

BATSFORD CHESS

THE ART OF PLANNING IN CHESS

MOVE BY MOVE

NEIL MCDONALD



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Introduction

The most intelligent inspection of any number of fine paintings will not make the observer a painter, nor will listening to a number of operas make the hearer a musician, but good judges of music and painting may be so formed. Chess differs from these. The intelligent perusal of fine games cannot fail to make the reader a better player and a better judge of the play of others.

**Emanuel Lasker,
World Champion 1894-1921**

A good plan helps your pieces; a better plan helps your pieces and at the same time hinders the opponent's pieces; the best plan of all meets the needs of the position. I shall seek to explain what 'the needs of the position' means in this introduction. We should begin by examining the different aspects of chess thinking.

Assessing a position

There is an old saying that life is no dress rehearsal: we only get one chance to shine. In chess, it is rather different. At various moments we have the power to choose between possible futures for our position.

Tactical calculation

An obvious way of doing so is to visualise a series of moves from a given position – that is, hold a series of moves in our head, not literally see them being played in ghostly fashion on the board. In that way we can *calculate* two or more possible futures for our position. If we see a future that leaves us with an extra pawn, everything else being equal, we will choose that over one which leave us with equal material.

There is an essential place in chess for thinking of the kind 'if I go there and he goes there, I can take the bishop...or can I?' In fact, if you are serious about improving your play, you should train yourself every day by solving puzzles of the 'mate in three moves' variety. You might even try to develop the habit of reading through variations given in a chess book 'blind', i.e. without moving the pieces. It would not only sharpen your tactical vision during a game, but also make the digestion of opening theory a bit easier, and as a bonus would spare you the hassle of reconstructing positions on the chessboard!

Verbal analysis

In this case we use our *judgment* to decide the best way to improve the layout of our pieces. An internal dialogue that weighs up various strategic factors and persuades us to castle queenside rather than kingside means a different future for the position.

What is planning?

Analysis of the features of the position and tactical calculation are not to be confused with planning. Analysis may tell you that you can put a rook on an open file, but that doesn't mean you can make any use of it; calculation may show that in two moves time you can get your knight to a splendid-looking square in the centre – but again, it doesn't mean it will do anything of value there.

Planning is about getting your pieces working together in a group, so that their overall strength is greater than the sum of their parts. That is what is meant by *coordinating the action* of your pieces.

So, as in the examples above, analysis may tell you that the rook can go to an open file, but it needs planning to hit on the idea of using the open file as a basis for an attack on the opponent's king, which would employ all the other pieces as well; or perhaps calculation

shows that you can get your knight to the centre square whereupon planning says 'Great: the knight will help support the other pieces to queen the passed pawn'.

Alternatively, planning might disagree with both ideas: 'the rook is useless on the open file, it should be on the kingside, backing up the advance of the f-pawn' or 'the knight looks pretty on d5, but I would prefer to keep it on c2, defending the passed pawn'

Pattern recognition and model thinking

For a beginner, any game is rich with novelty and unexpected success and failure. He or she has no internal models with which to compare the position on the board; it is like being in a dark room, fumbling about blindly and trying to make sense of the objects we touch.

We are delighted when, for the first time, out of all the mess and confusion, we manage to carry out a successful operation – it was sheer luck that all the elements fell into place to allow us to make our first combination. But we don't forget it: we have tasted our first success, and the pattern gets placed into our unconscious mind.

The next time a similar situation arises, we are waiting to unleash it.

In other words, we have begun to apply *model thinking* and *pattern recognition*.

Of course, if instead of our own clumsy trial and error method, we can grasp the plans and ideas of the great players and make them part of our second nature, so much the better.

The purpose of this book is to feed your imagination with such ideas. However, you must decide for yourself whether it is appropriate or not to apply them in a situation that arises in one of your games. You are the master of your pieces! Nevertheless, if you have seen how Kasparov or Kramnik have handled a similar position, it cannot fail to increase your chances of finding the right plan. This is what Lasker meant in the quotation above. In time, you will have enough internal models in your unconscious mind to handle a wide variety of situation well, and you will be on the way to master strength.

The role of intuition

Naturally, pattern recognition and intuition are closely linked. However, intuition tends to be a more personal, subjective thing. Even if we know that Karpov has handled a position in a certain way – or we simply have the feeling ‘a master would play x followed by y

here’ we might still shrink away from following in their footsteps.

And we won’t necessarily be wrong: far from it! Our intuition is related to our knowledge of ourself – our strengths and weaknesses as a player, our likes and dislikes, our temperament and level of stamina. Intuition, in chess at least, is often related to practical decision making, not just a gambler’s ‘seat of the pants’ feeling that he is going to be lucky – though that aspect can be important as well!

Imagine there is a scenario in which we can castle on the same side as our opponent and then put pressure on a weak pawn; or else we can choose to castle on the other wing, and start an all out attack on the enemy king. Imagine also that our judgment and tactical calculation tell us that, whilst going after the weak pawn gives reasonable chances, objectively speaking, castling on the opposite wing is more promising.

Nevertheless, we might still opt to castle on the same side and attack the pawn. Why? We might have learned from experience that we feel nervous or uncomfortable when the kings are on opposite sides, and both players are attacking. Or we might be aware that we are playing an opponent who thrives in the cut and thrust of an attack, but hates boring

Introduction

positions. Or we might know that we tend to get into time pressure in sharp situations and mess up even good positions.

It is not unusual for even strong players to conclude in such cases that ‘castling queenside looks good, but I should settle for a safe edge by castling kingside’.

Intuition grows and changes – again, for better or worse – throughout a player’s career. It is likely to be more accurate in familiar set ups, where it is most strongly assisted by pattern recognition. Intuition seems a strange, intangible concept, but in chess at least it can be taught and trained.

Both the master and the amateur might have similar thoughts about a position: ‘I feel that there should be a mate there: let’s see if I can work it out!’ The master then calculates to a finish; the amateur calculates enough to satisfy himself that he can trust his intuition, even if everything isn’t cut and dried. You might object that the master is ‘merely’ displaying technique, whilst the amateur is the one genuinely using his intuition.

But then why did the master start calculating in the first place unless his instinct told him to calculate? There are so many possible moves in a given position that no one could become a master by trying to

calculate every single possibility, without help from the intuition.

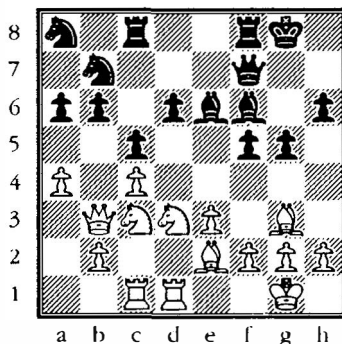
Of course, the master is more likely to have the finer intuition: it is possible the amateur won’t even notice that a combination is possible.

Intuition versus calculation

When I was a young boy, one of my favourite books was Irving Chernev’s *The Golden Dozen*. (this has since been re-released by Dover under the rather less snappy title *Twelve Great Chess Players and their Best Games*) Incidentally, I still think it is a fine book by a great writer.

I marvelled at the following story about David Bronstein, who once drew a match for the World Championship.

D. Bronstein-A. Khasin Moscow 1957



In this position, says Chernev, Bronstein played ‘what Kirby in *Chess World* calls “the most

remarkable, the most unbelievable winning move in chess. Here Bronstein produced the extraordinary and crazy looking 25 ♖a3!! Believe it or not, Russian analysis has shown that it is the only clearly winning move”

The game finished:

25...♗xc4 26 f4 g4 27 e4 ♗d4+
28 ♗f2 ♗xf2+ 29 ♖xf2 ♗xe2
30 ♖xe2 ♗ce8 31 ♖g3 fx4 32 f5
♗h7 33 ♖xg4 ♗g8 34 h3 ♗g5
35 ♗e3 d5 36 ♗f4 ♗xg4 37 hxg4
♗c7 38 ♗e3 ♗e5 39 g5 1-0

Chernev provided no analysis to back up Kirby’s assessment that White is winning after 25 ♖a3 – we are supposed to trust the authority of unrevealed ‘Russian analysis’.

At the time I was both amazed and perplexed by 25 ♖a3.

I was full of doubt, but then I said to myself, ‘I was told it was going to be unbelievable, so why should I be surprised that I have these doubts? And after all, White won, didn’t he?’

It is rare in life that we can solve a mystery in a novel or a poem or a chess move by directly asking the author. But in this case I got lucky.

Many years past, and I got to see David Bronstein when he visited England. I told him how much I had admired the move 25 ♖a3 in his game with Abram Khasin – and had the temerity to ask, had he really calculated everything to an end?

Bronstein replied to the effect that Khasin had a weak nervous system, so he, Bronstein, had decided to sacrifice the pawn straightaway with 25 ♖a3 in order to involve his opponent in a tough, double edged fight. He thought Black would get over excited and try too hard to exploit his extra pawn. Whatever the objective assessment of the position, Bronstein knew that this was his best winning chance against an emotionally unstable opponent.

“But Russian analysis said 25 ♖a3 was winning...”

Bronstein just shook his head sadly, as though he felt deep sympathy for me.

It in no way diminishes Bronstein’s achievement that he played 25 ♖a3 for practical, psychological reasons rather than as the prelude to a carefully worked out winning combination. He showed a deep understanding of the dynamic nature of chess and its effect upon the human character. Also, though I didn’t realise it at the time, it shows genius to be able to recall instantly the psychological factors around a game played more than a quarter century previously.

The drawbacks of model thinking

One of the dangers of an over-reliance on pattern recognition is that it may replace the act of creation with a series of ‘one size

fits all' positional abstractions. We can become blind to the peculiar features of the specific position in front of us.

A related danger is that there is so much opening theory these days that it can clog up the player's mind, especially if there are no obvious indications as to what is important and what is just 'noise'.

At his or her competitive peak, a top Grandmaster will have deep opening knowledge, endless stamina, fighting spirit, and an ability to calculate variations quickly and precisely. All vital requirements no doubt: but then a lot of players who are healthy and enthusiastic and armed with computer databases have all these qualities, but they never achieve greatness in chess. So what is the missing ingredient?

True creativity in chess

The vital attribute is what Capablanca called the highest quality in a chess player, namely strategic judgment: in other words, the ability to take just the elements of a position that are relevant and weave them together into a convincing plan of action. The hardest task of all can be to know what things to discard – as we saw above, a well placed knight or an open file, may be strategic red herrings that lead to a misunderstanding of the position.

The real defining mark of a world class player is a highly developed understanding of the logic that governs any given position. This provides the ability to 'see through' a position – and thereby hit on the correct plan whether after a methodical analysis or a moment of inspiration. No one is flawless, and the games of Capablanca, Fischer and Kasparov suffer from occasional lapses of comprehension; but they made fewer such errors than their contemporaries during their best years.

Perhaps we don't all have the genius of an Anand or Kasparov (if you do, let me wish you well, as you still have a lot of hard work to do!). However, as Lasker says above, we can all become better players by looking at great games.

In this book you will find some games that are so instructive that they deserve a move by move coverage that begins immediately after the opening. A game with lighter commentary is occasionally thrown into the mix when it helps to clarify the strategy of one of the more heavily analysed games.

It only remains for me to wish you good luck in improving your chess!

Neil McDonald

Gravesend

February 2006

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1: Ferocious files

It is astonishing how much hot water a master can wade into in the first dozen moves, despite a century of opening experiments!

William Napier

A plan has to fit the requirements of the position. An examination of the pawn structure will to a large extent reveal how ambitious we can afford to be. Starting with the opening phase, we might have to decide whether we should spend time snatching a pawn, or developing the pieces as rapidly as possible. Another question could be whether we should embark on a three move manoeuvre to put a knight on an excellent square, or rush out the horse in one move to a merely 'decent' square.

If the situation in the centre is blocked, it might well be correct to grab a pawn; as World Champion Steinitz remarked, being a pawn ahead is worth a little trouble. However, a similar decision in an open position can be fatal. Likewise, a long bishop manoeuvre could be a fine idea or a suicidal waste of time, depending on

whether the opponent can respond vigorously.

The problem when making such judgments is that very few centre pawn structures are completely open or completely closed; and a blocked centre can become open and vice versa.

This brings us onto the theme of the present chapter. The speed with which the rooks can be deployed will have a great bearing on the positional considerations above.

In contrast to the queen, bishop and pawn, the powers of the rook hasn't changed in the long history of chess. A player more than a thousand years ago in ancient Persia had to grapple with the same problem that now faces us: rooks are powerful pieces, and any plan we choose will benefit greatly from their assistance. However, they need open lines (or files) to function at their best, and at the start of the game these are all blocked by pawns. What is the best way to provide a rook with an open file? As we shall see, a sacrifice – whether of material or the long term health of a pawn structure – can have a

powerful effect if it opens a line of attack for one or more rooks.

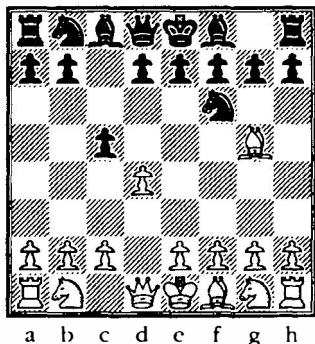
In the first game, Alexei Shirov, for all his extraordinary genius, suffers a catastrophe. He chooses a plan that would have been excellent in a closed position, but which fails because there is an open file in the centre. It took a moment of inspiration (9 ♖xf4!) to prove his error of judgment.

Game One

White: P.Wells
Black: A.Shirov
 Gibraltar 2006

The opening here was the Trompowsky:

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♙g5 c5



Black's plan is to gain maximum benefit from the weakness of the b2 square created by White's second move. He therefore clears the way for his queen to go to b6 as quickly as possible. He also challenges the d4 pawn as part of a general 'anti-dark square' campaign.

3 ♙xf6

In contrast, Peter Wells is content to do some damage to his opponent's pawn structure, even if it means handing over the traditional defender of his dark squares.

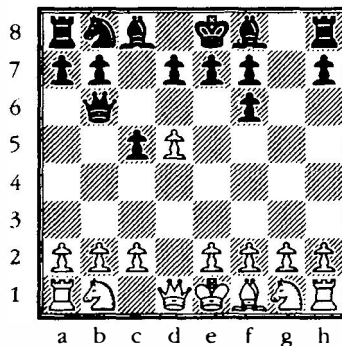
3 ... ♗xf6

Shirov recaptures towards the centre as he sees it gives him the opportunity to activate his bishop on h6.

4 d5

The pawn grabs a space advantage and denies the enemy knight its natural post on c6.

4 ... ♖b6



Black's plan gains momentum. No doubt he was encouraged by White's previous move, which appears to be something of an abdication of the fight for the dark squares in the centre.

5 ♖c1

An awkward looking response. The white queen is reduced to the role of guardian of the b2 square. Surely White has no hope of the initiative here?

5 ... f5

Shirov calls on the help of the f-pawn in his bid to punish White's apparently lackadaisical build up.

6 c4

Another red flag to a bull. Wells strengthens his grip on the light squares in the centre, but is apparently oblivious to his opponent's intentions on the dark squares.

6 ... ♖h6

Black gains a lead in development by harassing the white queen.

7 e3

The obvious response, but now we see the point of Black's fifth move.

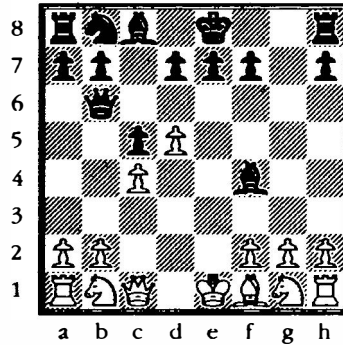
7 ... f4

The intention is to leave White with a weak pawn on e3 after 8...fxe3 or reopen the diagonal for the dark squared bishop.

8 exf4

Apparently surrendering the dark squares, but there is a surprise waiting

8 ... ♙xf4



The high point of Black's game. White surely can't capture the bishop as it leads to disaster on b2 – or does it?

9 ♛xf4!!

Up until now Black has been convinced that he has been positionally outplaying his opponent. Indeed, if White now played 9 ♛c2, Black would have a pleasant position as his dark squared bishop is by far the strongest minor piece on the board. Wells' exchange sacrifice, even if objectively the verdict is no more than 'unclear', is a big psychological shock for Black, who has the initiative wrenched from him.

9 ... ♛xb2

I find it easy to sympathise with Shirov here, as it hard to accept that

White can build up a dangerous attack, when as yet he only has the queen in play.

10 ♖e2!

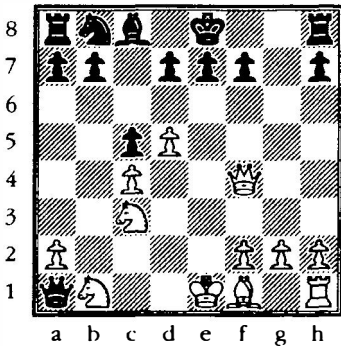
The knight heads for c3 to support his comrade on b1 and also close an escape route for the black queen.

10 ... ♜xa1

A nice feast, but if Black is careless then his queen or king are going to pay with their lives.

11 ♖ec3

Completing an unusual knight manoeuvre: how often does the knight head straight from g1 to c3 in the opening?



11 ... ♜b2?

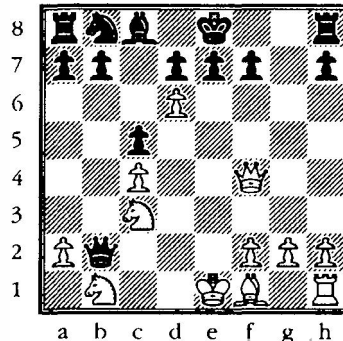
Shirov was understandably keen to get his queen out of the corner, as White had the straightforward plan of 12 ♜d2, taking away the escape route on b2, followed by 13 ♙e2, 14 0-0 and 15 ♖a3, winning the trapped queen.

Instead Black could have made it difficult for White to implement this plan after 11...d6! 12 ♜d2. Now useless for Black is the variation 12...♙f5 13 ♙e2! when 13...♙xb1 14 0-0 leaves him powerless against the threat of 15 ♜xb1 when the black queen is captured anyway; or if 13...♜xb1+ 14 ♖xb1 ♙xb1 and then 15 ♜b2 is a killer as it forks the bishop on b1 and the far off rook on h8.

However 12...♜g8! keeps Black alive, as if 13 ♙e2 ♜xg2 stops White from castling. In fact, it is hard to see how White can capture the black queen in a 'clean' way. Instead, White could play 13 g3, reigniting the threat of ♙e2 and 0-0, but then Black can create counterplay with a7-a6 and b7-b5.

Apparently, Shirov had been consuming a large amount of time hereabouts, which shows he had come to the game unarmed. It proved beyond the capacity of even a tactical wizard to work out all the ramifications after 9 ♜xf4.

12 d6!



A very strong move. White's basic aim is to mate the black king, or failing that, to force Black to hand over a lot of material to avoid mate. His plan depends on two inter-related themes:

- an attack on Black's dark squares
- the crippling of Black's pawn/minor piece deployment

An attack on Black's dark squares

It is somewhat ironic that after parting with his queen's bishop on move two, and then putting his pawns on light squares, White has become master over a key complex of dark squares in the centre.

Not only is e7 vulnerable to attack, most obviously with ♖e5 and ♖xe7 mate, but its elimination with d6xe7 will bring Black no succour: thereafter, the white queen and knights would be able to exploit the d6 and f6 squares with moves like ♕f6 or ♘f6+ or ♘d6+. Furthermore, by vacating the d5 square, the pawn advance has opened the way for the ♘d5 and ♘c7+ – another dark square!

Also with 12 d6, Black has been denied any escape route with his king to c7, as the dark squares have ceased to be his friend.

The crippling of his pawn/minor piece deployment

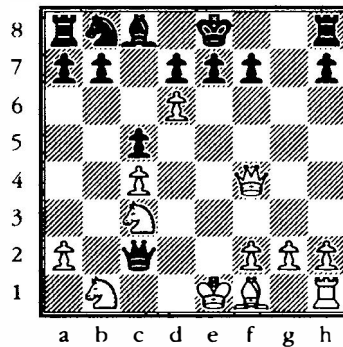
But surely with 12 d6 White has handed Black a nice square on c6

for his knight? True, but White has prevented a far superior deployment of the knight with 12...d6 followed by ♘d7 and ♘e5, when the knight is well centralised and shelters e7 from attack.

And crucially, the bishop on c8 has been shut out of the centre by 12 d6! It could be developed with b7-b6 and ♗b7, but this is painfully slow and unlikely to have any bearing on the life and death struggle involving the black king.

12 ... ♕c2

Not the way to put up the most resistance, but Shirov was no doubt dispirited by the unexpected disaster.



13 ♕e3!

Much stronger than 13 ♕e5, which appears to win due to the double threat of mate on e7 and h8, as Black has the riposte 13...0-0! when 14 dxex7 ♖e8 is far from clear. Besides, White has to reckon with a disruptive check on c1.

By putting his queen on e3, Wells ensures that 13...0-0 can be met with 14 ♔d3 – another free developing move at the expense of the black queen – 14...♚b2 15 ♚g5+ ♘h8 16 ♚h6! There is a double threat of mate on f8 and h7, and this time Black has no clever response.

Shirov gave up the ghost here and **resigned**. After Black deals with the threat of mate on e7, White can develop his pieces with ♔d3 and 0-0, when he will have a decisive advantage in firepower aimed at the black king.

A possible finish is 13...♘c6 14 ♔d3 ♚b2 15 0-0 and if now 15...e6 16 ♘b5 ♘d8 (or 16...♘f8) 17 ♘1c3 and White will trap the queen with 18 ♖b1, whilst keeping a lethal attack on the black king;

Or 15...b6 16 ♔e4!? – threatening 17 ♔xc6 dxc6 18 ♚xc7 mate – 16...e6 17 ♚g5 – aiming again at the e7 square – 17...♘f8 18 ♔xc6 dxc6 19 ♚h6+ ♘g8 (if 19...♘e8 20 ♚f6! wins at once by threatening mate on e7 or h8) 20 ♖e1 f5 – trying to make space for the king – 21 ♖e2 – driving off the black queen as 21 ♖e3?? ♚c1+ mates for Black! 21...♚b4 22 ♖e3 and 23 ♖g3 mates.

An amazing demolition of one of the best players in the world. Even more astonishing, the first twelve moves above had already been

played 12 years earlier by the archpriest of the Trompowsky, Julian Hodgson. A slight difference in move order is that Van der Wiel played 5...♔h6 and 6...f5:

Game Two

White: J.Hodgson

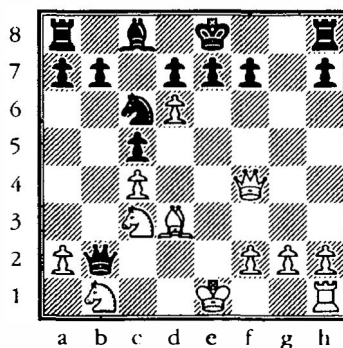
Black: J.Van der Wiel

Dutch Open Championship 1994

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♔g5 c5 3 ♔xf6 gxf6
4 d5 ♚b6 5 ♚c1 ♔h6 6 e3 f5 7 c4
f4 8 exf4 ♔xf4 9 ♚xf4 ♚xb2
10 ♘e2 ♚xa1 11 ♘ec3 ♚b2 12 d6!
♘c6

A slightly tougher way to resist than Shirov's 12...♚c2.

13 ♔d3



Hodgson calmly completes his development. Black's king cannot run anywhere except to the wide open kingside, and his rook on a8 and bishop on c8 are unlikely to see daylight before the game ends; so why should he hurry?

13...exd6

Black gets rid of the pesky pawn and creates a strong point on e5 for his knight, but this won't be enough to hold back all the white pieces.

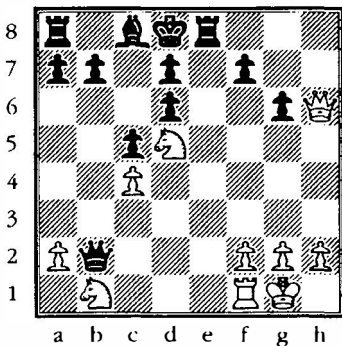
14 0-0 ♖e5 15 ♜f6 0-0

Ghastly would be 15...♞g8 16 ♖d5.

16 ♖d5

The knight takes possession of the key centre square with the threat of mate in one.

16...♞e8 17 ♜g5+ ♖g6 18 ♖f6+ ♜f8 19 ♜h6+ ♔e7 20 ♖d5+ ♜d8 21 ♗xg6 hxg6



22 ♖bc3! 1-0

White has cut off the black queen's contact with the f6 square, so that 23 ♜g5+ or 23 ♜h4+ leads to mate.

Splendidly energetic play by Hodgson, and a marvellous

blueprint for Wells to follow. It is very surprising that Shirov didn't know about this earlier game. If I may add a personal note, I gave the Hodgson game in a book I wrote on miniature chess games back in 1994. I never thought at the time that another world class player would lose in this fashion.

There must be something special about this opening trap in that it has caught out both Van der Wiel, a leading Dutch Grandmaster of the 1990s, and Shirov.

The fact that White initially handled the position in the manner of a closed position evidently dulled Black's sense of danger. After all, his development was leisurely to say the least, with only his queen developed after seven moves; and handing over the bishop pair at move three is not the decision of a player looking for a quick knockout blow – unless of course his name is Julian Hodgson!

But an important transition occurs after 7...f4 as the e-file is opened: we switch from a closed position to one with an open centre file. Then development becomes an important factor. White might not have an actual lead in development at move nine, but his pieces can be mobilised far more quickly than the black pieces, especially once he has been allowed to play 12 d6. It could be said that Black misjudged the time factor; he thought that the

Ferocious files

number of pieces in play was less important than his material advantage.

Note that without the open e-file, White's sacrifice would fail. Taking the Hodgson move order, with 5...♔h6, if 6 ♖xh6? ♗xb2 and White loses the exchange and a pawn without getting any compensation – as the e-file is still blocked.

Hence we see that the white rook having the e-file was the difference between victory and defeat.

In the next game, White didn't actually offer any material to activate his rook, but was willing to seriously compromise his pawns.

Game Three

World Champion Emanuel Lasker warned us at the end of the 19th century not to begin an attack until we have a tangible advantage. It is a question of how much energy is attacking how much resistance. It can be a matter of very fine judgment. At move 12 in the game that follows, either White or Black has seriously misjudged the situation – they can't both be right. That is what makes chess such a difficult – and intriguing – game.

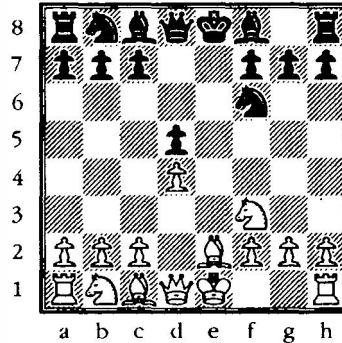
White: V.Tregubov

Black: M.Belov

St Petersburg 2002

The opening was the French Exchange Variation:

1 e4 e6 2 ♖f3 d5 3 exd5 exd5
4 d4 ♗f6 5 ♔e2



It is hard to believe that such undemonstrative play can lead to a crushing attack and victory for White in only 23 moves. Mikhail Belov found it hard to believe as well, which of course is why he lost in those same 23 moves.

There are many ways to win a game of chess, and a painless way is to let the opponent overreach himself by removing his sense of danger. David Bronstein once gave me the following semi-jocular piece of advice: 'an old Russian trick is to pretend to be half asleep, in order to make the opponent careless. If you play such an actor, the correct response is to offer him a draw, as when he refuses he will look foolish'. Of course, you have to remember that the acceptance of 'Bronstein's Gambit' leads to an instant draw!

5...♔d6 6 0-0 0-0 7 ♔g5 h6
8 ♔h4 ♔f5

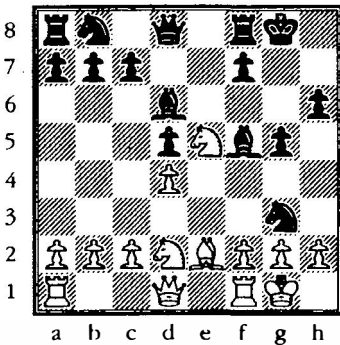
The first sign of carelessness by Black. This is a good square for the

bishop, but why the rush? Simply 8...♖e8 would prevent White's next move with equality.

9 ♖e5 g5

Now Black embarks on the ambitious plan of eliminating White's strong dark squared bishop:

10 ♗g3 ♖e4 11 ♖d2 ♖xg3



12 f×g3!

If you are playing through this game on a chessboard, it is possible that your fingers might have automatically tried to remove the knight from the board with 12 hxg3. Indeed, to misquote Botvinnik, every Russian schoolboy knows that you should recapture towards the centre in these positions. And didn't Spassky once say that it is a good idea to let your fingers do the playing?

You might be thinking that former Russian schoolboys like Vitaly Tregubov have been forgetting all the lessons handed down by

Botvinnik and Spassky and all the other great patriarchs of the erstwhile Soviet School of Chess.

But let's suspend our disbelief for a moment, and assess the situation before our eyes.

The drawbacks to 12 fxg3 are obvious. We are taught to respect the centre, but White flagrantly removes the pawn that not only guarded e3 but also sheltered his king from any potential checks along the a7-g1 diagonal. From a planning viewpoint, the disappearance of the f pawn means that there is no longer the chance to advance f2-f4, which would have supported the knight on e5 and perhaps been the prelude to a future kingside attack. So, the recapture 12 fxg3 has reduced White's long term strategic prospects.

Therefore 12 fxg3 is a huge concession. Only an inexperienced player who can see no further than a one move tactic against the bishop on f5, or a player with a profound feel for the initiative, would make such a move. So why did the very strong Grandmaster play like this as White?

It all comes down to the weakness created by 9...g5, which persuades Tregubov to try for a quick knockout blow against the black king. If the black pawn were back on g7, 12 fxg3 would be crazy. As things stand, however, there is a

nasty hole on the f6 square which the white rook can exploit. The rook is of course attacking the bishop on f5, which gains time for White's plan. Another important factor is that black knight is still on b8. If it were on d7, Black could retreat his bishop to h7 with at least equal chances.

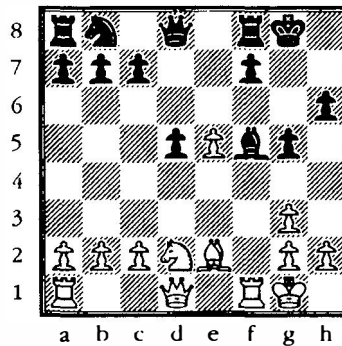
In effect, Tregubov is sacrificing the long term health of his position in order to generate a lot of temporary energy that he hopes will overwhelm the black king without the need to use pawns. It is evident that having committed himself to such a plan White has to make sure it succeeds at all costs, or else he will face a long miserable struggle just to hold a draw.

To summarise: there are holes in the fortress being besieged and few defenders available to pour oil on the attackers' heads. But are there enough attackers, and will they break through before the cavalry arrives in the shape of the black knight? That is the big question that will be answered over the next few moves.

12 ... ♖xe5

If 12...♗h7 13 ♕d3!? (or perhaps 13 ♖g4!?) and the pressure on f7 would most likely persuade Black to capture the knight anyway, so by exchanging straightaway he reduces White's options.

13 dxe5



Statically speaking, the isolated e5 pawn is just a weakness, but from a dynamic view point it provides the white rook with a base on f6.

13 ... ♗h7

Now what is the move that adds the most power to the white pieces?

14 ♕d3!

White offers the exchange of a bishop that was doing nothing on e2 for the black king's only minor piece bodyguard. At the same time he clears the way for his queen to enter the attack on h5.

14 ... ♗xd3

It's a good idea to exchange, as otherwise ♗xh7+ and the recapture ♖xh7 would draw the black king away from the defence of f7 and onto a square where h6 might drop with check. For example, White

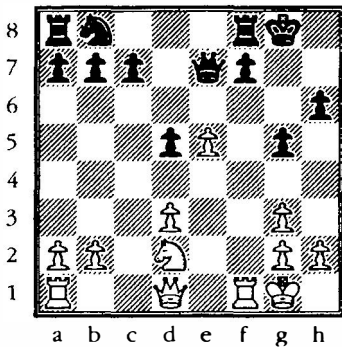
could play ♖h5, attacking f7, and then ♜f6 threatening ♜xh6+.

15 cxd3

Although the e5 pawn is no longer isolated, the white pawns are still disjointed. If only Black could move his pawn back from g5 to g7 he would have good chances.

15 ... ♖e7

Black hopes to slow the white attack by forcing him to spend time defending e5. In any case, it was too late for 15...♘c6 as 16 ♖h5 ♘xe5 – even worse is 16...♙g7 17 ♜f6, when h6 drops with check – 17 ♖xh6 is highly unpleasant for the black king.



16 ♜f6!

Let it be the first object of your attack to create strong points as near your opponent's camp as possible, and occupy them with pieces which have from there a large field of action – Emanuel Lasker.

It should be remembered that a positional mantra such as 'a centre pawn is worth more than a wing pawn' means nothing if the loss of the wing pawn leads to a king being mated. Tregubov is more than willing to give e5 in return for getting his rook to the h file.

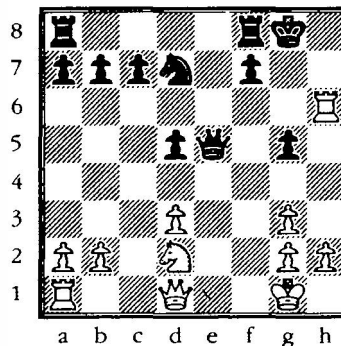
16 ... ♖xe5

I expect Belov had a more sceptical view of the white rook on the h-file. He intends to beat off any white attempt to attack and then win with his superior pawns.

17 ♜xh6

Indeed, the next couple of moves will reveal whether the rook is badly misplaced or the leader of a glorious assault on the black king. Remember that a leader needs followers: it is imperative that White manages to bring the rest of his army to the aid of the rook.

17 ... ♘d7



Now Black is on the point of consolidating with ♘f6 and ♙g7, etc. when his king is safe. In that

Ferocious files

case, White would be in big trouble with his rook trapped off side and his pawns in a mess.

18 ♖h5!

In this type of situation, vigorous action turns a potential loss into a win. The queen arrives just in time before the black knight can keep her out.

18 ... ♜ae8

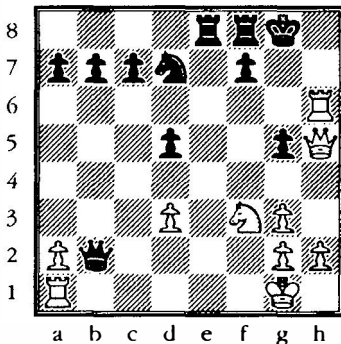
Alas for Black, if 18...♘f6 19 ♜h8+ ♔g7 20 ♖h6 is mate.

19 ♘f3

No time is to be wasted: the knight joins the onslaught and harasses the black queen.

19 ... ♛xb2

He might as well grab the pawn. It's always psychologically easier to defend against an onslaught when you know that a slip up by the opponent will present you with a winning endgame.



20 ♜f1!

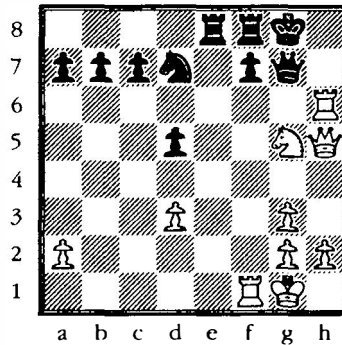
Calmly played. It isn't always right to take a pawn with check: 20 ♖xg5+? ♖g7 and White has either to allow the exchange of queens, when he is forced into a disastrous endgame or resort to 20 ♖c1 when 20...♘e5 is also good for Black.

20 ... ♛g7

Having gained some booty, the black queen rushes back to defend her king.

21 ♘xg5

The attack looks formidable, but Belov hopes to save himself by pinning the white knight.



21 ... ♜e5

This loses in pretty fashion, but if 21...♜e7, adding a defender to f7, White can build up a winning attack as follows: 22 h4! (it soon becomes clear why White wants to make a hole for the king on h2) 22...c5

(What else? If 22...♗e5 23 ♖h7! followed by 24 ♗f6+ or 24 ♗xf8) 23 ♜h7 ♝e5 24 ♚h2! c4 (If the black queen moves from e5, say to d4, then the pin on the white knight is broken and so 25 ♗xf7 is a massacre) 25 ♜e1! and the black queen finds herself with too much to do as she must guard both the rook on e7 and the h8 square against mating lines. If 25...♝xe1 26 ♜h8+ ♚g7 27 ♝h6 mate, or 25...♝f6 26 ♜xe7 and Black dare not recapture on e7.

22 ♜xf7!

An unexpected breakthrough on a square that is protected three times. If it wasn't for this resource, Belov might well have come out on top.

22 ... ♜xf7

A piece doesn't guard the square it stands on. A move before f7 was defended by the rook, but now:

23 ♜h8+! 1-0

It is mate on h7 after Black takes the rook.

Game Four

White: P. Svidler

Black: E. Bareev

Wijk aan Zee 2004

The game that follows reminds me of this miniature played by the great Aron Nimzowitsch. White

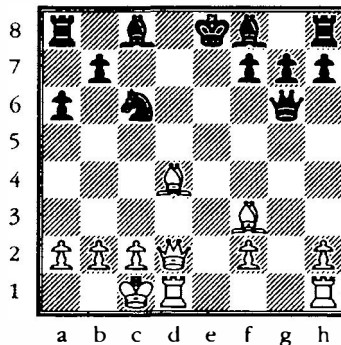
brings his rook into the fight whilst Black is busy grabbing material:

White: A. Nimzowitsch

Black: S. Alapin

Vilnius 1912

1 e4 c5 2 ♗f3 ♗f6 3 ♖c3 d5 4 exd5 ♗xd5 5 d4 e6?! Here 5...♗c6 or 5...♗xc3 6 bxc3 e6 were sensible replies that aim at development. 6 ♗xd5 ♝xd5 7 ♖e3 cxd4 8 ♗xd4 a6 9 ♖e2! Not allowing the threat to g2 to delay his build up. 9...♝xg2 10 ♖f3 ♝g6 11 ♝d2 e5 The only good thing about Black's position is his solid shell like pawn structure, so this is suicidal. The only hope was development with 11...♖e7 or 11...♗d7, but after 12 0-0-0 things are still menacing. 12 0-0-0! exd4 13 ♖xd4 ♗c6



14 ♖f6! A fine clearance move that threatens 15 ♝d8+! 14...♝xf6 15 ♜he1+ ♖e7 If 15...♖e6 16 ♝d7 mate. 16 ♖xc6+ ♚f8 Or 16...♖xc6 17 ♝d8 mate. 17 ♝d8+! ♖xd8 18 ♜e8 mate.

It doesn't matter that, nominally speaking, at one stage Black was two pices and a pawn up; the game was going to be decided by a rapid attack, which meant that White was in effect two rooks up!

Now we jump forwards 92 years. The level of sophistication of the play has increased, but White's attacking philosophy remains the same.

Peter Svidler is one of the brightest stars of world chess. He was born in St.Petersburg in 1976 and has been Russian Champion many times, four at the last time of counting in 2005, and also won the FischerRandom World Championship. In an interview he said that his greatest chess strength was his feel for the initiative. That certainly proves the case in the present game.

His opponent Evgeny Bareev was born in Russia in 1966, and once reached as high as fourth in the FIDE rating list in January 2004. In tournaments, he has been overshadowed by the likes of Kasparov and Anand, who have made big plus scores against him, and by Kramnik, but he has long been a match for any other player in the World. His technique is quite amazing.

What to look for:

In the present game, it is the proverbial case of an irresistible

force meeting an immovable object, with the object giving way in surprising style. Indeed, seeing the abrupt finish to the game, with Bareev losing at least a rook to a two move combination, you might well be left thinking: "Why doesn't a player like Bareev ever make simple blunders against me?"

Well, to borrow a phrase from tennis, it wasn't an unforced error on the part of Bareev. The blunder was the culmination of many anxious moments for Black, who was kept under continuous pressure. Could you have subjected one of the World's elite to such pressure? Let's consider what was involved:

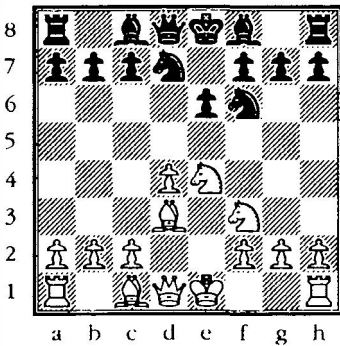
Svidler played an opening variation which he had prepared thoroughly before the game, and which he suspected that Bareev would find disagreeable. If instead he had just played the standard opening moves handed down by theory, then Bareev would no doubt have had an antidote ready. It is by no means easy to find opening ideas of such novelty and power that they will unnerve a 2700 Elo player.

Furthermore, move after move, Svidler kept offering his opponent bad endgames. There was never any way to liquidate the tension that satisfied Bareev. Again, it is immensely difficult to keep control against a master of positional play and not allow him to wriggle out somehow.

In short, this was a tremendous game by Svidler. The moral is: if you want to win quickly, be prepared to play an endgame.

The opening was Bareev's perennial favourite, the French Defence:

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♖c3 dxe4
4 ♜xe4 ♜d7 5 ♜f3 ♜gf6 6 ♙d3



Imagine if the two players now ignore what their opponent is doing, and satisfy themselves with the quiet development of their pieces in their own half of the board.

If White is left in peace, he can build up his game with moves like 0-0, ♙f4, c2-c4, ♗d2, ♙ad1 and ♙fel. His pieces would have effortlessly found squares of maximum efficiency. They would be ready to take part in any manoeuvre that White chose in the middlegame.

Meanwhile Black could also develop with ♙e7, 0-0, b7-b6 and

♙b7; but his pieces would have less activity – indeed, what does he do with his rooks?

If the status quo is maintained, Black has worse chances of achieving an efficient development than White because the pawn on d4 is further up the board than the e6 pawn. Thus, a white rook would sit happily on d1, where it might for example be transferred to h3 with ♙d3 at some point in support of a kingside attack. A black rook on e8, shut in behind the e6 pawn, would lack this flexibility.

This is what people mean when they talk about a space advantage. A space advantage means more potential scope for the pieces, and therefore a more promising middlegame. It doesn't win a game by itself and can be a double edged sword: indeed, in openings such as the King's Indian, Black actually hands White a long term space advantage, in the hope that he will mess up due to the responsibility of having to handle such a large empire. However, everything else being equal, a space advantage is a good thing.

6 ... c5!

Having read the above, you will understand why Bareev is so keen to attack the d4 pawn forthwith. He doesn't want to sit and watch as Svidler achieves a better strategic layout of his pieces.

Ferocious files

White's centre is disrupted, which means he can't prepare an attacking build up, with his forces mobilised behind and around the d4 pawn. Instead the centre becomes open, with the likelihood that pieces are going to be exchanged off, and the congestion in the black position eased.

7 0-0

No time is to be wasted. Every move brings fresh forces into the attack on the centre.

7 ... ♖xe4

Black has two knights and they both want the f6 square, so it is worth making this exchange.

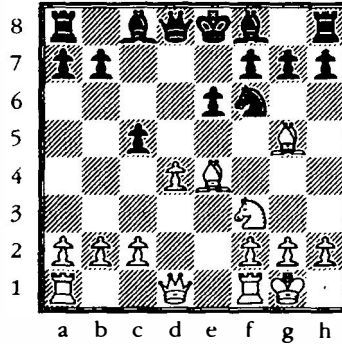
8 ♙xe4

As a rule, a knight desires a stable post in the centre, as it is a short range piece; in contrast, White's bishop would be just as effective in pressuring the black queenside if it were sitting on g2 after g2-g3. It would also feel a lot more secure.

8 ... ♞f6

Bareev puts his knight on its best square with gain of time.

9 ♙g5



Good judgment. White's dark squared bishop is an active piece and not many players would wish to swap it for a 'ordinary' knight. Nevertheless, Svidler signals that he is planning to exchange on f6 in order to make secure the e4 square for his other bishop. He has seen that the attack on b7 will make it awkward for Black to develop his own bishop from c8: this will be a significant factor in building up White's initiative in the centre.

As it turns out, this strategy is enough to hoodwink even the great Bareev, who has been playing positions of this type all his life.

9 ... cxd4

All according to plan. Black eliminates the d4 pawn and claims that he has reduced the pressure in the centre.

10 ♞xd4

Whereas White would argue that the pawn exchange has increased the vitality of his pieces. Who is

right? After Black's next move, there is no doubt, but here the position is delicately balanced.

10 ... h6?

A positionally greedy move. Bareev puts too much faith in his pawn structure to resist White's dynamism.

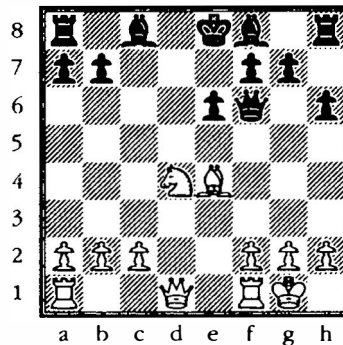
It is certainly a positional trump to acquire the bishop pair, but it turns out that Black won't survive long enough to enjoy them. Simple and best was the developing 10...e7, which was in fact the way Bareev played when he reached this position in subsequent games – various players jumped on the bandwagon as far as playing this line as White after Svidler's startling success. Play continues 11 e3 (there is no point in playing 11 e6? now as 11...xf6 is just excellent for Black) 11...0-0 and Black has completed his kingside development. White can try to put pressure on the queenside beginning with 12 a4, but it is nothing compared to the hot water that Black finds himself in after the over ambitious game move.

11 e6

Plain embarrassing would be 11 h4?? g5 and White loses a bishop.

11 ... xf6

Sometimes Black can get away with 11...gxf6 in this type of position, intending e7, 0-0 and f6-f5. But here White is so far ahead in development he can scotch Black's plan with 12 e1! when if 12...f5? 13 exf5 wxdl 14 axdl exf5 15 e6 is double, discovered check and mate, or 12...g7? 13 f5 wxdl (13...exf5 14 e6+ f8 15 wxd8 mate) 14 xg7+ f8 15 xe6+! followed by 16 axdl, and White pockets a pawn.



12 d3!

Instead 12 b5 looks on the face of it more dangerous, as it threatens a massive fork on c7. However, Black has the riposte 12...e5! when the black queen attacks both minor pieces and holds everything together.

The strength of the less obtrusive game move seems to have eluded Bareev's attention. The immediate threat is 13 e7! e7 14 b5+ d8 15 xb7, and Black has been obliterated. Bareev also has to be

concerned about a queen check on b5 or a rook coming to the d-file.

It isn't always the obvious or most direct attacking move that wins the day. Once again, we should call on the wise words of Emanuel Lasker: 'if you see a good move – wait – don't play it! You might find a better one.'

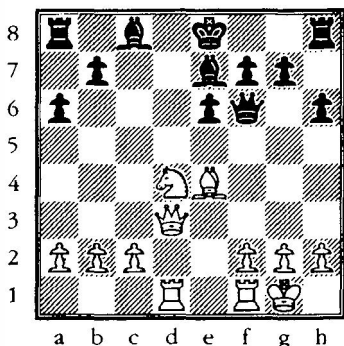
12 ... a6

It is rather ominous for Black that despite only having one piece developed – and in fact the queen would be better at home on d8, guarding c7 and fighting for the d file – he is obliged to make another pawn move to ward off a tactical threat.

13 ♖ad1

The golden rule for winning quickly is to get your rooks into the game first!

13 ... ♙e7



Now Black is very close to completing a successful opening strategy. He only needs to play 13...0-0, when he has the two bishops, a safe king and a solid pawn structure.

14 ♘c6!

An unpleasant surprise. The knight is obviously immune as 14...bxc6 15 ♙xc6+ costs the rook in the corner. Black can still play 14...0-0, but there would then follow 15 ♘xe7+ ♚xe7 16 ♗d6! and Black is forced into a bad endgame after 16...♗xd6 (if 16...♞e8?? 17 ♗xe7 ♞xe7 18 ♞d8+ and mate next move, while if 16...♗f6 17 ♗b6! leaves the black queenside in a bind.) 17 ♞xd6 ♞b8 18 ♞fd1. White has absolute control of the d file, and is threatening 19 ♞b6 followed by 20 ♞d3 and 21 ♞db3, winning the beleaguered b7 pawn. Black can't even unwind with 18...b5 and 19...♙b7? as this would drop the a6 pawn after the bishop exchange.

Incidentally, this shows us how connected are the three phases of the game: opening, middlegame and endgame. Bareev ends up losing quickly because his thoughts were focused on how to avoid bad endgames of this type.

14 ... e5

Bareev gains space in the centre, clears the way for the development

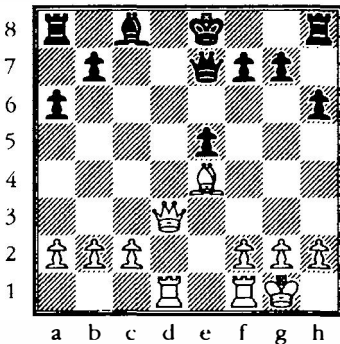
of his light squared bishop, and now really threatens to nab the white knight.

15 ♖xe7

It may not appear significant at first glance, but the weakening of Black's control of the d6 square which results from this exchange will allow Svidler to bully him with the threat of bad endgames.

15 ... ♗xe7

It looks like the white initiative has dissipated. Black is ready to play 16...0-0 and then gain space with 17...f5, when his two pawns against one in the centre ensure him of a pleasant middlegame.



16 f4!

It is essential for White to strike while the iron is hot as any delay would let his opponent escape the pressure. Rather remarkably, this is White's first pawn move since 2 d4. However, hardly any plan can work with piece play alone: at some point

the foot soldiers are going to have to be sent in to clear obstacles.

16 ... exf4??

He had to make do with 16...0-0, based on the principle that it is better to be a live dog than a dead lion. Then 17 f5!? leaves Black under pressure: his bishop is denied any safe way to develop in the centre, and he no longer has the freeing move f7-f5 available.

Alternatively, White can head for a good endgame again with 17 ♗d6 ♗xd6 18 ♖xd6 exf4 19 ♖xf4.

17 ♖xb7! 1-0

A terrible shock for Bareev who has no choice but to resign. If 17... ♗xb7 18 ♗d8 mate, while he loses his queen upon 17... ♖xb7 18 ♖fe1 without any abatement of the white attack. Meanwhile, if he saves his took on a8, the other one drops off: 17... ♖b8 18 ♖c6+ ♔f8 19 ♗d8+.

Game Five

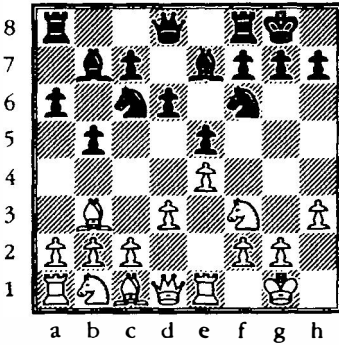
White: A.Grischuk

Black: G.Kamsky

Khanty Mansyisk 2005

The opening moves of a Ruy Lopez were:

1 e4 e5 2 ♖f3 ♖c6 3 ♖b5 a6
4 ♖a4 ♖f6 5 0-0 ♖e7 6 ♖e1 b5
7 ♖b3 0-0 8 h3 ♖b7 9 d3 d6



Both players have developed their pieces quickly, seized an equal chunk of space in the centre and castled their king into safety. Things are so finely balanced that the two little pawn moves on the wing that now follow will have an important bearing on the outcome of the game.

10 a3!

White's light squared bishop is an important piece and so Grischuk spends a move to prevent its exchange for a knight, as would occur after 10 ♖c3?! ♗a5 and 11...♗xb3. A good development doesn't just depend on getting the pieces into the game rapidly; some pieces are so important to an opening scheme that it is worth investing time to preserve them.

10 ... h6?!

Kamsky chooses a piece layout that is typical of the closed Ruy Lopez: the rook will go to e8, clearing the way for ♗f8, g7-g6 and

♗g7. In this way, the bishop on e7, which is currently stalemated, will assume a useful role both in defending the king and, after White's projected pawn advance to d4, fighting for the centre.

However, this isn't the best set up available for Black. I think that Grischuk was counting on the fact that his opponent was playing his first elite tournament after a long absence from the chess scene. He hoped – correctly – that Kamsky's opening play would be a bit rusty. A more enterprising approach for Black, endorsed by Anand, would be 10...♗a5 11 ♗a2 c5, gaining space on the queenside, followed by a quick ♗c8 and ♗e6, challenging the white bishop. Another interesting possibility was 10...♗b8 and 11...♗bd7, improving the layout of the black pieces – whereupon 12...♗c5, harassing the white bishop, would be an option.

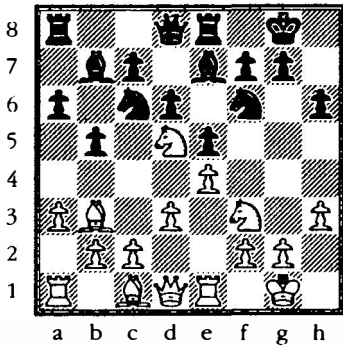
11 ♗c3

The point of White's previous move was to preserve his bishop on b3 whilst allowing this knight to apply immediate pressure in the centre.

11 ... ♗e8

Kamsky centralises his rook as planned.

12 ♗d5



With the positional threat of 13 ♖xe7+. Black's dark squared bishop won't win many prizes for activity at the moment, but as the game will eventually become open after White expands in the centre, the bishop pair would be a useful long term asset.

12 ... ♗xd5

The white knight was strong, but Kamsky should have tolerated its presence whilst he carried on with the bishop manoeuvre outlined above with 12...♗f8. It is seldom a good idea to change a plan in mid flow unless there is a compelling reason.

13 ♗xd5

Now the lucky white bishop exerts pressure along two diagonals.

13 ... ♔c8

Kamsky acts immediately to break the pin on his knight. He also clears d8 for his knight, though this

won't prove a happy placement for it.

14 c3

Somewhat later than is usual in the Ruy Lopez, White sets about increasing the size of his pawn centre. He doesn't play the immediate 14 d4? as this would allow Black a welcome simplification with 14...♗xd4 etc. Besides White wants to maintain a pawn on d4, not least because it puts pressure on the e5 point.

14 ... ♗d8

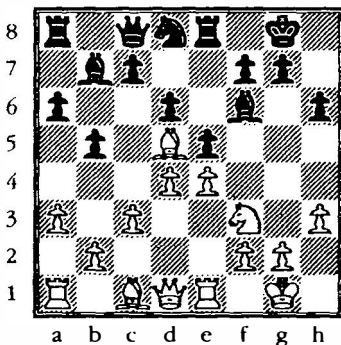
Evidently Kamsky hoped to reactivate the knight on e6, but after White's reply the pressure on e5 prevents him from ever getting it to that nice square.

15 d4!

White methodically increases his space advantage in the centre and threatens to win a pawn with 16 dxe5. As one of the aims of Black's strategy was to make e5 into a strong point with ♗f8 and g7-g6 and ♗g7, this is a very worrying sign for him.

15 ... ♗f6

In reply, Black rushes to bolster the threatened square, but the bishop is about to find out that f6 is a far less secure square than g7. Perhaps 15...♗f8 was still the best move.



16 ... Nh2!!

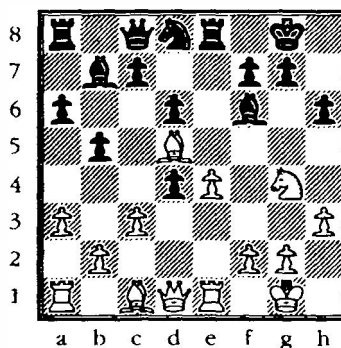
A brilliant positional move. Grischuk responds to Black's attempt to put pressure on his centre by decentralising his knight! The threat is 17 Qg4, with the intention of demolishing Black's kingside with 18 Qxf6+ gxf6 19 Qxh6 with a quick mating attack to follow. If 16...g6 then 17 Qxh6, while after 16...Qe6, the move Black wants to play, there follows 17 Qg4 and if the black bishop saves itself – which indeed it must to prevent the destruction of its kingside – then the e5 point drops.

Black therefore has no choice but to exchange pawns on d4, but his positional problems are about to get worse.

16 ... exd4

If now 17 cxd4 Black can avoid the worst with 17...Qxd5 18 exd5 Rxe1+ 19 Qxe1 Qd7 threatening to capture on d4 (but not 19...Qxd4? when 20 Qe8+ and 21 Qe4+ wins the bishop).

17 Qg4!



17 ... Qg5

Any strong player would take advantage of this 'free' move – the knight joins the fray at no cost, as Black surely must attend to the threat of catastrophe on f6.

An awkward move, as Black will end up with a further weakness on g5. However, the alternative 17...Qe7 is not only terribly passive, but gives White the chance for an immediate attack with 18 Qxh6!? If then 18...gxh6 19 Qxh6+ Qf8 trying to shelter from the powerful Qh5, White has 20 Qxd4 – threatening mate on h8 – 20...f6 21 Qd3! with the dire threat of 22 e5! clearing the way for the queen to go to h7 with mate on h8 or g8 in the offing. Alternatively, 22 Qg3 would lead to carnage on g8.

Nor does it help Black to exchange on d5 in his sequence: 18...Qxd5 19 exd5 gxh6 20 Qxh6+ Qf8 21 Qxd4 f6 22 Qh4 followed

by 23 ♖h5 and 24 ♖g6 (or 24 ♘f5) with a quick mate on g8 (or g7).

It shouldn't come as a big surprise that Black is helpless once his king's defence is opened up. The knight on d8 is terribly placed, and the black queen finds herself boxed in and able to contribute almost nothing to the defence, whilst the white queen has complete freedom of action.

18 cxd4

A patient reply. Grischuk isn't afraid of allowing 18...♙xc1 as then 19 ♖xc1 brings the white rook into the game.

18 ... ♙xd5

This turns out terribly so perhaps he should make do with 18...♘c6, when at least he has his pieces mobilised, though his pawn structure is decidedly inferior after 19 ♙xb7 ♖xb7 20 d5 ♘c5 21 ♙xg5 hxg5 22 ♖f3 etc.

19 exd5

Suddenly the white and black rooks are face to face.

19 ... ♖xe1+

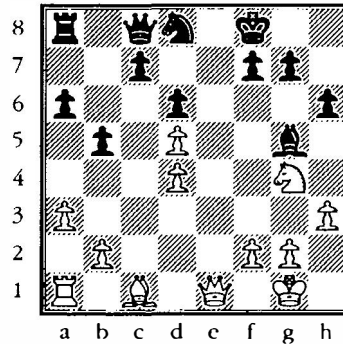
Black prefers to exchange rather than have his queen dragged to c8 in the variation 19...♖d7 20 ♖xc8+ ♖xe8 21 ♙xg5 hxg5, when White could attack c7 with 22 ♖c1, etc.

20 ♖xe1

Grischuk will exploit his control of the e-file in most instructive style.

20 ... ♔f8

The black king is called on to defend its own back rank.



21 ♙xg5

At last it is the right moment to take the bishop, as White thereby achieves a rapid mobilisation along the open file.

21 ... hxg5

The exchange of three minor pieces and a rook has reduced the chance of Black being mated, but the knight on d8 and the pawn on g5 are far from pretty.

22 ♖e3!

The attack on g5 not only gains time to bring the rook to e1 but also obliges Black to weaken the e6 square.

22 ... f6

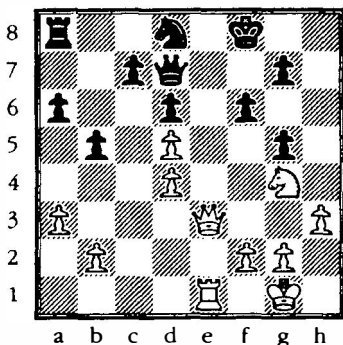
Better than 22...♞f5, as the black queen is needed to guard e7 and e8 after White's next move.

23 ♖e1

The rook is centralised with the threat of mate in one.

23 ... ♞d7

Given time, Black will unwind his game with ♘f7 and ♜e8, so he must be allowed no breathing space.



24 h4!

Excellent! Had you even noticed that this pawn existed, except as the defender of the white knight? Grischuk sees it will play a vital role in his kingside attack. Like an African Bushman who can find water in the most arid desert, a top chess player can discover resources in the most barren-looking position.

24 ... ♘f7

The knight bolsters the g5 square and had to move from d8 if the black rook was ever going to join in the game. Nevertheless, the hole on e6 now becomes available to the white queen.

A quick word about pawn structure. The white pawns on d4 and d5 are doubled and isolated – according to positional lore, they are therefore terribly weak. Not so: the pawn on d5 provides vital support for White's next move, and, as we have seen so far, has hindered the black knight by keeping it out of the c6 and e6 squares. It has also restrained the black pawn on c7, keeping it a backward pawn. The pawn on d4 also has an important role in stopping Black from playing ♘e5, blocking the e-file. As will be seen, it is also ready to fill the breach by going to d5 if the pawn in front of it is lucky enough to be transferred to e6.

The pawns aren't weak, statically speaking, as they are difficult to attack and because White has the initiative. Dynamically speaking, they are strong as they dominate key centre squares.

25 ♞e6!

White doesn't have enough power to carry a kingside attack, unless he is prepared to bully Black into weakening himself by offering him bad endgames. As a rule, a top player will always choose to take

his chances facing a dangerous attack in the middlegame rather than endure a bad endgame.

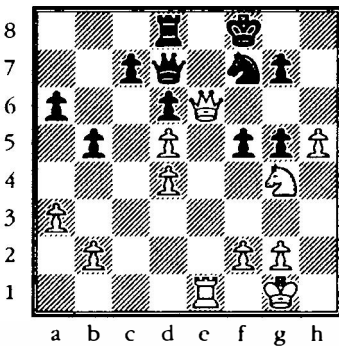
25 ... ♖d8

The rook join the fray. Kamsky can't stomach 25...♖xe6 26 dxe6, when White's doubled pawn has become a passed pawn that can be supported by d4-d5.

26 h5!

The pawn has done its duty in attacking g5, as enticing the black knight to f7 has won the e6 square for the queen. Therefore, the pawn advances and prepares to ram g7 with 27 h6!

