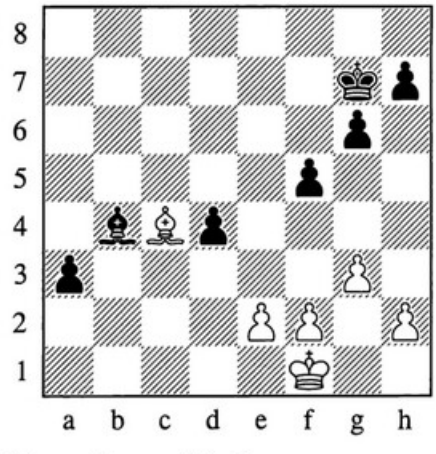
36...bxa3

The pawn only needs to cross one more light square before it reaches the last rank, which partly restricts the mobility of the white bishop. For instance, weak black pawns along the b1-h7 diagonal would be untouchable. The bishop does an excellent job of controlling a2 though, and if the white king gets to d3 there would be no way for Black to break through.

37.♔f1

White is just one step away from the draw (38.♔e1), but he will never be allowed to make it!

37...♗b4!



Not so fast, my friend...

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It suddenly becomes clear that the availability of the b4-square has a decisive impact on the final result. Firstly, the bishop makes use of it, in order to prevent the enemy king's centralization. Next, the black king will transit through b4 on his way to b2.

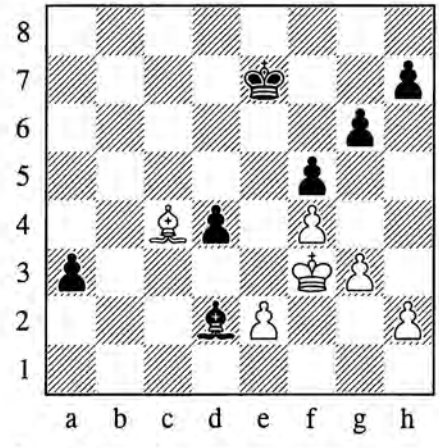
38.♔g2

My opponent had his second long think in this ending (another ten minutes), but it is too late to look for salvation. It is symptomatic that he played quickly in the critical moments (33rd and 36th move) and spotted the trouble (bearable, in the first case, but unsolvable in the second) only after he fell into it.

38.e3 would not improve White's position even a single bit after 38...d3.

38...♔f6 39.f4 ♔e7 40.♔f3 ♗d2!

The final touch. It is not clear how effective White's planned e2-e4 would be, but I preferred to stop it anyway.



Preventing the enemy counterplay (even if it is feeble) is an important technical method. There is a small paradox here. In the earlier phase of the ending, when Black tried hard to build up a decisive advantage, accurate calculation in the critical moments was essential. Now that the game is won, it is best to avoid unnecessary complications, which would require additional efforts to calculate.

In any case, the last move was strong enough to convince my opponent that any further resistance would be useless. Superficiality and failure to spot the hidden subtleties in an apparently simple position were the elements that led to his defeat.

It took me only nine moves to win a position that was defendable for White. I simply maintained the pressure and took my chance when he went wrong.

0–1

I find the game against Zifroni quite instructive from a technical point of view. It is also a good warning against carelessness in such apparently simple positions.



The 1990 U14 World Champion

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In the following game I managed to implement a similar way of exchanging rooks under favourable circumstances. This time the whole operation was forced and even a world class player could not avoid defeat.

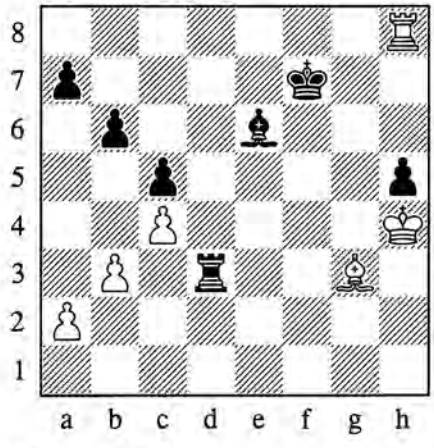
Vienna 1991

At this tournament (a strong round-robin event held at the City Hall) I scored my second grandmaster norm. My sisters were playing in different groups and we were accompanied by our mom. I started very well, winning my first two games with Black. The final result gave me a special boost for the upcoming Hungarian Championship, which I won a few months later.

This game was played in the first round against Zoltan Ribli, one of Hungary's strongest ever grandmasters. Twice a Candidate and three times a national champion, Ribli was part of the golden team that won the 1978 Buenos Aires Olympiad.

Zoltan Ribli – Judit Polgar

Vienna 1991



The queenside structure is completely symmetrical and, once again, removing rooks from the board would lead to a clear draw. However, during the game I found a forcing way of transposing to a winning bishop ending.

54...♔g6

As the reader already knows from previous chapters, I have always enjoyed playing for mate, even in simplified positions. Black threatens to win a piece with ...♖d4†. The white bishop cannot move because of mate in one, while the white rook cannot harass the king because the g8-square is defended. The whole set-up reminded me of the following game fragment, which I had seen during one of my training sessions:

Alexei Suetin – Mikhail Botvinnik

Soviet Championship, Moscow 1952



Suetin carelessly played 76.♖h5?, placing his rook on a passive position. 76...♔c5! created a nice mating net in the middle of the board. White had no satisfactory way of preventing ...♖e3 mate and thus resigned.

55.♖f8 ♖d4† 56.♖f4

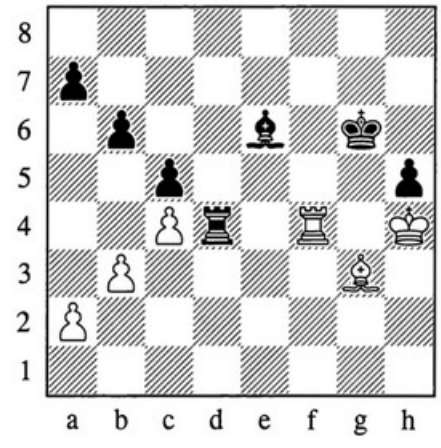
Forced, since 56.♗f4 loses a piece to 56...♔g7. It may seem that Black has not achieved anything special. The mate has been avoided and the exchange on f4 would lead to an easy draw. When I had started the "attacking" sequence it was my intention to place Ribli in zugzwang and force him to take

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on d4. This would lead to the appearance of another passed pawn, which should suffice for a win.

Zugzwang is something I have always treasured in chess, perhaps because I could not imagine a similar situation in any other sport. Gaining an advantage by handing over the ball or the right to serve? Hardly conceivable...

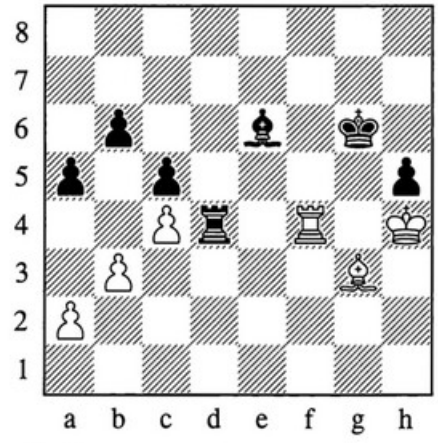
When I reached the current position I took ten minutes choosing between what seemed to me two equivalent continuations.



56...a5

I preferred this over 56...a6 because I wanted to keep the white pawns on light squares for as long as possible, in order to make them vulnerable. I also evaluated that White would not have time to attack my pawns with his bishop because my d-pawn will be too far advanced. As in the final part of the previous game, the passed pawn will only need to cross one square that can be defended by the bishop.

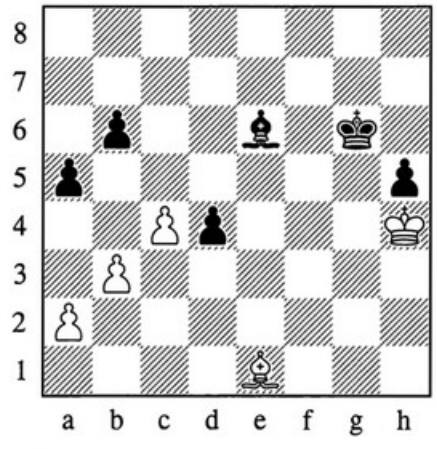
In my old notes I mentioned that the more cautious 56...a6, avoiding placing the pawn on a dark square, wins as well. Analysis proves my initial evaluation was correct. In fact, most bishop moves along the h3-c8 diagonal would probably also get the job done.



57.♖xd4

White has to release the tension, as other moves would lose material without any compensation. For instance, 57.♗h2 ♖d2 (double attack!) 58.♗g3 ♖xa2 or 57.a4 ♖d3, winning a second pawn in both cases.

57...cxd4 58.♗e1



58...♗g4!

A very important move, creating a perfect job distribution between the bishop and the king. The h5-pawn is defended, allowing the king to centralize. At the same time, a sort of barrier will be created against the white king as his rival advances along the g6-c2 diagonal.

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White's only chance is to exchange all of Black's queenside pawns and create a passed pawn of his own. This sounds nice, but it is impossible to achieve if Black plays accurately. If all the pawns disappear except Black's d- and h-pawns then Black is winning, as consulting a good endgame book will confirm: the remaining passed pawns are separated by three files and there is no possibility of building a fortress like in my game against Karpov, page 183.



59.a3

This is insufficient for at least two reasons. True, 59.c5 does not help either after 59...bxc5 60.♗xa5 and the king steps forward: 60...♔f5 61.♔g3 ♔e4 62.♔f2 h4



White cannot fight against the two passed pawns.

The trickiest defensive try was 59.a4!? with the idea of playing b3-b4 without allowing ...a5-a4, as happens in the game. In addition, the process of exchanging pawns would be accelerated after ...axb4 ♗xb4 followed by either c4-c5 or a4-a5.



One important point is that Black cannot take advantage of the "self-blocking" character of 59.a4 with 59...♗d1? because this in turn blocks the d-pawn's queening square, allowing 60.♗f2 d3 61.♗xb6 ♗xb3 (the simple point is that 61...d2 no longer guarantees a new queen) 62.♗xa5 ♗xa4 63.♗d2, achieving the desired drawn ending.

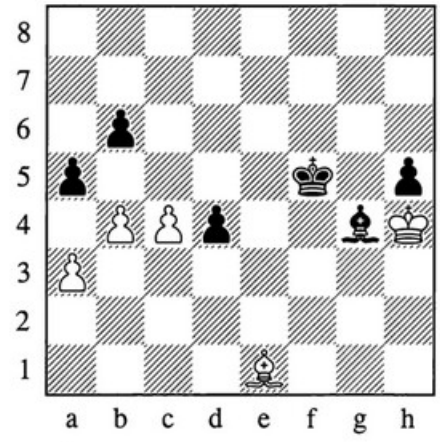
In order to win, Black has to take measures against the planned b3-b4 with the prophylactic move 59...♗e2!, and then advance the king.



White would have no defence.

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59...♔f5 60.b4



60...a4

I chose the principled continuation, avoiding pawn exchanges. Black could also win with: 60...axb4 61.axb4 ♔e4 62.♔g3 ♔d3! The king temporarily blocks the pawn while taking the shortest path to e2, from where it will support the pawn's advance most effectively. 63.c5 ♔e2 64.cxb6 ♗c8 Such retreats are sometimes surprisingly effective; the white bishop can no longer stop the pawn. Although not especially complicated, this line requires precise calculation, which Black can do without at this stage of the game.

The game continuation keeps a reserve pawn on the board, which will be enough to win even if White gives up his bishop for the two passers. The fact that the a1-square is not controlled by the black bishop is not important, because the white king is busy with the other rook pawn.

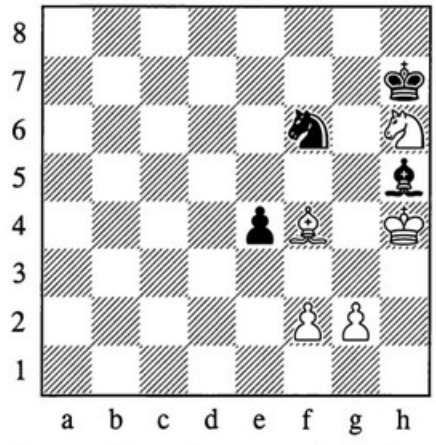
61.c5 bxc5 62.bxc5 ♔f4
0–1

It certainly was pleasant to start the strong Vienna tournament with a first round win over such an experienced and solid opponent as Ribli. This game was also a great self-confidence builder for the Hungarian Super Championship three months later, where I emerged as the winner.

The time has come to examine the final part of my game against Karpov, which I have referred to already. Just for a change I was on the defending side on this occasion, but I managed to achieve the desired result (a draw, obviously) with a well calculated simplifying operation.

Anatoly Karpov – Judit Polgar

Hoogeveen 2003



Despite the reduced number of pawns, White's position is quite promising. The immediate threat is ♔g5, winning a piece, but 45...♗e2 would fail to solve all the problems because of 46.♔g5 followed by ♔f5, when the e4-pawn would be in danger. Without knights, the position would be trivially drawn of course, but there is no easy way to exchange them.

I felt that Karpov was quite confident of victory, but I managed to find a forcing way to simplify the position into a theoretically drawn ending.

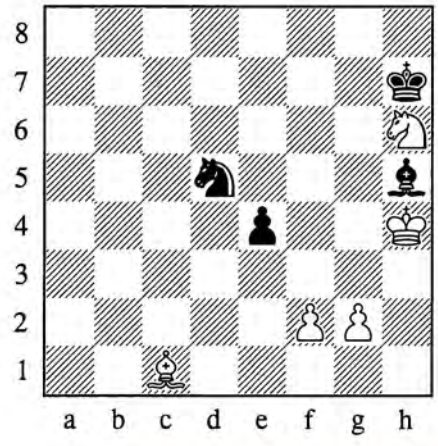
45...♘d5!

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When playing this move I had foreseen the following sequence until the 49th move and knew that the resulting ending is a book draw. Once again, the countless hours spent studying the endgame paid off.

46.♗c1

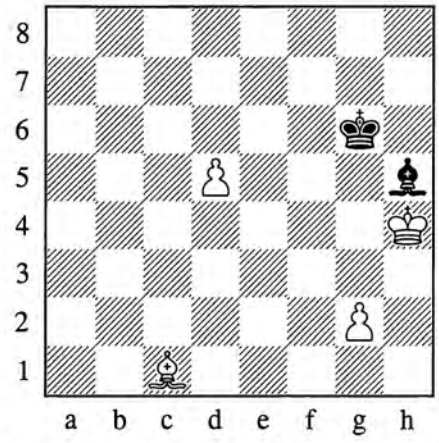
White has to allow the following move, blocking the bishop's diagonal, because after 46.♗g5 ♗e2 the white king cannot move forward. Black would play ...♔g6 next, when the white pieces would be poorly coordinated.



46...e3!

A funny way of exchanging knights.

47.fxe3 ♔xh6 48.e4† ♔g6 49.exd5



It is impossible to give a general rule for evaluating this type of ending. In his endgame Encyclopaedia, Averbakh writes that a distance of at least two files between the passed pawns is necessary, but not always sufficient, for a win. In this concrete position an essential element is



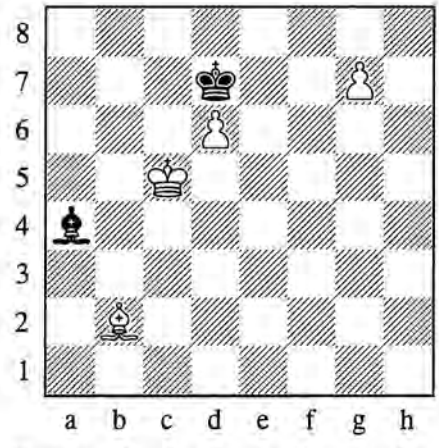
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that one of the pawns is just one file away from the edge of the board, which allows Black to set up the following fortress:



If we push all the pieces one square to the left, this defensive method would be unavailable and the position becomes a win.

Although I remembered most of these aspects rather well, it was not easy keeping calm and patient after several hours of play, especially against such an outstanding endgame expert as Karpov. Fortunately, I managed to remain focused and eventually we reached the following position after White's 67.g7:



Karpov offered a draw without waiting for 67...♗b3.

½–½

Sacrifice to simplify

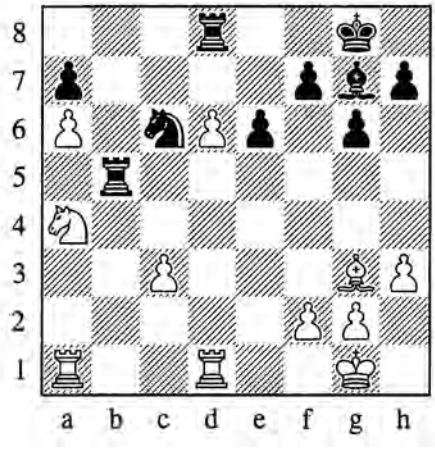
Simplifying does not refer only to the exchange of identical pieces. It sometimes makes sense to sacrifice a small amount of material or carry out exchanges of different groups of pieces and pawns that are roughly equal in value. This kind of complex operation is not easy to anticipate or judge, as will be illustrated by the following two games which were played against strong opponents. In both cases I traded two minor pieces for a rook and a pawn, which is situated somewhere on the border between a sacrifice and a level swap.

Judit Polgar – Keith Arkell

Duncan Lawrie Women-Men, London 1988

This tournament, held shortly before the Thessaloniki Olympiad, was unusual in that it featured five men and five women. It provided me with good training in playing against women, which proved quite useful during the Olympiad.

I have many great memories from this event. Sofia was also playing and our mom was there with us. On the day off I watched the famous musical *Chess* for the first time in my life, and found it impressive and inspiring. Last but not least, I won the event convincingly!

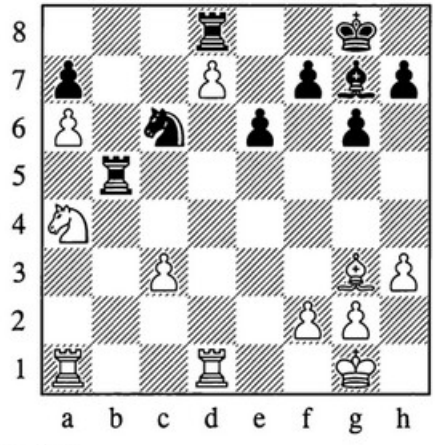


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My structure is far from perfect, which makes it hard for me to convert the extra pawn.

32.d7!

I played this after just seven minutes of thought, but managed to foresee and correctly evaluate the consequences of Black's answer.



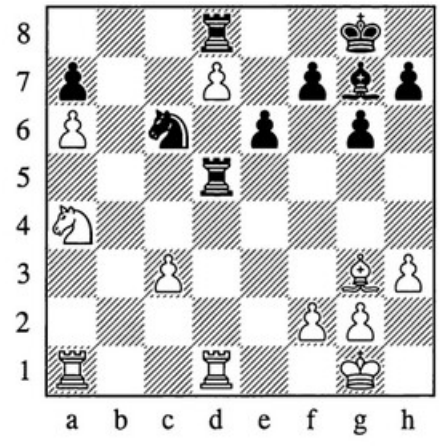
32...♖d5

My opponent had only nine minutes left to reach the control and probably thought that the last move would solve all his problems by cutting off the d-pawn from its colleagues.

32...♘e5 is not entirely satisfactory either: 33.f4! Forcing Black into a pin that is as dangerous as it looks! 33...♘xd7 34.♗h4 Restricting Black's bishop. 34...f6 35.♗f2 The problems along the d-file and the weakness of the a7-pawn leave Black in a hopeless position. 35...♖a5



36.♘c5! A good example of simplifying into a won ending. 36...♖xa1 37.♖xa1 ♘xc5 38.♗xc5 Tying down the black rook to the defence of the a7-pawn. 38...♖a8 39.♖b1 Followed by ♖b7 with an easy win.



33.♖xd5 exd5 34.♘c5 ♗f8

This was the position both sides had been aiming for; it seems that the d-pawn is as good as gone...



35.♗c7!!

It is easy to overlook this move, especially in time pressure. My opponent must have thought that the attacked knight has to move away. Instead, I attack the defended rook. Since the alternative was giving away the

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d7-pawn, we can state that White is not really sacrificing material. It is more accurate to say that a bishop and knight are exchanged for a rook and a pawn.

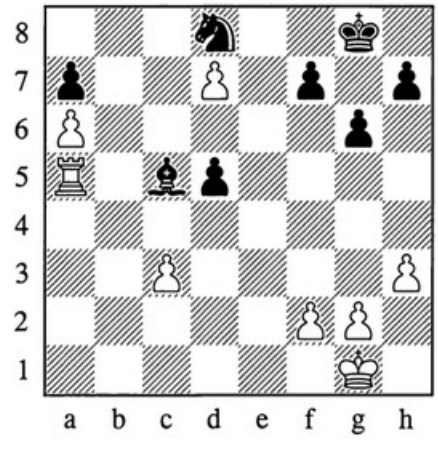
35...♗xc5 36.♗xd8 ♘xd8

From a static point of view, Black seems to be fine. He just needs to reach e7 with his king to control the situation. However, dynamically things simply do not work out well for him and he will lack just one tempo to consolidate.

37.♖a5!

I believe this move was unexpected by my opponent. The radical activation of the white rook had to be foreseen when embarking on this line.

Generally, I consider that *time* is the most important factor related to what I would call my aggressive style. From my early years, I readily sacrificed material to achieve my aim faster.



37...♗b6?!

A mistake rarely travels alone. Black wrongly thinks that the bishop will be stable on b6 or c7. As a general remark, I believe that players defend much better today than they did twenty years ago, and not only at the highest level.

37...♗e7

After this move I would have had to be very precise in order to retain the initiative. The main target is the a7-pawn, but clearing the path to it is not at all trivial. Although I was far from having calculated everything until the promotion of the a-pawn, I was confident that the position should be winning. The following detailed analysis confirms my intuitive evaluation:

38.♖b5



White threatens 39.♖b7 when 39...♘c6 would not be an adequate defence because of 40.♖c7. Therefore, the most stubborn defence is:

38...♘c6

However, this move has the hidden drawback of clearing the d8-square. The pawn's natural tendency to advance, first highlighted by Nimzowitsch, will be an important issue in the lines below; a well-timed d7-d8=♕ would clear space for the rook and misplace one of the black pieces.

39.♖xd5

39.♖b7 leads nowhere because of 39...♗d8 and the d7-pawn stands in the rook's way, preventing ♖d7-d6.

39.d8=♕† should also do the job, but the text continuation wins the d5-pawn before sacrificing the d7-pawn.

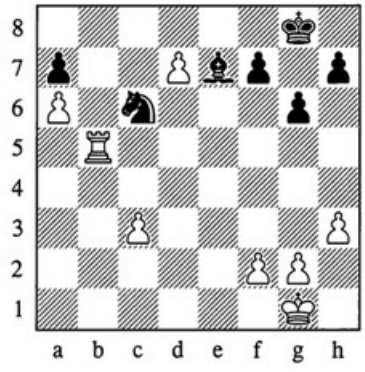
39...♘d8

Aiming to keep the pawn blocked.

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The king is one tempo too slow to join the defence: 39...♔f8 40.d8=♕†! Now 40...♗xd8 41.♖d6 wins a piece, which leaves us with 40...♘xd8 41.♖d7 ♘c6 42.♖c7. After winning the a7-pawn nothing will stop my little pawn from queening!

40.♖b5 ♘c6



41.d8=♕†!!

It's the same issue.

41...♗xd8

This leads to an interesting case of domination by the rook over the minor pieces, but 41...♘xd8 loses the a7-pawn: 42.♖b8 ♔g7 43.♖a8 ♘c6 44.♖c8 Chasing the knight away. 44...♘e5 45.♖c7 And White wins.

42.♖d5

It is funny that Black cannot coordinate his pieces. The immediate threat is ♖d6, so the bishop has to move away.



42...♗b6

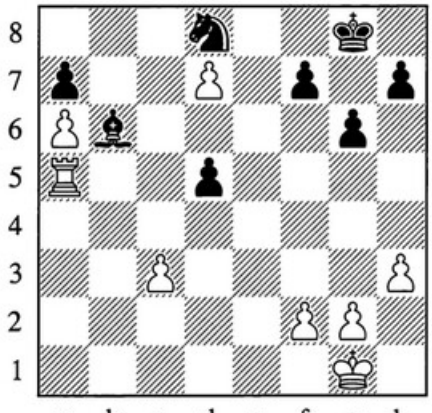
This allows the most elegant refutation.

42...♗e7 43.♖d7 followed by ♖c7 wins the a7-pawn.

42...♗a5 43.♖c5 and 42...♗f6 43.♖d6 both lose a piece.

43.♖d6!

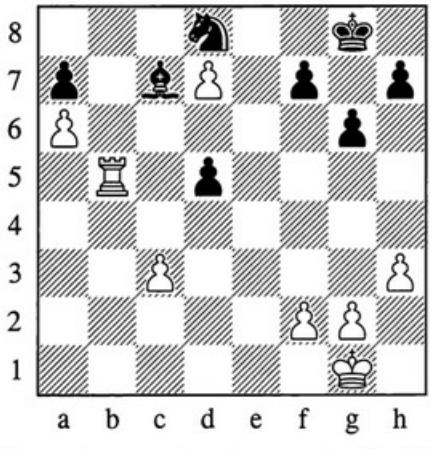
Black loses a piece; if the knight moves, the pawn promotes after 44.♖xb6 axb6 45.a7.



38.♖b5

Threatening ♖xb6.

38...♗c7



Retreating to the last rank of defence. Apparently, everything is well defended along the b-file...

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39.♖b7!

Exploding any remaining illusions.

39...♗a5

After 39...♘xb7 40.axb7 Black once again is one tempo too slow in playing ...♔e7.

40.♖xa7

Black's minor pieces are helpless against the far advanced passed pawns.

1–0

In this game the thematic sacrifice/exchange was necessary to keep my main trump, the far advanced pawn. In the next example I deliberately switched from an illusory attack to a promising ending using the same kind of operation.

Egilsstadir 1988

This was my second visit to Iceland, just a few months after the Reykjavik tournament. My whole family travelled to Egilsstadir, as was the case with most events during that period of our lives. We usually chose festivals where many sections were available, so Susan could play in the A-group while Sofia and I could take part in the B-group or the Open. As a curiosity, Egilsstadir is the only place where four members of our family played, as my father competed in the Open. Incidentally, he won a great game against the top board of the Faroe Islands' Olympiad team!

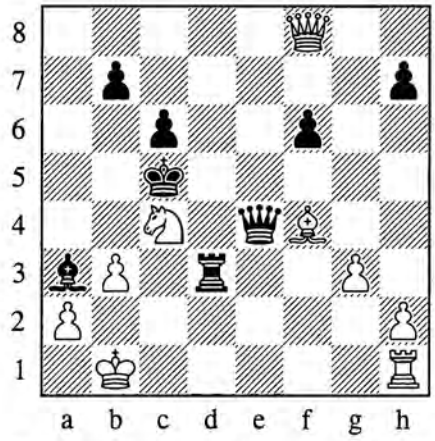


Laszlo Polgar – The Victorious!

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Jonfinn Thomsen – Laszlo Polgar

Egilsstadir 1988



The apparently deadly check on f8 was met by the discovered check 31...♖d6†! forcing immediate resignation.

The games started unusually late, at 7 p.m. The organizers thought that in addition to chess there are great opportunities for tourism in Iceland and at this time of year (June) there were "white nights" in Egilsstadir. I have pleasant memories of this tournament. The organizers were very kind to us and did everything to ensure my family had a good time. Among other things, we had great fun on a mountain where we had a snowball fight in our bathing suits!

Judit Polgar – Helgi Olafsson

Egilsstadir 1988



Right after the opening I had started fighting for the initiative by sacrificing small amounts of material. Helgi defended very well, returning the material whenever needed in order to keep my attack within tolerable limits. The position remains unclear, with an unusual material balance. Although White still has an attacking position, I knew that the power of the bishop pair should not be underestimated. Therefore, I decided to look for ways of simplifying as the best practical chance of keeping the upper hand.

37.♖e1!?

I realized that I should not have two rooks on the well defended d-file, so I switched one



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of them to the e-file, creating one obvious threat (♖xf8† winning a piece) and a more subtle one.

37...♘c7

Black spent three out of his remaining seven minutes on this natural move. In time trouble we usually try to "play safe" keeping all the pieces defended in order to avoid unexpected tactical blows. Paradoxically, the solid text move *allows* a forcing tactical operation that leads to some problems for Black.

The main alternative was 37...♗g4. I could have replied 38.♕h7 followed by re-centralizing the queen keeping the initiative alive, but the game remains unclear.

Objectively, 37...♘c7 cannot be considered inaccurate, because a draw was in reach after it. However, from a practical point of view the position became easier to play for me.



38.♖xf8†!

On the previous move I had already taken the decision to simplify to a promising ending. The four minutes I spent before capturing on f8 were to double-check all the nuances. Since my attack was more or less at a standstill with queens on the board, the last move is the best practical decision. As in the previous game, we cannot really speak about a sacrifice, since I had calculated that the a6-pawn will fall.

38...♕xf8 39.♕xf8† ♔xf8



40.♖c1!

The point behind my 37th move is revealed now. After having decoyed the knight to c7, the rook switches to the c-file with gain of time. It is instructive to notice the way in which the minor pieces are dominated, without access to any of the squares from which they could defend the a6-pawn.

40...♘b5?!

Once again, a typical time-trouble reaction and this time one that complicates Black's defensive task. Quite frequently, the last move before the control proves to be a serious mistake. This happens because players know that on the next move they will have plenty of time and want to stay safe until then. Safety is relative though. It looks natural to keep the pieces around the a5-pawn, in order to prevent its advance once the a6-pawn has fallen, but the last move actually dooms Black to a long and passive defence.

The safest way to draw was the counter-attacking plan 40...♘d5, which at first does not look logical at all, because it spreads the

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pieces all over the board. 41.♖c6 ♘f4! The key counterattacking move. 42.♖xa6 ♗d5



Black will eliminate the g2-pawn and give up the bishop for the a-pawn, reaching a drawn ending.

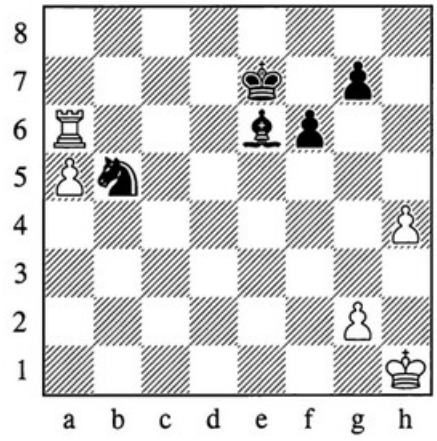
41.♖c6 ♔e7 42.♖xa6

This is the position I had in mind when playing 37.♖e1. In such endings the player with a rook and an outside passed pawn usually has the advantage. One famous example is the second game of the second Karpov – Kasparov match, which we watched "live" on Russian TV (an inspiring experience, as far as I can remember!).



Karpov managed to reach a draw with an unusual regrouping of his minor pieces and the general opinion was that he had created some sort of miracle.

Judging by the speed with which Helgi played this phase of the game, I had the distinct feeling that my opponent was sure he could draw with ease and this may have been one of the causes of his defeat.



42...♘c7 43.♖b6 ♗d5?

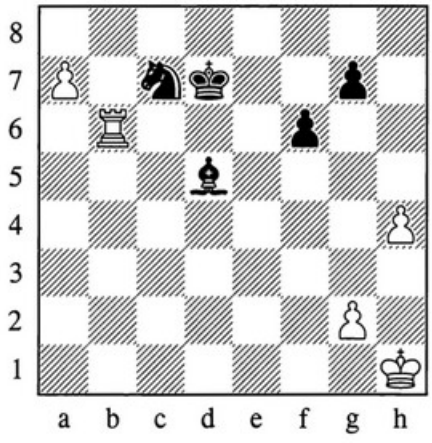
After this careless move, played after thinking for only two minutes, I doubt that Black can save the game. He should not have allowed the enemy pawn to advance as far as a7, just one step away from becoming a mighty queen!

In the Karpov – Kasparov game the then reigning champion managed to block the pawn on a3. His mechanism was curious, because the a2-square was not on the bishop's colour! The bishop just helped him to create barriers in the rook's way.

In our case, it is hard to understand why Black refrained from the obvious (and forced) 43...♗c8, after which it would have been hard for White to find a way of making progress. Did Helgi not notice this simple resource or did he simply lose his sense of danger to the extent of thinking that any move would earn a draw?

44.a6 ♔d7 45.a7

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Black's pieces enjoy much less mobility once the pawn has reached the seventh rank. Since the g7-pawn also needs permanent care, the white king can hope to get to b8 at some point. Although the process is quite slow, Black can do little except sit and wait.

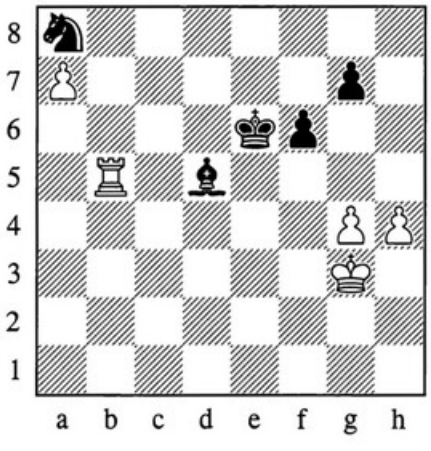
45...♘a8 46.♖b8 ♔e6 47.♔h2!

After having made significant progress on the queenside, the time has come to centralize my king.

47...♔f5 48.♖b5 ♔e5 49.g4

Gaining space and preparing a possible candidate for promotion.

49...♔e6 50.♔g3



Maybe this is the position Helgi was aiming for, thinking that his fortress was unbreakable. Indeed, Black's army is placed harmoniously, controlling all the access squares towards b8, but it is always risky to retreat to the last line of defence when there is a more active choice. When things are on the edge, it is easy to overlook some active resource for the opponent.

When I was a kid I often failed to anticipate a long-term plan of my opponent, say, requiring twenty moves or so. For example, sometimes the king makes a long march to the far wing to provoke a slight weakness, then returns to the opposite wing, and so on. This mainly happened because I did not have the patience to sit and think for three or four hours in a row, but I have the feeling that many tacticians have similar problems even after they have grown up!

In our case, Helgi may have overlooked that White can use the support of his king to widen the battlefront by breaking the kingside with g4-g5. Black cannot allow the creation of a passed pawn after gxf6 ...gxf6, which means that he would have to release his control over the e5- and g5-squares. This will lead to new possibilities for the king, which will eventually get to b8.

50...♗h1

Black keeps the bishop far from the open files on which it could be attacked, which might allow White to win a tempo. It is curious, though, that when choosing his next two moves he will fail to spot that the g-file is one that should be avoided.

51.♔f4 ♗g2?!

Maybe not really wrong yet, but a first symptom of the problem mentioned above. It should be noted that the seemingly "long"

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diagonal does not provide the bishop with many good squares.

The safer alternative was:

51...♗c6

When the winning process would have required move-by-move accuracy:

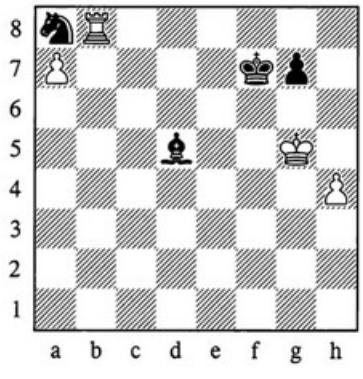
52.♖b8 ♗d5 53.g5



53...fxg5†

Black gets into trouble rather quickly if he tries to maintain the tension: 53...♔f7 54.♖d8 ♗h1 55.♖d7† Forcing the king to become either passive or exposed. 55...♔g6 56.h5† Another example of an ending becoming tactical. 56...♔xh5 57.gxf6 gxf6 58.♖h7† Winning the bishop on the spot and the knight quite soon. In this line, if Black had placed his bishop on g2, rather than on h1, White would have won with 57.♖xg7, based on the double attack 57...fxg5 58.♖xg5†.

54.♔xg5 ♔f7



55.♔f5!

Heading for e5, which has become available after the last pawn exchange.

55...♔e7 56.♔e5 ♗h1

Black has been pushed back, but is still kicking. White needs to work a bit more before gaining the d6-square for her king.

57.♖b1 ♗c6 58.♖g1

Forcing the black king to clear the path for his rival.

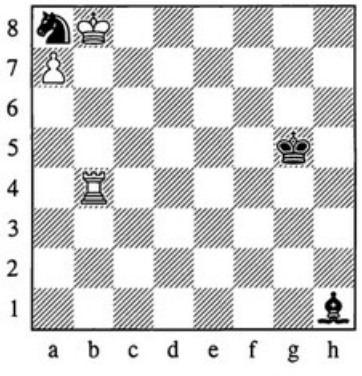
58...♔f7 59.♔d6

Coming closer to the target; it all depends now on whether Black will be in time to liquidate the kingside and return his king to the other wing.

59...♗e4 60.♖g4 ♗h1

Remarkably, the longest possible diagonal still proves too short for the bishop; a typical case of domination.

61.♖b4 ♔g6 62.♔d7 ♔h5 63.♔c8 g5 64.hxg5 ♔xg5 65.♔b8



The king has reached his final destination and the end is near.

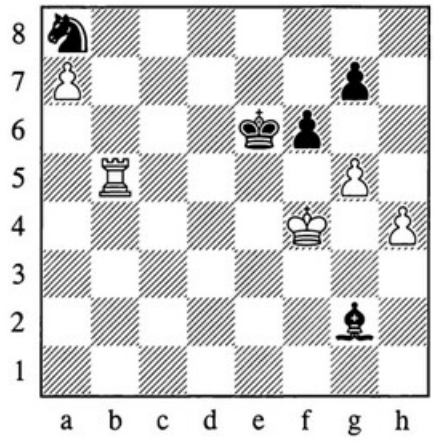
65...♔f5 66.♖b7

As noted by Tartakower, "chess is the tragedy of one tempo". Black is one step too far away to draw with:

66...♗xb7 67.♔xb7 ♔d7.

52.g5

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52...fxg5†?

Helgi committed this blunder almost instantly; it sometimes happens that you think in terms of plans, failing to notice certain concrete moves.

My mom used to say that I was okay when things got to the endgame, because she thought that fewer pieces would mean fewer problems, but I am afraid this is not the case! The reduced amount of material usually means that most mistakes are decisive.

Black should have played a waiting move such as 52...♗h1, when White would have to carry out the plan described above.

53.♖xg5

In some of the lines above, this kind of double attack was delivered after thorough preparation. In the game, I had it for free.

53...♗h1 54.♖xg7

Black is helpless against the two passed pawns.

54...♔f6 55.♖g1 ♗d5 56.h5 ♘c7

The position is winning of course, but when replaying the game in recent years I wondered why he resigned so soon? I asked the engines and they revealed the truth: Helgi got a shock when he realized that it is mate in 14! I guess I would have played the recommended 57.♖g6† followed by 58.♔e5 but then most likely worked out a slightly longer win.

1–0

Gradual simplifications after the opening

So far, we have examined examples of positions with reduced material on the board, either an ending or very close to one. In the last game of this chapter, simplification took place as a longer and gradual process. The opening had just come to an end when I started to take the possible endings into account.

Judit Polgar – Alexandar Budnikov

Debrecen 1990



We had played a sharp line of the French Defence. By that time I was improving my opening preparation. Around 1989 I started working with Laszlo Hazai and together we worked out a lot of new (for me) main lines in the French, Ruy Lopez, King's Indian and other openings. For me this was a major change; before 1989 (when I was already rated 2555) I mainly played sidelines such as the King's Gambit and 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♘ge2 against the French. Looking back, I can say that it was

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a little late for this kind of change, but better late than never!

When analyzing sharp lines like the one from this game, we also considered the inevitable link to the characteristic middlegame and sometimes endgame positions. This game is a good example of how useful the kind of "long vision" achieved as a result of such training can be.

In the current position, Black has to be ready for the idea of ♗xf5 ...exf5, e5-e6, with strong threats against the king. He has two basic ways of preventing this.

17...♘xg3?!

The first step of a gradual simplifying process that will lead Black to a hopeless ending just ten moves later. It looks natural to eliminate the potentially dangerous bishop and keep the other knight on c6, in order to start fighting for the e5-square with a well-timed ...f6.

The main alternative was 17...♘ce7 holding the kingside position. Since in this case ...f6 would have been out of the question, my plan was to start queenside play with 18.♖fb1. In my notes (written right after the game) I evaluated White's position as slightly better and I do not see any reason to change my opinion now.

18.fxg3!

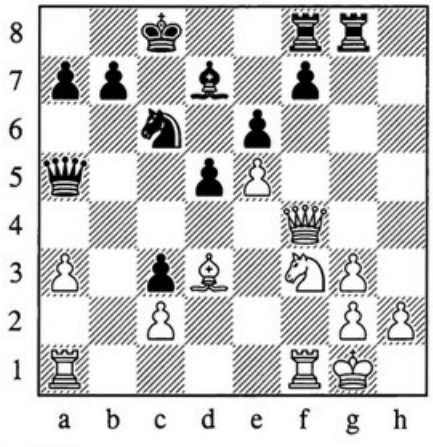
This capture away from the centre may have come as a surprise to my opponent. There are a few elements justifying my decision.

Already at this point I had in mind that the h-pawn could become extremely strong. Actually in this line one of the "killer ideas" is queening this pawn, although in practice it happens very rarely. This may be because players with Black are usually aware of the danger and tend to choose lesser evils on the way to the ending.

White's king position would be far less safe after 18.hxg3, because of possible attacks along the h-file. After the text move His Majesty is as safe as houses. If the rooks are exchanged then h2-h4 followed by ♔h2 would avoid any back rank trouble.

Finally, my way of capturing also anticipates Black's main plan. He will obviously try to break up the centre with ...f6, so opening the f-file is useful. Black cannot refrain from ...f6, nor allow White to prevent it, because in this case his communication between the wings would be very poor. In such an eventuality, even if I lose the a3-pawn, the h-pawn may win the game on its own.

So White already has a huge advantage and Black has to quickly find some counterplay.



18...♕d8

Preparing the thematic break.

19.♕e3 f6 20.exf6 ♖xf6

Black decides to keep his queen close to the queenside, dreaming of winning the a3-pawn and queening his a7-pawn.

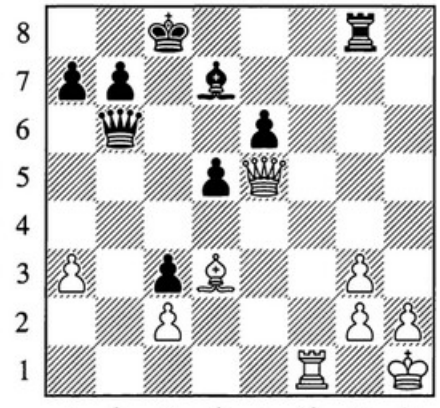
After 20...♕xf6 I planned to stabilize my control over the e5-square with 21.♖ae1. Another way of achieving the same goal was 21.♗b5 d4 22.♕e4, when Black's centre would be under strong pressure.

21.♘e5

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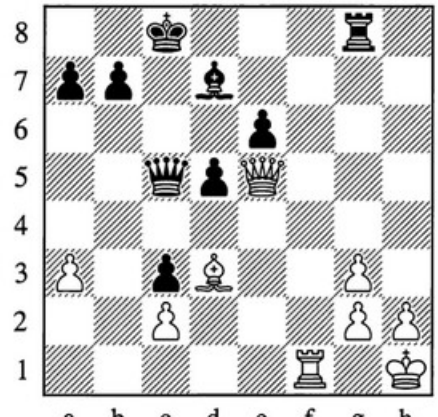
My bishop is more active and also more stable than its rival, which justifies my decision to exchange knights. The last move also leads to the physical occupation of the dark squares, blocking the enemy centre.

21...♘xe5 22.♕xe5 ♕b6† 23.♔h1 ♖xf1† 24.♖xf1



24...♕c5?

After this mistake I can force matters. Black failed to understand that White's queen is far more dangerous than the black one, which means he should try to exchange them. He should have played 24...♕c7 25.♕d4 ♔b8 when probably I would have played 26.♖e1, stabilizing the situation in the centre and preparing the slow advance of the kingside pawns.



25.♗h7!

An excellent example of simplifying from a position of strength. White is interested in keeping her active queen on the board, but would benefit from exchanging rooks. This would make the advance of the h-pawn easier and more effective. I do not openly go for the exchange, but instead force to Black carry out this exchange himself. The main threat created by the text move is ♖f3xc3, winning on the spot.

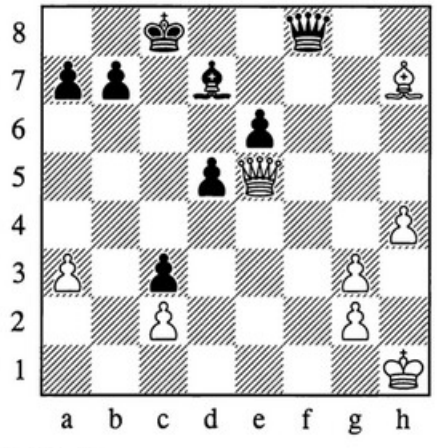
25...♖f8

A sad necessity.

26.♖xf8† ♕xf8 27.h4!

Finally I have reached my dream scenario where my pawn will be much quicker than Black's counterplay on the opposite wing. We can also note that the white king continues to be safer than his rival.

I did not care about winning the c3-pawn with 27.♕xc3†, because this would lose time and allow Black some counterplay after 27...♗c6, followed by ...♕f2.



27...♕xa3

At this point my opponent ran into time trouble, probably due to his problems on the board and the impossibility of finding an adequate defence.

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28.h5 a5 29.♔h2

I could not play the immediate 29.h6 because of 29...♕c1†. It now becomes clear that my pawn is faster and all my pieces better placed than Black's.

29...a4

29...♕c1 would lose two pawns to 30.♕xc3†.

30.h6

The rest is easy; the pawn's promotion is ensured.

30...♕c1 31.♕xc3† ♗c6 32.♕h8†

Improving the queen's placement with gain of time.

32...♔c7 33.♕g7† ♔b6 34.♗d3

Black resigned without waiting for 34...a3 35.h7 a2 36.h8=♕. It is funny that both white queens prevent the promotion of the black pawn.

1–0

I hope that the examples examined in this chapter have convinced the reader that endgames are not at all dull. I also tried to make clear that systematic study of the endgame can be rewarding both creatively and in improving one's results.

Summing up, I would say that my golden rules in the ending are:

1) Fight for the initiative
2) Have a clear plan
3) Centralize the king

The order of these priorities will change according to the necessities of the position.

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Chapter 12

Attacking without Queens



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In the gradual process of simplifying the position, the exchange of queens is regarded as the most important moment. Once these mighty pieces are off the board, the dynamic balance is strongly altered. One common mistaken tendency is to consider that queenless positions are equivalent to endings, reducing the active side's attacking potential and improving the defender's chances.

In practice, things are more complex. Queenless positions can feature middlegame elements, such as a strong initiative or even mating attacks. In many cases, exchanging queens is the best or even only way of maintaining the initiative, a situation illustrated by all the examples from this section. To make the paradox even clearer, in all but one of the cases I provoked the exchange despite being a pawn down, or sacrificed a pawn in the process.

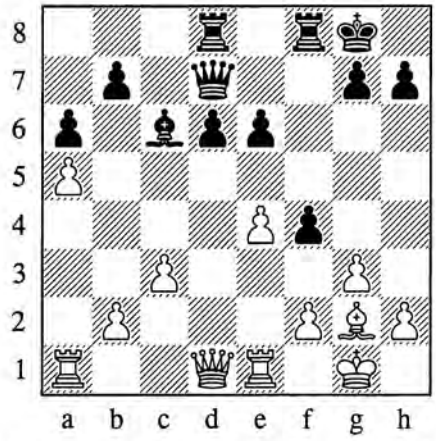
In the first game, the pawn sacrifice comes as an alternative to the offered exchange of queens.

Miguel Illescas Cordoba – Judit Polgar

Pamplona 1990

I had lost to Miguel one year earlier with the same opening, the Sicilian Taimanov (see page 351 of the Tournament Diary chapter). This time, he chose a peaceful line (6.g3) and offered a draw soon after the opening was over. The game was played on New Year's Eve and he was probably in a party mood already.

However, I was used to the fact that, as a professional chess player, you have to be ready to fight on special days, including your birthday! Besides, I felt comfortable in the position so I saw no reason not to play on.



My bishop is more active than his and I have some hopes for a blockade on the dark squares, thanks to my far-advanced f4-pawn. Miguel's next move is directed against this plan.

20.♕g4 ♕f7!

Strategically, the correct move, maintaining the tension. Releasing it with 20...fxg3 would help him improve his structure with 21.hxg3, and give away the initiative. As so often is the case, there is also a tactical nuance involved.



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21.♕xf4

Miguel chooses to enter an inferior endgame rather than living with the permanent threats of ...f4-f3 or ...f4xg3 followed by ...♕f2†. He takes into account the pawn weaknesses, hoping that in the absence of queens his defence will be easier.

He correctly refrained from winning a pawn: 21.gxf4 ♕xf4 22.♕xe6†?! ♔h8 23.♖e2



Apparently, White has managed to parry the immediate threats and can hope that the extra pawn would compensate for the strategic shortcomings. Now 23...♗b5 is ineffective because of 24.c4.

But after 23...d5!!∓ he is in trouble. 24.e5 allows 24...♗b5 25.♖c2 ♗d3, when the rook would have to leave the f2-pawn undefended, while 24.exd5 loses outright to 24...♖de8.

21...♕xf4 22.gxf4 ♖xf4∓



White's kingside is very weak, but he probably hoped that in the absence of queens, things would not be too bad. Besides, the queenside structure favours White, and I have to be careful about my backward d6-pawn. White's bishop is "bad", but mine is also somewhat restricted in its actions. To give a hint of what is to come, later I will use tactics to bring it into play with decisive effect.

It is too early to evaluate whether I have realistic winning chances. For the time being, the important thing is that I have a clear attacking plan based on gaining space on the kingside.

23.♖ad1 ♔f7

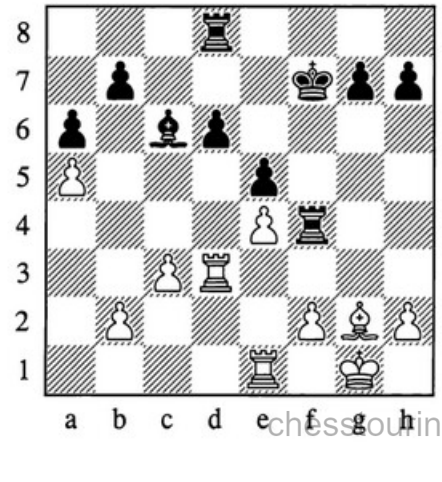
The king hurries to e7, in order to support d6 and possibly free the rook from this task.

24.♖d3

Intended as a multipurpose move. In some cases, White could double rooks on the d-file, although this is problematic now, because e4 is hanging. Miguel will try to use the third rank to neutralize my initiative, but will fail to do so.