26 ... f5



It looks as though Black might escape, as 27 ♖e3 ♖h6 is none too clear, but the white knight has no intention of going backwards.

27 ♖f6!!

The great 18th century French player Philidor, who we shall meet

several times in this book, once claimed that the pieces were the servants of the pieces. He would certainly have liked this position, in which the sacrifice is made possible by the strength of the pawns on d5 and h5.

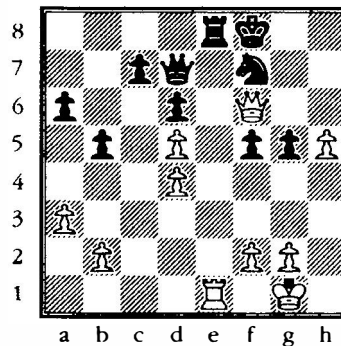
27 ... gxf6

If 27...♖xe6 28 dxe6 when 29 e7+ will win at once.

28 ♖xf6

Now Black has to act fast, or else 29 h6 will come with the double threat of 30 ♖g7 mate or 30 h7 followed by queening. If 28...♔g8 29 ♖e7 will force Black to part with his queen to prevent disaster on f7.

28 ... ♖e8



It looks as though Black will be able to refute the sacrifice by challenging the white queen after 29 ♖c1 ♖e7! 30 ♖xf5 ♖e4! or if 29 ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 30 h6 ♖e1+ 31 ♔h2 ♖xf2 32 h7 ♖h4+ and the

Ferocious files

passed pawn is stymied, leaving Black to enjoy his extra piece.

However, he has reckoned without the so-called weak pawn on d5:

29 ♖e6!

A reminder that it isn't only knights that can profit from an outpost square. Black is denied the opportunity to simplify except on White's terms.

29 ... ♗d8

If 29...♖xe6 30 dxe6 ♗e7 31 ♗xf5 wins easily, e.g. 31...♔g8 32 ♗xf7+ (there is also an utterly trivial win after 32 exf7+ ♗xf7 33 ♗xg5+ etc. but it is always better to have a winning pawn endgame than a winning queen endgame, as the twin swindle evils of perpetual or stalemate are far less likely to occur) 32...♗xf7 33 exf7+ ♔xf7 34 d5! it is most precise to cripple the black queenside pawns and so prevent c7-c5, but in fact other sensible moves would win as well) 34...g4 (or 34...♔f6 35 g4 and with a protected passed pawn that ties down the black king, White can bring his king forwards in leisurely style and capture all the black pawns.) 35 ♔h2 ♔f6 36 ♔g3 ♔g5 37 h6 ♔xh6 38 ♔xg4 and the kingside passed pawns decide.

30 ♗xf5

Naturally White avoids the exchange of queens and keeps up the pressure.

30 ... g4

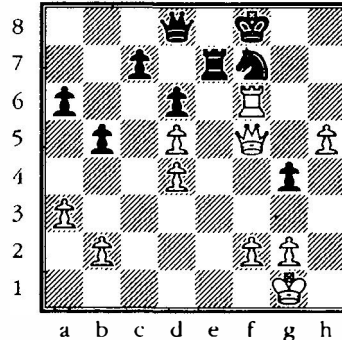
An attempt to buy off the attack at the cost of a pawn after 31 ♗xg4 ♗g5.

31 ♖f6!

The e-file has served White brilliantly but it is the f-file that will decide matters.

31 ... ♖e7

Black is equally helpless after 31...♗e7 32 h6.



32 h6

It is worth tracing the career path of this pawn.

Its first role was to make 16 ♔h2 possible by vacating the h2 square, after which it became the defender of the knight on g4. Thereafter, it launched itself into an attack on the

g5 pawn, and began to introduce threats against the g7 pawn. In doing so, it forced significant concessions from Black. Then, in its next incarnation, it supported the white queen in mating themes against the g7 square; these remained until the end of the game, by which time the versatile pawn had become a lethal passed pawn.

Attacker, defender, vacator, supporter, potential queen – the pawn performed all these jobs perfectly.

32 ... ♖d7

The last forlorn attempt to exchange queens. Of course, his opponent will have none of it.

33 ♕g6 1-0

Here Kamsky decided to call it a day as even if he manages to stop mate in two beginning with 34 ♕g7, the advance of the passed pawn will lead to mate on g8 or by promoting into a queen or rook. A superb game by Grischuk.

Game Six

White: R.Ponomariov

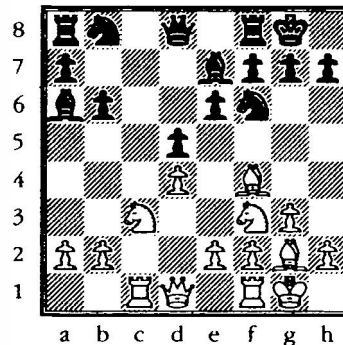
Black: V.Topalov

Sofia 2005

The opening was a Catalan:

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 d5 4 g3 ♙b4+ 5 ♙d2 ♙e7 6 ♙g2 0-0 7 0-0

c6 8 ♙f4 b6 9 ♘c3 ♙a6 10 cxd5 cxd5 11 ♖c1



The pawn structure is fixed and almost symmetrical in the centre. There are no weak points in the black camp, and the bishop on a6 looks a little more active than the bishop on g2. White has only one claim to advantage, and that is the fact that his rook has been the first to reach the c-file. The solid response would be 11...♙b7 when 12 ♘e5 ♘bd7 is a small plus for White. Instead Topalov, true to his style, decided to liven things up:

11 ... ♘c6

Now Black is ready to play 12...♖c8, when there can be no talk whatever of White being better. White therefore has to act fast:

12 ♘xd5!

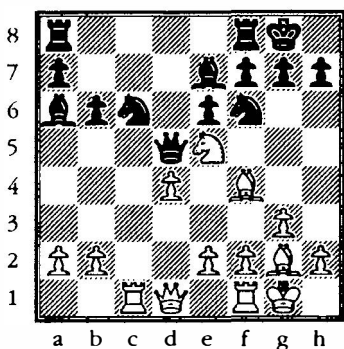
Uncovering an attack on the black knight and so forcing the black queen onto an exposed square.

12 ... ♕xd5

Ferocious files

There is no choice, as after 12...♖xd5 13 ♜xc6 ♜xf4 14 gxf4, Black's bishop pair offer no compensation for the missing pawn: in fact, the change in the pawn structure has strengthened White's grip on the centre by bringing a pawn to f4 rather than forced any real weakness to his king's defences.

13 ♜e5



Now the black queen is hanging and if 13...♚xd4 14 ♜xc6 ♚xd1 15 ♜xe7+ ♚h8 16 ♜fxd1 leaves White a piece up. If Black retreats his queen he will be left a pawn down with a horrible position after 14 ♜xc6. Does this mean that Topalov will have to resign?

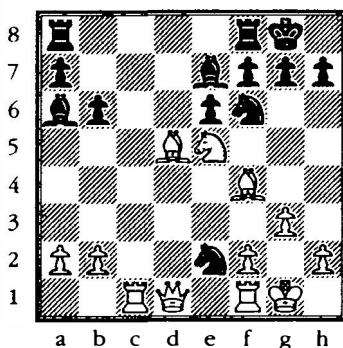
13 ... ♜xd4!

Actually, the Bulgarian Grandmaster had prepared this queen sacrifice before the game.

14 ♜xd5

Of course such a generous offer cannot be refused.

14 ... ♜xe2+



Topalov's idea is that after 15 ♚h1 ♜fxd5, Black may only have a knight and a bishop and a pawn for the queen, but he has a multitude of threats, including 16...♜xc1 and then 17...♜xf1, when the material balance swings decisively in his favour. Even if White finds a way to hold onto his material, Black will have huge positional compensation, not least on the light squares. The black rooks can also be brought effortlessly into the game. At the same time, the black king is completely safe and there are no pawn weaknesses for the white queen and rooks to assail. Therefore it isn't too difficult to conclude that Black would have excellent chances if White tried to keep his booty. Ponomariov came up with a much better solution:

15 ♚xe2!

White returns the queen immediately in order to pacify the situation and exploit his control of the c-file.

15 ... ♖xe2

Now Black is even a pawn up, but White's right to move first proves more significant.

The best square, as on a6 the bishop would make the a7 pawn a fixed target, besides doing nothing to oppose an invasion by the white knight with ♘c6 at some point.

16 ♖xa8

If now 16...♗xf1 17 ♖f3! ♗b5 18 ♜c7 ♖c5 19 ♜xa7 and White has regained his pawn with the chance of creating a passed pawn on the queenside. Black would have good drawing chances, but Topalov was still in sacrificial mood:

18 ♜c2!

Ponomarev's main aim is to exchange off a rook, as then Black's queenside pawns should be easy pickings for his remaining rook. For this reason he doubles rooks as quickly as possible on the c-file – and conversely Topalov does his best to block the file by utilising the c5 square.

16 ... ♜xa8

Black prefers to fight the exchange down, for which he has a strong light squared bishop and a sound pawn.

18 ... ♘d5

One of the features of the position that persuaded Topalov into sacrificing the exchange must have been this fine outpost for the knight. Here the horse not only blocks the d-file, but also guards the c7 square.

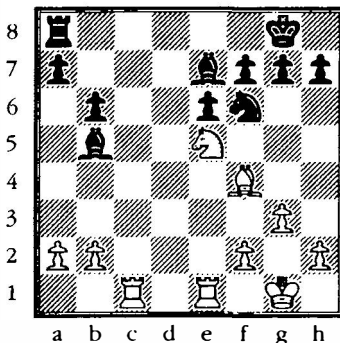
17 ♜fe1

Fortunately for White all his pieces are on dark squares, where they can't be attacked by the enemy bishop.

19 ♜ec1

It would be no exaggeration to say that 20 ♜c8+, if allowed, would win the game for White: such is the importance of Black keeping a rook on the board.

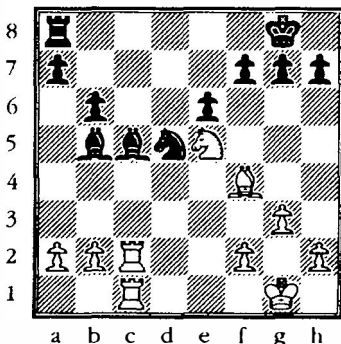
17 ... ♗b5



19 ... ♖c5

An essential move. It looks as if Black's exchange sacrifice has been fully justified, as the white rooks have been frustrated. However, there is an almost imperceptible gap

in Black's blockade, which Ponomariov spots in a flash:



20 ♔d2!

An inexperienced player might make this fine move by accident, out of fear of 20...♘xf4 21 gxf4, when his kingside pawns are fractured. In fact, it would be a strategic mistake for Black to give up his wonderful knight, not least because the white rooks would be presented with an open d-file. The damage done to White's kingside would be of much less consequence.

Ponomariov retreated his bishop for a different reason, as soon becomes clear.

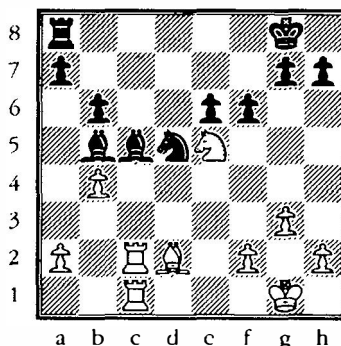
20 ... ♜f6

In general, it is desirable to evict the white knight from the centre and create a hole on f7 for the king. However, first of all he should have strengthened his hold on the b4 square with 20...a5! Then Ponomariov intended to give back

the exchange with 21 ♖xc5 bxc5 22 ♜xc5 ♜b8 – the a5 pawn is lost in any case – 23 ♙xa5. It looks as though White's queenside passed pawns are going to win the game for him, but in fact after 23...f6!, as pointed out by Grandmaster Shipov, Black equalises: 24 ♘f3 – other knight retreats also lead to b2 dropping – 24...♙e2 and White has no time to save the b2 pawn from capture.

So it seems that Topalov's exchange sacrifice might have stood up if he had found 20...a5. In the game, things go rapidly downhill for him.

21 ♜b4!



An instructive breakthrough. The exchange of rooks is so desirable for White that he is willing to sacrifice pawns to achieve it.

21 ... ♙f8

If 21...♘xb4 22 ♙xb4 ♙xb4 23 ♜c8+ ♜xc8 24 ♜xc8+ ♙f8

25 ♖c6, when the black bishops are passively placed and White's threats include 26 ♗xa7 and 26 ♗d4 followed by 27 ♗xc6.

22 ♗g4

The knight retreats and, as will be seen, intends to perform an even greater service to the rooks than leaving itself temporarily en prise.

22 ... ♖d8

The barrier on c5 has collapsed, and so the rook rushes to the d7 square in order to avoid being exchanged. Little did he realise that this would lead to an even greater catastrophe for Black...

The best way to fight on was with 22...♗e7! – it is more important to control c8 than to guard the c7 square.

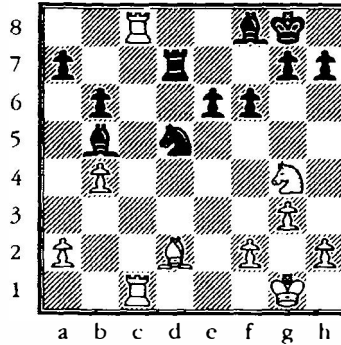
23 ♖c8

Now 23...♖xc8 24 ♖xc8 would represent the complete triumph of White's plan. He could prepare an attack on the a7 pawn against which the black minor pieces would be helpless.

23 ... ♗d7

Assuming nothing dramatic happens on the next move, all would be well for Black. He could play 24...♗e7! with an attack on

both the white rook and bishop, or at the very least 24...♖f7 to break the pin on the back rank. Unfortunately for Topalov, something dramatic does happen:



24 ♗h6+!

An inspired knight sacrifice that Ruslan Ponomarev explained in the *British Chess Magazine* was partly based on intuition. There is nothing to be ashamed of in that – I guess all of us would like to have such a trustworthy intuition!

24 ... gxb6

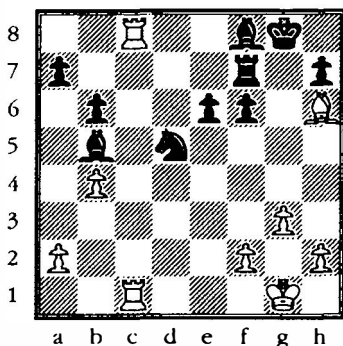
Of course the offer must be accepted as 24...♖h8 allows mate in one.

25 ♗xh6

Again Black's hand is forced as 25...♖f7 26 ♖xf8+ ♖g6 27 ♗d2 leaves him the exchange down for nothing.

Ferocious files

25 ... ♖f7



It is time to look at the results of the knight sacrifice. Black has two pieces for a rook, but due to the pin on f8 he is in a terrible bind. White has to make sure that his opponent is never able to disentangle himself, whilst preparing a fatal increase of pressure on f8.

26 ♖d8

The rook clears the way for 27 ♜cc8, when the game would be decided at once by 28 ♜xf8+ followed by mate. If Black tries to defend with 26...♗a6, then 27 b5! ♗b7 28 ♜b8! intending 29 ♗xf8 and then 30 ♜xb7 wins.

26 ... ♞e7

The knight heads for g6 to bolster f8. This is necessary, but sadly for Black it deprives him of a possible means of escaping the pin: namely with f6-f5 and ♜f6, harassing the white bishop. Once the black knight is positioned on g6, the ♜f6 move

wouldn't have the same effect as it doesn't attack the bishop.

27 ♜c7

With the threat of 28 ♜xe7 ♜xe7 29 ♜xf8 mate.

27 ... ♞g6

The knight reaches g6 in time to avoid immediate disaster.

28 ♜cc8

On the other hand, the c8 square has become available for the rook to strengthen the pin. Now the next phase of White's plan focuses on achieving the advance f4-f5 or h4-h5 to dislodge the black knight from g6.

28 ... e5

Black has only one piece that isn't tied down to f8: namely the light squared bishop. He prepares to use it to fight the advance of White's kingside pawns.

29 f4

Already there is the threat of 30 f5, when the knight dare not move as mate follows on f8.

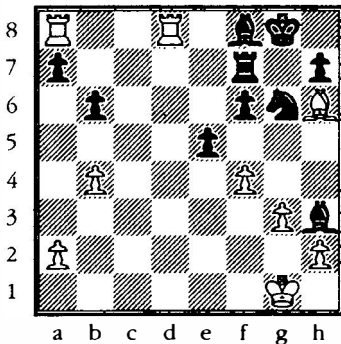
29 ... ♗d7

The bishop halts the f-pawn and attacks the rook.

30 ♖a8

The rook goes to a8 in order to put pressure on the a7 pawn. If now 30...♗c6 31 ♜ab8, and the bishop can no longer go to d7 with gain of time by attacking a white rook. As White is ready to advance his rook's pawn to h5, the black bishop is needed on the kingside immediately.

30 ... ♗h3



Here the bishop does a sterling job in ruling out both f4-f5 and h4-h5. Has White's plan been defeated?

31 ♔f2!

No: White's kingside action may have been obstructed, at least for the time being, but he can exploit the pin on f8 in an indirect way by utilising his queenside pawns.

Imagine if Topalov plays 31...e4 32 ♔e3 f5. Black has fortified his kingside, though this means that the light squared bishop must stay in

the vicinity of h3 and g4, or else the h4-h5 advance will win. Therefore, it cannot oppose anything White chooses to do on the queenside. This gives White the chance to utilise his queenside pawns, e.g. 33 a4 ♗g4 34 a5 bxa5 35 bxa5 ♗h3 36 a6 ♗g4 (As explained above, there is no time for 36...♗f1 37 h4 ♗xa6, as 38 h5 wins) Now White can put a rook on b7, and create a passed pawn, without even allowing Black to break the pin on f8: 37 ♜db8 ♗h3 38 ♜b7 ♜f6 (what else?) 39 ♜g7+ ♔h8 40 ♜gxa7 and in a couple of moves the a-pawn will be able to queen.

That might seem a lot of moves to calculate ahead, but it becomes far easier if you think in schemes. White can say to himself 'after 31...e4, I will put my king on e3, and after Black defends e4 with f6-f5, I can advance the to a6 and play ♜b8 and ♜b7, winning the a7 pawn, when Black will be surely unable to stop me queening, as his pieces are still tied down.'

31 ... b5

Topalov decides to stop the advance of White's a-pawn straightaway.

32 ♜db8

However, all the same White intends 33 ♜xb5 followed by returning the rook to b8 and then advancing the queenside pawns to create a passed pawn.

32 ... exf4

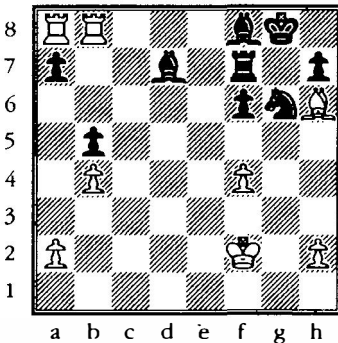
Topalov decides that the only chance is to give up the blockade of the h3 and f5 squares on the kingside and bring his light squared bishop back over to the queenside. First of all he captures on f4...

33 gxf4

and White retakes. Now it is too late for Black to change his mind as White is ready to play ♔g3 and then h4-h5.

33 ... ♕d7

Now 34...♖c6 looks a serious threat, but White is able to ignore it and finally carry out his intention to molest the black knight.



34 h4!

Ponomariov forces an endgame where he will be a pawn down, but Black will be helpless due to zugzwang. If instead 34 ♖xa7? Black is suddenly alive again with 34...♕e8!

34 ... ♖c6

He has no choice as otherwise White's next move wins at once.

35 h5

The thing Black feared most of all has come to pass: his knight is attacked by one of the kingside pawns.

35 ... ♖xa8

At least he can avoid immediate resignation by taking the rook.

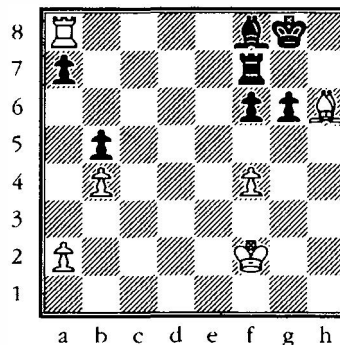
36 hxg6

A vital zwischenzug, hitting the black rook, as White would be left red faced after 36 ♖xa8?? ♕c7.

36 ... hxg6

If 36...♕d5 37 exf7+ and Black loses f8 as well.

37 ♖xa8



This might look like the best position Black has had in a long time, but in reality it is hopeless.

37 ... f5

Because his king and rook are tied down to the bishop, Black is compelled to make a pawn move, even though it lets in the white king. No better is 37...g5 38 f5! a6 39 ♖g3 and Black has run out of moves (if 39...♗g7 then 40 ♔xg7 ♕xg7 41 a3 and 42 ♗xa6 is a very easy win, though 40 ♖g4 might be more thematic in the style of the game).

38 ♖g3

The white king scuttles forward like a spider approaching its paralysed victim.

38 ... a6

The last safe pawn move before zugzwang destroys Black.

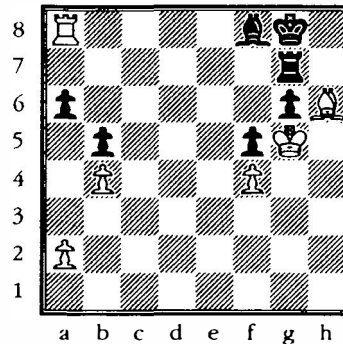
39 ♖h4

Of course, the pin isn't going to be bought off by the promise of a measly pawn on a6.

39 ... ♗g7

A desperate move that hopes to fight on after 40 ♔xg7 ♕xg7, but White's reply kills him stone dead.

40 ♖g5! 1-0



Black is in zugzwang and will lose all his pieces, including the king, after 40...♗f7 41 ♖xg6.

Ponomariov had to play with both imagination and precision to subdue his redoubtable opponent.

2: Dangerous diagonals

A knowledge of combination is the foundation of positional play.

Richard Reti

To avoid mistakes is the beginning, as it is the end, of chess mastery.

Eugene Znosko-Borovsky

The games in this chapter celebrate the role of the bishop in various plans, ranging from a winning combinative sequence in the first game to an ultra subtle positional sacrifice by Kasparov in the last. In between the bishop gets to demonstrate its prowess in attacking the enemy king.

You will notice that in every game, a tactical oversight of various degrees of seriousness allowed the victor to achieve his aim. Although this is primarily a book about strategy, may I gently advise you to heed the wise words of Reti and Znosko-Borovsky above: and watch out for tactics!

Game Seven

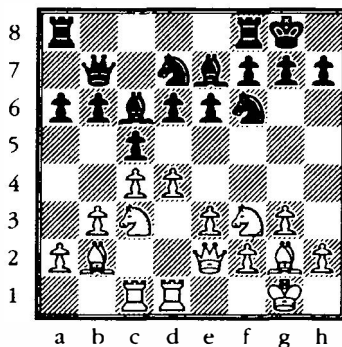
White: A.Istratescu

Black: L.Ftacnik

Khanty Mansyisk 2005

The game began as an English Opening:

1 c4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 c5 3 ♘c3 e6 4 g3 b6 5 ♗g2 ♗b7 6 0-0 ♗e7 7 b3 0-0 8 ♗b2 d6 9 e3 ♘bd7 10 ♖e2 ♖c7 11 ♝ac1 a6 12 ♝fd1 ♗c6 13 d4 ♖b7



Here Black is solidly entrenched in the centre. He has less space, it is true; but his king is safe, there are no pawn weaknesses in his camp, and all his pieces are well centralised. Furthermore, it seems that he has successfully opposed any pressure down the a8-h1

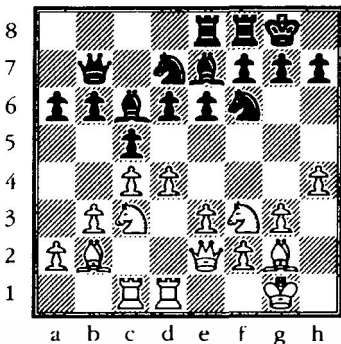
diagonal: after all, the white knight on f3 is pinned against the bishop on g2, and 14 d5? – the only aggressive move for White – would just drop a pawn to 14...exd5 15 cxd5 ♖xd5 16 ♗xd5 ♙xd5.

Judging from what follows, the apparently successful outcome of his opening play seems to have Black complacent: he simply can't believe that anything can trouble him here.

14 h4

Black's overconfidence was probably increased by this move: it looks as though Istratescu has given up any hope of achieving anything positive in the centre. Hence he makes a general space gaining move on the kingside, perhaps with the idea of 15 ♙h3, getting his bishop out of the pin but admitting he has gained nothing from the opening...

14 ... ♗ae8



Played without a care in the world: what could be more natural

than to centralise the rook in response to his opponent's 'neglect of the centre' with 14 h4?

15 d5!

This must have made Black sit up in his chair. Aren't his pieces covering the d5 square four times?

15 ... exd5

Of course he has to take the pawn.

16 cxd5

Once again the black bishop is attacked, but this time there is a choice.

16 ... ♗xd5?

The only way to fight on was with 16...♙b5, though after 17 ♗xb5 axb5 18 ♖xb5 White is a pawn up with the two bishops. Still, it was worth a try as anything can happen in a game of chess as long as there is no great material advantage on either side – a fact that Black, a very experienced Grandmaster, is about to prove himself by overlooking that he is going to lose his queen!

17 ♗xd5

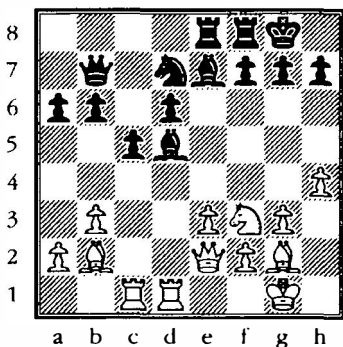
The first step in luring the black queen into the open.

17 ... ♙xd5

As a rule, you should trust in your judgement and analysis and always

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play the move you think is best if you can see no refutation. It is better to be confident in your powers than be afraid of ghosts. Nevertheless, I'm surprised that Black, back at move 16, hadn't spent an hour or more on the clock deciding whether to accept the 'gift' as he would then surely have seen the danger.



18 ♖xd5!

Did Black really think that his opponent, rated 2622, had just blundered a centre pawn? After all, if White didn't have a winning combination here, he would be lost; there is no 'solid' continuation available for him that justifies giving up the pawn. It is more usual for a player to fall for a trap when it is 'disguised' as an attempt at gaining a long term initiative.

18 ... ♛xd5

The black queen finds herself dragged out from her shelter.

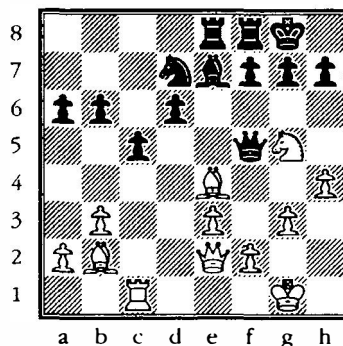
19 ♘g5

Here we see that 14 h4! was played with a specific, tactical idea in mind, and not for some vague positional purpose. Without the pawn on h4, White's combination would fail as Black could simply take the knight with his queen.

20 ... ♛f5

Safe for the moment, but there is no escaping White's light squared bishop.

20 ♙e4 1-0



The black queen is cornered – if such an expression can be used when she is trapped in the centre. If 20... ♛f6, White could nab the queen, or perhaps even better play for mate with 21 ♙xh7+ ♚h8 22 ♛h5. When a computer program tells you that the best move is 20... ♛xf2+ it is time for Black to resign.

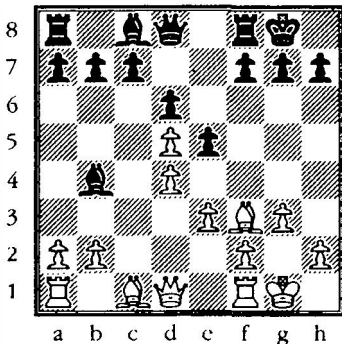
The next time you feel that you are getting too confident during a game, just remember 15 d5!

One more observation should be made on the game. Istratescu didn't play 14 h4 with the intention of catching his opponent in a trap – in fact, I expect he was very surprised when Ftacnik played 14...♖ae8?? White's idea was that the *threat* of 15 d5 would oblige Black to compromise his secure position in the centre: for example with 14...d5, when White should have the edge after 15 cxd5, etc. as he already has his rooks in the centre. In other words, Istratescu was using *tactics* in support of *strategy*, not playing for tricks.

Game Eight

White: **E.Bareev**
 Black: **S.Volkov**
 Moscow 2005

The opening moves of an English Opening were 1 c4 ♖f6 2 ♘c3 e5 3 ♘f3 ♘c6 4 g3 ♘d4 5 ♗g2 ♘xf3+ 6 ♗xf3 ♗c5 7 0-0-0 8 e3 d6 9 d4 ♗b4 10 ♘d5 ♘xd5 11 cxd5

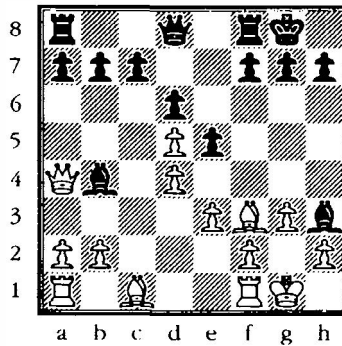


Here Volkov played:

11 ... ♗h3?

which on the face it looks a very natural move; Black develops the bishop with gain of time by attacking the white rook and after 12 ♗g2 (what else?) 12...♗xg2 13 ♕xg2 White's kingside has been slightly weakened. However he was in for a nasty surprise:

12 ♖a4!



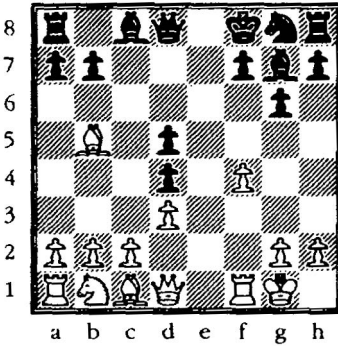
The bishop finds itself attacked with no where to run. With hindsight, Black should have played 11...♗a5.

* * * *

Volkov's bishop went missing in Moscow; the great Alexander Alekhine lost his bishop in similar fashion to the veteran master Joseph Blackburne at St.Petersburg in 1914:

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 ♘d4 4 ♘xd4 exd4 5 0-0 g6 6 d3 ♗g7 7 f4 c6 8 ♗c4 d5 9 exd5 cxd5 10 ♗b5+ ♕f8

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11 ♖d2?? ♜a5! 12 a4 a6

When asked how he could have fallen for the trap, Alekhine said that he had simply forgotten about the bishop. The future World Champion kept his head and managed to salvage a draw after some lacklustre play by his opponent; this no doubt explains why after the game he was answering questions from astonished onlookers rather than breaking up the furniture in his hotel room.

It seems to me that the youthful Alekhine had already mentally chalked up the full point before the game even began against his 72 year old opponent, and was thinking more about his encounters with Capablanca and Alekhine and Lasker. A risky business, as at St. Petersburg Blackburne showed his prowess by beating Nimzowitsch!

If I may be allowed to digress, I would like to mention that Blackburne didn't learn to play chess until he was about 18 years

old, when Morphy's spectacular visit to Europe in 1858 stimulated general interest in the game. Alas, this meant Blackburne never actually played Morphy: a great loss as it would have been awesome if he had met the arch priest of the open game in 1858, and then the founder of the hypermodern school Aaron Nimzowitsch in 1914.

Still, it is reassuring for any player who comes to chess at a late age to know that Blackburne managed to reach the highest level. You don't need to be beating Grandmasters at 12 if you have a natural flair for chess. Incidentally, Akiba Rubinstein, another world class player, learnt to play chess at 16.

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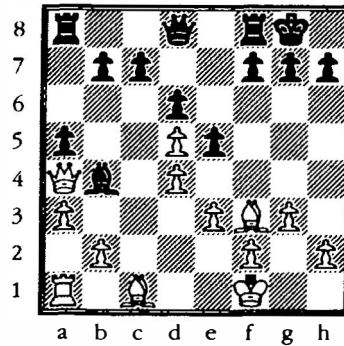
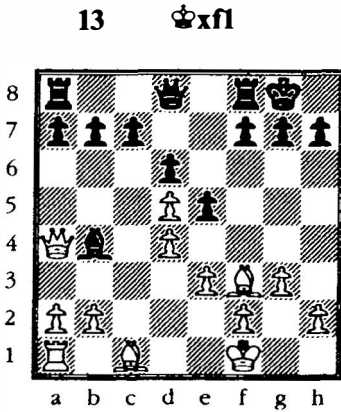
Returning to the game Bareev-Volkov, I'm surprised by Volkov's blunder as I would have thought that every Russian schoolboy would know about the game Alekhine-Blackburne. A player generally experiences all the tactical blunders possible, in the same way that older people get fewer colds than younger people as their immune system has been attacked by, and therefore grown resistant to, most types of microbes during their long life.

12 ... ♖xf1

'Take first and philosophise later'

was Tartakower's advice in such situations.

Now there is no escape for the bishop.



One bishop dies and the other is left in lethal peril.

14 ... ♖e8

13 ... a5

Actually there was a way out for the bishop: 13...c5 14 dxc6 e.p. ♙a5 15 cxb7 ♜b8. Black is still the exchange up, but White has a powerful passed pawn which is well defended by his bishop. Beginning with 16 b4, Bareev could advance his queenside pawns to support the passed pawn, before which it would be imperative for Black to give back the exchange with ♜xb7 (after say ♜e7) ♙xb7 ♜xb7; but this is by no means easy for Black to arrange, and he would still be left a pawn down.

About twenty years ago, I watched John Littlewood, author of *How to Play the Middle Game in Chess* commentating live at the British Championship. A certain remark he made has stayed in my mind ever since. In one of the games, Black had completed his development after suffering some anxious moments. It still looked precarious for him, but Littlewood said that Black could be pleased that he had at least survived long enough to get all his forces into play. "It is always better to die with your boots on" were his exact words.

Therefore Volkov seeks his chances with a different material balance.

If you are in trouble, then just aim to get all your pieces out and put them on active squares. You may still lose, but it is the best chance.

14 a3

If 14...exd4 15 exd4 ♜f6, with a double attack on d4 and f3, then

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16 ♖d1! puts an end to Black's fun in the centre after which White can capture the bishop.

15 ♖d1!

Bareev is a fantastic master of positional chess. Assuming he survives the opening phase of the game, he is virtually invincible. Here he is going to give us a wonderful lesson in how to exploit a material advantage.

Two positional rules are exemplified by this queen retreat. Firstly: do not hurry! The bishop has no way to escape from b4, so it doesn't have to be snatched from the board immediately.

Secondly, simplification isn't always the best way to exploit a material advantage. Bareev refuses to get involved with the forcing sequence 15 axb4 axb4 16 ♖xa8 ♖xa8 17 ♖xa8 ♖xa8 when Black threatens 18...♖a1 winning a piece. Not only would it be the height of folly to present the black rook with the only open file on the board, but the advantage of two minor pieces can best be exploited in a middlegame attack on the black king, for which White should keep the queens on the board, and, if possible, the rooks as well.

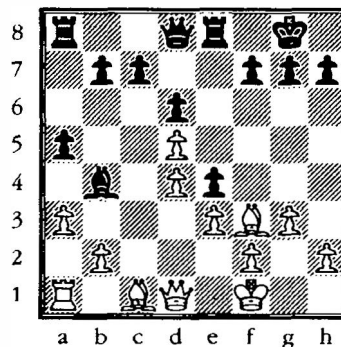
15 ... e4

After 15...exd4 White has two ways to go badly wrong:

16 exd4? ♖e1+ wins the white queen.

16 ♖xd4? ♖c5 and the bishop slips out.

However, Volkov evidently didn't like 16 axb4 dxe3 17 ♖xe3 when both the white bishops enjoy an open board. If then 17...axb4 18 ♖a4! ♖xa4 19 ♖xa4 and White captures on b4 with good winning chances.



16 ♖e2!

No routine play is permitted! I'm sure that most club players, and quite a few international strength players, would retreat the bishop to g2, based on the lazy reasoning that 'the bishop belongs on g2'. Indeed on g2, it defends the light squares around the white king and attacks e4; but the light squares are in no particular danger as Black has no knights or light squared bishop. Meanwhile, White's position is too good to leave the bishop sitting staring at e4, when on e2 it can influence the action on the queenside.

As will be seen at move 21, there is another reason why reserving the g2 square for the white king is a good idea.

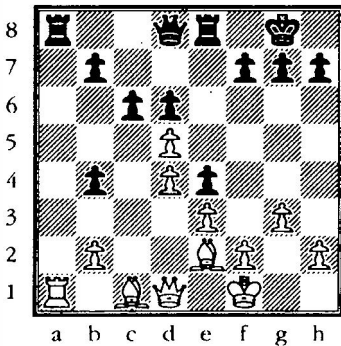
16 ... c6

Black strives for counterplay on the queenside. He clears the b6 square for his queen and attacks the advanced d5 pawn.

17 axb4

The bishop wasn't going to run away. However, it is a good idea to capture it before Black has the chance to play ♖b6, when a3xb4 could be answered by ♗xb4, avoiding the weak pawn on b4.

17 ... axb4



Materially speaking, things don't look too bad for Black: he has a rook and a pawn for two bishops. However, the bishop pair will become deadly if targets appear in his pawn structure; for that reason, Black will strive to keep lines closed, and try to maintain his

pawns in a solid, mutually defending chain.

18 ♔d2!

A simple developing move, but it shows that Bareev has given thought to the needs of the pawn structure.

White mustn't touch the pawn on c6: after 18 ♖xa8 ♗xa8 19 dxc6? bxc6, White has exchanged off the pawn on d5 which is going to win the game for him.

18 ... ♗b6

If 18...cxd5 19 ♔xb4, Black is left with a congealed centre pawn structure which can be dismantled, after an exchange of rooks, with moves like ♗b3 and ♗xd5, or ♗b3 and ♗a3 and then ♔xd6.

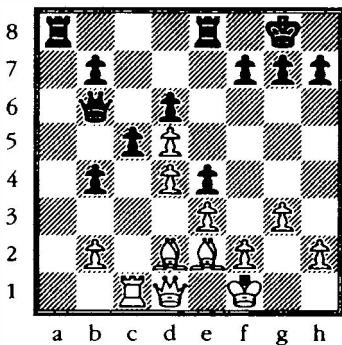
19 ♖c1

Bareev wants to put his queen on b3 as the next stage in his plan, but he cannot leave his rook hanging. He therefore hands Black control of the a-file, as he judges that his rook will perform a useful role in the attack on the centre.

19 ... c5

Volkov will try to turn the pawn on c5 into a bulwark against the white bishops and rook. As discussed above, 19...cxd5 20 ♗b3 leaves the pawns on b4 and d5 as sitting ducks.

Dangerous diagonals



20 ♖b3!!

A lot of players relax after getting a material advantage; whereas a player in trouble will often fight his hardest. It is no wonder that winning a 'won' position is often described as the hardest thing in chess.

A typical euphoria move would be 20 dxc5 which looks good as after 20...dxc5 White has a passed pawn. However, Black's queen then has contact via the third rank with the kingside. A possible continuation is 21 ♖c2 ♖h6! 22 ♔g1 – definitely not 22 ♖xc5? ♖xh2 threatening mate – 22...b6. Black has secured the c5 point and can put up a tough resistance to the advance of the passed pawn. Bareev would like to reach this sort of position but with the black kingside pawns advanced, as then not only would he have the passed pawn, but also a strong attack on the black king.

As shall be seen, by keeping the black queen out of contact with the kingside, Bareev can force his opponent into making concessions in his king's safety.

Thus we see two broad strokes of White's long term strategy:

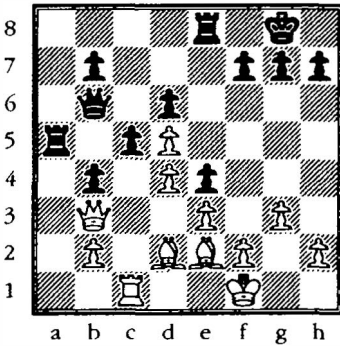
(a) create a passed pawn on the d-file

(b) launch an attack on the black king

Other general, supporting themes include clearing lines for the bishops or attacking Black's pawn weaknesses. And the plan will be instantly changed if a better opportunity arises. For example, if Volkov ever offers the exchanges queens, Bareev might well accept if he judges that the endgame would be a technical win.

20 ... ♖a5

Black can temporarily win a pawn by capturing on d4, but it would wreck his pawn structure and bring the white bishops alive: for example 20...cxd4 21 exd4 ♖xd4 22 ♔e3!? ♖e5 23 ♔f4, and White will regain his pawn with more to follow after 23...♖e7 24 ♖xb4 or 23...♖d4 24 ♔xd6 ♖ed8 25 ♖d1! ♖f6 26 ♔xb4.



21 ♔g2!

A quiet move, but it contains the vicious strategic threat of 22 h4 followed by the advance of the pawn all the way to h6. If Black then replied g7xh6, his kingside would be fatally weakened; if g7-g6, the pawn on h6 would be strong in the endgame and a menace to the black king in the middlegame – for instance, White could aim to get his queen to g7 or try for a back rank mate.

The pawn never gets to h6; in fact it never gets beyond h4. But the threat is enough to persuade Black to weaken his kingside.

You will see that by playing 16 ♖e2 rather than 16 ♖g2, White has given himself the chance to clear the back rank to make ♜h1 possible to strengthen any attack along the h-file.

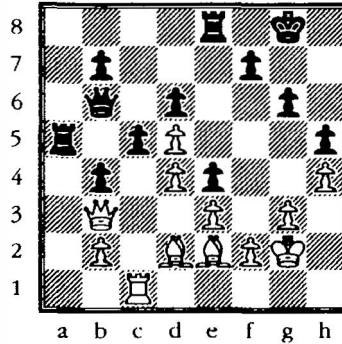
21 ... g6

Volkov prepares to put a pawn on h5 to hold back White's kingside advance.

22 h4

All as planned. Now Black's reply is forced or else 23 h5 will come with even greater effect due to Black's previous move.

22 ... h5



For the moment, the kingside has been stabilised.

The story so far: Black has resisted the urge to play c5xd4 so his pawn chain is still intact; White has avoided the 'obvious' d4xc5, despite the d4 pawn continually hanging. This means that Black's blockade is holding firm on the queenside, where as yet there is nothing for White to attack; but the black pieces are shut off from the kingside by the d6 pawn. Therefore, Bareev would like to force a further loosening of Black's kingside structure, so that a future attack would have more power; or he wants to create and exploit a passed pawn on the d-file. Let's see how Bareev proceeds with this plan.

23 ♜d1!

First of all, the rook is placed on a square where it is ready to support

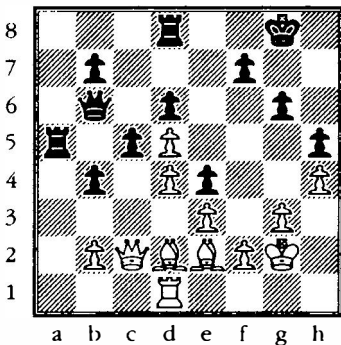
Dangerous diagonals

the advance of the passed pawn after the exchange d4xc5 and recapture d6xc5.

23 ... ♖d8

The rook rushes to counter the potential threat.

24 ♔c2!



Now the poor rook on d8 is overworked, as it can't staunch up the d-file and save the e4 pawn from capture. Here's what might happen after 24... ♖d8: 25 dxc5! dxc5 26 d6! the passed pawn breaks free. If now 26... ♔xd6 27 ♗xb4 wins material by discovered attack. And if 26... ♖d8, White can sacrifice the passed pawn to get at the black king: 27 ♔xc4 ♖xd6 28 ♔e8+ ♔g7 29 e4! and Black has no defence against the threat of 30 ♗h6+! when 30... ♗xh6 31 ♔h8 is mate, or 30... ♗h7 31 ♔f8 and mate follows on g7.

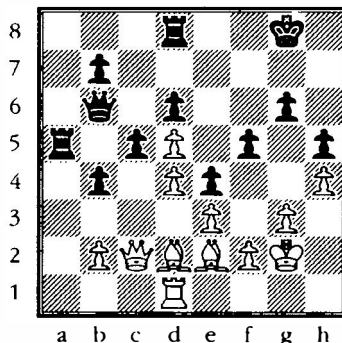
It wasn't luck that White had available the moves 29 e4 and 30 ♗h6+ to finish off the game. The

black kingside is full of dark square holes, and the black queen and rook on a5 are mere bystanders. White had an overwhelming advantage that had to lead to mate; if he didn't, then Bareev would never give up his prized passed pawn.

24 ... f5

The upshot of the variation above is that Volkov feels compelled to defend e4 with this pawn, which further strips away the cover from his king. White's dark squared bishop would love to help the queen exploit the holes on f6, g7 and h6, whilst the light squared bishop would find g6 a wonderful target, as it can no longer be defended by any pawn.

Alas, White's own pawns on d4 and e3, as well as Black's pawns on e4 and f5, are blocking the diagonals of the white queen and bishop. But not for long, as Bareev has decided it is the right moment to break open the centre. The plan is f2-f3, dislodging the black e4 pawn, then e3-e4!



25 dxc5!

White has resisted making this exchange for five moves. But if 25 f3 there follows 25...cxd4 – Black also changes his mind about the capture! – 26 exd4 ♖e8!? Then White no longer has available an e3-e4 advance to break open the centre, as occurs with such force in the game. He also doesn't have a passed pawn.

True, White can still carry out the plan of 27 ♖c4 going after the b4 pawn; but it is far less 'clean' now that the white king and second rank have been weakened by 25 f3. Black would still be in trouble, but Bareev has no wish to give him counterplay with e4xf3+ or perhaps e4-e3. If White's winning plan is picking up pawns on the queenside, he would prefer to keep everything neat and tidy on the kingside, with the pawn back on f2 where it shields his king, guards the e3 square and supports a ♕e3 move.

However, Bareev wants the action to be in the centre and on the kingside. Therefore he exchanges with 25 dxc5, even though this allows the black queen contact with the kingside.

25 ... dxc5

If 25...♖xc5 Bareev would certainly have forgotten all about the plan of f2-f3 and switched to winning on the queenside with

26 ♖b3. Likewise if 25...♖xc5 26 ♖b3 when 26...♖xd5? loses at once to 27 ♕c4.

26 f3!

White is loosening the defences around his own king, but assuming he plays correctly his initiative will render this irrelevant.

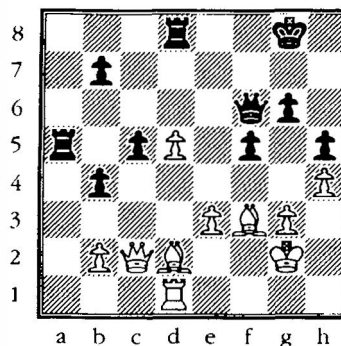
26 ... exf3+

The barriers to the white bishops begin to crumble away. The passed pawn is still immune as if 26...♖xd5? 27 ♕c4.

27 ♕xf3

The bishop defends d5 and edges closer to an attack on g6.

27 ... ♖f6



The queen rushes over to bolster the kingside. Black has a 3-1 pawn majority on the queenside, but is too late to dream of a pawn storm.

28 e4!

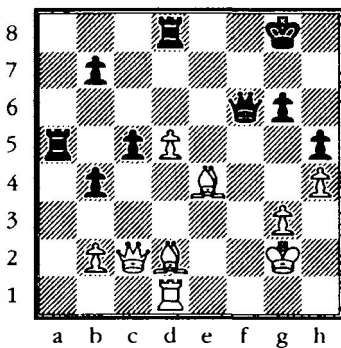
Dangerous diagonals

The decisive centre breakthrough comes with the tactical threat of 29 ♙g5 .

28 ... fxe4

The last barrier to the white bishops is swept away.

29 ♙xe4



The triumph of White's plan.

– a black rook is out of the game on a5

– the black king's defences have been eroded

– the white passed pawn is well supported

– the white bishops have open lines

You will notice that the plan has been successful because it both strengthens White's game and weakens that of his opponent.

Now the next stage begins. White will weave together two ideas – the advance of the passed pawn and an attack on the flimsy defences of the black king – to force the win. The enormous power of the bishops will prove vital.

29 ... ♞a2

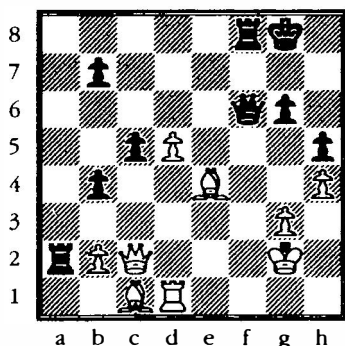
Nevertheless, Volkov won't lie down, and White still has to be vigilant. If 30 ♙g5 ♜xb2 31 ♙xd8 (not 31 ♜xb2 ♞xb2+) 31... ♜b3 and Black picks up the white queen. Still, after 32 ♞d2 ♞xc2 33 ♙xc2 , followed by 34 ♙g5 and the advance of the d5 pawn, White should win; but why on Earth should Bareev choose such a continuation, which grants his opponent passed pawns and activity?

30 ♙c1

As we said above, one of the good features for White is that the black rook is cut off on the queenside, rather than staunching up the king's defences or helping to ward off the threat from White's passed pawn.

30 ... ♞f8

The last glimmer of hope is the f-file. But as will be seen, the only way the rook on a2 can play any role in a counterattack is by offering itself as a fruitless sacrifice.



31 d6!

After his meticulous preparation, Bareev finally unleashes the passed pawn. Black can't hope to stop it from queening and at the same time resist the attack on his king.

31 ... ♔h7

The king defends g6 and sidesteps a check by the white bishop or queen on the a2-g8 diagonal, when the rook on a2 would be lost.

32 ♖xc5

The collapse of the c5 point ends the strategic battle. All that remains now is for Bareev to resist some traps.

32 ... ♜a5

Volkov gives up a rook for the sake of one check, but against normal moves the passed pawn or the threat of 33 ♖xh5+ would quickly have decided matters.

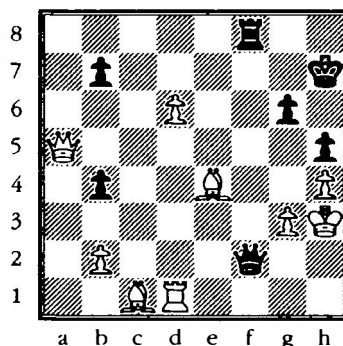
33 ♖xa5

In such situations you shouldn't be afraid of ghosts. Black is going to slam his queen down on the f2 square and cry out 'check!'... but then what?

33 ... ♕f2+

The collapse of the f2 square is often very bad news for White, but two extra pieces cover a multitude of sins.

34 ♔h3



The white king finds a safe haven and leaves Black facing a snap mate after 35 ♖xh5+ ♔g7 36 ♖xg6+.

34 ... ♕e2

Volkov fights to the end. His queen guards h5 and attacks the rook and a bishop. If allowed, Black will play 36...♜f2 followed by 37...♖g4 or 37...♜h2 mate.

35 ♜xg6+! 1-0

One of the secrets of exploiting a material advantage in the

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middlegame is to give back *some* of it to force a winning endgame. White has two extra pieces, so he can afford to give back one piece to kill off any danger. After 35...♔xg6 36 ♚g5+ ♔f7 37 ♚e7+ ♚xe7 38 dxe7 ♔xe7 39 ♙f4 Black is a piece down in a very simplified position and cannot hope to hold onto his pawns for long. No self-respecting Grandmaster would play on in such a situation.

This was a magnificent display by Bareev.

Game Nine

Model thinking: or the Seirawan plan

White: V. Kramnik
Black: D.Sadvakasov
Astana 2001

Before looking at the Kramnik encounter, it is worth casting an eye on an earlier game in the Queen's Gambit Accepted:

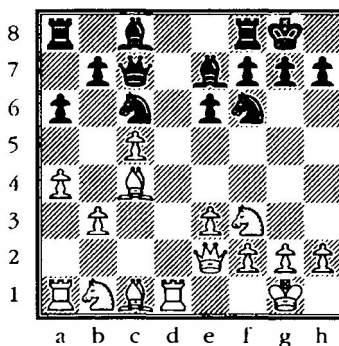
Game 9a

White: P.Nikolic
Black: Y.Seirawan
Skelleftea 1989

1 ♖f3 d5 2 d4 ♗f6 3 c4 dxc4 4 e3 c5 5 ♙xc4 e6 6 0-0 a6 7 a4 ♗c6 8 ♚e2 ♙e7 9 ♜d1

Here Seirawan chose to ignore the threat of a discovered attack on his queen, and rightly so:

9...0-0! 10 dxc5 ♚c7 11 b3



If now 11...♙xc5, White could build up an initiative with ♙b2, ♗c3 and ♜a1, with pressure along the c-file. Therefore, Black began an immediate counterattack on the kingside by freeing his queen's bishop:

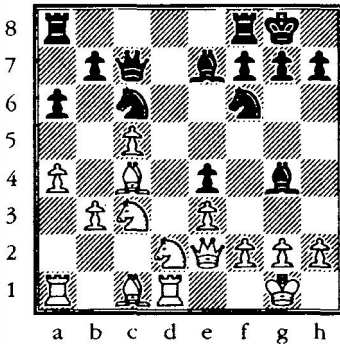
11...e5!

Black is leaving a hole on d5, but things happen too fast for White to exploit it:

12 ♗c3 e4 13 ♗d2

The pawn on e4 would be a target in the long term, but after Black's next move there will be no long term:

13...♙g4



Now White must oblige his opponent in ridding him of his weak pawn, whilst accepting the fracturing of his own kingside pawn structure. Nikolic was soon struggling to hold his position together against the powerfully centralised black pieces. Eventually he drops two pawns, but then the game is suddenly agreed drawn:

14 f3 exf3 15 gxf3 ♖b5 16 ♖b2
 ♙ad8 17 ♗ce4 ♗e5 18 ♙f1 ♗xe4
 19 ♗xe4 ♙g6 20 ♙ac1 ♗xc4
 21 ♙xc4 f5 22 ♗f2 ♙f7 23 ♙cc1
 ♙fe8 24 ♗d3 ♙xb3 25 ♙f2 ♙f8
 26 ♙g2 ♙xa4 27 ♗f4 ♙f7 28 ♗h1
 1/2-1/2

I guess Scirawan was in time pressure and feared the pressure on g7, but the position looks excellent for Black.

Playing through this game, you might make a mental note ‘the plan of e6-e5 and ♙g4 is the way to free Black’s game in this set up. Yes, that is what I will do if I ever reach such a situation. After all, Seirawan has beaten Kasparov and Karpov in

his career, so he must know what he is doing!’

In fact, it is not only important (and interesting) to know how strong players have handled an opening set up – it is vital. I’m not talking specifically about opening theory: just playing through the games of Capablanca, for example, would give you a ‘feel’ for where the pieces belong. The great Cuban’s openings are *de facto* old fashioned, but he made every move according to sound principles, with a large dose of intuitive genius thrown in as well.

It is now time to look at Kramnik-Sadvakasov. Here Black gets a rather inferior version of the Seirawan plan above, but it is only when he panics and changes track that he meets with disaster. The moral is: once you have chosen a plan, you should try to see it through, unless there is a compelling reason to abandon it. In the same way that too many cooks spoil the broth, a position can be ruined if a player keeps changing his mind about the way to combine the ‘ingredients’ available to him.

1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 ♗f3 ♗f6
 4 e3 e6 5 ♙xc4 c5 6 0-0 a6 7 a4
 ♗c6 8 ♙e2 ♙c7 9 ♙d1 ♙d6?!

Black tricks himself with his different move order. Instead 9...♙e7 10 dxc5 0-0! gives us the Seirawan game above.

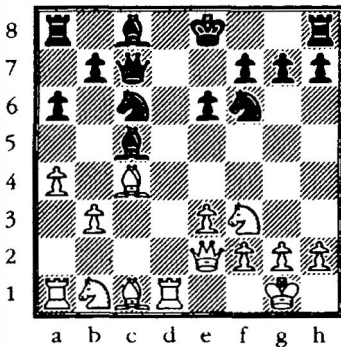
10 **dx5**

It may appear that this is a harmless move, liquidating the centre, but White is opening both the c file and d file for his rooks and also the a1-h8 diagonal for his dark squared bishop.

10 ... **♙xc5**

Black has no choice but to recapture as in contrast to the Seirawan game his bishop is hanging.

11 **b3**

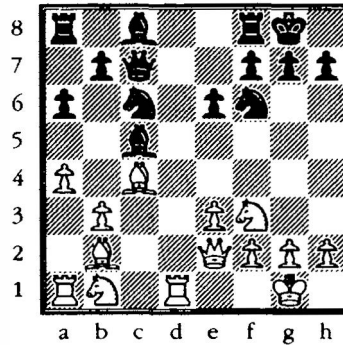


White avoids the routine 11 **♘c3**, as he wants to have the threat of **♙xf6**, breaking up Black's kingside pawns, when he puts his bishop on b2, and the knight would get in the way. It just shows you that the rule of development 'knights before bishops' isn't always correct, even in a position without a complex pawn structure in the centre.

11 ... **0-0**

Naturally the black king shouldn't remain too long in the centre when there are two open files.

12 **♙b2**



Now Black must stop 13 **♙xf6**, which would seriously undermine his king's cover. If 12...**♙e7**, then White could continue 13 **♘bd2**, intending **♗ac1**, and then perhaps **♙d3** and **♘e4**, aiming to clear the way to exert pressure along the c-file and on c6 in particular. The black queen would find herself awkwardly placed on c6; and, even worse, White's queenside pressure would make it difficult for Black to develop the queen's bishop properly, if at all. Therefore Black elects to follow the Seirawan plan of advancing his e-pawn.

12 ... **e5**

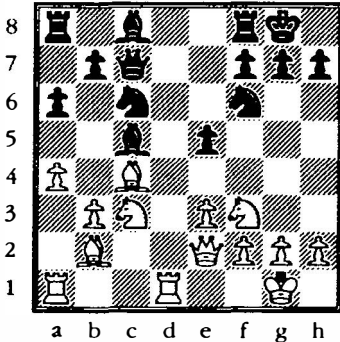
A double edged move. Its advantages are that it:

- prevents 13 **♙xf6**
- opens a line for the bishop on c8
- introduces the idea of e5-e4

Its disadvantages are that it

- weakens the d5 square
- uncovers the potential weakness on f7
- makes the black e-pawn a target

13 ♖c3



Only now. The knight is rewarded for being patient, as the outlook from c3 is now far rosier as a gap in Black's pawn centre has appeared on d5. You will notice that Kramnik's plan has instantly changed shape due to his opponent's previous move. He is no longer thinking about how to exploit the c-file with his queen's rook or embarrass the black queen on c7. Instead his focus is on the d-file and the newly created hole on d5. He also needs to have worked out a countermeasure against Black's e5-e4 and ♖g4 theme discussed below.

A plan needs to be continuously moderated or even changed completely according to circumstances. These days at least, you

hardly ever see a game in which a player kept to the one and same plan throughout the middlegame. Even if the basic intention behind his schemes was the same – let's say giving mate to the enemy king – a multitude of frequently changing mini-plans was being employed. And at some point or other, the mating plan could have been 'bought off' by the opponent by giving up material or accepting a (far) worse endgame.

13 ... e4

Black continues with the Seirawan plan, but the fact that he lost time in playing ♗d6 and ♗xc5, rather than just ♗e7, makes it rather less attractive for him.

A more modest continuation was 13...♗g4, though White has a pleasant edge after 14 ♖d5! – the best way of dealing with the threat of e5-e4 – 14...♖xd5 15 ♗xd5 and White reverts to the plan of c-file pressure with 16 ♖a1 etc. Once again we see the flexibility of planning that is required from White in this position.

14 ♖g5

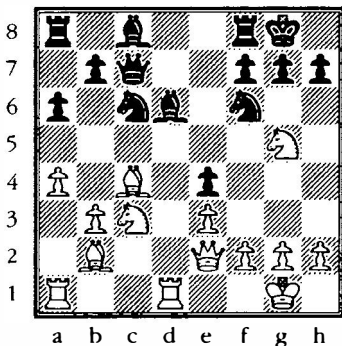
The knight is dislodged but is now well placed to aid a kingside attack. Besides, the c4 pawn is hanging. Therefore Black has to act fast.

14 ... ♗d6?

Dangerous diagonals

Black loses confidence in the Scirawan play. Having come this far he should have seen it through with 14... ♖g4, though 15 ♘d5! is a strong riposte: 15... ♙xe2 16 ♘xc7 ♙xd1 17 ♘xa8 ♙c2 18 ♖c1 and White's pressure on f7 and down the c file cause Black problems. Still, Black should be able to defend adequately with 18... ♘b4.

In the game we shall see that failing to follow a plan through can have disastrous consequences.



15 ♘d5!

Black was hoping to restrain White's initiative after 15 ♘xc7 ♘xe4 16 ♘xe4 ♙xh2+ 17 ♖h1 ♙e5. However, White has no reason to worry about the h2 pawn, nor indeed the e4 pawn, as his pieces have enough energy to carry out a direct kingside assault.

15 ... ♘xd5

After this forced exchange there are no black minor pieces left on the kingside to defend their monarch.

16 ♖xd5!

The recapture that adds the most energy to White's position. It is always an ominous sign for the defender when an enemy rook appears on the horizon.

16 ... ♙xh2+

Black has no choice but to capture the pawn and hope for the best: the e4 pawn is indefensible, and there would be no point surviving a middlegame attack just to be a pawn down in the endgame against Kramnik.

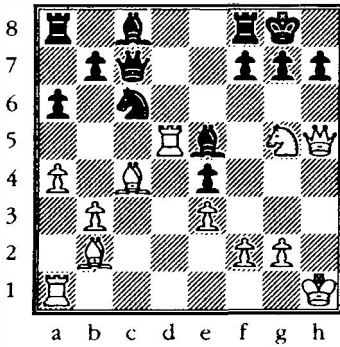
17 ♖h1

As a rule, in such situations it's best to keep the king in contact with the intrusive black bishop, so that a piece will be tied down to its defence; or perhaps the bishop will suddenly be hanging at the end of a variation and be a 'free present' for the king. Of course, if Black had an attacking follow up to the bishop check, it might be better to run to f1; but such is not the case here as White holds the initiative.