24...e5

Eliminating once and forever the possibility of activating the g2-bishop with e4-e5, and thus consolidating the blockade on the dark squares.



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25.♖f3?!

Miguel starts playing without a clear plan. He should have realized that ♖xf4 is not a real threat, and instead gained queenside space with 25.c4 followed by b4. This would have been a double-edged plan though, since the c4-pawn would become slightly weak.

25...g5 26.♖d1

Another neutral move. After 26.♖xf4† exf4 I would get the excellent e5-square for my king and a dangerous kingside majority. The attempt to prevent the blockade with 27.e5 would allow me to win a pawn in various ways, by playing ...♖e8 with or without inserting ...♗xg2 or ...f3.

Knowing with hindsight the effectiveness of my rook pawn's advance to h3, it makes sense to consider 26.h3. This puts up some resistance in the fight for space, but has the drawback of creating a new weakness on a light square. "Do not move your pawns on the wing on which you will be attacked" is one classical axiom. 26.h3 would give me a rather wide choice of plans. I could blockade White's pawn with ...h5-h4, or create a passed pawn on the h-file. Or else, I could play in a similar way to the game, with ...h5, ...g4 and ...hxg4, opening the h-file.

26.♖h3 would not cross my plans in any way in view of 26...♔g6 followed by ...h5.



26...g4

Forcing White to make an important decision.

27.♖e3

White admits that his third-rank adventure has been merely a waste of time.

White could have tried to take advantage of the slightly exposed position of my king on the f-file with:
27.♖xf4† exf4 28.f3



Apart from the simple 28...gxf3 29.♗xf3 ♔e6 followed by ...♖g8 and ...♔e5, with clear domination, I could also consider the more ambitious:
28...h5 29.♖f1

Otherwise, ...♔f6-e5 would follow.
29...g3

My far-advanced pawns are threatening, but the situation is double-edged, since they also need permanent care.

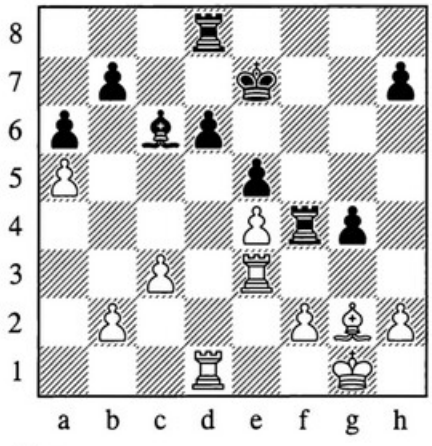
After the game move, my advantage consists of three main elements: the better bishop, strong pressure against the backward f2-pawn and the possibility of gaining even more space with my h-pawn.

The highest priority at this stage of the game is to take measures against the freeing moves h2-h3 and f2-f3.

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27...♔e7

The king takes over the task of defending the d6-pawn, while clearing the f-file. This not only prepares ...♖df8, with increasing pressure, but also gets ready to meet either f2-f3 or h2-h3 with ...♖g8, when White would have a hard time defending all his weaknesses.



28.♖d2

Over-defending f2 before it is threatened, and possibly hoping to make f2-f3 playable.

28...h5!

Suddenly, the threat of ...h4-h3 is very unpleasant. The need to keep the e4-pawn defended means White risks having to play ♗g2-h1, when the bishop would remain cut off from the rest of the board forever.

29.c4

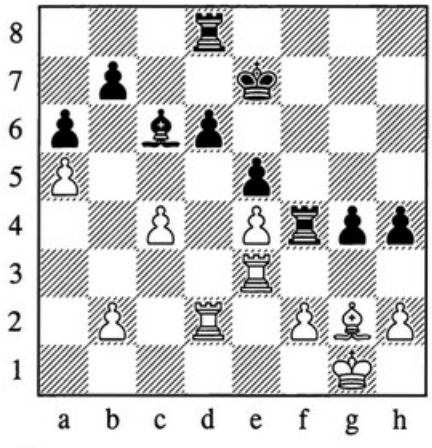
Finally displaying some activity. By now, he may have understood that the 'neutrality policy' would not guarantee a draw.

White is not ready yet to open the kingside: 29.f3? gxf3 30.♗xf3 ♖g8† with a strong attack. When playing 28.♖d2, he may have thought that 31.♖g2 would defend the king properly.



Unfortunately for him, I could win a pawn and simplify to a won pawn ending with 31...♖xf3! 32.♖xf3 ♖xg2† 33.♔xg2 ♗xe4. A nice geometric motif along the long diagonal.

29...h4



30.♖de2

The correct move, over-defending the e4-pawn, but played with the wrong idea, as we will see.

30...♖c8

The consequences of 30...h3 31.♗f1 are not entirely clear. Later, White could regroup with ♖e1 and ♗d3.

Therefore, I decided not to define my kingside intentions yet and looked for a way of opening a new front on the queenside. The first step is

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provoking b2-b3 with ...♗d7-e6. The bishop would then return to c6, followed by the opening of the b-file with ...♖b8 and ...b6.



31.♖b3?

It now appears that 30.♖de2 was meant to free this rook from the defence of the e4-pawn. The last move looks active and prevents my plan based on ...b6. However, allowing the bishop to be cornered will have fatal consequences. I must say that White's rook activity along the third rank did not yield him anything good. On the kingside, it led to a considerable loss of time and now it leads him to a lost position.

Any neutral move (for instance 31.b3) should have been preferred.

31...h3!

Of course, I grab my chance at once.

32.♗h1

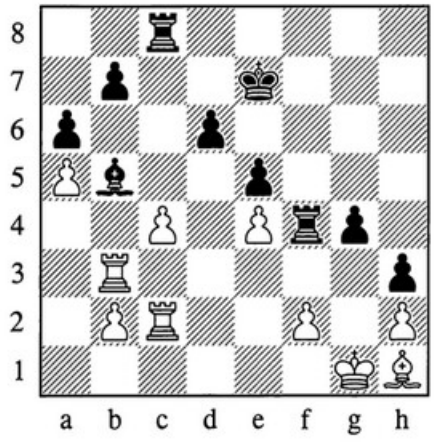
The bishop has been caged and White's king has back rank problems.

32...♗b5!

This trick starts a forcing sequence that leads directly to a decisive advantage. We can note that b3 is the worst possible square for the rook along the third rank, as it prevents b2-b3. Ironically, my bishop joins the action just after its counterpart has been cut off!

33.♖c2

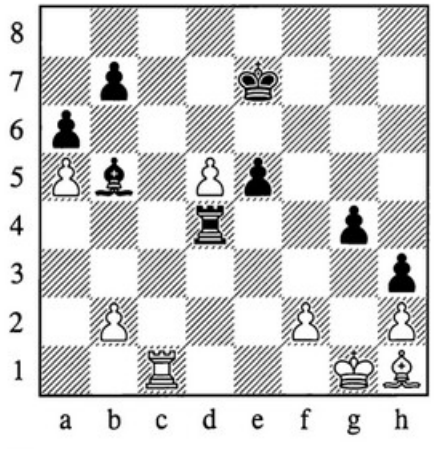
It may seem that there is still some hope for White, since the b7-pawn is hanging. My next move destroys this illusion.



33...d5!!

A spectacular pawn break, leading to the activation of my rooks.

34.exd5 ♖cxc4 35.♖xc4 ♖xc4 36.♖c3 ♖d4 37.♖c1



White is just in time to defend his back rank, but his position remains desperately passive.

37...e4

Making the fight against the h1-bishop the highest priority.

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38.♖e1 ♗e2!

The best way to maintain the domination, making use of White's back rank weakness. Instead 38...♗d3 would allow White to free his position somewhat with 39.f3.

39.♗g2!?

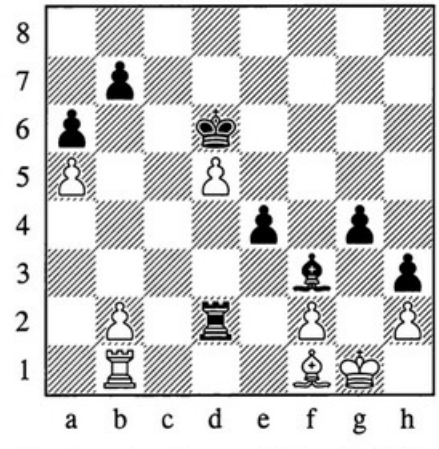
A small counter-trick which slightly improves the bishop's position, based on 39...hxg2 40.♖xe2, but it fails to change the overall evaluation. I had not seen it, but was not too bothered since I was going to place my bishop on f3 anyway.

39...♗f3 40.♗f1

The rook ending would be just as bad. His rook would have to defend the back rank, while my king could advance and pick up as many pawns as I liked.

In the next phase of the game, Miguel will try his last chance – stalemate.

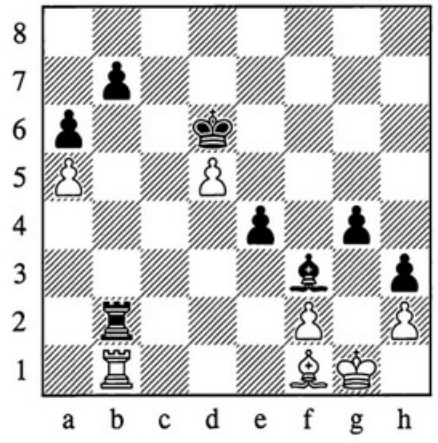
40...♔d6 41.♖b1 ♖d2



Creating the threat of 42...e3 43.fxe3 g3 44.hxg3 h2 mate.

To avoid this picturesque position, White has to abandon his b2-pawn.

42.♖e1 ♖xb2 43.♖b1



It was worth trying this, at least to get some moral compensation for his long suffering. I am not forced to stalemate him with 43...♖xb1, and I was not such a naive little girl, either!

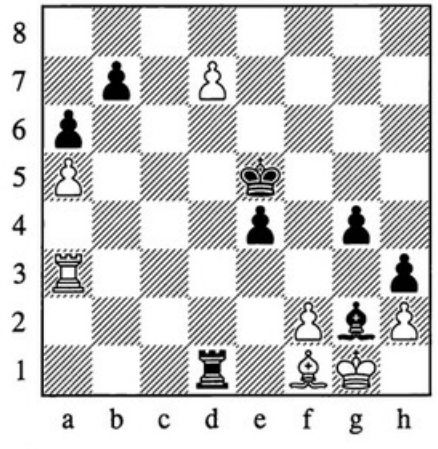
43...♖a2

Renewing the threat of ...e3, and so not giving him the time to take on b7.

44.♖a1 ♖d2

OK, enough of the harassment! The rest of the moves were played through inertia.

45.♖a3 ♔e5 46.d6 ♖d1 47.d7 ♗g2



48.f4†

The only way to avoid mate.

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48...♔xf4 49.♔f2 ♖d2†

Not wishing to end the year by playing on three pawns down after ...♖xd7, Miguel finally resigned.

After the job was done, I could switch to party mood (although I am afraid I spoiled Miguel's!). In the evening, I went out on the streets with my mom, Susan and some other players, enjoying the typical New Year atmosphere. In Pamplona, people add a local touch by dressing up in traditional costumes, so it was an entertaining way to celebrate my win!

In the next game, I decided to allow the exchange of queens while also sacrificing a pawn, which proved to be the best way of keeping my advantage.

Judit Polgar – Spyridon Skembris

Greece vs. The Polgar sisters, Corfu 1990

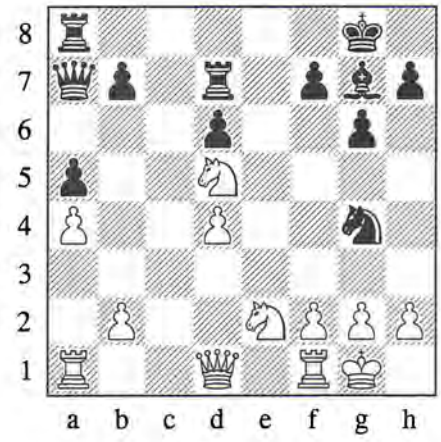
This game was part of a rather unusual match, which was played using the Scheveningen system between the Polgar sisters and three members of the Greek Olympiad team: Skembris, Kotronias and Grivas. It was played a few months before the Novi Sad Olympiad and in some ways it anticipated the "Polgaria" concept mentioned in the comments to the next game.

We had a wonderful time on the picturesque island of Corfu. The sea was great, the food was excellent and everyone was very kind. If I add that we won the match by a large margin, you may understand that I have very nice memories of Corfu and the tournament.



Corfu 1990 with my mother and sisters – a winning team!

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I have a wonderful centralized knight, and Black's position lacks harmony. My opponent probably hoped to maintain the balance due to his strong pressure against the d4-pawn. After some thought, I decided that the pawn was not important enough to prevent me from activating my position.

20.♘ec3!

I assume that Skembris had seen this coming, but underestimated my compensation for the pawn, hoping that he would be able to resist in the endgame.

20...♕xd4

Practically forced, otherwise ♘b5 would be killing.



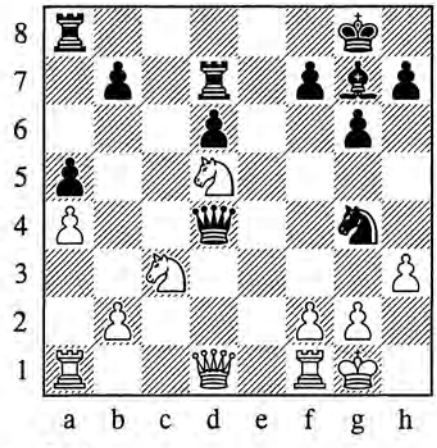
21.h3!

He might have overlooked this move, hoping for the "natural" 21.♕xd4 ♗xd4 22.♘b5:



Black's position seems to be hanging everywhere, with possible forks on f6 or b6, but I am sure he had prepared the accurate defence 22...♘f6!∓ when my compensation for the pawn would be questionable.

The game move forces the queen exchange under circumstances that are less favourable for Black.

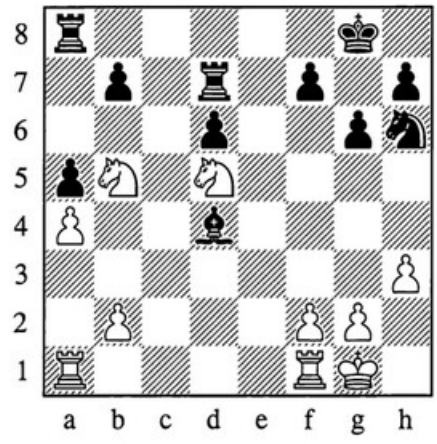


21...♘h6

This passive retreat is forced, since 21...♕xd1 22.♖axd1 ♘f6 23.♘b6 wins an exchange.

22.♕xd4 ♗xd4 23.♘b5

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Having been deprived of the defensive resource ...♘f6, Black can no longer keep control of the weak f6- and b6-squares. This means that, just as in the previous line, he will lose an exchange, but at least he can grab a pawn on the way.

23...♗xb2 24.♖a2 ♗g7 25.♘b6 ♖ad8 26.♘xd7 ♖xd7 27.♖d1



Black has two pawns for the exchange, but his queenside pawns are immobile. He cannot create a dangerous passed pawn, and he cannot even save his d6-pawn. Summing up, I have a clear advantage and good winning chances.

27...♗f8 28.♖ad2 ♘f5 29.g4 ♘h4 30.♖d5 b6 31.♔h2!?

The d6-pawn will not run away. Therefore, I decided to activate my king first, provoking new weaknesses.

31...h6 32.♔g3 g5



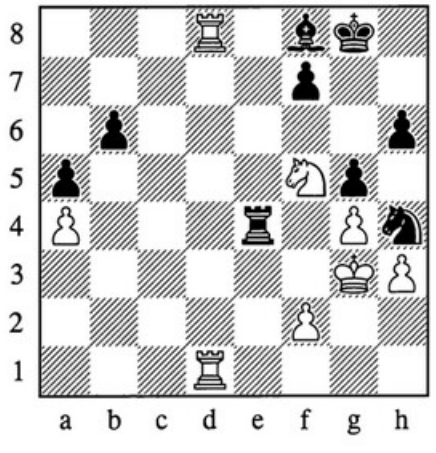
33.♘xd6

Now that the f5-square has become available, I found no reason to delay this capture.

33...♖e7 34.♘f5 ♖e4

Hoping for some queenside counterplay. However, my attack will prove faster and more effective.

35.♖d8



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Creating a well masked threat, which my opponent overlooked.

35...♖xa4?

35...♘xf5† was absolutely necessary, when I would have had to play a few accurate moves to get a winning endgame: 36.gxf5 ♖f4 37.♖b8 ♔g7 The only way to save the bishop from the threat of ♖dd8. 38.♖xb6 ♖xf5 39.♖b5 I would soon get a passed pawn on the queenside.



36.♖xf8†!

Oh, these little tricks...

It always feels nice to finish a well played game with an elegant, although in this case not that difficult, tactical stroke.

1–0

The hero of the initial struggle was my centralized knight. It was worth giving up a pawn and even exchanging queens to make the most of its overwhelming activity.

My decision to exchange queens in the following game was to a certain extent a matter of taste. From a practical point of view, it was the simplest way to keep my attack going despite being a pawn down.

Novi Sad Olympiad 1990

This was my second (and last) Women's Olympiad. Our team was the same as two years earlier, with the minor difference that Ildiko Madl was now playing on the fourth (reserve) board. During the Olympiad and in later magazine articles, people frequently referred to our team as "Polgaria" instead of Hungary. I am sure that most of these comments were well-intended, but this was unfair to Ildiko, who scored a couple of important wins.

The fight for the gold medals was even more dramatic than in Thessaloniki. The Soviets and our team both scored on average more than 2½ points per match, and we both won our last round matches 3–0. This left us tied on points, and the Buchholz system had to be applied to determine the winners. The result was to be decided by the last game to finish, from the match of one of our former opponents, played somewhere very far from the top boards.

I was sitting with the spectators, together with my teammates and captain, waiting for the final verdict. We had done our best, having achieved a fantastic performance, but everything was now out of our hands. I knew exactly what would happen in either of the possible cases: gold would be a great success, but silver would be judged by many as a complete fiasco. This may sound weird, since getting a medal is supposed to be a success, but things sometimes work differently in practice.

It was during that *endless* wait that I took the decision not to play in any more women's competitions. Achieving a close to perfect result and not being sure if it was enough to win was unpleasant. I promised myself that I would work hard to get into the men's team. Four years later, in Moscow, I played on the top board of the men's team, and in the 2002 Olympiad I was part of the team that won the silver medals.

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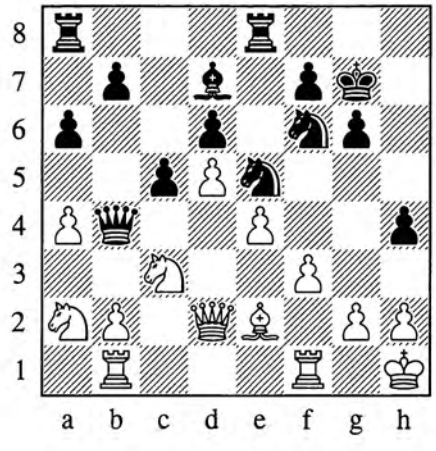
Facing the US in Round 5

Back in 1990, Caissa eventually decided to smile on us, and we ended up as winners. All three sisters won the individual gold medals on their respective boards.

Anna Akhsharumova – Judit Polgar

Novi Sad Olympiad 1990

This game was played in our fifth round match against the USA.



White's last move was 19.♘1a2, with the obvious aim of unblocking her queenside. In the event of a queen retreat, she could start an attack with 20.b4. I was not entirely happy with 19...♕b3 either, because it would most likely lead to a repetition after 20.♘c1.

19...♕d4!

This natural move implies a pawn sacrifice, the consequences of which had to be evaluated correctly.

20.♕g5!?

The critical continuation, attacking the h4-pawn and threatening to trap the super-centralized queen with ♖bd1.

20.♕xd4? was out of the question. 20...cxd4 Since 21.♘d1 d3 wins a piece, White has to weaken her centre with 21.f4, when after 21...♘eg4 she would lose several pawns.

20...c4!

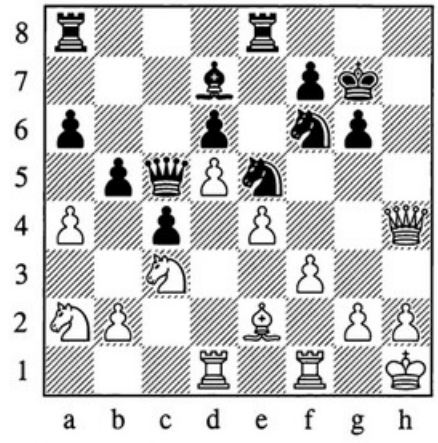
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A multipurpose move, clearing a retreat for the queen and preparing the typical Benoni queenside attack with ...b5.

21.♖bd1

Improving her position a bit before taking the pawn.

21...♕c5 22.♕xh4 b5



White's extra pawn does not count for much yet, since her massive kingside majority cannot be put into motion without creating weaknesses.

For instance, 23.f4?! would yield Black a decisive initiative: 23...♖h8 24.♕g3 ♘eg4 White cannot parry the numerous threats (...♖xh2†, ...♘e3, ...♘h5).

My queenside majority is less impressive visually, but it is quite effective. White has no way to stop ...b4, after which her knights will remain very passive.

23.axb5?

She probably wanted to get rid of the a4-pawn, which would be lost after ...b5-b4, but opening the a-file will have fatal consequences.

23.♕f2!? would have been a lesser evil. 23...b4 24.♕xc5 dxc5



25.f4 This intermediate move is essential in order to stay in the game. 25...♘d3 26.♗xd3 bxc3 27.♘xc3 cxd3 28.e5 White has some compensation for the sacrificed piece, with chances to put up resistance.

23...♖h8!?

Heading directly for an exchange of queens, despite being a pawn down.

Modern engines prefer 23...axb5!∓. I do not remember my exact train of thought at this stage of the game, but probably I underestimated my attack after 24.f4.



Black could continue 24...♖h8 25.♕g3 ♘eg4 26.h3 ♘h5.

From a practical point of view, my decision was correct, since White's only possibility of putting up resistance after the game continuation was a piece sacrifice which was not easy to decide upon.

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24.♕f2 axb5 25.♕xc5 dxc5



It may seem that things have improved even more for White from a structural point of view: she has a crushing majority of five pawns against two. At the same time, my queenside majority has a serious defect in the doubled pawns.

And yet, dynamic factors are more important in this position. All my pieces are active, while White's are passive or even misplaced, as is the case with both her knights. The immediate threat is ...b4, winning a piece, while 26.f4 is answered by 26...♘eg4, with a familiar picture.

26.♘c1?!

White decides to avoid the immediate threats, hoping that in the long run she will be able to put her centre into motion. In doing so, she clearly underestimated the strength of my initiative.

The best practical chance was:

26.♔g1!

Removing the potential threat of ...♘h5-g3†. Psychologically, it was not easy to decide upon sacrificing a piece in the following line:

26...b4 27.f4 ♘d3 28.♗xd3 bxc3 29.♘xc3 cxd3 30.♖xd3



We have seen a similar position in the comment on 23...axb5 above. White has three pawns for the piece and, more importantly, her structure has become mobile. The absence of the a4- and a6-pawns, in comparison with the other line, allows the activation of the bishop along the f1-a6 diagonal. One way of doing this is:

30...♘xe4 31.♘xe4 ♗b5

Play is likely to transpose to a rook versus knight ending, with pawns left only on the kingside. The weakness created by f2-f4 should offer Black some practical winning chances.

While this is not so bad for Black, I may have preferred 26...g5 (instead of 26...b4), stabilizing the kingside and planning to proceed with ...b4 and ...♘h5.



26...b4 27.♘b1

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27...♘h5!

I am pretty sure that my opponent underestimated this move. So far, the knight has fulfilled a merely defensive (or prophylactic) role, by inhibiting the enemy centre's advance. Once it joins the attack, the position become critical for White. The threatened double attack ...♘g3† can be parried in several ways, but even so it gains an important tempo.

28.♖fe1?!

This should have lost on the spot. Instead after 28.♔g1 ♘f4 play would have been similar to the game.

28...♘g3†?!

This wins, but 28...♖a1! 29.♘d2 ♗a4, with huge material gains, would have been simpler. The fight is over after the bishop finally finds a way to sidestep the enemy pawn chain and get actively involved in the play.

By coincidence, both winning plans are based on the rook files!

29.♔g1 ♘xe2† 30.♖xe2 ♖a1



Creating an annoying back rank pin.

31.♘d2 ♘d3

Once again, I missed an immediate possibility of activating my bishop: 31...♗b5 I would win material under slightly more favourable circumstances than in the game.

Usually, it is difficult to choose between several good moves. But better this way than having to choose between bad moves!

32.♘xc4 ♖xc1 33.♖xc1 ♘xc1 34.♖c2 ♘b3



White does not have enough compensation for the lost piece, since she cannot maintain a safe blockade of my queenside majority. I went on to win in 48 moves.

One of the key elements in this game was the 'controversial' situation of the e5-knight. Had my opponent managed to drive it away with a well-timed f3-f4, my position would have become critical. The way it went, I managed to achieve some stability for the knight by tactical means. And as we saw, eventually the knight delivered the decisive blow on the 31st move.

Even though my 23rd move may not have been objectively strongest, from a practical point of view it was entirely justified. In the last two examples, the exchange of queens was more of a necessity than a matter of taste.

In the next game, too, I exchanged queens when a pawn down. This time, I had no immediate threats, just persistent pressure.

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Wijk aan Zee 1990

Following my great run in 1988, which included seven tournament wins, in January 1989 I reached the top of the women's rating list, overtaking my elder sister Susan. It took some more time, though, until I really started playing better than her.

This event was one of the very few occasions in which all three sisters played in the same round-robin group. I played well, and achieved the best result among the three of us, finishing third.

I am very thankful to Susan for never displaying any trace of jealousy. On the contrary, she was always highly supportive and proud of me. On more than one occasion she joined us, her little sisters, as a second, helping us with our opening preparation or the analysis of adjourned positions, as well as simply teaching us everything she knew about chess. Her moral support was also invaluable. Two such examples were the 1986 Under-14 Boys World Championship in Puerto Rico and the 1989 Rome Open, where Sofia won with a fantastic score of 8½/9, ahead of many strong grandmasters!

Judit Polgar – Ferdinand Hellers

Wijk aan Zee 1990



A few moves earlier, I had sacrificed a pawn, reaching this position almost by force. Black's knight looks very strong, but his bishop is in some danger.

18.f5!

Not really trapping the bishop, but forcing favourable positional modifications.

18...♕b6†!

An important defensive resource, allowing Black to avoid material losses.

19.♕d4!

It is easy to establish that after 19.♔h1? Black gets a devastating attack with 19...♘f2† 20.♖xf2 ♕xf2 21.fxg6 ♖ae8 followed by either ...♖e1† or ...♖e2.

The remarkable thing about the game move is that it retains good compensation for the pawn despite the exchange of queens and the absence of immediate strong threats.

19...♕xd4†

My opponent spent eight minutes on this move. It would make little sense to let his structure be spoilt after 19...♗h5 20.♕xb6 cxb6, so maybe he just wanted to understand the objective merits of my slightly unusual decision.

20.cxd4 ♗h5 21.♗f4



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This is the position I had been aiming for when sacrificing the pawn. I have an active bishop pair and the possibility of creating combined pressure along the c- and a-files. Black's extra pawn is not so relevant at this point, since he cannot create a passer. The knight is his most active piece, but it also blocks the e-file for Black's rooks.

I did not think then and will not claim now that White has an advantage. I just liked the idea of maintaining the initiative and some slight but enduring pressure, with hopes of breaking my opponent's resistance in the long run.

21...c6

Objectively, there is nothing wrong with this consolidating move, but from a practical point of view it would have been better to strive for active counterplay. So 21...bxa4!?, clearing the b5-square for either minor piece, and the b-file for the rooks, would have been preferable.

The game move leaves me with the more pleasant position, although Black should be able to hold a draw with accurate defence.

22.h3 f6

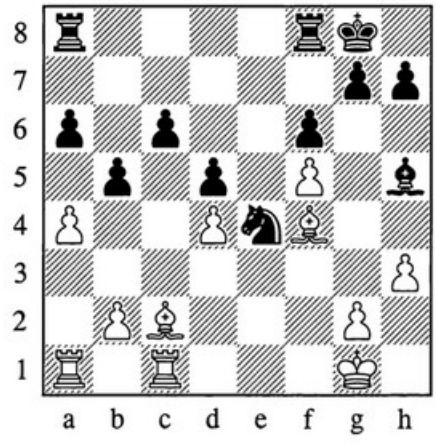
Clearing an escape route for the bishop.

23.♖fc1

It is useful to start building the pressure against the c6-pawn by occupying the c-file with a rook. I can decide later where the c2-bishop should go.

It is better to avoid any radical weakening of my kingside and keep the threat of g2-g4 in reserve.

The last move threatens to regain the pawn, while keeping some pressure due to the kingside space advantage and more active bishop.



23...♖fd8

Anticipating the opening of the d-file after an exchange on e4.

After making this move, Black had only 15 minutes left to reach the 40th move, and decided to offer a draw. His evaluation of the position may have been something like this: "I am a bit short of time, there are some threats around, but being a pawn up, I should be out of any danger." I thought differently about this latter part, and actually enjoyed my position, so I decided to play on.

24.axb5

After completing my development, it seemed natural to open the queenside. Besides, I force Black to make an important decision, which is rather unpleasant when in time trouble.

24...cxb5

Weakening the d5-pawn, but keeping the material advantage.

The alternative was:

24...axb5

Giving back the pawn, in order to provoke some simplifications. This would fail to achieve full equality, though:

25.♖xa8 ♖xa8

Hoping for ...♗e8, with a safe position.

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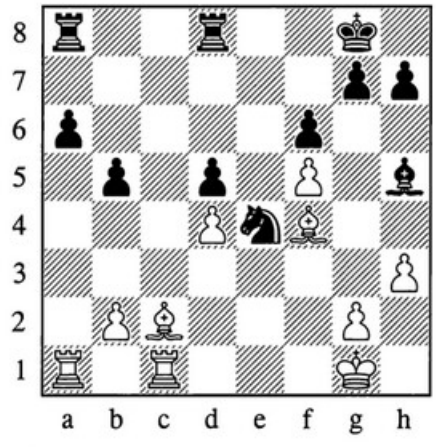
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26.♗xe4 dxe4 27.♖xc6±



My pieces are more active, and my passed pawn more dangerous, while my f5-pawn paralyzes Black. In addition, the black king is slightly unsafe. Although the presence of opposite-coloured bishops offers good saving chances, Black would have to suffer for a long time.



25.♗b3

With his a6- and d5-pawns attacked, Black cannot prevent my rook's invasion on c7.

25...♗f7

Another solid but somewhat passive move; a natural choice with little time left on the clock.

25...♗e2, planning ...♗c4, deserved consideration, but the bishop would be rather unstable. I would have played 26.♖a5 freezing the queenside chain and increasing the pressure.

26.♖c7 ♘d6

The logical consequence of the previous move.

The threat of ...♘c4 more or less forces the following exchange, but this means giving up his only active piece. Moreover, the e-file becomes available for my rooks.

An ambitious try was:

26...g5 27.fxg6 hxg6

Black fights for space, but creates even more weaknesses on the dark squares. One should never forget that pawns never move backwards!

28.♖e1!

Threatening ♖xe4.

28...f5 29.♖ec1



All Black's pawns are on light squares, which allows my f4-bishop unchallenged control of the dark squares. In the presence of rooks, this can easily lead to a decisive attack.

27.♗xd6 ♖xd6 28.♖b7

A multipurpose move. I prepare to double rooks on the seventh rank with ♖c1-c7 and prevent his queenside expansion with ...a5 and ...b4 by putting pressure on b5. In fact, ♖xb5 is an immediate threat.

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28...♖ad8?!

The idea is correct, but the move order is not, which is typical for time trouble. My opponent planned to neutralize my seventh rank pressure with ...♖8d7 at the required moment.

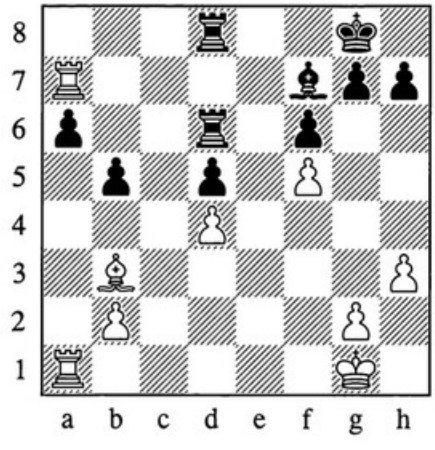
After having opened the e-file, he could not prevent my rook's activation with 28...♖c8 because of 29.♖e1 ♖e8 30.♖c1 followed by ♖1c7.

The best defence would have been 28...♗e8! aiming for the aforementioned defensive mechanism, but keeping the a6-pawn defended for one more move. I may have played: 29.♖c1 ♖ad8 30.♖c5



Black faces no immediate threats, but his position is very passive. I could increase my pressure slowly, as the play is rather one-sided.

29.♖a7!±



Taking full advantage of the previous inaccuracy. Suddenly, Black loses his main trump – the extra pawn. Since this adds a new weakness to his position (the b5-pawn), his problems are now quite serious.

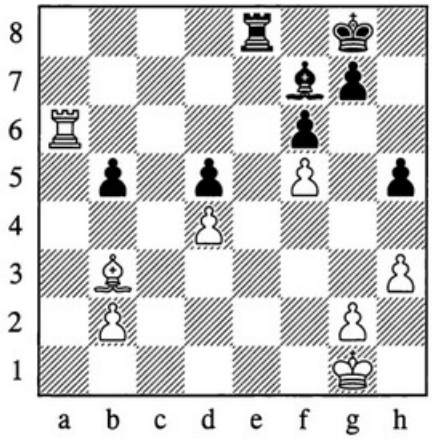
29...h5?!

Gaining some space and avoiding back rank problems. However, he should have preferred 29...♖c8 followed by ...♔f8, occupying an open file and keeping the king close to the centre. Such nuances are easy to overlook with just seven minutes left on the clock.

30.♖1xa6 ♖xa6 31.♖xa6 ♖e8

As strange as it may seem, the rook will not be able to take advantage of the numerous squares available along the e-file. The best thing would have been to admit that the previous move was unnecessary and returned to the aforementioned plan. That is, Black should have taken a similar approach to my Hastings off-board adventures, as mentioned on page 73 – retrace your steps and start again!

True, 31...♔f8? would lose a pawn after 32.♖b6, but 31...♖c8 would have been better. The best way to prevent Black's counterplay would be 32.♖a1, but this would remove the immediate danger my opponent was facing.



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32.♔f2

A centralizing move, taking three squares away from the enemy rook.

32...♖e4

Apparently, Black's counterplay is on track, but my next manoeuvre will shatter his illusions.

It is worth mentioning that, had he played 29...♔f8 instead of 29...h5, the counterplay based on ...♖e4 would also have failed after 33.♖a8† ♔e7? 34.♖a7† followed by ♖xf7 and ♗xd5†. This is why the rook would have been better placed on the c-file.

33.♖a8† ♔h7 34.♖f8

The black king and bishop are caged and separate from each other, which forces the rook to retreat, abandoning Black's dreams of activity.

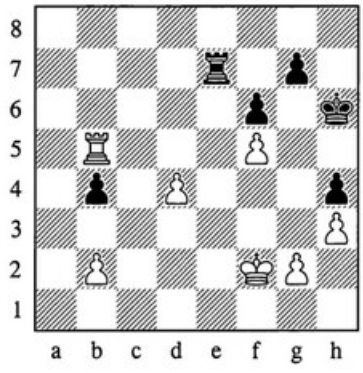
34...♖e7



35.♗c2?!

After having made significant progress over the past few moves, I started playing quickly and rather superficially.

I refrained from winning a pawn with 35.♖d8, because then Black could start a kingside attack with 35...h4 36.♗xd5 ♗xd5 37.♖xd5 b4 38.♖b5 ♔h6 followed by ...♔g5, when my f5-pawn would become weak.



White's winning chances are similar to Black's drawing prospects, but I believed that my position should be technically winning with bishops on the board.

My last move sets up a tactical trick: 35...g6?



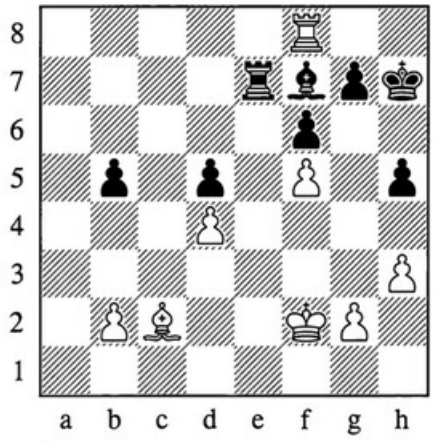
Now 36.♖xf7!† ♖xf7 37.fxg6† wins a piece. However, the pawn break 35...g6 was not a serious threat anyway, since it weakens the kingside structure, helping me to get rid of my potentially weak f5-pawn. Even if the trick did not exist, I could have reacted simply with 36.fxg6† ♗xg6 37.♗xg6† ♔xg6 38.♖d8, leaving Black without the aforementioned counterplay.

Instead of ...g6, Black's main strategic threat is ...h4, followed by ...♔h6-g5, a point that we

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both failed to understand during the next few moves.

Since ...h5-h4 is essential for Black's counterplay, the best way to keep my advantage would have been 35.h4!, reaching a position similar to that after my 38th move in the game. Then if 35...g6 36.fxg6† ♔xg6, White can play 37.♖b8 as 37...♖e4 is impossible because of the pinning move 38.♗c2.



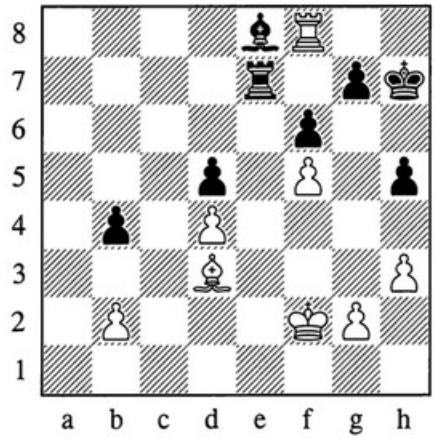
35...♗e8?!

Missing a first chance to start his kingside counterplay with 35...h4! with the threats ...♗h5 or ...♔h6-g5. I may have played 36.♗d1, preventing the bishop's activation and aiming to consolidate on the kingside, with the possible continuation 36...♔h6 37.♖h8† ♔g5 38.♗g4:



White threatens g2-g3, with mating ideas. Black's best chance is 38...♔f4! 39.♖xh4 ♖c7 radically activating his pieces. It is quite understandable that he did not embark on such wild play with just a few minutes on the clock.

36.♗d3?! b4?!



A weakening move rather than an attacking one.

37.g3!?

Finally grasping the essence of the position, although nowadays I would definitely prefer 37.h4, leaving the decision about the g-pawn for later. In some cases, g2-g3 may create a zugzwang position.

37...b3 38.h4!

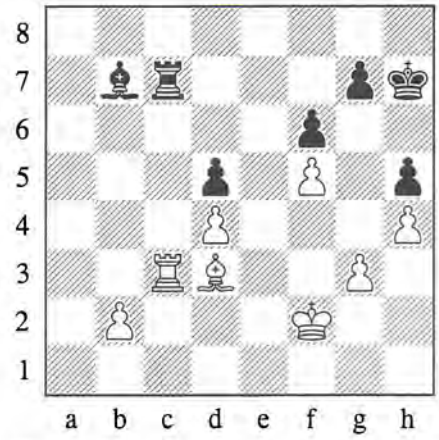
Finally! Black is completely paralyzed and a closer look reveals that he faces zugzwang. The rook and king are immobile (...♔h6? is met by ♖h8 mate), while bishop moves would open my rook's path to the queenside.

38...♗c6 39.♖c8 ♗b7 40.♖c3

I win a pawn, without giving up any of my domination.

40...♖d7 41.♖xb3 ♖c7 42.♖c3
1–0

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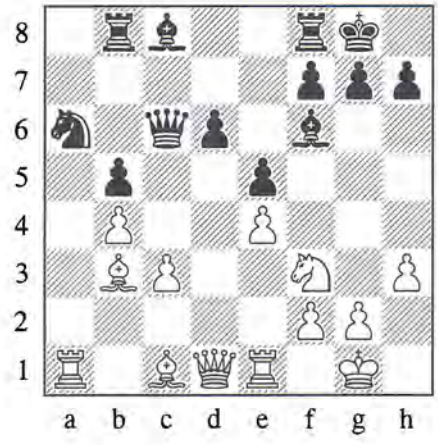
The rook exchange would lead to a won bishop ending, while otherwise the advance of the b-pawn would leave Black without any hope. His king is too far from the centre to help put up any resistance, while the bishop is "bad" and in some cases vulnerable. Therefore, Black's decision to resign and save some energy for the final three rounds was entirely justified.

In this game, the combined pressure of my rook and bishop played a decisive role, leaving Black in a hopelessly passive position.

Two rounds later, I won another game using the same paradoxical method of exchanging queens when a pawn down.

Judit Polgar – Paul van der Sterren

Wijk aan Zee 1990



My development is more harmonious, since the a6-knight will need some time to become active. From a static point of view, controlling the c4- and d5-squares is essential. Black probably hoped that I would lose a tempo defending my c3-pawn, when 22...♗e6 would keep the strategic balance.

22.♗d5!

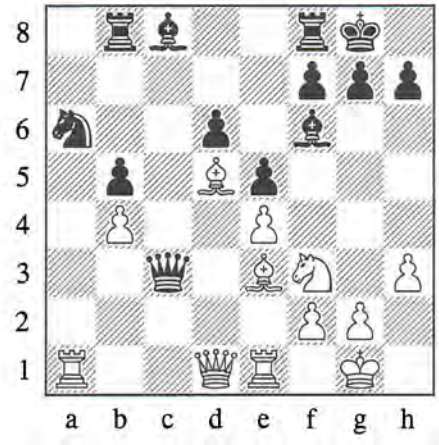
A clear sign that I treasured the initiative and control of the critical squares more than material.

22...♕xc3!

Otherwise, he would be worse without the consolation of an extra pawn.

23.♗e3!

The same policy as on my previous move; I sacrifice a second pawn, for rapid development and piece activation.



23...♕c7

Playing safely: Black prepares ...♗b7, in order to neutralize my pressure.

The second pawn was poisoned, as the following lines demonstrate: 23...♘xb4? 24.♗d2 ♕c5 25.♖c1 winning the knight. Or 23...♕xb4 24.♕c2 followed by ♖eb1, trapping the queen.

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24.♕c1!

This unexpected move plays a key part in the operation started by the pawn sacrifice. The initiative along the c-file is significant. It also is important to exchange the main defender of Black's position – his queen.

With my bishops targeting the queenside, it becomes clear that Black should find the best way of giving up the exchange, which is not an easy decision from a practical point of view.

24...♗b7?!

Understandably, my centralized bishop was getting on my opponent's nerves, but this is not the best way to return material.

One natural alternative was 24...♕xc1 25.♖exc1 ♘xb4:



White keeps the initiative with 26.♗a7 ♗d7 27.♗xb8 ♖xb8 28.♖a7, but Black's position remains hard to break.

The best answer was the paradoxical:

24...♕d7!

Black avoids the exchange of queens despite being a pawn up! This way, he will have better chances of keeping both wings well defended and even creating kingside threats. In the following line, Black sacrifices material in order to achieve perfect piece harmony and disorganize my army.

25.♕a3

Preventing ...♗b7 and threatening to increase the pressure with ♖ec1.

25...♘c7!

It is best to hurry with the regrouping, although this implies losing the exchange.

26.♗a7 ♘xd5 27.♗xb8 ♘f4



Suddenly, Black's position has become harmonious, despite his small material disadvantage. I would prefer White after 28.♗a7 followed by ♗e3, but the position would remain double-edged. The picture may change in just an instant, just as rain can arrive after a sunny summer day.

25.♗a7



25...♗xd5

Now that Black's control over the c8-square will inevitably be weakened, it is better to

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refrain from the intermediate capture on c1. After 25...♕xc1 26.♖exc1 ♗xd5 27.exd5 ♘xb4 28.♗xb8 ♖xb8 29.♖ab1 the weakness of the back rank has a decisive impact.



Black cannot take the important centre pawn, because 29...♘xd5? loses the knight to 30.♖xb5.

After the last move, many black pieces are hanging, and I had to find the best order of capturing them.

26.♕xc7 ♘xc7 27.♗xb8 ♖xb8 28.exd5 ♘xd5

One important point is that the double attack 28...e4? can be answered with the counterattacking 29.♖a7.

29.♖ad1 ♘xb4 30.♖xd6

Black has two pawns for the exchange, but his position lacks harmony. The bishop is passive, the knight unstable, and the back rank vulnerable. All these factors mean my position is better.

30...♘c2

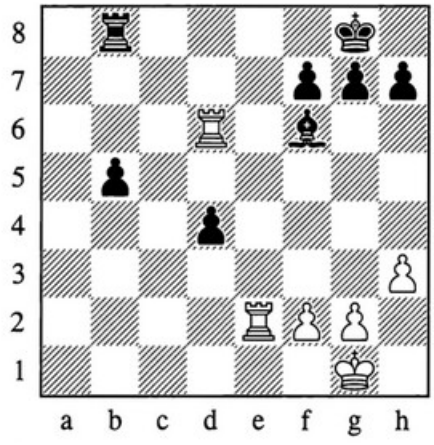
Due to the back rank problems, 30...♖e8?! would fail to prevent 31.♘xe5.

31.♖e2!

Not giving Black a free move to consolidate with ...b4-b3, or the simple ...h6.

I preferred my last move to 31.♖c1, because the rook will be better placed to block the d-pawn after the inevitable exchange on d4.

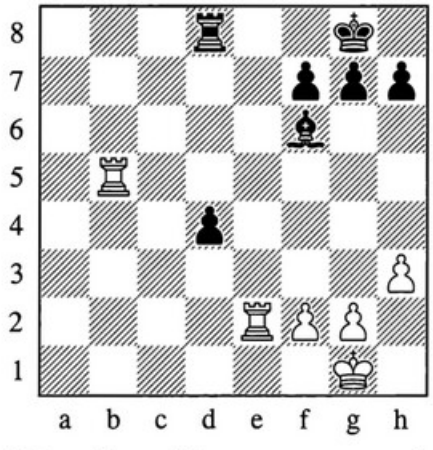
31...♘d4 32.♘xd4 exd4



33.♖b6!

Chess is the tragedy of one tempo, and in this case Black lacks the time to avoid back rank problems with ...h6. Without this tactical nuance, winning a pawn, White could not claim an advantage.

33...♖d8 34.♖xb5



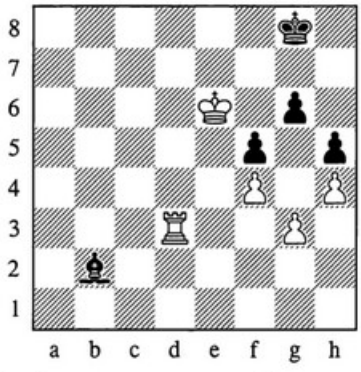
This ending still presents some technical difficulties, because I have to keep an eye on the d-pawn. At the same time, the necessity

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of permanently defending it restricts Black's possibilities.

We can now appreciate the difference between 31.♖e2 and 31.♖c1. With the rook on c1, 34...d3 followed by ...d2 and ...♗c3 would activate Black's position. The way it is, 34...d3? loses a pawn to 35.♖d2, threatening to meet ...♗c3 with ♖xd3, but also the simple ♖b3xd3.

In order to understand the later course of the game, some reference points are essential. The ending with rook versus bishop, with three pawns each, is winning even in the relatively unfavourable situation when the structure is blocked. The following position was analyzed by Kholmov in 1973 and can be found in many ending books. (For a better understanding of my ending against Van der Sterren, I switched the colours in Kholmov's original position.)

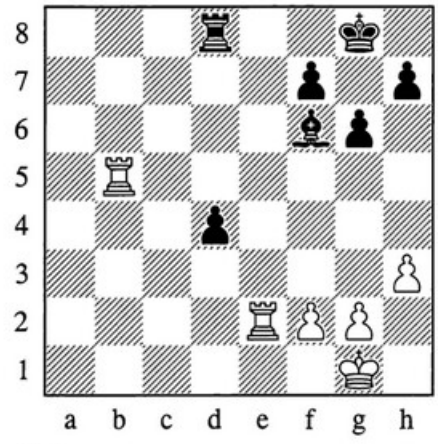


White's pieces occupy excellent squares; the only way to make progress is by using a pawn break: 1.g4! Black's fortress falls apart after either 1...fxg4 2.f5 or 1...hxg4 2.h5.

In the similar position without the f-pawns, this kind of break is not possible and Black has little trouble defending his fortress.

34...g6

If White manages to exchange rooks, then Black will not be able to keep his d-pawn and defend f7 properly at the same time. Black has a hard job avoiding this unfavourable exchange, since White intends to double rooks on the seventh rank, attacking f7. All these elements lead to the conclusion that I should win this ending. The only thing I need is accuracy and a bit of patience.



35.♖d2!

Preventing ...d4-d3, which had become a threat after Black's last move.

35...h5

This way of arranging the kingside pawns is almost universal. Black fights for space without creating any pawn weaknesses. The immediate threat is ...h5-h4, when White's pawns could advance only at the cost of simplifying the position, which would create the danger of a draw.

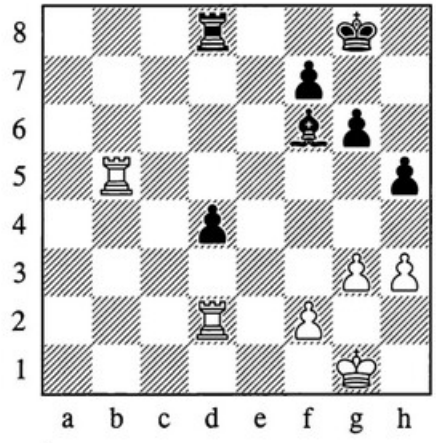
In the event of a passive policy by Black, I could carry out the following plan:

1) Bring my king to d3, in order to free my rooks from defensive tasks.
2) Double rooks on the seventh rank, forcing Black to defend passively with ...♖f8.
3) Start a kingside attack with g4 and f4, followed by transferring the king to g3 in order to prepare h3-h4 and g4-g5. Black would most likely be suffocated.

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36.g3!

Preventing ...h4, which could be well met by g3-g4, avoiding pawn exchanges.



36...♔g7?!

Black gives up the seventh rank too easily, thus shortening the technical phase. 36...♖d7 would have prolonged the fight. I would have transferred my king to d3, then doubled rooks on the b-file and played ♖b7. Once the seventh rank was conquered, play would proceed as in the game.

37.♖b7 ♖d5

Black anticipates the danger surrounding the f7-square and intends to defend in the most active way, by placing the rook on f5. With the rook on f8, the plan based on f2-f4 and g3-g4-g5 would most likely soon place Black in zugzwang.

38.♔f1 ♖d8

This retreat is temporary; the rook will soon return to the fifth rank.