17 ... ♙e5

Black withdraws the bishop immediately to meet the pressure from its white counterpart on b2 and also prevent the white rook from sliding over from d5 to the kingside.

18 ♖h5



Such a move is only possible when it is supported by tactical awareness. If White hadn't spotted the combination that concludes the game he would have had to make do with 18 ♖xc4.

18 ... ♗f5??

A move of the 'looks right' kind that bedevils the play of even top Grandmasters. Indeed, putting the bishop on f5 serves many purposes. It defends e4 as well as h7, removes the white queen's latent pressure on e5 - or at least apparently so - and develops the queen's bishop. All this is fine and good, but White has so many pieces aimed at the black kingside - queen, rook, two bishops and knight - that Black needed to think about how to ward off the specific threats.

A much tougher defence was 18...h6, which reminds us that the most efficient looking move isn't necessarily the best. Sometimes a

crude threat to a piece is what is needed. Then after 19 ♘xf7 Black would be mated upon 19...♙xb2 20 ♘xh6+ ♚h7 (or 20...gxh6 21 ♗d7+) 21 ♘f5+ ♚g8 22 ♗d7+ but 19...♗xf7 would survive to the endgame: 20 ♗xe5 ♘xc5 21 ♙xe5 ♗e7 22 ♙xf7+ ♗xf7 23 ♗xf7+ ♚xf7 24 ♗c1. White's rook is about to seize the seventh rank, and the pawns on c4, g7 and also b7 are potential targets. Against the player who at the time had the finest technique in the world, it is doubtful that Black would survive; but then again, where there are opposite coloured bishops in the endgame, there is always hope.

19 ♘xf7!

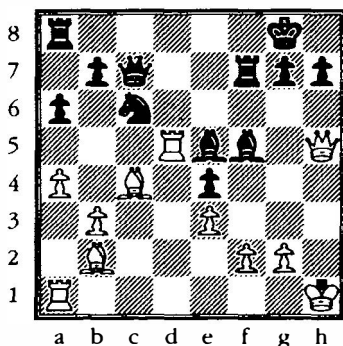
We all recall childhood tragedies that go 1 e4 e5 2 ♙c4 ♘c6 3 ♗h5 ♘f6 4 ♗xf7 matc.

In fact, through the centuries, Black has suffered more disasters on f7 than any other square. Model thinking should teach you to view Black's apparently solid defence of this square with considerable scepticism. As will be seen, not only the white queen and knight, but also the white bishop and rook can besiege this square.

19 ... ♗xf7

There is nothing else, as if 19...♙xb2 20 ♗xf5 ♙xa1 21 ♘g5+ ♚h8 22 ♗xh7 mate.

Dangerous diagonals



20 ♖xf5!

The wonderful point is that 20...♗xf5 21 ♖d8 is check and mate!

20 ... g6

Or 20...♙xb2 21 ♖d7, unleashing the pin on the rook on f7, when if Black saves his queen then 22 ♗xf7+ is decisive, while 21...♗xd7 22 ♗xd7 doesn't help.

21 ♙xe5 1-0

After 21...gxf5 22 ♙xc7 Black remains a piece down as 22...♗xc7 23 ♖d7+ costs him a rook.

A stunning attack by Kramnik that developed from a quiet looking position.

Game Ten

A tale of two bishops

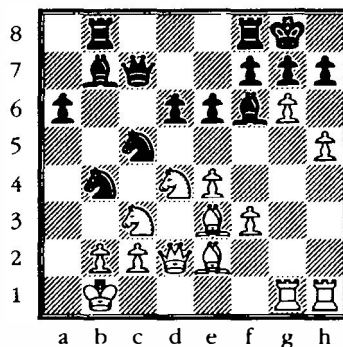
White: M.Adams

Black: G.Kasparov

Linares 2005

The opening was a Najdorf Sicilian:

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4
4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♙e3 e6
7 ♙e2 ♗c7 8 ♗d2 b5 9 a3 ♙b7
10 f3 ♘c6 11 0-0-0 b4 12 axb4
♘xb4 13 g4 ♙e7 14 g5 ♘d7 15 h4
♘c5 16 ♙b1 ♖b8 17 h5 0-0 18 g6
♙f6 19 ♖dg1



A race has developed between White's assault on the kingside, and Black's counterattack on the queenside. White will win if he conquers the g7 square, while Black will similarly triumph if he gains mastery of the b2 square. Over the next few moves, Black's dark squared bishop will succeed in both defending g7 and attacking b2; White's dark squared bishop, on the other hand, misses the moment to attack g7 and is unable to defend b2. And so, Black's attack has more potency and he wins!

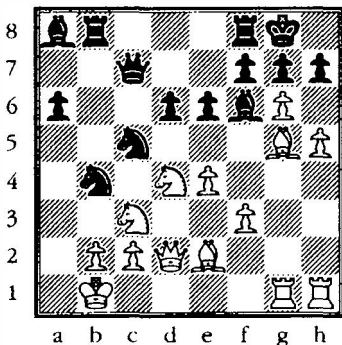
An oversimplification of a struggle between two Titans such as Adams and Kasparov? Yes, but if you keep in mind the above generalisation, it will help to explain many of the moves and ideas that follow.

19 ... ♖a8!!

At first glance, the kindest thing that can be said about this move is 'they also serve who only get out of the way'. However, as will be seen at the critical moment, putting the bishop on the a8 backwater is a master stroke. Now White had better get moving with his attack, as the black rooks intend to gang up on the b2 pawn.

20 ♖g5

After the game, the players decided in their analysis that the result of the game should be... a quick draw! Best play is apparently 20 ♖h6! when the white bishop gets to attack the aforementioned g7 square: 20...♗b6 – too risky for Black is 20...gxf6 21 ♗xh6 – 21 gxf6+ ♖xh7 22 ♖xg7! ♖xg7 23 ♖xg7+ ♖xg7 24 ♔f5+! – the point is to win the f5 square for the queen – 24...exf5 25 ♗g5+ ♖h7 26 ♗xf5+ ♖h8 27 ♗f6+ etc. with perpetual check.



Still, the game move looks very menacing, as the threat is 21 ♖xf6

gxf6 22 ♗h6 with a quick mate. If 20...♖xg5 21 ♗xg5 intends mate on g7 after 22 gxf7+, or 20...♖xd4 21 gxf7+ ♖xh7 22 ♗xd4 and Black is facing 23 h6.

20 ... ♖e5!

The only move, but it confounds the white attack. If Adams was going to succeed, he would be able to play 21 f4 now, but this meets with the crushing response 21...♔xe4! 22 ♔xe4 ♖xd4 (only now) 23 ♗xd4 ♗xc2+ 24 ♖a1 ♖xe4, and the threat of 25...♗a4 mate is lethal.

Here it is worth observing that at the key moment – when the White attack came to a standstill and the game became an exhibition of tactics from Kasparov – *it was the bishop on a8 that made the difference*. After all, it wasn't there to support the 21...♔xe4 riposte to 21 f4, Black would have to part with his dark squared bishop with 21...♖xd4 22 ♗xd4 when White maintains threats against g7 and the attack on b2 is far less powerful.

The bishop on a8 now goes unmentioned until the end of the game, but it helped in a big way. Only a genius could have realised its value on a8.

21 ♖h7+

White could still have tried his luck with 21 ♖h6, which is similar to 20 ♖h6 in the note above, but

Dangerous diagonals

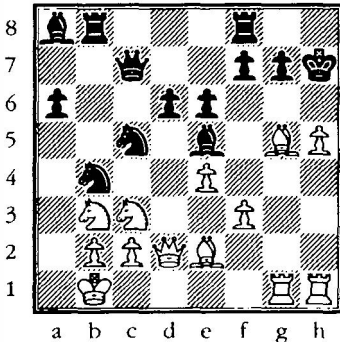
Adams decides to break open the g-file at once.

21 ... ♔xh7!

The pawn has to be eliminated as if 21...♔h8 22 h6! g6 23 f4 ♖xe4 24 ♖xe4, when in contrast to the variation given in the note to 20...♙e5 above, White gets in first as after 24...♙xd4 25 ♗xd4 comes with check.

22 ♖b3

The white attack has come to a dead end, as g7 is securely defended and if 22 h6 g6 shuts up shop. Seeing no answer to Black's looming attack on the queenside, a demoralised Adams quickly buckles under.



22 ... ♖xc2!

A brutal combination by the master of attack in his last tournament.

23 ♖xc5

If 23 ♗xc2 Black can choose between 23...♖xb3 with 24...♗a5 to follow which looks horrible for White, or simply 23...♗xb3, threatening ♙xc3, and then 24...♜fb8 with a massacre on b2.

23 ... ♖a3+!

The point: Black extricates his knight with a zwischenzug.

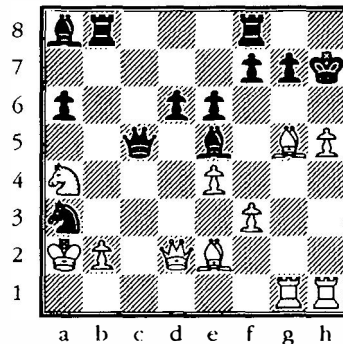
24 ♔a2

The only advice you can give in such a position is to keep the king on a light square and hope for a miracle.

24 ... ♗xc5

Not only regaining the piece but preparing to answer 25 bxa3 with 25...♙xc3.

25 ♖a4



A last ditch attempt by a tough fighter. The black queen is now en prise and a defender is added to the

b2 square. If Black loses faith in his attack, he might end up losing a knight as well...

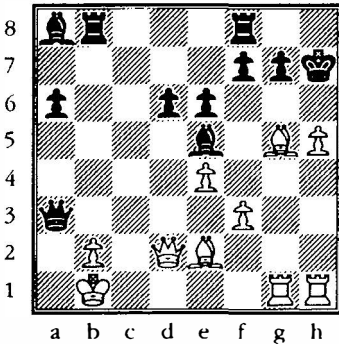
25 ... ♖c2!

With the magnificent point 26 ♖xc5 ♜xb2 mate.

26 ♖b1

Or 26 h6 ♜xb2+ 27 ♖xb2 ♜a3+ 28 ♖b1 ♜xb2 mate.

26 ... ♜a3



0-1

Disaster on b2 can't be averted for more than a couple of moves. A possible finish is 27 ♖xc2 ♜xa4+ 28 ♖b1 ♜a3! and b2 collapses (this is more precise than 28... ♖xb2). Alternatively, if 27 ♜xc2 ♜fc8! when moving the white queen to safety allows 28... ♜xa4 and b2 drops, while 28 ♜xc8 – hoping for 28... ♜c8?? 29 bxa3 – 28... ♜xb2+ 29 ♖xb2 ♜xb2 is mate.

Game Ten

To end this chapter, here is another fine game from the tournament at which Kasparov announced his retirement from competitive chess.

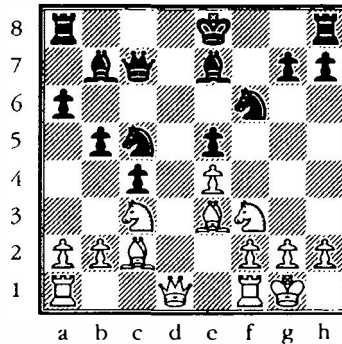
White: R.Kasimdzhanov

Black: G.Kasparov

Linares 2005

The Opening was the Meran Variation of the Semi-Slav:

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♖c3 ♖f6 4 e3 e6 5 ♖f3 ♖bd7 6 ♖d3 dxc4 7 ♖xc4 b5 8 ♖d3 ♖b7 9 0-0 a6 10 e4 c5 11 d5 ♜c7 12 dxe6 fxe6 13 ♖c2 c4 14 ♖d4 ♖c5 15 ♖e3 e5 16 ♖f3 ♖e7



The story so far. Black has a majority of pawns on the queenside; his pawn on e5 is just as valuable as the white pawn on e4, each conferring an equal share of the centre. We notice that the pawn on e4 is hanging, as it is attacked three times and defended only twice. Black has a good lay out of pieces

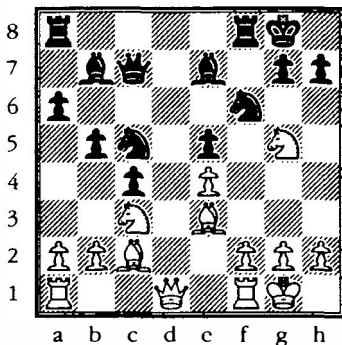
Dangerous diagonals

and pawns, and only needs to castle to have good long term prospects. Therefore Kasimzhanov decided to take immediate action:

17 ♖g5

The knight defends the e4 pawn a third time and clears the way for f2-f4 in some variations, when White would make use of his own pawn majority in the centre to attack e5. As there is also a fork looming on e6 with ♗xc5 and ♘e6 if Black castles, White hopes to at least cause some disruption to Black's build up. Instead there came the unruffled:

17 ... 0-0!



It has been said semi-jokingly that the best answer to a threat is to ignore it, and so it proves here.

18 ♗xc5

Black last move must have been a shock to Kasimdzhanov, as the greatest player in the world would hardly miss a simple two move

knight fork. And even less would he have missed in it in his opening preparation before the game. And if he wasn't still in opening preparation, why was Kasparov playing so fast? Such must have been the anxious thoughts that went through the FIDE World Champion's mind. Calming down, he would have realised that he has to accept the offer, or else the knight is left out on a limb on g5 and Black can take control of the d-file with 18...♖ad8, etc.

18 ... ♗xc5

Over the next couple of moves the black pieces are drawn almost against their will into taking up posts where they attack the weakest square in White's camp, which here is on f2: this is a sign of a good positional sacrifice.

19 ♘e6

There is no going back: White has to take the take the material and see what his opponent has in mind.

19 ... ♕b6

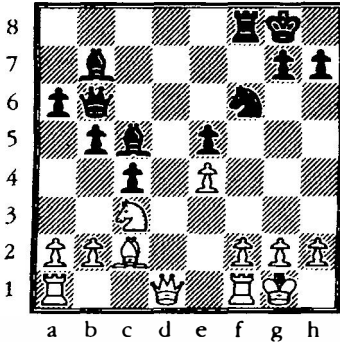
The black queen is also 'forced' onto her best square, where she helps the bishop put pressure on f2.

20 ♘xf8

White would have a poor game after 20 ♘xc5 ♕xc5 in view of the

weakness of d4 and the ever present threat of b5-b4, undermining the defender of e4.

20 ... Rxf8



And finally the queen's rook ends up on the f-file, where it is available for action against f2.

It is now time to take stock and ask ourselves what Kasparov has gained for the exchange. Firstly, it is worth reminding ourselves that there is only one open file on the board: the d-file. In order to show its superiority over a bishop, a rook needs open lines, or at least a semi-open file which contains an object of attack. Incidentally, the black rook has such an object on f2 – Kasparov has been lucky as usual. In contrast, one of the white rooks is sitting passively on f1, defending f2, while the other is shut in on a1. It is true that White could (and indeed does) give this rook some scope with a2-a4, opening the a-file; but there is nothing much to attack down it. The same can be

said about the d-file. The black pieces are covering all the infiltration squares. Besides, if necessary Black can block it with Qd4 .

White would love to be able to exchange off Black's rook, both to lessen his opponent's attacking chances and also allow his remaining rook to penetrate more easily into the black camp; but this proves impossible.

Comparing the minor pieces, we see that White's bishop on c2 has less range than either of the black bishops. It has a purely defensive role which Kasimdzhanov tries to improve with disastrous consequences on his next move. In short, there are no targets in the black camp, nor any obvious way for White to create any, or improve the activity of his pieces.

OK, so much for White's problems. But can Black play to win against sound play? The fact that White has parted with his dark squared bishop means that Black has control over the dark squares c5 and d4 in the centre, and, as mentioned above, can target the f2 pawn. If White is obliged to play f2-f3 (after first moving his king, of course) this would be a victory for Black, who adds e3 to his dark square collection and can introduce mating threats against the white king of the kind discussed later at Black's 24th move. So the white

Dangerous diagonals

pawn has to stand its ground on f2, even though it is vulnerable there.

If Black wanted to win on the kingside, the obvious attempt would be to bring his knight into the attack on f2. However, this is problematical, as if the knight wanders away, White should be able to counter with ♖d5. Alternatively, Black could try to win on the queenside, say by moving his queen to e6 and bishop to d4, to get both pieces out of the range of ♖a4, and then preparing a disruptive advance of the queenside pawns beginning with b5-b4. The white knight would be driven from its important post. Then the pawns on b2 and e4 might be in risk of falling off.

Could Kasparov had made such a plan work? Black's queenside pawns and bishop pair look a good match for the extra white exchange. Alas, we shall never know, as Kasimdzhanov immediately blundered

21 ♖d5?

Here we see the practical value of a sacrifice: taken by surprise, White immediately blunders. A sacrifice that would never work in the laboratory often works in a real game if it is unexpected by the opponent.

White's idea is an attractive one: open a diagonal for the bishop on c2

and create a passed pawn. Unfortunately for the Uzbekistan Grandmaster, he inadvertently creates a far more powerful passed pawn for his opponent and lethally extends the diagonal of the bishop on c5.

After the game, Kasparov pointed out that 21 ♖e2 ♖e6! (with ideas of 22...♗g4, hitting f2) 22 h3 ♗d4 gives Black huge pressure for the exchange. Nevertheless, this is what White should have tried, as now f2 falls.

21 ... ♗xd5

He captures this way in order to keep the knight for the combination that follows.

22 exd5

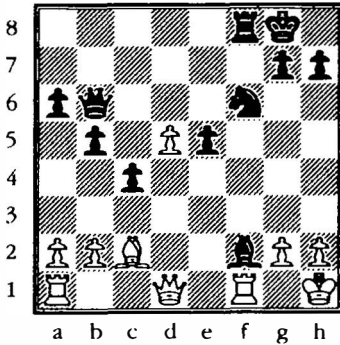
For a second White can rejoice that his bishop sees daylight, but...

22 ... ♗xf2+!

Not only winning a pawn but far more importantly laying the groundwork for mating combinations against the white king.

23 ♔h1

There is no choice, as if 23 ♖xf2 ♗g4 when disaster follows on f2 as the knight can't be taken: 24 ♖xg4 ♖xf2+ and mate in two moves.



23 ... e4!

The pawn rushes to e3, where it will support the bishop and so free the queen from defensive duty. Of course, if White is careless, it might go all the way to e1...

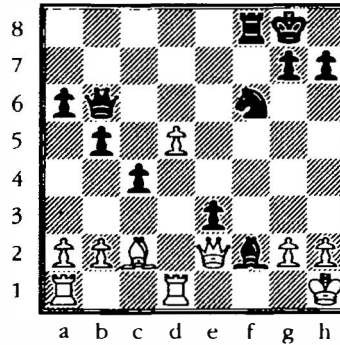
24 ♖e2

White aims for a blockade on the light squares, combined with the bringing of his king's rook to d1 to support his own passed pawn.

24 ... e3

Mission accomplished. Note that if the white queen wandered away, Black would be able to play ♘h5 and ♘g3+! when h2xg3 is answered by ♚h6 mate. A tactical theme of this type is continuously hanging over White's head. His king is in great jeopardy on h1, as with no escape route any check on the h-file would be a killer.

25 ♠fd1



25 ... ♚d6!

Given one extra move White could play 26 d6! when the passed pawn, which can be assisted with ♙f5 as necessary, would give him excellent play.

This simple move crushes White's hopes. Not only is he deprived of counterplay, but the black queen is looking eagerly down the diagonal towards the h2 square. Here we can see the value of the adage that when there are opposite coloured bishops, the player with the attack is virtually a piece up. Kasparov is able to build up a lethal assault on the dark squares, whilst successfully keeping his pieces out of the range of the bishop on c2.

26 a4

Kasimdzhanov refuses to despair and opens up another front on the a-file.

26 ... g6!

Dangerous diagonals

An excellent little move without which the black attack would come to a standstill. Now the h5 square becomes available for the black knight. There is looming the threat of ♖h5 and ♗f4, evicting the white queen from e2 and then advancing the passed pawn, or even ♖h5 and ♗g3+, aiming for the familiar snap mate after White captures with h2xg3 by ♜xg3 and then ♜h4 mate. The latter idea might fail in some cases to a defence with ♜d4, but it is something for White to worry about.

27 a**x**b5

At last the white rook on a1 can join in the game. Even in a lost position, there are chances of salvation if you steadfastly activate all your pieces and believe that the opponent will go wrong. Well, perhaps such a strategy doesn't work against Kasparov, but I expect that Kasimdzhanov would have found a way to bamboozle most of us if we had the black pieces here.

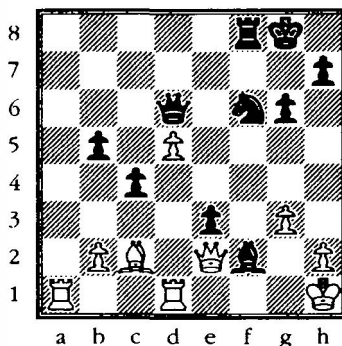
27 ... a**x**b5

Black has no need to hurry as his opponent cannot break out of the bind.

28 g**3**

White takes the bull by the horns and prevents ♖h5 and ♗f4, whilst

making a breathing space on g2 for his king. Unfortunately for him, his kingside defences are too brittle to resist Black's attack. If the white bishop could be transported from c2 to g2 it would be different, but that is only a dream.



28 ... ♖h**5**!

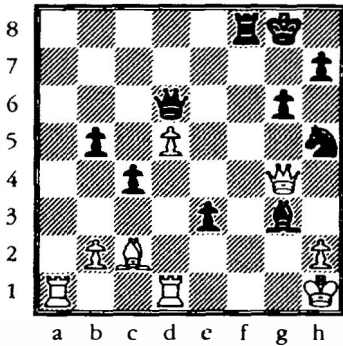
Anyway. Now the threat is 29... ♖xg3+! 30 hxg3 ♜xg3 and there is no good defence to 31... ♜h3 mate, for example 31 ♜f1 ♜h4+ 32 ♔g2 e2! 33 ♜xe2 ♜g3+ and mate next move.

29 ♜g**4**

White rushes to protect g3 and also threatens to exchange queens in an unfavourable manner for Black with 30 ♜e6+.

29 ... ♗x**g3**!

The game ends with a sacrificial flourish that is typical of Kasparov.



30 **hxg3**

If 30 ♖e6+ ♗xe6 31 dxe6 e2 32 hxg3 exd1(♗)+ 33 ♜xd1 ♘xg3+ 34 ♔g2 ♘h5! and White is two pawns down in the endgame and faced with loss of his passed pawn with a fork on f4. Therefore White takes the bishop, because a world class player will always prefer to take his chance facing a mating attack rather than die less dramatically, but much more certainly, in a technical endgame.

30 ... ♘xg3+

Black is now a whole rook down, but the white king has lost all his pawn cover and only has one defender – the queen. The attacking force includes a queen, rook, knight and, importantly, a strong passed pawn.

31 ♔g2

If 31 ♔g1 e2 32 ♜e1 ♗c5+ 33 ♔h2 ♗f2+ 34 ♔h3 ♘h5! And the threats of 35...♘f4+ or 35...♜f3+ are decisive.

31 ... ♜f2+

A powerful entrance. If now 32 ♔g1 ♘c2+ and mate on h2 next move, even after 33 ♗xe2.

32 ♔h3

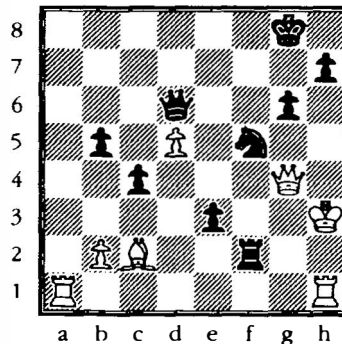
If only White could get in 33 ♗e6+ his king would be saved, and he would win the game.

32 ... ♘f5!

Shutting off the e6 square and intending mate on h2 with queen or rook.

33 ♜h1

White keeps on battling. Perhaps Black will be tempted into grabbing the bishop on c2 and giving the white king a respite...



33 ... h5!

No such luck. Kasparov has made excellent use of his pawns in carrying out the attack – not only the passed e-pawn, but the g-pawn

Dangerous diagonals

and h pawn have provided fine service. The white queen needs to stay on the g file to fend off 34...♙g3 mate, but she would be lost after 34 ♖g5 ♜f3+ 35 ♔g2 ♜g3+.

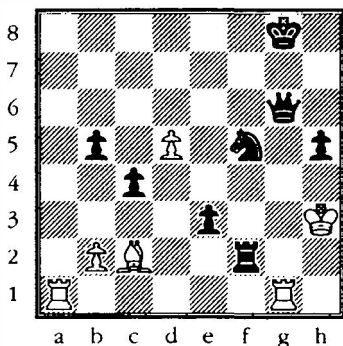
34 ♖xg6+

A last act of bravado.

34 ... ♜xg6

If allowed, the black queen now has a choice of mate on g2, g3 or g4, depending on whether the black queen favours her rook, knight or pawn the most.

35 ♜hg1



Now White regains the queen by force, but this is small consolation as the endgame will be dead lost.

35 ... ♜xg1

Simplest. Black would have to win the game all over again after 35...♜f3+?! 36 ♔h2 ♜g3?? 37 ♜xf5 ♜xf5 38 ♜xg3+.

36 ♜xg1+

This is the rook's first and last move in the entire game. When you consider how much use Kasparov got out of his own queen's rook, it is easy to understand why White always seemed to be outgunned, even when he was ahead 'on points'.

36 ... ♔f7

0-1

White resigned as there is no hope at all after 37 ♜xf5 ♜xf5. A brilliant game by a player who many believe is the greatest ever to sit down at a chessboard.

3: Wearing down a weakness

A pawn, when separated from its fellows, will seldom if ever make a fortune.

François Philidor

It is better to sacrifice your opponent's men.

Saviely Tartakower

Let's assume our opponent is sensible enough to develop his pieces to decent squares, fight for the centre with his pawns, and avoid doing anything reckless with his king. We will therefore need to soften him up gradually if we are going to get the win we deserve.

This can best be done by targeting one or more weak points in his pawn structure. In what follows we shall look at various techniques for forcing and exploiting such weaknesses – or even persuading the opponent to create them for us!

Game 12

A model attack against a weak pawn complex

White: M.Petraki

Black: P. Stiris

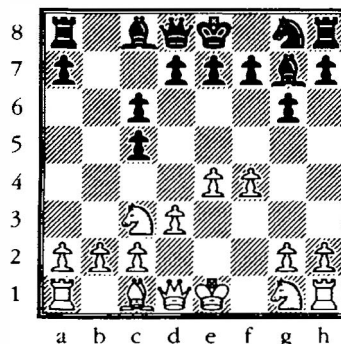
Nikea 2000

The opening was the Rossolimo Variation of the Sicilian:

**1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 ♙b5 g6
4 ♙xc6 bxc6 5 d3 ♙g7**

For the moment, this bishop enjoys a fine diagonal, but it all starts to go wrong after Black's next move.

6 f4!



Wearing down a weakness

Philidor would have been proud of this move. The white knight is made to wait on g1 while White's hold on the centre is strengthened using pawns.

6 ... e6?

Whereas this move would have filled the French genius with artistic horror. It is a serious error, after which Black's pawns are irrevocably compromised. Instead he should have kept his centre compact with 6...d6 7 ♖f3 ♕f6, etc.

7 e5!

The pawn is very strong on e5 where it shuts in the black bishop.

7 ... d5

Black meets the positional threat of ♗e4 and ♗d6+.

8 ♗f3!

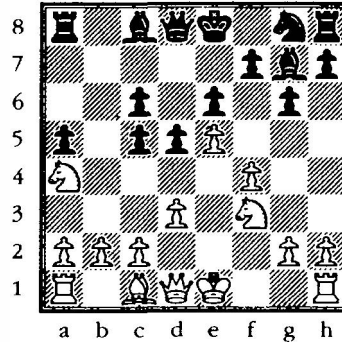
Far better than 8 exd6? ♜xd6, even though Black has doubled isolated pawns, as the bishop on g7 comes back to life, making it impossible to carry out the plan of attack against c5. In such situations, the opponent is to be allowed no freedom.

8 ... a5

A complete waste of a move. He should have tried something like ♗h6, 0-0 and f7-f6, perhaps

followed by ♗f7, to test the defence of the e5 pawn.

9 ♗a4!



'First restrain, then blockade, and finally destroy!' said Nimzowitsch. He was referring to a passed pawn, but the same technique will work perfectly against the c5 pawn.

9 ... ♜e7

Things are actually so bad for Black here that 9...c4 10 dxc4 ♗a6 was worth considering, when if 11 cxd5 cxd5 Black can claim compensation for the pawn as the bishop on a6 is stopping White from castling. However, White isn't obliged to capture on d5: instead 11 b3! is very strong as if 11...dxc4 12 ♜xd8+ ♜xd8 13 ♗c5 and the white knight is dominant. Instead Black can try 11...♗e7, but 12 ♗c5 follows anyway, and if Black keeps refusing to take on c4, he might end up a pawn down for nothing after ♗xa6 and c4xd5.

10 c4!

Following Nimzowitsch's dictum, the pawn on c5 is blockaded – or rather, we should say fixed. It is prevented from ever advancing from the death trap on c5.

10 ... ♖a6

The bishop will be useless on this square – in fact, all it does is encourage White's next move, which is the strongest on the board. He had to seek counterplay at all costs with 10...f6.

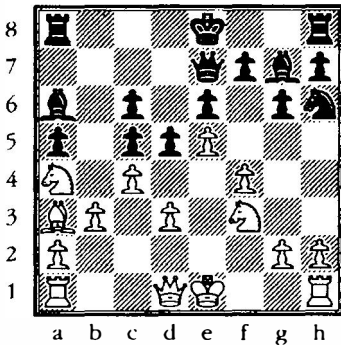
11 b3!

The pawn on c4 is defended and the route to a3 is cleared for the bishop.

11 ... ♘h6

There was no longer any way to hold onto the c5 pawn.

12 ♖a3



12 moves she has a completely winning position.

12 ... ♘f5

Black can't even castle as 13 ♖xc5 wins the exchange.

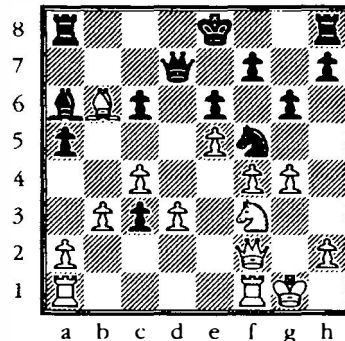
13 ♖xc5

A pawn down with marked dark square weaknesses, Stiris is surely doomed. The game ends somewhat faster than might be expected due to his attempt to play actively. We shall content ourselves with looking at the final moves briefly:

13...♚d8 14 0-0 d4 15 ♚d2 ♖f8
16 ♖b6 ♖b4 17 ♚b2 ♖c3

This trick doesn't work, but in any case the d4 pawn was falling.

18 ♚f2 ♚d7 19 ♘xc3 dxc3 20 g4



20 ... ♚xd3

Maria Petraki's strategy has worked perfectly: after only

A desperate lunge that loses the queen, but 20...♘c7 leaves Black in

a hideous position. White would have many ways to win, not least by rounding up the c3 pawn; but the most efficient seems to be 21 ♖g5! followed by 22 ♘c4 and a check on d6 or f6, when White's dominance of the dark squares would be absolute.

21 ♖ad1

Evidently Black hoped to do something along the g-file after 21 gxf5 gxf5, and then 22...♖g8+, 23...c5 and 24...♙b7. Of course, it is all cloud cuckoo land. Still, Petraki decides it is simplest to take the queen.

21 ... ♔e4

As David Bronstein once remarked, a weakness on the dark squares is also a weakness on the light squares: the black pieces can't expect to be safe if they stay on light squares.

22 ♗g5 1-0

There is no way out for the black queen.

Having played through the game above, Vescovi's strategy in the following encounter should seem crystal clear.

Game 13

White: G.Vescovi

Black: E.Limp

Sao Paulo 2005

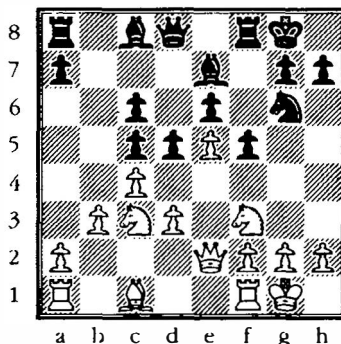
**1 e4 c5 2 ♗f3 ♘c6 3 ♙b5 e6
4 ♙xc6 bxc6 5 d3 d5 6 ♕e2 ♗e7
7 c4!**

Looks familiar? White fixes the pawn on c5.

**7...♗g6 8 0-0 ♙e7 9 ♘c3 0-0
10 b3!**

And here the way is cleared for ♙a3.

10...f5 11 e5



As in the Petraki game, White closes the centre. He has his target on c5, and doesn't want to be distracted by any black counterplay.

11...d4

Chasing the white knight where it wants to go, but if he leaves the

pawn on d5, then White can open up another channel of attack on c5 with c4xd5 and ♖ac1. Not that White would hurry to play c4xd5 as it might allow Black to defend the c5 pawn with a rook on c8 after the recapture c6xd5; or the pawn might even be able to break free with c5-c4 somehow - remember Nimzowitsch's dictum about blockading the pawn. However, it would be a permanent threat hanging over Black.

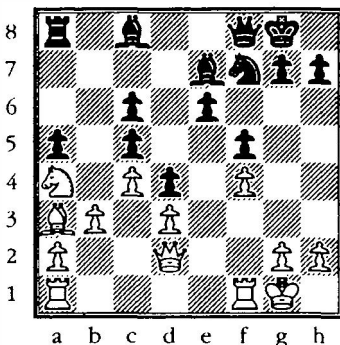
12 ♖a4 ♜f7 13 ♙a3 ♜f8
14 ♜d2!

There are two threats contained in this move. The first is 15 ♜a5, winning the c5 pawn; Black prevents it. The second occurs in the game.

14...a5 15 ♖g5! ♖xe5

Black tries an exchange sacrifice as his position is just falling apart after 15...♙xg5 16 ♜xg5 ♖xe5 17 ♙xc5.

16 ♖xf7 ♖xf7 17 f4!

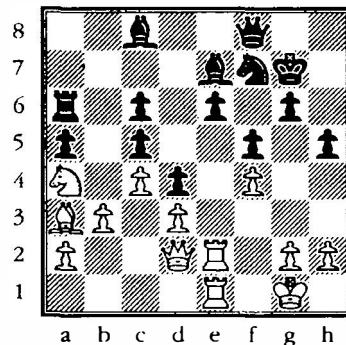


Players tend to fall asleep for a while after winning material, but not Vescovi. This alert move not only deters Black from expanding in the centre with 17...e5, which would to some extent liberate the light squared bishop, but also lays the ground work for a fine counter sacrifice.

17...♞a6

A very uninspiring waiting move, but here's what might happen after 17...e5: 18 fxe5 ♖xe5 19 ♜e2! ♖g4 (Black has to play the modest 19...♖g6, but 20 ♞ae1 is excellent for White) 20 ♖b6 ♞a7 (or 20...♞b8 21 ♖xc8 ♞xc8 - 21...♜xc8 22 ♜xe7 - 22 ♜e6+ ♔h8 23 ♞xf5) 21 ♜xg4! fxg4 22 ♞xf8+ ♙xf8 23 ♖xc8 and White has won a piece.

18 ♞ae1 h5 19 ♞e2 g6 20 ♞fe1
♔g7



21 ♞e5!!

White returns the exchange in order to dismantle Black's pawn chain on c5 and d4.

Fundamentally wrong would be the alternative sacrifice 21 ♖xe6? ♗xe6 22 ♖xe6, even though it opens the e-file. White wants to leave his opponent with a useless bishop on c8.

21...♗xc5 22 ♖xe5 ♗f6 23 ♗xc5 1-0

There is no time for 23...♗xe5 because 24 ♗xe6+ wins the queen. Meanwhile the rook on a6 is hanging and e6 is about to drop as well, so Black called it a day.

Game 14

Whilst applying the ideas suggested to us by model games is a valuable tool, every individual position has to be assessed on its own merits. For example, most endgames books will point out that having a queenside pawn majority is a good thing.

Imagine the following scenario. It is a pure king and pawn endgame and you have converted the pawn majority into a passed pawn. On the queenside, you are 1-0 up in pawns; on the kingside, 2-3 down. It is likely that the opponent's king will have to rush off to stop the passed pawn, leaving your own king to munch through pawns at his leisure on the kingside. There is no denying that it is extremely useful to have this model of a winning strategy in a king and pawn endgame, even though it is highly abstract, as you can for example refer to it when you are deciding whether to exchange

off pieces in a more complex endgame.

But in the middlegame and most complex endgames, a queenside pawn majority is not an advantage in itself. And even in a simple endgame it might not prove to be. Other positional factors will determine whether it is an asset, an irrelevance or even a liability.

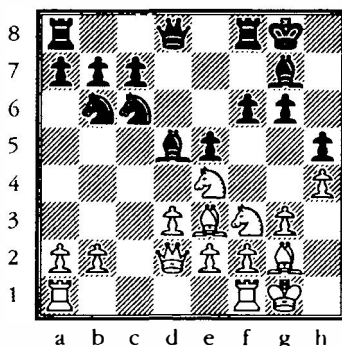
The truth of this is revealed by a virtuoso strategic display by Lev Aronian. He shows tremendous tenacity and, like all gifted tactical players, is very strong in so-called 'simple positions' where precise calculation is required.

White: L.Aronian

Black: A.Areshchenko
Khanty Mansyisk 2005

The opening was the Grunfeld English:

1 ♖f3 ♗f6 2 c4 g6 3 g3 ♗g7
4 ♗g2 d5 5 cxd5 ♗xd5 6 ♗c3 ♗b6
7 d3 ♗c6 8 ♗e3 0-0 9 ♖d2 e5
10 h4 h5 11 ♗g5 f6 12 ♗e3 ♗e6
13 ♗e4 ♗d5 14 0-0

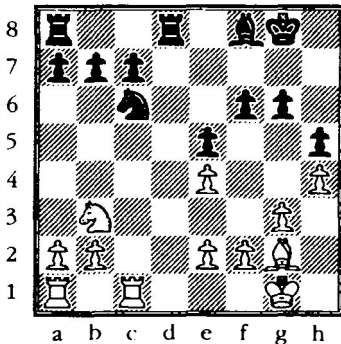


Here Black embarked on a simplifying combination, but things didn't turn out as well as he hoped:

14... ♖xe4 15 dxe4 ♜xd2
16 ♖xd2 ♜c4 17 ♜fc1!

An excellent decision as White's dark squared bishop wouldn't have much scope after 17 ♖c3. Allowing its exchange gains White a couple of tempi that will prove valuable in his strategic operations on the queenside.

17... ♜xd2 18 ♜xd2 ♜fd8
19 ♜b3 ♖f8



White mustn't be allowed to play ♜c5 unopposed.

Here we shall begin our move by move coverage of the endgame, but first we should try to assess the position. At a superficial level, it might seem good for Black: he has a healthy 3-2 majority of pawns on the queenside, whereas White has a doubled e-pawn.

In fact, if you rearranged the black pawns so that they are on a7,

b6 and c5, this would undoubtedly be true.

However, as this stand, Black's queenside pawns are in fact a strategic liability. The problem is that it is impossible to shake off the pressure down the c-file. His pawns are paralysed, as the knight can't move from c7 without allowing ♜xc7.

'Well', you might think, 'Black only needs to play a move like ♜ac8 or ♖d6 to defend c7, and then his knight is free to move'. If only it were so simple! The move ♜ac8 fails to ♖h3, driving away the rook. And White can respond to ♖d6 with ♜c5 when in view of the threat to b7, Black would almost certainly have to exchange with ♖xc5 ♜xc5, when it is back to square one as far as defending c7 goes.

As for White's apparently 'weak' doubled pawns: they are much more alive than Black's moribund pawn majority on the queenside.

The pawn on e4 provides a wonderful protected square for the bishop on d5, which it could reach after either ♖h3, ♖e6 and ♖d5, or e2-e3, ♖f1, ♖c4 and ♖d5. Then the black knight would be under intolerable pressure, and Black's pride and joy, his control of the d-file, would be snuffed out.

And the pawn on e2, after e2-e3, will guard the d4 square, thus

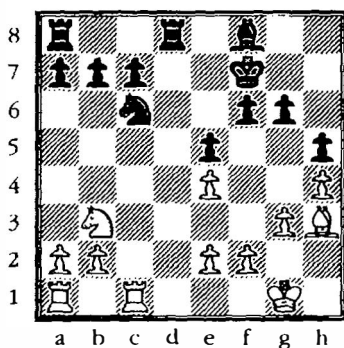
keeping both the black knight and bishop out of a potential outpost square. You will see that d5 is therefore a potential base for a white bishop, because Black cannot arrange c7-c6, whereas d4 doesn't 'return the compliment' to the black bishop.

Now it's time to see how play evolved in the game:

20 ♖h3!

Already the bishop aims to intrude with 21 ♖e6+ and 22 ♖d5, when Black's queenside pawns will be wrecked.

20 ... ♔f7



A complete answer to the threat along the diagonal, after which Aronian changes track and brings the bishop out via f1. So what was the point in the excursion to h3: hasn't the black king just been brought one square closer to the centre, which is exactly where he is meant to be in the endgame? (Remember Reuben Fine: the king is a strong piece. Use it!)

Ah, those general principles that stop players from looking at the position in front of them. By enticing the black king to f7, Aronian has made it harder for his opponent to free his game, as now ♖xc7 will come with *check*. The idea of ♖h3+ would only rebound on White if the black king somehow ensconced itself safely on the queenside, and helped to alleviate the pressure on c7. However, it is difficult to see how this could happen.

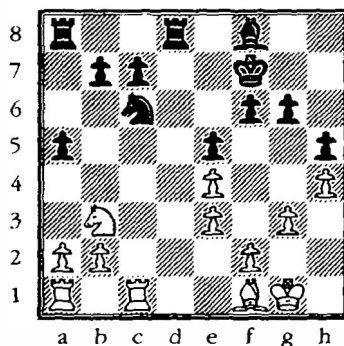
21 e3!

As discussed above, the d4 square is taken away from the black pieces and a second escape route is opened for the white bishop.

21 ... a5!

An extremely good decision. Areshchenko seeks counterplay before White has time to play ♖f1 and ♖b5, or ♖f1, ♖c4+ and ♖d5, when he is crushed on the c-file.

22 ♖f1



Looking for a quiet positional advantage, but Black won't let him enjoy it in peace.

22 ... a4

When a player has positional threats at his disposal, he normally tries to delay the moment of truth for as long as possible, in order to keep his opponent guessing as to where the blow is going to come from. The need to deal with various threats at the same time causes technical problems for the defender as he has to keep pieces in reserve to deal with every possible emergency. He may also become despondent, which can lead to a psychological collapse – which in turn is usually followed by a similar collapse on the chess board.

The threat of ♖c5 has been hanging over Black's head for the last few moves, so he is relieved to make White actually carry it out – as then he no longer has to worry about it.

23 ♖c5

Nonetheless, despite the comments above this remains a very strong move.

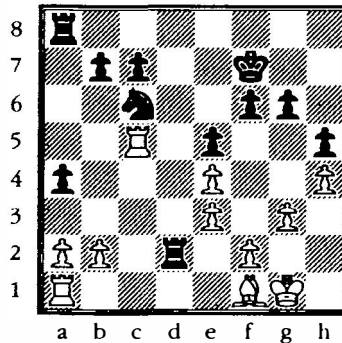
23 ... ♗xc5

A necessary capture as Black cannot tolerate the attack on b7.

24 ♖xc5

Now White's bishop is far superior to the black knight, which is paralysed by the need to block the attack on c7.

24 ... ♜d2!



Still, Black is fighting hard. The rook seizes the seventh rank and attacks b2, and if 25 ♗b5 ♜a5! pins the bishop when White is suddenly in trouble.

25 ♜b5!

A far more efficient way to defend b2 than 25 ♜b1? when 25...♗e7 begins to look good for Black – again if 26 ♗b5, 26...♜a5! is a nasty pin.

25 ... ♖d8

With the pressure on the c-file lifted for a moment, the knight takes its chance to run away. It appears that Black might be slipping out of his difficult position, but White's next move restores his advantage.

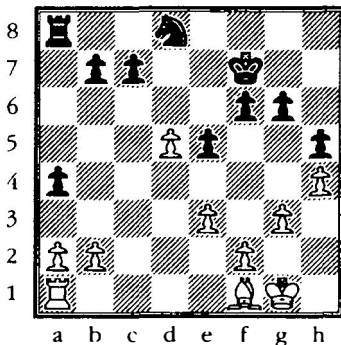
26 ♖d5!

Now 26... ♖xb2 27 ♖d7+ ♔e8 28 ♖xc7!? would be fraught with danger for the black king. White's dream finish would be ♖c4, ♖d1 and ♖ld7, with a mating attack; but even if he didn't achieve this, Black would have a difficult life. Incidentally, here we see proof of Aronian's good judgment when he played 20 ♖h3! to cajole the black king to the second rank: the fact that 27 ♖d7 comes with check is crucial in this line.

26 ... ♖xd5

Of course Black has no wish to improve his opponent's pawn structure, but there was no real choice.

27 exd5



Every position has to be evaluated according to its particular features. Try a little experiment: move the black pawns back from g6 and h5 to g7 and h6. It hardly seems to alter the position, but in fact Black

would be clearly better after 1... ♔e7 followed by 2... ♔d6: the c7 pawn is secure, and the white pawn on d5 is vulnerable. White would have no active play for either rook or bishop, whereas Black could attack with a4-a3: in effect, he would have a useful extra piece in the form of the king.

Now return the pawns to g6 and h5, and let's see What would happen if Areshchenko tried 27... ♔e7: 28 ♖d3! f5 – or else 28... ♔f7 with loss of time – 29 e4! and the black king must attend to the attack on his kingside pawns, which means he can't head for the d6 square to meet White's ♖cl.

In short, if it wasn't for the vulnerability of Black's kingside pawns, White's 'kingless' strategy would have fallen short.

27 ... a3!

Still, Black is a long way from being lost and with this pawn thrust activates his rook.

28 bxa3!

White would be playing with fire if he let the far advanced black pawn live with 28 b3. Black could try to get his knight to b4 or his rook to c2 to tie down the white rook to the defence of a2 – or possibly carry out both manoeuvres, when a2 would drop. White would have to play precisely to hold the balance.

28 ... ♖xa3

After 28...♔e7 29 ♖c1 ♔d6 30 ♗b5!? intending 31 ♗e8 once again the weakness of g6 is vital for preserving a slight White advantage.

29 ♖c1

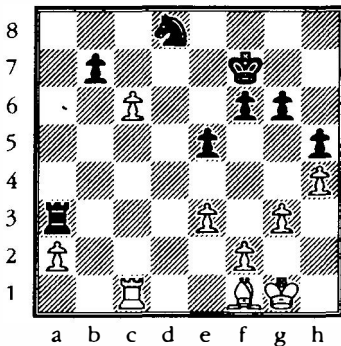
White activates his rook with the threat of 30 ♖xc7+, creating a strong passed pawn.

29 ... c6

Forced, as if 29...♖xa2 there is a nice trick in 30 d6! threatening both 31 ♗c4+ winning the rook and 32 dxc7.

30 dxc6

Also necessary, as after 30 d6? Black would be winning after 30...♔e6, as long as he avoided the poisoned bait on a2.



30 ... ♗xc6

The natural recapture, as it reactivates the knight and avoids giving White a passed pawn. Nevertheless, Aronian makes it look like the losing move! After 30...bxc6 the d5 square would be guarded by the black pawn, so that the ♗d5 motif, which will be so crucial in what follows as it defends a2 and attacks black's pawn on b7, would be prevented. However, White could keep on pressing with 31 ♗c4+ ♔e7 32 ♗b3 followed perhaps by bringing his hitherto lazy king over to b2 to support the advance of the a-pawn. The fragility of the g6 pawn would prevent the black king wandering too far from the kingside. So life still wouldn't be easy for Black. In fact, I'm half inclined to believe that if Areshchenko had played 30...bxc6 all the commentators would be saying 'the losing move. He could have drawn with 30...♗xc6'.

31 ♖b1

In what follows, Aronian's advantage always seems to be hanging by a thread, but it proves to be a thread made of steel.

31 ... ♗a5

The knight defends the b7 pawn and also controls c4, so that 32...♖xa2 now becomes a threat – of course if 31...♖xa2? immediately then 32 ♗c4+.

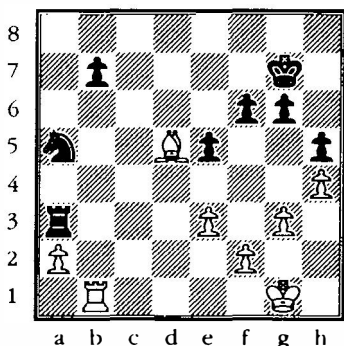
32 ♖g2!

It is remarkable that White's little force – a rook, bishop and seemingly harmless passed pawn right back on its starting square – can cause Black so many problems. Areshchenko always seems tantalisingly close to a draw by eliminating the white a-pawn, but he can't quite win it in a 'clean' way. In the end his old bugbear, the weakness on g6, will cost him the game.

32 ... ♔g7

The black king has to stay in the vicinity of its loose kingside pawns. The a2 pawn was still taboo because of a bishop check on d5.

33 ♗d5



Here we see the superiority of a bishop over a knight in an endgame where there are pawns that can be targeted on both sides of the board. The bishop is able to defend a2 and attack b7 whilst retaining its flexibility, whereas the black knight

has been deprived of all its mobility by the need to defend b7.

33 ... ♜f5

Black might have waited with 34...♞a4, but it seems hopeless. For example, White could have brought his king over to the queenside to defend a2 and then attacked b7 with ♞c1 and ♞c7+.

34 e4!

It isn't enough for White to have tied down the black pieces on the queenside: he needs to create another target on the kingside if he is going to overwhelm the defence.

34 ... ♜fxe4

If he avoids this exchange then White can go after the e5 pawn with ♞b6 and ♞e6.

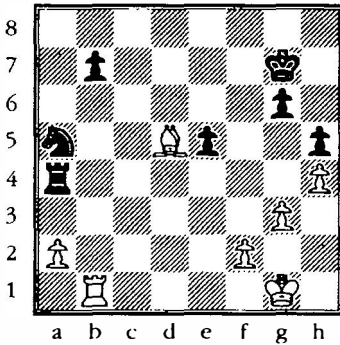
35 ♗xe4

White's winning idea is revealed: after 35...♞xa2 36 ♞b6 he will pick up the g6 pawn and after that the h5 pawn as well. Then his rook and bishop can restrain the black b-pawn from advancing too far, when he wins comfortably with his passed pawns on the kingside.

35 ... ♞a4

Areshchenko isn't so obliging and forces the bishop to give up its attack on g6.

36 ♔d5



Now, however, Black has run out of decent moves.

36 ... ♖d4

If 36...♖a3 then 37 ♖b6! leaves Black in zugzwang after 37...♖a4 38 ♔g2 – moving the rook to a3 allows ♔e4, moving the king to h7 or h6 loses to ♔f7.

37 ♔g2

Simply 37 ♔xb7 does the trick e.g. 37...♖xb7 38 ♖xb7+ with a winning rook and pawn endgame, or 37...♖a4 38 ♔d5 or finally if 37...♖d2 38 ♔e4 ♖xa2 39 ♖b6 when g6 drops.

Instead the bishop returns to a safer square. Perhaps Aronian was in time pressure.

37 ... ♖d2

After 27...♖a4, White can get back on track with 28 ♖b6, when 28...♔h7 29 ♔d5 ♔g7 30 ♔g2 is the zugzwang discussed above.

38 a3

A shrewd move which encourages Black to attack the pawn immediately, after which he gets in ♔e4.

38 ... ♖d3

The tough way to resist was 38...♖d4! though White would be able to arrange ♔e4 and f2-f3 as in the next note.

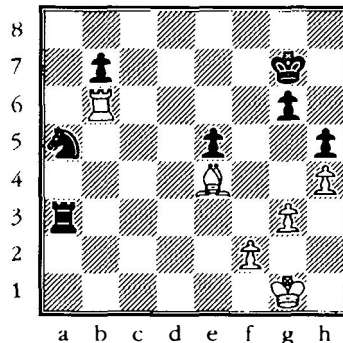
39 ♔e4

At long last the bishop is on its desired square, and if 39...♖d4 40 f3! followed by 41 ♖b6 is winning.

39 ... ♖xa3

Black grabs the pawn, it is poor fare compared to the feast of kingside pawns that the white rook is going to enjoy.

40 ♖b6



Wearing down a weakness

The culmination of Aronian's relentless strategy. The g6 pawn is now indefensible, as if 40...♖c6 41 ♜xb7+ wins a piece. The rest is self explanatory as the white rook rounds up a couple of pawns.

40...♞a4 41 ♜xg6+ ♔f7 42 ♙f5 b5 43 ♞b6 ♞a1+ 44 ♔g2 ♖c4 45 ♜xb5 ♞a2 46 ♙d3 1-0

Black resigned as his remaining pawns are about to drop off after 46...♖d6 47 ♜xe5.

Game 15

If your opponent is preparing a bad plan, don't stop him!

Karpov and Petrosian were the two greatest masters of the art of doing nothing. The following game shows that on occasion Ivanchuk can be shrewd enough to give his opponent enough rope to hang himself.

It should be mentioned that there is nothing at all easy about such an approach to chess. It took amazing insight and calculation by the Ukrainian Grandmaster to discover what was wrong with Kamsky's plan. If such a defect hadn't existed, then doing nothing would be the proverbial equivalent of Nero fiddling while Rome burned.

White: V.Ivanchuk

Black: G.Kamsky

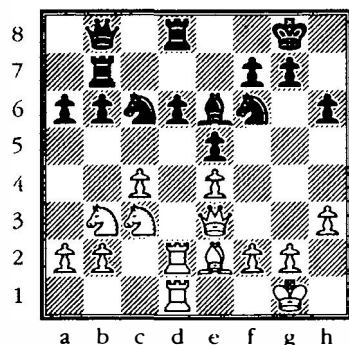
Wijk aan Zee 2006

The opening was a Kan Sicilian:

1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 a6 5 ♙d3 ♙c5 6 ♖b3 ♙a7 7 ♜e2 d6 8 ♙e3 ♖f6 9 ♙xa7 ♞xa7 10 c4 ♖c6 11 ♖c3 0-0 12 0-0 b6 13 ♜e3 ♜c7 14 ♙e2 ♜b8 15 ♞fd1 ♞d8 16 ♞d2 e5 17 ♞c1 ♙e6 18 ♞cd1 h6 19 h3

Kamsky tried:

19 ... ♞b7



with the evident intention of 20...b5 'gaining counterplay'. White could pre-empt this plan with 20 ♖d5, but he comes up with a much better plan...do nothing! He has seen that there is a defect in Black's plan, and so quietly retreated his bishop with

20 ♙f1

This move does no harm at all and gives the opponent the chance to ruin his solid defensive line.

20 ... b5?

Kamsky should have played a waiting move with 20...♘e7, but having geared up for this advance it's difficult to resist.

21 cxb5

Strategically speaking, this is normally an unwelcome exchange for White, but there is an important tactical nuance concealed in the position.

21 ... axb5

Not 21...♗xb3 22 bxc6 ♗xd1 23 cxb7 and Black can resign.

22 ♘d5!

What's this? White has been gearing up pressure against the d6 pawn, but now he lets Black block the d-file.

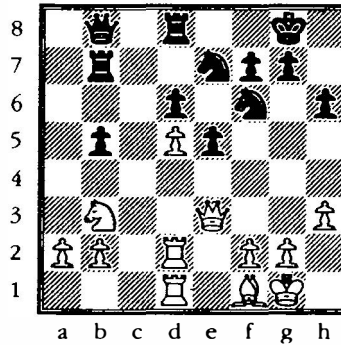
22 ... ♗xd5

Kamsky eagerly snatches at the bait.

23 exd5

Now the isolated pawn on d5 makes a bad impression.

23 ... ♘e7



It seems like Black has played immaculately: the white rooks are tied down to the defence of the pawn on d5 and so can't exploit the open c-file. Meanwhile, the b5 pawn is securely defended, and there are no obvious targets in the black camp. Indeed, if you put the queen on a8, Black would have an excellent game. But there is a dynamic point that has evaded Kamsky.

24 ♖a5!!

Ivanchuk must have seen the strength of this move when he agreed to Black's 20...b5 advance. Who but a genius would have realised the importance of the a5 square at that point?

24 ... ♜c7

Black staunches up the c6 square. Letting White have a passed pawn with 24...♞a7 25 ♘c6 ♘xc6 26 dxc6 ♞xa2 might have been playable were it not for 27 ♜xe5!!

25 ♘c6

The key point of Ivanchuk's play. In order to avoid losing the exchange, Black has to unblock the d-file, which reactivates White rooks whilst ridding him of the weak d5 pawn.

25 ... ♖xc6?

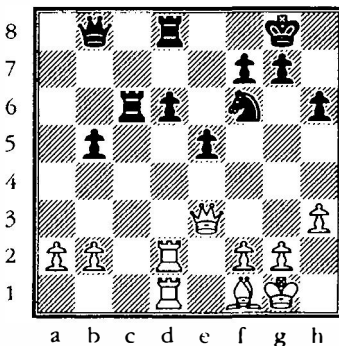
A routine capture. Black misses the trick 25...♖xd5! counter-attacking against the white queen. Then 26 ♖xb8 (the only move, as 26 ♗xd5? ♖xd5 27 ♗xd5 ♗xc6 just wins material for Black) 26...♖xe3 27 ♗xe3 ♗xb8 28 ♗xd6. White has the initiative, but in contrast to the game, Black has no weak pawn on d6.

26 dxc6

Now the white rooks can rejoice at the pressure on d6 being re-established.

26 ... ♗xc6

But hasn't Black just won a pawn?



27 ♕xe5!!

We can only marvel at the depth of Ivanchuk's conception when he allowed 20...b5. He must have already seen this sham queen sacrifice right back then, as otherwise the whole line would be good for Black and 20 ♖d5 would have been preferred.

27 ... b4

If 27...dxe5 28 ♗xd8+ ♕xd8 29 ♗xd8+ ♖h7 30 ♖xb5 and to add insult to injury, Black can't even play 30...♗c2 because of 31 ♖d3+ winning the rook.

28 ♕d4

The dust has settled. It will be hard work for Ivanchuk to exploit his advantage, but he certainly has the better of it with the superior minor piece and attractive targets on b4 and d6.

28 ... ♕b6

Black challenges the well placed white queen. Perhaps 28...d5 was a better approach, creating some space for his pieces and blocking the attack on f7 that follows. In reply, White could still play 29 ♖c4!? taking advantage of the pin on the d-file in order to get his bishop to b3, where it joins the assault on d5 (for if 29...♗xc6? 30 ♕xc4! dxc4 31 ♗xd8+ etc.)

29 ♖c4!

Here we see there is a third pawn weakness in the black camp on f7.

29 ... ♗xd4

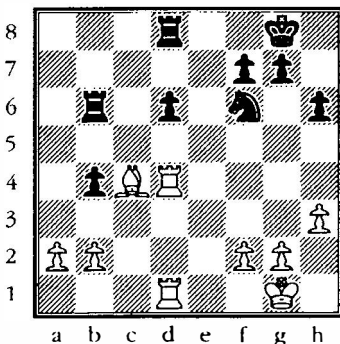
Kamsky completes his plan to ease his game by exchanging queens, but it doesn't have the desired effect. For one thing, it gives White the option of a pawn advance to undermine the knight on f6 without having to worry about any counterattack against his king.

30 ♖xd4

The rook recaptures and is not only well positioned to harass b4 and d6, but will also be able to assist any kingside pawn advance.

30 ... ♖b6

Black defends b4 in anticipation of White's next move, but it means that a white rook will soon take control of the c-file.



31 ♖b3!

The bishop is far stronger than the black knight. It makes the pawn on b4 a fixed target by stopping it from advancing; it guards a2, so that the pawn isn't a weakness, despite being on a semi-open file; it also prevents any invasion of the kind ♖c8 and ♖c2; and of course it is putting pressure on f7.

31 ... ♔f8

The king rushes to the centre to help defend d6, but if anything this makes matters worse. In reality there is nothing much Black can do, as Ivanchuk has a clear plan to increase his advantage.

32 g4!

Highly thematic. The idea is h3-h4 and g4-g5, when the knight is compelled to retreat. Thereafter, the f7 pawn can be assailed by both white rooks with ♖f4 and ♖c1 and ♖c7. Even if Black defended the pawn successfully, something else is sure to give – perhaps the pawn on b4 will drop off, or maybe the pawn on d6.

32 ... ♔e7

The king tries to lend a hand, but is instantly pushed back.

33 ♖e1+

A useful intermediate check before switching to the c file.

Wearing down a weakness

33 ... ♔f8

Of course, if 33...♔d7 34 ♖xf7 would save White a lot of time and effort.

34 ♖c1

Possession of this open line will bring the white rooks great joy throughout the game.

34 ... ♖d7

Black takes measures to defend against an invasion on c7.

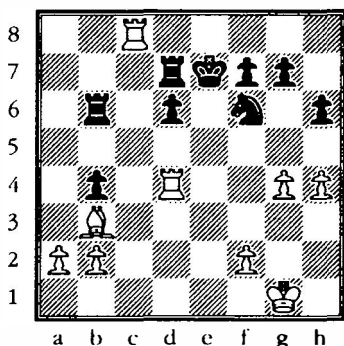
35 ♖c8+

...but the white rook can just as effectively infiltrate through the eighth rank.

35 ... ♔e7

Instead 35...♘e8 36 ♖a4! leaves the black knight in a terrible pin.

36 ♖h4



White reverts to his plan of advancing the kingside pawns,

which is given an extra impetus by the unfortunate position of the black king on e7.

36 ... g5

This leads to the loss of a pawn, but he can't allow 37 g5 hxg5 38 hxg5, when the knight dare not move in view of 39 ♖e4 mate!