I might have considered 38...g5, aiming for stability on the dark squares, although this would chronically weaken the f5-square.

39.♔e2 ♖e8† 40.♔d3 ♖e5 41.♖a2 ♖f5 42.h4!?

By placing my pawns on dark squares, I build a net around the enemy bishop. Black will soon be in zugzwang.

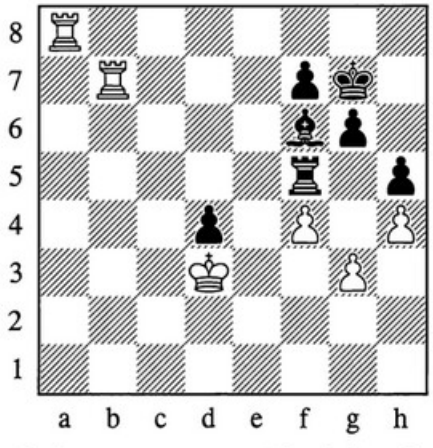
42...♔g8?!

Losing immediately.

42...g5 would have reduced the number of pawns, but weakened Black's structure. After 43.hxg5 ♗xg5 44.f4 ♗f6 45.♖aa7 Black would lose one of his pawns.

42...♗d8 would give up the d4-pawn, when play may eventually transpose to the Kholmov position.

43.♖a8† ♔g7 44.f4



Black is in zugzwang. The bishop has no squares available, and any rook move would be answered with ♖aa7, winning the f7-pawn and creating decisive threats.

1–0

Black lost this game mainly because he failed to find a good way of improving the position of his a6-knight. True, the knight eventually reached d4, but this led to the decisive weakening of Black's kingside structure by having the e5-pawn cut off from its colleagues.

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This is my favourite photo of my sisters and me –
taken in 1991

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Chapter 13

Decisive Games



People have described me as a lioness at the board – in Malaysia in 1990 I met the real thing

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The happy outcome of a well played game often depends on finding an excellent move at the right moment. On a bigger scale, the same situation frequently occurs in tournaments: in order to finish first (or achieve some other sporting aim) one has to win the decisive game, typically in the last round.

The ability to deal with the increased tension of the game which will decide the tournament is an important part of every strong player's arsenal. Since I was a kid, I have tried to ignore the sporting importance of decisive games and just play the best moves I could. I was confident that if I managed to keep the tension for a long time, my chance would eventually pop up and there I would be, ready to grab it!

I have selected three games played at different levels and which were surrounded by different levels of tension, to illustrate some typical psychological aspects.

King's Gambit

Judit Polgar – Glenn Flear

Hastings 1988/89

The reader is familiar with some of my off-board stories from this tournament from the comments before my game against Singh (page 73).

It was clearly the strongest open I had ever played in and things went very much my way. When I sat down for the last round game I knew that a victory would ensure that I won the tournament.

However, I did not feel real pressure on this occasion. Nobody had big expectations of me before the tournament and my result was already considered something of a sensation. I was also very satisfied with my play so far, so it was more of a win-win situation.

I chose a sharp opening because it was the only one I knew, but later I did not mind simplifying to an ending with enduring pressure, in full accordance with my "decisive game strategy" expressed above.

1.e4 e5

Glenn always played this, which somewhat simplified my preparation.

2.f4

Raymond's Keene reaction to this move in his comments for the tournament bulletin was: "What a choice of opening for the decisive last round game – the romantic 19th century favourite, the King's Gambit."

Indeed, the King's Gambit was then as rare a guest in grandmaster tournaments as it is now. But I had learned it in my childhood and was fascinated by such games as the Immortal Anderssen – Kieseritsky, London 1951. It was my first opening against 1...e5 and my results were so good that for a long time I did not feel any need to change it.

My progress in 1988 was so rapid that I started having frequent games against grandmasters before I could adjust my repertoire to the new requirements. Still, in the present game the King's Gambit did its job quite well.

Since the King's Gambit is so rarely seen and is considered basically unsound, players tend not to be well prepared against it. Nowadays, it can only be used as a surprise weapon.

Later, I followed my friends' advice and switched to the Ruy Lopez. This involved a huge analytical effort, but I was greatly helped by my trainer Laszlo Hazai who knew the ins and outs of this opening with both colours.

2...exf4 3.♗c4

I always played the Bishop's Gambit – "Perhaps the most romantic variation of a romantic opening," as Keene called it.

Theory considers that the most consistent continuation is 3.♘f3. This was the favourite

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choice of Boris Spassky, the last World Champion to play the King's Gambit on a regular basis.

It is curious that 22 years later, I used the Bishop's Gambit to defeat former World Champion Topalov in our rapid match in Mexico 2010.

3...♘f6

The most principled reaction. The bishop is somewhat exposed on c4, which allows Black to start his counterplay in the centre.

The tempting 3...♕h4†?! deprives White of the right to castle, but the king is quite safe after 4.♔f1. Next, ♘g1-f3 will cause Black losses of time and will be followed by the rapid occupation of the centre.

3...d5 is another reasonable way of meeting my third move.

4.d3

4.e5 is ineffective because of 4...d5!. We can see here the drawbacks of the early bishop development: this resource would not be available had White played 3.♘f3.

Or if 4.♘c3 then 4...c6 followed by ...d7-d5.

4...d5 5.exd5 ♘xd5



This was the main line recommended by theory as leading to easy equality. White has some advantage in the centre, but will need some effort to regain the f4-pawn.

The evaluation is probably correct, but I had analyzed the line exhaustively and practised it in countless training games.

6.♘f3 ♘b6

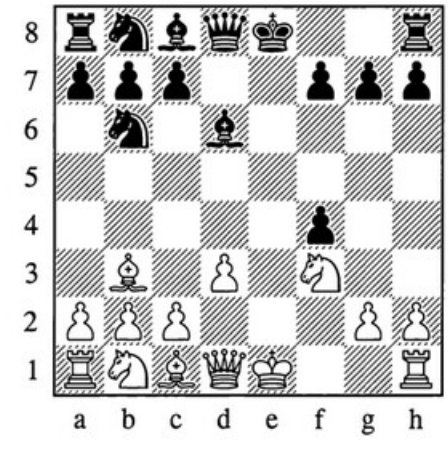
Glenn spent eight minutes on this novelty; it is hardly Black's best choice. After the voluntary knight retreat from the centre, Black will have to look for alternate ways of defending the f4-pawn.

The developing 6...♗e7 is simple and good.

In my later game with Campora in the 1989 New York Open, I won back the pawn with 7.♗xd5 ♕xd5 8.♗xf4, but failed to obtain an advantage and the game was rapidly drawn.

Maybe 7.0–0 is more consistent, provoking Black to defend his pawn with 7...g5. It was partly for this kind of unbalanced position that I liked the King's Gambit so much.

7.♗b3 ♗d6



If Black could castle, he would retain the extra pawn for a long time, with excellent play. Glenn probably did not expect my next move.

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8.♕e2†!

This causes Black more trouble than he may have expected.

8...♕e7 9.♘c3

This developing move shows clearly that the tension along the e-file favours White. Black should avoid 9...♕xe2† 10.♘xe2 followed by ♗xf4, when my central majority and the pressure against the f7-pawn would ensure a long-term advantage.

This means that I can choose the right moment to release the tension.

9...♗g4?!

This apparently active move does not contribute in any way to the fight around the f4-pawn. As we will see, Black will not be able to take any particular advantage from the occupation of the d4-square after the exchange on f3.

9...♘c6 induces some dynamic modifications in the thematic fight around the f4-pawn. Still, White keeps the initiative: 10.♕xe7† ♘xe7 This is Black's point: he can defend the pawn and retain the right to castle. However, another typical King's Gambit issue comes to the fore: the pressure against the f7-pawn.



After 11.♘g5 0–0 12.0–0 ♘g6 13.♘b5 White will win back the pawn with an active position.

Since the tension does not favour him, Black should have stepped out of it with: 9...♗e6! This also neutralizes the strong b3-bishop. In this case, White would have problems proving a concrete advantage.

10.♕xe7†!

A good moment to exchange queens. The time had come to play ♘e4 (or ♘b5) in order to attack the d6-bishop, but I needed to release the tension first.

10...♔xe7

A necessary concession. The king's presence in the centre will tell in some cases. True, it will mainly happen in lines that were not actually played in the game, but this means that Black's choice is somewhat restricted.

11.♘e4

An interesting psychological moment. The aggressive 11.♘g5 may seem better suited for a decisive game.

Rather than starting an unclear attack, I wanted to retrieve the pawn and keep a small but persistent advantage.



11...♗xf3

Consistently fighting for the d4-square. With a bishop on b3, Black should consider 11...a5!? when the more or less forced 12.a4

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has the drawback of weakening the bishop's defence. Black has a few ways of trying to take advantage of it.

12...♗xf3 13.gxf3 ♘c6 would transpose to the line from the next comment, but 13...♘8d7 deserves attention.

Even with the loss of a tempo Black could offer the bishop exchange with 12...♗e6. White would keep a small edge in all cases, so maybe Black's choice is merely a matter of taste.

12.gxf3 ♘c6

Once again an important alternative is:

12...a5

To win back the pawn, White would reply:

13.♘xd6 cxd6

Black threatens to activate his rook with ...a4 followed by ...♖a5, so most principled is:

14.a4 ♘c6 15.♗xf4 ♘d4



The insertion of the moves ...a7-a5 and a2-a4 weakened the stability of the b3-bishop, but White got something in exchange: the b6-knight is undefended and the a1-rook can be activated in an original way:

16.♖a3!±

White threatens ♗e3 (possibly after ♔e1-f2), and it appears that the f3-pawn is poisoned, or at the very least it leaves a nasty aftertaste:

16...♘xf3†?! 17.♔f2

Curiously, there are no good squares to retreat to:



17...♘e5

Relatively best. 17...♘h4? loses outright to 18.♗g5† while 17...♘d4 leads to a queenside disaster after 18.♗e3 ♘xb3 19.♖xb3.

18.♖e1

The threat of d3-d4 does not allow Black to defend his knight properly.

18...♔f6

This is playing with fire.

18...♔d7 is safer in the short term, but the ending after 19.♗xe5 dxe5 20.♖xe5± followed by ♖b5 offers White a big advantage.

19.d4 ♘ec4?!

This only makes things worse, but otherwise White would win the d6-pawn with a huge positional advantage, thanks to the bishop pair and mobile centre.



20.♗xc4 ♘xc4 21.♖f3!+–

Suddenly, the king is left alone against the combined attack of all White's pieces.

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13.♘xd6 cxd6

A necessary strategic concession, since 13...♔xd6 14.♗xf4† would offer White a strong initiative.

14.♗xf4 ♘d4



Both of us had been playing fast so far: I had used 21 minutes, compared to Glenn's 27. Now I had my first long think (16 minutes) and designed my plan for the next few moves.

15.♔f2

Protecting the f3-pawn and clearing the e-file.

15...♘xb3

Black could have delayed this exchange, but I could have provoked it with ♗f4-e3 anyway. Although my bishop will not go to e3 in the game, the position would not be drastically different.

16.axb3

The main reason I liked to play the King's Gambit was the possibility of complicating the fight and getting tactical play from the very start of the game. However, I was also aware of the general strategic idea: to get a pawn advantage in the centre and slowly squeeze Black in the endgame.

This position illustrates the latter aspect. Black can do very little against the slow advance of my compact mass of pawns. As for the doubled pawns, they are neither weak nor immobile, as the game shows. Besides, having doubled pawns means an extra open file for the rooks, as Bronstein used to say. In this case, I developed my a1-rook without actually moving it!

16...a6

The seemingly active 16...♘d5 does not lead anywhere after 17.♗d2 followed by c2-c4.

17.♖a5!

Illustrating Bronstein's aphorism quite clearly. The rook will prove very effective on the fifth rank.



17...♔d7

This may look like just a precaution, but Glenn might already have planned to use his king as an active defender, as we will see on move 21.

18.b4 ♖he8 19.c4

White's queenside attack develops naturally. However, I spent 11 minutes on my last move, wondering whether I needed to include my c-pawn in the attack.

I was tempted by the more active: 19.♖ha1! Then if 19...♖e6:

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I discovered that after 20.b5 ♘d5 Black gets counterplay. For instance, 21.♗d2 ♖ae8 getting out of the pin and threatening ♖e2†.

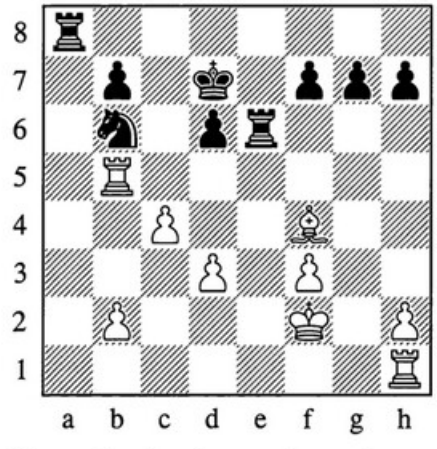
However, 11 minutes were not enough to notice that I could deviate with: 20.♗e3! Gaining an important tempo for the attack.

Summing up, I would now prefer 19.♖ha1 to the game continuation.

19...♖e6 20.b5

I remember that this series of four advancing moves was a great source of inspiration and self-confidence.

20...axb5 21.♖xb5



My position has improved over the past few moves. Still, in chess as in life it is difficult to get something without giving something else away. By opening the a-file, I helped Black to develop his queen's rook without having moved it – now both sides' rooks have enjoyed this privilege.

21...♔c6

A typical issue for simplified positions: rather than becoming a target, the king prepares to take an active part in the defence. The attacked rook is already defended of course, but Black intends to restrict the mobility of my pawn chain.

22.♖c1

It was about time to complete my development, bringing my last piece into the action.

22...♖a2

An important defensive resource, slowing down my attack.

22...♖ae8 would fail to threaten anything serious, since ...♖e2† can be met by ♔g3. I could unleash the well masked threat created by my last move: 23.d4! ♘xc4? 24.♖g5 (or to some other square along the fifth rank) followed by b3, winning the knight.

After Glenn's move, the same line does not work:

23.d4 ♘xc4 24.♖g5 ♖xb2†

Black has removed the annoying b-pawn with gain of time, but White has not exhausted her resources.

25.♔g3 d5



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26.♖xc4† dxc4 27.d5† ♔d7 28.dxe6† ♔xe6

Black has three pawns for a bishop and the connected ones on the queenside are dangerous. The most likely outcome is a draw.

So I needed to find one more prophylactic move before advancing my pawns.

23.♖b3?

I was too focused on my plan and overlooked the counterplay allowed by my last move.

23.♗e3 would also be premature, because of 23...♘a4 24.d4 d5! with counterplay.

The ultra-patient 23.♖c2! followed by ♗e3 and d3-d4 was the correct way to proceed. But how could I be patient at the age of 12 with the tournament win in sight? I wanted to advance my d-pawn as soon as possible.

23...♘d7?

Missing his only real chance to save the game: 23...♘a4!



We both thought that this would fail to 24.d4, threatening a fork with d4-d5. However, the simple zwischenzug 24...♖f6! gains an important tempo for Black, allowing him to take the b2-pawn.

If instead 24.♖c2 ♘c5 25.♖bc3 and Black can force a draw by repetition with 25...♘a4.

24.d4



After the double oversight, the game has returned to its normal path: White's attack develops systematically. Apart from the fork, there is the strong threat of 26.d5† ♔c7 27.c5!.

Glenn chooses the only reasonable defence.

24...♖f6 25.♗g3

Controlling the h2-b8 diagonal is important for retaining the threats.

25...b6

Black has managed to slow down my queenside initiative and the time has come to look for new ideas.

26.♖e1!

As mentioned on move 21, to gain something you usually have to give something. Now it is Black's turn to experience this – he avoided the immediate threats, but had to give away the e-file. The threats of ♖e7 or ♖e8 are quite annoying.

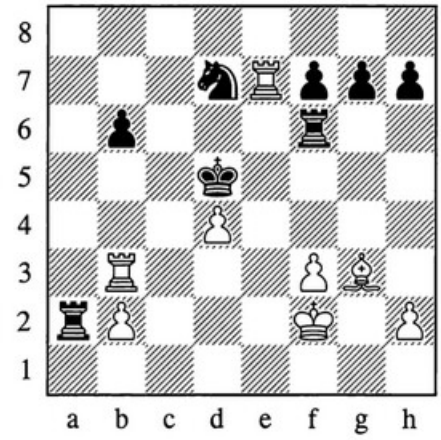
26...d5?

Possibly the result of premature panic, this move exposes the black king even more.

Black should have created some kingside counterplay with 26...g5, possibly followed by ...h7-h5, inviting me to demonstrate a concrete winning plan.

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27.cxd5† ♔xd5 28.♖e7



Since 28...♔c6? loses the knight to 29.d5!†, Black loses all stability.

28...♔c4

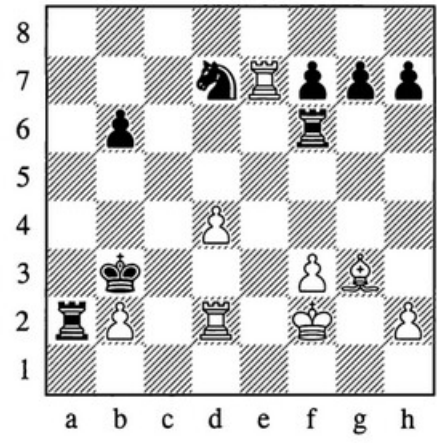
The best practical chance, based on a series of small tricks.

If 28...♖a7 then the simplest reply is 29.♗e5 ♖f5 30.♖xb6, winning an important pawn.

29.♖c3† ♔b4

The knight is still taboo, because of ...♖xb2†.

30.♖c2 ♔b3 31.♖d2



Black's zwischenzugs have come to an end. In the meantime, my rook has occupied the best square, behind the passed pawn.

31...♖a7 32.d5!

Since White's strategy in the King's Gambit is to clear a path for the centre pawns, we can state that this time it ended in success. The d-pawn, which started its career rather timidly on the fourth move, now displays tremendous power.

Or, as a mother, I feel that this pawn is no longer a baby – it has grown up into a mature soldier!

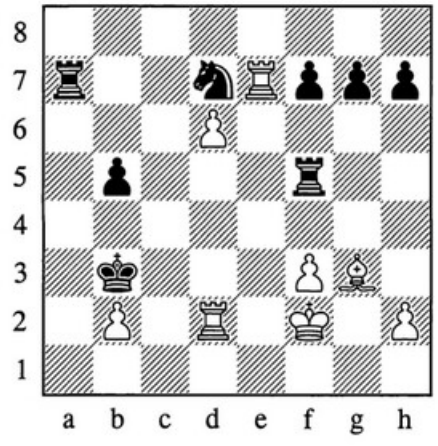
32...b5

Played instantly, but it does not improve Black's position in any way. Still, there was nothing better.

33.d6

By this point, I could hardly control my enthusiasm. I correctly felt that nothing could prevent me from winning the tournament!

33...♖f5



Black is against the ropes, but White needs to find a way to unblock the pawn. This can be achieved either by bringing the reserve d2-rook to c7, or to a3, molesting the a7-rook.

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34.♖d3†!

A well calculated decisive sequence. If allowed, I would play either ♖c3-c7 or ♖a3 next.

34...♔c2?!

Unfortunately, Glenn does not allow me to show my hidden idea. The only way to prevent the threats was 34...♔xb2, but this would unexpectedly lead to mate: 35.♖e2† ♔c1



The king seems to be still breathing, but... 36.♔e1!! followed by ♖d1 mate!

35.♖c3† ♔xb2 36.♖c7

Facing huge material losses, Black resigned. A possible continuation was 36...♖xc7 37.dxc7 ♘b6 38.♖e8 ♖c5 39.♖b8.

It is easy to imagine my happiness and impatience to phone home and let my dad and sisters know about the final result. As for the impression created on the public, I will again quote Raymond Keene:

"This elegant victory deservedly won the best game prize, judged by US Champion Michael Wilder, Stewart Reuben and myself. The game also clinched first prize for Judit in the Challengers, ahead of England's own prodigy 14-year-old Sadler as clear second."

(From this point of view, my game against Sadler on page 98 proved to be crucial.)

"Next day, the media fell in love with Judit, but the coverage in the national UK press might have been even more extensive had Japanese Emperor Hirohito not passed away on the day of the game, thus devouring most of the available space on the front pages.

The world's most famous chess prodigy has much to celebrate in 1989: a 2555 rating, first place in the Challengers section and a place in the 89/90 GM section."

As mentioned above, in this case the pressure of the decisive game manifested itself only at some peak moments of the game and did not exceed tolerable limits.

Things were quite different in the next game.

Fond du Lac 1990 – World U14

I was the clear rating favourite for the championship, and I travelled to Font du Lac (Wisconsin, USA) with just one thought: I *had* to win the gold medal!

My closest rival was Vasily Yemelin from Russia. After I drew with him in round five, the fight for first place became a head to head race.

The tournament regime was tough enough, with 11 rounds in just seven days, but I made things even more "entertaining" for myself by adjourning three games!

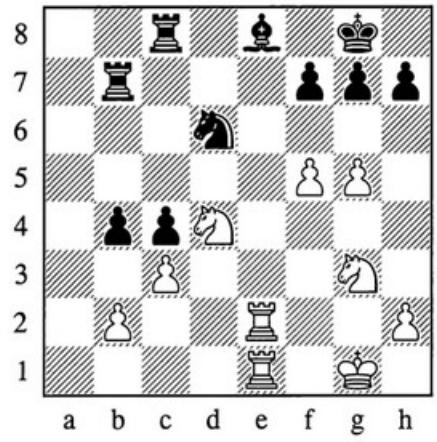
Before the last round I shared the lead with Yemelin. I remember I was so stressed that during breakfast I could hardly swallow. I do not remember any other occasion on which I went into a decisive game feeling so tense.

Still, the game itself took a similar course to the previous one. I chose a solid line against the Najdorf and maintained persistent pressure despite the exchange of queens.

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Judit Polgar – Marcin Kaminski

World U14 Championship, Fond du Lac 1990



All my pieces are on optimal squares, so the position is ripe for concrete action.

33.f6!

Creating the threat of ♘gf5, with unsolvable back rank problems for Black.

Remarkably, 33...g6 does not parry the threat.



White can sacrifice one of her knights to let the other one produce the damage: 34.♘gf5! gxf5 35.♘xf5 White regains the sacrificed material with interest, since apart from the back rank threat, there is a fork on d6.

33...bxc3?

Apparently, my opponent took my last move as an attempt to weaken the dark squares around his king.

The only chance to stay in the game was:

33...♗d7

Removing the bishop from its exposed location.

34.♘gf5 ♘xf5 35.♘xf5 ♖cb8



36.♘d6

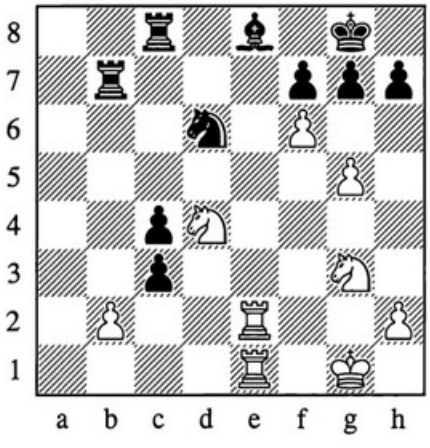
Probably better than 36.♘xg7 bxc3 37.bxc3 h6 38.gxh6 ♔h7 when Black has some counterplay.

36...♖b6

36...♖c7? defends the pawn but puts Black in a deadly pin after 37.♖e7.

37.♘xc4 ♖e6

Black has lost a pawn, but can still put up some resistance.

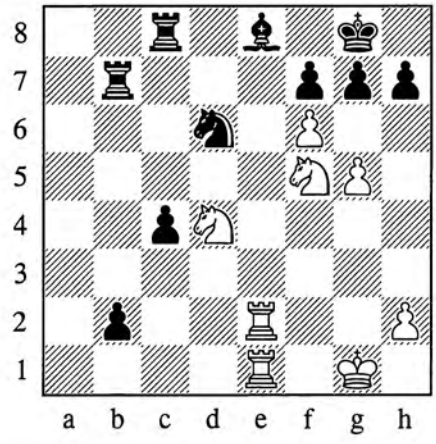


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34.♘gf5!

This zwischenzug, ignoring the strong queenside threats, decides the game and the Championship!

34...cxb2



This pawn's advance looks scary, but a second zwischenzug clarifies everything.

35.♘xd6! b1=♕ 36.♘xc8

In view of the threatened mate, Black has to give up his newly-born queen.

36...♕xe1† 37.♖xe1
1–0

I cannot know whether Yemelin experienced the same kind of pressure as me, but he drew his last game, so the Championship ended in a clear win for me.

The next game was of crucial importance for the period of time covered by this volume. Had I not won it, this book might have been different. There were sufficient external factors to build up the stress, but this time I managed to deal with the pressure quite well.



Receiving the Best Game Prize from GM Denker

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1991 Hungarian Super-Championship

The 1991 Championship in Budapest was a round-robin tournament which gathered together every single one of Hungary's strongest players and was rightly named the Hungarian Super-Championship. As a curiosity, I remember that one of the demo board boys was Zoltan Almasi now Hungary's second strongest player and a Super-GM.

I was getting used to playing my most important tournaments abroad and so it felt unusual to take part in such a strong event in my hometown. On a positive note, I would mention the moral support of local fans and friends as well as the comfort of preparing for the games at home.

Even the venue was very familiar to me: we played in a small theatre called Orfium Casino inside the four-star Beke Radisson Hotel. My sisters and I used to swim in the Beke Hotel pool quite frequently and we had some friends working in the hotel. From time to time during the championship, the porter or other employees would sneak into the playing hall to check out the situation on the demo boards.

On the other hand, the pressure was much greater than abroad, and sometimes I felt that being under the local media's spotlight took away a lot of energy. Besides, no one is a prophet in their homeland and I felt that there were some people who were definitely not rooting for me.

In high level tournaments at this time (the Interzonals, for instance) the organizers used to apply a rule that players from the same country should meet in the early rounds, in order to avoid any doubts about the justness of the results.

The organizers of the Hungarian Super-Championship decided to extend this rule to the two sisters in the tournament, Susan and I, so we were scheduled to meet in the very first round.

I drew number one and Susan was awarded number ten automatically. We made a short, fightless draw, as usual. By contrast, my second round draw with Portisch came after six hours of struggle.

As the tournament progressed, I won two games with White against the Rauzer Sicilian, against Groszpeter in round 4 and Sax in round 6. Before the last round, I was sharing the lead with Adorjan (on 5 out of 8) half a point ahead of Sax, Joszsef Horvath and Susan.

A win in the last round against Tolnai was essential to secure the title, but a draw would be enough for my third and final grandmaster norm. I had turned 15 in July, meaning that I could break Fischer's long-lasting record and become the youngest ever grandmaster! The obvious question was whether to aim for a draw or go for the norm *and* the championship.

Before the last round we had our third day off (a common feature in closed events at that time), which gave me some time to deal with this psychologically complicated situation. I was the rating favourite (2550 compared to Tibor's 2480), but Tibor was an unpredictable player, who could produce fantastic tactical games once in a while.

I remember that the evening before the game we discussed the situation with a very good family friend whom we had invited for dinner. The general opinion was that Tibor would not really mind a bloodless draw, since his results so far had been modest, which had probably caused him to somewhat lose interest in the tournament. A peaceful attitude seemed to be justified by the fact that earlier that year in Munich I had missed the grandmaster norm by losing my last round game with White against Beliavsky. (You can find three other games from Munich in this book: against

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Wahls on page 30, Hübner on page 90, and Anand on page 287).

However, I did not want to give up my chances of winning the championship so easily. However, I promised that if things were not going my way, I would consider offering a draw.

Tibor Tolnai – Judit Polgar

Hungarian Super-Championship, Budapest 1991

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6

I prepared this small surprise after it was suggested by Ilya Gurevich. Ilya was playing in a tournament in Budapest at the same time as our championship and came to visit us the evening before the decisive game. He had played 4...a6 in a few games and following his advice I prepared it with Laszlo Hazai for this game.

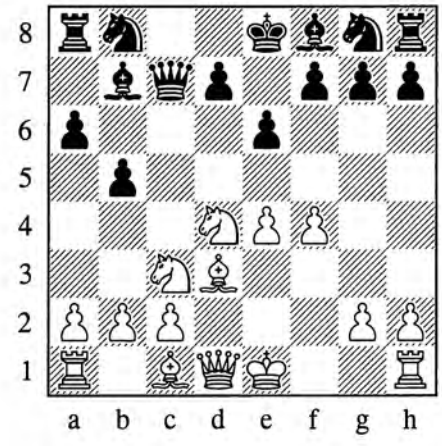
I only hoped that Tibor would choose the double-edged line that actually did appear in the game...

Previously, I had almost invariably played 4...♘c6, as against Xie Jun (page 157) and Friso Nijboer (page 364).

5.♘c3 ♕c7 6.f4

This is what I was counting on, since Tibor had played it before on a few occasions. When I have this position from the other side, I usually prefer 6.♗d3.

6...b5 7.♗d3 ♗b7





The post mortem analysis

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An important difference compared with my usual 4...♘c6 lines is that Black delays the development of the b8-knight in order to create pressure against the e4-pawn as soon as possible.

There is also some similarity with my usual line: the d7-pawn does not move yet, leaving the a3-f8 diagonal open, and aiming to move to d5 in one jump.

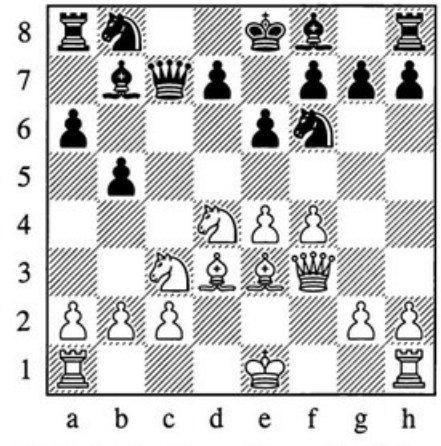
8.♕f3

This is the start of an aggressive plan, based on castling long. On the other hand, placing the queen opposite the b7-bishop solves Black's problems with developing the king's knight.

8...♘f6

Without needing to fear e4-e5 anymore.

9.♗e3



We had played quickly so far (Tibor had used 12 minutes and I had spent only 2), but now I thought for 15 minutes. As you may infer, my preparation for this game was very general and I was basically on my own already.

9...♘c6

I saw no reason to leave the knight undeveloped any longer.

10.0–0–0

After this move I felt that my opening experiment was fully justified: I had managed to drag Tibor into a sharp fight.

Since Black now gets a clear queenside target – the king – it makes sense to investigate the alternatives.

10.g4

This is premature.

10...h5

A typical reaction.

11.g5

Otherwise, the attack will leave White only with weaknesses.

11...♘g4

Threatening the strategically winning exchange on e3.

12.♗g1



12...♘xd4

Black needs to maintain the initiative, as otherwise the g4-knight might get into trouble.

13.♗xd4 ♗c5

13...e5 14.fxe5 ♗c5 is a worthy alternative.

14.♗xg7 ♖g8

In view of the overwhelming activity of the minor pieces, Black has fantastic compensation for the pawn.

In this line, the d4-knight proved vulnerable, but 10.♘b3?! should definitely be avoided.

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As a general rule in the Sicilian, White's king's knight is best placed in the centre. In many variations, Black gladly spends a tempo with ...♕d8-b6-c7 or ...♗f8-c5-e7 in order to force the knight back to b3 (see, for instance, the comments on the opening phase of my game against Polugaevsky, page 301).

We can infer that willingly retreating the knight is wrong in principle. Besides, there is a simple concrete reason that speaks against this move here:

10...d5 11.e5

This is the standard reaction to the central break.

11.exd5 ♘b4 is great for Black.

11...d4!

With the knight on d4, this resource would not have been available. Black takes over the initiative.

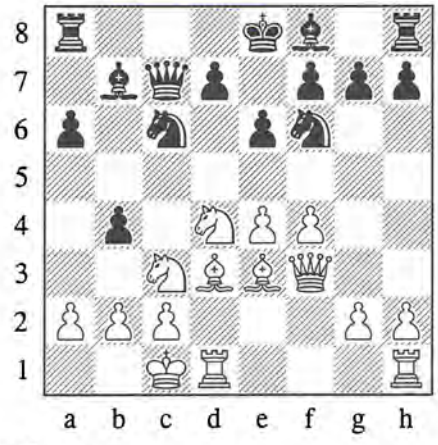


10...b4

As I found out after the game, this was a novelty. I considered two alternatives: 10...h5 to slow down the kingside attack, and 10...♘a5.

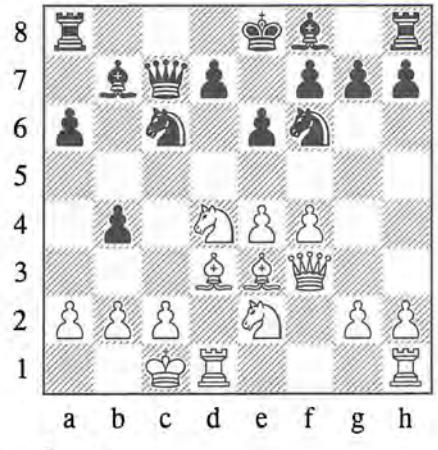
The latter was especially appealing in view of the original plan of ...♘c4-d6, increasing the pressure against the e4-pawn and taking advantage of the omission of ...d7-d6.

My last move looks more natural and less risky, though.



11.♘ce2

11.♘a4 is an important alternative, putting some pressure on the b6- and c5-squares. I would have played 11...d5 12.e5 ♘d7 covering the weaknesses and inviting White to justify the knight's presence on the edge of the board.



11...♘a5!

White threatened ♘xc6 followed by ♘e2-d4, so I decided to step aside from the tension. My last move leaves both White's knights competing for the d4-square, which is likely to cause some loss of harmony.

12.g4 d5

Played according to the rule that a wing attack should be countered with a break in the

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centre. Concretely, the knight needed d7 as a retreat square.

13.e5



With the d4-square safely blocked, White has no reason to refrain from this standard reaction.

13...♘d7!

13...♘e4 looks more active, but I feared 14.f5 would give White the initiative. The knight is more useful on d7; by keeping an eye on the e5-pawn it inhibits f4-f5. It also enjoys more mobility on d7 than on e4, having a choice between jumping to b6 or c5.

14.♔b1!

This is a generally useful prophylactic move in the Sicilian, although there is no rule without exceptions: please refer to 23.♔b1 in my game against Polugaevsky (page 308).

In this specific case, White clears the c1-square for the bishop, anticipating my next move.

Preventing the knight jump with 14.b3 would create unnecessary weaknesses. I would probably have played 14...♘c5 bringing the knight closer to the c3-square.

14...♘c4 15.♗c1



15...0–0–0

I had already started looking for a good moment to deliver my favourite ...g7-g5 blow, but could not find a concrete way to make it work. For instance: 15...g5 16.f5! ♘cxe5 17.♕e3 Black cannot justify the weaknesses created by the daring advance of the g-pawn and I would definitely choose White here!

Therefore, I decided to move my king into safety, hoping that ...g7-g5 would work later.



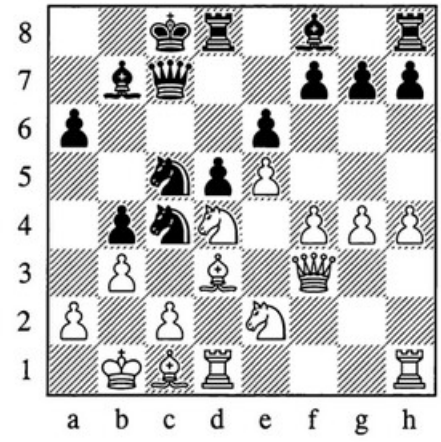
16.h4

It looks as if the 12 minutes spent on this move allowed Tibor to read my mind. His last move radically prevents my pawn break.

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I was looking forward to meeting 16.b3 with 16...♘a3† 17.♔a1 g5 with counterplay in a complicated position. After the weakening of the long diagonal with b2-b3, losing control of the e5-square may have unpleasant consequences for White.

16...♘c5 17.b3



17...♘a3†

The knight was indirectly defended on c4, since bxc4 would allow the double attack ...dxc4, but I thought that a3 was an even better square for it.

18.♔a1

White's king has little to worry about and he threatens to open the queenside with c2-c3, putting mine in some danger.

18...f6?

Played too quickly, after just nine minutes. In principle, the idea of breaking in the centre is correct, but my pieces are far from optimally placed to justify such an ambitious action.

The safest continuation was 18...♔b8!? moving the king to a safer square and preparing ...♖c8. If 19.c3 ♘xd3 20.♖xd3 ♘b5 with complications.

Even though it looks like a waste of two tempos compared to 13...♘e4, 18...♘e4 would also have made sense. The circumstances have changed over the last five moves: my king is safer and the c3-square is weak. In fact, the last move prevents the immediate c2-c3. White can try to prepare it with: 19.♗xa3 bxa3 20.c3



Now not 20...♘xc3? 21.♖c1 with a deadly pin.

Instead after 20...♗c5 21.♕e3 the position is very complex and full of resources for both sides.



19.c3?

Tibor was also becoming impatient: he spent only six minutes on this move. As in my case, his idea is good in principle, but could be refined.

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After the correct 19.exf6! gxf6 20.c3± my position would fall apart.



The c5-knight is tied down to the defence of the e6-pawn and the c-file will open in White's favour.

19...fxe5 20.fxe5



The difference with respect to the line suggested above is that now I also have a target, on e5.

20...♘c4!

I was really proud of this unexpected move. My knight returns only a few moves after I had played ...♘c4-a3. As in the case of the recommended 18...♘e4 above, the explanation is that the circumstances had changed abruptly in the meantime. My last move threatens ...♘xe5 and makes use of the fact that the knight is still taboo on c4.

21.♘xe6?!

This apparently logical blow has a hidden flaw. Since his last move attacked my queen, Tibor counted on 21...♘xe6 22.bxc4 dxc4 23.♗e4. However, 21...♘xe6 is not forced at all.

He could have retained the better chances with:

21.♗b1!

Removing the bishop from the attacked square and achieving a harmonious regrouping.

21...♘xe5



22.♕h3!

Another far from obvious move, putting the queen out of my minor pieces' reach.

22...bxc3 23.♕xc3

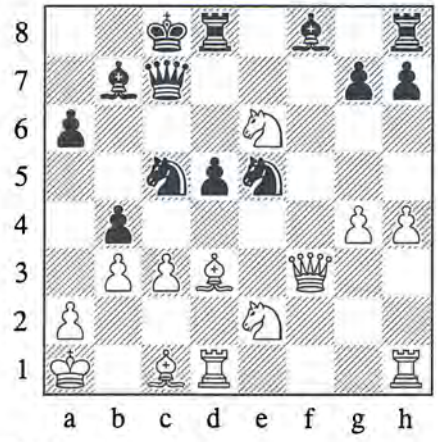
With my e6-pawn vulnerable, I would have faced problems meeting the threat of ♗f4 followed by ♖c1.

21...♘xe5!

A strong zwischenzug, played after only three minutes. With so many pieces hanging, the position becomes chaotic, which was something I had hoped for since the beginning of the game.

Obviously caught by surprise, Tibor now sank into deep thought for almost half an hour.

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22.♕g3?!

Not the best choice, but after you miss a strong move by your opponent, it is not easy to maintain clarity.

It is understandable that Tibor disliked the position after the somewhat simplistic: 22.♘xc7 ♘xf3 23.♗f4 ♘xd3 24.♖xd3 d4 Threatening a double attack with ...♘e5 and grabbing the initiative.

The best move was:

22.♕f5

Black has to resort once again to a zwischenzug in order to avoid getting the worst of it:

22...g6! 23.♘xc7† gxf5



Tibor must have stopped here, thinking that his knight is lost and with it the game. However, White has not yet exhausted his resources.

24.♗xf5† ♔xc7 25.cxb4 ♘e4 26.♘f4

White has two pawns for a knight and a strong initiative. The d5-pawn is vulnerable and apart from the obvious ♘e6† White threatens ♗b2. I would probably have chosen to give up some material to regain the initiative.

26...♗d6 27.♘e6† ♔b8 28.♘xd8 ♖xd8



White is at least not worse from a materialistic point of view, but his b4-pawn is hanging and Black's pieces are very active. The position is hard to evaluate, maybe dynamically balanced is a good try, but subjectively I prefer Black.

22...♘xe6 23.♗f5 ♔b8 24.♗xe6



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I played the forcing sequence rather quickly, but now I stopped for a while to readapt to the changed situation.

24...bxc3 25.♘xc3

White decides to take the pawn at once.

The tempting 25.♗f4 would allow the zwischenzug 25...c2 provoking a loss of coordination in White's army. Still, the position would remain unclear and with mutual chances after 26.♖d2 ♗d6 27.♖c1 ♘g6.

25...d4

I was getting more and more inspired by my position and I felt that the atmosphere in the playing hall was tense. It felt as though the spectators knew they were going to witness something extraordinary: a little girl winning the championship ahead of so many great players. Not to mention breaking Fischer's record...

26.♖hf1

The best square for the rook. For instance, 26.♖he1? would lose material to 26...♘f3 27.♗f4 ♗d6.

26...♗b4 27.♘a4 ♖he8



I played my last two moves almost instantly. I felt it would be difficult to find anything better than completing my development with gain of time.

I remember that with such a harmonious setup, I felt I was getting close to the win. Objectively, this is largely exaggerated, since Black is only better, not winning. However, if we add that the psychological initiative was on my side, we can state that subjectively I was right. Besides, the final result supports my optimism.

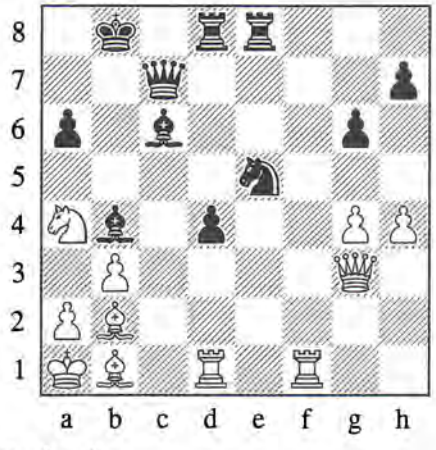
28.♗f5 ♗c6

Fighting for the c3-square by creating the possibility of eliminating its main defender, the a4-knight.

29.♗b2

I am not surprised that he rejected the passive 29.♘b2. I would have continued with 29...g6 followed by ...♗c3 and ...♗b5 with domination.

29...g6 30.♗b1



30...♗xa4!

I am surprised to find out from my scoresheet that I played this highly committal move after just two minutes.

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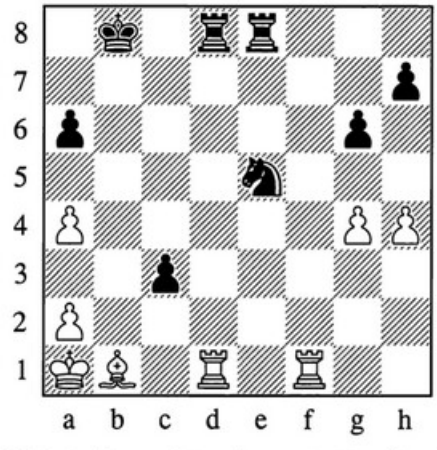
Psychologically, I entirely approve of my decision, which justifies the exclamation mark awarded to the move. The ensuing endgame allows me to play for a win without any risk, meaning that I could fight for the title with the norm in my pocket.

I also seem to have felt at home in the simplified position, since I spent only 18 minutes for the remaining 18 moves!

Things also look right if we step into Tibor's shoes: being a tactician, he would have preferred to defend in a messy position, which would offer him chances to trick me. Being tortured in a dull position without anything to aim for in the tournament must have been hard to bear.

Objectively, 30...d3 would have been stronger, but the position would have been more difficult to control. One important point is that White cannot win the d3-pawn: 31.♗xe5? ♖xe5 32.♖xd3 ♖xd3 followed by ...♗xa4 and ...♗c3† with a deadly attack.

31.bxa4 ♗c3 32.♗xc3 ♕xc3† 33.♕xc3 dxc3



This is the position I was aiming for when I played 30...♗xa4. My centralized knight is stronger than the bishop and the white king is immobile. Also, I am practically a pawn up.

34.♖c1 ♖c8

Defending the c3-pawn and planning ...♖c4.



35.♖f4?!

Too passive. White defends the g4-pawn and prevents ...♖c4.

During the game, I considered it was absolutely necessary to play:

35.h5!

This would increase White's drawing chances by exchanging pawns and activating the bishop. At the same time, it indirectly defends g4.

35...♖e6

Defending the pawn and preventing ♖f6.

36.hxg6 hxg6 37.♖fe1 ♖c5

Over-defending the knight in order to free the e6-rook.

38.♖e3 ♖ec6 39.♗e4 ♖c7 40.g5



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With my pieces tied to the defence of the c3- and g6-pawns, I do not see how I could improve my position.

35...♖c5 36.♖b4† ♔a7



37.♖b3?!

Missing one more chance to play 37.h5!. With the white rook away from the f-file, I could try playing 37...gxh5 38.gxh5 h6, leading to the following position:



Black has avoided getting a kingside weakness on a light square and has better practical chances than after 35.h5, but the final result remains uncertain.

37...♖ec8

Threatening to win the bishop with the advance ...c3-c2.

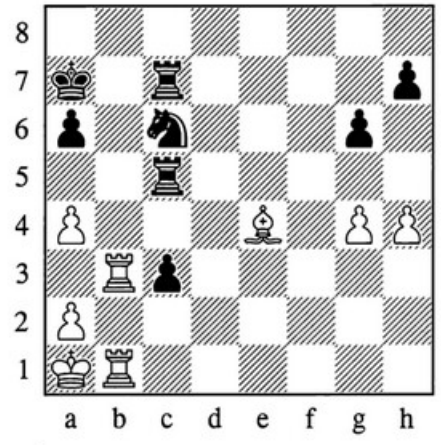
38.♗e4 ♖8c7

Defending the b7-square.

39.♖cb1

Faithful to his style, Tibor creates tactical threats. He may have also relied on the fact that "All rook endings are drawn". Well, not this one...

39...♘c6



40.♗xc6

There was no way back, since 40.♖c1 would be met by 40...♘a5 followed by ...♖c4.

40...♖5xc6

Apart from the strong passed pawn, Black has the more active rooks and somewhat freer king. Taken together, these elements are enough to ensure the win.

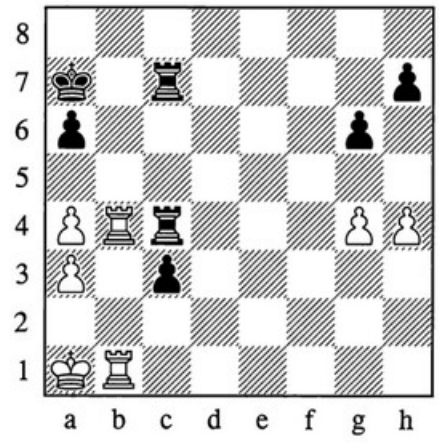
41.♖b4

Trying to defend the fourth rank, but it is too late.

In the absence of the bishop, 41.h5 would be ineffective: 41...♖c4 42.hxg6 hxg6 Winning a pawn and the game.

41...♖c4 42.a3

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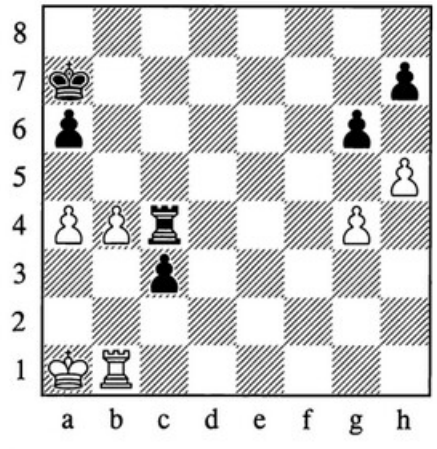
This desperate attempt to defend the fourth rank will prove to be only a temporary solution.

42...♖xb4

42...a5 would be equally good, but once I find a forced win I almost never look for a second one.

43.axb4 ♖c4 44.h5?

Allowing a final trick. 44.♔a2 would prolong the fight, although after 44...♖xg4 Black should win anyway.



44...a5!

Ouch! The pawn is taboo because of ...♖xa4 mate, so White's queenside is doomed.

45.hxg6 hxg6 46.♔a2 ♖xb4 47.♖g1 c2 48.g5 ♔b6

In view of the line 49.♖c1 ♖xa4† 50.♔b3 ♖b4† 51.♔c3 ♔c5 White resigned.

Looking back, I believe that when things go your way, there is nothing better than playing in your hometown. This game marked my most important achievement in the period covered by this volume and even justifies its title.

Despite feeling like I was walking on clouds, I had the usual post-mortem analysis with my opponent, and only then shared my happiness with the rest of the family...

The final standings were (from 9 rounds):

1st	Judit Polgar	6
2nd-3rd	Sax, Adorjan	5½
4th-5th	J. Horvath, Susan Polgar	5
6th	Portisch	4½
7th-9th	Lukacs, Tolnai, Groszpeter	3½
10th	Farago	3

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Chapter 14

Memorable Games



With three gold medals won at the 1988 Olympiad in Thessaloniki. I should be so lucky to repeat my 12½/13 score!

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The connection between the games in this chapter is even less obvious than in the previous one. The criterion of selection is partly subjective. As the title explains, I consider each of them to be special in its own way. Or, in other words, I simply could not imagine leaving any of them out of this book!

Among my opponents, you will find a future World Champion and several world title Candidates. Despite the high level of the players, some of the games have quite a few mistakes. I hope that this aspect will only make the chapter more interesting, since it best reflects the character of chess as a fight, with its ups and downs.

Scheveningen Sicilian

Judit Polgar – Lev Gutman

Brussels 1987

Even today, I still consider this game one of my most memorable achievements. At the age of 11 every game against a grandmaster was a thrilling experience and I remember how impatient I was to challenge Gutman in his favourite Sicilian.

As it turned out, Gutman became the first grandmaster I beat, which marked one of my biggest psychological steps forward. By a happy coincidence, Sofia also got her first grandmaster scalp at this tournament, by beating Glenn Flear.

I travelled to Brussels together with my whole family. Susan played in the A-group, a round-robin tournament, while Sofia and I took part in the B-group, a Swiss-system tournament with 32 players. Two years later, the same system was used in my most memorable tournament from the period covered by this volume, the 1989 Amsterdam OHRA reserve group (see Chapter 15).

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e6 6.♗e2

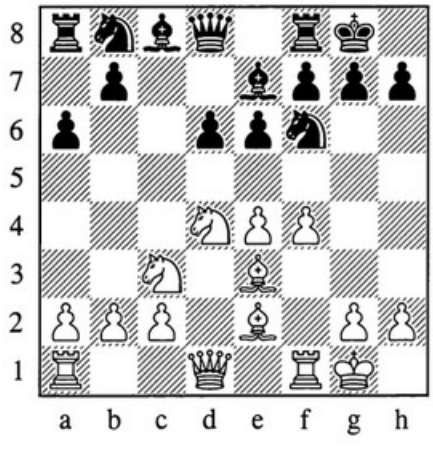
Curiously, the sharp Keres Attack starting with 6.g4, which entirely suited my style, was not a part of my repertoire at that time. I started to use it much later, after I experienced the dangers from Black's side, but in the '80s the classical system was the main weapon for Sofia and me.