37 ♖h8

As so often happens, the pawn that drops isn't one that was originally a target: it is not b4 or d6 or f7 that is doomed, but the h6 pawn. That is why when planning a chess strategy you have to be flexible, and keep your eyes open for sudden opportunities: the reward for your labours isn't always in the expected place.

37 ... ♖d8

Black can only rush his rook to the kingside to prevent a total collapse.

38 ♖xh6

With the fall of a pawn, it becomes 'a matter of technique'. Nevertheless, Kamsky fights hard and the way Ivanchuk gradually subdues him is very instructive.

38 ... ♖g8

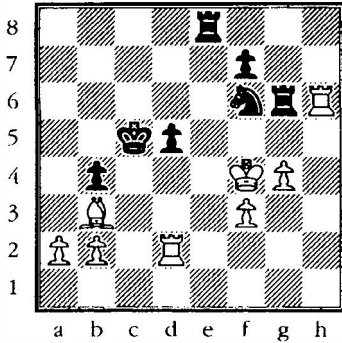
The pawn on g5 has to be supported.

Wearing down a weakness

45 ♖d2

A simple retreat that prepares to switch the attack to the c-file.

45 ... ♜g6



Meeting the attack on the knight and giving White the chance to go completely wrong with 46 ♜xg6?! fxg6 47 ♔g5 ♜c6 48 ♔xg6?? ♖e4+ 49 ♔f5 ♖xd2 50 ♔xc6 ♖xb3 when White has to try to scrape a draw after 51 g5 d4, as 51 axb3 d4 wins for Black!

46 ♜h1!

Ivanchuk wants nothing to do with complications on the kingside. He leaves the black rook passively placed on g6 and brings his own rook to the queenside, which is bare of defenders.

46 ... ♜eg8

He stops 47 g5, but it shows that Black is in a bad way when he is compelled to double his rooks against the brick wall on g4.

47 ♜c1+

Meanwhile the white rooks can seize the open c-file.

47 ... ♔d6

By now the king must be heartily sick of defending the d5 pawn.

48 ♜dc2

With the black rooks sitting on the g-file, there is nothing to resist White's queenside breakthrough.

48 ... ♜d8

The rook rushes over to help its beleaguered monarch.

49 ♜c7

Not only attacking f7, but with the evil intent of 50 ♜1c6 mate!

49 ... ♜d7

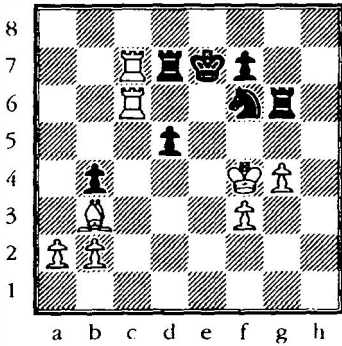
The only way to deal with both threats.

50 ♜1c6+

The white pieces take up excellent squares one after another.

50 ... ♔e7

Black has saved his king, but his position is fast crumbling.



54 ♖xf7 1-0

Black's d-pawn is easily stopped whereas White's connected passed pawns sail through.

Game 16

If there are no ready made targets for our pieces, then it is necessary to create one. Topalov shows us how by outplaying his opponent from a position that looked almost dead drawn.

White: F.Vallejo Pons

Black: V.Topalov

Linares 2005

51 ♖c2!

The bishop heads for f5 to end all resistance for example if 51...♖g8 52 ♖f5 ♖xc7 53 ♖xc7+ ♔f8 54 ♔e5 and the black pieces are entirely dominated.

51 ... d4

A last desperate bid to escape.

52 ♖xd7+

Black is still fighting after 52 ♖xg6 ♔d5+ 53 ♔e4 ♔xc7.

52 ... ♔xd7

The only move as if 52...♔xd7 53 ♖xg6.

53 ♖xg6

Now is the right moment to take the rook.

53 ... ♔xc6

Black has survived to a minor piece endgame, but two pawns down it is without hope.

The opening was a Queen's Gambit Declined:

1 ♖f3 ♔f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♔c3 d5 4 d4 ♖e7 5 ♖g5 h6 6 ♖xf6

As will be seen, White is determined to take every opportunity to exchange off pieces.

6...♖xf6 7 ♗c2 dxc4 8 e3 c5

In conjunction with his next move, this ensures that Black frees his game in effortless style. Not that the Spanish GM would have been particularly perturbed; in fact he probably welcomed the liquidation that brings him nearer to a drawing haven.

Wearing down a weakness

9 dxc5 ♖a5 10 ♙xc4 ♜xc5
11 ♗e4 ♜a5+ 12 ♚e2 ♙e7

Black deals with the double threat of 13 ♗d6+ and 13 ♗xf6+ breaking up his kingside pawns.

13 ♜c3

Topalov would have relished a complex middlegame in which he could have attacked the white king. Instead he is forced into an endgame, as the white queen is also attacking g7.

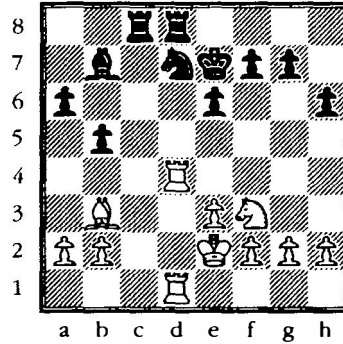
13...♜xc3 14 ♗xc3 a6 15 ♜hd1

With hindsight, White should have tried for pressure down the c-file with 15 ♜ac1. If then 15...b5? White would have the spectacular sacrifice 16 ♙d5!! when 16...exd5 17 ♗xd5 wins material in view of the threat of 17 ♜xc8+ and 17 ♗c7+. If then 17...♙d8 18 ♗b6 and wins. However, it seems that White is keen to kill off the tension, even though this forfeits any chance of advantage.

15...♗d7 16 ♗e4 b5 17 ♙b3
♙b7 18 ♗d6+

White has used his slight lead in development to arrange this further exchange, which deprives Black of the bishop pair.

18...♙xd6 19 ♜xd6 ♚e7 20 ♜ad1
♜hd8 21 ♜6d4 ♜ac8



Surely Black can't play to win here? The pawn structure is almost symmetrical and there are no weaknesses in White's camp. However, as soon become clear, White has no constructive plan. He is so to speak treading water. Meanwhile Black can improve his position: and that must mean that perforce White's chances deteriorate.

A comparison of the pieces on either side will help to clarify why Black has the better chances.

The bishops

The black bishop enjoys an open diagonal, whereas White's bishop is just staring at a brick wall on e6. Furthermore, the bishop on b3 is vulnerable on b3 to attack with a5-a4 or ♗c5.

The rooks

White rooks are doubled on the d-file, but with the help of the black king, they are easily kept at bay. In contrast, the c-file offers more potential to the black rooks.

The kings

They may be on mirror image squares, but as described above, the black king is stopping the white rooks doing anything on the d file, whereas the white king won't be able to restrain the black rooks acting along the c-file.

The knights

At the moment they seem of equal value, but White wants to lessen the pressure that the bishop on b7 is exerting down the long diagonal. This will entail retreating the knight to e1, after which the black knight is much more active.

By themselves, these little plus points for Black seem tiny, almost meaningless. However, Topalov manages to weave a strong attacking plan out of them. Vallejo Pons is a very strong Grandmaster, but move by move from now on his position goes downhill. The moral is: respect small advantages!

22 ♖e1

Here the knight guards the c2 square against any future invasion. White also intends to curb the activity of the bishop on b7 with f2-f3 and e3-e4. Is this not a constructive plan? No, because White is building a beautiful outpost on e5 for his opponent's knight.

22 ... a5!

Topalov utilises his queenside pawns. Now White has to reckon with a5-a4, disturbing his bishop.

23 ♗f3

Restricting the black bishop, but now the f3 square can no longer be used by the white knight to challenge its opposite number on e5.

23 ... ♖c7

Black doesn't want to exchange off the rooks, or his advantage will vanish. Therefore he defends the knight from the side to allow the other rook to slip out to c8.

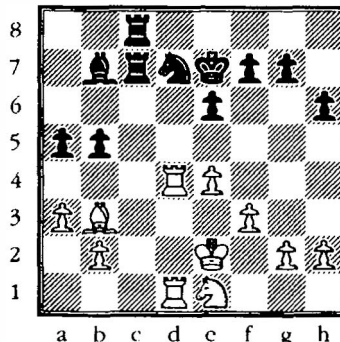
24 e4

White completes his plan of centre expansion, though it is doubtful that it has done more good than harm.

24 ... ♖dc8

The rook and the knight escape the pin on the d-file and so regain their powers.

25 a3



Wearing down a weakness

He had to deal with the threat of 25...a4, winning two pieces for a rook after 26 ♔c2 ♖xc2+. However, this is a positional concession as it presents the black pawns with a 'hook' on a3 that they can use to open lines with b5-b4. Topalov won't hurry into making such a move until he can recapture after a3xb4 with ♖xb4, when the bishop on b3 and the pawn behind it on b2 would face a frontal attack.

25 ... g5!

Move by move everything gets better for Black. He prepares to put his knight on e5 without being disturbed by f3-f4.

26 ♔e3

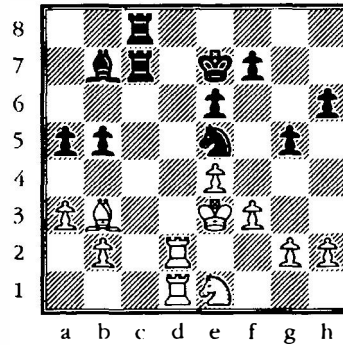
White evacuates his king from e2 so that he won't be faced by a discovered check after ♔a6 and b5-b4, or by any tricks based on ♖c2+. However, later on Topalov will be able to exploit the fact that e3 is the distance of a knight fork from d2 and b2.

26 ... ♘e5

The knight takes up a superb station in the centre.

27 ♖4d2

The lack of harmony among the white pieces is apparent, for if 27 ♘d3, to challenge the black knight, then 27...♘c6 wins the exchange. Therefore Vallejo Pons retreats his rook in the hope of playing ♘d3 next move.



27 ... ♔a6!

...but Topalov puts a stop to that scheme. Remember that a good strategy is as much about stopping the opponent doing what he wants as carrying out your own plans.

Incidentally, it shows the inefficiency of White's strategy that he has gone to so much time and trouble setting up a pawn chain on e4 and f3 'in order to shut in the black bishop' and then the bishop casually switches to a6, where it will soon control a better diagonal than it would ever have enjoyed on b7.

28 ♖d6

Back again. If 28 ♘d3 ♘xd3 (also 28...♘c4+ 29 ♔xc4 bxc4 and 30...c3 looks good for Black) 29 ♖xd3 b4 30 ♖d6 and now Black has the extremely strong piece offer 30...bxa3! 31 ♖xa6 (if 31 bxa3 ♖c3+ loses for White) 31...axb2 32 ♔a2 ♖c1 and it is difficult to find a defence for White, as if 33 ♖d2 ♖b8! 34 ♖xa5 ♖a1 and the threat of 35...♖xa2 followed by queening ends the game. Whether

or not White could save himself, this scary variation was understandably enough to put off White from playing $\Delta d3$.

28 ... ♖a7

Calmly defending the bishop: Topalov has no need to hurry.

29 ♖d2

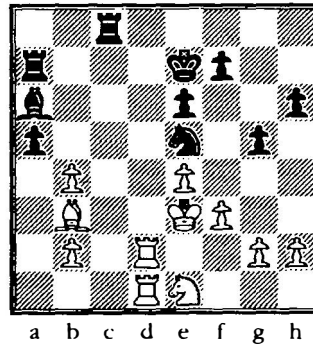
Meanwhile White can only make waiting moves, as 29 $\Delta d3?$ just drops a rook.

29 ... b4!

Now once and for all $\Delta d3$ is prevented, and even worse for White he is forced into an unwelcome rearrangement of the queenside pawn structure.

30 axb4

The only chance was to block things up with 30 a4, but it would have been horrible to make such a move. After say 30...♖ac7, White is totally passive and forever at the mercy of a $\Delta d7$ and $\Delta c5$ manoeuvre, or a sudden ♙c4! , in either case with the aim of exploiting the undefended white bishop to win material. Not, however, 30...♙c4 at once as the pin 30 ♖c1! avoids the worst for White.



30 ... ♖b8!

It's extremely important to understand why this is the correct way to proceed. The obvious 30...axb4 would be a colossal strategic blunder, as the white bishop, and more importantly the pawn on b2, would be shielded from frontal attack by the black rooks. It doesn't matter that White can now attack the a5 pawn: because Black has his pieces on far superior squares, he has the initiative, which means that his attack on b2 will be deadly, whilst White's attack on a5 can be easily dealt with.

31 ♖a1

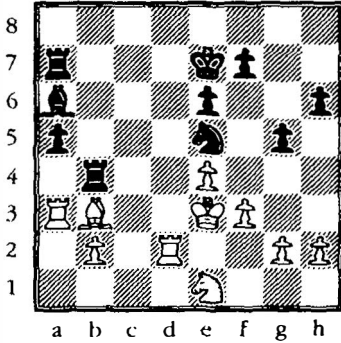
If instead 31 $\Delta c2$, hoping that Black will be persuaded to block things with a5xb4? then 31...♙c4! is a formidable reply.

31 ... ♖xb4

Now the b2 pawn will be subjected to enormous pressure.

32 ♖a3

White brings his rook to a3 to support the bishop, which he hopes will keep the b2 pawn sheltered; but Black's reply ruins the idea.



32 ... a4!

When a player has the initiative, his pawns become weapons; when his pieces are disorganised, they are targets.

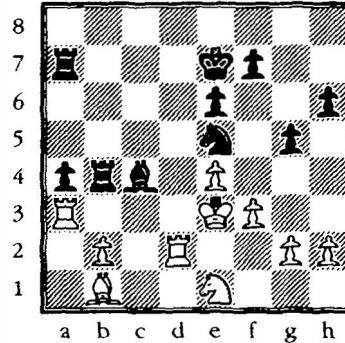
33 ♙a2

The bishop has to retreat, as taking on a4 opens up a knight fork on c4. We are often told about the importance of centralising the king in the endgame, but it isn't always a good idea, especially when there is a relatively large number of pieces still on the board. White's king has been vulnerable to tactics both on e2 and e3, and, looking a little ahead, ♙f1 will prove an important move for Black; so can we really say that White would have been worse off if his king had been sitting on g1?

33 ... ♙c4!

Chasing the white bishop back even further with the threat of 34... ♙xa2 and then the familiar fork on c4.

34 ♙b1



Both of White's minor pieces are on rotten squares. It is no wonder that something has to give.

34 ... ♙f1!!

Unexpected but entirely logical all the same. It is a part of endgame lore that you need to be able to target *two* weaknesses, not just one, to have winning chances. Here White can just about hold the balance on the queenside, as Black can't capture b2 without a4 falling; but the sudden attack on the g2 pawn overwhelms his defence.

35 ♙a2

The hapless bishop has to return to a2 to fend off the fork.

35 ... ♖ab7

At last Black has achieved his aim of doubling rooks against b2.

36 ♘c2

The only chance was to attack the bishop at once with 36 ♘f2, though after 36...♙c4!? White remains close to defeat.

36 ... ♖xb2

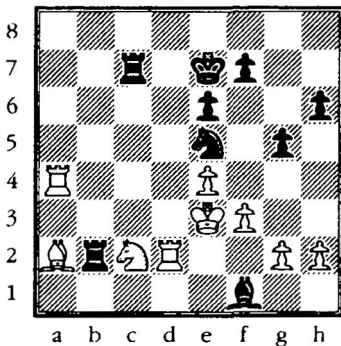
The triumph of Black's strategy!

37 ♖xa4

He can't allow the passed pawn to live. It seems as though White might escape as there are only pawns on one side of the board, but...

37 ... ♖c7!

A decisive return to the c-file. White will suffer disaster on c2 or c3.



38 ♘f2

The knight cannot move: 38 ♘d4 ♖c3+ wins a rook; if 38 ♘a1 – an embarrassing move indeed! – 38...♖c3+ 39 ♘d4 ♖xd2+ 40 ♘xc3 ♖xg2 and White's pawns all drop; or 38 ♘e1 ♖c3+ 39 ♘d4 ♖c4+! (the strongest, but 39...♖xd2+ 40 ♘xc3 ♖e2 is simple enough) 40 ♙xc4 ♖xd2+ and if 41 ♘c3 (41 ♘xe5 f6 mate!) 41...♘xc4 42 ♖xc4 ♖d1 43 ♖c7+ ♘d8 and Black wins a piece.

38 ... ♙b5

0-1

White will remain a piece down after 39 ♖a5 ♖xc2 40 ♖xc2 ♖xc2+.

Game 17

The following game doesn't make a striking impression. There are no outlandish sacrifices nor freakish manoeuvres to thrill the imagination; nothing at all, in fact, to suggest a superhuman intellect is at work. The young Azerbaijani just makes a series of ordinary looking moves and then Black loses a pawn. And yet we should ask ourselves what is about these unpretentious moves that has a Grandmaster of the strength of Milov completely busted within 25 moves.

White: T.Radjabov

Black: V.Milov

Warsaw 2005

The opening was a King's Indian Defence:

**1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7
4 e4 d6 5 h3**

Radjabov adopts a very solid system. He wants to put his queen's bishop on e3 in order to support d4; so first of all he rules out ♘g4 in reply, when the bishop would have to move again as allowing an exchange on e3 would be positionally unacceptable. The dark squared bishop is a key piece for White in this set up and it is hardly ever a good idea to allow its exchange for a knight. White could have achieved the same end with 5 f3, when we have the Samisch variation, but Radjabov decides to keep f3 for his knight.

5...0-0 6 ♗e3 ♘a6

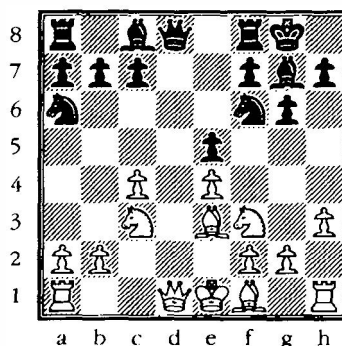
The knight goes to a6 so that White doesn't gain a tempo by attacking it with d4-d5, as is the case after ♘c6. If White plays d4-d5 anyway, the knight can go to the centre via c5; but most likely it would stay on a6, deterring b2-b4 and guarding the c7 square.

7 ♘f3 e5 8 dxe5

Radjabov clarifies the situation in the centre by creating fixed pawns on e4 and e5.

8 ... dxe5

After Black's forced recapture we shall start our move by move examination.



9 c5!?

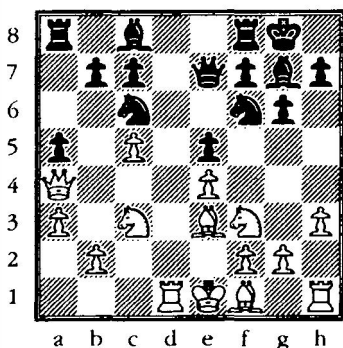
Normally in this variation Black will centralise his knight with c7-c6 followed by ♘c7 and ♘e6. Radjabov's plan is to prevent this and at the same time hobble Black's queenside pawns with 10 ♗xa6 bxa6. He hopes that the black bishop on g7 will remain an ineffectual piece, shut out of the game behind the pawn on c5.

Of course, handing over a long range bishop for a knight on the edge of the board is not a matter to be undertaken lightly; but Radjabov has judged that the fixed centre pawn structure won't give much scope to the black bishop pair. Entirely wrong would be 9 ♘xe5? when after 9...♘xe4 10 ♘xe4 ♗xe5 the black bishop springs to life.

9 ... ♘b4

12 ... ♖c6

14 ♕c2



White has secured a pleasant positional advantage on the queenside, but he must be careful not to rush things.

13 ♙e2!

It isn't always the most direct attacking moves that are best. A calm move that negates the opponent's own plan can be far more effective. The dynamic potential inherent in the King's Indian set up is revealed after 13 ♙b5 ♘d4! 14 ♘xd4 exd4 15 ♙xd4 ♘xe4 with excellent counterplay for Black. After Radjabov's modest game move 13...♘d4? 14 ♘xd4 exd4 15 ♙xd4 ♘xe4 16 ♙xg7 would win a piece for White – there is no devastating 16...♘xc3+ riposte as would be the case if the bishop was on b5.

13 ... ♙d7

Now White has to watch out for 14...♘d4!

Again Radjabov is obliged to adopt a defensive frame of mind. But the good thing is that his queen can retreat out of danger, whereas the black pawn on a5 can never move backwards.

14 ... ♖fd8

Black centralises his rook with one more dynamic plan up his sleeve if White is over ambitious.

15 0-0

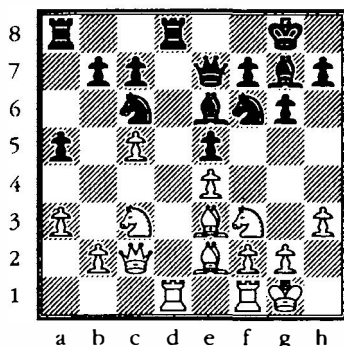
Again we have to applaud White's restraint. If instead 15 ♘d5 ♘xd5 16 exd5, Black can counterattack with 16...♙f5! when 17 ♕c4 e4! attacks f3 whilst bringing the bishop on g7 to life.

Now that White has castled, Black really has to reckon with 16 ♘d5 ♘xd5 17 exd5, driving the knight from c6 and creating mobile white pawns in the centre.

15 ... ♙e6

The bishop hurries to guard the d5 square, but the knight on c6 becomes vulnerable and the bishop itself becomes prey to an unwelcome exchange. Once again, we see that things that never actually happen play a big part in the outcome of a game. Like the threat of 10 ♙xa6, the threat of 16 ♘d5 has obliged Black to

weaken himself – a plan doesn't have to occur in a game to achieve its ends, it is enough that it is in the opponent's mind. As Tartakower said, the threat is stronger than the execution.



16 ... ♖b5!

All the stronger for being delayed. Now Black has to avoid 17 ♖xc6 bxc6, when his queenside pawns are wrecked. Thereafter White might even be able to get away with ♜xe5 – a move that normally fails to ♖xh3, when if gxf3 ♜xe5, but here White would have the follow up ♜xc6.

16 ... ♞a7

The knight turns on its pursuer, but ends up stuck in a rut on the edge of the board.

17 ... ♖a4!

The bishop heads to b3 in order to exchange itself for Black's 'good' bishop on e6 (and so leave him with the 'bad' bishop on g7 which is shut

in behind its pawns.). This exchange will facilitate the attack on Black's queenside pawns.

17 ... ♖c4

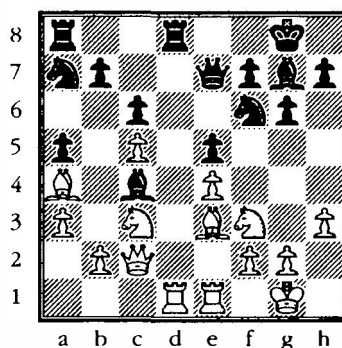
Meanwhile Black has no constructive plan and so makes do with a one move threat.

18 ... ♜f1

If now 18... ♖a6, Black has secured his queenside, but the bishop would be shut out of things. Therefore White could act in the centre with 19 ♞d5 ♞xd5 20 exd5 with enormous pressure and the chance to create a passed pawn on the d-file in the future.

Note that the rook on e1 is suddenly well placed to fend off Black's 20...e4? as 21 ♖g5 and 22 ♜xe4 would win a pawn.

18 ... c6



Black guards the important d5 square and clears the way for his

Wearing down a weakness

queen to defend a5 with ♔c7, should the pawn be attacked; but unfortunately for him he forgets this on the next move.

19 ♖b3!

Finally completing his plan to challenge the guardian of Black's light squares.

19 ... ♗e6

He understandably wants to deny the white queen the b3 square, but this is a howler. After 19...♗xb3 20 ♔xb3 Milov would have to defend his queenside pawns for what would feel like an eternity, but that would be better than having them drop off straightaway.

20 ♗xe6

White hands over control of the b3 square, as he has an even better post for the queen.

20 ... ♔xe6

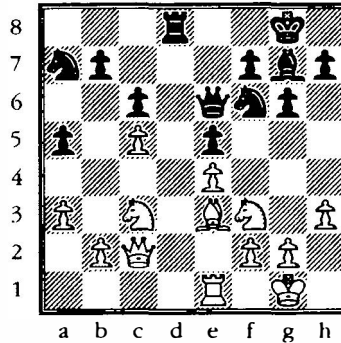
Thoroughly ugly for Black would be 20...fxe6, when White could cash in at once with 21 ♗xe5 or maybe let Black stew with 21 ♔b3.

21 ♖xd8+

This exchange is necessary to draw away the rook that can defend a5.

21 ... ♖xd8

Black is pleased to get the rook centralised, but the smile soon vanishes from his face.



22 ♔a4!

The queen goes back to a4 and suddenly the a5 pawn is indefensible.

22 ... ♖d7

The rook advances a square: losing a pawn is bad enough, but it would be even worse if the black pieces were forked on a7 and d8.

23 ♔xa5

The first concrete return for White's plan of queenside pressure.

23 ... ♗b5

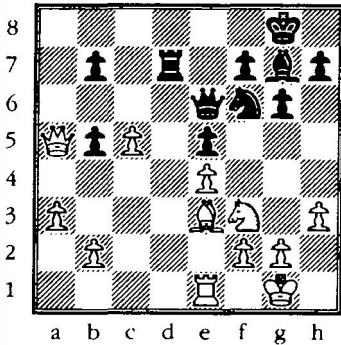
Milov begins to fight back. He offers the exchange of a knight badly placed on the edge of the board for one that is well centralised and defending the e4 pawn.

24 ♖xb5

This is clearer than 24 ♔a8+ ♕e8
25 ♕xb5 cxb5 as the white queen
gets to snatch another pawn.

24 ... cxb5

The fact that further damage has
been done to Black's queenside
pawns means that there is no hope
at all for Milov in solid play. He
will need to stake everything on a
counterattack.



25 ♕g5!

White uncovers a defence of his
e4 pawn.

Not 25 ♔xb5? ♕xe4 when Black
can advance his pawn majority in
the centre, free his bishop, and
cause all sorts of problems for
White.

Players often get careless once
they have won a pawn, and start to
believe that the game will 'win
itself'. I can assure you that if you

are playing a Grandmaster as strong
as Milov that certainly won't
happen. It is essential for Radjabov
that he stays focused right until the
end of the game.

25 ... ♕h5

The knight heads for its
traditional King's Indian post on f4.
Besides, if White had been allowed
to play 26 ♕xf6! he would have
decadened most of Black's
counterplay.

26 ♔xb5

Having secured the e4 square,
White gobbles a second pawn.

26 ... h6

Milov makes a hole for his king
on h7 and prepares a last ditch
advance of his kingside pawns.

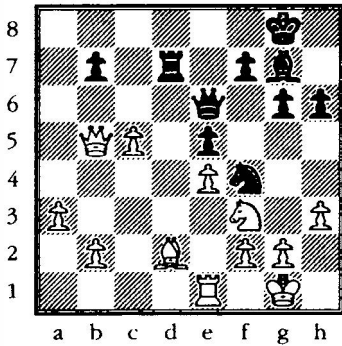
27 ♕d2!

The correct retreat as the bishop
deters the natural assault on White's
centre: 27...f5 28 ♕c3! and next
move 29 exf5 will uncover a triple
attack on the e5 pawn, which is
therefore lost.

27 ... ♕f4

Deprived of the f7-f5 idea, Milov
makes the only other aggressive
move available.

Wearing down a weakness



28 ♖xf4!

Radjabov must have carefully appraised the strength of his next move before making this exchange, as it is important to keep the bishop on g7 shut in.

28 ... exf4

For the first time in the game, Black's dark squared bishop can see daylight...

29 e5

but straightaway the prison door slams shut again.

29 ... g5

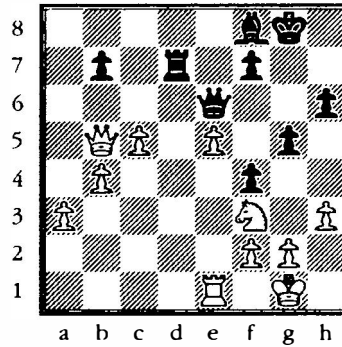
Nevertheless, the obstruction of the bishop by the white pawn on e5 isn't as firm as that of the black pawn that preceded it – after all, you can attack an enemy pawn and even sacrifice material to remove it, whereas you can't capture your own pieces! Milov aims to dislodge the white knight with a quick h6-h5 and g5-g4 and then conquer c5.

30 b4

Radjabov decides he can spare a move to advance on the queenside, as if 30...h5? 31 ♖xg5.

30 ... ♗f8

Black needs to defend g5 if he is going to get his pawns rolling, and so prepares ♗e7 and then h6-h5 and g5-g4.



31 ♗e2!

Radjabov realises that he can't just ignore Black's counterplay. He therefore offers to give back one of his queenside pawns in order to assume the initiative himself on the kingside. After all, Black's pawn advances have exposed his own king just as much as creating latent threats to the enemy monarch.

31 ... ♗b3

Milov grabs at a pawn on the queenside. There was little alternative, as after 31...♗e7, White

can play 32 ♖e4 and 33 ♘d4, breaking through in the centre.

32 ♖e4!

A powerful centralisation which prepares to undermine the f4 pawn.

32 ... ♙e7

If instead 32...♖xa3 33 e6! and the black king will soon be annihilated on the light squares.

33 ♙h4!

Now the black pawn chain disintegrates.

33 ... ♗g4

If Black's bishop were still on g7, he would now have an excellent game, as a knight retreat could be met by ♙xe5. But of course, if Black hadn't played ♙f8 to try to get in ♙e7 and h6-h7, Radjabov could have gone on his merry way with queening a pawn on the other wing.

34 ♘d2

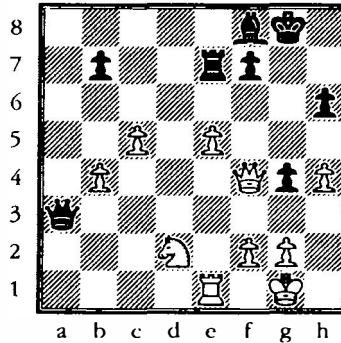
Clearer than 34 ♘d4 ♖c3, when White can't capture on f4 straightaway as the rook hangs.

34 ... ♖xa3

The need to break up White's queenside pawns means that the black queen is unable to defend her

own babies on the kingside.

35 ♖xf4



Not only capturing a pawn, but ensuring the win of another, as if 35...h5 36 ♖g5+ ♔h8 – 36...♙g7 drops the rook-37 ♖xh5+ and the feast continues.

Not being by nature bloodthirsty, here I shall call a halt to the move by move coverage. Next move White will be three pawns up, and he has a winning attack to boot. Everything flows nicely for him as step by step he pushes the black pieces backwards with his pieces and pawns, whilst bringing his own forces to bear against the exposed black king:

35...♙e6 36 ♖xg4+ ♙g6 37 ♖e4 ♖c3 38 ♘f3 b6 39 h5 ♙e6 40 ♘d4 ♙e8 41 ♙e3 ♖c1+ 42 ♔h2 bxc5 43 ♙g3+ ♔h8 44 ♖c6! 1-0

The double threat of 45 ♖f6+ with a quick mate and 45 ♖xe8 finally persuades Black to surrender.

4: Surging through the centre

Les Pions sont l'ame du jeu

Philidor: *'L'analyse du jeu des Echecs'* (*Analysis of the Game of Chess, 1748*)

'Pawns are the soul of chess' is a celebrated phrase attributed to Philidor, the 18th century French chess genius and musical composer at the Court of Versailles. Although a better translation of the quotation above is 'Pawns are the very life of the game', the meaning is clear.

The foot soldiers on the chess board may not be as grand as knights and bishops, but they mark out the territory of a player and help secure its key points. Their battle array will play a crucial part in whatever plan will be chosen: whereupon they will be the first into the fight and provide a cheap and plentiful source of cannon fodder when it is necessary to sacrifice.

In real life, Philidor's patrons at the court of Versailles, namely Louis the 16th and Marie Antoinette, were to meet a terrible fate for despising the 'pawns' in

their empire. A king and queen cannot rule without the support of the ordinary people: and neither will a wooden king and queen on a chess board last long without showing respect for their pawns.

In this chapter, we see how it is possible to build a winning strategy on a seemingly insignificant advantage, namely a pawn majority in the centre. The initial games are taken from the Grunfeld Defence: an opening system in which Black allows his opponent an extra centre pawn in the hope that he can restrain it with piece pressure and a judicious use of his own pawns.

The Perils of Pawnless Play

In the first game, White exploits the mobility that the extra pawn confers on his centre to charge forwards and bludgeon the black king. Black, meanwhile does his best to get by without using his own pawns: the kind of 'soulless' display we might expect from a machine.

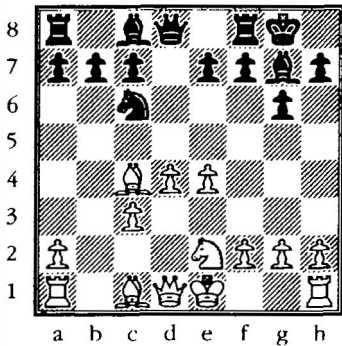
Game 18

White: Crafty

Black: ZChess

WMCCC London 2000

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 d5
 4 cxd5 ♘xd5 5 e4 ♘xc3 6 bxc3
 ♙g7 7 ♙c4 0-0 8 ♘e2 ♘c6



The first sign of indifference towards the pawns. A standard plan in this type of pawn centre involves 8...c5 and only then 9...♘c6, in order to put maximum pressure on the d4 point. In that way, White would be distracted from a kingside attack by the need to fortify his centre. The move 8...c5 would also aid the black pieces, as the queen's rook could find an active square on c8, with the chance to harass the bishop on c4 after c5xd4. Furthermore, the black queen would be able to go to c7, or even a5, to join in the counterplay. As the game develops, these avenues for the black queen and rook remain barred. It can therefore be said that: in neglecting the pawns, a player is neglecting his pieces as well.

Naturally, at any point over the next few moves Black could play ♘a5, attacking the white bishop and clearing the way for c7-c5! But ZChess never gets around to it.

9 0-0

White meanwhile enjoys the luxury of castling without any concerns about his centre.

9 ... b6

Black condescends to make a pawn move, but it is with the aim of clearing a route for his bishop to enter the game.

10 ♙e3

Normally in the Grunfeld, this bishop has to work hard in bolstering the d4 pawn against a sustained attack. Here there is no such pressure, and White has the luxury of preparing a plan to exchange off Black's dark squared bishop, which is a key piece in such an opening structure.

10 ... ♗d7

Black's pawnless play begins to do serious harm to his position. Here he might have played 10...♘a5 11 ♙d3 c5!? Gambiting a pawn, when after 12 dxc5 – by no means forced – 12...bxc5 13 ♙xc5 ♗c7 the white centre has been undermined and Black has counterplay after 14 ♙c3 ♘c4 etc.

11 ♚d2

In contrast to his opponent's colourless queen move, White presses on with his plan to exchange dark squared bishops.

11 ... ♝d8

The black pieces line up in a non-existent attack on d4. The rook move is also strategically wrong, as it weakens the f7 square. Black still could and should have grasped counterplay with 11...♘a5 12 ♙d3 c5, though White could ignore the demonstration with 13 ♙h6.

12 ♙h6

Normally when White plays this move in the Grünfeld he has to keep one anxious eye on the d4 square, which is usually under heavy siege by a black pawn on c5 and other black pieces. Here he has a luxury of pursuing his plan of a kingside attack without any worries whatever about his centre collapsing.

12 ... ♘e5

Meanwhile, Black continues to engage in senseless excursions with the pieces.

13 ♙b3

Of course, White sees through the 'trap' 13 dxe5 ♜xd2 14 ♙xd2 ♝xd2.

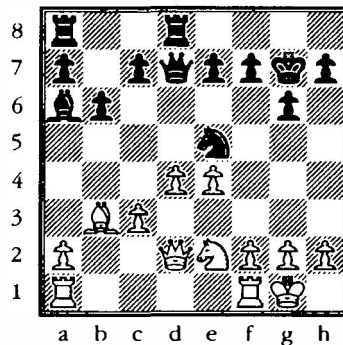
13 ... ♙a6

Now ZChess wants to win a piece with 14...♙xh6 15 ♜xh6 ♙xe2. It can't avoid the exchange of bishops with 13...♙h8 as after 14 ♜f4! the knight dare not move from e5 as mate follows on f7.

14 ♙xg7

Of course White jumps at the chance to get rid of the 'Indian' bishop on g7, which is still an important defensive piece, even if it hasn't been properly activated by Black.

14 ... ♙xg7



The kingside is looking ominously empty of black pieces

15 f4!

....and so White begins a direct attack. The positional justification is very strong: the dark squares around the black king are weak, and the black rook has abandoned its defensive duty on f8. The f7 square

is already under pressure from the white bishop and can be further threatened by the white rooks after the opening of the f-file. Furthermore, Black has no counterplay and White's pawn advance comes with gain of time.

15 ... ♖g4

The black knight's meandering makes a sad contrast to White's forceful strategic play.

16 f5

Already Black is threatened with an invasion on f7 with 17 fxg6 fxg6 18 ♖f7+.

16 ... ♕d6

As usual, ZChess can't resist its one move threats. Perhaps White will forget about the h2 square...

17 g3

He saw it! Black has too many problems of his own along the f-file to exploit this loosening of White's kingside pawns.

17 ... ♘f6

Blocking the potential attack on f7 and once again hoping for favourable tactics after 18 c5 ♜xe5! 19 dxe5 ♜xd2 20 exf6+ exf6 21 ♘f4 – he can't hold onto the material – 21... ♘xf1 22 ♜xf1, when

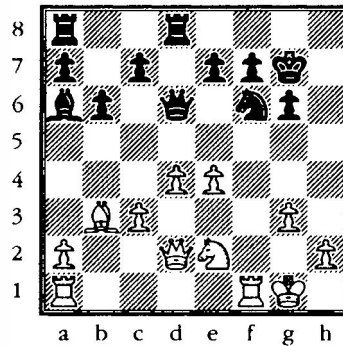
Black looks better in this messy position.

18 fxg6!

Crafty ignores all its opponent's attempts to play sharply and gets on with its methodical attack.

18 ... hxg6

It wouldn't surprise me if hereabouts Black was getting excited by ideas of 19... ♜h8 'starting an attack down the h-file'.



19 ♜f2!

Not only getting the knight on e2 out of a pin, but turning 20 e5 into a real threat, as in reply 20... ♜xe5 21 dxe5 ♜xd2 22 cxf6+ exf6 23 ♘f4 would now win a piece.

19 ... ♜c6

The queen sidesteps the pawn fork, but the last hope was 19... ♘xe2! As will be seen, the bishop on a6 remains a bystander until the end of the game, whereas

Surging through the centre

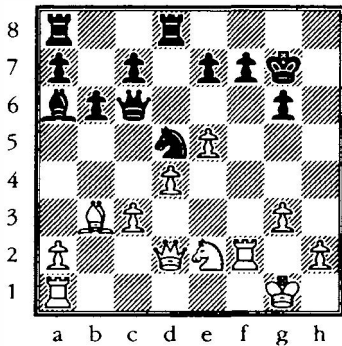
the white knight plays a leading part in the kingside onslaught.

20 e5

This advance not only dislodges the knight from f6, where it shields the vulnerable f7 pawn, but also leads by force to its exchange: a strategic plus for White, as will be seen.

20 ... ♖d5

The knight has no choice as other moves allow 21 ♖xf7+.



21 ♖xd5!

An excellent decision that cements White's grip on the dark squares. At first glance this exchange might look rather dubious as ZChess, who still has a light squared bishop, is handed control of the long diagonal aiming at h1. However, Crafty has calculated that his initiative will overwhelm Black before he can organise any meaningful counterplay. And as regards his own attack, getting rid

of the black knight makes it much easier to dismantle the defences around the black king.

21 ... ♕xd5

Now given a free move, Black could play 22... ♖b7, when the position suddenly changes: White has no answer to a crushing black queen check on h1.

22 ♖f4

Crafty gains a tempo by attacking the queen and instantly all Black's counterplay vanishes.

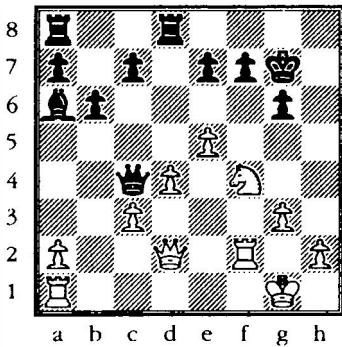
White's dark square phalanx of pawns in the centre is impressive, but it won't win the game unless it is converted into a battering ram to smash open the black king's shelter. The knight will also play a vital part in line opening by introducing threats against the g6 pawn and the idea of ♖h5+! to make possible a queen check on g5.

22 ... ♕c4

A strange move. A human player would probably try 22... ♕c6 so that at least there is the latent idea of 23... ♖b7 and 24... ♕h1 mate to give White pause for thought. However, 23 e6! is still killing, when if 23... ♖b7 24 d5 etc. and the swarm of white pawns is overwhelming.

The white pawns now systematically undermine the pawn

defences around the black king. Once these barriers are gone the game will be over, because not a single black piece – queen, two rooks and bishop – has shown the slightest interest in helping their king. Black is reaping the harvest of a pawnless strategy.



23 e6!

When a player has mastery over squares of one colour, a winning breakthrough usually occurs on a square of the other colour. Here White has a dark square ascendency, so in order to win he has to undermine Black's defences on the light squares.

23 ... f5

After 23...fxe6 White can win with 24 ♖c2! followed by a crushing queen invasion on g6, or in more forcing style with 24 ♔h5+! gxh5 25 ♜g5+ ♕h8 26 ♜f7 and mate follows on g7 or along the h file.

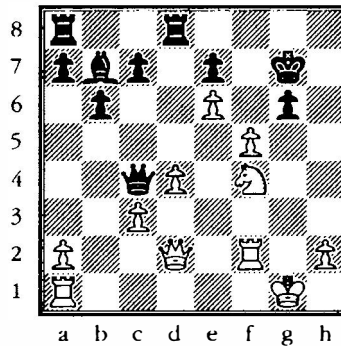
24 g4!

Challenging a second time the black f-pawn, which is White's chief enemy on the kingside, as there isn't a black piece in sight. If now 24...fxg4 25 ♔h5+! wins in the style of the note above after 25...gxh5 26 ♜g5+ and then 27 ♜f7, or 25...♕g8 (25...♕h7 26 ♜f7+) 26 ♜h6! gxh5 27 ♜f7.

24 ... ♖b7

A last attempt to do something down the long diagonal.

25 gxf5



The attack crunches through. White can safely ignore Black's previous move, as if 25...♜c6 the simplest reply is 26 ♜g2! blocking out the attack on h1.

25 ... g5

There is a nice mating sequence after 25...gxf5 26 ♜g2+! ♕xg2 (if 26...♕h7 27 ♜f2 ♕xg2 28 ♜h4+ leads to mate in the style of the mainline) 27 ♜xg2+ ♕h8 28 ♜h3+

♔g7 29 ♖g3+! step by step the white queen approaches the black king, which can never go to f8 e.g. 29...♔f8 30 ♖g6! and 31 ♖f7 mate follows) 29...♔h8 30 ♖h4+ ♔g7 31 ♖g5+ ♔h7 32 ♖h5+ ♔g7 33 ♖f7+ ♔h8 34 ♘g6 mate!

26 f6+!

Another hole is punctured in Black's kingside. It would be a massacre after 26...exf6 27 ♘h5+ ♔h8 28 ♖xf6 intending 29 ♖h6+.

26 ... ♔h6

The last attempt to find a semblance of pawn cover on the kingside.

27 ♖e3!

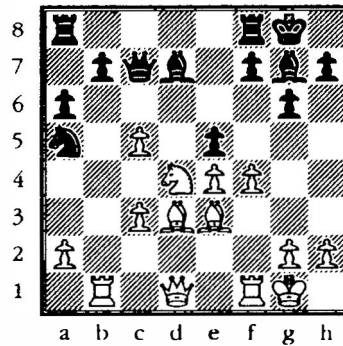
The programmers decided to pull the plug here, as if 27...exf6 28 ♖h3+ ♔g7 29 ♘h5+ ♔f8 30 ♖xf6+ is too much for silicon to bear. A total drubbing for Black's pawnless play.

Anyone playing through this game will be struck by the dynamism that the pawns added to White's game – chesswise, they could walk through any walls. A player is in the utmost peril if he doesn't appreciate his pawns and the value they add to his game.

Game 19

White: K.Sakaev
Black: V.Belov
Krasnoyarsk 2003

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 d5
4 cxd5 ♘xd5 5 e4 ♘xc3 6 bxc3
♙g7 7 ♙c4 c5 8 ♘e2 ♘c6 9 ♙e3
0-0 10 0-0 ♙d7 11 ♖b1 a6 12 dxc5
♖c7 13 ♘d4 e6 14 f4 ♘a5 15 ♙d3
e5



Here Sakaev ignored the threat to his knight and played:

16 f5!!

Despite having spent far too many years for my own good looking at chess, I'm not yet indifferent to such an inspired move. I find something deeply noble, even spiritual, in the way the knight sacrifices itself to heal the broken white centre. It is like Order emerging from Chaos, or if you prefer, a planet being formed out of scattered lumps of swirling rock. Whatever your chosen metaphor, the way that Sakaev brings together

his pawns into a strong, mobile centre is artistic and scientific and courageous.

16 ... exd4

Before you get carried away analysing the possible consequences of making a sacrifice and the opponent accepting it, it is always worth asking yourself: does my opponent have an uncomplicated and effective way to decline the offer?

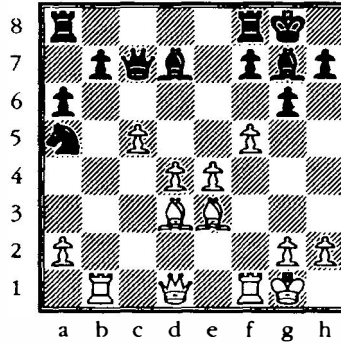
If the answer is yes, you should try to find an alternative move that gives you better chances than the sacrificial move would give, assuming it were declined; only if you can't find such a move should you return to looking at the sacrifice and begin the tough job of analysing what happens if it is accepted.

There is nothing more frustrating than spending half an hour looking at a piece sacrifice, finally building up the strength of will to make it and then – the opponent responds instantly with a move that declines the offer, wins a pawn and leaves you facing defeat in a long endgame grind.

Here Black has no good way to decline the offer. If 16... ♖xc5 17 f6! exd4 (17... ♗h8 18 ♘f5 and when the black queen moves to safety you can decide whether to mate on e7 or h6) 18 cxd4 and with

19 fxg7 coming it will soon be over for the black king.

17 cxd4



Now White has a 4-1 pawn majority between the c-file and f-file. It is important that the white rook is on b1, preventing a challenge to the centre with b7-b6.

The heavy analysis that follows at move 20 and 21 might suggest that the sole purpose of the sacrifice was to lay the groundwork for a mating attack. However, targeting the black king is only one part of White's strategy, albeit an essential part. Sakaev will do his best to maintain his centre pawns in good formation until the opportunity arises to advance them en masse to further cramp the black pieces and create passed pawns. Of course, this plan will be combined with threats against the black king – and if a chance to mate appears, it won't be necessary at all to arrange a big push in the centre.

17 ... ♖fe8

Black frees the f8 square in anticipation of White's next move.

18 f6

Entirely wrong would be 18 fxg6?? as after 18...hxg6, the bishop on g7 still has scope and Black has the option of f7-f5 in some cases to attack e4. On the other hand, after the game move, the bishop becomes passive and Black can no longer challenge the white centre.

18 ... ♗f8

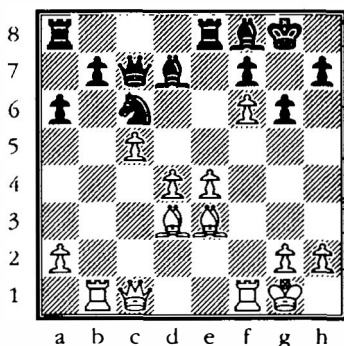
The bishop chooses this square over h8, where it would be entirely shut in.

19 ♕c1!

White aim is to eliminate the bishop that guards the g7 square, and then get the queen to g7 to deliver mate. The basic blueprint is ♗h6, ♗xf8, ♖h6 and ♖g7 mate.

19 ... ♞c6

The knight returns from the wilderness and slows down White's initiative by attacking d4.



20 ♔h1!

It may seem odd to describe moving the king one square into the corner as a dangerous attacking move, but read on...

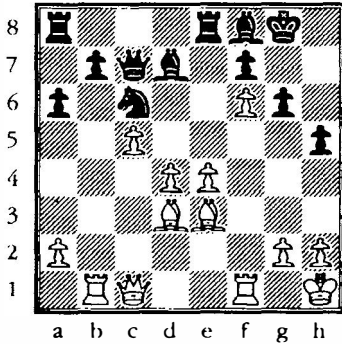
It would have been foolish to rush in with 20 ♗h6? when after 20...♞xd4! 21 ♗xf8 ♞xf8 22 ♖h6 it looks like mate, but 22...♞e6! defends g7. Taking this variation further, if 23 ♗c4?? aiming to eliminate the defender of g7, then simply 23...♖xc5+ wins the bishop. Alternatively, White can continue the attack with 23 ♖f3, intending 24 ♖h3 followed by 25 ♖xh7 mate. Then all goes well after 23...♞fe8? 24 ♖h3 ♞f8 25 ♖g7 mate. However, Black has the saving move 23...♖c5+! when 24 ♔h1 ♖g5 or 24...♖h5 defeats White's attack. Of course, if 23...♖c5+ wasn't check, White could play ♖h3 in reply, when Black has nothing better than ♖h5, giving up his queen to ♖xh5...

Here we see the point of 20 ♔h1! Now White really is threatening to win with 21 ♗h6, as Black's ♖xc5 no longer comes with check as in the above sequence. And it's not just the ♖f3 idea that is revitalised: the ♗c4 move (which was just a gross blunder in its 23 ♗c4?? version above) also becomes a dangerous weapon.

Yes, the unpretentious 20 ♔h1 is a move to fill Black with dread!

20 ... h5

Black finds a different way to defend against the bishop invasion on h6, but it falls foul of White's accurate reply.



21 ♖f4!

If instead 21 ♖h6?! Black would lose in wonderful style after 21...♜xd4? 22 ♖xf8 ♜xf8 23 ♜h6 ♜e6 24 ♖c4! and there is no good answer to the threat of 25 ♖xe6 followed by 26 ♜g7 mate. For example:

(a) 24...♖c8 25 ♖xc6 fxc6 26 ♜xg6+ ♜h8 27 f7 and the threat of 28 ♜h6 mate should make Black resign at once; or

(b) 24...♖e8 25 ♜b6!! (a stunning move. White wants to take on c6 with the rook, so that he has the deadly follow up ♖xc6+) 25...♜d7 (or 25...♜d8 26 ♜xe6 fxc6 27 ♖xe6+ ♖f7 28 ♜g7 mate, while 25...♖c6 26 ♖xe6 wins as in the 24...♖c8 line above) 26 ♜xe6 fxe6 27 ♖xe6+! ♜xe6 28 ♜g7 mate.

However, Black can kill all these variations right at the beginning by answering 21 ♖h6 with 21...♜h7! when the black king stops any ♜h6 move. As Reuben Fine once remarked: 'The king is a strong piece. Use it!' He was referring to the endgame phase, but also in the middlegame the king is often an important defender of itself.

21 ... ♜d8

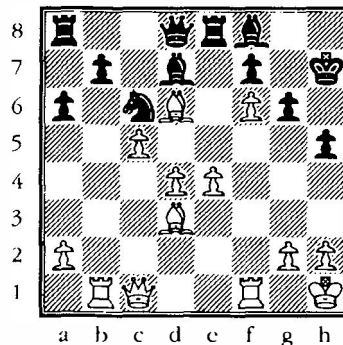
The queen retreats, after which d4 and f6 are both hanging, but White has everything under control.

22 ♖d6!

The reason behind his previous move. Sakaev has found an alternative way to get at the black bishop on f8. The immediate threat is 23 ♖xf8 ♜xf8 24 ♜h6, when mate on g7 decides the issue.

22 ... ♜h7

The king is obliged to cover the h6 square himself as if 22...♜xd4 23 ♖xf8 ♜xf8 24 ♜h6 ♜e6 25 ♖c4 followed by 26 ♖xe6 wins.



23 ♖e3!

Sakaev stops 23...♟xd4. Despite being a piece down, White has no need to hurry. The important thing is that he maintains an invincible centre, as this will ensure the black pieces remain lifeless, even though they are apparently on decent centre squares. It should also be mentioned that the Russian Grandmaster had to foresee a refutation of Black's attempt to destroy his centre that occurs in the game.

23 ... ♟xd6

Giving his opponent a passed pawn, but what else can he do? If 23...♟h6 24 ♜f2 ♟c8, to defend b7, White can build up with 25 e5, and prepare the d4-d5 advance, perhaps with ♜fel and ♟c4. Also after 25 e5, there is the dangerous plan of 26 ♜h4 intending 27 ♜xh5 to exploit the pin on the g6 pawn.

24 cxd6

The white centre has grown to fearsome proportions, but Belov hopes to cut it down to size with his next move.

24 ... ♟c8

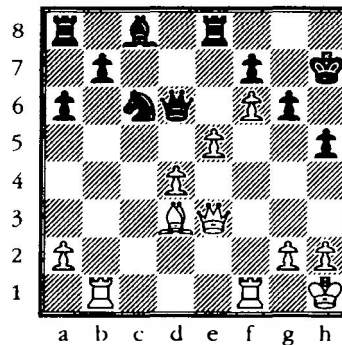
The bishop defends against 25 ♜xb7 and uncovers an attack on the d6 pawn.

25 e5

If 25 ♜g3? ♟xd4 breaks up the white pawns, so Sakaev advances the e-pawn and opens the diagonal of the bishop on d3.

25 ... ♜xd6

This is the move Black had relied on. If 27 exd6 ♜xe3 when White's pawns are wrecked, or 27 ♜g5 ♜f8! 28 ♜xh5+ ♜h6 and the black king survives.



26 ♟xg6+!

A devastating reply that destroys all Black's hopes.

26 ... ffg6

If 26...♟xg6 27 ♜g3+ when Black loses his queen.

27 f7

The black rook is overloaded: if it moves to f8, the queen drops; if it moves forwards, the passed pawn queens.

27 ... ♜e7

Black has to give up the rook to avoid immediate disaster.

28 fxe8=♚

A handsome reward for the sacrifice of the bishop.

28 ... ♖xe8

Normally, two minor pieces are worth more than a rook in the middlegame, but here White has connected passed pawns, a lead in development and an easy target in the black king.

29 ♖f6

With the barriers along the f-file removed, the white rooks can infiltrate and attack both g6 and the weak f7 square.

29 ... ♗e7

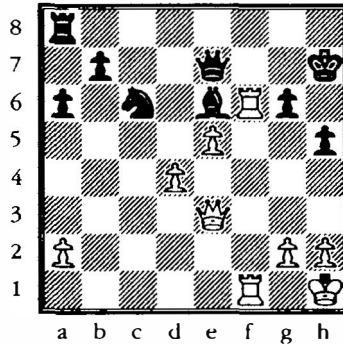
Black has to develop his bishop, but if 29...♗e6 30 ♖xb7+. Incidentally, the white rook has been sitting quietly on b1 for most of the middlegame, but its pressure on b7 has caused Black severe problems.

30 ♖b1

But now it is time for the rook to join its comrade on the open file.

30 ... ♗e6

Black develops his bishop and meets the threat of 31 ♖f7+.

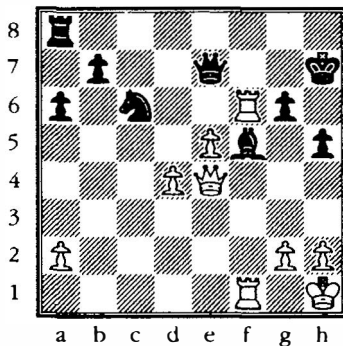


31 ♗e4!

A move with intentions that sum up White's strategy: exploiting the pawn centre (32 d5, winning a piece) and mating the black king (32 ♗xg6+).

31 ... ♗f5

Now after 32 ♗f4 ♖d8 Black would at last have his pieces organised, but White has a straightforward combination to end the game.



32 ♖1xf5!

When attacking a kingside structure full of dark square holes,

Surging through the centre

the way to win is often with a breakthrough on a light coloured square, as then there is no where left for the king to hide.

32 ... gxf5

The last of the pawn cover is stripped away from the black king.

33 ♖xf5+

Even the quiet 33 ♖h4 would win, which shows that the black position has entirely gone.

33 ... ♔g8

Black has an extra piece, but he would willingly swap the knight for a pawn on g7.

34 ♖g6+ 1-0

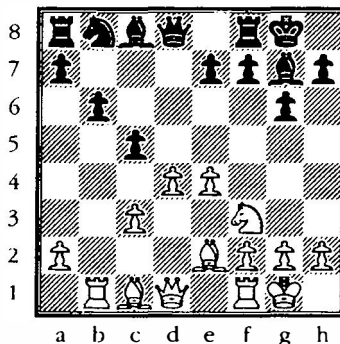
Black resigned. After 34...♖h8 35 ♖xh5+ ♖h7 36 ♖h6 he loses his queen, when the rook and knight are no match for the white queen and connected passed pawns.

Game 20

Although the theme of this chapter is the value of the centre pawn majority, it might be useful at this point to 'turn the board around' and ask: how does a great mind like Kasparov, a fan of the Grunfeld, defend Black's position?

White: **B.Avrukh**
Black: **G.Kasparov**
Ramat Aviv 2000

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 d5 4 ♘f3
♙g7 5 cxd5 ♘xd5 6 e4 ♘xc3
7 bxc3 c5 8 ♚b1 0-0 9 ♙e2 b6
10 0-0



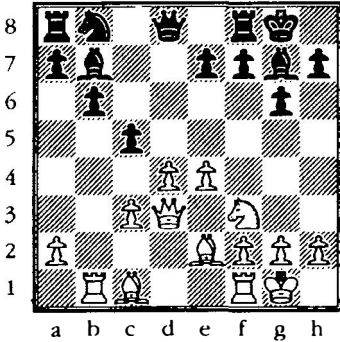
If now 10...♙a6 then 11 ♙xa6 ♘xa6 12 ♖d3!? ♖c8 13 ♙g5 gives a pleasant edge for White who after 13...♖b7 can try for a kingside attack with 14 h4!?

10 ... ♙b7

The attack on c4 is highly awkward, as 11 dxc5? ♙xe4 would be abysmal. Meanwhile, 11 d5 drops the c3 pawn, 11 ♙d3 or 11 ♘d2 lose the d4 pawn, and 11 e5 is positionally undesirable, as it removes the flexibility from White's centre and leaves him weak on the a8-h1 diagonal. That means the white queen has to be called for defensive duty, though this also isn't entirely satisfactory, as will be seen:

11 ♖d3

If 11 ♖c2, the white queen could become a target for a rook after the c file is opened by an exchange of pawns on d4 and then ♜c8.



11 ... ♗a6!

It looks distinctly strange to move a bishop that has just been developed a second time. Indeed, just one move ago the idea of 10...♗a6 was rejected as leading to a passive game, so why is it recommended now? It becomes clear on the next move:

12 ♕e3

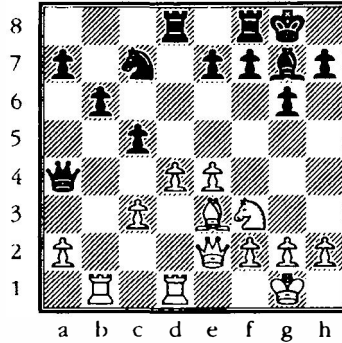
The best post for the white queen, who like a mother hen protecting her chicks is guarding the three pawns on c3, d4, and e4.

12 ... ♕d7!

Here is the difference. The black queen can head for the a4 square, where she is actively placed, putting pressure on both the a2 and

d4 squares – or e4 square if White advances d4-d5.

13 ♗xa6 ♜xa6 **14** ♕e2 ♜c7
15 ♜d1 ♜ad8 **16** ♗e3 ♕a4!

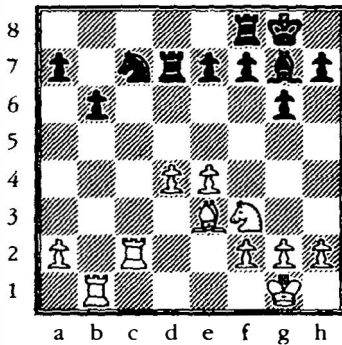


The black queen is a real nuisance here and impossible to evict with either piece or pawn. It wasn't obvious that this would be the case, and the value of the ♕d7 and ♕a4 manoeuvre in the Grunfeld was only discovered after a lot of work by opening theorists.

17 ♜dc1 ♜d7 **18** ♕c2

It is normally a bad sign for White if he feels obliged to beg for the exchange of queens in the Grunfeld. If things are going well for him, the presence of queens will give him attacking chances against the black king, perhaps combined with an advance of the centre pawns; but here, with the black queen looming large and baleful over all his plans, White can at best hope for a draw. He was wise to go on the defensive, as if 18 dxc5 ♕xc4 19 cxb6 axb6 20 ♜xb6 ♜d5 gives Black excellent play for a pawn.

18...♖xc2 19 ♜xc2 cxd4 20 cxd4



20 ... f5!

Having restrained the white centre, Kasparov tries to break it up.

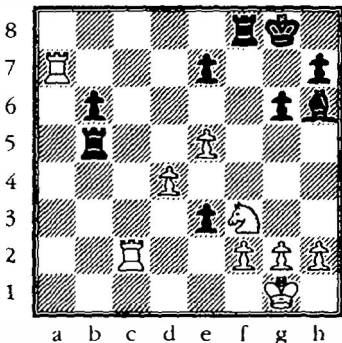
21 ♜bc1!

Chasing the knight from c7, as after 21 e5 Black could play 21...f4 22 ♔d2 ♘e6, putting enormous pressure on the d4 pawn.

21...♘b5 22 e5 f4 23 a4!

The only way to stop disaster on d4.

23...fxe3 24 axb5 ♔h6 25 ♜a1 ♜d5 26 ♜xa7 ♜xb5



Threatening mate on the back rank. Black's strategy has turned out splendidly and he has a definite edge due to his passed pawn and the active bishop. However, White managed to hold onto the draw:

27 ♔f1 ♜e8 28 fxe3 ♔xe3 29 ♔e2 ♔f4 30 ♜aa2 ♔f7 31 ♜cb2 ♜a5 32 ♜xa5 bxa5 33 ♜a2 ♜a8 34 ♜a4 ♔e6

Now Black only needs to play 35...♔d5 when he would surely win, but a tactic came to White's rescue thanks to a discovered attack on the bishop:

35 d5+! ♔f5 36 ♘h4+ ♔xe5 37 ♘f3+ ♔f5 38 ♘h4+ 1/2-1/2

Black has an extra pawn, but his king can't escape from the attentions of the knight without dropping a piece.

By studying the games of the experts, we learn which squares and ideas are important in a particular opening variation. This helps us to diagnose the likely cause when something goes wrong in one of our own games.

Game 21

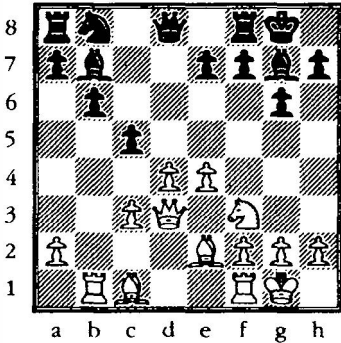
In the following game, it didn't take much for Black to end up in trouble, just one passive move. However, he then fought back strongly leading to a game of great instructive value.

White: P.Kiriakov

Black: A.Ledger

Hastings Challengers 2001

(The opening moves as in Avrukh-Kasparov above)



11 ... ♘d7

A sensible developing move – but it is wrong, wrong, wrong! General positional rules should always be broken if they are against the needs of the specific situation on the board. That is why Kasparov’s 11...♙a6! should be preferred to the natural knight development.

As the middlegame develops, Black will suffer in two ways:

- he has a passive bishop on b7
- he cannot play ♖d7 and ♗a4

12 ♙g5!

This is highly annoying for the black queen who is now tied down to the e7 pawn. Black could drive off the bishop with 12...h6 13 ♙h4

g5, but this would weaken his kingside, while 12...f6 would shut in his own bishop and leave a hole on e6. In either case, the cure would be worse than the disease, so Ledger refuses to be provoked.

12 ... cxd4

Black wants to play his knight to f6 without allowing the possibility of d4xc5 in reply. He may also have hoped to gain counterplay down the c-file.

13 cxd4

Kiriakov can rejoice in being rid of his vulnerable pawn on c3.

13 ... ♘f6

Now the attack on e7 is blocked and White’s e4 pawn is hanging. Nevertheless, the black bishop on g7 is singularly unimpressed at having seen a potential target on c3 vanish on move 12 and then be shut in by the knight. As this bishop is usually the key piece in Black’s opening scheme, it shows there is a lack of harmony in his position.

14 d5

The white centre is impressive and cannot be challenged by 14...e6 because of 15 e5, winning a piece – once again the bishop on g5 is Black’s nemesis. In contrast, the black bishop on b7 is a sorry sight. It only has one safe move and that is back to c8.

A highly double edged response. The rook decides to block the advance of the a-pawn manually, but it will find itself in great peril.

18 ♖b3

The queen defends the a2 pawn and clears the way for the bishop to go to b5 to shut in the black rook. Then the basic scheme to win the exchange would be: ♖b5, ♖d2, ♜c4 and ♖xa5.

As will be seen, the queen will also be well placed on b3 to counter Black's attempt at counterplay in the centre.

You will notice that White has changed track: his idea is no longer to besiege the b6 point, but rather to smother the black rook on a5 and win the exchange. This isn't inconsistency on Kiriakov's part: on the contrary, one plan has evolved from the other as part of a natural 'flow'. After all, the black rook would never have wandered into the trap on a5 if it hadn't been for the threat of a4-a5.

18 ... ♜g4

Black hopes to free the c5 square as an escape route for his rook, either by eliminating the bishop on e3 or by chasing it away.

19 ♖b5!

The rook is shut in with gain of time by hitting the black queen.

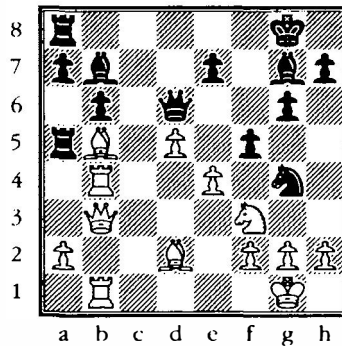
19 ... ♕d6!

The best square for the queen. She eyes the h2 square and blocks a d5-d6 pawn advance: rather cryptic considerations that become clearer after Black's next couple of moves.

20 ♖d2

A quiet move which forces a sharp reaction from Black, as White is almost ready for ♖xa5...

20 ... f5!



A strong counterattacking move from International Master Andrew Ledger, who after his imprecise opening plan has defended with great determination. It is vital that he initiates action in the centre before the rook is eaten with 21 a4 (to avoid any ♜a3 move), 22 ♜c4 and 23 ♖xa5.

You will recall that Kasparov made a similar strike at e4 on exactly the same move: there also 20...f5 deserved an exclamation mark. Of course, the 13th World

Surging through the centre

Champion had already exchanged queens, so that there were no mating ideas to terrorise his king.

21 ♙c6!

Once again, White changes his plan. In fact, he is obliged to adapt to a new situation in which Black is threatening to demolish the whole of his pawn structure with 21...fxe4 and 22...♙xd5: then we can no longer talk about Black's light squared bishop being 'bad'! Furthermore, once the f-file is opened, Black can dream of a kingside attack with ♜f8, ♜xf3 and then ♜xh2+.

Previously we have been talking about trapping the rook on a5 and also about how poor the black bishop is on b7: but Kiriakov seems to contradict all that by releasing the black rook from a5 and offering to exchange off the 'bad' bishop.

However, it doesn't mean the plan of trapping the rook on a5 was wrong, as Black has been compelled to seek unfavourable complications with 20...f5. But it would equally be wrong for White to pursue the idea. Kiriakov switches his focus to the centre and kingside and with 21 ♙c6 kills off most of the dynamism in the black position.

21 ... ♙xc6

If 21...♜b8 22 exf5 gxf5 23 ♙f4 and wins material, as 23...♗e5

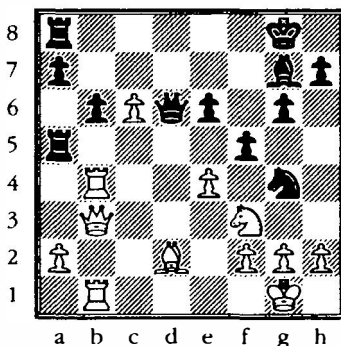
24 ♗xe5 ♙xe5 25 ♜g3+! nabs a bishop.

22 dxc6+

White has managed to convert his central pawn majority into a passed pawn and has also opened up the long diagonal between the white queen and black king.

22 ... e6

The pawn will become a target on e6. Perhaps he should have tried 22...♗h8, when not 23 ♗g5? ♜xh2+, but simply 23 exf5 gxf5 24 ♜c4, supporting the passed pawn and threatening 25 ♙xa5, looks very strong for White.



23 exf5

White's new plan begins to clarify: the e6 point is to be conquered, when Black's kingside pawn structure will fall apart, leaving the black king at the mercy of a white attack. Kiriakov therefore clears the way for his rook on b1 to attack the e6 pawn.

23 ... **gxf5**

Instead 23...**fxf5** would activate the rook with the threat of 24...**fxf3** and 25...**hxh2+**. But alas for Black, White gets his 'rook takes knight' in first with 24 **fxg4**.

24 **fxe1**

The rook is the first white piece to attack the pawn.

24 ... **fxd5**

In reply, Black recentralises his rook and shields the weak point. Ledger's counterattack in the centre shouldn't give him more than the worst chances in a messy position, but that doesn't mean it should be underestimated.

25 **xf4**

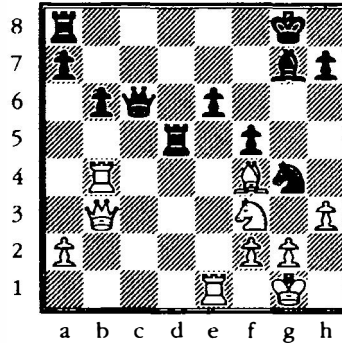
It seems that 25 c7! was better, when after 25...**xc7** 26 **fxe6** White has a pleasant edge, for example 26...**xc5** 27 **xe1!**? defending f2 – 27...b5 28 a4! and White has a safer king and more compact pawns.

25 ... **xc6**

There is no choice but to eliminate the passed pawn. If 25...e5, White has various ways to exploit the pin on d5, the prettiest being 26 **fxd4!!** **fxd8** (or 26...exd4 27 **fxd6**) 27 **fxd5** **fxd5** 28 c7! and Black will shortly be a queen down.

26 **h3**

White's idea is to chase back the knight and then win the e6 pawn, but after the correct retreat it is by no means clear.



26 ... **fh6?**

Only now does Black go seriously wrong. After 26...**fh6!** it is hard to see any real advantage for White: 27 **fd4** (or 27 **fg5!**?) 27...**hd7** 28 **fxe6** (a horrible blunder is 28 **fxe6?** walking into a pin after 28...**fxe8**) 28...**fh8!** (but not 28...**fxd4** 29 **fxe8** mate) and Black is fighting hard.

27 **fxh6**

A necessary exchange to win control of the d4 square.

27 ... **fxh6**

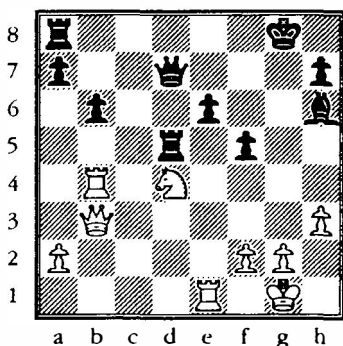
The elimination of the black knight has not only deprived Ledger of a piece that was a good defender of his king and counterattacker, but also dragged his bishop to an exposed square.

28 ♖d4

Now the attack on the black queen means that the e6 pawn is doomed.

28 ... ♗d7

There wouldn't be much hope for Black after 28...♖xd4 29 ♖xd4, as e6 and his king would remain targets.



29 ♖xe6!

The correct way to capture as it gains time by attacking the black bishop. Of course, the white knight is taboo because of a potential discovered check on the black king.

29 ... ♘f4

Ledger tries for swindles based on back rank mate by controlling the h2 square. After 29...♘f8 there is a beautiful win for White: 30 ♖e5 ♖d8 – the only way to defend d5. If now 31 ♖b5, attacking d5 a third time, 31...♘c5 blocks off the rook. So White clears the d4 square with 31 ♖c6!! also attacking d8, when

31...♗xc6 32 ♖d4! achieves the third attack on d5 and wins the exchange and the game!

30 ♖e7!

Setting up a pin on d5 with gain of time. If now 30...♗xe7 31 ♗xd5+ and unfortunately for Black he has no time to mate on e1, as he either loses the rook on a8 with check or his queen after 31...♙g7 32 ♖xf5+.

30 ... ♖c8

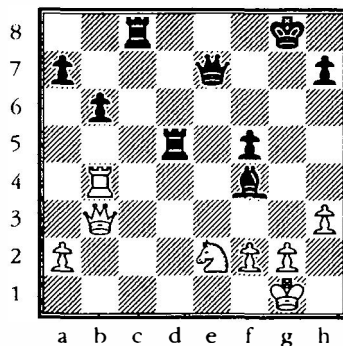
A last try: if 31 ♖xd7?? ♖c1+ mates.

31 ♖e2!

Stopping mate on c1. Now besides the pin on d5, Black's queen and bishop are hanging.

31 ... ♗xe7

It's either this or resignation.



32 ♖xf4!

Also winning is 32 ♗xd5+, but this is the cleanest kill.

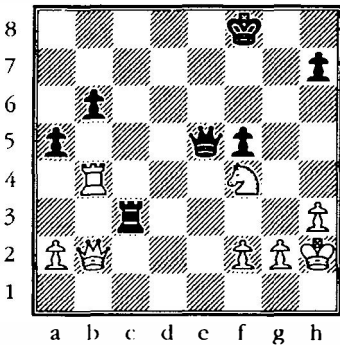
32 ... ♔f8

Black has to accept the loss of a piece. The game would probably have finished here but for time trouble.

33 ♖xd5

Here we shall conclude our move by move analysis as White has both an extra knight and a safer king. Ledger tried for some tricks but his opponent's sharp tactical eye misses nothing:

33... ♖c1+ 34 ♔h2 ♕e5+ 35 ♖f4 a5 36 ♗b2 ♖c3



It looks as though White might have blundered, as if his rook remains defending the knight, say with 37 ♖c4, there follows 37... ♖xh3+! and White loses his queen. In fact, Kiriakov has everything under control:

37 ♖b3! ♗xf4+ 38 g3!

The point. Both the black rook and queen are hanging, and if

38... ♖xb3 39 ♗h8+ followed by nabbing the queen. Black therefore resigned.

Game 22

The Art of Winning with Black

In the final two games of the chapter, we see Anand using his centre majority to grind out wins as Black against opponents who seem more than happy to kill off the tension and draw against their celebrated adversary.

We have all been in a similar situation, in which we are desperate for a win, but our mean opponent refuses to give us any chances to play actively. Anand's games suggest the following response to such a plight:

You must keep on playing one move after another that suits the requirements of the position. Do not make any artificial attempts to force the pace of the game. Do not fear simplification, the endgame, a strong opponent's attack, or complications, if this is the path that you are required to follow. The development and flow of your game should be as natural as that of a living organism.

The opponent will blunder: he must, or you cannot win. The best way of provoking a mistake is to develop your game as required by the tactical and strategic features of

Surging through the centre

the position. Excellent play provokes errors!

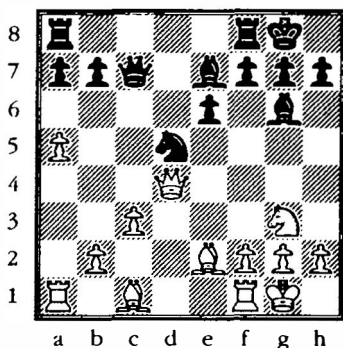
White: R.Kasimdzhanov

Black: V.Anand

Linares 2005

The opening was an Anti-Sicilian:

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 c3 ♘f6 4 ♙e2
♙g4 5 d3 e6 6 ♘bd2 ♘c6 7 ♘f1
d5 8 exd5 ♘xd5 9 ♚a4 ♙h5
10 ♘g3 ♘b6 11 ♚d1 ♙g6 12 0-0
♙e7 13 a4 0-0 14 a5 ♘d5 15 ♚a4
♚c7 16 d4 cxd4 17 ♘xd4 ♘xd4
18 ♚xd4



When assessing the health of a player's position, we should ask ourselves three key questions:

firstly, is the king safe?

secondly, are there any weaknesses in the pawn structure?

and thirdly, are the pieces well coordinated?

I have used these three little questions throughout the book.

Here we can assert that the white king is safe. He might come under heavy attack in the future, but at the moment there is no danger threatening him: his pawn defences are solid and there are sufficient defenders at hand.

Nor can we espy any weaknesses in the white pawn structure.

When it comes to piece coordination, though, we can't be so optimistic. White is behind in development and Black can centralise a rook with gain of time by ♖ad8, harassing the black queen (with the neat point that if ♚xa7 in reply then ♙c5 traps the queen). An even greater concern for White is the fact that the bishop on c1 has yet to be brought into the game.

Still, this lack of coordination in White's position – which is essentially a lack of development – doesn't look too serious. Nothing much appears to be happening, which should give Kasimdzhanov plenty of time to sort things out.

However, Black is Anand: a brilliant strategist who knows how to exploit to the full the very slightest defect in his opponent's camp. Would you believe that he manages to deter the development of the bishop on c1 *for another 19 moves*? Such is the forcefulness of his play.

We have no choice but to examine every move to see how this can happen.

18 ... f5!

In what follows, Black will make full use of his 4-3 majority of pawns on the kingside. Alas, for Kasimdzhanov, he cannot get his own majority on the queenside to work for him in the same way.

We stated that there are no weaknesses in White's pawn structure. However, their *value* has been undermined by the lack of piece coordination. If his pieces were on decent squares, White could utilise his queenside pawn majority to evict the black knight from its strong post on d5 with 19 c4. Then 19...♖b4?! 20 ♔f4! would solve the problem of the bishop's development. However, Black can reply more strongly with 19...♙c5! after which 20 ♖h4 ♖b4 is excellent for him, as 21 ♙f4? e5 pushes back the bishop, while 21 ♙d2 f4 forces the white knight to decentralise itself on h1 or h5, after which 22...e5 leaves Black in command of the centre.

In the same way that the Romans talked about a healthy mind in a healthy body, a healthy pawn structure requires a healthy piece deployment to function properly, and vice versa.

19 ♔a4

White evacuates his queen from the centre in anticipation of Black's next move.

19 ... ♗ad8

Here we see the value of 18...f5! If 20 c4 ♖b4 and White is unable to develop his queen's bishop to any square, as if 20 ♙d2 the rook takes it while 20 ♙e3 allows a pawn fork on f4.

Therefore, in contrast to the black rook, which is effortlessly developed to d8, the white rook is stuck on a1, unable to enter the game.

20 ♗d1

The penalty for 20 ♙d2 is 20...f4 21 ♖e4 ♖b4! cutting off the white queen's defence of e4 22 cxb4 ♙xe4 and besides the damage to White's pawns, the black pieces are rampant, e.g. 23 ♙c3?! f3! with a fierce kingside attack.

The problem of developing the queen's bishop has become of enormous significance. White would much rather have played his other rook to d1, and kept this rook on f1 to help defend the f2 square. But how?

Given the chance, White hopes to play 21 ♙d2 followed perhaps by 22 ♙e1, when the bishop is passively placed but at least it is out of the way of the rook on a1. However, things happen too fast to allow him to carry out this plan.

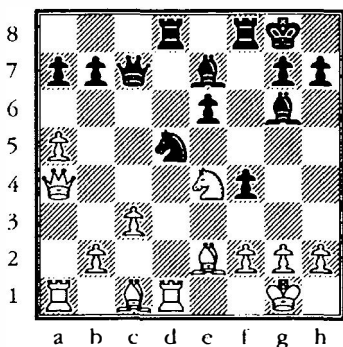
20 ... f4!

Surging through the centre

Attacking the white knight and permanently denying the white bishop access to c3 or f4.

21 ♖e4

In his undeveloped state, maintaining a knight on e4 is a luxury White can't afford. He had to go the defensive with 21 ♖f1, though he is under a heavy siege after 21... ♗e5 22 ♘f3 ♘c5, when the f2 square is looking very shaky.



21 ... ♗e5!

Kasimdzhanov mustn't be allowed a moment's respite to get in 22 ♘d2. The attack on the knight overstretches White's too few developed pieces.

22 ♘f3

If 22 f3 ♘c5+! exploits the weakness of the e3 square: 23 ♘h1 (intolerable is 23 ♖xc5 ♗xe2, with 24... ♖e3 to follow) 23... ♘e3!? 24 ♘xe3 ♖xe3 (also tempting is 24... ♗xe3) White has got rid of his problem bishop on c1, but the

gigantic Black knight on e3 is an even bigger headache.

After the game move, it appears that White is holding everything together and can at last play 23 ♘d2. However, you will notice that if the d-file is opened, the white queen will be overworked, as her functions would then include defending the rook on d1 as well as the knight on e4. With this in mind, Anand unleashed another stunning pawn move:

22 ... b5!

Now after 23 axb6 ♖xb6 either the defence of e4 or d1 has to give as the white queen is overloaded in her tasks. For example 24 ♗c2 ♘xe4 25 ♘xe4 ♗xe4! 26 ♗xe4 ♖xd1+ and mate next move.

23 ♗c2

The white queen has no choice but to walk into a pin.

23 ... ♖f6

....which Anand exploits at once.

24 ♖xf6+

Fortunately for White this is check or he would lose a piece.

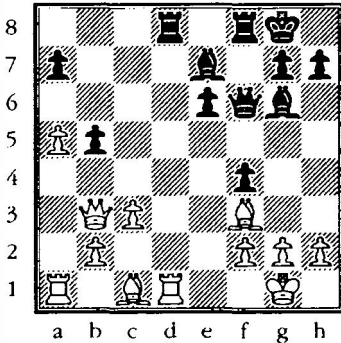
24 ... ♗xf6

The removal of obstacles in the centre favours the better developed

player. Here the exchange of knights has opened the d-file and the diagonal of Black's light squared bishop, as well as cleared the way for a centre advance with e5-e4.

25 ♖b3

This game has been one long frustration for White. He only needed one move to get his bishop out to d2 and avoid the worst, but his queen was hanging.



25 ... ♜xd1+

You will notice that every time a developed piece is exchanged, the energy imbalance between the white and black forces tilts further in Black's favour. If you have three cabbages and a friend has two cabbages, and you both eat one, then rather than 33% more cabbages than your friend, you suddenly have 50% more. Herein ends the grocery lesson.

26 ♚xd1

Not 26 ♜xd1 ♚e5! and there is no good way to stop a winning check on e1 as if 27 ♜d2 ♜d8.

26 ... ♜d8

The rook seizes the open file with gain of time.

27 ♚e2

The queen hopes to restrain Black's kingside pawns whilst keeping the first rank secure and assisting development with ♜d2. However, the weight of numbers opposing her means that this is too much even for a piece as powerful as the queen.

27 ... ♜d3

A useful preparatory move. Anand plans to advance his kingside pawns, and so first of all he moves the bishop to d3 so that e5-e4 won't shut it in. And as will be seen in some of the variations given below, the g6 square will be a useful attacking square for the black queen.

28 ♚e1

White might have been pleased to provoke Black's last move, as now the d-file is blocked. Indeed, if left in peace, ♜d2 and ♜d1 will save him.

28 ... e5!

Surging through the centre

The black pieces have done all they can by themselves: now it is essential for Anand to call on the services of his pawns, or else White will escape.

29 ♖e2

The bishop retreats before it is pushed back. If instead 29 ♖d2 e4! continues the centre advance unabated as 30 ♖xe4 leads to the loss of d2.

29 ... ♗xe2

Another exchange, and once again the strength of the black initiative increases.

30 ♜xe2

Now it is time for the next wave of the black attack: a pawn storm to break up the white king's defences.

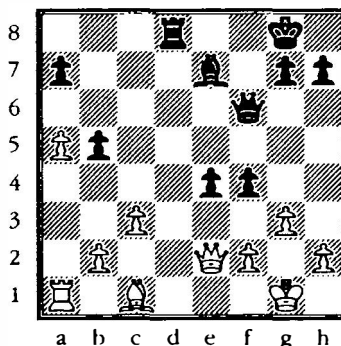
30 ... e4!

The black pawns cooperate strongly with the black pieces, whereas the white pawns on the queenside, which might equally have forged a passed pawn, are inert.

31 g3

It was too late to develop. Here's how the game might finish after 31 ♖d2: 31...f3 32 ♜e3 ♜g6 – threatening mate on g2 – 33 g3 ♜g4 – forcing White to guard his g2

square – 34 ♖h1 ♜h3 35 ♜g1 ♖d5 – intending 36...♜xh2+! 37 ♖xh2 ♜h5 mate – 36 ♜xe4 ♜h5 37 ♜a8+ ♖f8 and there is no good way to stop mate on h2.



31 ... e3!

A highly instructive move. It was very tempting to play 31...f3, in order to try for the mating pattern with ♜h3 and ♜g2 described in the note above, especially as 32 ♜xe4 loses at once to 32...♖d1+. However, after 32 ♜f1 it is by no means obvious how Black can arrange a mate on g2. Meanwhile, the bishop on c1 can suddenly join in the game, sitting nicely on e3, and then the white rook can go to d1...

Throughout the game, the focus of Anand's attention has been to keep the white bishop and rook subdued. With the game move, he pursues a winning plan on the kingside whilst ensuring that the bishop remains a lousy piece, even when it finally emerges on d2.

32 fxe3

The ignominy of the white queen-side pieces would be complete after 32 f3 ♖d6 33 gxf4 ♖d1+ 34 ♖xd1 ♜xd1+ 35 ♔g2 e2.

32 ... f3!

The point of his previous move. Black's majority of pawns on the kingside has been converted into a passed pawn that will decide the game.

33 ♖xb5

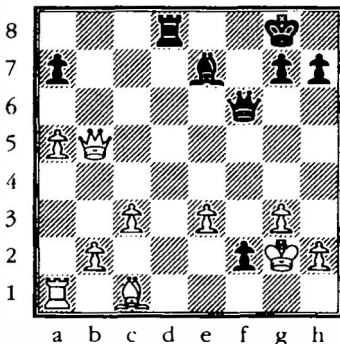
The queen is doing her best, but she is getting no help at all from the other white pieces. The fact that White is now two pawns up is of no relevance, as he is for practical purposes a rook and a bishop down.

33 ... f2+

Passed pawns must be pushed.

34 ♔g2

The only move as if 34 ♔f1 ♜d1+ will queen the pawn.



34 ... ♜f8!

It's never too late to lose a game of chess. If 34...♜d1, which looks as if it ends the game at once, then 35 ♖b3+ picks up the rook and wins for White.

35 ♖d5+

Kasimdzhanov fights to the bitter end. On d5 the queen will be able to ward off disaster on the light squares, but only temporarily. Indeed, it would be astonishing if White managed to save himself when he has only his queen in play.

35 ... ♔h8

It is harder to find a greater difference in comfort level between the black king tucked away on h8 and the white king trying desperately to stop the passed pawn queening.

36 ♔f1

The king is a most unreliable blockader of the passed pawn. Black has only to give a queen check on h3 or the a6-f1 diagonal unopposed by the white queen to end the game. Anand of course finds the way.

36 ... ♖h6

With the threat of 37...♖h3+ 38 ♖g2 ♖xg2+ when the pawn queens with checkmate.

37 ♖d2

At long last the bishop leaves c1, but it remains pathetically useless as it is hemmed in by its own pawns on c3 and e3 and can't even go to e1. Still, the rook on a1 can now fight for the f1 square, which allows White to fight on just a little longer.

37 ... ♜h3+

Anyway, Anand finishes the game in efficient style.

38 ♜g2

The white queen is forced to g2, where it can no longer guard against a killing check in the centre.

38 ... ♜f5
0-1

Now there is no good answer to the threat of mate on d3, as if 39 ♜c6 ♜d3+ and the pawn queens next move.

The white rook on a1 never moved, while the bishop on c1 only got to move once. Such was the power of Anand's strategy.

Game 23

Next we have a fascinating clash of ideas. The black e4 pawn is a target, but also a source of energy.

White: E.Miroshnichenko

Black: V.Anand

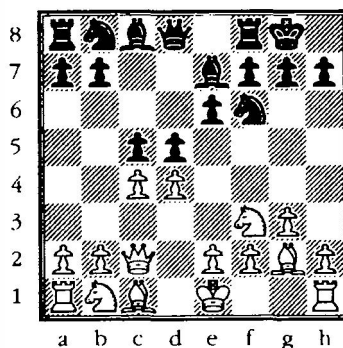
Porz 2004

The opening was a Catalan:

1 ♖f3 ♗f6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 d5 4 ♖g2
♜e7 5 d4 0-0 6 ♜c2

An exceptionally solid opening variation for White. It promises him only a minimal advantage, but it keeps Black under lock and key.

6 ... c5!



This is a critical move for Black in almost every Queen's Gambit structure – that is, when white pawns on c4 and d4 are opposed by black pawns on d5 and e6. Here Anand wants to liquidate the white centre, and so gain freedom of action for his pieces, whilst avoiding any of the following pitfalls.

– dropping a pawn

– being left with a (weak) isolated pawn on d5

– opening lines in the centre that the white pieces can exploit

– allowing the bishop on g2 to cause problems against b7

Just as there is a thin line between genius and madness, it is often difficult to tell whether a move like 6...c5 is a great idea as it demolishes the opponent's pawn centre, or an appalling misjudgment which removes the obstacles to the opponent's pieces and/or entails the acceptance of a long term structural weakness.

So how do we know whether 6...c5 is objectively good – perhaps it only works out here because the black pieces are being handled by a player as resourceful as Anand? That is a fair question, and if Kasparov had been playing White, perhaps 6...c5 wouldn't look so hot. However, it is also worth remembering that a great player is usually a shrewd judge of the objective value of an idea, so the fact that Anand chooses 6...c5 after home preparation suggests the move has intrinsic strength.

7 0-0

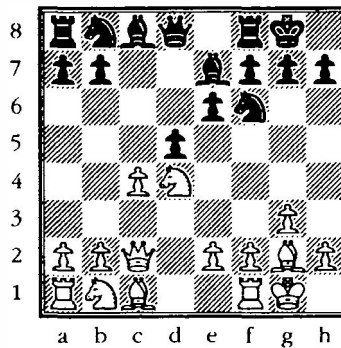
If 7 cxd5 cxd4 8 dxe6 (better to play 8 ♖xd4 when 8...♖xd5 is about equal) 8...♗xe6 with active play for Black, who can gain time at a later point by attacking the white queen with ♜c8 or even ♜c6 and ♜b4.

Another game played by Anand as Black went 7 dxc5 ♗xc5!? 8 cxd5 ♗b4+ 9 ♗d2 ♗xd2+ 10 ♜bxd2 ♜xd5 11 0-0 ♜c6. The white rooks are the first to enter the battle for the centre squares, but there is little to attack, and the game referred to ended in a quick draw. I can't help thinking that Miroshnichenko should have killed off the tension in the centre in this way, so as not to give his opponent dynamic chances.

7 ... cxd4

Now a double edged battle is in prospect, which is exactly what the higher rated player desires.

8 ♜xd4



If White is allowed to play 9 cxd5, then Black must accept either an isolated pawn on d5 or else grant the bishop on g2 an open diagonal with 9...♜xd5. Alternatively Black would be left with a weak pawn on c6 after

Surging through the centre

8...♘c6 9 ♘xc6 bxc6 10 b3 a5 11 ♘c3. In that case, he would be far from lost, but White has the small positional advantage he desired from the opening.

8 ... e5!

Anand allows the bishop on g2 its open diagonal, but with the crucial difference that the c and d files remain blocked by pawns. Therefore neither the white queen on c2 nor a white rook (after ♖d1) can compliment the action of the bishop by exerting additional pressure on the black queenside. On a more positive note, the former FIDE World Champion is striving for the initiative by establishing a mobile pawn centre.

9 ♘f5

White saves his knight and aims to acquire the bishop pair.

9 ... d4

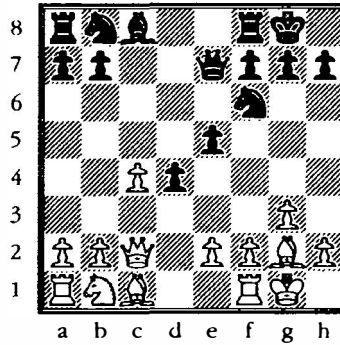
The point: the d4 pawn slips past the challenge of the c4 pawn. It also takes away the c3 square from the white knight.

10 ♘xe7+

If 10 ♗g5 Black has the interesting response 10...♗c5, leaving the white knight out on a limb on f5. Straightaway White would have to contend with 11...d3!? cutting off the defence of

the knight by the queen followed by ♗xf5.

10 ... ♗xe7



How should White go about attacking the black centre?

He needs to utilise his pawns, but 11 f4? is answered by 11...e4 when Black has a beautiful centre which blots out the bishop on g2 and leaves White paralysed. The advanced black pawns can be supported by moves such as ♘c6, ♗f5, ♖ad8 and ♖fe8. Then, according to circumstances, Black could create a passed pawn with d4-d3 or perhaps prepare an attack on the white king with h5-h4, etc.

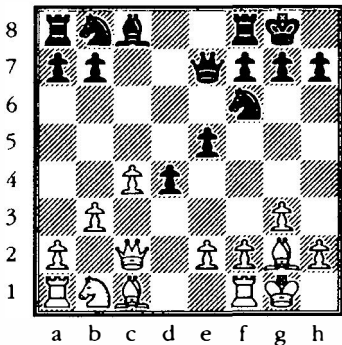
Note that even if White achieved the f2-f4 advance in such a way that Black couldn't reply e5-e4, he would still be leaving himself with a weak pawn on e2 and a hole on the e3 square. So we can conclude that the f2-f4 move is a non-starter.

The only other way to challenge the black centre is with e2-e3. This

looks more sensible, but the immediate 11 e3 achieves less than nothing after 11...♟c6 when 12 exd4?! ♞xd4 leaves the black knight dominant in the centre, or if 12 ♞xc6? bxc6 13 exd4 exd4 and White has parted with his light squared bishop for no good reason, leaving his king dreadfully vulnerable to attack by ♞h3, etc. In the game, Miroshnichenko decides to persevere with the idea of e2-e3, but only after the most thorough preparation.

11 b3

Alternatively he could hand back the bishop pair with 11 ♞g5 h6 12 ♞xf6 ♜xf6 13 ♞d2. However, 13...♟c6 then leaves Black with the superior long term chances as he can prepare a gradual advance of his centre pawns.



11 ... ♟c6!

Black meets the threat of 12 ♞a3, winning the exchange, in the most economical way. If instead he had

played the careless 11...♞d8, then after 12 ♞a3 ♜c7 13 ♞d2, not only would White have activated his bishop free of charge, but Black would have a strategically inferior layout of pieces, with the wrong rook on d8.

12 ♞a3

As White intends to give up this bishop for a knight, the better way to do so would still have been 12 ♞g5 h6 13 ♞xf6 as in the note to 11 b3 above. However, in that case he would have to admit that 11 b3 was just a wasted move.

12 ... ♞b4

The knight walks into a pin. Nevertheless, White's bishop is also shut out from influencing the centre. Miroshnichenko elects to swap straightaway and then concentrate on preparing e2-e3.

13 ♞xb4

Instead 13 ♜d2 a5 14 e3 would keep lead to sharp play. You may recall that in the game above between Kasimdzhanov and Anand, the Indian Grandmaster prevented White from developing his queen's bishop until move 37. Maybe Miroshnichenko was afraid something similar would happen to his knight on b1 after 14...♞d8!? 15 exd4 exd4.

13 ... ♜xb4

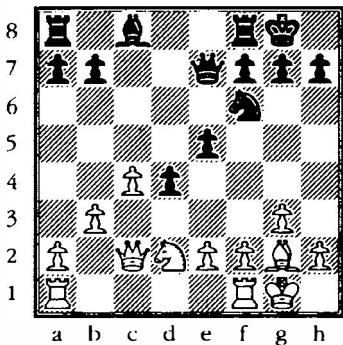
Surging through the centre

The queen is dragged offside but it is only temporary.

14 ♖d2

In the note to 18 ♜xd4 in Kasimdzhanov-Anand we said that there were three questions we need to ask ourselves when assessing a position. Here White has a safe king and his pieces developed, but we cannot assert that the pawn structure has turned out particularly well for him, in spite of the absence of weaknesses. The black pawns on d4 and e5 give Black a lot of potential activity. As always the point of contention is whether they can be successfully undermined by e2-e3.

14 ... ♜e7



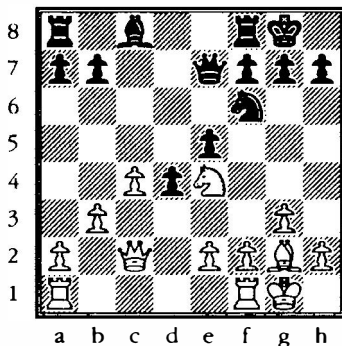
The queen definitely belongs on the e7 square, where it is well centralised and defends e5 and b7. In contrast, it isn't yet certain where the bishop on c8 should go or whether the black rook should stay on f8 or seek its fortune on e8 or d8.

If you are absolutely sure you are going to make a certain move at *some point in the near future*, then it makes sense to play it straightaway.

15 ♖e4

Evidently White wants to remove everything that isn't nailed down. He would be delighted to see the last minor pieces vanish from the board after 15...♙f5 16 ♖xf6+ ♜xf6 17 ♙e4 ♙xe4 18 ♜xe4 as then he could prepare the plan of e2-e3 at his leisure: Black would have no effective counterplay.

Alternatively, as in the game, he wants to get in e2-e3 without worrying about the ♜d8 and d4-d3 response, as would occur after the immediate 15 ♙e1: 15...♜d8 16 e3 d3, with good chances for Black e.g. 17 ♜b2 e4!? 18 f3 exf3 19 ♙xf3 ♙h3.



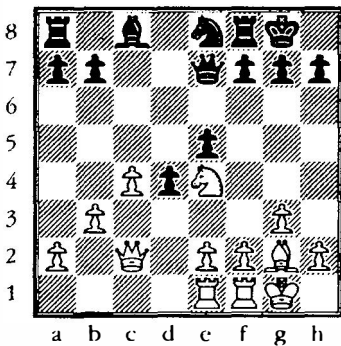
15 ... ♖e8!

An excellent decision. The knight retreats in order to avoid exchanges

and allow the black pawn centre to be broadened.

16 ♖a1

No doubt Miroshnichenko was happier with the plan of e2-e3 now that Black can't respond with ♖d8 and d4-d3 as discussed in the comment to 15 ♘e4.



16 ... f5

As in the Kasimzhanov game, Anand succeeds in making his centre pawn majority work much harder than White's 3-2 majority on the queenside.

17 ♘d2

The white knight returns to d2...

17 ... ♖f6

....and the black knight returns to f6.

18 e3

At last White carries out the strategic advance we have discussed above.

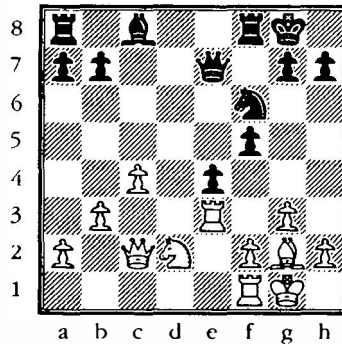
18 ... dxe4

There is no choice, as the e5 pawn would be at death's door after 18...♖d8 19 exd4 ♖xd4 20 ♘f3.

19 ♖xe3

Here a huge mistake for White is 19 fxe3 as after 19...e4! his bishop is shut in, the knight is denied f3 and the rook is passive on e1. And to make matters worse, he no longer has an f-pawn with which to assail the black pawn on e4.

19 ... e4



Remember what we said earlier about playing the moves you are sure you are going to make straightaway, in order to keep more flexibility with moves that you aren't quite sure about. Anand feels that sooner or later he will have to advance the pawn to e4 due to pressure along the e-file, and so he does it at once.

Surging through the centre

In what follows, White will have to try to prove that the black e-pawn is a liability as it can be attacked head on by all the white pieces, whereas Anand will insist that it confers dynamism on his game.

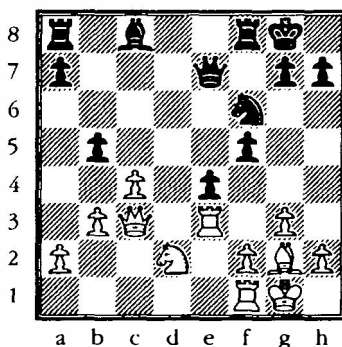
20 ♖c3

Miroshnichenko hesitates. He sees that if 20 f3, then 20... ♗c5 is awkward, as the rook on e3 is both hanging and pinned against the king. He could then continue 21 ♖c3, aiming to push back the black queen with b3-b4, but the annoying 21... ♜d8!? idea resurfaces, and even threatens to win a rook with 22... ♜d3. Play might continue 22 b4 – not 22 fxe4 ♟g4 and wins at least the exchange – 22... ♗d4 23 ♖xd4 ♜xd4 or 22 ♟h1 ♗d6!? and in both cases Black's control of the d-file gives him counterplay and at the least equal chances. Besides 20... ♗c5, Black has other tactical resources, including the wild looking 20...g5!? though White seems better after the careful 21 ♜e2 – taking on e4 still falls for the ♗c5 and ♟g4 idea – 21... ♗c5+ 22 ♟h1 e3 23 b4! ♖xb4 24 ♜xe3 etc. Or finally, Black could keep the tension with the simple 20... ♟d7.

Nevertheless, White should have braved these variations. With the game move, he defends his rook on e3 and prepares to answer the ♗c5 move with b3-b4, driving back the black queen. He wants everything

to be nice and secure before he plays f2-f3, but the effect is the total opposite: Anand is presented with a tempo which in such a double edged situation is priceless.

20 ... b5!



A powerful move. It provides the bishop with the b7 square, from where it can bolster the e4 pawn. It also allows 21 f3 to be answered by 21...b4, driving back the white queen, followed by 22... ♗c5.

21 ♜e1

White's position is beginning to deteriorate. If 21 cxb5 then 21... ♟d5 22 ♗c4 ♟e6 will win the exchange with 23... ♟e3, even after 23 ♜e1. Or if he doubles rooks against e4 then 21 ♜fe1 b4 22 ♗b2 ♗c5 23 f3 ♟b7 is clearly good for Black.

21 ... b4

If White's queen retreats, say with 22 ♗c2, it is very useful for Black that he is able to play 22... ♗c5,

putting his queen on an excellent post where she frustrates f2-f3 and controls the dark squares, without being kicked back by b3-b4.

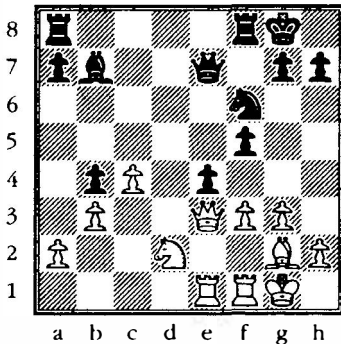
22 ♖e3

White decides not to allow ♖c5, but this proves an awkward square for his queen, as she can be harassed by ♘g4, f5-f4 or ♜d8 and ♜d3 (always assuming ♜d3 doesn't allow ♖xd3 exploiting the pin on the e-file).

22 ... ♗b7

Black develops his bishop in support of the e4 pawn, which for many moves has been the focal point of both players' schemes.

23 f3



The moment of truth. Will Miroshnichenko manage to prove e4 is a weakness?

23 ... ♜ad8!

In what follows, the rook will play a crucial role on the d file. The

latent threat of ♜xd2 will forever hamper White in his attempt to quell the dynamism of the black pieces. He will also have to watch out for ♜d3. It is therefore possible to conclude that White missed the boat with 20 ♖c3, and made things even worse for himself by putting his queen on e3.

24 ♜e2

White defends his second rank and in particular the knight.

To illustrate the strength of the rook on the d-file, here is what might happen after 24 fxe4: 24...♘g4 25 ♖e2 ♖d7! when 26 ♘f3? fxe4 or 26 ♜e1? ♖d4+ 27 ♖h1 ♖e3!, intending ♖xe2 and then ♘e3, win for Black, while 26 h3 ♖d4+ 37 ♖h1 ♖xd2 gives him a strong initiative.

24 ... ♗c6

Black mustn't get carried away: 24...♜d3?? 25 ♖xd3! So Anand takes a time out to stop 25 ♖xa7, and readies himself for 25...♜fe8 or maybe 25...♖b7, when ♜d3 becomes a threat.

25 h3

White still runs into trouble after 25 fxe4 ♘g4, and so guards the g4 square. Unfortunately for him, the dark squares in his kingside now quickly fall apart. Still, it was impossible to suggest any good

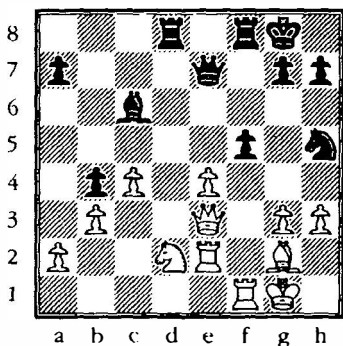
Surging through the centre

plan: put simply, White has already been strategically outplayed.

25 ... ♖h5!

The attack on g3 practically forces White into the capture on e4, as 26 f4 ♜c7, intending 27...♗d3, is too horrible for words.

26 fxe4



Miroshnichenko captures the e-pawn – something he has dreamed about since the opening. However, he will be greatly disillusioned as his own pawn on e4 will permit Black to establish a dark squared bind in the centre, as it blocks in the queen and rook along the e-file as well as the bishop on g2. Still, if White can free himself with 27 e5 he would suddenly have a great position.

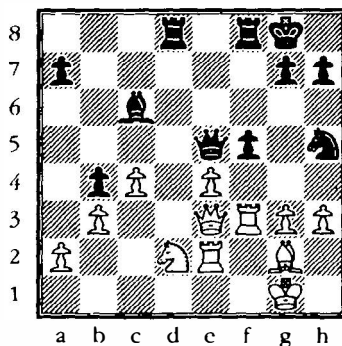
26 ... ♜e5!

The black queen clamps down on the e5 square, after which the white pieces remain shut in. If that wasn't bad enough, the g3 pawn is under

lethal attack, since 27 ♖h2 f4 28 gxf4 ♘xf4 further increases Black's domination of the dark squares with the threat of a decisive discovered attack.

27 ♜f3

Instead 27 exf5 loses a piece: 27...♜xe3+ 28 ♜xe3 ♙xg2 29 ♖xg2 ♜xd2+.



27 ... ♘g3!

A crushing move that is the logical outcome of Black's forceful play.

28 ♜ef2

Black's dominance of the dark squares is seen in its most crude form after 28 ♜xg3 f4. Here is a possible finish after 28 ♜e1, with the white pieces driven move after move away from the defence of vital squares: 28...f4 29 ♜f2 ♜d6 30 ♘f1 ♘xe4 31 ♜xa7 ♘g5 32 ♜f2 f3 33 ♙h1 ♘xh3 mate.

28 ... ♘xe4

A cruel mockery of White's strategy: the square that his pieces have worked so hard to control falls to the enemy pieces.

29 ♖xe4

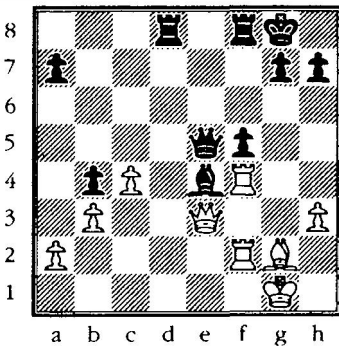
Of course, the knight can't be tolerated on e4.

29 ... ♗xe4

... but the bishop will prove a deadly replacement.

30 ♖f4

The rook evades the grip of one black pawn – 30 ♖g3 f4 – but another one is about to pounce on him.



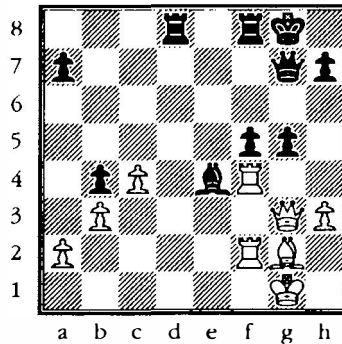
30 ... g5!

The rook is trapped as the attempt to turn the tables with 31 ♗xe4 gxf4 32 ♗d5+ discovering an attack on the white queen, can be answered either by 32...♖d5 or 32...♗xd5!

31 ♗g3

The last chance is to pin the g-pawn.

31 ... ♗g7!



0-1

White loses at least the exchange. A very tense and exciting battle. Once again, Anand's centre pawn majority came up trumps.

5: Pawns and goat pegs

'The fourth arrangement is called watad al-fazz or gechi gazighi (goat peg). It is so called because he who plays it wins with the pawns. They are like a peg in his opponent's clothes, and the opponent is like a man with his hands bound'.

From a Turkish manuscript written in Constantinople, 1501.

As well as the 'goat peg', opening strategy in the Arabian form of chess also included the *torrent pawn*: a pawn advanced like a battering ram to splinter the opponent's pawn structure. The game Grischuk-Kamsky, given in the Ferocious Files chapter, witnessed both a goat peg on d5, which restrained the black knight, and a torrent pawn that charged down the h-file.

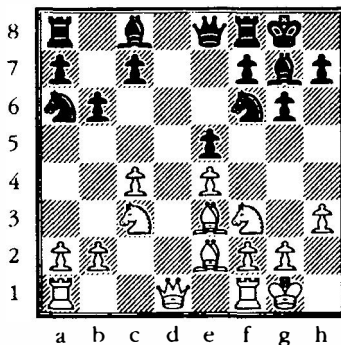
In the present chapter we shall look at more examples that demonstrate the spirit of the ancient game is alive and kicking in modern chess strategy.

Game 24

White: **E. Bacrot**
Black: **R. Kempinski**
Khanty Mansyisk 2005

The opening was a King's Indian Defence:

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7
4 e4 0-0 5 ♗e2 d6 6 ♘f3 e5 7 ♗e3
♘a6 8 0-0 ♘g4 9 ♗g5 ♖e8
10 dxe5 dxe5 11 h3 ♘f6 12 ♗e3 b6



Black's idea is to put the queen's bishop on b7 and use it as part of a concerted attack on White's centre with ♘h5, ♘f4 and f7-f5. However, this turns out badly so perhaps he should make do with 12...c6, guarding the d5 square and keeping the bishop on the c8-h3 diagonal.

Then at some point the black knight might return to the centre via c7 and possibly go to e6, assuming that the e5 pawn was securely defended after a move like ♖h5.

So Bacrot has to choose a plan. What should it be? The situation in the centre is stable, and White can't initiate action on the kingside – he has to wait to see what Black attempts there. On the queenside, however, the b6 pawn is an inviting 'hook' for a c4-c5 pawn advance to break open the c-file. Yes, that is what the White position requires! But if Bacrot plays 13 c5 Black simply takes it, so he has to do things gradually:

13 a3!

A modest move, but it gets the White queenside pawns rolling. It also secures the c2 square for the queen without being molested by ♖b4.

13 ... ♙b7

The bishop attacks e4 and hopes that in the future it will be able to look even further down the long diagonal, should Black get in f7-f5 and eliminate or lever the e4 pawn out of the way. Best of all, the bishop would support a mating attack against g2.

14 ♔c2

White defends e4 and puts his queen on a square where she will

strengthen the envisaged c4-c5 advance.

14 ... ♘h5

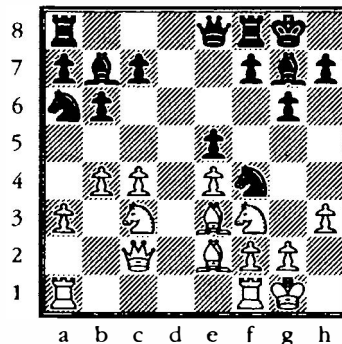
Both players go about their business. The knight heads for a strong post on f4 and clears the way for the f pawn to advance.

15 b4

Instead 15 ♖fe1 ♘f4 16 ♙f1 was possible, but Bacrot wastes no time in implementing the second stage of his plan of queenside expansion, even though it means conceding the bishop pair.

15 ... ♘f4

This knight is the only black minor piece that isn't hindered in its movements by pawns, whether white or black.



16 c5!

The torrent pawn mentioned in the introduction to the chapter. Now

the white pawns are cramping the black queenside pieces and there is the latent threat of c5-c6 (when the pawn becomes a goat peg!). The idea would be that a fork is set up after the reply ♙xc6 or ♜xc6 with b4-b5, winning a piece. If Black responded to c5-c6 with ♙c8 , then after b4-b5 – a move, however, that White wouldn't necessarily hurry to make, as leaving the knight stranded on a6 might be stronger – ♜b8 his queenside pieces would be buried alive. It needs to be prepared though as the immediate 17 c6? would fail after 17... ♜xc6 18 b5?! ♜xc3 ! 19 ♜xc3 ♜xc2 + etc.

16 ... ♜xe2 +

Normally in this type of set up, it would be an achievement for Black to exchange his knight for the light squared bishop. However, the white knights will prove the star minor pieces in what follows, mainly because the black bishop on g7 never achieves the semblance of activity.

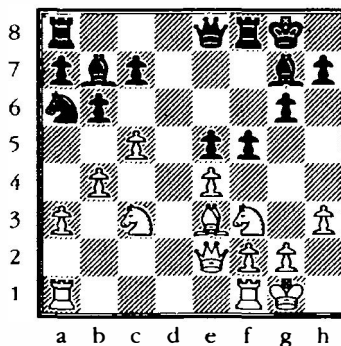
17 ♜xe2

White recaptures and prepares to reignite the threat of c5-c6! Which will only work if Black can't respond ♜xc6 ; b4-b5? ♜xc3 .

17 ... f5

In view of the increasing pressure on the queenside, Kempinski has little choice but to press on with his

kingside counterplay, even though White will be able to exploit the weakening of the light squares on e6 and f7.



18 ♜fc1 !

Bacrot chooses to ignore Black's demonstration and, by defending the knight on c3, makes 19 c6! a strong threat: 19... ♜xc6 20 b5 or 19... ♙xc6 20 ♜xa6 wins a piece, while if 19... ♙c8 20 ♜d5 !? intending 21 b5 looks gruesome for Black.

Now 18...f5 only helps White, as after 19 ♜d2 (19 ♜g5 !?) he can either just leave the pawn on c4 and press on with his queenside attack as in the game, or he could put a knight on the impressive e4 square with ♜dx4 . If instead 18...f4 19 ♙d2 and it will take a long time for Black to get his kingside attack going, if he ever can. Therefore, it seems that the strategic plan of putting the black bishop on b7 is at fault, as it doesn't seem able to add any impetus to a kingside attack. Black could afford to have one

piece not contributing to his kingside pressure – the knight on a6 – but two pieces is too much.

18 ... **bxc5**

Now the torrent pawn has succeeded in its aim of tearing asunder the black queenside. In fact, this capture amounts to capitulation. After all, Black opens lines for the benefit of the white pieces whilst at the same time allowing his own knight to be ‘undeveloped’ back to b8. It is hard to think of a more blatant disregard of the rule that you shouldn’t make pawn moves on your weaker side of the board. The only hope was 18...f4 19 ♔d2 c7-c6, to bring the knight back into the game via c7. The black queenside is then flimsy and a ready target for the white pieces, but it would be paradise for Black compared to what follows.

19 **b5!**

Of course White wasn’t going to allow the stabilisation of the pawn structure on the queenside with 19 bxc5.

19 ... ♘b8

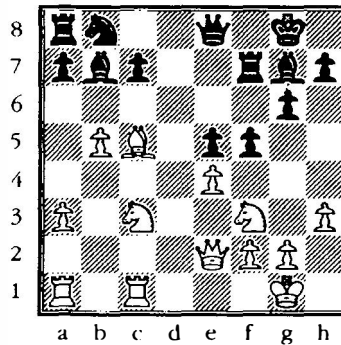
Back home again. Bacrot now plays so forcefully that Black never gets the chance to play ♘d7.

20 ♔xc5

White regains his pawn and flushes out the rook from f8.

20 ... ♖f7

A natural response, but with the advantage of hindsight, the oddball 21...♖f6 was to be preferred. If then 22 exf5?, attacking e5, Black’s game springs to life with 22...♘d7! attacking the white bishop, followed by 23...♖xf5. Instead 22 ♖c4+ would have kept White’s advantage, but Black would still be in the game.



21 ♘g5!

As we shall see, one strand of White’s winning plan is to invade on e6 with the knight; another is to force the exchange of the black king’s rook. The game move fits both purposes.

21 ... ♖d7

Perhaps a better fighting chance was the awkward looking 21...♖f6. In the game, the rook is on an open file, but it doesn’t want to be there in the least. In fact, Bacrot has enticed it to d7 for two reasons:

firstly, it becomes vulnerable to an unwelcome exchange, as we see on the next move; and secondly, it blocks in its own knight by preventing Qd7 , which means the black rook on a8 remains forever entombed.

22 Ad1!

Simple and strong. Bacrot has a surplus of developed pieces, so every exchange will increase the number of men he has available to fight for the centre squares compared to his opponent.

22 ... h6

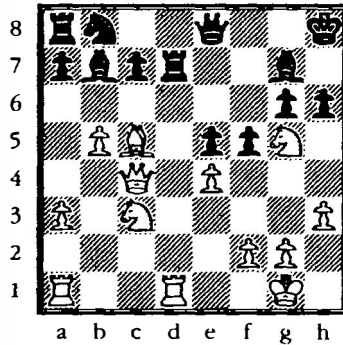
Black has to waste more time when he would like to sorting out his development, as if say 22...a6, making room for his queen's rook, then 23 $\text{Wc4+ } \text{Ch8}$ 24 $\text{Bxd7 } \text{Qxd7}$ 25 $\text{Qf7+ } \text{Cg8}$ 26 Qd6+ wins the black queen.

23 Wc4+

Rather than retreat the knight, Bacrot finds a neat manoeuvre that allows it to infiltrate right into the heart of the black centre.

23 ... Ch8

The king retires and makes room to answer 24 Qe6 with 24... Wg8! ? when the pin on the knight complicates White's task. Bacrot finds something much more convincing.



24 We6!

It is worth reminding ourselves that the way for White to exploit his advantage is not with a mating attack, but rather by exchanging off Black's active pieces. Then he will be able to overrun the d file.

24 ... We6

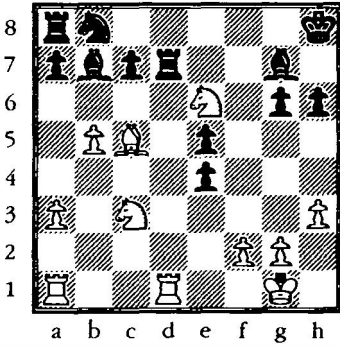
There was no hope after 24... Wc8 25 $\text{Qf7+ } \text{Ch7}$ 26 exf5 .

25 Qxe6

The knight's pressure on c7 will decide the game, or if 25... Bf7 26 Qd8! with a knight fork that would amuse everyone apart from Kempinski.

25 ... fxe4

Missing White's fine response, but it was already quite hopeless, e.g. 25...a6 26 b6! cxb6 27 Qxb6 and there is no way to stop 28 Qc7 winning the exchange, as if 28... Bxd1+ 29 $\text{Bxd1 } \text{Qc6}$ 30 Qxg7 Cgx7 31 Ad7+ wins a piece.



26 ♖e3!!

A fiendishly quiet winning move. Now Black has no good way to meet the threat of 27 ♘c5 hitting both the black bishop and rook, when 27... ♖xd1+ 28 ♖xd1 ♖c8 – there is no safe move for the bishop – 29 ♖d8+ wins a piece.

26 ... ♖c8

An abject retreat, after which all Black's queenside pieces are back on their starting squares. If instead 26... ♖xd1+ 27 ♖xd1 and there is no good way to stop 28 ♘xc7 winning the rook.

27 ♘d5!

White relentlessly hammers at the c7 square.

27 ... ♖xd5

It looks for a second that White has blown it, as if 28 ♖xd5 ♖xe6. But...

28 ♘xc7! 1-0

For if 28... ♖xd1+ 29 ♖xd1 ♖b7 30 ♘xa8 ♖xa8 31 ♖d8+ and White picks up the knight, after which for good measure he can capture on a7 and set about queening some pawns.

The concept of the 'goat peg', which ties the hands of the opponent, is also a useful reminder that strategy isn't just about your own plan: it also means anticipating your opponent's ideas and preventing him from playing his favourite moves. Or at least, making him work harder to achieve them, so that your own plans get in first.

An essential component of any plan is preventing the opponent from playing the moves he wants to play.

In the following encounter, Anand is always asking himself 'what would I want to do if I were in my opponent's shoes, and how can I stop it?' You will see a stunning use of both the goat peg and the torrent pawn.

Game 25

White: V.Anand

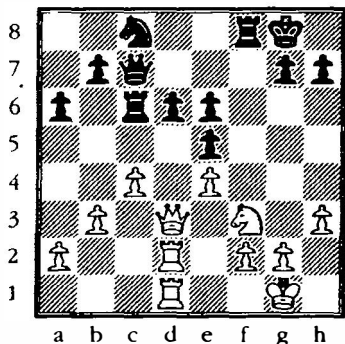
Black: P.Leko

Wijk aan Zee 2006

The opening moves of a Najdorf Sicilian were:

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4
4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♖e3 e5
7 ♘f3 ♖e7 8 ♖c4 0-0 9 0-0 ♖e6

10 ♖b3 ♜c6 11 ♙g5 ♞d7 12 ♙xe7
 ♚xe7 13 ♞d5 ♚d8 14 c3 ♞a5
 15 ♙e1 ♙c8 16 h3 ♞b6 17 ♞xb6
 ♚xb6 18 ♙xe6 ♙xe6 19 ♙e2 ♙c6
 20 ♚d3 ♚c7 21 ♙d1 ♞c4 22 b3
 ♞b6 23 c4 ♞c8 24 ♙ed2



White has obvious pressure against the d6 point, but at the moment it is well fortified. Meanwhile, the pawn on c6, although a potential target as it can no longer be defended by another black pawn, is performing a useful role in guarding the d5 square, where otherwise a white knight would be superbly placed.

Leko would like to build on his control, of the f-file with the manoeuvre ♞e7, ♞g6 and ♞f4. Once on f4 the knight would be practically immovable, as the response g2-g3 would seriously loosen White's defences and undermine the knight on f3, to say nothing about the pawn left hanging on h3.

However, the immediate 24... ♞e7 can be answered by 25 ♞g5! attacking c6. If then:

(a) 25... ♙f6 26 c5! dxc5? (he has to accept a wretched pawn structure with 26... ♙xc5 27 ♚xd6) 27 ♚d8+ ♚xd8 28 ♙xd8+ ♙f8 29 ♙xf8+ ♚xf8 30 ♙d8 mate.

(b) 25... ♚c8 26 ♚g3 ♚d7 (defending d6 as well as e6, but...) 27 ♚xe5! winning a pawn.

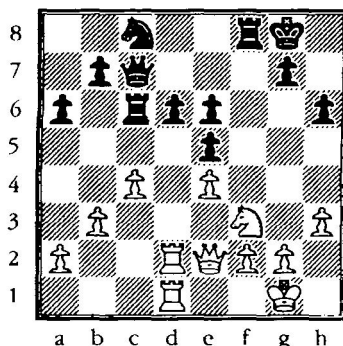
You will notice that the implementation of White's plan depends on seeing tactical nuances, such as 26 c5! in variation (a) and 27 ♚xe5! in variation (b).