Fashion may have played an important part in our opening choice. We had followed the games of the first two Karpov – Kasparov matches live on a Russian TV channel. Although Karpov did not achieve much with 6.♗e2 against his great rival, we analyzed the games thoroughly and discovered many attacking ideas for White.

In any case, the classical system worked very well for us. Apart from this game I also won against Ree and Hulak (see Chapter 15), while Sofia had a spectacular win against Chernin in Rome 1989, a tournament where she achieved the incredible score of 8½ out of 9!

Another interesting element proves that this system suited me well: most of my comments written soon after the game stand up to the computer's scrutiny a quarter of a century later!

6...♗e7 7.0–0 0–0 8.f4 a6 9.♗e3



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9...♕c7

A clever move order, preparing ...b7-b5.

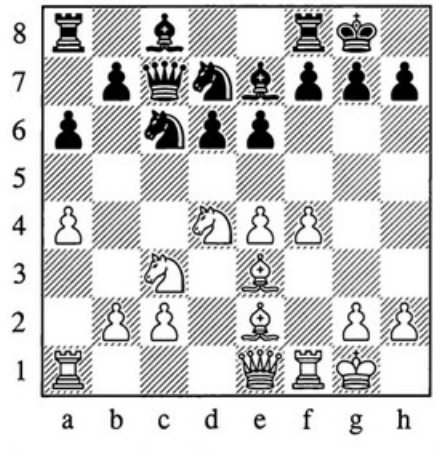
If 9...♘c6 then I would not spend a tempo on a2-a4, but instead go for the kingside attack with 10.♕e1.

10.a4 ♘c6 11.♕e1

Even after a2-a4, the queen transfer to g3 remained my favourite plan.

11...♘d7?!

The approved continuations are 11...♗d7 and 11...♘xd4.

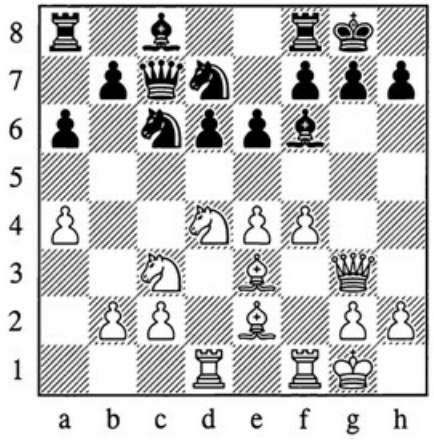


I am sure that Gutman was aware of the objective risks implied by this novelty. Black prepares ...♗f6, putting pressure on my central knight, but seriously neglects his development. He may have relied on the fact that White needs imagination and accuracy in order to uncover the drawbacks of his plan, evaluating that I was too young and inexperienced to display these qualities.

In those early years, many people who had heard about the Polgar family phenomenon had an inaccurate image of our strengths and weaknesses. It was widely known that we were working a lot on chess, so people wrongly assumed that we were big theoretical experts, but weaker in other areas of the game. Gutman's early deviation from known paths may have been the result of this kind of misjudgement.

This is the right place to confess that I never was an opening expert. My strongest area has always been the middlegame, where I found the optimal territory for displaying my imagination and the attacking patterns assimilated over the years.

12.♕g3 ♗f6 13.♖ad1



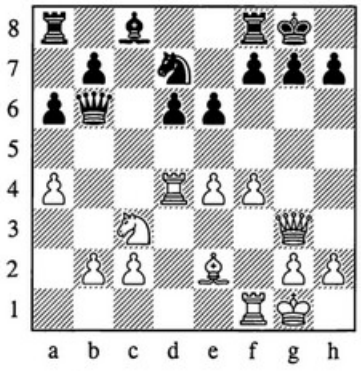
In the Sicilian, White's king's knight is best placed on d4; retreating it will usually reduce White's attacking potential. Besides, I aimed to complete my development as quickly as possible. True, in many lines the rook belongs on e1, supporting the thematic break e4-e5, but once the defence of the d6-pawn has been weakened, my last move makes a lot of sense, too. Moreover, we will see that my rook will be useful after the opening of the d-file, a few moves later.

13...♖b8

Probably played with the purpose of preparing ...b6. The immediate 13...b6? would lose material to 14.♘xc6 ♕xc6 15.e5, immediately taking advantage of the exposed position of his pieces, the f6-bishop among them.

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A critical line that I needed to evaluate before my last move is:
13...♘xd4 14.♗xd4 ♗xd4† 15.♖xd4 ♕b6



Under different circumstances, this double attack and pinning move would be quite unpleasant. The way it is, the multiple exchanges on d4 only aggravate the effects of Black's lagging development.

16.♕e3 ♕xb2

The queen exchange after 16...e5 17.♖d3 ♕xe3† 18.♖xe3 favours me, because it leaves the d6-pawn undefended, for instance 18...exf4 19.♖d3 followed by ♖xd6 and ♘d5.

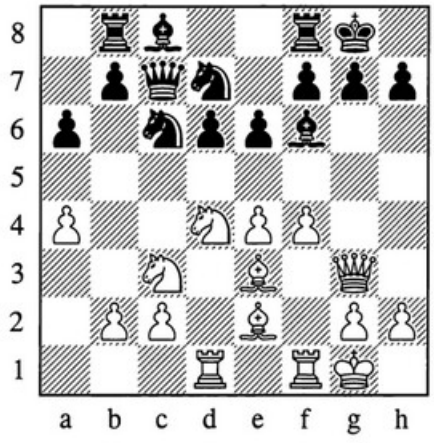
17.♖xd6



There is no obvious way for Black to complete his development. The greedy:

17...♕xc2?

loses the queen after 18.♖b1! followed by ♖d2.



14.♘xc6!?

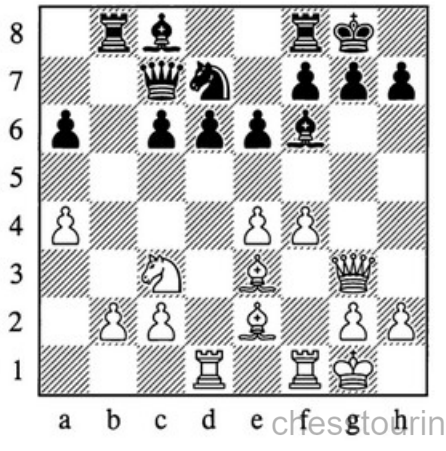
As a kid, I could not resist the temptation of the sacrificial attack initiated with this move. The way I see it now, my last move is slightly illogical, since it opens the b-file for the rook, partly justifying Gutman's opening experiment. From a practical point of view, it is entirely justified though, since it leads to positions in which I felt very much at home.

Objectively, it would have been better to make some generally useful move before starting my attack.

14.♔h1!? is a typical Sicilian prophylactic move, preventing Black from winning a tempo with check at a later stage.

14.♘f3!? also made sense, preparing e4-e5.

14...bxc6



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15.e5!

Clearing the e4-square for my knight and opening the d- and f-files for my rooks.

15...dxe5

Practically forced. If 15...♗e7 then 16.f5! threatening e5xd6, f5-f6 or ♗h6 and White wins material.

16.♘e4!

Threatening ♖xd7 followed by ♘xf6†.

16...♗e7

With so many weaknesses on the dark squares, Black has to keep his bishop.

16...♔h8? is simply bad: 17.♘xf6 ♘xf6 (Against 17...gxf6 I intended to play 18.f5, which is quite good, but 18.♕h4! is even better. The threats of fxe5 or ♖xd7 yield White a decisive attack.) 18.fxe5 ♘d5 19.♗c5 With complete domination in conditions of material equality.



17.f5

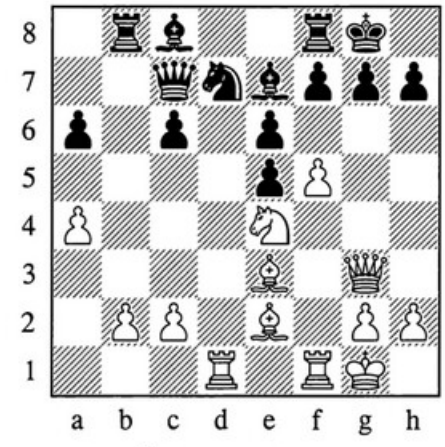
The last sequence of moves is typical for the Penrose Attack in the Benoni. I do not have a dangerous d-pawn, like in the Benoni, but controlling the d-file is an equally important positional factor.

I would retain adequate compensation for the pawn after 17.fxe5 ♕xe5 18.♕xe5 ♘xe5 19.b3.



White has two main threats. Exchanging the dark-squared bishops with ♗e3-c5 would leave Black with a bad bishop on c8, while ♗e3-f4 would create an unpleasant pin.

However, I did not seriously consider this line, because I wanted to continue my attack with queens on the board!



17...exf5 18.♗h6 g6 19.♖xf5!

You can imagine my excitement at this stage of the game: this was my fifth attacking move in a row!

I rightly avoided 19.♗xf8? ♔xf8!, which would leave Black with a threatening mass of pawns and more than enough compensation for the exchange.

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19...♖b4!

A strong counterattacking move, taking advantage of the somewhat premature opening of the b-file. Black puts pressure on my centralized knight and prevents the strong attacking move ♗c4.

19...♖e8? is the move I was dreaming of, as it allows the simple but elegant 20.♖xf7! ♔xf7 21.♗c4 mate.

19...♖d8? would leave the e8-square available for the king, preventing the mating scenario above. During the game, I intended 20.♗c4, but 20.♖df1 is even stronger.

The attempt to take advantage of the hanging position of my pieces with 19...♘c5? would fail to 20.♕xe5! saving my pieces as if by a miracle and winning an exchange.

20.♗d3

The tension is building up little by little. The e4-h7 diagonal seems well defended now, but five moves later my bishop will land on h7!

Gutman had little time left, which was not unusual for him. He was known as a typical time trouble player, but in this unclear position he may have needed time to choose between the possible move-by-move defences.

20...f6

During the next sequence, we both considered piece activity more important than material.

Gutman was afraid to leave the f-file unprotected with:

20...♖d8

I failed to find a clear way to an advantage, but the position would be difficult to play and evaluate for Black. I intended to play:

21.♖df1

and was quite enthusiastic about my position. I worked out the following lines recently; some of them are really fascinating!

21...♘c5

With the help of modern engines, this move looks safe, but how many players would dare to play it in a practical game?

21...f6 allows the dangerous exchange sacrifice 22.♘xf6† ♘xf6 23.♖xf6 ♗xf6 24.♖xf6. Black can prevent the decisive sacrifice on g6 with 24...♖g4, but after 25.♕e3 my compensation would be obvious.

22.♖xf7

Simplifying with 22.♕xe5 ♕xe5 23.♖xe5 is inoffensive. After 23...♘e6 Black has a great position.

22...♘xe4



23.♗xe4

The most consistent try.

White's attack would be stopped after: 23.♕f3? ♗f5!

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The following incredible computer line leads to a forced draw: 23.♕h4!? g5! 24.♕h5 ♗g4! An amazing defensive resource, taking full advantage of the queen rook's activity along the fourth rank. 25.♗xe4 (25.♕xg4? loses material: 25...♗c5† 26.♔h1 ♕xf7 27.♖xf7 ♘f2† 28.♖xf2 ♖xg4 With an extra exchange and a safe position.) 25...♗xh5 26.♖g7† ♔h8 27.♖xh7† ♔g8 White has to give perpetual check.



3...♗c5†!

This intermediate check is the only saving move.

23...♖xe4? loses to the surprising queen switch to the opposite wing: 24.♕b3!+– Black cannot defend the b3-g8 diagonal properly. For instance, 24...♖d5 allows mate in two with: 25.♖f8†!

4.♗e3 ♕xf7 25.♖xf7 ♖xe4 26.♗xc5 ♔xf7



The vulnerability of Black's king, and the lack of coordination between his rooks, compensates for White's small material deficit. The position would remain complicated, with roughly equal chances.

Finally, 20...♖e8 would lead to similar play after 21.♖df1.



21.♖df1

This strengthening of the pressure looked natural to me, but the simpler 21.♗xf8 might have been better. Black would have to play 21...♔xf8, keeping f6 well defended. If things calm down, the mobile kingside pawns would offer Black great compensation for the exchange, but after 22.♘g5 I would retain a strong attack.

21...♖xe4!

The best way to relieve the pressure.

If 21...♖e8 I could play 22.b3, consolidating my position and threatening ♗c4†. Black's position would remain dangerous, especially in time trouble.

22.♗xf8

My pieces seem to be hanging after:

22.♗xe4 ♘c5

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In fact, I could get out of trouble with:
23.♖xe5! fxe5

Safest. 23...♕xe5 24.♕xe5 fxe5 25.♗xf8 ♗xf8 26.♗xc6 would lead to an ending with approximate material equality. I would prefer White though, because of the active rook and queenside majority. You may compare this to my game against Olafsson, page 190.

24.♗xf8 ♗xf8 25.♖xf8† ♔xf8 26.♕f2† ♔e7 27.♕xc5† ♕d6

Black's centralized king should allow him to hold a draw despite his pawn weaknesses.

22...♔xf8

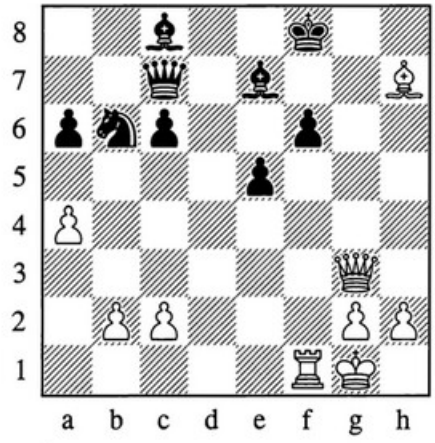
After unpinning the g6-pawn, Black wins material, but his king remains exposed.

23.♗xe4 gxf5 24.♗xf5 ♘b6



I assume that Gutman had been playing for a win all the way. After his last move, he may have hoped to extinguish my attack and gradually convert his material advantage. I am also sure that he considered my next move impossible.

25.♗xh7!

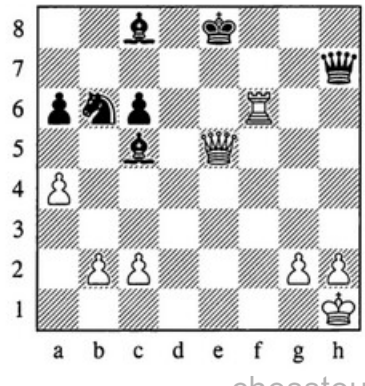


25...♗e6

Gutman chooses the safe reaction to the surprise. Although he always has to be careful about his king, there is no immediate danger yet.

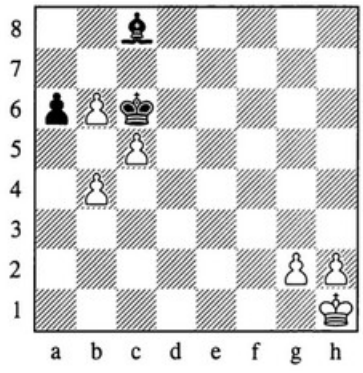
My last move implied a bishop sacrifice, but it would have been dangerous for Black to accept it:

25...♗c5† 26.♔h1 ♕xh7 27.♖xf6† ♔e8 28.♕xe5†



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In 1987, I analyzed the line: 28...♕e7 29.♕xe7† ♔xe7 30.♖xc6 I concluded that White has good winning chances. Black's pieces are hanging, but a few more moves are needed to draw a clearer conclusion: 30...♗e3 31.a5 ♗d7 32.♖xb6 ♗xb6 33.axb6 ♗c8 34.b4 ♔d6 35.c4 ♔c6 36.c5



Black will not be able to stop my kingside pawns from queening.

There is a better defence, though:

28...♗e7!

This allows Black to draw with accurate play.

29.♖xc6 ♕f7!

Forcing the king to occupy an exposed square.

30.♔g1 ♕f5! 31.♕xf5 ♗xf5

The knight is defended indirectly in view of ...♗c5†, while after:

32.a5 ♔d7

White will not be in time to defend the b6-pawn as in the line above, and Black should save the game.

26.♗e4

A solid regrouping move. Eliminating Black's h-pawn not only restored approximate material equality, but also created a dangerous passed h-pawn.

I have a feeling that somewhere around this moment Gutman lost his confidence, realizing that the girl sitting in front of him would keep creating problems in his time trouble. Objectively, Black is doing fine, but he needs to avoid losing coordination.

26...♘d5 27.♕h4 ♘f4

27...♔e8!? was an important alternative, aiming to transfer the king to the somewhat safer queenside.

28.♕h8†



28...♗g8

Displaying the first signs of excessive caution, which is typical for time trouble play.

28...♔f7 would have maintained his overall activity. I planned to simply advance my passed pawn starting with 29.h4.

29.♖d1!

After he weakened the defence of the d7-square, I immediately spot the possibility of invading his position with ♗f5 followed by ♖d7.

29...♘e6?

Another passive move, which leads to trouble.

Black should have aimed for counterplay with: 29...♕b6† 30.♔h1 ♕f2!

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30.♔h1!

A strong prophylactic move, threatening ♗h7 without needing to fear ...♗c5†. Suddenly, Black has to spoil his overall harmony.

30...♗d8 31.♗f5

Forcing the knight to open the h3-c8 diagonal, since 31...♕e7 32.♗xe6 would overload the queen.

31...♘d4



32.♗h3!

A clever retreat, keeping control of d7 and threatening c2-c3 followed by ♖d7. Black's position has become critical.

It is curious that in later games I frequently overlooked my opponents' similar retreats. See my losses to Gelfand (page 339) and Psakhis (page 369).

32...♕f7 33.c3 ♕b3?!

This attempt to get counterplay only succeeds in taking the queen far from the main action. The only way to prolong the game was 33...c5, but this would hardly change the result.

34.♕h6†♔e7

If 34...♔e8 then 35.♗g4 would defend the rook and include the bishop in the attack. 35...♘e6 36.♗h5† ♔e7 37.♕g6 with the decisive threat of ♕e8 mate.

35.♖f1!

I switch to the f-file with decisive effect.

35...♘e6 36.♕xf6† ♔d6

36...♔d7 37.♕g7† wins the g8-bishop.

37.♗xe6!



A curious position: with the exception of the rook, every piece is attacked. In view of the unavoidable material losses, Gutman resigned.

I believe that this game proved that I was more than just a girl who played for cheap tricks. It also gave me the morale boost for my long string of good results in 1988.

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Sicilian Defence

Judit Polgar – Gyula Sax

Hungarian team championship (first division), Budapest 1990

For more than a decade, Sax had been one of the leading Hungarian players. He was part of the "Golden Hungarian team" who won the Buenos Aires Olympiad in 1978 and he also qualified for the 1988 Candidates matches.

His play used to be very sharp and he was a *dreaded* specialist in such unbalanced openings as the Benoni and the Sicilian Dragon. However, he was less convincing in simplified positions or if his king was attacked.

On the way to the playing hall, I was still not sure which opening I would play, but I definitely wanted to avoid his Dragon.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♕xd4(!)

This will prove an inspired opening choice. In the middlegame, White retains the possibility of a massive kingside attack in a non-Dragon structure. There also is the possibility of provoking mass simplifications, with just some slight initiative in the endgame. As mentioned above, both scenarios were incompatible with my opponent's style.

4...♘c6 5.♗b5 ♗d7 6.♗xc6 ♗xc6 7.♘c3 ♘f6 8.♗g5 e6 9.0–0–0 ♗e7



10.♖he1

In my old comments, I suggested 10.♕d3!?, planning ♘d4 followed by f4-f5. This plan became fashionable later, but I remember that some Hungarian players had used it in the '80s. At grandmaster level, I was one of the first to experiment with this line. My major achievement with it was my win against Shirov at Las Palmas 1994; more about this in the second volume! Among other pioneers of the system I would mention Vladimir Malaniuk, Gennady Zaichik and Gennady Kuzmin.



Black's best antidote is 10...♕a5 preventing ♘f3-d4. White plays 11.h4 with a complicated fight.

10...0–0

The position is reminiscent of a Richter Rauzer attack. Unfortunately, White cannot take advantage of her superior development with e4-e5, because this would activate the c6-bishop.

11.♕d2

As I have mentioned before, as a general rule in the Sicilian, the king's knight is best placed on d4. After having taken Black away from his favourite paths with its early incursion in the centre, the queen retreats in order to allow the optimal regrouping.

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11...♕c7 12.♘d4 ♖fc8

Black neglects the defence of the d6-pawn, hoping to create threats along the c-file. This slightly provocative move continues the small psychological game initiated by 4.♕xd4. My opponent tries to drag me into a tactical battle, while I stubbornly avoid it!

This sounds a bit unusual. In a game between an experienced player and a young girl, things usually work the other way around...

Be that as it may, 12...♖fd8 13.f3 ♖ab8 is safer.

13.♔b1



13...♖ab8?!

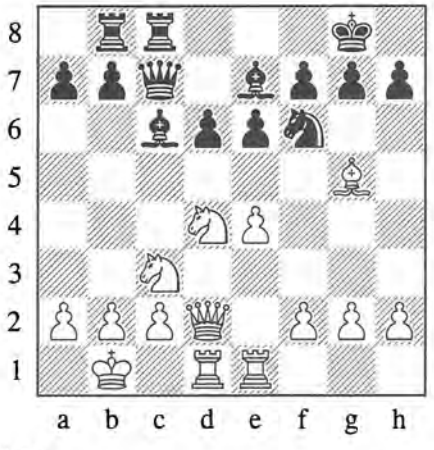
Black continues to mass his forces on the queenside, but the last move fails to improve his dynamic potential. In some lines from the next comment, the rook is passive and even exposed on b8.

The logical follow-up was 13...b5!? when Schoeneberg – Chekhov, Leipzig 1986, continued: 14.♘cxb5 ♗xb5 15.♘xb5 ♕c5 16.♘xd6 ♗xd6 17.♗xf6 gxf6 18.♕xd6 ♕xc2† 19.♔a1 ♕xf2



Black eventually managed to simplify to a drawish rook ending.

However, this course of events would hardly appeal to Gyula, since Black is aspiring only to a draw. Later in the game, he will fail to give of his best in a similar type of ending.



14.f3

Preparing a slow attack with g2-g4.

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I only briefly considered:
14.♘db5 ♗xb5 15.♘xb5
followed by pawn grabbing. The ensuing complications, which are not easy to foresee and evaluate, did not suit my initial attitude to the game. Detailed analysis proves that Black cannot find a safe square for the queen and is definitely struggling.



Black has a choice now:

15...♕b6
This releases the pressure against the c2-pawn, intending to trade the d6-pawn for the one on f2.
16.♘xd6 ♗xd6 17.♕xd6 ♕xf2
I do not remember very clearly my train of thought during the game, but maybe I did not like this position.



White can maintain an active position with:
18.c3±

Or if 15...♕c5



This looks active and forcing, but the queen is potentially exposed to ideas of ♘xd6xb7.
16.♗xf6 ♗xf6
If 16...gxf6 I could switch to a kingside attack with 17.♘d4 followed by ♖e3.
17.♘xd6 ♖d8
17...♖c6 was played in Greet – Jo. Hodgson, West Bromwich 2005. White could consolidate his space advantage with 18.e5! based on 18...♗xe5? 19.♘xb7! taking advantage of the back rank weakness. If 18...♗e7 19.♖e4 White has an extra pawn and a dominating position.
18.f4 e5



This position may be another reason why I rejected 14.♘db5. The knight is pinned and cannot be defended with e4-e5. However, White can maintain an initiative in the ending with:

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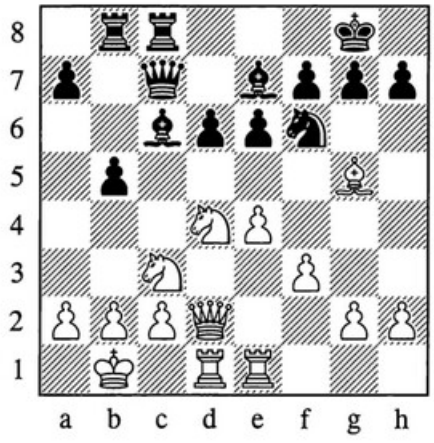
19.♕d5 ♕xd5 20.exd5!

If 20...♖xd6 21.fxe5 White keeps an extra pawn in the double rook ending.

20...exf4 21.♘e4 ♗e5 22.c4

White's pawns are more dangerous than Black's.

14...b5



All Black's pieces are now standing in the right places. It did not take long before I understood that my attack based on 15.g4 would be too slow, so I decided to switch to simplifications!

15.♘xc6!?

Curiously, this was a new move.

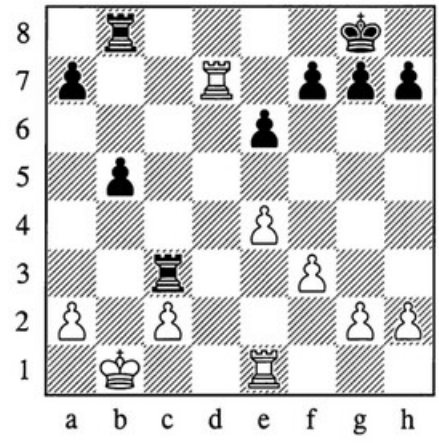
15...♕xc6 16.♗xf6 ♗xf6 17.♕xd6 ♗xc3

Gyula offered a draw here, which I sort of expected, since he does not like this kind of position.

I had several reasons to play on. First of all, when exchanging pieces in the previous phase I was following my initial plan, rather than aiming for a peaceful result. Moreover, I did not see how I could lose the ending. Or, to put it in a different way, if I lose such a position, it means I deserve it! Finally, Gyula had spent an hour and 15 minutes so far and I thought he was not feeling comfortable.

In general, I would advise young players to avoid making short draws, especially against strong opponents. In the long run, the benefits of the accumulated experience will show. Besides, one should not be afraid to play chess!

18.♕xc6 ♖xc6 19.bxc3 ♖xc3 20.♖d7



Experienced players know that such endings are drawn. You just need to play accurately for a while. When one happens to lose this kind of position, it is usually due to a series of small inaccuracies rather than one big mistake.

White's symbolic advantage is based on having better possibilities of activating the king. I planned to exchange one rook and one queenside pawn, in order to clear the path for the king. Obviously Black should aim to prevent this course of events.

For my opponent, this would have been the right moment to stop making automatic moves and have a deep think. The position has changed radically over the past few moves and earlier perceptions are now useless.

20...♖bc8?!

Not spoiling anything yet, but delaying the moment when Black can achieve safe equality. Maybe Sax was intuitively afraid of the rooks

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doubling along the seventh rank and also wanted to simplify. Instead, he should have looked for chances of counterplay.

In later games, Black managed to neutralize the pressure with:

20...a5!

By keeping both queenside pawns, Black takes preventive measures against the white king's activation.

21.♖ed1 h5

Or 21...g6 22.♖a7 a4 23.♖dd7 ♖bc8 24.♖xf7 ♖xc2. With both kings exposed, a draw by perpetual check was inevitable in Yandemirov – Aseev, Podolsk 1992.

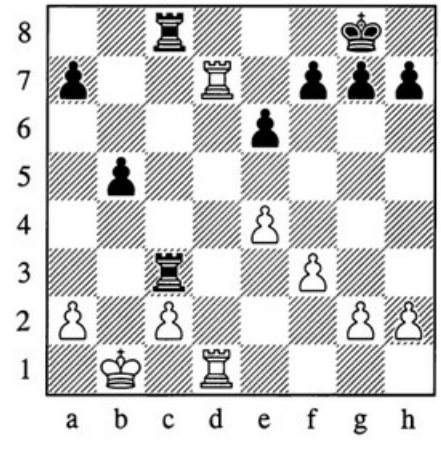
22.♖a7 ♖e3 23.♖d2

Black also has enough counterplay after: 23.♖xa5 ♖e2 or 23.♖dd7 ♖e1† 24.♔b2 ♖e2 25.g3 ♖c8=

23...a4 24.♔b2

A draw was agreed in Ossig – Kothe, Correspondence 1998.

21.♖ed1



21...g5!

Gyula made this move instantly. It is the best way to activate the king and generate counterplay with ...g4.

22.♖xa7

Black has to be very careful, because the b5-pawn is vulnerable.

22...♖xc2 23.♖d8†!

White has made some progress, by fulfilling both links of the plan mentioned in the notes to move 20.

23...♖xd8?!

This inaccuracy helps my cause; it is only a nuance, but these things tend to accumulate.

On the 20th move, Black failed to take measures against my king's activation; now, he neglects to rapidly centralize his own. 23...♔g7! would have practically gained a tempo over the game continuation.



24.♖xc8

Maybe he was afraid of 24.♖dd7, but Black draws easily with 24...♖8c3 25.♖xf7† ♔g8!. One of the kings will inevitably have to submit to perpetual check.

24...♖xc8 25.♖a5 ♖b8!

This kind of defensive move was not Gyula's forte. Black waits until the white king leaves the second rank undefended with ♔b4, and only then will start counterplay with ...♖d8-d2.

26.♔b2 ♔g6 27.♔b3 h5

It is useful to bring all possible candidates for promotion closer to the first rank.

28.♔b4

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28...♖d8!

Now is the moment to start the counterplay.

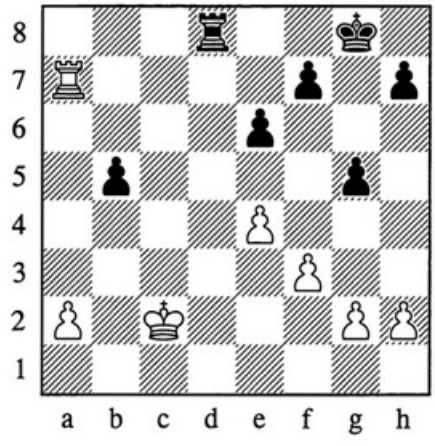
29.♖xb5 ♖d2 30.a4 ♖xg2 31.a5

If 31.h3 f5 followed by ...g4 and Black's passed pawn is just as fast as the a-pawn.

31...♖xh2 32.a6 ♖b2† 33.♔c5 ♖a2 34.♔b6 h4

Black has no problems achieving a draw.

24.♔xc2



24...g4!

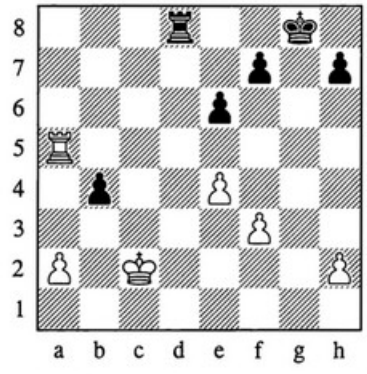
My evaluation from 1989 seems to be correct: this is the best way to create counterplay in this delicate situation.

Since he is a tempo down with respect to the variation from the previous comment, Black is in danger in the pawn race which inevitably results after 24...♔g7 25.♖a5 ♖b8 26.♔b3 ♔g6 27.♔b4 ♖d8 28.♖xb5 ♖d2 29.a4.

25.♖c7

The manoeuvre started with this move was intended as a refined way of attacking the b5-pawn. Under the rook's protection, the king can stay on the c-file and prevent an early intrusion by the black rook.

The straightforward 25.♖a5 can be met with: 25...gxf3 26.gxf3 b4!



Remarkably, White cannot take the vulnerable black pawn without losing one in return.

27.♖a4 ♖d4 28.a3

28.♔b3 ♖d3† is similar.

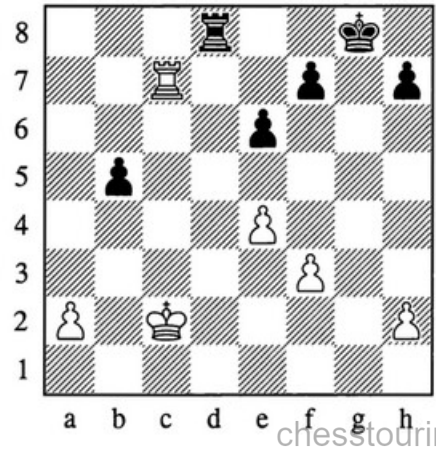
28...b3†!

A simple way of getting out of the pin.

29.♔xb3 ♖d3†

Followed by ...♖xf3.

25...gxf3 26.gxf3



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26...♖d4

Black misses a simple defensive plan, which does not require the participation of his king: 26...♖a8! 27.♔b3 ♖a4 28.♖c5 ♖a5 29.a3 ♔g7



There is no way to take the b5-pawn without giving up the one on a3. 30.♔b4 ♖a4† 31.♔b3 ♖a5 32.♖c3 ♖a4 and so on.

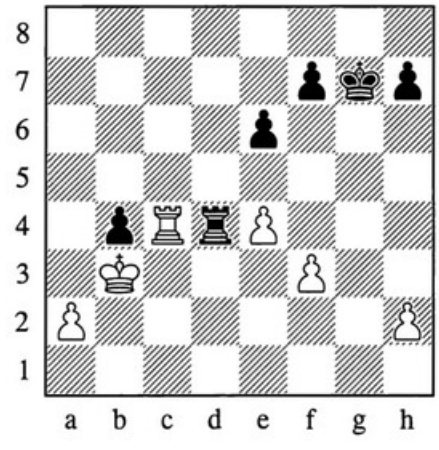
This mechanism can arise in many different areas of the board and it is useful to know about its existence. During the game, it may not be so easy to spot it.

Rather than searching for a safe defence, Sax looked for active counterplay.

27.♖c5 b4?!

Missing again the same plan, starting with 27...♖a4.

28.♔b3 ♔g7 29.♖c4



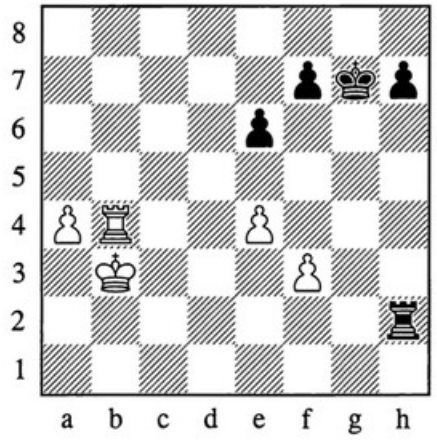
White has reached an improved form of the final position from the comment to 25.♖c7. The rook is better placed on c4 than it was on a4, because it does not block the a-pawn.

As a result of his repeated inaccuracies, Black has slipped from an easily drawn position into one that requires some struggling. Now he faces a choice between two continuations without a clear-cut outcome.

29...♖d2

Black decides to go for the h2-pawn. He probably thought that after 29...♖d3† 30.♔xb4 ♖xf3 the f-pawn would be easier to control by the white pieces.

30.♖xb4 ♖xh2 31.a4



31...♖f2?

In my comments from 1989 I considered this the decisive mistake. Although rook endings tend to retain some degree of uncertainty, I agree with my old evaluation.

In my notes I suggested the strong defensive move:

31...♖h5!

The only way to make progress would be:

32.♖b5

However, after:

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32...♖h1 33.a5 ♖b1† 34.♔c4 ♖a1

White's "extra tempo" (♖b4-b5) actually deprives the king of the important b5-square. This offers Black reasonable saving chances, for instance:

35.♔c5 h5

With counterplay.

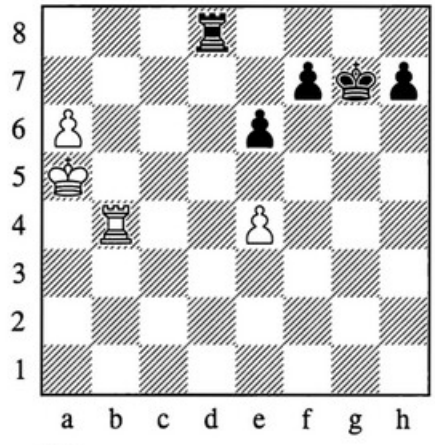
32.a5 ♖xf3† 33.♔a4

Black has a material advantage, but this does not make his situation easier. The availability of the b5-square makes White's coordination optimal.

33...♖d3 34.a6 ♖d8

If 34...♖d1 35.♔a5 and White can defend the a-file with ♖b4-a4 if necessary.

35.♔a5



35...♔f6?!

During the game, I did not quite understand this move, but I felt that I should win anyway.

Black fails to save the game by just one tempo after: 35...f5 36.exf5 exf5 37.a7 ♖a8 38.♔a6 ♔f6 39.♖b8 ♖xa7† 40.♔xa7 ♔e5 41.♔b6 With similar play as in the game.

Or if 35...♖a8 then 36.e5! which slows down the counterplay considerably.

36.♖b5!

Black's attempt to generate counterplay with ...♔e5 is easily refuted.

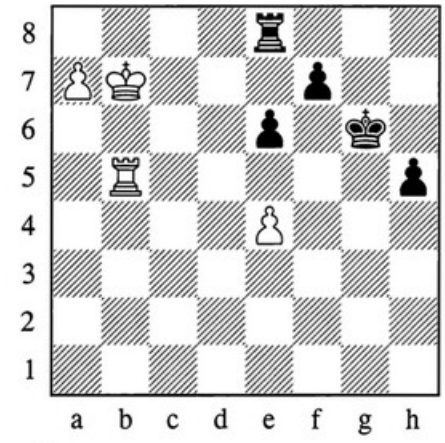
36...♔g6 37.a7

Threatening ♖b8.

37...♖a8 38.♔a6 h5 39.♔b7

A slight hesitation before the time control. 39.♖b8 would have shortened the game by two moves.

39...♖e8



40.♔a6!

Admitting my slight mistake. I correctly evaluated that 40.a8=♕ would lead to a draw: 40...♖xa8 41.♔xa8 h4 42.♔b7 f5 43.exf5† exf5 44.♔c6 ♔g5 45.♔d5 h3 46.♖b8 ♔g4 47.♖h8 ♔g3= I have this line in my comments from 1989. White misses a win by just one tempo. In order to win, I would need to play ♔d5-d4-e3 in one stroke.

40...♖a8 41.♖b8!

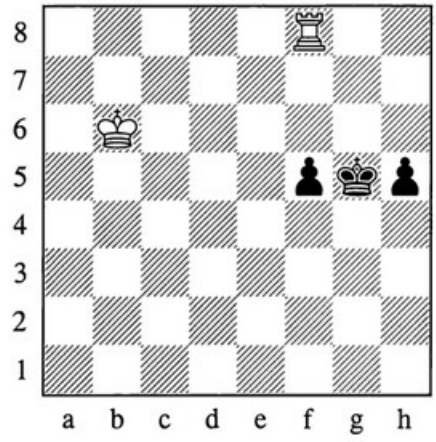
Finally taking the right path. Before playing this move, I calculated the whole winning sequence. This was only possible because of my intense homework on theoretical endings.

41...♖xa7† 42.♔xa7 ♔g5 43.♖f8

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In my old notes, I also gave the following winning line: 43.♔b6!? ♔f4 44.♔c5 ♔xe4 45.♖b4† ♔f3 46.♖h4+– With his king cut off from the pawns, Black cannot create any counterplay.

43...f5 44.exf5 exf5 45.♔b6!

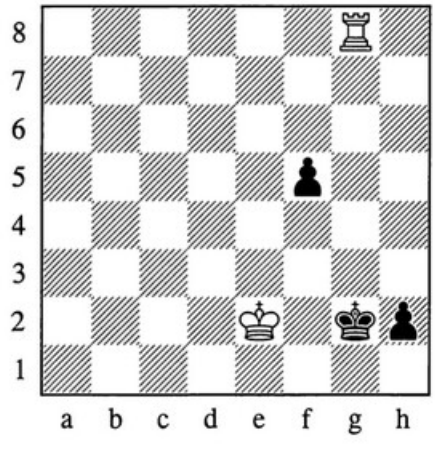


In such endings, the king's speed on the way back is amazing.

45...♔f4

Heading for e4, with the aim of restricting the enemy king.

46.♔c5 ♔e4 47.♔c4 h4 48.♖e8† ♔f3 49.♔d3 h3 50.♖h8 ♔g2 51.♔e2 h2 52.♖g8†



52...♔h3

Without the pawn on f5, this position would be drawn because of 52...♔h1, but the extra pawn spoils everything. In our game, White would win with: 53.♔f2 f4 54.♖a8 f3 Black is stalemated, but it is White's turn... 55.♖a1 mate. Just in time!

53.♔f2 h1=♘†

A desperate attempt to maintain approximate material equality. Against any other move, 54.♖h8† would be lethal.

54.♔f3

With the knight in the corner, Black is lost. Compared to the basic theoretical position, the extra pawn cannot help change the evaluation.

54...♔h2 55.♖g2† ♔h3 56.♖g5 ♔h2 57.♖xf5 ♘g3 58.♖f8

After 58...♘f1 59.♔f2 Black would soon lose his knight, so he decided to resign.

Many people were surprised by the nature of the final phase of the game. From me, they were expecting some tactical fireworks rather than this kind of technical accuracy.

New Delhi 1990

My first ever visit to India was memorable, but not without its ups and downs.

The organization of the tournament was excellent and all the players stayed at the Holiday Inn. Rajiv Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India, attended the closing ceremony, which speaks volumes about the importance of chess in India, even long before Anand became World Champion.

Around the middle of the tournament, I noticed an unusual number of security forces. Had anything bad happened? Not at all! The famous singer Samantha Fox arrived at the hotel for a few days; the increased security was part of the treatment for such special guests.

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I had a slow start in the tournament, with just half a point out of two games. There followed a quiet draw against Susan. Even in the days when our big sister was much stronger than Sofia and me, she would not fight against us. Somehow, this just came naturally.

The day before my fourth round game against Chernin I had some serious stomach problems. I found Indian food very tasty, but was not accustomed to it. Nowadays, things have changed for the better: I still enjoy Indian cuisine, but this no longer causes me any health problems!

In those years, Alexander Chernin was a very strong player and a true professional. He based his knowledge on what we call Soviet chess culture and was an incredibly hard worker and deep analyst.

I remember an illustrative episode. After he moved to Budapest, he started to work together with Susan. They carried out some long analysis in the Grünfeld, reaching move 35. Later, he complained that they did not analyze one more move, because the whole evaluation of the position depended on that! It is important to mention that in those days computer engines were not reliable, so players needed to rely on their own analytical abilities.

Chernin's qualification for the 1985 Candidates Tournament was an important peak in his career. Later, he diversified his activity, by writing some very good books and becoming a respected trainer.



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Alexander Chernin – Judit Polgar

New Delhi 1990

1.c4 g6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6

I had started to play the King's Indian on a regular basis in 1988. This complex and flexible opening gradually replaced the more straightforward Benko Gambit as my main weapon against 1.d4. I had studied it thoroughly with my trainer from that period, Laszlo Hazai, who was already considered an outstanding theoretician, although he was still an active player.

5.h3 0–0 6.♘f3 e5 7.d5



7...♘a6

As usual, when given a choice I aimed for rapid piece development. The most popular continuation is 7...a5 ensuring some control of the space on the queenside.

The main positional danger after my move is that White manages to play a3 and b4 before my counterplay gets going. It is worth noting though, that in this game ...a5 remained more of a potential plan, without ever being played.

8.♗e3 ♘h5



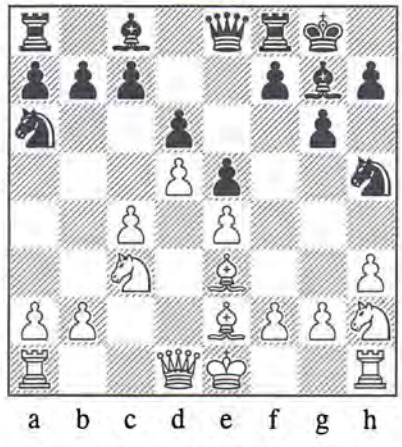
9.♘h2

This rather unusual knight retreat is the most popular continuation according to the databases. 9.♘d2 is more natural, but after 9...♕e8 followed by ...f5, the e3-bishop may feel uncomfortable.

9...♕e8

A typical move, which prepares the standard ...f7-f5 by over-defending the h5-knight.

10.♗e2



Hoping to inhibit ...f5, but in vain.

10...f5!

Shortly before my game, this had been played by Kasparov against Curt Hansen. I had

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analyzed it and came to like Black's position a lot.

11.exf5

11.♗xh5 gxh5 followed by ...♕g6 offers Black very active play at no cost; the doubled pawns are quite useful. The h7-pawn defends the king while its colleague restricts the h2-knight.

11...♘f4!

An important intermediate move, still following Kasparov's game.

12.♗xf4

Cu. Hansen – Kasparov, Svendborg 1990, went 12.0–0 ♗xf5, but I would prefer 12...♘xe2† followed by 13...gxf5, in order to maintain my structural flexibility.

Chernin's move was a novelty which remains clouded in mystery in view of my comments to 14.♔f1.

12...exf4 13.fxg6 ♕xg6



In the King's Indian, Black sometimes sacrifices a piece for the sake of opening the long diagonal for his dreaded bishop. In this game, I achieved this aim at the cost of a relatively unimportant pawn.

As if this was not enough, White has no obvious way of bringing his king into safety, since 14.0–0 ♗xh3 regains the pawn while keeping an active position.

14.♔f1

Surprisingly, Chernin had spent 57 minutes up to this moment. I cannot figure out what had gone wrong with his preparation. Did he not know Kasparov's game? This would make sense only if he had chosen this opening system by chance, hoping to take me out of my preparation, rather than show his own. In the '90s Chernin played the h3-system frequently, but replaced 6.♘f3 with 6.♗g5; possibly he made the change because of the problems he experienced in finding a good square for his knight in this game.

After the last move, White will face overwhelming problems with his coordination. Although Chernin did not make any obvious mistakes in the next phase, he could not save the game.

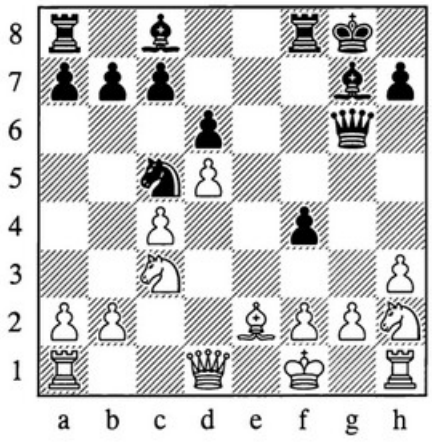
White had two alternate ways to deal with the threat of ...♕xg2.

14.♗g4 ♗xg4 15.hxg4 would leave the knight passive on h2 and lose the right to castle anyway: 15...♖ae8† 16.♔f1 ♘c5 Given White's development problems, I believe that I would have more than *just* compensation for the pawn.

14.♘f3!? is a cunning move, aiming to get some play along the g-file after 14...♕xg2?! 15.♖g1. I would have continued to activate my pieces with 14...♘c5 followed by ...♗f5, keeping the threat of ...♕xg2 in reserve.

14...♘c5

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With my bishop cutting like a blade along the a1-h8 diagonal, this knight is stable on c5 without me needing to lose a tempo with ...a5.

15.♖c1

White has problems on both wings and has no easy way of choosing his priorities. Chernin might have been afraid of ...♗xc3, leading to the chronic weakening of his queenside structure. His last move also seems to prepare b2-b4, but it will take a while before this becomes realistic.

With the king away from the centre, White could try 15.♗g4?! ♗xg4 16.♕xg4. However, after 16...♕d3† 17.♕e2 ♖fe8 18.♕xd3 ♘xd3 my pressure on the queenside and White's poor coordination would offer me excellent play.

The most constructive move may have been 15.♘f3!?, planning to meet 15...♗f5 with 16.♘h4.



Apart from the modest 15...♗d7, I could also consider 15...♗f6 followed by ...♗f5 anyway. Later, I could proceed as in the game with ...♔h8 and ...♖g8.

15...♗f5

A natural and active developing move, preparing to meet b2-b4 with ...♘d3.

16.♘f3

Hoping for either ♘h4 with a double attack, or ♘d4 followed by ♘e6.

16...♗f6!

I spent 20 minutes on this multipurpose move. It is the most flexible way of preventing ♘h4 and it prepares an attack along the g-file with ...♔h8 followed by ...♖g8.

17.♔g1?!

Chernin decides to castle artificially in order to connect his major pieces. He probably underestimated the dangers awaiting his king on the kingside; dangers that are quite usual in the King's Indian!

17.♘d4!



This would have been the last attempt to change the unfavourable course of events. If White manages to play ♘e6, he will get chances to hold, even if this meant giving up the extra pawn.

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Judging by my comments for *Chess Informant*, I intended to play 17...♗xd4 18.♕xd4 f3, opening lines for my pieces.

Now I would prefer to do the same without giving up my bishop:
17...f3! 18.♘xf3
18.gxf3 ♗xd4 19.♕xd4 ♖f7 followed by ...♖g7 and ...♖e8/f8 leaves the white king in great danger. Pinning the queen with 20.♖g1? would fail to 20...♗h3†.
18...♖ae8



Two pawns would be a small price to pay for my huge lead in development and perfect piece coordination. White would have no obvious way to get coordinated.

17...♔h8



18.♔h2

Once he has said "A" he feels he had to say "B" – he could not stop carrying out the wrong plan.

18...♖g8 19.♖g1

19.♗f1 allows 19...♘d3, overloading the bishop.

19...♕h6!

After this strong move, both g2 and h3 are under pressure. Although I still need two more tempos (...♖g7 and ...♖ag8) to complete my offensive regrouping, White cannot find adequate defences.



20.♗f1

This way of crowding pieces around the king will prove ineffective.

20.b4? would lose to 20...♖xg2†! 21.♖xg2 ♗xh3 with similar play as in the game.

20.♕f1 might be the most reliable defence, but the queen would be very passive on f1. I might just have played 20...a5 preventing b2-b4 and patiently preparing to double rooks on the g-file. White would be short of constructive plans.

20...♖g7

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I was not worried about his next move, since I had spotted another good square for my knight.

21.b4 ♘d7!

Heading for e5. My general plan is ...♖ag8 followed by ...♘e5 and ...♗g4 with crushing pressure.

So far, I had played unusually slowly by my standards, having spent one hour and 18 minutes. What surprises me more is that I needed just five more minutes to finish the game, even though I was a rook down for several moves!

22.♗d3

Hoping in vain to exchange one of my most dangerous attacking pieces.

22.♘d4 would unblock the f4-pawn, and would be met by 22...♗xd4 23.♕xd4 ♘e5 with the decisive threats of ...f4-f3 or ...♗xh3.



22...♖xg2†!!

Quite typical of my alertness in those years. The defence of the g2-square weakened for just an instant, but it was enough to start the decisive attack.

23.♖xg2 ♗xh3

A curious position in which White has no good squares for his rook, since 24.♖g1 would allow mate in one with 24...♗f1.



24.♘e4

After this centralizing move, White needs just one tempo to reduce my attacking potential (♘xf6), but he will not get that tempo!

Deflecting my bishop with 24.♗f5 would not help either: 24...♗xf5† 25.♔g1 ♗h3! The bishop returns with decisive effect. 26.♖h2 ♖g8† 27.♔h1 ♗g2† 28.♔g1 ♗xf3† with huge material gains.