24 ... h6

Peter Leko is of course a brilliant player who rarely loses. He rules out the possibility of 25 ♞g5 which proved so strong in the variations outlined above.

Now how can White prevent the manoeuvre 25... ♞e7 and 26... ♞g6 and 27... ♞f4, when the knight reaches f4 with a vengeance?

25 ♚e2!



A simple answer: if 25...♘e7
26 ♖xe5! dxe5 27 ♜d7 ♚c8 28
♜xe7 and White has won a pawn.

As will be seen, the Hungarian Grandmaster is persuaded that his opponent won't ever let him get in the ♖g6 and ♖f4 manoeuvre, and so switches to the plan of preparing b7-b5. If this goes well, then the black rook and queen will enjoy an open c-file after the exchange c4xb5; a6xb5. Furthermore, White's grip on the d5 square would be lessened, perhaps giving Black the opportunity to advance with d6-d5 at some point and create a passed pawn - though, of course, it would be highly double edged to weaken the e5 pawn. In any case, even without a subsequent d6-d5, the change in the pawn structure would favour Black, as the white a2 pawn could well become as much a target as the d6 pawn.

Of course, Anand is completely aware of this alternative plan for Black, and is already taking precautions against it. Note that in retreating to e2 the white queen remains on a square where she hampers Black's b7-b5 advance.

25 ... ♔h7

First of all, Black makes sure that a future ♚g4 by White won't gain a tempo by threatening to take on e6 with check.

26 h4!

The goat peg, which will be used to tie up a horse: that is to say, Anand will rule out ♖g6 once and for all by putting a pawn on h5 to control the g6 square. In fact, he intends to make the g6 square a possible base for his own knight.

26 ... ♚b6

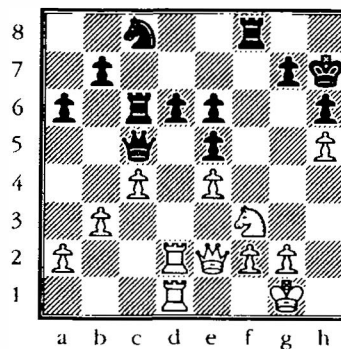
The queen heads for c5, where she defends both d6 and e5 and supports the b7-b5 advance.

27 h5

Mission accomplished: the g6 square is in White's hands.

27 ... ♚c5

Now given one free move, Black will break free with 28...b5! when after 29 cxb5 axb5 Leko suddenly has an open file for his queen and rook and can start claiming that White's a2 pawn is as much a potential target as the d6 pawn.



28 ♖e1!

Quiet, unobtrusive moves of this type often have a decisive effect on the outcome of games.

Anand will win because this knight performs brilliantly in the struggle for the centre squares. In contrast, Black's knight is sitting passively on c8 – we can't call it a useless piece, as it defends d6, but it is nowhere near as efficient as its white counterpart.

28 ... ♖c7

Black has no good way to stop his centre being struck by a c4-c5 move. Here are two variations:

28...b5 29 ♘d3 ♚a3 30 c5 dxc5 31 ♘xe5 with a winning breakthrough in the centre; or 28...b6 29 ♘d3 ♚a3 30 ♚g4 ♜f6 31 c5!! (it seems the c-pawn can walk right through a brick wall!) 32...bxc5 32 ♘xe5! dxe5 33 ♜d7 and there is no way to fend off mate on g7.

29 ♘d3

The knight has intentions that are obvious from the variations given above.

29 ... ♚c6

Leko has braced himself for the coming onslaught by keeping his pieces as compact as possible.

30 c5!

The torrent pawn sets an axe to the black centre.

30 ... ♘e7

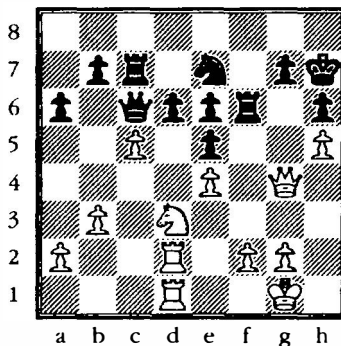
Intolerable is 30...dxc5 31 ♘xe5, when the white pieces flood through the open barriers. As d6 is going to be chopped anyway, the black knight might as well be activated.

31 ♚g4!

Now the e6 square comes under Anand's scrutiny.

31 ... ♜f6

It seems that things aren't too bad for Black after 32 cxd6 ♚xd6, but Anand's reply is excellent.



32 b4!

The key to breaking down Black's resistance is to create a potential outpost for the knight on c5. Now there is the threat of 33 cxd6 ♚xd6 34 ♘c5 when White has irresistible

pressure – for example, he could follow up with Rd6 and Qxe6 , winning the e6 pawn with mate looming on g7.

32 ... d5

Leko is obliged to give the e5 pawn to keep the d-file closed.

33 Qxe5

Not only winning a pawn but putting the knight on a commanding square.

33 ... Ka4

Black's only chance is to counterattack against the white queenside pawns.

34 Qg3!

Anand won't rest on his laurels. He prepares to infiltrate with his queen into the heart of the black centre.

34 ... Rc8

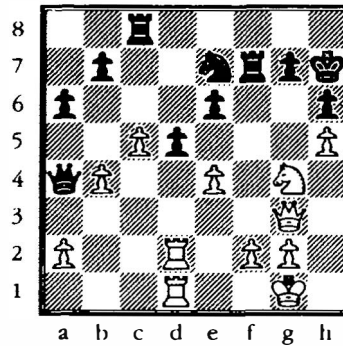
There was no time for $34... \text{Qxb4}$ as 35 Qg4 wins the exchange.

35 Qg4

The knight clears the way for her majesty to reach the d6 square.

35 ... Rf7

The rook has to retreat, but now e6 is left unguarded.



36 Rd6!

A powerful entrance. Black has no time to save the e6 pawn as he is terrorised by 37 Qe5 which would win the exchange or the knight on e7.

36 ... Rcf8

If $36... \text{Qc6}$ 37 Qe5 Qxd6 38 cxd6 and Black had better resign.

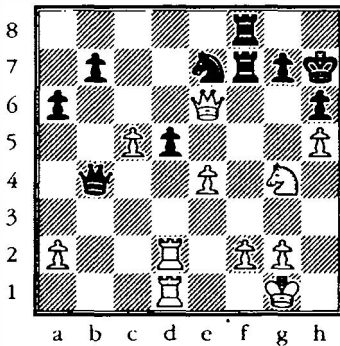
37 Qxe6

The demolition of the black centre is almost complete.

37 ... Qxb4

He has to try to confuse matters, as $37... \text{dxe4}$ 38 Qxe4+ just leaves White two clear pawns up, while even better would be 38 Qe5 , winning the exchange as usual.

Pawns and goat pegs



38 **exd5!**

White mustn't lose concentration: if 38 ♖e5? ♜xe4! pins the white knight. Instead Anand creates a powerful passed pawn.

38 ... ♜xc5

Leko grabs back a pawn and once again has prepared a saving response to 39 ♖e5 – 39...♜xf2! turns the tables.

39 **d6**

Anand avoids all tricks and pushes his passed pawn as far as possible.

39 ... ♖c6

The knight flees from the fearsome pawn but will have the chance to block it on d8.

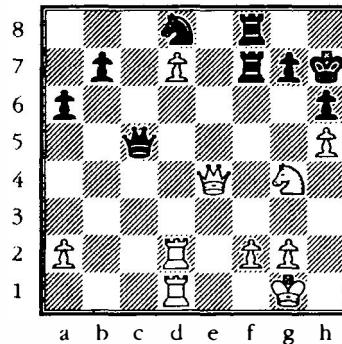
40 **d7**

Already White is threatening to win a piece by queening the pawn.

40 ... ♖d8

This is forced, but the absence of the knight from the fight for the centre squares is immediately felt.

41 ♜e4+



White wants to exchange queens, as this will remove the annoying pressure on the f2 square

41 ... ♜f5

After 41...♔g8 42 ♜d5 forces the queens off in view of the threat of 43 ♖e5, while if 41...♔h8 42 ♖e5! ♜xf2 43 ♖g6+ ♔g8 44 ♜xf2 ♜xf2+ 45 ♔h2 leaves the white king safe and Black unable to meet the threat to his rook as if 45...♜f7 then 46 ♜e8+ wins at once.

42 ♜e2

The most precise. The white rook is needed on the c-file, so why not play it there immediately?

42 ... ♜xe4

Black can't avoid the exchange of queens. If 42...♙g8 then 43 ♚xf5 follows in a flash.

43 ♖xe4

What's winning plan will gradually unfold over the next few moves.

43 ... b5

A belated attempt to get the queenside pawns working.

44 f3

White has no need to hurry. First of all, he frees his knight from the need to defend f2.

44 ... a5

Black can do nothing to improve matters on the kingside, so he might as well push some pawns.

45 ♘e5

After many adventures, the knight heads for the outpost square prepared for it at move 27.

45 ... ♖f6

He would lose instantly after 45...♗e7 46 ♘g6 ♖xe4 47 ♘xf8+.

46 ♘g6

Now the black rooks can no longer remain doubled on the f-file,

which facilitates White's plan of breaking down the resistance on the eighth rank.

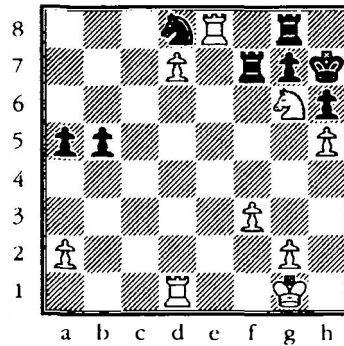
46 ... ♖g8

If 46...♗8f7 47 ♖e8 when the mate threat on h8 shortens the game by a couple of moves.

47 ♖e8

Intending 48 ♖del followed by 49 ♖xg8 ♙xg8 50 ♖e8+, winning the knight to start with.

47 ... ♗f7



A last trap: Black threatens 48...♖xd7! when 49 ♖xd7 – forced – 49...♖xe8 would oblige White to win the game all over again.

48 ♖d5!

Naturally Anand was never going to fall for that! If now 48...♖xd7 49 ♖xg8 ♖xd5 – alas, it isn't check, as it would be of the rook were on d1-50 ♖h8 mate.

48 ... b4

Leko hopes to grovel on after 50 ♖xa5 ♖xd7 51 ♗f8+ ♖h8, though even here 52 ♖a8 would win. Anand comes up with a cleaner finish.

49 ♗e7 1-0

Black would be helpless after 49...♖gf8 50 ♖xa5 followed by 51 ♖a8, when the passed pawn is forced through. This was a long, bitter struggle, but Anand's awesome technique made his final victory always feel inevitable.

Next we see the power of a goat peg on f6 in a game played Blindfold. The protagonists are two of the only four players at the time of writing to belong to the exclusive '2800 Elo club' – the others being Kasparov and Anand.

Game 26

White: V.Kramnik

Black: V. Topalov

Amber Blindfold 2003

The game began with a Scheveningen Sicilian:

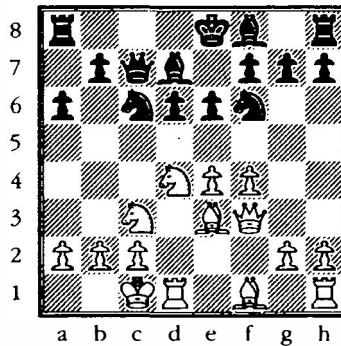
1 e4 c5 2 ♗f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♗xd4 ♗c6 5 ♗c3 d6 6 ♔e3 ♗f6 7 f4 a6

Topalov offers a straight fight between his attack on the queenside and White's kingside assault. He therefore allows White to keep his space advantage in the centre. After unfortunate experiences such as the present game, attention has shifted to immediate action in the centre with 7...e5! If then 8 fxe5 ♗g4! 9 ♔g1 ♗gx5, and Black's knight is solidly entrenched on e5.

8 ♖f3 ♖c7 9 0-0-0

The boldest move. It was still possible to play 9 ♔d3 and castle kingside with a slight edge, but Kramnik is also in the mood for a double edged fight.

9...♔d7



Black continues his plan of a rapid queenside deployment. However, the bishop will prove badly placed on d7, and, as will be seen, takes away an important retreat square from the knight on f6.

It was better to keep the option of putting the bishop on b7 at a later date after b7-b5. But note that if immediately 9...b5? 10 e5! and two black knights are hanging. Therefore simple development with 9...♗e7 was called for.

10 ♖b3!

An excellent response. Kramnik isn't interested in flinging his pieces wildly at the black king – or at least not for the moment. With the subtle knight retreat he prevents Black from activating his bishop with ♗xd4 and ♗c6. It is essential to remember that hindering the aspirations of the opponent is as much part of strategy as carrying out our own plans.

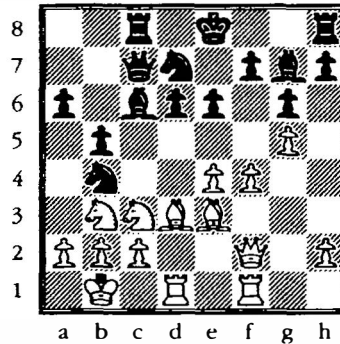
10...♞c8 11 ♖b1 b5 12 ♗d3 ♖b4
13 g4 ♗c6

So the bishop gets to c6 after all. However, as will be seen, the knight on b4 will pay a heavy price.

14 g5 ♖d7 15 ♜f2!

Another fine preventive move from Kramnik. By guarding the b6 square he prevents Black feeding more pieces into the queenside attack with ♖b6 and ♖c4 (or even ♖a4), when things really would start to get alarming for the white king.

15...g6 16 ♞hf1 ♗g7



In this double edged position we shall commence our move by move analysis.

17 f5!

In general, pawns are strongest when they are adjacent to each other in the centre, as on e4 and f4. The question of whether to advance one of them to the 5th rank is always of the greatest importance. Here, for example, White is ceding the e5 square to the black knight, a commanding post in the centre from which it can never be evicted by a pawn. On the other hand, Topalov won't be mated down the f-file, but his bishop will be shut in on f8. Kramnik decides that reducing the black bishop to passivity is more important than keeping the black knight out of e5. And, even without the sight of the board, his judgment is as impeccable as ever.

17 ... ♞e5

The knight leaps at the chance of occupying the e5 square, but 17...♖xd3 should have been played.

The exchange would be unthematic, as after 18 cxd3, White's centre has been strengthened – the e4 pawn is no longer a potential target, and Black's attacking chances on the queenside have receded, as if necessary White can always play ♖c1 to counter any pressure down the c-file. However, an anti-positional move is always to be preferred to one that loses material.

Note also that Black can't get rid of the dark squared bishop before it is shut in as after 17...♗xc3 18 fxe6! fxe6 (there is no time to save the bishop, as 18...♗e5 19 ♜xf7+ ♔d8 20 e7 is mate) 19 ♜f7+ ♔d8 20 bxc3 and Black is in no position to take advantage of White's shattered queenside pawns, whereas his king is going to be murdered by the white pieces acting down the f file.

18 ♗b6

White prevents his strong dark squared bishop being exchanged by 18...♗g4 and 19...♗xe3. At the same time, he is preparing to trap the knight on c2.

18 ... ♜d7

It was imperative to play 18...♗bxd3 19 cxd3 ♜d7, even though White has a clear advantage.

19 ♗e2!

An easy move to miss in a Blindfold game. After this crafty

retreat there are two threats: 20 a3, trapping the knight, and 20 ♘c5 ♜e7 21 f6, winning the bishop.

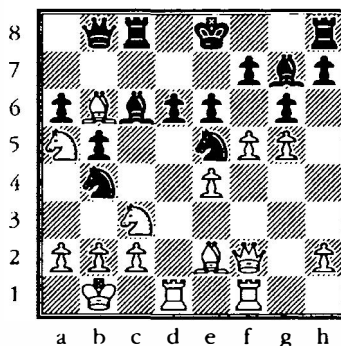
19 ... ♜b7

Black chooses the best way to give up a piece, as he will get a sizeable initiative on the queenside if White is careless.

20 ♗a5!

White mustn't hurry to trap the knight, as believe it or not, he needs to vacate the b3 square for his king.

20 ... ♜b8



This is virtually the only square for the queen, as Black wants to keep a8 free for his bishop.

21 f6!

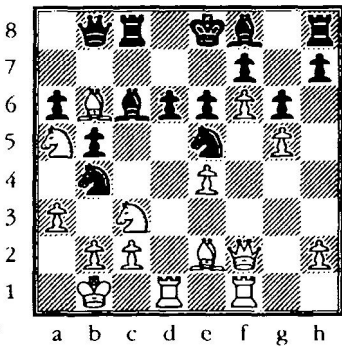
Another important intermediate move. The black bishop is prevented from contributing to Black's counterplay once White grabs the knight.

21 ... ♖f8

The bishop is cast into a dungeon from which it will never emerge for the rest of the game.

22 a3

At last. It all seems to be over as the knight is trapped, but Topalov finds a way to fight on.



22 ... ♞xc2!

A tricky sacrifice that White has done his best over the last two moves to render less effective.

23 ♔xc2

The king must capture the knight and brave the storm.

23 ... ♙xe4+

A powerful looking check, but thanks to Kramnik's patient 20th move, the white king has a shelter prepared for it.

24 ♔b3!

After 24 ♔c1 d5! Black's game comes alive thanks to his pressure along the c-file. His attacking ideas include 25...b4 as well as ♙xa3 or even ♜xc3+.

Now there is no pin on the c-file, and Black's bishop on e4 is hanging.

24 ... ♙a8

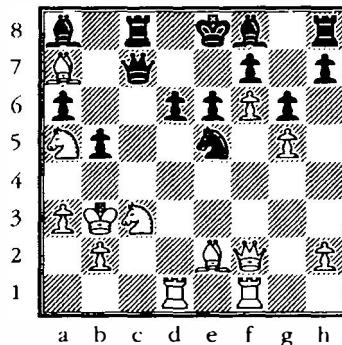
Now Black intends 25...♞d7! chasing away the white bishop when 26 ♙d4 ♜c7 wins the white knight on a5.

25 ♙a7

White gains vital time to meet the threat by harassing the black queen.

25 ... ♜c7

Now 26 ♔b4 would be one step too far for the white king as Black's dark squared bishop has the last laugh after 26...d5+.



26 ♜b6!

A timely intervention. The golden rule when facing an attack on the king is to exchange queens.

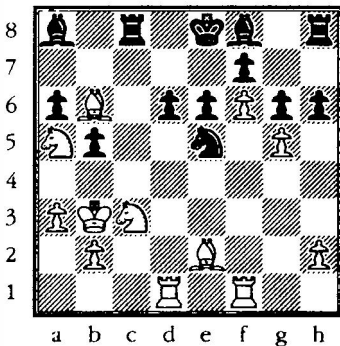
26 ... ♚xb6

There is no choice, as after 26...♚d7 27 ♚xa6 intending 28 ♙xb5 it is White who has an attack.

27 ♙xb6

You might think that White can afford to relax, as he has an extra piece and the Black counterattack is over. However Topalov hasn't given up yet, as a piece for two pawns is by no means an entirely hopeless material balance, especially as his pawns are compact.

27 ... h6!



If now 28 h4 hxg5 29 hxg5 ♖h3 and with the entrance of the black rook things get awkward for the white king again. Kramnik comes up with an inspired response.

28 ♙xb5!!

At the moment, Black is playing without the help of his rook on h8, while his bishop on f8 is only of minimal use as a defender of d6. But if nothing happens fast, then h6xg5 and d6-d5 will animate both these black pieces. Therefore, Kramnik sees that he has to take full advantage of his more active pieces before his opponent has the chance to catch up. The way to do so is by offering a sacrifice to get at the black king.

28 ... ♔d7

If 28...axb5 29 ♙xb5+ and a black piece will be forced into a fatal pin, either on c6 or d7: for example 29...♙c6 30 ♖c1 ♔d7 31 ♙xc6 ♙xc6 32 ♖xc6! ♖xc6 33 ♖c1 and White captures on c6, when he is a whole piece up and besides has a winning attack; or 29...♙d7 30 ♖c1 ♖b8 31 ♖c7! and the attack on d7 wins as if 31...♖xb6 32 ♖c8 mate.

With the game move, Topalov hopes to exploit a pin of his own after 29 ♙d4? ♖b8.

29 ♙d4!

Once again, Kramnik shows his willingness to return the piece to get at the black king.

29 ... ♙d5+

The bishop blocks the d-file with check to meet the threat of 30 ♖xe5, and so wins time for a capture on b5

30 ♔a4

The king is happy to move forwards in the support of White's initiative.

30 ... axb5+

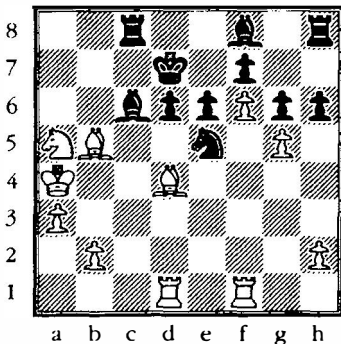
Regaining his material, but there won't be enough black pieces to withstand the queenside onslaught.

31 ♖xb5+

Now running with the king does no good: if 31...♔d8 32 ♖b6+ ♜c7 33 ♜c1 and wins or 31...♔c7 32 ♜c1+ ♔b8 33 ♜xc8+ ♔xc8 34 ♜c1+ ♔b8 35 ♖a6! and the threat of 36 ♜c8 mate is fatal.

31 ... ♖c6

The best chance, as it requires a little imagination from White to decide matters.



32 ♖xe5!

Here's a way for White to go entirely wrong:

32 ♜xc6?! ♜xc6 33 ♜c1? ♜a8+!
34 ♔b3 ♜b8 35 a4 ♜xb5+! 36 axb5
♜xd4+ and Black can play to win.

32 ... ♖xb5+

The only way to fight on.

33 ♔xb5

The white king continues its remarkable journey into enemy territory.

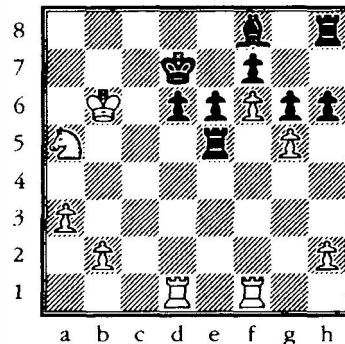
33 ... ♜c5+

Black utilises the double attack to regain his piece

34 ♔b6

....while the white king stroll serenely onwards.

34 ... ♜xe5



Now Black has equal material, a far more secure pawn structure than White, and potentially the best minor piece on the board. The white king is also an inviting target.

Therefore, he would have an excellent game – if only his bishop and the rook on h8 were involved in the game.

35 ♖c1!

There is only one file on the board uncluttered by pieces or pawns, but this is enough for the white rooks to mate the black king.

35 ... ♖xa5

If 35...♖c5 36 ♖xc5 dxc5 37 ♖d1+ and both 37...♙e8 and 37...♙c8 lose to 38 ♘c6, intending 39 ♖d8 mate, so Black must lose a piece with 37...♙d6 38 ♘b7.

36 ♖c7+!

Much better than 36 ♙xa5 when Black fights on with 36...d5.

36 ... ♙d8

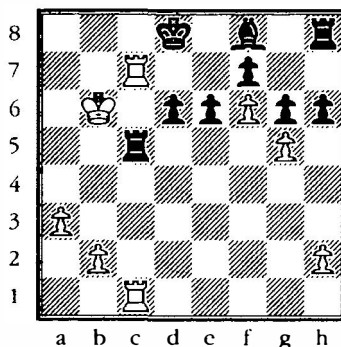
The king keeps c8 guarded, and if 37 ♙xa5 ♙xc7, though this was perhaps too much to hope for even in a blindfold game!

37 ♖fc1

With the threat of 38 ♖c8+ ♙d7 39 ♖1c7 mate.

37 ... ♖c5

Or 37...♖a8 38 ♙b7! when the rook dare not move from a8.



38 ♖1xc5

The last defender of the queenside perishes, but is White left with another attacking pieces to decide the game in his favour?

38 ... dxc5

For the first time since 21 f6, the black bishop can see daylight on d6, but the door is instantly slammed shut again.

39 ♙c6! 1-0

I don't know if Topalov has nightmares, but being a piece up and mated by a king and rook is surely suitable material. Certainly the black king is in a coffin as there is no good defence against 40 ♖a7 and 41 ♖a8 mate.

Whilst giving the marauding white king his due, the role of the goat peg on f6 shouldn't be overlooked: among its other powers, it takes away the e7 square from the black king.

Game 27

Vladimir Malakhov is a world class Russian Grandmaster, with an excellent positional style: you need only look at his fine win against Vallejo Pons given in the next chapter to confirm this. However, in the present game he plays the opening carelessly, failing to carry out a vital pawn advance. Thereafter young Magnus Carlsen, with a deft mixture of preventive and attacking moves, ensures that Black never escapes from the bind. A superb game by the Norwegian prodigy and a warning to us all about the importance of respecting our pawns. And yes, there is a goat peg on e5, and a torrent pawn on the h-file....

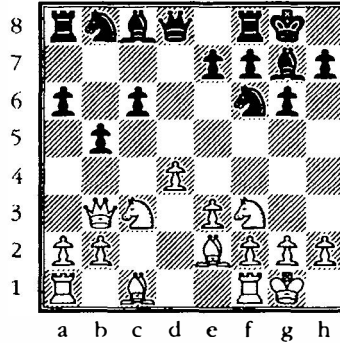
White: M.Carlsen

Black: V.Malakhov

Khanty Mansyisk 2005

The opening was the Meran Variation of the Slav:

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♖c3 ♘f6 4 ♘f3
a6 5 e3 g6 6 ♙e2 ♙g7 7 0-0 0-0
8 ♚b3 dxc4 9 ♙xc4 b5 10 ♙e2



10 ... ♗bd7

There doesn't seem to be much danger facing Black in this rather tranquil looking position, but he soon falls into a terrible bind. The pawn structure requires him to achieve the c6-c5 advance. This would remove the backward pawn on c6, and fill in the hole on the c5 square. It would also lessen the strength of the white centre by pressuring d4.

In fact, Black could have played 10...c5!? as a temporary pawn sacrifice. Then after 11 dxc5 ♗bd7 Black will regain the pawn, or at least considerably disrupt White's position. Here is how a recent Grandmaster game went: 12 ♚a3 ♙b8 13 b4 stopping a pawn fork on b4 and apparently keeping his booty, but...13...♗xc5! 14 ♙b2 (if 14 ♚b2 ♗d5 and Black will capture the pinned knight on c3, or 14 ♚b3 ♙e6 attacking the white queen and preparing 15...bxc3) 14...♗cd7 15 ♙fd1 ♚b6 and Black had equalised in Kruppa-Itkis, Kiev 2005.

Why did Malakhov avoid 10...c5, which has worked well for Black in the past? Perhaps he had found a refutation of the move in his own private opening research. Or maybe he feared that his opponent was going to ambush him with an improvement. Now it is possible that Magnus Carlsen had studied the Kruppa game and all the other relevant theory in this line and found a flaw in Black's play. But this wasn't the moment for Black be bluffed out of playing a strategically vital move. If he was afraid to play 10...c5, he should never have entered the variation in the first place.

With 10...♘bd7 Black aims for a 'non-sacrificial' 11...c5, but he never gets around to it.

11 e4

White gains space in the centre, frees the bishop on c1 and threatens to drive back the black knight with 12 e5. He we see that if Black was going to chicken out of 10...c5, he should at least have played 11...♗f5 last move to prevent this move.

11 ... ♘b6

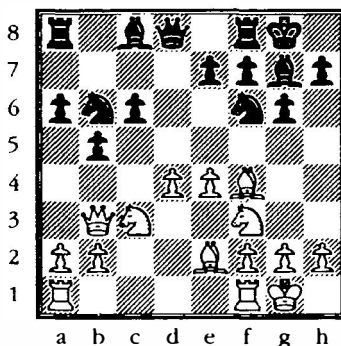
Black loses heart and abandons the c6-c5 plan altogether. Instead 11...c5 is fraught with danger as White can advance in the centre; still, it was the consistent move and worth a try: 12 e5 ♘g4 13 e6 c4 14 ♖d1 ♘b6 (not 14...fxe6 15 ♘g5

when the double threat of 16 ♘xe6 and 16 ♗xg4 wins for White) 15 exf7+ ♕h8 with complications.

Perhaps 11...c5 is risky; but nothing can be riskier than renouncing the plan that the position requires and simply making do with the development of the pieces. It is far better to be involved in a dubious looking, but tactically murky position, than waiting quietly to be strategically crushed.

12 ♗f4

The bishop finds an excellent post in the centre to complete a smooth development of the white minor pieces.



12 ... ♗e6

Who could resist a 'free' developing move? Black plans to exchange off light squared bishops and gains time for the manoeuvre by attacking the white queen. It makes a lot of sense to get rid of the bishop, as generally speaking,

Black has less space and it will therefore ease the congestion in his ranks; also, he intends to play e7-e6 to entrench himself on the light squares, and this would upset the bishop. Nevertheless, in view of the positional stranglehold that the white knights are going to exert in the centre, it might have been better to relinquish the bishop pair with 12...♙g4 13 ♖fd1 ♙xf3 14 ♙xf3 e6.

13 ♔c2

The queen doesn't mind being forced to retreat as she has important tasks on the second rank.

13 ... ♙c4

So here is Black's mini-plan. It looks very anaemic compared to the pawn play which he has spurned at moves 10 and 11.

14 ♖fd1

Not only bolstering d4 but also deterring a future c6-c5 in view of the discovered attack on the black queen after d4xc5.

14 ... ♖c8

Nonetheless, it seems that Black hasn't yet given up on the idea of c6-c5.

15 ♖a1

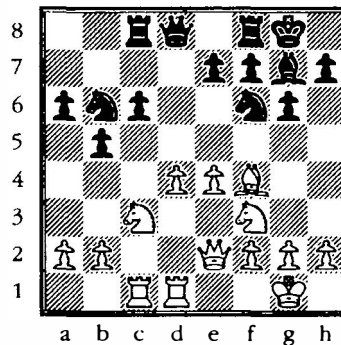
White completes a smooth development. His pieces can be said

to be on optimal squares.

15 ... ♙e2

A necessary exchange, as 15...♙d7 meets with 16 ♙e5, when Black must save his queen and be left with a dismembered queenside pawn structure after 17 ♙xc4 etc.

16 ♙xe2



White has emerged from the opening phase with a very pleasant position. Thanks to his opponent's passive play, he has the luxury of a variety of strategies and mini-plans to choose from. However, over the next few moves he will need to make some committal decisions. Let's look at his options:

Pressure along the c-file

The most obvious plan in view of Black's structural weaknesses on c5 and c6. White might have the following aims:

- at the very least, stop Black freeing himself with c6-c5

– attack the backward pawn on c6 with doubled rooks and ♖e5

– exploit the hole on the c5 square by landing a knight on it

Note a contradiction here – if we seize the c5 square as a superb base for the knight, we block the attack of the white rooks against c6. In fact, properly speaking, rather than being a facet of queenside pressure, putting a knight on c5 supports action in the centre or on the kingside – by its influence on the e6 square and general restraint of the opponent's pieces.

A pawn advance in the centre

It is highly unlikely that the pawn advance with d4-d5 would ever help White, but the alternative e4-e5 would achieve the following:

– drive the knight from f6 which strengthens a kingside attack

– clear the way for ♖e4 and ♖c5 to exploit c5

-- lessen the scope of the bishop on g7

But remember: with e4-e5 White is handing over the d5 square to the black knight. He is also blocking the ♖e5 move to attack c6.

Direct attack on the kingside.

Assuming that things remain static in the centre and queenside, White can prepare a gradual attack on the black king. Here are some general ideas:

– advance h4-h5 to open the h file and undermine g6

– challenge the important defensive bishop with ♗h6

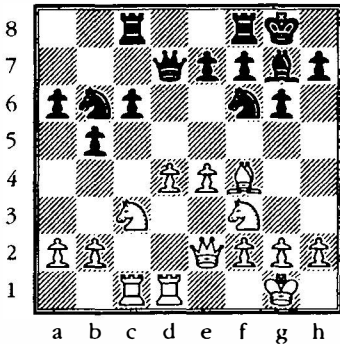
– manoeuvre the queen to h4 and play ♕g5

It will be seen that these kingside attacking ideas gain power if White advances e4-e5 and drives the black knight from f6. Thereafter, an h4-h5 advance couldn't be answered by ♖f6xh5; and the ♗h4 and ♕g5 attacking combination is far more powerful if h7 is no longer defended by the knight.

After assessing the options above, Carlsen decides that the way to set Black most problems is with the e4-e5 centre advance, ♖e4 and ♖c5 seizing c5 and a kingside attack. No doubt he was influenced by his opponent's next move.

16 ... ♗d7

The queen heads for b7 where she supports the c6 pawn. In other words, Black's strongest piece will be well placed to fight queenside pressure, but a long way from helping her king; this makes a kingside attack even more appetising for White. And, furthermore, on b7 the queen will be within range of an attack by ♖c5...



17 h3!

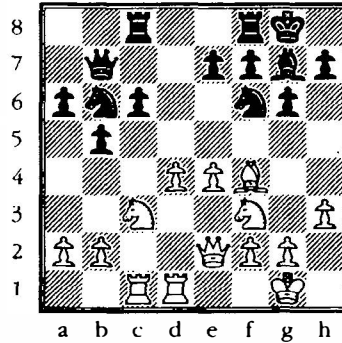
White wishes the black queen all speed on her journey to b7. With this unhurried little move he prevents her taking an alternative route to the kingside with 17...♖g4!? which would at least confuse matters.

Note that Carlsen avoids the tempting 17 ♘e5. Indeed, what could be more natural than putting the knight in the thick of things with an attack on the black queen? However, after 17...♖e6 the knight can be undermined with ♘h5 – and, even worse, White has deprived himself of his strongest plan: his own knight is preventing e4-e5. It could be said that Malakhov has set a positional trap, and his opponent has declined to fall into it. Wonderfully mature play from a 15 year old!

17 ... ♖b7

The black queen finds herself in a hinterland stuck behind the c6 pawn. Of course, things would be

very different if Black was able to break out with c6-c5. In that case, the e4 pawn might become an attractive target.



18 ♟g5!!

Another great positional move. We associate sacrifices and sharp attacks with the Norwegian wunderkind, and jumping ahead the present game will have a violent finish; but it is the ability to find unobtrusive ‘little’ moves in the build up that mark out a rare chess talent.

White wants to play e4-e5 to clear the way for ♘c4 and ♘c5. He might feel anxious to get this in straightaway, before Black can consider 18...c5. However, if immediately 18 e5 then 18...♘fd5 attacks the white bishop. Then after the bishop moves to safety, say 19 ♟g5, play might continue 19...♘xc3 20 ♖xc3 ♘d5 21 ♖c5. With the exchange on c3, Black has confounded the plan of ♘e4 and ♘c5; and he has also overcome what may be termed ‘superfluous

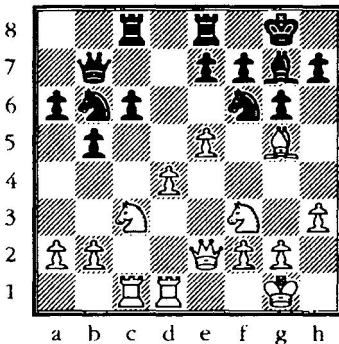
knight syndrome'. After e4-e5, Black has two knights, but only one suitable square for them on d5. Therefore he can be delighted to be rid of one of them. After 21 ♖c5, White could still count on an edge by besieging the c6 pawn, but the more biting plan of a kingside attack would have been rendered far less effectual.

In the game, Carlsen avoids all the hassle by moving his bishop one square. He has also seen that 18...c5 in reply would fail.

18 ... ♗fe8

Alas for Black it is too late for a comfortable 18...c5 as after 19 dxc5 ♗xc5 White can exploit his superior development to drive the black pieces backwards: 20 ♔e3! ♗cc8 21 ♔xb6 ♜xb6 22 e5 when if...♞e8? 23 ♞d5 ♜b7 24 ♗xc8 ♜xc8 25 ♞xe7+ and wins, so Black has to risk 22...♞h5 23 ♞d5 etc. when his knight is stranded on the edge of the board and vulnerable to being trapped by g2-g4.

19 e5!



Carlsen follows the plan outlined at his 16th move above. The strong pawn on e5 drives away the knight from the defence of its king and, in conjunction with his next move which rules out c6-c5, keeps the bishop on g7 shut in. The fact that Black is given the d5 square for his knight is of much less consequence.

19 ... ♞fd5

As you will be aware after reading the comment to 18 ♔g5 above, to allow ♞xc3 would be a positional mistake for White, and so...

20 ♞e4

Here the knight not only watches over the c5 square, but is also available for the projected kingside assault.

20 ... ♞d7

The knight stops an invasion with 21 ♞c5 and, in some cases, prepares to retreat to f8 either to aid its king, or perhaps to journey onwards to a good square on e6.

21 ♜d2!

A defensive and attacking move rolled into one. It not only preparing his next move but also restrains c6-c5, as 21...c5? 22 dxc5 leaves the knight on d5 hanging.

21 ... ♜b8

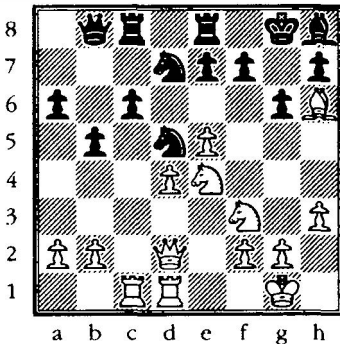
With the c6-c5 break prevented, Black has run out of good ideas. At least after this rather miserable retreat he can play the defensive move ♖f8 without White gaining time by hitting the queen with ♘c5.

22 ♗h6

At last all the preparations and precautions are complete, and so Carlsen begins a direct attack on the black king.

22 ... ♗h8

Despite being shut in by the pawn on e5, the black bishop still has great worth as a defensive piece. Hence Malakhov is loathe to allow its exchange.



23 h4!

Carlsen has a solid grip on the dark squares and Black is lacking the slightest activity. It is therefore time to start a battle for the light squares. The first step is to undermine the g6 pawn with h4-h5. If Black just waits, White could play h4-h5, h5xg6, and after the

recapture h7xg6, ♖g5 and e5-e6, splitting up the black kingside.

It will be seen that the intrinsic aim of this strategy is to mate the black king after destroying his light square defences. After Black's recapture h7xg6 in the scheme above, White could also play for a direct mate along the h-file with ♖g5 and then ♖h4 and ♘g5.

23 ... ♖f8

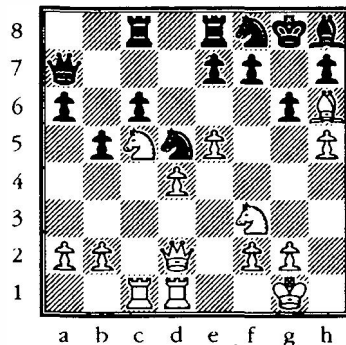
Black meets the potential threat of e5-e6 as above, but he loses more dark square control.

24 ♘c5

The fact that the white knight can sit with impunity on the c5 square shows that something has gone horribly wrong with Black's strategy.

24 ... ♖a7

He had to meet the threat of 25 ♗xf8 followed by a knight fork on d7 winning the exchange.



25 h5

Carlsen presses on with his kingside attack without a care in the world, as Black has zero counterplay.

25 ... ♖c7

This retreat reminds us that the value of a piece is to be judged by how well it contributes to the health of the whole army, not its own individual worth. The black knight was, in itself, beautifully placed on d5: it sat in the centre and could never be dislodged by a pawn. But how was it helping Black's war effort? Therefore Malakhov prefers to retreat it in the hope that it can support 26...♗f6, when the white knight on c5 is challenged, the white queen is denied the g5 square and maybe – just maybe – pressure against the d4 pawn might be a source of counterplay for Black in the future. Of course, if 25...♗e6 immediately, White can smash up the black kingside with 26 ♖xe6 fxe6 27 hxg6 hxg6 28 ♚d3! and White would win quickly, as if 28...♙h7 29 ♖g5+! ♙xh6 30 ♚g3 and Black has no good defence against the threat of 31 ♚h4+ ♙g7 32 ♚h7+ and mate next move.

26 hxg6

Now Black has the ugly choice between allowing the opening of the h-file or weakening the e6 square with 26...fxg6, when White

could play for mate with 27 ♖g5, 28 ♚f4 and 29 ♚f7, as Black wouldn't have f7-f6 in reply.

26 ... hxg6

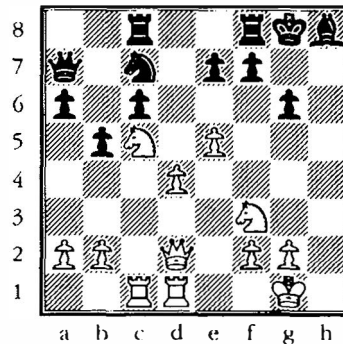
Now what is the move that changes the energy balance most in White's favour?

27 ♙xf8!

'With a knight on f8 it can never be mate' said Bent Larsen. Obviously Carlsen agrees with his great Scandinavian predecessor, as by exchanging on f8, White clears the way for his queen to get to h6 whilst preventing Black from challenging the knight on c5 with 27...♗f6.

27 ... ♖xf8

Black is relieved to be rid of the menacing white bishop, but the shadow of an even bigger white piece is about to fall over his king.



28 ♚h6!

The queen and knight are well known to be a formidable attacking force, as their different powers increases the chance of finding a key to unlock a defence. Here, for example, White to move could end the game at once with 1 ♖g5 intending mate on h7.

28 ... ♗g7

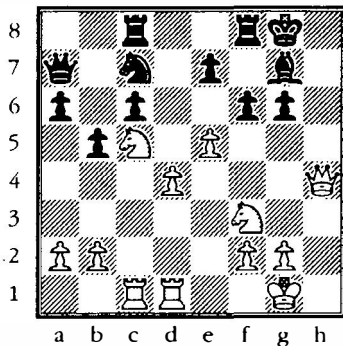
Black avoids immediate disaster by kicking away the white queen, but there is no hope of a successful long term defence.

29 ♖h4

Now the threat of 30 ♖g5 forces Black to wreck his king's cover.

29 ... f6

A horrible move to have to make, as the pawn was performing an essential role on f7 in guarding the e6 square and g6 pawn.



30 ♖g4!

Over the next few moves, Carlsen single-mindedly punctures light

square holes in the black kingside pawn structure.

30 ... ♔h7

The black king tries to hold together the rotten timbers of his fortress.

31 ♖h4

By compelling the g6 pawn to advance, the knight wins the f5 square for itself and the h5 square for the queen.

31 ... g5

Of course Black cannot allow 32 ♖xg6+.

32 ♖h5+

Lift your eyes from the black king's sufferings for a moment and take a look at the black queen sitting idly on a7. If there was ever a case of high treason this is it.

32 ... ♕g8

Even worse, if that is possible in such a position, is 32...♗h6 33 ♖f5 when the black bishop is lost straightaway.

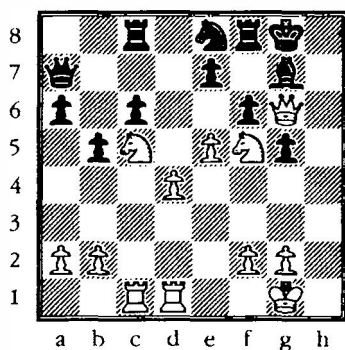
33 ♖f5

It is almost too easy: a second white knight takes up residence on the fifth rank. Black's pawns have clearly failed to do their duty.

33 ... ♖e8

Black meets the threat of 34 ♖xe7 matc, but concedes the e6 square.

34 ♜g6



1-0

Black's control of the light squares has totally collapsed. White has already seized the g6 and f5 squares, and the arrival of a knight on e6 is intolerable. Indeed, in the words of Adolf Anderssen, the great 19th century attacking genius 'Once you get a knight firmly posted at e6 you may go to sleep. Your game will play itself'. Malakhov didn't wait to see yet another murder by a sleep walker after 35 ♖e6 when the queen and knights descend on g7, or if 35...♞f7 36 ♖h6+. Nor does 34...fxe5 help as 35 ♜e6+ wins a rook.

Game 28

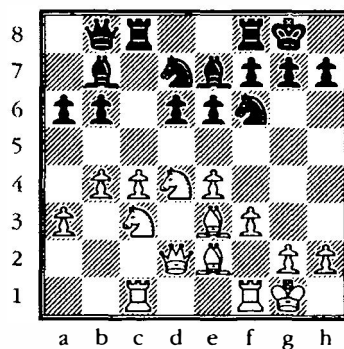
We have looked at several games in which Black's dark squared

bishop proves to be a miserable piece. To redress the balance somewhat, here is a game in which the bishop has a glorious career as it munches through one white piece after another. The victor, Humpy Koneru, is one of the very best women players in the world.

White: O. Annageldyev
Black: H. Koneru
Hyderabad 2005

The opening was a Sicilian Kan:

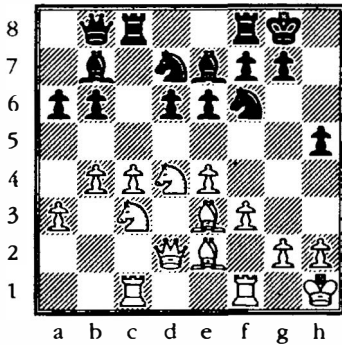
1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4
4 ♖xd4 a6 5 c4 ♖f6 6 ♖c3 ♜c7
7 a3 ♗e7 8 ♗e3 b6 9 ♞c1 ♗b7
10 f3 0-0 11 ♗e2 d6 12 0-0 ♖bd7
13 ♜d2 ♞ac8 14 b4 ♜b8



15 ♗h1

An interesting plan is 15 ♖b3 followed by 16 a4 and 17 a5.

15 ... h5?!



A torrent pawn! Nonetheless, I'm sure that even the maverick Nimzowitsch would have looked askance at such a move. Black blatantly weakens her king's position – can it be good?

In fact the grotesque nature of 15...h5 demands a punishment, and that is one of its virtues. After all, leaving aside the target on h5, the black position is ultra solid and flexible and ready for anything that White might care to throw against it: so why not give a man a rope, or an h-pawn, to hang himself with? Instead of carrying on with some nice, calm scheme such as 16 ♘b3, intending a4-a5 as outlined above; or the even more solid 16 ♖fd1 and ♙f1, White is roused into piece play against the black king.

Of course it would be wrong to assert there is no positional basis for 15...h5. As part of a concerted action involving moves like ♚a8, d6-d5 and h4-h3, it could be used to

undermine White along the a8-h1 diagonal. Also, whilst on h5, the pawn restrains g2-g4, which might have gained space for White, and provides a base for a knight on g4 in the event of Black playing ♘e5 and White replying f3-f4. Furthermore, a combination of moves such as h5-h4, d6-d5, ♙d6 and ♘h5 might cause White difficulties on the kingside.

Nevertheless the word that springs to mind is: provocation. For all this fine talk about strategy, there is no escaping the fact that 15...h5 has punctured a big hole in Black's kingside.

16 ♙g5!

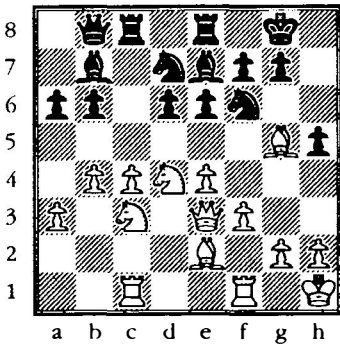
This makes sense, in order to stop the pawn in its tracks and pin the knight.

16 ... ♖fe8

Black breaks the pin, and asks White 'what can you do?'

17 ♚e3!?

The answer is: put my queen on a square where it will become vulnerable to attack by the rook on e8. Annageldyev isn't at all impressed by 15...b5 and tries to build up an attack on the black king.



17 ... d5!

Black achieves this thematic advance in very favourable circumstances. All the black pieces are ready for action, whereas White has a rook on f1 which would be better engaged on d1 or e1, where it would help to contest the two volatile centre files. And, of course, there is the white queen sitting nervously on e3...

As well as the obvious attacks on c4 and e4, White has to reckon with 18...e5 and 19...d4, forking the queen and knight.

Still once again we must come down to Earth and remind ourselves that for all the fine things going for Black in the centre, her defences along the h-file have been ripped open with the h7-h5 move.

18 ... exd5

A necessary exchange, even though it allows the rook on e8 to put pressure on e4.

18 ... exd5

White's space advantage has vanished and the black pieces come to life.

19 ... f5

However, Annageldyev isn't to be deterred from trying for a kingside attack. The knight takes up an impressive looking post and there is the threat of 20 Qxe7+, acquiring the two bishops and reigniting a pin on f6 after 20...Bxe7.

19 ... f8

The bishop is forced to retreat to f8, but now e4 is attacked four times.

20 ... f4

The only way to save the e-pawn is to buy time for its safe advance to e5.

20 ... Wa8

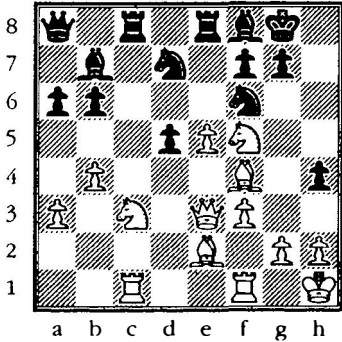
The black queen is shut in the far corner, which gives encouragement to White's plan of a kingside attack.

21 ... e5

The pawn advances, and attacks the knight which is the chief defender of Black's kingside.

21 ... h4

The pawn advances again and this time the reason is clear: Koneru wants to free the h5 square for her knight so that it can attack the dark squared bishop that defends e5.



22 ♖xh4?

Annageldyev is obviously annoyed by this impertinent pawn and so nabs it. In doing so, he loses a precious tempi – in fact, two tempi, as the knight was well placed on f5. Instead 22 ♛d4! was the critical move, breaking the pin on the e-file. Then after 22...♘h5 23 ♖g5 – saving the bishop and uncovering an attack by the queen on h4 – 23...♜xe5 24 ♖d3! White is a pawn down but he has organised his pieces in good style for an attack on the black king, which he can commence next move with 25 ♛xh4, as if 24...h3? 25 g4 ♘hf6 26 ♖xf6 gxf6 (forced as if 26...♘xf6 27 ♛xe5) 27 ♜g1! intending 28 g5 with a very strong, perhaps decisive attack. You will see that the white queen's blockade

of the d5 pawn stops the black queen and bishop on b7 getting involved in the game.

So perhaps White could have cast serious doubt on 15...h5. Still, the position remains complicated, and it wasn't at all easy for White to find this variation during the game. So, speaking from a practical point of view, the pawn lunge gave Black reasonable chances.

22 ... ♘h5!

Now everything goes swimmingly for Black.

23 ♘f5?

As has often been observed, one blunder is often followed by another in quick succession. Once a player loses the thread of a game, all his moves tend to look dubious. It was important to keep the strong dark squared bishop, even though after 23 ♖g5 ♜xe5 Black is starting to take over the initiative. Still, White should be OK after 24 ♛d2.

23 ... ♘xf4

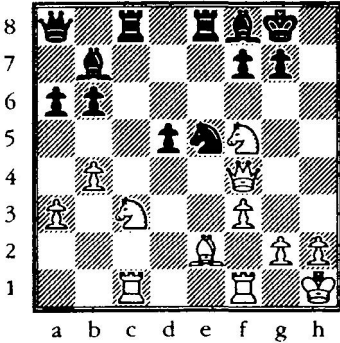
A significant achievement for Black, as it deprives White of his best minor piece.

24 ♛xf4

The queen and knight on f5 are stationed near the black king, but no other piece can help them launch an attack.

24 ... ♖xe5

Not only capturing an important pawn, but also stopping any aggressive gesture with ♕d3.



25 ♖a4?

A useless attacking gesture which merely decentralises the knight. Having seen his kingside attack falter, White carries on playing as if he still has the initiative, when it was in fact time to put on the brakes and stop himself sliding further downhill.

The best way to safeguard his game was with 25 ♔g3 ♖g6 26 ♕d3, though 26...♔b8!? looks slightly better for Black.

25 ... ♖g6!

Koneru finds the most economical way to deal with the threat of ♖xb6. First of all the white queen is driven back.

26 ♔d2

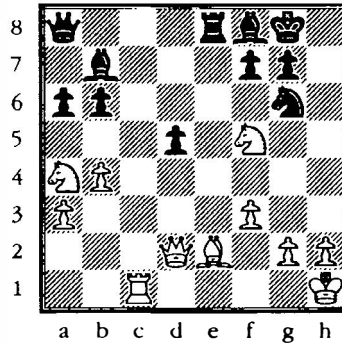
Of course, the bishop on e2 must be defended from the rook.

26 ... ♜xc1

This exchange clears the way for her next move.

27 ♜xc1

The rook finally has an open file after staring at f3 for 14 moves.



27 ... ♔d8!

The black queen returns to the centre, defends b6, and has a threat of her own that White entirely misses.

28 ♕f1?

It is useful to get the bishop out of harm's way and free the white queen from its defence, but this is a huge tactical blunder. Imperative was 28 ♖c3 or 28 ♕d3, regrouping his scattered pieces.

28 ... ♔d7!

A ferocious double attack which costs White one of his wayward knights.

29 ♖xg7

The horse sells itself as dearly as possible and does some damage to the black kingside.

29 ... ♗xg7

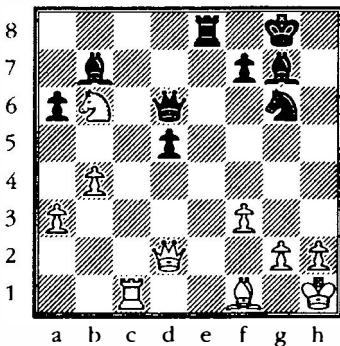
It is all over now, as not only is Black material up with a rock solid kingside, she also has a powerful passed pawn on d5.

30 ♖xb6

He has to grab this second pawn to have even a glimmer of hope.

30 ... ♕d6

Saving the queen and preparing another sneaky trap.



31 ♖c4?

The only way to play on was 31 ♖a4, though White would still be busted.

31 ... ♔f8!

A second highly unpleasant surprise for White. Not only is his knight now hanging, but he is menaced with 31...♗h6, winning more material.

32 ♖a5

Another way to lose was 32 ♖e3 ♗h6 33 ♖e1 ♔e7 when e3 drops.

32 ... ♗h6

Four moves ago this gluttonous bishop feasted on horsemeat; now he is about to gorge his appetite on something even bigger.

33 ♔d1

The queen naturally flees from the all consuming bishop.

33 ... ♗xc1

....but it is too late to save the rook.

34 ♖xb7

Annageldyev might have resigned here, or perhaps first murdered the dark squared bishop that has caused him so much woe. Instead he decides to capture the other bishop which rather remarkably has sat unmoved on b7 for the whole middlegame.

34 ... ♗xa3

0-1

Pawns and goat pegs

A highly interesting game. The next time you want to give some energy to your position, remember the torrent pawn -- though think carefully before you unleash a move like h7-h5 in the game above! If, on the other hand, you think the opponent's pieces are getting a bit too lively, it might be time for the goat peg...

6: Horrible holes

A beginner is happy if he manages to checkmate his opponent. For the master it is sufficient to discover the shadow of a weakness in the pawn structure somewhere on the remote outskirts of the left hand side of the board.

Aaron Nimzowitsch

We have arrived at the highest level of the art of planning: what to do when the position offers you no obvious path forwards, such as launching an attack on the enemy king, turning a pawn majority into a passed pawn, or picking up a weak pawn.

In such situations, you have to cast a thorough eye over the whole board and search out the slightest blemish in your opponent's otherwise impeccable pawn structure. If there is none, you have to wait patiently: be content with a solid move that improves the coordination of your pieces or strengthens one of your own fragile points. Or as Tarrasch put it: 'If you don't know what to do, wait for your opponent to get an idea: it's sure to be wrong!'

There is a lot of truth in the old maestro's semi-jesting comment, as even if the opponent chooses the correct plan, in order to carry it out he will have to neglect certain areas of the board. For example, if a kingside attack is going to succeed, it will require the help of all the pieces; but this will inevitably leave the queenside underdefended.

It is therefore reasonable to assume that sooner or later, just through the development of your opponent's plan, at least one square in his camp is going to be left insufficiently defended. From then on, you are required to focus all your attention on this one tiny flaw in his armour.

A so-called 'hole' is a weak point of this kind. It is a square in a player's pawn structure that can no longer be protected by one of his pawns. If the hole is on a centre square or another point of strategic interest, it can make a fine outpost for an enemy knight.

In this chapter, we shall begin by looking at three games in which there was a battle royal over a hole in Black's pawn structure on b5.

Horrible holes

The significance of such a hole is magnified by the fact that in each case the centre is fairly blocked, or at least stable, and no violent attacks on either king are possible. This is of course self evident, as it would hardly be sensible to concentrate all your firepower on one small point on the queenside if your king was in mortal danger or a dynamic struggle for control of the centre was raging.

In the first game, White seizes control of the b5 square and holds onto it tenaciously. You might think that this is essentially a defensive manoeuvre, designed to stop the opponent achieving counterplay down the b-file. However, it is aggressive in the sense that keeping Black bottled up will make it much harder for him to resist White's attack on the kingside. The result is a fine win by Ivan Cheparinov, the 19 year old trainer of Topalov, against one of the greatest players of the modern era.

Game 29

White: I.Cheparinov

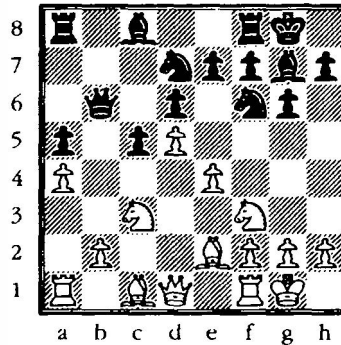
Black: V.Ivanchuk

Khanty Mansyisk 2005

The diagram position was reached in the Benko Gambit after the moves

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5
a6 5 b6 d6 6 ♘c3 ♘bd7 7 a4 a5

8 e4 g6 9 ♘f3 ♙g7 10 ♙e2 0-0
11 0-0 ♚xb6



Let's try to imagine each player's thoughts about the position as they weighed up their strategic chances.

Ivan Cheparinov

I have spotted a weak square in my opponent's position on b5. I should try to place a knight there and do my best to support it. This will not only deprive Black of any counterplay against my b2 pawn, but also deter him from attacking my centre with e7-e6, as the d6 pawn would then become vulnerable. So in this way I will secure my queenside from attack and also keep my space advantage in the centre. That means I will be able to start a kingside attack based on f2-f4 without being disturbed. With luck, this will culminate in a mating attack against the black king.

Vassily Ivanchuk

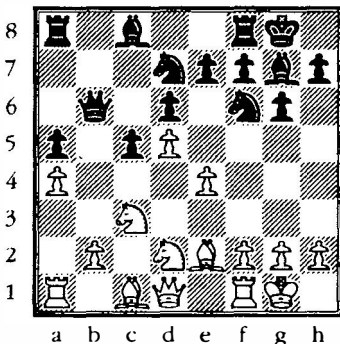
My pawn structure is solid, my king is safe and I'm not lagging

behind in development. But I still haven't shaken off White's space advantage. Maybe e7-e6 is an option to attack d5? Yes, I might try that if allowed! I see that White can stop me, but never mind: I should be able to exchange some pieces, and in an endgame I can exploit the weakness of the b2 pawn, and possibly the a4 and e4 pawns as well. Yes, I have a hole on b5, but I'm confident I'll be able to bring enough pieces to bear on this square to make sure White doesn't enjoy it in peace. Or perhaps I can occupy the b4 square with one of my knights in the future? Yes, I can be ambitious here and play for the win!

What to look for:

Two positional titans engage in an exemplary display of cat and mouse. Then Ivanchuk becomes over confident and makes a superficially strong manoeuvre that just leaves him in a strategic stranglehold. He puts a knight on b4, but what does it do?

12 ♖d2!



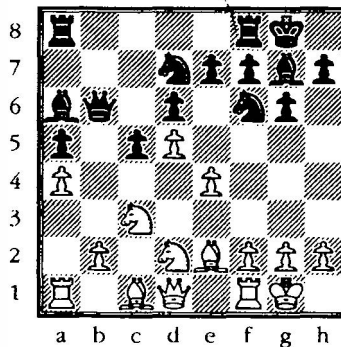
The positional jockeying begins. The knight:

- prevents 12...e6 in view of 13 dxe6 fxe6 14 ♘c4, when the d6 pawn drops
- defends e4 and so frees the knight on c3 to go to b5
- plans a manoeuvre to support its comrade on b5

Of course, White couldn't care less that the bishop on c1 is shut in for a couple of moves.

12 ... ♗a6

The bishop joins the fight for the b5 square, and if allowed will exchange itself on e2.



13 ♘b5!

Here we have a much heralded move that exploits the only gap in Black's armour. Cheparinov's first priority is to stifle any counterplay by Black along the b file.

13 ... ♜fb8

Horrible holes

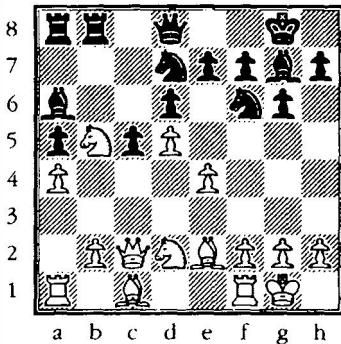
There is a dearth of open files for any of the rooks on the board. As Ivanchuk has no intention of advancing any pawns on the kingside, b8 is as good as it gets for the rook.

14 ♔c2

The queen overprotects e4 so that it won't be left hanging when the knight goes to c4.

14 ... ♖d8

The queen doesn't wait to be pushed back by White's next move as the b6 square is needed by his knight.



15 ♘c4!

A simple example of tactics supporting strategy. White is able to continue with his desired knight manoeuvre as if 15...♗xb5? 16 axb5 ♗xb5 (or else White increases the pressure with 17 ♗d2 attacking a5 a third time, or if necessary consolidates the passed pawn on b5 with 18 ♗a3) 17 ♗xd6!

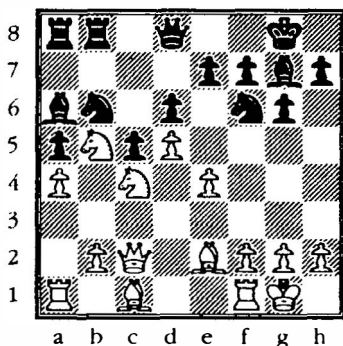
and the discovered threat of 18 ♗xb5 ensures that after 17...♗bb8 18 ♗c4 White has a clear plus. In fact, I would go as far to say that Black is losing between strong players of equal strength. Not only is the a5 pawn terribly weak, but Black is deprived of the d6 pawn, which is a vital facet of his pawn structure in all 'Indian openings' – i.e. openings in which the bishop is fianchettoed on g7 – as it holds back White's centre expansion with e4-e5. Its exchange for White's a4 pawn is strategically intolerable.

It is a paradox that in order to increase your hold on a strong point, you often have to lessen temporarily your direct control of it. Here for example, the white knight gets to a3 next move, which strengthens White's command of b5.

15 ... ♗b6

Black tries his own poisoned pawn offer. He challenges the white knight and if 16 ♗xa5? ♗bxd5! 17 ♗c6 (17 exd5?! ♗xa5 leaves White with a weak pawn on d5) 17...♗b4! counterattacking against the white queen 18 ♗xb4 cxb4 and Black has eased his game by removing the d5 pawn. If the pawn on d6 is Black's best friend in Indian Defences, then the pawn on d5 is his greatest enemy.

At the same time, Black threatens 16...♗xa4! destroying the defender of b5.



16 ♖ca3!!

You may have heard the expression that a knight on the rim is dim. So why does the white knight make the journey from f3 via d2 and c4 to a3? Was it really worth making three moves just to end up decentralised?

As so often, we need to remind ourselves that it isn't the fortune of the individual piece that matters – it is how it functions with the other pieces. For this reason it is often completely meaningless to count the number of squares, in the centre or otherwise, that a piece controls or attacks. Here the knight is only in contact with one square that matters – but what a square!

Black is in no position to launch a counterattack on the kingside, whilst the plan of undermining d5 with e7-e6 also looks unsustainable: the black pieces are on the wrong squares and the d6 pawn would become a target after the response d5xe6 followed by ♖d1 or ♗f4.

So White has little to fear in the way of sudden activity by Black on the other wing. Even with three minor pieces distant from his king, White still has more pieces on the kingside than his opponent.

So the action is all on the queenside, until White himself decides otherwise by breaking open things with the pawn advance f2-f4.

The exchange 16 ♖xb6 ♜xb6 would help Black. He would be able to follow up with ♗e8 and ♖c7, when White's barricade on b5 is pushed aside. In that case, the pawn on b2 would become a target. The knight on b6 is actually a nuisance for Black – it gets in the way of the rook on b8 attacking b5, and, as we see, also takes the b6 square away from the black queen. So, 16 ♖ca3 makes b5 safe in two ways: it adds a defender to the square, and refuses to acquiesce in an exchange that makes it easier to attack.

16 ... ♗e8

Both sides go about their plans with their attention transfixed by the b5 square. Ivanchuk prepares to put his knight on c7 to add to the pressure.

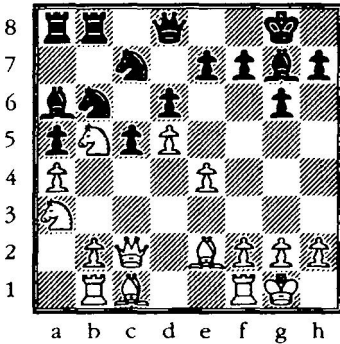
17 ♖b1

Meanwhile Cheparinov moves his rook from a1 so that he can play his next move which defends a4 –

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the principal defender of b5 – more hampered than the knights by the blocked pawn structure.

17 ... ♖c7



You will notice that all four knights have crowded themselves into a narrow place on the queenside. I don't know what the old masters would have thought about such play, as they played homage to such rules as 'keep the knights in the centre'. On the other hand, in this warped chess world with nothing but a vacuum to the right of the c-file, it could be said that the b-file is in the centre of the board!

18 b3

White solidifies the a4 square, thus finally ruling out any possible tricks with ♖xa4, undermining the defence of b5.

18 ... ♙xb5

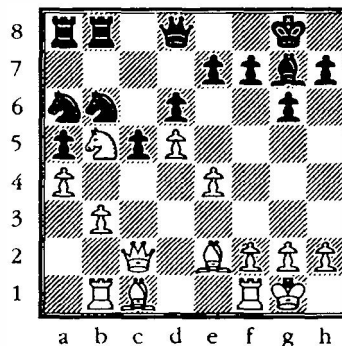
In principle, this is the best way to initiate an exchange of pieces on the b5 square, as the black bishop is

19 ♘xb5

The knight emerges from the backwater on a3 into the bright sunny uplands of b5 – and criminally, it is allowed to live.

19 ... ♘a6?

Ivanchuk looks for counterplay, but strategically speaking this could be considered the beginning of a losing idea. Instead of the rather useless manoeuvre to b4, 19... ♘xb5 20 ♙xb5 ♜f8!? is an interesting way to improve the layout of the black pieces, for example 21 f4 ♙d4+ 22 ♚h1 ♜g7 when Black is well entrenched and might be able to venture e7-e6 to gain activity in the future.



20 ♙g5

Since White's long term plan is a mating attack on the kingside, you might be wondering why he doesn't seize the chance to exchange off

Black's famous 'Indian' bishop with 20 ♖b2. In fact, Black's bishop isn't attacking anything, whereas on g5 White's bishop is a real nuisance. It keeps a far more valuable piece in the shape of the black queen tied to the defence of e7. If Black tries to drive it away with 20...h6 he creates a weakness in his kingside structure which he is sure to regret later on; while the drawbacks of 20...f6 are exemplified by the course of the game.

Let's see what might have happened after 20 ♖b2: 20 ♖b2 ♘b4 21 ♗d2 ♖xb2 22 ♗xb2 ♗f8! and the black queen – unbothered by the need to defend anything – replaces the bishop with 23...♗g7.

20 ... ♘b4

Apparently a strong square for the knight, but it looks less impressive when the knight is still sitting on b4 at the end of the game a full 24 moves later, without having stirred once or contributed anything either to the defence of the king or counterplay on the queenside.

Black has doomed himself to search for a non-existent attack on the queenside whilst White's initiative proceeds harmoniously on the kingside.

Of course, it was possible for Black to change his mind at great

cost to his ego, but a lot of gain for his position, with 20...♘c7! However, in the words of a proverb that Russians love to quote: once you have said 'A' you have to say 'B'.

21 ♗d2

White is pleased about the traffic jam of knights along the b-file. He wants everything to stay static on the queenside, so that he can begin his kingside assault with no distractions whatsoever. The only thing which might spoil his party is if Black somehow managed to advance c5-c4 to break open lines.

21 ... ♗d7

He might have played 21...♖b7 straightaway, so that if White continues as in the game with 22 f4 then 22...♗e8 (but not 22...♘d7? 23 ♘d6! winning a pawn thanks to the pin) 23 f5 ♘d7 and the knight crosses to the kingside one move sooner.

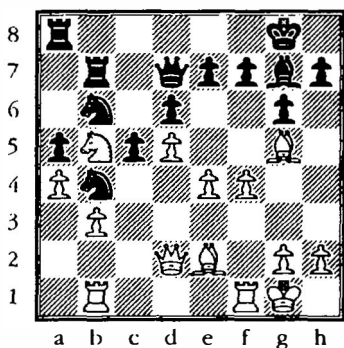
22 f4

At long last Cheparinov commits his f-pawn to the attack.

22 ... ♖b7

If 22...♖c8, aiming for 23...c4, then 23 ♖bc1 is a simple stifling response.

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23 f5!

A player obsessed with keeping a trim looking pawn structure will wince at this move. White relinquishes control of the e5 square, which becomes a hole in his centre: a black knight or bishop once stationed there can never be driven back by a pawn. It looks much more thematic to leave the pawn on f4 and prepare the advance e4-e5, in order to blot out the bishop on g7 and come crashing through the e-file after a future e5xd6 or e5-e6.

But the piece disposition dictates otherwise. The move e4-e5, even if it could be arranged without dropping material, would be a positional howler: how the black knights and queen would rejoice at seeing a big target appear on d5!

In contrast, the move 23 f5! gives nothing away as far as keeping a steady grip on the d5 square. Meanwhile, the white rooks are keen to see the opening of the f-file,

and, as will become clear, the option of ♖g4! will do much to force Black into positional concessions.

The pawn structure is being made to serve the white pieces; whereas Black has a solid, flawless pawn structure, but it doesn't help his pieces.

23 ... ♕e8

The queen vacates the d7 square in order to allow the knight to return to the centre.

24 ♖f3

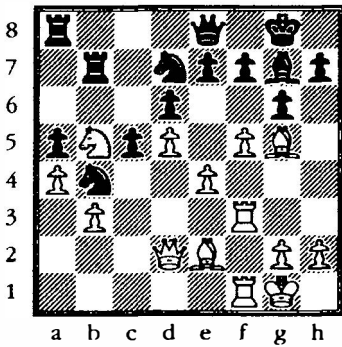
The centre of gravity on the chessboard has switched from the b-file to the centre and kingside. White's pieces are able to adapt more easily than Black's – in particular, his rooks have much greater scope than their enemy counterparts, which remain trapped by the nature of the pawn structure on the queenside.

24 ... ♞d7

In fact, this knight is the only black piece that can swiftly traverse the divide between the two sides of the board.

25 ♖bf1

White doubles his rooks and increases the latent pressure on f7.



25 ... ♔e5

Very natural was 25...♔e5, occupying the excellent square. Why did the maestro Ivanchuk avoid it? We can learn a valuable lesson in positional play by looking deeply into the matter.

After 25...♔e5 26 ♖h3, Black is facing the threat of 27 ♚f4 followed by 28 ♚h4 with a quick decision looming on the h7 square. The only way to prevent this is by blocking the kingside with f7-f6 and g6-g5. So play continues 26...f6 27 ♔f4, when Black wants to do two things:

- block the kingside with g6-g5 as explained above
- prevent the centre being opened by ♔xe5

Unfortunately for Black, he can't do both things at the same time. If 27...g5, there follows 28 ♔xe5!

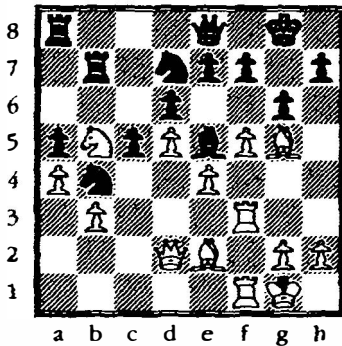
29 ♔c4!?. The disruption caused to Black's centre means that the scope of the white bishop can be increased with a well timed d5-d6, which would also allow all the other white pieces to infiltrate; or else White could simply target the c5 pawn. Black cannot survive having his centre smashed in this way when he is essentially a piece down as regards fighting for the queenside or centre as his bishop is locked in on g7.

But what happens if Black plays 27...♔f7 first, aiming to play 28...g5 on the next move? Unfortunately for him, White can cross this plan with 28 fxg6! hxg6 29 ♔g4! In that case, Black fails to achieve the blocking of the kingside; the white bishop gets to e6, the white queen can get to g3 or h4 via e1, and the black defences will soon fold.

So in other words, Black's problem is that he can't do two things at once: block the kingside with 27...g5 and prevent the centre being opened.

Ivanchuk tries an alternative plan which ensures that he is able to play the moves f7-f6 and g7-g5 whilst keeping the centre blocked; but as will be seen, the bishop is sadly placed on e5.

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26 ♖h3!

With the threat of 27 fxg6. If then 27...hxg6 28 ♖e1! followed by 29 ♖h4 and 30 ♖h7+ leads to a quick mate. So Black has to recapture 27...fxg6. Then comes a move familiar from the discussion above: 28 ♔g4! when the white bishop that has sat quietly on e2 becomes yet another attacking piece. Its entry on e6 is fatal.

White has such a huge advantage in firepower where it matters on the kingside – in effect, two whole rooks – that pretty sacrifices become possible. For example 28...♟f6 (or 28...♟f8 29 ♖hf3 ♟d7 30 ♔e6+) 29 ♔e6+ ♟g7 and here the most convincing way to win is with 30 ♟xd6!! A beautifully thematic move that brings White's last uninvolved piece into the direct attack. Whichever way Black recaptures he is soon destroyed:

30...exd6 31 ♔xf6+ ♔xf6
32 ♖xf6! (or 32 ♖h6+ ♟h8
33 ♖xf6) 32...♟xf6 33 ♖f3+ ♟g7
34 ♖c3+ ♟h6 35 ♖f6! and 36 ♖h3

mate follows; or 30...♔xd6
31 ♖c3! ♖d8 32 ♖xh7+! ♟xh7
33 ♖xf6 exf6 34 ♖h3+ ♟g7 35
♖h6 mate.

26 ... f6

All according to plan and necessary to prevent the lines with 27 fxg6 described above. Nonetheless, it is not a move that Ivanchuk would have enjoyed making:

- the bishop's retreat is cut off
- the knights are denied access to the f6 square
- the centre loses its flexibility

27 ♔e3

The bishop retreats from g5, but will return in some style a couple of moves later.

27 ... g5

Ivanchuk has little choice but to try for a blockade on the dark squares, as otherwise he has to reckon with 28 fxg6 hxg6 29 ♔g4, when the light squared bishop joins in the attack a well.

28 g4!

White's plan is to break through on the kingside.

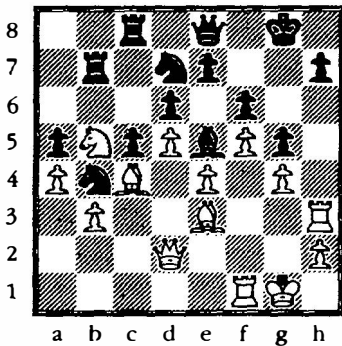
However, he has to be precise, as if 28 ♖h5, with the idea of 29 h4, then 29...c4! 29 bxc4 (recapturing

with the bishop drops h5) 29...♘c5!
– attacking both a4 and e4 –
30 ♖xc5 dxc5 and for the price of a
pawn Black has got rid of White's
strong dark squared bishop and
denied his other bishop access to
the c4 square.

28 ... ♖c8

Ivanchuk tries to generate
counterplay by utilising the c-file
after c5-c4!? or a line opening
sacrifice on d4.

29 ♖c4



Cheparinov is quick to pounce on
any idea of 29...c4 when after
30 ♖xc4 ♘c5 the black knight has
become active with a direct threat to
e4.

You might think that the black
bishop on e5 is splendidly placed,
as it has escaped from the confines
of its pawn structure. It controls two
diagonals and can never be attacked
by a white pawn. In fact, the bishop
would willingly give up all its
freedom and return to a dark square

prison on g7. It wouldn't have any
scope, but it would defend its king
against the looming assault.

Once again, we see that the
individual activity of a piece is far
less important than its contribution
to the overall health of a player's
position. Black would be delighted
to have a so-called 'bad' bishop
shut in behind his pawns. It should
be remembered that Ivanchuk only
put his bishop on e5 because he had
no choice – see the comment to
25...♗e5 above. He had no illusions
that it would be well placed on this
square.

Alas, circumstances mean that the
bishop can never return to g7. But
at least it can sacrifice itself
heroically in order to free the e5
square for the knight on d7. A
knight on this square really would
be master of all it sees. Not only
would it help bolster the kingside,
but it would support counterplay on
the queenside with c5-c4.

29 ... ♗d4

Although Ivanchuk loses, it is
impossible not to admire the skill of
a world class player in generating
tactics in even the most arid looking
position.

30 ♘xd4

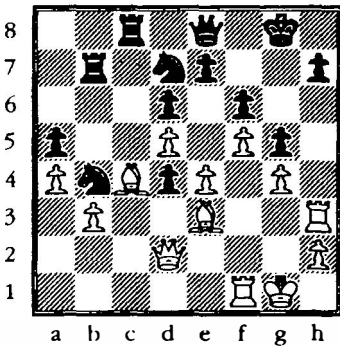
The blocked nature of the position
might suggest that 30 ♖xd4 cxd4
31 ♘xd4 was the correct way to

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respond to the invasion on d4. However, White keeps the bishop as he isn't interested in capturing the d4 pawn.

30 ... cxd4

Now things wouldn't look at all bad for Black after 31 ♔xd4 ♘c5, despite being a pawn down, as the white bishops have little scope.



31 ♔xg5!

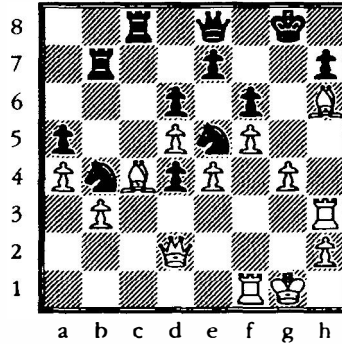
This pseudo sacrifice of the bishop is the whole point of White's play.

31 ... ♘e5

If 31...fxg5 32 ♜xg5+ ♔h8 (or 32...♔f8 33 ♜xh7 and the threat of 34 ♜g7 mate ends the game) 33 ♜xh7+! ♔xh7 34 ♜f3 and Black has no good answer to the threat of 35 ♜h3, mating. Black may have an extra rook and bishop, but they are cut off on the queenside and unable to help their denuded king.

32 ♔h6

The bishop clears the way for the g4-g5 advance and also controls the g7 square, which will prove to be a winning factor in what follows.



32 ... d3

The breakthrough on the c-file comes too late to save Black: 32...♘c4 33 bxc4 ♜xc4 and it's not a surprise when White has a bishop, queen and rook all poised to mate a defenceless king that he gets in first with 34 ♔g7! ♔xg7 – Black has to try 34...e6 to get the rook on b7 involved in the defence, but after 35 ♔xf6 with 36 ♜g5+ coming it will soon be over – 35 ♜h6+ ♔g8 36 ♜xh7+ ♔f8 37 ♜h8+ ♔f7 38 ♜h7 mate.

33 g5!

If 33 ♔g7 as in the note above, Black can resist with 33...♘f7! Keeping the white queen out of h6. So Cheparinov presses forwards with his pawn storm.

33 ... ♜f7

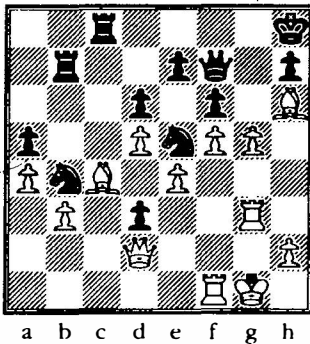
The queen tries to staunch up the second rank, but will end up paying with her life.

34 ♖g3

The terrible threat of 35 gxf6+ now forces Black's hand.

34 ... ♔h8

The king tries to hide away, but no dark square will be safe from the white bishop.



35 g6!

Just in time before Black can get one of his rooks involved in the game with 35...♖g8.

35 ... hxg6

If 35...♖e8 36 ♖g2 and White piles in along the g-file after 37 gxh7.

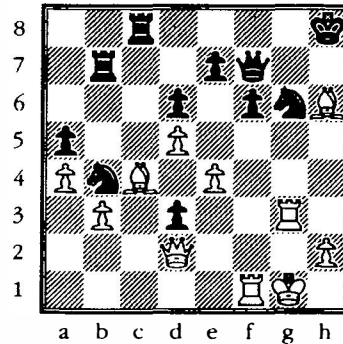
36 fxg6

Not only has the black king's pawn cover on the h-file been

removed, but also the f5 square has been vacated for the rook on f1 to join in the onslaught.

36 ... ♖xg6

Sometimes a king can hide behind an enemy pawn, but 36...♖e8 would be entirely hopeless. White would have many ways to win, for example 37 ♖g2 and 38 ♖h3, followed by moving the bishop from h6 to set up a queen check on h7.



37 ♖f5!

Now we have the white queen, bishop and two rooks attacking an open king who is defended by a queen and knight. Ivanchuk is capable of making his pieces do wonderful things, but such a weight of numbers is too much even for him.

37 ... ♔e5

Preventing the white rook going to h5, but Black can't hold out for long.

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38 ♔f8!

Cheparinov clears the h6 square for his queen.

38 ... ♖h7

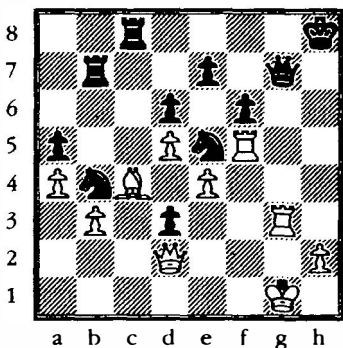
If 38...♖xf8 39 ♜h5+ and mate next move or 38...♜xf8 39 ♖h6+ ♖h7 and White can mate in two moves by taking on either f8 or h7.

39 ♔g7+

If now 39...♚g8 40 ♔xf6+ ♘g6 41 ♜xg6+ ♖xg6+ 42 ♜g5 and the black queen is lost. Ivanchuk decides he can get more material if he gives up the queen straightaway.

39 ... ♖xg7

White had better be careful now!



40 ♜h5+!

A vital move that sets up the queen check on h7 on move 42. A lot of 19 year olds would get over excited if they reached this position against Ivanchuk and grab the

queen, when after 40 ♜xg7+ ♚xg7 there is no win in sight and Black has a powerful passed pawn...

40 ... ♚g8

If 40...♖h7 then again the most precise move for White involves declining to take the queen straightaway: 41 ♖h6! when if 41...e6 – to get the rook on b7 defending h7 – 42 ♖xf6+ ♜g7 43 ♖xg7 is mate.

41 ♜xg7+

The correct moment to capture the queen. The rest is obvious as the white rook and queen surround the helpless king:

41...♚xg7 42 ♖h6+ ♚f7 43 ♖h7+ ♚e8 44 ♖f5 1-0

Not only is the rook on c8 hanging, there is also the threat of 45 ♜h8+ ♚f7 46 ♖h7 mate. A brilliant effort by Cheparinov, all the way from his patient queenside play through to the sacrificial attack on the black king. There is clearly something special about the b5 square, as we shall also see in the next game.

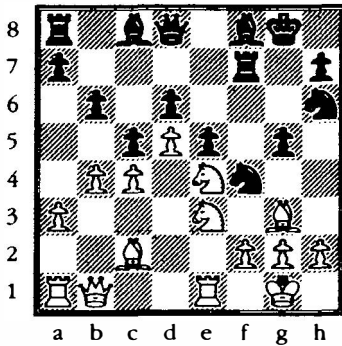
Game 30

White: A. Onischuk

Black: M.Brooks
Stillwater, USA 2005

The opening moves of a King's Indian were:

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♖c3 ♙g7 4 e4
 d6 5 ♘f3 0-0 6 ♙e2 e5 7 ♙e3
 ♘bd7 8 0-0 c6 9 ♗c2 ♘g4 10 ♙g5
 f6 11 ♙h4 ♘h6 12 d5 c5 13 a3 ♘f7
 14 ♘e1 g5 15 ♙g3 ♘h6 16 ♙d3
 ♗f7 17 b4 b6 18 ♗b1 ♘f8 19 ♖c2
 f5 20 exf5 ♙xf5 21 ♘e4 ♘g6
 22 ♘e3 ♙c8 23 ♗e1 ♘f4 24 ♙c2
 ♙f8



After a long preparatory phase, White began a plan of attack on the queenside with

25 a4

The idea is to ram the b6 pawn with 26 a5. Then after 26...bxa5?! 27 bxc5 dxc5 White has a protected passed pawn in the centre, or if 26...cxb4 27 ♗xb4 axb5 28 ♗c3!? and White can prepare c4-c5 as the next stage in his attack on Black's centre. In either case will easily regain the pawn on a5. Black sought to avoid all these problems with

25 ... a5

A radical solution that might well have worked if it hadn't been for White's inspired 27th move.

26 bxc5

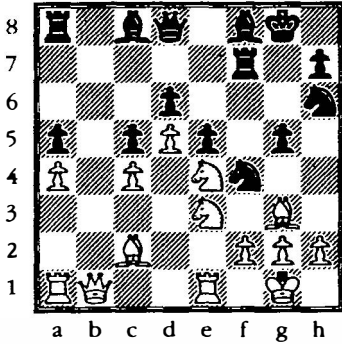
Entirely wrong would be 26 b5?? as it completely blocks the queenside. If White wants to try to win, he needs to create threats on both sides of the board.

After 26 bxa5 Black might well recapture 26...bxa5, but he has the added option of 26...♗xa5. Why should Onischuk spend time and energy working out whether or not this is any good for Black when he can capture on c5 instead? The only reason would be if he wanted to give his opponent the chance to hang himself by offering him an enticing, but inferior possibility; or he wanted to make his opponent waste time looking at variations such as 26...♗xa5 27 ♗b2 ♗fa7 etc.

26 ... bxc5

Hideous is 26...dxc5, as it leaves Black with a weak pawn on b6, creates an isolated pawn on e5, and transforms White's d5 pawn into a protected passed pawn. Such a move should only be considered if it gave Black's pieces an extra buzz of energy.

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27 ♖c3!!

White's knight looks brilliant on e4. Indeed, in books on the King's Indian, Black is often warned about the danger of letting a white knight sit on e4 with impunity. And yet Onischuk moves it away. Why?

It is the well being of the whole position that matters, not the excellence of the white knight. Here Black had ideas of ♜b7 followed by ♜b4 or the doubling of rooks on the b-file. So White stifles the activity of the black pieces by putting his knight on b5.

27 ... ♜b7

There was no longer anything to be gained with this move. However, Brooks trusts in the solidity of his position and is content to leave it to White to prove he has any advantage. Such a passive approach is asking for trouble, especially against a player with fantastic technique.

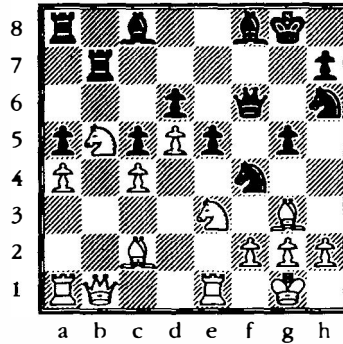
As this is the King's Indian, Black should try to launch a kingside attack, using the knight on f4 as a spearhead. Perhaps the best way is to utilise the h-pawn with 27...♗g4, intending 28...h5. Whether or not the attack would be sound, it is a better chance than the slow death of marking time whilst the opponent improves his position move by move.

28 ♗b5

Snuffing out any black counterplay on the queenside once and for all.

28 ... ♕f6

An active looking move, but in reality Black is only waiting.



29 ♜a3!

Meanwhile, White has the constructive plan of bringing his rooks into the fight for the b-file.

29 ... ♖h8

Played because the rules of chess say Black must make a move.

30 ♖b3

The knight on b5 regains its powers, after which Black has to watch out for tricks based on ♗xd6!

30 ... ♖f7

Black defends the h7 pawn so that he can shift the bishop on f8 back and forth.

31 ♕e4

The bishop vacates the c2 square as it is needed by the queen.

31 ... ♕e7

Another aimless move which makes a sad contrast with his opponent's purposeful play.

32 ♖c2

Now the way is clear for the other white rook to reach the b-file.

32 ... ♕f8

Black continues to wait and see if White manages to create any serious threats.

33 ♖e1

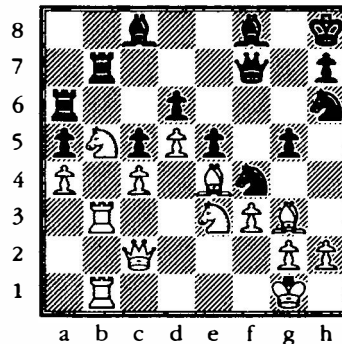
White's positional build up continues in methodical style.

He is truly 'playing without an opponent'.

33 ... ♖a6

One of Black's problems is that he cannot copy White by doubling rooks on the b-file as the a5 pawn is vulnerable to attack. On the other hand, if he could wave a magic wand, shout 'wingardium leviosa!' and watch as the black knight flew from h6 and landed on b4, all danger would be past from him.

34 f3!



White clears the way for his dark squared bishop to enter the queenside battle via e1. As will be seen, in vacating the g3 square the bishop itself will make possible an eventual g2-g3 to evict the black knight from f4 and instigate active play on the kingside.

34 ... ♖g8

This is not the fighting King's Indian we see in the games of Bobby Fischer or the young Kasparov!

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In the King's Indian, White always has to think twice about creating any targets in his kingside pawn structure. The pawn on f3 can now be rammed by 34...g4 which would open the g-file for Black's rooks...yes, but where are the black rooks? They are way off doing defensive duty on the queenside. Likewise, the diagonal from h6 to c1 is inviting for Black's bishop, but getting it to h6 would be difficult, as first the knight would have to be moved. And isn't the bishop performing an important defensive role on f8 in guarding the d6 pawn?

As usual tactics support positional considerations, thereby revealing the inner logic of a game of chess. If 34...g4? 35 fxg4 ♖xg4? 36 ♖xg4 ♗xg4 37 ♖xd6! ♗xd6 38 ♗xb7 and Black can resign.

35 ♗e1

The rook on a6 is reduced to the role of perpetual baby sitter to the pawn on a5.

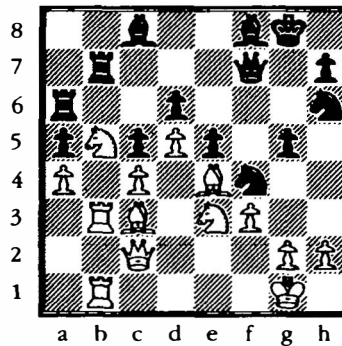
35 ... ♖bb6

Having moved his king and bishop backwards and forwards, Black now tries the same trick with a rook.

36 ♗c3!

The bishop increases its scope, as the e5 pawn is by no means an immovable barrier.

36 ... ♗b7



The story so far: most of Black's pieces have been forced into a defensive role, needing to protect the a5 and d6 pawns as well as the b-file against invasion. Without their help, the remaining black pieces have little hope carrying out a successful kingside attack. Compare the black knights. One of them appeared to hit the jackpot in the King's Indian: a commanding post on f4, from where it could lead a charge against the white king. Unfortunately, none of the other black pieces ever joined in the attack. The knight on h6, on the other hand, has never even been allowed to dream. Its situation has been pitiful, forever secluded on h6.

Because one clump of black pieces is still poised for an unpromising attack on the kingside beginning with g5-g4, and the other group is huddled in defensive mode, there is no internal harmony in Black's camp.

In contrast, the white pieces all have their freedom – they aren't

tied down to any pawns or squares. But how can White exploit his advantage?

One method, and one that I'm sure most players would have grabbed with both hands, is 37 ♖d2. This wins the a5 pawn and so seems like the logical conclusion to White's pressure on the queenside.

However, there might then come 37... ♗g7 38 ♙xa5 g4! White has won his pawn, but the rook on a6 is no longer passive: it ties down the bishop to a5 as it cannot retreat without dropping the a4 pawn, and this means that in turn the white queen is tied down to defending the bishop. Furthermore, Black has carried out his cherished g5-g4 advance.

Psychologically speaking, Onischuk doesn't want his opponent to switch from a defensive state of mind to that of a counterattacker. He wants him to go quietly to his doom, shuffling his pieces until a deadly blow strikes him. He doesn't want him to think 'well, I'm a pawn down, it's lost on the queenside, let's go for it on the kingside!'

The wily Grandmaster found a much better plan.

37 ♖f1!

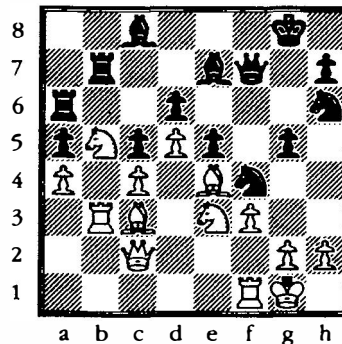
In the balmy days of the 1950s, the King's Indian scored a lot of

points for Black, as White would rely exclusively on his queenside initiative and leave his opponent to do the running on the kingside. In contrast, modern players know that White can also strive for the initiative on the kingside, and, if all goes well, take advantage of the loosening moves Black has made in his bid to play actively there.

In this specific position, White switches his attack to the kingside in very favourable circumstances: not least, the black rook on a6 is tied down to a5, meaning that Black will be a vital man short when lines are opened up.

37 ... ♙e7

The last peaceful move before sharp play commences.



38 g3

Dislodging the only minor piece Black can be proud of. An eventual f3-f4 would have been on the cards if the knight had retreated, but things happen much faster in the game.

Horrible holes

38 ... ♖h3+

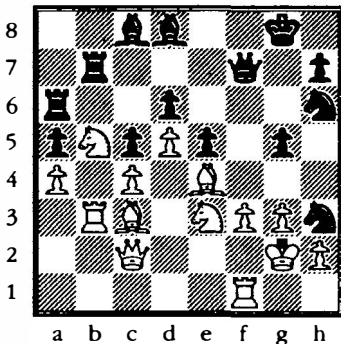
He had to go backwards with 38...♗g6, though 39 ♖g4! still looks very strong.

39 ♖g2

The situation of the black knights reminds me of Samuel Johnson's 18th century dictum that being in a ship is the equivalent of being in prison, but with the added risk of drowning. Here the knight on h6 is 'in jail' – it is shut in on h6 with no safe way to escape – but things are much worse for the knight on h3, which is 'shipwrecked' on h3 and facing a quick death.

39 ... ♙d8

There was no way of preventing White's next move.



40 ♖g4!

Cutting off the only lifeline to the stranded knight. If now 40...♗xg4 41 fxg4 discovers an attack on Black's queen, when the white king

will have a nice lunch of horsemeat on h3.

40 ... ♔g7

As he no longer has any decent moves, Black sets a nasty trap.

It is never too late to lose a game of chess. White's build up has been immaculate, but he could throw it all away with 41 ♔xh3?? when after 41...♗xg4 mate in two looms with 42...♜h5+, not to mention gruesome discovered checks by the black knight. If 42 fxg4 ♜xf1+ wins, while it is too late for the white king to repent with 42 ♔g2, as 42...♗e3+ wins the queen.

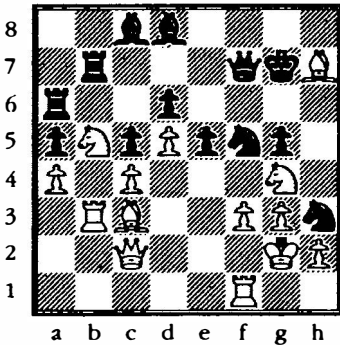
41 ♔xh7!?

This wins easily enough, but there was available a clean and forced conclusion to White's profound positional play in the shape of 41 ♗xd6!! ♙xd6 42 ♙xe5+ ♜f6 (or else d6 drops for nothing) 43 ♗xf6 ♙xf6 44 ♙xf6+ ♜xf6 (perhaps Onischuk missed that after 44...♔xf6 45 ♜b2+! is decisive as the black king can only go to e7, where he blocks off the queen's defence of the rook on b7: 45...♔e7 46 d6+! (or simply 46 ♙xb7+ and wins) 45 ♙xb7+ ♙xb7 46 ♔xh3 and Black had better resign.

41 ... ♗f5

Cutting off the bishop on h7 and hoping to fight on after 42 ♙xf5

♙xf5 , but Onischuk has a crushing response prepared.



42 ♜xd6!!

Black's pieces have grown so disorganised that his centre has become vulnerable to a destructive sacrifice.

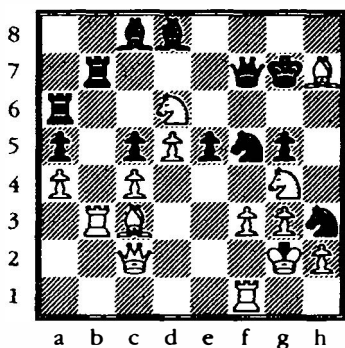
A less elegant, but equally efficient way to finish the game was 42 ♙xf5 ♙xf5 43 ♚e2 ♚h5 – or else h3 drops – 44 ♜xd6! when if 44... ♜xd6 45 ♜xb7+ wins or 44... ♜xb3 45 ♚xe5+ and mate in two: 45... ♙f6 46 ♚xf6+ ♙g8 47 ♚g7 mate.

Both in this variation and in the game continuation, all the white pieces that were engaged in the positional battle on the queenside – the knight on b5, bishop on c3 and rook on b3 – have a crucial part to play in the concluding attack on the black king. This smooth transition from restraining the enemy pieces to terrorising their king is a typical outcome of a well thought out strategy. Everything just 'flows'.

But perhaps you are in uproar at my definition of a 'smooth transition'. After all, White is obliged to sacrifice a knight in both cases on d6. Surely a sacrifice is by its nature a risky business; whereas a smooth conclusion to a game should be one that involves either a non sacrificial mating attack or else the risk free capture of material?

Well, I agree that a sacrifice is often a risky business – any venture that requires the analysis of a long sequence of moves can be ruined by one oversight. We see an example above in the note to 41 ♙xh7 above. There was a simple and far less messy way to win the game with 41 ♜xd6 but Onischuk missed something in his calculation. Yes, it was 'simple' but the 2600 Elo Grandmaster, in sparkling form, missed it.

There is a saying that the hardest thing in chess is to win a 'won' position. That seems to be true based on the number of times a player comes up to me and says 'I was completely winning, but...' I also know how hard it can be to make the final push to finish off an opponent who is dead but won't lie down. In fact, in bad positions, a player often fights extremely hard and finds a lot of resources, so much so that it makes you wonder how he could have played so badly to get into such a mess in the first place.



42 ... ♖xd6

After 42...♖xd6 43 ♗xe5 the black king will be raked with fire by the white bishops. For example 43...♜h5 – to keep the g6 square defended against an invasion by the white queen – 44 ♖xb7+ ♗xb7 (after 44...♗xb7 45 ♗g6! the black queen has no square to run to where a discovered check doesn't win her. For one move the rook on a6 is involved in the defence of the king, but...) 45 ♗c6+! ♗f6 (moving the king is hopeless due to White's ♗f5! move e.g. 45...♗h6 46 ♗f5! ♖a8 47 ♗xc8 ♖xc8 48 ♜f5 and at the very worst White will pick up the knight on h3 leaving himself with a crushing material advantage.) 46 ♗xf6+ ♗xf6 47 ♜b2+ ♗f7 48 ♜h8 and besides the routine 49 ♜xc8, there is the threat to win Black's queen with 49 ♗g8+ ♗g6 50 ♗f7+! and to cap it all, there is a mate in four beginning with the moves 49 ♜g8+, 50 ♜f8+ and 51 ♜h6+. That's all too much.

43 ♖xb7 1-0

A splendid positional game comes to an end with a simple tactic. Whichever way Black recaptures on b7, the knight on f5 falls.

Game 31

White: M.Adams

Black: V.Topalov
Sofia 2005

The games of Michael Adams show that if you have enough strategic insight, powers of calculation and endurance, you can still win in 'Capablanca – style' these days.

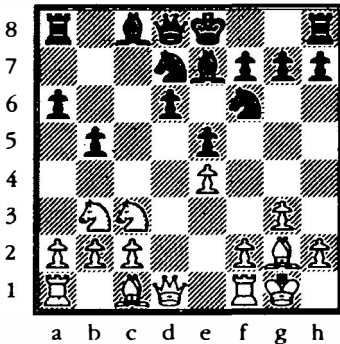
In the following game, it looks as if Black has everything he could wish for when playing the Sicilian Najdorf: an easy piece development, a king safely castled and the only weaknesses in his pawn structure – on d5 and d6 – easily coverable by his pieces. Furthermore, Black is Topalov – the same Topalov who was trouncing all his opponents in the second half of 2005 as he stormed towards a fabulous result at the World Championship tournament in Argentina.

How could Adams outplay such a formidable opponent step by step from a seemingly innocuous position? It all comes down to that white knight on b5 again!

Alas, as they say, chess can be a cruel game, and all White's hard work is undone in time pressure. Nevertheless, despite the result, this is a most instructive game, both for Adams's fine strategy and Topalov's vigorous defence.

The opening was a Najdorf Sicilian:

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4
4 ♗xd4 ♗f6 5 ♖c3 a6 6 g3 e5
7 ♗b3 ♗bd7 8 ♕g2 b5 9 0-0 ♗e7



Black's plan

A standard set up by Black: his pawn on e5 has evicted the white knight from the strong d4 point and is stoutly defended by the d6 pawn. He is ready to castle, and can then seek counterplay along the c-file with moves such as ♗b7, ♞c8 and b5-b4.

White's plan

Black has a hole on d5, but White isn't in a position to exploit it; Black can defend the d5 point with

moves such as ♗b6 and ♗b7 (or ♗e6 once the knight moves). Nor is any white minor piece in a situation to attack the d6 pawn, or at least not yet.

Generally speaking, White has no right to dream of storming the barricades on the kingside, if only because his knight on b3 is unable to take part in any attack. Therefore, entirely wrong would be 10 f4? even though it does contain the nasty trap 10...exf4?? 11 e5! and the discovered attack on a8 wins material. But we are trying to beat the FIDE World Champion who doesn't fall for such things, right?

In fact with 10 f4 White would be needlessly exposing his own king to pressure along the a1-g1 diagonal. Black could try to exploit at once with 10...b4 11 ♗d5 ♗xd5 12 ♜xd5?! (better to try 12 exd5, though 12...a5! leaves Black doing very nicely.) 12...♜b6+! 13 ♔h1 ♗b7 and Black completes his development with excellent chances.

Adams comes up with a much better plan: altering the pawn structure on the queenside so as to create a passed pawn. It will be a long, laborious task and full of positional and tactical pitfalls, but his technique will prove up to the task.

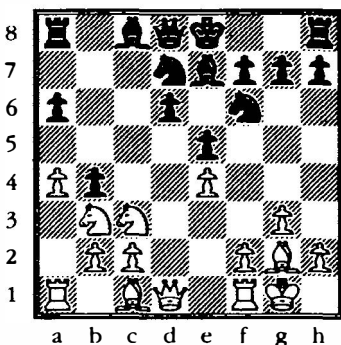
10 a4!

Horrible holes

The first step is to challenge the pawn on b5.

10 ... b4

If 10...bxa4 11 ♖xa4, when it is awkward for Black that 11...♙b7?!, developing and keeping a6 guarded, can be met by 12 ♘a5! ♜c7 13 ♘xb7 ♜xb7 14 ♜e2 and White has pressure on a6 and the bishop pair.



11 ♘a2!

This decentralisation of the knight only works as White has his bishop on g2, where it restrains Black from counterattacking in the centre with d6-d5. As an experiment, try putting White's bishop on d3 and moving the g-pawn back to g2. Straightaway the freeing 1...d5! becomes possible – if 2 exd5 ♘xd5 3 ♙e4 ♘7f6 etc.

Now return the pawn to g3 and the bishop to g2, and the centre becomes fixed again. You might be beginning to see that this position, for all its differences, shares an

important feature with the Cheparinov-Ivanchuk game given at the start of the chapter. It is as if the players have called a truce on two thirds of the board, and all the energy of their pieces is going to be devoted to the three files on White's left hand side.

11 ... a5

The only good way to defend the pawn, as if 11...♙b8 then 12 a5 would cut off any future support with a6-a5, when b4 would be a sitting duck to ♙d2, etc.

12 c3

The knight vacated c3 in order to make this vital pawn stab possible.

12 ... bxc3

Black must capture or else he will at best be left with a weak pawn on b4.

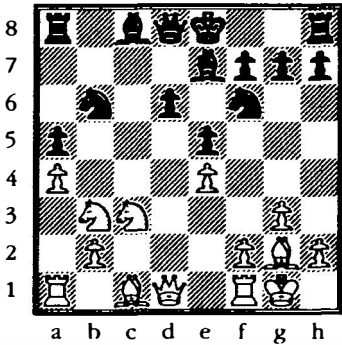
13 ♘xc3

The knight returns to the centre and finds to its delight that in its absence the restricting pawn chain on a6 and b5 has vanished.

13 ... ♘b6

Meanwhile, the black horse heads for the c4 square which White weakened many moves ago when he elected to fianchetto on g2.

14 ♖b5!



White's queenside pawns are hardly the model of a compact pawn structure, but they serve his strategic ends perfectly. The pawn on a4 provides a support for the knight on b5, and also fixes the black pawn on a5 by preventing it from advancing. This isolated black pawn is therefore a permanent target and requires the defence of the rook on a8. In fact, White can attack it further with ♗d2 and even ♜e1, which means that Black is going to have to sacrifice the harmony of his pieces to stop it dropping off the board. You will see that White's knight on b3, which it seemed was never going to have a great future after being driven from d4, has suddenly found a role in which he can cooperate with the other white pieces. The b3 square is no longer a backwater.

Meanwhile, the white pawn on b2 is sheltering comfortably behind two knights. It looks like the ugly duckling of White's well

coordinated army, but as will be seen it will have a vital role to play in a couple of moves.

14 ... 0-0

Topalov decides he has done everything possible for the moment on the queenside and so takes the chance to safeguard his king. Remember Pillsbury's advice: castle because you have to or because you want to, not just because you can'.

15 ♗d2

Having fixed the a5 pawn as a target, Adams now attacks it with his bishop.

15 ... ♞c4

The knight meets the threat and counterattacks against the bishop.

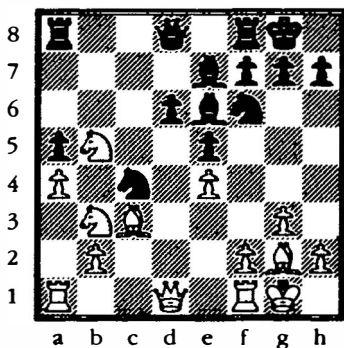
16 ♗c3

White has no wish to hand over his bishop, especially when it has a secure post on c3, whilst the black knight is as it were 'hanging in the air'.

16 ... ♗e6

The most active square for the bishop where it defends the knight and might be able to instigate counterplay in the future with d6-d5.

Horrible holes



17 ♖e1!

Adams deters the d6-d5 break as the e5 pawn would be left hanging to the rook and bishop on c3 after the reply e4xd5. He also frees the f1 square to allow the bishop on g2 to enter the queenside battle at the appropriate moment.

17 ... ♜b8

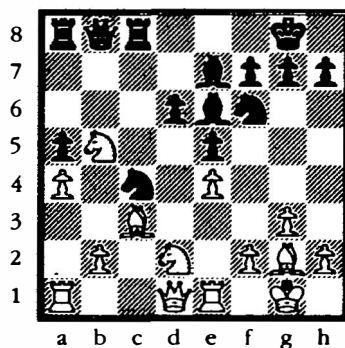
Meanwhile, Topalov clears the way for his king's rook to join in the action on c8.

18 ♘d2

Challenging the black knight which is an important defender of the a5 pawn.

18 ... ♜c8

Black brings more soldiers into the main theatre of action. Instead 18...♘xd2 19 ♜xd2 would help White to get at the a5 pawn, whereas after the game move if 19 ♘xc4? ♙xc4 brings the black bishop to bear against b5.



19 b3!

This little pawn move, which is typical of Adams' relentless positional style, is the most efficient way to get rid of the black knight from c4.

19 ... ♞xd2

The knight would be badly placed after 19...♞b6, being denied access to both the c4 and d5 squares.

20 ♜xd2

If 20...♙xb3 21 ♜eb1 ♙e6 22 ♙xa5 would be excellent for White as he has his passed pawn and the black queen is very awkwardly placed on the open file.

20 ... ♞d7

If 19 b3 is typical of Adams' constricting style, then this knight move is characteristic of the Bulgarian Grandmaster's chess philosophy. The knight heads for c5 in order to sharpen the struggle.

21 ♖e1

Simple and strong: White would be in all sorts of trouble after 21 ♖xa5 ♘c5, with a huge fork in prospect on b3.

21 ... ♘c5

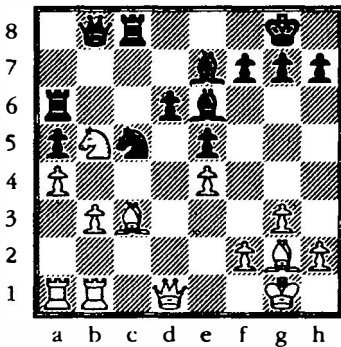
The knight arrives at a fine post where it attacks b3 immediately, is ready to put pressure on a4 if White plays b3-b4, and makes ♖f1 problematical for White as it would leave e4 hanging.

22 ♕d1

The white pieces and pawns cooperate in a selfless manner. The white queen doesn't think she is above defending the pawn on b3.

22 ... ♖a6

The rook clears the way for the queen to go to a8 in anticipation of White blasting open the b-file next move.



23 b4

It has taken a lot of hard work, but at last White succeeds in creating a passed pawn on the queenside.

23 ... ♗xb4

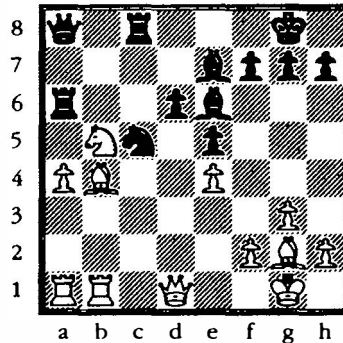
Black can at least be pleased to get rid of the weak pawn on a5 which was a nuisance to defend.

24 ♖xb4

The correct way to recapture as he wishes to clear the c3 square for the knight.

24 ... ♕a8

The queen hurries from the exposed b-file and puts pressure on both a4 and e4.



25 ♘c3!

Just when it seemed that White's position was getting overstretched, this knight retreat consolidates everything. It not only defends both a4 and e4, but also clears the way for White's light squared bishop, which has waited patiently on g2

Horrible holes

since move eight, to join in the queenside battle with gain of time.

25 ... ♖d8

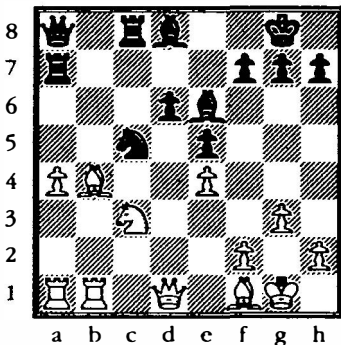
Every piece on both sides is desperate to get involved in the fight either for or against the passed pawn. The dark squared bishop rules out, at least for the time being, the a4-a5 advance.

26 ♙f1

Nevertheless, White's pieces are the more harmoniously deployed. The attack on the black rook signals the start of a sharp attempt to exploit his advantage.

26 ... ♜a7

The rook retreats and keeps up the pressure on a4.



27 ♘b5

The advance of the passed pawn is stymied at the moment, so Adams goes after the d6 pawn, whose defence has been somewhat

neglected by Black in his obsession with stopping the a-pawn.

He hounds the black rook and intends to capture on d6 with his knight. He isn't tempted by the immediate 27... ♙e7!? 28 ♜xe5 ♙f6 29 ♜h5 ♘d3 gives Black dynamic counterplay to say the least. That would be the type of position in which Topalov's thrives!

27 ... ♜d7

The rook saves itself and makes sure that the white knight won't have a comfortable life on d6.

28 ♘xd6

Anyway. The reckless steed walks straight into a pin, but Adams trusts his analysis – and the help of his bishops – will enable him to extricate it.

28 ... ♜c6

Now both rooks are attacking the knight, so White's hand is forced.

29 ♙xc5

The bishop deflects one rook and wins time for its comrade in arms to drive the other rook from d7.

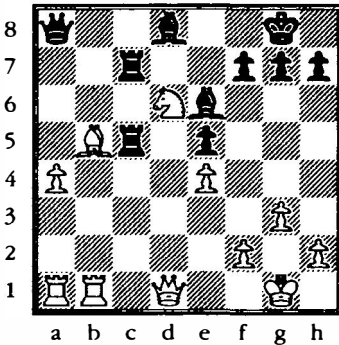
29 ... ♜xc5

Given one free move and 30... ♙e7 will end the game, so:

30 ♖b5

The bishop arrives just in time.

30 ... ♗dc7



Over the last couple of moves, Adams has not only won a pawn but also eliminated the black knight that was giving him a tactical headache. He has also driven the rook away from the a-file. Therefore, the way is clear for the passed pawn to advance. On the other hand, the white knight still finds itself in jeopardy, and if it moves from d6 then e4 might drop: this would be particularly dangerous as White's remaining bishop has wandered a long way from the defence of his king, so ♗xe4 could be combined with ♖h3 or even ♖d5 in some cases to force a snap mate. Of course, this is unlikely to happen – Black's own weak back rank means that he would be likely to be mated first if his queen leaves a8 – but White certainly has to be careful. Meanwhile the black rooks are actively placed along the c-file and just waiting for a slip up by White.

31 a5

Nonetheless, Adams is confident that the passed pawn will tie down the black pieces so much that they will be unable to engage in any meaningful counterattack.

31 ... g6

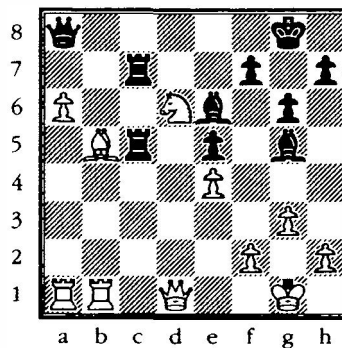
A useful move that takes away the f5 escape route for the black knight. It also makes a bolt hole for his king to rule out back rank mates and, as will be seen, supports the space gaining h7-h5.

32 a6

The passed pawn advances one more square towards its happy destination.

32 ... ♖g5

Black gets his bishop off the back rank or else the fork 33 ♘b7 will win the exchange.



33 h4

Horrible holes

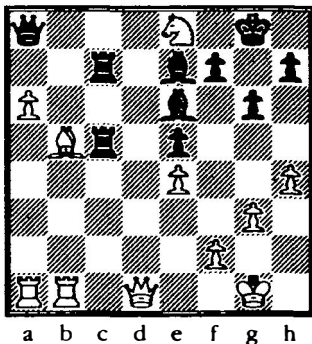
It isn't apparent how the passed pawn can safely traverse the heavily guarded a7 square. The white bishop can support the pawn fully on the light square a6, but a dark square is another matter entirely. Therefore Adams intends to create a diversion, which will in time involve giving up two minor pieces for a rook, but hopefully break Black's hold on a7. The first step is to free the d2 square for his queen.

33 ... ♗e7

After 33...♗h6 34 ♘b7! ♖c3 35 ♗d8+ the queens are exchanged and then the passed pawn runs through, helped by ♘c6 if needed.

34 ♘e8

A very imaginative move: the knight buries itself on e8.



34 ... ♖a7!

The passed pawn mustn't be allowed to advance any further. For example if 34...♖c8 35 a7! ♖xb5 36 ♖xb5 ♖xe8 37 ♗b1 –

threatening 38 ♖b8 to oust the black queen – 37...♗d6 38 ♖a6 the black bishops are gradually crowded out by the white queen and rooks 38...♗c7 39 ♗c2! ♖c8 40 ♖c5 ♗b7 41 a8=♗!? ♖xa8 42 ♖xa8+ ♗xa8 43 ♖xc7 and the endgame is easily won, though it will take a little work: the first stage would be to put e5 under pressure so that f7-f6 is forced, whereupon the black king becomes exposed to attack. Naturally White would aim to do this without dropping his e4 pawn. Note that if the queens were exchanged, White has a straightforward win by bringing his king forwards. A way for White to start would be ♖h2 and ♖c5, when if Black responds with ♗b8 to defend e5, then ♗c3 forces f7-f6.

Returning to the game, Adams plans a similar line to this variation: he wants to compel Black to accept the material offer of two minor pieces for a rook, as he considers that the passed pawn will then cost Black a piece, leaving the rook and queen versus queen and bishop scenario with four pawns each on the kingside.

Things aren't so simple, however.

35 ♗d2

All the attention has been focused on the queenside, but suddenly there is the threat of 36 ♗h6 ♗f8 – or else it is mate on g7 – 37 ♘f6+ ♖h8 38 ♗xh7 mate.

35 ... ♖xb5

Black has no choice but to accept the material on offer.

36 ♖xb5

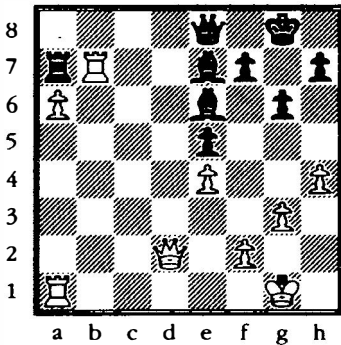
The game is about to reach its critical moment. Will Black be able to hold back the passed pawn?

36 ... ♜xe8

Topalov has avoided mate on the kingside; now he has to avoid disaster on the queenside.

37 ♖b7

The white rook reaches its ideal square.



37 ... ♗c5!

The only move, as 37...♖xb7 38 axb7 and 39 ♖a8 next move wins the game. The pawn also decides matters after 37...♜a8 38 ♖xa7 ♜xa7 39 ♜e3!? (39 ♜b2!?) 39...♗c5 40 ♜xc5! ♜xc5 41 a7 or if 39...♜e3 40 fxe3

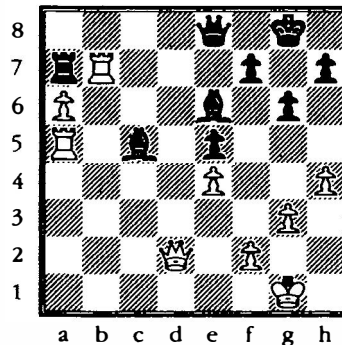
♗c5 41 ♔f2! – not even giving black the f2 pawn – 41...♗a7 42 ♖c1 and 43 ♖c7 etc. will force the win of Black’s dark squared bishop for the pawn.

38 ♖a5??

Having to calculate long and difficult variations takes its toil. Evidently Adams wasn’t satisfied with 38 ♜c1! ♜c8 39 ♖xa7 ♗xa7 40 ♜xc8+ ♗xc8 41 ♖c1 ♗xa6 42 ♖a1 ♗xf2+! A vital desperado move. One of the bishops is lost anyway, so he pockets a pawn with check. After 43 ♔xf2, with the pawn missing from f2, Black should draw if he sets up a blockade with the bishop on e6, h7-h5 and putting his king on f6. However it isn’t all that simple to arrange.

In any case, White should have headed down this route, as he would have no losing chances and might win; whereas in the game he is suddenly in deep trouble.

38 ... ♜c8!



Horrible holes

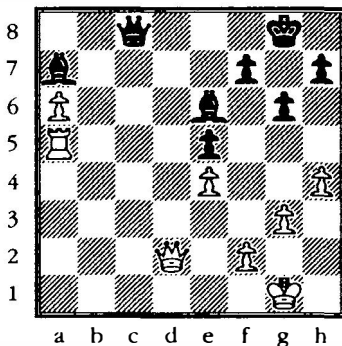
Topalov is rewarded for putting up such a tough defence. White may have overlooked that 39 ♖c2, which appears very strong, can be answered with 39...♙a6! when after 40 ♙a6 ♖xb7, attacking a6, or 40 ♙xc5? ♖xb7, the passed pawn has died for nothing.

39 ♙a6

Still, White might have tried 39 ♖c2 ♙a6 40 ♙a6 ♖xb7 41 ♙xc5 ♖xf2+ 42 ♖xf2 ♙xe6, with reasonable drawing chances.

39 ... ♙a6

It turns out that there is no longer any way for White to break Black's hold on a7. Therefore, Topalov can build up a lethal attack on White's king with the help of his fearsome bishops. As will be seen, having to guard the a7 square doesn't diminish the ability of the dark squared bishop to assail the f2 square.



40 ♖h2

It would be a brave man who tried 40 ♙xe5, as after 40...♖b8 the rook dare not move due to 41...♖xg3+ exploiting the pin on the f2 pawn. If 41 ♖a5 ♖c1+ 42 ♖g2 ♖b2! And f2 drops with a massacre. However, 41 ♖f4! might have held on.

Here we shall conclude the move by move analysis as Adams can only play waiting moves whilst Topalov infiltrates with his queen and bishops.

40...♖c7 41 ♖g2 h5 42 ♙a1 ♖c4 43 ♖e1 ♖d3

Black first of all seizes the light squares, and then the dark squares – f2 and g3 – become vulnerable to combinations.

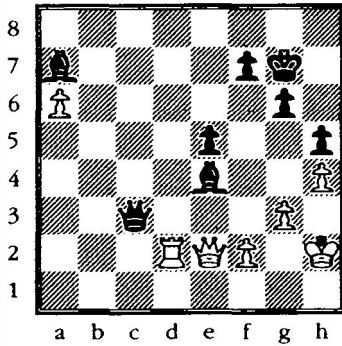
44 ♙a5 ♖g4 45 ♖h2 ♖h7 46 ♙a2

If 46 ♙xe5 ♖f3 and f2 drops – or 47 ♖g1 ♖xg3+.

46...♖f3 47 ♙a5 ♖c2 48 ♖g1 ♖g7 49 ♙d5 ♖xe4 50 ♙d2

Here the penalty for 50 ♙xe5 is 50...♖xf2+! 51 ♖xf2 ♖d1+ 52 ♖f1 – or mate on h1 – 52...♖d4+ and wins the rook.

50...♖c4 51 ♖h2 ♖c3 52 ♖e2



52...♙d4

One can sympathise with Topalov's eagerness to shut out the white rook, but there was a very pretty win with 52...♙xf2! The easy part is 53 ♜xe4 when you will win after taking the rook, but why not mate with 53...♜xg3+ 54 ♔h1 ♜h3. So White has to try 53 ♜xf2 ♜c1 with two variations in which a pawn on g4 proves to be a hero:

(a) 54 ♔h3 ♜h1+ 55 ♜h2 ♙f5+ 56 g4 hxg4+ 57 ♔g3 ♜f3 mate

(b) 54 g4 ♜h1+ 55 ♔g3 g5!! 56 hxg5 (what else?) 56...h4 mate.

53 ♞a2 ♙a8 54 ♜d1 ♜c4 0-1

White has had enough of the torture. His kingside cannot withstand the attack by the black bishops and queen, for example: 55 ♞a4 ♜c5!? (even better than 55...♜c6) and now 56 ♔g1 ♜c6 mates, while if 56 a7 ♙xf2, with 57...♜e3 to follow. That leaves

56 f3 but then Black can end things neatly with 56...♙xf3! 57 ♜xf3 ♜c2+ 58 ♔h3 ♜xa4.