The sensible-looking 24.♔g1 would lose to the simple 24...♗xg2 25.♔xg2 ♗xc3 with an extra pawn and a continuing attack, since 26.♖xc3 drops the exchange to: 26...♕g7†!



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24...♘e5!!

A quiet move of tremendous strength in a position a rook down, which caused Chernin to spend 12 of his remaining 14 minutes.

25.♘xe5

If 25.♘xf6 then 25...♘xf3† 26.♕xf3 ♗g4† wins the queen.

Or 25.♔g1 ♗xg2 26.♔xg2 ♖g8† 27.♔f1 ♕h1† followed by ...♕xf3†. I stopped calculating here, "failing to notice" that it is mate in 14, which is quite obvious for the engines.

25...♗xe5



There is no hurry to take the misplaced rook, since the light-squared bishop can be useful in building up the mating net. For instance, the last move creates the threat of 26...f3† 27.♖g3 ♗g2† 28.♔g1 ♕h1 mate!

26.♘g5

Desperation. He forces my next move, but under very favourable circumstances.

26.f3 would parry my initial threat, but lose to 26...♗xg2† 27.♔xg2 ♖g8† with a nice mate to follow: 28.♔f1 ♕h1† 29.♔e2 ♖g2† 30.♘f2 ♖xf2†! 31.♔xf2 ♗d4† 32.♔e2 ♕g2† 33.♔e1 The king has returned to its initial square, which proves fatal: 33...♕f2 mate.

26...♗xg2† 27.♔xg2 ♕xg5†



28.♔f3

If 28.♔f1 then 28...f3 overloading the queen and threatening ...♕g2†.

28...♖g8 29.♔e2 f3†



In view of 30.♔e1 ♗f4 followed by ...♕g1† and ...♖e8†, Chernin resigned.

I consider this to be my first win over a great player in which I played very well all the way. It proved an incredible self-confidence builder, since later I improved my tournament situation by beating the "local players" Anand (see page 22) and Prasad!

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Winawer French

Judit Polgar – Wolfgang Uhlmann

Amsterdam 1990

Uhlmann used to be a very strong grandmaster, who in his best days qualified for the world title Candidates matches. I had great respect for him, but this did not show on the board, as I was looking forward to a real fight.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 ♘e7 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 c5 7.♕g4

Throughout his career, Uhlmann almost exclusively played the French Defence against 1.e4 and was rightly considered one of the world's greatest specialists in this opening.

The sharp Winawer variation played in this game suited my style perfectly. I did not mind ruining my queenside structure for the sake of getting attacking possibilities on the opposite wing. I knew that White could have problems if the fight took a positional course and that most endings would be bad for me. However, I always felt confident that my attack would break through before things got serious on the queenside.

This optimism was supported by my practical results as I won many games before move 30!

7...0–0

In the '50s and '60s, Uhlmann consistently chose the ultra-sharp 7...♕c7 8.♕xg7 ♖g8 9.♕xh7 cxd4. In the huge complications that usually arise in this line, having the better home preparation can make a huge difference; it is occasionally possible to collect the point without much effort over the board.

In the late '80s, Uhlmann gradually switched to the more cautious game move.

8.♗d3



8...f5

My opponent had bad memories about 8...♘bc6 9.♕h5 h6 10.♗xh6 gxh6 11.♕xh6 ♘f5 12.♗xf5 exf5 13.0–0–0 c4 14.♘h3 with a deadly attack that won the game on move 22 in Vogt – Uhlmann, East Berlin 1989.

A few months earlier, I played the following inspiring game, which bears some similarity with the Uhlmann game:

8...♘d7 9.♘f3 f5 10.♕h3

The queen takes the h7-pawn under observation and clears the path for the g-pawn.

10...♘b6 11.♖g1 ♕c7 12.♗d2

Before starting the attack, it is useful to cover all the important squares along the c-file.

12...♘c4



13.g4!

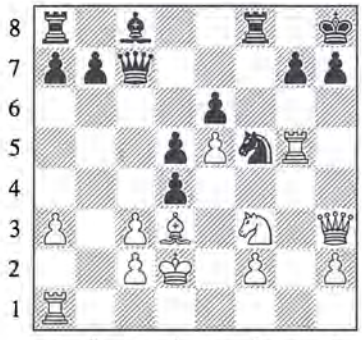
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Everything was ready for my "trademark" pawn move.

13...♘xd2 14.♔xd2 ♔h8 15.gxf5 ♘xf5

This knight provides some temporary stability on the kingside, but Black will need to start some queenside action before my pressure becomes unbearable.

16.♖g5 cxd4



17.♖ag1!?

It is interesting to compare this move with 18.f4 from the main game. In both cases, I allow the physical destruction of my queenside with ...c5xd4xc3, for the sake of rapid piece mobilization. In this position, the concession seems even bigger since the second pawn capture is with check!

17...dxc3† 18.♔d1



After connecting rooks, I can retreat my king to this safe square. Black is two pawns up, but seriously behind in development. The queenside pieces cannot arrive in time to defend the king, which will soon be under attack by all my pieces.

18...♕e7 19.♖h5 ♘h6

The knight has to abandon the great blockading square on f5 in order to defend the h-file, but even this does not save the day.



20.♖xg7!

Blowing up the king's barricades.

20...♔xg7 21.♖xh6 ♖h8 22.♖f6

This quiet move is certainly not the only win. White threatens three different mates in one.

22...♔g8 23.♖f4

Threatening ♖g4†.

23...h5



24.♖f6!

This elegant rook manoeuvre forced Black's immediate resignation in Judit Polgar – Sinkovics, Budapest 1990 (it is worth mentioning that Sinkovics had been my trainer

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for a short period when I was very young). After the defence of the g6-square has been removed, there is no way to parry the threat of 25.♕g3† ♕g7 26.♖g6.

9.exf6 ♖xf6 10.♗g5 ♖f7 11.♕h5



11...h6

This is the surprise Uhlmann had prepared for our game.

11...g6 is by far the main move, gaining a tempo but chronically weakening the dark squares.

Uhlmann's move is more solid strategically. He must have thought that this is the way one should treat young tacticians and he probably hoped to induce me to release the tension with ♗xe7 soon.



12.♗g6

A very active move, immediately occupying the weakened square with gain of time.

I was tempted to try the sacrifice 12.♗h7†!? ♔xh7 13.♕xf7 hxg5 14.♘f3.

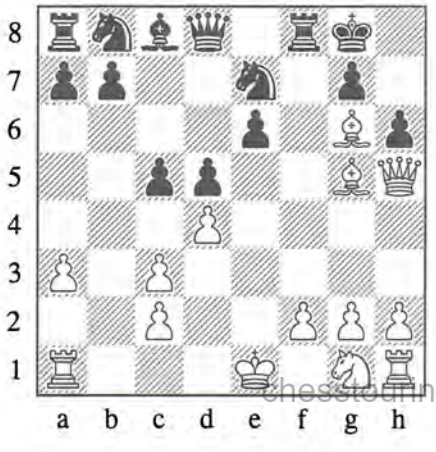


I could not come up with a clear evaluation of this position, and I was put off by the thought that my opponent must have analyzed it at home.

After the tournament, I eventually came to the conclusion that White has a winning attack and I looked forward to testing my idea in practice. Looking again at this position after so many years, I believe that White may be slightly better, but Black's play would be easier from a practical point of view.

About 15 years after my game, 12.♘f3 started to become popular; this is how new lines are created.

12...♖f8



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13.♘f3!

It makes no sense to release the pressure with ♗xe7 while ...hxg5 is not a threat. The bishops paralyze much of Black's army, while White has easy development.

13...♘bc6 14.0–0

I spent 15 minutes on this move, as I was still unsure what I wanted to do with my g5-bishop.

Unfortunately, 14.♗xh6 only leads to a draw by perpetual: 14...gxh6 15.♕xh6 ♘xg6 16.♕xg6† ♔h8=



14...♕c7?!

Uhlmann had had enough of the pin and decide to cut the Gordian knot. This radical approach has the drawback of losing a tempo in a moment when his development is incomplete.

The principled move was:

14...♗d7!

Trying to catch up in development and threatening to release the pressure with ...♗e8. Maybe Uhlmann did not want to leave the c5-pawn undefended, but it seems that

15.dxc5

was not so dangerous:

15...♗e8 16.♗xe8 ♕xe8 17.♕xe8 ♖axe8 18.♗xe7

Or 18.♗e3 ♘f5.

18...♖xe7 19.♖fe1



White's extra pawn fails to impress. Black can immediately create queenside threats with:

19...♖f4=

15.♗xe7!

A well timed capture, forcing Black to concede control of either the e5- or the g6-squares.

15...♕xe7

Relatively best, since 15...♘xe7 16.♘e5± offers White too much activity.



16.♖ae1!?

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At first sight, 16.♖fe1 looks more natural, since it keeps the a3-pawn defended and in some cases allows the activation of the queen's rook with ♖ab1. At the same time, the usefulness of the f1-rook is not entirely clear yet.

I played my move after only six minutes. I did not care about losing the a3-pawn, since this would cost Black a valuable tempo, and I planned to start a massive attack with ♘e5 followed by f4, when the placement of my rooks would be entirely justified.



16...♕f6?

After only 11 minutes, Black decides to move his queen for the third time in a row. This is wrong in principle and does not work out well here for concrete reasons, too.

If Black was willing to neglect his development, it would make sense to grab a pawn at least:
16...cxd4 17.cxd4 ♕xa3 18.♗d3

I did not investigate this position seriously, being sure that my attack would be overwhelming. The immediate threat is ♕g6, and 18...♘e7 19.♘e5 would leave Black paralyzed, without even the possibility of developing with ...♗d7. Still, Black's defensive resources are not yet exhausted.

18...♕e7!

Rushing back to the defence.

19.♕g6



19...♖xf3!

I am sure that I did not see this excellent resource, or at least that I did not take it seriously. Black clears the f8-square for his king and ruins White's structure. The f3-knight not only defended the d4-pawn, but also threatened to join the attack at the right moment, so it is worth trading a rook for it.

20.gxf3 ♘xd4 21.♕h7† ♔f8! 22.♖e3 ♕f7



Black has two pawns for the exchange and the better structure. The first wave of White's attack has been neutralized, since ♕h8† can be answered with ...♕g8. If Black could complete his development, he would be better, but White retains some initiative with either 23.f4 or 23.♔h1.

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Once again, the safest way was to develop:
16...♗d7

I intended to play:
17.c4

Getting rid of my weaknesses and opening files for my rooks. I believe that Uhlmann did not like this position, but things are not entirely clear.

17...dxc4 18.dxc5



The position is slightly more pleasant for White, because of Black's queenside weaknesses. There is no clear way to a concrete advantage, though.



17.♘e5!?

After eight minutes during which I foresaw some of the ensuing complications, I could not resist jumping forward. The loss in the previous round had not affected my aggressive spirit in any way.

However, objectively this was not the best move.

The simple 17.dxc5! should have been preferred, based on: 17...♕xc3?! 18.♘g5! White would at least win the e6-pawn, retaining a dangerous initiative.

17...cxd4?!

Uhlmann probably took for granted I would reply 18.cxd4, ignoring my game against Sinkovics.

Instead of grabbing a pawn, Black should have sacrificed one to get out of trouble:
17...♘xe5! 18.dxe5 ♕g5!

The only way to neutralize White's initiative. If 18...♕e7 19.c4! White ensures a retreat for the bishop along the d3-h7 diagonal, in order to create a deadly battery with ♕g6. Other attacking moves would be f2-f4 and g2-g4-g5.

19.♕xg5 hxg5 20.♖e3



Since White wins the g5-pawn, I stopped my calculation here. A bit prematurely, since Black can get very strong counterplay:
20...♖f4 21.♖g3 ♖a4 22.♖a1 ♗d7 23.♖xg5 b5

White does not have enough forces to continue the kingside initiative, while the queenside is in serious danger. The position is unclear.

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18.f4!

Just as with 17.♖ag1 from the Sinkovics game, this move clearly shows my attitude towards the queenside weaknesses: why care about them?!

Suddenly, Black has no antidote to the massive kingside attack.

18...dxc3

Played almost instantly. Black clears the g1-a7 diagonal, for a (sometimes saving) check on c5.

Exchanging knights would not work out well, since it would open the f-file:
18...♘xe5?! 19.fxe5 ♕g5

If 19...♕e7 20.♖xf8† ♕xf8 21.♖f1 ♕c5 22.♗d3! Black is helpless against the threat of ♕g6-h7 mate!

20.♖xf8† ♔xf8 21.♕f3† ♔e7



A nice mate in three follows:
22.♕f7† ♔d8 23.♕f8† ♔c7 24.♕d6 mate!



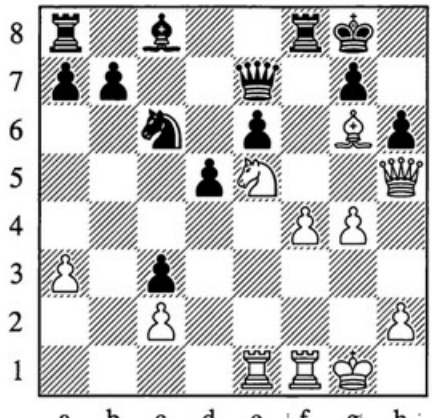
19.g4!?

I was becoming over-enthusiastic and played this strong move almost without thinking, failing to notice that the move order was slightly inaccurate.

19.♗d3! followed by g4-g5 would have been even stronger, since Black cannot retreat with his queen in view of ♕g6.

19...♕e7

Once again, taking on e5 was impossible, but for different reasons this time: 19...♘xe5 20.fxe5 ♕g5 (or 20...♕e7 21.♗d3! followed by ♕g6) 21.♗h7†! This trick is possible only with the queen defended by the g4-pawn.

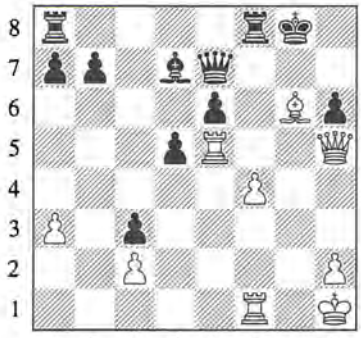


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20.♗d3

I had been looking for a good moment to retreat the bishop ever since I placed it on g6.

Still, I spent ten minutes comparing the merits of this move with: 20.g5 ♘xe5 21.♖xe5 (21.fxe5 does not work because of 21...♕xg5† 22.♕xg5 ♖xf1†!) 21...♗d7 22.gxh6 gxh6 23.♔h1



With ♖f1-g1 coming next, Black's position is hopeless.

Objectively, this continuation is stronger, but I thought that White's play would be simpler after the game move.

20...♕e8

Obviously the only defence against ♕g6, but Uhlmann only played it after thinking for 15 minutes. This was probably a sign that he did not like his position.

21.♘g6

Paralyzing Black's kingside and creating the threat of g4-g5xh6. It would be inappropriate to say that I gained a tempo by attacking his rook – under no circumstances did I intend to exchange my knight for such a passive piece!

21...♗d7

This developing move arrives much too late.

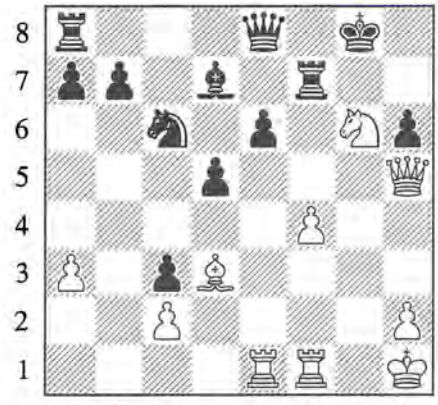
As explained above, 21...♖f7 would be a pointless precaution. Besides, after 22.g5 we would more or less transpose to the game.

21...♘e7 is best met with 22.♘xe7†! as the e7-knight is more important than the rook, since it defends the g6-square. 22...♕xe7 23.♕g6 With ♕h7† and g4-g5 in sight, Black is simply lost.

22.g5!

With such hyperactive pieces, White can afford to attack with simple moves.

22...♖f7 23.gxh6 gxh6 24.♔h1!



This is quite similar to ...♔g8-h8 from my Chernin game. White clears the g-file for the rook, with decisive threats. In the final part of the game I missed some quicker wins, but the final result was never in doubt.

24...♘e7 25.♖g1 ♘f5 26.♘e7†?!

This wins material, and I expected my opponent to resign.

26.♗xf5 would have been more convincing: 26...♖xf5 27.♕xh6 ♔f7 28.♕h7† ♔f6 29.♘e5 with mate to follow soon.

26...♔f8 27.♘xf5 ♖f6 28.♕g4 ♕f7 29.♘d6 ♖xf4

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30.♘xf7?!

Once again missing the most effective continuation: 30.♖ef1! e5 (or 30...♖xg4 31.♖xf7† and then mate in two) 31.♖xf4 exf4 32.♕h4 With an extra knight and a decisive attack.

30...♖xg4 31.♖xg4 ♔xf7



White is winning here, too, but Black's compact mass of pawns allows him to play on for a while. I was angry with myself for not finding a mate sooner, and played one more inaccurate move:

32.♖h4?!

32.♖f1† ♔e7 33.♖g7† ♔d6 34.♖h7, clearing the path for the h2-pawn, was quicker.

32...♖h8 33.♔g2 ♔f6 34.♖h5 ♔e7



Setting up a trick.

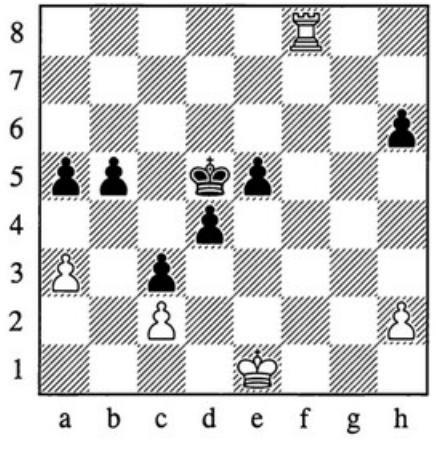
35.♔f2

I was not nervous enough to fall for 35.♖xd5?? ♗c6 36.♗c4 ♖d8 when suddenly Black is winning!

35...♔d6 36.♖e3 ♗e8 37.♖he5

The rest is not really very interesting.

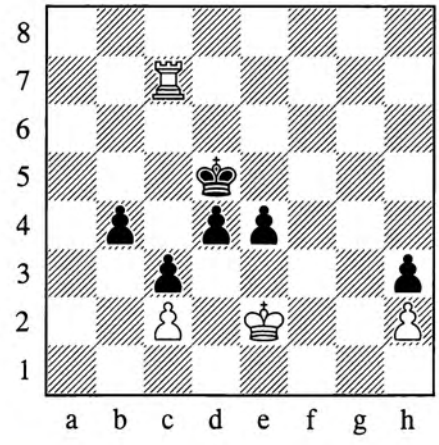
37...♖f8† 38.♔e1 ♖f6 39.♖e2 ♗c6 40.♖5e3 d4 41.♖g3 e5 42.♖g6 ♖xg6 43.♗xg6 b5 44.♗e4 ♗d5 45.♗xd5 ♔xd5 46.♖f2 a5 47.♖f8



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One gets the feeling that Black has missed the right moment to resign. Sometimes this happens when things go completely wrong, contrary to initial expectations.

47...b4 48.axb4 axb4 49.♖c8 h5 50.♔e2 h4 51.♖c7 h3 52.♖c8 e4 53.♖c7



Black is in zugzwang: If he moves his king, ♖c4 wins the b4-pawn.
1–0

In an interview on Dutch television, Jan Timman mentioned that for him this game was the first serious sign that I could become a really strong player in the future.

Maybe here is the best place to say that I admire Jan for his sporting achievements, but mainly for his love for the game. His artistic nature is reflected in the numerous studies he has composed. In the late '90s we worked together occasionally and every time I could feel his inexhaustible enthusiasm for chess.



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Open Spanish

Judit Polgar – Viswanathan Anand

Munich 1991

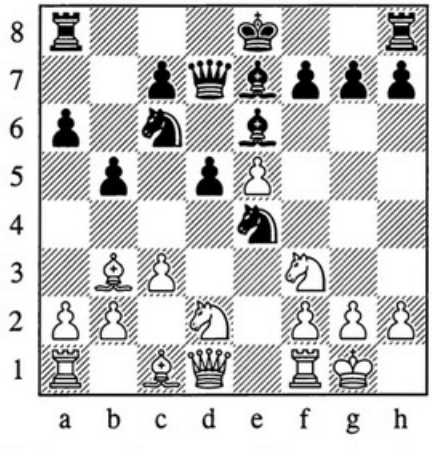
Two other games from this tournament can be found in this book: against Wahls (Chapter 1, page 30) and Hübner (Chapter 6, page 90). This one was played just after the first day off, when I had two out of four.

In a previous meeting, I had defeated Anand with a small trick (see Chapter 1, page 22), so he must have been more aware of the hidden dangers this time.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0–0 ♘xe4 6.d4 b5 7.♗b3 d5 8.dxe5 ♗e6 9.c3 ♗e7 10.♘bd2

The same opening variation as in my aforementioned ninth round game against Hübner, but there I deviated with 10.♗c2.

10...♕d7



Trying to take me out of theory by choosing a sideline, but I asked myself whether it really makes sense to develop the queen before castling.

11.♗c2

A new move, inviting Black to make a decision regarding the active (but also exposed) knight.

11...♘xd2

A rather simplistic solution. Black avoids any tension in the centre, but his last move is a concession that speeds up my development.

Later, Krasenkow introduced 11...♗f5 and drew with Amador Rodriguez (1993) and Thomas Luther (1996).

12.♕xd2!?



A slightly unnatural move, which Anand possibly underestimated. The queen obstructs the c1-bishop, but only temporarily. The main idea is to meet castling short with ♕d3, forcing a weakening of the kingside.

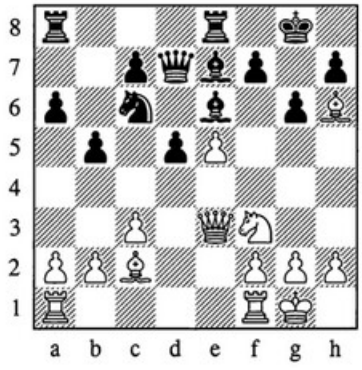
12...♗g4?!

In the lines based on ...♘e4-c5, this is a thematic move, clearing the e6-square for the knight and increasing the pressure on the e5-pawn.

The way things are here, the idea of giving up the bishop is dubious, because Black will not have any pieces left to blockade the e6-square in time. I would say that after the previous exchange, the bishop had become the heart of Black's position.

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The lesser evil would have been: 12...0–0 13.♕d3 g6 14.♗h6 ♖fe8 15.♕e3



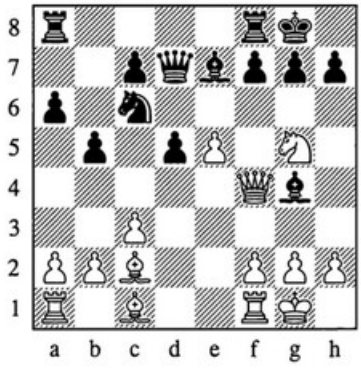
White has weakened the enemy kingside and activated her play considerably. I could develop the initiative with ♖ad1 and try to encourage an exchange of the dark-squared bishops with either ♘g5 or ♗g5. At some point, h2-h3 would be a useful move, preventing ...♗g4.

Yet, this would not be the end of the world for Black. He could build up his counterplay with ...♘a5, ...c5 and ...♖ad8, preparing ...d5-d4. Or he could aim for a blockade on the light squares with ...♗f5.

Since both sides' plans are consistent, we can infer that time and speed of action would be telling factors. White's chances are preferable, but the situation remains double-edged.

13.♕f4 ♗xf3

Consistent but careless! Once again, castling is an important alternative. If 13...0–0 I planned 14.♘g5:



Black should avoid 14...h6? 15.♘h7 ♖fe8 when White has several attacking possibilities. The most straightforward is 16.♘f6† gxf6 17.♕xh6, but 16.h3 followed by 17.♘f6† may be even better.

Therefore, Black has to give up his dark-squared bishop with 14...♗xg5 15.♕xg5, when White has strong pressure against the enemy kingside.



14.♗f5!

This zwischenzug takes full advantage of the early development of the black queen. White practically wins two tempos. I assume that Anand had overlooked it when deciding on 12...♗g4 and I wonder whether he had spotted it when he took on f3, hoping that things may not be that bad after all.

14...♕d8

So far, I had spent only 14 minutes. I needed the same amount of time to understand which way of recapturing was better. Or maybe, knowing my temperament in those years, it is more accurate to say that I was guessing which position would make me feel more at home.

15.♕xf3

I eventually chose the dynamic approach. For the sacrificed pawn, White will get a very strong initiative.

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15.gxf3!? was also possible. The doubled pawns are not weak, since Black cannot prevent f3-f4-f5 in the long run.

The reader may remember that against Hübner I was successful with a similar structure with doubled pawns, so maybe my decision in the current game was just a matter of the inspiration of the moment.

15...♘xe5 16.♕e2!

It is essential to prevent Black from castling, otherwise my initiative would vanish. For example, Black would be doing fine after 16.♕g3 ♘g6 followed by ...0–0.

Up to this point, Anand had played at almost lightning speed. After my last move he seemed to grasp the difficulties awaiting him, since he thought for 17 minutes!

16...♕d6

The retreat to g6 is not effective anymore. If 16...♘g6 then 17.♖e1 and Black cannot castle.

16...♘c6 places the knight on a safer square, but leaves the d5-pawn vulnerable: 17.♖d1 0–0 18.♗e4± After regaining the pawn, the bishop pair ensures White a strong initiative.



17.♖e1

Once again, I had a pleasant choice. The other good continuation was 17.♗f4!? f6 18.♕h5† when Black has to move his king, giving up the right to castle, since 18...g6? would allow 19.♗xg6†! based on the pins along the h2-b8 diagonal and the h-file.

17...♘c6

Anand faced difficult choices on practically every move, but he was back to playing with his trademark speed.

If 17...♘g6 then I planned to do the same as in the game, and prevent Black from castling with 18.♗g5.

17...f6 18.f4, possibly followed by ♕h5†, is not at all appealing for Black.

18.♗g5



Black cannot castle and faces the threat of 19.♖ad1 followed by 20.♗xe7 ♘xe7 21.♖xd5.

18...♔f8

The only move.

If 18...f6, hoping to neutralize my dark-squared bishop, then after 19.♕h5† ♔f8 20.♖e6 Black is underdeveloped and poorly coordinated. His position cannot resist the massive assault on the weakened light squares.

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Black is not in time to drive my f5-bishop away either:
18...g6



19.♖ad1!

Completing development and creating the aforementioned threat. Black loses after:
19...gxf5 20.♗xe7 ♘xe7 21.♖xd5! ♕f6 22.♖xf5!

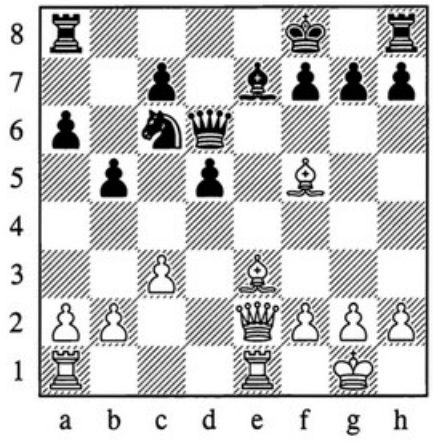
Toying with the overloaded black queen.
22...♕d6 23.♖e5



After winning the knight, White will be a pawn up *and* have a decisive attack.

The somewhat better 19...0–0 would not save Black either: 20.♗xe7 ♘xe7 21.♕xe7 ♕xe7 22.♖xe7 gxf5 23.♖xc7 Black's desperately weak pawns are easy targets for White's active rooks.

19.♗e3!



After having forced Black to give up the right to castle, the bishop gladly "loses a tempo". The exchange on e7 would help Black to solve some of his coordination problems.

In order to maintain the initiative in the next phase of the game, I need to prevent Black from connecting rooks. The general plan is to increase the pressure along the central files. For instance, if it was my move, I would doubtlessly complete my development with 20.♖ad1. The d5-pawn is not Black's only weakness on the left half of the board; under certain circumstances, b2-b4 followed by ♗c5 would be crushing, while a2-a4 is also likely to cause problems.

19...g6

Knowing the later course of the game, it is easy to recommend 19...♗f6. Black prepares ...g6, when he could meet ♗h6† with ...♗g7 and clears the e7-square for the knight at the same time.

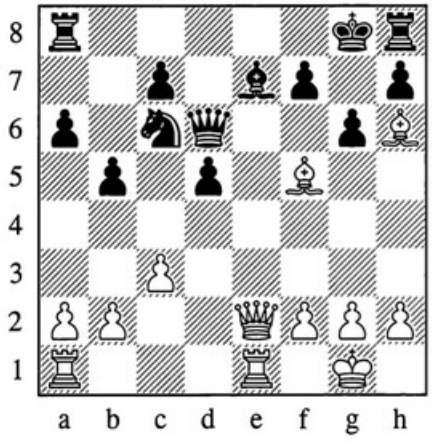
However, this approach is slow and offers White a wide choice. Apart from the standard 20.♖ad1, I could play 20.a4 when Black cannot avoid opening a new line. For instance: 20...b4 21.cxb4 followed by ♖ac1, when Black may well regret weakening the defence of the a3-f8 diagonal with 19...♗f6.

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20.♗h6†

The king will not get to g7 that easily!

20...♔g8



The h8-rook has been temporarily imprisoned, but if Black is given enough time he will manage to sort things out with ...♗f8, soon followed by ...♔g7. Keeping this positional threat in mind, I looked for an alternative to the neutral 21.♗d3.

21.♕g4!

A strong multipurpose move. It clears the e-file for the rook and increases White's control over the h3-c8 diagonal. The dream scenario is that these two elements could lead to a surprise mate with ♗c8 followed by ♖e8. Of course, one would not expect Anand to allow such a simple disaster, but this latent threat forces him to watch his step.

Last but not least, the last move prepares to gain a tempo with ♗h6-f4 in the event of ...♗f8.

21...♕f6?

Anand's desire to drive my bishop back is understandable, but his last move practically loses a tempo.

My main concern when playing 21.♕g4 was to have a good answer to:

21...♗f8



Unfortunately, the tempting 22.♖e6 which apparently puts unbearable pressure on the black kingside is strongly met with the zwischenzug 22...♘e5! when White loses material. This is one of those typical cases when a promising attacking position can be ruined by one careless move.

Rather than falling into this trap, I intended to play:

22.♗f4 h5

Gaining some breathing space for the h8-rook.

23.♕g3 h4 24.♕e3 ♕e7

Defending the d7-square, but this is a temporary solution.

25.♕d2 ♕f6 26.♗d7±

White will regain the pawn and keep a huge lead in development.

Black's best chance was:

21...♘e5 22.♕g3 f6

Visually, this is unappealing, but it does give Black some stability in the centre.



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The premature 23.f4 would leave the h6-bishop trapped, allowing Black to simplify: 23...♘f7 24.♗e6 ♗f8 25.♗xf8 ♖xf8 Followed by ...♔g7.

I would probably have played:

23.♖ad1

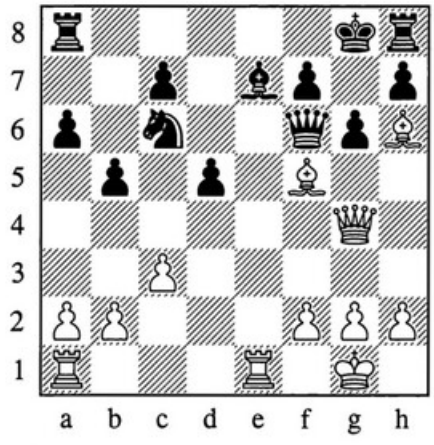
Completing my development and keeping the possibility of meeting

23...♗f8

with

24.♗e3!

Beside his development problems, Black has weaknesses on both the dark and light squares. On White's agenda are moves such as b2-b4 followed by ♗c5 and f2-f4 and soon ♗e6.



22.♗c2!

Psychologically, it was not easy to decide upon this retreating move.

The hyper-aggressive 22.♖e6? fails to the already familiar 22...♘e5!.

22.♗d7 was another tempting step forward, but I decided it was better to keep the d7-square available for my queen.

22...♗f8

This is the best way to fight against my h6-bishop, since 22...♕h4 23.♕d7± looks terrible for Black.

23.♗g5

Starting to gain time by chasing the queen.

23...♕d6 24.♗f4 ♕d8 25.♖ad1±

Finally, I found a good moment to complete my development with this centralizing move.

25...♘a5

A typical manoeuvre for the Open Spanish. Black intends to activate his knight on c4 and also prepares to secure the endangered d5- and c7-pawns with ...c7-c6.

26.h4!

With the knight far away, it is simply logical to provoke new weaknesses on the kingside. With such poor coordination, it is no wonder Anand will not be able to prevent my brutal plan of h4-h5xg6 followed by the sacrifice ♗xg6.

26...c6

If 26...♘c4 I could ignore the queenside counterplay and carry out my kingside plan: 27.h5 ♘xb2 28.hxg6 hxg6



29.♗xg6!

Logical and strong; the bishop demolishes the king's defence.

29...♘xd1

Or 29...fxg6 30.♕e6† ♔h7 31.♖e3 followed by ♖h3†.

30.♗xf7†!

White has sacrificed a large part of her army,

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but the remaining pieces are enough to weave a mating net.

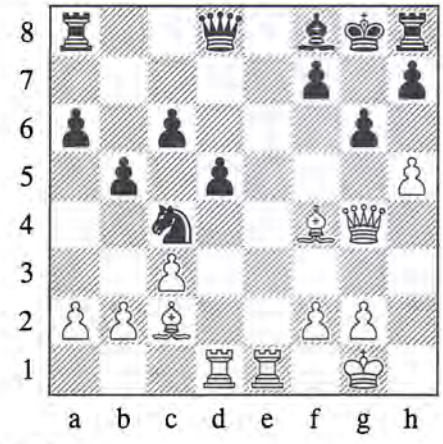
30...♔xf7 31.♕e6† ♔g7 32.♗e5† ♔h7 33.♕f7† ♔h6 34.♗f4† ♕g5 35.♖e6 mate!



A nice mating pattern with the black queen pinned.

In positions such as the one before 29.♗xg6!, when you feel that a forced win is in reach, it is worth investing some time and energy in calculating long lines. You may well not have a second chance to finish off your opponent.

27.h5 ♘c4



28.b3

At this point in the game I got over-enthusiastic and spent only a few minutes on this move. In doing so, I disobeyed the rule mentioned above.

I failed to find a win in the following line:

28.hxg6 hxg6 29.♗xg6 fxg6 30.♕xg6† ♗g7 31.♕e6† ♔f8



At first 32.b3 looked strong, to win the d6-square for my bishop, but then I noticed Black could save himself by returning material with 32...♕f6 so I decided to play b2-b3 before sacrificing.

In fact, White has more than one promising continuation. The simple 32.♕xc6 retains the initiative, but the best move is:

32.♖d3! ♕f6 33.♗d6† ♘xd6 34.♖f3

Since 34...♕xf3 loses material to the zwischenzug 35.♕xd6†, Black has to play:

34...♘e8 35.♖xf6† ♘xf6 36.♕d6†

From a materialistic point of view, Black is well-off, but his poorly coordinated pieces are vulnerable to the hyperactive white queen. Still, it is hard to say if this line is more promising than what was actually played.

The situation is very different after the elegant:

28.♖e6!



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The thematic rook invasion threatens not only tactical fireworks on g6, but also the simple ♖xc6. Black would face unsolvable problems.

Unfortunately, I failed to spot the amusing mate after:

28...fxe6 29.♕xe6† ♔g7 30.h6!#

Nice, but not really difficult...

28...♘d6 29.hxg6 hxg6



30.♗xg6

Finally, the long-awaited attack starts. The basic difference with respect to 28.♖e6 is that Black's knight is closer to the kingside, while the c3-pawn is weak. These elements offer Black some vague hopes of saving the game.

30...fxg6 31.♖e6!

The strongest. If 31.♕xg6† ♗g7 32.♕xd6 ♕xd6 33.♗xd6 ♗xc3 White would only have a better endgame.

31...♖h7

The best practical chance; Black needs to mobilize his pieces somehow.

31...♘e8 fails to adequately defend the king: 32.♖xg6†



Since 32...♘g7 leads to a somewhat surprising mate in two with 33.♕e6† ♔h7 34.♖h6, Black has to play:

32...♗g7 33.♕e6† ♔f8 34.♖xg7!

Eliminating an important defender.

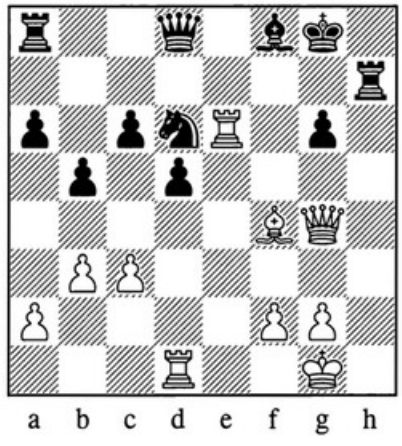
34...♔xg7

If 34...♘xg7 then 35.♗d6† wins the queen.

35.♖d3

With a decisive attack.

The other rook lift would leave the back rank undefended: 31...♖a7 32.♗xd6 ♗xd6 33.♕xg6† ♖g7 34.♖e8† White wins the queen.



32.♗xd6

This is the simplest way. White wins back the sacrificed material, while continuing the attack.

32.♖xg6† should also win. I rejected it after I spotted the following trap: 32...♖g7

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33.♗xd6? ♕xd6! Suddenly, it is Black who wins!

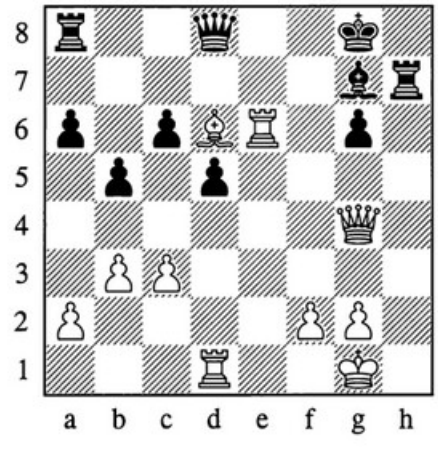
We will see a similar cross pin in the comments to 34...♕d7 below.

32...♗g7

A sad necessity.

If 32...♗xd6 33.♖xg6† the king has no safe place to go. For instance: 33...♔h8 34.♕d4† An elegant centralizing move, forcing mate in three.

After Anand's move, the game becomes calmer for a while. White has strong pressure and objectively there is only one plausible final result, but there is no forced win yet. I knew that I needed to restart building up my attack until it became decisive.



33.♖de1

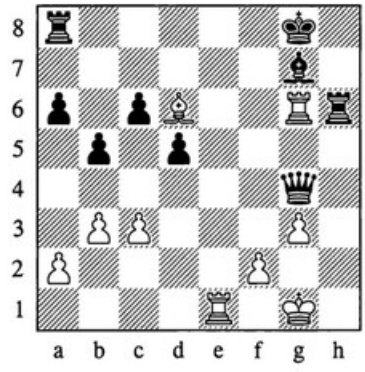
There was nothing wrong with 33.♖xg6, but my move is the most active, bringing in the last forces.

33...♖h6 34.g3?!

But this is overcautious. 34.♗f4! would doom Black's pawns along the sixth rank.

34...♕d7!?

This came as a complete surprise and rather spoiled my mood. The main point is that the g6-pawn is indirectly defended since 35.♖xg6? loses the bishop to 35...♕xg4.



We saw a similar pin in the comment to 32.♗xd6.

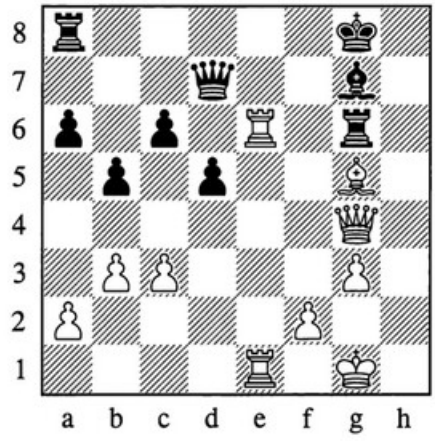
Although Anand's last move does not change the evaluation of the position, it makes White's win more difficult from a practical point of view. I started reproaching myself for not taking the g6-pawn a move or two earlier. This is the wrong attitude while the game is underway and it eventually caused more inaccuracies that needlessly prolonged the game.

35.♗f4 g5

Another good try to complicate things by adding some tension.

36.♗xg5 ♖g6!?

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Another nasty surprise. Dealing with two different pins at the same time is not at all pleasant, even if objectively they are inoffensive.

37.♕f5?!

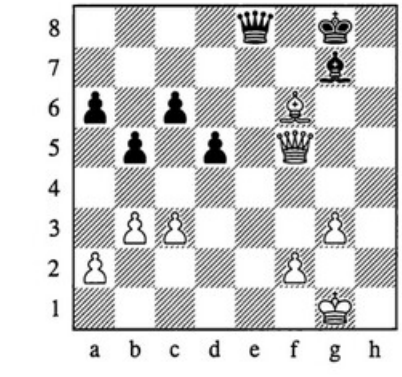
I have the feeling that around this moment I started giving chances to my opponent.

Now I would prefer the consolidating move 37.f4. With his pieces dominated, Black would not be able to take advantage of the airy position of my king.

37...♖xe6 38.♕xe6†?!

Objectively, not the best choice. Since the black king is seriously exposed, I should have kept the queens on the board.

I remember that I felt frustrated when I realized the effects of having let my queen be decoyed to f5. If 38.♖xe6 ♖e8 39.♖xe8† ♕xe8 40.♗f6:



The black bishop is not pinned (as it would be with my queen on g4), so I could not get an easily winning pawn endgame by force.

However, the queen ending is winning as well, although it would require some technical effort.

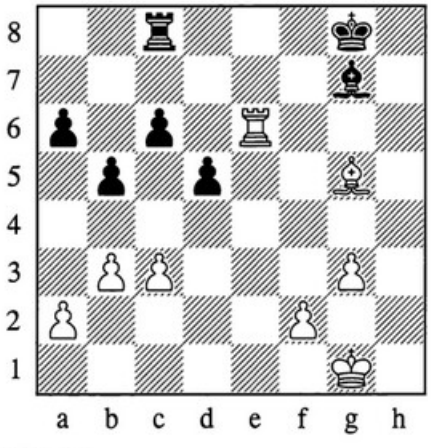
38...♕xe6 39.♖xe6 ♖c8!

Anand starts showing his class. Instead of rushing in, he builds up his queenside counterplay methodically. First, he needs to restrict and kick away my rook.

The following two pseudo-active alternatives would both lead to lost positions:

39...♗xc3?! 40.♖xc6 d4 41.♖d6 followed by ♗f6xd4.

Or 39...c5?! 40.♖d6 controlling the queenside pawn majority and getting ready to advance the kingside pawns.



40.♗d2?!

After this hesitant move, the last before the time control, White will need to work hard for the point.

I remember that I wanted to play safe, but resolute action was called for: 40.f4! (planning to meet 40...♔f7 with 41.f5) 40...♗xc3 41.f5 Material equality has been restored, but White's pawns will run faster.

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40...♔f7!

With the queens gone, the king can take an active part in the fight. This is a radical change in the picture, since for a long time the main question was whether the black king would be mated. Suddenly, Black is back in the game.

I remember my strong disappointment at this point, comparing the current position with that around move 30. Still, I retained some hopes that my extra pawn would tell. And so it did...



41.♖e1 c5!

Now is the right time to advance the pawns.

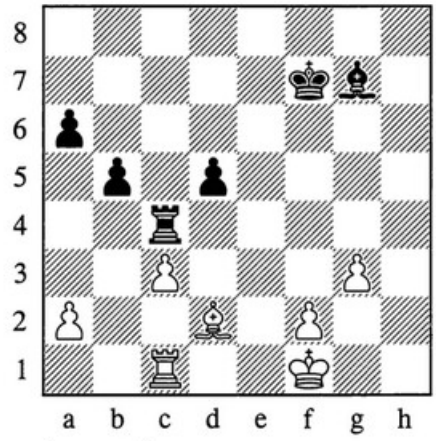
42.♔f1 c4 43.bxc4 ♖xc4

The most logical way to capture, putting my queenside pawns under pressure.

If 43...dxc4, planning ...♖c8-d8-d3, I could play 44.♖e4 followed by ♔e2 and then slowly advance the kingside pawns.

44.♖c1

I remember that the most irritating thing was that, instead of starting some action on the kingside, I had to keep playing defensive moves. The rook has to stay passive until the king reaches d3 and only then could I look for some activity.



44...♔e6 45.♔e2

This is my first move forward in a while, which brought some renewed optimism. Maybe Anand also intuitively felt that things were about to change for the worse, which would explain his nervous answer.

45...d4?

For once, Anand's move came as a pleasant surprise. Why did he help me get rid of my main weakness?

I thought that the best defensive plan was to place the king on f5 and the bishop on e5. The central break could be effective only if my king was on d3. It would not be easy to demonstrate a clear winning plan for White.

46.cxd4 ♗xd4?!

Anand completely misjudged the bishop ending.

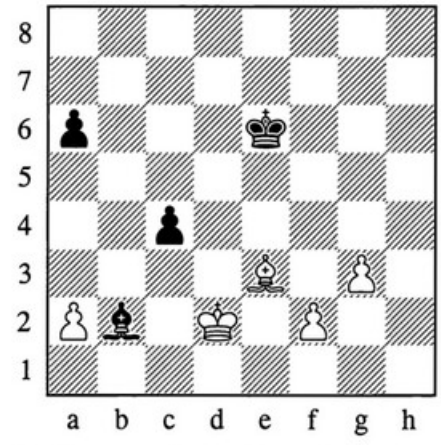
He should have kept the rooks on the board at any cost: 46...♖a4 47.♖c2 ♗xd4



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48.♗c1! A quiet move, taking the a3-square away from the rook and preparing the slow advance of the kingside pawns. White should be winning, but not without technical difficulties.

47.♗e3 ♗b2 48.♖xc4 bxc4 49.♔d2



As the game shows, this ending is easier to win than Anand had thought.

49...♗g7 50.♔c2

The best place for the king. It blocks the enemy pawn and allows me to take control of the long diagonal with ♗d2-c3 whenever needed.

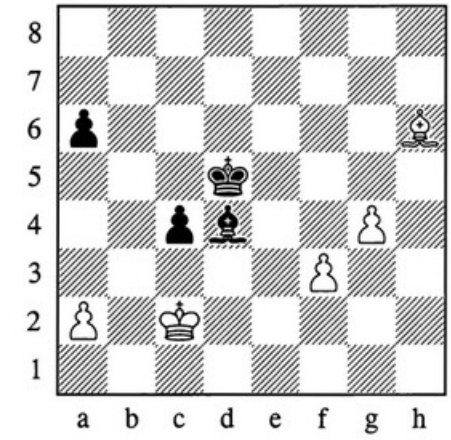
50...♔d5 51.f3!

Keeping an eye on Black's possible counterplay. The king should not be allowed to e4.

51...♗f6 52.♗h6

From this square, the bishop controls the g5- and g7-squares, creating the threat of an unstoppable advance of the g-pawn.

52...♗e5 53.g4 ♗d4

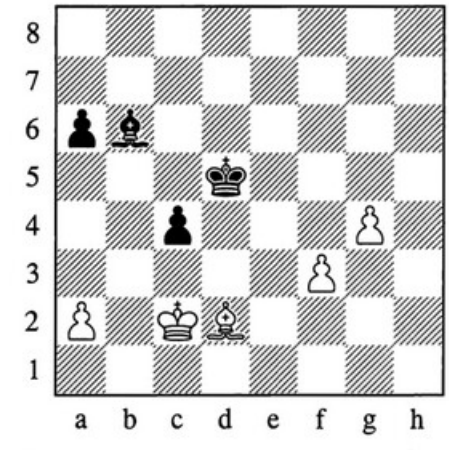


A good defence against 54.g5? which would be answered with 54...♗e3. Anand rightly decides that his king stands well in the centre and should not retreat to the kingside.

54.♗d2

Readjusting my plans. The threat is 55.g5 followed by ♗c3 and the further advance of the g-pawn. For reasons that will become obvious on the next move, 54.♗c1! would have been more precise.

54...♗b6!?

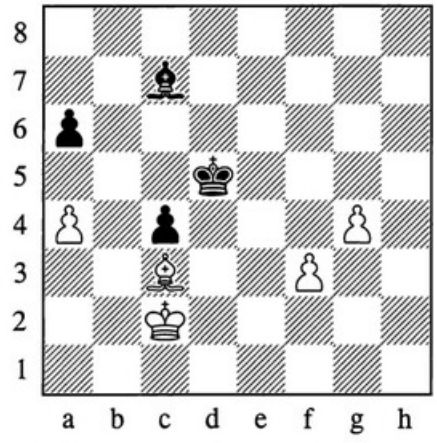


Preparing to meet 55.g5 with 55...♔e6, not fearing 56.♔c3 because of 56...♗a5†. Black would not have had this resource if my bishop had been on c1.

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55.♗c1 ♗a5 56.a4 ♔e5 57.♗g5 ♔d5 58.♗d2 ♗c7 59.♗c3!

After a few hesitant moves, I finally hit on the right regrouping.



59...♗f4

Black could have put up a little more resistance with:

59...♔e6 60.♗h8

Threatening ♔c3.

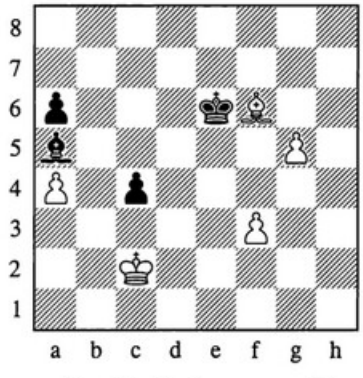
60...♗f4

60...♗a5 allows 61.f4.

61.♔c3 ♔d5 62.♗f6

Threatening g4-g5 and so on.

62...♗c7 63.g5 ♗a5† 64.♔c2 ♔e6



Apparently, Black has everything under control, but White's next move wins a decisive tempo:

65.♗c3! ♗c7 66.g6

With my g-pawn so far advanced, Black's king can no longer return to d5. His bishop will not be able to defend the queenside effectively.

66...♗d6 67.♗d4 ♗b4

The only way to prevent the advance of my king.

68.f4

Followed by f5-f6 with an easy win.

60.♗f6 ♗g3

Planning to meet ♔c3 with ...♗e1†, but the bishop will not be able to cope with the threats on the opposite wings.

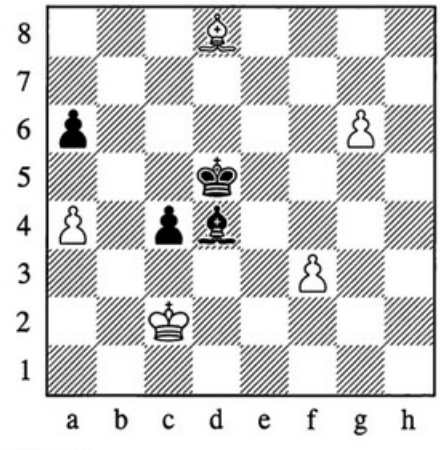
61.g5 ♗h4

This pin is ineffective because the black bishop has no mobility at all along the h4-d8 diagonal.