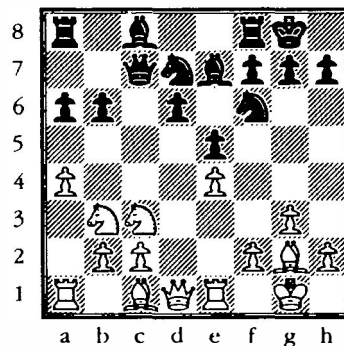
Game 32

It is time to look at some games in which the fight is over a hole in the centre. We shall concentrate on the d5 square, which Black voluntarily deprives of its pawn cover in the Sveshnikov Sicilian and certain lines of the Najdorf.

White: V.Malakhov
Black: F.Vallejo Pons
Khanty Mansyisk 2005

The opening moves of a Najdorf Sicilian were:

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4
4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 g3 e5
7 ♘b3 ♙e7 8 ♙g2 ♘bd7 9 a4 b6
10 0-0 ♜c7 11 ♞e1 0-0



The hole on d5 is, for the moment at least, securely in White's control. On the other hand, 12 ♘d5 would

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be a mistake for various reasons: on c3 the knight guards the b5 square, and so hinders any Black counterplay based on b6-b5. It also blocks the c file, and so obstructs an attack on c2 with ♖ac8, once the c8 square has been vacated, of course. The exchange of knights on d5 would also be a mistake in a general sense – White has more space and so should avoid easing the cramp in Black's position by exchanging any piece, unless there is a strong positional justification. And finally after 12...♗xd5, White must either recapture with 13 ♖xd5, when he loses time to 13...♗b7, or else with 13 exd5. In general, an outpost square should be occupied with a piece, not a pawn; the only justification would be if the change in pawn structure created a new, and better, outpost. In fact, after 13 exd5, there is the idea of 14 ♗d4! with 15 ♗c6 to follow, when the passive knight has found an excellent square and in reply 14...exd4? 15 ♖xe7 would be intolerable for Black. However, Black has many ways to scotch the threat, most simply with 14...♗f6, when White has just eroded his positional advantage.

There is no reason for White to engage in immediate action. Black isn't about to start any attack. So, based on the principle that if you don't know what to do, improve your worst placed piece, Malakhov played

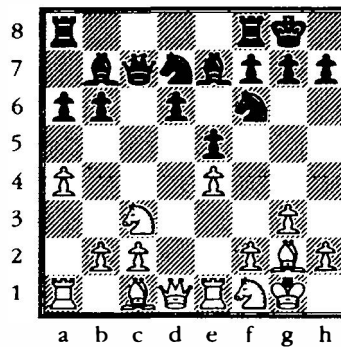
12 ♗d2!!

The knight is heading towards the d5 square via f1 and e3.

12 ... ♗b7

Sensible development: Black adds a defender to the d5 square and connects his rooks.

13 ♗f1

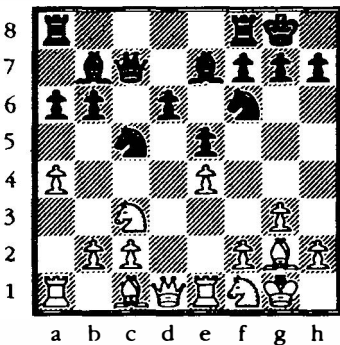


Now Black is in a dilemma. If 13...h6, which is positionally desirable as it rules out White's next move, then 14 ♗e3 contains the added idea of 15 ♗f5. This would establish the knight on a strong square where it not only threatens the black king, but also plays an important role in the battle for the centre. Technically speaking, the f5 square isn't an outpost, as it can be attacked by a pawn; but a counter with g7-g6 by Black is hardly feasible, in view of the fact that the h6 pawn would be left hanging. If Black hasn't played 13...h6, then the white knight would be far less secure on f5, as Black could prepare

g7-g6 with ♖fe8, ♗f8 and then g7-g6. Vallejo Pons elects to avoid 13...h6, but it is a case of out of the positional frying pan and into the fire.

13 ... ♘c5

I hope you can count, as after 14 ♘e3 the e4 pawn would be a goner as it only defended twice and attacked four times.



14 ♗g5!

A classical positional move that we shall discuss further in the next game. White's dark squared bishop can't fight for the light squares directly, but it can play a decisive role in winning control of the d5 square by eliminating a piece that can – the knight on f6.

14 ... ♘e6

The black knight eyes the d4 square, but unlike d5 it can never be an outpost as White can play c2-c3. Vallejo Pons has no illusions about this; the main reason for the knight

move is to free the c5 square for his queen in anticipation of ♘d5.

15 ♗xf6

All as planned: the bishop would have made this move voluntarily, even if it wasn't attacked.

15 ... ♗xf6

If it were now Black's move he could play 1...♗g5! so that if 2 ♘e3 ♗xe3 exchanges off his bad bishop for the knight before it reaches Nirvana on d5.

16 ♘e3

It has taken a long journey for the knight to reach this square via f3, d4, b3, d2 and f1, but it is worth it to be in contact with d5.

16 ... ♕c5

The queen evacuates c7 or else after White's next move she would be obliged to return to the passive d8 square to prevent ♘xf6+ breaking up the kingside pawns.

17 ♘cd5

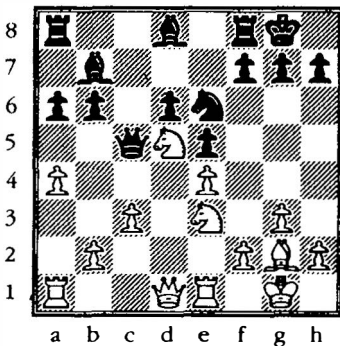
Malakhov chooses this knight for the honour of occupying the ideal square, as the way is cleared for the c-pawn to advance. It is also important to keep the other knight to go to c4 in the future, when it will help besiege b6 and d6.

17 ... ♗d8

The bishop has to wait its chance for active play. At the moment it is best employed in defending b6.

18 c3

Here we see why the pawn structure favours White. He can keep the black knight out of d4, whereas Black cannot evict the white knight from d5.



18 ... g6

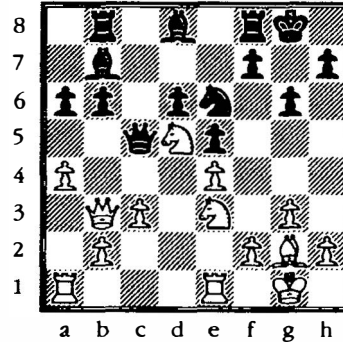
Vallejo Pons at least makes sure that a white knight won't land on f5. He also allows himself to dream of counterplay with f7-f5.

19 ♕b3

White's plan is unfolding step by step. The queen vacates the d1 square so that a rook can add to the potential pressure on d6, and, as will be seen, prepares to issue a challenge to her opposite number.

19 ... ♜b8

Black anticipates that the b6 pawn will be attacked a third time with ♖c4 in the future, and so prepares to bolster its defence.



20 ♜ed1!

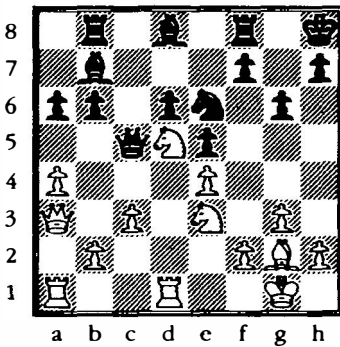
The right rook. The reason for keeping the rook on e1 is to deter a black attack on e4, beginning with f7-f5; but Malakhov is confident that if he plays correctly he doesn't need to take this precaution, and can employ his rook more actively in putting potential pressure on d6. Certainly for the moment he is right as if 20...f5? 21 exf5 gxf5 22 ♖e7+! ♗xe7 23 ♕xe6+ ♜f7 24 ♖xf5 and Black's position is collapsing.

Instead 20 ♜ad1 would be a routine move that obeys the rule that you should centralise your pieces; but in effect it would be undeveloping the rook, rather than developing it! As will be seen, the a-file offers the rook a way into the game via the third rank.

20 ... ♔h8

A useful move that makes the f7-f5 advance far more plausible by removing the king from the line of fire of the white queen.

21 ♖a3!



The black queen is performing a double role: not only is she staunching up the d6 and b6 pawns, she is also exerting pressure towards what is the most vulnerable point in White's position: the pawn on f2. Black could build on his queen's influence by implementing the f7-f5 plan discussed above. Then he would have ideas of f5-f4, driving away the knight that shelters the weak pawn, as well as simply f5xe4 opening the f file for his rook. Other attacking motifs would include ♕g5 or ♘g5. Of course, Black would have to check that this ambitious plan worked tactically, but psychologically speaking, the hope of achieving counterplay on the kingside is a spur for Vallejo Pons to maintain his enthusiasm for the game.

In contrast, Malakhov doesn't want the annoying distraction of possible kingside complications; he wants everything to remain quiet, with White gradually turning the screw on the queenside and in the centre, and his opponent consigned to a miserable defence of his weak pawns.

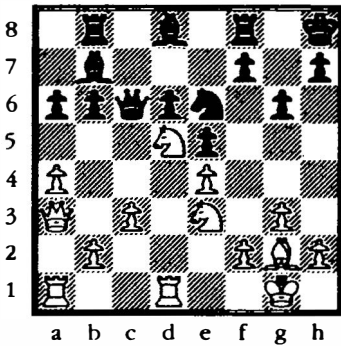
The golden rule is: if you want to damp down a position, exchange the queens. If now 21...♚xa3 22 ♖xa3, and the rook enters the game. It is ready to go to b3 and put pressure on b6. At the same time, the c4 square has become available to the white knight, from where it can attack both b6 and d6.

21 ... ♚c6

Black turns down the disagreeable offer and puts his queen on the only safe square that doesn't allow ♚xd6.

But what a miserable square it is compared to c5 as far as any kingside counterplay is concerned! Not only is the queen no longer aimed towards f2, she would be in the direct firing line of the bishop on g2 after f7-f5? and White replies e4xf5. Such a continuation would be bound to lead to catastrophe for Black. Thus we see that with the simple move 21 ♖a3! White has destroyed all Black's hopes of kingside action. This is the Soviet School of Chess at its apex!

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22 h4!

Another fine move. The black knight and bishop are denied access to the g5 square. Note that White can only afford this loosening of his pawn structure as Black's counterplay has been neutralised. If now 22...f5? 23 exf5 gxf5 the bishop on g2 can be unleashed against the black queen with 24 Qxb6! (or simply 24 Qe7 and 25 Q7xf5) 24...Wxb6 25 Rxd6 followed by 26 Rxe6 and Black is being murdered.

22 ... Qc5

If Black sat still, then White could play 23 b4 – to keep the knight put of c5 – followed by 24 Qf1 and 25 Qc4, when the d6 and b6 pawns come under huge pressure. In such a scenario, a key theme for White would be b4-b5! To clear the way for the white queen to support Qxd6 whilst driving the black queen away from her defensive post.

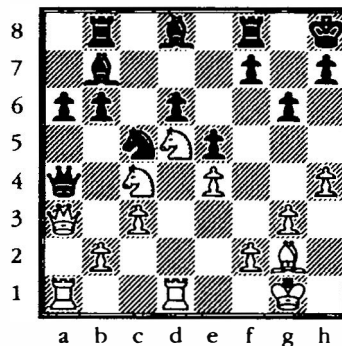
23 Qc4!

After having made a series of preparatory moves, Malakhov decides it is time to strike against the d6 pawn. There is the threat of 24 Qb4 followed by 25 Qxd6, winning a pawn. Or if 23...a5 White can cash in at once with 24 Qdxb6 Qxb6 25 Rxd6 Wc7 26 Rxb6.

Meanwhile the e4 pawn is poisoned: 23...Qxe4 24 Qxe4 Wxc4 25 Wxd6 and Black loses as his rooks are forked. The pawn structure so hampers the bishop on d8 that it doesn't have a single move that would connect the rooks without losing itself.

23 ... Wxa4

Black is obliged to seek the exchange of queens that was so unwelcome to him at move 21. To do so he utilises a potential pawn fork with b6-b5.



24 b4!

It is essential not to rush things as after 24 ♖xa4 ♘a4 25 ♗xa4 b5 Black escapes, and would be doing very well if White tried to regain the pawn at once: 26 ♗b4?! bxc4 27 ♗xc4?! ♙xd5 followed by 28...♗xb2.

24 ... ♖xa3

Now the queens are exchanged on Malakhov's terms.

25 ♗xa3

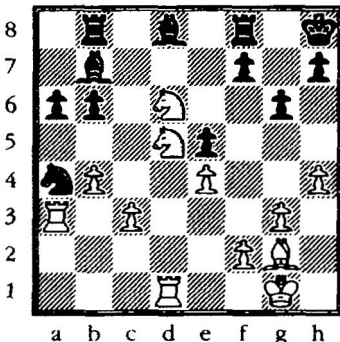
White is temporarily a pawn down, but c5, b6 and d6 are all hanging.

25 ... ♘a4

An attempt to keep the knight active rather than retreat into passivity on d7.

26 ♘d6

Of course he isn't interested in 26 ♗xa4 b5, when Black regains the piece with a greatly improved game.



However, you might be wondering what exactly White has achieved in carrying out his plan of conquering the d6 square. After all, he hasn't won any material, so you might think that Black should be happy to have swapped the weakling on d6 for the healthy pawn on a4.

In fact, a quick survey of the relative activity of the black and white pieces will reveal that White can be said to have a winning position.

Let's start with the rooks. Rooks thrive on open lines, but here the black rooks are shut in behind their own pawns and confined to defensive duty, having to guard b7 and f7 – thanks of course to the white knight sitting on d6.

In contrast, one white rook sits on the open d-file, the other on the semi-open a-file. The rook on a3 is attacking the black knight, and applying pressure to the pawn on a6.

Now let's move onto the minor pieces. The light squared bishops on b7 and g2 might be said to be of equal value. However, there is no denying that the black knight on a4, which is offside and en prise, is a far worse piece than the white knight tying down the black rooks on d6. And finally, the white knight on d5 dominates the black bishop on d8, which is completely paralysed.

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The main purpose of examining this game was to follow move by move Malakhov's plan to its culmination with 26 ♖xd6. We shall now look at how he exploited his advantage.

26...♙c6 27 c4 b5

Black feels it is necessary to add to the protection of his knight; in any case, White could force this move with ♖da1 at some point, when the knight dare not move as a6 drops. However, White now acquires a passed pawn, which his excellently placed pieces can shepherd towards its queening square.

28 c5 a5

In what follows, Vallejo Pons will do his best to bring his pieces to life, but the opening of lines will also make it easier for the white pieces to support the c-pawn.

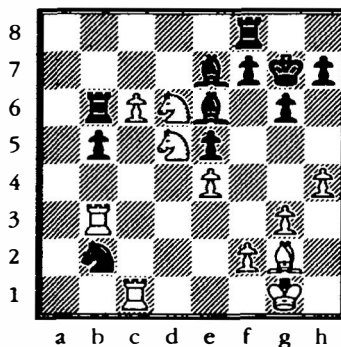
29 ♖c1 ♗g7 30 ♖b3 axb4

If Black waits, then 31 ♙f1 followed by 32 axb5 would win the b5 pawn.

31 ♖xb4 ♙d7 32 c6 ♖b6

Vallejo Pons employs a lot of clever tricks to fight the advance of the c-pawn, but Malakhov remains alert.

33 ♖d3 ♙e6 34 ♖d5 ♖b2
35 ♖b3 ♙e7



Giving White the abundant choice between grabbing the rook (winning), the pawn on b5 (good winning chances), the knight (possibly winning after 36 ♖xb2 ♙xd5 37 exd5 ♙xd6), or last and definitely least the bishop (with a messy position after 36 ♖xe7? ♙xb3, with a draw at best for white). Malakhov chooses the best.

36 ♖xb6 ♙xb3 37 ♖xb5 ♙e6 38 c7 ♖d3

Vallejo Pons wriggles hard, but sooner or later he will run out of resources.

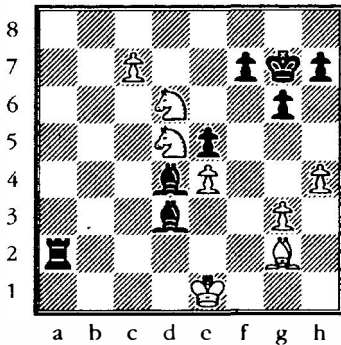
39 ♖c3 ♙c5 40 ♖d5 ♙xf2+

It looks like progress to give a check at f2, but after White's reply the knight on d3 can't move without dropping the bishop.

41 ♗f1 ♙d7 42 ♖d6 ♙c5
43 ♖b7 ♙d4

Daring White to take the knight when his rook will be pinned. Malakhov calls his bluff as he sees that Black's counter attack will falter after a few checks.

44 ♖xd3 ♜b5 45 ♚e2 ♖a8
46 ♜d6 ♖a2+ 47 ♚e1 ♜xd3



The white knights and black bishops make a pretty picture down the d-file, but for White nothing is as beautiful as seeing a new queen appear on c8 as it caps his strategy.

48 c8=♚ ♖a1+

The much celebrated spite check.

49 ♚d2 ♜a6

Black takes a pot shot at the queen. As all his clever attempts to trick Malakhov during the advance of the c pawn have failed, it would be amazing if this worked!

50 ♚d8 1-0

A great technical display by Vladimir Malakhov.

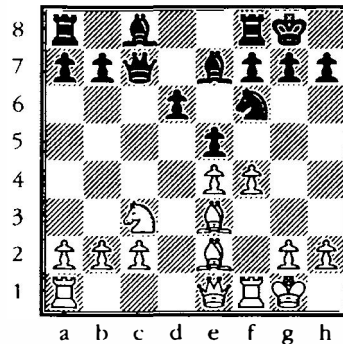
Game 33

Study the classics!

I first encountered the ♜g5! idea that Malakhov used to such good effect in a game played by Vassily Smyslov, which the former World Champion analysed in his Best Games collection.

White: V.Smyslov
Black: I.Rudakovsky
Moscow 1945

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4
4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 d6 6 ♜e2 ♜e7
7 0-0 0-0 8 ♜e3 ♘c6 9 f4 ♚c7
10 ♚e1 ♘xd4 11 ♜xd4 e5 12 ♜e3



12...♜e6?

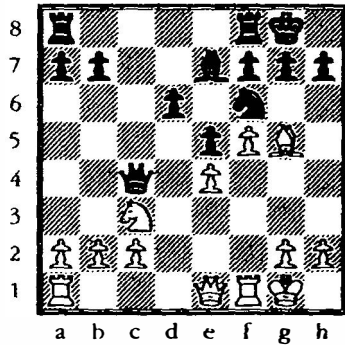
A routine developing move that is a big mistake. Many years later, Kramnik and Anand reached this position at the Amber Blindfold tournament in Monaco, 2004. Even without sight of the board, Anand played 12...cxf4 13 ♜xf4 ♜e6 14 ♚g3 ♖fd8 with a quick draw.

13 f5! ♜c4

Horrible holes

He should keep his bishop to fight for d5 with 13...♔d7, even though it's passive.

14 ♔xc4 ♚xc4 15 ♔g5!

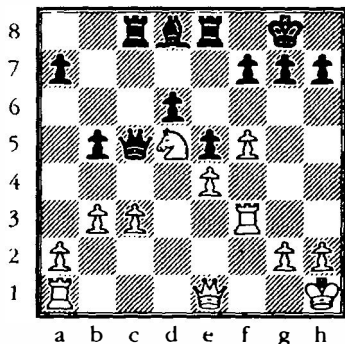


Here it is. White becomes undisputed master of the d5 square.

15...♞fe8 16 ♔xf6 ♔xf6 17 ♘d5 ♔d8

If 17...♚xc2 18 ♞f2 and Black will lose the exchange to a fork on c7 sooner or later, e.g. 18...♚c4 19 b3 ♚c5 20 ♞c1 and then 21 ♘c7.

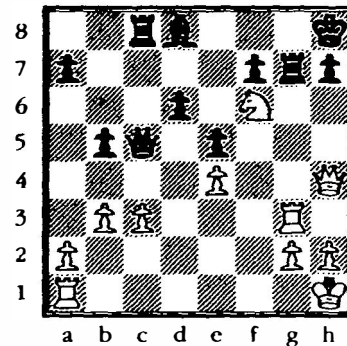
18 c3 b5 19 b3 ♚c5+ 20 ♔h1 ♞c8 21 ♞f3



21...♔h8

Understandably, Black doesn't want to immolate his bishop further with 21...f6, when White can attack anyway with 22 ♚h4 etc. However, White is now able to break through along the f file.

22 f6! ♞xf6 23 ♚h4 ♞g8 24 ♘xf6 ♞g7 25 ♞g3



Now the biggest threat is 26 ♚xh7+! ♞xh7 27 ♞g8 mate.

25...♔xf6

The knight vanishes, but the damage is irreparable. Black cannot defend against the attack along the g-file and keep the d6 pawn defended.

26 ♚xf6 ♞cg8 27 ♞d1 d5 28 ♞xg7 1-0

After 28...♞xg7 29 ♞xd5 the threat of 30 ♞d8 mate costs Black his queen.

A very instructive game. If you are interested in improving your

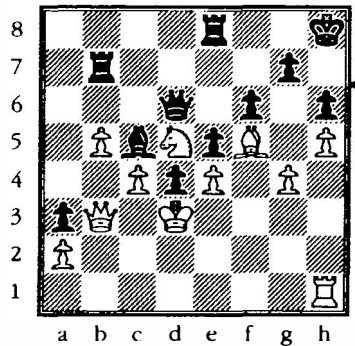
positional chess, I cannot recommend highly enough the study of the games of Smyslov, Botvinnik and all the other greats. In fact, 'study' is probably the wrong word as it suggests you have to make an effort, whereas you can just enjoy yourself playing through their games, and the positional ideas will rub off on you.

Nowadays, you very rarely get such one sided – and therefore instructive – games between World Class players. Whereas Smyslov was able to carry out his plan with virtually no resistance – gain control of d5, play f5-f6 to force a breach in Black king's defences, tie Black down along the g file and then come crashing through the undefended d-file – these days any self respecting Grandmaster will grasp at any way to muddy the issue. He will give up a pawn to gain counterplay, for example – anything to spoil the smooth flow of White's strategic attack.

I suspect that Malakhov had seen the Smyslov-Rudakovsky game, or at least as a young boy he had received training from veteran masters who knew the '♗g5 trick', and so had made it part of his armoury.

After seeing the Malakhov and Smyslov games above, it won't surprise you to hear that a powerfully centralised knight can sometimes be worth a rook. The key

consideration is that there aren't any useful open files for the rook. Here is a rather quaint example.



It arose in the second game of the 2005 match between Michael Adams and the HYDRA computer. Black is the whole exchange up, and the white king is sitting in the centre of the board. If there was but one unobstructed file, the black rooks would surely flood into the white camp and end the game in a matter of moves.

But where is the one open channel? The answer is that it doesn't exist. If Black had a light squared bishop, rather than a dark squared bishop, he could arrange ♗xd5, when the recapture c4xd5 would give the black rooks the c-file, or if instead c4xd5, Black could break open the c-file with e5-e4+ as a sacrifice, and thus give the rooks a way to breakthrough.

For all its billion move calculations, the machine couldn't comprehend what an experienced carbon based chess player can grasp in a few minutes of general thought.

Horrible holes

Namely, that the position is a positional draw.

To confirm this, the human doesn't need to analyse long variations. He or she just needs to look at the possible breakthrough points and ask three questions:

What happens if Black ever arranges the break out g7-g6 on the kingside?

It is easy to conclude that Black would be playing to lose, as even if he managed to evacuate his king from h8 somehow, in order not to be mated along the h file, White can always reply to g7-g6?? with h5xg6 and acquire a protected passed pawn. Even if Black managed to organise his rooks on the kingside, so that he could then give up the exchange with ♖xg6 and answer ♗xg6 with ♕xg6, his position would be full of light square holes.

And then, to crush even such a meagre hope for Black, we realise that White can in the first place play ♗g6 to block the g7-g6 advance as soon as it becomes even remotely feasible for Black.

What happens if Black ever arranges a ♖xd5 sacrifice to open the c-file?

Well, White can place his own rook on c1 as soon as it became likely, when he would be the one to enjoy the fruits of such a sacrifice.

Black would have no material advantage and an inferior, perhaps losing, layout of pieces.

Could Black ever put enough pressure on c4 to make it crumble?

No. With White's minor pieces guarding both the c7 and c8 squares, it is impossible to see how Black could even begin to fight for c4, which is soundly defended by the white queen and king, and can be bolstered by ♖c1 if necessary.

So we see that no breakthrough for Black is possible. His rooks remain forever trapped behind the pawns. For his part, White dare not displace any of the stones in his defensive edifice: the pawn advance b5-b6 soon leads to the loss of the pawn, when the black rooks charge down the b-file; while after g4-g5 Black responds f6xg5 and can then prepare an exchange sacrifice on f5 to wrench open lines.

Actually the computer not only gets the assessment wrong, it doesn't even know how to create any practical chances. Hydra would never arrange to play g7-g6, even if he were playing the weakest human player in the world, who was guaranteed to play the worst move every time, but had been given the kindly advice by a passing Grandmaster to play his rook from h1 to f1 and back again.

It is incredible that the Hydra computer can crush Michael Adams 5½-½ in a match, and yet not have any understanding. It is the equivalent of a pocket calculator that, without understanding the first thing about mathematics, can effortlessly outfox an Einstein in the speed and precision of its numerical calculation.

The game above was in fact abandoned as a draw in the diagram above, with the Machine wanting to play on until Doomsday.

Taking things one step further, we might ask ourselves: if a well placed knight can easily hold a draw, might there not be circumstances in which it is actually *stronger* than a rook? The game that follows will answer this question in spectacular style.

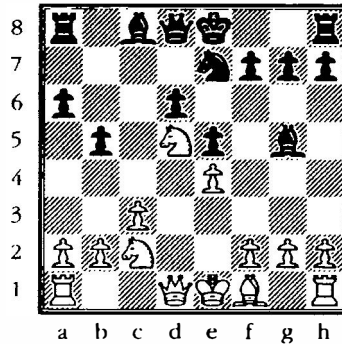
It was played at the European Championship in 2005 between Sergey Karjakin from Ukraine and the Azerbaijani Teimour Radjabov, who, like Kasparov, was born in Baku. Both had been prodigies, with Karjakin still only 15 years old at the time of the game and Radjabov an old hand at 18. The latter was already good enough to come second, just behind Nisipeanu in the tournament, while Karjakin finished equal third.

Game 34

White: S.Karjakin
Black: T. Radjabov
Warsaw 2005

The openings moves of a Sicilian Sveshnikov were as follows:

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♟c6 3 d4 cxd4
4 ♟xd4 ♘f6 5 ♟c3 e5 6 ♟db5 d6
7 ♙g5 a6 8 ♟a3 b5 9 ♟d5 ♙e7
10 ♙xf6 ♙xf6 11 c3 ♙g5 12 ♟c2
♟e7



Generally speaking, in the Sicilian, as in most openings, it is something of a concession for White to hand over his dark squared bishop for a knight. However, here he has the mighty d5 square for his knights and the makings of a grip on the light squares. You might expect him to focus exclusively on development and the quiet consolidation of his control of d5; in which case you will be surprised by his next move.

13 h4!

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At first glance, this seems a stupid move as White has little hope of a successful kingside attack, and is weakening the pawn front in his own king's future residence. However, this is the first shot in White's plan to take control of the...queenside!

13 ... ♗h6

Once battle is enjoined on the queenside, Black will lament the fact that he can no longer retreat this bishop back to d8, where it can join in the fight, or go to e7 to bolster the d6 pawn. As will be seen in the course of the game, the h6 square will prove a backwater.

14 a4!

The second stab with a rook's pawn by Karjakin, and this time his intention is far less mysterious. The threat is 15 axb5 winning a pawn, and if 14...♗b8 15 axb5 axb5 leaves White's rook in control of the a-file and a weak black pawn on b5.

14 ... bxa4

More or less forced, though the disappearance of the b5 pawn increases the scope of both White's king's bishop and his rook on a1, which can gang up on the a6 pawn.

Nevertheless, Black can trust in his bishop pair and the chance to play ♗b8, attacking b2, to offset White's pressure. He will probably

play a6-a5 at some point, to get the pawn out of range of the bishop on f1.

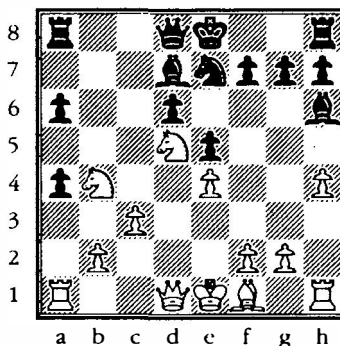
15 ♖cb4!?

The simple 15 ♖xa4 would leave White with some advantage but Karjakin is more ambitious.

15 ... ♗d7

Black accepts the bait. With hindsight, he would have done better to simply develop: 15...0-0! 16 ♖xa4 a5 17 ♗c4 ♗d7. Then the chances remain balanced after 18 ♖xe7+ ♖xe7 19 ♖d5 ♖d8 20 ♗a2.

Now after 16 ♗xa6 0-0 Black is rid of the sickly pawn on a6, and has kept the well defended and hard to attack one on a4: a good swap! He can begin his counterplay with f7-f5. Here we would be entitled to ask: what is White's pawn doing on h4? Nonetheless, Karjakin can cross all Black's hopes for a comfortable game with an excellent exchange sacrifice.



16 ♖xa4!!

This is an amazing conception, despite all we have said above about the power of a centralised knight. White gives up the exchange without gaining so much as a pawn for it, and as will be seen, has no direct attack on the black king in mind.

16 ... ♜xd5

Black exchanges knights before accepting the 'gift'. And wisely it seems, as White has a pawn for the exchange and a strong initiative after 16...♙xa4 17 ♚xa4+ ♕f8 18 ♜xe7 ♚xe7 19 ♚c6! ♚d8 20 ♙xa6.

17 ♜xd5

White puts his knight on an excellent centre square, where it cannot be attacked by an enemy pawn or – after Black's next move – any minor piece. It can therefore be said to be on an ideal outpost. There is also an important tactical point behind 17 ♜xd5 which stops Black castling.

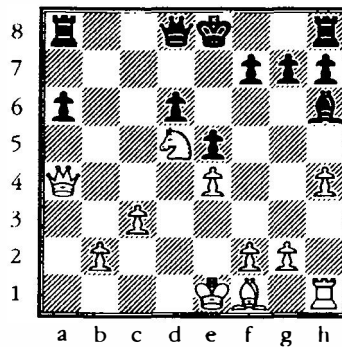
In contrast, a fundamental mistake would be 17 exd5? even though it secures the c6 square for the knight. The pawn is needlessly transferred from e4, where, as will be seen, it helps to deter any Black counterplay based on f7-f5, to the d5 square, where, besides depriving its own knight of a wonderful

square, it blocks any future attack on the d6 pawn with ♜d1.

17 ... ♙xa4

Perhaps Black might have considered 17...a5!? in order to keep the light squared bishop to fight White's dominant knight after a subsequent ♙c6, etc.

18 ♚xa4+



A very awkward check for Black, who has to forgo castling, as if...♚d7? 19 ♙b5! (better than 19 ♜c7+) 19...axb5 (or 19...♚xb5 20 ♜c7+) 20 ♚xa8+ ♚d8 21 ♚xd8+ ♕xd8 22 ♕e2 and 23 ♜a1 will bring mayhem down the a-file.

18 ... ♕f8

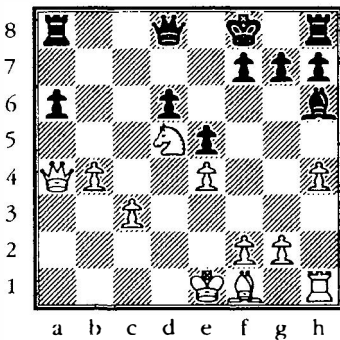
Black's problem isn't so much that his king is going to be in danger, but rather that the rook on h8 is, temporarily at least, shut out of the game. In fact the black king is sitting on the very square which the

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rook could use to good effect to support counterplay with f7-f5. It's rarely a good sign when the king stops his own rooks acting together.

19 b4!

The whole point of the exchange sacrifice is to keep Black bottled up. Therefore it would be a crass error to grab at material with 19 ♖xa6, which presents the black rook with an open file and puts the white bishop in a pin. Thereupon the crafty response 19...♝c8! would activate Black's game after 20 ♘b4 ♜g4! or 20 ♖xc8 ♜xa4 and White has to part with the e4 pawn in order to meet the threat of 21...♞a1+ winning the rook on h1.



19 ... a5

Radjabov is keen to save his pawn from capture with ♖xa6, but a more dynamic approach was 19...♝c8! which activates the black queen. Of course, we all flinch from moves

that expose our pieces to a knight fork; but happily for Black if 20 ♘b6?? ♝xc3+.

The power of the black queen on c8 is felt on both sides of the board. It radiates not only towards c3 (as above, ruling out the fork) and a6 (defending the pawn) but also towards g4 (where positioned it would attack g2 and e4 and indirectly harass the h4 pawn, deterring White from castling); and finally the f5 square – in support of the f7-f5 advance.

A plausible sequence for both sides after 19...♝c8 would be 20 g3 (or 20 ♖d3 g6 etc.) 20...f5 21 ♖h3 ♝c4? 22 ♖xf5 g6 it appears that White is in big trouble, as c4 drops if he moves his bishop. But 23 ♝d7! ruins everything for Black: 23...gxf5 24 ♜e7+ ♔g8 25 ♘f6 mate. However, 21...g6! in this sequence would keep the tension.

White doesn't want any mess; he wants everything to remain quiet whilst he goes about the business of completing his development and applying pressure on the queenside. As the saying goes, White wants to be 'playing without an opponent'. So Black should jump at any chance to disrupt the logical flow of the game with tactics.

20 b5



It is a good moment to pause and consider the outcome of the opening. White has an invincible knight in the centre. Not only is it superb in itself, it crushes any hope Black has of exploiting his extra centre pawn – in fact the pawn on d6 has become a smothered, hopeless thing. So practically speaking, White could be said to have a pawn for the exchange, as he has two pawns against one on the queenside, whereas Black's centre pawn majority of five pawns is no better than White's four pawns. White already has a dangerous and well protected passed pawn that is eager to advance; whereas Black will never be able to break out by d6-d5, unless White completely loses control of the position.

Black has his own passed pawn, but it is blocked and for the time being at least harmless. In fact, it is more of a target than an asset. The presence of opposite coloured bishops means that, although Black has a nominal material advantage, he is ill equipped to fight for the

light squares. He would much prefer to have a light squared bishop sitting on e6; in that case, Black would have an undoubted advantage.

Instead he has a dark squared bishop on h6, which will find it difficult to attack anything, as all the enemy pieces are on light squares. You will notice that White keeps his pawn on c3 for a long time, as he doesn't want to allow the black bishop to regroup on the queenside with a manoeuvre such as ♗d2 and ♗b4 , heading for c5 to attack f2, or staying on b4 to defend the a5 pawn and block the b file, to make it harder for White to support his passed pawn. White will also curtail the activity of the black bishop, whilst increasing that of his own, by playing g2-g3.

Black is of course the exchange up, but as we remarked in the preamble above concerning the Adams-Hydra game, when there are no open lines, a strongly placed knight can give full compensation. Black's rooks have little scope and cannot break into White's half of the board.

However, this pleasant state affairs won't last forever for White. Given time, Black has a clear plan to generate dynamism which has already been mentioned above: advance f7-f5 to attack e4 and break open the f-file. If you put the black

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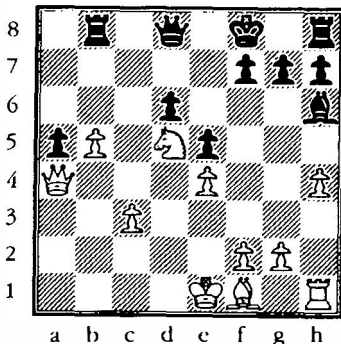
king on h8, and move the rook from h8 to f8, then straightaway Black can play f7-f5! with good chances. In reality, with the black king on f8, the f7-f5 thrust is has much less power; but Black can unwind his game with g7-g6, ♔g7 and then ♖f8 and f7-f5.

White has two tasks: on the kingside, to prevent, delay or at least lessen the effects of Black's counterplay with f7-f5; and on the queenside, to win the game by demonstrating the power of the passed pawn, whilst keeping Black under lock and key.

Naturally, it will be a tall order for Karjakin to keep such a talented tactician as Radjabov under continuous restraint.

20 ... ♖b8

Black rules out the dangerous move 21 b6, which can now be met with 21...♖xb6! 22 ♘xb6 ♗xb6, with an excellent game for Black. However, strategically speaking, the a5 pawn has lost a vital defender.



21 g3!

Making way for the bishop to go to h3 and at the same time defending h4, so that White can castle without allowing ♗xh4.

21 ... g6

A vital move. Black vacates g7 for his king and lays the foundation for an expansion with f7-f5.

22 ♔h3

It may seem strange that White moves the bishop to h3, away from the defence of the b5 pawn. However, on h3 it helps to restrain Black's counterplay based on f7-f5; and in any case, it is more involved in the queenside action aimed at c8 than it would be on e2 or d3, where it stares at the b5 pawn, and is likely to be blocked in even more after White bolsters the b5 pawn with c3-c4.

22 ... ♔g7

Black's plan continues with his king freeing the f8 square for his rook.

23 0-0

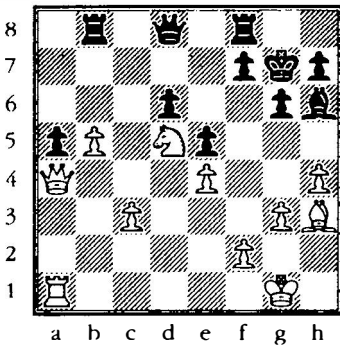
White responds in similar style: his king retreats into a well prepared shelter and allows the rook to enter the queenside struggle.

23 ... ♖f8

Now all is ready for the much heralded pawn attack on e4 with f7-f5.

24 ♖a1

Karjakin shows complete disdain for Black's plan by removing his rook from the defence of f2. The a5 pawn is now doomed as 24...♖a8 25 b6 intending 26 b7 or perhaps even better 26 ♜c6 is intolerable.



24 ... ♜h8

Black loses faith in his plan, as after the move he wants to make, 24...f5, there follows 25 exf5 gxf5 and White has the trick 26 ♙xf5!? when if 26...♖xf5? 27 ♜g4+ picks up the rook. However, if Black refuses the bishop offer with 26...♜c8! things are by no means clear: both the white bishop and pawn on b5 are hanging, and 27 ♙d3? fails to 27...♜f7 when now the knight on d5 and the f2 point are attacked. In fact, White might well do better answering 24...f5 with 25 ♜xa5!? giving up the e4 pawn in order to press on

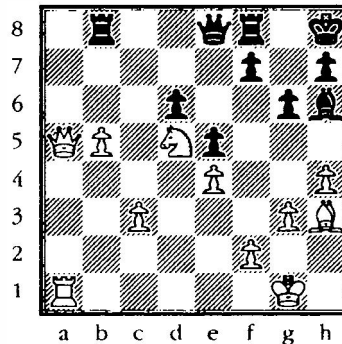
with his queenside pressure, for example 25...♜xa5 26 ♖xa5 fxc4 27 ♙d7. White has the initiative thanks to his passed pawn, but the situation remains unclear.

25 ♜xa5

White's queenside breakthrough comes with greater force due to his opponent's hesitancy on the wing.

25 ... ♜e8

Radjabov wants to keep his queen for belated action on the kingside as his prospects would be cheerless in the endgame. Therefore he attacks b5 and edges her closer to f7.



26 c4!

A classic illustration of the positional rule 'do not hurry!'

It would have been very easy to play 26 b6 here, when Black's counterplay is in full swing after 26...f5. But the alert Karjakin has seen that by keeping the c7 square

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free for his queen, he is able to defeat Black's plan once and for all.

26 ... f5

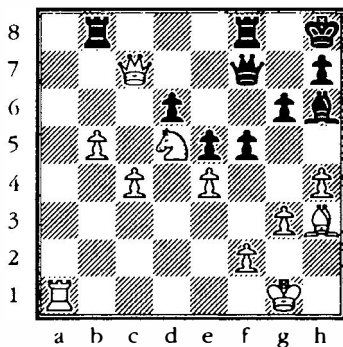
The much vaunted pawn advance finally arrives, though in a far worse shape than it would have been back on move 24.

27 ♖c7!

A strategically decisive entrance. White's queenside pressure has spread like a fire to engulf the whole board, as the black king would be facing checkmate on h7 after 27...fxc4 28 ♖a7.

27 ... ♕f7

It is with a heavy heart that Black offers the exchange of queens which he avoided a couple of moves ago. However, there was little choice, as after 27...♖f7 28 ♖xd6 Black's queen can't go to f7 and meanwhile White has connected passed pawns on the queenside.



28 exf5

It would have been quite wrong to play 28 ♖xd6? fxe4 when suddenly Black has counterplay against f2 – and for good measure, 29 ♖xe5+?? is answered by 29...♗g7 when White loses a rook.

Instead 28 ♖xf7 ♖xf7 29 exf5 exf5 30 ♖a6 would transpose to the game, but reaching the position one move sooner.

28 ... ♖xc7

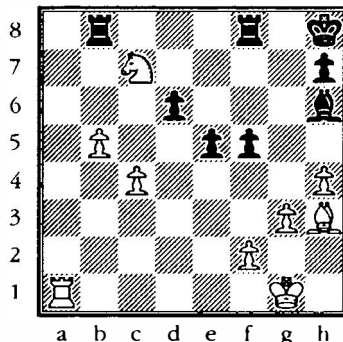
After 28...gxf5 White has the delicious choice between 29 ♖xd6, attacking the bishop and 29 ♖a7!?

29 ♖xc7

Only a task as important as capturing the black queen can persuade the white knight to descend from its paradise on d5.

29 ... gxf5

Shutting out the white bishop, but Black's hold on the f5 square will prove fragile.



30 ♖a6!

Brilliant positional play! Karjakin sees that the rook is needed on the c6 square, and gets it there with gain of time by hitting d6.

30 ... ♖f7

One passed pawn in an endgame is terrible enough, but two working together can bludgeon their way through almost any defence. Therefore, Black wins time to put the bishop on the f8 square by attacking the knight.

Instead 30... ♖fc8 would set the positional trap 31 b6? ♖xb6 32 ♖xb6 ♖xc7, when Black is still in deep trouble but the opposite coloured bishops give drawing chances. However 31 ♖c6! is far more accurate when if 31... ♖b7 32 ♖d5 ♖xc6 33 bxc6 and the pawn will cost the rook, as it journey to c8 can be assisted by ♗xf5, etc.

31 ♖d5

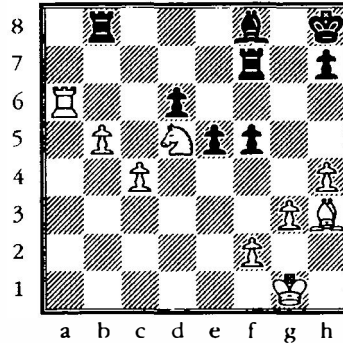
The knight returns to its lofty outpost, where it is free from all worldly woes.

31 ... ♗f8

A sad end to the bishop's dreams of taking part in a mating attack on the kingside. You will notice that all White's pieces and his queenside pawns are on light squares, so even if the bishop were somehow to

become active there would be little for it to attack.

As a rule, the more ambitious a strategy, the more disastrous is the effect if it goes wrong.



32 ♖c6!

Completing a superb coordination of the queenside pieces. Now all four units are grouped together in a mutually defending diamond shape. The pawn on b5 supports the rook, which in turn blocks any attack on c4, the guardian of both b5 and d5.

32 ... f4

Radjabov tires of his prospectless defence and does his opponent's work for him. If Black had waited, Karjakin would have chosen the right moment to play ♖e3, in order to compel Black to reply f5-f4 and open the line for the bishop on h3. Still, it is likely that Black would have been able to generate more counterplay with the knight temporarily away from d5. Things are much smoother for White in the game.

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33 ♖e6!

White has no wish to grant Black an open file by allowing 33...fxg3, but on the other hand, 33 g4 shuts in his bishop behind the pawn. Therefore, the bishop keeps itself active by employing a *zwischenzug*.

33 ... ♖g7

The rook saves itself and attacks g3.

34 g4

White establishes a light square bind on the kingside similar to that on the other wing.

34 ... ♖e8

Black would be utterly tied up after 34...h5 35 g5. Therefore, Radjabov grasps at the only remaining gap in White's light square wall: the e4 square. He plans a concerted bid to free his game by advancing e5-e4 and creating a passed pawn of his own. It requires some preparation, as if 34...e4? 35 ♗xf4.

35 ♗f5

The bishop not only defends g4, but also fights against the e5-e4 advance and is ready to help the b-pawn queen. In the long term, Black cannot resist such a fine coordination of the white pieces.

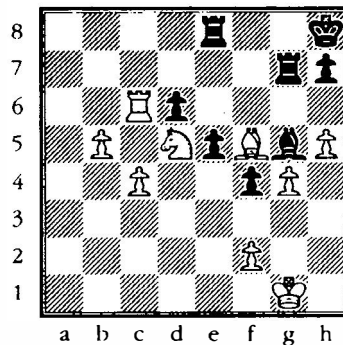
35 ... ♗e7

Still, Radjabov is fighting hard. He attacks the h4 pawn and so wins the g5 square for his bishop.

36 h5

Very embarrassing would be 36 g5? ♗xg5! when all White's fine play would be undone.

36 ... ♗g5



At last the bishop finds an active role, but it is too late.

Now a methodical approach for White would be 37 ♗e4, which has the virtue of preventing Black from acquiring a passed pawn. This would cement White's hold on the light squares, after which he could improve his position by playing the passed pawn to b6, his king via g2 to f3, then ♗f5 again, ♖e4 and finally ♗c8 followed by b6-b7. White's control of the light squares would leave his opponent paralysed. If Black tried to confuse matters after 37 ♗e4 with 37...f3

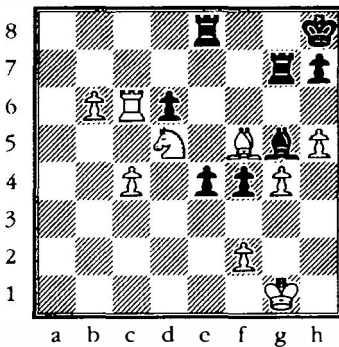
then the game might end 38 b6 – it's simplest to ignore the f pawn – 38...♙h4 39 ♖f5 ♜a8 – or 39...e4 40 ♙c8 – 40 ♜c8+ ♜xc8 41 ♙xc8 and 42 b7 wins. Or if 37...♙h4, 38 f3 should win but White also has the neat trick 38 ♔g2 to activate his king, as 38...♜xg4+ 39 ♔h3 ♜eg8 40 ♙f3 ♜g1 41 ♔xh4 leaves Black two pieces down for a rook and facing disaster on the b-file.

37 b6!

If you are sure of your tactical powers, then it is better to go for the immediate win rather than indulge in strategic manoeuvres. Karjakin has calculated everything to a win in a couple of moves and so allows his opponent a brief moment of dynamism in the centre.

37 ... e4

At last Black's counterplay in the centre is in full swing, so White had better waste no time in deciding matters on the queenside.



38 ♜c8!

One of the principles of strategy says that when you are the exchange down, you should avoid the exchange of your remaining rook. However, all principles of chess should be sacrificed in favour of playing the best move! Karjakin sees that the key to the position is getting his bishop to c8.

38 ... ♜xc8

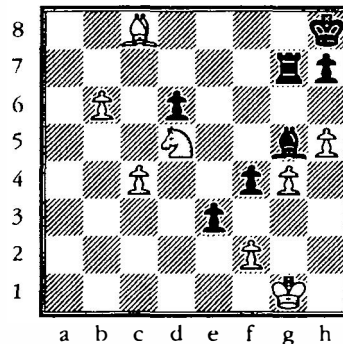
Black has little choice, as if 39...♜eg8 40 ♙e6.

39 ♙xc8

Here the bishop not only supports the advance of the b-pawn, but also shelters it from attack by black rook along the first rank.

39 ... e3

Black bursts through to create his own passed pawn, but it proves to be one move too late.



40 fxе3

It is never too late to lose a game of chess. If 40 b7? ♜xb7 41 ♙xb7

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e2 and the passed pawn is unstoppable.

After the exchange on e3, White is the exchange down, but a king up when it comes to fighting the respective passed pawns.

40 ... fxe3

Unfortunately for Black, the f2 square is now available for the white king to apprehend the passed pawn if it advances to e2. Given one more tempo and Black could play 1...♖f7, when it would be White who had to work out how to draw the game.

41 b7 1-0

Radjabov resigned as he must give up his rook with 41...♖xb7 42 ♙xb7. White then puts his king on e2 and captures the e3 pawn to end all hope.

Thus we see the culmination of White's long term strategy to queen the b-pawn. However, it mustn't be overlooked that it only succeeded thanks to the restraint of Black's counterplay on the kingside. This was a game that required Karjakin to have his eyes roaming over the whole board, not just fixed on the b-file.

Game 35

Keen followers of chess of a certain age and dedication will have

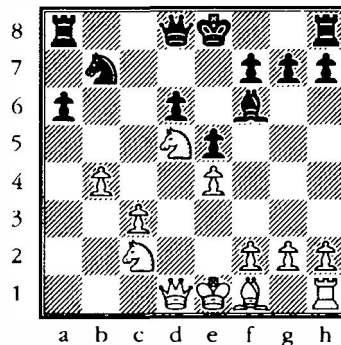
remarked on seeing Karjakin's exchange sacrifice "Ah, yes, just like Kasparov-Shirov."

White: G.Kasparov

Black: A.Shirov

Horgon 1994

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4
4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 ♘c6 6 ♘db5
d6 7 ♙f4 e5 8 ♙g5 a6 9 ♘a3 b5
10 ♘d5 ♙e7 11 ♙xf6 ♙xf6 12 c3
♙b7 13 ♘c2 ♘b8 14 a4 bxa4
15 ♖xa4 ♘d7 16 ♖b4 ♘c5
17 ♖xb7!! ♘xb7 18 b4!



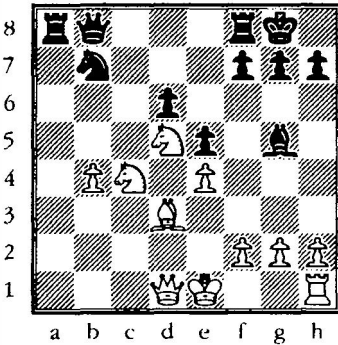
One move ago, two black pieces were fighting White's control of the d5 and e4 squares; now the bishop has vanished from the board and the knight finds itself trapped in limbo by the b4 pawn, which guards both the a5 and c5 squares. The white knight has therefore become the monster that no poison or bullet can kill familiar from the Karjakin game.

18...♙g5 19 ♘a3 0-0 20 ♘c4 a5
21 ♙d3!

Keeping the knight imprisoned on b7. Entirely wrong is 21 b5, allowing 21...♖c5.

21...axb4 22 cxb4 ♖b8

Hoping to play 22...♘d8 and then reactivate the knight on c6 or e6.



23 h4!

If the bishop retreats to d8, it takes away the only square that the black knight can use to get back into the centre. Therefore, the bishop chooses to go to the a familiar passive square:

23...♗h6 24 ♘cb6 ♜a2 25 0-0 ♜d2 26 ♖f3 ♖a7 27 ♘d7 ♘d8

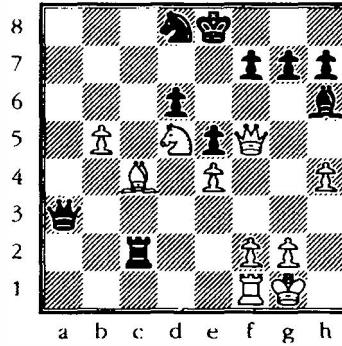
The only chance was to hold onto the booty with 27...♜a8. Now Kasparov equalises the material count whilst keeping a passed pawn and attacking chances.

28 ♘xf8 ♔xf8 29 b5 ♖a3 30 ♖f5!

Black's king is driven out into the open, as if 30...♜xd3 31 ♖d7,

threatening mate in one on d8, or mate in two on e7, wins out of hand.

30...♔e8 31 ♗c4 ♜c2



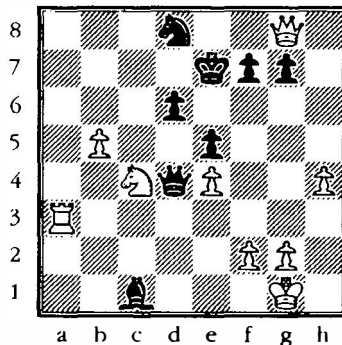
32 ♖xb7!

Kasparov never misses tactical finishes such as this.

32...♜xc4 33 ♖g8+ ♔d7 34 ♘b6+ ♔e7 35 ♘xc4 ♖c5 36 ♜a1! ♖d4

Or 36...♖xc4 37 ♜a7+ ♔e6 38 ♖e8+ when the knight drops with check.

37 ♜a3 ♗c1



38 ♖e3! 1-0

An elegant finish. If Black takes the rook he drops the queen to a fork on f5, while 38 ♖d5+ is also a menacing threat and 38...♙xe3 39 ♖xe3 is totally hopeless for Black.

I have rarely seen such a purely positional sacrifice of the exchange as 17 ♖xa4!! above.

I can't recall any examples in the games of Capablanca or Botvinnik. Therefore Kasparov deserves the credit as its pioneer. It shows that fresh strategic plans can still be discovered: they haven't all been exhausted by the researches of the hypermodern players of the 1920s or the Patriarchs of the Soviet School of Chess in the 1940s and 1950s.

On the whole, however, modern chess is based on refining – through calculation and tiny strategic nuances – previously well established models for handling positions. Only in a blue moon do we get a whole new strategy as seen in the game Kasparov-Shirov.

Having seen this prequel to Karjakin-Radjabov, you are probably thinking that not just technique, but also genius can be borrowed. Was Karjakin really adding anything knew to chess, or had he just done his homework well?

There was a lot more than copying going on here. Karjakin took the original conception and made all the particular details his own – like Shakespeare borrowing the basic plot of Macbeth from Ralph Holinsted's *Chronicles*, or Jimi Hendrix doing a brilliant cover version of Bob Dylan's *All along the Watchtower*. The imitation in either case has a life and power of its own: a lot more people read Shakespeare than Holinsted, and Bob Dylan was so impressed that he started using the Hendrix arrangement of his song himself.

Postscript

After I had written the above, I watched the eighth round of the Corus Chess tournament at Wijk aan Zee on the Internet. Anand's game as White against Van Wely might give you a sense of *déjà vu!*

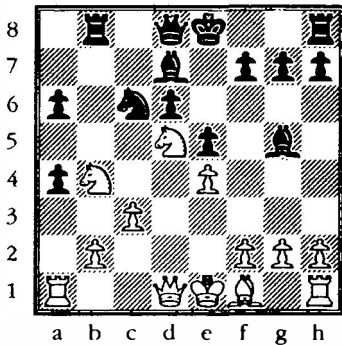
Game 36

White: V.Anand
Black: L.Van Wely
Wijk aan Zee 2006

1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 ♖c6 3 d4 cxd4
4 ♖xd4 ♖f6 5 ♖c3 e5 6 ♖db5 d6
7 ♙g5 a6 8 ♖a3 b5 9 ♖d5 ♙e7
10 ♙xf6 ♙xf6 11 c3 ♙g5 12 ♖c2
♖b8

Black hopes to deter White's queenside expansion due to the rook's potential attack on b2, but there nonetheless followed:

13 a4 bxa4 14 ♖cb4 ♙d7



15 ♙xa6

In contrast to the Karjakin game, here White is in a hurry to eliminate this pawn before it can be used to dislodge the white knight with a6-a5. Besides the black rook is on b8, rather than a8, so the bishop doesn't become vulnerable to attack.

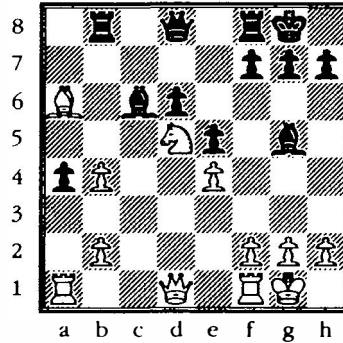
If after playing through the Karjakin game, you had made the mental note 'I shouldn't rush to grab the a6 pawn – it is the a4 pawn that matters!' you might have been on your way to blundersville with something like 15 ♖xa4? a5 16 ♖xc6 ♙xc6 17 ♖a2 0-0. Yes, you haven't given up the exchange, but Black is very comfortable.

Remember that although you can and must borrow ideas from other games, during a real game you have to work out what the specific position in front of you requires.

15...♖xb4 16 cxb4

The positional justification for an exchange sacrifice grows with the appearance of a passed pawn on the b-file.

16...0-0 17 0-0 ♙c6



18 ♖xa4!

Here it is.

Interestingly, after the game Anand described the exchange sacrifice as giving White a 'risk free position'. Indeed, when a player has the tactical acuity and strategic vision of an Anand, there is no danger for White, who will at least draw thanks to the powerful passed pawn. But jumping ahead, I imagine that some other players might be concerned about the huge pawn centre Black is able to develop later on in the game. Anand being Anand he proceeds to draw its fangs and then create a second passed pawn on the h-file, which persuades Van Wely to throw in the towel:

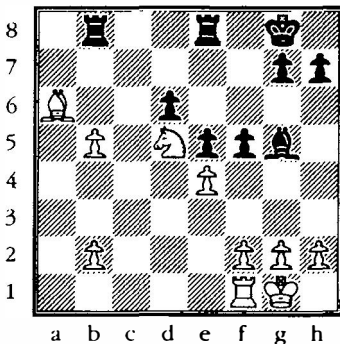
18...♙xa4 19 ♖xa4 ♖e8

Horrible holes

We would say that the exchange of queens helps White, but the Dutch Grandmaster is keen to get a rook on e8 for reasons that become clear in the next note:

20 ♖xe8 ♜fxe8 21 b5 f5

Black offers a pawn so that after 22 exf5 e4 he can put pressure on the white knight with 23...♜e5, whilst keeping in hand the option of e4-e3 to break open a file for his rook.



22 b6!!

Anand crosses Black's plan by giving up the e4 pawn. Nothing unique to the Karjakin game or the Kasparov game above could have pointed you to the strength of this idea. You would have to work it out through reasoning, based on your knowledge of similar situations in other games. Simply put: the black rook remains passive on e8 and the black pawn centre is kept under restraint, despite the loss of White's e4 pawn. Still, it was a matter of subtle judgment, as it evaded the

attention of a top player like Van Wely, either during the game or possibly in his pre-game preparation.

22...fxe4 23 h4!

This kingside expansion will prove very significant later on. If 23...♙xh4 24 ♜c1 and the white rook penetrates down the open file. Incidentally, this reminds us of the value of the bishop on a6 which stops Black using the c-file himself.

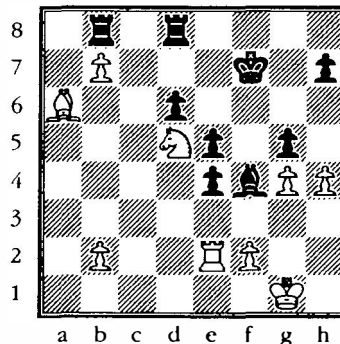
**23...♙d2 24 b7 ♖f7 25 ♜d1 ♙b6
26 ♜b4 ♖e7 27 ♜d5+**

I expect Anand repeated moves to clarify his thoughts or gain time on the clock.

**27...♖f7 28 g4! ♙f4 29 ♜e1 g5
30 ♜e2!**

The rook finds another way to get to the c-file via c2.

30...♜ed8



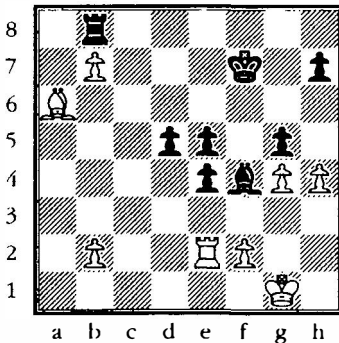
It seems that Black is about to emerge on top, as he is ready to play

31...♖d7 and 32...♗dxb7, returning the exchange in order to eliminate the passed pawn.

31 ♖b4!

The knight relinquishes the blockade square and allows the black centre to expand, but crucially 31...♖d7 can now be met by 32 ♖c6! ♗bxb7 33 ♙xb7 ♗xb7 34 ♖d8+ and the fork picks up the rook.

31...d5 32 ♖c6 ♗g8 33 ♖xb8 ♗xb8



34 h5!

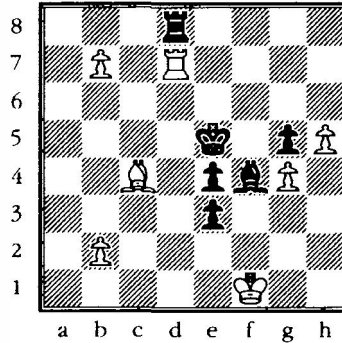
White mustn't hurry to exploit the c file with his rook, as he needs to save the h pawn from exchange with g5xh4 if he is going to win the endgame.

34...♙e7 35 ♙f1

The black centre may look impressive, but the white king can oppose any attempt to queen a pawn, whereas the black king can

offer no opposition to the pawn on b7.

35...d4 36 ♗c2 e3 37 fxe3 dxe3 38 ♗c7+ ♙f6 39 ♗xb7 e4 40 ♙c4 ♗d8 41 ♗f7+ ♙e5 42 ♗d7!



1-0

The passed pawn will queen with check if Black takes the rook, while if 42...♗b8 43 h6 and one of the passed pawns will soon get through.

Anand borrowed the model, but he added his own genius to it. The idea of giving up the e4 pawn was very fine; and I don't think many of us would have realised the importance of advancing the kingside pawns with 23 h4 and 28 g4 etc. when all attention was focused on the white passed pawn and the black centre. The most creative players still come out on top, despite all the advances in chess technique.

It is time to say goodbye. Let me wish you the best of luck in trying to emulate Anand and all the other great practitioners of the art of chess.

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