62.♗d8

Threatening 63.g6 ♗xd8 64.g7.

62...♗f2 63.g6 ♗d4



64.♗a5!

The bishop's return to the long diagonal is decisive.

64...♔e6 65.♗c3

In view of the line 65...♗e3 66.g7 ♔f7 67.♗e5 followed by ♔c3, Black resigned.

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A really hard fought game, in which Anand displayed unexpected defensive resources. It could have ended long before move 40, but a series of inaccuracies forced me to restart the winning process almost from scratch.

Aruba 1991

The year after our Olympiad debut, my family had the chance to meet the world-famous Dutch chess Maecenas Joop van Oosterom.

Joop was impressed by our achievements, but also displayed some curiosity possibly combined with a hint of scepticism: how far could we really go if we had the necessary conditions for study and practice? He decided that there was no better way to find the answer than offering us his generous support.

He started by giving us a laptop as a present. In those days, laptops were big, heavy and quite expensive; only a few chess players used one. Joop also helped us get all the trainers we needed. Later, he even organized tournaments in which we could test our skills or gain invaluable experience. In other words, he became our sponsor.

In March 1991 Joop organized two matches at the same time in his then hometown, Aruba in the Dutch Antilles. Two experienced grandmasters faced the two younger Polgar sisters. Sofia played against Gennady Sosonko and I crossed swords with Lev Polugaevsky.

At 57, Polu had left his best days as a world title Candidate well behind, but he remained one of the world's strongest players. The depth of his opening preparation was famous; in 1991, he did not seem to have lost any of his interest in working hard at home.

These were sufficient reasons for Joop to choose him as my opponent, but maybe there was also a sentimental aspect: when Joop played in the junior World Championship, Polugaevsky was competing, too...

We played in a suite in our hotel, with only about ten chairs for the spectators. These were usually taken by Joop and his friends, plus our parents and on some occasions by local chess lovers.

This was my first ever match, while my opponent had huge experience as a match fighter. When I sat down for the first game, I did not know yet how important this would be in the long run.



At the opening ceremony with Polugaevsky and Sosonko

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Judit Polgar – Lev Polugaevsky

Aruba (1) 1991

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

Polugaevsky was considered one of the world's greatest Sicilian experts, if not *the* greatest. Since I happily played this opening with either colour, I was looking forward to the theoretical dispute with great excitement.

6.f4

In 1991, this was my new weapon against the Najdorf. I had it well worked out and felt very confident with it. It would have been unwise, of course, to challenge Polu in the variation that bears his name: 6.♗g5 e6 7.f4 b5

6...e6

The other important line is 6...e5 7.♘f3, which leads to completely different types of position. Black gains some space in the centre, but weakens the d5-square.

Prior to our match, Polugaevsky had used several setups with Black, but the transposition to a Scheveningen with the game move was clearly his favourite.

7.♗d3

A flexible move, not disclosing my intentions yet. In most cases, I would choose the same plan as in the game, but after 7...♘c6 I would deviate with 8.♘f3.

The most popular move is 7.♕f3, preventing 7...b5. The main line goes 7...♕b6 8.♘b3. After having forced the knight to retreat to a relatively passive square, the queen will gladly "lose a tempo" with ...♕c7 in order to allow the standard queenside attack.

Since my move does not put immediate pressure on Black, he has a relatively wide choice. Any normal developing move deserves attention.

7...b5

The most active continuation. Black starts his queenside attack without defining the position of his pieces yet. It may seem strange that he has moved almost only his pawns, but this is not really uncommon in the Sicilian. It is also what one would expect from the "godfather" of the aforementioned Polugaevsky variation.



After 4...♘f6

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From the alternatives, I will only mention 7...♕b6!? when Black does not threaten ...♕xd4 in view of ♗b5†, but White cannot castle. Since the pawn sacrifice 8.♗e3 ♕xb2 9.♘a4 ♕b4† 10.c3 ♕a5 does not seem to offer an advantage, White would probably have to retreat the knight anyway.

8.♕f3

If we compare the opening phase with my game against Tolnai (page 240) we can see that I was ready to play this kind of sharp position with either colour.

8...♗b7



9.g4

This aggressive line was then almost unexplored territory. True, it was part of Anand's repertoire, but only when his rating was around 2400.

The slower 9.♗e3 allows Black to regroup properly with his knights: 9...♘bd7 10.g4 ♘c5 11.g5 ♘fd7 In fact, this tabiya is usually reached from the move order 6.♗e3 e6 7.f4 b5 8.♕f3 ♗b7 9.♗d3 ♘bd7 and so on.

9...♘c6

Apart from suiting my style, this variation had the psychological merit of taking Polu out of his known variations, which can be inferred from the 20 minutes he spent on this move.

In the fifth and seventh games he deviated with 9...♘fd7 followed by ...♘c5 and ...♘8d7, regrouping as in the variation mentioned above.

10.♘xc6

Vishy's choice of 10.♗e3, maintaining the tension, is better.

10...♗xc6



11.a3?!

Losing a tempo. I refrained from the natural 11.♗e3 as I overestimated the force of 11...b4 12.♘e2 d5. In fact, White keeps control with 13.e5:



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Then 13...♘e4 14.0–0–0 followed by ♘e2-d4 and f4-f5 is simply good for White, but I was afraid of 13...♘xg4 14.♕xg4 d4. However, White gets tremendous compensation for the exchange with 15.♘xd4 ♗xh1 16.0–0–0.

11...♗e7

Not the only good move. Since I had no control of the d4-square yet, transposing to a French-type structure would be a worthy alternative: 11...d5 12.e5 ♘d7 13.♗e3 ♗c5



We can see that White is slightly behind in the fight for the blockade and has to permanently watch out for the thematic ...d5-d4. 14.♗xc5 ♘xc5 15.♘e2 ♕b6 For instance, if 16.♘d4 ♘a4 and White cannot maintain stability on the dark squares.

12.♗e3 ♘d7 13.0–0–0



13...♕c7?!

Black also plays a bit too slowly. Maybe Polu was considering ...♘d7-c5 and wanted to avoid the trick ♗xc5 ...dxc5, ♗xb5.

With my queenside weakened, he should have started his attack at once: 13...♖b8!? 14.g5 b4 (14...a5 is also worth considering) 15.axb4 ♖xb4 Followed by ...♕a5 with strong counterplay.

14.h4?!

I cannot remember why I preferred this way of advancing my pawns over the more natural 14.g5. Apart from later transposing to the game with h4-h5, I could use the h-file with ♕h3, pinning the h-pawn and putting pressure on e6. This would create the strong threat of g5-g6. Castling would not solve the problem because of ♘d5! ...exd5, exd5, hitting h7 and c6.

However, the main reason to criticize my last move is that I missed the strong:
14.♗d4!



The main point is that the natural:
14...0–0?!
allows a thematic combination:
15.♘d5! exd5
If 15...♕d8, White can simply take the bishop pair, but there is an even stronger move: 16.♖he1! Keeping up the pressure and completing development.

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16.exd5 ♗b7 17.♕e4

This double attack wins back the sacrificed piece, with positional interest. In this line, we can notice some negative aspects of the black queen's premature development.

Instead of castling, Black could try 14...e5, but this would weaken the d5-square. I could choose between 15.♗e3 and 15.fxe5.

14...♕b7

Once again, preparing ...b5-b4 with the help of the rook would be stronger: 14...♖b8! The queen would go to b7 only after ...b4, axb4 ...♖xb4, increasing the pressure against the e4- and b2-pawns to the maximum.

We have only reached move 14 and I have pointed out several inaccuracies from both sides already. This is not really surprising in the Sicilian. What makes this opening so interesting for both sides is that one has to make intuitive choices on virtually each step. There are at least three or four major plans available and evaluating their merits is almost impossible by concrete calculation.

Under these circumstances, mutual mistakes are likely to pop up and the winner usually is he (or she) who makes the penultimate mistake. This game will be no exception.



15.♗d4

It appears that Polu's last move came as a complete surprise, since I only answered after 16 minutes. The sequence h2-h4 followed by ♗e3-d4 does not seem to make much sense, but by now I seem to have understood that my attack would work better if Black castled.

15...0–0

Polu rightly refrains from the hurried:

15...b4

which would takes unnecessary risks.

16.axb4 ♕xb4 17.♗xg7 ♖g8



The bishop is almost trapped. If White had to play 18.♗h6, Black would obtain a decisive attack with 18...♖b8 followed by ...♗f6 and ...♘c5. However, the black king's presence in the centre creates the conditions for a thematic Sicilian sacrifice.

18.♘d5! exd5 19.exd5

White has two pawns for the piece and a strong initiative.

19...♖xg7

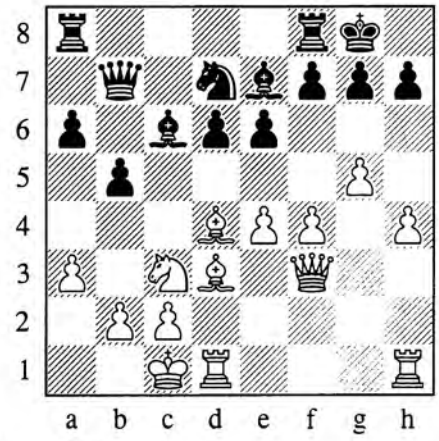
Otherwise, White would gain a tempo for the attack with 20.♗c3 followed by ♖he1.

20.dxc6 ♘c5 21.♗f5

White has full compensation for the piece, but the real fight is ahead. The first wrong step could cost either side dearly.

16.g5

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16...♖fe8!?

This is one of Polu's favourite prophylactic moves in the Sicilian. Black clears the f8-square for his minor pieces, in order to consolidate the kingside, and he also prepares counterplay along the e-file in case of f4-f5.

I do not think that he seriously considered:

16...f5?

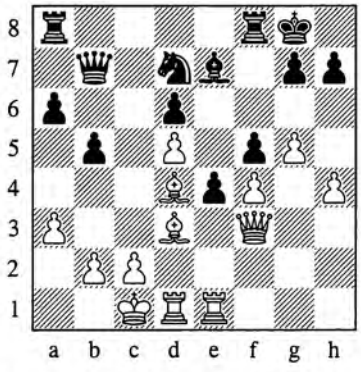
Black unexpectedly strikes on the wing where he is supposed to be on the defensive.

The tactical refutation is quite nice:

17.♖he1 e5

Otherwise it would be hard to justify the previous move.

18.♘d5 ♗xd5 19.exd5 e4



The pawn chain does not offer Black a reliable shelter against White's well mobilized army.

20.♖xe4!

Since 20...fxe4 21.♕xe4 followed by ♕xe7 offers White more than enough compensation for the exchange, Black may consider:

20...♕xd5?

This would give me the chance to use a combinative pattern that has been one of my favourites since early childhood.



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21.♖xe7!! ♕xf3 22.♖xg7† ♔h8 23.♖xd7† ♔g8 24.♖g7† ♔h8 25.♖g6† ♖f6 26.♗xf6 mate!

Of course, one could not expect Polu to be caught in such a way.

However, I did not understand why he rejected the active 16...b4! 17.axb4 ♕xb4. I intended 18.♘e2, but after 18...♘c5 followed by ...♖b8 Black has great play.

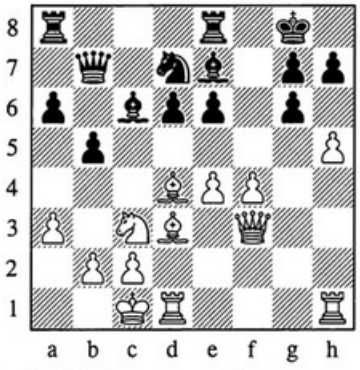
After being offered a tempo so generously, I now had to choose between three different ways of starting my own attack.



17.h5

The natural continuation, preparing g5-g6.

In many cases, reversing the move order speeds up White's attack, but 17.g6?! fxg6 18.h5 gives up control of the f6-square too early, allowing Black to consolidate his kingside.



18...♗f6! Exchanging an important attacking piece. 19.♗xf6 ♘xf6 20.hxg6 h6 After the exchange of bishops, Black's kingside is very stable, while the queenside counterattack is ready to start.

I rejected 17.f5 because it leaves the e5-square in Black's hands. Now I would probably choose precisely this move, because it creates two potential threats at the same time: g5-g6 and f5-f6.

17...b4

Finally, we get direct pawn contact. Acting quickly is essential in positions with opposite-side castling and Black obviously is ahead from this point of view.

18.axb4 ♕xb4 19.♘e2

A multipurpose move. Apart from defending the bishop, White clears the c3-square for it and over-defends the b2-pawn. As for the knight, it may later jump to d4 or g3, getting closer to the enemy king.

19...♘c5

Increasing the pressure against my e4-pawn and making sure that Black can exchange the potentially dangerous d3-bishop at any time.

20.g6

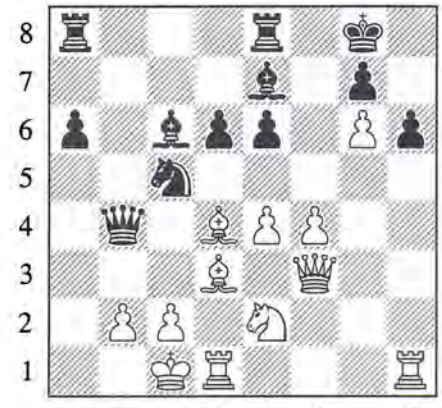
White cannot do without this, so I played it after only two minutes.

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20...fxg6 21.hxg6 h6

The most common reaction to White's pawn attack. Black has managed to keep the kingside closed, but now has to watch out for tactical blows such as ♗xg7 or ♖xh6.

Once again, I had to choose between several apparently equivalent continuations.



22.♖dg1?

I considered this a consistent move, concentrating all my pieces on the kingside before starting the sacrificial attack. Indeed, a neutral move such as 22...a5 would be met with 23.♖xh6 gxh6 24.♕h3, when the part played by the g1-rook is revealed after 24...♗f8 25.g7! ♗xg7 26.♕xh6.

However, in the Sicilian with opposite-side castling, one can rarely afford the luxury of preparing the attack in such a slow manner. Polu's accurate answer illustrates this perfectly.

Immediately after the game, Polu suggested:

22.♗c3

Against any queen retreat, White would play 23.♘g3, followed by either ♗xg7 or ♖xh6, with a promising attack.

I rejected this because of the zwischenzug:

22...♗xe4?

Recent analysis proved that I had stopped too soon:

23.♕h3!

Bringing the queen into an attacking position.

23...♕b7 24.♗xe4 ♕xe4 25.♗xg7



With a decisive attack.

However, Black has a powerful antidote to Polu's move:

22...♘xd3†!

Now is the right moment to eliminate the bishop! In order to defend the e4-pawn White has to weaken the king's position.

23.cxd3

At a later moment, ...♘xd3† could have been answered with either ♖xd3 or ♕xd3, keeping the attacking chances intact.

23...♕b7

Preparing to defend along the seventh rank if necessary.

24.♘g3



It may seem that White's attack is proceeding

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at full speed. The threats ♗xg7 and ♖xh6 are in the air, but Black's counterplay is faster:

24...♗a4!

Followed by ...♖ac8 soon. White's king appears to be more vulnerable than Black's.

The strongest move is:

22.♕h5!

Threatening ♗xg7. In the event of careful play by Black, it leads only to equality, but even so this is an achievement. I have mentioned already that things have not gone White's way so far.



22...♘xd3†

If 22...♗f8 White can complicate matters with: 23.♗xc5 dxc5 24.♕e5 c4 25.♕c7!

23.♖xd3 e5

Black has neutralized the threats, and is ready to grab the e4-pawn, but his queen cannot escape a perpetual pursuit:

24.♖b3 ♕c4

24...♕a5?! pins the e5-pawn, giving White a tempo to consolidate: 25.♘c3!±

25.♖c3 ♕a4 26.♖a3 ♕b5 27.♖b3

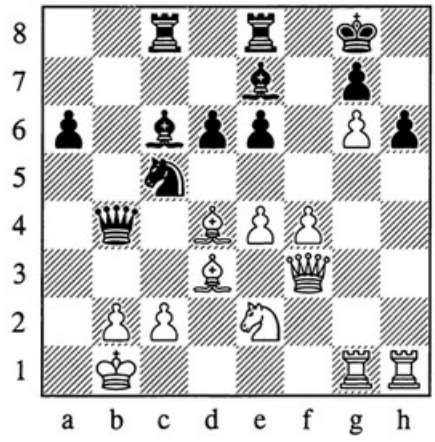
With a draw.

22...♖ac8!

A brilliant move, combining indirect defence with counterattack. Polu played it after only five minutes, but he had to play quickly: he now had only 20 minutes left to reach move 40.

There are several reasons why the white king feels uncomfortable in opposition with the enemy rook, but the strongest threat is 23...♘b3!† 24.cxb3 ♗xe4† winning the queen.

23.♔b1



Logical and even necessary, but insufficient.

23...♘xd3?!

This thematic move, which was played instantly, has only one drawback: there is something even better!

After the far from obvious 23...♗f6!! White is in big trouble.

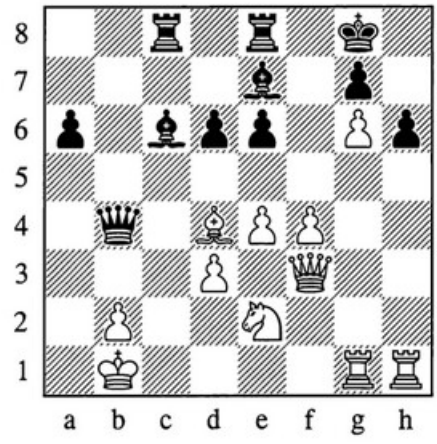


The point is that 24.♗xf6? loses to the zwischenzug 24...♘xe4! threatening a fork on d2. We can note here that the generally useful ♔c1-b1 was not without drawbacks.

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White's best chance is 24.♕e3 ♗xd4 25.♕xd4. Unfortunately, this means giving up any attacking chances; Black can start attacking my weaknesses with 25...♖b8∓.

24.cxd3



24...♕b3?!

This move came as a complete surprise. Its idea is quite original: Black threatens 25...♕c2!† 26.♔xc2 ♗xe4!† winning a pawn and exchanging queens.

I was mainly worried by the objectively better:
24...♗a4! 25.♗c3 ♕b6

With excellent play for Black. Unfortunately,
26.♖xh6?

does not work for hidden reasons:
26...gxh6 27.♕h3



The threats of ♕xe6† and ♕xh6 seem decisive, but Black can defend both pawns with:
27...♗h4!!

The point is that 28.♕xh4 ♖xc3–+ leaves the e2-knight overloaded.

In such complicated games, experienced players have a special feeling about the moments when it is worth having a long think. Polu might have known that the position after my 24th move was just such a moment, but he could not afford to have a proper think because he had little time left to reach move 40.

This is why opening surprises are important. If the opponent spends time and energy in the early phase of the game, he might be left short of both in the late middlegame.

25.♗c3?

Missing my chance.

We both considered 25.♗xg7! to be impossible because of:
25...♕c2†? 26.♔xc2 ♗xe4†



We had both missed:
27.♗c3!

Blocking the check and removing the bishop from the attacked square.
27...♗xf3 28.♖xh6 e5 29.♘g3

With a decisive attack, despite the exchange of queens.

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If 25...♔xg7? the simplest win is 26.♘d4 ♕b7 27.♖xh6! completely destroying the king's shelter.

Black's only defence is not easy to find over the board:
25...e5!



Black restricts the knight and clears the a2-g8 diagonal, allowing the queen's participation in the defence if needed. White's attack is only enough for a draw:
26.♖xh6 ♖b8 27.♖h8† ♔xg7 28.♖h7† ♔g8 29.♖h8† ♔xh8 30.♕h5† ♔g7 31.♕h7† ♔f6 32.♕h4† ♔g7 33.♕h7†
The king cannot escape the perpetual.

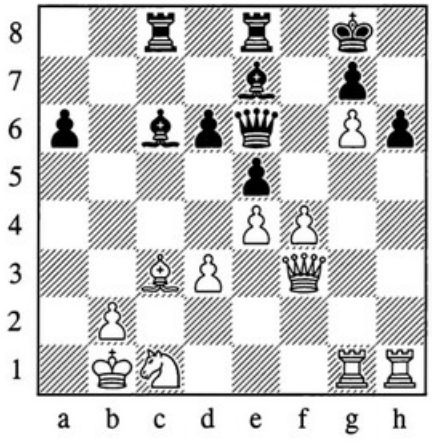


25...e5!
A great move, restricting my minor pieces.

26.♘c1
A good defensive move, practically neutralizing Black's attack. Instead 26.fxe5 dxe5 27.♗xe5 allows the familiar 27...♕c2†! with favourable simplifications for Black.

26...♕e6
An accurate move: Black needs to defend the f7-square.

If 26...♕b5?! I planned 27.fxe5, but 27.♖xh6! is even stronger: 27...gxh6 28.fxe5 ♖f8 29.♕h3 With the deadly threats of ♕e6† and ♕xh6.



27.♕e3
After a short phase in which I had been worried about my king, I now became optimistic again, since the main events are likely to take place in the neighbourhood of the enemy king. Besides, Polu had only 12 minutes left for the remaining 14 moves.
My last move was not the best objectively, but proved an inspired practical decision since Polu went wrong immediately afterwards.

27.f5?! ♕d7 followed by ...♗f6 and ...d6-d5 would hand the initiative to Black.

In principle, Black has an excellent position, so it made sense to grab a pawn at least: 27.fxe5 dxe5 28.♗xe5 (I did not like 28.♕f7† ♕xf7

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29.gxf7† ♔xf7 30.♗xe5 ♗g5! when Black's bishops are very strong) 28...♖f8 With, at the very least, good compensation for the pawn.



27...♗f8?!

Polu played this overcautious move, over-defending the h6-pawn, after two minutes. Being short of time, he did not anticipate the part played by the f6-square.

After the more active 27...♗f6! I would have had to accept that my attack was only an illusion.

28.f5

I had anticipated the bishop manoeuvre, so I played this instantly. 28.♖h5 was a promising alternative, maintaining the tension in the centre.

28...♕f6

The queen is known to be a bad blockading piece, but Polu might have thought that this position was an exception.

28...♕d7? would allow a decisive attack with 29.f6 gxf6 30.g7.

29.♗e1!

Threatening to unblock the kingside with ♗h4. The reader may note some similarity with ♗d3-f1 from my game against Hübner (page 90).

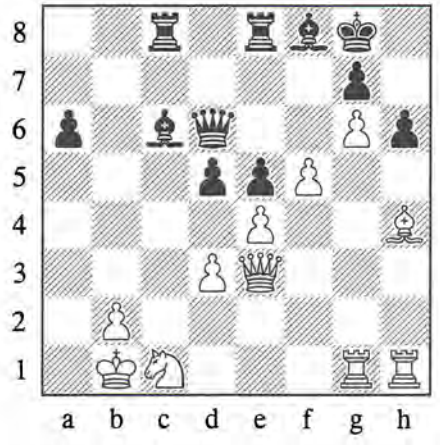
This move must have come as a cold shower for my experienced opponent. He probably thought that his central pawns would protect the queen quite well, overlooking that the h4-d8 diagonal is undefended.

29...d5?

This looks like premature panic.

He had not lost the fight for the f6-square yet. 29...♗e7 would have kept Black in the game. Polu might have overlooked that apart from activating the bishop, this move also clears the f8-square for the queen. 30.♗h4 ♕f8 31.♗xe7 ♕xe7 32.♘a2 Threatening to stabilize the centre with ♘a2-c3. 32...d5 33.♖c1 With chances for both sides.

30.♗h4 ♕d6



31.f6!

After this thematic breakthrough, nothing can save Black.

31...♖e6

If 31...gxf6 then 32.g7 ♗xg7 33.♕xh6 with a winning attack.

32.f7† ♔h8 33.♕g3

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Before playing this, I foresaw the following sequence until the very end.

33...♗a4



Black's counterplay arrives much too late.

34.♗f6!

An elegant move, threatening 35.♖xh6 mate. Since 34...♖xf6 loses to 35.♖xh6† anyway, Polu tried his last chance.

34...♖xc1†

Deflecting the rook from the g-file, but only temporarily.

35.♖xc1 ♖xf6



36.♖cg1!

My advantage on the kingside is so strong that I can afford to simply renew the threat of ♖xh6!†. Quite a different situation compared to 22.♖dg1?.

If 36.♖c8? ♖xg6 37.♖xf8† ♔h7 and I cannot find a win.

36...♖f1†

Another deflecting move, but Black is giving away too much material.

37.♖xf1 dxe4



38.♖fg1!

For the third time the rook occupies this attacking position, forcing Black to exchange queens.

38...♕xd3† 39.♕xd3 exd3 40.♖e1

Threatening ♖xe5 followed by ♖e8.

40...♗c2† 41.♔c1

1–0

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Too many mistakes, the reader may complain. That is true, but this only shows that the position was enormously complicated. Even today, I am proud of having won against such an outstanding Sicilian expert as Polugaevsky.

Polu's match experience started to tell immediately after this game was over. While I was sharing my happiness with my family, the ever-enthusiastic Joop and other local fans, Polu quietly retreated to his room where he worked out new ideas for Black and readjusted his match strategy according to the feedback offered by the first game.

It was not until my 1998 match with Karpov that I learned how to avoid spoiling my chances in a match by letting myself be carried away by excitement after a beautiful (or important) win. But more about that in the second volume.

Polu won the second game with the white pieces and later the match, by a score of 5–3. I could not complain too much about the result, since my opponent started as the clear favourite. The match offered me a unique and invaluable experience, which probably was Joop's intention in the first place.



With Joop, who gave us many happy memories

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Joop wishing me luck before one of the games

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Chapter 15

Amsterdam 1989 OHRA Tournament Diary



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My long string of good results in 1988 and the corresponding steep rise in my rating did not remain unnoticed in the chess world. The most notable reaction was an invitation to a high-class tournament, the Crown group of the Amsterdam OHRA tournament.

Despite being flattered, my father handled the situation very wisely. Years earlier, Susan had played in a few tournaments that proved a bit too strong for her and the disappointment caused by the results had a negative, though short-term, impact on her career.

Therefore, my father kindly asked the organizers to invite me to the Reserve group (the organizers' name for the B-group), in which he thought I had better chances of getting a good result. As we will see, he could not have been more right.

This was my first ever visit to Holland. My mom joined me, while the rest of my family stayed at home. I could say that there was a negative side to my new rating, since starting from 1989 I received more and more invitations just for myself, and there were fewer occasions when the whole family could travel together.

My mom does not really play chess (she barely knows the rules), but her moral support was essential throughout the tournament. During the games she sat in the audience, knitting or reading. She knew my typical ways of reacting to the situation on the board, so she could figure out what was happening in the game from my body language. Still, she sometimes had to ask those around her for more detailed information.

I felt more confident if my mother sat where I could see her. Therefore, she always tried to get a place in the front row. As the tournament progressed and the public became more and more interested in my games, some of the spectators who arrived early kindly reserved the best place for her.

The Reserve group was limited to 24 participants, who crossed swords over nine rounds, using a Swiss system. A "closed open" we could say. One week before the start, the organizers decided to invite Azmaiparashvili. Since the number of participants had to be even, they also added a Dutch player, my first round opponent, Hans Ree.

In his best days, Ree had been one of Holland's strongest players. At the time we sat down for our game, he was rated almost 100 points lower than me, but that did not really mean anything. I was so young and had gained so many rating points in such a short period that my real strength remained a guess, not only to the public, but also to myself.

Ree is reported to have displayed his confidence and wit before the game by stating: "In case I get the option to take a pawn en passant, I think I will not do so, even if it is good for me. I guess she is too young yet to know that rule!"

Scheveningen Sicilian

Judit Polgar – Hans Ree

Amsterdam 1989

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 d6

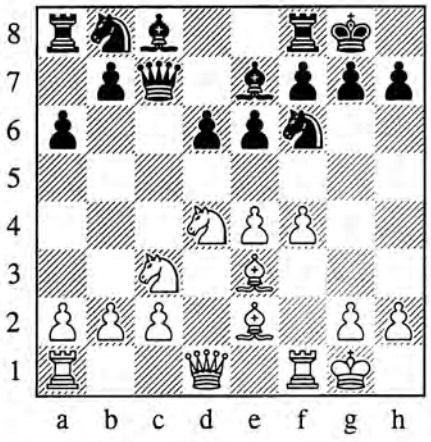
Nowadays, this move order is considered dangerous because of 6.g4 (the Keres Attack). Black usually prefers to reach the Scheveningen variation via Paulsen or Najdorf move orders. As mentioned in the notes to my game against Xie Jun (page 157), g2-g4 and ...g7-g5 were sort of my trademark moves, but usually not at such an early stage of the opening. In this game, I will advance my g-pawn only after a few more developing moves.

6.♗e2

I have commented on the variation introduced by this apparently modest move in the notes to my game against Gutman, page 252.

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6...♗e7 7.0–0 0–0 8.♗e3 a6 9.f4 ♕c7



10.g4!?

Finally!

Prior to my game, this resolute attack had been seen quite rarely, but White had obtained outstanding results with it. Among the major upsets caused by 10.g4, the defeats of World Champions Tigran Petrosian and Boris Spassky are worth mentioning.

White usually plays g4 only after laborious preparation, for instance: 10.a4 ♘c6 11.♔h1 ♗d7 12.♘b3 b6 13.♗f3 ♖ab8



And only now 14.g4.

10...♖e8!?

This is a useful and flexible move, clearing the f8-square for either the bishop or the knight, preparing to consolidate e6 and eventually to react with ...e5. Its only drawback is that it delays the development of the queenside. I assume that Ree chose it because he wanted to avoid the preparation of his baby-opponent. There is nothing wrong with the last move, though; the mistake arrived a few moves later.

Black has several other ways to react to the unexpected attack, but not all of them are sound.



Before 10.g4

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10...h6?! contradicts the rule "Do not move pawns on the wing where you are weaker" and is strongly met with 11.g5 followed soon by g5-g6, as in Jansa – Kinnmark, Gothenburg 1968. Looking back, it is kind of funny to see that in 1989 I based my preparation on a game played more than two decades earlier!

White has to take into account the central break 10...d5!? whenever playing g2-g4 in such positions. I relied on the following game: 11.exd5 ♘xd5 12.♘xd5 exd5 13.♗f3± White had consolidated his space advantage in Sax – Eising, 1972; not a very recent game either!

The most natural developing move is 10...♘c6 and this was the World Champions' choice in the aforementioned games. White played 11.g5 followed by f4-f5 in both cases.

Shatashvili – Petrosian, Tbilisi 1945, went: 11...♘e8?! 12.f5 ♘e5 13.♗g4 ♘xg4 14.♕xg4 ♕c4 15.f6 ♗d8 16.♕h4 g6 17.♕h6 e5 18.♘d5 1–0

In Kholmov – Spassky, Moscow 1964, Black retreated his knight to a better square: 11...♘d7 12.f5 ♘de5 13.f6 ♗d8 14.fxg7 ♖e8 15.♕d2 b5 16.♗h5 ♘e7 17.b3 ♘7g6 18.a4 bxa4 19.♖xa4 ♗b7 20.♘f3 ♕e7 21.♘xe5 dxe5 22.♖c4 ♔xg7 23.♘a4 ♔g8 24.♗xg6 hxg6 25.♕c3 ♗d5 26.exd5 exd5 27.♖c6 ♕d7 28.♗f2 ♗a5 29.♖xg6† fxg6 30.♕xa5 ♖f8 31.♘c3 ♕g4† 32.♗g3 ♕d4† 33.♖f2 ♖ac8 34.♕xd5† ♕xd5 35.♘xd5 ♖xf2 36.♔xf2 ♖xc2† 37.♔e3 ♔f7 38.♔d3 ♖c5 39.♘e3 ♔e6 40.h4 ♖b5 41.♔c4 ♖a5 42.♔c3 ♖c5† 43.♘c4 e4 44.♗f2 ♖d5 45.♗d4 ♖f5 46.♘e3 ♖f7 47.♔b4 ♖b7† 48.♔a4 ♖d7 49.♗c5 ♖d2 50.♔a5 ♖a2† 51.♔b6 ♔e5 52.b4 ♔f4 53.♘d5† ♔f3 54.♔a7 ♖d2 55.♘e3 ♖a2 56.h5 a5 57.b5 1–0

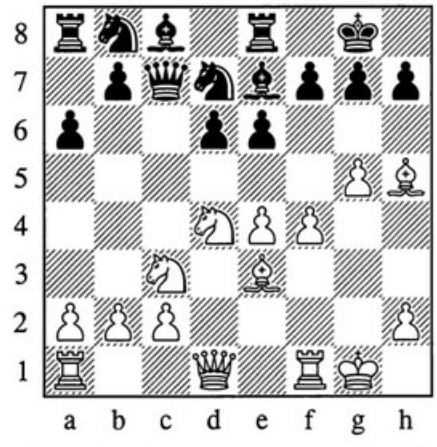
11.g5 ♘fd7



Black's flexibility has not been affected in any way, and he intends to continue developing with ...♘c6 or ...b5 followed by ...♗b7.

I was out of my preparation, but I knew that I needed to increase the force of my attack with some active moves. After nine minutes, I came up with:

12.♗h5!



I immediately put pressure on the f7- and e6-squares, which had been slightly weakened by Black's last two moves. Apart from ♘d4xe6, there is the more complex threat of ♗xf7† ...♔xf7, ♘xe6 with a strong attack.

The slightly unusual developing of the bishop to h5 was seen in the following famous game:

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Keres – Kotov, Candidates Tournament, Budapest 1950:



Black is slightly behind in development, which induced Keres to play:

9.♗h5!?

Threatening ♘xe6. Kotov should have played ...g6 with or without ...♘xh5 in between, but he preferred to avoid weakening moves and defended e6 with:

9...♕c4?



The game went:

10.♘xe6! ♕xe6 11.♘d5!

With a crushing attack for White, who won quickly:

11...♔d8 12.♗g4 ♕e5 13.f4 ♕xe4 14.♗xd7 ♗xd7 15.♘xf6 gxf6 16.♗xf6† ♔c7 17.♗xh8 ♗c6 18.♕d2 ♗h6 19.♖ae1 ♕g6 20.♖e7† ♔d8 21.♖fe1 a5 22.♗d4 ♖a6 23.♕f2 ♗f8 24.♗b6† ♔c8 25.♖e8† ♗xe8 26.♖xe8† ♔d7 27.♖xf8 1–0

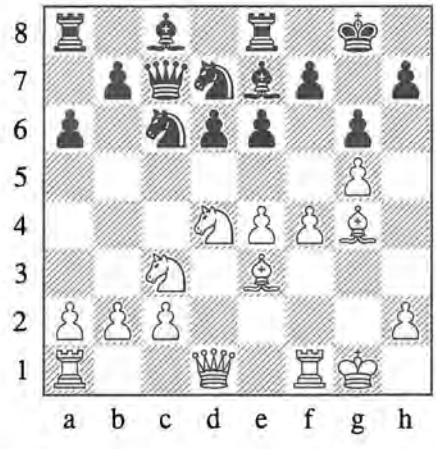
Ree did not repeat Kotov's mistake, and instead decided to cover the h5-e8 diagonal at the cost of slightly weakening the dark squares.

12...g6 13.♗g4! ♘c6?

The decisive mistake, played almost without thinking. Black tries to catch up in development at the least advisable moment, ignoring the tactical threats on the light squares or perhaps simply underestimating his opponent.

It was essential to over-defend the e6-pawn with 13...♗f8, which also prepares to reactivate the bishop with ...♗g7. This is precisely how Polugaevsky reacted against me two years later, in Aruba. I played 14.a4 but did not achieve anything.

Later the theoretical discussion continued with 14.f5 in Shirov – Anand, Buenos Aires 1994, ending in a nice attacking win for White: 14...♘e5 15.fxe6 fxe6 16.♖f6 ♘xg4 17.♕xg4 ♘c6 18.♘xc6 bxc6 19.e5 d5 20.♖af1 ♗g7 21.♗c5 ♕xe5 22.♖f7 ♖b8 23.♕f3 ♕xg5† 24.♔h1 ♕d8 25.♖xg7† ♔xg7 26.♕f7† ♔h8 27.♗d6 e5 28.♗xb8 ♗f5 29.♗c7 ♕e7 30.♕xe7 ♖xe7 31.♗d8 ♖e6 32.♖e1 ♔g8 33.♗c7 d4 34.♘e4 c5 35.♔g2 c4 36.♔f3 ♖e7 37.♗d6 ♖e6 38.♗c7 h6 39.c3 g5 40.♘g3 e4† 41.♔g2 dxc3 42.bxc3 ♗g6 43.♖d1 ♖e7 44.♖d6 ♔f7 45.♗d8 ♖e8 46.♗b6 e3 47.♖d7† 1–0



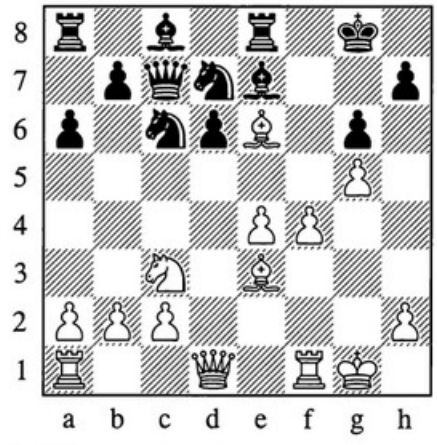
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14.♘xe6!

This sacrifice and the whole attacking sequence is rather natural, and I assume that I spent most of the eight minutes I used before playing it just calming myself down.

14...fxe6 15.♗xe6†

The point of provoking ...g6 is clear now: the king has no adequate way of hiding from my bishops.



15...♔h8

What else? The only way to avoid the nasty check ♗d4 is 15...♔f8, but after 16.f5 the king would face a decisive attack along the f-file.

16.♘d5

It is interesting that even though ♗d4† was essential for my attack, I had the patience to prepare it by activating my position to the maximum with gain of time.

By now, my opponent understood that he was in big trouble, and he took 15 minutes before answering. Unfortunately for him, there is no adequate defence.

16...♕b8

Other moves do not change anything significantly.

16...♕d8 would offer me some additional tactical ideas such as 17.♗d4† ♘de5 18.♗b6, trapping the queen.

Against 16...♕a5 I planned 17.b4 ♕b5 18.♘c7, but 17.♗f7 is just as strong as in the game.



17.♗f7!

I spent 17 minutes on this move, my longest think in the game.

I had initially relied on 17.♗d4†, but then was not entirely satisfied by the variation: 17...♘de5 18.♗xc8 ♕xc8 19.fxe5 dxe5 20.♗e3±



True, I am a pawn up and have a dominating position, but there is no immediate win. Although I managed to find an improvement, it is worth mentioning that this line had served me well as a "safety net" when deciding

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upon 14.♘xe6!.

The main merit of my last move is that it avoids exchanging the bishop, which will remain a dangerous attacking piece.



17...♖f8

17...♖d8 would leave the rook hanging after 18.♘xe7 ♘xe7 19.♗d4† ♘e5 20.fxe5 dxe5, allowing the discovered attack 21.♗xe5†.

18.♗d4†

After just one minute, I found no reason to delay this check any longer. I start regaining material, while retaining my attack and lead in development.

18...♘de5 19.♘xe7 ♘xe7 20.fxe5 dxe5 21.♗c5



Black has lost a pawn and his underdeveloped army is vulnerable. He cannot avoid further material losses.

21...♔g7

The more natural 21...♕c7 is met with 22.♕d6! ♕xd6 23.♗xd6 when Black has to give up tons of material in order to avoid ♗xe5 mate.

22.♗xe7 ♕a7†

A spite check. Instead there are many wins available after 22...♖xf7 but I may have chosen the following line: 23.♗f6† ♔g8 24.♕d8† ♖f8 25.♕d5† ♖f7 26.♗e7 with a decisive pin.

23.♔h1 ♗h3

Finally completing his development, but it is much too late.

24.♕f3

I had the feeling that my opponent resigned with great pain; he probably did not expect such a result against a 13-year-old girl!

1–0

Some of his fellow grandmasters and journalists teased Ree for his defeat. Being a chess writer himself, he made the self-mocking comment: "When I start to lose to young girls, maybe it is a sign that I should stop playing!"

When I sat down for this game, I had little idea about the great Dutch tradition regarding best game prizes. I was pleasantly surprised when the next day, just before the games started, it was announced that: "The daily prize of 100 guilders for the most spectacular game in Round 1 has been awarded to Judit Polgar for her victory over Hans Ree. The jury consists of Jongsma, Orbaan, Pliester and Withuis." Starting the tournament with a win was inspiring, but getting some cash after the very first game was not bad either!

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The first thing we did after the game was to call home, to let the rest of the family know about the result. This was before the Internet or live broadcasts, so my dad and sisters had to live with the tension for a bit longer than just the duration of the game.

After sharing the joy with them, we returned to our daily routine. I used to go to sleep around 10.30 or 11 p.m. and wake up quite late the next morning. I liked to have a big breakfast around 10 a.m. and a small lunch. It also depended on the game schedule. In Spain, the rounds start in the late afternoon, but in Holland it is common to sit down to play at 1.30 or 2.00 p.m. Therefore, in Amsterdam I used to skip lunch and have some fruit or a sandwich instead.

My preparation usually lasted for one and a half or two hours, depending on the opponent's repertoire. I always stopped one or one and a half hours before the game, when I went for a walk and relaxed. My preparation consisted of playing over my lines from a big bunch of hand-written notes. The chess material I used to take with me to tournaments weighed around 10 kilos and I always kept it as hand luggage. I was afraid to check it in with the airlines, since losing my notes would have caused irreparable damage!

My notes also proved useful in the second round, since I had the chance to play an opening that I had studied extensively.

Benko Gambit

Stefan Mohr – Judit Polgar

Amsterdam 1989

I cannot know for sure whether the other players had started to take me more seriously after my first round win. One thing is clear though: my second round opponent's approach was the opposite of Ree's. He thought quite a lot on every move and soon got into time trouble. The game also had a completely different character, featuring a tense fight where the outcome was unclear for much of the game, rather than a one-sided affair as in the first round.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5





While Sofia and I play training games, our parents are working on the card files

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In those years, the Benko Gambit was Sofia's and my main opening against 1.d4. We used to work together between 1985 and 1990 and our repertoires were very similar.

Since this is an opening that requires a high degree of specialization, a few words about our opening preparation are needed. We had learned it from an expert, IM Miklos Morvay. In addition to concrete variations, he managed to explain to us quite well the middlegame nuances, and then we had the chance to practise in rapid training games. We frequently made use of the huge card index patiently prepared by our parents over the years, which enriched our knowledge of typical strategic and tactical ideas.

Working on an opening is a never-ending process. Between tournaments, we tried to fix any potential problems, in order to avoid getting caught in concrete preparation during the next game.

The main idea of the Benko Gambit is to get easy development and active piece play, with enduring pressure against the enemy queenside. For such attractive prospects, I did not mind paying the price of just one pawn, and it actually made me happy whenever my opponents accepted the sacrifice! To a certain extent, this was my favourite approach in the early phase of the game, as previously explained in my notes to the game against Flear (page 228), where I employed the King's Gambit.

After my game against Gelfand in round four (page 339) I understood that I could not rely on gambits alone when building my main repertoire. The Benko is well suited to be a surprise weapon, especially if one needs to win at any cost. Playing it every now and then can be useful because it complicates the opponent's preparation before the game: apart from other solid openings, he would need to have at least a brief look at these somewhat unusual positional gambit positions.

4.cxb5 a6 5.e3

This line became very popular in the late 1980s. White aims to create tension, where concrete analysis will be very important. I remember that we had to analyze it a lot, checking all the lines in detail, but we actually enjoyed Black's position.

The main line is 5.bxa6, which leads to more clear-cut play. Black fianchettoes the king's bishop and then masses her major pieces on the open a- and b-files, without paying much attention to White's play.

5...♗b7

One important effect of cxb5 has been the weakening of the d5-pawn. Over the next few moves, the play will gravitate around this central square.

6.♘c3 ♕a5



7.bxa6

In general, this can be regarded as a small success for me: White releases the tension, helping me to develop. As the game continued, it became clear that the last move was part of my opponent's preparation, at least until the tenth move.

The developing move 7.♗d2 is more common.

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7...♘xa6 8.♗d2 ♕b6

Renewing the threat against the d5-pawn.

9.e4



9...e6

The most logical continuation; I am better developed, so I must try to open the centre.

10.♗c4?!

Still following his preparation, I assume: up to this point he had spent only 11 minutes.

A few months later, Joel Lautier, who was then the most promising French player, defeated me with 10.♘f3. This subsequently became White's main continuation.

10...♘b4

An impressive picture: I attack the central pawn from four different directions! I had used only one minute so far, and I finally made my opponent think for a while.

11.♘ge2 ♘xe4!

Despite spending 17 minutes on his previous move, my opponent had not anticipated this simple blow. He may have considered only the successive captures on d5. The game move has the merit of undermining the white chain from its base and it also takes advantage of the exposed position of the c4-bishop.

There was a reason for my rapid and confident play: I had had the same position one year earlier, in a French open. In those years most people did not travel around with laptops and databases, so many games by their opponent passed unnoticed during pre-game preparation.



12.dxe6

Relatively best. My earlier game went 12.♘xe4 exd5 13.a3 dxc4 14.axb4 ♗xe4 when I had an extra pawn and two great bishops, C. Flear – Judit Polgar, Royan 1988.

12...fxe6 13.♘xe4 ♗xe4 14.0–0

I have restored material equality and have a strong pawn centre. I also have several active pieces, and only need to complete my development in order to consolidate my advantage.

The best move would have been 14...♗e7 followed by ...0–0, but I got over-enthusiastic, possibly because my opponent had played so slowly after having been caught by surprise.

14...d5?

With my king in the centre, this is risky.

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15.♗xb4?!

This and the next move may have been a result of the following thought process: White will exchange some of my developed pieces, after which his lead in development should make itself felt. If this guess is correct, he clearly underestimated the dynamic resources of my position.

We both missed the strong intermediate move 15.♘c3! when I would have some problems maintaining stability. 15...♗c2 fails to win a piece because of 16.♕f3, pinning the d5-pawn.

The same move would follow after the best continuation 15...♗f5, creating the threat of ♗xd5. I may have answered 16...0–0–0, followed by ...♘c2-d4. Although my central position would be impressive, my exposed king would make the situation double-edged.

15...♕xb4

A hyper-dynamic approach.

15...cxb4 is an important alternative, neutralizing White's queenside pawns with only one black pawn. A possible continuation is 16.♗d3 ♗xd3 17.♕xd3 ♗c5 with active play for Black.

I chose the game continuation because I did not feel like letting my three "sister-pawns" be separated from each other.

16.♗d3

Consistently following his plan. There seems to be some danger looming over e6. It is interesting that in the initial phase of the first round game the same square was also in the limelight.

16...♗xd3 17.♕xd3



17...♗e7!

I paid more attention to the defence of my vulnerable pawn than Ree did with his. Just as in the previous game, it is essential to keep the possibility of covering e6 with a rook, although geometrically things are different here. The path of communication is the sixth rank (instead of the e-file) and the defensive task can be fulfilled by the queen's rook.

The seemingly more active 17...♗d6?! would cause me some problems after 18.♕h3. In contrast, after my move, 18.♕h3 can be comfortably met with 18...♖a6, followed by ...0–0.

18.♕e3!?

The most effective way of attacking e6, because it allows ♘e2-f4.

18...♕g4

Such long queen moves tend to alter the dynamic balance radically. I needed 11

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minutes to convince myself that this is the only satisfactory defence.

Unfortunately, 18...♖a6 19.♘f4 ♗g5 does not work because of the intermediate move 20.♕e2! unpinning the knight with gain of time and creating the deadly threats of ♘xe6 and ♘xd5.

19.♘f4

Quite threatening. Since 19...♖a6 20.♖fe1 is very promising for White, I invested 17 minutes in finding something more imaginative.



19...♖a4!?

This is the kind of spectacular move that I could not resist playing. The major piece transfer from one wing to the other along the fourth rank leads to the kind of sharp situation in which I frequently managed to outplay my opponents.

Objectively, 19...d4 would have been safer. White would not be able to avoid simplifications, because his knight is hanging. 20.♕e4 0–0 21.♕xe6† ♕xe6 22.♘xe6 ♖fb8 23.b3 ♖a3



Black has obtained the usual Benko Gambit type of compensation for the missing pawn. True, there is no pressure along the a1-h8 diagonal, but the space advantage in the centre is just as good. The position would change radically in White's favour if he could bring the knight to c4, but there is no obvious way to achieve that.

20.♘xe6

It is clear that White has no alternative. He needs to take a pawn and deprive me of the right to castle, even if this means embarking on irrational complications.

20...♖e4 21.♘c7† ♔d7



This is a good moment to explain why I had aimed for this position, where I am a pawn down and have lost the right to castle. My compensation

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mainly consists of the hyper-activity of most of my pieces, including the central pawns. White's coordination is far from perfect and he needs some time to get his queen and knight onto safe squares.

Psychologically, this is a very difficult moment for my opponent. With 25 minutes left on his clock for 19 moves, he needed to choose between the numerous possible queen escapes. In most cases, the knight will be taboo, because of the fork f2-f3, but there is an exception: after 22.♕d3? ♔xc7 23.f3, I would have the zwischenzug 23...♖d4, retaining the material advantage. This variation is easy to discard, but all the remaining queen moves have about the same objective merit, which complicates White's choice.

22.♕c3

This is not bad, but it fails to clarify the position. White will need to calculate his next moves with great accuracy, which is a situation one should avoid in time trouble.

Mohr could have passed the psychological pressure to me by playing 22.♕a3. I could have forced a draw by repetition with 22...♖a4 23.♕e3 (indirectly defending the knight by attacking the bishop) 23...♖e4, but I would not have been happy with such an outcome. I would probably have chosen to play on with 23...d4. The most likely result would be a draw, but only after huge complications.

Another similar line is 22.♕b3 ♖b4 23.♕e3.

The most natural move is
22.♕d2
but it can lead to huge complications:
22...♗d6!
A difficult move to find, based on the fact that 23.♘xd5 runs into 23...♖d4.
23.♘b5 ♗xh2†!
This sacrifice is justified by the huge difference between the enemy armies' piece activity. Black cannot get more than a draw against accurate defence, but this is not easy to foresee: what if there was a hidden way of strengthening the attack?
24.♔xh2 ♕h5†
With the white queen on the third rank, the attack would be unsound because of 25.♕h3†.
25.♔g1 ♖h4 26.f4
The only way to avoid mate.



26...♖e8!
Cutting off the king's escape in advance and bringing in the last fighting units.
27.♖fd1
The best defence is to counterattack. In view of the threat of ♕xd5†, Black needs to act quickly.
27...♖h1† 28.♔f2 ♕h4† 29.♔f3 ♖h3†!
With a draw by perpetual check.



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22...♖c4 23.♕e1

Partly as a consequence of his previous move, White continues to balance over the precipice. In order to save the knight, he attacks the bishop, choosing the least exposed but also most passive square for his queen.

Once again his choice was quite wide.

23.♕e5? would lose the knight without any compensation to 23...♗d6.

I would also win the knight after 23.♕a5 ♗d8, but White could complicate the fight and achieve reasonable compensation with 24.b3.

He probably rejected 23.♕e3 because, unlike in the similar lines above, the c5-pawn is defended, which allows: 23...♗g5!? However, after 24.♕a3 ♔xc7 25.♕a7† the game would end in a draw by perpetual.

I would conclude that, for the second move in a row, my opponent missed the safest exit from the looming complications.



23...♗d6!

My opponent probably overlooked or underestimated this strong move, since he now thought for 15 minutes, leaving himself with only seven to reach the 40th move.

24.h3!

The only move.

24.♘xd5 allows the double attack 24...♕h5. Note that 25.♘b6† ♔c6 does not help White.

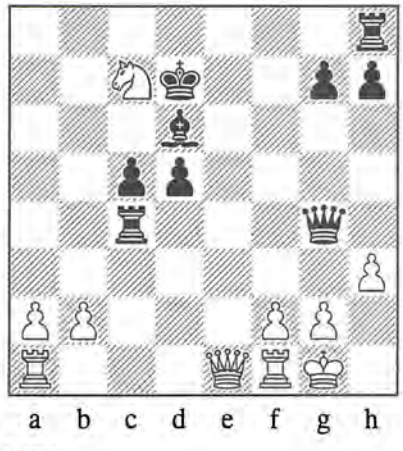
With the queen on e1, 24.♘b5 allows a winning attack:
24...♗xh2†!

We have seen this before.
25.♔xh2 ♕h5† 26.♔g1 ♖h4 27.f4



27...♖e8!

This comes with gain of tempo, compared to the similar line examined above. The combined threats of ...♖h1† and ...♖e2(†) lead to a quick win this time.



24...♕f4!

After ten minutes of thought, I rightly

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decided that provoking g2-g3 would help me. In certain cases, White has to worry about ...♗xg3. Subconsciously, I may have been influenced by the success gained by provoking ...g6 in the previous game.

24...♕g5 is less accurate. After 25.♘b5 I could not answer 25...♗b8 because of 26.♕a5 with an attack, since there is no sacrifice on g3 available. I would have to play: 25...♕e5 26.♘xd6 ♕xe1 27.♖fxe1 ♔xd6



My active position should allow me to draw, but not more than that.

25.g3 ♕g5?!

But this is too optimistic! I saw that I could force a draw with 25...♕f5! 26.♘b5 ♕xh3 27.♘xd6 ♖h4 28.gxh4 ♕g4† but I wanted to play for more. I enjoyed my piece activity and noticed that my opponent was feeling uncomfortable with this position, but I underestimated the vulnerability of my king.

26.♘b5!

The merit of this obviously forced move is that it prevents the desirable 26...♖e8 in view of 27.♕xe8!† ♔xe8 28.♘xd6† followed by ♘xc4. White would get two rooks and a pawn for the queen, with possibilities of attacking the exposed black king.

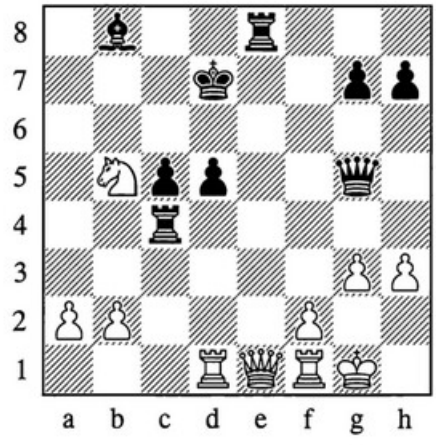
I remember that I felt that things may get out of control, but there was now no way back. The following loss of time is more or less forced.

26...♗b8 27.♖d1

A logical developing move, threatening to take over the initiative.

27.♕e2, intending ♕f3, would have been a worthy alternative, since 27...♕e5 fails to force the queen exchange now that the pawn is on g3.

27...♖e8



28.♕d2?

A completely wrong decision, which can be explained by his time trouble (less than five minutes). My king was starting to feel uncomfortable, and the queen exchange is just what I needed to solve this problem. Despite being a pawn down, my position is not worse in the ensuing queenless middlegame, a theme examined in the 12th chapter.

28.♕a5! would have punished my risky experiment, but I am not sure how many strong players would find this move in time trouble. No immediate check is available, and the main threats of ♕b6 and ♘c3 are not obvious at first glance.

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One important point is that the apparently crushing 28...♖e3 is refuted by the far from obvious retreat 29.♕d2!, attacking the rook and d5 at the same time. This going back and forth by the white queen is not easy to anticipate.

Or if 28...♗xg3 29.♕a7† ♗c7† 30.♔h1 ♕e5, the tactics work out unexpectedly well for White:



Now 31.♘xc7 ♕xc7 32.♖xd5† ♔c6 33.♖xc5†! forces the rook to abandon the defence of the a4-square. 33...♖xc5 34.♕a4† followed by ♕xe8, with a material advantage for White.

From a practical point of view, all of this would have been almost impossible to foresee, and only excellent intuition and a bit of confidence would have allowed White to embark on the lines starting with 28.♕a5.

28...♕xd2 29.♖xd2 ♔c6



The position has calmed down in my favour. All of my pieces (including the king) are very active, and the mobile central pawns are threatening. The missing pawn does not make itself felt at all. White should be able to maintain approximate equality, but only with very accurate play.

30.♘c3?!

The intermediate 30.b3!?, winning a tempo for setting up the defensive barricades, was worth considering. 30...♖ce4 31.♘c3 ♖d4 32.♖fd1 ♖xd2 33.♖xd2 ♖e1† 34.♔g2 d4 35.♘a4



My compensation is not in question, but White can still hope to hold a draw.

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30...d4 31.♘e2



White hopes to play b3 followed by ♘c1-d3, but he will not have enough time.

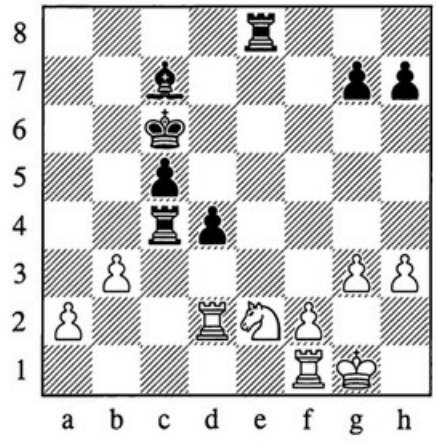
31...♗c7!

Improving the bishop's placement; see also Chapter 6.

32.b3?

With just one minute left, he consistently carries out his plan, missing my strong answer.

The only chance to save the game was 32.a3!, planning to meet 32...♗a5 with 33.b4. White should be able to hold the game with very accurate play.



32...♗a5!

Zwischenzug!

33.♖b2

After 33.bxc4 ♗xd2 I would soon win the a2-pawn (and possibly also the c4-pawn).

33...d3!

The second zwischenzug in a row!

34.♘f4

After 34.bxc4 dxe2 my pawn would cost White a rook.

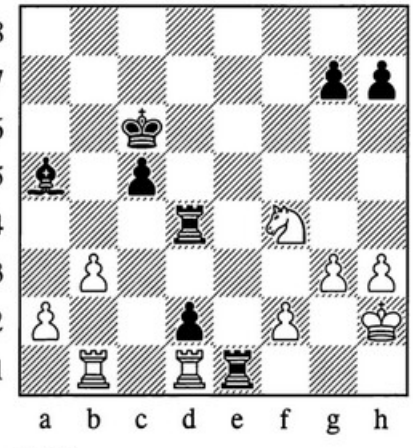
34...♖d4

The d-pawn is unstoppable now; White is lost.

35.♖d1 d2 36.♖bb1 ♖e1† 37.♔h2

37.♔g2 would keep the king closer to the e1-square, making the combination used in the game ineffective because of f3 followed by ♔f2.

I would have had to resort to more trivial winning methods, such as 37...g5 38.♘h5 ♖xd1 39.♖xd1 ♖e4 followed by ...♖e1.



37...♖xf4!

Not the only winning move, but a simple and elegant one! I eliminate an important defender, clearing the king's path to e2.

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38.gxf4 ♔d5 39.♔g2 ♔e4



Preventing ♔f3 on my way.

40.b4!?

A last trick, with seconds left on the clock. He hopes for 40...♗xb4 41.♖xb4† cxb4 42.♖xd2 with equality.

Instead 40.a3, threatening b4, would be parried most simply by 40...♗c3.

40...♖xd1

Under different circumstances, this would be a small concession, as it allows his king to get to f1. The way it is, I get a second passed pawn, which will end the game shortly.

41.♖xd1 ♗xb4

Not wishing to see my second pawn reach the second rank, my opponent resigned.

The media were interested in my success almost from the beginning. All the newspapers published big articles in which my games played an important part. I even made it onto the front page after I beat Ree and also after I fulfilled the norm with my eighth-round win. Even the NOS journal (Holland's most prestigious 8 p.m. news program) reserved a special section to cover my progress.

After my second win, I was also satisfied with the third round pairing. For the third time, I played against a player rated lower than me, so I could play without inhibitions.

Caro Kann – Panov Attack

Judit Polgar – Benjamin Finegold

Amsterdam 1989

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4

The Panov Attack used to be my main weapon against the Caro Kann. I felt at ease in this system and for a long time I was quite successful. In fact, these two aspects usually go hand in hand...

Sofia and I learned the ins and outs of this system from Andras Meszaros. We knew many attacking patterns and tactical ideas, most of them based on White's space advantage and easier development. At the same time, we were also aware of the fact that if White's initiative vanishes, Black would have the better of it since the d4-pawn is weak.

I have occasionally played the Panov Attack in recent years, but it does not feel the same as in the past. With the help of computers, most of the variations have been deeply analyzed until move 25 or 30, leaving little room for improvisation and creativity.

4...♘f6 5.♘c3 e6 6.♘f3 ♗e7 7.cxd5 exd5



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Ben decides to stabilize the centre, possibly influenced by my previous wins in dynamic positions. If this is true, we will later see that he will be caught in his own psychological trap, since static positions do not suit his general style at all.

The main continuation is 7...♘xd5, transposing to a Semi-Tarrasch.

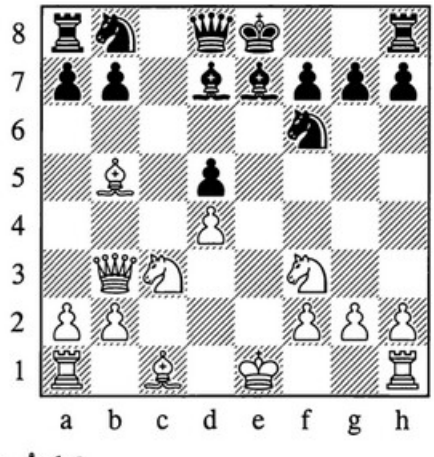
8.♗b5†

I knew that given the symmetrical structure I needed to act quickly in order to retain some initiative.

8...♗d7 9.♕b3

Increasing the pressure and inviting Black to exchange on b5, which will activate my play even more.

It would make no sense to speed up his development with 9.♗xd7†?! ♘bxd7.



9...♗xb5

For some reason, Ben seemed to be out of book already, since he thought for about half an hour before making this move.

In principle it would be better to refrain from this exchange with 9...0–0, but this would not prevent me from keeping the initiative with 10.♗xd7 ♕xd7 11.♘e5±.

10.♕xb5† ♕d7 11.♘e5

Another energetic move, forcing the exchange of queens under the most favourable circumstances, as it leads to the activation of both my knights.

11...♕xb5 12.♘xb5 ♘a6

This forced move highlights the difference in activity between the knights, which leads to the conclusion that the opening has been a success for White.

Although I excelled in tactically messy positions, I had nothing against playing with a minimal but stable advantage. At the same time, I knew Ben was a tactical player and assumed that he would not feel comfortable defending a passive position.



13.♗f4

In my notes I had the following line: 13.0–0 0–0 14.♗g5 ♖fe8 15.♖ac1± Timman – Benko, Wijk aan Zee 1972.

I preferred to develop the bishop before castling for two reasons. First of all, I wanted to clear the c1-square for my rook so it could occupy the open file as fast as possible. Besides, castling is not an absolute must in positions without queens; in many cases, the king can be developed actively in the centre!

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13...0–0

In view of the aspect highlighted above, this may be considered a small success for me. But since he is more passive, Black did not have a choice regarding his king's position.

14.♖c1

Although a2-a3 is part of my general plan of restricting Black's activity while developing my initiative, I felt that the right time had not come yet. By leaving the b4-square undefended, I practically invite him to play the next move, which just helps me to regroup.



14...♗b4†?!

The 18 minutes spent on this move seem to have convinced Ben that my king would be vulnerable in the centre. The later course of the game proves his judgement was mistaken. In fact, my king is likely to display overwhelming activity in the event of further simplifications. Therefore, it made no sense for Black to lose a tempo provoking a move I would have played anyway.

It would have been better to start the fight for the open file with 14...♖fc8!, keeping the b4-square free for the queen's knight, which is Black's worst placed piece. 15.♔e2 ♘b4 16.a3 ♘c6



My position would be more active anyway, but at least Black would restore his overall harmony and coordination.

15.♔e2 ♖fe8

Ben's hopes must have been based on pinning my knight. However, in the absence of the immediate threat of ...f6, I can continue to improve my position.



16.a3

There was no reason to refrain from this planned move anymore. Apart from cutting the a6-knight off from the play, I also force Black to surrender control of the e1-square.

16...♗f8 17.♖he1!

Not being sure yet about where my king should go, I decided to complete my development and wait for my opponent to define his plans.

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17...♖e6

Black tries to remain flexible, too. While maintaining the pin, he creates the threat of ...♖b6, challenging my queenside stability.

There was no way of achieving effective counterplay along the e-file.

For instance, the forceful 17...♘h5 is neutralized by 18.♗e3 f6 19.♘d3. White has maintained perfect coordination, while the h5-knight is poorly placed.

The more natural 17...♘e4 is met by 18.♔f1, when Black has problems coming up with a concrete plan.

18.b4

The simplest way to parry the threat. Since the thematic break ...a5 is not available, my queenside structure looks solid enough. However, we will see that things are not so simple.

18...♘e4 19.♔f1



19...♘d6?!

Fighting against my b5-knight is the correct idea, but the method chosen is not the best. Ben must have underestimated the fact that after every new exchange, the passivity of his a6-knight and king would become more relevant.

19...f6?! 20.♘d7 puts Black in an unpleasant pin and creates the threat of ♘c5.

The best defence would have been 19...♖b6!.



In order to maintain my advantage, I would have needed to play accurately.

The natural 20.♘c3 would allow the unexpected 20...♘xc3 21.♖xc3 ♘xb4! exchanging two minor pieces for a rook and two pawns. This line proves that my queenside is less stable than it may seem at first glance.

20.♘c7 would help Black to get rid of his problem knight. 20...♘xc7 21.♖xc7 ♗d6 I may still retain some pressure, but Black is close to equality here.

The correct reaction is 20.f3! attacking his knight rather than retreating mine. 20...♖xb5 21.fxe4 dxe4 22.♖xe4



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Despite the structural changes, my position would remain better. The a6-knight is passive and my central pawn is likely to become threatening.



20.♘xd6 ♗xd6 21.♘d3!

Continuing the simplifying process for reasons explained above.

21...♖xe1† 22.♔xe1 ♖e8† 23.♔d2 ♗xf4† 24.♘xf4

Things have calmed down and it is safe to say that the rest is mainly a matter of technique. The superior activity of my pieces will inevitably result in the win of a pawn, without giving away anything.

24...♔f8

Black starts centralizing his king and eliminates the back rank dangers. For instance, after 25.♘xd5?! ♖d8 the threat of ...♖xd5 would be real so Black would get his pawn back.

25.♔d3!

Renewing the threat of ♘xd5.

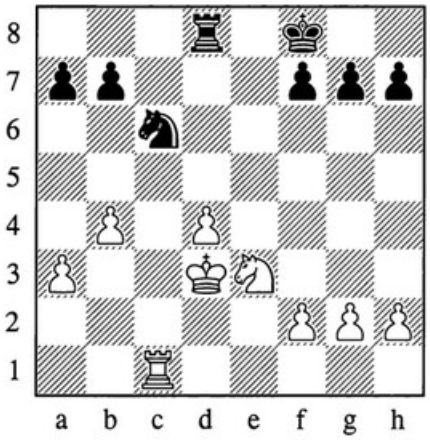
25...♘b8

The knight returns into play too late to change anything. Also 25...♖d8 would not save Black after 26.b5 ♘b8 27.♖c7, collecting the queenside pawns.

26.♘xd5

There was no obvious way of strengthening my position, so I decided to cash in my advantage.

26...♖d8 27.♘e3 ♘c6



28.d5

The pawn not only gets closer to promotion, but also helps me gain more space for my pieces, while pushing Black against the wall.

As a general rule, you should start carefully watching a pawn when it crosses the fifth rank.

28...♖d7 29.b5!

The simplest and most effective way, driving the knight away in order to get d4 for my king. Besides, winning space on the queenside will be part of the final plan, so my last move is useful anyway.

29...♘e7 30.♔d4 ♔e8

Black has managed to stop my pawn, but his position remains very passive. I decided to increase my space advantage slowly, leaving concrete action for a later stage.

31.a4! ♔d8 32.♖c3 ♖d6 33.a5

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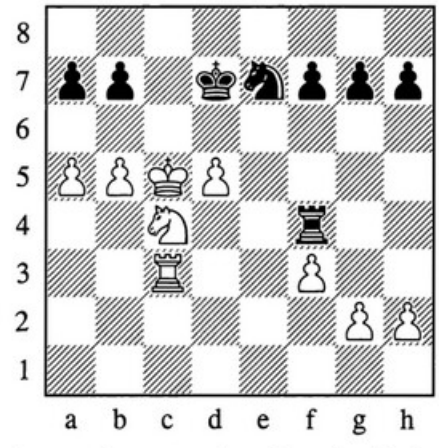


33...♖f6

Ben finally loses patience. The counterplay initiated with his last move will cause him to lose coordination.

Passive defence with, say, 33...b6 would have offered better chances of putting up some resistance.

34.f3 ♖f4† 35.♔c5 ♔d7 36.♘c4



It now becomes clear that the black rook cannot offer a reliable defence against my massive queenside offensive. For a start, Black has to spend a tempo on parrying ♘e5†.

36...f6 37.b6!

The most effective way to continue the attack.

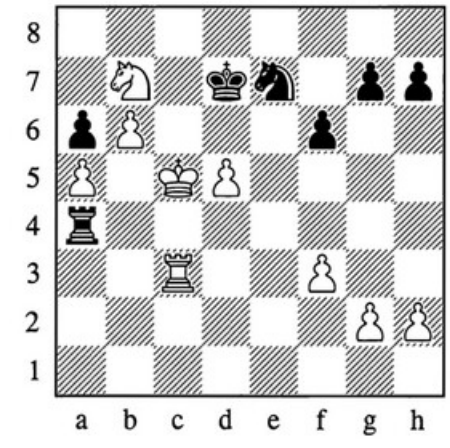
37...a6

Aiming to keep the queenside blocked. Instead 37...axb6† 38.♘xb6† would just speed up my attack.

38.♘d6

It is just that simple; the b7-pawn is doomed, as is Black in general.

38...♖a4 39.♘xb7



The rest is easy and does not require any comments.

39...h5 40.♖c4 ♖a2 41.♔d4 ♖d2† 42.♔c3 ♖xd5 43.♘c5† ♔d6 44.♘xa6 ♖b5 45.♘c7 ♖b1 46.a6 ♖xb6 47.a7 ♘d5† 48.♘xd5 ♖a6 49.♘c7
1–0

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After the game; analyzing with Jonathan Speelman looking over my shoulder

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After my third win in a row, more and more people wanted to see me play. There was not enough room for all of them and so there was a crowd of people outside, waiting for their turn. Most of them were armed with pocket chess sets, so that they could at least follow the moves. As soon as some of the spectators left the playing hall, the same number of people was allowed to enter.

According to my Dutch friends, the situation was not entirely new. It was the same during the 1935 and 1937 Alekhine – Euwe matches, or Timman's training match with Kasparov (Hilversum 1985) and his Candidates semi-final with Yusupov (Tilburg 1986). However, it was quite a novelty that a 13-year-old girl produced the same effect.

You can imagine that I felt like I was walking on the clouds. The outcome of the next game helped me get back to reality. The top board pairing was forced, since only one other player had scored three wins.

Schmidt Benoni

Boris Gelfand – Judit Polgar

Amsterdam 1989

At the time Boris was considered a rising star of the greatest magnitude, as was Ivanchuk, and many thought that at least one of them would become a world title challenger within a few years.

Shortly before the tournament, Boris had spent a week with us in Budapest. I doubtlessly benefited from the blitz games we played in that period, but when we sat down for our game in Amsterdam I discovered a hidden facet of the issue.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3(!)

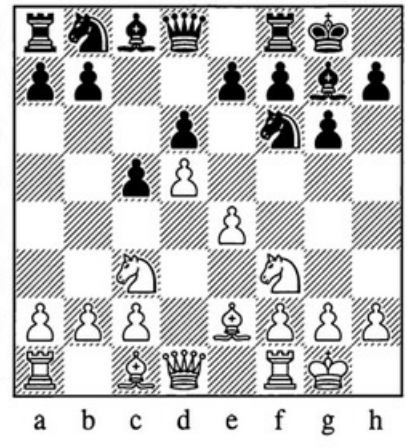
Of course! During his visit to Budapest, Boris had noticed my fondness for the Benko Gambit and my slight problems in meeting move orders other than 1.d4 followed by 2.c4. This is typical: the more experienced player, raised in the spirit of the systematic Soviet Chess School, spots his young sparring partner's weaknesses and finds ways of taking advantage of them. (We will speak about some exceptions to this rule in the forthcoming volumes.)

I must confess that during and after the game I found Boris's opening choice rather "unfair", but over the years I learned that this is part of the game.

2...c5 3.d5 g6

I decided to react with a counter-surprise. For a Benko Gambit player, 3...b5 is the normal answer, whereas the game move leads to the Schmidt Benoni.

4.♘c3 ♗g7 5.e4 0–0 6.♗e2 d6 7.0–0



Although neither of us had experience with this variation, the opening phase ended in a psychological success for Boris. Black's position is rather passive and counterplay usually only becomes possible after a laborious manoeuvring phase; this was really not my style.

7...♘a6 8.♖e1 ♘c7 9.♗f4!?

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Boris aims for rapid piece development, without paying attention to my queenside threats. 9.a4, radically preventing ...b5, is more popular.

9...a6

I wanted to carry out ...b7-b5 without exchanging my b-pawn for his e4-pawn, in order to keep the option of gaining queenside space with ...b5-b4.

When allowing 9...b5 10.♘xb5 ♘xe4, Boris may have been influenced by Tal – Speelman, Reykjavik 1988. The game ended with a nice ♘xf7 combination for Tal, even though Black was doing fine after the opening.

10.a4



10...♗d7

Typically for my impatience in those years, I wanted to provoke pawn contact as soon as possible.

The main line goes 10...b6 followed by ...♗b7. This would put pressure on d5 and prevent



Boris plays 2.♘f3

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White's planned e4-e5 for a long time, but it fails to create any immediate threats. The latter aspect hardly suited my temperament.

11.e5!

The only way to fight for the initiative.

White could prevent my main plan with 11.a5, but then my minor pieces would get new horizons and I could play 11...♘b5, undermining the e4-pawn and dreaming of occupying the d4-square.

11...♘h5!



An important defensive resource. Had White spent a tempo on h2-h3 (for instance, instead of 8.♖e1), he could have played the calm 12.♗h2. The way it is, the bishop has to give up control over e5 and the situation in the centre becomes unstable.

12.♗e3!

This dynamic approach, allowing major structural modifications, is the best choice. Instead after 12.♗g5 f6 13.exd6 exd6 followed by ...b5, I would have had little to complain about.

12...dxe5

Giving up the idea of a positional queenside attack. I had no time for 12...b5 because of 13.♘d2 followed by ♗xh5.

13.♗xc5 ♘f4 14.♗f1



I used to be confident in this type of unbalanced position and I hoped that my piece activity would compensate for the doubled pawns.

Objectively, the position is playable for Black, but Boris outplayed me in the next phase of the game. I missed my best chance for equality on the next move and systematically overlooked his strong moves after that.

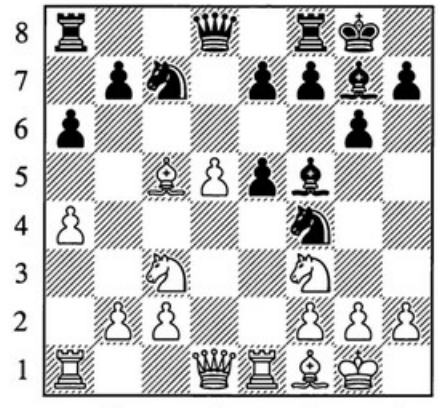
14...♗f5?!

My first intention was 14...♗g4! but I could not find a way out after: 15.h3 ♗xf3 16.♕xf3 ♘cxd5 17.♖ad1



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With a bit more effort in my calculations, I may have found the excellent defensive resource 17...♕c7! 18.♖xd5 ♘xd5 19.♕xd5 ♖fd8 20.♕c4 ♖ac8. White is pinned and cannot maintain his material advantage for long. The position is far from clear, but I would have had good chances of reaching equality with accurate play.



15.♘xe5

This is objectively strong, but there was something even better.

We both considered 15.d6! to be inoffensive in view of: 15...exd6 16.♗xd6 ♗xc2



However, after the elegant 17.♕d2! I would be in trouble. White threatens to win either a piece with 18.♗xc7, or an exchange with 18.♗xf8. In addition, a later ♘f3xe5 would leave my pieces hanging. I would have had to sacrifice an exchange just for a little compensation, but I feel that with accurate play White could consolidate his advantage.

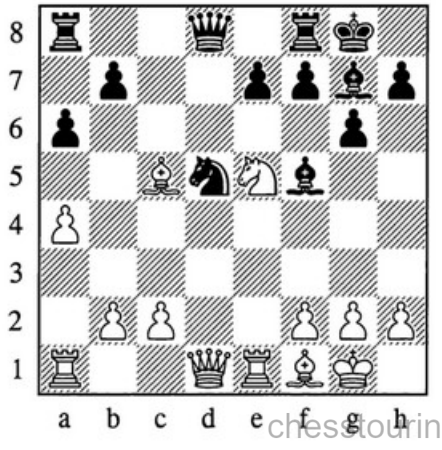
15...♘cxd5 16.♘xd5



16...♘xd5?!

At that age, I believed that in worse positions I should keep the queens on the board in order to retain chances of tricking my opponent.

Objectively, 16...♕xd5! would have been better, clearing the d8-square for the a8-rook in order to complete my development and provoke further simplifications. But after 17.♕xd5 ♘xd5 18.c3± White's position would be more active and his queenside majority might become threatening.



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17.♗a3!

This came as a complete surprise to me. I had entertained myself by calculating forcing continuations, but failed to take into account this prophylactic move. White removes the bishop from an exposed square, thus avoiding any intermediate black move, while keeping control of the important a3-f8 diagonal. Now I have no obvious way of displaying even a trace of activity.

17...♗f6

Since there is not much to be done, I decided to over-defend the e7-pawn.

18.c3!?

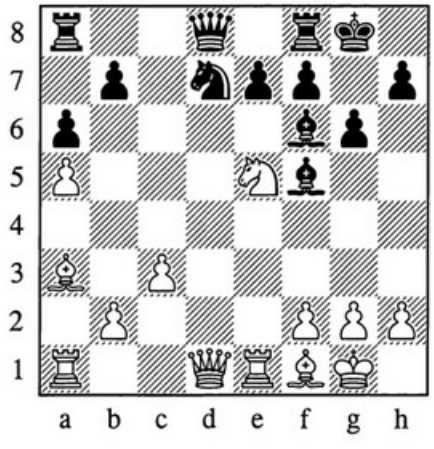
Another strong waiting move, restricting my minor pieces even more and opening up new prospect for his queen. It became clear that Boris was patient and ready for a quiet game.

During the game, I found the last move quite unpleasant, but objectively 18.♕f3! followed by ♖ad1 may have been even better.

18...♘b6

My knight was not doing much in the centre, so I decided to offer an exchange with the e5-knight.

19.a5 ♘d7



20.♘f3!

Played on move two, ♘f3 was unpleasant enough, but now it came as a complete shock. In those years, I was not accustomed to the fact that one could improve one's position by retreating.

Boris wisely avoided the exchange of knights, leaving my queen and knight passive. Besides, the newly created threat of ♘d4, winning the bishop pair, cannot be parried adequately. I tried to defend for 22 more moves, but in the end could not avoid defeat:

20...♖e8 21.♘d4 ♘e5 22.♘xf5 gxf5 23.♕h5 e6 24.♖e3 ♗g7 25.♖h3 h6 26.♖g3 ♕f6 27.♗c5 ♘g6 28.♗b6 e5 29.♗c4 ♔h7 30.♖d1 ♖ac8 31.♗b3 ♖e7 32.♗d8 ♖xd8 33.♖xd8 e4 34.♕d1 f4 35.♖d6 ♕e5 36.♗xf7 ♘f8 37.♖xg7† ♕xg7 38.♗c4 e3 39.fxe3 fxe3 40.♕f3 ♘d7 41.♕f5† ♔h8 42.♕h5 ♘f6 1–0

This loss did not affect my fighting spirit too much, probably because it came after a very good start. It also helped that we had a day off right after this game. I spent it visiting the city with my mom, leaving behind all the unpleasant emotions.

The game with Boris gave me a warning though, that things would not always run as smoothly as I wanted. And paradoxically, things sometimes go better after a loss!

Pirc

Judit Polgar – Zurab Azmaiparashvili

Amsterdam 1989

At the time, Azmaiparashvili was ranked 38th in the world and was one of Kasparov's youngest seconds. The organizers decided to invite him almost at the last moment, apparently as a result of Garry's insistence. As I mentioned above, the number of participants

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was balanced by adding another Dutch player, my first round opponent Hans Ree.

1.e4 d6

For many years, Azmai has been one of the world's leading Pirc experts. His major achievement with this opening was a convincing win against the reigning World Champion Anatoly Karpov in 1983.

2.d4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.f4 ♘f6 5.♘f3

At that time, the Austrian Attack was my only weapon against the Pirc. It suited my style and I felt confident with it. Even though I later widened my repertoire, this variation continued to serve me well, time and again. For example, see my game from Istanbul in 2000 against Smirin in one of the future volumes.

5...c5 6.dxc5

The sharp positions arising after 6.♗b5† would suit my style rather well, but I have always preferred to transpose to a Sicilian type of structure with 6.dxc5. Thousands of Sicilian training games made me feel very much at home in these positions.

6...♕a5 7.♗d3 ♕xc5 8.♕e2 0–0

This is the main continuation, but in view of my tenth move, 8...♗g4 is worth considering.

9.♗e3 ♕a5



10.h3!?

This used to be our pet line; Sofia and I scored a few spectacular wins with it. It prevents the pinning ...♗g4 and prepares massive space gains with g2-g4.

The theoretical line continues 10.0–0 ♗g4, which allows Black to fight for the dark squares in the centre.

10...e5

Since I spent a tempo on a pawn move, Azmai decided that he can afford to answer in the same way. His last move aims to start counterplay in the centre. It also suits his concrete approach to the game.

The most natural way of developing is 10...♘c6.

I once faced the slightly speculative 10...♘h5. It did not prevent me from gaining kingside space, and my king surprisingly was part of the process: 11.♔f2 e5 12.f5 ♘f4 13.♗xf4 exf4 14.♕d2 ♘c6 15.♕xf4 ♕b6† 16.♕e3 ♕xb2 17.♘d5 ♘b4 18.♘xb4 ♕xb4 19.♖ab1 ♕a5 20.g4 b6 21.g5 ♖e8 22.f6 ♗f8 23.♕f4 d5 24.e5 ♗c5† 25.♔g3

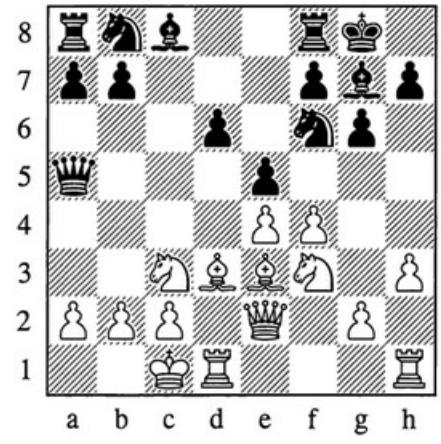


Despite its advanced position, my king is safer than its rival. 25...♗a6 26.h4 ♕a3 27.♖bd1 ♖ad8 28.h5 ♖d7 29.hxg6 fxg6 30.♗xa6 ♕xa6 31.♕g4 ♕e2 32.♖d2 ♗f2†

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33.♔g2 ♕e4 And, noticing that I had several simple wins, my opponent resigned in Judit Polgar – Hennigan, London 1988.

11.0–0–0!?



I spent 11 minutes before taking this decision, which leads to sharp play due to the opposite-side castling. Despite my considerable lead in development, things are not entirely clear, since my king is slightly more exposed. Azmai sank into deep thought and only played his next move after 51 minutes!

11...♘bd7

At Wijk aan Zee in 1990, Van Wely tried 11...♘h5 against Sofia, but fell into our home preparation.



12.f5!

Sacrificing the exchange to gain time for the attack.

12...♘g3 13.♕e1 ♘xh1 14.g4

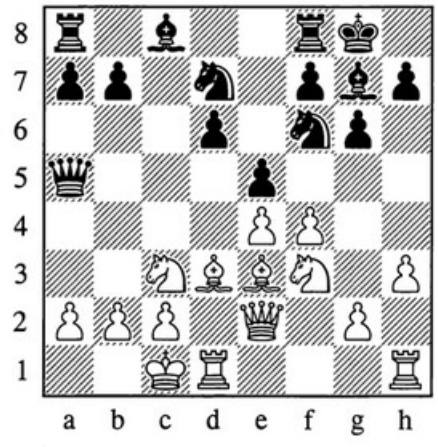
14.♕h4 may be even stronger.

14...gxf5?

After unnecessarily opening the g-file, Black will be crushed.

15.gxf5 ♕d8 16.♗c4 ♔h8 17.♘g5 ♗h6 18.♕h4 ♗xg5 19.♗xg5 f6 20.♗h6 ♘d7 21.♖g1 ♕e7 22.♕g4

With mates on g7 or g8 in sight, Black resigned.



12.g4

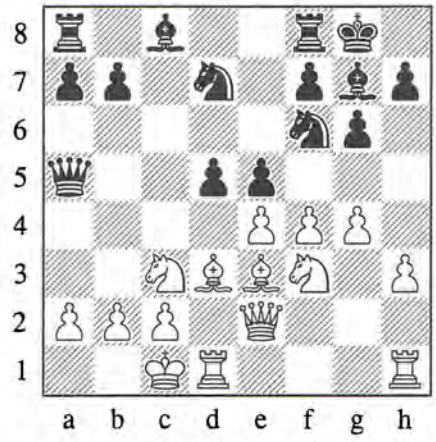
My kingside attack has a positional character for the time being. I threaten to gain space and push the f6-knight away from controlling the d5-square. If I succeed in this, then direct threats against the black king will inevitably follow.

Therefore, Black has to react quickly.

12...d5!

Quite logical: an attack on the wing should be answered with a counterblow in the centre. The position becomes very sharp and difficult to play over the board, since we will face important decisions on almost every step. This explains the unusual number of mutual inaccuracies in the next phase of the game.

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13.exd5?!

Despite my relatively long think (sixteen minutes) I failed to find the best continuation.

I believe that I rejected 13.♘xe5! mainly because I did not realize that after 13...dxe4 I could maintain the positional pressure with the simple 14.♗b5.

Black should play 13...♘xe5 14.fxe5 ♘xe4 and now I could stabilize the position in my favour with 15.♗xe4 dxe4 16.♖d5. I have better development, a space advantage and chances to take control of the dark squares.

13...e4!

An excellent multi-purpose dynamic move: Black clears the e-file and the long diagonal, while deflecting my c3-knight from the defence of the a2-pawn.

14.♘xe4 ♕xa2

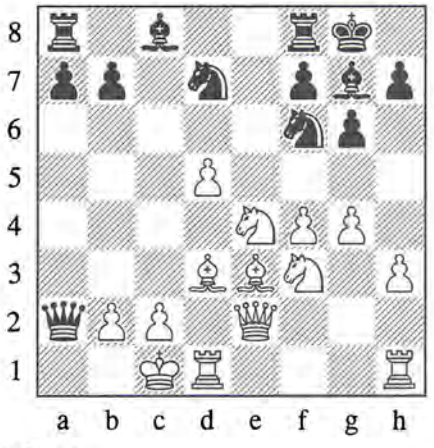
Azmai decides to refrain from the intermediate exchange on e4, in order to keep my d5-pawn under attack.

For practical reasons, 14...♘xe4 15.♗xe4 ♕xa2 would have been simpler.



The following variation, ending in a spectacular perpetual check, is almost forced: 16.c3 ♗xc3 17.♗b1 ♕a5 18.bxc3 ♕xc3† 19.♗c2 ♕a1† 20.♔d2 ♕a5† and so on.

Maybe Azmai wanted to play the game out and thought that by keeping the position messy he would give me a chance to go wrong. This approach eventually turned against him like a boomerang.



15.♘c3!

It took me only two minutes to decide that I should keep my advanced d-pawn rather than the one on b2. I also noticed that after my move I would win time by harassing the enemy queen.

I did not seriously consider 15.♗d4. After 15...♘xd5 16.♗xg7 ♔xg7 Black has no worries.

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15...♕a1† 16.♔d2 ♕xb2 17.♗d4



When heading for this position, I did not mind having my king in the centre. I thought that my superior development and strong centralization would be at least as important.

17...♕b4?!

From the long string of questionable decisions, this is the most difficult to understand. True, Black has to retreat his queen, but there was no obvious reason to refrain from inserting the intermediate 17...♖e8. The concrete usefulness of this move will be revealed slightly later.

18.♖b1 ♕a5

Played almost instantly. Unfortunately for Black, he cannot keep my knight pinned for more than an instant.

The most desirable move would be 18...♕d6, blocking the d5-pawn and hitting f4. However, as a consequence of not having played ...♖e8, I could consolidate my central position with 19.♗e5, without fearing a strong exchange sacrifice on e5.

19.♖a1



19...♕c7

19...♕d8 was an important alternative, putting indirect pressure on my central pawn and thus inhibiting ♘e5.

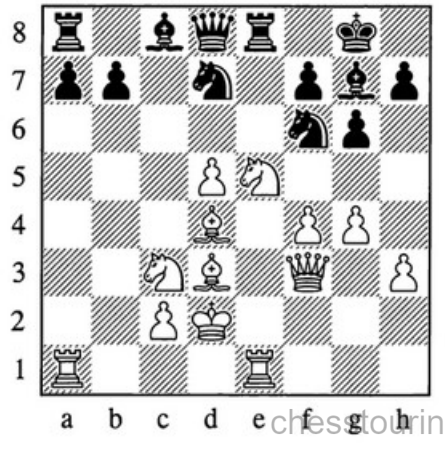
20.♘e5 ♕d8

Hitting on the right idea, after some delay. With 23 minutes left for the next 20 moves, Azmai was approaching time trouble. It was obvious that he did not feel comfortable at this stage of the game. His attack has failed, he is behind in development and his forces are deployed on the last three ranks.

21.♕f3

I take full advantage of Black's hesitation to strengthen my central control by over-defending d5.

21...♖e8 22.♖he1



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It always feels good to complete development with this kind of centralizing move.

22...♘b6

Black's only chance for counterplay is connected with attacking my advanced d5- and e5-outposts. But as the next moves prove, I have little trouble maintaining my territorial superiority.

23.♖a5!

An elegant and effective way to defend d5. Black cannot take advantage of the apparent vulnerability of the rook, since discovered attacks do not work. For instance, 23...♘c4?† 24.♘xc4 defends the rook, or 23...♖xe5 24.fxe5 attacking the knight.

23...♘fd7 24.d6!

The strongest move, gaining space and opening new paths for my pieces. On the other hand, it clears the e6-square for Black's bishop. As I mentioned earlier, in chess and in life it is rarely possible to get something without giving something else away.

24...♘xe5 25.fxe5 ♗e6

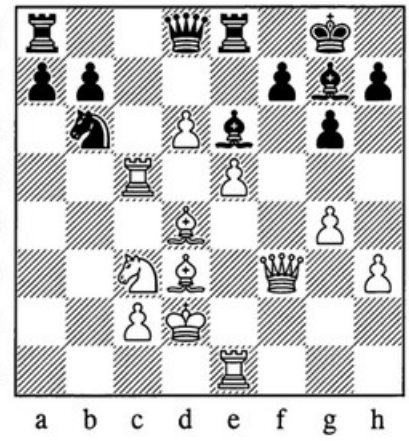
Black has made some progress with his development, and shored up the defence of his kingside. Now I had to watch out for ...♘c4†.

The immediate 25...♘c4†? would lose to 26.♗xc4 ♕xa5 27.♕xf7†.

I would probably have met 25...♕g5† with 26.♕e3, consolidating my domination.

26.♖c5

Evacuating the a5-square, over-defending c4 and threatening to invade with ♖c7. Aesthetically, my space advantage creates a strong impression, but in practice accuracy is essential in order to keep control.



26...♕g5†?!

An impulsive check, after just two minutes. 26...♖c8 would have been more useful, trying to gain some relief by means of exchanges.

27.♗e3

The most natural answer, gaining time by attacking the queen. However, there was no need to weaken the defence of the e5-pawn.

27.♔d1!± would have been more accurate, when I would most likely win a tempo anyway with ♘e4.

27...♕d8

Had Azmai resigned himself to the thought of a draw, or perhaps he intended to find out my own thoughts: would I agree to a repetition? I actually believe that he just wanted to repeat the moves once in order to gain some time.

Facing the threat of ...♘d7 with a double attack, I took seven minutes before making up my mind.

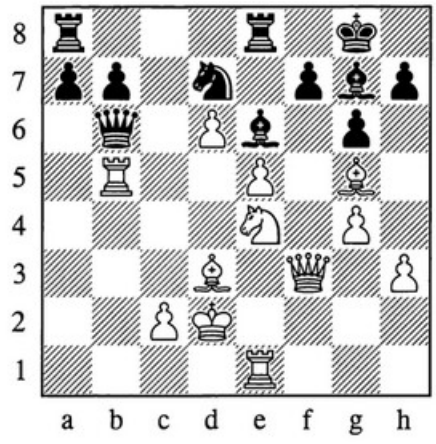
28.♘e4?!

I could not resist the temptation to reject the indirect draw offer of such a strong opponent, but a better way of doing so was 28.♗d4 ♕g5† and only then avoid the repetition with 29.♔d1! transposing to 27.♔d1 above.

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28...♘d7 29.♗g5 ♕b6 30.♖b5

It may seem that I have a persistent initiative. However, I have not made much progress over the past few moves, while Black's queen finally gets some activity.



30...♕d4?!

This active-looking move is not the best.

30...♕c6 would have forced me to defend e5 with 31.♗f4 with a very complicated game.



I must confess that in this position I would not mind being Black at all!

31.♕f4?!

I became over-enthusiastic and played quickly, aiming to take advantage of the fact that the enemy queen is unprotected. But as we will see, the threat of ♘f6† is not always as deadly as it looks.

The best way to restore control in the centre would have been exchanging Black's active queen with 31.♕e3!±.



31...♘xe5?!

Azmai uses a small trick to defend his queen indirectly (32.♘f6† ♗xf6 33.♕xd4 ♘f3† winning material), but he could have done even better.

Not 31...♗xe5? which would lose immediately to 32.♖xe5 and either capture on e5 would be met with ♘f6†. We have two echo lines here, in which the black queen faces a discovered attack by either my queen or rook.

We both completely overlooked the strong 31...a6! when after 32.♘f6†? ♗xf6 33.♕xd4 ♗xg5† followed by ...axb5, Black has a decisive material advantage.

After realizing this, I would probably have played 32.♖xb7, but after 32...♗xe5 Black would also have his chances.

32.♗f6

I was convinced my position was winning. The knight is pinned and under serious attack, while the black queen is hanging. Azmai might have thought more or less the same, since he spent all but his last two minutes on his answer.

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32...♗c4?

The only saving move is beautiful and hard to find: 32...♗d5! The bishop obstructs the fifth rank and clears the e-file at the same time, ensuring the knight some much needed stability. The only drawback of this move is that it allows 33.d7, but after 33...♖e6 the position would remain complicated, with a probable draw in the event of accurate play from both sides.



33.♗xe5 ♖xe5

Played with just seconds left. 33...♗xe5 34.♖xe5! would lead to a pattern we already know.

34.♘f6† ♗xf6 35.♕xd4

You can imagine my state of mind with an extra queen against a strong grandmaster!

35...♖xe1 36.♕xc4 ♖ae8 37.d7

With his flag about to fall, Azmai tried:

37...♗g5†

Then he noticed that the bishop was en prise and resigned.

A complicated, intense and dramatic fight. It also illustrates the widely-known fact that a game of chess is won by the player who makes the penultimate mistake.

The jury was apparently impressed by the spectacular nature of the game, but failed to notice or simply did not take into account the numerous inaccuracies. Be that as it may, I was awarded the daily best game prize for the second time in the tournament!

The organizers had been confronted with increasing problems concerning the incapacity of the main playing hall to host the big crowd of spectators who came especially to see me playing. After the fifth round, they took the radical decision to reserve the main stage for my game. They changed the location of the Crown Group games, moving them to the building's penthouse. It was very unusual to see outstanding players such as Korchnoi, Speelman, Beliavsky and Gulko overshadowed in this way.

This decision caused Gert Ligterink to write in his newspaper De Volkskrant: "From now on a 13-year-old girl is responsible for all public relations of the OHRA tournament!"

As a result of my win, I caught up with Gelfand and we shared the lead with Ben Finegold. However, in the next round I suffered a slightly unlucky "theoretical" loss.

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Sicilian Taimanov

Miguel Illescas Cordoba – Judit Polgar

Amsterdam 1989

This was my first game against Miguel, but over the next few years we would meet in tournaments quite frequently.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 ♕c7



In those years, this variation of the Sicilian was my only weapon against 1.e4. I was attracted by the rather unusual way Black can develop. The d-pawn stays on its initial square for a long time, which makes the f8-bishop highly mobile. In some cases, moves such as ...♗d6, ...♗c5 or ...♗b4 can cause White lots of trouble. Black also wins time for her queenside counterplay based on ...b5, ...♗b7, ...♖c8 and may even save a tempo over classical Sicilians if she manages to play ...d5 in one stroke.

On the other hand, the weakness of the dark squares is a permanent source of danger for Black. Also, it is not easy to find a good moment to develop the king's knight, in view of the permanent threat of e4-e5. This may cause the king to stay in the centre longer than is wise.

I knew that Miguel was an expert on the Taimanov with Black, but I completely ignored to what extent this would influence his preparation for our game.

6.f4

Nowadays, this is an almost forgotten line. White usually plays in the spirit of the English Attack with 6.♗e3 (followed by ♕d2 and 0–0–0) or 6.♗e2.

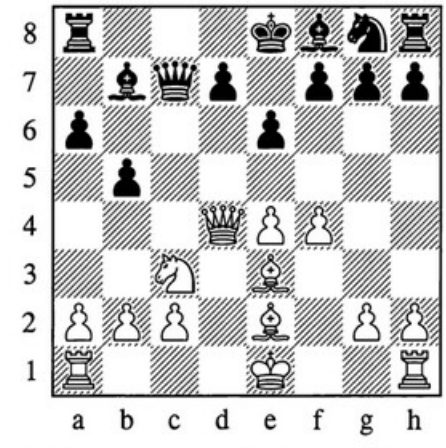
6...a6 7.♗e2 ♘xd4

I always played like this, but 7...b5 is an important alternative.

8.♕xd4 b5 9.♗e3

A logical developing move, preventing ...♗c5 and keeping the option of castling on either side.

9...♗b7



White has played all the possible neutral moves and now has to decide the fate of his king. It is curious that castling on either side is playable and both lead to important lines of the variation, which is not a very common situation in chess theory.

10.0–0

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This is the kind of move I expected from Miguel. He is a sound positional player, who is ready to embark on sharp variations only when necessary.

10.0–0–0

This speeds up White's initiative in the centre (the d7-pawn is put under pressure at once). On the other hand, the king is exposed on the queenside, which offers Black chances for counterplay. At the Thessaloniki Olympiad I won the following crucial game:

10...♖c8 11.♖d2 ♘f6 12.♗f3



12...♕a5!

I had prepared this novelty at home, together with my sisters. I could not have chosen a better moment to make use of it. I threaten to win the a2-pawn with ...b4 and allow ...♗c5 without the necessity of exchanging queens.

13.e5 ♗c5 14.♕d3 ♗xe3 15.♕xe3

Both my minor pieces are hanging, but I decided to ignore this circumstance.

15...b4! 16.♗xb7 bxc3 17.♖d3

17.♗xc8 ♕xa2 would be curtains.

17...♘g4

The position had become more tense and complex than my experienced opponent could stand and she decided to provoke some simplifications. She probably underestimated the power of my queen in the fight against her poorly coordinated rooks.

18.♖xc3?! ♘xe3 19.♖xc8† ♔e7 20.♖xh8 ♕xa2



Despite approximate material equality, my attack is decisive.

21.g3

Defending the h1-rook.

21...♘c4 22.♔d1

Starting a long and joyless trip.

22...♕b1† 23.♔e2 ♕xc2† 24.♔f3

The king has reached the kingside in a most unfortunate way. Would it not have been simpler to castle short in the first place?!

24...♕b3† 25.♔g4 ♘e3† 26.♔h4 ♕xb7 27.♖g1 ♕f3

White resigned in Polihroniade – Judit Polgar, Thessaloniki (ol) 1988.



10...♖c8

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A typical position for the Taimanov. My queenside is fully developed, but all my kingside pieces are on their initial squares. In the next phase of the game I plan to solve this problem with ...♘f6 and ...♗c5.



11.♖fd1

At the time I thought this was a novelty; the known continuation was 11.♖ad1. The presence of a white rook on the a-file will make a big difference after White plays a2-a4, a detail that I failed to understand fully.

Unfortunately, I did not know that Miguel had faced this novelty in the previous round against Amador Rodriguez. He had a difficult position after the opening, but managed to draw. You could say that Miguel received a free lesson which he gladly used the very next day against me!

Nowadays, I cannot imagine being caught by surprise in this way. When I prepare for a specific opponent in an open tournament I always check his games from the earlier rounds of that event. This method gives me answers to a few important questions: what form is my opponent in, which opening had he prepared for the event, does he use a stable repertoire or, on the contrary, does he prefer to surprise his opponents.



11...♘f6

I found no reason to deviate from the plan that is approved against 11.♖ad1.

Miguel's reaction on the previous day had been more accurate, taking advantage of the hidden differences induced by the novelty. 11...♗c5!

With the rooks developed the other way around (on d1 and f1) this does not work because of: 12.♕xg7! ♗xe3† 13.♔h1 ♔e7



White should refrain from the greedy 14.♕xh8 because of 14...♘f6 followed by ...♖g8 and ...b4 with strong counterplay.

Instead, 14.f5 or 14.e5 followed by f4-f5 gives him a strong attack, which only applies if the white rook is on f1!

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With the rooks on a1 and d1, after 12.♕xc5 ♕xc5 13.♗xc5 ♖xc5 14.♖d4 ♘f6?! 15.a4! White had the initiative in Amador Rodriguez – Illescas, Amsterdam 1989.

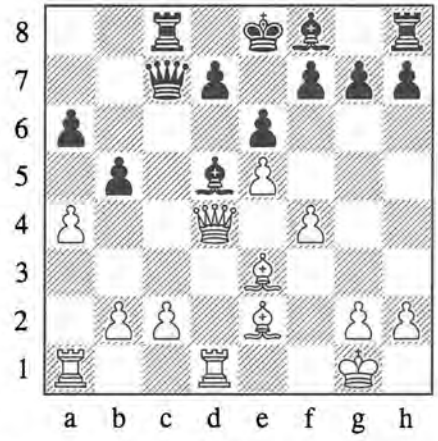
Black can improve with:
14...♘e7!



Rendering 15.a4 inoffensive in view of 15...♘c6 followed by 16...b4 with excellent play.

In the light of these lines, I would conclude that 11.♖fd1 cannot be considered "a perfect novelty". It offers chances to open the queenside, but gives up the kingside attacking plan. However, as a surprise weapon it can prove effective, especially if the opponent reacts mechanically.

12.e5 ♘d5 13.♘xd5 ♗xd5 14.a4!



White finally shows his trump. The inevitable opening of the queenside justifies his rooks' placement.

By now I probably sensed the danger, since I spent nine minutes on my next move. Still, I could not avoid making a serious mistake.

14...♕b7?

I am sure that this was based on a miscalculation, the nature of which I will explain in the next comment.

14...♗c5?! would be equally bad: 15.♕xc5 ♕xc5 16.♗xc5 ♖xc5 17.axb5



Since 17...axb5 loses to 18.♖xd5! threatening ♖a8†, Black has nothing better than: 17...♖xc2 18.♗f3! After the exchange of bishops, Black's back rank problems and the weakness of the d7-pawn give White a clear advantage.

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It was essential to avoid opening the a-file: 14...bxa4!

This is a strategic concession, but Black wins some time to complete development.

15.♗xa6 ♗c5 16.♕xc5 ♕xc5 17.♗xc5 ♖xc5 18.♗d3 ♗c6



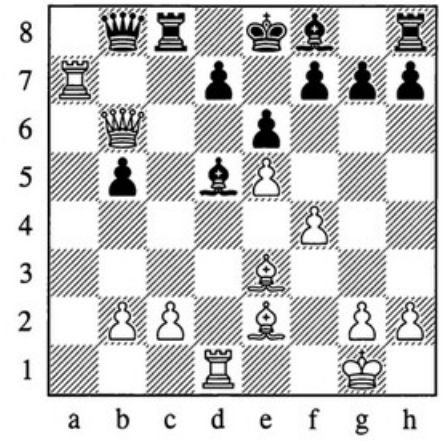
White has a space advantage and the better structure, but after the inevitable ...♔e7 followed by ...♖b8 Black will have normal development and chances to equalize gradually. The game Illescas – Marciano, France 1990, eventually ended in a draw.

15.axb5 axb5

I believe that my initial intention was 15...♗c5. Unfortunately, after the spectacular 16.♕xc5! ♖xc5 17.♗xc5 axb5 18.♖a7 ♕c8 19.b4 my position would be completely paralyzed. My king would be stuck in the centre, the b5-pawn would be hanging and the c5-bishop cuts like a sword. 19...♗c6 fails to consolidate because of 20.c4, creating a dangerous passed pawn.

16.♖a7 ♕b8 17.♕b6!±

This strong move prevents ...♗c5 for good and weakens the defence of the b5-pawn. I have no chance of saving the game, since I am too far behind in development.



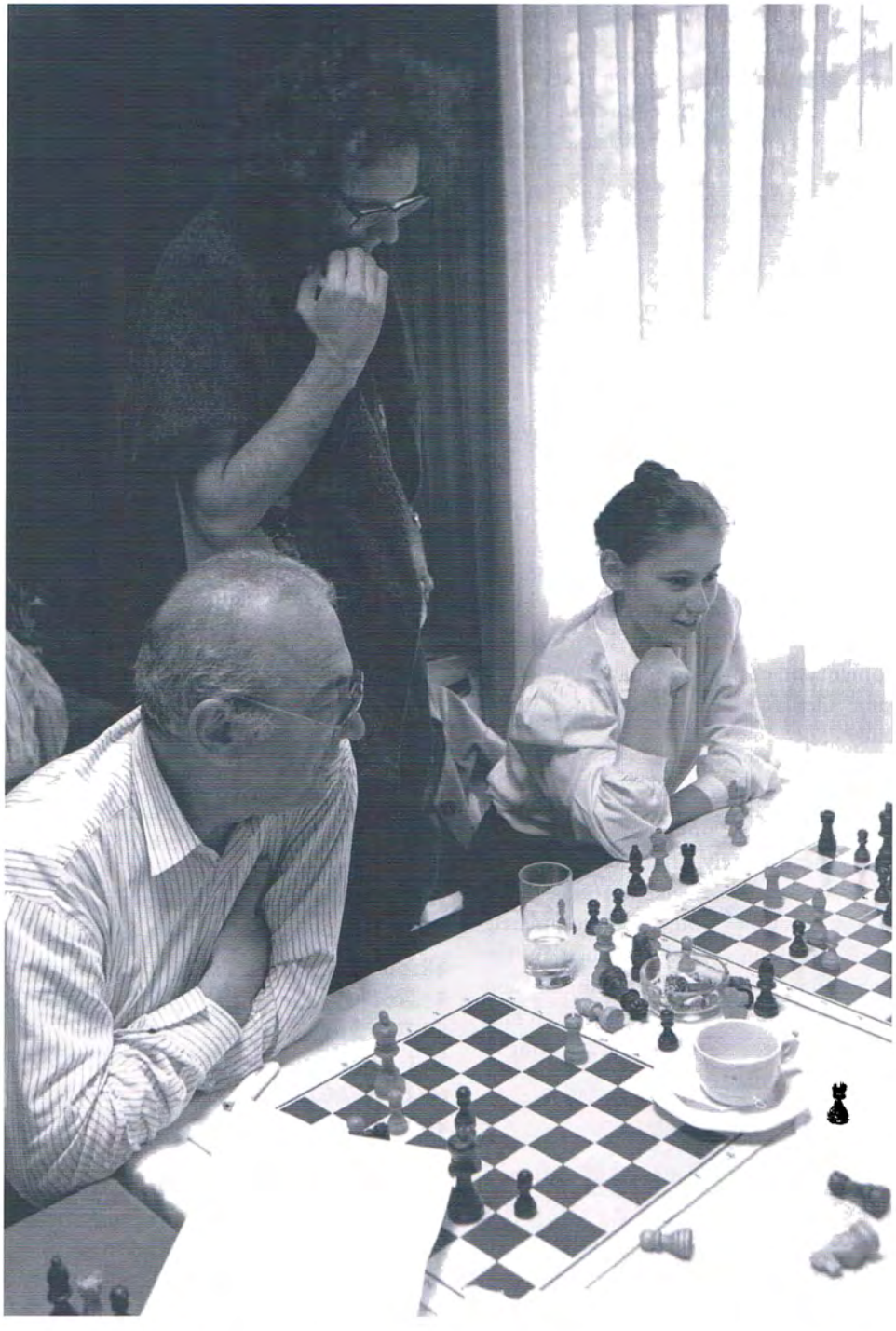
17...♕xb6 18.♗xb6 ♖b8 19.♗e3

White plans to exchange my only active piece, the d5-bishop, with ♗f3 (with or without ♔f2). After that, the d7-pawn, and the seventh rank in general, will be desperately weak. Despite a long struggle, I could not avoid defeat.

19...g5 20.fxg5 ♗g7 21.♗f4 ♗f8 22.♗e3 ♗g7 23.♗d4 h6 24.gxh6 ♖xh6 25.♗f3 ♗xf3 26.gxf3 ♖c8 27.c3 ♖g6† 28.♔f2 ♖h6 29.♔g3 ♖g6† 30.♔f2 ♖h6 31.♔g2 ♖g6† 32.♔h1 ♗f8 33.♖da1 f6 34.exf6 ♖g5 35.f4 ♖f5 36.♖a8 ♖xa8 37.♖xa8† ♔f7 38.♖a7 ♖xf4 39.♖xd7† ♔g6 40.♔g2 ♖f5 41.♖b7 e5 42.♗e3 ♖xf6 43.♖xb5 ♔f5 44.♔f3 ♖f7 45.♗f4 ♗g7 46.♗g3 ♖d7 47.♔e2 ♔e4 48.♖b4† ♔f5 49.♖b5 ♔e4 50.♖c5 ♖a7 51.♖c4† ♔d5 52.♖g4 ♗f6 53.♖g6 ♗d8 54.♖g8 ♗f6 55.♖f8 ♗e7 56.♖f5 ♗d6 57.♔d3 ♖a1 58.c4† ♔e6 59.♖h5 ♖d1† 60.♔c2 ♖f1 61.c5 ♗c7 62.b4 ♖f7 63.b5
1–0

In those happy days such painful losses did not affect my energy and optimism at all. One round later, I struck back with another spectacular win, which won my third daily best game prize.

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Analyzing with Miguel after the game, with Korchnoi and Speelman watching

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Scheveningen Sicilian

Judit Polgar – Krunoslav Hulak

Amsterdam 1989

Hulak was one of the best players of the former Yugoslavia. He was known as a Sicilian specialist, which rather simplified my preparation.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6



By a remarkable coincidence, my four last games of the tournament reached this position. Three times I played with Black, and aimed for the Taimanov variation. For Hulak, this is just one of his favourite move orders to reach the Scheveningen system.

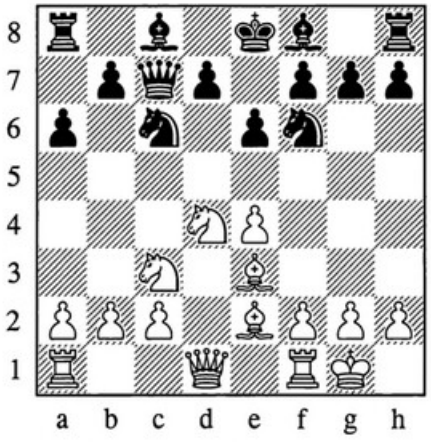
Playing the same opening with both colours is a delicate matter. Inevitably, there is at least one point where one's repertoires with White and Black intersect. In order to make things work in practice, the respective position has to be sound for both sides and sufficiently complicated to offer chances for a real over-the-board fight.

When two specialists in the same variation meet, the game is usually decided by a combination of factors: the depth of home analysis, the players' objective strength as well as their self-confidence.

5.♘c3 ♕c7 6.♗e2

Irrespective of my opponent's move order, I stick to my favourite classical system.

6...a6 7.0–0 ♘f6 8.♗e3



Up to this point, Hulak has played according to my own repertoire with Black. I used to keep the game within genuine Taimanov territory with 8...♗b4, but my opponent's opening taste is different.

8...♗e7

A transposition to the Scheveningen system is inevitable now.

9.f4 d6 10.♕e1

The most straightforward continuation, which suits my style perfectly. The queen is heading for g3, immediately putting pressure on the black kingside.

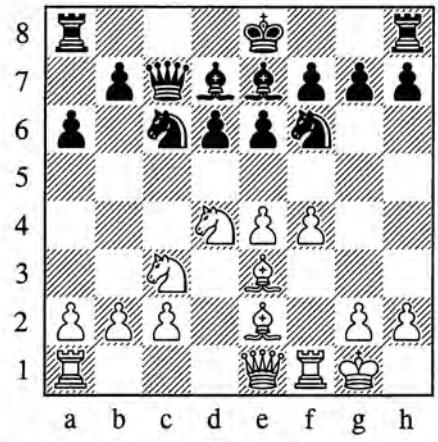
10.♔h1 and 10.a4 are important alternatives.

10...♗d7!?

It seems that Hulak had examined my first round game against Ree and drawn some conclusions. He delays castling short until g2-g4 is impossible.

The usual move order to reach the game position after 14 moves is: 10...0–0 11.♕g3 ♘xd4 12.♗xd4 b5 13.a3 ♗b7 14.♖ae1 ♗c6

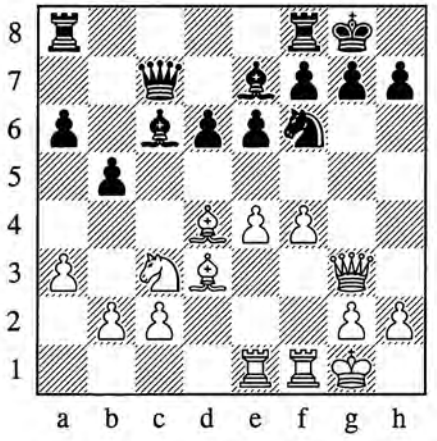
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11.♕g3 0–0 12.♖ae1 b5 13.a3 ♘xd4 14.♗xd4 ♗c6

We have reached the aforementioned classical Scheveningen tabiya.

15.♗d3



Although the e4-pawn did not need extra protection, this is a useful move, placing the bishop on a more active square, with attacking ideas.

15...♖ab8!?



Rupert van der Linden's drawing of the game

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This is the novelty Hulak had prepared. In reply to a neutral move such as 16.♔h1, he would challenge my overall stability with 16...b4 17.axb4 ♖xb4.

On the other hand, the rook's presence on the h2-b8 diagonal is practically asking for the central break I was looking forward to playing anyway.

Black had tried several other moves. I will mention only 15...♖ae8, as played by Portisch against me in 1994. The game eventually ended in a draw.

16.e5! ♘e8!

A typical reaction. Black keeps the tension and renews his queenside threat.

16...dxe5 would lose an important tempo after 17.♗xe5 ♕b6† 18.♔h1 ♖bd8. Then I would continue my attack with 19.f5, reaching a promising position.



17.f5!

The most energetic continuation of the attack. It is interesting to note the geometrical detail that my pawns are placed at the intersection of the files controlled by the rooks with the bishops' diagonals. Concretely, this ensures the hyper-activity of my pieces, making it obvious that my attack is running at full speed.

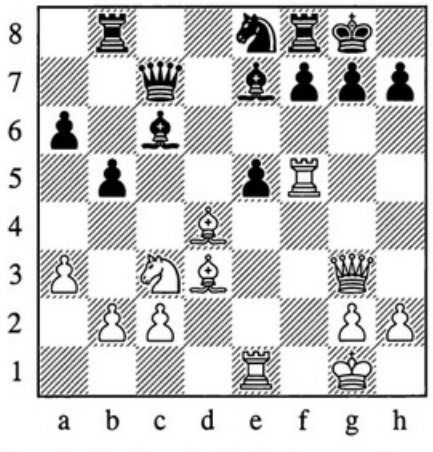
The first threat Black should worry about is 18.fxe6 fxe6 19.♕h3, which forces him to release the tension somehow.

17...exf5 18.♖xf5

I am surprised to learn that I spent 19 minutes on this natural move. 18.e6 was indeed a tempting alternative, but I do not believe that I considered it seriously, since it makes the f6-square available for the black pieces.

The only explanation for my unusual delay that I can think of is that I felt that the position was close to winning and that I should double check all the details in order to avoid spoiling anything. If this is right, the comments on the next phase of the game prove that I strongly underestimated Black's defensive potential.

18...dxe5



Practically forced; Black has to release the tension. At the same time, he leaves me with an unusually wide choice: no fewer than four of my pieces compete for the honour of recapturing!

19.♕h3!?

It took me ten minutes to choose this way of continuing the attack. By targeting h7, I

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increase the tension, whereas taking the pawn would reduce it slightly.

I may say that my decision was based on artistic criteria: I simply could not resist heading for some really beautiful lines I had calculated.

Objectively, the simple 19.♗xe5 would have been better.



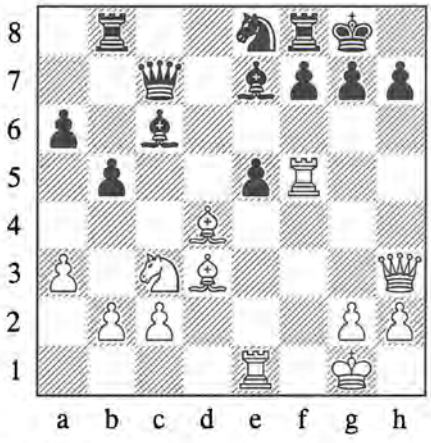
I must confess that in the line 19...♗d6? 20.♗xd6 ♘xd6 I failed to find the multipurpose 21.♖c5! when Black's minor pieces would be pinned and exposed to the threats of ♘d5 or ♘e4. By clearing the d3-h7 diagonal, I would create the additional threat of ♗xh7† followed by ♖h5† and ♕h4 with a decisive attack. Black would have no satisfactory defence.

Black's only defence would be 19...♕b6†! taking the c5-square under control with gain of time. 20.♔h1 Black seems to be in dire straits because of the simultaneous threats of ♗xb8 and ♗xg7, but the unexpected 20...♗d6! would keep him alive.



The bishop is defended indirectly (21.♗xd6 ♘xd6 22.♕xd6? loses the queen to 22...♗xg2!†), but I could keep some initiative with 21.♕h4±.

However, the game move proved an excellent practical decision, as it confronts my opponent with numerous tactical threats and the difficult task of finding an antidote. Hulak spent 25 minutes on his next move, but failed to find the optimal defence.



19...h6?!

An unnecessary weakening. Hulak's train of thought is fairly easy to imagine – the immediate threat created by 19.♕h3 was ♖fxe5, hitting the h7-pawn and the e7-bishop simultaneously.

19...g6? does not secure h7 at all: 20.♗xe5 ♕b6† 21.♔h1



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Black has no time to save his b8-rook with, say, 21...♖d8? because of the thematic combination: 22.♕xh7†! ♔xh7 23.♖h5† ♔g8 24.♖h8#

19...exd4? is more difficult to evaluate.



I wrongly assumed that 20.♖xe7 wins, based on 20...♕xe7? 21.♖e5. In fact, Black is not forced to take my rook, since material is even. 20...♕c8! would pin my f5-rook, maintaining a defensible position.

The best combination is 20.♖xf7! ♘f6! (The only defence. Taking the rook would lead to mate: 20...♔xf7? 21.♕e6# or 20...♖xf7 21.♕xh7† ♔f8 22.♕h8#) 21.♖fxe7± After restoring material equality, I would retain a strong initiative.

The best defence is: 19...♗f6!



The hidden point is that the discovered attacks against h7 are no longer dangerous. 20.♖xf6? ♘xf6 loses the exchange, while 20.♖fxe5 g6 21.♘d5 ♗xd5 22.♖xd5 ♖d8 is absolutely fine for Black.

The f6-bishop proves very effective after 20.♖h5? e4! 21.♖xh7 ♗xd4† followed by 22...g6. In this line, the omission of the prophylactic ♔h1 makes itself felt.

I did not see 19...♗f6 and cannot know whether this was also the case for Hulak. Could he have rejected it because it allowed a forced draw? The possible draw is: 20.♕xh7† ♔xh7 21.♖h5† ♔g8 22.♗h7† ♔h8 23.♗g6†

I raised a similar question in the comments to Azmai's 14...♕xa2, but the situation is different here: Black's position is not appealing enough to induce ambitions of playing for a win, irrespective of the opponent's age...

20.♗xe5



Another difficult moment of decision for Black. My centralized bishop attacks his queen and rook, while also targeting the g7-pawn.

It is fairly difficult to calculate all the relevant variations. In such situations, one should also use intuition.

20...♕a7†

Right after the game, I was convinced that 20...♕b6†?! was a better defence. However,

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recent analysis has proved this move is inferior to the alternatives. 21.♔h1 ♗d6



22.♗xg7! A thematic sacrifice, destroying Black's king's defence. 22...♘xg7 23.♕xh6 ♖fe8 24.♖ef1 With a strong attack.

In this line, 21.♔f1 is an important alternative, using the king to defend the e1-square, but I only took 21.♔h1 into consideration. If play continues as in the line above, then 24.♖xe8† ♖xe8 25.♖g5 ♕d4 26.♘e2 ♕xb2 27.♕d6 wins.

Generally speaking, after either queen check on the g1-a7 diagonal, the attack starting with 22.♗xg7 is possible, partly because the d6-bishop is hanging. This makes 20...♗d6 an important candidate. I may have nothing better than 21.♕g3± with an active position and lasting pressure.

21.♔h1



21...♗d6?

For far from obvious reasons, this is the losing move.

The only defence was 21...♖d8!. The main idea is to take the steam out of my sacrificial attacks with a well-timed ...♖xd3. I could continue 22.♕g3 or 22.♕h5, with enduring kingside pressure.

After Hulak's move, 22.♗xg7 was entirely playable, but I spotted a nicer and more effective resource.



22.♖g5!

With the terrible threat of ♕xh6. Suddenly, Black is lost.

22...♕f2

A desperate defensive try. Instead 22...♗xe5 would not parry 23.♕xh6 at all.



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Here we see the difference with respect to the similar position that could have arisen after 20...♕b6†. In that case, 23...♗xg2† would win my queen, but obviously this resource is not available here.

After 23...g6 24.♖exe5 Black's position is hopeless.

23.♖f1 ♕xf1†

Hoping to reduce my attacking potential by simplifying. Black's kingside would crumble after 23...♕d2 24.♕f5.

24.♗xf1 hxg5



25.♗d3!

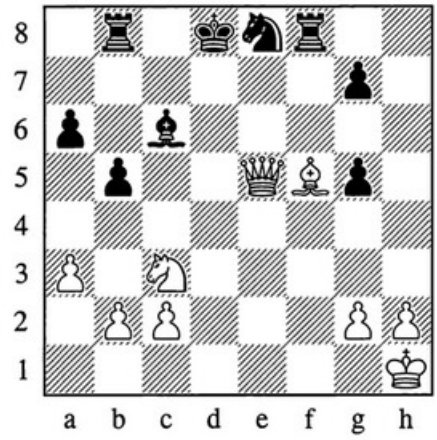
The bishop returns to the attacking diagonal with decisive effect. With his rooks uncoordinated, Black cannot put up serious resistance despite his minimal material advantage.

I played the next phase of the game very accurately, at times finding the only winning moves. I felt very much in my element!

25...f5 26.♗xf5 ♗xe5 27.♕h7† ♔f7 28.♕g6† ♔e7

28...♔g8 29.♗e6† would mate soon.

29.♕e6† ♔d8 30.♕xe5



This is the position I had in mind when I played 22.♖g5!. Material equality has been restored, but Black's poorly coordinated army cannot defend the exposed king.

30...♖b7

Aiming to finally reconnect his rooks.

31.♔g1!

In the Sicilian, ♔g1-h1 is an important prophylactic move. Here, the king returns to g1 for safety reasons: it allows g2-g4 and avoids back rank problems.

31...♖bf7 32.g4 g6

With the feeble hope of 33.♗xg6?? ♖f1 mate.

It is interesting that Black's pressure along the f-file will not yield anything concrete, because of my continuing initiative. The f5-bishop will remain under attack for several moves, because Black will have enough worries with his king.

33.♕b8† ♔e7 34.♘d5†!

I use some simple tactics to exchange Black's most active piece without slowing the rhythm of the initiative.

34...♗xd5 35.♕e5† ♔d8 36.♕xd5†

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There is no safe place for the black king anywhere on the board.

36...♔c7

36...♔e7 would lose an exchange after 37.♕d7† ♔f6 38.♕e6† ♔g7 39.♕xg6† ♔h8 40.♕h6† ♔g8 41.♗e6+–.

37.♕c5† ♔b8 38.♕b6† ♖b7 39.♕d8† ♔a7

Black has managed to defend his king, but his chronic lack of coordination will cost him material after my next move.

40.♗xg6
1–0

Many years later, I found out that there were rumours that I had won this game thanks to my home preparation. Apparently, some people were reluctant to believe that a 13-year-old girl could win such a game over the board.

After the game, I once again felt like I was flying. This time, the feeling persisted for longer than after the third round, since I also won a good game the next day.

Sicilian Taimanov

Friso Nijboer – Judit Polgar

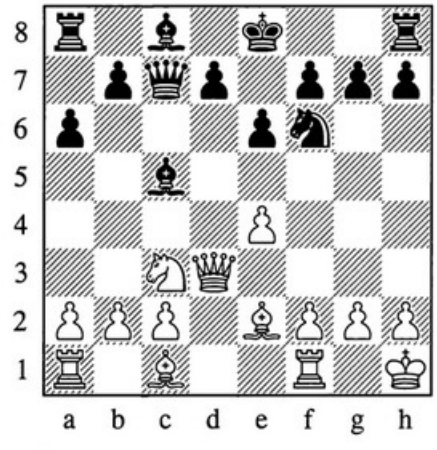
Amsterdam 1989

I sat down for this game knowing that a win would practically secure my first grandmaster norm with one round to go. My mood was so good that there was no room left for nerves. I am sure that as an adult I would have felt more tension.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 ♕c7 6.♗e2 a6 7.0–0 ♘f6 8.♔h1

8.♗e3 is the main line, and I was prepared to play 8...♗b4. The game continuation was fashionable at the time; White makes a half-waiting move, planning to meet 8...♗b4 with 9.♗g5.

8...♘xd4 9.♕xd4 ♗c5 10.♕d3



10...h5

My sisters and I played this slightly extravagant move quite frequently. I liked to push my pawns and did not care much about the weaknesses left behind.

In Hungary, the international master (later grandmaster) Tibor Fogarasi was a leading expert of this plan. As a curiosity, I will

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mention that Anand had also played it once, but long before he became a strong player.

Black's main idea is to prepare ...♘g4, starting active operations on the kingside, which traditionally is White's attacking territory.

11.f4

This has always been the main line, though other moves are possible. For example, in 1995 Kasparov defeated Kengis with 11.♗g5.

11...♘g4



The threat of winning the exchange with ...♘f2† causes White some discomfort.

12.♘d1

This looks too passive to challenge the viability of Black's plan.

12.♕g3 is rather time consuming. 12...b5! Ignoring the threat in order to win time for development. 13.♗xg4 hxg4 14.♕xg4 ♗b7 15.♕e2 b4 16.♘d1 This position from Xie Jun – Judit Polgar, Thessaloniki (ol) 1988, is examined in Chapter 10 on page 157.

12.e5! is a better way to meet the threat.

12...♘f2?!† is too risky: 13.♖xf2 ♗xf2 14.♘e4 With a strong initiative.

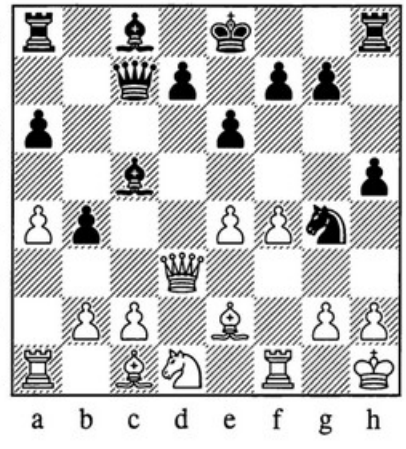
12...d6 is better. 13.exd6 ♕xd6 14.♕xd6 ♗xd6 15.♘e4 White's play is more pleasant at this stage, but in my game against Erenska from the 1988 Olympiad I managed to win after a complicated battle.

12...b5 13.a4

Since this was a family weapon, Friso could also study my sisters' games for his preparation. The last move is intended as an improvement over a game between Michael Adams and Susan at the junior championship in Adelaide 1988, which continued 13.♘e3 when White did not get much after: 13...♘xe3 14.♗xe3 ♗xe3 15.♕xe3 ♗b7 Black has enough counterplay, based on ...h4, ...♖c8 and ...♕c5.

Friso's move is typical for the Sicilian in general, but it is not entirely justified here, because of White's lagging development.

13...b4



The queenside is a probable destination for my king, so I need to keep it blocked. Besides, the last move offers me the additional idea of ...a5 followed by ...♗a6.

14.c4?!

I see two main drawbacks to this move: White blocks the queenside forever and

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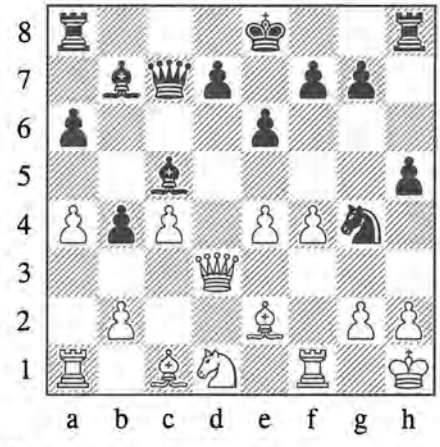
spends a tempo that could have been used for development to do so. I assume that Friso wanted to protect himself against ...a5 and ...♗a6 and get rid of the backward pawn at the same time.

Indeed, 14.c3 would be strongly met by 14...a5!, consolidating b4 and clearing the a6-square for the bishop.

The weakness of the c2-pawn is not so relevant at the moment. If 14.♘e3 then I would not even consider grabbing the pawn, but instead choose between the developing moves 14...♗b7 or 14...a5.

In fact 14.♕h3 may be best, leading to complicated play after 14...♘f6.

14...♗b7



15.a5?!

Friso played this after 24 minutes; I felt that he was not too sure of himself. One thing is clear: losing so much time in the opening on pawn moves cannot remain unpunished!

15.b3 followed by 16.♗b2 looks like a better plan.

15...0–0–0

I spent just two minutes on this natural move and eight minutes in total up to this moment. This shows that I felt comfortable with my position in the game and in the tournament.

After completing my development, I planned to play my pet move ...g7-g5 against virtually any white move, including 16.h3.

16.♗e3?!

Giving up the bishop pair is a major positional concession. Friso spent 51 minutes on this move, which makes me think that he did not like his position. Although he used to be well-known for his time trouble, I cannot stop myself from making a few general points.

In most positions when there is no need to calculate complicated lines, 15-20 minutes should be enough to make a decision. After longer than that, one usually starts to hesitate and lose focus. It often happens that an exceptionally long think is followed by a bad move.

16...♘xe3 17.♘xe3



17...g5!

The fight for the dark squares makes even more sense now. And I had only spent 13 minutes up to this moment!

18.fxg5 ♕e5

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Centralizing the queen and attacking three pawns at the same time.

19.♗f3

19.♖xf7? would lose the knight to 19...♗xe4 20.♕d2 ♗xe3 since 21.♕xe3 drops the queen to 21...♗xg2†!.



19...♕xg5

I had my first long think before this move (ten minutes!) and decided to be practical.

I was strongly tempted by the following variation: 19...♗d6! 20.g3 h4 21.♘g4 hxg3 22.♘xe5 ♖xh2† 23.♔g1 ♗c5† 24.♖f2 ♖xf2



I reached this position in my calculations, but I was not sure about the evaluation. In fact, White is simply lost, for instance 25.♕d1 ♖xf3† 26.♔g2 ♖e3. The naked white king is helpless against the perfectly coordinated black army.

While pondering about the consequences of 24...♖xf2, I also became slightly worried about an earlier deviation: 21.c5, aiming to get some counterplay. This made me choose the safe mode. In fact, 21...♗xc5 would be very good for me.

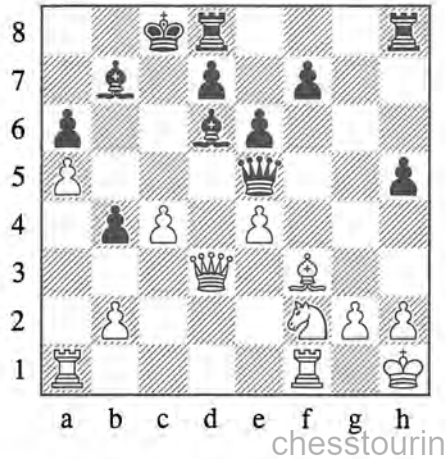
Although I cannot complain about the outcome of this game, I cannot help thinking that with a bit more focus I might have won my fourth best game prize of the tournament...



20.♘d1?!

Once again, Friso neglects his development. 20.♖ae1 was essential, although after 20...♕e5 I would have a wonderful position.

20...♕e5 21.♘f2 ♗d6



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At this point I felt like I was living in a dream. I have great control of the dark squares and strong threats against his king.

22.g3 h4 23.c5!?

So maybe I had guessed his possible reaction after 19...♗d6 quite accurately.

23.♘g4 hxg3! would lead to an almost identical variation as above, with the difference that the white g5-pawn is missing.

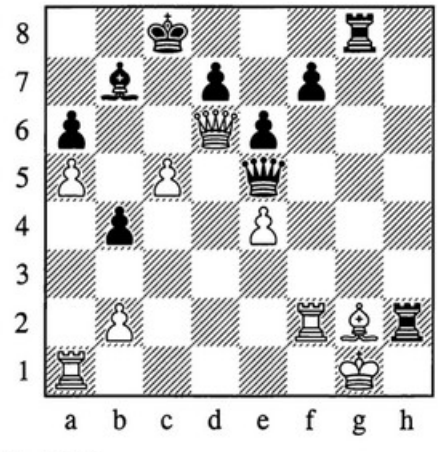
23...hxg3!

This is a piece exchange rather than a sacrifice. The important thing is to maintain the rhythm of the attack.

24.♕xd6

Defending h2 in X-ray mode. Instead 24.cxd6? would allow mate in two with 24...g2†! followed by 25...♕xh2 mate.

24...♖xh2† 25.♔g1 gxf2† 26.♖xf2 ♖g8† 27.♗g2



27...♖h5!

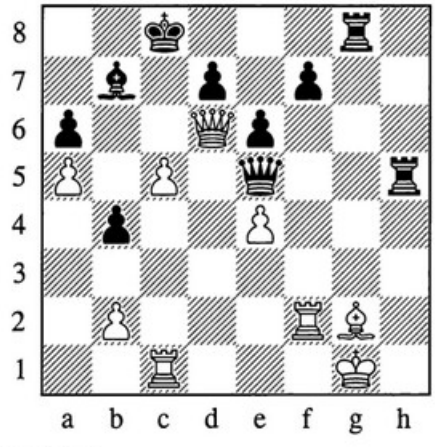
Another practical decision. I remove the rook from its attacked position, maintain my blockade on e5 and attack the c5-pawn.

It turns out that 27...♖gxg2† would have won by force. However, in a crucial game it would hardly be wise to embark on a long line in which everything depends on the accurate calculation of forced lines.

28.♖c1?

Making things even worse in a position that was already lost. He probably took it for granted that I would allow the exchange of queens, overlooking my next move.

28.♕xe5 was necessary, although it would not have offered any chances to save the game. 28...♖xe5 Threatening ...♗xe4 followed by ...♖eg5. 29.♔f1 The c5-pawn is doomed, but I could add more tension with 29...♗c6! followed by ...♗b5†.



28...♕h8!

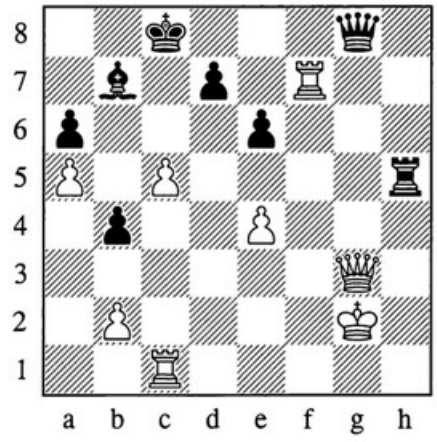
Suddenly, there is no adequate defence against the threat of ...♖h1 mate!

29.♖xf7

Clearing the f2-square and even threatening mate in two with ♕xd7†, but leaving the g2-bishop unprotected.

29...♖xg2†! 30.♔xg2 ♕g8† 31.♕g3

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Setting one final trap.

31...♗xe4†!

Avoiding 31...♖g5? 32.♖f8†!. One has to be careful until the last moment!

32.♔f2 ♕xf7† 33.♔e3 ♗c6

A calm retreat, reminding my opponent that I am a piece and a pawn up.

0–1

The situation could not have looked any rosier. I had achieved my first grandmaster norm and for the third time in the tournament I shared the lead with Boris Gelfand.

The phenomenon which the press called "Polgarmania" was developing explosively. Here are two illustrative quotes from Hans Kottmann's article in *New in Chess*: "The mayor of Amsterdam, Mr. Van Thujn, one of the busiest men in the city, admitted in his speech that he had forced himself to find the time for playing over Judit's games" and "This tournament could only have been surpassed if we had had Kasparov here as well."

I felt full of enthusiasm and energy and my tournament fate might have been different had there not been a day off before the last round. Taking a break after the fourth round loss had definitely helped me to recover, but I would have gladly played my last three games without a break.

I could also complain about getting a second Black in a row, but I believe that the real reason for my last round defeat was deeper than that. I faced a very strong and experienced opponent, who knew how to take advantage of my weak points.

Sicilian Taimanov

Lev Psakhis – Judit Polgar

Amsterdam 1989

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘b5

In the early '90s, Lev became my trusted trainer and we had the chance to speak about our first over-the-board meeting in Amsterdam. He confessed that he chose to transpose to a Hedgehog for psychological reasons. He was an expert on this system with Black, and had the feeling that it would not suit my style and temperament.

While watching my games during the Amsterdam tournament, Lev had noticed on more than one occasion that I could be dangerous tactically, but also excessively impatient and impulsive. In the Hedgehog, the play has a manoeuvring character for a long time, which, according to Lev's judgement, would give me plenty of opportunities to go wrong.

5...d6 6.c4 ♘f6 7.♘1c3 a6 8.♘a3 b6

I was aware that Kasparov had successfully tested 8...d5!? in his 1985 match against Karpov. One year after the match, Karpov cast some doubt on this pawn sacrifice in his game against Van der Wiel in Brussels.

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Anyway, in the current game I did not feel like giving up a pawn so soon.

9.♗e2 ♗b7 10.0–0 ♘b8 11.f3 ♘bd7



I played the opening rather fast, since everything had gone according to my notes. By now, I had spent three minutes compared with Lev's 13. He played his next move after nine more minutes.

12.♔h1!?

The normal move order is 12.♗e3 ♗e7 13.♕e1 0–0 14.♕f2 ♖c8 15.♖ac1 ♕c7 16.♖fd1 ♖fe8 17.♔h1 ♕b8 reaching the final position from the comment to 15...♖fd8.

Lev had the brilliant intuition that by deviating from the normal lines just a bit, he would make me lose the thread.

12...♗e7 13.♗f4!?

In this line, the bishop usually goes to e3, since Black has little trouble neutralizing the pressure against the d6-pawn. As explained below, the last move should lead to a transposition, but only if Black understands the subtleties of the position.

13...♕c7 14.♖c1 0–0 15.♕d2



So far, I had played all natural moves. Starting from this moment, I had to make a series of over-the-board decisions since Lev's 13th move had taken me out of my "book".

15...♖fd8?!

Lev's psychological experiment starts bearing fruit. I had learned, of course, that Black's counterplay in the Hedgehog is mainly based on the thematic breaks ...d6-d5 and ...b6-b5. This and my 17th move are too straightforward an attempt to do that, resulting in a gradual loss of coordination.

In his comments for *Chess Informant*, Lev rightly pointed out that 15...♖fe8! was better. The aforementioned transposition arises after: 16.♖fd1 ♘e5 17.♗e3 ♖ac8 18.♕e1 ♘ed7 19.♕f2 ♕b8



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My knight jumping back and forth caused the loss of two tempos, but White's queen and dark-squared bishop also lost a tempo each on their way to the best squares.

By the way, White would not achieve anything after 20.♗xb6 ♗xe4.

It took me some years to understand that in this structure my rooks belong on e8 and c8, while the queen usually goes to b8. This is the best way to maintain flexibility for the subsequent manoeuvring phase. The thematic breaks become possible after either thorough preparation or a moment of carelessness from White.

Typically, the first piece exchange takes place in the range of moves 30-40 and the position does not change dramatically on the way – too boring for my enterprising style from those years.

Had Lev played 12.♗e3, I would most likely have reacted correctly, since the respective line given above was part of my preparation. After 13.♗f4 I decided that I had landed in a different line, failing to notice that the hidden mechanisms of the position were very much the same.

16.♖fd1 ♘e5 17.♗e3

17...♖ab8?!

A rather unfortunate move, cutting off the natural queen retreat to b8. Besides, the rook would be vulnerable in the event of a later ...d6-d5.

I could reach a normal position with 17...♖ac8 followed by ...♘ed7 and ...♕b8.

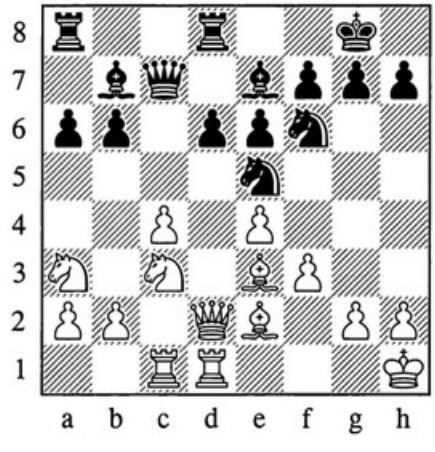
18.♕e1 ♗a8

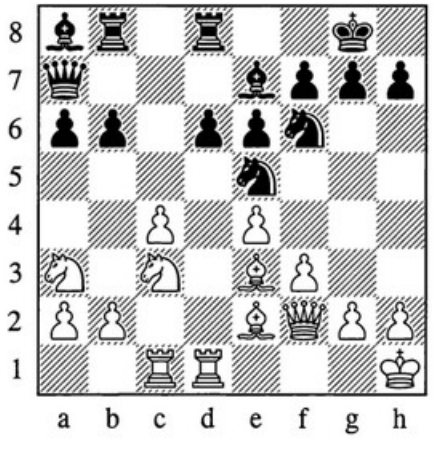
I wanted to regroup with ...♗c6 and ...♕b7, but noticed that 18...♗c6? allows the crushing 19.♘d5±. My last move prepares ...♕a7, ...♗c6 and ...♕b7. Unfortunately I did not realize that I was just making moves without improving my position.

19.♕f2 ♕a7

By evacuating the c-file and defending the a6-pawn, I prepare to meet b2-b4 with ...d6-d5 and if cxd5 then ...♗xb4 attacking the a3-knight.

My last move certainly looks ugly, since it makes the queen the target of a pin by the bishop. However, given the slow character of the play it takes several inaccuracies before Black is in a critical position. I cannot put the blame for my defeat on a specific move, but rather on the whole sequence from moves 15 until 22.





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20.♘ab1!

This came as a complete surprise. Even after my game against Boris, I still could not understand that one can improve one's position by retreating!

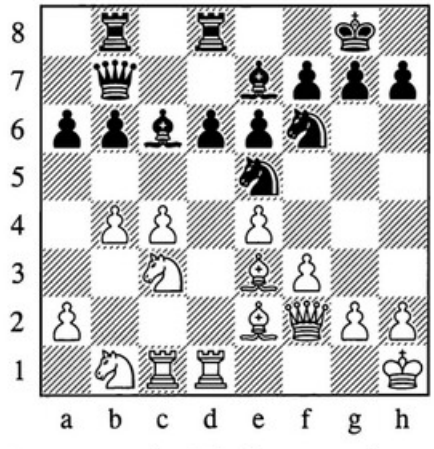
After completing his development, White had just one badly-placed piece: his a3-knight. The last move is the start of a slow but effective queenside attack based on ♘d2, b4, ♘b3 and a4-a5.

After 18 minutes, I had to accept the fact that there was nothing to be done against b2-b4, since after ...d5 cxd5, ...♗xb4 would not gain time anymore. I found nothing better than continuing my initial plan.

20...♗c6

With such poor coordination, 20...d5? is out of the question. After 21.cxd5 exd5 White has several good continuations, for example 22.♕g3 and my entire position is hanging.

21.b4 ♕b7



It may seem that I finally managed to restore my coordination. However, after Lev's next move I will have no favourable way to carry out either of the thematic breaks.

22.♘d2!

Giving the highest priority to the knight's activation. Had he thought that ...b5 was a real threat, he could have played 22.a4 followed by ♘d2-b3.

22...d5?

Played after 11 minutes, this is the decisive mistake. 19 consecutive moves without any piece contact had completely destroyed my patience...

The position was not ripe for 22...b5?! either: 23.cxb5 axb5 24.♘b3 Followed by ♘a5 with strong queenside pressure.

I should have kept manoeuvring. Nowadays, I would probably choose 22...♗e8 followed by ...♖dc8 when the pressure against c4 would cause White some problems in carrying out his queenside plan.

After my daring move, Lev sank into deep thought for no less than 42 minutes! I started to become optimistic, failing to understand the real meaning of his prolonged analysis.

Looking back, I believe that he knew very well that his position was winning, but the prospect of a shared first place in the tournament put great pressure on him. He may also have spent some of the time adapting himself to the sudden switch from manoeuvring play to concrete calculation.



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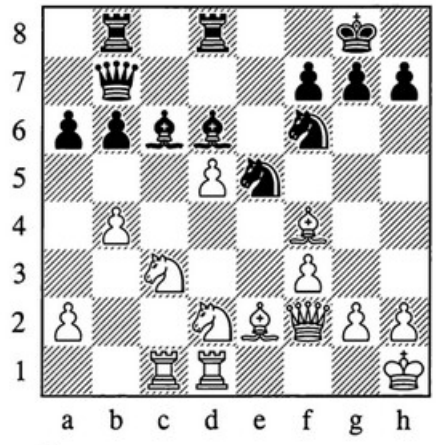
23.cxd5 exd5 24.♗f4!

This simple move underlines the unfortunate placement of my pieces. It is worth mentioning that Lev spent on it 11 of his remaining 23 minutes.

24...♗d6

I defend the knight and create the threat of ...♘e5-d3, gaining the bishop pair. Unfortunately, my bishop will be vulnerable on the open central file and I will not get an opportunity to execute my threat.

25.exd5



25...♗xd5

I could have put up more resistance with:
25...♘xd5

White would reply:
26.♘xd5 ♗xd5 27.♘e4!



27...f6

An ugly weakening move, but the alternatives are worse.

27...♘d3 can be met by the strong zwischenzug 28.♘f6†! gxf6 29.♕g3† ♔h8 30.♗xd3 when my king is hopelessly exposed.

27...♗xe4 loses material to 28.♖xd6!.

28.♘xd6 ♖xd6 29.♕d4

The double pin is quite unpleasant. Black has no time to prevent the loss of a pawn with ♗xe5 because of the additional threat of ♗c4!.



26.♘de4!

Despite his approaching time trouble, Lev plays the final part of the game very accurately. After his last move, all of White's pieces are taking part in the fight, while some of mine are hanging.

26...♗xe4

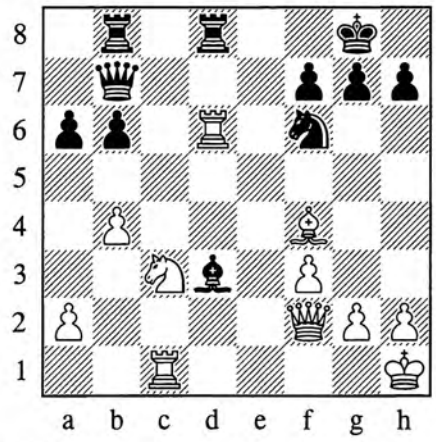
26...♘xe4 does not change anything after 27.fxe4! ♗xe4 28.♖xd6.

27.♖xd6!

This apparently simple stroke is effective only in connection with the 29th move.

27...♘d3 28.♗xd3 ♗xd3

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29.♖d1!

This accurate move clarifies the situation. Lev wins material, the game and the tournament! I could have resigned here, but I needed to see some more moves before accepting the inevitable.

...1–0

With 6 points out of nine, I shared third and fourth places with Gelfand who also lost his last round game. Psakhis and Azmaiparashvili shared first, half a point ahead of us.

The feeling of disappointment caused by the final game was soon diluted by last-minute news: my win against Hulak was awarded the prize for the best game of the whole tournament, including the Crown Group!

Final classification in the Reserve Group (from 9 rounds):

1st-2nd	Azmaiparashvili, Psakhis	6½
3rd-4th	Gelfand, Judit Polgar	6
5th-7th	Illescas, Nijboer, Van der Sterren	5½
8th-10th	Finegold, L.B. Hansen, Van Wely	5



Analyzing with Lev after the game

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Final classification in the Crown Group (from 10 games):

1st	Beliavsky	7
2nd-3rd	Speelman, Korchnoi	5½
4th	Gulko	5
5th-6th	Van der Wiel, Piket	3½

Even in the best tournaments, the dream usually ends after the last round. For me, in Amsterdam 1989 it was different.

The hotel manager took us personally to the airport, where the passport control officers recognized us and treated us as special guests. It did not take long before the KLM staff on the plane also recognized me. The pilot kindly invited me into the cockpit, where I spent most of the flight.



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Records and Results

Records

Rated number one on the Women's Rating list for 23 years
Named "Woman Chess Player of the 20th Century" by ICWA
Broke Bobby Fischer's record, by becoming the youngest grandmaster in history in 1991
Seven times winner of the Chess Oscar
First and so far only girl to win twice the World Youth Chess Championship for boys
First and so far only woman to enter the top ten of the World Rankings
First and so far only woman to win a medal at the Individual European Championship

World Chess Champions I Have Defeated

Smyslov (1957-1958)
Spassky (1969-1972)
Karpov (1975-1985)
Kasparov (1985-2000)
Khalifman (1998)
Anand (2000, 2007-present)
Ponomariov (2002)
Kasimdzhanov (2004)
Topalov (2005-2006)

Individual Chess Highlights (covered in this volume)

1986	New York Open, USA (unrated section), 1st place
1988	Timisoara, Romania (Boys) World Under-12 Championship, 1st place
1988	London, England, 1st place
1988	Mazatlan, Mexico, World Junior Rapid Championship, 1st place
1988	Varna, Bulgaria, 1st place
1988/9	Hastings, England, 1st place
1989	Amsterdam, Holland, 3rd-4th place
1989	Egilsstadir, Iceland, 1st place (shared)
1990	Fond du Lac, USA, (Boys) World Under-14 Championship, 1st place
1990	Ajka, Hungarian Rapid Championship, 1st place
1990	Amsterdam, Holland, 1st place (shared)
1991	Budapest, Hungarian Super-Championship, 1st place

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Team competitions (covered in this volume)

1988 Thessaloniki, Greece, Women's Chess Olympiad. At age 12, I won one team, and two individual gold medals with the Hungarian Women's team. I also won a gold medal for the best overall performance at the Olympiad.

1990 Novi Sad, Yugoslavia, Women's Chess Olympiad. I won individual and team gold medals for Hungary.

Exhibition matches (covered in this volume)

1990 In Corfu, the three Polgar sisters defeated the Greek national team.

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